

Wrong End of the Telescope View of the US Mid-term Elections

by Khurshid Hamid

"One shall resort to some armchair soothsaying averring that the Republicans by their present venture into the uncharted waters of impeachment of the Presidency are shooting themselves in the legs politically, as they have been adept at lately, and are likely to suffer setbacks in the coming elections."

ALWAYS look at life through the wrong end of the telescope: things appear in much sharper focus and you always see the forest instead of the trees, but like Fortia in The Merchant of Venice it is easier to teach one's readers on what were good to be done than by one of the many to follow one's own teaching.

the telescope on the goblets of Bill Clinton, Monica Lewinsky and Kenneth Starr stalking the sordid scandal-ridden political scene in the United States. And even as the full House of Representatives were debating the move to initiate proceedings of formal impeachment inquiry (published by The Daily Star some days later on 15 October), one had made a foolhardy bravado prognostication about the results of the forthcoming November 3 elections that went against the mainstream thinking of House Speaker Newt Gingrich, House Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde, all Republican and some Democratic Congressmen, and the political pundits of the U.S. and international media. And still more foolhardily it bucked the historical trend of mid-term elections' results since 1822 as well as since 1934.

litical pundits had predicted that just as the Democratic landslide in 1974 after Watergate and the last Republican landslide in 1994 after Whitewater, both instances of discontent with the White House translating into routs in the Congress, and just as since 1822 the party of a Democratic President in his sixth year in office, and since 1934 the party of an incumbent President has always shed seats in the House of Representatives, history would repeat itself in the present mid-term elections with the Republicans bolstering their thin margins in the Senate and the House, and the Democrats being slaughtered.

the turnout to be as usual abysmally low, at around 30-35%, which always translates better for the Republicans since religious conservatives are the most motivated to vote. The Republicans' game plan was to go in for the Presidential juggernaut with an impeachment bolstered by a popular mandate.

Democrats also captured the governorship of the most populous state California, rolled back the Republican tide in the South by topping their governors in Alabama and South Carolina, and won the governorship of Iowa for the first time in three decades. All this was warm comfort for President Clinton. And one's modest effort at playing Nostradamus and prediction mongering hit the jackpot.

in person. Hyde has said that he wanted to wrap up the Judiciary Committee's impeachment hearings by the year's end. Hyde further said he would invite only Kenneth Starr to testify and that there were no plans to call other figures involved in the scandal.

tainted by its practitioners. The U.S. Constitution and its eternal principles have been preserved from being frivelled by the politicians and pundits. These were the tenor of one's trepidation in the earlier article one had written on the subject. Politicians, far away and nearer at home, all feel that they should shape the way their respective people think, but they do not realize that they are fighting a losing battle in this. The ordinary people are exceptionally well informed through the rise of television, the Internet and lobbies in the developed world, and the non-governmental organizations and the tea stalls in the developing countries.



The author is the former Bangladesh Ambassador to Italy and Switzerland.

LETTER FROM EUROPE

Double Consciousness and Quest for Identity in Chicano Poetry

by Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam

While the Eurocentric hegemonic culture of Anglo mainstream America, uses a self-serving oppositional binary system to divide America into "us" (the dominant group) and the "other" (the dominated group), the Chicano literature, (or at least significant part of it) on the other hand, in its quest for self-identity and struggle against this imposed sense of "otherness", provides literary paradigms which advocate a more positive open identity.

ONE evening, when I got home rather early, Carmen said, "Darling, I am afraid, you may have to change your plans about playing tennis with your friends this Saturday because we are thinking of going to Toledo." Toledo, the old imperial city of Spain is approximately fifty miles from Madrid. It represents the fusion of three cultures—the Christian, the Islamic and the Jewish. I must confess that like its ancient walls, narrow winding streets, souvenir shops, synagogues, churches, mosques and of course, its museums. Although Carmen and I have visited the place several times, yet we like going back to it again and again. But to go on a Saturday would mean sacrificing my long established habit of playing tennis with my friends on that day and that prospect did not please me in the least. So I asked, "Who are these 'we'?" I thought the children had something else to do. Carmen replied, "Oh, no. I was not thinking of the children. An American poet and novelist called Rudolfo Anaya is here on a lecture tour. Both he and his wife Patricia would very much like to see Toledo. So I have told them that we will be delighted to show them around. Besides, I thought you would like to meet with Rudy. He is one of America's top Chicano writers." Carmen, in her capacity as the Coordinator for North American Studies Center at the University of Alcalá invites writers, educators and professors from U.S.A. and Canada quite regularly and following the American tradition invites them home for lunch or dinner. And I must admit that I enjoy meeting with them. Because of my own personal background I am especially interested in ethnic writers.

appropriate to ask, who or what is a Chicano or a Chicana? In the thirties, the European-Americans started using this term in a derogatory manner while referring to the American citizens of Mexican origin. No one exactly knows the exact origin of the term. According to one version, it is merely an abbreviation of "Mexicano". According to others, it is a meld of the "Chi" of Chihuahua (a Mexican border province) and the "cano" of "Canoa". Having long suffered racial discrimination from mainstream America, the militant activists of this ethnic group have now adopted it as a positive term of self-identification in their struggle for social justice.

American settlers. Thus the Anglos became the owners of the land, dominated the economy and political life. The Mexican-Americans became unskilled labourers, who worked on the land which was no longer theirs and started suffering racial discrimination from the dominant group. The Mexican-American (the Chicano) also felt the overwhelming presence of a foreign culture (English). He was torn between two cultures and suffered from a crisis of identity. What was he? Was he a Hispanic-Mexican, or a Mexican-American or simply an American? Should he learn only Spanish or English?

caught in the cross-fire between camps while carrying all five races on your back not knowing which side to turn to, run from.

THOUGH the most recent China-Taiwan talks are being played as a breath-through in the international media, they only mark the end of open hostilities across the Taiwan Strait.

Taiwan Tiptoes towards Independence. Sophia Yow writes from Hong Kong. Includes a map of Taiwan and a timeline of key events from 1550 to 1987.

wan was already a sovereign country. "Would not" because it would arouse attention and reaction from the international community.

Since I had not so far met a Chicano poet, I agreed with Carmen that I would indeed be happy to spend the day with Rudolfo Anaya and his wife.

Actually for a better understanding of the Chicano situation we have to go back to the year 1521 when the Spaniard Hernán Cortés destroyed the Aztec Empire in Mexico by capturing Tenochtitlan (Mexico City). Since the European invasions accompanied by few women, they married or started living with Indian women. This phenomenon was responsible for the birth of a new mixed (in Spanish Mestizo) race and a new nation called Mexico. After consolidating their hold over Mexico, the Spanish invaders moved north in the first half of the eighteenth century conquering Texas, New Mexico or Aztlan (the original home of the Aztecs), Arizona and California. The entire area was named as New Spain and ruled by viceroys on behalf of Spanish monarchs. After more than a decade of armed struggle, Mexico became independent from Spain in 1821. Mexico's northern provinces were sparsely populated. The newly independent Mexican government had neither the means nor the energy to consolidate its hold over this vast territory. In hindsight, it is now clear that the Mexican government was also not conscious of the Anglo-American peril from the north. By the time the Mexicans became aware of the danger, it was too late. In 1836 the Anglo-American settlers in Texas were successful in gaining independence from Mexico and in 1846 Texas became a part of the United States. Further annexations took place soon. In an undeclared war against Mexico, President James K. Polk (1844-1848) conquered the entire Spanish-speaking area north of Rio Grande (which subsequently came to be known as the American Southwest), thus converting the Spanish-speaking people (the Chicanos) of this area into second-class citizens in their own land.

the history of the Mexican-Americans is the history of this strife. Because of their multi-cultural background, their multi-culturalism, their bi-lingualism and the discriminatory belief system of the dominant group, "the Chicanos see their own being as inadequately represented by a single fact of reality". They are treated as the eternal "others". He (the Chicano) feels alienated from both the cultural modes—the Mexican and the American. Hence the quest for his own cultural niche, his own space, his own identity (Rebolledo and Rivera) At times there is a sense of despair in this long quest. Lorna Dee Cervantes writes:

I feel I am a captive aboard the refugee ship. The ship will never dock. El barco nunca atracará.

Then there are the "local" Taiwanese, those who trace their family history back to at least 1895 when the island was ceded to Japan by the Qing government. They felt betrayed then, and later suffered under the harsh rule of the Kuomintang. Locals, therefore, have a strong sense of Taiwanese identity and traditionally find "mainlanders"—both KMT and communist—untrustworthy.

On many occasions he has called for China to face the reality, to respect the Taiwan government as a political entity with the same importance as the Beijing government. Taiwan belongs to a cultural and historical China, he says, not to the PRC.

Unification, he maintains, can only happen under a free and democratic system. Communist rule has "proved to be a failure"; the sovereignty of the Republic of China (the formal name for Taiwan) is independent of the PRC.

The closeness of the parties' positions means that sometimes the KMT even borrows ideas from the DPP. Lee's "unite under a democratic and free system" strategy is very similar to the "one country, one system" negotiation strategy suggested by Hsu Hsin-liang.

Domestic Violence Needs Public Attention

Naunidhi Kaur writes from New Delhi

THE trip to Toledo, besides being pleasant was very educational for me. Rudolfo Anaya was born on 30th October 1937 in Pastura, a village in eastern New Mexico, U.S.A. He earned an MA in English from the University of New Mexico in 1968 and started his career as a public school teacher in Albuquerque. In 1970 he was appointed as the director of counselling at the University of Albuquerque. He joined the English department of the University of New Mexico in 1974. In 1966 he married Patricia Lawless. His first novel Bless Me, Ultima, (1972) has established him as one of the major contemporary Mexican-American (Chicano) writers. Then came in quick succession Heart of Aztlan (1976); Tortuga (1979); The Silence of the Llano: Short stories (1982); Isis in the Heart: A love poem, etc. In 1971 Bless Me, Ultima won the Premio Quinto Sol, the most coveted Chicano literary award. Later Anaya went on to win the New Mexico governor's Award for excellence and the President's Salute to American Poets and Writers. Rudolfo talked of multiculturalism, bilingualism, Jungian ideas on intuition and feeling and Chicano quest for identity. He also talked about his childhood in the village, his back injury as a youth, his move to the city etc. in such simple, unpretentious manner that I was impressed. By the time we got back to Madrid from Toledo, I had become an ardent member of Rudolfo's fan club. The day with Anaya also increased my interest in contemporary Chicano poetry and its role in the Chicano quest for identity.

Since, except the native-Americans (the American Indians), all Americans came from somewhere else, the doubleness or double-consciousness (the term first used by the great African-American thinker W.E.B. DuBois) lies at the heart of American experience. Yet, as Pat Mora in her poem Legal Alien puts it, there is something very special about the Chicanos:

an American to Mexicans a Mexican to Americans a handy token sliding back and forth between the fringes of both worlds

and this is my land. While the Eurocentric hegemonic culture of Anglo mainstream America, uses a self-serving oppositional binary system to divide America into "us" (the dominant group) and the "other" (the dominated group), the Chicano literature, (or at least significant part of it) on the other hand, in its quest for self-identity and struggle against this imposed sense of "otherness", provides literary paradigms which advocate a more positive open identity.

Five-year-old Sunanda, living in the southern Indian state of Kerala, saw her mother being doused in kerosene by her drunken father. She heard her screams and two years later still wakes up sobbing inconsolably for her mother.

Most people do not realise that wealth and social status are no immunity against private violence, activists say. "The servants who get bashed by their drunk husbands to doctors who are strangled to death," explains media researcher Ahliha Sivadras of the Centre For Advocacy and Research in Delhi.

They feel immigrant women are doubly vulnerable because they live far from their families, and are unfamiliar with the language and laws in their adopted country. "Many times the batterer threatens them with deportation if they tell anyone about the abuse," explains Sakhi volunteer Prema Vora.

In the upper and middle classes, where privacy of both emotions and acts is maintained, family members quite conveniently feign ignorance of gender-based violence.