



**LIFE'S
LYRICS**
NASHID KAMAL

Farzeen Huq

Farzeen Huq is my friend from Holy Cross school days, 1970 to be exact. We were catching up in London where she lives, I admired her beautiful garden and every corner of her home had an exquisite piece of furniture which caught my fancy. I was curious to know where she had bought them from. "You want to know?" she said, "Look at this piece, this one I bought for five pounds". "Five pounds?" I was shocked, my face showed that expression, mouth agape. "Ha ha, not like it looks now, it was a junk, as I was driving I stopped at the red lights and I spotted this piece of furniture in a second hand goods shop and I indicated to the seller to bring it to my car and handed out the money, before the red light turned green and I got honks from the cars behind, or the cops come to give me a ticket!", said Farzeen.

"And then?"
"Then I stayed up nights, fixing broken bits, sanding it down, dyeing, varnishing, getting it shipshape to turn it into what it is today." I am now really fascinated, "and the other pieces, you must have bought them from antique shops?"
"Yes indeed, this 8x5 feet period furniture (Henri IV) is called a French Oak Buffet on which I passionately laboured away for something like 100 hours over a period of months."

Amazing, my friend is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist and works as the Clinical Lead for a Specialist Personality Disorder Service in St. George's Hospital, London. She regularly visits Dhaka University and in her attempt to transfer knowledge she has been teaching Psychological Therapies (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy) to students and teachers at the University. It is usually summer when she teaches her modules; she has no time to meet up with her friends, but goes back with a deep sense of satisfaction from contributing a little to her motherland.

A beautiful Tanpura lies at the corner of her room. Farzeen and her sister Nazmeen used to train in Tagore songs, when we were students and we have spent many evenings in the company of Sadi Mohammad, the renowned Tagore exponent who also taught her sister. Farzeen's father Syed Mujibul Huq was a die-hard Tagore fan, and has published English translations of some of his favourite Tagore songs. Her mother Habiba Huq now aged 88 can still sing Tagore songs beautifully in tune. Farzeen carved out time to do a B Mus degree in Rabindra Sangeet in London with Prantik (affiliated with Dokhini School of Music, Kolkata).

Her daughter Naomi Laskar is a Surgeon, and son Shayan is working as a Telecommunications Engineer. She once tripped over a tin of paint, whilst trying to paint the ceiling of her house. Her left ear had a big tear which needed suturing, Naomi happened to have her suturing kit with her which she was about to start stitching with but Farzeen shouted out loud for Shayan to come and video the entire scene, which she later shared with us. Farzeen said to me, "who would have the chance to get a cut sutured by their own daughter?" What a zest for life, every bit is to enjoy and she sets that example.

Nashid Kamal is a Professor of Medical Demography, Nazrul exponent and translator.



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KAZI SALAHUDDIN RAZU

ENGLISH PLAYS IN DHAKA CITY

At the very outset let me spell out what I mean by *English plays*. By the phrase I do not mean plays written by English playwrights in English language nor do I mean Bangla translations of English plays performed in Dhaka city. What I mean is: plays written and performed in English language in Dhaka city – beginning from the British rule until now.

Nothing is chronicled in black and white or even print about the staging of English language plays in Dhaka city, which very much endorses and reinforces the fact that we are not a very conscious nation or community with the habit of documenting our history and culture appropriately. I asked people concerned and also my friends of the theatre world if I could find any archival materials – private, autonomous or national – where documents of theatre history were/are orderly archived in Bangladesh but to my utter disappointment nobody could give me any rightful information. There are hearsay evidences – but not substantiated – that in the then East Pakistan there were at least two – or who knows, perhaps more – groups, *Dhaka Stage* and *Prometheans*, that used to stage plays in English language in Dhaka. But dismayingly nobody could give me any names of the plays they performed, or provide any information about the performers or activists associated with the groups—not to speak of the kind of audience who patronized them.

Pathetically, though *Banglapedia* – the national encyclopedia of Bangladesh – has a twelve-page article on Bangladesh Theatre, in its *Introduction of European Theatre* section it merely describes the history and legacy of initiation of proscenium playhouses in Calcutta by the British colonialists, but chronicles nothing about Dhaka. The colonialists rightly tried to show their supremacist elite culture at that time by staging original Shakespeare, Massinger, Congreve, Sheridan and the likes in *The Theatre*, the proscenium playhouse built by them in Calcutta in 1753, which continued until 1808 – *Banglapedia* documents. I am positive similar things happened in Dhaka too but we have no access to that information.

However, the above prologue is meant to be my prefatory remarks to a play that had its shows between December 11 and 15 at Mahila Shamity, Dhaka, and it was all English – meaning, written in English by John Boynton Priestley, an

English novelist-playwright, (who was prominently mechanical in establishing *International Theatre Institution* in 1948 collaboratively with Sir Julian Sorell Huxley, the first Director General of UNESCO) and most of all, it was performed in English by Bangla speaking actors. I witnessed, as far as I can recollect, two plays performed in English by our actors of two theatre groups, and I have no hesitation pronouncing they were of no standard whatsoever primarily because they all had extremely affected English pronunciation having little or no idea about English stress and intonation. No, I do not expect any Bengalee to speak like a native speaker of English but when one acts on the stage one must deliver one's speeches in a way that become both meaningful and communicable to all audiences or the play instantly distances itself to a world of ambiguity. But *The Inspector Calls* is different – all the performers could speak English loud and clear, create the drama that was essential to interweave the storyline, and communicate the deep-structured yet invaluable message that every successful work of art needed to convey. The directorial flair and aptitude displayed by Naila Azad genuinely calls for spontaneous acclamation, for she was almost hundred percent successful extracting from her team of performers – including off-stage workers – what she needed for the success of her own adapted play. The only person who can be critiqued a bit is Toufikul Alam Emon playing the role of Mr Burhan. It is true that the role demands clowning around but he perhaps overdid it with his slightly affected English pronunciation, and more often than not, unnecessary body movements. All others were well-suited to their respective roles and to be frank Iresh Zaker stands out to be the A+ performer among them, especially because he very skillfully sequenced and queued his dialogues with his co-actors!

The play is a *Jatrik* production and I have all my good wishes for them mainly because they have put their good and bona fide effort for the revival of the culture of performing English plays in Bangladesh. We love our mother tongue from the core of our heart but we also have respect for all other languages of the world, for languages are the proud cultural heritage of the entire mankind. Keep it up *Jatrik*!

The writer is a theatre activist, playwright and theatre critic. He is also a Bangla Academy awardee for translation.

**WHAT'S
IN THE
THEATER?**
ABDUS SELIM

