



interview

"Creativity is an exercise in some kind of a schizophrennia"

The man who has virtually revolutionised Hindi film song by injecting poetic richness was in the city last week in connection with the Kabikantha's Spring Poetry Festival. Zaved Akhter spoke to Ziaul Karim about the process of creativity and the cultural void created in the present day electronic civilization. Excerpts:

Ziaul Karim: Writing poetry is more of an individual act. You write songs for movies also. When you do that you have to think about the story or work with a composer and so on. All I am trying to point at is the dualism of your personality. Who do you synchronize between the two?

Javed Akhter: I suppose we can divide any art into two factors: one is the craft of it, and the other obvious part of art is the art. If you have the facility and the technique (this is very important, although people tend to confuse it with art itself which is not true) and the necessary command over the craft then it is possible for you to slip from one role to another; to be able to slip from one frame of mind to another; to be able to bring yourself in a certain mood or certain mental condition which is required. If you have a developed craft with you which is very very important in any case. Besides, I think there is no watertight compartment between art and commercial art. Ultimately we are discussing art and commercial art. Even to paint a good calendar or a poster you have to be a good painter. You may say that commercial art is the result of team work. So is music. When a symphony is produced that is the result of a team work. When you are working in a play that is also a team work. But there are good actors and bad actors; there are good music conductors and bad music conductors. So team work doesn't deny you a certain kind of solitude which is required for creating art. Team work may make it a bit different or more complicated the process of reaching the solitude required for being a creator. But it doesn't become a kind of

impossibility. So, even to produce good commercial art you have to be with yourself and you have to be honest with yourself in some way or the other and you have to enjoy it, feel it, live with it. Now again I give example of acting not because I put any premium on this particular form of art but because it is so physical that it is easier to illustrate the point.

Here is an actor. He is on the stage. And he is doing a scene that his mother is dead or has lost his beloved or whatever. Now he has to feel that pain, that agony. He has to emote and at the same time he has to remember the chalk line where he has to reach to take the light and so on. Now this is a kind of a schizophrennia, if you like. But then every kind of art needs certain kind of schizophrennia. Even when you are not working in team (like you are not writing something to a tune, for a situation) and writing for your own self, or writing something that really matters to you and are so overwhelmed by the experience of the feeling that you are bound to write. Even then there is a part of you which is very cunningly watching you and telling you 'no, this word is not that good; that word will bring pathos and so on and so forth. On one side you are totally involved in your writing and your feeling on the other side a part of you is very objectively, if I may say so, in almost a calculated manner, is watching and giving very very shrewd advice.

ZK: So even when you are writing for your self there exists a sort of a dual personality.

ZA: I suppose so. I think creativity is an exercise in some kind of a

schizophrennia. I am quite sure. Because you have to be involved. You cannot be creative without being involved. But you cannot be creative at the same time without being extremely watchful of your creation. This is a paradox. But that is how it happens like I gave you the example of the actor who is feeling the pain and the emotion of the scene but at the same time coming on the right chalk marks.

ZK: What is actually the process of your writing? How do you conceive your themes? Do you take notes or work it out inside your head or how do you do it?

ZA: People tend to put or create a kind of a halo around their works and they start confusing it to be some kind of a supernatural process. The flip side of the arrogance is that it is all God. "God gave me the idea". Because they are so convinced that the idea is so good only God can give it.

I suppose, being a rationalist, I don't have any such romantic notion about the process of creativity whether it is mine or somebody else's. But again I feel that we can not call it completely a process of our conscious mind. As a matter of fact there is an area or piece of land between countries which is called no-man's-land. Same way there is a kind of a no-man's-land between your conscious and sub-conscious mind. And I suppose all the creativity takes place there. You take on challenge consciously about a poem, a novel or a short story. And at a conscious level at one stage you think this is a good idea. You think that it can be a wonderful short story or a beautiful poem. That is not enough. Now what happens is that it

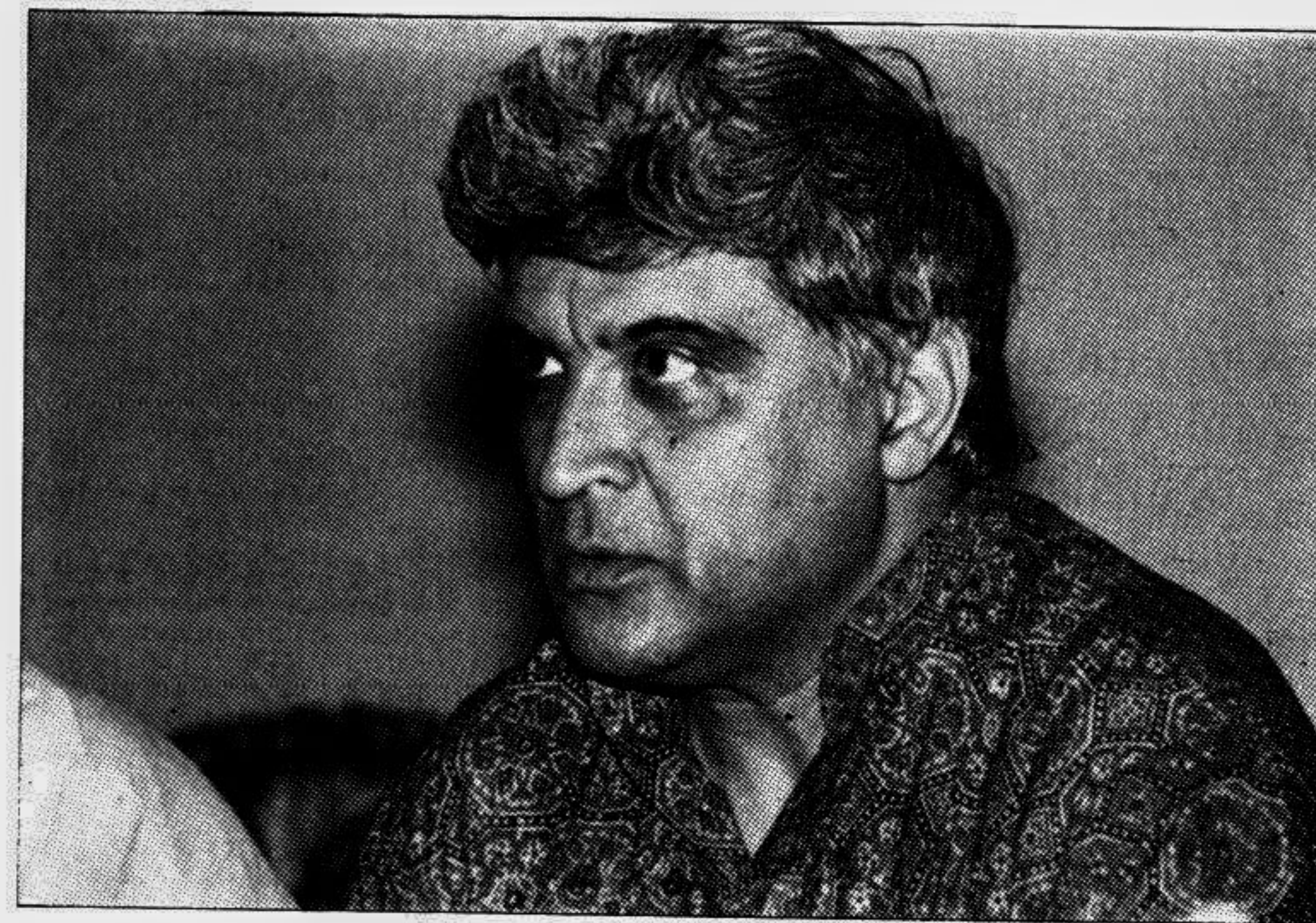
is some-where in your mind that you tend to forget about it, but it keeps on growing on its own and one day you feel that you have to write it and you should. When you start writing certain parts come to you that you are not prepared for.

ZK: Is it sort of an inside compulsion that you are talking about?

ZA: Again I don't want to romanticize it or glamourize it. Yes some time it does happen that you get so excited and overwhelmed by the idea that you have to put it on the paper. But so often it happens that you feel that, "what is happening to me, I have not written anything worthwhile since almost two months. I must do something. Am I sleeping?" And you think about it. Gradually you feel very bad that you are not writing. So that guilt also activates your mind.

ZK: What really agonizes you about the present civilization: The bombardment of electronic media and the decline of moral values? How do you look at this electronic civilization?

ZA: First of all I don't think that media is a four-letter word at all. And electronic civilization is some kind of a wolf. It's all wrong. If something is wrong anywhere it is wrong with the people not with the medium and we blame the medium. Like we say power corrupts. The fact is power does not corrupt man, it is man who corrupts power. But we blame power for it. I think instead of blaming media we have to find the faults somewhere else. It lies somewhere within us. It lies within our value system. Came a time in Southeast Asia when we realised that we have to move



ZAVED AKHTER: A passionate and spirited talker

forward as a nation, as communities or individuals materialistically. In this process our priorities changed. We ignored in this whole development urge the importance of aesthetics in society, of traditional art, literature. It was never discussed or talked about. If you see the parties whether in my country or your country or in Pakistan for that matter everywhere in this subcontinent their manifestoes don't speak anything about culture. They don't think it is a matter of any significance at all. What has happened that the younger generation through some kind of a process of

osmosis has learnt from our generation that "we have to make a place, by hook or crook, in the sun. We have to be materialistically successful." And in this process what is called art, literature has been ignored. Now the cultural void that has been created has to be filled by something. Don't blame the youngster if he is trying to fill that void with V channel or MTV. It's not MTV's fault that there was a void. We created that void in the society. And instead of blaming those things which are filling the void I think we should think about the void.

poems by Ashok Vajpeyi

To Be

To be dew-drenched in the moonrise of her body

Water Touches Her

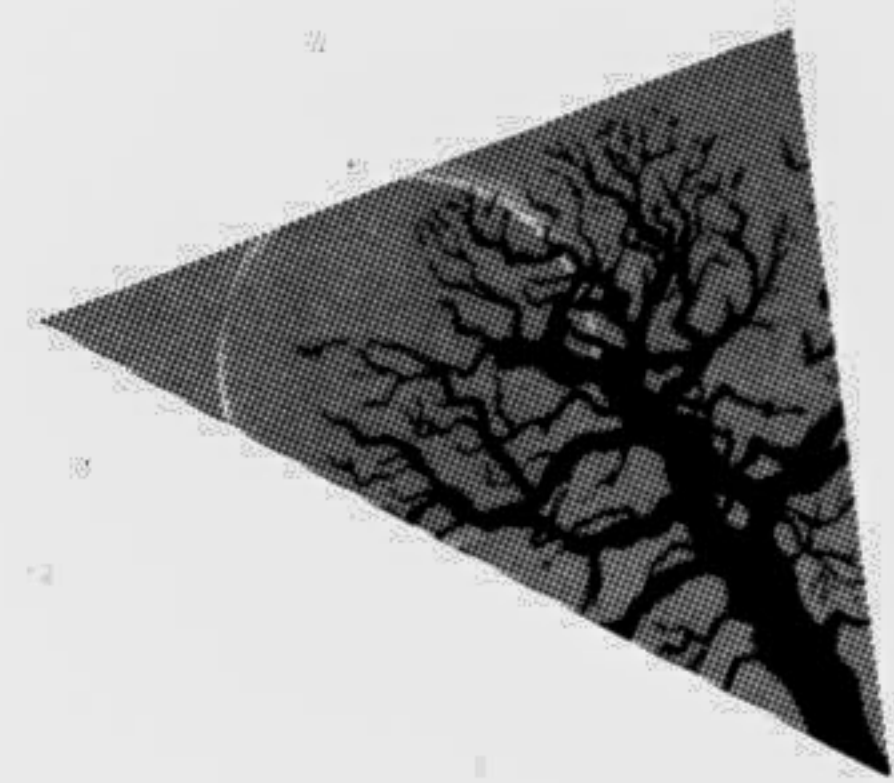
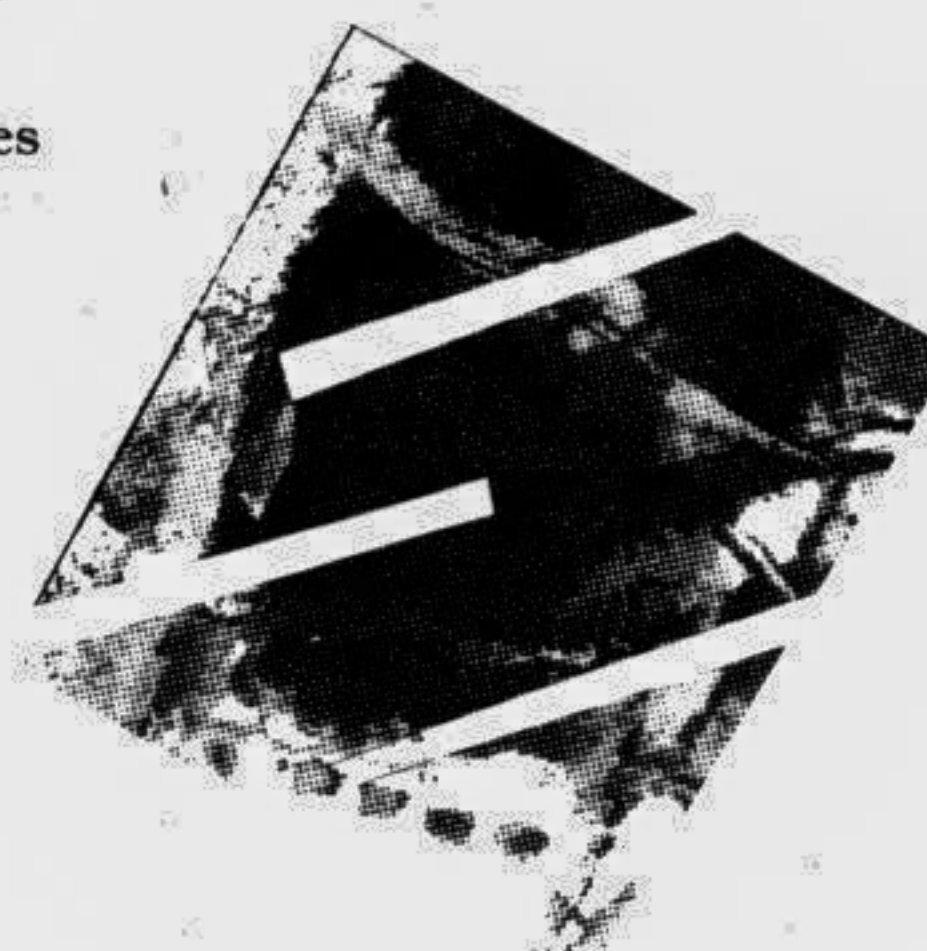
Water touches her the radiance of her skin the splendor of her limbs —

Water rushes down her hills, her valleys —

Water envelops her kisses her —

Water hesitates retreats warms to her body runs amok —

So many memories of her body inside the water.



Nude 3

She's a mirror Not she, her nudity — it's herself that's reflected in it. Youth beholds its own opulence in that mirror. Beauty gazes at its own exquisiteness. She's a mirror not only she, her nudity ...

The sky, unveiled in night-darkness is its own mirror.

Nude 5

Contained within her own syntax — She is a word.

not in a prayer not in a poem not in a restless call.

She is word — fair-skinned the shade of catechu dusky and bashful.

She is a word — nude unshadowed quivering in the syntax of silence.

Nude 7

In such a small space how could she be the sky? Contained yet without limit So close yet, beyond reach full of so many planets?

Dew-drenched in her own moonlight basking in her own sun? With so little room, how could she be the earth?



That nude — not on the bed of the earth not beneath the sky.

She, the nude.

Nude 8

The earth took off her foliage, her rivers and valleys.

The sky undid the knot of the planets.

The sun put aside its fervency.

The moon washed its face in dew.

Once again, after centuries, the crag turned over on its side.

Time unveiled itself, and she became the nude.



in the other's reluctant, hesitating withdrawn.

The flash of a light-like space and its disappearance Some day even this joy will be unbearable.

Not only

No, not only the soul in love but the body too will be scorched in its blaze.

No not only will the body burn on the pyre even the soul will turn to ashes.

Love, or death there's no fire that burns only the soul or only the body.



Nude 2

There was nothing left to cover her with no sky no time no light of the sun.

But there was the sky of her body spread like green of grass and the time of her body like the wind outside of time.

There was the sunlight of her body bright as her salty charm.

In her own sky in her own time basking in her own sunlight she the nude.



Nude 9

She couldn't cover her nudity with beads of perspiration, with kisses everywhere from head to toe, with the play of love. She covered herself, somehow, with her own bashfulness with the petals of her own desire.



Hand 1

Even this joy will be unbearable — the hand holding the whole of creation contained in miniature within the flower. This flying of a single straw becoming the dream of a nest in the sky.

In the darkness that hand held

Where's The World

Where's the world when I embrace you with every fibre of my body and lull your beauty in fulfilment, When we're beautiful in that fervid interweaving of our bodies?

Where's the world then — its anguished fathers, it crazy, anxious brothers How can work go on in offices and classes why set aside for us a solitude, lit by a mild sun a blue chunk of sky the size of a window and a delirious afternoon?

Where's the world then that catches up with us later on the street-corner — anxious, but out to humiliate us Where's the bewildered and well-intentioned world of venerable old men, unsated by their wives When we're beautiful on a delirious afternoon in that fervid interweaving of our bodies...? Translated by Teji Grover and Arlene Zide