

music

Impromptu Jazz from Germany

By Fayza Haq

HOLGER Mantey, born on a German island called Rugen 35 years ago, and having travelled extensively, says about the difference in early Jazz and the one now played and appreciated throughout the western world and beyond. "The European jazz musicians have other roots and inspirations than that of the early African American singers of soul music, which the American slaves revelled in to give expression to the heights of their hopes and depressions. The early jazz had to do with the gospel too."

Moreover, in Europe, jazz is not followed in any standard way — there is a lot of improvisation, with great pride taken in the personal interpretations and individual compositions. Of course, we find early American jazz quite fascinating and interesting, but we ourselves do not indulge in it."

Talking in his soft-spoken voice, and peering through this tiny cylindrical glasses, Mantey enumerates his favourite jazz experts as George Gershwin, Louis Armstrong, Charley Parker, Harry Hancock, and Mingous. He comments, "When Germans flock to hear jazz music from USA, one can't be sure if the gathering is to hear jazz or to witness American musicians. People here are more taken up with seeing themselves with the American way. People take care to have good public relations so that there is a good turnout at jazz performances in my country. My own music is not purely jazz. At times I bring in swing, be-bop, techno music — a development of rock music from the sound of the computers, using electronics without musicians."

Can he make a living with his improvisations and experiments — does it draw avid crowds? "I combine my playing in concerts with teaching of 20 pupils, five of whom are private ones. I love all my pupils — whether they be private or from the school, whether they are girls or boys. In order to excel, I tell them to practise as often as possible, but they must have intrinsic talent too. Mere repetition for hours will not help if they don't have music from within themselves. I spend three more hours a day in teaching. I tell my students that they must have a feeling for what they want to play. They must bring out what is in their heart. Mere technical skills cannot produce music."

My music is my interpretation of life. However, I let my musical notes explain myself. I try to capture happiness, boredom, depression and different emotions using all forms of music ranging from blues to rock. I find all music interesting, and sometimes I'm inspired by Indian music too. However, the piano is not the right instrument to experiment with classical Indian music you can try it but it is difficult.

The way Mantey got onto the piano was that his father was a musician who played the double bass in presenting folk music. He believes that now, in Europe and in USA, rock and pop music is taking over, while the coteries for classical concerts is gradually on the decline due to the speed of modern mechanised existence. Mantey says, "I enjoy

rock and pop music and I even admire singers like Madonna; Michael Jackson, Sting and The Spice Girls, who are very popular with my students. With the steady wave of rock concerts and pop performances, my own audience is relatively limited, but that does not bother me. It doesn't concern me whether I'm playing to 50 people at a small theatre

or 1,000 at a festival. I want my listeners to enjoy themselves — their number doesn't concern me."

Mantey began his present tour in Pakistan, and has given a number of concerts in India. He was partly backed by the Goethe Institut during his tours. He has been to Sri Lanka, Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, USA,

and also Russia. "I enjoyed myself best in Italy and India, which have different types of audiences. I enjoy travelling and giving concerts in different parts of the world and savouring different types of rapport with my audiences."

Asked to talk about the purpose of music — is it to relax or think deep or to voyage into unknown regions, Mantey

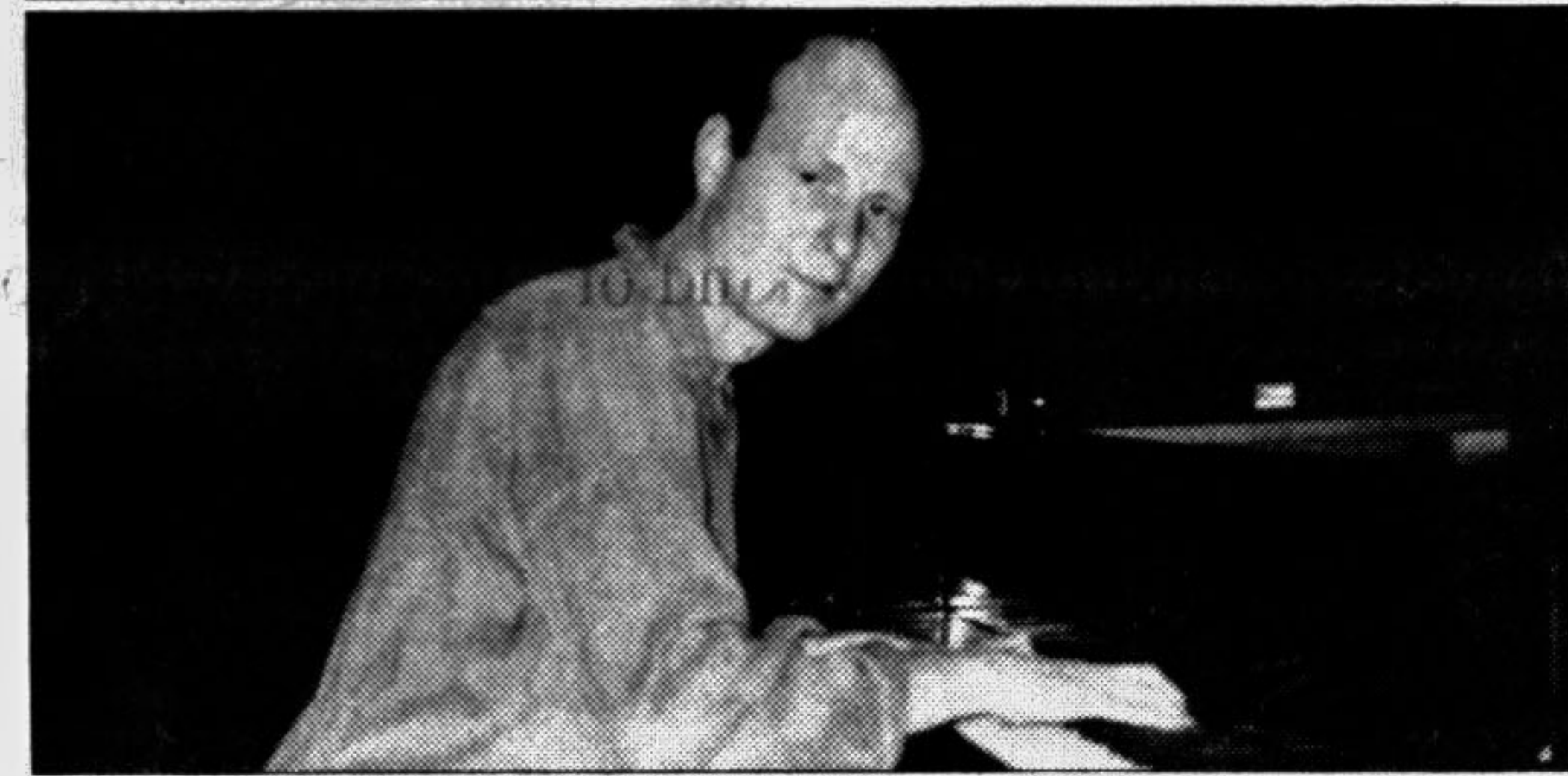
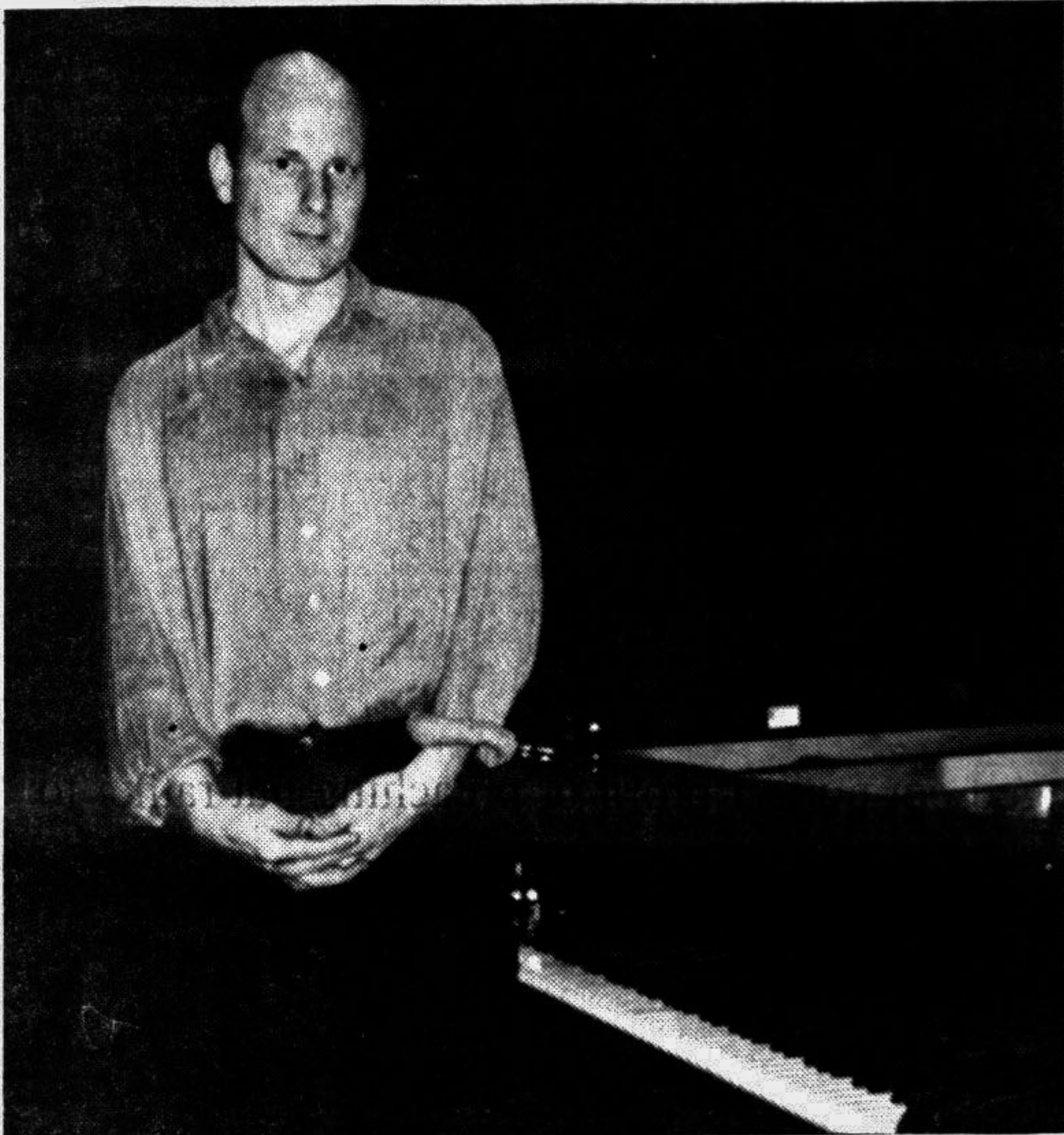
comments, "My music is my interpretation of life. However, I let my musical notes explain myself. I try to capture happiness, boredom, depression and different emotions using all forms of music ranging from blues to rock. I find all music interesting, and sometimes I'm inspired by Indian music too. However, the piano is not the right instrument to experiment with classical Indian music — you can try it but it is difficult. The 'Karnataka Ensemble of Music' combines eastern and western music with remarkable suavity and subtlety. Charlie Mayano, on the saxophone is another delight in experimentation. This time I'm playing solo but I often play as duo or trio with my German colleagues. The saxophone player is Mathius Schubert from Cologne while Christopher Dell plays the xylophone, and he too is from Cologne. Meanwhile the percussion man Bjorn Uaecal comes from Turkey."

"Quite often I don't have a list of musical pieces. Sometimes my listeners come and praise me for my jazz, and at other times ask me why I did not include jazz in my repertoire. I improvise as I go, as I explained earlier. I play my own composition this evening, and these include 'Redecta', 'Ka', 'Like', 'Plz', 'Palu and Bellavista' and 'St. Brook'. Sometimes I add George Gershwin or Jackie Mc Lean, or sometimes old German choral music too, Mantey explains about his performances."

Asked how he composes, Mantey explains, "I just play on the piano as the notes come to my mind, dwelling on one theme or another." His family, including his girl friend — who helps with the retarded people — is proud of his profession."

Just because he plays off beat music does not mean that Mantey does not or cannot play the classical composers like Chopin or Bach, but he prefers the romantic musicians, which bring into mind images like the rainbow, the first raindrops or the quivering of a butterfly's wings."

What he enjoyed most about Bangladesh was the workshop with the Bangladeshi musicians. He has been exposed to subcontinental music through live performances before coming to Dhaka. He enjoyed it although he admits he is not as yet aware of all its nuances."



poem

The Earth — A Long Poem — I

Written by Fazal Shahabuddin introduced and translated by A Z M Haider

POETS, painters, novelists and writers are basically visionary dreamers. They are endowed with intuitive faculty to prognosticate the shape of things to overtake life on earth. They can anticipate sunshine of hope and darkness of despair to loom large on this planet and mankind inhabiting it. What they foresee decades and centuries ago transpire long afterwards, to the utter amazement of mankind.

Jule Verne, a French novelist and possibly one of the greatest scientific fiction writers of the world, who never travelled beyond France, informed the world 160 years ago of the Depth of 2000 leagues (old Dutch measurement) of the seas wherein submarines would ply. His prediction was based on his innate foresight and not on any scientific data. Indeed 150 years after his presage, the Americans have invented nuclear submarines for plying at that incredible depth of the seas. In one of his novels he predicted the flight of a spacecraft which would enable man to land on the moon. His forecast is a reality today. He even went to the length of prophesizing that the spacecraft carrying man will splash back on the Pacific.

One of our noted poets, Fazal Shahabuddin, wrote a long poem entitled the Earth dwelling at length on man's contribution to evolution from early stage to the present state of civilisation on it as well as to its perceptibly slow extinction by him. In writing this poem 14 years ago Fazal appeared more like an anthropologist than a poet. By the touch of his magic wand of poetry he has elevated an otherwise prosaic theme of an anthropological interest to the level of art. Before writing this poem Fazal

seemed to have undertaken a thorough study to ascertain evolution of man and the civilisation he built so assiduously on this planet and those of other species preceding his advent in it. Man was the last of the species to come to this planet and build it as the home of human civilisation. Unlike other species man imparted so much to this earth. For instance, he inherited sound from which he created alphabets. With the help of alphabets he wrote poetry and created music. He brought fire from the sun and subjected it to his own control to initiate the process of material civilisation.

Fazal foresaw the danger inherent in material advancement of man on earth. It is this material advancement which is causing environmental imbalance on earth, to its peril. The poet lamented man's mad race for acquisition of lethal nuclear arms which can devour miles and miles of human habitation by their corrosive poison and completely wipe out life from the areas of their infernal explosions. He visualised environmental pollution caused by this suicidal course adopted by man. Poets are prophetic in their vision. Having foreseen the frightful consequences of the nuclear blasts being carried out by nations, Fazal poured forth agonised outcry in his long poem the earth in ten parts more than a decade and a half before mankind held the Earth Conference at Rio Genorio to forewarn humanity of the inherent danger of continuing with suicidal nuclear detonations.

Fazal's long poem the Earth is one of its kind in the whole history of Bengali literature. Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poem on earth about a century back. But that is a verse which relates man's hymn to extol earth and its gifts to him.

The Earth

The only one earth we have
It is for all of us
For mankind, for trees
For birds, beasts, insects and flies
The only one earth we have
For all of us
For light and darkness
For mountains and oceans
For dawn, dusk, day and night
For the sun and moon light
We have only one earth
We have only one world
For all of us
For grasshoppers and paddy fields
Water and earth
Words and silence
It spreads over past present and future
We have only one world
in which we continuously survive many deaths
This is our only world
This is where all our thirsts, aspirations
desires and prayers
keep dallying
Let us not destroy this world at any time.

II

We know this world did not belong to us for long
Did not belong to mankind
It did not belong to mankind for millions of years
It did not belong to us
We know
once there was ceaseless rain

all over the world
For crores of years
There was only rain rain and only rain
There was dinosaur and giant size birds
There were huge trees spread all over endless horizon
with inseparable pomp and grandeur.
I know this earth did not
belong to us for a long time
This planet was covered by limitless water
boundless wind
and thick green mosses
This planet was consigned to
fire and gale
This world was steeped in
a protracted day shorn of light and darkness
This world did not belong to us, to mankind.

III

This world of ours, this earth
This universe
What is its age?
How much old and ancient is this planet
Wherein we have built houses to live in
How many years have we passed
ever since inception of our creation
Do we really know how many years have lapsed
and what is the age of this earth
When and how was it born
How long ago
Five hundred crore years ago
or even more, six hundred crore years ago?
What do the scientists say, What do they know
Is the age of earth equal to that of the sun
Is it equal to the age of all the stars
that exist in this planetarium
I do not know, nor do I want to know

nor shall I ever know
if the world ever existed like this
for all times
at the beginning and at its origin
Did this world exist right
at the earliest dawn of creation
as it is today?
I know this world did not belong to us
for a long time
did not belong to mankind

IV

How long will this world survive
How long trees, flowers and foliage
birds and beasts will last?
How long earth, sky and ocean
will remain animated in the indestructible glow of life
How long life and death, creation and destruction
will ring and reverberate in wind
through immortal words.
Mountain ranges will become restive
Oceans will be submerged
Birds will keep flying at dawn and dusk
Butterflies will become more lively and colourful
Herds of pigs will turn more wild
How long this world will remain alive
in light and wind, water and fire
in sunshine and moon-light
This is our only world
This is our eternal motherland
Will its life-span equal to that of the sun
Will it live for seven and a half hundred
crore years or even more
Or will it die long ago
Then what will happen to trees and flowery leaves
What will happen to birds and beasts

What will happen to insects and mankind
How long shall we live
in this world's light and darkness, wind and rain
How long shall we live.

V

Once the world belonged to green mosses
Did mosses give anything to this world
Did mosses care to know anything
Did mosses care to know anything
beyond their bounds
Once the world belonged to woodlands
Did trees build anything in this world
except waving their branches
Once the world belonged to dinosaur
Did dinosaur give anything to the earth
During their hundred and fifty crore years tenure
when they ransacked this earth without resistance
Once the earth was without wind
What windlessness gave this world
except silence of death
Once the world was lightlessness
spread all over horizon
Did lightlessness impart anything to this world
except remorseless dark coffin of winter night
under which nothing survives
neither mosses, nor woodlands, nor dinosaur
nor birds, beasts and insects
nor melody of streams
Lightlessness has ushered in only lifelessness
Nobody has given this world anything
except himself
Nobody would give anything nor tried to give
But man?

(to be continued)