

TEENS and TWENTIES

Nowhere Men, Chase that Dream of Yours

by Raffat Binte Rashid

In those old days of ours, whenever we saw a group of young boys we felt secure. We knew they would help us if some unforeseen incidents took place in the streets. But nowadays whenever I see, let it be simply two men on a bike or walking close to me, I shudder, I panic. I hide my belongings and pray hard so that they take a detour and leave me. So that I am not their prey today.

A woman or even a man born in the late fifties, sixties feels this way about us... the youth of today. It is a shame, a tragedy left unexplained. Youths of any generation are the architects of that particular time they belong to, that culture and society they represent; in one word their actions and thoughts can change their entire nation and their deeds are also directly proportional to anything good or bad about the country in which they live.

February 21, 1952: the incidents that took place that day and the days that followed, the history that was made, was all done by the students... women and men of that time, that decade.

Their actions that were later reflected in 1971, when young people of that era leaped into war, a war for independence without a second's hesitation.

But what do the youths of the decades that followed 'War of Independence', do? This particular section of the population for the last 24 years, actually did nothing to build this nation of ours. They never took the task of building the nation as their own... always thinking it was somebody else's job.

The youths today, majority of them, are frustrated, unemployed, roaming the streets with no dream, no aspirations of their own, living in coloured worlds, taking intoxicating trips to nowhere, and being used by leaders. Their's is no life but they are trapped... against their will. Their lifestyles are contrary to the spirit of liberation.

Indeed, the direction and destiny of youth in Bangladesh are today, fraught with uncertainties gradually mounting up. Such uncertainties largely stem from the problem of unemployment which can be plotted on a steadily rising curve. As population increases and the demographic flux of people from villages to towns and cities turns out to be an irreversible rhythm of life, the problem of employment begins to assume an incredible monstrosity, particularly for youth who ultimately pose tragically themselves as 'nowhere men'. It is from such a sense of uncertainty or loss or sometimes rootlessness that either anger or frustration grips youth, eating into their vitals and precluding the possibilities of "fare forward, voyagers!" to use T.S. Eliot's heightened spiritual imperative," expresses Azfar Hussain, a professor.

To bring about changes in the conventional content of education is also important; in fact we need people-centered, need-based education for youth encouraging them to exploit their talents fully. University, college even primary school syllabus does not amply reflect history, the sense of history in the youth of today are very important. They have to prepare themselves for a war of a different type now," he reflects.

So youths wake up from this nightmarish sleep, shed the fears and uncertainties, these emotions are not for you and chase your dreams.

Wake up, Sweetie. We'll be late."

It was mother's tender words spoken so maternally that woke me up on a frigid, December morning. I stumbled out of bed feeling lethargic trying to rub the stubborn sleep out of my weary eyes. Only three hours before our plane takes flight and lands, in Bangladesh: a country I had not seen in what seemed an eternity.

I left my homeland when I was merely a baby, and now I'm being forced to return after thirteen interminable years. As apprehensive as I was about the idea, I had little choice in the matter. I stood out on my front porch glimpsing at the buoy, suburban Los Angeles streets for the last time in weeks.

As we reached the airport and began boarding the terminal, I took a glimpse at mother's face. I saw the enthusiasm glowing in her eyes. It was the first time she was to see her family in thirteen years, people whom to me were unknown strangers. I had never seen such excitement within her, and for a moment, it alleviated all my tension. I

felt empathetic to what she was feeling, how could one be separated from their loved ones for such an extent of time? She was strong, and I admired her.

After sitting an endless twenty-three hours in an uncomfortable, crouched position, we at last reached our destination. It was just how I pictured it. A small, third-world country with poverty lingering in every street corner, I was swamped with beggar children during my first five minutes there, and watched them being shunned away like wild dogs in the night. I peered through the airport window, analyzing the millions of faces staring back. I wondered if any of those faces could be my grandmother, grandfather or uncles and aunts. Before I knew it my mother and I were being drowned in embraces and tears of utter joy. I felt so awkward, who were these people trying to seem ecstatic to finally see them again, too. I threw my arms around these strange bodies and faces.

We were lead into this quaint little home where we spent all our days and nights. It

was my grandfather's humble abode, where we, at least I, became reacquainted with my family. The hours we spent merely talking about ourselves! I have this family which I never even knew, existed. A bond grew between us, and I found myself feeling as if we shared a closeness all

joys of nature. I was always taught that extravagance and voluptuous luxuries were all that could make a person content. Yet I see these gaunt figures dressed in rags, who contain no riches at all, and they appear so satisfied with what little they have. I was compelled seeing them.

Limited Bliss

by Karishma Huda

I would so end days with my uncles roaming around my city, trying to dig in depth and reveal some knowledge about my heritage. The tattered streets and its disheveled appearance was just a covering, hiding this captivating city called Dhaka. The facts I discovered and sights I beheld were so fascinating. The modesty and natural beauty of the rice patties and villages were breathtaking. The simple lifestyles of the people, their living in such a modern society, not enough time is given to admire the

Their indigence is a virtue, for it gave them strength and taught them to be appreciative rather than take what they have for granted, like most of us do. How could anyone turn these blameless, famished souls away? As such as we possess, we can sacrifice a few jingling coins to help the less fortunate to at least gormandize on a small, sufficient meal. We can treat others with such cruelty and insensitivity. We talk of our desperate hopes and futile lives, when there are others with literally nothing smiling so leisurely and

thanking God for being alive. Being in Bangladesh was good for me. It was where I belonged. I felt at ease with this strong connection with my birthplace. I then understood why mother was yearning to return. How could I have actually wished to pass up this opportunity? It was my home, where I felt I should be.

The last two days in Bangladesh were the most devastating days of my life. I sobbed and wailed, for who knew the next time we would return, or even if we would return. As my family escorted us to the airport on our last evening there, I felt more emotion than my fragile heart could carry. I had found happiness in my native town, happiness within my family. There was so much I learned who I was. I was given new desires, new emotions, and my mind broadened. I realized the significance of heritage, for without it, one has no meaningful knowledge about life or about himself. It was time to board our plane and bid our last fare-well. The tears we cried were

innumerable, but this time they were not tears of joy. Long embraces were reciprocated, and for the first time in my life, I felt feeble and weak. My grandfather saw my blurry figure through his tear drop, and I felt its cold moisture hit my arm. He spoke no words, but held me so tight as if he never wanted to release me. I heard his wail, and I was forced to push him aside.

The painstaking moment was too much for me to handle. I crossed the white line, knowing I could never step back, that they were gone. I took one last glance at my family and my country, knowing that now I must return to a world of loneliness and solitude. A world of shallowness, of material, a world I didn't want to be a part of. That last glance is still repeated over and over in my mind, for it was the last glance I ever took. Although I never returned, I never forgot. Hanging in my room is a painting of the rice patties that I uncovered under a pile of dust. Every night I look at it and remember, with the same cold moisture rolling down my cheek.

Putting up with a Woman's Taste is ...

by Trishna

It was one of those 'nothing goes right' days when I got involved with my landlord in a wrangle and came to the conclusion — that was it! Hence began the search for the nearest to perfect house, which was yet another abominable experience.

Every evening, after returning from work, accompanied by my wife, I would have to go out looking for a suitable house. Putting up with a woman's taste is the toughest job, I tell you. Yes, I guess it's tougher than avoiding fights with them. For the next six and a half weeks we had been moving ground in residential areas like vagabonds, curiously in search of plates that said — TOILET. I preferred didn't deserve my wife's second thoughts.

Some asked for advance with which I could build my own house, rents of some would make me go bankrupt before I could turn into a father in law, and the rest required so much renovation that I could rent two more houses for a few months with that amount of money. Some seemed to invite too many of the terrifying spices, according to my wife, like cats and mice, some were too stuffy, some had bad doors, some had floors, some collapsing ceilings, some steep staircases some not too fancy toilets, some not large enough bedrooms, some had too large ones, which would stand as a problem in order to fill it up with the little number of furniture we owned. Some didn't have enough balconies, some had too many houses in the neighbourhood which would create a headache for my teenaged daughters, some

didn't welcome enough sunshine, some kitchens didn't have all the facilities that "boss" required, etc, etc.

I wonder how I got lucky to be chosen by a woman who can detect so many faults in houses! Frustrated and exhausted, I, at last, let my wife free to go around and pick up the house of her choice, herself. That she did, after almost a week and was I then relieved? That afternoon, I went along with her to

house. That would keep me worried all night through if they would be safe from burglars and if the boy next door is trying out his luck dropping notes there.

Something about that house kept on bothering me — yes, you guessed it right, the rent. It didn't seem to deserve what the owners were demanding for and the three month's ad-

one's things while unpacking them. All the three ladies, my wife and two daughters were more advanced in this job than I was, as I was the one who stayed in the house for the least hours. But still, I did my best well, at least I gave my family that impression.

Coming back from the office, I would get to work immediately. I was given two

task required lot of energy. I found out and it was swallowing much time too. So, I just took out the clothes and dropped them in the suitcases. That was so easy! But the arduous job awaited me and that was shutting the suitcase.

It appeared like an elephant's belly and zipping them seemed to be impossible. The flat, neat, nicely closed suitcase of my wife's laid right in front of my eyes while I was here, fighting with the lifeless thing to make it look similar. First I sat on the tangled clothes in order to flatten it a little but didn't succeed. Then I exerted a pressure on them with my two hands and the success I gained is not worth mentioning. Finally, a bright idea came to my mind and I placed some fat books on them. That helped a little but it created another problem made the suitcase heavier.

Then I peeped into my wife's looking for the secret of her success. I was ashamed on seeing the nicely folded clothes placed neatly on one another and could feel the colour in my face. I was fortunate to have no one around to witness me blushing. Nevertheless, I knew that there was something that I should prevent from occurring and that is, letting my family see my packing. So, I locked the suitcases giving the excuse that the helpers would be tempted by gents' clothes for themselves and kept the keys to myself.

The other times did not give me much trouble but the

second thing that did, were my shoes. May not be the clothes but it was an open secret that I owned the maximum number of shoes in the whole house. I was unable to find one complete pair at a time and hence the degrees increased in my temper. At last, I called the little boy who worked for us to come and give me a hand. Well, that did help me a lot and hence in the following hour, the job was done.

The big day finally arrived and all our belongings now lied in bags and boxes. It was my responsibility to supervise the helpers in loading the carts, keep a strict eye on them so that they wouldn't steal anything and even lift some of the luggagees along with them. While the three kept on hurrying me, I went on working and wiping off sweat. None of them bothered to help and I wonder what happened to equal rights then. At last, another chore was completed and we were on our way towards our new house which cost us all the hard work, energy time and the most important — money. As I drove along the street, I somehow felt much lighter and tried to ignore the thoughts of the works that were yet to be done when we reach there.

But my wife seemed double exhausted than I was and after a sigh she said, "next time, we must keep more time in hand for packing."

Next time! I don't want to count my days till then.

Freedom

by Shawkat Haider

LAZY down a geranium
Sings an unseasoned tune
For me.

The lunatic on the street
Staying awake at knockin' ease.
The wind that hurt little desire
Blows gently in brackish tears
And tender mind and soiled hands
And easel of forgotten eyes
Scream in free my madness
Is your ordeal over? they say,
life defined someday.
And those suspicions
And call of moist geranium
Designed upon skull of a dream,
Snowy, no one else's above—
How would I write again
Songs of wind in floor of memory
Larkin' attired woods, where
Light grows wild & wilder
In trust of truth and freedom.



Liberation of Bangladesh

by ASG Dastgir

LIBERATION of Bangladesh is a blood-red rose
Bloomed, wrapped in fragrance,
opened are the soft petals
Yellow pollens shower with the touch of light.
Bangla-Bangla-Bangladesh.
Liberation of Bangladesh is the warmth of the sun
Covered with the yellow gold.
Remind the warm hearts
Crimson touches on the green borders.
Bangla-Bangla-Bangladesh.
Liberation of Bangladesh is a speech in the sea
Sands on the beach.
A pearl lost in the oyster
Waves of the sea in rolling might,
Bangla-Bangla-Bangladesh.

Shahida — A Case for a National Heroine

by Maqsoodul Haque

In a sleepy village called Bagha under Madhupur Thana of Faridpur, lived a twelve year old girl by the name of Shahida. She lived there in a small hut with her parents and her brother and sister. Shahida was the eldest of the children. Not much is known about her parents, other than the fact that they must be very, very poor. I say poor while reading between the lines of the press report, as the only light they could afford in their house was not electric bulbs but the poor man 'koopee', a lamp which burns a naked fire.

Shahida took her responsibility despite her age, very seriously. On the evening of 27th December, '95, she was alone at home, ostensibly baby sitting her two younger brother and sister while her parents went visiting her grand parents. A freak accident caused the 'koopee' to ignite the little hut that was home. In panic she ran out of the house the first instant. The fire by this time had started devouring the hut. She realised moments later that her younger brother and sister were inside, and surely they would be roasted alive. The spirited twelve year old made two successful forays into the burning hut to rescue them. The initiative caused serious burns to her little body and at a health clinic, a few hours later, Shahida died!

Shahida would have been honoured as a national heroine in any other country. Bangladesh does not want any heroine, however I call upon all so called children organisation, to try and find out details of her frightful death. Death that she embraced so courageously.

Once again long live the young. Also can I ask all readers of this column to join me in a moment of prayer.

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.



They played their role well and made you independent, now it is up to you, the youths of today, to start from where they left and complete their half done mission. — Photo by A K M Mohan

An Agonizing Letter

by Manwar Islam Rumi

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

"Well" I answered with gloomy face. "Are you angry with me for any reason?" he asked me suspiciously. I didn't reply rather I asked him "Are you now involved in politics?" My question surprised him. "Oh Rumi, why are you worried about this? Did you forget once in college you were also into politics?"

"Just remember Babu that was college not university. Here politics is dangerously different".

"Babu doesn't care", he told firmly.

In the meantime I understood clearly that my instructive sentences are totally useless.

I asked him, "Does your father know?"

"It is not a matter to inform everybody" Babu replied, cool. Perhaps his father doesn't know his dear son have already reached the end of life.

All on a sudden, two boys quite pale with fear, rushed into the room and said, "Babu Bhai, Tareq is dead. Shamim's group have attacked and stabbed him while he was sitting in the canteen. He is now lying on the road near the canteen. We can't go there. The canteen is now in their capture. What should we do?"

Babu listened everything silently. His glance was full of contempt. Then he stood up and said, "Send the news Rony, Titu and Yasir. Call Sonu for his microbuses. And sit

by for the night action. Tonight their hall — will be the ours".

I never heard a voice so cruel and cold like his. With unbearable agony and shock I came out from his room. Next morning my eyes were fixed on the newspaper. The news shattered me. The heading was "Student Leader Badly Injured." In one breath I finished reading the news.

Babu received serious injury when two bullets hit him in the chest. He was taken to our Medical College Hospital and later he was shifted to a private clinic. When I reached the clinic I saw the some of the senior leaders of their party. I entered his room and found his motionless body lying on the bed in the corner of the room. I stared at his swooned body with vacant eyes. The memories of by gone days rose in the canvas of my mind. Tears began to trickle down my cheeks. I came out from the room. At the corridor one of his friends gave me a letter.

A small letter in swift hand writing, "Dear Babu, how is your studies going on? I hope you are well. Here we are arranging Shahin's wedding. So, don't waste time after receiving the letter. We all are expecting you in two days.

Your mother"

Shahin is Babu's beloved younger sister. Almost three years ago I saw her in Babu's mess, she was there with her father. This letter smashed my broken heart. Man is liable to some kind of trouble and society can't save them. Death is one of them. But what about 'these kinds'?