

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

Calcutta. The work requires a lot of hard work, painstaking research and knowing the author as I do, a lot of secrecy.

"When do we talk about your work and about yourself as an author?" I asked.

"Only when I retire!" he promptly replied. That's own retirement I am writing for!

The creative urge moves others too, in many different ways. A former journalist who had published books on travels and stories for children has set up one of the finest art galleries in town. Now, we have from him two albums of reproductions of Zainul Abedin.

And, I wonder, how does an award-winning singer divide his time between music and his official — and mundane — duties as a secretary of one of the most demanding ministries of the government? Could he be our Tansen bringing rain to our parched land and, by some miscalculation, turning it into a flood?

Apart from friends mentioned earlier, there are quite a few retired civil servants who have stepped out of shadows of their retirement to take up newspaper writing with both gusto and expertise. At least in the case of one, it is a return to his old profession after three and a half decades — first with a few hesitant steps into

what had become a somewhat unfamiliar world and then with gathering enthusiasm.

As columnists of this paper, these born-again journalists, not to mention a number of established columnists, bring into their writing a wealth of experience based on their intimate knowledge of the working of the system and on their commitments to values and standards of a possible good government in Bangladesh.

This is what I call reincarnation.

WRITING about the painstaking research on Bangla words and expressions by my judge friend, I must now record my appreciation for Nurul Islam whose 1,080-page monumental book, combining five volumes into one, has been lying on my desk for months. Written in Bangla, the book, titled, 'Tales of Immigrants' (Prabashir Katha), is a history that traces the earliest Bengalee arrivals in the United Kingdom right until the present day. It is full of an incredible amount of facts which, judging by comments by critics appearing on the back jacket of the book, are accurate. Glancing through the book, full of historic pictures, I



A historic picture showing noted Sitarist Ravishankar (right) at a Bangladeshi restaurant in East London. He played a leading role in organising a series of concerts in aid of our liberation struggle in 1971. Nearest to the camera is Tasadduq Ahmed a noted social leader of Bangladeshi community in Britain.



Syed Nasrullah who earned the distinction of first Bengali to become a Mayor of Hackney Borough Council in 1988.

know now a great deal about many of our illustrious men and women who made their mark, not just in Britain but in all other foreign countries, from the United States and Canada to Jamaica and Singapore. Again, it is not only about famous people but also about lesser known visitors and residents in these countries. If you have happened to have lived in Britain or France, USA or Canada, you may just find yourself mentioned somewhere.

What adds much strength to this massive book is that it is also a socio-political study, among other things, upholding the work done in several foreign countries, especially in Britain, for our war of liberation in 1971.

We had a brief chat when the author Nurul Islam had dropped in my office months ago to present me with a copy of his book. A student of the M. C. College of Sylhet, the district he hails from, Islam worked on five volumes of his book for long 15 years, travelling in all different parts of world, spending his own hard-earned money and time on tours and research and finally publishing it — of all places — from Sylhet.

HOW about setting up a Chair in one of our universities for a study of migration of our people to the West? Well, you may run into some unexpected problems.

Some years ago, one of the foundations here decided to establish a Chair for research on, if I remember correctly, on economic trends in Southeast Asia. The foundation would make a substantial grant to run the study out of an endowment fund.

A senior member of the foundation met with a mid-level official of the University of Dhaka for an exploratory talk.

"You want to give us a chair," the university official in total bewilderment, "and spend all that money for buying a chair."

"What kind of chair are you talking about? Made of gold or silver?" he asked, now more puzzled and even a little irritated than before, as if a stranger was making a fool of himself.

Needless to say, it took some time for the official of the foundation to explain that the establishment of a chair would merely mean creating a research facility within a faculty, not a separate department. The explanation probably worked. However, the university official still looked a little dubious.

SAYING of the week. "What was green has become grey. What was foolish remains foolish still."

Picasso Loves Things and Eats them Alive

by Jean-Marc Dupuich

ONE thinks of the poet Apollinaire: 'I am drunk with having drunk the whole universe'. To love things and to eat them alive', said Picasso. Such voracity reminds one of the Minotaur, which has been drawn and painted many times and which is thus not missing in the exhibition. The Minotaur is a ruin with Continued on page 11



Pablo Picasso: L'italienne (1917)

DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

The Hunter

by Asoke K Bagchi

IT was a sensational discovery! On the morning of one Bengali New Year's Day, somebody had pasted a handwritten newspaper on the newspaper board of our hostel. The name of it was Hunter, it must have been written by an expert calligrapher.

But the contents of it were rich in the amorous pursuits of many of the inmates! The attacks were extremely personal and the affected individuals fumed and clamoured after reading and complained to the Superintendent of the hostel. They vowed to detect the culprit who pasted the news-sheet.

Within a few days everything was forgotten. It reappeared again on another morning with lots of more venom and filth. There was also a fling at the newly married wife of the Superintendent and other infra-naval topics. But just like previous occasions everything quietened down.

The third Hunter involved me! May be one of its roving reporters had seen me in the once famous Bengal Restaurant on Chowringhee Road in the company of a beautiful trainee nurse of our hospital whom I was entertaining at a lunch. One of her uncles was the male chaperone, who did not mind my sweet twitterings to her!

That issue was pasted on the morning of Mahalaya before the Durgapuja. It had a full detail of my activities in the restaurant. I became furious at that insinuation on my personal life, but with loss of difficulties I kept my cool.

I conferred with my closest confidante BN and analysed the situation and found that Hunter appeared only on special occasions, was written by the person with the same handwriting, the ink was of violet colour. So we started to find out who used violet ink in the hostel? I found that dozens of our boys used similar ink so that line drew a blank!

Our newspaper boards were located on the first floor of the hostel in a square area leading to the dining hall and the kitchen. The floor of that space was a favourite sleeping place of our cooks and servants. Daily after finishing their duties they usually retired round about the mid-night or a little later.

Myself and BN decided to sleep there on the night previous to the next holiday on the calendar. We smeared some mustard oil on our bodies and lay there covering our faces with gamchha. The clock ticked we could hear the midnight clang of the bell of a factory next door. We were wide awake, round about 3 AM a pair of wooden slippers (Kharam) tick-tocked its descent from the top floor, it suddenly stopped. We were convinced that somebody was coming down the stairs. Then we heard the shuffling of bare feet, suddenly a shadowy figure came along the verandah holding something with both the hands. He was mildly humming a tune. He started to paste the sheet of paper on one of the boards, at the opportune moment we sprang up and encircled him and started to shout... "Thief! Thief!". The other inmates got up and came down to the venue and were about to beat him up. He pleaded guilty for his acts and we released him with a stern warning.

The guy is now a renowned anesthesiologist of Calcutta, trained in UK, USA and the continent of Europe. His adviser, RC is an oncologist settled in Salem, Virginia, USA. Who admitted his involvement almost thirtysix years later!

Old Parades Opine

by Samir Asaf

Life's flower will wither, who knows but when! If you haven't met a rainbow, let it only be a rain. Your fortress against pain, and yet swept away, Every teardrop is a diamond that gathers a new dream. If you pick up the broken pieces, You might even find what you are looking for. And when you go back to see that road again, Those butterflies will have flown, who knows but where!

Voluntary Deafness

by Arunabh Sarkar

When the Queen passes all traffic of commoners is barred. The white-livered guardians of the law signalling with their hands enforce the restriction. The stream of traffic — scooter, truck, Toyota and Mercedes — grind to a halt because the Queen will pass. And you, my very queen, wanted to say something. I have therefore barred from my hearing all other sounds.

Translated by Zakaria Shtrazi

FOR months already, men in uniforms and signs (of one side) of the war have been proudly walking down the streets of Belgrade. Those who feel the shame have already taken off their uniforms; others, those that we meet on our streets, have left dead bodies and raped women behind, before showing their smiles to us.

Whether he fights for Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Indochina, or Uzbekistan, in every way, whether liberator or imperialist, the warrior rapes women. He feels in his head, in his gun, in his sexual organ that all the inventions of civilisation encourage him to do so. Nietzsche, then Hitler, said clearly: Man should be trained for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior.

If this is how things are, if this is what leaders do, then rape becomes the act of the war-ethnic code, which means it's no longer a matter of one's own whim but of collective obligation. The soldier, while slaughtering and raping, feels the omnipresent blessing of a leader who approves. That is the inspiration, the reason for living: that collusive, silent sign of approval from the almighty.

The whole thing is not as much about recreation, if at all, as about the confirmation of one's power and the satisfaction of entering the herd of 'real men'. Post-Second World War feminists will say that the concept of 'real men' is an invention of civilisation, a social construction, therefore not a destiny but a set of deconstructible behaviour.

In any case, at any moment, the warrior must never forget which gender he belongs to, which is the gender of the gun, which gender is the cry of the conqueror and which the moan of the dying. In his ears, the moan of a dying woman and the moan of a dying man do not have the same value. The same sound is not the same sound. Men and women come from separate realities.

Male squadrons order rape. If the soldier has any doubts, because he had spent his childhood playing with his sister in the yard, because he felt love for his mother — colleagues are there to straighten him out.

War is something else. The first rule is to rape the women of the enemy. Through the humiliation and destruction of the enemy's property, the power of the warrior is enforced, confirmed are the certainty of his virility and the superiority of his people. Everyone before him has done the same: rape is one of the elementary institutions of heterosexual society, and he, the warrior, is the body of this machine.

If the women of the enemy are not utterly available to him, if he happens to be in a war in which everybody speaks the same language, then the target, in fact, can be of any nationality.

In June of this year of soldier of the Green Berets (a Muslim paramilitary force) spoke on TV for every bus filled with women which he drove to serve the soldiers he would get DM200. If he could not fill it with Serbian women, then Muslim and Croatian women would do. The important facts were that they

RAPE IN WAR The History of the Universal Soldier

by Lepa Mladjenovic

The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina has recently received world attention and elicited outrage because of the revelation of rape camps. Several hundred thousand women have been subjected to rape and killed or forced into prostitution. In the article below the writer says that rape in war is not just 'fun' but the affirmation of power through the humiliation and destruction of the enemy's property, that is, women. And in wartime, men's self-declared power and right to rape and kill women merely increase.

were women, that the bus was full, and that he got DM200.

In December 1991 a federal army soldier said, 'I only remember that I was 20th, that her hair was a mess, that she was disgusting and full of sperm, and that I killed her in the end.'

Four bullets in her stomach. And nothing changes in the world. No institution of justice will ever have him on trial. Her internal horror cannot find words in the social hierarchy of values.

Special value is guaranteed to men who get killed in wars. They die heroically and have monuments erected to 'unknown soldiers' — the same ones who have hundreds of times raped hundreds of women.

Raped and murdered women do not die as heroines. No monuments rise for them. They become heroines only for us — women who look at the world with women-identified eyes.

Several hundred thousand women have been raped in Croatia and Bosnia during this war. Many of them have been raped several times, many of them killed — women of all ages, of all nationalities, but of whom the war statisticians have no record. Many of them are still in forced prostitution, in the hotels and schools of Sarajevo and other cities. We do not know how each one of these women has survived — if she has — how she has resisted, how they have threatened her, or how she has become a victim of sexual slavery, what were the living conditions she was unable to change. What will happen to her self-image, to her erotic fantasies? Will she be able to use the grinning grimace of her attackers and resist ever after?

This morning, the guy from Knez Mihajlova street put on his uniform again to show himself to us. The reflection in the mirror has enlarged yet another size. And people will search for the words of justification.

The Hidden History of Women

After the Vietnam War, feminist researchers started to search for the unknown testimonies of the sexual abuse of

women. Feminist historians have also started re-reading historical documents in order to find the presence of rape in all wars since the beginning of civilisation.

To the victor belong the spoils goes the saying of the Ancient Greeks. The availability of women after the battle was the traditional prize for Greek warriors — and here we see how it is always difficult to distinguish between rape and war prostitution. Forced with physical force, or forced with money — this is a part of the militaristic concept of soldiers' right to women.

Rape is recorded during the Roman wars of the 6th century, during the Hundred Years War between France and England, during the reign of every English king, during the wars of liberation in Africa, and so on.

In January 1942, in a report by Soviet foreign minister Molotov we find two pages about the sexual harassment of women: 'In the Ukrainian village of Borodayeveska, fascists violated every one of the women and girls... In the region of Bercevozka, drunken German soldiers assaulted and carried off all the women and girls between the ages of 16 and 30.'

From the other side, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote in his book *The Gulag Archipelago*: 'Yes! For three weeks the war had been going on inside Germany and all of us knew every well that if the girls were German they could be raped and then shot. This was almost a combat distinction.'

At the Berlin Film Festival in 1992, German feminist film director Helke Sanders presented a documentary which shows that the soldiers of the Red Army raped about 2 million women in the territory of Poland and east Germany in 1945; the camera focuses on old women who were 15 or 16 years old at that time, who testify to having been raped up to 100 times.

A group of women in Korea have demanded reparation from the Japanese government for 100,000 women who, during the war between Korea and Japan in 1930-1940, were forced to the Pacific Islands into a long-lasting sexual slavery. The majority of women were 16-18 at the time, taken away from

their families which they could never again go back to. They tell of having been forced to serve soldiers up to 15 times a day.

During the occupation of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990, Iraqi men raped and tortured women of all ages. As abortion is illegal in Kuwait, women were forced to carry pregnancies to term. After that, men of Kuwait killed these children: they were the children of the enemy, not of rape. These women had no chance to continue with their normal lives and usually ended up in forced prostitution, suicide or other self-destruction.

The number of rapes is enormous on all fronts in Croatia and Bosnia, but also in all towns of former Yugoslavia to which warriors are returning home. The SOS telephone lines for women and children victims of violence in Zagreb and Belgrade have noted that, since the war began, the number of

registered cases of rape has increased by 100%. The number of death threats and the use of weapons in domestic attacks has increased by 100%.

Most of the time these are war veterans, guys from Knez Mihajlova, Illica, Vase Miskina, who sleep next to Kalashnikova set carefully on nightstands. When these eternal soldiers are not among enemies any more, they turn to their legitimate wives as objects of rape and massacre.

In the first report on the war in Croatia, Helsinki Watch publishes the testimony of an Albanian woman from Kosovo who, during the Federal Army's so-called 'Liberation of Vukovar', was found in a cellar with a group of Croats. The men were shot while her life was spared and in exchange she was interrogated and raped repeatedly for 12 hours (January 1992). Will she ever be able to

transform her silence into language and action?

Meanwhile, he is still among us. When he gets a job as a waiter in your neighbourhood restaurant, you'll leave him a tip and a smile. But maybe, at that very moment, she'll be very close to you, on the other side of the wall, in the storeroom, toilets, kitchens, in all those spaces where much less money is earned, where one works from dawn to dusk without enough air, without windows, tips and your smiles.

We are looking for her, maybe some of them will find us.

A Public Event

Feminist studies have concluded that war rapes generally have three characteristics: first of all, war rape is a public event. The enemy has to see Continued on page 11

Women Victims of the War in Bosnia-Herzegovina

by Ivana Balen

The issue of rape of women in the Bosnia-Herzegovina war has been used as a political instrument to justify retaliatory violence, violations of human rights and government action of one type or another. As for the real victims, the women themselves, they just became more stigmatised and reticent after the international media frenzy.

THE first documentation of rape camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina was released to the international media in November 1992 by Nina Kadic and Yeljka Mrkic of the Zagreb women's group Tresnjevka. Although their report contains valuable testimonies — and a comprehensive list of rape and death camp sites — its credibility is undermined by the claim that 120,000 women had been the victims of rape and forced incest, nearly four times as many as estimated by the Bosnian government.

The Bosnian authorities have incomplete documentation for 13,000 women, and complete documentation for 3,000. According to the government's own 'Commission for Investigation of Various Crimes on the Territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina' there were 14,000 officially reported rapes.

Since all these reports deal with crimes against Muslim or Croatian women, the Serbian nationalist media responded by quoting a list of camps supposedly formed by Croats and Muslims. The media hype around these allegations resulted in daily TV testimonies from Serbian women survivors.

And in this way a sinister competition in martyrdom was launched, victims on all sides serve to justify retaliatory violence, violations of human rights, and government action of one type or another. There is no absolutely reliable source of information, and data are being manipulated for political propaganda.

The dangers one encounters if the problem is handled in this way are immense. First, unreliable information and exagger-

ated attitudes make people disbelieve the news in general. Second, manipulation of data for political aims leads to hatred, revenge, and further violence against women. Third, it can be less than helpful for governments to take charge of the situation — one particular aspect of this is that some women victims of rape have been denied access to abortion.

Suggestions have been made that they should bring their pregnancies to term and give the children over to special homes in the care of the government or of the political regime the women live in.

In response to this, an action group in Zagreb launched an appeal for concrete help, while saying 'we oppose strongly any kind of manipulation of victim, unchecked statements, numbers of victims, unchecked information, as well as the use of women who are the victims of rape for the purpose of spreading hate, national intolerance, and war propaganda.'

Not many women who have been working on the issue of violence against women will like to hear this. Checking and verifying? What has happened to the first commandment of women's aid, that of basic, unconditional trust?

We are not about to get sceptical about women and their claims. But so far, we have heard from women rather less than from outraged statesmen, outraged clergymen, and other outraged leaders. As for women victims themselves, they became more stigmatised and reticent after the international media frenzy of the past few months.

One can hope that this worldwide outrage will help

change things for the better. However, experience shows that authorities are very careful to get only selectively outraged — only about the transgressions committed by others and safely outside their control.

What has been done so far? Several appeals were distributed internationally, asking largely for the same thing: to investigate and close down the camps; to provide help for women survivors (medical, financial, and emotional support, access to abortion or safe ante-natal care according to their own choice, and the formation of rape crisis centres); to change the 4th section of the Geneva Convention of 1949 so that rape is treated as a war crime and to form an international commission to investigate the problem.

However, appeals have so far proven to be of little or no avail. As usual, the answer must be found in self-organising and self-help, and work has already begun on a network of crisis centres.

Activists from SOS Telephone in Belgrade are leading the project there. In Zagreb, an action team is now establishing contacts throughout the country and in Bosnia-Herzegovina. A group of women in Sarajevo, 'Flowers of Love', is willing to work on the problem as well. A gynaecological clinic has continued to operate throughout the war in Sarajevo, despite horrifying conditions. — Third World Network Features/Peace News

IVANA BALEN has been active in the women's and peace movements in both Zagreb and Belgrade. She wrote the above article for the London-based Peace News.