



An Artist for Women

by Schrezad Joya Monami Latif

sometimes, it makes me sick how to men women are simply sex objects. Afrozaa qualifies emphatically. Her paintings show her silent anger. She says that before she left for the US, she was naive in that she believed that it was really only in Bangladesh that women were so blatantly kept under. "I grew up once I got there and realized that women's subjugation in all forms is truly a universal thing."

Afrozaa has been painting since she was a child, her major in Art School was in Oriental art and when looking at her prior work, one can see her growth as a person and artist.

Her earlier favorites were watercolors and miniatures of Moghulesque women with their slanted doe eyes and long wheat complexioned faces. She now says she is not so definite in the characters she draws. She no longer systematically hampers after fine lines but blends in a bit of everything. A bit of the west has actually seeped into her work. She has had three exhibitions in America, her last one in Houston was especially well received and very successful.

Afrozaa's strength and source of inspiration, is as one can guess from the subjectivity

of her art, a woman — her mother. "I used to want to be a classical singer," she laughs. As a child, Afrozaa's obvious gift as an artist shone through and her father, Jamil Ahmed, always told her he'd send her to Paris to be an artist. Unfortunately, he was killed along with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 and could not see his daughter's gift on canvas.

After her father's death, Afrozaa grew up with her mother who had the task of raising four young daughters all on her own. Afrozaa's strength and empowerment as a woman comes from her adolescence where she saw her mother run her own business and raise them single handedly in a society where single parent households are not only a rarity but a stigma.

Asked if being an artist was harder because she was a woman, she says she had it good because of her mother's ardent support but cannot name even one fellow female Art College graduate who has gone into art as a profession. "In this country, people who go to art college are looked at as ones who did not get in anywhere else such as BUET or the Medical College. Little value is given to an artist's craft unless they are Van Gogh or Monet or course." Especially our society makes it as if women should just get married and have babies. A career as an artist is especially looked down at. Afrozaa feels very strongly about this and says it hinders higher participation of women in the art field.

Afrozaa has worked for BRAC as a designer for Aarong and was a jewellery designer in LA for a few years. She continues to explore other channels — graphic design and print making, but painting is what makes her happiest.

And does she want to be internationally famous and world renowned? Wouldn't that make her the happiest of all? "Of course!" she exclaims. "It would be the fulfillment of my life's dream if I could serve as a source of inspiration for women everywhere."



"ONE shouldn't paint just so that he/she can sell paintings, but because it comes from within," says Afrozaa Jamil, a 32 year old Los Angeles based painter whose third solo exhibition in Dhaka opened yesterday at La Gallerie and runs till the 28 of this month. Afrozaa is a petite, demure artist whose strength of character and thought is belayed in her work if not her physique. Her exhibition shows twenty-one of her most recent works, most of which are large 3'2" done in acrylic and oil pastels. A 1985 graduate of the Bangladesh Institute of Fine Arts, Afrozaa's subjects are mostly either women or fish. The latter she started painting once she left Bangladesh with her husband, for the US in 1989.

"I started painting fish once I moved away from home. They symbolize Bangladesh to me and often I paint them in nets because that's how I view Bangladeshi women, in bondage." Afrozaa feels strongly about the oppression and subjugation of women and most of her paintings portray the truth of women's social status in our society. "A man's View," is one of her more daring paintings. It shows three naked women standing facing the canvas, one of them has her hand over her crotch.

In LA I always see these huge billboards advertising cellular phones or a car, something quite irrelevant, and yet there will be a huge painting of a woman in bikini or less



"A man's view" is of women as sex objects

Sad Silence Sprouts into Smile

Aasia Begum (40), mother of four children (2 boys, 2 girls), of Kandania Uttar Para Group (ASA), Thanakapasia, Dist-Gazipur narrates her case of struggle and success.

In those afflicted days my elder son informed me of the landless women's group organized by ASA (Association for Social Advancement). I became desperate to change my fate. Hence, one day, I kept me standing by the road side and met the Community Organiser of ASA. From her I came to know about the group that it was an attempt to empower the powerless. The practice of the group was to lend money to the poor helpless people on 15% simple interest to invest in some schemes. On knowing everything I enlisted my name and remained with the group till today.

From the next week I went on regularly maintaining my presence in the Development Education Class and depositing weekly savings of Tk 4/- only. In the development education class, I heard about women's right, savings, income generation and also about nutrition, food value, prevention of common diseases, etc. Right after five months (in 1990) I received Tk 1,000/- (one thousand) as the first term credit. I mortgaged eight jackfruit trees for Tk 500/- (five hundred) and purchased

10/12 chickens with the rest (Tk 500). I repaid the instalments from the poultry scheme.

The calculation of poultry scheme comes below:

10 chickens were purchased, 250 eggs from 1 chicken came in a year (one average).			
Income		Expenditure	
Money came in a year (Tk. 10 x 250 eggs x 2 time average)	Tk. 5,000/-	Costing (feeding/vaccination/preparing of cage, etc)	Tk. 3,000/-
		Repayment of instalments	Tk. 1,150/-
Total	Tk. 5,000/-		Tk. 4,150/-
Net profit= Tk. 850/- (5,000-4,150)			

After the repayment I received Tk. 2,000/- and Tk. 4,000/- as credit in '92 and '93 respectively. With the credit amount of 2nd term I mortgaged six 'ganda' pine-apple field. In the same year marriage ceremony of my daughter took place. Being unable to meet up all the cost I sold 10 decimal of land. At the end of the year Tk. 1,500/- came from sale of pine-apples. Tk 2,000/- came as I returned the land to the owner. Excluding a part as family con-

sumption, Tk. 1,500/- remained in my hand. And adding this with the 3rd credit of Tk 4,000/- an amount of Tk. 5,500/- could be available. With this amount I purchased a rickshaw for my elder son. Also the scheme of poultry was gradually expanding.

Now, I find myself in a rather improved condition. My elder son has become an earning member, elder daughter is busy with her family and the

younger two (both in class III, a girl and a boy) are continuing their schooling.

I became much benefited by involving myself in the group. My children are getting education and treatment. I have also purchased a bed to sleep in comfort. A tube-well is sunk for clean water. I hope to build a water-sealed latrine for the family within a short time. Now, I am in a better position. However, to become self-reliant 4 to 5 terms loan would be needed.

We started our new family. My husband's occupation was share cropping. Sometimes he cultivated in his own land also. Meanwhile two more children took birth and the number of our family members rose to six. Eventually days were rather agreeable. The elder son began schooling. But the days did not continue for long. My husband passed away to the eternal world. Few months could be managed with the saving.

After his sad demise I had to manage the family with much hardship. For two to three years I served as a maid servant in the houses of well to do people. My elder son was engaged in a rich man's house as domestic help. My elder daughter grew up. I felt for her marriage but reality kept me silent. Because, it was the time for my family to divide a single meal into two and time to ignore all the basic human needs. I was the mother of four children, but none of them could carry on their studies due to poverty.



Women buying and selling from each other

Sunset Rule Unconstitutional

by Saira Rahman

The existence of the sunset rule and a few other discriminatory rules singles out University Ordinance as prime target for legal reform, otherwise state authorities concerned are on the verge of being held responsible for violating both the constitution and international law.

RECENTLY, female students of the Dhaka University have awoken to the realisation that a gulf of difference separates the female hostels from the male ones — and they are attacking this discrimination with vengeance. One of the main topics of contention is what is called the Sunset Rule, which demands that women students return to their resident halls by seven pm.

The rule, first introduced by the Proctorial Rules of 1922 and then included in the Dhaka University Ordinance of 1973, gravely hampers women students from pursuing their studies in libraries, research work, cultural activities, internships at law firms and all other extra-curricular and educational activities they could otherwise have taken up. For classes it is from to note that way back in 1922 this rule also applied to male students, but in the last few decades, men have enjoyed full freedom on campus — and out of it as well, paying no heed to the rule which says that male residence halls will close their gates at nine in the evening (the University Ordinance). Universities established after Dhaka University have no such 'sunset rule' among their regulations — women of Jahangirnagar University, BUET and Dhaka Medical College are not tied down by this obsolete regulation.

The government is continuously emphasizing the necessity for the upliftment and development of the female sec-

tor and have almost begun to realise that women play an integral part in the development of a nation. Then why are these discriminatory laws still on the loose? A student of Dhaka University needs to take part in study groups, library and research work, etc in order to supplement her or his studies and, more important, for female students to compete equally with their male counterparts.

Not only is the 'sunset rule' downright discriminatory, it goes against the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Article 26 (2) of the Constitution clearly states "The state shall not make any law inconsistent with any provision of this Part (Fundamental Rights), and any law so made shall to the extent of such inconsistency, be void." Article 28 says that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of sex. Article 10 states that 'steps shall be taken to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life' and Article 19 states that 'The State shall endeavour to ensure equal opportunity to all citizens'. Thus the rule is clearly inconsistent with the Fundamental rights guaranteed to the people by our Constitution.

Bangladesh has been a party to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (UN-CEDAW) for quite some time. CEDAW defines discrimination as 'any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on

the basis of sex, which has the purpose or effect of denying equal exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of human endeavour'. Article 10 voices equal rights in education, including equal access to educational and vocational guidance. The existence of the sunset rule and a few other discriminatory rules singles out University Ordinance as a prime target for legal reform, otherwise state authorities concerned are on the verge of being held responsible for violating both the Constitution and International Law.

Laws aside, the sunset rule is like a dash of icy humiliation flung on the faces of the students of the various Dhaka university halls. On the average, university students begin their undergraduate education when they are 18 or 19 years of age. By that time, they acquire the right to vote, to marry, and to enter into contracts. Nevertheless, they must be within the 'safe' four walls of their hostel by seven in the evening till they graduate at 24 or 25! What crimes have female students committed that they must be locked inside their halls at a specific time and checked to see if they are all there, like prisoners, while their male counterparts roam around the campus freely and create havoc and death and destruction to satisfy political aims?

The author is currently doing her Master's in Law from Dhaka University



Female students waging a protest locking the main entrance of the Dhaka University Registrar's office demanding abolition of the Sunset Law.

Woman Scientists Serve as Role Models

WOMEN scientists in South Korea continue to be outnumbered by men.

In terms of achievement, however, they are not far behind. In fact, some of them are becoming leaders in their field.

One is chemist Dr Park Song-ja, who has developed a method for extracting and analyzing toxic materials with just one test, considerably shortening this painstaking procedure. Dr Park, one of the first two women scientists to become senior researchers of the Korean Institute of Science and Technology, is now trying to establish the permissible standards for toxic materials, which has not been determined in South Korea.

The other woman scientist is Dr Kang Hye-jung, an expert in high polymer chemistry of the National Institute for Engineering and Technology. She has developed bio-decomposable plastic.

This will make it possible for plastic manufacturers to do away eventually with non-biodegradable components which are major causes of environmental pollution.

Dr Kang continues with her research, since the new plastic is seven to eight times more expensive than the regular plastic. Further study is needed to reduce its cost.

In computer software development, Dr Huh Un-na, another woman has developed an interacting videodisc and a videodisc which displays nature through film. A leading expert in educational software development, Dr Huh, chair of Hanyang University's Research Institute for Computer Education, is attempting to link

engineering with learning.

The accomplishments of these trailblazers show that female students should not shy away from the scientific disciplines, as they sadly do. Of the 73,275 researchers employed by national and public research institutes, higher education institutes and industries in South Korea, only 2,352 are women according to 1991 statistics.

Chemistry is a favourite field, with women scientists doing research in applied chemistry including chemistry process design and development, catalyzer technology, chemical materials including inorganic materials and high polymer, toxicity and stability of chemical materials, and environmental chemistry.

However, chemistry is still a male-dominated field, says Dr Oh Sea-hwa, senior researcher of the dyestuff, dyeing and finishing department of the Korea Research Institute of Chemical Technology. She was the first woman scientist to be employed by the institute and is acknowledged as the top expert in dye engineering.

Biochemistry and life engineering are other areas where women should challenge male dominance, Dr Oh said. The proportion of women remains high in pharmacy. Women compose about half of the 50 researchers of the National Institute of Safety Research which tests and evaluates pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, food and new chemical materials for their safety and effectiveness.

At the National Institute of Health, 20 out of 48 pharma-

cists are women, mostly in the divisions of medicines and pharmacognosy where they analyze the ingredients of pharmaceuticals and non-pharmaceuticals before these products are given authorization by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs.

Women's presence is likewise getting stronger in private companies, with women making up some 25 per cent of researchers in such large pharmaceutical companies as Dong-a, Yuhan and Joog-ot.

About half of the 1,400 members of the Korean Association of Pharmaceuticals are women.

An increasing number of women are going into architecture engineering, which is a science united with the arts and has diversified into such fields as architecture design, urban planning, environmental behaviour and construction.

One of the leading architectural engineers in South Korea is Dr Kim Jin-ae, whose projects have been central in creating an urban image for the country's capital, Seoul. She leads the Study Group for the Construction of New Houses, composed of engineers seeking to improve the quality of life through improved housing.

Similar study groups have been organized by the 250-member Korean Association of Women Architects, which manages a free counselling centre on housing for the general public. It has been undertaking a study on the expansion of child care centres and makes its innovations available for free to centres which request for them.

Smoking Causes Decline in Women's Physical Abilities

In a twist on the old warning that smoking shortens your life, researchers say it can also make you feel older.

Elderly women who smoke are weaker and less agile than their nonsmoking contemporaries, researchers say.

For an older woman, smoking may have the same effect as adding five years to a person's age," said Dr Heidi D Nelson, lead author of a study that appears in a recent issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association. "The study adds to the long list of reasons why people should not be smoking."

The study's results also suggest that older smokers may increase their risks of injuries from falls and require more frequent treatment for physical injuries than nonsmokers, Nelson said.

The study measured how 9,704 white women over the age of 65 performed such basic physical tasks as gripping an object, walking, rising from a chair and climbing stairs.

Smokers performed more poorly than nonsmokers in 11 of 12 categories tested, said Nelson, an assistant professor of internal medicine at Oregon Health Sciences University's School of Medicine.

In each case, test results for the smokers were similar to what would have been expected for women years older. The researchers said smoking causes vascular problems that may explain the poorer functions.

The smokers in the group averaged 16 cigarettes a day. "Younger women are smoking sooner and more often than this group. What's ahead might be more dramatic," she warned.

Dr Michael Thun of the American Cancer Society, who did not take part in the research, said smoking "accelerates aging and loss of function in many ways."

He said the study suggests that more research needs to be done on smoking's effect on neuro-muscular function.

In the same study, researchers measured how moderate drinkers performed physical tasks as compared to nondrinkers.

The moderate drinkers — those who averaged fewer than 14 drinks per week — did better on 11 of 12 tasks than their nondrinking counterparts.

But despite those findings, Nelson said she wouldn't advise an older friend to start drinking.

She said the results could stem from the fact that women who are healthier in the first place tend to have a more social and active lifestyle that includes an occasional alcoholic beverage. Another reason could be that women who have medical problems may then stop drinking.

The women in the study were volunteers from Minneapolis, Baltimore, Pittsburgh and Portland, Ore., participating in a larger study on osteoporosis. — AP News

