

PERHAPS it was the only Friday (8 Oct.) I didn't bother to get my copy of The Daily Star since its launching, for I knew My World would be in a suspended animation for another two weeks. The regular medical check-up, a bit of rest and an overdue holiday — all in the Thai capital would naturally give him a fillip to his writing when he is back home by 20 Oct, as he hoped and professed. I just kept counting the weekends.

Possibly it all needs a hyperbolic expression upto an elegy to describe the moment I heard he died — the impact of his death on me later.

Where do I begin — I Well it was a bright morning in the middle of the year 1989. My eyes stopped at a heading on the front page of the Bangladesh Observer — S. M. Ali joins Observer as editor. My eyes sparkled with excitement — yes, it looks like I know the man! I met him in Kuala Lumpur! But what excited me was my discovery of a fact.

In 1987, during my training at AIBD in Kuala Lumpur one day we took a break and decided to visit UNESCO office which was housed on the same building. We the Bangladeshi group was earlier told by Mr A'bad, Director (Technical) of ABU, that another prominent Bangladeshi was holding the prestigious post at UNESCO there.

We entered the UNESCO office. He was alone. He looked up with a smile and welcomed us. He inquired many things about our country. With his winsome face he sounded sage and seemed altruist. The next day I proposed to drop in his office again. My teammates appeared declining, saying there was no pomposity of personnel, staff and visitors in his room better move towards Mr. A'bad's chamber. So I walked up alone. He nodded with a smile — the smile which was innate in him. There was no visitor, no sign of busy work — he was found alone again. I don't seem able to remember what we talked but I remember — mostly I spoke. He seemed to be a good listener. But I didn't have the slightest guess that the S. M. Ali of UNESCO and journalist S. M. Ali (whose column 'Dateline Asia' in the Bangladesh Observer I always read with avidity) was the same person. Neither did he give me the slightest hint that they must have been read and heard by many Bangladeshis including myself! That was what we should describe as the quintessence of modesty. If we could attain this simple characteristic it will give at least one perfection to the millions of us. So when I came across the news on the front page with his photo I was full of joy. I decided I must see him soon.

The changes he made during his sojourn at the Observer were sheer noteworthy. Its editorials, post-editorials, reporting, features — everywhere there came laudatory changes. I never knew there were such good hands in that paper. What were these same staff doing so long? I wondered. Seeing S. M. Ali with the Observer for a few months only, my conviction (the fate of a newspaper depends enormously on its editor) was confirmed.

In last December, I received a letter of invitation from our Alumni as usual (The English Alumni of Dhaka University holds its regular re-union on last Friday of December). But it was different at that time. It came with Alumni logo but from the office of The Daily Star where S. M. Ali, himself an Alumni, addressed the Alumni, along with the invitation, with a sharp appeal which concluded — "Read The Daily Star and Subscribe." Bob Dylan asks in his song — "How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man? How many things must a man take care in

Let Him be There



by Salahuddin Akbar

a newspaper before we call him an editor? S. M. Ali was an editor.

In reply, I made another appeal to S. M. Ali that instead of subscribing, I indeed deserved a complimentary copy. The reason — very simple. It looked like my mission when I kept telling people of my acquaintance after the launching of The Daily Star in '91 — "Have you seen the new English daily The Daily Star? Star has replaced Observer. Read it. You'll agree with me." They believed me because they also saw me advocating for the Observer too long (especially during my teens when I contributed to the pages of Young Observer). In fact, there came over a juxtaposition of feelings in me. I was witnessing the looting number of readers from my old favourite and gloating over the increasing number of my new favourite Star. I happily remember I made quite a few dozens of subscribers (apart from my Television Headquarters office and Newsroom) of Star within a few months. Most of the subscribers told me that when they heard the death news of S. M. Ali they instantly thought of me. How often I spoke to them about his idea, zeal and work! Being remembered alongwith someone great is something to feel complacent. It runs parallel to another incident occurred years ago when Uncle Kim (Thomas Ansell) died. My friends whom I spoke about Uncle Kim as my editor, during my student life, thought of me with the news of his death. Both Thomas Ansell and S. M. Ali once worked in the same Observer. T. Ansell did not get at all from that paper what he really deserved and died in utter financial distress, and the obituary of S. M. Ali was published in that paper (from where he resigned) by an agency report UNBI! No staff writer was there to write a few lines of obituary for that paper where he began his journalistic career!

I sent a few letters to the mail section of Star. And I had been longing to meet S. M. Ali and recall our meeting in Kuala Lumpur (The managing director of Star Mr A S Mahmud also once asked me to see S. M. Ali). I attempted several times — "He is not in the office, he is off to-

Hector the flashing helmet...

S. M. Ali believed in the essential goodness of every human being. My short stay in South East Asia made me marvel at the progress there and subsequently I was turning pessimistic about Bangladesh while S. M. Ali returned home after decades from there with optimism for his country which never withered away. He was serious yet he went along with his usual sense of humour — a rare gift inherited from his uncle Syed Mujtaba Ali (his early piece of My World where he described how it took him 30 years to get his MA certificate — is a typical one). His thoughts and visions surpassing his insight into current issues and swift penning of problems is simply astounding and hardly to be found again. The quickness of his mind to see the multifarious aspects of a single issue was always our food for thought. The ethics of journalism was so truly imbibed in him that he consistently searched for democracy and common welfare through his timely commentaries. To our wonder, it is perhaps the only newspaper, that he shaped, which does not sadden the readers with obvious politicisation. In its terse and deeply moving editorial of the inaugural issue of The Daily Star S. M. Ali enunciated — "to serve the nation as a truly independent newspaper No politician will be able to take this paper for granted, but none will be given cause to doubt our fairness." Making the Star shining still (in our period of decadence like the Jacobian period of decadence in England) as an independent newspaper is the hardest job to be performed by his successors and disciples though they can still name it as the only without mentioning daily in the country. Here lies a solace for its late founder-editor.

There are certain deaths when even the clown king of American journalism Art Buchwald weeps, in his writing on the death of John F. Kennedy, he wrote as many as 23 lines — each sentence begins with 'Weep'. While entering the Baitul Mukarram Mosque for S. M. Ali's namaj-e-janaza the assigned TV cameraman asked me if I was a relative of late Ali or whether hailed from Sylhet district because he never saw me attending any such occasion though I myself put a number of obituaries on TV screen. I replied, "Nothing of that sort. But to me he was our Russell Baker." My ex-colleague was, however, happy to see me there. When John Lennon died in '80, his ex-beatle Paul McCartney did not go to the funeral; he said he would mourn in private. Lennon-McCartney played together. Their death should be shocking to each other which might need a private mourning. I know S. M. Ali well but he didn't know me. Still I felt I wanted to mourn his death in private. Instead of going to the Press Club for janaza I went to Baitul Mukarram Mosque.

My chance to meet S. M. Ali was never fulfilled during his life time. This time when finally I had my chance to see him I would have to see only his dead face! — I sighed. His dead body was being taken away to Press Club for the second janaza and from there to The Daily Star premise for a while. I quickened my pace. I got entangled in a traffic jam. I met a friend of mine. He just held me on. The sudden evening drizzle sent us scurrying for shelter. The evening lay enveloped into total darkness. I reached the Star and found the whole atmosphere still. At the entrance when asked for a glimpse of his face they said — "His body is taken away to Banani graveyard a short while ago. You just missed." It echoed the reply of my earlier inquiry — "He's out." I know he is out there somewhere — to shine on somehow. The writer is Deputy Director, DFP

There have been numerous epithets for late Ali by the people writing in memoriam (There seems no exaggeration — not at all, all epithets are exact and even it invites more) — the doyen of journalism, the epitome of journalism, the forerunner of journalism. Yet I seem to be insatiated. I wish I could use metaphor or the epithets for him as we read in Homer's Iliad; — Achilles the great runner,

In Keeping with the Concern

BOOK REVIEW

Drug Addiction Among the Students of Dhaka University (A Sociological Study)

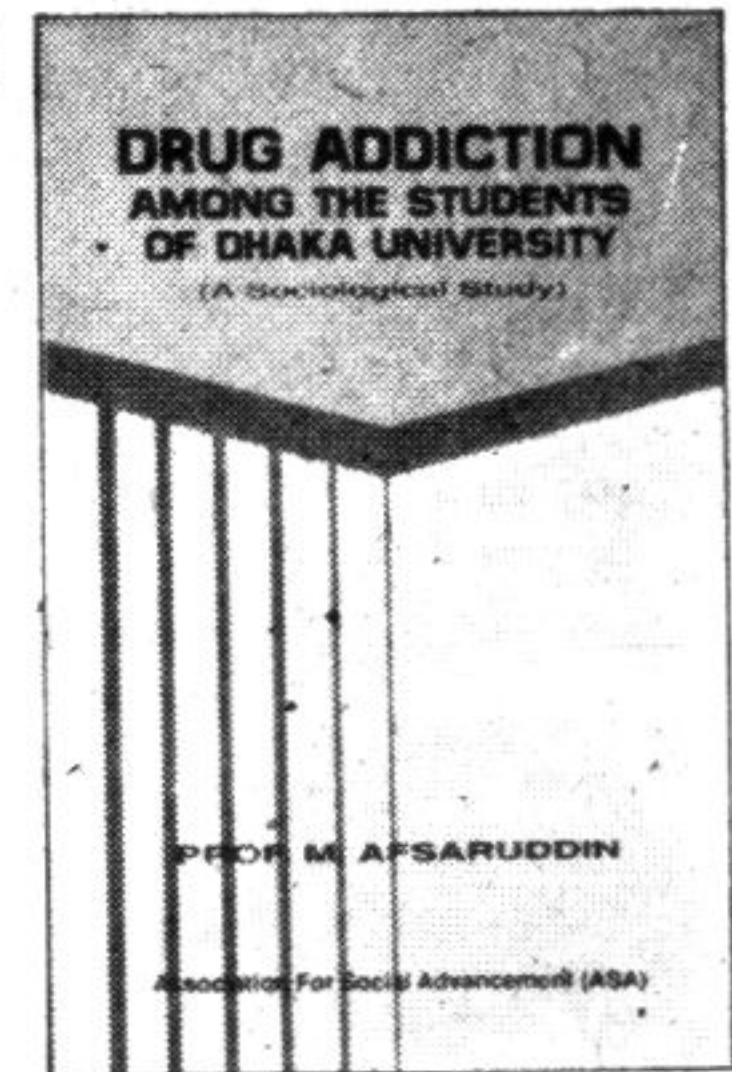
by M Afsaruddin

Published by Association for Social Advancement (ASA), Dhaka, 1993.

Price Tk 60.00, 85 pp.

Reviewed by

Professor Muhammed Anisuzzaman



— both foreign and domestic — also goes with drugs.

A major reason for drug addiction is frustration (28%) and it is always consumed with friends (90%). Video movie is the enjoyment for most addicts (74%) indicating that its effect has not been healthy at all. The effect of religion and the habit of offering Friday prayer are anything but regular. Another interesting discovery is that discipline at their home is of moderate nature and that most parents are good. This suggests that the addicts took to drugs for conditions outside home (love affairs, frustration, just for enjoyment with friends, etc.).

Having shown the drug addiction level among the Dhaka University students, the author goes on to suggest how the evil can be fought at social, governmental, family, school and religious levels.

The book is well researched. It has presented us with the most recent information about the menacing problem and its societal effects. True, Dhaka University has been with forefront of most social, intellectual and political movements including the freedom fight. It is also true that Dhaka University is increasingly becoming a place for several sorts of anti-social activities like drugs, hijacking,

smuggling, arms and infighting among student groupings. If such things are not nipped in the bud; these would corrode on social bonds and incapacitate the youths. Thus, the book is a contribution to our social consciousness to grapple with drugs.

However, the methodology of the book may be open to question. It claims that 100 students have been interviewed (p.3). Fine. How are these 100 students chosen? How many male and female? If the number is the sample size, how big is the university? On what criteria, have these students been se-

lected as drug addicts? The names of 17 students of Dhaka University who collected data are given on page 73. What about the names of five teacher-supervisors who guided the field research? It is claimed that the researchers were given "sufficient instruction" about the survey. Does it ensure reliability and validity of data collected? The steps taken to increase reliability and validity are not specified. What is the guarantee that the responses are most reliable? Have these been cross-checked by other relevant information, such as — the opinion of the Provosts and House Tutors of Halls concerned, the doctors treating the drug addicts, and the parents presumably supplying the money? These cross-checks would have increased the validity further.

The author observes that the number of addicts is increasing at an alarming pace (p.12), but does not quote any official figure. It would be useful to have the increases shown year by year from 1978 to 1993 for a trend. Whatever figures are quoted (pp.12-13), these have not been documented by source. At the same time, it must be conceded that such figures are difficult to collect as many are not reported at all.

The appendices are valuable. Appendix-B gives the entire questionnaire for the readers to follow the questions asked. The bibliography is useful, but it has no entries in Bengali or of any publications from Bangladesh. Several spelling mistakes can be noted throughout the book.

These comments notwithstanding, the book deserves to be studied by policymakers, politicians, university students, teachers and the parents for a proper perspective of the drug addiction among Dhaka University students. This reviewer pleads for the replication of such studies.

In the Groove: Audio Reviews

"Yes I Am" (Island) — Melissa Etheridge

LIKE her Midwest male counterpart, John Mellencamp, Melissa Etheridge always has produced capable — sometimes moving — heartland rock, hinting she would one day create something transcending.

We're still waiting. There is little in content on her newest release, "Yes I Am", that is different from last year's "Never Enough". The rockers, crafted around Etheridge's 12-string, are her usual fare: songs of lost love filled with images of angels and with lines like "I got razors a rippin' and tearin' and strippin'."

"Yes I Am" is a touch more acoustic than the rock-pop of "Never Enough" — which really didn't get the radio play it deserved — but no more intimate. The Kansas-born singer really tapped out the subject of love on her second, and so far best LP, "Brave and Crazy", which took the listener through a gambit of emotions on her

journey of healing a broken heart. It didn't hurt that her band at the time really kicked. She left us on that 1989 release with a song about leaving on a fast-moving train, but since then Etheridge hasn't gone too far.

One tune does stand out on "Yes I Am." "All American Girl" is not Etheridge's usual narrative, but a story of modern womanhood. She sings softly, "Her lover never came home. And it's half past three. Today her best friend told her, He's HIV."

Powerful stuff that Etheridge has doled out sprightly to her fans. Etheridge needs to reinvent and challenge herself along such lines. She also needs to create more interesting instrumentation in her arrangements, which are becoming stale. Etheridge's artistry is often subtle, but one great tune isn't enough to save "Yes I Am" from becoming her poorest effort to date.

"Perfectly Good Guitar" (A and M) — John Hiatt

"PERFECTLY Good Guitar" is certainly an apt name for the newest release from one of America's most accomplished songwriters. Whether it's the punk '60s feel of "Something Wild" or the picking on "Angel," the guitar playing on John Hiatt's latest is irresistible.

And to freshen up his sound,

Hiatt went with some young talent — lead guitarist Michael Ward (School of Fish), drummer Brian McLeod (Wire Train) and producer Matt Wallace (Faith No More).

If you are looking for introspective song writing of such past Hiatt Classics such as "Lipstick Sunset," or the beautiful arrangements found on

The New Heinemann Asian Writers Series



At last a major publishing house, with an unequalled name in publishing foreign fiction, is giving Asian writing the status and recognition it deserves. With generous sponsorship from the British Arts Council the new Heinemann Asian Writers Series is being launched today, 19 November 1993, at a ceremony at the Commonwealth Institute, London.

The first six titles have been selected by Series Editor, Ranjana Ash, a founder member of the South Asian Literature Society and Visiting Fellow at the University of London.

The launch titles are nearly all translations which have never been available in the English language before. All acclaimed on their original publication they cover the spectrum of South Asian literature from a classic novella by Nobel prize-winner Tagore, written in 1916 in Bengali, to the very contemporary tale of Hindi immigrants to the United States and their struggle with conflicts and pressures their host community brings to their traditional morality and values.

Heinemann also hopes with the publication of these first six novels to bring to readers' attention some of the very best translators working around the world today in a variety of Asian

language including Hindi, Malayalam, Urdu, Tamil, and Bengali.

QUARTET
Rabindranath Tagore
Translated from Bengali by Kaiser Haq, Professor of English, Dhaka University.

A classic novella written in 1916 by India's greatest ever writer. Modest Unassuming Sribhish joins his friend Sachish as a disciple of Swami Llananda. They prepare to dedicate themselves to the spiritual life but Sribhish finds himself increasingly drawn to a beautiful widow. *Quartet* is at once a philosophical exploration and a love story.

JANANI
Shaukat Osman
Translated from Bengali by Osman Jamal, formerly of the English Dept. Chittagong University.

A realistic evocation of a poverty-stricken Muslim Bengali village at the mercy of social and economic forces. Despite the tragic events of the story the village's inhabitants live in dignity an even humour.

All books will be original paperbacks priced at around \$5.00. Distributed in Bangladesh by University Press Limited.

More Opinions from Participants

by Fayza Haq

"No Exhibition can Satisfy You Fully"

BADHAN Das from Calcutta, who has been painting since the 60's, talking about the Bangladesh Biennale '93 said that every exhibition has room for improvement and not this Biennale alone. "No exhibition can satisfy you fully. In the west you can find exhibits which are very controversial but this does not apply here. In the works of the host country, despite the commendable standard, we could find some faults but we belong to the third world, and it is very difficult to organise something of this stature. It is very encouraging that a small country like Bangladesh with its economic difficulties is trying to have an ambitious exchange of ideas among Asian countries. It is certainly leading to globalization of art," he said.

Dwelling on the standard of paintings, Das commented, "It is not in the hands of the Bangladeshi organisers to control the quality of the art works in an international exhibit. The standard is mostly controlled by the authorities of the participating countries. If you do not consider the socio-economic condition of the country from which the entries come, you can easily be critical. But if you know the hardships that the countries face vis a vis countries in the west and the progressive places like Japan; you stop being critical."

Talking about the state of art in India he said, "This is a melting pot of various styles and genres. When we think of art as a commodity to be sold, we produce a kind of skill which can at times be faulty. If



we think about contemporary trend sometimes we may get confused as regards the assessment of the art piece. After the Industrial Revolution in Europe a number of schools of arts came up. Today, in our country we try to develop a

"The Interaction between Different People is Wonderful"

Meher Afroz from Karachi, Pakistan, who won one of the coveted prizes at Dhaka this year, assessing the Art Biennale commented, "It is really wonderful as it brings interaction between so many people in the Subcontinent and the rest of Asia, with their diverging cul-

tures and homes originating in different places. It is a great experience for me to participate for the first time in the Bangladesh Biennale — both visually and mentally. In '88 we had a big exhibition such as this in Pakistan but after that there has been no display of style which will communicate internationally. The humanity that lies in the core of art, however, remains unchanged. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are political barriers, not cultural barriers. What we can differentiate as something unique is Subcontinental art. If you study the history of the Subcontinent you realise that it has given a lot to the world in the past in the form of culture. It is a pity that today we often learn of history in the east through what the occidental rulers taught us."

Das added, "If you consider the modern European culture, it has been nourished by the Asian culture. Then, if you consider the modern European culture it is something given to them by the Muslims who controlled Europe in the

Middle Ages. Historically we were much more civilized before the west and we have nothing to feel inferior about as regards our cultural feats."

Talking about the young artists of the Subcontinent, he continued, "Often artists are influenced by economical impacts. If I am economically powerful, I will be reckoned by the others as someone of consequence, no matter what my integral ability is. I cannot say that I am satisfied with the works in our countries but I have a lot of hope about what can be achieved in the future."

Dwelling on his own work, he said that he worked specially on canvas although he also used paper. "I love to work with dry powders and charcoal, and my dimensions are usually quite big."



such or nature." Talking about her own paintings, Meher said, "I like to paint what I observe. I don't grope for a topic. What I paint emerges from my personality, age, and the atmosphere that I am surrounded by. I observe what I feel and think. Artists should be aware of what is happening around them. As you grow older, your experience and observation naturally expands. I do not confine myself to any 'ism'. If you are committed, no matter what your imagery or symbolism is, you are expressing the truth. The style is not of great consequence to me."

Meher teaches in the Indus Valley School.