O many. Rome is the Vatican and to some. Rome is the Colosseum. For me this last is quite true When I have been away from Rome, the first thing that makes me feel that I am back. is the reassuring sight of the Colosseum, unceremoniously parked right in the middle of the busy thoroughfare. One wonders how much truth there may be in the famous phrase attributed to Bede that as long as the Colosseum

stands. Rome stands. Having said that, I do find it ironic that this barbaric temple of butchery, this coiled python of a building, which has swallowed so many lives, and now sits contented in the Roman sunshine, should have become the symbol, even a touchstone, of the eternity of a great civilisation. Or, perhaps, it is not ironic at all, but inevitable that through the ages people have become inured to the hidden venom, the savage raison d'etre of this edifice. Perhaps violence and the need for blood-letting is an essential ingredient of the character and condition of man, and the whole purpose of human societal organization, its civilization, has been to contain, control or channel this basic instinct. In that sense, perhaps, the Colosseum is an appropriate and realistic symbol of a human society. containing within it the contradictions of man's nature. It gives you a taste of what the artistic and intellectual aspects of man can achieve, for who can deny the genius of the architects and engineers of antiquity in building this marvel in stone: it also shows you the baser side of man, with which the users of this building came to terms and to that purpose. shaped for themselves an ac-

ceptable vessel in which to pour their collective poison. The conventional reaction to the Colosseum is normally two-fold. The initial one is of immediate awe and admiration of the size, magnificence and design of the structure. The next is a delayed, self-conscious revulsion upon reflection on the purpose of the building, the brutal entertainment it was used for. One can go on endlessly about the horrifying decadence and savagery of a people, crowding to watch spectacles of man killing each other, or men being mauled to death by wild beasts, and after having registered our horror we can also moralize about the abysmal depths to which these blood hungry people had sunk. And yet, somehow, I find that it does not behoove us, the socalled enlightened people of this century, to direct our censure at these Romans. There is, of course, no justification or defence for violence as passtime, as way of life. But we, the citizens of this violent strife-torn, modern world. cannot be the ones to moralize. We have not risen above the ringed seats of the sandy arenas of our little world where everyday we watch the atroci**RUMINATIONS FROM ROME**

As Long as the Colosseum Stands . . .

by Neeman A Sobhan

ties of man against man while peace, like some Christian martyr of old is torn to pieces by forces as feral and senseless as wild lions. In our world, something

else that is at par with the gladiatorial combats of the old that we so revile, is the direct crudery of Bull-fights, where people watch animals being slaughtered, and Matadors being gored to death. It should come as no surprise to the affcionados of Bull-fighting that gladiatorial fights, too, were considered as displays of courage and skill and not simply as a form of punishment and torture. It was that too, of course, but there were various grades of these bloody entertainments, of which the fight of the gladiators was thought of as the noblest and the life of the gladiator was viewed as the most glamourous, if shortlived! So much so that a lot of freemen actually volunteered to be trained as gladiators, and it was not just slaves and prisoners of wars who were forced into this life. A graffitti on a wall in Pompeii records this statement about a certain popular Thracian gladiator called Celadus: "the man the girls sigh for"! In fact, the emperor Commodus once created a scandal by insisting on fighting in the arena himself.

The wise have always ex-

horted that one should never judge the morals of one age by the morals of another. So if. instead of imposing our values on the Romans, we take an objective stance and examine the psychology of what appears to be a barbaric people, we might find interesting data about the differing or similar ideas another culture had about the concepts of tlying. killing, valour, honour, and the importance or insignificance of bloodshedding. My personal opinion is that, a thorough research of the past, may reveal that ethos of blood-lust and 'heroism' has not changed much among the male of the species. The Roman menfolk(women were banned, or they chose not to go) went to the Colosseum of their daily dose of adrenalin and to vicariously exercise their impulse for brutain. But in every age amphillacities have existed in the hearts of men, just as glutted with a love of savagery and violence. At the Colosseum, the Romans were regaled with mock naval battles that ended in genuine massacres; the battles and massacres, in the name of religion nationalism or politics that, courtesy CNN, we watch on our TV sets from the comfort of our homes, are real ones. Every day we witness gory details of death and destruction.

lack of moral responsibility or compassion for the tortured. the degraded, the oppressed, like our Roman counterparts. And the popular film industry of today where violence is the main ingredient, or the blood thirsty video-games my children play where you kill off humans for fun, is only a recondite and secondhand from of the same entertainment the Romans thrilled at.

No. the moral high ground is not the best way to view the Colosseum. Actually, one of the better ways to observe it is from another high ground. which is a hill called the Oppio Park at the far end of the area on which the Colosseum stands. Beneath this lies the remains of Nero's house, and

from here one has a good view

of the physical aspects of this

great pile. We have touched

upon the moral implications of

the place, now let us spend

some time on its general

Almost everyone is familiar

with the bare facts of the

Colosseum. This was the great-

est of Roman amphitheatres, a

huge four storey structure.

started by Vespasian and

opened by his son Titus in AD

ment spectacles. It could hold

almost 50,000 spectators. Two

details make it a marvel of

Roman engineering and archi-

tectural skills. One, that it was

built on marshy grounds re-

covered from draining the lake

of Nero's Golden House! Sec-

ond, that it was designed in

such a way that the amphithe-

atre could be emptied of its

crowds in a matter of minutes!

This was due to the clever and

abundant placement of eighty

exits, called, evocatively

enough, vomitoria!

80, and used for entertain-

aspect and physical structure.

Although in its decrepit stage it has inspired much artistic enthusiasm, one can but speculate what we would have thought of it had it come down to us in its intact form. Reconstructed models show a very different and gaudy facade. It was made of white marble which may have been painted, and decorated with statues, bronze shields and much gilding. Its tiers of arches and half columns was much admired and imitated by Renaissance architects. Sometimes an awning would be stretched over the top to provide shade, and sometimes at night, a giant chandelier would be hung over the arena.

The arena itself was a sanded area with a perimeter

of 527 metres and a substruc-

ture of corridors and cells. In

the arena men fought with an-

imals and with each other. The

famous gladiatorial fights were

only one kind of entertainment

that was provided at the Colos-

seum, but they were the most

popular. This was considered

as simply a blood sport that

everyone enjoyed! A typical

programme at the arena may

have been arranged in this way:

Ad bestias. The hurling of the

toughest criminals, defence

less to wild beasts, then may

have taken place the

Gladiators meridiani', in

which criminals would fight

each other to death, two at a

time and with only one being

armed, finally, the most glam-

orous event would take place

sional gladiator combats. These

were mostly specially trained

slaves, prisoners of war, crim-

A typical afternoon's pro-

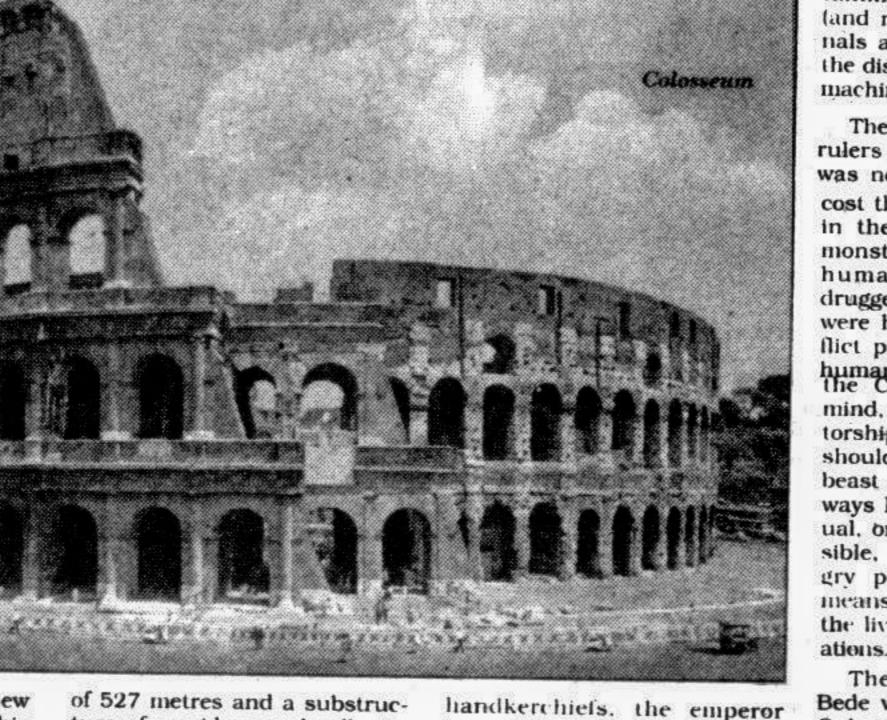
ceedings at the Colosseum

inals, and even free men.

in the afternoon, the profes-

would start to musical accomemperor would consult the crowd. If they cried "Mitte" or

The emperor, his entourage ing this huge machinery of and other wealthy and prestigious people would take their seats in the reserved area. closest to the arena. The gladi- administered, the unruly ators, magnificently attired in masses kept happy and in conarmour and helmets, then entered and marched around the arena saluting the emperor. shouting "Morituri te salutant," or "We who are about to die salute you". Lots were then drawn to see who would fight, and referees marked out the fighting area. The combat paniment. When a gladiator was wounded he fell to the ground begging for mercy. The save him, and waved white



Colosseum stands, Rome stands; when the Colosseum falls. Rome falls; and when Rome falls, the world falls, Of course, I take this statement as a metaphor. To me it reinforces the idea that we are all links in the great chain of humanity, so we cannot dissociate ourselves from the fate and history of other people, other cultures. The story of the Colosseum, its glory and shame, is ours too. We are all. by turns, the wavers of the White-handkershief the Peace thumb-down signal to our brothers, and at the same time that bleeding heap of humanity, down on its knees, at the mercy of the whims of a cynical, indifferent world. 'Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee', said Donne. And we many add that, it matters not where the Colosseum stands. there are similar amphitheaters inside every man, and

ment and political manipulation. Seen like that, the Colosseum is a symbol of what men are reduced to when they exchange their political options and freedom for the gratification of their basic needs, for mere "bread and circuses". This phrase of Juvenal is an would be something like this: important clue to understanddictatorial politics. This building was the tool by which the Roman public was cleverly trol by the devious Roman emperors. Imperial Rome of that time was glutted with slaves who worked for free, so there were thousands of unemployed citizens in the city. To prevent these people from taking part in the government, or from agitating, it was vital to feed and distract them. Thus in the interest of the empire, food was doled out and free entertainment on the most lavish scale imaginable, was provided.

> In this way, almost 150,000 idlers were kept pacified, and at the same time, the entertainment itself took care of (and neatly dispatched) criminals and prisoners of wars as the dispensable fuel to run this machine.

> The cost incurred by a few rulers to sustain their power was nothing compared to the cost the humanity had to bear. in the creation of this mass monster of irresponsible, inhuman, almost morally drugged dregs of mankind who were hoisted on history to inflict pain and death on other humans. The only lesson that the Colosseum gives, to my mind, is that the evils of dictatorship is the only danger man should steer clear of, the only beast to be fought, as this always leads to a single individual, or a few selfish, irresponsible, immoral or power hungry people having the vital means to play with and wreck the lives of millions, for gener-

The complete phrase of Bede was that as long as the when Man falls, the world falls.

FROM THE CORRIDOR OF MEMORY

Personality Profile

Tamizuddin Khan by AKM Jalaluddin

HE year was 1953; and Moulvi Tamizuddin Khan, President of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, was visiting his hometown; Faridpur. He was there in connection with a family marriage. He stayed in their family home where his younger brother, Dr Abu Ahmed, a homeopath lived with his large family.

Apparently Moulvi Tamizuddin Khan, the family patriarch, had decided to invite a large number of guests. So, friends, neighbours, political colleagues and relatives, both near and distant - all were invited. As distant relations, we were also invited "Bring also the children" the invitation added.

· We are distantly, indeed very distantly; related to them. Not only my parents but the whole family and the domestic aides were also expected to be there.

So we turned up in full strength. Tamizuddin Khan re ceived all the guests person ally. My father introduced me inis eidest child) to him and asked me (as was our family practice) to touch/kiss his feet ("Kadam Busi" in Bengali) which I did. He asked me one or two questions of general nature - and I answered them promptly.

"Waif a minute", he said to me, "there are not enough China (plates) for all the guests. So we have to use Banana Leaves." He instructed that the guests will be served on plates and Banana leaves alternately, regardless of their social position. As a-10-year old volunteer I was given a minor role in supervising the arrangements.

Tamizuddin Khan asked me, "What is your aim in life?" "I want to be a Barrister-At-Law". I said. "You mean you want to be a lawyer". he corrected me. "Now you can become a lawyer by taking a BL degree here, or go to England and America for a law degree.

After he had finished his part I began to ask my questions. By then I was a regular reader of newspapers (Daily Azad and Weekly Ittefaque). So, there was no shortage of questions about the constitutional problems of Pakistan. I said to him, "The MCA's are so lazy that they could not give the country a constitution for last six years. They should hang down their head in shame."

Both Moulvi Tamizuddin Khan and my father were surprised at the virulence of my language (which was actually a quote from Musafir - a master of political sarcasm). My father thought that I was discourteous and I saw his red eyes.

Moulvi Sahib sensed the situation and told my father smilingly, "Mannan Sahib, your son is right." And turned to me and said, "I am a mere President of the Assembly. I have no power of my own to do anything. If the members choose to be inactive, I am to preside over their inactivity." Later, on further reflection. I deeply regretted the use of such language. My father appreciated the fact that I had myself un-

derstood my lapse. In the meantime, a small crowd had gathered around us and enjoying what they thought to be a verbal duel. Moulvi Tamizuddin Khan turned his attention to other guests and told my father. "I hope to have a longer chat with your son in future."

But the long chat did not

take place. When I met him in

1960 - he was living in a modest house in Purana Paltan and was in poor health. My father and I had a brief conversation with him (he was then the President of the defunct East Pakistan Muslim League). Tamizuddin Khan looked like a sage to me. He was transparently honest and lived rather modestly during 1954

62 (when he was out of office). He had no regrets about that He truly believed in the dignity of living a life of simplicity and He could, however, be very strong in matters of principle. It is now a matter of history how stubbornly he fought the

legal battle against the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly (in the Sind Chief Court. later the Pakistan Federal Court). Altaf Cauhar writes in his biography of Ayub Khan (PP

288-89) that the Khan had "a

flerce exchange" with Tamizuddin Khan (July 1960). The latter (i.e. Tamizuddin Khan) maintained, despite Ayub's impatient interruptions, that the parliamentary system was the only form of government suitable for Pakistan Ayub gave up in frustration (Ayub Khan, The First Military Ruler of Pakistan by Altaf Gauhar. University Press Lamited a newsreporter, I was interviewing Dr Shahmuliah

when the news of his death reached us. "He was truly an outstanding person - honest and courageous", said Dr Shahidullah (August 1963).

Moulvi Tamizuddin Khan would always remain in my memory as a straight-forward, clean, humble and, a kind person. He was, of course, clean and honourable - absolutely clean and honourable — from the crown of his head to the toes of his feet.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Life through the Eyes of Children

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

OR ten year-old Falan, which means thrown away, life is hard enough as a 'tokai'; yet it does not stop him from noticing the suffering of people around him. He feels for the crippled man on the street who has to beg in order to pay for his children's education. He sympathises with the small boys and girls who break bricks to support their parents and takes pride in being a citizen of a country that was freed by sacrificing Mukti Joddhas. Like Falan there are many poor children who possess this ability to see beyond the surfaces and read the stories behind the faces. In order to bring out this inner vision of children, Drik, a photographic resource centre, has come up with a project that allows children to portray reality through their own eyes, with the help of the camera. The idea is to use photography as "a means of empowerment", says Dr

Shahidul Alam, Drik's Managing Director and the project's creator. With the help of the camera the children have been able to express their innermost thoughts in a creative yet

with the same casualness and

very real way. The Kids with Cameras project is part of a larger scheme of Drik's to promote photographers and writers from the Third World and give them the opportunity to portray their people and culture through their own vision rather than through foreign eyes. Drik introduces photography not only as a medium of self-expression but as an instrument that empowers the individual by providing him or her with the means to affect society in a particular way.

The project began in October 1994 when Dr Alam selected several children from a school in Mirpur. 'We discussed pictures and whether they would be interested in taking photos, says Alam.

They certainly were and soon a group of children photographers were formed with a pinhole camera made from a milk can and a room with a tubewell in the children's school to serve as a makeshift dark room. Later with the technical support from Drik, such as providing cameras and processing the film, the children took over the project. taking pictures of whatever they thought was important

or interesting.

Although the project was to have ended after six weeks. the children's enthusiasm and seriousness about photography prompted Dr Alam to carry on with the project with the support of UNICEF and Arkeleton Trust. At present there are about ten children all of whom are working. They include garment workers, a welder, a garage mechanic and a cow-herd.

With very clear ideas of what they want to photograph. these children have put together photo essays that, says, Alam, convey very powerful messages.

Rabeya, 12, for example. would like to take pictures of children crushing bricks, 'tokais' who work in the street, malnutrition of children and the hard work of women. Swapna, 12, wants to take pictures of people who live in the slum, orphans and unhappy people, and Pintu, also 12, would like to portray rickshawpullers, mastaans and people who don't have enough

to eat. There are also happy events they would like to capture in their camera lenses: children playing in the rain, flower gardens, a baby taking a bath and 'tall, tall boys who go to col-

The captions under the pictures indicate a level of social awareness that seem surprisingly mature for those so young. On a photo of a puja, Ighal writes, "We're Muslims, So we have to respect the rituals and we have to live all together like brothers." On a picture of a wedding: "I know a 14 year-old girl. But she has already a child. Her father has arranged a wedding because he needed some money. You can see how thin the girl is. Before she was more healthy. But because of this marriage, she became weak."

Apart from providing an avenue through which they can express themselves, the project has also been very successful in terms of how their community views them. The experience, says Dr Alam, has given the children a sense of identity and with their cameras they are now considered as important persons in the community. Rabeya, for example, takes pictures of village weddings and Pintu has taken pictures of tenants being evicted. "They now feel they have some control of their lives, though in a small,

For Alam, who sees himself merely as a facilitator of this

way," comments Dr Alam.

empowerment process, the project has been a 'tremendously educating and revealing experience'. "It was not just about taking photos but also dealing with complex problems, the amount of freedom they have, my relationship with them and their families." He relates how he had to persuade one of the children's father not to get his twelve year old daughter married off and allow her to continue to

turned his thumb upwards.

and the life was spared. How-

ever, if they cried "lugula" or

kill him, then the emperor

turned his thumb down and

the fighter would be killed.

Sometimes a particularly brave

or skillful contestant would be

granted his freedom. The sur-

prising fact is that a few of

these slave turned gladia or

sometimes refused the prof-

THE ROLL STREET LEG XFREES

aspects. I have finally come to

terms with it. In fact, as I

greet it like an old friend

whenever I return after an ab-

sence. And I have an individual

approach to it. I consider it

not as a symbol of Roman

decadence, nor as an example

of Ancient Rome's architec-

tural grandeur. To me it is an

institute of public administra-

tion in the real sense, that is

an institution of mob manage-

mentioned at the outset.

Having lived in the shadow

fered freedom!

take pictures. In a society where such poor working children maybe dismissed as urchins and tokais, the project aims to get a certain message across. "First of all," says Alam, "people will see that these children have very important things to say and, secondly, given the opportunity they can articulate themselves with cogent arguments." "The project is part of many such efforts to create awareness about the strength and dignity of these children."

he adds. Alam hopes to spread this awareness not only in Bangladesh but to other countries as well. An exhibition of the children's photographs is being arranged by Drik to expose their work to the general public. Alam also plans to bring out a publication of these photographs and essays. Moreover, through electronic mail (Email) he wants to send these stories and images to other countries "so that these children can reach out to other children in a more effective

The Kids with Cameras project is an attempt to recognize the fact that children need more than just food, clothing and shelter; they need self respect and the ability to have some control over their lives. "The project diffuses some of the myths we have," says Alam, "that simple people do not know what is good for them; they certainly know what is good for them. It's either that we have not given them the opportunity to attain their goals or we have not been listening enough."

All photos : Courtesy - DRIK



Dr Shahidul Alam with his young photographers - enjoying the Durga Puja festivities in Sonargaon.



Array from the city's chaos — tranquil countryside.



Kamalapur Railway Station - architecturally exciting.

- Picture taken by Molli



- Picture taken by Peara