buildings, ghost-like in the gathering dusk one moment but lit up and full of people in motion the next.

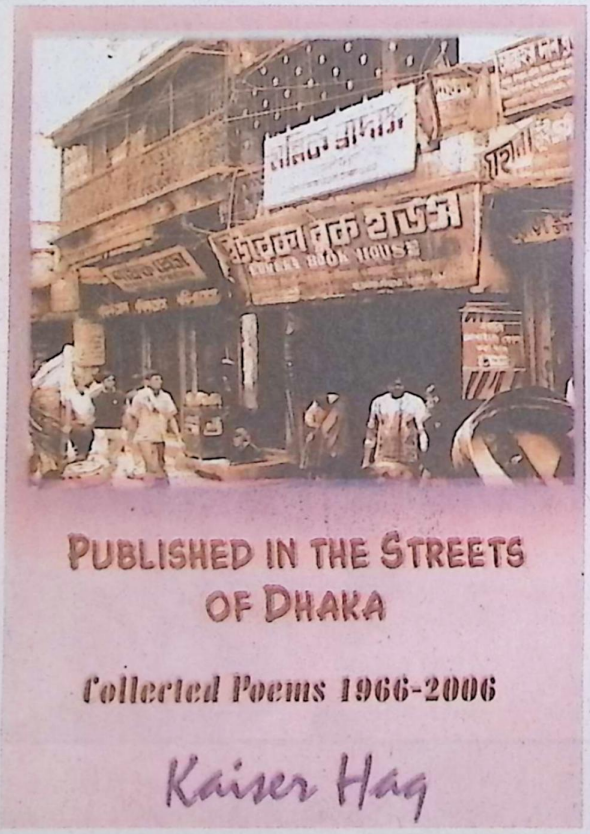
To one speaker, the denizens seem quite remote from them, but the second one notes that "those oblongs of light" were their home too. But doesn't the concluding stanza of this brief poem ("...Fragile Slates/On which we may adumbrate/Our unsteady kisses") remind us of the ending of "Dover Beach," where Matthew Arnold, famously confronted with a receding Sea of Faith, exhorts his beloved to understand that they should be true to one another since they were positioned "on a darkling plain/Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight/Where ignorant armies clash by night?"

In fact, Kaiser Haq's stance as a poet is that of the rooted cosmopolitan. Willingly, and even defiantly, he bases himself in Bangladesh, but his mindset is that of a citizen of the world to whom, in an age full of chaos, the only stay against confusion can come through the seeking, restless mind. Haq, to put it slightly differently, refuses to be complacent, and opts either for communion with seekers everywhere or, aware of the inanities of the quotidian and the vanity of human wishes, resorts to laughter and satire at people's pretensions and the incongruities of existence.

Again and again, the new poems have Haq oscillating serio-comically between the unreal and exhausting nature of life in Bangladesh, where everyday he encounters "the murderous decibels /of hucksters, honkers, sloganeers" (Spend, Spending, Spent), and the solace he finds in the company of great artists, seekers and thinkers with whom he feels akin in his search for a way out of a "passing show" that is perpetually tinged with the absurd. "Figures of Speech," the second poem of the *New Poems* section of the volume, thus begins with the poet ruminating on childhood memories of bathing in the river of his ancestral village, which make him remember Heraclites on flux, Buddha on time and being, Rimbaud on the self and the other.

But Haq is aware, too, of how polluted the river has now become, a thought that depresses, for one is then confronted with the feeling that our "doom/looms" and all "we have/to fall back on" is "figures of speech" (and by implication, poetry!). In "Bloomsday Centenary Poem in Free Verse and Pros," written on or about June 16, 2004, he imagines Joyce's dual protagonists a century later in Dhaka "enact the Odyssean perambulations/through fetid, waterlogged lanes, /clutching dripping umbrellas/the monsoon having arrived with a bang/and tiptoeing through slush;" only, they have now metamorphosed in Haq's imagination to Ali Baba, Sindbad and Kipling's Babi Hurree Chandra Mookherjee. Almost miraculously, the poet has had "a double-barreled epiphany" of sorts that aligns him with all cosmopolitan street walkers of the imaginative kind: "Dublin is Dhaka is any city/and Bloomsday is today is any day."

Haq is only too aware that, though he traverses time and space seamlessly in his imagination to become one with a poet like Rimbaud or a novelist like Joyce, writers elsewhere may not notice how much at home he is with them. The title poem of the collected poems, "Published in the Streets of Dhaka," originates in Gore Vidal's slighting reference to publishing in a city of philistines, in a characteristically acerbic passage of his essay "On Prettiness." Haq's response to the caustic American expatriate author, however, is to take up the gauntlet on behalf of his city, albeit half-seriously: he has opted to publish from where he lives, "plumb in the centre of monsoon-mad Bengal." He is only too aware that he lives in a world where things are falling apart, but he knows full well also that "evil...requires no axis/To turn on," and that Dhaka is no worse a location to pitch in together with other flaneurs of the imagination chronicling the absurdities of contemporary existence. And so he concludes that he will cut a "joyous caper" by way of a riposte to the peripatetic cynic Vidal, and in imitation of another celebrated American in self-exile, Henry Miller, "On the Tropic of Cancer, proud to be/Published once again in the streets of Dhaka."



Published in the Streets of Dhaka: Collected Poems 1966-2006. Dhaka: writers.ink, 2007. Distributed by The University Press Limited. ISBN 984 8715 11 8. 156 pages.

And so it is that the dust jacket of *Published in the Streets of Dhaka* has a sepia-tinted photograph of Banglabazar, the Grub Street of Dhaka, for Haq is truly defiant in his stance -- he is a Bangladeshi poet in English, no matter what some of his fellow citizens think about a countryman writing in English, or what the rest of the world says of the state of English-language publishing in the country. However, any reader of *New Poems* easily becomes aware that asserting his identity thus is, for Haq, not merely a matter of proclaiming