

## Book Review

# Barisal by the Bay

Translations are a finicky, delicate, punishing matter. Dr. Johnson growled that "Poetry indeed cannot be translated." So what, as the revolutionary once wrote, is to be done? Do you do the literal word for word and thereby introduce the poet's world in the most unmediated, direct but 'unpoetic' way, or do you choose a richer, but perhaps more dangerous and difficult, rhymed verse? What is to be, content or style? Fakrul goes for the latter.

By Khademul Islam

EVERY summer for the last six years I and a friend have been going biking through wildlife sanctuaries on Maryland's Eastern Shore, right by the Chesapeake Bay. It is an immediate and exhilarating experience, to pedal through tidal marshes and grassland beneath a vast sky, to pump legs on trails past hickory, beech, pine and white oaks, glide past saucer magnolias and black-eyed susans. On any given ride, we spot ospreys, herons, wood ducks, plummeting sea hawks, wading egrets, turtles, the striped muds, the yellowbellied slider and diamondback, sense us and freeze. Returning at evening, overhead we see Canada geese (them honkers as the locals term it) in V-formation on their migratory Atlantic Flyway routes.

It was then, headed for home, with the bay's waters a lonely, hopeless indigo and golden eagles circling in the dying light, that long-forgotten lines of Jibanananda Das kept coming to me unbidden. Lines from poems in Ruposhi Bangla and Banalata Sen, about Dhanshirir teary, about rivers and dew, about hawar rat. Upon hearing all this my sister sent me Abdul Mannan Syed's volume of Das's poems, complete with appended essays and the stunning photocopy of the poem Abar Ashbo Phiray in the poet's own hand. Since then I have always packed the book on my cycling trips. A vanished Bengal comes alive with Jibanananda Das gently elbowing me in the ribs:

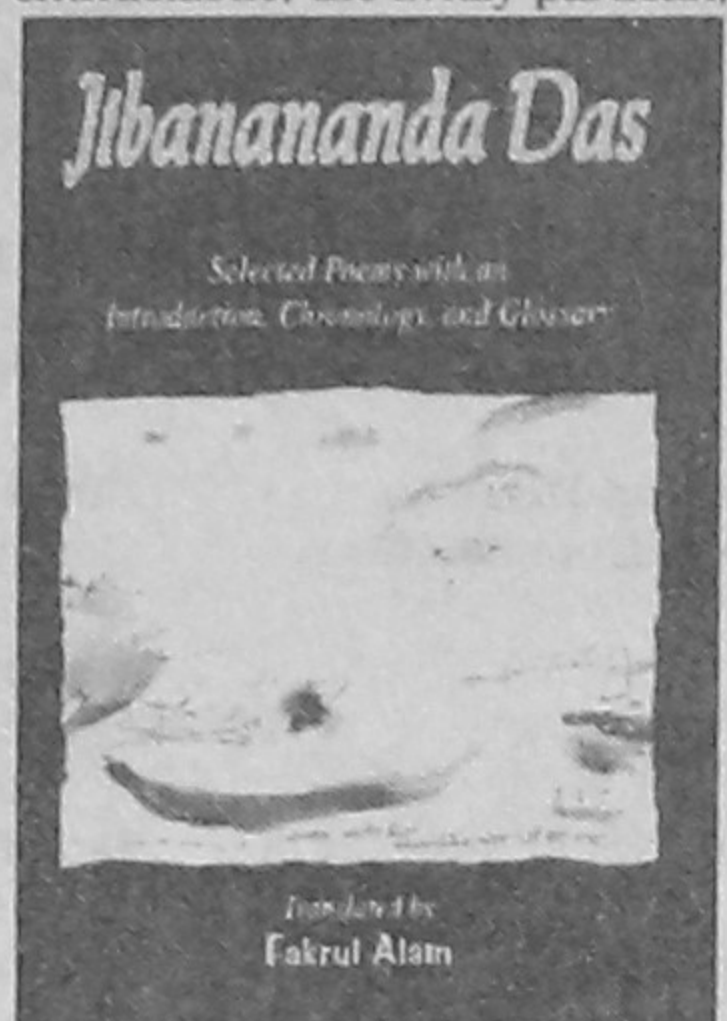
"Look an owl."  
"Where?"  
"Ojja Lokkhi pecha."  
"Tai to."  
"On a shumul tree branch."

In Ruposhi Bangla it is his specificity that I delight in: that particular owl in that particular tree; the 'neel' 'shooporir' boat, the utterly Bengali music of 'kuchi' 'kuchi shaympoka' in Ashbo Phiray. In Banalata Sen it is the fusion of the themes of mortality and death with metaphors of birds and rivers. With the aid of a trusty Samsad Bengali-to-English dictionary, I have ventured further, more tentatively, into the despairing later works, into Bela Obela Kaabala and the uncollected poems. Into Buddhadev Bose on Das.

I also read Clinton Seely's A Literary Biography of the Bengali Poet Jibanananda Das: 1899-1945. It is an amazing work, a hermeneutic effort by a Westerner who lived in Barisal and steeped himself in local people, language and natural surroundings. Then, due to the vagaries of mail couriers, almost a year later after it was published, my sister sent me Fakrul Alam's translations of Das's poems into English. Aha, I thought to myself, what hath the man wrought?

But first things first: I am no poetry critic. Though I have been reading poetry fairly constantly for the last ten years and count among my favorites poets such as

Mary Jo Bang, Seamus Heaney and Vijay Seshadri, though I know what is spondee and simile, there is far more between meter and trope than I can ever hope to know. But even more crucially, I have to confess that I have no idea what would constitute rhetoric and mode, or pre-Dasian intonations, in Bengali poetry. Though I can hear its music, the stressed syllables, I wouldn't know how to scan Bengali poems. A technical analysis, therefore, of Fakrul's book of poems I will leave to minds more capable than mine. What I write, I write as the wildly enthusiastic, the avidly partisan,



**Jibanananda Das: Selected Poems with an Introduction, Chronology, and Glossary, translated by Fakrul Alam (The University Press Limited, Dhaka 1000, Tk. 290.00)**

Translations are a finicky, delicate, punishing matter. Dr. Johnson growled that "Poetry indeed cannot be translated." So what, as the revolutionary once wrote, is to be done? Do you do the literal word for word and thereby introduce the poet's world in the most unmediated, direct but 'unpoetic' way, or do you choose a richer, but perhaps more dangerous and difficult, rhymed verse? What is to be, content or style? Fakrul goes for the latter. As he puts it in his scrupulously-worded introduction, he has aimed for "recovering something of the poetic qualities of the original, in transmitting the tone of the poet... for distinct traces of the poetic signature." This, my friend, a heavy burden to life in the context of a poet as uniquely Bengali, as individually gifted, as Jibanananda Das.

The result is predictably of varying success, something Fakrul Alam himself acknowledges implicitly. Of the eighty poems translated, thirty-two are from Ruposhi Bangla and Banalata Sen, a fortuitous choice since these contain the poems that a non-Bengali should be introduced to. His best efforts are in the translations of the more complex, the more difficult, the more beautiful, the more poignant. For example, Abar Ashbo Phiray, which was the first poem I turned to, thankfully is translated as Beautiful Bengal, not I Shall Return

(thereby raising the specter of, say, General MacArthur in the Philippines) works for me. On the other hand, Biral (The Cat), that affectionate caress by Das, does not. I can't quite pinpoint why. Perhaps it is the line:

After its success somewhere in stripping a few pieces of fish to the bone

Maybe it is that muddled 'success' and the thoroughly unsatisfying filler of 'somewhere'. I did read each poem in the book, sometimes going with the poems in the original, sometimes against translations in my own head. I like An Orange (Kamalalebu), An Overwhelming Sensation (Both), the dusky image of:

Like a gray owl spreading its wings in Agrabah's early winter darkness in The Conch-Garlanded One (Shankhamala), the fact that Fakrul rather cleverly weaves in all the Bengali names of trees and bushes in Becau I Have Seen Bengal's Face (Banglar Mukh Ami Dekheyachhi), Windy Night (Hamar Raat) billows. In fact, I like all the translations of Dhushar Pandulipi and Ruposhi Bangla, though it beats me how 'ranga' might become 'barred clouds'. I agree with the logic of keeping Das's dashes, smile with pleasure at the pointing out of Yeatsian echoes. I am less impressed by some other poems. The principal thing that mars a small number of them is what Anthony Burgess termed the 'arty' translation, "the overwrought reworking that sinks the line, dooms a stanza. There are clunkers too. For example, for me Fakrul's Banalata Sen (the poem itself, not the whole book) was ruined by the word 'transaxation,' which does not at all have the startling effect, the sudden intrusion, of the vernacular 'Jayn dayn' (with its echo of Larkin's 'intricate, rented world' in Aubade). It disturbs the mood, as if supply-side economics, not the give-and-take of daily Bengali life, our fish markets and our Rickshaw fares, slipped into Das's riverside brooding on time. I hate to say it, but here I prefer Seely's Banalata Sen, the literalist's approach, his line:

All birds come home, all rivers, and all this life's tasks finished... to Fakrul Alam's version, his line:

All birds come home, all rivers, and all this life's tasks finished... to Fakrul Alam's version, his line: I don't get it. "All birds home." Does it mean homing in? And that "again" just to set up a rhyme with "Sen" doesn't make sense, since in the original it is life's unceasing transactions coming to a close this one, final time. Though when I thought about it, I could not come up with a better word for "transactions." Nor with a better line. See, dear readers, the hellish nightmare of translation!

The glossary is both necessary and a delight. I quarrel only with the definition of the Krishnachura as "a colorful tree which blooms in spring." That's it? Where is its crimson blaze, its scarlet flowers? Jibanananda Das, a poet of almost clinical exactitude when it came to nature, would, I feel, agree with me. The other caveat I

have is that a certain defensive note creeps into the Introduction when Fakrul declaims lines like "I have never taken the kind of liberties with Das's poems..." or "will show that I was right in opting for..." It is too much the didactic wagging finger, the hyper alert translator assiduously tending to the potential breaches in his ramparts.

He needn't have fussed. Fakrul writes that he feels "happy" about his translations "because they gave almost always the feeling that I was involved in the poetic act." That is indeed an endearing confession, since it means that he followed, via the 'poem as a ghostly map' (Mary Kinzie's words), the many paths not taken by the author, was able to see the provisional nature of a poem in the making, discern how Das hovered above the abyss as he combined and recombined elements of orthodoxy and the experimental before conjuring up the finished product. It means that Fakrul Alam approached his task with sensitivity, and that should be defence enough. So the introduction, especially since it is meant for non-Bengali readers, should have been a little less studied, should have loomed itself aloft with a tad more charm and helium.

Aah, but I quibble too much. I should not, but I can't help it. It is one of life's small, but distinct, pleasures to bicker with a translator about a favourite poet and his poems. Fakrul Alam is an original effort. Every line in it is his own. It is not rebuffed material, mimetic exegesis culled from works already existing in Western libraries. For that alone he should be commended. Fresh translations, attempts like Fakrul Alam's, revive Das as a living, breathing poet, force us all to look beyond the entombed figure in the mausoleum busily being erected by the Bengali literary establishment. Fakrul writes that Professor Seely has done his translations out of his love for the poet. He himself had one no less. His book should be on the shelf of every reader, Bengali and otherwise, of the poems of Jibanananda Das.

And here in the United States summer has crinkled to fall (that's Americanese for autumn) and it is time to dig out the heavier tackle and gear (Hopkins anybody?) for bicycling in cooler weather. We have to hoist our bikes and my well-thumbed copy of 'Jibanananda: Kobita Shomogro' into a pickup truck and head out for the wooded trails, for egret feathers and sea hawks wiping 'the sun's smell from its wings,' for my private, my Das-gifted my very own, Barisal by the Bay. And who knows, perhaps the shy ghost of a reclusive poet, our beautiful, our bright Jibanananda Das, will nod at me from the shadow of an oyster boat or from behind the bole of an American tree as I read his words out aloud into the bright, chilly October air.

The writer is an ex-teacher of Dhaka University and lives in Washington D.C.

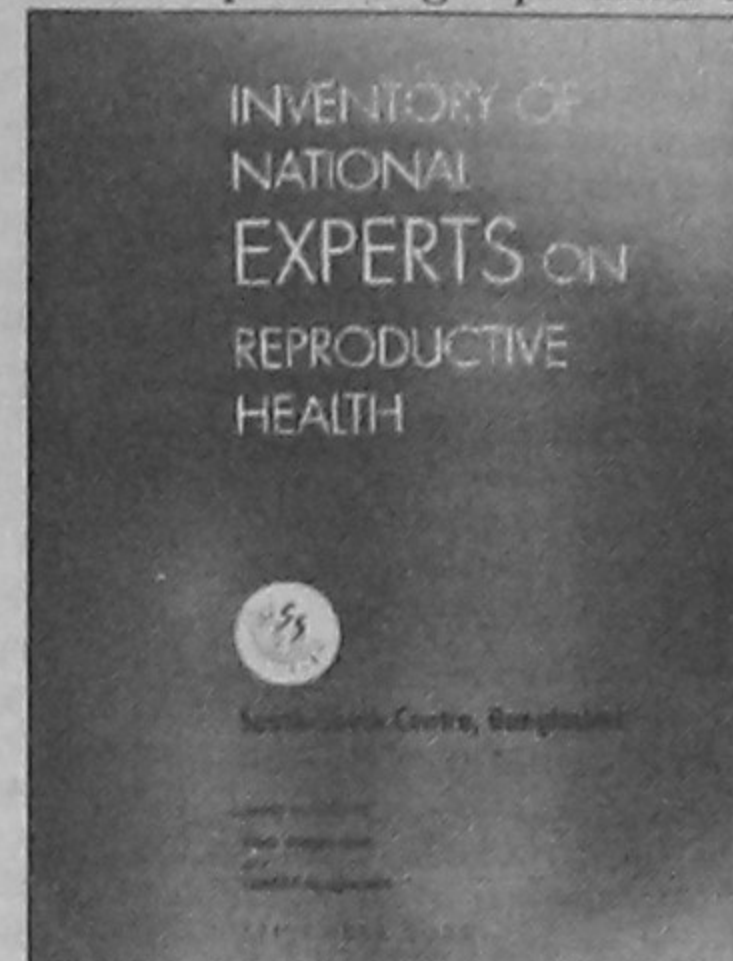
## Two Publications on Reproductive Health

By Andalib Rashdie

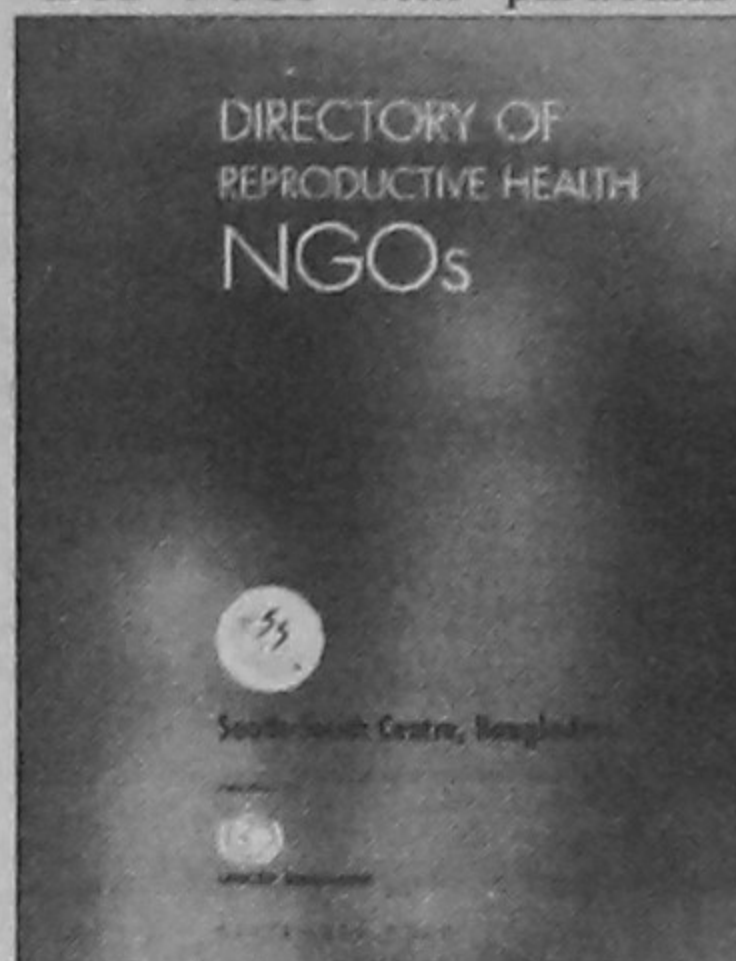
SOUTH-South Centre, Bangladesh brings out two important publications in reproductive health areas. One is the Directory of Reproductive Health NGOs and the other is Inventory of National Experts on Reproductive Health. The concept of reproductive health as redefined and restructured in the present context is a post-International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) phenomenon. ICPD, an unprecedented consensus of 179 countries in 1994 shifted the problems and prospects of population and health from a narrowly focused vertically structured family planning programme to a broader area of reproductive health. Bangladesh is among the pioneering countries to bring the ICPD message of a comprehensive reproductive health home and attempt implementation of ICPD Programme of Actions. Health Indicators for Bangladesh suggest an impressive rise in life expectancy at birth, steady decline in population growth rate, increase in contraceptive prevalence rate and a general decline in child and maternal mortality and morbidity. Yet health services remain illusive to the rural masses and urban slum dwellers.

The wider perspective of reproductive health encompasses among other issues the ones of safe motherhood, adolescent reproductive health, STD (Sexually Transmitted Diseases)/HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)/AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), family planning and gender and development. Reproductive health care as a constellation of methods, techniques and services aims at promoting reproductive

was instrumental in selecting the functional reproductive health NGOs and document these in a formatted directory. The Directory of Reproductive Health NGOs records more than hundred NGOs with particulars



**Inventory of National Experts on Reproductive Health**



**Published by South-South Centre, Bangladesh**

September 2000

including areas of activities and sources of funding. The document gives a first hand idea of organisations and specialised knowledge of their operational areas. Inputs that were gathered by administering questionnaires were adapted for the purpose of the directory.

There was a dearth of consolidated information on the expertise available within the country in the areas of reproductive health. The Centre ventured the preparation and publication of an inventory with national experts

capable of contributing to the critical areas of health and population and development. The inventory notes the area specialisation of experts and their working experience as consultants with international organisations. It is viewed the inventory will be of high utility for different stakeholders in the areas of health and population. This is a handy and useful tool in gaining access to national consultants and makes appropriate use of their expertise. It will help in establishing an effective linkage between national experts and the users.

Both the directory and inventory have some omissions and mistakes. A few not so significant NGOs and professionals' name appear in these publications. In the forwarding of the publications the Centre Director however assures of correcting mistakes and updating information in the revised edition.

Just after the pronouncement of National Health Policy, launching of two health-related publications is of great interest and utility. UNICEF supported the publication of Directory of Reproductive Health NGOs while the publication of Inventory of National Experts on Reproductive Health got support of WHO and UNICEF. These two publications are informative, interesting and useful. Both the Directory and the Inventory are well planned and aesthetically designed with catchy covers. Individuals and agencies having a stake in reproductive health may not like miss these publications that blissfully do not charge any price.

## Mahathir's New Deal for Asia

By Robin Crompton

EVER indefatigable, Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia has published a book entitled 'A New Deal for Asia' setting out his views on the Asian crisis and what needs to be done to prevent a repeat.

It looks back at the Asian crisis and forward to a new order which, the Prime Minister hopes, would make such collapse scenarios less likely, a world order fairer to the Third World and better all round. It is a response to his Western critics, an explanation of the background to his thinking, and a plea for a fairer, more rational, transparent and regulated financial system.

He calls for a more rational, transparent, accountable and better regulated financial system capable of averting the kind of collapse which took place in East Asia two years ago. He proposes standard remedies: eliminate speculative currency trading by levying an international tax on it (without naming its progenitor, Prof. James Tobin); and obligatory one-year deposits of the counter-value of investment with central bank in time of crisis. He would top this with a national tax on speculative capital gain.

All this is familiar from his earlier speeches. But here he broadens his scope. He calls for a New Deal for Asia: respect for its right to independent social and economic development free of speculative attack, outside interference or Western lecturing. He wants a genuine dialogue on international financial reform, in the hope of a new compact, a meeting of minds between Asia and the West. Many of his best passages are to be found in the chapter on Asian and Western values.

Here, I am 95% in agreement. Except for the epilogue, a rousing and uncannily accurate polemic, the book is more balanced, temperate and conciliatory than some of Mahathir's public pronouncements. That is clearly his purpose: to set the record straight, and project a more moderate image while sticking firmly to his guns.

Does he succeed, and will the doubters be won over? Certainly not the pin-striped twenty-something yuppies in the dealing rooms, whom he rightly decries: not Wall Street and the London City; not the Western right-wing media. They are not open to rational argument, and continue to denigrate him, although recently, given his revival of economic growth, the parrot cries have grown less strident. Radical intellectuals, of course, are well aware of the need for reform. They will welcome this restatement, despite its more Utopian, rhetorical flourishes. But will he convince the waverers, and capture some of the middle ground?

It's hard to say. He will impress some readers, especially non-Western, with his logic and impassioned commitment; and may reassure others with his protestations of moderation, democratic principle and the need for East-West understanding. He has deepened and broadened his argument, setting his ideas in a wider context, and appealing to the general good, not just nationalism. He makes concessions, criticizing Asia as well

as the West. While remaining critical, he falls over himself to appear even-handed, and for the most part, his language is measured.

But at times his passion shakes off the bridle and gallops away, as in the epilogue, which although perfectly arguable, is couched in uncompromising terms likely to repel the mealy-mouthed. His thesis: that the West is inherently aggressive, warlike and predatory, and remains so, is perfectly valid; but his radical statement of it will, I



fear, please only the converted. This section in particular could have benefited from peer review. In general, Mahathir's approach, between polemic and apologetics, its tone between the blunt and the bland, I don't mind; the subject is painful, and fundamental to world stability; it fully justifies impassioned engagement. But more skeptical readers may shy away.

There are other weaknesses. His critique of imperialism is not set in a wide enough context.

Imperialism is not an exclusively Western prerogative, even if it has been dominant for the past 500 years. What about Genghis Khan the Mongol, with his rapacious conquest of the world as far west as Hungary? History is replete with empires from North, South, East and West - as a glance at Toynbee's 'Study of History' will show. It is a general human phenomenon and aberration. This is the sort of avoidable error that weakens his case, and which any true friend could have pointed out before publication.

Another weakness is his reluctance to admit errors, except that of having been too adept a pupil of free-market capitalism. His stand is almost purely defensive. At times he relapses into old-style politician's rhetoric, as in the conclusion. No Westerner now respects such language, even if some Third World leaders, raised in a different culture, still unabashedly use it (even Mandela's conclusion in 'No Easy Walk to Freedom').

No book is perfect, and no principled statement will please everyone. The merit of this book is to stir the pot, expound his position in greater depth and clarity, to de-mystify the author, and to publicize his wish for a decent compromise. East/West tolerance and mutual respect, and a protected future for the rights and achievements of his fellow Asians.

Mahathir's New Deal for Asia (II)

Success is Mahathir's most

persuasive argument. Clearly, he has done Malaysia immense service in its remarkable build-up, its economic growth and political cohesion over 20 years. On this evidence, there can be little doubt of his fundamental commitment to the public good, whatever his shortcomings; and he has fully earned his place in history. His emergency measures of 1997-8, restricting currency trading and capital movements during the crisis, have ultimately worked, confounding the critics, admittedly at a certain price in international standing and investment, but sparing Malaysia a worse meltdown. For that, and for defying the crude free-market fundamentalists in full cry, he deserves respect and praise. As the prophet of a new order, the exemplar of a bold stand against exploitation, he merits a serious hearing.

Where I part company with him is on the politics. His treatment of Anwar, his former deputy and designated successor, was harsh, vindictive and bigoted. True, Anwar represented the kind of free-for-all capitalist fundamentalism that he detests, and may well have been, as such, by forces hostile to Mahathir. He hints as much, but does not produce the evidence. Political, as well as financial, destabilization was clearly attempted by his enemies. But Mahathir's response was none the less excessive. If he suspected disloyalty, he could simply have sacked Anwar. It was a gross error to persecute him on what are to outsiders, suspect sexual grounds. The argument, repeated in this book, that Malaysia would not be respected if led by a proven homosexual is grotesque and provincial, judging the wider world by narrowly domestic criteria.

His anti-imperial instincts, developed during the decolonization struggle, and determination that the West shall never again rule into Asia are entirely understandable, but lead him at times into excessive and exposed positions, such as the diplomatic and military support given to Indonesia over East Timor in the name of 'Asian solidarity', national sovereignty and non-interference. His recent opposition to investigation of Indonesian Army brutality in Timor is another example, flying in the face of his protestations of support for basic human rights. His unsureness of touch in this field is shown by two further examples: his ambivalence over the Tien An Men Square, and his condemnation of Serb atrocities in Kosovo (a safe distance away from his region). It is true that his policy towards East Timor was no more misconceived, and less brutal, than that of many more powerful countries at the time, as recently argued in this column. But that only underscores my point. He remains at heart an Asian conservative, like Jiang Jie Min, Park Chung-hee, Lee Kuan Yew and Chok Tong, whose fear of dissent and national disunity drive them into severe repression. His attacks on NGOs as meddling busybodies and human rights trouble-makers are similarly suspect.

He expends much ink on persuading us that he is not anti-democratic or dictatorial, but firmly reserves his right to be so

where he considers national unity, dignity or stability threatened. We have heard this kind of thing from conservatives before. It is a comprehensive let-out clause, a stretchable rubber band allowing him carte blanche, and falls to convince. In so arguing, he betrays his better instincts, and risks falling into the trap of the autocrat who considers himself indispensable, and where necessary, above the law. He is clearly an autocratic personality with a strong sense of mission. This leads him into what looks, to Western eyes, maltreatment of opponents, critics and dissidents.

In a way, and considered against his background, this may be understandable. Human rights may or may not be universal, but Asian culture undoubtedly differs from European. He has to operate in a radically different context, and has done so quite successfully for a quarter of a century, warts and all. Who are we to criticize? Are not his overriding stress on multi-ethnic harmony, non-sense national building, economic and social rights, and distrust of civil and political liberties understandable, given the tensions of the region? Did he not witness the Singapore riots of 1969, and those of Indonesia in 1998, only a few hundred miles from where he sat? They clearly traumatized him, like other East Asian leaders. He does not, on the evidence of this book, want to destroy democracy and self-determination, having fought for them against British colonial rule and repeatedly submitted himself for re-election since appointment. But he feels compelled to guide democracy as a sort of patriarch, as did Sukarno, Tito, Nehru, indeed all the leaders of the non-aligned Bandung Group before him; and when we watch the renewed convulsions of Indonesia today, we may feel he has a point.

But like them, he is over-afraid of anarchy, disorder and dissent, and like them, he over-reacts (one of the weakest passages in his comment on the Tien An Men massacre). In the last analysis, he is not confident of his own authority. He muzzles the press and his courts commit a foreign journalist to prison for 6 weeks for criticizing them. His personal weaknesses - vanity, suspicion, autocracy, a sense - whatever his protestations to the contrary - of personal and indispensability, sometimes push him over the blurred dividing line that separates benevolent paternalism from straight tyranny.

This is a pity. His political weaknesses offer the adversary too easy a target. This needlessly damages the reform cause, and is a matter for regret. But it cannot obscure his lasting merits: his refusal to be bullied or coerced by international pressures, his cogent case for financial reform and East-West dialogue, and his clear and forceful prose style. Love him or hate him, he ranks with the major Third World figures of our time, at a moment when most of his voices are obediently mute and conformist in the face of a tide of free-market ideology. His book, to me, is utterly absorbing, a testimony of a lifetime's political experience. Read it and judge for yourself.

## TRAVEL

# Pageantry at Persepolis

By Raana Haider

Continued from last week

THE Achaemenian dynasty came to an end in 330 BC when Alexander the Great routed Darius III's army at Marathon. Alexander-the-not-so-Great then proceeded to loot the immense wealth of Persepolis. The spoils were apparently transferred to Greece by a legion of some 5000 camels and 20,000 mules over a period of many months.

The ruins of Persepolis remained a magnet for European travellers through the ages. In the fifteenth century, a Venetian ambassador to Persia Giosaphat Barbaro travelled extensively in the country. Some two centuries later, another Italian traveller Pietro della Valle recorded the cineforn script for the first time. A Frenchman is credited with the first drawings of the ancient complex in the seventeenth century. Chevalier Chardin a jeweller visited India and Persia as much as for his love of jewellery as his love of travel.

He recorded his impressions in 'Lettres Persanes'. A short distance away from the tent city of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi lies the rocky platform 46 feet above the plain on which was built the famed city of Persepolis. Entrance to the vast complex (135,000 square metres) is made via two splendid staircases. One sweeps to the right

and the other to the left. Each stairway has 11 steps, every four or five of which are made of a single stone slab. Such is the construction that even horses could negotiate the stairs. Roger Stevens has emphatically declared "Since staircase building is an art of which we have learnt nothing and, it often seems to me, forgotten something since 500 BC, I append the measurements and other details for the benefit of future practitioners." One climbs without any sense of climbing. Massive rugged, devoid of ornament, designed perhaps to terrify but not to tire... the climb is any easy assault as Stevens declared. Reaching Persepolis on horseback, a nineteenth century French traveller Jeanne Dieulafoy wrote in 'La Perse, Chaldée, la Susiane'. "The steps are so slightly inclined that it is easy to go up and down team on horseback, and they are so broad that ten men can walk along them side by side."

Reaching the top of the terrace, we came to terms with the vastness of the fallen city. Trumpeters would have welcomed us at the top of the stairways. The procession of guest would then have been heralded into the Gate of All Nations. We passed two massive and terrifying winged-bulls that were built to repel with their symbolic power any evil spirits that may have lurked and threaten the might of Persepolis. Elsewhere, a bas-relief depicts the king fighting a lion, a popular theme in Persian art. Winged animals were one of the heraldic symbols of the Achaemenian dynasty. However, while Man proposes God disposes and the might have fallen.

One could then choose to enter the Hall with a Hundred Columns (70x70 metres long) that contained in its heyday 100 columns 12 metres high. Few of these soaring pillars today remain. The

fire that is alleged to have been ordered by Alexander-the-not-so-Great is believed to have been started at this site. Some 3 metres of soil and cedar three ashes were found on the floor when party excavated in 1878 by Motamed Farhad Mirza, the Governor-General of the Fars province. The revengeful act was a response by the Greeks for the burning of the Acropolis in Greece by the Persian king Xerxes some 150 years earlier. However, the few columns that remain reveal the grandeur and decorative detail of the lost city. Brick being a more perishable building agent than stone, almost the entire royal complex has been thus lost.

You could also choose to move to the Apadane built by Darius the Great. Here too as far as the eye can see are some remnants of decorated columns. The bases. In Pers and Persepolis by Werner F Dutz and Sylvia A Matheson, we are told that the Apadana palace had "ceiling beams of cedar, ebony and teak and were gold-plated, inlaid with ivory and precious metals." A double-headed lion sculpture was the capital carved atop one of the slender columns. Today excavated, it sits squat on the ground, remarkably intact. Its state of preservation is due to its being buried underground for a long spell. Reconstructed etchings in the above book bring forth vividly the magnificence and sheer opulence of what once might have been. Henri-Paul Eyraud in 'In Search of Lost World' speaks of "the close relationship between architecture and sculpture... the art of Persepolis is cosmopolitan and composite: it recalls the art of Assyria, Babylon and Egypt, and even that of Greece. However, Persian genius has transformed all these elements into a harmonious whole and given them a genuine originality."

Exposure to the elements of Time badly eroded one of the stairways of the Apadana Palace. The pleaded resistance of Persepolis the sight by which Persepolis is today known is the eastern staircase which had to good fortune to be buried underground. The natural preserver for centuries. It was concealed for some 2100 years until 1932 under a blanket of rubble. In rock relief, we see vividly the triumphal procession of visitors who came to pay tribute to the king of Persia, bearing gifts they travelled after. So detailed are the rock carvings, they appear to be truly shuffling in procession as they wait to present their offerings. The figures and features are identical. Only the dress conveys the nationality of the bearer. Representatives of 28 nations are identified. From far and wide came (in order): Persians, Medians, Parthians, Arians, Bactrians, Sogdians, Chorasmians, Drangians, Arachosians, Sattagydians, Gandarians, Indians, Haumas, Seythians, Babylonians, Assyrians, K Arabs, Egyptians, Armenians, Cappadocians, Lydians, Ionians, Scythians, Skudians, Petasians, Lybians and Ethiopians. So above are the depictions of bulls, cows, camels, baskets of fruit, fabrics, folds of the dress, ornaments, bows and arrows, lances and shields, chariots and animal skins... One could spend the entire day examining this magnificent depiction to homage. Elsewhere are found bas-reliefs of elite members of the Achaemenian army, the 'Immortals'. They were thus named for should one die, another soldier immediately replaced the late 'Immortal'. There they

Raana Haider is the wife of the Ambassador of Bangladesh to Iran

The fiction An Asian Encounter with Mohammed Anjad Hossain will be serialised from next week again.

-page-in-charge.