

HAY FESTIVAL DHAKA

CELLULOID POETRY

Challenge and opportunity for Bangla Academy

ASRAR CHOWDHURY

By 2030, more people in India will be reading English fiction and non-fiction than in Europe and North America. This population is estimated to be 500 million (half a billion). It is no wonder Western publishers are making book launches more and more in India these days. India is where an emerging English fiction and non-fiction reading market lies. More and more words, phrases and caricatures of South Asian origin are entering English literature. With a wave of freshness and originality, authors of Indian origin have changed the landscape of English literature and created a new wave and genre totally of their own. This genre is different because the Soul of South Asia is different --- rich in variety, deep in history and tradition.

Writers from Bangladesh and of Bangladeshi origin have a bright prospect to exploit this emerging market. Bangladesh and India share more than one common heritage. From a different spectrum, Bangladesh, West Bengal and Tripura are historically bonded together through the Bangla language. And thus share a bondage that transcends artificial political boundaries. Writers from Bangladesh and of Bangladeshi origin have a wonderful prospect to exploit an emerging and booming English fiction and non-fiction market in India first and then in South Asia. The recently concluded Hay Festival in Dhaka is a door of opportunity for Bangladeshi writers and writers of Bangladeshi origin. Bangla Academy being the host of the Hay Festival this year has created a basis for making this opportunity more than a reality.

Created in 1955, from the Language Movement of 1952, Bangla Academy has been a torchbearer of the Bangla language and the spirit of the Bangladeshi people for more than half a century. With original research, the academy has contributed in making Bangla move forward. With the Ekushey February Boi Mela, every year Bangla Academy injects a breath of life to the book publishing industry in Bangladesh. However, with the world moving on, and the world becoming more and more inter-connected, Bangla Academy is now faced with a new challenge --- to take Bangla literature and the writings of Bangladeshi authors to a wider global audience.

If Bangladeshi writers and writers of Bangladeshi origin want to exploit a global market, and an emerging market for English fiction and non-fiction in India and South Asia, then they need to adapt with the changing times and tide of a more inter-connected global audience. Adapting does not mean selling out or embracing all that is foreign. Rather it means keeping true to one's tradition,

history, culture and heritage. And by doing so, Bangladeshi writers can present themselves and Bangladesh to a wider audience.

Orhan Pamuk and Paulo Coelho, to name only two, write in their own languages. They present a tradition of mastery of story telling that is unique to their native countries, Turkey and Brazil. Today English is not only a language. It is also a tool for communication. Through well translated transliterations, the Turkish and Brazilian Souls have moved away from the political boundaries of Pamuk and Coelho's native countries and reached households around the globe. Pamuk and Coelho are household names in Bangladesh like any other country of the world. This has been possible due to their genius and also transliteration of their works.

The Soviet Union and the ideals of socialism

is a state institute that has proudly stood the test of time. By creating a pool of good translators, Bangla Academy holds the key to enabling Bangladeshi writers write in their own language with the flair of a heritage that is older and richer than those of many other cultures, and to present themselves and represent Bangla and Bangladesh to a global audience.

The Hay Festival in Dhaka, 2012, raises two vital questions and opportunities that have been revealed. First: Bangladesh shares a common heritage with India and South Asia, and even more with West Bengal and Tripura. As Bangladesh argues for India to open its markets to Bangladeshi goods, it may well be fruitful to think of opening access to intellectual products of Bangladeshi writers. This will create an opportunity for Bangladeshi



have collapsed for reasons that will remain the subject of debate for a long time to come. When socialism was alive and very much vibrant, Progress Publishers (Progoti in Bangla), a state agency, was instrumental in disseminating the masterpieces of Russian literature to the world. The Russian litterateurs wrote in their own language, expressing the Soul of their people, culture and heritage. Through well done transliterations, their works became a part of a global heritage and known outside the boundaries of the Soviet Union.

Besides being a torchbearer of the Soul of Bangla literature, and a proud patron to the book publishing industry in Bangladesh, the Hay Festival has put Bangla Academy in a wonderful position to take the works of Bangladeshi writers and writers of Bangladeshi origin to a wider global audience through their works in Bangla or in English. Bangla Academy

writers and writers of Bangladeshi origin to exploit an emerging and booming books market in India and South Asia. Second: Bangla Academy stands at a crossroads. Through transliteration of the works of Bangladeshi writers, Bangla Academy can take its role as a torchbearer of Bangla literature to South Asia and to even wider audiences across the globe. There is no doubt Bangla Academy has the intellectual resources and institutional capacity to perform this role. History bears testimony to that. The question for time to unravel is: does Bangla Academy have the passion and the pride to take Bangla and Bangladesh to a global audience? The nation will not want to be proved wrong.

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An allegory of optimism and simplicity

AFSANA TAZREEN

Take a moment to imagine the world from the point of view of a deaf-mute person. For those of us who are blessed with the ability to hear and speak, imagining ourselves being silent in a silent world is not an easy task. Very few of us comprehend how blessed we are to possess those abilities and even fewer of us refrain from complaining about our almost perfect lives. It is simply because we take those abilities for granted and forget to be grateful.

Recently I happened to stumble upon "Barfi", an Indian sentimental romantic comedy. Not a fan of mainstream Bollywood films, I was slightly hesitant to watch it. Nevertheless, in spite of myself, I got drawn into the story within the first 10 minutes. Written and directed by film maker Anurag Basu, the story revolves around a young man with impaired speech and hearing.

Barfi (Ranbir Kapoor) has always known his world as a quiet place. However, instead of being depressed, the ever-optimistic dreamer is always happy, carefree and knee-deep in pranks. He views the world around him like a silent film of Chaplin-esque fun in which the characters go about their business unaware of a silent spectator watching them, with an impish grin on his face. Kapoor uses just the right amount of old-school comedy to cement the fact that his character's handicap does not bother him.

Born into a poor, yet loving, family in Darjeeling, Barfi loses his mother right after his birth. Though his parents name him Murphy (smitten by their radio's brand), the boy, in a cruel twist of fate, is deaf-mute. He pronounces his name Barfi (popsickle) which sticks to him till the very end. It is the only word he can say.

Quite a charmer, his bittersweet relationship with Shruti (Ileana D'cruz) and his unpretentious friendship with Jhilmil (Priyanka Chopra) set in motion a turntable of events that eventually throw him off the course of his familiar life. The alchemy between Barfi and Jhilmil, an autistic girl with cold-hearted parents, is particularly heart-rending.

The movie, told mostly without dialogue, winds in and out of three separate timeframes. Barfi unmistakably reminds us of Charlie Chaplin and Raj Kapoor (Ranbir's grandfather). The film which will be sent as the Best Foreign Language Film nomination for the 85th Academy Awards in February 2013 has award-winning performances.

Ranbir is definitely a contender for best actor and Priyanka needs to be commended for shedding her vanity to portray her character of an autistic girl, though at times it seemed that she was trying too hard. Ileana plays the conflicted character of Shruti with solemn elegance.

Set against the backdrop of a picturesque Darjeeling, the movie soothes and teases your senses at the same time. The lush tea plantations, quaint narrow-gauge trains and mist-shrouded hills of the sleepy town are captured by cinematographer Ravi Varman so skillfully that you would almost want to plan a trip there.

The refreshing background score by Pritam is captivating enough to transport you into Barfi's world of simplicity and love. Reflect on the sheer beauty of the following lines of a song written by Swanand Kirkire:

Khamoshi ki loriyaan/ Sun toh raat so gayi/Bin kahe bin sunay, baat ho teri meri/Ankahee si gufigul/ Ansunee si justaju/Bin kahe bin sunay, Apni baat ho gayi...

A pleasantly different film, "Barfi" works so well because of its simplicity. It does not try to perform miracles or look for cures. Instead, it merely observes a man's acceptance of who he is and the way he loves his life despite the many obstacles he encounters.

A brilliant allegory of optimism and simplicity, the movie reminds us that no matter how tough our lives may be we can always strive to be better people. After all is said and done, one thing is for certain, the feel-good movie will surely leave you with a smile.

AFSANA TAZREEN, MOVIE AND LITERARY BUFF, IS WITH THE DAILY STAR.

REFLECTIONS

Fakrul Alam: A pupil's tribute

JUNAIDUL HAQUE

Fakrul Alam (notice the missing h) is the youngest of the trio that also includes Syed Manzoorul Islam and Kaiser Haq. They have been friends for more than four decades. They are almost of the same age. They are the most creative among our teachers who are still active. Even readers expect me to write simultaneously on all three of them. This time I have a powerful reason. I remembered Syed Manzoorul Islam and Kaiser Haq when they reached sixty in January 2010. Then a few readers enquired, 'What about Dr. Fakrul Alam?' I assured them that I would write on him when he reached sixty in July 2011. I am sorry that I am a little late in keeping my promise.

Fakrul Alam was not a known name when we discovered him as a young lecturer when we were sophomores in the Department of English, University of Dhaka, in 1975. Syed Manzoorul Islam was known to me as an essayist even then. Kaiser Haq was my boyhood hero at St. Gregory's High School. I proudly remember that Manzoor Sir recognized me even during my admission viva! I felt so happy! I had regularly contributed to the Young Observer page as a school and college boy. I guess I was more famous as a teenaged writer than I am now! We first saw Fakrul Alam after our admission. He was Kaiser Haq's classmate and best friend. Very soon we felt that all three of them were our favourite teachers. All three were liked equally by us.

Dr. Fakrul Alam is an outstanding academic now. A friendly teacher like him is rare. I enjoyed a lot doing tutorials with him. He was a very affectionate teacher. He was very fond of his students. My friend Farhad Bani Idris and myself got a lot of affection from him. Farhad later joined the department as a teacher. Now he teaches at Frostburg State University, Maryland. A handsome person like Fakrul Sir has reached sixty too! He was so friendly that we never considered him an elder. No wonder he looks younger than us these days. He swims

and plays tennis. He is a little shy but is always ready to fight for a just cause. His moral strength inspired us. He was a sportsman and loved to talk sports with us.

A well-known scholar, Fakrul Alam is our internationally known translator. He enjoys translating Rabindranath Tagore and Jibanananda Das. He is perhaps the best translator of Jibanananda Das in our land. He is a very capable editor. Read a number of his *Six Seasons' Review* and find it out for yourself. Recently *The Essential Tagore*, jointly edited by him and Radha Chakravarty, took the literary world of Calcutta and Dhaka by storm. It is the best anthology of Tagore I have ever seen. English translations of Tagore's songs, poems, short stories, novels, plays and letters by the best translators of India and Bangladesh. A wonderful book of 819 excellent pages one can leave for one's grandchildren. It was published jointly from Harvard and London on Tagore's 150th anniversary of birth. *Politics and Culture: Essays in Honour of Serajul Islam Chowdhury* is an excellent anthology on the life and works of the legendary professor-writer, jointly edited by Prof. Alam and Prof. Firdous Azim and published in 2002. Fakrul Sir has edited a few other important books too. We can also mention here his *Dictionary of Literary Biography: South Asian Writers in English*. It was published by Thomson Gale, Detroit, in 2006.

Fakrul Alam had his education at St. Joseph's High School, Notre Dame College and the Department of English, University of Dhaka. He belonged to the 1973 batch of M.A. but the examination was held in 1975. He taught us during the second half of the seventies and the very early eighties. Later he went to Canada for his Ph D from the University of British Columbia in 1984. His dissertation was 'Daniel Defoe and Colonial Propaganda' and his supervisor was Professor Ian Ross. Earlier he did another M.A. from Simon Fraser University in Canada and the dissertation was 'The City in Melville's Fiction'. This time he was supervised

by Professor Robin Blaser. He returned to teach at the Dhaka University from October 1984. He was a Fulbright Scholar and Visiting Associate Professor at Clemson University in 1989-1991. He became chairman of the English Department from October 1994 for three years. He taught as a Visiting Professor at Jadavpur University in early 1996. He was Dean of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences and Professor, Department of English, at East West University during September 2004 - September 2006. He was Visiting Professor at Viswa Bharati in January 2011.

Among Fakrul Alam's published books, mention must be made of at least three. *Imperial Entanglements and Literature in English* was published in 2007 by Writer's Ink, Dhaka. *Jibanananda Das: Selected Poems* was published by University Press Limited, Dhaka in 1999. Nobody translated Jibanananda Das better than him in this part of the world. *Daniel Defoe: Colonial Propagandist* was published by University of Dhaka Publications in 1989. He has also written on Rabindranath Tagore, R K Narayan, V S Naipaul, Edward Said and Bharati Mukherjee. He has received a lot of honours and professional awards. He was Jury Member of Commonwealth Writer's Prize for 2003 (Eurasia region).

Fakrul Alam has always been a sincere, hard-working academic. Very popular with students and colleagues, he has been an excellent essayist, editor and translator. His works have been widely appreciated at home and abroad.

What has kept Fakrul Sir so young? He must be the youngest looking sixty-year-old in Dhaka! Only controlled food habits and physical exercise? A loving wife in Nazma Apa? He smiles and adds, 'Spending your day with young people helps, you know'. His bright students have also kept him young and handsome. His sisters dote on their only brother. Old students like me have also remembered him all these years with great respect and affection.

JUNAIDUL HAQUE WRITES FICTION AND ESSAYS.

REPORT

Vikram Seth speaks at IUB

Renowned author and poet Vikram Seth delivered a talk at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) on Sunday, 18 November 2012 at its permanent campus at Bashundhara, Dhaka. Prof. Razia S Khan delivered the introductory speech and welcomed everyone to the talk where she introduced the author. Among others, Towhid Samad, Chairman, Board of Trustees, IUB and Prof M Omar Rahman, Vice Chancellor, spoke on the occasion.

They also presented the IUB sash to the honourable speaker and announced him as the IUB's Scholar in Residence for the year 2012.

In his lecture, Vikram Seth mentioned his appreciation of the physical geography of Bangladesh and noted that he had been overwhelmed by the hospitality of the people here. He also mentioned that secularism was the essence of humanity. Later he read from his writings and answered questions from the audience. The noted author said that he did not have any feeling of being uprooted. Inspiration had been a moving force in his writings.

Prof Niaz Zaman delivered the formal vote of thanks. The programme was conducted by Sayyeda Tun Noor Sameera, a senior at the university.

It was a good audience, including participating writers of the Hay Festival, members of the faculty and students of IUB, who enjoyed the talk of the author.



Photo Caption: Renowned Indian author and poet Vikram Seth delivering a talk at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).