

Following the occasion of World Habitat Day...

If there is no home, then there is an essential human urge for seeking one. What we call the theatre of the drift is nothing but a continuous drama in which man is a wanderer, a seafarer, a storm-endurer, and above all, a homeseeker. After all, in the twilight, we all return. But where?

Amiya Chakravarty, one of the front-ranking modernist Bengali poets, weaves a texture of symbolism around 'home' and 'homelessness', and exploits the voyage-motif in illustrating the drama of man's irresistible search for identity in a poem, rendered into English here.

Where are You Moving
O Earth

by Amiya Chakravarty
Translation: Azfar Hussain

You, too, don't have a home
but a journey towards home.
The whole earth
the wind
waft in the blue of dusts — in strange verdure;
the diurnal fire
again the rain pours in the black eyes.
Kailas Manasa Lake
unfamiliar Calcutta —
walking on the fringe
return to dusts.
With trees seeds bones dreams
with knowledge strange
and with the ineluctable geometry
of apathy
of whirlpool
where do you take me
o earth:
I, too, don't have a home
but a journey towards a home.



Of Rubbles and Rising Towers

by Fayza Haq

At the photographic exhibitions held in the city, whether by foreign photographers or by local ones, with a few exceptions, one usually sees pictures of Bangladesh, but in Azizur Rahim Peu's recent exhibition at the Goethe Institut, one found many absorbing pictures from abroad. Peu had concentrated on the theme of Germany's unification and the living conditions in that country.

In "Serenity", where the photographer had brought in the mountains of Saxony, he had depicted cliffs, trees and the clear sky. Peu had tried to present the peace in Germany before '39. He had in mind not only the landscape but the peaceful co-existence of the people.

In "Aftermath of War" he delineated a broken church. The highrise type building at the side of a bombed church was also another church. The photographer wished to depict the rebuilding of Germany by the years that followed '45. The turrets, doors, windows and walls of the old church had obviously been heavily shelled and stood in contrast to the new edifice.

"Reconciliation" depicted a crippled man on a wheelchair, who had been affected by the war. During '45 Germany, Peu felt the condition of the Germans could be symbolised by the handicapped middle

aged man. A child in a pram being pushed by the mother, in the same picture, represented the present promising Germany, with a bright future, in the eyes of the photographer. The rest of the photograph contained a scene in a village in a small town with women going about shopping.

"The New Era" presented the same child being held in the mother's arms while she was telephoning in a booth. The photographer believed that one of the first things that the Germans did after the Second World War was establish communication within the country and outside it; and this was done with alacrity. That is why Peu brought in the symbol of the telephone booth.

Another following photograph was a picturesque scene of a child sitting on a pram before a neat shop with decorative doors and windows. The rendition of light and shade with optimistic angle continued the theme of progress and development. This again glorified the new era.

"Victor and Vanquished" delineated the child as a teenager, not yet quite self-sufficient, with a knapsack on her back like her friends, watching a tiger in a zoo, and contemplating the development of her country.

In a continuation of the same theme was an untitled

piece with a staircase which is a universal symbol of progress. Men had been depicted at the top with the bright sun above, to represent hope and accomplishment.

In "Reunification" was shown pieces of the broken and scribbled Berlin Wall with passersby sitting down and taking a respite by the wall with his luggage beside him. In the second picture under the same title could be seen the opening of the roads between East and West Germany. Normal peaceful traffic was depicted.

In a third photograph under the same title could be seen the falling of the statue of Lenin on heaps of rubble in Alexander Platz. The people in eastern Germany were shown as passing by but were not apparently concerned by the fallen statue and the heap of broken tiles.

People were depicted as looking at the destruction, but they did not appear to be deeply affected by it in any way.

The giving of asylum to genuine refugees was shown by the dark skinned and dark haired people queuing up to make telephone calls at the public booth. This photograph depicted a change in political outlook and was termed "Sanctuary".

There was an untitled picture with parts of obscene words against the government

by the Neo Nazis who regularly ruin the city walls with their scribbles and their actual terrorism. A man was shown sitting at the railway station where the graffiti was found, to complete the composition.

The Germans celebrating the reunification of their country was brought in "Meeting of the Mind". People were depicted as parading, singing, and chanting prayers. Peu had brought in thousands of people in his focus. A second picture with women under umbrellas, carrying religious placards, went with the theme. A third photo, with a man holding on to a wall, with a church steeple taken at an angle, brought in the concept of endeavour and new zeal.

In "Perspective" Peu had shown a figure lying on the grass viewing an old church in the background. Here again he combined the new and old in Germany.

"Music" was the last piece, with a lot of black at the back and front and this was meant to be a happy ending to the exposition. Students were shown as playing the flute to collect money for a dance later in the evening. The photographer wished to bring in the importance of music in life in Germany.

Peu, who is a staff photographer of 'Ittefaq' has held exhibitions in Germany, India and Bangladesh. He has won four first prizes including the Shilpakala Academy grand prize. He has a diploma in Graphic Arts from Dhaka and one in photo-journalism from Germany.

Mohammad Abdul Latif

Continued from page 10

to presidency. It may be worthwhile to mention that he had the opportunity of receiving training in physical exercises from the renowned instructor Guru Babu Gopinath Pal at Calcutta Marwari Club.

While working as a trainer in Kushtia Gymnastic Club his name became legendary in erstwhile East Pakistan as he had demonstrated some performances like breaking stone on chest, stopping running car, bending iron rod by throat and breaking iron chain with bare hands etc.

Apart from a gymnast, he was a good football player. As a footballer he began playing at Ajmeer Gymkhana Club in 1939.

Besides being a gymnast and footballer, he has left indelible mark in acting in dramas. He had not only performed on stage but also took part in Radio dramas. Abdul Latif acknowledged with gratitude he received from renowned dramatist (late) Mohammad Nizamuddin. Abdul Latif had also contributed toward enrichment of Bengali drama which had not been developed like other fields of literature like novel, short story and poetry. He has written as many as five dramas, three of which were broadcast by Radio. All the dramas were, however, presented on the stage in different places of the country. These are: Protishodh (revenge), Ratrihesh (end of the night), Sadhak Lalou (Mystic Lalou), Jharer Sheeh (end of the storm) and Abuzh Mon (unreasonable mind).

He is a man so amiable and hospitable. As a social worker, he served Kushtia Municipality from 1953 to 1958. He also participated in the War of Liberation of Bangladesh along with his sons. As a result of his contribution to the society Kushtia Municipality has named the lane by the eastern side

Why is Bosnia Bleeding?
Are they Guilty? Of What?

BOOK REVIEW

An Open Letter to the Pope by Shamael

Published by: Rummana Haq
Printed by: Islamic Foundation Press

Reviewed by:
M. Shamsher Ali

Vice-chancellor, Bangladesh Open University

A book titled "An open letter to the Pope" written by Shamael has recently appeared. At the very outset, I must say that this is a book with a difference and should be read by people of all faiths. Written under the title "An open letter to the Pope", the book depicts a nerve-racking pathetic scenario of the events in Bosnia and poses a question to the Pope "Is this Christianity?" The author then has very successfully attempted at dispelling from the minds of the Western people the idea that Muslims have been aggressive. In fact, it has been shown by quoting historical facts from reputed Western scholars that Muslims have always adopted the idea of "No first attack" and have repulsed aggression. The victory and spread of Islam has been due to the very substance in the message of the Holy Quran. The sword has never been the factor. The lack of understanding of the Islamic faith by the peoples of other faiths has led to an ever-widening gap between them. The responsibility for this misunderstanding should be borne also by the Muslims who should convey to the Jews and the Christians that their prophets are also our prophets and are mentioned with dignity in the Holy Quran and that the Muslims have been asked in this Book not to distinguish between prophets.

The author has aptly quoted from the Quranic verses and from Maurice Bucaille's book 'The Bible, the Quran and Science' to show that the Quran contains all the elements of science, economics and sociology necessary for conducting a meaningful life on this planet. There is hardly a topic of life that has not been covered in the Quran.

However, the point that should be emphasised is that the Quran is a clear guidance not for a particular community but for the whole of mankind

(Sura 3, Verse 138) and that all mankind is just one single brotherhood (Sura 21, Verse 92). This emphasis on universal brotherhood in a world torn by conflicts should greatly encourage people of all religions to have peaceful co-existence. Non-Muslims must not apprehend any harm from Muslims, as the religion of the latter has given them clear instructions to ensure just treatment with people of other faiths. Muslims have also a right to just treatment in the lands of the non-Muslims.

Although there is no compromise in Islam with the Unity and Omnipotence of God, it is the duty of every Muslim to convey to others that a Muslim can never be unjust and non-tolerant. The author has performed that duty remarkably well. The interesting thing is that beside quoting suitably from the Quran, the author has quoted from eminent non-Muslim personalities like George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, H G Wells, Stanley Lane-poole, Thomas Carlyle, Eisenhower, Humboldt, Maurice Bucaille, M K Gandhi, Napoleon Bonaparte, Sir Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan and many others whom the West respects and adores, to proclaim the greatness of the message of Islam. Such an analysis of the faith of Islam by deep and penetrating minds of the world has never been presented in one place either to our own intellectuals or to those in the West.

The author deserves nothing but praise for this wonderful intellectual achievement. Praise is also due to the author for unfolding to the common people the clear indications in other scriptures about our Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (SM) who has been described as the Comforter. The author has also highlighted the world-view of many illustrious pundits which points to the fact that the Quran is a common prayer for all.

However, a question which the author has not raised is — if Islam is a perfect code of life, why are Muslims in a sad state of affairs in many parts of the world? The answer is not difficult to find. Muslims are professing their faith and are observing rituals all right but are not following the code of Islam. The practice of Islam should be not merely on the performing of rituals but in performing acts which serve mankind. Unfortunately, in the context of the present day world, Muslims are unable to serve mankind, to the extent that they could, because of the lack of certain tools and techniques. One such tool is science and technology. Science is a strong point of the Quran and so it was of the early Muslims who taught the rest of the world so much. But it is no longer so with the present Muslims who have become technologically and hence economically dependent on the advanced countries. Muslims, the world over, are paying a

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE POPE

"We created man from the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in clay. If we had wished to find a partner, we could have found it in Our Presence if we ever did."

SHAMAEL

high price for this dependence. It is in this aspect of the present day Muslims which could have been highlighted by Shamael.

I have no words to console Shamael who is apparently shocked and bewildered at the inner contradictions and double standards of the western countries in almost all affairs of the Muslim countries. The world scenario presented by the author points to the present reality that might be right and that the jungle-law is still prevailing. I can only point to the society that we would all like to achieve a scientifically advanced society with full faith in the Almighty God and right action for the whole of mankind is the kind of reality that we should all strive for.

But for the present, if like Shamael, every Muslim can convey to others, through his or her words and action, the beauty and truth of the Message of Islam, the day is not far off when force will give in to reason. I compliment the author for such untiring efforts in appealing, through the Pope who symbolises Christian morality, to the realms of conscience of the saner sections of the world community for stopping the blatant violations, not only of human rights, but of life itself in Bosnia. I end by quoting from the last part of the author's open letter to the Pope: "Which of these verses, do you think is evil-inspired? Why is Bosnia bleeding? Are they guilty? Of what?"

Shabnam Mushtari at the British Parliament
A Spellbinding Performance

G D Govender writes from London



Prior to her rendition of Nazrul songs at the House of Commons, Shabnam Mushtari is listening to Mr Keith Vaz MP, a patron of British Bangladeshi Friendship Society. Shabnam is the first Asian woman to have sung at the British Parliament.

Shabnam, of course, also treated us in song to the profound philosophy, wisdom and lyrical beauty of the literary giant of the subcontinent Rabindranath Tagore.

It was an evening to savour and to remember. The multicultural audience applauded the chivalry and gallantry of Keith Vaz MP, especially the charming, delectable prose in which he set the stage for the inimitable Shabnam.

Shabnam also paid tribute to the man who made the evening possible, one of Britain's best known restaurateurs, Amin Ali. Amin, a quiet and secretive backer of the Asian arts, was this time forced to come out of his closet, especially after the revelation by Shireen Akbar, a feisty worker for the arts, that when her voluntary organisation was organising a major cultural event and run out of funds, they turned in desperation to Amin Ali, who unhesitatingly wrote out a cheque for £10,000.

The promoters of this most majestic of events in the hallowed halls of the formerly wholly imperialist British Parliament were the British Bangladeshi Friendship Society. The members of this powerful team with many more winning goals to score are: Amin Ali (chairperson), Nazrul Islam

Bashon (general secretary), Mohib Chowdhury, Paul Whittle, Syed Samadul Haque, Dr Fazal Mahmood, Denis Purcell, Syed Golam Dastagir Nishad, Karen Good and May Bayer.

We also need to remind ourselves of the high achieving Bangladeshi community expertly described by Amin Ali, who himself rose to his position of pre-eminence in Britain's

restaurant from humble beginnings: "Over the past decade, a number of Bangladeshis have begun to reach positions of success and influence in Britain."

"We need to incorporate ourselves into the mainstream political, economic and cultural machinery of Britain, because that is the most direct and likely way we can improve the lives of those who have been less fortunate than us here."

Interview with the Director General

Continued from page 9
far developed 1,000 titles for the universities in different fields. Some of these books are very popular and sell very quickly and there are others that have not been as popular with the students.

DS: Why not?
HR: Well in that case I will have to say some unpleasant things. In the universities today, students can get away with rotten notes prepared by some bloke some 10-15 years ago. These are then photocopied and handed down from generation to generation and they vomit all these notes and get their degrees sometimes even with a high second class. This is a very sorry state of affairs. It means that our students are not being informed about the latest in thoughts. So there should be a change in attitude. If the students use good textbooks and if in their evaluation, teachers are strict and see to it that students use good textbooks then this 'note craze' will go. Then probably students will go for the Bengali textbooks available.

DS: Bangla Academy has brought out a formidable list of publications. But how many are actually sold?
HR: We are selling a lot of books nowadays. During the

last financial year we sold books worth 65 lakh taka which is an all time record in this country. If you break this and analyze it you will find we are selling books worth Tk 125,000 each, week. Moreover we are hoping this year we will exceed the target of ten million taka.

This is because people now know more about our books. We are publicizing through TV and the news media has been very cooperative. In fact the whole country is involved in the Academy affairs nowadays and watches with interest what comes out of the Academy press.

DS: What projects are in the pipeline for Bangla Academy? What is its role in the 21st Century?
HR: For one thing, we have started a language training programme which teaches Bangla to foreigners; we are offering computer training courses; with the help of CITech we have developed a Bengali font; with Saptasindhuv we have developed an electronic typewriter which has been standardized and will replace the hand operated typewriter.

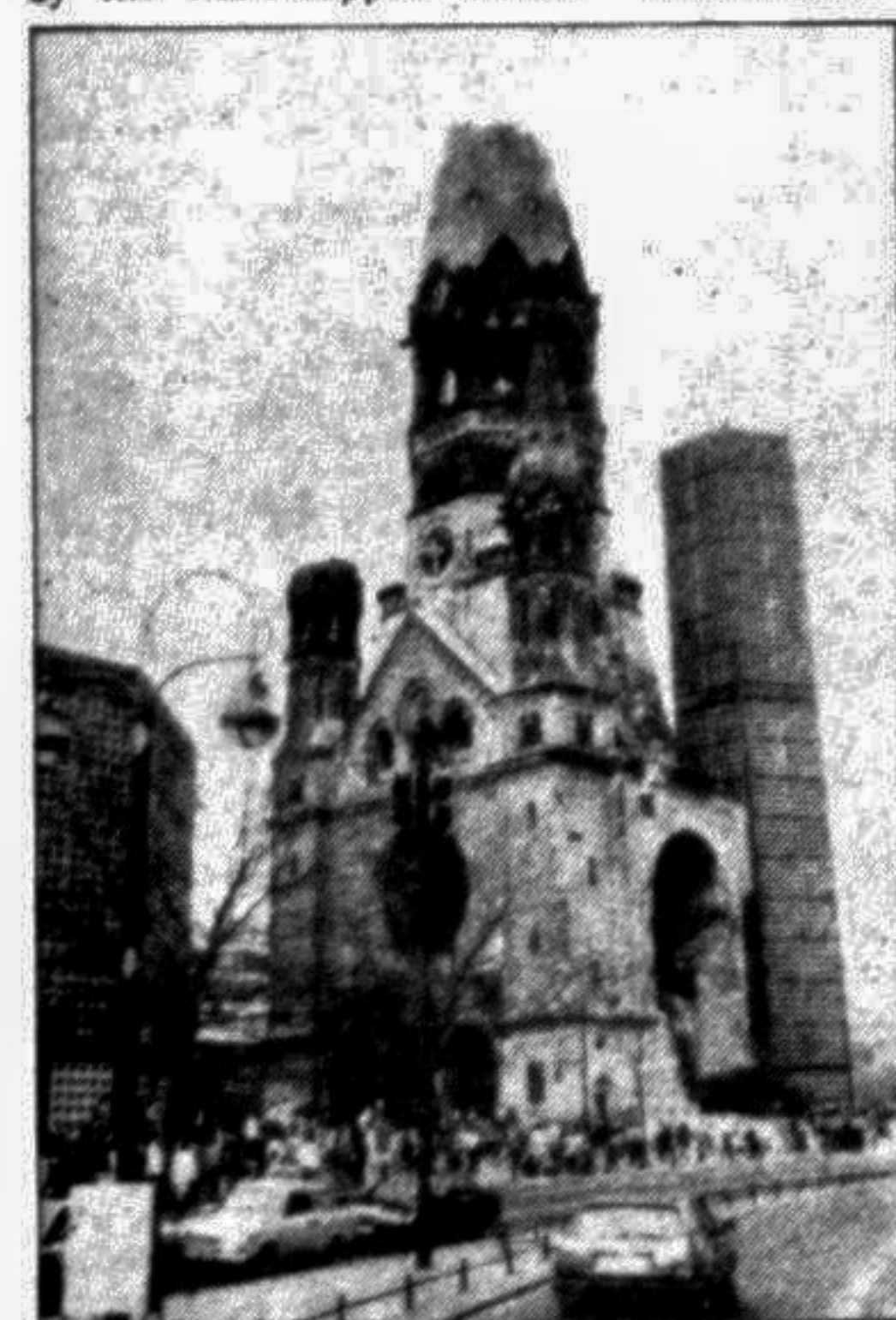
In order to face the new century, we are trying to modernize the Bangla Academy press hopefully by next June.

Moreover we have received 10 computers from CITech and Apple for our research and documentation and compilation programmes.

In the pipeline, we have a new project — a course in creative writing for young writers. The government will give 1.50 crore Taka for this programme which will hopefully be implemented within the next three months.

The library itself consists of a huge collection of old manuscripts, journals, rare books etc. Researchers come here to make use of these materials. In that sense the Academy is a kind of think tank where you can get any information for research. In the future we hope that this place will be recognized as a degree awarding institution. It will be a research centre that will award higher degrees. This means having from 5 to 10 renowned scholars as Bangla Academy professors. Some 50 students will be awarded MPHil or PhD degrees every three years. The Academy is therefore looking forward to meet the challenges of the new century. The changes will leave the Academy beyond recognition.

DS: Thank you for your time.



Aftermath of war - Still remains



Reconciliation



Victor and vanquished



Reunification