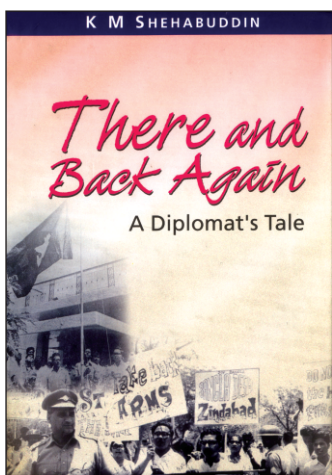


## History, from one who helped shape it

**Syed Badrul Ahsan recommends a diplomat's memoirs to readers**

THE war that was fought for Bangladesh on the diplomatic front was as intense as that on the fields of battle. While at home and in the refugee camps it was political mobilisation of a people toward the establishment of a free state that took centre stage, in the hamlets and villages it was a focused armed resistance to Pakistan that underpinned the goal. But all of that happened, in the true sense, after the emergence of the provisional Bangladesh government with Tajuddin Ahmed as prime minister. What has not been much remarked upon, in all this celebration of the contributions of individuals and groups to the rise of Bangladesh is the concerted movement on the part of Bengali diplomats, wherever they happened to be in 1971, in favour of the national struggle. K.M. Shehabuddin carries out a necessary responsibility in recording the story of the uphill struggle he and his colleagues, then in the Pakistan Foreign Service and yet mortified by what the state of Pakistan was doing to their fellow Bengalis, shaped and carried to a successful culmination.

There are of course the known episodes of how diplomacy came to be part of the larger struggle for political self-assertion. Think here of Hossain Ali's role, in Calcutta, in the making of the story. Ali made headlines with his rejection of Pakistan on 18 April 1971. And then there are the other tales that one needs to be reminded of, nearly four decades after the collapse of Pakistan in this coun-



There and Back Again  
A Diplomat's Tale  
K.M. Shehabuddin  
The University Press Limited

try. Shehabuddin's work is an instance of how we as a people need reminders. And he is in an eminent position to assume that role, for he and his colleague Amjadul Huq, both of whom were positioned as diplomats in the Pakistan high commission in Delhi when Pakistan launched its genocide in its eastern province, were the first Bengali diplomats to publicly renounce their allegiance to Pakistan and align themselves with the Bangladesh cause. That was on 6 April 1971. It was risky business, given especially that there was at that point of time hardly any reassurance that Bengalis would survive Pakistan's military onslaught. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was in

incarceration somewhere in West Pakistan; and his political associates were nowhere to be spotted. There was, in all this atmosphere of gloom, hardly any indication of any war being planned to push the Pakistanis out of the province. The Mujibnagar government was yet many uncertain days away.

Shehabuddin's act, as also that of Huq, was clearly emblematic of courage. The two men did not appear at all ruffled. No second thoughts came in the way of their belief that Bangladesh was on the way. This much became clear as they faced a battery of newsmen in Delhi following their decision to turn their backs on Pakistan. 'From now', said they in their statement, 'our allegiance is to Bangladesh, which derived its authority from the unambiguous mandate of the 75 million Bengali people.' A process of history was thus set in motion. In the weeks and months that followed, what Shehabuddin and Huq consciously chose to work for was a task that other Bengalis would emulate. But of course there were all the difficulties and irritants involved as well. Unlike these pioneers, there were quite a few who found themselves caught between a rock and a hard place as they pondered their future. And some Bengali diplomats there were who would not take a position until it was rather late in the day. That is where Shehabuddin's book turns out to be a substantive record of events. Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, as he notes, as head of chancery at the

Pakistan mission in Delhi, would initially look upon any pro-Bangladesh sentiment with disfavour, even hostility. He would take a long time to ally himself with Bangladesh, and that too after the Mujibnagar authorities served him and a few others with an ultimatum. But if spontaneity in declaring allegiance to Bangladesh was being looked for, it was to be spotted easily. A.H. Mahmood Ali, Pakistan's vice consul in New York, opted to serve Bangladesh on 25 April. There was, in addition A.M.A. Muhith, economic counsellor at the Pakistan embassy in Washington, who defected on 30 June. There was too Mohiuddin Ahmed, in Shehabuddin's opinion a firebrand nationalist, whose desire to link up with the Bangladesh movement on 10 April was stayed largely by Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury on the ground that he could renounce Pakistan only after instructions were received, obviously from Mujibnagar. Mohiuddin Ahmed eventually made the move on 1 August, through an impassioned speech at a rally in London's Trafalgar Square. The author notes that Reaz Rahman, at the Delhi Pakistan mission and initially sympathetic to the Bangladesh cause, clearly had a change of mind following a call from his father-in-law Hamidul Huq Chowdhury. In November 1971, a time when Bangladesh's liberation appeared to have turned into a fait accompli, Rahman travelled

from Delhi to Islamabad. There were others who would not leave Pakistan's Foreign Service until early 1972, despite being asked to do so. Some would remain hostile to Bangladesh, until compelled to leave Pakistan after December 1971.

The work goes beyond an enumeration of the diplomacy involved in the struggle for Bangladesh. It is a *tour d'horizon* for anyone curious about the history of Bangladesh's diplomacy during and after the war. And yet it is more than that. There are the incidents that he relates. In 1993, Shehabuddin is amused by newspaper reports back in Bangladesh (he was in Paris at the time) about the observance of the death anniversary of artist Novera Ahmed. Bengali intellectuals, he tells readers, remained 'blissfully unaware that she was still alive but living incognito and in oblivion in her beloved Paris.' Soon after Bangladesh's liberation, a ruling party lawmaker travels abroad and insists on being put up at Shehabuddin's residence on the plea that he cannot bear expenses that might be incurred in a hotel (and this despite the allowance he had on him). Within hours of his arrival, as the writer discovers to his amazement, the man wishes to enjoy certain pleasures through sight-seeing. He certainly does not complain about expenses this time, but he surely has put the diplomat's family through much inconvenience. Shehabuddin recalls his meeting with General

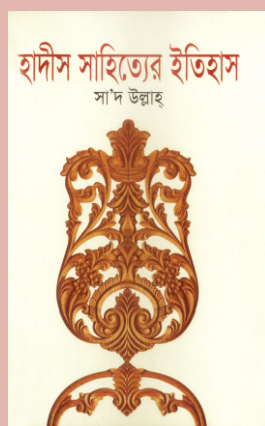
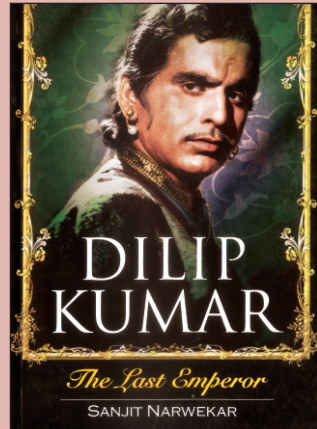
Ziaur Rahman and Begum Khaleida Zia at his Paris residence in 1973. In his position as deputy chief of staff of the army, Zia was then a member of the Bangladesh Wages Commission and was touring Europe to familiarise himself with wage structures there. Zia felt clearly proud in relating to Shehabuddin that what he had done in 1971 was in the name of Bangabandhu. 'Both he and Begum Zia', writes the diplomat, 'held Bangabandhu in the highest esteem'.

*There and Back Again* is, in broad measure, the memoirs of a diplomat who has served his country with distinction. K.M. Shehabuddin notes the triumphs of Bangladesh's diplomacy as also the difficulties it has regularly been confronted with. As an individual who served all governments in the country until his retirement (his final call was as ambassador to Washington during the period of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government), he remains a living record of some of the most intense and purposeful phases in Bengali nationalist politics. This is a book to be savoured, for it comes from a suave and distinguished citizen of this land. You cannot put it down without wanting to flip through the pages yet one more time.

Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star.

## At a glance

Dilip Kumar  
The Last Emperor  
Sanjit Narwekar  
Rupa & Co.

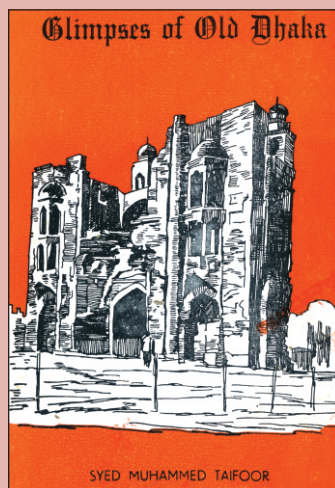


Glimpses of Old Dhaka  
Syed Muhammed Taifoor  
The Pioneer Printing Press Ltd.

An old work, published as far back as 1956, *Glimpses* provides an insight into how Dhaka used to be before it got lost in a maze of urban squalor. Those who knew Old Dhaka first hand cannot but sadly reflect on the images that come alive here of a lost town. And those who have not experienced Old Dhaka will enrich the social history they have studied over the years.

Hadees Shahityer Itihash  
Sa'ad Ullah  
Shomoy Prokashon

Interpretations of the Hadith being so numerous and so varied, this work on how the Hadith took off as part of Islamic social thought is revealing. Anyone intrigued by theology or plainly interested in the history of the Muslim faith ought to go swiftly into Sa'ad Ullah's analysis of things. A good number of doubts will be cleared. The information is rich.



Where Angels Fear to Tread  
And Other Essays  
Azizul Jalil  
The University Press Limited

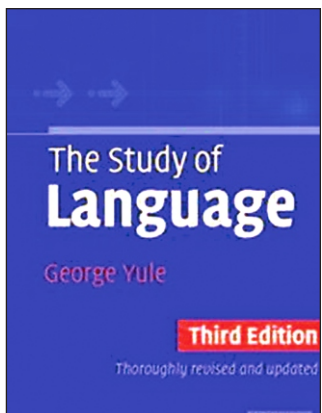
It is the prolific writer in Azizul Jalil who comes through once more. The book is a collage of published articles on a variety of subjects, one that is as gripping as the other. The writer talks of his travels around the world and then takes you on a journey through certain annals of history. And, of course, there is always that bit of nostalgia about the home country.

## Just a bit of language

**Binoy Barman gets entangled in a linguistic enterprise and assesses its value**

A book on linguistics -- the scientific study of language, as it is commonly defined -- should not put you off. It may be intriguing and claim your attention in its own right. It can make you aware of your own existence. After sometime, you feel you are a human being because you can speak. That is, in your most prominent identity you are 'homo loquens' -- speaking man, not simply 'homo sapiens' -- wise man. Many other animals have intelligence, albeit to a lesser degree, but it is only humans that have language to its fullest potential. Humans are uniquely distinguished from other animals with the language they use. Stripped of your language, you are nothing but an animal, mere flesh without thought and meaning. You talk in words, think in words and even dream in words. Human life is composed of words. Human history is accumulated in words. Human civilisation has been built upon language, the symbols we meet in books and tongues.

The Study of Language is an interesting book. It is excellent as an introduction to linguistics. It touches on the entire gamut of linguistic phenomena -- from sound to sentence, from the historical to the contemporary, from theory to application. The book has been primarily designed for academic purposes. And it hits the target. It has been immensely popular with students and teachers of linguistics. In fact, its demand has been so overwhelming all over the world that the publisher had to go for a third edition. A low priced edition is also available for countries in Africa and for Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in Asia. The first edition came out in 1985, the second edition in 1996 and the third edition in 2006. The



The Study of Language  
George Yule  
Cambridge University Press

publication has been gradually improved with the incorporation of new sections on current issues. Language can be analysed at different levels, say, sound, word, sentence and meaning levels, which give rise to distinct branches of linguistics. The analysis of sound has two aspects. When we analyse the physical properties of sounds, we are concerned with phonetics; but when we focus on the arrangement of sounds in a language we are concerned with phonology. Morphology is the study of morphemes (smallest meaningful units of grammar) -- how they come to form words. It is concerned with word structure and is distinct from lexicology, which is rather interested in the history of words. The study of how words are put into sentences is called syntax. If morphology is called word grammar, syntax should be called sentence grammar. Semantics is the study of meaning. When we specifically refer to how speakers and hearers convey meaning to each other we extend the field to what is called pragmatics. Language can also

be analysed at text level, which will lead to text analysis or discourse analysis. All these aspects of language analysis have found their due place in the work.

Linguistics interacts with other disciplines in its course of investigations, out of which many interdisciplinary subjects emerge. We should notice when we are engaged in verbal communication, our brain/mind processes language for us. In this sense the study of language entangles psychological processes; as a result we get psycholinguistics. In recent times psycholinguistics has branched into a more biologically focused subject called neurolinguistics, which brings the psychology of language down to neuronal functions. In a similar vein, language is used in society and is closely associated with social and cultural norms. The study of language from social perspectives is called sociolinguistics. We can consider how languages evolve or change over time. The study of language from the historical point of view will be termed historical linguistics. Computers use programming language to interact with human users. This man-machine interaction has given rise to computational linguistics. The book has skillfully captured all these interdisciplinary subjects.

We should not lose sight of the fact that language is employed by its users, especially the writers, for various stylistic purposes. Stylistics is the subject which deals with style matters and this is where linguistics and literature find an interface. However, Yule is reluctant to include the subject in his universally acclaimed book. We find no justification for this. In its tight-knit scope the book could not also accommodate some other interdisciplinary subjects such as clinical linguistics, foren-

sic linguistics, biolinguistics, ecolinguistics, ethno-linguistics, anthropological linguistics and evolutionary linguistics, many of which are very recent developments. We can hope these topics will be properly addressed in some later edition of the book.

Notwithstanding the scope void, The Study of Language gives much more than just the description of different branches of linguistics. For example, it familiarises readers with gestures and sign languages (in chapter 16). It explains the forms and functions of American Sign Language (ASL), a special language which is widely used by the deaf in the US and elsewhere. In chapter 2 the book investigates the properties of human language and animal language. The writer recounts how different chimpanzees and other animals were taught language (in a very primitive sense) and how it greatly differs from the natural language used by humans. In the first two editions the properties of human and animal language were treated in two separate chapters which were integrated into one in the third edition. Another conspicuous change which might be noticed is the treatment of meaning. In the first edition semantics and pragmatics were in one chapter (chapter 11). But in view of burgeoning importance, the two concepts were dealt separately in two different chapters in the second (chapter 11 & 12) and third editions (chapter 10 & 11). It is often convenient to discuss a topic dividing into two chapters as has been done particularly with psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. Psycholinguistics is divided into 'First language acquisition' (chapter 14) and 'Second language acquisition/learning' (chapter 15); and sociolinguistics into lan-

guage and regional variation' (chapter 19) and Language and culture' (chapter 20).

Since the time of Sir William Jones, an 18th century linguist who initiated a new trend in comparative linguistics, the subject has advanced a long way with numerous ramifications. At the beginning of the 20th century Ferdinand de Saussure made a clear distinction between diachronic (historical) and synchronic (contemporary) study of language, putting more emphasis on the latter, which paved the way for structural linguistics. Leonard Bloomfield was a great structuralist and, influenced by logical positivism, presented a behaviourist explanation of language. B. F. Skinner followed in his footsteps and attempted to explain verbal behaviour with operant conditioning, an improvement over Pavlov's classical conditioning. In the middle of the century appeared Noam Chomsky, who revolutionised the study of language, setting up a separate paradigm called generative linguistics, which again is embedded in the larger branch of cognitive linguistics. Mentalist in essence, his theory stood face to face with behaviourism. Consequently it revived in history the old philosophical debate between empiricism and rationalism, which still continues in full vigour.

The analysis of language is a multifaceted enterprise and dichotomy in it may be established on various lines. For example, taking a line of theory/application, we may get theoretical and applied linguistics. Some linguistic investigations have implications for practical fields. For instance, psycholinguistic theories are applied to language teaching;

and findings in computational linguistics are utilised in artificial intelligence. Similarly, we can make a dichotomy on historical/contemporary line. The historical account of language is termed diachronic linguistics and the account of language at a particular point of time is termed synchronic linguistics (recall Saussure).

If a book of linguistics is written on general purposes incorporating all the essential aspects of the subject it will be labelled general linguistics (as the book we are reviewing at the moment); but if the book emphasises a particular aspect it will come out as a special category (there is unfortunately no generic term for this), such as phonetics and syntax, and psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. The dichotomy may also go through the line of intra-disciplinary/inter-disciplinary treatment. Discourse analysis is intra-disciplinary as its inquiry is confined to a particular subject area, but philosophy of language is inter-disciplinary as it combines linguistic explanations with philosophical doctrines.

The Study of Language is copious and authentic. Teachers and students of linguistics can reliably follow the book. It is useful not only for academics people but also for general readers who have an interest in language. The book is easily accessible for its lucidity; it is valuable for informative richness; and it is remarkable for a balanced combination of breadth and depth of the subject matter in question.

Dr Binoy Barman is a writer and Assistant Professor at Bangladesh University.

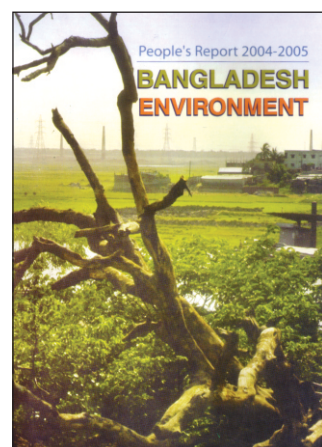
## A rich diversity of development perspectives

**Niaz Ahmed Khan is appreciative of a work on specialised subjects**

ALTHOUGH there has been a burgeoning of literature on the Bangladesh environment in recent times, a comprehensive treatment covering the complex nexus of environment, poverty and development has been strikingly rare. The principal worth of the publication under review lies in the fact that it attempts to fill in the above caveat in the contemporary literature, and moves beyond a mere techno-centric explanation of environmental problems in favour of a more humanistic and down-to-earth 'People's Account'. The report makes the case in the following manner:

In the case of Bangladesh, the poverty-environment relationship becomes a subject matter of interest from three perspectives, viz., (i) economic growth driven environmental degradation affecting the poor, (ii) natural disasters damaging people's livelihoods, and (iii) poverty having unfavourable consequences on the environment. This is the backdrop for the thematic focus of this Report (p.5).

The Report's above perspective of analysis is in conformity with the country's key national guiding policy document and the



People's Report 2004-2005:  
Bangladesh Environment  
Edited by Atiur Rahman and  
Mahboob Hassan  
Unnayan Shamannay, MOEF and  
UNDP

government's commitment to international development frameworks. The *Poverty Reduction Strategy* (PRS), for example, also views environment within the broader perspectives of poverty and sustainable development, and argues that: 'Human lives and livelihood in Bangladesh are intricately intertwined with nature. Consequently, no process of

development and eradication of poverty can be conceived of without putting caring for environment and sustainable development at the centre stage' (PRSP/GoB, p.156). The Report's analytical perspectives are also very much compatible with the government's commitment to broad philosophical thrusts expressed in such international development frameworks as the government's commitment to the *UN Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs), *SAARC Development Goals* (SDGs), and the social targets laid out in the *Partnership Agreement on Poverty Reduction* (PAPR).

The report is organised in nine chapters. Besides an introductory overview and a concluding chapter, the remaining seven chapters focus on such specialised topics as 'Background' (to the theme of environment-poverty nexus), 'Demography and Poverty', 'Spatial Dimensions of Poverty', 'The Eco-System', 'Urbanization and the Environment', 'Challenges and Initiatives', and 'Development Poverty Alleviation and Policy Interventions'. These broad titles, however, do not adequately reflect the range of

'subsidiary issues'. Under the title 'Demography and Poverty' (chapter 3), for example, the discussion sweeps across a wide gamut of issues, including the plight of tribal/indigenous populations and the ultra-poor in the environment-poverty nexus, area-specific (e.g. CHT, North Bengal, central Sal forest tracts), gender and feminization of poverty, a conceptual paradigmatic discussion on property, power and poverty; a collage of relevant media reports.

The presentational style of the Report is particularly interesting. Each of these discussion topics is pursued through two complementary perspectives: (i) the concerned common citizen's views and perceptions on the topic together with (ii) analyses and specialist treatments of leading experts in the respective fields. The stylistic get-up and format of the publication is impressive, and the readers will find the rich collection of relevant photographs valuable and soothing.

In the concluding chapter, the Report recapitulates the core conceptual and theoretical and arguments concerning the complex dynamics of the 'poverty-environment- development' linkages. It provides an alterna-

tive perspective on the traditionally held notion that blames the poor for environmental degradation. The poor are often not the agents of environmental degradation (example: encroachment of state forest lands). Poverty in fact becomes a direct outcome of environmental degradation. In this context, the Report argues and pleads for a deeper understanding of the poverty-environmental nexus on the part of all those involved in policy making. Drawing on a host of empirical and theoretical evidences and arguments, it concludes by putting forth the following rationale and proposition:

Why the analysis of the poverty-environment nexus? In looking to the future, we focus on the policy perspective. An understanding of the nexus is important because it has consequences for the allocation and administration of public resources for poverty reduction and for mitigating environmental problems. And therefore the linkage between environment and poverty should get proper attention of the policy-makers for promoting sustainable development in Bangladesh (p.325)

Some discussions are, however, rather terse and lack the needed elaboration for non-

specialist readers, some examples being the accounts of 'Logit Regression of Modelling Poor' or 'Regression of Poverty Status' (pp.206-208); 'Water level trend in the Barind' (pp.107-117); 'Climate change' (25-27) etc. Although for the most part the language of the Report is generally lucid, there are spots of obscurity in a few areas of the text. It would have been very useful for readers if the photographs had been appropriately captioned and labeled.

On the whole, this work should be worthwhile reading. It makes a valuable contribution to the literature on the Bangladesh environment and development by addressing a major gap (i.e. the 'poverty-environment-development nexus') and bringing in a rich diversity of analytic perspectives. This report, thus, deserves to be studied widely.

Happy reading!

Professor Niaz Ahmed Khan teaches in the Department of Development Studies, Dhaka University.

## Of private passions

**Tulip Chowdhury admires a man's life**

A triumphant novel of love and devotion, passion and fulfillment, Irving Stone's *Adversary* in the House captures the reader's imagination with the opening of the first page. It is about Eugene V. Debs, the pioneer labour leader whose life is a tug of war between his dedication to helping his fellow men and his love for two women. His private life is as violent and impassioned as the dedication that raises him to the heights of greatness and drives him to the depths of public scorn. Growing up in Chicago, Eugene learns about the interdependence of men on one another from his own family. His parents have shown him how compassion and kindness can open the way to a greater world. They are a happy family, loving each other and living in perfect harmony.

When Eugene begins work as a clerk in a store his heart finds no peace. He moves on to the fire service. Along with the work for saving lives he also finds a worthy cause to fight for, ameliorating the sufferings of thousands of low paid workers. Soon the union of firemen comes to depend on him to look into their problems and take the problems to the seats of government. This is the stepping-stone for Eugene. He finds a cause to live for. Next he stands beside the workers of the railway. He recognises the need for unity among the workers and calls on them to be together. He realises that anyone who works for human equity undertakes a double task; the duties of his particular job and fighting off the wolves who devour freedom. Eugene is determined to bring this freedom to the workers. He becomes their leader in standing up for their civil rights. This step is the opening chapter of his life as a labour leader, and as a socialist.

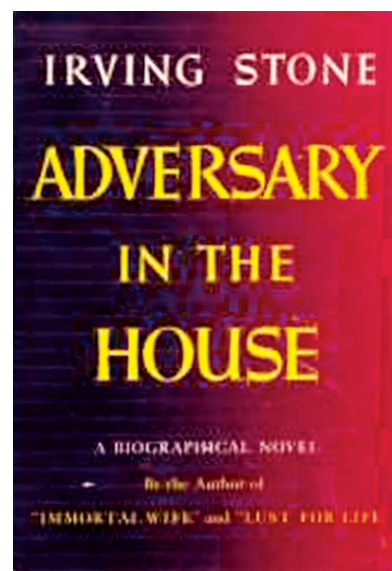
Even as he is driven by his dreams of service to humanity, he is tormented by his love for the two magnificent women of his life. Gloria is his passion, young, beautiful, adoring, always to love him but never to take his name. There is Kate, his wife, fiery, determined, forever to oppose him, never to share his dreams. Even when he is ready to stand as a presidential candidate Kate swears that she will never stand by his side, that he is only a fool to have such big dreams. And elsewhere Gloria quickly gets her own house ready to turn it into an office for Eugene's campaigns. It is Kate's dream to have a quiet home, free of public hassle. And yet Eugene cannot keep himself far from the people who depend on him to secure their rights and privileges. Gloria is ready to sacrifice her own ease and comforts to stand beside Eugene while he fights for his people. Eugene is tormented, driven by his wife's criticism under his own roof. There are times when he feels like staying with Gloria, as she leads the life of a widow, and yet his loyalty to his wife is like an

invisible wall that he can never get across.

Eugene is a die-hard socialist. He is able to organise millions of people under his banner. It is in the beginning of the twentieth century, when people are looking forward to new ideas, new plans that Eugene comes up with as components of his socialism. At one stage he is to serve three long years in prison but that does not take him away from the people whom he has united. He is with his people through thick and thin.

*Adversary in the House* is a book that is gripping and relates how strong a man's beliefs can be, how ruthlessly he can pursue his beliefs. Eugene's ideologies are so interwoven into the reader's mind that the reader is led to wishing that things would turn up as Eugene wants them to. Eugene's brother Theodore sacrifices his life to follow his brother to the nooks and corners of the country as he propagates his reforms. The brothers' unity does not fail to touch the heart of the reader. Irving Stone is a natural word artist when it comes to portraying his characters, with remarkable vividness. One is able to put the book down only when Eugene finds himself able to deliver the message of liberty to his people and the people stand on solid ground, knowing the value of their beliefs. Reading *Adversary in the House* leaves the reader with an extremely gratifying experience, a feeling that a good book is supposed to induce.

Tulip Chowdhury is a teacher and writes fiction.



Adversary in the House  
Irving Stone  
New American Library