

A Book Fair with an Impact and Purpose

by Fayza Haq

ONE witnessed a brisk sale at the 'Ekatturer Jatri' exhibition comprising 204 books on 'Muktijuddha '71'. It was a comprehensive and impressive display, including a well-known book with its translation into Bangla. This was held at 'La Galerie', and people came from far and near, and it was very much the talk of the town.

The basic motivation of the 'Ekatturer Jatri' that arranged the show was to endeavour to boost the morale of those who were working to nurture the spirit of the Liberation War. The organisation aimed at dispelling the confusion, created by otherwise inclined groups, about the cause and success of the Liberation Movement of Bangladesh.

What interested many of the buyers was the translation into Bangla of Tony Mascarenhas's book 'The Rape of Bangladesh' by Ranatree and published by Parama, Dhaka. In the book the author spoke of what he had reported to 'The Sunday Times', based on his experience as a journalist during the March '71 Pakistani army crack down, when Pakistani journalists and photographers had been sent to Dhaka for journalistic coverage.

Mascarenhas spoke of how the Pakistani army broke up a country that had been united for 25 years. He wrote in his book of how there were quotations from the Holy Quran in the paper that he worked in Karachi at the time when he had made the report. He added that 6.5 million Muslims of the then East Pakistan had been ignored by the central government rulers, while the Hindus, who resided in the said place, had been totally ignored and deprived.

Mascarenhas told of how he had arrived at Dhaka in '71, and he found the streets of Dhaka empty, while bonfires were seen in large areas; shops were shut and bared and black smokes had been seen emanating hither and thither and yon. Meanwhile, the air had been laden with an ominous feeling. He concluded that the revolution of the people of Bangladesh had not gone to waste. He added that he had his political guidance from Mr. Suhrawardy.

An album of pictures, which had been seen earlier, by some in Dhaka and elsewhere in Bangladesh, but which still retained the buyer's and viewer's interest was 'Dhaka 1948-1971'. This contained photographs of the Dhaka city and the collection of pictures were derived from the Dhaka City Museum and the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. It had been edited by Munstasir Mamun, a Professor of History, and Iqbal Khan, a reputed



Posters depict mood of the book fair

artist.

The album dwelt on the autocratic regime of 1990, which the mass movement of the people of Bangladesh had removed. It had been first published in 1992 and had been printed by the Padma Printers, Kamal Lohani, the ex-director general of the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy put in the forward of the album. 'The marauding Pakistani army that had swooped down on the unarmed people... To consolidate their position the army then formed the Razakaars and Al Badar squads to murder the Bengalees in cold blood. Yet the brave freedom fighters organised themselves into a formidable force and fought the occupation army. The Pakistanis applied strategies that they knew to overwhelm the freedom fighters, but the people's support made the Bengalee fighters invincible... Bangladesh came into being as a political reality.'

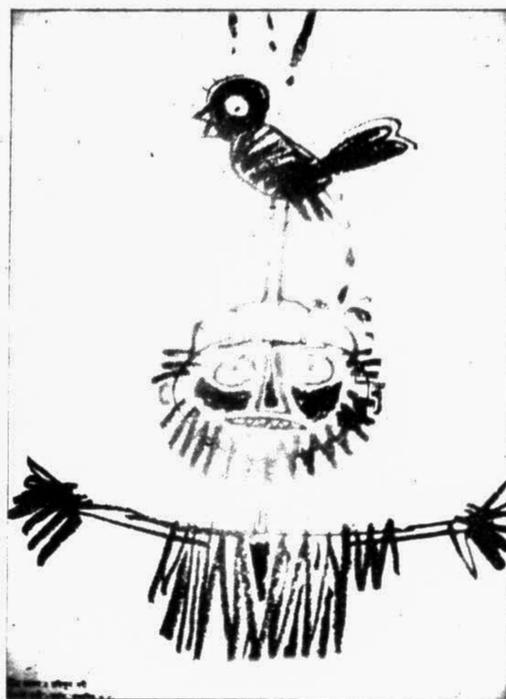
The pictures in the album included the photographs of the Language Movement fighter Rafiquddin Ahmed. The historical rally of students at 'Amtala', just before the breaking of Section 144. 22 of

February 1952 had been included. There were pictures of interest such as that of Mr. Fazlul Haque, who came to Dhaka via Calcutta, accompanied by Manik Mia and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. (He was soon to be removed from the chief ministership.) One saw Mr. Suhrawardy too speaking at the National Assembly, from a clipping from 'Ittefaq'.

There was too the photo of the beginning of the Agartala Conspiracy Case on 19.6.1968, when Sheikh Mujib had been produced at the court. Another picture dealt with Maulana Bhashani leading the 'gherao' of the Governor's House (now 'Bangabhaban') with the Communist leader Abdul Haq in front of the Maulana.

Another showed students breaking Section 144 on 9.2.1969 along with a meeting of the Student Action Committee at Paltan on the same day, as well as the police 'lathi charge' around 1969. Also seen was Maulana Bhashani amidst admirers at Tejgaon Airport on 24.3.1969.

Of more interest for those more keen in what has happened in the more recent past, was the photo that



showed Yahya Khan arriving at Dhaka at the end of March '71 with his famous one liner 'I don't demand anything' ('Mera Demagme Kuch Nehi Ata'). There were too photos of Freedom Fighters seen at the outskirts of Dhaka, Freedom Fighters entering Dhaka, and the surrender of the Pakistani forces on Dec 16, 1971.

Perhaps of great interest to many was 'Of Blood and Fire' by Jahanara Imam — labelled as 'The Untold Story of Bangladesh's War of Independence'. It had been translated by Mr. Mustafizur Rahman, the present Foreign Minister of Bangladesh. In his introduction Mr. Rahman wrote that Mrs. Imam's diary had been put in a book form, when first published in 1986. He said that it had then created a sensation in Bangladesh. He added that in quick succession four editions had been published. For the first time, the translator emphasized, that a personal account of events of the 'fearful days of 1971' had appeared in print. The English edition was geared for the benefit of the readers at large, outside the country, as Mr. M. Rahman had explained.

A book that sold like hot cakes was 'Ami Khaled Musharraf'. Edited by M. R. Akhtar Mukul and published by M. H. Nasir Kabir, it had been priced Tk 60. It told his story of the Freedom Movement and included the famous cartoon of Yahya Khan by Qamrul Hasan, contained pictures of his wife and children and hovering crows pecking the bodies of those killed during the Freedom Movement.

'Shadhinata Shrangamya Prohashi Bangalee', written by Abdul Matin, a journalist, contained the contributions and activities of the Bengalees living abroad during the Liberation War and earlier, during the March takeover by the Pakistani army. It covered political, social and economic angles. There were pictures from Washington and London and showed Bengalees picketing at No. 10 Downing Street. There was also Mrs. Lulu Bilquis Banu shown speaking to the Bengalees in Britain. There was photo of Mr Peter Shore, a British M. P. who had helped in Freedom Fighters' cause in the then East Pakistan. The book had been originally published at

London by Radical Asia Publication, and the hardcover edition cost Tk 120. The second publication had been done by Jatiya Shahitta Prokashanee, Dhaka.

Another book that created a stir was 'Bangladesh at War' written by Gen. K. M. Saifullah (Bir Uttam). The book was dedicated to the Freedom fighters, like all the other books at the book display. It had been published at Mohammadpur, Dhaka, and had a 'foreword' by Mr. A. S. Chowdhury, the former president of Bangladesh.

Mr. Chowdhury said in his message in the book, 'The book reveals moments of anxiety, suspense, retreat, preparation, determination and victory in the battlefields. The author has not omitted to portray the discrimination, neglect and the well-planned subjugation suffered by the people of Bangladesh prior to the declaration of independence.' He further added 'The author got encouragement and welcome messages from Chittagong, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Pabna, Bogra, Habiganj, Brahmanbaria and Feni, the author took a leading part in the war of truth and justice, and has given a vivid description of how the actual battles were fought out and won in the face of endless difficulties.'

'Genocide '71' was an account of the killers and collaborators by Muktijuddha Chetana Bikash Kendra. It had been first published by Niaz Zaman, an Associate Professor at Dhaka University. The contents included a) collaborators being rehabilitated b) the revitalization of the 'Peace Committee and their leaders' c) some other leading opponents of the Liberation Movement d) the rehabilitation of Al-Badar, e) the collaborations of intellectuals, and finally documents and photographs to prove the point of the book. The photos had been taken by Kishore Parekh and showed corpses at Rayer Bazar as well as a scene of a mass grave at Mirpur. Photos of Tikka Khan and Gholam Azam forming the Peace Committee, taken from a clipping from 'Dainik Bangla' had been also included.

Rafiqul Islam's book 'Tale of Millions — Bangladesh Liberation War '71' contained descriptions of battles at Chittagong, Kushtia, Ramgarh, the fate of the intelligentsia and the artists as well as the final campaign for Liberation.

The book fair, although held at Banani, drew viewers and buyers from all walks of life, throughout the length and breadth of the city. This was apart from having created a sensation for readers of daily newspapers, that had earlier supplied some details about the display.

Artists Bring New Life To a Cold War Relic

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series of 106 colourful paintings. This is the East Side Gallery, presently the world's largest open-air art gallery. Throughout 1990, artists came to make their mark on the wall — voluntarily and self-financed. In Europe, they came from as far north as Scandinavia, east from Hungary and Yugoslavia, south from Spain and Italy, and west from Britain. Artists also came from as far away as Canada, America, Asia and South America.

The themes touch on topics from peace and tolerance to love and freedom. The works express feelings of anti-oppression and anti-racism and represent various interpretations of what the wall meant to the artists, especially those from former East Germany.

The East Side Gallery runs along the busy, six-lane street Mühlenstrasse. On the other side of it flows the River Spree. Standing where it does, the gallery faces problems of pollution and vandalism.

Dr Heinrich Trust, from the Conservation of Landmarks Department of the Berlin Federal State Ministry, prepared the proposal to preserve the gallery. The main arguments for its conservation include the fact that it is the longest segment of the wall left intact and its significant location, between the Hauptbahnhof of Berlin and the Oberbaumbrücke.

Dr Gabi Dollf-Bonekampfer, from the same Department, says the manner in which this wall still stands is an excellent example of how it once functioned. As for the paintings, she feels that not all are worth keeping. However, she adds, it is the entire gallery, as an ensemble, that gives it its value as a monument.

The future of the East Side Gallery, in spite of the conservation order, is uncertain. Work on it began with informal permission from the border guards, still present at the time, and as such has never had a written contract with the Friedrichshain Council.

An architectural competition for the development of this area, launched this year, may mean that the gallery will have to go, at least in part. It obstructs the use of the bank of the River Spree for the landscaping of the proposed residential development.

He says: 'We do not know which parts of it will stay. We will try to keep as much of it and to integrate it in to the development.' Another option, conceived when the Friedrichshain Council's original plans were to get rid of the gallery by the end of 1990, is to have the wall dismantled, taken on a world tour and finally auctioned off in London.

Dr Dollf-Bonekampfer stresses that though it would do less harm to provide accessways through the wall, having it dismantled and moved about would defeat the purpose of conserving it.

The gallery was the brainchild of a West German, Siegfried Schönfeldt. Though he had the vision, he lacked the organizational skills. He ran an advertisement in the newspaper and a Scotswoman, Christine MacLean, answered it.

MacLean, a natural healer who has lived in Berlin for 12 years, was excited by the idea from the very start. The partnership, however, broke up soon after. MacLean, by then the gallery manager, carried on undeterred, dealing with the artists, authorities and the media.

She explains: 'The project was never meant to be a money-making venture. It is a project about people, their aspirations and ideals. It was never the intention to have 1.3 km of paintings by famous artists or the use of one particular style or technique. More important is what motivated the artists to paint the wall. The former East Germans obviously had a relationship to the wall which none of us from the West could ever fully appreciate.'

MacLean, now working in Romania, is pleased with the attempt to conserve the wall. She says she has no regrets over having spent so much energy on the project. When she sees visitors coming to the gallery, photographing and videoing it and walking along it, she feels a great sense of accomplishment.

She says: 'People now come to look at the wall in a new light, this once forbidding stretch of cold concrete.'

Despite its shaky future, the East Side Gallery is indeed a place of interest in Berlin these days. Through world of mouth, people continue to learn of the wall, it is included by tour operators in their programmes, and some people are even beginning to make return visits.

Hindu Epic that Enchanted the BBC

Daya Kishan Thussu writes from London

Tension between Hindus and Muslims has recently increased over the plans to build a temple at the site of a medieval mosque in north India. Many believe this is because of the growth in militant Hinduism which may have been spurred by showing Hindu epics on the state-run television. Adapting the world's longest poem for television, reports Gemini News Service, itself has not been without controversy.



OF PRIDE AND POLITICS: A scene from the Indian epic Mahabharata

Bible. Epics have also been given the Bombay film treatment, including the Mahabharat, but television has brought them to the living rooms and the slums of Indian cities.

Through satellite, television programmes can now reach most of India. And in poorer areas, community television sets have been installed by government.

The first major TV series was the Ramayana, which, despite its appalling production values, was hugely popular in India. It was also shown on Canadian television. Millions of videos of the series have been sold across India and among the expatriate Indian commu-

nity. Its producers made a fortune.

In comparison, the Mahabharat series was better made and has the virtue of a more interesting story. The world's longest poem, with 90,000 verses, it is traditionally supposed to have been written by Sage Vyasa.

No one knows that exact date of its origin, but many historians place it in the 5th Century BC. Over the centuries many variations and additions have been made by religious teachers.

Interwoven with profound philosophical and religious debates, the plot concerns the great civil war in the kingdom of Hastinapur in north India,

between two clans, the Kauravas and the Pandavas, which becomes a war between right and wrong, justice and injustice.

For centuries the Mahabharat has been part of the Hindu way of life. Even today characters and episodes from the Mahabharat are familiar to millions of ordinary Indians and are a part of their language and culture. That is also largely true for non-Hindus. Stories from the epic are taught in school textbooks.

In this respect Indian culture is quite different from Western, where few people are familiar with the characters and stories of the Greek and Roman epics.

The directors of the Mahabharat had no problem in making the classic accessible to their audience. Unfortunately, however, television's commercialism did not do justice to the genius of the material.

This television version compares unfavourably with the production by British director Peter Brook, who made a six-hour theatre and film version of the Mahabharat, using an international cast.

Despite the poor production values of the TV Hindu epics, they have revived, according to sociologists, a pride in being Hindu. Hindutav (Hinduness) is now on the national agenda in a country which celebrates its secularism and rejoices in its multicultural heritage.

Said Parveen Kumar, who teaches sociology in a Delhi college: 'This consciousness has led to greater sectarian divide in India and could weaken the secular fabric of society.'

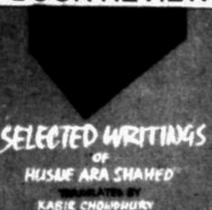
The BBC showed the Hindu epic in all its 92 episodes and half a million viewers watched it. Critics say that importing a cheap series has saved the BBC the trouble of making any new ethnic programmes for more than a year.

Said Narinder Singh, a Sikh businessman: 'The BBC seemed to ignore the fact that the Mahabharat was written in pure Hindi which more than half of the ethnic population in England has great difficulty understanding.' Many Muslims, who form half of Britain's two million Asian population, were also not entirely happy with the showing of a Hindu epic. They point out that for more than a year the Mahabharat was the only entertainment programme for ethnic minorities on BBC television. Said shopkeeper Rahmat Ali: 'It was insensitive towards the Muslim population. They had already suffered because of the Salman Rushdie controversy and the impact of the Gulf War, when Najaf and Karbala, the holiest shrines of Shia Islam, were being bombed.'

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A Multi-dimensional Consciousness

BOOK REVIEW



Selected Writings of Husne Ara Shahed
Translated by Kabir Chowdhury

Reviewed by Dipak Kumar Karmaker

LITERATURE and life are bound up with each other and are interdependent. As literature derives its raw materials from the stream of incidents in life, so life is, in turn, continuously sustained by literature. In all ages, literary activities pushed civilization upward, more and more towards higher forms of organization. And it so appears that without literature, the idea of progress is a myth.

In our country too, people show passion for literature and the ever-growing flow of literary writings is an outcome of this passion. Among many other books on literature, Husne Ara Shahed's recently published 'Selected Writings', translated by Kabir Chowdhury, is of particular interest. It is published by Alhajj S M Habibullah and printed at Habib Press Private Limited while its cover is designed by Purnendu Pattrea, the famous Calcutta artist.

Husne Ara Shahed is a reputed columnist, a writer of belle-letters and short stories. She has so far published twenty-four books. In these books she shows a multi-dimensional consciousness. On the one hand, she is a satirist of social hypocrisy and, on the other, a philanthropist.

In the book in question, the first of the belles-lettres, 'The World of Adjectives,' shows how people go by false verbosity. For example, 'true fact' 'pure ghee' 'fresh news', 'unadulterated oil' and such other adjectives are used only when one has the opposite kinds of things to 'sell'. According to the writer, writing of history is based half on facts, half on imagination. As far as words are concerned, the case of the demagogic politicians is significant.

'The World of Numbers' relates the all-pervading use of numbers. It seems to be the elaboration of the Pythagorean maxim, 'The world is numbers.'

'The Party Called the Public' is about hypocrisy in the political sphere. There are people in the society, who gain popularity by preaching democracy. In the name of public good, the social leaders leather their nests.

In the chapter called 'Characters,' the writer depicts the

be levelled by death. This is a subjective form of essay. The writer seems to show herself as a stoic and original creature.

'Who are Not Even Antiques' is a pessimistic piece. Husne Ara Shahed suggests that time, in its continuous process, casts illusion over man with the veil of future.

'The inner light shining on the lips,' throws light on the selfish nature of urban people. People are so self-centred that they even cannot give a mere smile.

The Dialogues, hints at the social hypocrisy. The New Harem' is written in a feminist spirit.

'The dead and the living' maintains that people are prone to externalism when there is some function. People attend death-ceremony not to show respect for the dead man but because it is a social custom.

'About the Literacy Day' tries to demonstrate in a humorous tone that the poor illiterate are not convinced of the benefit of education that they can get by reading and writing.

The short story, 'Hey, How are You?' is similar to the portrait of characters. It lacks the dramatic construction capable of yielding suspense which is an essential element of a short story. 'Tekka,' another short story, is more successful. Again the writer here shows sympathy for the poverty-stricken people. However, Tekka is particular, not general, he seems to be an artistic invention. Seldom we see any such Tekka in real life. The writer is probably unaware of the wickedness of Tekkas.

'Beyond the Circle of Light' is an incoherent story. No definite theme is worked out in this story. It is an effusive piece, for which one may form an idea that the authoress was swept off her feet by something not envisaged while writing.

However, this book undoubtedly speaks volumes for Husne Ara Shahed's creative literary talents. We sincerely hope that the book will make sufficient appeal to the readers. And thanks to Mr Kabir Chowdhury's lucid translation into English, the book might be appreciated also abroad.