

# Never on Sunday

by Arjuna

PHILIPPINE burial customs can be exotic, out-of-this-world, or macabre. As with other peoples on this planet, Filipinos have different ways of burying their dead — some jovious, others involving a lot of crying and lamentations.

They all, of course, showcase the natives' various beliefs about death — and the afterlife. In Palawan, for instance, residents of Cagayancillo Island never bury their dead on a Sunday. It is their belief that to do so would bring a series of misfortunes to the bereaved family. In contrast, inhabitants of Malbon in Metro Manila and other big towns in the neighbouring province of Rizal make it a point to hold burial rites on a Sunday.

The Negritos of Dao, Antique and Iriga, Camarines Sur sing and dance for several nights before burying the dead in the belief that music and merriment will open the gates of heaven for their dear departed. Death, according to them, is something to be happy about, never a cause for crying.

On the other hand, in the town of La Paz, Tarlac, and neighbouring areas, it is the custom to lift over the coffin of the dead all the grandchildren "so that his spirit would not haunt the living."

During a burial, it is common practice to toss stones or flowers into the grave so that the dead could rest in peace. However, there is a rule to be strictly followed by pregnant women — they must leave the

grave. Anyone who does, they believe, will be haunted by the ghost of the deceased for several days and nights.

Ilocanos, who live in northern Philippines, believe death is always an occasion for a gathering of people. Kin, neighbours, friends and other sympathizers pay tribute to the deceased by bringing wreaths. They talk of his past, of his good deeds. Native pastries are ordinarily served on this occasion — different kinds of rice cakes mainly. Others are given a choice between basi (the premium Ilocano wine) and dinuba (self-rolled cigars), or both.

The Pagobos, a cultural community in the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, bury their dead under the house. The mourning period lasts for a year during which the family wears old clothes, eats sparingly and avoids any form of leisure.

Other ethnic groups like the Aetas, a Negrito tribe, of the province of Zambales, Mandayas of Davao and Mangyans of Sibuyan Island do not only abandon the house of the dead person but burn it. Leaving the house of the deceased is also practised among the Mamanwas of Surigao, Tabagnos of Leyte and Imbatags of Bukidnon.

In Baruaan, Leyte, the cof-

fin when removed from the house for the burial has to pass through the window, not through the door. Great care is taken so that it does not touch any part of the window. Residents of the place claim that the soul of the deceased will rest in peace only if he is removed from the house through the window.

In the province of Antique, a strange custom is observed when the mother of a family dies. The youngest child is strapped for 24 hours to the bed of the dead mother. According to the people of Antique, if this practice is not observed, the spirit of the mother will come to take the child to the other world.

An ancient custom of wives rolling over their husbands' graves is still practised by some widows in Lipa, Batangas. As the woman rolls over the grave, she vows never to marry again. From the cemetery, she goes straight home, locks herself in and refrains from talking or seeing anyone for four days.

For the people of Arevalo, Iloilo, combing the hair while the corpse is still in the house is a bad omen. It is believed that whoever does so will also die. In Migao, Iloilo, lively music accompanies a child's cortege; a dirge is sung for a dead adult.

After the burial, in Maragayap, La Union, the survivors take turns jumping over the grave. They believe that doing this will give them long life.

— Depthnews Asia

I had to coin the word for many of our television advertisements, or commercials as these are called. The title means TV advertisements cunningly designed to divert the attention away from the product advertised.

You are shown live products money cannot buy; such as utterly charming women engaged in utterly irrelevant activities such as frolicking and prancing about in gay abandon, for reasons as mysterious as the feminine mystique, and unknown to this admirer (not critics). Such seductive behaviour, (but certainly not erotic, at least not on BTV), the media experts believe, is supposed to enhance the appeal of the product. The nature of the product is kept in suspense and then hurriedly revealed at the very end of the commercial.

Something might be wrong with me, because by the time the commercial ends, my attention had been so much diverted that I can neither recall the product, its name or its virtues, and why I should buy it.

I have read about subliminal advertising, and seen some. I do not know if this psychological technique has made me buy a product, as I hardly change my brands now, accustomed to

## "Tele-divertease-ments"

decades of use, some handed down the generation. That reminds me of the saying that the best products are not generally advertised — directly at least, as the satisfied clients carry the message by word of mouth to friends (no advertising budget!). For example, several years ago there was that Chinese restaurant in Gulshan by the shore of the lake, which did not have any signboard anywhere except a nameplate

the product advertised were something less. Since such notices are not displayed on the local TV, one might wonder what actually was included in the 'bargain' offer (with all due respect to the attractive models).

Some small news items appear from time to time in the newspapers to the effect that a few female activist groups in countries developed, or

the name of the item is not clear, as with the background jingle, subjective pronunciation, noise (within the commercial), tuning (by the viewer), background noise (in the electronic reception and in the verbal drawing room), the audio comes before the printed name. Why not identify the product first, then spill the garbage? Well, not my business, I am not a municipal inspector.

This writing is in prose, as is most of the daily life. Why, all, almost all, the commercials have to be in jingles (and that too in Bangladeshi)? The other evening I was watching an advertisement on some brand of shaving blade. There was a lot of jumping about, reminding me of the American play *The Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. I developed nervous tension waiting to see whether the young man with the razor in hand would burst into break dance while shaving.

I do not believe in self-molam of my face, and shaving is one of the small pleasures of life simply because this is the only time in the day when a man is not disturbed by the clamouring world. Looks like some folks are scared of the cutthroat.

## The Passing Show

Chuckles

at the gate in the residential colony. It was recommended by a friend. The food was excellent. Don't ask me for the location. I do not want the place to be crowded.

Coming back to the models used in the advertisements, perhaps there is a legal angle to it, as I have noted that in similar ads printed in the glossy western magazines, there was a notice in small print to the effect that the price mentioned did not include the model, or the clothes she was wearing, (if

otherwise, have been protesting on the advertising exploitation of the female form, and distorting the image of the female fatale. What I mean can be guessed from some of the adverts through the sky channels.

Back to our TV commercials. Less than five per cent of the valuable and available seconds are allotted to information about the product; the rest of the time is wasted (?) on foreplay or pointing out the product, using various gestures and postures. Sometimes, even

KATO dur gya mairdo rawana holo — the hero set off after ambuling some distance, so goes a mischievous line of a narration in one of our punthias. Bangladesh is surely moving economically but only towards a starting line celebrated by Rostow as the take-off point. The best performance in Bangladesh's lackadaisical economic performance has so far been in the building and construction sector — in the former rather than in the latter part of the activity, to be precise. Ruling governments and realtors — who doesn't know governments in Bangladesh can and indeed have been great real estate operators — would want to parade this fact as an indicator to economic progress. But there is no shortage of knowledgeable people who think that exactly the opposite is true in national economic situations, yet to reach the take-off point. There seems to be a realisation rather very late in the day on the part of World Bank that their mighty help to the Third World nation's development of economic infrastructure had gone down the drain. This together with the doles thrown in by the developed nations had captilly lined pockets a already rich in money gotten from speculation, graft, bribery and outright swindle often known by the name of 'business'. If all foreign injections of wealth were tallied with local cash generation and concentration, the figures could be staggering. Like astronomical numbers they would come rounded off to eight, nine, ten and more zeroes preceded by who cares what.

Where does all this money go? A hefty part goes to realise an agrarian people's dream for owning land and a home all to one's own — a dream lately bloating into owning acres of urban land and blocks of high rise mansions not so much for owning but for generating unending cycles of cash supply which in their turn make the environs of Dhaka or Chittagong into fresh jungles of concrete. How much money is going into building urban residences in a land where at least one third of the population, 40 million isn't it? — have no shelter to live in. No one

can now be cruel enough to shout the direst threat of all of the old days — *whitey ghughu chaurabo* — your homestead shall be reduced to a thriving colony for doves — to these people while a very big chunk of our national wealth goes into urban housing — of cash come from very lively gushes of sweat and blood.

More buildings are rising than becomes the overall picture of the nation: its literacy and its health, its employment situation and its investment-management profile. This could very well have led to a competitive ambience tingling the whole spectrum of investors and builders and designers — a competition for quality and efficiency. This could have been an ideal ground for architects to flourish. In reality, theirs is a community — still somewhat professional, at least more than the doctors and teachers by miles and still falling far short of what would please our dear friend and guru — Moju Bhal, the celebrated Mazharul Islam. As the investments in the building sector go on swamping the nation often with grossest visual vulgarities and inept living and working accommodation and unending structures brimming with risks to life and the viability of the collective called city life, the architects are progressively made to crawl on all four and become accessories to this 'nefarious game' selling even our future.

This I observe with a deep sense of pain, being an admirer of the architects as the brightest bunch of our people, mostly young and full of promise — skilled, often enough innovative, generally imaginative, and of course, knowing very well what their business is about. This is a time of a harrowing famine sapping the vitals of our nation — a famine of capable, educated and cultivated talents ready to take on the challenges in their respective areas. I feel like worshipping the young hopefuls among the architects they have worked up to. But then, the hopes and promises with most disappointingly under a relentless pressure of unscrupulous investors and their stooges.

This could, of course, have

## My Patches of Disquiet

Waheedul Haque

— his own tomb at Sasaram — and a bevy of other remarkable buildings including the mausoleum of his chief architect. How did Sher Shah do these without the help of Aladdin's Lamp? He had the will, he chose his men wisely and supported them ungrudgingly — that was his way to immortality.

Even in as bad a time as Ershad's own share of dictatorship — a dictatorship first established and then underwritten by the military, that is — an interesting structure started going up in a most unlikely place — the unhealthy milieu of the yard seemed to have been abandoned by the Railway at Phulbaria, for the benefit of the floating dross of the society. It was interesting primarily because of its massiveness. No tall building in Dhaka has such lavishly sprawling base. Soon enough it was evident that it would be as high as it was broad and deep. The Nagar Bhavan was a fit gift to the first genuinely elected Dhaka Mayor and symbolised victory of democracy.

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Once an eye full of measure of it has been taken in the time the rickshaw takes to cross the road in front — from one end of the edifice to the other — and you have been thoroughly impressed by some of the many things put on it to impress, not the least of which is a kind of a grandiose picture of balance and harmony, you start looking for space — open space, landscape to be precise — that should house such a thing. It was too close to the road that was not laid out to run by such a modern-day palace.

My unease, disquiet you can say, was somewhat laid to rest by one of the two architects doing this fine job. Please treat the Secretariat, the Osmany

OUR tongue often carries your national or regional identity. The Arabs, all speaking the same language, identify Egyptians or Saudis from their linguistic accent. The English speaking Irish distinguishes the Scottish from the Cocknish Londoner. And with the language or dialect your status is rated. Language often acts as an enemy. That's why it is often claimed that the dumb has no foe, and individuals and nations fought hot and cold wars to impose one's language on others. The Vikings tried to impose their language on the English, the French carried their tongue wherever they went as colonists. So did the English and others. The Japanese are alleged to have used batons to teach their tongue to the Manchurians and Koreans.

The late Zahur Hossain Chowdhury, one of the few non-conformist anti-establishment journalists of Bangladesh spoke chaste Bengali and also used to speak in Noakhali dialect without bothering about and difficulty which his listeners could have faced in understanding it. Once one of his friends reminded him that his Noakhali-Bengali was not understandable, his reply was quick and straight. He claimed that it was the people's language and 'you people vulgarized it'. He jokingly vowed not to cut the corners to make it straight.

When three Feni-ans met — Abdus Salam of Observer, Zahur Hossain Chowdhury of Sangbad and Mahbubul Hoq of Purbadesh — the Noakhali dialect was at its highest peak. The trio never switched to the other side. It was pure Noakhali dialect spoken by people from Sitakund to Chaudhogram and Majdee to Chandpur.

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman has not been able to liberate his Bengali from the influence of the Sylheti accent. Once he threatened his critical listeners that if they patiently did not listen to his Bengali, however bad, he would speak in pure Sylheti dialect. This worked well and

## The Astonishing Museum of Relief Maps

### Dozens of Small-scale Models of Towns

by Claire Thierry

There is a secret gallery, unknown to the general public, nesting beneath the rooftops of the sumptuous 'Hotel des Invalides', in Paris. It contains nearly a hundred relief maps, models of towns, ports, arsenals and fortresses, made in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, for the use of sovereigns and their military strategists. It is a place of memory, shortly to be turned into a museum.

EVERYTHING can be seen there. The tumbledown cottages and the chapels, the narrow alleyways and every stone of the fortifications, a hedge of

Garden's and the Nagar Bhavan as a kind of whole and you will get your landscape. He argued convincingly and I had three-quarters of a mind to agree with him. But the road kept blocking even an imaginary integration of Osmany Udyan with Nagar Bhavan. Well, how about, balancing the anterior with the posterior — which seems not to have even been attempted, although the two elevations were of mirror-image sameness?

It was a sad sad tale that came out in reply. And the tale, as it unfolded, tugged at my heartstrings with excruciating pain. For, I too, had my dreams about how to utilise the vast space left open by the shifting of the railway station and the yard to Kamalapur. My interest lay wholly in using it in a way that would have a liberating influence on the suffocating minds of the residents of Old Dhaka. I thought of a cultural complex — theatres, art galleries, libraries, cine-complex of the Calcutta Nandan type — with tens of acres garden space thrown in. This could be a wonderful way of elevating life in Old Dhaka and at the same time offering people living in fringes of New Dhaka in conditions for worse a perpetually blowing southerly breeze of rejuvenating culture. Imamuddin, the man who designed and built with architect Lalun Nahar the Nagar Bhavan, was now expounding to me the substance of my dreams of thirty years — which I have known to be as good as shattered and had long resigned to the fact of one more chance of redeeming the damnation that is living in this city. Why, this Jason-faced construction has been designed to contribute to making Dhaka into one wholesome city instead of the present contrary pictures of pampering and neglect. Provisions were there to balance the Osmany with another generous garden on the other side. And then the Mahmudul Hasan streak struck the authorities. A six-storey shopping complex would rake in for the DCC tens of crores of much needed cash which the gardens would deny them out went the gardens. The clock-tower would have a near-Big Ben thing, one of its two faces turned to old Dhaka and the other to the

irributed the information throughout the English-speaking world. But the French avenged it by inventing and incorporating a similar phrase into the French dictionary. They coined the word 'anglaise' — to go off in English style. 'Filer a l'anglaise' is just the French synonym of 'to take French leave'. The frogs known for their harsh sounds (croaking) were equated with the French. The French were called frogs by the English. The French, here too, avenged it is a rather dignified way when they called the English the 'roastbeef'. How and where, the English resembled the bovine community has not been elaborated.

The last English big at the French was the English name of a particular birth control implement — the French leather. The French ingenuity in throwing the blame back on the other side of the Channel was equally laudable. They added a similar phrase in French, *capote anglaise* — the English overcoat — meaning the same implement. This linguistic duel continued for some time and when one became aware of the other's potential in retaliation to the same kind the degree, they buried the hatchet and sued peace.

In a Moscow park an intelligence agent caught a Russian who was reading a book with peculiar signs. On enquiry he told that it was a Hebrew grammar. The agent wanted to know why he was reading Hebrew as his chance to visit Israel was bleak. The learner told that Hebrew was the language spoken in paradise and his knowledge of Hebrew grammar might help him to speak better.

"Suppose you go to hell, how this grammar helps you?" asked the agent.

"In that case, I am equally proficient in Russian," replied the learner.

Allah-God-Bhagwan knew all these frictions and feuds over language. That's why He has not kept any official language of His own. He speaks to, and receives message from, your mind.

Year by year, the collection grew richer. In 1697, there were 141 relief maps whose function was both military and didactic with an immediate assessment of the strategic situation, a simulation of sieges and combats with a view to improving protective constructions, inventing new ones and refining defence or attack plans.

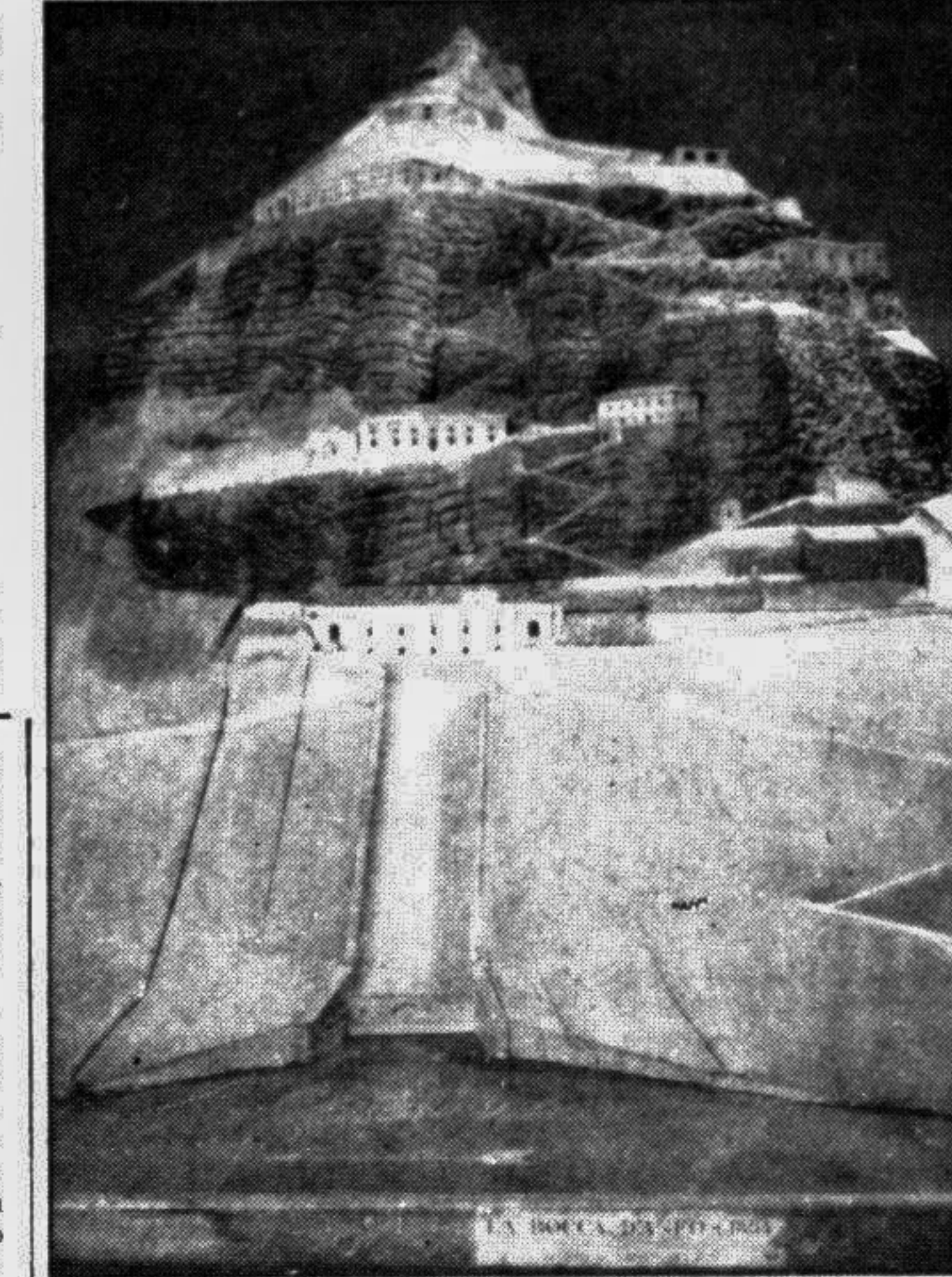
In 1710, these extremely accurate reduced models were transferred from the royal apartments in the Tuileries to the Grand Gallery in the Louvre where the king had his prestigious visitors admire what were called 'little marvels'. Were they not proof of the power of the kingdom?

In 1777, the collection was moved to the former wheat granary in the attic of the Hotel des Invalides, where it still is today. But Louis XVI was not interested in it and it was no longer looked after.

With the Revolution, the relief maps became important again and were national property. When Napoleon set out to conquer Europe, he had new ones made. But the way wars were waged changed. There were fewer sieges and more movement. Topographical maps were needed and no longer models and so these stopped being made in the 1870s.

It is true that they were complex and expensive to make. Military engineers took measurements and made maps and drawings from which skilled craftsmen built models using cleverly cut 'tables' which could be assembled and dismantled easily and in which the joints could not be seen.

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Relief map dating back to the first empire and representing the citadel of 'La Rocca d'Anfo' in Italy

## The Toiling Masses

by Seema Ahmed

My deprived country It pains to see you walk in the streets An old man, Older my misery, hunger and thirst Toupee and beard Honest as the Holy Book Hand in hand with his progeny A little girl in a white frock, shaved head and bare feet Walking on a road that leads nowhere What is your story this time Is it the floods that swept away your home Or is it the cyclone that took away all but this little girl Do you live in a little house, the space of two graves just And do you toil as each and every soul, day after day In the fields ploughing, breaking bricks, pushing, pulling Man after man Day after day Darkened as coal The toiling masses of Bangladesh.