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Some East Pakistan Painters

SYED WALIULLAH

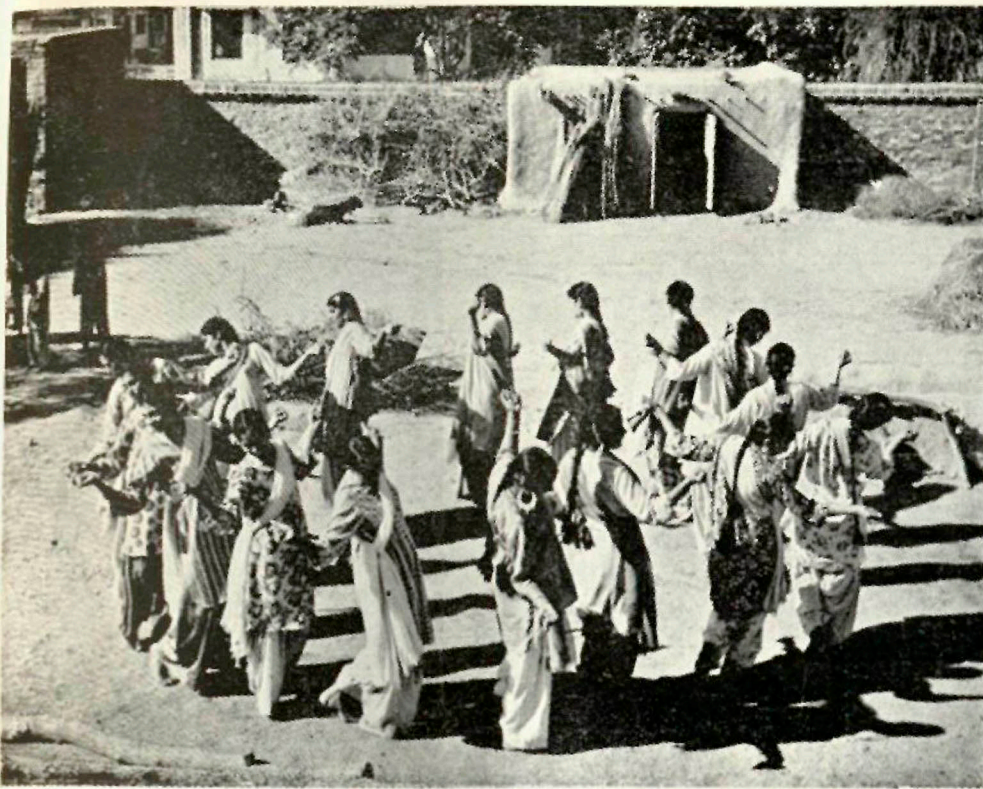
Absence of regionalism is perhaps the outstanding feature of most of the painters of East Pakistan today. Although it is very difficult to say whether the scores of paintings that leave the easel of these artists indicate any particular trend, it can be safely said, however, that they furnish an impressive proof of their productive vigour and their aspirations unequalled in any stage of the artistic development of the region.

Zainul Abedin is undoubtedly the pioneer among the modern artists of East Bengal. He is a powerful artist and possesses an exquisite sense of colour. The main reason of his being able to attract the attention of art critics in the early stages of his development is the breath of fresh air which he infused into the painting of those days which had a marked tendency to be cold and lifeless. For some years he painted with unusual avidity the landscape of East Bengal which seemed to intrigue him beyond measure by its nuances and intrinsic delicacy. The appeal his landscapes made to the sensuous perception was irresistible.

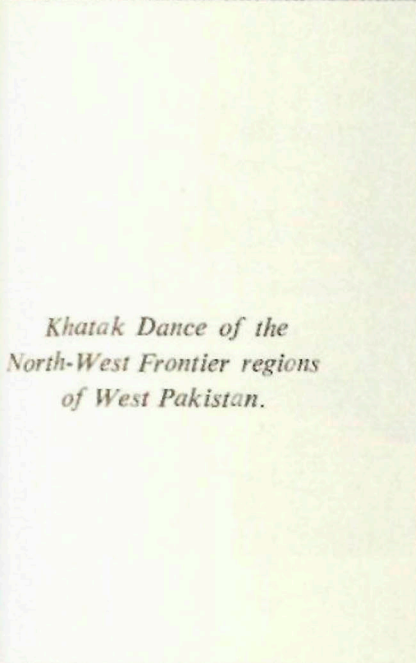
Zainul Abedin's painting suffered an appreciable break after this distinctive phase during which he poured forth famine sketches. He is again back to his water-colour and oil. But always now one notices behind the grandeur and solidity of his composition a sadness; his vision is haunted.

One of his recent water-colours depicts a silent procession of the grieved, sorrowful people wending their way to Quaid-i-Azam's simple grave. The painting is the embodiment of the national tragedy as well as the people's profound love and regard for the Father of the Nation.

The talent of Safiuddin Ahmad, who is junior to Zainul Abedin by only a couple of years, came to be recognized just about the time Zainul Abedin started basking in the



*'Luddi' dance of
West Pakistan.*



*Khatak Dance of the
North-West Frontier regions
of West Pakistan.*



*'Jhoomar', another folk
dance of West Pakistan.*

1. *A study in charcoal by Shafiq Ahmad.*
2. *Girl with flowers by Kibria.*
3. *'Snake Charmer' by Anwarul Haq.*
4. *Still-life by Aminul Islam.*
5. *Wood cut by Safiuddin Ahmad.*

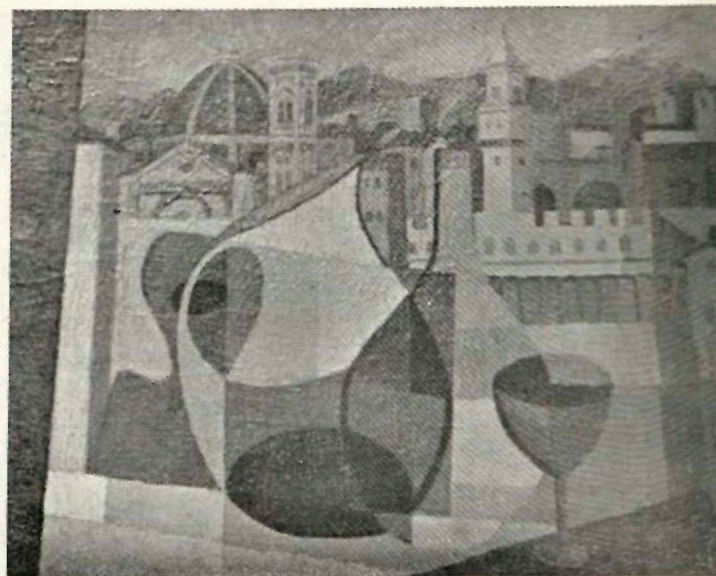


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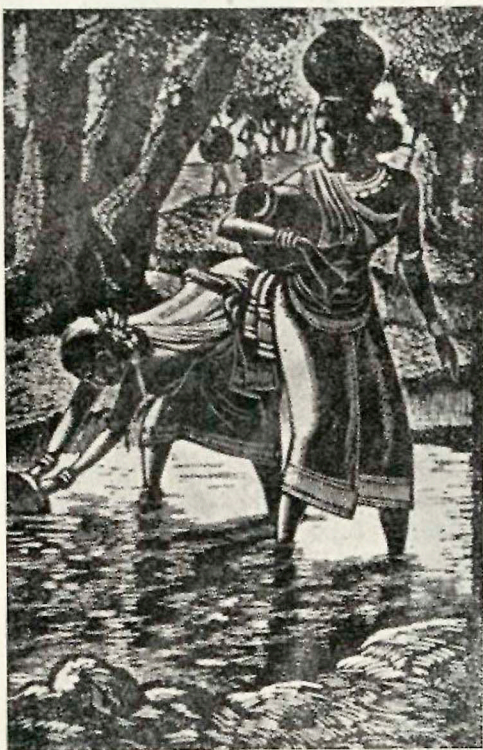
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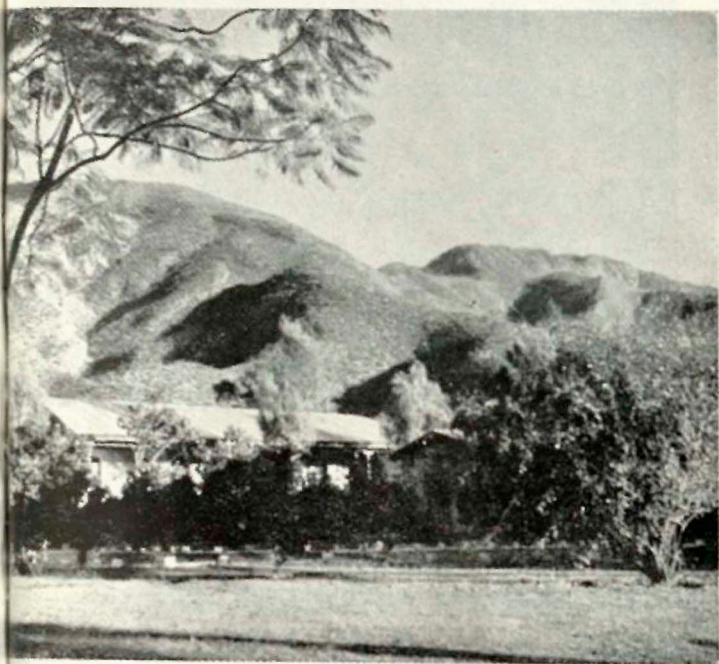
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1. Country Craft on an East Pakistan river.

2. Swat Landscape.

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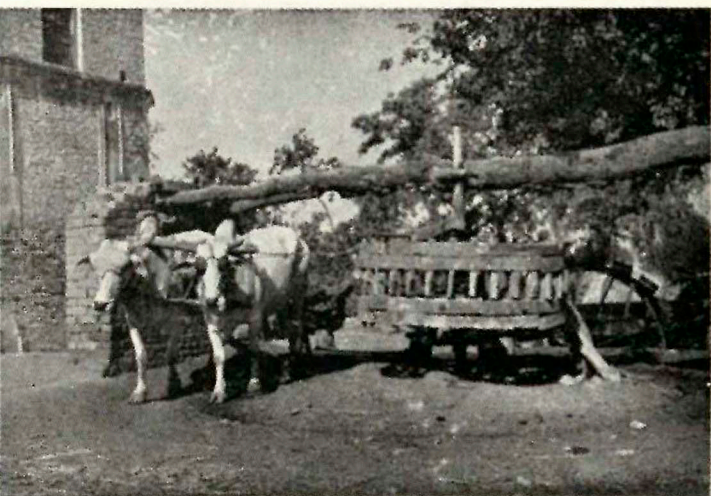


3. River-traffic in East Pakistan.

4. A Village in the Swat Valley.

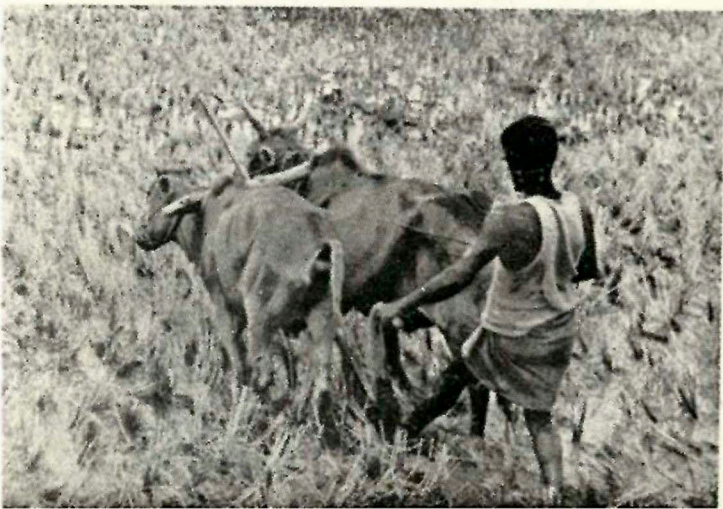


Tea pickers of East Pakistan.



The Persian Wheel from West Pakistan.

Ploughing a rice field in East Pakistan.



A Peasant of West Pakistan.

Washing the Jute fibre in East Pakistan.



sun of his sudden fame. Though his grasp of the rich texture of life seems to be more firm than Zainul Abedin's, he is apparently under the control of some unexplainable force. And in the consequent dualism, his perception weakens and often his paintings become cameos of nostalgic dreams. There is in his paintings an unconscious display of deep, ruffled poetic emotions. In spite of the thoroughness, the minute details, the exquisite sense of colour and the occasional bright reflection of the sunny Pre-Raphaelites, the artist's entire polychromous design seems to draw inside instead of projecting. Whatever the subject, whether it is about homeward-bound buffaloes along a row of tall eucalyptus trees or a pair of sleepy birds in a cosy nest, there is always an unapproachable remoteness.

Like those of Zainul Abedin's, Safiuddin Ahmad's paintings have also been exhibited in London, Paris and Singapore, and have earned him a wide reputation. He has undoubtedly broken new ground in the field of art in this country inasmuch as very few artists have so far specialized in what might be called technical forms of painting. For some years past he has been busy in mastering aquatint and dry-point. He is also very good at wood-engraving. This varied interest in the technical forms of communicating the artistic emotions makes him explore with greater zeal the intrinsic variations of rhythm as well as colour which are less responsive to the ordinary eye than the obvious, prismatic beauty. The quintessence of his painting, therefore, lies not in the formalism but in the search which is more than often caught in the interacting forces of known and unknown sentiments. Precisely for this reason Safiuddin Ahmad's landscapes are rare. All his earlier efforts to paint a real landscape in the arid tracts of Santhal Pargana in Bihar failed; the recent landscapes of the riverside scenes in East Bengal show no improvement. One detects in these cases the evident inspiration which is not direct and, therefore, does not tally with the peculiar expressive urge of his subtle, and perhaps, forlorn mind.

Among the less prominent but none-the-less talented artists, first comes Qamrul Hasan, who combines in himself the power to enjoy lavishly the physical abundance of life and a sensuous, artistically impulsive mind. The mode of his expression tends to become rather violent and florid, the vulgarity of which is fortunately compensated to a great extent by the force of his presentation.

Next comes perhaps Anwarul Haq, whose scanty paintings reveal a definite and likable style. What strikes one most is his tendency to select unusual subjects of painting. This tendency has led him to wander in the snow-capped hill-places, trying to arrest with the help of the brush something seen from an uncommon angle — perhaps a rickety,

wooden balcony with a square background of cloudy, drizzling sky; a tea garden which rises like a wide flight of stairs, or an old Pathan whose eyes, face and beard all possess an angular sharpness. The reminiscences of the not unpleasant days passed in his boyhood in the interior of East Africa still painfully disturb him as he perhaps feels he has left behind his real subjects there where nature yet wears an unfaded, boisterously youthful appearance. Anwarul Haq's colour composition sometimes seems drab but that is because he has a pronounced dislike for bright colour. Instead, he prefers to give his paintings a subdued glow.

Khwaja Shafique Ahmad claims the attention of art connoisseurs mainly because of the solemnity of his mission. He is one of those artists who seek beauty not where it is blatantly significant but where it lies hidden and is, therefore, more delicate. The landscapes as a whole appear to him to be hazy and undefined; individual objects are not studied specifically as they seem to have no value as compared with composite beauty. This is reflected in his painting. Yet one feels the presence of a more delicate beauty behind the seemingly rough structure of his landscapes.