



Shoes abandoned, Amulya walks barefeet on a muddy road. Still from Satyajit Ray's film "Samapti".

Yes, thinking about mud



KAZI KHALEED ASHRAF

MUD is the bane of the Bengali middle-class. Yet, mud is all over the place. Mud—that gooey, gluey, brown muck—lies waiting in the dry dust and with a little sprinkling of water rises up in rebellion, and grabs the pumps, heels and sandals of the middle-class and makes them skid off balance.

The whole ground cover of Bangladesh is a blanket of mud, unsuspecting when dry and unforgiving otherwise. The ground under water, in ponds, paddy fields, canals, and wetlands, is mostly mud. In other geographies, it is swamp, bog, peat or fen, that muck we have abandoned as we donned the culture of cities (they literally bog us down, or put us in a quagmire). Salman Rushdie, in *Midnight's Children*, gives an animated picture of a landscape of "chirring insects and croaking frogs" (he was describing the Sundarbans), where ripened fruits fall on the ground to be devoured by insects, bugs, and other miniscule creatures that throng the moist ground.

Mud's elusive behaviour makes it unreliable to the urbanites. When dry, sans water, mud can be as brittle as biscuits, and crumble like dust at the slightest pressure. As winds whip up over such a terrain, mud floats around as dust. Here is the opening shot of a film that captures the conundrum vividly:

Amulya returns to his home village from the city educated and transformed into a petit *babu*. His boat glides into the mushy riverbank, and as he steps off the boat, bag and baggage, he slips and falls into the mud full body. A young girl, Mrinmoyee, watching the sad spectacle of the town *babu* breaks out in laughter. We will soon realise that Amulya falls in love as well. With this mud metaphor, Satyajit Ray's tender and beautiful movie "Samapti" opens up a narrative on that slimy substance as well. Based on Rabindranath Tagore's short story, the narrative is a reverse transformation of a *sahib*, willing to reconcile with the world of wetness.

Mud and muck are at the crux of development strategies, in what we consider as "cultured", and what we deem to be otherwise. There is nothing glorious about mud. When it clings to us, on our white pants, we immediately rush to clean it off. Advertising agencies are constantly selling detergents that get rid of mud and soil off rambunctious children, as if the slightest stain will mark the fall of society. While some mothers chastise their children for getting mud on their clothes, some mothers and others cake in mud for a more beautiful body. While

urban dwelling calls for the banishment of mud from its premise, people in villages still lovingly layer the floors and walls of their houses in a most aesthetical way.

Muddy stuff is at the cosmic beginning of things, yet there is no philosophy of mud. No one has thought deeply about the ubiquity of mud in our progression as humans. Aristotle spoke about a certain "foamy matter" in a primordial world condition that allowed for the generation of new life, but we are not quite sure it is mud.

Borne out of the mixture of water with dirt and soil, mud is transformative, shifting from brittleness to a paste. In the hands of men and women, mud becomes clay, and the substance of Bengal's cultural products for millennia. Baked, mud can become brick and terracotta, and remains the fundamental material source for building edifices, such as cities. When barge loads of brick arrive at the periphery of Dhaka, and when trucks grumble along urban streets loaded with bricks,

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they are basically bringing in *banglar kada*, caked and baked.

Yet wetness remains an anathema to the urbanite. Frankly speaking, I myself am at odds with mud and water. My personal urbanisation is so complete that if I were to find myself in the shoes of Amulya, literally, my fate would have been no different than his.

With his new jacket and pumps, the emblems of the *shohorey sahib*, Amulya (Apu in Tagore's story) relies on dry weather and grounds to maintain his new urban aplomb. Muddiness is despised as a condition of primitivity, the original cosmic chaos from whence order and civilisation may have evolved. That wet, muddy and slushy condition can only be the domain of "backward" peoples.

There are other muddy predicaments for Amulya, one who has forgotten his rural

manners. While walking a village road one day, he encounters that abhorrent stuff once again, and once again fails to negotiate it, and in desperation and frustration, kicks his shoes off, and walks on bare-feet. Only Ray could portray that sweet and sour moment of a young *babu* in the midst of mud. There are quite a few occasions where mud is a protagonist in "Samapti" which so far has eluded most critics of the film usually fixated on romance and relationships.

While the urban class abhors it, the farmer and the fisherman cherish mud. Call it what you will—silt, sediment, *poli*—mud is the stuff of life. Mud is the opposite of dry and rough. While we are desperate to be dry, the delta refuses that, and presents us with giga-gallons of water and tons of mud, silt and slush every year. Life in the delta depends on that.

For the dry ideologue, mud is nothing but treacherous. It lies awaiting in the dry dust before the monsoon comes, and makes the elegant *babu* or *begum sahib* walking along a village path lose all their elegance, not to mention encounter embarrassing bouts of slips and falls. Cars get stuck on rural roads, and only helping villagers, bare-feet, can salvage such a situation. Stories of Pakistani soldiers in 1971 stuck in a muddy bout and unable to manoeuvre still provide us glee.

Unfortunately, in vying to build brick and concrete houses with tin roofs, the beautiful mud houses of Bangladesh are fast disappearing. Centuries of refinement for a cool condition that came with mud walls are being disowned for climatically discomforting situation as long as there is no reference to the uncouth mud.

The American architect Louis Kahn made great use of bricks in his architectural masterpiece in Dhaka. Bricks become elegant walls, straight and curved, and arches open up as beautiful cuts. Kahn knew the transformative property of mud. In an apocryphal story from the 1960s, Kahn was meeting some engineers in Dhaka. Soon he went out of the room and returned with a bucket of mud and pointing to the content, demanded: "Make me brick." And they did ... and thus the magnificence of Sangsad Bhaban arising from the water as a new song of modernity.

In the last scenes of "Samapti," while a storm rages on, Amulya goes out bare-feet and drenched, looking for his wife Mrinmoyee who is hiding herself, rain soaked and shivering, under a tree. While most critics note a tender story of romantic reconciliation, Amulya also comes to term with the material foundation of his rural life-world: the intractable blend of mud and water.

Kazi Khaleed Ashraf is an architect, and directs Bengal Institute for Architecture, Landscapes and Settlements. Kazi Khaleed Ashraf is an architect, and directs Bengal Institute for Architecture, Landscapes and Settlements.

SYED MAHBUB MURSHED'S 108TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

Standing up for truth and justice

HALIMA AKTAR

SM Murshed, who was born on January 11, 1911, rose to pre-eminence as a jurist imbued with a deep sense of social justice. His contribution to the field of literature was no less outstanding. His legacy includes his vast store of wisdom on various issues ranging from jurisprudence to politics to innumerable social causes. As a jurist he was a pre-eminent exponent of the rule of law. Like many great legal minds he drew his inspiration from a variety of historical, philosophical and theological sources. Yet he was able to interpret these sources in his own inimitable fashion.

He was acutely aware of the fact that excessive insistence on the letter of the law often violates its spirit. In recounting his legal skills, one is reminded of the artfulness of Portia's intervention in Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice". The application of the rule of law is ultimately down to the deft, and even witty, handling of the law by legal practitioners. Murshed demonstrated his talent in this connection by reforming innumerable laws, unravelling their complexities; offering us something truly unique in the process. He can be compared to great jurists such as Marshall, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Lord Denning.

He was forever kind and generous with his affectionate advice for his juniors, without ignoring those senior to him. His relations in this area were governed by mutual self-respect and tolerance. Murshed's reputation as a great judge came through some famous cases like the Mahmud and Samabarton Mamlas, all of which are landmarks in the legal history of Pakistan. His forte lay in constitutional law as evidenced by the Minister's and "Pan" cases.

His fame was not just confined to the shores of his country, but he had an international reputation in this regard. Like all great judges his judgments were not only impartial but tinged with humanity and compassion. Indeed, few took exception to his judgments. But the hallmark of a truly great man is the ability to rise above the narrow confines of his profession. Murshed never allowed himself to be shackled by any particular ideology or dogma, but took a

leader records that no one except Chief Justice Murshed dared to accept being the chief guest at their annual conference. This is where Murshed also like Bangabandhu made the clarion call for provincial autonomy.

It was also Murshed's courageous protest resignation in the late sixties as chief justice that made the intelligentsia find him in the whole country as the only acceptable presidential candidate against Ayub. He played a prominent part in the mass upsurge of 1969 against President Ayub Khan, and in the roundtable conference convened by Ayub in its wake. He gave his support to the 11-point demands of the students of what was then East Pakistan. What perhaps is most significant was that during the roundtable conference while Ayub was virtually on his knees and in addition, with the dissolution of the one-unit in West Pakistan, Justice Murshed demanded "one man one vote". With the breaking of one-unit Murshed argued in his speech that it was the vote of the eastern wing that created Pakistan and we were the majority population prior to this. In the then Pakistan National Assembly, there was parity of 150 seats each for East and West Pakistan. However, it was because Murshed's one man one vote proposal was accepted that 169 seats out of the 300 came to East Pakistan in the next national election. Therefore, Justice Murshed paved the way for deciding who would be the majority in East Pakistan and who could form the National Government.

His commitment to democracy was



Syed Mahbub Murshed

Inevitably, men like Murshed have to confront many obstacles. Socrates was forced to drink the cup of hemlock; Murshed too was subjected to many pressures by the government for his honesty, integrity and above all his independence.

keen interest in the political developments of his time. He was distressed by the episodic communal violence that punctuated the politics of the 1940s.

Murshed also was an active participant of the Language Movement. In early 1954 he helped draft the famous 21-point manifesto of the United Front led by his uncle Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq along with the late Abul Mansoor Ahmed. Similarly, further to his monumental work another significant contribution by then Chief Justice Murshed was that he gave the final touch to the drafting of the historic six points in 1966 for provincial autonomy which was the demand of Bengali intelligentsia. This was what Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman fought and was jailed for.

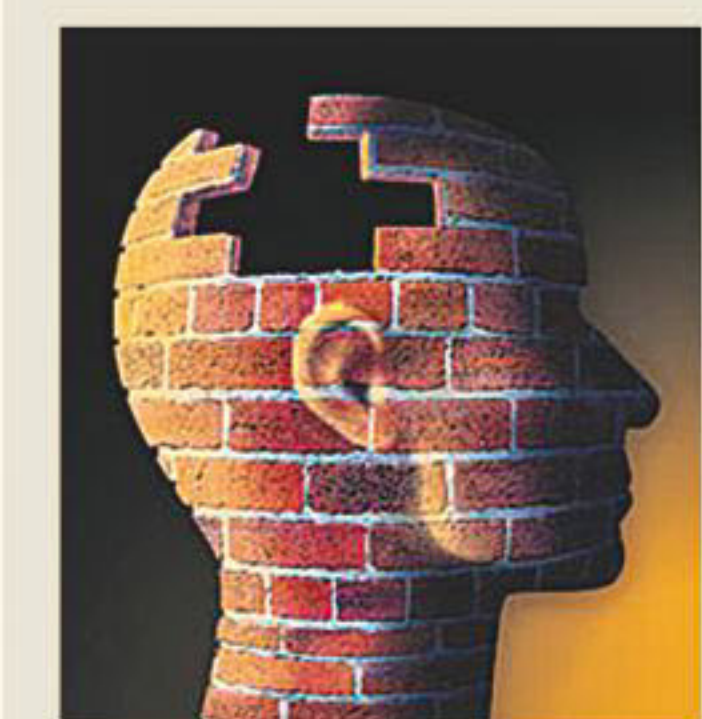
Later in 1966, Mazhurul Haq Baki the then President of the Chattrra League and also Serajul Alam Khan another student

demonstrated by his dedication to the freedom and well-being of his people. He protested vehemently against any form of corruption, venality and exploitation. When the education department of our country was becoming corrupt, Murshed stressed that the role of teachers is to instil values, indicating that they should be at the forefront in protesting against any undesirable situation. We should be cognisant of the range and depth of his knowledge which included writings on diverse subjects in top flight journals and magazines. His association with the Anjuman-e-Mufidul Islam showed his concern for the poor. He was President of Rotary and Lions clubs, and was deeply involved with many cultural and social causes. As a powerful voice of humanity, to him "man was the measure of all things".

Inevitably, men like Murshed have to confront many obstacles. Socrates was forced to drink the cup of hemlock; Murshed too was subjected to many pressures by the government for his honesty, integrity and above all his independence. But unlike the proverbial Faust he did not sell his soul, remaining uniquely courageous in maintaining his freedom. As a man Murshed was loving to his family and affectionate to his friends. His compassionate vision of Islam still inspires us. Not only was he a truly international figure, but Murshed will continually inspire our nationalistic principals as someone whose values and principles, as well as his steadfastness in this regard, often without recompense, are worth emulating in an age of time serving convenience.

Halima Aktar is an Advocate and a researcher on Justice Murshed.

A WORD A DAY



INCHOATE
ADJECTIVE

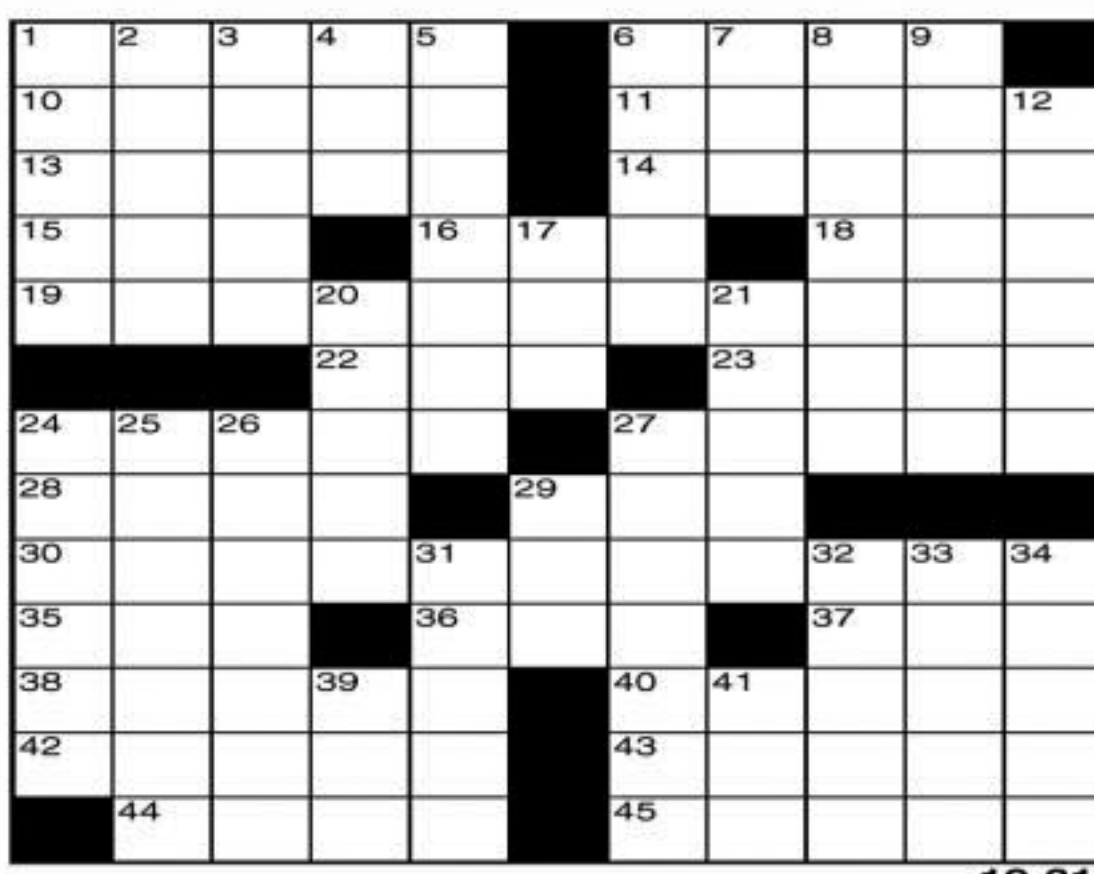
Just begun and so not fully formed or developed; rudimentary.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 Small crown | 35 Dyeing tub | container |
| 6 Min. parts | 36 Make a choice | 9 Shirt parts |
| 10 Inert gas | 37 Place to park | 12 Nodding, perhaps |
| 11 Russian range | 38 Nebraska city | 17 Bounder |
| 13 Wild fear | 40 Musical set in Argentina | 20 Like some questions |
| 14 Comic strip unit | 42 Gave a score to | 21 Wise teacher |
| 15 Mineral suffix | 43 Ohio or | 24 Passion |
| 16 Glacier makeup | Mississippi | 25 Company |
| 18 Casual shirt | 44 Anchor's delivery | thinker |
| 19 Annual celebration | 45 Requires | 26 Put in other words |
| 22 Finish | DOWN | 27 Sewing aid |
| 23 Cry | 1 Short putt | 29 Eat late |
| 24 Day after 19-Across | 2 Furious | 31 A bunch |
| 27 Violet's cousin | 3 Nixon's vVeep | 32 Martini garnish |
| 28 Adam's home | 4 King of France | 33 Famous |
| 29 Friend of Frodo | 5 Age-old | 34 Sky sights |
| 30 Things to make on 19-Across | 6 Tenement worker | 39 Chop down |
| | 7 Historic time | 41 Compete |
| | 8 Scout's Water | |

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

