

FAREWELL TO GANDERIA!

ALY ZAKER

(Readers, sorry for the pause. So my journey through life re-starts. I promise to continue for as long as I can.)

Life in Ganderia was most engaging and colourful. I had developed friendship with a number of local kids of my age. And there was no dearth of juvenile pranks. We used to play all kinds of games. I was particularly good in cricket as has been told before. But with the untimely deaths of Baba, Maa and Didi the three of us, Bhaia, Jhunu and I became restive. Add to it, some of our relatives and friends kept saying that there must be something wrong with our home. So we locked the house and left for a small rented apartment in Maghbazar. Such was our distress that we failed to register the impact of this leaving our abode of over a decade. So there was not saying a formal farewell to my home. But news does get around. The day before we were supposed to leave Salahuddin and Wasek came to see me and muttered just one word, "Jabiga"? This, I am afraid,

cannot be translated. I would therefore try to fall back on my inadequate adaptation capability and say that perhaps the closest one could get is "So you are leaving?" This one simple word was loaded with so much of emotion that I broke down in tears. And what a torrent it was!

After that I went back to Ganderia on occasional visits every now and then and was pained to have found that my most loving abode was fast dissipating in to an urban slum. One of those days I woke up very early and went back to Ganderia to go around the places where I frequented with my local friends: The quaint little railway station with black cinder-spread platform and the flaming Krishnachura trees. In summer the Krishnachura flowers created a riot of colours. I sat on the wooden benches for a while and ruminated. There were so many memories of



my childhood and adolescence entwined with places like this. The tank of Jatin Das close by. The antiquated house of Dinanath Sen, The Ganderia High School and, of course, right across the railway track the lush green paddy fields and vegetable patches. I was full of

remorse having to leave this area but our home was too painful for the present. So I closed the book and stashed it away to revisit at some later period of my life. And now the locality has become unrecognisably ugly. What is more, as the time advanced, most people of the locality that I was friendly with, were lost to the vagaries of time. They were either dead or, like us, left Ganderia.

I was seldom at ease with Maghbazar, where we had made our new home. Firstly, the area seemed alien and devoid of friends that I had grown up with and

secondly, this was an area that had very little or no character. I now know that I should not have complained. For, the whole city of Dhaka has become devoid of character. Well, my complaints are not unfounded. The cities of New York or Paris have a distinct character. But Dhaka had another story. Today there are no traces of the famous Dhakaiya culture anywhere. In fact the Dhakaiyas are a rare commodity here in this city. The late Sayeed Ahmed our most dear playwright Sayeed bhai used to lament about this in our nightly addas. He came from the famous family of Kader Sarder of Ashek lane off Islampur and missed it dearly. Sayeed bhai was full of Dhakaiya antics. We used to have hilarious sessions discussing the fabulous time we had in old Dhaka.

On arriving at Maghbazar, the initial days went in bringing the disarrayed mind to order. Then, as if in a dream, I was reminded about my primary tasks; studies, by my parents and Didi.

They left me in a lurch so early in life.

An Eternity in One Night

ARTS GAZE BY LUBNA MARIUM



Theatre group Teerondaj's choice of Badal Sircar as the playwright to be presented during their agitprop event at 'Beauty Boarding', on April 28, 2017, Friday, was appropriate for two reasons. Firstly, the theatre group's anti-establishment stance, which has led to their being denied bookings at the national auditoriums, was at the crux of their decision to use alternate venues, as a mode of protest. Therefore, staging Sircar, known for defying the system through his 'Third Theatre' movement, was most apt. Also, setting up stage in the run-down, but culturally significant venue, resonated Sircar's belief that, props and costumes while used to create an illusion of reality, are superfluous; since spectators come to theatre ready to use their imagination and are prepared to accept the stage as a stage, at any cost.

Of course it was the heritage value of the boarding house, once the hub of 'adda', or intellectual exchange, within the young literary intelligentsia of the 1960s, which had drawn the audience, that night, to the premiere of Teerondaj's play, 'Shaarattir'. From our eminent Poet Laureate Syed Shamsul Haque's memoirs we learn that it was Poet Shahid Qadri who had begun the trend of patronizing this cozy little boarding house, established by the two brothers Prahlad and Nalini Shaha in the late 1940s. Their generous hospitality towards artistes, writers, filmmakers et al, soon made it a pilgrimage for the young, aspiring creative community. From 1952 to 1967, this was Syed Haque's den, in a corner of which he wrote some of his greatest pieces of literature. Haque Bhai

fondly reminisces, too, the visits of the Bengali swimmer Brojen Das, who became the first Asian to swim across the English Channel, and the effort the Shaha brothers made to arrange healthy meals for him from the nearby eatery of Gobindo's. Of greatest sorrow is the heavy price the siblings had to pay on the deadly night of March 28, 1971 when the



Pakistani Army mercilessly murdered Prahlad and seventeen other boarders.

Teerondaj did well to arrange an 'adda', before its theatrical offering, fondly titled 'When there was fire in the River'. Did the past tense mean to suggest the waning of passion in recent times? Having myself been coopted to be part of the discussion, I felt mildly frustrated at

the lack of sharpness in the dialogue. One misses the cutting-edge discourses informed by progressive politics.

The innovative use of space and the youthful fervor of 'Saarattir', did make up, though, for the disappointment. Swinging between the real and the surreal, we see a different Sircar, exploring the deeply personal emotions of a man

and his wife, seeking refuge in a seemingly abandoned mansion, on a stormy night. Challenged by the elusive and mysterious owner of the homestead, the couple is pushed into confronting their deepest desires and aversions. That one night becomes a symbol for the exploration of a life-long of yearnings, as one is reminded of Blake's timeless verse,

'To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.'

Director Deepak Sumon is to be congratulated for intelligently negotiating the available performance area, specially the use of the upstairs balcony to locate supernatural characters representing unconscious and unchallenged emotions within each person. Even if a bit jerky, as premieres sometimes are, the three main protagonists played by Sumon, himself, Nasrin Nasha and A K Azad Setu, were commendable in their roles; except, maybe, that little bit of amateur portrayal of total abandonment to 'anondo' or 'ecstasy' as desire drowns all. Throughout the play the spectator is led to question the very existence of the strange landlord. The director would have done well to engage more with this elusiveness. Clarity seemed to limit the almost impossible scope of Sircar's theatrical landscape. The music too left much to be desired. Having said that, the team's passion almost made up for whatever was lacking, as did the very ambiance of the venue.

One wonders, though, how such enactments would play out in top-notch venues like the National Auditorium. Isn't it time to rethink the need for professionalism in theatre?

To end our night out at 'Beauty Boarding', we treated ourselves to a dinner of 'shorsheilish' and 'murighonto', which I highly recommend to future patrons of the venue.

Maybe history can be relived.