The Food of Love

FAYZA HAQ

Flautist Mohammad Hassan Ali, who performed at the Alliance Française recently, is full of aplomb and drive, as he played on the wind instrument the "Bansri"(Flute), which as one knows, differs from the western counterpart -- and is more often in metal or a combination of wood and metal. As the mood of the tunes varied, the lighting too changed to create the suitable ambiance. As too many had not rushed in to crowd the hall to a bursting point, the rapport between the audience and Hassan Ali grew with time. This flautist has often performed overseas, and in India and Pakistan. He has played both as a soloist and as a part of the Bangladeshi delegation. At the Alliance Française performance, this being his second effort at the venue, he played at will, with remarkable control of notes.

Hassan Ali has performed for the radio too, and for film makers, sometimes even serving as the music director. He has not had the patronage of Alliance and other music lovers, as say, her junior, Bari Siddiqui, and is more of an introvert, although full of wit and repartee during the parley with "The Daily Star", at Café Veranda, the following morning. He had brought his huge canvas bag of different flutes of various shapes and sizes, and was ready to give command performance, ad lib. For Hassan Ali, music is to charm the soul, and take one away from the grinds of daily, mundane existence. Music carries him from this world to the next, to his Maker, as he puts it, and only when the notes cease, does he get back to earth. He has mastered the "sargam" in his youth, and sailed forth to have the tunes at his fingertips. As he swayed and puffed at the keys, the tunes flew out with magical melody putting him on a class with other local masters.

Since the flute does not have ready followers-- as it does not easily usher in financial reward for the professional musicians in Bangladesh --so Hassan Ali's students maybe counted on the fingers. His "shagirds" usually play -- not as a profession but what is locally called "passion". Hassan Ali, however, earns his bread and butter with his flute, and looks prince-like in his attire by day and evening-- taking heart in playing for his listeners -- along with rearing a contented family, where music plays a vital part. Charming away his audience, he brought in the message of peace and harmony, even in the poignant tunes.

He looked composed, determined and poised--ready to take on his listeners, and drive any discontentment from their minds and hearts. Hassan Ali did not pander to any element of cheap or ready sensationalism. He lithely crept up to listeners' attention by changing gradually from the classical to the popular, in order to bring in variation -- and lighten the atmosphere of the oncoming night -- with its humid pressures outside the hall. He knew he could feel the pulse of the people, and gradually mastermind the feeing of ease and well being among the audience--seated both on the spread-out white sheet on the floor, and a few spacious and comfortable gallery- room included at the back in the concert - hall. Hassan Ali's notes transported one from the metropolitan, mechanical existence-- to one of repose and hopeful dreams. It was as if one were lifted and carried away and out, breathing paradise air -- in one of the pages of the Arabian Night's tale, or the Rubayyat of Omar Khayyam's. Such was the magic of the flute's notes that evening.

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Hassan Ali began his pursuit of flute notes as a child in the village of Rupganj, Naraynganj. His father took him to a fair where he bought him a flute. As a child, wanting to pass his time, and also have a good time at it, Hassan Ali practised his flute, learning the "sargam" under his uncle, Moejuddin Khan, who himself was a student of Ustad Allauddin Khan in India. Later he learnt to play more seriously and effortlessly under his next teacher, Ustad Shamsul Haq for 17 years. Shamsul Huq played for Bangladesh Betar -- apart from coaching students privately. Hassan Ali picked up the silver flute as well as the clarinet, meanwhile.