

LIVING

Young Entrepreneurs with Ambitious Beginnings

by Fayza Haq

KAWSER Mahmud, S Masum Reza (Ronnie) and Fazole Karim Khan (Tutul) are students of final year masters, who have organised Eid sale displays for the past three years with considerable success.

conscious and this influenced us. We were also inclined to be motivated by fashion magazines, films and videos. We felt we could share our ideas with others. We found an appreciation of our drive to work with fashion designs," says Tutul, sipping a cup of tea and

speaking at Drik display gallery at Dhanmandi, where Karuj clothes occupied two rooms amidst lights and background music in a display that spread over a week.

"In our country they do not promote the local textiles as

they do even in our neighbouring country India. As for the designers, they tend to copy the Indians or the westerns," puts in Kawser.

Elaborating on themselves Ronnie explains, "We do not have academic qualifications in

fashion designing but we have professional experience in matters like block and screen printing, tie and dye, and embroidery. We go in for embossing and hand painting too. It is no longer a hobby for us; it is our profession. We are now a consultancy for TV ad and for

costume designing for the theatre. We spend an average of eight hours a day on designing and have exhibitions every Eid of Fitr. We plan to open a boutique in Dhanmandi. Local textile designers, fashion magazines and fashion shows are not common in Bangladesh. If

local textile mill owners consulted us it would help them as well as us.

Talking about the problems that they face they say, "People in our country are not quite geared to fashion. We get no response from textile owners.

We tell them that we will give them the credit if they supply the material as we desire and require, but we have had no response from them. We have no local producers of clothes, proper tailoring materials or accessories for clothes like buttons. There are garment factories but their aim is to export abroad. A singer painter or a sportsman can get sponsors here in Dhaka but not a dress designer. Overseas it is the textile owners who sponsor fashion shows but this is rare here. When we sell our commodities, we get back the cost of tailoring, clothes purchased but not the effort that we put in the designing. We get frustrated at this but have to accept things as they are."

This time we have 400 kurtas, 100 pieces of ladies wear and 50 shirts on display, which took us three months to prepare. Last year, at the Alliance Francaise, we had to pay Tk 400 per hour for the hire of the display room and this did not leave much profit for us at the end. This time, however, we paid a token of Tk 5000 at the outset and this was a great help for us, they add.

They point out "The type of buyers are middle, upper middle class and the more affluent. As we have not pursued this as a regular exercise we do not know as yet if this will be a paying project or not, however this will establish us as designers. Our prices are quite reasonable. Our purjabis range from Tk 250 to Tk 1800, shirts from Tk 400 to Tk 500

while the sets for women cost from Tk 1000 to Tk 2,200. We do take help from catalogues but we try and bring in new ideas like mixing of fabrics at the neck, cuff and collar plate of purjabis and the use of exclusive buttons. We have also introduced variations of block print and hand print. Seventy-five per cent of our material use local textiles. The rest are from overseas. The other fashion houses too have to use foreign materials. We are a team of 20 that includes Farouq, the tailor with his 7 assistants; the screen printer Salim; the block printer Ashutosh and his 3 colleagues, and occasional workers like the students of

Fine Arts and Architecture, who help with the motifs. We are not competing with houses like Aarong or Probortona as they are well established, have years of experience and maybe foreign funds to rely on. Our assets, began with Tk 50,000 and today it is Tk three lakh. We hope to have summer, winter and new year collections.

We plan to go in for children's clothes too, specially party wear. We try to follow western designs but also combine them with eastern styles and so combine the best of both the worlds.

"At our sale we have kept only one or two pieces of a particular design as we want to limit the product of each design. But there may be as many as ten customers who may desire one particular design with the same material."

Members of "Karuj" find tremendous encouragement for their design work at home as their parents feel that they are doing something creative and are not wasting their spare time. Also, this might eventually become their entire pre-occupation as a source of earning.



Just Your Cup of Tea

by Shahid A Makhfi

FROM a statistical standpoint, it appears that the world is neatly divided between coffee drinkers and tea addicts. If it emerges that tea rates second to coffee in terms of commercial importance, it is just because tea producing countries choose to reserve a fair share of Camellia sinensis leaves for domestic consumption.

Tea has gained friends among about one half of the world population. And fondness for tea as a hot or cold beverage, has long ago become a point of agreement. But who invented tea? In fact there are more tales about tea than there are teas. Though the origins of tea remain obscure, the lore laced history of the ageless beverage offers a number of possible answers.

According to Chinese legend, the honour of tasting the first cup of tea lies with the mythical Shen Nung, second emperor of China, who, it is said, was born sometime in the 28th century BC with the body of a male and the head of a bull. Shen whose name means divine labour — was found of nature — and it must be said something of a health nut. One evening as he sat before the fire boiling his drinking water, the gentle breeze blew a few leaves from Camellia like shrub into his water pot, producing a clear, fragrant liquid. And while he was probably trying to decide whether or not he should finish the drink, a second, and then a third, leaf flew into the cup. Thus it was, Shen Nung who courageously drank the golden liquid, and

stumbled upon tea, so the story goes.

Japanese mythology credits a Buddhist monk for the tea discovery. Bodhidharma, a man of great moral and spiritual wisdom, was known to meditate for countless hours. Once after an especially long session, the patriarch was so tired that he fell asleep while in deep meditation. Naturally, he was furious when he awoke. And so, in mortification he cut off his eyelids. The monk's eyelids fell to the ground and germinated as the fatigue dispelling tea. Bodhidharma's stay awake cure was a bit drastic but it has kept countless eyelids open for all times since then.

Whichever tale one chooses to accept — and there are many more — the origins of tea are open to speculation. But since history is defined as the written record of man and his enterprises, early documents support general belief that cultivation of tea began in China and then spread to Japan, probably around the year AD 800. By then, according to Chinese writings, China boasted a thousand and ten thousand varieties of tea. In Japan, however, tea did not immediately acquire popularity though it was credited for its medicinal values.

The first real tea addicts were the 13th century Zen Buddhists who fell into the habit of drinking tea during meditation sessions because it helped them stay awake. Then, tea also became a regular feature in Zen rituals. By the 15th

century, the Japanese had learned to drink tea, not only as part of Zen ceremonies in honour of Bodhidharma, but as an everyday beverage. Yet as the 17th century rolled around tea was still a rarity in Europe.

Long before Britishers held tea in high esteem they were definitely partial to coffee and more coffee was consumed in England than anywhere else in the world. The English East India Company, which came to hold the greatest tea monopoly in the world, helped usher in the European tea drinking era in the early 17th century. The newly established trading ties between Europe and the Far East quickly brought about a tea boom, and by the beginning of the 19th century, England had imported nearly 3.5 million kilograms of tea. It came to be regarded as a novelty drink by ladies at court. By 1770 — tea stalls were displacing coffee stalls all over the country.

Ancient Chinese specifications call for certain favourable moons and fair weather to achieve successful plucking of tea, which must then be carefully handled in a special manner, dried and sealed. And early Chinese manuscript, now in the British Museum, mentions the virtues of tea including its properties of improving vision, preventing drowsy, purifying the blood, as a remedy to bladder and kidney ailments, sharpening memory and driving fears. It was considered a panacea for ills, spiritual, mental and physical. In 1127, the withering of the tea

leaf became a popular step in the processing of tea and in 1279 a Chinese book mentioned the use of tea branches and flowers in decorative arrangements.

On accounts of tea industry, Taimur, the Mongol conqueror who over ran three continents, deserves a mention for his hygienic rule. His armies were under strict instructions to avoid water which had not previously been boiled. The astonishing precaution produced water that was bland and tasteless. Later, tea leaves were added for flavour.

Now-a-days, with so many types of tea easily available in loose, instant, soluble or tea bag form, one may be hard to put to understand the adventurous past of the universally popular product which even happened to be involved in one of the causes of the American Revolution. But that is a long story.

Speaking of revolutions, however, let us spare a thought for Mr Richard Blechynden, who in his own way revolutionised tea drinking. The triumphant discovery for which the world is indebted to this Englishman is simply iced tea. As chance would have it, Blechynden was trying to sell tea at the 1904 St. Louis World Fair. To no avail. The hot weather calls for refreshment, not for hot beverages. So how did Blechynden rid of his tea? A stroke of genius. He just filled the kettles with ice. Indeed, as someone said 'need is the mother of invention'. So if you are in want of a new gastronomic speciality, try your imagination on tea.



Tips on Comforting Those in Grief

by A. S. M. Nurunnabi

WE often feel powerless when a friend or relative has suffered the loss of a loved one. "What can I do to help?" is an age-old question which arises whenever a friend, relative or colleague suffers a death in the family. Many people are immobilized out of fear that they'll do or say the wrong thing. There is no one dramatic gesture or pearl of wisdom that will dissolve the heartache, but there are many acts of thoughtfulness that can convey our concern and help to soften the blow that a friend or a loved one has suffered. Here are five ways to say "I care."

1. Be there: Some people think that it didn't make much difference whether they went or not. But this attitude of a friend of mine changed when his wife died. I saw how many friends and relatives tried to make a special effort to be at her funeral. He then realised and recalled, "Suddenly I knew how important this is to the person who has suffered the loss."

It is just as important to go to the bereaved person's home. "I don't remember anything that was said," my friend recalls of the period after his father died when well-wishers flocked to his home.

By being there, we can help in other ways. A social researcher says, "At first an aggrieved family is so stunned that it doesn't know what it needs to do. Let alone tell others how to help. That is why people who are grief stricken seldom respond to the well-meaning offer." If there is anything I can do, let me know. There's still nothing more powerful than one human being reaching out to another.

2. Listen: In a survey of bereaved people, it was found that most sympathizing comments don't help and some actually hurt. Cited were such remarks as: "It's better now because he is at peace." "Don't question God's purpose." "You will get over this." Above all never say, "I know how you feel" unless you really have gone through the same experience.

The best way to get a mourner to open up is with a question: "Would you like to talk," or "It must be hard to think about life without him; how are you adjusting?" The need to listen and share grief extends to chil-

dren. When his best friend died suddenly, Rafiq, the family friend said little about their father to the minor son and daughter and returned to normal family routine soon. When they began sharing their feelings, they finally began to accept the unacceptable.

3. Send a note: Notes can share personal memories, or they be simple and short, such as "I'm thinking of you during these painful days," or "I'm praying for you during this time." For years our neighbours admired the beautiful flowers my grandfather grew. When he died, the neighbours gave the community library a book on flowering plants, in memory of grandad. At this, my grandmother was deeply moved.

4. Extend an invitation: An

invitation gives the bereaved something to look forward to instead of looking back on the source of pain and suffering. Consider what the person likes to do. Eat out? Go to play? Take a drive?

Bereaved people often decline invitations — or accept only to cancel at the last minute. People in deep mourning may fear losing control of their emotions in front of others. They may even feel that if they have, they are being disloyal to the person's memory. On the other hand we may advise to help them know it is all right to begin enjoying life again.

The death of a loved one is a devastating emotional loss. But a sincere expression of caring and sharing can help us to turn the grief of futility and despair into the grief of faith, and hope and release.

The sadiM Touch

by Nico den Tuinder

THERE is still hope for Dhaka: the wonderful invention of the dustbin has reached this rajdhani. Some months ago I spent yet another morning in the Botanical Garden, and to my surprise I saw some trash cans being made. Great, I thought, after some time I will be able to see the plants again instead of all the biscuit wrappers, softdrink cans and stray paper.

Do Bangladeshis spoil their environment on purpose? You will all know what a tickertape parade is. Whenever you become a hero in the States, stand up in an open car, and move through Manhattan, all the office clerks will empty the contents of puncher containers and shredders over your head. Bangladesh has invented its own version of this homage. I went to the National Monument in Savar in March.

The fields were littered with the fruits of 24 years of independence: plastic and tin. I collected the waste of me and my companions in a big (plastic) bag; the Bangladeshis were having great fun at this.

My Dutch colleagues and I are probably the heroes of our Bangladeshi office: every day banana skins, orange peels, cigarette buds and water are showered over the roof top facing our kitchen.

Rivers don't escape this fancy for spoiling one's own nest. About a week ago I spent the day floating down and up the Buriganga on the Alliance Francaise boat. Other people had the same idea of a watery picnic. The boat in front of ours left a whole trail of lunch boxes behind it. Tom Thumb would have been jealous.

The birds, fish and the animals walking on the earth's

surface will be happy that Bangladesh is a poor country. Wealth is the biggest ecological crime. Many people change their car every couple of years in Holland. For some five months at the beginning of our project in Bangladesh my team was driven around in a car that would have ended on the garbage heap in Holland before I was even born. Words beginning with 're' can be amply applied in Bangladesh: repair, reuse, recycle. Lamps made out of softdrink cans; fences made of coconut branches; bags made of textbook pages; you will only find them here.

So, my dear Bangladeshis, beware of the lures of wealth. When king Midas of the ancient Greeks touched anything, it turned into gold, even his food. You are developing the opposite touch, turning Sonar into Moyla Bangla.



..... And fashion in the West

COOKERY

Sweets

Halva (made from carrots) (for 4)

1 lb carrots
Sugar to taste
2-3 cardamoms
1/2 lb butter
1 pint milk
Seedless raisins or chopped almonds

Peel, wash and finely grate the carrots. Melt the butter and put into it 2 or 3 cardamoms and the carrots, and cook gently with the lid on until all the butter has been absorbed. Add the milk and simmer on a medium heat, stirring occasionally, until all the milk has dried up and the butter begins to show again at

the bottom of the pan (the mixture should be the consistency of rice pudding), add sugar and chopped almonds or seedless raisins, according to taste. Serve either hot or cold.

Pouri

4 oz. white self-raising or wholemeal flour
Salt
1/2 oz. butter or cooking fat

Fat for frying
Shred the fat into the flour, add salt, then, with a little water, mix to the consistency of pastry. Roll out into six equal portions, divide each into three into a circle about the size of a coffee saucer and fry in hot deep fat until it turns golden brown and becomes puffy.