was, had to live with modest means. His father, a religious yet liberal-minded man, encouraged his son to write and his mother who had seen Kazi Nazrul Islam in person, when she was a child, nurtured a secret desire that one day her son would be a great writer.

It was while in class 8 or 9 that Selim, by then quite a bookworm, read Jasimuddin and started to understand Rabindranath, reading *Gora, Char Odhay, Ghore Baire* and memorising at least 50 of Tagore's poems. His childhood was spent in a secular environment Muslims, Hindus and Boishnabs lived in harmony and provided the mixed culture that influenced Al Deen's secular sensibilities. Al Deen believed that a society that does not have a mixed culture cannot really develop, a theory that egged him on to incorporate different religious and ethnic elements in his works.

In his university days the western masters such as Tolstoy, Dostoyvosky and Shakespeare caught his attention. He read Camus and Sartre and became familiar with Greek and Hindu mythology; he had read all the religious books: the holy Quran, Bible, Tora, Mahabharat Ramayan and so on. This was also when his life-long friendship with Nasiruddin Yuosuff began based on their mutual interest in philosophy, literature and politics. It was a friendship that endured all throughout his life and was enmeshed with his professional career. They, along with like-minded friends found Dhaka Theatre, which proved to be Al Deen's main platform where his work came alive on stage.

While a student of Dhaka University in the late 60s, Al Deen was influenced by a number of people. Poets Ahsan Habib and Rafiq Azad had encouraged him to write plays instead of poetry. He adapted 'Rider to the Sea' into drama form with Sandwip as the backdrop. It was Rafiq Azad, a mentor for young people like Al Deen and Yuosuff, who gave the name of Selim Al Deen to the boy from Feni who had been originally named Md. Moinuddin Ahmed. Munier Chowhdury whom he considered to be the greatest teacher he had ever had, greatly inspired him to write plays. Al Deen was at that time, trying to come to terms with the theory that tragedy, an integral part of the western literary tradition, was absent

mising Master



in Bangla literature. This was completely unacceptable to Al Deen who found it a contradictory notion for a region fraught with a history of rebellion, upheavals, death and despair. How could there be no tragedy? The absence, he realised, was not in the existence of tragedy but the lack of depiction of tragedy in Bangla theatre. It was this gap that he wanted to fill and that would preoccupy him for the rest of his life.

In 1970, when still a university student, Al Deen's TV drama called 'Librium' later

For Al Deen music was a vital part of his theatre.
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