

21st Century High Politics in the Indo-Pacific and the Bay of Bengal

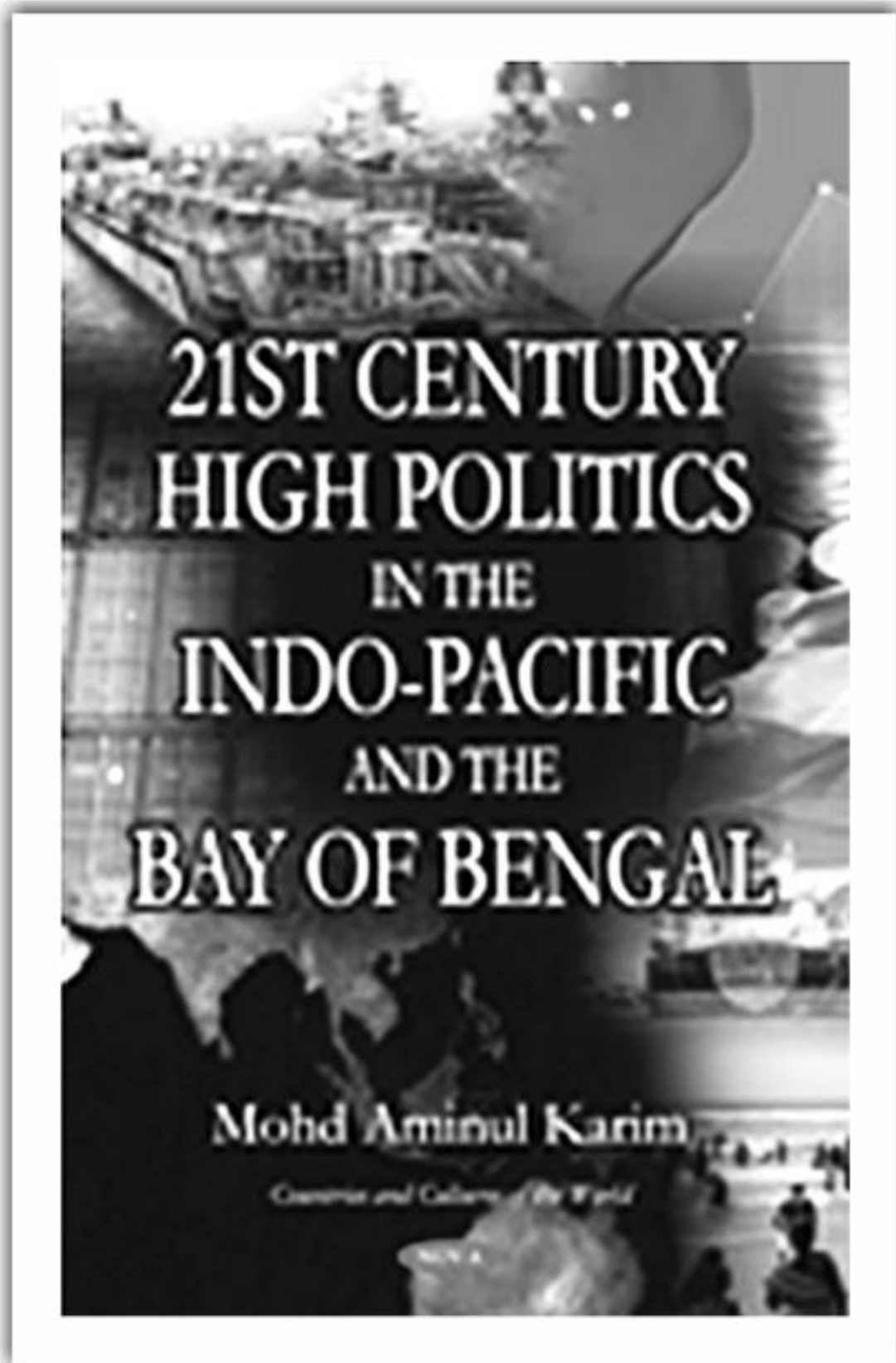
REVIEWED BY REZAUL HAQUE

Mohd Aminul Karim, Nova Science Publishers, Inc, New York, 2017, ISBN: 978-1-53610-881-1

A post-cold war international economic and political order is still unfolding and has been witnessing concerted attempts by traditional and emerging global and regional powers to reshape geopolitics across the globe and dictate international relations. Relatively smaller nation-states are also endeavoring to rediscover their potentials, redefine their roles and reassert their importance in the global stage. The primary purpose of these attempts by every nation, big or small, is to sustain its economic development and have it cushioned by a firm security environment. The shifting balance of power and geo-political reconfigurations will undoubtedly have a far-reaching impact on 21st century global politics and economics. Obviously, this has become a 'hot topic' for academic discourse.

Mohd Aminul Karim's 21st Century High Politics in the Indo-Pacific and the Bay of Bengal is a successful attempt to bring to the fore the importance of the countries of the Asia-Pacific and Bay of Bengal regions and the maritime communication network of these regions in advancing global economic development and political stability. An analysis through regional economic cooperation and strategic and security collaboration of the prospects of accelerated economic growth and the social development of the Indo-Pacific and Bay of Bengal region countries, including Bangladesh, has been provided in the book.

Although this aspect of the book has not been explicitly captured in its title, it focuses more on the economics, in particular commerce and international trade, of the nations of the Indo-Pacific region than politics *per se*. The work is a unique mesh of cutting-edge concepts, emerging



political realities and unfolding economic potentials encapsulated into an innovative strategic direction for countries of the region to consider for furtherance of their economic development and national security. Lt. General (ret.) Karim has aptly argued for the importance

and relevance of application of some traditional and modern concepts, strategies and theories, which are infrequently used in political and economic literature, for a prudent analysis of geopolitics.

Having clarified the concepts of region and sub-region and relevant theoretical issues in chapters 1, 2 and 3 of the book, Karim turns to deal with current and emerging compulsions, medium and long-term economic goals and the political ambitions of various powers, primarily USA, China and India within the Indo-Pacific and Bay of Bengal regions in chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 4 focuses on perhaps the most important initiative of this era—the attempt through China's leadership to integrate Asian economies with Africa and Europe – the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). To his credit, Karim has dedicated all of chapter 7 to Bangladesh, outlining in it its maritime strategy and potential to leverage the 'blue economy' of Bay of Bengal region to its benefit. In doing so, he has rightly elevated Bangladesh's position in the regional and in global arenas.

In chapters 8 & 9 the author presents an in-depth analysis of the long-term interests and objectives of major powers like USA, China, Japan, India and Australia of the Indo-Pacific and Bay of Bengal regions, and of they have reoriented their foreign policies to respond to their emerging geo-strategic interests. Of particular interest is Professor Karim's analysis of how the relatively smaller powers of the Indo-Pacific region such as Pakistan, Myanmar, Vietnam, Bangladesh and others are maneuvering within emerging complex geopolitical alignments to pursue their respective economic and political goals. The significance of

Pakistani-Chinese strategic relations and the acrimonious state of China-India relations has been well amplified in the discussion on the emerging features of the Indo-Pacific region.

The book pinpoints US interests in the stability of the Indo-Pacific region and the safety of its sea-lanes, highlighting in the process the importance of the Strait of Malacca through which twenty-five percent of world's traded goods and sea-borne oil passes. Powerful global players like the USA, China and Japan have also found a new frontier in South China Sea to demonstrate their kind of '21st century high politics'. Dr. Karim explains in his book why and how this game of power politics can potentially destabilize regional and global security arrangements and adversely affect the economic and social development of nations.

Karim's work is a significant and a novel addition to the existing body of knowledge about the rapidly growing importance and contribution of the Indo-Pacific and Bay of Bengal regions to the global economy and security of nations. 21st Century High Politics in the Indo-Pacific and the Bay of Bengal can, indeed, serve as a valuable resource book for both students and instructors of advanced International Relations and Political Science. Academics; researchers, political scientists and journalist covering regional and global politics will surely benefit immensely from the analysis and conclusions presented in the book. Foreign policy strategists and national-level politicians will also be able to draw on the information and analyses in the book in formulating their policies.

The reviewer is an Adjunct Faculty at Independent University, Bangladesh, Dhaka



MUSINGS

Coleridge: Stories of Betrayal, Pain and Misunderstanding

YASIF AHMAD FAYSAL

Sometime in 1797 something magical happened in English literature. Two poets, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge by name, went out for a long walk across the countryside of England, hoping to bring about revolutionary changes in poetry. They had then and later many rounds of deep and animated conversation. They vowed to work together. Their collaborative work became famous as the *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection of poems. These two men were at the vanguard of the English Romantic Movement. Throughout history they have been seen as 'friends.'

As Dorothy Wordsworth (sister of William) recalled, the ardor of excitement that Coleridge brought to this friendship was amazing. Dorothy remembered that on his first meeting with the Wordsworths, Coleridge ran down the road, climbed a field and landed up in their cottage—an act that surprised agreeably the otherwise equable and meditative Wordsworth. What really struck them was that a man with such a waif-like appearance and adenoidal expression (thick lips, noisy breathing) could have eyes that would move and roll, as if, in frenzy, and could win anyone that they came across, with their dreamy far-away expression. Wordsworth, so to speak, fell in love with the man right away.

Love, of course, has always a fairytale dimension to it in the beginning. Everything is so amazing when one is in love; it feels as easy as it is smooth going downhill. Unfortunately, however, people in love soon face critical situations that test the steel of that love. Only in fairytales, as we all know, the ending is always good.

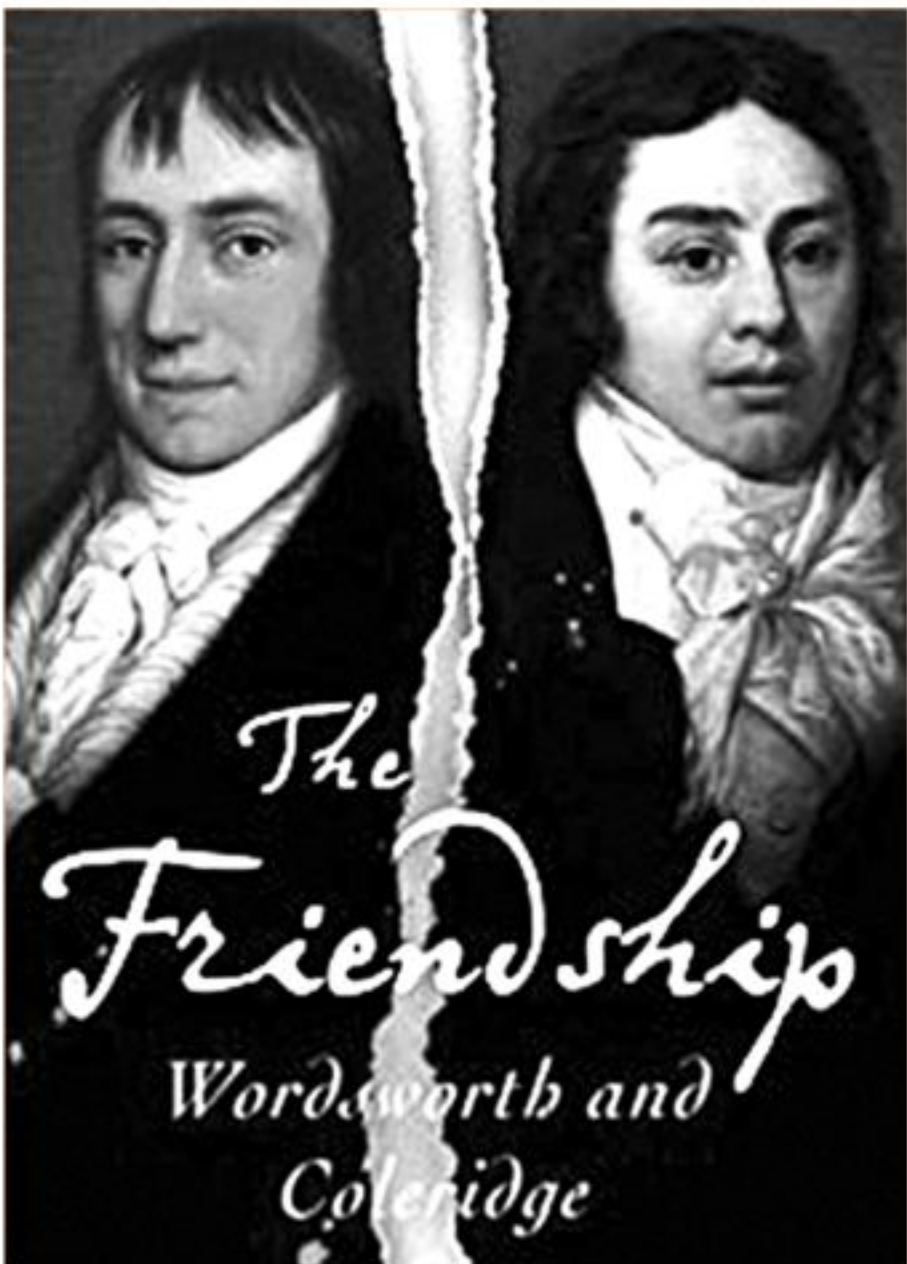
But did the relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge develop like the ones in fairytales? Quite the opposite, in fact.

When Coleridge died in 1834, Wordsworth was still alive; he still had 16 more years of his life to live. He penned the following lines in eulogizing his late friend: "Nor has the rolling year twice measured, / from sign to sign, its steadfast course, / Since every mortal power of Coleridge / Was frozen at its marvelous source." But these lines are nowhere close to telling us the fact that for the last three decades previously the two friends had lived in estrangement from each other. Indeed, for more than a decade they had even stopped visiting each other. *Lyrical Ballads*, that brainchild of their friendship, was by this time a monument of a fuzzy past. There were a lot of promises made around this collaborative work and most of them had been delivered; all of them, however, had become irrelevant by this time as far as the friendship was concerned.

Even after the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* had come out in 1798, signs of strain in their friendship were evident. In the second edition, Wordsworth refused to include Coleridge's *Christabel*. He even altered and modified some of Coleridge's poem without informing the poet. Coleridge was deeply hurt. The contrasts in their poetic natures were becoming too obvious to be ignored: Coleridge believed in the creative power

of the poet, while Wordsworth subscribed to a kind of Pantheism. That was clearly a recipe for conflict. The friendship soon was on the line.

What did not help the matter was some of the provocative comments Wordsworth made in their circle of common friends. Comments such as Coleridge was too "metaphysical" or too "self-obsessed." He had even gone out of his way in a letter to Montagu to confide that Coleridge was a "drunkard" and a "liability". That was something less than what one expects from a great poet and not quite what one expected from the man who had shown great sympathy for common people and ordinary lives. Coleridge undoubtedly had some problems—his marriage, addiction, and coxcombical adoration of creative people. But they were not the causes of the main problem he was facing; they were rather, as pioneering biographers have pointed out, symptoms of things going fundamentally amiss with his life. But Wordsworth was found wanting in time and interest in understanding them.



Any friend of Coleridge knew that 'precocity' was the right term to define the kind of man that Coleridge was. He knew a lot, read a lot and promised much. He was a "library-cormorant," as he said of himself. It was a privilege to listen to him preaching. His voice "rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes," Hazlitt once observed. He was a prodigy to men; yet, he was such a sorry sight. His life was a series of incomplete projects; he seemed caught in limbo, and his was a life punctuated by betrayals of people he wanted to latch on to for security.

Things like these happen when you are, as any psychologist will confirm, unsure of what your abilities are. Coleridge certainly had a history of struggle with his poetic Muse. This struggle is of seminal importance in understanding the root of

his troubles in life. Throughout his life he kept switching to new things, going to new places, looking for new people to interact with; there was a risk of failure in these ventures but it was a risk worth taking for him; he sought relief from pain at any cost.

It was too much for Coleridge to confront the reality that his creative power was on the wane, the kind of power that he saw in abundance in the likes of Wordsworth, Southey or Lamb was not his any more. He hardly could bear to watch his creativity slowly but surely drain out of his life, leaving him to dally with dull and dreary metaphysics. The wound was deep and he always ran after artistic or other gimmicks to paper it over. But he also needed narcotics to help him along.

This story of his addiction is as infamous as the story of his reverencing 'superior' figures. The vacuum made by the gradual dwindling away of creativity forced him into a continuous, often pathological, search for tutelary figures who would work as buffer between the poet and the harsh world outside.

The problems of Coleridge's life somehow found a way into his art. The failure to get the co-ordinates right between his life and work is the prime reason why Coleridge, the man and poet, is an enduring mystery for us as he was for Wordsworth, his great contemporary and 'friend.'

The whole point of our discussion is neither to advertise the excellence of Coleridge as a poet nor to re-calibrate his place in the pedigree of the celebrated Romantics. The point is that when we have occasion to talk about imagination as a potent human faculty, we also need to be aware that factors such as the 'background' and the 'mental composure' of the poet also warrant attention in relation to the exercise of imagination. Coleridge is perhaps a great example of literary misinterpretation that follows when a poet is fatally wrenched from his intensely lived experience.

Unlike Wordsworth, Coleridge did not subscribe to the opinion that imagination is necessarily joyful. Too many things are at stake in our mental life for our imagination to keep discovering grace and beauty everywhere. Crises in life, big or small, find introjections into our psyche, often with the effect of benumbing its natural function. Creative writers are known to experience this phenomenon. No wonder that it was Coleridge himself who coined the term 'psychosomatic,' and not some scientist. And it is very fitting that Coleridge, as he experienced the mood of dejection slowly taking over and a long squally night weathering out, has the following lines to say--

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
In word, or sigh, or tear—

Yasif Ahmad Faysal teaches in the Department of English at Barisal University.

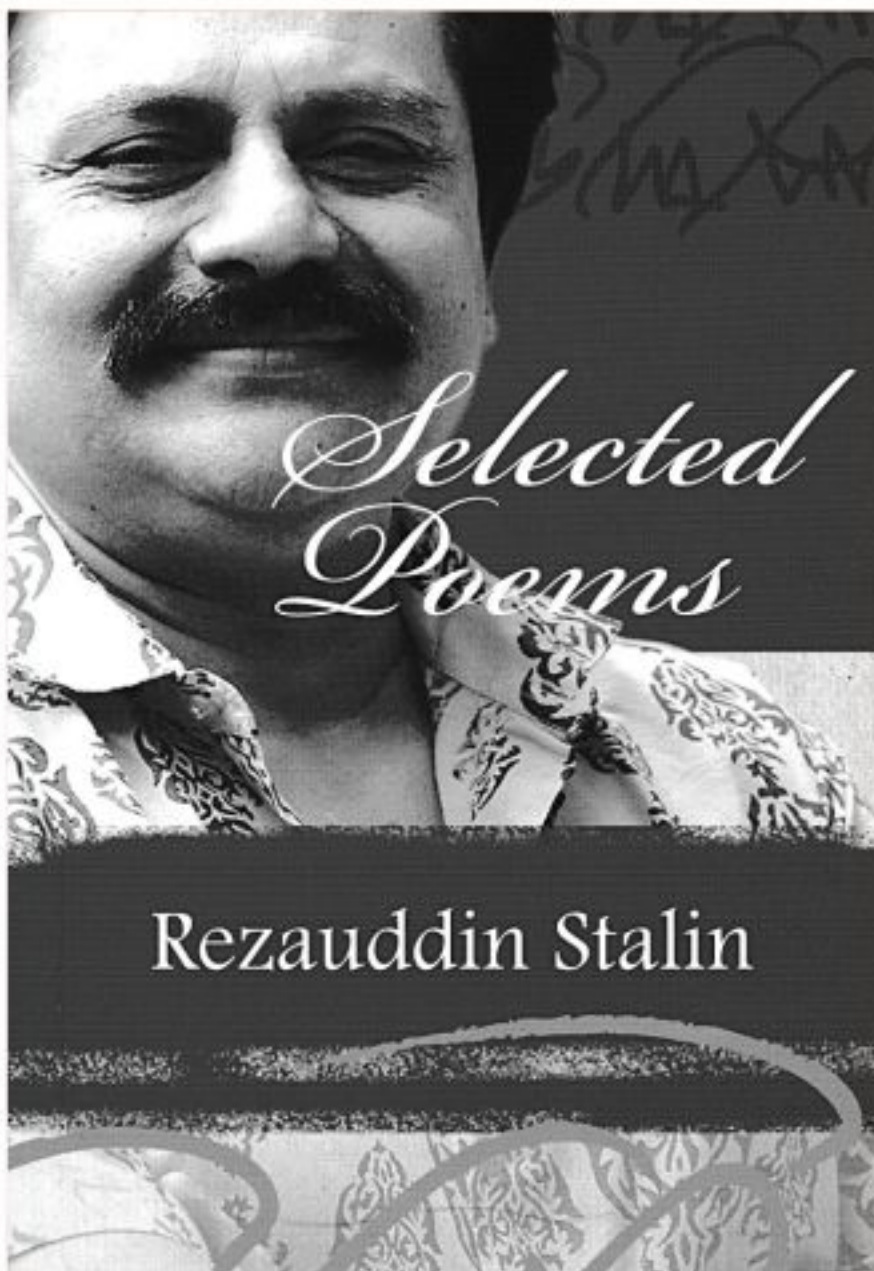


THUMBNAIL REVIEW

Sense of Poetic Essence

BINOY BARMAN

Selected Poems, Rezauddin Stalin, Kureghor Prokashoni, 2017
ISBN 978-984-92095-4-6



The sublime use of language can be best met in poetry which holds an intrinsic kinship with aesthetics. Poets play with words delicately to create poetic essences and readers extract some sense from them. The whole business of poetry is in fact an aesthetic game.

Rezauddin Stalin is a very good player of such aesthetic game. A voice from the eighties in the Bengali literary scene, Stalin has proved his poetic genius through more than thirty books of poetry. He is modernist in expression, careful in diction and arrangement of lines, and able to exert an impact on the mind of readers. His poetic techniques function at the emotional as well as cognitive level. His poems are replete with mythical allusions; he often weaves tales with words through a mixture of truth and fiction. His verse reflects his social sensibility and hence it never seems to be congruent with 'art for art sake'.

Stalin has published his *Selected Poems* recently. This collection contains 69 poems translated from his published books of poetry by Zakeria Shirazi, Gulshan Ara Kazi and Helal Uddin Ahmed. Zakeria Shirazi has also written an introduction to the book, highlighting the salient features of Stalin's poetry.

No translation can be completely faithful to the original. Poetry, in particular, is often considered 'untranslatable' due to the load of hidden associative meaning of words deployed in poems. However, all through translators of *Selected Poems* have tried to keep close to the form and meaning of the original. Rendered in a new shape, the poems may even prove attractive to readers. Certainly, they will introduce them to an important voice that has been heard for some time now in Bangladeshi poetry.

Binoy Barman is the Director, Daffodil Institute of Languages (DIL), and Associate Professor, Department of English, Daffodil International University.