

# Extracts from the Rural Life

**D**R Ashraf Siddiqui, poet and litterateur, is noted in our contemporary literature for his scholarly contribution to research and discovery in the field of folklore. Folklore, representing our long tradition and culture and stories of joys and sorrows, ups and downs, struggles and sufferings of common day to day life occupies a pre-eminent position in the creations of Dr Ashraf Siddiqui.

The compilation under discussion, 'Darao Pathic Bor' contains 49 poems by Dr Ashraf Siddiqui. The poems were written between 1987 to 1990, a fully matured stage of the poet's literary career. The poems mostly reflect extracts from our rural life. A few are tributes paid to late poets while some others are depiction of changing social situations with suggestive comments, covert or overt.

'Laloner Gan' (the song of Lalon) reflects the appeal of the songs of mystic poet Lalon Shah. Lalon, through his songs full of mystic philosophy casts magic spell on the mind of audience. Although he is devoid of all terrestrial grandeur, he is adored and respected by people. Even poets, artists and writers find themselves totally lost hearing the heart-touching messages of Lalon's songs.

In 'Shiladhey Saradin' (A whole day at Shiladhey) the poet depicts his visit to Shiladhey, a place concerning the memory of great poet Rabindranath Tagore. Things reminiscent of the late poet mingled with natural environment of Shiladhey arouses a sense of poetic feelings in the mind of the visitors.

In 'Mahua Malua,' the poet recollects cultural function based on folk tale at Netrokona. The staging of 'Mahua' and 'Malua', creation of some unknown bards of rural Bangla, was successful representation of extracts from eternal rural life of Bangladesh.

Manus (man) shows that in the society, troubled with malices and distrust, there still exists genuine humanity. The poet refers to an incident

## BOOK REVIEW

**Darao Pathic Bor (O Passersby, Halt a Little)**

A collection of poems by Dr Ashraf Siddiqui. Published by Ashraf Siddiqui Foundation, Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Cover design: Desktop Computing Limited. Pages: 68, Price: Tk. 40.00.

Reviewed by Md Mahub Hassan



cas are now undergoing great changes. New problems in the transitional period of the society are observed. Reluctance of agricultural work is resulting in less production. It is time for the policy-makers to find out a way for solution.

'Karat' (karate) and 'Biran-gana' (heroine) 1 and 2 describes stories of a female student and a housewife who depending on physical training and indomitable courage, defeated teasers, hijackers and dacoits.

'Hay Tarunna' (oh youth) is the expression of poet's optimism about victory of the youth's valiant force directed in the constructive way. His utterance about youth:

In your face and eyes, what a fearless message of determination You make it seem This stormy time will end and triumph will surely come.

In 'Shono, Hay Durjodhon' (oh Durjodhon, listen) the poet calls upon Durjodhon, symbol of suppression, to refrain from illegal and internecine warfare and return to the path of truth. He warns that all evil forces are destined to be conquered by soldiers fighting for the cause of right.

Darao Pathic Bor (a term from a poem of Michael Modhusudan Datta, meaning — o passersby, halt a little) is a call for looking into our own rich culture.

The very style of Ashraf Siddiqui's writings, lucidity and clarity in conveying message are prominent in the poems.

of selfless service of a village couple when he was in trouble on the way.

In 'Kabir Samman' (the honour of poets), the poet expresses his concern over unbecoming clashes among poets belonging to different ideology. He says,

Difference in views and path

Has been remaining since ancient time and will remain But for that a poet's tale (Whom eternity may give immortality)

of this inhuman dishonour during his lifetime Remains as history of disgrace for the nation and country.

In 'Ekhon Mufassaley' (now in village), the poet says that by modern education and introduction of science, rural ar-

# Market Forces Create New Problems for the Children

by John Montagu

**F**OUR in ten of the world's malnourished children live in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The charity Save the Children, which works in more than 50 countries, says many there and in other parts of Asia and the Pacific are suffering because of social and economic change and "policies designed to stimulate economic growth."

Their plight is often horrifying: the children who lie on Calcutta's railway stations, lucky if they can beg or steal enough to eat; the children who live off rubbish tips or pavements stalls; and the ones who are enticed into prostitution and other forms of slavery.

To meet the challenges, Save the Children is launching a special initiative on Asia. It is drawing attention to the situation of vulnerable children in 14 countries in Asia and the Pacific and focussing its educational work there.

The Save the Children Fund (SCF), whose President is Britain's Princess Royal, will be 75 years old in 1994. Its first emergency grant, was £512 sent for famine relief in China in 1920. Last year projects in Asia, including China, received £11.9 million — about 20 per cent of the Fund's overseas budget.

The new initiative is being launched to raise public awareness in Britain and the rest of the developed world of the size of the problem. A new book called *Children at Crisis Point* with a foreword by Pakistani cricketer Imran Khan is part of the drive.

On one level in Asia is the need for immediate relief during emergencies such as the civil wars in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Calls on funds arise from natural disasters like the Mount Pinatubo eruption in the Philippines and last year's cyclone in Bangladesh.

But most of the children at crisis point are suffering in much more everyday situations, like those from Vietnamese coastal villages whose families barely make

Social changes and policies designed to stimulate economic growth — in other words, market forces — are creating new problems for children in Asia. One of the world's best known charities — Save the Children — intends to focus attention on Asia where so many are suffering. Gemini News Service reports on a new initiative being launched with publication of a new book.

**CHILDREN AT CRISIS POINT.** With 146 photos. Andre Deutsch. Price in UK£9.99. Available from Save the Children, 17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD

Tun is a Thai boy with cerebral palsy. He is a slow learner and has had an operation. He and his family live in a house beneath an expressway in Klong Toey, Bangkok. Under a rehabilitation programme funded by Save the Children they have helped to give Tun physiotherapy after his operation.



enough money from salt marshes or rice fields, or the ones in the Sind desert of Pakistan, who leave school to make carpets to pay their parents' debts.

These make up the vast majority of Asia's malnourished children whose crisis comes from everyday poverty and the demands of the market economy.

Then, usually because their families have been too poor and unable to look after them, there are the vulnerable children who run the streets to try to fend for themselves.

Appalling cases often come to light. A young Thai girl who had to put up with every kind of exploitation by a brothel-owner found she had AIDS and gave birth to a child who died of it. Remarkably, she still had the strength to campaign for better protection for other children.

In Thailand the Task Force to End Child Sexual Exploitation is gathering momentum and receives support from Save the Children and many other agencies.

A strong feature of its work in Asia is partnership with Asian non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In India, it works through a network of recognised agencies like Mobile Creches in New Delhi, Children in Need Institute in Calcutta, Arthik Samata Mandal in Andhra Pradesh and Bhubaneswar Mahila Ashram in the Himalayan foothills.

In other countries Save the Children's natural partner is the host government or local government office, especially where a specialised form of training is involved. In Laos, for example, it is actively training kindergarten teachers.

In Fiji, it is training physiotherapy aides who can work at village level. In Nepal it is working alongside the government in primary health care training, progressively handing over responsibility to local health services.

"Sustainability," the phrase now so popular with develop-

ment experts, means the kind of enduring help which will remain longer after the implementing agency has left. A sustainable project must have the potential to support itself.

It is not as easy as it sounds. Save the Children is more realistic than some other agencies about the length of time necessary to sustain long-term development.

There are, however, some signposts to progress. In Ladakh, north India, isolated communities have been helped to set up their own health care training and support programmes over the last decade.

In coastal Vietnam Save the Children supports a range of vital new programmes, including food storage, income generation and revolving loans, to help people find alternatives to the hard toil of fishing and cultivation which have driven so many to become refugees.

With its new initiative, Save the Children is in one sense making a bold offer to its supporters. If they come up with funds for emergencies, they will spend them immediately on saving children.

If they also provide regular funding, it can turn their support into long-term projects which, often by example, will ensure that many more children are cared for.

For while welfare and relief is an essential part of aid-giving, the rights of children — now recognised by the new UN Convention — have transformed aid agencies from purely responding as outsiders into becoming agents of change and enabling genuine development to take place from within.

This is the critical part of the message which Save the Children hopes to convey through its Asia initiative.

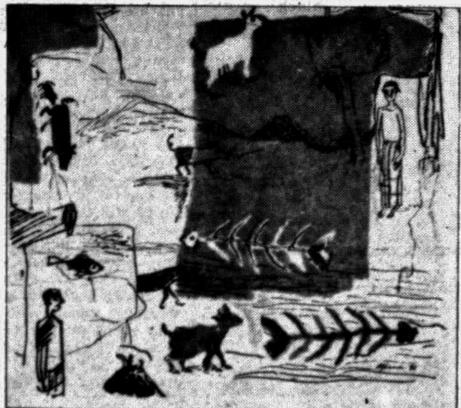
Freelance Journalist JOHN MONTAGU is editor of *Children at Crisis Point* and was editor of *Prospects for Africa's Children*, published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1990.

# Man, Nature and Complexities.

by Fayza Haq



Many People, Many Minds



Existence in Nature (2)

Murshida Arzu Alpina, who held her third solo exhibition at the Alliance Francaise, said about her work, "I want to hold up the truth. The phases of unhappiness in a person's life occurs more often than in contented ones." I am fascinated by the complications in life. I portrayed this in combining distinct drawings with forms of colours. I mixed reality with impressionism and expressionism.

Alpina, who has participated in 37 combined exhibitions had 40 pieces at the exhibit, each one distinctive and vibrating with life. In 'Many People Many Minds' she had placed canvas upon canvas for experimentation. In this way she wanted to break the dimension of the composition. The canvases were of different sizes. The panel at the right had different heads placed at varied angles. This oil creation had used warm colours like brown, ochre, and blue. The lines were bold and the piece depicted different and attitudes of people.

The canvas at the top, in the same composition, showed the distance among human beings even when they are together. It depicted a man and a woman looking away from each other. The third canvas in the creation was a combination of abstract and semi-abstract forms which had been cleverly juxtaposed. Once again there was stress on the eyes and nose. The fourth piece in the composition again depicted the complications in the mind of the people who live together. Both the man and the woman looked dissatisfied and distressed.

The last canvas 'Many People...' was a combination of pastel, pencil, pen and picture varnish. In this the artist depicted her belief that women

should be aware of their strength and abilities.

One saw a mature and fascinating combination of strokes in the pastel drawing 'No 36'. It showed a figure bending over and another leaning somewhat towards her.

In 'Existence in Nature (1)', one found pastel and ink on handmade paper. To bring in the vastness of our existence the artist had carefully synthesised space and figure — cows, dogs, fish and human beings were all blended together in a simplified harmony. This had been done in two separate sheets of handmade paper.

'Existence in Nature (2)' had a graphic quality in the oil pastel and ink creation. The artist had depicted houses, trees, animals and people in back, cobalt blue, rose madder, gold and a medley of other colours.

'Drawing 38' was a gorgeous abstraction bringing in rain, clouds and nature around. Alpina had used acrylic, and pencil with cadmium yellow, blue and scarlet lake. It had a soft, gentle effect which many of our young painters aim at in some of their work but fail to achieve.

About 'Sharp Sighted Woman', the artist explained, "Often our women are not aware of their rights, abilities and power. They have no opinion of themselves. Here I have accentuated the beauty of the woman with her elongated neck, and put in a few jewels, to present an intelligent and beautiful individual, who has the power to contribute a lot to the society in which she lives."

One found a vibrant abstraction in 'A Place of Dream'. The colours were that of the countryside Alpina elaborated. "Sometimes we dream of

leaving the densely populated cities and living in the simple villages with their vastness of green." One could locate a kite and contours of huts. The lemon yellow, chrome orange and geranium lake were pulsating with life, held together by black and white.

In 'City Life' one found creases of paper used as clouds in the vastness of our existence. The drawing had been extended on to the mounting. The artist had highlighted the rickshawpuller as the key figure in the scene. "No matter how much we progress with roads and buildings, we cannot ignore the rickshawpuller", Alpina commented.

In 'Drawing 40' was depicted the despair of a man and a woman, despite having everything in life. There was a play of lines on sepi green. No shadows had been used and the lines had been created by acid eating into the zinc plate, while creating.

Another semi-abstract was 'Tear away' had the artist bring in the theme of misunderstanding and disenchantment in human relationships. Sharp lines of pen and ink were combined with acrylic, oil pastel, water colour and all blended into an exotic creation which told a story of strife.

Alpina, who had worked hard with balance and composition, bringing in subjects which were both idyllic and disturbing, recently won the 'Best Overseas Award' by the Royal Overseas League, U.K. The artist has studied in Dhaka and Santiniketan. In her recent solo, she had combined psychological probing with symbols, along with childhood nostalgia and a study of the environment. She had depicted the elements of both happiness and despair with an intricate.

# Rural Bengal — an Eternal Continuity



Life is boisterously active in rainy season.



Hearts are sportive in love.

Continued from page 9  
To make the unknown known and the known unknown."

In our country, men are used to reserve a special room for their loving women and keep a distinguished place for them in their heart. Women have tremendous appeal to men:

"There is no place of peace without women  
And we satiate our thirst for life in women."

However, it is known to all that the majority of our rural people are poverty-stricken and they are to pass their times round the year half-fed or unfed. Many of their evenings are lost into deep darkness with only a vacant look at their hungry children. Hunger snatches the sleep from their eyes. The moonlit night leaves no appeal to these hungry souls. So is the colourful hour of sunrise. They find little time to appreciate as they are always apprehensive of starvation and hunger. They always try to avoid it even by prayer. Their only prayer is: Let my children be served with a pot of milk and a plate of rice."

But as soon as their stores are full, by dint of blessing of nature or by their own means, they also do not forget to enjoy them artistically. In the prosperous hours of Pous, the country plunges into festivals, community of people undertaking grand programmes of entertaining guests with delicacies. The doubts once expressed by Gopal Haldar about the culinary weakness of the Bengalees as a nation, among all nationalities of this sub-continent, still hold true.

The gracious wife serving her husband *ogra* rice with home-made butter, *mouli* fish curry and *nalta* herb salad on plantain leaf — is a picture that depicts the reality of a virtuous couple as well as Bangalee man

and woman of eternal continuity. The Bangalee wives are devoted to preparation of common foods in an uncommon and delicious manner and in serving them artistically before their husbands. Through this the love that dwells deep into the heart of the wife finds its way of expression — a love mingled with the recipe of food. It is considered to be her devotion, her worship, her creative expression and her aesthetic way of dedication. The 'Mymensingh Gittika' bears a sublime picture of aesthetic preparation of meal:

"Having bathed in the early morning  
The dame enters the kitchen room.

She locks her hair and smarts up for work;  
And starts by soaking the floor with the water of holy river."

Then she prepares so many delicious dishes, a cursory look into which may arouse an instant appetite in any of us. These include a broth of fish and pigeon, with arum, and cakes of various types and kinds having a sweet name for each i.e., *chandraputi*, *chat*, *chapati*, *pua*, *khripuli* and so on. And then she serves the finest quality boiled rice in a golden plate with a flake of lime on it. This reminds us of our entire identity as Bangalee, which has tacitly been spoken of in the folk-saying quoted by

Rev. Day. The rural Bangalees have been passing their days through endless calamities. Long and various exploitations have made the majority of them poor and pauper. But their prayer still remains as simple and clear: Let my child be fed with a pot of milk and a plate of rice."

The feudal society denied their prayer. The capitalistic structure had ruthlessly snatched their food. The hard-earned independence had enkindled a new ray of hope in their hearts. But they are yet to be the same folk and race in their cherished land. Should the eternal continuity subdue the dismay once again, to let

their hopes turn bright! We now require to change our vested outlook and endeavour for virtually lessening the gap between the villages and the towns, and ensure real uplift of villages and the villagers. We ought not to forget that the soul of our country lies in its countless villages. We shall have to find out a social system that can ensure employment, food, home and health to the villagers. This is the only way to bring back the prosperous days of Pous in our rural Bengal.

The writer is Director, Public Relations & Publications, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh.

# Keeper of the Ancients' Secrets

**N**INETY-YEAR-OLD Maria Reiche is virtually blind and walks with a stoop, but the official keeper of the gigantic hieroglyphics of Nazca, Peru still has what it takes.

With unconcealable irritation, she answers the endless questions of tourists who visit Nazca to see the colossal drawings etched on the plateaus. Some of them, reputed to be of extra-terrestrial origin, measure up to 300 metres long.

These drawings were not done by extra-terrestrials," Reiche says. They are the creation of the old inhabitants of this territory. One has to see them as scientific and religious evidence of humanity."

The big hieroglyphics carved on the plateaus of Nazca, Peru have never failed to fascinate people, but Maria Reiche has devoted a whole lifetime studying them and trying to convince people about what they really mean. Abraham Lama of IPS reports from Lima, Peru.

restrial watchers, has said the beautiful and geometrical drawings were made by mysterious crewmen of spaceships that landed on earth about 40 centuries ago.

Daniken also ascribes many of the world's ancient monuments such as the pyramids in Egypt and in the former Mayan and Aztec kingdoms that have been built on a superhuman scale, to beings from elsewhere.

"That's all nonsense, a result of cultural ethnocentrism," retorts Reiche. "The Europeans tend to believe there was neither science nor ancient wisdom before them.

so they use the extra-terrestrial theory to explain evidence of other peoples' scientific knowledge."

Born in Dresden, Germany in 1903, Reiche studied mathematics in Hamburg and came by accident to Peru. She prefers not to dwell on this topic, but it seems she was looking for a change of air and seeking to get as far away as possible from a failed love affair.

Reiche says she is still waiting impatiently for a successor who would be ready, like her, to dedicate a whole lifetime to unravelling the mysterious drawings of birds,

monkeys, whales and reptiles through mathematical calculations.

The drawings are based on astronomy and Reiche says she can prove it with her calculations. "But I am not an expert in this matter," she concludes. "It should be studied by social researchers, historians and archaeologists. I only deal with the mathematical relationships between the figures and the zodiac constellations." Reiche thinks many qualified people must have participated in the making of these drawings.

Archaeologist Luis Lumbreras, a respected expert in ancient Peruvian history, shares Reiche's views on the astronomical nature of the drawings.

Some historians say a prolonged drought must have forced the people to migrate and abandon the area while others say the Nazcas were killed by a military invasion of the Wari, a warlike tribe from the mountains to the east of the region.