aclay Havel was first a humanist, political activist and dissident, and then, through a strange and ironic turn of events now so fondly known as the 'Velvet revolution' that also marked recent developments in many other communist countries in Eastern and Central Europe in the last couple of years, became the President of Czechoslavakia. This latest role has been thrust on him by history and he seems to be playing it with gusto and dedication; but the one role he really relishes is a slightly offstage one, that of a humanist writer with a quiet voice of conscience.

Havel was recently asked by an interviewer how he reconeiled the rather opposing demands of president and dissident (he would always remain a dissenting voice. Havel wrote in Letters to Olga, even to himself if the world outside changed and conformed to his ideals). The two identities are important for him, Havel replied, as the one keeps the other in balance. For one thing, he can always bring in an element of self-scrutiny to whatever he does, whatever decision he takes.

Havel's idea of protest-it is evident from the interview and from his plays and essays—is not a crying out in anger against the world, but is as much a quiet turning inwards. examining an individual's responsibilities and failures as it is a turning outward and taking on an establishment that feeds

Unmasking lies and Deceptions

A Review by Syed Manzoorul Islam

Temptation by Vaclav Havel. Translated by George Theiner London: Faber and Faber, 1988.

TEMPTATION

Václav Havel

The cover

unsatisfactory if it remained

within the ambit of what Milan

Kundera once termed merc

'system-bashing.' Temptation

does more than that, it is

rather an exploration of the

private truths that constitute

our most enduring moments

and account for, what Havel

describes so wistfully in the

Book Review



Havel on a postage stamp.

The plays are absurd, but absurdities, maintains Adler. "are those of the system." The microcosmic world of Temptation is a cruel and tragic exposition of that system in which man is trapped in a snare of lies and duplicity. But the play would be rather a doctrinaire piece and thereby

"Open letter to Dr. Gustav Husak" (1975) "the direction of life." Temptation is a play that

sets against a self-exhausting and self-deceiving system a cognate pattern of self-exhaustion and self-deception, this time so private that the protagonist can maintain, for a long time without being detected, the standard of doublespeak. Once he is found out however, the system crumbles for him, he cannot be absolved for his erime by the establishment that valorizes conformity and stigmatizes deviation, and, unaccustomed to personal accountability, faces the inner void like a child, as does Dr. Faustus

The play's intricate world of official zeal, duplicity, jealousy. and mutual mistrust reminds one of Orwell's 1984, only that Temptation's setting could castly be the mind of man. For, on one level, the play is a rich allegory of man's failure to seek for his own private salvation in a world where his individuality is constantly suppressed. The play's characters-The Director, his Deputy, the Scientists, (including the faceless Vilma, the other agent of temptation) are all, in varying degrees, aspects of that allegory, and represent what Havel describes in "The Power of the Powerless" (1978) as "instruments of mutual total-

ity." Only Maggie, the Good-Angel representative of the society's anticode ("Anticodes" is the title given to a number of poems that Havel wrote and published in 1964), a dotting secretary who is prepared to share in Foustka's dreams and damnation. Maggie, to be sure. is doomed, she herself saw it coming when she vowed her alligiance to Foustka.

Faustus is not mentioned just in passing here: he is pertinent and central to the structure of Havel's play, for Temptation is built around the Faust legend, Dr. Henry Foustka, a disgruntled scientist. finds a way out from his frustration and his sneaky ambition through necromancy.

Thus Maggie says it all. She is let loose at the end of the play, a distracted Ophelia without the Prince, in a state that is perpetually rotten. Havel's grim comedy brings us face to face with a moniothic society with its severe demands of conformity. But the cracks show rather pitifully We see Maggie through one of these cracks, as she sees the world through them.

But what about Foustka? Is he conceivable after the velvet revolution? Yes, says Havel, so long as man opts for entropy, in his own private world as in the world of his fellow men. Foustka and the Science Institute and the Director and the Scientist will all be there.

The reviewer is a Professor of the Department of English, Dhaka University.

The Fateful Days

Review by Waliur Rahman

OF BLOOD AND FIRE

E VERY Bangladeshi has a special feeling about the

who have lived through the

period will never forget it. For

those of us who did not, this

book is a must. Mrs. Jahanara

Imam has captured the spirit

heightened sense of

patriotism, the willingness to

cious possession, one's life, for

the country, the despair at

moments, the slow exhibara-

tion of joy as the momentum of

the war of Liberation builds up

and the final victory inspite of

its tragic cost is most authen-

tically presented in her book.

Her book, which is a day to day

diary of the period, beginning

from the magic month of

March, till the final day of ltb-

eration, 16th December, 1971

takes us on a nostalgic path of

our glorious history of the

Bangladesh War of Indepen-

dence. She has reinvoked the

authentic environment of the

society, the University Profes-

sors, the upper middle class

professionals, the artists,

singers, writers, the young and

fiery students who were sen-

timentally and romantically

enveloped in a sense of eupho-

ria and despair. Against this

backdrop was the heady call

for independence. The stu-

dents saw the ugly reality

which was starting at them

while the olders merely envi-

stoned rosy dreams of their

own flags flying atop their

country while closing their

eyes to the butchery and bar-

barity surely to be experienced

from a senseless and mindless.

greedy government who would

not let go of this captive terri-

of two sons. Rumi and Jami.

her husband Shartf, her old

and ailing father-in-law with

the failing eyesight, the ser-

Mrs. Imam's beautiful family

actually give one's most pre-

year 1971. Those of us

the moment, the

Author Translated by Published by

The untold story of Bangladesh's War of Independence Jahanara Imam. Mustafizur Rahman. Academic Publishers, Pages: 246

> hard-won independence. Brilliantly Mrs. Imam rethe Freedom Fighters who performed daring acts in broad daylight, the blowing up of the bridges and army conveys, and ultimately the Power Station. She is a proud mother of one of the most daring freedom fighters. For she had to let Rumi go to meet his destiny. united. When the city people

are fleeing to the interior we see peasants keeping jars of water for the thirsty fighters. In a typical gesture of hospitality the poor villagers would kill their chicken to feed the fleeing towns people in their moment of destress. In retaliation Pakistani army burnt the villages in and around the cities. looted their meagre belong ings, shot the men after raping their womenfolk in front of

witness the anguish of a

army broke into the house and





the Cantonment, Sharif undergoes a heart attack which ul-

timately claim his life.

When Liberation comes it is tinged with the further tragedy of the killing of the intellectuals. It was like a parting gift of

Mrs. Imam leaves her readers with a hope for the future, an optimism amidst her per-

sonal tragedy. Jami finds a new #0 road, a road which spells a fu- 1 ture with hopes of fulfilment as This excellent diary is # work of a gentle, sensit; 'S artist, faithfully recording an een recreating a moment of mage in-

stunned silence. Mrs. Imam's best contribu-

so that they may relive throu the months and value the

counts the heroic exploits The war of Liberation shows nation, a people totally

We are distressed when we

mother whose brightest star. her son Rumi, is captured by the Pakistanis and tortured beyond imagination. In grief and sorrow, she and her husband run from pillar to post to free him. Her anxiety takes her to the Cantonment and the religious mendicant, the Pagla Pir. all to no avail. The entry of 6th September, when Azad's mother describes how the soldiers entered her house and beat up the inmates is blood curdling. Yet these are the actual happenings that took place, and we should never forget it. The personal tragedy of

Mrs. Imam goes side by side with that of the country. Since the fateful night when the

pre-71 family in Bangladesh.

The Untold Story of Bangladesh's

Jahanara Imam

Cultured and well-read, the

house would draw the intellectuals, the artists and the Civil Servants who gathered to discuss the time - the currents and 'what was to come'. From these conversations and the personal comments of Mrs. Imam we can recreate the atmosphere of the time. Set against this background is the harsh drama of the moment the resistance of a population who refuses to be humiliated by a foreign domination which aims at destroying the very

roots of society. It is her son Rumi who reminds them that a civil war is inevitable when he tells his mother, mother, the signs are ominous. Why should all these generals accompany the President on his official visit? On another occasion he reminds his family. "Don't you see why? They are only buying time. These discussions are nothing but eyewash."

The events of the month of March chronologically lead to the devastating ultimate day of Pakistan — 25th March. From the anxious mother we witness the questions put to Mr. Niogi. a well known astrologer of Bangladesh, "Is the country going to go through a blood bath?" and, "Am I likely to lose Rumi?".

In an interesting aside we see the extent of unity there was among the Bengali people. and also the extent of rebellion against Pakistan from the incident on the Dhaka Television when they cleverly manage to avoid playing the national an-

them on the 23rd of March. The author delineates how the most unlikely targets like Professors of the University. students, newspaper offices, shop-keepers, vendors, even the owner of a well known tea stall was lined up and shot. Among the other things destroyed was the Shahid Minar - the memorial of the Language martyrs. Since destruction and killing of this magnitude had never been on this soil before there was grim and

tion in my opinion, is the faithful recording of the minutest details of the next nine months. We had lived through this period so we know about it. The gathering of information, the Swadhin Bangla Betar, the resistance in the district cities, the phenomenon of the Biharis and their behaviour during this period, the strange acts of cruelty and torture of the Pak army like drawing out the blood of young Bengals. This will remain for all posterity, for the succeeding generation of Bangladeshis,

vants, and her dog Mickey could be any normal happy and Fire

Book Review



Translated by Mustafizur Rahmar

pick up her husband, her two sons. Rumi has never returned. Sharif, her husband and Jami were released after much torture. And on the 13th of December, partly due to the sor row about Rumi and partly due to the torture he suffered in

the Army of occupation.

for all Bangladeshis. It is red Bangladesh in her momental of glory unparalleled inspite hat the hardship. It is also a for to which is gone forever. 7 ower hopes and aspirations of a purmantic and poetic ped whose emotions were stiff slishlated by the search for just ernand truth and who never con uld promised till their independent dence was wrested and at 1. terrible cost. The banks wer __ empty, the roads, bridges, air ports had been destroyed I Even the doctors, specialists, teachers and students were mercilessly killed. The horrors perpetuated on the people remain unparalleled. But memories are short and peoul an ple fail to learn from history d Thus we acknowledge this it book with felicitation. It should at be read by all the Bangladeshiel o

The translation by Micy. Mustafizur Rahman is excell lent. He translated the essenof the book faithfully, cath 's emotion, each nuance that is experienced : the English itself has a style and lucidity of its own. It is a good example of translation from Bengali to English. We hope to see more translations from him in the future.

The cover picture of young freedom fighters reflects content well. The printing easy and readable.

Crusaders and bringing all of the Holy Land under Muslim sway. Saddam likes to point out that he and Saladin share the same birthplace: The Iraqi village of Tikrit. But in Genevieve Chauvel's imaginative "autobiography",

Saladin emerges as a leader far more honorable, fair and clement than Saddam. Parallels with the current crisis, however, have made the book popular with readers interested in clues 'to what makes Saddam tick.

Saladin

by Genevieve Chauvel

Pygmalion; 365 pages; \$24

ADDAM Hussein is often

800 years ago. No doubt Iraq's

President would like to repeat

Saladin's achievements, which

included sweeping into

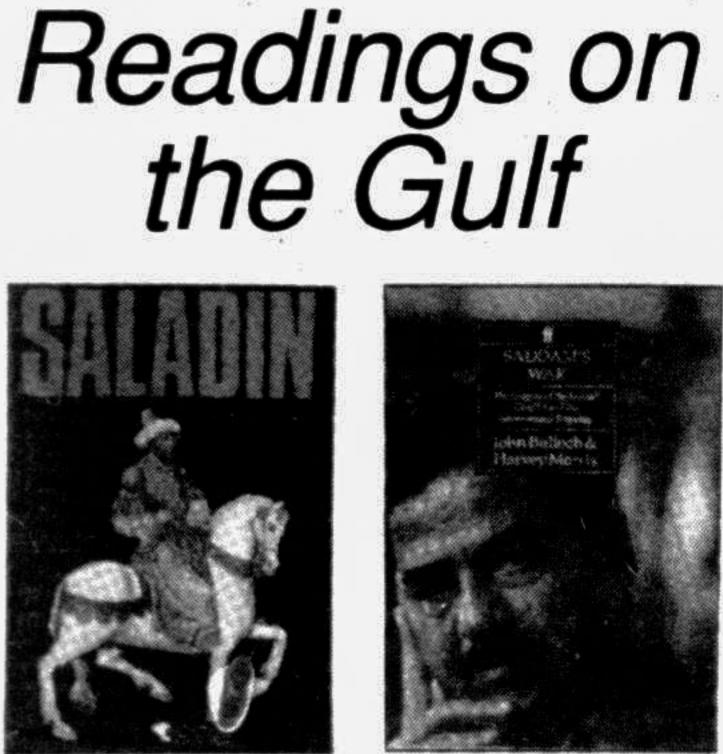
Jerusalem to throw out the

compared to the great

Sultan Saladin, who lived

Written in the first person and signed "I, Saladin, who consolidated Islam", the book details how the son of a great Kurdish family became Sultan of Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia and Yemen. Saladin waged war against the Frankish Crusaders in Palestine, holding off Richard the Lion-Hearted, with whom he signed an armistice in 1192. In Egypt, Saladin abolished a corrupt caliphate and built up its economy and military.

A consummate diplomat and pious Muslim, he treated his Christian subjects with tolcrance and offered generous settlements to Christians remaining in Jerusalem after his victory over the Crusaders. To strengthen Egypts position, he made peace with the Byzantine Empire. When Saladin died in 1193 at the age of 55, the poet Omar al-Kateb wrote that "generosity, justice, honor and the public's good fortune ended with him.



us on false hopes and ideals.

Quite frequently, Havel's pro-

tagonists would tear away the

mask from an ideologue's face.

would turn upside down the

false models of development

and statecraft, and expose the

hollowness behind relation-

ships that, in the name of this

or that ideology, deny man his

essential freedom. The

Havelian protagonist demands.

and often gets, his freedom to

indulge in his dreams and fan-

responsibility to society or to

himself. Havel's plays are thus

attempts to understand an in-

dividual, bring him into focus

as an 'unhoused, untenanted

man who has been exhausted

by a long struggle with the

establishment, but who is no

less at war with his own inor

dinate ambitions, desires and

Temptation (first published

by Faber and Faber in 1988)

can be read in the light of

Havel's continuous crusade

against lies and deceptions

that are perpetuated by the

state and sanctified by larger-

than-state dogmas. As early as

The Garden Party (1963), and

The Memorandum Havel at-

tempted, in the words of

Jeremy Adler in the TLS, to

"unmask Communism as a

power dependent on a public

lie that utterly conflicts with

private truth."

tasics; but he is not without his

Saddam's War: The Origins of the Kuwait Conflict and the International Response by John Bulloch and Harvey Morris

Faber and Faber REPARED in the months 'lowing Iraq's takeover of Kuwait in August, Saddam's War was rushed into print the week of the first bombing raid on Baghdad. John Bulloch, diplomatic correspondent of the Independent on Sunday, and Harvey Morris, deputy foreign editor of the Independent, paint a graphic portrait of Saddam Hussein's family background and his rise to power. The President, they conclude, is a "small-town political gangster who developed an obsession for history." They detail his alleged misdeeds, including dropping an opponent into acid and watching him dissolve and the execution of suspected conspirators by colleagues in the Baath Party with guns Saddam

meeting. While the authors blame the West and other Arab leaders for failing to recognize Saddam's threat, they argue that the President is ultimately responsible for campaigns of terror and wars, "which he waged against his political opponents, against his own people, against Iran and in which, ultimately, he threatened to embroil the rest of the world". While praising the timing of its publication, the Sunday Times noted that the book was "by its nature.... only a prelude to ... eclipsing events." In its review the Guardian suggested that Saddam's War is "scissors-andpaste stuff, a hurried compilation." but still "worth not only reading but retaining as a ref-

erence material

handed out in the middle of a

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita.

I would like to use your column to bring to the attention of readers some of the most prevalent prejudices in our culture. The one I and most striking and disgusting is Colour Prejudice. Fair skin or light skin is always preferred to the dark, especially for girls. We very easily criticise the West for their colour bias, but we do exactly the same or even worse. Mothers, when looking for brides for their sons, want a fair complexion, parents prefer their children to be fair, etc. A fair girl is considered to be more beautiful and the dark girl is always made to feel inferior, no matter how beautiful her features are or how talented she may be. I have heard few people protest against this discrimination which women constantly face. Please print my letter and hope others will write on this

Shakila, Shegun Bagicha

Dear Shakila Thank you for your letter. I find great pleasure in printing it. This is a sad and shameful aspect of our society and will only change through education, incre d awareness of women's position in and contribution to society. This will also

change when women are no longer considered to be objects of decoration but rather citizens who contribute equally, and in many ways more, to society. Preference for fair skin in women is very deeply ingrained in our psyche through books, magazines, stories, and folklore and will be very hard to get rid of. But attitudes are gradually changing, and we hope we will be rid of this prejudice someday.

Dear Mita,

My son, 7, is so naughty and restless that I am really fedup. He does not sit still for 5 minutes, is destructive and hits his cousins.

Believe me he is a source of embarrassment for me in public places or when I am visiting. I have often thought of taking him to the pshychiatrist. Do you think he is abnormal? People say he will outgrow this behaviour but I do not have the patience to wait.

Khushi, Dhanmondi

Dear Khushi,

No, your son is not abnormal and neither is there anything wrong with him. On the contrary he may be highly intelligent, and is trying to say something to you and is doing it in the only way he can. Often over- excited or restless children are also highly intelligent and this energy needs to be channelled in the right direction. A child of 7 is still very easy to mould the way you want to. Remember you are not dealing with an ordinary child. You must be very creative when trying to change his behaviour. Take it as a challenge and give him your time, energy and loving care. Please read books on such children; some of them offer sound and practical advice.

Dear Mita.

I have been married for 10 years out of which 8 years were spent abroad. Recently we have returned and due to financial constraints plus family obligations my husband insists we stay with my in-laws. They are very nice people but my mother-is-law is very interfering. I have to tell her everytime I go out and what time I shall be back. That is not all : she insists on looking after our son, who is 9, and is completely spoiling him. He has no bedtime and no eating time. He gets what he wants and I cannot say anything. My husband says I am exaggerating the problem and will not talk to his parents about it. What can I do, I am very unhappy because of them as I have led a fairly independent life before and after my mar-

Nasreen. Mohammadpur

your intelligence, wit and humour you will be able to change some of the most annoying aspects of her behaviour.

Dear Nasreen,

Dear Mita. I read your advice to the friend who wrote on behalf of the battered wife. You are right, this happens very often among people we know but we do not protest and suffer in silence. A woman who was beaten by her husband would never have the courage to write to you for advice, let alone leave her husband. Lately there has been an increased awareness of this problem, and there are various organizations where women can seek help. But given the extent of the problem, it is highly inadequate. I have known a cousin to suffer a life of abuse and yet prefer to stay with her husband rather than go to her fa-

You have written about the most common and prevalent

problem between daughters and mothers-in-law. But things

have changed since our mothers or grandmothers were

daughters-in-law. Now-a-days mothers-in-law can be pur-

suaded to change their behaviour and in some cases have even

become friends! Approach this problem as someone who is

more educated, younger and therefore more easy to adapt.

Mothers-in-law have set ideas through years of experience,

which they find very hard to change. Moreover they do not

really know how to behave with daughters-in-law. Many times

they are not even aware of being interfering. I am sure with

Daisy, Chittagong

Dear Daisy.

ther's house. Why is this so?

As I wrote before, battered or abused women continue to stay with their husbands for a variety of reasons and the primary one is financial. You have written that a cousin continued to suffer humiliation rather than go to her father's house. She does not go because she will again be dependent on someone and her father might not be financially stable enough to support her. Another big factor is the social taboo which surrounds separated women. Even now society blames the women for anything which goes wrong in the marriage as women are primarily responsible for keeping things in order at home. With education, I hope this attitude will gradually change. As I have already written, this is a very complex issue to solve in this column, but we can bring this subject up often for discussion.

WRITE TO MITA



Run by a trained and experienced Family and Marriage counsellor, assisted by a professional team of doctor, psychologist and lawyer, this column will answer questions relating to family, marriage, health, family laws, and social and interpersonal relationships. Please address letters to Mita, The Daily Star. GPO Box 3257 or to 28/1, Toynbee Circular Road, Motijheel, Dhaka-1000.

demonstration of concern for about its contents. 'City of Joy'

From Page 9

It cannot legally stop the shooting of the film, since the permission has been granted by the Centre. Expected to provide all the customary assistance to the film makers, the state government is grudgingly helping the team with police protection and other facilities during the shooting. much to the chagrin of the cadres of the Left Front who are opposed to the film.

But there is a curious side to the present controversy. Some of the Left Front leaders were apparently taken in initially by Dominique Lapierre's

Calcutta. In 1989, the then CPI (M) mayor of Calcutta, Kamal Bose gave a public reception to the author of 'City of Joy'. Calcutta Corporation was so impressed by the title of the book, that it chose to borrow the name to entitle a memorandum which it submitted to the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi seeking financial assistance for the city's development. It later transpired that neither the Mayor nor the other Left Front leaders had read the book before arranging the grand reception for its author. The book was dismissed as trash by leading Bengali critics soon after its publication. But the Left leaders apparently had no idea

When Ronald Joffe pro-

posed to make a film based on the book, his first script was referred to Satyajit Ray who was reported to have expressed in no uncertain terms his disapproval of it. Joffe then made some changes in the original script, and with a well-known Bengali writer, Sunil Gangopadhyaya as an adviser, started working on its production. But the revised script also has apparently failed to satisfy the Bengali critics. According to Utpal Dutt, the script is worse than the book. The state government's minister for culture and information, Buddhadev Bhattacharya (also a CPI-M leader) has openly come out

against the proposed film. Among those working in the film, at least one actor- Biplab Chatterjee - has walked out in protest against what he thought was an attempt to de-

pict Calcutta in a bad light.

The furore over the shooting of 'City of Joy' in Calcutta has highlighted several contentious issues involving the age-old problems of Centre-State relations in India in particular as well as of freedom of the artiste in general. As mentioned earlier, the permission for location shootings by foreign film makers is granted by the Centre. In this case, the question arises whether the Centre sought the West Bengal g vernment's approval before granting the permission.

in Alipore for shooting some of the sequences. The garden is the property of the central government, and hence the state government can have no say in the matter. But under the rules, it is expected to provide police protection to the team. Caught in a fix, the Left Front now is trying its best to stop the shooting in some indirect way. It is giving its tacit support to the demonstrations of protest and is probably relying on a spontaneous - or whipped up - violent public protest against the shooting so that the filming of 'City of Joy' becomes almost impossible in Calcutta. Given this situation, it is urgent that

Joffe's film team has hired the

Horticultural Society's gardens

New Delhi and the state gov ernments come to some agreement as to the modalities of granting permission to foreign film makers engaged in shooting on locations in states. It also involves the larger

question of censorship. While one surely agrees with the principle of freedom of artistic creation, one must also remember that the law of libel curtails such freedom when it leads to mud-slinging against any citizen. A city, unlike a cittzen, however, cannot claim protection against such mudslinging under the law of libel. And that is the handicap from

which Calcutta suffers. Sumanta Benerjee - a Delhibased journalist- will be writing for the Daily Star regularly.