

# The unaesthetic realities of life

by A.R. Nagori

A pathetic and very sad tale of a sacked journalist has been reported by 'Lahori' in DAWN, (Sept 8) where he quotes a letter from a Lahore daily: "Sir, how can a man survive when he has no home, no shop, no food, no dress, no licence, no black car — and it would be vain to talk of green card — no immovable property no movable property, no job, no pension ... when Pakistan came into being Qazi Aslam was available to the newspaper world in the shape of an all-rounder — Qazi Aslam".

## Jail

These lines brought back some sad memories for me and inspired to cite similar examples of the apathy and callousness meted out towards artists in Sindh. But before I do that I have an anecdote relating to Qazi Aslam. Qazi Aslam, a journalist / cartoonist friend of 'Lahori' is remembered by me as an artist of talent and I quote here from an article of mine which appeared in 'Viewpoint' 29 March, 84. "If one may recall the Kalabagh rule, in the early years of Ayub's Martial Law an exhibition of paintings by Qazi Aslam was seen spread along the pavement of the Mall. Starting from Tolinton Market and leading towards the Museum. It remained opened for days and nights and the artist stayed at the site. There was no coverage or publicity in the controlled press.

The artist was sent to jail for his series of works titled as 'Uncle Sam's feast' on the charge of displaying unauthorised paintings on roads and pavements. These were the Kennedy/Johnson days and Qazi Aslam had shown Bashir's camel bringing a 'Circarama' on its back to Pakistan, and an elephant,

loaded with American military hardware, for the retreating Indian army from NEFA. The idea was to expose American hypocrisy in this region. Understandably, the rulers of the day were annoyed with the artist.

Then, one witnessed the

## We live in a society where artists are treated like dirt

first ever mobile painting exhibition in Lahore. Paintings were displayed on a donkey-cart. Art reached Akbari Mahdi, Mochi Gate, Bhatti, Lohari, Gowalmandi and many slum areas of Lahore. The artist/donkey-cart driver was arrested and sent to jail. Mr Justice Manzoor Qadir had to deal with an unusual petition. A petition against cruelty to an animal was filed on behalf of the hungry donkey for his master was in jail and there was no one to look after him. Needless to say, the ass won the case. Cruelty to animal was looked into, but the artist was not entitled to such relief... This is an example of man's non-conformist nature. Can a society, such as ours tolerate these men? That he is still alive is shocking enough for me.

## Certificate

Artist Gul Muhammad Khatri was a devoted Sindh painter who hailed from Thatta and spent most of his life in the T.B. Sahitorium in Karachi, where he died after a prolonged illness, in want of proper attention. His posthumous exhibition was arranged by a few youngsters in Hyderabad, for his family was in dire need of relief. The artist had left his paintings as his inheritance. His teenaged

son ran from pillar to post for recovering money for the sale of paintings to a cultural institution of repute. For a year or so he paid frequent visits from his village in Thatta to Hyderabad and Jamshoro. The reason for non-payment was lack of human feelings.

lege in Islamabad wrote to me a moving letter and enclosed a hundred rupees cheque to open an account in the name of Khatri's son and advised me to appeal for charity. I returned her the cheque for I could not trace the late artist's family.

## Allan

Then, one witnessed the horror of painter Ahmed Parvez's death. Sain Marna, the greatest exponent of the Eik Tara died on the roadside. No one recognised his body. The most tragic and

for Mecca).

We spent million of rupees for years to scale down a stubborn fellow named Geoff Hunt — coaches and financial managers were appointed — PIA and our Banks are trying hard to groom our 'national assets' in squash and cricket. We can boast now of having the youngest multi-millionaire sportsman groomed by our proud 'national' institutions, enjoying tax-free wealth. (My request and scheme submitted for promotion of Fine Arts in Sindh was politely turned down. Though it did not visualise any encroachment

Alam Channa'. While the latter gets a house and all necessities of life provided to him by the government, Allan Fakir remains just a 'Fakir'. His song 'Humma Humma' was written, composed and sung by him as claimed by him. He got a few chips and all credit and millions went into coffers of PTV. Allan is not just a folk singer, as he works under me in my department, I have come to know that his linguistic knowledge is far superior to highly qualified experts that I know of who head such departments.

While this gem of Sindh is not getting his due share in life,

blind man of 65 or 70, who dragged his feet in walking, dressed in rags, sleeves with holes showing at the elbows, his hand placed on a shoulder of small boy, was led into the room. He approached the secretary to the VC who pressed a button and shouted at the peon to turn the blind beggar out.

One of the visitors in the office got up immediately and introduced the man. The blind beggar was none other than the founding teacher of the same university, who had come to see a new VC, his former junior colleague, to help him on his 10th annual visit for his undecided pension case. The finest teacher of his subject, a scholar with more than hundred publications to his credit, a teacher who had never charged any fees for examination duties, never filled any remuneration bill for correcting answer books, and throughout remained devoted to his profession and to genuine research, was summarily discharged along with hundreds of corrupt officials. He was not given any of his dues. His appeal in the High Court was decided in his favour after a period of 10 years. He came to collect his pension, hoping for human treatment from his former colleague. Needless to say his hopes were shattered.

He was told by the legal adviser of the university that they were thinking of filing an appeal against the decision of the court and if nothing came out of it at least the case would linger on for another 10 years. The disheartened professor, sold his room in the city and left for good losing all hopes. He told this writer that 'I am already 70 years old. How long can I expect to live?'

He is still alive and lives with a daughter somewhere in the north. For his young son who was a doctor had recently died in a road accident. Perhaps for his honest life spent in misery he will enter paradise and achieve his 'Nirvana'.



The boy was asked to produce a succession certificate. The family discovered that acquiring a succession certificate is much more costly than amount expected from paintings. I wrote a letter to the editor on this case of apathy. No one on Olympus was moved, instead, a lady, probably a lecturer, in some col-

moving plight was of Mai Bhagi in Sindh. The artistic merit of her creation is unique. She was an artist par excellence we all know how she passed her life and how she died with her unfulfilled wish of performing Haj. (Next day one witnessed on PTV a fortunate contingent being garlanded for their departure

upon any existing nursery scheme or the Colts scheme of our 'National' organisation).

Folk singer Allan Faqeer is trying desperately to get a house of his own to be left behind for his family. A star performer who dances and sings 'Jeevay Pakistan' on VIP occasions, has no place to live. He says, 'I am taller than

other fakes are thriving on exploitation. But alas no individual or single organisation can be blamed exclusively for such a callous attitude towards our artists because society as a whole is responsible for it.

In a waiting room for visitors to the VCs office in Jamshoro University a near