

Face to Face

An Affair with Birds

He is 52, and single. His love for bird and nature has led him to frame the winged beauty of nature in their unspoiled grace. Art and ornithology are tied in a happy marriage in his photography. Always at the thick of action, Enam Ul Huq is the only Bangladeshi to go on birding-trips as far as the Antarctic. Interviewed by Ziaul Karim

Q: What inspired you or guided you to lead a single life? Don't you feel that you need a family to have sense of completeness?

A: The real reason must be buried deep inside me which I don't know. There must be psychological reason for psychrists to reveal. What I can say or what I have known about me is that I was greatly influenced by some western philosophers when I was a college student.

Q: Who are they?

A: Well they are Kant, Hegel, Descartes, Shopenhauer, and few British philosophers like Russell.

Q: But Russell was not single.

A: Yes, but most of them. And most of the great Greek philosophers were bachelors except Aristotle and Socrates. They were badly married I would say.

Q: Is there any particular philosophy then that left an indelible impression on you to choose the life you live now? Have you ever given a thought on it?

A: Yah. I don't think that there is one philosophy that made me decide about living a bachelor's life. But from the age 20 I knew for sure, never had any doubt, that I would be single. All the philosophers I used to read and still am a great admirer are mostly single. It appeared to me that if anyone have great involvement in life, a lifelong passion, he doesn't need a family to look after or kids to raise. He may still do it, but it is not necessary. It became clear to me in my 20s that most people need it, they can't survive without it. Without it they will have nothing to do. There is nothing to fill up their time. I thought

those who have deep involvement in anything, this would never be their problem. They may still marry and raise a family, but it would never be necessary in the sense that without this their life would be empty. I don't need a family to fill up my time. I have never had one empty moment.

Q: But have you never felt that you need someone to share your emotions, your's deas?

A: Of course I need people to share my thoughts, and my emotions but that doesn't mean that I need a person of opposite sex. I have great friends and shared my ideas with them and in my life I have never been short of them. Whatever we feel or think we need to check with another individual for pleasure and for also knowing that we are not doing something that doesn't click with another human being. But I do not really think that has to be a woman.

Q: What draws you to photography and particularly bird photography?

A: Well I started photography for birds. I always wanted to capture the charm and grace of the winged beauty through my lens and mostly encouraged by my friend Anwar Hossain who said since I am greatly involved with birds if I do photography I would do good. So that was the beginning. What makes photography more interesting to me now is that since I do photography I see more things than any one else. My life is bigger now. I see things in detail even if I'm not using my camera. Photography has expanded my world and every detail is now worth seeing. Thanks to photography I have never taken such a close look before at anything.

Q: What makes you stand out from other professional bird watchers in the world is your emotional involvement with bird. What I call human element. This is a question to a sensitive man like you: What worries you most in our society?

A: What disturbs me most is our lack of sensitivity. Most people in our society are insensitive. I tend to believe that you get more out of life if you are sensitive to more things.

Q: But what really has gone wrong that we are becoming more and more blunt?

A: I think that modern civilisation has the tendency to be monocentric like going after one thing, taking one path and then pursuing it too strongly. At present time we are too occupied with material growth excluding emotional elements that makes us human being.

Q: Do you think that we are going through a process of dehumanisation?

A: Yes. In many ways — more and more mechanical and less and less human. We no longer look at things that are of no immediate benefit.

Q: What about the present political culture, how do you look at it?

A: I have never given much thought on it. To speak the truth I'm politically insensitive. When I think of politics I think of how much freedom I have. I have never been interested in party politics.

Q: Do you vote?

A: I seldom do.

Q: Why?

A: I vote only when I have a candidate I have a right to vote, but I think it is my right also not to vote. Unless I have a candidate I like I don't go near the polling booth. If there are ten

candidates and if I dislike them all I am not going to vote for the least disliked one. Most people vote for the least disliked one. If I have to vote I have to like the person whom I'm voting for.

Q: You have been photographing birds, and orchids for some time now. Lately you have started photographing tribal people. What difference it makes. How do you like photographing people. This is a new subject for you.

A: My photography comes from the same source: If I am attracted to something I try to freeze the image in my camera. What fascinated me in photographing people is that human face has a lot of things to tell. It is not only a form or colour like a bird or an orchid.

Q: So it is basically psychological aspect that has been added to your photography.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you believe that a supreme being is behind the creation of this universe?

A: We do not know about the creator and I also believe that we will never know. I think we are incapable of knowing him. The difference or distance between the creator and the creation is necessarily so great that one can't know the other. Like if I create something, for example, an ant how do I communicate it that I am its creator? How do I know their mind? How do they know me? There is no way. There can not be any way. If anybody or a power has created this universe the difference is so great that there is no question of communication. What we have conjured up by way of explaining him is basically to fill up the gap. I don't think knowledge about him is even possible.



When I was a Teenager...

MUSTAFA Monowar, an artist of high calibre, a puppeteer of immense popularity, a man deep rooted in his soil. Today we have him to talk about the most memorable part of his life: his boyhood.

Born in 1936, he grew up in a rich cultural environment. His poet-father always made sure that his six children had the right kind of exposure. But he missed a vital element in his life, his mother, who died when he was four, and he felt this absence all through his life. His friends' mothers used to treat him very kindly because of this and he cherished those moments. In fact, anything to do with love, care and sweetness touched him very much.

He recalls a time when a neighbour complained that he stole mangoes from his tree. For that, his father beat him in public. After that, the rest of the neighbours came forward to scold the person who had made the complaint. To the astonishment of his family, sacks of mangoes started to come in from the neighbours for little Mustafa.

His sisters took up the role of mother, whom he could hardly remember. The void left in him by the death of his mother surprisingly made him a responsible and independent boy. He learnt to cope with life by himself. He was in fact far more mature in his youth than his peers. Since childhood he had this fascination with creation. He liked to experiment and see what could be created from just a bamboo stick or clay. He actually made his own toys! It was things like these, which he enjoyed.

Another thing was his curiosity. He always wanted to know why, which often exasperated his family because they didn't always know the answer. Yet, his father encouraged such thoughts.

"My father once bought me a mini-piano, which was very expensive. I was very interested in from where the sound came. I tried to break it: I twisted it and nurtured it, all in vain. Then an idea struck me. So, I took it up

to the third floor roof and threw it down from there. I came down to see it broken into several parts, which was my intention. However, it gave me no hint whatsoever about where the music came from. All I saw were strange wires and parts which made no sense. My sisters were furious and complained to my father. To my surprise, he only said that the next time I wanted to know something I should ask him!"

He had a fun-loving family for which he did not have to 'go out' in order to 'have fun'. They found interesting things to do right at home and they enjoyed being at home. He flew kites, went around picking mangoes and on special occasions went

to the local fair to buy sweets, and if very lucky some chocolates. There were always people coming to their house: people like singers, poets, painters and other curious people. These gatherings made their home a lively place. These artists gave him his interest in music, eyes for the arts and the power of language. There were many an occasion when he made speeches encouraged by his father.

He feels that the tenderness and caring attitude are no longer there in neighbours. When he was young, even the shopkeepers were like family.

At one time, when chocolates cost only about a few paisas, I took a tk.10 note to the nearby

shop and asked for a chocolate. The shop-keeper did give me one, but also took me home and returned the money to my father. This kind of love and trust can hardly be found today."

He also feels that the people today are very self-centered. People are becoming more materialistic these days. In the past he has seen the sacrifice mothers and wives made for their children and husbands. Epic stories of Sharatchandra and Rabindranath hold this true. Today, he feels that there is not enough love to even think of such sacrifices. There are Biraj Bous no longer. Television and videos have replaced the story-telling grandmothers. The morals and the ethics without

any religious prejudices learnt from the grandmothers over years remain imprinted on the children's mind. But the children of today are deprived of such stories. Also, the reading habit is no longer there.

When Mustafa was young, he, along with his brothers and sisters, used to read out books to one another. Today, books have been replaced by television. He is worried about the outcome of this. According to him, this generation will retain nothing of what they learn."

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'Today the market forces determine the arts. We have the heritage of monophonic music, but we are on the verge to lose it. Classical music seems too old-fashioned. Film songs are fashionable because they sell. Painters paint thinking if it would sell. They thrive to become popular.'

"Soul Search"

Serajul Islam Choudhury
Essayist

Q: What gives you the greatest pleasure?

A: Being able to do and/or write something likely to be of interest to others.

Q: Do you have any recurring nightmares?

A: I have had my nightmares, of course. But there have been no recurring ones. Maybe, this is because I am not a dreamer. I believe those who dream expose themselves to the visitations of nightmares.

Q: What do you dislike most about yourself?

A: My timidity. I have known myself to be a timid person, and hated myself on that account.

Q: What is your greatest fear?

A: Getting lost. The first childhood nightmare I can recall was of crying in sleep feeling hopelessly lost in a world which was vast and seemed to be widening, continually. That idea of losing my bearings, finding the world menacing and looking around foolishly has continued to be fearful to me.

Q: What has been the biggest mistake in your life?

A: Failure to make proper use of time.

Q: What makes you cry?

A: People's cruelty to one another.

Q: Who is your role model?

A: My father, I liked his sense of responsibility, particularly.

Q: How important is money to you?

A: My journey across life has been one of acquiring knowledge about many things. One of these is the value of money. I need money, but I do not live for making money.

Q: What is more important to you, your personal or professional life?

A: Personal life, undoubtedly.

Q: Are you afraid of death?

A: I do not think of death, really. I find ignorance blissful, in this respect.

Q: Which book has influenced your life most?

A: A novel by Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, called *Ramer Sumati*.

Q: If you were given a chance to start all over again, what would you want to be?

A: A writer.

Q: What worries you most as we are standing at the threshold of the 21st century?

A: The rise of anarchy in Bangladesh.

Q: If you have to sum up the philosophy of your life in three sentences, what will that be?

A: The individual is the measure of all happiness — personal as well as collective. But it is impossible for the individual to exist, let alone thrive, without the help of others. What is needed, therefore, is the achievement of an equilibrium between me and others, between the personal and the collective.

Interviewed by Ziaul Karim

