

Dunham: The year my daughter, Katherine, was studying on a Fullbright Scholarship, we were living in an apartment in Siddheshwari. It was then that we got to know that our landlord's daughter and son-in-law would act in a drama called 'Bishad Sindhu,' at a theatre. This was based on a historical novel. 'Bishad Sindhu,' and is mainly about religious martyrs of the Shia sect, and the two grandsons of the Prophet Mohammad(SM,) Hassan and Hussain, and the prophecy about them. This drama was a production of Dr. Jamil Ahmed, a professor of Dhaka University, whom I found to be a director and dramatist of the highest calibre. Jamil Ahmed blended the *tajia* brand of acting with the *jatra* in an amazing manner, which also had touches of ancient Greek tragedy and modern European acting, in that this drama was staged on two evenings back to back. The presentation of the scenes, the dialogue and acting was so powerful that I watched many of these shows, and continued, till I was considered to be the good luck symbol, or mascot, or the team. The inspiration and the story of this production, which was outstanding, was the melding between the Middle East and the typically rural Bangla country life. This drama continued to be staged for 3 to 8 years, twice every month, even though its subject matter was considered somewhat controversial.

It is necessary to mention that there was other outstanding work being performed in Dhaka. We were enchanted by the unprecedented creativity of the Dhaka directors of dramas which went on, one after one another. Adaptations in Bangla, and at the same time, ancient, folk, and modern forms were applied in these performances.

Question: You have lived in West Bengal for some time; can you say something about that in the context of your experience in Bangladesh.

Dunham: As I have spent more of my time in East Bengal I have a greater affinity for it. Yet I have visited Kolkata many times. I find a lot of similarities and dissimilarities between the two Banglas. The dissimilarities are mainly in the dialects, and the religious customs and traditions, and this is why the expression of the arts is also varied.

In the 1960's there was much appreciation for the songs and dance-dramas of Tagore but at the same time Iqbal was also in the minds (consciousness) of the East Bengalees. Possibly, East Bengal, even if they were puritan, they develop their own trend in their creativity of painting and drama. I personally feel that there is more originality in drama and the visual arts of Bangladesh, than Kolkata.

From 1960-1970, my husband Dan, on behalf of the Ford Foundation, went to Kolkata for the development of the shanties for the Metropolitan Planning Organization. That was when I saw the Durga Puja. In Kolkata, with my friend, Martha, who was an anthropologist, I saw the festival of Muharram. I took many photographs and made lots of recordings. These were helpful for my book, Jarigan.

I had already told you about the lady who raised me and that I had visited Kolkata, and Darjeeling with her.

That was the time of the revolution of the Naxalites. Prof N. Mukherjee, who was a colleague of Dan's at his office, was protested against. He was Professor of Law at Kolkata University. He could play the sitar well. Even though I continued practising the sitar and tabla in Kolkata, I was often quite busy with my 4 year-old daughter Catherine at that time. On Catherine's birthday, at the time when we lived at Elgin Road, she saw a puppet show for the first time. I used to take Catherine to Miss Barth's School at Lee Road; now there is an international school there where I found some friends. Catherine's teacher and her husband became quite friendly with us. She was a director and actor, and had various shows in Kolkata.

Jacqueline, daughter of Phyllis Bose, used to attend the drama lessons given by Shrimati Mazumdar at Park Street. Jacqueline later became an actress and producer of cinema. Phyllis herself acted for a couple of minutes in the film 'A Passage to India.'

During this time Dan designed a school for Mother Teresa.

While traveling in a taxi, the Naxalite's threw tea at Dan. They also invaded the office of Ford Foundation and tried to set it on fire but could not succeed as they, themselves, got drenched in kerosene.

We had become quite friendly with Badal Sarkar, in Kolkata and watched his first show of the drama 'Indarjit.' We also became friendly with Rustum Bharucha who had done his PhD. in Theatre from the reputed Yale University in the USA. He has written many books on Theatre and Drama, and we have had discussions on Theatre for years.

We met Satyajit Ray once. He is not alive now but if he was, with his keen eyes and proverbial memory, he would be able to recollect me. I cannot remember whether I visited him with a previous appointment, or had just knocked on his door, suddenly, one day. We had visited a friend's house in Lee Road for a chat/gossip one day and this house was near his apartment. That American friend was a member of 'Bread and Puppets' Theatre. At that time they were world-famous and were staging shows in Europe and Mexico. They wanted to tour America with their productions. They started their work in the 1960's and had built up public opinion against the (American) war in Vietnam through their street shows. Their puppets were wonderful and had their own wonderful styles. We went to discuss with Satyajit Ray and asked his advice as to where in Kolkata the show could be staged. We had taken lots of photographs but came back disappointed as he could offer no help. It was then that I saw the spinet harpsichord in his apartment. He (Satyajit) was a handsome and big-made man and his good looks were combined with intelligence. I consider myself fortunate to have met such a great man. The houses of the area were of the 19th century and looked very spooky.

In the spring of 1971, when the War of Liberation started in Bangladesh Dan and I were in Washington D.C. lobbying against Pakistan, to Nixon. We made the senators aware of the situation in East Pakistan. At the time of the great public meeting of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Dan was in Dhaka. He was given the responsibility to move the ladies and children of UNDP somewhere safe, outside Dhaka. In the meantime Mrs. Nixon sent me a wonderful letter stating that our lobbying had been successful, and the USA's assistance to Pakistan had been stopped.

Dan was again sent to Kolkata by UNDP (or UNICEF or Ford Foundation, I cannot remember,) to make arrangements to rehabilitate the refugees. At that time the camps for East Bengali refugees were in a terrible condition and Dan designed the sewage system there, which brought them relief from the unhygienic condition that existed.

Question: You spent time between 1972 and 1993 in New York doing different kinds of work; what did you do then?

Dunham: I joined Columbia University after I returned. At that time Ainslie Embree used to teach the history of the Independence movement during British rule in India. He was happy when he read our book, 'Living in Dhaka.' He introduced us to the works of Nirod Chaudhuri. In that course he introduced us to the struggle for freedom of the Bengalis, and we also about their lives. I came to know, and became friends with Prof. Barbara Stoler Miller (sp.) She was a scholar of Sanskrit, and a translator. When the two of us used to learn bangle classes, a candidate of PhD. used to correct our pronunciation when we studied Tagore. Step by step I learnt Sanskrit in four semesters, and this helped me to study the Bangla language in the context of Linguistics.

Then started the conference for Bengal Studies and both Dan and I submitted papers for the Conference.

In 1992-93, our daughter Catherine received a Fullbright Scholarship, and went to Dhaka to do research on living conditions of female garment workers. I helped her in translating interviews of garment workers. In 1993, Catherine's co-worker, Mukhlesur Rahman 'Lenin' advised me to apply at different organizations and NGO's to help me with writing the book on Jarigan. At last Ford Foundation agreed, and our dialogue started. Again, for a year I visited libraries to do my homework, and in 1994 I returned to Bangladesh to do field-work for my research.

Question: Tell us about your work with Ravi Shankar.

Dunham: In this matter I have to talk about Prof. Lisle Barnett (who, at that time, was at Brown.) She had gone to India during World War II with her husband and daughter. She was a staff pianist of All India Radio and a teacher in a Montessori School. Her daughter used to study at a British School, where my daughter happened to get admitted after some time. While residing at Kolkata she met Ravi Shankar and became his friend. Some years later, after she came back to New York and started teaching at the City College, she requested Ravi to come to the college and deliver some lectures. He agreed, and

for 6 weeks he conducted lecture-demonstrations once a week. Lijlo recorded those. Later when I helped Lijlo in the project of the Society of Ethno-Musicology to produce a discography on Indian music, she made me listen to those lectures. We started considering about how we could preserve those records. Then, it struck us, to ask Ravi Shankar to make records with more modern technology, and, along with this, there should be a complimentary book on the main ideas of classical Indian music. Ravi agreed, and the next few weeks were spent in his hotel room in Gracie Square Mansion. He had some selected students there. Ravi's coordinator, Sue Joes, had arranged the classes prior to this. Lijlo and I had made a plan for his syllabus, but Ravi had revised it and made a plan for his own syllabus.

Those days were very exciting and we got to spend, and work, very close to Ravi and his strong and ever-lively existence personality. We also got to know his students (some of whom were professional musicians,) and enjoyed our discussions with them. Even though it was a coincidence that I happened to work with Lijlo, I was prepared for this work as I was already trained in both the music systems. As the recordings were aired for American audiences, I repeatedly requested her to teach the students Western musical notations. This was necessary to let the students comprehend matters instead of just memorizing them, and I directed the learning towards that end. He listened to this with a lot of patience and understanding and tried to act in that way. I have a feeling that he managed to make a compromise.

The recordings were made in 3 tapes, and put into a beautiful box, and along with it was a marvelously ornamented complimentary book. My copy has Ravi Shankar's autograph done with his thick nib. Besides these, there were many boxes full of those rough notes of the 1960's which had our plans and lectures of those series of lectures. Lijlo used to say that those days were the best time of her life, and they were of mine too.

Question: There is a Bangladeshi family which is very close to you, I have heard. Tell me about them.

Dunham: Ever since our connection with Bangladesh in the 1960's a family was our constant companion, and were as close to us as cousins. We had helped this family to come to New York in 1969. At that time, Ruplal Duria was my husband's chauffeur in Dhaka. We had helped them get their passport, visa and come as my father's chauffeur. In the meantime Dan had gone to Kolkata for two years to work for the Ford Foundation. When he came back (to New York,) he found Ruplal a job as a security guard of a multi-storeyed building in Park Avenue. He worked there for 35 years before he retired. Dan himself maintained Ruplal's finances in such a way that he would be able to visit Bangladesh every two years, and also able to be comfortable, and certain about a secured, retired life.

In the meantime the turmoil started in Bangladesh. We saw how this family, belonging to the janitor-class, with his wife Mona and his four little children, fell prey to racism and discrimination in East Pakistan. In the spring of 1971, at the advent of the War of Independence, Ruplal was in New York while his wife and children went to Rajshahi, to his father-in-laws, from Dhaka. The Pakistani army caught them and killed all the male members of the family. Ruplal was relieved as we arranged to bring his wife and children to New York. Fortunately Ruplal found a government-rented apartment which was very near our affluent area in New York. I used to maintain a diary to record their experiences at that time. Ruplal's great disappointment at not being able to launder his lungi in the East River, is in this diary! And, he was very furious when he found out that he could not bargain with the cashier of the supermarket! The couple was absolutely illiterate, which was why it was our responsibility to see to the education of their children. Their children were very hard-working, intelligent and polite, and the fact that they were good-looking also helped them to get admission into well-reputed private schools. (All these factors are considered to get admission into private schools in this country.) Ruplal, and his wife (in her white sari,) were such a handsome couple, that the parents at the Parent-Teacher Conferences, would often ask them whether they were diplomats of any country. Their young daughter became a model when she grew up. The two older children entered public school and performed well in their lessons. All their four children studied at colleges and universities, got jobs, got married, and two of them have children. Ruplal and Mona are till today, illiterate, but they speak four languages - Hindi, Bangla, Urdu and, after they came here, they picked up English. Ruplal himself, later, helped his brother and family to come to New York and settle at Queens. My husband helped them to settle down here but as they lived in a place which was very far from where we were, we were unhappy that we could not take better care of them.

Question: In this context I remember that the late Prof. Ahmed Sofa, whom we addressed as Uncle Sofa (as he was related to my mother for living in Chittagong (?)) was a philosopher and an active humanitarian. Incidentally, you also knew this person very well. Can you tell me about him?

Dunham: While I was writing the book, 'Jarigan,' a wonderful young man called Lenin, helped me to solve many practical problems, and he helped me to contact some specialist singers and 'boyatis.' Later, Lenin also helped my daughter with her research work. He had no one equal to him with regard to making friends with people from different walks of life. How Lenin took me to Sofa Mama is an amazing example of having a social network of a story (?). It is as much for Lenin as it is for Sofa ??? Like the gentle spider of Charlotte's Web, Sofa had his connections and let others contact him, and he did this with a lot of care.

While I was working on my research, Sofa was working at the Goethe Institute, and also with another German non-government organization, for teaching computer to under-privileged children. In the 1990's when he was working with his German colleagues, he went to Germany and learnt German. He translated Goethe's 'Faust' into Bangla. German translation's of his work was well-appreciated there. Besides, he knew French very well and was an admirer of Romain Rolland (?).

The German organization proposed to Sofa to write a song for those children who were being sent to the Philippines, to observe the culture there as they were to exchange cultures of their own countries. Sofa selected Jarigan as the type of song for the occasion. For this Lenin was again engaged to arrange a concert of western classical music from Goethe Institute. My jazz-pianist, son-in-law, did a piano recital there. One evening Lenin met Sofa there and immediately thought of introducing him to me as he felt I would appreciate him.

Lenin took me to meet Sofa in the penthouse of a building in Mymensingh Road, quite near my apartment in Siddheshwari Road. After that I often used to visit him for discussions, and Lenin used to bring along Pulok who was better known as Shukolpo. He was a young singer and was assisting me in my work of reviving Jarigan. Later he left for Delhi to study for his Masters degree. Whenever Sofa would start telling his stories about his adventures, those two would pick up newspapers and get engrossed in reading (they had heard his stories so many times before!) He also joked about his four describing himself as a pecked-at piece of bread among them, when they would sit at his feet listening to every word he said. You must have read his novel, 'Pushpa, Brikha and Bihanga Puran,' which is a description of his roof-top garden and the jealousy of blossoming plants.

Almost every morning we would call the other, around seven, and if Sofa wasn't busy with anything else, he would

come over with roses from his garden. Sometimes I would ride my bicycle and go over to his place. Sofa's adopted nephew to whom he gave shelter, would carry my bicycle all the way to the third-floor roof, so that it would not get stolen. I accepted the work of reviewing the translation of his 'Pushpa, Brikha and Bihanga Puran,' and re translating it. I also did re-translation of the translation of his book 'Om.' Both of his books reflect, humorously, the petty ego of human character which paralleled a deep dependence on natural humanity.

In 1996 I returned to New York after I finished writing 'Jarigan,' and while translation of the two books was going on, I would regularly correspond with Sofa. In 2001, right after my husband passed away, Sofa also passed away.

Question: Then, let us come back to the discussion of your book, 'Jarigan.'

Dunham: From 1994 to 1996 I returned to Dhaka for the purpose of doing field-work for which I had to visit the villages very often. I was working on music notation with some people. I used to send hand-written notations to my son-in-law in New York, and he used to compose them on the computer and print them out for me. I had quite a few translators working on composing the text of my collection of jarigans. The job of translation was pretty difficult as there was a great variation in the colloquial languages of the different regions of Bangladesh.

I was greatly taken over by the production of 'Bishad Sindhu' which I watched. Dr. Jamil Ahmed who had composed a wonderful book on the art of *jatra*, had staged it. It was a six hour long drama and had to be staged on two consecutive nights. This show continued for many years and was a wonderful blend of folk music, and the tradition of 'jatra.' Along with these there was a mixture of the tradition of *tazia*

and modern philosophy. It was greatly successful in the aesthetic sense and, at the same time, it deeply touched the soul. I saw the drama nine times in two years, recorded all the songs and established a deep friendship with the entire group.

I met the Cultural Attache of the Iranian embassy and his wife, through my friend, Ameneh Ispahani. They had invited me to an observance of a Muharram event (a 'majlis,') (which commemorated the tragedy of Karbala.) I collected a reproduction of a painting of a very serious scene of the tales of the Martyrs. In this way I made my collection from various sources.

Question: In your family you have raised a successor of Bangla. Tell me something about your daughter Katherine who grew up in Bangla and some of her recent works.

Dunham: In 1964 my daughter Katherine was born in New York. Within 3 months of her birth we came to Bangladesh and she grew up speaking Bangla. A funny thing happened after we finished our work and decided to return to New York. When we took her to school for admission, she wasn't very fluent in English, as she would mostly speak Bangla with our attending friends. So that the teachers would not misunderstand and form opinions about her I used to hang a card from her neck, saying 'I do not speak much English, but I speak Bangla.'

When she grew up she herself decided, herself, to go to Dhaka to work with female garment workers, for research. In 1992-03 she stayed there and we joined her. She had learnt Bangla during her childhood, and continued practicing speaking it, with the children of Ruplal, who was our all-time companion in New York. Still, then, whenever she would take any interview, my presence would help her a lot.

In reality, in the sixties, her father, Dan, did some research on the floating workers of Dhaka and Kolkata, especially their accommodation. Katherine could proceed with her research, which was based on her father's research, especially on the additional problem of female garment factory workers. In Dhaka city, the working class was work-dominated, and muslim-dominated. The females would live further towards the village, and from there they would come to work. A female activist, called Shefali, could bring about a new kind of solution. She rented a house and let out the rooms to some of these workers. These places not only provided food and accommodation but also literacy classes and simple mathematics. Shefali gave lessons on how they could do bank transactions, and be economic in spending income.

Shefali would advise the factory owners about having such dormitories.

That year, Katherine designed a huge school building for Notre Dame College. Dan had shown her some details. The school building was completed some years later.

A few days later, my jazz-musician, son-in-law came to become my companion, and he, within a few days, memorized 200 Bangla vocabulary cards prepared by us. In the sixties we had prepared these cards for all the foreigners who came

to stay in Bangladesh. We called these cards 'Valloy' cards. He also learnt to play the tabla within a short time and mastered the basic beats and lyrics.

That year we all stayed together in two rooms on the third floor of a four-storeyed building. There was a big terrace. Katherine had designed a huge cottage for dining and living. The rest of the terrace we turned into a garden with potted plants. A rickshaw painter had painted a picture of country life. Even now I have it. This picture is a picture of Bangladesh, a picture of my Bangla!