

# TEENNS and TWENTIES

An Interview with Rokonzaman Khan

## Dada Bhai, Always an Inspiration

by Siraj-us-Saleheen

FROM my childhood I always had a fascination about the *Kendria Kanchi Kanchar Mela* and was more eager to learn about its founder Rokonzaman Khan, better known as *Dada Bhai*. The *Kanchi Kanchar Mela* is one of the pioneering children organization formed mainly by *Dada Bhai* in 1956 and has till now played a leading role. Recently, my dream came true, as I had the opportunity to meet him. Without any former appointment, I visited his office. On entering his room I was confronted with a most pleasant sight. There, in the middle of two or three children was the famous *Dada Bhai* chatting away in a most ordinary position. As he spotted me, without asking who I was, told me to take a seat and to wait a bit. After he had finished with the children, he asked the reason for my coming, after hearing the reason, he was very happy to help me out and gave a spontaneous interview despite his tight schedule. So began an interesting conversation:

(Daily Star) DS: When and where were you born, sir?

(Rokonzaman) RZ: Oh not please don't call me 'sir'; every one else calls me *Dada Bhai*. You may call me by that name too.

DS Thank you. When and

where were you born, *Dada Bhai*?

RZ: I was born on the 9th April, 1925. My father's home town is in Bheramara thana of Kushtia district. But actually I was brought up in my grandfather's home town, which is Pangsha thana of Faridpur district. My uncle was Yakub Ali Chowdhury. It was under his caring shadow that I grew up.

DS: How did the 'Kanchi Kanchar Mela' originate?

RZ: Oh my! now, let's see... (thinking a while) it actually has a long story. During the British period, a monthly paper named *Ananda Mela* was regularly being published from Calcutta for children. A portion of that paper was called *Mukul Mohfil*, from which the organization *Mukul Fauz* originated, which was later known as *Khelaghar*.

After the partition in 1947, these organizations broke up, and as a result no children organizations were left. Realizing the need for such a structural framework, Begum Sufia Kamal, Prof Ajit Kumar Guha, Prof Abdullah Al Muti Sharfuddin and myself took up some positive steps to create an organization for children.

Such being the objective, on the 5th October, 1955, accompanied by fifteen or more

children, we began an informal meeting, with Prof Sharfuddin as the Chairperson. In the garden adjoining the house of Begum Sufia Kamal. The rain had just stopped and the grass still wet. In such a surrounding the 'K K Mela' and its members will always be indebted to Begum S Kamal, Prof A A Sharfuddin and not to mention Prof A K Guha.

DS: What are the main objectives of your organization?

RZ: In short, the answer to this question would be to help and guide children to lead a proper life and in the future be a good citizen. Broadly speaking, this organization has five branches, according to its objective. These are: literature, cultural side, arts and crafts side, sports and recreations and social works.

From 1964 to the month of February, 1971, we regularly brought out a monthly paper named *Kanchi O Kancha*. We still publish annual papers for children each year and also bring out Wall-Papers with the help of our children members. We even conduct literature contests, song, dance and painting competitions. We frequently arrange painting exhibitions and various cultural functions. We give sports



Members of the Norwegian team performing one of their dance numbers. — Star photo

training to children; whenever there is any international event, such as the SAAF Games or the parade, on the 16th December, our members are eager to perform.

As for social works, our members are always at the frontline when there is a need for extra hands, for example, in cases like cyclone hit areas or even in flood affected areas, one of our main motto is to help the destitute and affected people.

DS: Why do you work with children?

RZ: That is an unusual question to ask, and a very hard one to answer. Because, I never stopped to think why I work with children; must be because I feel more at ease with them. Look at our young kids today. What recreation does a boy of class eight or nine has today? Who shall show him the right way to

live? All these kids do, is sit back and watch satellite TV. There was a time when in cultural programmes the number of participants were so many that we could not accommodate all of them. Today it is a different picture, a very sad but a true one though. I think a child is a rose bud, still new to the world, just bursting with curiosity about their environment. We must guide them so that they can prepare themselves for the brave new world.

DS: What are the achievements of K K Mela?

RZ: Uphill now this organization has come a long way and has achieved a great many things in spite of its economic drawbacks. In 1973, a group of children from K K Mela went to attend a pioneer camping held in GDR (former East Germany). In 1977, another group of children participated in a cultural competition under

my leadership held in Lisna near the Black Sea of the then Soviet Union (now Russia). It was an international event. Countries like the USA, former Soviet Union, former Yugoslavia, former Czechoslovakia, Israel participated in that competition. A young boy from our country became second in the swimming competition amidst such tough competitors. In singing competition, Bangladesh got first prize in four items. In the general knowledge competition, a girl from our country earned the second place. Incidentally, she happened to be my daughter. She thus became a member of the International Friendship Organization. Besides this our organization has earned many other prestigious international awards. Some of the former members of our K K Mela are now holding important positions in various organizations throughout the country.

To name a few, Hashem Khan, Shahrukh Chowdhury, Rafiqunabi (Ranabi), Papia Sarwar, Subir Nandi, Apel Mahmud, Mahmud Talukder, and many more whose names I can not recall now at this moment, are notable. Many of our members had active roles in the War of Liberation 1971. Notable amongst them are Shaheed Lt Samad, nephew of Professor Ataus Samad and a boy named Bokul, many of our girls had also worked as nurses at a hospital near Bismariganj.

The most exciting news is that, with the help of the Norwegian government, we are constructing a children complex at Segun Bagicha, which will have an auditorium of nearly 300 people. It will be completed in a very short period of time.

DS: What about the branches outside Dhaka Metropolitan Area?

RZ: You would be amazed to know that throughout the whole country, we have more than 200 branches, most of which are situated in villages and unions. Their organizational works are as same as ours. But the sad news is that, we can not help them financially which could boost their morale. But we always keep in touch with these branches and they maintain a regular link with us. Everyday we receive letters from them. You will be delighted to know that the Bangladeshis living in London have decided to establish a branch of K K Mela there.

species just to retain their evolutionary, niche and survive.

In this race for survival an animal will adapt. The more it adapts, the more it affects its surroundings and competitors along with its neighbouring creatures, quite possibly pushing them to extinction, if they haven't adapted as well. The same in the case of man. Man is the ultimate creature on top of the evolutionary ladder, conquering every terrain from jungles and deserts to frozen wastelands, from mountains and plateaus to low lying plains.

Therefore man affects the environment the greatest, exerting extreme pressure on it, displacing or forcing more animals to extinction. So even though the destruction may seem 'artificial', it is all done by Nature. Man's destructive streak is following Nature's laws and is being guided by Nature every step of the way.

The bottom line is, man is only a part of a vicious cycle of life and death with no control over his actions. Nature is responsible. Nature wants man to destroy life and then start all over again. And even if Nature wasn't responsible, it wouldn't care, it would still start all over again.



Miss Bangladesh Anika Taher will participate in the forthcoming 'Miss World' competition to be held in South African Sun City on November 18.

## I Still Am

by Kazi Khaled Arafat

There's hope for him yet — he was conscious for a second today.  
Thanks for letting me know, Mr Cure-em-all, I didn't know I was —  
Then I guess that I still am.....

**Drifting in Eternity**  
In limbo, between Heaven and Hell;  
Hovering between Life and Death —  
Victim of an accident — a fatal one  
But not fatal enough — no, not yet.  
Not able to live or die;  
Flying in an elemental vacuum;  
Kept alive by a respirator.

**Pull the plug!**

**Blood and plasma flowing in;**  
They've cut me up more than the truck —  
I'm a week-old mummy!

**Let me die!**

**Twisted by emotions — but incapable of expressing them**  
Darkness imprisoning me — my brain is about to explode!  
5-4-3-2-1-0!..... It didn't  
I want to talk; but my brain is weak.  
So goddamn weak-but is it a brain or some computer?

**Let me go, you fools!**

**I don't wanna live as a vegetable or "exist" as I am.**  
Good news — chart on the screen going down  
Green mountains disappearing  
"I'm very sorry, but ...."  
Sorrow. Tears. Hysteria. Funerals. Condolence meetings.  
The grave.  
Ahh..... they're letting me go.  
Thanks doc. God luck for your next case.

## Looking Beyond the Ivy League

by Nadim Hossain

APPLYING to US colleges is a nerve-racking experience. Without the luxury of visiting the States, how will you make the right decision? Barron's college rankings and college brochures are helpful but leave more detailed questions unanswered. For those suffering from college anxiety, Loren Pope's book *Looking Beyond the Ivy League* is heaven-sent. It is particularly useful in its discussion on specialisation at the undergraduate level and on the job market of the future.

The author's main message is that small liberal arts colleges are often better than big, famous universities. People generally go for the name of the university rather than the quality. The equation 'famous-good' applies only to graduate and doctorate studies, where extensive research takes place, the results of which never fail to be picked up by the media.

In fact, even at the graduate level, a famous institution's caliber should not be taken for granted. In eighty-four Nobel Laureates years, 137 were from the US. Only 9 are from mighty Harvard, 18 from all the other Ivies (Amherst, Wesleyan, Williams). Yet, the City College of NY has 7 Nobel graduates. Swarthmore 6, Oberlin 3 and Wooster 2. For the undergraduate it is perhaps better to go to a college which is not affiliated with any university. This is interesting for those who tend to eliminate institutions because they have never heard of them. The reverse is also true — there is a tendency to be biased towards the ones one has heard of.

Another downfall of large universities is that they often boast of famous professors but these professors actually never even have much contact with the undergraduates; they either do not teach any college courses or they send their graduate teaching assistants (a student at University of Pennsylvania confirms this). The author, Loren Pope confronted a faculty member telling her that some undergraduates found professors indifferent. "They are not indifferent, they're hostile!" There are exceptions of course. A student at the University of Chicago says that he had a Nobel Laureate professor in his first year. The idea is to take the fame and glory of an institution with a pinch of salt.

One advantage of the liberal arts is that it enables you to change your major. In fact, most students change their majors at least once, if not twice. Furthermore, there is only a one in a ten chance of doing anything connected with your major, ten of fifteen years after graduation. This flexibility is an important part of being 'prepared' for the long term. The author quotes the late Brian Wilson, former Amherst Dean of Admissions, "the good

college should train you for nothing and prepare you for everything". A college should teach one how to think rather than what to think. Pope asserts that a college should "liberate, causing enlightening changes in values, attitudes and thinking that will help throughout life."

In the context of performing in the workplace, a survey of employers has offered proof that employers are looking for the ability to think, solve problems and for an open, creative personality, rather than a business major, good grades and a prestigious college. They can usually assess a prospective employee's character through an interview. An overall understanding of people, politics and society are very important to marketing, according to one long time marketing manager. These are developed more via a liberal education rather than a narrow one. At the end of the book there is a story of a man who hired a foreign language major who knew nothing about the business of running a scrap-metal business. This employee turned the business into the most efficient scrap-metal firm in the Midwest, by virtue of his intelligence, imagination and logic. The man in the story warns that the trend of specialising education will be successful only in "keeping a steady supply of drones moving to a beehive."

Pope's book helps you understand a great deal about the US system of higher education. It provides a new perspective for those well entrenched in college applications. It helps clear doubts on the value of a liberal education. The key chapters are the ones on education and specialisation, the qualities of non-prestigious colleges (including the charts of PhD and graduates in Who Who), and the chapter on writing application essays. Those who are applying to colleges this winter should try to grab hold of this book. It will no doubt enlighten you.

(The writer of this article attends Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.)

## Quotes

Compiled by Iftekhar Rashid

1. A lie has speed, but truth has endurance — Edgar J. Mohr
2. If you can't read a bundled peoples then fled just are — Mother Teresa
3. Anger is a win which blows out the lamp of the mind — Robert G. ....
4. A community is like a ship, everyone ought to be prepared to take the — ....
5. Life is like a ---- of chess. Unpredictable — Ripa K
6. If you wanna be bad, just beat it — Michael Jaccogon

## 'This Time Man is Nature's Ecological Time Bomb'

by Nameer Rahman



ONE of the hottest topics today is the environment. Deforestation, pollution, the ozone layer, global warming caused by the Greenhouse effect, all of these issues have put the spotlight on the environment and how it is being destroyed.

A vast crop of statistical data has almost convinced the entire world that man, and man alone is responsible for the destruction of the planet. But is he? In the backdrop of this environmental nightmare I ask, is man really more cruel than nature? I think not. Rather, Nature is a cruel mother, that does not hesitate to use her offspring to fulfill her cycle of life and death.

My contention is that Nature in all its glory has for more than 3 billion years repeatedly permitted one life-form after another to gain dominance before demolishing it, sometimes to the point of extinction. Nature has done it before, is doing it now and will do it again and again in the future. This time man is Nature's ecological time bomb. Let the evidence present itself.

In order to grasp my concept one must know and understand what evolution is and how it works. Evolution, to put it simply is based on one catch word: adaptability. Since the creation of life there have been three possibly four mass extinctions. The first one took place more than three billion years ago when primitive bacteria was the dominant life-form. This bacteria was the first to use photosynthesis to make its food, releasing oxygen as waste, helping to create out atmosphere. But the oxygen proved to be its downfall.

Ironically that while oxygen means life to one type of living creature, it meant death to another. Even nowadays it is fatal to many types of current bacteria. Of the old kind, there are a few small surviving colonies off the coast of Australia. But the fact remains, the dominance was hampered

Next in line were the dinosaurs, ranging in size and shape from chicken sized lizards to the great seismosaurus — a dinosaur 140 feet in length. Dinosaurs first came around in the Triassic age 245 million years ago shortly after the first mammal and mammal-like reptiles appeared. Both mammals and dinosaurs having originated from the same "stem" or family. It was in the Triassic age or just before it when the second mass extinction took place.

This mass extinction gave the dinosaurs the foothold they needed, eliminating many of the small mammals as well as an incredible 98 per cent of all marine animals. Scientists are

still unsure of what caused the cataclysm, but dinosaurs quickly climbed into the vacant niches and evolved. This lasted till the end of Triassic age when another wave of extinctions took place wiping out a majority of the dinosaurs and their main competitors, the mammals.

This extinction, probably caused by a meteor impact, started the Golden Age of dinosaurs with the Jurassic Era. Small dinosaurs, carnivores the size of pigeons and miniaturized brontosaurus survived the calamity and took over, quickly evolving and diversifying to such exotic creatures as Iguanodon, sauropods and biped carnivours, and

continued to do so the following Cretaceous era.

The final extinction came at the end of the Cretaceous era 65 million years ago, but controversy shrouds the matter. What killed them and how? Some paleontologists say the extinction was gradual, others say it was sudden. Only a minority believe that a meteor caused the extinction. Could they have died of some disease?

Fossils found were supposedly dated to be from a couple of million years after their supposed extinction. Could they have evolved? Was it an ice age? But they died suddenly and mysteriously of which only the mammals survived. And now we have mammals headed by man. We have now set the underlying pattern.

It seems that everytime a life-form gets a foothold, Nature wipes it out somehow or the other. If one were to examine biological history more thoroughly one would find a stunning number of extinctions on a lesser scale wiping out entire regional flora and fauna.

Now it is the mammals' turn. Nature is using man as an instrument of destruction. Even if man wipes out everything Nature will start all over again. This time with insects and in time eliminate them. Or maybe Nature will produce synthetic polymer eating bacteria. Or maybe metal based life as Isaac Asimov once suggested, or even plants which can think. Maybe life not based on enzymes. Maybe crystalline life as presented in Michale crighton's 'The Anomoea strain'. The possibilities are endless.