

LITERATURE

The Ballad of a Marshy Land

A Short Story by Fakiha Hug

HAFIZ put down the creel at the yard, then sat on the terrace of their hut. Laily drew it near and peered into. There were some shrimps left inside. "I have sold the rest of the catch. Water has risen up, fishes gone deep, everybody is very much worried." A tinge of anxiety was marked on Hafiz's face. It didn't bother Laily. They have to live with it, this devouring surge. Fishermen can't be changed into masons or take any other vocation just for the fear of a deluge. They are groomed in the way to be able to fish in the tumult whirlpool. It is their life, they are bound with this uncertainty and wrath of swelling water. Even they are quite content with periwinkles or seaweed as their meal in adverse condition. Still they don't want to immolate their family occupation.

Small shells. Hafiz felt like touching it. He liked her dishevelled hair too; it was like to tame an enraged river. Laily put some cooked briny fish curry beside the rice on his plate, then poured a spoonful of lentil soup on it. He asked for some green chillies. He thought himself to be lucky to have a wife like her. Just at that time his mother came from outside cursing someone. Hafiz knew this unnamed victim was none but Laily. Hafiz's mother couldn't stand her daughter-in-law as she was childless. But Hafiz didn't pay any heed. For every second reason she blamed her. Now all her venom vented in air. She lamented. "What a bad omen has come to the family! The otiose witch didn't take care properly that's why the bull ran away from the byre. This bar-

ren witch put a magic spell and made my son blind. And in this night who is going to bring it back?" Laily stood motionlessly with her head hung down. She didn't tell Hafiz, but that did not mean that she wanted to hide it from him. She thought he had come after an all-tiring day. But Hafiz got the message the other way. All his love for her vaporised in a moment. He shouted, "Why didn't you tell me?" Tears ran down the wretched girl's cheek. She intended to say all a little bit later but the obdurate man didn't have that patience. Laily acquiesce everything. Still the maenad mother-in-law shouted, "Go and get lost

you fruitless, voluptuous... Now with all such brawling, Hafiz became infuriated also. Being in the middle of the exchange of hot words, he took his mother's side and rebuked Laily. "She is right, you didn't bring any good luck..." Laily looked stunned, she cast a long glance with her watery eyes. And that night silently she left the house, nobody noticed. She was deeply hurt by his words. Wasn't it him who knew how much she craved for a child? And moreover the incident of the morning was not due to her fault. The rope was worn out and the bull was too strong for it. Deep into the night a storm started. It made Hafiz

Hafiz looked around. The omnivorous river had calmed down after devouring the whole habitat. Suddenly his eye caught the sight of a saree, tangled in a bush. Hafiz ran to the spot and leaned. It was Laily, his Laily. He stooped and embraced her. He kissed on her beautiful undone hair. Once while he first welcomed her in his life she was garnished with sweet scented sandal and now, after a long time, and even with all her muddy body and dank hair, she was no less attractive in her unusual trousseaus. She slowly opened her slumberous eyes. She couldn't believe herself. At once all her sorrows and grievances washed away, she murmured, "You have come back..." Hafiz put his hand on her mouth and said, "No it's not I, it is you, who have returned to my life. This river doesn't only take, it gives life back too."

Where had You been, Pray?

by Zulfikar Matin

On both sides I find a gloomy landscape — But out homestead, corpses piled up, Grim wee over a waste land. Not a single bird in sight. Sarees of outraged sisters here and there — This was that Bangladesh: Swept away by a Ganga of blood — Going along that gun-powder-stinky road I asked the beauty gay: During the last nine months Where had you been, pray?

The history makes a halt, Sheikh Mujib, bullet-hit, falls on the stairs, Before the astounded eyes of the voiceless people At the amorous call of the men in uniform Razakars — killers ascend the throne, Rampant everywhere terrorism, conspiracy And secret murders by dark night, Brute force of muscles steps up, Shameless flies on the milk float in palmy days, With a religious camouflage on All greedy cheats reappear in haste, The memory of '71, the sacrifice, The day-break of guerilla fighters — All, alas, prove futile. In that cruel and tedious evening of a life shut up My pensive voice asked the beauty gay: Don't you remember Where had been your nine-month stay?

Yet the country turns round, The mothers of the martyrs calls forth, Firebrands rush out of the new-age, People cannot forget the loss of their kin, Marks of atrocity are not effaced either Drifting on that high tide With a sail unfurled Again I asked the beauty gay: Just remember and say Where had been your nine-months In our hours of dismay?

Translated by Nazim Mahmood

Invitation

by Helal Kabir Chowdhury

Your sojourn to a distant land Your desire for a decent companion Doesn't calm my penchant for you

Extend my arms And shower you with sweet words, Your surprise and indifference To my approach Has not detracted me.

When are you coming to This home of yours? Holed of love, Wait for the moment For you to say 'yes' To my invitation.

Your rosy red lips And wondering eyes bewitches me with a feel unknown to all. It is you And you only.

Sniper Alley

by Shakib Ahsan

(Dedicated to the memories of the dead and the maimed of Sarajevo)

Faces from the turkish mart Fled to roadside window perch Fed to some shambles instead Starved to horrid death Because of some deadly ratio Cooked in histories of clannish desperado.

Some feel responsible to punish suddenly A horde of blatant renegades Who have a devious pedigree Of some spiteful six centuries.

Splinters of varied shapes and sizes Sift up small trustful grips That held a tin soldier Now never will hug or tuck in.

Little heads of golden braids Frolicking and never afraid A dingy gleam on those wide eyes Tell, they know when to say good byes.

A teddy bear, a woman's slipper Beret old men to hide their shame Like moors riding the roughshod Leave all they once acclaimed.

For those ripe corns and summer sky Dirtied by their honest brow Some are on crutches, some violated Some bent in half with brittle age.

Streets of tracers billow over a quarter-moon lit snowy dingle A device of a play to go on the sly With no one to blow off the whistle.

Unsleepy stares of mothers strain Over the child, coldly slain At the cost of shuddering pain Her girl has it all forgotten.

Tearing his clasp of his son Sliding past the packed up train The father holds his last stand His faith is as haughty as the gun.

Nightfall

by Samir Asaf

Let alone the green mountains, the blue sea, Now upon night's sail!

The waking eyes drawn to the music, Dance with darkness, unafraid.

Silent waters seduce a crowd of strangers Broken waves surrender to the shores, Forgotten candles under the moonlight stare; Birds sing away the perfume of embrace!

ANNIVERSARY

UK's VJ Day Commemorations

Jim Kelsey writes from London

A veterans' parade before the queen, receptions in their honour, a remembrance service at buckingham palace and fireworks on the thames are among the highlights of VJ Day Commemorations on 19/20 August that will mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the 1939-45 war. Giving details of the ceremonies, the Prime Minister, John Major, said that the two days would be a sombre affair giving thanks and paying tribute to the British and Commonwealth troops who went on fighting in the Far East after the war in Europe ended. Together with over 100 similar events organised throughout the UK, it marks the end of the government's official ceremonies remembering the end of the Second World War. The palace open air service on 19 August, where

poppies will rain down from the sky from Battle of Britain aircraft during a two minutes silence, will be followed by a march past with the Queen taking the salute on the Mall. It will be led by former prisoner-of-war Harold Payne who served in the Far East and will include thousands of veterans from all over the world. Some 104 charities who take care of the veterans and their wives will also be represented in the parade. A veterans centre will be in operation at the Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre as well as Vetlink — the highly successful computerised data base enabling old soldiers to trace their comrades. In the evening, the river thames will be the scene for a number of water and airborne events culminating in a giant firework display from Charing Cross to the Tower of London. The veterans will

be entertained at the Tower of London, aboard the royal yacht Britannia and HMS Belfast and Exeter moored in the river. On the following day church services will be held throughout the country and at war grave cemeteries throughout the Far East. The Queen will give a public address at London's horseguards' parade followed by a national two minutes silence concluding with sunset and beating the retreat ceremonies. The London commemorations will be mirrored at similar ceremonies in Edinburgh — which will be attended by the Princess Royal, Cardiff, where the Prince of Wales will preside, and Belfast. Answering questions about Japan's reluctance to make reparations to former prisoners-of-war and the countries they occupied, Mr

Major said that representations were still being made and he was hopeful that ultimately the situation would be solved 'not with a gesture but an outcome'. Although the August event sees the end of the official celebrations there will be one more before the Second World War is confined to history books. The Chamber of Shipping, which is responsible for Vetlink, is holding a British and Pacific fleet commemoration on 2/3 September in Portsmouth. It will be the chamber's final act of philanthropy in remembrance of over 1,000 ships who returned from the Far East carrying military personnel and liberated prisoners-of-war. They were too late for the British jubiliations in 1945 so the chamber has decided to pay a belated tribute to all the veterans who are still alive. — LPS



Marriages are Made in Heaven

Continued from page 9

with the wishes of the Lord, in procreation, in the glories of bringing up the children, in sanctifying natural instincts, and desires and of conducting them with good morals, of giving company, support and solace to each other in prosperity and adversity. When the minister is fully assured that the pair has assembled for marriage of their own will, he will then ask the pair to join hands and take the marriage vow. The bridegroom will say "I (name) take you (name) as my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you, and honour you all the days of my life. The bride will say "I (name) take you (name) as my husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honour you all the days of my life."

what monsters you make of them." But the quality of life between a man and a woman living together in marriage cannot be judged by these kinds of summary and pathological observations. Even great degree of similarity may not be enough to keep the joy of marriage from turning into the wintry grey of despair. And let us look at the other side. Even appalling differences may not be strong enough to wreck the bridge of harmony. This much I have learnt from reading the observation of W B Yeats, on marriage. The fundamental lesson of marriage is that, the couple would have to walk the road together. And this can be a bitterly laborious task without the understanding that the will to walk the road has to be powered by enduring love. W B Yeats observes that "A man and a woman should choose each other for life. A long life is hardly enough for a man and woman to understand each other, and to understand is to love. The man who understands one woman is qualified to understand pretty well everything."

It is common sense that the understanding that serves, rests on the basic fact that every human being is unique. Naturally, respect for this basic fact enables one to love the total person, not without the frailties and follies. Love is seen to grow well, with the steady support of trust. In the observations of most of the marriage and family counsellors, I have found that love, respect and trust are the three human elements that, in most cases, make a good marriage. Love is the assurance that the bond of marriage will not shrink. It has good prospects of growth. The common concept of love in marriage is visualised as a caring together

ness, a cheerful sharing that does not question, a hope that believes in good days. It creates a sense of well-being. Such a mental state is a favourable breeding ground of happiness. The business of daily living expects that such happiness is not merely a thing of showy celebration. It is a mental environment which sees riches in small things. Such discovery is itself enriching. An outline of this positive attitude is seen, as the resolve to walk the road together in prosperity and adversity, in sharing joy, in togetherness, in readiness to bear the burden, in an enduring hope which looks beyond oneself, and in waiting for another day. Together, the specialists observe, should have enough space where one can breathe freely and without any constraint and guilt. On the other hand, marriage without love is generally seen to degenerate into a bondage. Of course, marriage can survive without love. In quality, the survival of marriage without love is a kind of penitential servitude. It knows the fulfilment of carnal desire, but not the enriching satiety that love would have added. Such fulfilment will have the banality of the basic instinct that exists in all living creatures. Children born out of this union, without love, may only increase the irreversible nature of the penal servitude and bring a feeling of abject submission to the fate of this bondage.

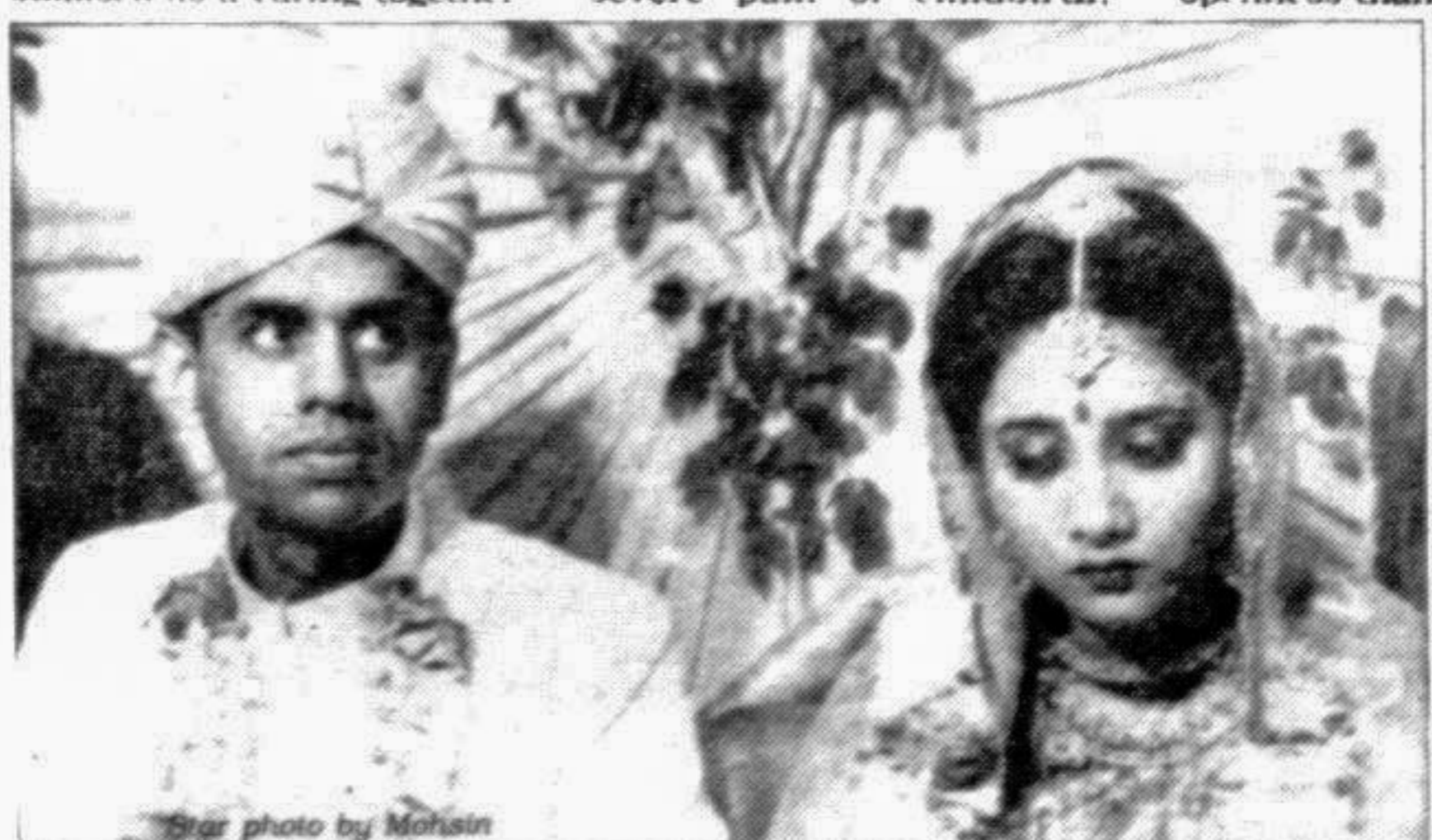
2 Religious rites sanctify marriages, celebration adds charm. But all that begins with dazzling firework may not produce a grand show. It remains a fact that, marriage is an important institution of the civilized society. The bountiful rewards of a happy marriage has found a fabulous expression in the emphatic statement that "When marriage works, nothing on earth can take its place." ("A Full Life" by Helen Gahagan Douglas). The ceremony is but the curtain-raiser in the real life play called marriage. What follows is that of the strength of interpersonal relationship between a man and a woman.

3 The counsellors are almost unanimous in agreeing that children play an important role in marriage. The arrival of babies is generally thought to be a matter of time and convenience. For the woman, in spite of the severe pain of childbirth,

motherhood brings greater satisfaction. It is a common knowledge that such an adored source of joy can, at the same time, put marriage to a stressful situation, both of the physical and emotional nature. Children, when they come, take away a greater part of the attention, particularly of the woman. Raising the child well, in theory, is a collective task. But for the mother, the task has greater dominance over her thought and labour. Obviously, the man no longer does enjoy an exclusive monopoly of the thought and the attention of the lady. The extent to which the focus of attention and thought of the lady shift to the children can become a delicate matter. It is not infrequent that the man feels ignored and ill-attended. Unless dealt with great consideration, it may deteriorate into one of the causes of marital discord. The problems of any nature involving the children are seen to put the mother into greater visible emotional distress. This puts her in a situation where the accountability of the mother becomes greater than the father. She is readily blamed for the follies of the children. It is therefore necessary, both the man and woman should tread this path carefully with discretion. The basic truth of marriage is that the man and the wife are the principal partners. Their interpersonal relationship has a greater priority, as far as the well-being of the marriage is concerned. This knowledge rightly therefore should be practiced with continuous dedication and fairness. The children will learn to treat this reality with deference. The nature of relationship between a man and a woman in marriage is such that it will have greater refreshing openness than any other rela-

tionship. Because, the involvement and intimacy is greater. Such openness allows access to the totality of the person, the private person, without the social veneer, that the outside world sees. This discovery may not meet the person the other has either expected or has known in premarital courtship. Or, more plainly, it may be a fall from the pedestal one has put the other on. The necessity of mutual respect is born out of discovery of the total person. He or she, excepting the monstrosity, should be accepted with the frailties, the eccentricities which are within the limits of civilized human conduct, along with charming qualities and dignifying virtues. The mutual respect begins there. Intelligent couples use this openness in useful adjustments, pleasing corrections, harmonious blending, for the steady growth of confidence in marriage into a source of inspiration for the flowering of talents and personalities. Trust, the other virtue, has great usefulness in marriage. It allows happiness and joy to strike firm roots. Freedom which comes with caring trust, offers the partners to be what they are. Such belief spurs the innate human nature to seek new frontiers of happiness and joy in fulfilment. The fulfilment comes with seeking diverse pleasures in engaging in hobbies and pursuits. But the freedom should be tempered with discretion, in making sure these are not outrageous in character and detrimental to the commitment which holds the marriage, the couple together. The purpose of trust in marriage is in dignifying, not scandalizing it. The lesson is very important. Love may become feigned display of affection and the mere name of easy access to the fulfilment of unfaithful desire. Mutual respect can become hypocritical civility to hide growing distance, and

an excuse for declining ardour. Trust can become a much abused licence to immoral liaisons and lowly vices. These are all possible. Unless there is an abiding commitment to the inviolability of the bond itself, and the belief that greater well-being lies in it. The commitment will surely hold love, mutual respect and trust from waning with time. Conclusions Happy marriages, be it love or arranged, are, to my mind, more matters of chance. Application may correct its course. But, it rarely can protect the marriage, from the ravages and scars, when the storm comes. A happy marriage is paradise on earth. Even the humblest of home lights up with the glow of tender cares, graceful sharing of little pleasures in grinding wants and, of course, with the hope of a better dawn tomorrow. And absence of happiness or compatibility in marriage can turn the most opulent home into an abysmal pit of hell with brutally coarse marital discord, vulgar hedonism, and black unrepented vices. The punishment savages with fury. These are the pictures of two opposite parallels. There is no charted course of either a happy or an unhappy marriage. Years of love resulting in marriage crashes into rancorous marital discord and eventual separation. Marriage, arranged after thorough scrutiny sours at the slightest pretext and starts a downhill course of regular petty feuds into bitterly irreconcilable differences. While mere infatuation of lesser period may create a fabulously happy marriage. So is the case with marriage arranged with casual observation. It can surprise everybody by turning into a wonderful marriage of two persons made for each other. Destiny has such great power. That is why people call marriages are made in heaven.



Every man and woman is of one's own kind. Similarities and differences of the pair are therefore not of absolute nature. The degree varies. Similarities are generally thought to build harmony and, differences discord. The well-being of the state of interpersonal relationship between human beings, be they men or women, is influenced by the relative dominance of these two factors. On the other hand, William Shakespeare observes in his play Hamlet that marriage is a relationship where the women reign, and that the pernicious nature of the domination turns a man into a lowly creature. Hamlet in the morbidity of his thought rambles to Ophelia: "Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough

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