

exhibition

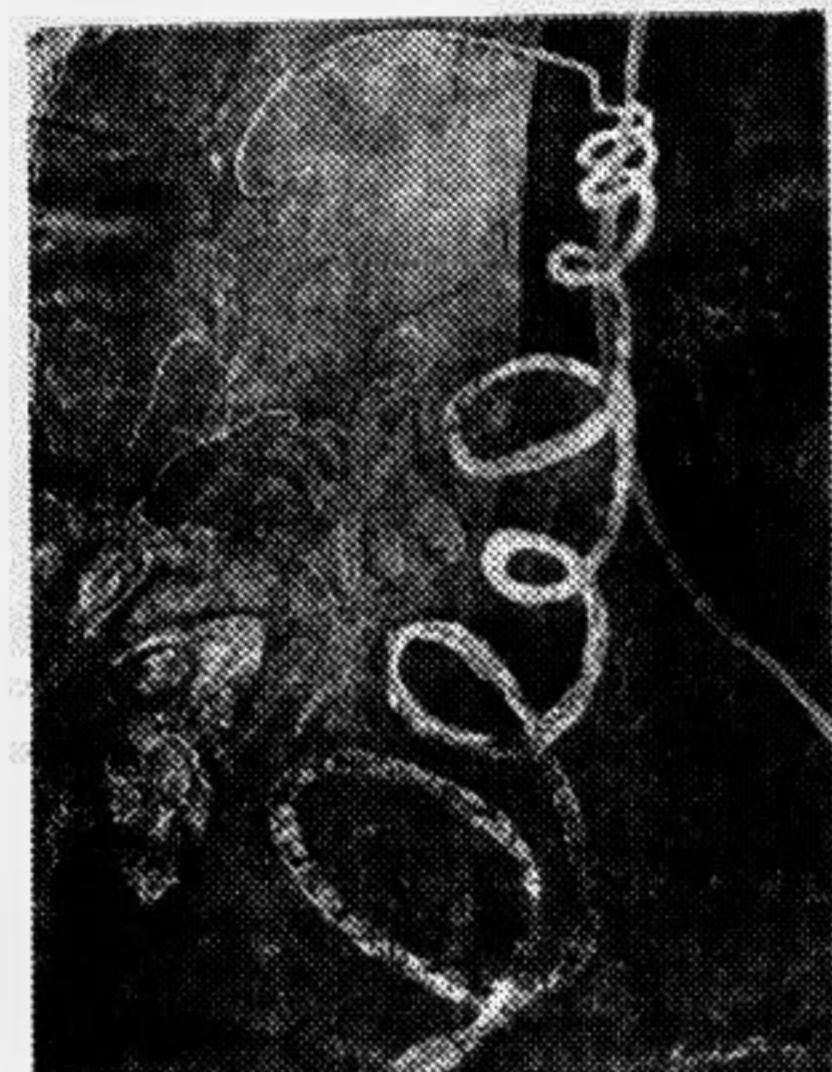
## "The Young Ones Should Never be Afraid"

by Fayza Haq

THE group of four young artists, "Pratibimbo", who held an exhibition of their experimental works at the Zainul Gallery recently, have proved themselves daring and innovative. Shushanta Adhikary has completed his Masters from Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, India, but the rest of the group are Masters students of DU, who have presented bold new delineation of their impressions of life around them. Although naturally yet to establish themselves in the Bangladesh as professionals, these artists, in their early 20s, have presented the Dhaka connoisseurs and art lovers with a medley of numerous subjects, styles, themes, compositions and media. They are certainly promising, pragmatic and persistent in their drive to show the world the magic of the realm of paints and fibres.

"When in India, I switched from Oriental Art to Painting, as I wanted to work with the inspiring nature around me, as that spurred me on intensely. The Santiniketan is an uncrowded area, far from the city's pollution and humdrum mechanical life. The trees, birds, and even the sky and clouds moved me on. The scenes there are simply exotic and ethereal and it makes any painter rush to his brushes to capture some of the nonpareil scenes. I felt that every type of flower on earth that I was personally acquainted with were there. Krishnachura, radhachura, polash, passion flowers, chambelis, and roses were all to be found in abundance, as if it were some veritable paradise on earth," Shushanta explains his source of inspiration.

In "Abolambinee", Shushanta depicts the dependence of Bengali women on their men. This has a flat pillar-type composition in shades of grey, with twining tendrils of vines, bearing golden-hued grape-like leaves, done in tints of beige tinged with dreamy purple, and touched with pearly grey. A romantically twirling whitish curling vine clings on desperately to the oval coloured pillar. The twirls of the vine are dramatic and bold, and done with precision. To support it to the right of the composition is a simple pale-brown harder and older vine, that stands out against the midnight blue apparent sky.



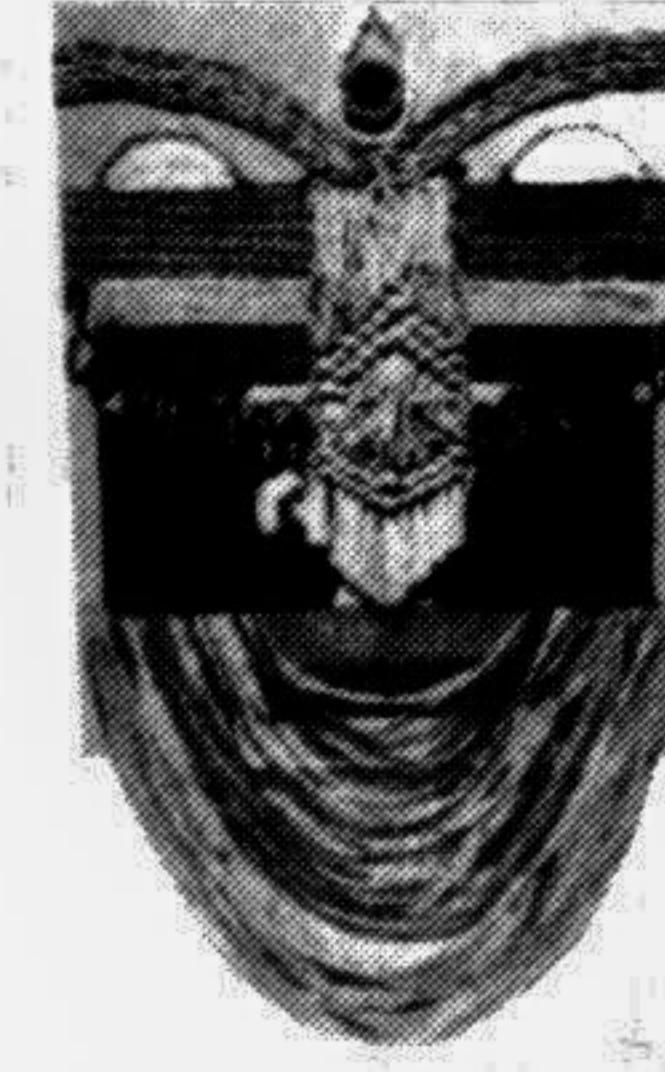
Abolambinee, mixed media by Shushanta Adhikary



Life-4, mixed media by Mohammad Shahabuddin



Landscape, mixed media by Syed Mohammad Mosibul Haque



Pouranik Atti Theke, mixed media by Suravi Sobhana

Thus the artist has the male gender in the form of the massive section of the pillar, while the lyrical vines are the symbols of the delicate sex. The style is semi-abstract while the choice of composition of blues and beiges are idyllic, presenting a happy theme of contentment. This is in mixed media.

"After Falgun" is again a mixed media creation which has a pale-green fruit tree in the background. Both the leaves and barks of the trees are done in soft, pastel shades of muted green. In front is a large round ball-like composition which is a viridian green, with a stark white strip in the centre — denoting a fruit seed. Just as the wind drives the blooming and bursting flowers and leaves, so it carries the seed which is a chola pod. The cycle of creation and recreation of nature, with apparent ease is captured with spontaneity and dexterity, bringing in the lure of perennial nature around man, once he crosses the bars of hectic and chaotic city life, with all its overwhelming milling and pushing. "Nature moves on despite our fixation and frustrations with the necessary activities in city lives," Shushanta comments.

In "In Tune of Bhairabi", one finds the sitar in the centre, presented in a semi-abstract form, in which the minimal details are brought in. A hand, carefully holding the musical instrument is delicately outlined and in-

cluded. The face of a startling beautiful woman is outlined at the left, in black. In front are twirls of leaves presented in different shades of green, beige and reddish-brown. The swirl of the woman's hair adds to the charm of the optimistic composition, bringing in the theme of "... woman and song", with the ruby red whirling line across the composition, which heightens the dream-like effect. A tree, outlined in charcoal, at the bottom, with details of leaves includes the artist's favourite theme of self-perpetuating tranquil nature, that surrounds mankind is the oasis of harmonious existence. "Where I worked, nearby was the Shantibhaban, and naturally music often drifted in, and this is what I have attempted to capture", Shushanta elaborates. The subject and lines are deceptively simple, but with the economic strokes, the artist presents his subject of the woman, offset by the semi-abstraction, with confidence and remarkable maturity.

Shushanta's favourite artists in the east are Jogen Chowdhury, Sanad Kar and Subramaniam, and in the west, Picasso and Kandinsky. He has won four awards from Khulna and Dhaka. He is a temporary teacher at DU, and says that he abhors commercial art.

Mohammad Shahabuddin has a neat square form in his "Life-6", which is an abstraction. It has red colours

sweeping down on it, and has texture work in grey and oblong yellow strokes. There is a fair measure of play of grey with the paper, and colours twist and thicken in places, thus manoeuvring dexterously with the texture to add fascination to the viewer. The background remains a collage of brilliant red. At the bottom, one finds a human figure, in shades of pink and white, in a simplified and distorted version — to bring in modernity and experimentation. On the left, is a symbol of city life presented like some electrical pole. "I have tried to bring in the beiges and browns, along with the greys of our gram Bangla in my work," Shahabuddin elaborates. The collages are there for adequate effect of the composition. The white is there to depict mankind's hope, despite all despair and desolation that often surrounds him.

Examining "Life-8", one finds once again a collage, with a piece that is oblong in shape bringing in a human figure, surrounded by a fancy-free play of texture with white and chocolate brown. At the forefront, is a vermillion rectangular and pointed, similar but larger shape, with black and brown collages pasted on. The collage work continues on to the bottom for balance, in brown and grey. On the top, the horizontal collage pieces that run like a bar, hold the composition together. Sweeps and splashes of red, along with salmon-

pink and white cheerful strokes go together to depict mankind's pain, bring in red is a symbol of agony. There is an attempt to overcome problems which are shown in the effort to camouflage and balance the vermillion. The ochre in the background is to offset the subject. The reds and greens incuded in the composition stand for the national colours.

Shahabuddin has participated in 13 group exhibitions, and has won two awards in Dhaka. He has taken part in two workshops, and his works are included in private collections in USA and India.

In M Mosibul Haque's "Landscape", one sees overwhelming splashes of inky-blue and beige connected with delicate narrow horizontal and some curved lines, with a backdrop of misty blue-green in the left background. This is obviously an aerial view, and looks like chapter torn from an atlas, and presented in an impressionistic style. Land and water are brought in by the beige and the inky-blue. The muddy water is to stress the state of our rivers in Bangladesh. The narrow lines are brought in to depict imaginary river routes. The artist has used acrylic for this work, which he prefers, as he finds it easy to handle. "In water-colour, the hues tend to pale later on," Mosibul comments.

In Mosibul's series of "Landscapes" of three separate pieces, set side by side,

the artist has brown, red and pink lines and circles, touched with grey, which bring in trees, branches and leaves in semi-abstract forms, in frenzied sweeps. Paler colours offset the darker ones. The black is added to provide depth. "This represents different seasons, e.g. in the winter scene, one can locate barren branches, while the autumn piece has an abundance of browns and reds," the artist explains. The artist has used mixed media in these, including oil and acrylic. The effect is imaginative and intriguing. The artist thus presents nature in abstraction with buoyant strokes.

Mosibul has participated in eight solo and combined exhibitions; has taken part in two workshops; and has his paintings in various private galleries in Dhaka.

Shahin Sobhana Suravi, proves herself the most striking exhibitor of the foursome — in some ways — because of her unusual media i.e. jute fibre, mixed with ribbons, mirrors and other related artifacts. In the tapestry piece, "Pouranik Atti Theke", Suravi depicts the portrait of the goddess Kali, with half-moon eyes, a bindya on the forehead, arched eye-brows, hanging tongue, in yellows, greens and mauve geometrical forms, touched with tassels swinging ribbons and beads. Suravi belongs to the Craft Department and feels that she can best project her creative impulse through fibre work.

In "Sriti Ekatur" Suravi has depicted a tortured martyr of '71. The man is been hanged by his feet, while his hands are tied behind him. She has included green and red colours of the national flag in her compositions to drive her point home. The black bush is the head, while the yellow-ochre limbs are outlined in black.

Suravi has participated in more than a dozen group exhibitions and has won an award too.

It is heartening to see the brave new ventures of the young artists, who will surely blossom as more matured ones, and will eventually be acclaimed individuals in the Fine Arts field, with time to come. They battle against odds, and use every instruction and guidance that they have been provided with to the best of their ability.

can draw men and boys as sharply and sympathetically as she can draw women and girls. This gives her stories a rare androgynous strength. One striking passage in the novella *Shankha-karat* employs the very female image of the pre-mature breaking of the amniotic waters and the dehydration caused by that leakage to describe a young man's sense of panic and helplessness at the thought of losing a particular young woman. Perhaps only a female author would have thought of using such a female image to describe the psychology of a young man, but it is extremely appropriate in the context as it suggests the young male's dependence on a mother-figure.

My very special favourite among Dilara's novels is *Mural*, a bitter-sweet story of chance encounter set in the western Indian city of Aurangabad, which I enjoyed all the more because of having visited that city. I fell in love with the character of the hero, Riyaz, and found myself wishing that the heroine, Rumana, would write to him soon from New York! With this confession, I shall take my leave and ask Dilara to tell us more about her life and work.

impression

## Introducing Dilara

by Ketoki Kushari Dyson

WHILE it gives me the greatest pleasure to introduce Dilara Hashem to you today, I am immediately plunged into diffidence, thinking — who am I, coming from England, to introduce Dilara to a gathering in Washington DC? In a sense Dilara belongs to this city, working as she does as a producer and broadcaster for the Bengali Service of Voice of America. Dilara, who has been in broadcasting for a very long time, is a diligent and energetic radio journalist, — as I can testify, having been tracked down by her for interviews in different locations of the world, — last year she literally took my breath away when she rang me up in my room at the Ramakrishna Mission Guesthouse in Calcutta. Radio journalism is, however, only one amongst the many activities of this multi-talented woman. She is also a singer. But it is in the field of diasporic Bengali writing that I am specially honoured to be able to claim Dilara as my colleague. We have some things in common in our backgrounds. Like me, Dilara was born in pre-partition India, — we are roughly the same generation, — like me, she read English literature at university, in her case Dhaka University.

She has continued to write in Bengali in spite of being in diaspora for many years.

Although Dilara has written some poetry, fiction is her special field. In my judgement, she is among the most talented writers of fiction writing in Bengali anywhere today. She is an award-winning writer, but awards don't necessarily tell us much. All those who win the coveted prizes do not always touch our hearts, or impress us by the sweep of their imagination or by the scope and span of their humanity. So many times it happens that a book is recommended to us in a blaze of publicity, but when we read it, we are left with a feeling of disappointment. This is where Dilara was different for me when I read her. After reading any of her novels or novellas, I have never been left with a tinge of disappointment. Obviously, some books impress us more than others, but it is the sustained quality of her substantial output that marks her out as a major Bengali fiction-writer of our times. She is a humanistic writer of grit and quality.

It is now over one hundred years since the first Bengali woman gave an account of her travels abroad. Again, she

thinking of Krishnababini Das, who spent eight years in England and published *Engla Bangamahila* in 1885. We can justly claim this book as the first diasporic writing by a Bengali woman. Before that, Rasasundari Devi had already published her autobiography in 1876, and Swarnakumari Devi, a sister of Rabindranath Tagore, had published her first novel in 1870. During the intellectual revival known loosely as the Bengal Renaissance, although, for historical reasons, it was women from the Hindu community who started writing and publishing first, it was not as if there was a complete vacuum in writing from the pens of Muslim women. In the preface of an important book published early this year from Calcutta, *Zenana Mehfil*, an anthology of Muslim women's writings in Bengali in the period 1904-1938, edited by Shaheen Akhtar and Mousumi Bhownik, I came across four names in the period between the 1860s and 1902. Then Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain started publishing in 1904. Begum Rokeya can be claimed as the first feminist woman writer in Bengali. A distinguished educationist, Rokeya was a first-rate intellect and a brilliant writer. Again, she

was not alone in her period. In the anthology I just mentioned, there are selections from the writings of eleven Muslim women. Out of these eleven, the names of Begum Rokeya and Sufia Kamal were known to me, but the nine other names I had never heard before, a shocking confirmation of how patriarchal history fails to highlight the achievements of women. These are just a few introductory words to place writers like Dilara and myself in perspective. We are proud to be following the trail left by other Bengali women in the last century and the present century.

Dilara is a perfect mistress of the art of story-telling. Her stories are tightly constructed, sparse structures, often taking several threads forward with admirable skill. She does not seem to take any pleasure in superfluous brush strokes. The international span of her settings, the locales of her cross-cultural narratives are made vivid with remarkable economy. I admire the way she can bring locales alive — from America to the South Asian subcontinent — with just a few carefully chosen details. In the context of our times her strength is in the firm, realistic groundings of her stories. Dilara is not

into fantasy fiction. Her gripping and moving stories are about people like you and me, people with whom we can identify. But she can also create characters who are a little more set apart, like Ansar Ahmad of *Sadar-Andar*, set right here in Washington. He is dead when the story begins; his death begins the narrative; but by the time the story ends, a life-size portrait of the dead man has been drawn. Dilara portrays with compassion and insight the currents and cross-currents of the lives of the Bengali Muslim middle classes, at home and abroad; the political perspectives of her narratives are skilfully incorporated in the portrayals of individuals. It is through the lives of individual men and women that politics is brought home to the reader.

The two works which must count as Dilara's masterpieces are the semi-autobiographical novel *Kakataliya*, which is of considerable documentary importance and which fascinated me because it indicated to me the overlap between our childhood backgrounds, and *Amolokir Mow*, a richly textured family saga with its unforgettable central character of Sara. Viewing her world steadily with a woman's eyes, Dilara

can draw men and boys as sharply and sympathetically as she can draw women and girls. This gives her stories a rare androgynous strength. One striking passage in the novella *Shankha-karat* employs the very female image of the pre-mature breaking of the amniotic waters and the dehydration caused by that leakage to describe a young man's sense of panic and helplessness at the thought of losing a particular young woman. Perhaps only a female author would have thought of using such a female image to describe the psychology of a young man, but it is extremely appropriate in the context as it suggests the young male's dependence on a mother-figure.

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poem

## On Hearing The Death News of My Grandmother

by Syed Nageeb Mustafa Ali

Hi Mom and Dad,

Assalamalaikum. How was your flight? How did you enjoy your stay at Abed Mama's? Did you like the video-tape recording of Boston?

I assume that by the time you get this email, the Janazas must have happened. I pray that it all went smoothly and did not put a toll on the world's greatest parents (you, that is).

I'm sure it must feel very weird coming home to Dhaka to find that the feeling of security that your parents are there is now gone. I'm sure it must be very sad to be in Dadu's home, but not to find Dadu. Losing a loved one is indeed painful, and a loss in life that is never



filled again.  
With time the wound does not heal, certainly, for we will always remember  
Dadu. She will remain in our hearts for the wisdom she gave us,  
the many times she would pray for us, the way she would make us laugh  
with her words; our hearts will never forget her in the same way our  
tongues will never forget the taste of the delectable 'Nankatai's' she used  
to make.

Yet, we must remain in our convictions that Almighty Allah has the best of plans. We should be grateful to Allah for the happy times we had with Dadu, and we should never lament that we do not have. The time of our deaths is set before or at birth; we have been created by Allah's will, and we are taken away by Allah's will. Even a drop of rain cannot ground without the will of Allah, for each rain drop is carried down by an Angel, Alhamdulillah. Dadu herself would not want us to be sad, but in all



her piety, she would believe that instead we should be praying for her and ourselves with as much zeal as possible.

Dadu touched our lives in the most profound and magnificent of ways, leaving us all with a strong sense of loss. The only way to do justice to the kindness she gave us during her life is through praying for her.

I love you guys. It pains me that Dadu is gone, and also pains me very much to know that two of the people I love most are going through a lot of pain right now. Please take care of yourselves and firmly believe that Almighty Allah really has the best of plans and it is in Allah that we must put all our faith.

Love,  
Your younger son,  
Nag