

# Academy's New Dictionary — a Must for the Writing Desk Evolution of Bengali

by AZM Shamsul Alam

WAY back in the sixties the Bangla Academy set up a milestone in Bengali lexicography by publishing the Regional Language Dictionary. The Academy, in sequel to that, did laudable work in publishing a series of booklets devoted to coining Bengali counterparts to international and English technical terms employed by the various disciplines. These were found to be very useful although this could not be taken as contributing in a big way to the discharge of the Academy's lexicographical responsibilities. However, in 1984 the Academy published the rather ponderous tome of Shivaprasanna Lahiri laying a good foundation of the learned body's future lexicographical enterprises.

There remained a very bad gap in the field insofar as there was nothing for the ordinary user by the lay users of the language — something capably suitable for ready reference and something that could stay on the writing desk. Light and unforbearing. This was especially necessary to induce people to look up things in a dic-

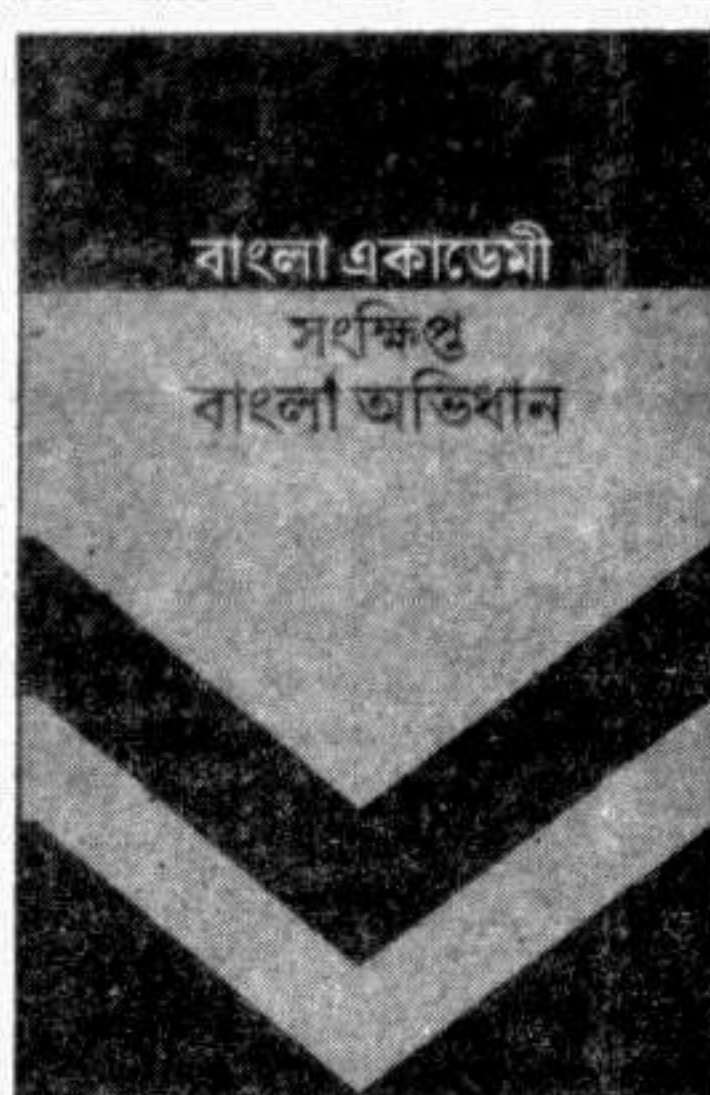
tionary whenever in doubt — something very unknown to this land where the species of dictionary-minded ones has gone extinct.

Now Bangla Academy has come up with a very presentable volume to fill that gap. Termed the Samkshipta Bangla Abhidhan or the Concise Bengali Dictionary, this comes out as a fruit of seven years' labour put in by the Academy's own expert personnel — Shamsuzzaman Khan and Selina Hossain being prominent among them — with the eminent scholar Professor Ahmed Sharif presiding over their exertions. The book is admittedly a concise version of the Academy's own Bangladesher Byaboharik Abhidhan by Lahiri but is far from being a case of useless duplication. Things have been updated, given a modern ambience and added relevance.

There is no end to making this mirror of a language reflect truly the latest state of a language in question. And the Bengali language as a whole has suffered from inadequate lexicographical care. The widely circulated Samsad dictionary

**SAMKSHIPTA BANGLA ABHIDHAN**  
Edited by Ahmed Sharif  
Bangla Academy, Pages 672. Price Tk 200.

Reviewed by  
**Waheedul Haque**



was a poor but popular substitute for the authentic and highly dependable chalanika of Rajshekhar Basu — now gone

out of fashion and perhaps also of print. We very badly needed something that could make up for the lapses of the Samsad dictionary. And we have every reason to expect that this has been taken care of in a satisfactory manner by the new dictionary.

The Director-General of Bangla Academy, in his foreword, has claimed that in the new dictionary the selection of entries and formulation of the definitions thereof and demonstration of usage have reflected the *poribesh* (situations, atmosphere, ambience, environment or what?) and heritage and culture of Bangladesh. The claim can mean or unmean very many fuzzy and often misleading things. Language-wise, it is not only wrong but very dangerous to draw a line around the

longue spoken in what is now Bangladesh, and say that there is a clear distinction between the one practised within the line and the other that is used outside of it. Unless qualified as otherwise or specialised in some manner or the other — a dictionary's subject matter is a language as a whole. And Bengali, exactly as it happens with German or English or more so with Arabic or Spanish, is one language although very much transnational. There is no dictionary for Peruvian Spanish or Sudanese Arabic or Austrian German. I personally use the British Chambers and Oxford and the American Webster and New Heritage dictionaries without making much of a distinction between them. If the dictionaries published in West Bengal or Assam fail to mirror the Bengali language as a whole, due mainly to a prejudice against loan-words from Persian and Arabic, there is no reason why a Bangla Academy dictionary should match those defects and fail to serve as a compendium for the whole of Bangla language which again is a telltale repository of the cul-

ture or the becoming of the historical Bengalee people as a whole.

The 'Samkshipta' dictionary compares very well to the market-ruling Samsad, especially in the quality of the print and overall presentation. But it is sure to face odds in a more important matter: Price. The Indian dictionary sells in Dhaka for a round 100 taka whereas the Academy volume has been priced at Taka 200. The Academy will be well-advised to bring it down to a competitive level which can be done through going for a big run. However, it is well-known that marketing is something for which the Academy is famous for. It could very well go seriously for inducing institutional purchase of such works of scholarship in so big a bundle as can give the big print runs a foothold. Let us hope that the new dictionary would reach every educated Bangladesh home and spill over into neighbouring regions and the Bangla Academy's notoriety of printing books and not selling them would not stand in the way of that.

BENGALI was the original language of Dravidians living in the region. It was more in the form of dialect and spoken language and did not have any written literature. Aryans came with Indo-European Sanskrit language. Sanskrit used to be written in a script called Deva Nagri, which is believed to be script of the city (Nagar) of the gods (Dev). So long Bengali was without any script, it was very fluid, with great flexibility and absorbing capacity of foreign words.

Pali, Prakrit, Deva Nagri were the off-shoots of Sanskrit. All these tremendously influenced Dravidian Bengali language. In many north and western provinces, the Indo Aryan language completely absorbed and even replaced the local languages and dialects. But the resilient Bengali had greater resistance.

During pre-Muslim period, Sanskrit was the court language of the Hindu kings and emperors of Bengal. It was also the language of the writers, scholars and intellectuals. The Muslim king adopted Persian as the court language and liberally patronised the development of Bengali language and dialect.

After the advent of Muslims, Bengali started undergoing another change. Muslims brought along with them Arabic script. Under the patronage of Muslims, golden age of Bengali language started. The Muslim scholars used to write Bengali in Arabic script, more particularly in Nastaliq which was some kind of deviation or perversion of Arabic script which itself underwent many changes. For many centuries Nastaliq was the script for Bengali language.

During the Muslim rule, not only the Arabic script, but also Arabic words entered into the Dravidian Bengali language. Dewan, Adalat, Foujdari, Munsiff etc are the Muslim terminology in administration. Dewan was the head of revenue in the Mughal court. The designation of Todormal, the famous Revenue Minister of Emperor Akbar, was Dewan. Now also civil cases are called Dewan cases.

Adalat is an Arabic word, which means justice. Adalat was the court of justice. Now also in Bangladesh Civil Courts are called Dewan Adalat. The word Munsiff is originated

from Arabic. 'Insaaf means justice. The officer who delivers justice is called Munsiff.' Fouj is a Persian word, which means army. Foujdari is the head of the army. 'Foujdari Law' literary means Martial Law. The criminal courts are known as Foujdari Courts. Kotwal was the head of police during Mughal time. The police station which used to be under the direct control of the superintendent of police is still called Kotwali.

France and English have influenced the languages of the colonies ruled by England and France. Arabic had also influenced the language of many countries. The dynamism and thrust of Arabic was so great that the language of the Egyptian Pharaohs, Assyrians, Lidyans, Mesopotamians, Babylonians were completely lost and forgotten.

When English arrived, they took up a plan to free Bengali language from Arabic and Persian influence. Under the supervision of Father William Kerry of Fort William College, Calcutta, the implementation of the work started. Other institutions such as Sree Rampur College, Hindu College etc. were set up to supplement the work of Fort William College.

The plan succeeded to a great extent in Calcutta, the capital city of Bengal and Indian Empire. A kind of Bengali developed, which was greatly free from Urdu, Persian, Arabic and Turkish words. But Arabic, Urdu, Persian words dominated the Bengali language of the Muslims of the eastern Bengal.

Revered William Gold Sack, a Christian priest, came to preach Christianity and with great labour learnt Bengali in Calcutta. His area of operation was the distressed rural villages of east Bengal. To his great surprise and disappointment, he discovered that rural people smiled when he talked, not so because of his accent, but because unfamiliar Sanskrit-based words. He also found it difficult to understand the words used by the common man of eastern Bengal. He started taking note of the unfamiliar words he heard and learnt that most of these words are of Arabic, Persian and Turkish origin. He arranged these words alphabetically and got it printed in the form of a dictionary.

## A Gallery with a Promise

by Fayza Haq

"DIVINE Arts" is a new gallery that has opened at Sonargaon Hotel and appears to be stocked with good items of a number of well-known painters. The prices are high, but apparently the gallery caters mostly to visiting foreigners who can afford the high cost.

"Mother and Child" was a sketch by Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin. It was a simple pen and ink sketch with silk mountings and a frame of brown and gold paint. It showed the mother holding a child and worrying about the future.

There was Mohammed Kibria's "Composition" — an abstraction in grey, white, blue and black. There were black patches on the grey back-

ground and a few lines.

"Afternoon" was another abstraction in green and purple by Mahmud Hoque. There were black and white squares, lines and abstract motifs.

Jamal Ahmed's "Seascape" was a tranquil watercolour that brought in unison the land and the sea. Sea gulls could be seen in profusion. This had an impressionistic impact and was a soothing combination of browns, greys and white.

Quayum Chowdhury's water colour depicted a woman from the village, sitting and fanning herself. Touches of pencil strokes added shading. There was another water colour by the same artist and showed three village women in simple saris but presented in inimicable swirling lines. The village foliage in the background was brought in with bold dra-

matic strokes. Qamrul Hasan's "Festival" showed a gathering of people at the Bangla Academy "Battala". The tree was in raw green and was a dramatic creation with eyes and nose on the bark. The people gathered to hear the speaker were in simple black bold strokes, touched with shades of yellow and lemon green. Vermilion with yellow dots formed the background.

There were two woodcuts by Abdus Sattar in sea green and showed two women in reclining positions. The limbs, bosom and hair had been exaggerated and poetised. Simple shades of green were used but they had a dynamic impact. SM Sultan's "Fishing" was a water colour in which one saw Sultan's idyllic vision of vil-

lages with bulging muscles and torsos. It showed the men ploughing and fishing. The village was shown in pale yellow and blue.

Shafiuddin Ahmed's "The Sound of Water" was an etching in green, beige and ochre. The abstract patterns brought to mind birds, fish, flowers and trees.

Chandra Shekhar Day's "Elephant Man" showed a man sitting down. The composition was done with brilliant colours of red, green, blue and yellow mixed together in an overwhelming riotous profusion.

Abdul Razaque's "The River" had been shown with wild, overwhelming abstract dots, squiggles and strokes. By the red, yellow, blue and black lines one could imagine the underwater life of the rivers.

KM Mithu had two entries in black frames, which depicted rickshaws with broken wheels. This symbolised the endless struggle and strife of the commonman in Bangladesh. The colours ranged from soft blue and white to dramatic and eye-catching reds.

"Image of Rangamati" by Kanak Chapa depicted women at work, weaving a loom. While one was at the loom the other was looking on. It was an impressionistic creation, with a lot of blues and white. The artist had highlighted the patterns of the motifs in the traditional cloth of the Chakma women in red, blue, ochre and green, in geometrical patterns.

An etching by Rokeya Sultana showed a mother and child on a rainy but moonlit night. The images had been simplified. It was almost like a

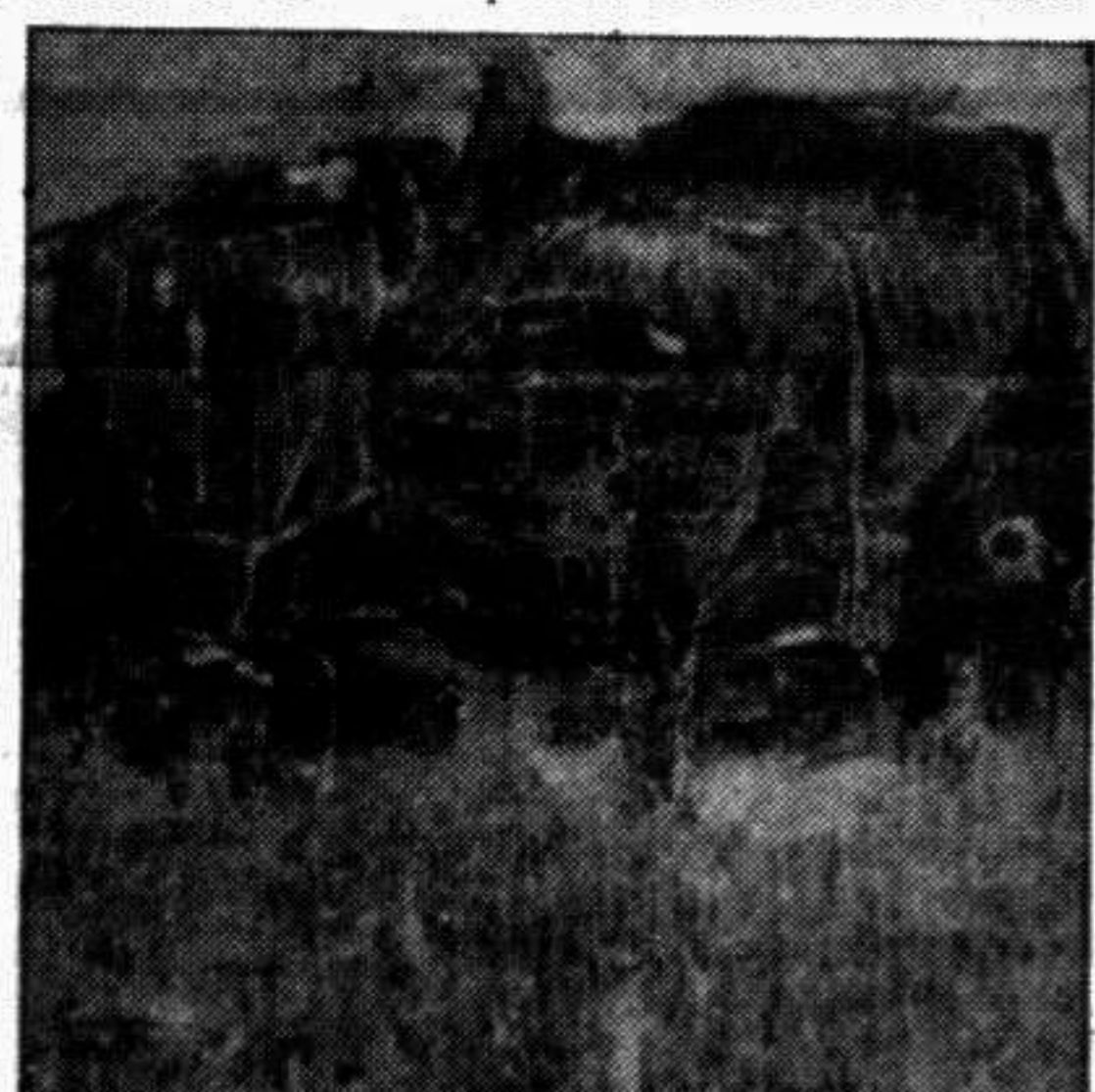
child's work and yet not quite. The brown, black and white had been combined with care. "Landscape" by Nasreen Begum was a picturesque combination of trees, crescent moon, flowers and abstract images, all blended into a beautiful and harmonious blue-green creation.

Morshed Arzu Alpina's drawings showed scenes from everyday life in crayon. There were the bedroom and dining room scenes, along with people working in fields, and children playing with kites. The drawings were modern and effective.

The opening of a gallery is always welcome as it has an outlet for the artists to sell their work. At the same time people get yet another opportunity to admire, and buy art pieces, if they can afford it, that is,



Mahbul Amin : SETAR



Abu Taher : COMPOSITION

## South Africa in Transition-II

### From Hostels to Homes

Continued from page 9

schemes. She concluded that planners had overestimated the ability of black workers, raids under paternalistic mine compound conditions, to adjust to normal township living. She also found that planners had failed to take into account the different housing needs and priorities of a broad variety of workers.

Using the same survey in 1991, this time for the migrant labour project, Laburn-Pearl and field researcher Hosia Mohalbane found that the general understanding of the housing scheme was only marginally better than three years previously.

#### Little change

Four years after the introduction of the Home Ownership project, the scheme continues to attract young, skilled workers who are used to urban living. Those who have participated have by and large previously lived in townships and have not brought their families from rural or homeland situations. Laburn-Pearl says. Thus the roots of the migrant labour system are still intact.

Dr James says that many migrant workers did not wish to move permanently to the mines. Some did not want their families close to the violent rebellion in the townships. Others feared that urban living would cost too much. Many miners also retained emotional and material ties to their homes in rural areas.

There were many others, however, like Richard Mamola who rented rooms and shacks in the townships near the mines. Living in cramped, overcrowded conditions, they avoided the separation of families that is a feature of hostel life.

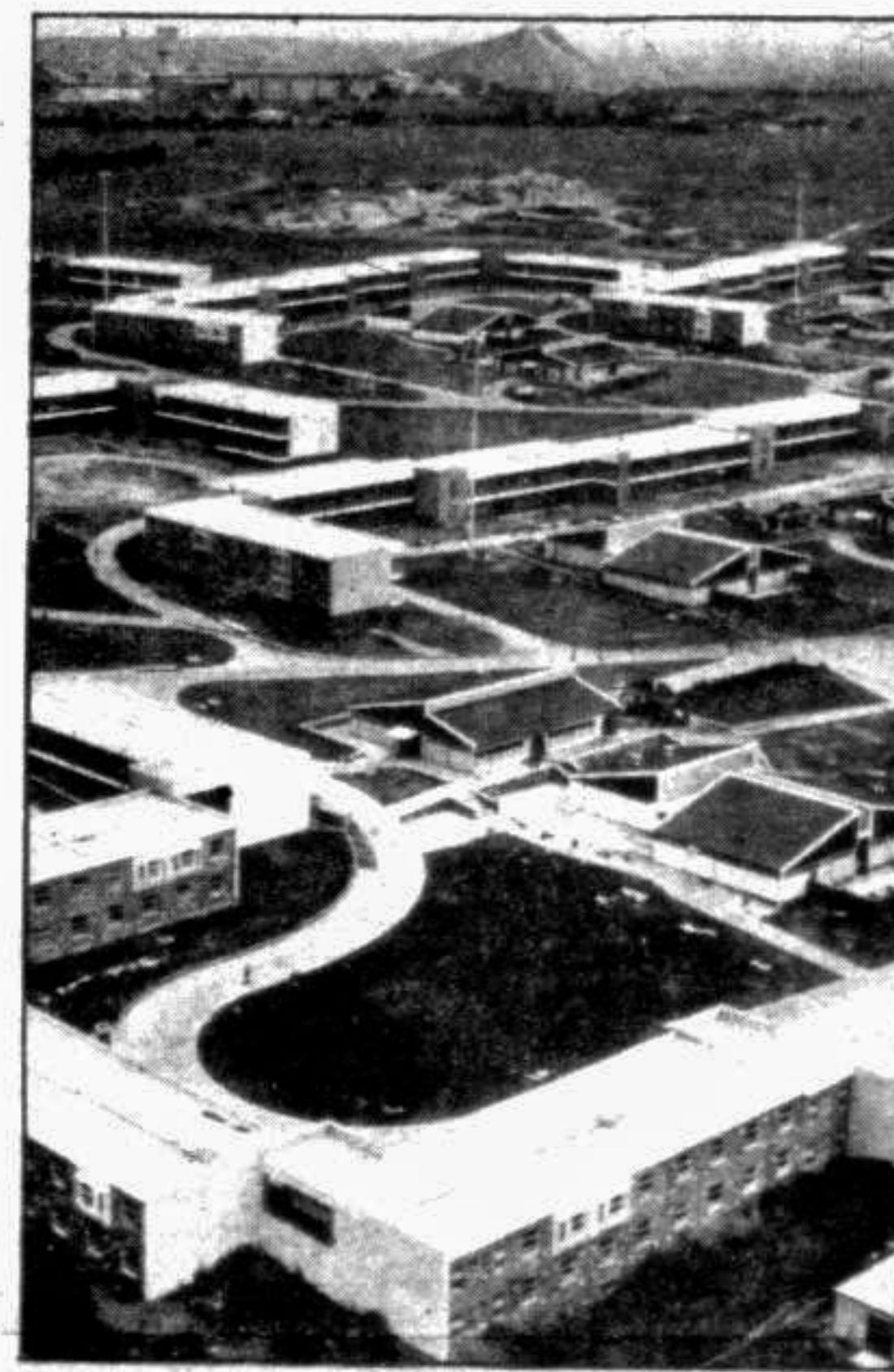
"For these, the scheme has provided a welcome means to obtain their own property, although many might be ambivalent about the financial advantages of this, especially in the current recession," says Laburn-Pearl.

#### Clean wage

The economic crisis of the gold mines compelled the mining houses to suspend their home ownership schemes last year. Dr James says that instead, they sought to get out of the home ownership business by introducing the concept of a "clean" or "all-inclusive" wage.

"The idea was to pay black workers a wage that included an accommodation component, which could then be used to rent single-sex accommodations or township units or to pay for mortgages or the erection of squatter shacks."

Left to their own devices, there are no powerful driving forces pushing either the mine companies or migrant workers toward a restructuring of migrant labour markets. "The present state has shown no interest in abandoning migrancy for the mines and, as a result, allocated no additional resources that could assist in the development of settled communities of labour," says Dr James.



A mining complex built in the 1970s.

He suggests that the government could offer tax incentives and subsidies to encourage mining companies to reform the hostel system. He also says that low-income public housing should be available for those workers who want to settle permanently near the mines and better, more humane hostels could be built for those who prefer to remain as migrant labourers. Dr James does point out, however, that migrant workers at least have housing in a country where there are an estimated seven million homeless people.

Richard Mamola is thus, for all the humbleness of his spare, two-bedroom home, a member of a tiny minority of black South Africans. He has a son, William, who has started a business in the township manufacturing security gates. William is trying to earn enough money to study to become an architect.

For Mamola and others like him, there is no turning back. They are urbanites now. "I am going to stay here. I have even cancelled my Transkei citizenship and given my cattle to my younger brothers," he says.

But for the vast majority of the hundreds of thousands of black men of South Africa's gold mines, the migrant labour system continues to operate — and, if nothing is done to address the problem now, could long outlive apartheid.

Philip van Niekerk in South Africa

## Work Begins to Save the Great Zimbabwe Ruins

John Gambanga writes from Harare

ZIMBABWE is expecting to raise about \$10 million in material, technical and financial support for an ambitious five-year programme to preserve its cultural heritage.

The main attraction is Great Zimbabwe, the spectacular and fascinating dry stone walls and numerous daga structures, spread over 720 hectares near the town of Masvingo.

Historians agree that the ancient ruins were the capital of an early Shona-Karanga empire which flourished between the 12th and 15th centuries.

Archaeologists believe that the settlement, which at its peak had around 11,000 people, was abandoned at the end of the 15th Century. The ruins of Great Zimbabwe are the oldest in southern Africa. Their historic, cultural, scientific and economic importance to Zimbabwe is immense.

A few years ago the government of President Robert Mugabe set up a conservation team, headed by a resident archaeologist, because the stone walls, weakened by rain, grassland fires and visiting tourists, had begun collapsing. The team includes a civil

engineer, a photogrammetrist, an archaeological conservator and a traditional stonemason.

Webber Ndoro, a senior curator with national Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, the parastatal in charge of the country's archaeological heritage, said there had been movement of the stone walls for some time.

The government took an interest in preservation of the ruins after a Unesco-funded report by Spanish archaeologist Hamo Sasson in 1982. He recommended the setting up of a professional team to conduct research at the national shrine. It also recom-

mended a programme of conservation. In 1984 the government committed \$ 350,000 towards preservation of the ruins. The money is too small for the amount of work needed.

The conservation team at the ruins uses a monitoring

system that gives an early warning if the walls are about to move or fall.

Ndoro said: "We use strain gauges which we stick on to the wall to measure very accurately the movement of the stone walls."

He admitted it was a long and cumbersome exercise. After the initial measurements precise photographs of the walls are taken and each block of stone is drawn and numbered using colour coding. The photographs, numbers, and documentation ensure that the original structure of the walls is maintained.

"We don't want to distort anything. We try to be as faithful to the original as possible and to abide by international standards and ethics of restoration," Ndoro explained.

The team has rejected modern methods of conserving the ruins proposed by civil engineers from the University of Loughborough in Britain. A report by the engineers said that a structural weakness was the main reason for the falling walls.

The engineers devised a monitoring process to assess the movement of the stone structures inside and recommended the reconstruction of the walls from the inside so that the inner cores will be strengthened without altering the appearance of the outer walls.

The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe team has opted to use the traditional

method of restoration because its has been pointed out that the recommended ago-textile material has a much higher thermal movement than stone and is therefore unsuitable.

Now a group of international donors has met in Harare to discuss ways of preserving the ruins and other parts of the country's archaeological heritage.

The meeting, co-sponsored by Unesco and the United Nations Development Programme attracted donors from Britain, US, Australia, France, Japan, Germany and the Scandinavian countries.

Japan has already donated material to be used at the Great Zimbabwe ruins by the conservation team and Germany has donated \$ 60,000.

Like the Egyptian pyramids, the ruins add an important chapter to the history and culture of the Shona people, the predominant group of blacks in Zimbabwe. The ruins also earn a much foreign currency through tourism.

There are more than 200 other ruins, similar in structure to the Great Zimbabwe, although none is as large as the national shrine, from which the country got its name.

John Gambanga is Features and Supplements Editor of The Herald, Zimbabwe's leading daily.

Great Zimbabwe was found overgrown in 1868. It was probably built about 1100 BC. Main building known as the Temple may have been a chief's palace

The bird portrayed on the Zimbabwe flag

Ground plan of Temple

Soapstone objects found in Zimbabwe

## An Award Too Late to Come!

Continued from page 10  
recognition of the great patriot that Netaji was/is?

CG: The awarding of Bharat Ratna should not be confused with the 'story' of the air crash. That is a totally different question. It has nothing to do with whether one believes or not in his death or not. It is not the recognition that has come late, but the way in which it has come. We are opposing the way recognition is being given to Netaji for his great sacrifice.

DS: Netaji's close friend Kiron Shankar Ray sided with Gandhi during the dispute between the Mahatma and Bose following the latter's election as the president of All India National Congress (AINC) at its national session at Tripuri. Almost everyone has blamed Gandhi for his opposition and indeed dictatorial attitude. But Ray appears to have held Netaji responsible for similar blemishes. How do you explain this?

CG: In Bengal there had been many groups or factions in the Congress — as in many other places; for that matter in

country, too.

DS: A man of Netaji's character is not likely to hide himself in anonymity for long. Is not that clear enough that he is no more alive?

CG: Yes, I agree with this viewpoint.

DS: It is believed that had Subhash Bose been there, the sub-continent would never be divided. How do you substantiate this argument?

CG: I firmly believe it as the Indian National Army (Azad Hind Taa) was a perfect example of unity in diversity. They never thought of religion, community, language or otherwise — they ate the same food, lived under the same roof, fought shoulder to shoulder on the battlefield. Netaji introduced Hindi in Roman script to bring unity and was successful in this effort. He could have kept India united for he had been successful to have an united Indian Army, which is the back bone of every nation.

DS: Suppose Netaji did appear all on a sudden. How do you think the Indians will receive him after such a long time?

CG: He would be acceptable unanimously not only as the leader but the deliverer of the nation. But will this miracle ever happen?