

# A View from the Gate

*(Written before a departure. And the return.)*

The purpose of this column has been to review art and entertainment around us. It is not, as some people, and at times, the writer himself would like to think, a cultural column. For what is offered as art here is paint on canvas. Entertainment consists of the radio, cinema, theatre, the impending menace of T. V., and now increasingly, cabaret shows. So far, none of these have produced a sufficient volume of qualitative material to warrant their consideration as the culture of Pakistan. Aspects of entertainment, and artistic expression are without roots in the soil and spirit of the land and if, by some contrived twist of circumstance, frail links show their shreds, they are of indeterminate nature, young, and easily mixable with other roots.

Thus the amount of irrelevant material within the scope of this column is irritatingly clear. One must hint about culture and what makes a civilized culture but must use only the superfluous mediocrity of our society to illustrate it. For this column is essentially topical with the inclination to be durable about it.

This column is aimed at snatching live, indulgable action near to the reader and extracting its high and low points in print. It seeks to set the stage for a continuous dialogue between reader and writer. A measure of the weakness, rootlessness and remorselessness of our social structure and culture is the fact that this column so far has been merely a monologue. Frequently, this writer got the feeling he was writing a column solely for Zombieland, where inhabitants move but do not live, speak but do not say anything. Readers' response is horrifyingly low and this fact makes one painfully uncomfortable when one remembers time and again that this journal's readership includes a segment of educated people. People of a higher economic class and a more refined social sense than the large majority of the nation. If then, these people observe such a

deathly silence, such a mindless, thoughtless, feelingless attitude to what goes on around them, the purpose of this column deteriorates to one of self-preservation alone. This has roughly all the proportions of high Greek tragedy. Readers I have met are verbally active but seem incapable of summoning the energy and discipline to organise their thoughts on paper and create an informative discussion. I have been inflicting unconcerned readers with my unwanted, doesn't-make-a-difference, printed presence since 1958 and have maintained an enthusiastic eye for additions to the local writing guerillas. The watch-out has been in vain. If anything, the number of writers, including non-full-time letter writers to journals, has fallen and lost some of its quality. The loneliness of this column, on the other hand, has become almost melancholic. Which is again dangerous, for review writing must be competitive in order to improve, constantly moving, never settling down complacently on self-formulated and accepted opinions, but forever testing them in the fire of dissent.

There is no meeting ground for points of view. In daily newspapers where management desires a steady profit from advertisements, reviewers applaud some of the worst Italian and American movies it has been my misfortune to witness. For instance, I recollect that this column used only one word to describe a mismovie called *Psycho-a-go-go*, calling it moronic while the city's leading daily English paper, in its Sunday section, devoted about one and a half columns to praising this base picture, calling it thrilling, exciting, well-made and so on and on, tastelessly. In effect, recommending that readers see it, readers, including children. Children, who already handicapped by their presently rootless culture, have no business being exposed to an animalistic, homicidal, vulgar movie. Then, the other English newspaper confines itself to reproducing word by word, the press releases sent by movie studios and distributors. This is immoral journalistic behaviour and the pity of it all is these newspapers, and other journals like them, are read regularly without being caught out, or reprimanded, or boycotted by the supposedly educated minority. Culture is today afflicted by the commercial virus and profit does make monkeys out of men.

This column claims no kudos for itself. On the contrary, it admits to certain lapses which have occurred due to the circumstances in which it has survived. But at no time has this column let personal and commercial motives guide its perspective on entertainment. Nor in art. Amusingly, this writer has personally gained the hostility of

some local artists whom he thinks are not. These matters, however, are subsidiary to the main, the larger, the higher objective. To promote a classically modern sensibility of culture, slowly, steadily, by looking at what is obtained around us. To suggest that what is obtained around us is not necessarily what we need. To replace it with cultural planes of a more civilised, less commercial nature. To involve the readership in the social search for that Pakistani culture which is traditional and new at the same time, and in touch with the convulsive world of today.

These are the basic purposes of this column. Despite the present mediocrity it has to groan through, and in spite of the silent reader, this column shall persevere.

( June, 1967 )

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