

REVISITING THE PAST



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REVISITING THE PAST

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Certificate of Approval

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporate here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

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Declaration

This dissertation is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

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TANZIM AZIZ



REVISITING THE PAST

To my parents who raised me, especially Amma:

Thank you for being supportive

To my reasons for being:

Zayeen and Umair, my two most precious angels

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PREFACE



Memory was the repository that furnished me with this life writing and revisit the past. However, the unprecedented pandemic COVID 19, forced a break in my normal schedule, giving me time to think and reflect on the past.

Throughout my life, I wanted to discover myself. This thoughtful life writing is a mélange of significant incidents of my life which are inseparable, intertwined with each other and made this solitary journey of life meaningful. Many people helped me to sculpt this journey smooth. My deceased father, *Abba* occupies the memorabilia the most, may be that's human nature- we look

for those who left us, we miss them or we cherish the warmth and values embedded by them in us. I admire *Abba* for believing in empowering his daughters, four of us.

I came across a lot of people in this journey— family members, friends, relatives, teachers and colleagues whose fond memories are preserved in the archive of my memory with love and tenderness. Some of them have left this world for eternity but I still feel their presence.

As I have entered a new phase of life, the trousseau I brought to my new family fifteen years ago seems insignificant. Through this journey of life, I have been learning to treasure those aspects which are immeasurable-quality time spent with family in the past, our trips which made us rediscover ourselves and even knowing the known people from a new dimension!

Having come across different phases of life, and coming to this point, I realize that my inner self wishes to reminisce about the fond events that occurred in the past, only treasured as photographs until now. But my mind has treasured them too, not as photos but in a room, where they are nurtured with tenderness. The memories no longer want to be dormant; they want to come out of the room and to be expressed as discourse, in the pages of a book perhaps! Hence, my memories that inspired me to express my noteworthy past experiences into paper, I felt like re-visiting the past!

This write up is an account of life in the 90's especially, when I grew up. I have talked about life where the dominance of technology was absent. We neither had a cell phone nor we played video games. There was not any social media either. Nowadays, we visit our acquaintance's profiles on social media and by uploading happy pictures, we claim to be happy. But in those days, we visited each other's place in person and social events were more. Life was easy going, we played with boys, but parents did not worry. But nowadays, the scenario is completely different. We cannot think of letting our children play outside. Every afternoon, we used to play 'hide and seek', indoor games, like-chess, Ludo, carrom. After our final exams would be over, we would organize one- dish- party and would have picnics. The sight of flying kites in the locality was a common occurrence. People would play *Antakshari* frequently. Reciting Holy books in the morning was a usual phenomenon. Children would read books on vacation and even played badminton on the streets or in the field during winter. In these thirty years our country has been promoted to a developing country from an under developed one, but through the advancement of technology, we are moving to an era, which is alarming. We live in an era, when it is asked frequently whether we are robots or not. We knew empathy as an inborn quality of human beings. But nowadays, it is taught through courses, reminding us, that we are the best among all the creations of our creator.

Life was very simple and people were less complex. It may sound weird now, but my motivation to attend my kindergarten was the food items which were sold during tiffin break, kabab paratha and potato chips on transparent packets, no particular brand though. However, when it came to reading books in my adolescence, my preferred genre would be detective books like *The*

Complete Adventures of Feluda of Satyajit Ray or *Misir Ali Unsolved* by Humayun Ahmed. Reading the supernatural thriller *Debi* was full of suspense and watching its adaptation in 2018, was like revisiting the past. The experiences of watching supernatural thrillers like *Conjuring* and *Annabel* with my sons recently were exhilarating with no doubt but the experience of reading a book and watching the adaptation in a movie theater is unexplainable.

One of the residents of an apartment of our Mohammadpur residence, whom we called *khalu*, was an official of Balaka Cinema Hall, who always gave my parents complimentary movie tickets. Me and my sisters watched joint venture movies on big screen with his daughters. When VCR came to households, it became a routine to watch Hindi or Indian Bengali movies. Each weekend residents of all the apartments of our Mohammadpur residence used to gather at our living room, and the room turned into a theater drastically with enthusiastic audience. This scenario is something we cannot think of nowadays. We are too busy uploading our pictures in social media, watch movie trailers in Netflix and Amazon Prime video. But watching a movie with a whole bunch of people of the same building until midnight, elders drinking tea and chatting- are something rare currently.

However, narcotics were there too in the 90's. But not in abundance like now. I remember, there was a rehabilitation center for drug addicts in our Dhanmondi vicinity. The other day, a thief, who was also a rehabilitant of that center was caught red handed while taking away transferrable raw materials of buildings from our backyard. As a teenager, I came to know an incident about my

younger sister's close friend's brother. He had a fight with his father about not accepting the girl he loved. The father hit him so severely that he became intellectually disabled. He had been admitted into a clinic for mental patients where the authority provided them with narcotics to tame them. This scenario is still prevalent.

Social ailments like female trafficking and assaults took place in those days as well but nowadays, the culprits have become stronger by expanding their networks. But the number of rapes is increasing due to the widely accessible adult sites. The Evil doers are always trying to make profit by making vulnerable people their medium to succeed. I recall an incident when my mother showed empathy towards a physically abused girl left on a pavement of Dhanmondi overlooking our residence at noon in the 90's. By her torn outfit and the signs of agony, we were sure about what had happened with her and whom to inform. When afternoon was drawing closer, a physically challenged beggar, a three-wheeler driver, rickshaw puller all thronged around her. Amma took out a phone number from Abba's Supreme Court Phone number directory and called up Advocate Elina Khan who was well known for her humanitarian activities. Surprising but true she came in a microbus with two other humanitarian activists to the victim's rescue in an hour. It was difficult to convince the victim to be rehabilitated though.

Nowadays, hackers and scammers have expanded their networks overseas through the help of technology, also by using false identities. In the 90's hi-jacking was prevalent, but the

miscreants nowadays have adopted social media as a medium to traffic women to neighboring countries and to the Middle East. They sell them as commodities.

In the 90's when we lived at our Dhanmondi residence, our then chauffeur's wife landed at our residence from their village home all of a sudden claiming that he had a secret relationship with our physically challenged maid. I do not remember exactly, how the complex situation had been handled but I do remember a tragic incident about my chauffeur which took place three years ago. He had an affair with one of the female guards of a leading shopping mall. When her family got to know about the affair, her brother and an influential figure with his men hit him with tools so severely, that he had to be admitted into a hospital. But he couldn't survive. His wife filed a case, and she got justice with our intervention.

However, I have been thinking of life writing to convey the message to my audience that it is a decent way to preserve the records that have occurred in the past. It will enable the readers even after thirty years to realize the life style of the people in the 90's, when I grew up. However, I am attracted by this genre in particular, since I wanted to convey my sons about the people and the surroundings that shaped up my life and made me who I am today. I have come across a few Memoir and Autobiographies of public figures. The note-worthy which influenced and motivated me immensely is *Unfinished* by celebrity Priyanka Chopra Jonas who unfolded herself as an actress talking about the metamorphosis of a girl of doctor parents, who earned the Miss world title and subsequently entered the movie industry achieving India's national film Award, Padma

Shri, People's Choice Awards and other accolades. In her Memoir, she said, "My difference is my strength" (112). I loved the lines where she expresses that, "Some instinct back then told me not to fall prey to the insecurity of not fitting into the existing mold" (112).

Priyanka Chopra in her *Unfinished* has talked about both her unpleasant and uncomfortable experiences in the movie industry. I liked the way she talked about those with courage but keeping the names anonymous. However, her empathetic, humane side is also evident when she visited rural villages and refugee camps around the world as a Global UNICEF goodwill Ambassador, spent time with the refugees in UNICEF shelter, shared in her memoir the devastating and heartbreaking stories of the girls who have suffered sexual violence. Sharing a story of a victim who was strong and resilient even after the trauma she had experienced, losing her infant who had been raped by her husband. Chopra expresses that she still has hope to move forward, "In spite of her trauma and loss, this fourteen -year-old, like almost all of the children I have met on my travels, was not hopeless" (227). The shared stories of the refugees and the memoir both were inspiring.

M C Mary Com in an Autobiography, *Unbreakable* was motivating as an individual as she talks about the hardships she had to endure in the formative years of her career as a boxer, and says further that the hardship was the foundation of her strength. It had been difficult to follow her dreams without any resources and support. Her struggle is evident in these words, "Life wasn't easy, finances even less so, and education was not going to put food on the table" (4). However,

she is the recipient of the Arjuna Award, The Padma Shri, Bronze medal for the 2012 London Olympics.

Her relentless hard work, and her conviction to prove that “women can achieve as much as men can” (132) has brought M C Mary Kom success in a male dominated sport and conquer poverty. She pushed every boundary she encountered. Initially she did not have any sponsor. But she even paid for her own travel expenses to participate in different competitions and camps. She says, “I am tough because of my background. They made me who I am today. They gave me the strength to keep fighting” (3).

We are displaced is a book by Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai, that I have read and thought about the helplessness of the refugee who were forced to leave their native land because of conflict and had to make a choice between life and death. Malala had been someone of this fraternity who had been displaced with her family and chose life a decade ago in a foreign land, far away from home, Birmingham. Her book is an account of her journey and stories from refugee girls around the world who had similar stories like Malala’s.

This book is a soft reminder that “the displaced who make up these staggering numbers are human beings with hopes for a better future” (Prologue x). Her experiences and views shared in this book made me perceive life from a different perspective and realize that it is a blessing to

live in a sovereign country. The staggering number of professionals like doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, poets and even priests are forced to be displaced of the existing conflict in their respective countries and people forget that they had a unique identity once, a student or an activist or a father, or to be more prominent, called by the name given by their parents perhaps! But being a refugee and being displaced, removes their unique identity they had once and makes them identical not in appearance but in identity, 'displaced' and 'refugee'.

I admire the way she reminisces about the normal days they had once, "I missed the days when we had picnics in that same countryside. What was once our refuge was now a battle ground" (12).

However, the aforementioned authors had been my influence to come up with life writing. My sons had been my inspiration. They wonder, when I reminisce about the past, especially about my childhood. They find it hard to imagine me as a child, also that I belonged to a generation when technology wasn't prevalent. But visiting the neighbors, relatives on festivals was a custom, sharing of constructive thoughts and ideas about politics and social reform were common among academics as well as common people. Through this write up, my aim is to deliver the present and future generation about the life in the 90's, to focus on the social and political issues which were prevalent in those days and also the lifestyle that has changed over thirty years due to the

advancement of technology. There was less technology but people cared for each other, which is rare nowadays.

Moreover, when my sons would become adults and I won't be in this world, this write up would be memorabilia for them. I am sure, the chapters, which might seem puerile to some of my readers, they would be able to understand, why I have written them. If my readers read the chapters about my childhood and would think the discourse meaningless, I would request them, to imagine me not as a woman of forty but in a reminiscence about kindergarten especially, as a four-year-old child who knew nothing about the complexity of life and the world!

This write up consists of recollections of my deceased father not only as my father, but as a philanthropist, a person embedded with values of Bangladeshi culture, a good singer and a poet. A Cinephile, who loved to watch movies with family and close ones. Seen the drama *Tumhari Amrita* in a theater in Dhaka with my mother, where Shabana Azmi and Farooq Sheikh performed live. We watched quite a lot of Parallel Cinema in VCR as adolescents with our parents. Some of those are *Arth*, *Sparsh*, *Bhavna*, *Khandarh*, which had serious content but introduced us to the complexity of life. We also watched a lot of movies of Dilip Kumar, be it *Madhumati* or *Shakti*, Abba would critically analyze the scenes as a Film Critic. Abba didn't miss the chance to visit him with Amma as enthusiastic audiences in a Five Star Hotel of Dhaka where he had a live conversation with the audience. That was one of the most treasured moments of his life.

However, there are memories of going to different sites with him since he was an entrepreneur as well. I admire his architectural acumen, which is reflected on his establishments. He was an Advocate of Supreme Court of Bangladesh, by profession.

I also recollected memories of my maternal grandmother, who was a minimalist person. An avid reader of story books of different genres. She would surprise us finishing multiple books in a day! I also remember her discussing the plot of *Ashami Hajir* by Bimol Mitro fondly with my elder sisters. My sisters would discuss the content of novels like *Na Hanyate* (It does not die) and also *La nuit Bengali* (*The Bengali Night*) with her as well after reading them. We had a reading culture, we read for pleasure.

Real stories of other people have adorned this write up as well, I have reflected upon one of my friend's interfaith marriage in one of the chapters. 'Nanu Bari' (Maternal Grandmother's place) is referred to as mysterious, for a pond it had. It seemed like a haunted one for other aspects as well. There is a chapter on this.

In one of the chapters, I reminisced about a difficult phase of my life during our stay in Singapore and Bangkok for my son's critical surgeries. It is a bliss, that he had recovered and living a healthy life by the grace of Allah.

Travelling had been one of the passions of my life. Travelled with family members, to different parts of Bangladesh as well as other foreign countries to visit only for pleasure or for a special prayer even. The latter is covered in a chapter titled *Mannat* meaning special prayer. Attending one of the most significant events of my life, my MBA Convocation Program in Melbourne wearing a bespoke saree is reminisced about in a chapter. Genting Highlands and The Eiffel Tower removed my acrophobia. While roaming around in Disney Land Paris, it seemed that there is no word as unhappiness in the dictionary. In Lego land Malaysia and Madurodam in Holland, it felt surprising how artificial miniature structures of different monuments and figures can even put a big smile on our face!

We also watched a number of award-winning movies on BTV, in a program named Movie of The Week. I remember *My Fair Lady*, where Rex Harrison acted as a phonetic professor and transforms Eliza, Audrey Hepburn, a working-class woman in the movie into an aristocratic one. We had *Roman Holiday* of Audrey and Gregory Peck in our family archive which we had watched innumerable times!

The subsequent chapters will demystify, how our tranquil Dhanmondi residence turned into a Shooting *Bari* and what I referred to as *Shantiniketan* , the abode of peace.

Tanzim Aziz

REVISITING THE PAST

One

LIFE IN THE '90s



On a recent visit to the Gulshan site with my sons brought back memories of my earlier visits to it with my father, *Abba*, when I was about seven or eight years old. Before being

demolished, the building used to be Brazilian Embassy for seventeen years and much later

Philippine Embassy for thirteen years. *Abba* drove us to the Brazilian Embassy in our chocolate color Toyota Corolla, and when the car used to stop in front of the Embassy, I used to look at the Brazilian flag surprisingly and thought to myself, “Does *Abba* own this house?” “If he does, why can’t we get inside without permission?” Protocols used to be maintained in order to meet the Ambassador or the Consular Officer due to any kind of maintenance or other relevant issues. It was the residence of the Brazilian Ambassador, Bernadino Raymond da Silva that *Abba* let. The Ambassador lived with his wife and two daughters named Tina and Barilla. We visited the Ambassador’s residence once, as I recall and played with their daughters. *Abba* and *Amma* got invitations on National events of Brazil at the Embassy.



From left: *Abba*, *Amma* with H.E. Bernadino Raymond Da Silva (fourth from the left)

at the Brazilian Embassy

The two storeyed building was an architectural monument, the garden overlooking the building, the Christmas tree, manicured trees, and at the entrance, the name of the building, ‘Ameena Mansion’, named after my Late paternal grandmother. The grand black and white floral design of the gate made it look regal!



Abba, Amma in front of the gate of ‘Ameena Mansion’, the Brazilian Embassy

Abba put his heart and soul to make this building. Back in the 90s, people usually bought the raw materials themselves, so did *Abba*. The interior design of the building was simply stunning, no doubt it was rented as the Embassy. A well-designed building with huge glass doors and

windows to let in enough light and the intricate wooden curved design of the main entrance door leading it to the grand drawing room, simply says high of the Architect. The colorful mosaic of the ceiling of a veranda overlooking the kitchen says *Abba* had a good taste and Architectural acumen being a lawyer of Supreme Court of Bangladesh. He was a practicing Lawyer at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, later became Assistant Attorney General.

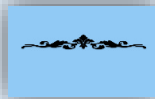


Amma with w/o H.E Mario Cesar de Moraes Pitao

at our Dhanmondi residence

He was an extrovert who liked to socialize with people. A singer with a magical voice! Had he been born in this generation he would have taken up music as a career but in those days, in traditional middle- class families it wasn't considered a real career choice! He sang "*Tumi je*

amar” a Bangla movie song of Suchitra Sen of the ‘70s really well and quite often. A big fan of Suchitra, which made us watch movies which can be referred to as masterpieces like “*Deep jele jai*”, “*Andhi*” are two among her best performances that I recall, we watched those with all the residents of our Mohammadpur residence. On weekends, *Abba* would call me and my younger sister Brishti, “Megh-Brishti go to all the flats and tell them that we are going to play, Gunga-Jamna starring Dilip Kumar tonight”. We would go to all the flats with our domestic help and would say the same thing accurately adding the start time. Surprisingly, every member of the families would come and our huge living room would turn into a movie theater in a while. Dilip Kumar was *Abba*’s all-time favorite. We watched *Raam aur Shyam*, *Madhumati* and many more starring Dilip Saab. *Madhumati* was about re-incarnation and the concept was adopted later and reconstructed as Deepika Padukone’s debut film *Om Shaanti Om*.



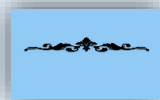
Abba had a wide array of fiction and non-fictions, a few volumes of *Bimol Mitro*’s *Ashami Hajir*, *Shorot Rochonaboli*, *Robindro Rochonaboli*, Anthology of Shakespeare, Bible, biographies of Gandhi and Nehru, History of America, and noteworthy book of other genres. He used to be very poetic, whenever any acquaintance asked our names, he would say spontaneously in rhythms,

“*Shaon-e ashilo Bonna*,

Megho tobo Brishti” (The Rainy season brought flood caused by cloud and rain).

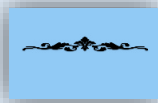
This is how four of his daughters named Shaon, Bonna, Megh and Brishti would be introduced and everybody would get mesmerized not only by the names but also at the poetic skill of the poet!

Abba bought the house we lived in from an elderly Non-Bengali person whom we called *Bihari Dadu*. Later *Abba* renovated it, and the building became a much sought after buildings for tenants for its attractive exterior. We lived on the third floor and let the other floors. The relationship we had with the occupants of other floors was simply remarkable, our parents embedded the value on us that the occupants of other flats were not our tenants literally, rather we were like a family. Me and my younger sister *Brishti* were accustomed to playing in the afternoon with Shoikot and Shumit, who lived on the second floor, were younger than me but older than *Brishti*. They had a video cassette of Hindi movie songs (like music videos) which we used to borrowed quite often to play in VCR when our cousins or friends would visit! We also borrowed video cassettes from nearby video cassette rentals for fifteen Taka at that time.



He used to be the Founder President of Lion's Club of Dhaka Jahangir Nagar, used to do this to socialize with people and do charitable works. I still remember he declared in one of the Conventions at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka "I will donate eighty thousand takas for the flood affected people", we (four of us) looked at each other, also looked at *Amma* in surprise (in those days, this sum was a huge amount), who was the Vice President of Lioness Club at that time. She also taught History at Dhanmondi Degree College after a long gap of teaching at Central Women's College. She did two Master's from Dhaka University in late 60's, one in History and the other in Education with distinction. Used to be a very smart lady who drove my maternal grandfather, the then Dean of Faculty of Arts of Dhaka University to the campus.

We used to get tired at the Conventions which continued till midnight. In those days, there wasn't any social media, so going to the clubs, chatting with other members, was something people looked forward to, especially *Abba*. *Amma* preferred to stay aloof but she didn't have any option, she had to mix with other Aunties, who held other significant positions of the club. Distributing sewing machines among women in need was a common phenomenon when the contribution (monetary) was accumulated.



Two

Ah, kindergarten days!



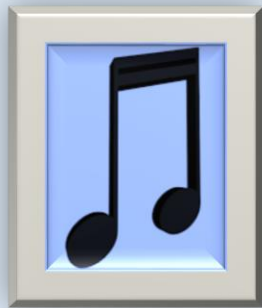
School was fun since I could have Kabab Paratha wrapped like a Shawarma and potato chips in a transparent packet sold during tiffin time. I was a student of Nursery of an International school named Maple Leaf International School in Dhanmondi, which was well-known for providing a fine academic education. During that time, Ms. Zeba Ali was the Principal and it used to be one of the best English medium schools around. But the problem was with syllabus or curriculum, since we were taught mostly in English, we hardly knew Bangla. The classes used to be over crowded, may be students were over capacity. My elder sisters used to accompany me to the school, they were in higher classes. All the students were accommodated in the same building. I remember my kindergarten teacher Mrs. Bham, who used to be Burmese. I

especially remember her for her attire, a fashionable long blouse paired with a Sarang or unstitched cloth draped with elegance. Later she taught my elder sisters Shaon Apu and Bonna Apu as their home tutor.

Rather than my elegant teacher and the playground my motivation to attend school was, during break time having Kabab Paratha or potato chips!!

Three

MY SHANTINIKETAN



We moved to our Dhanmondi residence back in 1991. It was a serene environment compared to that of Mohammadpur. So, in a sense it was *Shantiniketan*, a bode of peace. Our residence was of a bungalow pattern. The one-story building stood in the middle of a beautiful lawn surrounded by flowers, and a backyard. The lawn had a swing, a very tall Christmas tree almost bent towards the swing. There was a guava tree and a pomegranate tree on which flock of parrots would gather to taste the sweet and sour seeds of the fruit. There were two Palm trees overlooking the netted veranda which bore Pindo Palm fruits. Squirrels were often seen climbing those trees to eat those



Me and Amma in our Dhanmondi

Residence on the day of my Graduation of BBA

fruits perhaps! We had a few mango trees of various kinds; *Gopalbhog*, *Shiduri*, *Fojli*, Jackfruit trees, Palm trees, surrounding the lawn and banana plants at the back yard. During summer, when the fruits would ripe, Amma would make them pluck by our helps and gardener. After keeping some for us, Amma would distribute those among our relatives and neighbors. We had thirteen coconut trees, and the fruits were so abundant that when the artisans would come to pluck them *Amma* would give them some.

We planted vegetables at the backyard but they didn't grow well. Heard much later from an expert that a land where palm trees are grown, vegetables don't grow well. There was a tin-

shed chamber of my father at the backyard. Heard that a movie sequence had been shot there since that room resembled village homes of Bangladesh.

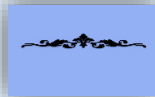
Soon after shifting to this house, I noticed *sargam* in the afternoon. Showing my keenness to learn music, *Amma* admitted me and *Brishti* into *Shrodhara*, our new music school. We started with basics, “*Sa re ga ma pa dha ni sa*”. Gradually, we moved to Rabindra Sangeet and Nazrul Geeti. My favorite Rabindra sangeet numbers were “*Edin aji kon ghore go khule dilo daar*”(Which door has this day opened), “*O-rey Grihobashi khol daar khol*”(Open your door the home -dweller, everything’s on the swing). I could understand that both had same kind of meaning but I was able to configure the metaphor besides the literal meaning, which means-opportunities that you have in-front of you, and there is an invitation to step out of the door, which means transcending borders.

The music school was not only a favorite place where we would be delighted to learn new songs and would sing melodiously but the lyrics of the songs were sources of boundless wisdom! *Shurodhara* changed my mind set in such a way, that I started singing songs based on the existing weather. Drifting rain-bearing clouds of the rainy season made me restless, and I would sing “*Bojro manik diye gatha ashar tomar maala*” or “*Rimi Rim jhim rim jhim oi namilo deya*” (Pitter-patter pitter-patter in the season of rains).

Gradually, my attention was on the senior classes where they learnt classical notes. I loved the way they practiced the note “*Ni dha pa ma pa ga ma ga re ga ni re sa*”. Surprisingly, I still

practice those notes, these notes help me to remove my tension, depression and soothe my mind when I'm over-worked. My music lesson helped me to prepare my sons for their music tests in school. When my sons used to be small and I showered them, I would sing, "*Kothao amar hariye jawar nei maana*" and they would sing along.

Not surprisingly, I call Shurodhara "my *Shanti Niketan*" (abode of peace). No doubt, I'm still passionate about joining a music school all over again may be for classical music or Rabindra Sangeet. I wish I could join Shurodhara again but alas! I can't, since Shurodhara, my *Shantiniketan* has been demolished. A new building of concrete has replaced it disrupting the tranquility of mind of the music lovers like me, but whenever, I look at the new structure, my heart still ponders, "*Ni dha pa ma pa ga ma ga re ga ni re sa*".



Four

SHOOTING BARI



Abba looked troubled. The trouble was, a producer of Bangladeshi movies saw our lawn from a nearby building and he liked it a lot. He didn't ask Abba whether he would let it for shooting purposes. Rather, this gentleman named Mr. Bolai asked *Abba* that he wants to shoot in the lawn and in the living room. He assured *Abba* that it won't take them more than three days. Abba agreed unwillingly.

The next day, there was a big surprise. Dhallywood starts like Anju Ghosh, Omer Sani and Rajib (villain) appeared with a huge crew consisting of fifty to sixty artisans. We were excited, amma asked us, “Go to Sherina’s place and tell your Aunty that there’ll be a shooting at our place.

We went to Aparna apa’s Ma’s place as well, and said the same thing. They came. All sat in our living room. Anju Madam was cordial, she said looking at me, “ Dekhte ekdom thai meyeder moto”(“Looks exactly like Thai girls”). I gave a generous smile.

Sherina Apa’s Mum did a blunder. She said, “as a leading film actress why don’t you stay slim”?! Surprisingly, Anju Madam was calm and handled the question dignifiedly. She said “Bhabi, see we are provided biryani as lunch all the time, that’s why we put on weight”. We had to trust her, because biryani was really provided among all the stars and crew members.

The name of the movie was “Ei niye Shongshar”. But we didn’t see any *shongshar* (family), rather a sequence was shot, in the lawn where Anju madam would be sitting in the lawn having tea, while the villain Rajib would abduct her. Our boundary wall was surrounded by innumerable rickshaw pullers, who wanted to have a glimpse of Anju Ghosh, a very successful actress of that time and known among Rickshaw pullers as ‘Beder Meye Jyotsna’ - a commercially successful character which gave her fame in both Bengals.

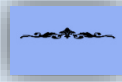
Amma asked us to call Anju madam, Aunty. We were very obedient. We did call her Aunty, so she was very sweet to us. The other day she wore a wig of curly hair. But before the wrap up of the first day shoot, she changed her outfit in our guest bathroom, which we weren't aware of. After they left, I went to the guest bathroom as the other ones were occupied. I sprang like a frog as I held the wig of Anju Aunty, and it gave me a weird kind of feeling, not having seen a wig before.

Anju Aunty was a bit forgetful as well, since she left a bright red robe also. Thank God, she hasn't left anything else! After a while, her Body Guard came. He said, "Madam has left her wig". "I've come to pick it up".

The next day, there was a sequence shot in the living room. I was wondering that they don't choose me as a child artist for the movie, since the title was "Ei niye Shongshar"(This is family), and I didn't see any child artist around ! Luckily, I wasn't chosen. Had I been chosen, I wouldn't have done three Masters'. I would have been a leading actress of "*Beder Meye Jyotsna 2*" perhaps!!!!

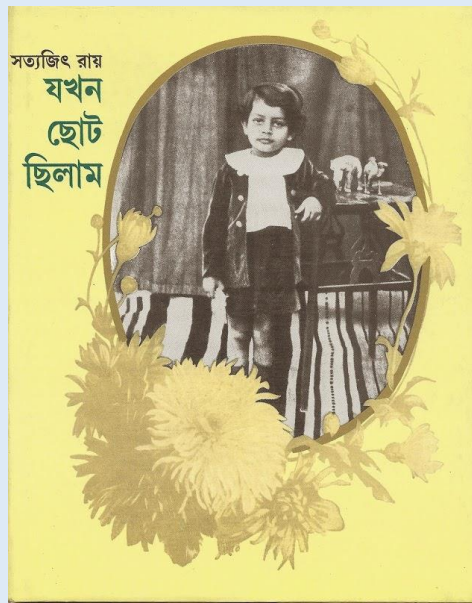
It wasn't eloquent for us, after the shooting was complete, our bungalow was known among rickshaw pullers as "Shooting Bari". We didn't have to explain the location, the rickshaw pullers

would say, “O! Shooting Bari, aagey koiben toe”! (Oh! Shooting Residence, you should have said earlier!)



Five

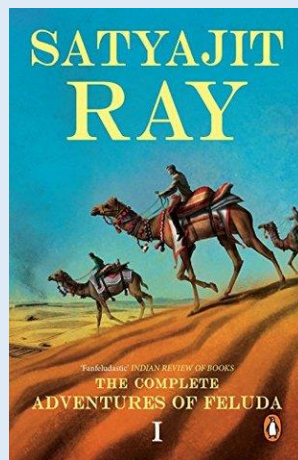
AVID READERS!



When my *Nanu* (maternal grandmother) was alive and used to stay at our place in Mohammadpur, the most noticeable thing about her would be her elegance, reticent nature and her remarkable

reading habit. She used to start the day, reading newspaper, *The Bangladesh Observer*. A graduate from Kolkata, she was conversant with English. As far as I remember, she finished reading all the books we had of Humayun Ahmed, Bimol Mitro, Rabindranath Tagore, Shomoresch Majumder, Shirshendo Mukherji, Moitreyi Devi and Satyajit Ray.

When Brishti was little I used to read her Arabian night fictions. In those days, students like us used to read books during vacations since they hardly knew about on-line games. There was a book shop nearby. During winter vacation, when final exams were over, we used to look forward when *Amma* would buy us books. The culture has passed on me. I buy my sons a number of books of their preference during book fairs like ‘Ekushey Boimela’ and book fair organized by their school each year.



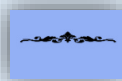
I used to be an avid reader of immensely popular Feluda mysteries of Ray. *Joto Kando Kathmundute, Darjeeling Jomjomat, Gangtoke Gondogol*- are his detective fiction but more like

travel literature. I was so influenced by his writing that I ventured as a fiction writer and wrote quite a few, one of them I recall was about re-incarnation and the title was ‘Ami jatishshor’.

Lately, I have read a few excerpts from Ray’s memoir *Childhood Days* for my sons but unfortunately children nowadays find it eloquent when they observe the absence of technology in the life style during Ray’s childhood. But I see a ray of hope since my nine-year-old son is writing an autobiography!! Trying to imitate me perhaps!

As a seven-eight years old girl, Brishti used to love reading *Archie* comics. In her teens, she graduated from comics to detective fiction. Fictions like *Nancy Drew* and *Hardy Boys* were her most favorite. Later, Agatha Christie’s detective fictions replaced *Nancy Drew* and *Hardy Boys*.

When my Uncle and Aunts visited us from Canada, they would bring us the best seller novels and those were considered precious gifts!



Six

MYSTERIOUS NANU BARI

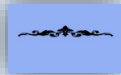
Our Nanu *bari* was in an expansive area consisting of the building surrounded by a beautiful landscape which consisted of lush green trees and a mysterious pond. Heard from many that before my Nana (maternal grandfather) bought this house, deities would be sacrificed in the pond. Also heard that a woman committed suicide in the pond a long time ago. It was believed that the pond was too deep, deeper than a usual pond and the water hyacinth grown on it was mysterious as it drowned someone!

We hardly went close to it. My eldest *Khala* (maternal Aunt) inherited the pond. They put trucks after trucks of sand to fill it up and make a building on that plot but took them ages to fill up! Before that they put a water pump to remove the water from it.

There were stories about a jack fruit tree in the middle of the compound overlooking the building. Heard from my youngest *Khala* (Aunt) that my youngest Mama (Uncle) saw a woman sitting on a dangling branch of the tree wearing a Victorian gown and a fan in her hand! He got so scared that after seeing it, he had high fever!

Planchette was a usual affair when *Amma* and *Khala* were with their friends. Calling the spirits was a thrilling experience for them. The way the spirits would answer the questions through the coins was really fascinating! *Amma* said once that sometimes some spirits were annoyed and it was evident through the rapid movement of the coins! She also forbade us not to try this since spirits should not be called hampering their peace. She also noticed that who ever has called the spirits has endured an accident in life or loss of a dear family member.

Hearing these accounts made me realize that the house was really haunted!



Seven

MY VOICE!

As a part of the BBA Program at North South University, I had to do an internship. Thought Rahimafrooz Batteries Ltd. would be a good option, Afrooz Uncle being Abba's friend. Me and Farah were the only Interns from NSU to Rahimafrooz that year. I worked for the Industrial battery Unit and Farah Automotive battery as far as I recall. The office was at Nakhalpara. The factory was located downstairs, so it was easy for me to have a practical knowledge about the batteries. By the end of the three months' term I had to prepare a paper based on my research.

Work load at Rahimafrooz was manageable. All the seniors were also nice to us. They were mostly of middle-aged group including the Receptionist, whom we used to call Aunty. The other day she said, "Tanzim, you speak very beautifully and you have a nice voice", then she asked me, "We need a recorded welcome message. Would you like to volunteer"? I agreed. After a while, she showed me a message and asked me to read it. While I was reading it, she recorded it simultaneously. When I shared this with my friends, they started calling at the land phone number of Rahimafrooz Batteries Ltd. just to listen to my recorded message!! They must have had an earache.



Fight

ON STAGE

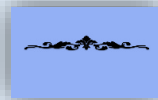
On stage, my first performance in-front of teachers was at SOS Hermann Gmeiner College, while studying at the 11th grade. I took part in group singing at the Farewell to the Seniors. We sang, “*Tolo Chhinnobina*”.

Surprisingly, while doing BBA at NSU, I haven’t taken part in any cultural programs. But, after joining GrameenPhone, I took part in a number of Cultural Events. I performed in an in-house short play, walked on the ramp with other colleagues to showcase a designer’s outfit on GP Night, a yearly program that used to be organized for the employees and by the employees of GP. I wore a black designer salwar-kamiz, and I did my own make-up. Couldn’t rely on the professional artist’s make-up. I thought putting on his make-up items would spoil my skin texture. Before walking on the ramp, we rehearsed rigorously for almost a week, after office hours! I wonder, how enthusiastic I was!

However, I also sang solo and in a group in a number of on-stage programs of GrameenPhone. The last time I sang in a group was in a Cultural Event of GP at Bashundhara Convention Center in 2006.



After quitting GP, I joined the Human Resource Department of Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka as an Assistant Manager. I performed with a male singer on stage, and it was a popular Bangla Movie Song keeping in mind the audience. Surprisingly, while we were rendering the song, “Amar Gorur Garite Bou Shajiye”, the audience started dancing along. It was far beyond we expected. The great thing about the performance was we won the Champion title. But I would share the credit with my singing partner, a Senior, Front Manager of Pan Pacific Sonargaon.



Nine

POWERPUFF GIRLS

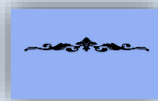


It was in my early '20s, when I received a 'Learner's Driving License' from Macadem Driving School. I had been working for GrameenPhone as a part-time employee since I didn't finish my Bachelor's in Business Administration yet. Our elderly chauffeur used to pick me up when my office was over. One fine afternoon, I felt like driving. I asked my chauffeur "Give me the key Uncle, I would like to drive" we switched our seats. I was driving very smoothly, and our chauffeur was always there to guide me. At that time GP had several buildings scattered over Gulshan but in the same vicinity. Initially, I worked at the Call Center at Celebration Point in Gulshan. From Celebration Point, I turned left , drove slowly and abode by all the traffic rules. And was very cautious about the clutch-gear-and accelerator thing. Drove towards Tejgaon. It was thirty minutes past five in the afternoon perhaps and it was the end time of the garment factory workers. As I

recall, I regret to use that route that day and must have been decisive to use an alternative route during that hour.

While I crossed Tejgaon Aarong and took a right turn, I saw a huge number of female garment workers of the garment factories located nearby were returning home from work. I was driving behind the group of women. All were curious to see a woman driving a car!! All of a sudden, A female worker with a morbid attitude said, “your car has touched my knees”. In a fraction of a second, other the other women joined her to see a female reckless (???) driver!!!!But the cynical woman looked energetic and couldn’t show where she was hurt. The other women joined her exactly the way the power puff girls, Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup unite!!And the cynical woman was definitely Buttercup. At one point it felt that she would punch me for getting on her way.

Surprisingly, I was very calm and said ‘sorry’ to her, also paid a fine to the traffic surgeon. And everything normalized. For being a twenty-year-old girl, I enjoyed the whole incident and it was like an adventure!



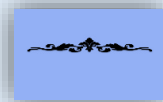
Ten

CINEMA HALL vs GOETHE INSTITUTE vs CINEPLEX



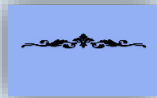
When we lived at our Mohammadpur residence, a family lived on the first floor. We were very cordial with them. The patriarch, whom we called Chacha, was an official of Balaka **Cinema Hall**, a leading movie theater back in the '70s, even until now. They used to offer us complimentary tickets for Bangla movies. I reminisce about one named '*Doordesh*', which was a joint collaboration between Bangladesh and India and shot mostly in Toronto. I thoroughly enjoyed it with my sisters and the Apus', daughters of *Chacha*. I liked the song sung by Runa Laila, "Dushmoni koro na priotomo" ("Don't keep enmity in your mind, beloved"). The white gown that Babita wore while lip-syncing the song, was stunning. Later *Amma* bought me a similar white gown on Eid from 'Fairies', an outlet for kids in Gulshan.

The next time I watched Mask, starring Jim Carrey with my GrameenPhone colleagues at Modhumita Cinema Hall. I noticed that day, a female colleague all of a sudden disappeared, heard later that he was having an affair with another colleague who was much older than us. Sadly, they broke up later.



Notting Hill is a movie that I watched with my sisters at **Goethe Institute** back in 1999 through a projector. The plot was very simple and the movie was well made. It was about how the life of a

simple book shop owner, (Hugh Grant in the movie), changes after meeting a very famous film actress played by Julia Roberts. The title song sung by Ronan Keating, “When you say nothing at all”, became an anthem among young men while making a romantic proposal. Hugh Grant was my first celebrity crush.



Batman vs Superman was the first movie that I watched with my sons in a Bangladeshi **cineplex** in 2016. But watching the violent content, I came out of the theater before finishing it watching

thinking it won't be appropriate for their age. But kids enjoyed having popcorn and coke sitting on the VIP Lounge of Star Cineplex.



Me, Zayeen, Umair and *Amma* watched Avengers Endgame at Shimanto Shombhar two years ago. After it was released in Cineplexes, Zayeen and Umair said, “ Ma, Avengers Endgame is the last movie of the Avengers series”, “we want to watch it, please, please, please!!” My husband was busy with work, so I asked *Amma* whether she would accompany us. She agreed. All of us watched it together. Me and my sons love watching movies in the darkness of Cineplexes, deluged by a huge screen. The movie delighted all of us for the splendid performance of all the artistes, especially of Chris Evans, and my most favorite among all the artistes of the movie.



Eleven

Biye



I couldn't figure out what happened?! Had I grown prettier all of a sudden?! NSU Classmate turned colleague at GrameenPhone gave me a wedding proposal, asked me, "Amake biye korba?" (Will you marry me?) I replied politely, "I'm going through a throat problem", which wasn't a lie in fact, but a lame excuse for a serious proposal as such! He asked the other day, "Tomar gola batha tthik hoise?" ("Have you recovered from your throat problem"?) I smiled. He was a nice person, but I wasn't prepared for getting married at that time. Maybe he understood. I was enjoying my life, going to the office early in the morning by office bus with colleagues and was earning a handsome amount of a salary. I was content with that.

Surprisingly, another serious type of a male colleague, a top notch of DU gave the same proposal through an older female colleague! A colleague from another department of GP, brought a wedding proposal on his nephew's behalf!!!All were handled politely by me and I asked the latter to contact my parents since he gave an acquaintance's reference.

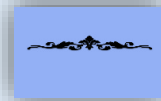
However, I joined GP before finishing my graduation as a part-time employee. I worked at GP while doing my Internship at Rahimafrooz Batteries Limited. Soon after my graduation, I became an officer, and a well-known face among my colleagues.

The other day *Abba* showed me a picture of a man, saying he's a Barrister, I knew his father, was a Justice of Supreme Court and all the Lawyers want him as their son-in-law since he's just come back to Bangladesh from England and has joined Supreme Court as a Lawyer. I said nothing looking at the picture.

The next day, *Abba* said, you may see him if you want to. They'll come for shopping to Aarong, you'll go there with your *Amma*. I saw the groom to be. He wasn't that impressive. I didn't like the color (Paste) of his shirt, neither the hairstyle.

Abba thought we must talk with each other alone. We talked at Santoor. The next day, his mom called my mom and asked for my consent. But I was in a dilemma, they were in a hurry.

My parents said, “Say ‘yes’, this is a very good proposal and you might not get such proposals later and they are very keen to make you their daughter-in-law”. I said, ‘okay’, which I regretted later, I think one must take at least a year or two to know a person well. The person whom I saw for half an hour at Aarong, not spoken a single word to each other, the second day had a formal conversation, on our third meeting, became my husband in a Dhanmondi Venue. The whole process of my ‘*Biye*’(Wedding) was faster than an express mail!!!



Twelve

AN INTERFAITH SECRET MARRIAGE

I recall an Interfaith secret marriage between my conservative Muslim friend Asma, and her Hindu boyfriend. They were medical students back then, later became doctors. Asma called me up in 2005 asking for help since her family was hitting her abruptly. But she didn't disclose the reason. But I was inquisitive, wanted to know the reason. She said, "Since I'm doing better results than my elder brother, he's jealous and wants to take away my certificates from me. I protested, so he started beating me up". I trusted her. The next day, she visited our place and left her academic certificates with us. Surprisingly, her mother came to us to know where she was. After twelve years, I came to know that, that particular night her family members were hitting her after knowing she had married someone from a different religious orientation, which was hard for their conservative family to accept. Sadly, her husband died. Now she is a doctor and looking after her only daughter.

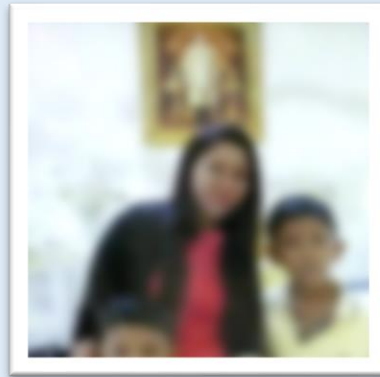
Thirteen

MATERNAL BOND

It is hard to explain the bond I share with him. His humorous side makes me laugh. His inquisitive nature makes me thoughtful. His intellect makes me proud. However, his consciousness about physical fitness, amazes everyone in our family! He is my nine-year-old adorable son Umair.

When he was born at Square Hospital in 2011, he was a healthy baby. I reminisce about those days, when Zayeen, my elder son, then two years nine months old, took Umair's pictures in excitement. He was overjoyed and thrilled to have a baby brother whom he would play with. Eventually, when Zayeen noticed that I was giving a lot of attention to the newly born Umair, he started becoming over possessive about me. But as he grew up, he realized I love them both equally.

Umair was very little, when he had very high fever. It had been a few months that we had shifted into our new apartment in Dhanmondi. It was a night in winter. My husband, Sohel was in Naogaon with my mother-in-law. I was staying in the new flat with my two children. That night,



Me with Umair and Zayeen at Bangkok Hospital

Umair must have felt discomfort due to high temperature. He screamed once or twice, I don't remember exactly how many times. I called my mother, who informed my brother-in-law to take us to Square Hospital. It was late night. Duty Doctors at the Emergency checked him up and gave medicines to bring down the temperature. But at that time, we didn't realize that he lost his hearing by thirty percent.

When he was two, he started bleeding. We took him to a pediatrician at Square Hospital, Umair went through his medication, but his condition didn't improve. We decided to consult a doctor of Bangkok Hospital of Thailand. Sohel, contacted the Bangladesh correspondent of Bangkok Hospital for an appointment. They sent us an estimate of the surgery by mail.

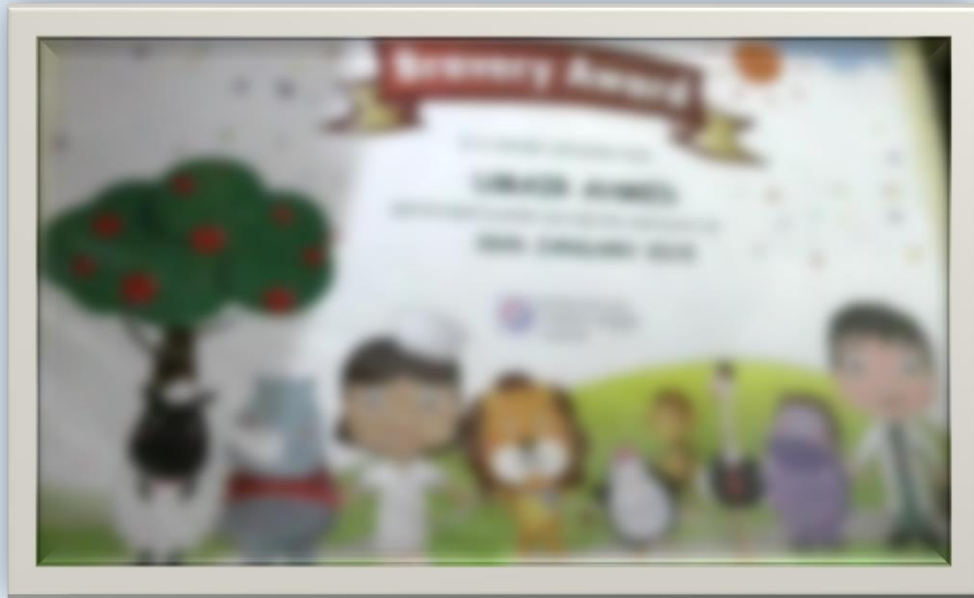
By going through his medical reports of Square Hospital, Bangkok Hospital informed us that Umair's surgery was going to be a very critical one, since he had a polyp in his body for which he bled. At one-point Umair became anemic by losing blood.

We went to Bangkok and saw a general physician of that hospital initially as they suggested. Umair had slight fever at that time, also had nasal block. So, the doctor advised to bring the temperature down and suggested a nasal suction. After, it was done, the anesthetist checked his chest if he still had any congestion or not. When she found that his chest was clear, advised us to admit him in the Hospital for a surgery. The surgery was critical, for which we had to stay at Amari Residence of Bangkok for twenty-three days. We spent the Eid-ul -Adha of 2015 at Bangkok Hospital where Umair had been admitted. Umair had been given a very beautiful spacious room where we as his family members could stay with him as well. We were impressed by the doctors since they took the case seriously and paid much attention to Umair. But the nurses' behavior was disappointing as they hardly showed up when needed.

The surgery was expensive. Before going to Bangkok, I uncashed a fixed deposit my father had left me with. As we stayed at Amari residence for twenty-three days, the bill was increasing. I remember, when Umair was admitted in the hospital, due to complications, he vomited quite often. I used to do the laundry to save money.

The other day, the house maid of Amari residence came to clean up the suite we rented, was surprised to see the number of clothes I have washed, she exclaimed “There’s a laundry downstairs”. O my goodness! you have hung the clothes in the living, bathroom even in the cupboard”. I said nothing. I went through the price chart of the laundry at the first floor; it was pretty expensive. We couldn’t afford it at that time, since we had to pay the rest of the bill of the hospital before releasing Umair.

Umair had to fast for long twelve hours before surgery. If he ate anything he would vomit. It was a sad phase of both Umair and my life since Umair had canola on his left tiny hand and lost



Umair was given a Bravery Award from Bangkok Hospital

weight significantly due to bleeding. After a critical surgery, they tested the polyp, whether it carried any cancer element. But, the result was negative. We were very pleased. Umair recovered gradually and received a bravery certificate from Bangkok Hospital.

We were happy, but another health issue occurred within a year. I started noticing that he kept his mouth open while sleeping. Also, he used to snore when asleep. When we saw an ENT doctor at Square Hospital, the doctor said that Umair's tonsils had enlarged to such an extent, that he had been struggling to breathe normally. He suggested a surgery. We were anxious to hear that.

We went to KK Women's and Children Hospital Singapore for the surgery. Doctor KK was very friendly and generous, so were the nurses, especially the South Indian ones. Doctor KK informed us that Umair's tonsils should be removed completely, which would assist him to breathe easily. Also, his Adenoid would be trimmed with a medical tool which could stop bleeding as well.

He could hardly swallow food. Even had difficulty drinking milk or any liquid. So, he had been admitted into KK Hospital for the surgery. The ambiance of the Hospital was overwhelming. Admitted children could play downstairs at the play zone. They had toy vehicles resembling different animals. Also, I used to take him to the slides at the play zone. They had patisserie at the first floor, we used to eat there when Umair was admitted.

Tubes were set in Umair's ears after surgery. After that every six months we had to go to Singapore for follow up checkups. Our frequent visit, made Umair think that Singapore was our second home. We used to stay at Park Royal in Singapore for his follow up checkups. Me and my husband used to take the kids to City Square Mall opposite to Park Royal. We used to have our meal at MacDonald's and after that kids played at the indoor play zone.

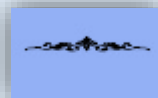
We took the kids to Universal studio during Umair's follow up checkups, so that each trip becomes pleasurable for him. We watched 6D movies of transformer, got photographed in Madagascar background. Visiting Marina Bay Sands and Gardens by the Bay made them content.

By visiting these places of attraction, Umair started forgetting that he had health issues. We even bought the kids blazers from Mustafa Mart to make them look smart, feel confident,



Me, Zayeen and Umair at the Universal Studio

which made them happy as ever. Our activities might make people think that we were materialistic as parents, but our actions were always meant to make the kids happy.



Fourteen

TRAVEL ACCOUNTS



"The essence of adventure lies in exploring the unknown"

I believe travelling is a process of rediscovering one's self. The quest for adventures is not limited to men only, for their free movement in the public sphere. Women can also travel in a group of friends or with family if security is a question. It is a shame that I have never travelled alone. As a child, I travelled to India a few times with my parents and sisters. Enriched with culture Rajasthan is a place which I have visited with them and have accumulated my experiences into this travel account for substantial readers. Though women travel writers were non-existent in the past, there is a revival and modern women travelers like me can be inspirations for other women who want to

explore the world and emerge as writers. To me travelling is also a way to escape the constraints of my society. There was a time when men dominated Travel Literature, female travelers were dressed up as man and travelled extensively. But no disguise is needed in this modern world, as a human being I have the right to know and explore, and can't be content with a sedentary life.

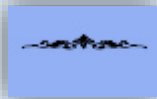
Precisely articulated plan has taken me to the Genting Highland which removed my acrophobia. Traveling to different parts of the world and knowing people and their varied culture have made me a better person as well. Wandering where the distant horizon blurs blue into the sky..

Enveloped by the Alps and surrounded by placid lakes, this land's landscape is picturesque and breathtaking. The fresh breeze and the serene ambience made my holidays in Switzerland phenomenal. Walking along the coastal path for the pedestrians around the expansive Lake Geneva, enjoying the astounding views of Lucerne in euphoria, descending from Mount Pilatus by the steepest train on Earth...or delve into Swiss chocolate in the most innovative country of the world! The memory archive is full of beautiful memorabilia...Having brunch by a lake in Lucerne or Movenpick ice cream that melted my heart and left a long-lasting effect! The luxurious resorts, the historic mansions make this country simply a sublime. A utopia indeed.

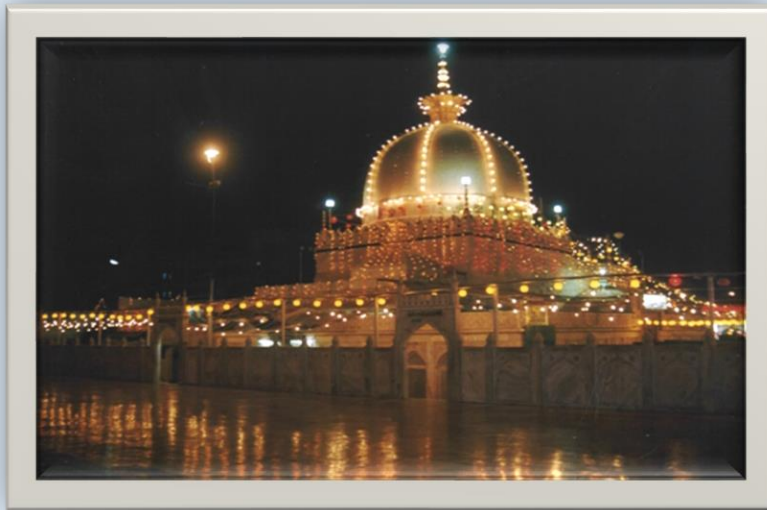
Expansive Lake Geneva seemed like a sea to me, breathtaking Lucerne made me think at once staying there forever. I felt for the first time in my life that I am not too short- in the miniature park of Madurodam, cannot forget the aerial view from the Eiffel Tower and the adjacent Merry-go-round, the souvenir shops and the croissant! I am addicted to flowers but missed the Tulip Festival in Amsterdam in 2014 due to off season. Had to be content with plastic and ceramic tulip souvenirs while coming back!!!

While in Johor Bahru, my kids became ecstatic at Lego Land, Genting Highland removed my acrophobia, Penang Island made me romantic, Singapore always makes me feel at home while Melbourne treasures one of the most memorable events of my life- my MBA Convocation.

However, Tea gardens, greenery almost everywhere and staying at world class resorts of Sreemongol at Hobigonj of Bangladesh are something I relish. Traveling is my passion. In my bucket list are Venice and Maldives, before they disappear into the sea!



Mannat in Ajmer

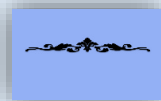


Ajmer Sharif that we visited at Rajasthan

Spending an Eid at the exquisite destination of Ajmer's Pink City, staying at the enchanting residence of a *khadem* with parents and sisters while I was a student of class five, was an overwhelming experience. Overwhelmed by their hospitality, and entertained with sumptuous

dishes that they served us on Eid day, we started exploring the city. The nearby eateries with their menus posted in large alphabets to draw customers, the congested markets that sold ethnic dresses, the precious Lac bangles of Rajasthan that Amma bought us -all are still vivid. We couldn't ignore the inevitable chaos! It is believed that the wishes come true if one visits and prays at the Dargah Sharif (Shrine), surprisingly my parents had a *Mannat* (wish) too. Devotees who thronged for ziyarat (prayer) from different parts of the Indian sub-continent, throw coins, or precious items into a huge deggh, believing that their wishes might come true! Meals for the devotees are prepared in the deggh mixing it with the precious items and later served among them.

Taking off shoes at the entrance of the Dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, amazed by the sight that the floor being dusted with the decorative petal of a peacock, or seeing a peacock or a camel at the desert for the first time while riding on a bus, were fascinating. Had *Laal Maas* with *Naan* bread for the first time at a dhaba which was simply inexplicable.



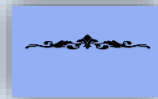
Kingdom of **F**antasy



“It is on the road that my inner voice speaks the loudest”

It was a new flamboyant theme park in Ashulia by Concord in 2002. The commercials were aired on TV, print ads were on leading magazines too. We were longing to explore, hang out in the tranquility of the elaborate theme park, spend the whole day doing rides and have *Chotpoti* and *Fuska*. The trip to Ashulia, a couple of hours away from Dhanmondi, seemed phenomenal. Since Amma, Abba, me and my three sisters were going to a Bangladeshi amusement park together for the first time! We were thrilled about it. Back then, the amusement park had just started its

operations a few months ago and we were eagerly looking forward to watch a 3D movie!! Deluged by the bumpy roads, valleys and hills, and inundated by the 3D sound, it felt that I were in the middle of the action in a virtual world! After watching 9D movies nowadays, the 3D movies seem obsolete, but the experience that I had almost twenty years ago, was absolutely delightful. The ambiance of the park was simply pleasant, we were overjoyed and even the very familiar brand of ice-cream seemed flavorsome! Amusement rides, like the Bumpy Roller Coaster, Giant Splash and Bumper Car were real fun. Also, ‘soaring, tumbling, freewheeling’ through the Magic Carpet ride was simply amazing!!



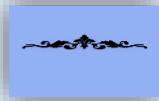
IN PALACE



Kids asked their father, “Baba, are we going to Singapore this Eid vacation”? Sohel said, “this time me and your mother would take you to a beautiful resort in Sylhet”. I said, “nowadays there are luxurious resorts in pristine locations of Sylhet. Also you will see the tea gardens.” We stayed in a villa surrounded by exquisite landscape. It had a huge verandah, where we took pictures. There were buggies to pick up us from the villa to desired destinations inside the premises.

Did fishing, but I think nowadays the fish are smart, if the bait is not delicious enough, they don't get caught! Watched a children's movie in the cineplex but it wasn't worth watching, so we came out of the Cineplex. Me and the kids played Air Hockey in the Game Zone almost for two hours. The kids' zone was also entertaining. We almost lost Zayeen who was hiding in the intricate maze!

There is an infinity pool with amazing views of the helipad, amphitheater and lake. We de-stressed ourselves in sauna. There is also Turkish bath which provides a therapeutic experience removing the toxins from the body. Ayurvedic treatments like *Shirodhara* is served in Spa to female clientele to rejuvenate themselves.



A

serene Summer vacation in picturesque

E

urope



Europe-a mélange of different people, culture, and languages always fascinated me. Its lush landscape- magnificent scenery, natural lakes, and old structures invited me to visit it and experience it. The virtual tour of the landscape of the Netherlands boasting the gorgeous tulip garden, old windmills, and beautiful canals did not make me content unless I visited them in

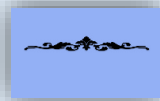
person. However, I dreamt about discovering the breathtaking unique old town, Lucerne surrounded by flowers, lake and mountain peak, for years. Walking by the shore on bare feet by the enormous refreshing Geneva lake while the soothing breeze would blow away my hair gently -is something I craved for. While tasting the luxurious chocolates of Switzerland, travelling to the stunning Rhein Falls overlooking the lush farmland, I considered a luxury. I saved money for this desired tour for years and planned for it in leisure. The waiting was over on April 2014. It was I, who decided for a real tour to three pristine countries of Europe- France, Switzerland and Netherlands with my family. After we received the Schengen Visa, allowing us to visit twenty- six countries of Europe, we could cover three countries only due to budget constraints.



Zayeen and Umair by the Lake Geneva

However, we travelled by Emirates from Dhaka to Switzerland. Having the privilege to visit the hidden gem of Europe, Switzerland, was simply remarkable. The country which is well-

known for its impressive scenes, castles and the Alps left us spellbound when we visited it. We could cover Geneva, Zurich and Lucerne. The first city we visited was Zurich. Stayed in this classy, entertaining and versatile city for three days.



Zurich



Zurich

In Zurich, the ambience was spectacular. The lake Zurich and its promenades were pulsing in life as the families like us indulged and revived themselves in sportive and diverse activities. We

explored the lake Zurich through leisurely peddle-boat ride. They even had sailing boats and courses for the more adventurous! I noticed that the shores of Lake Zurich have given birth to many iconic Swiss designs. Got to know from a local that approximately, one twelfth of the total employed population of Zurich work in the creative and cultural sectors. Amazing! After taking rest in our hotel, I browsed through a department store named Manor at cosmopolitan Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse featuring top labels and fashionable brands but found the items a bit pricey. But we shopped at H&M. We bought hoodies for kids which we found later, made in Bangladesh! Also gifted a hoodie to my mother-in-law which was made in Bangladesh as well! It became a bit problematic to make her understand that those were originally from H&M. Delicious, unique chocolate was a motivation to visit Switzerland besides its scenic beauty, so we visited independent chocolatiers besides some famous chocolate factories such as the Lindt factory in Zurich where they demonstrate the making of different chocolate creations of Switzerland. We indulged in as many bites as you could handle. Lindt's Lindor truffles are one of the best chocolate treats, I have ever had! The pastries that caught my attention right away when we visited Switzerland are none other than my absolute favorite Carac, a Swiss dessert with a sweet taste and a chocolate filling and three different colors, peach, green and brown.

Lucerne



Lucern

On the fourth day of our visit to Switzerland, we took the train from Zurich Airport to get to Lucerne city in 1 hour 2 minutes. Also, the cheapest way, (costing 12.50 Euro) to reach Lucerne. Our trip to Mount Pilatus by accident, is something I reminisce about till today. Surprising my husband with a present of a CK watch from an authentic watch boutique at Lucerne, the lush green countryside of Switzerland is also a fond memory I recollect from my archive. At the top of the Mount Pilatus, which we climbed through the cable car and train, offered us beautiful gardens of sunflowers, country cottages, amidst the breathtaking Swiss Alps as the backdrop. The medieval architecture of Lucerne, gives it a look of fairytale setting. From Lucerne, we went to Geneva by

train. We stayed at Warwick Geneva. Geneva is well known for the Geneva Lake, which is like a sea in fact when one goes near it and experience the expansiveness of the lake and the picturesque scenes it delivers. It became almost a routine to go to the lake in the afternoon from our hotel, Holiday Inn and stay there till the evening, and enjoy the fresh breeze, the wide array of yachts boarded on the northern side of the lake, where we would walk along the pavement after crossing the spacious road. My youngest son, Umair loved to collect pebbles and I was his companion besides other children.

Though language was a barrier since they generally spoke German and French which we hardly understood but the bridge lying over the lake bridged the individuals of two completely different cultures. We could see a number of renowned Swiss watch stores on the Southern side of the lake, Rolex, Omega, Cartier, Longines, Tissot are some of the best brands to be mentioned.

The turquoise blue color of the lake and the color of the sky merged together and used to form a landscape painting which I still behold into my eyes. I was also mesmerized by the scenic beauty of the Mont- Blanc range.

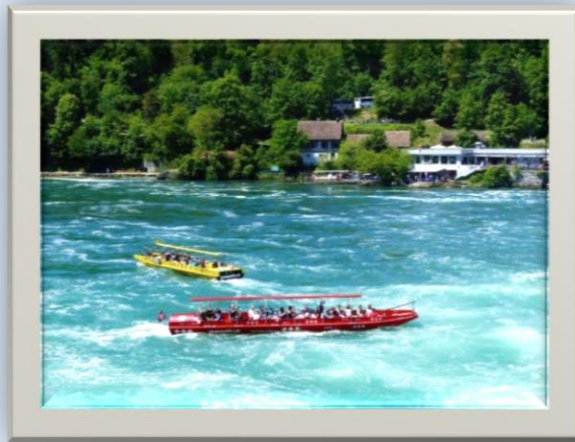
Rhine Falls



Me and my family in

Rhine falls

On the eleventh day, a Bangladeshi acquaintance in Switzerland, took us to the stunning Rhine Falls by car. It is a beautiful wine growers' region which is close to the German border. It is Europe's biggest waterfall. We were thrilled by this sublime natural phenomenon by taking a boat



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Me and Umair on a boat at Rhine Falls

ride close to the Fall. When the boat went close to the Fall, we along with other passengers on the boat could feel the force of the water falling into the lake as it splashed on us. The picturesque landscape was breathtaking. Surrounded by opulent greenery, the houses overlooking the lake were almost identical, white structures with brick roof.

Paris



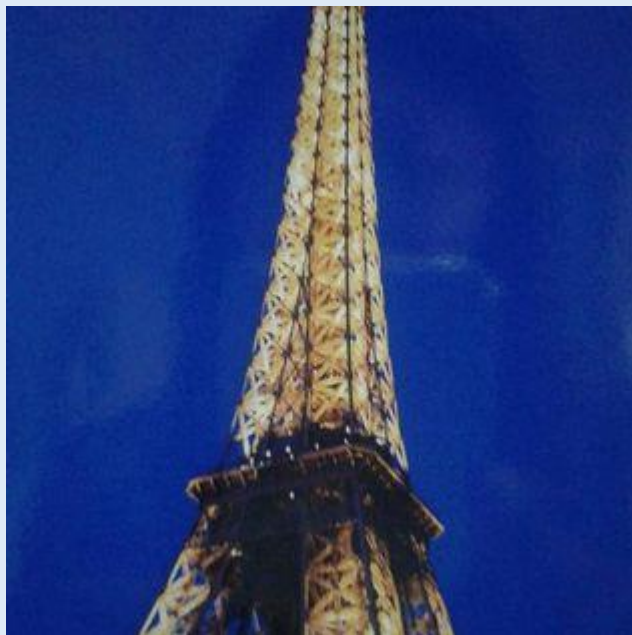
From Switzerland, we headed for a riveting trip to Paris by train. We stayed at Holiday Inn, in a suite consisting of two rooms. We had a room booked by an acquaintance initially, who booked the room for three instead of four by mistake. But after seeing four of us the hotel personnel insisted us to take a suite, which was the only available option at that time. It caused us budget constraints eventually.



The Eiffel Tower

When you're back from France-
Take up your pen and write down
Why you like me -it would be nice and fun!"

Emmanuel Macron on a poem about Eiffel Tower



The Eiffel Tower



Zayeen and Umair are on a merry-go-round

Eiffel Tower as a backdrop

We planned to cover the famous top tourist destinations of Paris, -The Eiffel Tower, Disneyland Paris, Louvre, Paris. I had a desire to go to the top of this ancient conspicuous paradigm, the Eiffel Tower, which is named after the engineer Gustave Eiffel. His company designed and built the tower. It is also considered to be a distinctive symbol of Paris for 130 years. We went to the Eiffel Tower, situated at Champ de Mars, by a taxi. Later waiting at the long queue for hours, we regretted of not buying the tickets earlier!

The elevator took us to the top most floor, from where we had the panoramic view of the pristine landscape of Paris and of course the iconic Seine river that flows through Paris. We enjoyed the picturesque natural beauty of the city and didn't miss a chance to take pictures to behold the beautiful memories. We bought souvenirs from its souvenir shops on the esplanade and first and second floor. Each shop has its own specialty. Souvenirs like-a set of miniature Eiffel Towers, key rings, bags, stationaries and coffee mugs, we purchased from the souvenir shops are the memorabilia of our Paris tour. We didn't miss the opportunity to have aesthetically presented snacks but didn't go for gourmet with refined rich courses being a bit pricey.

When we came down from the Eiffel Tower, it was evening by then but seeing the merry-go-round my kids, Zayeen and Umair were high-spirited and asked me grinning "Can we have a ride on the Merry-go-round, Ma"? It was hard to avoid the whimsical, brightly painted carousels. I bought them tickets merrily for the Parisian carousel.

However, we had croissants at a patisserie named F. Fegueux near the Eiffel Tower in the 7th arrondissement. The croissant was soft, moist and the top crust was sweet, still, my kids had it with jam. Me and Sohel had it with luscious cheese.

Disneyland Paris



"A dazzling place I never knew"

It is one of the top ten most visited theme parks of the world. Consists of two parks, Disneyland Park and Walt Disney Studios Park and a shopping district named Disney village comprised of about fifty eateries and a number of outlets. However, Walt Disney Studios Park is based on movie making concept. This Magic Kingdom is envisioned by master story teller Walt Disney where Europe's most loved stories live on up. In Disneyland, though children are the main target audience, older visitors like us are not neglected either. It is a shining, shimmering, happy place where everybody walks along the whole place. But the disabled people can ask for disabled pass at the Information center. One thing amazed us, we did not see the same Disney character twice, there is no duplicate.



Zayeen in Disney Land Paris



Umair in Disney Land Paris

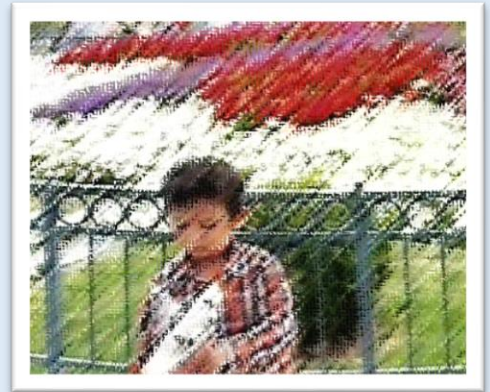
However, this park is extremely clean and the employees are not treated as usual staff, rather as members of the franchise. I visited it in April with my family, and it was very busy during

that time, though it is suggested to visit it in January when it is chilly. But the ambiance is indescribable, seemed like, I'm in a whole new world! Unbelievable sight indeed!



Me and Zayeen in Disney

Land Paris



Umair in Disney land Paris

My sons were amazed meeting their favorite Disney characters and by the colorful parades. It felt great since most of the visitors wore hair bands with Mickey Minnie logo, girls wore princess like dresses. We took pictures in front of the theme castles and flower garden. Bought our sons their favorite Disney toys and T-shirts with Mickey logo. It was a merry trip to Disneyland Paris where we spent almost the whole day. Gave us some very unforgettable memories!



Dazzling Kuala Lumpur



On Our First visit

Our first visit to Kuala Lumpur was on the thirty first December of 2005, the month our wedding reception took place. We were received at the Airport by my husband's Malaysian friend Barrister Ghani who is a well-known figure there for being a captain as well of a ship, also by his wife Alisson and a year-old son Adrian. We stayed at their apartment in a condominium situated at Jalan Kiara.

Ghani took us for a drive on the first of January 2006. We found the streets very clean and very few people than we expected! He took us to 1Mont Kiara, which is an expansive shopping mall with a variety of stores and eateries. It was decorated for both Christmas and New Year perhaps. The Festive look made me happy! I bought outfits from H&M.

We went to Petronas Twin Tower later, also shopped at Suria KLCC, which is at the feet of the Tower. Orange is my favorite global brand which is affordable and offers a wide array of wearable outfits. I bought three comfortable outfits for myself.

On the third day of our trip, we visited Penang Island. Sitting on the beach seeing the sun set was a precious sight! Spent the whole day at the beach, took pictures and we talked. Perhaps, we wished we could make the time stand still!

After we returned from Penang Island, Ghani and Allison, took us to Genting Highlands, located on the peak of Mount Ulu Kali which is 1800 meters above sea level. 20 degree or slightly



Genting High Lands

above. The climate was spring-like and the temperature during day was around 20 degree or slightly above. We had a fascinating cable car ride. It removed my acrophobia. The view from the cable car watching the sculptures of the ancient natives on the nearby hills and the dense forest beneath are still vivid!

However, adventurous Ghani took us to a medieval French village, Bukit Tinggi, which is situated in the middle of a rain forest. There is a rabbit garden that we visited and spent some time looking at quite a huge number of cute rabbits! I have never seen so many rabbits together!



French Village in Malaysia

We also visited the Administrative capital of Malaysia, Putrajaya. It is twenty-five kilometers away from Kuala Lumpur. The building structures are an amalgamation of modern architecture with Islamic influence. The well thought design of the streets, the water body and the

landscape gave the federal territory a progressive infrastructure. However, one can apply for Malaysia My Second Home program in Putrajaya which allows foreigners to stay in Malaysia for ten years, but there are some criteria.

On Our second visit

We stayed at Grand Millennium, a five Star Hotel in Bukit Bintang on our second visit to Kuala Lumpur with our two adorable sons. Our main purpose was visiting Lego land at Johor Bahru. It is a theme park where everything is made of Lego. There are also toy stores where they sell the authentic Lego brand toys. Zayeen and Umair roamed around the whole place even when it was humid. We did boat rides and car race. Kids received their Lego Driving License, which looks almost like an original one. The driving licenses boosted kids' confidence!



Umair is holding a hand of a lego bench lion



Zayeen and Umair are sharing a with a lego man



In Sunway Lagoon

Sunway Lagoon is a theme park, especially known for its water kingdom. It is an artificial lake with a tower in the middle. Zayeen got into the top of the tower, water was splashing over him, he was enjoying it so much that it was difficult to stop him. There is a zoo as well.

Thirty first December in the land of Himalayas



We spent the thirty first December of 2013 in Fulbari Resort in Pukhara of Nepal. Initially, we visited Kathmandu, stayed at Everest Hotel. There was a antique shop downstairs from which I bought an antique decorative item which still adorns our sitting place. I bought stone accessories from another store, surprisingly they took taka when I ran out of Nepali Rupee! We went to Pokhara from Kathmandu in a plane so slim and light that when it moved left and right, it seemed that we, the least passengers ever boarded a plane, were about to fall off on to the lush green landscape!!

On the thirty first eve, there was a party at the downstairs hall room. In one of the hall rooms, there was a live concert and on the other, a feast. Sumptuous dishes were arranged in rows



Fulbari Resort in Pokhara, Nepal

and to my astonishment, I discovered a fried cockroach in one of the attractive dishes! When informed the waiter, he removed it in such a way, as if it were a usual phenomenon! Now I wonder, was that a special cockroach dish?!

Looking at the gorgeous view from the balcony is something beyond description. I had a walk alone in the morning of first January when my family was still asleep! Walking along the serene garden in the expansive area in winter removed my stress and recharged me for the new year ahead.

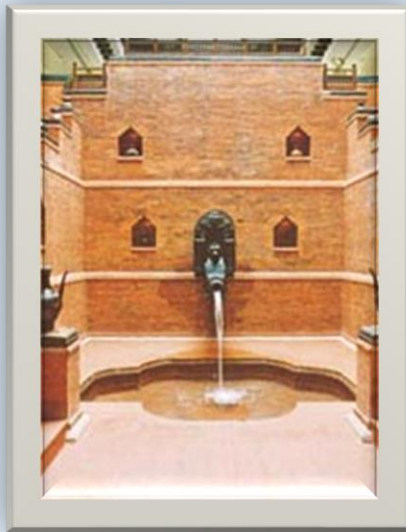


Zayeen and Umair are all smile in

Phulbari Resort

There were souvenir shops downstairs, which sold especially stole (kind of shawl). I bought those of a variety of colors for myself and for closed ones as gifts. Three unframed paintings by local artists adorn the wall of my master bedroom, one of sunrise, sun set the other and a cloudy sky overlooking some rural habitats is another. Looking at these paintings brings me back some beautiful memories of Pokhara.

Tal Barahi Temple also known as Lake Temple is located on the island of Phewa lake, was also in the tourist package which had to be reached by crossing a river like lake.



Fulbari Resort

It is a two-story structure and a temple of Hindu Goddess Durga. There is another serene temple downstairs of Fulbari resort which I dropped by, noticed full of intricate wooden curved windows and other precious artifacts.

However, Himalayas being the highest Mountain range of the world has one hundred and ten peaks, seven thousand three hundred meters above sea level. We saw the Annapurna II mountain peak from Pokhara. We bought two wooden intricately carved souvenirs from a shop situated on a valley. Also, bought Nepali *tupi* or cap for my sons.



FEELS LIKE SECOND HOME- SINGAPORE

The other day My kids were saying, “Ma, can you take us to City Square Mall? We want to play.” I was amazed. Since, it’s not in Bangladesh, in Singapore. There was a time when we had to visit Singapore two to three times a year for medical check-ups. Kids were little. We usually stay at Park Royal overlooking City Square Mall, an environmentally friendly shopping mall well equipped with all the necessary tools needed in play zones for a child’s mental growth.



Changi Airport

Whenever Singapore Airlines reaches the Singapore Changi Airport, the picture-perfect setting makes kids very happy and we cannot resist taking pictures. A big hub for destinations throughout Asia, it is also considered to be the best Airport of the world. It is an example, how a planned infrastructure and green set up can rejuvenate the passengers like us and invite the visitors to visit it once again for its endless attractions, Marina Bay Sands Hotel, Singapore Flyer, Gardens by the Bay, Sentosa Island, Madame Tussauds Singapore.

Singapore is a melting pot of cultures. One gets to see people of diverse descent. South Indian, Malaysian, Chinese. Also, this vibrant “Lion City” as it is referred to city boasts a culture which is an amalgamation of English, Arab, Chinese, Malaysian and Indian. Most people speak English, so very easy to communicate. Basically, they are bilingual. They either speak English or Mandarin, Malay or Tamil. Filled with delightful culinary experiences.



Me with Zayeen and Umair at the Cloud Forest in Singapore

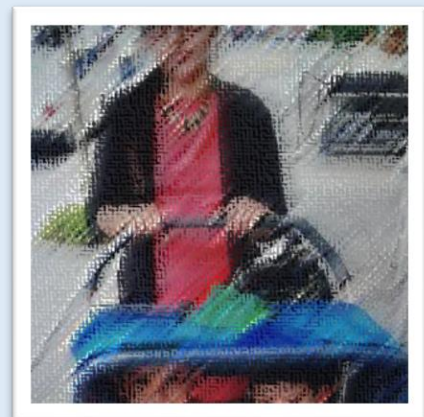
Singapore Flyer, Asia's largest observation wheel, is something we never miss. The ticket is around forty Singapore dollars for adults and ten for children, quite affordable and the experience is simply breathtaking. We immersed ourselves in a canvas of views of the city- the stadium, lake, Marina Bay Sands Hotel, the Super trees at Gardens by the Bay; observing everything from hundred and sixty-five meters above the sea level! Amazing! One can also dine inside it, but a couple has to spend SGD three fifty and above for it! A hefty amount indeed.



Zayeen and Umair in Gardens by the Bay

Marina Bay Sands Hotel is an iconic hotel and one of the most famous not only in Asia but in the world. Best known for its state-of-the-art architectural design and seven-star property. Guests can swim in its rooftop infinity pool.

Universal Studio is Singapore's only movie theme park. The day we visited the Universal studio it was hard to roam around due to scorching sun. I put kids in a stroller where two persons could sit easily. We took pictures in one of their studios in different themes like, *Madagaskar* and Transformers.



We watched Transformers 3D movie. Throughout the show, I kept my eyes closed. It was too scary, it seemed that the transformers would destroy me! When the movie was over, Zayeen said, "Ma, now you may open your eyes".

Meeting a Raptor from Jurassic Park, Umair got frightened hearing the noise it made. He started crying. We had to leave early.



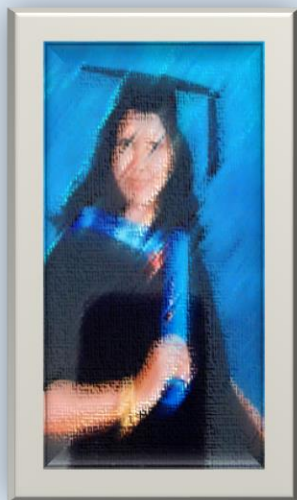
In Dolphin Island Sentosa

The Dolphin show in Sentosa Island, was brilliant. Two dolphins were accompanied by their trainers. Some colorful birds were also the attractions of the show who flew above the audiences and kept both the dolphins and the birds kept all of us mesmerized.

Fifteen

The Exquisite Lace saree of my MBA Graduation

The other day, I was organizing all my dismantled sarees from my closet according to their color and the occasion I was going to wear them. Each saree has a tale to tell since I bought each one of them or designed some of them myself keeping in mind a special occasion. I discovered that I have a huge collection of pretty sarees-Jamdani, designer jamdani, muslin, katan, Rajshahi silk, Kanjeevaram, embroidered Taushore, Chiffon,Kota, Taant and delicate lace saree. The color of the sarees varied according to their material. Among all of my favorite sarees one magnificent lace saree made me nostalgic, it is so special to me, made me look elegant and sophisticated on a very significant event of my life, Victoria University Graduation Program in Melbourne, Australia.



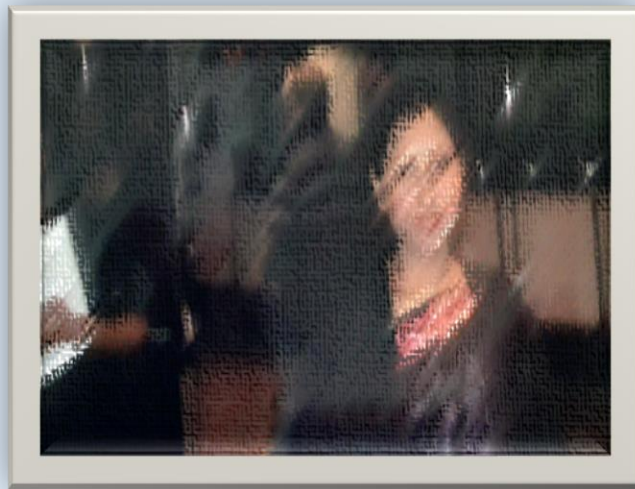
Me in my Convocation gown at Victoria University, Melbourne

It was the year 2009 October; I was a mother of a year-old son, Zayeen by then. Though I was associated with our family real estate business indirectly, I was an entrepreneur as well who designed customized sarees out of passion. I designed bespoke sarees for close relatives and sold them in my boutique named Tanaz. The unique design of the sarees was appreciated by the clients, especially Mimmi Apa, a cousin. Seeing me anxious about the attire for the ceremony, she said, “If you can design bespoke outfits for the clients, why can’t you design for yourself? You know yourself better than anybody does.” Her stimulating words impelled me to design my own attire for the most awaited occasion of my life MBA graduation program of Victoria University. Also, my designed outfits were chosen by *The Daily Star* Eid Fashion Album jury, surprisingly all of the models on the cover page wore my creations! That was an inducement as well.



Victoria University Convocation

The occasion was much awaited because I did not collect my graduation certificate until 2009 though I started it in 2004. In between 2004 and 2009, a few significant phenomena took place, for instance, my marriage, a full-time job at a multinational company and motherhood.



Me draped in the exquisite lace sari at my MBA

Graduation

Looking at the black lace saree with intricately embroidered red lace '*paar*', I reminisced about the choice of the color and fabric that would suit my personality and of course, the occasion. I decided to wear a saree which would represent my culture as well. Still remember, the woman of Southam studios who was helping me to put on my gown and graduation cap for photoshoot,

appreciated me in the saree profoundly, saying “you look gorgeous in this saree”. However, I decided not to go for vibrant colors and thought black would make me look elegant. So, I collected the chic black floral lace material from a fabric shop of Rapa Plaza, Bangladesh. After buying it, I sketched a few designs of ‘*paar*’ that would complement the fancy lace. I thought to myself red would complement black the most, and I was not wrong.

It was a tough decision to travel overseas with a one-year-old child. But I was determined to attend the program, so my husband Sohel then a barrister, now a Justice helped me to fill up the form for my graduation. My youngest sister Brishti, a barrister, helped me to book tickets online far ahead of the program. I remember the tickets of Economy class to Melbourne were quite reasonable, costing us Eighty thousand taka for the adults and my son Zayeen’s ticket was less than that. I managed to pay for my ticket only from the savings I made and my father bought us the rest of the tickets to fulfill my dream. We applied for Visit VISA to Australia and when we received the VISA, I was overwhelmed. However, I ordered one of my boutique artisans to prepare the stylish saree, attach the embroidered ‘*paar*’ with sequins to the saree. When I trialed the saree at my Parents’ Dhanmondi residence a few days ahead of the Graduation program, I looked at my reflection in the mirror, I was mesmerized by the beauty of the exquisite lace saree. It certainly elevated my confidence to attend the program and I was looking forward to it on my minimalistic, experimental, yet statement making saree.

We contacted one of my cousins named Shejoti who lives in Melbourne with her husband Shakil, so that we could stay with them as their guests. After they confirmed that we could, we started packing our luggage. As I look back, I feel embarrassed thinking that I took rice and pulse in small packages for my sons' meal along with Cerelac. But the Custom Officials seeing the pulse asked, "What are these, pulse? You are not allowed to carry pulse to Australia since these are restricted". I also over stuffed our luggage with my sons' comforters and 'kantha' to wrap him up in cold weather. Surprisingly, in Melbourne, during day time, the weather used to be sunny but after the sunset the weather became cold but not chilly. The temperature was bearable so was the ambience in Melbourne. I was amazed to see crows roaming around in the locality for leftover food perhaps. But the clean environment must have disappointed the crows.

Giving Shejoti company while she hung the clothes from a rod at the expansive backyard of her one-storey residence, made me feel that I was in a village or in a Holiday resort. Living in an overpopulated city like Dhaka, made us feel initially that the place was too quiet but it felt serene after a few days when we got accustomed to it. We would go for a nearby long walk or Shejoti and her husband Shakil bhai would take us for shopping or a long drive to visit picturesque park and sea beach.

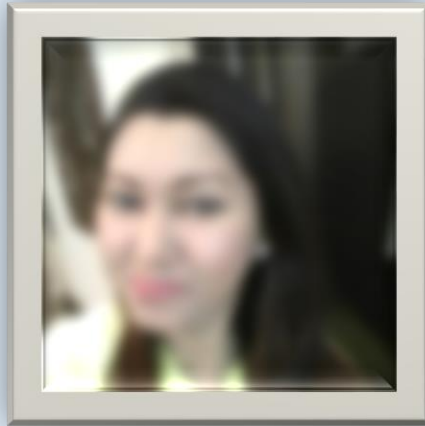
However, we received the venue/location/parking map, guest (husband) ticket and registration slip regarding graduation, by post in Dhaka. The sitting arrangement was also specified

in the guidelines. I got a seat in the middle of the hall while Soheli could sit anywhere of the hall. It was also in the guideline that children below six were not allowed due to the duration of the program. This statement made me despondent thinking that I would not be allowed to take Zayeen along with us. It was mentioned in the guideline, “The ceremony would commence at 10 am but the graduands had to arrive and register for the ceremony at the Registration desk at The Forum, level 1 from 8 am to 8.45 am”. By 9.15am, I collected my Academic Dress and put it on over my extremely beautiful saree. Being a dandy, I was concerned that my lovely saree did not get shadowed like a silhouette behind my gown. After the individual and combined photographs with Soheli by a professional photographer, looking at the photos in her camera, I was relieved that since the academic dress was knee long, the lace and pleats of the graceful saree were easily visible. I ensembled the superb attire with bangles and my favorite simple necklace.

On the graduation day, Shakil bhai drove me and Soheli to Flemington Racecourse main entrance before going to his office, while Shejoti looked after Zayeen almost the whole day. I was thrilled to be at the venue, attending the program, sharing the Hall with students of different nationality. My presence in a saree gave me a distinct identity among all the nationals. Having refreshments and taking photos were pleasurable as well. While Soheli was taking my pictures on a different floor after the certificates were given, he asked me to turn around to enjoy the breathtaking view of the horse racing at the background. Attending the graduation ceremony draped in a saree in a foreign country and stand apart was an experience never to be forgotten. The lovely delicate lace saree made a special event very special with pictures my archive boasts. It is

undoubtedly timeless and priceless, a quintessential possession to be cherished for the rest of my life.

AUTHOR'S NOTE



I am very delighted to be an MA student of the Creative Writing Program, which has enabled me to practice creative non-fiction write-ups in courses from which the idea of writing a Memoir emerged eventually. I believe that this memoir would be a treasure for my elderly mother, who is not aware of the fact how the phenomena that occurred in the past, have impacted on me. It is a medium to communicate the fact to my family, teachers, friends and the audience that in this fast- moving world, sometimes we need to acknowledge the people who have contributed significantly to who we are today. Moreover, this memoir could bridge my childhood to that of my children's as well. By going through the pages, they will get to know their mother from a different perspective perhaps! Also, the readers will get to know that revisiting the past is a pleasurable journey and they must try it too, and cherish the most pleasurable moments spent with family, friends and dear ones. At this phase of life, I thought this would be the right time to compile my experiences of the past, before I become older and could recall everything properly.

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This memoir would not have been possible without the love and support of many people. I would not be who I am today without the steady hand of my mother, Mrs. Farida Aziz. She has always been my rock allowing me to venture new opportunities, like pursuing a Master's in English Literature, a completely different discipline from my previous background in Business Administration. She gave me the confidence to continue and complete my MA program almost after a nine-year study break. I attended my classes leaving my children at my mother's place, most of the time, thinking they would be the safest there. I would not be able to function successfully in this world as a mother, wife, professional and student without her encouragement. She has shown me how to think for myself and to use my voice. Through the journey of the process of writing the Memoir, I realize that I developed a special bond with my mother, also noticed that she is very excited to read the end product. I dedicate this Memoir to my parents and would compile it as a book to gift them!

It was very challenging for me, initially making my husband understand about pursuing my dreams of being a writer. As I am associated with my family business and a beneficiary, he thought that should be more than enough for a woman, but I wanted to utilize my potentials. But I am grateful to him to accompany me to my MBA Convocation in Melbourne, Australia. I was a

new mother back then, he did the correspondence with my then University, Victoria Melbourne, for the graduation formalities. Also delighted about the fact that now he understands that I am determined to complete my MA program with distinction and utilize my potential and creativity in the education industry perhaps!

Recalling the experiences and revisiting the past, had been a wonderful journey. And the person who would have been the happiest to see me completing my third Master's and knowing my Dissertation content consists of memorabilia of him, the most, is my father. He had been a very strict father. His conviction was that an illuminated individual is never dependent on others. In me he embedded the ideology that, as a woman, I should be self-sufficient, a caring mother and an enlightened individual who would change her society with her intellect. When some of the acquaintance critiqued me for joining the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka, he felt proud of me saying, "Among nine hundred sixty-seven candidates, you were selected. You have proven that you were the best qualified person for the post". Abba taught me to work hard. The whole process of writing down my experiences, was a trip to the past reminiscing about my father as a multi-faceted individual who possessed a vast knowledge about literature and music and had an aesthetic architectural acumen besides being a practicing lawyer, Chairperson of a real estate company, Founder President of a Club and President of an Association.

A special thanks to incredibly talented Professor Kaiser Md. Hamidul Haq Sir, my Dissertation Supervisor for his meticulous feedback, while doing my Dissertation. He had been my great influence in choosing the Non-Fiction genre for the Dissertation.

In addition, I want to thank my amazing sons, who have supported me during this writing process and have helped me become a better person. Zayeen, reproduced the old pictures, which I have incorporated in my Dissertation. Umair has uploaded the photographs from the family archive for me. I am grateful to them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pursued a Master's in English Literature and Cultural Studies and achieved a merit distinction, magna cum laude. Passionate about writing creatively in different genres. Currently, doing her dissertation in Non-fiction to complete a Master's in Creative Writing. Earlier earned an MBA from Victoria University, Melbourne and BBA from North South University.

As an individual, she is creative, resilient and articulate. In the verge of cultivating her strengths and unleash her potentials. An academic adept at intertwining award winning fictions with theories and interpreting it in a comprehensible manner.

PHOTOGRAPH CREDITS

The photos are mostly from the author's Family Archive. The rest are collected from authentic sources.

