

ALLAH did not make the mother-in-law but man made it for his own advantage. When blood relationship could not build a substitute for mother man looked for legal cover to discover one — mother-like but not mother — and called her mother-in-law. She could have been called shadow-mother or god-mother but the lexicon accommodated only one term — mother-in-law. Ever since this paper-mother by common consent who arrives with the spouse or is unavoidably tied with the wedding becomes a central pin in your conjugal life — either for good or bad. Two persons who did not get the best or worst out of this mother by legal connection are Adam and Eve. And Adam unfortunately did not know what mother-in-law's hospitality could be like. Sweet and savoury things did not run over his tongue. And so did Eve not know the wrath of the mother-in-law or her generosity in feeding or caring for the daughter-in-law.

It is no belated attestation but honestly I admit that some of the best food I gorged heartily were the culinary creation of my mother-in-law who always expected instant audit report from guests on her preparations. To reap benefits remote or nearby, the reports had to be positive and eulogistic which, of course, were hardly contrary. Silence about or lack of response to the preparation was considered unfriendly and the guest could not expect repetition of the invitation if the host was not forget-

I T was a million to one chance that fate brought together once more Sakina and Bashir Ahmad at the Victoria Terminus (London) on a cool evening of October 1979. It was a chance meeting after a quarter of a century. During this time Sakina moved up the ladder to hold an important position in her own country. Bashir continued to be a faceless civil servant, struggling to get ahead.

The story unfolded some twentyseven years back, in October, 1952 when both Sakina and Bashir were students at the LSE the hotbed of leftist politics. Both of them worked for the World Government Society, which took them to different places, and also to different people like Lord Bertrand Russell, Mr V K Krishna Menon, Mr & Mrs Seretse Khama et al. Those were the balmy days when long hours were spent at the LSE Cafeteria, or the British Library of Political and Economic Science. None of them had much money, but this did not deter them to visit the Nurjahan Restaurant near Euston, or the modest Indian Restaurant at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. For 2 shilling and 6 pence 1/8th of the present £), one could get a meal in those days.

October '52 was soon followed by December '52, and the Christmas was on the offing. With budget constraints, Sakina and Bashir made bookings with the British Council for a week's Christmas holiday tour at the Shanklin YMCA in the Isle of Wight.

Amidst the regular programmes there were some respites. Sakina and Bashir Ahmad spent those off times in visiting all the few coffee shops in Shanklin. These were the days of endless conversation and of friendship. The Christmas Day at the YMCA was a memorable event, that was made possible due to the thoughtfulness and untiring efforts of the Manager of the YMCA, truly dedicated man in his early sixties. Father Christmas brought presents for each of the British Council participants. The week at Shanklin passed off too quickly, as all good things do. Bashir Ahmad and Sakina were back at their respective Halls of Residence, the Passfield Hall and the Women's Hall. The courses at the LSE were gruelling indeed, so all the students had to burn the midnight oil and there was not much time for socializing. In the summer of 1953 Sakina

Electronic Media: Stealing Innocence from the Child?

ONCE upon a time — and a very good time it was — there said to be an old lady on the moon and for the children she was the granny of the moon who in her spinning wheel wove and wove all day long to fabricate her web of tales of fairies and demons, ghosts and goblins, clever and fool, prince and princess.

Tales were true than, at least the child's vision took them to be true. With their eyes open and wearing signs of awe the children listened to and believed in the tales of their moon granny.

by Shamsad Mortuza

live via satellite, and millions of people throughout the globe including the children witnessed it.

People, and also the children, no longer want to believe in what they do not see. Consequently, children of our time prefer the Cinderella who goes to the beautician rather than the Cinderella who goes back to the chimney soot at the strike of 12.

For the children, the beautician promising silky hair appears real. In fact she is today's fairy mother. Even though she cannot turn pumpkins into carriages or mice into horses but she sure can transform the distressed hair into attractive shapes.

Distant Drum

M N Mustafa

ful. Frigidity does not help re-new friendship or friendliness.

Mother-in-law in this country, for centuries, were noted for the lavish manner which they feed their sons-in-law. A commercial advertisement by Philips depicts the anxiousness of a rural Bangladeshi mother-in-law to entertain the son-in-law. The son-in-law is the apple of the mother-in-law's eye. His hands, as if, were created by the Sustainer just perhaps to feed some one else's sons who are locked with their daughters in wedding.

Excessive adulation and fondling of the son-in-law in traditional Bangladeshi culture has given rise to what in rural Bangladesh is known as the *Murgha Culture* — the culture of big cock reared and fell for the gastronomic delectation of the son-in-law. In rural areas the son-in-law's arrival at the house of his wife's parents marks a big occasion so far entertainment is concerned. The big cock, reared with care, falls under the knife, varieties of cakes or *pitthas* with elaborate artistic designs are prepared and the son-in-law, the victorious for the moment, enjoys the best whatever his parents-in-law could afford. The man who took the hands of their girl (no matter he could conquer the heart or not) appeared to have been destined just to enjoy The whole relation effusive with affection, springs

from the overflowing and sincere affection of the mother for her daughter.

In the Hindu community the son-in-law has a special day in the annual calendar. It is *Jama Shashthi* — the day the son-in-law is treated lavishly. He is entitled to a new suit of clothes — all at the cost of the parents-in-law, a series of sweets and what not.

While studying journalism in the Punjab University we used to go for picnic either at Shawdara where lies *Mokbara-i-Jahangir* — Emperor Jahangir's grave — and few hundred yards away lies the mortal remains of Empress Nurjahan. The entire political ambition of Nurjahan centred around offering or acquiring the Mughal throne for her son-in-law, Shahryar, who had no legal claim on Mughal crown. The result was Shahryar's premature death, Nurjahan's soundless expulsion from royal favours and almost an inglorious burial by any Mughal standard. Excessive misplaced love and affection for the daughter, Ludley Begum, and its radiated heat for her spouse, Shahryar, did not elevate any in life's station rather ruined them in the unfair worldly competition for loaves and laurels.

Similar was the fate of son-in-law, Louis XVI of France and his spouse Marie Antoinette daughter of Maria Theresa of Austria, the commandeering

empress. Mary was the extension of her mother's sensory organs — eyes, ears and tongue. Louis too was blinded by her mother-in-law's affections. When torrents of misfortunes started befalling the couples during French revolution, Maria Theresa's wings of affection for the son-in-law failed to provide a cover.

But the fruit was not sweet everywhere. Many daughter's-in-law suffered silently not only for absence of mother-in-law's affection but also due to her hostility. Khana, the astrologer wife of Mihir's son, a courtier of Vikramaditya, lost her tongue. Her mother-in-law conspired to have her tongue chopped off for the offence of academic arguing on astrology and astronomy with her father-in-law.

Maneka Gandhi, wife of Sanjay Gandhi, had no honey flowing sweetly in her relations with her mother-in-law Indira Gandhi.

Deprived and frustrated daughters-in-law and sons-in-law openly avenged the affectionless mothers-in-law in all ages. Once a mother-in-law died in an old age home for women. The authorities wanted the advice of the wife of the deceased's son. The lady asked them to cremate her first and then spread the dust to the ocean so that the mother-in-law did not get any chance to stage a comeback.

Another disgruntled son-in-law wanted to buy a donkey at double the quoted price because the animal killed the neighbour's mother-in-law by a single kick.

she said that the dinner will be on her charge account.

The dinner spanned for over two hours. Sakina stated quite proudly that she had grandchildren. Poor Bashir meekly replied that his daughters were still in school and college. A poor performance indeed.

Twentyfive years rolled by, and the two hours also passed too quickly. A friendship that began some twentyseven years ago, was revived for two hours in the elegant diningroom of London Hilton.

But all good things do end sometime. Sakina and Bashir Ahmad said their warm good-byes. The time was ten O'clock at night, so Bashir decided to have a gentle walk in the wide expanse of the Hyde Park. It was a lovely night.

DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

An Enduring Friendship

by Shahabuddin Mahtab

want home for her engagement to a high dignitary and a very wealthy man. She came back to complete her degree.

Sakina was duly married after a year and she was quickly blessed with three lovely daughters. Bashir Ahmad had to struggle on, and married five years later.

It was a professional association grant, that brought Bashir to London in the October of 1979.

Sakina wanted to revive their old memories so she suggested to go to the

Nurjahan Restaurant near Euston Station. When they reached the place, they found a new landscape, amidst which the Nurjahan Restaurant had vanished. They decided to make a second try, to their old restaurant near Tottenham Court Road. When they reached there, that to had vanished. Sakina now firmly commented that the explorations were now over, and she proposed that the dinner will now be in her hotel, the London Hilton overlooking the Hyde Park. To allay all fears,

Amsterdam

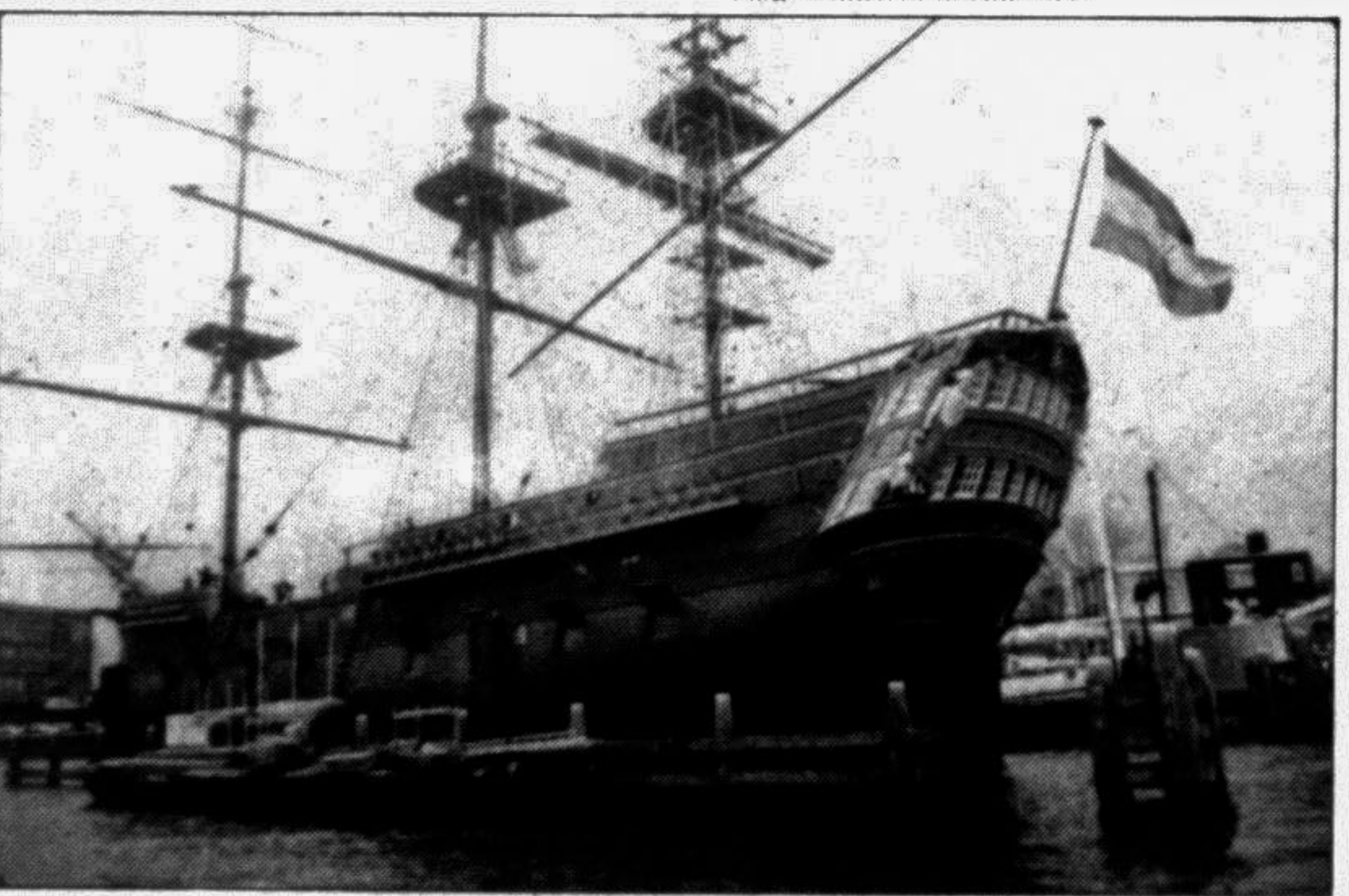
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capital of Europe, maybe because Amsterdam has a very tolerant and permissive atmosphere and also a lot of offer to the gay people. Throughout the year many events are organised for the gay people in the city. For example, the European Gay and Lesbian Pride Festival takes place every year in this city.

The writer is a Staff Correspondent of The Daily Star who visited Amsterdam last month with a 12-member media team. The tour was organised by the KLM Royal Dutch Airlines.



Tourist attraction at Amsterdam



Reproduction of 17th century ship, a tourist attraction at Amsterdam harbour.

about rain-forest, ozone layer, CFC, oil sleek, nuclear warheads, Charles-Camellia telephone talk and so on — but they know only what they are told of through a 'magic box' called television.

In fact, by the grace of the electronic media, today's children are turning into machines or rather, computer with data bank. Neurone cells of their brains are being replaced by assorted microchips. This may sound like an extreme assertion but unfortunately it is so.

Just some time back, when the national Text Book Board decided to set questions outside the provided Question Bank — there was fury and ransacks, and there was processions. After all, our children knew that one question from outside the reservoir would have caused a short-circuit in their sophisticated hi-tech brains.

Thanks goes to the Education Ministry, who man-

LOOKING down the memory lane with a feeling of ambivalence I just wonder whatever has happened to this society of ours. The Bengali Muslim society — the sprawling Muslim community who thrived on either side of the mighty Padma, comprising on the one hand of the vast majority of peasants — the tillers of the soil and on the other hand, the sizeable middle class dotted with a few feudal families. A basically nationalist people the Bengali Muslims accelerated their pace for a separate homeland at the turn of the century although the idea was conceived long ago. This dream was realised in 1947 partially and totally in 1971. In between everything is history.

A newly formed nation has to go through many phases of transition. Since the inception of Bangladesh we have been continuously traversing through this process reaching nowhere near stability and prosperity. It is time for some candid soul-searching, time to ponder how much we have contributed in terms of national development in order to reap a good harvest. We are an independent sovereign nation for well over two decades. Two decades is not that long a period in the life of a country, but it is certainly time for us to evaluate whether we have made a good beginning or not.

Let us first take the people into consideration. In my opinion the Bengali Muslims are proud but not without humility, cultured to the core but never ostentatious, basically religious but hardly tainted by bigotry, susceptible but also highly resilient, politically conscious and above all totally nationalist. But as destiny had it, the Bengali Muslims of the sub-continent had time and again suffered geographical, political, social and cultural onslaughts in the hands of the marauding invaders. Nature has endowed this country with a rich foliage but its wrath had at times been devastating. But fortunately enough, we have been able to survive one cataclysm after another. It seems that at the present moment we are faced

with another such crisis. It is not the same society as it was a couple of decades back. Change is inevitable but we have to make sure whether we are changing for the better or for the worse. In every sphere of life we see erosion of norms and values which is eating up the very vitals of our existence. The middle class which was the cream of the society is on the verge of moral bankruptcy. People who have made a difference in this country and who are at the helm of affairs now they all owe their roots to the middle class. We have the rich and the poor but slowly the middle class is being wiped off. It is needless to say that it is too great a loss for us to concede. A country like ours cannot survive without a sustainable middle class. In order to retrieve some of the lost social values and to bring about a change in the quality of our life and culture we shall have to launch some sort of movement to create awareness and consciousness among the people.

The emergence of Bangladesh as an independent sovereign nation boosted the very psyche of the Bengali Muslims. What a gigantic, stupendous and monumental achievement it was for our people. But this great achievement has gone to our heads. We have failed to realise our hopes and aspirations as was expected. Many of the good qualities which are inherent in the Bengalis are fast disappearing and the society is losing its real identity.

Let us for instance take the case of Bangla, our mother tongue, whose importance cannot be overemphasized. There is more in the observance of the Mahan Ekushey than in the qualitative improvement of the language and its application in all spheres of life. The mushroom growth of the so-called English medium

BRIDE! This sound is pure ecstasy. A bride — whether in a simple shalwar-kameez, saree-blouse, skirt-jumper or any other dress, she is always beautiful, even if she may not become a joy for ever.

Whenever a marriage party passes from nearby, everybody wishes to have at least a cursory glimpse of her, and of the bridegroom too. Old and young, male and female, married and unmarried, rich and poor — all have had a natural instinct to look at a bride or bridegroom. There may be different psychological interpretations of this phenomenon. Perhaps the married men and women unconsciously compare them with their own partners; and the unmarried to make up their mind how their future partners should be.

The celebrated TV actor of Singapore, Yang Li Bang who has been voted the most popular TV actor thrice, and Ms Li Nanxing got married in October. Mr Li Bang had reportedly made arrangement to decorate his bride's flowing off-white wedding gown with about 500 pieces of diamond worth over one million US dollars. Besides, the bride

There is something, it seems, that is fulfilling when we, modern-day travellers visit lands rich in ancient ruins and gaze in awe at the splendour, for instance, that was once ancient Greece, or the grandeur that was once Rome.

This is also true while held spellbound by the immensity of Abu Simbel, or the mind-boggling length and breadth of China's Great Wall. Lesser archaeological sites are no less glorifying, and this is no more evident than when one travels the lovely hills of Gilead town located north of Amman, capital city of Jordan.

Some 45 minutes of driving up and down winding roads to the hills of this historic place brings the columns and temples of the ancient city of Jerash in sight.

For centuries this glorious Roman provincial city lay buried under sand and rubble, but it is now slowly emerging under careful excavation of Jordan's Department of Antiquities.

To those who have had the enviable opportunity to view the diggings and the unfolding physical composition of a once thriving and living city, the sight is a fascinating study of a perfectly preserved piece of antiquity.

From the dim past, the excavators slowly bring into focus the verdant environment of the city full of flowing streams and a year-round supply of fresh water. The latter had brought Arab tribes to the town, assuring them as it did of the vital commodity needed so badly in this desert land.

Then came the time of Alexander the Great, or one of his generals, or perhaps Ptolemy II, who transformed it

Random Thoughts

The Social Slide

by Farida Huq

with another such crisis. It is not the same society as it was a couple of decades back. Change is inevitable but we have to make sure whether we are changing for the better or for the worse. In every sphere of life we see erosion of norms and values which is eating up the very vitals of our existence. The middle class which was the cream of the society is on the verge of moral bankruptcy. People who have made a difference in this country and who are at the helm of affairs now they all owe their roots to the middle class. We have the rich and the poor but slowly the middle class is being wiped off. It is needless to say that it is too great a loss for us to concede. A country like ours cannot survive without a sustainable middle class. In order to retrieve some of the lost social values and to bring about a change in the quality of our life and culture we shall have to launch some sort of movement to create awareness and consciousness among the people.

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schools only vouch for it. Education — the backbone of the society is in the doldrums. A degree holder is not truly educated and has to undergo series of tests to prove his or her worth. Parents are sending their children abroad for better education and those children no doubt will be a lost generation to the country. An alien culture has begun to take its grip on them and even if they return they will be ostracised and live as social pariahs.

Whom should our children follow as the ideal persons? There are, of course, no dearth of patriots — people who have dedicated their lives for this country — people who are still working relentlessly for this country, unfortunately do not get projection. The 'role models' for our youths are perhaps people who have established their status in the society by whatever unfair or fraudulent means they have found handy, people who are rich, who have fleets of imported cars in their garages, who lead a jet-set life and are Bangladeshi only on special occasions like Ekushey February and Pahela Baishakh.

History is often distorted and with every change at the top whatever preceded in the past is to be discarded as not worthwhile. The copybook maxims do not any more hold good for practical purpose in the context of our country. For many of this generation 'middle class' is a derogatory term and middle class sentiment is something to be derided upon.

The Bengalees always believed in austerity and simplicity. But what we see in real life now is too much indulgence in extravagance. The socio economic scenario of the country does not give us much edge as the majority of our people still happen to live below the poverty line. Every occasion is a matter of great celebration

and observed in Western-style razzmatazz, be it a wedding ceremony or a birthday party or a solemn event like a *waz mahfil* or a *urs sharif*.

Have we not of late become an essentially a consumers society, the markets being stacked with less local and more foreign stuff. Looking at those dazzling imported luxury items one can easily imagine their sky-rocketing prices and also their steady demand. Although the law enforcing agencies have often been seen impounding them with a lot of fanfare but these contraband items manage to stage a comeback to the relief of the 'foreign-crazy' buyers. The middle class have hardly any access to these. Then who are the buyers — the *nouveaux riches* who perhaps have all the power to pull the strings from behind the curtain and let this charade go on?

The advent of video clubs and Hindi films have done more harm than good to the society in the name of entertainment. These clubs have taken the place of libraries which is said to be storehouse of knowledge. We hardly see as many libraries these days as there were video clubs cropping up in every nook and corner of the country. In the olden days, people used to pass their time reading books, now they do so by watching Hindi and even English uncensored movies which has a tremendous adverse effect on the society. The middle class is paying a heavy price for it, financially morally and culturally.

The electronic media and other sources have made this modern world of ours a global village. So outward influence cannot be easily averted. Let our foundations be formidable enough to enable us to discriminate between good and bad. Let us be educated to realise what to accept and what to discard. A stable government, a viable economy and strict adherence to our deep-rooted culture and heritage and the survival of the middle class can only ensure our position as a respectable nation on this earth. All is not lost yet. Let us all strive hard to achieve our long cherished goals.

Diamond Studded Bride

by KR Zakhmi

wore several other outfits that day including a gold coloured miniskirt and a fire-engine-red long gown.

Unfortunately, the diamonds were beyond the buying capacity of the bridegroom. The jewellery were loaned by a local shop. How much he had to pay to the real owner of the diamonds is not known, but we may surmise easily.

The news is of course envious for many zealous lovers. However, such a fabulous wedding ceremony is not guarantee of a happy conjugal life. A famous progressive Urdu poet — Sahir Ludhianvi who is known throughout the sub-continent, especially by his best songs written for films with closest cooperation of late SD Burman, music director of many immortal tunes — was so much distressed at the sight of Taj Mahal that in one of his poems of the same title said:

Ek Shahinshah ne dawat ka sahaara lekar
Hum gharibon ki muhabbat ki urya hai mazaq

(Taking advantages of his huge wealth, an emperor has inflicted insult to poor lovers like us)

Sahir died a few years ago as a confirmed bachelor. He did not find a suitable bride during a period of about 55 years from his birth. I had had opportunity to meet him several times in *mushaira* (poets' functions for reciting self composed poetry), always with a beautiful girl beside him. Once he told me that he did find a few ideal girls of his choice, but unfortunately they were also in search of an ideal husband. However, let me go back to the point. Another film director of Bombay inducted a song especially written to refute the charges made by Sahir against Emperor Shahjahan. This song was written by another famous Urdu poet Shakeel Badayuni and became an instant hit:

Ek shahinshah ne banwake haseen Taj Mahal
Sari dunniya ko muhabbat ki nishani di hai
(In the shape of a beautiful

Taj Mahal
An emperor has given a gift of love to the world)

What Mr. Yang Li Bang will do for the memorial of his wife if she dies before him cannot be surmised. However, I wish both the couple a very long and happy conjugal life.

The news of the said wedding dress and decoration is thrilling. But it is most unpleasant to learn that Mr. Yang Li Bang had to keep looking at the floor to make sure none of the diamonds drops off. Instead of looking deep into the eyes of his bride.

Certainly, as they have become life partners both will be at liberty to look into each other's eyes, hearts and their parts of choice. But to look into the eyes of a bride just on the occasion of wedding ceremony is a divine ecstasy, which Mr. Yang had to miss.

Oh, sorrow to this. Before concluding, it comes to my mind that Mr. Yang must have been aware of the 1200-strong guests. Many of them must have also looked at the floor for at least one piece of the diamonds, which could be more valuable for them than looking at the diamond studded bride.

Continuing along the street, the visitor sees the two fine Roman baths which were a great institution with the pleasure-loving Romans. By the fourth century, many Christian churches were standing. Under Justinian VII, more were built and Christianity apparently had a firm control of the town.

Bishops from Jerash were known to attend councils in other lands. Here began an annual festival that attracted much attention every year, on the anniversary of the miracle of Cana, when Jesus turned water to wine for the wedding feast. The fountains of Jerash were said to run wine instead of water.

When the Persians invaded in 614, the beginning of the end of Jerash started and when the Moslem conquest forbade 'all images and like nesses,' the destruction of icons, mosaics, statues, etc should have left nothing at all.

Fortunately, much escaped and when the Crusaders came in the 12th century, there was an attempt to retake the town. But the Atabey of Damascus had turned the temple of Artemis into a fort and it was nearly demolished by Baldwin II in the fight for the town.

With the departure of the Frankish knights, Jerash sank into oblivion, and the dust of centuries settled upon it. The desert sands blew over it, half burying the columns choking the fountains.

It lay untouched and was like a sleeping beauty awakened when the Department of Antiquities began its recovery in 1920 and found a perfect example of a splendid Roman city.

— Depthnews Asir

asian diary BY ARJUNA

A Sleeping Beauty Awakened

into a Hellenistic enclave. It flourished and grew into a bustling centre of trade, culture and the arts. Just after the birth of Christ, Rome's jealous eye lit upon this jewel.

In the year 63 BC, Pompei conquered the whole area and from this point on, Jerash became an outpost of Roman culture and civilisation.

Today, the approach to the town lies past the Triumphal Arch, erected by Hadrian in honour of himself in 189 AD. Beyond is the just discernible ruined oval of the once great hippodrome where games and athletic events were held.

The South Gate of the city is now the ticket wicket, and following some remnants of the city wall, a patch climbs up a hill to the left of the massive crumbling Temple of Zeus, whose state of disrepair contrasts sharply with the beautifully reconstructed amphitheatre beside it.

Here, 32 tiers of seats hold 6,000 spectators, the lower ones marked with Greek letters and numbers and reserved for celebrities.

Back down the hill, one beholds the enormous oval of the Roman Forum and its concentric circles of paved blocks enclosed by Ionic columns, 56 of which are still in place. From this emerges the Street of Columns — classic feature of all ambitious provincial city plans — running the entire length of

the city, north and south.

Here one sees where the later ornate period took over from the simpler early forms: elegant Corinthian columns replacing the Ionic. At this same time in the late first century AD and early second in Trajan's reign, many more ornate changes were made, the city much beautified. Here along the main street, shops were built under columns, with watermain beneath them.

At the street crossings, monuments with statues were set up, often financed by the proud civic-minded citizens.

Next, the high, impressive columns of the Temple of Artemis, patron goddess of the city, tower above the area and are reached by a Propylaea or gate and a flight of stairs. Beneath the temple's great courtyard, a museum is being expanded to house the finer treasures that keep turning up during reconstruction. Then take a look at the mosaics, inscriptions, statuary and carvings found nearby and the coins testifying to the trade Jerash had with the Nabataeans.

Opposite Artemis' temple are the remains of the Christian Viaduct Church which made prudent use of the old temple's forecourt. Other Christian churches were built in the 4th and 5th centuries: 13 churches in all have been