

DLF DIARIES

T. S. MARIN

I wrote this for you, Mamma—for being insufferable on Day 1,

And for my friends—silver and gold, and platinum.

Day 1

16 November, 2017. Thursday

Dear Diary,
Today is the day! After a year's wait! Truth be told, I think Dhaka Lit Fest to bibliophiles like me is what Eid or Christmas is to many—something you look forward to throughout the year, something for which you buy dresses

Silk and Suede
Speaking of mud, you MUST NOT wear fancy silk sarees in “London weather,” nor suede slides. For the last 5-6 years, I’ve been basking in the glory of being reasonably graceful in saree. Along came a windy day and I was this unruly-haired, muddled miss!

Adonis
Some people give this cute grandpa vibe—with their silvery locks and twinkling eyes. Adonis definitely is one of them. His session with Kaiser sir was mesmerising although half the time was lost in translating to and forth. Aah, how I longed to understand the

as Lewis Carroll might have said!
When you work at academia and/or print media, that sort of becomes the motto. It is hilarious to see the esteemed colleagues in their element—the sweetest professor might be a mischievous speaker, the grumpy editor might turn out to be as giggly as a teenager, the almost quiet poet is probably the most articulate one. Isn't it beautiful when people show their true selves?

Little joys
The best part of DLF is possibly that delightful moments are spread in every little nook and cranny of the beautiful

Day 3

18 November, 2017. Saturday

Diary dearest,
Rain or shine, ache in tooth or heart, no way I was going to miss the closing day of DLF; so I set nonstop alarms from 9 a.m. onwards, and, as an additional measure, asked a couple of trusted early-birds to give me wake-up calls. And there I was—all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed by 10.30 a.m. to frolic in another day full of books, ideas, love, light, sights and sounds! In no particular order, the treasured moments of the closing day are listed below.

old ones. But there is something different in the very air of DLF—everything seems nicer and prettier and happier... or perhaps it was simply the beautiful autumn weather. Today, I have met virtual friends for the first time and it felt like I knew them since childhood, also, old friends who gave the biggest hugs and measured how long my hair had grown in the past two years. I even met and managed to converse “sweetly” with a friend-turned-enemy (because of her blatant social climbing!)

Anuk
I loved every moment of the DSC lit award and the closing ceremony—not because it was the award and closing ceremony of DLF 2017 but because it felt very warm and heart-felt and was COMPLETELY devoid of lengthy boring speeches! The short-listed authors or their representatives reading excerpts of their creations was a real treat, and among the 5 nominees, the youngest one, Anuk Arudpragasam won my heart. I was quite happy when my favoured candidate actually won the prestigious award—though his bashful postures while receiving the crests was a smidge baffling. He seemed more like a child having a timeout in a corner of the stage. My confusion, however, was instantly cleared during his wonderful acceptance speech. *The Story of a Brief Marriage* is about the heart-breaking genocides of Sri Lanka during its civil war, but you can hardly be buoyant and enthusiastic when you win an award for writing about something so upsetting and heart-felt.

Books, Books everywhere!
Without any shred of doubt, books are the best part of any literary festival—books old and new, classics and contemporary, books smelling like heaven, tiny books, hard-covers, books with fancy dust covers, books fresh out of the publishers, books with yellowing old pages. This year, I went out of my comfort zone i.e. classics and fantasy, and grabbed anything and everything that caught my fancy. I even bought *An Unsuitable Boy*. My boss is going to be so mad—he really hates Karan Johar. And I will guarantee you this—I haven't done this much weight-lifting since I was about 75 kg!

Dear Diary,
It was a magical three days; I stayed back for a long time after the closing ceremony—absorbing every last moment of it—sitting on the ancient steps of the Burdwan House. Couldn't agree more with one of the directors, DLF is something we wait for the entire year, and when it ends, we are left with this tremendous sense of happiness, contentment, and melancholy—all at the same time.

Until next year...

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PHOTOS: AUTHOR

and make elaborate itinerary, something that just has to be flawless! Now that Day 1 is over and I am back home, properly fed, and in the serene tranquillity of my study, I must note down today's highlights before they drown in Day 2's adrenaline rush.

Rain rain go away!
I can't remember checking the Yahoo weather app this frequently, ever. Yes, last couple of years, DLF took place on extremely sunny days. I (naïvely) assumed that a bit of drizzle will cool the heat off and lock the dusts from the Bangla Academy premise. Boy, was I wrong! Today, the weather turned out to be as temperamental as those that the Lintons and Earnshaws experienced centuries ago in another country and clime.

Ceaseless drizzle? Check.
Murky grey sky? Check.
Sticky yucky mud? Double check!

French conversation!

The Swan Lake
You know that quaint little pond in Bangla Academy? In my head, I named it The Swan Lake since the academy has a big flock of swans—along with cats and dogs. A dog and her chubby little puppies won the hearts of the literati in DLF 2015. However, these swans are not necessarily of the “cutie pets” variety. In fact, these scandalous villains took particular pleasure in biting and pulling at the couture *panjabees* (and sarees) of fest-lovers. I have now lost my faith in the goodness of swans. Sorry, Tchaikovsky!

N.B. My editor later pointed out that those hooligans are actually geese, not swans.

Bonkers
We are all mad here; complete bonkers,

academy... the wafting aroma of coffee, constant clicking sound of cameras, sniffing books discreetly, the *shiuli-tala*, the music, the bright neon coloured stalls, the light-shows after dusk, the reading tent, the old world charm of the main hall, even those scoundrel swans. Oops, geese!

It is already so late! Goodnight, Diary. Tomorrow is Day 2 and I simply can't wait!

Day 2

17 November, 2017. Friday

I woke up with this excruciating toothache, Diary.
Not sure whether I'll have any wisdom or not, but I certainly am having my fair share of pain. Between the DLF, dentist, and the comfort of my bed, I am afraid I am going to opt for the third one.

Shoutouts and hugs (and evil eyes)
How many people can recognise you from behind in an over-crowded auditorium and call out musically? Not many, I am sure. And hence, I consider myself awfully lucky—my circumference might be small but the people in my life are priceless gems! Not to mention, the academia of Bangladesh is a small pond where everybody knows everybody. You either get a hug or an evil eye!

Ahsan Akbar
Of all three directors, I personally enjoyed his sessions and speeches most. There is something undeniably infectious about him that not only cheers up the audience instantly but also radiates in the entire fest arena!

Make new friends and ...
Big gatherings (of like-minded) are always a great window to make new acquaintances and catch up with the

PRESS RELEASE

ANUK ARUDPRAGASAM WINS THE DSC PRIZE FOR 2017

Anuk Arudpragasam has been announced the winner of the prestigious DSC Prize for South Asian Literature 2017 for his novel, *The Story of a Brief Marriage* at the Dhaka Lit on the 18th November, 2017.

In a glittering award ceremony, the US \$25,000 DSC Prize was awarded to the winner along with a unique trophy by Hon'ble Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, Minister of Finance of Bangladesh. The writers, publishers, media and literary enthusiasts that had gathered at the Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad Auditorium at the Bangla Academy for the finale of the Dhaka Lit Fest enthusiastically applauded the winner.

The five shortlisted authors and novels in contention for the DSC Prize this year were Anjali Joseph: *The Living* (Fourth Estate, HarperCollins, UK), Anuk Arudpragasam, *The Story of a Brief Marriage* (Granta Books, UK), Aravind Adiga, *Selection Day* (Fourth Estate, HarperCollins, India), Karan Mahajan, *The Association of Small Bombs* (Chatto & Windus, UK & Viking, USA & Fourth Estate, HarperCollins, India) and Stephen Alter, *In the Jungles of the Night* (Aleph Book

Company, India)
Speaking on the occasion, on behalf of the jury, Ritu Menon said, “The jury met and discussed the shortlisted novels in detail. As all the shortlisted novels had considerable strengths and remarkable literary quality, deciding the winner was not an easy task. However, the jury agreed that Anuk Arudpragasam was the best possible choice for *The Story of a Brief Marriage*. The novel is impressive for its intensity and rich detail, and for exploring the tragic heart of war with such quiet eloquence. It is also a testament to the redemptive power of love, and to the human spirit's capacity for hope.”

The DSC Prize for South Asian Literature is an established international literary prize that awards the best work in South Asian fiction writing each year. This year the DSC Prize received 60 eligible entries with participation from publishers from the South Asian region as well as from countries like the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia and South Africa amongst others.

Congratulating the winner, Surina Narula, MBE and co-founder of the DSC

Prize said, “My heartfelt congratulations to Anuk Arudpragasam for winning the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature 2017. This year the shortlisted novels were all equally exciting with diverse subjects which brought out the nuances and the changing dynamics in South Asian life in a unique and evocative way. It must have been a tough task for the jury members to choose from these five exceptional contenders and arrive at the eventual winner. We are honored to be invited to give the award this year in Bangladesh. The DSC Prize has now completed seven successful years, and it remains focused on recognizing and showcasing the immense talent writing about the South Asian region and bringing it to a larger global audience.”

The DSC Prize for South Asian Literature 2017 was judged by a diverse and distinguished panel. This year's international jury panel included *Ritu Menon*, Jury Chair and eminent feminist writer who has commented on a wide range of gender issues affecting the South Asian region, *Valentine Cunningham*, Professor Emeritus of English language and Literature



at Oxford University, UK who has authored several books on Victorian fiction and poetry, *Steven Bernstein*, celebrated screenwriter, director, author, cinematographer and lecturer based out of

Los Angeles, USA, *Yasmin Alibhai-Brown*, respected journalist, pundit, radio and television broadcaster, based in London who has written extensively on society, culture and feminism, and *Senath Walter Perera*, Senior Professor in English, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka who has authored several publications on the diasporic and postcolonial literature of the region.

About the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature:

The US \$25,000 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature, which was instituted by Surina Narula and Manhad Narula in 2010, is now one of the most prestigious international literary awards and is specifically focused on South Asian writing. It is a unique and coveted prize and is open to authors of any ethnicity or nationality as long as the writing is about South Asia and its people.

Now in its 7th year, the DSC Prize has been successful in bringing South Asian writing to a larger global audience through rewarding and showcasing the achievements of the authors writing about this region.