

If we are approaching the close of the month of Ramadan, we are also coming to the end of the round of Iftar parties. I am not sure, which provides us with greater relief.

Since I have attended a few Iftars, it may be a little uncharitable on my part to join in the chorus of voices against the growing practice of turning a solemn fast-breaking affair, very often a family show, into festive occasions.

The arguments made against the practice, often heard right while a party is in progress, are few — but perfectly valid. It is out of tune with the mood of austerity — the so-called 'dai bhat concept' — that is preached by the administration and, indeed, by all the political organisations and their leaders. Then, if one counts the number of parties held by the President, the Prime Minister, some cabinet ministers, the opposition leader, a few political parties and even one or two representative trade bodies and then adds up the cost (if possible), we would get some kind of an idea as to how much has been 'spent' — a better word may be wasted — during the past three weeks. Would it be enough to set up a dozen medical clinics in rural areas, a couple of primary schools, one or two orphanages or even a few stipends for deserving students? Perhaps.

When I brought up the subject at one such Iftar party, with a banker friend sitting next to me, with my usual lack of tact as to the source of the fund, the answer was that it is all provided for in what is called the contingency budget, available to government leaders and heads of political parties. Fair enough. However, going by the dictionary meaning, the use of a contingency allocation should involve 'a possible or unforeseen occurrence' which, in the context of Bangladesh, can mean anything but hardly a pre-planned and well-organised Iftar party.

The elitist touch of some of these parties bothers some people, including myself. At the end of each party that I attended, I usually asked my driver how he was looked after by our host. Interestingly enough, in his case, the treatment varied a great deal from place to place.

In one place, drivers were accommodated under a pandal, with appropriate seating arrangement, and served quite an elaborate Iftar. A good case of well-deserved hospitality. Unfortunately, at least at two other parties, boxes containing some fried stuff were handed over to them, without a glass of juice or water to break the fast.

Even the elitist approach produces some confusion in working out rational

# MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

categories. At the place of the opposition leader, editors of newspapers and news agencies, lumped with diplomats and leaders of the business community, were separated from senior journalists who had been entertained earlier (leaving some editors wondering if they might be left out this year). Again, when news agencies released the long list of guests and several dailies published them in full, there was no mention of leaders of the business sector and heads of financial institutions. Again, members of the teaching profession were entertained separately from the 'intellectual' group, the latter meaning writers, poets and perhaps artists. Whoever was in charge of drawing up these lists probably had a hard time deciding where to put Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, Sarwar Murshed Khan, Rehman Sobhan and a few others who can be placed in any of these categories but cannot certainly be invited again and again, by the same host!

THE near-destruction of the Naz cinema, that mini-movie house, behind the Gulistan by a fire a couple of weeks ago, evoked in me a bit of nostalgia, as it probably did among some of my contemporaries, for the time when seeing good English movies was one of our favourite weekend leisure activities.

If I recall correctly, it was built in the late fifties by the owner of the newspaper and immediately described in newspapers as the smallest movie house in the erstwhile Pakistan — or perhaps in the whole of South Asia — with a seating capacity of a couple of hundred, and a single rate charged for all rather comfortable cushioned chairs. It was fashionable — and fun — to go and see the current English films there, and feel part of a select audience.

We were told that with its limited seating capacity, Naz was anything but a profitable operation. So, from time to time, it served as a theatre — there was a small stage behind the movie screen — for use by cultural bodies, including the United States Information Services (USIS) and the British Council. So, it was at the Naz where we heard a few

American singers brought here by the USIS, including Mahalia Jackson. Many of us had never listened to a singer of such a stature before — not in person at a close range — and her powerful booming voice filled the small hall, from one end to the other, putting us all in a kind of trance. For me, it was an incredible experience. After all these 30 years, I would still like say, 'Thank you, USIS, for bringing that great singer to Dacca.'

Then, the USIS brought Dave Brubeck with his orchestra. As Naz was too small for the show, with almost every music lover dying to hear the noted jazz player, the one and only banquet hall of the then Shahbag hotel provided the venue. It was filled to its capacity for a two-hour performance.

It was one thing to enjoy the performance of Brubeck; it was quite a different matter — almost an impossible assignment — for me to produce a review on the show, with no more than a casual knowledge of jazz, to justify the USIS invitation.

For seeing English movies, the Britannia had gained much greater popularity than either Gulistan or Naz. Wasn't it just on the opposite side of Gulistan? I asked a contemporary of mine the other day. But he was rather vague about it. I mentioned it to a young teacher of the Department of English of Dhaka University. He looked at me with a mixture of curiosity and anxiety. He probably wondered that having travelled a little bit too much, I had started confusing one place with another.

For me, there was a particular reason for bringing up the subject with some one teaching English Literature in our old university. It was to Britannia where the then Head of our department, the Department of English Language and Literature, A G Stock took some of us, all her students, to see the 'Hamlet', with Lawrence Olivier playing in the lead role.

At the end of the long movie, we walked out the cinema hall without saying a word, again as if in a stupor, only looking at Miss Stock in gratitude. Then, as if breaking the silence, our teacher told us that some one in London saw the movie but did not know that it was a play by William Shakespeare. All he said to a companion

was, 'It is marvellous, full of Shakespearean quotations!' Then, feeling light and happy, we found a couple of rickshaws and headed back to the university campus.

WE have started receiving our share of greeting cards for Eid. The latest one for me comes from Kuala Lumpur, sent by our family friend, Hugh de Silva, a noted broadcaster from Sri Lanka, currently the Deputy Director of the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD), one who cares a great deal for the training programme for the electronic media of Bangladesh.



The artwork on the card, reproduced here, is interesting and different from what we see in our own productions. The message, 'Selamat Hari Raya Aidil Fitri' is the Malayalam version of Eid Mubarak. The writing style is based on Arabic calligraphy which has added a new dimension to the Malayalam art.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK  
"In India, there is too much government and too little administration; too many laws and too little justice; too many controls and too little welfare..... A lawsuit once started in India is the nearest thing to eternal life ever seen on Earth."

Nani Palkhivala, a leading businessman of India, quoted by the London Times in the review of 'Nehru Memorial Lectures 1966-1991'.

# What will be the Future of Cultures?

by Dr Yogesh Atal

WILL economic and technological progress destroy our cultures? Will we witness a return of intolerant chauvinism that would make cultures retreat to their shells? Will there be a judicious fit between the old and the new? Where are we going? What will be the fate of cultures? These are the questions that form part of the enquiry on Future. To catalyze thinking on Future, UNESCO has supported the initiatives of the World Futures Studies Federation. Under the leadership of Dr Eleonora Masini, Chairperson of the Executive Council of WFSF, UNESCO set up a Working Group of experts to discuss the issue of Futures of Cultures. The Group convened its meeting to discuss the issue in the Asian context in Bangkok from February 8 through 11, 1993. Previously, similar meetings have been held in Latin America and in Africa.

The realization that the present century is soon going to be a past tense has led scholars to shift their orientation from the present to the future. The newer scholarly interest is not only on 'what will be', but increasingly focusing on 'what should be'. Rather than entering into an uncertain future the desire is to fashion a future of our liking by stemming the unwanted trends and initiating the desirable ones. The magic figure of the year 2000 has, somehow, prompted the reviews of the past on the one hand, and instigated the intellectuals to construct the images of the Future, on the other. Future Studies has become a new academic specialty built on the cutting edges of various social science disciplines.

Future Shift is, in a way, linked with the commitment to Development. Began as a process of decolonization — which was negative in its orientation — Development became, in the countries of the so-called Third World, an ide-

ology for rapid planned, and directed, culture change. Newly independent nations began to move in the predetermined direction with defined goals and targets and preconceived strategies. The planners and administrators took on the role of the 'fashioners' of Future. Developing countries got involved in the revolution of rising expectations. The West served as the reference group and even proxied many decisions. Westernization and Modernization became synonyms of Development.

But expectations have led to frustrations because of the mixed gains of development. It was a mistake, it is now realized, to blindly imitate the West. Development did not succeed in homogenizing the world. Traditions did not oblige their obituary writers. The process of development, in fact, created greater disparities, broadened the divide between the rich and the poor, and falsified many tenets of modernization. Alongside of modernization, grew the process of revival and resurgence of tradition and even of religious fundamentalism.

Those who take the pessimistic view of the future of cultures feel that all cultures will lose their primacy through hybridization and will be reduced to their ornamental roles. The optimists, on the other hand, feel that cultural communities will plunge into their indigenous roots and come up with their own recipes for survival and advancement.

Asia is home to major civilizations and religions; it is indeed a cultural mosaic. All Asian societies and cultures are simultaneously experiencing the twin processes of globalization and indigenization. The universal desire for change notwithstanding, societies are making an equally emphatic assertion of their respective cultural identities. The forces of change have not transformed cultures even into look-alike societies. Industrial-

izing Thailand cannot be mistaken for Taiwan, or the roaring tiger of South Korea for Japan.

What one witnesses in Asian cultures is a growing heterogeneity — a queer mixture of tradition and modernity: jumbo jets and bullock carts; mosques and science labs; traditional attire and western paraphernalia. Through the exposure to the wider world, each culture has certain elements of a global culture which itself is now greatly differentiated rather than being merely 'western'. The migration of people and their settlement in other cultures has given rise to, what I call, Sandwich Cultures — sandwiched between the forces of the parent culture and the host culture. It is not only Japan or China that have come to, for example, Bangladesh, but Bangladesh has also reached these destinations. Chinese restaurants in different lands, to take another example, have popularized Chinese food, but in each country Chinese food tastes differently because of its adaptation to the local taste. The way English is spoken by people of different countries demonstrates cultural ingenuity to adapt outside elements.

Countries are becoming heterogeneous in their cultures and plural in their social structures. No doubt, cultures are also losing some of their traits. But disappearance of certain traits does not amount to the destruction of a culture; similarly, accretion of new traits contributes to cultural enrichment and not its impoverishment.

Culture should not be viewed as a museum of tradition. As a living entity, it is a continuously growing phenomenon. The opening out, the inter-cultural dialogue, the cross-cultural fertilization, and the modernity-tradition negotiations contribute to the growth of cultures and reinforce their resilience. Cultures are like bamboos which bend but do not break when winds blow fast.

Fears do exist in terms of the possibilities that open out with each technological advancement. Some people argue that growth of science heralded the end of Nature, that genetic engineering now heralds the end of Culture, and that robotics in future will cause the end of Species. This is a horrible scenario for the future in which no one will like to enter. However, it must be stressed that whatever is technologically feasible is not always socially desirable and culturally acceptable. To the same innovation, different cultures respond differently.

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I came across the picture of a century-old school building printed under the caption 'Across the Country' in an issue of The Daily Star. The local correspondent, indeed, took pain for his in-depth reporting.

I got carried away by the picture to the spot for a while — stepping down from a steam-engine train on a foggy winter morning at Srimongol railway station, then riding sixteen miles by a green jeep to reach there...

Although my mother seemed to be grumbling at the backward location of my father's new posting, yet I was turning to be happy at the view of the roadside hills that led to our sojourn — Maulavibazar.

## REFLECTIONS

# Like a Water Colour in the Rain

Well, that was back in 1965.

by Salahuddin Akbar

It was another Friday. I bought a copy of The Daily Star to take a trip to Ali's World as my usual wont every Friday.

My unfinished expression thus got prompted to recollect more in tranquillity after having completed the trip over S M Ali's: 'It's all about my old school.'

Yes, it's all about our same old school — Maulavibazar Govt High School. I was barely eight at that time. But there seems

to come so many things that I can easily remember with ecstasy and longing.

On the very first day of my entering the school premise I was asked to sit for a special admission test. I had my testimonials from St Placid. So I was easily enrolled after a wait of few days. And it was just for one year as we moved out the following year.

As I grew older and began doing on Keats — the sensu-

ousness in his poems was aptly felt by me mainly because of my early association with Bakul, Sheuli and Hasnahena during my morning walk and casual nocturnal stroll along the main road of the town. While picking up the Bakul in the nascent sunrises, I felt like devouring the smell of it. The lemon-like fragrance from another small and sleek tree, the name of which is still unknown to me, mostly conjures up my afternoon roamings at Maulavibazar where I first sensed that

'sensual' smell and fell in love with instantly.

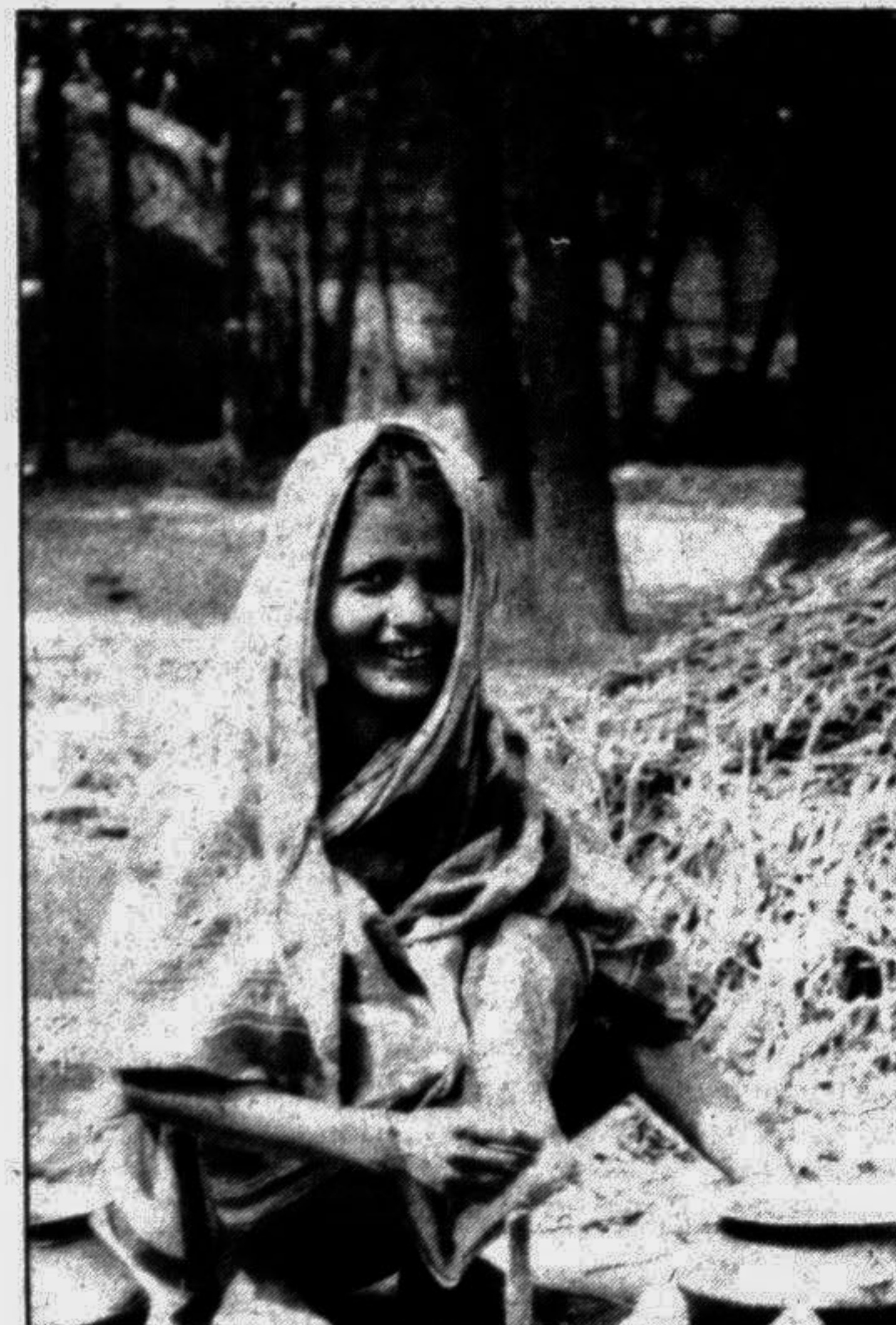
It was that school where I first learnt cricket and basketball and later became an all-rounder (winning the matches for English Department and my team Padma at PATCC).

The boy who seemed to me mysterious in our class was the 'Pankhapuller boy'. I often wanted to talk to him but never had any chance to. He used to sit at the rear of the class — his eyes expressing wonder, envy and despair. There was electric light in the school; but why there was no provision for electric fan, I never bothered it anyway. Decades later, I got the answer from 'A Passage to India' — that there were posts of Pankhapullers in British India and till late sixties either our government or the Pankhapullers did not want to abolish the posts.

It was the Islamiat class I enjoyed so fancy free. Our house was adjacent to the school. So our Maulana Sir never failed to duly utilise that advantage. He would regularly send me running for his paan-sapari. Everybody including that Pankhapuller thought I would get the highest mark in that subject. To my big surprise, I got only the pass marks in the final exam (what I really deserved as I depended on the paan, not on the book). I still cite it as an example of impartiality of a

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# Grameen Bank Female Loanees



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fall back into poverty at their first crisis or natural disaster.

Investment in Agricultural Land  
More than 8-out-of-10 (84%) of the formerly poor Grameen Bank 10-term loanee households have invested in

Poverty Status	Grameen Bank Members		Non-Members	
	Per cent	Avg Dec' l	Per cent	Avg Dec' l
very poor	57	37.9	40	26.7
mod poor	85	55.3	67	71.5
non-poor	89	143.6	100	125.0
TOTALS	78	100	48	51.9

Source: Tangail, Crucible of the Grameen Bank Approach Research, 1992/93

source of their new prosperity. Former daily labourers have been transformed into small farmers by means of long-term borrowing by their wives, from the Grameen Bank. Not only does this mean that the formerly poor cultivators get a

## Earned by Investment in Productive Assets and the Operation of Agricultural Land

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non-poor	89	143.6	100	125.0
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better return for their labour, but also they now have economic and food security, through their ownership and control of agricultural land. If a flood washes away their Amon crop seedlings, the land will still be there, probably more fertile, after the waters recede. A Capital Recovery or Seasonal Loan from the Grameen Bank will help them to get back on their feet, because they own and control productive assets. In an emergency, say sudden serious illness of a household member, some of their own land could be leased-out temporarily or some of the leased-in land returned to its owner to raise the funds necessary for successful treatment. In short, the reduction of poverty brought about by long-term borrowing from the Grameen Bank is sustainable because it is backed-up by ownership and control over assets, especially agricultural land.

## Social Stability and Democracy

The Grameen Bank currently is lending to more than 1.4 million poor and formerly poor households in more than 30,000 villages throughout the country; that is, in about half of Bangladesh's 65,000 villages. The processes discovered by the research in the Tangail District probably, are going on to a greater or lesser extent in most villages in which the Grameen Bank is lending. The ultimate impact of the economic and social transforma-

tions being wrought, albeit incrementally, by the Grameen Bank loans likely will amount to a major structural change in the rural areas.

The proportion of small farm households will increase substantially, while that of the landless will decline accordingly. This is because most GB loanee (95% in the villages studied), were landless at the time of taking their first loan, and most (80-87% in the villages studied) of the agricultural land in which they will invest will come from middle and rich village households. The long-term implications of this structural change for social stability and further democratization of the polity in the rural areas should be considerable and positive.

Small farmers are known all over the world as a source of social stability; they know only too well the end result of social turmoil: landlessness and destitution. Usually they will not support de-stabilizing political movements. On the other hand, they are increasingly likely to voice specific, concrete demands: for better and more stable prices for their crops, for higher subsidies on inputs, for better infrastructure to link them to the markets, and for protection against competing foreign food imports, etc. — through associations and interest-pressure groups that will spring up among them. Politicians, to be successful, will have to deliver some of these political goods. No longer will they be able to capture the rural vote through empty slogans, pump-priming and divisive communal appeals. The polity will have become more democratic and responsive.



Bangkok: L to R — Mr S Izawa, Deputy Director, Dr Eleonora Masini of WFSF and Dr Yogesh Atal. Dr Atal initiating the discussion.

## WRITE TO MITA

# The Second Stage of Marriage

I had started writing on the stages of marriage two weeks ago and would like to continue with the same this week. If the first stage of marriage is called the Honeymoon stage the second stage could be called the Responsibility stage. This is the time when couples renew their commitment to each other and need to feel reassured about their relationship. Couples go through many changes specially in terms of new challenges and opportunities. This stage starts with the arrival of children, change in jobs, acquiring material wealth, and lasts till the children are grown up and couples are once again left to themselves.

Let us examine what really happens during this time. Couples now realize that they have made a lifetime commitment to each other. This realization for some can be quite awesome. Some feel trapped or restricted and react by gradually becoming indifferent, bored while some look for diversions outside the marriage.

These are all symptoms and reactions to the changed lifestyle which many couples are not prepared for. There is no formal training that couples receive for family living. Though marriage is recognised as the most important event in a person's life, yet couples come to it quite unprepared. They have to rely on their instinct, commonsense and, of course, the informal training they have received at home. This is true for women who are taught the virtues of adjusting, adapting and abiding by all the rules set forth by the in-laws and husband. For men there is no such training. They are pampered, spoiled and told that once they grow up, have a job and get married they will be masters of their household.

Given the changing role of women in our society the above training is not working very well. It is a society in flux where women are gaining independence and demanding equal

rights faster than men are able to adjust to it. In other words, men are not changing as fast as time demands them to. That is why we see disillusionment with marriage among young people. Women are, of course, blamed for it. Our grandmothers and mothers click their tongue and say it is all because of 'Women's Lib'.

Going back to the states of marriage, here is a case study to illustrate the above point.

Rana and Sayeed have been married for five years. One year ago, Rana gave birth to a beautiful little girl for which she gave up a promising career of a bank. Sayeed is smart, ambitious and a thoughtful, loving husband and father. They live independently and have good relationships with both the families. Everything seems fine, so where is the problem?

Rana: My baby is now one-year old, gradually I would like to go back to my profession. Though I love taking care of her and my home, I would still like to have a career. I am trying to arrange proper care for her before I join work again. My husband is not agreeable to it at all. He thinks the baby will be neglected. Moreover, he says that I should promote his career instead of thinking of my own.

Sayeed: It is not that I want her to stay at home all the time. She should choose a career that will not cause harm to the family. Suppose, something happens to the baby while she is out. Who will be responsible? Banking is too tough a profession, I am only trying to protect her. I would hate to see her work so hard and get sick. I am ready to provide her with all the comforts she wants, then why does she have to work?

This is a long story and I shall continue with it next week. Meanwhile, I would like my readers to think about it. What do you think is happening with Rana and Sayeed?

— Shaheen Anam