

RISING STARS

The Young People's Page

Let Christmas be Every Day

by Judith de Costa

Look above you and you'll see a spotless blue sky. Look around you and you'll see all the green your eyes could wish to behold. Birds twitter in your car as the cool breeze blows through your hair. Ah, summer, I hear you sigh. Well, a Merry Christmas to you too!

You've probably heard of the perfect White Christmas in the similarly-titled carol. It goes: "May your days be merry and bright, and may all your Christmases be white." Merry and bright is all well and good but to me the rest is all wishful thinking. I've never had the pleasure of experiencing a Christmas in the snow, building snowmen in the cold outside and then running indoors to the beckoning aroma of hot chocolate; to sit in front of a blazing fire, toasting nuts and marshmallows and gorging myself on Christmas goodies like there's no tomorrow. Then again, maybe the gorging bit is not entirely true.

Just because winter in the tropics is equivalent to summer in Europe or other cold lands does not mean we do not enjoy Christmas. Most folks here enjoy the season just as it comes because they don't know what they're missing somewhere else. Thousands of people work away from home. Duty calls them away from the comforts of home and the warmth of family life. But the celebration of religious festivities calls for togetherness. Thus we have longer holidays for such festival as Thanksgiving in America, Diwali in India, Eid in all Muslim countries and of course Christmas worldwide. I could go on forever educating you on the significance of holiday seasons but there are too many to even just mention.

Christmas in most Christian-dominated countries is beginning to lose its essence of love and generosity to commercialism. The exchange of gifts has become synonymous to the word Christmas. No longer is it the thought that counts, but however, the actual figures on the price tag of a new dress, toy train-set, etc. If it's from Selfridges or Bloomingdale's, you're my best friend or my fave uncle. If you made it yourself, you really shouldn't have bothered taking the trouble. Wouldn't it be more worth your while (and mine) if it came off a department store rack?

Everybody is by now well acquainted with the sale-boos-

ing slogan "Price slash for the holiday season". The Christians in Bangladesh are a minor race though, so you'll rarely get such offers here, except to the diplomatic community perhaps. That seems pretty silly to me, considering the fact that they pay for imported stuff from their own countries, when they can easily afford to go home and spend Christmas with the family. And some even do! So while diplomats and privileged persons (a lot of whom are not even Christians) stock up on imported traditional foodstuff for the season, those, to whom it would make a world of difference if they could get hold of a turkey are unjustly deprived. That's not very Christmassy, is it?

Nevertheless, we make up for the lack of actual food by receiving soul-food in plenty. Our community has not been carried too far on the wave of Christmas-commercialism, hence the spiritual tide of the season is stronger. We welcome the birth of Jesus Christ by means of going to church and celebrating mass in a less flashy but nonetheless magnificent aura. We welcome the babe, Jesus, into our hearts by partaking of the simple feast offered at either the vigil celebration normally held at midnight of Christmas Eve or the next morning. However, for many years, it has been held an hour earlier because by the time we're homebound, we are well into the next day.

In Bangladesh, the term used for "Christmas" is "Baradee", meaning "The Big Day". In English this is used as a reference to one's wedding day, especially for the bride as it is obviously a turning point in her life. However, in my opinion it is a fitting name given to the auspicious occasion of Christmas. It is not a time for non-Christians to feel odd for there is no hard and fast rule saying you have to be of our faith to take part in the celebration. There's a big sort of feeling which precedes the big day even in Bangladesh. People get busy fixing up their houses and colourfully decorating it with streamers, balloons and other decorative items. New clothes flash up on Christmas Eve and the next day.

In many ways Christmas doesn't differ much from Eid. Like at both times there's lots of visiting around and receiving visitors, plenty of eating

until you feel queasy, lots of small talk...

The city folk have almost all they could want for a great Christmas day. The big hotels show the kids a great time with presents, candy and Santa Claus, who agreed to come and spend the day with them as his

for the deprived families living in the rural areas. That's because there are too many Cratchets and less responsive Scrooges. Like the Cratchets, there are families just as big where the parents feel ashamed that they cannot buy their children a few new (or



Caption: Christmas in a Bengali home

big delivery has been made the previous night while everyone was either at church or asleep. But for the less fortunate, Christmas is just another day, unless some generous person makes it a special occasion for them.

In our poor country, it is only a handful who can afford something nice for Christmas and those who have the best of the season to enjoy can be named straight off the top of one's head. I'm sorry to say that whereas the ghosts of Christmas convinced Ebenezer Scrooge to see Bob Cratchet's plight and take pity on him. There's no such luck in store

second hand) clothes or even one new toy. It is doubly hard for them because giving one child something means buying stuff for the others, because if everyone is not satisfied, hostilities will spoil what little comfort the time of year itself brings. I'm talking about folk who can hardly afford a decent meal once a day and to whom a plate of well-cooked rice would be a luxury on Christmas day.

The priests in Bangladesh try to alleviate the sheer misery of these people by asking the well-to-do to contribute generously so that they can at least experience some joy in a season when there should be no hardships or worries.

Whereas we, the younger generation, are the means through which the elders reach back in time, we are also responsible for making our parents feel worn out. It is in order to bring a smile to our faces and some hope for our future that they toil away, year in and out, scrimping and saving so that we can throw away the fruits of their labours later on. If Christmas is a time for giving for all then let's resolve to give our folks a helping hand from the new year, instead of just the usual hard time.

I'm sure you resent being told to be better when you thought you were already good. Well, that's just it: be better; good is not enough! After all I've told you about

how we spend Christmas, you're probably thinking, sheesh-poor lot. You are wrong. So what if we're just a few folk trying to influence everyone with the Christmas spirit? At least we are trying and I must say the influence has been pretty heavy. You'll see a small tree coveted in blazing coloured lights in a corner of many a store or office, so much so that you'll want to put up one in your own home. The traditional trees used as Christmas trees are unavailable in this country, which is why either natural or artificial substitutes are used. I'm talking about plastic trees where you see the real thing almost every way you turn your head! Still, even a fake tree can give a genuine thrill.

Of course it saddens us that the whole city does not get lit up by the public authorities for Christmas the way we light up our own homes. But a lit up city is useless if the heart remains in darkness. Joy springs from within: only you have the power to make you happy. The Christian doctrine tells us that Christ came to the earth to save man from destroying himself by sinning time over again. Christ set the example of the forgiveness of sin which we were meant to follow. He was sent for our benefit and therefore it is only right that we warmly welcome him with a reception fit for a king. In turn he will fill our hearts with love and tenderness and our lives with more joy than we can ever ask for. Love to one's neighbour (not necessarily just next door) will fill everyone—you and me alike—with the Christmas spirit and make this Christmas one to remember forever. Giving during the season is the key word. So it's passed Christmas day, so what? Just like anyone can give, so you can give anytime, too.

Wars can be stopped by the influence of the Christmas spirit. It is a time when criminals are reprieved, with the hope that they will change for the better. Some do. If people sentenced for petty crimes (not the serious ones, no way) can improve, we who are not can too, don't you think? Make Christmas as personal as possible; forget the delicious hamper, festive turkey, eye-catching decorations and gaily wrapped gifts. Remember only the gift of love. We, the minority Christian community receive the love and support of our beloved friends of different religions, all year round, and at Christmas time we reciprocate as best as we can with love. So, everybody be grateful for what you yourself have and enable others to have for themselves. Give a little. It won't hurt.

Girls and boys, call your friends over today—as soon as you finish reading this—and tell them you want them over at your house immediately. Tell them you want everyone to get together and let one another know how special he/she is...They won't think you're nuts, trust me. They just might have been touched by the Christmas spirit too!



Like Kaluva going to Marapana

Kaluva was simpleton, though honest and sincere. The village chief wanted him to go to another village chief, and asked him to start before daybreak. So Kaluva did, but without taking the chief's written message, for he was

told nothing about the message. This proverb means following instructions literally without understanding the purpose, or loyalty without commonsense. "Laughing Together" — UNESCO Sri Lanka

A Rickshaw Puller's Day

By Md Atique Ullah

Cock-a-doodle-doo! Cock-a-doodle-doo! Malu reluctantly removed the patched and filthy blanket covering his bare body as the clamour of the morning rooster prevented all his attempts to extend his sleep further. He tossed his head and saw his brother sleeping soundly, the pillow soaking with his saliva. "What a disgusting sight" thought Malu. In an obscure corner of the room lay his mother and sister, also sound asleep. He came out of his thatched hut and suddenly a cool breeze blew over his bare body. He shivered with cold, but also felt elated at the cold touch of the wind.

The foggy morning has a moist smell and Malu enjoyed the aroma. He entered the kitchen and obtained some ashes from the fireplace and started scrubbing his teeth with his middle finger using the ash a kind of tooth-powder — poor man's tooth powder. He reached for the tubewell and drew some water that collected in a bucket. He washed his face and drenched his bare body for ablution. After performing his ablution, he changed into another lungi and a half-torn shirt. With a shivering body and clattering teeth he somehow unlocked his rickshaw which was stationed a few yards from his hut. Without looking back at his hut, he drove his rickshaw into the metropolitan area of the city. It was so early in the morning that very few people were seen on the streets. Shops were not open yet, save a few obscure ones here and there.

Malu drove his rickshaw at a controlled pace his eyes searching desperately for a passenger. Just then someone from somewhere shouted "Hey, rickshaw". Malu excitedly drove as fast as his legs would allow to the valuable passenger before other rickshaws reached him. It was an old man.

"Will you go to Asad gate?" asked the man. "Yes, Shahib" replied Malu. "How much would you charge?" asked the man again. "Five Taka, Shahib" answered Malu. "I will give you four Taka, no more" said the old man. "Get in Shahib" Malu requested. He got his passenger on his rickshaw and started riding towards his destination. Malu continued his efforts till noon when it was his lunch time. By that time his stomach usually started digesting itself from hunger. Malu had a special spot for taking his lunch. Certainly it was one of the spots where many other rickshaw pullers also had their lunch (it is in Nilkhet, University area). Malu usually had a couple of slices of bread and a handful of Jilabees which he would swallow greedily. After his meal he would wash his throat with a litre of water and a cup of tea. Usually after feeding himself he would gather all his earnings and start counting. "Four plus six equals ten. Ten plus two equals twelve..." Malu would continue his calculations. Today he has earned so far fifty four taka. With that he will be able to buy a ribbon for his sister. He had promised her a few days back that he will buy her a red ribbon.

His sister, Kamini, was an obedient and a dutiful sister. She reached seventeen last month. Since his mother is bedridden, Kamini had to perform all the household work. At night she took lessons at a government school. Malu plan for her was to marry her off so that she could build up her own family. The hooligans of his basti disturbed Kamini a lot, so he had to pay them extra cash regularly to keep them at bay. His brother Bilu was mentally retarded. Most of the time he had to be kept tied in chains because sometimes he would attack people with whatever he found at his disposal. Malu's elders advised him to poison his brother so that he could get rid of a burden. But Malu loved his brother. After all it was not his brother's fault that he was mentally retarded.

As he sat brooding over his problems he suddenly realised that he dawdling unnecessarily. He got up and bundled his money in between the knot of his lungi. As he was doing that, he thought of buying some fish and some vegetables. "Kamini will make a delicious

curry" he thought. In the evening when streets became less crowded with people, when shops began to close down, a man suddenly jumped into Malu's rickshaw out of nowhere. He commanded Malu to go straight. Malu had nothing else to do but carry out the orders. He was extremely annoyed by his passenger for not bargaining the fare as is the custom. Malu began to swear at his passenger and wished he could kick him out. But he was desperate. He had to earn money for his family to feed them otherwise would have to starve. Meanwhile, the passenger halted Malu in front of a lamp-post at the beginning of a dark street and got down.

"Do you have change for five hundred Taka note?" asked the passenger.

"I don't even earn more than ninety or hundred Taka a day. How do you expect me to give you a five hundred Taka change, Shahib!" answered Malu.

"How much do you have?" asked the passenger. "Eighty four Shahib" Malu blurted out in amazement.

"Give it to me. I will give a hundred Taka note" said the man.

"O.K. Shahib. Here it is" Malu gave him all his day's earnings.

"Wait here. I will get the note from my house" said the man and melted into the dark.

Malu waited anxiously for the man to return. But an hour passed and still the man did not return. Malu began to get suspicious. "Did the man forget me?" "Where did he go?"

"Will he ever return?" All these questions kept rising in his mind.

At last he resolved to search for the man. But where would he find the man. He did not know where the man had gone except that he had entered the street. So, he went to each and every house of the street, but was returned with a scowl or a scolding for disturbing them at such an hour. Malu felt as if he was falling from the sky.

He could not keep his balance. All this money that he had earned with his honest labour had vanished just like that. He could not still believe himself.

What would happen today? His family would be waiting anxiously for him to bring some food to eat. They were all dependant on him. How could he feed them? Malu screamed in amazement. He thought of these things and created a scene. Every body in the street thought he had gone mad.

At last when all hopes seemed to have died Malu drove back to his hut and locked his rickshaw. When he entered his hut he saw his brother, mother and his sister sitting in order, expecting him to have brought something to eat. But Malu was a failure today.

"Haven't you bought anything to eat today" asked his mother.

Malu did not answer but lay down on his mattress.

"Don't talk Ma. I am very tired and exhausted. Let me sleep" said Malu and he slept till the world work up again.



THE WHEEL

1. A man is running while carrying a heavy load on his back. He says, "YUM! I LOVE BANANAS".

2. He trips over a banana peel and falls. He says, "PLOP!".

3. He is still on the ground, looking frustrated. He says, "YEDWI!".

4. He has an idea and starts rolling a wheel. He says, "CRASH!".

5. He is now running easily with the wheel. He says, "OU CH! OU CH!".

6. He is celebrating his invention. He says, "HEY! HE JUST INVENTED THE WHEEL!".

BY SHAHED CHOWDHURY

QUIZ CLUB

Please send in your answers by Thursday!

- What is the name of the official residence of the President of France?
- What is the most frequently sung song in the world?
- Which famous ancient library was burnt down by the Romans?
- Who was the first person to walk in space?
- What do the initials GATT stand for?
- Name the source of the line, "Rajar hasto kare shamosto goriber dhan churi".
- Which legendary of Bengal built a fortress of bamboo?
- Who were the stars of the classic Bengali film, "Deep Jele Jaye"?
- Which Bengali poem describes the life of a village postman?
- Where is Satyajit Ray's ancestral home?

Here are answers to December 13, Quiz Club:

- A. 1. Nur-e-Alam Siddiqui; Abdul Quddus Makhani; A. S. M. Abdur Rab; Shahjahan Shiraj; Mujahidul Islam Selim.
- A. 2. March 7, 1971, at the Race Course Ground (now Suhrawardy Uddyan).
- A. 3. On March 25, 1971.
- A. 4. March 26, 1971.
- A. 5. April 17, 1971, at Mujibnagar, near Meherpur in Kushtia. Tajuddin Ahmed was elected prime minister.
- A. 6. General Mohammad Ataul Ghani Osmani was Commander-in-Chief. Maj. Gen. Abdur Rab and Air Vice Marshal Abdul Karim Khondker were his chief of staff and deputy CoS respectively.
- A. 7. Maj. Gen. Shafulah led the 'S' Force; Maj. Gen. Ziaur Rahman led the 'Z' Force; and Maj. Gen. Khaled Mosharraf led the 'K' Force.
- A. 8. Captain Mohtuddin Jahangir; Lance-Nayek Munshir Abdur Rab; Sepoy Hamidur Rahman; Sepoy Mohammad Mostofa; Mohammad Ruhul Amin; Flight-Lieutenant Muthur Rahman; Lance-Nayek Nur Mohammad. (All Shaheeds)
- A. 9. December 3, 1971.
- A. 10. Ninety-three thousand Pakistani soldiers surrendered on December 16, 1971.