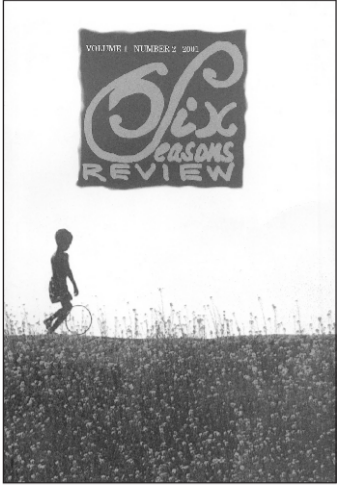


REVIEW

A staple for the nation's literature

International in scope, half-yearly periodical on arts and letters from Bangladesh *Six Seasons Review's* current issue focuses on contemporary world poetry, writes Ziaul Karim



Six Seasons Review
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FIRST appearing into our literary landscape earlier this year, *Six Seasons Review*, published by Mohiuddin Ahmed of University Press Limited and edited by a quartet of editors, was a landmark event. With the publication of the journal a long felt need for a platform has been laid where new writing in English from Bangladesh would flourish and a vacuum for an interaction between international writers was filled.

For the healthy growth of a nation's literature there is no alternative to a specialised literary magazine and *Six Seasons Review* has come up with the promise to provide the necessary nutrition to the nation's literary health much to the joy of both readers and writers of the country.

In its sophisticated matt-finished edition, the current issue of the *Six Seasons Review* maps the geography of world poetry and presents some of stars glittering in the contemporary literary scene. Within the covers of the periodical readers would get to know some of the best poets writing in languages as diverse as Hebrew, Macedonian, Danish, Norwegian, Polish, German, Korean, Iranian, English, Urdu and Bangla.

The current issue, having all the hallmarks of the inaugural volume

intact, features an added injection of new blood and direction: Entitled 'In My Anecdote', a new feature section has been introduced to present memoirs of 'interesting personalities', plus the non-fiction section of the journal has included into its space 'interview' of leading voices in contemporary creative and critical writing with Homi Bhabha, one of the world's foremost postcolonial critics and author of *The Location of Culture* (Routledge 1994), giving a thought-provoking interview on post-colonial issues and concerns.

Charismatic Noazesh Ahmed's memoir is an interesting reading. A scientist and a brilliant photographer, Noazesh is a walking Bible on Bangladeshi plants and flowers. His encounter with one of the fecund voices in modern Bengali literature Buddhadev Bose at the University of Wisconsin in the summer of 1957, where Bose was a visiting professor and Noazesh finishing his doctoral research, has been brought into life with Noazesh's eye for details and a great sense of crafty humour. His journey on an Italian luxury liner from New York to Genoa, via the

Azores, Lisbon, Gibraltar and Naples -- described in the second part of his engaging memoir -- takes us on interesting rendezvous including the climbing of hill mountain immortalised by El Greco in his famous work titled *Toledo*. And in the course of his journey he met the love of his life. It has been a story of love won and love lost leaving an echo of the melancholic song *Che sara sara* in our mind.

Drawing its inspiration from the famous *Granta* magazine, *Six Seasons Review*, it appears from the current issue, is concentrating more on theme-volume. The current issue, a special on world poetry, opens with three poems by Iranian poet Muniyam Alfaker. The Iranian original has been translated by Samer Mansoor into English. Even in its translated version, the poems retain the delicate music and powerful images of Alfaker's poems. In their economy of expression and the rhetorical force, the poems echo Japanese haiku. Here is the first poem:

The Sky is My Hat
the sky is my hat

the earth my shoes
the air
the air
the air
the air
...my clothes

The Macedonian poet, Zoran Anchevski, featuring next in the volume with a deep psychoanalytic poem 'My Little Me'. The poet with a dispassionate eye looks into his self and observes the conflicting desires shovel and grovel within him, possibly in all of us. I can not resist the temptation of quoting the whole poem:

When I fenced my little me
and said to myself -- This is mine
I grew,
Became my dictator --
handsome and greedy.
Now I prepare for rebellions,
ambushes;
I plot evil,
I hire traitors, assassins.
But in fact
as the lowest of all evils,
I grove before his feet
and flatter, salivating at his throne.

Sudeep Sen, one of the quartet

editors of the *Six Seasons Review*, has translated the poem with the poet.

Comprehensive and rich in variety, in tone and texture, the poetry section in the volume is worth its entire text-space.

The other poets who have been fascinating reading are Reetika Vazirani, Kwame Dawes, Di Brandt and Daniel Wiessbort.

Visually outstanding, the photography section features poignant images by Noazesh Ahmed. Noazesh has an uncanny graphic sense: The first photograph of the portfolio, taken from a top angle position, shows a cluster of fishing boats forming a refreshing geometric balance and rhythm. The picture showing heaps of oil drums with emphasis on their circumference again speaks of Noazesh's interest in geometric unity of the composition. This is true about all his pictures collected in the section.

The photograph carried on the cover of the current issue, also by Noazesh, features a silhouette figure of a young boy playing with a wheel with a mustard field in the foreground -- both complementing

each other in a striking visual harmony.

In the Fiction section two pieces stand out for me -- The Call of the Wild by Cicely Palser Havelly and Transformation by Nuzhat Amin Mannan. Havelly's prose is racy and she compels her readers to finish the story without a break. On the contrary, Nuzhat's prose is meditative. It is about a girl, Nadira, who is being betrothed. The wedding rituals, the tinkling jewellery, red and gold bangles transform Nadira into a new being.

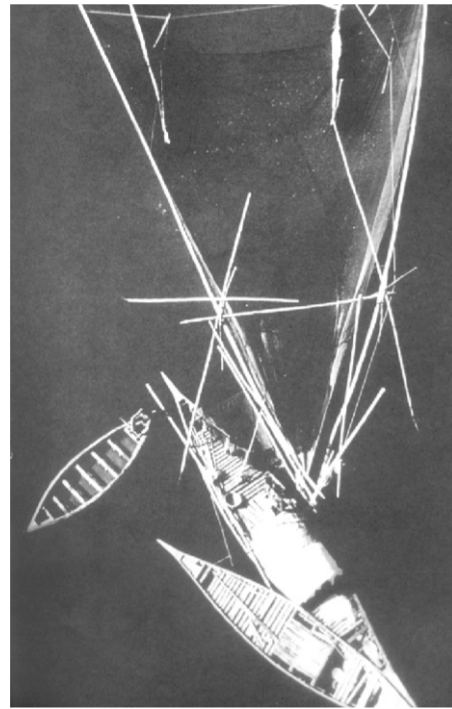
A heart-warming aspect of *Six Seasons Review* is that it is edited by writer-academics; of the four editors except Fakrul Alam, Kaiser Haq, Syed Manzoorul Islam and Sudeep Sen are themselves creative writers.

One of the finest colourists of contemporary Bangladeshi art Monsur-ul-Karim features in the Art section. The swaying paddy field or peasants working in the field have always fascinated Monsur-ul-Karim. The harmony and hidden symphony of rural landscape of Bengal is the recurrent theme of Mansur.

Three books have been reviewed in the Book Reviews section. In reviewing latest book of translation by William Radice *Particles, Jottings, Sparks: The Collected Brief Poems Rabindranath Tagore*, what Kaiser Haq points out correctly that Radice and also Tagore 'limit themselves to a top-sided view of modern literature.' Tagore rejected modernism's emphasis on the darker side of life. By drawing our attention to the poetic range of major twentieth century writers such as Eliot, Auden, Yeats, Heaney, Walcott, Rilke and others, Kaiser Haq says that "When Tagore wrote his essay (on modernism), there was more to modernism than he makes out", to which I quite agree.

To produce a 200-odd-page 'A-5' format magazine every six months without compromising its quality is a fine testament to its editors' competence and talent and for the healthy growth of our literature. *Six Seasons Review* has already proved its worth as a staple.

Ziaul Karim edits literary and cultural pages of The Daily Star



Two poignant images from Noazesh's portfolio



Monsur-ul-Karim Source-7 Oil on Canvas 122 X 125 cms

BOOK REVIEW

Of woman and the icon

There is rebellion in Mohua against a patriarchal society and its rigid codes and rules and values, and indeed, there is a great struggle. No doubt, Hasna Begum has done a commendable job in this her first novel, says Rebecca Haque

As the poet said, there is a garden in her face. Hasna Begum's credits are impeccable. Scholar, philosopher, moral guide and mother and grandmother, she has written a tremendous novel about Woman as mother, as potent a dreamer and as powerful as the birth of a legacy.

The figure of the Madonna and Child is a vivid figure-an icon no less powerful than the aesthetic cover of the book. The cover shows a Pre-Raphaelite painting of John Everett St. Vincent Millay's *The Blind Girl*. A woman is not a woman until she gives birth and suckles the babe. Love sees all not with the eyes only but with the heart.

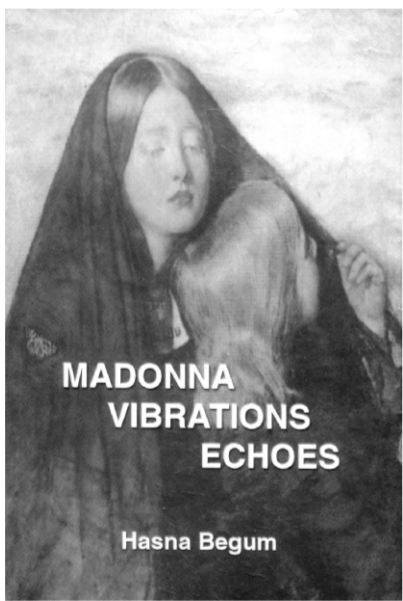
The novel centres around the figure of Mahua-mother, survivor, fighter. The tripartite division of the book's title merges fluidly in the novel as interior monologue or the stream-of-consciousness novel. Then there are no chapter divisions but the vibrations and echoes merge and delve into each other and no plot structure either as it should be as in a novel of this type (cf., Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*).

Mohua moves from being within echoes of being a daughter. And a woman and gaining motherhood and accepts as a woman the glory of motherhood. She also accepts the growing bond between herself and her daughter as a glowing legacy for the future.

On the other hand, however, there are some (albeit few) negative attributes of the novel. For example, there is much too much repetitive use of the name of Mohua, and there is although no well defined plot as it should be in the stream-of-consciousness method, there is nonetheless a clear focus in what are Hasna Begum's ideas about ethics.

Mohua realizes the commingling between class and ethics. Though this review uses by and large a philosophic view (and there are no printer's devils in the entire book), nonetheless I find the book to be partially unfulfilling as to what Hasna Begum really wants to say about feminism. Is she a feminist or is it subsumed within her liberal humanism? Thus as the realism that occurs in our minds as this reviewer picks the book up to peruse it again, Mohua becomes an icon in the universal sense.

There is rebellion in Mohua against a patriarchal society and its rigid codes and rules and values, and indeed, there is a great struggle. No doubt, Hasna Begum has done a commendable job in this her first novel.



MADONNA VIBRATIONS ECHOES
By Hasna Begum
Academic Publishers, October 1999, Price Tk. 80.00, Pp. 96

ESSAY

The use of land in Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* and Silko's *Ceremony*

Traditional American Indian literature was primarily oral, and the American reading public for long had ignored and, to a great extent, preferred to remain ignorant about different cultural facets of its native community, says Shamsad Mortuza

THE Kiowa Indian Natachee Scott Momaday and the Acoma Pueblo Leslie Marmon Silko are two of the most celebrated contemporary Native American writers. Momaday received the Pulitzer Prize for his maiden novel *House Made of Dawn* in 1969 - one year after the US federal government had passed the Indian Civil Rights Act (ICRA) giving self-determination to its indigenous people. It was also in 1969 that Silko published her first short story in the *New Mexican Quarterly*. Her recognition as a poet came in 1974 when she received an award from *Chicago Review* for her first collection of poems, *Laguna Woman*. Silko's maiden novel, *Ceremony*, came out in 1977 -- following the adoption of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975. Without taking any credit away from these two writers, let me just say that reception and recognition of these two authors by the mainstream audience signals a changing attitude towards the Native Americans that was taking place during the 60's and 70's-- both at political and social levels.

Traditional American Indian literature was primarily oral, and the American reading public for long had ignored and, to a great extent, preferred to remain ignorant about different cultural facets of its native community. Traditional American Indian literature remained solely concerns of salvage anthropologists (like Alfred Kroeber) and museum curators of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The first generation of Native American writers writing in English was all educated in boarding schools and was forced to forget their cultural past in favor of the great Melling Pot. Those who were writing fashioned their writings after western model (i.e. Mourning Dove) or were simply assisting the ethnographers (i.e. Alfred Phinney to Franz Boas). With the change in political scenario, attitude towards the original inhabitants of the continent was changing. And, I suppose, the tribes were also changing their position regarding the white.

These changes, however, came after centuries of struggle against white persecution. Momaday and Silko were writing at a time when Indian activism was at its height. With the rise of the American Indian Movement (AIM), "traditionalism became very popular" (Deloria et al. 1983: 153). A group of Indian lawyers probed into their land claims based on the "frozen" treaties that guaranteed rights of the Indian people "as long the grasses grow and the rivers flow". After completing her BA from the University of Albuquerque, Silko went to attend law school with the intentions of giving legal assistance to Native Americans. However, she gave up that pursuit and began to teach and write instead. But her interest in land claims, as is evident in *Ceremony*, never faded away.

Momaday, on the other hand, inspired by his mentor Yfor Winters, was deemed to become a poet in the '60s. He left his seventh-grade-teaching job at Dulce School at Jicarilla reservation, New Mexico in order to avail a poetry fellowship at Stanford University. He ended up publish-

ing the novel *House Made of Dawn*, followed by his quasi-mythical memoir *The Way to the Rainy Mountain*. In both of these works, Momaday refers to the Kiowa emergence myth that tells of his people coming out of the wooden log in the pre-contact age. There is a strong sense of spirituality that ties the people with the land. Almost all groups of the native people identify themselves as the people, who belong to the land. It is the land that gives their tribal identity. But the political upheaval of the 60's brought the tribes to a common platform as they launched a pan-Indian movement and floated "Red Power" as a parallel force of "Black Power." In an interview, Momaday recalled the time, and said:

When I was little, people didn't think of themselves as Indians. They thought of themselves as Kiowas, or Comanches, or Crees, or whatever. But in the last 50 years or so, the tribal distinctions have broken down. But the sense of Indianness has remained as strong as ever, and maybe it has become stronger.

This sentiment of pan-Indianness and traditionalism, which was in vogue in the 1960s, made their inroads into the writings of Momaday and Silko. Thus the ceremonial dawn running that defines Abel's Kiowa identity in *House Made of Dawn* comes in a Walotowa (James-Pueblo) and Navajo ritual framework while in *Ceremony* the Acoma Pueblo Tayo's healing involves Navajo sandpaintings and the unorthodox treatment of the medicine man Old Betonie.

Momaday and Silko made their protagonists transcend their tribal identity in order to address a larger audience. In a native voice they assert that the intricate worldview of native people was not inferior but different. They uphold the earth as a spiritual being whose dynamics depends on the communion with its inhabitants. Such view earlier was shelved as mythologies, folklore, or primitive religions or idealistic dreams of romantic visionary. But Momaday and Silko locate their narrative in contemporary America, making the problem of the native individual as a problem of internalized racism and colonization. Since their fictive protagonists as world war veterans have trod both White and native worlds, the mainstream audience locates itself on the fence that divided the self from the other and have views of both sides.

As readers, we sense that it is the native attitude towards the land as a space that separates the American Indians from other ethnic groups, especially in their attitude towards 'land.' While the mainstream view, predominantly White Male Protestant, holds the vast land of the continent as the Promised Land where they can materialize their 'American Dream', the native community harbors a different sacred purpose for the land. The land is dynamic and alive, and human being must participate in its movement to give its momentum and its wholeness. The momentum comes through engaging in a story, thereby bringing an enactment of the past into present while the wholeness comes through the understanding of the beauty of the relationship between the people and the land. Paula Gunn Allen

explains it in her celebrated *The Sacred Hoop*:

The tribes seekthrough song, ceremony, legends, sacred stories (myths), and talesto embody, articulate, and share reality, to bring the isolated, private self into harmony and balance with this reality, to verbalize the sense of the majesty and reverberant mystery of all things, and actualize, in language, those truths that give to humanity its greatest significance and dignity. To a large extent, ceremonial literature serves to redirect private emotion and integrate the energy generated by emotion within a cosmic framework. (1986:55)

Momaday and Silko have chosen ceremonial narrative to find a niche for their private emotions in a larger framework. Their writings are replete with references to the land. The land is a source of healing for both Abel and Tayo whose lives have been dislocated by the Second World War and also by the loss of their alter egos. Abel in *House Made of Dawn* has lost his brother Vidal and Tayo in *Ceremony* lost his cousin Rocky. Both the protagonists try to find solace in alcohol, albeit in vain, and finally find healing through participating in ceremonial rituals. Momaday does it in his characteristic symbolic fashion while Silko moves a step further by accusing the white of stealing their land and by tracing evil on earth in general. We are caught in the cobweb of fact and fiction as we identify her symbols against realistic background. For example, she identifies the killed Japanese soldiers with the Indians.

It appears that Silko is deliberately both accepting and rejecting Momaday. The resemblance between *House Made of Dawn* and *Ceremony* is striking. So are their differences. Abel is sent to a relocation center after killing an Albino (white man) while Tayo attempts to kill his adversary Emo and ends up in VA hospital. Both Abel and Tayo are war veterans who receive traditional ceremonial healing for their 'battle fatigue'; both of them are addicted to alcohol. They indulge into sex with white women as a gesture of protest or even revenge. But most importantly, these two have finally returned home.

On the surface, land for both Abel and Tayo is primarily the home place, at least before they begin to understand its larger spiritual significance. When Abel returns to Canon de San Diego, "He could see his grandfather, others, working below in the sunlit fields. The breeze was very faint, and it bore the scent of earth and grain; and for a moment everything was all right with him. He was at home" (1989[1966]: 30). And in *Ceremony*, Tayo is welcomed in the Mesa by Robert, who said, "I am glad you are home...I sure am." (32)

To be concluded in the next issues

The paper was presented at the Regional Conference on American Studies, Nagarkot, Nepal, September 23-27, 2001. Shamsad Mortuza is an Assistant Professor of English, Jahangirnagar University.

POEMS

Bar girl in Kathmandu

AFSAN CHOWDHURY

Wearing a blue sari on her unaged body,
She furls and unfurls her dress like a flag.
Like the flag on a raft lost in a storybook sea.
She is a bar girl in a cold night.

There is no kindly snow drift to lend her a shawl.
Half naked, hungry, she will do anything for dollars.

She said that.
Anything.

She dances in the desperate language
of lovers without love and singers without music,
She mimics the leaping shadows of death
that dance on the walls of the cheap bar,
selling lazy hours at black market prices.

Selling time to men in hired names and buttoned coats,
softly talking to their own faces that gleam in the mirror
of the beer foam spilled on the rickety table.

Anything, she said.

What is anything?

II

The blue dress falls on the floor,
As beer drowns the room,
she gathers the crowd's noisy words
like faded flowers in a tubercular garden.

She waits for their lust to exhale,
burning the last meal inside the belly
her belly stars back at them without words,
naked and bare in the half light of the bar.

Rum and lime swim in their dark eyes
awake like charcoals in a fog fed night.

She dances on invoking gods she never met,
Waiting with the patience of a fool,
at a place where mountains begin
and end on a fine day.

Anything, you said, I remind her.
And she asks for a five hundred rupee note.

"The rates are higher when you aren't lonely.
I have only dal bhat tarkari. I'm a good dancer.
I am a tantric girl. Even goras like me.
You should like me. You aren't even a gora."

She smiles and her face shines
like the Buddha in the dark.

III

Lighting a gora cigarette, she eats the smoke with her tongue.
Her lips are snowy with sugar muffins and wine.
Her body falls apart like her dress till she is no more.
I desperately want to hold her hand before she slips away
inside my head or some where else in the smoke.

Are you a girl or a whore? A woman or a worker?
A time pass or a human being with eyes?

A kid brother waits in the hall to take you
home in the last bus from Patan.

Ah, yes. Always.

Anything, she says. You can do anything.
You can say anything.
You have paid.

Afsan Chowdhury is Assistant Editor of The Daily Star

Eating Rice & Fish

Maachey Bhaatey Bangaalee
-- a local saying

SUDEEP SEN

1. Fish

I use my fingertips
to pry open,
feel, and sense

the hidden taste
of fish --
its flesh and scales,

its coarseness
and gloss,
its geometry,

its muscle-bone
and tone --
Gently, I relish it all.

2. Rice

Delicately sheathed,
wrapped
in papery husk --

I love the feel and
elegance of slender
long rice grains --

their seduction
and charm,
their aroma and shape

their fine flavour,
and
their deep virgin taste.

This poem is an extract from the forthcoming book Postcards from Bangladesh by Sudeep Sen, Tanvir & Kelley Lynch to be published by University Press Limited, Dhaka at the end of the month.

Sudeep Sen's *Postmarked India: New & Selected Poems* (HarperCollins) was awarded the Hawthornden Fellowship (UK) and nominated for a Pushcart Prize (USA).