

HOW OTHERS LOOK AT ASIA

ALTHOUGH geographically very much part of Asia and the Pacific rim, Australia has since its founding as an ex-convict's colony, looked towards Western Europe (Britain in particular) for its trading, political, and artistic links.

Alison Broinowski, an Australian diplomat, writer and broadcaster, has done some deep soul-searching as well as through research into this area and presented to the outside world a graphic historical account of the reasons why her country had for so long been tied to the apron strings of an antipodean world. In 'The Yellow Lady', Broinowski goes into considerable detail the various areas of Australian culture, such as art, music, drama and architecture and how they have evolved over time.

As Australia has isolated herself for so long from her immediate neighbours such as SE. Asia and Asia, readers from this part of the world have been denied the knowledge of apparent wealth of her literature. While English, American and to a certain extent, European literature have made quite an impact in Asia, Australian arts have scarcely created a ripple in the pool of humanities in the region. Hence, to such readers of 'The Yellow Lady', the author's voluminous account of her country's artistic creativity comes as quite a revelation.

Torn between her British origins and European-oriented immigration policy (until the recent decades or so, Australia seems to have awoken from her deep slumber where Asia is concerned and appears to have decided that her interest lies more in her surrounding neighbours than in an antipodean world far away. For starters, the Australian Trade Commission is sponsoring an

BOOK REVIEW

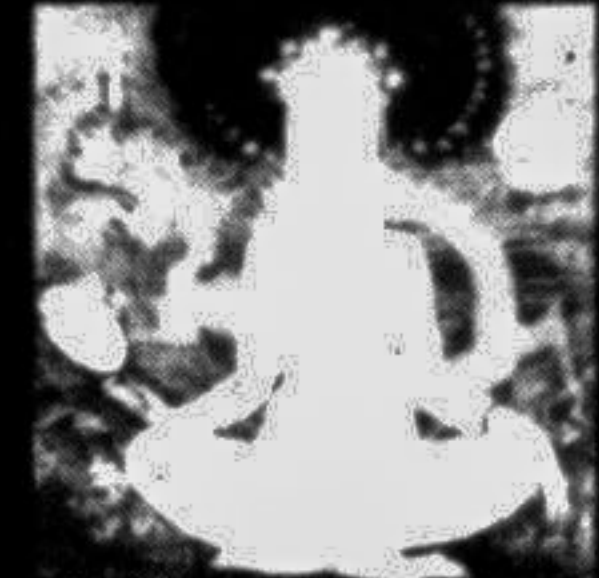
THE YELLOW LADY (Australian Impressions of Asia)

Author: Alison Broinowski

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203 pages

Reviewed BY NANCY WONG

The YELLOW LADY Australian Impressions of Asia



Alison Broinowski

Asian Basketball League, comprising of players from Jakarta, Bangkok, Singapore and Perth, due to take place in November this year. This is quite a revolution in the field of sports, considering that Australia has not yet joined the Asian Games (Asia's version of the Olympics) which has been around for a long time.

Broinowski's analysis of the attitude of her country towards Asia, its people and arts, is penetrating and her caustic wit is unsparring when it comes to expose deep-rooted prejudices coupled with a deplorable ignorance of things Asian. For example, "As late as the 1920s it was believed by foreigners that those who learned Chinese went mad". Without the slightest insight into the ancient Chinese culture, "Australian writers, like their Western counterparts,

perpetuated condescending antipathy to Chinese in the way they transliterated names and represented Chinese spoken English." Thus Australian playwrights made Chinese characters on stage comic figures with mythical names like "Ching-Chong Chinaman, Hang Hi, Hang Lo and Ah Sing". Moreover, there was a tendency to confuse Chinese and Japanese characteristics as playwrights found it quite acceptable to interchange the two distinct cultures in their theatre presentations.

Because of Australia's former immigration policy of excluding Asians from her shores, her artists and writers looked to Europe for inspiration in such areas as literature, architecture, music and ceramics. There were however some adventurous souls who

travelled and lived for prolonged periods in Asian countries like Japan, Indonesia, Cambodia and Vietnam. They did their best to imbue the culture of their host countries but more often than not with a sense of superiority of their own, with the result that their views were less than open. One such writer was Tom Hungerford who served as part of the occupation force in Japan after World War II, and stayed on. To Australians of that day, Japan was viewed in terms of 'Mikadoland' peopled with quaint, delightful ladies dressed in kimonos and holding a parasol in hand. As Broinowski observed, "Hungerford's experience of Japan was limited by his culturally impoverished inheritance. His *Souvers of the Wind*, like most of the war writing, and like *Luce* novels by Hal

Porter and Elizabeth Kata, was littered with errors in Japanese. But in its day, *Souvers of the Wind* was thought daring in its sympathetic presentation of the Japanese. This was the reason given for delaying its publication by six years!"

Apart from their European origins, the various wars in which Australian forces participated with the Allies reinforced certain deep-rooted prejudices and fears of the Orient. One General Blamey in 1942, described the Japanese as "a curious race... a cross between the human being and the ape... But he is inferior to you and he knows it."

Similarly a few decades later during the Vietnam War, an Australian writer "equated the Viet Cong with leeches and mosquitos". Because of their Euro-centric outlook, Australian writers could not really depict accurately or with deep sensitivity their Asian neighbours. Broinowski goes into great detail about the numerous Australian writers who have attempted to incorporate Asian characters into their novels and their successes and failures. What emerges is a carefully woven tapestry of Australian art, literature and film making, starting from the settlers' time up to the present. She also traces the Oriental influences (Chinese and Japanese mainly) in her country's architecture as well as music.

On the whole, 'The Yellow Lady' is an authoritative book on how Australia has responded to Asian culture and answers many questions regarding attitude that has puzzled many an "Australian watcher". Beautiful reproductions of paintings, cartoons and architecture serve to illustrate the author's point of view.

Idle Fancy

A Short Story by Nurul Huq

RUPA was bored. She turned from the window and bounced into a sofa. Her eyes languished, her lips pouted, she yawned. Suddenly she caught sight of herself in a mirror on the wall. Her eyes brightened, she sat up and smiled. Rupa was an interesting girl.

A pretty, pretty face looked back from the mirror. A face with gleaming eyes and creamy skin, a delicate nose and rosy lips. Clouds of hair fell away from a dewy brow and dimples trembled on the cheeks. A lovely girl of seventeen.

Rupa was charmed. "Pretty, pretty," she murmured and sighed. Life wasn't so bad after all. The fan whirred and hummed overhead. Cars passed in the street below. A crowd cawed somewhere far away. Rupa felt deliciously lazy and pleasantly wicked.

Raising a slender arm, she massaged her hair across a cheek. A tiny smile twitched her lips. Her eyes looked up sideways and dropped at once. She blushed and hung down her head, and hardly knew where to look. She got up and left the room.

The girl came back and stared. She stared at the sofa in the centre of the room.

Rupa tried to speak, but her courage failed altogether. She turned to go, then controlled herself with a great effort. She sailed to the sofa and sat down, eyes lowered and hands together.

Her dignity was wonderful. But she was clearly troubled. Rupa slowly raised her splendid eyes, and they were full of tears. Her lips trembled, her bosom heaved, she looked truly beautiful.

Suddenly her eyes flashed, she moved back and gasped. Her hand went forward, but she drew it back like a shot.

"What, marry you?" she trembled. "What shall I say? ... Ask my father." She burst into tears and fled from the room.

Rupa came back however, and very happy she was too. She closed the door softly and turned round with a finger to her lips and a delicious roguish look in her eyes.

"Now, don't be noisy," she whispered. "My husband may

come back any moment." Her eyes sparkled, she was breathing quickly. "What? I am the cutest thing on two legs? Why you rogue, you mustn't sly such things to a married woman!"

Rupa glared, then suddenly giggled. "Darling!" she sighed, throwing out her arms. But she suddenly stopped dead, an ear cocked at the closed door.

Her eyes widened. "My husband!" she hissed. "He's back! Through that door, quick! Fight him? You fool, he'll kill you if he finds you here?"

Rupa rushed to a side door and threw it open. "Go, go, yes, yes. Tomorrow, I'll meet you there. I promise. Rupa closed the door, turned round and smoothed her hair. She was panting.

Someone was really coming. Heavy foot-steps came up to the main door. A man burst in. An angry young man, dressed in the height of fashion. His eyes blazed, his nostrils flared. He was awful.

"Where's my food?" he thundered. "Lazy slut! Next time I catch you fooling round here, I'll fix you!"

"Sir, I... I..." began poor Rupa. "Back to the cook-house," he snarled. "And take the trash with you." She grabbed the trash and fled.

Women Fight

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Countries who ratify the convention are required to submit country reports once every four years on the progress women have made.

These reports are examined by an International Committee of 23 elected experts. This year the committee examined 11 reports from a diverse group of countries: Bangladesh, France, Iraq, Kenya, Nicaragua, South Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Sweden, Britain and Yemen.

Customs and traditions sometimes contradict legislation, and should be changed in order for women to be equal, delegates said. For example, in Nigeria, which has three different types of marriage (Customary law, Islamic law and State law), adultery is a criminal offence only under the state's Marriage Act. Under customary law it is a criminal offence for women but not for men.

Women continue to be discriminated against because of their economic situation and lower standard of education, said Florence Ruth, the Kenyan representative. She said that the traditional inferior status of women was reinforced by the predominance of marriage under some customary laws that limited women's rights. Traditional discriminatory practices are declining in Kenya, she said. But some of those cultural patterns were "dear" to the people of Kenya and their elimination could only be achieved gradually. Cruel practices such as female circumcision are dying out, because women consider them unacceptable and there is a new awareness among men who prefer not to marry women they know are circumcised.

However, some NGO representatives did not share this optimism. "What the Convention does is promote a whole new culture, a culture of human rights. The problem is how to promote a new culture in a particular society where men are supreme in the family, where they are supreme within the village, where they are headmasters and chiefs," said a delegate.

Having political power would make a big difference, it was agreed. Dow said Botswana has only two women in parliament, a tiny achievement in the 26 years since independence. She said the only way this can be changed is through legal and human rights education. Only with education can people feel strong enough to demand their rights. "Women in Botswana want dignity which can only come with equality," said Dow.

"Women within the home do not want to be beaten under the disguise of tradition," she said. "They do not want their children be raped. They do not want school children to be made pregnant. Statistics have shown that Botswana has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Africa. It is older men that have made these young girls in schools

Her story



pregnant. We want a system that says it is wrong."

Women Writers

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being studied at the institutions are written by men."

Emechetta agrees that progress has been slight. "Some people would like to convince us that less than ten well-known women writers from Africa is a marvellous thing. We can hardly accept this," she said.

"In a world where men sometimes act as if they are the only human beings who matter, the need for women writers is even more acute."

Mrinal Pande, an outstanding Hindi writer and journalist from India, also thinks that women's literature in developing countries deserves much more attention.

"Through literature, women can find a voice which can help them pass their messages as well as render an education to those who need it," said Pande.

Indian women writers explore the complex socio-cultural, political and economic problems which they have to confront in their daily lives. They attempt to preach to their society about the need for positive change in all spheres of life.

One such book is Nayantara Shagal's novel *Mistaken Identity*, published in 1988. The author describes the role of women's literature: "It is about the search for a common Indian identity. But it is also about the determined struggles by Indian women against the repression they often suffer under what are sometimes highly dogmatic social traditions and religions."

In most traditional societies, women continue to encounter obstacles. In some developing countries women are not even allowed to express

themselves in public and writing is seen as taboo. The culturally-conditioned places for women are by the firestones. Their profession — nourishing children.

One problem is the limited access to publishing facilities. "Quite often, mainstream publishers have no stomach for the highly committed literature of most women writers in developing countries," said Pande. "In search for quick profits, most publishers prefer to trade in the works of established writers... Unfortunately, these established writers are mainly men."

Pande sees illiteracy as a major constraint. She explained: "Only 30 per cent of India's population which can read and write are women. Any woman to be published must accordingly come from this thin population stratum."

On the economic front, women in most developing countries generally lack the economic power that would enable them to break loose from the cobweb of poverty. The main out-of-home economic activity for women is either agricultural, or selling products in the market. Meanwhile, it is the men who count the profits.

Political inhibitions are entrenched in some of these countries. For example, in South Africa, where generation of women have hungered, in vain, for the freedom to write, writers like Miriam Tlali and Nadine Gordimer, have managed to write about the apartheid system from within. Others, like Lauretta Ngcobo, Bessie Head, and Farida Karodia have had to work through the frustrations and pressures of exile.

In countries like Uganda, successive regimes have repressed or even murdered writers and creative artists, including women.

Whatever the case, the struggle for women to establish their own space, in a profession dominated by men, will continue.

VINCENT MAMOMBE, a poet, playwright and freelance journalist, is co-ordinator of African Literature Forum.

Indian Women

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movement will die a natural death due to lack of formal leadership. The agitators, meanwhile, have formed district committees and are now planning to form a state level group. And many rickshaw drivers and lorry drivers who used to transport arrak to shops have vowed not to do so in future.

Whatever the outcome, the women in Andhra Pradesh have launched a war against deprivation, poverty and exploitation. "They've realised that education and awareness is the key to a whole new world of prosperity and well-being," says Dr. Vijay Kumar, an activist leading the movement in Nellore district.

ATIYA SINGH is a freelance journalist and lecturer born in Hyderabad.

Meaningful Lyricism in Mixed Media

by Fayza Haq

MARUF Ahmed, talking about the new elements that he had brought into his paintings, this time at the 'La Galerie', and comparing it with the one that had been held before at the Goethe-Institut, Dhaka, three years ago said that his exhibition had been a mixed media on paper in the earlier case, while this time, he held a show in mixed media on canvas. The style in both of them has been the same but the latest venture, had more depth of perception and the subjects had been delineated with a deeper conception of emotions.

For the last six years, the

had been found earlier. The quality has improved and the artists' horizons have widened."

Asked if he felt that the artists had combined well the western and eastern cultures in their endeavour to forge ahead, the painter said, "Quality is a relative matter. Artists can maintain their own culture. If you consider the contemporary painters' style and texture, you feel that their experimentation should pursue them instead of them being in pursuit of a choice of style or texture."

Since Impressionism began in Paris, it was natural that artists from overseas flocked there, years ago."

Talking about what took him to the Federal Republic of Germany, the artist explained, "It is very strange as to how I landed up learning my vocation in Germany. I met a journalist after Liberation, having graduated from the Dhaka College of Arts in '73. In this process, I got to know a lot of Germany via this individual. I managed to obtain a scholarship in '76 from DAAD, a German academic centre. It took me two years to master the German language since the German vocabulary is not easy to master. Meanwhile, I continued painting to keep in touch with my vocation."

Speaking about the German painters that have influenced him, Maruf commented, "Although there are ample reports saying that Paris is the seat of learning for art and literature. I differ with them. Germany has also the same Impressionistic and Expressionistic works, although they were done in a scattered fashion. Paul Klee, Kandinsky, Schmidt-Rutloff and August Moke for instance, had created powerful and influential masterpieces. However, there was a different political system from that in France, and U.K. The Nazis destroyed numerous excellent artists and literary works," he said.

"The bombing by the Allied Forces added to the destruction and chaos that had been already created by the Nazis. The Germans failed to appreciate Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism and Surrealism prevalent in Germany at that time. The Nazis termed it all as 'garbage'.

There is documentary evidence to this, and I have seen a couple of the filmed proofs. The archives of the German Government will back my views and statements," Maruf added.

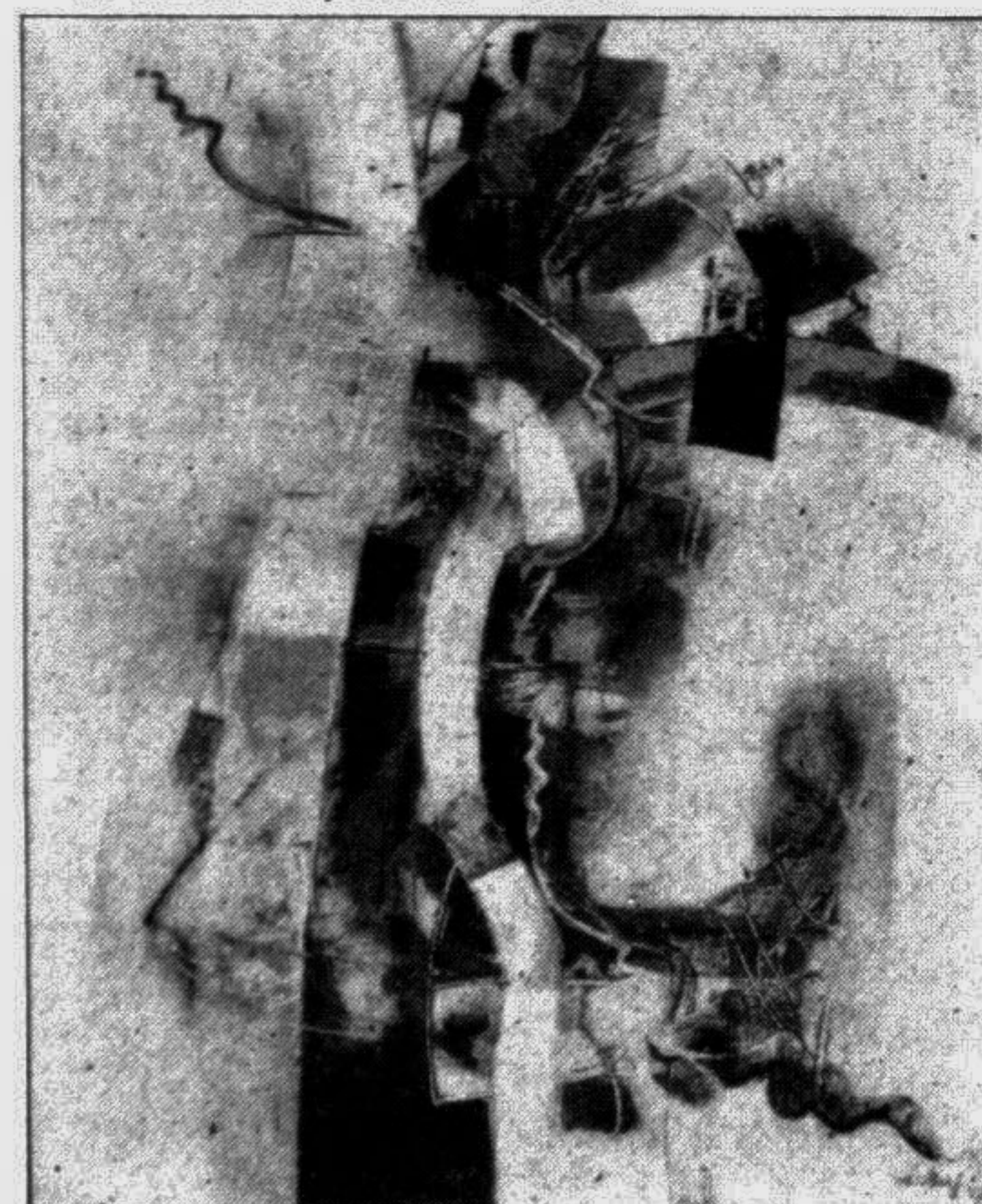
"Furthermore, the genuine artists had to flee from the country due to the prevailing political situation. At the same time, I understand that Bangladesh earlier lacked the sort stability for the Germans to establish a correct liaison," the artist continued, in the presentation of his views.

When asked about his style, Maruf said that he had been influenced more by the German Expressionists, but at present, he was trying to develop his own style. The exhibition contained 12 paintings in mixed media, comprising two oils and six acrylics; the painter added, when asked to give specific details of his entries at the 'La Galerie' display.

Talking about what made him take to painting initially, Maruf explained, "I was interested in it when I was at school, in '67. As you will know, in those days, it was difficult to get permission from parents, because they believed one could not make a living by painting alone, which was often the case everywhere in the world."

Asked if his wife Christiana gave him moral support or not, Maruf said, "As my wife, she does a lot for me in providing home comforts, despite the course that she had been pursuing to obtain her M.S. in Political Science, at the University in Bonn."

At 41, Maruf's interests, he explained, are films, theatre, listening to symphonies. Meanwhile operas are not his cup of tea. "While in Bangladesh in my young days,



COMPOSITION

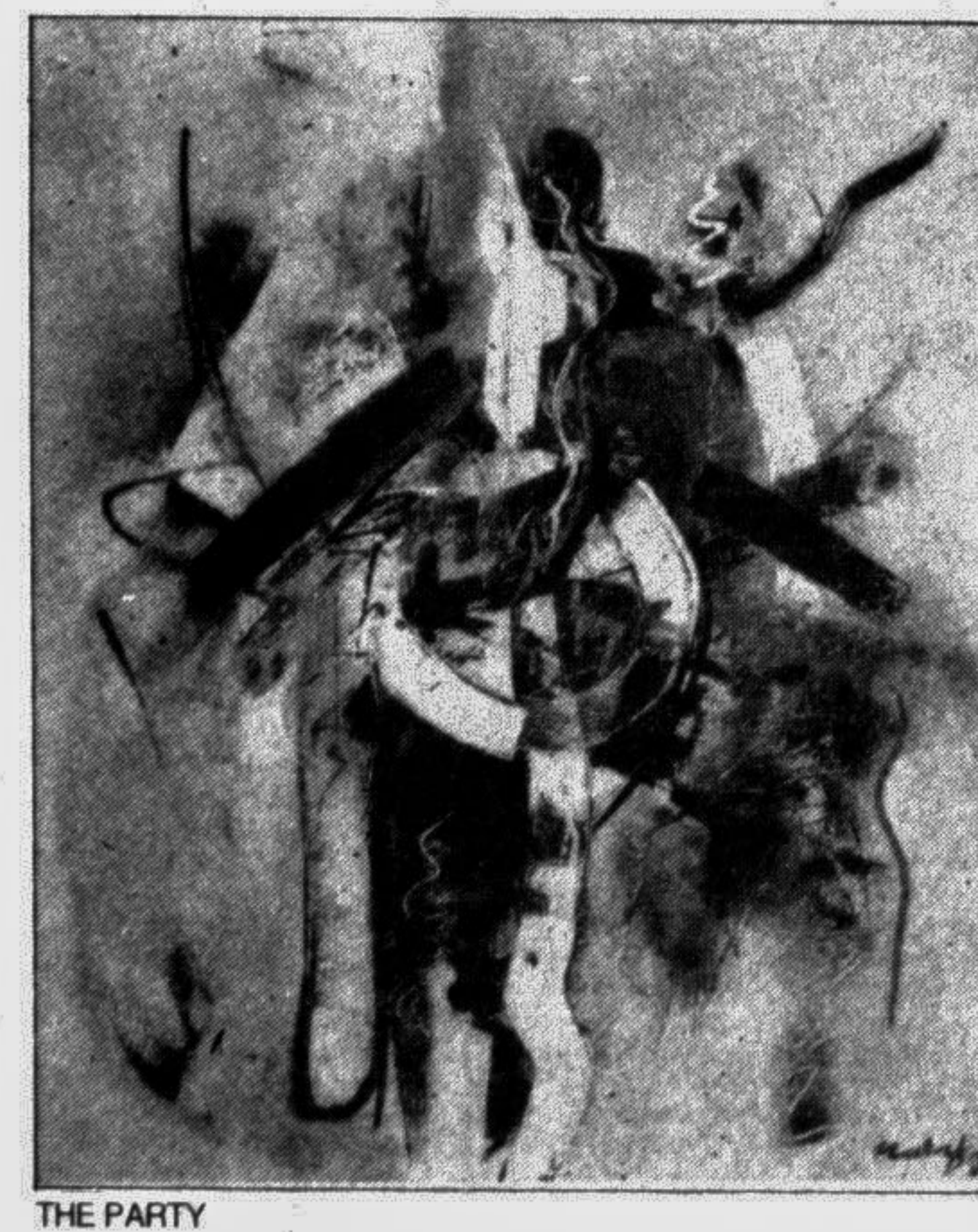
artist said, he had expressed his feelings rather than the contents of his mind — both philosophical and psychological. He had always used bright colours to symbolise hope in his works, he added. The choice of colours have continued to play a predominant role, he assured. "Critics have termed my work as 'Lyrical Expressionism' or 'Abstract Expressionism', but I am not interested in 'isms'. Maruf informed.

Talking about the main object of his paintings, Maruf elaborated, "I believe that colour and composition are important. I feel that realistic styles are outdated in the '90s. My figures in abstract forms stand for human beings and the atmosphere that surrounds them."

Dwelling on the state of art in Bangladesh, as a painter who resided in Germany for 17 years, Maruf said, "I have recently noticed that there is a dearth of patronage for the artists as there are very few galleries in Bangladesh. There are limited private exhibition places such 'La Galerie' or 'Shilpangan'. There is more competition now vis a vis what

Questioned about how he rated the Bangladeshi artists, having lived and worked in Europe, Maruf explained, "European galleries and patrons are accepting a considerable amount of paintings of Bangladeshi artists. However, their number is not adequate and in my opinion, this is due to the lack of communication between Germany and Bangladesh. While there is regular communication between London, Paris and Dhaka, this is not the case between Bonn, and the capital of Bangladesh. And this has resulted in a communication gap. This is despite the fact that Cologne and Berlin have a good collection of art works, comprising genuine nonpareil antiques and contemporary works of the masters from all over the world.

There is best contact of Dhaka with London due to the migrants of Bangladeshi origin now working in the U.K. capital city. A number of artists have been to Paris from Dhaka since the time of the Impressionists. In Germany we are not brow-beaten by the concept that London and Paris are the havens for artists.



THE PARTY

Will Eco-Tourism Trample Sri Lanka's Remote Landscapes?

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Trees and putting up glass and concrete structures. Nor do people like this invasion of their remote, quiet spots by alien lifestyles. They fear the AIDS disease, drugs, alcohol, homosexual practices, and believe that their children would adopt these lifestyles indis-

criminally.

This has been evident from numerous protests already against the setting up of tourist complexes. In two instances the government had to back down.

The people of the Catholic diocese of Chilaw protested strongly against the setting up

of a 500-acre tourist resort at Iranawila. The project was scrapped. Similar protests were mounted by Buddhist monks in the Kalutara district against a proposed tourist resort zone. This, too, has been abandoned.

Protests continue against a hotel resort at Kandalama,

near the historic Dambulla temple, on the catchment area of the Dambulla reservoir. Here the protests were wide-ranging and came from Buddhist monks, Catholic and Christian clergy, farmers of the area, university students, environmentalists, politicians and pan-Sinhala-Buddhist organisations