

Some Thoughts on Greeting Cards; the Missing Credit to Our Artists; and Let Us Think about Recycled Paper

THE number of greeting cards one gets for the New Year is said to serve as the yardstick of the recipient's social standing. Personal popularity and professional status — in that order. However, when one works for an organisation, like this writer, the number of cards received may well vary according to the performance of the institution. From this point of view, our newspaper has done well so far — thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen — and I have enjoyed the reflected glory that belongs to The Daily Star.

In several Asian capitals, some offices display the cards, tied to a string, hanging from one end of the room to the other. On entering such a room, a visitor is expected to say, "What a beautiful selection of cards" and then take particular notice of the ones with official monograms. It is a pity that we did not do the same which would have added some colour to our austere looking newsroom. However, we put up the card received from the Prime Minister at its well-deserved centre of the notice board. It was a nice gesture from Begum Khaleda Zia.

If one did not get as many cards this year, as received last year, the drop probably has little to do with any possible decline in his or her social standing. It is said to reflect the poor state of the economy, which has forced a number of business houses, banks, insurance companies, media-related organisations and even newspapers to cut down on their budget for public relations, the printing of greeting cards and calendars being a major casualty.

This has apparently turned out to be a blessing in disguise for one UN body, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). One source says that the sale of the UNICEF greeting cards has been pretty brisk in Bangladesh this year, probably more than in the past, but I do not have the figure. One day, it would be nice to know how much this poor developing country has contributed to the welfare of deprived children all over the world, through the purchase of UNICEF cards.

All this does not mean that UNICEF has taken over the entire greeting card business. Many trade houses, fewer than last year, have come out with their own. My own impression is the printing quality of our locally-produced cards and calendars continues to show improvement, year after year, together with their contents, such as paintings

and photographs. We know, a few households cut out these illustrations and frame them as decorations.

What I find most disconcerting is the absence of any acknowledgement and due credit to artists and photographers whose brushes or cameras have produced these illustrations. Among the greeting cards received by my office during past three weeks, I have counted nearly two dozen with excellent illustrations, all of good quality, which are without any form of credit. Whether these illustrations are

permission. Threatened with legal action, the Dhaka paper settled the bill with more promptness than it usually shows in paying the legitimate dues of its employees.

There is a general misconception that copyright of materials used by newspapers runs only for 24 hours. In recent years, the relevant laws have been changed, giving the protection of copyright enjoyed by a writing or an illustration a longer time frame, if not a permanent safeguard. Legal questions apart, there are issues of ethics and moral-

Ambassador to Bangladesh — that popular couple that contributed a great deal to the strengthening of ties between our two countries.

I wonder if some of our business houses should not start using recycled paper for their greeting cards and thus keep down the cost of printing. The question is, do we have facilities for the production of recycled paper which, in some countries, is used extensively for school text books? What do we do with, say, copies of unsold newspapers or when they are resold to vendors by subscribers?

A couple of years ago, a noted industrialist here talked to me what sounded like an ambitious plan of producing recycled newspaper for export. To ensure the quality of his paper which, he rightly felt, ought to be better than what we get from our Khulna factory, his plan was to use imported used newspaper from abroad. It was not as outlandish as it sounded. After all, according to one recent report, such leading US newspapers as The New York Times and the Washington Post have been increasingly using recycled newspaper, almost over 20 per cent of the total requirement. I am curious about the fate of the Dhaka project. Just another casualty of the downturn of the economy or pushed under the carpet?

Meanwhile, let us see if we can produce recycled paper

for our greeting cards. Or maybe the UNICEF can come up with an inexpensive variety of its greeting cards for 1993 on recycled paper, in addition to its normal version.

Possibilities are indeed limitless when a resourceful organisation like UNICEF chooses to be daringly innovative. Here is one more thought.

Sketches and illustrations the organisation uses for its greeting cards are all — or nearly all — by established artists from different countries.

Could UNICEF make a departure from its established practice by including some works of child artists in its selection? We know, many such works would not match what UNICEF puts on its cards every year. But, then, they would convey something of that childlike innocence and spontaneity that provide a special quality to children's art. For example, I reproduce here the sketch by a six-year old girl. I borrowed the card from the selection of my journalist colleague and old friend, S. Kamaluddin. The original is in colour. Its reproduction in black and white does not do full justice to the charming work.

Well, if the UN Children's Fund does not come forward to promote children's art, who else will?

MY WORLD

S.M. Ali

cut out from published brochures or bought from artists — painters, photographers — I would not know. What I do know is that organisations have no right to use them without appropriate acknowledgements.

There is one illustration, used on a greeting card, that made me first sad and then angry. It is a fairly well-known sketch by one of our great artists, the late Qamrul Hassan. His signature in Bangla, with a date in 1973, is there, which one can barely make out. But this can not be taken for proper acknowledgement. For the benefit of our Department of Culture, I reproduce the sketch in question. A clipping of this column will also go to UNESCO which is concerned about the protection of intellectual properties, under universal copyright laws. Notwithstanding the legal position, I think it is blatantly wrong to use any illustration — photographs or reproductions of paintings — without due credit and permission from artists.

Maybe Bangladesh has not yet singled the copyright laws. Hence, we remain in a free-for-all situation, using, or rather lifting, materials for our publications we have not paid for, sometimes without even any reference to the source. However, not every foreign publication is willing to put up with this situation. A couple of years ago, a London newspaper sent a fat invoice to a local daily charging it for two articles the Dhaka publication had lifted from the British paper, without bothering to take its

ity which should not be shrugged off by our publishers, journalists and media practitioners.

BACK to the subject of greeting cards, a couple of them received by this writer have used recycled paper, with simple designs printed on them. One of them is from Kathmandu, signed by the Lohanis — Mohan was, until recently, the Nepalese



GREETING CARDS WHICH TELL DIFFERENT STORIES: Left, a sketch by noted artist, the late Qamrul Hassan which is used by a local company without any credit to the painter. Right, a sketch by Tazim Fatima (Masha), a six-year old girl, used in her self-designed card.



Yvonne Puts Black Theatre On the London Map

David Spark

Black drama is finding a permanent base in central London. Early in 1992 Wole Soyinka's play *The Road* will be followed by a Jamaican farce and later a Jamaican pantomime. Behind the venture is actress Yvonne Brewster who got fed up with being cast on TV as black comedian Lenny Henry's mother.



YVONNE BREWSTER 'I wanted to be in the theatre'

FOR the first time a black drama company has established a base in London's theatreland. It is called Talawa and in February it will reopen the 350-seat Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre, off Holborn, with Nigerian Wole Soyinka's play, *The Road*. This will be followed by a Jamaican farce, *Smile Orange* by Trevor Rhone, and by the words, dance and music of Ntozake Shange's *The Love Space Demands*. Talawa will round off the year with a Jamaican pantomime, *Arawak Gold*.

Energetic founder Yvonne Brewster says Talawa is a Jamaican word meaning 'female, small, strong and not-to-be-messed-about-with' — not a bad description of Yvonne herself.

She left Jamaica for drama school in Britain because 'I wanted to be in the theatre.' She appeared in several television series, finally drawing the line at being cast as the mother of comedian Lenny Henry. 'I felt I was too young,' she says.

She launched out instead into directing plays, and five years ago got a £80,000 grant from the Greater London Council. Her husband told her she had better form a company or she might have to sell their house if things went wrong.

So she formed Talawa and launched it with *The Black Jacobins*, by the cricket-loving West Indian playwright and Marxist writer, C.L.R. James.

This was at the rather comfortable Riverside Studios in West London.

Since then she has not just presented 'black' plays, but has advanced boldly into the English classic repertory with Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

These won audiences as well as Arts Council grants and the praise of critics. 'We have money in the bank,' she says.

Her chance to move Talawa into theatreland results from a disaster — a bold but over-ambitious plan to create a black arts centre in the Roundhouse, a historic former locomotive shed in North London.

A lot of money went into the conversion but when the Government wound up the Greater London Council there was not enough to complete it. Moreover, black theatre groups were not keen to perform in a vast auditorium initially built for quite a different purpose.

However, Pamela Howard, who directs the theatre-design course at the London Institute, knew that the Arts Council had set aside money for the Roundhouse project and that this money could now be put to other uses.

She proposed that the Institute and the Council should join in refurbishing the Cochrane Theatre, which the

institute owns. She also proposed that Talawa should be the resident company.

This would give her design students access to a working theatre. It could also attract students from ethnic minorities to join the design course.

The Arts Council is putting £194,000 and the London Institute £150,000 into a refurbishment designed by Nigerian architect Abi Odedina.

Psychologist Dr Marie Stewart, who chairs Talawa, says the theatre needed to be made more comfortable and attractive. They wanted it to be 'an eye-catching building which will welcome the audience we want to get from London and further afield.'

For Yvonne Brewster, the Cochrane has the advantage of being a purpose-built theatre with purpose-built equipment. She dismisses as patronising suggestions that Talawa should have gone into a converted warehouse in Brixton, heartland of London's West Indian community.

Black people, she says, have style. They drive Mercedes cars as well as old bangers like mine. 'She reacted strongly when the Arts Council chairman mentioned black theatre in the same breath as theatre for the disabled.'

Nor does Brewster see it as a statement of political solidarity. Unlike an Asian, she does not have an alternative identity. Being black is simply what she is. And theatre is what she wants to do.

Her Cochrane project got a handsome send-off from the British Establishment. Minister of Arts Tim Renton said minority communities had brought new cultural perspectives and 'have made us think again about our ideas of theatre and music.'

'I would like to see more black and Asian directors, actors, sculptors as an integral part of our life. Equally, black and Asian organisations need to get a better foothold. Renton pointed out that the director of a leading Asian company, Tara Arts, is presenting his latest production at Britain's National Theatre.'

GEMINI NEWS

Due to unavoidable circumstances, advice column 'Write to Mita' does not appear this week.

THE drawings, paintings, graphics and sculptures by twenty-one Indian artists, which have been on display since January 4th, are an entertaining and fascinating array of contemporary Indian art.

After listening to the seminar held at the Shilpakala Academy in this context, and having spoken to the three artists, who had been flown in from the neighbouring country, one comes to the conclusion that one had yet to learn a great deal about art, culture and civilization, in general and in particular. What the contemporary artists in India are today aspiring to do is to combine the art and culture of both the East and West, and take a further step into yet another world of dreams, aspirations and achievements. The artists who had participated in the show were well aware of the past but had achieved in the past by the artists the world over.

The most interesting work was perhaps the oil on canvas creation by Nilima Sheikh. Her piece in the exhibit was presented in three panels, and appeared to depict 'what you will'. The painting appeared to delineate a landscape, although speaking to the lady one realised that she was interested in anything and everything. She did not believe in 'isms'. The painting appeared to be a tranquillising landscape of India with gorgeous trees, expanses of water, and dry baked areas, surrounded by swirls of water.

Sanat Kar, the leader of the artist's group that came with the Indian display, had a fascinating item. This had the subject of a person being carried by a bull. A beautiful indigo blue peacock was hoisted on to the human figure. Angels from heaven appeared to guard this exotic ride. The sky was green and the face of the human being orange but nothing was amiss.

Mr. Kar was well aware of the environmental and socio-

economic problems of human beings, not only in the Subcontinent, but the world over. He appeared to be humorous, philosophical, and full of 'joie de vivre'. He appeared to be well acquainted with the contemporary artists of his own age in Bangladesh. The message and advice that he gave them was from Omar Khayyam, and could not have been more adequate.

One failed to find the entrance of Mr. Joges Chowdhury.



Leela Mukherjee: FAMILY

AN EVENING WITH INDIAN ENTREE OF ARTS A Slice of Nirvana

Fayza Haq

the shy sensitive artist, who was also a member of the group of artists, whose works were on display. He knew well the history of the various schools of art that had been set up in India since the British Raj. Within one's tight schedule however, one failed to get even a glance of the works of this soft-spoken Commissioner of 'Santinetian'.

Bikash Bhattacharjee's entree reminded one of the exotic works of Matisse and Gauguin. But one was intrigued and mystified by the presentation. Who exactly were the women depicted, and what were they doing in the balcony in that manner? How were they keeping their composure in the apparent pell-mell life that surrounded them? The oil painting remained photographic rather than purely impressionistic.

The solid stone-like portrait of an Indian gentleman by Bipin Goswami was impressive. The artist, who had been to various parts of the Subcontinent and London, had created an individual with a definite personality. The facial features were undoubtedly that of a person who had lived and learned well. The front part of his 'dhoti' was displayed in a suave manner. As one was not allowed to touch any of the items, flown from abroad, and there were not adequate or detailed captions — one was not sure of the medium. One simply conjectured that it may have been of cement and glossed over. Yet it could have been of stone too, which one could have figured out had there not been so many guards around, blushing only when

you asked them trivial questions.

The carmine flying angel by Saroj Gogi, with wings of a bird and the derriere of an animal, yet with the visage of a woman complete with her bosom made any viewer, disenchanted with the world, want to carry on with the business of living. The beautiful green scenario, under the angel was decorated with beautiful flora and fauna of different species, sizes and colours. The green and black dominated in the forefront. Yellow and red hues were subtly added to hold the composition and continue with the artist's experimentation.

The Vincent Van Gogh-like creation by Paritosh Sen, educated at Madras and Paris, took the viewer back to the land of 'Under the bridges of Paris with you', as so many cosmopolitan creations can. The colours used were that of Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers'.

Actual sunflowers were in the forefront. The painter was included too and here Sen's own style and perception took over. The artist was red haired. One wondered where Sen had got his Auburn haired model from. He was complete, with his easel, brushes and a pipe.

The entree by Katriek Pinc was subtle, sophisticated and soothing. The three exotic peacocks in the picture appeared animated, and full of 'joie de vivre'. More interesting than the rest of the subjects on the piece was the Japanese-like portrayal of the tree in the backdrop, which appeared like some mysterious owl or bat or

even a rodent, eating and pecking out the nest of some bird.

Leela Mukherjee's entree had the mother and child theme. It was in wood and had been carefully carved out. The details were meticulous. The

the banana, as presented by Manjit Bawa, with the artist's blacks, browns and gentle touches to delineate the tvara, that the young woman was wearing, and to indicate her teeth, was again soothing and delectable. The artist has had his works displayed in India, USA, Europe and Japan.



Manjeet Bawa: UNTITLED

artist born in 1916 in Hyderabad, Sind, had studied fine arts at various places in India. His contributions are displayed with pride in New Delhi today.

The young woman eating Madhavi Parekh, who comes from Gujarat, and has no formal education, has had solo exhibitions before in India. Her entree was a charming and soothing feminine creation, with greens greys, yellows,

beige, dots and lines. It was clear, precise and contemporary in every sense. She had brought in the life in India, the people, animals, and the vegetation in a delightful design.

Women's different depiction by Nalini Malini, who was born in '46, and educated in Bombay, was quite a nouveau presentation. It brought in women from India, Far East and Europe in the four corners of her work, and kept an impressionistic visage of a woman, with a charcoal effect, in the centre. The subject was done apparently with pencil and chalk. Malini's exhibitions have been seen before in India, Europe and USA.

The portrait of the man by Manu Parekh, from Ahmedabad, depicted a man with blood-shot eyes and in torment as his teeth were exposed, and he had wrinkles on his face. He was wearing a shirt and 'chadar' but appeared to have no peace of mind. Parekh had well analysed the fate of the majority of the people, both in India and elsewhere. One came to the conclusion that the average individual somehow makes ends meet.

The more abstract creation by Mona Rai, who has once been a student of psychology and painting in New Delhi, was yet another eye-relief. It had combined blue with orange and yellow, and had put soft and gentle touches of multicoloured dots and dashes to complete her entree. Mona Rai has had exhibitions in USA, Europe, Far East, India and is a recipient of a fellowship from the cultural ministry of the Indian government.

The portrait in sculpture done by Ved Nayar, who had studied at the Art College in Delhi, at one time, was impressive. It reminded you of the sculptures found in the ancient civilization of Egypt and Mesopotamia. It was dark, and

the profiles were negroid. But one realised that this could have been a portrait of someone from anyone of the Aryan descent. Even a Tamil Nadu individual could have been portrayed in the piece.

Amittav Das's abstraction in black, red and yellow was dramatic, if nothing more to the common viewer. Once again one felt the effect of harmony and peace, which was perhaps in the mind of the artist.

Yet as people know, art pieces have various interpretations, seen, read and heard various times. Anything which is a piece of art, is never boring — no matter seen, read or viewed many-times over.

One hoped that the viewers of this unique art exhibition of Indian art in Bangladesh had realised that the display was the product of people who were searching for a feeling, language and destiny of their own.

Requiem Shakil Kasem

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