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"Ka" controversy

Being controversial has been a favourite trend in our literary circle for quite a long time. Every generation in contemporary cultures sees this trend, and some favourite topics exploited in this type of hypes are: politics, sex, feminism, religion etc. Ms Nasrin and her recent works represent this hype. Her "Nirbachito Colum" (Selected Columns) was outstanding, a brave masterpiece (however weak the sentence structure or scholarship might have been). But her book "Lojja" (SHAME), which caused her unjust expulsion from the country, was a very poor, lower than mediocre novel. The idea was good and her intention was to draw a picture of the suffering of the minority. But good intention does not qualify as a yard-stick of a novel's quality. It was comical that soon after Lojja's publication, many so called "intellectuals" hailed that junk as a quality work, and the book was sold like hotcake -- a nice example of how media and controversy can boost a poor feature's status.

Now, we are talking about her recent book "Ka". People are going crazy about the sexual contents, very few are talking about it's style and structure. As a reader, I am yet to be impressed by Ms. Narin's ability to write fictions or novels, but her columns always had some points, though (once again) she often lacks scholarship or quality argument to claim them. My earnest request to all, please do not create a media hype. Instead of worrying about it sexual contents (which should be perfectly fine if it meets the need of the artistic expression), try to judge the book from a literary point of view, and refrain from creating another useless, tasteless hotcake like Lojja.

Mr. Bari from Khulna blamed Ms Nasrin for seeking limelight. Well, it's the critiques who gave her the lime-light, and its neither Ms Nasrin's fault nor is a credit attributable to her talent. It's our senseless sensitivity to anything sexual and unconventional that caused her to be famous.

Tirtho Mahood, Albany, CA, USA

I find Mr. Syed Shamshul Haq's article, "I speak of the freedom of the pen," published as editorial, is highly evasive, self-righteous, self-contradictory, and hypocritical by nature. For, in his article, to offer an apology of his action, what Mr. Haq wrote tantamount to cliché political slogan, without any intellectual or aesthetic substance. It evinces that carefully Mr. Haq has avoided logical interpretation to gave the readers a serious defence of his action. Besides, his arguments contain inherent contradictions that a careful analysis reveals: First, how Mr. Haq can argue that banning a book saves freedom of pen? This is the millennium old justification employed by self-appointed moral guardians. If Taslima had delineated fictitious account, as Mr. Haq alleges, all he could have claim, is removal of relevant pages or section of the book, instead, as he had requested the judge to ban the book per se, it deprives readers right to know as well as freedom of pen of which Mr. Haq champions! Should Mr. Haq believes in such a logic of banning the book, then half of his novels (?) could be banned, as time and again, serious critics such as Humayn Azad, have accused his novels bordering on pornography and plagiarism.

Second, when the majority of Bangladeshis felt disgust against Taslima Nasrin's repeated assault on religious personalities, including the prophet of Islam, to defend her, among others, Mr. Haq was most vocal. Bangladeshis remember how Mr. Haq had condemned Khaleda Zia's attempt to ban other books of Mrs. Nasrin earlier. It indicates that what Mr. Haq does, is apply a double standard, as his action suggests that slandering becomes all right with Mr. Haq, if the victim belongs to his opponent group, but in his case, is not acceptable.

Third, to refute Taslima Nasrin's claim, Syed Haq did not proceed to invalidate her arguments, supplemented with evidence. That is to say, Mr. Haq accepts the fact that what Taslima describes actually took place, as Nasrin tells her readers. In other words, in the name of saving freedom of expression, Syed Haq attempts to suppress the truth in which contrary to his lifelong support for Western mode of life, to make water muddy by exploiting cheap sentiment, invokes anti-Western diatribe suggesting that West likes to belittle the East!



In sum, it is pathetic to notice that how Mr. Haq fails to convince his readers about his action. Given his writing skill, he could have present a solid apologia pro scripta sua, and that the Syed Haq episode, in my opinion, in reality, is a classic example of poetic justice, as throughout her trajectory rise of fame through sensationalism, it was Mr. Haq, who staunchly had patronised her!

Curzon Chatterjee
Stanford University, Stanford, California

B Chowdhury and the need of a third force in politics

Bangladesh has many problems like extreme poverty, high rate of illiteracy, extensive nepotism, corruption, political rivalry, unscrupulous trade unionism, poor governance, inefficient bureaucracy, unemployment, loan defaults, black marketing, etc. We may overcome all these problems. But who is supposed to take the initiative for this? The answer must be the political leaders of the country. But it is an irony of fate that we lack such uncompromising, dedicated, patriotic and honest leaders who can steer the country.

The performance of the two major political parties of the country is far behind people's expectation. Due to their failure, the problems are increasing day by day. Politicians or political parties in the developed world work for the development of their people. But the political culture in Bangladesh is totally different. Though we are supposedly ruled by a democratically elected government, yet there is a severe lack of democratic norms and spirit in our political culture.

The parliament is the symbol of our national pride and dignity. It is very sad that the citadel of our democracy and freedom is seemingly abdicating its sacred responsibilities to the hubris of a handful of lawmakers.

In such a tumultuous political situation, ex-president B Chowdhury

has opened his mouth at last and stepped into the lime-light over the last few days. People want this type of person in politics but there is no room for good people in our political arena and that is our misfortune. In the back drop our conventional politics, the emergence of a third force is necessary. The majority of the people will definitely welcome any move in that direction.

MH Bari
Khulna

I had been going through the reports published in your esteemed Daily and few others covering Prof. Chowdhury's recent statement to the media covering the subject. My random reaction has been, what prompted the venerable Professor to "come out of the woods" all too suddenly. The motive behind such an action appears to be among others "fishing in troubled waters". When the Professor says, in response to a related question something to the effect that, he may consider floating yet another Political Party if the people want him to do so, I am rather curious. What does he mean by people?

To the best of my knowledge irrespective of what one may or may not say, the truth is, there is hardly any Political Leader in the country who has any real contact with the people at large. The so-called contact with the people by a Political Leader today is based on coercion, intimidation, terrorism and muscle flexing.

I do not hold brief for any of the political parties, simply because, if anything, collectively they have inflicted grievous injuries to this country, more so to the teeming millions belonging to the lower middle class (now a vanishing class) including the abject poor and the disadvantaged.

On the contrary I have good memories of Prof. Chowdhury when he was a practising Physician. As a Physician he can still continue to be "of service to the people" more as against a Political Leader. He may have held high positions in BNP and was one who held the country's highest office at one time but then this is entirely a new ball game!

Shamsher Chowdhury
Dhaka

B Chowdhury is not only famous as a physician, but was also a respected figure in the political arena for his distinctive qualities. After all, he is one of the few gentlemen in the existing political field. He always had his own stand regarding political matters -- his opinions were sometimes different from his party BNP and he has paid for that.

Even though we live in a so-called democratic society, political parties seldom practice democracy. Party chiefs take the ultimate decisions and they are never elected democratically.

Bangla cricket



PHOTO: AFP

It is symptomatic of us as a nation to dwell between extremes. We hold one opinion one day and another diametrically opposite the next day without realising the somersault we make for no good reason. The way our cricketing status is being discussed these days is a case in point. After a row of innings defeats, a competitive match against Pakistan turned all our cricket lovers to predict Bangladesh was finally a force in test cricket. Well what happened with the English in the just concluded home series? Now those who applauded our cricketers after the Pakistan series are again crying foul.

I am a cricket fan and hope for the best for our test status. However, as always, I feel that we do not deserve to play test cricket and no matter how much more we wait to gain experience, we will continue to lose our matches, though the margins of our defeats may improve marginally. For those who do not agree with me, please open the website www.cricket.org and see our cricketing statistics and compare with other test playing countries. Statistics never lie and statistics show there is not even a ray of hope in the very clouded sky of Bangladesh cricket. Mr. Whatmore had some impact on our team, teaching our cricketers what test cricket is about, playing the ball with a straight bat and bowling at the wickets. These days, on a well-prepared track, any club, county, provincial team can be expected to perform with the bat the way our cricketers have performed in Pakistan at least once in a long while.

Also, we must not forget that Pakistan played with a new team against Bangladesh. However, test cricket is about consistency and we are still nowhere from being consistent. And, who retained this Captain? He neither bowls nor bats and is the team's poorest fielder. If cricket ever, like tennis team events, has a non-playing captain, we can think of bringing Mahmud back. Till then, he should be banished from the test arena for good. Finally, we have, after the English series, maintained our 100 per cent defeat record intact if we overlook one draw that we achieved by divine intervention.

Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhanmandi RA, Dhaka



Remembering the Dhaka Eids

Celebrating Eid in the US

There are certain things in Dhaka that simply cannot be found anywhere else. As a person who was born in Dhaka and spent almost all his lifetime there, I think I can never find in any other place in the world the kind of enjoyment we used to have while celebrating Eid in Dhaka. The people living in US certainly get to enjoy a great many things that people in Bangladesh can only dream of. Security of life, peace of mind, no traffic jam in the streets, clean air, and a constant supply of electricity or water are some of the privileges that are taken for granted by Bangladeshis living in the US. In exchange, as I see it, things like Eid celebrations are the price they have to pay for choosing to live in the US. For most Bangladeshis working here, Eid day is almost like any other business day. There is no national holiday for Eid. Many of them cannot afford to take leave on Eid day. Parents go to work and children go to school. It is surely quite different from the nation-wide Eid celebrations in Bangladesh.

However, despite all the limitations, people here do make an effort to celebrate Eid in the best way they can. They drive long distances with their families to say Eid prayers at the mosques. Unlike in Bangladesh, women here go to the mosques to say prayers. The mood and festivities of hugging each other and exchanging Eid greetings after the Eid prayer is perhaps the same as in Bangladesh. They may have to go to work on Eid day, but the joy of Eid stays with them throughout the day. At some later time, during one of the weekends, the Bangladeshi Association will organise an Eid reunion, where all the Bangladeshi families living in the area will get together and enjoy being a Bangladeshi Muslim. Eid here may not be as colourful and festive as it would have been in Bangladesh, but the spirit of Eid is perhaps the same everywhere, no matter which country or colour you belong to. Being new here, I still miss the Eid celebrations in Dhaka, but people who have made this land their home, celebrate Eid with the same spirit and passion as Bangladeshis living in Bangladesh do.

KM Zubair Sadeque, Duquesne University, USA

And practice definitely frustrates the intellectuals who are actively involved in politics. As a result, the educated people are losing interest in the party. Nonetheless, B Chowdhury is a true example of a tragic hero who is receiving harsh treatment from his countrymen for whom he did a lot.

The BNP should have been more tolerant towards B Chowdhury. However, Dr Badrudduza should also show restraint and refrain from overly provocative comments. Obviously, he has the right to think of a third party, and the BNP must uphold freedom of expression and association in a democratic society where opposite views are accepted.

Oli Md Abdullah Chowdhury
Gulshan, Dhaka

I would like to reply to the criticisms by Shahjahan Ahmed put forward on 16 Nov on the emergence of Dr. B Chowdhury.

The writer criticised the veteran leader on having failed to rectify the national errors while being a "senior member" of BNP. What I would like to point out is that the current political parties in Bangladesh hardly runs in an internal democratic manner that the writer is assuming. It is quite immature to expect that too many opinions of "senior leaders" other than the prime ministers themselves will be taken into account, if they do not satisfy the "ambitions" of the party. And we have seen over the last twelve years that however the pledges and ambitions of

our two main stream party lawmakers, they have remarkably failed to serve the goals of our nation, and "coincidentally" none of them has left the parliament any the poorer.

In such a circumstance, senior politicians like Dr. BC would find any good intentions for the country very hard to implement. Our current system resembles an utter chaos of security, bureaucracy and financial status; where anyone in the system is unable to change it, and only ends up getting "moulded" into it.

The only way to rectify such a situation is to clean it up from the head of the governance, and in that we need someone with sufficient good reputation and experience.

The only person in the country who owns the credentials to command such a respect from the people and other well-intended highly ranked civilians is Dr. B. C. It was about time, that someone like him would stand up and give the people some respite from the two "bad and worse" choices that they were currently constrained to.

My concluding message is that we are now in a situation of the "Wild Wild West" in US two hundred years back, and we should come to appreciate a thin lining of hope that we can see now in order to truly realise a "democracy" in our nation.

Saad Kabir, One-mail

Recently, some newspapers have published the news that a new third-

front in the political arena is going to be formed under the leadership of some veteran politicians. We appreciate their initiative. We are disappointed with the activities of the two main political parties. The people of Bangladesh have seen the regimes of the AL and BNP. They are not concerned about the welfare of the society, rather they support corruption, terrorism and nepotism.

During the election campaigns, they promise many things to the voters. When the come to rule, they forget their promises. Now the situation of Bangladesh is very frustrating. Many people of North Bengal are passing days without food, many are killed by the assailants. I find no improvement in the law and order situation. I think both the AL and BNP have failed to perform their duties in the parliament. In this situation, if a new party is formed under the leadership of some prominent politicians, and if their objective is to serve the people, we welcome them.

Topon Kumar Paul
The University of Tokyo
Kashiwanoha, Kashiwa-shi,
Chiba, Japan

The present political, economic and social condition of our country is quite grave. If we do not resolve it now then the coming generations will suffer more than we are suffering now. Mr. B Chowdhury is a person who commands the respect of everyone in Bangladesh. I am sure that he is the

leader we need now. The political parties have disappointed the commoners like us.

There is no security in society now. Much of it is the result of the conflict between the political parties and the unabated crime committed by the party-men from different parties.

If we continue to suffer like this, the corruption, poverty and crime in the country will increase and we will continue to be crowned as the most corrupt nation.

It is my firm belief that a civil revolution or I may call it *Bengoli Renaissance*, has to happen now. In that case B Chowdhury is the ideal person to lead us.

Reaz Mohiuddin
B.Sc. Engg, Sher-e-Bangla Hall, BUET

Leadership in our country

It is indeed heartbreaking that Bangladesh, since its emergence in 1971, has not seen a leader to be proud of. Despite being a country of 130 million, most of our leaders lack proper knowledge, education and above all leadership skills. While a true leader achieves love and respect from people through his rhetoric and actions -- the pseudo leaders in our country compel and allure people to love and respect them either by force or money.

None can win election without spending money and our leaders resort to corruption to compensate for the economic loss they incur during

elections.

The famous leaders of the world at present and in the past who made their mark on history had their own ideas and philosophies derived from their perception, analytical ability and knowledge. Therefore they were able to motivate their respective nations and lead their people towards peace and progress. Their ideologies even induced other nations. They had their dreams and they pursued pragmatic approach to fulfil their dreams -- some of them succeeded in their lifetime, and the legacy of others continued for generations until fulfillment.

Bangladeshis were also shown many dreams by few great leaders, still we hear about many dreams, visions -- but in reality the life of ordinary people is tinged with nightmare indeed.

In a society where a handful of bourgeois and rich have all the privileges and enjoys socio-economic security and justice -- condition of the rest of the people of the country is just opposite. Society has become morbid -- moral and cultural degradation is persisting everywhere. Such socio-economic cancer which has metastasized the whole nation -- has been caused by the leaders who claim to be believers of socialism, democracy, theocracy, etc but practices Hedonism. But still in these situations -- we still dream of something (someone) -- A leader born out of sheer necessity of the present who will lead us to the apex of development.

Momen
South Goran, Dhaka

Khoda Hafez vs Allah Hafez

I totally revelled in reading this most engaging article by Mahfuzur Rahman (Nov 18) on the prevalent controversy between "Allah Hafez" and "Khoda Hafez." I write this to thank the winter for his tenacious research and in-depth inquiry into the subject. My husband is from Iran, and in Persian, God is the most revered when referred to as "Khoda" (correct Persian pronunciation is "Khoda," not "Khuda"). So it has been somewhat amusing and amazing (not to mention crass) to note that some people are actually hell-bent upon degrading the term "Khoda." How ridiculous!

Are these people trying to insinuate that the majority of Iranian Muslims are any lesser Muslims than they are? Grow up my dear brothers and sisters and give better senses a chance.

Mahjabin Ahmad
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

A concerned Bangladeshi from Purdue University, USA

About 80 per cent of the people are least bothered about what is happening at the other end of the world. Most people don't even care about Bangladesh or Dhaka. Some may actually know about our country but the first thing that comes to their mind is "FLOOD!!!" and drowning ships due to over crowding.

Why is it like this? Why do people have this view? This is because our country is not being portrayed to the world as an emerging developing country, it's hard to imagine that people actually think that bullock carts are still running in the cities. Any Bangladeshi website I go to or any Bangladeshi book or anything related to Bangladesh, the main pictures presented in those are rice fields or congestion pictures, or pictures of small kids of the village without any clothes on.

Our media is not focusing our country in the right manner. This is providing the people of the world with a total misconception about our beloved country. The media and all others should know about this and try to change the way Bangladesh is being portrayed. I definitely think that Bangladesh is developing day by day, so we should be proud of the country and show it to the world and not stay clipped to the pictures which show signs of emptiness in the country and the poverty of the country. More of city life should be portrayed rather than villages and crops and cultivation. This is misguiding the whole world and giving them a false idea about our country.

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PHOTO: AFP AND SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

