

## An update on the globalisation debate

Inam Ahmed goes through an intellectual odyssey and enjoys it

Both its critics and backers, globalisation is a phenomenon to be seriously studied and debated. And when leading experts like Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz and Jagdish Bhagwati, representing the two sides of the debate respectively, are brought together in a single volume, one can expect a lively and state-of-the-art discourse on the subject. A recently published high profile book offers exactly just that: a reasoned and sophisticated update on the debate about the benefits, risks and future prospects of globalisation.

*The Future of Globalization: Explorations in Light of Recent Turbulence* is the outcome of a conference organised by Yale University and has among its contributors two former heads of state, Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico, and Mary Robinson of Ireland as well as a host of leading academics and experts.

Besides the wide-ranging thematic issues relating to globalisation, the book devotes separate chapters to the globalisation experiences of two particular countries: China and Bangladesh. The reason for a special focus on China is obvious, given its phenomenal rise as a global economic power. But why a separate case study for Bangladesh? The author of the chapter, Wahiduddin Mahmud, argues persuasively that the case of Bangladesh best illustrates the challenges faced by a low-income country striving to benefit from global integration. Other contributors to the book seem to agree, as they cite the example of Bangladesh in various contexts, ranging from the role of foreign aid to barriers to international migration and access of the exports of developing countries to the markets of the industrialised West.

As the title of the book suggests, the course of contemporary globalisation has been seriously affected by recent turmoil. The end of the economic expansion of the 1990s, the 9/11 tragedy,

the war in Iraq, the rising fuel and commodity prices, and the recurrent financial crises have shocked the international system to an extent not seen in years. Besides the sheer force of geopolitical and economic turbulence,

### THE FUTURE OF GLOBALIZATION EXPLORATIONS IN LIGHT OF RECENT TURBULENCE ERNESTO ZEDILLO



The Future of Globalization: Explorations in Light of Recent Turbulence  
Ed. Ernesto Zedillo  
Routledge (Taylor and Francis group)

there is also a backlash against globalisation created by a growing perception about its lack of fairness as billions of poor people are left on its fringes. Unless globalisation is better managed to mitigate its risks and downsides, the book argues, it can be slowed down, or even be reversed.

The list of grievances against contemporary globalisation, as pointed out by various contributors to the volume, is a long one. Even a strong supporter of globalisation like Jagdish Bhagwati, for example, agrees that extending national

laws of patent rights to trade agreements on arbitrary terms and at the behest of multinationals defies economic logic. Similarly, he is critical of the insistence of the rich industrialised countries on tagging labour and environmental standards to trade agreements since these are not really trade-related issues and should be dealt with separately under international conventions.

The removal of trade restrictions negotiated under WTO agreements is also alleged to have unduly favoured the industrialised West. As Mark Malloch Brown, a former chief of the UNDP, comments: 'For poor countries, free trade is neither free nor fair'. He substantiates his point by giving the example of Bangladesh, which has made some progress in participating in the global economy, mainly through garment exports. Bangladesh pays 14 per cent tariffs on its annual exports of about US\$ 2.5 billion to the US, while France exports more than US\$30 billion worth of goods to the US and pays only 1 percent in tariffs.

While there is general agreement that the distribution of benefits of globalisation has been unfairly tilted towards the rich countries, there is no such agreement about the actual impact of globalisation on poor countries in absolute terms. The critics, for example, argue that countries in sub-Saharan Africa have actually become poorer because of globalisation, while others argue that the reasons for their economic woes lie within their domestic economies. It is also argued that developing countries which have benefited most from globalisation notably, China and other East Asian economies have adopted global integration on their own terms, instead of being dictated by, say, the IMF or the World Bank.

There is also general agreement that, in spite of all its faults, globalisation can potentially be a powerful force for the progress of humankind by increasing international economic integration,

interdependence and interconnectedness. The problem is how to achieve what is variously termed as 'inclusive' globalisation or globalisation 'with a human face' in place of what Stiglitz calls 'unprincipled globalisation'.

Foremost priority is how to make the global trading system work for the poor. T. N. Srinivasan of Yale University traces the progress of the WTO negotiations from the failure at Seattle to the Doha Development Round and its subsequent collapse, but ends on an optimistic note by quoting the American proverb: 'It ain't over till it's over'. Stiglitz argues that the agreement on intellectual property rights needs to be renegotiated not only because it hurts the poor countries, but also because it may actually impede scientific innovations by restricting access to knowledge.

Other authors argue for an overhauling of the global financial architecture to avert the repetition of financial meltdowns. Lant Pritchett of Harvard University makes out a compelling case for more liberal policies towards international labour migration by analysing how the 'irresistible forces' of economic logic come up against 'immovable ideas' of racial discrimination and prejudices. Ernesto Zedillo, in his editorial introduction, sees a looming crisis in the global multilateral system and underscores the need for visionary political leadership that is wanting at present.

Coming back to the chapter on Bangladesh, Wahiduddin Mahmud points out that while most low-income countries depend largely on the export of primary commodities, Bangladesh has made the transition from being primarily a jute-exporting country to a garment-exporting one. The transition has been dictated by the country's resource endowment, characterised by extreme land scarcity and a very high population density, which makes economic growth dependent on the export of labor-intensive manufactures.

Inam Ahmed is News Editor, The Daily Star

It is not easy, however, for a least developed country like Bangladesh to specialise in manufactured exports. Having low wage costs can hardly compensate for its relative disadvantage in marketing skills and infrastructure, including transport, ports and product quality assurance. Moreover, the heavy dependence of its domestic industries on imported raw materials and intermediate goods makes it difficult for Bangladesh to satisfy the so-called 'rules of origin' in getting preferential access for its exports in the markets of the developed countries. Bangladesh is also greatly concerned with the issue of free movement of temporary workers across borders, given the important role of workers' remittances in its economy.

Bangladesh's development experience also brings into focus the issues surrounding the role of foreign aid, such as in meeting funding needs for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and providing support for the low-income countries to absorb economic shocks. Foreign aid currently received by Bangladesh is much lower compared to the average of low-income countries both as a proportion of GDP and in per capita terms; and this disparity has been increasing over the years. On the one hand, Bangladesh deserves international support given its record of achieving reasonably rapid economic growth and significant progress in social development indicators despite many odds.

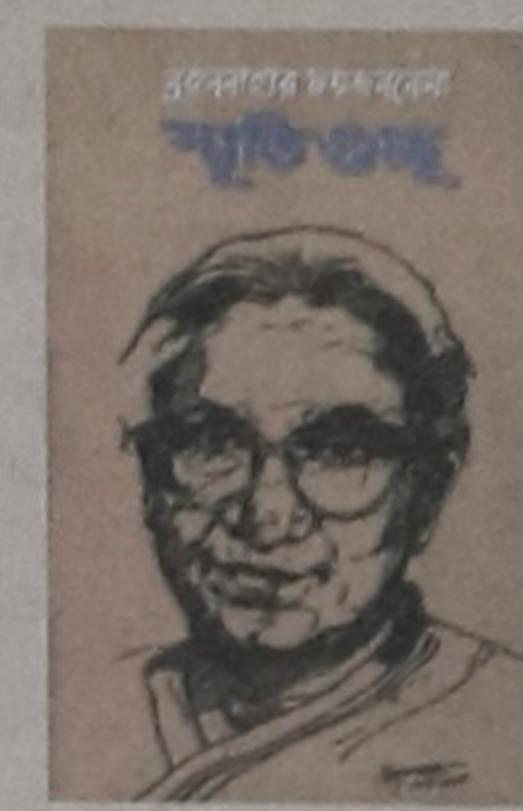
On the other, the country is alleged to have low 'aid absorptive capacity' due to weak governance. But part of the problem also lies in donors insisting on supporting unrealistic projects and policies. The author of the chapter concludes: If aid agencies and other international bodies fail to support economic development in Bangladesh, they will probably fail in other low-income countries as well.

Inam Ahmed is News Editor, The Daily Star

## AT A GLANCE

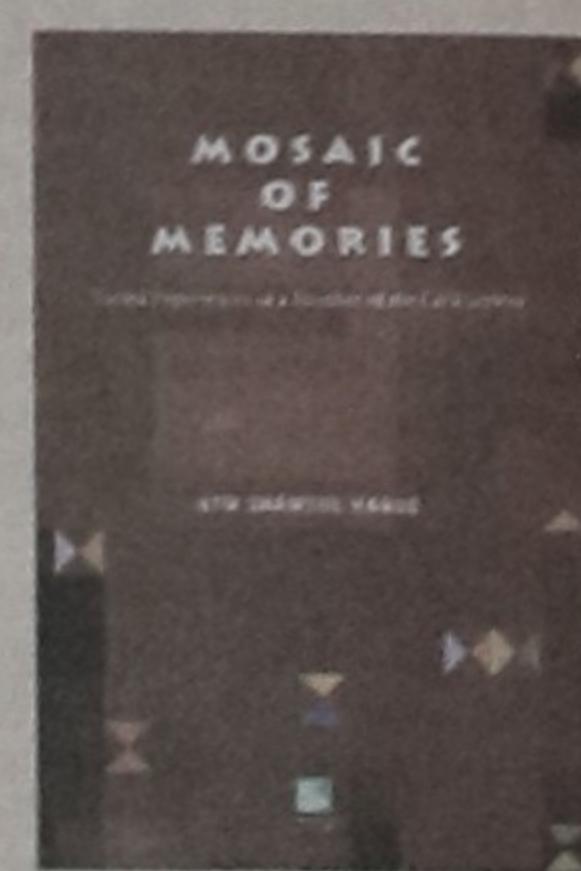
Noorun Nahar Fyzennessa  
Smriti Guccio  
Publisher Dr. Syed Ferhat Anwar

The work is a tribute to the life and career of a foremost educationist in the country. Arranged as a collection of articles, it studies her times as an individual, as a wife and mother and eventually as a teacher. Some of the more moving of tributes come from her children. And her friends reflect on the vitality that defined her being.



Mosaic of Memories  
Varied Experiences of a Member  
Of the Civil Service  
ATM Shamsul Haque  
Pathak Shamabesh

The author has long been associated with the civil service, first in Pakistan and then in Bangladesh. His experiences, varied and stretching over a long number of years, culminate in CIRDAP and then a foray into politics. The narrative is a good account of how bureaucrats carry themselves, and see the rest of the world carry itself.

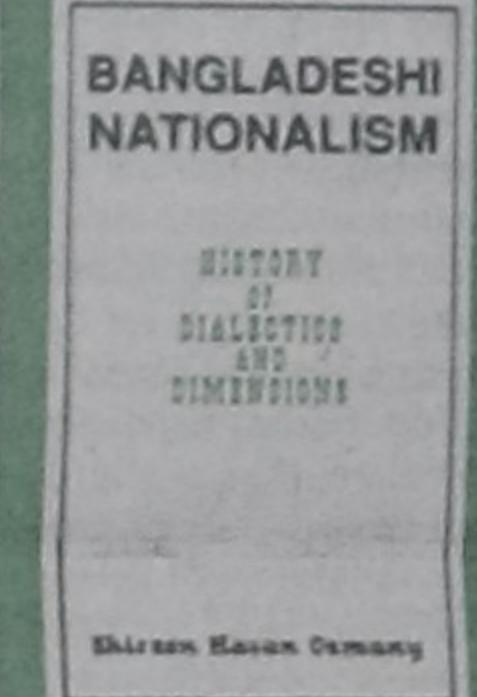


Pancha Shindhu Nodio Kotha  
Mahbubor Rahman  
Hakkani Publishers

Another work that traces the career of a former civil servant, this book narrates the training and the many people the author comes across through a lifetime of experience. There are the many instances of humour, or wit, that come in. And then, of course, are the developments that eventually have him see Pakistan lead to Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi Nationalism  
History of Dialectics and Dimensions  
Shireen Hasan Osmany

It was written quite sometime ago and is certainly an eloquent argument in defence of politics that remains as controversial as it is questionable. Osmany focuses on nationalism as it relates to the Muslim identity of the people of this country. Note, though, that Bengali nationalism remains the core of the national spirit.



## Synoptic tale of a culture struggle

Muhammad Zamir is thrilled by a work on 1952

THE Language Movement of 1952 was the first step towards the realisation of our dream -- an independent Bangladesh where citizens would be free to pursue their unique identity and consolidate their rich literary and enlightened heritage. The spirit of Ekushey and twenty-first February has been the inspiration for numerous poems, songs, short stories, essays, paintings and drama. For fifty-six years we have remembered the Language Movement and those associated with this significant chapter of our national history with pride, reverence and affection. This is, however, the first time that the movement, which established and re-affirmed our identity, has been remembered through a comprehensive collection of photographic data.

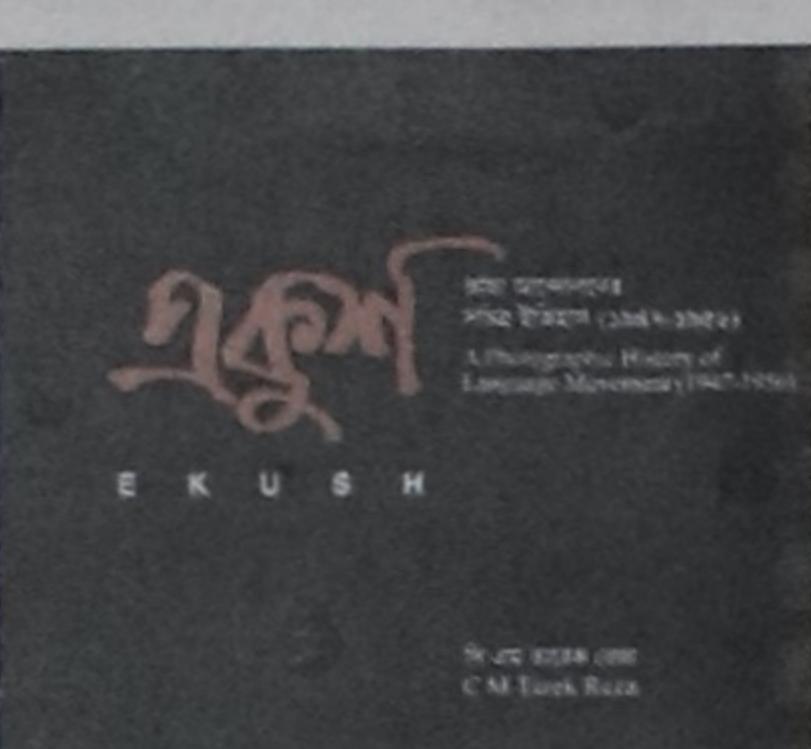
Ekushey symbolises for us a process of rediscovery. The demand for Bangla to be accorded the status of a state language reflected the yearning of the common man. This important publication presents the reader with just that.

C. M. Tarek Reza, the author, is no longer with us. A young man, he was working on his next publication, 'Ekator-r Moment of Victory' when he met with a road accident and passed away on 6 May 2007. That has made this work under review that much more special.

The publication, through the photographs of this movement, portraits of its participants (selected without political bias), reprint of contemporary newspaper articles and cartoons, has underlined the democratic and non-communal nature of the struggle undertaken between 1947 and 1956. It also includes a synoptic but multifaceted history of the Language Movement that seeks to explain the process through which the movement evolved. The volume first appeared in a shorter version in 2004. This time round, the additional materials have

enhanced its quality.

The importance of this book lies not only in its historical perspective but also because it includes, for our next generation, an objective record of what happened and why it happened. It should also be a collectible for our non-resident Bangladeshis who live far away from home but still desire to retain links with their rich cultural heritage. The Bangladeshi Associations established in different parts of the world can also think of



buying copies of this book for their community school libraries.

This publication could also prove to be very useful for the expatriate community residing in Bangladesh as well as people elsewhere. It will benefit anyone who wants to participate in a meaningful manner in the observance of twenty-first February as International Mother Language Day. A large part of the text is bi-lingual with English translation. That should facilitate understanding for the foreign readership.

Muhammad Zamir, columnist and former diplomat, is a life member of the Bangla Academy.

## Reflecting on values, before the young

Syed Badrul Ahsan recommends a work to teachers, and others

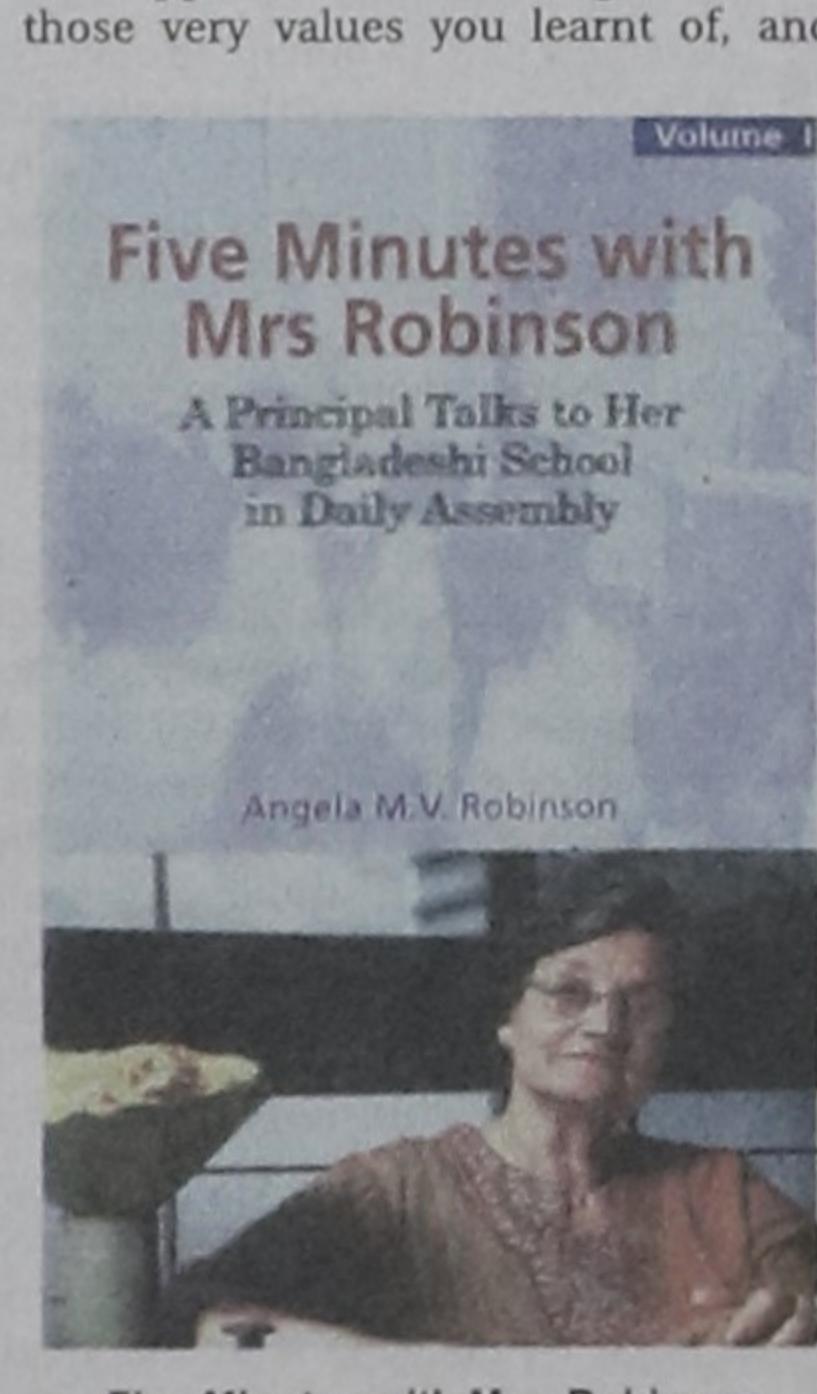
ALL teaching is a matter of involvement. Ask anyone who has been a teacher, especially in a school. There is the likelihood of your coming by a recapitulation of a sense of values, those which in these more uncertain times seem to be falling by the wayside. It just so happens that Angela Robinson is one individual who has held fast to those values even as they constantly appear to be slipping from our grasp. And she does so through informing the young she has been teaching in Bangladesh for a good number of years now that the classroom is but a window to the world beyond it. And that world is of course an appreciation of the truths and the beliefs we have always held dear, for the simple reason that they have underpinned our hold on politics, on history, indeed on the diversity of culture that has kept society in a state of stability for generations on end.

*Five Minutes with Mrs. Robinson* is a work that ought to be a springboard to how teachers in Bangladesh's schools, and not just in the urban ambience, can instill a sense of heritage and history in their pupils. There is an appreciable collection of notes, or you could call them mini-essays (the author might want to look on them as a series of talks she produced for students of The British

School, Dhaka, in a seven-month period between January and July 2003), which give you a sense of how not to let the minds of the young stray from the broader objectives of education. The subtitle of the book makes matters pretty clear: *A Principal Talks to Her Bangladeshi School in Daily Assembly*. Each talk is a five-minute peroration (or is that too emphatic a term?) on various aspects of life, encompassing as it does an entirety of knowledge. Robinson's aim is a whole lot more substantive than sermonising. She does not talk down to the children gathered before her in the pre-class minutes. What she fundamentally does is to set the minds in these young thinking as they get down to the daily routine of instruction.

Observe her neat choice of subjects. She sets off with 'The Story of the Christmas Tree', and you will likely wonder if it is not any run-of-the-mill tale so often told and retold earlier. Well, you do not need to worry, for what Robinson does is go on a journey to understand the history behind the tradition of the Christmas Tree and how it has, in our times, come to be symbolic of the spirit that once flowed from Jesus. You could go on and as you do so you might observe an expanding world of knowledge the writer offers. It is not that

you were not aware of such a world, assuming of course you went to school between the 1940s and 1960s. But what does appear to be reassuring is that it is those very values you learnt of, and



Five Minutes with Mrs. Robinson  
Angela M.V. Robinson  
Beacon Books

adopted, in school that Robinson now holds forth before your children or your grandchildren. She stresses the meaning of sharing and then expands the meaning, to let the young know that the world belongs to all and therefore every individual has a responsibility towards another, or many others, around him or her. Old-fashioned attitudes? Perhaps, but note that they happen to be attitudes in need of being restored or reasserted in our schools.

It is pleasantly surprising how Angela Robinson plays with ideas, turns them around and then builds the themes she feels should be assimilated by the young. In such pieces as 'Learning to be One of a Group' and 'Learning to be Part of a Group', she brings the children before her in quick, simple contact with thoughts that generally should be grown and nurtured at home. Of course, as you proceed deeper into the essays, you might be tempted to think that some of these pieces fall in the category of the offbeat. On deeper reflection, though, there is a good chance that you will find that such ideas as are brought up in 'Racism in Bangladesh Fair and Lovely' have long been in need of a debate. Robinson presents an unambiguous argument in defence of those with dark complexion, by debunking the thought,

as propagated by advertisements, that being fair and lovely is all that matters. She goes into more debunking of myths, as a turning of the pages in the book reveals. It is the moral questions of our times that Robinson dwells on, in that simplicity of language which remains a strong point about the work.

And yet Robinson moves on from morality to a plain dissemination of some of the more impressive lessons of history. Two notes, 'The Liberation of South Africa', are proof of her strong feeling that a sense of history should serve as an accompaniment to education in school. Not many teachers would feel the need for a talk with their pupils on such issues as human rights. Robinson certainly does not fall in that group. Her thoughts on fair trade, child labour, raising money for charities in her native United Kingdom, safety helmets, et al, present a composite image of the world as it happens to be in our times. Her reflections on pets and zoos, on rejecting 'bad culture' and on bullies ought to make the reader sit back and think.

And do not miss Angela Robinson's thoughts on coaching centres. Chances are you will end up agreeing with her.

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