

art Kajol Takes Colour to Danish Streets

by Fayza Haq

"BEAUTIFUL, wonderful and impressive". That is how onlookers described Ruhul Amin Kajol's street paintings in Denmark.

Kajol and ten young Svendborg people had been working with brush and paints for 12 days. The painting named "Heaven and Earth" was approximately 160 meter long and 5-6 meters wide.

Kajol said "I am satisfied with the result. The small streets give a good effect and the painting goes well with the old buildings," said Kajol at the inauguration. Mayor Jorgen Henningsen said, "For those of you who have not gone seeking adventure in this fairyland, I can only say: Do it. I am convinced that after a walk through the streets, you will be more happy than you were when you came."

"I have taken inspiration for the motif collage from nature," said Kajol, who has been working with street painting since 1991, when he painted the walls of a canal in a Spanish town. Folklore, pop, his own fantasy and the artist's own observations from nature — birds, animals, flowers, human beings, ships, water and sun are all included in the painting.

"A similar project in the Czech Republic more than a hundred people had spent — anonymously volunteered and helped create colour, celebration and happiness in their town," Kajol recounted.

"The colourful paintings on the street had an unforeseen but welcome side effect: They slow down the speed of the road users, some because they get confused and must therefore be extra careful, others because they simply want to see what kind of strange roadway they have entered."

Looking at the transformation of Teatergade, Keld Hornemann, 58 and his wife Brigit, 54, said, "Just imagine that we should experience something so unexpected and extravagant in our old



town. Wish we could see something similar at home in the streets in Kolding. All of Teatergade is transformed into a colourful fairy world with animals, birds, fish, garden, ships, fantasy figures and butterflies seen in a mosaic pattern."

"Once we saw something like this in a little border town in northern Italy, but it was not upto what we have seen here in Svendborg. I wish it could be permanent," Brigit Hornemann adds.

No one could think of a more elegant souvenir than the street painting, which is the decision of the Hornemann family, who wished the streets closed for the running traffic, so that everybody is calm and quiet and could admire the details of the art work.

"I am very happy with my task," stressed Kajol, who did not have any problems with getting helpers. He had made a small layout, which, without any difficulty he transformed into the big size on the road. Colours and mosaics came naturally into the painting. Whoever was interested gave a hand while Kajol was the kind, skillful and authoritative guide. The result was fun as well as something good.

The background of the merry and festive painting is otherwise sombre enough. It dates back to 1952, when a language struggle in Kajol's homeland Bangladesh, led to a peaceful demonstration which however resulted in several students losing their lives. When the police opened fire, the students fell. Streetpaintings and barefoot processions mark this incident. Kajol has carried on this memory to the country that he resides in now.

The street painting leaves a mark on the whole city area: the area between the cultural house, the newly renovated theatre and the town school just opposite. The colour and motif match that of the colour frieze on the wall of the hall behind the windows. It really works together.

"Danish TV news and daily newspapers covered this incident. It has become the tourist attraction of the town."

lecture Cultural Pluralism

by Prof Anisuzzaman

Continued from last week

THERE is no particular value of good or evil attached to any of the practices we have just mentioned, but people belonging to a culture usually have a strong preference for their own. Even when one can see that there is a variety of cultures, one is predisposed to take his culture as the norm and the cultures of others as deviations. Herodotus realized this when he said that "...if one were to offer men the choice of all the customs in the world they would examine the whole number and end up by preferring their own." The faith in the justification of one's way of life is, perhaps, necessary for the orderly running of his society, but at a certain point it develops into an ethnocentric view that leads him to believe that his is the superior culture to the exclusion of others. Each of the American Indian tribes used to call itself something like "the people" while referring to other tribes in most pejorative terms. Alberuni recorded in the eleventh century that it was rather common for one nation to deprecate others. It may be interesting to quote here a creation myth current among the Malay people as reported by Ina Brown:

The Creator made the first man of clay and baked him in the oven but took him out too soon. He had a very unattractive pasty white skin and lanky hair. He became the ancestor of the white people. The Creator tried again but this time he left the man in too long. His skin was burned black and his hair frizzled by the heat. This one became the ancestor of the Negroes. Profiting by his earlier mistakes, the Creator got the third one just right, a beautiful golden brown. This one, needless to say, became the ancestor of the Malay who look just as men should. The ethnocentric view, however, showed itself far beyond Malaya and far beyond what could be accepted as funny.

Arno Peters, who has produced a new world-map in the early eighties, for instance, complains that the current map of the world, drawn after Mercator's projection, distorts the actualities of the earth in favour of the countries inhabited by the white people. This image of the world, which had been accepted as definitive for four hundred years, Peters says, is a Eurocentric one where two-thirds of the map surface represent the

The spirit of African cultural revival was accompanied by a glorification of 'negritude' and a search for Pan-African cultural elements. The search is still on. To many, of course, different cultures became a matter of anthropological interest or of simple curiosity. Even today cultural difference has turned in many places into a spectacle for the tourists to enjoy rather than something for the imperialists to overcome. Otherness has become a saleable commodity—amazingly exotic, quite thrilling and tolerably pleasant.

northern half of the earth while compressing the southern half into the remaining one-third of the area. He points out that in the Mercator map Europe appears to be larger than South America which, in fact, is nearly double in size; Soviet Union, though smaller, seems considerably larger than South Africa; Scandinavia appears as large as India when, in reality, the latter is three times larger, and Greenland seems larger than China which is about four times larger. Mercator's projection was made in sixteenth century — the time of European expansion — and it seemed quite in order that Europe should occupy in his map a centre-of-the-stage position, but the vision has not been corrected even years after the loss of European empires. Similarly, Peters argues, most of the world histories, having been written in Europe, betrays a Eurocentric attitude. Thus what is dark ages for Europe was taken to be the dark ages for the world despite the fact that China, India and Arabia were making steady progress at the time.

This Eurocentric view found an exponent in Macaulay who, by his famous Minute of Education in 1835, had largely shaped the destiny of India. Macaulay was as contemptuous of the languages and literatures of Asia as William Jones, the founder of the Asiatic Society, was fond and respectful of them. The other thing that distinguished them was the fact while Jones, who knew 28 languages, had taken pains to master Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit, Macaulay learnt none of the oriental languages, but that did not deter him from passing judgement on them:

I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value..... I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.....

The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language [English], we shall teach languages in which, by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own; whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which, by universal confession, whenever they differ from those of Europe, differ for the worse; and whether, when we can patronize sound philosophy and true history, we shall countenance, at the public expense, medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farmer, astronomy which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school, history abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years long, and geography, made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter.

This arrogant ethnocentricity, this overwhelming sense of superiority and this total contempt for other peoples' cultures found even cruder expressions in many places of Asia, Africa and the Americas where the European powers established their colonies. The colonial view generally assumed that there could not have been anything in the colonies' past history that was positive or in which one could take legitimate pride or which was worthy of preservation. James Mill, author of the *History of British India*, belonged to this school of thought and to him, the civilizations of Arabia, Persia, India, China, Korea and Japan were all inferior. Confronted with the results of William Jones' researches on India's past, he came up with the explanation that Jones must have been misled by his informant pundits, who, having learnt of the progress made in the west, put the credit of their being originated in India.

It is, therefore, small wonder that the early European settlers in the Americas attributed the splendid monuments in Yucatan, Guatemala or Peru to Phoenicians, Egyptians or anyone else but the natives. The worse happened when, in Central America and the Andean areas,

the Spanish conquerors virtually exterminated those sections of the population which were supposed to be "repositories of the indigenous culture". In Africa, the relations of Europeans to Africans was generally that of a superior culture — representing a technological society — to an inferior culture — isolated, non-literate and tribal, and this relationship had to be reinforced by racial discrimination. It became the white man's responsibility to 'civilize' the blacks and thus it also became essential to undermine the structure of African society and the traditional way of African life.

I am not suggesting that the world was only full of Mills and Macaulays. Joneses and Colebrookes certainly were there, but they were in short supply. Moreover, Mills and Macaulays were pillars of empire. Their cultural views went hand in hand with attitudes of political domination and justification of economic exploitation of the colonies. As they divided the world into centre and periphery, they also had divided human culture into a dominant one — their own — and a subordinate one — that of the others. A variation of the theme was to recreate the others after their own image. France, for instance, attempted, for a period, to turn her Africans into French culture by making Black Frenchmen of them. But most of the time, the colonialists stressed upon the colonists' otherness.

In response, there also appeared the assertion of the otherness by the colonists. This trend is represented in Africa by Kenyatta who wanted to revive tribal values, rituals and organizations in Kenya, for "all these different aspects of life together that make up a social culture", and no part of it could be undermined without destroying the whole. Not only did he consider these as vital institutions for his people, but also claimed that these were superior to the European ones.

Opposed to this view was that of Nkrumah's who wanted Ghana to "benefit from western technology and insti-

tutions without sacrificing the values of its pre-technological society". The conflict between these two trends was somehow tempered by another development which saw a mixture of "the neo-traditionalism of some of the educated elite and the modernism of some of the tribal chiefs." The spirit of African cultural revival was accompanied by a glorification of 'negritude' and a search for Pan-African cultural elements. The search is still on.

To many, of course, different cultures became a matter of anthropological interest or of simple curiosity. Even today cultural difference has turned in many places into a spectacle for the tourists to enjoy rather than something for the imperialists to overcome. Otherness has become a saleable commodity — amazingly exotic, quite thrilling and tolerably pleasant. Years ago, I was told by a Filipino sociologist that, in view of the changes affecting the life and habitation of fishermen in the Philippines, some businessmen came out with the brilliant idea of buying up an island and setting a fishermen's traditional village, with the difference that tourists, arriving there on conducted tours, would have been received by beauties clad in fishing nets. The fantasy, however, could not be materialized due to the opposition of social workers, working with the fishermen, of which my informant was a leading one.

III

Meeting of cultures has produced different sorts of results in different parts of the world. The experience of post-colonial Latin America seems to have been very different from that of Africa. According to the Unesco *History of mankind*:

In the regions of Central and South America once dominated by the great empires of the Aztecs, Incas and Mayas, a European overlay rested on a broad Indian foundation. Here, developments of the twentieth century took the form of a cultural reorientation and a movement toward integration which brought

to prominence the Indian heritage. The process involved a social revolution through which depressed classes and isolated peoples moved toward full citizenship.

Mexico, which led the process, provides us with the perfect example. Her revolution of 1910 helped the Indians to come out of isolation and incorporate into Mexican national life while giving the Mexicans a new sense of dignity in the integration of the Indian heritage. We may compare this development with the cultural scene in Egypt where the resurgent Arab nationalism never allowed the Egyptians to identify themselves fully with Pharaonic tradition although they take pride in the cultural achievements in their distant past. The consolidation in Mexico of heterogeneous groups, separated by class and ethnic division, was led by the *mestizo* who were of mixed Indian and European descent. It was much easier for them to give equal place to the Indian and European heritage. Although, linguistically, monolingualism of over fifty Amerindian languages gave place, first, to bilingualism with Spanish, and, eventually, to Spanish monolingualism, there has been a genuine rebirth of the arts culminating in the outstanding development of Mexican mural painting that combined traditional indigenous forms and modern social themes. The *indigenismo* movement rejected ethnocentric Indianism on the one hand and a servile imitation of the west on the other. Basing the movement, as it did, on the intrinsic strength of the Indian culture, it also recognized the forces at work in society that make cultural change inevitable. While the principles and influence of the movement have embraced most of the areas in Central and South America, historians tend to give it a special position to Mexico:

Now Mexico offered to the world the first demonstration in modern times that a people could express its self-respect in terms which it had formerly despised. In a world where European superiority was still almost unchallenged, it was an assertion of human dignity for the mixed blood to be able to boast that he was Indian instead of apologizing for being only partly white. At mid-century Mexico remained an outstanding example of the successful integration and reorientation of races and cultures.

To be continued