

English Department Alumni Society

UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA

Registration No 304/92

Alumni News 2007

Vol XX

March 07, 2008

Contents

রামেন্দু মজুমদার সেলিম আল দীন এক অসমাপ্ত মহাকাব্য	25
K. Ashraf Hossain The Woodpecker	26
Golam Mustafa Poems of Jibanananda Das	29
Nafisa Jamal Perspectives	28
Z. I. M. Waliul Hye Reminiscence of the Days of Yore	29
Kaiser Haq Ode on the Lungi	31
Fakrul Alam Memories of Durga Puja	34
আলী কবীর ফেরা	37
কাজল বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় পরিচয় পাই -পুরস্কারে	38
মুস্তাফা মহিউদ্দীন জন্মান্তরের গল্প	39
Rebecca Haque..... Razia Khan Amin's Poetry : A Brief Critique	40
Junaidul Haque Ekushey February and Our Culture	44
Farhad Idris The Asiatic Society and Sir William Jones	45
আফতাব আহমদ সম্ভাবনা	48

Ahsanul Huq Monsoon	49
Jesmina Shanta Search	50
Md. Mahmudul Hasan Proceeding to a postgraduate research degree: some tips	51
Syed Mehdi Momin Media and Ethics	55
মাসউদ আখতার কনে-দেখা আলো	57
Anisur Rahman Encounter with Nordic and Bengali poetry	59
Abdullah al Mahmud Perpetual Pleas	61
Sonia Sharmin Reading and Teaching Robinson Crusoe	62
Nahid Kaiser My University Days	63
Sanjeeda Hossain Edds Inter Batch Performance Competition 2007	65

Md. Mahmudul Hasan

Proceeding to a postgraduate research degree: some tips

Introduction

Bangladeshi students generally think about embarking upon a structured, academic research project after completing their first degrees, honours and masters. Students with laudable academic credentials wish to do so in a foreign university, preferably in the West. However, when a Bangladeshi postgraduate research student goes to a western university to undertake their research career, s/he finds themselves in an unenviable situation in terms of their knowledge about the essentials of the research process and of their perceptions of research skills. I do not blame the students for this particular indefensible, worrying phenomenon. The entire education system of Bangladesh, especially the university education system, has failed to nurture or develop the research acumen of students satisfactorily. Nor does it adequately educate them in successfully conducting an academic research project on a reasonable scale. Some skills that students were meant to learn at collegiate level remain foreign to them even after obtaining a masters degree. This applies to both 'good' and 'mediocre' students. Obviously, with such an academic background, when a student goes to, for example, a British university with the ambition to undertake a postgraduate research degree, s/he finds it difficult to adapt themselves to a superior educational culture that emphasises, and draws most heavily upon, research-based studies.

This essay is an attempt to lessen the degree of such an initial *dhakka* (shock) that a Bangladeshi postgraduate student encounters in western academia. It is especially intended for students from a social science or humanities background who aspire to pursue an academic research career. I aim to address some issues, of which it is crucial for novice postgraduate researchers to be aware, before they go to the West to pursue an MPhil or a doctoral degree. Even if they conduct their research in the home country, Bangladesh, this concrete though not exhaustive guideline may help them to do so according to the accepted research norms and methodology.

The selection of a research topic

In the developed world, the education system is designed to cultivate the inherent potentials of students. Along with providing the students with an appropriate academic environment to unearth their latent talents, teachers and mentors always seek to explore the aptitudes and abilities of the students. So, by the time students finish their secondary school or their college, they know their area of interest and select their modules accordingly when they attend university. They choose to study a subject that they enjoy and understand better. The university education helps them further narrow their interest and select a specific topic for an MA dissertation or for an MPhil/PhD thesis. Usually, students decide upon their research topic for further education in the second or third year as undergraduates.

This is not the case with most Bangladeshi students. Along with the faulty education system, the socio-economic condition plays a major part in the untoward phenomenon in this particular respect. As there is no culture of mentorship, students usually do not receive any advice about the selection of their subjects or prospective areas of research. Upon entering universities, most students choose their subjects on the basis of their economic value and employment generation. In most cases, they choose a subject that has the most likelihood to guarantee a lucrative job, or at least can offer something that would help them to gain some employment. 'Good' students who pursue 'good' subjects do not necessarily enjoy their fields of study. They could do better if they could choose a subject that they would genuinely enjoy. Results: one studies a subject one does not actually like,

though s/he pretends to do so; in some cases, poor performance or the mild risk for some kind of psychological disorder; and in most other cases, frustration. I apologise for this red herring, this digression. But, this is predominantly the sad, but true, story of our Bangladeshi education system.

People holding responsible positions – both academic and non-academic/bureaucratic – within the groves of academe and without, and who could help students in many capacities and would thus rescue the nation, seem to have little concern about this particular failure of our education system. Unfortunately, they seem not to care much about the general pupils' study culture. Given this sad situation, the students themselves should come forward to put an end, at least to some extent, to this deleterious condition. In view of this practicality, they should take the helm of their life, that is, the future course of their educational pursuits. It cannot be realistically expected of the average Bangladeshi students to determine their research trajectory upon finishing a college education. However, we can urge the university students not to waste any more time and their potential in the fields of study that do not agree with their subject interest or individual aptitudes, talents and motivation.

Students with the noble ambition of embarking upon further studies, for example, MPhil/PhD should trust their instincts and determine their areas of interest accordingly. For instance, if one studies literature at a university, s/he should opt for a specific literary period, a specific genre, a definite subject matter, and a particular author or authors. But in all cases, their choice should merit a full, comprehensive research that corresponds to their intended degree course, MPhil/PhD. Another important consideration in choosing a research topic is that one must passionately love it. A research career is a solitary project, and it requires unending motivation and enthusiasm for the researcher to reach the furthest end and the actual goal of the study. If one is not sincerely keen on their research area, they may find it difficult to carry on and to accomplish the whole project.

Writing a research proposal

The first big hurdle to start a research project is to write a workable research proposal. Admission to a university, funding for a research project and getting an appropriate supervisor largely depend upon the content, the apt formulation and the overall merits of a research proposal. A successful research proposal requires some patient reading about how to write one. To begin with, one can read at least one or two books on proposal writing. For example, *Proposals that Work: A guide for planning dissertations and grant proposal* (1999) is a book to start. In addition, it is highly advisable to use the Google search engine (www.google.com; or, for more academically specific information: <http://scholar.google.com>). One can enter, for example, "how to write a research proposal" and perform a search. This should bring much useful material on the methods of proposal writing. If the resource materials obtained through Google belong to a recognised university, one can reasonably rely on them. Otherwise, the general policy of caution will apply.

It is unwise to rush to write a research proposal without going through a sufficient amount of the methodological literature available. Once students have consulted appropriate resource materials on how to write a proposal, they will hopefully formulate their own ideas and employ them in their project. However, I intend to give some tips, which may be of some help.

A proposal has to be properly structured. For example, one needs to break it up into:

- Introduction
- The problem
- The purpose of the study
- The questions to be dealt with
- Literature review

- Bibliographical study
- The contribution of the research
- The method of the study
- Ethical issues
- A detailed bibliography at the end.

The bibliography should include all the works the research proposer has read while preparing their proposal. These are some tentative ideas. Based on extensive, further study, one can formulate and structure one's own proposal accordingly. But the bottom line is that, the proposal should demonstrate the proposer's good command of the area of their research topic, including their familiarity with the major writers and greats in their chosen field of study. It should also reveal a solid grasp of stylistic matters and ethical standards. One should also not be too ambitious when making a research proposal. One has to consider the temporal limitation, that is, 3-4 years for a fulltime PhD and 1-2 years for an MPhil, of their research project. One should not bite off more than one can chew.

Although most Western universities offer induction courses on research methodology and on how to better organise a research project within the limited time frame, it is important to make an in-depth study on writing essays and related issues that a university graduate is reasonably expected to know. Without some basic paraphernalia of research ethics and standards, one may encounter some shocks and embarrassment. Some important related issues of which one needs to be aware are as follows: what is an academic research? What are its characteristics and requirements? One needs to be conversant with various types of research, such as:

- Qualitative and quantitative research
- Pure and applied research
- Primary and secondary research
- Theoretical and empirical research
- Descriptive and explanatory research
- Positivist and interpretive research
- Humanities, social sciences and management research.

So on and so forth.

Another requirement, about which one needs to be well-informed, is both research technique and the style of writing a dissertation/thesis. This involves a whole variety of issues. The most important ones are:

- Grammar and style
- Using standard and academic language that excludes informal and slang
- The organisation of an essay
- Following an accepted referencing system such as, APA and MLA, when using other scholars' works and citing sources
- The question of research ethics and plagiarism.

And similar other matters.

Research funding

This may appear the most difficult part of the whole issue. Pursuing a research degree without scholarship is traumatic. The writer of this essay completed a PhD thesis with a negligible, partial

scholarship and can imagine the extent of hardship one can predictably encounter without any funding whatsoever. But for inquisitive, meritorious students, a PhD has a lot to offer; and proceeding without scholarship is an adventure worth taking. The most known research awards (such as Commonwealth and Monbusho scholarships) are distributed among selected categories of people; and in some cases, politics and lobbying plays its niggling part. Let us presume that we are not among the few fortunate ones. So what is the way forward? In blunt terms, you will need to beg for research funding. One can draft a persuasive 'begging' letter and email it to different funding agencies. It is better to try for a scholarship from Bangladesh, as many funding agencies put it as a condition that the applicants should reside in a 'third world' or developing (read poor) country. However, this is a matter of chance and we need to rely on Allah.

For my part, it is better to pursue further education in an English speaking country. However, if there is no chance of research funding, this preference can be compromised. University education is free – no tuition fees – in some European countries. It is worth trying to get oneself admitted to one of those.

Below are some website and email addresses for the students to explore and apply for research funding:

<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/services/admissions/g&aCDL.html> (By visiting this site, one will come across many other website addresses of funding agencies).

Some email addresses are: csfpout@acu.ac.uk, ors_scheme@cvcp.ac.uk,
info@marshallscholarship.org, scholar@isdb.org, japanimfscholarship@imf.org,
japanimfscholarship@iie.org, jjwbgs@worldbank.org, ramin1@worldbank.org, adbjsp@adb.org,
info@akf.org.uk, wrcrawley@wallace-trusts.org.uk, Chevening.Online@britishcouncil.org

Conclusion

The above advice and information I have provided can by no means be taken as a complete set of instructions in the undertaking of a research project or in exploring research funding. This essay has been intended only to provoke students' curiosity to study further on this subject. Before starting a postgraduate research career, fashioning a research mind is very important. A research career may not always satisfy crude, human economic greed; but it gives the researcher invaluable, divine pleasure — the pleasure of intellectual satisfaction. Moreover, undertaking continuous research projects will help us make the best use of the intellectual ability Allah has given us.

Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka MA of 1995.