

TEENS and TWENTIES

The Guilt

by Reetu Sharma



MASOOM had been sitting in the hospital room beside his sick son's bed for the last 12 hours without a blink. Antara was huddled in the couch in the corner of the room. Bijoy, their only son, was in a coma. The saline drip was dripping rapidly. His face looked innocent, well, he was innocent, what can a child be when he is just 15 months old and has been diagnosed as having CP, cerebral palsy.

The Neurologist had explained to Masoom and Antara that Bijoy had CP which resulted from congenital malformation of the brain. It was too early to say whether it was moderate or severe. Too early to say whether he would ever feel the mother's love and father's affection and too early to say whether he would ever recognize his parents at all.

Bijoy was born on 10th October, a very gloomy day for Antara. She was carrying Bijoy for nine months but through out the period she had a lump in her throat — a lump of guilt. She always tried to swallow it down to her stomach but it bounced back. She used to put her finger in her mouth — far into the throat so as to induce vomiting thinking that the lump would go but to no avail. Once Masoom had caught her doing it and had even scolded her for trying to hurt "his" child in her womb.

Oh, how could she relieve herself from the guilt. She used to look at Masoom, her heart full of love and affection for him but, her guilt coming ahead. Masoom was very innocent — just like what his name indicated. He loved his wife very much, trusted her a lot and tried to keep her happy. The only problem in their life was his work. He worked day and night and only came home after one or two days. Antara never liked being alone. She had always wanted a husband who would be with her, take her out for dinner and lunches and remember birthdays and anniversaries. But Masoom was just the opposite.

Theirs was an arranged marriage. Masoom was a flourishing engineer and Antara had Masters Degree in Sociology. They used to talk for

Theirs was an ideal pair, handsome to look at and in love with each other. They had wanted a baby since the first year of their marriage but till last year Antara was unable to conceive. And after three years when Antara told Masoom about her positive pregnancy test he was yelling and jumping with joy. He had taken her out for dinner and had bought precious gifts for her. But since her pregnancy test Antara's eyes were blank and the mass of lump had being to form in her throat — the lump remained there for the rest of her life — even long after Bijoy had passed away.

A year ago Antara was shopping in the mall when she bumped into a man with specks and moustache wearing a white kurta and pajama and carrying a bag. He had a typical look of a poet — a tragic poet. Oh, Oh, she knew him and he was also starting at her. It clicked, he was Ashim, her college friend. Oh, how could Ashim have kept a moustache and wear kurta? It was quite out of imagination. She started laughing and he too joined her. She asked him about his whereabouts. He said he had come to the city for three days to attend a poet's seminar. She invited him to her house. On the way she told him about her marriage, her husband Masoom, who was in the village where the construction of the road was going on. It had already been two months since he had come home though he did phone her twice a week. Once they reached her flat she told him to wash and rest while she cooked lunch for

hours on end, argued the whole day and ever had fights over small things, they were falling in love without realising. When Ashim found out his love for her he never had the guts to tell her. He was frightened that he would lose her, lose the friendship which he cherished so much. So he never approached her. And she had the same feeling and by the time she realised she loved him her parents had already arranged her marriage with Masoom, a civil engineer with a bright future and by the time she realised what was happening in her life she was married

off and had moved with Masoom to another city. Today after three years she had met Ashim again. The same Ashim whom she had loved and whom she had lost in the whirl wind. She prepared lunch and called him. He took up from the past and straddled to the dining room. Antara served him and they ate in silence — a deadly silence between them. While she was serving the vegetables it fell on her tumbling hand. She shouted and ran to the bathroom to cool it under the tap. Ashim ran after her and helped her to put the medicine,

When Masoom's mother died she performed all the rites, looked after guests and family. Masoom got transfer back to the city. After two months Masoom forced Antara to go to the doctor, and she gave good news. Yes! Antara was pregnant! Masoom could not believe his luck. He was yelling and shouting. Then finally after nine months Bijoy was born — at last free from his mothers body, away from hate and despondence. Masoom named him Bijoy — a winner! After his birth Antara had refused to look at him. She never breast fed him. His cries would make her screen and she would shout. She was becoming a neurotic. Masoom looked after Bijoy. He would feed him, bath him, oil him and change his nappies. He would tell Antara that Bijoy looked just like him — exact resemblance. But when Antara looked at her son she saw the exact picture of Ashim staring at her. Then she would turn away.

During the first postnatal visit to the hospital the doctor found something wrong in the baby. He advised hospitalization and investigation. The diagnosis was made as cerebral palsy — the diagnosis which had taken life away from Masoom — who had loved his son so much. How could this happen to him? Why was Antara so indifferent? Why didn't she care for Bijoy? Why didn't she even take him in her arms? How could a mother hate her own child? Masoom started to hate her for this. It was no use, she just ignored his pleas to just hold Bijoy in her bosom, to give him her love till he lived.

The day Bijoy breathed his last, exactly 58 days after he came to the world Masoom cried. He cried like a child. Antara took him in her bosom and comforted him. She knew her life was ruined either way — if she didn't tell him about Ashim and Bijoy she will always feel guilty and if she told him he would be ruined too. So she thought as she patted his head in her chest she would rather suffer and live with the guilt than tell the truth and ruin Masoom's innocent life too.

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"Take the Initiative"

by Gemini Wahhaj

I just read Trishna's article about her frustration at being an outsider to her own culture. When I studied at an English Medium School, I felt the same way. Most of us had no idea about our country's history or geography. We didn't speak, sing, a recite poetry in Bangla, we didn't know the prominent politicians, artists or writers of this country. We had come from around and were posed to leave again in a few years — Bangladesh was just a transit stop.

So, like you Trishna, I resented my role as an on-looker. I lamented my ignorance, but had no idea what to do about it. Expect now I know, if no-one will teach us our history, so what. We can compile it ourselves. We have the unique magic of living in a country where the history-makers are still alive. The people who fought in the language movement, or the liberation war, lived through the post-liberation chaos, the people who are the helms-men of this country's future — they are all around us, and they're more than happy to tell us what happened.

So here is my suggestion. Organise a class project to compile your own account of Bangladesh. Interview the history-makers (freedom fighter, politicians, university professors, journalists, and artists), collect excerpts from publications (historical accounts, poems, stories). Then published a textbook for future classes. Go ahead, do it.

The best thing about English Medium Schools is that they are innovative in their academic programmes. Your school principal should be more than happy to allow such a project.

Even if you wish to study abroad, it will help to know your country. When I was a foreign student in the US, what bothered me most, even more than the Americans' ignorance about my country, was my own inability to tell them anything different. So when they mentioned floods and famines, I grinned foolishly. Now I know better. Yes we're poor, I should have said, yes we should be ashamed of the poverty, the starvation, and the chaos all around us. But at the same time we are proud, because we just made history 23 years ago and we're prepared to change it, again and again, we're proud because we're a rich culture; rich in song, painting, literature, festivals, and celebrations. We're amazing because we're young, and we can fix any situation which is less than perfect.

So you think it's a problem that our youth are not aware of the magic of Bangladesh? Then fix it. Don't wait for the teachers to do anything. Take the initiative yourself.

Wise Words

Compiled by Ismat Haseen

When a man is willing and eager, the Gods join in — Aeschylus.

Nothing is more disgraceful than insincerity — Cicero.

First step to knowledge is to know that we are ignorant — Cecll.

No man has a right to do as he pleases, except when he pleases to do right — C. Simmons.

The greatest truths are the simplest; and so are the greatest men — Hare.

He who builds according to every man's advice will have a crooked house — Danish proverb.

There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion — Francis Bacon.

You only live once. But if you work it right, once is enough — Fred Allen.

Poets utter great and wise things which they do not understand — Plato.

The best of all medicines are rest and fasting — Franklin.

Saying Goodbye, Before Saying Hello ...

by Asrarul Islam Chowdhury

Would you like me to say
That you're the one I want?
Would you like me to say
'Tis we who had the fun?

I can't say that
I don't know why
It's haunting me my dear
We never got the chance to know each other
That's really what I fear.

You said goodbye, before you said hello
I don't like this state of mind
For we'll soon have to end the show.
Although it feels like ages that we've known ourselves
But now you have to go.

If you have to go
Then go, now my love
I don't want to stop you
If you want to fly away like a dove.

All I want you to know is
I'll always think of you.
Although you were a drop of dew
In my heart, you'll always be new...

What is ...?

HAVE you ever wondered just exactly what makes an oratorio different from an opera? Or when an accompaniment stops being an accompaniment and becomes part of the ensemble?

Confused? Peter Paul Nash will explain all in What is...?, a new series for BBC World Service beginning on February 27 at 1635 (GMT).

In it he will look at some musical terms which regularly crop up in concert programmes, on CD labels or on the radio. He attempts to strip away the jargon and, by asking a whole host of further questions, finds out what they really mean and how they fit into the wider musical context.

In the first programme, he

asks What is a Quartet? Is it just four guys or gals in sequined forks and close harmony, or are there other elements? Can any four individuals just decide to play together and get a satisfactory result or is there more to it? Why must a particular piece be a quartet not a quintet — why can't a fifth player just string along? Why can't one of the four drop out and leave a trio...?

Having solved this problem he will go on to explore the deeper implications of Accompaniment (March 6), Sonata (March 13), Cadenza (March 20) and Oratorio (March 27).

Each programme will be repeated on Tuesday at 0750 (GMT) and on Wednesday at 1235 (GMT). Issued by: BBC International Press Office

The Struggle, the Victory the Hard-Earned Democracy

by Farhana Yusuf

HUNGER, misery, desperation and devastation had been revolving around Haiti since 1991 — the year Haiti's first democratically elected President, Jean Bertrand Aristide had been sent to exile. Aristide was nearly eight months into his five years term when the military junta threw him out in 1991 and took power into their own hands. Thus commenced in Haiti, a brutal dictatorship that snatched away peace and left the country to writhe in the torments of hell.

With what views before them did they force Aristide to hand power over? Was it because he was an unliberal man? Because he was not worth to be a President? May be Aristide was not a perfect President. He may have made ordinary people feel safe on the streets the middle and upper classes, especially the military felt anything but safe around him. He had many other faults-faults which if continued much longer would ultimately had extinguished either his popularity or his future prospects or may be both.

Still he had been democratically elected and five months is considered to be a very short time to judge a man's capability and stamina, especially when it came to handling a disordered country such as Haiti. As I said earlier the military rule was the worst thing that happened to Haiti because if the circumstances during their rule were otherwise, they may have been justified suitable and Haiti's condition would certainly not be that desperate and destructive as to call for so much international attention.

When the Haitians have become strained and tired of plucking the seeds of torture and devastation, aid seemed to take a peek and offer a glimpse of bliss and hope. Sitting in his White House office, President Bill Clinton tried to sort a way out to handle Haiti. He thought that an invasion would probably be the only way to remove the military leaders if warnings and time limits to hand over power to the democratically elected leader have had no impact on the usurpers.

Now, for millions on people around the world, the question is whether this invasion is absolutely necessary or not. This is rather a difficult question

nevertheless the answer will soon be unfolded gradually as I proceed.

First of all, we have to take into account Haiti's tortured history. We have to remember that since the present crisis emerged three years ago, Haiti had been pushed to the brink of disaster which is now at its peak. Being the western Hemisphere's poorest country, Haiti had been devastated by natural disasters, political violence and corruption. These have again led to hunger, massive unemployment and hopelessness among the people. Such state of affairs reached a point when it became unendurable for the people and tens of thousands of Haitians desperately tried to find some way to leave the country into U.S. Long lines of men, women and children would be seen waiting outside the visa office in the US embassy of Port-au-Prince. When the visa office closed in May, most Haitians seeking US visas were turned down and many tried to flee the country without visas.

They risked their lives in rusted fishing vessels, tiny sailboats and even rafts. Hundreds of people have drowned while making their way across the sea. Since 1991, over 46000 Haitians have been intercepted by the US coast guards and turned back, but even so more than 11000 people have already reached Florida. The US Immigration and Naturalization service there rounded them up and held them in detention centres for asylum hearings before being permitted to stay. This is definitely a meaningless solution to such a critical problem and in the long run clearly fruitless. Hence, Clinton's decision for an invasion.

Clinton's plan had been to invade Haiti and force the military leader Lieutenant General Raoul Cedras to surrender. But at home the American President was met with a lot of protests and disagreement. At a Newweek Poll, it was seen that only 34% of the American people approved of Clinton's way of handling the situation in Haiti and the problems of Haitian refugees and 57% opposed the idea. Republican leader Bob Dole said that "the President did not make his

case for an invasion," former Vice-President Dan Quayle commented that "Clinton considered an invasion in order to increase his standing in public opinion polls." Even some of Clinton's supporters urged him to hold off until after the November elections. In spite of so many negative attitudes, Clinton decided for an invasion. And why not? No one can blame Bill Clinton of failing to give peace a chance.

Warnings were continuously sent forth to Haiti to Cedras to leave willingly before being forced to. Clinton believed that in such situations and under such circumstances an invasion could be the only source to stability. He explained to America on TV that an invasion is by far the only possible way of restoring peace and retain democracy not to mention force the brutal military dictators into yielding power. Nevertheless Clinton sent former President Jimmy Carter, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell and Senate Armed Services Chairman Sam Nunn for negotiations with Cedras and his other two top military leaders.

Even while negotiations were under way, constant reminders were passed through that if negotiations failed to arouse Cedras and move him, an invasion will be sent out immediately which ultimately would. Despite all these Cedras and his generals sat tight not sure what to do, how to move on or rather I suppose they wanted to see how Clinton acted and whether he was really serious. Even at the eleventh hour, when American warships reached their invasion stations and was just awaiting Clinton's order, he gave Cedras a brief moment to decide and even proved willing to talk. But it seemed that what was originally intended must and should happen.

Hence, US military was sent to invade Haiti with the utmost hope that they would help bring Haiti under control and luckily may force Cedras to give up power. But such prospects were yet considered as quite poor as because no one could predict what impact the US mission would make on Haiti. It is true that a lot depended on them especially as

on one hand Clinton had to send them under so much pressure and so there were a lot of expectations from them. On the Other hand, if they were successful, it would be a great achievement for them after their failure in Rwanda. But the US mission is not going to be the only force in Haiti; to lift the weight off US a little, the American combat force will gradually be withdrawn and replaced by a multinational force from some 24 countries of which one of the country is Bangladesh.

At a prescribed date it is seen that Bangladesh stands at the top of the list for engaging 800 troops to be sent for peace keeping in Haiti. Then comes Argentina and France with 100 gendarmes to train new Haitian police force, Panama with 100 doctors, paramedics, nurses, human-rights observers, UK with 12 military advisers and so forth. Bangladesh's participation and co-operation in the Haitian peace-keeping policy has been praised and appreciated by President Bill Clinton himself and also by US Secretary of State, Warren Christopher.

As the mission landed in Haiti and started conducting their charges and carrying out the other countries around the world sat and watched in suspense what took place in the ensuing days in Haiti. At such state of matters when it was doubtful whether America could leave behind a functioning democracy, the US mission's roles in the country increasingly improved the conditions in Haiti.

Within three days of their invasion, a parliament meeting was arranged. The Mayor returned from hiding, electricity had been doubled as refugees went back from Guantanamo (Military base in Cuba) to Haiti. Soon the troops captured the national palace, the prisons and the warehouses etc. As every thing came under control of the US troops, Clinton believed that Haiti's military leaders would relinquish power by October 15 (1994) and exiled president Jean-Bertrand Aristide would return to Haiti as called for in the agreement negotiated by former President Jimmy Carter.

To be continued

Time in Frame

'Time in Frame' is for those interested in photography. Send us your best photograph with a caption (if required) and a small technical detail of the shot taken. Show the others what you see through the lens. Your coloured or black and white photographs could be on campus, politics, every day Dhaka, ofcourse beauty and anything different that your creative mind captures which others hardly notice. Every week the best entry would be published in this new column — introduced just for you. Send us your work in time for the next issue.



Only pictures like this can now say that these guests were here. Pelicans at the Mirpur Zoo last winter. This high speed 400 ASA, 200 zoom, afternoon shot was captured by A K M Mohsin.