

POETRY

Two Poems

FARNAZ MAHBUB

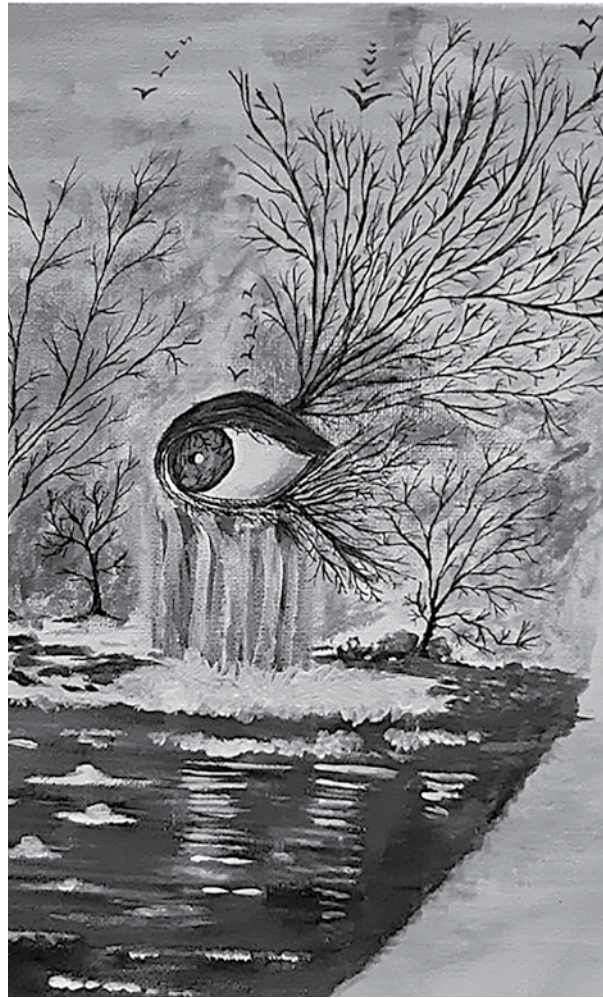
Freedom Height

Psychedelic noises – a cacophony so harmonious
Her reflection - pickled to full term
As she walked
That walk through resolve - or resentment
Sailing through newsroom den
Folded along, with her treasures

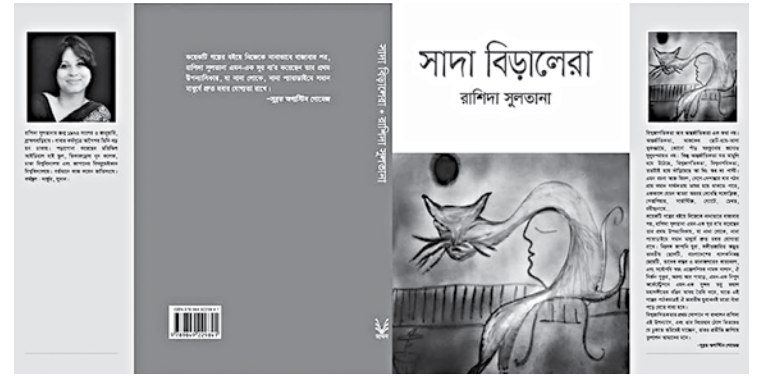
Coil

Envy: a velvet castle
Smooth as silk – candid as honey
A puzzle: the pieces; found in toy-land
Cannonball of raw emotions
Cloaked by immortal fog
Minds seduced – thoughts confined
Its victory is a camouflage
To our reasoning

Farnaz Mahbub's passion revolves around traveling and writing. Currently, she resides in Toronto, Canada.



NEW BOOK



Rashida Sultana's much-admired novel, *Shada Beralera* has been translated into English as *The White Cats*, recently. The novel portrays the story of a woman who discovers herself anew in a foreign setting while plunging into an enigmatic romantic entanglement. The novel has been translated by Rehnuma Siddique Shinthi, who writes poetry and fiction and works in the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh, with the assistance of Professor Fakrul Alam, writer, academic and Bangla Academy Literary Award winner in the "Translation" category. The novel has been edited by Arunava Sinha, award-winning translator of classic and contemporary Bengali fiction, who currently teaches at Ashoka University. He has translated over 50 books, including works of Rabindranath Tagore, Buddhadeva Bose, Bani Basu, and Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, into English.

Language Attitude Anxiety and Remedial Propositions: A New Approach to ELT

Asantha U. Attanayake. *Post-Colonial Curriculum Practices in South Asia: Building Confidence to Speak English*. ISBN: 9780815355526. Routledge, 2019

SABIHA HUQ

Asantha U Attanayake's first exchanges with me were over e-mail. She was travelling across the Subcontinent to collect and develop materials for her forthcoming book. Her visit to Khulna University in 2016 was a happy occasion for both our students and me. I was glad to meet an enthusiastic ELT scholar and her equally supportive partner, and an everlasting friendship ensued. Our students at the English Discipline were happy to receive her, and a friendly tete-tete with her was an opportunity to share their everyday troubles and anxieties over learning English. She stayed for two days and headed for Rajshahi on the third. When her book *Post-Colonial Curriculum Practices in South Asia: Building Confidence to Speak English* came out, our joy was boundless at her successful completion of the project. Indeed, this is a book that was much desired for teachers and students of English who inexhaustibly aspire to own a foreign language against their linguistic and cultural grains.

The first noticeable point about Attanayake's book, and which is why I harp upon its necessity for non-Anglophone readers of the Subcontinent, is the researcher's candid authorial viewpoint with which she vents a painful realization in the Preface. She rues over the fact that our academia is neither research-friendly, nor appreciative of initiatives by an individual researcher; and that it is brazenly evident in questions as to why one even writes a book. Attanayake naturally exposes her experiences at that. "This study does not contribute to the national economic or social development of Sri Lanka" was the comment of the National Science Foundation of the country. She comments, "We hear from all quarters in South Asia that our research is under-developed, especially in the Social Sciences, and that 'there is no serious research' being undertaken. How on earth can an academic engage in serious research when support from the system is negligible?" Students and scholars in Humanities from our part of the world, which now has the accolade "Global South," face this reality everyday when scholarships or grants for academic work of this stature are few and far between. The author has indeed travelled far and wide in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka; her sincerity in authentic field research is manifest in her painstaking but rewarding travel through urban habitations.

In a dozen chapters Attanayake has tried to focus on how students in South Asian countries

suffer the anxieties of learning a second language. Her concerns over the attitudes of the post-colonial South Asian societies that nurture apathetic attitudes towards English and English learners, who in turn are jinxed between necessity and inhibition, are voiced at length. The British colonizers established English as a lingua franca, but its "ownership" has always remained the privilege of an elite section of South Asian post colonies. Outside of this elite circle, the masses perceived English as a necessity or a commodity, the (non) acquisition of which impedes progress in life. A kind of love-hate relationship has therefore marked the common man's responses to the language in the post colonies.

Fear, shyness, and lack of confidence that Asantha Attanayake defines as LAA (Language Attitude Anxiety) cumulatively complicate English language teaching; and unless one takes these attitudes into consideration, ELT in South Asia is apprehended to fail.

In the introductory chapter Attanayake explains the differences of approach to ELT in native and foreign settings. In North America or Singapore, the academics hardly feel the necessity of building confidence for ELT as a separate endeavour; whereas in the four South Asian countries she has surveyed, the author shares

common experiences of anxiety while teaching English. She also clarifies the difference between this anxiety which she marks as lack of confidence in post-colonial South Asian English learners, and the commonly known issues like FLA (Foreign Language Anxiety) and FLCA (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety). According to the author, "fear, shyness and uncertainty linked to speaking English in South Asia, locating them in the attitudes of the society towards the English language and the people who speak English well and those who do not speak well" make for crucial differences. She proposes that this kind of fear or anxiety is a result of social attitudes that generate a lack of confidence in the learners. She further argues that the confidence (or the lack thereof) depends on the power the language enjoys in particular sections of society, thereby taking the ELT issue to the critical domain of Foucauldian discourse of power. Her overall observation is that in South Asian societies the language attitudes towards English have not evolved much, but that these have been twisted and turned "only to re-establish their power." Attanayake has mentioned two domains in which the learners face the challenges

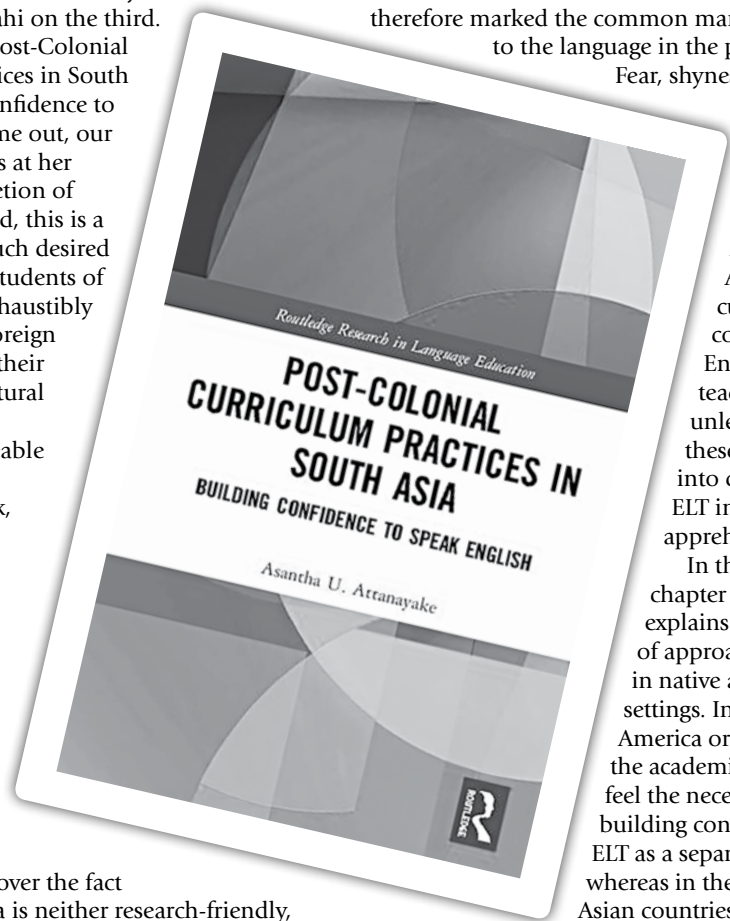
of language attitudes: that of the classroom (the inner society) and the region beyond the classroom (the outer society); and these concentric circles are obviously interconnected. Conversely, the sources of anxiety or lack of confidence are also twofold: the learner's inherent anxiety of not knowing how to speak in English, the inability to speak fluently at length, or paucity of vocabulary are as true as the external fear of negative criticism – both being equally prohibitive. Attanayake claims that such fears or uncertainties enmesh South Asian learners because of disparaging social attitudes that cause a lack of confidence in them, thereby thwarting attempts to converse in English: "This lack of confidence to speak in English may in turn cause the learners to develop a set of negative attitudes towards their own speaking ability, which may then be projected onto the entire English language learning process, which results in further poor performance in learning English." Learners who are poor in spoken English are paranoid about their mistakes, and are overwhelmed by how others see them. The better speakers, on the other hand, are over conscious about their accents and "are anxious about their English being judged as lower than 'posh' varieties of English (i.e., British or American)."

Attanayake categorises the "watchdogs" who create and police these societal attitudes towards English into two: those who speak English fluently and those who do not speak English at all. She

the attitudes of these societies towards any language and its speakers. A language can be prestigious and useful, or lowly and useless. Depending on the status of that language, its speakers are evaluated and inevitably identified accordingly. The learner's accuracy, accent, fluency, pronunciation and such other factors, are considered. She also discusses the attitudes present in society towards English language learners. Her concern over learner attitudes towards English language and fluent English speakers is significant. She observes negative attitudes in English language learners towards their own English language speaking ability. These negative attitudes "cripple the learner and are manifested in a lack of confidence to speak English". A learner's own negative attitudes towards English stem from the language attitudes present in his or her society towards its speakers, which create a "judgmental set of attitudes" according to her. If society's attitude is negative, the over anxious learners reaffirm their own negative attitudes towards the language and its fluent speakers. These attitudes are then projected onto their own lack of speaking ability and feed into equally negative attitudes towards the entire English language learning process. The language attitudes mentioned by the author can work in both cyclical and linear processes in terms of what they produce, which is genuinely interesting. At any given point in the cycle, one factor leads to the other and propagates another factor or attitude and influences the cycle as a whole. In a linear progress the society's language attitude turns into the learner's attitude towards language learning, that looks rather a straightforward jump from one step to another, which indeed, has many intricacies that the author has explained better in the cyclical process. Here she shows how FLA/FLCA falls short in explaining the situation in post-colonial South Asia and LAA (Language Anxiety Attitude) can fill the lacuna.

Attanayake has suggested a "fight fire with fire" policy to build confidence. Her proposed course on building confidence to speak English is a very good suggestion. Based on Speech Act, the designed course promises efficacy. In one of the chapters, she also discusses the role of the teacher, and how a teacher is to be trained for the proposed language class. However, what seems to be lacking in her discussion on related logistics is the necessity of a sympathetic, and perhaps a passionately friendly environs at the English departments. A teacher in the proposed classroom may abide by the rules of "no grammar teaching" or "no error correction", but who knows if another teacher of a different course would not scold for a single lapse, would not ask the student to get out of the English department, which, unfortunately, our respected teachers say to the weak students. A holistic approach is always a better approach, but it is quite difficult to achieve such a goal. Thus far, Asantha Attanayake's suggestion that an intervention must take place to prevent learners from experiencing anxiety and to build confidence among learners to speak English, can make for a good beginning. It is, undoubtedly, important to include LAA in our academic discourse.

Sabiha Huq is Professor of English at Khulna University.



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comments that these 'watchdogs' are more than often imagined, as there is no actual need for them to be present or visible to create the anxiety in the English language learner. It is true that our learners, inside or outside of classrooms, refrain from speaking English out of fear that they would be laughed at, even when no visible "imaginary other" is present. These absent critiques are no less influential than physically present obstacles.

Attanayake investigates into the processes involved in the creation and propagation of language attitudes, and their effects on language teaching-learning scenario in the four countries under consideration. She primarily considers