

Prologue

Oxford Revisited

I eked out a living as a scientist, that was my occupation. But my preoccupation was, and still is, interacting with people - people with personalities and life styles which are different from most of us; who are generally regarded by others as eccentric or crazy. This curiosity has given rise to an intense and insatiable desire to discover what makes some people extra-ordinary. I have met and befriended many people. I have listened to their obsessions and fears with patience and understanding. But none of their tales has made such a deep impact on my psyche as those of Rolf's.

According to C.G. Jung (*Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, ISBN 0-415-25390-X, 1993), *'the 'modern man' shouldn't be taken as the ordinary man in the street. He would be inward looking, having a rather strange and non-conformist behaviour, but be fully self-conscious. He would not be considered as crazy or mad, as his activities in his conscious world would not fall into the category of 'mad man' as defined by the psychologists'*.

On my first encounter I sensed that Rolf was such a 'modern man', defined by Jung, as his behaviour often did not conform to that of a normal man. I sensed that something from the past had been haunting him. His apparent youthful exuberance and gaiety were attempts either to cover or to overcome the pangs of that experience. He knew that the trauma he had been nursing for decades were lurking in the depth of his subconscious. These needed to be brought into the conscious state of mind. To do that he must share his heart wrenching and at time amusing stories, which had shaped his adult life, with someone special.

The ordinary man in the street does not have time or inclination to listen to stories from a man whom he considers to be crazy or simply paranoid. But these tormented souls need a listener. The listener need not be a 'modern man' as defined by Jung. He could be an ordinary man in the street who lives mostly on his primitive instincts. But, he must have respect for him and have faith in the intriguing and often melancholy episodes of his tales. There is an acute shortage of listeners to such stories amongst the ordinary men in the modern world. Who wants to listen to such time-wasting stories which have no intrinsic values or usefulness?

I certainly do; such is my nature. Despite busy modern life I would always find time to lend a sympathetic ear and a receptive mind to such story tellers. My obsession with listening to strange and supernatural stories was not confined to childhood. It has never left me since childhood. I do not believe in ghosts and fairies anymore, but I believe in miracles and so did Rolf, because of his amazing escape from certain death in the Nazi concentration camp.

In my childhood in a remote village of Bangladesh, there was no television or radio or newspapers. We spent our evenings in a glorious dreamland inhabited by fairies, ghosts and demons with the company of our local boatmen and fishermen. The stories of their encounters with such creatures during their nocturnal adventures captivated me. The stories narrated with a bit of natural acting, mesmerized me and made a deep and lasting impression of that other world in my psyche. I never thought the stories were imaginary. I was sanguine that they themselves passionately believed in their stories which had been handed down to them by their ancestors.

Millions of people lost their lives in Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. A handful survived to tell their stories. Rolf was one of them. He miraculously survived to tell me his story. According to him death was immensely more desirable than staying alive. But still Rolf, along with other Jewish inmates, did struggle to hang on to their breaths by the skin of their teeth. The process of de-humanization was so intense that he was beyond being stunned and was devoid of any

emotion while narrating this to me. Surprisingly, I listened to his story as a matter of fact and without being emotional or feeling sad. Perhaps time had taken its toll, even desensitised me shamelessly.

In the course of time he was able to put that melancholy episode behind him. He got on with life, pursuing his passion for fine arts, playing the violin, going to concerts and of course, with socializing and chasing women. He was desperately looking for love. But that tranquillity and peace of his mind was short lived. The on-going saga in connection with the, so called, 'secret agents' of an organization, allegedly hell-bent to destroy him, was making his life hell and was crippling him from inside and deprived him of the pleasure and excitement of life.

He tried to tell others, including complaining to the law enforcing authorities, but nobody believed or gave any credence to his story. I was very curious to find out the cause of his, often unusual turns, particularly his accusation of some friends and acquaintances of being accessories to those agents. After many encounters and enjoying many happy events together the right moment appeared for him to tell me the story of the organization and its agents. According to his account of events, the episode which was initiated by him to challenge an established protocol of psychoanalysis went out of his control and he fell afoul of a powerful International organization. I thought by knowing the story I might have been able to help him. But when I listened to the whole story I realized that there was nothing I or anyone else could do about his fear or phobia. It was sad that this episode, real or imaginary, was slowly but surely destroying a highly cultured and immensely intelligent mind.

However, the child in me was there in my subconscious adult student life and I considered his stories to be sacrosanct and did not have any reason to doubt their authenticity and did not attempt to validate their truth. I got the impression that it had taken him over a decade to find a person like me, a listener who is a genuine well-wisher and a true friend and, in lots of ways, with some common interests. It had taken almost three years and many encounters and events to build the bond and trust between us and for me to understand the psyche of my friend. I had listened to his hypothesis on the '*appearance of primitive instinct in modern man in a new psycho-physiological level*'. Before the end of our last encounter we found the rare coincidence of both having right frame of mind, for him to narrate, and for me, to listen to the most important story of his eventful life.

Rolf and I remained as buddies for the whole of my student life at Oxford. His youthful exuberance, love for art and music and for pretty young women fascinated me. I published a semi-biographical doccu-fiction in Bengali (*Rolf*, Utso Prakashan, 2008, Bangladesh, ISBN 984 700590054 3) long after Rolf passed away from this world. He is gone, but I am still alive with all the vivid memories of my encounters with him and his stories. The present book is based on the same theme and intertwined with a brief social anthropological account of the awakening to adulthood of a young man from a remote corner of the Indian subcontinent, plunged into the exciting and explosive cultural revolution of sixties England.

Sheikh Rafi Ahmad. (sheikhrafiahmad@hotmail.com)