



poem

The Warrant

by Nirmalendu Gun

It was noon when I reached home. The sun was shining all around, and the shadow of my body, after the long walk, became the shadowless shape of a straight line.

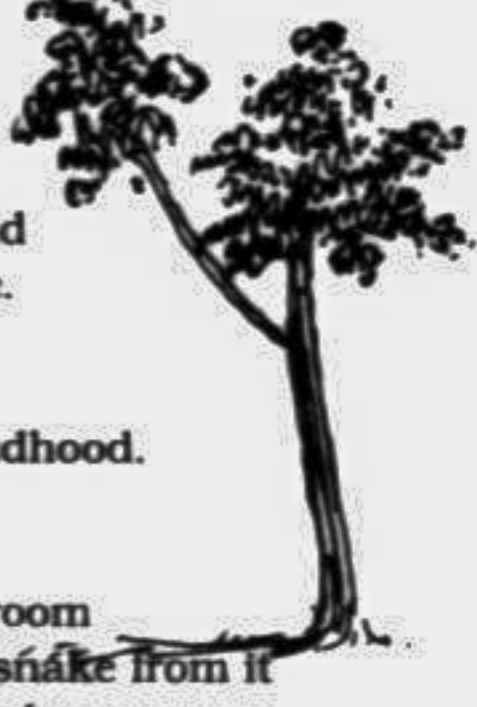


Nobody could recognise me. I asked somebody for a matchstick to light my cigarette in the train, and someone at the 'mohokuma' station tried to grab me, while someone else put a grip on my shoulder and shouted. I merely reminded all of them about the resemblance in human faces.

Nobody could recognise me, none, even the political leader, once a communist, who kept watching me from a distance, could not tell who I was.

After getting down at Barhatta, my home station, I sat in Rafiz's stall for a cup of tea. A wonder it was that Rafiz even couldn't know me while he came to pour some more sugar in my tea for the second time. After long five years I am returning to my unchanging village — Through the same uneven path on that same black borderland beside the paddy-field — after how long a time am I returning to my village.

It was noon when I reached home. The sun was shining all around, and the wind was drifting eloquently, and much change had there been to the house. From the tinned roof to the pond-water from the garden-flower to the cowshed nowhere did I see any sign left of my childhood.



There was a 'belli-plant' near the study-room stooping, suddenly the slick tongue of a snake from it stuck out at the hot noon; and around the house grew, like spontaneous growth of unkempt beard, grass, bush, holes and the deep forest of weed, as if everywhere wild nature was adamant to taunt and rule civility.

A fox was almost lying beside a dog, seeing me one of them took to its heels at once, while the other tried to recognise me snuffing the smell out of me. the way the police and the checker at Tejgaon did to identify me.

As I was looking around, I came suddenly across a tree, the Ashok tree, fatally damaged in the storm of '92, how too much shade did it offer once; easily could two humans hide in its shade; once, the whole night, in the name of love, we two hid under its shelter.

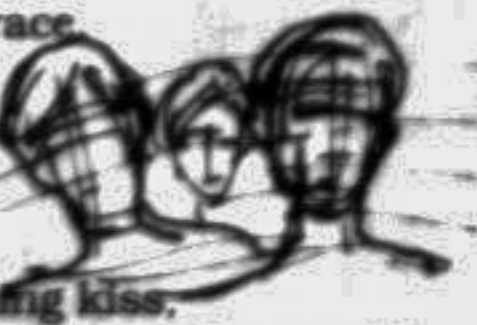


That girl, Basanti, oh that Basanti, she was now in Bihar, raising four children by her bandit-husband.

A tinkling sound was heard from the fish in the pond, and again did the snake stick its tongue, and toward the west flew an aeroplane — shaking the sleepy, placid, foolish village.

From the rear of the house I gave a loud knock on the door, which opened — Ma. For so many days the door which had not opened for so many days the door which had not responded to any human voice, that rusty door now just flushed open with a big noise in a moment.

I, who had foiled the attempts of the sleuths many times, that I in the midday sun of Chaitra became most easily a prisoner to an embrace that I holding Ma eye to eye, turned immediately into a wanton child.

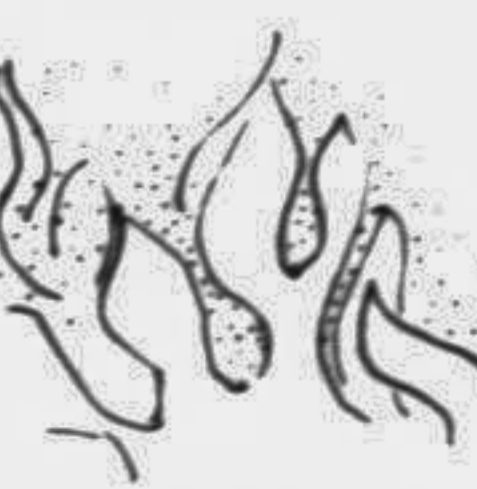


I remained submerged in one single weeping kiss, while Ma trod the whole path in the jungle over to the pond to wash the rice, and I looked inside the house, the old picture of the god, Ganesh, in between the rooms was replaced by Lenin, and I found also on Father's desk volumes of Marx beside the book of accounts, while a torn picture of Skrupskaya covered a broken patch in the glass of the show-case. Ma was returning from the pond, and Father would return from the town in the evening, crumpled as usual under the family burden.

My cousin's wife would come to visit me from the house of the Sens, would request me to marry again.



Hearing of my return would come from Jasomadhav NAP worker Yasin, covering a distance of three miles in rain would walk from Rasulpur Aditya.



And so would Abbas from Amtala at the dead of night with deadly weapons. Everyone will ask news about Dhaka, or about our future or where was Ayub Khan or did Sheikh Mujib do any mistake? How long would they keep the warrant of arrest against me? I wouldn't say anything, I would only look into their eyes the many several futures of the Bengal. Anxiety in their eyes would precipitate pitch dark nights, and I, wiping my voice clear of the tortuous sense of failure, will speak out: I don't know anything about all this I don't understand anything about all this.

Translated by Mohit Ull Alam

fiction

An Island Evening

by Yuwa Hedrick-Wong

Continued from the last week. FRANCIS BANTERED with Lila in a jovial teasing way. Lila reacted as if she were appeasing a troublesome and persistent child. She took Francis' hand from her fleshy buttock, put it firmly on the table and said to him, "Now I will go and get you your wine." Francis smiled at Alex then watched Lila as she walked away. "Lila was eight when I first met her. I converted her whole family. I was once a church minister, you know. What a lovely child she was." He paused, and as an after thought, added, "And quite her own woman now."

An Australian wine, very well chilled, was served by a waiter. There was no ice bucket; the bottle just stood on the table sweating beads of cold water. Lila, it seemed, had disappeared. Francis raised his glass to Alex. "Cheers, and I hope you had a good visit here."

Then he drank deeply. The sea reflected the slanting light of the setting sun in jumping, glimmering sparkles so bright they hurt Alex's eyes. The shadowy islands had darkened into a deep mauve.

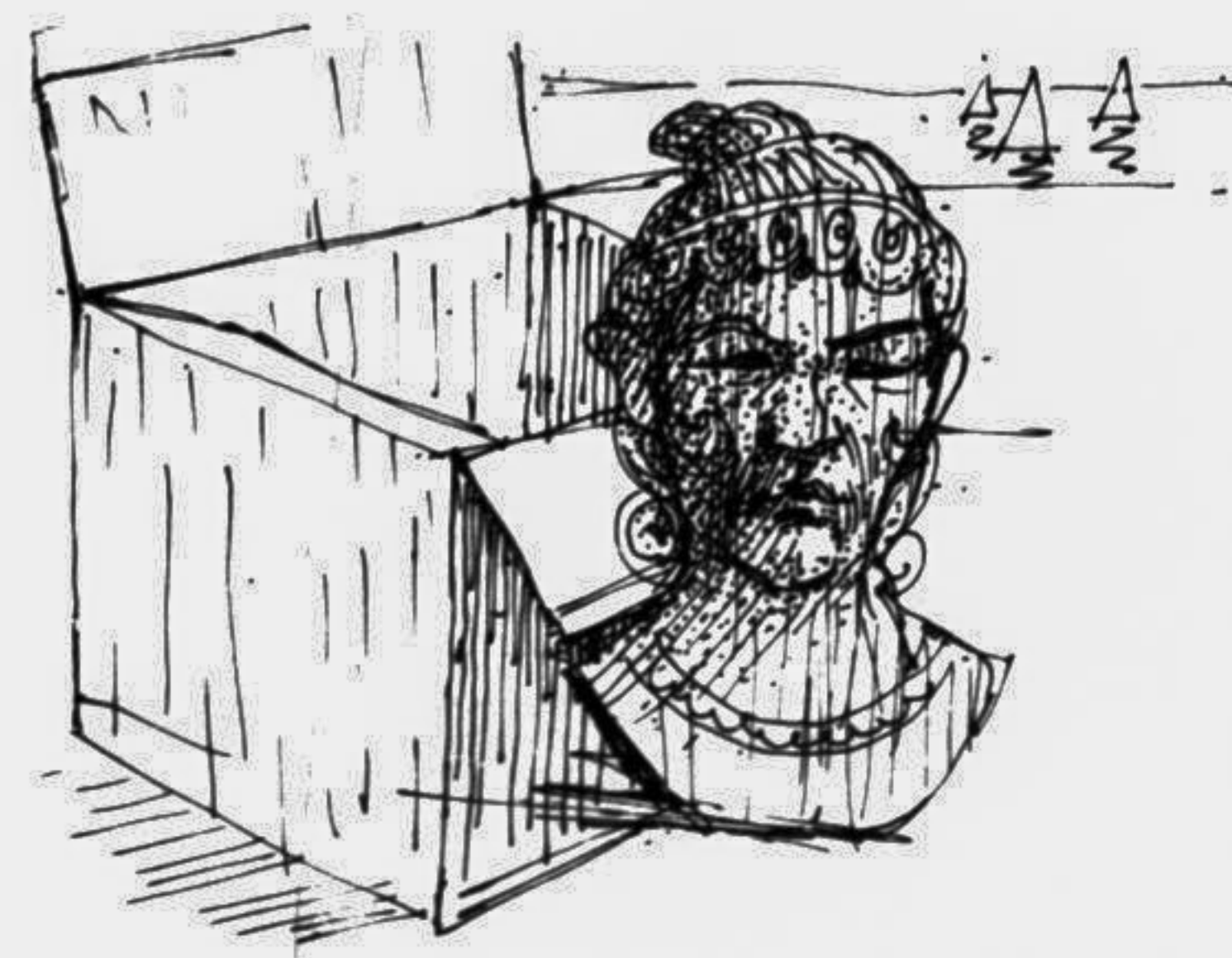
Francis waved his hand across the window and said: "Alex my young friend. I used to think of all this as beautiful. Now I increasingly think of it as a kind of desolation."

"Desolation?" Alex asked.

"Strange, is it not?" Francis said. "I don't usually burden visitors so unceremoniously with my private thoughts. But I thought you would understand."

Shafts of sunlight slipped through the awning of the thatched-roof and dappled Francis' thin dark face with circles of dancing light. His dark brown eyes seemed watery and a different light shone from them.

"My father converted to



Christianity when I was eight. A year later my younger brother was born. He was named transform as a memorial of my father's conversion. We do things like that, we islanders.

"As a young lad I was full of enthusiasm about new things. By that I mean

things from the west, things European. I was the top student in my mission school. I was singled out for attention. I suppose, because of my enthusiasm as well as my family. My father, you see, was one of the very important high chiefs and his conversion was what made

the mission school possible. It was from my mission school teachers that I learned about beauty. I learned that the islands and what surrounds them are beautiful. It was a rather novel concept to me, nature as beautiful, I mean."

Alex heard noises behind him. Turning around, he saw more guests arriving. Groups of Australians, and a large crowd of Japanese.

Francis took another drink and continued. "As a young child I knew only lovely things and awful things. But my mission teachers taught me about beautiful things. Beautiful things are beautiful because God made it so. What is beautiful and what is divine are one and the same. And you cannot understand this kind of beauty without knowing at the same time ugliness. And, knowing ugliness, sinfulness. You told me that you are agnostic. Is all these too abstruse for

you?" Before Alex could answer, Francis continued. "I am telling you this because I may have to share some of the past with you tonight, if Eddie is to do what he said he would do."

"Eddie" was Sir Edward Kenilorea, a prominent figure is Solomon Island's independence, and now Solomon Island's senior statesman. In fact, it was Sir Edward who met with Alex when he first arrived from Canada a week ago for business meetings, and who introduced him to Francis and then to David Hughes, a banker who reputedly ran the country's financial affairs. It was Francis' idea that they take Alex out for a farewell dinner before he left for Fiji the next day for another round of meetings with government officials for the purpose of coordinating foreign aid to the South Pacific island states.

To be continued

books

Poems for a Rainy Day

Politics by Asif Azam Siddiqi Joy Publisher: Mrs Najma Siddiqi Pages: 32, Price: Tk 75

by Arifa Ghani

ASIF AZAM SIDDIQI Joy (b.1966) is a new name in the world of poets. His recently published book of poems, Politics, is an attempt to establish himself in the comparatively rare position of a Bangladeshi writing English poetry. The book, published by Mrs Najma Siddiqi, is priced at Taka seventy-five and has a cover design by Najil Tarek. The cover provides the first hint of things to come as it features the figure of a man in black and white, apparently in terrible anguish, on a mauve background.

One opens to the first page and is met by God. This is a poem where the poet expresses his desire for a perfect but unattainable world. A certain cynicism pervades this poem as it does many others, like Next Revolution

Please, Rainbow Cemetery Freeway, and Some Grand Departure. These poems all express a yearning for a perfection which eludes the poet's grasp, and indeed, all humanity's. Beneath the cynicism, however, one can detect a note of self-portraiture when he speaks of "(I) his poor boy on the street, he has no place to be."

Asif, as one learns from the back cover, has spent a large part of his life outside his motherland which perhaps, explains his feeling of homelessness. The expatriates voice can be heard in Dice of Truth and Circle the Statue. The patriot in him bursts out in anger, in Dancing in the Graveyard, at our disregard for the sacrifices our people made for independence. The use of such images as "summer lace", "parking lot" and "snow", however, betray his western upbringing and that, despite his love for home, he has been unable to curb western influences.

The poem Politics, after which the book in named, appears on the last page. This poem expresses the poet's dislike of hypocrisy, pretentiousness and false values, though he has expressed similar opinions better in I'm Not Your Brother and Deserve to Die. Personally, I feel that the book has been misnamed as the title misleads. When I was given this book to review, I felt slightly irritated as politics does not interest me much. It was only after I looked between the covers did I discover a book, not of politics, but of poetry.

Quite a number of the poems speak of love as would be expected from any poet of Asif's age but they all describe a lost love. Rejection, dejection and loss form the basis of such poems as Anniversary, Love is, The Coloured Circle and A Graveyard Day. But I was truly surprised to see no embitterment in the person who gives a first impression

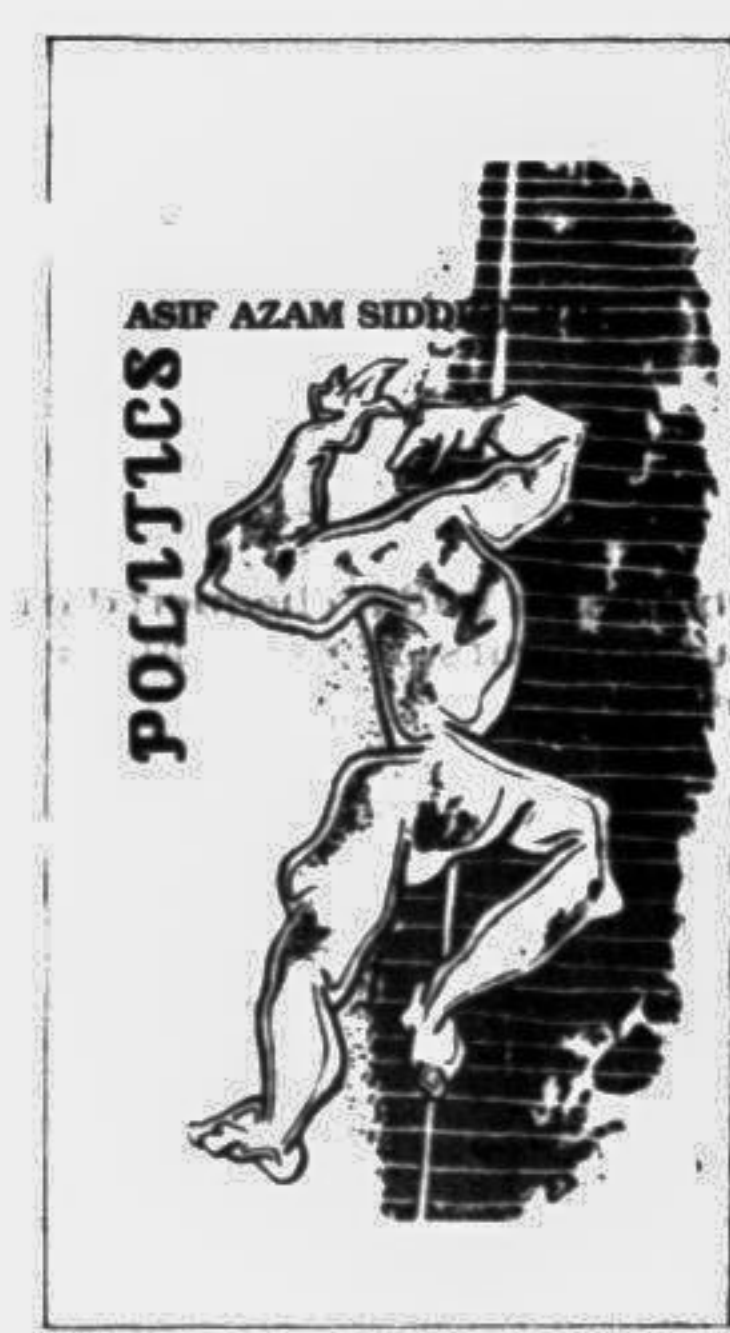
of being quite cynical. There are, however, also such poems as Hope End Path which offer the light of hope through love at the end of an apparently desolate path.

Each of Asif's poems has a lyrical quality, enhanced by repetitions of words, lines, and sometimes, even stanzas. One particularly lyrical poem is Her Soft Death Elliptique which, again, is a poem about rejected love. The poet describes his love thus: "On Halloween, she's Cleopatra, she dresses up in coins. On Halloween, she's Cleopatra, she's no ancient drawing". In Love is, small words, joined by hypens, and coupled with a repetition, provide not just lyricism but a summary of the poet's entire experience: "Empty-big-chasm-hollow/Empty-big-chasm-hollow".

Like a typical modern poet, Siddiqi refuses to punctuate his text. One line merges with the other in a stream of consciousness and

it may at times become difficult for the reader to keep track of the direction in which the poet is taking him/her. Despite the poet's modernity, however, the quality of editing is not up to the mark. Spacing between any two poems is not enough to distinguish between them, especially if one is browsing through. There are also some obvious grammatical errors, as in God, where the tenses are mixed up. There are also many printing mistakes.

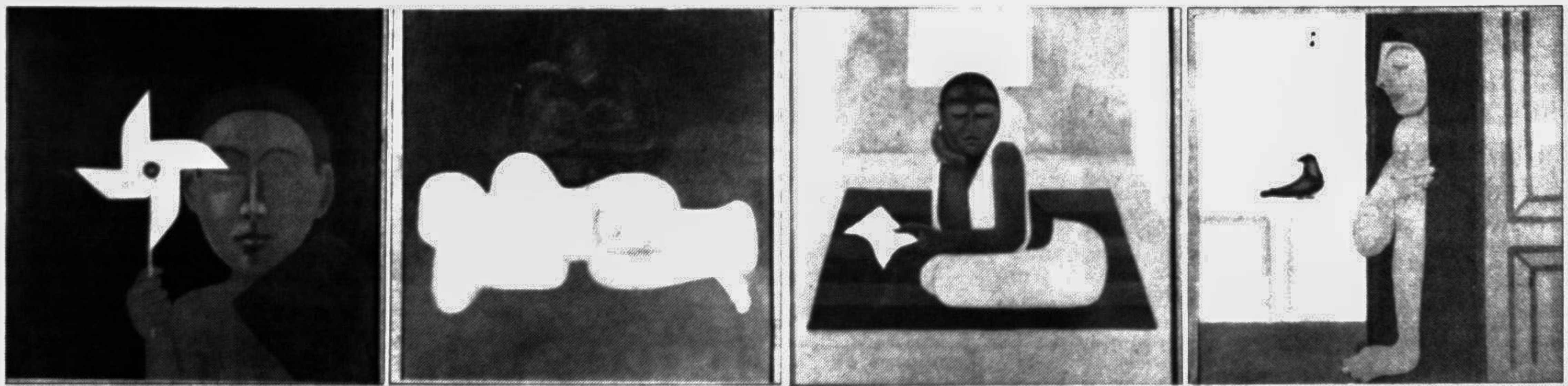
Politics contains a total of twenty-seven poems. Each poem is marked by a simplicity of language, poignant feeling and lyricism, with a tinge of cynicism at some points. Also, as Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui says in the foreword, "His verses move lightly, often trippingly, and are marked by a refreshing colloquialism". In short, this slim edition provides a temporary respite from the tensions of every-



day life if one disregards the cynicism, the printing errors and the high price.

About the writer: Arifa Ghani is lecturer in English at Jahangirnagar University.

exhibition



Search for Whole in Fragments

by Fayza Haq

ABDUL MUQTADIR, who recently held a solo exhibition at La Gaabout his works. "All my works are untitled. I have not based them on any subject. I consider my works only to be situations. In fact, I have tried to paint light, or I should say, situations of light. Light is reflected from visible objects in different quantities, amounts and values to my sight. The image thus obtained is then compared with my previous experience and the visible objects are identified. Muqtadir continues, "This light comes to my eyes in the form of colours — seven colours of the visible spectrum of light as energy

form. I presume I can draw the inference from this that I am, in fact, seeing light — not the visible objects. "Thus, if I consider all visible objects situations of light, I can very well say that I am viewing the visibly fragmented forms of the absolute energy of light. I perceive this through the influence of various proportions — proportions among various wave-lengths of different colours in all their available quantities, amounts, frequencies, intensity and value. Muqtadir adds, "These proportions are expressed essentially in terms of countable mathematical figures. I consider all such

figures as multiples of "one". So, now I can perceive all proportions with reference to "one". — the fragmented colour forms with reference to the original indivisible and invisible every form of light.

"In my canvases I have chosen the easily recognisable situations as structural support around which to juxtapose the two opposites — visible fragmented colour forms of light and the invisible, omnipresent and indivisible energy form of light. The resulting experience is a perception of an all pervading entity — beyond the pigments, beyond the elements — at once sublime, pulsating and thought pro-

voking".

Muqtadir continues, "During the formative years as a student of arts I was lucky to have extraordinary teachers who taught me how to see, how to observe, how to take note of the point of reference — how to feel the presence of the visually invisible references, how to avoid the distracting influences of the emotions, how and why not to try and force oneself to attain things and skills at the wrong and inappropriate juncture of time. One of my teachers taught me that there is no substitute for determination, hard work and patience in attaining excellence."

In one of the paintings Muqtadir presents a side view of a woman, appearing almost like a geometrical pattern — the blue rectangle of the sky, the grass, the door, the balcony, and the black crow match and complete the motif.

The beauty of the simplicity of rural life is delineated in the painting. A barely clad village boy with a paper twirling toy and a kite is seen in another dramatic scene. A woman kneeling down and pondering over a letter is the theme of another creation. One is amazed at the apparent simplicity of the strokes and the purity of the colours used. The artist's depiction

of a boat is also remarkable for its fresh and uncomplicated approach subtle variations of beige and brown, touched with green and blue complete a countryside depiction of the riverside.

Some of the artist's works are realistic while some semi-realistic. He blends his theme with portrayal of human and other animate beings. Although the paintings bear no titles, the theme is communicated and the viewer is allowed freedom of thought.

Muqtadir graduated from the College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka in '60 and is today one of the country's successful commercial artist.