

A Subtle Amalgamation of Optimism with Pessimism

by Fayza Haq

IFTIKHARUDDIN Ahmed, who recently held his solo exhibition of mixed media at Alliance Francaise, has now returned to Dhaka, after his year-long study at Paris.

Speaking about the influence of European art on his recent display, Iftikhar said, "I got the opportunity to see the works of renowned painters like Picasso, Matisse, Kandinsky, and Miro. I did this by going to various European museums, at different times."

"Going from Bangladesh to Europe, I felt like a ship that had suddenly found itself in an ocean of fine arts, so to say. All around me were well-known artists and amidst them I found myself to be a Lilliputian. I took myself to be a despicable artist from a country, known to the west, as a part of the Third World. I was, naturally, perplexed."

When in Bangladesh, he

considered himself poor. However, when he compared the works of the artist, in his country, with those found in Paris, he realised that, at least in the sphere of painting, Bangladeshis were not lagging far behind. He insisted that in no way are the Bangladeshi painters inferior to those found in Europe.

Iftikhar did not digress into the sphere of sculpture, being a painter, essentially. Whatever problems that he faced as an artist while in Dhaka, he sorted them out selectively, while staying in Europe. He had, for instance, some forms, like, say, the rickshaw, that he had once worked with. Studying abroad, the artist learnt ways and means to highlight them effectively. There were socio-political and economical, local problems, that once hindered his work. This

was due to the fact that impressions of environment, naturally confines an artist's creation, at all times and places.

Going to Paris, Iftikhar found himself in what one knows as a beautiful and historical city. He witnessed, for instance, how the traffic rules are adhered to. "I found myself in a disciplined world, in a traffic situation, which might appear overwhelming to one from overseas. His horizons, consequently widened."

"I was influenced by the environmental situation, which, obviously influences every creative worker. In Europe, I learnt to handle the element of balancing the space problems, which once perplexed my mind. Nevertheless, I was always aware, that whatever the Bangladeshi artists are doing in their country, is not to be bypassed. They are doing their best under the circumstances, which perhaps, artists from the west, may not be able to match. This, I believe, is because in the east, we can trace back our ancestry, to literally thousands of years. Just consider the art works found in Mainamati or Paharpur", Iftikhar pointed out.

"Nevertheless," the artist added "what Bangladeshi people are doing presently, is confined and hindered by their own circumstances. Today in the mid 90's, we find ourselves perplexed by our situation. Meanwhile, the people of, say, in Europe, on the other hand, lead a more systematic life."

"An artist, for instance, in Europe, as I saw, has different galleries where he can put in his works and have them easily sold. In Bangladesh, on the other hand, there are only about six private and two national galleries at Dhaka, and these too do not charge you any entry fee, as do the galleries that I have visited in Europe. There are similarly few sponsors even at Dhaka, our capital city (as I found on my arrival, only recently). Without their encouragement, our artists cannot make much progress."

Asked to elucidate if his technique had improved, Iftikhar said "I have my own identity, I believe. A connoisseur cannot come to the conclusion that my paintings have the influence of one master or another from Europe. I was determined, when first going to Paris, that I would return to Bangladesh with some paintings, which would be recognised as those of my own. I did not want to merely imitate the works of European artists, that one sees at the European galleries."

"I believe that I have clearly shown sincerity in my works, after having studied at Paris and toured some of the capital cities of Europe. To project sincerity in my work was the main purpose of my trip to Paris", he said.

The artist's oil on canvas, "Life" depicted a broken railway line. In this, Iftikhar wished to delineate the regional preoccupation, in the minds of our local artists, that they are caged within the framework of the earth. The symbol of life, that one found in the artist's show, held a year back, at Alliance Francaise, had been repeated in this piece. This comprised two balls of different sizes and hues, held together by a solid iron rod. The "Stop" sign that one found at the right forefront, stood for death. One thus realised that Iftikhar is still somewhat pessimistic as before, despite his recent western orientation. Nevertheless, the paler colours that ensue from the dark ones, assert his nouveau element of decisive hope in this piece as with all other ones, in his latest exhibition.

Iftikhar brought in the theme of motherhood in "Madonna", which bore the images of a cow tending its calf. The various parts of the basic anatomy of the animals had been placed on different parts of the composition. This mixed media too carried ingenious composition, new techniques, and flamboyant colours, muted and amalgamated with soft, soothing white and beige. In this composition too, the artist had attempted to bring in his belief that man remains limited and confined, despite all his perseverance. The images, portrayed on the

piece, stood for mankind — the subject of many artists, writers, scientists, and philosophers — since God created man.

The artists next favourite piece at the display was "Freedom", which depicted the head of a person, who had achieved his peace of mind after repeated struggle and strife. Iftikhar had experimented with colour, shape, texture and technique, to assert his beliefs, and present his skill and mastery in painting.

There were highlights of red in this piece, as the artist felt that this could convey the theme of revolution, which he felt was essential for the progress of man, and to usher in new hopes of freedom, and progress.

When at Lausanne, Switzerland, the artist had been inspired to paint "A Ship", in which the form of a ship had been brought in, along with a grey sky, to denote an oncoming storm, from which the ship was trying to escape, and reach the safety of a harbour. This was a mixed media composition.

Iftikhar's most fascinating and mind-boggling piece was "Landscape", which had a triangle in the centre, balanced by dark bars, at the sides. Its main form was building, with a flaming yellow crescent moon, on one side, carefully balanced by a matching neat rectangle on the other one. This patch on the right brought in the essential element of *joie de vivre*, which is necessary for the existence of all mankind.

Iftikharuddin Ahmed, had been a scholar of the French government for higher studies on painting at Academie de la Grande Chaumiere, Paris, between '93 and '94. His has held five solo painting at Dhaka and two in France. His group shows include 14 in Bangladesh, at 15 abroad. He won the first prize for painting as a scholar at Paris in '94. Earlier he won four Commonwealth exhibits for young artists between '76 and '74.

For an artist in his early thirties, Iftikhar has proved himself a dynamic one, even going by international standards.

revenge for Agamemnon's killing. Soon after the killing, they began to convince the people of the kingdom Argos that the killing was just. Klutaminestra was in illicit love and she killed her husband. So, Orestes and Electra tried to persuade the inhabitants of Argos that a miscreant had no right to live. Meanwhile, they were sentenced to death by the Court. Finding no other alternative, their wrath fell upon their uncle Menelaus who did not help them during the difficulties. To take a revenge, they planned to kill Menelaus' wife Helen and to abduct his daughter Harneun. Helen disappeared when Orestes tried to kill her. The Sun-god Apollo saved Helen as she was Apollo's legitimate child. Orestes and Pulades abducted Harneun and sought Menelaus' help in exchange for his daughter's life. Menelaus turned furious and revengeful as a reaction to this incident. In this climactic moment, Sun-god Apollo intervened. He ordered all to hold off and told Orestes to leave Argos for a year. He also ordered Menelaus to go back to his kingdom Sparta forgetting all enmity.

In this play Electra comes off as a brave and intelligent woman who causes the main incidents and controls the hero. She also appears as an influential personality. Today, when the question of women's freedom is gradually gaining ground in our country, the theme of the tragedy appears very relevant and topical. The set, background music and lighting of the play were adopted from the ancient

A Look into the Contemporary Global Issues

BOOK REVIEW

Journal of International Relations

Vol. 1, No. 2, January-June 1994

Editor: Dr Akmal Hussain

Published by the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Dhaka.

THE Department of International Relations of the University of Dhaka is the only academic premise of its category to teach inter-state relations in the country. In December, 1993 it published the Journal of International Relations for the first time since it began its journey in 1947. The second issue has recently reached the readers' hand.

This issue contains six different articles which deal with important features on current global politics like, European Union (EU), the UN peace-keeping operations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

In the first article titled, "A Fortress Europe in the Offing: European Union, Single Market and the Developing World," Shamsul Khan expounds the important characteristics of the EU with special reference to its various phases. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the United States has become the sole superpower and the structural change which has taken place in the world order augment the concept of *Pax Americana*.

On the other hand, the process of European integration has achieved a remarkable success through the Maastricht Treaty which projects a multidimensional horizon for a 'Unicentric' Europe as well as a 'Eurocentric' world. In the aftermath of single market initiative in 1985, the treaty of European Union was initiated in February, 1992 and it started functioning as a single market from January 1, 1993. The transformation from the EEC to EC expands frontier among member states themselves while it increases trade barrier with developing countries. The author examines how the EU and the Single European Market (SEM) are affecting developing countries. As an outcome of SEM a third state will be able to enter a greater market only by negotiating a set of 'Eurocrats'. On the other hand, the SEM can easily monopolise the trade policy with a third country. The writer identifies a number of complexities in accelerating the EU, such as the problem with jurisdiction of its activities, demise of sovereignty, negative integration through Single European Act etc.

In recent days peacekeeping has become a regular routine work for the UN though the practice was not incorporated into the UN Charter. Gulam Mustafa in his article titled "The UN Peacekeeping Operation: Challenges and Options" represents a brief history of the UN Peacekeeping Programmes beginning with the UN Truce Supervision Organisations active in Palestine in 1948 to date. Since the birth of the UN as a world organisation it has been accused by a number of states for being "used". Despite its severe criticisms it has been trying to exhibit an excellent performance for peacekeeping throughout the universe. The author categorically discusses various issues which include various dilemmas, problems, prospects and options for the UN peacekeeping operations and justifies them from a critical point of view.

As there is no homogeneity among the NGOs and their roles differ for various reasons it is difficult to develop a general theory about them. Hence, the author proposes some basic elements for theorising about NGO phenomenon and its role.

The focus of the whole world community is now fixed on Bosnia-Herzegovina as it is a great human tragedy in the post cold war era. Md Ramjul Huq and M A Aziz trace the genesis of the Bosnian crisis from the seventh century in their article titled, "The Bosnian Crisis: Failure of International Diplomacy". Bosnia-Herzegovina is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state where 44 per cent of the populations consists of Muslims, 31 per cent Serbs, 17 per cent Croats and 8 per cent others. In January 1990, the Federation of Yugoslavia broke up and the event was followed by Serbia and Croatia's declarations of independence on June 25, 1991. They proclaimed their determination to establish 'Greater Serbia' and 'Greater Croatia' claiming the Bosnian territory as their autonomous region respectively. Thus, started an undesirable, unbearable and unpredictable endless suffering for the Bosnian Muslims.

Why did the conflict start? How is it being prolonged? How and why are the peace plans failing? What is behind the Serbs' continual rejection of the peace plans? This article attempts to answer these pertinent questions.

The authors elaborately discuss every minor initiatives in

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the Bosnian peace efforts with keen attention to every peace plan. The peace proposals of the EU and the UN missions are becoming useless mainly due to the refusal of Serbia and Bosnian Serbs. At last the United States has sponsored a package of peace plan which established a Croatian-Muslim Federation by offering the 51 per cent of the territory and 49 per cent to the Bosnian Serbs who are presently controlling 70 per cent of the land. But they have not yet shown any positive will to except the peace plan and, therefore, the crisis remains unresolved. Moreover, the UN arms embargo on all parties of the former Yugoslavia has actually unarmed the Muslims and led them to a situation of savage chaos of ethnic cleansing. So, the world community should keep it in view that if their diplomacy fails in resolving the Bosnian Crisis it will lead the entire region to state of total chaos and instability.

Quest for nuclear arms is increasing in South Asia despite the fact that the probability of a nuclear war has defused in the post cold war world. Another article titled, "South Asia without Nuclear Bombs?" by Md Nuruzzaman delineates the path of nuclearisation in South Asia along with its characteristics, problems, challenges and alternative measures. India and Pakistan are at loggerheads with each other since their independence in 1947. The post-independent geo-politic and geo-strategic vulnerabilities of the both countries inspired them to opt for nuclear arms. The Sino-Indian war of 1962, Chinese nuclear attainment in 1964, emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, India's peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974 and Pakistan's policy of Islamic Bomb accelerated the issue and paved the way towards nuclearisation in South Asia. The writer judges the rationality of nuclear weapons in the region and hence proposes alternatives.

Sap M U Islam examines the impact of NAFTA from the view of Bangladesh's national interest, in his article titled, "Understanding NAFTA: Benefits and Raison d'être". NAFTA is the largest free trading block in the world which came into effect on January 1, 1994. It has only three members, the United States, Canada and Mexico. Due to inclusion of Mexico in NAFTA the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are facing a dilemma that it may be inward looking and liberalised towards Mexico while detrimental to the interests of the LDCs. In this regard, the writer studies the case of Bangladesh and Mexico presenting comparative features, data, statistics and calculations. He finds Mexico in a better and advantageous position than Bangladesh in trading with the US, and the other investors will usually prefer Mexico to Bangladesh for its greater exposure. In order to cope with all the unfavourable circumstances the writer proposes that Bangladesh should apply for NAFTA membership.

The editor Dr Akmal Hussain selects these timely and important topics from the global hodgepodge. Hair splitting explanations, appendices with necessary map, data charts, graph enrich the journal very much. So, this issue is a timely one reflecting some of the serious problems and aspects of contemporary international relations.

Reviewed by

Mohammad Badrul Hassan

Staging of a Greek Tragedy in its Own Traditional Way

by Gobinda Bar

THE sun was just peeping over the horizon. It was still dawn. But many had already flocked to the Mukta-mukha of the Jahangirnagar University, suspending their sleep and jogging and walk. After all "Orestes" was going to be staged.

Yes, "Orestes", a classical Greek tragedy by Euripides, was staged recently at the amphitheatre of the Jahangirnagar University. The production was a practical performance test for the second year students of the Department of Drama and Dramatics.

In our country, Greek tragedies are rarely staged and there are always some difficulties associated with the production of a classical tragedy. However, it was staged with some original features that were followed by the ancient Greeks while staging the

tragedies. For example, we may refer to the use of chorus. It is an extraordinary characteristic of classical tragedies and is not found in the contemporary plays. The staging time is another exception of the production. We are accustomed to enjoy a play in the evening but it was staged just at sunrise. Addition of these features to the performance implies devotion to the fundamental ritual of the Greek play.

"Orestes" has a narrative style which is very much available in the classical tragedies. Playwrights like Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides were very much popular in the ancient Greece. Their plays were staged at sunrise after a whole-night festival. Amphitheatre, day-light, use of music and chorus were the salient features of those performances. The recent production of

"Orestes" at JU followed all the features of the tragedies faithfully.

Afsar Ahmed, translator of the play and Chairman of the Dramatics Department said, "Perhaps it is the first production of the tragedy at an amphitheatre observing the fundamental rituals of Greek play after about 2500 years. There is no amphitheatre in Asia, continent like ours. As far as I know it is the first translation of the tragedy and I tried my best to remain faithful to the original."

The tragedy begins with the news of death of Agamemnon's wife Klutaminestra who killed her husband herself. Orestes and Electra are the son and daughter respectively of the late couple. Electra, her brother Orestes and his friend Pulades killed Klutaminestra in

revenge for Agamemnon's killing. Soon after the killing, they began to convince the people of the kingdom Argos that the killing was just. Klutaminestra was in illicit love and she killed her husband. So, Orestes and Electra tried to persuade the inhabitants of Argos that a miscreant had no right to live. Meanwhile, they were sentenced to death by the Court. Finding no other alternative, their wrath fell upon their uncle Menelaus who did not help them during the difficulties. To take a revenge, they planned to kill Menelaus' wife Helen and to abduct his daughter Harneun. Helen disappeared when Orestes tried to kill her. The Sun-god Apollo saved Helen as she was Apollo's legitimate child. Orestes and Pulades abducted Harneun and sought Menelaus' help in exchange for his daughter's life. Menelaus turned furious and revengeful as a reaction to this incident. In this climactic moment, Sun-god Apollo intervened. He ordered all to hold off and told Orestes to leave Argos for a year. He also ordered Menelaus to go back to his kingdom Sparta forgetting all enmity.

In this play Electra comes off as a brave and intelligent woman who causes the main incidents and controls the hero. She also appears as an influential personality. Today, when the question of women's freedom is gradually gaining ground in our country, the theme of the tragedy appears very relevant and topical.

The set, background music and lighting of the play were adopted from the ancient

Greek tradition. Yet, all the performers were apprentice. But all of them did enough justice to their characters under the able guidance of Rashid Harun, a lecturer of the Department of Drama. The overall performance had the audience somewhat mesmerised.

grabbing Douglas' wealth. On one occasion quite by accident one of them speaks of how their uncle had a soft-spot for a particular nephew (Fox) who he has not seen in over 20 years. So they hire a private detective to track him down. The plan being that Douglas would be duped into giving everything to Fox. He is found and the long lost nephew arrives at his uncle's doorstep. Just when things seem utterly

Viewing Video

by Lenin Gani

'Greedy folks have long arms' this adage aptly sums up my discussion about this week's lead film Greedy, a comedy starring veteran actor Kirk Douglas and Michael J Fox. Douglas plays the senile uncle Joe whose vast fortune lures his scheming nephews and nieces. Although they hardly appreciate each others company and are constantly bickering among themselves, they are united in

hopeless Douglas ends his elaborate charade to have the last laugh. Set in the dusty back streets of Israeli-occupied Jerusalem, Seventh Coin is a murder-thriller in which an American female tourist accidentally comes into possession of a rare coin which Englishman Peter O Toole will stop at nothing to get. Apparently O Toole has collected six of them but he needs the seventh one to complete the set for a for-

elgn buyer. During his search, he commits multiple-murder to achieve his goal. There are plenty of hair-raising chases through the streets. The ending is a rather poor anti-climax, in which villain and, in this case, the heroine, face each other in a standoff with no guesses as to who comes out the victor. Unfortunately, there are no new arrivals from Bollywood. Therefore, this week's chart is predominantly English.

ENGLISH

NAME	TYPE	CAST
1. With Honors	(Comedy)	Joe Pesci/ Patrick Dempsey
2. Death Ring	(Action)	Patrick Swayze
3. The Kiss of Death-2	(Horror)	Demi Moore
4. The Canton Godfather	(Action)	Jackie Chan
5. The Soft Kill	(Murder/Thriller)	Matt McCoy/ Brian James/Corbin Bernsen
6. Watchers-3	(Horror)	
7. Road Runner vs Coyote	(Cartoon)	Edward Furlong/ Frank Langella
8. Brain Scan	(Horror)	Gary Daniels
9. Deadly Target	(Thriller)	
10. Circuitry Man-II	(Sci-fi)	
11. Necronomic	(Horror)	
12. American Eagle	(Action)	
13. The Second Victory	(War Thriller)	
14. Hot Times	(Adult Comedy)	
15. Sex Pot	()	

Source: Film Fair Video and other clubs

