

Encore Symbolism but with a Difference

by Fayza Haq



Chess



Rickshaw



New Vision 1992

KHALID Mohammed Mithu, whom Dhaka knows already as an accomplished photographer due to his earlier photographic exhibitions, has proved himself a success as a painter too. He has used symbolism with remarkable efficiency. This was seen in his painting exhibition held at the residence of the French ambassador, Serge Degallax.

From the technical point of view, he attempted to use various kinds of interesting and fairly new techniques. He went in for symbolism again because of "the depth that goes into it. You can interpret what you will from it," as he explained.

In his "Return to Self" which was an abstraction, he attempted to depict life in Bangladesh. In the foreground we saw a mass of grey and red, as symbols of every day life in the country. He employed soothing colours to a point but also used dark colours to portray life's constant strife and struggle. He used numerical signs in the foreground, outlined by squares, to depict the continued endeavour of Bangladeshis.

In the "Story of a Door", Mithu brought in the middle class people. The partly

opened door portrayed the condition of the people. We could view broken doors and the ramshackled doors, which stood for unending strife. In the backdrop the painter had put in further abstractions, to once again bring home the message of pain and agony of everyday existence. The hues that he had employed were white, muted grey, green and mauve. Circles and lines were added to heighten the interest to the composition.

We saw an actual tube of paint in "The New Vision". Along with the tube of paint, brilliant red hues and dramatic black were splashed. Mithu tried to establish the fact that we needed to create new dimensions in the art scene in the country. He also tried to establish the fact that he felt that we needed to develop a new mode of art in a three dimensional form. This may not have appeared anything new in places such as Europe, USA or Japan, nor even in Bangladesh itself, but it was a fresh at-

tempt for Mithu himself as a painter and young artists like him.

In "Unfinished Story" Mithu used an actual broken pencil and shavings from crayon. The paints in the background, once again, asserted the need for a 3-D form. The colours used were vibrant brown, grey and orange as well as effective black. The lines and squiggles that he had used completed the composition.

In "Game", through the simple impressionistic presentation of a chess game, in black and white, Mithu tried to depict the superiority of the fairer races over the darker ones. Putting aside the symbolism, one could enjoy the painting due to its bright colours, textures, and the mingling of soft hues at the back that heightened the impact of the artist's stress on the problems of life.

One of the artist's favourite themes remained the rickshaw, which he has used before in his earlier works as a

photographer. The subject was presented in incisive details, with black wheels and a colourful body of the rickshaw itself. The gentle greys, pink and browns played up the portrayal of the difficult life in Bangladesh. In the use of a number of wheels the painter symbolised the constant effort of the local rickshaw drivers to earn a living.

In "Tension" the painter presented the inner tension of mankind, using a figure, with various semi-circles, squares, squiggles and a mass of yellow, orange and grey. Meanwhile, "Rest" had the subject of the common man having respite, after a hard day's work. There was the use of an actual "stop" sign and resting shovels, which had been used to enhance the impact of the artist's theme.

While the expose was an impressive one, with a nouveau angle, one was perhaps a little disappointed when one compared it with his symbolic works as a photographer. One expected far more from someone with potentialities such as Mithu. The artist is better known for his camera and video achievements for which he has won acclaim at home and abroad.

The French National Anthem Called into Question

TWO centuries ago, when revolutionary France took on the "Europe of tyrants", the "Marseillaise" became the rallying cry of the proud and indignant French Republic.

It was written in Strasbourg in spring 1792 by the poet and musician Rouget de l'Isle, the captain of the Rhine army. He had been asked to compose a hymn by General Kellermann, the future victor of Valmy, who wanted "something suitable to inflame the hearts."

The hymn, which was first sung in the capital of Alsace, only really became popular in Marseilles where it had been brought by a student called Francois Mirour. The Marseilles regiment, which set off for Paris where it was to take part in the storming of the Tuileries, the residence of the Court, adopted it as its marching song. Hence the name "Marseillaise" given it by the Parisians.

Since then, with periods of eclipse due to historical circumstances, the "Marseillaise" has remained the French national anthem. Inspired by revolutionary fervour, it has been said that Rouget de l'Isle wrote it, but that it was dictated to him by the motherland.

On the occasion of the Olympic Games in Albertville last winter, the polemic on the matter of the national anthem once more came to the fore. Standing on a platform, a little girl sang in her graceful voice about the "ferocious soldiers" slaughtering "our sons and wives" and the "impure blood" watering the furrows of land.

This caused immediate indignation in some newspapers, on the radio and on television, those in favour of a revision of the hymn made themselves heard. Among them were a few personalities including Abbe Pierre, who is unanimously respected for his action in favour of the underprivileged.

The Hymn to Liberty Does the end of world conflicts and colonial wars not

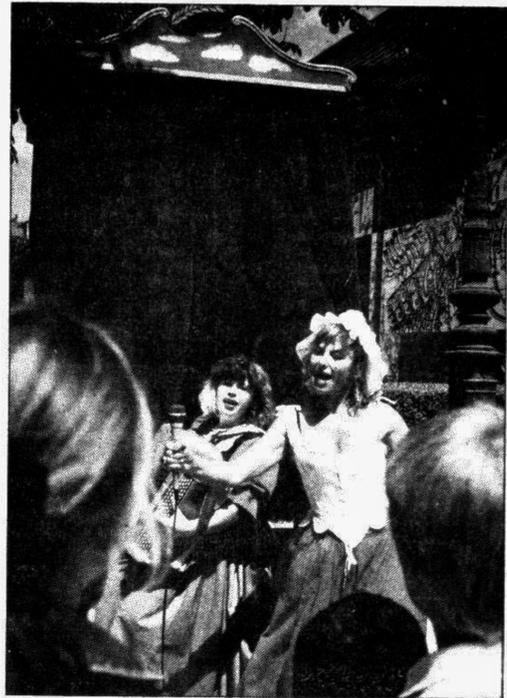
Should the words of the "Marseillaise" be changed? This old quarrel is back in the forefront. On one side, there are those who ask that certain "bloodthirsty" lines be omitted; on the other, those who see red at the idea of altering the national anthem.

show peace as a henceforth normal situation between nations? Does the farmer in his field, the worker in his factory or the clerk in his office think of raising "the bloody standard" against the invader?

So why maintain these "male tones" of exaltation in

war? Why not replace them with pacific lines? Or else only sing the lines in Rouget de l'Isle's work which encourage indulgence towards the enemy:

"Frenchmen, as magnificent warriors,
Bear or restrain your blows.
Spare these sorry victims,



"La Marseillaise" being sung in the gardens of Tuileries during the festival of the bicentenary of the French Revolution.

Arming themselves against us regretfully."

And, for young people, this verse (attributed to Marie-Joseph Chenier) inviting them to seek inspiration in the virtues of those who came before them:

"We will enter careers
When our elders are no longer there.
We will find their dust there
And the trace of their virtues."

But, for a large number of French people, the "Marseillaise" is sacred. They bristle at the idea that a single note or a single comma could be changed or cut out. This was clearly seen in the 70s when the then French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing wanted to slow down the tempo to give it more dignity. It caused a general outcry.

"The anthem is sacred. Do not touch it," the supporters of the "Marseillaise" cry out. It is for ever a part of the heritage. Was it not singing these heroic verses as a last challenge to the Nazi occupiers that members of the Resistance in the last war faced their executioners?

In France, everything, even songs, now end up in surveys. These show that war veterans and youngsters, pregnant women and schoolgirls, grocers and farmers all agree, to an overwhelming majority, to ratify the vengeful anthem.

This song, taken up by all the insurgents on earth, would never have gone all round the world, if it had been the product of chauvinistic militarism, the historian Michel Winock writes. "In spite of the clanking of arms with which its verses resound, it contains a clear message that peoples have understood: there is no fraternity except through liberty." That is why according to him, the "Marseillaise" has, for over a century, been "the true international anthem of the human race."

The Birth of a Language — Salvation or Just More Confusion?

by Charles English

EVER since God struck Babel with a thunderbolt, according to the Christian Old Testament, the peoples of the world have been doomed to be tongue-tied when talking to each other.

No single one of the world's 5,000 languages is understood by everybody, rendering communication at international level both difficult and expensive.

Now two British science tutors are publishing a 6,000-word dictionary of their own contribution to better world understanding, an artificial language known as Glosa.

Proponents say Glosa can be learned in a few days because of its simple grammar. It could save the European Community millions of European Currency Units (that's money in Euro-speak) in translation costs.

Wendy Ashby and Ron Clark are compiling the dictionary of Glosa (meaning language), using Latin and Greek derivatives. They have had no response from the United Nations so they are targeting the European Commission, where translation and interpretation fees devour much EC time and money.

At the end of last year, the Commission employed 450 interpreters and 1,250 translators to help communicate in the nine official languages of the Community. In 1989, translation and interpretation cost the European institutions 47 million Ecus (\$53m), says the Commission in London.

In 1980, says Clark, 33 per cent of Commission staff and 50 per cent of European Parliament staff were fully engaged in translating and interpreting. This absorbed 50 per cent of the total administration costs of the EC.

If the EC grows as expected, there could be up to 15 official languages by the end of the century.

Glosa is based on just 20 key words which give you an idea how to express tenses and nuances. For example "tu" expresses the future tense, and "pa" the past. Hence "te canta," meaning "she sings," becomes "te fu canta" — "she will sing" and "te pa canta" — "she sang."

On top of that, you need a 1,000 — word vocabulary which can be built to 6,000, the contents of the soon-to-be published Glosa dictionary.

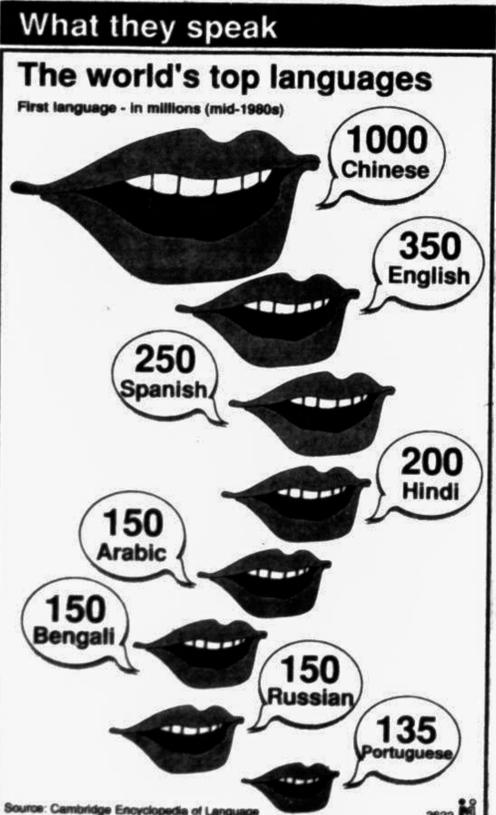
For example, the word "health," say Ashby and Clark, is little known outside English. But the Latin SANI and the Greek HYGIE are completely international and are used in Glosa. Thus:

French SANitaire HYGIEnique
German SANitar HYGENISCH
Spanish SANidad HIGIEna
English SANitary HYGIEne
Russian SANitarii GIGIEnitski
Italian SANitario IGIEnico

"Of course Glosa has no literature," says Clark. "But as more and more people use it,

A new language has been born which, its is claimed, can be learned in two days and is capable of the finer arts of poetry and political jargon. Glosa is a recent addition to a host of artificial languages designed to put translators and interpreters out of a job. But don't throw away the phrase books yet. A universally spoken language is still a long way off.

The Loom of Language, by Frederick Bodmer, is available from Merlin Press, 10 Malden Road, London NW5 3HR. Price 8.95



some will produce original work, translations and newspapers in Glosa. It is a full, rich language which will be capable of all literary genres, including poetry.

The European Commission, though, has given Glosa a chilly reception. A spokesperson said Glosa's implementation, "could certainly not happen in the next five or six years. The idea of the EC is to keep up the official languages."

Referring to the most successful artificial language to

meetings.

"Glosa could be used at this very basic level, at least, to provide simple instructions," Elliot told Language Matters magazine. "But I am convinced that its potential is greater than that."

Glosa has elderly roots. It is based on a dictionary of Inter-glosa, an artificial language created in the Forties by Lancelot Hogben, a scientist and linguist at Aberdeen University. But Inter-glosa and its derivative are just two of many proposals for a global language.

Several hundred such languages have been recorded. In the 17th Century, Shakespeare's contemporary Francis Bacon suggested that ideas be represented by real characters, or pictograms, that could be understood regardless of language.

Language invention came back into fashion at the end of the last century. Volapuk, invented in 1880, triggered the creation of a host of artificial languages, including the most popular, Esperanto.

Esperanto is taught in some schools in Europe, but has never gained the popular support its speakers hoped for. Critics say it is decidedly dated.

"It is unacceptable," says Thomas Wood, a language inventor from Cheshire. "Esperanto uses accented letters which should disappear. There is too much of the wrong kind of grammar and it is an unwieldy kind of language."

Wood has his own languages to promote. He says his latest, Interling, can be picked up in an hour or two by anyone who knows a Western European language. It has a loyal, if small, following.

The artificial language enthusiast's holy book, Frederick Bodmer's The Loom of Language, is still highly popular after 40 years. Former ICI chairman Sir John Harvey Jones chose it for the BBC's Desert Island Discs radio programme as a book he would most want if he was cast away on a desert island.

Martin Eve of Merlin Press, the book's publisher, says: "It is our best seller. Some books come and go, but this one just goes." Eve bought the rights to reprint it after being unable to find a copy.

Linguists around the world go on trying to establish the existence of a single, natural language at the root of all spoken tongues. Some believe they have identified the source of all languages on Earth, spoken by our hunter-gathering ancestors. They call it Proto-nostratic.

Opponents says this is so much hot air. But, as Interling-speakers would say: "Nulting venturat, nulting ganat."

— GEMINI NEWS

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Looking Forward with a Hope

Book Review

BASANTER PRATKHAJE

by Tofazzal Hussain
Published by Sajeda Hussain,
Mitali Prakashani, Dhaka, 1992
Cover designed by Ainul Huq Munna
Price Tk. 40/=

Reviewed by
Dipak Kumar Karmaker



THE appeal of poetry is, — as far as the literature of a nation is concerned — to the people with a particular kind of imagination and sensibility. But it is the prose whose appeal is immediate to all. As a literary form, the novel is of great interest to the readers. From that apart, other literary values, give to the readers a private dimension, as it is usually meant for individual solitary reading.

While poetry springs from imaginative and emotional drive, the writing of novels is based on real life. A novel is the reflection of life in details and a deep sense of the truth in life gives rise to it. Though we find the experience of life reflected in the short stories, novel works out materials derived from life with a broader perspective.

In our country, novels are very infrequently seen as compared to the other forms of literature. And in this regard the novelist Tofazzal Hussain is of consequential importance. His noteworthy books are 'Pradas Pather Dinguli (1st part)', 'Bhuli Kemane', 'Tomari Sakashe Prabhu', 'El Sundar Prithibite', 'Prabas Pather Dinguli (2nd part)'. This novel is Tofazzal Hussain's 'Basanter Pratkhafe', perhaps his latest. It has been brought out by Sajeda Hussain, Mitali Publishers, with a cover illustration by Ainul Huq Munna.

The writer himself is the protagonist of the book. We have the narrative through the mouth of the novelist. But he is not an omniscient narrator. The plot-construction of the novel is loose. The link is established in the incidents through the author's narrative voice itself.

It is an urban novel, that is, the places where actions take place are hectic cities. Although the novel deals with the urban life, there are occasional touches that imply the writer's aversion to city life and yearning for the natural surroundings of the countryside. Similarly, the writer seems to dislike western culture, but admires whatever is indigenous to our nation. The name of the protagonist is Reza Hussain, a journalist and a writer.

The theme of the novel is in principle woman's place in society — in the present social milieu. The novel reflects women's position in the changing circumstances that they are descending from the ivory tower of the four corners of domestic life into the professional world. In their new life the kind of problem they face, is also found in the novel.

The novel abounds with adultery, divorce and conjugal complications. The continuous frustration in the women's

emotional and sexual life naturally gives rise to the question. What is a woman? Is she a saraband of fleshy organs? — or essence of Platonic love?

In the story Hussain has an acquaintance with Selina who is doing a public relations job. Through her, the protagonist comes to know other women. Hussain establishes a kind of brother-sister relationship with Selina. We meet Mrs Zaman who has a small business. She lost her husband a year ago. Rebeka is another woman who was married ten years ago but the conjugal life was not successful because of the husband's interest in adultery. Later, in the novel, Rebeka again gets married to a foreigner, but this time also the nuptial life does not last long.

Hasnain comes across a woman called Ifat and Ifat has also an unfortunate past. She once had her husband, but divorced him for the latter's excessive idleness and aversion to practical life. A love relationship gradually grows between Hasnain and Ifat throughout the novel. Ifat again gets married to a young man who was head over heels in love with her. But she also divorces him for he fell in love with a maid-servant and decided to marry her.

Hasnain also had his married life once. But there was the divorce because his wife was engaged with another person. Hasnain had a daughter named Natasha who remains with her father. She studies in a convent at Shillong. As far as his relationship with Natasha is concerned, the universal filial tenderness is depicted with great beauty and grandeur. The novel, however, ends with the union of Hasnain and Ifat.

The title of the novel 'Basanter Pratkhafe' (waiting for the Spring) implies that even though the success of man-woman relationship seems hardly possible, the author looks forward to future when Basanta of love will really

come. At least Hasnain's final union with Ifat smacks of a note of hope. Hence, the novelist may be called, in the ultimate analysis, an optimist.

In our country, people seldom venture to write novels, except a few prominent ones

who can be counted by the finger. Whereas people show profuse interest in writing poetry. But poetry cannot present the down-to-earth life as truly as a novel can. In this respect, the initiative that Tofazzal Hussain has taken in writing 'Basanter Pratkhafe' is laudable.

At the Journey's End

by Muhammad Nazmul Haque

As your rhythmic image plays into my pristine pains
The glitters of the sun reach me through the scattered rains

After dusk—
When the clouds float away, beyond the eyes
You play on, in the bondage of my gypsy mind —
And appear like the full-moon in an autumn night
Then my expectations soar higher and higher
To meet yours —
Mingled with the blue of the serene sky.

Do not ever say —
We met only the other day
Since time immemorial —
We have been together
Here and there
On the banks of Mississippi and the Nile,
In the green of the corn-fields
On the ups and downs of the hills
On the silken shore of the Bay
Under the comforting sun of the winter day.

A thousand years ago — I whispered to you,
I can journey through eternity
To be near to
Your pulsating eyes
Your sacrosanct mind
Your satin palms
And your transparent charms.

We have traversed through
Timeless day and night
For the cherished abode
Which at long last is within sight
So dear look there,
The horizon is crimson
The plains
And the birds merry with hymn
Now at the journey's end
May we cry aloud —
Here we are —
With purple stream of love in veins
Let our hearts throbb
Our hopes vibrate
Our dreams flourish
In this beautiful world.