

Another Literary Delight

My classmate at the University, service colleague and a very dear family friend, Syed Altaf Hussain Shah has made yet another contribution to our literary delight by compiling a collection of his articles that he wrote in different phases of his life, encompassing the impressionable age in 1960's to his ripe years of mid 70's.

In his book titled 'In a Lighter Vein', Altaf Shah Sahib has so lucidly touched upon certain very amusing facets of our governing institutions and the shenanigans of certain 'movers and shakers' of our age so adroitly duped in corruption. While going through the highly absorbing article on 'corruption', I thought that had my dear Altaf Shah not been a symbol of an unimpeachable character and one who firmly believes in living by one's strict moral values, I would have dared venture in an equally lighter if not pejorative vein quoting one of his selected ever green quotes, captioned, 'Wisdom of the Ages' attributed to the mother of Karl Marx that, "if instead of writing a lot about Capital (i.e. corruption) he had made a lot of it, it would have been much better" and surely like Mr. Ten Percent and the ilk, would have climbed the ladder of highest pinnacle of political glory and achievements in our country. Woefully the era of corruption with its attendant vices and its political capital and glorification is still flourishing unabated and eating up the very vitals of our economic, social, political and administrative fabrics.

Shah Sahib has narrated his employment saga beginning from an autonomous body to the change of his mind, leaving its shores by jumping into the deep-sea of Civil Services and finally anchoring on the banks of Postal Services. It is indeed an interesting journey of ultimately achieving one's realm of self-actualization.

Whereas, every article of this book is worth pondering, the one relating to the experiences that he had in the postal service, are worth sharing. Again I would like to mention specially an interesting article of Altaf Shah sahib which he wrote while still in his late teens i.e. 1962 captioned as "Irregularities" wherein he has so convincingly opined that 'irregularities are akin to human nature' and, like "Mother Nature" keep evolving and under-going metamorphosis without possessing a "set-clock" or a "pre-determined geometrical pattern".

Altaf Shah's compilation of quotable quotes titled, 'Wisdom of Ages' is also a treasure to trove and I would like to reproduce one such quote attributed to George M. Adams:

“There is no such thing as “self- made man”. We are made up of thousands of others. Everyone who has ever done a kind deed for us, or spoken one word of encouragement to us, has entered into the make-up of our character and of our thoughts, as well as our success.”

Another amusing quote stated below from an anonymous personage is a golden prescription of healthy life: “Laughter is like changing a baby’s diaper – it doesn’t solve any problem, but it makes things more acceptable for a while.”

To me the most absorbing article in the book is about Altaf Shah Sahib’s alma mater- the great ‘Islamia (Islamiyah) College, Peshawar’, wherein he also held the prestigious office of the “President” of the famous ‘Khyber Union’ (1962-63). Incidentally, I, being the President of his (healthy) traditional rival Edwards College, Peshawar Students Union, was also in attendance in the very historic meeting mentioned in his book which was chaired by Altaf Shah Sahib at his prestigious ‘Presidential Lodge’ of the Islamia College’s Khyber Union’ which, inter alia, discussed the formation of Peshawar University Debating Society representing all the affiliated colleges. This mere acquaintance at the cusp of the tryst of sister institutions’ representatives ushered in a lifelong association of our two families which Ma shaa Allah flourishes unabated and unhitched ever since.

Once again, I would like to congratulate Altaf Shah Sahib on compilation of his articles on myriad subjects in a book format which are indeed a reflection of his writing prowess in lucid, succinct and in a truly ‘lighter vein’. While trying to epitomize my feelings, I will sum up praying: “Allah Karey zor-e- qalam aur ziadah.”

Zia – ur – Rahman Zabeeh

Ex- D.G. Pakistan Post &

Chairman Zabeeh Group of Companies

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## In Praise of “In the Lighter Vein”

Syed Altaf Shah belongs to the gifted breed of top civil servants known for their exclusive literary flare in the tradition of Mukhtar Masood, Mustafa Zaidi, and Dr Ikram Azam. Some three years ago I had the delight of reading his Urdu autobiography *Hadees-e-Namabar*. The book is an engaging tale of an accomplished Postal Service officer couched in a very crisp and lively language, and is filled to the brim with amusing anecdotes of his life and illustrious career. It is an excellent smorgasbord of history, literature, culture travelogue, humour and witticism.

Altaf Shah has the talent to turn a simple episode into a pleasant story and a clumsy situation into a hilarious event, and lets the reader giggle and laugh--at times even at his own expense. This is the real test of a humorist worth his salt as we find this remarkable gift in all great works of humour, specifically in those of Pitras Bokhari, Ibne Insha, Syed Zamir Jafri, Shafique-ur-Rahman, Colonel Muhmmad Khan, Mushtaq Ahmad Yusufi and Ata-ul-Haq Qasmi. His present short book *In a Lighter Vein* is a collection of his old writings echoing different times and eras. One needs to have good historical and literary insight, as well as a refined taste of wit and humour underlying the veneer of his pithy remarks here and there, in order to grasp and appreciate fully his profound message.

I am confident *In a Lighter Vein* will attract readers from all walks of life to sip from the cup of his exhilarating and insightful tales so aptly shared in this short collection.

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