

THE VIEW AFAR

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POETRY failed poets miserably in romance. They glorified love, gave it wings to soar heights of ecstasy and rendered it blind of reasons. Yet the poets themselves proved luckless in love. They did not fare well in effective piercing of the hearts of their beloveds. Most of them used wrong tools, were off the target and greased wrong terminals and joints. As a result they portrayed frustration or dejection in love in glowing terms rather than successful harvesting of the crop of love. They used poetry to carry their message. But poetry proved less lethal as weapon to penetrate the thick layer of the unwilling. As a result the story of the return of the vanquished poet from the battle of romance is very poignant and elegiac. Poet Keats who hailed poets as 'bards of passion and of mirth' (as if others are deprived of this particular virtue) himself encountered disaster in his romantic adventure when his fiancée, Fanny Browne, did not agree to waste her love on a short-statured man like Keats. The poet instantly, in a 180 degree turn, took back all the beautiful attributes he showered so lavishly on the lady and chided her publicly 'La belle dame sans merci' — a young lady without mercy. Poets' ability to spark off romance being better than most, they usually start it well and smoothly. The trouble start when their unbounded emotions and ununmuzzed passions go beyond control. In all ages poets desperately fell in love and accepted rejection, in most cases, sportingly. Some of course wailed majestically, however. Here we trace out some poetic romance long before Jesus Christ was born. Pre-Christian poets like the modern ones, duplicate us in no small way. During the time of Julius Caesar, many Roman poets, then mostly writing in Latin, took love as an essential element in poetry. Lucretius, who flourished between 145-30 BC sought refuge in romance, philosophy and poetry. He had a round of love affairs. Unluckily he fared very badly and consequently, like the fox-failed to pluck grapes, wrote ungallantly about women and denounced the lure of womanly beauty. He could not have done better either. He became so much disenchanted with women, who hurt his feelings mortally that he advised the itching youth to appease the flesh with calm promiscuity. He admired marriage but called passionate love as madness that stripped mind of clarity and reason. 'If one is wounded by the shafts of Venus — whether it be a boy with girlish limbs who launches the shaft, or a woman radiating love from her whole body — he is drawn to the source of the blow, and longs to unite. No marriage and no society can find a sound basis in such erotic befuddlement.' Valerius Catullus, a native of Verona came to Rome in search of fortune and met a beautiful woman, Clodia by name, who was the wife of a governor. Catullus romantically named her Lesbia and called her the 'lustrous goddess of the delicate step.' Lesbia accepted Catullus as one of her worshippers and the enraptured poet laid at her feet the most beautiful lyrics in the Latin tongue. Lesbia had a sparrow which she often fondly pressed to her bosom. The poet, jealous of the parrot reaching his lover's bosom more easily than him, could not hide his envy when he says: 'Sparrow, delight of my beloved. Who plays with you And holds you to her breast Who offers her forefinger to your seeking. And tempts your sharp bite; I know not what dear just it pleases my shirring one To make of my desire. Like the jealous archer who killed the mating birds, leading to creation of Valmiki's Ramayana, the poet could have killed the sparrow sharing the better of the lover's bosom but sane wisdom saved the sparrow and poet's love. For a while the poet was consumed with happiness, attended her with new composition daily, read his poem to her and forgot everything but his infatuation. He said lyrically: 'Let us live, Lesbia mine, and love And all the mumbing of harsh old man (It was her lover's husband) We shall reckon as a penny worth. Sun may sink and return; For us, when one our brief sun has set. There comes a long sleep of everlasting night. But this romantic ecstasy created by the sweet aroma of love did not last long. The sun was destined to set premature. She betrayed her husband for him and she betrayed him for another. Her benefactions ranged so widely that Catullus madly fancied her 'embracing at once three hundred adulterers.' The heat of his love cooled down as fast it shot up and turned into hatred when he wrote: 'A woman's words to hungry lover said Should be upon the flowing winds inscribed. His passions for her became bitter and he took coarse revenge. He accused her of yielding to tavern habitues and poetically denounced her lovers. To soothe his agonized mind he took to travelling and slowly recovered from the pain and pangs of sting of frustration in love. Quintus Horatius Flaccus, known as Horace (BC 40) first tried his hands in using arms. He found new wisdom in the battlefield. There in a battle he

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

However, there were sensitive South Asians who saw British liberalism as a mockery and racism as a potential threat to the immigrants. Perhaps one of the first books I read on this theme, even before landing in Britain in the early fifties, was 'Passage to England' by DF Karaka, a noted Parsee journalist-editor whose weekly 'Current' had earned a place for itself among publications in Bombay.

In Britain, we saw both sides of the picture. It did not take us long to realise that if Karaka was not all wrong, that he had overstated his case about racism in the United Kingdom. While my pipe-smoking Marxist friends from Colombo saw racism as an evil inherent in British capitalism, there were enough decent local families, with hardly any political education, like the one I stayed with for two years as a paying guest, never said or did anything which even remotely reflected any prejudice against their foreign guests.

Then, there were British politicians who, with their commitment to liberal humanism, accepted multi-racialism without any outward reservation. A former Prime Minister and a leader of the British Labour Party, Clement Attlee was a guest at a television panel discussion, facing a dozen or so Asian and black journalists and students, including myself — it was perhaps my earliest TV appearance — who asked quite a few direct questions.

One was almost blunt. 'Mr Attlee, the questioner asked 'if you have a choice to select a husband for your daughter, between a young black, very black, African who, with a doctorate from Oxford, is teaching in a university in his own country and a relatively uneducated English truck driver, what would be your recommendation for your daughter?'

The unflappable British leader took hardly a moment to give his answer. He said, 'The choice would be that of my daughter. However, if she comes to me for advice, my unreserved recommendation would certainly be for the African. No question about it. Next question, please.'

Some time later — maybe years — another Labour Party leader, Stafford Chips (if I am not mistaken) gave his daughter to marriage to a Ghanaian student who, with a degree from a British University went back to teaching in his country.

In the fifties and even later, multi-racial marriages, especially between the white and blacks, served as test cases of ethnic co-existence. They remained limited both in number and impact on the society.

There were also a few disaster cases. One day, a young British girl came to see Moulana Bhasani, then living in exile in London, with a pleasant Bangalee Muslim young man. The British girl asked the Moulana to convert her to Islam and then to perform her marriage to the youngman accompanying her. The man was

quiet and appropriate enough for the occasion, also just a little nervous.

The Moulana was all ready to oblige the young girl, right there and without losing any time. But I was filled with misgivings.

I asked the young couple to leave Bhasani and me alone for a while and wait in the next room, which they did. The young man seemed more nervous; the girl was more composed than before.

I explained to Bhasani that we must make some enquiries about the young man, his family background, his financial condition and, more important of all, if he had another wife in his country. But Bhasani, impressed by the two visitors, was unbending. When the pair returned to the room, the Moulana converted the girl to Islam and performed the marriage ceremony with the clockwork precision. The young bride was all ready to join us for dinner, but groom seemed to be in hurry to go. And so the couple left.

Some six months later, the girl was back to see the Moulana, this time crying. The youngman and gone back to the erstwhile East Pakistan and had cut off virtually all connections with his English wife. Yes, he had a Bangalee wife at home and here in London, his English wife was pregnant.

Another disaster case — and a somewhat colourful was that — concerned a rather devious young chap from Dhaka. He showed a photograph of the Dhaka High Court and passed it on as the family's residence in the capital.

Of course, the family had three other residences, one by the seaside at Cox's Bazar which has the longest beach in the world. It was a superb presentation. After this, a proposal for Marriage came naturally. More natural was its acceptance.

After a year of so, I am told, the couple came back to Dhaka. This time, the young man confessed to the girl why he had resorted to such audacious lies 'to win the beautiful girl.' The girl accepted the situation in good grace. The couple found a modest house at Shantinagar and became reasonably happy with their work.

Acronym Causes Confusion

MY suggestion that we should be careful in avoiding the use of acronym BNP which stands for the racist British National Party to avoid confusion with our own Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

With my advice still to reach the newswriter, the following single column headline appeared on back page of The Daily Star on Monday.

57 ACTIVISTS OF RACIST BNP HELD IN EAST LONDON

As a headline, it calls for no complaint. But I am relieved that the headline was not shortened to say: 57 ACTIVISTS OF BNP HELD. This would

brute the day. 57 activists of racist BNP held in East London LONDON, Sept 26: Police on Sunday arrested 57 people, all believed to be members of the racist British National Party, as they arrived to distribute leaflets.

A Nice Note from Sadri Ispahani

FROM time to time, we get letters from thoughtful readers with items for possible inclusion in the 'My World', sometimes phone calls chiding me for being too nostalgic, especially about greater Sylhet with which I have strong ancestral connection. But rarely do I get a piece that adds to my sense of history or perhaps of many of our readers.

One such contribution has now reached from none other than Sadri Ispahani, the noted entrepreneur of Bangladesh.

In a covering letter accompanying the contribution, addressed to me personally, Ispahani says, 'I was looking through my old records recently and found some interesting report of what took place 6 months after Pakistan came into being. As you have been reminiscing in your weekly column 'My World,' I thought this report (which I am enclosing) would be of interest to you.'

The report referred to by Ispahani is as follows:

In February 1948, the following five gentlemen met in Dhaka and decided that it would be impossible to work under the despotic rule of Karachi.

The high-handed civil administration under the Chief Secretary, Mr Aziz Ahmed was quite intolerable.

The elected representatives were unable to project policy as outlined in the party's election manifesto.

Maulana AHK Bhasani, Mr Mohammad Ali of Bogra, Khawaja Nasrullah, Dr A Malik and Mr Toffazal Ali were the five gentlemen.

When the Government of Pakistan got knowledge that such a meeting was held, they took the following action after some time.

Mohammad Ali of Bogra was made Ambassador to Burma, Khawaja Nasrullah was made Chief Whip of the East Bengal Assembly, Dr A Malik was made Minister of Labour in Government of Pakistan and Mr Toffazal Ali was made Minister in East Bengal Government in charge of Land Revenue.

Maulana Bhasani was sent to jail.

My World' in a Suspended Animation

AS I will be going on two to three weeks leave for my regular medical check-up, a bit of rest and an overdue holiday, in that order, probably from this afternoon, this column will not be appearing for next three Fridays. During my absence, Executive Editor Mahzuz Anam will be in charge of the paper as the Acting Editor.

go on paying for everybody's throwouts," said Elsie Tu, co-chair of the Legislative Council Security Panel.

Jim Morris, Hong Kong's Deputy Secretary for Security, said the sooner the new boat people are sent back the better, adding: "The earlier we do that, the earlier the message gets across that this is not a place to flee to."

FRANCES KELLY is a Canadian freelance reporter/photographer based in Hong Kong.

In search of safer shores Vietnamese Boat People are Suddenly Back Again

Frances Kelly writes from Hong Kong

Last year only 12 Vietnamese boat people sought refuge in Hong Kong — against 20,000 in 1991. Now hundreds are suddenly appearing again — 1,000 so far and up to 10,000 arrivals are forecast. The new arrivals are among the ethnic Chinese who fled the Sino-Vietnamese war in the 1970s. Hong Kong and Britain are pleading with China to take responsibility for them.

AS world attention focuses on the thousands of Chinese boat people clamouring to get into the United States, tiny Hong Kong is once again being swamped by Vietnamese boat people.

Almost daily for the last month, hundreds of ethnic Chinese Vietnamese men, women and children have been sailing into Hong Kong on small, crowded fishing boats and demanding refugee status.

More than 1,000 have come ashore so far and some of the new arrivals claim as many as 10,000 others may soon follow.

At a time when Hong Kong government officials believed the problem of the Vietnamese boat people was finally over, the sudden human flood has taken almost everyone here by surprise.

Last year, only 12 Vietnamese boat people sought refuge in Hong Kong against 20,296 the year before.

The new boat people are among 280,000 ethnic Chinese who fled Vietnam during the Sino-Vietnamese war in the late 1970s. They were later granted asylum in China and are now classified as illegal immigrants by the Hong Kong government.

During interviews with Hong Kong officials, the boat people said they fled from Beihai in China's Guangxi province after their squatters' community, housing some 2,000 families, was bulldozed to make way for a property development.

The mass influx is causing a tizzy of diplomatic activity and has spurred both Hong Kong and Britain to plead with Beijing to take responsibility for the crisis and help stem the exodus from Guangxi.

"For people in Hong Kong, this is a very, very important issue and it deserves priority treatment from officials in China," said Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten, who has appealed to the Chinese government to repatriate the boat people "as rapidly as possible."

As yet, China has not formally responded to the appeals from Hong Kong and Britain. However, a Chinese government

spokesman told a Hong Kong television station that authorities in Guangxi have been asked to try to stop the Vietnamese from leaving.

Hong Kong refugee co-ordinator Brian Bresnihan said he feared the sudden influx of boat people from Guangxi would disrupt the government programme to send back Vietnamese migrants who have been rejected as legitimate refugees.

"To a degree we are blown off course for an early repatriation of Vietnamese migrants," Bresnihan said. "At the moment, the impact is not very significant, but if numbers grow, resources will have to be diverted to deal with this group."

Two detention camps have already been set aside to house the new arrivals, who by law cannot be mixed with Vietnamese migrants since they are detained under separate sections of the Immigration Ordinance.

Hong Kong's problem has received little notice overseas as international attention focuses on the thousands of Chinese illegal who have endured nightmarish journeys crossing the ocean to seek asylum in the United States.

Six hundred illegal Chinese migrants stranded in boats off Mexico, were recently repatriated to China. Meanwhile, the United States Coast Guard says other boats carrying Chinese are reported to be heading towards Hawaii.

Even so, America's boat people problem seems small compared to what Hong Kong has had to endure.

Since the Vietnam war ended in 1957, Hong Kong has played reluctant host to more than 200,000 desperate Vietnamese boat people who came searching for freedom and a better life. About 38,000 are still in detention in Hong Kong, awaiting repatriation to Vietnam or resettlement overseas. Last year, almost 13,000 volunteered to return to Vietnam. Others are being forcibly sent home.

After doling out US\$100 million a year to house, feed and



clothe the boat people, Hong Kong residents were happy that an end to the problem was finally in sight.

But the arrival of a new wave of boat people and the relative silence on the part of Chinese officials is causing fresh quivers

of concern.

"That light at the end of the tunnel is beginning to look worryingly like the head lamp of an oncoming train," warned an editorial in the South China Morning Post. "Unless China can be prevailed upon to take

back the new influx, the territory could once again become the unwilling host to thousands of migrants for whom no one else will take moral or financial responsibility.

"It is crucial that China recognise Hong Kong is not a holding camp for people displaced in its own social upheavals."

The ethnic Chinese who fled Vietnam during the Sino-Vietnamese border war were resettled in the Chinese provinces of Guangdong, Hainan, Guangdong and Fujian. Some 13,000 were sent to Beihai, about 560 kilometres west of Hong Kong.

Beihai was then a small fishing port, but has since become a boomtown and magnet for people from other provinces drawn by the prospect of better jobs. An estimated 10,000 Vietnamese are said to be among the thousands who have flooded into the city in the last five years.

After their squatters' camp was razed, many of the ethnic Chinese Vietnamese found themselves sleeping on the streets. Others have put up tents on the land now scheduled for redevelopment.

Those who escaped to Hong Kong told officials here they had travelled to Guangdong province by land before buying fishing boats to carry them to the tiny British colony. Hong Kong legislators are making it clear the new boat people are not welcome.

"Poor Hong Kong has to suffer all the time and we cannot

Germany Restrains Entry of Asylum Seekers

by Farid Ahmed back from Berlin

IT is a basic instinct — an urge for a better life — to avoid problems. So man roamed one part to another in the world from the ancient time and still now they are leaving behind desperate circumstances.

But now people's move across the international border and countryside to cities is in larger numbers than ever before and has led to a crisis.

A new era dawns in the central Europe when Germany again put bar on the entry of asylum seekers from the first of July with an amendment of the law for asylum seekers which was promulgated in 1949.

German Government sealed off its frontier areas as the applications of the asylum seekers are increasing day by day. It became an issue after the Berlin Wall had come down in 1989. Crime and violent incident increased since the wall opened.

A recent report of the United Nations Population Fund says that at least 100 million international migrants are living outside the countries where they were born. This is the two per cent of the total world population.

Out of this total number, 17 millions are refugees, 20 mil-

lions fled violence, drought and environmental disturbance and the rest economic migrants who left their native lands for a better life.

On the migrants, 15 millions are in the West Europe and 6.3 millions alone in Germany including its 'so-called' migrant workers, political refugees and economic refugees.

In the last year nearly 500,000 asylum seekers came into Germany and 230,000 people applied for asylum during the first half of this year, said the Senat Commissioner of Foreigners Affairs

in Berlin, Barbara John. "Very few of the asylum seekers are proved to be genuine," she said.

After the Second World War, Germany needed workers and then in the 50's they imported labourers from the Mediterranean countries, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, Korea, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and Tunisia. But in 1973 they stopped recruitments of migrant workers. Some of them left and the rest stayed in Germany.

Most of the foreigners in Germany are from Turkey.

A New Iron Curtain Divides Rich from the Poor

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The German government has been moving on all fronts to tighten the net. Schultz and his colleagues are to get 3,000 more staff for the eastern border. German diplomats have been twisting arms getting the Poles, Czechs and Rumanians to accept back immediately anyone caught across from their countries. The Czechs have responded by drafting in the army to help police its borders and are pressing the Slovaks to set up border posts to reduce the flow of refugees.

Groups working with asylum-seekers in Berlin believe all that will happen is that the cost of the trip will go up and the illegal refugees will go underground, creating another problem for the police.

Going underground — and probably many always did — would be easy for such groups as the Turks with their large numbers throughout the country. In Berlin alone there are 130,000, making it the largest Turkish city outside Turkey. They are critical of the politicians who have so altered the constitution that the right to asylum hardly exists.

The entire Western Europe is building a fortress. All they are doing is passing the problems on to other countries," said church worker Elizabeth Reesen, who organised a demonstration of refugees in Berlin on the day the new asylum law came into force.

Hanna Garrer, who advises refugees, said: "The politicians argued that the attacks on foreigners had to stop and the only way for this to happen was to close the borders immediately. It is nonsense. A few days after the vote ending the right to asylum there was the attack in Solingen (a right-wing arson attack in which one Turkish woman and four others were burned to death) and every day the newspapers report three or so new fires here."

She believes that rather than change the law the government should have acted long ago to speed asylum procedures, not waiting until only six months ago. Some had been waiting for years.

The huge numbers costing eight billion marks last year alone caused resentment among ordinary Germans. Housing and social services such as health have been strained at a time when Germany has received

more than 200,000 refugees from the former Yugoslavia. It is also in recession and coping with the strains of unification. Nor was it fair on the refugees. At the Rosenthal camp on the Czech-German border the loneliness, depression and despair of those waiting for a decision that will probably be negative is even written on the walls. A Kurd said he had been there two and a half years.

"Abandon all hope ye who enter here — and stay!" one young Nigerian has written. Right-wing extremists, skin-heads and neo-Nazis — mostly under 21 — picked up the mood expressed by the politicians and ordinary people and gone into action against foreigners. Right-wing acts of violence have increased almost ten-fold in two years.

Critics feel the government should have tackled the problem of attacks on foreigners from another angle: by integrating them into society.

But the nationality laws are still based on blood and the question of allowing dual citizenship to such groups as the Turks is not yet decided.

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question for asylum but those who will arrive via Poland and Czech Republic will be deported within 24 hours.

After the amendment hundreds of guards were posted to monitor Germany's 550-mile frontier with Poland and the Czech Republic to keep vigil on the asylum seekers' movement. More than 100,000 asylum seekers arrived via Poland last year.

Meanwhile the living standard of asylum seekers has been curtailed. Earlier, besides accommodation and clothes they were given cash but now they will be given only food, clothes and accommodation.