

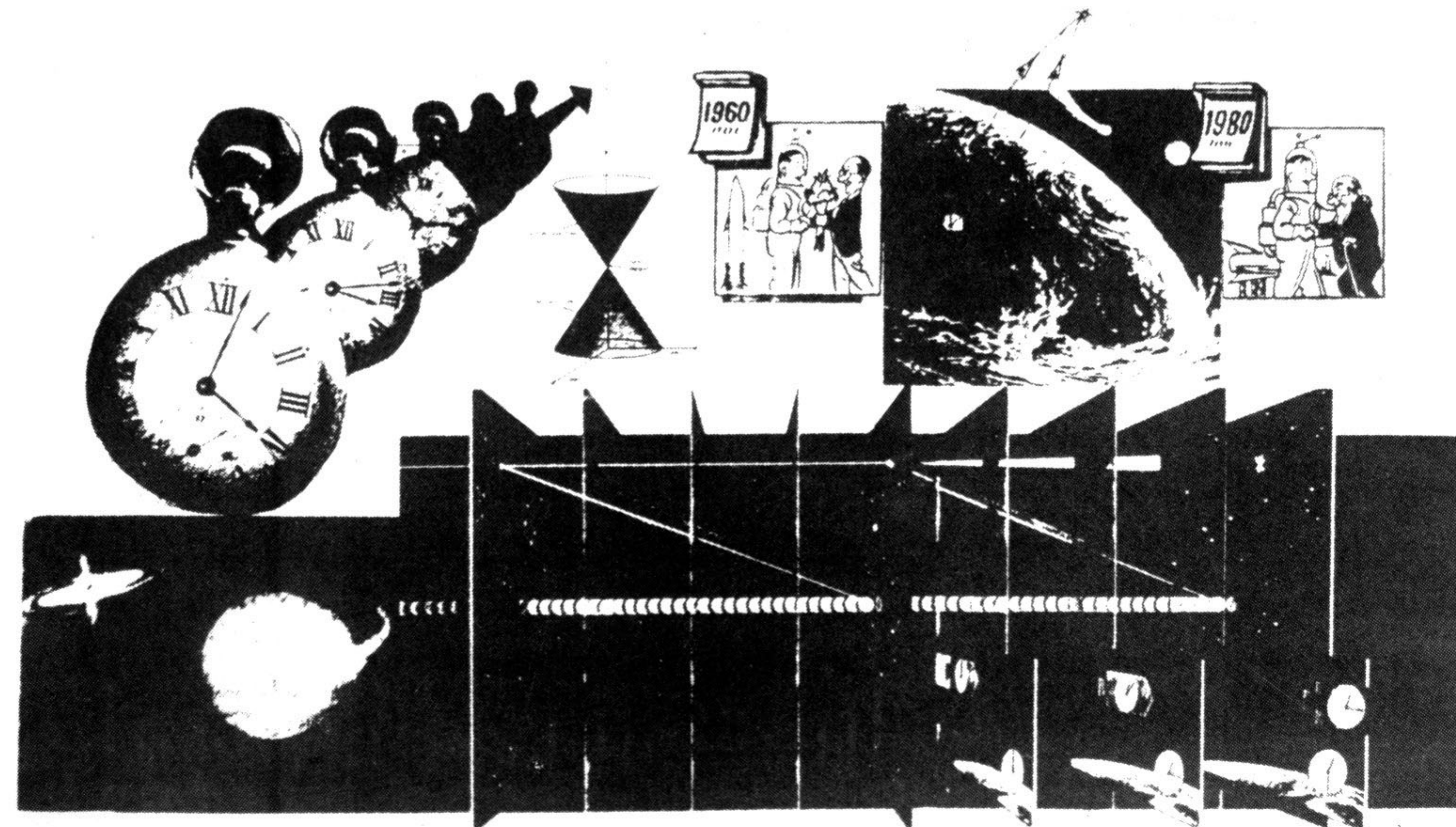
impression

From Hypatia to Enigma of Time

by Waheedul Huque

BROADENING the niche of the rational in man's soul and society seems to be the aim of a strangely named and yet quite an enduring movement called Discussion Project. This they want to achieve through dissemination of knowledge. But knowledge without understanding can be dangerous. Dead information enlivened by the supremely creative activity involved in the striving to understand salvages man from the ever-repeating animality to the oft-erring but ever so ground-breaking specialty of humanity. The Discussion Project launched in 1992 at Narayanganj — the unliveliest place in all the world, with only one speaker and two paying listeners — is broadly a science populariser series of lectures illuminating the approaches of a post-quantum physicist not burdened with metaphysical hangovers. And from the very beginning through all of its sessions — three in kind: individual discussion, group discussion and open discussion — it has been a payment thing at Tk 50 a person for one 'discussion'. The beauty of this pioneering and incredible event was that on many occasions the 'discussion' was held to a sell-out house. The number of sessions and the variety subjects treated at these offer a measure of broadness of vision as well as some interesting bias. Let us look at a dozen of them:

1. The Cosmic Calendar of Carl Sagan
2. In Search of a Second Universe (enquiry into extra-terrestrial life)
3. The Geological Calendar
4. The Enigma of Time (The Einsteinian slowing down of time etc.)
5. The Origin of Life
6. Forces of Nature and GUT (The Grand Unifying Theories)



7. Introduction to Psychology
8. The Big Bang and Origin of the Galaxies
9. The Euclidean Geometry (the sum of a triangle's angles is equal to right angles)
10. The Riemannian Geometry (the sum is greater than two right angles)

11. The Lobachevskian Geometry (the sum less than two right angles)
 12. Incidence Geometry
- This sampling may be indicative of certain bias but it is too early to be sure about that. Asif, yes he is not known by any other name, first or third, started it all and continues to be the leading light

of the group, is a physicist by training. But so were Bernal and Bronoski and Sagan. And yet they ventured into vistas not commonly understood as physics. And Asif has his mentors among such and specially Carlbagan on whom he has written a book soon to be published by the group.

If there is indeed a bias in the aims and doings of the Discussion Project it is not so much on disseminating the physicist's or astrophysicist's idea of things or the world about us there is a preponderance in the group's thinking of the phenomenon of the enquiring mind and its manifestations and quests

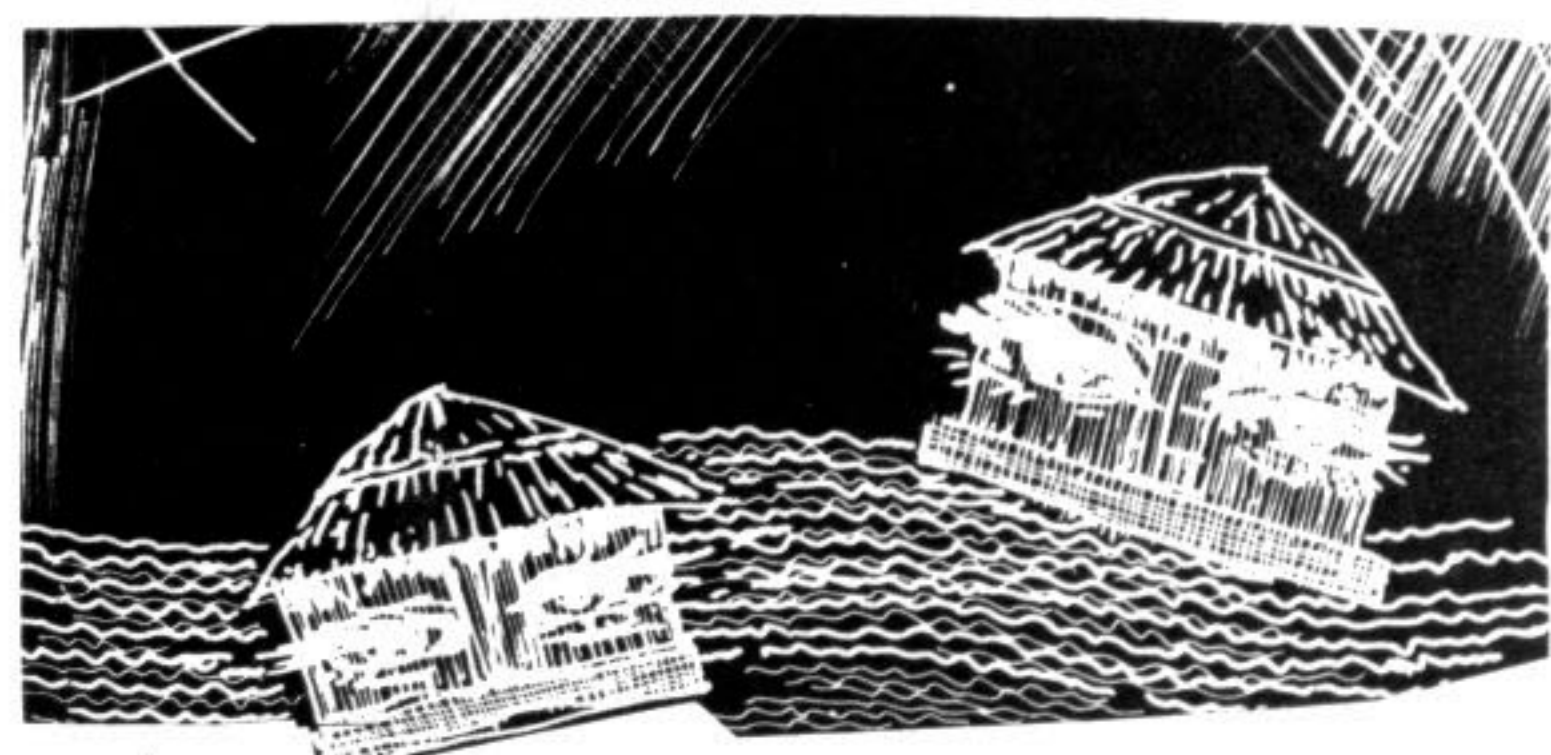
over the centuries beginning with Thales. And as such Asif and his group places very high the achievements of the Alexandria Library and the group that grew around over centuries, culminating in the sad and mad assassination Hypatia than whom there wasn't a more luminous woman — or man — in the ancient world and even in the epochs following until we come up to Marie Sklodowska Curie. It is highly unusual for a populariser of Einstein and Dirac, Heisenberg and Shroedinger to worship Hypatia and her lost world.

Hypatia is but a gateway to understanding science and mathematics or the world by setting these on the history of man's intellectual striving. This background gives the group's endeavours and Asif's lectures a quality throbbing with life and liveliness.

The group gathers routinely in Asif's small room lined with some five thousand valuable books — some of them masterpieces of all time. And there is a PC at the corner with advanced science and mathematics programmes like Matlab. Video cassettes are there of Bronowski's Ascent of man or Salam's series on the origin and development of the universe. And there are charts and scrolls all around the walls. Asif is small and diffident. So are all that have gathered around him. But all of them think big and beautiful. It is hoped that neither Asif nor Discussion Project will continue to be unique for a long time. Dozens of young people's science clubs are coming up. And at least one has already made quite a mark — the Astronomical Association. Asif's will be a very healthful influence on all of them. In the latest of Discussion Group lectures, Asif speaks on the Enigma of Time on August 16 at the auditorium of the Atomic Energy Centre, Mymensingh Road.

poems about Sravan by Jibananda Das

Translated by Fakrul Alam



Monsoon Night (Sravan Rat)

I wake up from sleep slowly
In the thick darkness of this monsoon night.
Do I wake up because of a sound coming from somewhere far off
in the Bay of Bengal?

It has been a while since the monsoon rains stopped;
As far as I can see are dark clouds
In their laps they quietly hold on to the last waves to hit the shore;
Silently, they listen to the sound of the Bay.

It seems
Some people are flinging open wide doors
And then shutting them;
Somewhere in the distant — silent — margins of the sky.

Those who have their heads on pillows
Keep sleeping on
To wake up tomorrow morning,
Slowly, the lost laughter, tales, loves, and faces which had
disappeared into the earth's stony skeletal darkness
Resurfaces;
Breaking free from the stolid ribs of the earth they seek me out.

It is as if the Bay of Bengal's passion has been all spent
Mile after mile the world appears to have become hushed.
Someone seems to be saying:
"If I could open and shut doors the same way
I would be able to plumb the depth of this silent night —"
Someone lays dark hands on me and slowly wakes me up.

I lift my eyes
And slide through two layers of darkness like a gray cloud:
I enter that chasm.

For a Thousand Years Always at Play (Hajar Bachar Shudhu Khela Korey)

For a thousand years, like fireflies in the dark, always at play;
Everywhere spread out night's eternal estate;
Moonlight pouring on the sand — Devdaru trees casting shadows
in uncertain sway,
Like broken columns; the Lord Krishna's capital Dwaraka
wrecked, in ruins his state,
Our bodies overpowered by the scent of sleep — life's
transactions completely concluded;
"Remember?" said she — "Banalata Sen?" was all that I said.



Harvesting Is Over (Dhaan Kata)

Harvesting is over — the fields are strewn with straw
Leaves, chaff, cracked eggs, snake skins, nests — wintertime.
Leaving behind all these, over there in the field's maw
Now sleep people that I knew — in sleep that is sublime.

One lies over there — day and night we'd meet day after day
When I dallied with her I'd be guilty of such sins;
Yet in peace in the deep green grass where dragonflies play
Lie hid forever thoughts of her and my obscure imaginings.

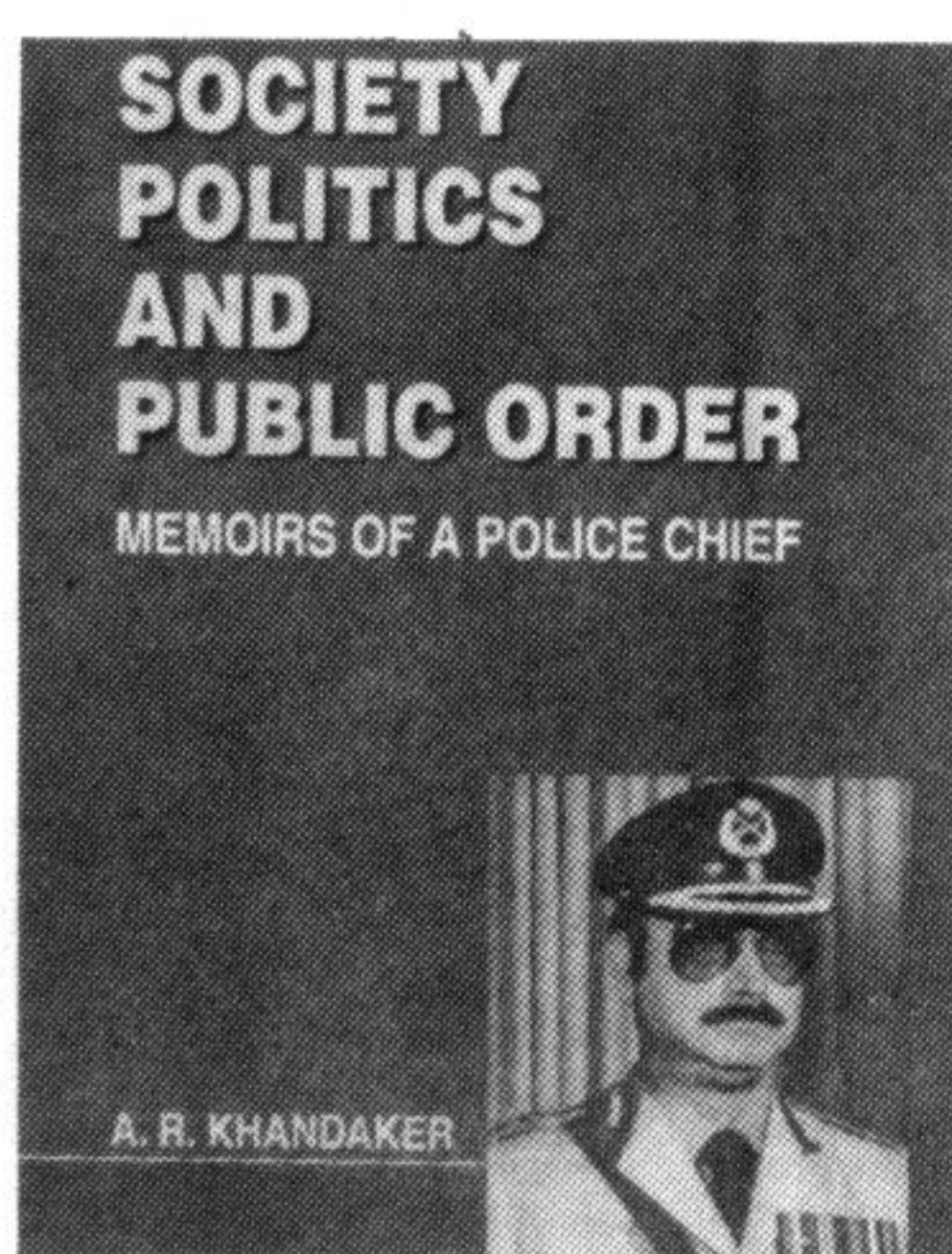
books

Ex-Police Chief Bares His Soul

FORMER Police Chief Mr. A Raquib Khandaker states that a neutral, efficient police system was imperative to maintain the edifice of a healthy police system and any political intervention with the functioning of this basic organ i.e. bypassing proper institutional supervision and control, will lead to the growth of a police state marked by arbitrariness and irresponsibility. In a book on title *Society Politics and Public Order — Memoirs of a Police Chief* the former Inspector General of Police of Bangladesh reminisces his career as a policeman.

The former police chief describes through many incidents how different regimes, since 1947 used the police force to their respective political aims.

He explains the dilemma of the police force in the following words:



"The position of government officials in such matters was always very delicate and difficult. The party in power expected them to work in their favour and alternately would make them the scapegoats for anything going wrong while the opposition parties would expect that they should at least remain neutral. This is how it should be, which however, has remained a far cry in the level of development of democratic process."

He says that the Police Commission setup in 1988-89 headed by Justice Aminur Rahman Khan produced a report which did not receive due attention. Instead the Minister at that time, in collusion with some subordinate officers of the department prepared his own report.

Mr. Khandaker writes:
"The police administrator is a key figure in the law enforcement policies

because he links the department to the decision makers. It is through the choice of a particular administrator that the values of the local political cultures are translated into law enforcement policy. The police must represent the department within the context of the political environment."

"There was never a time anywhere in the world when people gladly welcomed the police for anything they would like to do, the reason being that police emerged as a force of coercion to regulate the various aspects of social life and most often came to be blamed for excesses in their use of force in doing that job."

"During the colonial days, police in the subcontinent became all the more unpopular because of their role in suppressing political agitations during the movements. The colonial rulers arbitrarily used the police to keep the politi-

cal activists quiet."

"After independence, however, political concepts have undoubtedly become a part of our daily speech. We often abuse bureaucracy and praise democracy. Little do we ponder however that bureaucracy is a working tool of democracy provided the bureaucrats can be governed to work within the norms called for making democracy flourish."

"It should therefore be the aim of a state to establish an honest, educated and efficient bureaucracy. Administrative justice, and of uniform standard, for all and sundry, needs be established. Politics, policy and police emerge from the same root. The objective of politics is to gain authority to organise the Republic in the interest of the safety and welfare of the population.

The author a former police chief has explained through many points that the police officers should be required to act

according to well defined rules with precise limits of power prescribed by the laws of the state. The writer A R Khandaker retire as Inspector General of Police in 1990. He was Police Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, for two terms.

In his book "Society, Politics and Public Order," he describes the socio-cultural life of people with particular emphasis on the crime problems of the different districts where the author served as a Police Officer.

In the present context of the controversy of the role played by the Detective Branch of the Police establishment and the consequences that followed Mr. Khandaker's book will serve as an important reference document in the investigations and in deciding the course of action to be followed by the government of the day.

— Based on a press release