

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 talks, 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 Mahbubul Haque 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 unknown 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.

THE VIEW AFAR

M N MUSTAFA

ADAM ate the fruit and suffered but others quarrel over the kind of fruit which actually the first man ate at the behest of his consort. Since the eater or 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, brightly coloured fruit-vegetable combine. It lures, appetizes 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.

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, it 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.

The legacy of obeying the wife, with example set by the first father, has not ceased yet. Consequences for disobedience to wife are also disastrous. Small people we ignore, big ones we quote. Laby Clementine Churchill once hurled a dish of spinach at her husband. Because Winston did not listen to Clementine and persisted in remaining spendthrift. It however failed to hit Churchill as it was wide off the mark. In such situations husband's safety lies in wife's failure to hit the target. Failure of one is the success of another.

The jackfruit, believed to be the poor man's aphrodisiac, has also entered the arena of Adam controversy. Some people hold that the forbidden fruit which Adam gorged at his wife's be-

hest 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 eulogising the fruit — the Kathalbagian, 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 sacrilegious 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. Let us elaborate the point. A Pathan visitor to Bangladesh was once presented with a jackfruit. This being the first encounter with a jackfruit he did not know how to eat it. Biting on the jackfruit peels, he tried to reach the cells inside. This way the sticky stuff of the jackfruit smeared all his whiskers and finding no way out to get some one advised him to shave off his beard. The jackfruit having done this to the Pathan, Adam too could have faced the same ordeal after eating the fruit. Since the jackfruit caused his whiskers wipe off, the Pathan considered this fruit as 'najaseh', one which is forbidden or not permitted. Despite the Pathan's ordeal and his consequential judgment on the sacrilegious act of the jackfruit, the fruit continues to attract all variety of eaters — heaven seekers or heaven losers.

There is still another claim on Adam's fruit. It was Dorian which abound in South East Asia. Almost like the small cousin of the jackfruit with pointed exterior cell tips and strong stinking odour, Dorian is another aphrodisiac which divinity did not approve to be eaten in the garden of Eden for obvious moral reasons. About Dorian the people say, one may love or loathe it but none can ignore it. In hotels both Dorian 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 Dorian if at all it was the fruit.

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

The above column will feature in the Weekend Magazine once 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 hurled 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 full 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,

may all sentient beings. 'So long as was a single dog in my country is without food, my whole religion', said Vivekananda, 'will be to feed it.' What a humanitarian spirit enshrined in the heart and tongue of a spiritual monk!

Vivekananda's philosophy was, to all intents and purposes, humanitarian in character. He had a lofty vision of mankind. Hence he characterized man as the noblest of all noble beings, the personification of Brahman, the Absolute. Nothing is greater and nobler than man; for each soul is essentially divine. Our goal consists in manifesting this divine within, by controlling nature, external and internal. To control external nature man uses science and to control internal nature he needs to have recourse to religion.

Vivekananda's philosophy of life can justly be characterised as synthetic in character, in that it lays equal emphasis on the material and spiritual aspects of life. An ideal society, he says, is not merely a society where all live with equal rights and privileges, but where there

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Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of The Religion, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best. — Swami Vivekananda

The Preacher of Harmony and Oneness

by Swami Aksharananda

answered 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 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 learnt 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

A Philosophy for Man

by Md Mahbub Hassan

I have found this unknown Hindu monk more learned than all our learned men put together. This evaluation and ensuing letter from a renowned Harvard Professor enabled Swami Vivekananda to address at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on 11th September, 1893. Having got the opportunity to begin his work in the United States, within a short time he became the guru or preceptor of a number of truth-seeking people belonging to and exhausted by mechanical life-style of Western world. Outwardly religious, it was the initiation of dissemination of a philanthropic philosophy. While the soul behind this philosophy was Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, it was the dedication, sincerity and endeavour of his disciple Swami Vivekananda that carried the great message of philanthropy, fraternity and integrity to the peoples of the world.

Leading the life of a Sannyasi and referring to and explaining the verses from Vedas in solving intricate problems faced by mankind in the present world, should Vivekananda be regarded as a dogmatist? Or, was his philosophy intended to inspire people lead a ascetic life where in-

stincts should be extinct? Ramakrishna-Vivekananda philosophy, or to say in a wider sense, ancient Indian philosophy does not show any inclination in favour of this. While annihilation of instincts is impossible or impracticable, sublimation is the only acceptable way for mankind. Once when Vivekananda expressed his desire to his guru Ramakrishna for leading an isolated life to get perfection in meditation, the latter rebuked him calling a self-ish guy. And it was Vivekananda who in later period devoted himself to the great cause of preaching the philosophy of love, peace and integration among Indians as well as peoples throughout the world. A virtuoso in Indian music, sculpture and fine arts, Vivekananda held religion, science and fine arts as different means of expressing the same truth.

Vivekananda's discussions and suggestions on issues like education, eradication of poverty and ignorance, tackling population problem and various contemporary pragmatic aspects show his attitude towards life to be modern, though not 'western'. He was truly a modern, rational-minded man, searching the soul in the past. Doing so was not parallel to attempt of turning the clock of history back. Because, in the language of Vivekananda, 'knowledge exists eternally and is co-existent with God. Then man who discovers a spiritual law is inspired and what he says is revelation; but revelation too is eternal, not to be crystallized as final and then blindly followed.' And also 'the sum total of knowledge is ever the same; only sometimes it is more manifested and sometimes less. The only source of it is within; there alone it is found.'

Within the 'self' being the only source of knowledge, for the manifestation of it Vivekananda says, 'consciousness of self is essential. When this consciousness comes, man can feel the presence of God in his self. Thus comes a stage when man can see the single existence of God everywhere and extend his narrow ego everywhere. That is a situation where man sees his own self in various forms and self seems to be omnipresent. Then loving all becomes loving oneself. And to such lovers there is no distinction of caste, learning, beauty, birth, wealth or occupation because all are His.' Vivekananda's conception of God and conception of humanity are mingled in one.

3-H Formula

'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

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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 Afiaz; 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 Ullah'. 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 story.

'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. Unfortunately 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 Thakurdhan Ullah. The met at last on the pier and Thakur sobbed on the chest of his aunt and uncle.

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



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

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