



Interview with Members of the Jury

by Fayza Haq

'Babgladeshi Artists Have a Good Standard'

— Sawasdi Tantisuk (Thailand)

S AWASDI Tantisuk, from Thailand, who was one of the members of the jury of the Sixth Asian Art Biennale '93, giving his impression of the occasion said, "This is the first time that I have come to Bangladesh. I was impressed both by the paintings and the sculpture pieces which I found modern. I liked the graphics work best of all as they were most progressive, in my opinion."

Tantisuk said, "I myself have been painting for 50 years. I have worked mostly in water colour and have not faced any major problems in my career in getting materials or finding patrons."

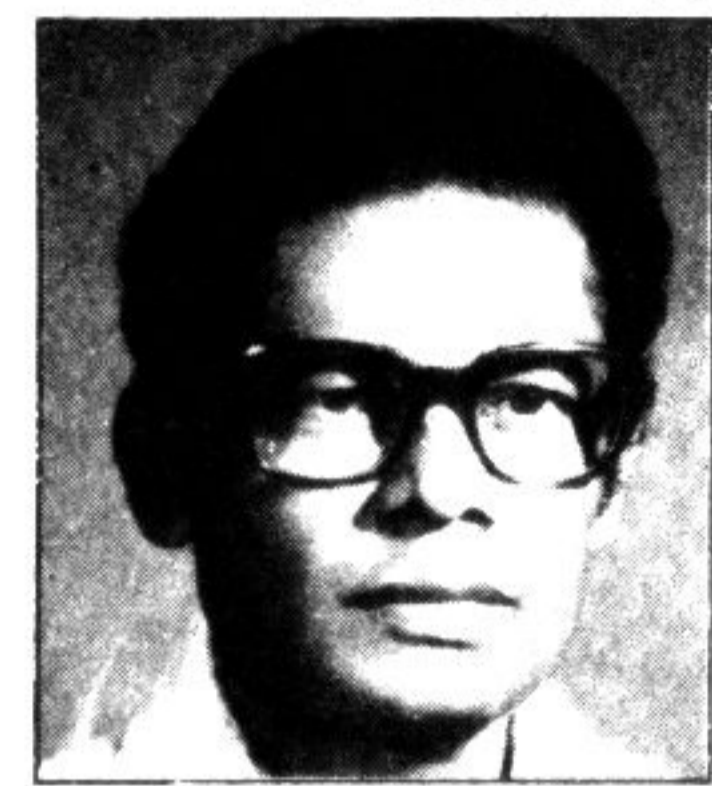
Dwelling on the artists of Bangladesh he said, "They have a good standard and are comparable not only with those in Asia but also with those in the countries of the west. I am making this comment based on the



6th Asian Biennale of Bangladesh. Their imagery, colour combination and texture experimentation are certainly promising.

'India's Standard Could have been Much Better'

— Abdur Razzaque (Bangladesh)



Abdur Razzaque, another member of the jury from Bangladesh, giving his opinion of the Art Biennale said, "I think this Biennale excels the ones

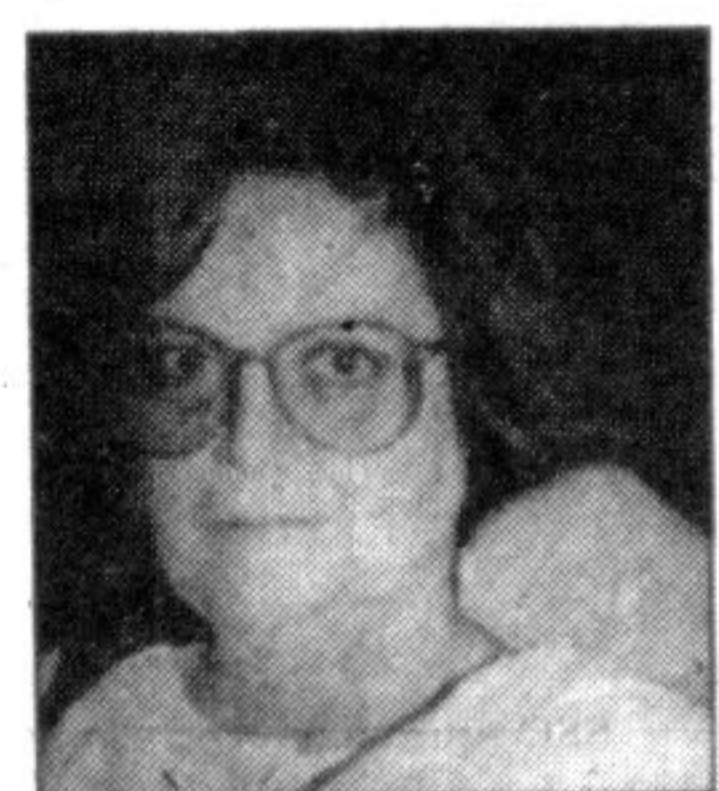
before. This year the number of foreign entries are more than before. I feel that they have improved over the last few biennales. This year Saudi Arabia, Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries sent in good entries. The overall work of Bangladesh is good no doubt. India's standard could have been much better.

Indian authorities did not send their best work or even their better quality works. In selecting the entries for the Biennale, as regards the foreign countries, there must be some strict rules and regulations and set standards. The Biennale should improve with time. Instead we have seen better works before.

Some Opinions from Participants

Coming to Bangladesh is Like a Dream Come True'

S ALIMA Hashmi, the daughter of the famous poet, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, who has been teaching painting for 23 years in Lahore, speaking about herself, said, "I am currently researching and writing a book on the women painters of Pakistan. I think their role is quite unique, not just among Asian countries, but generally speaking, because most of the major art institutions were started by women and staffed by women, and this is continuing."



mean from a general worldwide point of view. Looking at the Bangladeshi entries, I was interested in the number of women artists whose work, to my mind, was extremely fine."

Biennale is that I'm getting a chance to see what is currently in the art world in Bangladesh, comparing that and seeing the co-relation with what is happening in my own country."

She added, "There is a lot of exciting relevant work coming out. The artists are conscious of the fact that they have to communicate with the people. There is an expansion of the art market which influences what people are doing. There are a lot of serious painters who are concerned about issues rather than about selling their works. This is always very stimulating."

Bangladesh has Broken from Stereotyped Themes'

Dodi Karim Tabba, who represented Jordan, said about herself, "I have made Jordan my home for 18 years, and am married to a Jordanian sculptor. I graduated from the Punjab University. In Jordan I worked as a graphic designer for the Royal Jordanian Airlines. I have been promoting art and painting myself for the last 15 years. I have done gallery management in Finland and Sweden, and ran two major galleries in Jordan."



Jordan on the occasion, although I am the only delegate from my country. The Jordanian works include water colour, collage, ink drawings, and sand on oil — which was very much appreciated by the Japanese jury."

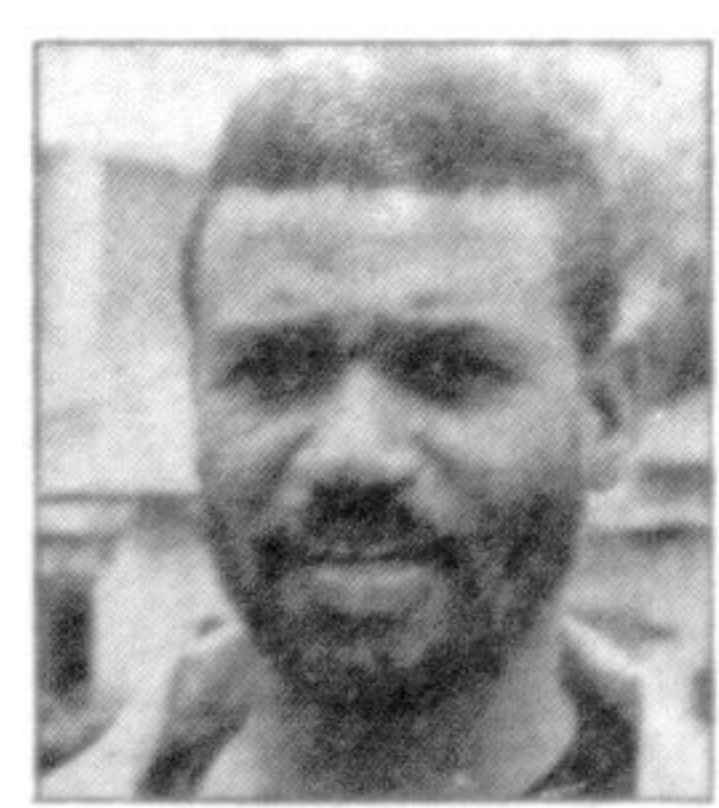
themes from nature. Of course, they are a part of Bangladeshi culture but I think in art there must be more freedom. I would say that the quality of the Bangladeshi painters is at par with what one can see in the galleries of USA."

Talking about her impressions of the other countries, she praised Japan for sending "an obvious best selection of work". She said that she was also impressed by Korea and Pakistan, "I was happy to see the works of my teacher from Lahore, Qudsiya Nisar. As for the entries from UAE, they really surprised me as I have lived in UAE and have not seen art of that standard before. There are some countries which should have contemplated more before they sent in their works, but I will not mention any names."

"I do collages and mixed media. I used to do figurative work but I have broken away from it and into more abstract. I think abstract art is a true form of expression. I have done art courses in England. As a married woman I could not venture into a masters degree abroad," she added about herself.

I was Surprised with Their Progress'

Abdur Rahim Salim of the UAE, giving his impression of the Biennale said, "I feel the Art Biennale '93 has been successful and has brought prestige and honour for Bangladesh. I was delighted to meet the other artists from different countries and to sit and exchange views with them, and to learn about the different cultures that the Biennale has brought together."



son of Bangladesh, Salim said, "I enjoyed talking to the friendly Bangladeshi artists. I was surprised with their progress. I find the people of the country kind, generous and ready with their smiles, and this openness of heart is something I have not

found in any other country. I've been to Egypt, England, Finland, France and Russia. Nowhere else are the people as friendly."

Giving his impression of the standard of Bangladeshi artists, he said, "I was specially impressed by the work of the Bangladesh gold medal winner. Discussing about his group from UAE, he said that there were two delegates, who belonged to an art society, "In UAE," he informed, "there is not much development of fine arts as yet. I have personally spent five years in Cairo and before that held exhibitions in my own country. In UAE there are about 500 artists and they are trying their best. Out of the lot only 150 are regular artists. We have, unfortunately, no college of arts of our own."

'Art Lovers in Japan Go in for the Modern'

— Hideki Nakamura (Japan)

Hideki Nakamura, from Japan, who was also one of the members of the jury, had this to say, "I was a commissioner in the Bangladesh Biennale of '86. I felt that the 6th Asian Biennale is much better than the one I saw before, as more countries participated this time, so there is more variety of style. This applies both to the Bangladeshi artists and the foreign ones. I would have liked to have stayed on longer and seen more of the Bangladeshi artists and talked with them, as I liked them so much."



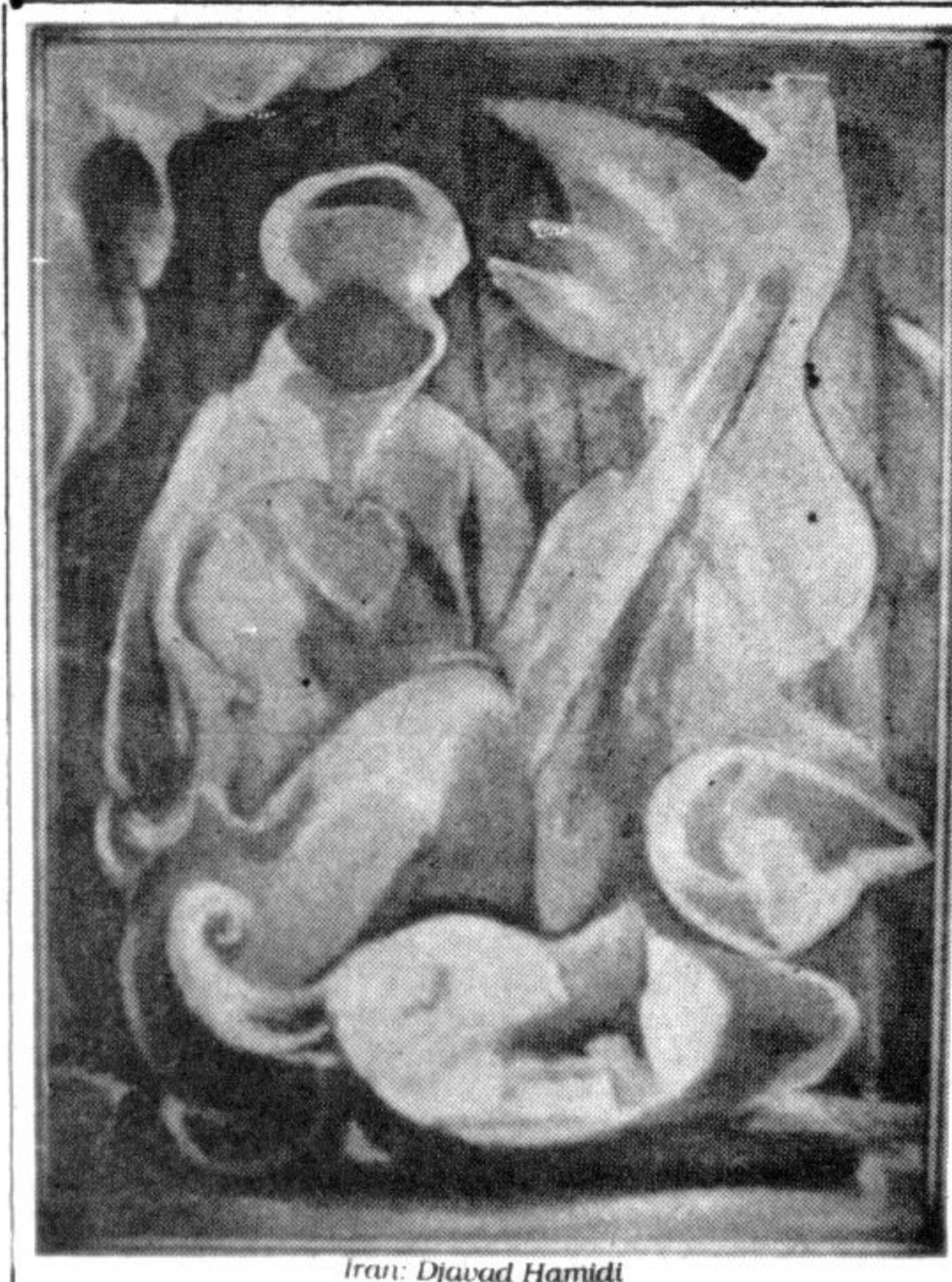
Speaking about Japan's entries Mr. Nakamura said, "They put up what could be seen as installations which were modern and huge. This type of work is very popular in Japan. My country has traditional works too as opposed to the modern work which is on display at the Biennale. After 1886 the Japanese people began to get westernised. By the 50's and 60's they were even more influenced by the American culture. By the 80's the young artists felt the need to go back to their own culture and were searching for their identity. They began combining traditional images and styles in their avant garde forms, at times."

He continued, "One artist at the 6th Asian Biennale, Bangladesh, Kijuro Yahagi, brought in holes in his images to show how perfect images have been destroyed in his country. The other artist, Kazunori Sadahiro, wished to depict the industrialisation of his country and the metropolitan development around him. Thus the works appear highly

westernised. Many young art lovers in Japan go in for this overtly modern form, although traditional art exists, side by side, for those who prefer more orthodox work."

Speaking about himself, he said, "I am an art critic and have been working since the late 60's, writing for newspapers and magazines. I am also a professor at the Nagoya College of Art and Design. I have been teaching for more than twenty years, and have been dealing with art theory and art aesthetics."

Commenting on the Bangladeshi artists he said, "They are very different from western painters and I believe that there is great potential in them. The young artists themselves should be aware of their own strength, and work on it." Asked if the Bangladeshi artists were keeping to their tradition he added, "Tradition is a type of mental memory. Based on tradition, the artists should go ahead and create new things pertaining to their contemporary surroundings."



Iran: Djavad Hamidi

'The Standard of the Biennale is Almost as Good as anywhere in the World'

Bilquis Ahmed Fakhro from Bahrain has been working as an artist for over ten years now. She graduated in '75 from San Francisco, California. "For five years I was busy raising my children. It is in the 80's that I took up my career seriously. I am a free lance artist and am an art critic for newspapers and magazines."



Talking about the standard of the Art Biennale '93 Bilquis said, "It is almost as good as anywhere in the world. We are all living in modern times and are affected by the late nineteenth and twentieth century art. At the same time, one must express one's feelings through one's own heritage. The issues that one presents in one's paintings must come from within oneself. One does not have to imitate the west. However, now we are more international rather than living in the packets of the east or west. Subjects like human rights, environmental problems, and

feminist movements are universal topics. In his Biennale I find these subjects, and come to the conclusion that it is a good getting together of artists and their works."

Finally, commenting about the standard of Bangladeshi works once again Bilquis remarked, "They express themselves as artists from California, New York or Paris do."

Asian Biennale The 'Best Award' Winners

by Dipa Haq

WITHOUT doubt, the biggest cultural event of the year in Bangladesh is the Sixth Asian Art Biennale. Controversy over awards is not unusual in such competitions, and so it is worth noting that this year there haven't been any overt protests. However, one can question the taste and aesthetic standards of the judges, even though, one grants their fairness in judging. I for one, do not understand how Lee Yeul's 'Evolution in Space' can be given a 'best award'. It fails to convince me that it has the thematic richness or the technical mastery that a winner of the top prize ought to have. I have had no such difficulty with the two other 'best award' winners, Mansoorul Karim's 'Roots' and Kazunori Sadahiro's 'Chain Form'.

Mansoorul Karim's 'Roots' (14 and 15)

At a distance the febrile lines on the paintings reminded me of the surrealist Matta. As one gets closer, they look more like gashes on the flesh of the paint. Karim's two canvases in oil are infused with lyrical movement and romantic colours. Both paintings are divided into two segments — upper and lower; within each frame two canvases are joined horizontally. Thick paint covers the surface but, interestingly, not in the popular impasto fashion. The lower sections of the works are darker in mood, even though 'Roots 14' has much white on the right hand side, where flashes of cadmium red on a patch of black along with tortured human forms and red incised lines, like wounds, create a psychological charge of romantic agony.

Lee Yeul's 'Evolution in Space'

It is done in mixed media — oil and acrylic — and is what I would call a pretty picture, superficially pleasing but providing no lasting aesthetic satisfaction. Its dominant colours — pink and brown — remind one of strawberries and chocolates; dots and spots on the thick and smoothly laid-on warm-brown paint enhance the impression.

The interaction between the various forms and textured surfaces seems a little too contrived. The exploration of texture too, is somewhat overdone: the painted surface has been raked with combs in one place, impasto dominates in another, cross-hatchings and squiggles with a pencil are deployed elsewhere. What I am trying to point out is that, this is technique for technique's sake — which, unfortunately, is the flaw of much art in this region.

There are echoes of realistic forms on Yeul's canvas — what appears to be the head of a galloping steed occupies the centre of the composition, and close to the upper left corner is a spotted form in which, I can recognize the body of a startled deer. Incongruous in depiction is the use of two extremes of brushwork techniques: expressionist in the central form,

smooth in the other. It is evident that the artist has picked up varied techniques without having assimilated them.

The upper halves of the canvases sing with organic forms. The greens, cerulean blues and reds of objects like spores, mushroom-like forms, cocoons, bees, flowers and foliate shapes all add up to a vibrant affirmation of life.

I would like to end with a caveat, though. The thematic range that the artist has tried to incorporate, I feel, demands a more architectural treatment.

Kazunori Sadahiro's 'Chain Form'

At first sight, the ordinary visitor will probably be baffled by this mixed-media work, but anyone with a sensitive eye will be intrigued by this array of mechanical images — it is al-

most an exhibition by itself. This very young painter (Sadahiro was born in 1969) is fascinated by Japan's industrial archaeology — its post-World War II, low-tech, pollutant-spewing machines, which seem so remote from today's high-tech, dust-free, affluent Japan. Sadahiro recognizes that this now-dead past created the prosperity that he has inherited; hence the deep psychological attraction.

What he has done in this series is to take a simple, almost primitive industrial component, a small model of which is installed like a piece of sculpture, and let his imagination play with it. The result is a series of mechanical images derived from this component and mounted on novel, box-like panels with wheels and handles.

Sadahiro seems to meditate on what the inner structure of the device might have been like. Each of the panels is enriched by layers of small blueprints and drawings of diverse objects — machines, maps, the human form, umbrellas etc. He has thrown a veil over his emotional response to the subject and has treated it instead in a highly cerebral manner. It is noteworthy that the map of the USA has been used a number of times, no doubt to point out that the USA has been an inspiration and a model for Japan's industrialization. Interestingly, even though the artist has used various devices, such as, arrows and dotted and unbroken lines, that help to suggest movement, his images of the mechanical device in all the panels remain resolutely stationary; one is tempted to read into this criticism of the view that equates industrialization with progress.

What struck me most about 'Chain Form' is the images triggered off by my own imagination, so that I found myself trying willy-nilly to unravel the symbolic significance embedded in them. I am tempted to go back to them a few more times, even though Sadahiro's kind of art isn't quite my cup of tea — a sure sign that he has created something compelling.

Mir Mosharraf Hossain

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Resistance has two stages, at least, as Edward Said justly points out in his *Culture and Imperialism*. Said maintains: "After the period of 'primary resistance', literally fighting against outside intrusion, there comes the period of second, that is, ideological resistance..." Though Said speaks of resistance temporally and linearly, it so happens that a primary resistance may, at the same time, be an ideological resistance which we see in Mosharraf, but on a scale defined by, among others, the limits of the middle class. The movement that Mosharraf carries forward in his *Darpan* suddenly degenerates, at the end, into an image of submission, into a cooked-up *sura* of supplication: Mother Victoria, you are Great, save us! For Mosharraf Victoria becomes a mother — a mother for the middle class indeed. This 'Mother' would save one only in rhetoric — that is yet another implication Mosharraf provides, constituting a case of colonial *aporia*. In yet another work by Mosharraf — *Udasth Pathik (The Indifferent Traveller)*, we see the writer uncasily juggling up this implication through a typical colonial image of domination and submission: "The English people are our masters. They

are gods, they are infinite... We salute them heartily." Certainly, the heart is not there (that heart with which Mosharraf speaks of freedom in his epic work *Bishad Sindhu*), but that salutation is only a colonial stock response, a colonial reflex action like "I beg most respectfully to state, sir", etc.

Whatever may be the limits of the class, the fact that Mir Mosharraf Hossain is an anti-zamindari and by extension an anti-colonial writer is evident indeed. And his anti-colonialism is further bolstered by his anti-communal outlook. His work *Go Jiban*, published in 1987, exhibits a militant response to communalism which draws its ideological energy and inspiration from colonialism itself. Mosharraf undauntingly mentions in the first proposition of *Go Jiban*: "Both the Hindus and the Muslims are dominant here in Bengal."

Indeed, colonialism in India he wanted a division between the Hindus and the Muslims, but Mosharraf did not. True, Mosharraf had to write a few low-quality religious books towards the end of his life, but he was never in favour of a meaningless schism between the Hindus and the Muslims. His *Bishad Sindhu* can certainly be read as a text of resistance to cultural splits and breakages,

and also as a text of an epic struggle to achieve a comprehensive unity so as to stem the divisive colonialist dynamics that inspires communalism which is, metaphorically, a dagger in the hand of a Simar unmovingly seated on the breast of Hossain.

One of the critical trends, still existing, is manifested in the characterization of Mosharraf as a great Muslim writer. But, what is a Muslim writer, after all? The word *Muslim*, as customarily applied to Mosharraf, only delimits the power, potentials and possibilities of the writer, and also communalizes the act of criticism itself by freezing the position of Mosharraf against the fiction of the Hindu position. A writer is a writer; he is neither a Muslim nor a Hindu, nor a Christian, and Mosharraf certainly demands and deserves such a secular critical attention.

In today's Bangladesh, post-colonial resistance to imperialism is time and again dominated and subdued by the terribly centering culture of bourgeois politics, which is responsible for communalism that we see today. Mir Mosharraf Hossain, here, certainly provides inspiration for an anti-colonial, anti-communal and even anti-imperialist struggle.

The writer teaches English at Jahangirnagar University and is on the editorial board of 'Saptahik Samoy', a national view-weekly.

Ibsen's Nora

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not true to herself, (though to a much lesser degree than Helmer) as she had been maintaining a secret against her husband for long, to be used as a weapon in hours of necessity. (This gives the implication that her inner world was shattering gradually for long.)

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.

Today, what is most necessary is that, everyone should develop a considerable state of self-knowledge. By acquiring self-knowledge man would have a fair attitude towards woman. They would be able to create and practice the values and maintain the situation in which woman can operate with their proper human dignity. And for woman, they will educate them-

selves, not for their husbands, but for themselves.

So, our people are to be endowed with the practical and scientific knowledge and the education that, as Rousseau suggested, would enlighten each individual and thus edify one's mind. To conclude, let's hope everyone gets, proper education. Let everyone learn that each human being, be it a man, or a woman, is an individual, that each has a separate entity.

JFK

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America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty, which will protect the beauty of our natural environment, which will protect the great old American houses, squares, and parks of our national past, and which will build handsome and balanced cities for our future. I look forward to an America which will reward achievement in the arts as we reward achievement in business or statecraft. I look forward to an America which commands respect throughout the world, not only for its strength but for its civilization as well. And I look forward to a world that will be safe not only for democracy and diversity, but also for personal distinction."

Longing

by Rumi Islam

He said good bye and went away —
The twilight glow lost in the dark of evening.
He didn't turn up again — and start ringing
My door where I look for night and day.

When will come back beloved mine?
Smile on lips, and your eyes pecking
Of your heart, I'm sure that's kidding
For me, while mine too for thine;

And bury all the difference at once
We two in equal tranquility

Translated by Mala Shahu