

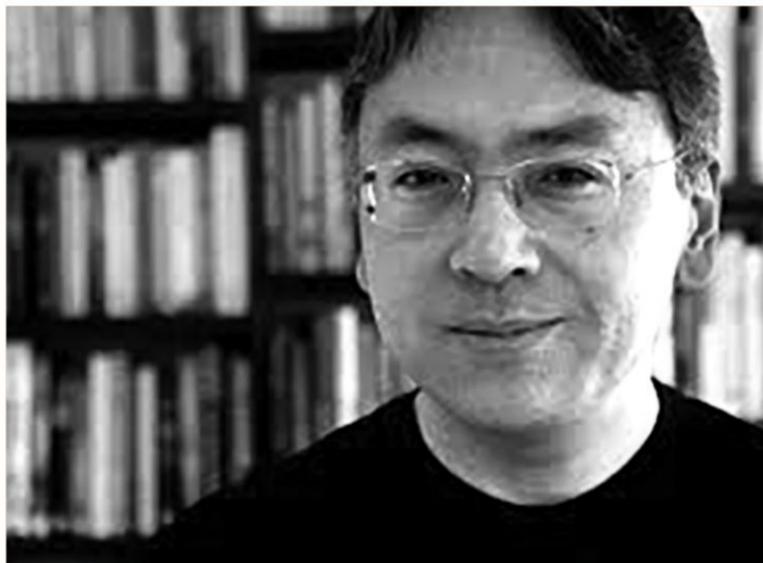
THE 2017 NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE WINNER

Kazuo Ishiguro's Craft of Recreating Memory and Forgetfulness

SOHANA MANZOOR

That Kazuo Ishiguro was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature this year is significant for various reasons. The declaration of Bob Dylan's name as the 2016 Nobel Prize winner in literature had caused much controversy and some people across the world had become not a little concerned about the criteria set by the academy to chose the winner in this category. Judging by the entail response, however, one feels that Ishiguro is the right choice for almost all serious readers and artists. Known as "Ish" to his friends and acquaintances, Ishiguro is loved and admired by many readers and critics the world over. Blending profound insights into history and social awareness with impeccable craftsmanship, Ishiguro is quite unique as a writer. While his focus is on the present, he works through the ambivalent process of making memories, forgetfulness and remembering, followed by a sense of haunting, or of loss. Ishiguro's viewpoint is not negative, but it is indeed complex and thought-provoking. At a time when social unrest, neo-fascism, and racism are on the rise, it indeed feels reassuring for the readers that the Academy chose Ishiguro to be this year's Nobel Laureate.

At the beginning of his career Ishiguro would be asked questions such as, "How typically Japanese were your parents?" or "Why did you move to England?" for the novels he wrote then. But he has moved on from those novels to experimenting with



many sub-genres of prose, ranging from memoirs to detective novels; and from science-fiction to magic realism. He is also one of those rare authors who can claim to be both a diasporic and a main stream writer. Little wonder that Sara Danius, the

permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy, commended Ishiguro as a writer who, "in novels of great emotional force, has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world." Focusing on another interesting aspect of Ishiguro's

writing she said, "If you mix Jane Austen and Franz Kafka, then you have Kazuo Ishiguro in a nutshell."

Can a writer as serious as Ishiguro be summarized so easily? Perhaps not. Nevertheless, Danius did not describe Ishiguro in these terms in a facile manner, for she was attempting to explain to a world audience the essence of Ishiguro's greatness. The minute details of human relations and observations that Ishiguro depicts in his work are balanced by the epiphanic realizations his characters have. Indeed, what better way to bring together the artist of "two inches of ivory" and the greatest existentialist author that ever lived than with such finely achieved balance?

After the media got a whiff of the Nobel, a group of journalists accosted Ishiguro at his doorsteps and asked him to talk about the themes of his novels. He blinked repeatedly and looking bewildered, said, "The way countries and nations and communities remember their past, and how often they bury the uncomfortable memories from their past." Unprepared he might have been, yet he was succinct enough to summarize acutely the essence of his fiction, thereby giving us a sense of why he so richly deserved this year's Nobel prize for literature.

Sohana Manzoor is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh. She is also the Deputy Editor of The Daily Star Literature and Review Pages.

Political Economy of Unpeopling of Indigenous Peoples: the Case of Bangladesh

The Quest for a Sustainable and Peaceful Solution
Muktobuddhi Publishers, ISBN 978-984-34-0891-4, 2016

REVIEWED BY ABDUL MANNAN MANNA

The word 'people' is a very common and widely used term but the prefix 'un' and the suffix 'ing' makes it perfect as the title of *Political Economy of Unpeopling of Indigenous Peoples: the Case of Bangladesh*. The author of this book, Abul Barkat, is professor at the Department of Economics of the University of Dhaka and is well known at home and abroad for his works in the field of the political economy of human development. This particular work focuses on the injustice rendered to the tribal people or the *adibashis* of Bangladesh, their exploitation and 'unpeopling'. The author points out astutely the mechanisms deployed to "unpeople" them and how and why they are being so mistreated.

The hard work that has gone into the making of the book is evident in its 6 tables, 16 figures, 2 diagrams, 249 indexes and 48 extensive footnotes. Such documentation details socio-economic aspects of the life of the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh and substantiates the causes and backgrounds of the exploitation of their ancestral homes and the reasons why they are being forced out of them. As the author notes, he had "spent many long hours at their homes, listening to them and learning from them the realities of their lives." What he saw and heard in his field research "were eye-openers" for him and gave him insights which he would not have otherwise gained through "mere bookish knowledge." Indeed, his direct encounters with them helped him grasp the full extent of "the painful process of unpeopling" going on in many parts of Bangladesh.

Barkat notes that indigenous peoples are usually visible in our cities and go on pursuing their livelihoods there without causing any disturbance to civic society. But at present they are rarely seen in what were their homelands except some remote areas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sylhet and elsewhere. They are, as per Barkat's observation, scattered in 46 divisions of Bangladesh, divided into at least 49 communities and use over 40 different languages. A recent official documents report that the number of such minority communities is now 27. This information suggests that some groups of indigenous peoples have not been included in the report and indicate their unpeopling in such state documents. Surely, it should be a matter of great concern for us as Bangladeshis that they have been thus ignored and counted out officially. Barkat indicates that the fact reveals that indigenous peoples are weak politically and economically and that their resources are being grabbed by imperialist forces and elites still active in the country.

It is in this sense that Barkat terms the political economy of indigenous people as a "political economy of curse", seeing the phenomenon as indicative of the "unpeopling

of indigenous peoples". But he also notes that this is not only 'country specific' but also "a global phenomenon." He declares that indigenous peoples are always the subject of exploitation by the state and state nourished rent-seeking elements. To analyze the deprivation of indigenous peoples who are treated as 'ethnic groups', 'ethnic peoples', 'small minority groups', 'tribal peoples', 'small tribes' and so on, Barkat proposes a conceptual framework to establish the facts about the political economy of unpeopling and to account for backwardness of indigenous people. He observes that indigenous peoples are often denied their fundamental rights

Barkat's book makes obvious that the political history of the indigenous people in Bangladesh, specifically those living in the areas of Chittagong Hill Tracts, is a history of political intervention and exploitation by

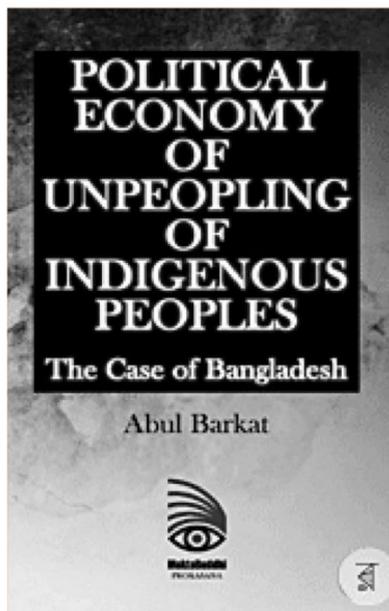
take the responsibility of creating a sustainable environment for these exploited people.

From the many astute observations made by Barkat, the one that can be singled out here is his view that 'the conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, in essence, is not a conflict between the 'Bangalees' and the 'tribal'; it is the outcome of the clash of two modes of production - that of the rent-seekers and the archaic economic system of the indigenous peoples—that has been going on over time. Tracing the history of the unpeopling of indigenous people, Barkat notes how during the partition of India in 1947, the act of deprivation and inequality accelerated. He states firmly that the Muslim-Hindu communal riots that took place in the region in 1964 maximized the process of deprivation. Furthermore, the construction of the Kaptai Barrage was one of the major reasons for the unpeopling of the hill-indigenous peoples.

On the issue of unpeopling, Barkat finds a divergence of opinion between the academics and government. However, he is for finding a common ground for linking them and rightly suggests that they must come to an agreement through which the rights of the indigenous peoples could be protected. At the same time, the author appreciates the CHT Accord 1997, but notes with some annoyance the delays that have occurred in implementing it. This, he suggests, is due to an exploitative mode of production dominated by e rent-seekers, groups who never create wealth but take away wealth created by others. He recommends successful and expeditious implementation of the CHT Accord 1997 in accordance with its original spirit. This requires, according to Barkat, unconditional political commitment. He is all for a mass movement against the deep-rooted rent-seekers-grabbers and upholds the truth of the classic rallying cry- "all poor and marginal people unite".

In sum, Barkat's research on the indigenous people and his ideas and observations on ways of rehabilitating them and protecting their rights should prove helpful to those who are willing to explore the way forward for dealing with our indigenous peoples. Researchers, policy makers and humane thinkers will be able to acquire a lot of insight into the lives of the tribal and ethnic peoples of the hills and our plains through Barkat's book for he has discussed meticulously their lifestyles, livelihood and cultural aspects while narrating the history of socio-economic and political injustice the indigenous peoples have experienced for decades.

Abdul Mannan Manna is a writer, poet and translator.



forces who live outside the hills but are inside the country. He makes clear that the poor and indigenous peoples of Bangladesh have been dominated directly or indirectly by rent-seekers and the compradors of international agencies. Within a free market system, anti-people politics has further pluralized the situation. As a result, the poor and marginal peoples of Bangladesh, especially its indigenous peoples, have been exploited over the decades. Barkat suggests that the state, keeping in view the Constitution's stance on human rights, should

THUMBNAIL REVIEW

Of Ball Gowns, Corsages, and Tuxes

REVIEWED BY T S MARIN



By 21 authors, including:
John Green • Libba Bray • E. Lockhart
David Levithan • Daniel Ehrenhaft • Rachel Cohn • Ned Vizzini • Holly Black • Melissa de la Cruz • Sarah Mlynowski

21 Proms, Edited by David Levithan and Daniel Ehrenhaft, Scholastic Inc, ISBN 978-0-545-79867-9, 2007

In more ways than one, an anthology is like an assorted box of candies; you never know what's coming next; *21 Proms* is no exception to that tendency! Penned by 21 witty and contemporary authors (most of whom chiefly write YA and chick-lit books), each (and every) short story of this anthology articulates the dream, or nightmare of every American youth--Prom Night!

The unique quality of this collection is its diversity. Only a couple of these stories end in the quintessentially happy way with the hero and heroine going to the prom together and dancing and kissing. Breaking all stereotypes, none of the protagonists of these 21 stories is a Prom Queen or King, not even in Elizabeth Craft's "You are a Prom Queen, Dance Dance Dance".

The couples, or rather, triangles in most of these stories are borderline bizarre. Libba Bray's "Primate the Prom" explores issues of bestiality and racism. The story by one of the editors of this collection, David Levithan's "Lost Sometimes," shows how being a homosexual teen is doubly confusing, as does Brunt Hartinger's one-act play, *The Question*.

Ball gowns and corsages, men in tuxedos, dancing the night away... the top three reasons I am obsessed with proms. While there is an abundance of gowns and flowers and tuxes in this collection, dances and the promise of happily ever after are rather scarce. A few stories shone brighter than other ones, but sadly, most were a tad too experimental, and hence, disappointing. 2 stars out of 5, and a bonus one for the cover! Finding its characters in their prom attires in the cover after having read the story first, for me, however, has been a real treat.

T S Marin is a lecturer of English at Primeasia University and Sub Editor of the Star Literature and Star Reviews pages. She is still not over the fact that her high school did not have any prom!