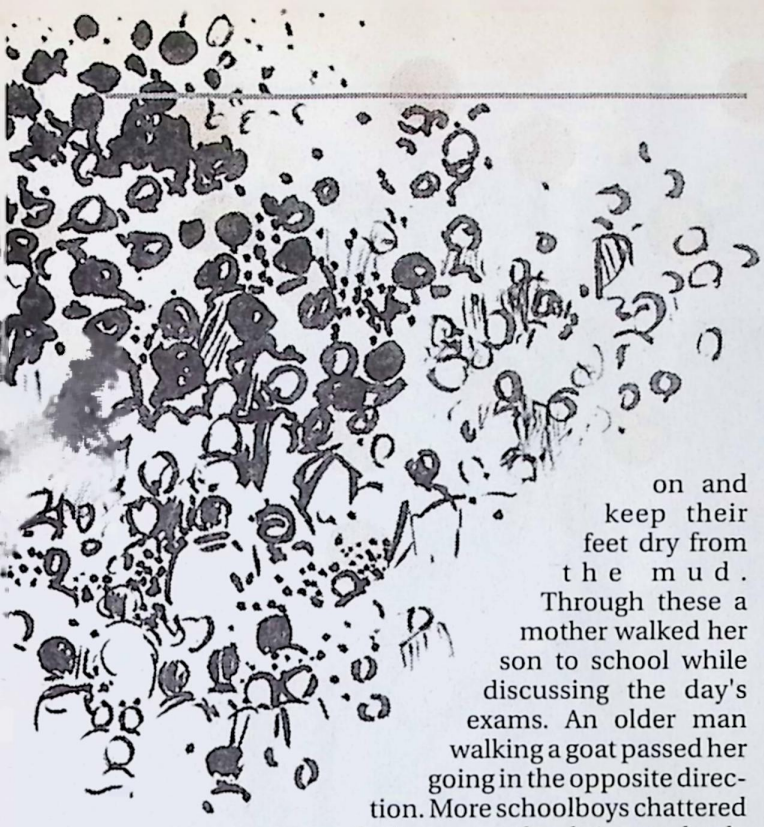


on and keep their feet dry from the mud. Through these a mother walked her son to school while discussing the day's exams. An older man walking a goat passed her going in the opposite direction. More schoolboys chattered on their way to school. A completely *borkha*-clad woman also hop-scotched her way to dry ground. It was like an elaborately choreographed dance for which they had rehearsed since the day they were born. There were no collisions: if someone was in the spot where you are going to be next, you just waited until they had moved on.

In other parts of the city, tiny rickshaw school-vans carried 12 children absorbed in conversation to school, *thelagaris* with a few tons of goods maneuvered their way from Chawk Bazar to Islampur through impossibly narrow streets, and numerous shopkeepers in city Bazaars sold goods to their customers in correct order even though no customer appeared to be in queue. Queue? There is no space for a queue!

This kind of drama takes place all the time, all over Bangladesh. Except that for people here it is not drama, but c'est la vie.

For those seeking privacy our lack of space exacts a toll. This is a cruel city for the courting couple who must climb the Khilgaon flyover at dusk to find some peace and quiet. Privacy is compromised in other activities. I see people happily eating away, brushing their teeth, or sharing a cup of tea with a friend - all in public.

And so Bangladeshis play the hand that fate has dealt them with grace, humour and patience. And I realise that in order to live a fulfilling life here, I must relax the fence I have built around myself over my years in the West. It is only when I accept the sea of humanity as part of the landscape, and cast myself as a drop in that sea, that I can truly feel I have come home. ■

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