

MEMOIRS – CHAPTER 4 - LIFE



By Abdulrazak Fazal *Updated: September 2020*

Dubai was a debacle for me, and I found myself back in Daressalaam where my career has slipped noticeably over the last two decades. Besides working for the Chandarias for some 13 years I am now being dragged here and there killing my time. Life has put physical as well as mental strain on me and I feel real exhaustion. There was a time when I loved travelling. Between 1967 and 1995 I travelled abroad almost every year. Today even if offered a free ticket I would not like to travel because of exhaustion. It is unfortunate that I have not gone to Mecca for Haj and now my physical strength would not permit me to go through its hassle. I could not even perform 'Umrah' when I was right there in Jeddah for two days but due to uncertainty of my onward flight my desire remained unfulfilled. Though I never attend the annual Supreme Council Session it simulates in me the feeling of accomplishment when in its invitation letter it erroneously addresses me as 'Alhaj'. I pray to Allah to grant me 'shifa' and 'niema' to perform this obligation.



The shop scene at Hampden Rd, Harrow Weald in London



One of the many tourists' sites in England- Windsor Castle

My only ambition is to travel to Iraq for the ziarat of Imam Husain at Karbala, and at Najaf for that of Maula Ali whom I idolize. Maula Ali was the advocate of true socialism, its real champion. He would not even light a candle ascribed to Baitul Maal (Treasury) when performing other than official duties. I am also a great admirer of Mother Teresa as she served humanity, and Imam Khumeni too for his simplicity and above all he was a man for the masses.

Today's computer age has revolutionized the world. The new invention may have simplified human tasks, but it has also set in its dreadful monotony. No doubt its advantages are manifold. The rare and costly telegram is replaced by the regular, casual and inexpensive email. Internet chatting to far off relatives and friends is a matter of routine. What is in vogue today is the mobile phone. Wherever you may be, on your way or at a site or resort you can communicate through it. The globalization factor has eased and narrowed links. In the past a rare journey to Daressalaam from Zanzibar implied sendoff besides sukhri (present) and its reciprocity. Today one may travel all the way to London or New York as often as twice a week without even a hint.

There used to be a time when we eagerly listened to the aapki farmaish (Indian songs) program on the radio and awaited with enthusiasm the visits to cinema

houses. Cinema goers would queue up outside cinema houses to book tickets in advance and during intervals jostled so that no part of the film was missed. Today the video and television may screen films of choice in the room itself but also lead to a spell of dozing. The soaring inflation has made life extremely difficult. Three decades back a dollar cost as little as seven shillings while today it is priced at eight hundred shillings. The purchasing power of an ordinary citizen is reduced considerably.



Long queues outside Cameo Cinema House.
The queues have vanished and no more remains Cameo.

Even cricket has lost its old touch. Before there would be hardly two to three test series in a year and cricket followers looked forward to them. The one dayers or limited cricket was not heard of. Today's commercialization has resulted in numerous one dayers but in terms of technique the game has become poorer. It is just bang and bang. Imagine fifty overs being shared between eleven batsmen while a bowler restricted to only ten overs. The battings and fixing of matches is really saddening. My favourite West Indies, once referred to as the mighty West Indies, is a depleted force today. A test match involving them is finished in a day and a half. There was a time when even five days of full play were not enough, and the test would result in a draw. Today with the emergence of teams like Zimbabwe and Bangladesh competition has become lopsided. At the local level certain anti elements crept in causing real disarray in the game. Somewhat my interest in the game is waning.

My serious problem is that I am absentminded and suffer from forgetfulness. Its main target seems to be my precious passport document that had to undergo temporary abandonment on as many as four instances. The very first instance that I recall occurred way back in the 1960s in Mombasa when, in sheer excitement of meeting my sister, my handbag with documents in it was left in the cab. Before I could remember it, the cab had moved from their residence at Fish Market. I chased it running like a mad man and fortunately a traffic halt at Fort Jesus enabled me to get hold of it.

The second time was when I heard my name being mentioned on the public announcement system at the Bombay port. It startled me and on reporting to the officer concerned I was shown my passport of which I was completely unaware. The third incident happened at Cairo airport where I was in transit. While standing in a queue and waiting to board the plane it dawned upon me that my passport was missing. I became apprehensive and ran here and there looking for it. The departure time was approaching, and I was losing my nerves when it struck me that I might have left it in the washroom below. I rushed downstairs and to my utter relief found it exactly there.

The last incident was a sensational one when I had gone to London with my family. We were on a shopping spree one day moving from one end to another and eventually dropping at Swiss Cottage on our way to a relative's place for dinner when we realized that the bag containing our passports and tickets that we had carried along with us was not there. I shuddered and just did not know what to do. We prayed to Allah and sought the saints for help. We were not in a mood to proceed for dinner and turned back in despair dropping down at Wembley Station whereas a mere last resort I reluctantly approached the stationmaster. I could not believe my ears when he pronounced my name in a peculiar accent. The bag was found in the tube that luckily for us did not proceed further and had halted at Wembley Station. We were then directed to Finchley Road Station where an officer made us fill the form and pay five pounds against the receipt of which our bag was handed back to us. God and the saints had come to our rescue. It was miraculous.

In Dubai, the exorbitant house rents varied considerably and had to be prepaid annually. We therefore tended to change our residence every year during our stay there. Once on my way back from the office in my absent-minded state I landed at the previous house. I was stupefied with amazement to see a stranger open the door. In London it was usual with me to sit in tubes in deep meditation while my station had passed way back.

Sometimes such incidents can put one in a precarious situation. Again, in Dubai I returned home once carrying purposelessly an item from a supermarket that I had neither paid for nor intended buying. Instantaneously I returned to the

supermarket to place it back stealthily in its original place. Over here once on a Saturday night in the middle of a barbeque at hotel Africana I remembered that the strong room keys under my custody had been left at the bank itself. I left the dinner and was driven to the bank where the security man who had access to the main gate escorted me to my room. The keys were right there lying on the table. Funnily every Saturday I get my quota of paan (betle leaves) wrapped but reach home empty handed. Actually, I place the paan packet on a cupboard in one corner of the mosque but after prayers I forget to collect it, only to come back all the way from home and return.

Time ticks away and memory fades. Most of my writing is a memoir and thus nostalgic. Before I am assigned any write up I find it not all that easy but once I put myself into it everything flows. The mind races, images explode in the head and the retentive memory crops up. Writing at times can be stressing. I become intensively obsessed and irritatingly preoccupied. Once during the 1984 Supreme Council Tournament I had kept awake the whole night preparing the write ups. The following morning, I interviewed the former Zanzibar fast bowler Gulamhusain Ismail (Golo) at his residence and from there hurried to Gymkhana ground to report the Union versus Dar Brotherhood match that was being played there. It was scorching summer and the physical and mental pressure that I was imposing upon myself became unbearable. Unusually I did not stay longer at the ground and in a state of dizziness returned home where I passed out.

It therefore really hurts when there is no recognition or somebody else grabs the limelight. During the write ups I even sacrificed routine family chats or children's attention and at times they even complained of neglect. With my priorities and preoccupations, I used to get this wretched feeling that I was even neglecting my old mother. She is almost ninety, invalid and restricted to her bed in a tiny compact room recalling nostalgically the spaciousness of our old house and the good old days of Zanzibar.

My mother has gone through real difficult days in her life but gave us all the affection and pampering. She even spoiled us for despite hard days she met all our demands and wishes. Even today she is concerned about her children, wherever they may be. All along since my birth more than five decades ago I see her suffering from ill health and day by day her health keeps deteriorating.

In Fatma (Dolly) I have an understanding wife who tolerates my eccentricity without a complaint. My daughter Sameera is somewhat scholarly and pursuing Pharmacy at the Muhimbili Medical Centre. I owe my website to my son Nabeel who is obsessed with computers. With his keenness on mathematics and physics he is a probable candidate for a degree course in Engineering.

Life has its ups and downs. At times it can be dreadful. Africa with its poverty abounds in crimes. Burglary is rampant in this part of the world and even we were not spared from the misfortune of being its victim. It was the 17th of Ramadhan in March 1989 when during morning hours our house was burgled. I was away in the office. Two armed robbers with guns following our maid entered inside our house along with her. It was traumatic for my mother and wife who were subjected to their cruelty. They emptied cupboards and bags, and robbed us of our ornaments, cash, and other precious possessions. The experience was a mental torture. We were dealt a cruel blow but then life must go on.

I am proud to be a Zanzibarian. One belongs to where the childhood memories exist. Sadly, it pains me to visit Zanzibar for it is no more the good old Zanzibar that I was associated with. Its stone town is a ghost town and haunting. You pass through those streets and gullies where you frequented in the past and some ghostly feeling creeps in, and in the still of the moment everything around there seems sad and sullen. The impoverished inhabitants look dejected and stare hopelessly at the visitors. Today's Zanzibar is more of a tourist resort and a dumping ground for cheap imports inducing the mainlanders to go there on a shopping spree. There is a drastic change in its cosmopolitanism and its Asian population has dwindled considerably. In its place an Indo/Arab/African race has cropped up.

The twentieth century has ended, and the new millennium dawned. Today I kill my time reclining on the sofa or my bed reading books, listening to Abdulbasit's Koran recitation, Murtaza Bandali's Jungbari nauha/marshia and the old songs of Rafi, Lata, Talat, Mukesh and Hemant or the ghazals of Mehdi Hassan and Jagjit Singh, watching BBC documentaries and flicking the television channels. I am also adapting myself to the internet and marvelling at its phenomenal performance. Life is a passage of time. There have been good days as well as bad ones and I will always cherish them. I am 53 years old now and life past fifty seems to expedite the end.

The above memories were penned 20 years back. A lot of happenings have occurred since then. Sadly, my mother passed away. I had the fortune of going for 'ziarat'. My daughter did her Masters in Pharmacy. My son graduated in Engineering and did his Masters in Finance. In cricket the T20 format supersedes the 50 overs one dayer. The inflation keeps soaring and \$ costs shs 2350 (Sept. 2020).

The mobile phone is transformed into a cell phone that performs multiple functions. It is a computer cum tape recorder cum camera & video. Facebook and WhatsApp have become the norm. We can watch all sorts of documentaries on YouTube. Telecast of a live event has been simplified into 'zoom' that leads in modern technology. The 'online' functioning such as shopping, banking, and

various other operating systems have shaken up the world and made me feel useless. I am 73 years old now. Indeed, the laws of nature never fail. When bells toll kings must obey.

By Abdulrazak Fazal

Updated: September 2020

Click below for:

- ▶ **[Abdulrazak's Updated Memoirs Series Articles](#)**
- ▶ **[Abdulrazak's Updated Zanzibar Articles](#)**
- ▶ **[More Zanzibar articles](#)**
- ▶ **[Tributes and more interesting articles](#)**
- ▶ **[Abdulrazak's original website](#)**