

# A nation finding its way . . .

## Syed Badrul Ahsan re-reads accounts of a formative era

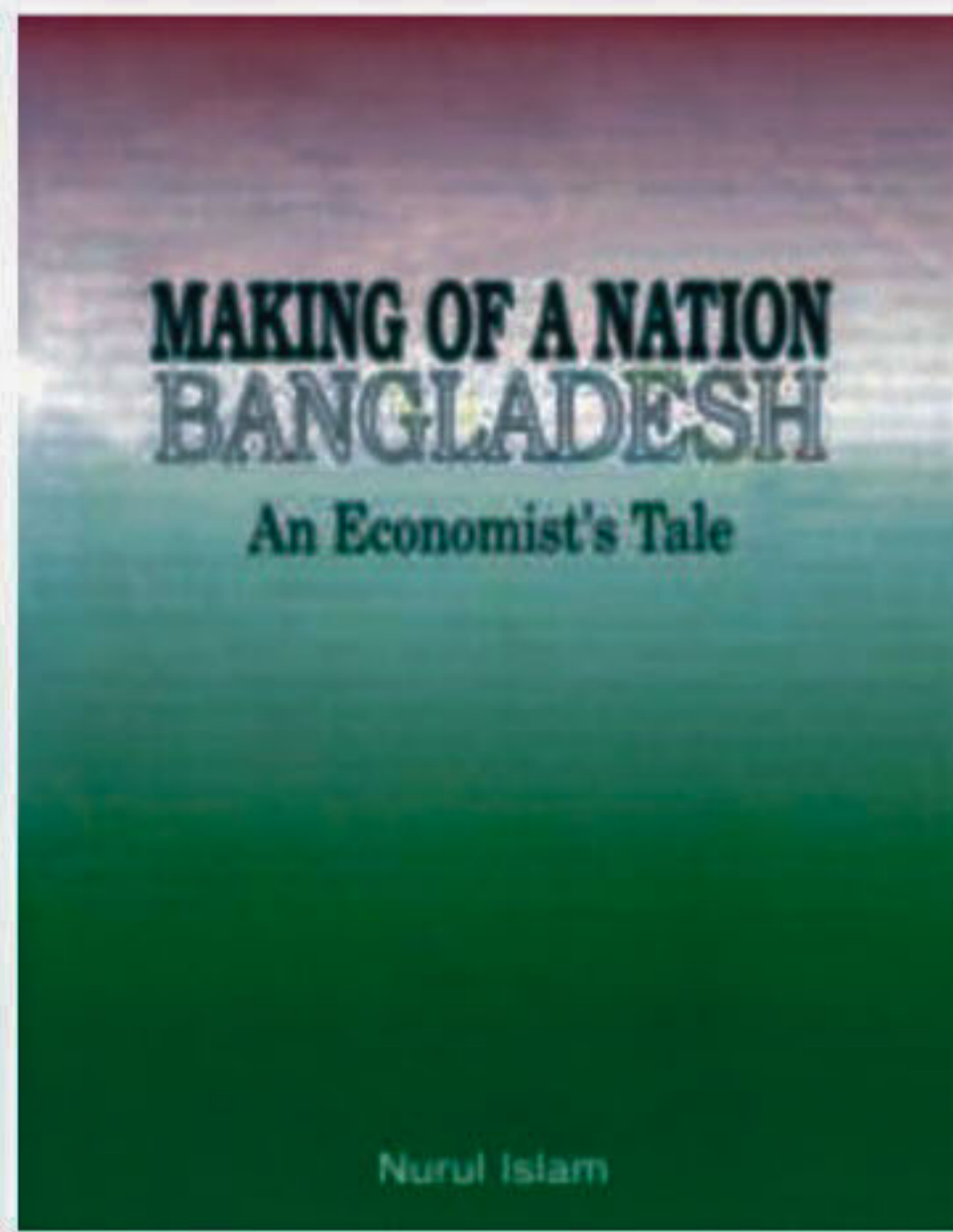
Forty years into Bangladesh's independent statehood, it makes sense to travel back in time and reflect on some of the pioneering work which went into the making of the state. Nurul Islam was one of the men who played a quiet yet formidable role in advancing the Bengali cause through his assessment of the economics that needed to underpin the idea of, first, regional autonomy for East Pakistan and, second, full sovereignty for Bangladesh. With him there were Anisur Rahman, Rehman Sobhan and Mosharraf Hossain, men who shared his view that Pakistan's Bengali province, being geographically removed from its western half and, more significantly, characterised by clear socio-cultural differences with Islamabad, could legitimately lay claim to a different, more attuned to reality sort of economy.

The story of how Nurul Islam and his fellow Bengali scientists came to link up with the Six Point movement for regional autonomy, spearheaded as it was by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, comes through in his exhaustive 'Making Of A Nation: Bangladesh: An Economist's Tale.' Of course it is not a new work, seeing that it first appeared eight years ago, with a reprint (all by The University Press) a few years later. Islam spent the period of the War of Liberation in the United States, galvanising the individuals and groups he thought could and would influence the course of events in war-torn Bangladesh. His links with the West, primarily through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, were what he based his work on. He knew Robert McNamara, about whose fraught relations with Tajuddin Ahmed he has much to say in this work. Indeed, there is much that Islam, as an insider in those early days of the

struggle and those immediately following it, reveals here.

It became Nurul Islam's job, once Bangladesh stood liberated and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned home from Pakistani captivity, to take charge of the planning commission as its first deputy chairman. The chairman, of course, was the prime minister. In a country born of a bitter war, with tens of thousands dead and an entire population wallowing in misery, it was a hard job for the government to go about doing business as usual. But, again, those insurmountable odds Bangabandhu and his colleagues faced were to be overcome in the first three years. Forty years on, it is fairly easy for scholars and analysts of Bangladesh's history to go fault finding with the nation's first post-liberation government. But that a difference was made by that government --- and Nurul Islam was one of the paramount players at the time --- can never be in doubt. The realities were all out there. No one among the political leadership, apart from Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had ever held a position in government before. Overall, it was one of those rare moments in history when the provincial outpost of a country found itself, through a tortuous, pretty dramatic struggle, in the position of a free country.

Bangladesh, as Islam notes with fascinating detail in his work, did find a toehold in its search for a niche on the global arena. It became part of the Bretton Woods institutions; it went into the United Nations despite relentless opposition to its membership; and it did, thanks to the pragmatism demonstrated by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, find new alignments in its foreign policy. The rift between Mujib and Tajuddin clearly saddened Islam, for he was close to both these political



**Making Of A Nation  
Bangladesh  
An Economist's Tale  
Nurul Islam  
The University Press Limited**

giants, an association which went back to the mid-1960s when an embryonic Six Point plan first began to be injected with doses of substance by a young, idealistic Awami League leadership, with quite a bit of help from Nurul Islam and his fellow economists. It was Tajuddin who eventually made for the exit. Islam would meet him after his fall from grace, making it clear to Bangabandhu that he could not simply stay away from the wartime leader who after liberation had proved to be an

astute finance minister. Islam's respect for Bangabandhu was enduring. The Father of the Nation was 'very perceptive and quick to grasp critical policy issues and decisive in action.' Islam, like so many who have lived through and made history with Bangabandhu, remains impressed by Mujib's knack for remembering men and events. The writer recalls Bangabandhu going back to discussions with him on subjects weeks and even months after the two men had first talked about them.

In Khondokar Moshtaque Ahmed, it is the conspirator Nurul Islam discovers. Towards the end of 1974, when Islam makes it known to Bangabandhu that he planned to leave government, it is Moshtaque who offers him unsolicited comments on what he considers Mujib's arbitrary running of the administration. Islam is left surprised. He mentions another episode, this one in the course of a boat trip arranged for visiting Australian prime minister Gough Whitlam in December 1974. Strolling along the deck, Islam comes across Moshtaque and Taheruddin Thakur in conversation with each other. Again, unsolicited, the two men remark on how thankless Islam must have found his work at the planning commission and how relieved he must be to be going out of it. At that point, Bangabandhu turns up and, pointing at Moshtaque and Thakur, asks them what they are up to and why they always are huddled together, conversing in whispers. Years later, Nurul Islam would reflect on such telltale signs of a disaster in the making.

'Making Of A Nation' is a necessary insight into an era that remains, for all its attendant difficulties, a defining period for Bangladesh. Islam recalls his meeting with General Ziaur Rahman, at the latter's invitation, at the end

of 1974. For reasons which remain as mysterious as they were in that critical year, Zia noted that Nurul Islam was about to depart from the planning commission but felt that he ought to stay on in his position. Bangladesh, said Zia, would emerge from the woods and things would brighten up.

This is a work where an encapsulation of history as it was forged between the early 1960s and mid 1970s comes to the reader. Nurul Islam speaks of meeting Ayub Khan face to face, for the latter suddenly appeared to be intrigued by the 'two economies' theory then being floated by Bengali economists. Of course, in the end, Ayub Khan did not give it any further thought. Islam notes the careful manner in which Tajuddin Ahmed ignored Robert McNamara, who was busy doing all he could to speak to the finance minister, in Delhi in 1972. Tajuddin was yet upset that the United States had tilted in favour of Pakistan during the 1971 war. Besides, McNamara, having prosecuted the Vietnam War for years before moving on to the World Bank in 1968, was still a symbol of American insensitivity for him. When plans for McNamara to visit Dhaka eventually did fall in place, Tajuddin was not amused. He opposed the idea of an official dinner to be hosted by the deputy chairman of the planning commission for the visitor. And when McNamara called on him, Tajuddin startled the World Bank president by suggesting that if the Bank wished to assist Bangladesh in its economic recovery, it might as well make bullocks available to it for purposes of accelerating agricultural cultivation in the rural regions of the country!

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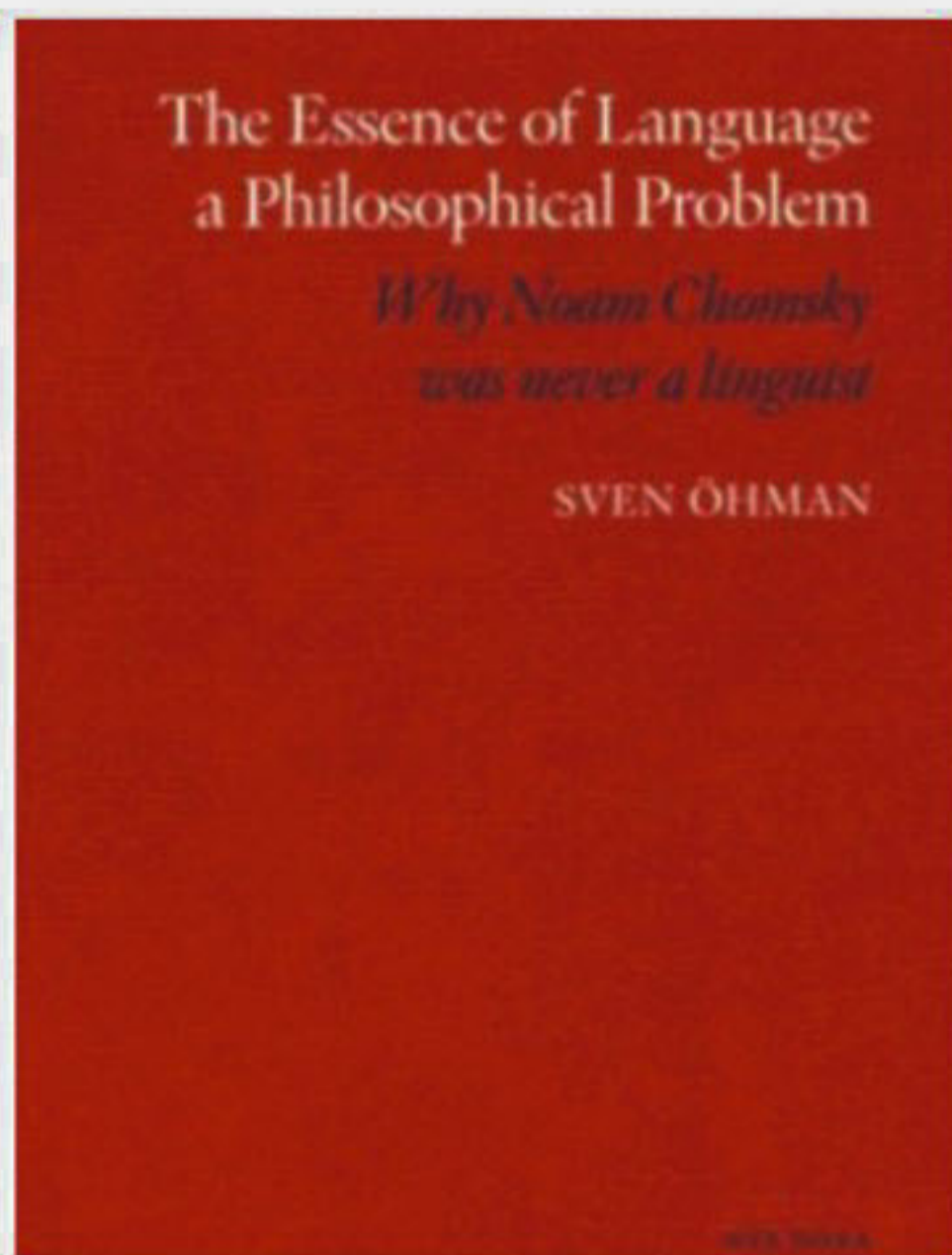
# A weaver of imaginary tales

## Nausheen Rahman sifts through a writer's life

"All autobiography is self-indulgent"; so said Daphne du Maurier, whose books so many of us have read and loved. Who can forget "Rebecca", "My Cousin Rachel", "The Loving Spirit", "Frenchman's Creek", to name just a few of her novels? Hence, an opportunity to read about this writer in her own words in a book she calls "Myself When Young. The Shaping of A Writer", is not something lovers of English literature can let pass.

Autobiography is also a mirror reflecting the writer's mind, soul and spirit. This book, published as a memoir to celebrate du Maurier's seventieth birthday, was not one she was happy about writing. It is the first volume of an autobiography that never got completed. Yet it helps us understand the complex, elusive Daphne du Maurier to quite an extent.

"Myself When Young" includes a very enlightening introduction by Helena Taylor, a very succinct, modest and honest "Author's Note" (in keeping with her character), and of course, du Maurier's account of her life from the age of three to twenty five (most of which is information gleaned from the diaries she kept from the age of twelve to twenty five). It is a record of her "thoughts, impressions and actions". She admits that there is nothing profound or wise in it. However, this 195-page memoir is replete with observations and quotes which are food for thought. She feels that if this book (originally named "Growing Pains: The Shaping of a Writer") causes her contemporaries to recall their own memories and encourages young writers, her writing will have been



**The Essence of Language  
A Philosophical Problem  
Why Noam Chomsky  
Was Never A Linguist  
Sven Ohman  
Nya Doxa, Sweden**

worthwhile.

Du Maurier was a loner from childhood and became a recluse in her old age. A reading of the book shows how she longed for, and was

happy with, her own company, the countryside and most notable, the sea. She valued "freedom from all ties" (even at the tender age of twenty two), and sought tranquility above everything. She loved sailing deeply and whole-heartedly, saying that she felt completely at peace and pure when she was at sea, and that everything seemed, "beautiful and eternal". Her idea for her first novel, "The Loving Spirit", came from a schooner "Jane Slade", and its title from a poem by Emily Bronte. Quite a few of her works centre around the sea. She also loved to explore the woods and even get lost in it. The seeds of many of her stories were sown when she was out in nature.

This writer had an intriguing personality. She writes frankly about her shortcomings (both in her character and her writing), and makes no excuses for them. Her attachment to her parents was never intense and her relationship with her two sisters was close and companionable, despite the fact that she was so different from them. She writes, "Angela and Jeanne were content with their lives. Why did I have to be different?.....They had no desire to break away as I did.". She did have feelings for a married, 36-year-old cousin, Geoffrey (whose holding her hand under the rug when she was fourteen, had first awakened an instinct in her), a lot of affection for Carol Reed, a "tall, slim-hipped" 22-year-old director, an attraction for Fernandes, her French teacher, and an enduring friendship with Adams, a sailor.

The du Maurier family frequently changed houses; these houses served as sources for some of her stories which were of succeeding genera-

tions; each had its own identity and linked the past with the present. "We are all ghosts of yesterday". People and things pass away, but not places". Family history was delved into and represented. Abstract concepts of family, generation and continuity played important parts in her fiction as well as biography.

She says she "hated being obvious in any form or fashion". She believed that, regardless of what anyone said, there had to be "Truth, no striving after cleverness, nor cheap and ready-made wit. Sincerity beauty purity". There was an underlying depression in all her themes which she realized full well, but couldn't get rid of. She also wondered why she felt so sad thinking of a past she had never known and why this past had such a strong hold over her. It was always the past, "just out of reach, waiting to be captured". She also wonders if "happiness will always elude her, lying just ahead round the corner". Other features present in her stories were discontent and a desire to escape, and because many writers look for an "elsewhere" to feel at home, and women readers have a deep craving to be somebody else, somewhere, they could cater to these needs.

This book, considered an autobiographical romance, sketches the writer's development into "creative freedom and independence". Reading it has made me want to read her novels again, this time with a clearer and wider perception. It is really very interesting to know about how she was feeling as she was growing up, and the confusions, anxieties and aspirations she faced on the way. Her comments about herself and her writing process, are ana-

lytical and revelatory.

Du Maurier always played heroic manly roles in childhood games and from an early age identified with male heroes. She had invented a male alter ego for herself, Eric Avon, who disappeared for a while, but resurfaced as the male narrator of five of her novels. Acting was in her genes and Eric was part of a dramatic role she was only too happy to play. She identified closely with male mentors. Finding her grandfather's old diary, she was charmed by his changing moods and realized how much like him she was. All these things bring out the gender confusion and bisexual feelings (in her words "Victorian tendencies"), and her impatience with feminine roles and responsibilities. She was concerned about the "constraints and sheer dullness of orthodox femininity in early to mid-twentieth century fiction". She was influenced mainly by women writers who were of the same opinions. She pays a huge tribute to Emily Bronte and acknowledges a big debt to all the Bronte sisters and Katherine Mansfield.

Daphne du Maurier refers to herself as "a spinner of webs, a weaver of imaginary tales". Her memoir concludes with her sailing away down the Helford River and Frenchman's Creek with her just-wedded husband, Major Browning. This may be taken as a symbol of her always trying to get away from reality through her fancies. It also marks the end of one phase of her life, and the beginning of another.

Nausheen Rahman is a teacher and literary critic.

# Of reputations proper and misplaced

## Anisur Rahman finds a polemical work pretty appealing

Swedish linguist Sven Ohman (1936-2008) knew differently, and it would be even harder to imagine why he believed that Noam Chomsky (b. 1928--) has never been a linguist. It is something hard to believe for anyone who is familiar with the name of Chomsky and the reputation it carries. Formerly an Uppsala University professor of linguistics, Sven Ohman in his book, *The Essence of Language: A Philosophical Problem*, has successfully established his observations and findings denying Chomsky's position as a linguist.

The book is a concise presentation of some linguistic questions as well as answers to those questions, writers' own opinions, reflections and dismissal of definitions of linguistics that have been in vogue to date. All these provide something of a personal account which the writer has featured in the book in a convincing way for readers inside and outside the ramparts of the linguistic and philosophical world. This slim volume includes a whole range of thoughts --- basic ideas of traditional grammar phonetics, phonology, the concept word, the use of the human voice in spoken language and much more. Obviously, they are aimed at shattering the 'myth' of Chomsky's standing as a linguist despite the fact that some of Chomsky's books are an integral part of syllabi on linguistics at universities in various countries.

Sven Ohman, a scholar and academic, taught linguistics at different universities and studied and conducted research on the same at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and elsewhere. The more interesting, rather ironic, part of the story is he even enjoyed the lectures on linguistics by Chomsky at MIT. The book under review is a result of detailed scholarly scrutiny, focusing as it does on the unsettled linguistic debate and anatomy of linguistics centring on Chomsky.

Ohman frankly notes that he took Chomsky's teachings to his heart, and had several friendly discussions with him in connection with his classes. It is clear that he feels there was a relation of friendship between them. And yet, perhaps his being six years younger and his deep respect for the man Chomsky were obstacles in the way of a true, fulfilling intellectual friendship. Sven Ohman's findings aim at demonstrating that Chomsky's language theories cannot replace traditional linguistics by appealing to mathematical constructions. For that approach does not have much to contribute to our general understanding and use of actual languages.

The writer dismisses the notion that linguistics is sometimes described as the science of language by showing us how to deal with language problems. Thus he establishes his own definition through formulating his own

ideas: in a brief form, linguistics is the science of words as used in saying things by means of letters in writing.

Ohman believes that, probably inspired by his own interpretation of the example of theoretical physics, Chomsky settled for an in-depth analysis of linguistic facts that could be observed in language and that shed light on crucial matters that Chomsky considers to be linguistic theory.

Ohman belongs among those who feel that Chomsky's ambitions completely undermine his grand project regarding linguistics. However great a linguist Chomsky may be projected in the media to be, Sven Ohman continues to maintain that linguistics is a study of the actual use of what everyone knows as language. The book is a clear attempt at showing that Chomsky is not a linguist at all but an intellectual soldier of fortune. Ohman makes a note of MIT linguistics being just a media hoax!

The suspicion is that Noam Chomsky has never received any formal training in any academic discipline and has not submitted a doctoral thesis for examination in any subject. Ohman tries to establish this suspicion as fact by simply pointing out Chomsky's saying: 'we try to show...' The writer thus suggests that Chomsky confirms the suspicion that for him linguistics is, of course, a branch of applied mathematics, in which he makes assumptions from which he mathematically derives



**Myself When Young  
The Shaping of a Writer  
Daphne du Maurier  
Virago**

conclusions which he may feel rhyme more or less well with what he takes to be linguistic facts.

In connection with Chomsky's visit to Sweden in 2002, Sven Ohman wrote a long article for Svenska Dagbladet, a morning newspaper in Sweden, to explain that Chomsky is not a scientist at all, but a political ideologue who started out in the 1950s by seizing power over American linguistics through overthrowing the somewhat provincial behaviorism that had reigned supreme in indigenous American psychology since the early 20th century and to which American linguistics the Bloomfield school had pledged its allegiance.

Ohman makes some more interesting observations over a Nobel Prize vis-a-vis Chomsky.

He notes that that there is of course the prize in literature but it is only awarded to poets and writers of fiction. Chomsky's writings do not qualify for this distinction.

There is finally the Nobel Peace Prize, but Sven finds it hard to believe that the committee will consider Chomsky eligible on political grounds. Well, ... who knows? If Henry Kissinger and Barack Obama could get it, why not Chomsky as well?

Anisur Rahman, a journalist, is at present doing research in Sweden. This review is a reprint