



**A LIFE
 LESS
 ORDINARY**
ALY ZAKER

Profession, Passion & the story of being!

So, I came back home at long last. The first few days of me being home was spent as if I were in a daze. Everything I saw around me, my favorite city seemed to be very attractive. Only about nine months ago, I left this city in peril for being reduced to a stateless person. People close to me and older than me tried to talk sense into my thought process by asking me whether I have thought about my future. Well, quite frankly, I had not thought of anything. I just wanted to get out of this enslaved city of Dhaka, where I desperately wanted to breathe freely. It seemed there was no present or future left here, and the uncertainty beyond its confines seemed apparently so much more comforting. Some would say that this was absurd romanticism of a young man who had very little experience of life. I thought, at that point in time, so what? Launching myself into the unknown would teach me to determine my future. But before I took the final leap, I went around the city, trying to find answers to my queries about life beyond it. There, obviously, was no answer. So, I left this city unceremoniously. But now that I was back here again, all worldly needs glared at my face and I had to find an answer to my basic needs. During the war, I was very busy with my responsibilities at the *Liberation War Radio*, and having worked with the Government in exile, I thought that in an independent Bangladesh, I would naturally join the National Government in some capacity. Money or position was not important those days; working for the nation was. Back home, when I was waiting for an opportunity to join the Government, some of my old colleagues from the advertising outfit I worked for before the war came to visit me. They said that they were anxiously waiting for me to return from the war. The advertising agency that they were working and I was heading was owned by a Pakistani entrepreneur. It was closed down mid-way through the war, and my colleagues had lost their jobs. They thought that once the war was over, I would return and open the closed shop again. This, I had never thought about before, but I could not turn down the expectations of my colleagues who have always been so dear to me. I opened the closed shop the very next day, and found my work station in exact disarray as I had left it. No one, ostensibly, entered it since I had left. My job now became simple. I had to renew contacts with the business that I had quit and reassure those that ran it about me being back in business. One advantage was that I loved my profession from the day I entered it. So, I took to it just as a fish takes to water.

The author is a renowned stage performer, actor & director. He is also a successful business personality.



Pir who speaks textbook language

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



Pir (variant spelling: *Peer*) is purely a subcontinent concept that has etymological root in Persian language. In English, the word can be translated into *saint* or more specifically, *holy man*. I lived in Libya for almost four years, and I never had any confrontation with any *Pir* there, and I also came to know from the people who had been to different Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia or other nearby Arab countries having close affinity with Islam, that belief in *Pir* and their divine powers are considered anti-Islamic. I also had the opportunity to listen to an anecdote about a very highly educated and revered religious person from Bangladesh getting into huge trouble in Saudi Arabia because a good number of Muslim people from the subcontinent working there used to consider and esteem him as *Pir*, and would visit him routinely for his blessings. So, *Pir* is purely an Indian subcontinent connotation, referring to a religious head that shows ordinary people the path to heaven, and as a result, we have innumerable *Pirs* and their *majars* (tombs or shrines) throughout India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. A considerable population in all these countries has convincing belief in their divine powers.

Syed Waliullah, a Bangla novelist, short story writer and playwright, wrote at least two fictions on this theme—*Lalsalu*, a novel (translated in English, titled *Tree Without Roots*, by the writer himself), and *Bohipeer*, a stage play. The two other plays that he wrote are: *Tarangabhanga* and *Sudanga* (□□□□□□). As far as my knowledge goes, two of his plays — *Bohipeer* and *Tarangabhanga* — were performed with a considerable degree of success (but not as expected as per their latent contemporaneity) in Bangladesh.

One can effortlessly trace feministic hints in Syed Waliullah's literary works, especially in *Lalsalu* and *Bohipeer*. Waliullah, like Abu Ishaque, another Bangla writer of fame, wrote fictions about religious bigotry and exploitations of marginal and subaltern population, including women and children by the privileged and powerful. The most fascinating fact is, both writers were contemporaries—Syed Waliullah was born in 1922 and Abu Ishaque in 1926. One also finds it intriguing that both of them were troubled with social taboos stemming from illiteracy and blind faith in religion, during late 40s and 50s, when Pakistan came into being in the name

of Islamic ideology. Though Abu Ishaque did not write any play, his novels have distinct empathy with the themes of Waliullah's novels and plays.

As a literary work, *Bohipeer* has an all-time pertinence in Bangladesh, more so in a society that has been gradually submerging into the influence of oil-rich Gulf cultures. To me, this is because those countries have been employing a huge number of blue-collar workers from Bangladesh—both skilled and unskilled—for manual labour, for about three decades now. The metamorphosis started almost twenty years back, and its influence is quite discernible in our present day social context and practices. *Dhaka Theatre Moncha* has done a great job revitalising *Bohipeer* on our stage at a time when we feel the growing heat-wave of fundamentalism at home and abroad. Though I cannot give them unrestricted words of praise for their performance quality, I have all admiration for their bravado and aptness. Director of the play, Afrin Huda Tora — a young, yet erudite person of dramaturgy — has befittingly tailored and customised the play to focus a lone woman's logic for survival, rebelling against the imposed pronouncements of a male dominated community that is mostly obsessed with religious biases. The message could have been statelier if Tora and her cast had concentrated more on physical and facial expressions, and acts rather than on their voice projections, for that effort of theirs marred the acting quality considerably. As for set, light and props, those were a bit more than run-of-the mill — there were scopes for further innovation.

I am a believer in youth charisma and adroitness, which allure me a lot, though I am also aware of the fact that they do not have all the required or desirable qualities or characteristics in them — but what they have is perhaps, the most sought-after and coveted constituent for gaining success in future (if fostered appropriately): faith, sincerity and devotion. At the end of the day, we must remind ourselves: *practice brings perfection*.

The writer is an educationist teaching English Language & Literature at Central Women's University. He is also a Bangla Academy awardee for translation.