

The Calcutta Psyche

By Chanchal Sarkar

WHAT if one were asked to name the three main failures which have scuttled the dreams that we Indians had in 1947? One would certainly be the inability to foresee the pattern of urban expansion and to prepare for it, cushioning people from the dreadful hardships that hold them coil.

Among the very worst examples is Calcutta. But in 'The Calcutta Psyche', the latest issue of the India International Centre's quarterly, only Ashok Mitra (the distinguished former civil servant) has sorted out the strands of neglect and avarice which have reduced Calcutta, India's leading city even in 1962 though deprived of the great human and natural resources which went to East Pakistan, to being fifth or sixth today. Bhabani Sen Gupta's piece on 'The Radical Mind' fairly bristles with dogmatic conclusions but they are worth examining. From these two essays the testament is a terrible indictment of the CPI-M government which could not, or chose not to, see which way the social and economic wheels were turning and brought about (perhaps by lack of perception sauced with blinkered dogmatism) the slow but certain garrotting of a great city. The Congress was not a whit better and has further deteriorated to

becoming an unlikely alternative. Its one dazzling exception was Dr B.C. Roy.

The rest of the journal reads too much like a requiem. There are most attractive vignettes, like that of the stage actresses of yesteryear. Sometimes the writers unfurl their

erudition with a roll of drums as in 'Ramakrishna and the Calcutta of his Times' but manage to leave the impression that the hammer blows of dry scholarship have haircracked the foundations of some of the most remarkable men of our time.

There are links missing. The city cannot be just the product of uppercaste, highly educated Hindus who had absorbed much of the best in

Western thought and science and tried to assimilate and dovetail it with their own. Cal-

cutta has for long been a city where the non-Bengali and Bengali populations ran neck to neck and today the Bengalis are may be the also rans. Muslim Bengalis didn't exist in the East alone but also in the West. The unsophisticates, the artisans, the mechanics are totally

missing in the account as are the Parsis, South Indians, Gujaratis, Maharashtrians, Punjabis and others.

One of the most interesting short books to appear in Calcutta in recent times is the rapporteur's brief description of meetings of the Parichay Group held usually in the home of Sudhindranath Datta. How very lively and wide-ranging they were.

Even so there has always been more to Calcutta than the Parichay Group or the Kallol Group, Jamini Roy, Rabindranath Tagore's paintings and Bengali food. The weakness of books on Calcutta is that they apply a patina of rouge on the same already glowing cheeks. And on the same monuments, too, like Satyajit Ray. No dishonour to Satyajit Babu; he is a great film maker of our time. But every one gets fatigued and so must Mr Ray be today. His 'Shakha Proshakha' is better than his 'Ibsen (Gonosotr)' but that is not saying very much. Maybe he lacks stimulation from his obsequious peers.

No, there is much more to Calcutta than vainglory and nostalgia. Even more than the past the future beckons and asks for answers. In 'The Calcutta Psyche' the future is a blank.



'Once Upon a Time...' Photo: M. Haris Uddin.

BOOKS

As the title suggests, 'Pather Padabali' is a collection of eight poems on the single theme — the blood-stained roads of the capital city of Dhaka during the unprecedented mass movement of 1990, which rang the death-knell of the autocratic regime and paved the way for establishment of a democratic system in the country in accordance with the objectives that guided the historic movement.

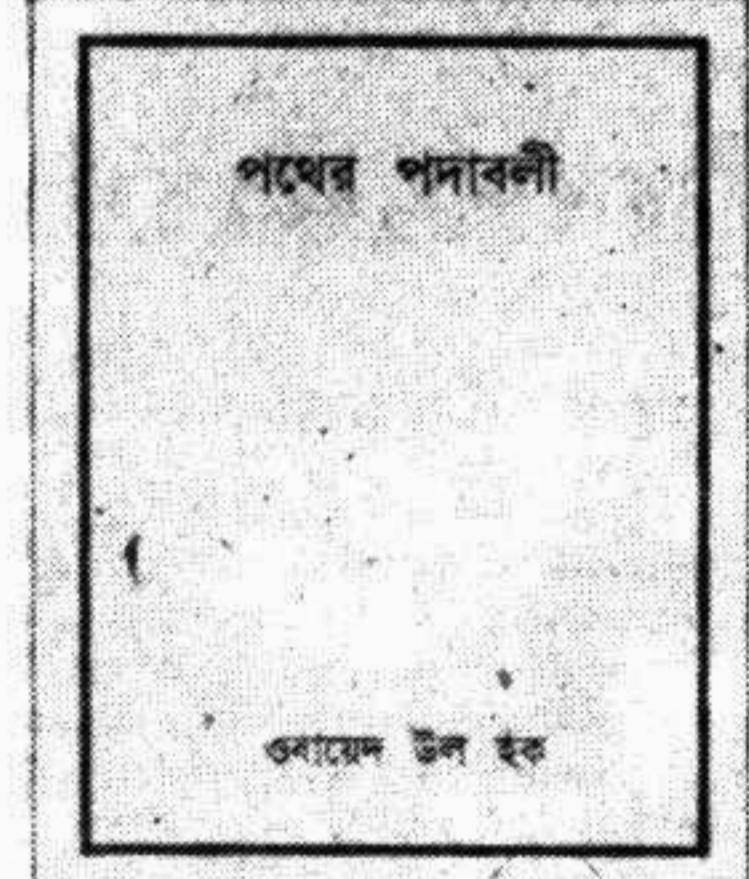
It is a versified account of the popular upsurge in which

Rhymes of the Road

Pather Padabali (Rhymes of the Road), by Obaidul Huq. Published by Arham Masudul Huq

Price: Taka Ten only.

the nation's collective will found violent expression. The poems depict the blood-tinged streets as a massive stage on



which the greatest and the most exciting drama of the mass upheaval was impressively enacted. They also pay rich tributes to the people who carried on the movement defying death, especially to the martyrs who sacrificed their precious lives in the struggle for the country's early transition to democracy.

'Pather Padabali' is a thin volume every page of which is eloquent with the heroic performances of the lovers of liberty.

— Bookworm

Nightmares for India's Mail-Order Brides

FOR thousands of Indians settled in the West, adapting to their new environment poses no problem, except one — marriage.

Unmarried migrants generally seek 'made-in-India' spouses. They import them in droves, wherever in the world they might be.

No one knows how many of these transnational marriages have worked, but an alarming number are turning out to be nightmares.

Take the case of Sudha, 24, a Master of Arts degree holder from Delhi University. In order to escape squalor, dowry demands and overbearing mothers-in-law, she agreed to marry Vinod, living in Toronto.

Sudha was brought up in a lower middle-class family. She had a dream to see New York and London, shop in big department stores like Marks and Spencer, and enjoy all the attractions of the West that she had seen on television.

She also wanted to improve her career, a choice denied her by her parents, whose traditional concern was to foster the career of their sons.

They were also keen to marry off Sudha since a foreign son-in-law could act as a lever to pull the rest of the family overseas.

Vinod and Sudha's marriage was arranged and executed within a week. Vinod then re-

turned to Toronto, leaving Sudha behind to await her visa, which took six months to arrive.

Sudha landed in Toronto, full of dreams, only to find that Vinod did not have an MBA degree, as he had claimed. He was a taxi driver, making barely \$500 a week.

Vinod started behaving badly: he would give her no money, never take her out to meet his friends nor invite

her plight. They mortgaged their property and raised enough money to bring Mira back to India.

Over the years, countless stories from unhappy brides in the West have made their way back to India. They tell how the suave and gentle person before marriage turned out to be already married, or had a white mistress, or had lied about his job, or often indulged in physical abuse after marriage.

Invariably, all expatriates had lied about their status in their prospective in-laws. An aeronautical engineer turned out to be a baggage handler, a practising pharmacist instead ran a hole-in-wall pizza place.

Two reactions have emerged in India in response to this: upper middle class families have become understandably wary of such matches, and second, matrimonial advertisements from expatriates are increasingly finding no takers. Another disincentive is the high rate of divorce among Indians settled in the West.

Why don't expatriates marry girls of the land they are settled in? Why do they want spouses from India?

A Delhi-based psychologist, Navin, who lived in the West for a few years, says foreign girls do not fit the conception of a wife in an Indian male's mind. "He wants," says Navin, "a docile, homely girls, who moulds herself to his wishes, serves Indian food, and submits to his whims and fancies."

Western girls are too independent. Indian girls brought up in traditional homes are taught to make their marriage work even at the cost of effacing themselves.

On the other hand, expatriates in the West have no trouble finding grooms from India for their daughters. Dangling a 'green card' (in the case of the US) before unmarried engineers, computer specialists or other educated young men attracts them like bees to honey.

Such arranged marriages seem to work well until the imported grooms get their own green cards. With this in their pockets, some husbands come out in true Indian colours wanting their wives, who've been bread in the West, to act and behave the way they're supposed to back in India. Having been brought up in the freer atmosphere of the West, however, the girls will sue for divorce rather than submit to their husband's wishes.

Divorce, doesn't necessarily deter the man. He hops aboard the next available India-bound flight, marries, a 'homely' girl and returns with her to his adopted land. Older women, often widows and divorcees, in India don't appear to have problems adjusting to expatriate life.

"I think we have less illusions about how wonderful both America and marriage might be," says Jassi Bhatt, 43, whose fiancée works as an engineer in California.

On the other hand, observers say that Indians who migrated in the West have no idea how women have changed in their homeland. "They think they (women) are still freeze dried, the way they left them 10 years, ago," says one.

Indian expatriates are estimated to number over 700,000 in the US, 500,000 in Canada and 600,000 in the UK. They have been there for periods ranging up to two generations. They will never return to the motherland, except, of course, to look for a bride for themselves or a husband for their marriageable daughters.

mentally, retarded. He would act abnormally. To show his passion for her, he would bite her all over the body.

Worst still, her father-in-law, whenever he was alone with Mira, would switch on pornographic films and try to molest her. For Mira, it was mental agony. Locked in the damp, tense atmosphere of her home and bossed by a mother-in-law, she endured it for two months.

One day she found the opportunity to post a detailed letter to her parents outlining

Indian men who migrate abroad are reluctant to marry foreign girls. They want "homegrown" Indian wives. In order to find them, they advertise in India. Women who answer are often disappointed when they discover the truth about their husbands. As Gemini News Service reports, arranged marriages sometimes turn into nightmares. by Atiya Singh

them home. Far from home in a strange country, Sudha had no one she could turn to for advice or solace. She didn't even know how to drive a car.

When Vinod discovered that Sudha was venturing out to make friends on her own, he got her pregnant to confine her indoors. For two years she endured misery for the sake of her child, but eventually she left Vinod for good, and now lives alone with her child.

Sudha's story is that of a dream gone sour, but what happened to Mira was horren-

Cultural Heritage

contd. from preceding page
the mentality of the people. The rural and the urban met in these poets, and the result was a wide audience.

This awareness was however not confined to literature only. At about the same time there was a greater interest in formalised musical and fine arts institutions. Jasimuddin, Abdul Alim and Abbasuddin popularised folk songs and reminded the Bangladeshi

people of their proud, rural heritage, of folk songs and musical instruments that they had forgotten. The radio, and later the television helped to disseminate this national interest in folk arts even more. Musical schools revived folk arts and belted fears that after the Partition of India, cultural consciousness would disappear in Eastern Bengal without the encompassing influence of Calcutta. Dancing, in particular

received a strong boost under the supervision of Bulbul and Afroza. The natural rhythm of the people found expression in ballet and dance-dramas not only became popular within, but found appreciation abroad. The rhythm, suppleness and precision required discipline and it was not difficult to find.

This awareness for music seeped through also into the field of Graphic and Fine Arts. The talented Zainul Abedin emerged as a guide in establishing for the first time a School of Fine Arts in Dhaka, where students came from all over the country.

Qamrul Hassan and others joined in this movement and brought out and nurtured the artistic talents latent amongst Bangladeshis. Their works portrayed the day to day life of the peasant — his little problems, miseries, tragic events in his individual life and the few silver linings in his clouds which covered his imagination. However, the most important aspect was their realism — ranging from famine scenes of Abedin to water colours of others depicting the impoverished people fighting formidable odds. This was to be manifest later during the struggle for Bangladesh, and in the early Seventies after the birth of Bangladesh.

The passionate documentation of Bengali imagination through the ages have evolved in measured steps. It has only grown stronger in the process. On the way it has picked up the cultural effect of importing more than 3000 words from Persian and Arabic into itself. It has adapted to religions playing a decisive role in the modulation of its life and its socio-cultural concepts and outlooks. The evolution of the heritage that is Bangladesh's today is rich, varied and full of appreciation of sensitivity. In the words of Andre Malraux, it is "dynamic" with unlimited scope for further growth.



Manipuri Dance. Star Photo by Shafiquddin Ahmed.

'Instant Oolong' Alters Tea Rites

A unique Chinese tea is changing the way tea is drunk. By C. Gengtao.

IT is common knowledge that tea drinkers the world over have to make tea, from loose tea leaves or tea bags.

This is true also in Japan, except with regard to oolong tea imported from China.

Eight years ago an innovative Japanese company began making a tea drink from oolong. Packed in cans and paper bags, the sugar-free drink was sold in street stalls and supermarkets, and at railway stations and airports.

With an oolong craze already raging among Japanese consumers as a health drink, the 'oolong fast tea' quickly caught the public fancy. Sales shot up 90 times in five years to reach 77.4 billion Japanese yen (US\$600 million) in 1987, from only 820 million yen in 1982.

The popularity, analysts say, is due to the drink's double-edged advantage: it promotes health and it dispenses with the trouble of tea making, suiting people living in a fast-paced society.

Ito-En Co., the Japanese maker of oolong tea drink, is now exporting its new product overseas, going the way of all successful Japanese companies which import raw materials and sell finished products on world markets at a profit.

Japan now imports more than 10,000 tons of oolong tea a year, mostly from China's Fujian province, producer of the best oolong. The combined sales of oolong tea leaves and oolong tea drink in Japan exceeded 100 billion Japanese yen in 1987 (the latest available figure), 52 per cent of the sales value of Coca-Cola in that country.

Oolong tea drink in Japan is packed in tins, aluminum cans, glass and plastic bottles and

paper bags, of varying sizes. It is usually drunk cold, though consumers preferring hot tea can buy their choice in keep-warm vending machines.

A Sino-Japanese joint venture in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian province, now produces an oolong tea concentrate, which is shipped to Japan for making the tea drink.

The joint venture, called Fujian Oolong Corporation, was set up in 1987 by Ito-En Co. and Tokyo-Maruchiji Shoji Co. of Japan and Fujian Tea Import and Export Company and Fuzhou Pharmaceutical Factory of China. Annual production is about 150 tons, packed in 10-kg and 3-kg tins.

"One kilogram of concentrate can make 50 kg of tea drink," said Jin Jianmin, general manager of the corporation. The workshop is located inside Fuzhou Pharmaceutical Factory and employs 20 people.

The reason the pharmaceutical factory is a partner is that it can provide pure water," Jia said.

Other areas in China are following suit. Xiamen City (Amoy) in southern Fujian has a similar operation. A factory in Shenzhen in south China's Guangdong province produces instant oolong tea.

polyphenolic substances through the actions enzymes. "Full fermentation of tea leaves results in black tea, while no fermentation produces green tea. Oolong is in between," Zhuang said.

Fujian's Anxi County and Wuyi mountain range produce the best oolong, Zhuang said. The best varieties are Wuytyan and Tikuanyn. The former won the top title in a national tea contest. The latter is a gold medal winner in another national tea competition.

Legends have grown around Tikuanyn, which literally means Iron Bodhisattva (a deity in Buddhism). One of them traces the origin of this particular oolong variety to a farmer who lived 200 years ago.

While on a pilgrimage to the Bodhisattva, the farmer spotted a mountain slope a tea tree whose leaves had a unique fragrance. A branch he took home gave birth to the present-day oolong variety.

Because the tea leaves are thick, "as heavy as iron," the tea became known as Iron Bodhisattva.

Good oolong tea grows on newly-stone-turned soil on tall mountain slopes shrouded in mist, where sunlight is weak and temperature differences between day and night are great, according to Zhuang.

"That is why growth of good oolong is limited to certain areas," he said. "If transplanted elsewhere, they are no longer the same."

To retain and improve the quality of oolong, Zhuang said, farmers use carefully selected cuttings instead of seeds to expand tea groves. "Use of seeds tends to change the nature of the tea variety," he said.

— Depthnews

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita, I want to marry a girl but my mother does not like her at all. She does not give any reason but says the girl is not good enough for me. I don't want to make my mother unhappy but also cannot leave the girl. What can I do? I am 25 years old and can make my own decision.

Yousuf, Narayanganj.

Dear Yousuf, If you are sure of your feelings then go right ahead with or without your mother's approval. If the girl you have chosen is clever she will ultimately win your mother over. But before you take the final step have a last conversation with her and try to find the logic of her behavior. She might have many reasons and one of them could be not wanting to let go of her son. Be as gentle as possible but this is your life, and as an adult you have the right to run it the way you see fit.

Dear Mita, Thank you for this column. We feel that we can go to someone for advice all the time. We are two sisters aged 26 and 28 and both have good jobs. We live independently and are happy. Why is there so much pressure on us to get married? We want to, but have not found right partners yet. People treat us as outcasts and say cruel things to our mother and brothers. We are criticized for being too choosy. Tell us Mita, should we settle for second best?

Two Sisters, Dhaka.

Dear Mita, I am engaged to a man I have known for many years. We are going to be married next year but recently I am developing some doubts. He is very possessive and whenever I complain he says things will change after marriage. What do you think? He does not like that I talk to other men and says jealousy is a sign of love. Please advise if I should marry him.

Salma, Dhaka.

Dear Salma, Unfortunately people who are possessive and jealous usually do not change after marriage and in some cases become even more possessive. They usually prevent their spouses from growing and developing her/his potentials. Don't take any hasty decisions. He must be having many qualities which attracted you to him. Weigh those qualities against the ones you don't like and see if you can make a partnership out of it.

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.

Dear Mita, My husband is a very successful businessman. He gives me everything I want except time. He is so busy that I seldom see him and even if he is home his thoughts are far away. When I complain he gets angry and says it is only because of us that he works so hard. I don't want so much money. I want him. Please advise.

Seema, Chittagong.