

ALY ZAKER

Intrinsic Ugliness Shows Through

I am, as is customary with me late in the evenings, sitting in front of the TV seeing what ever is happening in the box. At times when I get bored I zap the channel and surrender to yet another demonstration of utter uselessness. I keep seeing. Mind you, I see more than I watch. There's a difference between seeing and watching. You don't bother to register what you are seeing. But watching is another ball game. At times I am awakened by some exceedingly solicitous adverts like 'hi handsome, hi handsome' or "...a bit of set wet gel makes you look very, very sexy". It is then that I am reminded of an essay I had to read as a part of my subject in the university.

I owe today's One Off to my most favourite English essayist Aldous Huxley. His essay, The 'Beauty Industry', may seem a period piece now but read in between the lines it would speak almost profoundly on a subject that holds good for the present as well as 'forever'. He dwelt upon, if my memory serves me right (having read the essay almost forty years ago), the redundancy of the ever increasing obsession of individuals to use beauty related products and the opportunism of the manufacturers of those to make easy money there by. The readers may wonder why such a big fuss over something as innocuous as products that made some one look good? Well, the apparent fuss, in reality, is more than meets the eyes. The moral of the essay, I dare say, would still hold good. What Huxley wanted to put across, and quite convincingly as well, is that however beautiful one wants to look by putting additional polish, the intrinsic ugliness to one's nature shows through and that ugliness comes from within. It has more to do with the head and heart than with the skin and the body. As I watch the television these days it seems ever so true. It seems like the whole world is desperate to put a little more polish and a lot more glitter behind which the ugliness may find a place to hide. Little do we care about the fact that this ugliness is beyond repair by trivial beauty aids. This ugliness is not skin deep. It comes from within and has to do with our souls rather than the physique.

An example from a real life situation may be pertinent in this connection. It might be possible for many to recall that whenever we have a special someone coming to visit Dhaka the V.I.P road becomes the centre of attention. All hell breaks loose on this road. The carpeting redone or at least repaired, the road side landscaping is manicured and 'of course' pavements are made out of bounds for the pedestrians. But beyond the so-called V, I, P road the condition, I can bet, is not worth looking at. So, development of Bangladesh starts at the V.V.I.P terminal of the Airport and goes up to the entrance of the Prime Minister's office. The less said about the rest of the country the better. Even the roads within the much vaunted residential district for the high and the mighty, Gulshan, are not worth writing home about. Bangladesh has been kept ugly in terms of it's over all appearance, economy, education and all those that make a nation worthy of looking at. Who cares about what remains stashed away from the public scrutiny as long as a glance at the face that we are interested to show to the outsiders is fully made over? My thesis is that, the journey on the road forward is to address the ugliness from within rather than putting a superficial polish on the face. Our people have, by virtue of the phenomenal self-interest of our rulers at various times, been kept at an arms length from the real face of the nation. So what if the nation was given birth to at the cost of the lives that their ancestors? At no point in time, the people were given the right information. Nor were they allowed the right to information. We have always been a loser in the end. This is why at thirty seven we are still an infant nation. If things go on as they have for the years gone by we will become an infantile nation. The sooner we look within ourselves than just the façade the greater the chance of not letting others call us a failed state. ■