

POETRY

Her Holud-Covered Hands

RAHAD ABIR

I've seen many hues of yellow. Colorful, gray, unadorned. The pristine *bokul* podium, the vibrant spring awash with the fragrance of yellowy brilliance, the mournful memory of my adolescent day—the wedding ceremony of “Aaj Amenar Gaye Holud,” or the spring celebration in this Dhaka's concrete jungle. But where's that veritable yellowness? Many years ago, I went to visit Khala. My uneducated, unremarkable aunt who'd shared her husband with another woman. A year after her marriage, the old man died, turning Khala into an eighteen-year-old widow. Khala was crushing *holud*, turmeric roots on a grinding stone. The moment she heard of my arrival, she ran and cradled my face in her hands. She cried. After so many years you came to see me, my boy! Poor Khala, she fully forgot to wash her spice-adorned hands! My face was then all yellow from her holud-covered hands. The acidity made my eyes teary. In my younger days, Shefali, donning a yellow sari, took my face in her hands all the time, kissed me. But where's that passionate, holud-hued genuine love? Many years later, I went to see my Khala again. She was in bed, eyes closed, sunken deep into her head. Her *paan* chewing mouth still. The tip of her tongue lay touching the corner of her reddened lips. Black, stained teeth unmistakable in her wide-open mouth. Khala! I said to myself, where are your holud-covered hands now? She was quiet, in a sound sleep.

Rahad Abir's work has appeared in The Los Angeles Review, The Bombay Literary Magazine, Himal Southasian, Courrier International, The Wire, BRICK LANE TALES, and elsewhere. He has an MFA in fiction from Boston University. He received the 2017-18 Charles Pick Fellowship at the University of East Anglia. Currently, he is working on his first novel and a short story collection.



Happy Ministry

YASIF AHMAD FAYSAL

In the slanting columns
of the morning sun
on September's grass,
none came for me

none
except
a lemon-winged grasshopper
and a chilly-peppered one
a tiger-dotted one as well.

in the greenery,

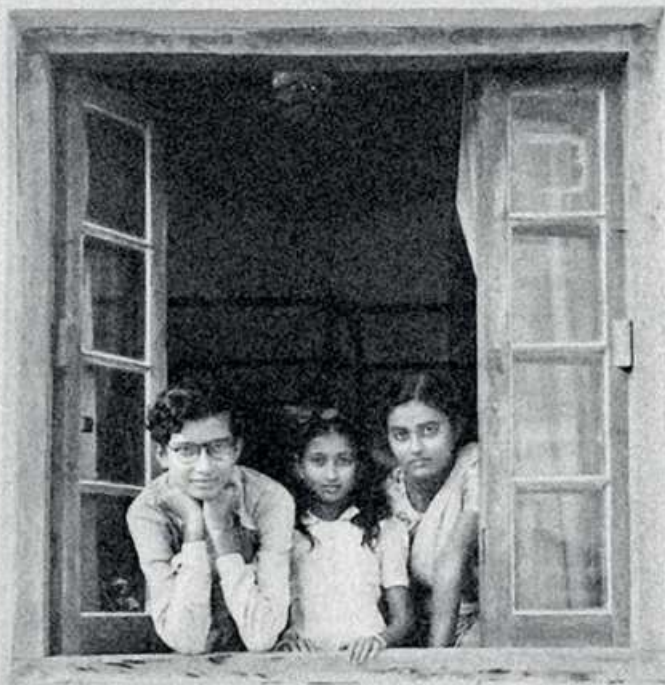
ants too showed up
silent uncomplaining workers

if I were the prime minister,
I would make the lemon-winged my minister,
the chilly peppered one my deputy
the tiger-dotted one my chief of staff
all the working ants my advisors
By the time earth firms up
next spring
My happy ministry will surely lighten up
our part of the world.

Yasif Ahmad Faysal teaches English at the University of Barishal.



Home in the World A Memoir



WINNER OF THE Nobel Prize

Amartya Sen

BCCL

allen lane

THE READING OF A MEMOIR

MAHMUD HUSSAIN

Memoirs make for an intellectually absorbing reading. They belong to a different genre of literary creativity distinct from the tenor of “autobiography.” Their mood centers on particular themes, and their philosophical approach to writing reflects upon the critical interpretation of phenomena rather than merely narrating facts about them. This demands a meditative engagement with the time and history about which the writer is speaking consistent with the intellectual dilemma besetting his mental activity. In that sense, memoir has an *epistemic* value.

Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's *Home in the World: A Memoir* has recently come out, and anyone reading it will perceptibly be drawn to the fact that the theme of the book focuses not merely on his growth as an individual but rather as a scholar committed to an inquisitive search for truth through the vast field of economic science. One wonders whether the *memoir* can be posited as the substance of his earlier writings by which he promoted his economic theories. However, his trials with economic questions have also urged him to develop a strong passion for the study of philosophy as an *epistemic* correlate to both human and non-human aspect of economic challenges. He has given economic science a powerful “human perspective,” and any attempt to do otherwise is at the peril of the meaning of *man* as the substance of knowledge. So, if we take his vast domain of academic inquisition, it is reflected in the attributes of economic science interpenetrating into the system of philosophy.

After reading the *Memoir*, probably, one will look upon him more as an economist who approaches the “dismal science” quoting Thomas Carlyle, with a sharp scintillating eye marked upon the calling of *science of Philosophy*. One can simply read his previous books to come to that conclusion. *Poverty and Famine, Development as Freedom, The Argumentative Indian, Identity and Violence, The Idea of Justice and On Economic Inequality* are some of his extraordinary oeuvres that address human problems from the ontology of philosophy rather than experimental rigour of economic model. A person not familiar to the science of Economics will understand him better through his philosophical writings rather than his works on game theory, rational choice theory, probability theory and other mathematical foundation of economics. In that sense, he can be classed with Adam Smith who also approached Economics from point of view of moral philosophy. Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Essays on Philosophical Questions* were the successor response to his epoch-making *An Inquiry into the Causes of the Wealth of Nation* to face the darker side of economic transaction in terms of human greed, selfishness and reckless profit-seeking motive. Adam Smith comes often in the *Memoir*, and what regales me most is that the publication of Adam's book in 1776 also tells about the excellent trade that Bengal conducted through its rivers at that time thus making it the world's one of the most economically prosperous and opulent region.

Amartya Sen as an economist will remain incomplete to the reader if he fails to comprehend his relentless and passionate love for man as an individual. The idea of man being at the core of economic development and freedom is what he searched for in his study of economics. If Economics as a science has to perform a self-fulfilling *episteme*, it cannot remain idle to the inquiry of causality that affects one part of the world in senseless deprivation of material entitlements, while the other part enjoys the surfeit of consumption. Thus, chasing the moorings of poverty and eradicating them has become Amartya's

life-long scholastic passion. His work on poverty is still the foremost amongst the economics giants. It was the ‘Great Bengal famine’ in 1943, when he was barely 10 years old, the tragedy of 2 to 3 million people dying of starvation left an indelible imprint on his conscience. Poverty also had an impact on his choice of academic subject for career. His early flirtation was with Physics and Mathematics, but partly influenced by his friend, Sukhamoy Chakrabarty and partly by his concern about social inequality, he choose to study economics along with mathematics.

The *Memoir* is an excellent repertoire for a lay reader to initiate interest in the reading of the historicity of economics. The book has an infectious touch of pleasantness because of its style in presenting tough economic issues in simple language. In the 1940-1950s, economics was passing through a reformative stage consequent upon its relation to political science and sociology. It was the heyday of John Keynes, Nicholas Kaldor, A.C.Piguo, Maurice Dobb, Piero Srafa and many others. But the economist who, in my opinion, seemed to trouble him enormously was Kenneth Arrow. Amartya Sen's interest was in the value of individual choice aggregating in the process

Amartya Sen as an economist will remain incomplete to the reader if he fails to comprehend his relentless and passionate love for man as an individual. The idea of man being at the core of economic development and freedom is what he searched for in his study of economics. If Economics as a science has to perform a self-fulfilling episteme, it cannot remain idle to the inquiry of causality that affects one part of the world in senseless deprivation of material entitlements, while the other part enjoys the surfeit of consumption.

of decision-making. Arrow's Impossibility Theorem had unnerved him a lot. Arrow had used the example of voting system as being an exercise in imperfect social activity. If one agrees to Arrow's theorem and extrapolates it to the techniques in other areas of social functions, one is likely to fall into intuitive despair. But Sen took the challenge having seen in it the prospects and promise of welfare economics. He read Arrows' *Social Choice and Individual Values* with a critical scrutiny to arrive at the conclusion that individual decision in making a choice is a rational process, and must be examined holistically. He, in a manner, revived the importance of Impossibility Theorem in the Cambridge circle of economists by exploring Arrow's proposed axioms and their combinations to careful and original depth. His Ph.D. dissertation titled “Choice of Capital-Intensity in Development Planning” was a precursor to his future commitment to development economics. Later on, he assisted Mahbub ul Huq, Pakistani Finance Minister in the production of *UN Development Report* by which countries are assessed in terms of quality of life. He made sense of the world by traversing the long path of economics shaped by the western ideas of capitalism and free market economy, and supplant it in quest for the destination of poor man's emancipatory role that governments ought to ensure in addressing the

primitive human demand for employment, equitable wage, and affordable purchasing power.

Amartya Sen knows well that an economist's *Memoir* will be incomplete without the mention of Karl Marx. In fact, there was a time when any great work in economics was either professedly Marxist or anti-Marxist. Marx was responsible for transforming the concepts of political economy, and virtually brought the Westphalian concept of nation-state system to naught, and replaced it with the principal of preservation of individual sovereignty as belonging to particular classes. Economics was struggling hard with its own limit of freedom as an *episteme*. Marx's fatuous call in the 1848 Communist Manifesto – “Workers of the world unite!” was a freak fancy, yet he conquered the imagination of the great minds of the 20th century. The debacle of the Communist world cannot be attributed to Marx but to states' authoritarian practices which failed to fathom Marx's theory of class struggle in conjunction with contextual illumination of labour theory of surplus value, concept of objective illusion, nature of exploitation, and ideal-material dialectic. So, Amartya who read Marx deeply finds many of his ideas convincingly relevant today.

As an economist, Amartya takes you through all the famous personalities in the field but I was little bewildered not to have seen the reference of few others --- Joseph Schumpeter, Frederick Hayek, Karl Polanyi, Mansur Olcun, Von Neumann --- who have treaded the Economic tower of Babel at the same time. May be his lack of intimacy with them is compounded with the limitation of space for the *Memoir*!

There is a chapter called “Bengal and Bangladesh” where his emotions run deep in identifying himself with the philosophy of a united and secular Bangladesh as an elevating and glorifying idea. The existence of Bangladesh is a matter of pride for all Bengalis as a home built within the bigger home of the world. He was born in Dhaka, grew up in Calcutta, and now lives comfortably in London. A man who finds solace and happiness through his work can make any place on earth his abode. The title of his *Memoir* called *Home in the World* aptly reconciles with his kind of magnificent humanism.

One should read the *Memoir* with an engrossing passion. Those who have known Sen as a great economist will learn that he is much more than a scholar-extraordinary, not merely content with search for truth in economic theories and mathematical analysis. His vast erudition in other fields of knowledge --- literature, politics, international relations, physical sciences, medicine, linguistics, history, sociology, philosophy --- makes him an incredible polymath. He belongs to the genre of great minds of all times like John Keynes, Bertrand Russell (it is interesting that being a mathematician, Russell received the Nobel Prize in literature and will be known more for his political writings than his hard-boiled *Principia Mathematica*), Kenneth Arrow and a few others. Sen knew Ludwig Wittgenstein who trained as an aeronautical engineer but is famous for his revolutionary work in linguistics. It will be a fitting tribute to Amartya's *Memoir* by inverting Wittgenstein's aphorism:

Whereof one can speak, he must write.

For a great teacher, where speech ends, writing begins. *Home in the World _ A Memoir* is a gift of excellent writing.

Mahmud Hussain is retired Air Vice Marshal and former High Commissioner to Brunei.