

Poetry

Moving poems, departing poets: The enigma of farewells

17BC, a young poets' group read their works at Bengal Shilpalaya auditorium in the city on August 17

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WHAT was it that brought back memories of Sri Lanka? Colombo, Kandy, the anglophile places of South Asia where the accents were lilting but the language crisp and friendly. Where people named their children Ashok Bradman, part in joy and the rest in pride, a child born in homage to the cover drive.

The single storied building is so rare in Dhaka and one is almost grateful to be invited to one. The cool inside, the large plants moonlighting as luxuriant foliage and the chattering voices of the wise but young who had gathered to read and listen to poems, all made that ambience pleasantly unreal and its this that I suppose makes Colombo so special.

It was also so full of the incense of departures. The parents were on the move, the children were like birds, young and sprightly already lifting to meet the sky that came rushing down in a delight of meeting the new, the already embraced, yearned for and spoken to in the universality of common memories and keyboards and websites. And even as I met people of my own age and kind, saw the young confident faces, so unbearably sure of tomorrow's feast, I also saw through their eyes other eyes, their parents eyes peep through and share a different dream then they were breathing through. I think it was a party of a kind that lay in the dutifully and neatly kept lines of teacups and tea bags waiting for thirst to grow. I know now it was the overwhelming smell of departure.

In Kathmandu, the raggedly dressed man you meet especially the westerner always claims to be writing a novel. Yet there are few serious writers in the valley and almost no one is ready to dress for dinner. But in Colombo, chatting on the beach, they roughly polish a piece of stone with their fingers as it rests on the palm and then throw it politely back to the waves. Then they carefully choose a dinner within the hearing of the sea. As the butler silently moves to serve they read the overseas mail from foreign publishers or stare at the humbling waters and wait for the from the cousin already settled which will send them



Young poets of 17 BC with poets Shamsur Rahman and Sudeep Sen

packing them to Hunslov or New Brunswick where Sri Lankans write great works and are published or toil at law desks as their coconut and cashew curry nursed brain finds solutions to intractable questions of British legal variety. Most go to the USA nowadays.

They may be violent but they can't be anarchist. In Kathmandu, the sunset on a Newari evening soothes the soul to oblivion and like the once-hoopla on the Freak Street, it doesn't matter what happened in the end.

No two places could be more apart. I saw more than a fair share of my friends in the room and it was much later that I realized that most were parents of the poets who had gathered to read their works. It's such a strange and sublime feeling to be a parent of a poet. How does one begin to introduce and how does one end? From oblivion to high-powered neons flashing messages to friends and kindly relatives. It's a rare moment worthy to be alive.

I sit next to Hana, a young lady I know who shares the same floor of

our office. "Are you a poet too?" "No," she laughs politely. How stupid of me. She would be bustling about if she were.

"Are you leaving Bangladesh?" Or is it that she herself said that she was leaving for a distant university in the States to study. She didn't like programming as in computers. It all fitted in. I sat next to a temporary resident here. It's all a series of departures.

Another face, a returned one hailed me. "I have heard that you have made a do but haven't seen it." Naim, an old acquaintance says. His wife works for an advertising company. Nina. Chairs rustle and I see the ancient white mane of Shamsur Rahman on a cane sofa on the first row next to Sudeep Sen, mentor of 17 BC, India's best known English language poet residing in Dhaka.

We start much later but I enjoy the young poets moving about without the obvious self-conscious confidence of those who read poems in air-conditioned auditoriums. It's far memory but our foot-

path and traffic island poetry of the seventies. There is a comfort in the air, a distance from the road where cars and rickshaws and autos jostle with extra-ordinary energy in a desperate bid to flee each other. Hell is others in a traffic jam.

Out here the room is full and the session begins.

Barring a few which were unnecessarily trying to be contemporary, real, concerned, or plain rhymed, the poems are uniformly good and to be so good so young is rare. As if they have an advanced computer and when they push the keys, great poems leap out with methodical regularity.

They are also different poems of a kind I don't fully understand and as I feel slightly alienated I feel a sense of a strange triumph. That of understanding that we are not of one generation-that's (ahem) easy- but of another kind. We have shared the same city and certainly the same meaningless politics but within each were growing another world. I see that as the world of departure and staying. Fundamentally memories for constructing the imagination is

unrooted here even if all of them don't go, they in fact already have. And we are not stay backs but almost releasing the compelling bird of our own assassinated desire of escape. We wanted to run away, they want to go. That's what makes us different it seems. At least in one part.

The poems are superb speaking in the binaries of two generations, one destructed, the other waiting to be dug into being.

A few of them are simply marvelous.

Finally Shamsur Rahman takes the stand. Speaking in Bangla, he praises and then spoils the evening for himself and other by bringing in the ludicrous imagery of Michael Madhusudhan Dutt and the famous return of the prodigal poet to the muddy shores of Bengal and Bengali. For forsaking the West which refused him. But when was that? Has the great poet of Bangladesh forgotten that yahoo is mightier than the pen.

He becomes confused as his speech progresses. He realizes that trashing all means trashing Sudeep as well, a guest, so he spends a few minutes praising him and justifying that Sudeep is different because he grew up in an entirely different environment where English was the first tongue. He rambles on with what becomes a speech people politely wait to finish.

But these are the Sudeeps. These are the departing ones. Like Sudeep himself departed and so many others like him left Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai to be pulled in by the hungry hands of a welcoming West for those who wish to travel by the same train though in different classes.

But then how should Rahman bhai know? In front of him, everyone is so properly Bengali. He can't imagine the departures without images of exile hood. He sees no departures but only desertsions. It makes him slightly out of touch.

On the way back I greet him. He struggles and then remembers.

"Afsan, you have become so old. Your beard has gone all white." He has to remember so many people. My commiserations, O poet.

There are the poems and the poets and how can one separate one from the other? Many of them remember a young poet, a young girl Kashfi, who died young, a friend of many. Four have left for abroad, others are full of departure plans. Once the session ends, made easy because the audience was so friendly and understanding and indulgent in a genteel sort of way, there is relief of "now that it's done I am glad it's over." Histories are cast aside as admission forms cover the front page of newspapers with regular announcements of the dead and the dying. There is a chirpiness

in the air, childlike, liberating, like fleeting birds in every sense swishing away to happier climes.

In the end it was as much about the poets as it was about their songs. They already have memories of lands they are going to and will pass into other histories, other people and fashion a world of global uncertainties amidst growing roots. They are not going to be rootless but send down new roots and they are already wise about that. Proud parents wait for them, some alternating between departures and the room grows small as dreams the size of admission plus scholarship plus summer jobs plus majors and a life in a land that will not cheat them of their personal history wherever it's planted.

It has happened in this delta many times before but never have they been so much in control. They can always be away but in touch and know when never to visit a place where they had public poetry reading sessions. It's a world very far away but secure and full of green, colour of envy and promise.

I talk to Kajal Banerjee of the English Department. We meet after years and he talks about a piece I wrote on the departure of Hindus from Bangladesh. He shows me a tome he has edited on the topic. "Unless the elite stay back, the community will not be led. Who will guide and protect the beleaguered Hindus?" I ask. We promise to meet and depart.

What we heard that day were not just poems really though they were certainly that. What we heard were good-bye notes by those who were departing and the space left vacant by their absence to be filled up by words.

Nina introduces her daughters, one of them who was a poet today. "He saw you when you were that small." They are a bit bemused by this declaration. I smile in sympathy. Oh, parents.

There is tightness in the chest that won't go away.

The liveried bearers were folding the cups, the napkins and the caramel cakes away in the muted light, which made that room seem like a ship at sea.



The two hosts

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cinema

September 1 to 5
Chalachitram Film Society and Goethe-Institut have organised a 5-day special filmshow programme titled, 'A Bondage of Partnership' at the Goethe auditorium on the occasion of 20 years of Chalachitram Film Society (1982-2002) and 40 years of Goethe-Institut in Bangladesh (1961-2001).

Food Festival

Sept. 2-7
A British Bangladesh fusion food festival is being held at the Vintage Room Restaurant at Hotel Sheraton in the city. a-la Carte dinner is available from 7:30 p.m. daily.

Virtual art show

August 25 November 01
Artist A. Rahman holds a virtual art exhibition at www.filpstudiobd.com/arahman The virtual display is first of its kind in Bangladesh by artist A.Rahman.

Architectural designs' show

Aug. 17 Sept. 09
An exhibition goes on at the National Museum at Shahbagh in the city to reveal the unfolding drama of the design and construction of Sher-e-banglanagar. Timetable: 10:30 a.m. 4:30 p.m. (Saturday to Wednesday), 3:30 7:30 p.m. (Friday). The show is closed on Thursday.

Dance festival

September 15-17
Nriya Dhara, a dance institution hosts 'Bangladesh Dance Festival', a 3-day event that schedules to display dance disciplines of several origins from across the country, in cooperation with the Bengal Foundation. State Minister for Cultural Affairs, Begum Selima Rahman inaugurates the festival at Bangladesh National Museum in the city.

TV GUIDE

BTV	12:10p.m. News headline
	12:15 News headline
	12:20 Selected program
	12:45 Azan
	1:00 News
	2:00 News headline
	2:20 Open University
	2:40 Health program
	3:00 News
	3:05 Bangla feature film
	4:00 News headline
	4:30 Aiker shongbadpotro
	5:00 News headline
	5:30 Magazine
	6:00 News
	6:35 Jiboner alo
	7:00 News headline
	7:05 Environment program
	7:30 Selected program
	8:00 News
	8:30 Drama
	9:00 News headline
	10:00 News at ten
	10:30 Anandalok
	11:30 News
	11:45 Closing
CHANNEL-i	1:50p.m. Bangla film
	5:05 Documentary
	5:35 Joto pod toto
	6:10 Music Plus
	6:45 Houseful
	7:15 Channel I News
	8:00 Drama
	8:30 Apon bhuboney
	9:00 Channel I News
	9:30 Shongbadpotrey Bangladesh
	10:00 Marine location thekey
	10:30 Channel I News
	11:15 Joto pod toto mot
	12:00 Channel I News

ATN BANGLA	5:00 Islamic Prog.
	5:30 Health care prog. Sushtha Thakun
	7:00 Film song's prog. Surchobi
	8:00 ATN Bangla News
	8:25 Talk show : Face to Face
	9:00 Musical prog. Dener Shasay
	10:10 Musical prog. Music Time
	12:00 ATN Bangla News
	12:30 Mage Serial : Mohine
	2:05 Film song's prog. Surchobi
	2:30 ATN Bangla News Headlines
	2:45 Bengali feature film : Greholakkhe
	5:50 Islamic prog. Sundor Jeebaner Jannee
	6:25 Film based prog. Cine Magazine
	7:00 ATN Bangla Evening News
	7:25 Musical prog. Music Time
	8:00 Mage Serial : Kun Semanyai Mukte
	8:35 Musical prog.
	9:10 Reporting prog. Prekshapat
	10:00 ATN Bangla News
	10:35 Drama serial : Khushie
	11:10 Musical prog.
	11:30 ATN Bangla News
	12:00 Bengali feature film : Biswas Abiswas
BBC WORLD	6:00 BBC News
	6:30 World Business Report
	7:00 BBC News
	7:30 Asia Today /Asia Business Report
	8:00 BBC News
	8:30 Asia Today /World Business Report
	9:00 BBC News
	9:30 Asia Today /Asia Business Report
	10:00 BBC News
	10:30 World Business Report
	11:00 BBC News
	11:30 World Business Report
	12:00 BBC News
	12:30 World Business Report
	1:00 BBC News
	1:30 Fast Track/Holiday
	2:00 BBC News
	2:30 Hardtalk
	3:00 BBC News
	3:30 Simpsons World
	4:00 BBC News
	4:30 Asia Today /World Business Report

5:00 BBC News	Hardtalk
HBO	6:30 The Chamber
	8:45 Beverly Hills Cop II
	10:45 Over the Top
	12:45 The Whole Nine Yards
	2:45 Cry Freedom
	6:00 The Phantom
	8:00 Wayne's World
	10:00 Rush Hour
	12:00 Housesitter
	2:00 The Chamber
	4:15 Caught
STAR PLUS	7:30 Hum Saath Aath Hain
	8:00 Aatma
	9:00 Hit Filmene Hit Sangeet
	9:30 Fox Kids Daily
	10:10 Hit Geet
	10:25 Kya Film Kya Geet
	10:30 Small Wonder
	11:00 Maal Hai To Taal Hai
	11:30 Meri Saheli
	12:00 Shanti
	12:30 Hit Filmene Hit Sangeet
	1:00 Kaahin Kissi Roz
	1:25 Film Toppers
	1:30 Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki
	2:00 Bhabhi
	2:30 Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi
	3:00 Shagun
	3:30 Kasauti Zindagi Kay
	4:00 Kavita
	4:30 Kabhii Sautan Kabhii Saheli
	5:00 Kora Kaagaz
	5:30 Hit Filmene Hit Sangeet
	6:00 Small Wonder
	6:30 Fox Kids
	7:20 Aaj Ki Baat
	7:25 Kya Film Kya Geet
	7:30 Kulkum- Pyara Sa Bandhan
	7:55 Film Toppers
	8:00 Hum Saath Aath Hain
	8:30 Kyun Hota Hai Pyarr
	9:00 Kasauti Zindagi Kay
	9:30 Kismey Kitnaa Hai Dhuum Aaj
	10:00 Dekkhenge Hum
	10:30 Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki
	11:00 Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi
	11:30 Kaahin Kissi Roz
	12:00 Film Toppers
	12:05 Aaj Ki Baat
STAR GOLD	7:00pm Geet Bahar
	7:30 Nazrana
	11:00 Bollywood Beats

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS	STAR MOVIES: 7:00 p.m. <i>The Nightmare Before Christmas</i> . Acclaimed filmmaker Tim Burton's imaginative vision is brought to the big screen as never before in the magical stop-motion animated musical-fantasy THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS! Set in a world where every holiday has its own special land, Halloween's beloved Pumpkin King, Jack Skellington, wears of the same annual routine. Stumbling upon the entryway to Christmastown, Jack is instantly enraptured with the decorations, toys and warm spirit and years to run the holiday as 'Sandy Claws'. However, a stranger to anything but Halloween haunting, Jack learns that even with the best intentions, his special spin on the Christmas holiday could go awry.
	CHANNEL-i: 1:50 p.m. <i>Devdas</i> . The film was made in Bangladesh with performance from Bulbul Ahmed and Kobori as Devdas and Parboti, respectively. The plot of the story is based on Sharatchandra Chatterjee's Bengali epic novel with the same title. The triangular love story between Parvati, Devdas and Chandramukhi finds place in the film.
11:30 Chhoti Bahu	3:00pm Geet Bahar
3:30 Love In Simla	7:00 Bollywood Beats
7:00 Star News English	7:30 Lamhe Pyaar Ke : Kismat
8:00 Star Bazaar Hindi	8:00 Hotline
8:30 Tonight at 8	9:00 Star Samachar
9:30 Star News English	10:00 Star Business News
10:30 Star Newshour	11:30 Star News Hindi
12:00 Star News Hindi	
CHANNEL [V]	8:00 [V] Back to Back
8:30 [V] Jumpstart	9:30 [V] Hit Machine
10:00 [V] Hit Machine	10:30 [V] Back to Back
11:00 [V] Back to Back	11:30 [V] Hit Machine
12:00pm [V] Zabarast Hits	12:30 [V] Jungli Jukebox
1:00 [V] Hit Machine	1:30 [V] Zabarast Hits
2:00 [V] Hit Machine	2:30 [V] Hit Machine
3:00 [V] Hit Machine	3:30 [V] Back To Back
4:00 [V] Hit Machine	4:30 [V] Hit Machine
5:00 [V] Top 5@5	6:00 [V] Hit Machine
6:00 [V] Hit Machine	6:30 [V] Hit Machine
7:00 [V] Hit Machine	7:30 [V] Hit Machine
8:00 [V] Hit Machine	8:30 [V] Hit Machine
9:00 [V] Hit Machine	9:30 [V] Hit Machine
10:00 [V] Hit Machine	10:30 [V] Hit Machine
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9:00 [V] Hit Machine	9:30 [V] Hit Machine
10:00 [V] Hit Machine	10:30 [V] Hit Machine
11:00 [V] Hit Machine	11:30 [V] Hit Machine
12:00 [V] Hit Machine	12:30 [V] Hit Machine

PICK OF THE DAY	The Bone Collector On HBO at 10:00 pm The Manhattan murderer is leaving bony fragments of clues behind after his killings to see if any man of like-minded intelligence is willing to go on a little joyride into corpse-town with him and pick up the missing pieces -- provided they can keep up.
8:20 News	8:30 Ardhangani
8:45 Yaaden Radio Ceylon Ki	9:00 Nickelodeon On Zee
9:30 Nick On Zee	10:30 Hum Paanch
11:00 Kitne Kool Hain Hum	12:00 Mehndi Tere Naam Ki
12:30 Kitty Party	1:00 Love Marriage
1:30 Kohi Apna Sa	2:00 Kamal
2:30 Gharana	3:00 Pehala Nasha
6:30 Nickelodeon On Zee	7:00 Nickelodeon
8:00 Kitne Kool Hain Hum	8:30 Kamaal
9:00 Amanat	9:30 Khelo Number Khelo
10:00 Kohi Apna Sa	10:30 Love Marriage
11:00 Tu Kahe Agar	11:30 Gharana
12:30 Yeh Dil Kya Kare	
ZEE MUSIC	7:30 Sizzlers
8:00 Music Box	8:30 Artist Of The Fortnight
9:00 Sizzlers	9:30 Hit Pe hit
10:30 Hit Mix	11:00 Taaza Maal
12:00 Just Jammin	12:30 Hit Pe Hit
1:30 Music Box	3:30 Jharokha
2:30 Tara Rum Pum	3:30 Hit Mix
4:00 Zee Music Box	5:00 Dil Se
5:30 Hit Mix	6:00 Music Plus
7:00 Dialogue	7:30 Zee Music Plus
8:30 Bes Of The Best	9:30 Sizzlers
10:30 Dil Se	10:30 Jharokha
11:00 Music Box	11:30 Phoren Maal
12:30 Phoren Maal	
ZEE NEWS	6:30 Religious Prog
7:00 RPT	7:30 Bulletin
10:00 RPT	10:30 Bulletin
12:00 RPT	12:30 Bulletin
1:00 Manoranjan	1:30 Wild Rescues I
2:00 Champions of the Wild	2:30 Walk on the Wild Side
3:00 Animals Planet Safari	4:00 Animal Doctor II
4:30 Tamed N Trained	6:00 Extreme Contact
6:30 O'Shea's Big Adventure	7:00 Vets on the Wild Side
7:30 Animal X	

8:00 Animal Planet Safari	9:00 Champions of the Wild IV
9:30 Cats	10:00 Animal Doctor II
10:30 Tamed N Trained	12:00 Extreme Contact
DISCOVERY	7:30 Animal People II
8:00 Rolf's Amazing World of Animals I	8:30 Wild Discovery
9:30 Globe Trekker	10:30 Healthy Living
11:30 The Human Body	12:30 Woman's Hour
1:30 Wild Discovery	2:30 Amazing Animals
3:30 Discovery Kids	4:30 Action Zone: Expeditions
5:30 Lonely Planet V	6:30 Animal People
7:00 Rolf's Amazing World of Animals II	7:30 Wild Discovery
8:30 Health living	9:30 Human Body
10:30 Junkyard Wars	11:30 Weather Wonders
ZEE MGM	6:30 Carry On England
9:00 The Man Who Knew Too Much	11:30 Doctor At Large
2:00 Italian Movie	4:30 The Woman in Red
7:00 Dead On	9:30 Secret Admirer
ZEE ENGLISH	6:00 Benny Hill Shoe
6:30 Capitol	7:00 Family Pride
7:30 Heartbreak High	8:30 Benny Hill Show
9:00 Three's Company	9:30 Kate & Allie
10:00 Living Single	10:30 ER
11:30 Full House	12:00 Fresh Prince of Bel Air
12:30 Veronica's closet	1:00 Royal Canadian Air Farce
1:30 Benny Hill Show	2:00 Three's Company
2:30 Friends	3:00 Seinfeld
3:30 ER	4:30 Suddenly Susan
5:00 Mad About You	5:30 Heartbreak High
6:30 Full House	7:00 Jesse
7:30 Seinfeld	8:00 Three's Company
8:30 Fresh Prince of Bel-Air	9:00 Suddenly Susan
9:30 Veronica's Closet	10:00 Mad About You
10:30 Seinfeld	