Eight People Eight Stories One Line

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In 2009 I moved to Dhaka for a spell and brought my young son with me. He was enrolled at the American school and whenever I would go to drop him off or pick him up, we would pass the American Embassy, and I would see the line of people waiting outside to be let in for various reasons.



Though most wait inside now, I know some of those patiently standing in the relentless heat and dust wanted visas to enter the US. When I was stuck in traffic, which was often, I would try and catch a glimpse of some of the faces in that line. If I did, I almost automatically made them the protagonist of a story-never fully thought through—but I knew they had a story, and enough need, endeavour and ambition to put up with what most have described as a humiliating dog and pony show.

Forget the anthropological, sociological, geo-political implications of what it means for a brown person to go begging to be let into America, for me, my imaginings became more about the human spirit. Those on the line's entre, more often than not, was arbitrated by the whims of a sullen, white person, who was nobody back in Duluth, Minnesota, or wherever they were from, but was now rendered a demi-god of sorts, trained to wheedle out the "undesirables" and unlock the gates (or not) to the Promise Land. But there was more to this. What brought someone to exactly at this moment, and place? What choices, decisions, joys, tragedies or desperation? What was behind that smile or stoic demeanour? It was the beginning of a journey, epic or small, that brought them to stand on that line.

That line started to take on new meaning for me. It became the invisible line that separates people by colour, class, accidents of birth, circumstance and religion. The wall around the American Embassy reminds me of the wall around the Forbidden City in Beijing; high, red brick, and impenetrable—a fortress. How can a brilliant student from a humble family in Chuadanga, who wants to continue to learn, or a teenage bride, whose husband left three days after the wedding to go back to Jackson Heights, Queens, negotiate or scale that wall?

I started formulating an idea on how to bring these stories to life. I wanted to show the richness, diversity and yet universality of human endeavour, the instinctive need for something better, movement, migration and thus progress, evolution. I thought theatre was the perfect