

Bangladesh Learnt Much from CNN Coverage of US Polls; Some Unsolicited Tips for BTV; and Three New Publications

Down the Memory Lane

What Brandt was to Me

by Mamun Haq

ECONOMY...economy...economy," Larry King of the Cable News Network (CNN) repeated the word three times summing up the view of a panel member on the defeat of George Bush in the US presidential election.

This post mortem came last Saturday, after several weeks of the most exhaustive, objective and stimulating TV coverage of the polls in the United States I had seen in my life. At the end of it all, I saluted CNN and wondered about the impact of this coverage on our national leaders, on our average viewers and, indeed, on our own Bangladesh Television (BTV), almost in that order.

The summing up carried the message, loud and clear, that no matter what Bush did in the past, it was the state of the US economy, with its long lingering recession and unemployment, that sealed his fate. Here, his failure overshadowed the US role in ending the Cold War with Moscow or the Gulf conflict.

The message was also for the government in Bangladesh, for all its national leaders and politicians in other countries which watched the coverage.

A few other lessons also seemed relevant for Bangladesh.

Bill Clinton won because he was "about tomorrow" and he concentrated on issues rather than on rhetorical promises, with the electorate presented with detailed plan for health care, education, environment, law and order and the development of inner cities, among others. In this exercise, it was the maverick independent candidate Ross Perot who came out second, not Bush who seemed more concerned about demolishing the personalities of his two challengers than about the issues.

Here, the lesson for Bangladesh is also obvious. Our leaders may indeed be greeted with applause as they talk about achievements of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman. But many in the audience will be asking themselves, "But what about tomorrow?"

To such an audience, it is more important to know — and see — how the multi-party system is working today than to hear, again and again, that it was Zia who first introduced it to replace the martial law regime. On the other hand, people may be more curious about Awami League's plan for administrative reorganisation when (and if) it comes to power than to learn that Sheikh Mujibur created a new administration out of nothing.

Some say that one cannot compare the sophisticated electorate in the US with that in a developing country like Bangladesh. I cannot disagree more. When the chips are down, an average voter in the US, Bangladesh, Australia or Great Britain — name any country you like — is most concerned about all the basic things which touch his or her life, the medical facilities, education of children, law and order, police harassment, sanitation and environment.

So, if the CNN coverage helped us — the average viewer and national leaders — to be better informed of the US election process, it also provided us with an understanding of democratic norms in one of the most vital areas, an election.

WHAT was the impact of the CNN coverage, in content and presentation, on the Bangladesh Television (BTV)?

Well, don't ask me. Check with the BTV people or with the Ministry of Information. All I can do here is to give you a view from outside.

In the first place, we saw how press freedom really operates when it comes to a TV coverage of an election campaign, freedom combined with objectivity and fairness. A number of leading newspapers had endorsed Bill Clinton — a couple of them had given their support to George Bush — but the CNN coverage seemed free from bias. I had no way of monitoring other US-based

networks.

Since the CNN was free from bias and had done its homework on the issues under discussion, its principal interviewer Larry King could be bold, forthright but polite in putting questions to all the three presidential candidates during the TV debates. He seemed to make them feel at ease and extracted as much information and opinion from each one of them as one could get during a TV debate. In this respect, King's 90-minute interview with Bush, punctuated by phone-in questions from within the United States and outside, was an excellent TV performance by both the CNN man and the President. It was excellent because it combined an informal air with a businesslike dialogue. In some ways, even the seating arrangement in this debate — with Bush and King occupying two chairs side by side, without (if I remember correctly) even a table between them or a notebook in the hand of the CNN man — showed how a one-to-one interview should be conducted, regardless of the occasion or importance of personalities involved.

It is this debate that should offer some new

ideas to the producer of BTV's "Mukho Mukhi".

The recent one of the series, one with Minister Zahiruddin Khan and AL MP Ataur Rahman Kaiser, was well-conducted by Shafique Rahman who handled the questions and the replies from Khan and AL leader with professional ease. By our local standard, it was good and informative. But, by regional yardstick, it fell short of my expectations.

Part of the problem was, it turned out to be a formal affair, with every one looking a little stiff, asking what sounded like well-prepared questions, with the Minister and AL MP providing detailed answers, without any interjections except briefly from one member of the panel and the moderator. There were no sharp exchanges, no cutting replies and, oddly enough, not even a smile on any of the deadly serious faces.

It was also the seating arrangement, with three journalist members of the panel, the two politicians and the moderator sitting at a respectable distance from one another (so it looked on the TV screen) that added to the formal air. I could not help wondering why the group did not sit around a table, with the moderator, sitting in the middle, conducting a free unstructured conversation rather than a formal interview. That should have made the camera work easier and certainly more interesting. With participants sitting close to one another, the camera could focus on the close-up of more than one, perhaps two or three faces, at the same time. In the BTV production we saw, the camera remained fixed on the person who was speaking, without picking up reaction from other faces to what was being said, say, by the Planning Minister. This is what happens in most panel discussions or in one-to-one interviews presented by BTV.

Most of what I have said here comes from common sense, from training programmes I watched at the Kuala Lumpur-based Asian Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) and from my own somewhat limited participation in TV panel discussions in countries outside.

"In a well-done TV programme," a Hong Kong producer once said, "one third is innovation, one third is risk and the remaining one third is

based on a good model."

Putting his own prescription to use, the producer, quoted above, turned out a number of programmes for the colony's television network in the seventies, two of which earned my appreciation.

Believe it or not, one was titled "Face to Face" which could be the English version of "Mukho Mukhi", except, in content and presentation, it was completely different from the BTV production.

It was always a one-to-one conversation in which Derek Davies, the then Editor of the Far Eastern Economic Review, was the permanent interviewer. It was, in effect, the Davies show.

On the screen, viewers only saw the two-third profile of the Review editor, with the other person facing the camera. Since there was hardly much domestic politics in the British colony, the guest in the programme generally belonged to such fields as the literary world, social work or trade and commerce. The network often went after visitors to the colony, including government leaders from other countries passing through Hong Kong, and brought them in as

"guest" of Davies. Some guests probably never forgot the experience!

As one could see from the 60-minute show, Davies would have done enormous homework on his guest before getting started on the programme. So, he could ask questions which were incisive, astute and even a little aggressive, but never, as far as I recall, rude or too personal. There were even smiles and gentle laughs that brightened up the conversation.

The other programme that I saw regularly was the weekly "Press Conference" in which professional journalists served as questioners, with some one from the Hong Kong administration, a leading industrialist or a visiting dignitary submitting himself to not-too-gentle

inquisition.

The programme followed a somewhat conventional pattern. But it was always informative enough to provide a news report for any of the dailies the following morning.

Whether our friends in BTV have picked up a few ideas from CNN, especially in news presentation and production of panel discussion, remains to be seen. Maybe they should try, fumble and stumble, but still try. And let them also produce interviews and panel discussions in English for the benefit of the ever-expanding foreign community which only watches the 10 pm news to know what's going on or what people

are saying in this country.

Watching "News at Ten" for finding out what's really going on in this country?

Well, we will be back. Stay tuned!

NEW books and journals keep landing on my desk, which should be reviewed in the Star's weekend magazine, written about in this column and finally read — in that order. No, no, that's not true. New books do get read, from cover to cover, before they get reviewed, sometimes quite extensively, as we did with "Sailing Against The Wind", a superb publication on boats of Bangladesh, brought out by the University Press Ltd.

Three new publications that I glanced through during the last unexpectedly long weekend are all on most innovative subjects and well-printed on glossy paper, with extremely well-designed covers.

First, "A Thousand Year Old Bengali Mystic Poetry" by Hasna Jastuddin Moudud, just another superb publication by the University Press Ltd. In terms of quality of printing by BRAC Printers, the layout and reproduction of photographs, it matches the standard set by any international publishing house, reflecting the progress the country has made in this field in recent years. So, congratulations should go in full measure to Hasna J Moudud, the University Press Ltd and the BRAC Printers — I trust, we got them in the right order this time — for this scholarly book which was published in May on the occasion of Buddha Purnima, a wonderful gesture on the part of one of our relatively unknown authors (that's because of politics casting its shadow over her life) showing her respect of a great religious leader of the world.

The second publication is "The Yellow Lady" by Alison Brotnowski, which deals with Australian impressions of Asia. The publication which comes to me with the compliments of the Australian High Commission in Dhaka discusses different aspects of the relationship between the "Country Down Under" and Asia, from the perspective of a former Australian diplomat who has served in a number of countries in this region.

The third is the latest issue of "The Journal of Development Communication", a Kuala Lumpur-based quarterly journal — a most worthwhile publication for experts in this field. It is the mouthpiece of the Asian Institute for Development Communication (AIDCOM) whose work I have followed with keen interest — and admiration — for past ten years. What's more, the journal is edited by Khairul Bashar, a Bangladeshi expert on communication, a former civil servant and journalist.

All three publications will be reviewed in our magazine, exhaustively, objectively and extensively. Meanwhile, let me get more publications even if some get misplaced before reaching our reviewers. In such cases, my embarrassment matches the impatience of kind publishers and their equally kind authors.

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

ideas to the producer of BTV's "Mukho Mukhi". The recent one of the series, one with Minister Zahiruddin Khan and AL MP Ataur Rahman Kaiser, was well-conducted by Shafique Rahman who handled the questions and the replies from Khan and AL leader with professional ease. By our local standard, it was good and informative. But, by regional yardstick, it fell short of my expectations.

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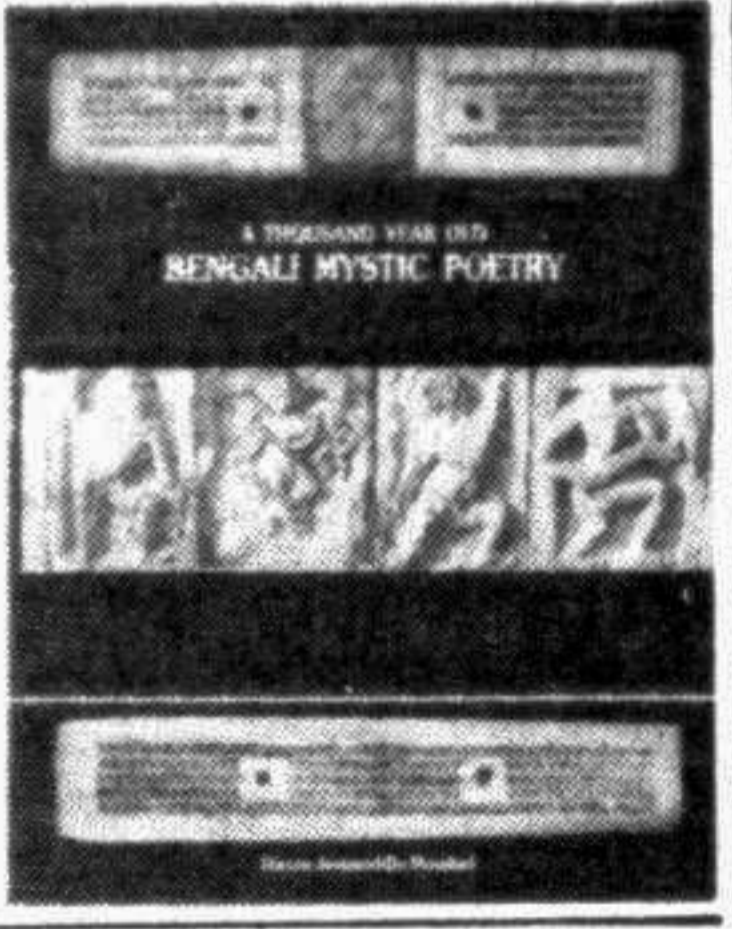
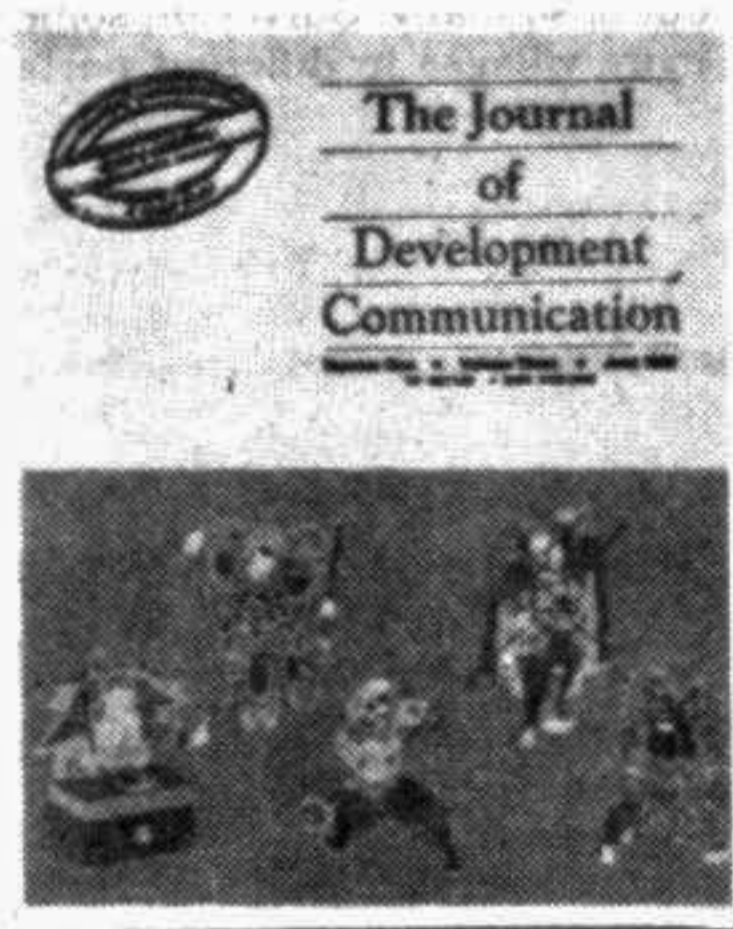
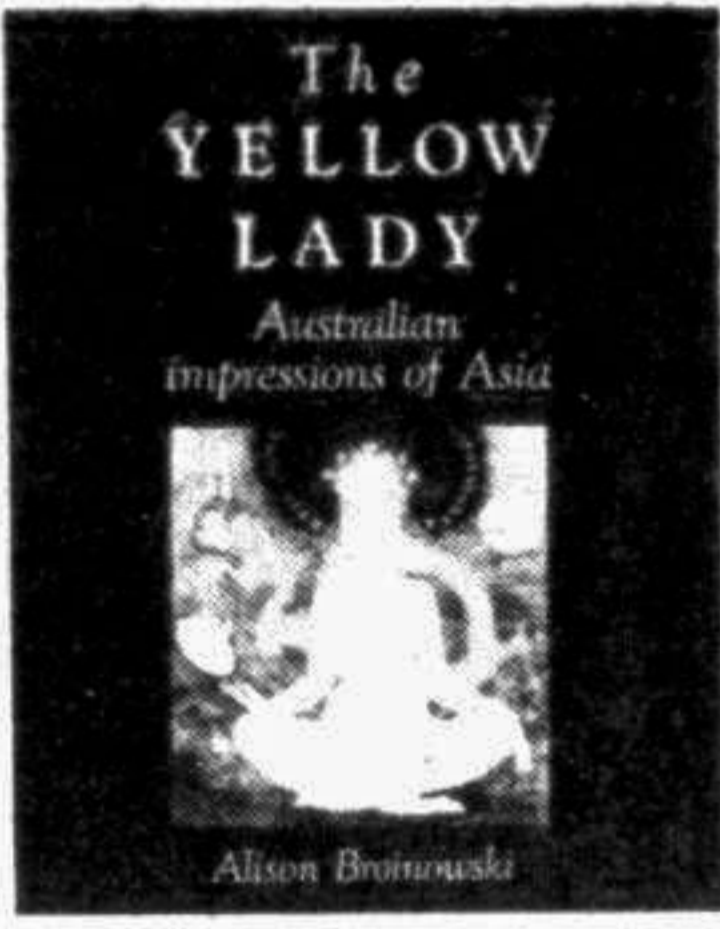
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Is there a Third World Literature?

by Daya Kishan Thussu

IN choosing the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott for the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature, the Swedish Academy has recognised a major poetic talent in the Third World. In the 90-year history of Nobel Prize he is only the tenth writer from the developing world to have won the world's highest literary honour.

Walcott, English language professor at Boston University in the United States, is best known for his verse epic Omeros. It is a rewriting of Homeric stories — Achilles,

Hector, and Helen — set in Walcott's native St. Lucia.

The Swedish Academy cited him as the authentic "voice of the West Indies". However, to some West Indian writers his poetry does not have strictly indigenous characteristics. It is not written in patois, nor is it based on reggae rhythms. Instead his work is very much in the European literary tradition.

But then how many of poets and writers from the European world have been known internationally? And what has been the record of

the Nobel Committee in spotting literary talents outside Europe and the US?

China, where the arts of writing and printing were invented, and an ancient and sophisticated culture survives, has not yet been discovered by the Swedish Academy. For instance, Lu Xun, a major influence on modern Chinese literature, was ignored. Nor has the Academy recognised a Persian or Turkish writer, while many obscure European and American writers have

been awarded the prize.

The Nobel statistics are revealing. Out of a total of 89 award winners, 79 have been European or American writers. Apart from Rabindranath Tagore, who composed poetry in Bengali and Naguib Mahfouz of Egypt who writes in Arabic, all the other award winners from the developing world wrote in a European language.

Not since poet-philosopher Tagore — the first non-European to win a Nobel Prize way back in 1913 — has any writer from the Indian sub-continent been considered worthy of the award. Hindi short story writer Premchand, Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz of Pakistan and Bengali novelist Sarat Chandra Chatterjee are just three of many other major omissions.

Internationally, other obvious gaps include such outstanding writers as Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, Norway's poet-dramatist Henrik Ibsen, British novelist Joseph Conrad, US novelist Henry James, James Joyce of Ireland and, more recently and most controversially, British novelist Graham Greene.

In the field of literature, as in politics and economics, it is much more difficult for a Third World writer to gain international recognition than for a European, mainly because of language. Works in a non-European language are unlikely to be noticed outside their own regions.

In a country like India the English language, the instrument of colonialism, still wields considerable influence. Most of the powerful national media and publishing are in English. After the US, it is the biggest publisher of English language titles in the world. The irony is that only three per cent of the population speak English.

Unless a writer acquires sufficient fluency in English, his or her chances of being recognised nationally are limited. Translation facilities, where they exist, are often not up to standard. Once the national press discovers the writer, he/she can be noticed by the international media and publishing industries which continue to be dominated by the West.

How the South has scored

1913 Rabindranath Tagore (India)	1945 Gabriela Mistral (Chile)	1967 Miguel Asturias (Guatemala)	1971 Pablo Neruda (Chile)	1982 Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Colombia)
1986 Wole Soyinka (Nigeria)	1988 Naguib Mahfouz (Egypt)	1990 Octavio Paz (Mexico)	1991 Nadine Gordimer (South Africa)	1992 Derek Walcott (St. Lucia)

Winners of Nobel Prize for Literature

2789

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita, I really appreciate that you bring issues such as wife beating to the attention of the general public through your column. This is a big problem in our society but no one wants to talk about it. I have noticed that whenever anybody writes about this it is for somebody else, either a sister or a neighbour. I suspect women ask advice for them selves but are ashamed to admit it. Why do you think women are reluctant to talk about it? It is after all not their fault.

Shamina, Gulshan, Dhaka

Dear Shamima, You have asked a very complicated question and the answer to which is not easy. The main reason women are not willing to talk about it is because they somehow feel responsible for what has happened, and that it is their fault. Traditionally women are perceived to be the ones who should look after the well being of the family and are blamed for any problem, no matter whose fault it may be. Unfortunately, women blame themselves even if no one else does and feel they have not lived up to the expectations of the husband or family members.

More and more women should speak up against wife abuse and bring it out in the open. There should also be an effort to tell victims of abuse that it is not their fault.

Dear Mita, After I gave birth to my third daughter, my in-laws were so upset and expressed it by feeling sorry for me which upset me even more. I have two older daughters who are beautiful, brilliant and loving. Both me and my husband are thrilled to have the third one and nobody can make us feel sorry for not having a son. We are proud of our daughters and want to prove to the world that they can match boys anytime. What are your thoughts on this issue.

NNishat, Purana Palton, Dhaka

Dear Nishat, I was thrilled to read your letter, my heartiest congratulations to you and your husband. Your daughters are very lucky to have such parents. Don't be too harsh on people who prefer boys to girls, it is as much society's fault as it is theirs. Hopefully, such prejudices will go away with education and enlightenment and it is people like you who will contribute to build a society where women will be treated equally with men.

Dear Mita, Last week you answered a woman who complained that her husband does not talk to her. Your answer was good, but still does not answer her questions completely. Suppose she tries everything and he does not respond what is she supposed to do? I know a person who is very pleasant and talkative outside but as soon as he comes home he becomes serious and unfriendly. What do you suggest?

NNRehana, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Dear Rehana, I have said before that I do not have any readymade solutions to people's problems. All I do is suggest alternatives which might work. If a person seems happy and pleasant outside and unfriendly at home, then there is something going wrong within the family which needs to be looked at. People don't usually start behaving in strange ways out of the blue. One of the problems in our family lives is people do not confront problems but rather ignore them as if they will go away if not dealt with. This is a mistake because problems then keep on multiplying and reach an irreversible situation, perhaps like the one you are referring to.