

Nationalism versus the Learning of English

by Saroj Kumar Baul

W HATEVER 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 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 contract 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

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.

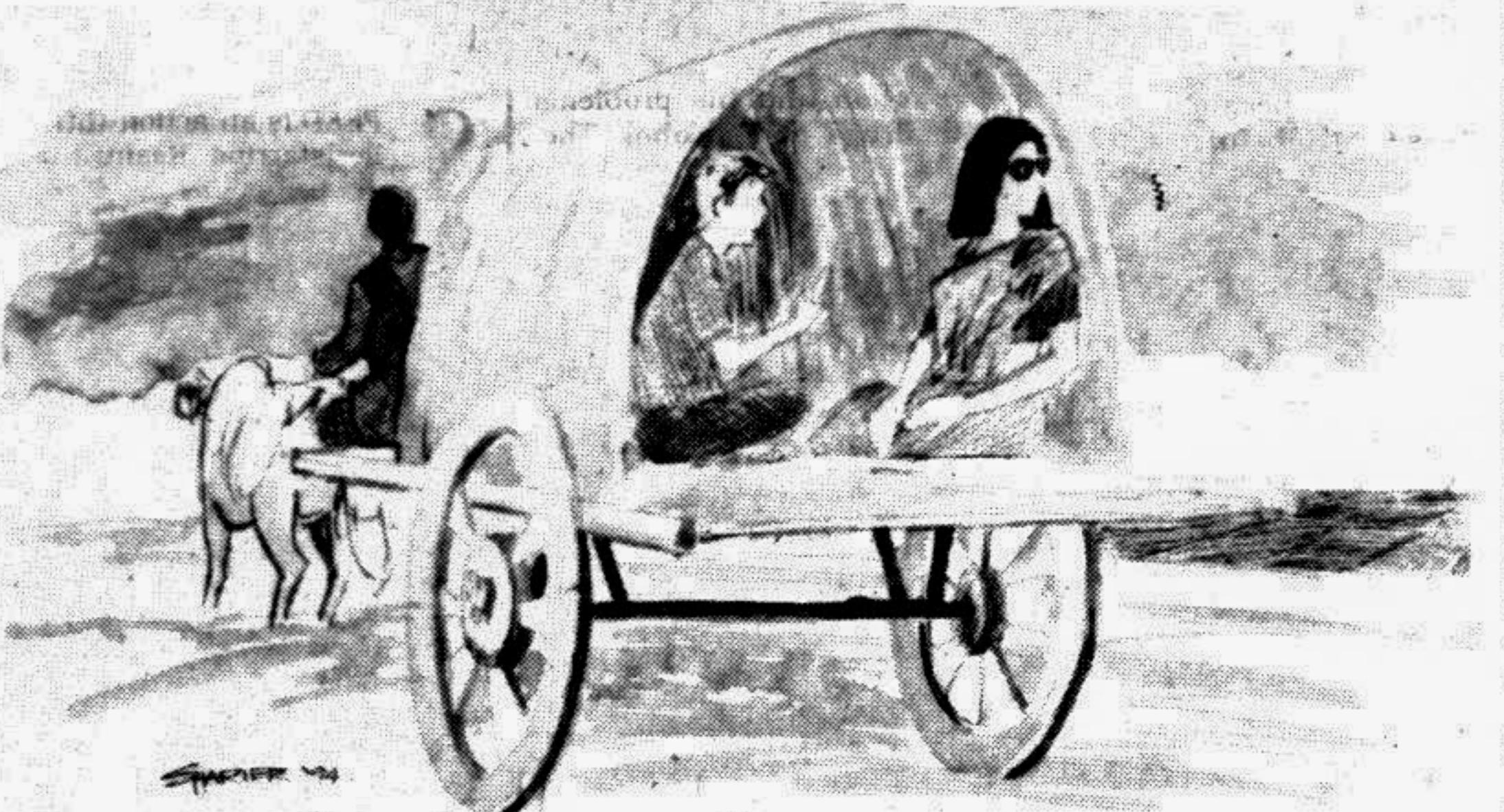
To sum up, linguistic chauvinism or Jingoism can not be appreciated now-a-days. Learning English will not hamper our national and patriotic feelings, rather modern learning through English will revitalize our real national feeling. First and foremost our mother tongue should be given its rightful place 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.

The writer is a teacher of English at Omargani MES College, Nasirabad, Chittagong.

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. "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 toggled 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 'shh-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 eyesight 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 upto her in the face, as if accusing her for being so tall.

"In the kitchen I spilled a little salt today and I 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-

posed. His 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

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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.

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.

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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 Amit Ali and Moulana Abul Kalam Azad too in this context.

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

tries. The impacts of such subversive thoughts 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

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