

The Dhaka Book Fair: A Laudable Effort

THE Dhaka Book Fair which began on the 1st of January on the ground adjacent to the Bujy Sarani in the capital was destined to become a major book event in the years to come. The fair which concluded on 15th January was part of the country-wide book exhibition programme organised as part of the Grantha Dibash or National Book Event announced by the Prime Minister Begum Khadeja Zia in her inaugural address at the 1993 National Book Fair at the Dismal Memorial Hall on 1st January 1993.

In fact the latest Dhaka Book Fair substituted the National Book Fair which was being regularly held every year under the sponsorship of the National Book Centre and the Ministry of Culture. Earlier, the government announced a National Book Policy which was drafted by the representatives of all the sectors concerned with the book industry in the country. But the development which has thrown cold water on all the good steps taken by the government in the book sector is the unprecedented price hike of paper since August 1994.

However, the Dhaka Book Fair was well organised by the National Book Centre and the book lovers and readers responded positively and enthusiastically. As had been the case with the earlier National Book Fairs the publishers displayed and sold their own books and publications at the Dhaka Book Fair. This helped to give us the true picture of the publishing industry in Bangladesh. The Amor Eku-shey Book Fair held in the month of February at the Bangla Academy presents a picture of rows of bookshops along with rows of shops selling anything from hand-crafts to T-shirts, and does not give a true picture of the state of the publishing industry.

by Mohiuddin Ahmed

However, the Bangla Academy Book Fair has developed its own typical character and is likely to go on its own steam. For a long time the publishers in Bangladesh have been feeling the need of some kind of an international book event in Dhaka and perhaps the Dhaka Book Fair will, gradually over the years, assume this character. The Fair was open to international publishers and already a number of them displayed and sold their books as a test case. Two things possibly have happened (a) Those of our publishers who have so far failed to see the book world beyond Dhaka, and in some cases beyond Bangla Bazar, are given an opportunity to see developments in the international book industry and (b) many of our readers and book lovers might go to see and buy the books they had been wanting to buy.

Besides, each year we would be able to compare the progress made in our own book industry with others in the world. Our authors would get the exposure to foreign publishers. Foreign publishers participating would be booking for potential writers from Bangladesh. The Dhaka Book Fair may become the meeting ground of books from both East Asia and West Asia and if this was to be achieved in the future, we need to start planning now.

We hear of great developments in the field of education in Bangladesh, but have the funds for the libraries increased? This calls for rapid and effective steps to build up a national library network without which neither education nor book industry could move forward. These are steps which should also be on the agenda of all political parties.

A significant development with regard to the Dhaka Book Fair has been the support and sponsorship coming forth from the members of business and industry sectors. It may be worth noting that the National Book Centre had not to spend any money in building up the fair infrastructure. All the pavilions and stalls were sponsored or erected by either big business houses or publishers themselves.

The National Book Centre also arranged for cultural events: discussion on books, art and culture to inform and enlighten the visitors. The cultural events drew a good audience each evening and the law and order agencies did a tremendous job by keeping Dhaka Book Fair premises free of mastaans.

Let us hope that this Book Fair takes the desired course of becoming an annual important international event in Dhaka.



Visitors at the book fair

A Question of Attitude

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On its perilous way/From a tree's summit; a poor Indian's sleep/While his boat hastens to the monstrous steep/Of Mont-torenci. Why so sad a moan?/Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown;/The reading of an ever-changing tale;/The light uplifting of a maiden's veil;/A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air;/A laughing school boy, without grief or care;/Riding the springy branches of an elm." It requires extraordinary courage for a man who is being ravaged by the pernicious tentacles of tuberculosis to write such splendid lines which lift the spirit of even the most

dejected heart. What powered his thoughts? HOPE. The mellow light that shows the path. His faith in hope was so firmly rooted. It imparted great sensibility to his attitude. This luminous light led him to write in the poem "To Hope". "When by my solitary hearth I sit./And hateful thoughts un-wrap my soul in gloom/When no fair dreams before my 'minds eye' flit./And the bare bloom of life presents no health./ Sweet Hope, ethereal balm upon me shed./And wave thy silver pinions o'er my head." This faith in hope is a thing to be learnt. This learning should not be treated as

something which merely enriches the knowledge of a pedant. Life of the great ones teach us that it has to be bred into the character. This is a task of lifelong practice. Robert H Schuller gives a wonderfully convincing pictorial description of this practice in his book "Tough Times Never Last. But Tough people Do." He narrates "I remember one winter my dad needed firewood, and he found a dead tree and sawed it down. In the spring, to his dismay, new shoots sprouted around the trunk. He said, 'I thought sure it was dead. The leaves have all dropped in the wintertime. It was so cold that twigs snapped as if there were not life left in the old tree. But now I see that there was still

life at the taproot.' He looked at me and said, 'Bob, don't forget this important lesson. Never cut a tree down in the winter time. Never make a negative decision in the low time. Never make your important decisions when you are in your worst mood. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass. The spring will come.' Life, for everybody, will come to an end. But there is definitely no logic in dying everyday by the cuts and wounds of life, by the weight of the daily grind, by the rigours of meeting the demands of ambition, by the exertions of outdistancing others. We all can understand that only a positive attitude can save us from these daily perils.

Aijaz Ahmad's Talk on the Future of Marxism

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While referring to the Rousseau-marked fissure of the Enlightenment, Professor Ahmad not only brings to the fore the unresolved questions of democracy and equality by exhibiting this very ideological logic that "ideas of equality in one domain lead necessarily to ideas of equality in other domains." Professor Ahmad at the same time makes this important point that we have had so far the fractured Enlightenment, the incomplete Enlightenment out of which both Marxism and feminism were born — born with that undiminished scar, the question of equality, and that not only Marxism and not only feminism, but democracy itself still lives in its prehistory. The future of Marxism is also indicated thus: "It depends on accomplishing unfinished tasks left off by Marxism's prehistory."

As one would see, Aijaz Ahmad does not speak categorically of the future of Marxism in the manner of a prophet: he does not predict or foresee any future as such. What then he does is that he views the future in terms of its relationship with the past and the present, and also goes on to indicate, as to how the future can be built. In other words, the theme of his talk is not "what is the future?" as such, but it involves the question "how can a future be built?" In providing some answers of his own, Professor Ahmad now turns to the actual history of political Marxism in order to review "the balance-sheet of Marxism's gains and losses."

from the pressures of multinational capital which are greater today than they have ever been in the history of humankind. The issues of national autonomy, national independence and agrarian transformation continue to be the two fundamental issues in which Marxism historically had its deepest roots in our society."

Aijaz Ahmad now turns to yet another fundamental task of Marxism by underscoring the need to invent more and more rights and defend them, because what has happened is that the passage of history has thrown up new and newer needs, and new historical subjects. At this point, he particularly emphasizes the issue of the massive destruction of nature by capitalist appropriation, all feminist issues that are coming up, and the issue of radically transforming the meaning of democracy itself in terms of inventing, defending and consolidating new rights in harmony with the new needs and new historical subjects. Democracy, to Ahmad, is certainly a question of defending its familiar mode of articulation in the right of representation, the electoral process, and so on; but then, as Ahmad argues, it is also a question of constant radicalization of new rights and a question of ensuring the equality of rights and opportunities. The future of Marxism, comments Ahmad, much depends on how Marxism accommodates, addresses, negotiates, and even radicalizes all such issues.

The next issue Aijaz Ahmad takes up is that intractable logic of Marxism — the issue of the reconciliation between central planning and democratisation of life. He observes that one of the fundamental problems in the twentieth century is that there are certain levels of economic life which require central planning — a central planning that is not tied to the issues of profit, but tied to the issues of social survival. What is important, for Ahmad, is the issue of how one articulates the market which is based on exchange and profit, in relation to social uses of economic production. This requires, further observes Ahmad, that there be central agencies that would look at this articulation; but then, this is not workable without greater and greater democratisation and devaluation of power to the smallest possible unit — down to the village and the small community. This is still a problem, stresses Ahmad, which needs to be thought through, both politically and theoretically. However, Professor Ahmad indicates that the relationship between central planning and democratisation at the level of the smallest unit is partly a question of articulating political democracy and large scale economy; but then, it is also the whole question of restructuring the economy of various social skills.

It is precisely at this point in his talk that Professor Ahmad suddenly returns to the issue of Marxism's gains. He says, "let me follow just another chain of thought. I spoke of what Marxism gave us in Asia; but before that, I barely remarked on the fact that Marxism transformed the nature of capitalism in its very heartlands." He refers to the 1930s when two important things happened and coincided

Distant Drum

M N Mustafa

TIME is up to pay tribute to the donkey and relate its achievements. As a token of tolerance a donkey always welcomes a kick from its lover. Yet man thrusts lavish praises on every animal and bird and ignores donkey's patience and tenacity. The pigeon's legs, cuckoo's voice, duck's walking, lion's personality, hyena's laughter and fox's cunningness have been cited and commended. But the donkey, like the political party in power remaining always on the bitter tongue of the opposition leader, is the eternal wrong front. Only two persons, Shakespeare in his poetical soaring and the Kabultwala, in his misplaced gratitude thrust greatness on this otherwise tenacious and unispringing animal.

Besides Shakespeare, some painters also portrayed the life-style of donkeys. One such painting portraying the donkey and his spouse in a painting exhibition attracted the attention of an inquisitive child. He wanted to know from his intelligent father whether donkeys too enter into marriage bonds. The father who harvested the bitter fruits of wedlock laconically told his son that only donkeys enter into wedlocks. Here the donkeys literally or figuratively take the full load of the social-spiritual-biological liabilities of the bond called marriage.

In the religious books including the Holy Quran donkey's reference is only for its hoarse voice. Donkeys also brought fortune. Prophet Saul or Talut by a divine command became a king when he went out in search of his father's donkeys. In the Old Testament referred to in the Holy Quran, donkey is mentioned symbolically to have suffered death and decay only, to be clothed with flesh again by Allah who has full control over time. Braying of ass has no musical effect but still the musicians have accepted it as a standard for being unmusical. The Americans credited

with inventing alternatives for everything, have recently made a cocktail out of donkey and zebra. Through cross-breeding between a male donkey and female zebra they were successful in producing a hybrid which has been named 'zonkey'. With zebra's white and black stripes the zonkey will now inherit the donkey's tenacity and stupidity and zebra's beauty. Paying tribute to America's inventive and innovative genius, some anti-Americans claim that the Biblical and the Quranic devil does not exist now. They have reported that the American biologists successfully made a cocktail of men and devil. This cross-breed, America's enemies claim, have been distributed round the world.

Hitler suspected them to be Jews. But Ayatullah Khomeini, fed by America in his rainy days did not give this credit to the Americans. He claimed that the devil lived in America with exit permit only to visit Soviet Russia.

I was glad to find a donkey playing a significant role in a circus in Moscow, side by side with horses, possibly brought from Uzbekistan. They donkey was not alone, he had his spouse too to play the assigned role. It was not immediately known whether donkeys have since been absolved of the common charges against them in respect of their follies after the successful bourgeois proletariat revolution. But the Moscow circus authorities, while portraying Pushkin's story, did not forget the donkey whom alone we have given the sobriquet — the beast of burden. By assigning a role to play, the Russians made sincere attempt to instil an artistic sensibility in the otherwise dull and uninspiring physical constitution of the donkey. I was also told by my friends

ning. He worked in a circus and met another donkey, fat and healthy, belonging to a washerman. The washerman's donkey took pity on the circus donkey for his ill-health and asked him to leave the circus since he did not get adequate food. The circus donkey, heaving a sigh, replied that it was serving the circus only for a prospect. It ran like this. The owner of the circus had a beautiful daughter. She walked on tight rope in the circus. Once she fell down the rope. The owner got angry and before everybody vowed that if she fell again from the rope, she would be married to the donkey. And since then the donkey was awaiting the moment when she fell from the rope and then a formal proposal for marriage between the donkey and the owner's daughter would be made.

Shakespeare paid the richest tribute to the donkey, the lover. In the annals of love and lovers, a donkey had the fortune of winning the heart of the fairest, the queen of the fairies. In the drama, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Bottom turned into a donkey by the magic spell fell in love with no less a person than the Queen of the Fairies, Titania. Here Titania agog with praise for donkey's beauty, claimed that God created donkey in His spare time to bestow all beauty on him.

Another lavish tribute was showered on the donkey by an Afghan, A Kabultwala who came to Bengal to earn his bread once failed to pay for his meals in a hotel. The hotel-keeper, as a measure of punishment, got his head shaved half and made him to ride a donkey with his head turned towards the tail of the donkey. But the Kabuli took this punishment of shaving and donkey ride as a token of Bengali hospitality. On return home he praised Bengali hospitality which included free ride on a donkey. He invited other Kabulis to visit Bengal at least for a ride on a donkey.

The Last Plays: The Final Victory

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kill his sleeping brother Alonso. This conspiracy would have been executed, had there been no intervention of Prospero through the agency of Ariel. This conspiracy, if executed successfully, could have brought in some what tragic consequences. The foul, conspiracy of Caliban and his drunken associates though a burlesque of the more serious machination of Antonio Sebastian was hatched out for execution in the afternoon when Prospero would enjoy his routine sleep. So sleep that facilitated Duncan's murder leading to the explosive tragic

process of moral upheavals was not allowed here to cause the destruction as planned. The Serpentine evil raises its hood, but it has to recoil to the charming power of good. Prospero has more than reasonable ground to resort to revenge turning *The Tempest* a not too unreasonably Senecan tragedy. Folded within his power, his enemies could have been heavily punished, but the sole drift of his purpose does not extend beyond their repentance. He has strong resentment against his enemies, but that does not blur his vision by having recourse to revenge. Revenge, to him, is a wild justice which does no good to the doer — nay, it is harmful and derogatory as it tantamounts to the breach of self-control, self-mastery and moral elevation which Shakespeare's maturer vision of life has invested Prospero with.

Shakespeare's last plays may, therefore, be viewed as plays in which the evil, though it makes its entry since flesh and blood is heir to it, is relegated to a position where it is too feeble to counterbalance the benevolence of the good, and on each occasion, when it resorts to guileful devices and machinations, it has to give in to no tragic happenings at the least. These plays are redeemed by the omnipresence of an eye that keeps constant beneficent watch over the frailty and mortality of human beings. All these have been achieved by the skillful manipulation of the materials and devices which were fraught with tragic consequences of the greatest magnitude. Shakespeare's art — his stagecrafts 'make vile things precious' crowning him with the glory of final victory, and herein lies at least one aspect of his 'infinite variety'.

other thoughts, including its own categories such as class, production, labour, wage and so on. He boldly underlines this point that ecological degradation and the coming-into-being of a very powerful feminist movement require from Marxism a historically new kind of theoretical effort to think through precisely the issues that come from outside the historical knowledge of Marxism, for which, perhaps, some analytical categories in various forms exist — some more thought, some much less thought. Professor Ahmad then concludes his talk with this note: "Once the question of radical equality has been posed, nothing eventually can actually stop it. Indeed, the most radical kinds of questions come from those Marxists which are always ready enough and open enough to think of all the needs and all the transformations as much as possible."

The talk, as one notices, privileges a theoretical imperative, namely rethinking. This imperative itself is an integral part of the Marxist dialectical philosophy, and one can readily refer to Lenin for his insistence on this imperative always felt crucial for theoretical and political struggles. And recently Henri Lefebvre, in his "Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics," underlined this imperative as a means of getting out of Marxism's crisis, both internal and external. But, the strength of Ahmad's talk lies elsewhere, particularly in his brilliant analysis of the prehistory of the moment of the birth of Marxism, on which Ahmad's talk seems to spend more time than he spends on any single issue. Significant in direction, this analysis, by identifying both the void of the Enlightenment and its filler-in of sorts, namely, Marxism, in fact foregrounds the unfinished tasks and the future agenda of Marxism, which he also ties to a number of specific issues, namely, transformation of agrarian societies, national liberation, ecology, feminism, and so on. However, with regard to the proposed theoretical negotiation between Marxism and Feminism, we have actually very little concrete suggestions on which to build such a negotiation.

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The Passing Show

by A Zabr

A Shopping List for the Opposition

WHAT the Opposition parties are doing may not be very clear, but what they are not doing for are disinterested in is easier for the people to list.

The current 'people's programme' unleashed on the masses by the Opposition may be too technical for the majority of the voters, as the implications of the care-taker government proposal (during the general election) may be debatable only by a very small minority of the enlightened citizens, as it is a high-level technical issue, which, according to the Opposition view, cannot be solved even inside the parliament. How hartals, blockades, and street agitations could provide a solution have not been understood very clearly.

Here is a partial list (alphabetical, A to Z) of issues of possible interest to the Opposition MPs. The readers may add to the list, if interested in some form of patriotic exercise.

A for Anti-corruption, the Drive may be revived or re-introduced. Agriculture is well

known hence the leaders may deliberate on the erosion of some other form of Bengalee culture, now rapidly facing obliteration. The effectiveness of the Parliamentary Committees (encouragement of opposition proposals).

Bangladeshis abroad (employment, investment packages, anti-hundi measures): banana export; Bandarban and Baridhara problems; border anti-activities, (smuggling of heads, herds, and coin). Bakshish (which areas to legalize).

Coal (economical disposal of the unsold surplus in the state stock); curry powder export (a 3m market, including one million Bangladeshis living abroad); charity (national code on uncharitable remarks); cholera (export of the famed Oral Saline); campus peace (stabilize) and violence (weight increase). Opposition amendments to the new Coast Guard scheme. And the silent and invisible Civil Service (Do's and Don'ts).

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