

In memoriam – Aamir Ali

I cannot help to notice that in the span of four months we have lost two of our great ones. Firstly, Witold Zyss last August, and now Aamir Ali, one of his predecessors and friend. Wise and invariably gentle and accommodating to other views, Aamir was one of the pillars of FAFICS. As a pioneer on the expansion of the Federation soon after its founding, he was instrumental in the addition of AFICS India Bangalore, as its first non-European/North American based member.

Upon his retirement he had been very active with other ILO former officials in drafting 'ILO Friends Newsletter' and also presided AAFI-AFICS, to which he too was affiliated. For several years he presided FAFICS and at the end of his tenure was designated President Emeritus, in recognition of his excellent performance.

I had the pleasure of meeting Aamir for the first time in Geneva in 1998 when George Saddler, another one of our greatest Presidents, was President of FAFICS. We also coincided on two other meetings of the Council and again when Witold was President.

As much as I can recall, I believe that Aamir's last important contribution to FAFICS took place in Geneva during the Council in 2003 when he headed the AAFI-AFICS delegation and I was heading AFICS-NY delegation. On that occasion he elicited my views about a possible change to the double majority applicable across the FAFICS Statutes, if and whenever necessary, to decisions not reached otherwise by consensus. We both coincided on the need to reduce its application, discussed it with Witold, who concurred with us and who in turn raised it with Anton Doeve, President of FFOA.

Aware of the preliminary endorsement he had from the representatives of the four major member Associations to amend the Statutes, Witold proposed to the Council to embark on their revision, thereby triggering a Federation-wide process of consultation to amend them. It culminated on their adoption based upon a consolidated document containing the views received which was circulated it to all member Associations, including the incorporation of last minute changes. The document was discussed by an Open-ended Working Group with practically all the representatives attending the Council session, approving it unanimously and submitted subsequently to the Council which finally approved it as well, unanimously. Undoubtedly such was a fundamental change for FAFICS, since the tempo was right to limit the application of the double majority only to financial matters and to the revision of the Statutes, should consensus not be reached on proposals to their effect.

In sum, it was a pleasure to know him and to share work with him. Whenever in Geneva during my tenure as President of FAFICS, I usually had a good chat with him over the telephone. Though no longer at the helm he was very appreciative to be kept au courant about the life of the Federation and the course of major events, which he could follow thru the circulation of all FAFICS circulars and reports to the emeriti Presidents, at the same time they were sent to all member Associations, as well as invitations to participate in the Federation meetings.

Aamir marks shall remain among the best enriching FAFICS history. May he rest in the peace of the Lord.

Andrés Castellanos del Corral

He bestrode the narrow world like a Colossus, and we petty men walked under his huge legs and peeped about<sup>1</sup>

My first impression of Aamir Ali dates back to a FAFICS Council meeting in New York in the late 1990s. I had never seen him before, let alone heard him speak or read his reports. With consummate skill, he guided the deliberations and displayed a prodigious gift for interpreting the eddies of argument and debate. He seemed to be alert to every move in the game and the shift in the options open to him and the Federation. There was no last word, only the next word. He suited the action to the word, the word to the action<sup>2</sup>.

This was clearly somebody who had a sense of humour, loved words and prized clarity. His summaries of the debate and decisions under each agenda item were *sans pareil*. I was bowled over. Here was a man of magnanimity and generosity of spirit who took it upon himself to enlighten me about the arcane workings of the Pension Board and after-service health insurance, as well as the battles royal that member associations on occasion loved to wage, if only to keep the juices flowing.

Only over the years did he reveal more about himself in a series of illuminating glimpses of his career and life in general. I learnt that he had been to school in Kobe, Japan, but later went to The Doon School in Dehradun, Uttarakhand: a school in India modelled on the British public school, but 'alive to Indian ambitions and desires'<sup>3</sup>.

It was here that he acquired a love for mountaineering. The reviewer of *For Hills to Climb*, a compilation of mountaineering stories that Aamir had edited at the turn of the millennium, speaks of mountaineering being a curious pastime. 'It gets you nowhere quite dangerously, but compensates by crystallising awareness of fully conscious living'<sup>4</sup>.

Aamir led a very conscious life. His career with ILO that spanned 39 years saw him posted first to New Delhi, then on to ILO headquarters in Geneva where, apart from a brief interlude in Montreal and a longer break in New York as Director of the ILO Liaison Office in the seventies, he rose up swiftly through the ranks.

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, William *Julius Caesar Act I, Scene II*

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare, William *Hamlet Act III, Scene II*

<sup>3</sup> MacDougall, David *The corporeal image: film, ethnography, and the senses*, Princeton University Press

<sup>4</sup> Aitken, Bill, *Capturing the Mystique of Mountains*, The Tribune of India, 2002

Even in retirement, he was called upon to represent the Secretary-General to sessions of the International Law Commission. His skills were always in demand.

His mastery of English was a skill that was honed at school. Geography and English were considered the strengths of Doon, whose alumni numbered a Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, at least eight ministers of state, numerous members of parliament, senior diplomats and bureaucrats, generals and air marshals galore, as well as Anish Kapoor, the sculptor, and some eight titular princes. No wonder then that Aamir should have travelled the world and written four novels: *Conflict* (1947), *The Story of Buddha* (1952), *Via Geneva* (1967) and *Assignment in Kashmir* (1971), as well as *The Story of Geneva* (1989), *Folk Tales of Asia* (1957) and *For Hills to Climb* (2000-2001). I think that Aamir would have chuckled at his being listed among the old boys who had gone on to be writers, rather than being included among the diplomats and bureaucrats of the more traditional diplomat mould.

His pen was always at the ready. In 1986 he founded the newsletter for former ILO officials; it started out as *Friends*, but has since morphed into *Message*. Three years later, he helped revise the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention of 1957. He was also editor of the AAFI-AFICS Bulletin in Geneva.

Throughout his life he remained the inveterate mountaineer. Stories of his getting up before dawn to clamber up the Salève and still be back in the office by nine o'clock, together with his feats in the Alps and the Himalayas, border on the apocryphal.

He did, however, have one other love: he was a member of the Geneva English Dramatic Society and founder of the Shakespeare Study Group for UN retirees in Geneva. Both activities obviously predestined him for the courses that he gave on effective speaking and chairing meetings: a past master of both, he also came to Vienna to train young diplomats. He was even a guest lecturer on the QE2; he presumably spoke on mountaineering, but undoubtedly on Shakespeare, given that he also found the time to write *A Basic Introduction to Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

The two skills also meant he was foreordained for the office of FAFICS Chairman. He headed the Federation at a decisive point in its history. In addition to writing the Council reports (many in advance of the actual meeting), he also set up working groups on the future of FAFICS as its ranks swelled. He was a clear conceptual thinker for 'words without thoughts never to heaven go'<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare, William, Hamlet Act III, Scene III

In *Markings* Dag Hammarskjöld wrote: ' We remember our dead. When they were born, when they passed away - either as men of promise or as men of achievement.' Amir was both; death will have no dominion over my memory of him.\

Peter Lillie

## Aamir Hassan Ali



### Background

Nationality – Indian  
Father: Hassan F. Ali  
Born: 29 September 1923 in Bombay, India  
Married: 29 August 1959 to Clarinda Richards  
(Born 19 May 1923), a former UNHCR employee  
Son: Rafi Aamir (Born 8 February 1960)

### Education and previous employment

1929-1937 – English Mission School, Kobe, Japan  
1938-1939 – Doon School, Dehra Dun, India  
1940-1944 - B.A. (Hons.), Elphinstone College, University of Bombay  
April 1944 – June 1946 – Assistant Master, Doon School, Bombay  
Taught English, Manager of the DS Weekly, active in drama,  
coached boys' swimming  
July – December 1946 – Associate Editor, *Trend* magazine

### Work within the ILO

2 January 1947 - Entry into service  
2 January 1947 – Member of Section (trial period), Grade 4, ILO Office, New Delhi  
10 July 1947 – Appointment confirmed  
Work in the Social Insurance Section  
18 December 1947 – Member of Section, Official Relations Section, Geneva  
12 February 1948 – Member of Section, Social Insurance Section, Montréal  
Circa November 1948 – Transferred to Geneva  
30 November 1949 – Transferred to the Advisory Missions Section/Division  
(still Member of Section)  
19 February 1951 – Promoted to Member of Division and transferred to the  
Director-General's Office  
17 November 1952 – Detached to the High Commissioner for Refugees  
1 January 1955 – Member of Division, Special Research and Reports Division, Geneva  
1 January 1959 – Principal Member of Division/Executive Assistant to the  
Director-General, Director-General's Office  
November 1960 – 18 May 1961 – Principal Member of Division, Special Research and  
Reports Division (while the IILS was being set up)  
1 September 1961 – Principal Member of Division, International Institute for Labour  
Studies  
1 December 1961 – Promoted to Counsellor grade  
1 January 1966 – Promoted to D.1 grade  
1 March 1966, Promoted to Chief, Relations and Conference Department  
1 September 1966 – Promoted to D.2 grade  
1 August 1973 – Director, ILO Liaison Office for the United Nations in New York  
1 January 1976 – Chief, Personnel Department, Geneva  
1 October 1979 – Chief, Training Department  
1 February 1982 – Chief, Personnel Department  
1 January 1986 – Retirement  
1-22 June 1988 – Representative of the Secretary-General at the Commission on the  
revision of Convention no. 107, 75<sup>th</sup> Session of the ILC

7-28 June 1989 – Representative of the Secretary-General, 76<sup>th</sup> Session of the ILC  
September 1999 – External Collaborator post to participate in a panel examining a complaint falling under Staff Regulations and to prepare a written report on the matter

### **Areas of expertise – Additional information**

Speaks Hindi and English

During his employment at the ILO, was a member of the Geneva English Drama Society

Author:

- Novels *Conflict* (1947), *The Story of Buddha* (1952), *Via Geneva* (1967), and *Assignment in Kashmir* (1971)
- Booklets *Folk Tales of Asia* (1957)
- Books *The Story of Geneva* (1989)
- Editor for *Environmental Protection of the Himalaya* (1994)

Contributions and book reviews in the *Himalayan Journal* and the *Indian Mountaineer*

1986 – Founded the *Friends* Newsletter – for former ILO officials – still heads it today

1989 – Helped revise the outdated Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957

1993-2000 – Editor, *Bulletin of the Association of Former International Civil Servants*

2000-2001 – Editor, *For Hills to Climb* (Doon School Publication)

2001 – Founder of a Shakespeare study group for former international civil servants

Conducts courses on “Effective Speaking” and “Chairing Meetings” for UNITAR

President, Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants (9 years)

Chairman, Association of Former International Civil Servants (AAFI-AFICS), Geneva (7 years)

### **Sources**

#### *ILO archives*

International Labour Office Personnel File No. 4217

#### *Other*

Jayal, Nalni D. “A Many-Splendoured Dosco! Aamir Ali (214-K '39).” The Dosco Website.

[http://www.dosco.org/news/2007/02/a\\_manysplendoured\\_dosco\\_aamir.html](http://www.dosco.org/news/2007/02/a_manysplendoured_dosco_aamir.html)

(accessed 30 July 2010)