

A report on the sickening spectacle of the return of the body of Ferdinand Marcos, presented in Honolulu for three and a half years after his death in exile, and its unceremonious burial in his home province of Ilocos Norte has got an appropriate headline: Filipinos do not need this ghoulish fuss.

The feature, probably originally published by a Manila newspaper but lifted by a local English daily, is by Armando Doronila, one of best-known editors in the Philippines, who, like so many other journalists in his country were thrown out of their jobs, with their publications closed, during the dictatorship of Marcos. Doronila found sanctuary in Australia, a good job and joined other exiles in the international campaign against the Marcos rule. Others were less lucky. While a few were put in jail, some went underground or just adopted a low profile, disassociating themselves from all media activities. The vacuum was partly filled by a couple of weeklies, brought out by exceptionally brave young journalists and by the *veritas*, a privately-owned Christian radio station which, among others, employed some Bangladeshis for its Bangla service. Equipped with powerful shortwave transmitters, the station had an Asia-wide reach. It received well-deserved letters of appreciation from listeners in Bangladesh.

Even the most tragic situation has some comic sides. And so it was with the dictatorship of Marcos. One of the best-known journalists, more pungent in his writing than Doronila, who was promptly put in jail by Marcos soon after he had imposed martial law in the country was Louis Beltran. While this journalist was languishing in a Manila prison, another Louis Beltran, an internationally-known media specialist from Bolivia came into Manila to attend a seminar. No one stopped him as he entered the country. A week later, as he was at the airport ready to board a flight for Bolivia, the immigration woke up to the possibility that one of the worst foes of the President had escaped from jail and with a forged passport was heading for the West. While the plan was delayed for nearly two hours: an intensive probe went on. Finally, someone actually went to the jail to make sure that the 'real' Louis Beltran was still in custody.

I heard it all about five years later from Beltran of Bolivia, when we were colleagues in UNESCO, promoting media development in our two different regions. * * *

It was hardly a professional achievement for a visiting journalist to get an exclusive interview with Ferdinand Marcos or even to be invited to lunch at the Macalangan, the sprawling riverside presidential palace. He carried out his own image-building exercise. When he needed any help, he got it from his wife, Imelda who was of course also concerned about her own public standing, as a possible successor of her husband as the president of the Philippines.

After all these years, it is perhaps a little irrelevant to recall any part of the conversation from the three major interviews and a number of shorter ones I had with Marcos over a period of nearly two decades. During this time, I became older and perhaps a little wiser, discarding some of my illusions about the so-called dynamic nations, while the Philippines leader suffered more and more from his kidney trouble, turning to his authoritarian ways in running what was once a vibrant country.

What was important about the three major interviews was that they took place at different

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

stages of the political career of Marcos.

The first one was in the late sixties when, after a pretty successful first term, he had started on his new term in office. The second interview came a few months after he had put the country under Martial Law in Sept 1972. In the third — and final — one was in the late seventies, when the stage was virtually set for the national election and the exit of Marcos from the Philippines in 1986.

The first interview reflected a kind of lingering vision of the democratic future of the Philippines articulated by President Marcos, forcefully and effectively, detailing the socio-economic reforms he planned to carry out during what he called his final term in office. For an outsider, it was difficult to guess what he was going to do next, which was the imposition of an authoritarian system on the archipelago.

In the second interview when he had emerged as a dictator, Marcos was anxious to justify the qualitative change of his regime to the outside world, using the foreign press as a channel of communication. Much smarter than other dictators we have known in this region, including Ayub Khan, Marcos gave his new administration a label. He called it The New Society and published books on this phony concept, ghost-written by some of the best writers in the country. He found a new target for his persistent attacks, the oligarchs, as he called them, the heads of big corporations in the private sector which owned virtually all that kept the country on the move, from power and telephone system to production and marketing of food products and soft drinks and beer, from banks and insurance companies both print media and several television stations. These corporations gave the country a strong base in the private sector and a boost for the market economy, thus making the Philippines something of a model for other countries in the South East Asian region in economic planning. But all kinds of irregularities, rampant corruption and lack of concern for consumers practised by these corporations gave all the popular reasons to Marcos to go them, throw them out of business, but then fill the vacuum with his people. So, we got a new term enter the political dictionary of the Philippines: cronyism. But with no accountability to anyone, except to Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, the new 'oligarchs' plundered the country, turning a number of profitable concerns into sick ailing ones. The so-called market economy turned sour.

Incidentally, cronyism must be known by other names in different countries. What should we call it in Bangladesh? The nearest Bangla expression I can think of is *chancham*.

In the third interview, Marcos was defensive, physically tired and mentally exhausted. He was then said to be taking all kinds of pills, especially before meeting any visitor, to keep up a superficial show of confidence. But it did not work all that well. He probably knew that his so-called reform process had virtually collapsed. To me, he seemed a pathetic figure, still unable to come to terms with the realities.

In some ways, he was very much like Ayub

Khan of 1968 and today's Mobuto Seiko of Zaire who may well be the next African leader to get overthrown; hopefully, before his once affluent mineral-rich country becomes another Somalia.

This reference to Zaire reminds me what an African friend once said about continuing deterioration in the administrative ability of dictators when they remain in power longer than a few years, even within their own narrow framework of references. Now, corruption, inefficiency and bureaucratic bungles have started eating into every dictatorship. Generally speaking, this was not so with the early dictatorial rule in many developing countries.

In some ways, the same is true with military coups. One by generals is overthrown by a group of mid-level army officers who, in turn, may be obliged to hand over to uneducated non-commissioned sergeants or corporals. Herein lies the tragedy — and agony — of Liberia. In the process, as in the African state, nothing much is left of what you may call an administration.

W HATEVER he did in his five-decade long chequered career, he did it in his intimate style, with total commitment and a spirit of innovation. While his achievements were often very much his own, he shared the fruits of his work, in wide-ranging fields, with others, teaching them what collective responsibility was all about.

He fought for press freedom in his home country, Shri Lanka, but harassed by the then Bandaranaike Government, resigned from the editorship of a prestigious daily, and then won the Magsaysay Award for Journalism in 1959. Instead of devoting his time exclusively to writing books, which he did all his life but in his spare time, he got involved in the training of journalists as the head of the Kuala Lumpur-based Asian Programme of the International Press Institute (IPI) when this writer first met him in Lahore. Then, some ten years later, in 1968, he joined two other Magsaysay winners, Amitabh

Chowdhury of India and Mochtar Lubis of Indonesia in setting up the Manila-based Press Foundation of Asia (PPA), devoted to journalism training and bringing grassroots economic development to the people through media. In achieving this objective, he helped in establishing national press institutes in India, Malaysia, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines. He came to be referred to as the 'newspaper doctor' for visiting more than 200 newsrooms in Asia, giving advice to editors.

Two major UN agencies, UNFPA and UNICEF,

where he successively held top positions during the two past two decades would remember — and honour — him as the pioneer in bridging the gap between media and people-oriented development, through readable features produced in different Asian languages, including Bangla, and English. 'We still have a long way to go', he would say from time to time and keep chalking out the next phase of activities for PPA.

This was Varindra Tarzie Vittachi who died in Oxford, England last Friday, at the age of 72, of a lingering liver disease.

To say that the demise of this doyen of Asian journalism leaves a vacuum that will be hard to fill would be an under-statement. Maybe, we should just recognise the fact that, instead of giving all his time to writing what he once called 'my delightful obsession' — he wrote a superb column for *Newsweek* and edited that short-lived brilliant Hong Kong-based regional Sunday paper *'The Asian'* in 1970-73 — he opened many doors for media development to others who regarded him as their mentor. This writer is just one of them.

It was both as my mentor and a 'newspaper doctor' that Vittachi looked through a copy of *The Daily Star* which I distributed at a meeting of the PFA Board of Directors and Trustees in Bangkok in October 1991. While other directors from eight countries, glanced through the paper approvingly, Tarzie first complimented me on the publication and then started marking the main news pages. 'No, my friend,' he said firmly but gently 'you must go for tighter reporting and editing, cutting down on what we call protocol coverage of government leaders.' I keep repeating this advice to my colleagues at our regular staff meetings. If this paper has improved in last one year, since I had my last meeting with Vittachi in the Thai capital, part of the credit must indeed go to the newspaper 'doctor'.

There remains so much to say even about Vittachi's future plans, like bringing out a magazine for SAARC, published from Dhaka; about setting up a South Asian regional press institute, probably based in Kathmandu; and raising the quality of the *Depthnews* services. Then, right at the end when his liver ailment could not dampen his spirit, his focus changed from regional co-operation to international concerns. Or maybe they just merged. He worked hard with a group of like-minded development experts in establishing the Green Cross whose inaugural meeting was held in Kyoto last April. Those of us who had the opportunity of attending it — the invitation to me was signed by Vittachi — missed him at the meeting. He could not just make the long trip.

How many of the ideas that this incredible, lovable and dynamic man who refused to mentally succumb to his fatal illness, perhaps until the very end, which he talked about in his conversation and writings, will be now carried out by others in one form or another remains to be seen. It will be a pity, indeed a shame, if they fall by the wayside.

Varindra (Tarzie) Vittachi

DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

Balthazar's Feast

by Asoke K Bagchi

S HE WAS a motherly lady, the wife of a very important person of the then India, who was a renowned jurist and headed many institutions and was very close to the 'Kot Haf' sahibs of the British Raj.

She was admitted into our wards under the Chief for an operation on her gall bladder which had a good collection of stones. She was occupying our VIP room.

She was successfully operated upon and the Chief demonstrated sixty gall stones she was harbouring to demonstrate to her goggle eyed friends and relations.

On the morning of her discharge I presented her with a glass vial filled with all her stones which could well be a subject for future gossip!

She gave a satisfying smile and presented me with a bunch of fine invitation cards of artistic design announcing the marriage of her only daughter with an upcoming barrister of the Calcutta High Court.

We were very much elated to receive the invitation and thought that a very sumptuous dinner must be in the offing.

On the gala day five of us dressed up in our best of dhotis, kurtas and shiny shoes and proceeded to the venue of the marriage located in an exclusive aristocratic locality of south Calcutta. From quite a distance we could hear the drone of the *sehnai*. A huge pandal was erected on a ground with multi-coloured fabrics. The *sehnai* maestro was playing from his perch on the gate. Huge limousines were disgorging the VIPs at the gate and some people were busy ushering them in.

I was feeling rather nervous to enter through the gate in my baboon attire. After lots of hesitations we entered through the gate and sat down on a row of wooden chairs set to the left of the entrance. The honoured guests were entering into an inner courtyard where a foreign band was playing European tunes.

But alas nobody paid any attention to the five of us. We waited for almost two hours, suddenly Jatin discovered that there were some paper packages of 'Magnolia' ice-cream on a corner table. We crept to the table and devoured a few cups of that stuff. As it was already getting late we left the place in utter desperation and walked almost like dazed persons. In about an hour we reached Esplanade, where we entered a south Indian eating house and ate *masala dosas* to our hearts' content. We promised not to divulge anything about our debacle and started for the hotel by train.

Next morning our inquisitive colleagues gathered to hear about the gala feast. I said, 'It was the greatest of feasts in my life and the dishes which were served were unique. There was a special dish in which a small chicken was cooked inside the tummy of a big one. All we did, we discarded the outer one and ate the savory inner Chic... oh! what a taste and flavour!! The desserts were all English.'

Years later the groom of that marriage who was then a high court judge came to me professionally for a consultation. At the sight of him I remembered about our misfortune of the past and felt like punching on his nose!

And I Realized It Was No One But You

by Nurul Huq

Suddenly I saw you and realized
You were the love that comes along once in a life-time.

My eyes filled with tears but my heart was full of joy.
You were so familiar, so old, yet so new.
I gazed at you and asked myself:
Is this the love I've waited for all my life?
And I realized it was no one but you.

I knew you were Ancient Love
Come to awaken me from a thousand years of sleep.

You touched the rosebud of my heart.
It awakened and blossomed into a rose

And caught the sunbeams and danced in the wind wild.

You turned and looked at me and set my heart ablaze.

I became an eagle, soared into the sky in sheer delight.

Then swooped down over the glittering sea.
Down to the setting sun.
And I realized it was no one but you.

You smiled at me with brilliant eyes
And I changed into a shooting star.
I rose over the magic sea
And raced the clouds and the winds across the sky.
And shot towards the serene moon.
And I realized it was no one but you.

You came up to me, you took my hand
And realised it to your lips.
You looked into my enthralled eyes, and I into yours.
And I asked myself:
Is this happiness, is this joy, is this love?
And I realized it was no one but you.

Gandhian Spirit Alive in South African Struggle

During a recent trip to South Africa, Vandana Shiva found that the Gandhian spirit to fight for justice and peace is strong there, as progressives of all colours work together towards a post-apartheid society.

In September 1992, Pietermaritzburg was the location of an international meeting to reflect on 'What it means to be green in South Africa'. The greening of South Africa is a significant part of building a post-apartheid society, a society that does not determine access to social, political and economic participation on the basis of colour.

Gandhi's sense of justice. It led to the formation of the Natal Indian Congress under his leadership.

In 1907, the Asiatic Law Amendment Act, nicknamed the 'Black Act', was introduced which required all Indians to register. The resistance to the Black Act was the beginning of the famous 'Satyagraha' campaign inspired by Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance.

It was the first time this type of mass struggle had taken place in South Africa and it sowed the seeds for later struggles.

For me, a trip to South Africa was like a pilgrimage for justice, freedom and solidarity.

It brought out the many connections between the struggle in India and in South Africa.

Today 80% of South Africa's population live on 20% of the

land between blacks and whites. The black areas called 'homelands' or 'bantustans' form less than 78% of the land in South Africa.

Displacement and 'Homelands'

Displacement is the most significant environmental issue in India. It is also the most significant green issue in South Africa.

In 1913, the South African government made a law - the Land Act - which divided the land between blacks and whites. The law said that no

whites could own land in African areas and no African could own land in white areas.

The black areas called 'homelands' or 'bantustans' form less than 78% of the land in South Africa.

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land in South Africa.

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I SWARACHANDRA Vidyasagar exhibited a broad spectrum of concerns and yielded an equally broad range of achievements. He evolved a prose-style in Bengali which is, till to date, taken as a model for further stylistic experiments. He wrote textbooks for the students which still exhibit an uncompromising pertinence, as far as the ideals of effective learning are concerned. Vidyasagar also made significant educational reforms aiming at secular, modern, integrated education which even today provides guidance and direction for educationists and students alike. His emphasis, charged with an unyielding reformist energy, on promoting female education was a remarkable event in the nineteenth century Bengali society, characterized by the feudal mode of production and colonialistic repression. In fact, his concerns with women were not only confined to imparting education to them, but found expression in such socio-political and cultural projects as legalizing widow-marriage and putting a viable stay against early marriage and polygamy. One can certainly go on to multiply the areas and achievements of Vidyasagar, but the truth is by now evident: Vidyasagar was a freedom fighter in every sense of the term. True, such a characterization of Vidyasagar is nothing new, but the truth, so recognized and characterized traditionally, demands re-reading in the light of the ethos of our times. In other words, the question is: who is Vidyasagar in our times?

Michael Madhusudan Dutta, who could come close to Vidyasagar and elicited a great deal of support — both emotional and financial — from him had numerous occasions to identify certain rare qualities in Vidyasagar. Madhusudan's ardent characterization of Vidyasagar, exhibiting a kind of passionate superlativism, as 'the greatest Bengali' is well-known. One may argue that Madhusudan's proximity to Vidyasagar might colour the former's perceptions and impressions of the latter with a certain amount of prejudiced subjectivism, but Madhusudan could not miss the point which justifies the 'greatness' of Vidyasagar: it was Vidyasagar's unrelenting struggle for freedom. In fact, the image of struggle and freedom have



problems, and could successfully move away from the semantic, syntactic and grammatical inconsistencies of the kind of prose used by his predecessors. The fact that Vidyasagar was a freedom fighter could draw significant support from his unprece-dented struggle for language.

Yes, Vidyasagar had to find a voice — and that too, was not only a linguistic task, but an explicitly political one in that he had to dwell on new subjects and issues that would certainly come into conflict with the then colonial and feudal politics and culture, a culture that was influenced by *shashtra*-dominated norms and conventions. But what were these new subjects? They were, first of all, *widow-marriage* and *women's emancipation*. It is true that Raja Rammohun and his famous 'Atmya Sava' raised these issues enthusiastically prior to Vidyasagar's programmes, and the characteristic quality of

Vidyasagar's interventions lies in the fact that he could come up with an appropriate language capable of encapsulating and energizing the issues mentioned above. In fact, the language Vidyasagar created for accommodating anti-colonial, anti-feudal and secular subjects such as *widow-marriage*, etc., was the language of struggle, the language of dialectics, discourse and debate. In fact, it was Vidyasagar to whom the credit of first engineering a dialectical mode of discourse could be attributed. Vidyasagar clearly exposed the hollowness of the *pundit* prose and showed that such a language was not an effective weapon for carrying forward the struggle for freedom. Vidyasagar maintained, 'Those who are responsible for imparting education should envisage the very first aim to develop and enrich Bengali literature.' What Vidyasagar actually meant by this statement, with his overt stress on the numerical significance 'first', was that the very Bengali language should be energized as the language of establishing 'rights'. Notice also Vidyasagar's unambiguous emphasis on the *politicization of language*, meaning that language should ceaselessly generate power; for, how can language *per se* be a significant part of the freedom movement if this language fails to generate power? Indeed, Vidyasagar's most significant accomplishment is nothing but his language, a language that is energetic and powerful, and thus, political as well.

Vidyasagar wrote as many as 27 books, and all of them, starting from *Basudeva Charita* down to *Bhugalakha Bananam*, bear the varying proportions of stresses on the *politicization of language* which may be characterized in the words of Frederic Jameson as 'the political works of culture'.

One should particularly notice that Vidyasagar was insistently involved in undertaking his political