

SHORT STORY

All That Glitters Is Not Gold

SHAMA NAZ SIDDIQUI

The afternoon sky had been suddenly obliterated by enormous clouds of sands, instantly turning the day into night. The dusty sky was lit by flashes of lightning that scorched the air, followed by a clap of thunder. Then the deluge. Sheets of rain smashed all around and turned the dirty streets of the city into frenzied streams of mud. Shraboni and I entered the first shop in sight to escape the peals of thunder and rain.

Shraboni is a friend of my mother, and a true American. She was in love with fast food and cars, expensive jewellery and a life without responsibilities. But she could afford it. She and my mother were best friends at collage, a friendship that has passed the test of distance and time. Shraboni wanted to scour the jewellery stores for any new sort of item to add to her already vast collection. She wanted a tour and I readily agreed to take her.

Shraboni was an exceedingly handsome woman in her

midthirties, with high cheekbones, wide-set, direct eyes, prominent nose, and a thick head of curling dark hair, wet now at the ends so the strands stuck on the pearl-like skin of her shoulders and long neck. She had altogether an aggressive face with sharp blue-green eyes now scrutinizing the jewellery shop in which we had sought refuge. Her fascination for jewellery was a good thing because she looked drop-dead gorgeous in almost any sort of ornament.

The shop was a huge one and very brightly lit. It was decorated sumptuously in a florid style of old Venice with arched beamed ceiling, walls covered with gleaming jewellery in crystal-clear cases and lush colours everywhere—the wholly Venetian shades of blue, green, yellow and burnt orange. A massive clock hung beside the chandeliers that were weeping pear-shaped tears of blown glass.

A well-dressed man with a warm smile, stood behind the waiting to serve us. I scanned the jewellery. Everything was extremely flashy but nothing that

Shraboni would fancy buying. Suddenly a strikingly brilliant necklace grabbed my attention. Instinctively I turned to draw Shraboni's attention. But she was gazing at the necklace with a dreamy look in her eyes. The keen salesperson noticed it and he carefully took it out so that we could have a better look.

"It is one of our finest piece, ma'am," said the man in an artificially honeyed voice. "This exquisite diamond necklace, as you can see madam, has pearshaped stones strung together on a platinum chain." I could detect a faint note of pride in his voice as he said this.

Now that it was so close, it looked even more magnificent than ever. Shraboni took it out delicately and put it on her neck. She turned to her reflection on the long, full-length ornate mirror.

"Do you think it suits me?" asked Shraboni excitedly. She was trying to hide her enthusiasm from the salesperson...but she was not being particularly successful.

"Are you kidding?" I whispered in her ear, "You look stunning in that."



artwork by mesbela zamian

She was now totally hooked and asked for the price. It was much more than I had assumed. She was terribly rich, so she could afford it. The deal was a quick one. Shraboni left the place with a broad grin on her face.

A couple of months later, Shraboni came to visit us again.

To be frank, I was a bit confused. She generally came after two or three years, never this early. I learnt later that the true cause of her trip here was not to visit us. "I have a friend who is an expert on diamonds. I asked him to check on my diamond. Do you know what he said?" she paused

for a dramatic effect. "These are awfully good fakes. I was horrified when I heard that. I showed him the device, do you remember, that I bought?"

Of course, I remembered. When Margaret bought the necklace, the salesman had used a small device to prove that

the diamonds were original. It made a tinkling sound when it was tapped against real diamonds. He said that this would not happen with the fakes. On an impulse, Margaret wanted to buy the device too. The salesperson was clearly reluctant to part with it, but he had been in any position to refuse.

"He also revealed that the pin-sort-of-thing, which was supposed to cause the sound, was actually broken. The tool would create the tinkling sound on any material, even wood!" I was shocked by this piece of information. "We have to go back to the shop. We cannot let them get away with it."

As planned, we went back to the shop and confronted the manager. With a thousand apologies, the manager said that they would take it back. However, 20 percent of the price would be deducted. The real cost of the necklace was much less than the twenty percent. Margaret left the shop with a clouded face. It was not a good sign. She had some really good contacts at the higher levels of government. This could mean

that doomsday would descend on the shop.

Sure enough, a couple of days later, the headline of the morning newspaper confirmed my suspicion. The shop selling fake diamonds was finally exposed. It turned out to be a huge scandal. It was forced to shut down and the owners were fined heavily. As I had assumed, Margaret was there in the article too. She turned out to be quite a hero.

The shop had an elaborate scheme behind the screen. Seeing the posh and lavishly decorated shop, with the glorious merchandise (fakes of the originals!) the ordinary people took them for granted. They had devised a clever ploy of providing guarantee certificates, which were actually worthless.

On that moment, I could comprehend the true meaning of that clichéd proverb, "All that glitters is not gold."

Shama Naz Siddiqui is a Bangladeshi in the United States. This story was originally sent in for inclusion in *The Daily Star Book of Bangladeshi Writing*.

TRAVEL WRITING

FAKRUL ALAM

Pelican Parade/Philip Island

In my first visit to Australia in July 1996 I saw the pelicans of Philip Island, a popular tourist spot only two hours by car from Melbourne. To see the penguins' parade, spectators have to sit themselves in a stadium-like spot at a time when the sun is setting and look for the birds returning from their daily excursions to the sea. Just before the light is going to fade, you see the first one emerging, then a second, and then many, many more, walking in their wobbly way, singly, or in pairs, or in larger groups, relaxed, and totally heedless of the amused/awed spectators.

On this Australian trip, I missed the Penguin Parade, but we saw Philip Island on a day's outing. It is a pretty island, full of enchanting beaches, striking views of the sea, small picture-postcard coves, cliffs, and blow holes, and eye-catching observation points from where you can see countless sea birds nesting or taking off or dipping into the sea. The pelicans, alas, were nowhere—daytime for them is for foraging in the sea—but the gentle breeze combined with the island's delectable sights to leave us happy and excited when we headed back for Melbourne in the evening.

Queensland Art Gallery/Museum, South Bank, Brisbane.

One hot Brisbane morning, we got off at the City Cat service's South Bank station to spend the next few hours in the cool comfort of the Queensland Art Gallery and the Queensland Museum, all part of the same cultural complex, a place so beautifully designed that it was voted the world's "Best Public Project" in 2004. Inside the art gallery were many delights: Australian art of the nineteenth century, though not terribly original stylistically, distinctive for the broad vistas and bright light of the continent captured by landscape painters; major displays of leading Australian modernists such as Sidney Nolan and Margaret Preston; an exhibition of Australian photography from the mid-twentieth century; works by a contemporary jeweler Barbara Heath, and a special room containing interactive art for children (the room was full of thrilled boys and girls when we were there).

Like the Queensland Art Gallery, the Museum was packed with exhibits for people of all ages. I found especially

fascinating the Aboriginal & Torres Islander Cultural Center and exhibits from the first penal colonies and displays on Queensland flora and fauna. We didn't have the time to visit the Queensland Science Centre that is part of the museum, but the excitement of the children coming out of it was testimony to the appeal of the complex.

Race Relations

Australia is beautiful but of course it isn't paradise. The particularly cloudy day that has always darkened this mostly sun-drenched land is racism. In the three weeks we spent in the country we came across a number of reminders of the way racism survives here. In fact, a couple of days before we left Dhaka I was sobered by a report on CNN about race riots in Bondi Beach. When we were in Sydney the TV channels were still carrying stories of mob excesses and analyzing the cause of the riots. We heard that fights had taken place between the sizable, strutting Lebanese youths reveling on the beach and the bigoted, beer-swilling white Aussies who were not ready to let anyone else swagger on their turf.

The museums we visited in Canberra and Queensland contained exhibits that reminded us that racism was always the serpent in this Eden, driving some white immigrants to acts of extreme cruelty and apartheid against the aboriginals. Although the government now appears to be determined to do away with discrimination and promote multiculturalism, some hate-genes of the past have persisted through generations. I might be mistaken, but one night in a Melbourne bus stop full of Chinese people and our sizeable Bangladeshi group, I think I heard a drunken white Aussie turn around and swear at us. Encounters like these always remind me of Countee Cullen's poem "Incident" where he remembers how once as an eight-year old boy in Baltimore he had been called "nigger" by a white man, so that he "saw the whole of Baltimore from May until December; Of all the things that happened there/That's all that I remember."

Sydney Opera House

From up close, the Sydney Opera House is every bit as attractive as it looks on post cards or from a ferry moving across Cockle Bay. One of the highpoints of our stay in the city was the guided tour we took of it. Our tour guide, a Kwassie ("a

Kiwi or a New Zealander who has become an Aussie or an Australian"), recounted the legendary birth of the Opera House, its driven, deadline-blind Danish architect, the aghast city fathers faced with unacceptable cost overruns, the eventual commissioning of the masterpiece and memorable concerts that took place in it. She showed us the impressive interior, gave us demonstrations of the amazing acoustics of the concert halls, and pointed out the intricate details of the ceiling. I was dazzled and went into the wishing mode: If I could I would be back here for my next holiday watching *Carmen* or *Madame Butterfly*!

Toilets

For the sensitive South Asian, an exasperating moment in the irritable V. S. Naipaul's book on his travels/travails in India, *An Area of Darkness*, is his account of Indian toilet habits. But the closet Brahmin has a point: tourists in the sub-continent will inevitably suffer as they travel across the countries of the region either because of the lack of toilets or because of the filthy state in which most of them seem to be. How nice then to travel for hundreds of miles at all times of the day in a country where the toilets are never unclean and always working, and where whether one is in a park miles from nowhere or in an overcrowded airport lounge early in the morning, one can feel relieved at the thought that one can relieve oneself in a clean toilet whenever one wants to. I salute then the cleanliness of Australia; for a traveler to a distant land, no negligible issue!

Universities

No doubt because university teaching is my life, I am fascinated by campus architecture. In Sydney, therefore, I went to see Macquarie University, in Canberra the Australian National University, in Melbourne, Monash and Deakin University and the University of Melbourne and in Brisbane the University of Queensland.

University education is big business in Australia and business is booming! I believe that it earned the country over a billion dollars last year; the result can be seen in the investment being made in campuses: new buildings seem to be everywhere while old ones have been refurbished and reequipped with state-of-the-art research and educational facilities. Of the campuses we visited, the University of Melbourne is in the

most splendid shape. It's obviously in the Oxbridge mould, architecturally as well as educationally. The sprawling, lush green campus of the University of Queensland is pleasant too, but of the newly built campuses, only Deakin appealed to me because of the innovative ways in which its architects designed their buildings in the middle of Melbourne city, making maximum use of the space available while establishing a contemporary, almost postmodern ambience.

Vineyards

In a few Dhaka cocktail parties, Australian wine will occasionally be served, and wine connoisseurs now acknowledge that the best Australian wines, like some South African and Californian ones, are comparable to good European ones, but it was a surprise to see vineyards almost everywhere we went in New South Wales and Victoria. For me one memory that will stay vivid is that of vineyards in the evening sun next to the highway as we drove to Mornington Peninsula—a couple of hours away from Melbourne—the hills appeared to heady me to be draped with grapevines and looked very picturesque in the mellow light.

War Memorial, Canberra

The Australian War Memorial in Canberra has been built to commemorate the thousands of Australians who have been killed in the two world wars and the Korean and Vietnam War but is also a war museum. It records how Australians have given their lives for conflicts that erupted in the western hemisphere and is a reminder of how closely Australians link their nation's destiny with Great Britain and the United States. The most impressive part of the memorial is the roll of honor where all Australians killed in conflict are listed; there is a solemnity about the way the list has been put up and the Hall of Memory it leads to is particularly memorable.

When are our martyrs going to have a memorial museum as solemn and as grand as complete in the Canberra one? When will we pay our debts to every single one of them for 1971?

Xmas Day, 2005

We spent the day in and around Sydney, but the city had gone quiet; most people seemed to have taken off for the country or for holidays overseas. To me,



Concluding Part

it didn't feel like Christmas, not certainly the way one is encased by it in Canada or USA; the weather in the city that day was quite hot and the vegetation not quite right; no pine trees, no chimneys, what ruse could Santa take to invade the minds of children of all ages in such a climate? Even the TV channels didn't appear to be preoccupied with the day, unlike on New Year's Eve, which seemed to be an occasion for revelry and non-stop partying.

Yarra River Promenade, Melbourne

It was evening when we got down from the delightful (plus free!) City Circle Tram, crossed the Yarra, and strolled into the Southbank Promenade. Modeled obviously after London's magnificent art park on the Thames (as is Brisbane's South Bank), it is a reminder of how cities can learn from each other to become more livable, cosmopolitan, and lovable. Theatres, sculptures and cafes dot the South Bank; on the Yarra riverboats ply tourists and rowing teams glide their boats swiftly past people like us who decide to fling themselves in the grass, rest tired legs and fascinate themselves with the wonderful views of city skyscrapers, parkland, and people relaxing.

Zenith Beach

As I think of our Australian trip a month later the image that first comes to my mind is of its blue skies and blue water, its innumerable beaches and bays where one can surf, sail, or simply stretch out in the sand. It is fitting then that I end my Australian travel piece in Zenith Beach, a small, somewhat wild, but perfectly beautiful beach facing Tasman Bay in New South Wales. Nowhere near as glitzy as the Gold Coast in Brisbane, or as crowded as Manly Beach in Sydney, it is an example of how much there is in Australia for one to discover and enjoy quietly, and at one's own pace too.

The author would like to thank his hosts in Australia, Asif and Saima in Sydney, Shahid and Shammi in Canberra, Rakib and Urmi in Melbourne, and Obaid and Ifat in Brisbane, without whom, truly, this could not have been written. Fakrul Alam is professor of English at Dhaka University.

Book Review Review

Here Speak the Standard-bearers

Azfar Aziz

Practising Journalism: Values, Constraints, Implications (pb) edited by Nalini Rajan; New Delhi: Sage Publications India; pp. 358; Rs 450

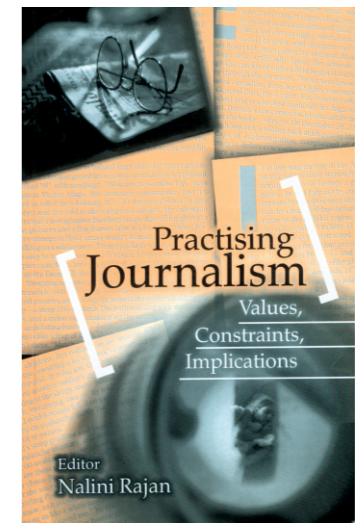
Although the press in Bangladesh shares the same childhood with its neighbouring lands, unlike their Indian counterparts journalists here seldom talk about their profession or vocation, whichever way they look at it. Their pep talks on ethics, objectivity, neutrality, accuracy, etc., are usually limited to classrooms, occasional training sessions and social functions. Most of us are also not proactive in observing professional norms, personally or institutionally, as well as being un-protective about our fundamental rights either. Into this sterile environment, this book—*Practising Journalism: Values, Constraints, Implications*—brings a breath of fresh air from across the border that can go some way in resurrecting long-suppressed idealism, and editorial missions, if any, in newsmen's mind.

Excellent edited by Nalini Rajan, an associate professor at the Asian College of Journalism in Chennai, this volume comprises of 26 write-ups by leading Indian journalists, writers, journalism teachers and media practitioners. The book, in her own words, reflects a "fascinating spectrum of practices, trends and visions within the journalistic profession. When I got all the papers, I was quite excited by the variety of ways in which the craft is practised and viewed. It is that excitement that I wish to impart to the reader, both inside and outside the profession." She has scored brilliantly in achieving that goal.

The volume is divided into four thematic sections—the core values, specialisation within the craft, the constraints of practice, and implications for the future—preceded by an introduction by Rajan, who has authored a number of noteworthy books.

The first section, on the core values, starts with a lucid historical overview of the Indian press by B.R.P. Bhaskar. The journalists of Bangladesh can learn a thing or two from the accounts of how the major Indian newspapers pursuing radical editorial missions during the colonial period were tamed one by one by the emerging bourgeoisie. However, unlike our unions that prefer kowtowing to political parties to professional independence, Indian journalists pursued press freedom, not bestowed by the Indian Constitution, through litigation and judicial dictates.

We can also learn a few things about ethics from the straightforward article of N. Ram, the editor-owner of 'The Hindu,' where he explains what his family-owned daily stands for. He has added five ethical principles—truth-telling, freedom and independence, justice, humane-ness and contribution to the social good—to the journalistic functions articulated by Noam Chomsky and Edward S Herman the credible-information, critical-



adversarial or watchdog, educational and agenda-building functions.

In this regard, Rajan remarks in the introduction, "Admittedly, the idea of ethics in journalism is being challenged today by market-driven objectives. Nevertheless, as most of the articles here inform us, it may be an ideal still worth pursuing." To my knowledge, not a single news organisation in Bangladesh has adopted a code of conduct. The vulnerability of our newsmen to threat, harassment, assault and even murder has also something to do with the wide range of unethical, immoral and often illegal practices many of them are used to. They are two sides of the same coin. We can re-learn the maxim that freedom, security, respect, and credibility of the press are closely tied to ethical journalism.

The third article, the passionate account of the spectacular rise of a nearly bankrupt *Prabhat Khabar* to the number one Hindi daily in Jharkhand by its editor, Harivansh, illustrates the above case most singularly. Because of its relevance to the Bangladesh situation it is worth dilating on at length here. "When it was quietly agreed in this age of free market and globalisation that ideals and values have no place in journalism, *Prabhat Khabar* considered ideals and values to be its very basis," states Harivansh. Through an arduous journey since the 1990s, the newspaper evolved as "the torchbearer for various ethical agitations in civil society. It did not imbibe the liberal and market-oriented view of the 'consumer as king', but accepted the Gandhian principle that 'readers are the masters.'" Much of the daily's success, he writes, came from the paper's efforts to reach out to its readers. It conducted reader-journalist interactive programmes like 'readers' courts.' It linked itself to information about people's movements, and carried out voters' awareness campaign during elections: "It thus not only became a part of the cities but also of the villages."

How did this fund-starved team of journalists withstand a series of aggressive marketing drives by well-off newspaper houses? Simple: "*Prabhat Khabar* has always associated itself with public issues and conducted a direct conversation with the people," that "the experience of getting involved in

social issues empowered *Prabhat Khabar*. And such power or strength cannot be obtained from market publicity or by giving gifts."

In my view, this tale of "a very bold experiment" alone renders the book a must-read for every working and aspiring journalist, and journalism teachers and trainers. Rajan is right in saying that "Against all the media-related shibboleths of the inevitability of tabloidisation, dumbing down and marketing pragmatism, the story of *Prabhat Khabar* is a tribute to the journalist's faith in the values of the profession. The paper's success teaches us an important lesson—commitment to an ideal, rather than to profit making, is all-important. By linking information to credibility and political activism, *Prabhat Khabar*'s success shines like a beacon in the last decade, which has been characterised by media sensationalism and economic liberalism."

The fourth number in the volume, on investigative journalism by Dilip D'Souza, deals with this ethical issue related to the extent to which a journalist should protect his/her sources and honour their privacy rights, even at the cost of social good. "The answer will depend," Rajan notes, "on how the media differentiates between the 'social good' and the 'selling good'; or between editorial and marketing functions."

N. Ram puts it very succinctly: "Great newspapers with a soul know where to draw the *lakshman rekha* and how to give primacy to the editorial functions."

The space allotted for this review does not allow discussing the wide range of topics delved into by all the writers. Suffice it say that these include some standard, as well as unconventional, views on gender, caste, and communal issues in journalism, journalistic practice in war and peace, censorship and repression by the state, the role of media technology and future trends, sports journalism, urban reporting, and alternative media like community radio.

The message that Rajan seems to convey through the selection of articles, seems to be this: Journalists must go by principle and develop the ability to keep away from subservience to money, muscle, and power. Self-censorship, privileging advertisers and sponsors, suppressing or inflating facts to please others or to serve self-interests are all impediments to freedom and the status of the Fourth State. In Philip Meyer's phrase: "To cope with the acceleration of social change in today's world, journalism must become [a] social science in a hurry."

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—Mahmudur Rahman
Mills College, Oakland, California, USA

With the publishing of this book, *The Daily Star* has given young Bangladeshi writers like me an opportunity to connect with the people we write about. This is an important platform for us. It is also very encouraging to see that our efforts are being acknowledged.

—Dr. Kazi Anis
University of Liberal Arts, Dhaka, Bangladesh

—Munjulika Rahman, Washington D.C., USA

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