

Moulded into a living

By Kauser S.K.

In our society, women's aspirations and potentials are usually thwarted by man's amorphous domination of her will. A woman invariably conditioned to perform pre-given roles is seldom properly prepared to fend for herself.

Although she confronts a challenge with great ability, it goes without saying that she would fare better if she is suitably equipped for the unforeseen but possible difficulties of life.

For e.g. when a woman is suddenly thrown in a situation where she is expected to financially support her family, but has no prior experience of a paid job, she undergoes a dual trauma; not only must she emotionally adjust to the new demands on life, but also become pragmatic and find a place for her labour (whether physical or mental) in the market. Had she already been gainfully using a skill, her transference into a new situation would be emotionally less traumatic.

Unfortunately, society sees women in a manner that fails to see the necessity of being equipped with a marketable skill and having put the skill to use prior to reaching a situation which compels her to bring an income. Because of this peculiar perspective, women are less career oriented and become subject to strains and stresses that accompany the feelings of dependency and helplessness.

Living tool

Furthermore, a woman tradition-bound to the duties related to her home usually becomes self-effacing because of the nature of her work in the house. As there is no monetary value placed on it, she invariably places little worth on her work and, therefore, on herself.

On the other hand, a man viewing her function as directly serving him and others in the family is not able to see a woman's worth independently of what she does within the boundaries of her house. Out of this pre-dominant set-up emerges the general attitude of men vis-a-vis women.

A woman without a monetary value and pre-ordained to care for others automatically falls into the slot of being taken for granted. Like a tool which is designed for a purpose and then used according to certain requirements, a woman too is moulded into a living 'tool'. Just as a tool has no control over its future a woman too finds her future chalked out by others.

At this point one could protest that even a man has no control over



Illustration by Sumbul Nazir

his future; that society places restrictions on him, compelling him to work according to some pre-given expectations; yet, it is not difficult to see that within the social constraints, a man still has more choices for his mode of existence.

Whether he fails or succeeds in his endeavours does not change the fact of his position wherein there are more opportunities to determine his future. Furthermore, his role of being a bread-winner gives him a higher status which inadvertently influences his attitude towards those who do not generate an income. Since women usually fall in the latter category, the prejudicial attitude towards them becomes self-explanatory.

Under-current

Though a great deal of verbal appreciation is shown to women, and their role is lauded because of the duties they fulfil, the affect of the absence of monetary worth linked to a woman's duties cannot be denied. Because of the separation between women's duties and their financial assessment, women are viewed as more dispensable than men!

In other words, their significance is less. In addition to this, as was pointed out earlier, they get taken for granted. These factors together

seal women's future into a pre-given mould.

It has been frequently said that it is a man's duty to provide economic security to women, yet the fact remains that this ideal situation is not a matter of course. Besides, even if and when it occurs, it is still mostly accompanied by restrictions placed on women wishing to express their potential in areas other than home. And, although monetary provisions could be made, the worth of women remains secondary because of the absence of economic independence.

Whether one likes it or not, the importance of personal income is a strong and undeniable under-current of life. Given the perennial downgrading of materialism, the acceptance of this fact may encounter instinctive rejection. On the surface, its focusing on economic independence could be interpreted as espousing materialism.

Yet, if for a moment, one suspends the age-old general repugnance to materialism and views it as an inevitable necessity which need not necessarily become the prime force in life, this necessity can be accommodated without a sense of indignation.

The need of money and the impli-

Feel better about yourself

Linda Werner, 31, is pleasant and friendly and sociable. If a man propositions her in a bar, "How about a little smile, honey?" she has the answer ready: "How about a little respect?"

Dr Werner is also a psychologist with a successful practice once upon a time, she suffered from a chronic case of lack of self-esteem. She was, she says, a passive, appeasing, unprepossessing wimp loved by all because she caused inconvenience to none. What saved the doctor was self-assertion: now she teaches it to others.

Dr Werner has a practice in Palm Beach, Florida, but because of her own past she can recognise her former type whether she appears in Palm Beach, Plaistow or Paddington.

The person with low self-esteem thanks the waiter profusely when she eats out alone and he seats her in a dark corner next to the gentlemen's loo. She answers "I really don't mind" so often to her partner's queries about where to go on holiday, which film to see or what car to buy that she no longer gets asked — just told.

What it amounts to, says Dr Werner, is a denial of civil rights—your own. It happened to her because she grew up in a traditional family where being lady-like meant being self-effacing as possible.

"I believed I had no right to an opinion," she explains. "I always felt terrible because I was constantly giving in. I felt if I made a stand, I'd be rejected. Finally, I realised I was the only one who could change.

"I know now that so long as it's not at somebody else's expense, you can be assertive and feel a lot better."

Linda Werner began self-assertion classes in Palm Beach three years ago.

Her present group numbers 22, aged ranging from 16 to late 60s. They include housewives, teachers, lawyers, nurses and some women from the wealthiest areas of Palm Beach; a lack of self-esteem can be found, she says, amidst the wealthiest and most educated.

"Once they're on a course,

change always comes first in what seems to others like trivial areas. A woman tells her husband she doesn't like him reading the paper while she's talking. Or she'll return something unsatisfactory to a shop for the first time in her life. Or she'll stop her mother in a full flow of complaint on the telephone and say, 'I'd like you to listen to me for a minute.'

"It sounds like nothing but it can mean weeks of effort. The woman feels she may jettison her whole personality or risk her relationships. Once she's done it, she always feels better."

Self-assertion, contrary to popular belief, is not, an off-spring of the women's movement. It began in American colleges over 25 years ago, to help male students overcome their shyness with women.

It has been adopted by feminism in the last 10 years (more so in the States than in Britain). Now, at the

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extreme, self-assertion courses are easy to mock. They are accused of self-indulgence or creating female piranhas equipped to attack rather than communicate. But Linda Werner's methods and results are uniquely constructive.

She spends the first couple of sessions simply talking and using herself as an example. "I have people so shy they can't get their names out or they act very aggressively because they have always used that aggression as a defence.

"I tell them I can't change their lives but I can give them a glimpse of what is possible. I can teach them the skills to become assertive so that eventually it becomes a way of life."

Initially, she points out the difference between a passive, aggressive and assertive person. Example: a girlfriend calls with problems just as you're leaving for

work. The passive person listens and is late. The aggressive person snaps: "Some of us have jobs, you know." The assertive person says at a suitable moment: "I'm late for work but I'll phone as soon as I get home tonight."

The class later reconstructs scenes in which they role play. Finally comes the attempt to translate their new-found assertiveness into real life, fortified by a number of tips.

In a group, Linda Werner suggests, always be the first to speak because the longer you leave it, the more you will shrink while the first to contribute doesn't always have to be a raconteur.

If you don't want to do something you are asked, begin the sentence with "no" — if 'no' gets submerged in a sentence it often becomes "yes". Be direct, say "I feel" not "it makes me feel" and don't apologise continuously.

Occasionally, she says, a woman will become too aggressive "but usually they swing back when they realise how unattractive it is to make demands unreasonably all over the place." A couple of women have become divorced and some marriages have required counselling because the partners have found the "new" person hard to accept.

Linda Werner thinks that is an acceptable price to pay because the alternative would have been women who were painfully timid, withdrawn or suffering from a range of psychosomatic complaints covered by the blanket diagnosis of nerves."

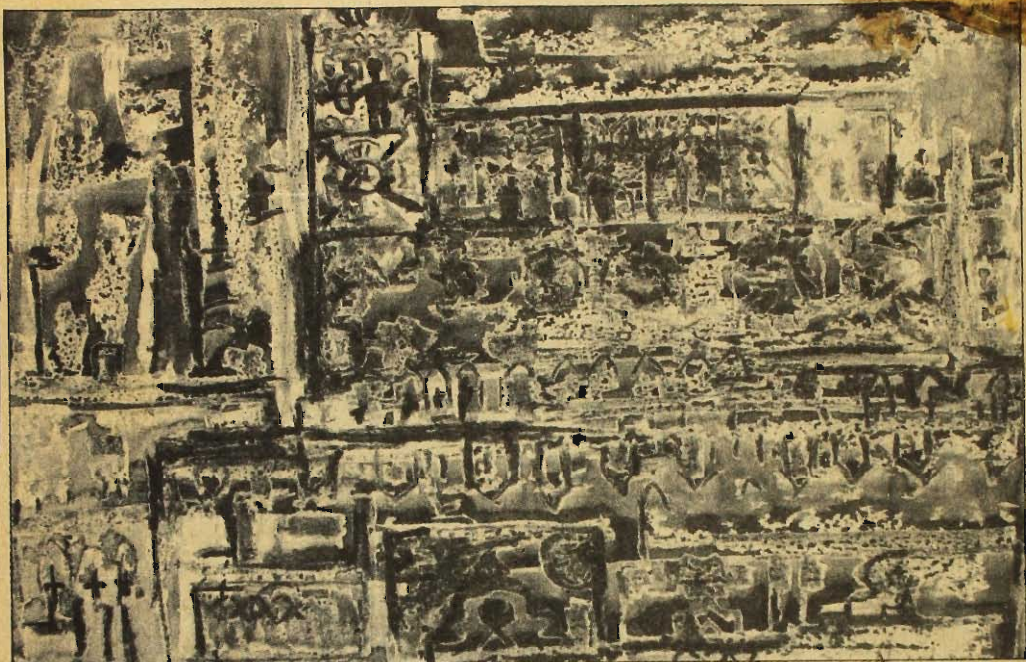
Recently, Linda Werner has also begun to help men, who come to her because they feel socially inadequate or they believe they are being "dumped on" in their careers. They are the ones who are asked to work the longer hours or, say, accept a lower pay rise because they don't know how to object.

"Men who use violence on their wives or partners have also begun to ask for help.

"People fear they've got something to lose by being open," says Linda Werner. "What they don't realise is that what they gain in the long run is more intimacy.

"Put it another way," she adds in an appropriately assertive fashion, "in the long run, like me, they just feel better about themselves."

Dawn Express Service



'Lace-like' texture of the tombs

Chawkhandi Tombs in paint

It takes the brains of Nahid to create these paintings which no enunciation of methods or formulae can fully explain —

By S. Amjad Ali

Recently, a very interesting exhibition was put up in Karachi showing some old monuments of Sind, including the tombs of Thatta. They were fairly detailed pen and ink drawings by a young Frenchman, Henri Souffay, in which the beauty of certain architectural forms and the charm of certain carved designs was lovingly and exactly shown.

They were not architectural drawings because the emphasis was not on straightness of the line and the symmetry of the curves but on the forceful projection of the three-dimensional form and the high-relief carving with all its play of light and shade. This was achieved through various degrees of sparse and dense doodling in the shaded areas to render light and shade.

That was one way of looking at the old tombs, a draughtsman's descriptive, realistic and mainly



his studio while he was working on a painting. "Oh Mr. Sargent", she would effuse, "how do you get that wonderful shimmer on the dress?" and again "How do you get that lovely bloom on the cheeks?" and again, "How do you get that natural sparkle in the eyes?" The long-suffering Sargent answered question after question until he could take it no more and finally silenced her by hissing, "With brains, madam, with brains."

Similarly, it takes the brains of Nahid to create one of these paintings and no enunciation of methods or formulae will fully explain the end product.

Wizardry

Still, an attempt can be made to at least draw attention to some of the most striking examples and what are the main points of appeal in them.

Take No. 12. A squarish area is marked off on the left and filled with a lightly sketched in cluster of diamond shapes (really, squares stood on end). The base line reappears on the right in the form of zigzag lines that suggest the tops of the same diamond shapes. The space in the right half is filled with two or three vertical lines of diminishing length crossed on top to make descending steps.

Thus the basic framework or design is provided. But now comes the real brainwork or wizardry. The main design areas are treated in light orange and the rest or the ground in light purple that undulates in depth and intensity from area to area. There are also touches of green and just a few dots of red.

Another very successful painting is No. 10 which again has a very well balanced linear design made up of clusters of diamond shaped

scriptive, realistic and mainly linear reconstruction of what appealed to him.

Painterly Response

Quite different was the painterly response of Nahid who is soon putting up an exhibition of her paintings inspired by the Chawkhandi Tombs. She is an artist who has already held half a dozen one-woman shows of her work during the last twelve years and is one of the galaxy of gifted women who are bidding fair to dominate the art world of Pakistan unless the men artists bestir themselves.

Nahid raves about the beauty of the Chawkhandi Tombs situated on the outskirts of Karachi, which deeply impress everyone who happens to visit them.

The eerie and desolate setting of the vast conglomeration of tombs, suddenly appearing in the midst of nowhere, with no village or habitation nearby, the sand-covered, snake-infested, wind-buffed place with its aura of mystery and memorials of death; the fantastic and unusual pyramidal structures of the tombs, with solid rectangular forms of diminishing size rising one over the other; their stark profiles against the unobstructed horizon of the wasteland now smitten by the mid-day sun and now drenched in the blazing colours of the setting sun — all this strikes awe and wonder in the visitor by "beauty that hath some terror in it."

Nahid however is enthralled by the surface decoration and stone carving, which has been described as "lace-like" for the delicacy of the minute patterns and the exquisiteness of the execution.

She is full of admiration of the ingenious use of squares and circles, hexagons and radiating lines of a hub.

However, the merest glimpse, the most casual impression, the most furtive glance is afforded of these designs in the paintings, and that too in the form of doodles rather than drawings, as if the artist recoils from the idea of delineating them with any firmness and exactness.

What seems to appeal to her above all and what finds fullest reflection in the paintings is the eroded texture of the stone and its age-old patina and the undulations of tones — which are rendered by the artist now in one colour, now another, in monochrome, and also very attractively in two or three closely related colours, thus translating chiaroscuro into chromatic fantasies.

The work is done on paper with mixed media, using water colour,

The artist with a painting.

oil pastels and chalky pastels. Most often, the main design is very sketchily drawn and the enclosed and outer blank areas rubbed with oil pastels of one main colour in one painting, using the pastel lengthwise and not from the pointed side, so as to create patchy and dappled effects on rough paper placed on uneven surface.

When the same area is treated with an appropriate matching water colour, the impressions left by the oil pastel repel the water colour and only the interstices get coloured. Thus a very plausible textural effect is created and the minute details also get treated clearly in two different colours without any laborious minute work. Afterwards, linework or colouring is also added with chalky pastels.

There is much more, however, to the production of the final painting than this simple formula. What colour to use in the slightly raised oily patches and what to fill in the slightly lower surrounding areas and then how to vary both with infinite gradations of lighter and darker tones and how to enliven the whole composition with a few touches of brighter or slightly contrasting colour in just the right intensity and area, all this only the consummate artist can do.

The wasp-tongued John Singer Sargent was once being badgered by an admiring but inquisitive lady in

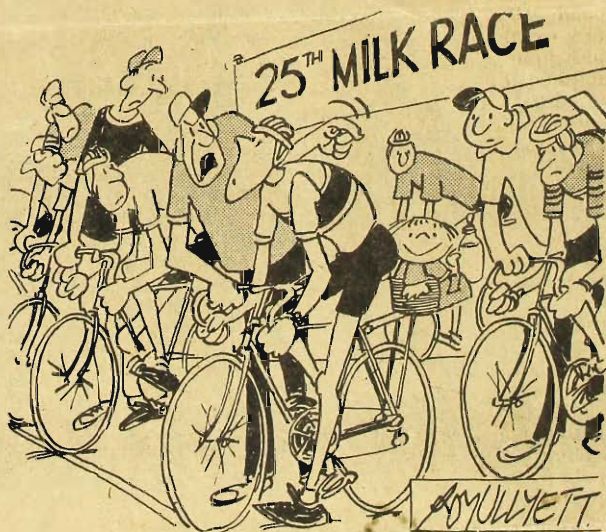
up of clusters of diamond shaped squares and some half-diamonds or arch shapes. And then there is the marvellous jugglery and play of colours — in this case, mainly yellow and orange and light red, suggesting strongly the richly coloured Gujarati miniatures. It has a kaleidoscopic variegation as the eye travels on it enthralled from tone to tone and tint to tint.

There is only one, No. 11, in which there is any suggestion of the structure of the tombs by suggesting the stepped profile.

There is only one in which there is a marked composition in depth and that is the one with an almost black ground and surrounding area and in the main picture area, vertical and horizontal rectangles — some very light, some very dark, as if receding and projecting by virtue of their light value.

In most others, it is mostly the charm of the eroded surface that has been presented by a play of colour and just a fleeting suggestion of patterns.

Where the pattern is too vaguely or weakly suggested, the painting meanders aimlessly and flounders in a sea of colour that remains inarticulate. Even a diffuse unity serves the purpose but sometimes the line pattern or colour pattern is so little in evidence and the line, if there is any drawing, is so limp and listless that nothing but texture remains and that is hardly the stuff of which successful paintings are made.



I told you to get a baby-sitter for him !

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