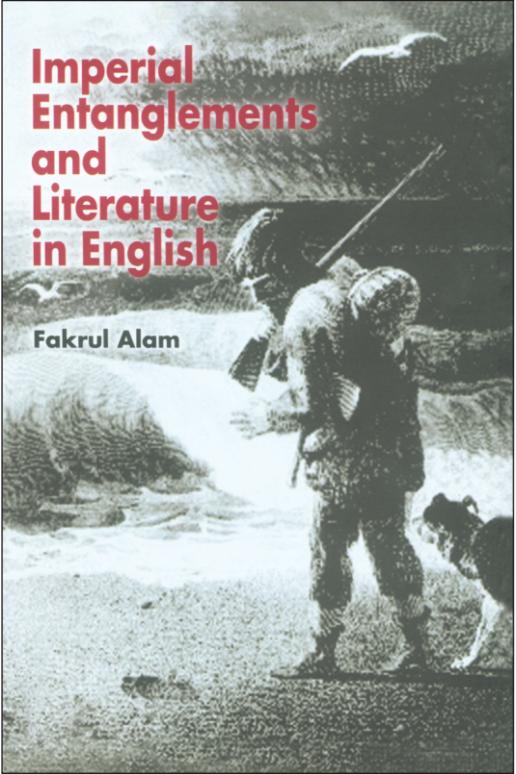


# Sorting out contrasting and discordant voices

**Hasan Al Zayed** is appreciative of a work which appeals to literature enthusiasts



Imperial Entanglements and Literature in English  
Fakrul Alam  
Writers. Ink, Dhaka

Imperial Entanglements and Literature in English is a collection of twenty six essays that span more than two decades and cover a wide range of postcolonial issues, including imperialism, migration, exile and counter-resistance. It is probably the first book from Bangladesh that covers and cuts across such a wide range of multidisciplinary issues. Its fundamental focus, however, is literature; literature is the thread that binds the diverse interest of the book together. Though most of the essays of this book are scholarly in orientation, what makes them fascinating is their lucidity, the

way complex ideas unravel themselves with utmost simplicity.

Prof. Alam's book is divided into two very clearly marked sections: colonialism and postcolonialism. It begins with Francis Bacon, one of the makers of British colonialism who wrote in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and ends with Jhumpa Lahiri, one of the new generation diaspora writers who came to prominence only a few years ago. Thus, even sequentially, the book travels a long distance.

The first part of the book "Colonialism and Literature in English" is the result of Prof. Alam's efforts to trace the legacy of colonialism in British writings. The focus, nevertheless, gets narrower as the essays from chapter 3 to chapter 7 dwell primarily on British colonial entanglements in India. While the first two essays "Baconianism and Colonial Discourse" and "Defoe's South American Schemes" discuss the formation of British colonial ideology and make apparent the intellectual connivance that allowed colonialism to run riot not only in the places adjacent to Europe but also in areas far away from Europe, the third essay attempts at weighing the impact of that ideology in the minds of British colonial rulers who practised the imperial ideology in day to day life. The essays in the first part also uncover the traces of the complexity that was at the heart of the colonial entanglement in India. Essays like "Nabobism on Trial" and "Rudyard Kipling at the Indian Moment" are, thus, examples of the ambivalence of colonialism, the story of ethical doubt and unsettling pessimism. "Nabobism on Trial" looks into Edmund Burke's critique of British rule in India and thus leaves the trace of the truth that colonialism faced resistance not only from outside but also, on a few occasions, from inside.

One of the things to be noticed in the first part is the plurality of preoccupations. Fakrul Alam, unlike most interpreters/hermeneutics of colonial transactions who neglect the plural, often ambivalent dynamics of colonial consciousness, takes into account the internal dynamics of colonialism. In other words, his essays incorporate contrasting and discordant voices within British colonialism. As a result, on one hand, we get to see the optimism of Eliza Fay, an Englishwoman who was in India in the eighteenth century; on the other hand, we come across the pessimism of Rudyard Kipling, dejected at the possible demise of the British Empire. But what is most important about Fakrul Alam's analysis of colonialism is that he maintains an ethical balance between a critique of colonialism and a wholesale rejection of Western humanism. Teaching Orwell in

Bangladesh thus is a reminder that not all western humanists are colonialists, that we should note the difference between colonialism and critical humanism.

In the second part of the book, "Postcolonialism and Literature in English", Prof. Alam analyses not only the impact of colonialism on Indian writers but also the counter discursive attempts the postcolonial intellectuals put up against imperialist texts. This is also the section where he writes about some eminent postcolonial writers: Nirad C. Chaudhuri, R. K. Narayan, V. S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, and Jhumpa Lahiri. Two notable exceptions here are Edward Said and Kaiser Haq, not because they cannot be put under the rubric of postcolonial writers but because they are radically different from the people mentioned above. Kaiser Haq is Bangladesh's most eminent poet in English. Partly because he is the only poet included here, partly because he writes from Bangladesh, the essay on him demands a thorough reading. Prof. Alam's core argument is that Kaiser Haq's "poems are rooted in Bangladeshi life" and that he has been able to transform his rootedness into good poetry because he has been able to bring his rootedness to bear with his long acquaintance with experiments in Indian English and European poetic traditions.

This book has a separate section on Edward Said with six essays of varying length. They contain some of the most apt and comprehensive reviews of Said's work, for they show a willingness to read Said in context without exaggerating his political bias. Of the six essays on Said, three are reviews of his books, two are research papers, and one is an obituary published immediately after Said's death. The three books that Prof. Alam brings in for discussion here: *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), *Reflections on Exile* (2001), and *On Late Style* (2006) were all written after Said got to know about his illness and began his long, traumatic fight with leukemia. Alam's essay captures, with deliberate compassion, the work as well as its author, whose deeply inflicted life, both as a cancer patient and as a Palestinian exile, led him towards an agonistic understanding of exile and irreconcilability on one hand and an antagonistic reading of all kinds of determinisms on the other.

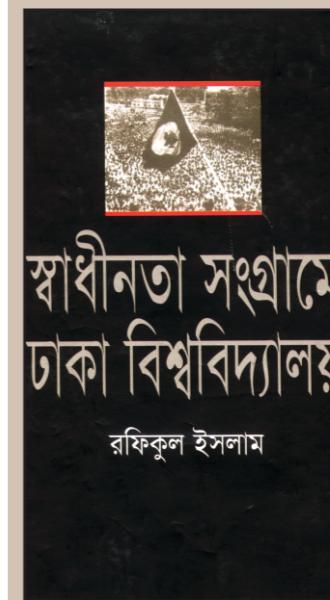
Like Said, Narayan also enjoys special attention in this book. Of the five essays, four are research studies that challenge some of the conventional assumptions about Narayan. The first of the Narayan essays, "Narrative Strategies in Two Narayan Novels", for example, disputes Naipaul's claim that Narayan is "an instinctive,

unstudied writer". In this rare essay on Narayan's style not many people have written on Narayan's style. Alam claims that Narayan was not a simple storyteller; his narrative strategy is rather subtle and its complexity lies in the apparent simplicity of its presentation. "Plot and Character in R. K. Narayan's *The Man Eater of Malgudi*", the second essay on Narayan, is also a formalist/psychoanalytical reading of the Indian novelist's technique. Style and narration, again, emerges as the central preoccupation of the author. The third essay on Narayan, "Reading R. K. Narayan Postcolonially" is an attempt to affirm Narayan's relevance, this time in the postcolonial context. In one of the brilliant passages of this essay, Prof. Alam dismisses, appropriately, Gayatri Spivak's reductive claim that Narayan has not allowed his women characters in *The Guide* to represent themselves. Going against the grain of Spivak's thought, Fakrul Alam claims that Rosie gains power and strength by becoming a "classical" dancer. He reminds Spivak that while she has chosen to become a "guide for the elite sections of the western academy", Narayan's strength has been "in being rooted in his community".

One of the few criticisms that one can imagine is that this book shows a willingness to sacrifice criticism for the sake of solidarity (Said himself has warned us against solidarity before criticism). The essays would have been much richer had they mentioned that there is a tiring circularity in Said, that there is a rigid provincialism in some of Narayan's work, and that the popularity of global English has eclipsed postcolonial writings in vernaculars. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suggest that these omissions are anyhow nearly as important as the achievement of the book. This book is a landmark in Bangladeshi literary criticism and will continue to be essential and inspirational for years to come. This is a book that should be read not only by professionals and students, people who are working in the same field, but also by anyone who takes an interest in literature.

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Hasan Al Zayed is senior lecturer in English at East West University.

## At a glance

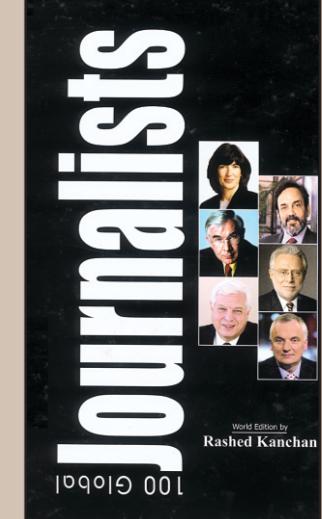


Shwadhinota Shongrame  
Dhaka Bishwabidyaloy  
Rafiqul Islam  
Oijijhya

The political traditions set in Bangladesh by Dhaka University promise to be enduring. And yet for the heritage it inaugurated in the Pakistani days, the nation's premier institution of higher learning has paid a huge price. This work is a journey back to a time when the young died in droves at the hands of a bloodthirsty foreign occupation army.

100 Global Journalists  
World Edition  
Rashed Kanchan  
Swiss Origin  
New York, London, Paris, Dhaka

Rashed Kanchan is a well-known newscaster in Bangladesh. This book, from that perspective, is a handy little possession if you are looking for the stories behind the lives of the journalists he writes about. Most of them are television personalities, with of course some print media people thrown in. An enjoyable work, this.



Memories of My Melancholy Whores  
Gabriel Garcia Marquez  
Jonathan Cape

It is a strange book, chronicling as it does the desires and sexual gratifications of a news reporter in his nineties. It is a night of mad love, so we are told, with a virgin adolescent that the old man wishes to spend. The tale is not as gripping as earlier Marquez stories, but you just might want to amuse yourself by reading about the cravings that come with creeping senility.



IN THE LINE OF FIRE  
A Memoir  
Pervez Musharraf  
Free Press,  
London, New York,  
Sydney

In The Line of Fire  
A Memoir  
Pervez Musharraf  
Free Press,  
London, New York,  
Sydney

These memoirs of Pakistan's fourth military leader should make interesting reading, especially for the praises he heaps on himself. It is like any other self-adulatory book by a serving dictator, turning untruths into what they should not be. Remember Ayub Khan and the pretty controversial book he produced in the 1960s?



PERVEZ MUSHARRAF

## Of nihilism, dealing in cars and driving old taxis

**Karim Waheed** reads of objects crafted in beauty and speaks of the experience

For generations the artisans of Dhamrai have been making exquisite metal objects, ranging from ornate sculptures to everyday objects like pots and pans using different techniques. Only a few publications on some of the older pieces found throughout Bangladesh are available in the market. Books on the art itself or the Dhamrai community are even fewer in number.

Shawn Akand's *Dhamrai Janapader Kansha-Pitol Shilpo* (a study on bronze and brass works of Dhamrai) is a sincere look at the craft, down to the nitty gritty. What makes this book a potentially must-have is the history of the locale and the community, an analysis of the market, current state and evaluation of the metal craft, informal conversations with the artisans and more.

Akand, an artist, tries to clarify his raison d'être for taking up this initiative in the preface. He admits that he was not infatuated with the metal craft of Dhamrai. Hence there was no bias, which might have made the book a soft-best on the imminent extinction of the art. The publication was not done for or on behalf of some organisation; neither does it facilitate in earning him a prestigious degree from some institution. Coming from a family that has strong ties with folk art (Nakshi kantha, in this case), Akand says that he just wanted to bring to light an honest picture of Dhamrai and its community of artisans.

The book starts off with a geographic and historic overview of Dhamrai. Akand introduces quotes and excerpts from published works by noted historians and archaeologists as well as popular local myths. Among them, the possibility of the name 'Dhamrai' originating from 'Dharmarajika' is quite intriguing. The Ashoka pillar at Mokomtolar Mazaar in Dhamrai has given archaeologists reason to speculate that of the 84, 000 'Dharmarajika' (monastery) founded by Ashoka

throughout his empire, one might have been in the locality now known as Dhamrai.

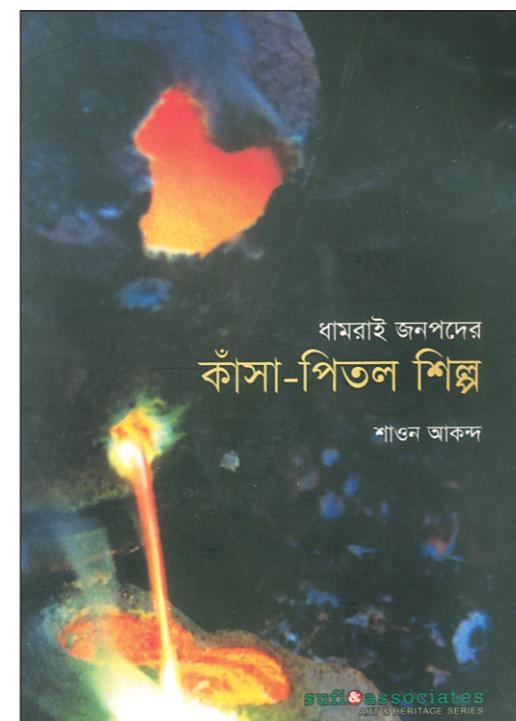
The second chapter examines the use of metals native and ore in the region through the centuries. Artefacts made of copper and copper alloys found at 'Harishchandra Rajar Dhibi' in Savar, close to Dhamrai, dating back to 7-8th century ACE indicates that the use of metals in the region is nothing new.

Akand examines the different methods used in metal casting. Artisans working with brass and bell metal apply techniques, including 'Cire-Perdue' or 'Lost Wax', 'Clay Casting', 'Sand Casting' and 'Hammering'. Engraving and repair work, locally known as 'Nalok-er Kaaj' are also common in the vicinity.

According to Akand, it can be speculated that use of 'Lost Wax' method among the local artisans started and flourished between 800 and 1100 ACE. However, in recent times (post-liberation war), local artisan Mosharraf Hossain (of Kayetpara) reintroduced this method to create sculptures made of brass and bell metal. A skilled potter of Kagajpara, Ananda Chandra Paul, assisted him. After his death in 1990, Hossain's wife Rasheda Mosharraf along with Ananda Chandra Paul and Gaurango Paul are continuing the legacy. The 'Lost Wax' method includes four stages – making a model with a mix of paraffin and wax (usually 10:3 ratio), moulding an outer layer for the model using clay, casting using brass and bell metal and finishing.

Akand addresses exploitation of the artisans directly and indirectly by local middlemen, traders in Dhaka and international art dealers in the fourth chapter. Usually the artisans work at factories where they are paid like day labourers. The 'Mohajon' or owners pay an artisan around Tk 70-80 every day.

Artworks like sculptures made in Dhamrai are often



Dhamrai Janapader Kansha-Pitol Shilpo  
Shawn Akand  
Sufi and Associates

sold at antique stores in Gulshan. According to Akand, these stores label these pieces as 'antiques' and often sell them to foreigners. An American art dealer purchased an artefact from Dhamrai for BDT 9000. She eventually sold the piece for USD 1500 (approximately BDT 90,000).

Marginalisation of the market for metal craft has also been discussed in the book. As plastic has become popular over the last few decades, metal utensils have become virtually undesirable to the masses.

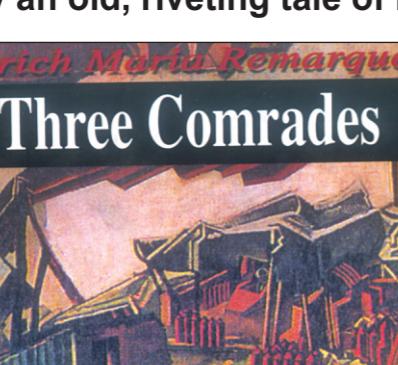
Akand had interviewed local artisans, including Abdul Hye, Phonibhusan Banik, Ananda Paul, Rabindranath Sarkar and others to zoom in on their plight, working conditions, their aspirations and current state of the craft itself. Details such as statistics on the workshops and artisans have also been provided.

The book also highlights local culture and festivities like 'Rathjatra', 'Ban-Durga Puja', 'Buraburir Mela', 'Chaitra Shangkranti' and 'Chadak Puja'.

Colour photographs of artisans at work, different methods of working with metals, reliefs, everyday items and utensils made of brass and bell metal and local festivals are also featured in the publication.

All in all, Dhamrai Janapader Kansha-Pitol Shilpo can be a good source of information to art and history enthusiasts, namely, anyone interested in our heritage of metal craft. However, visually the book could have been more attractive. The colour photographs, for instance could have been used throughout the book.

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Kareem Waheed is cultural reporter, The Daily Star.



Three Comrades  
Erich Maria Remarque  
One World Pub. Inc. Calcutta

comrades carry themselves through with remarkable unity, going to the extent of selling the auto repair shop that had been their main source of income. The relationship of the three friends is truly heartfelt. The story becomes unlike any love story one has read. Written with superb simplicity and directness, it becomes a heartbreaker.

Robert's two friends, Koster and Lenz, are

devoted to each other beyond words. Koster and Lenz are two young men who have given themselves to the world. Koster is the strong one, the muscular man who can keep bullies off the track. Lenz is the kind who stays with friends through thick and thin and is loving and warm. When Robert and Patricia fall in love they all celebrate the union as if all of them have found their loves. Their happiness is reflected in the beauty of love, suffering and camaraderie. The times were a challenge to life itself. And yet the three friends' dedication to each other went beyond all barriers. Their splendid comradeship and the spirit of self-sacrifice find constant and inspiring experiences.

Robert and his friends manage to make a living

dealing in cars and driving an old taxi. They live in a time when economic survival was getting tougher by the day. It is in this setting that Robert meets Patricia. The story becomes spellbinding when gentle Patricia enters his life and they discover the world of love, romance and sacrifice. Precisely when Robert is having his life illuminated with the light of love, readers are moved by the heart-breaking tale of Patricia as suddenly a fatal disease threatens her life. Robert is devastated and his friends join him as he tries with all his heart to touch Pat's life with a little sun.

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Tulip Chowdhury writes fiction and is a teacher.

## The inadequacy of state-centric security

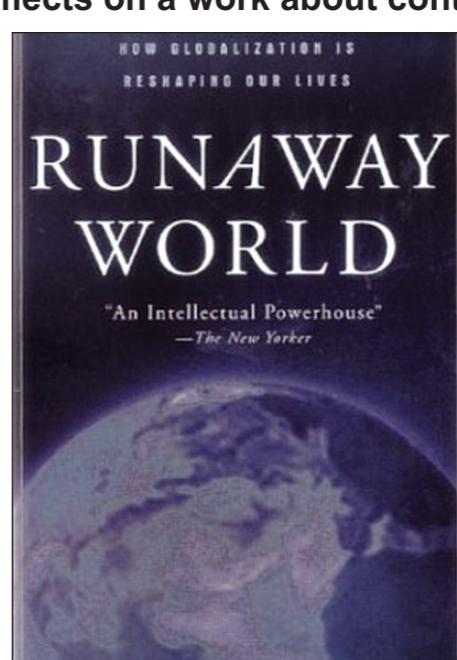
**Mohammad Afjal H. Khan** reflects on a work about contemporary issues

From the drawing room to the General Assembly of the UN, globalisation is a widely discussed subject. Anthony Giddens' *Runaway World* is an effort to analyse how globalisation is reshaping our lives. This book is carefully divided into five substantive chapters -- Globalisation, Risk, Tradition, Family and Democracy -- to explore the transforming impacts of globalisation. The structure is clarified at the preface so that the reader can realise the flow of the book with very little effort. Giddens, the former director of the London School of Economics, has observed events and actors from kaleidoscopic angles.

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Giddens clarifies the fact that fundamentalism is not limited specifically to Islam or generally to the religions. He points out in a bias-free manner that the militant group Al-Qaeda was actively supported by the US during the later stage of the Cold War as a means of anti-Soviet policy.

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However, after the Cold War neither the US nor the West showed much interest in Afghanistan and left the country in a mess. This book remarkably points out the main traits of 11/9 -- sophistication, planning, coordination and media coverage. Above all, the writer is understandably worried that the model of the 11/9 attack can be used by any terrorist or criminal groups. He satirises the military power of the US and claims that in an interconnected world security is no more primarily or mainly any state's affair. Carpet bombing in a territory can hardly solve the problem imposed by terrorism. The challenge of globalisation in the provision of security is that state-centric notions of security are becoming inadequate to combat threats in the present cumbersome and interconnected world. Giddens appears to be realistic and diplomatic in advocating the political means; for example, compromise, negotiation, and dealing with the problems that sparked insurgency in the first place, to resolve terrorism. He observes that the 'war against terrorism' will not be successful unless a resolution of the Israel-Palestine issue in particular and a change in American and Western policies in the Middle East in general are effected.

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Significantly, the book does not ignore the fact that globalisation in many ways advances the



Anthony Giddens  
Runaway World  
How Globalisation is Reshaping Our Lives  
Anthony Giddens  
Profile Books Ltd, London

interests of the US and the West. It has contributed to the creation of a world marked by the rich North and the poor South. Remarkably, the largest companies with an annual turnover higher than the GDP of many countries are in many ways dominating the sovereignty of states in their pursuit of benefit. Global inequality is notified as the sole cause of the

anti-globalisation movement. This book has accepted the truth of 'globalisation geared to the concern of America and the other rich nations'.

Giddens, an economist, observes that the corporations can dominate the legitimate power of democratic states where they can buy votes or contribute in the funding of the political parties. This is identified as one of the reasons why they are sometimes indifferent to the social and environmental consequences of their product or policy. Though Giddens considers the inequalities among nations and regions, he ignores the gap between the rich and the poor inside individual states. However, he is right to oppose the idea of comparing two or more states on the GDP yardstick. He argues that it would not give the correct reading unless price differences and cost of living are considered. This book recommends several pragmatic points to be confirmed before opening up a state's market. Promotion of education, emancipation of women, banking reforms and a stable investment climate are a few of them.

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Noticeably, this book does not identify Islam with a particular tradition; 'a dazzling variety of cultural resources' in Islam is admitted by the author. However, globalisation is transforming sexuality, marriage, relationships and, above all, the family. The divorce rate is increasing, mostly in western societies.

Giddens concludes by recommending structural changes to facilitate proper democracy. The inclusion of a few footnotes or endnotes could have made the book more accessible for the general reader. Overall, it is a substantive book for those interested in exploring the transforming effects of globalisation.

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Mohammad Af