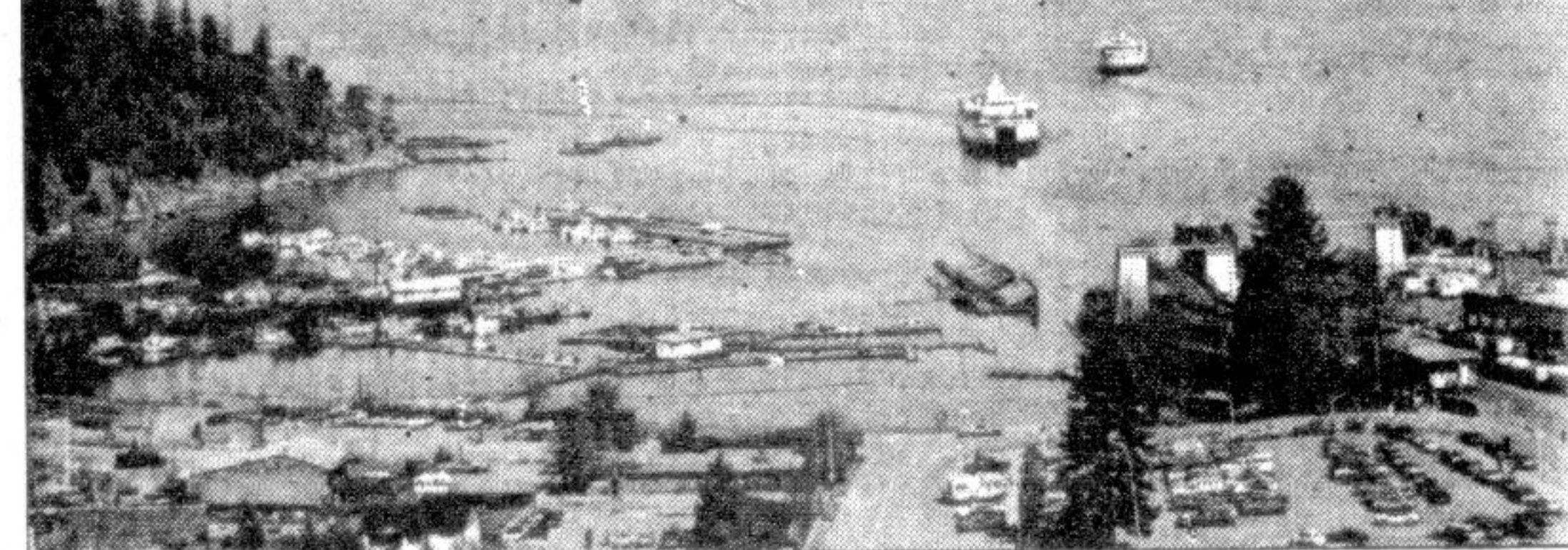


The Daily Star WEEKEND MAGAZINE

People and Places

They Enjoy Controlled Environment in Canada

by Dr. Maliha Khatun



Vancouver, BC waterfront.

It is a strange sight. Canada is the second largest country of the world in area but it has only 24 million people. Even in city suburbs you seldom see a man as you take a walk in the morning enjoying the gardens ablaze with summer flowers on either side of the road. You walk mile after mile but hardly come across a man or a woman on your way except a few senior citizens or youngsters jogging for health. I remember a dog inside a house always backed when we passed by in the evening. My son told me the dog had never before heard human footsteps as people seldom passed this way at night on foot.

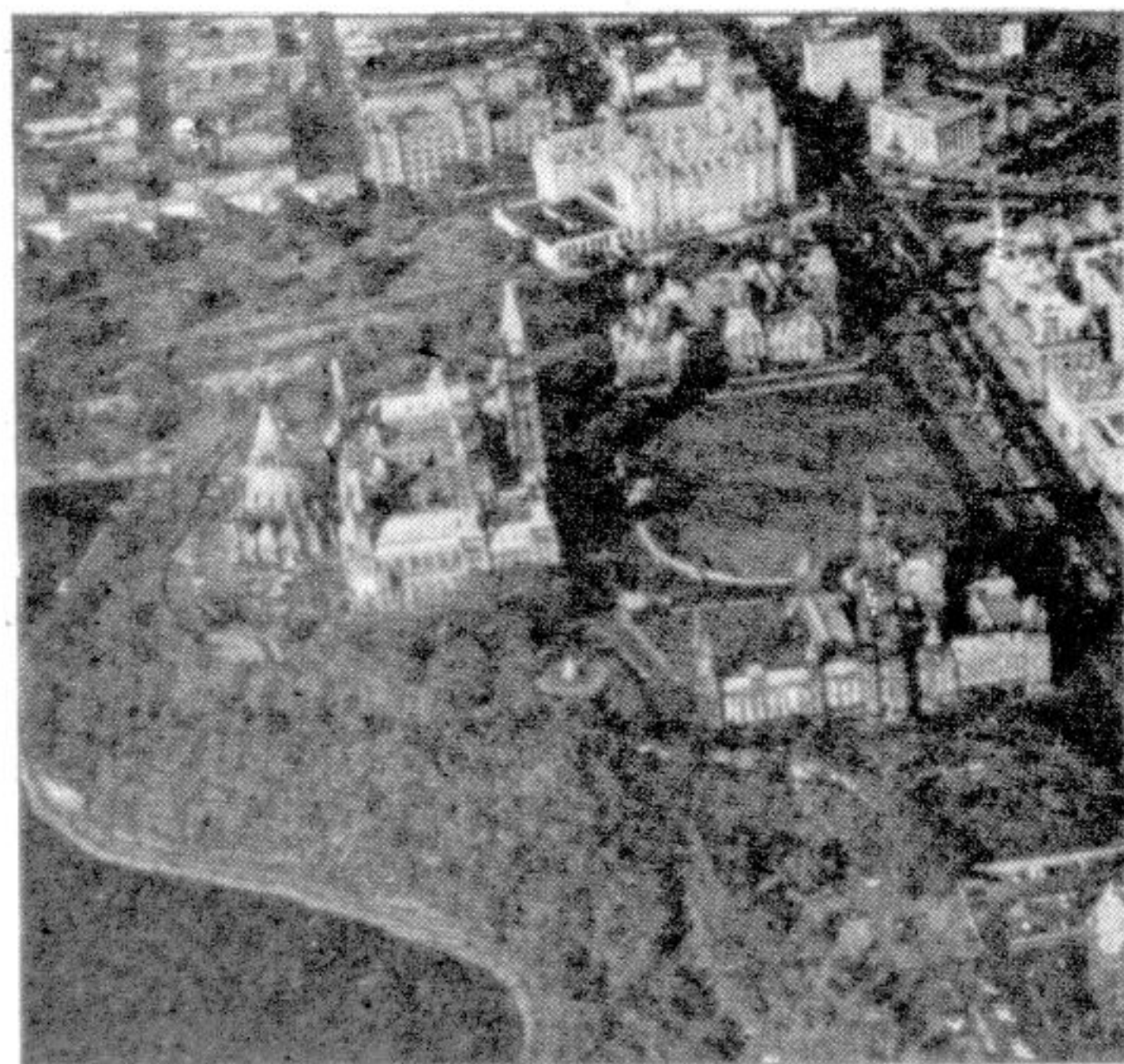
The houses are silent, the footpaths are silent, the fields and meadows are silent, the entire neighbourhoods are silent. The only sound you hear is the sound of the cars whizzing past or the par of the lawn mowers, especially on weekdays; every house owner is found trimming the lawn in front of his house. And in Canada, the houses in the suburbs have no fencing walls at all. Reason: the gardens outside your house and the well-trimmed lawn are a part of the roadside beauty and they must be enjoyed not by you alone but by the pedestrians as well.

The houses in residential areas in also have no fencing walls for the simple reason that elements which contribute to the destruction of open lawn and gardens do not exist in Canada. No herds of cows are seen nosing around, no heinous medley of urchins, armed with bamboo sticks are seen breaking twigs and branches of roadside trees.

As I see it, I have a feeling that we are in the age when western Europe was in the mid 15th century. Here is a picture of a roadside life in Edinburgh in Scotland. And what do you see? A confused medley of children, pedlars and pigs, not forgetting the puddles. The street was neither paved nor cobbled, but at intervals stepping stones had been laid down across the road. The centre was slightly higher; this was the causeway on which the gentry rode, open gutters ran down on either side of the road to the great delight of the pigs, wooden booths smuggled under the road, those of the same trade sticking together. The inevitable flocks of beggars wandered around, some lame or blind, it is true, but others sturdy rogues. In addition to all, that we see in the then Edinburgh street, we have something more to our credit to enhance the picturesque confusion of street life. Instead of pigs, we have a pack of pariah dogs and the flock of beggars is far bigger and far more clamouring.

The industrial revolution in Europe brought prosperity and gradually changed the social and economic condition and improved the standard of living. They made all round improvements and by controlling the natural environments turned their cities and countryside into virtual paradises.

In Canada as also in Australia I at once felt that I was in a man-made environment. This controlled environment is the product of science and technology. It speaks of



Parliament Buildings in Ottawa

man's power over nature. In almost all the western countries the modern age is dominated by science and its child-technology. One is reminded at every turn of the streets in Western cities how decisive science and technology have been in the organization of their enterprises and formation of their modes of living as well as thinking. As you wander about in the streets or sit by the fireside reading the papers or watching the television, you will not fail to realise that in many spheres of contemporary living — from domestic architecture to control of nuclear energy — the Western growth in technique which they own to science, holds a total sway over the environment and the human life. They all tend to create conditions favourable to lead a life of physical comfort and ease. The progress of the Western man tells the tale of his creative and adventurous spirit. Canada, America or as a matter of fact, the whole Western world tells the same tale of man's supremacy.

However, the enormous scientific and technological achievements of the Western World has not made the Western man master of his fate, but in some ways put him even more at the mercy of natural forces that he has learnt how to control. It is interesting to note here that the great philosopher-historian Dr Arnold Toynbee takes the view that "high technical achievement is connected with the decline rather than the growth of civilisation".

Beauty of nature in Canada cannot be explained in words. Rivers flow singing peacefully. Duchs swim peacefully. Gardens smile with colourful blossoms. Trees with red leaves softly swing in the breeze. And children play joyfully near rivers and meadows; older people sit in gardens and listen the birds sing.

Many people lie to enjoy the red, colourful forests. And to enjoy beauty of the garden, garden parties are thrown by rich people. Grainean Park created in 1938, celebrated anniversary when I was in Canada. To celebrate this historic event, the National Capital Commission invited us to a garden party on the grounds at Kinmore, the summer estate of Prime Minister. Garden parties are popular events in Canada. Associations of all kinds used garden parties for reunions, as social gathering during conventions or as fund raising events to support favoured charities. Garden parties gave politicians an opportunity to socialize with their electorate.

It is a pleasure to visit country, especially the one like Canada and then sit leisurely and ponder over the sweetpast.



Mount Teardale in Alberta and Banff, Canada's oldest National Park

predicament of women in general in the social milieu. Subjection of woman, both physical and mental, is a long drawn-out issue since the age of slavery. In fact, a greater part of humankind has remained enslaved and fettered for ages. And it must not be confused that regarding suffering, the conflict is not always between man and woman, but between the oppressing authority and the oppressed. But that this is a male-dominated world, woman faces the most tragic lot.

Not until the advent of the European Renaissance and then the Reformation movement in England that every human being is regarded as an independent being; independent of religion and state. But in practice, women were yet to be viewed as free and independent. Their rights of education was established but their physical strength was still argued on, for which they had to wait until the Industrial Revolution. By then,

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The green and gold mosaic, Prince Edward Island

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Mir Mosharraf Hossain: 'More than a Case of Colonial Aporia



The present piece is offered here in connection with the observance of the 146th birth anniversary of Mir Mosharraf Hossain, the author of *Bishad Sindhu*, who was born on November 13, 1848 and died in 1912.

by Azfar Hussain

ONE can see the semiology of colonialism symptomatically at work in the writings of most of the nineteenth-century prose-writers including Bankim Chatterjee and Mir Mosharraf Hossain. These writers, hailing from the middle class, occupied a peculiar space inside the colonial topography, as Edward Said calls it, that the nineteenth-century colonized India presented. The space was peculiar in the sense that the middle class then had an uneasy relationship with colonialism itself. The politics of colonialism always tended to incite wreckage and breakages in the cultural whole of India and thus wanted to induce a state of alienation between the middle class and the culture of the masses. True, the middle class fought against colonialism, against its values and texts, against its domination. But, such a resistance had its limits which are the limits of the class itself.

Mir Mosharraf Hossain's work exhibits both anti-colonial resistance, and signs of giving in to the pressures of colonial domination. But, while Mo-

sharraf's resistance is heavily charged with a kind of physical immediacy and force, his giving in appears only rhetorical.

Mir Mosharraf Hossain worked with a variety of forms. He wrote plays, autobiographical essays, treatises, novels, poems, etc. Though he is proverbially known as the author of *Bishad Sindhu*, certainly written on an epic scale and with epic imagination, Mosharraf also politicises his texts with his dramatic and dialogic interventions. Mosharraf himself strongly believed that dialogue, the speeches charged with the rhythm of living, could be more effective and direct than otherwise. And he comes up with speeches, and also with statements, in his *Zamidar Darpan* (the *Mirror of Zamindar*) which was published in 1873. Here is a text where one sees Mosharraf's experiences of the ideological commerce between colonialism and feudalism, where signs of both resistance and retreat can be read, and where *aporia* as the colonial fate begins to emerge. At least, a four-fold textual operation is discernible in *Zamidar Darpan*:

the text of domination, the text of violence, the text of resistance, and the text of retreat.

Violence, for example, is there for the eye and the ear. The inhuman pauperisation of the farmers encouraged by feudalism, and by its agent, *zamindar*, has been so imaginatively and audaciously brought to vision in *Darpan* that poverty itself turns out to be the crudest form of, what Said once called, *colonial violence*. There is yet another text of violence — *Neel Darpan* by Dinbandhu Mitra, published in 1860 — which exhibits the colonial power-relations between domination and subjugation — between the zamindar and the peasant. But, while violence in *Neel Darpan* is, at time, curbed by a distancing position Dinbandhu assumes, in *Zamidar Darpan*, this violence has a bitter, almost unlivable immediacy; a kind of thingness which would render any form of disinterestedness almost impossible.

It needs mentioning here that Mosharraf lived close to the Indian zamindars, saw them working and walking, and he himself also spent sometime working in the office of a zamindar. Mosharraf had left at least four autobiographical works from where we come to know that Mosharraf was very much tied to his relatives some of whom were zamindars themselves. This proximity is no doubt dangerous, but generates violence of the kind we just referred to, and also proves that Mosharraf is more courageous, even in the physical sense of the term, than one could then possibly anticipate.

Given the space and sweep of *Zamidar Darpan*, given its force and fury, one can certainly say that Mosharraf moves not only towards a text of violence, but also towards a text of resistance as he begins to dismantle, through the images and speeches of violence, the existing power-relations that marginalize and silence the poor landless farmers. This resistance, though physically made against the zamindar and the zamindari system, is also ideologically anti-colonial. When Mosharraf speaks of freedom and unity in *Go-Jiban*, or when he tries to foreground a kind of aestheticized politics of movement and liberty in the beginning stream of the rescue canto of *Bishad Sindhu*, we see Mosharraf's similar resistance at work, perhaps more charged with myth, music and meaning.

Continued on page 11

Ibsen's Nora and Woman's Individuality

by Rezau Haque

NORA, the heroine of Ibsen's play 'A Doll's House' left her home in quest of her true identity. This dates back to a long time: more than a century (it was published in 1879), and in the western society this is no longer a cause of tremor of excitement. But as far as we are concerned, our doors of perception are still not that open that we shall hail Nora on her way.

Nora's great stride certainly involves some ethical issues — is it not an outrageous strike on and vilification of the sanctity of marriage? Is it not immoral that she denies immodestly her primary duties towards her husband and her children? Is not her attempt too selfishly smug? But Nora asks us to see the other side of coin to vindicate her standing — "I must find out which is right — the world or I". Yes, she welcomes us to delve deep into the matter. We are to explore the causes why a woman is trying to be herself, trying to discover her individual worth. When her husband Torvald Helmer says that "Before everything else, you're wife and a mother". Nora retorts vehemently — "I don't believe that any longer, I believe that before everything else I'm a human being just as much as you are... or at any rate I shall try to become one". We find the mirror image of Nora in Djanendra Roy's Shushila (in 'Banganari') who upholds the belief that women are also eligible to freedom of choice.

Nora, a girl of romantic sensibility, could not cope with her husband's stringent morality or in other words, with his blind yielding to the social conventions. This antithetical situation gradually caused a gulf of differences between them, that eventually led Nora to her realization. From her childhood she observed that women are treated as dolls by men.

Before marriage, she was her papa's doll-child and now she has become Torvald's doll-wife. She painfully observed that

with the marriage-bond, she is enslaved with other drudgeries. And furthermore, what hurts her most is the realization that woman is a wanton plaything of man. However, in the environment she was in, it was impossible for her to find her true self; her being was getting crippled day by day and when she could no more bear it, she decided to leave her home not only making a breach to the marriage-bond, but also denouncing all other social and moral codes.

In respect of the treatment she had, Nora epitomizes the

their suffrage was established. And then came the French Revolution with a more humanistic approach — liberty, equality and fraternity — that kindled the latent spirit of all the oppressed, of course, of the woman to a great extent. People like Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, William Thompson, Herbert Spencer expounded their views to vindicate the standing of woman as a human being.

These humanitarian values were practiced somewhat considerably in the developed societies. But for us, it remained,

So, women should extricate themselves from the bonds of law and order which put the essentials of natural development in obligatory terms. Nora wanted to emerge out of these shackles. Tagore's characters as Shumitra, Gunabati, Shailabala, Bhanu and above all Nandini, all being incarnations of the individuality of women, stood in the need of freedom, not only of woman but also of the whole mankind. Tagore always spoke for the freedom of spirit from the social stagnancies as revealed in his plays like 'Muktadhara'.

Jean Paul Sartre and Simon de Beauvoir set a rare example. Till his death Sartre took the role of a husband and led his life with Beauvoir without getting married formally. Without committing to the customary formalities they took the side of freedom, righteousness, individuality and above all equality. They made it possible with their emphasis on the integrity, or uprightness of individuals. Let us all put ourselves on trial and ask — how far we are prepared to, show such regards to others to stand against the conventional values, that hurt people.

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'Achalayatan', etc. In fact, the attainment of freedom or individuality is the problem of us all. We shall later see that apart from the social laws there are other issues to be accounted for, that come in the way of attaining it. However, there is no denying the fact that for a civilized nation, it is perforce that everyone, especially woman, has proper dignity of a human being. Vivekananda asserted that a society becomes progressive in its attitude towards women. In ancient Greece, no discrimination was made between man and woman. In ancient India, particularly in the Aryan society, women had enjoyed a high social status. Today, in the modern and mechanical age, which depends more on one's intuition than on one's physical strength, we cannot discriminate sex in respect of one's innate faculties. It is empirically evident that in respect of demonstrating and exerting one's potentiality,

women, if given chances, are no less than men. So, there is no reason that they should not be ensured self-independence, freedom and thereby individuality. We should remember that the basis of social, moral and economic well-being, as J S Mill suggested, lies in the compatibility of the greatest good of the greatest member with the agreeable level of everyone's individuality.

So far goes the discussion, we have felt the need of woman's individuality and condemned society that comes in conflict with that. But in dealing with the problem at hand, we should give some thoughts to two other facts. First we should remember that society is for us, not we for the society.

Social Values, beliefs and laws changes as per the demand of the people, and the ardour comes from the people. We utter invectives against those religious practitioners whose regard woman as a means to serving man. We have seen the abolition of the inhuman cult of concrementation of a widow with her husband's corpse. So, it is the demand of the age, to adapt Voltaire's idea, that reason and judgement should be kept out of religious bounds.

We should remember the same in our political, economic affairs as well as in all walks of life. But these does not mean that we have to show our extreme disregard to the social codes. One's extreme volition may lead an individual to eccentricity, willfulness and waywardness and there may be anarchy in the society. And regarding free operations of mind and conducts, one may be fallible to transgress the bounds of ethics. And herein lies our second consideration to pay heed to. While asserting one's freedom of will as well as individuality one must not be ignorant of the air he or she breathes. We often try to feel ourselves endowed with the western values without getting ourselves

Continued on page 11