

# Nationalism versus the Learning of English

by Saroj Kumar Baul

WHATEVER may be the actual definition of nationalism, it does not mean hatred for other people of the world, their manners and customs, education and culture, literature and language and so on. Even the fierce Language Movement of 1952 was for recognition of our mother tongue as the state language in place of Urdu not to pour venom out on another language or the people who spoke it.

But what is most disheartening in the post liberation times is an unwritten declaration of a powerful movement against English. Abolition of compulsory English from the syllabus of Degree (pass) courses in early 1980's is a dogmatic step initiated towards unlearning the language and preventing the students from acquiring modern knowledge.

The impacts of such movement against English in our country in the name of nationalism are too many to sum up and more detrimental than these can be described. However, it is not felt necessary here since the subject has been elaborately dealt with many a time in different columns of the English national dailies. At the same time it is also difficult to summarize the ever increasing importance of English in this dynamic world of science and technology. Detailing the global importance of this language, preferably known as lingua franca, will simply be tautological for identical reason.

If our people think that learning English tells upon our nationalism, we may carefully take into account some celebrated writers of the world for juxtaposition.

History tells us that the relation between Ireland and England has always been hostile. But the renowned writers of Ireland have been enriching the English literature for long

three hundred years. W B Yeats, a Nobel Laureate wrote to some of his friends that he could not look down upon the English and that he owed to Shakespeare, Shelley and Blake to a great extent.

Chaucer and Pushkin brought about fundamental changes in their respective mother tongues. This was nothing short of rebirth according to some scholars. That was actually possible because of foreign inspiration and influence. At that time England had been an isolated island. It became part and parcel of Europe since Norman Conquest in 1066 and gradually inherited Greek-Latin culture. Had there been no such contact, perhaps it would not have been possible for a small island like England to give birth to an unparalleled literary genius like Shakespeare. Peter, Catherine and Pushkin were all inspired by foreign languages. Goethe renewed himself while he had been in Italy for two years and subsequently revitalized German literature with his multidimensional creativity in 19th century. Ibsen, the Norwegian playwright of global repute spent twenty seven years in Italy and Germany and during that period he was able to write the best of his dramas.

In case of our sub-continent R C Majumdar and P N Chopra wrote: English education may be regarded as the chief contributing factor to the great regeneration of India in the 19th century, referred to as the Renaissance.

India came into contact with Western ideas at a very opportune moment, when they were dominated by the French Revolution and the Age of Illumination (Main current of Indian History). According to Annada Sankar Roy if the English did not come and English was not introduced, and if Indians were not introduced to European literature

through English, Bengali literature would have remained restricted within the Age of Bharat Chandra. Modern Bengali literature would not come into being (Pravasi - 1368 B S 2nd Issue-276). So, had there been no Western contact at all in whatever way it might have been India could not have produced a Nobel Laureate Rabindranath.

Vidyasagar was a pioneer and patron of Bengali literature. He too had been a veteran nationalist throughout his life. On the 11th April, 1852 he submitted a report entitled Notes on Sanskrit College containing 26 chapters on education policy, to the then Education Samsad. He stated there in that English should be accepted as a compulsory subject instead of being treated as an optional one. He emphasized the need for learning English literature and language effectively even by the Sanskrit Paundras lest they should fail to get themselves acquainted with European knowledge and learning and translate them into chaste Bengali (Bangla Academy Patrika-Kartik-Posh, 1392 B S P-87 and 91).

We cannot also deny the fact that a good number of established writers of Bangladesh and West Bengal assimilated English thoroughly and enriched our mother tongue to an optimum extent.

This abridged and sporadic review brings out the patent fact that nationalism is not antagonistic to learning foreign language, specially English in this age of tremendous scientific and technological advancements. We should not forget the contributions of Sir Syed Ahmed, Syed Amir Ali and Moulana Kalam Azad too in this context.

We may cast our look even on the socialist countries, not to speak of Third World coun-

tries, and go through their English journals and publications to learn how intensely they are learning English. Most of the contributions to science and technology and other branches of knowledge have either been in English directly or in a translated form. But when some of our people underplayed the importance of English, they ignored the fact that even translation of any book of knowledge from English into Bengali also requires good command over English. So, to discourage learning English is to discourage even translation of books of knowledge into Bengali and also to intensify our poverty of modern knowledge and learning. We ought to bear in mind that English is neither a rival nor a challenging language so far Bengali language is concerned. On the contrary, it has always been an extraordinarily helpful language for enrichment of our mother tongue. The ever enriching store house of knowledge of the world is the asset of every one inhabiting the planet. So geographical boundaries should not stand in the way of sharing knowledge of any country alien to our own. There was a time when people of this subcontinent thought that going abroad and learning English were a sin. Those who returned from abroad had to atone under pressure of the then superstitious society. If we still think English is Robert Clive or Warren Hastings and deliberately do away with the language, we shall plunge our young generation into the abyss of infernal ignorance and commence our journey towards Medievalism from this age of science and technology. What is very much painful is that we being absolutely blind to our own failings, close our eyes to the dynamic world outside and thereby suffer perhaps from a myopia and a nostalgia, and feel gravitated to-

wards Medievalism. How much more agonizing it is when we know of some students going abroad on foreign scholarship are heard of being obliged to return home without completing their studies because of their inability to follow lectures at British and American Universities! (State of English in Bangladesh - Syed Sajjad Hossain. The Bangladesh Observer dated 27-12-89). In fact it is a sin to suppress our young generation within a darkened stalemate in this dynamic age.

To sum up, linguistic chauvinism or Jingoism can not be appreciated now-a-days. Learning English will not hamper our national and patriotic feelings, rather modern learning through English will revitalize our real national feeling. First and foremost our mother tongue should be given its rightful place in all spheres of national life. At the same time the status of English should be restored. This is very much possible simultaneously. It is however, learnt that though late, steps have been taken by the Govt. to introduce English as a compulsory subject in all Degree (Pass and Honours) courses. It will also be useful if it is introduced as a compulsory subject at the primary level of Engineering and Medical courses. It is the need of the hour.

A pragmatic education policy ought to be formulated for teaching English effectively at all levels of education. It is high time our Government and University authorities took appropriate steps in this matter. Procrastination will further awfully widen the generation gap available at important professional levels with a very few to be able to communicate in English efficiently with their counterparts.

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# Death of a Young Visionary

by T Hussain



Late Taimur Hussain

YOUNG Taimur Hussain (or Timur, as he himself preferred to spell his first name) finally returned home in Bangladesh in mid-1991 after a long spell of 14 years spent in the USA. During these years, he struggled hard to complete his education abroad and establish himself in life. Graduating from the University of Houston in 1985-86 in Electronics and Computer Engineering, he took a job as a Senior Telecommunication Analyst in a big airlines subsidiary, 'System One', in Miami, Florida and served there with credit for about six years. In the meantime, he obtained his US citizenship which was many a young man's dream, migrating from Asian countries.

He received his early education, while at home, in Shaheen Airforce School, Jhenidah Cadet College and then at the Notre Dame College, Dhaka. Determined as he was, he made his admission in Jhenidah Cadet College a dramatic success. Having qualified in the written examinations, he used the good offices of a Biman pilot (a friend of his freedom-fighter elder brother Iqbal), in failing to get the air ticket, to fly to Jessore enroute Jhenidah to appear at the viva voce test on due time. He actually travelled, in the cockpit with the pilot's permission. It was in early 1973.

He left for the USA for studying in the Tri-State University in November, 1976.

Taimur decided to return to Bangladesh in 1991, when he was working in Miami. Many of his colleagues, relatives and well-wishers really wondered why Taimur was relocating himself in Bangladesh, leaving a vast career opportunity in the USA. They tried to dissuade him from acting on this unusual decision. His firm answer was that he would go back and serve his nation. He took it as a challenge. Having arrived in Dhaka in mid-July, 1991, he plunged himself in a hectic and uncertain life, struggling relentlessly to

establish himself in his business pursuits — something he could call his own creation.

He was offered handsome jobs in the Bangladesh Computer Council, Bangladesh Biman and elsewhere. But he could not persuade himself to accept any salaried job, where life was easier, but lacked in challenges.

Taimur had high hopes and aspirations, indomitable courage and a rare spirit of dynamism. He was actually a visionary. He felt convinced that one day he would succeed in becoming a leader in his society — no, not as a political leader, but in his practical life, by dint of his own merit and hard work. Tall, handsome, self-confident and smart, he could impress anybody in course of his first meeting. His conviction was sincere, yet meaningful. Many a time, he came across frustrating environment, while dealing with financial institutions, banks, customs and other agencies. But he did not lose heart and kept on repeating his efforts with renewed zeal. He even did not hesitate to seek an opportunity to share his thoughts with the highest quarters of the government. Sometimes he succeeded, sometimes he didn't. He was also looking forward for a chance to see the Hon'ble Prime Minister, following his Eid visit to Sugandha to pay respects to her a year ago. But luck did

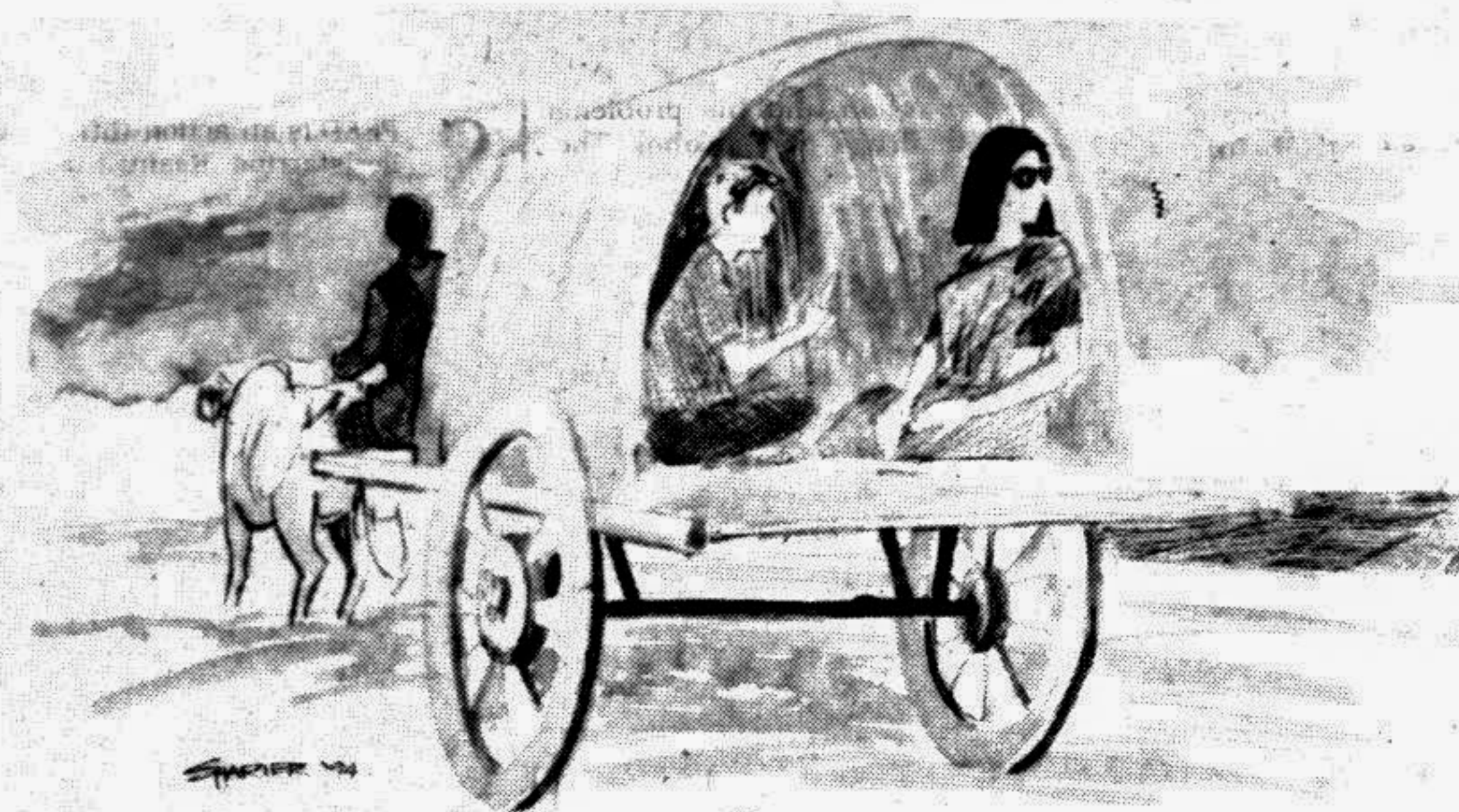
not favour him. He knew that there were many Bangladeshi professionals living abroad, but he was one of the few who had the will to return. He believed, if someone like him could succeed through honest efforts, then many others might follow. Unfortunately, cruel fate intervened and Taimur's hopes and expectations did not come true. He suddenly expired at the prime age of 35 years in the early hours of Friday, the 12th of August, 1994, while he was preparing to take wazu for saying his fajar prayers (Innaillahi wainna ilaihi rajeun). Brave Taimur's sad story will not be complete unless a couple of paragraphs more are added.

Taimur's personal life took a religious turn soon after he came back home. He used to say his daily prayers five times regularly and he rarely missed an occasion to visit the High Court Mazar to say his magrib prayers every Thursday. His mind was also full of piety. He was a 'bhaitya' to the street urchins, who always flocked around him whenever he stopped at the filling station opposite the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel to take fuel for his car. To each one, he used to hand over a five-taka or ten-taka note in a spontaneous desire to help the poor needy children. He promised half-yearly stipends for the education of buster boys and girls chosen for vocational training by a local NGO called UCEP.

Taimur loved books. Despite his day-long preoccupations, he could find time to read the international best-sellers. On the night previous to his tragic and untimely demise, he presented the Bengali version of the famous book of verses, 'The Prophet' written by Kahlil Gibran of Lebanon to his now-devastated young wife Helen married to him just about eight months ago. Was this a kind of premonition which prompted him to write 'To a lovely lady named Helen (of Uttara)' on the first page of the book, as the final farewell gift to the pretty woman he loved?

# A New House

A Short Story by Mohit Ul Alam



house as a bride.

Are you afraid? Yakub asked politely. His voice deep bass, suddenly alternating with a thin sound, his pronunciation defective. The road was most uneven, pock-marked, the wheels rattled as the bulls pulled the cart along. There was a second cart following, carrying the men whom Yakub's mother sent to the station to receive the bride.

She was so nervous and shy, she could not even conceive of uttering a single word to the man sitting beside her, a complete stranger, though her husband. She clung a little closer to Yakub. He read her mind. He said, 'I've taken the bullock-cart just to give you a sensation. The jeeps also go. But they are unreliable. On our way we'll cross two small rivers which have no bridges. The jeeps use ropes to be tugged to the other side, and often they get stuck up in the mud. But the bulls are sure to take us across.'

He went on, 'The station we got down at was the last station on this line. That was Nazirhat. Our village is nine miles up in the north where the hills have just started. The army is now coming to quash down the tribal agitators at Khagrachhari. They'll make the bridges, I'm sure. The road will be fine. In a matter of three hours you'll be able to see your parents.'

He looked at Mona sideways. He was keen on seeing the effects of his words. But Mona kept her head bent, though she heard every word. She wondered why her parents just gave her away in marriage so quickly. She cried, without allowing her tears to roll.

Then something happened. The cart suddenly swung, started running downward. Mona tumbled over, hit the thatched roof of the cart, her heart leapt out of her body. Yakub held her tightly. 'This is the first river. ... don't be afraid... you can cross it like

this in winter.' Cold sweat ran on her back soaking her blouse. The blanket that Yakub wrapped over her before the night fell felt most hot now. Yet, she wanted to see the river, saw nothing beyond a silvery mass in the moonlight. The bulls worked up their way against the cascading water. The cart groaned, water gurgling about the wheels. The cart-driver 'sh-sh-d' the bulls uphill with light strokes of the cane.

'Look at those trees lying on the ground,' Yakub said, while the cart jolted up the other bank. Mona looked, did not see the trees, but saw the vast world outside drenched with moonshine. She sighted the moon now, the upper-edge sliced off, silent and waiting over a mango grove. Yakub read her confusion again, and said, 'Those trees ... they fell to the storm last year. They are cotton trees, bigger but weaker than the bamboo trees. See, you'll be surprised at many things in the village.'

Her father's letters were strange ones. Cheap post cards scribbled in very dark ink, boosting her morale to stay in the village, giving news of relatives. One card followed the other fortnightly. When it came she would read it over and over again until tears filled her eyes.

'Behal (cousin-in-law) is indulging you,' Her mother-in-law badgered. 'He keeps your mind content with his letters. After your marriage, you've become one of us. Try to understand us.'

Mona couldn't tolerate the matter-of-fact attitude of the voice. The willfulness of her mother-in-law was to be challenged, but there was something overpowering in whatever she said or did that Mona felt that she amounted to nothing to this woman. She could only mildly protest, her voice choking. 'But everything is so different in the village. ... I'm the only daughter that's been married to the village. All my

other sisters are married to families in the city.'

Her mother-in-law held her breath, wore a quizzical look, and without adding any further word slowly retreated, trudging a little on her left foot. She was a small woman. Very old. But had a large house to keep. Her husband, wizened and rickety, with much of the evening gone, kept himself confined to his room all the time, reading books on religion. He lost his speech power; what he mumbled was understood by whosoever had lived in the house for long. In his incapacity, her mother-in-law took over the caretaking of the property, which was vast and expanding, and she boasted over it, would like to let Mona know about it, though she would feign that any reference to the lands in her talks was merely by chance. Her lower lip hung a little low from her once pretty face, and as she spoke to Mona, who was much taller, she looked up to her in the face, as if accusing her for being so tall.

'Be very careful of the wooden plank on the pond.' 'Yes,' Mona replied. 'Ask your father not to write too many letters ...' 'Yes, Mother,' Mona replied in the same tone.

'And talk to the womenfolk who come here. Have I brought in a dumb woman in the house for my son?' 'Yes, yes, Mother, I will.' She produced this consent in real horror.

A small path led from the kitchen to the pond in the backyard. It was surrounded by tall trees providing a natural cover for women to bathe in private. Yet, the bathing-space was cordoned off on three sides by a bamboo-fence, half-sunk in water, to ensure further privacy. Monju, a cousin of Yakub's, abandoned by her husband, lived in the house with three boy children. She would accompany Mona to the pond. Mona still felt shy, when Monju vigorously rubbed her

exposed back with a sponge, made from the inside net of a cucumber. 'You townswomen have too soft a skin,' Monju said as Mona smarted when her scrubbing became too vigorous. The wooden plank heaved under the weight. The water of that enclosed section reflected the opaque sky above. Rain was threatening to come. She then glided into the water, waist-high near the wooden plank. The water felt heavy and inviting between her two legs, and the foamy bubbles on her body burst at the touch of the water that had the crumbled grains of the water hyacinths floating. Eyes closed, ears plugged by fingers, while the thumbs came around to close the nostrils, it was how she managed the dipping into the water. Monju would laugh, her giggling continuing for a while over the water. 'Just hold the breath when you take the dipping, that will force the water out of your earholes and nostrils.'

Mother and son had an argument over the matter of tea. Taking tea in the morning was an unknown feature in the house. Only when Yakub stayed for a couple of days did Mona prepare tea. Yakub asked Mona to take tea even when he was away. His mother's bickering could be heard out in the yard. 'If she likes tea, why don't she tell me then? What is this — whispering complaints? All you people say she's simple, she doesn't know how to turn over a fried fish, now what do I see here ... ay, what ... the government officer's daughter putting everybody against me, picking up issues, ah, you call it simple, and all that, huh ...' In her raving she also protested, 'There must be more devilry in that stomach of hers, you better watch.'

'Your mother doesn't like me,' she complained. 'What happened?' Yakub asked. He was sitting on bed, his legs crossed, turning the pages of an adult magazine that he bought at the railway station. But he yearned for the afternoon nap, he yawned.

'In the kitchen I spilled a little salt today and she was annoyed.'

Finding Yakub not interested, she shifted the topic. 'Did you go to see my parents?'

Yakub's lazy eyes were ogling at an obscene cartoon on a page. His voice sounded casual when he spoke, 'Don't think much about your folks in the city. They're more than happy to give you in marriage to me. Yes, your father has eight daughters. Just imagine, what it means to get relieved of them by getting them married off.'

'Don't tell me, I've not forgotten how you people longed to bring me here.' Her tone was confident.

'That's my beauty, my queen,' Yakub, finding her teased enough, now warmed up and lunged forward to envelope her in his arms. But she ducked. Yakub missed, laughed in his deep bass voice, his strong sets of teeth were exposed. His slithering tongue shone and his purple lips ex-

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# Vanishing Town

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Lees and the Lius serve as the Chambers of Commerce, civil bodies, recreation and information centres. They may not look as hives of activity yet, but there is so much being done. Each has its own newspaper — the only Chinese dailies in India — with a combined circulation of 1,200 copies. They

serve as the only link with the Chinese past.

Every member of the Chinese community reads either the Overseas Chinese Commerce of India or the Chinese Journal of India and contributes stories, news and features to them.

Thus, perhaps both are identical and over the same

# Long Live My Mother

by Abul Ashraf Noor

My mother never dies....  
She is now far off my sight  
But alive in my heart....  
Long live my mother!

My mother was elegant and graceful:  
The day she died I grew a little older  
Many many cherished memories left behind  
I still remember.

My mother provided stability  
To my raw emotions  
Making it much easier  
To express my feelings to her.

She taught me how to live  
And how to die with divine smiles  
My strength, vision and courage  
Based on solid values, kept alive.

In my heart it tells me  
Of my mother's greatness and nobility  
Grace and love, in my real life, to-day  
Long live my mother!

For her my sorrow is much deeper  
Now than ever before.

None seems keen to rescue me in distress.  
If bad times come in dozens  
Yet what she taught me keeps me going  
In this cruel world of graceless society  
How wonderful her grace was!  
It is the gift of love  
I'm sure, I will have a chance  
To meet her again at my abode hereafter.

My love for her shall never fade  
Because she was my mother  
And mother of humanity  
Long live my mother!

# The Roasted Pigeon

by Gazi Abdulla-Hel-Baqui

Mother brought before me a roasted pigeon.  
The meat fills the glory of life,  
My mind fills with sky.  
Trackless ways and spots,  
My heart wings with cloud,  
With some other birds,  
Love and science.

Ah! a fleeting vision of far off  
Sound, shriek and silence.  
What an age-old feeling of Painful Joy!  
Mother brought before me a roasted pigeon.  
Look at man's instinct doing opposites —  
I tasted what binds peace with freedom.

This poem has been selected for publication in an American anthology entitled *The Coming Of Dawn*. The cassette tape of the poem with a baroque musical introduction is professionally presented by The National Library of Poetry, America.

topics. The quaint bearings of the newspapers also make for great tourist attraction as the pages are composed entirely by hand with painstaking calligraphy.

An invigorating whiff of spices brings one to the gates of Shing Cheung. For an Indian, the name rings a bell, as he or she will discover that it is seen on labels on the kitchen shelf.

Shing Cheung sauces have been flavouring Chinese cuisine all over India since the 1940s. Mr Wong, the owner, offers his guests chilled Chinese rose and thistle soft-drink — Sarsi Sal, which is also said to cure cold.

Tradition seems to be indispensable with the Chinese. Grandmother recipes go into the making of the chili, soya, sweet and sour sauces, and Chinese spices. 'The Chinese kitchen is never complete without soya sauce,' says Mr Wong Shing Cheung is one of two Chinese sauce companies in the country and has an annual turnover of 8 million rupees (US\$255,183).

No visitor to the Chinatown is likely to miss the restaurants which are named after the families who run them. Among the customers you will find diplomats, foreign tourists and, of course, the local Bengalis. The decor is typically Chinese and the place is painted in red. Liquor is served with large helpings of food.

But in deference to the sensitivity of the locals, beef and pork are banned items.

If you are so inclined, you can call at the world's largest chrome tanning plant, or so it is claimed, called Chung Wah.

The managing partner, Mr Yang, is full of stories about the problems faced by the Rs 7,250 million (US\$231 million) shoe industry. He hopes that the leather complex, which the West Bengal Government is establishing 18 kms away from Tangra, will tap markets outside Calcutta.

One of the problems of the Chinese community, like the others, is the flight of talent, of young people to Hong Kong and other Southeast Asian countries. They are looking for jobs, careers. Some fly away to Taiwan. Most have Chinese leanings and are disciples of Mao. Many have strong loyalties to Beijing.

Although they are all Indian nationals (only a few are still Chinese and holders of passport from their country of origin), the Chinese remain not part of the mainstream culture of Bengal. They are in Calcutta and yet away from it. They have formed their own cultural groups, run their own schools, inter-marry among themselves with the world outside the Tangra Road hardly noticing. In the foreseeable future, the 15,000 will probably dwindle to 5,000, leaving only some old people with their memories.

And that will be a sad day for Calcutta.

—Depthnews Asia