good Bangla despite my having spent a big chunk of my life outside Bangladesh.

In fact, these sorts of hackneyed comments do epitomize the poverty of culture in the Bengali middle and upper class. Consider this scene from a classic Bengali film of the 40s called *Udayer Pathe* by Bimal Roy: Anup is an educated unemployed Bangali in the classic sense, but he writes novels and poems depicting the have-nots and their miseries -- a sort of mouthpiece of the downtrodden.

He is in a dire need of a job to support his sister and mother. In this scene, we see him entering an employer's big office for his job interview. The employer (as was typical in those days, as it is now) doesn't budge an inch, carries on with his business at hand undeterred and fails to even acknowledge Anup's presence in the room. Anup is always careful not to use any English while talking in Bangla and vice versa.

Of course the employer eventually notices him and asks some questions. Anup gets the job, and asks his employer: "*Ami key neog potro petay paree, naaky apnar kothaee churanto bole mene nebo?* (Can I get my appointment letter, or can I take your word as final?)"

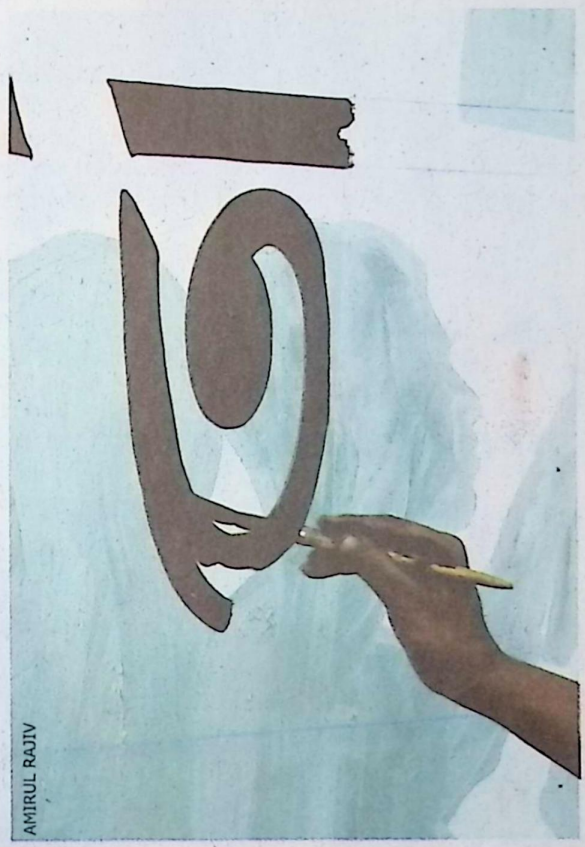
The employer couldn't help but wonder and asks: "*Apni to besh mojar lok moshay, apni kokhono Engreji shabdo bebohar koren na, bujhee?* (You're an interesting chap, you don't ever use any English words, I see.)"

Anup retorts in a measured tone: "*Ami Bangla ebong Engreji dootay valo jaani key na, tai dootoke meshanor proeojon mone kori na* (I speak both Bangla and English well, that's why I see no reason to mix them together.)"

Perhaps we are equally poor in both English and Bangla. Our schools and universities are churning out hundreds and thousands of graduates but, sadly, a considerable number of them cannot even write a short paragraph in perfect Bangla, or indeed in perfect English, on a given topic.

Indeed, the importance of English in this age of globalization cannot be overstated enough. But, are the schools doing enough so that our children leave schools with equal strength in both Bangla and English, and without a disdainful and condescending attitude towards their own mother tongue?

Ekushay has become merely a day of commemoration and nothing more -- young and old flock to *Shahid Minar*, religiously chanting "*Amar bhaier rokte*" and placing wreaths, like some ancient ritual -- the spontaneity and the sensitivity are barely present, but the resolve to maintain Bangla as an on-going struggle is missing!


AMIRUL RAJIV

Of course, the poets' and writers' seminars, the kids' art competitions, the same old tacky stereotypical programs on television, are all so ubiquitous on that day -- merely giving lip-service to the day! And then after a few days *Ekushay*, or the reason why those boys sacrificed their lives in 1952, becomes a distant memory. Bangla is no more about speaking; it is more a "show-case piece" for poets, writers, intellectuals and politicians for their own personal goal.

Cheap Hindi soaps are abundantly present in our living room boxes. Hindi soap opera storylines and tidbits are in-thing in any small chit-chat these days. The prime time in Dhaka, and indeed elsewhere in Bangladesh, is taken up by these foreign serials. Of course, technically, artistically or esthetically, the Hindi soaps are no better than the homegrown products, only that the foreign ones are more colourful and gaudy.

Nevertheless, a vast majority of the Bangladeshi viewers spend hours glued to the box, seemingly mesmerized by these cheap soaps which are devoid of any cultural or intellectual values, and far removed from any semblance of Bangla culture.

In our daily conversations, we unwittingly pollute the purity of Bangla by constantly interjecting some foreign word (English in this case) instead of an existing Bangla word, because the particular Bangla word is either too tacky (for our taste) or too grotesque for our tongue!

Somehow, however bizarre it may seem, we feel a sense of pride when uttering English words, sadly (most often) without the proper accent. Hundreds and thousands of essays, poems, songs and novels about *Ekushay* have been written in Bangla -- with nothing but pretentious glorification, passion and emotionalism fill these writings.

Indeed, we are consumed by our own all-encompassing emotion. The passion that fought for our language in 1952 was indeed benign. But do we honour our language with the same passion today, even after 36 years of our independence?

The trouble is, our cultural and social identities are much too embroiled in our perpetual desire to "celebrate" these, rather than "becoming them;" there is a constant hullabaloo and pretentious glorification of things "Bangla" but there is hardly a spontaneous feeling or attitude befitting Bangla and its culture. It's as though we are unwittingly pushing Bangla to its senescence.

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