

## Face to Face

## Kabori: The Sweet Girl of Sixties

The sixties when the process of urbanization was taking place and a sense of displacement from roots was growing, Kabori stormed into the silver screen with *Sutarang* as the image of sweet innocent village girl to make the newly urbanized nostalgic

DS: What do you have to say to the influence of MTV and satellite TV explosion?

Kabori: I have been with celluloid world for over 25 years and if not direct but somehow been involved with TV. What I feel is that the younger generation is under absolute grip of satellite culture. I don't say we should remain deaf to other cultures. The dynamics of any healthy culture lies in its openness, its constant dialogue to others which in turn supplies the necessary adrenaline to growth. Sadly, we now see a yawning gap between the younger generation and our traditional culture. If I may be allowed I would say we are living in a time of cultural ailment. Recently Ferdousi Rahman and I was invited to programme featuring folk music of Bengal in Calcutta. What really impressed me was the way the whole programme was conceptualized. It featured folk songs of two Bengals including celebrated numbers by Abbas Uddin, Kanailal Shil, Lalou. There were no chairs for the audience and nobody was allowed in trousers. It was a happy marriage of tradition in every aspect from dress code to

sitting arrangements. What I am trying to say is that there is attempt in West Bengal to recreate and revive the traditional riches. A content conversation between tradition and modernism is a must for a healthy growth. Hadn't we seen fruitful dialogues with the west in the past? Look at S D Barman or Tagore who himself is a grand example of how the richness of other cultures can be incorporated to ours. Today the scene is different. Since we don't know about our glorious tradition we suffer from inferiority complex and think that the west represent superior culture. This is absolute nonsense. We need to get rid of this motion and I'm pointing at the younger generation standing at the threshold of the 21st century.

DS: Who do you think should be held responsible for this degenerating media?

Kabori: Media I think partly responsible but education system is largely responsible. What are we offering to our kids at in the form of English school? Are they being fed with a literature which speak of our culture?

DS: You are a member of censor board. I would like to hear

your comments about the dance number that are Dhaka films' staple.

Kabori: I honestly think these are dirty, rotten, filthy stuff. Whenever there is a screening for the censor board (being a film people myself) I had to take pain killer tablets. The way the heroines are dressed — no one, not even the most avant-grade fashion designer of the world in his/her wildest imagination would think of anything like that. They literally impose the vulgar dance sequences on the storyline. Sex is part of life, but the way it is presented in Dhaka movies it reeks of perversion and sick mentality. Then there is the attitude of aping Bollywood. These people are not at all good even in copying.

DS: Then how come these movies see the light of the day? What are you doing with scissors in hand?

Kabori: There are underhand parleys. I don't know much about it.

DS: Is the censor board ineffectual then?

Kabori: There are cases of the scenes we have chopped off at censor are being rejoined

while screening in cinema halls. Corruption is all-pervasive in our country.

DS: What you are saying is that there exists no monitoring system?

Kabori: Yes. That is true. DS: Let's move to something else. What is your opinion about opposition's recent 60-hour hartal call?

Kabori: As a conscious citizen of the country I'm against any hartal call. We are now in internet world. Everything is changing for better. Our politicians should grow with time, should come up with more mature idea of expressing their protest rather than resorting to violence and non-cooperation. These are I think primitive approach. We have elected our representatives to give voice to our needs, dreams and aspirations not to be held as hostage in home. They are not there to settle their personal scores. They are there for us. This is what they are oblivious to.

DS: How do you look at the verdict of Bangabandhu Murder Case?

Kabori: I think finally though after a long time we are in a process that will do a world of good to restore peo-

ple's faith in law and justice. This is the most gruesome murder in present history. A murderer should be punished. There can't be any question about it. We are an unfortunate nation who could not try the killers of its nation. The trial I think is the auspicious moment of our history — a right step to a right direction.

DS: The nation has seen other heinous killing also, Ziaur Rahman, Colonel Taher, Siraj Shikder for example. Do you think that these cases should go for trial immediately?

Kabori: Yes. Indeed. If a killer go scot free it inspires other killer. That is what has happened in our case. Think of the indemnity Bill. It's a black comedy. I even had the difficulty to understand what our politicians say. Ambiguity and rhetoric play a vital role to what they say, it is like mystic chants that always carry double meaning. I have one question to BNP. As a democratically elected government why they didn't even thought of putting the killers on trial? Why indemnity Bill was not touched as a sacred cow during their tenure? Isn't it a national shame?

DS: Recently Sheikh Hasina declared that Awami League would never ever call hartal. What is your gut feeling?

Kabori: I welcome the spirit. For long we have to swallow bitter pills from our politicians. At least there is something positive for us. Maybe we are entering into a different culture of politics.

DS: Let's turn to your celluloid world. What needs to be done to salvage the industry from present rotting?

Kabori: My personal feeling is that Film Development Corporation which is now a public enterprise should be run by an autonomous body. If it goes to private hands we would see more of what is now being screened in the name of entertainment.

DS: What are the impediments to good entertainment movies?

Kabori: In a single word the financiers who are putting money in the movies. The cultured and educated class who financed the movies in 60's are now being replaced by half-educated and uncultured people. Naturally, the silver screen portrays and circulates the taste of these people. Then again the environment at all



cinema halls is to some extent responsible for keeping the good audience at bay. Whereas the cinema halls are considered as nice place for outing.

DS: There is almost a perpetual complaint that the film people are victims of neglect and indifference. In the past five years national film award was not given which is testimony to this utter neglect. What do you have to say?

Kabori: Do you think what is being produced and served on the platter as entertainment deserves award? Unpalatable, bad taste is what marks their celluloid effort. I was in award committee once and for seven days what I had been subjected to was in one word, horrible. How come they expect that government should patronize these stuff?

DS: Is sex-education necessary when rape and child abuse are on the rise?

Kabori: I don't think it would be a very good idea. Before anything I feel we, the parents, should be taught about it. I have seen many parents who apparently look progressive are seen conservative to the bones. So, parents need education first to change their mindset. Plus today's kids are not quality entertainment as we have seen in 50's and 60's. Literature that can open up kids'

imagination is now replaced by satellite TV channels and internet. Kids are now more exposed to vulgarity than ever before. So, sex education is not the only solution.

DS: Taslima Nasreen has returned from her exile. What is your opinion about her stand as a feminist?

Kabori: Let me tell you first what I really understand by



women's liberation. I'm a working lady and a mother and somebody's wife or sister. I feel I should be recognised first as a human being, a person who would have her own choice and the right to say so. I feel insecure when my husband starts worrying if I am late to return home. There should exist an understanding, a mutual respect. When I see the garments girls at night on their way to

home I feel really great. At least they are earning their own bread.

About Taslima I should say the way she writes tantamounts to vulgarity. I am against it. Literature should inject in you ideas of good and great not the feeling of ugliness. I feel by writing in a vulgar vein she hasn't at all helped women's cause. It's at most making us belittle. And what the fundamentalists are doing is equally vulgar. I don't think Quran permits violence and freedom of thought. If Taslima is wrong prove it through argument not by giving fatwa for someone's head.

DS: Let's imagine a situation that you are exiled in a deserted island for the rest of your life what or whom would you prefer to take with you?

Kabori: I would certainly take a book, a fiction may be. DS: Anything particular?

Kabori: Something by Shirshendu.

DS: Who would you rate as the sexiest man in Hollywood or back home?

Kabori: Gregory Peck. I wish if I could ever had a chance to act against him. Back home, nobody.

Interviewed by Ziaul Karim



## When I Was a Teenager...

HASHEM KHAN  
IN CONVERSATION

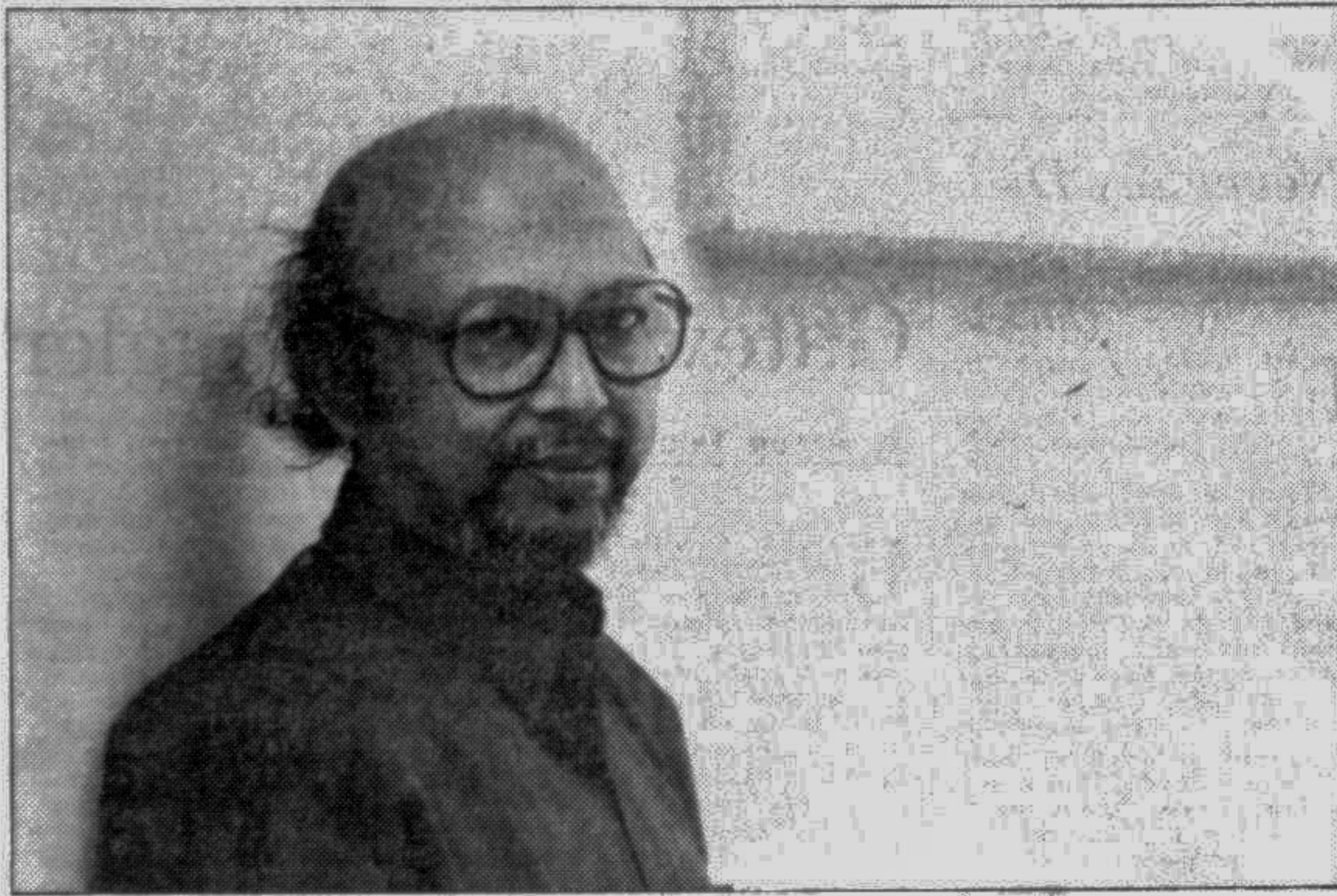
HASHEM Khan needs no introduction. He has captured many a heart with his paintings, and anybody who is anybody or nobody, knows the art works of Hashem Khan. Although the painting of his dreams is still unborn, his paintings, which are a combination of the portrayal of traditional Bengali structure, feelings and values and modernity, have been internationally ac-

by Navine Murshid

claimed. He is undoubtedly one of our master artists.

What was the life of such a great man like? What were his parents like? What was the social attitude when he was growing up? With more questions like these, we talked to the man himself about the most memorable part of one's life: his childhood and his teenage life. They lived in a village near Chadpur City.

That was the time of the India-Pakistan separation. "As a child, I was deeply affected by



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"For example, I was not allowed to go to the popular tea-shop nearby where all my friends went because I would get 'spoilt'; I was not allowed to bring home my friends although I often stayed over at theirs. Things like these created a distance, never to be filled up again. This is the kind of gap which I took care not to formulate in my relationship with my son and daughter. After I finished primary school, my immediate elder brother and I were sent off to our house in Chadpur to complete high school. Our father often stayed with us.

"During this time, some of the

distance was always there. The library in Chadpur influenced me and got me into the reading habit, something which my father never approved of. He wanted us to read out aloud what we were studying. I told him that I had learnt to read softly, and so would do that. That's how I had to cheat my father in order to read books other than my academics."

Yet, when he talked of his father, the love and respect Hashem Khan held for him was evident from the way he spoke. He came to Dhaka and joined the now 'Institute of Fine Arts' after graduating from high school. This was rather on impulse...an outburst from the rigidity of his surroundings.

He never got the encouragement of his dear ones. No one approved, let alone inspire him to be a great artist one day. Drawing and painting were considered as a waste of time. He recalls that the only time his father bought him paints was to draw maps! He holds in his heart no grudges. He understands that at a time when

artists meant no food, no security, no future, his father was justified in not wanting him to be an artist.

His teachers are also the ones who he regards highly. "Even today, when I see one of my teachers, I bend down and touch their feet to express the gratitude and love I feel for them," he said fondly. This is certainly something that lacks in the students of today's generation. For this, he blames not the students, but the society and the political environment as a whole. The social attitude is such that it induces people to act in an adverse manner.

"After 1947, politics started to mean something different. Politics was literally redefined. All of a sudden, the professors and teachers, the so-called intellectuals got involved with politics...either on their free will or by exploitation. This confused the students...those who were supposed to teach them ideals, morals and ethics were the very people who indulged in dirty politics. The aggression we see in the students of today built not in a day, but during a period of years. The students are merely the tools of

politics: caught in the cross fire. They are not to be blamed alone. It is the evil of politics, which made us forget that we are brothers; lost our love for humanity.

"Actually, politics was not so crude even in the 1970s. As a reason for this, I would say that before this time, those who entered politics were educated with good academic backgrounds.

"Their knowledge was their guide to good leadership. After that, education was hardly a criteria to get into politics. Every Tom, Dick and Harry had high possibilities winning elections provided that he had abundant money," he ended sadly.

It was evident that this man was worried about the present generation. He feels that this generation does not love their country, and he blames his generation for not being able to bring out the love we should be feeling. Yet, he sounded hopeful. "We shall overcome this," he said. As the interview drew to an end, Hashem Khan directed his parting words towards the readers, "Love your country...if you don't...learn to love it."