

# "A dream" remembered



HARUN UR RASHID

LAST 28th August, the 40th anniversary of the famed speech "I have a dream" of the US civil rights leader and Nobel laureate Martin Luther King from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington was commemorated by thousands of people. The contents of the speech remain as powerful and inspirational today as they were to the people who gathered (about 200,000) to hear them on that hot summer 40 years ago. The speech had galvanised Afro-American people to demand their equal rights with white people. It was a message of peace but of an aspiration no administration could ignore.

King was one of the gifted and inspiring orators of his age (although it was reported that in his school, he got a 'C'-minus for public speaking and 'A's' for other subjects). He owed his extraordinary power as an orator to the preaching tradition of the black church, where Church leaders sustained their oppressed flocks with the spoken word. His words in the speech were carefully chosen that was uplifting and moving. King was a pastor in Montgomery, Alabama and led a year-long boycott of the local bus company after a black woman was arrested in 1955 for refusing to give up her seat to a white person.

King was born in 1929 and was the son and grandson of Baptist preachers. He grew up in Atlanta, Georgia when segregation laws denied blacks basic human rights. Persuaded by his father he gave up plans to study law or medicine and after his ordination in 1948, com-

pleted a Ph.D.

He was a giant of a man who despite odds led non-violent protest marches against segregation, discrimination and injustice for Afro-Americans in the US. The protest march was peaceful and orderly because of his leadership. Soon after the march King and his followers met with President John Kennedy at the White House. A peaceful movement for human rights began in the US that became unstoppable. Like Leo Tolstoy and Gandhi,

band, the action earned him black vote that propelled him to power.

In 1963 jailed once again after a non-violent attempt to desegregate the restaurants and hotels of Birmingham, Alabama, King wrote a celebrated letter to clergymen why blacks could no longer wait for justice. In the same year on 28 August, he stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington and delivered his speech to a large crowd. Some of the extracts from his speech are quoted below:

state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice, "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama whose governor's lips are dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where

US media ignored the speech except that the speech received attention in an obscure corner in one of the pages of the Washington Post. In New York, recently the estate of the assassinated civil rights leader is selling materials from 1948 through his death in 1968 en masse on private sale in auction through Sotheby. The draft of the "Dream Speech" is reportedly offered for sale at US\$ 30 million dollars. King applied his eloquence and

"despite the progress we have made during the last four decades, people of colour are still being denied a fair share of employment and education opportunities in our society and still experiencing incidents of racial violence". The criminal justice system in the US continues allegedly against the Afro-Americans and they are determined to put an end to selective prosecution and discrimination in sentencing the Afro-Americans.

Martin Luther King was a great humanitarian and he believed in human dignity, irrespective of the colour of skin. He devoted himself to human welfare and sacrificed his life to a noble cause. Poverty, oppression and injustice remain the principal culprits in our world. In an age of polarisation and confrontation, the ability of anyone to address humanity has become dangerous and the more passionately one champions one wing of opinion the greater risk of arousing the passionate enmity of the other or others.

Drew Hansen, author of The Dream: Martin Luther King, said: "What remains 40 years later is the power of its words, the lyricism of the delivery, and most importantly, the vision of America's redemption. It is as important as the Gettysburg Address or the Declaration of Independence of the US".

Martin Luther King donated the entirety of his Nobel Prize money to charity, despite appeals to put the money toward his children's education. Love for others is a synonym for charity and Martin Luther King was able to demonstrate that he was symbol for love for all - black and white. As Rabindranath Tagore once said "There is only one history - the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger ones."

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Lest we forget

# Professor Noman

## More than a teacher

MAHBUB HUSAIN KHAN



Professor Noman passed away on September 6, 1996

PROFESSOR Noman was never really my teacher, in the exact sense of the term. Yet he was for me more than that. By an interesting set of circumstances, his wife was my mother's student, and I was, if not his direct student, the contemporary of his students in Dhaka College. Because of the circumstance of Mrs Muslima Noman being my mother's student, I was a fairly regular visitor to his house, long before I had passed my Matriculation Examination and gone into college. But once I had done so I was an even more frequent visitor to his house (he lived fairly near to us at that time) to get his guidance in English language and literature and much else, till the time I left Dhaka for Oxford. We had long sessions of tea and tempestuous discussions about literature on many an evening. Just before I left for Oxford we had quite a bit of debate whether I should or should not appear at the CSS examinations. He always preferred that I should lead a simple low profile, but high-yield life.

It has been to my eternal regret that after the early eighties I had not really been a visitor at his house, where I had always been welcome before with food for the mind and the body. And after my mother died in 1990, I think I met him only a couple of times. I had met him in my youth and early manhood, and I mean closely, and in this path through life, I have never ever regretted time spent with him. Neither have those friends of mine, who were his direct students in college. And now there is something to be said for the mentality of age which has come upon us. We are kinder in our judgement of our past. But I am sure, had Professor Noman lived, he would have been much kinder about us than we ourselves. There are many personal anecdotes that I could relate, here and now. But all of that points to the few memorial comments that I will now make about him.

He was an extremely fair person. For all of his life, he believed that true even-handedness meant that those in need should be allowed more. He has left us with that most elusive of qualities, a little bit of charm. He was

a person who regarded life as one long attempt to provide a happy moment or so for another person. My life and times with him, particularly in the sixties, are testimony to this.

Always he was outraged by those who rushed about, shouldering past others, their sides lathered with effort, horses in some cheap race, as they pawed for material success. He knew that life belonged to those who seek out the weary, sit with the defeated, understand the clumsy, and do this not as some duty. But to do it with the cheerful realisation that we are part of it all. He thought that the word 'duty' meant that each day there should be a word or gesture that would cause someone else to smile over the life about them. In particular towards his students. His contempt was reserved for those who would not attempt this.

He was a man utterly unspoiled. I thank God for the high privilege of having known him so well. He leaves us with a tradition of decency that we must attempt to carry on. His strength was such that even if those of us knowing him stumble now and then, Professor Noman's line of decency will reveal itself time after time in whatever generations there are to come in Bangladesh. As has been said of other aristocrats such as this one: Earth, you have received an honoured guest.

Mahbub Husain Khan is an erstwhile Civil Servant of Pakistan (CSP)

# BOTTOM LINE

**Martin Luther King was a great humanitarian and he believed in human dignity, irrespective of the colour of skin. He devoted himself to human welfare and sacrificed his life to a noble cause... Drew Hansen, author of The Dream: Martin Luther King, said: "What remains 40 years later is the power of its words, the lyricism of the delivery, and most importantly, the vision of America's redemption..."**

King stood for non-violence. He adapted Gandhian "Satyagraha" (non-violence or passive resistance) to the American conditions as a means to end the racial conflict in the US. It is based on the idea that moral appeal to the heart or conscience could be more effective than an action based on threat or force. It can be used effectively with an unjust government or invading army. King's depth of commitment to remove inequality and discrimination through non-violence was remarkable.

Stabbed, assaulted, imprisoned, King insisted above all love -- on the reconciliation of the blacks (Afro-Americans) and their white oppressors -- at a time when other civil rights leaders were murdered by white extremists. King transported the Christian theme of love, justice and equality into the political arena. He inspired Freedom Rides, launched counter sit-ins, boycotts and peaceful demonstrations. By 1960 his influence was so great that when presidential contender John F. Kennedy telephoned King's wife, Coretta Scott King, to express support for her imprisoned hus-

"I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of slave owners will be able to sit together at a table of brotherhood,

"I have a dream that one day the

little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers."

It is interesting to note that next day after his "Dream Speech" the



Martin Luther King: I have a dream

tactics to wider issues such as Vietnam War and the conditions of the poor, no matter what colour. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

He was shot dead, at the age of 39, in 1968 in Memphis by a hired assassin James Earl Ray. He wrote his obituary with the following words: "Tell them I tried to feed the hungry. Tell them I tried to clothe the naked. Tell them I tried to help somebody."

His son, Martin Luther King III who was five years old when his father made the speech at the Lincoln Memorial, reportedly told the crowd that jobs and freedom for blacks were still issues that needed to be addressed in the US. He told the media that "my father was more than a dreamer. He did not just talk the talk, he walked the walk."

In 1963 many black people could not vote. Neither could they use the same restaurants, bathrooms or hotels as white people. By 1965 the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act were passed by the US Congress to provide equality with whites. Although laws exist for equality, his son reportedly said that

# Imperial perspectives

EDWARD SAID

THE great modern empires have never been held together only by military power but by what activates that power, puts it to use and then reinforces it with daily practices of domination, conviction, and authority. Britain ruled the vast territories of India with only a few thousand colonial officers and a few more thousand troops, many of them Indian. France did the same in North Africa and Indochina, the Dutch in Indonesia, the Portuguese and Belgians in Africa. The key element is imperial perspective, that way of looking at a distant foreign reality by subordinating it to one's gaze, constructing its history from one's own point of view, seeing its people as subjects whose fate is to be decided not by them but by what distant administrators think is best for them. From such wilful perspectives actual ideas develop, including the theory that imperialism is a benign and necessary thing.

In one of the most perceptive comments ever made about the conceptual glue that binds empires together, the remarkable Anglo-Polish novelist Joseph Conrad wrote that "the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion and or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only - an idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea - something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to."

For a while this worked, as many colonial leaders thought mistakenly that cooperating with the imperial authority was the only way. But since the dialectic between the imperial perspective and the local one is inevitably adversarial and impermanent, at some later point the conflict between ruler and ruled becomes uncontainable and breaks out into all-out colonial war, as happened in Algeria and India.

We are still quite a long way from that moment in American rule over the Arab and Muslim world. At least since World War II American strategic interest there has been to secure (and to ever more closely control) readily accessible supplies of plentiful oil and, second, to guarantee at enormous cost the strength and regional domination of Israel over any and all of its neighbours.

Every empire, including America's, regularly tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, and that it has a mission certainly not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate the peoples and places it rules directly or indirectly. Yet these ideas are not shared by the people who live there, whose views are in many cases directly opposite. Nevertheless, this hasn't prevented the whole apparatus of American information, policy, and decision-making about the Arab/Islamic world from imposing its perspectives not just on Arabs and Muslims but on Americans, whose sources of information about the Arabs and Islam are woefully, indeed tragically, inadequate. American diplomacy has been

permanently impaired by a systematic attack conducted by the Israeli lobby on what are called Arabists. Of the 150,000 American troops in Iraq today, scarcely more than a handful know Arabic. David Ignatius makes this point in an excellent piece on 14 July entitled "Washington is Paying for its Lack of Arabists", ([http://www.dailystar.com.lb/opinion/14\\_07\\_03\\_b.asp](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/opinion/14_07_03_b.asp)) in which he quotes Francis Fukuyama as saying that the trouble is that "Arabists not only take on the cause of the Arabs but also the Arabs' tendency for self-delusion."

In this country knowledge of Arabic, and some sympathetic acquaintance with the vast Arab cultural tradition, have been made to seem a threat to Israel. The media runs the vilest racist stereotypes about Arabs (see for example a Hitterian piece by Cynthia Ozick in the *Wall Street Journal* on 30 June in which she speaks of Palestinians as having "trauced the life force, cultism raised to a sinister

Several generations of Americans have come to see the Arab world mainly as a dangerous place,

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where terrorism and religious fanaticism are spawned, and where a gratuitous anti-Americanism is mischievously inculcated in the young by badly-intentioned clerics who are anti-democratic and virulently anti-Semitic. Ignorance is directly translated into knowledge in such cases. What isn't always noticed is that when a leader emerges whom "we" like -- eg the Shah of Iran or Anwar El-Sadat -- Americans assume that he is a courageous visionary who has done things for "us" or "our" way, not because he has understood the game of imperial power, which is to survive by humoring the regnant authority, but because he has been moved by principles that we share. Almost a quarter of a century after his assassination, Anwar El-Sadat is, it is not an exaggeration to say, a forgotten and unpopular man because most Egyptians regard him as having served America first, not Egypt. The same is true about the Shah. The distortions of imperial perspectives produce further distortions in Middle Eastern society that prolong suffering and induce extreme forms of resistance and political self-assertion.

This is particularly true of the Palestinians, who are now considered to have reformed themselves by allowing Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) rather than the much excoriated Arafat as their leader. But that is a matter of imperial interpretation, not of actual reality. Both Israel and the US regard Arafat as standing in the way of an imposed settlement on

the Palestinians that will obliterate their past claims, and that will represent Israel's final victory over what some Israelis have called its "original sin", which was to have destroyed Palestinian society in 1948 and to have dispossessed the nation of Palestinians, who remain stateless or under occupation, until today. Never mind that Arafat, whom I have criticised for years and years in the Arabic and Western media, is still universally regarded as the Palestinian leader both because he was legally elected in 1996 and because he has acquired a legitimacy that no other Palestinian approaches, least of all Abu Mazen, a bureaucrat and long time subordinate to Arafat who does not have any popular support at all.

Moreover, there is now an independent and coherent Palestinian opposition (the Independent National Initiative) to both Arafat's rule and to the Islamists, but this gets no attention because Americans and the Israeli wish for a compliant interlocutor who is in no position to give us trouble. As to whether any such arrangement can work, that is put off to another day. This is the shortsightedness, indeed the blindness and the arrogance, of the imperial gaze. Much the same pattern is repeated in the American view of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and all the others. The trouble with these views are that they are so incompetent and ideological; they provide Americans not with ideas about Arabs and Muslims, but rather with the way they would like Arabs and Muslims to be. For a great and enormously wealthy country to be producing the kind of mismanaged, poorly prepared and incredibly incompetent occupation of Iraq that is taking place today is a travesty, on intellectual grounds, and how a moderately intelligent bureaucrat like Paul Wolfowitz could be running policies of such colossal incompetence and, at the same time, convincing people that he knows what he is doing, boggles the mind.

Underlying this particular imperial perspective is a long-standing Orientalist view that will not permit the Arabs as a people to exercise their right to national self-determination. They are thought of as different, incapable of logic, unable to tell the truth, fundamentally disruptive and murderous. Since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, there has been an uninterrupted imperial presence based on these premises throughout the Arab world, producing untold misery -- and some benefits it is true -- for a huge majority of the people. But so accustomed have we become to the blandishments of US advisers like Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami, who have directed their venom against the Arabs in every possible way, that we somehow think that what we do is the correct thing because that's the way the Arabs are. That this happens also to be an Israeli dogma shared uncritically by the neo-cons who are at the heart of the Bush administration simply adds fuel to the fire. And so we are in for many more years of turmoil and misery in an area of the world where the main problem is, to put it as plainly as possible, US power. But at what cost, and to what end?

In September, 1975, the 'International symposium for Literacy' met in Persepolis, Iran, to consider the implications of the successes and failures of the EWLP, issuing the 'Declaration of Persepolis.' The Declaration echoes the ideas of the 'literacy doctrine' but applies a much broader concept of literacy. Functional literacy was aligned with "effective participation in social change," and "critical consciousness" and it was declared that literacy work is a "political act," the success of which is "closely connected with national political will". (Evaluation of EWLP, 1975)

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# Adult learning for the twenty-first century

ABU HAMID LATIF

YESTERDAY, September 8, was International Literacy Day. Observation of the day this year had added significance because it is the first year of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012). In this connection, we may trace, in brief, the pathways through which the concept of adult literacy travelled onwards to adult learning within the framework of lifelong learning and learning society.

**Adult literacy to adult learning**

United Nations Population Commission in 1948 recommended that literacy should be defined as the "ability both to read and write a simple message in any language". Most of the governments during early 1950s considered the ability to read, write and compute at fairly elementary levels to be the criterion of literacy. However, during late 1950s there was a growing tendency to differentiate between a literate person and a functional literate person.

The World Conference on Adult Education held in Montreal in 1980 put adult literacy on the world educational agenda. In October, 1984 the General Conference of UNESCO decided to initiate a five-year Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP) designed to pave the way for the eventual execution of a world campaign in this field. In 1965, the World Conference of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy met in Tehran to consider, in particular, the manner in which national plans for the eradication of illiteracy could more effectively contribute to social and economic progress and to the objectives of the United Nations Development Decade.

The EWLP was launched in 1967 and the 'functional' orientation of EWLP became a predominant theme: "Briefly, the idea was to combine literacy and numeracy with a programme of education in basic vocational skills directly linked to the occupational needs of participants". Thus, functional literacy was essentially 'work-oriented' literacy. Over time this definition was broadened to emphasize 'life-oriented' literacy with programmes focused not only on narrow economic concerns but also on health, nutrition, family planning, and other concerns related to daily living, but this shift was late in coming and only affected a few of the programmes. (Jennings, 1990)

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In the meantime, the concept of 'lifelong learning', got currency and was discussed at different fora. The UNESCO-appointed Faure Committee Report of 1972 entitled Learning to be had made a passionate appeal to all nations of the world to reorgan-

ise their educational structures on two basic premises: first, that a learning society is one in which all agencies within a society become providers of education, and second, that all citizens should be engaged in learning, taking full advantage of the opportunities provided by the learning society.

Further impetus to the idea was provided in 1996 with the report by Delors et al, Learning: The Treasure Within. Pronouncing the four pillars of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to be learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together, the Delors Report laid strong emphasis on renewal of knowledge, skills and learning

educated, the rich and powerful. This new vision of adult education calls for the creation of inclusive learning societies building on all the potential and resource of all the people and the environment. (Unesco, Final Report on EWLP, 1997)

**Future directions**

A quarter of a century after *Learning to Be*, (1972) the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, (1996) chaired by Jacques Delors said that, "The concept of learning throughout life is the key that gives access to the twenty-first century. It goes beyond the traditional distinctions between initial and continuing education. It

can be seen in a globalisation of economic systems, in the rapid development of science and technology, in the age structure and mobility of populations, and in the emergence of an information and knowledge-based society. The world is also experiencing major changes in patterns of work and unemployment, a growing ecological crisis, and tensions between social groups based on culture, ethnicity, gender roles, religion and income. These trends are reflected in education, where those responsible for complex education systems are struggling to cope with new opportunities and demands, often with declining resources at their disposal. (Unesco,

themselves. (Unesco, 1997)

The countries in the Asian region have made significant strides in achieving the goals of adult and lifelong education as part of the education for all commitments. However, there is need and justification for redoubling the efforts to further strengthen adult education programmes. Some of the directions that seem to have emerged include harnessing traditional knowledge and wisdom, engendering socio-psychological values, making good parenting a part of adult and lifelong education, and encouraging literate environments. ICT education, providing for a reading culture through library movements and information sharing through effective networking is also encouraged. The cooperation of civil society in creating a learning environment and the encouragement of NGO participation in adult and lifelong education is essential, and most importantly, commitment of state support and funding for adult and lifelong education must be ensured.

The United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) is more than ever a necessity because literacy is a fundamental human right, a basic human need and a key to learning to learn. It needs to be emphasised that the main actor of the UNLD must be the national government in collaboration with civil society and the private sector.

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abilities of individuals to adapt to the new environment. The report advocated the acquisition of a sound general education, learning throughout life, acting creatively in and on one's own environment, acquiring occupational skills, and also more broadly, being able to face rapid social change and work in teams. (Manzoor Ahmed in *Institutionalising Lifelong Learning*, 2002)

The Policy Dialogue on Adult and Lifelong Learning held in Hyderabad, India in April, 2002 urged, through the *Hyderabad Declaration*, all countries, even the poorest, to adopt lifelong learning as an active principle for shaping education and learning policies and programmes. The *Hyderabad Declaration*, is an important statement that will guide the development of concepts and practices in adult and lifelong learning within the framework of Education for All.

**New vision on adult learning**

Taking into consideration the political, economic and social realities of the present day world the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education held in Hamburg in 1997 (CONFINTEA-V) tried to construct a new vision of adult learning: Adult learning was viewed as an integral part of a lifelong and life-wide learning process promoting family and community learning. Acknowledging the learners not as objects, but as subjects of their learning processes, adult education should more specifically contribute to:

- the struggle for social and economic development justice, equality, respect for traditional cultures, and recognition of dignity of every human being through individual empowerment and social transformation;
- addressing human sufferings in all contexts -- oppression, poverty, child labour, genocide, denial of learning opportunities based on class, gender, race or ethnicity;
- individual empowerment and social transformation.

A special call was made in the Conference to the effect that adult education should target the educated powerful elites in society as much as those who are the so-called marginalised and illiterates, since the macro-policies such as globalisation and structure adjustment which have affected the human condition so severely, are created today by the

links up with another concept, that of the learning society, in which everything affords an opportunity for learning and fulfilling one's potential'. The Commission's report, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, emphasised the importance of the four pillars of education: (i) learning to know, (ii) learning to do, (iii) learning to live together and (iv) learning to be. As indicated in the Hamburg Declaration, adult learning has grown in depth and scale, and has become an imperative at the workplace, in the home and in the community, as men and women struggle to create new realities at every stage of life.

Profound changes are taking place both globally and locally. They

1997) The Agenda for the Future in Hamburg Declaration focuses on common concerns facing humanity on the eve of the twenty-first century and on the vital role that adult learning has to play in enabling women and men of all ages to face these most urgent challenges with knowledge, courage and creativity.

The development of adult learning requires partnership between government departments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, employers and trade unions, universities and research centres, the media, civil and community-level associations, facilitators of adult learning and the adult learners