

## EDITOR'S NOTE

In commemoration of the Bangladesh Independence Day on 26<sup>th</sup> March, today's SLR starts with a poetic salute to our past; moves on to a proclamation of love for our present; and ends the poetic trail with an optimistic wish for our future. In addition, we have regular columnists Joe Treasure and Farah Ghuznavi enthraling us with their adventures down the long and winding literary road of a writer.

MUNIZ MANZUR



## This, My Land

SUFIA KAMAL

Translation: Kamaluddin A. Khan

Not gold, not silver, not pearl, *neelam* it is not.  
Like the blood-red heart, as soft  
and noble – is this earth of my land!  
In exchange for an unending stream of life – fresh  
and lively, unpurchasable by silver or gold –  
it has achieved liberation!

It has come to life again after crossing a sea of blood  
and become so close, so intimate, so inseparable from our  
existence.

The brave sons have given their lives,  
the daughters their honour and blood.  
Mothers have thrown away the pearls of their hearts.  
With speechless tongue and tearless eyes  
have they seen their children slain.

They have seen, too,  
their daughters nudged in sport.  
The bayoneted husband dying,  
has seen before his weary eyes,  
hands and feet bound,  
his wife tortured and dishonoured.

In spite of all that and everything else  
that the most wretched of the kafirs could imagine  
Bangladesh has come to its own,  
free from stint and guilt.

Holding in the fold of its crust millions of its loved ones  
it waited during the long, cold, winter nights  
to rise again in the fresh morning air.

In the glory of morning sunshine  
it has now raised its head,  
proclaiming: "The martyr's blood is never shed in vain!"  
The bereaved mothers, sisters, widows  
are today held in high esteem.

Out of the blue-black mud of sorrow  
the glorious lotus has come forth  
and bloomed in the morning air.

O my mother, my sister and little maid,  
who have suffered the evil touch of the debauch,  
the nation kisses you in respect.

Truly chaste are you.

Is there on earth a scale to weigh your worth?  
Every trifle particle of dust, honoured by your touch,  
shall glitter like the peacock's feather  
under the sun rays of Bangladesh.  
The world today is amazed by your glory.

No diamond, pearl, gold or silver  
Is comparable in aught  
To the dust of my Bangladesh!

## Mind Without Fear

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;  
Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up  
into fragments by narrow domestic walls;  
Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason  
has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening  
thought and action---  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

## Q&A WITH FARAH GHUZNAVI: The Writer's Wilderness Survival Kit

QTN: What are the qualities an aspiring writer should have?

ANS: I suspect that the qualities useful to an aspiring writer are very similar to those considered desirable in a writer who is already successful. Namely, the personality traits that are useful to a writer in the early stages of his or her writing journey are likely to be just as useful to the same writer further down the line.

Of course, the list of desirable qualities is likely to be as varied as the number of successful writers out there. There is no "one size fits all" approach, and it's hard, if not downright impossible, to come up with a surefire recipe for success. Indeed, it is somewhat like the famous quote from Somerset Maugham, on the subject of the novel: "There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are!"

But it is probably true to say that some attitudes are more likely to lead to a positive outcome than others. For example, there is no getting away from the fact that writing requires a certain amount of discipline. Having said that, I don't belong to the school of thought which says that writing is like any other profession. There are those who believe that if you

are an architect or a bricklayer, your job is to show up and do the work every day, and the same is true if you are a writer. I feel that where creative pursuits are concerned, it's rarely that simple. As an architect or a bricklayer you can follow a certain set of steps to a certain outcome. As a writer, you may attempt a similar series of actions, but the outcomes are rarely guaranteed. In fact, I think it is true to say that there is something inherent in the creative process that does not lend itself easily to guaranteed outcomes. Nevertheless, hard work is an unavoidable part of a productive writing life.

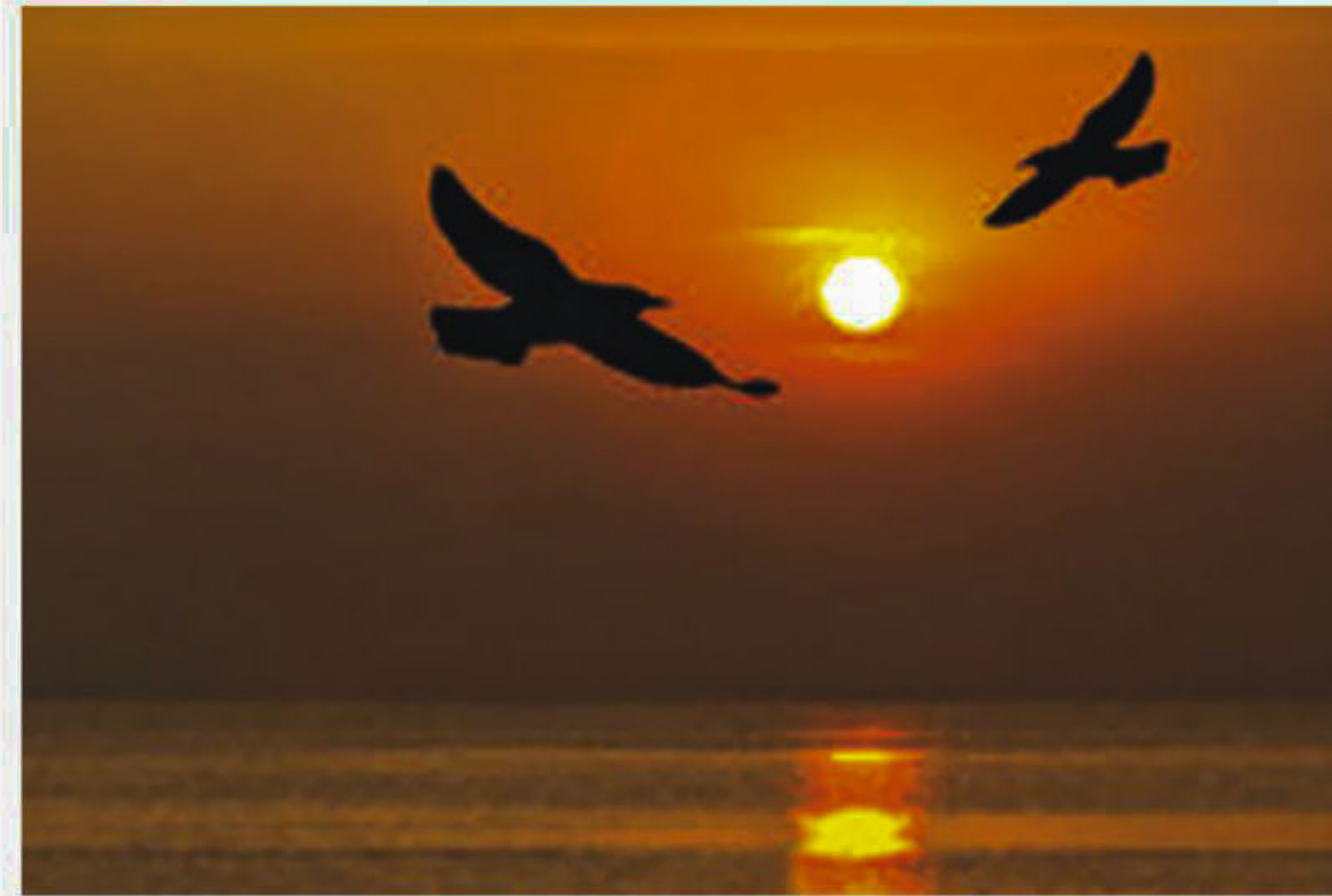
Now to a second consideration. Some degree of talent is undoubtedly required to become a good writer. However, talent by itself should be considered a necessary but not sufficient precondition for success. A natural gift for writing needs to be harnessed and developed through the discipline of regular writing, and the continuous process of improvement that takes place through revising and re-writing (un glamorous as that may sound!) In my experience, writing a good story requires more re-writing than any sane individual is willing to commit to. But for

I have just finished the draft of a novel. I shall ask a couple of people to read it – a fellow novelist with whom I've swapped work since we were both beginning our first books ten years ago, and a nonfiction writer I can trust to be honest about her response. Meanwhile I'm making my own list of improvements and corrections. Whatever these two readers say, I don't expect to make radical changes at this late stage – not because it's faultless, but because its minor faults won't take long to fix and its major faults are probably written into its DNA. Right now I happen to think it's the best thing I've ever written, but I'd be a peculiar kind of writer if I didn't think that. Realistically, if I've allowed it to become its best self, that's as much as I can hope for.

My simple ambition for this book was to tell a story. That isn't as obvious as it might seem – novels arise from many different impulses. Fulfilling that ambition meant first discovering what story was struggling to emerge, then preventing my own bad habits and insecurities from getting in the way. Trying too hard can be as much of a problem as laziness. The easy slide into cliché is one danger, but the desperate tap-dance to avoid cliché can be just as derailing. The dangers are different for different writers. Here's my personal list. (1) False climaxes and other moments of cranked-up drama. These often emerge from a fear of not sufficiently exciting the reader's interest. (2) Comic twists and amusing bits of dialogue that don't lead

anywhere. However funny, jokes are too costly if they reduce the tension, soften the focus, or weaken the reader's sense of a character. (3) Writing that draws too much attention to itself. One of the reasons I like using a first-person voice is that, at every point, it simplifies the question of what to describe and how, because the answer is governed by the personality and mood of the narrator. (4) Explanations either of plot or motivation. I recently heard a journalist say, 'in politics, if you're explaining you're losing'. I think the same is true in my line of work. If you don't understand why my character is making an unexpected decision to complicate his life, a paragraph of convoluted psychological analysis isn't going to help. (5) More plot than the story needs. Though my American writer friend (mentioned here before) thinks we should liberate ourselves altogether from the mechanisms of plot, I still like the frame a plot provides. But it should be just enough to the carry the story's weight, or the book will be all head and no heart. Of course, these are the faults I've been conscious of trying to avoid. What about the ones I haven't even thought of that I'll find in this book when it's already too late? I suppose they'll just have to provide the impetus for my next one.

Joe Treasure is the author of two novels and teaches creative writing at Royal Holloway, University of London.



## I Sing of Heroes

KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM

Translation: Abdul Hakim

I sing of Heroes -

The youth, the revolutionary,  
Who, armed with a sharp Excalibur  
Today go forth in all directions  
With valiant steps and steady  
Upon a campaign for the impossible,  
The Egyptian Pyramids of Antiquity,  
Stand as a chronicle of such campaign,  
Heroes whose mere breath  
doth drive away into oblivion  
The dead leaves of moth-eaten scriptures  
Who hew down the haunts and  
temples of false gods.

And the time-honoured ale-house  
Of the grand hypocrite

In the person of a reputed Moralist;  
Whose mighty streams of ideal reform  
Swept away the long-standing nuisance  
The awful and heavy stocks and stones of customs,  
The old fossils of dead scriptures.

Those who came fearlessly  
To the temple of the unreal  
Armed with the stout relentless club,  
To break the bondage of 'Maya'  
And did with undaunted courage  
Strike, by means of mighty hammer  
The Chinese walls of superstition.  
Those who ploughed the Burial Ground  
And pushed away the dead bones  
To layout a garden of blooming flowers,  
Who now crowd the seashore of life,  
As 'Cynosure of neighbouring eyes'.  
I sing of Heroes.

Who today march forward  
Upon the path of life in tune, with the world  
-- At dead of night the other day  
A passenger who, all alone,  
launched his boat

On the dangerous Deep,  
Did not return to the shore next morning.  
In memory of that fearless adventurer  
I shed my tears and write an Elegy  
Even today in the stillness of Night  
Even today I keep sleepless all night  
And sing a song of welcome to him  
He who did not return on the morrow  
Did indeed take an aerial journey over night,  
As a traveller of infinite space  
In search of a far-off New World.

The eternal Sentinel at the gate of Death  
Trembles in fear of him,  
And keeps ever-wakeful vigils.  
Those who under the mighty impulse of life  
Pursue Death ceaselessly  
In the depths of the ocean,  
In the boundless sky,

And all over the surface of the Globe,  
Those who go down into the Hades  
And despoil the palace of Yakshas  
of its rare gems,  
Who disregarding the bite of the  
terrible cobra

Steal the jewel from its head,  
Who have controlled the thunder of Bajrapani,  
And made the proud lightning,  
Daughter of the clouds,  
A captive and a maid -  
I have come to salute and sing

Of those who are attended by the wind  
As an obedient servant  
Refreshing them with its balmy breath -  
My wailings and lamentations fill all the air for those  
Who mount the Scaffold  
And the Scaffold itself is tired now  
Of hanging them.

And in whose prison,  
Behold, the fair Dawn held in fetters  
Doth wake up and smile  
A flowery smile!

## SLR WRITING COMPETITION

Aspiring writers are invited to send in a **short story or poem** that must contain the number **"twenty-two"** in some form or manner.

You must be over **18 years old.**

Only **ONE** entry per person.

**WORD LIMIT**  
**500 words**

**DEADLINE**  
**10th April**

Winning entries will be printed in the SLR page. Attach your story as a .doc with the email subject line: "Third SLR Competition". Send your entries to DSLitEditor@gmail.com.