Maths somehow never interested me. Sorry Jafar Iqbal. What is a fag exercise? Well you had to stay back after the school hour or come back on the week end (Sunday) and do lots of arithmetic. Big ones. It would be grueling. We did not have any calculators of course.

BIS building also housed the USIS and the Chittagong Municipality Library. Though USIS would have lots of propaganda materials it also had a very good children's section. Who could be a more exciting hero at my age than Mark Twain's, Tom Sawyer and Huckelberry Finn? Years later when I was sitting on a river front restaurant on the banks of Mississippi river on a moon lit a moonlit night in 1989 in Vicksburg, Mississippi the adventure of my childhood heroes started to unfold so vividly. Memories could never be sweeter.

Chittagong Municipality Library had a rich collection of rare books. You had to deposit the price of the book to borrow one. The librarian Das Babu was a very friendly person to students. I always wondered why Das Babu always shaved once a week.

Chittagong Public Library and the Pakistan Council Library were inaugurated in the early sixties. Both were stocked with new books. Though Pakistan Council allowed borrowing its Children's section was not very rich. Membership cost Rs. 5/-. Later it was merged with the public library. Public Library never lent out books. One had to go there and spend time reading books. Excepting the BIS all libraries would subscribe to daily newspapers. Newspapers from Dhaka would normally be available in Chittagong a day later. Chittagong had its own Bangla, English and Urdu newspapers. I would spend two or three hours a week in these libraries browsing through the shelves or reading the newspapers. I still carry the habit of spending times in libraries. Few years back while reading newspapers in lovely spring morning in the reading room of the University of Lancaster, London I chanced to read sign on the wall that said 'Once William Wordsworth Longfellow used this reading room.' What could be more exciting? USIS carried a women's fashion magazine called 'Elle'. At my age it is natural that I tried to take a quick peek in 'Elle'. One day the librarian Mr. Hena gave me a very unfriendly look and my love for Elle terminated.

My dad would give me two anna daily for tiffin. Though not very good in saving somehow I managed to save few annas per week and when my saving reached eight anna (fifty paisa) I would rush to Islamia Library at Anderkilla to buy a new Swapan Kumar series book. Swapan Kumar series, published from Calcutta was a thrilling detective series. Detective Dipak Chaterjee with his assistant Ratanlal (like Dr. Watson of Sherlok Holmes) could solve any crime and mystery, from bank robbery to kidnapping and to murder in Calcutta's China Town. Reading Swapan Kumar series some how I had a feeling China Towns must be full of stripped T-Shirt wearing hard core criminals and gangsters. Later on I found that China Towns any where is the most exciting place that one could go to.

Coming of the Puja was a special occasion for book lovers as many new story books and Puja issues would come from Calcutta. Chittagong's Cooperative Book Society was the major importer. What an outstanding book shop! I believe no one could beat Dev Shahitya Kutir when it came to publication on such special occasions. We had to save more money to buy the Puja issues as these would cost somewhere between two rupees and ten. Eid special issues were non existent in those days. Exchange of story books was very common and the network we managed to establish survived for many years. The youngsters of today are more busy exchanging music and computer game CDs and SMS.

Time has changed.

Short cut to many English classics would be available in 'Classic Comics'. Each would cost one rupees and Chittagong's 'Screen and Culture' book shop (Current Book Centre) and 'News Front' would import comics and readers were plenty. Mr. Mohammed Amin of Screen and Culture would sometimes give me comics on credit as I was his regular customer. These two book shop of Chittagong played a significant role creating young readers. Mr. Amin passed away few years back and Mr. Yousuf Chowdhury of News Front keeps on getting younger. These days he is very much involved in the Dairy Farm Movement. He calls it 'White Revolution.'

The habit of reading I picked up in my child hood never left me. I can claim with all fairness at my age I am still an avowed reader. On a regular day I read at least five to six national dailies and two to three international newspapers. Access to internet has made life easier. I buy books regularly and try to read them. I am still learning and enriching my vocabulary. I still talk in my class of Ptolemy, Socrates and Galellio. Some of my students think these names are in no way related with the subject matter I teach. In one of my semester end evaluation form one of my student wrote at my age I perhaps forgot about my subject and to try to hide my ignorance in Sum Tzu, Chanakya, Confucius and Sarat Chandra. Most think they benefit from my class as it gives them an opportunity to go into a different world for a change.

Education these days have become quite expensive and knowledge seems to have found its place in small compartments, mostly focused only to text books, needed to pass examinations. If teachers and parents do not take efforts to bring these young learners out of the tunnel we would see more Kamruls coming back with a sad face as their teams could not compete successfully in an international competition. The responsibility of improving the situation lies more on us-teachers and parents.

It was the winter of 1997. In a UNESCO organized regional seminar on education held in Vishwa Bharati University (Shanti Niketan), India I was presiding over a plenary session. The eminent economist and one time Vice Chancellor of Vishwa Bharati University; Professor Amlan Datta was the key note speaker. During his deliberation Prof. Datta commented *'if the students have not learnt, the teachers have not taught.'* Nothing could be more true.

Professor of Business Administration, East West University.mannan@ewubd.edu
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