

The Merchant of Venice: Dhaka Little Theater's Spectacular Presentation

by Ulfat Hussain

All that glitters is not gold" an oft quoted Shakespearean verse has been entwined again by Dhaka Little Theater with a tinge of Bengalee taste in it. The presentation of three cascades — Gold, Silver, and Lead, is unique in its own style and bears dramatic excellence. The music and dance through which the director Ataur Rahman presented three cascades gave life to seemingly inert scenes. It was as if the audience woke up, moved and sat erect; their attention drawn to what the little performers were doing on the stage. This was my feeling while I was seeing "Venice Saudagar" a translated version of Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice." Frankly speaking, this lyrical presentation of the cascades kept us spellbound till the end of the play — a marvelous presentation indeed!

Dhaka Little Theater has been on the stage for about fifteen years. It is a juvenile organization formed by a group of challenging youth who see into the future. They dream for new society, for a new life.

Translation of Shakespeare, be it tragedy or comedy, is really difficult considering Shakespearean philology, style of presentation, continuity, humour and meaning. Mr Abdus Selim has done this work so easily that it can be an example to those who venture to translate foreign plays into Bangla.

On seeing the drama one would agree that the translation has been very lucid, smooth and easy for the little actors to play their part. Translation has been in prose, not in poetry. One must give credit to him for choosing common diction and speech of our language. Some dialogues of the play have been deliberately omitted to suit the little actors' mouth. However, these omissions did not hinder the play's continuity and meaning.

Mr Ataur Rahman, the director of the play, is a very popular name in the country's drama circle. He has about 20 years experience in staging plays. However, he had to work more on his genius in the production of this play because most of his troupe members — actors, technicians, etc. are young and novice. As a director, Mr Rahman has shown his excellence in the spectacular presentation of the three cascades, and in the choice of other songs and music that followed. The character's performances were enlivened with music, dances and songs attuned to the Bengalee culture. Mr Rahman demands credit in the selection of songs and music. Viewed in perspective, he through his superb direction of the play held together in harmony a variety of subjects — acting, lighting, set



I have everything — my alluring glamour, a rich husband and our loving son Tutul — all combine to let flow a beautiful serenity in our family. There is no turmoil in my life. You will probably wonder how I have been living my life in a carefree paradise; but you will understand when I give you my daily routine.

I rise very late in the morning. While sipping a steaming cup of tea I dictate the cook the menu for breakfast, ask the boy-servant to wash Tutul's face and change his outfit. And I fix the towel and toothbrush myself for my husband, Sushovan. Then we sit for breakfast together.

I send the cook to the market after Sushovan is gone out for his office. And me — oh yes, I got something to do like playing with Tutul on the veranda, bathing in the morning sun, sometimes playing music on the cassette player or telephone friends or relations just for casual talks to while away my time. At noon I bathe Tutul, then run water for my shower long and relax. At midday Sushovan and I sprawl on the bed together. But Sushovan has got the habit of sleeping at this hour and he sleeps and snores, while I turn the pages of various magazines and journals. Sometimes Sushovan and I go out after the afternoon tea. But mostly we cannot, because Sushovan has his own world and he works in a government office too. He has a lot of work to do there. He is a government officer as well as a noted litterateur and TV-Radio personality. No wonder that he is also involved with a number of cultural organisations and has already become a popular figure in society. And no wonder he is surrounded by sycophants all around.

Life is too Big, Dear!

A Short Story by Khurshida Haq

tance between us. My elder brother was a professor of philosophy and Sumit was of history. I had taken none of those subjects. He used to drop in our house to see my brother. Seldom did we talk and I had not yet woven my dreams around him.

One day he walked in when my brother was not at home. I was wearing a saree that day and trying all the time to wear it in a perfect way. As I was fixing its border, the cloth around my bosom nearly fell off. And he came right then. He looked enchanted as I opened the door. I said, "Bhaiya is not home may be he'll be right back. Will you wait?" He did not reply but gazed at me with unblinking eyes and said, "Why don't you always wear saree? Wear it all the time, won't you?"

He said nothing more that day and I started thinking of him since that time. I cannot tell you exactly in my inadequate language what his little words meant to me that day. But you will surely understand as you all have the experience that sometimes a small word or subtle expression, even a look can bring a deeper and profound meaning in our lives. That was how Sumit became the dream man with the few words he had spoken on that memorable day. The rest of the story was very quick. He came to know about my feelings, and I understood him. Sumit was very romantic no doubt, but his words and manners seemed to be mysterious to me. I could

and others performed well. Though most of the performers were amateurs, their performance with little flaws and ambiguity of expression here and there, went beyond the circumference of amateurism; they acted like professionals. Costuming was also amazingly Bengalee and not like what a sixteen century venetian would wear — Punjabi and Pyjama for male and Sari for female characters. Shylock's costume has been like that of a Kabuliwalla's dress — a popular figure of a usurer in our country. A little mention about the stage is necessary here. The stage (Mahila Samiti Mancha) is not equipped with sound system so the actors on the stage had to speak at the top of their voice for being heard by all specially those in the back. The acoustic deficiency of the auditorium really hindered a more subtle performance of the actors. It has become increasingly necessary for us to have a permanent theater stage with all modern facilities. Will the authority and those concerned with culture look into this?

Through all the changes of fashion and taste in these hundred years, Shakespeare has never lost his appeal. I feel Dhaka Little Theater's "Venice Saudagar" will ever remain appealing and entertaining to a Bengalee audience in the days to come. Thanks to Dhaka Little Theater for a beautiful presentation.



not properly understand him. Was it due to our age gap or because of his manners and character — I do not know. I was very much surprised the day he touched me. He made me understand "Darling, please don't misunderstand me. We can get closer without having it," he said looking at my eyes full of questions. It's not sin. The body is a harp; it sings when the music is played on the strings of heart. It's impossible for one to exist without the other."

I do not know myself how much I realised the meaning of his words. But he touched me that day.

I know, you will now blame me. But love is said to be such a trap, you can not retreat once you put your foot there. I was only drowning. But believe me, my love was as pure as gold. My views towards physical aspect of love was very

much orthodox. Hesitation, fear, barrier all were there in me. Inspite of these — could I retreat? Was I capable of rejecting wild Sumit? No, I could not. Sumit was crazy and he made me crazy too. My craziness, restlessness, briskeness — all seemed to have suddenly disappeared for the first time the day I felt my second self appear. Instead of being impatient, very calmly I let him know the fact. Sumit was a teacher by profession — I was the eldest girl in my family, studying BA. Both the families were somewhat solvent and nice; there was no barrier from either side. But do you know, what Sumit said? I have a friend who is also my relation. He is a doctor. I know there will be no problem though it's for the first time. It's a matter of just a day. No one will ever know anything about it."

My head grew heavy and my sight grew dim. I almost fainted on him. He held me. But I managed to control myself. He said, "Fix a time within a day or two. The thing could be done on the plea of visiting our house."

I just hated to ask him any question. Without saying a word I moved out of his room with firm footsteps. If I had to bow down my head to someone then why should it be he? My parents, my brothers and sisters were closer to me. And I let them settle down my sorrow and shame. My mother cries, my father wiped his tears, and my brother only

shouted — not to me but to an unknown enemy. "Who's that scoundrel? please tell me. Let me do something."

I know what my brother wanted to do. He wanted to beg if he could know his name. Because you cannot force anyone when it comes to marriage. Moreover, there was no witness or proof. I realised that the mistakes that I could make was already committed. I would only aggravate my sorrow and shame.

I left for Dhaka on a plea of visiting my maternal grandfather's house. Once again, my soul searched salvation and I was purified. I gave up my study. My mother's love and care made me still standing on my ground again regaining my basic sanity and physical beauty. I got married in Dhaka to a well-established officer, noted litterateur and a TV-Radio personality. I still do not know why Sumit avoided me. He was highly ambitious. Last time I heard of him he was busy trying for a scholarship to go abroad.

Was that the reason why he neglected me? Or was it that his idea of marriage and expectation of bride was higher? Or why he did not accept a sinner like me — could it be like that — men are basically strict regarding their marriage although they are promiscuous in love. I do not know, what the real cause of his eluding me was. But you might understand.

After my marriage I did not cherish any impossible dreams. However, I hoped I would be happy. My husband would love me. I would be the mother of a baby as calmly as a doll in our solvent family. You have already seen that I have get everything. But happiness? — which is the first and last goal of everything — did I get it? My husband has given me everything — child, an affluent family — he has handed me the key of happiness. But the door of my happiness is locked and elusive as ever.

The reason is, my husband has given everything excepting himself. I told you, earlier, he is surrounded by fans — many of them are girls. He participates in programmes on TV and Radio, where plenty of girls take part. He gets quite a few programmes as he also dwells on literature. Since he works in an office he cannot find time to prepare the materials in the day time. So he can budget only his night time. He remains awake long time while I search for happiness and toss on my milk white bed. In the warmth of Tutul. In the day time I forget myself amidst work and people. But my real self appears on the mirror of my eyes as the day rolls into night. There is only a note of weariness and emptiness in my eyes. The day quickly passes by — yet every



moment of the night seems longer and never ending. I can feel every second of the passing of time. I wonder when — this slow, unending road will end? When will this untold agony of my mind will cease?

It was her physical hunger that drove Basanti to the street in 1974, she wanted to sell her body. But can you tell me where should I go to ease my mental sufferings? Who will I turn to for the satisfaction of the hunger of my mind? Believe me, the door of my happiness still remains closed despite the fact that Sushovan has provided me with almost everything. This is my story — a story of many Basantis, like me. Well, you have not liked this story? Right? For it sounds a very common and ordinary. All of you will say the same thing like Hasu Bhai?

Hasu is my cousin. You are yet to know another episode of Hasu Bhai chapter in my life story. To tell you briefly — Hasu Bhai had weakness for me. But I never realised it in our talks or conversation, chats or singing. He took me for a walk along the bank of the river Padma in a February evening. He bought me gifts — a costly perfume, a long chain of red stone and a ring wrapped in a paper. I got the message of his gifts quite clear in the soli-

tudes of that evening.

That was why I could not accept his gifts. While returning the wrapped packet to Hasu Bhai, I only said, "give all these to Bulu."

Bulu was the younger sister of Hasu Bhai and she was of my age. Hasu Bhai threw away that wrapped gift on the river in the darkness of night. Since then Hasu Bhai tried once more to send me the message of his heart. He sent me a letter on the torn page of a diary.

Hasu Bhai wrote — "My Tajmahal may not be built if I don't get you. But the Jamuna will flow till eternity." Probably it was a quotation from some noted writer. I cried after reading that letter. Because Hasu Bhai was very simple and naive. It was pitying me too to cause him pain.

Hasu Bhai understood my silent rejection. He got married somewhere else. It has been only a few days back that, I told Hasu Bhai about my life story when he came to visit my house in Dhaka. I said, "I never wrote any story Hasu Bhai. But I'm planning to write one about my own life. This could be the story of many other girls like me."

I told him exactly the story of my life adding some emotion and pathos with it. But

important matters in our lives — our economic problem, social inconsistency and maladjustment, critical global situation ...", Hasu Bhai laughed and said, "Life is too great my dear!"

I do not know if you will say the same thing. Maybe you will agree with Hasu Bhai that there is no philosophy of life in my story. Well, it could be true. But the only thing that I could say is: although our sorrows differ only in patterns, the pain of Basanti and my sorrows and pangs are the same.



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What is the purpose of the International Year?

The 1993 International Year for the World's Indigenous People was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly to strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous communities in areas such as human rights, the environment, development, education and health.

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Gunter Grass: Keeping the Critical Conscience of Society Awake

It would be far too simplistic to think of Gunter Grass and the development of his creative genius in a mereliner scheme: from a poet and writer, who seeks poetic isolation — over an election propagandist Grass, who looks for public involvement — up to a slum dweller Grass in Calcutta, who desires to experience the alien in its immediacy. Gunter Grass has lived — consciously or unconsciously — a chequered life. These manifold experiences of his life, which he internalised during the turbulent span of recent German history, are complexly interwoven in his literary works.

He was born of Polish-German parents on 16th October 1927, in Danzig, in today's Poland. He spent his formative years in the same town. One can easily trace his early biography from his literary works, particularly his two important novels: "The Tin Drum" and "Dog Years". Towards the end of the Second World War in 1944 he was drafted in the German army.

In 1945 he was taken prisoner of war by the American army. After his release he worked as a labourer on a farm and in a potash mine, and later became an apprentice to a stone-mason. Occasionally he also worked in a jazz band. After an unsuccessful attempt to finish his high school education after the war-torn days, he studied fine arts in Dusseldorf and in Berlin. In 1956 he shifted to Paris, where he started his literary career, initially with nonsense poems and grotesque plays. If we see the great structures of his entire work, we can see diverse changing interests reflected in his creative career. All these changes have contributed to the development of his literary personality.

Grass writes lyrics, plays, novels, short stories, and even makes etchings and sculptures. In 1987 he displayed his etchings and lithographs in Delhi. He has participated in election campaigns, and reacted to the political issues of the day. This versatility of his interests has given rise to the complex structures of his literary works.

The Literary Phenomenon

In 1959, his highly original novel "The Tin Drum" appeared on the literary scene and became an immediate commercial success. It has been translated into many languages. He went on to produce two more significant prose works, "Cat and Mouse" (1961) and "Dog Years" (1963). All these three novels deal with his early life in Danzig, which experiences the fateful emergence of the Third Reich. The three-volume new edition of these novels has rightly been subtitled as the "Danzig Trilogy". This work was regarded a literary phenomenon, which broke away from all literary conventions. Here writes Oskar Matzra, the dwarf, his own life history, in which his individual development is shown against the background of every day life, which is affected by the political events of the time. He is physically retarded, but intellectually alert and possesses almost supernatural powers.

He can shatter glass with his voice, when the grown-ups try to snatch the Tin Drum away, which he has got as a gift on his third birthday. With fantasy and irony Oskar writes his history against the grain. This

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debunking with the Trilogy

Towards the end of the fifties, when he established himself as a writer, his main concern was to find out his relation with his own past and retrace it against the grain. The "Danzig Trilogy" bears testimony to it, which debunks the entire German socio-political reality of the first half of the twentieth century as the outcome of an imminent nationalistic extremism in Europe as a whole.

In the seventies, Grass actively participated in the political life of the Federal Republic of Germany and tried to relate the political ideas to religious ethics and upheld the social commitment of the writer. During this period, which had given rise to the well-known students' protest movement in Europe (1968), Grass intensely analysed and discussed the West German reality and attempted to infer the legitimation of the writer from this socio-political interaction: "For the writer is called upon to raise his voice, if in our country the injustice would once again become prescriptive law. For the place of the writer is in the midst of the society."

Grass is thus looking for a "new sensibility", which may open up a differentiated perspective of looking at one's own society from an intercultural equidistance. In August 1986 he decided to shift to Calcutta, where he stayed up to January 1987. He wished to live in a social milieu, far away from the social elite and experience the alien way of life with a "consciousness of rupture". He compiled his experiences of his second visit to Calcutta in his controversial narrative "Tongue Showing" ["Zunge Zeigen", 1988], in which he tried to show the social contradictions of a "Third World" reality. But at the same time he was hinting at the contradictions of his own society.

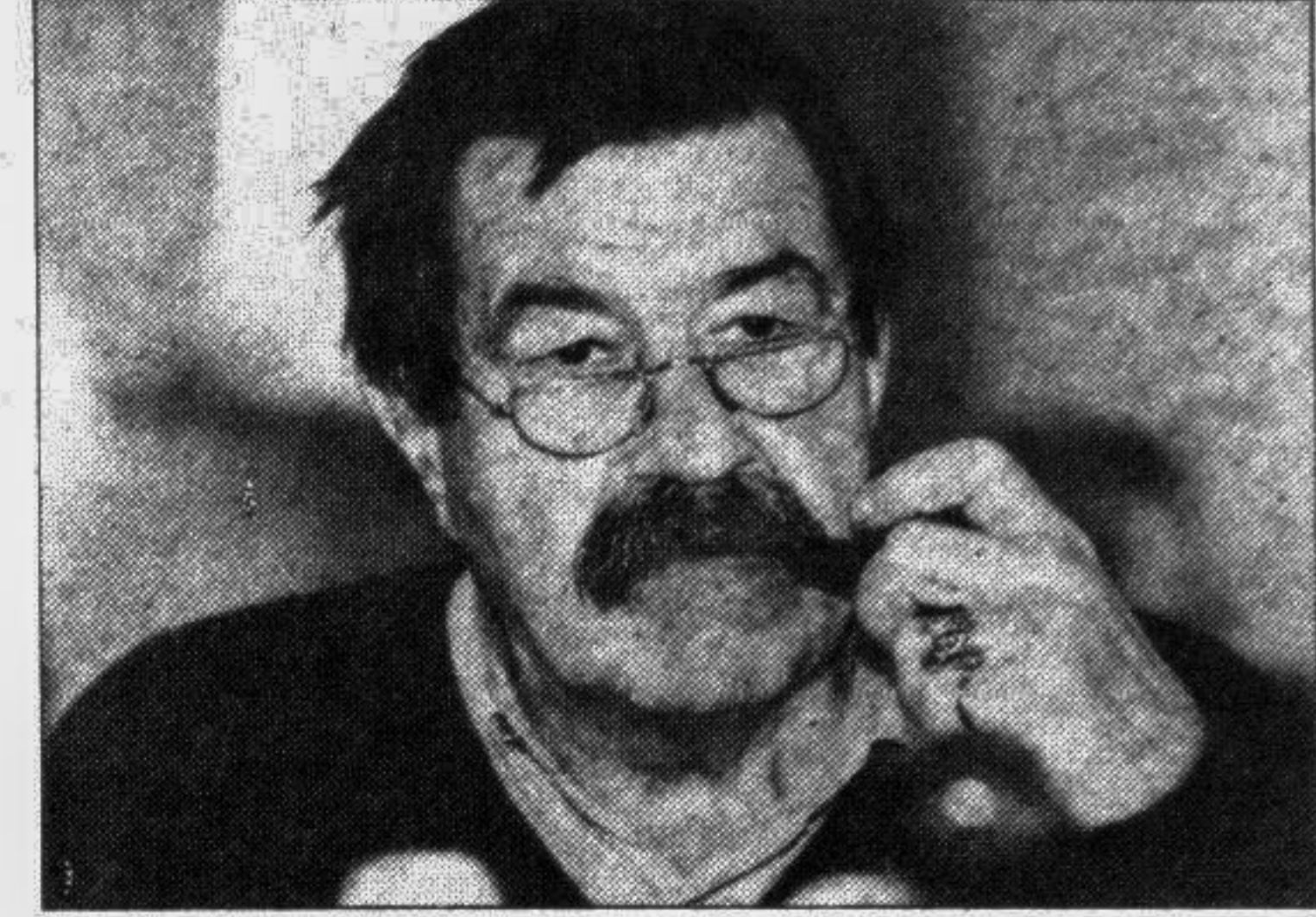
Tongue Showing of Kali

After watching this "Tongue Showing" of Kali he now goes over to listen to a portentous "Toad Croaking" — a German metaphor for the ominous Cassandra cries — which is the title ["Unkenrufe", 1992] of his recent book and also the content of a simple love story between a German and a Polish couple. Grass knows how to transform it into an ironical dramaturgy, which attacks the logic of West-East relations between the Germans after the fall of Berlin Wall in 1989. It exposes the absurdities of the changing realities in Europe through a satirical debunking of vulgarisation of free market economy.

In all his works Grass has been incessantly trying to keep the critical conscience of the society awake, in that he continues to warn — like toad croaking — that the new forces in Europe unleashed through the collapse of socialism and resurgence of market economy have given rise to a consumerism, which is creating its social unconscious. Grass never gets tired of advocating the task of the writer, which lies in penetrating the facile reality and exposing the outdated modes of social and political behaviour, hearing the ominous croaking of the toad in the midst of the bustling.

Courtesy: The German News

Pramod Talgeri profiles Gunter Grass, the most known German literary figure and thinker who has influenced other writers with his bold style, and society at large with his liberal thinking



Gunter Grass in 1992. Writer, Sculptor, graphic artist born 16th Oct 1927

With his liberal political attitude, his almost provocative insistence on rationality, the aggressive style of his speeches and the moral judgement, he spared neither the rightists nor the leftists. Against this background of the turbulent days of the "Extra-Parliamentary Opposition" (APO) towards the

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Grass with his "She-Rat"

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