

# A Brutal Murder: Society in Peril

by SH Khondker

**M**ONTHS back, a street vendor, named 'Jaj Mea, was murdered by a few mastans (goons). He is now gone forever. He will not return to suffer the pains of poverty he had experienced when alive and to see the ills that have seized our society.

His death was sudden, unexpected and violent. He was killed because he had refused to yield to the illegal extortion of the mastans. His refusal to pay tolls to them was in no way a wrongful act. In fact, he was within his right to make such a refusal. But the mastans got angry and beat him to death; and that too, in broad day-light and at a place near Gulistan — which remains crowded throughout the day.

Jaj Mea was a poor man; so poor that he was not in a position to hire even a tiny thatched shop. To make both ends meet he did not have any alternative but to take to the footpath to display his merchandise. Could he never think and for that matter, could any one else with a grain of sanity ever think, that illegal rent had to be paid for this to the illegal masters? Footpaths, like roads and streets, belong to the state and not to any individual or a group of individuals. Yet, tolls are extorted even from the poor footpath vendors and this, it appears, is not a secret. His fellow footpath traders might have paid the tolls to avert the fate he had met.

Extortion of any kind is a cognizable offence. No law of the land supports such a nefarious action. Strange though it may appear, such heinous actions are going on unabated. Yielding to extortion is also a wrong doing. Those who pay tolls to the mastans do commit a wrong but they are helpless in doing so most of the time. They have to do so for safety, because apparently there is none to protect them. Jaj Mea was, however, different. He had courage not to yield to the extortionists. And that was the only fault that had cost his life.

Death, it is said, opens the gate to the eternal life in the world beyond. Yet, for that eternal existence nobody wants to sacrifice life. Everybody, rich or poor,

prefers living on earth to the endless living in the unknown world beyond and works hard to keep death away as far as possible. Nevertheless, death one has invariably to encounter, though one does not know how, when and where this inevitability will take place. Jaj Mea, too, did not know that his life would suddenly be cut short in its prime not by Azrail but by some hated hoodlums.

**When Jaj Mea was done to death his fellow traders and others were around him but none dared to help him lest they also had to meet the same fate as did he. What they perhaps do not know that sooner or later they too may meet with similar fate.**

All deaths are agonising but unnatural and violent deaths are more agonising. Had his death been natural, the pains resulting thereupon would not have been so acute and would not have provoked anybody's anger. Strangely, those who perpetrate such acts go roaming and if ever apprehended, more often than not, find a way out.

When Jaj Mea was done to death his fellow traders and others were around him but none dared to help him lest they also had to meet the same fate as did he. What they perhaps do not know that sooner or later they too may meet with similar fate. How long can we go on paying tolls to avert punishment of the extortionists? Criminals are criminals. They are blind to reason. Therefore, Jaj Mea's fellow traders would have done good to themselves, if they had acted unitedly to ward off the wrong-doers. United the people stand, divided they fall. The failure of Jaj Mea's fellow traders to face the extortionists reflects the pitiable character of our society. One seems to live for oneself only and the good trait of fellow-feeling of the bygone days seems to have gone away with the wind.

Jaj Mea might have left behind immediate family members who depended on him — wife, children and maybe, old parents too — who depended

solely on his earnings, however meagre that might be. With his death this source of income of the family has also gone. How will these helpless dependants survive? Who will give them food and shelter? The death of a Jaj Mea creates a social problem which often goes unnoticed. In a society where around sixty per cent of the populace languish under abject poverty the problem is more acute. It may not be far from

truth that these helpless people may take to begging or stealing. It may also be that the sons of Jaj Mea, if any, may also become mastans, when grown up, will probably try to avenge the brutal death of their father. The victims of their revenge may not necessarily be those who had killed their father. *Mastanism*, if not timely and properly checked, goes on increasing and spreading. One who, in normal circumstances, would have been anything but a *mastan* often becomes so under compelling circumstances. Such a situation is more deplorable and injurious than the death of one Jaj Mea.

Nobody is a born *mastan*; nobody is a born criminal. *Mastanism* is a product of polluted social environment. It is a regrettable social vice the eradication of which demands decent living. It is no longer confined within the city precincts alone; it has spread even to the remote villages where life, until a few years back, was quiet and peaceful. It has also taken into its grip the youngsters. Teenage school-going boys commit robbery and kill even their friends and accomplices without any remorse. What a society we are living in!

The murder of Jaj Mea is not a single instance. Had it been so, people would not have worried so much. If one opens

a newspaper in one fine morning, news of murder, slaughter, rape, hijacking etc. will invariably draw one's attention.

These have become so common now-a-days that absence of them in the newspapers appear to be rather unusual. Life and property and even honour have become insecure. People are at the mercy of the wrong-doers and they suffer inexplicable mental agony because of them.

With the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state we all dreamed that henceforth we would see better days. Free from exploitation and misrule of alien forces we would have a disciplined society and prosper economically. Nearly one quarter of a century has elapsed, our dreams are yet to come true. May be that we do not have the resources and I dare say, the sincerity and consensus of those who matter in bringing about an appreciable change in the condition of our poverty-stricken people. But what about an orderly society? Are we incapable of setting the society in order? We are surely not; yet the society has been allowed to go so wrong. Far from improving, things are continually deteriorating. And the net result is undue violence that has by now taken away a good many lives. Not only that, violence in the society also impedes development efforts. Even the academic institutions are not free from violence. The universities which were once calm and quiet places of learning are often shaken by bomb-blasts and gun-shots. Young lives are lost, classes are closed, and the scheduled academic programmes are dislocated. One wonders, in dismay, how long things will go on this way.

Putting the society in order does not seem to be a very difficult task if the will is there. What is needed is a strong desire to curb the rate of violence, and above all, sincerity and consensus among our national leaders. If the society could be made orderly, the lives of Jaj Mea and many others would have been saved. There is still time to set things right.

ocratisation is a means to defend hunting with the pack. This public of followers is willingly a keen supporter of a practice which occupies most of its leisure time, the two researchers write.

They were also surprised to note to what extent hunting with the hounds was locally rooted. In particular, the important hunts which almost always take place on the same land. It means a great knowledge of the land and a passion for wild animals which one also finds in huntsmen's homes. Trophies, photographs and hunting scenes recreate a little of the magic atmosphere of the forest. Hunting provides an opportunity for social gatherings. Hunting days, celebrations and the participation of the locals in the event make hunting an activity which is deeply rooted in the local tradition and fully alive. This tradition for large scale hunts has been maintained in its different rituals. It is like returning to the sources, a break in the ordered sequence of social time. Hence there is a great feeling of change and a removal from the constraints of the ordinary world. The concern for maintaining tradition can be seen in the costumes which have remained unchanged for more than 200 years.

## A Time Outside Time

Hunting with the hounds is a time outside time during which the hunters are in communion with nature. They enter a natural environment and a wild sacred world, and the rituals express a group attitude against the opaqueness of the forest. Speech is rich in references to place names, paths and alleys whose names are only meaningful to the initiated. A novice has the im-

Continued on page 11

long-term national policies. It is not easy to make everyone play the game according to the rules.

Efficient policing has always been a problem in emerging societies in the developing countries. We all know the problems, and we all have been hunting for good administrative solutions for more than a generation now. What is the shape of the improvement rate curve every successive generation? In this information age, the generation gap and the mores are changing at a much faster rate than administrations can cope with.

How the mores of a society change is another specialised field of exercise. The politicians tend to drum up the publicity that the solution is politic. Therefore, neutral or non-political observers and experts have to guide the public opinion on the implications of the political proposals put out by opposing parties.

Enjoy the conundrum.

**P**UBS and all sorts of drinking places are sprouting like the proverbial mushrooms in most urban centres of India. In Bangalore, South India, for example, over 100 beerhouses have opened their doors late last year alone.

Alcohol consumption has gone up to an astonishing level of more than US \$300 million annually, and still climbing. In fact, by the year 2000, some analysts are predicting a total of US \$1 billion investment in the liquor industry and from the opening of new chains of pubhouses.

No longer taboo to teenaged girls and women, these watering holes are enjoying unprecedented business, most of them remaining open up to the early morning hours.

However, the scenario is very much different in Bombay. Instead of proliferating, the city's pubhouses are fast diminishing in number. Existing ones including the swankiest, are thinking of switching to other businesses.

This is because a determined police force is cracking down on unlicensed drinking in public places, for one thing. For another, local pubs have become notorious as fronts for prostitution, and as frequent sites of gang brawls. Police look at this as reason enough to crack the whip on them.

There was also the case of a young model, who had come to enjoy the night at an exclusive pub and was engaged in a conversation with two men. The men offered to drop her home, but instead, she was forcibly taken somewhere else and sexually assaulted.

In the glamorous suburb of Juhu, frequented mostly by film stars, the rock bar Razzberry Phinoceros opened with much fanfare. But within three days of opening, the police swooped down on the place for running a dance floor and for allowing music bands to perform without a permit. There have been repeated raids on other pubs and discotheques and stern warnings from the police.

But the police are not the only ones adversely affecting business. The Bombay blasts and riots also had their effects. According to one pub manager, Bombay parties usually start before 10 pm and they go on until the wee hours. But now all this is a thing of the past. Coupled with the almost ceaseless raids by the authori-

## asian diary On the Wagon

ties, how can any pub survive?

Another giant and exclusive club, the Sheetal Again, known for its association with name film stars and glamorous models, was not spared from police raids. When one was conducted recently, the lawmen said they were looking for a notorious gangster known for frequenting the place. During the course of the raid not a few of the patrons were roughed up.

The manager said, 'I wouldn't be surprised if these people will shun the club forever.'

Several other entertainment giants have closed down, including the well-known RATC Club. It had been a hit with the MTV crowd as well as movie greats.

According to Arup Patnail, deputy municipal commissioner of Zone 7 in Bombay, 'We have no alternative but to deal sternly with hotels and restaurants involved in prostitution and girl-picking. Although the tradition of high night life in the fashionable districts of Bombay is respected by the police, occasionally there is a spill-over of criminal activity even to the more sophisticated pubs.'

Sometimes even management does not know about this. Is it strange then that we have to do our duty?

He explained that a number of hotels and pubs are controlled by known gangsters and there have been shootouts in some of these places. 'We have to come down heavily on these drinking houses,' he said.

Mr Patnail admits that even the 'cleaner' establishments could have been hit but he said he would rather err on the side of safety.

According to the police, they treat all establishments equally. Licensing rules apply as much on a small beerhouse as with the more exclusive nightclubs. But the bar owners are angry about the whole thing. Anil Kumar, managing director of the well-known pub

RR, said: 'Liquor licensing rules in Bombay are about 50 years old. How can anyone run a bar with such antiquated regulations? For instance, personal permits are required before anybody could have a drink in a restaurant. Now, who honours such a regulation?'

The Bombay people consider such a rule — and there are quite a number of similar ones — as utterly ridiculous in this day and age. On top of that, such a licence to drink has to be renewed every year.

Some of the pubs have turned into more exclusive clubs in an effort to survive. But the membership fees are too high, some clubs charging 11,000 rupees (US \$353.13) annually. Single, unescorted women are not allowed inside. Needless to say, these are drawbacks to earning a profit, one manager lamented.

The government is itself facing a dilemma of sorts. While taking a stiff stand against pubs in Bombay, it cannot close its eyes to the fact that Bombay clubs and hotels contribute as much as 850 million rupees (about US \$27.28 million) annually to the exchequer. As one official puts it, 'If you want more money to pour in, we have to allow the issuance of more licences for the sale of liquor and the opening of more bars. We may also have to encourage drinking over longer hours.'

How can this jibe with the current tough stand of the police on the operation of pubs? one exasperated bar owner asked.

And as if this were not enough, prohibitionists are up in arms against the liquor and bar business. They are also frowning on widespread drinking practices of the upper class in Bombay.

According to Pandit Vinayak Vyas, an unrelenting prohibitionist and campaigner against drinking, 'Isn't it a scandal that tax revenues from liquor are used to finance education of our children and other de-

velopment projects? Even Bombay University and primary schools are funded by increased revenues from the sale of liquor in retail shops, bars and hotels.'

Bombay's pub managers have all but given up on the possibility of a resurrection of the business. Taking into consideration all the roadblocks thrown in the way of earning a decent profit, they see only gloom ahead. The existing ones, however, continue to struggle.

According to Vittal Kumar, who manages the discotheque Go Bananas, 'It is certainly difficult to run these joints, and one cannot be 100 per cent infallible, however stringent the rules. But we try very hard to deal with known hoodlums.'

Bar owners lament the fact that sometimes the police close their eyes where seedier bars are concerned. The pub owners claim that quite a number of policemen are in league with some pubs which have hostesses, bar girls and cabaret shows.

'We are not claiming bribery takes place', one owner said, 'but how can these particular clubs operate with such hospitality girls while they are very strict with us?'

Some pub managers say that this kind of situation exists all over the world. Even in London and Paris, hookers and gangsters abound in most drinking places, but these establishments are not close outright.

Bombay pub owners, however, are not about to give up, much as they criticise local police for being too tough on their establishments. They believe that money is more important than all the pontification of prohibitionists against the evil of the demon rum.

Soon they say, central prohibition committee members, if not the government itself, will realise that revenue from liquor and the pubs will do more good for everybody than the puritanism of the framers of the Constitution who wanted prohibition to take hold throughout the land.

Bombay itself benefits to the tune of 7,000 million rupees (about US \$ 199.26 million) from the liquor business in the form of taxes. It is the second largest contributor to the coffers of Maharashtra State.

How can anyone ignore this vital statistic?

— Depthnews Asia

# The Sacred World of Hunting

by Wilma Levy

Since 1975, hunting with the hounds has been sharply on the increase. In 1974, there were 218 hunts and in 1991 381 with 10,000 members and 50,000 followers. This is a surprising phenomenon when one considers that ecological anti-hunting movements have sprung up in parallel with this rise.



**I**N spite of the new interest from which it has benefited in the last twenty years and the rich, picturesque rituals involved, hunting with the pack has not, till now, been the object of any specific research. So the two sociologists from the French National Scientific Research Centre (CNRS) ventured into practically virgin territory from a scientific point of view when, for two years, they took part in various hunts in France. By car-

on foot, but most often on bicycles, they were able to mingle with the followers of prestigious hunts such as those in Rambouillet, or witness fox or badger-drawing.

Their first surprise was to note the extreme mix of social classes. In the Bonnelles hunt, which is one of the most prestigious in France, bankers and dukes rubbed shoulders with road-sweepers and factory workers. The former were huntsmen on horseback and

the latter the followers who make a considerable contribution to the hunt. This democratisation is recent as, not so long ago, the world of hunting was a very closed circle. 'Hunting with the hounds used to be reserved for the king and his nobles', one of the followers of the Bonnelles hunt points out. Today, on the contrary, it is the most democratic hunt as anybody can follow a hunt. But, more than a sign of the times, this dem-

ocratisation is a means to defend hunting with the pack. This public of followers is willingly a keen supporter of a practice which occupies most of its leisure time, the two researchers write.

They were also surprised to note to what extent hunting with the hounds was locally rooted. In particular, the important hunts which almost always take place on the same land. It means a great knowledge of the land and a passion for wild animals which one also finds in huntsmen's homes. Trophies, photographs and hunting scenes recreate a little of the magic atmosphere of the forest. Hunting provides an opportunity for social gatherings. Hunting days, celebrations and the participation of the locals in the event make hunting an activity which is deeply rooted in the local tradition and fully alive. This tradition for large scale hunts has been maintained in its different rituals. It is like returning to the sources, a break in the ordered sequence of social time. Hence there is a great feeling of change and a removal from the constraints of the ordinary world. The concern for maintaining tradition can be seen in the costumes which have remained unchanged for more than 200 years.

## A Time Outside Time

Hunting with the hounds is a time outside time during which the hunters are in communion with nature. They enter a natural environment and a wild sacred world, and the rituals express a group attitude against the opaqueness of the forest. Speech is rich in references to place names, paths and alleys whose names are only meaningful to the initiated. A novice has the im-

Continued on page 11

## The Passing Show

# A Voting Conundrum

by Alif Zabr

have to bear the responsibility after the announcement of the result.

How far this type of bribery is within administrative and legal control, with any type of government, caretaker, or otherwise? How many times an election could be annulled, cancelled, or re-election called for?

The problem is moral, social, political, and administrative. The solution is a package of checks, controls, and deterrents which have to be applied on the society for quite sometime, in phases. This is not a new type of exercise for human civilization; therefore there is no nov-

elty effect in the present game being played in Bangladesh by a section of the politicians.

Corruption is a timeless human vice, and simple or revolutionary, ad hoc or temporary solutions have never been successful (to err is human). The point to note is that the problem (of vote rigging) has roots beyond the political jurisdiction. Therefore, the non-political leaders of the society have also important roles to play, which cannot, and should not be minimised by the politicians, to attract the limelight upon themselves.

It demands collective teamwork at national level based on

long-term national policies. It is not easy to make everyone play the game according to the rules.

Efficient policing has always been a problem in emerging societies in the developing countries. We all know the problems, and we all have been hunting for good administrative solutions for more than a generation now. What is the shape of the improvement rate curve every successive generation? In this information age, the generation gap and the mores are changing at a much faster rate than administrations can cope with.

How the mores of a society change is another specialised field of exercise. The politicians tend to drum up the publicity that the solution is politic. Therefore, neutral or non-political observers and experts have to guide the public opinion on the implications of the political proposals put out by opposing parties.

Enjoy the conundrum.

# A Memorable Trip

Continued from page 9

agers, their wives and children was arranged at the tea club. Cultural show at Sreemongal was lively but because of shortage of space on the stage and prevailing hot spell of the season then, many could not enjoy well the function which was so elaborately arranged and included Manipuri dance, recitation and songs. Children from Norway also put up a good show in the function. Of the twelve boys and girls, Anitha Cathrine Asbjornsen, who was adopted from Poonia, India at the age of eight months in 1981 by Antkar Asbjornsen, a telecommunication engineer of Arendal, demonstrated her remarkable skill in dancing.

On 31 October they attended a briefing session at Bangladesh Tea Research Institute (BTRI) which had been playing a pioneering role in improvement of the tea industry of Bangladesh since its inception in 1957. It has nine divisions which disseminate research results to the tea growers. The visitors were also informed that 158 tea estates of varying sizes covering 48000 hectares of land produce about 50 million kilograms of tea annually. About 30 million kilograms is annually exported to 23 countries. They were also shown the tea nurseries and plucking process of the two leaves and a bud.

The visit to Khasia Punjee — tribal village of the Khasis — few kilometres off Sreemongal town on the hillside was interesting. A beautiful sprawling landscape with hills, deep forests and streams make it worth seeing. About five hundred Khasis are living presently in the solitary recess of Khasia Punjee which is far from the hustle and bustle of modern civilization. According to historians, the Khasis settled in greater Sylhet district particularly in Jaintapur, Jallong, Tamabil and some parts of Sunamganj from Khasia-Jainta hilly region of Assam about six hundred years back. However, Dr G A Grierson, writer of Linguistic Survey of India was of the view that originally Khasis belonged to the hill tribes of the mountainous regions of China. Over the centuries Khasis began their journey towards south from China and Burma (Myanmar) and settled in Assam and Sylhet.

Children and parents from Sreemongal joined us in the trip to Khasia Punjee. Khasis thrive on selling betel leaf, betelgut, pineapples, oranges, bananas and jambura (grapefruit). Presently they are receiving education and I met at least one young man in the



At Comilla War Cemetery

Punjee who claimed to have obtained master's degree from Chittagong University. They run a school and church. At least 130 students are enrolled in the school. The visitors were lavishly entertained at the hill top residence of the headman Utian Tang Peyar with bananas, pineapples, oranges, jambura (more to their liking), biscuits, cakes, soft drinks and tea.

Behavioural patterns of the children whether they belong to European countries or hail from this part of Asia continent are alike. That has been demonstrated when they were left alone, or while they were travelling back from Sreemongal to Dhaka in a microbus.

To make the trip pleasant and interesting one of the girls was asked to tell fairy tales of Norway. Iselin, 12, who is in the sixth grade, ventured to tell us the tale of 'Three Billy Goats'. The story in short is that three billy goats were scared of 'troll', a creature with special powers of evil nature, who lives underneath the culvert. The troll warned each billy goat that he would eat them up if they dared pass over the bridge. Two billy goats passed, each saying troll that the next one was 'my fat brother and you would love to eat his meat'. The third one was really fat and heavy and fell down on troll who could not withstand the pressure and died. It would be rather pertinent to add that Torbjarn Egner and Ennea Kat are the two prominent fairy tale writers of Norway. The visiting children told another Norwegian folk tale which related to an ambitious rich old but ugly farmer, who wanted to

grab anything he could lay his hands on. He was a widower and wanted to marry a charming young girl of a poor farmer by hook or by crook but he could not succeed. At last the poor farmer agreed, in lieu of debt and a piece of land, to marry off his daughter to the rich farmer. The servant was sent to bring what was promised to the rich farmer. But neither the servant nor the daughter was aware of what was promised. The servant brought the horse as was handed over by the daughter and the horse was dressed up as a bride as instructed (without seeing) by rich farmer. The horse was led into the wedding-hall to the utter surprise of the guests present. Afterwards the rich farmer never proposed to any girl.

At Daudkandi ferry ghat our bus was encircled by inquisitive people, young and old.

Particularly Anita Cathrine was a victim of volleys of questions as she looked like a Bengali girl. The more she said, 'I am not a Bengalee, I can speak only Norwegian and English', the more the people asked silly questions. She heaved a sigh of relief when the ferry started moving. And at 8 o'clock in the night the children reached Dhaka at the end of three days' whirlwind but lively tour of Chandpur, Comilla and Sreemongal. One of the boys incidentally celebrated his birthday on first of November. He was Markus Skuggevik, son of the leader of the delegation Mr Per Erik Skuggevik. Like the children of urban elite of Bangladesh Markus was also inquiring of his father about the prospective gift for the celebration of his birthday. All the children wished him many happy returns of the day.

## Indelible

by Nazim Mahmood

It is quite  
Easy to write  
On a slate all clean  
Erase at will  
If you feel  
It is not what you mean

But if the slate  
Indeed a plate  
Of the mind of a man  
Spots on the sheet  
Stay ever-writ  
Wash out? You never can.