

An Anthology of Writings on Dhaka University; and How Do We Translate UN Jargon into Bangla?

DHAKA University is seldom far from our thoughts. From a distance, more physical than mental, we see what goes on there with anguish and pain, very often also with anger, blaming all and sundry for the tragic situation that prevails in what was once called the 'Oxford of the East'.

From time to time, but only in my imagination, I walk along the tree-lined shaded roads which are free of all traffic, except a few rickshaws and bicycles, stop by a roadside shop for a pan and then drop by the British Council to look at the latest copies of *The Times*, an acquired habit to assert my somewhat uncertain standing as a student of English Language and Literature. Yet, it is anything but a wasteful ritual. Some phrases from a report stay in my mind; a headline makes a strong impression; and the lay-out of a page catches my attention. So, somewhere along the way, my training as a journalist begins, under a pretty good teacher, *The Times*.

So, I can go on and on, with my patchy reminiscences of life in Dhaka University, from the late forties to early fifties, the years of turmoil and regeneration which, by stages, changed the course of our history and our own lives.

Maybe one day I will ask some of my contemporaries to put down their thoughts and recollections. Then, adding one of my own — I am not that unselfish — to this precious collection, I will take them to Muhammad Jahangir of the Press Institute of Bangladesh. He would know what to do with what I may prematurely describe as his unexpected precious acquisition.

Why to Muhammad Jahangir? This is because it is this well-known television personality, a writer and a senior staff member of the Press Institute who has just sent me a copy of *Smriti Kathay Dhaka Bishwabidyalyay* (Reminiscences of Dhaka University). It is an anthology of writings on our alma mater, all in Bengali, by the best-known luminaries who have served the university, many from its establishment in 1921, through its formative years. A few — alas, very few — are still associated with it and sharing with us the anguish and pain of witnessing the decline of the institution.

It is Jahangir who has compiled and edited the collection of 144 pages, containing 21 pieces, with an introduction by Dr Anisuzzaman, currently with the Bengali department of the University. In his preface, Jahangir acknowledges the sources of different chapters, the help of his publishers, the Mowla Brothers, and the contribution of two artists, Abdul Razzak and Gnyum Chowdhury, who did the painting of the Curzon Hall and the writing

for the title page respectively for the jacket. It is a well-planned professional job which has earned Jahangir the right — and the responsibility — to produce the second volume of the anthology.

If Dhaka University had once been called the 'Oxford of the East', it was not because of its well-planned buildings, its teacher-student relationship or its forward-looking innovative curriculum. (For instance, as we learn from the piece by Kazi Motahar Hossain, Dhaka University raised the teaching of Statistics to the M Sc level even before the same was done by the Presidency College in Calcutta.)

There is little doubt that the University gained its reputation mainly because of the kind of teachers, including many intellectual giants, who joined the institution, even when it had just started in July 1921 with 60 lecturers and professors for 877 students in 12 departments, residing in three residential halls.

What a galaxy of talents: Romesh Majumdar, Kazi Motahar Hossain, Abul Fazal, Buddhadeb Basu, A F Rahman, S N Basu, Mohammad Shahidullah, N C Sen Gupta, Abdul Razzak, A G Stock and Kamaruddin Ahmed. But there are others, including a few of my contemporaries.

the capital of combined East Bengal and Assam, the establishment of the university was overshadowed by dark clouds and threats to communal harmony. Yet, in the midst of all these crises, students went to their classes, Satyen Bose carried out his history-making research in physics and student actors staged their plays. Students often got into fist fights, but none ever brought out a gun. No stones were thrown at the office of the Vice Chancellor. Ideological affiliations were strong — after all, it was the time of the anti-British agitation reaching its climax — but factionalism had not raised its ugly head. And, of course, there were no session jams.

It mattered little if Dhaka University could really be called the 'Oxford of the East'. What mattered was that it was an institution teachers and students felt like writing about, with some pride, a great deal of nostalgia and hope.

MY knowledge of Bangla has been put to a severe test by the United Nations system, especially by one of its major agencies, the World Bank.

How do you translate 'structural readjustment' into Bengali? I have checked some local papers in Bangla and casually gone through the last budget speech of Saifur Rahman for our local equivalent of 'structural readjustment'. And I am more confused than ever. I have decided that next time I am obliged to use the term, in English, I will coin a new expression and make my modest contribution to UN vocabulary.

This problem of translating the complex UN terms into other languages, especially in Asia and Africa, is not a new one.

While working for UNESCO some years ago, I was told by a Chinese expert in Beijing that his office had serious difficulties in translating the then commonly used term, 'The New World Information and Communication Order' into Chinese.

In this context, what is the difference between information and communication? he had asked. I was ready with some kind of a reply. 'Information is the product; communication is the process,' I had mumbled. 'But what is the difference between order and a system?' he had asked again. Years later, I was told by a colleague that the Chinese had coined their own term for 'information and communication order' and replaced the last word by 'system'. I wonder, what Beijing is now doing with 'structural readjustment', not just with translating the expression into Mandarin but also with its application. Here, as in so many other matters, there may be a lesson for Dhaka to learn from Beijing.

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali



The jacket of the anthology of writings on Dhaka University, compiled and edited by Muhammad Jahangir.

Some of the pieces are written by the teachers themselves; some are about them written by others, in a few cases, based on interviews. (There is a good one by Sardar Fazlul Karim talking to Prof Abdul Razzak; another one by A F M Shahidullah writing about his father Dr Mohammad Shahidullah.)

Reading through all the 21 pieces, one gets some rare glimpses of life in the university through those crucial years, about appointments (some a little controversial) of teachers, the personality and the working style of the first Vice Chancellor, Philip Hartog and some well-hidden tension about the ratio in the representation of Hindu and Muslim teachers in different faculties. Yet, despite these teething problems, life followed its well-planned course, thanks to successive Vice Chancellors (never mind a few controversial ones).

Another picture emerges from these writings. It is about visits to Dhaka by Rabindra Nath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam, when the two poets, during their separate trips, sang and recited their poems in different halls, usually staying with teachers. (Tagore was the house-guest of Romesh Majumdar for a week, providing the historian with enough material to write a human interest piece on his distinguished visitor.)

Then, as a bonus, one gets a picture of Ramna from the pen of Buddhadeb Basu.

It was also the time of political uncertainties almost bordering on turmoil. With the two communities — Hindus and Muslims — sharply divided over the British plan to carve up Bengal, with Dhaka becoming

Ahmad, due to the fact that he was a grandson of the poet. He also suffered imprisonment in Britain and India, spending a total of eight years behind bars. In India he had joined the Communist Party, but having developed differences, he founded, in 1937, his own Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI) which, however, split itself into several factions.

Saumyendranath was a well known writer, art-critic and musicologist, and a master of several languages. He belonged to the Kallol group of writers who had collectively brought in significant changes in the Bengali literary scene after the First World War. Among his works are: *Rabindranather Gan, Yabree, Trayee, Lenin and Viplob Russia* in Bengali, *Padosjanik and Russian Kavita*, translations of Russian poems into Bengali, with a brief history of Russian poetry, *Communism and Fascism, Tactics and Strategy of Revolution and Hitlerism and the Aryan Rule in Germany* in English, a book on Gandhi in French and another on revolution in German.

He was a great favourite of Rabindranath who composed the song, *O Mahamanaba Ase*, at his request. On the eve of the last Bengali New Year in his life (April 1941), he told Shantideva Ghosh that Saumyendranath, after having criticized his works, had requested him to compose a poem to the victory of Man. Rabindranath wrote a long poem on the theme, went on reducing the size of the poem, set it to music and directed that it should be sung on the new year's day. His, and Saumyendra's, wishes were fulfilled.

Saumyendranath was married to Hutchesingh, but they did not have any issue.

resents the anti-democratic, ultra-nationalistic ideology of that age. It may be mentioned here that the Antigone-drama of Brecht was written at the end of World War II. In the drama of Brecht, the year 1945 has been mentioned. The drama of Brecht awakens our memories of German aggression against former Soviet Union. 1941 saw the Germans marching into Soviet Union. We are reminded of these events when we go through the play. The interpretation of Antigone given by Brecht is certainly a great contribution in our century.

Wherever tyranny and oppression harms our peace of mind we certainly think of Antigone of Sophocles. Brecht opened our eyes. Not only Brecht, but also Jean Anouilh has been an eye-opening experience for us.

The writer's German teacher at the Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka.

OF MEN AND MATTERS

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probably immediately thereafter (was it following the divorce of the Roys, one wonders) that Luhani moved to Moscow and settled there. He joined the sixth congress of the CI held in Moscow in 1928 as a member of the Indian delegation along with Saumyendranath Tagore (1901-74) who had arrived in Moscow the previous year. In 1927 Luhani was nominated on a special commission set up by the Executive Committee of the CI to prepare a report on the Indian question. When the report of the commission was placed before the sixth congress it was he who protested that the point of view presented was 'not in its original but in its travestied form.' This charge appears to have been directed against Roy.

At the tenth plenum of the Executive Committee of the CI, which took place in Moscow in 1929, M N Roy was denounced both by Luhani and Saumyendranath. While Roy was expelled from the communist movement at the plenum, Luhani sided with Stalin (1879-1953) and continued to occupy an important position in the Communist Party and International communist movement. He is believed to have died in Moscow.

II

Any introduction of Saumyendranath Tagore (1901-74) must begin with a reference to his great grandfather, Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905). Of his 15 children, the second, Dvijendranath (1840-1926) was the eldest son while Rabindranath (1861-1941) was the fourteenth child and the eighth son. A philosopher and

a poet and a man of many talents, Dvijendranath developed the Bengali shorthand and bookkeeping, as he called the technique of making various sorts of boxes, edited the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* (1884-1908) and the *Bharati* (1877-83), and was the secretary of the Adi Brahma Samaj and president of the Vangiya Sahitya Parishad for a number of years. His fourth son, Sudhindranath (1869-1929), was a reputed author and critic, but is best known as a very competent young editor of the prestigious literary journal *Sadhana* (1891-94), the editorship of which passed on to Rabindranath when the former gave up. Saumyendranath was the eldest son of Sudhindranath and Charubala Devi.

Saumyendranath graduated from the Presidency College, Calcutta. In 1921 with honours in Economics. As a college student he had joined the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in 1917 and the All India Students' Conference held in Ahmedabad in 1921. He was attracted towards communism at an early age, came under the influence of Muzaffar Ahmad (1889-1973) and Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976), and joined the Labour Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress, founded by Kutubuddin Ahmed, Ilchanakumar Sarkar, Shamsuddin Hussain and Nazrul Islam in 1925. The organ of the party was the *Langal* (1925-26) of which Nazrul Islam was the chief director. The second session of the All Bengal Tenants' Conference held at Krishnagar in 1926 decided to form the Bengal Peasants and Workers' Party (later known as the

Workers' and Peasants' Party) and to absorb the Labour Swaraj party within itself. The *Langal* was now followed by *Ganabani* (1926-28), edited by Muzaffar Ahmad, as the organ of the new party. Saumyendra became a leading figure of the party and contributed political essays to both the periodicals as well as the first Bengali translation of the *Communist Manifesto* to the latter. His family decided to send him away from politics to Europe, but this only helped embolden his revolutionary fervour and come in contact with other revolutionaries there.

In April 1927 Saumyendranath arrived in Moscow, with what he claimed as a mandate from the Workers' and Peasants' Party (WPP), in order to establish direct contact with the CI. From his first day in Moscow he was more than critical of M N Roy. As already mentioned, he was admitted as an Indian delegate to the sixth congress of the CI where the Soviets wanted the dissolution of the WPP while the British communists favoured its continued existence. Saumyendranath sided with the British against the official Soviet position but warned that the Indian Communist Party should not in any way be subordinated to the Communist Party of Great Britain. We have also noted that he played a key role in expelling Roy from the communist movement. Shortly thereafter he must have moved to Germany, for when Rabindranath visited the Soviet Union in 1930, Saumyendranath joined his entourage from Germany. After the rise of Hitler he was arrested in Germany but was released, according to Muzaffar

Antigone and Bertold Brecht

by Mamun Huq

rary world.

In this short discussion of mine, I would like to refer to Bertold Brecht who has attempted to use the theme of Sophocles in order to depict the crisis of his own society.

Brecht, an extraordinary writer of this century, also took up the drama of Sophocles with a certain purpose in mind. The drama of Sophocles has been given a different shape by him. The central theme of Brecht is the war between Thebes and Argos.

This war was a war of two dynasties in the drama of Sophocles. It was an outcome of the rivalry and enmity between two brothers — Eteokles and Polyneikes. They did not agree to share power after the departure of King Oedipus and their father. This led to the

war between Thebes and Argos. This war ended in the victory of Thebes over Argos. Brecht starts his play at this point of the war. Kreon tries to mobilize all power in Thebes through terror and his stern authority. The army of Thebes is later defeated near Argos. This leads to the downfall of the Theban state. The resistance against Kreon's dictatorship is shown in this play. He uses Antigone of the classical age in order to mould public opinion against Fascism. Antigone of Brecht has become a new contribution against fascist dictatorship. Kreon the autocratic ruler suddenly becomes a prototype of Hitler. On the other end, we see Antigone and the progressive forces behind her. In other words, Antigone leads the anti-fascist forces, and Kreon represents

Eric Rohmer: The Colourist of the Games of Love and Chance

by Pierre Albert Lambert

WHO remembers that, in the 50s, Rohmer was one of the creators of the 'New Wave', together with Truffaut, Chabrol, Godard and Rivette? At the age of 71, after a career spanning forty years, the man remains as secretive as ever. He hates talking about himself, shuns festivals and cannot bear society events.

His grandparents, who came from Alsace, sought refuge in the Corrèze region after the 1870 defeat and Rohmer himself went up to Paris at the age of 20 to finish his studies in literature. First of all he taught literature before moving onto television for schools, in 1963, while, at the same time, teaching cinema at

university. It was at this time that, at the cinema library, he learnt the works of those he considered as his masters, by heart: Renoir, Welles, Hawks, Rossellini and Mizoguchi, to whom he devoted learned articles in *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*.

In 1962, he shot *Le Signe du Lion*, as an amateur and without a budget. A friend lent him the camera and another one provided the film. The story was a very personal moral fable which set the tone for what Rohmer's work was to be, but he did not become known until 1967 with *La Collectionneuse*.

With his long, slim figure Continued on page 11



Eric Rohmer with Jean-Luc Godard (right)

Nazrul Islam in 1929. He was elected a Fellow of the University of Calcutta and presided over the All Assam and Bengal Bengali Language and Literary Conference in 1943. He was as known for his literary works as for his liberal humanism.

Ali's family life did not run smooth. At the age of seven he was wedded to his cousin, Ayesha, who was only two years and a half old. His first child, a daughter, was born in 1910. He divorced Ayesha when he married Nellie, a Bristol girl. He had two sons and a daughter by her. The sons are probably still in India and the daughter, Zebunnisa Hamidullah who used to live in Pakistan, became quite famous as the editor of the *Mirror*, published from Karachi in the 1950s. Nellie, however, left Wazed Ali in 1928 to marry his third brother, Shaikh Shamsur Ali, an insurance man, social worker, honorary Justice of Peace, author and amateur painter. The next year Wazed Ali married a young Burmese lady who was converted to Islam and given the name of Badrunissa. She died at childbirth in 1931 and the

son she left, S B Ali, used to work for the Khulna Newsprint Mills. Wazed Ali died in Calcutta in 1951.

S Wazed Ali published scores of articles, stories and books. Notable among his works are: *Gulistan* and *Mashukar Darbar*, collection of short stories; *Jwaner Shilpa*, *Prachya O Pratichya* and *Bhabishyater Bangalee*, all essays; *Paschim Bharate*, a travelogue; *Granadar Shesh Vir*, a piece of historical writing; *Sultan Saladin*, a play; and *Badsahee Galpa*, stories for the juvenile readers. His collected works in two volumes, edited by Syed Akram Hossain, and a biography by the same scholar have been published by the Bangla Academy (1985).

Wazed Ali wanted that we place loyalty to humanity over everything else; that all of us acquire knowledge and a sense of beneficence; and that we give the mother tongue a very important position in our national life. Most of it appears to be utopian at the moment, but who knows, it may come true one day. We need men of action, indeed, but still we cannot do without dreamers.

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,

I am intrigued by a letter from 'Anonymous', and your response to the same in your issue of the 28th instant.

I am deeply moved and in full sympathy with the plight of the lady whose husband is 'running around'. I can fully understand how distressed the lady must be, and the attendant humiliation she faces socially, emanating from her husband's wanderings.

However, I am somewhat taken aback at your casual approach to this problem in suggesting that the lady leave her husband as he will 'never change'. Such an attitude does not lend any solution to the problem but only result in a miserable broken family for the lady and her grown-up children.

The whole point of this letter is to request you to think twice before making sweeping statements like 'He will never change', and 'Leave him'. As an advice columnist you must consider the anguish of all concerned when a marriage of one with children is broken.

Is it not better to help the heart-broken to work out ways to promoting a blissful married life, rather than assume the role of judge, jury and executioner and break up which God has put together?

A S R Huq, New Eskaton, Dhaka.

Dear Huq,

Thank you for your letter. I could only print a part of the letter as it was too long. If you have been reading my column regularly you must have noticed how much I am against drastic decisions which might break up a marriage. In the above case don't you think the lady must have already tried to keep the marriage together? What else has she been tolerating all this humiliation for? And as for children? Often they are better off in a secure, separated family than in a tense family situation where the mother is constantly being humiliated. I am certainly not advocating breaking or leaving home at the slightest pretext, on the contrary, every effort should be made to keep the family together — but this responsibility has to be shared by both the partners.

Dear Mita,

Two years ago my eldest daughter married out of her choice and without our consent. We knew it would not work and it hasn't. She left her husband few months ago and now

lives with us. Recently, her husband has started coming to the house and she meets him. Both me and my husband dislike this as we want her to divorce him and start a new life. My daughter says she wants to give it another try. I don't know what to do. He is not good enough for her and his family is even worse. Please advise how can I stop my daughter.

Anonymous, Mirpur, Dhaka.

Dear Anonymous,

It seems you have not yet reconciled to the fact that your daughter is an adult and should make her own decisions. Maybe she made a mistake the first time but if she is trying to give her marriage another chance, then she should be allowed and even helped to do so. She is right in giving it another try, who knows perhaps they will resolve their differences and realize the marriage can be salvaged. Please don't be hurt by my advice, but you have to face reality and the truth. The reality is your daughter, as an adult who wants to take control of her life. The truth is you are trying to prevent it just because you don't like her husband.

Dear Mita,

I have been married for five years and have a daughter. My problem is that my husband is not ambitious enough. He works in an international bank and although the salary is good I never have enough money to indulge in luxury as most of my friends do. My husband refuses to change job or start some business. This is creating tension between us and we end up fighting. What should I do? Please advise.

Zaqeen, Gulshan, Dhaka.

Dear Zaqeen,

You will not like my answer but I think it's you who has the problem and not your husband. Comparing life styles with one's neighbours and friends is a dangerous habit which can only end in disaster because there will always be some one richer, prettier, more popular etc. Being content is a virtue which keeps a person happy and brings harmony in the family.

Your husband is not unambitious, he is just content. Please don't think that I am advocating a lifestyle devoid of all pleasure, luxury or fun. All I am saying is one has to draw the line between what is enough and what is too much. This is not an issue to fight over, it is an issue to be discussed and resolved.