

Perspectives on Perspective

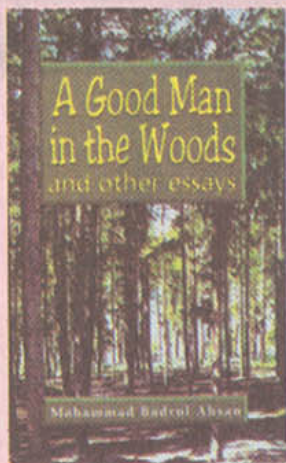
"Life roared in this man until a few hours ago, until this man died in his sleep, right there in the empty half of the bed. He did not have time to say a word, a whine or whimper, let alone a formal goodbye to the woman who cooked for him, made love to him, washed his clothes, talked to him, comforted him, nursed him, raised his children and who was sleeping next to him.

How quickly people discard their bodies in death as if a band of gypsies are in a hurry to go to the next place. And how people take care of this body, do so much for its pleasure, for its comfort, for the satisfaction of its urges to keep it strong, beautiful and healthy. Yet how this body betrays its resident and threatens to evict him, never telling how long he could stay in it. How she spent her life with a carcass, never knowing who lived there, never understanding the life force that moved it, never realising how soon she was going to lose it."

Such insights into human behaviour, nature and life in general fill and enrich Mohammad Badrul Ahsan's *A Good Man in the Woods and other essays*. Ahsan, a banker by profession and writer by passion, has been writing the column "Crosstalk" in *The Daily Star* since 2000. The book is a compilation of the writings published in the daily over the years. The subject matter is diverse, ranging from the feelings of a woman whose husband has just passed away in "The Leprechaun" to Bush and Laden to "The Night of the Lost Nose-Pins", about two hundred Hindu women raped after a change in government.

Ahsan has a flair for detail. He describes with raw emotion and at the same time, simplicity, everything from the death of a woman who lead a life "abandoned by her father, pimped by her husband and exploited by her lover" to "The Weakness of Power". In the latter he cites Bertrand Russell's argument that, next to enjoying ourselves, the next greatest pleasure consists in preventing others from enjoying themselves, which, more generally, means acquisition of power. But, writes Ahsan, power has its law of diminishing utility, and that the biggest challenge after taking power is to keep and enjoy it. "It's indeed a weakness never to have power," he writes, "but it's even worse to have and lose it. Long after the lights are gone and the stage is empty, the show must go on in the mind of the once all-powerful. Because it really needs a very strong strongman not to fall before his own eyes even after he has fallen before the rest of the world."

Strong in matter, from historical to topical, and rich in description, Ahsan's writings bring a perspective on... perspective. He observes things more passionately and more powerfully than most people, yet, written down on pen and paper, the obvious truth of it all hit's the reader like something that is easily taken for granted.



A Good Man in the Woods and other Essays
 Mohammad Badrul Ahsan
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 145 pp, Tk. 245

History, like a coin, has a flip side to it, writes Ahsan in "The Other Side of History". It's the historian's hand, which gives it a spin, and determines whether the head or the tail is going to win. There is a winner's side of history, and then there is a loser's side of it. There is a privileged side of history, and there is an underprivileged side of it. There is a ruler's side of history, and there is a subject's side of it. There is an oppressor's side of history, and then there is an oppressed side of it. There is a gainer's side of history, and there is a sucker's side of it.

Regardless of the many sides one can take on any issue dealt with in *The Good Man*, what Ahsan really brings to every piece is depth and insight that can only come from highly tuned senses of observation and the compassion to feel what one's subject is feeling, or rather, what it is possible for a variety of subjects to feel under different circumstances. For readers who have been drawn to Ahsan's column over the years, the collection of essays is definitely worth a read, and, perhaps, a place in the personal library.

--Kajalie Shehreen Islam