

# TEENNS and TWENTIES

## An Agonizing Letter

by Manwar Islam Khan (Rumi)

In our college, almost all of us called Babu 'Jambo'. It also had a reason — an interesting incident for it too.

We were the students of 2nd year then. English class was going on. It was Mostafiz sir's class. He was the youngest professor of our college and nice looking too. In his absence we addressed him as 'Hero Sir'. Though he was not over indulgent he had the power to convince any type of student. Moreover, he was not only smart but also one of the best English prof. of our college. We, the members of a naughty group disturbed the classes, but were quite gentle in his class, though. Specially me, the so called leader of our group, I was already marked by all other sirs and madams, but I was very polite only in his class. Perhaps, that's why he liked me more than other boys.

Anyway that day I sat just behind Babu. Babu was as competent as simpleton I think he was the bulkiest fellow in the whole class. We always used to try to irritate him by commenting about his figure. That day just for fun I passed a comment. All at once he stood up and said, 'Sir, Rumi is disturbing me and now and then he disturbs me.' I was startled, because so far as I know he never complained before. Anyway, the day was in my favour. He asked Babu to stand up instead of me and said 'Oh! Babu stop the fuss, if you care to join the cinema, I am sure you'll get the roles Jambo usually prefers.

I breathed again. The whole class burst into laughter. From then we nickname Babu as Jambo. Even the first year students addressed him as 'Jambo Bhai'. Anyway this Babu in our last classes of college became my close friend and so close that when I used to miss

the class, he would also.

Babu, the only son of his parents, was in fact very meritorious. In our class his position was third. He lived in Dhaka in a Mess and his parents lived in the village. His father was the primary school teacher of their village. He regularly used to send money for Babu. At last H S C came. Just before the exams Babu had a serious illness. In spite of his illness he attended the exam and got 2nd division. On the other hand I, who have mostly passed my two years of college life, by speaking on politics, disturbing the classes, got star mark. How it was possible I still don't know but this unexpected result spinned the turn of my life.

My parents were very much despondent about me.

My father thought I would just scrape through the exam. But my result reanimated my dad. I have got chance in Dhaka Medical College.

There the pressure took most of my time. I was always busy with my studies. Almost two years have passed, since I meet Babu, though I knew that he was student of Dhaka University in Arts Department.

One day I was passing by his hall and decided to give him a big surprise. Entering his room I have fallen into an embarrassing situation. Four to five young men were cleaning arms openly. I shuddered, seeing one in Babu's hand, it was glittering in the sun shine coming through the window. Copper skin and long hair made him look like a criminal. Initially he was taken aback but then burst into joy. He jumped from the bed and clutch me to his heart and said 'Oh! Rumi! It's been a long time since I last saw you.'

By this time others left the room. Now he sat in front of me and inquired with a smile. 'How is uncle and aunty?'  
To be continued

## "Eid is coming, Eid is coming,"

by Gemini Wahhaj

WHEN we lived in Mosul, Eid meant a huge house party lasting several days. Bangladeshis came down from Baghdad, Basra, Soleimania, and Kirkuk to gather at our two-storied, two-roofed house in the middle of nowhere. The Eid preparations commenced. All the women congregated in the kitchen to cut onions, wash rice, and marinate the meat. We children, at least twenty of us, roamed the premises, playing-house, running about the lawn, fighting, or loitering around the kitchen. The climax was an Eid feast, poetry readings and Tagore song deliveries by the adults, and a children's drama (usually organised by my mother).

When we came back to Bangladesh, Eid took on more meanings, it meant waiting for something special: a whole month's fasting in anticipation of coming celebrations, or buying Eid dresses and then neatly folding them away till the big day. Come noon, my cousins lay sprawled on their beds under a whirring fan in all their Eid finery, aching from over-eating. My grandmother stuffed my notes in my fist, salam or no salam. And my parents fought on the eternal issue: to visit the village (my father's home) or not.

For all the years I lived in Bangladesh, Eid was always in the summer. It always started with a cool morning, and ended with all of us watching a movie on the VCR under an overworked fan. My brothers got up in the morning and searched for their Eid T-shirts, mislaid since the previous year, or alas, perhaps a size too small. When the house was

empty of all the males, female preparations started. My mother started to organize the house, while I started to dress up. Flowers were duly cut from the poor gardener's year-long collection, leaving him with a ghastly empty plot by about 10:00 am.

My mother's Eid fare for guests was always simple — semoi and kabab. On the other hand, there were some cruel aunts who expected you to finish three parathas at their place after you'd visited 20 other homes. The best part about Eid day was pulao and chicken korma for lunch, cooked entirely by my mother. This was the only-day of the year when my mother cooked.

And then, Eid in the US. Or no Eid. After spending an anti-climatic Eid my freshman year, going about my classes in my usual dress — no fan fare, no Eid greetings, nothing — I wrote a caustic editorial in the university newspaper. I demanded Eid banners everywhere, a special Eid dinner at the dining hall, I wanted everyone to know what Eid was. This article 'Bringing Eid to Campus' was long, nagging and very emotional. Next thing I knew, a professor I had interviewed for another article pulled me aside.

"I don't think it's always right to lash out without knowing the facts. A lot is being done for Eid," was the gist of his lecture. Feeling downright patronized, I walked away.

"How come, if so much is being done," I thought, "there's still no Eid on my

end?"  
Later I found out that this same professor had been working for a long time on a project to make Eid a presence on campus. In fact, the next year his Muslim graduate students (and co-workers on the Eid project) made it a point to invite me to all their Ramadan and Eid functions. The Muslim Students Association held iftar parties on every evening of Ramadan. Each evening a different country hosted the feast, featuring their own national cuisine. Since there were only a few Bangladeshis, they pitched in with the Pakistanis.

The Philadelphia and New Jersey Bangladeshis also threw an Eid party every year. I went to this huge affair one year. All the aunts were decked in their finery — after all, this was the largest conglomeration of the year. It was a potluck and we were running short of food — generating amusing expressions of bad-temper and a near-flight to get to the goods. But still, it was wonderful to be near so many sarees, punjabis, and Bangla-speaking people on Eid.

Once my Pakistani roommate and I threw an Eid party for all our international friends, thereby generation an interesting debate about the validity of celebrating a Muslim event with non-Muslims. In fact, a few devout Muslims refused to attend on this ground. I still remember that Eid. We bought halal meat and vermicelli; and stayed up all night to

cook. Our friends came over to help us. The next day, we dug out our Shalwar Kameezes and bangles, and our filmy sandals. After this, the Eid party became an annual event among our circle of friends. One year, an American in our group threw us his own Eid party.

When I moved to New York, I went to Jackson Heights the night before Eid. My brother and I stopped at Meghna, a Bangladeshi grocery shop, to buy some Bangla tapes and tamarind achar (tamarind chutney). And here, for the first time ever in America, I experienced Eid. All around me were Bangladeshis buying semoi (vermicelli), chicken, pulao (rice), and incense.

"Have they sighted the moon yet?" someone asked.

"Oh yes, I bought a new saree," said someone else.  
Even outside, on the streets, there was a mad rush, a tangible excitement. Anybody could tell that something big was about to happen. But when I came back to Manhattan the next day, things were normal again. Stoic faces stared straight ahead, while I felt like bursting from the effort to contain the celebratory impulses within me.

Now I'm back in Dhaka, and each confirmation of a coming Eid is an endless source of happiness. The mob-like crowds at Gausia, the iftar layouts on Mirpur Road, my friend's five sets of Eid dress — everything seems to bellow proudly "Eid is coming, Eid is coming!" I twist my head to catch a last glimpse of the Eid-shoppers from my rickshaw, and then I sit back happily. Eid is coming, and this time we'll celebrate properly.

## 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, of course 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.



This is happiness; a father buying his children gifts for Eid, things they always wanted. This afternoon shot was taken by Sk. Enamul Haq, using a 8 aperture and ASA speed 250.

## Freaky Fashion — Phobia of Eid

by Siraj-us-Saleheen Lovell



Siraj-us-Saleheen Lovell, a feminine hand, makes a hard contact with the boys' bony cheek. The owner of the hand (naturally a steamed up young lady) starts shooting all sorts of verbal abuses towards the boy. "Don't you have eyes? Watch your hand or I'll tear it off, you oversized baaboo! idiot! I'll call the police — etc. etc. The dumb-founded poor guy, not knowing what he actually did to get such a bashing to be precise (the just came with his sister for some shopping) walked away head-down bearing the insult.

Don't be so alarmed, the boy just had a hard luck, that's all; he was at the wrong place and at the wrong time. Every Jack knows that it's suicide to enter places like the Gausia Market, New Market or the shopping centres of New Elephant road, specially when it's the eve of Eid. These areas are strictly 'No-Guy's zones'. But that doesn't mean that only young ladies can fashion-parade on Eid-day alone; no sir. It's an open competition; even men can participate, and believe me, when they do, they mean business. Guy's have places too, where, without having to look out for sharp tongues and sweet slaps, they can shop with their hearts content. Basically, I'm not going to give a boring account of these places, but merely the outcome of the fashion-crazy male clan after visiting such places.

One specific characteristic of recent heroes is their damn-care attitude (whether good or bad, that's trivial). They just dress as they like and keep inventing fashions of their own. Thanks to Bangabazaar and Doza-Market that lads of today can make their imaginations for shall I say illusions come true. It's rather impossible to classify men's fashion nowadays. Still lets try some out. Boys from

school levels have a common Eid-Fashion which are — A pair of straight-cut (as they call it) or skin-tight jeans, a thick shirt (they don't care if they're sweating or not) and a pair of high-boots. Some of them wear just a T-shirt with jeans and a pair of Air-snickers, which glows with every step (I wonder if it's OK to set torches on shoes nowadays; God knows what's next). The dress up of teenage school-boys is not so bad, but oh God! after that stage college and varsity boy have an urge to dress up like oversized Chimps; their fashions and styles are extremely grotesque. This is the level where lads are mistaken for ladies, some of them start

keeping long hairs (sometimes even trying to tie pony-tails), wearing bracelets on both hands, ear-rings on both ears. Some maniacs, wearing tight jeans and high boots gets the idea of keeping the front buttons of their shirt open (no, no! don't be so horrified, they at least keep a T-shirt inside to cover their bony, pathetic (but thought to be) machoistic body). Don't forget the sunglasses which make them look like aliens from Planet Apes or just blind men searching their way out. There are ones trying to imitate singers from 'Channel-V' wearing T-shirts with 'Heavy-Metal' (and many other relative things) painted on them

though I doubt if they can spell such words properly; some even have skeletons (rather their own reflections) painted on T-shirts.

Those who are a bit more conscious about their appearances, put on ironed shirts with a nicely fit gentleman pant and a matching moccasin. Not to mention carbon-framed glasses and a little 'spray' of men's cologne. The more traditional one's like to wear neat and simple clothes, fortunately which is a lot more acceptable than those described before. Some prefer the traditional 'Eid' dress — a nice looking embroidered Punjabi with either a pair of jeans or a gentleman pant or pajamas. The interesting fact is that such a dress looks good on men of any age. But dreadfully, nobody cares, and the thought of today is 'Better be a Gorilla than a Gentleman'. Besides these there are some who like their kind as special fashion wears, these belonged to their forefathers as well. For example you may see men of different ages in the old-town areas wearing the dress known as 'Dhakaia Kutti' dress — a very thin almost see through silk Punjabi with a white coloured or batik printed Lungi and a 'Kohlapuri' sandal or a 'Nagra', chewing paan (betel leaf) and a cigarette in their hand completes the attire.

After such a strenuous dissection and analysis of today's men's fashion on the eve of Eid, it's hard to choose one from them, isn't it? It's up to you guys out there to pick your own fashion, whether you want to look like a put, or a gentleman or an ordinary man, it's totally up to you. But please, wear something that's at least presentable and nice; not something that makes you look like an Orang-Outang. Have a Happy Eid.

## Holes in the Photograph

by Kazi Khaled Arafat

REMEMBRANCE of a hateful love —  
Laughter filled  
Hallucinatory delusions of a happy nightmare  
Mirage like  
The past  
My future left behind, lost in time  
Never again to be  
Tear stained to be  
Tear-stained pages in the Book of Memories  
Whispers of long forgotten songs  
Written in blood —  
With the ink spilled all over.

Can you hear the silenced screams?  
Unearthly shrieks —  
Sinister reminiscence of the unforgiven unforgotten —  
Anguish of long ago —  
Torments I thought I'd left forever —  
Repeated in vicious dreams.

They all disappear  
As I commit them to passionate flames;  
Waves of emotion pass sickeningly through me  
As I cheerfully burn this friend, that friend,  
As I tear the gyves of emotion  
And laugh dementedly in glee.  
Until its all over  
Gone  
All the dark traces  
Of a dark life.  
Except the eternal darkness itself.

## If Peace Returns...

by Farhana Yusuf

THIS within October 15, 1994 the mighty General Cedras resigned, handed over the power and left for exile with his family under tight security.

With his departure ended the brutal dictatorship that had for three long years ruined the already shattered country.

The Haitian crisis had been built up with three years of mixed signals, diplomacy and extreme sufferings. A crisis that we now hope will end slowly but fully. Being able to restore Aristide back to power had been a great challenge for Bill Clinton. But to be able to see Haiti ruled peacefully by a democratic hand will be an even greater challenge. Because in the long run, the most important thing that is going to matter is whether the hard-earned democracy is functioning properly or not.

This job is going to be Aristide's and it will undoubtedly be a tough task for him to bring absolute peace and stability to a land that has known nothing but violence for its 200 year history. However, Aristide reaffirms his commitment to his people to work with them to lift Haiti from misery to poverty with dignity. An enormous challenge indeed he has to confront.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide's triumphant homecoming in Port-au-Prince has also turned out to be a welcome foreign-policy for Bill Clinton. First in Haiti and now in Iraq, the use of force brings Clinton two much-needed, foreign successes. We must acknowledge the fact that Aristide's triumphant return would never have occurred without the persistence and help from President Bill Clinton who dispatched a peaceful army to pave the way. For when Clinton dispatched his military under so much pressure and at such risk, the best he could have wished for from the Haiti policy his negotiators brokered for him was that the military phase would end quickly, that there would be no loss of American life and that he would have given Haiti a chance at some sort of democracy.

The reason that stressed President Clinton from the very beginning was the point of restoring Aristide back to power as soon as possible was that as Haiti's first democratically elected President Aristide held a moral trump-card, and that was legitimacy. This

was the first reason. Secondly, we need only to see Haiti's condition after Aristide's exile and Cedras's takeover to realize the military's inefficiency in ruling. As I said earlier, Aristide may not be the perfect ruler either. During his reign, famine and misery haunted the people, economic destruction created intense devastation. In schools, class rooms were lit by candles and children had no food for noontime break. Haiti's once paved roads were riddled with holes, stones, gravel etc and washed out by floods. The forests have been stripped to the stumps by desperate people looking for firewood. Jobless peasants sat listlessly outside roughly built huts. There were no electricity or running water for days on end.

Men and small children loitered in the roads hoping to push a 'stuck-car' for a fee.

When vehicles slowed down, starving boys ran on to the road and begged for money or coins. Now, the question is, why were these boys starving? Why were the people jobless and how come there was no electricity or running water? In short, why were the Haitians so desperate... enough to risk their lives and escape the country to USA? Instead of improving Haiti's condition, the regime started murdering and terrorizing Aristide supporters. Over 2000 people (all Aristide supporters) had been killed and it was this fear plus the desperate conditions that had made so many Haitians leave the country.

It may take some time to bring Haiti back to order what with all the misery and bloodshed the country has gone through. The stains of blood and the marks of misery will not go with a little washing; it will need a strong and firm hand for thorough cleansing. Let us see if Aristide is the owner of that strong and firm hand. Because if Aristide is successful and if he leaves behind him a stable country with satisfied people and most important of all, if peace returns to the country, we as well as the Haitians will know and draw comfort from the fact that all the miseries, bloodshed and sufferings did not, after all, go in vain.

This writing has been prepared with extensive help from Time Magazine, Newsweek and Readers Digest.  
The end

## The War Generation

by Maqsoodul Haque

THIS 21st February, I was called by a young lyricist/poet who I have bumped into only twice at a recording studio. He had already earned himself a reputation by writing lyrics for the bands Feelings and LRB. He was excited and depressed about a book of poems he has published in six excruciating hard days. The book is called 'Icha Holay Chhootay Pari Tomar Abhiman' — roughly translated into English 'I can touch your frailty/vanity, if only I wished!'. The back flap of the book introduces the poet.

It says: Latiful Islam Shibli, an angry young man completing his Masters in Economics. Born one dawn of 1st Boishakh, he opened his eyes to see the preparation for the war of Bangladesh in full swing. He did not understand war then. He however carried the fire of war in his heart, most actively in the anti autocracy agitations of 1990. Suffered police brutality and was fugitive from the law for various false cases filed against him. As he continued to burn his finger in fire, he also mastered poetry. Later he turned to Band Music as his preferred form of expression. He successfully wrote the songs 'Jail thekay Bolchhe' — Speaking from Jail, and 'Maa Kay Botish' — Go tell my mother, performed by leading bands of the country. He is a model for 'Complete Man' of Century Fabrics. His city of infancy and childhood is Natore, His city of adolescence and youth, Dhaka. His addiction — WAR. His profession — WAR. His love — WAR.

The cover has a photograph of a bar bodied, muscular and macho young man. He has an attitude that almost says, 'I HAVE ARRIVED'. He would set many a female heart on fire with his good looks. The model is the cover of course the poet himself — and he is depressed. Eyebrows have been raised by 'poets' and other 'intellectuals', that converge ritually on the 'Boi Mela' ground: the bare body, the poet's bare body on the cover, it is certainly a matter of controversy. Some even said damaging things about his life style. Fortunately, times they are a changing. This is a generation that is objectively putting forward the spirit of the War of Independence. For them the war has not ended. An enemy of one hundred thousand surrendered as the war came to a formal end — yet in twenty four years we have a million traitors in our midst, ready to sell off the country for a price. The bare body is a defiant tool — it is supposed to shock, and I am glad it has. Shibli has now attracted the powers that may be to read his work, which is impressive. I congratulate his marketing genius. He has some pretty poems in the book. It would have been a shame if it went unnoticed.

Shibli does not need consolation, but I assured him that he is not the first one to go for bare body defiance. Autocracy in 1990 was overthrown only when Nur Hossain, a young man, came out bare bodied with slogans 'Down with Autocracy' and 'Set Democracy free', written on his chest and back. He was a walking poster. It was too much for the 'powers' or for that matter anybody's imagination. He was shot dead! Today, traditional hypocrites that we are, we have a square in his name, also a postage stamp. Today we ridicule Shibli. Perhaps Shibli understands the pangs of the unfinished war — which Nur Hossain took with him to his grave. Perhaps we have a lot to learn from Shibli and his like?