

LIVING

Creating Clothes with an Artist's Touch

by Aasha Mehreen Amin



Mukti modelling her own clothes



SETTING up a clothes boutique seems to be a popular way to become financially independent for many middle-class women. While the commercial areas are flooded with these shops, even the inner lanes and roads of residential areas are filling up with boutiques usually inside somebody's house. The increasing competition has led to the birth of many amateur designers who have discovered their own talent by turning a knack into a lucrative business.

Ishrat Jahan Mukti is among the new generation of designers who have combined their artistic inclinations with good business sense. Young, energetic and always ready to experiment, Mukti designs clothes that have a distinct thumb print — hers.

Her boutique, Zest, is a small outfit in West End street, a tiny living room turned into a shop that sells mainly designer *shalwar kameez* and western-style garments. Zest's exclusivity lies in the fact that the clothes are absolute originals, created by Mukti. "I never try to copy others although I do take ideas from fashion magazines." In fact, each outfit is totally different from the other. Working with various types of material ranging from pure cottons to mixed fabrics, the clothes are enhanced by delicate embroidery, buttons, lace or shells in designs that are both contemporary and classic. A red

tunic with delicate gold embroidery may be dramatised by a long orange coat with green embroidery in the borders creating a Mughal effect, complete with churidar. Mukti uses long flouting styles in tune with present fashion trends. A long cheese cloth type *kurta* is decorated with pale cream shells and wooden buttons giving a very stylish, contemporary look. Other clothes are more simple such as the milky white cotton *shalwar kameez* with delicate embroidery on the front and heavier wall on the dupatta.

A collection of dramatically hand painted *shalwar kameez* and sarees are also part of this attractive collection. In addition, Mukti has designed a number of western outfits — trendy vests for both sexes, kilottes with jackets and ankle length dresses. Mukti emphasises that all her clothes are very wearable in Bangladesh and nothing is too outlandish or revealing to make anyone uncomfortable wearing any of her clothes.

With her artistic hand, Mukti designs everything herself. This includes drawing the outlines for embroidery choosing the colour of the threads and colour combination of the cloths, sketching the designs, hand-painting the patterns on the fabrics and even doing the cutting. This is not so unusual, considering her natural flair for drawing and painting, a knack that has ended

up in a designer clothes line rather than an art gallery. "I always wanted to go to art school," says Mukti, "but somehow that didn't happen."

Instead, with only 10,000 taka, Mukti started designing clothes, running around tailor and embroidery shops to get them done. Then after her marriage and with her father-in-law's help, Mukti bought two embroidery machines and later a few sewing machines. Thus with three permanent staff and some seasonal workers (mainly those who do embroidery), Mukti has set up a factory of sorts. Today she has the logistical support to be able to claim that she can supply garments on a large scale.

With regular shows in the best hotels of the city and a through word of mouth, Mukti has developed a sizeable clientele. Moreover, her prices are relatively reasonable between 700 taka to 1,500 taka. This is, however, she admits, quite hard to maintain with prices of material, many of which are foreign, going up everyday. She works with cotton, Swiss wool, cheese linear, mixed checks, denim etc.

Being a model herself (she appears in the Ponds television advertisement), Mukti keeps up with the trends of fashion. The present time is a very comfortable time for fashion," says Mukti, "basically everything goes. There is no fixed time frame that the styles have to

fit in; it can be the '60s style, the '70s style or a combination of both. Everything is mixed."

Age too poses no barrier, at least not for Mukti's designs. "I have something for everyone," she says, "usually," she continues, "the western clothes, such as jackets, long skirts, kulottes etc., are popular with the teenagers, the light coloured simple *shalwar kameezes* such as the white outfits with white embroidery can be worn by both young girls and even older women, many of whom are now wearing *shalwar kameez*."

Being financially independent, says Mukti, has been her greatest achievement giving her freedom and self-confidence. "Of course I couldn't have done all this without my husband and father-in-law's encouragement," adds Mukti, mother of a two-year-old son.

For the future, Mukti plans to experiment more with men's fashion. "This is something that has been very neglected in Bangladesh and men always complain that they are excluded from the fashion scene," muses Mukti.

Mukti, which appropriately means freedom, dreams about establishing herself as a designer. "I want people to know 'Zest' as a unique boutique. My objective is not just to make money but to do something really creative and different," she says. As far as creativity is concerned, Mukti says she is ready to take it to the limit.

Building Up Your Child's Confidence

by A S M Nurunnabi

PEER pressure of undesirable nature is often the mainspring of delinquencies committed by children in various ways. The present-day indiscipline and waywardness are largely attributable to the ugly side of peer pressure. Besides, children are sometimes victims of flawed standard society sets to assess the worth of children. Praise and admiration are reserved for those who have the good fortune to be blessed from birth the characteristics which we wrongly consider as highly valuable — beauty, brains and riches. Experts in child psychology view this as a vicious system. Its impact can be counterbalanced if we help young people to develop self-esteem. It may be remembered that all children are created worthy and are entitled to the right to personal respect and dignity.

A sizeable part of a child's self-concept is born from the way he thinks you see him. When a child feels convinced that he is loved and respected by his parents, a situation is created in which he is inclined to recognise his own worth as a person. Many children know they are loved by their parents, but do not believe they are regarded with high esteem by them. Parents should try to understand the individuality of their children and should not underestimate them in the presence of others.

Parents should also take time to introduce their children to good books, to fly kites and play ball with them. Another effective way to build his self-esteem is to encourage him to get involved in a hobby, volunteer work or part-time job. Parents can

help bolstering their children's sense of self if their opinion is asked and are trusted to perform tasks appropriate for their age, and treat what they think, say and do with importance. These are the building blocks of self-esteem.

It is generally observed that one characteristic of a person who has inferiority complex is that he talks about his deficiencies to all and sundry who care to listen. This creates an adverse reaction in the listener who will later treat him according to the version he has provided of his nature. Since self-criticism can become a self-defeating habit, parents should teach a "think positive" attitude to their children.

Parents should serve as a confident ally, encouraging them when they are distressed, intervening when any threat to them is overwhelming, and giving them the tools to tackle the obstacles in their path. Since an individual counterbalances weaknesses by capitalising on his strengths, it should be the job of the parents to help their children find those strengths. In this context, parents should assess a child's strength, then select a skill with the best chance of success. If the parents find they have made a mistake in this respect, then they should start again on something else. But care should be taken to ensure that no inertia intervenes to keep the parents from teaching a skill to their children.

It is an accepted principle that preparation for adult life is derived from training dur-

ing childhood. A child should be encouraged to progress on an orderly time-table, taking the level of responsibility appropriate for his age.

There are three important characteristics which distinguish those with the highest self-esteem. These are: i) the children are more loved and appreciated at home; ii) their parents set firm guide lines and iii) their homes are characterised by openness.

Keeping these considerations in mind, parents should always remember that every child is entitled to hold up his head in confidence and security.



Ruffled skirt with black lace tights. Courtesy: Elle

From Bikini to Budapest — Other Years to Remember

Nicola Cole in London

IT was an instant hit. A hundred years ago, the jerky public screenings of the world's first film, a French melodrama, in Paris, London and New York hailed the arrival of cinema.

Thanks to the Lumiere brothers' pioneering *cinematographe*, plus rival United States and British projectors, a new cultural medium was born.

The centenary will be celebrated in style, including a contest to choose the "Ten Films that Shook the World."

The "one-eyed monster" that nearly eclipsed cinema — television — is also celebrating a birthday in 1996.

On 26 January, 1926, Scottish inventor John Logie Baird demonstrated in London the first live transmission via his "televisor". Today, television's global viewing audience totals hundreds of millions. Ownership of TV sets extends from about seven per 1,000 people in Sierra Leone to about 100 in Malaysia and 470 in North America, where the small screen is watched for an average three hours per day.

By the age of 16, the typical North American has already seen an estimated 3,000 violent scenes on the "tube", and numerous sex episodes.

Capable of informing as well as shocking and entertaining, Earth's most potent medium has, along with cinema newsreels, covered most of the major political, cultural, social and sports events that will mark anniversaries in 1996.

The first of a series of US nuclear weapons tests at Bikini Atoll in the Pacific Ocean took place 50 years ago. (Local inhabitants returned after the tests, but were evacuated again after being found to have ingested the largest dose of plutonium ever monitored in any population.) Soon after the tests began, the women's bikini swimwear was born — named for its supposedly "explosive" effects.

Also in 1946 was the debut United Nations Assembly in London. Ten years later came the shameful Anglo-French invasion of the Suez Canal zone. This British-French campaign of naked colonial aggression, in collu-

sion with Israel, was abandoned after intense US pressure.

In the same year, the anti-Soviet uprising that erupted in Budapest on 23 October spread throughout Hungary, but was swiftly crushed by Soviet troops. About 3,000 patriots died in three days as they fought bare-handed against tanks. (The 80th anniversary of the tank prototype falls in 1996).

Hungary's Premier, Imre Nagy, the first communist leader to renounce one-party rule, declared the country's neutrality and sought UN help. Forcibly removed by Soviet soldiers, he was tried in secret and executed, refusing to confess his "guilt", even though this would have saved his life. He became a national hero.

It all happened a decade after Britain's Winston Churchill warned: "An iron curtain has descended across the (European) continent."

A "wind of change" was blowing, however. In 1956 alone, independent republics were proclaimed by Egypt, Sudan and Tunisia. Morocco regained independence and Pakistan became a republic within the Commonwealth.

Independence anniversary celebrations will likewise feature in Barbados, Guyana, Lesotho and Malawi during 1996, where TV cameras recorded the new flags rising 30 years ago — as well as in the Seychelles and Trinidad and Tobago, republics since 1976.

The Philippines will see double jubiliations: 1996 marks half-a-century of independence and the 10th anniversary of the "people power" rout of Ferdinand Marcos' regime. The freeing of more than 400 political prisoners was among Corazon Aquino's first acts as new president.

Alfred Nobel died 100 years ago. He had believed that humankind would "recall with horror" from further intolerance and violence once it saw the explosive power of his "safety powder" (dynamite). But the Swedish inventor died disillusioned, leaving most of his huge fortune to the funding of prizes for major contributions to peace, medicine, literature and science.

Among the people most deserving of a posthumous award would be Edward Jennings, who in 1796 de-

veloped the smallpox vaccine. The disease was eradicated 180 years later, and the world can now appreciate his contribution to medicine.

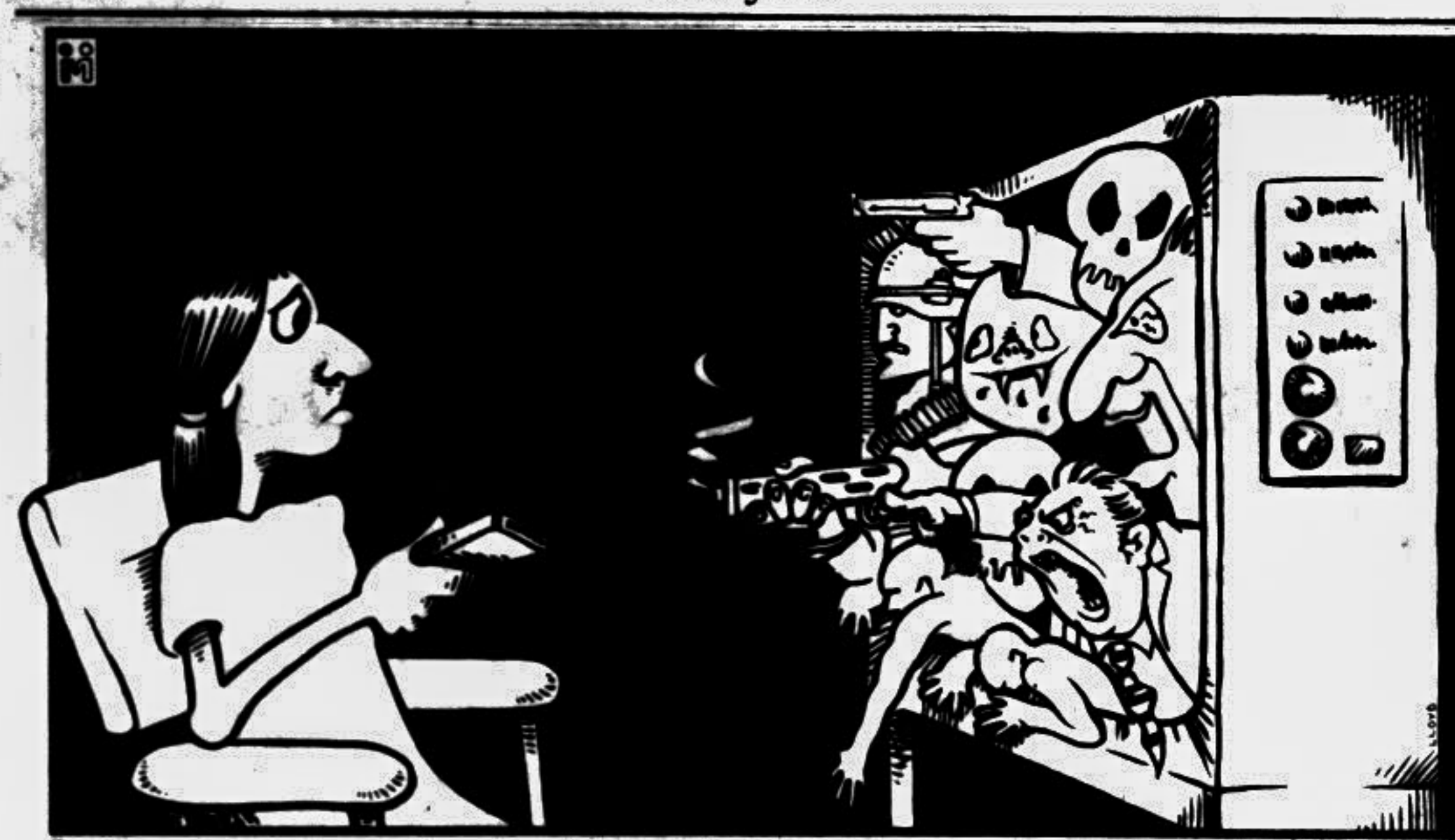
Other notables likely to be remembered this year include Friedrich Engels, the German socialist who died in 1896. He scorned working people, but co-wrote the *Communist Manifesto* with Karl Marx. The rambunctious showman "Buffalo Bill" Cody, promoter of Wild West myths, was born 150 years ago — if he came back today he would be surprised to see that native tribes' rights were back on the agenda — as was the very English author-eccentric Gilbert Keith Chesterton.

Unaccountably finding himself in a provincial town one day, he telegraphed his wife: "Am in Market Harborough. Where ought I to be?"

Chesterton, who died in 1936, would probably have agreed with the character in the play *La Ronde* who preferred the past "because it's so much more reliable than the future." Gemini News

The writer is a British freelance writer who has worked for *The Times* of London and *The Australian*.

It has been 20 years since the supersonic airliner Concorde's maiden flight, 40 years since Hungary's anti-communist revolt and 50 years since the first UN Assembly. All these and most of the other anniversaries that will be marked in 1996, reports Gemini News Service, were shown on film or TV — which also celebrate milestone birthdays this year.



By age 16, the average American has seen an estimated 3,000 violent scenes on TV

COOKERY

Cheesy Hearts

1 cup grated cooking cheese
5 hard-boiled eggs
1 1/2 cups baked and mashed potatoes
1 tsp ginger and chili paste
salt and pepper to taste
1 1/2 cups dried bread crumbs
2 eggs
fat for shallow frying

Method: Grate the eggs on the thin side of the grate and combine with the cheese, potatoes, ginger-chilli paste and seasoning. Check the seasoning. Powder the bread crumbs. Beat the eggs well with a teaspoon of water and a pinch of salt in it. Form heart-shaped cutlets with the hand or with a heart-mould. Dip in egg and coat with crumbs allow to dry for ten minutes and then shallow fry till golden.

Cheese Smorgos

12 slices bread
3 tbsp butter
3 4 tsp prepared mustard
salt to taste
four No. 25 gr cubes cheese
12 walnut halves

Method: Remove crust from bread slices. Grate the cheese on thick side of grater. Make a paste of butter, mustard and salt. Toast one side of each slice and apply paste on the untoasted side only. Top with grated cheese to fully cover the butter layer and keep a walnut half (flat side down) right in the middle and grill till cheese melts and is heated through.

Cheese and Fish Wheels

225 gr flour
55 gr frozen butter
60 gr grated cheese
125 gr tinned fish
3 level tsp white sauce
salt to taste

Method: Sift the flour and salt together. Grate in the frozen butter and make it sandy with the finger tips. Add grated cheese and mix with the finger tips. Sprinkle cold water on top and make a soft (not sticky) dough. Roll out into 30 x 18cm rectangle on a floured board and trim the edges. Drain the oil from

Noise

by Nico den Tuinder

VINCENT van Gogh, my famous painting compatriot, once cut off one of his ears. He must have hated noise: why did he not stick out his eye, or shorten his nose? If he had lived in Dhaka now, he would have cut off both ears. The city is just a nightmare for my ears.

When I first came to Bangladesh, I stayed in one of the five-star hotels. It was, and still is, a good sound-show introduction to the country. In the lobby the pianist rattled her instrument. At the poolside waiters drove trolleys with shaky and noisy glasses. At night the doorman used to shout "Driver Farhad!" to the nearby parking lot, keeping me awake for hours. The Bangladeshi way of providing a comfortable stay at more than 100 USD per day.

I feel sorry for the Bangladeshis who have to work in Motijheel. The morning, beeping, whistling, and drumming traffic always make conversations virtually impossible. Whenever there is a meeting of some sort, the whole street is decorated

Toasted Cheese Logs

1 small white loaf
100 gr cooking cheese
4 tsp butter
pepper and salt to taste

Method: Slice the bread lengthwise into thin slices and remove crusts. Use a very sharp knife. Grate the cheese into the butter and add seasoning to taste. Mix well into a paste. Lay each rectangular slice on damp cloth and spread the paste on one side each. Roll as tightly as possible and secure with a toothpick each. Brush each roll with melted butter and bake in a hot oven till crisp and golden brown.

Serve hot.

Nutty Fingers

2-1 2 tsp butter
2-1 2 tsp flour
1-3/4 cups milk
4 cubes cheese (grated)
1 tsp finely chopped onions
3 tsp chopped peanuts
salt and chili powder to taste
1-1/2 cups dried bread crumbs
oil for shallow frying

Method: Make white sauce with the first three ingredients, cool a little and add the next four ingredients. Mix well and spread the mixture on a greased flat tray. Allow to cool till set. Cut into fingers. Roll in crumbs and shallow fry till golden brown. Serve hot.

with loudspeakers, blaring the whole day. There is hardly a sound-proof room in my office; if there is, air-conditioners overrule man.

The attack on my nerves does not stop at home. Quite recently building works started next to my house, and in the usual manner, materials are dumped as if they were bags of feather. Only, they are iron plates and we are talking about heights in metres. I had to instruct my staff not to put down glasses with a bang, lift things instead of dragging it with a shriek, and not to shout while arguing. Is Bangladesh deaf?

Even in an ordinary difference of opinion, voices are raised quickly. Televisions and radios in Dhaka seem to have only two levels: loud and very loud.

My company is paying me some extra money on top of my salary as a compensation for the discomforts of working over here. I think it should add ear plugs, loudspeakers and throat-soothers to the pay package.

