In Memory of S. Twareque Ali

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Abstract. We remember a valued colleague and dear friend, S. Twareque Ali, who passed away unexpectedly in January 2016.
1. Remembering Twareque

Syed Twareque Ali, whom we all knew as Twareque, was born in 1942, and died in January 2016. This brief tribute is the second one I have prepared for him in a short period of time. With each sentence I reflect again on his extraordinary personality, his remarkable career – and, of course, on the profound influence he had in my life. Twareque was more than a colleague – he was a close friend, a confidant, and a teacher in the deepest sense.

When I remember Twareque, the first thing that comes to mind is his laughter. He found humor in his early changes of nationality: born in the British Empire, a subject of George VI, Emperor of India, he lived in pre-independence India, became a citizen of Pakistan, and then of Bangladesh – all without moving from home. Eventually he became a Canadian citizen, residing with his family in Montreal for many years.

Twareque’s laughter was a balm. In times of sadness or disappointment, he was a source of optimism to all around him. His positive view of life was rooted in deep, almost unconsciously-held wisdom. Although he personally experienced profound nostalgia for those lost to him, he knew how to live with joy. He could laugh at himself, never taking difficulties too seriously.

And he loved to tell silly, inappropriate jokes – which, of course, cannot be repeated publicly. He introduced me to the clever novels by David Lodge, *Changing Places*, and *Small World*, which satirize the academic world mercilessly. In Lodge’s characters, Twareque and I saw plenty of similarities to academic researchers we both knew in real life – especially, to ourselves.

Twareque was fluent in several languages, a true “citizen of the world.” He loved poetry, reciting lengthy passages from memory in English, German, Italian, or Bengali. In Omar Khayyam’s *Rubaiyat*, translated by Edward Fitzgerald, he found verses that spoke to him. These are among them:

...  
Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring  
The Winter Garment of Repentance fling:  
   The Bird of Time has but a little way  
To fly – and Lo! the Bird is on the Wing.  
...

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread – and Thou  
   Beside me singing in the Wilderness  
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!  
...

The Moving Finger writes, and, having writ,  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
    Nor all your Piety nor Wit  
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.