

A Poet with a Voice of Conscience

by Razia Khan Amin

BOOK REVIEW

hance:

Courage is the stock-in-trade of wives tied to headstrong husbands. This partly sincere partly mocking homage to TS Eliot visualizes the 'bard' at his clerk's desk at the Lloyd's in the 'unreal city'—organizing the bills of lading—and leading the double lives of poet and bank clerk.

Sunlight on a broken column is one of the best pieces in the collection. This partly sincere partly mocking homage to TS Eliot visualizes the 'bard' at his clerk's desk at the Lloyd's in the 'unreal city'—organizing the bills of lading—and leading the double lives of poet and bank clerk.

Tell me truthfully who confounded you who or Ezra Pound with a silent sonic boom of doom's strange surreal music and laconic lipless poems rattling bones in underground.

Ezra Pound's ruthless pruning surely is partly responsible for the laconic liplessness.

But Nadeem's ambivalent love-hatred towards the poet produces the song not of J Alfred Prufrock but the modern carpetbagger, the yuppie, the intellectual turned tradesman, the singer and musician turned businessman. In 'My Media' he declares:

'and despite the rumour I'm neither a loser nor an over-achiever' the commercialization of the living arts he satirizes incisively nevertheless, I accept no emoluments for this melodious ministry but endowments and gratuity

I humbly receive only in hard currencies.

The Americanized over-mechanical generation is seen mixing lyrics with lollypops poetry they whisk 'into ice-cream cones.' The extravaganzas of the billion-dollar bonanza explodes on the readers' head with all Nadeem's sup-



pressed contempt!

He quotes from the exquisite sonnets of Michaelangelo, thanks to Arthur Symonds. 'Christened with water colours' and 'baptized in absinthe' are phrases which take a permanent place in the mind. The punishments for a 'misprint' summer are nothing but added delights to an already indulged youth when smudging the canvas with fin-gerprints in imitation of Van Gogh's use of the thumb for a similar purpose — intensifies the zest and lust for life. The final twist comes when he confesses:

I love the squish, when I squash a tube of paint, and the colours

as they dance to life Entranced I thought I would paint forever ever suspecting that I might exhaust my lust for life with an excess of colour.

The celebration of motherhood is tender & intense: Every mother is a sister of Mary. The divinity of mothers brings him down to his knees in deep and unqualified worship.

'Requiem' again is such in its enviable marriage between phraseology and emotion: 'And love departed' —

From the waste lands of my heart where a dying moon descends and no stars shine...

The terrible dissection of the anatomy of love in the poem of the same name petrifies the reader with fear which shows Nadeem's apparently light-hearted jocularity can culminate into total dis-enchantment of the kind which disintegrates the human personality.

Thus love gives to each the shit that we deserve there is no tragedy in blood and blood is sweet to love.

'Never love' has all the exquisite lyrical flow of Elizabethan songs such as Shakespeare and Ben Jonson penned only with 'its modern succinctness' if you would not be accused of having robbed the night of the stolen stars above, never love never, never love.

The use of echoes made fashionable by Eliot evokes associations with Coleridge and of course Eliot himself. Frequently, the cleverness of the prose-poem is a trifle tiresome lacking the urgency and the pungent sharpness of the previous vignettes. His wish for the end of modernity, 'because it lays the veneer (spelled ventr!) of romance', is understandable though. Love song of the fugitive captures the crisp rhythms of Anglo-Saxon verse so deftly put-to-use by Eliot:

You might die from dining and winning and choke in your turtle-soup

without even understanding the etiquette of grief... The finality of Possessive Individualism will long haunt the readers:

Tomorrow the sun will rise for

no reason at all and wanting to love, we may die and the heavens may be amused

The latest craze, environmental worries, has invaded Nadeem's poetry with a bang in his 'Tears':

'like acid rain and love is the toxic waste of (my) distasteful tears.'

piece. The writer develops a kind of affection for the girl who works in the house. He feels passionate for her even though the latter comes from a lower social class. However, one day she was crying, for which the author thought that she had been seduced by someone. And he starts avoiding her as best he can. However, at the end of the story, he comes to know that it was not seduction any man but by an insect that got inside her ear, for which she cried. The 'short' story is an enjoyable one.

'Nirajja' (shameless) is written by Kasem Anis. The story is based on social consciousness. Rabeya, a middle-aged maid-servant, marries again and again. It so happens that her sons find their father younger than they. The story throws light on the point that at times the fathers of the bridegrooms in society trade on marriage. The point that Rabeya feels no shame in marrying repeatedly, is driven home satirically in the story. Kalim Ahmed's 'Harano Swapno' (lost dream) is a pathetic story of a woman who lost her husband. Her loving husband died while fighting in the Liberation war. Now she has only one son around whom she has centred her dreams. But he also dies in the campus violence of Dhaka University. In the story, a terrible conflict between the demands of the individual and those of the state, has been given a serious treatment.

'Kaushal' (technique) is about the stranded Pakistani people. A poignant sense of loss of identity is expressed by the characters. However, the story is not merely concerned with the problem of national identity only, it also manifests the private emotions of a housewife for her husband.

However, on the whole 'Bangladesher Urdu Chhoti Galpa' is a readable book. The readership must encourage the writers to write more and better.

Christianity and society: The influence of Christianity on the cultural and spiritual development of society; the Russian Orthodox Church; past and present; atheism and religion.

Interchurch relations yesterday and today: The Russian Orthodox Church in the Ukraine and its ties with the Christian East; ecclesiastical and cultural relations with Romania; the Russian Orthodox Church and the ecumenical movement.

Also published in French.



The Asylum-seekers

A FILM REPORTAGE

by Waheedul Haque

The clean, racy and efficiently made film grips the mind with a kind of hopelessness of the case of a bunch of seven such asylum seekers, out of possibly thousands swarming that proud Teutonic state ever since 1974, and does not itself make out case. Or refrains from doing so. It manages only to skim over the problem but has the merit of

professedly aiming at nothing deeper than that and succeeds in introducing the problem to the less informed ones. Perhaps quite unintentionally it exposes, on the one hand, the German dilemma of being forced by the weight of circumstances back into old and familiar jingoism which every decent German is extremely reluctant to, and on the other,

the humane approach taken by the churches amounting to go against the wishes of the state and sheltering the boys for more than two years from a certain deportation.

The presentation of the film was followed by discussions by Mr Mustafa Monwar, the television and stage presentation expert and Dr S I Khan of Dhaka University. The director of the Goethe Institute — the venue of the show — termed the film as being unfair both to Germany and Bangladesh. But that seemed too far less material as a point as the aspects were overlooked by the makers of the film.

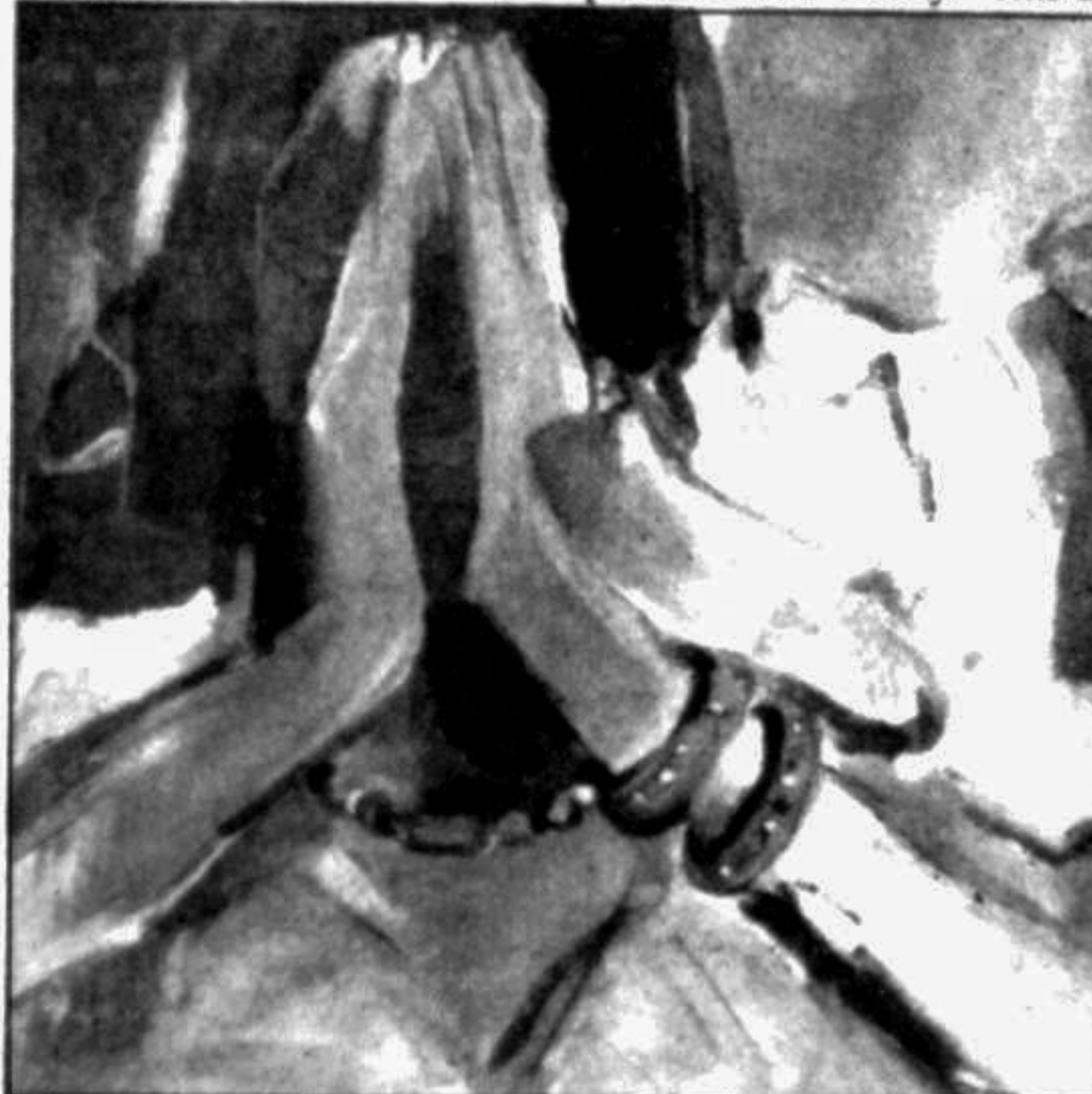
Bold, Beautiful and Benign

by Fayza Haq

MURSHIDA Arzu Alpina and Suraiya Chowdhury held a joint exhibition of eye-catching oils, etchings and combined mediums, at 'La Galerie' recently. The colours excited one; the figures pervaded one's mind; the themes fascinated one's sleepy bearing at 10 am on a weekend; while the display was a clever one, with the nylon and chiffon backdrop of scarlet, black, olive green, and magenta drapery. The pale wooden frames of Suraiya and Alpina's olive ones arrested the spectator's attention—the main exhibit apart. A lot depends on presentation in art displays, dining and sales of any items — ranging from magazines and medicines to clothes and jewellery—as one knows full well.

In Alpina's 'Frightened Child with Mother' one saw a woman bedecked in a white necklace, cobalt-blue and magenta bangles. The face and body, along with the hair, had been done with confident and swift strokes. The child at the right, had a frightened appearance, with innocent features and hair in braids. The mother was markedly modern but the child was far from affected. The painting depicted bold, modern mothers who had a hold over their children in the present times. This work was in oil brush work, as were all of Alpina's other pieces.

'Secret Talk with Myna' delineated a delectable, modern woman — bereft of clothes, with a necklace with a turquoise pendant. 'The woman was so alone that she took recourse to talking with the pet bird, taken out of the cage', the artist explained. The piece was bubbling with colours and highlights — which include geranium lake, ultramarine, cadmium yellow, and plenty of beige. 'I usually use four main colours with variations in all my work,' the artist elaborated.



Tears of Joy: Murshida Arzu Alpina

Eric Rohmer: The Colourist

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and his bonze-like lined face, those close to him describe him as an ascetic who mainly lives on tea and crackers, but also as a rigorist combined with an eccentric.

He has been called 'the watercolourist of the wanderings of the heart and mind' and 'the colourist of the games of love and chance.' 'I attempt to describe beings as they are,' the film-maker, who has always been fascinated by young women, replies simply.

Their torments in love have always dominated Rohmer's world. From film to film, he has described the whole palette of them: passion-love, reason-love, friendship-love, etc. His important films showing this include 'Ma nuit chez Maud' (1969), 'Le genou de Claire' (1970), 'L'amour l'après-midi' (1972), 'La Femme de l'Aviateur' (1981), 'Pauline à la plage' (1983), 'Les Nuits de pleine lune' (1984), 'Quatre aventures de Reinette et Mirabelle' (1987), and 'L'ami de mon ami'.

Rohmer's Little Music With a subtle scalpel, Rohmer explores the intimate daily lives of his heroines. He sounds their little secrets and all the nuances of their feel-

In 'People with Multiple vision', one could see the same persons having different visions, as Alpina, explained. There were five figures of different sexes to be seen. The men were bare chested while the women were heavily clad. The eyes were depicted in various shapes, sizes and angles. The entire was interesting and absorbing.

'Reaching the Moon' was a landscape with rocks. 'When I had gone to Chittagong for an artists' camp, I was inspired by nature around me, and this is the product,' Alpina commented. The backdrop of the sky was cobalt blue with ultramarine. The cliffs were in cadmium red, yellow ochre, while the forefront had splashes of white. The impact remained impressionistic.

There was a fascinating semi-abstract piece 'Grandmother with Fairy Tales' by the same artist. The forms had been somewhat distorted, and lines of brush strokes had been used as colour patches. The grandmother, with the dark child, was seen telling stories of a white snake, in the forefront, a kite painted in grey and light red; while there was a dog and a washerman's donkey, seen in grey. The last two items were depicted well as they usually do not take to each other.

There was a representation of a man and woman in close proximity in the backdrop in 'Tear Away' by the same artist. The image symbolised the close relationship between a man and his beloved, as courtship or marriage progressed. The figures in the forefront were women, depicted as lamenting in heavy shrouds. A fair measure of black had been used to enhance the depiction of the separations and divorces, and other bitter existence that prevail in our society. 'This is

based on factors. I have known of four cases among my friends and acquaintances, and this is no myth or fabrication,' the young artist explained.

A musical scene was depicted too by Alpina and here she showed the women as being older than the actual models were. She wished to depict the maturity and absorption of the players. The beige and crimson lake were balanced well with the darker hues.

Dwelling on the contemporary scene of art in Bangladesh Alpina remarked, 'I don't believe that we are westernised. The western art is highly publicised whereas we have more depth and maturity in our work which goes back to centuries. We have a multicultural impact in our work.' Talking about problems in getting materials, the artist said that after attending the environment workshop arranged by the Goethe Institut, she now knew that she could create out of stones, broken glass, torn baskets and even paper bags. Alpina was no longer worried about purchasing expensive papers and colours. She sings, and writes poetry as her hobbies. She has been lecturing at the Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka, for seven months.

Suraiya, the other artist, was no less mature or engaging in her displays. Of a more serious deportment, her vision too remained less static than that of Alpina's, but this is not to say that her lithos or paintings were in any way inferior in charm or visual impact. Her pen and ink sketch 'Nature' had flowers, bumble bees and even a butterfly. This symbolised the affection in every heart, the artist explained. 'This is the reality of life whether people notice or admit it or not,' the artist elaborated. The strokes were exquisitely feminine and fine.

Voicing her opinion on the present art scenario in the country, Suraiya had this to comment, 'I feel that we have yet to establish our known style. Ours is a conglomeration of various themes and media; and we have not yet acquired an identity of our own.' Suraiya works at a school for mentally retarded children at New Circular Road, apart from her artistic pursuits.

The display showed what a couple of women could offer the critical art lover, having combined their ingenuity and technical finesse — their imagination and dreams apart.



Play of Light of Dancing Figure: Suraiya

everyday language. There are few carefully prepared dialogues but, on the contrary, frequent improvisation during filming. Hence the tone of authenticity and truth which characterizes 'Rohmer's little music' that the critics speak of. It is a bitter-sweet music, tinted with humour and producing emotion which leaves one charmed, as with 'Le Conte d'Hiver' for which he got the idea from Shakespeare.

The film begins with the last moments of a holiday love affair. Felicie, a young Paris hairdresser, gives her address to Charles whom she has loved passionately for a few weeks.

In her emotion, she makes a slip and confuses the names of two towns in the suburbs, so that the lovers are unable to get in touch with each other.

Years go by. Felicie brings up her little girl born of her love affair with Charles. She has affairs with other men, but only one matters, the one she has lost. Against all likelihood, she remains convinced that she will find him again. And then, one day, in the midst of an anonymous crowd on a bus...

The moral of the story, for Rohmer's tales always have one, is that one should believe

in unexpected wonders. It is not the first time that the filmmaker tackles the theme of wonders. It was already the case in 'Le Rayon Vert' which won him the 'Golden Lion' at the Venice Biennale in 1988. Critics did not fail to approach him the melodramatic aspect of the ending to 'Le Conte d'Hiver.' The director answers: 'The miracle took over during filming and I did not want to change anything. Moreover, isn't life often a melodrama?'

CORRECTION

We regret that in the article, 'A Book Fair with an Impact and Purpose', Mr Mustafizur Rahman who has translated the book, 'Of Blood and Fire' by Jahannara Imam, from Bengali to English, was inadvertently mentioned as the 'present Foreign Minister of Bangladesh'. Mr Rahman, the translator in question, is at present the Ambassador of Bangladesh to Russia. Before taking up his present assignment, Rahman, a career diplomat, was the Additional Foreign Secretary to the Government of Bangladesh. We apologise for the error.

— Editor

BOOKS

The Christianization of Ancient Russia — a Millennium (988-1988)

1992, 337 pp., illus., 16 x 24 cm ISBN 92-3-102642-9

the conversion of Rus' to Christianity; the role of Christianity in the assimilation by Kievan Rus' of the Classical and Byzantine heritage; the religious achievements of Yaroslav the Wise.

Christianity, art and culture: Macedonia, Serbia and Russian medieval art; the development of architecture and art in Western Rus'; the evolution of

Russian ecclesiastical architecture in the seventeenth century; the Byzantine origins of medieval sacred music in Kievan Rus'; the role of the book in the Christianization of Rus'.

The theme of 'Holy Russia': The gift and enigma of Holy Russia; its genesis and permanence; the image of Russian Christianity in the West.

No one who is concerned with the well-being of a nation, can deny the highly significant role played in it by the mobility of culture. A culture of a nation should slowly, but ever-evolvingly, be modified by time. In order to widen the range of the intellectual sphere of a nation, it should not only confine itself to whatever is indigenous, for that matter, but it can also expeditiously appreciate an alien culture.

In Bangladesh, as in any other culturally conscious country, we come across the vernacular version of many books of foreign literature. These translations into Bengali offer our reading public an opportunity to have knowledge about foreign literature, culture and people. Keeping these considerations in mind, one will surely find interest as well as curiosity to read 'Bangladesher Urdu Chhoti Galpa' (Urdu short stories of Bangladesh), a book edited by S M Sajid Ayub Hossain and published, in February, 1992, by Shahkar Publications, Dhaka.

The first story of the book is 'Matir Sughran' (fragrance of soil) written by Ashmad Sadi. As the title of the story signifies, it is about the rural people and surrounding. It opens with beautiful description of a village that is near the border. The village is almost empty, for the military were raiding the houses in order to catch the rebels. (The backdrop well implies 1971 liberation war period). In the silence of a night, three soldiers enter a hut which belongs to an old man. He has his daughter and wife. The old man has not fled away from the village even at the risk of losing his life and family, because he loves the village deeply — he belongs to the soil. However, at one time one of the soldiers takes the daughter to one room. In the morning the soldier is found to be killed and the girl is holding the rifle. The end of the story is a bit obscure. It may be interpreted that the simple,

A book that unveils to readers the flurry of events surrounding the Christianization of Rus', as known in ancient times, the spread of the Christian message, its significant influence in Russian culture and society and, more recently, the Russian Orthodox Church's contribution to the ecumenical movement. At a time of change, when history seems to accelerate its pace in that part of the world, this book brings new insight into the sources of the mystic humanism that permeates Russian philosophy and thought. Contents include:

Christianity reaches Kiev and Rus': the sources: The world of Cyril and Methodius in Bulgaria and its transmission to Kievan Rus'; the baptism of Prince Vladimir and