

A Unique Theatre Experience

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

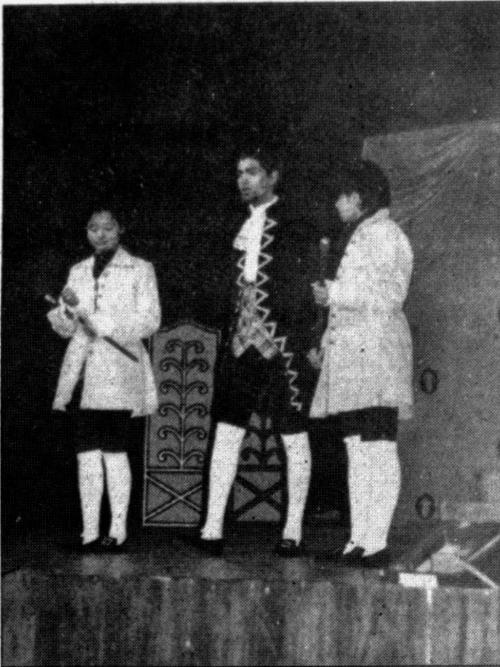
AS the audience waited with anticipation in the stuffy auditorium at the National Museum, few were ready for the explosive performance that would keep them electrified for the next three hours. All of a sudden one forgot about the heat, the sea of faces and the sound of animated chatter. All of a sudden, there was pin drop silence as the first curtain of Amadeus, a play by Peter Shafers, lifted.

We are transported to 19th century Vienna. Courtiers in colourful Viennese dress stand still while two young boys speculate over the death of Antonio Salieri, a famous old musician. The next scene is of a door with Salieri's two servants nibbling on his food which they have come to deliver. Salieri, old and decrepit, tries to kill himself but is rescued by his servants. He recovers and then begins his story. What follows is a tale of extreme jealousy, hatred and the destruction of one of the most talented of musicians, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who dies an ignoble death, unhappy, poor and unrecognized.

The play, moving as it was entertaining was a production put up by the students of Scholastica. The quality of the production made it hard to believe that these were all non professional actors, all of them in their teens. Even the director, Farhan Nadeem, an undoubtedly talented person, was only 21 years old. The scenes changed with incredible smoothness, the acting was flawless and the music perfect for the setting.

Maher Murshed, plays Salieri, the earnest musician turned villain with superb finesse and intelligence. With his Italian accent and natural wit he manages to create a Salieri, who is both vile and funny. Salieri's character is complicated by his consuming love for music which he considers a divine gift and his uncontrollable hatred for the talented Mozart and for God who has given the gift to that "vulgar creature" (Mozart) and not him. This Maher has captured with extreme deftness portraying a Salieri whose crime of destroying Mozart makes him detestable yet whose sincere, passionate love for music does not fail to arouse compassion for his disillusionment. This is especially true in the scene where Salieri, after being mesmerized by Mozart's music cries out to God in agony, "Signore..... You put me into perception of the incomparable which most men never know! Then ensured that I would know myself forever mediocre."

One of the most striking and commendable elements of Maher's acting is the speed and ease with which he changes from the old withering Salieri to the strapping young man in seconds. While someone inconspicuously changes his wig and coat, Maher changes not only his voice but his whole stance becoming in one moment a quivering old man and in another, a vibrant youth. This Maher, admits later was the most difficult thing he has had to do. For someone who has never acted on stage before, Maher, an "A" level student, plays his role with



Maher Murshed as Antonio Salieri flanked by Irum Ali and Renata Choudhury as 'The Little Winds'.

brilliance and self confidence. Farshad Mahmud another 'A' level student also shows great talent in his portrayal of the eccentric, childlike Mozart whose nervous giggles whenever he realizes he has done something wrong, never fails to make the audience laugh. Apart from the amusing scenes where Mozart chases his would-be wife Constanze or where he profusely kisses the Emperor's hand much to the Emperor's embarrassment, Farshad has also captured the other side of Mozart: the passionate often quick tempered musician. This is displayed in the scene where, after Mozart's announcement of an Italian opera called "the Marriage of Figaro" is received with very little enthusiasm, he bursts out in anger at the preoccupation of people with things that are unreal and superficial. With passion and earnestness, Mozart reveals his own dream of composing music that is new,

real and explosive. "My tongue is stupid not my heart," he says sadly in this moving scene.

The role of Mozart's wife Constanze Weber is played by another 'A' level student, Ibtisam Hyder. Ibtisam plays the naive coquettish fiancée, and the self sacrificing, disillusioned yet fiery wife with equal conviction.

Other characters include the dull spineless Emperor of Austria played by Iresh Zaher who gives enough comic relief to make the play entertaining, the Royal Chamberlain played by Ashfaqur Rahman, Count Orisni Rosenberg by Dayem Khandker, the Baron Van Sweeten, played by Ch.Fazle Shakib and Katherina Cavalier played by Adeela Panni.

But it is the superb performance of the 'Winds', Salieri's informers that has delighted the audience. They are played by Renata Choudhury of Class X and Irum Ali of Class IXB. Both young women play their

roles of young Viennese men to perfection, delivering their long dialogues flawlessly and with perfect timing.

Apart from the acting, what really impressed the audience were the costumes, designed and made by Eva Kamal (not-a student). They played a very important part in giving the scenes their authenticity. The make up and hair-dos complemented the costumes made of beautiful burgundy, green and indigo velvets, silks and lace. In addition, the stage sets, props, music and lighting were all done, with great skill and efficiency all done by the students with supervision from their teachers. "We wanted everything to be perfect," says Farida Zarek a teacher at the school and one of the stage managers for the show. "We paid attention to every little detail, the furniture, accessories, things like using a feather instead of a pen etc."

Many of the scenes, adds Maher, had been modified or toned down to be appropriate for a school play. "There are many vulgar scenes and obscene words in the play," says Maher, "they had to be changed". This difficult task fell on the director Farhan Nadeem, a student at the Dental College and son of Pakistani film actor Nadeem, who helped not only with the acting, but also with ideas on the technical side of the play. His creativity can be seen for example at the end of Act 1 where Salieri is conducting one of Mozart's pieces when Mozart himself enters and starts conducting, making Salieri stop in his tracks. The scene which is not in the original script, is very powerful.

In the last scene, Mozart weak with hunger and alcohol is struck by Salieri and falls lifelessly on his desk. Salieri reverts back to his old, decrepit self as he ends his terrible story.

The play with its clever direction, and superb acting was complete by the smooth change of scenes, the excellent sound track and special effects.

It was not just talent that was at work here but great team-work that made the play such a success. For those lucky enough to see the performance, it was a unique theatre experience that we hope to see repeated again and again.



Mozart (Farshad Mahmud) woos his paramour Constanze Weber (Ibtisam Hyder). Inset: director Farhan Nadeem.

roles of young Viennese men to perfection, delivering their long dialogues flawlessly and with perfect timing.

Apart from the acting, what really impressed the audience were the costumes, designed and made by Eva Kamal (not-a student). They played a very important part in giving the scenes their authenticity. The make up and hair-dos complemented the costumes made of beautiful burgundy, green and indigo velvets, silks and lace. In addition, the stage sets, props, music and lighting were all done, with great skill and efficiency all done by the students with supervision from their teachers. "We wanted everything to be perfect," says Farida Zarek a teacher at the school and one of the stage managers for the show. "We paid attention to every little detail, the furniture, accessories, things like using a feather instead of a pen etc."

Many of the scenes, adds Maher, had been modified or toned down to be appropriate for a school play. "There are many vulgar scenes and obscene words in the play," says Maher, "they had to be changed". This difficult task fell on the director Farhan Nadeem, a student at the Dental College and son of Pakistani film actor Nadeem, who helped not only with the acting, but also with ideas on the technical side of the play. His creativity can be seen for example at the end of Act 1 where Salieri is conducting one of Mozart's pieces when Mozart himself enters and starts conducting, making Salieri stop in his tracks. The scene which is not in the original script, is very powerful.

In the last scene, Mozart weak with hunger and alcohol is struck by Salieri and falls lifelessly on his desk. Salieri reverts back to his old, decrepit self as he ends his terrible story.

The play with its clever direction, and superb acting was complete by the smooth change of scenes, the excellent sound track and special effects.

It was not just talent that was at work here but great team-work that made the play such a success. For those lucky enough to see the performance, it was a unique theatre experience that we hope to see repeated again and again.

Ups and Downs in Bilateral Relationship

AFTER a bloody War of Liberation for nine months Bangladesh emerged in the globe as an independent and sovereign nation in December, 1971. Bangladesh's struggle for freedom influenced the actions and counter-actions of the international powers engaged in the competition for consolidating their foothold in this region as its geo-strategic position remained vital to their national interests. Thus, Bangladesh came into being at a time when the major foreign powers led by the United States and the Soviet Union were greatly involved in the affairs of the region; the former supporting Pakistan's case while the latter upholding the interests of India. Indian involvement in the Liberation War of Bangladesh in a way compelled the Soviet Union to balance in favour of the rightful cause of Bengalis as manifested by her great role in the UN Security Council at the final stage of the war. Soviet support during the pre-independence days paved the way for its even greater role in post-independence period of this country.

Whether Soviet role in independent Bangladesh was based on 'Soviet theory towards Third World development' or on other factors, is a question which aroused attentions both among the academics as well as interested quarters.

The book under review has been an attempt at providing deeper understanding of the Soviet role in Indian sub-continent and its policies in Bangladesh till 1975 including the various aspects and dimensions of Soviet-Bangladesh relationships as evolved under the influence of domestic, regional and international politics. This comprehensive work is divided into six broad sections where the author has highlighted and examined the following major issues: Soviet involvement in South Asian politics and the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh; Soviet views regarding Third World and its role in the domestic politics of Bangladesh; concept of joint security pact; Soviet-Bangladesh special relations;

Title: Soviet Bangladesh Samparka
Author: Tareque Shamsur Rahman
Published by: Academic Publishers, Dhaka, 1993,
pp. 130, Tk. 80.00
Reviewed by: Al Masud Hasanuzzaman

BOOK REVIEW

determining Indian role; US-Bangladesh relations and need for greater economic assistance; political change of August 1975 and consequent new directions in Bangladesh's foreign policy; and economic, commercial and military relations between Bangladesh and the Soviet Union.

The author has examined the Soviet attitude in the Liberation War of Bangladesh in two distinct phases. During the first phase, Soviet Union's position was marked by an indifference as Moscow took a neutral stand and was in favour of a non-military solution of the crisis within the framework of a united Pakistan. The writer has rightly pointed out that Soviet Union was caught in a dilemma with the apprehension that her direct involvement would result into bitter relations with Pakistan, Arab states and the Western powers. Moreover, Moscow considered that any division of Pakistan might cause instability in the region that would only benefit China vis-a-vis Soviet Union. At the second phase, there were changes in the Soviet views with the signing of 25 years Friendship Treaty with India in August 1971. Later in December (during the war), Moscow directly supported India against Pakistan and played a very crucial role at the UN upholding Bangladesh's cause and its emergence. The author is of the opinion that the above role of Moscow was mostly based on the principle of opportunism and national interest.

In the post liberation period Soviet Union may have wanted a kind of development in Bangladesh that would be



free from Western capitalist infiltration. She was in favour of making an alliance between the ruling Awami League and the pro-Moscow political organisations in order to establish her own theory of 'national democracy' in Bangladesh. Pro-Moscow parties led by CPB and NAP were also very active to fulfil Soviet objectives and inspired by Moscow they were instrumental in establishing mass alliance and forming one party BKSAL in this country. But all such initiatives, as pointed out by the author, proved futile since the ruling regime was not willing to develop 'Soviet Theory'. Therefore, one party BKSAL was created more to strengthen the hands of Sheikh Mujib rather than establishing socialism in Bangladesh.

Immediately after independence and Moscow's official recognition of our country, Bangladesh, as a gesture, emphasised greatly on her bilateral relations with the Soviet Union and as such maintained a pro-Soviet stand in all international forums. Steps were also taken by both the countries to facilitate cordial ties including economic and trade

links. But Moscow's strategy was to keep relations with Dhaka through India as its base but not at the cost of her more closer bond with India.

In the post liberation situation, Bangladesh was in need of massive aid and she had a great expectation from the Soviet Union in this regard. But due to incapability, Moscow was not able to provide Dhaka's desperate economic needs. The efforts at establishing a 'good image' of Moscow was significantly hampered by limited Soviet economic assistance to Bangladesh. Thus, Soviet objective of building socialist economy in Bangladesh could not be achieved as Dhaka's economic compulsions forced her to seek aid from Western donors. Although Moscow failed to do much in the economic sector, yet she contributed enormously to creating a base for Bangladesh's defence and military sector.

Political events of August, 1975, changed the nature of Dhaka's relations with Moscow and reversed her political and economic orientations to a great extent. As such, post 1975 foreign relations of Bangladesh witnessed Dhaka's closer ties with USA, China, Japan and many Muslim countries and consequent reduced links with Moscow. All the issues which came in the way of politico-economic relations between the Soviet Union and Bangladesh have been carefully and scholarly examined by the author in the book with due consideration of both internal and external dimensions.

The book is a product of hard labour as evidenced by the author's detailed analysis, penetrating enquiry and scientific explanations supported by necessary information and data along with a rich bibliography. This volume serves as a useful reference for the academicians and gives insight for further research. Moreover, it appears as a very valuable addition to our scanty literature on international relations written in Bangla.

The reviewer is an Associate Professor at the Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka.

A Handy Journal for Students and Teachers

IT is characteristic to both the scholars and students of International Relations to use relevant journals as vessels of their current thought and views on changing issues of significance. Non-static and ever-shifting nature of the discipline keep scholars busy in chasing the changing issues and shifting paradigms. Such circumstances usually force them to be journal-dependent in communicating amongst each others and their students. But we have only a handful of standard journals for this purpose, in our country. The bi-annual, 'Journal of International Relations' published recently by the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka is an ideal one for this purpose and will fill up the existing vacuum.

The Department of International Relations at the University of Dhaka was established in July 1947, at the beginning of the cold war. But the first issue of the 'Journal of International Relations' with six important articles on post cold war issues and predictions has seen the light only recently. 'Better late than never', congratulations to the editor Dr Akmal Hussain and the Publisher for such a great and much needed venture.

There are six articles and a book review section in the journal. Two of the articles are contributed by two South-Asian scholars. They are Rakesh Gupta, an associate professor, Centre for Political Studies,

Journal of International Relations
Vol. I, No. 1, July - December, 1993
Editor: Akmal Hussain
Publisher: Chairman, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka.
Pages: 140 Price: 30.00
Reviewed by: Farid Ahmed

BOOK REVIEW

School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and D Banerjee, the Deputy Director of the Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis (IDSA), New Delhi. Titles of their articles are 'Post Cold War Futures in International Relations' and 'Post cold war International Relations: A view from the South'.

'Bangladesh in the Post Cold War Era: Primacy of Domestic Imperatives' is written by Dr Iftekharuzzaman, Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Dhaka. Rest of the three contributors, Md Abdul Halim, M Shahiduzzaman and Ehsanul Haque are teachers of International Relations, Dhaka University. Their articles on US Presence in the Asia-Pacific Region, International Security Environment in the 1990s and the recent Nuclear Crisis in the Korean



Peninsular are of importance and current interest. The book review section is a colourful one. Here readers are introduced with six recently published books on International Relations, and simultaneously to have a closer look at the opinion and views of our own scholars, this journal will be of real use. Wishing a long life and wide popularity of the Journal.

ladesh in International Politics: The Dilemmas of the Weak States', Dr Ayed Anwar Hussain's 'Super Powers and Security in the Indian Ocean: A South Asian Perspective', Imtiaz Ahmed and Meghna Guhathakurta's (edited), 'SAARC: Beyond State Centric Co-operation', Iftekharuzzaman and Imtiaz Ahmed's (edited), 'Bangladesh and SAARC: Perspectives and Outlook', Emajuddin Ahmed and Abul Kamal's (edited), 'Bangladesh, South Asia and the World'. These brief but all encompassing reviews will be of real use to the interested readers. Thanks to the reviewers, Prof Al Masud Hasanuzzaman of Jahangirnagar University, Dr Akmal Hussain the editor, Prof Bhumitra Chakma, Prof Md Ramjul Huq and Enayet Mowla of Dhaka University.

The next issue of the Journal is scheduled in June 1994 and we hope that the printing and overall get-up will be of similar international standard. It is suggested that side by side brief introductory book reviews, the editor may include an in-depth review of a book of current interest in the successive issue. For better understanding of the contemporary issues of International Relations and simultaneously to have a closer look at the opinion and views of our own scholars, this journal will be of real use. Wishing a long life and wide popularity of the Journal.

Eradicating Racism through Photography

by Fayza Haq

THIRTY-FIVE year old Roshni Kempadoo, who recently held her exhibition of photographs at the 'Drik' gallery, came into photography from doing a BA visual communications course in central England, where she specialised in photography. Her interest in photography came from moving to England from Guyana and seeing photographs of Guyana and the Caribbean in a very negative light, showing the poverty and creating victim type images.

So she began taking photographs and joined a women's picture agency called 'Format Partners' after she left college. The agency provides pictures that redress imbalances i.e. pictures of black communities, positive photographs of women and people with disabilities. Alongside the work she does with the picture agency Roshni produces her own personal work which looks at issues affecting black people such as racism and inequality. "In England the term black refers to people of African, Caribbean and Asian origin. It has historically been used as a political expression for equal rights within Britain. The work that was here with 'Drik' came about from reading of the changes taking place between 1990 and 1992 of the formation of the European Union historically known as the EEC," Roshni explained.

This personal work explored the issue of the rise of racism within the European countries particularly against black communities living and working in Europe. "The title 'European Currency (ECU) is a pun on the European money

that will be used by the European Union over the next ten years. The Union is an economic merging of twelve European states to create a stronger trade market. This economic system being set up has a tremendous impact socially, culturally and politically. My concern there was to look at that impact as it affects black communities. They are being isolated and made unwelcome not being seen as European citizens but rather immigrants who present threat," she elaborated.

She has used six different denominations of the different countries with significant black communities to produce photographs that are computer generated using the bank notes and images she has taken.

The first entry had the British ten pound bank note. It addressed the issue of third world countries producing goods for the western market. The Queen's head is replaced

by a woman carrying boxes of bananas destined for England clearly owned by the "Geest" shipping company who holds the monopoly of importing bananas to Britain." Below was a group of Caribbean people amongst tourists with the text, "Poverty and dependency, the legacy of colonial rule."

The next photo was the German bank note of ten marks which included a woman of Muslim origin and incorporated the musical notes of the extracts of the German national anthem. At the bottom right of the photograph was another inset of a German family having lived in the Soviet Union who were now returning to Germany to take up the work that previously migrants from Morocco and Tunisia had been doing. The photograph also talked about the concept of German identity as "constructed biologically and based on a homogenous nation."

The fourth item was not produced on the computer, like another three entries, and it was composed of hands breaking out of shackles to relate to the issue of slavery. This image was combined with a ten pound note in a leather purse.

In yet another photograph the figurehead within the twenty franc note had been replaced by a woman wearing a scarf in the Muslim style. She looked down on two Neo Nazi supporters, one of whom was shaking his fist. "The welcome on the mat was clearly white and Eurocentric rather than multi-racial and international," Roshni explained.

The second smaller photograph was composed of an anthropological image of a black and white couple in the background and a black hand in the foreground holding two Greek bank notes. This photograph related to the importance of Greek civilization to European culture and referred to the physical ideal of a white European person.

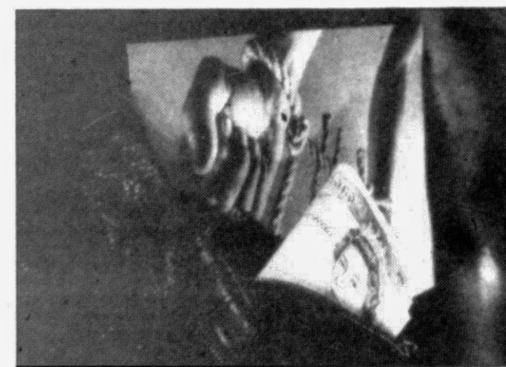


The third item was a Spanish bank note of a thousand pesetas and related to the issue of Spain's history of colonialist expansion, in particular Christopher Columbus who was featured on the left. The photograph specially referred to how the expansion resulted in genocide of the indigenous people of South and Central America. To the right was a newspaper photograph of African migrants in Spain and related to the issue of Spain's closeness to the African continent and that it was being expected to police the borders to keep a migrant population out.

The fourth item was not produced on the computer, like another three entries, and it was composed of hands breaking out of shackles to relate to the issue of slavery. This image was combined with a ten pound note in a leather purse.

In yet another photograph the figurehead within the twenty franc note had been replaced by a woman wearing a scarf in the Muslim style. She looked down on two Neo Nazi supporters, one of whom was shaking his fist. "The welcome on the mat was clearly white and Eurocentric rather than multi-racial and international," Roshni explained.

The second smaller photograph was composed of an anthropological image of a black and white couple in the background and a black hand in the foreground holding two Greek bank notes. This photograph related to the importance of Greek civilization to European culture and referred to the physical ideal of a white European person.



Another photo featured the Dutch ten guilder bank note and related to the perception of the black woman as being seen as exotic and a sexual object. It featured the historical fine art painting to the left by Gauguin and an Asian woman dancer on the right. The panel was titled 'This gaze' of social democracy."

Next there was the Italian bank note of 50,000 lira. On the left of the picture was a photograph taken from the advertisement of the company 'Benetton' which showed an Armenian ship in port with

people trying to get into Italy without success. On the right was a portrait of an African man. It related to the European economy being built on "the back of the foreign worker where labour is alien and therefore rightfully Governments want the work cheap and unorganised."

The third smaller photograph had in the background an extract from European Union Policy document with the title, 'Workers from non-community countries present a particular problem.' In the foreground was a Portuguese



bank note slipped out of a passport. The last small photograph contained a portrait of a Pakistani woman combined with a Greek bank note and a white mask reminiscent of the European theatre. The mask and bank note symbolised the domination of a white race but at the same time firmly placed the black woman at the centre of the piece almost as a refusal of the domination.

The exhibition was about by the collaboration between 'Drik' gallery in Dhaka and 'Autograph', the association of

black photographers based in London. It was the second collaboration of this kind and the intention was to continue an exchange of the work of Bangladeshi photographers going to Britain and black British photographers showing work in Bangladesh.

Roshni did a four-day practical workshop which involved using of computers and which had twelve participants. She also gave four talks on technology, black British photography, European racism and photographs used by charities.