

**A**LLAH 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 wedlock 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 respite. 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

lived up to 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-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.

Excessive adulteration 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, 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 *pithas* 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

## Distant Drum

M N Mustafa

Frigidity does not help renew 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.

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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 *Jamal Shashthi* — the day the son-in-law is treated lavishly. He is entitled to 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 Panjab University we used to go for picnic either at Shawdara where lies *Mokbarat-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, Shahriyar, who had no legal claim on Mughal crown. The result was Shahriyar's premature death, Nurjahan's soundless expulsion from royal favours and almost an ignominious burial by any Mughal standard. Excessive misplaced love and affection for the daughter, Ludmila Begum, and its radiated heat for her spouse, Shahriyar, 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 commandeer

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-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. Shakina stated quite proudly that she had grandchildren. Poor Ba 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 goodbyes. 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.

**B**RIDE! 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 atleast 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

**T**HERE 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.

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

## Random Thoughts

## The Social Slide

by Farida Hug

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 first take the people into consideration. In my opinion the Bengali Muslims are unique in their characteristics — 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

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