A Practical Experience at a Publishing House: The University Press Ltd. (UPL)

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December 2010



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A Report Submitted to

The department of English and Humanities

Of

BRAC University

By

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Student ID: 07103007

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts in English

December 2010

Acknowledgement

It has been a privilege to thank those who helped me write this report. I am grateful to my supervisor at UPL Ms. Mahrukh Mohiuddin and my supervisors at Brac Ms. Roohi Huda and Ms. Sabreena Ahmed for guiding my way through. I would also like to show my sincere gratitude to my colleagues at UPL who contributed to my learning experience. Furthermore, I would like to thank Professor Firdous Azim and the other teachers of English Department for their help and guidance, and for making my career at BRAC University an enjoyable one. Finally, I thank my parents, my seniors and my friends for giving me their love and support.

Nahian bin Asadullah

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1. Introduction

"News is something new; if it's not new then it's not news." Thanks to Mr. Mahtab Haider for giving us a really good understanding about news and media industry in the course titled "Introduction to Copy Editing". In this course I have also learnt what makes something news and what does not.

I did not choose media and cultural studies as my major concentration merely because it's a subject of study and it is highly in demand among many students. But rather I learnt about the journalists and their true qualities, which really motivated me to take up this challenge that I will be an honest journalist who will report what needs to be reported and abandon what is false. I read in my texts for *Introduction to Editing* course that a journalist should be considerate and humane. For instance, we all know how the journalists had interfered in the personal life of Princess Diana. They literally reported everything related to her, they even reported what is not true.

Another reason for choosing *The University Press Limited* for my internship is because I always had a fascination toward books. And by working with them I came to know how the books are published and made available to the public. I also became familiar with different papers that are used for publishing.

It has been my privilege to get the opportunity to do my internship at The University Press Limited (*UPL*) when my respected Chairperson of the department Ms. Firdous Azim gave me the offer. I was glad to hear that I got this great opportunity to do my intern there because I heard that it is a matter of luck for someone who gets a good company to start with his professional experience. However, I do admit that my responsibilities up there were not very close to that of a journalist, but I did learn a lot about how a publishing house works and in fact some of my academic courses aided me while I was working there.

It may be that I am the first one in the English department to have completed my intern at a publishing house. So it was really a different experience working there, as I was introduced to a lot of new things which I had not come across in my courses.

I was especially assigned to update and shorten the author information and the introduction at the University Press Ltd. As it is a publishing house there was not much scope for tasks related to my coursework, although some of the courses really helped me. I was assigned to do copyediting; I loved it because I had completed a course on editing. I will try to elaborate how I shouldered my responsibilities further in this report.

2. Brief History of The University Press Ltd.

The University Press Limited (UPL) is a leading publisher of Bangladesh. It publishes educational, academic and scholarly books both in the English and Bangla languages. UPL was set up as a publishing company in 1974 and it took over OUP's publishing programme of Bangladesh in 1975. Since then it has closely collaborated with OUP Oxford and its branches in Pakistan and India. UPL also distributes books of foreign publishers to Bangladesh. Till now, UPL has published 800 titles of which about 600 live titles are on its list and has presently an ongoing publishing programme of about 50 titles a year. UPL has its main office in Dhaka with office in Chittagong.

Books from the United Kingdom, India and Pakistan are distributed by *UPL*. Besides its joint publishing programme with *OUP* and its branches, *UPL* has collaborated and co-published with *Zed Books*, *Intermediate Technology Publications* in the UK; *West View Press, Indiana University Press, Kumarian Press* in the USA; *Sage, MacMillan, Manohar Books* in India.

UPL's publisher and Managing Director Mohiuddin Ahmed had been the editor of *OUP*, Pakistan Branch until 1972. He then took over as Chief Executive of *OUP*, Bangladesh. He has been actively contributing to the Book Development activities of Bangladesh.

UPL functions as a professional publishing house. It emphasizes on the following areasdevelopment issues, earth sciences, gender issues, anthropology, political history, economics, bangladesh studies and so forth. UPL publishes general, academic and scholarly books. The books published under the category of academic books are primary level schoolbooks. In publishing these books UPL takes help from teachers who are experts in teaching at the primary level and prepares manuscripts accordingly. UPL has a panel of writers for the primary books. The Managing Director of the publishing house Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmed said, "We are very careful about the vocabulary level of the books and we frequently sit with the panel of writers for rechecking before actually publishing them."

What others say about UPL

- "In the last quarter of a century, *The University Press Limited (UPL)* has established its name in the prestigious list of publishing houses not only in the country but also in the South Asian region."
- "UPL publishes the kind of books which can roughly be categorized as 'serious books', with the objective of dissemination and enrichment of knowledge."
- "Though academic and research-oriented books are its forte, UPL has always
 maintained its dynamic character by publishing books of literary value and those of
 historical importance such as our glorious liberation war."
- "... publishes English books. These English publications have not only earned international fame for *UPL* but at the same time provided the Bangladeshi authors with an opportunity to reach a wider readership beyond the geographical boundary of the country." [Daily Star Weekend Magazine, Dhaka, June 19 2001]

The University Press Limited has been one of the most prestigious publishing houses in Bangladesh and in the South Asian Region. It has definitely made Bangladesh known internationally through its excellence in the field.

3. Working at The University Press Ltd.

Although my concentration of study was media and cultural studies and I also took a course on print media titled *Introduction to Print Media*, but my working experience at *UPL* was a bit different. I came to know that studying in media and working in media is not completely the same. It should be noted that I am the only person who has done his internship at a publishing house but my friends have done their internships at newspaper agencies, so my working environment and responsibilities also differed a bit.

My first encounter with the media courses was *Introduction to Copyediting*, followed by *Translation Studies*, *Introduction to Print Media*, *Globalization and Media and Copywriting*. I have learnt a lot from these courses and they helped me during my stay at *UPL*.

In the course titled *Introduction to Print Media* I learnt how to write different kinds of features, articles, editorial, post-editorial and so forth. However, as I worked at a publishing house it did not help me directly but it did help me in other areas relevant to a publishing house.

It was a whole new experience to me, as I have not worked at any office before. However, I found it very easy to fit into the environment because of my respected teachers who have always guided me through my education at BRAC. They taught not only the academic sides of different courses but also gave advice how to adjust to any work environment by being friendly and inquisitive. It was then I realized how important was the Professional Skill Development Programme (PSDP) course, organized by the Career Service Office of BRAC University.

As I mentioned earlier, this was my first ever work experience. I learnt a lot of new things from my colleagues there. I saw how a corporate office is run, how they manage

the workload and cope up with the challenges and stress to meet the deadline of a task. I used to see my colleagues suffering a lot due to technical difficulties with the website.

But the positive thing was that they were really consistent in notifying the administrator frequently about what problems they faced.

My colleagues were very sincere about their responsibilities. Whenever anyone left office early or did not come to the office, for some reason they made it up on the next day by working extra hours. Interesting thing here is that the office administration did not compel them to work extra hours for their absence on the previous day but they willingly made it up.

3.1. Copy Editing

There is a sharp distinction between *editing* and *copyediting* that must be taken into consideration. Copyediting is the work that an editor does to improve the formatting, style, and accuracy of the text. Copy refers to written or typewritten text for typesetting, printing or publication.

In his book *Opportunities in Publishing Careers* author Robert A. Curter defines Copyediting:

"Copyediting is a kind of work virtually unknown to the reading public and often underestimated or misunderstood even by editors and others in publishing houses. In its basic form, it means taking the manuscript of a book and reading through it meticulously, correcting errors of spelling, usage, and grammar. At the same time, the copyeditor is doing what is called styling the book for the printer." (38)

Here the author basically means that copyediting is different from just editing something. Copyediting means to correct the errors of spelling, usage and, and grammar. As for me I

could not stick to the general definition of copyediting, however, I have tried to follow the rules of copyediting as much as I could.

I did the editing course in my final year at BRAC University. I learnt a lot from this course and at the same time had fun doing it. The course focuses on understanding of words, style, accuracy and the essentials of English usage. In the classroom, we edited news, features and editorial copy from various newspapers, journals, articles and also wrote headlines and designed pages. During the course we were taught that a Copy editor is the one assists the writer in his job, he does not write copies but edit it. Although copy editing in newspapers and copyediting in publishing houses are different but the idea is the copyeditor has to know his limitations. This always reminded me to focus on correcting incorrect sentence construction; over-writing and incorrect usage of the English language while my internship at UPL. I edited quite a lot of books published by

UPL. Among them I am going to mention a few. The tiles that I have edited are given below in the boxes:

Introduction

This volume of essays has been published in memory of the late Dr. Mahfuzul Huq, a leading political scientist of Bangladesh who died in 1966 in a helicopter crash in Faridpur, Bangladesh.

Leading Bangladeshi scholars and social scientists from home and abroad have contributed the eleven essays in this volume which examine and explain the developments in selected areas of politics and governance in Bangladesh.

The last thirty years have been eventful and turbulent times for Bangladesh as it struggles towards achieving a democratic polity. The analytical essays in this volume cover varied areas such as the political system, public policy, local government and administration, foreign policy and national security, ethnicity and religion and the Bangladesh War of Liberation.

The range and objectivity of the essays make the volume a significant addition to the literature on politics and governance. *Essays in Memory of Dr. Mahfuzul Huq: Thirty Years of Bangladesh Politics* should be of interest to general readers, specialists and academicians in the fields of Bangladesh politics, foreign policy, society and public administration.

Figure 1: Thirty Years of BD Politics: Essays in Memory of Dr. Mahfuzul Huq by Mahfuzul H. Chowdhury. Published by UPL (2000).

3.2. Editing and Rewriting Author Information

Besides editing and correcting the introduction of the books, I also edited and in fact I rewrote some of the author information. My knowledge gained in the course titled *Introduction to Print Media* really helped me a lot in doing this work. In that course I learnt how to write an author biography and what are the things that should be taken into account while writing about the author. Although that was not completely relevant to my work since it was on how to write a biographical article. It taught me what should be added in the author information or in other words what is relevant.

I basically rewrote the author information without deleting the original idea but I just rewrote it in a much more concise and new way. Since we learnt that an editor's work is to work on the structure, grammar, and punctuation of the text rather than changing the entire information. However, I was asked to delete the minute things that were not relevant or important for the author's information. Once I was talking to our managing director Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmed and he was saying if we talk too much about the author then it'll imply that this author is not well-known and qualified. If we give the relevant information it will give the readers an idea of the author's qualification.

Following is a sample of author information I have rewritten. The title and the author information are given below in the boxes:

Author Information (born Dhaka, 1964) has compiled and edited this anthology, did his post-graduation in Management from Dhaka University in 1986. He was a Lecturer at Rajshahi Government City College and Dhaka Government Kabi Nazrul College. At present he is associated with The Institute of Liberation, Bangabandhu and Bangladesh Studies of National University.

Figure 1: *Media and Liberation War* By Reaz Ahmed. Distributed by The University Press Limited (2005).

4. My Achievements

My achievements at *UPL* are few but significant. I would like to thank my supervisors both at the University and at *UPL* for giving me this learning opportunity. I consider myself really lucky for being blessed with a good internship and my supervisors who guided my way through the entire semester.

First of all, I was really honored when I was given the responsibility for updating the checklist of *UPL*. A checklist is a compilation of book titles that are published and distributed by *UPL*. Someone else had started making the list but he could not complete it as he left *UPL*, so I had to start all over again.

However, I could not complete the entire checklist during my internship either. I could arrange the categories such as "Agriculture and Livestock," "Bangladesh Studies," "Economics and Development Studies," "Education and Public Health," and "Gender Studies" etc. Among all the categories "Education and Public Health" was the biggest category. So I was very happy to have completed that mammoth task

I met different distinguished personalities during my stay at *UPL*. On the first day when I visited the Motijheel office I was kind of lost where to go. And just in front of the door of *UPL* office I met our favorite author Prof. Niaz Zaman who was really nice to guide my way through to the office. It could not get any better than this! First day at office and I got to meet one of my favorite personalities.

Another personality I met was the managing director of *UPL* Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmed. He seemed to be someone who is a father figure to almost everyone. On the very first day he welcomed me as if he is meeting someone who he knew from before. I felt very comfortable as he did not seem like a typical angry boss. Rather, from that moment, I had grown an admiration for him.

Meeting these famous personalities gave me a different perspective of life, as in how they talk and how they look at life as a whole. For instance, I have worked at *UPL* for nearly

three months, and I have never seen Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmed just sitting idle. He is the managing director but I think he is busier than anyone at the press because he likes to be active always.

5. Types of Publishing Houses

There are generally 7 types of publishing houses. They are, 1. Trade Publishing, 2. Professional and Scholarly Publishing, 3. Educational Publishing, 4. University Presses 5. Independent Publishers, 6. Alternative Media (E-books and Audio Books) and 7. Other types of publishing and related businesses ("Types").

UPL for the most part is a professional and scholarly publishing house. However, they also publish educational books. As I have already mentioned in the earlier chapters of my report that *UPL* publishes books for kindergarten level children. First we have to know what a professional and scholarly publisher is. A professional and scholarly publishing house publishes books specifically written for professionals in a wide variety of industries, such as medicine, law, business, technology, science and the Humanities.

UPL will fall under traditional publishing house. The good thing with a traditional publishing house is they do everything from editing to cover design, but the creative control is often missing. The authors get an advance although it's not much for a first time author, after the editing proves the work may even not look like the original work. And if the book does not make sale then the author has a really hard time to convince the publisher to put out another book of his. And if the book does make it to the book store, if it does not make a sale in 30 days, the book will be returned and this author will be possibly blacklisted by the publishing house (Shields).

Being a scholarly and educational publishing house doesn't make it any less commercial. Because in the end of the day the purpose is one and the same and that is making profits.

Shirley Biagi in her book An Introduction to Mass Media says:

"Selling a lot of copies of one book is easier and cheaper than selling a few copies of many books. This is the concept behind publishers' eager search for blockbuster books. Publishers are attracted to bestselling authors because usually they are easy to market. A 'Brand Loyalty' among many readers draws these loyal readers to buy every book by a favorite author, so publishers try to capitalize on an author's popularity in the same way movie producers seek out stars who have made successful films." (39)

The above statement is especially true for the giant publishing houses like *UPL*. They have created criteria for the authors to be able to publish in *UPL*. Practically speaking I did not find a single *UPL* author who does not hold at least a PhD. This, however, is not unlikely for a scholarly publishing house like *UPL*.

Interestingly enough, when I was editing the author information I was kind of confused about what to leave out. And so I asked our managing director Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmed on how to go about editing the author information. What he said to me was very amusing, he said: "Why do you need to include so many credentials about the author? If you make the author information packed with his achievements, the readers might think this author is not very popular, hence, we are trying to exaggerate about him."

6. UPL in Comparison with Other Prominent Local Publishers:

UPL is one of the biggest and well-known publishing houses in Bangladesh. It has been in the publishing industry for 25 years. So it is different from the other Bangladeshi publishing houses in several different ways.

First of all, *UPL* has an upper hand over other local publishing houses in experience. In the beginning *UPL* was no different than the *Oxford University Press*, Pakistan. The managing director *UPL* used to work for *OUP*, Pakistan. And later on he left *OUP* and established *UPL*, the experience that he gathered from *OUP* was transferred to *UPL* and that really made *UPL* a unique organization.

Secondly, the managing director of *UPL* showed me a long shelf of books in his office. He said that these books were professional books on publishing that other publishers of Bangladesh do not have in their collection.

Unlike some other publishers at home and abroad *UPL* has its own curriculum for the primary level school children. *UPL* has special focus on publishing primary level books in English. These books are written in simple English but at the same time it helps the children to improve their vocabulary. As I have already mentioned that *UPL* is very careful about the children's vocabulary level and the books are designed in a way that is suited to their level.

Sheba Prokashoni is one of the oldest and famous book publishers in Bangladesh. It's especially renowned for its western and detective books. On the other hand, UPL is known for its scholarly and educational books. Sheba Prokashani uses cheap news print papers for publishing. When the editor was asked the reason, he said they could publish the books in expensive white papers but then the books will be very expensive and the general readers will not be able to buy it. Therefore, Sheba concentrated on the quality of the writing rather than the quality of the papers. UPL, however, publishes in expensive papers. Largely because the books published in UPL are scholarly books and these are widely read in home and abroad.

Another difference between *Sheba Prokashani* and *UPL* is the former is better known locally than the latter. Because I have hardly seen people who don't know the name of *Sheba Prokashoni*, but when I told people I am doing my intern at *UPL* most asked me second time. Very few appreciated me and said it's a good place to do your intern. One of the reasons is *UPL* mostly publishes in English and we really have very few English readers in Bangladesh. Secondly, scholarly books are not for the commoners. The common people of Bangladesh mostly read popular fictions written in Bangla.

There are some other Bangladeshi publishing houses like *Oitijya*, *Annaprakash*, *Ankur* etc. They publish fictions and collections of poetry or historical research articles in Bangla.

Writers.ink is another prominent Bangladeshi publishing house. They mainly focus on promoting creative writing; they also promote Bangla literature in English language. Unlike UPL, they do not publish scholarly books. Moreover, they do not publish in Bangla whereas UPL publishes both in Bangla and English. Some of the titles published by Writers.ink are: Didima's Necklace and Other Stories by Niaz Zaman, Derelict by Kazi Fazlur Rahman, On Behula's Raft: Selected Poems by Khondakar Ashraf Hossain and so forth. UPL is one of the distributor's of Writers' ink

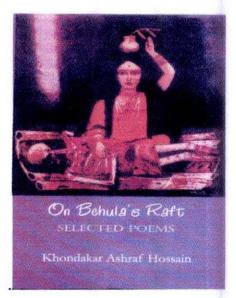


Figure 2: Cover page of *On Behula's Raft* by Khondakar Ashraf Hossain, published by Writers.ink (2004).

7. Threats and limitations of UPL

UPL as a publishing house has its drawbacks and limitations. One of the main concerns for UPL is the increasing popularity of the alternative media such as audio books, online pdf. Books etc. The publishing houses are always looking for more income from the content they own; but some book publishers are producing some books as audio books and electronic books. In addition, these books are designed in way where the readers can easily download them for free that is hampers printed books' sale.

Shirley Biagy in her book An Introduction to Mass Media said:

"Audio-books, first introduced in the 1980s, have been a growing sales category for book publishers. Book publishers produce classics and popular new titles on CDs for people who are more willing to listen to a book than reading it." (42)

Pollyana Ferrari in her book The Impact of the Digital Era on the future Books said -

"The organic consumption of the cyberspace has generated a number of transformations on our readers, regardless of place: South America, Europe or the United States. The hybrid texture of the Internet has been silently altering society in terms of the recorded music industry, editorial content delivery, media enterprises, and telecommunications. Some examples are: The Universities of Stanford and Michigan directed part of their collection 0f 7.4 million books to Google Books; The New York public Library handed over to Google material not protected by copyright laws." (1)

So, it is obvious that blogging is also one of the powerful weapons of digital media or alternative media. In fact, there is increasing number of author blogs. And in blogging the authors can get instant feedback and they have more readers worldwide on the internet. In addition, writing on blogs or internet these days are not less significant. Ferrari mentioned above that the universities like Stanford University and Michigan University

have directed a great number of their books to *Google Books*. This show the authors will get their recognition at the comfort of their homes, if they are to be given recognition.

Ferrari further says: "We have left the world of the sequence and entered world of association, where the act of reading and clicking are key steps to the success or failure of a product on the internet, be it a novel or newspaper headline." (Ferrari 4)

This above comment by Ferrari basically shows how easy it has become to access both international and local books. We can buy and order books online (eg. on *eBay*, *JSTOR*)

Piracy of books is another big concern for the publishing presses like *UPL*. One of my colleagues at *UPL* Ms. Maria Afrin said just after a day the book *Social Business* by Dr. Muhammad Yunus was published its pirated copy was available in the streets. When I asked her why this piracy is so widespread she says the reason being simply not observing who are doing this. This book *Social Business* cost 530 TK whereas it was being sold at a cheaper price in the streets (Afrin). This is a severe threat to a big publishing house like *UPL*, because if people get the same reading from the pirated copy why would they buy the original copy with a higher price.

One of the most common reasons for book piracy is the price. If the books are costly the piracy would increase. But I have observed that as a scholarly publishing house it's near to impossible for *UPL* to supply the books at the cheapest prices. *UPL* also have to consider their foreign authors and give royalty. Moreover, the material cost in publishing is really very important. If the books have contents of the academic field then the material used will also has to be quality material.

I already discussed the issue of increasing audio books and alternative media. Now I will expand on it a little bit.

As long as alternative media is concerned *UPL* lags way behind than the publishing houses in the west. Now-a-days, most publishing houses if not all produce audio-books considering the preference of the audience. It's hard to imagine that a

publishing house like *UPL* which has been in the industry for 25 years has not yet taken the help of technology in this age.

Moreover, in the electronic books the authors give out a few chapters for free as a sample reading. This way the readers have an idea about the book which helps them decide whether they will buy the book or not.

However, there are both pros and cons of technology. One of the cons of alternative media is the youth is more into listening and reading electronic books. They do not have the passion to collect books and form a library, this place is taken by the alternative media. Hence, the publishing houses like *UPL* face the threat of losing readers from the youth.

8. A Personal Account

I enjoyed my three months stay at *UPL*. It was a whole new experience and I learnt a lot from my colleagues and elders. It was a great platform for me to get to know a lot of distinguished people. It also earned me experience on how to work effectively in a new environment.

As I mentioned in the previous sections, my work was mostly to edit the author information and the introduction of the stories. I also scanned pictures that go with the title in the website and other media means.

One big problem I had to encounter was the frequent shifting of the offices. As the main office is in Motijheel, I had to go there every week at least for once. And the books that were not available in Badda, they were to be taken from Motijheel office. Since all records are stored in the Motijheel office.

If it was not for this frequent shifting of offices, I might not have lost the files I had prepared at the Motijheel office. The computer I used at Badda was of high configuration and the ms word that I used in it was not compatible to the low configuration computer of Motijheel office. Hence, I tried different things and messed everything up. So I had to wait until I got back to Badda office and edited the incomplete files from that computer all over again.

Despite this difficulty my internship at *UPL* all in all was a positive experience. My colleagues as I mentioned before were always willing to help. And even now whenever I have to get opinions about different publishing issues I call them up and I always get some perspective to benefit from them.

9. Conclusion

Working at UPL overall was a new experience for me and I learnt a lot from there without a doubt. I have experienced the bits of pieces of my classroom learning in 3 months. Because what I have learnt is practical experience and academic learning are two different things. However, I do think if these two go together then it can make a difference. Which I think happened to me, since I had the theoretical knowledge and by working at *UPL* I gained the practical experience.

Gradually I learnt how to get settled in a new working environment. And for each category I had a deadline to meet. This prompted me to produce more work in a lesser time. It was a challenge for me because at times I did feel bored, since I had to work non-stop in a computer for longer hours. However, I do find a positive aspect here and that is I learnt how to work under pressure.

Finally, I would like to end by saying that during my stay at *UPL* I did experience difficulties and also had my times of comfort. But on top of that I would always cherish that I did my internship in a good environment where I got to learn a lot from my colleagues. I worked with the books that came into being with years of hard work. I could read the original copies of famous books. And above all, I won some true hands of co-operation that will always remain in my heart till I die.

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Appendix 1

Introduction

Achinpakhi Infinity combines a wide range of theoretical learning and understanding of the indigenous theatre in Bangladesh and describes fully the way in which the tradition lives in Bangladesh today. It studies over eighty genres, which are related to various religions, (such as Islam and Buddhism), and cults (such as Krsna and Caitanya, Ramacandra, Siva and Kali, Manasa and Natha). It also includes a number of secular performances. The methodology adopted for major part of the study is based on fieldwork which includes witnessing performances in actual condition, interviewing the performers and the spectators, and studying written texts, audio recording and photographs of performances. In a few cases, performances, which no longer exist, have also been studied from published accounts. Excepting the minor cases, most of the genres have been studies in terms of: (i) background information of the genre, its performers and sponsors, (ii) performance space, (iii) text, (iv) structure of performance and (v) miscellaneous information related to the genre. Plans of performance space and photographs of performance have also been provided. Art forms tend to go through perpetual changes but it is hoped that the book will help the readers' journey into an art form rooted in indignity.

Figure 3: Syed Jamil Ahmed. *Acinpakhi Infinity*: Indigenous Theatre in Bangladesh. Published by University Press Limited (2000).

Appendix 2

Introduction

The Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD) coordinated by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has confirmed its good reputation. Each of the IRBD volumes has received critical acclaim both in Bangladesh and abroad because of the richness of the information and the quality of the analyses presented. The current volume, IRDB 1999 is the fourth volume and continues the tradition set by earlier volumes. The present IRBD volume Trends in the Post-Flood Economy: A Review of Bangladesh's Development 1998-99 puts under critical review the performance of Bangladesh economy subsequent to the devastating floods of 1998, traces growth trends of important macroeconomic parameters and focuses on three key sectors of the economy. The review of the agriculture sector focuses on the impact of the flood on the sector, the post-flood rehabilitation programme and growth performance in 1999. The chapter on the fiscal sector traces the major departures in the budget for 1999-2000 arising out of the responses to the flood and their implications for the performance of the economy. The chapter on the external sector presents an analysis of dynamics and recovery prospect of the sector in 1998-99. A major cross-cutting focus of IRBD 1998-99 is on the impact of the flood 1998 on both macroeconomic and sectoral performances.

Figure 4: *Trends in the Post-Flood Economy* by Rehman Sobhan. Published in 2002 by University Press Limited (2000).