

# Images of Time and Tribute

## ANWAR HOSSAIN'S ALBUMS ON DHAKA AND WOMAN

Reviewed by Iftikhar Ahmed Chowdhury



Dhaka Portrait : Satgambuj Masjid

No art can, perhaps, in the final analysis, escape the 'blame' of being an imitation of life. But it is the artist who makes the difference. His inner vision and unorthodox treatment of the subject transforms a commonplace matter, into something sublime. This life is beautifully metamorphosed into art by the sheer handling of the whole thing, in which the artist plays the cardinal role.

Similar is the case with the works of the internationally acclaimed master photographer Anwar Hossain. He also, in his two recent photographic collections — 'Dhaka Portrait' and 'Woman' published by AB Publishers has made an intricate attempt to transform the ordinary into sublime, temporal into timeless and life into art. Through his visions, going deeper beyond his camera, he has made an effort to touch the souls of many.

In 'Dhaka Portrait' Anwar pays his rich tribute to this very ancient city of the Mughals, Pathans, Company Rulers and Nawabs through 123 colour and black & white photographs. Through these photographic images he shows how this city of regis has the

chitectural relics against present day surroundings. It has enabled the photographer to being together or make an artistic harmony between two distant ages. The skyline of Old Dhaka is still not etched with high rise



Dhaka Portrait : Supreme Court



Dhaka Portrait : Ahsan Manzil



Dhaka Portrait : Lalbag Fort



Dhaka Portrait : Aparajeyo Bangla, Dhaka University

populous metropolis of the commonman. Dhaka city, which is nearly four hundred years old, was the 12th largest city of the world in 1700. Even in the second half of the 18th century it was still among the largest cities of the world. It was among the three capitals of the Mughals. But fortune declined fast. Dhaka partially regained its lost glory in 1971 when it became the capital of independent Bangladesh. Although, Anwar witnessed the changes of this city as an affirmation to the evolutionary process of the growing urban society, yet there is a subtle effort for recovering the 'lost life' and the realisation that there is the least possibility of a recovery which adds a kind of detached gloom to some of the images, belonging to Old Dhaka. Old Dhaka has been portrayed through its ancient ar-

buildings. The artist has portrayed Old Dhaka through numerous shots of Satgambuj Masjid, Ahsan Manzil, Lalbag Fort, Shankhari Bazar, Babu Bazar, Armanitola, Kasaituli, Husseini Dalan, Buriganga and so forth. The fact that the surrounding depicted in most of the photographs of Old Dhaka gives us a joyful impression with happy and exalted people may be a kind of wish-fulfillment on the artist's part. For, he too, longs for the tradition and is haunted by a feeling of nostalgia for the last vanishing and by gone days.

A few photographs may even tempt you to step into the usual hospitality of an Old Dhaka household, where you may be treated with traditional delicacies as Bakkar Khari, Sutli Kabab, or Tehari.

There seems to be a striking contrast between the im-

religious practices. It is as much a Dhaka of the Muslims, as it is of the Hindu's or people from any other faith; as much a Dhaka of the poormen, as it is of the rich's. Actually what Anwar did is that, he tried to eliminate the differences and endeavoured to give a common identity to all — citizens of Dhaka.

In the second collection, 'Woman', Anwar Hossain, through his kind's eye, tries to make a detailed analysis of woman and makes a hectic effort to explore her whole state of being. This book is in a way the artist's tribute to women. It is a daring display of his love, passion and admiration for the women of the universe. Through 123 photographs of women from 29 countries of the world, including 10 from Bangladesh, He has endeav-



Dhaka Portrait : Shahid Minar

oured to unveil the mysteries of feminine existence and presents woman in her totality to the beholders. As he explains: 'The cre-

With the expansion of the city limits, people from other districts have come to Dhaka to try their luck. People left homeless by river erosions, cyclones and floods have flocked to Dhaka. Their fight for existence continues in this fledgling city. In the images of the New Dhaka we see that, Dhaka, like a caring mother, takes her unfortunate children into her lap and helps them to sustain.

Anwar Hossain in this collection 'Dhaka Portrait' has tried to identify Dhaka with people from all sections of the society. Dhaka here has been rediscovered through its citizens' occupational, cultural and



Woman : Nepal



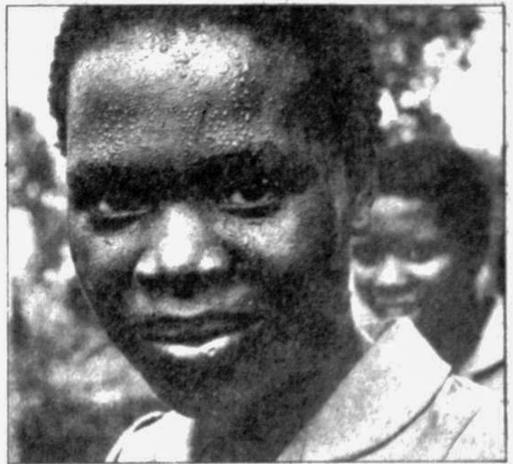
Woman : Bangladesh

ation of Eve has been nurtured through the legend of Aphrodite, the affections of the eternal Madonna to the present day sensitivity of Simone de Beauvoir or the dedication of Mother Teresa ... a woman of the contemporary world is still expected to possess the mythical chastity of Sita or the mystery of Mona Lisa. Woman today is East vs West; North vs South, poverty vs luxury; happiness vs sorrow or the lover vs the mother."

Thus, this collection is divided into five separate compartments — Aphrodite, Madonna, Simone de Beauvoir, Mother Teresa and Sita vs Mona Lisa. Although divided, each section freely corresponds with the other. For, it actually narrates the evolution of woman in general. Her one state of being is interconnected with the other.

In this collection of photographic images Anwar has not only portrayed the entire core of feminine existence, he has also brought into the scenario the tripartite relation of man, woman and child, which makes the human race. In this complex inter-relation, he has obviously made woman his focal point where she is almost identical with nature — as beautiful and mysterious. As all natural phenomena cannot be explained in purely rational terms, all actions and motives of the woman cannot be justified. The cover of the book substantiates this view. The woman portrayed in the cover is juxtaposed with nature and she achieves a status as great as nature herself.

Woman, like nature, conceives and gives birth. So, she also, like nature, is an eternal mother. Like nature, she conceives with the utmost care, gives birth and nurtures her child with such affection as cannot be matched by anyone else, not even by her much dependable male counterpart. Shots on pages 58, 61, 65, 68,



Woman : Swaziland

71, 73 are few of the glowing examples.

Anwar too, like all others, appreciates the charms of feminine beauty. But he seems to hold a different view altogether. For, he does not only feel enchanted by a mere pretty face. He tries to find

beauty in its own grace a woman is endowed with. Even a labour women's charm is enhanced when she is in the process of finishing her work. Anwar finds beauty in the honest sweat that disseminates on to her neckline, her bosom and arms. There is beauty in the process of a woman becoming a mother, a woman in meditation, a woman nursing her child, a woman coming of age or breaking loose from chains of male dominance.

Most of the symbols used in this collection came very naturally. But in some of the compositions, outside aid has been called into, to serve the symbolic purpose of the artist. Specially in few of the nudes that are there on pages 42, 44, 46, 49 and 51, symbols seem to have been organised. But it did not lose its appeal. Intensity of the subject combined with a technical mastery, lends those photographs a brilliant artistic symmetry.

As the changing roles of women are very much inherent in the history of creation, Anwar shows these changes as fundamental to the existence of the human race. Woman has never ceased to accommodate herself in this changing world. This is precisely the reason behind the sustenance of this universe. Without women would there be inspiration enough to sustain art?



Woman : Dhaka 1990



Woman : India



Woman : Cologne 1978



Woman : Bangladesh



Woman : Canada