

# TEENS and TWENTIES

Those were the Days, My Friend!

## For Teens & Twenty-ers of Today and Yesteryears

by Asrarul Islam Chowdhury

Those were the days, my friend  
We thought they'd never end  
— Mary Hopkin

Did you ever wonder how you've changed over the years? Why even a few years ago, you were quite different than you are today. Times have changed and so has the environment that surrounds you. But did you ever think, how people of your age were in yesteryears and also are today? Now that would be an interesting topic to embark on, wouldn't it? Well, it quite happens that, this is the topic that we'll try to talk about today. Actually, it will be a comparative study of teens and twentiers of Bangladesh of three decades, from 1965 to 1995. The questions we'll be asking are very simple — how do these people behave, what do they think about, how do they love and hate, how do other cultures influence their perception towards life, and so on.

Don't worry, be happy  
— Bobby McPherrin

The reader may have already got the impression that this narrative is going to carry on. This week we discuss students of the last three decades. What lies in the future "remains a mystery to us all" so as to allow the reader to have her/his thrill and imagination. One warning before we put on our dancing shoes. There may be generalisations, due to limited space and time. However, this is not an academic write-up. So, like the Calypso song goes, "don't worry, be happy!"

Clear blue skies...  
They were here before we came  
Will they be here when we're gone?  
— Graham Nash

People are a product of the environment they are sur-

rounded by. Today fortunate students have ample scopes in keeping themselves better informed with global phenomena, due to the grace of satellite TV and computers. In the sixties, satellite TV and computers were dream — even seeing a normal TV was a luxury. My father once told me that many people used to pay social calls at my grandfather's house, after sunset, just to see what was being telecasted on our TV set! (He owned a TV set at that time.)

In spite of limited opportunities, students of the sixties — and to some extent the seventies also — were advanced in one field at least. And that is a fair equity in knowledge. Of course, today's young people have a better perception towards life than those of the 60s, 70s and 80s. In the past, there were three types of students — good, mediocre and bad. The good were not as good as us, the mediocre were more or less as their counterparts today, while the bad used to just pass. Today's good students are exceptionally good, while the bad are, let's not say. However, yesterday's good students were not bookish as they are today. In the past, a good student used to keep track of events outside his subject. Today's good students unfortunately know little outside their own discipline. Could this be the bad effect of Adam Smith's specialisation?

On good thing has come by through time. In yesteryears, students used to think of having an academic career and they get themselves affiliated with the Civil Service. Strong middle-class feelings was the main catalyst in this attitude. Business or alternative means of livelihood was not widely accepted due to relics of a feudalistic society. Today, infiltration of capitalistic elements have widened the outlook of youngsters. Youngsters are in-

clining more towards market demanding professions. Gone are the days, when a young person would study pure Physics, Mathematics or Literature just for the joy of knowledge. Today's students are more interested in studying Business Disciplines, Applied Sciences, Engineering, Medical Science, Economics, and so on. Poverty and competition have compelled people to think like this. Today's students also have wide options for part-time livelihoods than those of the past. Private tuition was not a thing noticed among University students even five to seven years ago. Today, many students are earning their own expenses through private tuition. After completion of studies, the gifted are being absorbed in respectable places, while the less fortunate are inclining towards self-employment. The latter was not an accepted profession in the sixties and early seventies.

Today, young people are inclining more towards business, as dependence on a job usually does not help make ends meet. Indeed, BTV's "Mat O Manush" programme of Shykh Seraj has come a long way over the years in motivating educated, but unemployed people to go for self-employment.

The level of the depth of English among youngsters has deteriorated over their years. This, I think, is one fact on which you'll agree with me. My grandfather, to whom I was extremely attached, once said that there are three types of English knowing people. The first can speak in English, the second can write in English, while the last can think in English. Although, the number of the first group may have in-

creased over the years, the latter two have certainly declined. It's not that we should give up Bangla and learn an alien language, but we should acknowledge the fact that today's world is more intertwined than it was in the past. Moreover, in order to fraternize with other cultures, one has to be well adept in English. The bad side of English in this nation today is that, knowledge — especially that of English — has become centralised among the affluent few. These are the people who are getting fatter shares of the cake day by day. These are also the people who are being better placed in the society, principally due to their control over social power and wealth.

Going abroad is another feature that youngsters have exhibited over the years. Indeed, one should go as far as the walls of China in pursuit of knowledge. However, the nature of students on their attitude towards going abroad has changed through "time passages." In the sixties and till the mid seventies, students usually set sail to the UK. They would finish higher studies and return back to the country to serve the nation. Dominance of middle-class sentiment was mainly responsible for them wanting to come back and serve the nation. Moreover, from 1965 to 1971, we were in the yoke of foreign domination, while right after 1971, the country needed the young to build the aspiration of so many who gave up their lives to see a free Bangladesh. This attitude, however, became an euphoria. Because, during the second half of the seventies our young technocrats — in particular — embarked on journeys to the Middle East. The prime objective was to

earn "petro dollars" and the return, either to find a job or invest their savings in land and/or gold, the two most easy avenues that were available for investment during these periods. "The Bangladeshi Dream" of a poverty emancipated nation was over. Poverty and lack of opportunities for youngsters acted as catalysts in the migration tendency of youngsters. This tendency has just increased over the years.

An alternative avenue for students after Independence and upto the late eighties was going to former socialist states for education. This was driven by the romanticism of Communism. Various student activities of the sixties and those of the seventies impelled students to go to these nations for attaining Masters or PhD.

Today, the wheels have turned around. Today's students have not lost their interest on going abroad, but the motive is somewhat different. Plugging session jams in our Universities have made relatively affluent students to think about India for alternative means of higher education. Another group prepare themselves for North America and Australia. However, the tendency among today's students is not to come back after leaving their sacred motherland. Seemingly ever closing opportunities in Bangladesh and scanty salaries offered in job markets have made students and elders alike to fight for immigration. The craze of US immigration visas, and Australian ones in recent times, strongly support this proposition.

Prior to Liberation, there were only four general Universities — Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong and Jahangirnagar. The scopes for higher education were narrow. The number of technical colleges were also not many.

Today, more Universities have emerged. A market is not driven by biological or ethical needs. The powers of supply and demand have, no doubt, played a pivotal role in the emergence of private Universities, Medical Colleges and Schools throughout the country. Whatever the cause, the outcome has been for the good. Today students throughout Bangladesh do not have to confine themselves to a few Universities for higher or Colleges for intermediate education any more. The scopes have widened, although supply may not have been able to keep up with the ever growing demand. Hence there is still an excess demand in education. Clearly reflected by the ever growing tendency of our resourceful youngsters in going abroad for higher education and not wanting to come back.

Clear blue skies...  
Yes, they will be here when we're gone  
— Graham Nash

Let's see the bright side of life. Today's people are much more intelligent than those of the past. In my University, I find today's students to be better-read than we were. Transmission of BBC programmes — in particular — by the Government have no doubt pronounced significant effects on youngsters. Today's teenagers know the names of most international sport personalities, film stars, literary luminaries, etc, better than we or our previous generations did.

Man has a tendency to dub his own young time as the best of all time. Whatever previous generations say today, or those of today will say in the future — let's try to take the cream of all decades. Yes, the clear blue skies, our ancestors left us, will be here when we're gone, for our descendants to thrive on!

## Oh! It Is 'A Hot Summer Night's Scream'

by Fyyaz Shahnoor



THE last few weeks have been an ordeal for Dhakaites. It's been like a rehearsal for hell. The hot weather is driving us crazy, if Shakespeare had been born in Dhaka he would have written a "A hot summer night's scream", and without doubt he would have been right.

Sometimes when the heat becomes unbearable at night and I can't sleep I suddenly have this, shall we say, unorthodox urge. I feel like tearing up my clothes, run screaming into the night stark naked, climb up a tree and just cling there among the cool leaves (it must be the monkey in me). Well at least it proves Darwin's theory as unquestionably correct.

It's been a witches cauldron in Dhaka. April 20th was the highest so far when the mercury hit 39°C. Like the sun, tempers have been raging everywhere. Shop keepers quarrelling with customers over prices, wives quarrelling with husbands because he can't afford to buy an air cooler (like the one her neighbour's), students fantasising about strangling their teachers because of the long classes and so on and so forth. The sun is affecting our sanity.

To make matters worse our weathermen are forecasting rain since time immemorial. "Tomorrow's weather forecast says that there might or might not be a light to moderate showers over Dhaka and other districts." Boy, they can sure phrase their words, they can simply say that tomorrow night or might not be *Keyamat* (Doomsday). But wait it gets better, notice how they often say, "a cold gust of wind will blow over most parts of the country" and then totally forget to mention which parts. But I'm smart, I know they're taking us for a ride and I always follow my grandmother's advice: if your left toe twitches it'll rain and if both toes twitch then it'll pour. Unfortunately our erudite weathermen are not into this little secret, otherwise they could have been a little more accurate in predicting the weather.

It's been worse for the 'other' residents of Dhaka basically living or roaming around the slum. Those inferior beings with little or no mental capacity and polygamous habits in the most strictest sense, no, I'm not talking about the movie artists. I'm talking about the

animals of Dhaka (I'm always confusing these two terms, sorry). What I'm impaling is that the summer heat is giving a whole new meaning to the phrase "It's a dogs life" for the dogs. Parched throats of birds have lost their tune. Even the crows don't 'caw' as they (enthusiastically) once did.

But stop! It's not as alarming as it seems. Man is the most imaginative and ingenious among Gods creatures and he always finds a way out of the most grueling circumstances. I asked around and these are the remedies some of my friends put forward.

One suggested walking around nude. You can't deny it, this suggestion has its merits. (Just think how economical it would be). Further more it would be very difficult to discriminate among people because without clothes everybody looks more or less the same. Just imagine the headlines "Heat wave causes Dhaka to bear all". Of course the pick pockets would be out of a lucrative profession, (It would leave a lasting impression on a nude person, if you know what I mean) but these are minor difficulties that can easily be overcome.

Another suggested that we lolled our tongues out like dogs. It would cause evaporation and cool our bodies in the process. The catch here is that some people would have advantage over others because of their long tongues. For instance due to constant wagging, experts believe that tongues of the fairer sex is much longer and more elastic than that of the male. So obviously girls should adopt this technique. However it is my belief that the politicians of today would gain the most. They have very energetic and long tongues and they have the extra benefit of a wide mouth also. Among the other solutions offered were to submerge Dhaka in water, transfer all residents to Hawaii, bring Saddam Hussain on a state visit because his cold personality would cool things down etc.

Some even went far enough to suggested to push the sun a little further back. But the implementation of my first two suggestions are really easy but someone's got to start first, if anyone does, please let me know. Just imagine if both suggestions were taken up literally by all Dhakaites! I'm optimistic, in such difficult times, anything goes.

## 'Headstrong as Buffalo'

by Crespo Sebunya Kampala

UGANDA'S boy soldiers created much excitement and curiosity when they marched into Kampala as part of Yoweri Museveni's victorious guerrilla army in 1986.

The *kadogos* (small ones) also created alarm, because many were so traumatised by the civil war that it was feared they would be uncontrollable.

Charles Byamungu, for example, was 16 when he and a group of friends encountered some drunk government soldiers in 1983.

"They searched us and then, when we joked about a pregnant woman carrying bombs in her womb, they ripped the woman open with bayonets. Then they started shooting at us. I don't know how I escaped death. I fell under other bodies and crawled out after dark."

He was picked up by another armed group, who turned out to be soldiers with

Museveni's 20,000 strong movement.

"Many of the kids fled from their homes after seeing their parents bayoneted or shot through the skull," says Major Peter Bakale, director of formal education in the National Resistance Army (NRA). "We had to pick them up because there is no knowing what would have happened to them if they had fallen into the hands of government troops."

The NRA was aware that the children's future lay in its hands. The UN Children's Fund and the Save the Children Fund encouraged the new government to send them to school.

The boys were not easy to handle. Several had taken part in guerrilla warfare for years. As part of a victorious army, they had access to vehicles, women, cigarettes and bhang, which they were unwilling to give up.

But the army top brass were determined to keep them in the classroom. Initially, the boys were camped in military barracks in Kampala, but outside diversions proved irresistible and they frequently sealed out to enjoy the luxuries of city life, such as the open-air discos which suddenly became fashionable.

"This atmosphere was not conducive to serious studies," says Bakale, with understatement. So the boys were sent to Mbarara barracks, 260 kilometres away.

By now, some 700 young soldiers had been enrolled for school.

It took time for old habits to die. "Many were as headstrong as buffalo," recalls their teacher, Twinomujuni.

Many slipped away to bars and got into fights. About 260 older ones, who had the chance to get a discharge or to be redeployed were squeezed out, in order to enable the others to concentrate on their studies.

Nevertheless, other gradually dropped out and by 1992 only 186 *kadogos* were attending secondary school.

The NRA's chief political commissar, Lt Col. Serwanga, is happy with the army work: "We are proud of those who are going to sit for their university exams — 28 this year — because we have been emphasising

## 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, everyday 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.



Visible but no permission for entrance: This picture of India has been taken from the northern border of Bangladesh

— by Manwar Islam Khan (Rumi)

ing to them the need for a highly educated army which can take care of the country's security needs."

Other officers say they are impressed with the character and outlook of those who have stayed in school. A number have acquired skills such as carpentry and brick-making, as a result of which, says Lawanga, they have won tenders to supply furniture, to nearby schools "and are also carrying out repairs on their dormitories. Many buildings were shattered in the war and the extent of the work is enormous."

"Some have started farming small plots. These young men should represent the end of the *kadogo* chapter. But there has been a new influx of children from the north as a result of two rebellions there, particularly the fighting led by 'priestess' Alice Lakwena,

whose followers went naked into battle smeared with oil which supposedly made them immune to bullets and armed with sticks and stones which they believed would explode like grenades.

Anatoli Kizito was 15 when he followed the NRA into battle against the Lakwenas. He recalls that the rebels would sing loudly while charging and though the NRA mowed them down "we used to cry believing that we would be bewitched."

He was lucky to emerge unscathed from the experience, but his cousin Matovu, who shared similar experiences, acted aggressively and erratically when he returned to Kampala, repeatedly slapping children and young women until residents seized him and put him in a psychiatric hospital.

Almost 400 new children have been adopted by the army. "But for the problems

created by Lakwena's rebellion in the north and insecurity in the north-east, the problem of *kadogos* would have been overcome by now," says Lawanga.

But there have been failures too. Nearly three-quarters of the army children never went beyond primary school, and many were unprepared for civilian life.

"They were not used to taking care of themselves," says Major-General Emilio Mondo, "and the many years of service left them with a knowledge gap about the rules of civilian life."

Haruna Mukasa was tricked out of his money when he tried to set up as a street trader soon after leaving the army, which he had joined when he was 14.

Such men are part of a wider problem arising from the reduction in the size of the army: 33,000 men have been retrenched and 17,000 more



Museveni's guerrilla army. They took him into the force, and looked after him.

Scores of other were scooped up by the guerrillas because there was no-one else to look after them. They formed about 15 per cent of