

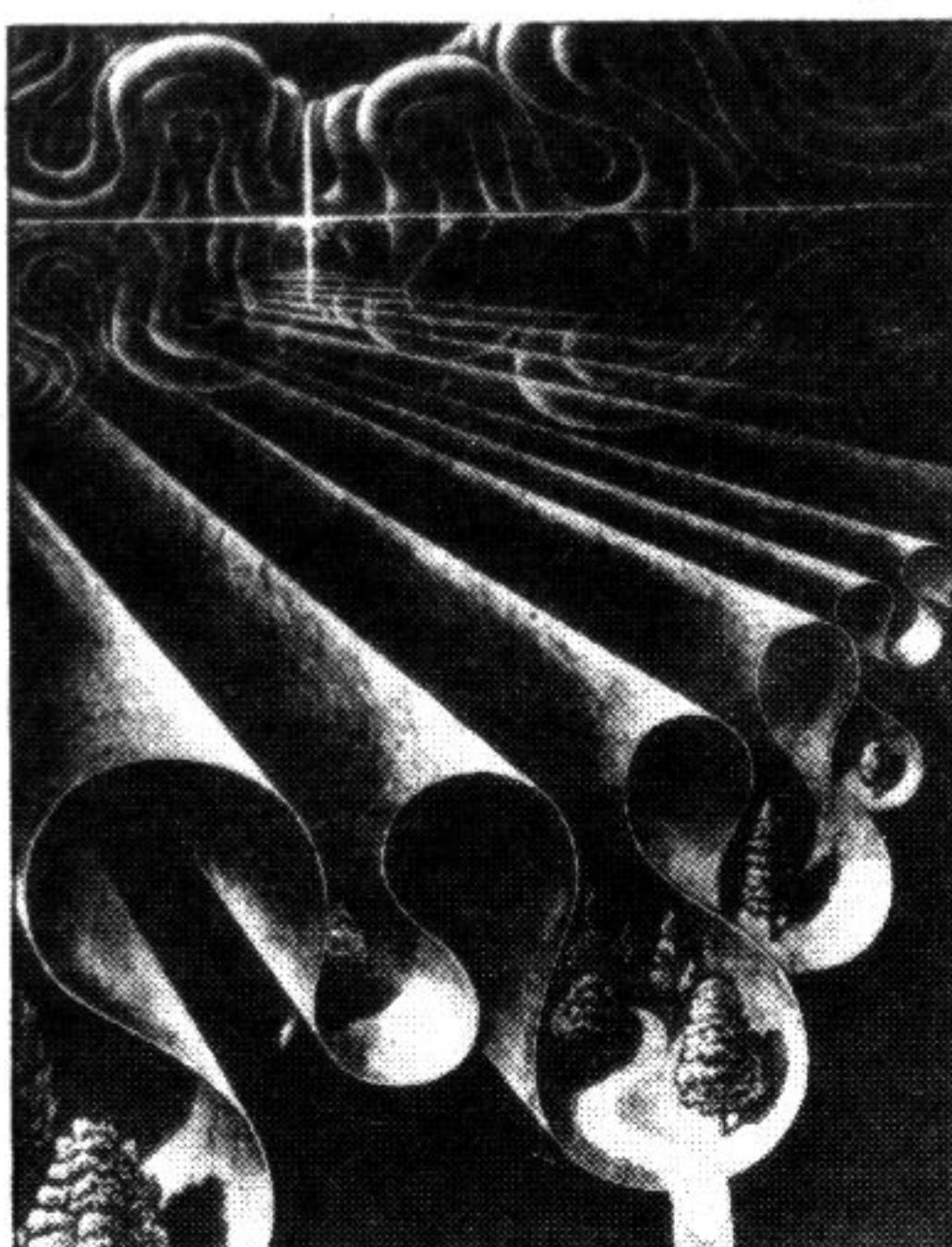
Meaningful Lyricism in Mezzotint

by Fayza Haq

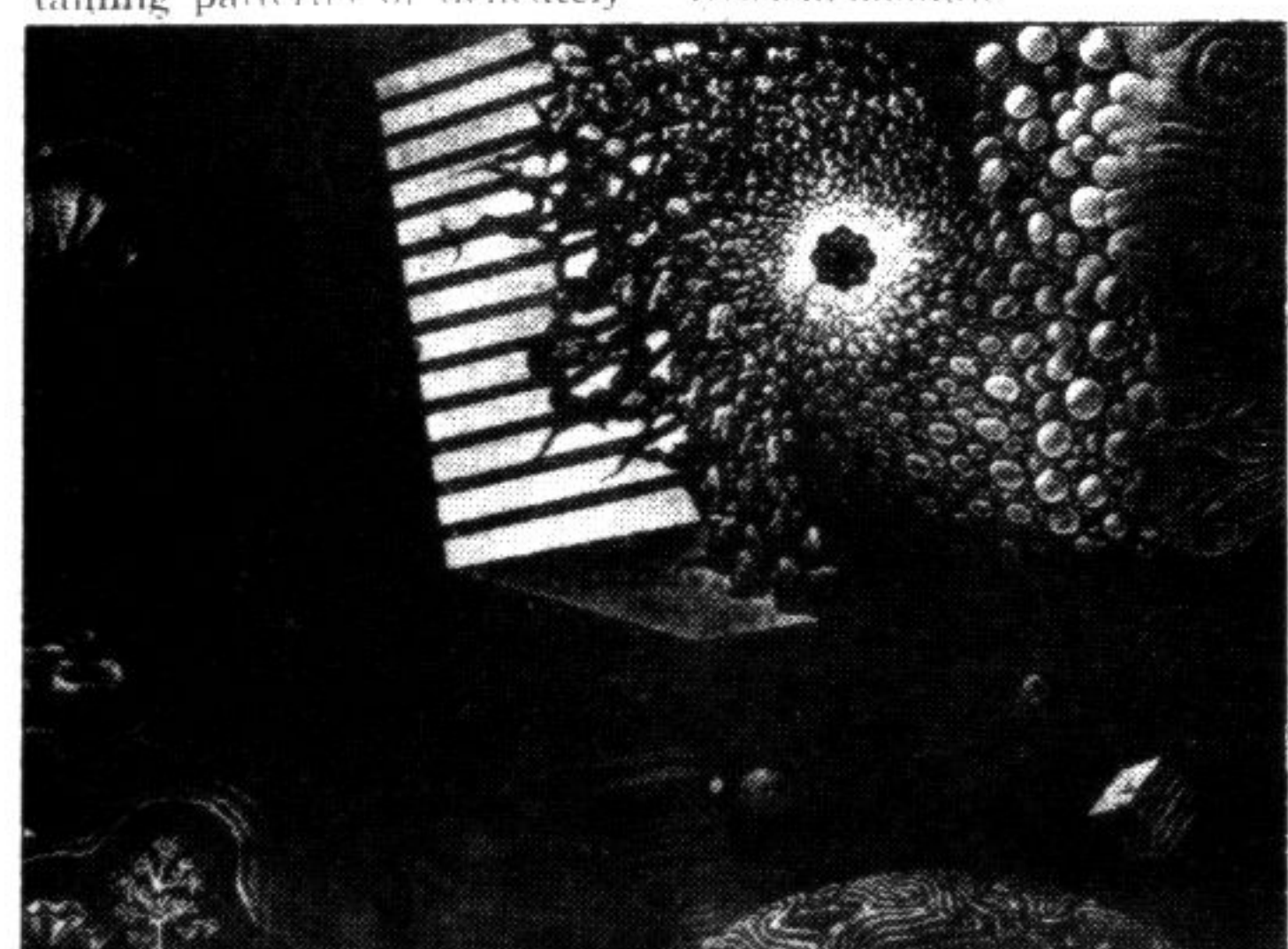
HERE is the present euphoria for black and white photographs as well as films and videos in *noir* et *blanche*. Recently, as the Shilpakala Academy, there were the mezzotint prints by Professor Shiroki Toshiyuki from Japan, who is here in Dhaka to conduct a month-long workshop on graphic prints at the Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka University.

Like much of the work coming from Japan, Toshiyuki's works too were modern and reflected the industrialization and urbanization of metropolises. His "Untitled-2" showed a brick pillar curving, twisting and finally dissolving into what looked like remnants of ferns, piled in a pillar shape. Droplet of tiny leaves and flowers, seen in geometrical embossed metallic sheets. At the back-drop one found a dominating cross, which had been used to hold the composition together. One witnessed the prowess of modernization, and the diminishing of the lure and the health-giving elements of nature in the work as in all others. The artist was consumed with the theme of metamorphosis in our lives over the centuries.

Five cubes of different shapes and sizes, curling somewhat at the edges, containing patterns of delicately



juxtaposed leaves, chrysanthemums, daisies, and lilies — put in with subtle simple lines appeared to be toppling down from a ringed horn in "Untitled-4". These were surrounded by forms that could be seen at the bottom. The careful curl in the centre where the brick joined the ferns had an unquestionable element of Kintsu about it.

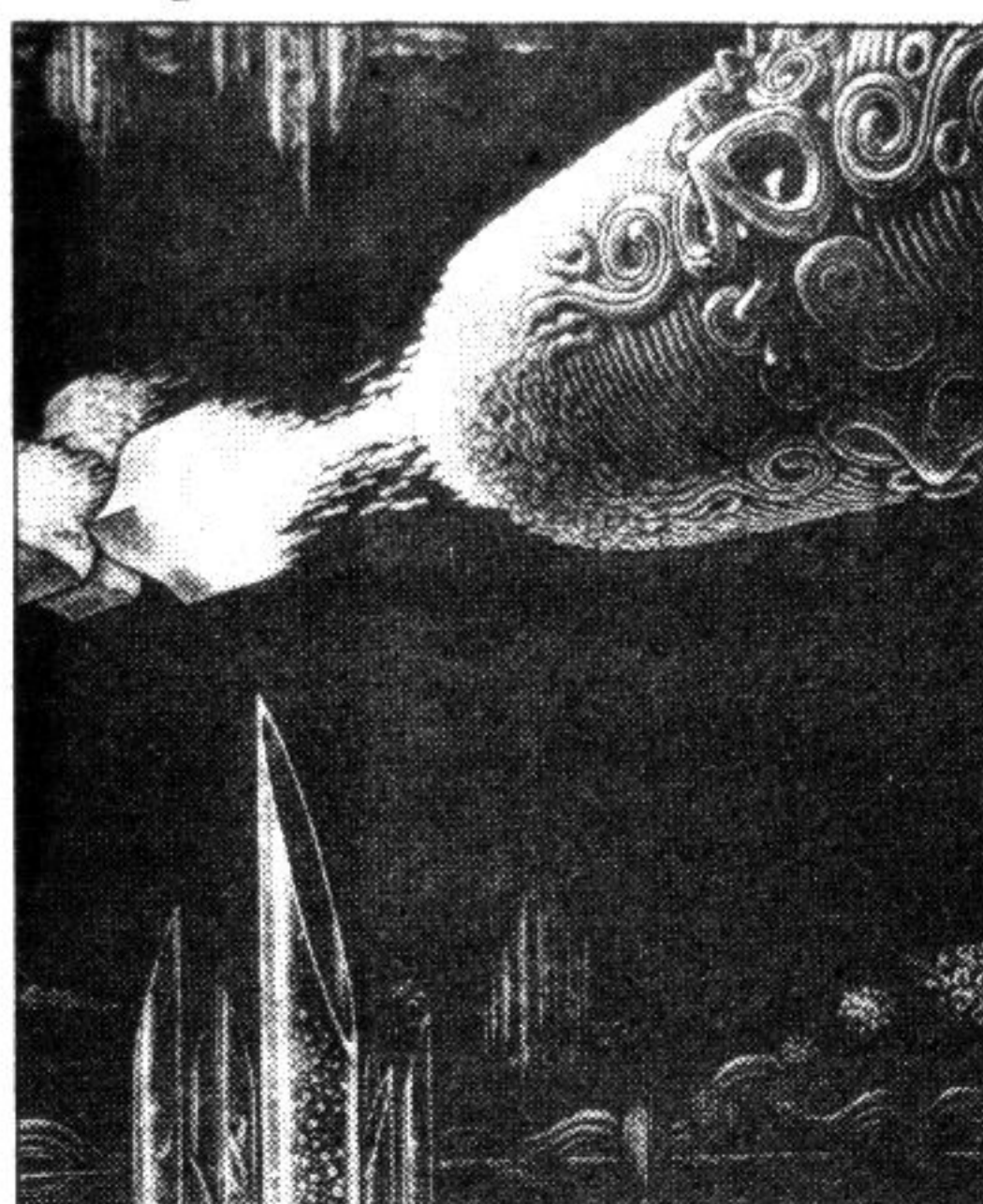


Untitled-5

The crumbling brick pillar, as much as the ferns, had been done in meticulous details with *tendresse*, care and infinite love of the subject.

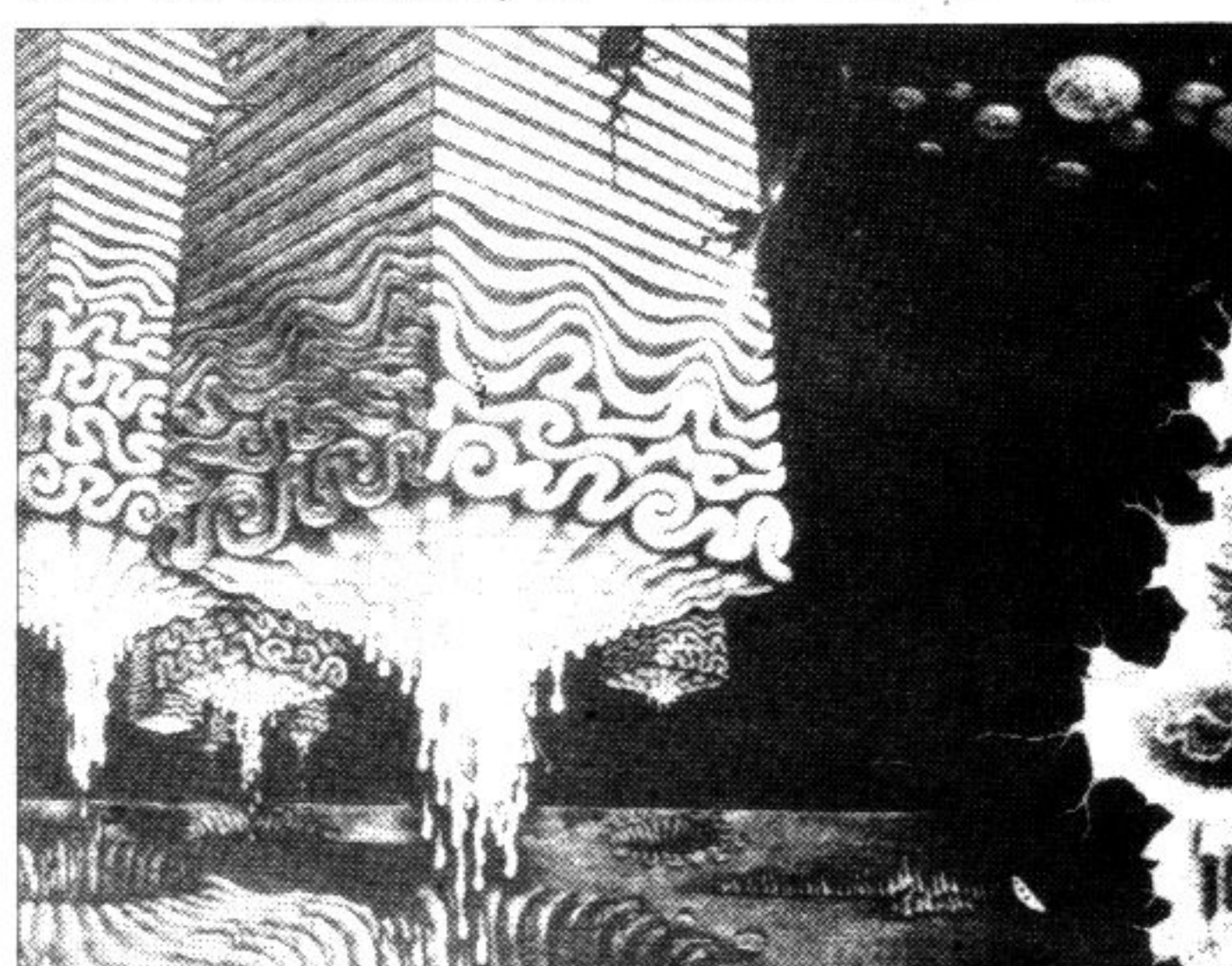
There were trees, waves, skies, rivers and layers of curling sheets of metal composed in an unusual perspective in "Untitled-3". In between the sheets coniferous trees were carefully couched, while gently flowing rivers, along with buoyant, swirling clouds were to be seen blended with the encircling layers of underwater floral growths with tiny delicate petals. While some of the elements from nature had been highlighted, the background was dark so that the subjects were easy to comprehend. In the falling of the cubes the artist had in mind the disintegration of our social and cultural values.

Out of the 34 pieces on display, perhaps the finest and the most intriguing print was "Untitled-5". To the right of the composition was a faint and intriguing rectangle containing minute mountain peaks, tiny shrubs, spaces of lakewater and dry parched land — all put into a neat com-



Untitled-3

posed whole creation. To the left of the print one found a cascade of blocks, placed with geometrical precision. In one of them one found a slim predator with sharp exposed teeth, lashing fins and whipping tail. There were fish and glimpses of baby octopuses too with an inset of floral motif. These were surrounded by un-



Untitled-6

derwater flora such as sea anemones and coral reefs. A picturesque shoal of tiny fish was to be seen atop this idyllic highly imaginative delineation of teeming underwater life.

Delicately cut-glass cylinders containing tiny flowers like baby's breath, more sprays, lyrical waves, more such creation at the left back-drop and a fascinating cylinder with lines worked on them to give the impact of inlaid metal work effect, were all there in "Untitled-6". One could interpret this as even a rocket that has been evolved over the years from natural jet-like movements found in the universe among living creatures.

Toshiyuki has used black and white because mezzotint has most scope in that. He has brought with him copper plates, rollers, colour, paper and all other graphic materials for his workshop that he has been conducting. He finds the technique fascinating and nouveau, and believes that this is most apt for expressing the inner thoughts and feelings of mankind. As he is accustomed to mezzotint he feels most at ease in it although he goes in for aquatints and has a penchant for wood carving. The artist comments that in Japan, despite the competition, a dedicated artist can easily make an adequate living.

Of a Vast Region, in a Nutshell

Asian Communication Handbook. Edited by Anura Goonasekera and Duncan Holaday. Singapore: AMIC, 1993, 450 pp.

HERE is a handbook of considerable substance. The clarity of the Handbook in its delineation of essential data, and the stimulation of its essays, are refreshing in their departure from assumptions and false comparisons, as well as the encouragement they offer to reach rational decisions on policy through clear, relevant information rather than opportunistic assumptions.

The Handbook covers the communication scene in 12 nations in the region: Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Each of the countries represented is given its own profile, including a brief verbal sketch of its history, status and trends in the development of its communications. This is followed in each case by a set of statistical data on the communication infrastructure operating in that country.

The format provides a very neat nutshell picture of each country, including a swift view of essential historical changes and an observer's view of critical events which affected the society's approach to mass communication.

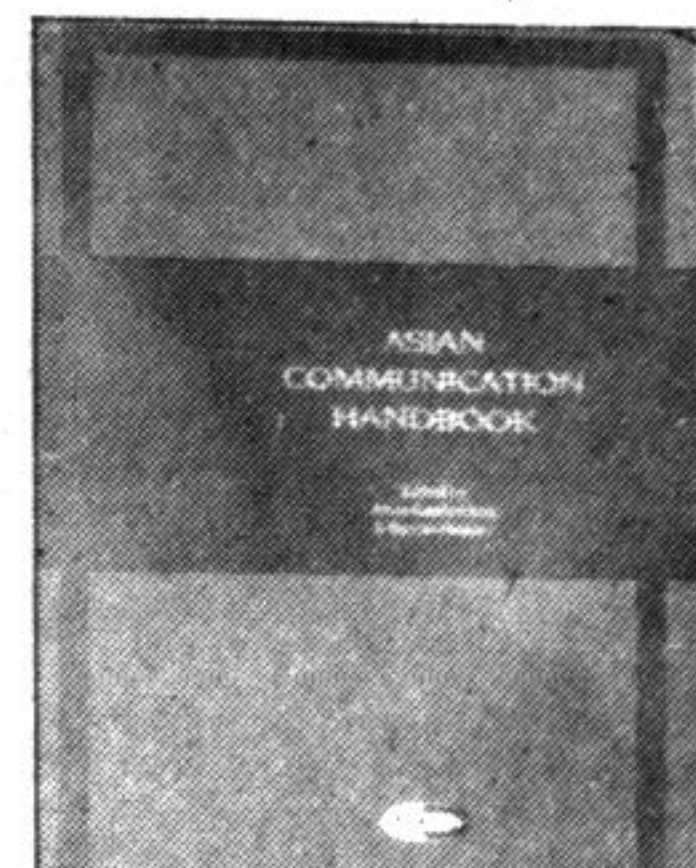
Such overviews are followed by concisely informative overviews of the various media, before following up with the statistical data, from the most basic demographic information, through economic indicators, employment in various media, classified listings of each country's print and broadcast media, laws governing the various media, and details of foreign broadcast programmes received. The data is not confined to print, radio and television, but acknowledges the strength of cinema in the region, both in terms of films produced, released locally and exported, as well as cinemas' audience capacities. Data on employment in the

various industries also give a real-world perspective when there is glib talk of a film industry.

The data moves on to Telecommunications (organizations, employment, satellite costs, even telephone charges), and the number of VCR sets in use and laws governing videotape rental and copying.

Clearly many would like these concise and pointed national profiles to have been more expansive, but this volume is after all, a handbook, and not an indepth discursive study. A picture is given, with sufficient information and observation to raise our historic and ideological awareness. More detailed, theoretical and anecdotal and anecdotal research is up to the reader — and each section is supplied with a listing of relevant data sources.

The four extensive essays which follow the national communication profiles form a most valuable section of this solid volume. They offer substantial bases for fresh thought on issues and implications of communication and development, and encouragement to those who wish to see policy and communication in realistic terms. The essays 'reflect current attempts to integrate and interpret the sort of data presented in the profiles at a theoretical level', and a clear thread is the increasing importance of telecommunications in economic growth and social development — factors



often taken too easily for granted.

There is a concern in all these essays for more effective, rational communications in and between the regional nations. Their rationales are well explained, and the point is well made that the complexity and impact of today's telecommunications cannot be put to the best use in a simplistic, pragmatic way without a strong underpinning of theory and informed regional interaction, if precious resources are not to be wasted. At the rear of the Handbook is an extensive bibliography on each nation. We are well directed to additional avenues of inquiry.

The Handbook is heaped with information, and better still, with food for essential thought in an area where technology is daily outstripping attempts at rational policy.

Reviewed by

Bryon Quigley

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Viewing Video

by Lenin Gani

THE Crow is an action movie starring the late Brandon Lee. It is ironic because the film is about a dead man and Brandon Lee who was accidentally killed during its shooting. This is not the first time that tragedy has struck the Lee family. Brandon's illustrious father Bruce Lee was also killed during the making of a martial arts film. Anyone who has seen Dragon Bruce Lee's life story, may feel a touch of *deja vu*. Apparently Lee family history told of misfortune for its males, so Bruce's father dressed his baby son in girl's clothing and later sent him to America to avoid the family curse.

Brandon was just becoming established with a couple of good performances under his belt. The Crow almost was scrapped after Brandon's tragic demise. He was shot with a real bullet while performing a stunt only two days before the film was completed. However, the producers used computer graphics to finish the job.

The basic theme of *The Crow* is about a man (Brandon) who is brutally murdered but manages to become resurrected with the help of a crow.

He then proceeds to take revenge on his assailants. If you have no difficulty in accepting this, then you will probably not be surprised to find out he has also become indestructible (well almost).

Kevin Costner stars as Wyatt Earp, a two-part three-hour epic western about the life and times of America's most famous lawman. The movie chronicles his complete life from the strong influences of his judge father, played by Gene Hackman, to the notorious gunfight at the OK Corral. The story also includes milestones in his life such as the death of his wife, his first killing and his meeting with Doc Holiday (Dennis Quaid). The film focuses on his job in a town called Tombstone and his relationship with his brothers. After the famous showdown, his brothers are gunned down in revenge. Costner is determined to seek out and avenge their deaths.

Although *Ena Meena Deeka* has an all-star cast a safer bet in this week's Hindi selection would be either Naaraz or Vijaypath. Both Films contain good music and interesting stories.

| ENGLISH | | |
|--|--------------------|---|
| NAME | TYPE | CAST |
| 1. Four Weddings And A Funeral | (Comedy) | Hugh Grant/Andie MacDowell |
| 2. Beyond | (Action) | Charlie Sheen/Landa Fiorentino |
| 3. My Girl 2 | (Comedy) | Dan Aykroyd/Jamie Lee Curtis |
| 4. Ebbtide | (Thriller) | Harry Hamlin |
| 5. The Crow | (Action) | Brandon Lee |
| 6. Monday Morning | (Action) | Roger Moore |
| 7. The Undertaker's Greatest Matches | | |
| 8. History of Wrestling | | |
| 9. Mania | | |
| 10. Blown Away | (Action) | Jeff Bridges/Tommy Lee Jones |
| 11. Wyatt Earp | (Western) | Kevin Costner/Dennis Quaid/Gene Hackman |
| HINDI | | |
| NAME | TYPE | CAST |
| 1. Naaraz | (Malial) | Mithun/Pooja Bhatt/Atul Agnihotri |
| 2. Vijaypath | (Romantic/Musical) | Sonali/Gulshan Grover |
| 3. Ena Meena Deeka | (Romantic/Comedy) | Ajay Devan/Tabu |
| 4. Aag | (Social) | Suresh Oberoi/Danny |
| 5. Khoda Hafez (goodbye) | | Rishi Kapoor/Juhi Chawla/Vinod Khanna |
| 6. Anupam Kher/Kader Khan/Shakti Kapoor/Kiran Kumar | | Anupam Kher/Kader Khan/Shakti Kapoor/Kiran Kumar |
| 7. Shethu/Gulshan Grover/Shakti Kapoor/Kader Khan/Sonali | | Shethu/Gulshan Grover/Shakti Kapoor/Kader Khan/Sonali |

Source: Fair Video and other video clubs

Boatman of the River Padma : Almost as Memorable as the Novel itself

A Review by Mahmud Hasan from London

BOATMAN of the River Padma' (*Padma Nadir Majhi*) was the only Bengali entry in this year's (37th) London Film Festival. As Satyajit Ray is dead it is taken for granted that there will be one Bengali film less in the festivals. Mrinal Sen had no entry this year, but then his later festival films are, more often than not, Hindi — and not Bengali.

'Boatman of the River Padma' is a joint India/Bangladesh production. It is directed by Goutam Ghose, one of the premier directors of India's Parallel Cinema. He chose a difficult novel — Manik Banerji's modern classic of the same name — to adapt for the screen. The actors and actresses are from both Bangladesh and West Bengal. And this is significant for the sub-continent of India (and for Bengal) both of which were partitioned in 1947 on the basis of religion.

Manik Banerji is a major Bengali writer of this century. He is perhaps the most powerful novelist writing in the language since Bankimchandra. A hard and tough man Manik Banerji moves around people who fight with their adversaries — both men and elements. The novelist speaks in a robust language and never accepts defeat.

Padma Nadir Majhi is a memorable novel. Great stories have, however, not always made great films. D H Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* was a failure. So was Manik Banerji's *Putul Nacher Itikatha*. Boatman of the River Padma is certainly not one of them and the film should almost be as memorable as the story is.

The time of the events is before the partition of Bengal in 1947 when Hindus and Muslims lived peacefully together. The world 'Majhi' in the title means both the boatman and the fisherman. They are inter-changeable. Their lives move around their boats which give them their livelihood. The events take place in a village situated by the mighty river Padma in Bangladesh. The people who live there are the fishermen, their wives and their children. They are at the mercy of Nature, but they struggle and live on. They live in and move about in a small area. Rains pierce in through the straws of their huts, waters flood their houses and after a heavy storm the women wait by the river for the return of their menfolk. Still, the villagers live. They love and make love, steal and cheat, cry and scream, celebrate any good thing that they can snatch from life and enjoy it to the hilt. This life is both particular and general — general among a community of people living anywhere in the world, especially among people who work

to live and live to work. The Marxist Manik Banerji knows them and is committed to depict their life. This village and the villagers were waiting to be re-discovered by him.

The protagonist of the story is Kuber, a humble fisherman who lives with his wife and children. His life is changed by Hossain Miah, a wealthy trader with a mission: populating a remote island in the faraway delta, employing the people to clear its dense forests and persuading them to settle in an ideal society free from sectarian strife. Rashu, one of the settlers of the island, has returned to the village having run away from there. He tells Kuber of the hardships and desolation on the island. But, deprived of his livelihood by a great storm and accused of a theft he has not committed, Kuber accepts Hossain Miah's offer of captaining his cargo boat. The film has many incidental threads and does not explain much about the odd island (Maina Dwip), but it provides a magnificently authentic portrait of life on the river Padma. Kuber ultimately moves for Maina Dwip, his sister-in-law (wife's sister) — the tough girl — who had an unhappy married life and has been after him ever since she saw him.



Rupa Ganguly and supporting actor



Champa and Rainsul

Perhaps they were meant for the life they set out for. Hossain Miah assures Kuber he would look after his family.

For some time Kuber has a suspicion of Hossain Miah and of his motive. Some people have suggested that it is a suspicion of the Hindu for the Muslim and it should be seen as an allegory — a timeless view of communal strife in India. Kuber is a Hindu and Hossain is a Muslim and so it is thought this suspicion for one another is natural. It is true. Kuber had a suspicion of Hossain Miah, but I must say when reading the book I never had the impression that Kuber's suspicion was a Hindu suspicion for the Muslim. Communal riots that became rampant in the sub-continent after the partition should not lead us to think that Hindu-Muslim enmity and mistrust always existed. It will not be right to interpret the events of the past on the basis of what came to happen in the future.

Kuber's suspicion is more likely to be the poor man's suspicion of the rich, an ordinary man's suspicion of a man who appears to be mysterious mixed with fear and trepidation of departing for an almost-unknown destination in the

faraway sea. The question then comes — what type of man is Hossain Miah? Is he evil? And, if so, some have asked, why Manik Banerji has made the character a Muslim — and not a Hindu? The answer to this is simple. There is no evidence to suggest that Hossain is an evil man. He is a dreamer who wants to create an ideal community in his island. In fact, he writes of Hossain Miah that he may be rich (perhaps richer than the landlord of the area), but he is nearer to the fishermen, the people, than the landlord. Not many Hindu writers would have made such a character a Muslim. It is disgustingly stupid to cast any aspersion of communalism on Manik Banerji.

To film a literary masterpiece is a bold task. More often than not the attempts are not successful. It is not easy to give shapes to the written words without misrepresenting or under-representing. Satyajit Ray was perhaps the most successful director in this genre

His filming of stories by Bibhutibhusan Banerji and Rabindranath Tagore are classic examples of great stories transformed into great movies. By and large Boatman of the River Padma has met the demands of Padma Nadir Majhi.

But some finer points are missing. Kuber steals money from Hossain Miah's pocket when he was sleeping in Kuber's house. It was not shown or mentioned. In a similar incident in Pather Panchali Durga stole a necklace from the rich man's house. When asked about it she lied. We later came to know about it through Apu after her death. (Nobody else in the story, however, would know it). The incident made Durga's character and the situation more complete and more real and it was what Bibhutibhusan wanted and Satyajit did not allow his viewers to miss it. By not allowing Kuber to steal the money Goutam Ghose missed the opportunity to make his character and the situation more complete. It is doubtful if Manik Banerji would like it.



The unforgettable Utpal Dutta

Again, in the story the Muslim girl had to leave her veil during and immediately after the big storm. It was Nature's demand which human beings could not fight. Goutam Ghose's viewers did not see it.

There are also some other things that are missing. Manik Banerji, a Marxist, knew about the economics of fishing and fish-trade and how it affected the fishermen's lives. He has mentioned them in the dialogues and narratives. We do not, however, see much of it in the film. Another omission was the midwaters, the expanse, of the Padma during the storm from where one could hardly see its banks. Perhaps this is not Goutam Ghose's failing. It may be that the Bengali cinema is still not capable of filming in big rivers during storm.

About acting the first name that should be mentioned is of Utpal Dutta. The veteran actor is Hossain Miah in the film. From his portrayal of the character one can see (dismissing any doubt one might have) Hossain is not evil. He is practical, but, at the same time, a dreamer. He helps others to help himself and that is how he feels he can reach his goal. He has no intention of harming others. Occasionally, we find him depressed. Perhaps he is not sure when, if at all, he would reach his goal. Boatman of the River Padma is Utpal Dutta's last film and when, at the end of the film, Hossain Miah says 'Khoda Hafez (goodbye)' to Kuber sending him to his dream-island, it is as if the actor was bidding farewell to the world. Utpal Dutta's death is an irreparable loss to the Bengali cinema.

Champa plays the role of Mala, Kuber's lame wife. She is from Bangladesh and Boatman of the River Padma is one of her first films. When interviewed at the end of the show the director Goutam Ghose spoke highly of Champa which, needless to say, he should. She is one of the sweetest things I have seen in films for some time. I have no doubt she has come to stay and has a lot to offer to the world of cinema.

Asaad, also from Bangladesh is the protagonist Kuber. He is a straight character. He is a simple hard-working man. His is a difficult part to impress with, but Asaad has come out creditably.

Kapila, Mala's sister, is Rupa Ganguly of Calcutta — Draupadi of the TV's long serial Mahabharata. Rupa caught the mood of the bold and sensual Kapila. Kapila had been after Kuber ever since she saw him and she won him in the end. She does not appear to have any compunction for her sis-

ter whose husband she took away. Some justification may be tried on her behalf saying that she had an unhappy married life. But Kapila's attitude, behaviour and way of life may not be limited to this explanation. She is an amoral character. Perhaps the final justification of her action lies in what happens at the end and that is Kapila — and not Mala — who is better suited to settle in Maina Dwip with Kuber. Rupa Ganguly has the essential sensual quality required for Kapila and she has exploited fully the forward endearing words Manik Banerji wrote for her.

Now something about the dialect used in dialogue. The dialect used is East Bengal's,

Unfortunately, many of the West Bengal actors found it difficult to come to terms with it. This may not be an easy work for ordinary men, but should it be so for the actors? Did they try hard?

Finally, Padma Nadir Majhi is a story of Bangladesh, but we needed some one to come from outside to film it and take it out to the world. Similarly, some time ago, Titash Ekti Nadir Naam, another memorable story of Bangladesh, had to be filmed by another outsider — Ritwik Ghatak. For the last thirty years I have been waiting to see a Bangladeshi film made by a Bangladeshi in the London Film Festival. How long more I have to wait?