

in memoriam

A Genius Lyricist, Masud Karim

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

SONGS and music are sources of inspiration as well as providing entertainment to one's heart. People love to listen avidly to songs and music either broadcast by radio or telecast by television, but one could hardly care to know the person, who composes them.

Masud Karim possibly was one of the very few who distinguished himself as a lyricist *per excellence* during the mid sixties.

I, myself, even did not contemplate to write a memorial six months back about Masud Karim. Fate, however, was to deal Masud an unkind blow. He died of cancer on 16 November 1996 in a foreign land, in Montreal, Canada, thousands of miles away from home, home, sweet home — Bangladesh.

A man of integrity, soft-spoken and shy, Masud Karim, whose nickname was Banni, was born at Kumarkhali, which is noted as a culturally and literally rich area, on 17 February 1940. Masud was my nephew, but he was senior to me in age.

As a student in Dhaka College in the Commerce Faculty in the early sixties, Masud Karim began writing poems, and in about a year he made a remarkable impression as a poet. He also in fact proved his worth as a composer of good sonnets. A few of his poems and sonnets have been published in the literary journal, Shamakal (Contemporary), edited by the poet, Sikandar Abu Zafar. His poems also appeared in the Shahitya Journal, edited by the poet Hemayet, apart from my edited weekly newspaper, "Sanjog" in 1960.

Subsequently, he concentrated on writing lyrics. During his college life, he was allured by his maternal uncle, Khondakar Nurul Alam, who was a dramatist and writer, to go to Karachi to

compose songs for the film which his maternal uncle planned to produce. He was made assistant to the producer.

Masud finally returned to Dhaka from Karachi in 1962 to appear in the examination. Today I recalled the fact that his father, Abu Daud Rezaul Karim, was so angry about Masud's disappearance that he was reluctant to pay for his return air ticket, but his loving and caring mother (Belly Bhabli) arranged the air ticket with the help of Masud's bosom friend, Hira, who happily settled in London as a banker.

His father retired as a section officer from the Board of Revenue of the erstwhile East Pakistan. It is a matter of coincidence that both Masud Karim and his father obtained a degree in 1962 from Dhaka University. His father did not appear in the BA examination from Presidency College of Calcutta in the mid-forties as a result of economic pressure, which dictated him to join a service, but he had proficiency in English literature and mathematics.

Masud Karim was not a diligent student like his illustrious father who was regarded as a moving English dictionary and could recite at heart Shakespeare's writings — poems and plays alike.

In an interview with Betar Bangla, a publication of Radio Bangladesh, which appeared in the edition of 16 July to 15 August 1994, Masud Karim attributed his inspiration to the former Regional Director of Radio Pakistan, Mr Ashrafu-Zaman Khan. In fact, Masud Karim was requested to write songs by Ostad Khan Majlish in 1954. Thereafter, a young rising star on the horizon of music, Mr Nirmal Kumar Majumdar, who won first prize in the provincial music competition held in Dhaka in 1961 and whom I introduced to Masud Karim, had made a request for composing a few songs for him. This Masud did

and tuned himself for Nirmal Kumar Majumdar. In the process, Masud Karim was enchanted with the world of music and songs. At times, he was seen to be so absorbed in composing songs for radio in particular that he forgot his meal. He used to survive on a few cups of tea and a sort of cake (*shingara*).

Song is a natural means of self-expression. Different races tend to develop different song idioms — the use of particular scales, melodic intervals, rhythmic motifs etc. A poet can compose songs out of emotion and songs based on rhythm. Masud Karim composed songs in a simple and lucid manner which touch our heart.

The following lines from his popular songs will bear out the fact of Masud Karim's own distinctive individuality as a lyricist:

"Flute is being played with familiar and unfamiliar tunes. My mind refuses to stay at home at this tune's auspicious moment."

or
"I am spreading the fragrance of the flowers of the tuberose, / I have been spreading the light of the moon which is covered by the clouds / I am trying to hide sorrows of my life through rendering songs and songs."

During the period from 1963 to 1966, Masud Karim had the privilege to serve as Programme Producer in Radio Pakistan, when his activities were restricted to official business only. His mind could not remain confined to the official business alone. He has a poetic mind.

In 1995, when he was working in the Radio Station in Chittagong, he found his life partner in the vocal singer, Dilara ALO. Dilara ALO was in the making of a promising vocal singer. He married Dilara ALO and they started their conjugal life at my official residence at Central Government Officer's building at Agrabad. Incidentally, I was serving as

sub-editor in the Central News Organisation of Radio Pakistan and was based at Chittagong in those days.

Masud Karim severed relations with Radio Pakistan as the salary was so little he could hardly cope with the expenses of his expanding family. He decided to join a pharmaceutical firm of his in-laws at Comilla where he served very briefly when he found a job as Secretary to the Vice-Chancellor of Mymensingh Agricultural University in 1969.

In a third world country like Bangladesh, a composer of songs is ill-paid. The amount of honorarium paid by radio or television, or even by a film producer, necessitates a composer to look for a job. Masud Karim, as a composer of songs, was no exception in Bangladesh. Therefore, we saw him moving from one trade to another to earn his livelihood and to have a decent life.

After Bangladesh came into existence, Masud Karim was attracted to the celluloid life of the world to earn money for the members of his family. He became producer of a film: *Ochena Otithi* (Unknown Guest) which was released to the market in 1978. Jointly with Bulbul Ahmed, actor, he produced two more cinema films: *Wada and Bhala Manush*. He began producing a coloured cinema film, *Phulmati*, based on the story written by Nazmul Alam, which remained incomplete in the studio of the Film Development Corporation because of financial constraints.

Masud Karim, apart from engaging himself in producing films, had written innumerable songs for cinema films of which the following films are worth mentioning: *Rajanigandha, Bhanga Gara, Goriber Bow, Bathar Dan, Agni Konna, Putra Bodhu, Awara, Anurag, Wada, Jhumur, Bhala Manush* etc. etc. Possibly out of frustration, as he did

not achieve the desired results from filming, Masud Karim was instrumental in establishing a modern advertising firm jointly with partners. Here too he was shocked to find that his share of money was embezzled by his partner in business. He finally started operating an advertising firm of his own under the name of Unique Advertiser which has left an indelible mark in the advertising arena. During these critical periods of his life, Masud Karim suffered mentally and received heart injuries. He had to undergo treatment, both at Dhaka and Bangkok, but he did not improve much.

By now, Masud's loving and caring wife, Dilara ALO, who also sang many songs written by him, began the profession of teaching in a school at Dhaka Cantonment.

That Masud Karim decided finally to leave the country to settle abroad was not known to anyone. In July 1995, Masud Karim, accompanied by his wife and two daughters, left for Canada via America. His son and eldest daughter, who lost her husband in a motor car accident in Texas, joined them. Having obtained a degree in chemical engineering, Masud's son began working in one of the biggest American oil companies.

The tunes to the many songs written by Masud Karim were composed by Khondakar Nurul Alam and Subal Das. With long established artistes like Farida Yasmeen, Ferdousi Rahman, Anwaruddin Khan, Syed Abdul Hadi, Mohammad Ali Siddiqui, Runa Laila, Nazmul Huda (Bachu), Abdul Jabbar etc, Masud Karim's songs remain embedded in our memories. I would like to quote a few more lines from his songs to substantiate my above contention:

"As an artiste I will sing songs for you
And will serve to your heart content.
As an 'artiste' I will remain forever

with you."
or
"When the hullabaloo would stop
Every nook and corner remains asleep
Only the bright stars in the sky will be shining dimly."

Apart from modern romantic songs, Masud Karim presented a number of devotional songs like Hamd and Nath and patriotic and folk songs also. He could have surpassed many of the famous lyricists like Rabindra Nath Tagore had he not been constantly engaged in finding jobs or doing business for a livelihood. So far the number of songs presented by Masud Karim stood at fifteen thousand. Masud Karim was awarded national prizes in 1982 and 1994 for composing songs for the films: *Hridoh theke Hridoh* and *Rajanigandha*. One of the characteristics of his compositions is that these are written in a simple and lucid manner without using a single vulgar word which leaves behind the mark of utter sincerity. There is an undercurrent of sadness in many of his lyrics, but never of bitterness. One is tempted to quote a few lines from one of his songs in favour of the above contention.

"My mind does not listen to the rule nor warning which remains behind joy and sorrow."

Fundamentally a deeply religious but secular in mind, Masud Karim's many-sided interests presented him strikingly as a genius.

Masud Karim, who was given a rousing reception by the expatriate Bangladeshis at a function in Montreal, has left behind his wife, the reputed artiste, Dilara ALO, one son, three daughters, a granddaughter and a large number of friends, relatives and admirers to mourn his death. His contribution towards Bengali songs will remain immortal.

book review

Gender and Development

By Tarek Ali Hassan

Author: Raana Haider, M.A., Sociology

Publisher: American University in Cairo Press by arrangement with The University Press Limited, Dhaka, Bangladesh. It was originally published in Bangladesh as 'A Perspective in Development: Gender Focus.'

Reviewer: Dr Tarek Ali Hassan, Al-Azhar University, ZKH Foundation for Holistic Human Development, Cairo, Egypt.

IT is the fashion for all to talk about human development in our era of unprecedented transition and challenge. Every now and then some work, some research stands out as different and special. This book by Raana Haider is such a work. Its concentration on women — this too has become fashionable — is a revealing journey into dimensions little explored or even suppressed, with a generous recourse to original work by women, quoted or listed in the copious and highly interesting references and bibliography sections. If you have accepted a long list of automatic assumptions about development or about women or about North/South relations, then brace yourself for a shock. This is an assumption-challenging book from the word go and this is why it is so fresh and I believe essential reading for all involved in development.

One of the many powerful observations corroborated with a large array of data and statistics reads as follows:

"The top-down, trickle-down process of development has worked neither at the macro-level (region, country), nor at the micro-level (household, family). Development accompanied by the process of modernisation for many has meant chronic unemployment, chronic inflation, un-payable debts, loss of purchasing power, nutritional decline, environmental degradation, denationalisation of resources and a setback in the quality of life."

In the Chapter on "The Development Mystique" a final section on the "Paradoxes of Development" treats the reader to some "reality sandwiches" extracted from one of her fascinating sources:

Rural development is (frequently) a process whereby affluent urban-dwellers teach poor peasants how to survive in the countryside without money.

The more important the decision, the

fewer and less well informed will be those involved in making it.

Maintaining stability at the apex of a sharply graduated social pyramid requires perpetuating instability at the base.

Treating the symptoms may prolong the disorder.

All this is certainly homing onto some of the basic conceptual problems that have bedeviled development for so long and led to so much wastage of time, energy, resources and money and above all wastage of human beings. If all is not well with "development" conceptually and in application, then it is the millions — or rather billions — of poor and weak, mainly in the south, that pay. Of those poorer and weaker who pay, women — and perhaps children — pay the most. Women pay the most in spite of working and producing out of all proportion to their lot. An incredible and cumulative injustice that has become the automatically accepted norm by many. Haider's argument to drive home her hypotheses is lucid, strong and supported by parallel research and data. There is never a boring moment as dogmas in development and in modern non-human centered economics fall one after the other.

After a very revealing exposition we are taken into what I call attempted diagnosis at causal levels. This is an important endeavour as I believe it is three quarters of the way towards treatment of illnesses — in a medical and/or a social sense. The chapter about the self image of women analyses with shocking rawness the derogatory self image that women have of themselves, and cites that distorted self image as a significant additional crippling factor. The book has many fascinating diagrams and illustrative graphs, and I would have very much liked one showing how the forces working towards denigrating the self image of women proceed in an inexorable spiral leading to the denigration of man too. One wonders who is the beneficiary/beneficiaries?

The chapter on pitfalls in relation to data collection and analysis is very pertinent. It is an awareness that is much needed in all fields of research and the pursuit of knowledge in the social and behavioural domains. This book underlines how easy it is to develop "corroborated" misconceptions when dealing with women, who do not have the means or who are deprived of the means and the skills to make their

voice heard. The data about them and their condition are frequently transmitted by others, probably male, and are interpreted through a male dominated reference. This male dominated reference is subject to such glaringly bizarre assumptions including "my wife does not work, she stays at home", meaning in reality: "she puts in many more hours of labour than myself! In addition to child feeding and bearing and rearing and housework and cooking and washing and sewing, she takes care of growing food for the family and of the demands of animal husbandry as well as the daily provision of water and fire wood or other fuel!"

Having led us to develop a critical stance towards potentially biased statistical data, we are nevertheless led to hair raising statistics about the state of health and nutrition of the female and male members of society in underprivileged and developing countries. Almost consistently the female is getting the rough part of an already rough deal. "Since suffering in silence is a culturally-ascribed feminine attribute, so too is its spin-off effect on health. The culture of silence and endurance encourages women to give lower priority to their health needs compared to the demands of other family members and enforces their lower status."

I think Raana Haider in her short but very eloquent work treats us to a very convincing discourse exposing the mechanisms of continued poverty, dependence and human waste. We are given insight into circuits that damage generations present and future. The damage includes females and males.

In the final chapters, we are taken to what might be deemed the suggestions for breaking out of the complicated spirals that keep women in an underprivileged state.

Raana Haider demonstrates repeatedly in a lucid argument, the fundamentality of women in any meaningful humane and sustainable development. How then are the billions of underprivileged women — and men — going to be helped?

How then are women going to be helped to develop a radically different self image? How are they going to be helped to develop self and environmental awareness, avenues to expression and dialogue and the necessary skills to use them and mechanisms for sharing in decision making over issues that affect their lives. How are the women going to be allowed access to continuous

education and continuous training? What are the mechanisms by which women receive just recompense for work performed within and outside the family? How can women have access to credit to generate income or to achieve the legitimate income enhancement that is the rightful return for their industry application and labour?

Mercifully, not all these questions remain unanswered: we have the exciting example of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh. The dogma breaking start is shown by this quotation from Mohammad Yunus, with which Raana Haider heads her chapter on "Women and Credit: A Catalyst for Development":

"Conventional banks are based on the principle that the more you have the more you can get. If you don't have anything you don't get anything. So credit-worthiness by itself is defined by the banking system as one who already has enough. Nobody questioned why the poor are said to be not credit-worthy. Grameen Bank has literally turned this principle completely around."

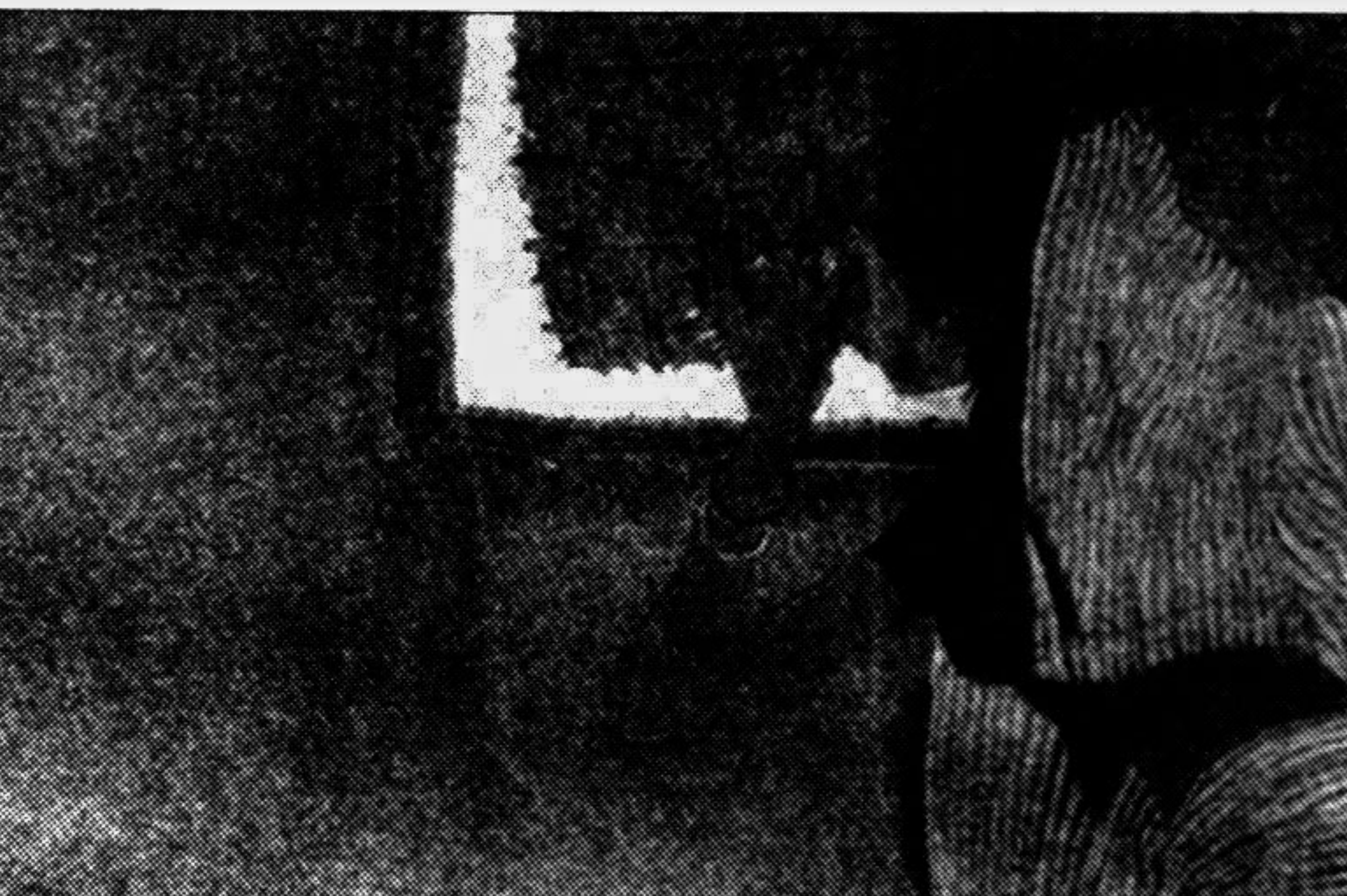
Nobody questioned why the poor — and especially poor women — are not credit worthy. It is wonderful to see a rising tide of dogma-disproving enterprises.

The other prescription of course, is education. We are given insights into the current position and into possible ways out in the chapter on "Women and Education: The Ultimate Lever". There is a chapter about "Women and the Environment" which argues effectively to home the point made in its opening quotation: "As long as attitudes and practices persist that undermine women's health, accord them status only as producers of many children and undervalue the roles they play as members of society, they are likely to play limited roles in improving and sustaining the environment in which they live." The final chapter is about women and work. I would have liked the book to have a chapter on religion and its use or abuse in the genesis or amelioration of the development constraints so eloquently exposed.

I do not think anybody who has read this book will anymore think of the term development as something they know outside of the specific context in which it is to operate. I think any humanly committed economist or sociologist with integrity will see the need to put to review many automatic assumptions.

A Joint Effort of Youth and Age

by Zillur Rahman Siddiqui



Taslima Nasreen and the Issue of Feminism
by Kabir Chowdhury & Saikat Chowdhury
Publisher Pratyasha Prakashan
Price: Tk 80.00

IN recent years, feminism has come to the fore as a social issue, and along with it Taslima Nasreen, poet, columnist and novelist, has emerged as a central figure in the debate raging round the question of women's rights.

Feminism, represented by scores of women's organisations, cannot claim any credit for Nasreen's appearance nor for her shooting into prominence within a short span of time. One is independent of the other. As a matter of fact, Nasreen is looked upon with considerable anguish amounting to disapproval by certain quarters. These include feminist organisations and people outside who simply are committed to promote women's cause. We have to note that Nasreen's campaign for women has remained her own, independent effort, and that she has generally kept clear of the routine activism of the professional feminists.

This brings out an important truth about Nasreen: she is not an activist in the normal sense of the term. She is a poet, an artist, in fact an individualist of the extreme type. She has never been on the streets, and her pen has been her only weapon. She is an anarchist, in the best sense of the term, and her life-style has been such as to prove she fully lives her ideas. This is a rare phenomenon in an otherwise conformist society. And if her writings have given offence to the orthodox, represented by

the so-called fundamentalists, her life-style has equally drawn their wrath upon her. This part of the story has been well-told by the essay, Taslima Nasreen and the issue of Feminism. It is a sensitive review of the issue of feminism in Bangladesh, but it is its focus on Nasreen that lends its special appeal in today's context: Nasreen in forced exile and a curious silence that has descended upon her native land over the mindless cruelty meted out to her by a callous society. To my mind, more important than Nasreen's stature, as a writer is her role as a rebel which makes her appear as a latter-day Nazrul Islam. The rage and fury turned against her by her irate critics reminds one of similar onslaught directed against the rebel poet in the twenties. More than half a century separates the two, but the society, despite some advance in the status of women, has not changed much. The forces opposed to change and progress, far from yielding the ground, have still their fort secure against progress; have in fact gained in striking power. While Nazrul never had to flee his country, Nasreen was forced to do so.

Nasreen by now has become the most radiant symbol, not merely of feminism, but of freedom in its wide sense, of protest against all forms of injustice. Her novel Lajja may be weak as a work of art, but its force as a protest against a conspiracy of silence is beyond question. The present essay makes out a strong case not only for feminism as a movement but also for Nasreen as a relentless campaigner of the cause. An extremely commendable work, a joint effort of youth and age.