

The poet in his grandeur

Md. Abu Zafar rediscovers Tagore in a new work

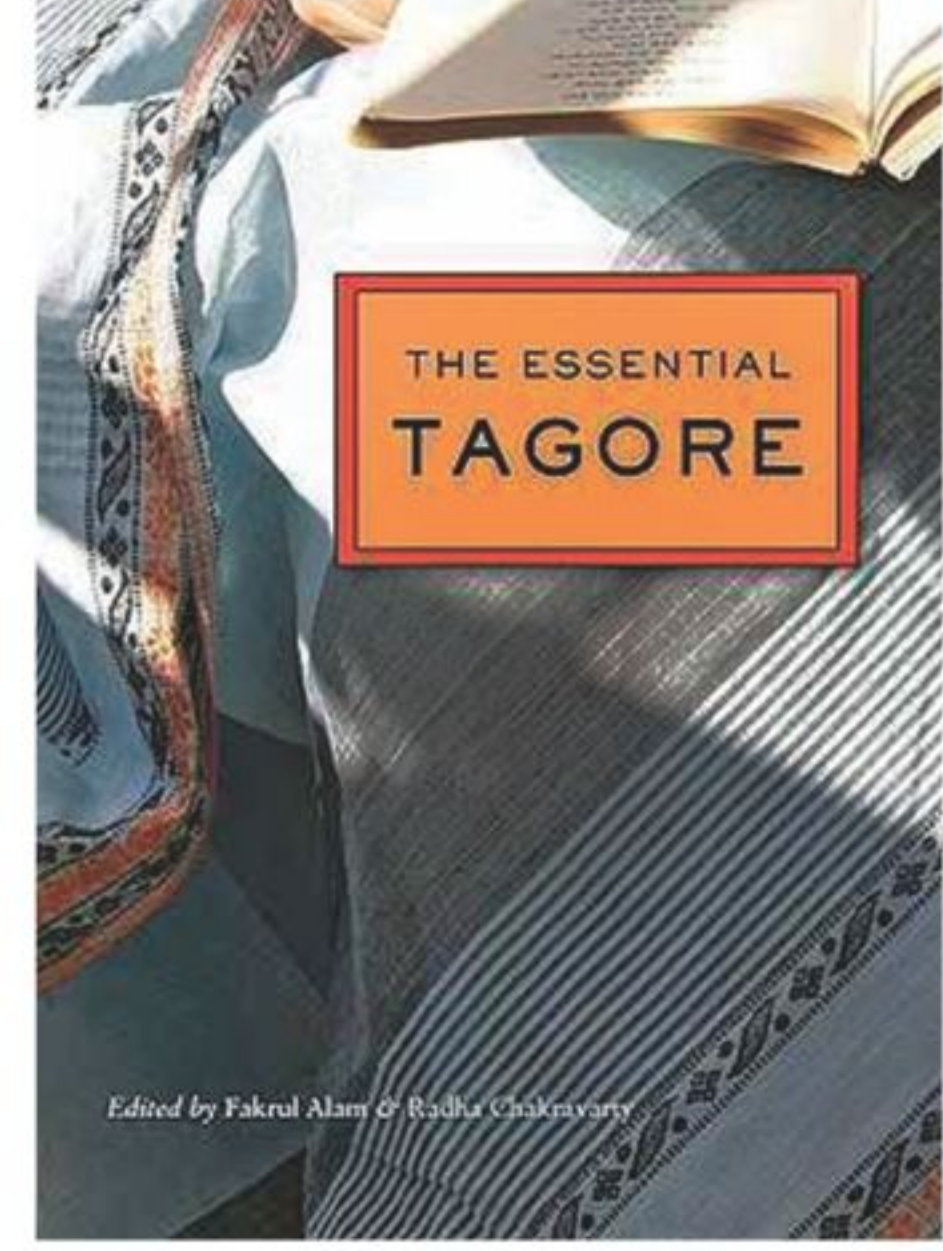
'A good book is a precious life-blood of a master spirit embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life', said Milton in his polemical piece *Areopagitica*. *The Essential Tagore* edited by Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakravarty and published by Bisva-bharati in India and Harvard University Press in the USA is such a work, one that preserves the quintessence and master spirit of Rabindranath Tagore through the medium of English. This ambitious collection was brought out in 2011 to mark the 150th anniversary of Tagore's birth.

Although Tagore is a household name among the Bengali-speaking people and his achievements in many genres of literature are simply astonishing, he has not been adequately and authentically presented to English-speaking audiences across the world. In 1969 Rabindra Nath Choudhury in the preface to his translated work *Fifteen Longer Poems of Rabindranath Tagore* said: '...the world still fails to know what greatness Tagore possesses because he has not been authentically and adequately presented in translation. I know the world would go into ecstasy over poet Rabindranath if only the world would come into contact with form as well as substance of his literature... his immense artistic sense has been displayed in his sonorous style, diction, choice of words with superb sense.' In fact, among Bengali writers, though Tagore remains the most important figure to be translated from the first decade of the twentieth century onwards, not much of his vast and variegated talent has been exposed to the world through English translations. Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakravarty have rendered a great service by bringing this mega volume of around 800 pages to showcase samples of Tagore's achievements in all genres of literature --- poetry, songs, autobiographical works, letters, travel writings, essays, novels, short stories, humorous pieces and plays. The translations are by thirty translators, including Amitav Ghosh, Amit Chaudhury, Sunetra Gupta, Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam. *The Essential Tagore*, however, is primarily a translated work with a difference. As its main objective is to showcase Tagore's life and works with all his diverse and variegated features, the book includes samples of Tagore's writings originally in English as well as from translations of his own works, because Tagore's appearance as a bilingual writer and his role as a translator are important facets of his genius that the editors say, are 'often overlooked when appraising his literary achievement.'

Immediately after its publication, *The Essential Tagore* received positive reviews worldwide. Barry Hill in *The Australian* (17 Dec 2011) welcomed the publication as "a wonderful job" and "almost all gold". Praising the editors and translators, Amartya Sen, in *The New Republic*, (June 9, 2011) exclaimed that though the excellence of Tagore's work is difficult to preserve in translation, the translators did a splendid job of producing a beautiful volume of selections from Tagore's vast body of writings. In the *Times Literary Supplement* (16.09.2011) Seamus Perry wrote that the

anthology testifies to Tagore's capability in many diverse modes, and reveals quite distinct aspects of his genius. In the magazine *Bookforum*, Aravind Adiga opined that the anthology reintroduced a great writer to the world. Amardeep Singh of *Open Letters Monthly* thought that *The Essential Tagore* "dwarfs all previous efforts" that were made to translate Tagore's work into English. Martha Nussbaum, an American philosopher, writer and scholar, proposed the book as the 'Book of the Year' in the *New Statesman* (November 21, 2011).

What makes *The Essential Tagore* exceptional from earlier, similar published works? In 1964 and 1966 Visva-Bharati published the anthologies *Boundless Sky* and *Tagore For You*. These anthologies included translations of poems, essays,



The Essential Tagore
Eds. Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakravarty
Harvard University Press, USA and Visva Bharati, Kolkata

addresses and others. In 1997, another anthology, *Rabindranath Tagore* edited by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, was published by Picador, London. But these anthologies are not as comprehensive as the present volume. For some reason or the other, these anthologies have not been able to create a significant readership, and remain without any edition or reprints. Lack of reception is also noticed about other translated works, including Tagore's. In the Introduction to *The Essential Tagore* the editors discuss these phenomena of Tagore translation over a hundred years' time, and justify the necessity of such an anthology in English. In sheer variety *The Essential Tagore* exceeds any of the earlier Tagore volumes. Again, the book's publication in India and the US facilitates its accessibility to readers worldwide.

But what was the necessity for the volume to have been so large, especially when most canonical writers in world literature are known by just a few of their writings? To talk of Germany's Goethe, for example, the work that comes to our mind is *Faust*. Similarly, we know Dante by his *Divine Comedy*, Tolstoy by *War and Peace*

or *Anna Karenina*, Coleridge by *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Keats by a few Odes, T. S Eliot by *The Waste Land* and so on. So why can Tagore not be found through a few of his most outstanding writings? Buddhadev Bose gave this answer in his essay "Rabindranath: Bishwa Kabi O Bangali" [Rabindranath: World Poet and Bangali]: 'Rabindranath is like the current of a river. One cannot pinpoint that this is Rabindranath.' Hence, so much versatile, variegated and dynamic is Tagore that it is difficult to judge him from a select few of his writings.

Yet the editors' judicious selections make the volume representative and comprehensive. It is divided into ten sections/genres, each preceding a brief overview of the particular genre. The first section signposts as "Autobiography" includes four autobiographical pieces two are from Tagore's own English [From *Talks in China* (1925) and from *The Modern Review*, (January, 1931)], and two are selected and translated from the Bengali works *Jibansmriti* (1912) and *Chhelebeli* (1940). These selected pieces provide a deep insight into Tagore's personal development as a man and as a writer. The second section is "Letters". Selections are from *Chinnopatra* (Torn Leaves), *Chinnapatrabali* and other sources. Letters written to Mahatma Gandhi, Romain Rolland, Sir William Rothenstein, Victoria Ocampo, Revd. Foss Westcott, Edward J Thompson, Charles Freer Andrews, Lord Chelmsford, Robert Bridges and some others (in Tagore's own English versions, mainly collected from the MS copy of Rabindra Bhaban Archives). These letters are the treasure trove of social commentary, self revelation, philosophical meditation, and literary creativity. The third section of the book, "Prose", includes a good number of essays among which some were originally in English by Tagore. The fourth and fifth sections comprise 150 poems and songs, a majority of which are translated by Fakrul Alam. Two plays, *Roktakarabi* and *The Kingdom of Cards (Tasher Desh)*, translated respectively by Rupendra Guha Majumder and Abhijit Sen, have been included in the sixth section, "Plays". Ten stories are included in the seventh section, "Stories". In the eighth section there are the four novels --- *Gora*, *Jogajog*, *Faerwell Songs (Shesher Kabita)* and *Car Adhya*. For reasons of space all are translated in parts but the stories flow in a manner that will give readers a fairly good idea about the whole. The ninth section is "Humour" and includes seven humorous pieces. The last section is "Travel Writing".

How is the quality of translation in *The Essential Tagore*? As already mentioned, Tagore's international reputation suffered a lot because of bad translations. However, the present anthology seems to have avoided many of the pitfalls of translation. Usually most anthological works of this kind suffer from uneven translation quality, because the translators engaged in the project do not possess the same competence or qualifications. *The Essential Tagore* does not suffer from such drawbacks. Another remarkable feature of the book is that all the translators (apart

from Tagore's own translations) have tried to preserve the local flavour of the originals by retaining many Bengali words as they are a post-colonial approach to translation. In the case of poetry/song translation the translators have shown unprecedented success. When I was reading the poem "The Golden Boat" (Shonar Tori) from Fakrul Alam's translation I instantly discovered that this translation is better than any of the earlier versions. The earlier translators of the poem include Tagore himself, Marian Maddern, Brother James, William Radice and Oneil Biswas. The poem 'Shonar Tori' in the original is highly symbolic and evocative in nature. One of the aspects is its gender ambiguity that in English translation is difficult to retain. The original line "dekhe jeno mone hoy chini uhare" poses serious difficulty in translation. While translating this line, however, all the earlier translators have specified the gender by using the pronoun 'he' or 'she', thus failing to preserve the nuance of the original. But to Fakrul Alam's credit, he has been able to tackle such a problem of translation and indeed preserves the original poem's nuances by avoiding the use of either 'he' or 'she'. Note the lines from his translation:

"Who's singing on the boat heading for the shore?
As I look on, I feel I've seen the face before
The boat speeds on but has no time to look around,
The hapless waves break up as they hit the ground
As I look on, I feel I have seen the face before."

Thus Alam's choice of words such as 'I've seen the face before' avoids identifying the gender, whether male or female. Again it is Fakrul Alam who has captured the beauty of Tagore's original verses more successfully than the earlier translators. The original poem has a distinctive rhyme pattern and is arranged metrically. This technical beauty of the poem has been reflected more adequately in Alam's translation. The above example shows rhymes that provide readers with the impression that the original poem is in rhyme. Not only poems and songs but also all the translated pieces of the book provide authentic and competent English translations. *The Essential Tagore*, therefore, is expected to represent Tagore more adequately and authentically than any of the earlier efforts. Sales figures for the book across the globe indicate its worldwide appeal.

The Essential Tagore can be a unique example of disseminating the greatness of our Bengali authors across the world. Good translations published by international publishers can work better. Though a great many works from Bengali literature have been published in English, most of these have remained out of focus because of two vital reasons, lack of good translations and good publishers. Therefore, government and private initiatives are necessary to disseminate the richness of Bengali literature globally.

DR. MD. ABU ZAFAR IS ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, JAGANNATH UNIVERSITY.

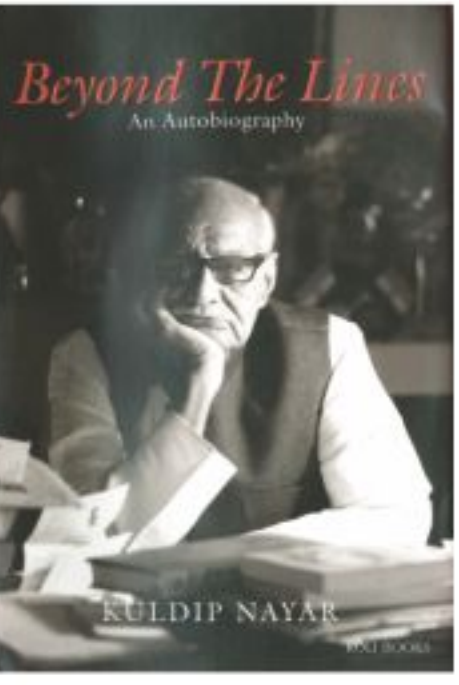
BOOK choice



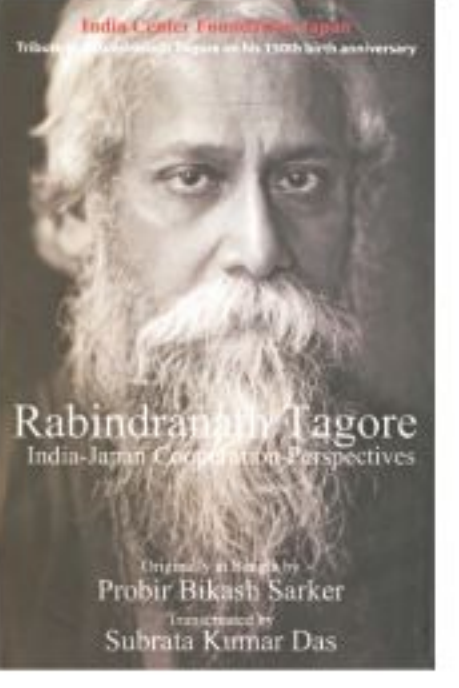
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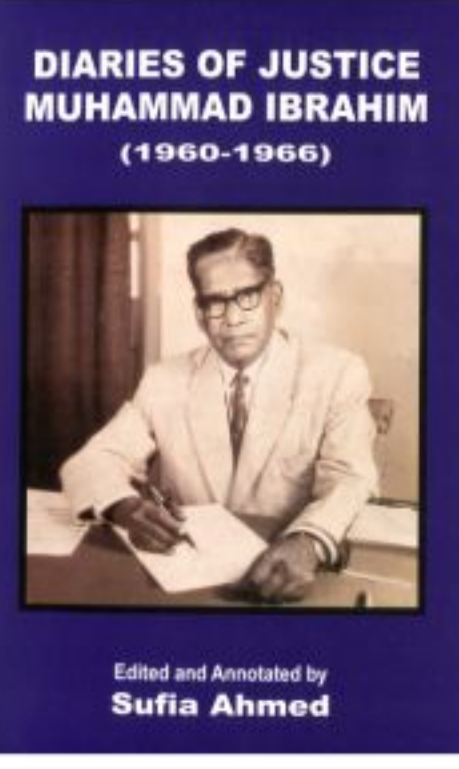
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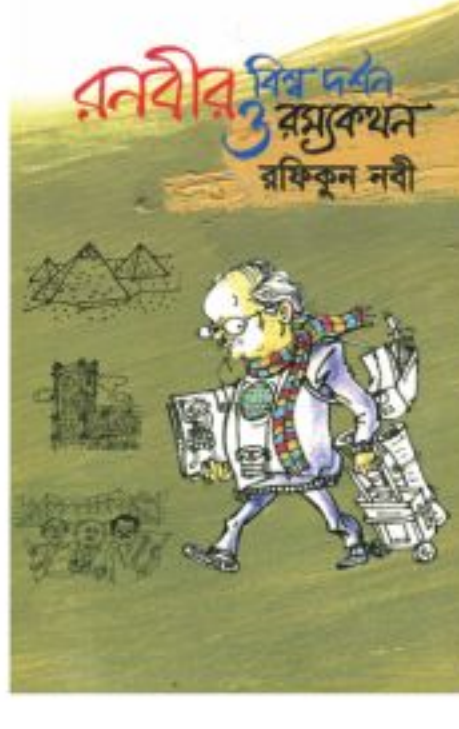
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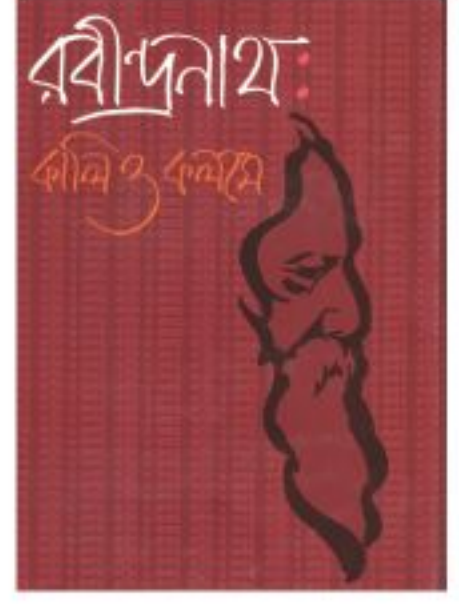
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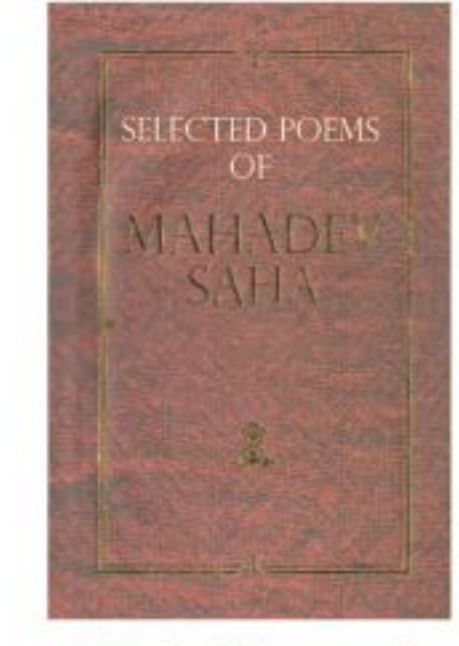
Diaries of Justice
Muhammad Ibrahim
(1960-1966)
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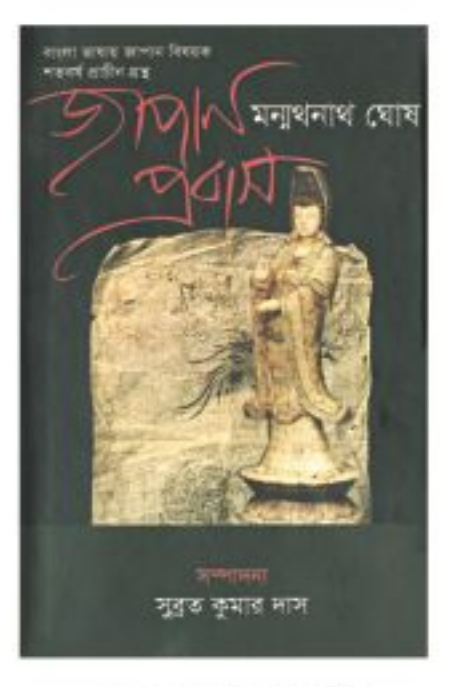
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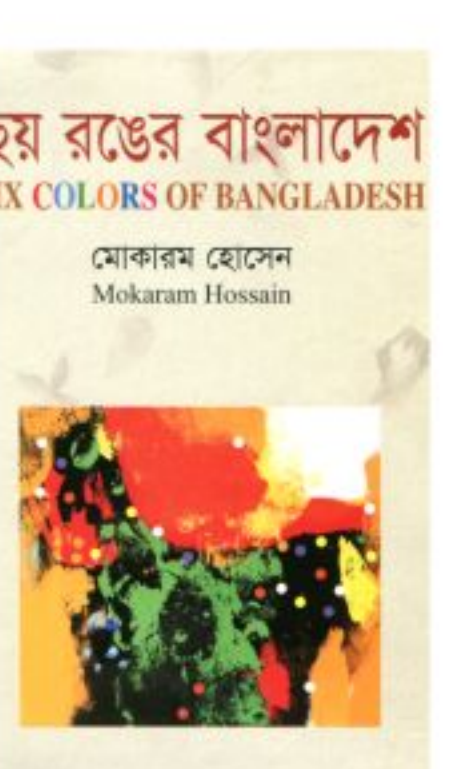
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Six Colors of Bangladesh
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Who's afraid of English?

Najma Khan is into nuances and meanings

This book was written to propound a new approach to addressing the problems faced by Bangladeshis in communicating in the English language. The author in his book has redefined English sentence structure in detail, naming it as "Parts of Sentence" and made a comparison with that of Bengali language to make our mother language the basis for learning English. Categorizing the "Parts of Speech" in three distinct groups, the author shows how each part of speech works in each part of sentence, thereby opening a new world of thoughts in English learning approach.

The author has claimed it as a "single structure bi-lingual learning approach" as against multi-structure in the traditional approach to learning English and suggested a Concept-Application-Drill sequence in applying his approach. He tries to justify his new approach in such a way that it incorporates a concept of comparative bi-lingual structure and a structural relation between Bengali and English. He uses "Bengali Sound Stress" technique to identify "Tense" and emphasizes using the auxiliary verb corresponding to the last sound of a Bengali sentence as an alternative to

HAIDER'S APPROACH TO QUICK ENGLISH LEARNING
হায়দার'স এপ্রোচ টু কুইক ইংলিশ লার্নিং (হায়েকস)

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By
Habibul Haider Chowdhury

HAIDER'S ACADEMIC RESEARCH
For the development of global education

Haider's Approach to Quick English Learning -
HAQEL
Habibul Haider Chowdhury
Community Development Library

thinking on Tense. The concept of "two syllable verb detection" has been introduced to easily separate auxiliary verb sound from the main verb sound contained in the Bangla last sound. A

chart for converting Bengali auxiliary verb sound (last sound) to English auxiliary verb was devised to ease the conversion process and named as 'Bangla to English Auxiliary Sound Conversion Chart (BEASCon Chart).' In the BEASCon Chart, the relation between auxiliary verb and main verb is also made clear. The simple structure is explained in a single format that is intended to reduce the burden of memorizing too many structures and suggested step by step structure building. A concept of "Predicate Reversing" focuses on an easier approach for translation that may be helpful for all levels from the students up to professional learners. The author's concept building process through the "bi-lingual Parts of Sentence" is an excellent learning technique and a sequential reading of his published book "HAQEL" may bring a radical change in English teaching methodology. The book needs further revisions to make it more understandable and capable to self study. However, the Author deserves a good commendation for this excellent basic research. This book becomes difficult for those who have a

preconception on traditionally used learning approach that conflicts in thinking and setting apart the long-rooted traditional ideas might be rather difficult. The technique so propounded although doubtful of completing in 42 hours (3 weeks) as claimed, however, seems to be an effective technique for all levels of learners and deserve recognition for application in both formal and non-formal education. Bangladesh is in a crisis position in communicative English and as a result, we are suffering badly in global communication. Many authors have so far been trying for years to solve this problem. They devised techniques and applied but outcome is insignificant against the requirements. This new approach may be applied to train up our school teachers to give a strong foundation to academic English learning. Our government should come up with priority to test all these innovations and give necessary support to meet up this national burning crisis. I welcome comments on this book by the readers who have already gone through this book.

NAJMA KHAN TEACHES ENGLISH.