In the 1980s, television in Dhaka was a sterile broadcast box. There was one government channel (Bangladesh Television), starting at six in the evening and ending at midnight with a fluttering flag over Tagore’s national anthem. Programming formats were prescribed, and even to sing on one of the variety shows, you had to pass an exam to become a “registered artist.” The nightly English-language program was usually a “remainedered” show on delayed recycling routes (High Chaparral and The Wild Wild West on a twenty-year time lag). This tedium of evening viewing finally cracked open with the inauguration of best-selling novelist Humayun Ahmed as a television dramatist.

Ahmed was the most successful novelist of postindependence Bangladesh, tapping into a new appetite for stories about the city’s middle class – as opposed to the staple of a romanticized, idyllic village life that perhaps never existed. Following his literary success, Ahmed began to write serialized plays for television. One of his most popular characters was a naming device in the figure of a talking parrot. In the inaugural episode, the bird was being trained to say “Tui Razakar!” (You are a wartime collaborator):

Mrs. Shah: Are they dead?
Peon: How could they not die? Listening to that one tape recording [of “Tui Razakar!”] all day, their brains are out.
Mrs. Shah: Aha ...
Peon: One is still alive, just dozing.
Mrs. Shah: He hasn’t learned any of the words?
Peon: A child takes two years to learn to speak, and this is only a bird!
Khalil (entering): Project abandoned. Where did he get these donkey birds? All that effort gone to waste ... Mrs. Shah, actually, a bird is a hollow fruit. Pretty on the outside, nothing inside.
Dulabhai (comes near the bird): Is this the bird?

Bird (screaming): Tui Razakar! Tui Razakar! Tui Razakar! Tui Razakar!

Dulabhai: That ... that ... donkey has taught him this word? Of all the things to teach? Get it out of here!

Bird: Tui Razakar! Tui Razakar! Tui Razakar! Tui Razakar!

In that onscreen family tableau, there was often a new arrival (“agontuk”) who was an unwelcome intruder. Each time he would enter the stage, the parrot would scream “Tui Razakar,” prompting gales of amusement from the TV audience. Fans applauded Ahmed for popularizing the naming