

LIGHT AND SHADOW

The kite with the blue tail

SHAILY FATIMA

The wind was soft against her closed eyes but it still woke her with the gentle rain on her face and she turned smilingly towards him. "It is raining, but don't say we have to go home yet".

"Okay, only for a few minutes. You don't want me to catch a cold, do you?"
"There's your cap for protection.....here, put it on. And the rain won't be for long anyway. I can see the sun behind the clouds".

"Let's start walking back to the car. It will be a five minute walk anyway".

She straightened, helping him up with one hand and holding his walking stick with another. She hooked his frail cardigan-clad arm with hers as they started walking.

"Abba, you know, it's funny but although I never flew a kite myself, when I sometimes look at the sky, I imagine flying a kite just like you did when you were young".

Abba's pace picked up a little now, "We would buy kites with all our pocket money. They would be of different colours with nice long tails. We would make our own when we didn't have enough money, but they didn't always perform that well. I remember I had once made a white one with a blue tail and it cut through two kites when I flew it."

"What happened to it then?"
"It got stolen and I think I know who did it."

"Didn't you charge him?"
"No, I had my fill of it by then and as I always say, better to get cheated than to cheat on someone.....I have always believed in divine justice"

"What happened?" she prompted.
"That boy had a book by Mark Twain which we all envied....." He was laughing, his slight frame quivering against her arm.

"And...?" she asked impatiently.
"A cow chewed up most of the book, but the boy refused to give up what was left of it. And his anger at the cow....." now she also joined him in his laughter.

"And to make matters worse for him, we named the cow Mark Twain!"

Her mind drifted at the familiar drone of his voice as he talked. She nuzzled against his arm and felt secure at the familiar, comforting smell of Pond's cream and Johnsons' baby oil on Abba. She tried to match her stride with his slower ones as they walked along, blanketed by an overwhelming sense of peace.

".....still feel the spool rolling between my thumbs and forefingers....."

She realised he was still lost in his kite flying days as he continued ".....the tug of the string.....the direction of the wind blowing.....You know what? At one stage you feel at one with the kite, as if it is you who is up there in the sky.....free and far away."

"Tell me, Abba. If I were a boy, would you have taught me how to fly a kite?"

"Have I ever stopped you from doing anything because you were born a girl?" he asked with a half smile, turning and looking at her.

"Of course, you did, Abba, many a time." She was quick to reply.

"That's not true and you know it. I think I have always tried to provide you with as many options as possible to choose from, and that is as liberal as any father can be with his child."

"But you didn't answer my question....."
"Of course, I would have taught you to fly a kite. But I can't think of any girl being an ardent kite flyer!"

"That's because we are groomed to play indoor games only."
"But then kites are bordering on extinction today", he

put in sadly.
"Yes, the sky no longer has the same horizon. One would have to stand on a very tall building to see a kite flying these days", she added.

As they walked side by side they almost missed a pothole in which Abba was about to step in, and she pulled on his arm reflexively saying, "Watch out!"

Then there was silence. Suddenly she could only hear her own breathing. She woke up with a jolt. Her eyes squinted against the sun as if in protest. She found herself in that state of denial that one finds oneself in when something good comes to an end.

At a loss, she glanced sideward and there it was, her very own composition of Abba's epitaph, mocking her to full wakefulness.

*I see the beacon that beckoned us to the right side
I hear the voice that we always sought as a guide
I treasure the gifts of your fatherhood that are never to be lost
I feel the love that was always there no matter what
And yet I struggle to find the words
That will tell you your true worth.*

A sense of unutterable void overcame her as she lay still under the clear blue sky, trapped in the feeling of being alone all of a sudden. The here and now seemed still and confined, reminding her of the narrow horizon of the sky she was referring to earlier. A sense of rebellion gripped her as if the sublime peace she enjoyed only moments ago could not be lost just like that. But then something in the horizon caught her eye and she stared in disbelief. There it was.....flying high.....free and far away.....no, it couldn't be.....but yes, there it was.....a white kite with a blue fluttering tail.

Shaily Fatima is a freelance writer

POETRY

Crab Nebula's song

FARIDA SHAIKH

Crab Nebula is the Lover constantly beaming radiation towards Beloved Blue Earth.

Crab Nebula is the core of a spinning neutron star in the midst of magnetic field remnant of a supernova in the constellation of Taurus 6500 light years away from the Blue Earth.

Crab Nebula is in a ceaseless swing for thousands of years Suddenly on 12 April sent out a passionate flare, bursting enormous gamma rays from its region 30 times more intense and 5 times more powerful than its normal energy output.

Crab Nebula's fury flared into even bigger eruption four days later Emission that were 100 times greater than the highest achievable energy

Then, Crab Nebula was suddenly silent 4 days later and left astronomers wondering. Crab Nebula's flare originated in the neutron star, 1 3 light years in radius

Then probably a rearrangement occurred in the surrounding magnetic field caused Crab Nebula to be mute. Just as before, cradled in its area of emission enormous as the Blue Earth's solar system.

Farida Shaikh is a critic and social commentator.

Birth of life

FARHA DIBA

Somewhere...
A bloody beast is screaming with anger,
A molten sun is mourning in tears,
A symphony is beating faster,
A breeze is whispering prayers.

Elsewhere...
A light is losing glow,
A river is flowing slow,
An angel is healing a blow.

At last...
Surreal became real,
Shine became summer,
Ripple became flood,
Screech became thunder.

Farha Diba writes post-modernist poetry.

TRIBUTE

Scholar lost to time . . .

ABU TAHER MOJUMDER

A year ago this month, we lost Dr. Jahangir Tareque, a well-known teacher, linguist, littérateur and translator. He was a professor at the Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka. At the time of his death he was living in accommodation to which he had shifted from his university quarters where he had lived for many years with his family, comprising his wife, a son and two daughters.

Born on 30 June 1943, Jahangir Tareque cannot be said to have lived a life of full maturity and accomplishment. But death doesn't care a straw for such a state of unfulfilled dreams and desires. It suddenly swoops on its destined victim and snatches him away from his near and dear ones, friends, fellow travellers along the path of life and dear disciples, who are left behind to mourn and moan for him by recalling his memories, the qualities of his head and heart and both the sweet and sour hours in his association. Jahangir Tareque was a man who cannot be forgotten so easily.

Jahangir Tareque was a reputed scholar in his own right. He was a pundit from all points of consideration. He had his MA degree in Bengali from the University of Dhaka in 1964. For further studies he responded to the call of the very famous centre of culture and learning in France --- he obtained MA in French from Université de la Sorbonne - Nouvelle, Paris, in 1971; MA in English from Université de Paris IV in 1973 and Doctorat de troisieme cycle, Université de la Sorbonne - Nouvelle, Comparative Literature Paris III in 1976. What commendable academic feats did he display! Added to these were his research fellowships and advanced training which added lustre to his scholarship.

Tareque was a prolific author whose list of publications is wide-ranging. Among these are translations, original works and research papers. Mention may be made of *Samajik Sankate Vijnaner Bhumika* (Can Science Save Us? by George A. Lundberg), Bengali translation, Dhaka, 1967; *Karigar Vidyar Dishari* (Trail Blazers of Technology by Harland Manchester) translation, Dhaka, 1988; *Shabdārtha*



- *Vijnaer Mulsutra* (Principles of Semantics), by Stephen Ullman, Bengali translation, Bangla Academy, 1993; *Madam Bovary* (translation), Bangla Academy, 1997; *Kazi Nazrul Islam : Poems Choisis* (French); *Kazi Nazrul Islam : Poemi scelti* (Nazrul Institute), Dhaka, 2001; *Kazi Nazrul Islam : Peomas elegidos* (Spanish), Nazrul Institute, Dhaka, 2002; *Kazi Nazrul Islam : Chansons* (French) Nazrul Institute, 2003; *Methods of Language Teaching*, Open University, 2001; *Symbolist Literature*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1988; *Sabdatha Vijnaner Bhumika* (Introduction to Semantics), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1997.

This short list has shown that his knowledge of European

languages was remarkably considerable. Indeed his proficiency included thirteen languages, and these are, apart from his mother language, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Latin and Dutch. I think no other Bangladeshi scholar has achieved such a success in acquiring knowledge of such a big number of languages. This acquisition enabled him to help all those friends and scholars who had to deal with any particular European or other languages. I am greatly indebted to him for acquainting me with the pronunciation and meaning of many European words when I was translating some works containing European terms.

Dr. Jahangir Tareque had a chequered teaching career. He first started teaching as a lecturer in English and Bengali at Jhenaidah Cadet College. Then he joined Chittagong Government College as professor of Bengali. This was followed by his joining, in 1980, the Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka, as associate professor and director. In 1988 he became a professor at this Institute. It is a matter of considerable pride on the part of all his well-wishers that from the beginning to the end of his career he was a very ardent, diligent, successful and popular teacher, a fact which was also a source of encouragement and pleasure for him. He used to enjoy his profession and shared his thoughts with his colleagues. Of a very amiable disposition, he was very honest and sincere, candid and sociable, easily approachable and always made a very pleasant and memorable impression on all he met and talked with. As a good friend I always miss him. His family members miss him deeply and his friends remember him with unmixed feelings of love. May Allah bless his soul in Heaven!

(Dr. Jahangir Tareque passed away on 29 June 2010). Professor Abu Taher Mojumder is Dean, Faculty of Arts & Humanities and of Social Sciences, Bangladesh University of Business and Technology (BUBT), Dhaka.

ENGLISH STUDIES

Otherwise, think other-wise!

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Speakers at the Second International Conference "Thinking Other-wise with/in English Studies," held at Jahangirnagar University on May 13-14, 2011, detected a crisis in humanism and emphasized the need for reshaping English departments. The purview of English Studies has to be rethought and redesigned in order to prioritize various objectives of teaching English at a university level, they opined.

Speaking as the chief guest, Chairman of the University Grants Commission Prof AK Azad Chowdhury pointed out that the lack of language proficiency was forcing us to lose our competitive edge in the global arena. He urged English departments to streamline their curricula to address real needs in the area.

"English Studies now include literary theory, rhetoric and composition, technical writing, creative writing, cultural studies, TESOL, linguistics, children's and adolescent literature, English education, pedagogical theory, computerization of literature," the convenor of the conference, Dr. Shamsad Mortuza, noted in his opening remarks, and added, "We can characterize the changes either as remarkable or as deplorable; but the

fact remains that English departments are changing. English departments are thinking otherwise."

While presenting the keynote speech, Prof Rajgopal Radhakrishnan, Chancellor's Professor of University of California, Irvine-USA, addressed the politics of language, focusing on its translatability in a postcolonial and postmodern milieu. He gave examples of Tamil writers writing in their native language as opposed to other Indian writers writing in English in order to explain how an act of translation, in the name of knowing others and knowing "thyself," imposed subjectivity on the work being translated. He then applied Ngugi's idea of *Decolonizing the Mind* to underscore the racial and gender politics of language.

After the opening session had set the tone, the first panel, titled "English Studies: Thinking Elsewhere", discussed the state of English Studies in different parts of the world. Dr. Arun Gupto of Pokhara University observed that students of literature were misappropriating western ideas while applying them to local cultural texts. Prof. Sangjun Jeong from Seoul National University shared his experience of drafting the syllabus

at the Centre for American Studies in South Korea, while Prof Elizabeth Platt from Florida State University enlightened the audience with her remarks on the hegemonic role of English in African countries. Prof Nurul Islam (Dean of Arts, Eastern University) was also critical of different language teaching models in Bangladesh.

The second panel dedicated itself to Poet-Sage Tagore on the occasion of his 150th birth anniversary. Those involved with the publication of *Essential Tagore* from Shantiniketan and Harvard University Press (HUP) shared the pleasure and pain of translating Tagore. The editors of the omnibus, Prof Radha Chakravarty (Delhi University) and Prof Fakrul Alam (Dhaka University), talked on the politics and policies of translation that guided their translation. Prof Somadatta Mandal gave the perspective of a translator while Dr. Sharmila Sen, editor-at-large of HUP, mentioned the reasons behind the commissioning of the "Essential Tagore" project. The session was moderated by Prof Shafi Ahmed of JU.

The next panel, "Translating and Translocating" featured Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam, who noticed that the approach to

teaching and learning literary texts was being influenced by the advancement of internet based materials and secondary sources. Prof Somadatta Mandal's paper dealt with the issue of authenticity of film versions of literary texts and their use in classrooms. Dr Sharmila Sen's talk focused on retaining beauty in translation at the expense of fidelity.

The second day of the conference had two plenary papers. Prof Raj Rao from Pune University critiqued TB Macaulay for his homophobia, and noticed the presence of such "sickness" (i.e. tuberculosis) in other areas of his language policy that shaped Indian sensibility. Prof Fakrul Alam's paper, on the other hand, was more current in his criticism of the British Council or other centres involved in the language trade. In a concurrent session, titled "Engreji", the audience heard talks on bilingualism, nativization, code switching and their impact on human cognitive processes.

There were also sessions on "Theory and Praxis," "Locating Bangladeshi Writers", "IN/TO English", "Course/Career", "A Room of her Own," "Nation/Narration," "Popular Culture" and so on. A total of seventy papers were shared during the two-day event with

more than 200 scholars in attendance.

The conference had its pleasant respite from serious academic discussions too. Poet Kaiser Haq amused the audience with his performative reading of his witty poems and writer-activist Raj Rao shared a chilling experience of transsexuality while reading out from one of his short stories at the Creative Reading session. The participants later went on a 'journey by boat' in Bongshi River, Savar. They also attended the book-launch of "Essential Tagore" at Bengal Gallery.

The two-day academic session was followed up by a workshop titled "Postcolonized!" Conducted by Dr. Sharmila Sen, the workshop traced the colonial agenda of teaching the English language and tried to find ways of negotiating and negating such political agendas in a postcolonial space. Reflecting on the migrant workers returning from the Middle East, Sen questioned the validity of our language policy. Later certificates were given to the participants by the Chair of the English Department, Mashrur Shahid Hossain.

Shamsad Mortuza, writer and critic, teaches English at Jahangirnagar University.