

A Founder of Modern Dhaka The Unforgettable Mrs B. Ahmed

by Waheedul Haque

In the mid-fifties I first met her. And over a long period of time after that I do not recollect any meeting of the cultural leading lights of Dhaka where she didn't occupy a very honoured seat. Gandaria Mahila Samiti was as active an organisation as it was respected. In the void, resembling the intergalactic expanses, that was created by the exit of the whole of Dhaka's highly cultured middle class in the wake of the 1947 partition of India, Gandaria Mahila Samiti, founded by Shahzadi Begum and Ashalata Sen, mother of Samar Sen, the doyen of Indian economists, was a brightly shining light from which we took courage in the gloomy days of those frustrating years.

universally despised, the four steered clear of party politics and saved themselves for higher and better things. Only one of the four — Sufia Kamal — lives on providing a shining example of the stuff her comrades were made of. Each one of the four had her full complement of specialities. Mrs B Ahmed, probably senior to all except Shahzadi Begum, was the one that the general run of cultural activists met the most and had the chance of working together. The others led the usual social work crowd that so often slid into a racket beholden to government funding and never much cared about the early cultural activism that was later even to overtake the influence of politics and contribute mightily to the development leading to the emergence of a nation-state for the Bengalees. Sufia Kamal was till then mainly a leading poet and was perhaps shaping up for her eventual take-over as the supreme leader of cultural and social resistance which all the way heftily contributed to the coming of age of the politics of Bengali nationalism or a culture-based politics.

most of her peers, one would simply be overwhelmed by a sense of mystery. What was her source of her inspiration and power, her enviable self-education and sophistication? Her love for and commitment to culture was something that rarely distinguished her colleagues in women's organisations and social work. Where did she pick that up?



For an answer I suggested to Begum Sufia Kamal the other day that may be losing her father very early in life and being brought up in the maternal grandfather's household had something to do with it. Sufia Khala was in two minds about the hypothesis. I clinched it by telling her about one Sufia Kamal, doesn't she know her quite closely? — who was similarly brought up by her maternal grandfather, the Nawab of Shahtabad. And how was I pleased to have been able to surprise her with another information. Mrs B Ahmed's husband Maulvi Muslehuddin Ahmed also lost his parents in his childhood and was groomed into a talented young man of many parts by his maternal grandfather and his uncles.

lady was the eldest sister of her husband. Much later a bright young man from Noakhali, writing and editing a journal 'Bulbul' from Calcutta and playing soccer for the redoubtable Calcutta Mohammedan Sporting Club married this great woman's daughter, Habibullah, his nickname Bahar and a brother to Nahar or Shamsunnahar Mahmud, was to become a very popular minister in the otherwise hated Muslim Ministry of the first post-Pakistan government in this land. Supposing Mahnubul Fatima was nothing by herself, her connections were such as could make her amply famous.

And she had everything — and in what quality! She was an accomplished writer of prose — perhaps the only after Rukya Sakhawat among the Muslim writers, to have regularly published her pieces of short story and essay in such high-brow journals as 'Bharatbarsha'. Fatima didn't teach Badrunnessa only through precepts, she taught her by exemplifying things herself. The Dhaka of early twenties was a cultured city all right — but not one Muslim could be found in the cultural and social elite of the city till the partition of the subcontinent. In those days of unredeemed backwardness of her community, Fatima did not sit satisfied with her literary pursuit and its rewarding successes. She involved herself with whatever contributed to social development — of her community as well as of the Bengalee people as a whole. I personally was impressed by one of her handiworks in the Dhaka of late thirties — the Shishu Mongalalay, the charitable maternity centre on Urdu Road. If Mahnubul Fatima didn't leave an equally indelible imprint, if not more, on her brother Muslehuddin, we hardly could have got our own dear Mrs B working for the society for the best part of the day beginning from her first days as a wife. But for a husband subscribing completely to the freedom of thought and action of not only women as a gender but of the wife, she couldn't at all blossom as the wonderfully selfless server of society that she came to be. At one stage of her life, she had to care personally for all of her

nine children and then go out to the call of duty outside. But for an enlightened Muslehuddin Ahmed it wouldn't have been possible for Mrs B to emulate M Fatima and set examples by herself. None of her children grew into social climbers, two of her daughters were leading dancers at a time appearing on stage for whatever reason — not to speak of dancing — was held as an outrage on social norms. Her eldest son was groomed into the best guitarist this side of the Padma — something society did not value at all. By her instance her nieces also bloomed into eminent dancers and singers. All this could not be possible if only the husband was made of the same mold as other Muslim gentlemen of the time were.

She founded in 1992 the 'Noadha Zenana Mahfil' in Calcutta — an association of her compatriots coming from the village of her birth in Manikganj. And soon enough she staged a drama, an unheard of thing for a Muslim lady to do, and donated the collected gate money to no less a person than M A Jinnah. During the 1946 communal mayhem in which thousands were butchered, she formed a peace committee and convened a *meeta* of people drawn from the fighting communities. These were very risky things to do there being every chance for misunderstanding by the extremists of her own community. In 1947 she rushed with succour to the aid of the victims of the Bihar communal carnage and the Muslim Women's Association of that province, moved by the toll she put into her work, offered her their presidency.

Passing Years, Falling Leaves A Train Journey with a Nawabzada

by Shahabuddin Mahtab

A government official in our country is looked upon as a special species. It was more so in Sindh (Pakistan). Our office was located near the Masjid-e-Khijra in Karachi. The Ministry of Communications was in Islamabad (the year was 1968). So also were the other important ministries (for our purpose) such as Finance, Economic Affairs, etc. So, to be on time, we would leave Karachi as early as 6 am in the morning and return back by, naturally, as late as 9 pm in the evening.

After a couple of months of shuttling about, my mentor Mr Golan Rasul Bhatti of Jhang (now deceased) called me to his room and admonished me for patronising the PIA (Pakistan International Airlines). Mr Bhatti told me to go to Islamabad by Tejam (a fast train), otherwise he would not countersign my travelling allowance bills. Mr Bhatti was a tough boss, but the kindest of men. I had the temerity to ask him, what was the necessity for those journeys which meant that it would take me about thirty hours each way. My mentor said, would I not like to have a new suit every month or better still, a good saree for my wife!

Thereafter, I was merrily travelling by Tejam, meeting many interesting persons such as filmstars Sabiha (heavily veiled), Santosh, Ada (Lux toilet soap model), Mr Manzoor Qadir, and a host of VIPs. I also met some friends, Mr Aminul Islam of the Engineering Service and Mr Nurul Alam, a Director in the Central Ministry of Education, and others.

carriage, and by the time my compartment-mate arrived the train was already late by five minutes. Thirty hours in a railway compartment, can only be made pleasurable with good companions or good books. I could somehow guess that the gentleman was a fine person, and also a 'Nawabzada'. Nawabzada sahib politely asked me what I was going to do for my supper. I told him that I would be going to the Railway dining car run by Kellner. Nawabzada with great force said that the Kellner foods were simply uneatable. Then he politely and earnestly enquired of me whether he could have me as his guest, till the end of the journey. He further added that it was difficult for him to dine alone. Nawabzada in his own polite manner, sought a favour (?) from me! Nawabzada's cook and his valet were working in the train's kitchen, and all the ingredients of the food were of the best quality. All the food items were prepared with 'Khales' Ghee (pure Ghee).

When we became friends after about an hour, Nawab Sahib asked me about my wife and the children. He was frightfully sorry that I had only two daughters. He asked me, if I would like to know the 'recipe' of having a son. I did not like to dampen the spirits of Nawab Sahib. So I said that it would be very kind of him if he told me the secret. 'Mahtab Saab' he said, 'when your wife is expecting another child, please go to the Masjid together, and pray to the Almighty that the name of your next issue would be Mohammed, and nothing else. Nawab Sahib had been blessed with a son, after he had five daughters. Nawab Sahib insisted that the recipe would be successful in my case.

To the great regret of

Nawab Sahib I did not follow his 'recipe'. When the tragedies of 1971 started, he phoned me from Dera Gazi Khan, and asked me if he could do anything for me, and if necessary he would come down to Karachi. My family left for Dhaka on the 10th of March, 1971, and I reached Dhaka on the 13th of April, 1971. I talked to Nawab Sahib, for the last time in June, 1971. Thereafter I do not have any contact with Nawab Sahib any more, but he was a great soul and I hope and pray that he is in the best of health and spirits.

Metamorphosis

by Rumi Siddiqui

When,
The cathodes, and all
The electrodes? failed
To speak;
The Dr. pronounced,
Sadly announced,
I'm DEAD!
It,
Must be, a paradox!
Exclaimed he!
Immediately, screamed for
Resuscitation, injection,
Coramine, and what not.
Me?
I felt 'sorry, for him
Did worry, Poor Dr!
Poor out-dated Dr!
Generation gap,
It must be!
You see
No one, told him
His son, and the
New generation
Metamorphosized.
Dr Oh Dr,
My heart, you see,
Was created, While He
Was on holiday.
The job was sub-contracted
To a mason.

Optical Mark Reader (OMR) and the Fear of the SSC Examinees

by Engr Gazi Z Ahmed

It is only natural that with the advancement of science and technology civilization will go forward. Although belatedly, it is good to know that our country has discarded, at least partially,

the age-old educational system with an infrastructure consisting of many loopholes and finally embraced a much timely method. An introduction under this new educational system is the grading of the examination scripts with the help of machine. And it is this introduction of mechanical help in precisely evaluating a student's performance that has raised a few questions in the minds of people. Can machine perform this kind of intellectual task with precision? Would machine be always free from the error of judgement? Doesn't it have limitations of its own? These questions have created an adverse effect in the minds of many, especially the SSC candidates.

Because the very exam is one of the deciding factors in a student's life, one may ask — would this machine do proper justice to a student's efforts? The answer is 'yes'. Because man is prone to mistakes of any kind but machines are programmed to be error-free. While examining objective-type scripts, human vision becomes exhausted after correcting 10-15 scripts and the examiner, himself after sometime, may forget the correct answers. Because the exam paper itself does not contain the answers but only the marked alphabets (a, b, c, d) of the correct answers. But if the machine, through a programme is made known the correct answers to each question it will never commit error. Because unlike the human brain, the mechanical brain is not flawed with digressive thoughts while thinking of a particular subject. Even so, can the machine prove to be 100 per cent correct? The answer to that also is 'yes'. Because the precision of a machine depends on its condition and also on the person who operates it.

If the operator does not feed the machine with the wrong information, and always follows the correct procedures of implanting informations, then the machine will definitely be 100 per cent correct. However, as we are quite new to this system, and the operators are not well-trained, it may, at first, not work with absolute precision. But then there must be checks before introduction/operations.

The machine which is used for this purpose is called OMR (Optical Mark Reader), which means examining through rays or light. As this machine works with the reflection of light, so the precision of rays will ensure the correctness of its use. Now, one may ask where will the reflection of rays come from? The round spaces that the students will fill in their scripts will not produce the ray. Rather, it will come from the empty spaces in the examination paper. When the examination paper will be inserted

into the machine if will only choose the correct answers in the circled box. Where it will not see any reflection, it will look for answers there. So, obviously it is understandable that the circled spaces will have to be filled in clear handwriting with dark black ink. As the colour blue is relatively lighter than black and reflects less, that is why it will be best to use a thick-nibbed black pen or ball-point.

As a person involved in this process, I have often noticed that while filling in the round spaces, the students become too keen on not touching the boundaries of the circle and this practice often leaves too much space between the writing of the circle. This practice may prove to be dangerous for any student. So the students should make sure that they do not leave any black spaces around the circle; they must not leave too much white space and they also must ensure that the writing inside the designated space is not light or blurred by any chance.

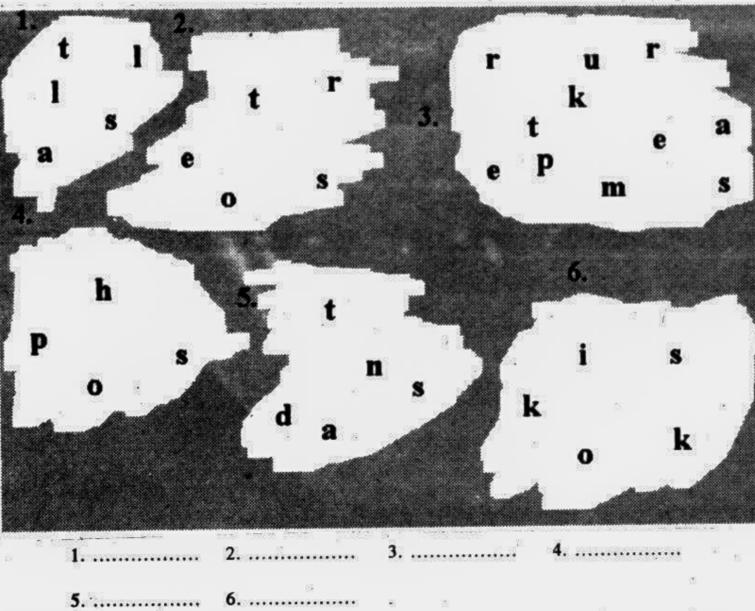
Again, some students are in the habit of filling up two spaces with one stroke of a pen. Filling up two or more spaces for one answer definitely means wasting the opportunity of answering those questions for which these spaces were designated originally. One answer must be replied within the given area, not more. After writing, if a student thinks that the answer which he has written is wrong, even then he shouldn't fill an additional space. Because, filling an additional space for the previous answer ultimately results in losing both the answers.

Another problem that may often arise is there is a hole in the circled area. So it is advised to everyone to use a plain hard-board sheet under the examination paper especially if the writing desk's surface is uneven.

This procedure wouldn't have caused much problem if the system was used in the higher classes of the schools. Students would have been accustomed to it by now. But it may bring an adverse effect on the rural students, who probably are not well informed of the procedure, because the teacher who is supposed to enlightens the students, himself has not probably seen the machine or experienced such methods of examination.

Wobbly Words

Try this word puzzle. In each shape the letters are jumbled up. Put them in the correct order, but be careful - some have more than one word. What do all of them have in common?



The Language Lab

In this column we want you to write to us about any little problems that you have with English and we will see if we can 'analyse' them. We will try to give the best answer possible in the space available.

Md Habibur Morsalin Xami writes to ask...

Which one is the correct form of the question?

1. Would you mind opening the door, please?
or
2. Would you mind to open the door, please?

Will the answer here is quite

clear. The first question is right and the second one wrong.

The reason for this is that the verb *mind* is followed by the -ing form of the verb. It can in some circumstances also be followed by a noun or pronoun as in *Don't mind him!*

It is generally true that the overall form of a sentence is determined by the verb you use. The elements that follow it are known as the verb pattern and some dictionaries give a description of the verb pattern for each verb.

Be careful with these patterns though. Many verbs have more than one possible pattern and sometimes a particular pattern is associated with a particular meaning. In other words, you can use a dictionary to check how to

use a word, but make sure that the example you are looking at has the same meaning as what you want to say.

If you want to write to us with any questions you have, simple or complicated, please write to The Language Lab, c/o The Daily Star.

Answers:
1. and 2. more? supermarket & shop
5. and 6. know
The two sentences are...
Would you mind carrying these books for me, please? and Could you open the window for a moment, please?

Contributors: Marina Byrnes, Dennis O'Brien, Janet Raynor.

The British Council, 1994

The British Council Language Matters

The Intro

Today we have some more puzzles for you. There is the usual Wobbly Words puzzle and also a Wobbly Sentences again!

As we said before, this is a good exercise for practising word order. Many people are not so confident with the

word order in questions and by doing exercises like this you can make it fun. This time there is also a connection with one of the other items in the column.

There is also a new Language Lab. Don't forget that these appear in answer to your questions. If you do not write we have no questions to answer. So put pen to paper

and send in your queries!

We are aware that some past questions have not been answered in the column but this is because they were sometimes a little bit too complicated. Space and time are limited and you stand a better chance of getting an answer if your question is related to a particular example such as today's.

Wobbly Sentences

Try this exercise to help you practise the word order in questions. There are two different questions mixed up. You must sort them out, put the words in the correct order and make sure you use the punctuation marks.

me a for
, you carrying
these please
you open for
could ? window
the ?
mind books would
moment please

Question 1

Question 2