The A to Z of Bangladeshi Bangalis

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My good friend R forwarded me an email that was titled, 'A to Z for Bangalis', apparently composed by a co-lingual from across the border, and the first two paragraphs went like this:

A is for *Awpheesh* (as in Office). This is where the average Kolkatan goes and spends a day hard at work. And if he works for the '*Vest* Bengal *Gawrment*' he will arrive at 10, wipe his forehead till 11, have a tea break at 12, throw around a few files at 12.30, break for lunch at 1, smoke an unfiltered cigarette at 2, break for tea at 3, sleep sitting down at 4 and go home at 4:30. It's a hard life!

B is for *Bhision*. For some reason many Bangalis don't have good *bhision*. In fact in Kolkata most people are wearing spectacles all the time.

This was very inspiring and then it occurred to me why cannot we have an A to Z for this part of Bengal too, not really much different from the West socio-culturally. For instance, their A could be ours too, and B, very much. So here goes.

A is for *aafsos*. This usually follows anyone's success. It could be someone else's better job, new car, new apartment, someone's exam results, a hit album, a new book. The feeling always is 'it could easily have been me', oblivious totally of the amount of effort the 'fortunate' persons put it.

B is for *bhaabi*. Loving, caring, accessible, and an unquestionable relationship. Sometimes too much loving, caring, accessible, and obviously questionable.

C is for cricket. The nation has been taken on a ride since the last-ditch ACC triumph at Kuala Lumpur with the final insult being uttered by the current captain (doing overtime), who should have been sent on LPR for saying on television prior to each match and every series that Bangladesh will win if they do well in batting, bowling and fielding. What else is there to do in this game? Lose, perhaps.

D is for Darling. A term oft used by Bangladeshi urban couples in public places within earshot of other quieter couples, approximately two months before their divorce and simultaneous to courting other such sweethearts. Ouch! Sweet hurts!

E is for *Ekushey*. The annual wakeup call to renew the pledge that one day we were Bangali with *ektara* and *dotara*, and so must we march on, but falling back to guitar and banjo by March first.

F is for foreigner. Oh! These guys we adore, especially in respect to their high-priced expertise, to the extent that a 25-year old Greek's opinion on the social problems of rickshaw-pullers is considered more authentic by the government than that of a Bangali with 15 years of experience of trying to earn a living by pulling the vehicle.

I is for *ijjat*. This is something every Bangali tries to save, often at the cost of someone else's. It also stands fir 'I', meaning '*aami*', the most important person to each Bangali.

J is for *jamai*. For some reason this status remains dodgy. In some houses, he is treated as a welcome member of the family (read son), in some he is an unwelcome resident (read *ghar jamai*), in most he is someone who always carries a threat of an impending marital disaster, and so treat him well.

K is for *kolakuli*. This is in *hirik* mode during the Eid festivals, but for the rest of the year some of us prefer not to even catch the eye of the other, and vice versa.

L is for love. No Bangladesh male falls in love if a lady looks at him, no way. But let her as much as engage in even small talk, and the man transforms into Niagra Falls. As for the women folk, they are not much different from their species elsewhere on Planet Earth; misunderstood as understood.

M is for mobile. An instrument of convenience, which has taught many Bangali the Art of lying unnecessarily. When expected in Gushan, but he happens to be still loitering in Motijheel, he will nonchalantly say that he has reached Moakhali. When after half-an-hour he is still not in Gulshan, he obviously explains that he is stuck in a jam.

N is for New Market. This is a miracle, not because even after sixty years it still remains new, but because no Bangali's shopping is complete without visiting this market, although the entire city and beyond is covered with shops selling the same things.

O is for O. A name given to husbands by wives talking unkindly about them to a 'friend' of the opposite sex, who also risks the threat of becoming a 'O', eventually.

P is for politics. (Please see R and upcoming issues)

Q is for question. This is the form in which we like to answer back. Ask any Bangalee the time, and he shall reply, 'what time do you need?' Or, try 'how are you'. And the retort may be 'will I be unwell?'

R is for *rajniti*. This is a serious passion of the every Banglee. Even if he does not seek a seat in the parliament, he will do politics within his family, workplace, sporting club, bus, hotel, neighbourhood, so much so that a *Dhakaiya* lamented in disgust that *rajniti* has entered our politics.

S is for *shaala*. An endearing relationship, but oft uttered by someone if excessively bothered. Also uttered if not bothered, but was supposed to, as in a student-teacher relationship years after passing, '*Shaala* did not teach us anything'.

T is for Tender. A fascinating technology to legitimise an illegitimate deal.

V is for visa. For the privileged, no less than an Olympic medal, because it is won by jumping the longest queue, leaping to the highest ambition, and running the fastest away from reality at home.

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