



LIFE'S LYRICS

ROUNDING UP 2016

NASHID KAMAL

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Considering the difficult times that Bangladesh has faced this year, the cultural scene has not fared so badly. If 2015 deserved an A plus, 2016 could do with an A minus, in spite of the violent spate that shook our lives.

The Nazrul Mela, first of its kind in Bangladesh was organized by the Nazrul Shongheet Shilpi Porishod. As the convenor of the BRAC Bank Nazrul Mela, I took a deep resolve, that no matter what life must continue and if we are the followers of Nazrul, we have to prove it. As the sponsors stood by their commitment, we saw Nazrul artists from 61 districts of Bangladesh, finding a platform in the Bangla Academy premises from the 29th to 31st October 2016. The security threat did not impede anyone, the rain and hail at the odd time of the year spoilt some of the outdoor activities.

Next came the Lit Fest where foreign delegates dared to take the risk of coming to participate. V S Naipaul stole the limelight, his gesture to visit the 'Lit fest' during such dark hours has really brightened up the scene. I enjoyed poetry sessions by Pakistani poet Fatema Hassan whose feminist finale speaking of being respected as a person (not as a woman) spoke of the universal desire of women. It was followed by two young poets Shehzar Doja from Bangladesh and Syeda Ahmed from NY who spoke about the terrorist attacks in her poems and other IS attacks affecting the entire world and lives therein. The highlight of the festival for me was a documentary screened in the 'Cosmic Tent'. It was titled the 'Saints of sin' by Aniruddho Sen. The documentary revealed the personal stories of five ladies in various situations in life. A Professor from India spoke about the role of men verses women in the ancient mythology as each story unfolded and was punctuated with songs by Anusheh Anadil and Palki, Armeen Musa, her band ghashphoring and lastly a Tagore song by me, 'shokhi bhabona kahare bole'... superimposed on a young woman who used to be a man earlier. The topics were taboo and the innermost discussions coming from the mouth of the actual persons added a new dimension to philosophy, sociology, human psychology and other dimensions that make up our mental and physical world. It was also an example of great collaborative work between India and Bangladesh. A local *baul* stole my heart, I missed his name.

Folk festival featured next with Kailash Kher lipsing to the music and hoping the audience won't understand. Sushila Raman, Paban Das Baul and some others like the Noorayn sisters stole the hearts of the audience. Some of the items, maynot be termed folk but added glory to the festival. The local bhawayya and bhatiali were missed throughout the event, so were the folk stalwarts of Bangladesh.

Next came the Bengal classical music festival. The first night was mesmerizing with octogenarian Girija Devi singing 'Sudh Kalyan'. However because I was not present in Dhaka, my review is only what I heard from other friends. Sangeet Martand Pandit Jasraj has created a new style of singing termed 'Jasrangi' a combination of vocal classical by one male and another female. The scales change and the two of them sing two different ragas in two different yet matching scales during the same time period. I heard that Sanjeev Abhyankar excelled in the Jasrangi style and the Carnatic sisters Ranjani and Gayatri were a favourite of the audience.

Once again the Bangladeshis have proved that they are invincible in every way. When poet Kazi Nazrul Islam was imprisoned for some of his writings, he had written in his famous 'Rajbondir jobanbondi' that what he writes is like the tune emerging from the flute of God. If you snatch the flute, music doesn't stop. God continues to play Bangladesh continues to strive...

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The author is an Academic, Nazrul exponent and translator

A LIFE LESS ORDINARY!

The Sporting Days!

ALY ZAKER

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I had no opportunity of having any formal introduction to organized games before I came to Dhaka. We used to indulge in indigenous games evolved by our elders when we were children. Those used to be confined within the courtyard of the East End club tent. It was not until my teens that I became interested in football or cricket. Football or what is more usually called soccer today, thanks to Americanization of the English language, meant kicking a round something and bringing it close to an opening agreed upon to be a goal post. The round or semi-round object for kicking needn't be a football. It could be anything. A Jambura, the Deshi grapefruit preferably unripe, could well be used as a football. The object we would be given to kick wouldn't deter our spirit. Soon we grew out of the Jambura and were given a used football to play with by our seniors at the East End club. This was one day in my life that I will never forget. We got the football on a Sunday morning. During those days Sundays, like anywhere else in the world, used to be considered the week end. I remember having kicked, carried and dribbled the football through the morning until it was well past mid-day when I remembered that I had to join the family for lunch. After lunch it was compulsory to take to bed. But today was quite another day. I tip toed out of the bed room when Maa was asleep and hit the ground again. My seriousness with the game was so profound that I played the game even in my dreams. Once it so happened that I dreamt I was right in front of the goal posts with the football with only the Goalkeeper at my mercy. I distinctly remember his begging eyes. As if he was trying to say 'please have mercy on me'. Well I did not care. There was the post with the lone custodian. So I took an aim and kicked the ball as hard as I could. What followed was hell. In my sleep I kicked the wall by the bed so hard that I nearly broke a couple of my toes.

All this assiduousness could not take me very far in football. I was born an eleven-pound baby and never looked back. In our childhood our parents did not believe in austere feeding of children. So, I grew big. The bulk intimidated with fast paced sports. I became more apt in sports that needed strength or not so much of running about. Cricket, therefore, became my favorite sports. In the annual sports at school level I excelled in Shot-put and Discuss throwing. But my heart went in for cricket from my teens. I started as a batsman and wicket keeper and opened the innings for the East End club which had a cricket team playing first division cricket. My senior partner as the opening batter was Syed Hasan Imam, subsequently the famous actor. Perhaps very few people know that Hasan Bhai who migrated from Calcutta in the fifties represented the West Bengal

cricket team. The two of us exchange lot of pleasant cricketing memories even to this day whenever we meet socially. Despite my love for cricket, the game that people really adored was football for obvious reasons. Firstly, football was a less complicated game. Secondly, the longer version of cricket could not hold attention of the people for long, remember the T20s or 50 over matches were still not known. Thirdly, the game, then played only in clean white clothes must have created an awe in the minds of the ordinary people. Besides, the gadgets and gears of the game cost a fortune. But most of all, very few Bangalis excelled in cricket nationally. Whereas in football quite a few of them got invited to be included in the Pakistan team. So, patriotic factor, naturally, played an important factor in determining the popularity of the game. Our own East End club of Ganderia had quite a good football team then. It had a prominent position in the first division league table. On the afternoons of our game we used to line up at the club tent to be marched to the Dhaka stadium or the grounds around it to witness the game. It was a three kilometer walk that we gladly undertook. Our home grown players like

Siraj Ahmed or Muhammad Idris made it to the East Pakistan team. And we were mighty proud of them. The famous Zakaria Pintu who later became the captain of the MuktiJoddha football team during our war of independence broke in to the Dhaka football circuit by playing in the East End Club. Dhaka Mohammedan Sporting club then was the most popular team followed by the Wanderers. But for us East End was the greatest. I distinctly remember that the top teams of Dhaka had already

started importing players from the Makran coast of West Pakistan. Some good ones were Kala Gafur, Omar, Abid, Gafur Baluch and Hasan Killer. They created awe for us the children. But then seeing our own Siraj bhai dribbling past them gave us immense pleasure.

I was last active on the cricket ground while in the Dhaka University representing the department of Sociology and did fairly well. Much after that when fitness fad became a life style statement I started on relatively strenuous kind of physical activities. Brisk walking and running became a daily chore. This is the time when I rediscovered that bi-cycling could be a fun sport. Dhaka had not grown this outrageous in terms of traffic and I was able to ride the cycle from my home at Bailey road to the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar merrily. I think time has come to give a gaming pause now. I would fall back on my memory of the gaming days as and when it becomes pertinent while writing this memoir.

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The author is an actor, director & writer These are excerpts from Aly Zaker's upcoming biography, exclusively for the readers of Star Showbiz.

