



নেহরীন খান স্মৃতি বক্তৃতা ও সম্মাননা অনুষ্ঠান ২০১৯

২৫ জুলাই ২০১৯, বৃহস্পতিবার, বিকাল ৩.০০ মিনিট

এস. এম. নওশের আলী লেকচার গ্যালারী

ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটি, ঢাকা-১২১২

ট্রাস্ট দলিল

নেহরীন খান স্মৃতি তহবিল, ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটি

প্রতিষ্ঠাকাল : ৩০ জানুয়ারী ২০১৭

নেহরীন খান স্মৃতি তহবিলের উদ্দেশ্য :

প্রতি বছর প্রতিষ্ঠিত বুদ্ধিজীবীদের নিয়ে গঠিত একটি নির্বাচনী কমিটির মাধ্যমে একজন সাহিত্যিককে তার অবদানের স্বীকৃতির জন্য নির্বাচন করে সম্মাননা প্রদান করা হবে এবং তাকে নেহরীন খান স্মৃতি বক্তৃতা দেয়ার জন্য আমন্ত্রণ জানানো হবে। তার বক্তৃতা ছাপানো হবে এবং সভাস্থলে বিতরণ করা হবে। নির্বাচিত সাহিত্যিককে সম্মানী হিসেবে কমপক্ষে ১,০০,০০০/- (এক লক্ষ) টাকা ও একটি ফ্রেস্ট প্রদান করা হবে।

ট্রাস্টি বোর্ড :

০১.	জনাব এ. জেড. এম. শফিকুল আলম, কোষাধ্যক্ষ, ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটি	সভাপতি
০২.	জনাব আকবর আলি খান, সাবেক মন্ত্রিপরিষদ সচিব, গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার	দাতা সদস্য
০৩.	জনাব শফিকুর রহমান, সহকারী অধ্যাপক, ইংরেজী বিভাগ, ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটি	সদস্য
০৪.	জনাব মোঃ জাহাঙ্গীর আলম খান, সচিব, বোর্ড অব ট্রাস্টিজ, ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটি	সদস্য সচিব

নেহরীন খান স্মৃতি বক্তৃতার সম্মানিত বক্তা নির্বাচনী কমিটি :

০১.	অধ্যাপক ড. ফকরুল আলম, সাবেক উপ-উপাচার্য, ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটি	সভাপতি
০২.	জনাব আকবর আলি খান, সাবেক মন্ত্রিপরিষদ সচিব, গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার	সদস্য
০৩.	ড. ভীষ্মদেব চৌধুরী, অধ্যাপক, বাংলা বিভাগ, ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, ঢাকা	সদস্য
০৪.	জনাব মাহফুজ আনাম, প্রকাশক ও সম্পাদক, দি ডেইলী স্টার	সদস্য
০৫.	জনাব মোঃ সাজ্জাদ শরীফ, ম্যানেজিং এডিটর, দৈনিক প্রথম আলো	সদস্য
০৬.	ড. ফওজিয়া মান্নান, ডীন, ফ্যাকাল্টি অব লিবারেল আর্টস এন্ড সোশ্যাল সায়েন্স ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটি	সদস্য
০৭.	জনাব এ. জেড. এম. শফিকুল আলম, কোষাধ্যক্ষ, ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটি	সদস্য

নেহরী খান স্মৃতি বক্তৃতা ও সম্মাননা অনুষ্ঠান ২০১৯

SUBJECT: THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY IN OUR TIME

অনুষ্ঠানসূচী

- বিকাল ৩:০০ মিনিট : অতিথিদের আসন গ্রহণ
- বিকাল ৩:০৫ মিনিট : স্বাগত বক্তব্য
অধ্যাপক ড. এম. এম. শহীদুল হাসান
উপাচার্য, ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটি, ঢাকা
- বিকাল ৩:১০ মিনিট : সহপাঠির স্মৃতিচারণ
আফসানা বেগম
ইন্টারন্যাশনাল টিচার, সিলভার ফার্ন ইন্টারন্যাশনাল স্কুল, থাইল্যান্ড
- বিকাল ৩:১৫ মিনিট : সম্মানিত বক্তার বক্তৃতা
অধ্যাপক ড. ফকরুল আলম
ভূতপূর্ব অধ্যাপক, ইংরেজী বিভাগ, ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, ঢাকা
ও
সাবেক উপ-উপাচার্য, ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটি, ঢাকা
- বিকাল ৪:০০ মিনিট : প্রধান অতিথির বক্তব্য
সৈয়দ মঞ্জুর এলাহী
সভাপতি বোর্ড অব ট্রাস্টিজ, ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটি, ঢাকা
- বিকাল ৪:১০ মিনিট : সভাপতির বক্তব্য
ড. মোহাম্মদ ফরাসউদ্দিন
মুখ্য উপদেষ্টা ও প্রতিষ্ঠাতা উপাচার্য, ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটি, ঢাকা
- বিকাল ৪:২০ মিনিট : সম্মাননা প্রদান
- বিকাল ৪:২৫ মিনিট : ধন্যবাদ জ্ঞাপন
জনাব এ. জেড. এম. শফিকুল আলিম
কোষাধ্যক্ষ, ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটি, ঢাকা
- বিকাল ৪:৩০ মিনিট : আপ্যায়ন

নেহরীন খান পরিচিতি



নেহরীন খান
(১৯৭৭-২০১৬)

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকারের সাবেক মন্ত্রিপরিষদ সচিব ড. আকবর আলি খান ও হামীম খান এর একমাত্র সন্তান নেহরীন খান ১৯৭৭ সালের ১২ জুলাই তারিখে কানাডার কিংস্টন শহরের জেনারেল হাসপাতালে জন্মগ্রহণ করেন। উল্লেখ্য, ঐ সময়ে তার পিতা কিংস্টনের কুইন্স বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে পিএইচডি ডিগ্রীর জন্য পড়াশুনা করছিলেন।

শিক্ষা জীবন :

১৯৭৯ সালে বাবা মায়ের সাথে দেশে ফিরে নেহরীন খান ঢাকার সানবীমস স্কুলে শিক্ষা জীবন শুরু করেন। ১৯৮৭ সালে তার বাবা ড. আকবর আলি খান মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের ওয়াশিংটনে বাংলাদেশ দূতাবাসে ইকনোমিক মিনিস্টার পদে বদলী হলে নেহরীনও চার বছরের জন্য যুক্তরাষ্ট্রে গিয়ে সেখানকার বেভারলি ফার্মস প্রাথমিক ও পেটোম্যাকের হার্বার্ট হুভার নিম্ন মাধ্যমিক বিদ্যালয়ে প্রাথমিক ও নিম্নমাধ্যমিক শিক্ষা লাভ করেন। দেশে ফিরে 'ও' লেভেল সম্পূর্ণ করে 'এ' লেভেল পরীক্ষা দেন। এ পর্যায়ে তিনি নব প্রতিষ্ঠিত ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটির ইংরেজী বিভাগে ভর্তি হন। ইংরেজী সাহিত্যে স্নাতক ডিগ্রী অর্জনের শেষ পর্যায়ে নেহরীন খান এর বাবা বিশ্বব্যাপ্তিকে বিকল্প নির্বাহী পরিচালক পদে মনোনীত হন। তিনি বাবার সাথে অবিরাম মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রে ফিরে গিয়ে ওয়াশিংটনে আমেরিকান বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে (The American University at Washington D.C) ভর্তি হন এবং ২০০৫ সালে ঐ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় থেকে ইংরেজী সাহিত্যে বি.এ ডিগ্রী অর্জন করেন। তিনি দেশে ফিরে পুনরায় ইস্ট ওয়েস্ট ইউনিভার্সিটিতে ভর্তি হন এবং সেখান থেকে ইংরেজী সাহিত্যে এম. এ. ডিগ্রী অর্জন করেন।

কর্মজীবন :

নেহরীন খান ২০০৭ সালে প্রেসিডেন্সী বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে ইংরেজী সাহিত্যের প্রভাষক হিসেবে যোগ দেন। এক সেমিস্টার পড়ানোর পর তিনি ইউনিভার্সিটি অব ডেভেলপমেন্ট অলটারনেটিভ (ইউডা) এ প্রভাষক হিসেবে যোগ দেন এবং কিছুদিন পর সহকারী অধ্যাপক পদে পদোন্নতি পান। ২০১৬ সালে তার অকাল মৃত্যু পর্যন্ত তিনি ঐ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়েই অধ্যাপনার সাথে যুক্ত ছিলেন। তিনি ডিক্টোরিয়ান সাহিত্য, রোমান্টিক সাহিত্য ও শৈল্পপরিয়ান সাহিত্য পড়াতেন।

গবেষণা :

ইংরেজী সাহিত্যের প্রতি তার গভীর অনুরাগ ছিল। বিশেষ করে অভিবাসীদের সাহিত্য নিয়ে- যে সাহিত্য অভিবাসী লেখকরা লিখেছেন এবং যে সাহিত্যে অভিবাসীদের জীবন প্রতিফলিত। স্নাতক ও স্নাতকোত্তর পর্যায়ে তার অভিসন্দর্ভের বিষয় ছিল দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার অভিবাসী সাহিত্য। তিনি অভিবাসী সাহিত্যে ঘর (গ্রিডসব) সম্পর্কে ধারণা বিশেষ যত্নের সাথে পরীক্ষা করেছেন। অভিবাসীদের যেমন সারাটা জীবন ঘর খুঁজতে চলে যায় তেমনি নেহরীন খানের জীবনটাও ঘর খুঁজতেই চলে গেছে। কানাডায় জন্ম, বাংলাদেশে প্রত্যাবর্তন, দুই দফা মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রে দীর্ঘ অবস্থান এ সব মিলিয়ে তিনিও অভিবাসীদের মতো সারা জীবন ঘর খুঁজে গেছেন।

বিশ্বাস :

পিতামাতার প্রতি গভীর ভালবাসায় নেহরীন খান কানাডার নাগরিক হওয়া সত্ত্বেও সেখানে একা থাকতে অগ্রহী ছিলেন না। তার বিশ্বাস ছিল, তার মা তাকে যে কোন বিপদ বা অকল্যাণ থেকে রক্ষা করবেন : ছোটবেলায় তাকে একটি গল্প শোনানো হতো, গল্পটা ছিল এরকম- একটি হাতির বাচ্চাকে দুট লোকেরা চুরি করে। নেহরীন একথা বিশ্বাস করে না। সঙ্গে সঙ্গে প্রশ্ন করে, হাতির মা কি করলো? তার বিশ্বাস ছিল যে, হাতির বাচ্চার মা-বাবা নিশ্চয়ই তাদের বাচ্চাটিকে রক্ষা করবে। এ ধারণাটি অবশ্য ভুল। নেহরীন তার জীবন দিয়ে শিখে গেল বাবা-মা সব সময় তাদের সন্তানকে রক্ষা করতে পারে না।



Biography of Hon'ble Speaker



Prof. Dr. Fakrul Alam

FAKRUL ALAM retired as Professor of English at the University of Dhaka on June 30, 2017 but is a member its senate. His publications include Rabindranath Tagore and National Identity Formation in Bangladesh: Essays and Reviews (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2013); The Essential Tagore (Boston: Harvard UP and Viswa Bharati: Kolkata, 2011; with Radha Chakravarty); Imperial Entanglements and Literature in English (writer's ink: Dhaka, 2007); South Asian Writers in English (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006); Jibanananda Das: Selected Poems (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1999); Bharati Mukherjee (Twayne's United States Authors Series. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995). His translation of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Unfinished Memoirs was published in 2012 by University Press in Bangladesh, Penguin Books in India, and Oxford University Press in Pakistan. He received the SAARC Literature Award 2012 at the SAARC Literature Festival of 2012 held at Lucknow India on 18 March 2012. He was awarded the Bangla Academy Puroshkar (Literature Award) in the Translation Category for 2013 on February 24, 2013. His translations of Ocean of Sorrow, the late nineteenth century Bengali epic narrative, Bishad Sindhu by Mir Mosharraf Hussain and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Prison Diaries, both published by Bangla Academy in November 2016 and February 2018 are among his most recent book publications. Among his forthcoming works is "The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore" in The Cambridge Companion to English Tagore, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2019).

THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY IN OUR TIME

Prof. Dr. Fakrul Alam

“A university should be a place of light, of liberty, and of learning”--Disraeli

I

This is a profound occasion for me since I have been invited by the Trustee Board of the “Nahreen Khan Memorial Memorial Fund” of East West University to deliver the lecture commemorating her this year. Nahreen was a dear student who took a number of undergraduate and graduate courses that I taught at East West in the first decade of this century; she also wrote a very good M. A. dissertation that I supervised. Indeed, I was so impressed by Nahreen’s intellectual abilities, her quiet but alert presence in my classes, and her pleasant personality that I had recommended her for her first teaching position at Presidency University. Her mother, Mrs. Hamim Khan, was my wife’s colleague at Sunbeams School for many years and I have immense respect for her father Dr. Akbar Ali Khan’s intellectual astuteness and thoughtful presence in our public life as well as his authorial acumen.

This is an even more memorable event for me because I am myself a member of the Trustee Board and have been part of almost all its meetings till now. It is gratifying that the other Trustees have felt that despite my position in the Board I should be invited to speak in this, the third memorial lecture, of the series. It is also gratifying to follow the two outstanding public intellectuals who preceded me in these lectures—Professor Serajul Islam Choudhury and Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam. They set a standard of discourse for this lecture series that is quite exemplary if not daunting and I will try to live up to the standards they set.

Because my meetings with Nahreen were all in academic circumstances, when I started to look for a topic that would be appropriate for this commemorative event, the thought that flashed through my mind almost immediately was that the lecture should have something to do with the idea of a university in our time. Let me point out here how in the introductory remarks of his lecture last year, Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam remembered that Nahreen was born in a completely academic environment in Kingston, Ontario where Dr. Khan had gone to study at Canada’s Queens University for his Ph.D. at the same time as he did. Almost all my meetings with Nahreen took place in the classroom or in my office room at East West University, and I know from my own experience as well as the recollections of her class friends in the last two commemorative events how much she liked learning and teaching in university situations.



I should add that I have spent almost all of my adult life till now in universities all over the world (almost 50 years till date!). I studied in the University of Dhaka's English department from 1969 to 1975, taught at this university from 1975 to 2017 and resumed teaching in it from the 1st of this July. I spent six years in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s to earn a M. A. from Simon Fraser University and a Ph. D. from the University of British Columbia. Between 1989 and 1991 I taught for two whole academic years at Clemson University, U. S. A. I have attended weeklong workshops at Oxford and Cambridge and spent over a week at Warwick University to develop a link program for the English department of the University of Dhaka. I have also taught for a few weeks at India's Jadavpur University and Rabindranath Tagore's Viswa-Bharati. As you all know, I have spent many years at East West University, either as adjunct faculty, or as Dean and Chair of the English department, and lately as its Pro-Vice Chancellor. For the last two years I have been a senator of the University of Dhaka, nominated by its Vice-Chancellor in the "eminent educationist" category. And of course I have attended workshops and given presentations and taken part in seminars in universities in many parts of the world.

For all these reasons, then, I felt that this occasion would be a fit one for me to revisit my experience over the years and come up with ideas and a vision of what a university should ideally be like in our time, especially in a country like Bangladesh, based on my reading as well as not inconsiderable experience as an academic. It is a topic that first struck me worth thinking about many decades ago when I read excerpts from Cardinal Newman's celebrated lectures collected in the book titled *The Idea of a University*. As perhaps some of you here are aware, he delivered these lectures in 1852 and 1859 at a time when he had left Oxford University and had been given the responsibility of setting up the Catholic University of Ireland. Since then, they have stimulated thought about the nature of universities endlessly and have influenced the ideals and thoughts of university administrators and academics all over the world again and again. Indeed, Newman's lectures have spawned many more lectures, seminars and books on the subject. Let me review it briefly in the second part of my lecture. In the third part of my lecture I will look at Rabindranath Tagore's idea of a university. In the fourth part I will talk about the ideals that were actualized in setting up and administering the University of Dhaka. In the fifth part I will discuss essays and features that depict the widening divide between the ideas and ideals that led to the setting up of some of the premier universities of our time and their present-day condition. In the concluding part of my lecture I will offer a few thoughts on the roles universities play in our part of the world nowadays and offer some more ideas about what universities should be like in our time.

II

Newman gave quite a few lectures over a number of years that comprised the final volume of *The Idea of a University* but I would like to focus on three successive ones. In Discourse 5, he makes a simple but weighty statement—a university is an institution primarily devoted to the “attainment of truth” (www.newmanreader.org/works/idea/discourse5.html, 1). It brings together people of learning dedicated to the pursuit and dissemination of truth. Newman next qualifies his initial statement by declaring that the kind of knowledge he has in mind is best prefaced by the word “liberal”, a word whose antonym for him is “servile” (5). In other words, the goal of the kind of instruction that a university offers is nothing but free-flowing knowledge, or as he puts it, “knowledge which is its own end” (10). The knowledge that is opposed to a “liberal” one he calls “mechanical”. He avers further, “Knowledge, in proportion as it tends more and more to the particular, ceases to be knowledge” (11.) The university for Newman is “a place of education” and not of “instruction” (12); it is a place where the mind develops to the fullest. The student of an ideal university will therefore end up with “a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste [and] a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind”; he or she will have necessarily “a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life” (17). Making the point even more elaborately at the end of this discourse, Newman says that ideally a university education must “open the mind”; it must “correct and refine it, to enable it to know, and to digest, master, rule, and use its knowledge, to give it power over its own faculties, application, flexibility, method”, and to help it develop “critical exactness, sagacity” and “resource” among other things.

Clearly, Cardinal Newman’s idea of a university is governed by highly idealistic impulses; it is directed by a vision that looks far beyond short-term goals and expediency. Newman is confident that the chief goal of university education is “the cultivation of the intellect as an end” (www.newmanreader.org/works/idea/discourses6.html,1). Its aim must be to promote an “intellectual culture” (2) that will teach those who are exposed to it to “reason well in all matters, to reach out towards truth, and to grasp it” (2). This is quite different from the education that one acquires in institutions where memorization or rote learning tends to be the chief goal. There the mind passively accepts what is given to it and is not ultimately expanded by what it acquires. In the ideal university, on the contrary, a student is entirely immersed in “a flood of ideas” (6). Departments in its faculty of sciences should thus bring before its students “the exuberant riches and resources, yet the orderly course of the universe”, in the process elevating as well as exciting them (7). Its arts faculty departments should offer courses that should “enlarge and enlighten the mind” (7). But such knowledge at the university level can never be acquired passively by its students; true education there must consist in their ability to see the “mutual and true relations” of phenomena (9). Moreover, the training a university gives to its students should be



through a process that is “analytical, distributive, [and] harmonizing” (ibid). The end result will be the possession by students of an “illuminative reason” (11), the acquisition by them of a sense of balance and of location, and their attainment of the ability to discern and weigh options so that they can take the right decisions in the life they lead afterwards. Ultimately, however, knowledge at the university level exists only to be transcended. Or as Newman phrases it, “you must be above your knowledge, not under it” (13). Knowledge must thus be “thought through and thought out” (14). In contrast to such active learning is the kind where reason operates feebly and is an altogether “mechanical process” (14). While the ideal university stimulates the mind and makes it creative, the bad one operates as if it is a factory for manufacturing students!

Newman’s *The Idea of a University* gives much thought to the atmosphere a university must create for its students. He feels that it must set up a world where students can be “keen...open-hearted, sympathetic, and observant”; it is a world where students will find it easy “to learn from one another” and will be receptive to “new ideas and views, fresh matter of thought, and distinct principles of judging and acting, day by day” (18). Once the university gives birth to what Newman calls “living teaching”, he expects it to then set up ‘a self-perpetuating tradition” (19), one which indirectly sets up generations of students for “self-education” (20). In such an atmosphere they will be ready and willing to range through the world of learning on their own. Pursuing “trains of thought” by themselves, they will be able to wander and wonder “in the wide open field of knowledge” (21).

In Discourse 7, titled “Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Professional Skills”, Newman notes that a university with the spirit of “Liberal Education” must “set forth the right standard” and “train its students” accordingly (www.newmanreader.org/works/idea/discourse7.html, (2). He is dead set against education that is purely utilitarian and suggests that a philosopher as important as John Locke had got it completely wrong when he had argued otherwise. Newman reiterates his earlier point in this discourse: “intellectual culture” is its own end (9), and a “healthy intellect” is what is most needed (ibid). The truly “useful education”, Newman is sure, “tends to good, or is the *instrument* [his emphasis] of good”. To clinch his point, Newman comes up with a famous example of what in rhetoric is called chiasmus: “Though the useful is not always good, the good is always useful” (11). To put it simply, good things will lead to things of enduring value; Newman therefore has no doubt that “if a liberal education be good, it must necessarily be useful too” (ibid). A truly educated person trained in the ideal university will have “learned to think and to reason and to compare and to discriminate and to analyze”: such a person will have “refined his taste, and formed his judgment, and sharpened his mental vision”, so much so that “he will be placed in that state of intellect” in which he can take up any one of the sciences and callings he fancies (12).

Newman emphasizes that he is not against “professional or scientific knowledge” unless it is seen as the sole end of a university education, for while it is necessary to train someone in law, or medicine, or geology, or political economy, and to produce lawyers, physicians, geologists and political economists, subjects in increasing demand in his time, the best university graduates there must have also received “a special illumination and largeness of mind and freedom and self-possession” (13). Newman is sure that a purely utilitarian approach adopted by its administrators will not create in them the kind of “cultivated intellect” that is the desideratum of the best university education.

Discourse 7 ends with a famous passage that I can’t help quoting in full at this point of my presentation:

...university training is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end; it aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power, and refining the intercourse of private life. It is the education which gives a man a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them. It teaches him to see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect what is sophistical and to discard what is irrelevant. It prepares him to fill any post with credit, and to master any subject with facility.... (21-22)

Newman goes on in this vein for another 15 lines or so till he concludes this discourse, but I hope I have quoted him at sufficient length to show how Cardinal Newman conceived university education as the means to producing the complete citizen as well as someone prepared for professional life, a complete human being as well as someone ready to think through and think out issues, compare and contrast them, analyze them and see long as well as short-term benefits for humankind in the work they do.

As I indicated earlier, *Newman’s The Idea of a University* has had immense influence over generations of university educators. A news feature published in Britain’s *The Guardian* on 20 October 2010 and written by Sophia Deboik, for instance, informs us that the country’s Universities and Science Minister at that time, David Willets, invoked it in a speech delivered in a conference on “the continuing relevance of the book” (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/oct/20/john-henry-newman-idea-university-soul>). However, the minister felt that the “anti-utilitarianism” of the book posed a problem in a world where a “balance” needs to be ‘struck between pursuing knowledge for its own sake and giving the students the saleable skills they surely deserve” (ibid). Nevertheless, in an excellent “policy paper” available online, Robert Anderson, Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Edinburgh and author of numerous books on the histories of universities, observes that the book has been of lasting



influence, especially in Britain and the countries that were part of what was once called “the Commonwealth”.

Anderson observes, however, that the phrase ‘the idea of the university’ was not invented by Newman; it can be traced to Wilhelm von Humboldt, the nineteenth century Prussian linguist and educator. Anderson adds that the ideas and vision Humboldt had propounded in the first half of the nineteenth century had a “seminal” influence on universities in Europe and North America in the twentieth century and has “shaped the research universities” of the United States, which “head the international league today” (www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers.the-idea-of-a-university-today). To Newman’s vision of a university, Anderson implies, the best universities must add the ideal of excellence in research through scholarship; after all, it is essential that the idea of a university must include the stretching of the frontiers of knowledge as well.

III

As many of us here know, Rabindranath Tagore did not complete school and had a torrid time with tutors and mechanical forms of learning as he grew up. Nevertheless, in 1921 he had the daring and the vision to set up Viswa-Bharati, an institution that was granted university status by the Indian government in 1951. What was the idea behind the kind of institution he was trying to set up and what drove him to risk so much financially in setting it up?

The answer to this question can be found in two lectures that he delivered in English in different contexts. The first of them, "The Centre of Indian Culture", delivered in what was then Madras and is now Chennai on 9 February 1919, was aimed at throwing light on "the ideal of education in India" (*The English Writings of Tagore*, Vol. 2. Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1996, 469). Like Newman, Rabindranath has no doubt that an institute of higher education should be devoted primarily to truth, but unlike Newman, who was naturally influenced by his Oxford upbringing, Rabindranath is convinced that it is a distinctively Indian truth that it must essentially draw upon. He is sure too that the institute best suited to India must initiate an "atmosphere of creative activity" and must be a place for "intellectual exploration and creation". It must also have an "organic connection with our surroundings" (ibid). He is also convinced that what was not needed was a university that was mindlessly imitative of a western one or "machine-made" in any way (470). Becoming specific at one point, Rabindranath declares that the kind of institution he has in mind should not be based on European models such as Oxford or Cambridge. Indeed, Rabindranath takes a distinctly anti-colonial tone to say the ideal centre of Indian culture should not be suffocated by the uncritical and complete embrace of things English. For example, it must not be made to lean on the English language, as was the case he believed with the indigenous universities of Ireland at one point of their unfortunate encounter with British imperialism. Rabindranath therefore stresses the use of the vernacular at the university level. Moreover, he emphasizes that the model that will work best for Indians could be developed on the model of ancient centers of Indian learning such as Nalanda and Taxila.

However, Rabindranath is sure that the ideal center of Indian culture should not depend on stagnant modes of learning as was the case with Sanskrit-based education in the region for centuries. Instead, Rabindranath would like to see the university to be a place that synthesizes the best from learning models adopted from everywhere with what it has inherited from India. To him, it is a place where "comparative studies" must also be encouraged. The world of learning, he asserts, cannot be circumscribed in the modern age or to it. Rabindranath is quite willing to acknowledge that western education has been "rousing" Indian intellectual life" in recent times (486) and there was much to learn from it without being overwhelmed by the load this could entail.

While “The Centre of Indian Culture” talked about universities intermittently and essentially prioritized the cultivation of culture, Rabindranath’s 1927 essay, “An Eastern University”, no doubt drawing on his recent experience of setting up Visva-Bharati fully and the plans he had drawn up for it, is much more focused on the kind of institute of higher education he would like to develop for the future. The idea of a university, he now tells us, is where people from different backgrounds can meet for “the common pursuit of truth” (*The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, vol. 2, 557). His university, he indicates, was being developed as an “International University” that had as one of its aims “promoting mutual understanding between the East and the West” (557). The best of eastern education and the best of western education would come into contact here. What should be kept in mind as well is that “universities should never be made into mechanical organizations for collecting and distributing knowledge” (559). The true end product of a university for him is education and not certificates.

The ideal university for Rabindranath should be drawing on the “living spirit” of a nation, as is the case with the best European institutions of higher education, (562) and must have “primarily for its object the constant pursuit of truth” (563). To that end, it must not offer “labeled packages of truth” through ‘authorized agents to distribute them’ but have “truth in its living association with her lovers and seekers and discoverers” (563). This seems to suggest that teachers and administrators of universities must be imbued with the vision of an organic and constantly expanding notion of truth unfolding in a community of seekers and teachers and must avoid all kind of parochialism and measures of expediency.

For Rabindranath a goal an eastern university should develop is to accept the “gift” of modern science...Europe’s great gift to humanity for all time to come” (565). Another goal must be for it to “provide for the co-ordinate study of all different cultures” (566). Still another would be to “break open the treasure-trove of our ancestors, and use it for our commerce of life” (566). But not to be neglected is art and music and the knowledge of what makes us human. Rabindranath’s, in fact, is a comprehensive view of what the ideal university should be like as we can deduce from his concluding paragraph:

In other words, this institution should be a perpetual creation by the co-operative enthusiasm of teachers and students, growing with the growth of their soul; a world in itself, self-sustaining, independent, rich with ever-renewing life radiating life across space and time, attracting and maintaining round it a planetary system of dependent bodies. Its aim should lie in imparting life-breath to the complete man, who is intellectual as well as economic, bound by social bonds, but aspiring towards spiritual freedom and final perfection (569).

IV

I grew up hearing that the University of Dhaka is also known as the “Oxford of the East”. Googling, I found out later that Allahabad university is known there as the “Oxford of the East” as well. Perhaps this is because both universities are residential in character and had at one time a three-year honors program as well as tutorial systems. Of course, there is no way the University of Oxford can be compared to these universities; we in Dhaka should not delude ourselves by pretending that we ever were or are anywhere close to the English university academically now.

But on the way its name has survived decolonization, it does seem to me that there is a fourth reason why the University of Dhaka was compared to the legendary Oxford institution of higher learning that has been a center of excellence for centuries. No doubt when our university was set up, the ideal governing it was the Oxbridge one. This is indicated by the speech given by its first chancellor Alexander George Robert Bulwar Lytton in 1923 (then the Governor of Bengal) when he declared that a deliberate attempt had been set up by the designers of the university to put a tutorial system in place “to free the teaching of the University from the bonds of the examination system of Bengal” (*Dhaka University: The Convocation Speeches: Volume I, 1923-1946*, 24). That system had been declared “fundamentally defective” (23) by Sir Michael Sadler’s commission set up by the imperial Indian government to inquire specifically into the conditions and prospects of the University of Calcutta in particular as well as the universities existing or to be set up in the subcontinent. In the light of its finding, the hope for those setting up a new university for East Bengal was that thereby each student should be “trained to think for himself instead of remembering by heart what he has read in books or been told in lectures” (24).

Turning to the students present in his address, Earl Lytton emphasizes that while “securing a job in life” was an important reason for them to come to the university, they should not look at it as “a mere technical high school” (28). Elaborating on the point in a manner that both Cardinal Newman and Rabindranath Tagore would have appreciated, he declares that “if this place is to become a great and famous university” its students must recognize the fact that “a University is a seat of learning and not a mere employment agency” (28). Unlike a “technical school” a university must provide courses and departments with “the sole purpose of producing the highest standard of achievement in that branch of study” (28).

It is interesting to note that in his speech welcoming back Earl Lytton to the university campus on February 20, 1924, Vice-Chancellor P. J. Hartog laid emphasis on the hours devoted to tutorial teaching by the teachers and “the original work” produced in the fledgling university by them. He also takes time out in this longish speech to stress a key point—at the university level teaching and research are not

activities independent of each other. As he puts it, while at the elementary level a “man may be an excellent teacher of elementary subjects without the power to add knowledge,” in “advanced work...no one can teach really well unless he has that combination of imagination with critical power which leads to original production” (37). An ideal university is one who teachers are engaged in “advancing knowledge”; even ‘elementary’ (first year?) students will benefit by coming into contact with such a teacher (ibid). Further, he suggests that one can be an “excellent and original teacher” without pursuing research actively and publishing; however, such teachers have become stuck at an academic point and therefore are not ideal academics.

In the Chancellor’s address and taking into account Professor Hartog’s speech registering the university’s progress in its initial years, Earl Lytton elaborates on the “ideal” that he felt guided the “training” imparted to the graduating students of that year. I intend to quote at some length from his peroration in concluding this section discussing the ideas and ideals that governed the University of Dhaka in its initial years, only noting before I start quoting that he has in mind what the ideal product of the ideal university should be like:

Such a type will have been trained to use his mind and not merely to memorize his text-books; he will be one who has acquired sufficient self-reliance to be unruffled by the criticism of others and sufficient dignity of character to discard the weapons of abuse; who is incapable of accepting either money or praise which he has not earned; who estimates the value for his work by the results it can achieve rather than by the praise which is bestowed upon it, who looks upon life as an opportunity for service rather than as a lottery for rewards; who is a creator rather than an imitator; whose scholarship and statesmanship alike are distinguished by thoroughness and precision; who learns his politics not in the speeches of past orators nor in the books of dead authors, but in the living facts of his own villages and in the hearts of old people” (43).

Thus far my lecture has been focusing on the ideas and ideals that eminent people had in founding universities and/or guiding them at their nascent stages. Whether it is the Oxbridge model-influenced insight and learning of a Cardinal Newman, or the genius and vision of Rabindranath Tagore in thinking out and articulating his goals in setting up Visva-Bharati, or even the high standards envisaged by colonial administrators of distinction like Earl Lytton intending to give the people of Dhaka “a splendid imperial compensation” (*Dhaka University: The Convocation Speeches*, 26), that would improve the educational and professional attainments of the people of East Bengal, it is clear that these men wanted to infuse in their audiences the belief that university education was primarily about knowledge as a good in itself and about creating graduates of moral as well as intellectual distinction. It was by no means meant principally for producing men and women geared exclusively for the marketplace or for any other purely utilitarian reason.

But of course ideals are one thing and reality is another. As T. S. Eliot, one of the greatest of 20th century poets had expressed this view in his poem “The Hollow Men”, “Between the idea/And the reality/ Between the motion/And the Act/falls the Shadow”. Reviewing the quality of public and private universities and the standards adopted in so many of them in our country, the debasing of the founding principles in far too many of them, and the increasingly overriding commercial concerns of so many universities worldwide in our age, I am well aware that the ideas and ideals of the eminent men I quoted earlier need to be seen in the light of recent developments in institutes of higher education threatening them. Between their ideals and the reality, shadows of various kinds have fallen. Quite a few outstanding intellectuals in the west and not a few eminent ones surveying the universities in our region have found plenty to complain about or lament at because of the debasement of the idea of a university in our time. Whether it is market-driven compulsions or ideological ones, the idea of a university and the ideals that guided their founding fathers have been seemingly vitiated in many parts of the world.

Let me begin with two of the better known western critics of the degradation of the university at the hands of exponents of financial efficiency in our time. In “The Death of American Universities” (the transcript of a 2014 talk he gave in Pittsburg), the great American linguist, philosopher, political activist, and outstanding academic Noam Chomsky has been scathing about the way universities in the USA have become “corporatized” in recent decades (<https://chomsky.info/the-death-of-american-universities>, 1) and the way their trustees “want to keep costs down and make sure that labor is docile and obedient” (ibid). Chomsky refers to a 2011 book by a sociologist named Benjamin Ginsberg called *The Fall of the Faculty: the Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why it Matters* detailing the growing power of professional administrators and profit-minded boards and the



costs borne for their actions by fee-paying students and increasingly marginalized academics. Chomsky decries the business model clamoring for efficiency over all else and enforcing high tuition; he points out that in absolutely democratic countries like Germany and Finland that have the highest academic standards, university education is actually free and even then of very high standard.

In contrast to what he sees around him in the west now, Chomsky would like to view universities as democratic institutions receiving sustained inputs from students as well as faculty members in all academic affairs, as was the case Chomsky claims in the 1960s in American when educational ideals were never compromised despite such democratizing. What Chomsky would like to see is a university where administrative interference is minimized and stress given to what a university should really be geared towards-creating students who “acquire the capacity to inquire, to create, to innovate, to challenge” (12). The opposite of such learning is rote learning preparing students for a designated and pure marketplace end. As Chomsky declares about true education, “It’s not a matter of accumulating some fixed array of facts which then you can write down on a test and forget tomorrow” (ibid). All education, but particularly the kind students receives at their apex institution”, should be about “enlightenment” and discovery; it is all about love of learning and transmitting that love from generation to generation. Chomsky does not expect university students to “copy” and repeat verbatim in an examination what the teacher said in the classroom, but let her or him articulate what she or he has to say about “real education” and “the purpose of university education in his own words: “It’s not to pour information into somebody’s head which will leak out” but to let students “become creative, independent people who can find excitement in creation and creativity in whatever domain their interests carry them” (14).

While Chomsky’s critique of neo-liberalism and business-driven concepts of university education are focused almost entirely on the United States, Terry Eagleton’s abrasive, thought-provoking assault on such concepts and attitudes in his article published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2015 stems from his location in Great Britain. He begins his piece by noting that the malaise afflicting universities is a worldwide phenomenon. This is exactly what he says about this point: “From Cape Town to Reykaajavok, Sydney to Sao Paulo, an event as momentous in its own way as the Cuban revolution or the invasion of Iraq is steadily under way: the slow death of the university as a center of human critique” ([http://chronicle.com/article/The-Slow-death-of-the/228991](http://chronicle.com/article/The-Slow-death-of-the/), 1). Eagleton tells us that he, a distinguished professor of English and the chair of the department at one time, had resigned from his position at one point because he realized he was ‘expected in some respects to behave less as a scholar than a CFO” (2). Eagleton stresses that while the Oxbridge colleges can still function relatively independently because of lavish endowments and their “pre-modern” setups (ibid), elsewhere in Britain senior academics working as vice-chancellors or deans are forced to act like



“senior managers” (2). Teaching, he emphasizes, has taken a back seat since research or programs that bring money in have been prioritized by quite a few British institutions of higher learning. He laments the fact that the humanities have been slighted the most in them and prophesizes sarcastically, “If English departments survive at all, it may simply be to teach business students the use of the semicolon”! (3) A prolific academic who has authored more than 50 books, some of which are quite outstanding, Eagleton decries the way academics are “churning out supremely pointless articles” (4) since it is only a question of “publish or perish” for them.

Googling, I found that the one word common in features available online on the state of India’s most reputed universities is ‘crisis’. In “Paradise Lost”, a longish feature published in *Open*, an Indian English-language magazine thriving on intellectually stimulating features, Jaideep Mazumdar concludes that though Rabindranath envisaged Visva-Bharati as a place “where the world makes a home in a single nest” (the university’s motto, as worded by him), “there are many nests in Visva-Bharati, today, all in bad shape” www.openthemagazine.com/article/india/paradise-lost, 9). The reasons, according to Mazumdar, are many, but the two most notable are poor administration and norms imposed on it by a University Grants Commission of India that has tampered with the essential nature of the intimate learning center that Rabindranath had envisaged. Visva-Bharati, we learn, had changed from a purely residential ashram-like institution to one that had far too many students and faculty living outside the campus, altering the closely-knit learning community that Rabindranath had envisaged. Moreover, to Mazumdar, the university was no longer concentrating on what he calls “value-based education” (ibid meaning, of course, moral values!), and was increasingly inclined to offering courses that were market-values oriented.

Visva-Bharati was not really conceived as a purely academic university and so it is understandable that it has had to suffer changes that Rabindranath would have disapproved of because of central government bureaucratic policies regarding funding. On the other hand, Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) was from its inception in 1969 established as an institution that could compete with the best academic universities of the world as one of India’s premier universities while being a place drawing strength from socialist and secular Nehruvian principles. It was also meant to provide access to students from disadvantaged communities of India as well as the more privileged citizens of the nation’s capital. But the university, envisaged originally as a place for open discussion and egalitarian values, has come under attack because of the government that has been in power in India in recent times.

Googling once again with the key word “crisis” placed next to JNU, I instantly found a piece printed originally in the fortnightly magazine, *Frontline*, published by the Hindu group. In a contribution printed on March 16, 2018, and titled, “An Ethos Under Attack” by Professor Jayati Ghosh, of JNU’s department of

Economics, readers are told that “for more than two years now, Jawaharlal Nehru University” has suffered from attempts made by the central government “aimed at undermining the fundamental nature of this university” (https://frontline.thehindu.com/columns/Jayati_Ghosh/an-ethos-under-attack/article, 1). Apparently, the Vice Chancellor and the other people put into administrative positions by him as well as the first BJP government had been working in a sustained manner that revealed a “determined undermining of all the norms and conventions that allowed for the smooth functioning of the university” and were “indicative of mala fide intent” (2). JNU had thrived academically till then to become “one of the premier institutions of higher learning in India”, the article avers, “Through JNU’s emphasis on academic rigor combined with freedom of thought, focus on social diversity and encouragement of debate, discussion and creative expression” (ibid). “The freedom of thought” was apparently for the BJP regime far too conducive to free thinking and debate; it therefore had to be subjected to “coercion and draconian exercise of authority” (3) so that it could be tamed. Let me add here that when East West University organized an international conference on translation studies recently and invited one of the leading professors of English based at JNU to be the keynote speaker, he was unable to come because the university administration would not let him leave his workplace. Through such harsh and arbitrary measures, Professor Ghosh asserts, and what she characterizes as a “potent combination of wanton aggression and lack of concern for the future outcome”, (4) JNU’s academic excellence and ideals were being destroyed. The modern university is in this manner under threat worldwide either from market-oriented policies or blatant political interference or a combination of such approaches that are ultimately detrimental for higher educational purposes. Surely this situation is something that we in Bangladesh will recognize as problems afflicting our universities as well.

I turn now to the University of Dhaka (DU) as my final instance of how premier institutions of higher studies premised on high ideals are being degraded by a combination of factors. In this case, academic excellence is far too often being set aside for political goals or expediency that benefit faculty members of a coterie, part of whichever party is in power, members of which would prefer to advance their careers at the expense of hard work and professionalism. In their introduction to *University of Dhaka: Making, Unmaking, Remaking*, two professors of the university, Imtiaz Ahmed and Iftekhar Iqbal, note that the “political foundation” of the university has over recent decades contributed to the increasingly unsatisfactory academic situation of the university (*University of Dhaka: Making, Unmaking, Remaking*, 14). In their view, this decline can be traced to three factors: the “governmentalization” of the institution (14), the shift from the initial goal of it being a center of “teaching and research” to one that now focused mainly on teaching, and the “mass production of interpreters instead of innovators” (16). Moreover, they suggest that the unplanned expansion, limited funds and inadequate

infrastructure have led to the current plight of the university, indicated by its abysmal performance in ranking exercises carried out internationally to evaluate university performances worldwide on a comparative basis. But it is the “governmentalization, partisan politics, and mediocrity” the first two factors create that they and the contributors to their volume cite as the main reasons for the fall of the university’s standards.

In “Dhaka University: Challenges for the Future”, published in the Op-Ed pages of the *Daily Star* this April, Mohammad A. Karim, a Bangladeshi expatriate now holding a high administrative position in the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, USA, comments on the basis of newspaper reports on plagiarism amongst DU faculty members as well as students that such reports “are in sharp contrast with what was envisioned in 1921 by Sir Hartog, DU’s first VC” . In my view, Karim wrongly blames the DU Ordinance 1973 for creating “a democracy of mediocrity” (ibid), for the fault, as he himself suggests a little later, is not with the Ordinance (flawed though it may be in places and in need of amendment in key areas and too idealistically conceived as it is), but in the way “the Ordinance has been manipulated in hiring vice chancellors, deans and heads-in cases compromising quality vital to higher education and contributing to conflicts” (ibid).

VI

Clearly, many universities all over the world—even the best ones!—have moved away to some extent from the original ideas and ideals of visionaries like Cardinal Newman or Rabindranath because of financial or ideological or other reasons. But the core ideas of sages like them could still inspire and guide men and women at the top of institutions of higher education who would like to see themselves as people directing centers of true academic excellence. For such people the values propagated by Newman like the pursuit of truth and the cultivation of knowledge for its own sake should remain key principles. The best universities of our time must still be geared towards enlightening and illuminating minds; they should, in addition, strive to lay claims to be primarily centers for creative, collaborative and active learning and not be seen primarily as business ventures or places that have a specific ideology to disseminate. They must, moreover, see themselves as sites carrying out state of the art research and as places housing scholarship in thrust areas. In short, they should be viewing themselves as institutions exploring and extending the frontiers of knowledge and not exclusively as enterprises emphasizing utilitarian ends.

The best universities of our time must also go all-out to have the kind of cosmopolitan atmosphere that Rabindranath had in mind when he conceived of his university as a place set up for “the common pursuit of truth” by men and women from different parts of the world. We can remind ourselves here once again that he had called his institution Visva-Bharati, and had penned for it a motto that implied that it was a place where scholars from all over the world could nest for the sake of knowledge in the dialogic mode. As Rabindranath had said, ancient universities of the Indian subcontinent like Nalinda and Taxila had attracted scholars from everywhere for a long time and offered models that still could be emulated in some ways. We can remind ourselves here as well that the root word of the English “university” is Latin for “universe”. To have an ambiance where wise men and women from all over the universe can commune with each other for intellectual and cultural work is clearly an important goal to be always adopted by the best universities. It is our good fortune that we can now make use of advances in international travel and the strides made in building the information superhighway and electronics infrastructure installed worldwide to achieve this goal far more easily and effectively than before.

Indeed, no university worth its name can or should stand alone. It and its faculty members and students must always be interacting one way or another with faculty members and students of universities from other parts of the world. There is a universe of ideas that should be made perennially accessible to students as well as faculty members in a university, particularly through resource-rich libraries and instant access to increasingly abundant electronic resources. The visionaries who

had the founding ideas of the modern university had seen it as the site of the confluence of ideas emanating from all parts of the world and all periods of history. The best of modern universities are indeed especially receptive to the global cross-currents of ideas and strive to be recognized for their own idea-making capacities globally as well.

Let me say in this context that I like East West University's name a lot since it acknowledges a universe-embracing goal; the name makes more sense to me because of this reason than that of some other universities of our country that use one or a combination of the four cardinal directions (north, south, east and west, but North South is a good name as well!) mindlessly. I am reminded at this point of Rudyard Kipling's imperial and intemperate outburst in rhyme, "East is east and west is west and never the twain shall meet". Surely, the university is where east and west and north and south must come together. Personally, I have benefited immensely intellectually from studying abroad and attending conferences and seminars in all parts of the world. Indeed, I am a great believer in academic networking. For similar reasons I am also a great believer in translation activities in universities and in publishing activities that transcend borders. That short as well as long trips in overseas universities make a scholar much more au courant in his subject and thus in a position to add value to his teaching and university is something I feel I can attest from my own experience.

At the same time the ideal university must be rooted in its world and must not be overwhelmed by what it receives from abroad; it must receive and nurture the culture and the language(s) of the region in which it has been set up. Here again we can resort to Rabindranath whose idea was to make Visva-Bharati a university that prioritized Indian culture, gave special status to the vernacular languages, and developed agricultural programs to benefit the people who lived next to Shantiniketan. In other words, the ideal university must draw strength from its surroundings and give back abundantly to the region where it is based what it receives from it. We can envisage this point differently by thinking of a university as an institution having a particular obligation to the city or neighborhood where it is housed or the country it belongs to. Such an obligation must be a priority for all departments of the university-whether in the arts or the social sciences or the sciences and engineering and business faculties.

Let me turn now to other things that the modern university must do to revive and augment the ideas and ideals pioneering people like Cardinal Newman and Rabindranath had in mind. One way I can make my point here is to resort to Jaroslav Pelikan's thoughtful 1992 book *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination*, Pelikan, a distinguished professor at Yale University, suggests that in addition to advancing knowledge by research and "extension of knowledge through undergraduate and graduate teaching", a new dimension has been added to

the function of a university in our time—"the diffusion of knowledge" through "scholarly publication" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, p.76). For this reason, he emphasizes the importance of having a wing of the university dedicated exclusively to scholarly publishing. However, he could have also added that this can be done through organizing high-quality seminars, conferences, and online colloquiums and exchanges of high quality.

Pelikan gives a few examples of the ways the world has benefited through the expansion of the idea of a university in the way it receives and transmits useful knowledge by citing the examples of the Green Revolution and advances in the pharmaceutical sciences and medicine in recent decades. Pelikan stresses too how the prospects of collaborative learning has increased manifold in recent times because of developments in satellite communication and the internet. He alerts us as well to the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in universities, suggesting that at the highest level the frontiers erected by departments should be breached as and when necessary.

Idealistic like Newman, Rabindranath and others in envisioning a role for the university as a beacon light for society, Pelikan sees the model university as "a staging area for the future" (148). Such an institution graduates students equipped to change the world for the better; its students often end up taking initiatives to change the unjust world they live in, necessarily at times through oppositional gestures. In other words, the search for truth in a university should and must benefit people in a way that pays no heed to borders or barriers of any kind after a point. We will do well here to remember the way the University of Dhaka generated the kind of oppositional ideas that contributed significantly to the liberation movement of our country time and again. But of course Pelikan has in mind not merely ideas that lead to activist impulses but also to forward looking solutions and innovations that can transform the health and well-being of a country. Thus departments in the humanities, the faculty of law, the "hard" and "soft" sciences, engineering departments, and many other departments as well, can play their part in making a university an instrument of societal transformation as well as a contributory factor to the health and overall well-being of all.

However, a development in the academic world that idealists like Cardinal Newman, Rabindranath Tagore and Pelikan could not have foreseen is the proliferation of universities as businesses or as institutions run on purely business models even in places such as Britain, Australia and Canada. Universities that have no endowments and little or no government support there must often now find ways of generating revenues for themselves. Such universities tend to prioritize departments and courses as well as events that bring in money to help them supplement admission fees and run their programs; a few of them may at times even offer "soft" diplomas as well and overemphasize extra-curricular programs,

occasionally at the expense of the arts and the hard and social sciences. Pelikan has no doubt that the administration of a university must get its priorities right-making money must not be overemphasized at the expense of the pursuit of knowledge.

In the penultimate chapter of his book, Pelikan says something that appealed to me as someone who has thought for long about the idea of a university and the ideals it should keep in view. This idea is indicated clearly in the title of one of his chapters: "The Task of Initiating a Work of Self-Reformation". What he implies thereby is the onus of university leaders to "initiate educational reform", including (and here he quotes the founding father of the modern university, Cardinal Newman) "the work of self-reformation" (169). What I take this to mean is twofold: since the best universities must always be poised to extend the frontier of knowledge they cannot and should not hold on to their present curriculum and current modes of teaching for a long time. I am reminded at this juncture of a line I like very much from the 20th century poet and critic William Empson, "The heart of standing is you cannot fly". More specifically, Pelikan emphasizes the point that all three key areas of the ideal university, that is to say, "undergraduate teaching, graduate teaching and research and education" will have to "initiate a work of self-reformation". This I must add must be perpetual; no university-no matter how famous it is-can rest on its laurels or ratings!

Undoubtedly, the two most difficult temptations a university in any part of the world and in our time must overcome if it is a private one (for public ones, the most difficult barrier is of course political interference, as is so obviously the case with the University of Dhaka in recent decades!) are: a) the temptation to make inordinate sums of money, and b) the obsession to climb up in rankings anyhow. The first subject is dealt with at length by Derek Bok, once President of Harvard University and now the 300th Anniversary University Professor of the institution in the concluding chapter of his book, *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003). Bok declares by way of conclusion to his book that "American universities nowadays face exceptional opportunities and exceptional risks" (199). The opportunities come from advances in research and developments in technology emanating from university departments that have practical value and business applications but the risks come from the same sources. He suggests that the revenues universities generate from patents that result from discoveries in university labs and the profits made from executive training programs, corporate patronage of one kind or the other, or the money to be had from seminars and conferences sponsored by corporations, etc come at high academic costs. Such practices may bring in a lot of funds to high-flying institutions, but far too often a few universities then end up trading "academic value for money" (201). Moreover, evening programs,

correspondence schools and extension divisions can all too easily compromise quality. So can faculty prioritizing consulting over teaching and research. Bok is especially concerned about new generations of academic researchers giving in to inducements offered by “private firms”, or bent on cooperating with “private companies” to “develop lucrative products” (204) at the expense of basic research and their teaching obligations. He is afraid that universities may have to “temporize, compromise, rationalize, and continue the gradual slide into habits that could alter their character in ways detrimental to their teaching, research and standing in the community” (206). Teachers who lose sight of their core values in the process will become “less mindful of their responsibilities, less collegial in their responsibilities, less inclined to take on tasks beyond the minimum required” (208). I have to say that to some extent the same problems can be seen affecting academics involved in teaching and research in our best public universities and can be a problem even in our private universities.

In *What are Universities For?*, the very lively and thought-provoking collection of essays on the idea of a university and the hazards universities face in our time, Stefan Collini, Professor of English Literature and Intellectual History at the University of Cambridge and Emeritus Fellow of Clare Hall, contends with the same idea that Professor Bok had seen as compromising many American universities—the commercialization of universities and the temptations of tampering with quality to generate revenue. Focusing mainly on British universities, Collini notes how “the current preoccupation with ‘access’, ‘funding’, and ‘impact’ constitute a ‘trinity’”, and dominate discussions about universities in his country (London: Penguin Books, 2012, 2). Throughout his book, Collini stresses the dangers of conceiving universities as vocational institutes or applied technology centers instead of valuing them as idea-generating institutions dedicated to “the goals of human understanding” and creation of “future scholars and scientists” (10). (3). Collini is all too aware about how “the principle of the autonomy of universities” (7) can be compromised by the pursuit of profits or obsession about finding newer sources of funding. He urges everyone concerned about the future of universities to be aware of the symptoms of what he calls the “pathology of systemic commercialism” (14). These symptoms are what we in Bangladesh must also be aware of at this point in time; rampant commercialism will destroy the core values of universities for sure.

But there is another aspect of Collini’s *What Are Universities For?* that I would like to highlight as I come to the end of my lecture—the excessive concern with things such as “ratings”, “citations”, “impact factor”, “accountability”, “accreditation”, etc. To me, this second factor is beginning to pose a serious threat worldwide to the ideal university that visionaries of higher studies had imagined. This is because such preoccupations not only undermine the idea of collaborative

research and endanger university linkages and interactions but also make quality research and teaching susceptible to the manipulation of such superficial factors as the number of times a research article is cited. As a result of such a scenario, universities are also being increasingly pitted in a Darwinian struggle for the survival of the fittest. Academics too are driven not by the urge to do quality research and scholarship of high value that demands substantial time and sustained thought because they fear that they must either publish at regular intervals a certain number of articles or perish professionally. Moreover, many academics are then driven to search for publications with “high impact factor” and become obsessed about “citations”, something I am beginning to hear even young Bangladeshi academics voice their concerns about every now and then. Collini, a distinguished professor who has published extensively quality books and articles himself, also decries university rankings and international comparisons based on data that he implies are often manipulated and based on publication in journals of dubious value. To him, such criteria lead to self-promotion at the expense of the actual pursuit of knowledge. Collini is appalled by “the glib assumption that universities are locked in combat with each other in some form of worldwide competition as well as domestic turf wars.” Ultimately, he sees in the globalizing academic world, symptoms of “the mercantilism of the intellect” (18). It is such commodification of the university that we in Bangladesh wanting to set up universities of excellence must also guard against.

For us in Bangladesh as well, a problem impacting adversely on the idea of a university as an exemplary institution where the pursuit of knowledge is a good in itself and the quest for knowledge is a guiding principle is being affected negatively in recent decades by political considerations. Amartya Sen, the Nobel laureate of whom we are all so proud, was recently smeared by a political campaign discrediting his attempts to direct the university at Nalanda as its first Chancellor. No doubt with the trumped up charges (no pun intended!) against him in mind, Sen used the podium when he was called upon to deliver the 39th Annual Pullias Lecture at the University of Southern California on March 9, 2017 to point at the major reason why till now the sub-continent has not been able to produce a university of a standard compared to Harvard or Oxford. No doubt ruminating on the attempts to smear him because of his criticism of the incumbent Indian Prime Minister’s economic policies, Sen declares unequivocally, “The stifling of academic freedom has been the biggest factor behind why we don’t have a single top university in India” (<https://rossier.usc.edu/amartya-sen-conscience-economics-urges-academic-freedom/> 3). In his lecture, Sen details how state interference has curbed the autonomy needed for a university to function optimally. The point to take away from his lecture is that academic freedom is a sine qua non for universities to function at the highest level. One can add that such freedom should be guaranteed even in private universities that want to become the best in the region.



But of course we cannot hold on firmly forever to the idea of the university envisaged by the visionaries with whom I began my lecture. To quote Canetti for the last time, the idea of a university, propounded by the likes of Newman cannot be viewed as something that has a “timeless essence” (21). There is no point in pure nostalgia and it is best to re-vision our idea of a university from time to time so that it can best suit our own period of history and location in the world. All I would like to say by way of conclusion though is that the best universities of our time must provide education that not only prepares students for professional life but also humanizes them fully. Faculty members of such universities should not merely publish for the sake of promotion but must attempt to advance knowledge in their disciplines as well as make their students articulate and humane so that they can express themselves well in every sphere of life. The best universities must graduate truly learned men and women who can become good citizens ready to shape the world around them in the light of tradition in addition to the discoveries being made in recent times. They must provide access to students from all communities and everywhere the opportunity to prepare themselves for professional life as well life itself. They must create students who are cosmopolitan in outlook but rooted in their own world. Scholarship and research must be prioritized there and studies in them pursued without reservation to extend the frontiers of knowledge and to make life and living easier for all through scientific and technical innovations. For such purposes academic freedom must be prioritized; financial or political considerations should not be allowed to block the path of free inquiry and interfere with the cultivation of knowledge for its own sake. We must conclude then that the ideas of the founding fathers who saw the university as a center for the pursuit of truth and the cultivation of knowledge for its own sake and for the generation of ideas and the diffusion of thought and moral values must remain guiding principles even now, although modifications will necessarily have to be made to the core values guiding universities in earlier period in some ways. To quote Benjamin Disraeli as I end, “A university should be a place of light, of liberty, and of learning”; nothing can or should change that!

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