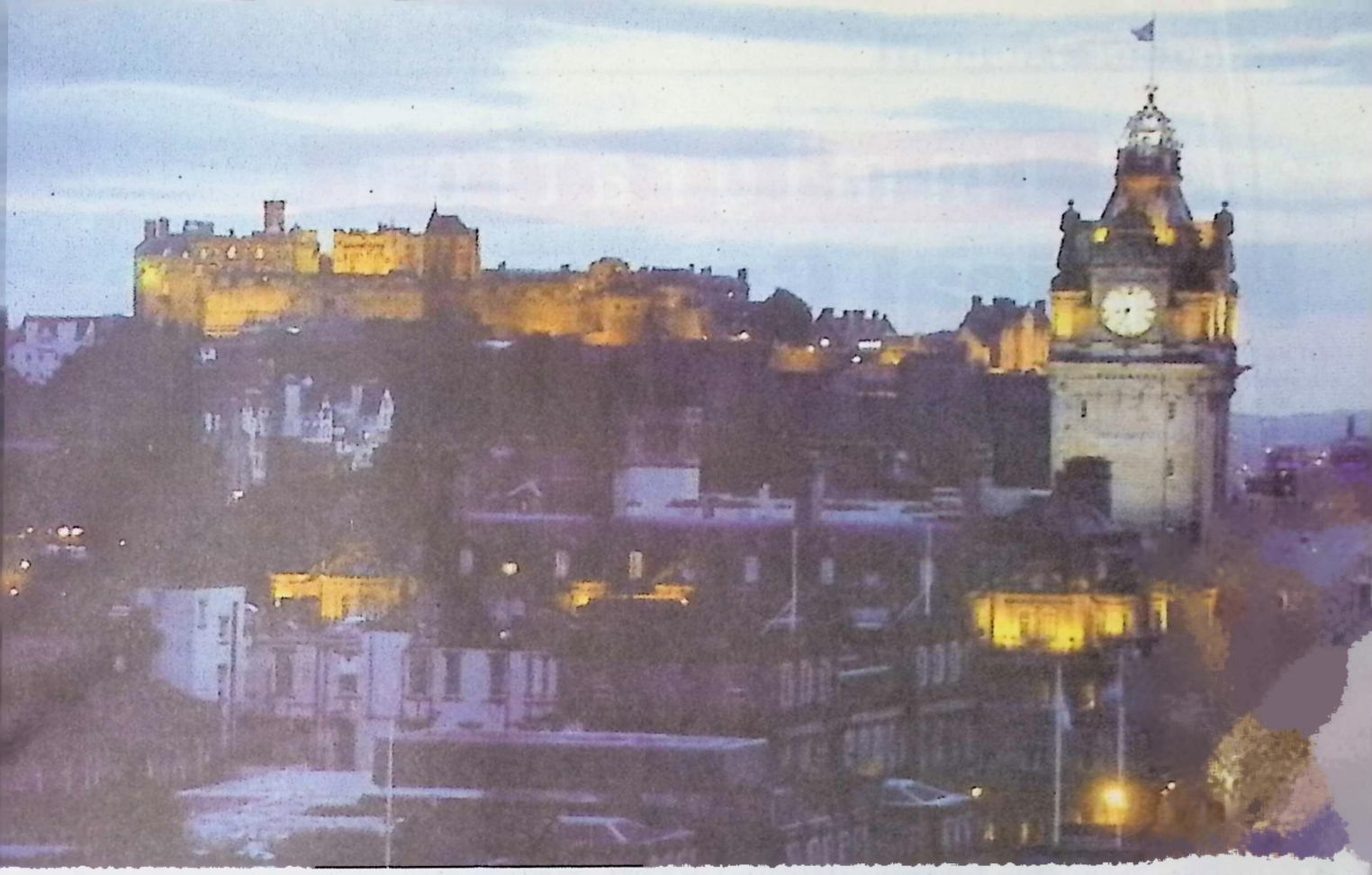


When I walked up to Shobha De at the end of a presentation by her in London on a breezy summer evening, she had crossed fifty, she had her dark hair sliding down to below her knees, and she had eyes that said a thousand words. I thrust her new book into her hands, asking for her autograph. She asked for a pen, and I gave her mine. In the end, the tale boiled down to her giving me her signature and I parting with my pen.

On a cold February morning, it was a pleasure finding myself before Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace. I told her it was my second meeting with her. The first? Well, it was not so much a meeting as it was a sighting of her in Dhaka when she was there in 1961 and I was on the shoulders of my cousin trying to catch a glimpse of her. She laughed; and then asked me if the London winter was not bothering me. I told her winter was my favourite season. She looked intrigued and gave me a quizzical look. Sometime in 1985, it was Pakistan's Sahibzada Yaqub Khan who gave me a quizzical look as I went on questioning his president, Ziaul Haq, for my newspaper. He wanted to know how old I was in 1971. I told him. And then he spoke to me, briefly, in Bangla. Since that day, we have tried to meet one more time. It has not happened.

The evening when I first met Robin Ghosh and Shabnam remains a moment to remember. Here was a musician the likes of whom are rare in our part of the world; and here was an artiste whose performance and unending beauty made her an enduring symbol of aesthetics for people of my generation. Having gone through Ghosh's music, having observed Shabnam in the movies, it was an absolute thrill to be in conversation with them in the relative stillness of the evening.

The wheels of memory grind on. The seasons follow one upon the other. On a declining evening in my little village, I look out at the path between the fields of rice and jute and remember how my father once led me by the hand through it as we went exploring the landscape. In my room, deep in the night, I seem to hear my mother's laughter, the same that once lighted up our lives in her moments of happiness. ■