

to draw their attention to the story about to begin. They developed the choreograph of the arena theater on their own without the benefits of arena theater examples, out of sheer necessity to be seen clearly by the audience sitting all round them. They used music, song and poetry not only for providing entertainment but also for furthering their theme in poetic form and riveting the onlookers. (5)

With his deep rooted ideological stability and inexhaustible physical energy Safdar undertook the socio-cultural mission of liberating the masses from ignorance and exploitation. This kind of commitment to the overall development of the working class prompted him to explore the possibility of achieving a *prolitcult* (proletarian culture) in our society. Ashok Mitra observed that,

The *prolitcult* Hashmi had in mind must render itself into agitprop. The entertainers of the mass culture assembled were committed to entertain but themselves. But as they entertain themselves, they also create further awareness about the class situation. Mass theater is a pulsating experience, but let there be no mistaking, it is a preparation for the inevitable class war. (19)

Ashok Mitra elaborates that the culture Safdar committed to propagate seeks to obliterate the distinctions between the leader and the led. Such is the purport of mass theater; the individual recedes into the background and the collective entity, constitutes the mass advances into the limelight. The mass culture Safdar was committed to is, of course, rooted in the assumption that activism today is creation tomorrow. Hashmi's total dedication to the cause of the working class meant that he had to endeavor to declass himself.

Safdar's aim was to organize a *mohalla* (street) based cultural uprising targeted to raise the consciousness of the exploited multitude through participatory programs. The raising of social awareness was to be harnessed to create the milieu for participatory entertainment, while the later was to be honed as weapons for class battle (Mitra 20). With this larger aim of creating a *prolitcult* Safdar built his dramatic structure with the basic ingredients of people's problems. In this process of mobilizing the culture of the masses in the cause of the masses, Safdar held the view that a neutral political positioning is out of the question. One has got to be thoroughly partisan in identifying the class enemy. It is this effort to mobilize society's down trodden through the modality of mass theater that brought him a martyr's death from the class enemy.

Safdar never tried to build up an individual aura around himself. This belief in the *prolitcult* and active participation in mass political movements taught him not to seek any individualistic gains. He was for a work style of collaboration and collectivism. Strictly speaking most of the plays now considered to be written by Safdar Hashmi are collaborative creations. But his contribution to these collaborations would be the greatest. As Tanvir comments, "Far from asserting his individuality, he tried to negate it completely while immersing himself in the pleasure of creating a good play" (qtd. in Qamar 253). On this culture of collaboration and collectivism in Janam, Safdar Hashmi's wife and co-actor Moloyoshree Hashmi recalled. "In our group even direction became a collective activity. From the creation of script for its performance, there was a feeling of shared responsibility and effort. Everyone was involved, although Safdar's creativity was of a high order and formed the basis on which our activity progressed at such a furious pace" (qtd. in Qamar 247).

Hashmi's political affiliation and ideological commitment were never a hindrance in his path of achieving artistic excellence while sticking to definite political aims. According to his mother, Qamar Hashmi (261), there were two dominant strands in his life – the commitment to the street theater movement, and the deepening relationship with the party. These preoccupations were gradually exhibiting not only their influence in fashioning Safdar's personality and his life, but also the significant impact of Safdar's contribution to the history and development of street theater movement. Political theater needs to analyze the reality to reveal the cause of the oppressive conditions – namely the oppressor. It has to counter the hegemonic myths of an essential and unchangeable reality and enable the spectators to dream of a different world beyond oppression. Finally, it needs to use the play to encourage the spectators to organize themselves to make the change possible (Ghosh 81). The activist in Hashmi discarded the 'traditionalization' or 'Indianization' of theater by adapting forms from folk theater traditions alone. He believed that this mere appropriation of folk theater forms, folk music, the *Ramlila* or *Raslila*, or the *Nautangi* theatrical forms alone would not help the contemporary Indian theater to achieve the so called 'Indianness.' For Safdar Hashmi acquiring Indianness lies only in the theater's deep concern with the contemporary lives of the people of India.

Studying the activist theaters of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Safdar Hashmi, Lopamudra Basu observed that, for Safdar theater was the primary terrain of artistic and activist expression who believed that the Indian mainstream theater was out of touch with the crucial issues confronting the masses. It was with a view towards expanding the range of his audience that he decided to take his plays to the streets of working class neighborhoods. Safdar took up cudgels on behalf of the marginalized sections of Indian society and the disposed, using his pen to write stirring prose that immediately made an impact on current consciousness. His success was due to his adaptation of the traditional sensibilities and folk songs, while introducing modern ideas and revolutionary thoughts that challenged the status quo. Basu further explains:

In examining Ngugi's and Safdar's careers in activist theater, it is interesting to note that both saw the similarities between present attempts at state censorship and colonial models ... In terms of their artistic choices, both playwrights infused their performances with songs, the diverse musical sources often representing a cultural syncretism defying religious and ethnic absolutisms. For both Ngugi and Hashmi, the end of their active involvement in theater marked a spatial reconfiguration of their original theater projects.

The rampant stark poverty; glaring social and economic disparities; the bureaucratic corruption; the feudal and industrial exploitation; the systematic communization of civil life, prevailing imperialistic attitude; dehumanizing working conditions in factories and fields etc. are the contemporary realities of India as far as Safdar was concerned. He believed that brushing all these social realities under concept and going for the glorification of the ancient myths and folk culture would not constitute Indianness. Mere adaptation of traditional devices, masks, songs and cultural rituals in theater would not make the theater Indian (1989: 90-91). True Indianness in theater can be achieved only when we take up the developmental and social issues for scrutiny, examination and analysis. The superficial ornaments could not be accepted for the nationalistic spirit in theater. Moreover, Safdar reiterated that, there is a lurking

danger in blind adaptation of traditional folk forms and rites in contemporary theater. It may prove to be disastrous rather than reformist. He elaborated on the risk of blind adaptation of traditional forms in contemporary theater as: "if you work with the traditional form along comes the traditional content also with superstition, backwardness, obscurantism and the promotion of feudal structures and sometimes, feudal formations. You cannot perform a surgical operation on a traditional form and take out the content because the two are very much intermingled" (1989: 140).

Safdar Hashmi believed that in the attempt at adapting traditional theatrical forms to the contemporary theater "the Indian main stream theater was out of touch with the masses confronting the masses. It was with this view towards expanding the range of his audience, he took his plays to the streets of working class neighbourhoods" (Basu). Theatrical forms are evolved out of historical necessities. When the society moves on, the issues of theatrical performance would go on changing. The new content in a particular historical era may require a new form for artistic expression. New thematic concerns need not necessarily fit into an old form. So largely, Safdar believed that, it is the content that decides the form, not the other way around. He believed that the elements and devices of artistic expression are created by the dramatists' creative views of life, not the other way around. That was why he openly opined that, "the theater did not begin with the proscenium nor has its evolution reached the final stage with it" (1989: 15). This concept was affirmed by Habib Tanvir when he said that "forms are often demanded by their times. Street theater form could not possibly have emerged during the forties, for the time demanded quite some other approaches to political campaign." (2001: 5)

*Janam's* plays were always based on burning topical issues. In 1978 there was a Hindu - Muslim riot in Aligarh. *Janam* prepared a play based on the report of an inquiry team that visited Aligarh soon after the riots. It was found by the fact-finding team that the reason behind the fresh rounds of riots had nothing to do with religions. It was instigated by the commercial interests of lock making factory owners. They wanted to create a schism between the Hindus and Muslims who were jointly involved in the traditional domestic lock making industry. *Janam* took the play *Killers* (1975) to Aligarh and showed the people the real reason for the riots. Another spontaneous theatrical intervention of *Janam* was seen in 1979 when the Delhi Transport Corporation doubled its fares conveniently just before three consecutive public holidays. Within hours, *Janam* went to the streets of Delhi with the play *DTC's Indulgence* forcing the authorities to slash down the hiked fares to the minimum. *Janam's* *Woman* in 1979; *Teen Crore* (30 Million) on unemployment; *Price Hike* (1980) on inflation; and *Wake up! O, Brave* (1984) on the anti-Sikh pogrom were the other popular plays of *Janam*.

No theatrical or artistic form was taboo for him. The only contradiction he recognized and he did not wish to resolve was between 'political' and non-political theater. He stood for political theater. All theater is communication. In the times in which we live the only meaningful communication is, to borrow Safdar's words from an article in *The Economic Times* in April 1986, that which "brings people closer to fighting organisations." Whatever helps that communication is valuable. That is why the debates on the 'art' of street-theater must have appeared to him an exercise in futility. If a given proscenium production helped that communication he would do that. If a street-play helped it, he would resort to it (Deshpande 4).

Rendering the intricacies of the political through the theatrical was the most conspicuous specificity of artistic-activism by Safdar Hashmi and *Janam* in post-independent India. In this process, his theater turned the public sphere of street as a potential pedagogical space for performing 'theater of the oppressed' for conscientization of the masses. Safdar Hashmi's oppositional theater was intended at dismantling the caste, class, and gender-ridden establishment, thereby exploring a way for the institutionalization of a society that is free of maximum prejudices and parochial interests. In this struggle, he wielded theater as his weapon. Safdar was a theater activist with a political purpose, a Marxist with an aesthetic bend of mind, an artist who took his theater to the street and an educator of the masses. Safdar held the ideological position that "[t]he belief in art for art's sake arises whenever the artists and people keenly interested in art are out of harmony with their social environment"(Plekhanov 21). His commitment for giving vent to the aspirations of the toiling masses gave his performance and writing a sense of urgency, a distinct pedagogical purpose and a focus to act purposefully. He understood that street-theater is primarily a form of politics. What is primarily political need not, however, be artless. Safdar and his JNM, through their praxis, resolved the contradiction between political-form and art-form (Deshpande 4). Whatever be the theatrical form, Safdar Hashmi believed that the themes of plays have to keep a close touch with popular mass movements; they have to interrogate anti-people political policies of the establishment, they have to defend the right to protest, and they should register the dissenting voices in the face of authorities. The thematic concerns and methodological devices that went into execution in the plays of Safdar are part of his attempts at politically educating the masses through the theater of the masses, i.e., political street theater.

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# Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in Bangladesh: A Study of the Cultural Implications of Dramatic Adaptation

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and  
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*Abstract: Foreign texts can be adapted by modifying the cultural specifics of the original to that of the target society to ensure a wider reach. The selection process of the foreign texts to a large extent is determined by the size of the theater group, the expertise of the actors, the group members' efficiency in using standard Bangla, and the level of cultural sophistication of the audience. Amongst all the foreign writers/playwrights, we have selected Chekhov's representation in Bangladeshi theater as our focus in this article. We are focusing on the adapted version of The Cherry Orchard produced by a theater group in Bangladesh and have tried to explore the transformation of the original text in terms of contextualization. While doing this, we used reception theory and Gramsci's theater criticism.*

Theater offers both communication and information with relatively little investment and allows for the experience of close physical and emotional contact between actors and spectators. It is a collaborative form of fine art that uses live performers to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience in a specific place. If we expand the definition, we come to see that theater embraces the notion of performance in general where the entire terrain of culture upon which society and state rests constitute performative acts. Thus, culture and society are integrated, and theater is viewed as an aspect of culture. A socio-political structure does not offer much space to the individual or the community to act on the world on its own terms, to generate its own meanings and effects. The very notion of taking the theater to people to teach them about their socio-political issues is a condescending approach. Cultural Studies, as During said, is "most interested in how groups with least power practically develop their own readings of, and uses for, cultural products – in fun, in resistance, or to articulate their own identity" (7). On a similar line, Schechner's Performance Theory helps us to understand an actual theater which should seek to answer the question, "how is it built and what are its bases? What are its functions and how does it relate to the life we live individually and collectively?" (1997, 40)

Theater groups in Bangladesh became active in post-independent Bangladesh and gave a new momentum to theater activities. The oldest groups of Bangladesh like Nagorik Nattya Sampraday and Udichi were active even in the pre-liberation period; both were established in 1968. After that, in the post-liberation period, numerous theater groups have come into being. In Bangladesh, the theater groups have extensively experimented with foreign texts. Shakespeare, Moliere, Camus, Albee, Chekhov, Sartre, Miller, Brecht, and Ibsen's plays have been translated or adapted. So, what is the reason behind the staging of foreign texts in Bangladeshi theater? To answer this, we can reference During (1993) who said that cultural products are articulated to explore self-identity. Now, the group theaters select the foreign texts because they want to facilitate their own cultural identity through adaptation of those texts. When these texts are contextualized, we find that most of the time the titles, characters' names, settings, and in some cases, even the storylines are changed to adapt and represent the culture or,

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according to Schechner, to relate to life individually or collectively ("Theater into the Twenty First Century" 5-14). In the post-liberation period, we see that almost all the theatrical groups have chosen to work with foreign texts. Foreign texts are translated or adapted in Bangladesh for the universal appeal of their diverse themes. The inadequacy of local writings on different issues is also a key factor.

According to the Bangladesh Group Theater Index 2005, Russian modern fiction writer Anton Chekhov's works have been chosen by almost all the theater groups and staged many times, and almost all of the texts were adapted. From our interviews with theater activists of some major theater groups, we found that the selection process of the foreign texts, to a large extent, is determined by the president of a group. This, in turn, is also dependent on the size of the theater group, the quality of performance, actors, the language efficiency of the group members, and the cultural orientation of the audience. As a result, the foreign texts are either translated or adapted.

For this paper, we are focusing specifically on Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in its Bangla adaptation, *Kanthal Bagan* by Ali Zaker (Nagorik Nattya Sampraday). We understand its representation in Bangladesh.

Anton Chekhov was born in 1860 and died in 1904. Grandson of a serf, Chekhov started working in his father's general store in early childhood. His belief in the power of individualism stemmed from his traumatic experience of poverty during his childhood. Chekhov contributed largely to reactionary newspapers and moved in conservative circles although later in life he became more liberal. He was aware of the social evils of Russian society. Thus, it is obvious that as a playwright, he would try to communicate this to his reader/audience.

We find a parallelism between Chekhov's and Gramsci's views on the purpose of plays performed on stage. Gramsci believes that while writing a play, a playwright must have a target audience in his mind, besides which the play itself has a disguised ideology to convey to the audience. In the *Chronicles* he demonstrates that drama must be viewed as 'a form of art' which has a function to create a self-aware and fully conscious public. Gramsci viewed theater as part of culture. In "Socialism and Culture," he writes that people are not merely receptacles to be filled with data and isolated raw facts. This view gave a new dimension to the idea of culture that it cannot be dominated by one class in the society. Rather it is an 'organization' which creates awareness in an individual to attain an understanding of himself in terms of his rights and duties to society. Gramsci writes, "Above all, man is mind, i.e., he is a product of history, not nature" (qtd. in Dombroski 93). He also emphasized class consciousness which can be attained through self-realization which later would spread to a whole class. To demonstrate how this social progress would work, he believed that this awareness about oneself is more than knowing about one's history and culture. Rather it encourages one to know "others, their history, the successive efforts they have made to be what they are, to create the civilization they have created and which they seek to replace with our own" (93). In addition, Gramsci later explains this social progress in largely socio-political terms where the class needs to know what factors regulate their lives. To reflect the complexities of society, a whole fictional world is created by Chekhov in *The Cherry Orchard* where the characters are aware of these complexities and their inclusiveness in it. Chekhov himself insisted that his plays be understood as descriptions of life, nothing more or less. He was frustrated by the misrepresentation of his text on stage and thus said:

Take my Cherry Orchard. Is it my Cherry Orchard? With the exception of two or three parts nothing in it is mine. I am describing life, ordinary life, and not bleak despondency. They [contemporary producers] invent something about me out of their own heads, anything they like, something I never thought of or dreamed about (qtd. in Magarshack 14).

Chekhov insists that the reader understand that life contains the comic and the tragic, the ludicrous and the serious, the pleasant and the painful. In *The Cherry Orchard*, when the family is leaving the estate for the last time, Gayev, a major character who is greatly agitated, says, "The train. The station" (Trans. West 59). And fearful that he may burst into tears over the departure, he hopelessly, pitifully, retreats into his make-believe world of billiard games with "In off into the middle, double the white into the corner" (West 59). We may smile at the meaningless remark, but we do so with tears in our eyes. These characters do reflect the people that we see around us and encounter every day.

Chekhov is relevant in Bangladesh for two basic reasons: first, the underlying ideology of his plays which is based on the belief in individualism, as in the case of the other pioneers of realistic theater like Ibsen, Shaw and Strindberg; second, the belief of these playwrights about the form of art which is associated with a moral dimension to be delivered to the audience in the theater. Modern theater in Europe went through changes in the views of life presented so as to find out what would be the moral ground of representation of reality in theater. With all the limitations of the "three-walls" stage of indoor theater, the performers seemed foolish in their attempts to represent reality. To overcome these limitations, the pioneers like Ibsen, Shaw, and Strindberg wrote about the disintegration of traditional certainties and for that they experimented with the realist form of theater, showing an abiding faith in the extraordinary individual. Ibsen, as Krutch has noted, "never shifts the burden of responsibility from the individual to 'social conditions' or economic pressure" (qtd. in Gassner 133). We note the same thing in Chekhov. Moreover, to encourage the actors to establish reality in their performance in the theater, the most influential realist director, Constantin Stanislavsky, came up with an exercise for the performers where they would search in their memories for the same kind of experience that the characters in the play go through. This technique helped Stanislavsky to bring authenticity in his production of Chekhov's plays. Similarly, when we look at the adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard* in Bangladesh, the contextualization helps the performers to represent the reality from their own personal experience. Like the other pioneers of realistic theater, Chekhov also wrote plays to show the immense potentialities and at the same time defects of an individual. Modern theater attributed dignity to the commoners which the earlier traditional theater denied. In one sense, it gave a humanistic dimension to the theater. A 19<sup>th</sup> de siècle sensibility marked the writings of Anton Chekhov but a clear perspective of positivism was also very prominent in a play like *The Cherry Orchard*.

To explore the reason why adaptation helps the audience understand the text better, we would like to discuss the terminology of reception theory which says, "the reader 'concretizes' the literary work, which is in itself no more than a chain of organized black marks on a page" (Eagleton 67). Without this active participation of the audience the literary work can never be understood by the readers or, in this case, the audience. Eagleton further says that the actual text is full of indeterminacies or gaps which can be



interpreted in different ways, and sometimes perhaps mutually conflicting ways, by the readers (or in this case the audience). The audience must come to witness the play with some pre-understanding, a dim context of belief and expectations. In the case of *The Cherry Orchard* in Bangla (*Kanthal Bagaan*), these involve Zaminder feudalism, Muslim inheritance law, status of women in the rural areas of Bangladesh; and universal issues too, such as, importance of money, morality, and so on. The theater groups synthesize these pre-understandings in the adaptation. Only then can successful concretization of items through integrated illusion happen. The same is true for the audience too because, without any prior idea, they cannot successfully receive the play. The audience also proceeds to concretely receive the items staged, sheds previous assumptions, revises older beliefs, and makes more and more complex inferences. As a result, the audience's pre-set ideas are challenged, negated or undermined. In this context, Eagleton refers to Wolfgang Iser's *The Act of Reading* (1978) where Iser discusses the strategies which texts put to work to revise our established norms. He says "the valuable work of literature violates or transgresses these normative ways of seeing, and so teaches us new codes of understanding" (qtd. in Eagleton 68). In the same way, stage performance aims at positive reformation in the society by bringing in the foreign texts and contextualizing them. Iser further says, "it brings us into deeper self-consciousness, catalyzes a more critical view of our own identities ... working our way through a book, is ourselves" (qtd. in Eagleton 68). Quotation needs clarification/checking. In theater productions, the audience can also undergo a similar psychological journey through first-hand experience or, as Schechner says, "one will be able to belong to a 'drama culture' or 'performance art culture' wherever one lives ..." (10).

Iser's reception theory promotes the humanist ideology, a concept that gives a lot of importance on the desirability of human beings to be flexible and open minded, prepared to put belief into test, and allow being transformed. The idea of adaptation of foreign texts also promotes transformation of the conventions of human beings. The transformative power of literary adaptation plays a powerful role in bringing the desired effect that the production wants to achieve – the same transformation we see in the case of *Kanthal Bagaan*, a completely transformed Bangladeshi psyche which is again not so far from the theme of *The Cherry Orchard*.

Theater groups are particularly tied to a place, particular social practices, and particular practitioners. But increasingly, texts are travelling and are frequently being domiciled outside their place of origin or primary practice. The people's inventiveness and creativity give rise to a new creation through fusion and hybridity. Anton Chekhov's various plays have been adapted by different theater groups. Amongst them, *The Sea Gull*, *The Proposal*, and *The Cherry Orchard* were recurrently chosen for their universal thematic and cultural appeal. *The Cherry Orchard* has become a popular choice for theater groups in Bangladesh as it represents the crisis and conflict of different classes of people that Bangladesh still suffers from. The text also notes the rise of a subservient class which is also identifiable in our history. Hence, the production of the adaptation successfully communicates with the audience. In *The Cherry Orchard* we see that the Russian characters like Lopakhin, Lyubov Andreyevna, Gaev, Varya, and Anya become Adu, Johora, Tasadduk, Miju, and Tamanna in *Kanthal Bagaan*, and the setting changes from a Russian estate to a village jackfruit orchard somewhere in Bangladesh. The setting and the characters' names may change, but the

universal crisis of monetary debt is the same, and the feudal lord's oppression, the carelessly luxurious way of life, the rise of the subservient classes do not change. The universal crisis of a materialistic world, the inhumane treatment of lower class people, the absence of intellect in both the subservient class and the Zaminders – all these we perceive from the adapted version too. The eurocentrism is contextualized and the events and characters' localization leaves the audience intellectually, culturally, and socially charged.

If we consider the original play and the adaptation, the transformation of characters in the two versions becomes quite distinct according to their contexts. In *The Cherry Orchard*, Lopakhin is seen wearing a waistcoat and yellow shoes, symbol of his newly acquired wealth. He calls himself a "rich man" but he also admits that at heart he is a "peasant," "a real peasant" (Frayn 2). He shows his unusual craving for money and only says that he is a "money grubbing peasant" (10). In the adaptation, the central character Adu, who is presumably an illegitimate child of the Zaminder (landlord) Syed Kamat Ali, has been portrayed as a sly crook, ready to do anything to confiscate the land of Zohra and Tasadduk. He seems, at times, to be caring about these two people, but again when he remembers the humiliation of being a servant to these people, he is not. A good trait of Adu is his passion for work; from dawn to late night he works. He is sincere in his work, but at the same time, he always deceives people to get his work done. So, the whole attempt of Adu to become rich is based on his immoral ideology as an emerging businessman. Adu can also be read as a symbolic character from the perspective of Bangladesh. Adu is a symbol of greed, power and the destructive force which appears in the society to destroy all good things. The destruction in *The Kanthal Bagaan* is also a symbol of a destruction of nature, a looming danger ignored by the people of Bangladesh as they seem unwilling to realize what price they have to pay for the destruction of natural elements like trees.

The women characters in the original play are portrayed as weak, submissive, and venerable, yet they are represented as strong figures at times; whereas, in the adapted play the women are typical village women preoccupied with marriage and the security that comes with it. However, in both the cases the sufferings of the women are universal. Chekhov's Ranyevskaya becomes Zohra in the adapted play. Both being spendthrifts, they spend money on irrelevant or unnecessary things. Similarly, both yearn for the golden past they had in the orchard during their childhood. We do not find any specific image of Ranyevskaya's childhood; whereas Zohra reminisces about her childhood fears surrounding a dominating father who used to control her mother completely. Here we see that the adaptation has contextualized the patriarchal society dominant in Bangladeshi culture. The women are not empowered but rather portrayed as suffering because of their gender in the social context. Zohra is the one who started believing in the supremacy of males in the society as her mother declares that whatever her father says must be true. We do not find anything different in Chekhov's story of women in *The Cherry Orchard*. The story of Ranyevskaya is that of a tragic one too; she is married to a "drinker" who dies of "champagne" and then she falls in love with the wrong person; wrong because she drains herself and becomes worn out only to find out that the man has left her for another woman. So, she is deserted by both the men in her life in different ways. As a mother, she has to bear the suffering of losing a child of her own in the same place where she was born. The son, Grisha is drowned to death. To forget, she moves to Menton and then to Paris with her only surviving child Anya, but

again returns to her home only to find, to her disappointment, that her ancestor's place is soon to be auctioned. She finds a way to get on with her life after receiving a letter from her second husband who implores her for forgiveness, but surprisingly she rejects the idea of reconciliation with the man and tears the letter. In the adaptation, Zohra has a different story; she is married to a drunkard, the son of a landlord. After entering her husband's house, she finds out that she is the fourth wife of her husband. She is asked to take the other wives as her sisters and try to live peacefully with them till her husband's death. Then she finds out that the other wives have got most of the share of her husband's property and she has been given a very small share (as she is the youngest) to survive with her only daughter Tamanna. Being a Zaminder's daughter, her money soon dwindles, and she finds herself in a dire condition. We do not expect her to get another chance to start her life with another man again. It seems she is doomed for the rest of her life.

The characterization of Tasadduk who is Gayev in Chekhov's play has also been modified to fit the village scenario of the play in Bangladesh. Gayev is a gentleman, very loving to his sister and niece. Gayev's desperation sometimes is very visible when he considers all the unreal possibilities that he might exploit to save the orchard. He thinks about getting an inheritance from someone or marrying Anya off to a rich man, and so on. He also considers arranging a loan from the bank to pay the interest. Contrastively, in the adaptation, Tasadduk has been portrayed as a typical spoiled child of a landlord who left school a long time ago, spent money lavishly on friends, and when it was time to pay back the entire loan, he went on a world tour and returned with no money. His bonding with his sister is explicit only when he gets emotional, but most of the time we find Tasadduk trying to get the upper hand, being the male heir, and pointing out to his sister his legitimacy for getting two-thirds of the property. He does not bother to take his sister's consent before mortgaging the property. So, he seems more villainous than Gayev, reflecting the problem of Muslim inheritance law where the male sibling gets the double share of the female. It does not always end here though, but sometimes results in increasing the greed of the male sibling who ultimately tries to grab all the shares.

Another character who plays the role of conscience of the society is Trofimov (*The Cherry Orchard*) or Sohel (*Kanthal Bagan*). The characters again have been significantly contextualized. Trofimov was the tutor of Grisha a long time ago and he is still a student. Lopakhin makes fun of him by quipping that even when he is fifty he will remain a student. But Sohel is a village school teacher and the representative of the educated, sensible young generation. He is aware about the parasites like Adu and also comments on the dishonesty of other characters. He shows his rebellious character by threatening Adu after the sale of the property to leave this job as he cannot accept the domination of an illiterate and dishonest man like Adu. He is the spokesman of other serious issues of our society unlike the inactive role played by Zohra and Tasadduk who fail to change themselves with time. He nonetheless addresses the larger issue of urbanization, a destructive force which does not believe in any sort of cooperation with nature; only knows how to exploit natural resources without thinking about the future generation. Unlike Trofimov, Sohel is a rebel who would not compromise with his conscience and has the courage to deny the domination of the emerging merchant class.

Music plays a role in both the plays and more significantly in *Kanthal Bagan*. In Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* music is used more as a background score or filler in

case of transitions. The characters hear music coming from a faraway place. Yepikhodov, a clerk, plays a guitar and sings a song commenting on the carelessness of the narrator and about the hurdles in life:

*What should I care for life's clamour,  
What for my friend or my foe. . .  
Had I a passion requited  
Warming my heart with its glow? (23)*

At one point Gayev and Ranyevskaya even mention a "Jewish Orchestra" (28). The motive behind adding *Baul* songs in *Kanthaal Bagaan* is more significant. The *Baul* character is an addition in the play to comment on the ongoing transition in the lives of the characters and also to lament on the bygone days; the songs also resound with a profound philosophy of life. The underlying theme of "apocalypse" is very aptly projected by the *Baul* songs. Here the music cannot be seen as a separate theatrical aspect; rather it is an integral part of the play that complements the ongoing action. The songs can also be seen as a retreat from the hardships of life. They also tend to teach human beings the concept of belonging and sustainability. The writer of the adaptation even ends the play with a song, stating the looming danger resulting from the greed and egocentric behavior of some of the human characters.

Besides the characterization, both the plays are uniform in the treatment of the theme of money which is the reason for the destruction of the orchard, a symbol of wealth and power exercised by the ancestors. Lopakhin even mentions the influence of money in a song in front of his two masters: "Money talks ..." (28). In the adapted text, from the very beginning, Adu tells Miju that he has enough money to buy the whole plot and that he acquired the money by selling the jackfruits every year. In this way, he cheats his master. The class that he represents is the emerging class with money in hand. Like the previous landlords, he is also a greedy and immoral person. In a way it can be said that this class is going to be more destructive in terms of its selfish attitude towards everyone and everything. The wish of Lopakhin to lease the land for summer cottages is similar to the wish of Adu to cut all the trees and make furniture with them. In fact, he also mentions that the ancestral building would be destroyed in order to build high rise shopping malls. Along with the theme of money, both the plays show the decline of hierarchy. In *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov shows the presence of only two classes – landlords and peasants or serfs. With the advent of capitalism, the hierarchical order is inverted: the master becomes penniless and the servant becomes rich. Only characters like Fiers and Sundernath remain loyal to their masters till the end. The similarity between both the characters can easily be comprehended by their confusions about the miserable conditions of their masters. By this, Chekhov attempts to show the end of the old order and the rise of a new system. A new class is emerging; it comprises the summer gentlemen in *The Cherry Orchard* who come to spend the summer in the cottages and the builders of the commercial multi-storied buildings in *Kanthaal Bagaan*.

In an interview with us, Ali Zaker, an eminent theater personality, and also the writer and director of the adaptation *Kanthaal Bagaan*, said he did not deviate from the main theme as conceived by Chekhov. In fact, Chekhov is chosen for socially common themes. The complexities, the class consciousness, the emergence of the nouveau riche class are portrayed in the adapted version by contextualizing them with reference to Bangladeshi culture. The play has been staged quite a number of times in different cities

and towns of Bangladesh and has had quite a positive response from the audience because of the familiarity of situations and characters. Ali Zaker also explained that the theater group Nagorik Nattya Sampraday has performed a significant number of shows of Chekov's works and the main reason for selecting Chekhov was a very personal liking for the writer's way of dealing with themes which very often reflect the spirit of the Bangalee psyche. The adapted version *Kantha Bagaanis* set on a Zaminder's estate in a Bangladeshi village, reflecting the decadent Zaminder landlords and the emergence of the mercantile class who still harbor in their mind the lust for a feudal lifestyle, and the sufferings of women. He feels that the crisis portrayed in the main text and the adaptation does not end with the text; rather, it turns into another crisis and does not get resolved. The intentional departures in the adaptation, like the change in the merchant's character, the brother, the introduction of the Baul – all are done to depart from the eurocentrism and to contextualize the play for better reception. Zaker clarified this point by saying that the introduction of Sufism in Baul songs helps to reach the audience better as most of the people have prior knowledge about the philosophy of Bauliana. The changes in the character of the brother can also be identified with the desire to grab the share of a sister as he is eligible to a larger share according to Muslim law. The characters come alive in a Bangladeshi village and reflect the crisis of the time.

Chekhov's plays portray a crisis in social and individual life, and his role as a realist playwright also made him project life from a humanist point of view. Thus, the audience can enrich their mind by receiving the underlying message of his plays which help them to understand their local culture and the culture of others as well. The individual or collective understanding helps the audience to identify with the setting, characters, and themes emotionally. The playwright's ideology becomes culture specific through adaptation. The consciousness of the audience raised through culture redefines their history and helps them to move forward to understand the societal concerns. The concretization of literary works synthesizes the pre-understanding of the audience through illusion; their conventional ideas are transcended and they are given a new understanding. In this way, texts travelling from one culture to another culture build up a common platform of understanding in every society which is, according to Gramsci, a desired outcome of theater. The changes and contextualization of the foreign text are done solely from the perspective of the country in which it is staged and hence the writer of an adaptation makes the necessary departures, contextualizing the crisis/problems of the society. In some way, the theatrical production plays the role of conscience, changing the perception of the audience intellectually, socially, and culturally.

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## Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* as a Political Novel

Nasihul Wadud\*

**Abstract:** *Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines delineates many of the political issues related to the partition of the subcontinent. The paper examines how the narrativized fiction of Ghosh creates the human story behind the political history that is responsible for the creation of nation-states. It explores various characters across the territorial divides to give a human face to political facts.*

*The Shadow Lines* is a political novel. The feeling of nationalism is prominent throughout the novel. According to Kapadia (1990), "*The Shadow Lines* focuses mostly on the meaning and nuances of political freedom in contemporary life" (123). In order to gain political freedom, Tha'mma, one of the central characters of *The Shadow Lines*, pledges to take an active part against the British Empire during the struggle for the independence of India. When asked by the narrator what she would have done if she had the option of killing the English magistrate, Tha'mma replies, "I would have been frightened ... But I would have prayed for strength, and God willing, yes, I would have killed him. It was for our freedom; I would have done anything to be free" (39). Tha'mma is a nationalist. She seeks freedom anyhow.

Tha'mma is a major character in *The Shadow Lines*. She is a "modern middle class woman" according to Tridib. Tha'mma was born in 1902 in "a big joint family, with everyone living and eating together" (121). While she is in college doing her BA in History in Dhaka, she comes to know about the "terrorist movement" amongst Bengal nationalists. She starts getting some ideas "about the secret terrorist societies like Anushilan and Jugantar and all their offshoots, their clandestine networks, and the home-made bombs with which they tried to assassinate British officials and policemen; and a little about the arrests, deportations and executions with which the British had retaliated" (37). One day, policemen raid a class when a lecture is going on to catch a "very young man" accused of killing an English Magistrate in Khulna. It is revealed later that he is a part of a secret "terrorist movement." The young man inspires Tha'mma. She wants to be a part of the Indian Nationalist Movement and do everything in her power to liberate India. Tha'mma runs secret errands for aspiring nationalists and even cooks food for them. She receives a setback though when she is widowed with a son at the age of thirty-two. She shows her gutsiness by raising her son single-handedly in a patriarchal society. Moreover, she takes up work as a school teacher. She starts life as a tenant in a one-room apartment in Calcutta. Without seeking help from anyone, Tha'mma displays her guts by raising her child who later becomes a general manager in a private firm and moves his family to a new house on Southern Avenue, opposite the Lake with "rooms upstairs, rooms downstairs, verandas, a garden as well as a roof big enough to play cricket on" (119). Tha'mma returns to Dhaka to meet her Jethamoshai in 1964. She finds Dhaka to be a completely different city. She is not able to relate to many things she had left behind in Dhaka. Her nationalistic feeling is shaken, however, after the death of Tridib, which is the climax of the political theme

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of the novel (Kapadia 1990). In *The Shadow Lines*, political events change peoples' fortunes.

In *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator questions the ideology of nationalism. Religious Nationalism led to communal strife during partition. Both Hindus and Muslims fought against each other then and many died while crossing the borders created by the leaders of India and newly formed Pakistan. Tha'mma's nationalistic feelings inflame her. Her patriotism was reinvigorated when she found her shy classmate showing his bravery in attempting to plot the downfall of an English Magistrate in Khulna although he was nabbed by the British police who put him under the line of fire for his involvement in the murder of an English magistrate.

Ghosh seems to be implying that many innocent people die in nationalist movements because of various reasons. People fight for the nation. They want to secure a spot for their respective nations on the global map by fighting for their rights. In Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, we see that Tha'mma's notion of the nation and nationalism contributes to the murder of Tridib.

Tha'mma reminds one of the obstinate neighbors in Robert Frost's famous poem "Mending Wall":

He moves in darkness as it seems to me—  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well."  
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors.

In Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall," the narrator keeps insisting to the obstinate neighbor that "Something there is that doesn't love a wall," but the neighbor seems to pay no heed to this saying. He remains obdurate, insisting that the separation of land is better than living without a fence. Similarly, in *The Shadow Lines*, Tha'mma looks to avenge her enemies at any cost for protecting her country from all evils. However, in the end, Tha'mma is treated as a foreigner in the place of her birth. It is demoralizing for Tha'mma who considers Dhaka her *desh* or country. Tridib's murder in Dhaka just adds more pain to her woes.

Tha'mma cannot come to terms with the changing political scenario in the post-British era. She is still "trapped in her pre-national spatial identity" (Gera 109). She is not aware of the definition of "the modern border" which is "political but real," (Gera 113). She now finds the freedom of the post-independent period to be contradictory to her idealistic notions of life without borders. Grandma cannot believe that she has to write Dhaka as her place of birth and India as her nationality in the passport application form. She cannot understand why her place of birth has to be differentiated from her nationality. Grandma lives a "middle class life in which, like the middle class the world over, she would thrive believing in the unity of nationhood and territory, of self-respect and national power" (119). She fails to come to terms with a "new world order" where borders are marked by passports, and not by trenches. Tha'mma visits Dhaka not only to visit her old home but also to bring her uncle back to India. Before returning to Dhaka for a short stay, she dreams of seeing the old Dhaka that she knew in her childhood. But she does not realize that the Dhaka she had left behind and the Dhaka she has seen in

Her return visit to her homeland are not the same. She cannot understand why her place of birth has come "to be messily at odds with her nationality" (152). Gera adds:

Tha'mma's search for the pre-partition Dhaka of her childhood and youth is projected as nostalgia for home. Tha'mma's attempt to identify herself as a native Dhakaian from the older parts of the city, who is contemptuous of the alien inhabitants of the new residential localities, records her amnesia in relation to her new Indian identity when confronted with more compelling claims of an older solidarity. (110)

Gera seems to have referred to Tha'mma's state of mind during her second visit to Dhaka. Tha'mma tries her best to find old glimpses of Dhaka then. She cannot come to terms with the changing world. She is an Indian and not a resident of East Bengal anymore. Her homecoming also leads to a sudden twist of fate. Tha'mma could never expect Tridib to fall victim to the communal riots of 1964. She has no sense of the political animosity between India and Pakistan. The loss of the prophet's hair in Nazratbal in 1964 had seen rumor and violence spread over India and Pakistan. Tha'mma had no way of knowing that Tridib would be murdered in her beloved Dhaka. She had tried unsuccessfully to affiliate herself with her homeland. The same people whom she thought of as friends turn out to be her enemies.

People of different nations are separated by boundaries. Borderland disputes are created by people. In "The Burthen of the Mystery: Imagination and Difference in *The Shadow Lines*," Mee observes, "the identities for which the people have spilled their blood are shifting, affected by the aspirations of the people themselves, and that boundaries are capable of being redrawn" (95). There is no fixed identity. Dhaka was Tha'mma's own country before the partition. Her return to her birthplace was not a pleasant experience. Each of her travel companions was treated as a foreigner even though Tha'mma thought Dhaka was her home, albeit one away from another home in India. Reality was too harsh on them. Each of them had to fill in the passport forms to collect visas to visit Tha'mma's uncle living in East Pakistan. During the reign of the British Empire there were no separate boundaries between the subcontinent nations. There was only one country, India, to define the whole subcontinent. Partition brought a change to the overall scenario. Constant changes in international politics on or before the Partition led to maps being redrawn and also brought changes in people's aspirations, objectives and expectations from their newly established country.

The logic behind the Partition still vexes many people. They try to rationalize the reason behind this event. Everyone has their own viewpoints regarding the Partition of India. Many still support the separation of India. However, in *The Shadow Lines*, Tridib shows no concern about politics. He is seen busier with national and international geographic channels of the world. We do not see him sharing his ideas about the Partition. On the other hand, characters like the narrator's parents have taken the separation of India as a normal course of life. They are not overwhelmed by the changes in politics. They treat every day as it comes. However, Tha'mma does not understand the reason behind partition. She is stuck in her past. She always takes great pride in her nationalistic feeling without understanding the ways of the changing world. In her return visit to her homeland seventeen years after she had left Dhaka in 1947,



Tha'mma "comes to know that border does not mean a solid wall put between two countries" (Alam 159). Tha'mma exclaims,

- If there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? . . . what was it all for then – partition and all the killing and everything – if there isn't something in between?

Tha'mma's son tries to erase her confusion regarding the changing political scenario. He explains to her that a boundary epitomizes "authoritative control" and not "physical geographical control" (Alam 159). He says, "The border isn't on the frontier: it's right inside the airport" (*TSL* 151-2). Tha'mma is distraught when she hears that she has to collect a visa to go to Dhaka. Before the partition, she "could come home to Dhaka whenever I wanted" (152). She always feels proud of her Indian identity. She wants to bring her uncle back to India in order to make him feel more comfortable in familiar surroundings. Mee observes,

the grandmother's very desire for national tidiness, for firm boundaries operating to guarantee a sense of self-presence, the desire to bring her family home to India, starts to unravel her faith in the stability of national identities. (95)

Tha'mma's attempt to take her uncle back to India, however, ends in a tragedy: her uncle, her nephew and Khalil, the rickshaw puller, are all killed in a riot.

Ghosh's search for "the little stories of small places" in family chronicles and neighborhood yarns makes him dig up histories buried and forgotten under the edifice of nationalism (Gera 110). Gera observes that Ghosh's novel examines the relevance of nationalism's concern with geographical restoration in the context of a new borderless, global landscape (111). Ghosh tries to go past the dominant Eurocentric discourse with a view to retelling the events of 1964 in order to give voices to those people who are never heard in mainstream history. Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* attempts to explore the almost forgotten incidents of the 1964 riots that took place in Kolkata and Khulna. He tries to throw light on the often ignored events of that year. They would have been forgotten to many if Ghosh had decided not to historicize that turbulent period. The narrator of *The Shadow Lines* himself could not gather first-hand knowledge about that incident. He had to leaf through many newspapers to discover the truth of the events of that period.

Tha'mma's feelings of nationalism are related to her idealistic views about self-esteem and the importance of national power. She does not like Ila's decision to stay in England. Tha'mma thinks only the British have earned the right to live in England because "It took those people a long time to build that country ... years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood ... War is their religion. That's what it takes to make a country" (*TSL* 77-78). Nationalism, the product of those times, carries for her the creed of religion, and informs her thoughts and deeds (Bhaduri 107). That is why the English can enjoy the privilege guaranteed by their country. She feels that Indians have no right to live there and enjoy the facilities that they have not earned. Similarly, Tha'mma's uncle does not believe in displacement. He does not want to see himself in India. Tha'mma fails to

change his mind. When she requests her uncle to leave his house for a better life in India, he makes a scathing attack on the notion of nationhood and nationalism. He says, "I don't believe in India-Shindia . . . I was born here and I'll die here" (215).

Tha'mma's uncle's remark indicates the resentment of people of the subcontinent suffering because of the decisions taken by Jinnah and Nehru on the basis of "Two Nation Theory" which led to conflicts and the struggle for power caused by political and economic self-interests. Tha'mma's uncle does not have any trust in politics. He does not want to shift to a new country to lead the life of an exile.

Ghosh depicts the politics of maps in subtle ways. In Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator compares the drawing of boundaries with the game of houses which Ila commands her young cousin to play through a willing suspension of disbelief. Ila says, "Don't you understand? I've just rearranged things a little. If we pretend it's a house, it'll be a house (70). Similarly, "rearrangement" and "pretension" are key words for the birth of nations. Most nations are created out of rearrangement, illusion and disillusion. The birth of a nation depends on the fixing of boundaries. A new nation is born out of the destruction and reconstruction of old boundaries. According to Gera, "Ghosh discovers the same strategy of 'rearrangement' and 'pretense' in the birth of nations, which he extends to the very process of the construction of reality" (116).

The notion of freedom is intermittently discussed in *The Shadow Lines*. Almost everyone is seen doing something to be free. However, the concept of freedom varies from person to person. Tha'mma believes in gaining freedom at any cost. A riot takes away the life of her innocent nephew Tridib. She is left with huge despair after the assassination of Tridib and her uncle. Tha'mma's friends turn out to be her enemies. After the incident, Tha'mma tells the narrator: "I gave the chain to the fund for the war . . . For your sake, for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us: we have to wipe them out" (237).

On the other hand, Ila has a different notion of freedom. Though born an Indian, she opts to be English. She seeks freedom of a different kind. She likes leading a life without restrictions. She has an Indian body but a British mindset. She picks a fight against Robi when she is warned by her brother not to dance with other men at a party. However, Ila cannot lead life as freely as she wants to. Her overwhelming passion for Nick curbs her desire to lead a free life. Ila's freedom is restricted after she gets married to Nick. She has to worry about Nick's alleged extra-marital affair with another woman as she fails to detach herself from Nick. Because of her devotion towards Nick, Ila at one point prevents the narrator from developing a relationship with her. She is restricted by her own chores. Nick uses her as an object, but because Ila has a sacrificing nature, she tries every means at her disposal to keep the relationship with Nick intact. At the end of the novel, readers see her inability to attain the kind of freedom she had always desired. She marries the same Nick who let her get beaten by a mob gang from his class. She is also jealous of Magda, the white doll. Ila belongs to those kinds of people who believe that everything white is beautiful. Speaking of Ila, N. Easwaram says, "She (Ila) seems to be the kind of person who is not attached to any particular place" (101).

Tridib is one of the most attractive characters of *The Shadow Lines*. He is a charismatic figure who helps expand the horizon of the narrator, giving him "worlds to dwell in" and "eyes to see them with" (20). Tridib teaches the narrator to "imagine with precision" (34). He is a renaissance man. His knowledge knows no bounds. He is a

romantic at heart. Tridib's knowledge of English places (despite the changing shift of events, construction and reconstruction of places that contradicted Tridib's knowledge of places with the narrator's expectations) helps the narrator to find many places similar to his uncle's description while he is pursuing his doctoral studies. As the narrator notes: "despite the clear testimony of my eyes it seemed to me still that Tridib had shown something truer about Solent Road a long time ago in Calcutta"(57). Tridib believes in cosmopolitanism. He is "happiest in neutral, impersonal places – coffee houses, bars, street corner adda – the sort of place where people come, talk and go away without expecting to know each other any further" (9). He has a positive attitude towards life. He hates people who "sink to the bottom of the sea of heartbreak when they lose sight of the herd" (18). Tridib likes the story of "a man without a country, who fell in love with a woman across-the seas" (186). He has an affair with May, a lady who lives in faraway England. We are told in his correspondence with May that he desires "to meet as the completest of strangers—strangers-across-the seas – all the more strangers because they knew each other already . . . in a place without a past, without history, free, really free, two people coming together with the utter freedom of strangers" (144). Tridib comes across as someone who swims across the frontier with his storehouse of knowledge. Unfortunately, the destruction of fratricidal politics of the subcontinent kills his life.

Politics gets murkier when there is violence involved. It is hard to tone down the scale of violence within a short span of time. People run amok at the time of violence. Many people get killed because of the violence which has a detrimental effect on children's mindsets. In *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator recounts his own experience of violence during the 1964 communal riots which led to the closing down of many schools and the police baton charging rioters in Calcutta and Khulna. The day when Tridib is murdered in Khulna, the narrator himself goes through a traumatic experience in Calcutta as "the streets had turned themselves inside out" and "the city" seemed to have "turned against all school children" (164). One of the narrator's school friends, Tublu, cried all the way for "all of us" (164). Everyone gathered around Tublu to console him. There was complete silence around everyone. The narrator compares the fear that he had experienced then with an earthquake. However, the fear they faced, the narrator believes, was beyond comparison. The narrator remembers his school mates starting to empty water bottles, fearing that they were poisoned. Moreover, mobs threw stones, pebbles and brickbats at school buses. While speaking of the tumultuous period, the narrator recollects how fear gripped the school children:

It is a fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets one inhabits, can become suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. (204)

Fear grips everyone when there is violence involved. When violence is raging, everyone fears that something ominous is going to happen. The spread of rumors also adds fuel to the fire. As a result of the impending nature of violence and the spread of rumors, everything becomes very chaotic. Amitav Ghosh stresses that due to social conditioning, the role of rumor in riots or mass movements can become deeply rooted (Kapadia 68). The main cause of communal riots in the novel was the stealing of the prophet's hair, which was caused by a rumor that had no connection with reality. But

and Muslims fought against each other on the basis of that rumor. By leafing through newspapers, the narrator found out that the real reason for the riots was rumor. In Calcutta rumours were in the air – especially that familiar old rumour, the harbinger of every serious riot – that the trains from Pakistan were arriving packed with corpses. With refugees still pouring in, rumours began to flow like floodwaters through the city and angry crowds began to gather at the stations (TSH 229).

In "Silence as Possible Mode of Response in *The Shadow Lines*," Rao observes that the communal riots "follow their own grotesque logic fed by rumours, devoid of humanity, as is evidenced at frequent intervals in the life of people living in the subcontinent since the Indian independence. The carnage let loose on such occasions is beyond description" (140). The riots erupt all of a sudden. There is no "hint of augury" before the impending carnage takes place. May's recollection about the tragic death of Tridib epitomizes the scale of violence she experiences, "When I got there, I saw three bodies. There were all dead. They'd cut Khalil's stomach open. The old man's head had been hacked off. And they'd cut Tridib's throat, from ear to ear" (151).

The narrator criticizes states, leaders and politicians who take no measures to stop the murder of innocent civilians. In fact, politicians are never bothered about the number of casualties during mob violence. A government is only interested in toning down the scale of violence by ordering the armed forces to kill anyone who distracts law and order. The armed forces only follow their superiors' command. They kill rioters. According to Rao, "the measure of government's success or failure depends on the number of deaths that occur. When only a few people get killed, governments have no use for them" (142). It is true that only a few people got killed in the 1964 communal strife, but there is no significant record of the number of casualties. As a result of insufficient data, many people do not have any idea about the scale of violence that occurred during the 1964 communal strife. While leafing through past newspaper records, the narrator found no accounts of the 1964 riots of East Pakistan in a leading Kolkata newspaper, which is "run by people who believed in the power of distance" and they also believed that shadow lines that are drawn to divide countries, regional borders, and "make good fences" to "make good neighbours" have a kind of absolute reality (138). The narrator says: Every word I write about those events of 1964 is the product of a struggle with silence I do not know where within me, in which corner of my world, this silence lies. . . . (218).

*The Shadow Lines* depicts a riot that occurred between ordinary Muslims and Hindus. Not many newspapers gave this incident the kind of treatment it deserved. It was almost excluded from public records. In *The Shadow Lines*, we find the impact of violence in Khulna where "some shops were burnt down and a few people killed" (227). Riots did spread from Khulna to Dhaka. In one rioting incident, almost "fourteen" people died "in frenzy off Khulna" (228). However, nothing significant happened in Kashmir. In newspaper reports, "there was not one single recorded incident of animosity between Kashmiri Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs" (225). Instead of spreading violence, Maulana Masoodi "persuaded the first demonstrators to march with black flags instead of green and thereby drew the various communities of Kashmir together in a collective display of mourning" (226). This indicates that astute leadership can stop violence from rearing its ugly head, and can metamorphose people of different sects into a united group.

The Second World War and partition displaced many people. In *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator's family escapes from Dhaka to Calcutta during partition. In Calcutta, they grew close to the Price family. The two families share a lot of memories. Tridib, the narrator's uncle, went to England for a short period and lived with the Prices during the Second World War. Apparently, the narrator started to depict incidents of his life soon after attaining his PhD in England. *The Shadow Lines* is about passages to and from England and India. Cross-cultural interaction and displacements occur because of partition and the Second World War with many victims resettling in a new land.

Partition traumatized the entire sub-continent. The religious conflicts left a sour taste on people's mouth. The sense of camaraderie that Indian Muslims and Hindus once had took a vicious turn after partition. Both India and Pakistan became antagonistic to each other after 1947. Communal frenzy ended the rapport that people of different religious sects had forged. It put an abrupt end to the shared communal history and culture.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* is without a doubt one of the greatest works of Indian literature in English. It is a novel which delineates almost every major issue related to the recent history of the subcontinent. It is especially memorable for the way it delineates often forgotten political events by bringing in characters from each period. In this novel, we find Tha'mma as an avid nationalist; Tridib, a universalist; Ila, a globalist; the narrator's mother as a subservient wife, Robi, a repressed nationalist, and the narrator, an innocent witness to the political conflict of the time. The narrator was not born when the Second World War and partition had taken place. He was very young during the communal strife of 1964. As a result, he could not have known the exact reason behind Tridib's murder. His father resolves the mystery behind Tridib's murder when the narrator grows older. In spite of being ignorant of such political incidents of the subcontinent, the narrator retraces the "story behind a story" – which gives his listeners the chance to know what actually happens through everyone's life when there is violence involved.

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## Strong Women in Rabindranath Tagore's "Laboratory" and "Mussulmanir Galpa"

Niaz Zaman\*

**Abstract:** *The paper examines two strong women characters in Rabindranath Tagore's late short stories: "Laboratory" and "Mussulmanir Galpa." In the former story, Tagore portrays an unconventional woman, very different from his earlier fictional heroines, while in the latter he portrays a Hindu woman who, because of circumstances, takes the decision to convert to Islam. Both the stories reveal a changing world, unconventional in one, violent in the other. Through the strong women of these two stories, Tagore suggests that women cannot merely accept changes but must attempt to act to find positive solutions.*

Rabindranath Tagore's first short story, "Bhikarini," was published in the Sraban/Bhadra issue of *Bharati*, that is, in August/September 1877. His last short story, dictated in June 1941, shortly before his death in August that year, was "Mussulmanir Galpa" – which appeared posthumously in *Ritupatra* in Asharh 1362 (June 1955). This story has been labelled "a *khasra*," a draft, in the composite *Galpaguchha*, consisting of all four volumes (879). However, though the story is extremely short, it has the structure of a completed short story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end – surprising, but also in keeping with poetic justice. Tagore's last story, written in his own hand and not dictated, was "Laboratory," which was published in the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* on 15 Ashwin 1347 (September 1940), a few months before Tagore passed away.

Both "Laboratory" and "Mussulmanir Galpa" are very different from Tagore's earlier stories. As Tagore himself said in an interview with *Forward* in 1936, his early stories were based on his contact with villagers, who "seemed to belong to quite another world so different from that of Calcutta" (851). He went on to say that these stories had "the freshness of youth" (851). His later stories, he regretted, "haven't got that freshness, that tenderness of earlier stories" (852). However, he believed that these later stories "have greater psychological value and they deal with problems" (853). When he was young he did not have these social or political problems in his focus. He pointed out that a writer does not stay static but changes with time and different experiences. In his words, "All of us have different incarnations in this very life. We are born again and again in this very life. When we come out of one period, we are as if born again. So we have our literary incarnations also" (853).

In both "Mussulmanir Galpa" and "Laboratory," Tagore discusses psychological and social issues that he had not dealt with earlier. Since both these stories focus on women characters, it would be good to examine a number of Tagore's earlier short stories which focus on women characters. In "Jibito O Mrito" (Living and Dead), published in *Shadhona* in Sraban 1299, that is July 1892, Tagore narrates the story of Kadambini, who everyone thinks is a ghost. Kadambini had been taken to the cremation grounds to be burned after she was supposedly dead. However, the rain starts

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and the men given the task of burning her leave the place. Kadambini revives. When she realizes she is alive, she tries to return to her family. However, she is shunned. Finally, Kadambini has to die in order to prove that she had not died earlier. As Tagore puts it, "*Kadambini moriya praman korilo she more nai*" (91).

In "*Streer Potra*" (The Wife's Letter), published in *Sabujpotra* in Sraban 1321 (July 1914), Tagore writes what might well be considered a feminist story. In this epistolary short story, Mrinal, a typical Bengali housewife, leaves home after the suicide of Bindu, purportedly to travel to Hindu holy sites. She writes the letter to her husband, narrating the story of Bindu and ending with the bold statement that though she will not commit suicide like Bindu, she will not return to her husband's patriarchal home: "*Ami aar tomader shei satash number makhon baraler galite phirbo na. Ami Bindu ke dekhechhi. Sangsharer majkhane meyemanusher parichayta je ki ta ami peyechhi. Aar amar darkar nei*" [I will not return to number twenty-seven, Makhon Baral Lane. I have seen what happened to Bindu. I have learned what the place of women is in the world. I do not need that any more] (575).

No, she assures her husband, she is not going to commit suicide. She reminds her husband of Mira Bai. Mira Bai did not kill herself, and neither will she:

*Tumi bhabechho aami morte jachhi – bhoy nei. Omon purano thatta tomader shonge aami korbo na. Mira Bai o to amari moto meyemanush chhilo – taar shikol o to kom bhari chhilo na, take to banchbar jonye morte hoy ni. Mira Bai tar gane bolechhilo "Chharuk Baba, chharuk Ma, chharuk je jekhane achhe, Mira kintu legei roilo, prabhu – tate tar ja hobar ta hok." Ei lege thakai to benche thaka. Aamio banchbo. Aami banchlum.* (576)

[You think I am going to commit suicide. Don't worry. I will not play that old joke on you. Mira Bai too was a woman like me. Her shackles were no heavier than mine. She did not commit suicide in order to live. Mira Bai said in one of her songs, "Let my father forsake me, let my mother forsake me, let who will forsake me. Mira will continue to survive, Lord – let whatever will happen to her happen." This continuing to survive is living.

I too will live. I am living.]

Like Ibsen's Nora, Mrinal leaves home and husband, rejecting strictures placed on women by a patriarchal society. However, in his two late short stories, "Laboratory" and "Mussulmanir Galpa," Tagore portrayed two strong women characters who did not leave home unlike Mrinal – or Ibsen's Nora. Of course, in "Mussulmanir Galpa," circumstances compel Kalpana to leave home twice – the first time when she gets married and has to leave for her husband's house and the second time when she is rejected because she has been abducted and dwelt in a Muslim's home. Kalpana returns to the home of the old Muslim who rescued her and gave her shelter. She does not, however, just come to terms with her situation but makes a decision which derives from the new knowledge that her experiences have imparted to her. Moreover, she is not a passive victim at the end of the story, but a strong woman who acts when the time comes. Neither Sohini in "Laboratory" nor Kalpana in "Mussulmanir Galpa" believes that the answer to the problems is leaving home. The answer is acting.

Tagore's interest in science is reflected in "Laboratory," which is very different from Tagore's other short stories in its portrayal of Sohini, whose values are very different from that of Tagore's earlier heroines. Tagore had to face adverse comments



about this story. In *Kabi-Katha*, Prashantachandra Mahalanbish describes the poet's asking him how people had reacted to "Laboratory." Has everyone condemned it, Tagore asked. Are people saying that the eighty-year-old poet has gone mad? Are they saying he shouldn't have written it? But, Tagore went on to say, "*Aami ichha korei to kachhe. Sohini manushta ki rokom, taar moner jor, taar loyalty, ei holo ashole boro kaha - taar deher kahini taar kachhe tuchho*" [I wrote it deliberately. The kind of person that Sohini is, her determination, her loyalty – these are the essential parts of the story, not what she does with her body] (865).

Bharati Ray in her essay, "'New Woman' in Rabindranath Tagore's Short Stories: An Interrogation of 'Laboratory,'" has discussed the feminist perspective of the story, calling Sohini a "New Woman." And, indeed, Sohini is a strong woman. However, apart from Sohini, there are two other strong women in the story: an older woman – the *pishima*, the paternal aunt, of the young scientist that Sohini selects to look after her husband's laboratory, and Nila, her daughter. My reading of the story is that Tagore gives us three strong women in the story who influence the men in their lives and who conflict with each other, with Tagore suggesting that it is women like Sohini who can continue the work started by men.

Nila is apparently more of a "New Woman" than is Sohini. Nila smokes cigarettes and even cigars, she wears a silk nightdress, she makes the first overtures to Reboti. However, Nila's influence is negative, detrimental to the young scientist's dedication to his work. Pishima's influence is also detrimental to both Reboti the boy and the man. She hovers suffocatingly over him like a mother. And, at the end, when he is about to get married to Nila, Pishima breaks off the marriage and leaves, followed meekly by Reboti.

The strong woman who works for good is Sohini. Interestingly, Tagore did not make her a Bengali but a Punjabi. She comes to Nanda Kishore, a scientist, asking him to rescue her and her Aima who brought her up. Aima needs seven thousand rupees to save her property. If Nanda Kishore rescues them from their predicament, Sohini will marry him and never leave – though she makes it quite clear to him that there have been other men in her life. When Nanda Kishore dies, carrying out an experiment, Sohini decides she will look after the laboratory and hires Reboti. Initially, she thinks that Reboti will be a good match for Nila, but eventually realizes that Reboti, who has never been exposed to young women, will suffer from this relationship. She forbids the two to meet, but when she has to leave to attend to her Aima who is ill, Nila tempts Reboti. Under Nila's influence, Reboti leaves the laboratory to become the president of a society and to attend parties. He agrees to marry Nila.

But Sohini is determined to save her laboratory. Earlier, she had told Reboti's teacher with whom she had become friendly, "*Ami Punjaber meye, amar hate chhuri khole shahaje. Aami khun korte pari ta she amar nijer meye hok, amar jami-pader wewdar hok* [I am a Punjabi woman. I can wield a knife skillfully. I can kill anyone, whether it is my own daughter or whether it is my son-in-law] (722). When Sohini returns to find that not only has Nila succeeded in distracting Reboti from his work, but is also consulting lawyers about how to get a share of Nanda Kishore's property, Sohini reveals her secret. Nila is not her husband's daughter. Nanda Kishore had known that; he had hidden nothing from him. However, she gave him his due and she would continue to look after his legacy. Dr. Chowdhury suggests that when Reboti's infatuation is over, he will return to his work. No, says, Sohini, he will not come near

her laboratory. However, as the marriage is going ahead, Pishima enters and calls Reboti. Reboti leaves immediately. He doesn't look behind even once.

Finally then, Sohini is left alone with her laboratory. Tagore does not tell us what will happen to her laboratory. But, in telling the story of how Sohini acquired the laboratory and how she attempted to preserve it, we get Tagore's picture of what a strong woman can do. Unlike Tagore's other women, she not only confesses in private to being a bad woman, she also gives birth to an illegitimate child and, when she is about to lose her husband's legacy, discloses in public the truth about Nila's parenthood. After her husband's death, she does not become a proper widow. She tells the professor, "*Amar boyosher bidhoba meyera thakur-devatar dalalder dalali diye porokaler dorja phank kore nite chay. Apni shune hoyto raag korben, aami o shab kichui bishwas kori ne*" [Widows of my age frequent holy places and meet priests who aver they can open the doors to the after-life. You may be angry when you hear this, but I do not believe any of this] (698).

Sohini is attracted to Dr. Chowdhury and kisses him once the first time, twice the second time so that the professor jokes with her, asking her whether the kisses will increase exponentially. When Sohini wants Reboti to become interested in Nila, she powders her own hair so that she will look older, dresses Nila in an attractive manner and even points out how attractive she looks. She prepares special delicacies for Reboti — *badamer takti, pistar barfi, chandrapuli, khirer chhanch, malaiyer barfi, bhapa doi* — and says that Nila has prepared these dishes herself. Afterwards, of course, she tries actively to prevent their marriage. The marriage does not take place, but not because of Sohini but because of an older strong woman.

In the story, Tagore has the professor discuss matriarchal society with Sohini. In Bengal, Dr. Chowdhury says, there was matriarchal society in the past. But that is not so today, responds Sohini. It still is, says the professor. Is there any other country in the world where men cry out to the mother? (699). Was "Laboratory" Tagore's attempt to show what matriarchal society would be like? In *Sultana's Dream* (1905),<sup>1</sup> Roquiah Sakhawat Hossein had shown a matriarchal society where women were scientists and teachers. In Tagore's story, men are scientists and teachers; women are caregivers and preservers of men's legacy. It is not enough.

In "Laboratory," Tagore introduces a Punjabi woman; in "Mussulmanir Galpa," he introduces a Muslim woman. Tagore has few Muslim characters in his writings, the most outstanding, of course, being the Kabuliwallah in the eponymous short story.<sup>2</sup> "Mussulmanir Galpa" is unique for two reasons. In the eponymous novel *Gora*, Tagore had analyzed what it means to be a Hindu, Christian or Brahmo. Gora believes in the purity of caste until he finally learns the truth about his race and religion. In "Mussulmanir Galpa," where a Hindu woman becomes a Muslim and marries a Muslim, Tagore seems to suggest through her that one can believe in both religions: Hinduism and Islam. This short story is also perhaps unique in that not only does the

<sup>1</sup> "Sultana's Dream" was written in English and published in *Indian Ladies Magazine* (Madras) in 1905. Three years later, the story came out in book form from S.K. Lahiri and Co., Calcutta.

<sup>2</sup> The Bangla original, "Kabuliwallah" (1892), is anthologized in Rabindranath Tagore's *Galpaguchha* (Calcutta: Vishwabharati, 2010), 110-115. The first English translation in 1912 by Sister Nivedita is available online at a number of sites. Accessed January 22, 2012. Other online sites edit the word "Cabuliwallah" to "Kabuliwallah."

female protagonist not die, she is also able to save another woman – Mrinal had failed to save Bindu.

Apart from the earlier “Kabuliwallah,” Muslims appear as minor characters in Tagore’s stories. And even in this short story, Tagore plays upon the racial prejudices and fears that Bengalis have of Kabuliwallahs: they are none too clean, they are violent and hot-tempered, and they kidnap little children and put them in their ubiquitous bags. Thus, when the stranger first appears, his appearance is not very pleasant: “He wore the coarse soiled clothing of his people, with a tall turban; there was a bag on his back, and he carried boxes of grapes in his hand.”

Kabuliwallahs were reputed to be kidnappers and Mini is initially terrified of him: “Overcome by terror, she fled to her mother’s protection, and disappeared. She had a blind belief that inside the bag, which the big man carried, there were perhaps two or three other children like herself.” Between the narrator and the Kabuliwallah, Mini manages to overcome her fears. Mini’s mother is not as easily convinced that the man is harmless. She rebukes her husband for allowing the Kabuliwallah to mix with their daughter and begs her husband to keep a watchful eye on him.

I tried to laugh her fear gently away, but then she would turn round on me seriously, and ask me solemn questions.

Were children never kidnapped?

Was it, then, not true that there was slavery in Kabul?

Was it so very absurd that this big man should be able to carry off a tiny child?

In the course of the story, the little Bengali girl and the bearded Afghan become friends, and the narrator is surprised to find Mini laughing and talking with the Kabuliwallah. Eventually, however, Mini’s mother’s fears come true. The Afghan is a violent man. When a customer does not pay him for a shawl he has bought, the Kabuliwallah stabs him to death and is marched off to prison. When the Kabuliwallah returns eight years later, Mini is about to get married. Her father, who had almost completely forgotten about the Afghan, is unhappy at the appearance of this jailbird on his daughter’s wedding day. It is inauspicious, he thinks. However, by the end of the story, Tagore shows how even this violent man can have a soft side to him. The man had left behind a daughter, who would be the same age as Mini. The reference to this daughter makes the narrator empathize with the Kabuliwallah. Unable to do much to help him earlier – there had been no attempt to intercede for him with the police – or now, he curtails on the marriage celebrations so that Rahmat<sup>3</sup> can go to visit his daughter who, like his own, must have grown up as well.

It is significant that the Afghan is referred to by the term “Kabuliwallah.” The term was pejorative. What Tagore was attempting to do was break down racial prejudices and show the human side of an outsider. There is no reference to the man’s religion, but we may read into the story both race and religion – concerns that Tagore brought up in *Gora* (1910). It was not, however, till the end of his life that Tagore took up the theme of religion again in his fiction.

In “Mussulmanir Galpa,” Tagore has two Muslim characters: Hobir Khan, an elderly Muslim, who married a Hindu woman, and Kamala, who is Hindu but becomes

<sup>3</sup> The name in the Bangla original is Rahmat, but Sister Nivedita used the name Rahman.

a Muslim. In the story, Kamala gets married and leaves home for her new home. On the way, the bridal party is attacked by dacoits. Kamala manages to escape and is given shelter by Hobir Khan. Hobir Khan takes Kamala to his home and tells her that she can pray according to her religion without fear of pollution. There is a Hindu prayer room in the house – where Hobir Khan’s Hindu wife would pray. But Kamala does not want to stay in Hobir Khan’s house and pleads with him to take her back to her uncle’s place. But when she reaches her uncle’s house, she is rejected as inauspicious and polluted. She has been widowed and she has stayed in a Muslim household.

Kamala returns with Hobir Khan to his house. Though Hobir Khan has told Kamala that she can keep her own religion, she tells him that her own religion had rejected her, the god of that religion had rejected her, dishonored her. She first got the affection she wanted in Hobir Khan’s household. Her god is therefore neither Hindu nor Muslim. But she has fallen in love with Hobir Khan’s second son and asks to be converted: “*Tumi mussulman kore nao amake, tate amar apatti hobe na – amar nahoy du dharm i thakuk*” [Convert me to Islam. I have no objection. Let me then belong to both religions] (747). By choosing to convert to Islam, Kamala could remarry. Unlike Hindu widows, Muslim widows could marry again. There was no religious stricture against widow remarriage in Islam – Bibi Khadija, the Prophet’s wife, was a widow when he married her.

In the twist that readers have come to expect at the end of short stories, the uncle and aunt who had rejected Kamala now suffer the same fate through their daughter, Sarala. Sarala, like Kamala, gets married and the bridal party sets off for the bridegroom’s home. On the way, the bridal party has once again to pass through a dacoit-infested region. Dacoits set upon the bridal party. This time, however, it is not Hobir Khan who rescues the new bride, but Kamala – now renamed Meherjaan. Meherjaan returns Sarala to her aunt and uncle. She tells her uncle that they can take Sarala back: she has not been polluted. She tells her cousin, “*Amar bon jodi kokhono dukhe pore tobe mone thake jeno tar mussulman didi ache, take raksha korar jonye*” [If my sister is ever in trouble, she should remember that she has a Muslim sister to rescue her] (748).

Why did Tagore, almost fifty years after he wrote “Kabuliwallah,” write another story where the protagonist is a Muslim, and a Muslim woman at that? Perhaps, Tagore, who was always conscious of what was happening around him, was responding to the Hindu-Muslim tensions at the time. In 1905, when Bengal had been partitioned along religious lines, he had protested; in 1911, he had written “Jana Gana Mana,” celebrating the end of that partition and celebrating the multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multi-religious society that was India. However, as the years passed, the tensions between Muslims and Hindus became more acute. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the leader of Indian Muslims, had, during the first two decades of the 20th century, advocated Hindu-Muslim unity and helped to shape the 1916 Lucknow Pact between the Congress and the All-India Muslim League. In tribute to his mediating role, Sarojini Naidu called Jinnah “the best ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity” (Quoted Noorani).<sup>4</sup> However,

<sup>4</sup> In a biographical note on Jinnah in *Mohomed Ali Jinnah: An Ambassador of Unity*, published by Ganesh & Sons, Madras, in 1918, Sarojini Naidu said, “He has true stuff in him and that freedom from all sectarian prejudice which will make him the best ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity.” Ian Bryant Wells draws upon Sarojini Naidu’s comment for the title of his book: *Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity: Jinnah’s Early Politics*.

when the Indian National Congress agreed to follow Mohandas Gandhi's campaign of *satyagraha* or non-violent resistance, Jinnah resigned from the Congress. The Congress and the Muslim League drifted further apart.

Serious proposals started being made for a separate state for Muslims in India. The growing division between Muslims and Hindus may be noticed in the Urdu poet, Muhammad Iqbal, who changed from patriotic Indian to pan-Islamist Muslim and later to one of the early advocates of a Muslim state. In 1904, Iqbal wrote the song "*Tarana-e-Hindi*," the opening lines of which are "*Sare jahan se accha hai hindostan hamara/ham bulbulein hain iski ye gulsitan hamara*" [India is better than all the rest of the world. We are its nightingales, it is our garden]. However, in 1910, Iqbal changed the wordings of this poem so that it became "*Tarana-e-Milli*," a song for Muslims. The opening lines of the song become "*Chin-o-arab hamara, hindostan hamara/muslim ham ham, vatan hai sara jahan hamara*" [China and Arabia are ours, Hindustan is ours/We are Muslims, the whole world is our homeland]. In a speech given at a Muslim League session at Allahabad in 1930, Iqbal called for a state for Muslims in India. In 1933, Choudhary Rahmat Ali published a pamphlet advocating the creation of a new state which he named "Pakistan," comprising "the Muslim-majority areas of India, the five Northern units of India viz: Punjab, North-West Frontier Province (Afghan Province), Kashmir, Sind, and Baluchistan." The name of the state, meaning "the pure land," was composed of the initial letters of Punjab, Afghanistan, and Kashmir, with the suffix "istan" taken from Baluchistan – the provinces that would form the new state.<sup>5</sup> By 1940, Jinnah had come to believe that Indian Muslims should have their own state. In March that year, the Muslim League, led by Jinnah, passed the Lahore Resolution<sup>6</sup> demanding a separate nation.

These Hindu-Muslim tensions also undoubtedly affected Tagore. It is possible that in his last short story, he attempted to stress that Hindus and Muslims could live together from the example of Hobir Khan – who had a Hindu wife – and Kamala, who converts to Islam but stresses that she will be faithful to both religions. As Tagore had noted in an interview published in *Forward*, he did not have social or political problems before him when he was young. It is quite clear that in "Mussulmanir Galpa," the political problems and schisms of the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century were bothering Tagore. Perhaps he chose as his protagonist a woman rather than a man because a woman was deemed to be more vulnerable, perhaps because a woman was not concerned with political problems but was affected by both social and political problems, perhaps because, earlier in *Gora*, he had analyzed the situation of a man brought up as a Hindu but whose parents were Christians. Thus, both "Laboratory" and "Mussulmanir Galpa" are significant stories of a changing world – and in the latter, a more violent world – and in both of which Tagore attempts through his created characters not to come to terms with it but to find positive solutions through strong women.

<sup>5</sup> Bengal did not figure in Choudhary Rahmat Ali's scheme – though Bengal was most active in the struggle for Pakistan.

<sup>6</sup> The resolution was tabled by A.K. Fazlul Haq.

This is an expanded version of a talk given at a discussion of Rabindranath Tagore's short stories on the occasion of the Nobel laureate's birth anniversary, organized by The Reading Circle and the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre, Dhaka, in May 2012.

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# Impact of Personality on English Language Learning in Bangladesh

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*Abstract: This paper is a report on a study which attempts to examine the relationship that exists between personality and English language learning. The Myer-Briggs Personality Type Indicator was used to carry out the research. The study sample was made up of twenty students with varying personality types who were doing their third foundation course in English at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh. Standardized spoken and written tests were used in the research to see if there is any relation between personality type and English language learning. The study shows that variations in the personality traits of students positively or negatively affect English language learning. This paper also investigated what students think about their teachers' personality and how it affects their personality and English language learning success.*

## Introduction

The difficulty of having a classroom comprised of introvert students is quite understandable. In an ideal situation, a teacher would like to have a good proportion of extrovert students in their class.

The outgoing nature of the extroverts makes their positive personality traits very apparent to all. Therefore, their positive traits often overshadow their negative ones. On the other hand, introverts are likely to be undervalued as they tend to be quiet and thus fail to showcase some of their very unique potentials in a short period of time. So, it is not unlikely for a teacher to consider a student's quietness as their lack of proficiency. As a result, the role of the class teacher is very important to help the introverts get rid of their social stigma.

A teacher is successful when students possess similar attitudes towards the target language, classroom activities and develop the target language at a quasi-equal level. It is important for the language instructor to understand their own personality as well as the personality type of students in order to develop materials which would benefit them with varying personality types (Ellis, 2005).

The personality types of our students at the tertiary level are probably very diverse for various reasons. One of the reasons is that our students come from three kinds of education systems – Bangla medium, English medium, and the Madrasha system (Asadullah, 2006). Asadullah (2006) posits that in these three streams of education the status of English and the teaching/learning approaches differ considerably. Based on the findings of his study it has been suggested that these differences among the mediums not only bring disparity in the students' standards of academic performance in English but also in their beliefs about the language learning approaches. In light of his findings, it may be reasonably argued that the social and cultural backgrounds of the students may also impart a role on students' personality.

This study will investigate whether students think that teachers' use of language, their appearance, approaches to teaching, choice of topics for materials and class activities, are in sync with students and how gestures and body language affect students' personality traits and performance in English language tests.

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The study seeks to investigate any significant relationships between personality and success in second language learning. Specifically, the researcher will look for answers to whether it is difficult for extroverts to reach accuracy in both speaking and writing. Another purpose of this study, if the findings are significant enough, is to find the techniques that can be used in post-secondary education to tackle the difficulties occurring as a result of personality variations as a culture bound trait.

### Definitions of key terms:

**Personality:** Personality refers to a dynamic and organized set of characteristics possessed by a person that uniquely influences his or her cognition, motivation and behavior in various situations (Myers & McCaulley, 1986).

**Extroverts:** According to the Myer-Briggs personality type theory, extroverts are those who are very social, prompt and always take part in classroom activities (Myers & McCaulley, 1986).

**Introverts:** Myer-Briggs say introverts are those who find it very difficult to get along with the classroom activities as they tend to be reflective and reserved (Myers & McCaulley, 1986).

**Balanced:** Balanced students are in the middle of introverts and extroverts. So, they enjoy both the aspect of being an introvert and an extrovert (Eysenck, & Eysenck, 1985).

### Literature Review

#### i. Personality:

In general parlance we perceive personality as one's preferred way of being or doing things in life. So, personality is likely to be predictable as one's preference for certain actions tends to be consistent. For example, one who tended to be quiet and reserved today may tend to be quiet and reserved tomorrow as well. The notion of a rigid personality type is further strengthened by the static-character research, which is typically based on a definition of personality comprising five features called the five-factor model (Brody & Ehrlichman, 1998), including openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism.

Personality has, however, been studied in a variety of ways. Some other studies have accepted the idea that personalities are also changeable. So, personality is not permanently stamped into our genes. Therefore, the personality traits such as perceiving, acting, thinking, reacting, coping mechanism, feelings, beliefs, etc. are not exclusively definitive.

#### ii. Instructional Methodology:

Wakamoto (2000) indicates that a diversity in instructional strategy may cater to the needs of all the students and a blend of instructional approach may avoid bias towards any particular type of personality and thus no single personality type will receive preferential treatment (Ellis, 2005). Some studies show that the introverts are better language learners as they tend to be reflective and thus produce accurate language (Ellis, 2008; MacIntyre and Charos, 1996). On the other hand, many other studies show that introverts perform poorly in speaking tests (Furman, cited in Zafar and Meenakshi,

2012). It is very unlikely that all teachers and students would be introvert by nature. Since Bangladeshi classes usually feature only one style of instruction (teacher centered/lectured based), it may satisfy some learners but unfairly challenge other types of learners with varying personalities (Nesa, 2004). So, eventually, all learners are shortchanged by a specific style of teaching/ learning approach and thus develop mastery in specific skills of a language that is facilitated by their preferred mode of learning.

#### Personality and SLA:

There has been a great deal of interest in the last 10 - 20 years on what makes a good language learner. And most studies have commonly attributed credit to learners' language learning styles, which is determined by one's personality, for successful second language acquisition (SLA). The Kolb/McCarthy learning-styles model (as cited in Brody & Ehrlichman, 1998) suggests that different things are best learned through different learning styles and techniques. This sounds very practical and logical, particularly with reference to the language learning objectives of a language course and the means/techniques of achieving those goals. For example, a good write up requires the learners to be reflective, focused, reserved and independent thinkers, whereas a speaking class would appreciate learners who are more social, prompt and risk-takers.

Brown (2001) opined that a learner's personality determines the ways a learner controls his/ her emotions and feelings during the learning process. Based on certain studies, a learner's pattern of perceiving, acting, thinking, reacting, coping mechanism, feelings, beliefs, etc. are all considered to be influenced by his/her personality type (Brown, 2001, Ellis, 2008; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985, Oxford, 2003).

Many research findings show that extroverts are better language learners as they are more social than the introverts (Oxford, 2003, Vygotsky, 1962). However, researchers like Naimen (1978) believe that personality types have nothing to do with language learning and therefore Naimen argues "there is no significant relationship between extroversion/introversion and proficiency" (64). On the other hand, Vygotsky focuses on the qualities of the extroverts for better language learning and says "By working with friends, classmates and same age students they can share and exchange their knowledge and in this way they may learn unknown things. By following those qualities of extroverts the introverts can acquire more knowledge" (Vygotsky, 1962).

Spada (2000) points out that it is necessary to bring some kind of combination in the personality type in order to help the learners learn the language quickly. Neither introvert nor extrovert is good for learning as none are flawless and both need to be aided by the other. For example, the extroverts are so talkative that they often miss many important discussions of the class and thus fall behind. On the other hand, the introverts speak so less that it becomes very difficult for the instructor to understand the learners lacking and to provide appropriate feedback.

#### Methodology

A quantitative research design will be used in exploring the issue. The study selected an entire class consisting of 20 students (Dörnyei, 2007, p.95) through random sampling strategy since the class is typical of all the English language classes at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) in Bangladesh. The selection criterion is based on the participants' age, background of education, personality types, and finally on their experience of getting along with the class activities. Though the questionnaire contains

some open-ended questions which were supported by relevant studies in this realm, the study relies heavily on the numbers of the gathered data from the questionnaire, exam grades and class performance, etc. to investigate the research questions.

### Research questions

1. How do introverts differ from extroverts and balanced students in terms of personality traits?
2. Is the development of language learning related to personality type?
3. Does the personality type of the teacher influence students' personality and success in language learning?

### Participants and setting

The study sample was made up of the undergraduate students of ULAB who were enrolled in the foundation course (ENG-103), which is the third and last foundation course in English. Twenty students participated in the study.

Personality has been classified into different types by different researchers based on one's preferred ways of doing things in life. This study used Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Myers & McCaulley, 1986), based on Carl Jung's concept of archetypes to categorize learners' learning preferences. This instrument defines personality as a dynamic and organized set of characteristics possessed by a person that uniquely influences his or her cognition, motivation and behavior in various situations. This type indicator of personality includes four types of scales, of which only two types, extroversion and introversion will be used and the Balanced personality type discussed by Ellis (2005) is included in this study to understand learner's role in acquiring second language.

**Table-1:** Number of Students at Each Level and the Gender Composition:

#### Personality Type Distribution

Personality Type	Gender		Total by personality type
	Female(8)	Male(12)	
Extrovert	1	4	5
Balanced	2	4	6
Introvert	5	4	9
<b>Total number of students</b>			<b>20</b>

The setting of the study was informal as the researcher was the instructor of the course. As a result, students' response to the questionnaire and classroom activities had some chance to be affected by the presence of the teacher.

The researcher stored the writing portfolio, grades of writing and speaking tests, and the researcher also kept records of class participation of each student in order to match it with the findings of the research questionnaire and also to see if the students were able to minimize their deficiencies based on their personality type.

The format of the questionnaire is shown in the Appendix.

### Data Collection Procedure

The researcher administrated the questionnaire to the students on the first day of their Foundation English Course (Eng-103). This questionnaire was divided into three parts, the first part named "Part A." It comprised eight questions and these close ended questions were made based on the Myer-Briggs Personality Type Indicator. The answers to the questions elicited the personality types of the learners. The second part of the questionnaire was named "Part B" and was made up of five close-ended questions. This questionnaire was used to form an idea about the students' attitude towards the target language, target language instructor, the materials used in the class and how the students behaved in the language class. This part of the questionnaire was very important in the research as it was thought to give a clear diagnosis of each student's personality deficiency as a second language learner. The researcher used the answers of this part to compare the students' performance throughout the course including the final grades. The third part of the questionnaire was called "Part C," which had four open-ended questions. This part was used to supplement some additional ideas regarding the students' personality type.

To judge the improvement rate of the three different types of students over the semester, two speaking tests [one impromptu (Midterm Exam) and one prepared presentation (Final Test)] and two written tests (Pre-announced Midterm and Final Test) were taken by students.

### Data Analysis Procedure

The description of the personality type was sorted out by reason. The extrovert (25%), balanced (30%) and introvert (45%) students approved the classroom activities at 40%, 60% and 22% respectively. The table below will show the students' impression of classroom activities.

Table-2: An Impression on Classroom Activity:

Reason	Total Number of students 20		
	Extrovert (5)	Balanced (6)	Introvert (9)
Enjoy Speaking	3	1	1
Like writing	2	3	7
Like reading	1	4	7
Enjoy listening	1	2	7
Enough time to finish tasks	4	3	2
Group discussion	3	2	1
Work alone	3	3	6
Role play	2	3	2

### Analysis of the Grades

#### Comparison of the speaking grades:

Comparing the speaking midterm grades with the final speaking grades of the three different types of students, it is seen that the extroverts made very little progress (the number of students getting Grades ranging from A to B-) in their final from the midterm, whereas the balanced and the introverts made reasonable and huge progress in their final from their midterm respectively. Surprisingly, the ratio of extrovert students who did poorly in the midterm speaking test did slightly better in the final speaking test.

**Table-3: Speaking Grades:**

Personality type	Midterm speaking grade		Final speaking grade	
	Grade range A to B-	Grade range C+ to below	Grade range A to B-	Grade range C+ to below
<b>Extrovert: 5</b>	3	2	5	1
<b>Balanced: 6</b>	4	2	5	1
<b>Introvert: 9</b>	5	3	6	3

*Comparison of the writing grades:*

If we compare the writing midterm grades with the final writing grades of the three different types of students, then we see that the extroverts made very little progress (the number of students getting Grades ranging from A to B-) in their final from the midterm, whereas the balanced and the introverts made reasonable and huge progress in their final from their midterm respectively. See Table-4 (Grades for Midterm).

**Table-4: Writing Grades:**

Personality type	Midterm writing grade		Final writing grade	
	Grade range A to B-	Grade range C+ to below	Grade range A to B-	Grade range C+ to below
<b>Extrovert: 5</b>	3	2	3	2
<b>Balanced: 6</b>	3	3	5	1
<b>Introvert: 9</b>	5	4	7	2

**Personality traits of a teacher:**

Table 5 was designed to find out which personality traits of teachers are associated significantly with the students' English language learning. While filling out this questionnaire, the students were asked to rate not only the class teacher but also other English teachers they had in previous semesters at the university. According to the students, they do well in a language course due to some of those qualities of their teachers, which are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5**

Personality traits of teachers	Students' responses
Voice (Dull/Monotone)	18 (90%)
Use of language	20 (100%)
Appearance	9 (45%)
Approaches to teaching	18 (90%)
Selection of materials	19 (95%)
Rapport with students	20 (100%)

Smiles	17(75%)
Assertive and Directive	20 (100%)
Feedback(Positive and constructive)	13 (65%)
Eye contact	19 (95%)
Physical position in the classroom	17 (85%)

Usually a second language classroom reciprocates the child language acquisition process, where learners are required to act more social, outgoing, motivated, confident. But studies show that learners' inauthenticity with the linguistic structures of the target language brings changes in their beliefs (Dornyei, 2003) and personality (Oxford, 1995). Oxford's (2003) study points out that a supportive facilitator through the virtue of her personality traits may help L2 learners reduce their inflamed anxiety, negative self-image, low confidence, demotivation, etc. So, the role of a teacher is important not only in developing classroom materials and classroom management but may also impart an effective role in helping learners build up a balanced personality through friendly behavior, gamut of tones, eye contact, classroom materials, rewards, praise, punishments and feedback.

#### Reasons for introversion:

The chart below was designed to elicit students' reasons for their quietness/introversion.

**Table 6**

Statements	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Total no. of introverts
They enjoy and learn more when the teacher has more talk time in the class.	0	5	5
They lack proficiency in English	2	3	
They are not comfortable sharing their thoughts aloud with others.	1	4	
They were quiet outside the classroom as well.	1	4	

The table reports that quietness does not necessarily signify students' incompetency in a language. So, quietness should not be considered a negative trait of students. Rather it should be carried by all types of students to a certain extent as we see from the midterm and final exam grades that quietness helped introverts to get better grades in language course. In support of these findings, it may be mentioned that MacIntyre & Charos, (1996) cited different significant studies, notably Wenden & Rubin (as cited by Patten & William, 2007), which points out that a learner's ability to process information relies on her/his attention capacity. Since different personality types have different preferred learning strategies, therefore, their attention capacity is likely to be different. Wenden & Rubin's (as cited by Patten & William, 2007) study

posits the fact that the introverts tend to possess a higher attention capacity to focus on form and meaning; so, their chances of acquiring accuracy in second language is greater.

### Result Analysis and Discussion

#### Personality traits of students:

When the students' answers of the different parts of the questionnaire were matched, the following traits of each personality types were found:

**Table 7**

<b>Extrovert</b>	<b>Balanced</b>	<b>Introvert</b>
1. Talkative	1. Occasional speaker	1. Reserved
2. Winning mentality	2. Winning is not always important	2. Winning means accuracy
3. Not reflective	3. Quite reflective	3. Reflective- perfectionist
4. Fast in language formulation	4. Quite fast in language formulation	4. Slow in language formulation
5. Not Perfectionist	5. Moderately perfectionist	5. Perfectionist
6. Positive towards oneself and the surrounding	6. Positive more than negative about themselves and surrounding	6. They are more negative about their strengths
7. Good adapter	7. Good adapter	7. Not an adapter
8. Not a loner-they are not good listeners. Therefore, not a good memorizer.	8. Loner	8. Loner
9. Leader by nature	9. Active team player	9. Follower

The personality traits found through the questionnaire echoes the Myer-Briggs classification of personality.

#### Relation between personality and development of English:

From the research calculation (Table 3 & 4) it is seen that the five extroverts were good speakers but their speaking grades were not very satisfying as the rubric for the speaking test (Table 7) not only gave marks for spontaneity and confidence but also had marks on accuracy and organization. Initially the introverts had less confidence but they were relatively more accurate in their language formation and more organized in their speech and writing. Moreover, this point is further strengthened by Brown's (2001) remark that extroverts tended to focus on meaning rather than form, a strategy which has been confirmed as contributing to success in second language learning. So, the result shows that introverts got better grades at the end for being more focused on language form. The introverts' accuracy rate in writing and in speaking is higher

extroverts and more than the balanced students. So, it would be wrong on our part to say that introverts are slow or inferior learners. On the other hand, looking into the answers of the balanced students it was seen that the balanced students' grades in writing and speaking tests were fairly stable. So, we can then say that the characteristics of the three personality types are responsible for their individual grades.

#### **Teachers' personality and students' language learning success:**

The deficiencies of both introverts and extroverts can be minimized if sufficient care is given by teachers in the class through proper classroom activities which would benefit students with different personality types. It is obvious from the questionnaire that all types of students believe that the personality type of the teacher also influences the formation of students' personality and English language learning success. So, modeling a positive personality is important. The findings suggest that students' performance in English is likely to increase when the teacher showcases some positive personality traits. The personality traits of a teacher can build up a friendly atmosphere for the students in the classroom and thus help students increase their confidence to perform better in English language classes. According to students, (Table 5), the following reasons are the most dominant traits of teachers' personality that positively affect students' personality:

- All the participants (100%) of the study believed that a teacher's non-assertiveness, rapport with them and use of language (uses "teacher talk") made students less shy in the class.
- Among the participants, 95% of them said teachers' topic selection for materials and class activities positively contributed to their English language learning success.
- 90% of the students claimed that teachers' monotonous voice and approaches to teaching significantly contributed to the language learning success.
- According to the students, the physical position of the teacher in the classroom (85%), and the teacher's feedback (65%) help students learn English.
- Students' responses indicated that their personality and learning success were positively affected by teachers' smiles (75%) and appearance (45%).

The findings of the study show that a good percentage of introverts can also become excellent speakers if they are given enough support in the class by the instructor through positive personality traits. Moreover, the study shows that the balanced personality type students are usually the best performers on average.

Oxford's (2003) study also reiterates the fact that the function of a true teacher, although not necessarily that of a teacher as a scholar, is to master the art of sacrificing his or her authority and letting the students develop and feel their own productive capacity in acquiring or generating knowledge. Thus, a comfortable, trustworthy and positive atmosphere may make the classroom a safe place where learners with varying personality types will not hesitate to make language mistakes and express opinions.

#### **Limitations**

The sample size of the research comprised only 20 students. Therefore, it will be quite unjust to draw any generalization from the findings of the data. A greater number of



participants could have made the results more reliable. Initially the participants were divided according to their gender, but the research did not eventually contemplate on this fact for further queries and generalizations. Therefore, a series of interviews with a higher number of participants could probably resolve those encountered problems.

### Conclusion

This paper shows that the teacher should not regret when they have a class where the introverts outnumber the extroverts as introvert students have some very unique qualities that assist English language learning. The findings of this study relates to Gardner and Clement's (cited in Oxford, 2003) findings where it was determined that both introvert and extrovert types of learners had equal opportunities for achievement, and that language teachers should address the needs of both personality types. This study suggests that introvert learners should possess some traits of the extroverts and the extroverts should acquire some traits of the introverts. In addition, the paper also puts forward the suggestion that the teacher should possess a positive personality to aid students in English language learning.

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## APPENDIX

## Part A

## Questionnaire

Please help your instructor by providing some basic information about yourself. This information will be kept confidential.

Name:

How do you prefer to be called? (Nickname):

Age:

Native Country and City:

Local phone number:

The Personality Type "Questionnaire (part A)" is designed based on Mayer Briggs Personality Type Theory and Jenkins Activity Survey (Jenkins, Zyzanski, & Rosenman, 1971). For each of the 8 questions below, answer by clicking on the most appropriate statement.

1. Compared with other students, how quickly do you usually complete your class assignments?
  - a. I am usually finished before everyone else
  - b. I finish faster than most of my classmates
  - c. I finish right on time
2. How often do you worry about future events?
  - a. Never
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Constantly
3. When you are faced with an unfamiliar problem, what do you usually do?
  - a. Address the problem immediately
  - b. Sit back and let things work out for themselves
  - c. Think about what to do and then take action
4. Has anyone ever told you that you talk too much?
  - a. Yes, often
  - b. A couple of times
  - c. No, never
5. How often do you finish other people's sentences because they speak too slowly?
  - a. Frequently
  - b. A couple of times
  - c. Almost never
6. When you are playing a game, how important is it for you to win?
  - a. Never important

## Part B

1. What kind of activities would **you** like to do this semester? Please mark only what you like.

1.a. More Groupwork(GP)	2.a. Only Class work(CW)	3.a. Writing>Speaking	4.a. Only Impromptu speaking (IS)
2. More Pair work(PW)	b. Only Home work(HW)	b. Writing<Speaking	b. Only Prepared speaking (PS)
c. More Individual work(IW)	c. CW>HW	c. only speaking	c. Impromptu speaking> Prepared speaking
d. GP=PW=IW	d. CW<HW	d. only writing	d. Impromptu speaking <Prepared speaking
	e. CW=HW	e. Writing=Speaking	e. IS=PS

2. How do you find yourself in the English language class? Put a tick mark inside the box if it matches with you.

Work in groups	Talkative	Don't talk even when the teacher asks	Like to Listen more	Want to be credited for work	Leader/always want to be the central character	Open up only when I feel that the environment is suitable
Work in pairs	Talk only when asked	Shy	Never happy with own speech/answer	Don't work for being credited	Follower/don't want to be the central character	Don't give my best effort to learn the target language
Work alone	Talk only when you feel it's important to talk	Confident	Never happy with others speech/answer	Like to let others know what I know	Always want to be the winner	Want to learn English only for academic purpose
Open up only when I feel that the environment is suitable	Jump into answering the question without being confirmed of the	Think a lot before answering correct	Always impressed with others speech/answer	Don't want to share, rather want others to identify	Never think of going for challenges	Want to learn English only for socializing
	correct answer			my qualities		

3. How are you as a person outside the classroom? Put a tick mark inside the box if it matches with you.

1a. Your friends call you talkative	1b. Listener
2a. Like being alone most of the time	2b. Never talk with strangers
3a. Busy finding fault with others	3b. Busy finding own faults
4a. Hang out with others most of the time	4b. Don't hesitate to talk even with strangers

4. How do you want to see yourself in the classroom?

Work in groups	Talkative	Don't talk even when the teacher asks	Like to Listen more	Want to be credited for work	Leader/always want to be the central character	Open up only when I feel that the environment is suitable
Work in pairs	Talk only when asked	Shy	Never happy with own speech/answer	Don't work for being credited	Follower/don't want to be the central character	Don't give my best effort to learn the target language
Work alone	Talk only when you feel it's important to talk	Confident	Never happy with others speech/answer	Like to let others know what I know	Always want to be the winner	Want to learn English only for academic purpose
Open up only when I feel that the environment is suitable	Jump into answering the question without being confirmed of the correct answer	Think a lot before answering correct	Always impressed with others speech/answer	Don't want to share, rather want others to identify my qualities	Never think of going for challenges	Want to learn English only for socializing

## Part C

1. Why do you want to learn English?
2. Is it easy or hard for you to speak English in front of other people? Give at least two reasons for your stand.
3. Describe at least two of your strengths and weaknesses as a language learner?
4. Answer this question only if you think you are more silent than others in the class. What are the factors you think are responsible for you being silent in the class?
5. What was the last school you attended? Where was it? What was it like?

## Tables

Table 8: Rubric for Eng-103 (Speaking/Listening)

Category	Sub categories	Marks (10)
Content and organization	<i>Have a clear introduction</i>	0.5
	<i>Body must include at least two major points with an example</i>	1.5
	<i>Conclusion has to be smooth</i>	0.5
Devices	<i>Description of the fact must be clear and vivid through the use of some techniques like transition for logical coherence+sensory words, adjectives and other devices for vividness</i>	1+1=2
Body language	<i>Eye contact, looks relaxed and confident, Movement of body parts (hand, leg, etc.)</i>	1
Spontaneity and clarity	<i>Natural flow in speech (does not sound like a memorized speech), looks relaxed and confident, loud and clear voice, intonation, speech rate</i>	2
Politeness	<i>Use of social expressions in question-answer and feedback session</i>	1
Vocabulary	<i>Variety in words</i>	0.5
Complete sentences	<i>Sentences are complete</i>	1

## Evaluating the Evaluator: The Need for an Accurate Evaluation System for ELT Professionals in Private Universities

Shaheen Ara\*

*Abstract: In private universities in Bangladesh, it is very common for talented English language teachers to move on to other academic institutions, other countries or even leave the profession altogether, simply because they were undervalued. This qualitative research examines how inaccurate teacher evaluations are in many ways responsible for the high turnover rate among ELT professionals teaching in private universities in the country. It also focuses on current evaluation practices, as well as their limitations and makes some recommendations on how evaluation techniques for English language teachers could be improved.*

With an ever increasing number of private universities, a growing demand for trained ELT specialists, and English language proficiency among students at an all-time low, if we do not wish to lose effective teachers to other countries or even other professions, it is imperative that English language teachers are recognized for the quality of their efforts, whether this takes the form of financial appreciation or otherwise, may be up to the respective universities. However, without a fair, transparent teacher evaluation system that motivates and provides incentives to effective teachers, while at the same time helping less experienced teachers develop their teaching techniques, the turnover rate will continue to rise and have a decidedly negative effect on the standard of education in general.

Which of course raises the obvious questions: how do we distinguish an effective teacher from an ineffective one? Do universities in Bangladesh have accurate teacher evaluation policies? Do the university authorities even want them? Are the key features of teacher effectiveness different for ELT professionals, and should those unique features lead to additional or different content on observation protocols? When rating ELT professionals, what special training, if any, do evaluators need? To find the answers to these extremely critical questions this paper will explore and analyze current trends and practices regarding Teacher and/or Course Evaluations in Bangladeshi private universities.

The question of how to evaluate teaching is critical for institutions of higher education for several reasons. The individual teacher, in order to work on improving her or his teaching, must have some way of knowing whether this way of teaching is better or worse than "that way." The institution, if it wants to encourage, recognize and reward excellence in teaching, must have some reliable means of distinguishing between more effective and less effective teachers (Dee Fink, 2013). This is not something that we can afford to ignore since faculty members are a key resource behind the success of academic institutions (Fairweather, 1996, 2002; Marsh & Hattie, 2002).

Yet, despite the importance of this question, most universities in Bangladesh have struggled without much success to find a satisfying system of evaluating teaching, let alone ESL or EFL teaching. Most colleges and universities evaluate faculty

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performance annually. The "evaluator," usually the chairperson or some executive committee, must discern how well each faculty member taught that year compared with others in the academic unit. In private universities in Bangladesh, administrators annually make general judgments about a faculty member's teaching. This occurs on decisions about salary, promotion, and teaching awards. In these cases the evaluators must answer the question: during the applicable period of time, was the faculty member's teaching sufficient to warrant an increase in salary, a promotion, or a teaching award?

Many tools are available to help assess student learning and teacher effectiveness, of which the end-of-term course evaluation is only one. The most common in Bangladesh, Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) can also be a measure of an instructor's achievements in teaching, but it is effective as one form of measurement among many. Just as students should be assessed in different ways over the course of a semester, teachers should also be assessed in a variety of ways, including peer evaluation and faculty portfolios as well as student feedback. Quality teaching comes in many different forms. More accurately, good or great teaching comes from a small constellation of a few performance factors very well done (e.g., communication skills, insights, materials, interpersonal skills, experiences, subject matter expertise, persistence, hard work) that vary in combinations with each teacher. In all cases these instructional strengths meet the demonstrated needs and priorities of students, using ethical practices. It should not be surprising that there are many different indicators of teacher effectiveness, and that the important evidence will vary by individual teacher (Peterson, 2006).

The Iowa State University Center of Excellence on their webpage ([www.celt.iastate.edu](http://www.celt.iastate.edu)) on *Peer Evaluation of Teaching* states that effective teaching displays the following characteristics; the list is divided into five categories, each of which represents one aspect of a teacher's responsibilities:

- Person as teacher
  - Is skilled at communicating
  - Has a positive attitude towards students
  - Exhibits respect for all students
- Expert on content knowledge
  - Is capable of using relevant information from specialist literature in his or her own teaching
  - Has thorough knowledge of his or her subject
  - Has knowledge of new developments in his or her subject
- Facilitator of learning processes
  - Places the student at the center when designing educational material
  - Is capable of designing activating educational materials
  - Is capable of building education in such a way that students gradually learn to learn in a self-directed manner
  - Is capable of giving feedback
  - Places the student at the center of his or her teaching
  - Is capable of activating students

- Is capable of assessing students' learning results
- Is capable of re-adjusting his or her practice on the basis of evaluations
- Is capable of designing tests that are appropriate for the desired learning results

• **Organizer**

- Is capable of cooperating with colleagues
- Is communicative when cooperating with colleagues
- Is capable of contributing to the curriculum

• **Scholar/lifelong learner**

- Is capable of reflecting on his or her teaching performance
- Is capable of drawing conclusions from reflection on his or her teaching performance
- Is open to innovation

Teaching evaluations are implemented in one of two ways, either summative or formative. Summative evaluation occurs at the end of a semester, usually a week before the last day of class. The evaluation is completed by the current students of the class. Students have the option to reflect on the teachers' instruction without fear of punishment because course evaluations are completely confidential and anonymous. In private universities in Bangladesh, this is typically done using a paper based format, where the paper form is distributed by an administrative staff while the teacher is out of the room. It is then sealed in an envelope and the teacher does not see it until after final grades are submitted. Ideally, this feedback is to be used by teachers to improve the quality of their instruction. The information can also be used to evaluate the overall effectiveness of a teacher, particularly for promotion and increment decisions.

Formative evaluation typically occurs when changes can take place during the current semester. Typically this form of evaluation is performed by peer consultation. Other experienced teachers will review one of their peer's instructions. The purpose of this evaluation is for the teacher to receive constructive criticism on teaching. Generally, peer teachers will sit in on a few lessons given by the teacher and take notes on their methods. Later on, the team of peer teachers will meet with the said teacher and provide useful, non-threatening feedback on their lessons. The peer team will offer suggestions on improvement which they said teacher can choose to implement. Formative evaluations are rarely to be found in private universities in Bangladesh.

According to Scriven (1967), summative evaluations are judgments about the results a teacher achieves while a formative evaluation provides advice on how a teacher can improve. Formative evaluations generally occur in the context of a relationship with a mentor, or with an independent expert. Summative evaluations, in contrast, are usually performed for use in personnel decisions such as contract renewals, promotions, and the granting of teaching awards. For summative evaluations the evaluators are assumed to be colleagues of equal or greater rank in the same or similar departments and disciplines. Summative evaluations add a comparative dimension, placing the individual teacher's performance in explicit relation to the performance of his or her colleagues (Chism, 2007).



However, for an evaluation system to be effective, it must be understood, credible, and valued. Much of the resistance to using evaluation results to make personnel and compensation decisions surfaces when judgments are based on a single score or data source (Blanton *et al.*, 2006). In addition, the American Educational Research Association, ETS, and others have indicated that making high-stakes decisions based on a single measure is not sound. Research suggests that multiple sources are required to gain a full, fair, and accurate picture of a teacher's performance (Blanton *et al.*, 2006).

Although one universal evaluation system for all teachers has the virtues of simplicity and implementation ease, the different teacher roles and responsibilities necessitates an evaluation system with the capacity to differentiate. The primary purpose of teacher evaluation should be to improve teaching and learning. How teacher effectiveness should be evaluated is the source of considerable discussion and debate. Under the assumption that teacher effectiveness represents, in part, a teacher's contribution to student achievement, teacher evaluation should consider evidence of student learning growth that can be reasonably attributed to the teacher. When direct evidence is difficult to evaluate or incomplete, as is often the case, collecting evidence on specific teacher practices that are known to improve outcomes for English Language Learners may be essential. Evaluation systems that recognize and account for the extensive training and education that ELT specialists bring to the classrooms will be better able to identify practices that contribute to improved learning and allow administrators to make sound hiring and performance decisions. If evaluators lack an understanding of specific practices that contribute to improved student outcomes, then the assessment of the teacher's effectiveness may be less precise, since there are certain elements of a teacher's performance that only colleagues in the same or closely-related disciplines can accurately assess. According to Cohen and McKeachie (1980) there are ten elements of teaching that colleagues are particularly suited to judge. Courtneya (2008) paraphrased them as: mastery of course content; course organization; appropriateness of course objectives; appropriateness of instructional materials [?]; appropriateness of evaluative devices (i.e. exams, written assignments); appropriateness of methodology used to teach specific content areas; commitment to teaching and concern for student learning; student achievement based on performance on exams and projects; and support of departmental instructional efforts. She goes on to say that, in all these cases, student evaluations alone are an insufficient indicator of effectiveness; only the informed judgment of disciplinary colleagues can complete the picture.

The following is a course evaluation report from a private university in Bangladesh (name withheld for confidentiality) through which students assess and rate instructors on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 = excellent, 4 = very good, 3 = good, 2 = fair, 1 = poor).

1. *The course instructor delivered a course outline that accurately described the course as delivered.*
2. *Always well prepared and presented the subject matter clearly.*
3. *Could stimulate an interest in the subject.*
4. *Encouraged board participation in the class.*
5. *Always punctual in starting and ending the class.*

- 8. Returned with comments the assignments, project reports, quizzes, tests, exam scripts etc. on time.
- 9. Fair in evaluating and grading the students.
- 10. Available to the students for consultation as needed.
- 11. Always used English as medium of instruction in class.
- 12. Compared with other instructors I have had in this university, this instructor was...

It is also important to mention that students are usually not requested to write any comments or concerns in such evaluation reports.)

While most private universities in Bangladesh tend to use a similar form of teacher evaluation, it is obvious that such a generalized evaluation instruction is neither capable of accurately measuring a teacher's contribution towards student learning nor can it be used to improve instruction. In fact, apart from questions 2 and 3, none of the other 8 questions have anything to do with actual teaching skills. Moreover, question 10 is not only highly judgmental but also perceived by many teachers as highly objectionable since they are being compared not only to teachers of their own disciplines, regardless of the different courses they are teaching, but also to teachers of other disciplines as well. Current evaluation systems are not constructed in ways that enable them to be used for professional development purposes.

Yet, unfortunately, most promotions, performance appraisals and compensation decisions are based on the results of such questionable evaluation reports.

Teaching standards for teachers of ELLs should begin with standards for high-quality instruction that apply to all teachers, but should then be differentiated to include the special knowledge and skills that teachers of ELLs should exhibit in their practice (EFETELL, 2012). With around 70 approved private universities in Bangladesh, most of whom use English as the medium of instruction, the demand for trained ELT professionals is higher than ever before. However, while the demand is there, the number of ELT professionals is limited. It is for this very reason that private universities need to make the retention of qualified teachers a priority.

While having an MA is a basic requirement for all teachers of English in private universities, there has been very little emphasis on actual teaching credentials. In most developed countries, if one wishes to pursue a career in English language teaching, one may also require a teaching license or a TESOL/TESL/TEFL certificate like the Cambridge CELTA (Certificate of English language Teaching to Adults), Trinity TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). Simply having a university degree is not the only criteria for selection.

English language teachers have to undergo rigorous training and many hours of peer evaluation/observation in these programs to be certified by reputed institutions like Cambridge or Trinity College. On completion of these programs teachers are judged to be qualified to teach English language globally, maintaining internationally acceptable standards. While it is true that many universities also provide ELT programs of comparable standards, the same cannot be said of universities in Bangladesh, while limited opportunities exist for rigorous training in teacher preparation programs for teachers of English to speakers of other languages. Out of half a dozen universities which offer ELT programs, only one or two actually focus on teaching practice. The result is that we are churning out English language teachers with no experience of

actual ESL/EFL teaching. These teachers may have the necessary theoretical knowledge but lack the teaching skills that are mandatory for language teachers in other countries. In fact, English language learners are more likely than any other group of students to be taught by a teacher who lacks appropriate teaching credentials (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Rumberger, 2008).

Having said that, it is the responsibility of the academic institutions that employ them to provide training for new ELT faculty. Yet, without the existence of an effective evaluation system, university authorities cannot identify the type of training that is necessary. The nature of learning itself is changing and teaching needs to change as well. However, this will not be possible unless private universities actively work towards developing an effective evaluation system for ESL/EFL teachers. While it is true that new inexperienced teachers should not be evaluated based on standards that are beyond them, it is equally true that ELT professionals should not be evaluated using standards that apply to all teachers, regardless of what they teach.

When recruiting teachers for English language courses, the general consensus seems to be that if an applicant is fluent in English and has the necessary degree (whether in Language or Literature), that applicant will automatically be an effective teacher. Evaluations focus more on whether a teacher is fluent in English or not rather than whether students are actually learning from that teacher.

At the same time, current evaluation systems do not take into account what teaching looks like at different levels of proficiency. There is an inclination to rate English language teachers by the same standards at every level, irrespective of the levels they teach. For example, in a pre-intermediate level class, a trained English language teacher may focus on minimizing teacher talk time (TTT) as much as possible. However, to an untrained evaluator/observer, it may appear that the teacher is hardly talking in class, which may result in a poor evaluation.

While some evaluators may explicitly address teachers' attention to meeting the needs of "diverse" learners, they may not attend to the special skills and strategies that are required of ESL/EFL teachers. Most experienced ESL/EFL teachers will have a distinct pre-teaching and practice stage. They will ask concept questions, use time lines focused on eliciting, modeling and drilling, all the while trying to reduce teacher talk time. Yet to the untrained observer, none of the above will seem significant.

Teachers of ELLs are required to have certification and training to instruct students with limited English proficiency. This certification recognizes that these teachers must have specific knowledge and training to ensure that they can effectively teach students with special language needs. For example, researchers have found that certain ways of communicating language to ELLs are more effective. Long (1997) found that teaching grammar was most effective as part of meaningful communication accompanied by brief interventions to point out grammatical structures that may be causing trouble for ELLs. Norris and Ortega (2000) found that explicit types of instruction were more effective than implicit types for ELLs. Neuman and Koskinen (1992) found that context was imperative in helping ELLs to acquire and use new vocabulary.

Unless the observer in a classroom of ELLs understands appropriate instructional methods for teaching language to them, it is unlikely that the observer will be able to distinguish between effective and ineffective teaching. ESL/EFL teachers must have a working knowledge and understanding of language as a system and of the role of the components of language and speech, specifically sounds, grammar, meaning,

coherence, communicative strategies, and social conventions. Teachers must be able to draw explicit attention to the type of language and its use in classroom settings, which is essential to first and second language learning (Gass, 1997).

It is essential that teachers have a working knowledge of academic language and of the particular type of language used for instruction as well as for the cognitively demanding tasks typically found in textbooks, classrooms, assessments, and those necessary for engagement in discipline-specific areas. Recognizing the differences between conversational language and academic language is crucial in that conversational language proficiency is fundamentally different from academic language proficiency—a reality that poses cognitive and linguistic challenges. Extensive research has demonstrated that it takes ELLs longer than their non-ELL peers to become proficient in academic language (Cummins, 2000). Academic language is decontextualized, abstract, technical, and literary. It is difficult for native speakers and even more difficult for ELLs and not limited to one area of language and requires skills in multiple domains, including vocabulary, syntax/grammar, and phonology. Students must be exposed to sophisticated and varied vocabulary and grammatical structures and avoid slang and idioms. Opportunities and instruction on using academic language accurately in multiple contexts and texts is of critical importance for all English language learners.

Therefore, when evaluating ESL/EFL teachers, it is extremely necessary for evaluators to have not only a basic understanding of the linguistic demands of academic tasks and skills which address the role of academic language in students' instruction, but also to recognize if learners are developing oral language competences which enable them to better communicate their ideas, ask questions, listen effectively, interact with peers and teachers, thereby becoming more successful learners.

Elise Wile (2012) in her article "How to Evaluate an ESL Teacher" points out that because ESL teachers are responsible for teaching students who are studying ESL and helping them to develop their language skills, an ideal ESL classroom will be one in which students feel comfortable and are engaged in a variety of effective and stimulating activities. She states that ESL/EFL teachers should be notified of teaching expectations well before an evaluation. The teacher should have a clear idea of what is expected. At the same time, expectations should be tailored to meet the specific needs of language learners. For example, an ESL teacher should encourage oral language skills, provide a variety of activities to stimulate oral and written English, and make reading materials available at the students' level of English proficiency. ELLs also require direct teaching of new words along with opportunities to learn new words in context through hearing, seeing, and saying them as well as during indirect encounters with authentic and motivating texts. The effectiveness of the materials that the ESL teacher uses to support his/her lesson should also be evaluated. Materials should be relevant to the ESL students' needs. Materials also should be engaging and specifically designed for ESL students. It is important to note whether or not students are engaged in the lesson. Since language learning is limited when students are forced to be passive learners, the ESL teacher should use a variety of techniques.

Incorporating teacher self-evaluation into the evaluation process is also something that could be considered. In many cases, teachers videotape themselves teaching a class, and afterward, view the tape to see if their voice is clear and the language is comprehensible to students, as comprehensible input should be used at all times.

Teachers also can use a videotape to observe the behavior of students, which is affected by the teacher's performance. While some of these guidelines may not always be practical in a typical Bangladeshi university ESL classroom, it is the author's personal experience that there has been little effort so far in focusing on the points suggested above.

According to Khan, Ahmed and Sarker (2010), discrimination in rewards and recognition, dissatisfaction with the promotion and performance appraisal process, poor research and publications facilities, and lack of administrative and technical support are some of the major reasons behind the inability to retain faculty members in private universities. In fact, in a recent study by Mannan, Haque and Rajeb (2012), it was found that around 50% of the faculty members in Bangladesh are somewhat demotivated while only 15 % seemed to be highly motivated. This is especially true for ESL/EFL teachers as many of them are increasingly concerned about being held accountable for their students' progress as measured by standardized evaluations. Even in the United States of America, according to Tollefson, Lee, and Webber (2001), "as progressively higher stakes are attached to evaluation results, teachers are beginning to question the validity and reliability of instruments used by evaluators who, in their opinion, lack the qualifications and/or experience to make legitimate judgments about their effectiveness.

It is evident that if we are to improve teaching, it is essential that we develop models of effective evaluation rather than ineffective ones that mis-measure and demotivate teachers, offer no useful feedback on how to improve teaching practice, and risk driving some of the best educators out of the profession. If a university believes that teaching is indeed complex and that it is important to recognize truly high quality teachers, then it must take into account much more of the complexity of teaching than mere reliance on teaching factors. Clearly, our universities need to develop and implement a teacher evaluation system that will improve instruction and increase student learning. Current evaluation systems are not constructed in ways that enable them to be used for professional development purposes. It is extremely important to build evaluation systems that can be linked to professional development. It is obvious that if done well, performance evaluations can become an effective form of teacher professional development.

University authorities must accept that no single questionnaire or method is suitable to every department or institution. Different kinds of questionnaires can be useful in assessing different kinds of courses and subject matters. It is also imperative that they realize that, to be reliable and valid, an evaluation of teaching should draw on multiple sources of information and that they should be used to help faculty members improve and enhance their teaching skills. It is essential that our universities ensure that the unique skills and knowledge of ELT/ESL/EFL specialists are considered and addressed when they are evaluated, establish evaluator training that includes explicit training on the specific disciplines, and establish a model in which peer-to-peer observations or evaluators are matched to a specific discipline. A successful institution recognizes the talents, dedication, and contributions of the university's workforce in a way that supports the university's mission, values and priorities (Fisher 2000). In order to have a sustainable competitive advantage, universities must provide not only suitable rewards and recognition consistently, but also establish and maintain written policies and procedures that ensure a sound basis for individual judgments fairly applied to all.

There is still much to learn about the evaluation of teaching and though there is already a considerable body of knowledge about teaching evaluation, the growing number of private universities in Bangladesh clearly indicates that our academic community urgently needs to add to that knowledge, since it will not be possible to recognize and reward teaching adequately until a more efficient system for evaluating teachers is introduced.

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# Investigating Undergraduate ESL Learners' Readiness for Autonomous Learning

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*Abstract: The paper reports on a study which investigated undergraduate ESL (English as a Second Language) students' readiness for autonomous learning of English. The main objectives of the study were to get a better understanding of Bangladeshi undergraduate ESL learners' perceptions about autonomous learning and teacher-centered learning, and to identify whether they are ready for autonomous learning. The study is based on a five-point Likert Scale questionnaire survey followed by a semi-structured interview conducted with the first year students of a major public university in Bangladesh. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 16.0). Descriptive statistics were calculated for each variable in the questionnaire in order to describe the respondents' perceptions about autonomous learning and teacher-centered learning. Paired-samples *t* tests were calculated to identify any significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ) in the respondents' preference for autonomous learning to teacher-centered learning. The results show that the participants in the study prefer autonomous learning to teacher-centered learning which may imply their readiness for autonomous learning. Though it is a commonly-held belief that teaching in Bangladesh is teacher-centered and students are heavily dependent on teachers at all levels, the study suggests the potential for implementing autonomy in undergraduate English language classes in Bangladesh.*

## Introduction

In autonomous learning, learners are in charge of their own learning and they take all decisions about their learning (Holec, 1981). If learners are given opportunities for autonomy, learning can be more focused and meaningful for them (Little, 1991; Dam, 1995; Camilleri, 1997; Chan, 2001, 2003). Again, the development of autonomy in foreign language classrooms can contribute to achieving optimal success in language learning (Little, 2004a). Therefore, it is important to encourage learners and give them opportunities to be autonomous in their language learning. But before implementing learner autonomy in the classroom, teachers need to know whether students are ready for autonomy because it depends on learners' "capacity and willingness" (Dam, 1995) to become autonomous. Learners have to have both ability and keenness simultaneously to be autonomous (Sinclair, 2000); otherwise it may be difficult for teachers to develop autonomy among the learners.

In Bangladesh, teaching is generally viewed as teacher-centered (Choudhury, 2006) and students at schools are heavily dependent on teachers. As a result, students may have developed a habit of teacher-dependence which they may carry with them to their undergraduate classes. But, do these students really prefer depending on teachers or depending on themselves for their learning? Are they ready for learner autonomy? To answer questions like these we need research into autonomous learning at the tertiary level in Bangladesh, which so far remains largely unexplored. Considering this

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need, the present study was undertaken with a view to getting a better understanding of Bangladeshi undergraduate ESL learners' perceptions about autonomous learning and teacher-centered learning, and exploring whether they are ready for learning English autonomously.

In line with the objectives, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) What are the most commonly held perceptions about autonomous learning and teacher-centered learning among the Bangladeshi undergraduate English language learners? and (2) Do the Bangladeshi undergraduate ESL students prefer autonomous learning to teacher-centered learning?

### **Learner autonomy and language learning**

The notion of learner autonomy was first developed in the early 1970s by Holec and his colleagues (Smith, 2008). In language learning, autonomy means "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec, 1981, p. 3). By "taking charge of one's learning" what Holec (2001) means is "to have, and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning." According to Littlewood (1996, p. 97), autonomy is the "learners' ability and willingness to make choices independently." Although learner autonomy empowers learners to take all decisions regarding their learning, it does not mean that they will do it alone without a teacher. As Little (1991) mentions, learner autonomy is not learning without a teacher, nor learning without interaction. It is not even a permanent state. The learner's willingness of being autonomous may also vary from time to time. So, teachers need to know whether learners are ready to learn autonomously in the classroom as "learner autonomy is characterised by a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purposes" (Dam 1995, p.1). Dam (1995) also added a new dimension to the concept of learner autonomy which requires learners to act not only independently but also "in cooperation with others, as a socially responsible person" (p.1). So, we can consider learner autonomy as comprising both independent and collaborative learning.

According to Trim (as cited in Norilda et al., 2004), a school or even a university cannot provide its students with all the skills and knowledge they would need throughout their lives. Therefore, it is important for teachers to teach their learners how to learn on their own so that they can use their learning outside the classroom. If learners are reflectively engaged in planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning in the class, their learning will be more successful than otherwise, and they should be able to use their knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom in the world beyond (Little, 2000).

Before teaching learner autonomy, a question may be raised whether it can be implemented in all cultural contexts as the concept of learner autonomy emerged in Europe and it is often treated as a western concept (Sinclair, 1997; Jones, 1995). Though learner autonomy is a western concept, there is no reason to think that only western learners are capable of developing learner autonomy. As Smith (2008) points out, "the exercise and development of learner autonomy can be seen as an educational goal which is cross-culturally valid" (p. 396) and, according to Little(2004b), there is enough evidence to support learner autonomy as a psychological phenomenon which can transcend cultural differences. Again, learner autonomy has multiple interpretations which are not solely western but universally appropriate and accepted as an important general educational goal (Sinclair, 1997). Therefore, we can also consider the

promotion of learner autonomy in context of Bangladesh because a proper implementation of learner autonomy would make learners autonomous and help them take responsibilities of their own learning of English.

### **Research on learners' perceptions on autonomous learning**

In order to implement learner autonomy, it is important for teachers to investigate whether the learners are ready for autonomy. Many studies have been done to understand learners' perceptions on autonomous learning in L1, ESL and EFL contexts. But I will review below some studies conducted in ESL and EFL contexts as they resemble the Bangladeshi context of teaching and learning English.

A research study by Thang and Azarina (2007) in the Malaysian ESL context observed 756 undergraduate ESL learners of three Malaysian public universities. The study revealed that most of these learners preferred teacher-centered learning. This finding was supported by Thang's earlier studies (2003, 2005) which reported Malaysian undergraduate students' lack of autonomy in their learning of English as a second language and lack of awareness of their language learning processes. Malaysian undergraduate learners' teacher-centeredness was also supported by Thang's later study (2009) where she compared between public and private university ESL learners. The study reported that both learner groups showed their preference for a more teacher-centered approach, but the private university students were likely to move towards a more autonomous learning approach. Thang and Azarina (2007) concluded that though the learners were teacher-centered, it cannot be said that they are not able to be autonomous. They "desire the freedom and responsibility to decide what, where, when and how to learn. They prefer to employ their own learning styles and are confident in themselves..." (Thang & Azarina, 2007, p. 14).

On the other hand, a study by Vanijdee (2003) in the Thai EFL context with distance learners in a Thai university reported Thai learners' preference for autonomous learning. Again a case study by Intradat (as cited in Thang & Azarina, 2007) which investigated both Thai teachers' and learners' perceptions about learner autonomy in a CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) course also supported the finding. The study showed Thai learners' positive attitudes towards learner autonomy.

Another study by Guo and Zhang (2005) in another EFL context, China, with the undergraduate students at a Chinese university reported that teaching autonomous learning strategies improved EFL outcomes of the students. The study compared the results after using traditional and autonomous teaching approaches with those students. The study reported that the group receiving autonomous teaching became more confident in speaking English, more aware of learning goals, strategies, and more involved in the learning process than the group receiving traditional teaching. Although this study revealed positive results for learner autonomy, the researchers remarked that in the Chinese cultural context it might not always be easy to develop learner autonomy.

From the above studies we find that learners' preference for autonomous and teacher-centered learning varies according to the learning contexts. In an ESL context like Malaysia (See Thang 2003, 2005, 2009; Thang & Azarina, 2007) learners were reported to be more teacher-centered. On the other hand, in EFL contexts like Thailand (see Vanijdee, 2003) and China (see Guo & Zhang, 2005) students preferred autonomous learning. Besides learning contexts, the nature of the courses may also play

an important role in students' preference for autonomous learning, as it is found that distance learners prefer to be autonomous while regular face to face learners express their preferences for teacher-centeredness.

### **Bangladeshi undergraduate English learners' perceptions on autonomous learning**

In Bangladesh, English is taught and used as a second language though it is not officially recognized as a second language. For the purposes of this study, however, English is used as ESL and the learners are considered ESL learners. In Bangladesh, English is taught as a compulsory subject from class one to undergraduate level and English is often used as a medium of instruction. At the pre-university level, teaching is heavily teacher-controlled and teacher-directed. This is also true for teaching at the university level as Choudhury (2006, p.88) mentions: "teachers prefer to conduct language classes in lecture mode." Students sit and listen to the lectures passively. Though this comment may not reflect the picture of all tertiary level institutions in Bangladesh, there is some truth in it that the Bangladeshi university students depend on teacher-centered learning, which may be due to their previous schooling.

Students' dependence on teacher-centeredness is also found by Saha and Talukdar (2008) who investigated undergraduate ESP learners of a public university. They found none of their respondents as confident users of English and who preferred to depend more on their teachers and their classes. The researchers also reported that the students preferred to be taught by teachers over learning English by themselves. Another study by Jamil (2010) investigated the possibilities of promoting learner autonomy for the EAP learners of a private university. The study reported that making learners aware of the learning process and giving them responsibility for their learning had both advantages and disadvantages for the learners. While some learners made quick progress, others found it difficult to take charge of their learning. They even refrained themselves from "interpersonal and social interactions like group work (and) peer review" (p. 48). The finding implies that some learners are not ready for autonomy.

From the above studies, we cannot clearly conclude whether Bangladeshi undergraduate students prefer autonomous learning or teacher-centered learning. We need more research, which is not available, to examine students' preferences or readiness for autonomous learning if we want to promote learner autonomy in their classes. From this consideration, the present study was undertaken and so it was limited to the examination of learners' readiness for autonomous learning.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this study 'autonomous learning' is used synonymously for learner autonomy. Here 'autonomy' does not refer to 'absolute independence' and autonomous learning does not mean 'learning without teachers' (Little, 1991). The reason for taking this view of autonomous learning is that students need to learn about learner autonomy from their teachers in the classroom situation as autonomy is not innate; "it must be acquired either by 'natural' means or by formal learning" (Holec, 1981, p.3).

Holec's (1981) concept of learner autonomy has been used as the basis for the theoretical framework in this study. The reason for using his concept is that Holec has given a comprehensive idea of learner autonomy and from his concept we find a clear guideline regarding the areas of learning where autonomy can be exercised by learners. According to Holec (1981), autonomous learners have the ability to take charge of their

learning by taking decisions regarding all aspects of learning, i.e. "determining the objectives; defining the contents and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used; monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.) and evaluating what has been acquired" (p. 3). Based on this concept of learner autonomy, the investigation in this study is limited to the five aspects of learning: decision making, learning styles and strategies, awareness about language and the self, assessment and feedback, and learner initiatives.

### *Decision making*

In language teaching, decisions are usually taken by teachers who set the learning goals for learners, select the materials and evaluate their performances. But in autonomous learning, it is the responsibility of learners to take and implement all the decisions related to their learning (Holec, 1981; Dickinson, 1987). In reality it is hardly possible for learners to do so alone in a formal classroom setting where they have to depend on teachers for many of their tasks including the syllabus and curriculum, assessment, etc. Therefore, it is the responsibility of teachers "to encourage learners to take active part in making decisions about their learning" (Scharle & Szabo, 2000, p 4) in order to develop learner autonomy (Balcikanli, 2010).

### *Learning styles and strategies*

One of the main characteristics of autonomous learners is that they have "insights into their learning styles and strategies" (Omaggio, as cited in Wenden, 1998, p. 41). They are consciously aware of and use both cognitive and metacognitive strategies which are again one of the conditions for autonomous learning to occur (Thanasouloulas, 2000). They take a greater degree of control not only over the contents but also over the methods of learning than what they usually do in a classroom learning environment (Norilda et al., 2004). The autonomous learners constantly review and reflect on their learning processes. But it is noted that this is an ideal picture of an autonomous learner.

### *Awareness about the language and the self*

Autonomous learners are aware of themselves as learners, their learning context, the language to be learnt, and the learning processes. They have a clear idea about the purpose of learning the language, the areas of their problems and improvement in that language. They can assess their strengths and weaknesses in their learning (O'Connor, Farrar & Crome, 2009). Learners' conscious awareness of all these is important without which they cannot make informed decisions about their own learning (Sinclair, 2000) and review their progress and future directions of their learning (O' Mallay et al., as cited in Sinclair, 1999).

### *Assessment and feedback*

Traditionally, evaluation is thought to be the teacher's job, but in learner autonomy, learners are encouraged to assess their performances as "autonomous learners consciously monitor their own progress, and make an effort to use available opportunities to their benefits, including classroom activities and homework" (Scharle & Szabo, 2000, p 3). Monitoring and evaluating own performances are important because if they do so, their learning may be more successful (Little, 2000). Autonomous learners also appreciate feedback from peers.

### *Learner initiatives*

Learners' own initiatives are important because "people who take the initiative in learning learn more things and learn better than those people who sit at the feet of the teachers, passively waiting to be taught" (Knowels, as cited in Guo & Zhang, 2005, p.13). Autonomous learners take initiatives and try out new things in their learning. Language is learned to be used to communicate with others at the time of need. So autonomy in language learning is essential for learners to become effective users (Littlewood, 1996; Nunan, 1997) because, according to Little (2004a, p. 19), "autonomy in language learning and autonomy in language use are two sides of the same coin; you simply cannot have one without the other." Finally, learners' own efforts are crucial because successful language learning depends not only on the teacher's contribution but also on the learner's participation (Scharle & Szabo, 2000).

## **Methodology**

### *Instruments*

The study was based on the mixed method model. Two instruments, a questionnaire and semi-structured e-mail interviews, were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data.

### *Questionnaire*

The questionnaire had two major sections: section one contained fifty items designed to elicit responses on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* while section two contained four open-ended questions to get detailed information on specific items of section one.

The Likert scale items were based on Thang & Azarina (2007) and Cotterall (1995) because their questionnaires had good reliability scores and they were used in a similar context to Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the questionnaire items were modified considering Bangladeshi context and the competence level of the participants. In doing so, feedback from two participants in this study and expert opinions were taken into consideration before using the questionnaire for data collection. The items were categorized into two groups. Item 1 to 25 were designed to elicit students' opinions about autonomous learning while item 26 to 50 to elicit their responses about teacher-centered learning.

### *Interview*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via e-mail with four participants. An interview through email was chosen because it is an easy way to get responses from participants. It supplies already transcribed data and it allows more time to the respondents. As a result, they can give their thoughtful opinions and detailed answers to the interview questions. The interview comprised seven questions which intended to solicit information in the relevant areas of learning which were used in the questionnaire.

### *Samples*

The sample population in this study comprised sixty nine (male= 41, female=28) first year BA (Honors) students of the 2010-11 academic session majoring in English at a major public university in Bangladesh. All the participants attended a compulsory English language course (Eng101: Advancing English Skills) in their first year. Purposive sampling method was used to select the samples in this study. The samples were selected from their regular class setting.

### *Procedures of data collection and data analysis*

Likert Scale questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data while open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data. The questionnaires were administered during a class of the participants while the semi-structured interviews were conducted through emails. The interview questions were emailed to ten of the participants who showed their interest in participating in the interview. However, data were received from four of them only.

The quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version16.0). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means and standard deviations) were calculated for each variable in order to describe the perceptions of the respondents about autonomous learning and teacher-centered learning. Again, a paired-samples *t* test was employed in order to identify any significant difference ( $p>0.05$ ) in the respondents' preference for autonomous learning to teacher-centered learning. On the other hand, qualitative data were analyzed by identifying common themes. These data were used to verify the findings from quantitative data.

### **Results and Discussion of Findings**

The results and findings of the questionnaire data are discussed first in order to identify the most commonly held perceptions about autonomous and teacher-centered learning among the participants.

#### **Decision Making**

The results in Table-1 below show that the highest percentage (97.1%) of the respondents agreed with item-1: "Students should set their goals and objectives of learning English" while a huge majority (91.13%) expected the teacher to allow them to choose the materials and 85.5% liked the opportunities to select classroom activities.

The responses of the similar items under teacher-centered learning show that the lowest percentage (39.1%) of the respondents liked "the teacher to choose (their) goals and objectives of learning English" (item-26) whereas relatively a lower percentage (68.1%) of the respondents thought that the teacher should select materials and activities for students.

These findings reflect the participants' willingness to be more autonomous in decision-making about their goals and objectives of learning, learning materials and class activities (see Holec, 1981). But they like to depend more on the teacher for evaluation of their performances as a large majority (87%) of the respondents supported this (item-31). A possible reason for this may be that the students lack confidence to evaluate their performances as they had no experience of doing this before. Therefore, teachers should involve them in decision making processes and thus help students take decisions about their learning (see Scharle & Szabo, 2000).

**Table-1 Questionnaire results: Decision making**

No	Statements	5	4	3	2	1	M
<b>Autonomous learning:</b>							
1	I think students should decide their goals and objectives of learning English.	56.5	40.6	1.4	1.4	0	4.52
2	I think teachers should give us opportunities to choose materials for learning English in class.	43.5	47.8	4.3	4.3	0	4.30
5	I think teachers should allow us to evaluate our performances in class.	47.8	34.8	10.1	5.8	1.4	4.22
3	I think teachers should give students opportunities to decide where and how to learn English.	30.4	55.1	7.2	7.2	0	4.09
4	I think teachers should allow us to choose tasks and activities to learn English in class.	26.1	59.4	8.7	5.8	0	4.06
6	I think students are responsible for their own learning.	40.6	36.2	10.1	16.6	1.4	4.03
<b>Teacher-centered learning:</b>							
31	I think it is the duty of the teacher to evaluate our performances.	49.3	37.7	8.7	4.3	0	4.32
30	I think the teacher should tell us why we are doing an activity in class.	21.7	55.1	10.1	13	0	3.86
29	I think the teacher should select the tasks and activities for students in class.	13	55.1	15.9	14.5	1.4	3.64
28	I think the teacher should select materials for students in class.	18.8	49.3	11.6	15.9	4.3	3.62
27	I think the teacher should decide where and how students will learn English.	20.3	27.5	13	33.3	5.8	3.23
26	I like the teacher to set my goals and objectives of learning English.	13	26.1	20.3	26.1	14.5	2.97

5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3= not sure, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree, M= mean

### Learning styles and strategies

The results in Table-2 below reveal that a good majority (82.6%) of the respondents agreed with item-7 that “teachers should give opportunities to students to learn in their own learning styles” and 79.7% with item-9 that “teachers should allow students to choose their own methods and strategies to learn English effectively.” But it is interesting to note that majority (69.6%) of the respondents liked the teacher to tell them their learning styles (item-32) while a large majority (81.2%) liked to depend on the teacher for their methods and strategies to learn English successfully (item-34). The finding implies the participants’ lack of insights about their learning styles and strategies although they have a desire to pursue their own styles to learn English. This finding may also be treated as a shortcoming of these learners’ autonomous characteristics because autonomous learners are aware of their learning styles and strategies (see Wenden, 1998). A possible reason for this may be that they are not used to thinking about their learning styles and strategies as they might not have been asked to do so before.

Again, a good majority (85.5%) of the respondents admitted the importance of reflection on their learning which may imply their awareness of metacognitive strategies (see Sinclair, 2000). But at the same time, 76.8% of the respondents liked the teacher to make them think and reflect on their learning (item-36) while a majority (79.7%) liked “the teacher to direct (them) on how to learn English” (item-35). This finding resonates with the idea that autonomous learning does not mean learning without the support of teachers (Little, 1991).

**Table-2 Learning styles and strategies**

No	Statements	5	4	3	2	1	M
<b>Autonomous learning:</b>							
7	I think teachers should give opportunities to students to learn in their own learning styles.	40.6	42	8.7	8.7	0	4.14
11	I feel reflection on and thinking about our language learning activities is important for learning English.	24.6	60.9	10.1	4.3	0	4.06
9	I think teachers should allow students to choose their own methods and strategies to learn English effectively.	31.9	47.8	8.7	11.6	0	4.00
8	I think teachers should allow us to learn at our own pace/speed.	29	34.8	18.8	17.4	0	3.75
10	I know my learning style and use it effectively.	18.8	30.4	37.7	11.6	1.4	3.54
<b>Teacher-centered learning:</b>							
35	I like the teacher to direct me on how to learn English.	39.1	40.6	7.2	13	0	4.06
36	I think the teacher should make us think and reflect on our learning.	31.9	44.9	18.8	4.3	0	4.04
34	I like the teacher to tell me what methods and strategies I will use to learn English effectively.	31.9	49.3	8.7	10.1	0	4.03
32	I like the teacher to tell me what my learning style is.	14.5	55.1	8.7	17.4	4.3	3.58
33	I like the teacher to tell me how much time I should spend on an activity.	15.9	40.6	14.5	21.7	7.2	3.36

5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3= not sure, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree, M= mean

### **Awareness about the language and the self**

The results in Table-3 below reveal that a good majority (78.3%) of the respondents admitted their awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in English, which is characteristic of autonomous learners (see O'Connor, Farrar & Crome, 2009). But it is striking to find the highest percentage (88.4%) of the respondents admitted that they liked the teacher to tell them when they had made a mistake (item-39) while an overwhelming percentage (87.2%) of them liked the teacher to solve their problems of English. These results speak of the participants' nature of over dependence on teachers (see Saha & Talukdar, 2008).

We have a contradictory finding, however. Although 69.6% of the respondents agreed with item- 13, “I know which aspects/areas of my English I need to improve,” in



response to item-38, 85.5% of the participants admitted that they liked the teacher to tell them the areas in English they should improve. It was also found that majority of the participants were not aware of the importance of learning English as the results show that 79.7% of the participants liked the teacher to tell them the reasons for learning English (item- 37).

All these findings reveal the participants' lack of awareness of their potentials as learners and knowledge of the target language which are important features of autonomous learners (see Sinclair, 2000).

**Table-3 Awareness about the language and the self**

No	Statements	5	4	3	2	1	M
<b>Autonomous learning:</b>							
15	I know my strengths and weaknesses in English.	26.1	52.2	13	8.7	0	3.96
13	I know which aspects/areas of my English I need to improve.	29	40.6	21.7	8.7	0	3.90
12	I have a clear idea of what I need English for.	29	39.1	18.8	10.1	2.9	3.81
16	I like to look for solutions to my problems of English by myself.	23.2	43.5	13	18.8	1.4	3.68
14	I know when I have made a mistake in English.	11.6	27.5	34.8	21.7	4.3	3.20
<b>Teacher-centered learning:</b>							
39	I like the teacher to tell me when I have made a mistake.	47.8	40.6	8.7	2.9	0	4.33
40	I like the teacher to solve my problems of English.	46.6	40.6	4.3	5.8	2.9	4.22
38	I like the teacher to tell me which areas I should improve in English.	42	43.5	10.1	2.9	1.4	4.22
37	I like the teacher to tell me why English is important to learn.	36.2	43.5	7.2	13	0	4.03
41	I think I do not have enough management skills to learn English on my own.	24.6	34.8	17.4	14.5	8.7	3.52

5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3= not sure, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree, M= mean

### Assessment and feedback

Autonomous learners monitor their learning and assess their progress (Holec, 1981; Little, 2000). This is confirmed by a vast majority (91.3%) of the respondents (see item-19). The results in Table-4 also reveal that a great majority (88.4%) of the respondents would like to get opportunities to self-correct their mistakes in their work. This finding contradicts the findings in Table- 3 above (see responses for item-14 and item-39) and also with the responses for item- 44 in Table-4 below that show 75.3% of the respondents liked the teacher to correct all their mistakes.

The results in Table-4 show that a large majority (81.2%) of the respondents admitted the importance of feedback in learning language successfully while 78.2% of the respondents like to get feedback from their peers. This finding may indicate their autonomous nature as they like collaborative learning (see Dam, 1995). But it is noted that almost the same percentage (79.7%) of them liked feedback from teachers while a

large majority (84%) opined that they needed the teacher to tell them about their progress in English. These findings here indicate the respondents' both autonomous and teacher-centered characteristics.

**Table-4: Assessment and Feedback**

No	Statements	5	4	3	2	1	M
<b>Autonomous learning:</b>							
17	I think feedback plays an important role in successful language learning.	49.3	31.9	15.9	0	2.9	4.25
20	I like the opportunity to correct minor mistakes in my work.	40.6	47.8	5.8	5.8	0	4.23
19	I think students should monitor and assess their progress of language learning.	31.9	59.4	7.2	0	1.4	4.20
18	I think regular feedback from my classmates on my language learning helps me most.	39.1	39.1	14.5	7.2	0	4.10
<b>Teacher-centered learning:</b>							
43	I like the teacher to give me regular tests.	39.1	50.7	5.8	4.3	0	4.25
45	I need the teacher to tell me how I am progressing.	36.2	47.8	10.1	4.3	1.4	4.13
42	I think regular feedback from my teachers on my language learning helps me most.	34.8	44.9	11.6	7.2	1.4	4.04
44	I like the teacher to correct all my mistakes.	33.3	42	2.9	18.8	2.9	3.84

5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3= not sure, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree, M= mean

### Learner initiatives

The results in Table-5 below reveal that almost all the participants (97.1%) admitted the importance of using English outside the classroom for developing their skills. But it is noted that a large majority (81.1%) of the respondents liked the teacher to tell them about their language learning activities outside the class (item-47). This finding reflects the respondents' dependence on teachers for taking initiatives to learn English even outside the classroom though a large majority (84%) of the participants admitted the importance of their own efforts for learning English. Interestingly, in response to item-50, a large majority (81.1%) of the respondents were of the opinion that the teacher's role was very important for their success in language learning while 82.6% of the respondents liked the teacher to motivate them to learn English.

The findings here imply the participants' awareness of the importance of self-efforts and initiatives for their learning. So, the participants may be considered to have a characteristic of autonomous learners as self-efforts and initiatives are crucial for autonomous learning (see Scharle & Szabo, 2000). But it can be mentioned here that the participants also underscored the importance of teachers' roles in their language learning, which again may reflect their teacher-dependence.

**Table-5: Learner initiatives**

No	Statements	5	4	3	2	1	M
<b>Autonomous learning:</b>							
23	I think using English outside the classroom is important for developing good language skills.	79.7	17.4	1.4	1.4	0	4.72
25	I think my efforts are important for my successful learning of English.	53.6	30.4	13	1.4	0	4.33
22	I like trying new things out for learning English by myself.	21.7	50.7	18.8	5.8	2.9	3.83
24	I think I can find my own opportunities to use the language outside the class.	23.2	40.6	24.6	7.2	4.3	3.71
21	I think I can learn English in my own way.	26.1	27.5	21.7	23.2	1.4	3.54
<b>Teacher-centered learning:</b>							
50	I think the language teacher plays an important role in my successful learning of English.	44.9	36.2	13	4.3	0	4.19
49	I think it is important for the teacher to motivate us to learn English.	37.7	44.9	15.9	1.4	0	4.19
47	I like the teacher to tell me what to do to learn English outside the class.	33.3	47.8	13	4.3	1.4	4.07
46	I need a lot of guidance from the teacher in my learning English.	39.1	33.3	17.4	8.7	1.4	4.0
48	I depend on the teacher for doing new things to learn English.	10.1	21.7	24.6	36.2	7.2	2.91

5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3= not sure, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree, M= mean

### Learners' preference for autonomous learning

From the discussion of the descriptive statistics, we find mixed results. That is, the participants like some aspects of autonomous learning and some aspects of teacher-centered learning. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether they prefer autonomous learning to teacher-centered learning or vice versa. For this reason, a paired-samples *t* test was done in order to see any statistically significant difference in the participants' responses for autonomous learning and teacher-centered learning items.

### Paired-samples *t* test results

The results in Table-6 below show that the mean of the responses for autonomous learning items ( $M=100.17$ ,  $SD= 8.606$ ) was greater than the mean of the responses for teacher-centered learning items ( $M= 96.65$ ,  $SD= 11.465$ ). A paired-samples *t* test results in Table-7 show that the mean difference was significant beyond the .05 level:  $t(68) = 2.132$ ;  $p=.037$  (two-tailed). The 95% confidence interval on the difference was [.225, 6.818].

Therefore, from the analysis of the paired-samples *t* test results we can say that the participants in this study prefer autonomous learning to teacher-centered learning. The possible factors which may contribute to this finding are the participants' maturity as learners; their understanding of the importance of using English outside the classroom (see Table-5, item-23 which has the highest mean,  $M=4.72$  of all items), and university education system which requires a lot more self-study by university students than the secondary students (the questionnaire was given to first year BA students too, not secondary students).

**Table-6: Paired-samples statistics**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Autonomous learning items	100.17	69	8.606	1.036
	Teacher-centered learning items	96.65	69	11.465	1.380

**Table-7: Paired-samples test**

		Paired differences							
		Mean	St Deviation	St Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Autonomous learning items-Teacher-centered learning items	3.522	13.723	1.652	-.225	6.818	2.132	68	.037

## Discussion of the findings from the qualitative data

### *Responses of open-ended questions*

The participants were asked whether they had ever had any opportunity to choose learning materials, class activities and evaluate their own performances in the classroom. It was found that only about one-fourth of the respondents had such opportunities. They were also asked to specify when they got these opportunities. It was noted that only one mentioned that he had got an opportunity of choosing class activities in school while the rest had the opportunities of choosing materials and class activities in their first year English language classes. This finding indicates that students have started getting decision-making opportunities in the undergraduate classes to some extent.

In reply to a question of their willingness to have these opportunities to take decisions about their learning and evaluate their own performances, over three-fourths of the respondents replied positively. The responses were categorized on the basis of common themes. The main objectives of their willingness are to achieve learning goals, to learn English effectively, to become active and conscious learners, to improve language skills, to plan for future learning, to become aware of their mistakes, and to develop themselves as confident learners.

These responses may imply that the participants are willing to become autonomous in their learning of English as they are aware of the benefits of autonomous language learning.

### *Responses of semi-structured interviews*

As mentioned in the methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four of the participants. Their responses reveal their insights and points of view about autonomous learning.

About choosing learning materials and classroom activities, the students gave practical opinions as they mentioned that if they were given such opportunities they would feel more comfortable and therefore would perform better in learning English. It

was found that the respondents were also aware of the benefits of taking charge of their learning by selecting materials, activities and evaluating their own performances. Regarding evaluation of their own performances, although the students acknowledged the traditional role of a teacher to evaluate students' performances, they would like to experience it with the help of the teacher as one student mentioned "they (students) should give a try to evaluate their acts in the class, but finally the role is given to their mentors (teachers)." One student also explained in the following quote why they should depend on teachers but at the same time he also asserted his point of self-dependence for his ultimate language learning:

I think I should depend on my teacher to a certain extent. Since teachers are more experienced they can guide us and give us suggestion about different ways of learning. Although I should depend on a teacher, I think that the final decision should depend on each individual.

It is noted that the respondents were not quite confident in taking charge of their learning as they had neither expertise nor any experience to do so. In their pre-university classes, no student had any opportunity to take decisions and choose activities on their own. In their undergraduate classes though they have some opportunities, but students consider them to be inadequate. Nevertheless they expressed a desire to experience it which is evident in one student's comment: "No, I'm not very confident about it, but if I am given a chance to choose materials or activities, I will get to know about my preferred way of learning."

The findings from the open-ended data and interview data reveal the respondents' willingness to take decisions about their learning of English though they would like to have some guidance from the teacher. These findings support and confirm the findings of the quantitative data that the undergraduate English learners in the university investigated are likely to prefer autonomous learning. These findings contradict Saha and Talukdar (2008) who found their undergraduate learners more teacher-centered. A possible reason for this difference may be that the participants in their study were ESP learners whereas in this study they were learners majoring in English. But it is to be noted that the findings in this study are supported by those of Jamil's (2010) who reported his participants' willingness to take part in learner autonomy although some of them were reluctant to accept autonomy.

The findings again contradict those of Thang and Azarina (2007) who reported Malaysian undergraduate learners' preference for a teacher-centered approach to learning although they possessed some characteristics of autonomous learning. But the findings resonate with that of Thang (2009) as they imply Bangladeshi undergraduate learners' willingness for autonomous learning within a predominantly teacher-centered teaching environment. Following Thang (2009), it can be stated that the findings in this study suggest that Bangladeshi undergraduate learners are not incapable of autonomous learning if they are given proper opportunities.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The findings in this study have important implications for teachers at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. They can attempt to implement learner autonomy in their English language classes as the findings reveal learners' preference for autonomous learning.

But before implementing autonomy, they have to be cautious and be ready for some challenges. It may not be an easy task because before entering the university, students undergo twelve years of schooling which is predominantly teacher-centered (Choudhury, 2006) and this long term teacher-centeredness may have helped develop a habit of teacher-dependence among the learners. So, teachers should proceed slowly in their attempts at promoting autonomy in language classes. They need further research to identify learners' personality traits and preferred learning styles which influence the development of autonomy (Scharle & Szabo, 2000, p. 5).

Moreover, teachers also need some autonomy-oriented training; otherwise they may face difficulties in implementing learner autonomy in their classes (Bağcıkanlı, 2010). They should be ready to accept their new roles of a facilitator of learning, counselor and learning resource manager in the classrooms for autonomous learning to succeed (Little, 1995; Voller, 1997).

Overall, the study may help the teachers with a better understanding of students' insights to plan their lessons for English language teaching in a better way with a view to making the learners autonomous in their learning and using English. The study may encourage other teachers to survey their students before introducing any autonomous learning program.

The study may also have important implications for other students who will know about the undergraduate learners' perceptions about autonomous learning and teacher-centered learning. They may be encouraged to appraise their own learning of English.

### Conclusion

The study investigated Bangladeshi undergraduate English learners' readiness for autonomous learning. The findings of both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that the participants in the study prefer autonomous learning to teacher-centered learning which may imply their readiness for autonomous learning. Thus, the study reveals a potential for implementing autonomy in the undergraduate English classes. But it is hard to generalize the results and state that all the undergraduate learners of English in Bangladesh are ready for autonomy because the sample size in this study is small (N=69). Although the mixed method was followed in this study, data were collected from students only. If teachers were included in samples, we could have received better perspectives of students' readiness for autonomy. Again, qualitative data were collected through open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews via email. But face-to-face interviews could have produced more detailed information. Furthermore, classroom observation and data triangulation would have helped to verify the findings and come to a better conclusion.

Despite these limitations, the present study is important because the findings imply a potential ground for promoting autonomous learning at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. But further research is needed with the participation of a larger sample from different universities to see whether the findings of this study remain the same. Teachers' perceptions of autonomous learning can also be researched in future before making any attempt to promote autonomous learning as a goal of language learning program.

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# Teachers' Awareness, Opportunities and Challenges of Adapting EFL Materials in Bangladeshi Universities

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*Abstract: Choosing a coursebook for a particular group of students involves adapting the material against the context in which it is going to be used because it is easy to understand that most text books are produced for large-scale, commercial use, and therefore are not always suitable for the needs of one's local, particular group. The teacher then, according to Hutchinson and Tones, "becomes little more than a cipher for a prepared text" (Hutchinson and Tones, 1994, in Tomlinson, 2003, p.347). This statement very well refers to Bangladeshi university teachers as most of them have become familiar with using Western textbooks like New Headway, Cutting Age, English for Life, etc. Be that as it may, we should remember that in this case the teachers might not feel comfortable about using these texts because of the mismatch of the global material and local needs of the learners. Therefore, the situation implies that, as teachers, it is important for us to evaluate teaching materials and then adapt them as tools to help our teachers. But the question is how far our teachers are aware of the need for adaptation of these EFL materials in order to make it context specific and student friendly. This paper presents EFL teachers' awareness of adapting ELT coursebooks at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. In addition, it focuses on teachers' opportunities and challenges of adapting ELT coursebooks. It is based on a criterion driven questionnaire.*

## 1. Introduction

Despite the range and variety of published materials on the market, it is difficult to find a perfect fit between learner needs and course requirements on the one hand, and what the course book contains on the other. Teachers often think of themselves as being dependent on prepared materials and they often do not believe that they are capable of writing good materials themselves. Interestingly, materials adaptation seems to be something teachers do a lot, but which is rarely researched or included in training courses (Renandya and Richards, 2004). Consequently, teachers simply rely on their own personal beliefs, experience and intuition in adapting materials.

However, all teachers are materials developers in that they are involved every day in matching materials to the needs and wants of their learners. In order to do this, they select, adapt and supplement materials when preparing their lessons and they make decisions about their materials throughout their lessons in response to their learners' reactions. They add, they delete, they lengthen, they shorten, they modify. They make use of their experience of teaching and their beliefs about language learning to "develop" materials of optimum use to their learners. We believe that all teachers have their own intuitive theories of language learning and that helping them to develop and articulate these theories in principled and coherent ways can help them to develop and use effective language learning materials. Why do teachers adapt materials? It all starts

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with the teacher intuitively feeling that something is not quite right. Teachers may feel uncomfortable because of a mismatch with their teaching environment (national, regional, institutional, cultural, etc.), their learners (age, language level, prior learning experience, etc.), their own preferences (personality, teaching styles, etc.), the course objectives (syllabus, institutional targets, etc.), and so on.

The hope, of course, lies with local, non-commercial materials which are not driven by the profit imperative and which are driven rather by consideration of the needs and wants of their target learners and by principles of language acquisition. According to Tomlinson (2011), “imported course books” and “foreign course books” are common terms used among millions of teachers and learners in Southeast Asia to refer to what elsewhere is known as “global course books.” They are introduced and distributed in Southeast Asia even if they are not written for this particular market. When a free-size shirt is designed for everyone, it has the potential to suit some and is likely to be rejected by others. This is exactly how imported course books operate in the region: they contain both helpful and unhelpful instructional ingredients.

As far as teaching in Bangladesh is concerned, it has been observed that despite several teaching practices being tried out so far after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, we are not in a very good position regarding our teachers’ teaching and teaching materials, and their success in the classroom. The most common difficulties comprise lack of proper training opportunities and limited access to materials (“Education in Bangladesh,” 2008). Still, we do not have any teacher produced English language teaching materials based on functions and integrated skills. However, although it is the responsibility of the government or the universities to provide opportunities for teachers to develop longer-term career goals and effective teaching skills, develop and adapt materials, and in-service teacher education, the assumption is that we do not have proper training and support from the government or from the institution itself. Although for teacher professional development, the teacher herself/himself has to perceive it positively, it is expected that universities are responsible for providing financial support, training, conducting research and providing need-based materials to support teachers. This paper addresses whether Bangladeshi EFL teachers are aware of materials adaptation. More precisely, the research will investigate the potential opportunities and challenges of materials adaptation in tertiary education in Bangladesh.

## 2. Literature Review

It can be assumed that ELT materials should be driven by principles of language acquisition and that ideally all units of material should be principled, relevant and coherent. The reality seems to be rather different, with commercial materials being driven by considerations of what the buyers (i.e. administrators and teachers) are likely to want rather than of what the learners are likely to benefit from, and with most materials developers driven more by intuitions about what is likely to “work” rather than by their beliefs about what facilitates language acquisition (Tomlinson, 2003).

From a survey of twelve countries throughout the world, Tomlinson found that about 85 percent of ELT textbooks were selected by administrators, 15 percent by teachers and 0 per cent by learners. The results of this situation are obvious: colorful photographs placed in the top right-hand corner of the right-hand page attract potential buyers flicking through a new book, with as many words as possible crammed on to a

page to achieve optimal coverage at an acceptable price. Each unit of the books maintains the same length and follows a uniform format to make timetabling, teacher allocation and teacher preparation easier and most tasks of the books replicate conventional test types so as to facilitate examination preparation (Tomlinson, 2003).

None of these characteristics are likely to add pedagogic value to a textbook, but all are likely to promote sales. This is not, of course, an attack on commercial publishers. Many of them try to add as much educational value to their products as possible, but for all of them the main objective is to make money. What this situation means for writers of commercial ELT materials is that they can at best try to achieve a compromise between their principles and the requirements of the publisher. In Bangladesh, we still lack an effective English language textbook comprising all integrated skills. What we have on the market is based on grammar which leads to rote learning.

Some of the things which many ELT materials are currently doing are likely to inhibit language acquisition and development. Obviously there are exceptions to these generalizations and there are some materials which are actually and commendably doing the opposite. But most are underestimating learners both in terms of language level and cognitive ability. In particular, they are treating linguistically low level learners as intellectually low level learners. They are impoverishing the learning experience in a misguided attempt to make learning easier by simplifying their presentation of language. They are creating an illusion of language learning by using a Presentation/ Practice /Production (PPP) approach which simplifies language use and results in shallow processing. They are also creating an illusion of language learning by ensuring that most activities are easily accomplished as a result of involving little more than memorization, repetition of a script or simple substitution or transformation. They are confusing language learning and skills development by trying to teach language features during listening and reading activities. They are preventing learners from achieving effective engagement by presenting them with bland, safe, harmonious texts (Wajnryb, 1996, in Tomlinson, 2011) and requiring them to participate in activities which do not stimulate them to think and feel. They are providing learners with far too much de-contextualized experience of language exemplification and not nearly enough experience of language in fully contextualized use. They are focusing on activities which require different listening or reading for detailed and literal comprehension and are providing very little opportunity for the sort of aesthetic listening and reading which stimulates the total engagement so useful for promoting both enjoyment of the language and acquisition of it (Rosenblatt 1978). They are failing to help the learners make the full expertise of the language experience available to them outside the classroom. They are focusing on uni-dimensional processing of language through activities requiring only the decoding and/or encoding of language rather than on multi-dimensional representation of language through activities involving the use of the full resources of the brain (Arnold 1999; Masuhara 2007; Tomlinson 2000c, 2001b, in Tomlinson, 2003).

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

Since the present study aims to respond to the research questions of a qualitative nature, data collection and analysis techniques from qualitative methodology were implemented.

Qualitative research entails collecting primary textual data and examining it using interpretive analysis. Qualitative research is a very useful research methodology because it is exploratory – its purpose is to discover new ideas and insights, or even generate new theories. That is, qualitative research mostly focuses on understanding the particular and the distinctive, and does not necessarily seek or claim to generalize findings in other contexts.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary research instrument. Here, the researchers themselves collect the data by directly observing or interviewing the participants, for example. The advantage of researchers doing this is that they can be responsive and adaptive to the participants and research setting and can quickly begin to explore unanticipated avenues of research. They can also collect a wide range of data and begin to think about it immediately, allowing them to clarify ideas promptly for accuracy of interpretation (Merriam, 2002, in Heigham, Juanita, and Robert A. Croker, 2009, p.11). In order to elicit data a written questionnaire administered to EFL teachers in Bangladesh was used as a main instrument.

### 3.2 Research Questions

The primary focus of this study is on teachers and their awareness of adapting EFL materials in Bangladeshi universities and the research questions for this study are:

1. How far are the teachers aware of materials adaptation?
2. What opportunities do they have for materials adaptation?
3. What challenges do they face regarding materials adaptation?

### 3.3 Written Questionnaires

The advantages of using questionnaires as data collection tools mainly come from the fact that with the help of questionnaires, large amounts of data can be collected quickly and economically from a large sample (Krathwohl, 1998). Questionnaires, as one of the most common forms of data collection tools, can easily be assessed in terms of reliability.

The written survey questionnaire used in this study was designed for Bangladeshi EFL teachers teaching mainly in private universities in Bangladesh. Questionnaires were given to twenty-five participants to explore the difficulties and the challenges that EFL teachers in Bangladesh have and might encounter in adapting EFL materials, as well as to investigate their awareness of materials adaptation. The questionnaire included 17 questions with fixed alternatives along with comments. (See Appendix-1)

### 3.4 Participants and Rationale for Selecting the Universities

All the participants in this study are university-level EFL teachers and a total of 25 EFL teachers participated in the research. All the participants are between 26-60 years of age. They work in different universities located in Dhaka, Bangladesh, from where the data has been collected. The ten universities selected for the study are: North South University (NSU), American International University Bangladesh (AIUB), University

of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), Northern University Bangladesh (NUB), The University of Asia Pacific (UAP), Stamford University, State University Bangladesh (SUB), Independent University Bangladesh (IUB), Jagannath University (JNU) and Eastern University (EU). In my opinion, these universities can be considered as model institutions for teaching methods and materials in Bangladesh.

#### 4. Data Analysis and Discussion

Let us begin by looking at the questions of section A relating to use of commercial textbooks and a particular view about materials adaptation. There are two basic questions in section A:

##### Section A

#### 1. Which EFL/ESL course book(s) do you use to teach Foundation English Courses at your university?

Coursebook	Frequency	Course book	Frequency	Coursebook	Frequency
New Headway	22	Cutting Age		English for life	1
Inspiration		Just right		Exploration	1
Face to Face		Natural English		Inside out	
Language to go		New English file		Opportunity	
Step forward	1	Total English		Intermediate English Grammar	20

Others (please specify):

Coursebook	Frequency
1. Business Objective	
2. English for Law	1
3. Internet (English Page, Ego4u)	1
4. John Langan's Writing skill books	3
5. Website pages	1
6. Reading Comprehension by Tibbits	2
7. Reading Comprehension by Dixon	1
8. Read and Understand by Betty Kirkpatrick and Rebecca Mok.	1

**Table: 1**

The result indicates that the use of western coursebooks in the EFL classroom for Foundation English courses has become a common practice among Bangladeshi EFL teachers with *New Headway* and *Intermediate English Grammar* being the most commonly used textbook. Therefore, a question may generally arise as to why EFL teachers in Bangladesh are used to using these textbooks in the classroom and the answer is that, even today, Bangladesh lacks teacher-produced context-specific English language coursebooks. As we do not have our own materials, so our teachers need to depend on western commercial coursebooks because they may find these to be useful

for its ready-made activities and lessons which help them to prepare for the class easily and confidently.

Dimitrios Thanasoulas (1999) in his article "Coursebook, Take It or Leave It," presents a significant point of view when he says, "Personally, I find a coursebook extremely helpful, as it guides me on what and how to teach, giving me some useful advice on the best techniques for presenting the material." A coursebook can provide teachers with the structure and help they need when starting out. Bell and Gower (in Tomlinson, 2003), in their list of advantages for the use of coursebooks state, amongst other things, that: "By dealing with a certain amount of routine work for teachers, the coursebook frees them to attend to more important aspects of lesson planning (including materials supplementation), and to concentrate on using their creative skills" (p.117).

However, there are several reasons for which teachers need to adapt materials. These include unsuitable and ineffective instruction, uninteresting topics, unsuitable materials for learners' cognitive development, unsuitable activities for a particular level of learner, etc. This in turn may affect the student's learning attitude and motivation. It is expected that if we use EFL coursebooks, it is necessary for the teacher to prepare and adapt activities according to the local needs of the learner, especially all skills and functions to keep the classroom atmosphere interesting and free of anxiety.

**2. "Interestingly, materials adaptation seem to be something teachers do a lot but which is rarely researched or included on training courses" (Tomlinson Masuhara, 2005).**

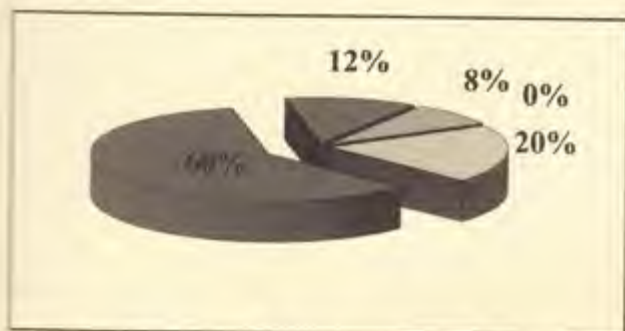
**Please give your opinion about the above comment in relation to the Bangladeshi context?**

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2	12	4	7	0

It appears from the data that there is a tendency among Bangladeshi teachers to adapt materials (*strongly agree*2/*agree*12) but they do not have any training on it which will lead them to professional development. It also shows that, even though it is an important part of ELT, we do not have much research on materials adaptation in our country. The data also shows that teachers are aware of the needs of the learners and are keen about preparing and developing materials accordingly. This really leads them to their professional development through self-reflection and, in order to speed it up, they need institutional support, although 7 participants agreed that they have institutional support.

### Section B

**3. Teachers are aware of materials adaptation to compensate for the lack of match between course aims and learner needs at tertiary level in Bangladesh.**



- 5. Completely
- 4. Moderately
- 3. Not Sure
- 2. Never thought about it
- 1. Not at all

The figures indicate that teachers are aware of bridging course aims and learner needs in tertiary level education in Bangladesh. It can also be inferred that the majority of the teachers (60%) are moderately aware of materials adaptation. Despite the variety of commercial material on the market, it is very difficult to find a perfect match between learner needs and course requirements and that is why many teachers continue to produce their own materials for classroom use. Indeed, most teachers spend considerable time finding, selecting, evaluating, adapting and making materials to use in their teaching.

#### 4. Foreign coursebooks and learner needs

To what extent do you think foreign coursebooks are suitable for the needs of one's local, particular group?

Completely	Moderately	Not sure	Never thought about it	Not at all
	22	2	1	

There are many reasons why English language teachers in Bangladesh may choose to develop their own teaching materials for Foundation English courses, despite the availability of commercially produced materials. An essential criticism of foreign coursebooks is that they are necessarily generic and not aimed at any specific group of learners. 22 out of 25 teacher respondents agreed that foreign coursebooks are moderately suitable for the needs of one's local, particular group which indicates that they feel that these coursebooks cannot meet the needs of local, particular groups of learners completely.

Again modern teaching methodology increasingly emphasizes the importance of identifying and teaching to the individual needs of learners which is usually difficult to implement if we use commercial textbooks for teaching local students where the needs of learners are very generic. It should be noted that English language classrooms are diverse places not only in terms of where they are situated, but also in terms of the individual learners within each context. Teacher produced materials can be responsive to the heterogeneity inherent in the classroom. This approach encompasses the learners' first languages and cultures, their learning needs and their experiences. Few coursebooks deliberately incorporate opportunities for learners to build on the first language skills already acquired, despite research suggesting that bilingual approaches

are most successful in developing second language competency (Thomas & Collier, 1997 in Howard, J. and Major, J., 2012). A teacher can develop materials that incorporate elements of the learners' first language and culture, or at least provide opportunities for acknowledgement and use alongside English. In addition, teacher-prepared materials provide the opportunity to select texts and activities at exactly the right level for particular learners, to ensure appropriate challenge and levels of success.

### 5. Adapting published materials to teach Foundation English Courses (FEC)

How far do you think you need to adapt published materials to teach Foundation English Courses at universities?

Completely	Moderately	Not sure	Never thought about it	Not at all
6	17			2

Given the results for the question of adapting published materials, it is found that the majority (*completely*6/*moderately*17) of the teachers agreed on adapting published materials to teach Foundation English Courses at universities. However, surprisingly, two teacher respondents expressed that they need not adapt materials of FEC at all.

The Foundation English Course (FEC) in public and private universities in Bangladesh is introduced to provide students with a sound foundation in the skills and competencies required to use English in an academic context. Teachers on foundation courses have the task of preparing students to be familiar with English medium classroom instruction and more specifically, equipping these students with the skills to enable them to be successful in their particular subjects in undergraduate and other programs.

The objective of the FEC at the tertiary level in our country is to cover the skills required to study their degree courses effectively, and in my opinion, it is very challenging to bridge the gap between the objective and the achievement to make the courses successful. The reasons are that the learners are all foreign language speakers of English and almost all of them come from Bangla medium background except a very few from English medium. So, in order to make it suitable for the level of learners, the teachers might feel that they need to adapt commercial coursebooks to teach FEC at universities.

### 6. Coursebook materials and cultural and ethnic diversity of target learners

How far do you think the coursebook materials you use are suitable for the cultural and ethnic diversity of your target learners of FEC?

Completely	Moderately	Not sure	Never thought about it	Not at all
	15	4		6

As majority teachers (*moderately* 15) opted for the option "moderate," it appears from the results that our teachers want to incorporate local culture in coursebooks. On closer inspection, however, it seems that, despite the wording of the question, many



teachers were choosing what they regarded as the more realistic, rather than the more desirable outcome.

An essential criticism of commercial materials, particularly those produced for the world-wide EFL market, is that they are necessarily generic and not aimed at any specific group of learners or any particular cultural or educational context. The possible lack of "fit" between teaching context and coursebook has been expressed thus: "Our modern coursebooks are full of speech acts and functions based on situations which most foreign-language students will never encounter... 'Globally' designed coursebooks have continued to be stubbornly Anglo-centric. Appealing to the world market as they do, they cannot by definition draw on local varieties of English and have not gone very far in recognizing English as an international language, either." (Altan, 1995, p. 59, in Howard, J. and Major, J, 2012). For many teachers, designing or adapting their own teaching materials enables them to take into account their particular learning environment and to overcome the lack of "fit" of the coursebook. As it is clear that it is not possible to target any local culture in commercial materials, it is the language teachers' responsibility to integrate local culture into their teaching after adapting materials.

#### **7. Suitability of coursebook materials for language level, prior learning experience, learning styles of target learner**

To what extent do you think the coursebook materials you use are suitable for language level, prior learning experience, learning styles of your target learners?

Completely	Moderately	Not sure	Never thought about it	Not at all
4	14	5		2

As far as language level, prior learning experience, learning styles of target learners are concerned, most of the teachers agreed that commercial coursebooks are moderately (*completely*5/*moderately*14) suitable for these learning elements. It is widely acknowledged that textbooks are the common materials used in language classes. They may be the teacher, the trainer, the authority, the resource, and the ideology in the foreign language classroom. (Hinkel,1999 in Turkan, Sultan, and Servet Celik,2007). Such textbooks are mass produced for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) purposes all over the world. These global materials aim to meet the needs of language learners, so that they can function well linguistically. Thus, it is extremely important that these textbooks include the vital components to teach the language and are appropriate for learners' needs, language level, prior learning experience, and learning styles. Yet regrettably, the commercial coursebook materials we use are not always suitable for the language level, prior learning experience, and learning styles of our target learners whereas textbooks produced at a national level for particular countries suit the students' local cultures, language level, prior learning experience, and learning styles.

#### **8. Suitability of coursebook materials with teachers' personalities, teaching styles, beliefs about language learning and teaching**

To what extent do you think the coursebook materials you use suit your personality, teaching styles, beliefs about language learning and teaching?

Completely	Moderately	Not sure	Never thought about it	Not at all
4	15	2	1	2

Majority of the teachers (*moderately 15*) agreed that these commercial coursebooks that we use suit moderately teachers' personalities, teaching styles, beliefs about language learning and teaching. Only 4 teachers chose the option "completely." Teachers may feel uncomfortable with a commercial textbook because of a mismatch with their own preferences (personality, teaching styles, beliefs about language learning and teaching), e.g., the materials offer a lot of communicative activities but a teacher fears he or she will lose control of the class by doing them. It appears from the results that teacher produced materials can overcome this mismatch. Therefore, initially, teachers can adapt the existing coursebook materials in order to suit their personalities, teaching styles, beliefs about language learning and teaching, and gradually move towards writing their own materials.

Arguably a teacher represents the most significant factor in any language teaching operation. Their personalities, teaching styles and beliefs about language learning and teaching play an important role in the throughput of different students in the institution. So it can be assumed that the commercial coursebooks cannot suit a teacher's personality, teaching style, beliefs about language learning and teaching.

Again in designing their own materials, teachers can also make decisions about the most appropriate organizing principle or focus for the materials and activities. And this can be changed over the course of the program if necessary. Most coursebooks remain organized around grammar elements and the PPP (presentation, practice, production) model of teaching, often with an "unrelenting format" which can be "deeply unengaging" (Harmer, 2001, p. 6). The teacher is typically a "constant" in the throughput of different students in the institution, and works in different ways at the interface of several systems – the classroom, the school, the educational environment – all of which affect a teacher's professional attitude and behavior. Personalization is another advantage of teacher-designed materials. In his 1991 article, Block argues in favor of "'home-made" materials saying that they add a personal touch to teaching that students appreciate. Tapping into the interests and taking account the learning styles of students is likely to increase motivation and engagement in learning. Podromou (2002) further suggests that there is also greater choice, freedom and scope for spontaneity when teachers develop their own materials.

#### 9. Coursebook materials and the Foundation English course objectives (syllabus, institutional targets)

To what extent do you think the coursebook materials you use match with the Foundation English course objectives (syllabus, institutional targets)?

Completely	Moderately	Not sure	Never thought about it	Not at all
1	17	5		1

As majority of the teachers (42%) opted for "moderately," it appears that they believe in local materials or adapting commercial coursebooks which can reduce the gap between the objectives of coursebook materials and the Foundation English courses. It is perhaps surprising that 5 teachers chose "not sure," which may mean that they are not very aware of the issue. It is needless to say that global aims usually cannot match with local aims and consequently teachers may feel uncomfortable with a commercial textbook because of a mismatch with materials (texts, tasks, activities), e.g., the text is interesting but the activities are boring and do not seem to fully exploit the text. Even the content of the local syllabus may vary a lot with that of a published material.

### Section C

#### Questions pertaining to teachers' opportunities and challenges of adapting ELT coursebooks

You are given choices from 1-5. In each case 5=strongly agree 4=agree 3=not sure 2=disagree 1=strongly disagree

		5	4	3	2	1
10	Tertiary level teachers have sufficient training on materials adaptation		3	5	11	6
11	Teachers have easy access to a variety of EFL materials for evaluation and adaptation of published materials	3	9	3	6	4
12	Teachers are able to afford sufficient time for adapting appropriate EFL classroom materials for the students of FEC	3	9	1	5	7
13	Teachers have sufficient authentic teaching materials (newspaper, pamphlet, leaflet, magazine, etc.) available to adapt coursebook materials.	7	13		2	1
14	Students' level of English proficiency at FEC encourages teachers to adapt coursebook materials.	3	7	5	5	5
15	Materials adaptation requires teachers to have better knowledge of target culture which is a challenge for them	9	12	3	1	
16	Teaching workload at own institutions gives enough opportunity to adapt materials for FEC	3	12		4	5
17	Teachers' universities provide opportunities and financial support for adapting and developing materials	3	8	1	6	6

#### 10. Training on material adaptation

None of the teachers strongly agreed to the idea that "teachers have sufficient training on materials adaptation" and only 12.5% of the participants agreed to the idea. On the other hand, 43% agreed that teachers lack sufficient training on materials adaptation. Therefore, lack of sufficient training on materials adaptation is reported by Bangladeshi EFL teachers as a major difficulty in adapting EFL materials in FEC in Bangladeshi tertiary level education.

### 11. Teachers' easy access to a variety of EFL materials

The teacher respondents are almost divided (*agree 12/disagree 10*) about their opinion. At present, most of the private universities have a rich library and the resources and facilities available to the teacher-designer can be considered as an element of context. Clearly, teachers must be realistic about what they can achieve in terms of materials design and production within the limitations of available resources and facilities. Access to resources such as computers (with or without Internet access), a video player and TV, radio, cassette recorder, CD player, photocopier, language lab., digital camera, whiteboard, OHP, scissors, cardboard, laminator, etc. will impact on decisions in materials writing and adapting.

### 12. Teachers' time for adapting appropriate EFL classroom materials for the students of FEC

On closer inspection, it seems that the teachers are equally divided about their opinion as 12 teachers responded in favor of the statement and the other 12 responded against it. A key disadvantage of adapting materials, and perhaps the key factor inhibiting many teachers from producing their own teaching materials, is time. To adapt any material, teachers need to think of the needs and interests of their learners, their own teaching capabilities and constraints such as time. The aim of any adaptation should be to maximize effective learning within the given time and context and to make both teaching and learning much more interesting. These involve a lot of time.

### 13. Availability of sufficient authentic teaching materials

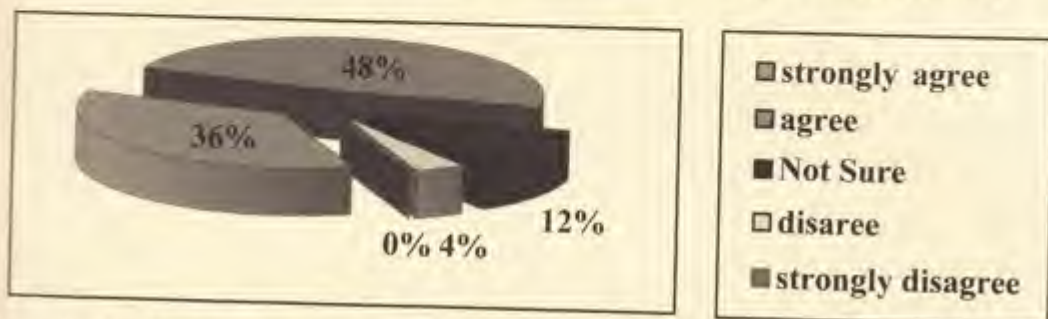
The majority of teachers (*strongly agree 7/agree 13*) reported that they have sufficient authentic teaching materials available to adapt the coursebook material in Bangladeshi universities which can be considered as a big opportunity for them to adapt materials. There is almost an unlimited supply of materials available online that come directly from the target cultures of the languages we teach. These resources provide "real life" linguistic input as well as valuable cultural information for our students. As far as logistic support is concerned, most Bangladeshi private universities have online facilities and resourceful libraries for the teachers and students. Teachers can collect literature, including poetry, folktales, short stories, fiction, non-fiction, novels, etc., from the university library and can access different websites to collect authentic materials to adapt coursebooks. According to Tomlinson (2011), materials for learners at all levels must provide exposure to the authentic use of English through spoken and written texts with the potential to engage the learners cognitively and affectively. If they don't provide such texts and they don't stimulate the learners to think and feel whilst experiencing them, there is very little chance of the materials facilitating any durable language acquisition at all.

### 14. Students' level of English proficiency

Here, again, the teachers in this study were divided about their opinion almost equally. 25% teacher respondents agreed that the students' level of English proficiency at FEC encourages teachers to adapt coursebook materials, but on the other hand, 25% teacher respondents disagreed on this point whereas 12.5% were unsure about it. In Bangladesh, students are usually familiar with traditional grammar based teaching in their secondary and higher secondary education, and consequently, when they enroll in

post-secondary level in universities, their acquired system of rote learning bars them from adapting to communicative classroom learning (Report of the English Teaching Task Force, 2004). This might discourage some teachers from adapting materials. But the situation varies according to the background and level of learners in different universities. However, this is usually the case with beginner level students for whom CLT or other methods (Task based approach, Lexical approach, etc.) are really something new to be familiar with.

#### 15. Materials adaptation requires teacher's better knowledge of target culture



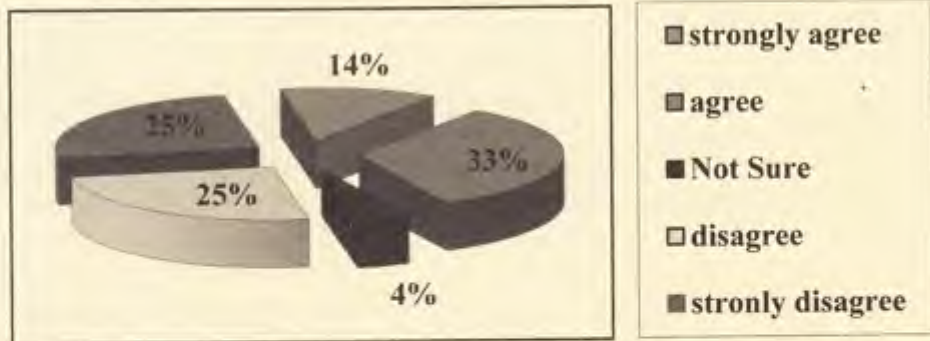
There is clearly a feeling among most of the teachers (*strongly agree 9/agree 12*) that materials adaptation in Bangladesh requires our teachers to have better knowledge of the target culture which is a challenge for them. As an EFL teacher in Bangladesh, my classroom experience says that teachers' lack of target culture (English) knowledge may work as a barrier to adapting EFL coursebooks. Proper teacher training, however, can build confidence among teachers.

#### 16. Teaching workload and adapting materials for FEC

Here, majority of the participants (32.5%) agreed that, apart from their teaching, they get enough time to adapt materials for FEC which is an opportunity for them whereas 25.5% showed their disappointment about workload. It also appears to show that the teachers who opted for "teachers' insufficient time for adapting materials" (*disagree 4/strongly disagree 5*) believe that some universities put heavy workload on teachers which is directly related to the lack of efficient English teachers in Bangladesh. Given that their income is not encouraging for demonstrating hard work, many teachers tend to lose their motivation to teach English in most effective ways.

#### 17. Financial support from university for adapting and developing materials

Here again, it seems that the teachers are almost equally divided about their opinion as 11 (*strongly agree 3/agree 8*) teachers responded in favor of the statement and the other 12 (*disagree 6/strongly disagree 6*) responded against it. At present, English language teaching at universities provides a career for a lot of teachers in Bangladesh, and



without the development and effort of such teachers; it would be difficult to operate the institutions effectively. Therefore, it is the responsibility of universities to provide opportunities for teachers to develop longer-term career goals, opportunities for effective teaching and opportunities for in-service teacher education.

### 18. Conclusion

Teachers must weigh up the benefits and costs of adapting their own teaching materials and make their own decision as to whether it is worth the time and effort. As Harmer (2001) puts it, "The good DIY (Do-It-Yourself) teacher, with time on his or her hands, with unlimited resources, and the confidence to marshal those resources into a clear and coherent language program, is probably about as good as it gets for the average language learner" (p. 9). Materials may vary in quality, quantity and level. The activities in a coursebook may be problematic in terms of skills and sub-skills, order of the activities, timing, learning styles, etc. Since we are still very dependent on commercial coursebooks, it should be the teacher's responsibility to be aware of the materials if they fit into the objectives of the class. The teacher should evaluate the level, communicative activities, the balance of skills, learning style, any audio-visual materials needed, the timing, culture, authenticity of input. Inevitably, there will be numerous constraints on any materials designer and compromises will be necessary.

The findings of this study indicate that the use of western coursebooks in the EFL classroom has become a common practice among Bangladeshi EFL teachers. It also appears from the study that there is a tendency among Bangladeshi teachers to adapt materials, although they do not have any training on it. The majority of the teachers believe that foreign coursebooks cannot meet the needs of local, particular groups of learners completely. One of the major findings of the study is that the majority of the teachers agreed on adapting published materials to teach Foundation English Courses at Bangladeshi universities.

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## Appendix 1

### Questionnaire

Dear respondents, below is a survey relating to adapting EFL materials at tertiary level in Bangladesh. The aim of my research is to discuss EFL teachers' awareness of adapting ELT coursebooks at tertiary level in Bangladesh. In addition, it focuses on teachers' opportunities and challenges of adapting ELT coursebooks.

This survey is anonymous and if there are some parts you would rather not fill in, please leave it blank. If you want to explain or qualify your answers, please use the comment boxes, but don't feel obliged to fill them if you are short of time. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Key words/Phrases: a. FEC=Foundation English Course

b. Materials adaptation: involves changing existing materials so that they become more suitable for specific learners, teachers or situations.

#### Section A

For the following question, please type an "X" against the name of the coursebook(s) in the appropriate box. You can check more than one box.

1. Which EFL/ESL coursebook(s) do you use to teach Foundation English Courses at your university?

New Headway		Cutting Age		English for life	
Inspiration		Just right		Exploration	
Face to Face		Natural English		Inside out	
Language to go		New English file		Opportunity	
Step forward		Total English		Intermediate English Grammar	

Others (please specify).....

You are given a choice of 1-5. In each case 5=strongly agree 4=agree 3=not sure 2=disagree 1=strongly disagree (Question: 2-3)

For the following comment please type an "X" in the appropriate box.

2. "Interestingly, materials adaptation seem to be something teachers do a lot but which is rarely researched or included on training courses." (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2005)

Please give your opinion about the above comment in relation to Bangladeshi context?

5	4	3	2	1

Comment:



## Section B

3. Teachers are aware of materials adaptation to compensate for the lack of match between course aims and learner needs at tertiary level in Bangladesh.

5	4	3	2	1

Comment:

### Questions pertaining to teachers' awareness of adapting ELT coursebooks

For the following questions please type an "X" in the appropriate box. (Question: 4-13)

4. To what extent do you think foreign coursebooks are suitable for the needs of one's local, particular group?

Completely	Moderately	Not sure	Never thought about it	Not at all

Comment:

5. How far do you think you need to adapt published materials to teach Foundation English Courses at universities?

Completely	Moderately	Not sure	Never thought about it	Not at all

Comment:

6. How far do you think the coursebook materials you use are suitable for the cultural and ethnic diversity of your target learners of FEC?

Completely	Moderately	Not sure	Never thought about it	Not at all

Comment:

7. To what extent do you think the coursebook materials you use are suitable for language level, prior learning experience, learning styles of your target learner?

Completely	Moderately	Not sure	Never thought about it	Not at all

Comment:

8. To what extent do you think the coursebook materials you use suit your personality, teaching styles, beliefs about language learning and teaching?

Completely	Moderately	Not sure	Never thought about it	Not at all

Comment:

9. To what extent do you think the coursebook materials you use match with the Foundation English course objectives (syllabus, institutional targets)?

Completely	Moderately	Not sure	Never thought about it	Not at all

Comment:

### Section C

#### Questions pertaining to teachers' opportunities and challenges of adapting ELT course books

You are given choice of 1-5. In each case 5=strongly agree 4=agree 3=not sure 2=disagree 1=strongly disagree

For the following statements please type an "X" in the appropriate box.

		5	4	3	2	1
10	Tertiary level teachers have sufficient training on materials adaptation					
11	Teachers' have easy access to a variety of EFL materials for evaluation and adaptation of published materials					

12	Teachers' are able to afford sufficient time for adapting appropriate EFL classroom materials for the students of FEC					
13	Teachers have sufficient authentic teaching materials (newspaper, pamphlet, leaflet, magazine, etc.) available to adapt coursebook materials.					
14	Students' level of English proficiency at FEC encourages teachers to adapt coursebook materials.					
15	Materials adaptation requires teachers better knowledge of target culture which is a challenge for them					
16	Your teaching work load at your institution gives you enough opportunity to adapt materials for FEC					
17	Your university provides opportunities and financial support for adapting and developing materials					

**Section D**

Personal Information

1. How many years have you been a teacher of English at tertiary level?

.....year(s).....month(s).....

Please type an "X" in the appropriate box. You can choose more than one option.

2. What type(s) of course(s) have you taught in past 3 years?

a) Remedial English		b) Spoken English	
c) Writing		d) Listening	
e) English for Specific Purposes (ESP)		f) English literature	
g) FEC (Foundation English Course)		h) Reading	
i) EAP (English for Academic Purposes)			
j) Other English courses (please specify).....			

3. For your appropriate age group, please type an "X" in the appropriate box.

Under 26	27-35	36-40	Above 40

Please use this space to make other comments or suggestions regarding adapting ELT coursebooks if there is any: [Comments]

# Demotivation in English Language Courses: Exploration of Reasons and Suggestions

Nasreen Sultana\*

*Abstract: The study aims to find out the factors of demotivation, which hinder the learning of the students in English language courses in Bangladesh. Even after learning English as a compulsory subject for twelve years in schools, students enter into university with a poor knowledge of English. Eventually, most of the students are found to be demotivated in the fundamental English language courses at the tertiary level and usually teachers are blamed for the demotivation of the learners. However, teachers might not be the sole reason for making the students unwilling to learn. This study assumes that often students are demotivated to learn because of their own barriers, which is sometimes psychological. They do not learn because of their unwilling nature towards studies. For the purpose of the research, data were obtained through structured long interviews both with the students studying at the tertiary level and the English language teachers teaching them. Afterwards, findings and necessary solutions are offered.*

## Introduction

As English has become more and more important as an international language, in most countries around the world, large numbers of students are learning English as a compulsory subject in schools and universities. In Bangladesh too, irrespective of public or private universities, English language is taught as the fundamental prerequisite course for all students studying in different disciplines. Generally, two or three foundation courses on English language are offered to the newly enrolled students which aim to develop their English language skills, so that they can pursue their own disciplines which are taught in English.

Despite the fact that students must pass English language examinations to graduate, many students are unable to learn the language successfully due to their high level of demotivation. In this regard, Trang and Baldauf Jr. (2007) have found out in a study in Vietnam that in language classes, demotivation always has a negative impact, which prevents students from gaining a positive learning outcome. Instead of learning, students just want to somehow pass the compulsory English language courses.

## Research problem

Even after learning the English language for twelve years as a compulsory subject, students enter into the tertiary level with insufficient knowledge of English. Despite the pressure to learn English in Bangladesh, many students seem never to develop any interest in learning this language. Usually language teachers find it challenging and, in some cases, impossible to motivate the demotivated students who do not have any interest in learning the English language.

Interestingly, whenever students are demotivated to learn, typically teachers and their teaching are blamed. There is extensive research on how, because of the teacher's

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inability to motivate, students fail to learn the language successfully. However, this might not be the case always. Often, some students remain demotivated in the successful language teachers' classes also. So, if the teachers know the reasons for the demotivation, they can help in the learners' learning process.

In this study, it is assumed that teachers are not the only responsible factor behind the demotivation of some students. There might be many other psychological problems also, which demotivate students in the language classes. Hence, it is important to explore critically the underlying causes of demotivation to understand the phenomenon in depth. The current study researches the causes behind demotivation to know why students dislike the English language courses so much, so that effective solutions can be offered.

### **Demotivation in language classes**

According to Yan (2009), demotivation is the negative counterpart of motivation. Typically, motivation is known as the driving force to do something or to achieve something. On the other hand, demotivation prevents students from gaining the desired learning outcome (Trang and Baldauf, 2007). Dornyei (2005) defines demotivation as "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behaviour intention or an ongoing action" (p. 143). By external factors, he means aspects such as learning environment and teacher. So, a demotivated learner is someone who was once motivated, but lost his/her motivation due to some external reasons. Later Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) have suggested that Dornyei should have added the internal factors (such as self-confidence and negative attitude towards English) also in defining demotivation. Moreover, there are some students who are demotivated from the beginning of the course. So, it should not be thought that there was a time when they were motivated.

Students' dislike of language courses has always been linked to the failure of the teachers. In this regard, Gorhem and Christophel (1992) list some problems, such as the teacher being boring, unorganized, unprepared, and unapproachable for which language learners become reluctant in their studies. However, later he concludes that the dislike of the subject area is one of the major reasons behind the demotivation of the students. Later in 1998, Oxford's investigation has also discovered four areas in which students in the English language courses feel demotivated. These areas are the teacher's personal relationship with the students, the teacher's attitude towards the course, style conflicts between teachers and students, and classroom activities.

Nevertheless, demotivation may originate from other sources as well, as Chamber (1993) points out, like the home environment, previous learning experience, and students' low self-esteem. The respondents (teachers) in his research consider that demotivated students are unwilling to learn and they lack confidence in their own capabilities. Of course, teachers' views would be different from those of the students and hence, Chamber suggests for conducting an in-depth study with the students to understand the reasons behind demotivation.

Apart from these, language learners can be demotivated due to personality factors, teaching content, and teaching aids or materials as well. Both Chamber's (1993) and later Ikeno's (2002) studies state that sometimes a student's personal characteristics are responsible for making them demotivated in English language classes. Learners may have too low self-esteem and less confidence to be successful in the learning. Further, factors such as uninteresting content, slow pace of the lessons, inappropriate level, and

end of the course are also reasons behind the demotivation in language classes (Korhonen & Christophel, 1992; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). Therefore, teaching materials play a major role in motivating the students.

Interestingly, students, who are unwilling in the language classes, usually have some basic characteristics. In defining demotivated students, Chamber (as cited in Hasegawa, 2004) offers some characteristics of the demotivated learners. A demotivated learner

- Lacks a belief in his/her own capabilities, demonstrates lethargy, 'what's the use?' syndrome and gives negative or no response even to praise
- Makes no effort to learn, shows no interest, and demonstrates poor concentration
- Is unwilling to cooperate, distracts other students
- Produces little or no homework, does not bring materials to the class, or loses them

Based on the given literature review, it can be said that in researching the reasons for demotivation, scholars have pointed out problems related to teachers, teaching, course contents or teaching materials. Very little research has been addressed towards the students themselves. So, students should be the starting and central point while finding out why they are demotivated in English language classes and how they can be motivated.

### Methodology

Participants in the study consist of thirty-five undergraduate first year students studying at different universities of Bangladesh. These students belong to various disciplines including English, Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, Media Studies, Economics, Environmental Studies, and so on and have taken English as the prerequisite course to fulfill the requirement for graduation. Participants have been selected as demotivated by their English course teachers for the purpose of data collection.

A qualitative analysis was done by conducting structured long interviews (Appendix A) in 10 to 30 minutes with the selected 35 students. The interview setting was a both formal and informal. Additionally, 10 English language teachers teaching at tertiary level were interviewed (Appendix B) to support the collected data from the students. The interview with the teachers was informal and they were simply requested to offer their thoughts behind the demotivation of the learners in their language classes. Interviews with both groups were recorded and the data was later transcribed and analyzed, and the findings were given.

### Findings

The present section includes the findings from the two groups of participants: students and English language teachers.

The interview with the students revealed the following:

#### • *Inattentive to studies*

It was found out that most of the demotivated learners in English language courses do not have any motivation for other subjects either. In general, they do not have the

intrinsic drive to study. Not surprisingly, due to their reluctant nature towards study, they do not have any particular aim in life either. So, these demotivated learners not only have distaste for language classes, they also dislike studies in general. Most unexpectedly, most of the learners are aware of their demotivated nature.

♦ *Dislike of the subject area (Fear factor)*

It was noted that demotivated students do not like English as a subject from their school days. Over the course of time, the dislike of English language has turned into a matter of fear for them. So they never enjoy the language classes and do not even try to learn anything from the course. For them, English language foundation courses at the tertiary level are an extra burden which they find unnecessary.

♦ *Not meeting expectations*

Interestingly, many students enter into the university with a sense of relief that they do not have to study language from now on. When they are asked to practice some language related activities, they feel greatly demotivated. Somehow, demotivated students develop a false notion about their own level of competency. Since many of them have passed the SSC and HSC examinations with relatively good grades, they believe that they do not need further language training.

♦ *Mismatch between their knowledge and results of previous public examinations*

Unfortunately, many students with poor English knowledge earned satisfactory grades in their previous public examinations. Thus, they have acquired a false notion too that they are good in the English language. However, at university, when they fail to meet the teachers' expectations, they become puzzled. Many of the demotivated students accuse their teachers of partiality when they receive poor grades.

♦ *Medium of instruction*

At the undergraduate level, teachers usually use English as the medium of instruction, which many of the learners cannot understand and cope with. They are simultaneously afraid of speaking in English inside the class, which is necessary since the class is being conducted in English.

♦ *Not relevant to the academic subject area*

Many students (except students majoring in English) complain that the materials they are taught in the English language classes are not relevant to their other academic disciplines. So, they do not have any interest in the classes. They find it difficult to understand how this English language training is going to help them in earning good grades in other subjects. Most of the learners criticize reading and writing materials which are based on English literature and are thus completely irrelevant to their academic life.

♦ *Low self-esteem and distrust of the teachers*

Almost all the participants were found to have less confidence about English classes than others. These students had very low self-esteem about their ability to do well in their studies. Unfortunately, demotivated students develop a kind of belief that their teachers are unable to make the lesson interesting.

From the above mentioned results, it is evident that though students have a tendency to blame the teachers, in most cases learners themselves are responsible for their own failure. They are demotivated essentially because they do not have any

personal drive for learning.

The findings from the interviews with the English language teachers are given below:

1. Students who are demotivated in English classes are generally inattentive to their studies. These students do not have goals for their studies and thus they find the classes worthless. From the first class, teachers can identify them as reluctant learners. Due to their fear of and low confidence in the English language, demotivated students never interact in the class and typically are irregular. Further, they never seek help from the teachers. Some students are unwilling to accept their poor English ability and thus stop learning.
2. Many of the learners come from rural areas where English is typically not the medium of their prior schooling. So, at the tertiary level, they feel uncomfortable in the English medium classes. When they find it difficult to follow the class, rather than trying harder, they choose not to learn.

Though teachers believe that learners are not demotivated because of their teaching, all of the respondents have agreed that whenever students are unwilling to learn, it becomes their responsibility to stimulate them. Sometimes they try to bring a change in their own teaching style, so that students do not get bored and add innovative activities to keep the reluctant learners active.

Overall the study finds that usually demotivated students are unwilling to learn from the class and the teacher. Generally, these students have low confidence and thus they do not believe in their own abilities to do well in the English language classes.

#### **Probable suggestions**

The study reveals that demotivated students suffer from their own psychological barriers, which are impossible to remove without external help. Some probable solutions are offered below to help the demotivated learners:

##### *• Involve the students*

According to the findings, since students are aware of their demotivated nature, they can be involved in finding the solutions too. The teacher might ask the learners to come up with different ideas to make the lessons more interesting and motivating for them. In this process, at least some students will feel more involved in the course of learning.

##### *• Awareness of the importance of English*

At the tertiary level, students are mature enough to understand the importance of learning English in today's world. So teachers can explain how English is going to help them to do well both in their academic and professional life. The research conducted by Trang and Baldauf Jr. (2007) has found that learners can only improve if they can realize the importance and significance of English language in their lives.

##### *• Offer ESP courses*

As the findings demonstrate, one size does not fit all. That is, one kind of material is not going to help everyone. Since learners' needs for English varies, the universities should offer English for Specific Purpose (ESP) courses. For example, the materials designed for engineering students will address only their needs and purposes. For them, materials prepared from literary work are not going to help them and eventually, they will not be motivated to learn something which is not required in their academic or real life. Therefore, to reduce the burden, universities should not form mixed batches; rather English language classes should be formed based on the students' academic disciplines.



- *Counseling and the multi-tasking role of the teachers*

Nowadays teachers have to play a multi-tasking role. In the present system of education, teachers take on various responsibilities as educator, as administrator, as counselor, as advisor, and sometimes as a personal mentor too. If learners are demotivated, then teachers have no option but to act as counselor or mentor to help the reluctant students.

In many of universities of Europe, America, Canada, and even in some reputable universities of Asia, there are counselors to help in developing the psyche of the problematic learners. Expert counselors can easily understand the shortcomings of the learners and can make suggestions accordingly. In Bangladesh too, the universities may hire trained counselors to counsel the demotivated students. In this way, students may discuss the problems with the counselors which they cannot discuss with the teachers.

- *Action research*

Teachers may conduct action research based on their own group of students to find out reasons behind low motivation or demotivation, so that they may come up with contextual possible solutions. This could be an avenue for self-development as well.

### Conclusion

The study reveals that many students are not motivated in English language classes mostly due to their lack of intrinsic motivation. They are not learning simply because they do not want to learn. Eventually, a big responsibility lies on the shoulders of the teachers to investigate the reasons for demotivation and accordingly, to motivate the learners for better learning outcomes. Since teachers play a central role in the entire education system, he/she is the most direct contact for the students.

### Limitations and further research

The present study has been conducted with a limited number of respondents. So, a further study can be conducted by collecting a larger volume of data from the students studying at various levels. Moreover, for a deeper understanding, a comparative study between motivated and demotivated learners can be undertaken so that more realistic solutions can be offered to motivate the demotivated students.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A (Questions to the students)

1. Why did you take this English course?
2. Do you think that universities should offer English as a prerequisite course? Are these an extra burden for you?
3. "I do not earn good grades because of the English medium education at my university".

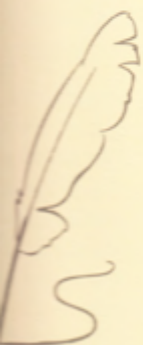
Agree or disagree?

4. What are the problems of English classes?
5. Please offer some suggestions to solve these problems.

### Appendix B

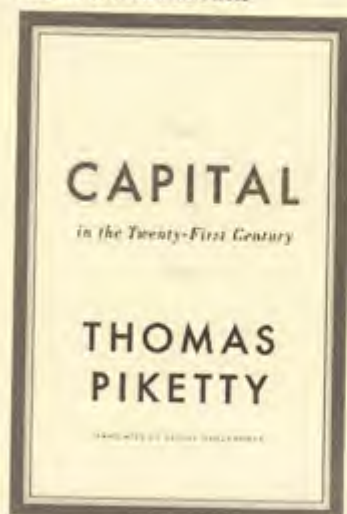
#### (Questions to the English teachers)

1. According to you, what are the reasons for students' demotivation?
2. As a teacher, what do you do to help the demotivated learners?



## Revisiting an Old Argument or Refashioning a Future?

Manzoorul Abedin



### *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*

Thomas Piketty, translated from the French by Arthur Goldhammer, 2014  
Cambridge, MA; London: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press,  
£25.39, pp.696.

ISBN-10: 067443000X; ISBN-13: 978-0674430006

When was the last time we heard an economist involve Jane Austen and Honoré de Balzac in his discussion of economic modelling? One of Thomas Piketty's many achievements in *Capital in the Twenty First Century* is to combine quantitative economic history and economic literature written with the Cartesian clarity we associate with the French scientific tradition. A core concern of Piketty's book is the following calculus: are the fruits of working hard greater than those attainable by marrying into a top fortune? If not, "why work? And why behave morally at all?" (p. 240). The book's substantive contribution is the way Piketty, a professor at the Paris School of Economics, has constructed a historical story from "as complete and consistent a set of historical sources as possible in order to study the dynamics of income and wealth distribution over the long run" (p. 19). The picture is familiar as it tells the story of our time: huge wealth and huge incomes concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of people, and a widening gap between high and low earners over the past quarter of a century. Using data from more than twenty countries, including France, Britain, Germany, the US, Piketty lays out the evidence for these trends, discusses the dynamics that will govern their evolution in the future, illuminates the critical roles of war and politics, and proposes remedies to the threat he believes growing inequality poses to democratic governance.

Ranging as far back as the eighteenth century to uncover key economic and social patterns, Piketty derives a grand theory of capital and inequality - a concept he captures in the expression  $r > g$  (where  $r$  is the rate of return to wealth and  $g$  is the economic growth rate). The crux of his explanation is that conditions prevailing between 1950 and 1980, far from representing a new normal, reflected an anomalous period in world economic history during which the growth rate of output ( $g$ ) substantially exceeded the rate of return on capital ( $r$ ). This created a dynamic in which capital's share of

\* The reviewer recently obtained his University of Cambridge PhD for his dissertation on English Education Policy in the Developing World.

national income ( $\alpha$ ) remained low and inheritance played a diminished role. Piketty suggests, however, we are now returning to a world of relatively slower economic growth that look more like the late nineteenth century, and thus making a slow but inevitable return to the 'patrimonial capitalism' (Giddens, 2001, pp. 157-158). When  $r$  substantially exceeds  $g$ , capital's share  $\alpha$  grows and, due to concentrated ownership, so does inequality of individual income. The main driver of inequality—the tendency of returns on capital to exceed the rate of economic growth—today threatens to generate extreme inequalities that stir discontent and undermine democratic values. Piketty closes the book by recommending that governments need to step in, now, by adopting a global tax on wealth, to prevent soaring inequality contributing to economic or political instability. Piketty believes that there is a "fundamental logical contradiction" (p. 571) in capitalism with "potentially terrifying" consequences for wealth distribution unless we adopt radical policies to tax the rich.

In varying degrees, poverty, unemployment and unequal opportunity are major challenges for all capitalist societies, including developing nations like Bangladesh. Picketty's book is thus also a reminder that it is time for us to enquire the ways growing inequality of income show up in a correspondingly more unequal distribution of wealth in Bangladesh. We should be concerned that greater income inequality might be transmitted to succeeding generations if money is a key element in providing opportunities to the young. And, needless to say, equality of opportunity is an objective that governments have struggled to realise over the years (Sobhan, 2010).

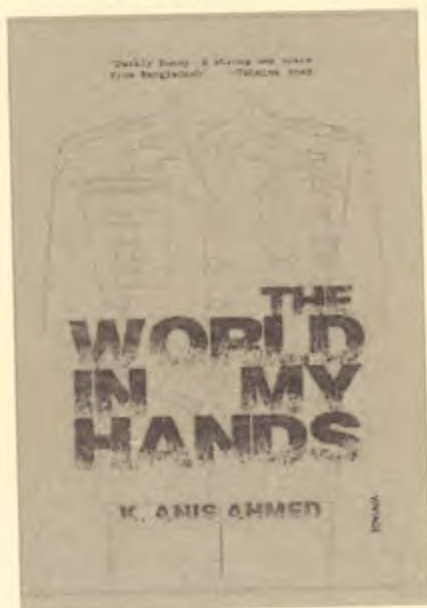
Nevertheless, it is possible to argue whether Piketty is right to think the future will look like the past and that today's super-rich mostly come by their wealth through work, rather than via inheritance, and dismiss Piketty's policy recommendations as more ideologically than economically driven. Piketty, however, makes it clear that he intends his as a work of history as much as economics (p. 33), and reiterates in his conclusion that "historical experience remains our principal source of knowledge" (p. 575). The book reflects and delivers on that commitment. Piketty explains his methods meticulously, and acknowledges their limitations. The literary references, far from a peripheral badge of erudition, play a central role in illustrating the dynamics of inheritance and wealth. There is no denying that findings of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* will transform debate and set the agenda for the next generation of thought about wealth and inequality across the globe.

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## Pandua Indeed!

Golam Sarwar Chowdhury\*



K. Anis Ahmed,  
*The World in My Hands*  
Random House India, 2013  
Rs. 299, pp. 376.

K. Anis Ahmed's *The World in My Hands* is indeed a powerful novel containing satire, humor laced with bitterness, and characters that are no strangers to readers living in Bangladesh. In the world outside, Ahmed's maiden novel projects a chunk of life from urban Bangladesh where people, like many other places in the world, have ambition, are in love, aspire to reach the top, and can even conspire to earn the favor of a military junta trying to get rid of politicians posthaste.

To those who know Bangladesh only as an impoverished and benighted country of millions, the novel introduces a land where people can think and act in order to succeed in life, and at the same time, connive and conspire. Like the author, urbane and suave, his first novel realistically depicts urban Bangladesh of the early twenty-first century when the military has ingeniously set up a hand-picked civilian government intending to exile the country's two political matriarchs who have ruled the country, in turns, over the past seventeen years. In the process, the military has picked up business tycoons, arrested politicians, en masse; and blindfolded and physically tortured university professors. These repressive measures were hitherto not experienced in independent Bangladesh although the military had staged a coup-d'état only three years after the country's birth in which the nation's founding father, along with his family members, was brutally murdered.

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Ahmed's novel is set in Pandua, readily recognized as Bangladesh by anyone aware of the topography of this South Asian country. Pandua is not a fictional land, such as R. K. Narayan's Malgudi or Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Macando; and the characters in the novel are the realistic men and women, whose hard work, success, and desires have evolved the society since the country earned its independence following a bloody war of liberation in 1971. Ahmed's description of the country is absolutely true when he says the land has been constantly shifting because of the mighty rivers that go on swallowing human habitat at regular intervals. This cruel reality of the rivers' fury is a metaphor for the periodic changes occurring in the country's political scenario. Democracy is practiced, and when politicians alienate themselves from the people, experiments of cleansing the society overnight are carried out by soldiers constitutionally authorized to protect the country's sovereignty from external aggression. The military experiment also ends in failure when people start resisting, which they have done ever since the partition of India in 1947, ultimately leading to the country's freedom.

It may become quite difficult for a novelist to depict a very recent happening in their own country because, unlike a historian or a journalist, the novelist cannot solely depend on factual events. For the creative writer, imagination and speculation are of supreme importance, and a novelist has to take liberties that the professional historian would rather shun. Although Ahmed's characters, Hissam, Kaiser, Natasha, Duniya, and even the Intelligence boss Brigadier Bakhtiar, are familiar people, the author makes them come alive imaginatively in a story of love, ambition, torture, endurance, and death. Kaiser's aspiration to reject a typical lower middle-class state of mind represented by his father, a clerk who recites Keats and is good at English, propels him to leave behind his small town and enroll at the University of Pandua. After earning a first class Honors degree, he drops out of university and starts a business for he intends to go up in a big way. He works hard and remains honest as much as he can in a society where old colonial laws and a snail-paced bureaucracy continually construct deterrents.

The novel's strength of portraying contemporary familiar characters in the context of potentially volatile political events transport the reader to a known world where they can readily identify with the characters as much as with the flow of events during the two-year military rule with a civilian face. Ahmed's satire can at times transform into rage, for example, when early in the novel Hissam Habeeb, Deputy Editor of *The Daily Pandua*, who is much too eager to become editor of the newspaper and keeps close contact with the military intelligence, mulls over the self-importance of men in uniform who, he thinks, leap-frog at least by two ranks: majors behave like colonels, colonels think they are generals who pretend to be gods during an emergency when clauses guaranteeing individual liberties in the constitution are rescinded. Ahmed's novel is not simply an exposé of the military's unsuccessful attempt to turn around the course of history between 2007 and 2010 in Bangladesh; it is also a powerful satire that removes the masks of those who constitute the civil society. Their selfishness, hyper-ambition, and sly maneuvers are treated with a sense of uncaring loathing by the author. Brigadier Bakhtiar wants Hissam Habeeb to bring together members of the civil forum in a new political party that would replace the PPP which had ruled in the immediate past, and the Soc Dems who were their predecessors in state power. There is a problem, however, as some of the old guards will not accept Sabine, who has done most of the spadework to head the new conglomerate. Ahmed's understanding of his society is spot-on as he has the Brigadier make it known that Sabine will not agree to be anyone's deputy, which the military man interprets as a manifestation of the typical Panduan ego.

Apart from the blending of reportage and imagination, Ahmed's ability to develop powerful characters such as Kaiser, his wife Natasha, and Brigadier Bakhtiar bear ample proof of his skilled craftsmanship. Natasha's early love for Hissam, her later decision of marrying the richer Kaiser, and

Hissam's lifelong affectionate involvement with Kaiser's family lends a tender touch to the narrative, evoking a softer feeling in contrast to the harsher realities of life that Ahmed narrates in a language uniquely his own. Ahmed's gripping narrative moves forward in twists and turns but always remains firm and in complete control of the author.

The novel, however, is not only about serious matters relating to purges and torture or the demolition of Kaiser's 30-storied commercial building: a symbol of his hard work and commitment. Ahmed provides relief to the readers when they follow the interesting and humorous philandering of Hissam with Duniya. The love-starved Hissam makes love to Duniya and wants to continue with the affair as long as he can although she knows what suits her best. Duniya, meaning the world, cannot be possessed by any individual like the world that cannot rest in one's own hands. The world belongs to all, and for any individual or intuitions to regard it as their own is a mistake.

After Kaiser is released from captivity that involved beastly physical torture which the man in no way deserved, his world soon comes to an end as he kills himself with an overdose of anti-depressants and sleeping pills. A shocked Hissam is overwhelmed by this twin loss of Duniya and Kaiser. He realizes a suicide could never be an act of taking revenge against the self, but is also a slap on the face of others. The military's world also shrinks as they decide to give up by changing their strategy of grabbing the world as they pleased.

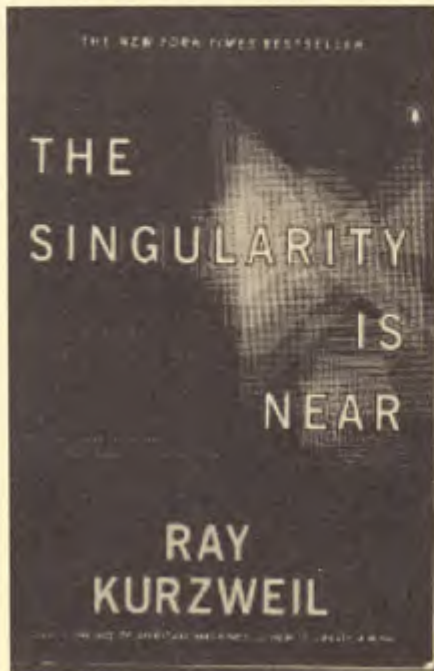
K. Anis Ahmed emerges, in my opinion, as the most powerful novelist writing in English in Bangladesh because of his deft knack of creating fiction out of a nation's two-year history of a military government's aborted attempt to sanitize the society. Ahmed's mature understanding of this world around him, narrated in a robust language, keeps the reader consistently glued to the 375-page novel.

After reading *The World in My Hands*, I wondered why the author changes the name of Bangladesh to Pandua and Dhaka to Palitpur. For any Bangladeshi reader the description of the city in its present and past would be much too obvious. The novel is not a frontal attack on the military; it only tells the tale of an entire society gone corrupt that the military wanted to cleanse in its own typical manner. Therefore, even if the author had retained the name of Bangladesh and its capital, there would be no reason for any particular institution, be it political parties or the military, to take offence.



## Nearing Singularity

Shamsad Mortuza\*



Ray Kurzweil

*The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*

New York: Penguin, 2005, pp. 652

Price US\$22

Optimism unsettles us. In the departments of English and Humanities, in liberal arts in general, we are trained to critique to prove ourselves human. Humanism, in its garbed guile, teaches us to point out what's wrong with humanity per se. Our criticism veers between skepticism and pessimism. Even when critics such as N. Katherine Hayles ask "How We Became Posthuman" or Donna Haraway perpetuates a tradition in which the posthuman subject takes the shape of a cyborg, we are very much within the comfort zone of critiquing humanism or its presupposed absence in the distant future. Hence, the optimism shared by Ray Kurzweil in *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (2005) unnerves us to say the least.

The book, shelved in the non-fiction popular science category of high-street book shops, resembles a sci-fi fiction; yet it remains solidly grounded in the soil of science. It turbo-boosts into near future and assures us that Singularity is attainable as early as in 2045. The Singularity, as Kurzweil describes it, is:

....a future period during which the pace of technological advance will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed... The Singularity will represent the culmination of the merger of our biological thinking and existence with our technology, resulting in a world that is still human but transcends our biological roots. There will be no distinction, post-Singularity, between human and machine or between

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physical and virtual. (7)

The “exponential rate” in which our intelligence is growing will soon make human being a non-biological entity, an Artificial Intelligence (AI). The “version 1.0 human body” (299) is all set to be upgraded into “version 2.0” when “Billions of nanobots will travel through the bloodstream in our bodies and brains. In our bodies, they will destroy pathogens, correct DNA errors, eliminate toxins, and perform many other tasks to enhance our physical well being. As a result we will be able to live indefinitely without aging” (300).

Put simply, these presumed upgrading of human versions will usher in a new civilization enabling us to transcend our biological boundaries and amplify our creativity. Such “radical and optimistic view of the future course of human development” is endorsed by a certain Bill Gates who features in the dust cover of the book. Listed as The New York Times Bestseller book, published by Penguin USA, and certified by heavy weight celebrities--The Singularity is Here has all the right ingredients to be on your bucket list (although the book itself will denounce the necessity of having any such death wish).

But if you are brought up in a milieu of liberal humanism that started finding faults with wage labor system and alienation of the laborer from his product, that once saw the metamorphosis of a salesman into an insect, that once viewed the self etherized as a patient on an operating table, well, be prepared to upgrade yourself from version 1.0 modernism to version 2.0 postmodernism and perform a post-mortem of a post-human.

Indeed, Kurzweil is too modern to sing any requiem for a hollow man or his vanishing race. Human being, just like any other products--“clothes, food, energy” (339)--for this popular science writer can be reduced to information. Yes, you heard it right—information. His mathematical mapping of the six epochs: ‘physics and chemistry’; ‘biology’; ‘brains’; ‘technology’; ‘merger of technology with human intelligence’; and ‘the universe wakes up’ shows how humans are right on course to attain Singularity. So, in Epoch 1, atoms and molecules engineered itself to become “information-rich, three-dimensional structures” (16). Billion years ago, in Epoch 2, carbon-based compounds evolved into DNA and stored information. In the third epoch early animals started recognizing patterns; and “ultimately, our own species evolved the ability to create abstract mental models ...and put these ideas into action” (16). Epoch 4 shows



Source: (Singularity 15)

heightened use of technology in which humans have outshone other mammals "in roughly doubling the computational capacity" (16). Epoch 5 is informed by a "human-machine civilization" (20) which will lead to Singularity in Epoch 6 in which "intelligence, derived from its biological origins in human brains and its technological origin in human ingenuity, will begin to saturate the matter and energy in its midst" (21).

So what makes human superior to other species? Why homo sapiens is singled out in the evolutionary design? According to this acclaimed inventor of our time, responsible for designing flatbed scanner for instance, "It is this shared specieswise knowledge base that distinguishes us from other animals. Other animals communicate, but they don't accumulate an evolving and growing base of knowledge to pass down to the next generation" (328).

So in a post-Darwinian evolutionary schema we are fast outpacing other creatures in our capacity of both generating and storing information. Death, for Kurzweil, is tragic only because it threatens the death of information. For the ever optimistic Kurzweil, soon we will "be able to access, permanently archive, as well as understand the thousands of trillions of bytes of information we have tucked away in each of our brains" (329).

The "ultimate longevity software" will ensure that "biological hardware" is taken care of; in other words, death will soon be pronounced dead. Earlier Kurzweil observed, "As we learn the operating principles of the human body and brain, we will soon be in a position to design vastly superior systems that will last longer and perform better, without susceptibility to breakdown, disease and aging" (302).

Kurzweil's vision is more than a Keatsian negative capability. He is in search of a, as Nietzsche said and Kurzweil quoted, "rope over an abyss" (373). The central urge of the author seems to be in pursuing a more involved role in the universe in order to reach for a greater existence. He knows that human competence in technology will encourage our race to take noble risks not only to extend our lives and escape death but also to guarantee that our future or the future of humanity is secured.

Whether one will grab the rope over an abyss offered by Kurzweil is a matter of choice; but from the vantage point of 2014 we can denounce some of the predictions that Kurzweil made in 2005. For example, the Google guru predicted that by 2010 even fabrics would be used to wire up the globe to create an ultimate Wi-Fi zone. Well, Wi-Fi is everywhere but not to the extent that Kurzweil thought it would. Nevertheless, Kurzweil remains an extremely intelligent thinker who can use a wealth of information to argue that singularity can be attained in another 30 odd years.

Meanwhile sitting in my ULAB office room, I am thinking of asking the admin to change the fluorescent tube lights and energy saving bulbs into LED bulbs. We have just gone green, and CFC bulbs are no longer the in thing. Leafing through Kurzweil, which I had to read while auditing a course on posthumanism at UCLA, I am forced to ask: Are we living in a parallel universe in which Kurzweil's dystopia is pure science, and where the signs around me are releasing nothing but signifiers of a distant utopia?





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