

# All about Season's Greeting Cards, Some Imaginary Events and Quotes of the Week

HERE was a time when I would hang my New Year cards on a string across the study at my residence or my office. There would be only a few, just enough for the room take a festive look. As I had no so-called business contacts those days, all the cards used to be from close friends and relatives, with a few lines of personal messages scribbled inside. Many would disregard the postal rule that one could not write much on the card if it is sent by second class mail or else the recipient would pay an extra charge. No concession from the penny-pinching British government, my friends would say, when, believe it or not, I worked for London post offices as one of the temporary employees hired to clear tons and tons of Christmas mail.

Since the wages were attractive and working atmosphere fairly congenial, thousands of students, under-employed journalists and budding writers, among others, would line up outside the recruitment offices of the British Postal Authority or whatever it was called, right across the United Kingdom, at least a month before Christmas. If one applied early enough, there was a fair chance of getting a good ten-hour shift (including overtime), in a post office either in your own locality or in the West End. On the other hand, if one took too long, he or she would end up with an all-night shift in an impoverished area in East London.

There was indeed a difference between working in a post office in, say, Kensington or Hyde Park through a day shift and being tied down to a night shift in an out-of-the-way place like Tooting Broadway. A friend who had done this job every Christmas for ten years, during which he had published five novels — one titled "Sorting Out," all about life in a London post office — saw all kinds of differences between the two. "At a Hyde Park post office," he would say, "you have a good chance of handling the mail for the Queen and members of the Royal family, some lightly perfumed, all carrying neatly-typed addresses, a few with an earnest plea written on the left hand side on the envelope. For The Kind Attention of Her Majesty Only."

When you get a job in a post office in, say, Tooting Broadway, you enter another world, my friend would say, as if sounding a warning. "It is a world of under-stamped Christmas cards, carrying incomplete and badly written addresses, not to mention insecurely packed parcels."

Then, my friend would end the discussion on a philosophical note: "I would always remember that Christmas is for every one, for the Queen as well as for Mr and Mrs Rosario, an immigrant couple from Kerala. You treat all

their mail with care and respect." Keeping this advice in mind, I worked at two different post offices in London, one in Kensington and the other in Acton, in night shifts in both, in two successive holiday seasons. So, I handled all kinds of mail, from the mildly scented cards for the Queen to almost half-torn envelopes for immigrant families from South Asia.

On returning home, I resisted the temptation of applying for a job in the General Post Office in Dhaka, using my experience in the British postal service as a part of my "foreign training," the kind of expertise which would have undoubtedly made me a strong candidate for the highest possible position in the department, in a matter of years. What a loss for the postal service of Bangladesh!

WITH their international flavour and humanitarian approach, UNICEF cards nearly outnumbered the local variety among the greeting cards we received during past weeks. However, there is little doubt that well-designed and well-printed local productions, some carrying artworks based on our indigenous motifs, have started posing a tough competition to the ones sold by the UN Children Fund. Herein lies a dilemma for the buyers of New Year cards: Should we patronise

our own artists and support the national printing industry or should we offer a helping hand to UNICEF which uses income from the sale of its cards in funding many projects for children in different countries of the world, including Bangladesh? Instead of looking for a clear choice, we should perhaps support both, say, by splitting our purchase of cards into two halves.

This year, *The Daily Star* used a miniature painting by a noted local artist, Kamrun Nahar on its card. Next year, we may well settle for UNICEF. Who knows?

The selection of the artwork by Kamrun Nahar was a well-planned conscious one. However, the choice of the illustration we used on the frontpage of the paper on the New Year day, a single column sketch showing two burning candles tied together by a ribbon, was a surprise and, I think, a good one.

It was the work of Josephine Sarkar — we used her first name with the illustration — which had been addressed to me personally with the greeting card from the Sarkar family. Jerome Sarkar is a regular contributor to this paper. I assumed that this budding artist, Josephine is a young reader of the *Star*. Whether she was pleasantly surprised to see her neat illustration used on the front page of the paper, albeit without her permission, I would not know. Thank you, Kamrun Nahar

and Josephine for joining the *Star* family. You are most welcome.

I reproduce with this column today a few of the cards we received during the holiday season, a random selection from my favourite ones, all in black and white, which hardly do justice to the original ones which are in colour.

MY fond hope of designing a New Year Card myself either for my personal use or for our newspaper came true only once and that too several years ago, when I worked for the *Bangkok Post*.

I toyed with the idea that the design should be relevant to a newspaper and innovative, perhaps even a little humorous. Finally, I came up with this: The normal size card showed a frontpage of the *Post*, with the paper's masthead reduced to the card's size. The rest of the space was filled with a montage of a dozen headlines, all totally imaginary, with a caption put on the bottom: Headlines you may never see in this paper next year.

Out of the dozen headlines, I can recall only a few. Here they are: COUP IN VATICAN, HONGKONG IS SINKING, SCOTLAND DECLARES INDEPENDENCE AND WEATHER MAN FORECASTS SNOW IN BANGKOK.

Imagine such a card for *The Daily Star*, predicting imaginary events (difficult since nothing is impossible here), with a touch of humour (too risky). Yet, with a bit of courage and good luck, we can perhaps get away with these headlines: SAIFUR ATTACKS WORLD BANK, CALLS FOR SOCIALISM FOR BANGLADESH; NAZMUL HUDA RESIGNS FROM GOVERNMENT, SETS UP NEW TV NETWORK; GOLAM AZAM ELECTED CHAIRMAN OF COMMUNIST PARTY, CONFESSES HIS PAST BLUNDERS; and BANGLADESH POPULATION ESTIMATED AT 50 MILLION, COMPUTERS BLAMED FOR PAST INFLATED FIGURE.

Well, if these predictions could come true, perhaps by a miracle, we would indeed be living in a different world. Come to think, it could be a change for the better.

## QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"Fame is no substitute for ability." Egyptian journalist, Mohammad Helal in his book on Sadat, "Autumn of Fury."

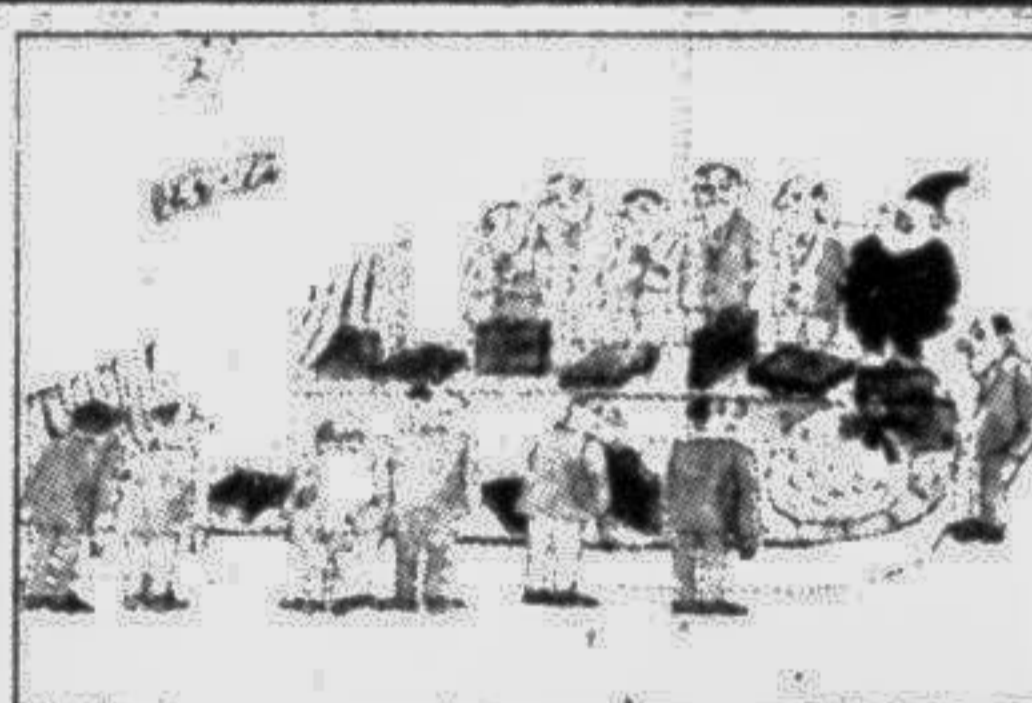
James Baker tells George Bush, "Mr President, I don't think that this should come from you, but I just found out that Bill Clinton renounced his American citizenship during the Vietnam War and now travels on a Bangladesh passport." (An imaginary quote from a recent column by Art Buchwald)

# MY WORLD

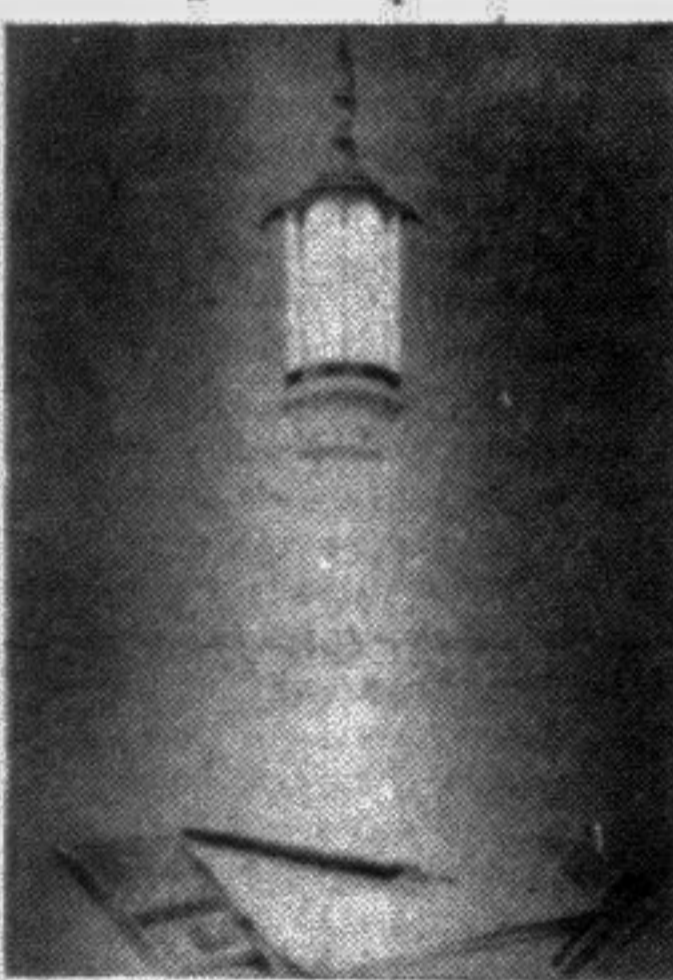
S. M. Ali



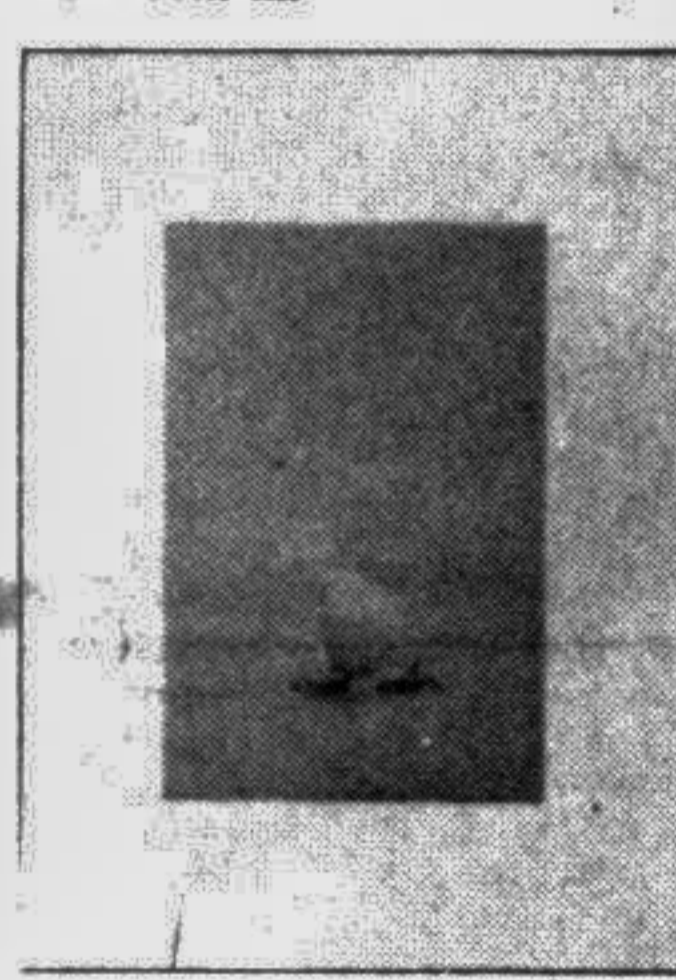
From Jean-Pierre Raynaud, Banque Indosuez



From M A Satter UBICO Investment Co., Dhaka



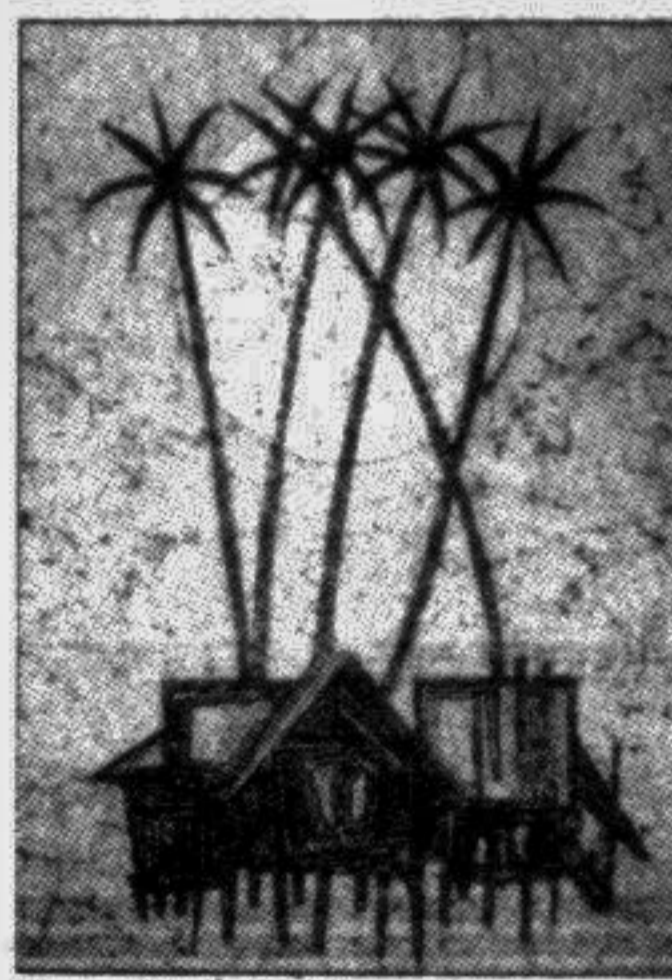
From the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon, Colombo



From Shethk Hasina



From Shah A M S Kibria and Mrs Asma Kibria (the painting is by Mrs. Kibria)



From Farjad Ahmed American Express Bank



From R A Mazumdar Bangladesh Tobacco Company Limited



From E A Chaudhury Chairman, Pubali Bank Ltd.

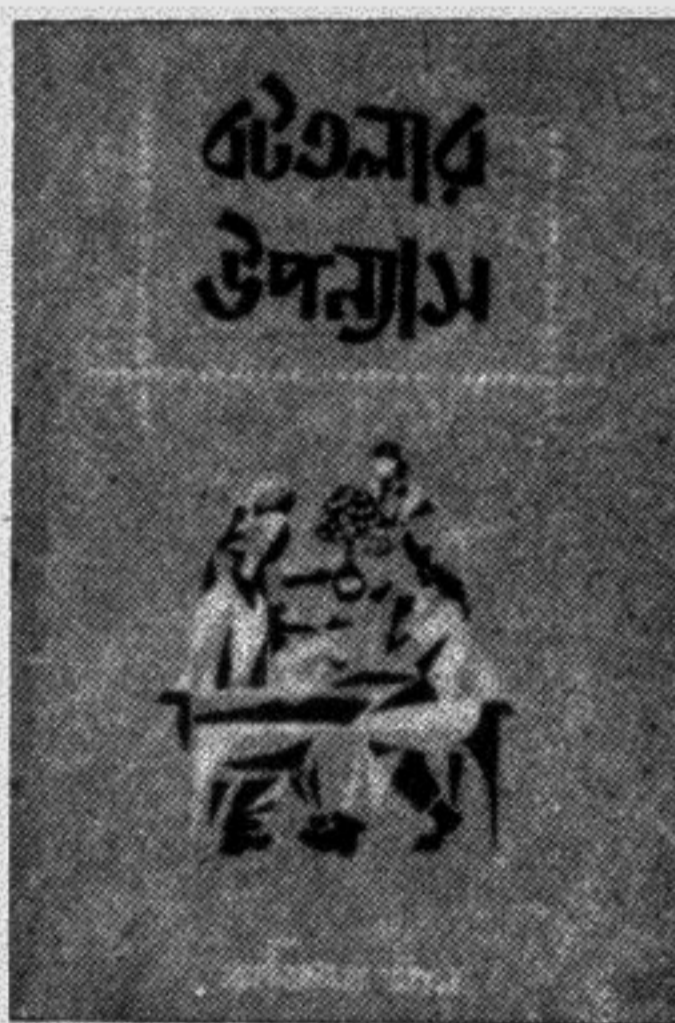
WRITTEN when I was eighteen, my first novel in its opening pages held a portrait which I have no hesitation in admitting was based on a dynamic journalist whom I had just met in my father's 3 Bath Island

drawing-room. S M Ali had come to see my sister Kulsum Huda. Soon after meeting him I heard he had hurt his leg. His lucid columns in the *Observer* had drawn my admiration earlier. So the convalescing journalist Zainul in my first

## DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

# My First Novel

Razia Khan



novel is the result of that meeting. Before the novel saw daylight I had sent the manuscript to a close friend Daud Khan Majlis who gave it to Syed Shamsul Huq without my knowledge. He had kept the manuscript unprotected and a sudden storm had blown away a large chunk of it. When I joined the Dhaka University as a student in the English Department, Syed Huq introduced himself to me outside the ladies common room and apologized for the mishap. I said: Will you please give it back to me.

Here was a man whom I did not even know, in possession of the object I valued the most at that time. Years later he would apologize to me again for plagiarizing from my letters which he used in one of his novels. I worked at the manuscript again and filled in the gaps left by the so-called

storm. Publishing was very far from my mind.

Towards the end of my MA course, the Editor of Meghna, Abdul Gaffar Choudhury, serially published parts of the novel when Serajur Rahman of BBC came to my home and proposed to publish it. There was some dispute about the title. "The peepal tree novel" bears a derogatory connotation. Third rate fiction sold under the peepal trees have mawkish melodramatic themes and are popular. I stuck to it despite Serajur's remonstrations. As I was terribly lazy he would coax me into copying the necessary number of pages for the press while I munched my green guava vigorously. Dr Anisuzzaman was kind enough to read some of the proofs when he occasionally visited me. The draft drawings for the cover made by Qayyum Choudhury depicted a huge

peepal leaf and a flat-faced woman who vaguely resembled me. I chose the cover by Mr. Rouf. It was done according to my wish in gray-blue-mauve and black and showed cubic figures of young people seated at a restaurant-table.

Dr. Thakurta and Wazihm Rahman reviewed the novel while I was in England. The second edition has run out. The other day I stole the only copy I have of it from a friend's

shelf hoping I will bring out a third edition. This is the book people often mention when they think of me as a novelist. All the ache and anxiety, ennu and exhaustion of a precocious adolescent have gone into it and like my youth which I have left far behind — it seems not something I have written but someone else. By the way, I have heard people whisper that my husband or some other male, and not I, wrote it. So much for idle speculations!

## Two Poems for Banalata

by Azfar Hussain

1  
*Quelque folie originelle et naive, une extase d'or je ne sais quoi!*  
 — Mallarme

Rising out of the depth of the sea with blue blobs of foam in her eyes, salt in her hair, and sapphires in hands, a woman calls me — an ancient woman whom I had known before my birth.

And I've looked for her everywhere — in the city burning with the unsayables, in the light that descends from the eyes of fireflies into the twilight-river.

And I've looked for her everywhere — in the heavy autumnal darkness that breaks like a sea through the eyes of the night.

I've looked for her, where a dream moves like a bird in the scattered syllables of the rains, and I've looked for her where a poem grows silently like a secret wound.

Perhaps tonight she comes near: 'harpes et luthes' in the violent wind of my blood.

Her silk sounds like Verlaine's music in my ear; her skin like knife-sitting passes through the rise and fall of my strokes. And deepens and deepens throughout the night the random lyrical meditation of my mouth on her hyacinth-like blossoming breasts, (oh, 'cite pleine de reves!') when she wounds me in her fire and I remake her in my flame.

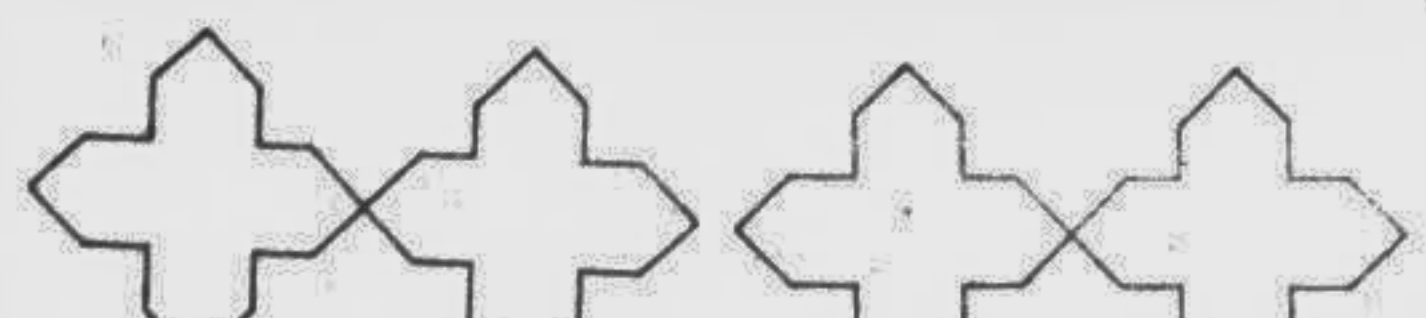
After all, we can only play tricks of madness with each other!

2  
 (after the Greek of Odysseus Elitis)

Before I saw you you had been light only, or just love, when love was not in this world.

But the moment you stepped into my night and surrendered to my soft lyric kiss, — a moment's mild disorder, perhaps a moment's mortal sin, you became a woman then, full-fledged.

1 Selected for inclusion in *The Commonwealth Anthology of Younger Poets* to be published by Indiana University, USA in collaboration with ITM/MUCIA Cooperative Programme in Malaysia.



# WRITE TO MITA

## The In-laws Problem in Marriages

Dear Readers  
 With a view to accommodating the large number of letters that we receive each week and reduce the time gap in replying to them, we have decided to change the format of this popular column. Instead of answering individual letters, we will henceforth group them according to issues, and reply to them at a time. Thus each week the "Mita Column" will deal with one specific topic. From this week also we have decided to make public the author of the column, who has been replying to your letters ever since it was introduced.

I have received many letters from women who complain that in-laws have been at the root of all their problems in marriage. This is indeed a very genuine problem in our culture where society has set certain norms and expectations from women without realizing that women's roles have changed over the years and they are not willing to abide by the traditional roles prescribed for them by society. On the other hand, in-laws have changed also (they are composed of women to remember?) they do not anymore make the demands on their daughter in-laws as before, their expectations have also changed which I am afraid is not appreciated very much. A little patience and restraint from both parties is called for. I once received a letter where a woman wrote that her mother-in-law was always complaining about her health so she has totally stopped visiting her except on special occasions. I do not think that this warrants such a strong reaction. So what if the mother-in-law complains about her health? If you do not live with her it will do you no harm to listen to her complaints once in a while. On the other hand she might have some genuine complaints which should be looked into, or perhaps she is just old and lonely and wants company?

Once I received a letter in which a woman complained that her mother-in-law talked too much, always sat in when her friends came and wanted to accompany her when she went out. Now, this is an example of a mother-in-law who has also changed with the time, she wants to be friendly. Out going, and extrovert but the daughter-in-law does not like it she would rather want her to be quiet, chewing betel nuts and cooking dinner for every one.

I realize that so far I have been rather harsh on daughter in-laws, which of course is not my intention. I personally know of many marriages that have gone sour because of this problem which has ranged from indirect taunts to the more perverse ones where a mother-in-law asked her daughter-in-law to leave the house and asked her son to divorce his wife. A point usually ignored is the role of the husband who can contribute to diffusing tensions between the two sides. But, on the other hand to be fair to him, he is often caught between the two and is forced to take sides or prove his loyalty to either one. In such situations a solid understanding between couples is very important which can overcome most crisis.

A common complaint that I get is that husbands don't usually protest unfair treatment towards the wife from in-laws. This has very often led to deep misunderstanding and friction among couples. Here, I suggest that instead of building up resentment against the husband, the wife should have a frank talk with him, tell him about the disappointment she has felt over his behavior and depending upon the seriousness of the problem, let him know that she is not willing to tolerate any kind of humiliation from anyone. The husband should be treated as an ally and not an opponent. Nothing should come between the trust and understanding between couples, no matter what the crisis is. Always try to talk things out, there is no better way to resolve conflicts than to have regular, free, and frank discussions. Communication is the key to solving all problems in marriage, be it problems related to in-laws, children, servants or drinking.

One thing we must all remember, in-laws are people, just like you and me. They have their faults, but so do we, and this we must remember when we judge them. Another thing to remember is we ourselves are in-laws to someone or other and it is likely that we too are perceived as the interfering, nasty, taunting in-laws that we accuse others of being. What I am trying to say is, don't look at your in-laws as in-laws, look at them as ordinary people, who are capable of love, affection and understanding and treat them as such.

—Shaheen Anam

The Story of  
 Alhaji Malek El-Shabazz —  
 Malcolm X  
 by Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed

ALONG with Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, Malcolm X was a black civil rights leader who worked for the emancipation of black American, in the 1950s and 60s. Reverend King was a Christian minister; Malcolm left Christianity to become a Muslim, and preached Islam to black Americans. The two leaders were wary of each other, and hardly ever talked. King considered Malcolm X too militant, Malcolm labelled King's methods too outdated.

Dr King's mission in life was to change the hearts of the whites. Eventually, the whites killed him. Malcolm X, almost exclusively, talked to the blacks on how to improve their lot by "any means necessary." Eventually, the blacks killed him!

Recently, Spike Lee, the young and bold black director, has released his epic movie, "Malcolm X". The writer has seen the movie. Here is a review and an attempt to put Malcolm X's life in proper perspective.

The movie opens with the tape showing the merciless beating of a black man, Rodney King, by four white Los Angeles policemen, all later acquitted by an all-white jury. It ends with the African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela, teaching Malcolm X's sayings in a South African class room. In the intervening three and a half hours, moviegoers are allowed to have a peek at the essence of the man and methods. His life reads like a spy novel; full of intrigue, suspense and murder.

Malcolm Little was born in the American mid-West in the 1920s. When his mother was pregnant with him, the white supremacist Ku Klux Klan, burned down their house. His father, a defiant man, "died" under mysterious circumstances. The family says, he was murdered for his defiance. His mother was committed into a mental institution. Malcolm was denied higher education and went to live with his sister in Boston. There, he became a hustler, pimp and a thief. Promptly, he ended up in jail.

In jail, a follower of Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the "Black Muslims" befriended him. After a lot of soul searching, Malcolm accepted Islam. After getting out of jail, Elijah Muhammad made him a minister, with the responsibility for preaching to the blacks. Asserting that his name, Malcolm Little, was given by the slave master of his forefathers, and since he did not know his real African name, he took the name Malcolm X. He explained that the 'X' stood, as in mathematics, as a symbol for the unknown. A strikingly handsome man, Malcolm was a natural orator. Preaching black separation from the whites, he was enormously successful in instilling pride in the blacks. It

Malcolm charged the third world nations with hypocrisy. If they are willing to criticize South Africa for the mistreatment of blacks, he reasoned, there is no reason why they should not equally criticize the United States for the mistreatment of its blacks. During his visits to Africa, he urged the Head of the States to support a resolution he was going to introduce in the United Nations, urging it to condemn America. Many United States Ambassadors to African nations complained openly about Malcolm's audacity. Malcolm's days were now numbered. Little did he know, that one of his body guards was an undercover agent!

In Saudi Arabia, King Faisal gave Malcolm an audience. As he performed the Hajj, a major transformation came over him. Hitherto, he had regarded all the whites as "blue-eyed devils." Now for the first time in his life, he came across blue-eyed people who were his brothers. In a letter to his wife, he apologised for having branded all whites as evil. After completing the Hajj, Malcolm took the more traditional Islamic name of Alhaji Malek El-Shabazz.

The sports fan the world over learned of Malcolm X  
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