

Artiste by choice and the grace of God ^{Chure}

Art
13 Jan
Dance

DR Faqir Husain Saga, who passed away in Burewala on Tuesday, was a versatile artiste and dedicated teacher. He was also an archetype in that he personified all that is best about Lahore.

The most remarkable thing about him probably was his integrity. Not just in the narrow sense of not being unfair to people he came across but also in the sense that he had a clear idea of his place in God's universe and was at peace with it.

Eternity, he realized, was not a gift, although the lazy among us wish that it were. You earned it through perfection. And perfection was knowing what you were capable of and faithfully achieving it.

In his case, he would gratefully acknowledge, the realization came early — he was meant to be a performing artist. Nor was he reluctant. Boldly he went his way as the art beckoned, effortlessly making what to lesser people would seem some very hard choices.

Dance, his medium, was neither universally respected, nor financially rewarding. It demanded dedication and Saga was not found wanting. It promised little and he was undaunted. When odds were clearly against him, he was brave and persistent, seeking a scholarship and getting it. Learning the craft from the best mentors, he evolved his own remarkably distinctive style.

Creatively conceived and choreographed, his peacock dance, the portrayal of a touching ritual of seduction, was truly spellbinding for its perfect balance between a suitor's desperation to express his passion and the restraint stemming from his vain awareness of his own beauty.

Few men have been so cheerful in adversity as Dr Saga. Denied for more than a decade, right in the middle of his career, the opportunity to perform, he was neither impatient nor bitter. Not only did he keep his teaching job, he also kept up his interest in the city and its people. He seemed to prefer teachers, artists and students but was comfortable with almost everybody. More importantly,

tone. Taken aback, he took only seconds to recover, exaggeratedly caressing his belly and answering "Well, if you are really curious, the man responsible for my being 'in trouble' is none other than Gen Ziaul Haq [the then president was blamed for the ban on dance performances at Alhamra and withdrawal of state patronage].

There was no false modesty about him. Come to think of it, there was nothing false about him at all. When several artists, including some dance artistes, were honoured by the government ahead of him, he never tried to conceal his disappointment.

For a man so clear about his place, Dr Saga bore his greatness with great panache. There was a childlike spontaneity about him. A whole generation of Ravians remembers him as Prof Mirza Athar Baig's middle-aged visitor who demanded to know where "the man with an eagle's nest on his head" was. "I am Saga," he would then introduce himself, "Dr Faqir Husain. I teach at the College of Veterinary Sciences. Do visit us

ing the day and barbecue dinners and long walks in the night.

Inevitably, the festivals have started. The Jashn-i-Lahore has been somewhat subdued, partly in deference to some city councillors who thought it was inappropriate in view of the border tensions and succeeded in delaying it if only by a few days. The Basant and the Jashn-i-Baharan are next and arrangements are being made for them even as hospital beds have been reserved for possible war-related emergencies and despite the near-complete evacuation from border villages.

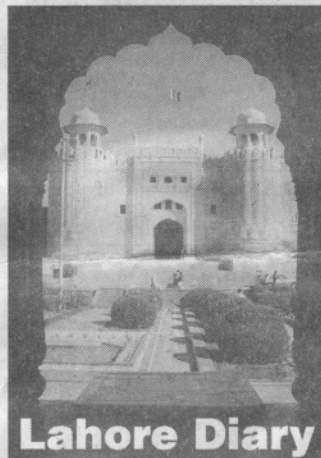
With the fog respite running out, it is also time for the war-peace thing to come to a head. Impatient with the no war-no peace period, some Lahoris say if there can be no early return to normalcy they'd rather be attacked now. Boredom is nobody's favourite way of dying.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

QUITE suddenly last week the Punjab Police went on a public relations offensive. District police chiefs all over the province claimed that the crime statistics showed a marked improvement over the past year. Slow with the figures, and, therefore, unable to answer the assertion directly, as most of us are, credulity is a rather endangered virtue. The statements were thus disbelieved immediately. Slowly, the denials have started pouring in.

While the statistics and the inferences are being challenged and defended, there have been two very alarming developments. One, kidnap for ransom is back. In the more recent cases Rs100 million and Rs60 million were demanded for the release of two industrialists. Two, there has been a spurt of deaths in police-suspects encounters. While the suggestion of a policy shift are routinely rejected, the pattern of evidence is familiar. In at least one case a judicial probe has been demanded and in at least another senior police officials have refused to believe the first account of events given by the local police.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Lahore Diary

and you'll see some wonderful things."

Getting to know him better, some of them started calling him Chacha Mor (literally Uncle Peacock). He did not mind. What surprised them, however, was the fact that he remembered them and 20 years on would acknowledge the adopted nephews he happened to meet somewhere.

...early — he was meant to be a performing artist. Nor was he reluctant. Boldly he went his way as the art beckoned, effortlessly making what to lesser people would seem some very hard choices.

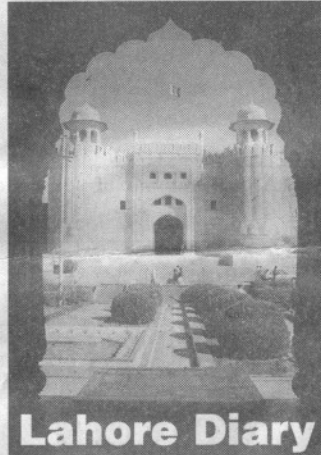
Dance, his medium, was neither universally respected, nor financially rewarding. It demanded dedication and Saga was not found wanting. It promised little and he was undaunted. When odds were clearly against him, he was brave and persistent, seeking a scholarship and getting it. Learning the craft from the best mentors, he evolved his own remarkably distinctive style.

Creatively conceived and choreographed, his peacock dance, the portrayal of a touching ritual of seduction, was truly spellbinding for its perfect balance between a suitor's desperation to express his passion and the restraint stemming from his vain awareness of his own beauty.

Few men have been so cheerful in adversity as Dr Saga. Denied for more than a decade, right in the middle of his career, the opportunity to perform, he was neither impatient nor bitter. Not only did he keep his teaching job, he also kept up his interest in the city and its people. He seemed to prefer teachers, artists and students but was comfortable with almost everybody. More importantly perhaps, he kept his great sense of humour.

A Lahori to the core, he was fond of conversation. He had a great sense of drama and was a wonderful storyteller. Also in the great Lahori tradition, an apt taunt seemed to be worth a friendship one stood to lose. If he did not lose any friends this way it was probably because of the obvious lack of malice and the fact that he himself most often was the target. Irreverent, sometimes to the point of being provocative, he was not above sharing risqué jokes and never mind who was listening. Once when he was explaining the necessity of perennially rehearsing one's skills, saying muscles had a very short memory, somebody remarked that he himself seemed to have lost some of his nimbleness, even the muscle

...a childlike spontaneity about him. A whole generation of Ravians remembers him as Prof Mirza Athar Baig's middle-aged visitor who demanded to know where "the man with an eagle's nest on his head" was. "I am Saga," he would then introduce himself, "Dr Faqir Husain. I teach at the College of Veterinary Sciences. Do visit us



Lahore Diary

and you'll see some wonderful things."

Getting to know him better, some of them started calling him Chacha Mor (literally Uncle Peacock). He did not mind. What surprised them, however, was the fact that he remembered them and 20 years on would acknowledge the adopted nephews he happened to meet somewhere.

As an elder he was affectionate, as a friend faithful, as a minor celebrity graceful. While he was not at all self-effacing, he tended naturally to treat people as his equals. A man for all seasons and a jolly good fellow, he appreciated the good things in life and lived life to the fullest.

The death of his son in an Air Force plane crash had shattered him. He used to say that his son had been too young to die. Which, of course, is absurd except in the subjective sense that the good doctor was not prepared for it. Neither were his 'nephews' when the inevitable overtook Dr Saga. He, too, died too young.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THE weather has taken a turn. The thick fog and the chill are gone and there is already a hint of early spring. Outdoors are ideal for sports dur-

...there can be no early return to normalcy they'd rather be attacked now. Boredom is nobody's favourite way of dying.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

QUITE suddenly last week the Punjab Police went on a public relations offensive. District police chiefs all over the province claimed that the crime statistics showed a marked improvement over the past year. Slow with the figures, and, therefore, unable to answer the assertion directly, as most of us are, credulity is a rather endangered virtue. The statements were thus disbelieved immediately. Slowly, the denials have started pouring in.

While the statistics and the inferences are being challenged and defended, there have been two very alarming developments. One, kidnap for ransom is back. In the more recent cases Rs100 million and Rs60 million were demanded for the release of two industrialists. Two, there has been a spurt of deaths in police-suspects encounters. While the suggestion of a policy shift are routinely rejected, the pattern of evidence is familiar. In at least one case a judicial probe has been demanded and in at least another senior police officials have refused to believe the first account of events given by the local police.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

IN a quixotic gesture by any standard, the Tourism Development Corporation of Pakistan last week sent a bus to Wagah to pick up 'Pakistanis returning from India' it had been informed were not coming. The bus remained at the border post for nearly two hours. The PTDC authorities then confirmed that they planned an encore performance on Jan 15.

As gestures go, this is probably in the latest tradition started by President Gen Pervez Musharraf with his instant hit of a handshake at the recent Saarc summit. So convinced were the official media and the Foreign Office of the triumph that once the early amusement was over Prime Minister Blair, Secretary Powell and President Bush hastened to warn Pakistan that they did not think the handshake had really achieved all it was meant to. —ONLOOKER

Shes