

LITERATURE

Arun Mitra, poet and winner of Rabindra Puraskar and Sahitya Akademi Puraskar, is a "young man" of 86. Popular among his friends and juniors for his amiability, Arun can be aggressive and never ever hesitates to express the truth, even if unpleasant, in a point-blank manner. Most recently, in an interview, he made an explosive remark: "If aggression of Hindi continues, Bengal has to think of parting with India." Born in Jessore in 1909, Arun began his career as a journalist. He was also with the *Anandabazar Patrika* for some time. He was awarded a fellowship by the French government in 1948. Three years between 1948 and 51 he was in Paris doing research in French literature at Sorbonne. On return he joined the Department of French Literature of the Allahabad University. After serving for twenty years at Allahabad he retired from his professorial life and since 1972 has been living in Calcutta, the city he has described as his heart beat. He has translated from most of the major French poets. The list is quite impressive: Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Claudel, Jacob, Apollinaire, Eluard, Prevert, Follain, Aragon and Rene Char. A man with a cheerful disposition Arun is particularly liked by the young poets and it is they who lovingly call him "the youngest poet."

has, for its source, the contact of the writer as a human being with the world outside. This contact works in the most direct way in the case of poetry among all the literary forms. What the poet sees or feels spurs him to express himself without any prior planning or preparation. The immediacy of reaction is nowhere so active as in the creation of poetry. I am, of course, speaking here of lyrical poetry and not of epic poetry or of any poem that tells a story.

The arguments of the champions of 'pure poetry' are beyond my comprehension. Those who want to haul poetry up on the ivory tower do so, I think, in reaction to what happens around them. In other words, their poetry too has the same source of creation. Incidentally, I would refer to the experiment of the renowned French poet Stephane Mallarme. We know that, in his attempt to give a purer meaning to the words of the tribe (donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu), he did his utmost to rid words of all human emotions and create a pure world of vocables. But didn't his efforts lead to a blind alley and ultimately to his own sterility? In spite of his extraordinary talent acknowledged by all, how many readers today, ninety years after his death, are drawn to him by the magnetic pull of poetry as they are drawn to Shakespeare or to Victor Hugo, for instance?

When I look back, I find that my poetry has at no time moved in that direction, to which I would give the name "cerebral direction." I have always believed, or rather felt, that the heart, and not the head, is the real generator of poetry. My nature by itself has always shutout all positive cerebration from my poetry, at least in its initial

murmurs. This earth with all that exists in it and all that is seen and felt in and around it is the inexhaustible reservoir of poetry. Because the realities of life can never be banished from genuine poetry, human condition is, in my eyes, the foundation on which it stands. Here I must guard against the possibility of a confusion. When I speak of the relation of poetry to human condition, I do not mean political or propagandist writing. In fact I believe that no poetry worthy of being characterised as creative writing can be created on the basis of a set theory or a utilitarian formula.

Now let me come back to my poetry and illustrate my point by reading a couple of poems:

*Not Only the Rustle of the Night*

The first sea belonged to my dawn.

I folded up the dark tent and looked to where the sun rises.

On a handful of shells there was not only colour but also the leaning shadow of the mast.

There were restless foot marks on the mast.

The call of millions of voices in the surge of water echoed and re-echoed in me.

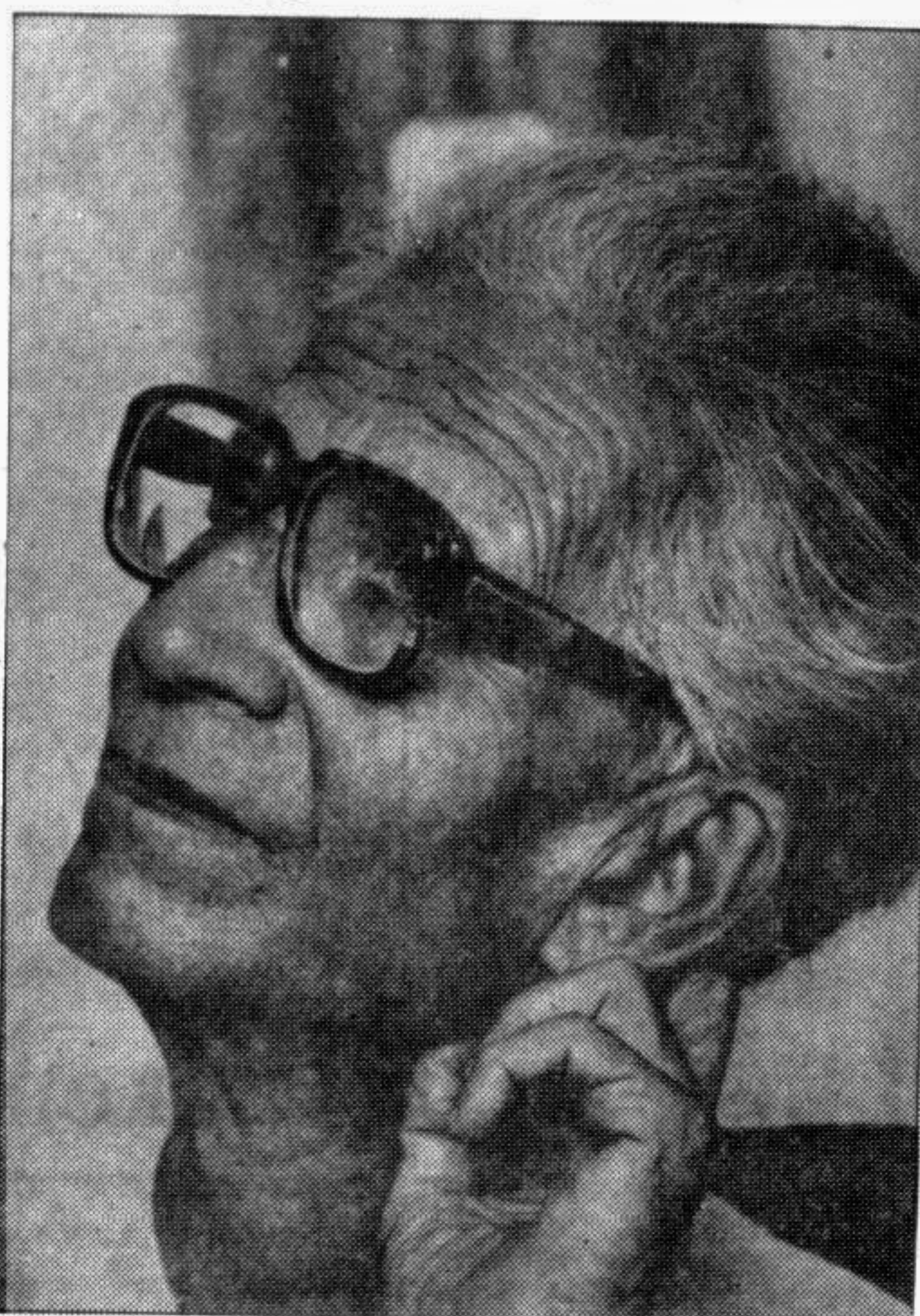
I turned round in the light of the earth

and thought of the invisible shore and of my compan-

The Quest

Arun Mitra

By arrangement with The Book Review



ions. The last sea belongs to sunset. Do the waves rolling to the horizon make all sorrows dance? The faces of my children bend over the tumultuous

water. Do I see them shaped in pain? By the side of innumerable companions, they hold together in my affection no hope ever dies there.

It is only the rustle of the night? I distinctly hear preparations going on for an early morning voyage on my last sea.

*Not Like the Wise*

Not like the wise, but speak like the blind touching. With my nerves, tissues and veins, I am on the same plain where you are. If you abandon yourself to the dusk, shutting the written words and put even one stray petal on the darkness of my skin or face, then I will certainly hear you. Not on the stage but beyond it on the ground I remain awake, sightless, in the form of an intense friendship.

Sometimes a few blades of grass bring up from the depths a wonderful possibility into the region of the senses. I know for certain that in our touch there is sunlight, there is rain. If you do not see any flow, any green, do not wait, but come near me. Let us arrange our veins and arteries over the dark fissures. Then we shall find our outlet. We shall see our words transformed into fields of corn and flowers.

It is obvious from the way I look at poetical creation that technical fireworks have very little attraction for me. That does not mean, however, that I am indifferent to the technique of writing. On the contrary, I have tried in course of my poetical career, to find newer modes of ex-

pression and have drawn more and more on common parlance, the mother of all living languages. The question of form and content is, I think, essentially irrelevant to the act of writing poetry. The writer is engaged in giving expression, as adequately as possible, to the experiences his senses and feelings have registered. Naturally, he is not in a mood to listen to theoretical debates at that moment. If he takes notice of them at all, it is only after he has finished writing the poem and who knows whether that will affect his poetical thinking and the form of his poetry before he sits down to write the next poem?

Viewed from this angle, the distinction made between verse and prose in the matter of writing poetry is also irrelevant as well as artificial. The nature of the impact which activates the creative impulse indicates, in fact, the form which the poem should take. Modern Bengali poets, like their brothers in other Indian languages, inherited traditional forms which behaved more often as captors than as liberators. In writing poetry, I started in the conventional manner, but after a time revolted against the shackles. I went over to prose form. It was either a prose broken into word-groups arranged in separate lines or a plain unbroken prose. I must mention that in this matter too Rabindranath was the great pioneer.

But this prose also seemed to me static. I moved away soon from the fixed grammatical form and began to introduce half-uttered sentences intermingled with others of that kind, as in the poem "in the later poem in my book." My mind was in revolt as it were against the finality of things. I would qualify the construction. This

kind of poems is personal. As such, it hardly lends itself to translation, as you can well imagine. Nevertheless, I am attempting a rough rendering:

*Impassable*

I have for so long moved at the same place together with the hand of the clock marking the seconds tick-tick consciously or unconsciously with the heaving of the ribs. Across the formidable road the big field the air stirred by birds and in the sky the swinging bell of the capital now touching on one end the ship where the heartwases of men and women who have launched themselves abandoning everything and then striking on the other end the hard edge of the road and ringing and within a hundred yard this groaning lane. In the jet of light up there the merry-go-round of the great city, down below the nocturnal living of the lane, dark drops fall one after another and the churning of love and hatred of sobs the supine land is soaked and turns muddy.

Although I make considerable use of prose as vehicle of my poetical expression, I am not totally averse to metrical forms. I use them still, if my expression demands them.

It is not for me to say anything about the significance, if any, of my poetry. Only the readers have the right to evaluate it. I may at most contribute a little to discussions about it. In the end, I should like to mention the heartening effect of the interest shown by the new generation in the poetry I have been writing. The young faces that gather round me when I read my poems infuse me with fresh ardour and I brace myself for going further ahead.

PROFILE

Dr. Shadani a scholar of Persian literature

BENGAL was the cradle of Persian language and literature even before the early days of the Muslim conquest. Great saints and Ulama in Sonargaon like Maulana Sharaf Al-Din Abu Tawwama and in Lucknauti like Qazi Rukn Al-Din Samarqandi produced works in Persian prose and poetry. Centuries have passed but they are still well-known for their Islamic learning and Persian scholarship. Madrasa-I Alia, Rampur in UP (India), has produced a number of scholars like Muhammed Ali Khan Athar, Maulana Imteyaz Ali Khan Arshi, Principal Abdus Salam Khan and others, who became famous throughout the sub-continent. Wejihat Husain Siddiqui better known as Dr. Andaleeb Shadani is also among those luminaries. Dr. Shadani was educated in the University of the Punjab, where he came in contact with Professor Shaikh Muhammad Iqbal. Professor Hafiz Mahmud Sherani and Maulana Syed Awlad Husain Shadan Bilgrami as his Persian teachers who were erudite scholars of Persian and quite known in and outside the country. Dr Shadani was so much attached to Shadan Bilgrami that he added Shadani to his name as a mark of respect for his

teacher. Dr. Shadani took his MOL as well as MA degree in Persian with credit in 1925 from the University of the Punjab. For some time he was private tutor to the son of the Nawab of Dojana, a small estate in the district of Rohtak in India. In 1926 he was appointed Lecturer in Persian in the Hindu College at Delhi and finally he joined the University of Dhaka as a lecturer in Persian in January 1928. In 1930 he undertook the journey to Iran in order to acquire the knowledge of Modern Persian and met there great scholars like Rasheed Yasmi, Sayeed Nafisy, Ali Akbar Dehkhuda, Habib Yaghmal and Abbas Iqbal etc. Besides he also visited Iran on different occasions in 1953, 1954 and 1966 in connection with literary conferences.

In 1931 he left for London for higher studies. He was awarded a Doctorate in Persian from the University of London in 1934, his topic being 'The Muslim Historians of India from 1205-1259.' His supervisor was Sir Denis Ross.

The general notion that he received his Ph.D. in 1933 is not correct. Actually he was awarded this degree in 1934.

a year later. Since 1928, he taught in Dhaka University till June 1969. Thus he had a pretty long record of service of about 41 years. Till his retirement he was Head of the Department of Urdu and Persian. He was elected Dean of the Faculty of Arts for consecutive three terms, i.e. for nine years which shows that he enjoyed the confidence and good wishes of the teachers of his faculty. After the extension of his service he was again appointed the Dean in his Faculty after a long gap on the basis of his seniority and experience. While in the Holy Family Hospital for a operation he was honoured by the Syndicate of the University of Dhaka with the post of Professor Emeritus in Persian but he did not survive. He expired in the hospital after his operation in July 29, 1969. The University of Dhaka lost in him a brilliant and experienced teacher as well as an able administrator and loving personality.

Dr. Shadani's taste for Persian started from Madrasa-I Alia Rampur which further developed in Lahore under the able guidance of Shadan Bilgrami a learned scholar of his age. In this short article it is difficult to

give a detailed survey of Dr. Shadani's works; a brief critical appreciation some of his work follows.

While a student, Dr. Shadani compiled in 1923 a dictionary of the words used in Modern Persian namely *Naqsh-i-Badl*. It was greatly appreciated and welcomed by scholars of Modern Persian but were unable to understand the current Iranian Language. The great lexicographer and the late editor of *Lughat Name-i Dehkhuda* (Persian Encyclopaedia), Dr. Muhammad Mo'in of Iran while giving a description of Persian lexicons compiled in the sub-continent has mentioned this book in an article.

*Rubaiyat or Taranaha-i Baba Tahir Uryan* of the 5th century which is composed in local dialect of Iran called 'Luri' or according to Bahar Khurasani (Fahlawiyat) is difficult general readers of Persian. It was edited and translated with explanation by Dr. Shadani with a learned and informative preface. Baba Tahir's verses are regarded highly in Persian Literature. Urdu translation of this book is the remarkable work of Dr. Shadani.

The rendering of *Qasaid-i Qaani*, the famous Persian Qasida-writer of Qajar period

is another work. Dr Shadani edited his *Qasaid* with the authors' life and its Urdu translation along with explanation.

*Insha-i Abul Fadl Allami* is yet another translation work of Dr. Shadani. Abul Fadl was an erudite scholar of Persian during the reign of Akbar, the Great and was well known for his command over Persian Language. Dr. Shadani rendered it in simple Urdu with a learned note and the life and style of Abul Fadl.

The only work of Dr. Shadani which has not yet seen the light of publication is 'The French Elements in Modern Persian'. It is alphabetically arranged with French words, their pronunciation and meaning in Persian. The manuscript could not be traced after Dr. Shadani's death.

There is no doubt that Dr. Shadani was a great scholar of Persian and rendered valuable services by translating and editing the classic of Persian in Urdu since his early career. He was regarded as an authority on Persian rhetoric and prosody in the Indian sub-continent. Though he was not trained in Iran yet he had wonderful command of current spoken Persian and could compose extempore Persian verses.

Professor M. Kalim taught in Rajshahi University.

17.5 pc of Bangladesh Under Water by 2100!

ABOUT 1,000 scientists from more than 70 countries have concluded after two years of study that emissions of greenhouse gases will warm Earth's temperature from 1 to 3.5 degrees Celsius and increase sea levels 15 to 95 centimetres in the next 100 years.

These findings by scientists from government, industry and environmental groups involved in the study sponsored by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are based on more precise measurements and models and are lower than the conclusions of a 1990 IPCC report, assert US scientists who worked on the current report.

"The basic finding is that tropical areas are most vulnerable" to the harm that higher temperatures and sea levels would produce in agriculture, land use and human health, Robert Watson, associate director for environment in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, said at a news briefing October 24.

If sea levels rise about 1 metre — the worst-case scenario — about 1 per cent of Egypt, 6 per cent of the Netherlands, 17.5 per cent of Bangladesh and 80 per cent of the Majuro Atoll in the Marshall Islands would be under water by the year

2100, according to the IPCC report.

Temperatures and sea levels would continue to rise after 2100 but at a slower rate as such greenhouse gases as carbon dioxide, produced by the burning of coal, oil and wood and by logging of forests, continued to accumulate in the atmosphere, the report said.

Agricultural production would probably remain high in developed countries because they have the money to increase irrigation or fertilizer use, which many lesser developed countries might not be able to do, Watson said.

In addition, some crops would have to be grown north of their present range because of higher average temperatures. Similarly, forests might disappear from much of the temperate zone where they are now and grow much farther north in Canada and Siberia.

The report does not estimate how many more people might go hungry, largely because the computer models projecting the likely changes in climate are not accurate enough yet to pinpoint how a

particular region would be affected, Watson said.

Malaria now exists in regions' housing about 40 per cent of the world's population. That number would rise to 60 per cent if temperatures increase 3.5 degrees — the worst-case scenario.

Jae Edmonds, chief of the climate change group at a Batelle Corporation laboratory, said at the briefing that current energy-efficient technology in industrialized countries could reduce greenhouse emissions 10 to 30 per cent at little or no cost.

But far more drastic measures would be needed to prevent any climate change, he said. He and others at the briefing said there would have to be an immediate 60 per cent reduction in emissions to prevent further concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, a step that would disrupt all economies in the world. The IPCC report comes in three parts. Representatives of about 60 countries met in Montreal, Canada, in mid-October and approved the part written by Working Group II, which was co-chaired by Watson and M C Zinyowera of Zimbabwe. The other parts are scheduled to be approved by governments and released later this year.

The writer is a staff writer of USIA

THE Dhaka City circle, "a creative community of painters" has just concluded an exhibition PAINTINGS '95

(Oct 29-November 16, 1995) at the Saju Art gallery. The group was formed in 1994 with Abu Taher as its president.

Other members of the group are Shamsul Islam Nizami, Golam Sarwar, Md Mohsin, Pramesh Mondol, Syed Enayet

Paintings '95

Hossain, Anwarul Huq, Rejaul Karim, Swayan Chowdhury, Birun Shome and Chandra Shekhar Dey. One of the Group's members, Golam Sarwar

died last month and the just-concluded exhibition is dedicated to his memory. The exhibition included 62 paintings by eleven members of the

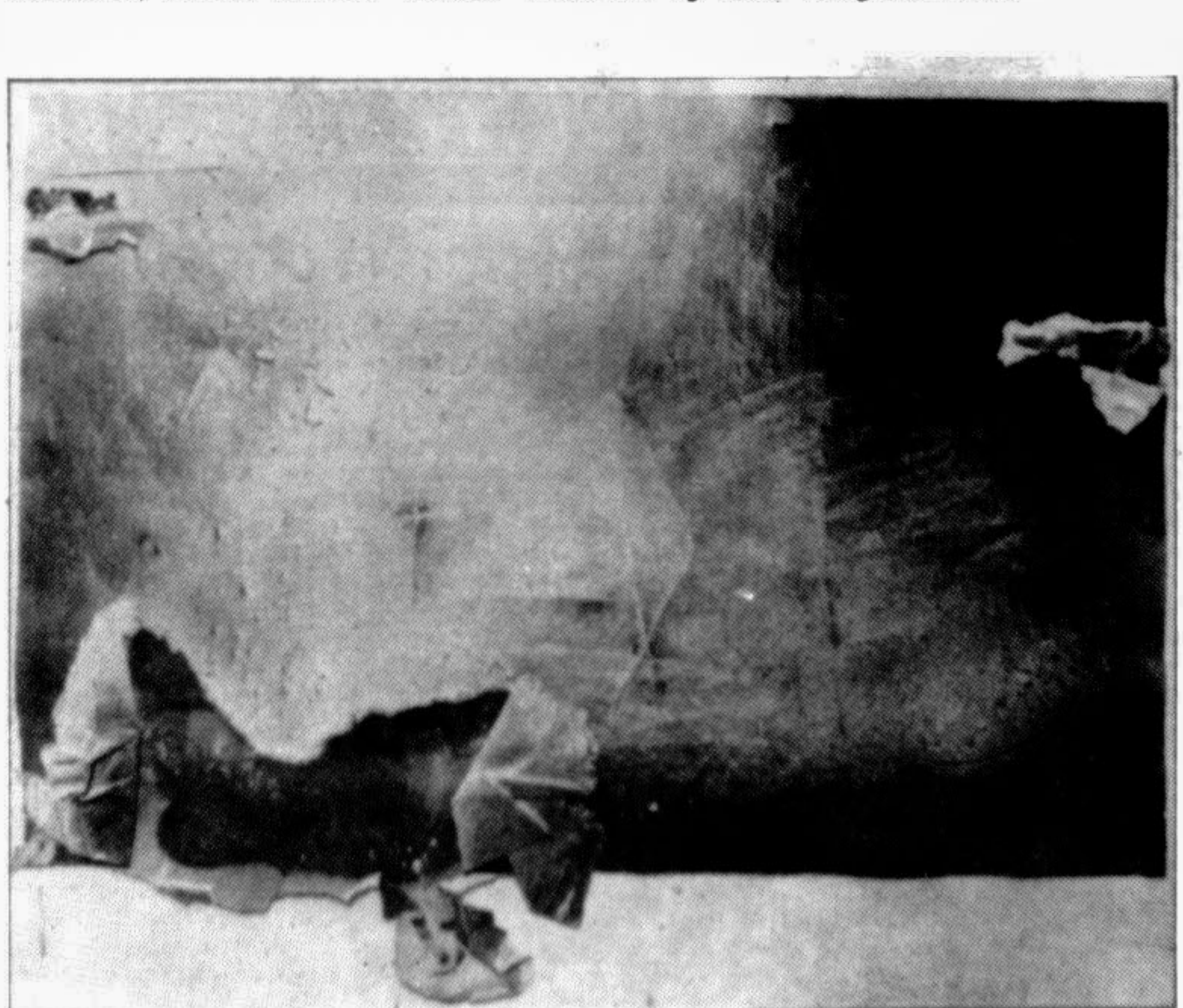
group, displaying a range and diversity in style and technique that was quite remarkable. The organisers of this show must be congratulated.



Abu Taher, Time, Oil on Canvas 46x39 cm



Mohammed Mohsin, Rhythm, Oil on Canvas 120x93 cm



Swayan Chowdhury, Nature - 5, Mixed Media 66x99 cm