

exhibition

Fine Arts' Annual Exhibition: An Outlook



Golam Moshir Rahman's *Anushlon-1* (Water Colour)



Mahbubur Rahman's *Shomoy ebong obosthan* (Oil)



SM Saiful Islam's *When I'm gone far away* (Pencil Sketch)

by Navine Murshid

THE Institute of Fine Arts began its annual ritual of judging students for their work in the area of paintings, sculptures, crafts, sketching, graphics and design late February. Six were given awards for experimental work, ten were given the 'best medium award', a dozen were given memorial prizes and one received the Aminul Islam Scholarship. This was certainly a time for celebration when Artist Safiuddin Ahmed inaugurated the exhibition and, Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University, Professor AK Azad Chowdhury was the chief guest.

The uncountable art pieces displayed throughout the gallery as well as the

classrooms are definitely an art lover's delight. The award winners certainly deserved their good fortune and are bound to do well in the future. Shahrier Hossain presented a wooden carved fish on display with its bones bulging out. The colour used and the expression portrayed made the fish come alive. This was an experimental work indeed. The colour green was very prominent in many paintings as students depicted the greenery of plants and trees. The variations in the use of colour, texture and emotion are the difference between paintings illustrating nature and its moods and moments.

Two such paintings received one of the 'best medium awards' and 'Shahid Amit Boshak Memorial Prize'. One of the outstanding works was a pencil

sketch done by S M Saiful Islam. He drew two pairs of jean trousers hanging from two hangers. First impressions may say that this is childish and too much like a photograph, but it should be noted that he is a second year BFA student and allowed to do realistic work only. The quality of the work has to be considered too. As eminent artist, Mohammad Kibria said, "You have to see the texture - you can almost feel the material of jeans."

Apart from the works of those who received awards, it is worth mentioning the names of Anadi Bairagi, Dewan Mizan and Maksuda Iqbal Nipa. These paintings have an ability to attract as people find themselves in front of these paintings over and over again. Both of Anadi's paintings, displayed in the

main gallery, are abstract and seem to portray some kind of turmoil or turbulence which is perhaps in the artist's mind. This could also be a portrayal of nature in one of its many dispositions.

Nipa's painting is actually a mustard field with the field meeting the horizon or as far as the eyes can see. The movement of light in the field has been depicted with great care and the hard work and the quality speaks for itself. One of the enjoyable paintings was one by Golam Mashhur Rahman Rana who painted a disarray of acrylic paints, tins, bowls, dirty rags, glue - all in a mess. The effect of paint spilling over has been striking and incidentally received one of the best medium awards.

However, there were some shortcomings that could have been done without.

Firstly, the distance from one gallery to another was quite winded and anyone entering the main gallery would think the exhibition is confined to that room only. Someone coming in from outside the Institute could not know that there were many other rooms, where hung hundred more art works. Secondly, there were paintings that should not have been in display. Bipasha Hayat's 'story of an apple' tells no story at all and does not portray any sort of creativity, emotions or feelings (not that it has to), and yet it was displayed in the main gallery. Some of the classrooms used as galleries were poorly lit and the paintings could be hardly deciphered. One of the main ideas of displaying is so that people can comfortably view paintings that are not otherwise possible.

Poor lighting spoils the interest to watch paintings causing art enthusiast to leave with a sense of deprivation.

Yet, such initiatives must be hailed. In spite of the little drawbacks, the exhibition has been a success. In no way can it be said that the future of our art world is in the darkness. The efforts of the students to organise such a big exhibition has left them with a sense of pride and enthusiasm to do better in the future it has given the blooming artists the confidence they need to explore themselves and the world around them. This has provided them with an opportunity to test themselves above anything else and today they have the ability to say that they can do a good work if they want to. The future master artists will certainly go a long way.

fiction

Dowry

by Camellia Ahmad

IT was a cold winter morning; the bleak slums seemed even bleaker in the diffused light.

The sun had not risen yet. The stillness lay like a blanket over the little squatter huts. A lone bird, huddled up like a ball of cotton wool, perched on the gnarled tree outside one of the smaller huts. Shivering in the silence, it stared disinterestedly down the rough, empty dirt track that disappeared into the thick morning mist. It led into the better half of the city.

"Fuli! Wake up!" the sudden sound broke through the stillness with striking viciousness.

Through a deep haze of exhaustion and sleep Fuli barely heard her husband as he called her. Kobir Mia was in no mood to be gentle. He roughly shook her awake. Their two-month-old son was soon crying out to be fed. Fuli got slowly out of bed and fed the child. It had been a month since she had gone back to work in the garments factory. She had had to support her husband throughout the two years of their marriage.

Kobir Mia had just come home from his wild, night-long drinking spree. At such times he was totally unpredictable and without conscience. He would alternate between self-righteousness and outright violence. Today, however, he seemed to be in a worse-than-usual mood: "Wake up, you slut!" he called again from the door. "Did you ask your father? How come he hasn't given me the money yet?"

Fuli managed to pull herself to a sitting posture, but it took a while for her to understand what he was saying. Kobir Mia had demanded ten thousand Taka from Fuli's father, as dowry, and his failure to pay it had infuriated him. Poor Fuli provided a convenient outlet for his tar-soaked anger. As he continued his drunken harangue, Fuli listened

in silent helplessness. She knew it would be fatal to point out that her father had never even seen so much money in one place.

"He could have at least given me the motor cycle he promised!"

The last time she had attempted to reason with him, he had given her a thorough beating to drive home the point that she was not to talk back at him. She particularly remembered how he had wound her hair around his fist and dragged her around outside the hut. He had all but severed her hair from her head.

"I should have known better than to trust that thieving old blind man. It is terrible how he continues to deceive and cheat me..."

There was an ominous pause as Kobir Mia kicked open the door and went out.

"At his age, he should be thinking of Allah... and death. How can he face the Day of Judgement if he cheats his own son-in-law? He will burn in hell! That will serve him right."

Fuli could hear him pacing agitatedly outside the hut.

"Your father is a lousy cheat, and sinner...!" His voice was getting so slurred that Fuli could barely make out the words. She sighed in resignation and braced herself for what she knew would inevitably follow.

"If he doesn't pay up soon, I... I'll give you a divorce!"

Fuli didn't say anything. It was the ultimate threat. She knew that if he kicked her out, her life would be even more miserable than it was now. Her father would take her back — she would have nowhere to go. She tried to swallow the lump that rose up in her throat but, as the trade of abuses and insults continued, she couldn't stop the helpless tears from flowing down her cheeks. Fuli thought of the times her husband

had beaten her before for the same reason and prayed that he would not do it this time.

Once he had even forced her to put her hands in boiling water. She hadn't been able to work for a whole month. This painful memory rose up like a spectre now to terrify her so badly that she abruptly forgot to cry. At that moment survival seemed more important than emotions for Kobir Mia was now saying that he was going to throttle her. She clutched the child even closer and listened carefully for Kobir Mia's approaching footsteps.



Fuli covered in a corner of the little hut as her husband swaggered back inside. She was lucky.

Kobir Mia was too drunk to beat anybody. He just stumbled to the straw bed on the floor and fell fast asleep.

While her husband's loud snores reverberated through the little hut, Fuli was lost for a while in a world of terrified memories. She was only sixteen but she looked at least twenty-five. There were dark bruises on her arms and face-evidence that her husband did not always make empty threats. She was sure that he would carry out all of his threats someday. Being careful not to wake him up, she scurried out of the hut to finish her chores. There was a lot to do before she left for the factory.

Fuli left the baby with the old woman in the hut next door and started off for work. The factory was two miles away and she had to walk the entire distance

before sunrise. On some days, one of her fellow-workers would meet her on the way and they would walk together. None of the workers could afford to travel by rickshaw or even by a scooter. On the way to the factory, the girls had to go past a park where they would sometimes see the plump wives of wealthy businessmen panting up and down the park roads like the white farm-ducks that Fuli's mother used to fatten and sell at the market. It was beyond her comprehension why those women did this. Fuli would say "Ma's ducks could walk faster than those snobs!"

The girls would giggle uncontrollably at this comparison and the good mood would last all the rest of the way to the factory. Fuli knew they had everything that she didn't — food and clothes — and they didn't have to work for a living either. It felt good to think that the women in the park were not all perfect.

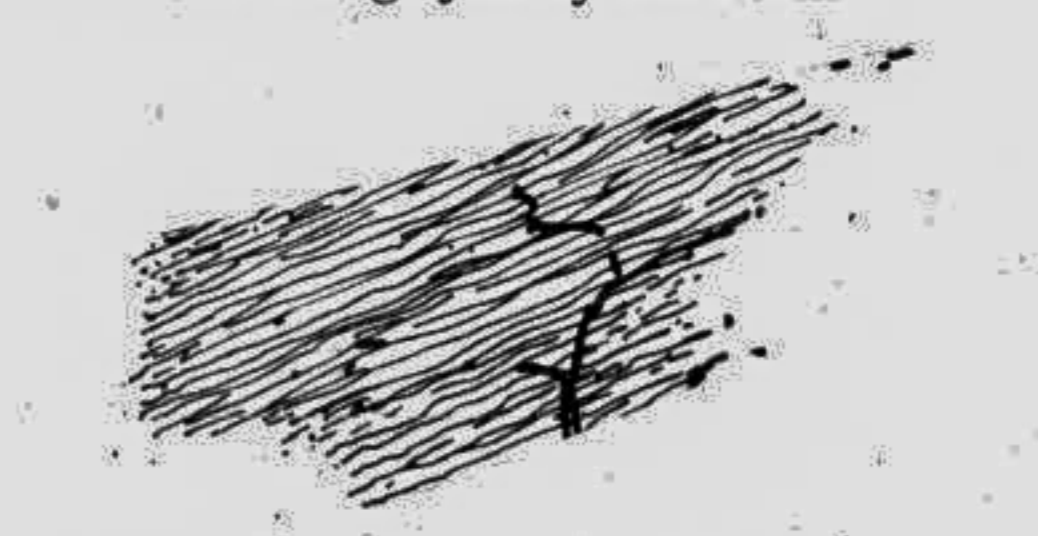
This morning, she did not meet the other girl. Neither did she see the fat ladies at the park. She was acutely aware of their absence this morning. She felt an inexplicable longing in her childish heart as she thought of them. After all, they were the only things in her life that she could laugh about.

Today, Fuli's mind was crowded with thoughts of her unhappy young life. As she thought of her husband, Fuli felt a tingling sensation of terror at the pit of her empty stomach. Even a trapped animal driven to extreme desperation by its tormentor attempts a final fatal dash for freedom. Man is only an animal of superior intellect, after all. Kobir Mia was getting more violent with every passing day and Fuli was getting as desperate as a trapped animal.

In sheer desperation, Fuli considered the possibility of leaving her husband. It was such a daring thought to her that she trembled with fear to even think of

it. Everyone knew what happened to the women who abandoned their husband's homes. In Fuli's world, in the slums, a girl could not survive without the protection of a man. Fuli knew she would merely be substituting one misery for another if she ever left Kobir Mia. She could never leave him.

The sun had still not risen yet. The morning twilight spread a diffused grey light that touched dully on the overflowing drains from the tannery and the garbage dumps that barricaded the road on both sides. Fuli did not bother to hold her nose. She was used to the smell of rotten organic matter. However, this morning, she was aware, for the first time in two years, of the stench that had permeated the entire neighbourhood. It seemed to reach out and engulf her like a living being. She felt as if it had seeped right into her soul and trapped her in a suffocating hold. She felt soiled and unclean and she was so stunned by this sudden feeling that she spat on herself to get protection from evil-spirits. She hurried on wondering if she was being eyed by the devil.



Although the feeling of unbearable suffocation did not leave her entirely, as she left the road behind, Fuli began to feel less unsettled. It was a peaceful morning after all. She noticed the chirping of the little brown bulbul birds on the trees that lined this street and wondered where they all went when the streets were filled with noisy people and

vehicles. The sound soothed her further. She was reminded of how glad she was to get away from the oppressive gloom of the hut: although the factory was not exactly as safe haven either.

She hated the manager. He was a stout, ugly man with a thick mustache and thinning hair. He leered at all the girls who worked under him and generally made life miserable for them. He interfered with their work at every opportunity. He accused even the most hardworking ones of inefficiency and tried to justify it by making cuts on their wages. He got away with it because all the workers were girls.

All too soon, she could hear the sounds of the machines at the factory. It was a cold, mechanical sound — nothing like the other sounds that had soothed her before. It broke rudely through her thoughts and reminded her that she was running late. The roaring of the boilers, and the unrelenting buzz of the sewing machines were punctuated with clangs from the large machines in the steel factory across the street. The noise rose to a crescendo as she reached the factory. It was the noise that she hated the most about her job.

She managed to sneak in while the manager's back was turned. He was busy screaming abuses at some poor soul. So the day began as it usually did — with the manager's shouting and the deafening din of the machines. It seemed like a normal day except for the fact that the girls working next to her were unusually quiet this morning. These were the same girls who sometimes walked with her to work. There was something in the way they hung their heads and worked with a tightlipped expression.

To be continued