

The Raj Novel

by Schrezad Joya Monami Latif

THE British have always been fascinated by India and its people. To the British, India has always been beautiful, exotic and mystical land of the maharajahs and brown-skinned heathens. It was Rudyard Kipling who was very influential in introducing the concept of India and the 'white man's burden' to British literature. Since then, British literature has recorded the milieu of themes and attitudes toward India that spans from the time of the British occupation of the Indian sub-continent to after 1947. In the twentieth century we have British writers such as E M Forester and M M Kaye who are all authors of novels that can categorically be defined as Raj novels.

Raj novels are usually sensationalised love stories that deal with the polarised relationship between the East and the West, between the British and their Indian subjects. Most often in novels written about India, novelists have been intent on the subject of the Anglicised Indian and the Indianised Englishman. In most cases in the novels, an Englishman will pass for an Indian only as a means of disguise and self-protection. On the other hand, an Indian with an English education and acquired English manners and ideas will always be either a misfit or the villain. This concept tests Kipling's Law, portrayed in many of his characters such as Detective Strickland, the protagonist of several of his short stories, about the irreconcilable essences of East and West and is obviously based on a clear racial prejudice. In Raj novels, often, the Indian will be westernised but can ever be English in his view points, responses to situations or more importantly, dependability and ethics. The Englishman, on

the other hand, can pass easily for a 'native'. Ben, the hero of the *Far Pavilions*, for example, fits in everywhere, from Peshawar to the Officers Club in Calcutta.

A common bond between the Raj novels that are pre-independence and post-independence (such as pre-independence writer such as Forester and a post independence writer such as Markandaya), are the British illusions of India — its mystery, its spirituality, its powers to liberate and to destroy, its dangers, its subtly seductive and threatening sexuality. All of these furnish the material for the Raj novel. Surprisingly, even in novels written after independence, the attitude that Indians are British subjects, backward and lesser than the white man is prevalent. In all Raj novels, the best character is always British, while the Indian character is usually stoic, passive and fatalistic. This perpetrates the Western stereotype that Indians are backward and starving because of their fatalism which is actually a guise for indifference. E M Forester's *Aziz*, in *Passage to India*, was the same, accepting things as they happened, as the will of the Almighty Allah.

In some of these novels, such as M M Kaye's *Far Pavilions*, there is a romanticized portrayal of the British Raj, a glorification of the Britons' rule of a land of mysticism and exotica. Her work, although sympathetic to the Indian guest for freedom, nonetheless displays a lack of understanding and respect for the people she writes about. Even at the risk of generalisa-

tion, one can safely say that most Raj novels like the *Far Pavilions* are written by people who simply pretend to understand India and its people. The British alone cannot be cited as writing Raj novels.

Kamala Markandaya is an Indian born novelist whose writings have significant 'rajish' qualities to them. She is a Western emigre writer with British perspectives rather than Indian. It is no wonder then, that Markandaya is better known in the Western world than in her mother country. In her novel *Nectar and a Sieve*, Markandaya's main characters are Rukmini, Nathan Kenny. Kenny is the English doctor who selflessly helps peasants such as Rukmini is illiterate and helpless peasant woman and her husband Nathan who is full of flaws of infidelity and incompetence. The honorable English doctor is on the other hand, self-less and the savior in Rukmini and other peasants' lives. Here the white man, typical of a Raj novel, is the savior and the Indians his beneficiaries, his subjects, Rukmini and Nathan, and Kenny represent the East and the West, India and the Great Britain. Markandaya like many post-independence Raj novelists, portrays India as backward, passive, bogged down by economic hardships and cultural tenets that confine people to obsolete traditions. Britons on the flip side painted as scientific, modern, and able to take Indians only in small doses. Authors such as Markandaya have no resentment toward the British for their prejudices and colonial conquest of India. Instead,

they have strong sympathies with the white man and share in their frustrations. To give her due credit, however, one must agree that Markandaya, although catering to an essentially white readership, is dedicated in showing the oppression that she sees in her India.

Raj novelists, most of them, share a fascination for India that no one can deny. Their love affair with India is a distant one, from the outside looking in. They find beauty in India's suffering. There is indeed beauty in India. The beauty that lies in the lush green fields of paddy and the banyan tree in the village square but there is no beauty in the poverty and the oppression that is in India. To glorify suffering is to idealise something that is not there. What lies in reality is the truth. The truth that is the fight of Markandaya's Rukmini and Forester's Aziz (in *Passage to India*). Tragically, neither author sees this truth.

How long will Raj novels continue to be written? Even modern day India with its bad publicity — bureaucratic snafus, missed connections, communal riots, heat, dust, dysentery — seems to be accorded an exotic appeal to non-Indians. To this day, the romantic imagination of non-Indians paints India as exotic, glamorous, mysterious, and dangerously seductive, paradoxically most dangerous and most seductive to those who feel superior to it, as a century and a half of Raj novels have taught us to expect. Given the Western penchant for exoticism and romance in far off lands, the Raj novel will probably continue for a very long time. And, given the trend toward westernisation in the sub-continent, so will Indian born Raj novelists, continue for a very long time, that is.

Waves of Indians Continue to Make Waves

Atiya Singh writes from New Delhi

As New Delhi rapidly opens up the economy to take advantage of competition, investment and new technology, it is reversing a flow that for centuries has seen tens of thousands of Indians leaving their homeland for opportunities abroad. Gemini News Service looks at the success of the Indian diaspora.

The Indian diaspora

Nepal 3.5m
Sri Lanka 1.5m
Malaysia 1.5m



Britain 1m
South Africa 0.9m
Mauritius 0.7m

Some go from rags to riches, like Muhammad Ali, who left his village a poor man and now employs 5,000 oil and construction workers in Muscat.

Some have unusual skills, like 36-year-old Rajanmahadavan, a psychology student at Kansas State University in the US, who possesses an exceptional memory. He earned a place in *The Guinness Book of Records* for reciting the value of pi to the 31,811th digit. Not surprisingly, he was the subject of a \$160,000 study aimed at determining how human memory works.

Computer wizard Dr Rajiv Joshi is working with the US giant, IBM, on the development of a chip that can send or receive eight billion bits of information per second.

In the United States, people of Indian origin boast a higher proportion of PhDs, doctors and other professionals than any other community. Of the country's 550,000 doctors, 25,000 are Indians.

The Wall Street Journal claims that almost two-thirds of male Indians in the US hold managerial or professional jobs.

The biggest concentrations of people of Indian origin are in Nepal (3.5 million), Malaysia (1.5 million), Sri Lanka (1.5 million), Britain (1 million), South Africa (900,000), Mauritius (750,000), Saudi Arabia (700,000), Trinidad and Tobago (600,000), US (500,000), Guyana and United Arab Emirates (500,000), Myanmar (430,000), Fiji (300,000), Kuwait (115,000), Netherlands (103,000), Portugal (102,000), Singapore (100,000), Thailand (85,000), France (60,000), and Germany, New Zealand and Indonesia (30,000 each).

Mauritius is the only country outside India in which people of Indian origin are in a majority. The prime minister and many ministers are Indian. Guyana is close: they make up 49 per cent of the population.

Overseas Indians left the homeland in three waves. The first occurred centuries ago and was confined largely to South and Southeast Asia.

"Monuments such as Angkor Wat in Cambodia and the Borobudur temples in Indonesia are eloquent testimonies to Indian influence," says Rahul Singh, a journalist who took part in the first global Convention of People of Indian Origin, in New York, in 1989. He points out that the Indonesian island of Bali remains virtually Hindu to this day, though the rest of Indonesia is overwhelmingly Muslim, and the Hindu epic, the Ramayana, continues to inspire Indonesian dance and art.

"And in the main museum

in Bangkok," he points out, "the prized exhibitions of painting and sculpture are Indian-inspired."

The second wave of migration took place during the colonial period and continued until the 19th century. Thousands of people from the provinces of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh were forcibly transported as indentured labour to Mauritius, Fiji, British Guyana, Trinidad, and Surinam.

In the third wave, in the 20th century, migrants headed for industrialised countries such as the US, Canada and Britain. Migrants in the first

two waves tended to be illiterate, while those in the third wave were often highly educated.

"Indians arrived at the right place (the US) and at the right time for success," says Nathan Glazer, an American professor and writer on ethnic issues.

He observes that for most Indians in the US the problem is not that they are not successful, but that they are not more successful.

Up to two-thirds of Indians in the US have college degrees and an 43 per cent have professional qualifications. The average household income of Indians in the US was \$48,320 in 1990, compared with \$28,314 for all foreign-born persons. The average per capita income of Indian immigrants stood at \$25,275.

Successful Indians include two Nobel laureates, Prof Hargobind Khurana of Harvard University and Prof Subramaniam Chandrasekhar of Chicago University. About 5,000 Indians teach and research in US universities.

In Canada, Indians have made significant contributions in education, farming and trade. Recently they have begun settling in Mexico, earning the nickname "Mexidus" (Mexican-Hindus).

In Britain, they are prominent in business, the professions and the arts. They have carved a special niche in literature — as the names Nirad Chaudhry, Salman Rushdie, V S Naipaul and Vikram Seth suggest. In Asia, people of Indian origin are often poor by local standards, apart from those who are traders or professionals. In Africa, they are prominent in education and commerce.

Among the explanations offered by sociologists for Indian adaptability is a cultural acceptance of the inevitability of crisis. Less contentious is the ascribing of a tendency to retain cuisine and religious and other practices to a fear of losing cultural identity.

India has lost enormous skills by its brain and brawn drain. But there is some compensation. Remittances home by overseas Indians now run to \$12 billion a year.

ATTYA SINGH is an Indian freelance journalist and lecturer.

Save the Baby!

by A Husnain

IT is a cynical morning. I am spring cleaning the Western concepts with which I have been poisoned or indoctrinated throughout my adult life. Since I belong to the earlier generation, I escaped indoctrination during my schooldays; but the minor generation today cannot escape the influence — through the mass electronic media.

Babies cause poverty! That is not my opinion, but the Western viewpoint. So do not allow babies to come into this world! Who said minors could not be criminals, and break the (Western) moral laws, such as this type of discrimination against babies! No right to be born! Isn't it *Brahmachari* doctrine we read about in the old books? Can God make a mistake? No. Everything can be explained to be due to "human errors". It would be impolite to heap all the blame on the politicians!

Have less babies. Smaller families. Till the population

growth curve becomes negative. Then relocate the factories in the 'baby' countries of the third world, where plenty of cheap manpower (human resource) is available. Do not allow the surplus labour to enter the industrialized countries. The factories are not there, but workers are still required in the service sector.

"We do not use products made by child labour". The western world is after the babies and children, as if the chasing of the poor adults is not enough. Question: which period during a lifetime is safe from the western horror laws?

In the highly industrialised countries, the succeeding generations will not have enough workers to run the nation. So robotise, mechanise, automate, and dehumanise. Do not de-

pend on the human being. Rely on machine. It is the materialistic age, plus the age of 'mis-information'.

One example how relying on the computer is effective: I receive computer reminders from a western country about delay in payment of bills of books shipped. I explain and clarify. The computer cannot and does not read my letter, and sends another reminder. Like this my five clarifications in several months were fruitless, because the computer entry was not updated. The computer is right, and I am at fault! No human touch is involved, because frailty, thy name is homo sapiens. The machine is the law.

Keep the surplus workers in their own country, and control the workers and the facto-

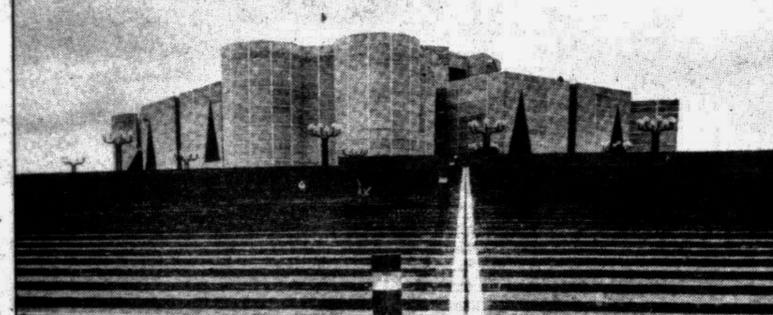
ries with rigid pre-conditions and conditions. Economic subjugation. The human rights clause was sought to be incorporated in the GATT and WTO drafts, but the beggars (of aid) prevented it temporarily.

Babies and jobs are scarce in the industrialized countries, and the rising unemployed have started rioting. The scarcity of babies came about with the mass break of homes and marriages, and marriages and homes. Millions of minors are 'homeless' and 'parentless' in the sense we define the original homes and the original parents. Parents can be replaced like spare parts, expendable, that is. Children can be reconditioned, like machinery, and broken marriages can be glued back, with synthetics.

NATO, space spies, CNN, VOA, and Security Council can save the world, without solving the problems in Bosnia, Somalia, Vietnam, Palestine.

But first watch for the new babies! Dangerous!

Architecture of the Last 100 Years



Sangshul Bhuvan, Dhaka.

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the capital city of Dhaka, it is true, but it also happened in other places like Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Bogra etc. Two events very important to note at that time in the context of architecture took place — one is the event of establishment and introductions of formal and academic study of architecture in the Engineering University in 1961 and other being the planning of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and the Parliament House by the world famous architect Louis Khan which was conceived in pre-independence time and built after independence. Recently Khulna University has also introduced a course on Architecture. Having two schools of architecture introduced in this country there has been a great enthusiasm for the subject of architecture both theoretically and professionally. This is why we are self-sufficient in this subject of great art being the mother of all arts and frozen music and also architects are inspired always to see this timeless creation of parliament house which is supposed to be one of the 20 best buildings ever built in 20th century. This building also serves well to the cause of establishing values and an epoch-making example to the subject of architecture, as well as to the professional architects in the urban society. Architects are now busy creating various

works, it is true, but their services should be directed to the appropriate goal by society as a whole, otherwise architecture cannot develop keeping with the true heritage of ours.

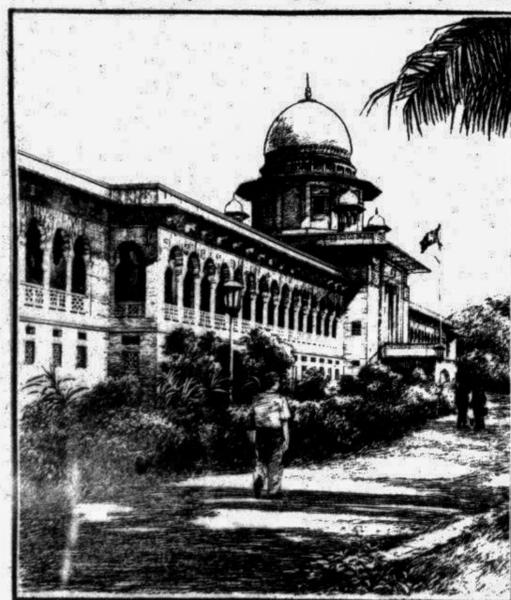
The first Master Plan of Dhaka City was adopted in

1956. Now there are 70 lakh people residing in this city out of which 20 lakh live in slum area and they are our floating population. The city has got a plethora of problems infected with ill planning and negligence like the problems

of residence, road-communication, traffic jam, sewerage, dustbin, water logging, law and order situation etc. The whole society is becoming unbalanced socially and politically. It is like the situation that prevailed in the era of great Matsanya from the mid 7th to 8th century AD which had got the principle of swallowing small fishes by larger fishes. The architect cannot change this situation. Architect is only able to help and cooperate the process of development. So, the architecture by which the society and the man can have a better place, space and build environment. A great number of people are flocking daily from all places of the country to this city for trying their luck, to get job and livelihood.

To mitigate this huge problem a comprehensive planning is needed with the scope of direct participation of the people. To implement this the knowledges of architects, engineers, planners, scientists

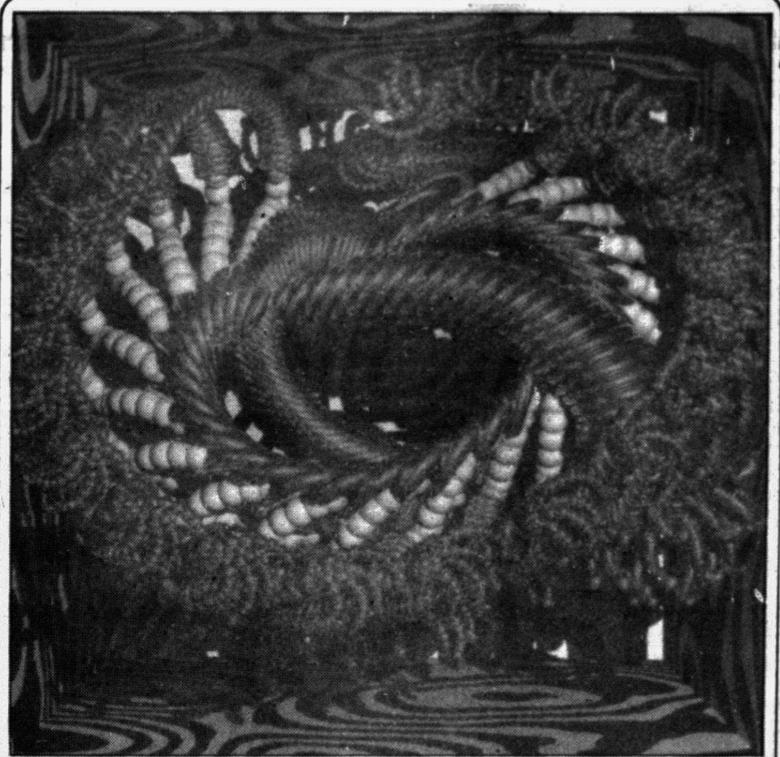
are very much needed and government must come forward for realistic solution as Dhaka is now the capital city of an independent country. It is true that the architects of this country have not yet been able to invent their own language of architecture as the vocabulary of mother tongue. But they are conscious in this respect specially this has developed after getting independence. Here lies the importance to become free and independent. Now the style of architecture which is being practised by our architects is a mixed and rootless media or style, the buildings built in Baridhara area are its bright examples. May be architects have not yet been succeeded to get their own architectural heritage like those of Pal and Sultanate times, we hope surely they will be able to find that missing link of heritage back, expressing and identifying their own true and glorious Bangalee entity and existence and thus we dream earnestly at the dawn of Bangla 15th century.



Supreme Court Building, Dhaka. Courtesy: Mohammad Iqbal/AB Bank



Chittagong Court Building. Courtesy: Shamsuddoha/ AB Bank



ART BY MUTATION

This fantastic and exciting shape, named "Metal Mutation in Red," has been generated by a computer process that mimics natural selection. The pioneer of the new art form, William Latham, joined forces with artist John Greenwood for their recent exhibition at the City Art Galleries in Manchester, north west England. Called "Mutations: Paintings by John Greenwood, Organic Television by William Latham," the exhibition explored the notion of mutating and transforming life in the synthetic world, drawing on the imagination of these two artists.

William Latham, a former student at the Royal College of Art in London, bases his work on natural shapes found by nature. Each piece begins with a sketch of a form, such as a lobster or a ribcage which is then transferred to a computer. The image is then influenced by a mathematical equation which can be rapidly altered and used to "breed" variations which the artist can explore. He has been breaking new ground with his computer-generated imagery, fusing modern art, mathematics, computers and evolution. It is a stunning example of the way artists, scientists and technologists now cooperate to broaden the public's view both of art and of computing.

—LPS

The Advent

by Faruquddin Ahmed

Years roll by as ages do to welcome a new era And it happened the other day with the morning ray. The Bangla New Year, nay a new century began As we all ran in a spree around the Ramna wisdom tree. It was a day of days, a year of years for us all As we remembered the many eventful episodes Across the annals of the just bygone century — The friends and dear ones we lost, the new ones we got. The cruel, ruthless wars we fought and suffered Were all awful human tragedies, but still than — We had a gain too in the great independence we achieved The priceless prize we won to enjoy and uphold for ever.

Step Aside

by Taslima Nasreen

Fall in love, if you want to. Here, I stretch my two shapely hands. Hold them if you like. There is no time to wait on the road. If I have to draw back my hands, if our views do not agree, then step aside, please.

Translated by: Kabir Chowdhury