

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

friends of Bangladesh.

During his speech at the opening session of the BNP council, Asghar Khan created a stir and rightly earned a rousing applause from the audience when, I believe, he became the first Pakistani politician to offer a public "apology" — or was it condemnation? — for the genocide committed in Bangladesh by his country's armed forces — and their local allies — during 1971.

I wonder if it would be right to say that the retired head of the Pakistani Air Force created a stir by his statement. Perhaps, it was for the younger section of the audience to whom Asghar Khan has become something of a distant figure.



Asghar Khan and Sartaz Aziz, two good friends of Bangladesh.

part of history of Pakistan virtually unknown in this country.

However, people of my generation and profession who have followed his political activities right from the sixties, with all the twists and turns, know full well that if there is a single Pakistani politician who would offer public apology for what the government of his country did in Bangladesh during the War of Liberation, it would be Air Marshal Asghar Khan. Again, I, for one, have the uncomfortable feeling that the lead given by Khan at the meeting in Dhaka would not be followed by other politicians in his country. Here, I would like to be proved wrong.

The former Air Force Chief has always been in something of a category of his own during his political life. I did not get a chance of seeing him this time. But I had found myself sitting next to him at a well-attended dinner when he was in Dhaka a year ago on a short visit, unfortunately too short for *The Daily Star* to do a full-page Conversation piece on him.

An impressive-looking man, with greying moustache and thinning hair — he looks much, much younger than his seventy-plus years of age, when in his conversation then, turned to politics from small talk, he emphasised the need for creating a new political culture in South Asia, something that we had been talking about for Bangladesh during the past two years.

It is far from a footnote in history. It had the potential of being a major development that could well change the course of events in the country. During the twilight years of the Ayub regime, in the late sixties, two persons most

talked about as successors to the General whose days were numbered were the late Justice Mahbub Murshed of erstwhile East Pakistan and Asghar Khan. Either of them could head an all-party interim government — or even a presidential system as an elected leader — and thus spare the country of Yahya Khan — and the 1971 genocide. Both of them shared a strong sense of justice and a commitment to morality in politics. So, if we remember all this, one should not be surprised that Asghar Khan offered a public apology for the genocide in 1971. With some — alas, only a few — deeply-held principles and that known quantity, political morality, do not disappear in the quagmire of personal ambition.

* * * *

SARTAZ AZIZ, a Pathan, has been a good friend of Bangladesh right from his days in the UN system before he returned to Pakistan in the eighties from a top-level post in the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Soon after Dhaka became a member of this Rome-based organisation, Bangladesh was one of the main beneficiaries of small and medium-sized soft loan assistance, with Aziz playing a pivotal role in ensuring that our needs were well looked after, in agriculture and in the reduction of poverty. At its early stage, the Grameen Bank was one of the beneficiaries of IFAD. And so was BRAC.

The commitment of Sartaz Aziz to agricultural development is very strong. During one of our meetings in Rome, the Pakistani expert presented me with an autographed copy of his book, titled, "Learning from China" mainly dealing with the way the world's most populous country has altered the face of its agriculture. An official of the United Nations system, Aziz did not go into politics, but he handled what we might call the whole range of projects, from building small dams to setting up co-operatives which gave a boost to food production, to education for women. I must surely go through the book again and see how far it is relevant to the present situation in Bangladesh.

A DAM ate the fruit and suffered but others quarelled over the kind of fruit which actually the first man ate at the behest of his consort. Since the eater of his instigator is not available to vouch or reject the claims, the discord has attained some element of controversy and therefore earned some commercial value. And the fruit vendors joyfully quoted Adam as the first eater of the fruit they offered for sale.

Some Americans however believe that the original temptation which overwhelmed the first man came astride a tomato, the shiny, bright-coloured fruit-vegetable combine. It lures, appetites and gastronomically soothes the system. Had there been no other better substitute, American artists would have painted the Cupid's arrow over the tomato. But they did not. It was the apple pierced by the Cupid's arrow which is considered a pious installation. His evidence is not direct, but circumstantial. Since Adam, unlike him, was not reported to have lost his whiskers after eating the jackfruit, the claim was unfounded.

The second claim was in favour of apple which some consider as doctor's substitute. They say that if one eats an apple a day, keeps the doctor away. Its assorted eye-catching colours emit some kind of appeal besides the hidden iron-rich meat inside. How Adam lost his sense of innocence after munching this fruit God alone knows, although it is claimed that the feeling to become tipsy might even come from distilled water if drunkenness is a state of conscious mind. It is difficult to refute the argument.

Some men, now encouraged by the newly found democracy in Bangladesh, view Adam's eating of the forbidden fruit from a different and discerning angle. The argue, by asking Adam to eat the fruit, Eve at the first instance, encroached upon the democratic right of her husband. She should have left it to his free choice in true democratic spirit. Understandable, his love for the consort begot and blinded his sense of judgment and he followed the wife's bidding unquestionably. Often we also do so as a legacy. It could be assumed that the first casualty of democracy was at the hand of Eve. If you follow or obey your consort, you just follow the traditions, don't break them.

There is still another claim on Adam's fruit. It was Durian which abounds in South East Asia. Almost like the small cousin of the jackfruit with pointed exterior cell tips and strong stinking odour, Durian is another aphrodisiac which divinity did not approve to be eaten in the garden of Eden for obvious moral reasons. About Durian the people say, one may love or loathe it but none can ignore it. In hotels both Durian and dog is forbidden and since its consumption is indicative of particular deficiency, most eaters do it privately. For these reasons perhaps God forbade Adam to eat Durian if at all it was the fruit.

Ever since the tomato, apple, jackfruit and durian are claiming that the first bite on either of them was due to Eve's instigation. And democracy always had a pernicious shadow.

The above column will feature in the Weekend Magazine on every fortnight

VIVEKANANDA: A HUNDRED YEARS SINCE CHICAGO PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS

The Essence of His Mission

by Dr Aminul Islam

ONE hundred years ago in September 1893 a young monk from India, Swami Vivekananda by name, hitherto unknown to the world community, luckily got a chance to address the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. The effect of the speech was instant and startling. The audience was overwhelmed. There was insistent demand for some more speeches to which Vivekananda agreed rather gladly. The message thus delivered heralded Vivekananda from obscurity to world fame. He, however, did not stop there, but carried on conveying his message till his premature death at the age of 39. His life, though short, was nevertheless active and eventful. He toured around the world almost in cyclonic speed, delivered scores of speeches, wrote many articles and poems and had correspondence with people all over the world. Thereupon he transcended the plane of a person and turned into an institution.

What one may naturally ask, was the mission of this great man, and what was so startling about it? To my mind, the mission was not altogether new, but the way it was communicated was really extraordinary. The mission can aptly be termed as humanitarian, in that it was aimed at the liberation of men, especially the distressed and the downtrodden. He chose to proceed through the path of religions, but the religions he had in mind was not merely the religions of his birth, but all historic religions. Following the lead of his Guru Ramakrishna he declared that if one religion is true, all the rest are also true. Holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possession of any church; every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character.

Vivekananda had profound regard for Islam and was in all praise for its equality and fellow-feeling. The Prophet of Islam, he recognized, was a true symbol of equality and brotherhood of man. At the same time he made no secret of his regard for Christianity, especially its humanitarian aspect. He specifically admired Jesus Christ's admission of every good man to the family of God. As for Hinduism, the religion of his birth, he had no illusion about its substance of humanism. Nevertheless he was sharply critical of the social inequities of the caste-ridden Hindu society which run counter to the idea of the unity of man and all other species of creation. Moreover, he could not see eye to eye with that ultra-spiritual otherworldly attitude which neglects the mundane needs of man. The spirit of Hinduism, he emphasizes, is not renunciation of life, but the affirmation of human power. To him, freedom is the essence of Hindu spirituality.

Religion, it is often enough said, is for man, and not man for religion. Vivekananda's view of religion lends support to this view. Hence his revealing observation: If religion cannot wipe off the tears of a widow and give a morsel of bread to the hungry, I am no longer in it. He goes on to say: First food and then religion; for without food nothing can be accomplished. The principal lesson of religion consists not in supernatural exercises, but in service to God in man.

The Preacher of Harmony and Oneness

by Swami Aksharananda

swered promptly, 'Yes, I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser sense. God can be realized...' The words of Sri Ramakrishna touched him deeply. He was attracted by Sri Ramakrishna intensely. But tragedy came in 1884 — Narendra's father passed away all on a sudden. All the family responsibilities fell on him. He was bewildered at the moment. His spiritual aspiration was about to shatter.

Very soon all the problems faced by him were over by the grace of God. He asked Sri Ramakrishna to help him so that he can remain absorbed in ecstasy day and night. Instead, Sri Ramakrishna scolded him and said, 'How selfish you are! To seek salvation for oneself is a selfish motive, you have to work both for the good of the people as well as for your own liberation simultaneously. Remember, your coming on earth is predestined to work for the well-being of the people.' On the 16th August, 1886, Sri Ramakrishna entered into Mahasamadhi giving the responsibility to Narendra to look after all his disciples. Soon after all congregated in a place and took Sannyasa, a life discarding

worldly things and enjoyments. Narendra took the monastic name Swami Vivekananda.

In 1884 Swami Vivekananda set out for wandering and came in touch with the suffering masses in different parts of the country. During this time he took shelter in the houses of the poor and had share of their meals. Sometimes he was princely received by the kings and the scholars. He travelled from one part of the country to the other extensively to know the condition of his countrymen. He was shocked to see such a miserable condition of theirs. He narrated these to one of his brother disciples, 'I am still unable to understand anything of your so-called religion. But my heart has expanded very much, and I have learned to feel. Believe me, I feel intensely indeed.' An expression of deep sorrow on his countenance was apparent and intense emotion shook his body, his voice was choked, he could say no more.

After completing his tour, he arrived at Kanyakumari, the last tip of the land in southern India on the sea. He swam to the rock nearby and sat there and had a vision of the condition of India's past, present and

future. He felt, 'We as a nation have lost our individuality and that is the cause of all misery in India. We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and raise the masses. The Hindu, the Mohammedan, the Christian — all have virtually trampled them under foot. Again the force to raise them must come from inside. In every country the evil exists, not with, but against religion. Religion is therefore not to blame, but men.'

At the Parliament

During his tour he came to know that 'The World Parliament of Religions' was going to be held in Chicago, America. Swamiji was then requested by his admirers to go there to represent Hinduism. Initially he was hesitant, but he decided to attend the Parliament later and on the 31st May, 1893 boarded the ship. He reached Chicago via China, Japan and few other countries. There he came to know that the Parliament would sit after one month. As Chicago was a very costly place, he had to move to a cheaper place, Boston. Again he came back to Chicago to attend the Parliament of Religions. Here he had heard that no one could be a representative without any credentials. Besides, the time of entry was also over. He was utterly perplexed. He wrote in a letter, 'Now I have to fight against odd. I am not finding out the path. But the Lord can show that path. Do or die. I will have to be firm at my determination.' It seemed by the grace of God all the difficulties had been withered away.

Miraculously an old lady helped him. She introduced Swamiji to Professor John Henry Right of Harvard University. Professor Right was very much impressed to see the depth of Swami Vivekananda's scholarship in all fields of learning. He, without any hesitation, gave a letter of introduction to the authority of the Parliament of Religions

Continued on page 11



At the Parliament of Religions, Chicago, Sept. 11, 1893.

The Bed-rock

One day Narendranath asked Sri Ramakrishna, 'Have you seen God, Sir?' He an-

swered, 'Consciousness of self interpreted by Vivekananda is a state which makes us able to love the whole world truly and flourish supreme human qualities. He emphasized on the endless expectation of man. 'Know you are infinite and fear will die.' And also, 'We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far. Each thought we think is tinged with our own character.' In this connection 3-H formula formed by Vivekananda can be remembered. 3-H or the simultaneous culture and utilisation of head, hand and heart can make a man perfect in true sense. The formula recognises the necessity of sincerity, motivation and practical action in attaining

Continued on page 11

THE VIEWAFAR

M N MUSTAFA

heat was jackfruit — cellular, juicy and sweet. Knowing of its potency to keep husbands roadworthy and mobile, rural wives often encourage husbands to take jackfruit and, after all, Eve was a woman with all womanly demands and qualities. Having swallowed the fruit, the first father was visited by the feeling which his progeny still undergoes, discovered his shame and in the process lost innocence.

But the jackfruit theorists are not many although they have named an urban area elongising the fruit — the *Kathalbagan*, a perverse diminutive to the garden of Eden so far jackfruit is concerned. A jackfruit eater from the frontier however does not agree to the assertion that Adam ate this fruit. For one jackfruit performed a sacrificial act by paying way to the extermination of a Pathan's beard which is considered a pious installation. His evidence is not direct, but circumstantial. Since Adam, unlike him, was not reported to have lost his whiskers after eating the jackfruit, the claim was unfounded.

The second claim was in favour of apple which some consider as doctor's substitute. They say that if one eats an apple a day, keeps the doctor away. Its assorted eye-catching colours emit some kind of appeal besides the hidden iron-rich meat inside. How Adam lost his sense of innocence after munching this fruit God alone knows, although it is claimed that the feeling to become tipsy might even come from distilled water if drunkenness is a state of conscious mind. It is difficult to refute the argument.

Some men, now encouraged by the newly found democracy in Bangladesh, view Adam's eating of the forbidden fruit from a different and discerning angle. The argue, by asking Adam to eat the fruit, Eve at the first instance, encroached upon the democratic right of her husband. She should have left it to his free choice in true democratic spirit. Understandable, his love for the consort begot and blinded his sense of judgment and he followed the wife's bidding unquestionably. Often we also do so as a legacy. It could be assumed that the first casualty of democracy was at the hand of Eve. If you follow or obey your consort, you just follow the traditions, don't break them.

There is still another claim on Adam's fruit. It was Durian which abounds in South East Asia. Almost like the small cousin of the jackfruit with pointed exterior cell tips and strong stinking odour, Durian is another aphrodisiac which divinity did not approve to be eaten in the garden of Eden for obvious moral reasons. About Durian the people say, one may love or loathe it but none can ignore it. In hotels both Durian and dog is forbidden and since its consumption is indicative of particular deficiency, most eaters do it privately. For these reasons perhaps God forbade Adam to eat Durian if at all it was the fruit.

Ever since the tomato, apple, jackfruit and durian are claiming that the first bite on either of them was due to Eve's instigation. And democracy always had a pernicious shadow.

DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

The Child of God

by Asoke K Bagchi

THE first class lounge of MV Jal Azad was quite commodious. On the star board side there were a few squishy glass windows. Under the last window a person always sat since the day of our departure from Bombay. He was young but had impressions of hard labour etched on his face. He was always dressed up in a check shirt, a brown woolen jacket and gray trousers. For some reason unknown to us, he always kept his face looking downwards and slowly played with his fingers. There was a hotelier from Tottenham Court Road named Altab; he said that the boy was from Noakhali district of East Pakistan.

One day I asked him, 'What is your name?' After lots of hesitation he said, 'I am Mohammad Thakur Dhan Ulah.' It is one of the greatest surprises I had in my life! How could he carry such a name and still live in East Pakistan in the early years of the fifties. After lots of persuasions he gave me his name.

I was born in a small village on the Sandwip island of Noakhali district. My father was a sailor on British ships and used to travel to many countries of the world. My mother had many issues but they used to die in infancy, so when I was born she took me to the local temple of mother goddess Kali and dedicated my life to her and the priest named me 'Thakur Dhan'. Meaning the property of God. Before the creation of Pakistan the name was innocuous but after the partition it became a positive nuisance in my personal life.

After the demise of my father while on duty abroad, my uncle also took to sailor's profession. Unluckily once while in England he had an accident and his right leg had to be amputated, so he did small jobs in Glasgow. He married an English lady and settled down in Glasgow. The uncle and aunt did not have any children. Now he is also old, so he had called me to help him out in his flourishing catering business.

I am a poor man, almost totally uneducated, I do not speak a word of English, I am dead scared to face my aunt and uncle. He held both of my hands and shedded tears! His life story was so poignant that I felt deeply for him.

The day the ship was scheduled to stop at Algiers in north Africa, Thakur came to me with a piece of paper and said, 'Doctor Babul would you kindly write a letter in English addressed to my aunt?' I agreed, the theme was, 'Most revered Aunt! At last I am coming, but you would be disappointed to see me as the illiterate, ill clad farmer from a remote village in East Pakistan. Please have some compassion on me; whatever you would teach me I shall try my utmost to learn that from you. Please pray to the Almighty for me! Yours affectionate nephew, Thakur.'

When the ship berthed at Liverpool, I could detect his well-attained uncle and aunt holding aloft a placard: For Mr Thakur Dhan Ulah. The met at last on the pier and Thakur stood on the chest of his amiable uncle.

Probably a traveller in Glasgow today may find a business establishment 'T Ulah & Sons' bearing a testimony to Thakur's prosperity and assimilation into a foreign society.