

MR AND MRS GULGEE

by Mrs Habeeb

THE afternoon that I visited Gulgee and his wife, Zarina, a very genial atmosphere pervaded their Bohemian flat. Cupid perhaps knew that their vivacious personalities would be best appreciated by each other and so the chance visit of Zarina to her sister in East Pakistan turned to be their meeting place.

Gulgee was then accompanying Prince Karim, the Aga Khan, on his tour of East Pakistan. He says that at the first glance of Zarina he knew she was the girl for him. A mutual friend introduced them and Gulgee promptly postponed his departure from East Pakistan for a few days.

Zarina left soon after for the United States of America on a scholarship to the Cincinnati University in Ohio to study Chemistry. They met again in London where Zarina was working as a Research Chemist. Gulgee did not admit that he intentionally or unintentionally chanced to be there. He courted Zarina, then flew to Bombay, to meet her parents, and then back to Zarina in Paris where Prince Karim, the Aga Khan, came in from Cannes to perform their marriage.

Zarina said she was most homesick on her wedding day for her mother and sisters who seemed so far away, there didn't seem anyone who could even help her to dress. The few people from their community (Gulgee is a Punjabi Ismaili and Zarina a Khoja Ismaili) assured the couple of their help, and gave a lunch in their honour, following the wedding reception.

The girls from the famous Parisein Beauty Salon Cerita came to her rescue she said. Though it was a Sunday they agreed to come over to her place to dress her hair and help her make-up. They were absolutely fascinated by an Oriental bride, dressed in a shimmering saree of silver and white.

The Gulgees were married in July 1962. On coming to Karachi, Zarina found herself at a loss without a job and in a new place without very many friends and relatives. She persuaded her husband to start a workshop for her where she could supervise the making of decorative green, brown, grey Pakistani marble

mosaic tiles and table-tops comprising of one to one and a half inch squares of different coloured marble, or long strips of marble set to give a matting effect. All these she herself designs and manages this project completely.

At the moment Zarina's own routine starts with a visit to the site of their house that is being built which they said was to have simple lines but one of its main feature is a studio seventeen feet by forty feet. A round of the houses where the mosaic tiles need supervision, beside giving instructions at her own workshop which is partly on the ground-floor at the entrance to their flat which is on the second floor and the rest of the work being done on the roof terrace.

Zarina says she is a wife, an assistant, and a friend to Gulgee. She also takes the credit for being his inspiration too. . . what her husband had to say was "Yes, Zarina is good for my painting", and then just as Zarina started to wonder at her husband's admission he teasingly added "Like good background music!".

Zarina and Gulgee seem to be completely in harmony with each other, they say that *besides observing the basic rules of co-existence one must be atuned to each other's moods.* Zarina never insists on an outing when she senses that her husband is in mood for work or planning and taking in impressions even if he may not be at his Canvas or Murial. Gulgee knows exactly how far he can get away as the temperamental artist husband.

When working on something the time or the day or the week matters little to him. It is just as well for Zarina that she thinks coffee-parties a waste of precious time as when she is out even on an unavoidable lunch invitation, she comes home to find the servants waiting, not daring to knock at Gulgee's door to remind him of lunch and Gulgee of course has forgotten there was to be a mealtime.

As his erratic sense of time does not co-ordinate with other people's time, Zarina has to constantly remind him of his appointments. Zarina never intended to tame her artist husband so she is not the least bit disconcerted to realise that it would be almost impossible to attempt such a thing.

Gulgee has been painting since his childhood but has also had a brilliant academic career. He received his Master's Degree in Engineering from Aligarh University (Continued on page 47)



Mr and Mrs Gulgee.



Mr and Mrs Gulgee with their infant son.

and got a first class first, then an M.A. again from Columbia University and his P.h.d. from Havard. He did not work at Engineering except on a few projects for the Govt. of Pakistan.

Gulgee says in answer to queries of young people who would like to take up Art, that "*Talent alone is not enough. Be honest with your-self, do you have the determination?*" he asks. "*The way up is full of knocks and snubs, it is not an easy career*", he says. He added that: "*If fame is the motive of a would-be Artist it is a wrong motive, you cannot be true to your object. An Artist depicts truth, he works in search of truth, which needs a true dedication to Art for Arts sake alone.*"

Zarina does not paint but also has assisted her husband with his marble mosaic mural, which is a fantastic study of a dancing figure done in marble mosaic depicting the dancers' graceful pose and contours and shades of the face done marvellously by the clever use of different shades of the marble from greys turning into black. Zarina's workshop is started with a view to help preserve the Craft Industry in the country.

The painting which dominated Gulgee's studio-cum-nursery (they seem to be camping in this flat temporarily, though Zarina has furnished their living room most comfortably and tastefully) was a large three by six and half feet canvas done in striking shades of Deep Blues and Reds and Oranges with play on light against

dark and the use of sharp relief in paints, which was complete except for the touch of golden foil on it.

"Sometimes a painting done for someone becomes so dear to us while working on it," said Zarina, "that one of us surely gets attached with it, and if it has been in our home for any length of time the personality of our room changes and we are sorry to part with it."

While Gulgee worked the finishing touches to his painting their five month old baby, parked in the studio slept undisturbed, he seems to be thriving in the atmosphere with the background of the whirling marble cutting machine coming from downstairs and the racket going on in the house. No tiptoeing into the baby's rooms or hush hushing for him! The Gulgees are lost in the wonder of their first born, a baby boy. They said "we never realised how wonderful it is to have a baby in the home till ours was born". They have not come up, with the right name for him yet, he is just babeso to them, I suppose with his cherubic smile and twinkling eyes he has bowled them over completely.

Gulgee says Zarina is fun to be with, they enjoy the same things, he and Zarina both agree that *wealth is no criterion for happiness, it is the little give and take and sharing of dreams, hopes and fears that make happiness.* Zarina seems to feel completely fulfilled, with a darling baby, her work, a new house coming up and a husband like Gulgee beside her.