

All That Guts and All That Go

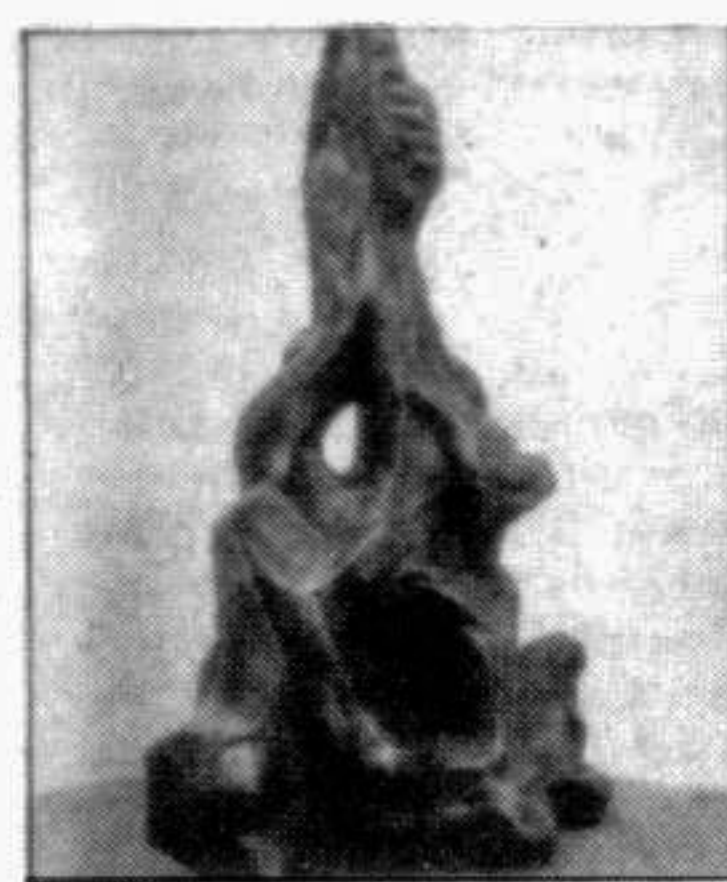
Fayza Haq

The Exposition of Contemporary Young Artists '91 at the National Museum involved 42 painters. It was the first time that the painters and sculptors have not fallen back on local patrons or foreign backers. They had an interesting display of varied styles, themes and media just by contributing Tk. 300 each. The selection committee started off with nine enthusiastic young painters. "Out of 175 artists 56 were voted," said GS Kabir, a young painter himself, one of the brains behind the project.

"We wanted to be independent and do something of our very own," Kabir informed me. The brochures and posters alone, carrying most of photographs of many of the displays, cost Tk. 37,000 while the rent for the hall was Tk. 400 for 12 days.

When so many styles, artists and themes had been brought together, the head might have swum and one may have got a little bewildered to find that there was no unifying theme. Yet the fact that the artists wanted something beyond the annual Arts and Crafts College exhibit, and had restricted the age limit to 35 years brought some bond into the exposition. It is not enough in a gallery that one gets a chance to witness picturesque composition, or sees clever presentation of symbols and thought provoking themes. The entries in a display normally has a common binding factor.

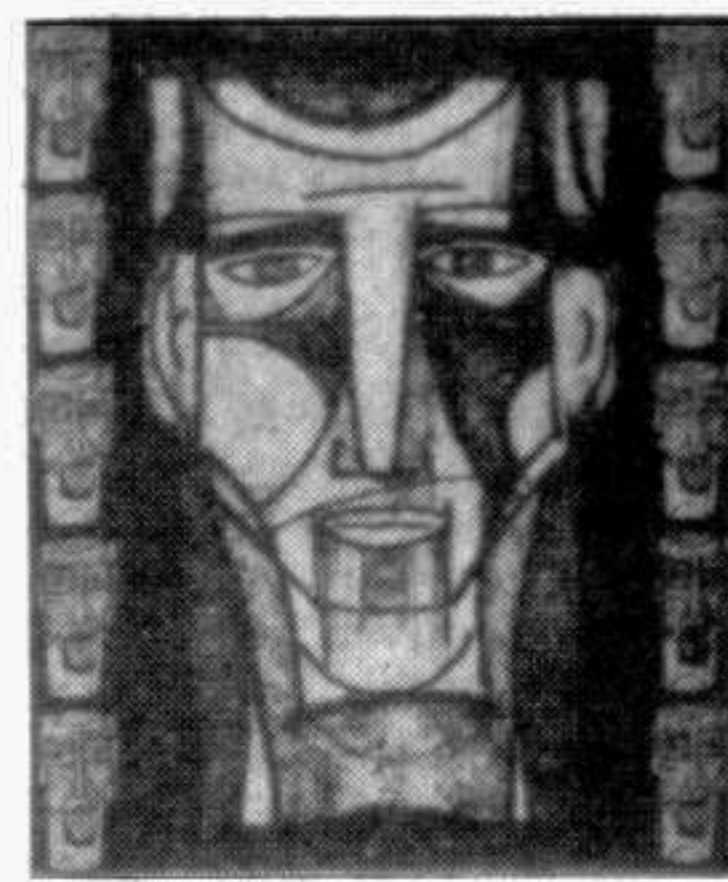
Through the works of the artists one could study the mind of the young generation and their preoccupations. The themes ranged from politics to social problems and sometimes even presented nothing more than a feminine angle of a tranquillising scene. The exposition encircled various medias ranging from cement and clay to collage and etching and the conventional canvas. One had a good study of our Bangladeshi modern metropolitan society simply by gazing for a few moments at the pieces that the young artists had laboured over.



Revolution. Shyamal

It was interesting to note that viewers included people from all walks of life and all age groups and not just the well-dressed bourgeoisie and their children, which is often the case in so many exhibitions in town.

There was Shishir Bhattachjee with his brush and ink drawing of a caricature aimed against the last political regime. The main character was shown as a cruel despot clawing and mauling the common man. His identity was easily recognisable from the presentation of the face and the army medals. In another



Untitled. Nazir Ahmed

drawing had Guide Azam, Ayub Khan and Yaha Khan shown with supreme contempt and tremendous hatred—once again in the form of caricatures.

Humayun Kabir Bahar's "Last distinction" encompassed battle fields with traditional elephants of India and soldiers carrying bows and arrows. A nasty looking guillotine was placed in the middle to add to the sinister effect of turmoil and conflict. The canvas was pulsating with colours ranging from pinks and blues to gaudy greens and mauves.

"Accident" by Iftekharuddin Ahmed brought in a theme



Untitled. Iftekharuddin

often witnessed on Dhaka roads. This was depicted with symbols and lines that were semi-abstract. The horror of the occasion was delineated by the gloomy greys and subtle pinks. His other composition called "Distinction of peace" had utilised symbols once again.

"Still Life" by Iftekharuddin Alam was merely on the experimental stage as the artist played around with the traditional still-life subject of bottles, books and flowers. It would be interesting to note his progress ten years from now.

Meanwhile, the creation by Morshed ara Arzu was a world away from havoc and pain with the steady swirls of pinks, blues and the lyrical white.

Rokeya Sultan's etching was likewise a soothing theme. It was print that had been created with a woman's gentle touch. The impact was calming after what one often witnessed about battlefields, slums and city ghettos.

The youngest artist of the group, Najib Tarque had an entire entitled "Master! who?" The ugly and uncouth greens and blues in the portrait were obvious symbols of perversion in men. Hiranamay Chandra's



Enthusiastic visitors admiring the exposition of contemporary young artists at the National Museum gallery. — Photo: Mohsin.

mixed media delineated people of Bangladesh being all agog with world politics, specially the Gulf War. The collage was eye-catching for being a product of a fairly new painter.

Habibur Rehman Habib's water colour brought in the downtrodden leading a simple life bordering on starvation. The scrawny and emaciated people with dried breasts spoke of the intense poverty

and hunger of the masses. The agony and suffering were captured in a few strokes. Symbols were once again painted into the semi-abstract.

"Dance of the Carnivours" by Nasir Hossain had the lascivious scenes from the back of rickshaws. The artists had not just the local film actors and actresses in mind but the so called polished unquestionable members of the bourgeoisie

and upper class.

There art pieces were not mere academic exercises. The painters and sculptors were hell bent on doing some experimenting of their own and trying to present to the viewers something new to see and meditate over. There was room for improvement. Yet considering their age, the initiative and effort were remarkable.

Ataur Rahman — a Tribute

Arshad-uz Zaman

IN the early hours of last Friday, Ambassador Ataur Rahman passed away in a hospital of his native Rajshahi. I have lost a most warm-hearted childhood friend.

Ataur Rahman and myself went to our first school in the early thirties in Malda (a town in West Bengal) Zilla School. He was a few years my senior but had already achieved fame by his academic distinction. We lost track of each other and my next encounter with him was in Paris where I was studying at the Political Science Institute of the University of Paris and he had come as a language trainee after joining the Pakistan Foreign Service.

Almost 20 years passed and we found ourselves in the Pakistan Embassy in Bonn, after crisscrossing the world in various Pakistan missions. Pakistan maintained a large mission in Bonn and it reflected the varied elements of Pakistan pretty well. Our Ambassador was Mr. Abdur Rahman Khan, who had very strong family ties with field Marshal Ayub Khan. His sister was married to Ayub Khan; his two daughters were married to two sons of Ayub. In a manner it was an extension of the Presidential Palace in Pindi and I had served for four months as Public Relations Officer to the President. I could clearly see the similarities. Our Military Attache was Col. Mustafa Khan, who was a most colourful personality from Hyderabad (India) and his wife Mumtaz was the elder sister of Mr. Bhutto, who was making long sojourn at his sister's place after his dismissal by Ayub. In this highly political atmosphere Ataur Rahman and I worked hand in hand to defend the Bengali rights for in that Embassy there were diplomats and staff from virtually every province of Pakistan.

Towards the end of 1968 I came on home leave to Dhaka in order to complete my house. In stretched my fifteen day holiday to more than three months, for I wanted to remain on the scene to witness the mass upsurge. This was an exhilarating experience as the people brought down Ayub's protégé in Dhaka, Governor Monem Khan. On my way back I stopped briefly in Rawalpindi and saw my friend Lt. Gen. S.G.M.M. Peerczada. Our friendship stemmed from the fact that he and I had identical fate in the Ayub House, as we both lasted four months. After my stay in Dhaka I was sure that the Ayub regime had entered the twilight zone and when I asked Peerczada about his thoughts, he said "You are too impatient. It will fall, in our lap like a ripe fruit." On reaching Bonn I told Ataur Rahman and Anwar Hashim, the young Third Secretary (now our Ambassador in Bucharest) that Pakistan was going to split up soon and if they had assets in

Pakistan, they should better get them out. I had made up my mind to seek a home transfer, preferably on deputation to the East Pakistan Government. Shortly afterward Ataur Rahman and I parted, as he went to Sudan as Pakistan's Ambassador and I headed home.

Ataur Rahman was a very emotional and intensely patriotic Bengali. In fact, his heart dominated his head. He was totally emotionally involved in our War of Liberation in 1971, when he was Ambassador in Sudan. His two sons were studying in the USA and he

ing packets of Bangladesh tea to the Egyptian soldiers in the battlefield. He was later our High Commissioner in Canada.

Ataur Rahman was a man of unbending energy and remained so inspite of several heart attacks. After retirement he was determined to do something concrete for the country. He set up single handed a factory for brass handicrafts and exported them to the USA, where his two sons were engaged in marketing them. He tinkered with other similar enterprises. Unfortunately he lacked the savoir fair of a businessman. He



Late Ambassador Md. Ataur Rahman

started instructing them by letter how to campaign for Bangladesh in various US circles and institutions. One such letter found its way into the hands of Pakistani authorities, who found a way to bring him to Islamabad, took his passport away. I visited Islamabad on official business sometime in August, if my memory serves me right, and found my friend forlorn, shunned by almost everybody. We took long walks in Islamabad and told him about the Liberation War and tried to cheer him as best as I could.

After liberation, Ataur Rahman was among the early arrivals via the Kabul route. He was given very important assignments specially in the Arab countries as the Special Envoy of the Government. True to his form, he put his heart and soul in the mission. During this period I was Chief of Protocol in the Foreign Office and this was really the fulfillment of our dream of our days in Bonn. Ataur Rahman and I went out as Heads of Mission about the same time in 1973, he to Cairo and I to Algiers. We maintained contact and I recall that he achieved quite a coup by offer-

ing without even telling his wife he sold their beautiful Gulshan house. She was heartbroken for she loved collecting good things from around the world and she loved her rose garden, which she tended with loving care. He shifted from one rented flat to another. We met often and talked about the state of affairs.

In the beginning of this month the tragic news came from the USA, from his son that his wife Surayya had died in a hospital. I rushed to his Uttara house, found him broken hearted, tried in vain to cheer him by talking politics. He asked to place an advertisement in two newspapers regarding 'Kul'. I saw him at the Kul. He would not leave my side. We held our hands in unspoken sorrow. Two days later I rang his house. He had gone to their ancestral home in Chapai Nawabganj. On March 22 I received a telephone call from my friend Abul Ahsan, the Foreign Secretary. Ataur Rahman is dead. (Inna Lillah....)

The writer was a former Bangladesh Ambassador.

ONE of the earliest known cities in the world, which was apparently suddenly abandoned, may never give up its secrets. The enemies are salinity and waterlogging, combined with lack of money and archaeologists.

Mohenjadaro—it means the mound of the dead—is 600 kilometres north of Karachi, Pakistan. Archaeologist John Marshall stumbled on its ruins 69 years ago.

While he was excavating a Buddhist stupa there came to light a complete metropolis—one of the earliest examples of human civilisation.

The ruins visible today are of a highly developed Bronze Age civilisation that existed between 2500 and 1500 BC in this valley of the Indus river.

The city is laid out in a chessboard pattern. Streets as wide as nine metres cross each other at right angles to divide it into rectangular blocks—rather like present-day New York.

Along the streets runs a remarkable system of covered drains, into which pipes for waste water and sewage open out from neatly built brick houses. There are even manholes to allow for cleaning the drains—suggesting a standard of sanitation that would be the envy of many modern Asian cities.

Mohenjadaro consists of two distinct sections—the actual hill, or mound, where the rulers were, and the larger lower city to the east, where lived the ruled.

Although no excavation has been done under the relatively modern Buddhist stupa, major buildings have been discovered around it—a large granary, an assembly hall and the Great Bath.

This is a magnificent rectangular structure, 12 metres by 7 metres, and 2.5 metres deep. Its bottom and sides are built of fire-dried bricks bound by gypsum mortar and reinforced by bitumen sealing.

Surrounding the Bath are several rooms, the whole being similar to the Roman baths which it preceded by over 2000 years.

Excavations have revealed an amazing picture of an urban society of nearly 5,000 years ago—at the time man was just beginning to settle into urban centres in river valleys such as here, on the banks of the Nile, and by the twin rivers of Mesopotamia.

The inhabitants of Mohenjadaro possessed a distinctive script—referred to as the Indus script, but as yet undeciphered—and a high degree of artistic craftsmanship.

Terracotta models of animals, painted wheel-made pottery, jewellery made of gold, ivory and shell, domestic utensils of copper and bronze—all testify to an advanced society.

Scales with standard cubic stone weights indicate an orderly and regulated system of commerce. The children even had toy bullock carts, marbles and dolls to play with.

Contact with the outside world existed probably along the Indus river five kilometres to the East and thence via the Arabian Sea to Mesopotamia. Excavations in the Mesopotamian cities of Ur and Kish have unearthed material related to that found in Mohenjadaro.

Today this same Indus river poses the greatest threat to Mohenjadaro. In 1922, when Marshall started excavating, the water table was 7.5 metres below ground level. Today, in summer, it can come to within 1.5 metres of the surface.

As a result the water dissolves natural minerals in the

Rising Water Threatens Uncovering of Ancient City

The remains of one of the world's earliest cities may be inundated before archaeologists can discover how it apparently disappeared quite suddenly. The remains of Mohenjadaro, 600 kilometres north of Karachi, are on a hill known as "the mound of the dead" and date back to between 2500 and 1500 BC. Of a population believed around 40,000, only 38 skeletons have so far been found. A rising water table is the enemy of excavation and, reports Gemini News Service, Nature seems to be winning. by Dr Sanjiva Wijesinha

soil and this solution of salts is drawn up by capillary action into the porous bricks. The salts react with the clay bricks and cause them to disintegrate.

Valiant efforts are being made by Pakistan's hard-pressed Department of Ar-

chaeology to preserve the ruins. But not only the exposed buildings but also the unexcavated buildings underground are being affected.

Attempts to excavate lower levels, which could reveal even older settlements, have failed because of waterlogging, and

unless the rising water table can be controlled these lower levels will almost certainly be lost forever.

Justice Abdul Kadir Shaikh, Chairman of Pakistan's Authority for the Preservation of Mohenjadaro, says: "Our main problems now are ground wa-

ter control and protecting the site from the river Indus."

Mohenjadaro is an enigma—its origin, its language, its people, its decline. Thanks to Marshall and succeeding archaeologists, we have learned much from its ruins and artefacts.

They portray with remarkable vividness the life of ordinary human beings as they lived nearly 5,000 years ago.

Pakistan has, despite enormous odds, managed to excavate and preserve Mohenjadaro thus far. Unless more help arrives soon, the waters of the unpredictable Indus river may soon complete their destructive work. — GEMINI NEWS

Dr Sanjiva Wijesinha trained in Sri Lanka, Oxford and Melbourne and is now Chief of Surgery at the Colombo Children's Hospital.

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,

I have a very serious problem which, perhaps, no one can solve. However I am writing to you as a last resort. My daughter who is only 18, has become involved with a young man who we totally dislike. She has been trapped by some jealous relatives and friends and is now convinced that they, and not we, are her well wishers. We have tried everything, from scolding to threats but nothing has worked and she is determined to marry him. The young man is a scoundrel who is taking advantage of our daughter's innocence. Please advise, as I am at my wit's end. It will be a catastrophe if she marries him.

Habiba, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Dear Habiba,

I hope you are prepared to hear some unpleasant truths. You are approaching the problem from a totally wrong angle, never even once taking your daughter's feelings into consideration. You have taken an inflexible position which is one sided, biased and totally wrong. Never once have you mentioned why you disapprove of the young man and probably your daughter does not know the reason also. Please build some communication and try to understand the reasons for her behavior. You know very well that threats and scolding will not solve the problem but will only aggravate it. Further talk to the young man if possible and try to assess how serious they are about each other. The most valid objection you can have is that since she is too young she should rather finish her education first. Please give her some confidence to wait a couple of years before taking any rash decisions. Try to be a friend to her because that is what she needs now.

Dear Mita,

I read your answer to the complain about unexpected guests and I must say that I don't agree with your advice. You know very well that it is not possible to leave guest in the drawing room and go in to eat. What about guests who come with children? Very often I cannot feed my children because of them. Both me and my husband have given hints about the timing of their visits but they fall on deaf ears. If I say anything firmly especially to my in-laws, I will be accused of being rude and inhospitable. I frankly do not think there is a solution. Do you?

Dilruba, Mirpur, Dhaka.

Dear Dilruba,

While you are right to a certain extent I don't believe nothing can be done about it. If after repeated hints some people do not understand then they will have to be told point blank and if they find your behavior rude then, too bad. But from my personal experience and training I know that people when told some unpleasant truths react negatively at first but later understand especially if they are convinced of your intentions. You can compensate by saying or doing something nice for your guest. Try not to make them defensive and at some point discuss the matter together as if approaching a common problem. Who knows, they might be facing a similar situation at home.

Dear Mita,

My husband and I totally differ on the way we want to bring up our children. He is very indulgent and doesn't say anything to them while I have to discipline them all the time. This creates resentment in them which is not fair to me. I have very high expectations and believe they need constant guidance. My husband interferes when I discipline them and openly takes their side. He cannot understand how I can be so strict being a mother and a woman. This has been going on for several years, but now that the children are growing and need more careful guidance I resent his attitude and which on the other hand is causing friction among between us. Please advise.

Farida, Maghbazar, Dhaka.

Dear Farida,

Children's upbringing is an important issue and any differences among you should not have been left unresolved for so long. It is common for a parent to be strict and the other lenient, but when this reaches a stage where it interferes with the smooth functioning of the family then it certainly is a problem. Please start to talk and discuss this between yourselves and analyses your actions as well as his. Start with yourself, make a list of complaints that you have against your children and show it to your husband. Discuss it with him and seek his opinion. He might not agree with most of them therefore discuss it not in a confrontational but amicable way. Remember, your goals are the same, that is, the welfare of your children. Therefore, approach it with that attitude.

Dear Mita,

I have a weight problem and am very sensitive to criticism. My efforts to reduce has not been very successful and most often I give up in frustration. My relatives, especially my in-laws, think I do not try hard enough which is not true. When people criticize me I give up and start eating even more. I feel people make fun of me behind my back and recently I have become a recluse. I find most of their remarks cruel and vicious. My husband too does not understand and insists that I should lose weight soon. I have consulted doctors several times but without much success. Please advise, as I think this is ruining my life.

Naseem, Gulshan, Dhaka.

Dear Naseem,

While I sympathize with your situation I cannot approve of this self destructive behavior of yours. By doing what you are, you only harm yourself. You are a grown, matured person and should act in that way. Criticism by friends and relatives, instead of making you defensive should make you determined to lose weight and show them that you can do it. Your husband does not seem very helpful in this matter but since I have not heard his side of the story I cannot make a comment. You know very well that it is possible to lose weight with proper exercise, a balanced diet and a measure of self control. Please consult a good doctor or a nutritionist if possible. Find out the reason for your weight problem — if it is hormonal, overeating or lack of exercise. Often it is a combination of all and has to be approached in a dispassionate and professional way. Remember, you have to feel good about yourself before other people feel good about you.

WRITE TO MITA

Run by a trained and experienced Family and Marriage counsellor, assisted by a professional team of doctor, psychologist and lawyer, this column will answer questions relating to family, marriage, health, family laws, and social and interpersonal relationships. Please address letters to Mita, The Daily Star, GPO Box 3257 or to 28/1, Toynbee Circular Road, Motijheel, Dhaka-1000.