



poem

Two Poems of Rabindranath Tagore

Translated by Fakrul Alam

The Golden Boat

Clouds rumble in the sky; rain pours down incessantly.
I sit all alone on the shore, uncertainly.
Heaps of paddy lie piled up — harvesting is done.
The swollen river speeds on turbulently;
While harvesting was going on, the rainy season had begun.

One tiny paddy field, and I so forlorn —
Around me, the frolicking water eddies on.
On the other side, a tree-shrouded shore is in sight.
And a village cloaked in clouds in the morning light.
On this side, a tiny paddy field, and I so forlorn!

Who is singing on the boat heading for the shore?
As I look on, I feel I've met him before!
Sail puffed-up, the boat speeds on; no time for looking around?
The helpless waves break up as they hit the ground —
As I look on, I feel I've met him before!

Where could you be going, to which distant land?
But for once moor your boat on this strand.
Go where you will, give to anyone freely
What you would. Only, take smilingly
My golden harvest after mooring on this strand.

Load as much as you'd on your boat.
Do I have more? No, I've given you the full load.
All that kept me by the riverbank, year after year,
I give them all up to you, layer after layer.

But pity me this once and take me away forever.

No room on that small boat — no room at all!
My golden harvest was enough to make it full.
On this rainy day, as clouds all over me swirl,
On the desolate riverbank I lie down forlorn —
All I had with that golden boat is gone!

The Two Birds

A captive bird in a gilded cage lay.
A free bird in the forest,
Fate decreed they would meet one day —
Was God setting up a test?
The free bird said: "Dear captive bird,
Let us two to the forest fly."
"Free bird, let us peacefully to the cage,"
Was the captive bird's reply.
The free bird said emphatically,
"I'll never give up my freedom."
The captive bird said ruefully,
"How can I in the forest be at home!"

Outside the cage, the free bird sang songs it had got
From its flights in forests.
The captive bird was full of sayings it had been taught —
The two talked in different tongues!
The free bird said, "Dear captive bird,
See if you can sing songs of the wild!"
The captive bird answered,

"Learn from me songs of the caged!"
The free bird said, "never
Will I sing songs dictated to me."

The captive bird cried, "how can I ever
Sing the song of the free!"

The free bird said, "the sky is blue and bright,
And nowhere do I feel fettered."
The captive bird said, "the cage is proper and right.
See how I am perfectly protected."
The free bird said, "for once let yourself go
And become one with the sky."
The captive bird said, "to this retreat know
You can yourself firmly tie."
The free bird said, "no!
How can one there fly."
The captive bird said, "this I know
There is no place to rest in the sky!"

This was how the birds came to desire each other
Though destined to stay apart.
Through the bars of the cage one touched the other
Silently, desire stirred in each heart.
But one the other failed to understand
Failed even its own self to comprehend
Vainly, they their wings fluttered
And wailed, "come closer!"
The free bird said, "what if I am trapped
Inside — never!"
The captive bird said with a sigh,
"I've lost the strength to fly!"

reflection

An Underground Heritage: Lascaux Caves

by Raana Haider

CREATION by a past generation entails conservation by this generation which will ensure preservation for generations to come.

"A dog's disappearance down a hole in the hills of Lascaux in the Dordogne region of France led to the discovery by four teenagers of the prehistoric cave art of the Cro-Magnon era dating some 17,000 years on 12 September 1940. The cave wall and roof paintings of bulls, horses, deer, cows and bison in colours of black, brown, beige, grey and white are superb reminders of the artistic heritage of our early ancestors.

Marcel Ravidat, an eighteen year old was walking in the hills of Lascaux with his dog, Robot. Robot disappeared down a hole in the ground and in the process of searching for his dog, he came upon a subterranean cave of an oval shape 17 metres long and 6 to 9 metres wide. This first cave hall was named by Ravidat, the Hall of Bulls. The cave hall gradually extends to a length of twenty metres in all.

Four days later, Marcel returned to the cave to share the sheer marvel of the site with three other friends. Nine days later, the Abbot of Breuil, an eminent historian and professor of the College of France visited the subter-

The stunning creativity of the Lascaux caves some 17,000 years ago gives credence to the belief that all people of all ages and of all times have a need for that which lifts the spirits - for that which allows the imagination to soar. In that context, France's heritage is the world's heritage. The Lascaux caves constitute a world heritage for it contains superlative natural phenomena and areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.

anean site and in exultation at the stupendous discovery exclaimed, "The Sistine Chapel of prehistoric times!"

The caves with its fresco paintings were opened to the public in 1948. Yet after receiving over a million visitors, the underground site was closed in 1963 for conservation purposes on the orders of Andre Malraux, Minister of Culture in the government of President Charles de Gaulle. Justification for its closure was the rapid deterioration of the paintings of seventeen millenniums ago. The increasing numbers of tourists had disturbed nature's balance which had earlier remained untouched through the ages. The Lascaux caves returned to darkness and silence.

Subsequently, work was started on a 'new' Lascaux cave in 1972 with replication of the original masterpieces of prehistoric art. A massive scientific and artistic exercise to re-

produce the paintings was undertaken. Lascaux II opened in 1983 to more than 300,000 visitors annually. The Lascaux caves are today one of the major viewing-sites for domestic visitors and foreign tourists to France.

Conservation awareness and measures in the early 1960s were far less advanced than today but the gradual loss of a priceless cultural heritage was sufficient to alert the authorities of the day. Similar discussions are underway in

Upper Egypt, regarding creating copies of artistic marvels, in particular regarding the exquisitely beautiful tomb of Queen Nefertari, the favourite wife of Pharaoh Ramses II.

At the Eighth International Congress of Egyptology (ICE) held in Cairo in early 2000, the theme of the conference was 'Egyptology in the 21st Century'. In a discipline where 'A Discovery a Day' is no exaggeration, the

debate between discovery, excavation and conservation was heated but all were unanimous in the urgency of the matter - termed 'site management'. Points of view ranged from total moratorium on excavations for ten years, to restoration and documentation of existing discoveries, to 'salvage operations' for antiquities seriously threatened by encroaching urbanism, agricultural expansion, rising groundwater levels, mass tourism and other environmental hazards.

Zahi Hawass, renowned Egyptian Egyptologist and Secretary-general of the ICE argued for replica tombs as a measure of Egypt's heritage, citing the example of the Lascaux Caves in France. However, Christian Leblanc, the French director of the archaeological mission of the CNRS (Centre National Des Recherches Scientifiques) on the other hand is not in favour of replica tombs. His reasoning is that "the situ-

ation is not the same here (in Egypt). People come from abroad, spend lots of money and want to see the monuments and not replicas." The debate is fierce and there is no consensus on the vital issues of excavation, restoration and exposure of Egypt's cultural heritage. And Egyptology is a discipline of global fascination and thus a matter of global heritage.

The stunning creativity of the Lascaux caves some 17,000 years ago gives credence to the belief that all people of all ages and of all times have a need for that which lifts the spirits - for that which allows the imagination to soar. In that context, France's heritage is the world's heritage. The Lascaux caves constitute a world heritage for it contains superlative natural phenomena and areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.

UNESCO in its journal on Culture and Tourism, 'Development of Crucial Issues for the 21st Century' asks 'Access to Heritage: Can the Past Century be Given to the Present and Preserved for Future Use?' For heritage, earlier defined as 'that what is primarily passed on from parents to children' is now being considered as 'the evidence of the past...considered collectively as the inheritance of present day society' notes the 'English Language', third edition, 1991.

The emphasis in heritage has shifted from a 'special' heritage system, to a 'general' one, in other words: from the age of heritage as history to that of heritage as memory, notes Pierre Nora, a French historian and director of studies at the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences in Paris. Furthermore, a 'kind of French model' may be discerned within the overall evolution of the heritage concept. In the French language, the very word for heritage, 'patrimoine', contains within itself, for better or worse, the word, 'patrie' - 'homeland' remarks Dominique Paulett in an article on 'The Universal Heritage: the French Model.'

Raana Haider is the author of 'Parisian Portraits', University Press Limited, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2000. She has lived in both Cairo and Paris.

essay

The Cost of Living

by Arundhati Roy

Continued from earlier week

SOME who were resettled on the peripheries of other villages have been robbed, beaten and chased away by their host villagers. In several resettlement sites, people have been dumped in rows of corrugated tin sheds which are furnaces in summer and 'fridges' in winter. Some of them are located in dry river beds which, during the monsoon, turn into fast-flowing drifts. I've been to some of these 'sites'. I've seen film footage of others: Shivering children, perched like birds on the edges of charpoys, while swirling waters enter their tin homes. Frightened, fevered eyes watch pots and pans carried through the doorway by the current, floating out into the flooded fields, thin fathers swimming after them to retrieve what they can.

When the waters recede, they leave ruin. Malaria, diarrhoea, sick cattle stranded in the slush.

Forty households were moved from Manibell in Maharashtra to a resettlement site in Gujarat. In the first year, thirty-eight children died.

In April 1999 the papers reported nine deaths from chronic malnutrition in a single rehabilitation site in Gujarat. In the course of a week. That's

To understand what's really going on, the first thing you must do is to look at a map of Gujarat. Look for two other rivers - the Mahi and the Sabarmati. You'll see that both are miles closer to Kutch and Saurashtra than the Narmada is. Both have been dammed and the water diverted to Ahmedabad, Mehsana and Kheda, the Patel-rich, irrigation rich, politically powerful areas of Central Gujarat. The people of Kutch and Saurashtra haven't seen a drop of water from these rivers.

1,2875 people a day, if you're counting.

Many of those who have been resettled are people who have lived all their lives deep in the forest with virtually no contact with money and the modern world. Suddenly they find themselves left with the option of either starving to death or walking several kilometres to the nearest town, sitting in the marketplace, (both men and women) offering themselves as wage labour, like goods on sale.

Instead of a forest from which they gathered everything they needed - food, fuel, fodder, rope, gum, tobacco, tooth powder, medicinal herbs, housing material - they earn between ten and twenty rupees a day with which to feed and keep their families. Instead of a river, they have a hand pump. In their old villages, certainly they were poor, extremely poor, but they were in-

sured against absolute disaster. If the rains failed, they had the forests to turn to. The river to fish in. Their livestock was their fixed deposit. Without all this, they're a heartbeat away from destitution.

For the people who've been resettled, everything has to be re-learned. Every little thing, every big thing: from shitting and pissing (where d'you do it when there's no jungle to hide you?) to buying a bus ticket, to learning a new language, to understanding money. And worst of all, learning to be supplicants. Learning to take orders. Learning to have Masters. Learning to answer only when they're addressed.

From being self-sufficient and free, to being further impoverished and yoked to the whims of a world you know nothing, nothing about - what d'you suppose it must feel like?

In fifteen years, the government has not managed to resettle people displaced by half a dam. What are they going to do about the remaining 3,199 dams? There's something wrong with the scale of the operations here. This is Fascist Maths. It strangles stories, bludgeons detail and manages to blind perfectly reasonable people with its spurious, shining vision.

So much for project costs. Now let's take a look at the benefits. The stated benefits.

The whole purpose of the Sardar Sarovar, the Government of Gujarat says, is to take water to the drought-prone regions of Kutch and Saurashtra which lie at the very end of the canal network. The Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam publicity campaign is full of pictures of parched earth and dying cattle. In the name of Kutch and Saurashtra, it justifies using about 80

per cent of Gujarat's irrigation budget for the Sardar Sarovar. It says, categorically, that there is no alternative to the Sardar Sarovar.

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When the Sardar Sarovar Project was first planned, there was no mention of drinking water for the villages in Kutch and Saurashtra. It was supposed to be primarily an irrigation

project. When the project ran into political trouble, the Government discovered the emotive power of thirst. Drinking water became the rallying cry of the Sardar Sarovar Project. Officially, the number of people whose thirst would be slaked fluctuated from 28 million (1983) to 32.5 million (1989) to 10 million (1992) to 25 million (1993).

The number of villages that would get drinking water varied from zero in 1979 to 8,215 in 1991. When pressed, the Government admitted that the figures for 1991 included 236 uninhabited villages.

Nobody builds Big Dams to take drinking water to remote villages. Of the one billion people in the world who have no access to safe drinking water, 855 million live in rural areas.

To be continued

The concluding part of Subrata Kumar Das' essay *Magic Realism in Nasrin Jahan's Novel* will appear next Saturday. — Page Editor