

Contemporary English Poetry: A Subcontinental Discourse

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in English

The Department of English and Humanities

BRAC University

September 2022

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing my degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Acknowledgment

I wish to express my gratitude to the almighty for giving me the strength and courage to get through the hardships. I thank my supervisor, Dr. Abu Sayeed Mohammad Noman for guiding me not only throughout my thesis but also throughout my entire undergraduate life. I would like to thank all the teachers in English and Humanities of Brac University who taught me everything I know and changed my life for the best. A special thanks to Ayesha Abed Library for providing me with the necessary documents for my thesis. Last but not the least, I thank my family, and friends for being with me throughout my journey, especially my mother who never stopped believing in me.

Abstract

This study starts by briefly introducing the colonial past of Bangladesh and then gives the personal experience of the author that is influenced by colonization. The paper then tries to investigate the causes behind the motivations of poets- Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam, who have acquired worldwide recognition for their creative work, particularly in the field of poetry. In addition to this, it tries to investigate the social factors that prevent poets from Bangladesh from advancing to higher ground, in the contemporary postcolonial period, where other countries by this time have adopted their brands of English and used them fruitfully. Additionally, it investigates whether or not it is rational for poets from Bangladesh to compose poetry in a language such as English. The paper concludes by giving solutions to each chapter- why Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam are celebrated for their work, how Bangladesh can advance in creating verses in English, and the rationality behind using English while composing poetry for the Bangladeshi poets.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Quality English translation is the means by which the rich literary history of Bangladesh can travel the globe. Despite many obstacles, the translation of Bangladeshi poetry has risen slowly but steadily over the past two decades. However, many great translations created by our gifted translators were unable to penetrate Anglophone markets. While Bangladesh also is unable to produce English poetry of its own on a consistent basis. In the contemporary era, Fakrul Alam is one of the leading translators from Bangladesh who has international recognition. Kaiser Haq is an English poet from Bangladesh who has grasped the attention of the world with his majestic poetry that not only defines Bangladeshi culture with all its colors but also shows how the country has advanced after colonization had ended. Bangladesh does possess poetic geniuses and it is quite evident when the Bengali poetry of the country is observed. However, English poetry is yet to make a mark coming out from Bangladesh.

Purpose of Research

Bangladesh is no different than other South Asian nations in terms of colonization. The only difference is after the colonization of the British had ended, the land was part of Pakistan, bringing additional history to the land and its people. In Modern times, it is one of few countries that had to be liberated on the basics of language, culture, and economy. There are many languages in Bangladesh but the majority of the people speak Bengali. However, even after liberation, English became a medium of communication in different institutions, like offices, courts, and different levels of education (after a period of Bengali nationalism). People living in

different classes- upper, middle, and lower classes of Bangladesh know a certain level of English. People are often noticed using Bengali and English together in places like social media. Many people in Bangladesh produce creative works in English, despite that less than a handful get global recognition, especially in the artistic field of poetry- which is less produced than other literary works.

This research will try to find out the reasons behind the motives of Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam who achieved global acknowledgment for their creative work, especially in poetry. It will also try to understand the social aspects that are keeping Bangladeshi poets tied down in reaching higher grounds while other Indian Subcontinent writers are being acknowledged in the same creative field, and whether creating poetry in a language like English is rational for Bangladeshi poets.

History

Throughout history Bangladesh, along with the rest of the Indian Subcontinent, has attracted foreign powers for its natural beauty and resources. Thus, the people who live in this part of the world have been exposed to different cultures from across the world. This is quite evident when someone looks at the cultural aspects of modern South Asian countries- the language, the literature, the food, the fashion, the celebrations, and many more. While looking into the language and literature, one will notice the cross-cultural exchange, cultural diversity, hybridity, and syncretism in contemporary South Asian cultures and languages, for instance, Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu are languages that are influenced by Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and

English. While having a discourse with the native speakers the influence of the previous foreign powers- who have ruled or created their colonies here, can be felt. Life in general for South Asian people significantly changed as they synced with other cultures and made the cultures of South Asia unique and diverse.

However, there are differences among the changes themselves- the difference between rulers and colonizers. Looking at the characteristics of the rulers like the Senas-who took over the lands of the Palas in Bengal, or the Mughals- who came here and adopted their culture with the locals, and even while ruling they helped the locals live a prosperous life. For instance, the Senas enforced masculine superiority over the existing Feminine and made Brahma the center of the universe (Husain, 89). Women's status was diminished during the Sena dynasty because the Senas were Brahmins and the society had become increasingly caste conscious. Brahmanism was a radical departure from the norm, as its rituals traditionally favored male supremacy (Brahmans—elite male caste) and relegated women to a subservient position in society. Manu- the head priest of that time, decreed that a woman should be under the authority of a man at all times, beginning with her father as a child, continuing with her husband as a young adult, and finally with her son after the death of the husband. When asked about women's rights, Manu infamously declared, "a woman must never be independent" (Husain, 89). To paraphrase Manu on the subject of married women: "a husband must be constantly worshiped as a god by a faithful wife" (Husain, 89) The extent to which women relied on men diminished their social standing. To ensure their place in the family and the community, they also needed to start a boy. If a man was unable to have sons, Manu and Kalluka instructed his followers to find a new wife. The male-dominated ritual stoked more contention and unfounded assumptions about women's place

in the afterlife, degrading their social standing and fostering a male-centric (male member as "sun") existence for them. In subsequent eras, "Sati" and similar rituals became socially acceptable (Husain, 91).

While Mughal rulers like Akbar were fair towards their subjects and worked to improve their lives. Akbar was a secular leader who allowed his subjects to freely practice their religions without persecution. Adding further evidence of his open-mindedness, he wed the Hindu princess of Jaipur. More than that, he had faith in his Hindu subjects and appointed members of the upper caste of Jaipur's Hindu community to important positions in his government, such as governor and tax collector. Everybody paid their fair share of taxes, and there were no discriminatory measures based on religious beliefs (e.g. Jizya in Islam). Despite most Hindus' lower status compared to Muslims, they had access to similar opportunities (Hill and Awde, 156-57). Akbar was able to unite much of India thanks to his secular outlook; citizens who benefited from the government's generosity backed him and the Mughal Empire. Some other features of Akbar were that to not offend Hindus, Akbar forbade Muslims to slaughter cows, abolished the death penalty for apostates, replaced the Islamic lunar calendar with a solar one, opposed slavery, and allowed women to practice their own faiths while marrying Muslims. It was during this era that people of different faiths were treated equally (Hill and Awde, 156-57). So, the rulers lived alongside the locals and saw them as part of their empires.

On the other hand, European colonization was quite different. They had the imperial mindset- the state policy, practice, or advocacy of expanding power and dominion, typically through the acquisition of territory or the promotion of efforts to gain political and economic

control over the territories of other states. Aside from Spain, Portugal, the Dutch Republic, and France, Britain was one of Europe's five major colonial powers in 1750. In 1850, the British Empire was unrivaled in its global reach. It was during this time that Britain became the “world's workshop”(Ward, 44). Against the East India Company's longstanding policy of trading through restricted coastal enclaves, Englishmen in Madras and Calcutta took the initiative.

Sub-imperialists used Anglo-French rivalry and Indian politics to their advantage. While Britain did engage in some international trade in the 1750s, it was widely believed that trade with India was detrimental to British manufacturing. Because Indian consumers did not want European goods, Spanish American silver was used to purchase India's main export, cotton cloth, which competed with British textiles. The East India Company's political dominance in Bengal allowed them to purchase Indian goods with locally collected taxes rather than silver. In contrast to the rapid expansion of Indian exports, British imports did not rise in proportion. The East India Company began cultivating Bengal as a raw silk source in the 1770s. If it weren't for cotton, though, Europe's exports would be dominated by other commodities. So, when the British Empire took control of India in 1857, they did it as it would benefit them, not only economically but also to overpower its European competitor.

Thus, it was quite different for the colonizers than the previous rulers- they (colonizers) only wanted to use the location as their colony and the locals as either inferior workers or slaves as they had nothing to do with India or its people but to get benefitted. Even the steps that seem to be positive like female education and building new transportation were done to increase their production and serve the throne and mainland- Britain. Returning to language and literature, the British colonizers taught the locals with the same imperialist mindset. For instance, teaching

them the English language would mean that they would have Indian translators who would translate between the Indian works and British lords for a better and easier process of production. This is evident in *Macaulay's Minute*, where it is stated- “to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (Alam, 16).

As people of the Indian Subcontinent started to learn the language of the colonizers- English, new classes like the middle class- Bhadraklok emerged, who had access to the knowledge of the colonizers. However, this backfired on the colonizers as liberal-minded people like Lord Ripon helped the educated Indians to find their destined path. Lord Ripon succeeded Lytton in 1880 after Gladstonian Liberalism won the British elections. Ripon's initial inclination was to speak for all Indians. He overturned the Vernacular Press Act, which had been passed to silence "educated Indian" and its opinions, among many other measures of Lytton's that he deemed counterproductive. In order to empower more Indians to handle their own affairs, Ripon also suggested major reforms to local self-government. Rapidly making room for "Indians in government service", Ripon altered the way India was administered. As an example, R. C. Mitter, an Indian, was appointed to the position of justice on the Bengal High Court. Ripon also advocated for legal reform that would allow Indian judges the same authority to impose punishments on European offenders as their English counterparts. The Ilbert Bill, which sought to end racial bias among judges, was unquestionably the most radical of his proposals. Educated Indians felt revitalized by Ripon's progressive policies, leading many to believe that they were entitled to a larger voice in public life and higher-ranking government positions. Although Ripon

was removed he remained a hero to the educated Indians who by now were conscious of their rights and the necessary steps that needed to be taken to ensure their freedom (Alam, 92-93).

The Indian National Congress in Calcutta at the end of 1883 was a precursory event. Finally, as Ripon was leaving in 1884, politically aware Indians orchestrated celebrations in his honor. These protests were incredibly effective, persuading their organizers that it was time to take longer-term measures in support of college education for Indians. After a year under Lord Dufferin's reign, they had reason to assume that the Viceroy no longer had their best interests at heart and was actively striving to advance Anglo-Indian biases (Alam, 93).

The freshly awakened Indian community's leaders spent all of 1885 preparing for a truly national assembly. As a result, three major gatherings took place in India during December: "the Madras Conference on December 23-25, the Calcutta Conference on December 25-28, and finally, and most significantly, the Bombay Congress on December 28-30". The composition of its delegates and the decisions it made were key factors in the Congress's significance. The delegates at this Congress, who collectively represented a large swath of India's population and geography, unanimously agreed on the need for coordinated action and spelled out their goals in a series of resolute resolutions. " We are at the beginning of a new chapter, possibly a new volume, in Indian history," Mackenzie Wallace, Dufferin's private secretary, said (Gopal, *British Policy*, 161). Because of this, the Bombay Congress is often referred to as the "Indian National Congress", the gathering from which India's eventual independence was inexorably forged (Alam, 93-94).

Indian nationalism could also be noticed in the literature of the Bhadrakalok. Originally released in 1882, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath* is a work of Bengali fiction. Among the most influential works of Bengali and Indian literature, it is inspired by and takes place against the backdrop of the Sannyasi Rebellion in the late 18th century. It was published in English under the title *The Abbey of Bliss*. People like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who expressed themselves using the English language were not successful at first, and so, other writers and poets like Michael Madhusudan Dutta had to switch to their mother language, where their thoughts and expressions were put among the greatest. Thus they became “examples of the impracticality of trying to write creatively in a language not one’s own” (Alam, 17). On the contrary, their successors in the first half of the twentieth century showed the world that Indians could write as well as their British counterparts. Writing in many forms- novels, autobiographies, or fiction writes like R.K. Narayan from South India or Bengal’s Nirad Chaudhuri created a dimension where they not only showed that the British left a mark on the politics and economy but also in the field of “creative expression” (Alam, 17).

Similarly, the colonial process being two-sided, the people who came here to colonize were also influenced by multiple cultures. The Indian influence and experience led many writers to write about the imperial presence of England in India. Renowned examples would be, Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Foster, J.G. Ferrell, and George Orwell. At first, they had optimism about the colony and many started to live here with the locals as Anglo-Indian settlers. These settlers would write their experience of India from “Anglo-Indian perspectives” (Alam, 16). At first, the writings would be in the form of letters, travelogs, and diaries. Soon after some of them shifted to fiction to write about their experiences. However, as the rebellious nature increased amongst

the locals, the existing optimism found in earlier writings of Eliza Fay- “the way of living suits me” (*Original Letters from India*, 450) towards the end of the eighteenth century was no longer visible. Rather, it was replaced by a sense of insecurity in the writings of “Kipling’s Indian writing” (Alam, 16) at the end of the nineteenth century- in the poem *The City of the Heart*, Kipling compares Indians with dogs, he states,

I passed through the streets of my haunted heart
In the hush of a hopeless night;
And from every gully a dog would start
And bay my soul with affright.

He then suggests in the final stanza that governing is the best way to keep these animals under control. “English law and order could keep Indians under control, but at a price — fear and emptiness” (Alam, 96).

But I smote with the dog-whip of Work and Fact
Those evil beasts on the head,
Till I made of my heart a wholesome tract,
Empty and garnished (Kipling, 225).

As the process of decolonization started with the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, the influence of the English language did not deteriorate, rather in the post-colonial era second and third waves of Indian writers in English, showcased their creativity and proved that Indian writers can write as well and creatively as native writers. With globalization and transnational capitalism, English emerged as the most powerful language representing not only

European cultural values but also those of the colonized. It was during the second half of the second wave and with the beginning of the third wave that Indian English writings truly flourished. Novelists like Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, and others became global sensations for their writings. Even in drama, Mahesh Dattani won a prize for his masterpiece. Poets such as Nissim Ezekiel, A.K Ramanujan, Dom Moraes, Jayanta Mahapatra, and Arun Kolaktar are prime examples of English poetry in India.

In Bangladesh, linguistic nationalism played a crucial role in not accepting English as a Bangladeshi language. Compared to India where there are many languages and people of different regions use their own languages, the majority of Bangladeshis understand the standard Bengali language. English was a blessing in India as it could unite the people, this is quite evident when one looks at post-independent India, on 15 August 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru delivered a famous speech in which he used English as the medium of communication. Nehru chose English because he knew that if he had delivered the speech in any of the other Indian languages—Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil, Urdu, or others—not all Indians would have understood it. On the other hand, Bangabandhu while giving his famous 7th march speech in 1971, where Bangladesh was declared an independent nation, he delivered the message in Bengali as most Bangladeshis knew the standard form of Bengali. After Bangladesh became an independent nation Bengali nationalism grew, like Urdu, English was also being looked at as a foreign language. Being a foreign language most people contained themselves from writing in English. However, English writing prevailed in the form of Kaiser Haq's poetry, which talks about different cultural aspects and shows the wounds that the colonizers had left behind.

The concerning fact in contemporary times is that after Kaiser Haq there were no globally acknowledged poets from Bangladesh. Surprisingly, looking at the other colonies of South Asia (India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), Africa, and the West Indies, numerous creative writers went on to become English poets. Bangladesh does have the same post-colonial mindset- the people of Bangladesh are going through a colonial hangover and use English in many forms of institutions, such as offices, courts, and education institutes(e.g. in universities and at the primary level- English medium schools). When it comes to literature, Bangladesh always had great writers who wrote in Bengali, and the people of Bangladesh enjoy their writing. For instance, Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, Humayun Ahmed, Taslima Nasrin, Manik Bandopadhyay, Shamsur Rahman, Ahmed Sofa, Jibanananda Das, Anisul Hoq, Zahir Raihan, Satyajit Ray, Michael Madhusudhan Dutta, and many others. The writings of these greats are more than a handful and so the people never had to look beyond the mainstream national literature. Looking at the amazing works these greats produced and the success they obtained from their literary pieces, new writers, belonging from all walks of life, more than often get encouraged to write in Bengali. On the contrary, very few people from the upper and middle classes get to read English literature in English medium schools and universities. Being inspired many people do produce English literature but do not publish them and even if they do, they are not able to grasp the national let alone the international spotlight as these pieces have a very small audience compared to the Bengali ones. People who do not publish their works question the quality of their own writings as they are constantly reminded of the great Michael Madhusudhan Dutta, who was a literary genius but only obtained success while writing in his mother tongue Bengali.

Personal Experience and Developing The Idea for Research

Growing up, English was always recognized as the language of the affluent. Belonging to the middle class, we lived in a joint family. With my siblings and cousins, I participated in a variety of activities. Due to the fact that the majority of cartoons back then were in English, learning a language such as English was quite simple. Thus, from a very young age, we were all able to speak English with great fluency. Whenever a foreigner visited, they were captivated by the fact that we spoke the language fluently. The adults in our household also admired the fact that we spoke English so early on. Unconsciously, we began to adopt a colonized worldview. Compared to Bengali, I felt more confident when speaking English. At the age of five, I composed my first birthday poem for my aunt. Even though everyone acknowledged that we spoke English, my cousins made fun of me for writing a poem in English. I felt dispirited afterward and did not write again until I entered university. Now as I look back at the memories of childhood, I realize- English was much appreciated by everyone as it represented our cultural capital.

English in Bangladesh has an elite status in the academic world. “Elite English-educated Bangladeshis prefer to show off their linguistic skills. English represents status, culture, education, and intelligence” (Sultana, 17). On the other hand, the Bengali medium students feel less confident, have a sense of powerlessness, and feel physically detached in classroom discussions (Sultana, 18) while they are doing classes with English medium students at university. University education tries to remove that gap of insecurity and make the students more confident by implementing English as the medium of instruction, students themselves

claim that English is the key to becoming more confident. Shaila Sultana in her research, “English as a Medium of Instruction in Bangladesh’s Higher Education: Empowering or Disadvantaging Students?” gathers students from both public and private universities and finds that- “Regardless of their education background, all the participants considered English important for their self-image, i.e., for their confidence and sophistication. 83.3% of the participants strongly agreed that English would help them to be more confident” (28).

My experience at university is quite similar, belonging to both English and Bengali medium backgrounds, and having developed good English speaking skills from an early age, I felt confident and responded to teachers whenever I had the opportunity. Moreover, my diverse background also helped me to make many friends from both mediums. Students from both mediums were equally skillful and had sound knowledge of English. The major difference between them was the practice of English. The students from English medium backgrounds throughout their twelve years of schooling had practiced all four language skills- reading, writing, listening, and speaking. On the contrary, the Bengali medium students only practiced reading and writing that too while doing subjects such as English first and second papers, compared to the English medium students who studied all their subjects in English. Naturally, the Bengali medium student felt less confident compared to the English medium students at first. However, gradually after the first year, the gaps kept on reducing until they were not visible anymore.

The mode of teaching also varied throughout departments. Belonging to the department of English meant that all classes were taught in English. However, the same cannot be said about

the other departments. While doing the pre-requisite “Courses Outside the Department” or COD courses, I noticed that teachers would sometimes give lectures in Bengali- whenever the students were unable to grasp the gist of the lectures. Within the department of English, there were three disciplines- Literature, Linguistics, and, Media and Cultural Studies. Having enjoyed the foundational courses of literature, I chose the discipline and was very fond of poetry. It was my third semester when I did the course, “Introduction to English Poetry”. During the course, I was introduced to the great Kaiser Haq through his decolonizing poem *Ode On The Lungi*. This poem connotes an ode on the subaltern, an ode on the disadvantaged, and an ode on the underprivileged. These oppressed individuals do not remain mute in this poetry. Instead, they are asserting their equality with others. People who wear lungis are not to be overlooked in this democratic world; they possess the same dignity as everyone else. In Ode on the Lungi, KaiserHaq brilliantly conveys the equal dignity and forceful voice of the subaltern. In this poem, he personifies the lungi in order to honor those who wear it and to give them their own identity. This poem made me conscious of the colonized mindset that I was developing throughout the years and wanted to know more about decolonization. Afterward, I remembered how I enjoyed playing with words as a child and started writing poems once again.

Other than playing with words, creating rhythmic patterns with different similes and metaphors was something I started to do quite often and within the next three years, I wrote many poems. Most of these poems are about my inner feelings, social, and cultural aspects. While others are based on experiences I heard from my friends and situations seen on the streets. I used pseudo-identity on a social media platform to publish a few of my works and was amazed to see people from other parts of the globe reacting to it. The people of my country did not seem

to care much about it, other than some of my friends who knew about the platform. Some of my friends suggested publishing my work in the form of a book.

At first, I thought most people might not be interested in reading poetry in this day and age, where everything comes in the form of audio and videos. Later on, I discovered there were a lot of people like me who wrote poetry in English and were interested in reading new pieces. Some questions remained, for instance, If poetry is a work of art and an open field for artists, why and how do people measure its artistic values?- I specifically had this question when I submitted one of my works to an event at my university and after it was selected an editor made some changes according to his preferences, completely ignoring the fact that poetry is an open area for poets where they can express themselves freely. In this case, he changed my expressions without my consent. Later on, I had withdrawn the poem as the changes did not express me or my feelings.

Moreover, if all the South Asian countries were colonized for the same amount of time then why is Bangladesh lagging with only one or two examples, while the neighboring countries are constantly producing English poets since their birth years? Moreover, if one's native language is more important, and English is the language of the colonizers, then why do people (especially those from countries like India) choose to write in English? Due to the fact that Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam are representative examples of creative English writing coming from Bangladesh, I deemed it necessary to conduct this specific research and center my attention on the two of them.

Literary Theory

In this paper, the literary theories of postcolonial criticism by Michel Foucault and Edward Said will be used. Foucault's theory of discourse- the relationship between power and knowledge will be specifically used in the context of Bangladeshi English poetry. On the other hand, Edward Said's orientalism will be used to show how English is the foreign language or “other” in the Bangladeshi context.

Foucault coined the term 'discourse' in his book, *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, to refer to a social system that produces knowledge and meaning and is historically contingent. He observes that language is in fact material, producing what he refers to as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (49) Thus, discourse is a technique of organizing information that forms the construction of social (and increasingly global) interactions via the communal grasp of discursive logic and the acceptance of discourse as a social truth.

According to Foucault, the logic created by discourse is structurally tied to the episteme (structure of knowledge) of the historical moment from which it originates. Nevertheless, discourses are formed by the effects of power within a social order, and this power prescribes specific rules and categories that determine the criteria for legitimizing knowledge and truth inside the discursive system. These rules and categories are considered before the discourse or a priori. This is how speech conceals its creation and ability to generate knowledge and meaning. This is also how discourse asserts its incontrovertible historicity. In addition, through repetition

in society, the rules of discourse set the meaning of statements or texts such that they are conducive to the political rationality behind their production. However, the discourse simultaneously conceals both its potential to establish meaning and its political aims. Thus, a discourse might masquerade as historical, universal, and scientific — i.e. objective and steady.

Edward Said's book *Orientalism* shows how the “self” is distinguished from the “other”. There is an eastern half of the earth (called the "Orient") and a western half (called the "Occident") to the globe. Westerners (mostly Europeans) dominated the East and its wealth. In addition, they divided the world into two groups, with Asia and Africa representing the "Others" and Europe representing the "Self." The West's constant depiction of the East as uncivilized gives it the pretext to civilize and control the region. As such, Orientalism can be understood as the European strategy of colonizing, remaking, and governing the people of the East. For instance, the colonizers preferred the spelling Calcutta for the city now known as Kolkata. Edward Said demonstrates how the Orient's self-perceptions are merely Western projections. Foucault's concept of discourse, which Said used to forward his thesis, refers to the exercise of disciplinary power or the implementation of control via the "rule of exclusion." As a result, the Orient can only be represented by the Occident, who manipulates the East and strips them of their ability to speak for themselves. The colonizers' use of scientific information (such as IQ tests) is abused to rationalize their genocide and slavery. European colonizers' art and literature perpetuate concepts of superiority and inferiority to this day.

Methodology

This paper will consist of qualitative research based on current research in the form of books, journals, papers, and interviews. The language debates of Africa and the West Indies, as presented in the works of Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiongo, and Edward Kamau Braithwaite, will be utilized to demonstrate how colonial people might use English. In contrast, literature and interviews with Fakrul Alam and Kaiser Haq will be explored to determine their motivations for composing English poetry. With the aid of existing literature and interviews, their perspectives on future Bangladeshi literary works on poetry and existing Indian writings in English will also be drawn.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Language debates from Africa and the West Indies

While at a conference at Makerere University in Uganda in 1962, Achebe released an essay titled "English and the African Writer," which sparked a discussion on whether or not English is a universal language. This article asks, "What is the colonial heritage of English as a language?" and is widely regarded as a seminal work on the subject. If we are undergoing a process of decolonization, especially a cultural one, we must examine the status of that language, and this is why English is such a divisive issue: not just because it is our second language, but because it was the language of our conquerors. However, Achebe shows English is the international lingua franca and he says it produces the national literature for the Africans-

A national literature is one that takes the whole nation for its province, and has a realised or potential audience throughout its territory. In other words a literature that is written in the national language. An ethnic literature is one which is available only to one ethnic group within the nation. If you take Nigeria as an example, the national literature, as I see it, is the literature written in English; and the ethnic literatures are in Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, Effik, Edo, ijaw, etc., etc. (27)

He makes this claim around the time of Africa's independence in the 1960s when the continent's citizens were able to communicate with one another in English. As a result, English came to serve as a sort of lingua franca for the continent, allowing its citizens to not only communicate with one another but also to project ideas and images to the rest of the world.

Achebe's goal in making English the international language of communication is to shift the balance of power by uniting Africans and projecting the colonial scars to the colonizers and the rest of the world through African literature. Also, one must answer the query, "What is African literature?" When reading this, one may wonder if it is African literature. Or works by African authors? What is the definition of national literature? These are the questions he asks. Whatever it is, if African people are given the power of representation, they will be able to clear the barbaric portrayal that has been projected to the rest of the world, and in doing so, they will also be able to reflect the genuine essence of Africa to the rest of the world.

What's fascinating about Achebe is how he turns African literature (writing in various African languages) into ethnic literature while also representing literature written in colonial languages as national works of literature. He did this because African countries were not like those elsewhere; Africans traditionally organized themselves into tribal groups, and after their nations were established, many of these groups had to merge to form a single country. As a result, when an African author writes in a specific African language, he is not writing for all Africans because they will not comprehend it; instead, his work becomes biased toward one nation rather than portraying Africa as a whole. However, he refers to English as the national language because writing in the colonial tongue is preferable because everyone will understand it.

He continues by saying that English is a colonial legacy since people did not challenge the nation-building process and so they clung to the languages that had been bestowed upon them. He claims that English was rammed down their throats despite its many benefits, including

the ability to talk to native speakers across Africa and, more broadly, the rest of the world. Of course, then the question comes up, can the African speakers speak as well as the natives?

Achebe expresses his optimism by saying, "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience," implying that no Africans should use English in the same way that the English did. But it must be a different English, one that maintains close ties to its British roots while also adapting to life in Africa (30). Furthermore, if the colonial borders are projected to the rest of the world through English the world will recall the colonial past of these nations and the reality will be reflected.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o begins his book, *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*, with the chapter, "The Language of African Literature" by criticizing Chinua Achebe. According to Thiongo, Achebe believed that it was the job of the African writer to improve the English language. Achebe had previously stated that he would write in a new form of English, one that could handle the weight of the African experience. Thiongo disputes Achebe's assertion, questioning why an African writer would place such emphasis on English when they need not abandon their connection to the land of Africa; his knowledge of the land comes through his participation in anti-colonial movements and liberation wars. All segments of African society, including the educated middle class (including speakers of English, Portuguese, and French), the working class, peasants, and students, banded together during these uprisings. Thiongo pauses for a moment to consider both the language's and the colonial child's (an African child's) development. The colonial children while growing up will get in touch with the languages of the colonizers through their surroundings such as media (Television programs such as English cartoons) and unconsciously might see the colonial language and culture as superior.

While looking at the language, he examines it from the perspectives of both communication and culture. There are three levels and dimensions of communication and culture. Both oral and written language serve as forms of communication that are intrinsically linked to people's ability to earn a living and sustain themselves. On the cultural side, he adds that language is significant because, first, it reflects continuity across time, having been passed down to us from generation to generation; and second, it is at the heart of our history, culture, and customs.

The second and maybe more crucial point is that it is along this spectrum that we develop our moral and ethical principles and our sense of what is valuable in life. It explains the world and how to comprehend it (the difference between good and bad, what is to be sought for, and what is to be avoided). Thirdly, the individual conceptions of our roles in this universe. All of these things highlight the significance of language. When one considers the development of the African child (during colonial times) alongside the role of language, a schism becomes apparent in the latter, prompting the question, "What happens to the African mind?" For Ngugi, this is the beginning of colonial alienation, or the "colonial split" in the psyche (the language of home and school are divided). As there are two possible ways of looking at the world, this divides everything in half. The home environment loses significance as the academic one becomes more prominent. The written word represents a third cultural element of language that furthers this separation. In this way, African children internalize negative and humiliating stereotypes about their continent from a young age, and the world around them reinforces these beliefs.

After that, Ngugi discusses the relationship between language and social class, focusing on the middle class and how they were energized by the anti-colonial movements. Ngugi deems this era to have been the finest in Africa's history because of the unity of all social classes. By banding together, they were able to stage a successful rebellion that ultimately resulted in their independence. Even in the language of their colonizers, writing was able to convey their oneness, proving the power of writing in any language. Using the colonizer's language was a challenge to the colonizer's authority. The post-independence landscape changes drastically as citizens lose faith in the very leaders who spurred them to break away from colonial rule. People become estranged from their history because neocolonial and late-capitalist strategies primarily targeted national leaders and many of them co-opted with the colonial rulers, and the past texts take on an ironic tone. This marginalized population then responds by critiquing themselves in writing, but for whom? If written for colonizers, it should be in their language; if written for Africans, it should be in an African language so those who fought for independence can read it as well.

In Edward Kamau Braithwaite's essay "Nation Language" Braithwaite says,

But it is an English that is not the standard, imported, educated English, but that of the submerged, surrealist expression and sensibility, which has always been there and which is now increasingly coming to the surface and influencing the perception of contemporary Caribbean people. It is what I call, as I say, the national language. (311)

Here Braithwaite is defining a national language, which is the mixture of the languages of the European colonizers and the African colonized, or "submerged" in his words. The traditional

form of English brought to the Caribbean had its standard, and it was primarily used to educate the colonized people. This English education taught the colonized about the history and literature of the colonizers, but it ignored both the new creole languages and traditions creolized tongues emerged as a result of two processes: first, the African tongues were drowned out by the European tongues, and second, the European tongues were altered by the African influence. Students in the Caribbean were taught about the British "story" and British history and literature, which alienated the colonized because there was no way for them to relate to what they were learning. This was even though many problems were occurring in the Caribbean, such as hurricanes and slave rebellions. Comparisons between the national language and its dialects are inappropriate because the national language is a new language.

Oral, sound, and musical components are all included in the national language. Standard English is linked with solitary pursuits, whereas this dialect is more performative and has its expressions than standard English. Since the calypso rhythm of the national language is likewise in opposition to the pentameter of normal English, this demonstrates that the national language is distinct from English and that it is a new language that has been divorced from the old language. Even though it was thought to be a new language, it had always been there, waiting to reach the surface. As a result, after it had finally reached the surface, it was altering the perspectives of individuals living in the contemporary Caribbean-

English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, might be English to a greater or lesser degree. And this brings us back to the

question ...can English be a revolutionary language? And the lovely answer that came back was: it is not English that is the agent. It is not language, but people, who make revolutions. (311)

Works of Fakrul Alam and Kaiser Haq

In his book, *Imperial Entanglements and Literature in English*, Fakrul Alam compiles the studies and writings he has previously written on the topics of colonization and decolonization. The articles contained in this book were either immediately or ultimately motivated to be written as a result of England's involvement in international affairs. It begins with an essay that investigates how Bacon's theories affected English imperialism and colonialism. After that, the focus shifted to opponents of the empire's excesses like Edmund Burke as well as defenders of the empire like Daniel Defoe. It encompasses the works of well-known authors like Rudyard Kipling and George Orwell in addition to those of less well-known English authors like Eliza Fay who resided in British India and wrote during that period.

Fakrul Alam claims that one notable result of the British colonial rule in India was the rise in the number of South Asian authors who wrote in the English language. Because of this, it contains a great number of articles on important authors such as R.K. Narayan and Amitav Ghosh, as well as the controversial Nirad Chaudhuri and the Bangladeshi poet Kaiser Haq. This book attempts to examine these and other authors through a postcolonial lens by drawing

inspiration from the life and writings of Edward Said. In this book, several chapters are devoted to providing more information about Said who made his home in the United States.

Imperial Entanglements suggest that the movement of people across continents has been the result of the English colonization of India and the spread of the English language on the continent. This is indicated by the fact that the movement of people has occurred as a result of the spread of the English language, Fakrul Alam in the introductory chapter says-

the English language led them to the ideals of the Enlightenment and made them clamour for democratic rights. One result of these developments was the emergence of Indian writing in English, while the other was the birth of the nationalist movement starting with the formation of the Indian National Congress in the 1880s (17).

As a result, it includes articles on Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri, who are both important contemporary writers who originate from the Indian diaspora. In the final chapter of the book, Fakrul Alam investigates the pedagogical implications of the expanding body of literature that is sometimes referred to as South Asian writing in English. Fakrul Alam in the book argues that the writing that South Asians are producing in English is an interesting source of content for English language instruction in India.

Aside from his research Fakrul Alam is renowned for his translation works. These works connect the unreachable audience of the Bengali writings and show the artistic value and beauty of the creative minds of this region as well as the enriched culture. The poetry collection titled, *Jibanananda Das: Selected Poems with Introduction, Chronology, and Glossary*, is no different-

it shows the true potential of Bengali poet Jibanananda Das. Alam also explains his translations so that readers know what exactly the expressions and verses are trying to indicate. Fakrul Alam starts the collection with the translated poem, *A Few Lines: Koyekti Line* (27), which is not the original first poem in Das's collection. However, Alam starts with this as it is an expression of freedom in poetry, and it draws the line between Jibanananda Das and other poets previous to his time.

There are a total of ninety-eight poems divided into eight segments in the collection. The range of parts are titled, Gray Manuscripts, Beautiful Bengal, Banalata Sen, The Great World, The Darkness of Seven Stars, Best Poems, In Time: Out of Time: and a Time Apart, and Uncollected Poems. Translating the legendary works of Jibanananda Das, Fakrul Alam shows the caliber of English creative writing and understanding of artistic poetry in Bangladesh.

Published in the Streets of Dhaka: Collected Poems will introduce readers to Kaiser Haq's entire collection of works as a poet, which spans more than 40 years of commitment to the literary profession. The earliest piece is prose poetry that he wrote in high school. It foreshadows what would come later in its brutal honesty. *Starting Lines* and *A Little Ado*, both of which Haq published in 1978, as well as the three collections that followed it in their entirety, as well as the new poems added to *Published in the Streets of Dhaka: Collected Poems 1968–2006*, as well as a sizable number of more recent poems, are heavily represented. "An Apology for Bangladeshi Poetry in English," Haq's motto, is included in the appendix.

Haq's poetry is ironic, quirky, and funny at the same time as having a wealth of emotional content and intellectual ramifications. He has an ear for the melodic phrase and an eye for the telling visual. Though almost all of his poetry is inspired by reality in his native region of the world, they have an international appeal.

Findings from Interviews of Kaiser Haq

In 2019 Kaiser Haq visited India to attend an interview titled “Past the brick lane”, where he spoke about his motives for creating his works and the current condition of Bangladesh in producing literary pieces. In the interview, Kaiser Haq was asked why he does not write in Bengali and chose to write in English. Haq answers this by stating that “Language is a tricky thing”, then he goes on to explain the language movement during the Pakistan period and how it played as a huge landmark during the liberation war in 1971. This also shaped the national identity of the Bangladeshi people, however, it was his English medium education background- that took place before the war, which made English his literary language. The difference between his English medium education and that is found in contemporary times is it was “scrapped” from the national curriculum to IGCSE and IB, resulting in a native-cultural alienation for the contemporary students. As the previous national curriculum did not alienate the students and Haq learned Bengali from his parents, he could also contribute to translation works. He continues his argument by stating Bengali was further pushed to be the essence of the Bengali national identity and in this process, the ethnic cultures and languages were being sidelined. However, as the twenty-first of February was being recognized by UNESCO as International Mother Language

Day, they (about thirty-eight ethnic languages) came back into the scene, and as transnationality expanded- many students got their higher education from the West, allowing them to produce new literary works in English. Even then, this number is very low, and compared to a country like India the process started very late. These works being done in Bangladesh are yet to become “popular” or globally acknowledged.

On the other hand, considering Bengal as a whole- East, and West, the Bengali Muslims who lived mainly in the East came late to join the British education system. Muslims had nothing to do with the Bengali Renaissance, at the end part of the nineteenth century prominent Bengali writers like Mir Mosharraf Hossain emerged. After the twentieth century, the Muslims of Bengal started to embrace British Education and people started to write in English. Haq then says that there was no official prize for writing in English and compares it to the “Angrezi Hatao” movement in the sixties in India. Only after acts were passed and prizes were offered for English writings did people truly get encouraged and started writing in English in India. If Bangladesh takes similar steps and Kaiser Haq argues that “Bangladesh should recognize English as the official second language” - this will not only encourage people to creatively use English in literature but also will not be ashamed as a stigma is attached- for not using the mother language Bengali and using the alien language of the colonizers.

Again, while talking about his motives to produce poetry in English, Kaiser Haq explains how he was fascinated with free verse writing and explains, “the rhythms of our English are different from the rhythms of someone born in the English home counties”, so he finds the use of free verse liberating. Another aspect of Haq’s poetry that is mentioned in the interview is that he

does not usually write love poems; rather, most of his poetry reflects the socio-cultural aspects of his surroundings and Bangladesh. At a young age, he was heavily inspired by Nassim Ezekiel and it reflects in some of his poetry, the irony, quirky, and funny nature can be observed in his famous poem, *Civil Service Romance* which he dedicates to his idol, Nassim Ezekiel.

When asked, which was more challenging for him- writing poetry or doing translation works, Kaiser Haq answered by saying, “you don’t know when you will write the next poem and then there are fallow periods and this is something one can do more systematically- in a more disciplined way” so both are equally important to his literary life. Then the interviewer asks if he writes poetry in between his translation works, Haq answered this positively stating, “Poetry comes in different ways ’, as one does not know when the next poem will come to him/her. He goes on to clarify, “poem comes in different ways”- some poems come at a go, while others take time, coming in the form of an image or a phrase, he usually writes it down and he encourages his listeners to do the same, “it is important to write it down, James Joyce used to walk about, he used to have scraps of paper in his pockets. If a phrase occurred to him, which he liked, he jotted it down and put it in his pocket. At the end of the day, you take all those pieces of paper out and sort them and then put them into a big notebook”. He then gives an example of a poem- *Writing Home* that came at one go, which he dedicated to his wife. This poem brings out his inner feelings about Bangladesh and his wife, as when he was in Scotland, the surrounding sounds of birds made him nostalgic about his home and he started to miss his beloved.

Other than these, Kaiser Haq mentions the importance of informal “Addas” while producing creative works like poetry. He is also optimistic about the new technology as it will

help new literary figures to publish their work. He gives an example that previously one would have to first print books and would not know whether they will be sold or not, but in the contemporary world, with the likes of the internet and social platforms, people can first view the works online and liking it they can order the books. Publishers used to have to publish all of the books at once because doing so was very labor intensive. Now, with the advent of sophisticated printing technology, publishers can publish whenever they like. Therefore, the modern poet has a lot of room to play with in terms of interacting with various readers.

In another previous interview with Wasafiri in 2015, Kaiser Haq compares Bangladeshi creative writing or poetry in English with the third-gender “Hijra”. Like the Hijras, Bangladeshi English writings and poetry did not have any identity. According to him, people thought, “it does not belong here”- as the accepted way of thinking was, “creative writing can only be in one’s mother tongue”, which he claims to be false and draws evidence from the history of the Subcontinent, one of his pieces of evidence was referring to Buddhadeva Bose, who famously stated that Indian poetry in English would not progress much and it is a “dead end leading nowhere” and Haq mentions how Bose was wrong stating, it will not be able to reproduce. In modern times, Indian English poetry has achieved new heights and become a literary tradition as it has lasted long enough and continues to grow. In the same way, Bangladeshi English poetry can achieve greatness if it is given status like the Hijra- who are now officially identified as the third gender in Bangladesh.

Chapter 3: Motives Behind Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam's Global Recognition

Both Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam use English as their literary language. There are a handful of reasons for their success while using English as their literary language, especially as poets. The most obvious reasons are that they are competent in using both the languages- Bengali and English. On the other hand, they project their culture and surroundings extraordinarily well while using English.

Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam both were born before Bangladesh emerged and both went to English medium schools. As it is learned from the interviews of Kaiser Haq that the English medium schools of their time were quite different from the ones existing today, they had a national curriculum that was more culturally suited for the Bengali children and so they were not alienated from their culture even while learning everything in English. English being their literary language, these gentlemen did not ignore their mother tongue. Both agreed that their parents along with the people they grew up with influenced them to use both languages in accordance with their settings. For instance, when they would be in school, the mode of instruction being English, they would use the language to learn and communicate with their teachers. However, when they were at home, they would usually speak to their parents in Bengali. Kaiser Haq mentions in his interview that his parents bought local Bengali books to teach him the language at a very early age.

Fakrul Alam on the other hand, in his chapter, "Using Postcolonial Literature in ELT", states that the English medium education made him not only competent in English but also

weakened his Bengali as he was speaking in English most of the time with his friends and teachers in school. His father would speak to him using a mixture of Bengali and English. However, as he was growing up, he managed to pick up the standard Bengali from his surroundings (375). So, when he translates Bengali poetry into English, he does not struggle but rather gives proper justice to the poetries of Rabindranath Tagore and Jibanananda Das. When native English users recite his work, they not only see the magnificent creations of the great Bengali poets but also admire the creativity and authenticity of Fakrul Alam's translations- which are masterpieces themselves. The cultural aspects of Bengal are beautifully illustrated in his translations. For instance, *The Birds- Pakhira*, a translated poem by Jibanananda Das is portrayed in its true form. The words chosen by Fakrul Alam are extremely accurate and when a native Bengali speaker recites them and compares them to the Bengali one, they see that the meaning is not hampered in any way, rather they are intact to their fullest form. Thus, being competent in both languages makes Fakrul Alam help tremendously in his translated poetry work. The same can be said about Kaiser Haq, who translated the poetry of Shamsur Rahman.

According to the book chapter "Fakrul Alam's Translation of Jibanananda Das's Poetry: A Well-Constructed Bridge" by Md. Nuruzzaman, Fakrul Alam's translation of Jibanananda Das's poetry acts as a bridge for native English speakers. He uses the theories of Ezra Pound. These theories suggest that a translator "can show where the treasure lies, he can guide the reader in choosing what tongue is to be studied." Pound calls this role an "interpretive translator" of poetry. In contrast, he proposes a different kind of translation, "where the translator is definitely making a new poem." Pound divides poetry translation into two categories because of this. Translations that "directly render the thought of the author" fall into the first type, while

translations “based on the original” and where “some new spirit is transfused” make up the second. He goes on to state that translators and poets having both qualities are the successful ones (Nuruzzaman, 73-74). Following these theories, Fakrul Alam can be considered a “well-structured bridge” to Jibanananda Das. Looking into poems such as, *Before Death-Mrityur Age*, it can be noticed that Alam follows the original and translates it accordingly with the same number of stanzas, and indifferent patterns, retaining the Bengali names, symbols, and images. On the other hand, when looking at the stanzas closely one would see that the dramatic essence offered in the original Bengali work can still be felt.

Thus the quality of translation is undoubtedly reaching the heights of geniuses. This would not be conceivable if Fakrul Alam did not have equal command over his English and Bengali forms. On the other hand, because he is well familiar with his culture, he was able to accurately portray the cultural dramatic elements.

Coming back to Kaiser Haq and representing the Bangladeshi socio-cultural surroundings - an honest image of Dhaka can be captured from his original works of poetry. The phrase "streets of Dhaka" is included in the title of his collection of poems titled *Published in the Streets of Dhaka*. This phrase conjures up several images of the streets of Dhaka, including the crowded pavements, the long line of cars, buses, and rickshaws stuck in traffic jams, beggars, hawkers, pavement sleepers, hutment dwellers, and slums. In his poems, the poet painstakingly portrays all of these peculiar metropolitan features that are found in Dhaka. Kaiser Haq imbues the city park with a personality all its own in the poem *Park*, which was selected from his early collection of poems titled *Starting Lines* (1968-1975). Through the poem, one can see parks in

their various guises at various times of the day, such as the morning, the afternoon, and the evening. A city's parks are an indispensable component of city life. Kaiser Haq demonstrates the connection that exists between metropolitan environments and the people that live in them. People who live in cities frequently have an unsatisfied desire to connect with nature, although metropolitan landscapes are typically soulless, mechanical, and polluted. In the poem titled *Park*, he gives an account of the activities that take place in an unnamed city park that is very similar to Dhaka's Ramna Park. Each day, a great number of individuals from all walks of life and for a variety of causes visit the park. After the "busy afternoon", it gets dark in the city, and street prostitutes use the park as their "parlour." So, the poem *Park* gives a picture of city life in Dhaka and how people there interact with nature.

The poem *Aubade* shows a picture of city life and landscapes in the style of Baudrillard. *Aubade* was originally a morning love song that was often about a lover and a beloved parting in the morning. The setting of the poem is "a clear, cool morning" (1), but it's not about love. Instead, it's about the morning in Dhaka, where, "Paintless whores plod slumward to wash./The muezzin calls the devout to pray "(2-3). The lines remind readers of *The Flowers of Evil* by Baudelaire, which is about life in Paris. "The Decibels increase as the man and machines/That make up the infrastructure of politics and murder" (*Aubade*, 17–18). This makes life in Dhaka seem too materialistic and tiring. In the poem "Spend, Spending, Spent" the speaker, a tired city dweller, says that every day he or she hears, "the murderous decibels /of hucksters, honkers, sloganeers (18-19).

Haq was heavily inspired by Nissim Ezekiel who was also an urban poet. Therefore, both share the flaneur character and humorous attitude in their works of poetry. The description of the setting of Dhaka city along with what people are doing is properly illustrated by Kaiser Haq, revealing the true nature of his city and its people- in other words, the usual surrounding of Dhaka in its most naked form. On the other hand, he uses humor to portray the other socio-cultural aspects of Bangladesh- *Civil Service Romance*, a poem by him, is a biting parody of the civil service. People in government posts in our country are not loyal to their positions. They are not committed to their work and do not act responsibly. Kaiser Haq's poetry is a satire on the bureaucratic culture of the government, in which bureaucrats are overly interested in handling little matters while blithely ignoring the more pressing cases. An officer is shown in this poetry making passionate love to a stunning new female employee. He is only interested in pursuing a romantic relationship with a newly hired female colleague and is completely unconcerned about the emergency file. Thus, by satirically depicting these love-making situations, Kaiser Haq mocks the political structure of our government's jobs, in which employees show neither morality nor duty towards their job. Throughout the poem, he pokes fun at the common perception that those who work in government have been morally and ethically compromised.

i. The letter

Subject: Improvement of Bilateral Ties

Dear Miss:

With due respect and humble submission

I beg to welcome you to neighbouring section. (1-5)

Haq depicts the bureaucratic inconsistencies of the Bangladeshi civil service with a touch of comedy. By emulating the format of letters of application to English Sahibs or Masters, he pokes fun at Babu English. As the poem continues the other socio-cultural aspects of marriage and gender positioning are also revealed. When it is time for the female to reply, she says in the final stanza -

I am on casual leave
cooking dishes.
Please apply through proper channel
and thereby oblige
Your loving servant.

Here, the inferior position of women in Bangladesh is also highlighted as on casual leave a woman must still work for her family. While she cannot even decide on marriage herself, it must be approved by a guardian- in most cases the father. Thus, Kaiser Haq is not shy to portray the real socio-cultural aspects of Bangladesh in his poetry, and with his great competence in both languages, he is good at expressing his feelings in English. No matter if it is an original work or a translated one.

Therefore, it can be stated that both Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam are very much competent in Bengali and English, while also having a habit of portraying the real culture of Bangladesh through their poetic works, the world acknowledges them. Reality being illustrated beautifully and artistically, people appreciate them and want more of their works in hand. Thus producing such magnificent work these two gentlemen are worthy of global recognition.

Chapter 4: English Poetry in Bangladeshi Context- Compared to Indian Subcontinent Context

Bangladesh, like other parts of South Asia, has two hundred years of colonial history. There are vast sources of English literature in this region- the literature provided by the colonizers to create the middle-class and then English literature created by the latter Indians while attending to the anti-colonial and postcolonial movements. These pieces of literature should have made the Bangladeshi people not only competent in English but also should have implemented creative ways to reproduce their versions of literary artwork, in this context- poetry. However, that is not the case for contemporary Bangladesh. Bangladesh, as a country is not known for its creativity in the field of English poetry, rather only a handful of people are recognized on the global stage, Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam are the only people that come to mind instantly while thinking about English poets in contemporary Bangladesh.

Historically Bangladesh had to be born twice, at first as a wing of Pakistan and then gaining independence from them to become Bangladesh. During this process, the mother language- Bengali was one of the reasons for the separation from Pakistan and after independence, nationalism for Bengali was increasingly growing amongst the people. Like Urdu, English was also being looked at as an alien or foreign language that had nothing to do with the Bengali people but made them remember the colonial past. Thus, English was never given the status of the official second language. Rather, just after the birth of Bangladesh, the institutions like courts and offices started to sack English and adapted Bangla. Some English terms were still being used, but not in their fullest forms. So, English always remained a foreign language and was removed from the daily public life of the people of Bangladesh (Alam, 376).

English learning has two folds. On one end of the fold, there is this rich literary past that spans over two hundred years, and the people of this region looked promising to retain their colonial literary heritage with the likes of the English learning method- “grammar-translation method”. This method was becoming “increasingly untenable” as this only focused on reading and writing. With the new mode of capitalism, it was important for people of the world to communicate with one another. Since British colonization happened across the globe English was more or less accepted throughout the world and so people were more focused to learn basic English but with the addition of speaking and listening too, so that they could cooperate easily. However, as Bangladesh gained independence, and English being considered the language of the outsiders, people had a negative appeal to the language and it was then not taught beyond the intermediate level. Thus, in the second fold came “communicative language teaching” which did not look at English literature as it claimed that language learning had nothing to do with literature, and tried to teach the general people with simple techniques and used examples that matched the Bangladeshi culture (Alam, 376).

Using one's own surroundings or cultural aspects to learn a language might seem to be positive and easy but to know how to use that language adequately the previous literature cannot be ignored. Literature allows its users not only to better understand how certain aspects of the language are used in a fruitful manner but also enhances the creativity of the user. In the case of poetry, a poem can be interpreted differently by different users- the poet him/herself can mean something which is his/her personal thought, looking at the piece an audience can derive a meaning that suits according to his/her personal experience. With creativity following in the

thought process the curious mind would at a point want to know more about the perspective of others and in the case of poetry- it will eventually lead to the viewpoint of the poet. Once a user gets used to such creative works that can be viewed from different angles and invoke different emotions of happiness, sadness, anger, and many more, he/she will understand how to use that language effectively and being influenced by the artistic works can even start to produce self pieces.

Sadly, that is not the case for Bangladesh. After independence, the methods of learning shifted, and the general people did not learn English from the existing literary text but rather from new “relevant” and “culturally appropriate texts tailor-made for language learning seemingly persuaded the government” (Alam, 377). In Fakrul Alam’s book, *Imperial Entanglements*, he is also observed “reading Nirad Chaudhuri's 1951 book” *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*-

one is struck by the way someone in a remote village town in colonial Bengal could not only learn to read or write English more than adequately but could also develop a love for the language and its glories without having the benefit of the "communicative method" of language teaching. (Alam,367)

When the new generation of English teachers came to the primary level of education, they were confused about using English as they did not use English at the advanced level themselves. The Bengali medium system started to look flawed, who tried to teach grammar without the literature and teaching language became a separate thing. On the other hand, as Kaiser Haq mentioned in his interview, the English medium schooling also changed its

curriculum from national to IGCSE and IB, and the students were alienated from their culture. So, no student could learn both languages properly or could not grasp self-culture in its true form in Bangladesh. Unlike Bangladesh, the neighboring country of India was not only able to implement culture and language together but make the vision of Achebe, Thiong'o, and Brathwaite a reality by creating their version of English.

Salman Rushdie in his preface to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing*, famously says that English has been used successfully in the writings of Indian literature and most people will agree with him, especially if one looks at the English poets and poetry they have produced over the centuries. By writing in their unique style, they gained widespread recognition and became celebrated authors on a global scale. In addition, these authors wrote not just in English but also in their languages, demonstrating that they chose to do so to create works that would appeal to readers of both groups (colonizers and colonized). Nissim Ezekiel's poetry, for instance, is written in his brand of English (Indian English), which stands for India as a cultural and linguistic reference point. In this way, English has become a literary language of India and Indian culture. Many people in India, including published authors, now consider English to be their tongue. This particular brand of English does not put off Indians but rather encourages them to adopt it and make it their own. Since not all socioeconomic groups in India share a common proficiency with English, most Indian authors also publish works in regional languages to reach readers who might not be fluent in English. If one writes in English, he or she will reach a wider audience than if he or she wrote in his or her native tongue, because the group of people who do comprehend English to the highest degree is regionally and culturally dominant. When compared

to other languages of the postcolonial world, English's success as an Indian language used in Indian literature stands out.

So, when we look at the English used in Indian literature, we can see that it is a projection of the kind of literature that Achebe wanted to see in Africa. The English used in Indian writings is not the same as the English spoken by the natives. Instead, English has paid the price of dominance by being used in a completely different way, as we can see in the case of Salman Rushdie, who used many Urdu words and phrases in his writings. Taking Achebe's language debate into account, we can say that English has been used well in Indian literature.

Children in India, like children in other postcolonial countries, have to start learning English at a very young age. Like African children, their minds get confused while they learn English. But English is more common in the Indian subcontinent than in Africa. India has always been ruled by foreign groups, so its people have always had to learn a second language. Before India was taken over by the British, Indian children had to learn Persian and Sanskrit, which can be hard for young people to understand. So, during the postcolonial period, it was common for people in India to learn a second language. This included English, which was already well-known as an Indian language. The Indian version of English did not separate the mind the way English did with Africans. Indian writers had to know how to write in both Hindi and English (English and the mother language). So, we can see that Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain wrote in both English and her native language (Bengali).

The writers of the Indian subcontinent wrote not only in English but also in their native languages. They did this because they knew that the issues they wanted to talk about should be understood by everyone. Writing in their native language did not make their work less important. Michael Madhusudan Dutta learned how important it was to write in his native language when he realized that not only did writing in his language made him happy, but it also helped him reach more people. On the other hand, the use of English in Indian literature shows the effects of colonization. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* starts with the birth of India and talks about how the two countries were changing at the time. The novel is written in English, so the colonizers can also read it to learn about these problems and see what they have caused. So, if you look at the work of Ngugi, you can again say that Indian literature has used English in a good way.

When we looked at the Achebe debate, we could already see that English in India was a trademark of India itself. English was not seen as the primary language. Instead, it was seen as a second language. Even back then, the people who wrote about India knew they had to learn this language to talk about their problems and show them to both Indians and colonizers. Indians used English to talk to people from other states, so most Indians knew at least some English. People learned basic English, and Indians started to use English words in their languages. For example, the words "table" and "chairs" are often used in Indian languages, but many Indians won't be able to say what these words mean in their language. This makes English an Indian language. So, English changed the languages that were already spoken in India. Also, when Indians speak English, they use some of their own words and phrases. This is common in oral

traditions, and modern writers have started to use English phrases in other Indian languages and words from those languages when writing in English.

The English language in the Indian subcontinent is also its language. However, it wasn't as sad as the English language in Africa and the Caribbean. The people of the subcontinent have always had a lot of good English literature. This literature shows the Indian people how to write good literature, and this is what the writers of the Indian subcontinent have always done. They followed the English writings of previous generations, which were their own, and so English literature in the Indian context was and is a rich form of English. So, Salman Rushdie is right when he says that English has been used successfully in Indian literature. So, when we read Braithwaite's essay "Nation language," we can see that, compared to the Caribbean nation language, the Indian English language was more developed at the time of decolonization. This made it easier for the next generation to communicate with each other using their version of English from an early age on, and the English literature that was written here did a good job of showing the world what India and its culture were like.

When one compares the experience of the Indian Subcontinent to contemporary Bangladesh, he/she will see that after being born twice Bangladesh had lost a lot of qualities existing in the rest of the subcontinent. For instance, during colonial times Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, who is a Bengali wrote in both Bengali and English. However, during the contemporary time when writing in both languages came up, people only give the example of Michael Madhusudhan Dutt, who failed as an English poet but succeeded in Bengali. The reason behind it

is quite clear, the nationalistic approach toward Bengali had a great impact on the minds of the Bangladeshi people.

On the other hand, the Bangladeshi colonial children of the upper and middle classes received English as their cultural capital through their surroundings, from sources of education and entertainment (media- television programs e.g. Cartoons). However, despite having a good grasp and sound knowledge of English, most people still preferred to write in Bengali as Achebe suggested that they developed negative thoughts about their culture and people. For instance, one might first question his/her own writing quality being from Bangladesh. Secondly, they may think that most people will not understand the value of the produced verses and so, they restrain themselves from writing in English and move towards Bengali where they will find a huge audience.

Moreover, not having mentors or teachers in the form of exciting poets the people did not have a role model to follow. One might argue that Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam are there, but even then, when one would try to follow them, they would lack their bilingual proficiency and understanding of culture as none of the Bengali or English medium education systems teaches the students everything with equal importance. Furthermore, the Bangladeshi people were unable to make a brand of English of their own and are still trying ways to develop a version that suits the people. The methods Bangladesh is trying are not helping either. Like other South Asian countries Bangladesh does not embrace English as its second language, and nor does it have an education rate like Sri Lanka (which does not identify English as a second language either, but

also produces English poetry globally). However, the Bengali language is creolized with English and other pre-existing languages.

So, the current state of English poetry in Bangladesh is lagging if it is compared to the rest of the Indian Subcontinent. However, things can easily change if certain steps are taken. The people already are trying to produce English poetry and are getting recognition on a national level. If English is recognized as a second language, English literature being taught again on all levels and mediums of Education- binding literature and linguistics together, giving cultural importance to both mediums, and following the footsteps of Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam as the existing poetry of contemporary Bangladesh, the country can not only create its brand of English but also can catch up with its neighbors in the field of English creative writing and in this context English poetry.

Chapter 5: The Rationality Behind Becoming a Bangladeshi English Poet

Poetry is one of the best ways one can express himself/herself. Poetry being an open field, a poet can play around with words and create something new all the time- which does not need to be following any rules. Poetry being artwork the artist has complete autonomy over his/her work. It necessarily does not need to be liked by all. Some poetry can also be for the self, as expressing inner feelings in the form of poetry helps one to understand themselves better too. One might then ask, “why English poetry and not Bengali?”, that would depend on the person, if someone prefers writing in Bengali they obviously can and should. However, writing in English has its rationalities. For starters, one can reach out to the entire globe with their poetic works-poetry can convey strong messages of empowerment, pain, anger, sorrow, and many more, with the use of English poetry these messages can be transmitted throughout the world, and as Achebe said, the colonial scars can be projected to both colonizers and colonized groups. Secondly, there is a lot of Bengali Poetry that are masterpieces, following the footsteps of Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam these pieces can also be shown to the world in the form of translated poetry. Furthermore, while looking into the life of Kaiser Haq, emerging poets will see that even the great man was put down by his surroundings while chasing his dream to become an English poet.

The contemporary world is very different from what it used to be in the earlier centuries. In the previous centuries reaching a mass audience of the world was quite difficult for someone living in a place like Bangladesh. Creating poetry in English for a person growing up in Bangladesh was something quite difficult, as it is proven in the earlier chapter that the

Bangladeshi Education system has its flaws that do not allow the students to cultivate their creativity, starting from the primary level. Only while reaching the advanced level of university education and choosing subjects like Literature would they only get the opportunity to study the previously produced literary masterpieces. Even if someone wanted to learn from literary pieces, they would not always be available and even being available they would often be quite expensive. So, to learn and from that learning cultivating the inner creativity to produce poetry in English was indeed very difficult. However, in the contemporary time with the rise of technology learning has never been easier. Books can be easily found and learned from with a press of a button in search engines like Google, Bing, and even video websites like Youtube, where students can not only find the textual pieces but also explanations how these pieces were used, what meanings do they carry- different interpretations of different scholars and many more. Even if someone wants to learn beyond the general interpretations one can find, scholarly books and articles, with free and paid services from multiple websites of university libraries and other private and public sources.

After the process of cultivating creative minds, one can not only be able to create self-poetic pieces in a global language like English but also share them through university, media, and social media sites that can help them to reach huge audiences. One writing in Bengali will also get similar advantages but they will only be able to reach the Bengali-speaking audience, whereas if they produce their poetic works in English they can reach more people as the British colonized almost all parts of the globe and many people understand the language. Wendy Bishop and David Starkey in their paper, “Electronic Literature” categorizes these methods of learning and producing literature through technology as “electronic literature” and

says, “most creative writing produced in the future will ultimately fall into this category” (84). So, learning and producing poetry has never been easier- making the production of English poetry quite rational for Bangladeshi poets.

Translated poetry is another field where Bangladeshi poets can show their creativity. Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam both obtained global recognition in this field of poetry. There are a lot of poems that showcase the cultural beauties and realities of Bangladesh. However, only the Bengali-speaking audience can enjoy these art pieces as they are in Bengali. Only by being translated into a global language like English will these pieces of poetry be able to grab the attention of the entire world. The poetry of contemporary poets like Moyukh Chowdhury, Nirmalendu Goon, Bimal Guha, and Shahabuddin Nagari can be translated into English. Poems containing the natural, social, cultural, and emotional aspects of Bangladesh can project the image of Bangladesh to the global audience through creative English translations. Not only will this represent Bangladesh but also the talent of such artists who do their work in Bengali. The world already acknowledges modern poets, as Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam have translated a lot of works of modern greats of Bengal and reflected the reality of not just Bangladesh but Bengal as a whole.

Again with the use of modern technology, finding such works, learning about them, and translating them into beautiful pieces of translated poetry will be joyful for interested poets. Poets can create an atmosphere of competition to achieve better-translated works. If a lot of people start to do translated works and competitions are held with lucrative prizes more people will follow this chain and can create a line of Bangladeshi English translation poets that will take

Bangladeshi English poetry to a grand level that has not been achieved before. Kaiser Haq in his interview session in India titled, “Past the brick lane” mentions that after the “Angrezi Hatao” movement in India, the government of India passed acts and gave away prizes for English writings. Similar steps in the Bangladeshi context can be done to produce and grow the English poetry of Bangladesh.

Kaiser Haq in the same interview also mentions that a creative work like poetry comes in many forms- some poems come instantly in the mind while some come step by step and as a poet, it is important to note these thoughts down. Before such modern technology, people had to carry pieces of paper in their pockets but the contemporary poet can easily note it down on their phones or any other device that they carry. Certain emotions of the human mind can be noted down in the form of poetry. Such pieces can help other people to be empowered and motivated. People around the world in contemporary times struggle with issues of anxiety and depression, with English poetry of nostalgia, sadness, anger, and love, people will know that they are not alone and such problems can be reduced with beautiful artwork of poetry. On the other hand, the colonized country of Bangladesh had to be born twice, and the sentiment of the people towards their freedom can be projected to both colonized and colonizer groups- showcasing the struggle for independence and even after being free the issues they (colonizers) left behind.

English poetry is quite powerful as it can project the feelings of the human mind to a large audience. Poets from Bangladesh can use this power to not only showcase different aspects of Bangladesh but also to have an influence on the world with their creativity. Poetry can be done in a variety of manners, for instance, Kaiser Haq satirizes the government employees in his

poem *Civil Service Romance*, similarly, poets can use different symbols, use other narratives, use personal experiences, and follow certain rhythms in their pieces or even use free verse to create meaningful poetry.

The creativity and the emerging youth of Bangladesh in creating literature are quite promising. However, politics and misconceptions amongst people are the things that are stopping the youth from trying different things like English poetry. Kaiser Haq in his essay, “The Story of Indo-Anglian Poetry,” while talking about Michael Modhusudhan Dutt’s life, presents it as “a cautionary tale” (57). In Bangladesh producing English is viewed negatively as it is the language of foreigners. Moreover, people conclude that, if such a poetic genius like Michael could not do it, how can someone else? Furthermore, they also point out the same man became immortal after writing verses in Bengali. The reason for such a conclusion to be made by people is stated by Fakrul Alam, who says in his book, “The conclusion to be drawn from all this was obvious: attempts to ape western literary models and mimic western culture could only result in dissolute lifestyles and literary disasters” (326). This same conclusion was also drawn by Kaiser Haq’s father who would often, “pontificate” (Haq, 57) about Micheal and warned his son about “the folly of writing in English and squandering his talents by chasing alien gods” (Alam, 326). Supposedly, if Kaiser Haq had listened to his father and stopped chasing his dream, he would not be this poet everyone admires and idolizes, rather, he would be unknown to his audience.

Thus, the people of Bangladesh do have the needed resources and caliber to enhance and exhibit their creativity through English poetry. The stereotypes are dismissed as norms and with

proper guidance from previous poets with their poetry, producing English poetry becomes very rational for future poets of Bangladesh.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Bangladesh is a country where the people have been colonized for centuries by different groups. After colonization had ended forever and gained independence from Pakistan, the people wanted to cut off all the things that haunted them. In the process, they almost chopped the things they gained from their hardship. Even then, the colonial heritage in the form of the English language and literature remained with the people while most of them tried to ignore it. The English used by the Bangladeshis belongs to them and people here can do whatever with it. They can certainly express their emotions and creativity through verse. Which is done by the great Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alam. By showcasing their brilliance in verse these two became global poetic figures in English poetry and translated poetry. They are two of the most celebrated poets in the world, and for good reason: they are bilingual proselytizers who often capture the essence of Bangladeshi life in their verse. The public enjoys their works because they skillfully depict real-world phenomena, and they crave more of their creations. Therefore, these two gentlemen have earned worldwide acclaim for their amazing job.

However, when compared to the rest of the Indian Subcontinent, the current state of English poetry in Bangladesh is significantly behind. Things can alter with a few simple adjustments. People are already making an effort to write poetry in English, and their efforts are being recognized on a national scale. International recognition will be achieved by Bangladeshi poets when they will be able to create English poetry in a skillful manner. Using English skillfully can be learned from greats like Kaiser Haq and Fakrul Alm, who suggest giving English the title of the second language in Bangladesh, teaching students their culture and both

the language with equal importance. Doing so will increase the chances of Bangladeshi poets to compete on a global scale.

Finally, with English poetry, one can express his/her emotions and reach out to people all over the world and send powerful messages of empowerment, anguish, rage, sorrow, and other emotions. Moreover, there is a wealth of excellent Bengali Poetry that deserves to be shared with a wider audience through translation. Moreover, aspiring poets might learn from Kaiser Haq's story by seeing that even this great man's dream was put down by his surroundings while becoming an English poet, yet he obtained greatness. Thus, it is quite rational for Bangladeshis to create verses using the English language as it can offer them greatness.

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