

SPOTLIGHT | FROM A FADING ERA

Modern technology has bulldozed over many age-long practices and professions. Fortunately, a few still survive to tell the tales of days gone by. Those who are nostalgic about the olden days can seek out these rare services and reminisce about a very different, fast disappearing culture.

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The Typist

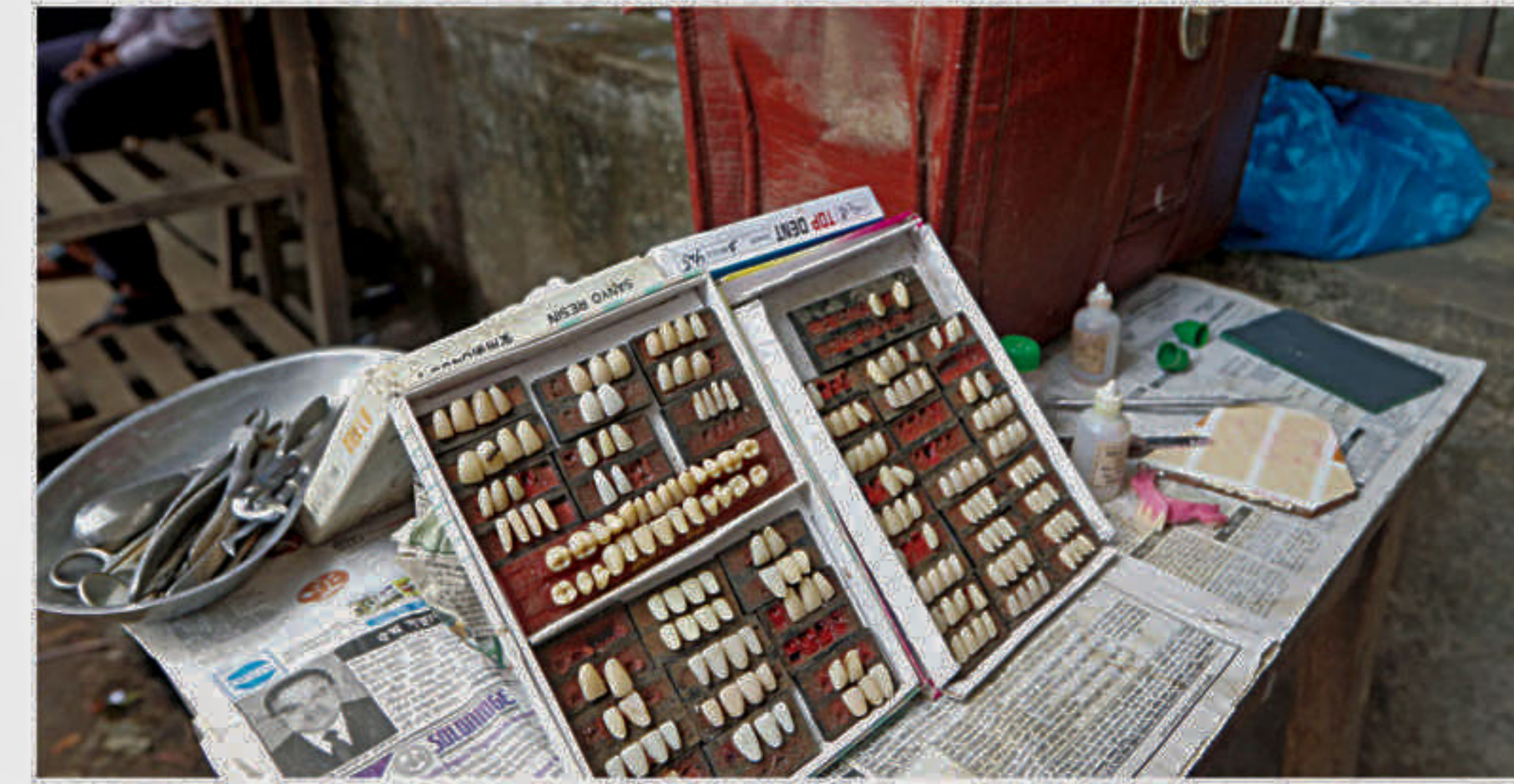
Amid a sea of broken chairs and wobbly tables, nearly hundreds of typewriters and newly added personal computers are buzzing with the sound of typing. On a humid afternoon outside the Dhaka Magistrate court Abdul Gaffer, 65-year-old typist slides a sheet of paper into his decade-old typewriter. Every day, he types around 70 to 80 pages and when his fingers are moving on the keyboard, it seems like he is performing a tap dance routine.

These days it is difficult to find new machines, since the typewriter companies are shutting down all over the world. But interestingly, the

culture remains alive here in Bangladesh. "I know computers can perform more efficiently than manual machines, but I am used to it," he says.

"Going forward" is the only writing system when using a typewriter. It is a huge problem, but for Gaffer it is a way of showing efficiency, "You cannot go back and delete anything if you make a mistake. So it requires concentration and efficiency to do the job properly."

In the last forty years the only enemies he faced in this business are the monkeys of Shakhari Bazar. He says, "The monkeys steal the affidavits and papers from my office. And I believe they are the only enemies I have."



Street Dentist

No clinic, no medical chair and equipment can be seen here, in fact, a patient can see a street dentist in Old Dhaka without an appointment. Habibur Rahman, a self-proclaimed 67-year-old street dentist begins his day with just a rusty toolbox. Every day, he performs complicated dental procedures on patients with limited and medieval equipment. It is a risky job and he knows it, however he claims he is providing a little support to the poor who cannot afford dental care.

Interestingly, he also sells human teeth to dental students. So he firmly believes it is a noble job that he is performing for the last forty years. He was his grandfather's protégé, "He was a master in this profession. And he taught me all the secrets of teeth."

However, with the advent of modern technology, his business is declining. He says, "A few years ago, I had 20 patients a day. Now it is three to four a week." He claims he doesn't do complex procedures and only focuses on tooth extraction and selling teeth.

"I am the only one doing this business in old Dhaka. I don't think anyone will take it up seriously after me," he concludes.



The Coin Bazaar

Md Aslam, a rare coin and stamp seller at Gulistan, claims that some school goers still come to him to buy coins. For that reason, whenever he comes to know about a rare coin, he rushes to purchase it.

Aslam, and 12 others sitting on the footpath of Gulistan market, collect these coins from different districts of the country. Usually, people come to sell old-coins in Gulistan. Depending on the coin's age, the seller decides the price.

Besides coins and stamps, an enthusiastic collector can also find new Taka notes here. According to Aslam, they are providing a public service. "Many people don't know what to do with a torn note. They don't know Bangladesh Bank's procedure of exchanging torn notes with a new one. So we help them change it."

Every day, they earn around 400 to 600 Takas. Aslam strongly believes that this is a kind of service that is never going to die out.



The King's Carriage

Can you imagine a city full of horse driven carriages? Probably not, however, only 100 years ago it was the only means of transportation in Dhaka city. Even 40 or 50 years ago these carts were visible on all the main roads of Dhaka. Now, it is only available in Old Town.

Believe it or not, the East India Company got the permission to do business in South Asia by presenting a gift of 16 horse driven carriages to Emperor Shahjahan. Once famous for its elite appearance, the number of horse-driven carriages is now declining slowly with the advent of the modern vehicles. Coach man Sayeed says, "It is still popular. Though our route is now confined to Gulistan to Sadarghat, we earn a good amount of money to survive."

"Sultan" and "Badsha" his two 12-year old horses run in the city from early morning till late into the night. Sayeed has two other helpers to run his carriage properly. Moreover, Sayeed loves this job and his horses. "When I was a child I always wanted to be a horse-rider like film stars, and now I have two horses," Sayeed says with a big smile.