



fiction

S/he

by Ahmed Ahsanuzzaman

"CAME. DID NOT FIND YOU. Will come tomorrow. Stay home."

That was all. There was nothing more on the chit. This is the third day in a row that Abhijit has found the same message left at his residence in his absence. The handwriting seems to be of one person. Although Abhijit was convinced that it was the same person looking for him not once, but thrice, he just could not track who it could be.

Abhijit searched exhaustively among his memories to unravel the identity of the mysterious, mistrusted stranger. He does not have any one (he never had any) who may come to his place on three successive days just to meet him. Since his childhood Abhijit (note that he does not have a surname) has grown up on others' mercy. Someone put him into an orphanage when he was only six. Perhaps that man was moved to pity by the sight of a naked child begging on the street. It has been a long time since then. Abhijit never met that gentleman again. He has forgotten his name which perhaps can be tracked in the register of the orphanage. Abhijit struggles to

imagine that it could be that person after all these years, and that too three times in three days! No way.

Abhijit does not have savoury memories even of his school and college days. Somehow they all knew that he did not have any identity. Everybody ignored him. One day he was late in the school, and the teacher for English ticked him off like anything. But the teacher did not say anything to Roy who too turned up late; rather he was welcomed in.

So Abhijit has all along been lonely. He now enjoys loneliness. It is company or chaos which he now detests most. He avoids them with studied care. He is yet to introduce himself to his roommate with whom he has been residing for two years in this congested mess at Fakirerpool. The man is a lowly bank clerk. Abhijit works as a night-guard of a Bangla daily newspaper office. His salary, — twelve hundred per month — needless to say, is irregular. To make up for the scantiness of an irregular pay, he sells nuts and almonds at the park in the afternoon. Abhijit does not find it difficult to maintain himself with his



income. He does not have any complaint.

But these chits have created stir in his otherwise quiet life. Who might have come to see him? Could it be Antara? He studied with her in college. They were never that close. However, it is true that she was the only person who did not hate him. He could see dreams of

a bright future in her cool, caring eyes. But that was that. It never went beyond that. That must be fifteen or sixteen years ago.

Never met her after leaving the college. It was improbable that she would come after so many years. And not one day, but on three days in a row!

Abhijit was sure that there was none

who could come to see him or leave three chits having failed to meet. But he could not discard the thought that someone came. Someone definitely came, but who was s/he?

After prolonged argument with himself, Abhijit arrived at a decision: he has to meet the mysterious person. He tallied out that the time of the person's arrival must be between afternoon and night. Abhijit hoped that s/he would stick to the pattern. He decided not to go out of his room at all. Probably he will be fired if he does not attend to his night duty. With his ability he could not fancy the prospect of another job right away. In that case he will have to fully switch to his part-time role as a nut-vendor. Even then he has to meet.

It is barely afternoon and Abhijit is absolutely tense. The bank clerk has gone home on weekly holiday. He is completely alone. Ideal atmosphere to meet the mysterious person. Abhijit starts taking preparations. It has been rather ritualistic. He has bought four packets of cigarettes along with refreshments for the expected guest. Not even the betel-leaf has slipped from the

list.

Wait has been Abhijit's fate since then. It's already eight. He has been lighting up cigarettes one after another. Twice he has cleared the ash-tray. At one stage he takes up the poetical works of Jibananda Das, his favourite poet. A particular poem, 'Bodh' is his favourite. He has already read it several times. Then he reads all the poems over and over.

It's twelve now. Yet there is no trace of the stranger. Has anyone played cruel joke with him? But someone has to be there even for jokes. Who is that s/he? Abhijit keeps waiting.

Abhijit has been dozing when somebody knocks at the door. It's clear. Once. Twice. Pause. Thrice. Then it goes again. Abhijit is sure. The stranger has finally come although it is four o'clock in the morning. He gets up, opens the door with the great expectation of meeting the stranger. No one is there. A quiet emptiness greets him. It's the only truth. Nothing else is there.

About the writer: Ahmed Ahsanuzzaman teaches English at the Narsinghdi Govt College, Narsinghdi.

exhibition

Crucible of Coloured Emotions

by Fayza Haq

DEBDAS CHAKRABORTY WAS sitting at the Shilpakala Academy where he recently had an exhibition of 46 paintings and 16 drawings. I say to him "You are appearing before the public after a fairly long time. How do you feel about it?" Debdas replies vehemently, "I paint every day for three to four hours apart from listening to music regularly. I have exhibited at La Galerie a year back. I am not suddenly coming back to painting. It's my daily schedule."

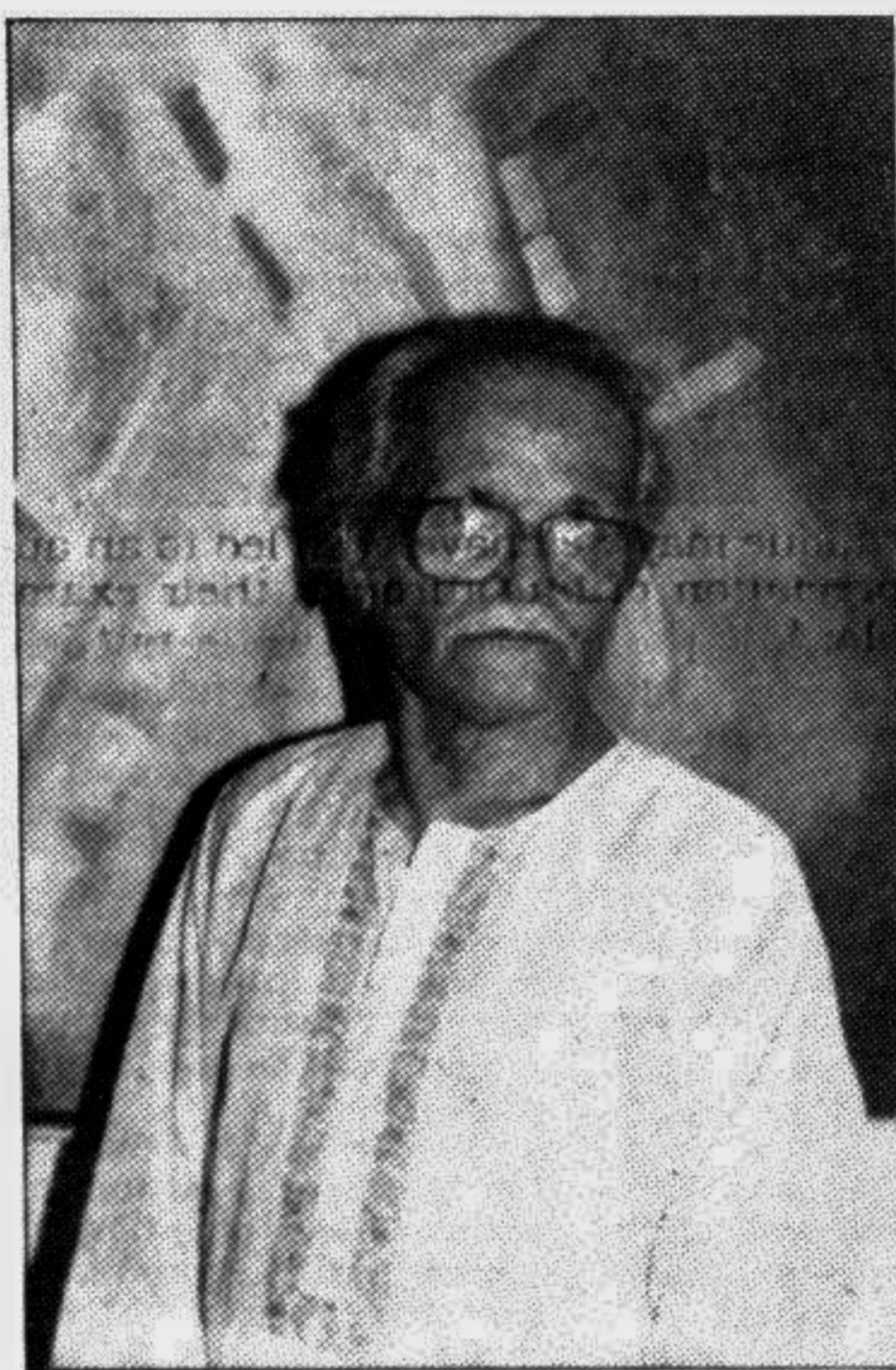
"I paint because I feel encouragement within myself. Painting delights me and fills me with satisfaction. I am 66 today. I have been painting for decades now," he adds.

Asked if he felt that there was a difference between the artists of his youth and the present day ones, he replies, "In our time we faced a lot of difficulties. We could get our pigments and canvases with a lot of problem. These days the atmosphere is very much in favour of the artists. Today there are art exhibitions every week and there are numerous art galleries to encourage them. Artists today are taking part in many more overseas exhibition."

Asked to talk about his contemporaries, he says, "There was Aminul Islam Quayyum Chowdhury, Murtaza Basir, and Rashid Chowdhury. They all went into semi-abstract on the whole. They all had a good calibre."

Speaking about his style Debdas said, "Form is changing with age. What you see today is semi-abstract."

Dwelling on his own feelings about painting Debdas says, "I cannot live without painting. This is not a means of



Devdas Chakraborty

earning for me, nor is it a form of luxury. I have the urge within me to create with paints. It is this strong desire within me that leads me to painting."

"Things are easier today for artists as there are many more artists to give you competition and many more connoisseurs of art to egg you on," he adds.

Talking about inspiration, Debdas says, "It comes from many things in nature around me such as the sound and form of the rain. The other, subject dear to me are 'time and space' and 'time and movement'. It is the duty of the painter to beautify the space that he sees around

him. Colour, form and drawings come into this sphere. It can be realistic or abstract. I have personally given up realism as it does not give me pleasure any more."

"Along with painting I sing. It is a tradition in Hindu families to train girls for singing so that they may be more desirable in the marriage market. This was there in our family. Hearing the girls sing we took to singing too. This gives me great satisfaction and I relax too," he adds.

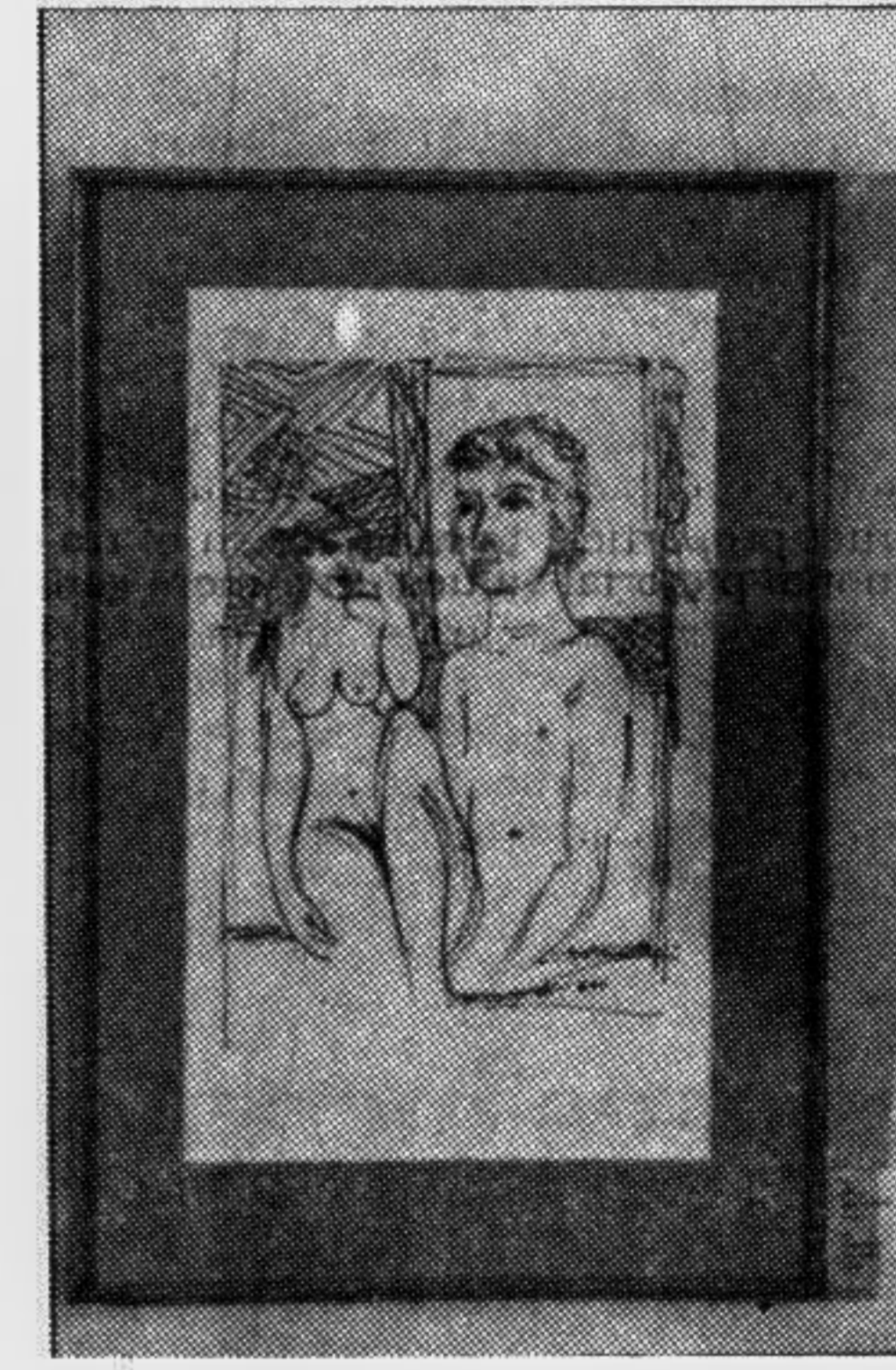
Asked if he had exhibited abroad, Debdas informs me, "I've done shows in



Russia, Germany and Poland."

"I've been lucky. I don't have the problem of having to earn a few thousand every month. I've been born in a well-to-do family. I paint for satisfaction of my soul and mind. However, I've tried my hand at regular jobs. I've taught at Chittagong for 14 years. Of course, I prefer painting to teaching," he comments on his life.

Speaking of why he confines himself to oil painting, Debdas says, "Oil has a wide range and you can work with it at will. If I don't like something I wipe it off. I can't do this in water colour."



Looking at his works one realises that there have been no sharp departures from one style to another. His figurative work shows an attraction to abstraction while his semi-abstract works have surrealistic penchants for shape and form. Debdas, despite being in his sixties, is invigorating, fresh and adventurous. The onlookers at the exhibition are stimulated by his vibrancy and mysticism.

There have been struggles and tragedies in his life even though he was born in an aristocratic family and did not have to worry about where the

money came from. When his wife died for instance, he felt forlorn. All this influenced his creative spirit. Like most artists he gradually moved away from figurative work to break down time and space.

Many of his paintings at the exhibition are put under the title "time and space". These represent his journey through life through the world of colours, lives and textures. They show his penchant for red, yellow and orange. At the same time, he uses blue to bring in the ethereal and spiritual elements. Here he depicts his emotional views on life. Triangles, rectangles and cubes are used subtly in his works so that their use appears natural.

There are some paintings in the display that are objective such as the figure of the woman in "Autumn". The same applies to "Family group" where red offsets the figures while blue and crimson have been used surrealistically.

Debdas's favourite subject "Rain" is a fascinating rendition of a single theme. Here his work pulsates with vibrancy and *joie de vivre*. The artist adores the rain falling on leaves and the corrugated tin roofs in the villages.

His two paintings called "Movement" have the same dynamism in swirling colours and juxtaposition of geometrical shapes.

For someone who was once expelled from Calcutta Art College for his leftist political activities, Debdas has come a long way. He has no regrets about coming to Bangladesh and is proud of his numerous friends and colleagues. His journey through life in his mid-sixties is bold and inspiring.

poems

Banalata Sen

by Jivananda Das

For a thousand years have I walked the ways of the world From Sinhalese seas in the darkness of night to Malay's Far have I roamed. In Bimbisha's Ashok's ash-grey world Was I present. Farther off in the darkness of Bidarva city I, a tired soul, everywhere around me life's foamy seas, Given a few moments bliss by Nature's Banalata Sen.

Her hair dark as some remote Bidisha night Her face Shrabost's artwork. As in a far-off sea, The ship-wrecked mariner, forlorn, foredoomed, Sees in some cinnamon isle signs of a grassy green land, Did I see her in darkness; said she, "Where had you been?" Raising her eyes, so nest-like, Banalata Sen!

At the end of the day, with the sound of dewdrops Dusk descends. The eagle wipes the smell of sunlight from its wings

The colours of the world fade, the tome all ready. Then for a tale, fireflies light up the world. All birds home — all rivers — life's commerce concludes



All that remains — darkness — and — face meeting face — Banalata Sen!

Translated by Fakrul Alam

Reaching Out

by Shadow

When the sun goes down Over the hills and The darkness surrounds like A blanket of obsidian truth The vampires roam on The savage garden I walk barefoot through The chilling snow With arms outstretched To your door Just to drink your soul For I am the Prince of darkness Crucified to immortality Tattooed to pain Shivering with an instinct Just to survive. A shadowless prince of Nothingness A lonesome soul Travelling on the devil's road



To hell I walk barefoot on the Naked earth With arms outstretched Just to kiss your Blood red lips Trick or treat!

Bounty of the Breeze

Z A Khan

Your tender gait on the meadow and stream Creates an yearning to foil the scheme, That dare drown the music and glauc And parleys with sorrow not to flee. Oh all devouring breeze, blow on, Blown into pleasure let us follow on To pave the way for an unbound joy That equates romance of Helen of Troy And be in quest of a life that abandons Sly, deceit and does not condone Ill, which peril our society To bring about an unmixed gaiety. Enabling all to stop and stare At your endless bounty and flare That has adored you to be charming And to enchant us unending.