

NON-FICTION

'Googly' is not an Indian sweetmeat

LAKSHMAN KADIRGAMAR

Lakshman Kadirgamar, assassinated in 2005, served in important positions in the Sri Lankan government. For a good number of years, until his death, he was foreign minister in the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga. Admired for his scholarship and his sense of humour, Kadirgamar never failed to become the centre of attraction wherever he happened to be.

The following article is an after-dinner speech Kadirgamar delivered on an earlier World Cup cricket occasion, extempore --- we are informed. We bring it to our readers, for two reasons. In the first place, it is an instance of how speeches can be turned into intellectual exercises. In the second, it demonstrates the wit which the late Sri Lankan politician could bring into his interaction with his audience.

Enjoy!
--- Literary Editor

"Captain Atapattu and members of the Sri Lankan team, Members of the Sri Lankan community, Friends of Sri Lanka, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some historians say, I think uncharitably, that cricket is really a diabolical political strategy, disguised as a game, in fact a substitute for War, invented by the ingenious British to

confuse the natives by encouraging them to fight each other instead of their imperial rulers.

The world is divided into two camps - those who revel in the intricacies of cricket and those who are totally baffled by it, who cannot figure out why a group of energetic young men should

spend days, often in the hot sun or bitter cold, chasing a ball across an open field, hitting it from time to time with a stick - all to the rapturous applause of thousands, now millions, of ecstatic spectators across the world. The game has developed a mystical language of its own that further bewilders those who are already befuddled by its complexities.

In the course of my travels I have a hard time explaining to the non-cricketing world - in America, China, Europe and Russia - that a 'googly' is not an Indian sweetmeat; that a 'square cut' is not a choice selection of prime beef; that a 'cover drive' is not a secluded part of the garden; that a 'bouncer' is not a muscular janitor at a night club, that a 'Yorker' is not some exotic cocktail mixed in Yorkshire or that a 'leg-break' is not a sinister manoeuvre designed to cripple your opponent's limbs below the waist.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me see whether politics and cricket have anything in common. Both are games. Politicians and cricketers are superficially similar, and yet very different. Both groups are wooed by the cruel public who embrace them today and reject them tomorrow.

Cricketers work hard; politicians only pretend to do so. Cricketers are disciplined; discipline is a word unknown to most politicians in any language. Cricketers risk their own limbs in the heat of honourable play; politicians encourage others to risk their limbs in pursuit of fruitless causes while they remain secure in the safety of their pavilions. Cricketers deserve the rewards they get; the people get the

politicians they deserve. Cricketers retire young; politicians go on forever. Cricketers unite the country; politicians divide it. Cricketers accept the umpire's verdict even if they disagree with it; politicians who disagree with an umpire usually get him transferred. Cricketers stick to their team through victory and defeat, politicians in a losing team cross over and join the winning team. Clearly, cricketers are the better breed.

It is said that the task of a foreign minister is to lie effusively for his country abroad. That may be true, but it is certainly true that he has to fight for his country and defend it at all times. Our cricketers may recall that in the run-up to the 1995 World Cup, Australia refused to play a match in Colombo, citing security reasons. Shane Warne said he wouldn't come to Colombo because he couldn't do any shopping there. The press asked me for a comment. I said "shopping is for sissies". There was a storm of protest in Australia... A TV interviewer asked me whether I had ever played cricket. I said I had played before he was born - without helmets and thigh guards, on matting wickets that were full of holes and stones, and I had my share of broken bones to show it. My friend the Australian foreign minister was drawn into the fray and phoned me. We decided to cool things down. A combined India/Pakistan team came to Colombo at very short notice to play an exhibition match in place of the Australian match. It was a magnificent gesture of South Asian solidarity. Against strong security advice I went on to the field to greet and thank

our friends from India and Pakistan. When the whole episode was over I sent a bouquet of flowers to my Australian counterpart. Flowers are also for sissies. I remember vividly the incident that occurred in Australia when Murali was called for throwing and Arjuna led his team to the boundary in protest, but cleverly refrained from crossing it. I was watching TV in Colombo. As a past captain I asked myself what I would have done in Arjuna's place. In my mind I had no hesitation in supporting his decision. A few minutes later the phone rang. The President of the Board called to ask for advice. I said Arjuna was right because a captain must, on the field, stand up for his men and protect them, but the consequences must not be allowed to go too far; good lawyers must be engaged and a reasonable compromise must be reached. That was done. During that tour I paid an official visit to Australia. My friend the Australian foreign minister in the course of a dinner speech invited me to go with him the next day to Adelaide, his home town, to watch the final day's play. I knew what the result was going to be. In my reply I said that at the end of the match I did not want to be the one to tell him that Australia had "won by a Hair". Accordingly, I went back home, as planned, to maintain the good relations that we have with Australia...

Foreign ministers sometimes find themselves in very difficult situations. Take the case of the Foreign Minister of Uganda. President Idi Amin told him that he wanted to change the name of Uganda to Idi. The minister was asked to canvas world opinion and return in two weeks. He did not do so. He was summoned and asked to explain. He said: "Mr. President, I have been informed that there is a country called Cyprus. Its citizens are called Cypriots; if we change the name of our country to 'Idi' our citizens would be called... Idiots". Reason prevailed. A story goes that a shark was asked why diplomats were his preferred food. He replied "because their brains being small are a tasty morsel, their spines being supple I can chew on them at leisure - and they come delightfully marinated in alcohol."

Ladies and Gentlemen, as I approach the close of this brief address I wish to speak directly to our Sri Lankan team. Today we lost a match. But you lost to the rain and M/s Duckworth and Lewis. You did not lose to England. Only a few weeks ago you had a resounding victory against South Africa. You will win again tomorrow. What is important is to keep up your confidence and spirits. All of us, your fellow countrymen and women, have been enormously impressed in recent times by the commitment, discipline, athleticism and determination that you have displayed in the field. The people are with you. We all know that each and every one of you, are constantly busy honing your skills. We can see that you are maintaining a high standard of physical fitness. When the people see this it gives them not only immense pleasure but the moral upliftment that Sri Lankans are capable of in rising to the challenge of sustained performance. Every team loses. It takes two to play a game. One has to lose. It is the manner in which you play the game which gives the promise of success to come. It is a great pleasure to see how youngsters are being drafted into the national team. Our team is united; it affects all the races and religions of our country. Cricket, like all international sport today, is highly competitive; and so it must be, and so it must remain. It must always be regarded as a very high honour to represent one's country at any sport. All of you are role models for our youth. They will be looking to see how you take defeat. To exult in victory is easy; to remain well balanced in defeat is a mark of maturity. Do not allow yourselves to be disturbed by the armchair critics who will no doubt engage in a display of theoretical learning on how the game was played. Many of these critics have never put bat to ball. It makes them feel good to indulge in the past time of amateur criticism. They do not know what it is to face fast bowling in fading light; to engage in a run race against daunting odds; to find the stamina and sheer physical endurance to spend concentrated hours in the field of play. They know nothing of the psychological pressure that modern sportsmen are subject to. Therefore, my advice to you is - ignore them. Go your way with customary discipline and methodical preparation for the next game, the next series in different parts of the world under different conditions. For me it has been a great pleasure and an honour to be here with you tonight. When I was invited to be the Chief Guest at this occasion on my way to New York for the General Assembly of the United Nations, I accepted with eager anticipation of meeting our cricketers and relaxing for a moment. Nobody told me that I had to make a speech, until last night when it dawned on me then that there is no such thing as a free dinner!"

SIC: Great teacher and writer

JUNAIDUL HAQUE

My friend Md. Shafiqul Islam recently wrote a wonderful piece on Prof. Serajul Islam Choudhury, the best teacher we had at the Department of English, Dhaka University. He was our favourite teacher, scholar extraordinary and perhaps the best essayist of the land. He reached the age of seventy five on June 23, 2011.

Prof. Choudhury is affectionately called SIC by his students. After reading Shafiq's article, I felt that I have a few words of myself to add. Our respect and love for him is boundless. He is the country's foremost intellectual, the best teacher we have seen and the best person we have come across during our student days. Rightfully do Prof. Fakrul Alam and Prof. Ferdous Azim, two of his most illustrious students, call him 'a leader of men and women against oppressive systems, and an activist in the cause of truth and enlightenment'. He has been the most inspirational and influential teacher of Dhaka University's Department of English in independent Bangladesh.

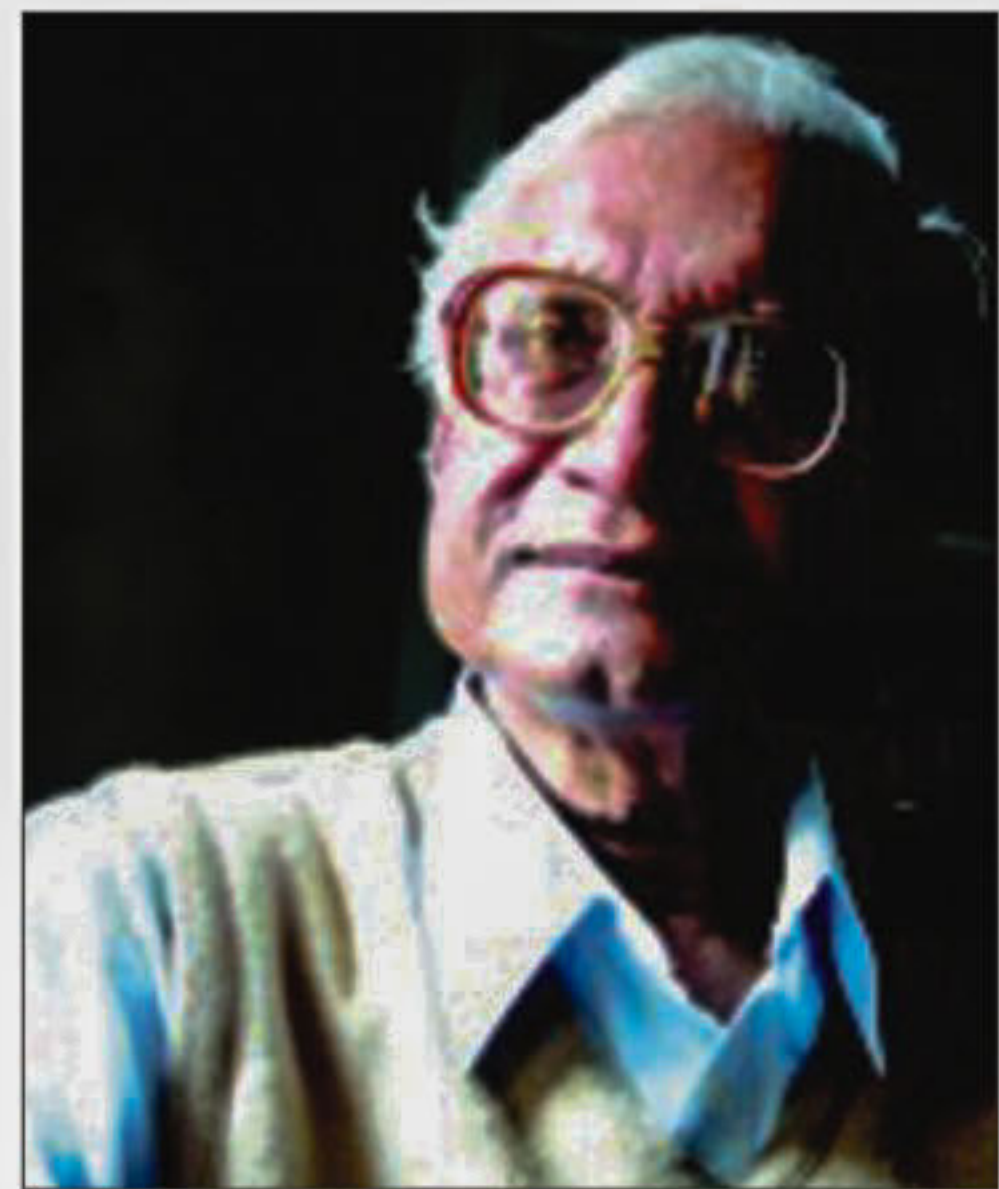
Edward Said, born, like Prof. Choudhury, in 1936, would like the men and women of learning in our time to be 'oppositional, progressive, secular and independent'. Prof. Alam interprets this as follows: "...the intellectual must not sell his conscience to a party or for power; he must, essentially, be a truth-sayer, and must resist becoming inducted into the establishment". To me it seems that both men of learning are here describing Prof. Serajul Islam Choudhury.

He was our Socrates, our Aristotle. He was the most caring and compassionate teacher to us. He taught us that Shakespeare was next to the Bible. To us he was next to an angel. He would not even look at us. He would look through the window into the distance. That was partly because of shyness. Even in the corridor he looked downwards while walking. He would not look at us and embarrass us, busy gossiping. But we never failed to identify the devoted, selfless teacher in him. He would read more than his students. I myself saw him collecting four books every day from the DU library, month after month, year after year. He read, he wrote, he taught and he edited. He was the most active teacher of his generation. We never saw him wearing costly clothes or even riding a rickshaw. In the campus he always walked. In our noblest dreams we wanted to be like him.

As a teenager I understood that loving Bangladesh was loving her nature - her majestic rivers, her green and golden paddy fields, her lovely trees and her beautiful villages. Serajul Islam Choudhury's books taught me that loving Bangladesh meant loving her people, her suffering millions. Since my boyhood I have been sort of a social democrat. It is because of Prof. Choudhury that I learned to respect Marxism and take it very seriously. His books taught my generation how to love our poor people, how to live to think about them. He is our first and foremost literary genius to interpret literature in sociological terms. He has been a very serious writer but always immensely popular, mainly because of his championing the cause of the poor and never failing to understand their feelings.

I am sad that no government seeks the services of neutral and wise patriots like him. He could guide a government to serve our people better. No government can trust him fully. A person who always speaks the truth and wants to be in the right path is not welcome in political circles. However, he is always with the people.

I remember a discussion we had with Shamsur Rahman at the poet's residence in 2002. A young writer complained to the poet, 'Junaid Bhai's guru weeps for the trees of Osmany Udyan but has no time for the oppressed minority or the repressed opposition workers'. I knew hard core Awami League or BNP supporters were not happy with him. He praised Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib and



supported the ideals for which we had fought our liberation war. How could BNP supporters like him? So only those who understood his genius liked him fully. As is my wont, I ventured to defend my favourite teacher before the young writer at the poet's residence. I could only say that SIC never tolerated injustice and repression when, to my surprise and deep satisfaction, the soft-spoken poet decided to firmly defend Prof. Choudhury himself and did it beautifully. He said that SIC was not a politician and could not call a public meeting to protest government repression. But he was doing his duty as a sincere intellectual. He was taking part in human chains, addressing Shaheed Minar meetings and signing courageous statements protesting oppression carried out by the establishment. We looked up to him and he never failed us. It was nice of him that he fought for both the people and the environment.

I was so happy that I said 'Hats off!' to my favourite poet. Our foremost poet was also a true intellectual in the Edward Said sense. His judgement was always objective. I felt proud of both my favourite poet and my favourite teacher. They have written almost nothing about each other although I am sure their admirers wanted it. So the poet's words in defence of our best anti-establishment intellectual made me very happy indeed. We remember with pride that SIC was selected to the VC panel of DU on three occasions in the past and always received the highest number of votes. But he never wanted to be the VC. I remember that in my early twenties, while going to the British Council, I would look at the VC's beautiful residence and feel sad that SIC had never had the opportunity to stay in it. We have reports that Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and Justice Latifur Rahman wanted him in their caretaker governments but he declined both the offers, although thousands like me strongly felt that he could be the best possible advisor.

SIC the essayist has no comparison. I have always been fond of his wonderful prose, which flows like the waters of a serene river. He has explored our history, our culture, our politics, our society and our literature with matchless insight, imagination and erudition. Once I asked a twenty-one-year-old to read his 'Amar Pitar Mukh'. The boy reported to me a few days later, 'Sir, I was moved to tears.' SIC has been our first scholarly essayist who could move people of several generations to tears.

I have written elsewhere that as a young man whenever I saw SIC, either in the English Department corridor or anywhere else in the campus, I kept gazing at him till he was no longer visible. If I had a companion, I stopped talking to him or her to look at him. I told you before that our admiration for this very simple, grey-haired gentleman knew no bounds.

JUNAIDUL HAQUE WRITES FICTION AND ESSAYS.

FICTION

A meal at a Chinese restaurant

LATIFUL QUADER

After the marriage they continued with their own way of growing. In the process, Nirmal caused a series of earth shattering disappointments to Krishna as far as her worldly aspirations were concerned. His apparent pliability was an illusion, it turned out.

In 1971, while they were in shelter with Krishna's relatives in Kolkata, it was expected all round that he should focus on looking for a secured occupation in India, while his Indian passport was being 'organised' by her relatives. Nirmal took up a service with the government in exile, instead; and then came back to a government job at the secretariat under the new government in Bangladesh. Krishna had mind to stay behind, but their first born Kobita was only months old at the time, so she and the baby joined him, after months of soul searching. But when the government granted Nirmal's request to post him to the college at Boro-digha, Krishna refused to budge and took up a job herself. In the post-independence chapter of their lives, Krishna got an MA, obtained a diploma from the then Soviet Union on a government stipend and returned to a lucrative job. On the side show: Nirmal played an upper hand with his connection at the Education ministry to provincialize the college which went to include further faculties and post graduate studies. Sobita and Ovi came along that filled Krishna's life, which she took as compensation for a flopped marriage. When she entrusted Nirmal with a fund that she had inherited to buy a residential plot at the outskirts of Kolkata, Nirmal took it as a challenge. After the buy he bought a harmo-

nium with the spare change. The harmonium proved to be useful, after the discovery that, the 'residential plot' was an agrarian terrestrial for which he paid almost twice the normal price. Not because he wanted to forget his proven ineptness, through music; but because a sense of isolation crept in him when he was accused of being on Krishna's way as she planned to settle in India. Krishna resigned to the fact that her migration was postponed, but remained on the lookout for opportunities.

About two months later of Hashikul's visit, this is end August. Nirmal-babu has submitted his tax return form. Niladri has received the letter from the North USA University Award Accreditation Board that they have granted him scholarship with full tuition fee and expenses for the duration of his Ph D with the provision for spouse allowances. Krishna's has now just 5 years of active service life left. Canadian embassy has granted two years student's visa to Lytton and his friends.

Hashikul arrange to feast three thousand people of Boro-digha who have been invited by announcement through the microphones of the two mosques. The three or four times announcement a day aired that MM Hashikul Islam's eldest son, Mohammad Mizanur Rahman Lytton, after completing his HSC from Queen Mary Pilot College with distinctions has been awarded a scholarship by the Canadian Government to go to Canada for higher studies. Will everybody kindly attend the feast and bless the young man who wishes to come back after his studies to serve the country.

Many come, including the consultant's

Advisor and his friends for whom a microbus has been hired and paid for by Hashikul. Wide canopy and chairs are hired while all day long the microphone plays aloud Hindi songs and Rabindra-sangeets at random order. Local dignitaries come and go. Lytton wears the suit that he would be wearing in the plane. His suitcases and other knick knacks that he would take with him are on display inside the house for close relatives to appreciate. Even the book, (Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austin) is placed neatly on top of the suitcase. This, he would be seen to be reading in the plane and holding in his hand during his entrance thorough immigration counter at Toronto airport.

The Advisor is handed the microphone who delivered a short speech to those who were present on the benefit of foreign education. Many shake his hand; take his picture and business cards. Others take their pictures with Lytton. A hired video camera man frames the entire event. Newspaper men are all smuggled an envelope each in their trouser pockets as they board on the micro-buses back to Dhaka. Word goes round that the Lytton would be on the print news the next day.

Hashikul has a big packet full of foods organised for Nirmal-babu's family that he send in one of the micro bus to be delivered to his house.

The next day, Niladri comes to see the family with a large size packet of Cadbury's Milk Tray. Avita, Krishna and Niladri sit in the veranda in cane chairs and discuss things that are all promising, going well and working out. Sharodia Puja is ensuing, Sourov Ganguly is sure to be included in the Indian Team and

Dhoom 2 has been released.

Hashikul arrives unannounced, with a mixture of pride, joy and relief on his face. He has a gaudy bag in his hand. He is introduced with Niladri. After Lytton leaves for Canada can they all have a Chinese together (meaning the 'Hashikuls' and the 'Nirmals')? Krishna looks awed at the prospect, but agrees with the hopes that the enthusiasm will die away. Will they go to the same restaurant that they went the other day? The alarm rings in Avita and Krishna's mind. Is the sucker unwittingly letting the cat out of the bag? They exchanged glare and changed the subject. Niladri wants to know how he knows about it.

Nirmal-babu joins them at this point. Hashikul pass over the bag to Nirmal-babu. Inside it there are two takeaway containers.

"Please taste if this is the right stuff", he fleetingly looks at all present. "I have checked with detail that you gave with the owner. I think this should be the thing you were looking for".

He is in hurry and leaves. Nirmal-babu goes to the kitchen with the containers. Avita and Krishna stay with Niladri, and continues as before, as if they are sorry for the side show. A slightly perturbed Avita remains with her charm on the façade while trying to read through the tad of smile on Niladri's face.

"This is the rice, look." Nirmal-babu returns from the kitchen a minute later. There is a sense of euphoria in his voice, the half-opened container in his hands, and hint of a gobble on his lips and moustache.

Krishna and Avita react with silence borderline shock. Niladri looks mystified. Avita feels

the heat around her ears. She thinks that probably these are times to pray to mother earth to open up. It took some time for Nirmal-babu to realise that his discovery doesn't bring joy in the same magnitude as his, rather it has caused no end of discomfiture to his wife and daughter for a very silly reason. After finishing the tea Niladri leaves.

When Avita had rung and called of the wedding, Niladri sounded calmly shocked. Then he mustered the metier to ask the reason, she told him that she thought their union would not work; she was talking from experience. She considered her father a misfit in the circles Niladri moved around and he would cause him embarrassments. That would be painful for her to bear. She was also not honest with Niladri about her father's idiosyncrasies. In fact, she tutored him to pretend that he is used to eat out. Niladri should have no problem finding someone more befitting with his social standing. Avita switched off the phone only to answer the prompt call back by Niladri.

Niladri went on to tell her that he knew about her father's way. Would Avita remember when she went talk to a friend who happened to be also dining in the restaurant, and were sat few tables away, leaving them two alone? Nirmal-babu had confided to him then that, he had never been to a Chinese restaurant before, or in any restaurant as posh as that one. That he would eventually find Avita to be a simple and honest girl after she discovered herself away from her mother's clutches. Niladri said that since then he felt real love for Avita. Ant it was all that mattered to him.

It was all news to Avita. (Concluded)