A Philosopher, Mentor and Friend

He is described by his loved ones as impulsive, childlike on the one hand and a philosopher and genius on the other, endearingly naïve as well as exceptionally creative. While Dhaka Theatre, of which he was a founder member, gave him the window to give his work a physical form, it also gave him a second family through his close relationship with Nasiruddin Yousuff Bachchu and actress Shimul Yousuf. Work and personal life were inseparable for this trio, which added another dimension to their relationship.

"To me he was a friend, a father, a guru and also like my child" says Shimul Yousuf. "All his child-like fancies he would ask of me and ask me about everything, what he should wear to a programme, what he should eat...He was very fussy about food, would eat only organic things and shunned anything that was synthetic; I would scold him for being so finicky."

Al Deen in fact, was quite a food connoisseur and had a vast knowledge about different kinds of food. "He just loved going to the bazaar and knew which fish should be eaten in which season, which vegetables should be eaten when" says Shimul. "He knew a lot about medicinal herbs and planted many of those trees in my village home in Dhamrai."

"Sometimes I would call him on the phone and tell him to come over for some work. He would be a little irritated but would come nevertheless. Then he would ask for some cigarettes, some paper and pen and go straight to the bedroom, sit on the bed, put his feet up on a pillow and sway them back and forth like a child. It is that image of him that keeps coming to my mind.

"In barely ten minutes he would come out with a brilliant piece of writing that we will be analysing for the next ten years!"

Al Deen's work was fulfilling but there were personal tragedies that kept him down from time to time. Although happily married, Selim and his wife Meherunnessa were childless. In 1982 the couple had a baby boy whom Al Deen named Mainul Hasan but his son died 15 minutes after he was born. The death of his son deeply wounded Al Deen and throughout his life he was against abortion. Being childless he hankered to be a parent and would make many call him 'Baba'. Another big blow came when Meherunnessa's younger sister's little daughter, whom Al Deen called his daughter, was diagnosed with blood cancer. In December, a few weeks before Al Deen passed away, the child had a relapse and the doctors had given their verdict that she did not have long to live. "On December 12, he came to me and cried a lot" says Shimul. "I do not want to see her death, I will go away to the village, he said." "I asked him: Are you running away? He replied "Yes I am."

His professional relationship with Shimu Yousuf and Nasiruddin Yousuff was based on unstinting mutual trust. "While doing the production script for his drama which was huge, I learnt from him how to cut out parts of the play and then co-relate them with other parts. He would jokingly say, "Cut as much as you like, a few buckets of water out will not make much difference to the ocean!" He had a lot of faith in himself too and knew what he was.

"After each production he would come with twinkling eyes and a slight smile and he would say: 'Can't say what you have cut!' He was that trusting"

Al Deen's tryst with nature was extremely deep, spiritual even. "He would see life in everything, even a stone was not just a stone", says Nasiruddin Yousuff. "He deplored the cutting down of trees and explained that each tree was a complete life cycle, the trees bear fruit, birds eat those fruits and spread the seeds so that other trees can grow."

His most favourite place was Jahanginagar campus where he lived and worked and where he would take frequent walks along the woods, inspecting and delighting in the beauty of nature. It was only someone as aesthetically-minded who would come up with a festival devoted to a particular species of flower. The *Mohua* flower with its unusual fragrance and intoxicating properties, intrigued him to no end and he would hold regular *Mohua* festival on campus which included lectures and discussions on the flower.

" It was sometimes hard to believe that the Selim who would laugh out loud at the smallest things, who wore the brightest shirts and would do anything for a packet of cigarettes and who would not accept invitations abroad because he was scared of flying, this same Selim could create such masterpieces."

To his students, many of whom became his colleagues and friends, he was extraordinary, unconventional and awe-inspiring. In 1974 Al Deen joined as a lecturer in the Bangla Department thanks to Dr. Ahmed Sharif and Syed Ali Ahsan. Soon he started arranging theatre festivals on campus creating a sensation among the students. At first