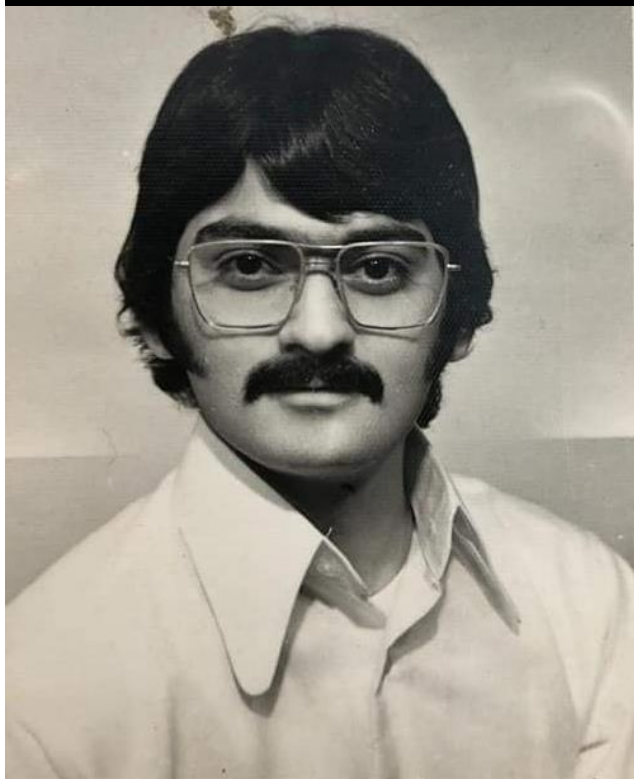


REMEMBERING BALI



By Abdulrazak Fazal *Updated: August 2020*



The 'Balis' restaurant across Annadil Burhani Cricket ground is a sad reminder and symbolic of Iqbal Jaffer Damji aka BALI. Remembering 26 years ago today we pay homage to BALI who passed away on the 11th of June 1993. His business acumen had led to the establishment of 'Bali's'. On the fateful morning of 10th June, he had gone to receive his hotel staff from Pakistan. On his way back from the airport he'd slight chest pain that made him see Dr. Kaushik who admitted him at the hospital. Bali himself did not at all approve of this hospital admittance. That evening when we went to see him, he was resentful of being stuck there but hopeful of getting a release the next day. Sadly, that did not happen and instead his lifeless body released.

Informing this unforeseeable news to his dad was tormenting. It shattered him. He became dumbfounded and remained so till his last breath. In the process he gradually lost his memory. Earlier he had lost his young daughter Kaniz and wife Zainabbai. My uncle Jaffer Khamis Damji was once a shrewd businessman. His entrepreneurial

skills had given a big boost to the 'Damji' business. In those days of the 1950s he'd travel to London, Hongkong, Singapore, Colombo and Bombay on business trips. He even opened a branch in Dsm (then in Tanganyika) in the 1940s. Among his 4 sons Bali was his favourite. In the late 50s when my mother had to go to Dsm for treatment my brother and I stayed with them for a couple of months at their 'Changa Bazaar' residence. The bonding between the father and son (then only 10 yrs. old) was amazing. We would sit at the dining table for hours and the two creating a hilarious environment. Early in the morning first we had to visit their nearby shop and each of us received 20 cents made up of 2 coins of ten cents. Bali was pampered all his life. He had tremendous influence over his dad and could easily convince and persuade him into any project. The two thought alike, as the saying goes 'like father like son'.

Changa Bazaar where they stayed had an amazing 'cricketing environment'. That corner of the street vibrated with cricket commentary on the radio when test matches were being played. We would sit with my uncle to listen to John Arlott, Maharaja of Vizay Nagam (Vizy) or Omar Qureshi, in the neighbourhood resided Muslim Dungersi and Anwer Ladha who also tuned their radios. Downstairs in the nearby shop Ramnik Nagar had his radio and Chunilal the tailor with his black board outside his shop enquiring about the score every now and then. When wickets fell or successive fours and sixes smashed all the neighbours reacted creating a wonderful atmosphere. Bali and I often went to Khalifa Ground where we'd to pay 50 cents (a lot of money in those days) to see certain matches. At times we would accompany Anver Ladha who was well known to the attendant at the ground and let us in free of charge.

Cricket had been a craze since those days. We blocked up the gully at Hurumzi banging tennis ball. Bali having generated interest in the game was soon to develop into a first-class cricketer. Seeing his style and footwork the talent in him became very much foreseeable. In Dsm besides being Head Prefect at Shaban Robert Secondary School in the 60s he even captained their cricket team that boasted of the cricketers of the caliber of Taher Amiji and Pranlal Divecha. While in London where he'd gone for further studies he played for his school. Later he played at club level in Karachi where he joined his father in business. He reemerged on the Dsm scene in the 1980s and donned USC colours opening their innings.

One incident that I'd always remember was his brisk 50 against Kinondoni. I then happened to be on the panel of USC's Selection Committee and had earlier cautioned him against slowness in his batting. He replied confidently "Wait, I'll show you." On his way back to the pavilion he gave me a cunning look. After taking off his leg guards he came rushing to me "How was it? Didn't I tell you?" I was speechless.

Handsome and charismatic, Bali was always smartly dressed and acquired the latest in cricket fashion. Recalling our London visit we made a round of sports shops to procure the flannel and GM bat of his liking for the Tarmohamed Tournament that

was approaching. He had passion for the game and aspired to perform well in Zimbabwe where the tournament was being held. He made an adorable companion during USC's tours abroad and had bought the Imran Khan hats for his teammates who displayed style on the field wearing the then in vogue hat.

He was a jolly good fellow and would even make fun of himself. One incident that he would often narrate was dropping a catch on the boundary line of Burhani's Zulfikar Yusufali who steered his team to victory. Poor Bali became the talk of 'baraza'. Bali's memories are plenty and will last forever. Just a few more that easily come to mind and always to be cherished:-

Attending his wedding in Karachi. Being avid foodies, he would drive us to Cozy Café at midnight for 'chicken & chips'. Introducing 'nihari' in Dsm and visiting my mother for her blessings along with his chef Husain and a bowl of 'nihari'.

Entertaining me with delicious 'biryani' at the posh Anarkali restaurant around Sadar in Karachi. Also, while in Bombay regaling with his narrative of Balwas, Copper Chimney, Bade Miya, Noori Mohamed and Saidi in a lengthy letter. Inviting me to see his newly formed Balis when seated along with my group during teatime of a local game at Annadil Burhani. Ah memories!

Time has flown fast. Bali's children were small when he'd passed away. His widow Hina had to suffer the agony of raising the children. Time eventually healed her distress and now the grandchildren keep her occupied. Bali's children are now all settled. Ali owns 'Maisha'. Naila runs her School 'First Years'. Farzana is in London. The 'Damji' business on Kitumbini that flourished under him had to shut down. 'Bali's' changed hands and was taken over by someone else. Destiny at times plays a real cruel game. Anyhow, life goes on.

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