

# A Colleague Designs a Park for Children; and Glimpses from a Train Journey in China

A colourful procession brought out by children in Dhaka on Sunday — hopefully also in other cities and towns — raised all the right slogans we can think of, such as, against the use of child labour, terrorism and the denial of basic human rights.

The placards carried in the procession, marking the four-day programme for the International Children's Day, were also painted with slogans demanding better education and more recreational facilities for millions of teenagers growing up in this crowded metropolis.

The call for more recreational facilities, meaning parks and playgrounds, for children has evoked a somewhat unique kind of response from a couple of my young colleagues in *The Daily Star*. Their idea is worth reporting and most certainly worth working on.

Just next to the Banani railway station, along the Airport Road and almost facing the Old DOHS, is a sizable empty plot. With fences on all sides, it does look like park, but it is not. It has nothing that one may associate with a park, not even benches where people can sit and relax. Instead, it is now covered with long grass, turning it into an ideal grazing ground for cattle.

It caught the attention of one of our photographers, Enam ul Haq who took a picture of the site, by coincidence, on the day children paraded the streets asking for more recreational facilities.

When we showed Enam's photograph to our staff artist cum reporter, Sharif, we all knew immediately what he could do with this plot of

land.

"We can show our readers what this place will look like when it is turned into a children's park," said Sharif, rather thoughtfully, but not without his usual broad grin.

So, we got a park, almost within 24 hours, but, sadly enough, only on paper.

We reproduce below the design of the proposed park as visualised by Sharif, next to the photograph by Enam. I cannot help wondering if the idea offered by our staff artist would

DOHS residents agree, we can even call it the "Barrister Nazmul Huda Children Park" since it is the Minister for Information who, on Sunday, reiterated the government's determination "to ensure a congenial atmosphere for children."

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THE proposed park near the Banani railway station may well serve as an example for turning other empty unused plot into small parks for children and adults.

depends on what we do with our immediate natural surroundings where flowers can grow, instead of weeds and uncut grass.

Remember the drive from the Chang airport in Singapore to the city, where the joke is that even the flowers bloom in a well-planned fashion under the discipline imposed by Lee Kuan Yew? And what about the landscape that one sees on both sides of the road as one approaches Tokyo's Narita airport?

In this respect, one lasting recollection of mine relates to my 48-hour long train journey from Canton to the city, where then still called Peking, back in 1965. It was a most comfortable train ride, but what I remember most was what I saw in some 20-odd railway stations, large and small, where we stopped as we travelled from one part of China to another. There was always music — not loud but gentle and soft — coming from the station's loudspeakers as the train entered the platform — and there were flowers, in trees and pots, in all different colours, surrounding the station. Stipping Chinese tea from the flask which was always there in my single compartment, as always full, and looking out through the window at the crowd getting in and out of the train noiselessly, I would be filled with a soothing comfortable feeling that I have seldom experienced during any journey, regardless of the mode of transport. It was then that I realised what it means to live in a clean pollution-free beautiful environment even in impoverished Asia. This realisation, I hope, will stay with me for ever.

## MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

evoked any response from our resourceful residents of Old DOHS who include a number of cabinet ministers, past and present, senior-ranking defence officers (retired and serving) and members of the business community, people with power or money, if not both.

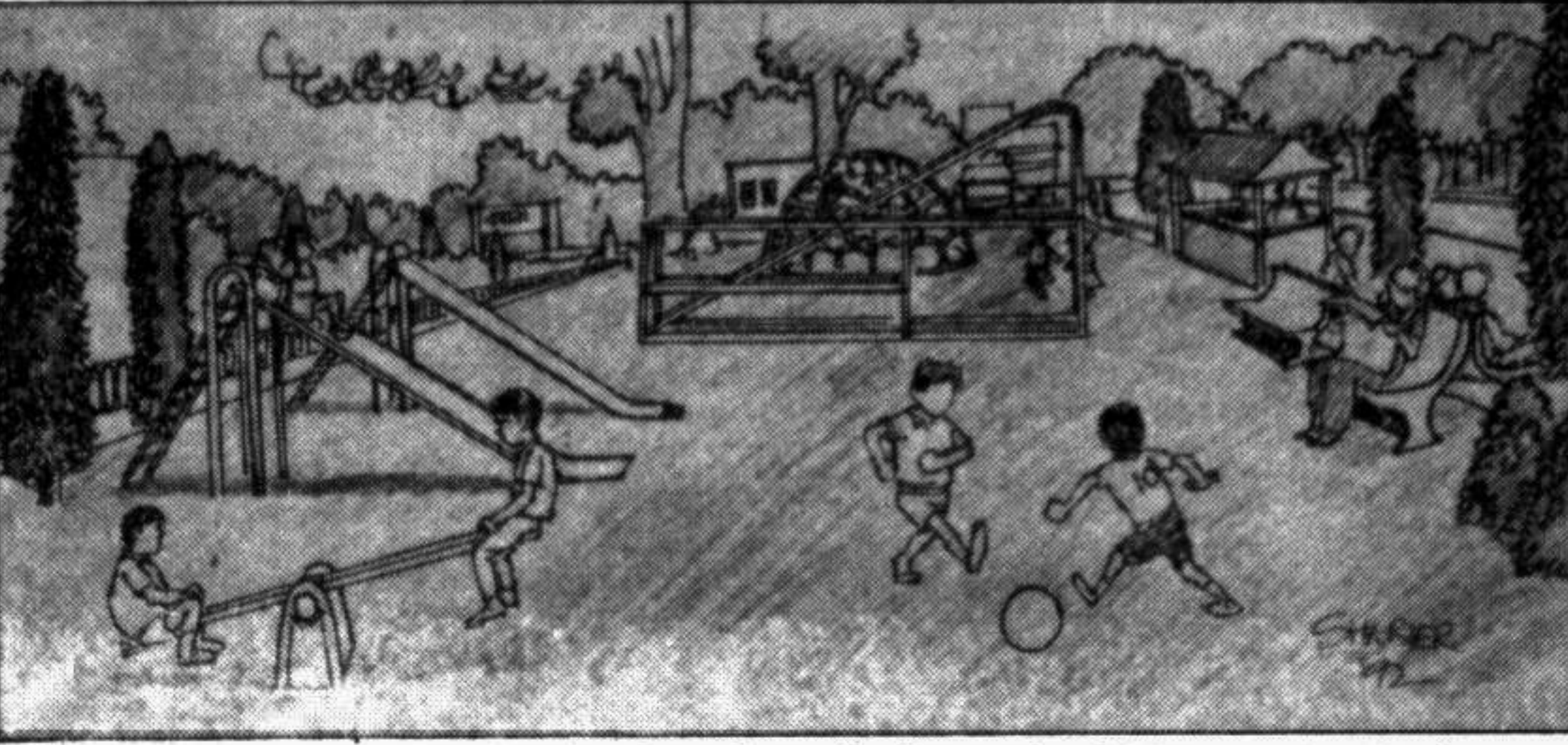
With this proposition comes a tantalising offer: Whoever takes the initiative in setting up a children's park on this empty plot — the design by Sharif carries no price tag, naturally — will be remembered by posterity. The park will be named after the prime-mover. Or, if all

We may not go for elaborate expensive landscaping. Just cut the grass, grow some seasonal flowers and put a few benches. Let us also clean up the so-called lakes and introduce some boating facilities. And there will be benches, donated by local civic-minded residents, where people will sit in the warm sunshine of the coming winter and read their favourite newspaper which, for the time being, remains unidentified.

The beautification of a city seldom means setting up huge impressive buildings. Much



An empty unused plot of land, (left) behind the Banani Railway Station, facing the Old DOHS, as seen in a Star photo taken last Sunday. On right, is the design of a children's park, for the same unused plot, as visualised by The Daily Star staff artist cum reporter, Sharif.



# An Award Too Late to Come!

by Rahat Fahmida



Chitra Ghosh in Dhaka.

— Photo by Prabir Saha

Her tall figure, sharp features and composed and dignified appearance speaks of her aristocratic family background. Chitra Ghosh is the eldest daughter of renowned Dr. Sarat Bose of West Bengal, India.

It is difficult to use an appropriate epithet to refer to this versatile lady. Having taught in reputed institutions in Calcutta, Ghosh now spends her maximum time working with up-coming entrepreneurs of the same city. This does not hold her back from being nostalgic, once someone starts talking of her most loved Uncle (father's younger brother) — Netaji, Subhash Chandra Bose. A patriot par excellence — Netaji's personality was a crystallising force to bring together people of different caste, creed and religion. This great personality, was posthumously awarded 'Bharat Ratna' by the Government of India early this year, which was refused by his family. This has led to great controversy.

Chitra Ghosh, Netaji's niece, in an interview with *The Daily Star*, during her recent visit to Dhaka, throws some light on the issue to help understand that controversy. The excerpt follows:

**Daily Star (DS):** So far we know, your family has refused the 'Bharat Ratna' award and put the Indian government in considerable embarrassment. What are the reasons behind the refusal?

**Chitra Ghosh (CG):** Yes, the family of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose has refused to accept the 'Bharat Ratna' because it was felt that it was doing a dishonour and it is not a bestowal of honour for such a great man; who was responsible for the creation of a new independent India and is only comparable to Gandhi, the Father of the Nation (India). It was not intended to be an embarrassment for the government but it was to be pointed out to them that Netaji should not be equated with men who are not of his stature. He should be recognised for his great sacrifice — but not by giving or awarding him 'Bharat Ratna'. It is not enough to give him a medal. Much more is his due!

**DS:** Many still do not believe in the plane crash (in which he is supposed to have died, according to others) theory. Is it any reason for the refusal, or should the Indian government be held responsible for the late

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### Witness to History

## Life and Times of Gen Wasiuddin

Continued from page 9 (through Osmany) to tell him the decision of Yahya regime to strike a military blow on the people of East Pakistan and for that a build up of arms and men would soon begin, unless the proposed dialogue of Yahya with Sheikh Mujib succeeded.

A bright career in the Pakistan army did not interest Wasi as much as the good of the Bangladeshis.

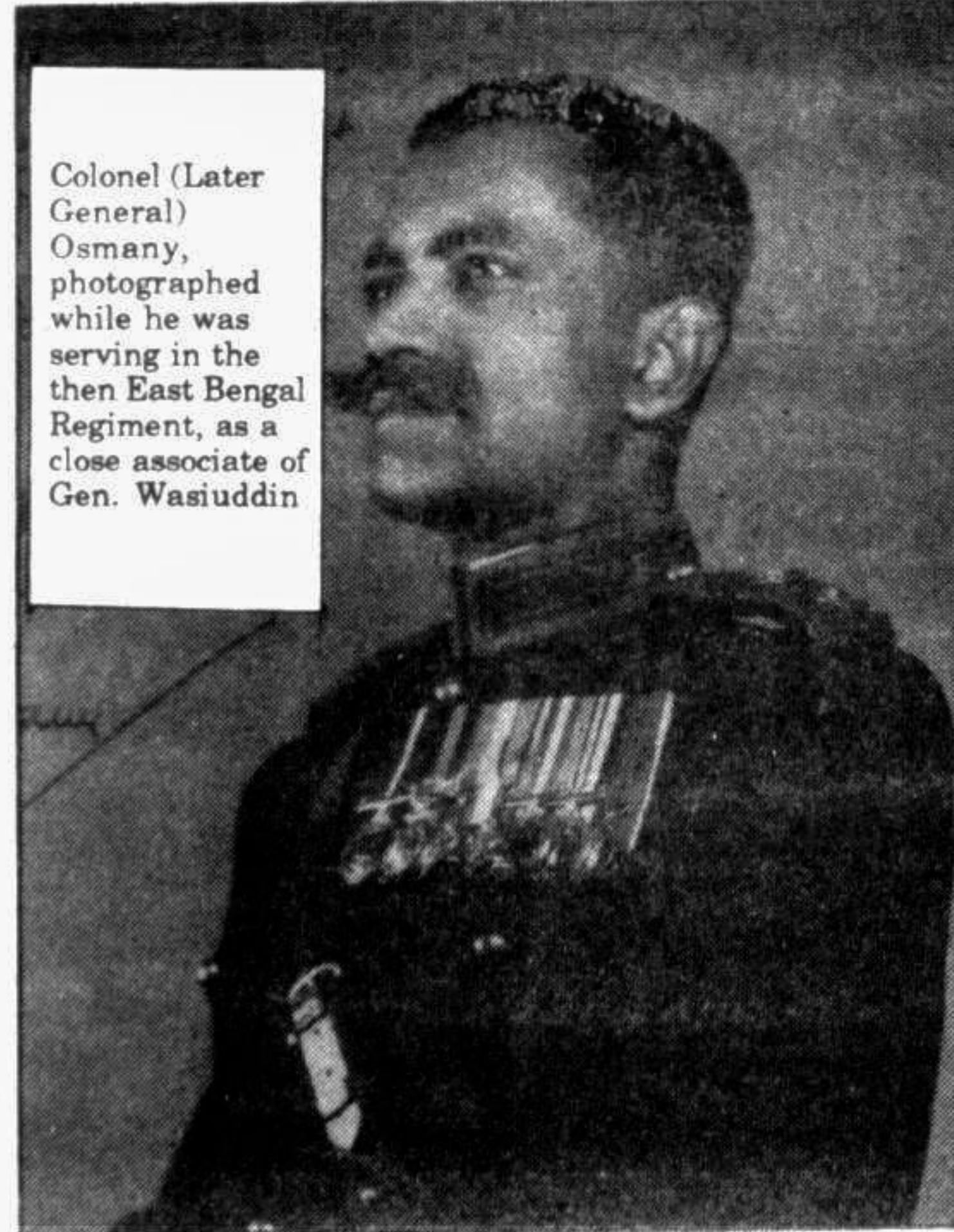
Gen Wasi was the General Officer Commanding 14 Division at Dhaka in 1961-62. This was the only time during Pakistan that a Bengalee commanded the only Division in East Pakistan. The period was a disturbed one due to student movements against the education policy of the government. I was serving as brigade major in Comilla with the result that I had information of inner events of Dvn HQ at Dhaka. The hawks were keen to smash the student movement by force; if necessary by deploying the army. Gen Wasi was a firm man with a strong mind and overwhelming personality. Whatever he thought, went. He made it amply clear that it was none of the business of the army to get involved in the student protest. The Pakistani authorities did not like this but Gen Wasi could not care. We knew, however, for certain that Gen Wasi would be the last person to allow shooting by the army on the students — some of whom might have come from the St Gregory.

In 1971, 5, 6, and 7 battalions of the East Bengal Regiment were in Pakistan. Pakistani authorities were at a loss as to what to do with these battalions consisting purely of the Bangladeshis. They were preparing for the Indo-Pak war. They could neither trust the Bangladeshis, nor could they afford to leave them out of battle because it would be too obvious. So another move came under Yahya to break up the Bengalee battalions in the middle of 1971. Lt Col HM Ershad, Lt Col A Rouf and Lt Col Mashhoorul Haq were the Commanding Officers of these battalions. They were called to 'Pindi and discussed the problem with Gen Wasi who asked for their feelings about it and the feelings of the troops. They said that the Bengalee felt strongly that the move be opposed. Gen Wasi did not take a second to say 'yes, of course we shall.' He got up, walked to Gen Hamid's (Chief of Staff) office and told him straight 'Leave us alone or you'll be responsible for any consequence.' As I said before that the moral conviction is a formidable force, Gen Hamid had to give in and Gen Wasi, a powerless representative of East Pakistan, won. It is difficult to describe, but this short statured 'tall' man always believed in his strength of being on the right path, fighting for a

cause in which his own interest was absent, and would talk down to everybody who thought otherwise.

Among these three battalions, five East Bengal Regiment under Lt Col MA Rouf was actually deployed in Lahore sector and was ordered to attack. General Bahadur Sher, a Pathan, commanding Lahore Corps and a straight-forward soldier set aside the suggestions from his subordinates not to deploy 5 East Bengal Regiment. He ordered their deployment. 5 East Bengal Regiment fought bravely, broke through the Indian defence, and entered Indian territory. As they saw

1957, when the map of the subcontinent changed once again. Many political events involving power politics also occurred. In Pakistan, Panjabi Generals led by Gen Hamid, the COS of army made a bid for power. But Bhutto, supported by Lt General Gul Hassan, Chief of Gen Staff and Air Marshall Rahim Khan (Air C-in-C) won and Bhutto captured power. His dream to become the Prime Minister and not to sit in the opposition, became a reality. He decided to barter the Bengalee soldiers interned in Pakistan with the defeated prisoners war in East Pakistan. So General Wasi with other Bengalee officers and men



Colonel (Later General) Osmany, photographed while he was serving in the then East Bengal Regiment, as a close associate of Gen. Wasiuddin

India their heart throbbled and their cherished dream of joining the freedom fight for Bangladesh overwhelmed them. The entire mortar Platoon and a bulk of the battalion walked further up, joined the Indian line and requested them to arrange for their transportation to East Pakistan border so that they could join the liberation struggle.

Poor General Bahadur Sher, the Corps Commander, must have been very embarrassed. But his consolation must have been to know that in the entire sector, 5 East Bengal Regiment's attack was the most successful and its penetration into the Indian territory was the deepest. So they did not let him down so far as the fighting was concerned.

December 1971 marked a major turning point in the history, comparable to 1947 and

were sent to prison camps. Before moving to the prison camp General Wasi contacted Peter Gill of BBC and gave him a vivid account of the inhuman conditions of prison camps in which thousands of Bengalee officers and men were thrust in. This news from BBC blasted the made believe Bhutto claim that the Bengalee soldiers were not prisoners but being detained as 'honourable' soldiers.

General Wasi was repatriated in October, 1973. We heard through BBC that he was made the Chief of Staff of Bangladesh Army. But the later events showed otherwise. I tried to ascertain his reaction to the government decision, first to appoint him COS and then to transfer him to foreign office. As a gentleman with old values, he did not utter a word against anyone. If the country did not need to utilise his ser-

## Shanti's Story : One in Diversity

by Qazi M. Fazal

SHANTI is a rarity in Bangladesh. She is a Hindi-speaking Hindu whose family has been in the country for several generations. Over the years her community in Azimpur has been able to preserve its language, religion and most of its culture and traditions despite the division of the subcontinent along religious lines and the presence of religious strife.

Shanti could not explain her unusual background. "I have lived here all my life and this is how I grew up," she said. A little investigation revealed that her ancestors came to Bangladesh a few generations ago from the area known as Orissa in India. They apparently belonged to the harijan (untouchable) caste in Orissa and decided to move to an Islamic region of South Asia in order to live a life without the stigma of their social class — Islam sees everyone equally. Over the past years, through intermarriage only within their community, her people have managed to retain their language and religion.

Shanti works at various households of the well-to-do as a masseuse. Her husband, like her father, is a cobbler of a government agency in Sylhet. She lives in an extended family structure of cousins and siblings in the same neighborhood. With the money that she earns she sends her two sons and a daughter to private schools. She even keeps a tutor for them — education is very important, she explained. Although she does not have any career plans for them, her only wish is that they grow up to be able to make proper decisions and that they do not have bar-

riers against them because of any intellectual incapability. They are learning Bengali as their primary language, but she still speaks in Hindi to them at home — it is her heritage and duty. She makes them read texts on Hindu rites and scriptures. Since these texts are only available from India they are written in Hindi; therefore another effective way of transferring her language to her children.

Shanti is firmly rooted in her faith in god and is happy. Her only regret, however, is that her community is disappearing. Her community does not suffer from much persecution, although there are occasional frictions with political and religious zealots. The government has been good in

protecting minority interests. However, her community's background is different from that of even other Hindus in Bangladesh. Through intermarriage with Hindus from various other communities, her own unique culture is disappearing. Her community is also breaking up and moving to different regions of the country where the culture may fade over the generations because of isolation. Although intermarriage between Hindus and Muslims is virtually non-existent, some do convert and marry outside even the Hindu community. But she is following her responsibility as a mother, she commented with a sigh. She is passing on what she has grown up with to her children, and it would be up to

them to take or leave whatever they wished.

Does she face any trouble in day to day life being a Hindu in a predominantly Muslim country? Wouldn't life have been easier for her if she had simply converted to Islam? Shanti pointed out that we are all the followers of the same God. We may have different ways of approaching this supreme being, she explained, but are the means very important when we all have the same end? If everyone followed the same way of praying and living their lives and if everyone followed the same culture and rituals, life would be boring indeed, she said. She enjoys the rituals and spirituality of Islamic events such as the Eids and she likes to share the values of her Hindu rites and pujas with her neighbors (she does not

worship statues, she explained — she uses the deities to merely focus her perception of God).

"Diversity among the various communities of faith and dialogue among them through tolerance" was her phrase when she tried to explain her understanding of the importance of being a minority member of a country. Shanti does not have any formal education and is illiterate. Yet her depth of character reveals a broad understanding of pluralism in a multi-faceted world. Perhaps it takes something more than a Harvard degree to understand the importance of one's own background and value that of others at the same time. Shanti would ask us to imagine the world with all its different religions and cultures as an interweaving of threads in one large blanket of humankind. And in the final analysis, what good is a blanket with threads weaved in only one direction?

## WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,

Is there any remedy for hair loss? I have tried everything, even the famous Chinese medicine 101, but nothing has worked. Everybody says the same thing and I am fed up. Meanwhile, I am almost bald and only 28 years old. This is so embarrassing and, moreover, I am afraid no woman will want to marry me as I will be completely bald in a few years. Please help me, I will do anything you ask me to.

Sadiq Khan, Segun Bagtch

Dear Sadiq,

I really wish I could say something different from what you have already been told. There is really no cure especially if the cause of hair loss is hereditary. I am sure you have seen doctors who might have suggested vitamins, change of water, nutrition etc. To be honest, nothing really works. About getting married, well, a woman will surely marry you someday and it will be for your personality and not your hair, Believe me, I am a woman too.

Dear Mita,

The letter from the woman who was stuck in a loveless relationship for 10 years was indeed very sad. It is easy for people to criticize her and only God knows the pain she is enduring without her children. Though she is a proud woman, I agree that she should take child support because children should always be with the mother. A father will never be able to give the love and attention that a mother will, and the children will suffer and ultimately blame the mother for abandoning them. What do you think Mita? You should advise the woman to keep the children with her no matter what.

Suraiya, Lake View, Circle, Dhaka.

Dear Suraiya,

I am sorry but I cannot take such extreme positions. The fact that a father can never give the love and care to children as a mother can is not true neither is it validated. There are many examples, even in our culture where fathers have made many sacrifices for the happiness of their children. I do agree that children could be better-off with the mother but that is also very subjective and varies from person to person. If child support or financial constraint is the only factor that is preventing the mother from keeping the children, then I don't agree that she should try to be with them and should not feel insulted to accept money from her husband.

Dear Mita,

All my life I have been a weak person and never stood up for my beliefs. In face of confrontation, I always tend to retreat even if I know my position is right. Now I am 25 and about to get married. The person I plan to marry is very supportive and encourages me to assert myself but I am afraid I will do what I have always done and gradually he will get bored of me. This disturbs me so much that often I almost broke up our relationship. What can I do Mita? I want to be normal but I am shy, weak and have no confidence. Please advise.

Anonymous, Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Dear Anonymous,

For some reason you suffer from lack of self-confidence and self-esteem. Since I do not know any details of your background, it is difficult for me to make an assessment. However, the fact that you realize your problem means you have come a long way in solving it. Another positive thing in your life is that you have chosen a sensitive, understanding and supportive person to be your life partner. Please try to appreciate him instead of pushing him away. Get involved in activities that are meaningful and make you feel good, your self-esteem will automatically increase.

## WRITE TO MITA

Run by a trained and experienced Family and Marriage counsellor, assisted by a professional team of doctor, psychologist and lawyer, this column will answer questions relating to family, marriage, health, family laws, and social and interpersonal relationships. Please address letters to Mita, The Daily Star, GPO Box 3257 or to 28/1, Toynebe Circular Road, Motijheel, Dhaka-1000.