

POETRY

Manifesto 2020

ANISUL HOQUE, TRANSLATED FROM THE BENGALI BY MOHAMMAD SHAFIQUIL ISLAM

Do you know, Mr Trump, for deaths of thousands of Americans you're responsible? You're liable for the heartrending laments of millions of mothers losing children around the world?

Do you know, Mr Putin, for humankind's helpless submission to a tiny microbe—neither an animal nor a plant, nor even a lifeless creature—you're responsible?

General Secretary of the United Nations, António Guterres, do you know you've totally failed to stop the spread of this deadly virus country after country?

President of the World Bank, Mr David, do you know for tears, laments, and panic among humankind, you're responsible? The tiger in a New York zoo is affected by coronavirus—you've carried that virus to him.

Yes, you all.

Mr Kim, do you know?

Mr Moon, Mr Li, Mr Abe—do you know?

And Mr Boris, you?

You've brought tears to every eye on earth. You've spawned fear in minds and ailments in souls.

A mother can't embrace her children anymore, neither can children hug their old father.

No more can lovers and the beloved kiss each other. Now there's an acute crisis of land for burial.

Frozen mortuaries are abounding in dead bodies too. The earth has an abundance of oxygen but humans don't have ventilators to breathe in because you've made this world so cruel.

America's 2021 budget for submarine fleet is 128 billion dollars. 12,800 crore dollars. 10 lakh 88 thousand crore taka only for submarines!

Now there's no money to buy ventilators! New York hospitals can't afford PPE!

Slipping into dustbin bags, doctors and nurses are working! Mr Modi, with your one-year budget of atom bombs, you could supply drinking water to every Indian. Then for a little water, a Rajasthani woman wouldn't have to walk six miles on torrid sand under the blazing sun!

With the one-year budget of atom bombs, you could help every poor Indian build a toilet! Every morning sixty crore people of your country answer a call of nature under open sky—what are you proud of?

Mr Imran Khan, with one-year budget of atom bombs, you could establish one hundred thousand primary schools! And ten thousand hospitals every year!

Your globalisation has carried coronavirus to the lungs of an indigenous young girl at Amazon. With a snap of coronavirus, your globalisation is turning African indigenous woodlands yellow.

Unable to endure hunger, youths are committing suicide in remote hovels of Bangladesh.

Do you realise, Mr Modi, your Citizen Amendment Act couldn't stop even a single virus?

The youth who walked two-hundred kilometers from Delhi had to embrace death—aren't you responsible for yellow blood frozen in his heart?

Do you realise, Mr Imran Khan, tanks



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don't ratify security?

Your F-16 is just like a cow chewing the cud, and on the Baluchistan-Iran borders, thousands of people are congested inside tents roasting in sweltering heat—no bathrooms, no water . . . despite symptoms, no scopes for tests! Already infected, they're spreading contagion all through Pakistan! No facility! No humanity!

Mr Trump, Mr Modi, do you realise, building walls or putting up barbed-wire on the borders, no one can protect themselves? Do you realise atomic missiles can't protect you?

We know, humankind won't be conquered. We know, people will buy life after paying the price. Born again, humans will come close—they'll embrace each other yet again.

Someday a vaccine will be discovered. Soon the last coronavirus will be destroyed from the world. But another virus will still exist—its name is greed.

The world will still keep jingoism, racism, class conflict, communal clash, and extremism. IMF boss, Ms Christalina, do you know you're responsible for this ignominy of humankind?

Mr Jeff Bezos, do you know a six-year-old child has died of a coronavirus that you've spread?

Mr Ambani, can you realise only money can't safeguard you?

If 80 percent resources of the world belong to 20 percent people, then coronavirus is inevitable. If 98 percent people's freedom is imperiled to only two percent, then coronavirus is inevitable. But just after one year you'll forget everything.

But only you aren't responsible, we have liabilities too for degrading humankind, for making the distressed humans weep tears. We'll also forget everything. We'll elect you President of America again, Mr Trump. We'll elect you President of Russia again, Mr Putin. And they'll make you President of World Bank, Mr David Malpass. They'll recruit young executives in World Bank, who'll send toilet rolls to Amazon, and tell the Africans to use hand sanitiser. The chimneys will spread smoke over. The sky will be dark again. With poisonous wastes, the atmosphere of this blue planet will darken. Bangladesh, Maldives, Netherlands . . . will drown with seawater rising. Again Trump will say, while using a toothpick, everything's in control. Corona is a hoax. Climate change is a spoof! Felani will hang on the barbed wire. On the Mexican border will die Rivera. On the cold covered van on the East European border will lie dead thirty homeless people. Aylan will lie dead upturned on the sands of the sea as if a doll wearing red outfit, in which there'll be stuck three seashells, plea to live in his fist, and dry salt in the pocket. Stunned, the little child Omran will see the houses falling down on his head, and blood stuck on his lips! Burnt to death, Nusrat will say—I'll convey the oppression to the whole world. Our souls are full of virus, and you're its champions, Mr Trump, Putin, Li, Modi, Imran, Boris, and Abe. But the virus doesn't differentiate between the rich and the poor, doesn't care about missiles, atom bombs, CAA, barbed wire, or border walls, because atom bombs can't ensure security. With deadly weapons, you can destroy this blue planet six times, but can't save a single child—missiles can't provide security! There's no deadlier virus than discrimination and inequality! There's no more dangerous epidemic than exploitation and greed! There's no more disastrous calamity than jingoism and communalism! There's no deadlier virus than war and envy! We want vaccines to destroy viruses in our souls. We want ventilators to nurse this earth, the ventilators that help build a pure world, where only a few people won't decide how 780 crore people will die, where 780 crore people will compose their own and joint manifesto for survival, the green manifesto affirming safety of each and every animal, plant, forest, hill, river, sea, and human!

Anisul Hoque is a Bangladeshi writer, poet and journalist who won the Bangla Academy Award for literature in 2011. He works for Prothom Alo, and is a fellow of The International Writing Program, University of Iowa. Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, author of Inner State (Daily Star Books, 2020) is Associate Professor, Department of English, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet. Email: msijewel@gmail.com

BOOK REVIEW

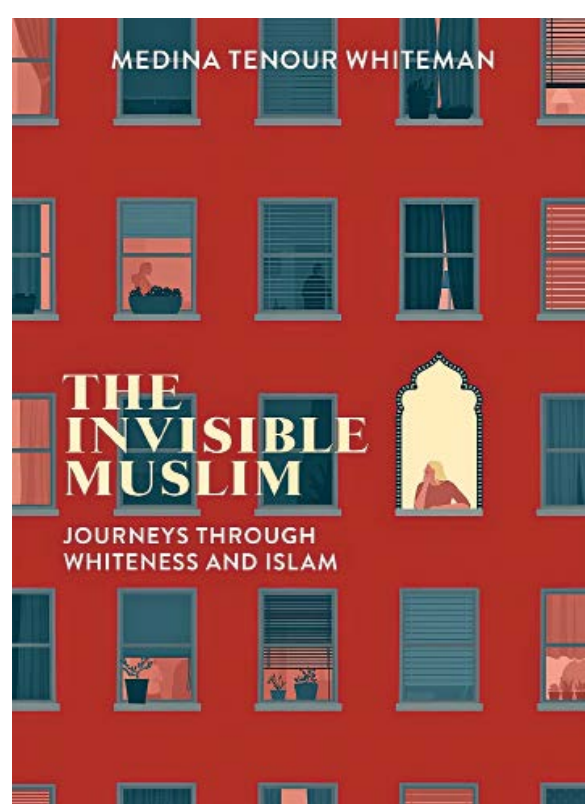
On White privilege and Islam

SAMIRA AHMED/ THE MILLENNIAL MA

Islam is practised by 1.6 billion people across the world. But when you grow up in a predominantly Muslim country like Bangladesh, it can often exist as a localised concept in your head. Travelling to distant shores and witnessing Islam in a foreign country can evoke a mild, albeit delightful shock. I remember my first congregational prayer at East London mosque, rubbing shoulders with Muslim women from every corner of the world. That Eid, I experienced the vastness of the Ummah both physically and spiritually, an age-old, billion-strong unity that transcends borders and backgrounds. I was humbled and moved beyond words.

I found that same sense of amazement, multiplied tenfold, while reading *The Invisible Muslim: Journeys Through Whiteness and Islam* (February, 2020). In a beautifully tapestried memoir, writer-poet and musician Medina Tenour Whiteman captures her lifelong reconciliation of her White and Muslim identities, taking us along on a spiritual journey from Kenya to Tanzania, India to Turkey, Iran to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Spain to Britain, highlighting the richness of Islam's history and diversity with a refreshing honesty. A keen observer, she offers a remarkably balanced, well-researched account of the Muslim world, with nine pages of resource material expanded upon at the back of the book. Each chapter in her book is a mini travelogue comprising of life and historical events crafted with eloquent writing and sharp-witted humour.

Where are you from? This is a question every person of colour living in the UK has received at least once during their lifetime. Medina poses this question to talk about the 'otherness' people of colour are often subjected to at the hands of White privilege. Be it that inexplicable anxiety at UK Border Control after a long flight or the hellish experiences many immigrants like myself get embroiled in with the Home Office, Medina's observa-



tions as an "invisible Muslim", of those who are visibly one, are astonishingly accurate—a rarity. Having more than one identity can be a work in progress—Medina, the Anglo-American daughter of Sufi parents born in Granada, Spain who grew up in Essex, Britain, has many. And perhaps that is why her memoir felt so

relatable to me, a brown Bangladeshi woman settled in London, despite the stark difference in our skin colours, passports, and hence lived experiences.

In examining her privileges, Medina speaks up about racism against Blacks, White people's appropriation of Africa (the "ghost of European colonialism, reincarnated as a tourism that objectifies and exploits"), and the prejudices that exist within Arab and South Asian communities that "are still guilty of anti-Black oppression, in fact we are often some of the worst culprits". In the chapter "Love in a Lacuna, Sex and Marriage", she navigates the tricky waters of these topics in Islam, from intercourse to divorce, and sex education to app dating, forcing us to think of our religion in ways many of us have simply not been taught.

The Invisible Muslim celebrates diversity in the Muslim world in all its nuanced forms and shades. It offers a topical read to better understand the anti-racism conversation raging across the world right now as well as a case study of what it means to be a Muslim in the West in the 21st century. Candid personal reflections interlaced with insightful analysis of world affairs both old and new make it a valuable addition to the list of modern day memoirs.

For Muslims who wish to explore Islam through the lens of history and the varied lived experiences of the Ummah across the world, including the oft-overlooked lives of converts, this book can be a treat. As for non-Muslims who wish to examine White privilege while diversifying their bookshelves to do mandatory anti-racist work, Medina's memoir is a good place to start.

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