The Changing Face of Bangladesh

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I was on my way to Sylhet. The gentleman sitting opposite my seat was quiet. Occasionally he lifted his head from his Tagore to take in the pastoral panorama speeding by. He sported short hair and was rather immaculately dressed for a train journey. At one point he ordered a cup of tea, which the bearer served rather shabbily, spilling much of it on the saucer in the moving InterCity.

The man smiled, but said in a sombre voice to the bearer, 'You are from my father's profession. You must do better than this'.

Intrigued by this incident, I introduced myself to the fellow traveller. We shook hands and exchanged pleasantries. What did he do for a living, I queried. 'I am in the army', he replied demurely. His father rose to be the head waiter of a college mess, he explained seeing my interest in the dialogue he had with the bearer.

As he readied to get off, he opened his bag to tuck in his book. There I saw the uniform of a full Colonel. Mentally I stood up to salute the father.

She was alone in the lift. As she pressed the button for her desired floor, a degree of great sadness overtook her. This was her father's lift. This was his station for twenty-eight years before he was taken away by cancer. He was a great dad. He brought her little things from work; a *singara* wrapped in a scrap of newspaper, sometimes a soggy jilapi.

At one point, the lift stopped at an in-between floor. Her teacher and two other students got in. I hope you are bringing in your lab report now, asked the teacher of her. *Jee sir*, she said almost quietly. The daughter of a liftman, she is today pursuing an engineering degree at one of the highest institutions in the country.

Two medical students were his passengers. His shirt was all sweaty; a *gamcha* around his neck brought the occasional relief as he wiped his face. The would-be doctors were engrossed in discussing a case study. They seemed to be having disagreement over an issue and were getting nowhere. At one point, the rickshaw-puller turned his head sideways towards them and suggested a solution. Right or wrong, the students were taken by surprise at the relevance of the rickshaw-puller's comment.

'How do you know all this?'

'I am training to be a medical technician, this is my second year. I am SSC pass, bhai.'

'Your father?'

'He is long gone. I live with my mom at a slum in Shyamoli, near the embankment. She works *choota* in the houses near our home.'

As the boys alighted at the house of one, they offered the puller a hundred Taka note.

'I will take the forty agreed upon; my mom's instruction,' said he. 'Pray that I can move with my mom into a house like this.'

They nodded their respect.

'If we meet again, let me know if I was right with the solution,' they heard him shout as he pedalled away to get his next passenger and a few more steps closer to his dream.

The lady of the house was leaving the small tailoring shop in Lalmatia. At one point she turned back and called her driver to bring a packet of sweets from the car. Handing it over to the humble tailor in that six-feet by eight-feet shop, she beamed, 'Here, this is from my daughter. She got GPA-5'.

'Madam, you have shamed me. I should have offered you first, for today you also get a packet from me,' smiled the sexagenarian as he ran his fingers through his tousled grey hair. He then retrieved a smaller box of sweets from the depth of his shelf. 'Today her BCS results came out. She is finally through.'

For a few moments the lady stood before the father of a future government officer.

While the rest of us are busy going on about our daily chores and wondering, almost betting, when the next hartal is coming and from where and for what and for who, a streak of gold is glittering in the sky heralding that the future bodes well for our people.

A silent revolution is taking shape. This is because of the hard work of a generation that believed in available opportunities, however minimal, without wasting time on bickering about the lack of them.

They had a vision. They believed in the dignity of their labour. The merit, sincerity, and perseverance of their children were their motivation. They pursued the rainbow. They were rewarded with the pot of gold.

These parents (and there are hundreds, perhaps thousands of them), who sacrificing aplenty, living on the border of poverty, and denied of even the simple leisure of life, focussed on a single agenda: truly educating their children. The rest became a new beginning.

At one point, you can make a move to force the change.

(Characters bear resemblance to actual persons, but the stories are concocted)