

# Nostalgia, Impressions and Images

I had eagerly looked forward to our stay in Bangladesh little realising three years ago how strong my bonds with this country were to become and how many of my roots I was to discover here.

Growing up in post-partition Calcutta, East Pakistan was a remote land for us children. Though my maternal family originally hailed from these parts, "East Bengal" for us meant the football team my mother supported much to our chagrin because the rest of my family supported the rival club Mohun Bagan. Or East Bengal evoked the "Bangal" dialect my mother lapsed into while speaking to her aunts, even though their family had lived in Calcutta for close to a century, their village in Vikrampur having been long subsumed by the Padma river. However, all that changed with the emergence of Bangladesh and the nostalgia for that part of the sub-continent where I was born and brought up led me eagerly to Bangladesh in the hope of seeing for myself the likenesses and differences.

My first impression of Dhaka was not what I expected. I had expected a lot more foliage and greenery than exists here. However, old Dhaka had some unexpected delights. Gracious mansions on the Buriganga: what histories would each of these houses have to tell. I wonder! Then the vibrancy and emotion of those heady days leading up to the democratic general elections of February, 1991. A visit to the Bangla Academy the evening before the elections was an uplifting experience. Thousands of people on the streets in an orderly, expectant and joyful mood. I recollect another memorable evening, spent at the Shilpakala Academy. There was a Rabindra Sangeet Sammelan on and the auditorium was packed to capacity — people sitting in the aisles, in front of the stage, on the stage, wherever they could find a niche, and all in a spirit of bonhomie. Can this cultural curiosity ever be fully satisfied? I hope it never can, and will never die.

Seasons are totally and necessarily intertwined with the Bengali psyche. The rise and fall of rivers, the dreaded "Kal Baisakhi" or storms bringing much destruction but also respite from the relentless heat and humidity, the joy of eating an unripe mango, or a ripe one for that matter, are all associated with the various seasons, and these seasons are

by Brinda Srinivasan

devastation and human suffering but after the ravages of nature are past, one forgets the destruction and can only remember the majesty and splendour. Forays into the countryside were always rewarding as we

profile of his career. On the banks of the River Padma with a breathtaking view and in that soothing or tranquil ambience, one is almost tempted to try one's hand at poetry! Inspiration is close at hand, but the talent is lacking!

Then onto Rajshahi where one saw some truly remarkable architecture. The old Zamindari house in Natore and

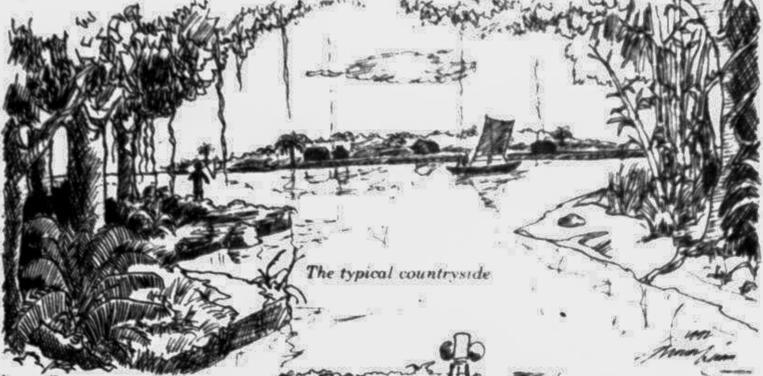
the ruins of the great Buddhist Monastery of Mainamati, and a fine museum. The Commonwealth graves where young men of many nations who died in war are buried was also worth a visit. The graves are exceedingly well maintained horticulturally and the Visitors Book is to be seen carefully.

I remember some magical evenings in Sylhet and Mouhi Bazar. The plains of Bangladesh spread out under relatively low altitudes; the weather seems softer, cooler and the countryside is truly green, with the haze of woods smoke in the twilight. The large workforce in the tea gardens is present but never obtrusive. The hospitality of the planters is legendary as indeed in every country where the leaf for the cup that cheers is grown.

The Bengalis are rightly considered a nation of singers and balladeers. This has struck me the most here. The extraordinary and dulcet voices of the ordinary man or woman was apparent, and their capacity to burst into song, whether it was my neighbour's gardener or the child vendor at a park, was heartwarming. Other races, even the Italians, would give a lot for such a natural attribute!

So many images pass through my mind on the eve of my departure. What will I remember the most? Will it be the evenings when we sat with close friends and had interminable discussions on just about every subject? Will it be the quiet solitude of looking at lush paddy fields bathed in the winter sunlight, or will it be of small children with bright eyes, desperately struggling to survive, who greet me ever so cheerfully when I am out on my daily evening walk? Or the trill of the 'ghughu' bird punctuating my early morning chores? Of course, it will be all these things, the people and places that go to make Bangladesh a special and loveable country.

The writer is wife of Mr. K. Srinivasan, the outgoing High Commissioner for India in Bangladesh.



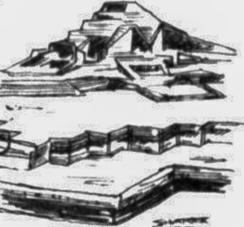
The typical countryside



Lalbagh fort



The traditional Baul



Paharpur monastery

brought into sharp focus in Bangladesh. All were so reminiscent of my childhood when these simple pleasures were all important. Nowhere did it seem to matter as much as during the monsoons, and to be on the banks of one of Bangladesh's awesome rivers. The sight is splendid and dramatic. Of course, these rivers wreck much havoc and

discovered much that was surprising and worth seeing. The town of Kushtia for instance yielded unexpected sights. Elegant old town homes and the tomb of Lalon Fakir. Not far from Kushtia town was Sheldaha, the excellently maintained home where the poet Rabindranath Tagore spent many years — the years which are considered the most

Putiya were marvellous examples of the Bengali renaissance. The piece-de-resistance were the exquisitely carved terracotta temples at Putiya. To see this at sundown was an unforgettable experience. I mention these places as they are relatively under-visited so far. Comilla was yet another such place. A beautiful old town with the attraction of

# Europe's First Asian Radio Finds Right Wavelengths

by Geoff Ellis

In a quiet side street in West London, Europe's first independent Asian radio station is well into another day of its round-the-clock programmes of news, music, chat and information. The religious songs that start each day — Hindu, Muslim and Sikh — are over, to be followed soon by two hours of popular music and new releases.

In the intermission, Sunrise Radio is using its airwaves to announce jobs that are available locally, with both employers and would-be employees phoning in for help.

Sunrise is one of a growing number of radio and television stations catering for the more than two million people of Britain's Asian community. It began in 1989 after the British government changed broadcasting rules to allow such stations.

It now incorporates a second station, Sunrise FM, in the northern city of Bradford, and is part of a group wanting to take over Spectrum Radio, a multi-ethnic station in London.

The man behind it all is Avtar Lit, who came to Britain as a 12-year-old from the Punjab in 1969. Despite early difficulties from his lack of English, he learned the language and worked with a cable television station before setting up Radio Sena, an illegal "pirate station" in Hounslow, West London.

Local people loved it but the authorities did not, and Lit left for the United States when inspectors from the Department of Trade began to close in on his operation. He returned to Hounslow in time to win one of the new, legal licences to set up Sunrise.

The station's impact is enormous. The few miles around its offices contain the greatest concentration of Asians in Britain, and the latest figures supplied by Lit show as many as 92 per cent of them may listen in.

One of the most popular shows is the Sunday afternoon "Family Introductions", presented by Lit, which helps families trying to arrange marriages for their sons and daughters. It's led to Lit being called the "Cupid of the airwaves" in the national press.

Sunrise Radio, in West London, caters to the British capital's large Asian population, heeding the unique likes and dislikes of its audience. The station is succeeding where others have failed because it is run by Asians who understand the differences between East and West.

The station also has a strong news side. British author Salman Rushdie came out of hiding to give an interview to Sunrise, following Ayatollah Khomeini's "fatwah" against him as author of *The Satanic Verses*.

The station had news of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination within 30 minutes of his death, thanks to a listener who was in India at the time of the bomb blast that killed the former prime minister.

During the Gulf war, Sunrise sent reporter Nartish Puri to refugee camps in Jordan and launched an appeal that provided tonnes of aid for the stranded foreign workers.

Puri has now moved to the BBC, and Lit is proud of the number of his staff who have moved on to such jobs.

"I think many of the people working here will be running their own stations in years to come," he says. Sunrise is home to the Asian School of Broadcasting, an institution chaired by Lit and used to spot and train talent.

The reason Sunrise has been so successful compared to other stations is that they have used British yardsticks to cater for the Asian community," he says.

"The Asian community is very different in its habits, likes and dislikes, and humour. What others tried to do was provide music and information for an Asian audience, but not deliver them in the right style."

Now Sunrise can be heard throughout Europe by satellite. "We have succeeded in making Europe a global Asian village," Lit says.

"We have been able to make this station belong to everybody — not just the educated — and make it an institution in the Asian community, listened to by the whole family."

— GEMINI NEWS  
GEOFF ELLIS is a former editor with the now-defunct Compass News Service in London.



# Pulling at Your Heartstrings

## Leela Samson Interviewed

by Fayza Haq

WHEN the Bharat-Nattiyam expert Leela Samson visited Dhaka to give performances and conduct workshops, there was a hub-bub non-pareil in the city.

Speaking to a conference of a select group of dance and music critics from the press, Leela said "I didn't take up dancing as a career from the outset. I could well have been a doctor. I took up dancing seriously at a later stage. I was, however, at the Kalakshetra Institute since the age of six, and finished a diploma course there."

Although being a Christian and dancing Hindu temple dances, she said she did not find a clash. "For an artist religion is of little consequence. In terms of art it doesn't bother me. I believe in all religions," Leela commented.

Dwelling on the "Nattiya Shastra" the danseuses said confidently, "In India there is a cross-fertilisation of old myths. Bharat-Nattiyam belongs to 'Shilapati Karm'. If you wanted to be purely regional there are the Tamils in the south who say Bharat-Nattiyam comes from the south. Every dance has its own text. Every



regional area can boast of its own particular text. Regions have now come together and so have myths and 'taalas'. The similarities in Kathak, Bharat Nattiyam and Manipuri are amazing. In the Siva legend, the 'abhinaya' parts are all the same. It is the nuances and the treatment of the 'raagas' that are different. In 'Nattya Shastra' the chapter on dance is not a single one," she observed.

Leela added in a self-effacing manner that she was not a scholar and she did not have enough research to give decisive opinions. "Today if you send someone from Bangladesh to learn Bharat Nattiyam, 'Kalakshetra' is the prominent institute. Yet there are good teachers in Delhi, Bombay, and Madras, and there is the 'Shantiniketan' too."

Does she feel that there was a slow phasing out of the classical art? "Classical art," she insisted, "has not moved away from the masses. Sometimes things become more important like food, clothes and shelter. The Indian government has made efforts to keep the classical arts alive for thirty years.

Stipends have been given to deserving students and the 'paramapara' system has existed for years. At present there is a big revival — students get Rupees 350 a month. Sometimes when a teacher is not good enough for the student, recommendations are made to get him to a place where he can obtain better training."

She continued in the same vein, "In the last fifteen years, we are influenced by the influx of 'Coca-cola and jeans' syndrome. This has influenced people in the Far East, such as Japan. A large number of students are not more than 28 years old, and neither are their friends and admirers. Earlier one found older people in the audience. To be involved in classical art is a fad. It is 'for the youth, and by the youth'. Once a year about 30 students are sent to 'guru' for two weeks. The 'shagird' must wear a 'lungi' and sleep on the floor, even if he is from a rich family in Punjab. The student automatically absorbs himself."

When she was in the west, in Europe, she gave performances in places like Vienna,

Spain and New York. "In such cosmopolitan places with old cultures, they know how to put you in the right perspective. Yet in the other cities, classical Indian dance remains an acquired taste. In a place like Bangladesh or Japan, there is a natural acceptance which one does not find in the west. The way they uphold an artist in the east is not the same as they do in the west. In the east the viewers delve into the philosophy of the performance," Leela commented about how she felt performing abroad, specially in the west.

"The reaction in Bangladesh was better than what we get even in India. There is a lot of restlessness in the crowd in my country. They go in for circus, Marxist plays, and what have you. They want everything to be 'exciting'. I had no complaints in Dhaka. The audience was ideal and a dancer's dream," she commented about how she felt performing in Dhaka.

"The Bharat Nattiyam has the weight of thousands of years. I believe it will outlast musical performances such as jazz, pop and rock music. It has stood the test of time. It gives a lot of peace, and we are not simply out to entertain. The dance touches the heart and mind of the audience. It leaves a deep spiritual impact," she asserted.

"Nobody denies," Leela added "that folk dances have their appeal. Yet the classical artist has to approach at a different level, to touch the soul." She continued "The majority of the artists do not constantly refer to the texts. There are Ph.Ds in music, and yet they may not be brilliant. When you are in the path of creative art, however, you have to drop some of the old theories."

"If a classical dancer wants to be modern he or she will look to the west. These influences sometimes have strange combinations of the east and west. Sometimes it is not a happy combination. It clashes with the sensibilities of the conservative, unless the dance is performed in a place like Bombay," Leela continued about the state of dancing in India.

What was her opinion of the dances presented in 'Dur Darshan'? Leela replied immediately, "It is not of a very high standard. Yet a large majority have been exposed to folk and traditional dances via the TV. The 'telly' has really opened up the art. The type of classical dance coverage there is mediocre. I am not satisfied. I would not like to see people watch me on the

Continued from Page 9

- limited human resources;
- institutional difficulties;
- limited financial resources.

Many developing countries do not have sufficient information on the scientific basis of the global warming issue, and why it is causing such widespread concern. Neither do they have the data for informed discussion of the policy options to restrict global warming which are open to them, or of ways of coping with climate change if it takes place as predicted.

Research and technical capabilities are low in many Third World countries. This means it is impossible for them to monitor potential global warming impacts or to study ways of coping with them if they occur.

If developing countries are to adopt and apply appropriate policies in response to global warming, they must be informed about what is happening. They must be able to monitor any changes in their own climate and along their own coastlines, and to collaborate with neighbouring states in building up a regional picture. A high degree of scientific assistance and training as well as coordination of studies and results will have to be provided by the industrial world for the appropriate international organisations if these essential tasks are to be carried out.

### What kind of development

The threat of global warming has stimulated the debate about what kind of development path the Third World should follow. Some environmental commentators feel that the global warming issue is yet another, and perhaps final,

screen in context of the milieu of the others.

"If I wanted French food," Leela elaborated, "I would not mix it with fish curry. We are playing games and falling prey to fast life, and the making of the easy buck."

Referring to mingling of the various genres of dancing, Leela commented, "It should be a perfect marriage. My sensibilities would be hurt if the blending was not well. It is like a polished gentleman being linked up with a gross African woman from the interior. The dances come from different areas. The questions begin: will the music be yours or mine, and so on."

What does she think of her awards? Leela replied without hesitating, "They are a pat on the back, but they don't give you the same satisfaction as an adoring audience."

To keep herself fit Leela does jogging, aerobics, and is a trifle careful of her diet.

For unavoidable reasons WRITE TO MITA is held up for next week.

# GLOBAL WARMING

warning that industrial society is on a course towards self-destruction and, therefore, provides an example which should not be followed by the developing world. It is a view shared by a substantial number of Third World observers who feel that the present model of development adopted by the majority of developing nations, in addition to being unsustainable, is a form of cultural and economic colonisation.

Many other developing country commentators, however, disagree. Certainly, politicians, and the populations which elect them, tend to conceive progress in terms which are largely those of the industrial nations. They want the possessions, comforts and conveniences of industrial society. The Chinese government, for example, is determined to provide every household with a refrigerator, an objective with which the population is likely to agree wholeheartedly.

There is a genuine fear among many Third World people that there is a hidden agenda in the global warming discussions: that the industrial countries would like to impose a form of development on the Third World which denies it the benefits industrial countries take for granted. The point is valid. It is not for the industrial world to use the threat of global warming as an excuse for trying to haul up the development ladder by which it has ascended to its present comfortable and dominant position. The debate about the development model it wants to follow is for each Third World country to resolve for itself.

People in developing countries have to formulate their own particular developmental response, based upon their own needs, capacities and priorities, backed up by financial and technical resources from the industrial world. In this sense the global warming issue can play the role of catalyst in the development process.

### Preventing deforestation

Some future scenarios for stabilising greenhouse gas emissions assume that deforestation in the Third World will be stopped. It would be highly desirable and most Third World governments would be glad if it happened. But there are many difficulties.

It must be recognised that the economic value and productive capacity of a standing forest, as currently computed, is extremely low. Even when people live there, obtaining fruit, nuts and other valuable products, this is a very low-intensity use of the land. Cutting the trees and turning the land over to farming is economically far more productive. There is,

therefore, an almost irresistible economic pressure to get rid of forests and put the land to other uses, which for local people will almost invariably be agriculture. Logging is also a means of turning the low economic value of standing trees into valuable timber — a process which countries under great pressure to pay back foreign debt find it difficult to forego.

In countries where many people are barely meeting their basic needs, preserving forest resources for the benefit of future generations may seem a luxury they can ill afford. It is in the interest of all countries to conserve the world's forest, the international community should recognise this and compensate poorer countries accordingly.

The present population of the Third World is about 3.7 billion people, about three-quarters of the world total. They consume about 20% of the world's fossil fuels. If the gap in living standards is to be narrowed, even prevented from widening an increase in the fossil fuel consumption of the developing world is inevitable.

This is an issue which will have to be recognised and accepted in the area of energy assistance. There is already a growing reluctance on the part of some donor agencies to provide assistance to projects which involve fossil fuels — for

example, supplying diesel pumps or diesel generators for a rural electrification project.

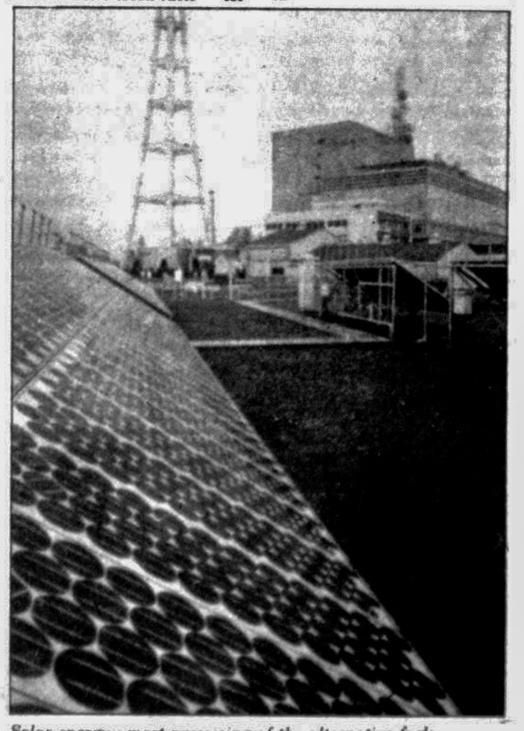
Renewable energy sources should, of course, be used when they are technically and economically suitable. But there are many occasions when this is not the case.

### Debt, trade and aid

The resources available to Third World governments wishing to take actions to avert the global warming threat are extremely limited in comparison with those at the disposal of the industrial nations. The full magnitude of the economic gulf between the Third World and the industrial countries is sometimes forgotten in discussions about global warming. But a few sample figures can help restore a sense of proportion.

The total economic output of France, with a population of 56 million, is about three times greater than that of India with its 900 million people. Norway, with just four million people, has an economic output about four times that of Bangladesh, with its 115 million people. The average Swedish GNP per person is 120 times greater than that of Tanzania.

Third World countries are as deeply involved in the problem of global warming as the industrial world. They need resources if they are to prepare themselves against its possible effects. They also need resources if they are to contribute to the fight against it.



Solar energy: most promising of the alternative fuels.