

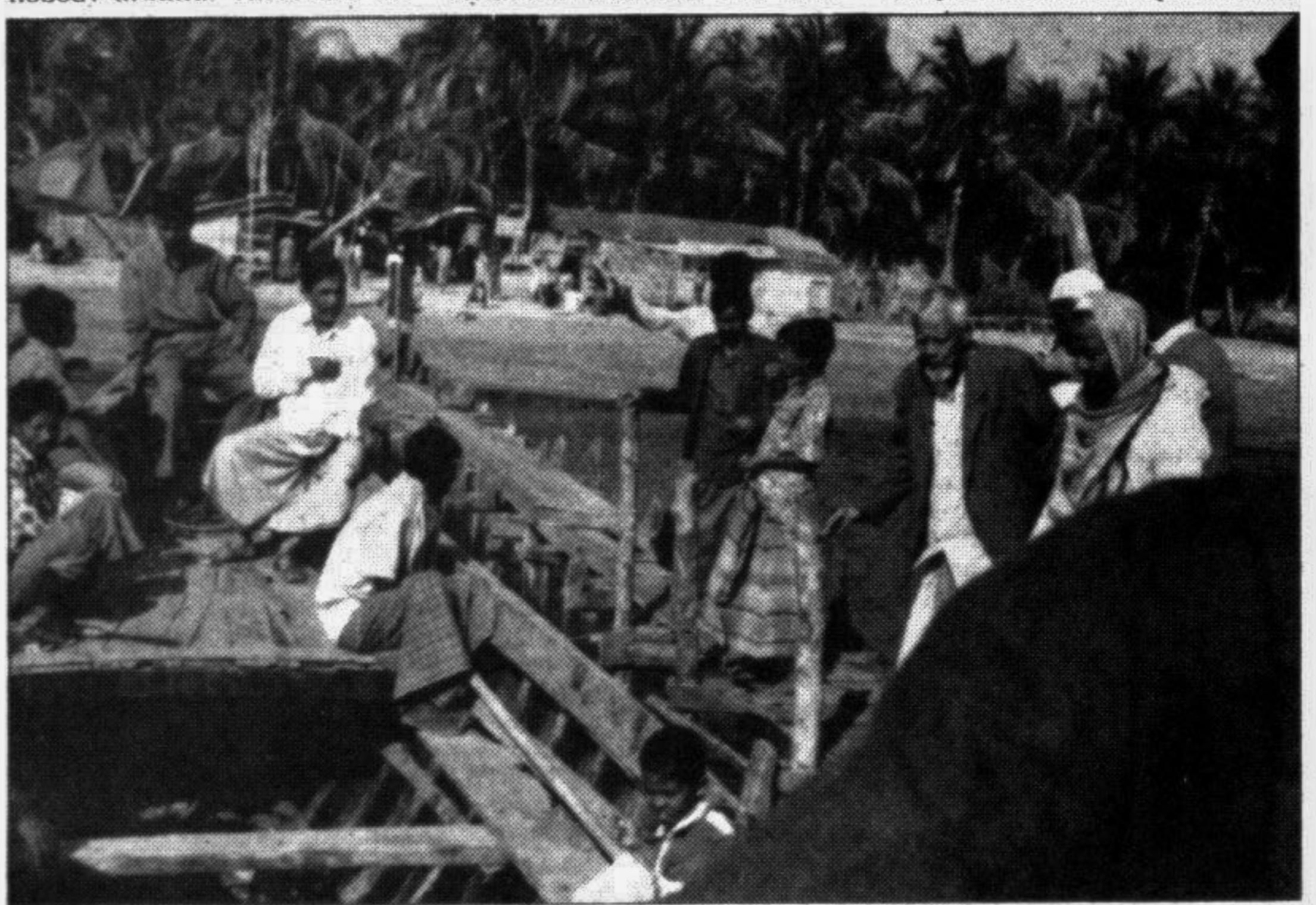
PEOPLE AND PLACES

St Martin's A Virgin Coral Island Invites Mainlanders

by Dr. Reza Khan

ST Martin's — an offshore island formed on a saucer-shape Peleistocene rock-slab, hardly 8km away from the mainland, in the Bay of Bengal is still virgin for the divers and snorkelers as none has dived in its clear blue water looking for the hidden wealth underneath.

The St. Martin's island, locally called *Narket Jinjira*, is the only coral island within the jurisdiction of Bangladesh. It is being encircled by living coral formations, vast expanses of non-utilized sandy beach and limestone, sandstone and base rocks. The red fiddler crab and other species form a mat over the beach when there is nobody around. There are in-



Kashem Master (second from right) taking a boat to Teknaf.

numerous variety of colourful shells, cowries, edible oyster, sea cucumber, sea urchin, sepiia, loligo and even one may find an octopus near the shore. The swimming of most beautifully coloured fishes through the pools and puddles amongst

the coral gardens, rocks and boulders is no doubt fascinating even if we forget thousands of gulls, terns and waders that line the beach and fish landing station.

As a crow flies the St Martin's is just over 8km from Badar Mukam — the nearest mainland point that is also the narrowest southernmost tip of the country. The mainland of Chittagong hilly area approaches the southern border through the seaside tourist resort of Cox's Bazar and in the process gets sandwiched between the Bay of Bengal and the river Naaf, that borders Myanmar (Burma). The river

is too rough for fishing activities. The women folk remain busy tending the domestic stock like the goat, poultry, duckery and also do kitchen gardening, besides household chores. There is one each of primary, secondary school and madrasa, post-office, police and border security force posts, cyclone warning centre and shelter as well as an electric generator. There is no dearth of grocery shops and tea stalls. The tea-stalls do also serve rice with sea fish, lentil and local vegetables, although the preferred curry-dish for the islanders appears to be chicken and beef and fish is usually considered as a secondary item. Interestingly, a lone tailor and a barber meet the needs of the islanders.

Other than coconut, paddy is also considered the cash crop. The green chilly, onion and water melon are being grown in monsoon when vegetables of different kinds are cultivated in both monsoon and winter. Some collect



St Martin's: Southwest coast with dune vegetation and dead coral skeletons

lime — goes on turtle-egg hunting.

The winter is the peak fishing season, that starts in October. The fishermen from the neighbouring areas bring in their catch on to the main is-

land and Bombay duck fetch good price. The fishing boats also anchor here to facilitate the boatmen gather their ration of daily necessities.

The Uttar Para runs for about two kilometres in

part at the southern end. There are two lagoons and both are regularly served by fresh sea water during the tides. So, we get a good growth of mangrove forest in these parts of the island. Of course

ended by the screw pine *pan-*

danus odoratissimus,

nishindha vitex nigra and

beach creeper ipomoea pes-

caprae. These stop the tidal

waves from hard hitting the

island. So far, no cyclonic

storm has lashed the island so

severely nor was there such a

tidal upsurge that could have

washed the whole islanders

and their domestic stock. Nev-

ertheless a strong storm during April 1994 uprooted most

of the half-a-century old trees

planted by the islanders and

the electric poles. There was,

however; very little damage to

the dwelling houses.

It is a general belief that

about a century back a dozen

or so conscripts from the

mainland of Chittagong district

took shelter on the island.

They went there by country

boat called 'sampan'. Later on

their families joined them too.

Over the years some people

from the mainland, Rohingya

Muslims from the Akyab coast

and Pakistani refugees settled

there. Almost the entire

area of the island belongs to

these people who got the

settlements from the British as

well as the subsequent govern-

ments.

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ART

He Paints Music: Ascending to Finer Heights

The formulation invented to describe and explain immigrant writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Hanif Kureishi and others might inspire one to describe him as a Japanese artist of Bangladeshi origin. Over twenty years of his stay in Japan has made him what Shamshur Rahman once in an interesting turn of phrase called 'An exile in one's motherland.' Kazi Ghiyasuddin — the first Bangladeshi who has been awarded a doctorate by the Tokyo Geidei, the most prestigious Japanese institution — has not only found famous galleries in Japan, Seibu Takanawa for example, and in Europe to display his oeuvre, but also sells well. Favourite among the internationally-famed art-dealers, a 10"x6" Ghiyas-creation fetches as much as 2000 dollars and a series of three paintings that adorn the Osaka's Omeda metro station garnered in 20 million yen. Regarded as a difficult man and mostly misunderstood, Ghiyas — whose visits to his birthplace go usually unnoticed — is never particularly fond of media attention. The following piece is a reading of a work of an artist whose lineage is traceable to Klee, Miro, Kandinsky, and who shares a somewhat common intellectual interest with his illustrious contemporary Cy Twombly. And who has developed a musical sensibility with his colours and the simplest visual stimuli, that is, his forms, which give both a sense of movement and tangible depths and eventually take one to a spiritual world.

by Ziaul Karim



Sound of Nature-2, watercolour, 1993

To listen to Ghiyas' visual music one needs to read the smallest units of Ghiyas' composition — pitch, scales, intervals, tones, and semitones, tempo, rhythm, chords and their progressions; or to use an architectural metaphor — the bricks of his musical structure and how the units take the shape of a building that can be called a sonata and the process of its adaption for full orchestra, symphony.

Now for the purpose of a visual listening, the best way would be to take a single piece or a 'microtext' that will serve as a key to the Ghiyas' esque 'macrotext'. Here we choose 'Sound of Nature-2', a watercolour painting, to encounter an audible landscape where musical elements are painted and set in an intense play to give the shape of a melodic equilibrium. But be-

fore decoding the tune encoded in the rhetorical strategies or the personal idioms of Ghiyas and the way the strategies are worked out against the influence of his precursors which Bloom calls 'the anxiety of the influence', we prefer to look into the process of reading involved to the understanding of a poetic work as presented by a French semiotician and how the process described by him, leads us to a better understanding of '...Nature-2.' To be more precise, we want to look at our selected work taking help from Riffaterre's reading process.

The first reading stage is also the level where the first interpretation takes place. It is at this stage the reader reads



Harmony in Green, watercolour, 1993

the text from beginning to the end from top to bottom of the page, and 'follows the syntactic unfolding'. During this stage-one-reading the meaning of poetry is apprehended. Riffaterre does not take the word 'meaning' in traditional sense. He reserves the term 'for the information conveyed by the text at the mimetic level'. The position of meaning is further clarified thus: 'From the standpoint of meaning the text is a string of successive information units.' But a text is one unit from the standpoint of significance and Riffaterre says 'significance is a manifestation of semiosis'.

The reader's input, at the first stage, is his linguistic competence, which includes

an assumption that language is referential — and ... words do indeed seem to relate first of all to things.' But the comprehension also includes literary competence. This competence is the 'reader's familiarity with the descriptive systems, with themes, with his society's mythologies, and above all with other texts'.

The maximal effect of retroactive reading, Riffaterre's second, comes at the end of the poem that is, when the reader is able to grasp the whole text and can compare backwards. Reading of the 'Nature-2' sets both the process of movement visual arts give more flexibility and open the text to approach from any and every side. Abstract art takes this openness to the point of infinity. And as the work con-

tinues to open it destroys the possibility of fixed meaning and in the process becomes resistant to interpretation. This resistance demands the reader's inputs as suggested by Riffaterre.

Back to the musicalological aspect, the circularity of 'Nature's' reading contributes to the melodic equilibrium. Now a journey into the work following through the network of relations, subject to a personal grammar of Ghiyas not valid beyond the compass of the given work, would reveal the musicality of the work. At first sight, the '...Nature-2' is nothing but short-winded ambiguous scribbles or child-like doodles or a blackboard half-erased, or half-marked signifying nothing. With almost insignificant doodles and lines, broken circles, dots on the verge of disappearance, Ghiyas creates a balance close to Beethoven's sonata in C minor. Very much like the classical sonata form, '...Nature-2' can be divided into three parts: exposition, development, and recapitulation. The development of the composition from

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1970 B.F.A. Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka University, Bangladesh.

1972 M.F.A. Chittagong University, Bangladesh.

1979 Master of Arts Education, Tokyo National University of Liberal Arts, Japan.

1985 Ph.D. in Fine Arts, Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, Japan.

One-man Exhibitions:
1970 East Pakistan Arts Council, Dhaka. 1977 Mochizuki Gallery, Tokyo. 1979 Mitake Gallery, Tokyo. 1980 American Club, Tokyo. 1981 Mitake Gallery, Tokyo. 1982 Marunouchi Gallery, Tokyo. 1983 Marunouchi Gallery, Tokyo. 1984 Marunouchi Gallery, Tokyo. 1985 Marunouchi Gallery, Tokyo. 1986 Miyuki Gallery, Tokyo. 1987 Oishi Gallery, Fukuoka. 1988 Shinseido Hatamaka Gallery, Tokyo. 1989 Kyobi Gallery, Tokyo. 1990 Seibu Takanawa Art Gallery, Tokyo. 1991 Dove and Love Gallery, Tokyo. 1992 Hanshin Gallery, Osaka. 1993 Hanshin Gallery, Tokyo.

Public Collection:
Bangladesh National Gallery, Dhaka. Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, Fukuoka City Art Museum, Japan. Gyuhama Building, Tokyo. Hanshin Department Store, Osaka.

like paraphrasing but after the initial stage, that is from the second, we begin to understand the significance of the poem. At this stage the whole poem is a single unit. But in first reading a poem is a series of informations or images or symbols. In painting we have the whole work before us and like poem we do not have to read it from beginning to end. So we can move freely and can enjoy painting from any distance or from any angle.

Let us see how the stages work for the reading of 'Sound of Nature-2' in particular and visual arts as such. With the watercolour, reading goes on not only in a linear or horizontal way but here the reading goes and returns from every possible way and continues to form a circular movement. What actually happens here is Riffaterre's two stages of reading becomes one or acts together from the very first experience. From the standpoint of relations, subject to a personal grammar of Ghiyas not valid beyond the compass of the given work, would reveal the musicality of the work. At first sight, the '...Nature-2' is nothing but short-winded ambiguous scribbles or child-like doodles or a blackboard half-erased, or half-marked signifying nothing. With almost insignificant doodles and lines, broken circles, dots on the verge of disappearance, Ghiyas creates a balance close to Beethoven's sonata in C minor. Very much like the classical sonata form, '...Nature-2' can be divided into three parts: exposition, development, and recapitulation. The development of the composition from