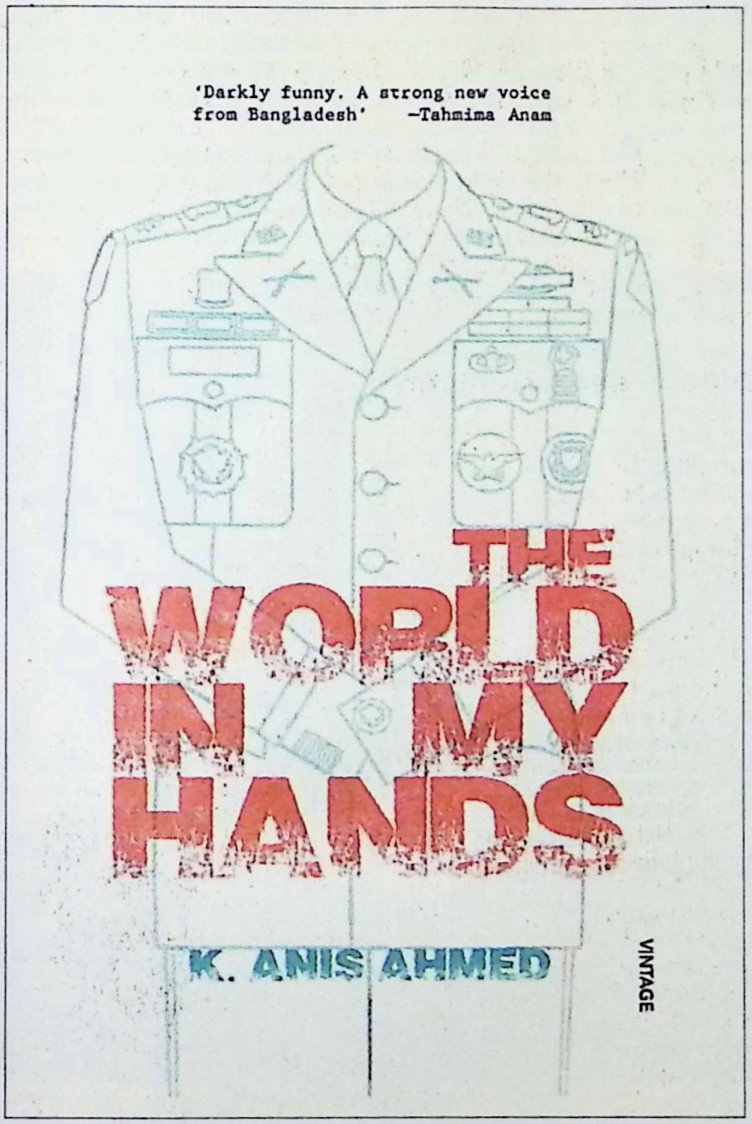


cultural literary exchange through translating each other's literature and also the dearth of Bangladeshi writers who write in English.

The conversation reinforced the fact that we, the readers, need to consider literature as an extensive social institution which incorporates history, anthropology, politics, and economics of a society. Literature can be a means which could possibly bridge the gap between different cultures and reach a universal culture. Translating our literary pieces into other languages can be one way to popularize our work among the book buffs around the world. At the same time, Ahmed mentioned the need for translating books from other languages into Bengali as well, as it will help Bangladeshi readers go beyond the border.

"We do need to do translations and I am involved with this new initiative called Dhaka Translation Centre headed by Kaiser Haq who is one of the leading contemporary poets writing in English", he opines. "We intend to translate 2 to 4 more books next year."

"I think this cross-cultural exchange is one of the few things we have lost during the last two decades," he argues. Drawing a comparison between the scene of world literature and Bangladeshi literature, he comments that we have neither adequate state funding nor a supportive private sector that could give extensive patronage to the arts.

In his conversation, Ahmed reiterated the fact that we need to improve our reading habit and build up a whole new generation of readers. He believes both the writers and readers need to do their respective part to do so.

"The greatest gift that Tagore has left to us is the modernization of language," Ahmed says. "He brought it very close to *mukher bhasha* especially if you see his final poems. Why are we, the writers not doing something close to that now where people could recognize themselves in the narratives?" he questions. At the same time, he recounted the importance of brushing our reading habit more and more, especially by incorporating more novels into our educational curriculum.

Anis Ahmed is one of those few English writers in Bangladesh who completed his 12 years of education in Bengali. He later completed his higher education from Brown University, Washington University and New York University before returning to Bangladesh in 2004.

"I am equally comfortable in both Bengali and English", Ahmed comments. "In fact I have written quite a few non-fiction pieces in Bengali. However, when it comes to writing fiction I find it much easier to write in English."

Ahmed has been writing for the past 20 years. His first book of short stories, *Good Night, Mr. Kissinger*, was published in November 2012. His first published story, "Forty Steps," appeared in the Minnesota Review (Spring 2000), alongside pieces by Carlos Fuentes and William Gass, and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. It was translated into Bengali as "Chollish Kadam" by Manabendra Bandyopadhyay in 2006.He is also a co-founder of Bengal Lights, Bangladesh's most prominent new English literary journal. ■