A Film About Truth: Schindler's List

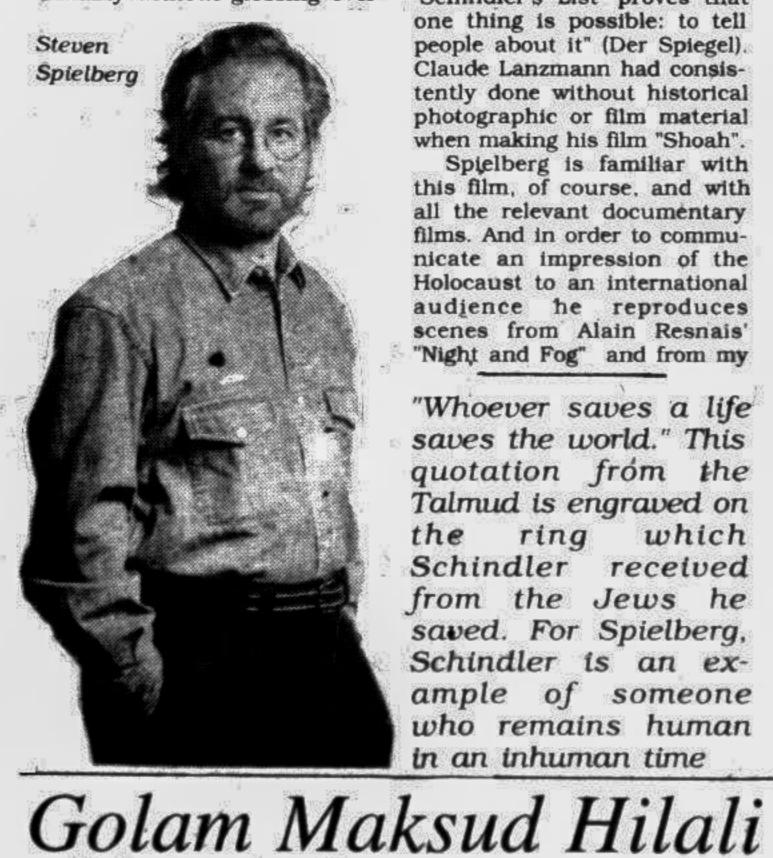
by Erwin Leiser

No documentation and no feature film can ever show the full truth about Auschwitz, about the mass murder of the Jews. Nevertheless, Hollywood director Steven Spielberg had the courage to direct a film epic about the Holocaust. A true story, but not a documentary film. The central figure is Oskar Schindler, war profiteer and rescuer of 1,200 Jews.

OMETHING the majority of right-wing extremist groups have in common is the fact that they describe all reports on the mass murder of the Jews in the Third Reich as atrocity propaganda. They claim that the Holocaust did not take place, and that there were no gas chambers in the concentration camps. Steven Spielberg's film about Oskar Schindler, who saved 1,200 Jews from deportation to the extermination camps, has to be judged against this background. The presence of the President of the Federal Republic at its German Premiere demonstrates just how important this film is considered to be for the "process of grieving" in

Germany. The fact that the hero of the film is "a good German" has not been availed of by German commentators as an alibi. Spielberg, an American Jew, is thought very highly of for daring in his film about the Holocaust to focus on a Sudeten German, whom he himself characterises as a "Nazi and war profiteer".

One of the many merits of the film is that it presents the ambiguities in Schindler's personality without glossing over



Continued from page 10

with the same ease, objectivity

and generosity of mind. On oc-

casions, a man like Dr Hilali

who was brought up in a con-

servative milieu, and who was

steeped in religious lore.

showed surprisingly a mod-

ernist attitude to life. Take, for

example, his biography of the

Turkish lady Halida Hanum.

who was, among the Muslims,

a pioneer of feminist move-

ment. Dr Hilali wrote with

great enthusiasm and sympa-

thy about Halida Hanum's mul-

tifarious activities, her role in

the war against the Khelafat

and the Greeks. led by Kamal

Pasha, her contributions to the

emancipation of women and

the advancement of education

and other worthy social causes.

anything. Spielberg tells Schindler's story because it is the story of a transformation, a metamorphosis. This adventurer, who at the outbreak of the war went to Poland to earn a lot of money, achieving this gaol with the help of cheap Jewish labour, turns into a humane man, who sacrifices his wealth to bribe the sadistic workcamp commander, and buys back all those Jews whose names he had managed to draw up on a list with the help of his Jewish bookkeeper Itzhak Stern.

To quote Spielberg on the message behind the film: "It is not necessary to be an Oskar Schindler, or a saint, to save the world." Had there been more Germans like him, 6 million Jews need not have died. Schindler is an example of the fact that even in an inhuman epoch a person can remain human. The fact that the film "Schindler's List" concentrates on the rescue of the "Schindler Jews" makes the tragedy bearable. This does not mean, however, that Spielberg is trying to play down the atrociousness of the Holocaust.

No film, be it a feature film or a documentary, can show the truth about the cynical mass murder of the Jews. But " 'Schindler's List' proves that one thing is possible: to tell people about it" (Der Spiegel). Claude Lanzmann had consistently done without historical photographic or film material when making his film "Shoah".

Spielberg is familiar with this film, of course, and with all the relevant documentary films. And in order to communicate an impression of the Holocaust to an international audience he reproduces scenes from Alain Resnais' "Night and Fog" and from my

"Whoever saves a life saves the world." This quotation from the Talmud is engraved on ring which Schindler received from the Jews he saved. For Spielberg, Schindler is an example of someone who remains human in an inhuman time

This biography which was pub-

lished in 1933 was written in

Bengali, obviously with the in-

tention of popularizing among

the contemporary Muslim men

and women the heroic deeds

and sacrifices of Halida Hanum

and to inspire them to follow

deserves attention is his book

on Alberuni. In the treatment

of the life and work of this

great scholar and traveller, Dr

Hilali was really in his ele-

ments. Alberuni's quest for

knowledge, his interest in

alien cultures and languages

and his restless travelling - all

these go to the making of Dr

Hilali's intellectual hero. He

emphasized in his book these

qualities of Alberuni. According

Dr Hilali's next work which

in her footsteps.

own film "Mein Kampf".

At the end of "Schindler's List", when a long line of the Jews Schindler actually saved. together with the actors who portray them in the film, place stones on Schindler's grave in Israel; the viewer realises that the film is telling a true story.

Schindler, who after the war had no more luck and made no more money, was revered in Israel, and it is in Israel that he is only now receiving the recognition he deserves. With great realism Spielberg describes who Schindler was and how he changed, but it is with the victims of the Holocaust that he identities; he knows that had he been alive then he would have been one of them. The film is not made in colour but' in black and white, with the result that the scenes have a documentary quality about them. Wherever possible, Spielberg filmed at the actual scenes of the tragedy; where each and every stone reminded him of the reality. He reconstructed this reality using actors unfamiliar to the cinema-going public - with the exception of Ben Kingsley (Itzhak Stern). Spielberg's film only includes episodes for which there are two witnesses. He did without the huge technical apparatus he otherwise

works with. Forty per cent of

to Dr Hilali, Alberuni is the

Aristotle of the East. He was a

man of extraordinary genius

and had an insatiable thirst for

knowledge. His encyclopaedic

knowledge covered the areas

of Mathematics, Astronomy,

Anthropology, Philosophy,

Eschatology, History.

Geography, Natural Sciences

Zoology, Botany, Geology,

Medicine and many other

branches of esoteric knowl-

edge. He mastered the various

branches of Greek learning

Muslim world. He visited India

and wrote his world famous

Kitab ul Hind which presents

to us a detailed account of the

sub-continent. It is said that no

other traveller prior to

Alberuni left us such an elabo-

rate account of India. While in

India, Alberuni learnt Sanskrit

and acquired knowledge of

and made them known in the

"Schindler's List" was filmed with a hand camera. Some of the scenes in the film could have been unbearable to look at if Spielberg had not filmed the people from close-up and with great sensitivity. There is something surprisingly calm and tender even about the merciless scenes which he

neither spares himself nor us. For Spielberg one important feature of the film is its topicality, at a time when there would again seem to be parallels. At the beginning of March 1994, the Emnid Institute published a survey commissioned by the American Jewish Committee showing that one fifth of the 1,400 Germans questioned had a negative attitude towards Jews. One third of them believed that a line should finally be drawn under the past. 22% would prefer to have no Jews living in their neighbourhood. Four years ago the figure was 14%. (59% said it made no difference to them if they had Jewish neighbours, 12% would welcome it).

When asked about the "revisionist" view of history which denies the Holocaust Spielberg said: "When someone from one of these right-wing extremist groups claims that eye-witness reports about Auschwitz are irrelevant as they have no bearing on the



truth, I replay that it is not the witnesses who are telling lies but that person, and that most

other people know this." However, Spielberg has had to acknowledge just how little his American public learns about the Holocaust from history books. He wants to provide information, above all for the young, and he has already succeeded in making the Holocaust a topic of discussion

I shall discuss briefly another

long essay of Dr Hilali titled

Islamic Attitude towards Non-

again wherever the film is

Frank Schirrmacher wrote in the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung": "Spielberg demonstrates that art can have an enlightening effect and can exert an astonishing power, even at a time when our senses are being blunted by images."

Schirrmacher believes that a film such as this one could only have been made in America, "perhaps because European artists have lost faith in films". But it is no mere chance that this is not a German-made film. No matter how Germans approach the theme of the Holocaust, they are always burdened by a demand which is not made of non-German authors or film directors: They have to "come to terms" with the past of their own people, get involved in an inner-German discussion. A German film director would just not have the distance which an artist requires so as to achieve clarity of vision.

→Courtesy: Deutschland

The film director and author ERWIN LEISER was born in Berlin in 1923 and left Germany after the pogrom of November 1938. Leiser's first documentary film "Mein Kampf" was made in Sweden in 1960. He now lives in Zurich.

mind and his instinctive love for man. Owing to short space

treated. In the charter of Medina he granted to the Jews equal rights and privileges along with the Muslims. His treaty with the Christians of Najran illustrates his justness.



One cam assume that probably Dr Hilali had in mind to minority communities living in the newly-created state of Pakistan when he wrote the essay. Preceding and following the partition of India, millions of people lost their lives, home and country as a result of the terrible communal riots which swept across the sub-continent, Naturally, the minority communities in Pakistan were subjected to an agonizing sense of uncertainty. One of the purposes which prompted Dr Hilali to write this long essay was, perhaps, to remained both the rulers and Muslim citizens of how the Prophet

impartiality and inherent nobility of character as a rule and statesman. A portion of the treaty was quoted by Dr Hilali (Hilali Rachanabali, Vol. II pp. 56-57). He also referred to Umar's (RA) attitude to the non-Muslims and implied th this should be the basis of po. icy towards minority communities in a Muslim state. He showed how non-Muslims were appointed to high state positions during the caliphate of Muawiya and others. Dr Hilali's deep concern for

the non-Muslims and the persuasiveness with which he pleaded for them show unmistakably that he could rise above religious differences and recognize the innate humanity of all men. I have said earlier that he had a genuine love for man. that he was devoted to the study of man his uniqueness and his undefiled sense of fellowship. He quoted lovingly a saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him): The whole creation is the family of Allah, so the most beloved person to Allah is he who does the greatest good to His family" (Ibid. p. 58) Dr Hilali as a true Muslim believed in this saying. He had a broad, tolerant, humane view of life. He was profound religious, but he was totally free from fanaticism of any kind.

Love and Life

by G A Momin

Looking out of window in the morning. I caught glimpses of a cluster of freshly blossomed lilies. All smiling in the soft light of the dawn.

Just out of my office in the afternoon. I was accosted by an old man with grey hair and bushy eyes. From the sling hanging across his shoulder he picked up a pack of cheap writing pens that he was vending. I bought one, not needed at the moment though He gave me the look of a mariner in the high seas and broke in shy smiles that mutely said. 'Thank you, thank you indeed'.

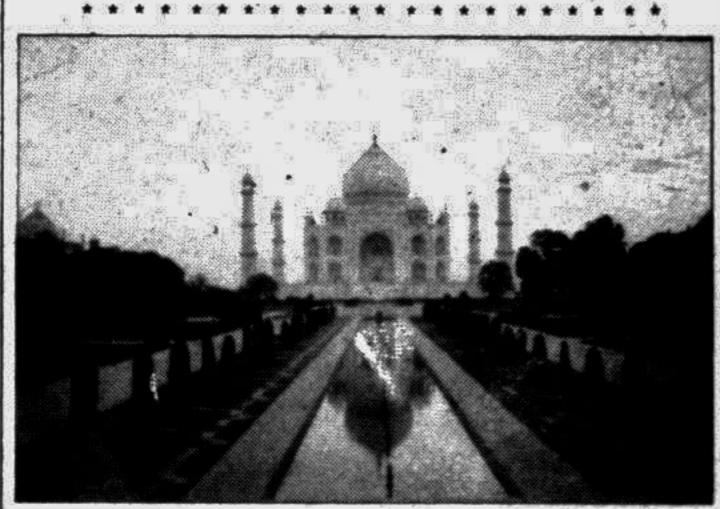
It got nearly dark when my vehicle stopped at a cross-road facing a red light signal. A tiny girl in frayed clothes came running to me whining softly 'Sir a couple of garlands for one taka only for one taka only sir...' The girl went on. I bought a couple of them. And the girl stepped back offering me a gift of serene smiles

In the evening you stood beside me under the open starry sky your smiles intoxicating the air all around rivalling the queenly moon raining down shiny smiles from above.

In silence I invited all the smiles of the day

who all came rushing in.

and encircled me hand in hand, dancing and singing wildly and wistfully to them I asked softly "What number are you dancing?" They stopped for a while and re-joined the medley replaying 'call it life, might as well call it love and life'.



The Tajmahal

by Golam Nabi

An Edifice imposing. Built by a spouse candid. Stands stolid To tell a tale of royal love fervid. A tomb - an epitome of tears -Relives the love of a spouse royal For his consort reginal The epitaph in marble Stands as a cenotaph of spleen door regal. A monument built with toils and tears Spanning years To commemorate love connubial On our earth ephemeral! The fount wells up tears for the crushed and the smother'd The wind breaths all breath anguish'd a requiem for the dead anonymous The emperor built it with intention innocuous.

Love Reborn by Nazma Yeasmeen Haque

E went to not so far off a country for a surgery L L that was long overdue. She accompanied him urged by her inner self although moaning over the fact that she hardly remembers occasions when they travelled together for real holidays. Nevertheless, the thought of being by his side in times of need kindled her emotions. A mixed feeling brought about by uncertainty in more than one way in her

mind throughout the journey and at the hospital. While recuperating but still required to be in weekly care of the doctor for quite some time, they lodged themselves in a hotel. Having known the reason for staying in the hotel, they were allocated a room in a quiet corner of special floor, special because it contained almost all the amenities of the hotel including a swimming pool with its adjoining areas set beautifully in a marvellous surrounding. Imagine rows of fir trees in a rectangular shape swaying in fresh air on the sixth floor of a building! It was serene and exceptionally refreshing. It seemed as if nature was very generous in pouring out gifts from its inexhaustible store. Gazing at the clear, bluish water of the pool alone was so soothing. Nature was close to them, they were closer to one another. They felt warmth in the closeness of companionship that was almost forgotten, if not lost altogether. At least, it was overshadowed by the daily chores. duties and responsibilities that turned life into a sort of mechanical existence. Priority of life was confused and therefore, displaced so much so that

wood, the life itself. Passing quiet moments and talking softly, they came as close as they were ages ago. If felt new: feelings that seemed to have faded away did not ac

living style was taken for

granted. Far too many trees.

enveloped life not noticing the

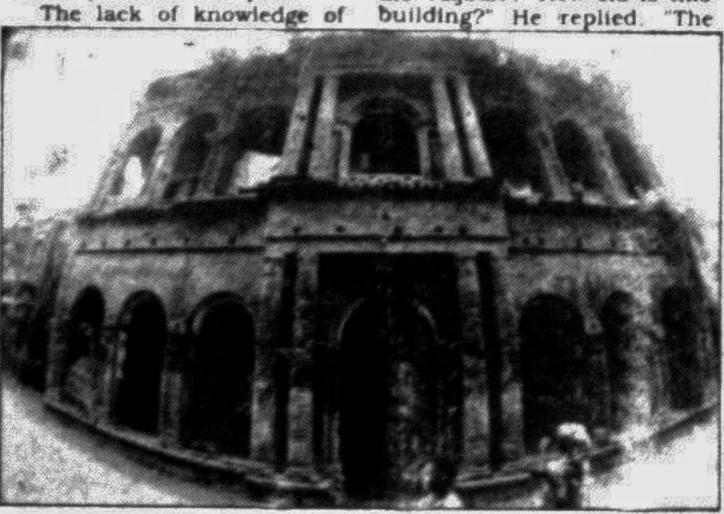
tually fade. It was re-discovering one another as it began in early years of married life. The medical treatment and

the convalescing period turned out to be blissful while only two of them stayed together, one caring for the other. He being cared for felt a deep sense of belonging and tender touch of love; she perceived the silent message that was conveyed by his intent look and minimum words. Perhaps one does not feel much use for words when strong emotion is present. She often thought of his surgery as blessing in disguise for them to have a respite from the humdrums of life where life did not demand the following of a routine work. A detour, however short, added romance to life enhancing joy in living. Life that was encrusted so long unwittingly overlooked by the two came out of the hard shell. Busied with tasks but now away from all those, life moved back to days long past when they were young. Although with the mellowing of age, love passes through many phases transforming itself into various shades, yet romantic love does not die in the life of a couple who learn to be compassionate and therefore, become com-

Love is heavenly, it is blissful. And this love bounced back to a couple aged fifty and fiftyfive years when days passed between the two only. The young people of today perhaps will be surprised at this revelation but may learn as well that love needs to be nurtured consciously for keeping it alive and that again for the sake of renewing our life. Believing that love is present, desiring it to be present and expecting it to be present, people can make it a reality overcoming present day crises in marital adjustability. And that will be like building Tajmahais in every couple's heart, however young or old they may be

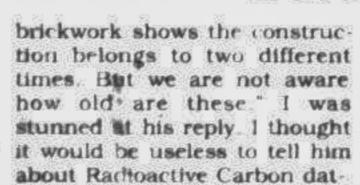
Save Part of Our Heritage

Continued from page 10 preserve this as a national historic site. I understand, there is a Department of Archeology under the Ministry of Culture. Please preserve our pastf





some of the people in the Department of Archeology is alarming. I asked one of the attendant from the Department of Archeology at the 'Rajbari', "How old is this building?" He replied. "The



ing The facilities are available in Bangladesh. We just have to use them. We have to save this part of our heritage!

Hindu philosophy, mathemat-

ics and astronomy. Dr Hilali

says that Alberuni was truly the

intellectual link of the Muslim

world between Greece on the

one hand and India on the

other. Needless to say that

Alberuni would receive such

warm homage from Dr Hilali.

For, contact among human civ-

ilizations, their interminglings

and the impact of one upon

another show unmistakably

that despite fundamental dif-

one species i.e. mankind.

Behind Dr Hilali's many-

branched scholarship and in-

rellectual interests, lies his

one single subject of study. It

is man manifest in his endless

exploration into the mysteries

in these two volumes, speak of

Dr Hilali's remarkably liberated

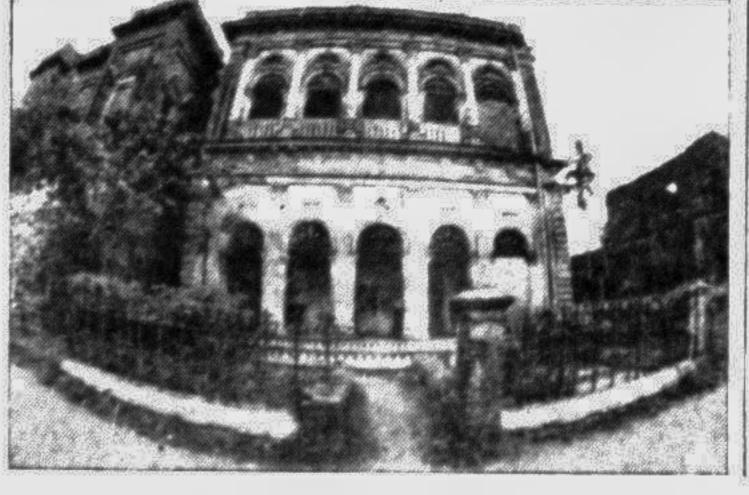
Most of the essays included

of the universe.

ferences, all men belong to

The writer is Associate Professor. Independent University Dhaka





(peace be upon him) and caliphs handled the question of non-Muslim communities during their rule. He quoted profusely from the holy Quran and the sayings of our Prophet (peace be upon him) and the caliphs how the non-Muslims should be treated. Dr Hilali quoted from the holy Quran Those who believe and those who are Jews and the Sabians and the Christians who ever believes in God and the Last

shall they grieve" (v : 69). Following the holy Quran the Prophet (peace be upon him) set examples as to how the non-Muslims should be

Day and does good works -

they shall have no fear nor