

SHORT STORY

A Formless Dark

DHRUBO ESH  
(translated by Farhad Ahmed)

Hello, who goes there?  
It's Rifat Zayed.  
He is going in a rickshaw.  
From Chankhar Pul, to the Shahbagh area.  
Sutopa will be there at the Art Institute. In  
Mollah's canteen. Ah, Sutopa! Perhaps Purabi  
will be there too. Or maybe not. But no, Purabi  
will be there. She has this mysterious relation-  
ship with Sutopa. They are always together. Rifat  
has met with Sutopa twenty-one times in the  
last month. Out of which Purabi has been absent  
only three times.

On the traffic island in the middle of the road  
Rifat sees the *doyle* birds made of cement. One  
day they should just take flight and go away - fly  
away from this city. An upbeat Rifat silently  
gives the two birds permission to fly away. Go,  
winged ones, wherever you want to fly!  
The birds do not fly.

Rifat looks at the krishnachura trees and notes  
the sky's mood. Not actually of the sky, but of  
the clouds. The sky is overcast. So many clouds,  
like a painting. Clouds floating, gathering,  
drifting. Gray-coloured clouds, rain-laden.  
When will it rain? Any time now! And so many  
krishnachura flowers, all these amazingly red  
krishnachura flowers - it seems a surreal scene to  
Rifat. Such a gathering of gray-coloured  
clouds, is it - or isn't it?

Today Rifat's poems have been published in the  
daily morning newspaper. In the literature page,  
titled 'A Few of Rifat Zayed's Poems.' Great care  
has been taken in publishing them, accompa-  
nied with drawings done by Hasan Habib. And  
so Rifat today is in a rare mood! Any and all  
scenes seem surreal to him today! Or even half-  
ghostly, unearthly.

Has Sutopa seen the morning paper? Which  
paper does she keep? That particular newspaper  
- no, not likely. If she did, then she would have  
seen his poems. Would have read them. And  
would have mentioned it. She hasn't said  
anything. Sutopa has a mobile phone. Rifat had  
called her from a mobile phone shop, and had  
talked to her for a total of seven minutes. Out of  
which Sutopa had spent four minutes lecturing  
him on what he should do, that, in the context of  
the present socio-cultural conditions, what did  
he think he was doing? In short, why wasn't he  
getting a mobile phone? And what, Rifat had  
asked, would happen if he did? The price of a  
mobile phone had recently come down greatly,  
she said, one could manage it within twenty-two  
or twenty-three hundred takas - the whole set.  
Why wasn't Rifat aware of the fact that if he

owned a mobile phone then he could talk all  
night with her? All night? Yes, all night! But aside  
from this, why else should he get one? Weren't  
poets not supposed to have cell phones? And so  
it had gone on and on...

The rest of the three minutes they had spent  
talking on other topics. The essence of it was  
that Sutopa would be waiting at Molla's canteen.  
Inshita, Sutopa's sister, or related to her in some  
such way, studied at the Art Institute. She may  
also be there with Sutopa. So that would make it  
three of them: Sutopa, Purabi, and Inshita.  
Inshita had a lover, a well-known singer. Would  
he be also there, wondered Rifat. He was always  
hanging around at Mollah's canteen, when did  
the beggar find the time to sing?

Is Sutopa already there?  
If he could only show Sutopa this surreal scene...  
Red krishnachura, the gang of gray clouds...  
Hardly has he finished the thought that the rain  
came down. Jhum, jhum, jhum, the rain  
suddenly slants down hard.

Of course it stands to reason that it would be  
sudden.  
Big drops of rain.  
Rifat gets wet.  
"Uncle, don't you have your plastic sheet?"  
The rickshawallah replies, "No."  
"Then stop! I don't want to get wet."  
There is a bus stop shelter right by the roadside.  
Rifat leaps down from the rickshaw. Scurries  
under the roof of the bus stop shed. Others have  
also taken refuge there. Rifat's rickshawallah too  
scrambles for cover.  
Rifat looks around.

On the other side of the road is the old  
racecourse, now a park, with its mausoleums of  
three national leaders. Getting wet - the trees in  
the park, the mausoleums. Getting wet too are  
the two cement birds. One can barely make  
them out from here.  
It is a pelting, driving rain.

It streams down from a desolate sky.  
The wind and the rain -- they are masters of the  
universe now.  
There is a crack of thunder, then a flash of  
lightning.  
The rain comes down even harder now.

It's raining cats and dogs -- that's what the  
English would say.  
A nasty phrase!  
And in Bengali?  
*Mushuldharay*, the rain, coming down in  
torrents...  
This phrase, too is no less ugly...The word  
'*mushul*' meant '*mugur*', or a cudgel.  
The rain, cudgeling the earth.

What would that be like, the rain falling like  
cudgels, like hammers? There was a song by Bob  
Marley - 'Got to have kaya now/ For the rain is  
falling...' which Pablo Rahi had translated it into  
Bengali: 'Hang loose and smoke ganja/Because  
it's raining...'

Oh Pablo, where are you now?  
Rifat has cigarettes in his pants pocket. A packet  
of Gold Leaf cigarettes. And a Ronson lighter.  
The lighter was in memory of an almost  
forgotten girl. She now lived in Wisconsin -- had  
married and left, was now the mother of a child.  
Children - two, in fact - born in the USA. Will  
they learn how to speak Bengali? Will she teach  
them?

Rifat draws out the cigarette packet and the  
lighter.  
The rain has not damaged the cigarette packet  
since it had been in his jeans pocket. Rifat  
extracts a cigarette and lights it. He draws in a  
lungful of smoke and thinks, that woman now in  
Wisconsin once liked to get wet in this kind of  
rain. That was a long time ago. She and Rifat.  
And Sutopa?  
Does she like to get wet in the rain? And Purabi?  
That girl too is interesting. Arunima Chanel  
Purabi. After being introduced to her Rifat had  
immediately thought of a wild duck - had  
thought of a village once upon a time and  
Arunima Chanel Purabi. Was this the same  
Arunima Chanel?

Purabi was in Statistics. Sutopa in the Bangla  
department.  
Again there's thunder, and a flash of lightning.  
And the rain, is it now coming down harder?  
Wasn't the rain's musical instrument the kettle-  
drum, the one used in wars in ancient times?  
Today, this city, Dhaka, is going to drown.  
Before the rain there had been a wan light. Not  
anymore. On every side there's now a late  
evening darkness. Even though it's not yet time  
for the Asar call to prayers. Or had it sounded,  
and Rifat hadn't heard it?  
Somebody else lights a cigarette.  
It is only now that Rifat sees the others -- those  
who have taken shelter in the bus stop shed. He  
glances at them cursorily: Ordinary people, off  
the street. Poor people, one could plainly see  
that. Besides Rifat, there are seven others. Two  
women. Sitting on the cement bench. Quietly.  
The others are talking. About the rain.  
"Its been quite some time since it rained like  
this."

"If I could only get my hands on this bitch of a  
rainy day..."  
"Why, what has the rain done to you?"  
"Done to me? Done to me, you say? The harm's  
been done to those who till the land -- could

anyone of them scatter any seeds today? This is  
not rain, this is Allah's curse!"  
"Curse it is, and here it comes again."  
Thunder, and then a streak of lightning!  
Rifat thinks about the two girls. Who are they?  
They were not 'good' girls. But then who are  
good girls? Are these two women really women?  
Or just bodies, for sale for fifty or a hundred  
takas? When it was after evening they stand with  
all the world's desolation inside them. Go  
around in rickshaws in designated areas.  
Whoever wants them, gets them. Rifat feels a  
vague kind of uneasiness. The two girls have  
started to talk to each other. But in low voices,  
and nothing of what they say can be overheard.  
And of course over and above it there is the  
sound of the rain. Rifat wonders, what is it they  
are talking about, is it about him? But no, there  
is no logic to his thinking such a thought, is  
there? No, there isn't. So, then?  
Rifat again turns back to the rain.  
Yes, today Dhaka is definitely going to drown.  
This rain is not going to easily go away.  
And over there Sutopa --

So Rifat, what do you do now?  
Should he walk in this rain? Walk all the way  
over to Mollah's canteen? Will Sutopa be  
impressed by it? In the last three months how  
impressed has she been by him? A lot? Some?  
The last time they had met was day before  
yesterday. Dhanmondi Road Number 2, at the  
Alliance Francaise, for half an hour at the  
Alliance's cafe. They each had a mug of coffee.  
And talked and chatted, after which Sutopa had  
said, "So what are you like?"  
"Not nice," Rifat had replied.  
"So then it's impossible."

"What's impossible?"  
"If you'd been nice," Sutopa had replied,  
"maybe I'd have married you."  
"Should I try?"  
"Try what?"  
"Try and see if I can be nice."  
"No use. I won't marry you."  
"Will Purabi?"  
"Purabi? No. Purabi is not going to marry some  
boy."

"Oh, so is she going to marry a girl?"  
Purabi had not been there then. It was one of the  
three times she hadn't been there. Rifat takes a  
drag of his cigarette.  
There's no smoke.  
Oh, the cigarette has gone out a long time back.  
A raindrop had put it out. Re-lighting this one  
again would not be the intelligent thing to do.  
Even if he did light it, smoking it would be  
useless. A waste. What else can he do?



Rifat takes out another cigarette and lights it.  
Isn't this rain going to stop today? How long has  
it been?  
Not less than half an hour.

It has rained this long!  
Come on, take a rest!  
It should be like a television program: We're  
going to take a small break and we'll be right  
back. If only it would stop for even five minutes.  
Mollah's canteen at the Art Institute is three  
minutes by rickshaw from this bus stop shed.  
But this rain - this cats-and-dogs-and-cudgel  
rain. Not going to stop anytime soon.  
A poem--can't one dream up one now?  
Jhum jhum jhum -- a poem about rain.  
Yes...No...Yes...No...Yes...No...This is the rhythm  
of the falling rain, it seems to Rifat. Seems not  
rain, but simply foul weather. Tomorrow there  
will be photos of this storm in the newspapers.  
It'll be all over the news on television channels.  
The water-logged city of Dhaka, its inhabitants  
the victims of rainwaters. No government has  
yet taken any steps to relieve the people of  
waterlogging. A poem comes to Rifat's head:  
*Rain rain mayuri dances...*

A line of poetry. Not the peacock, not the bird  
mayuri! No, the 'mayuri' here is the actress  
Mayuri. The Bengali movie actress Mayuri. Let's  
envision the scene then: in this torrential rain  
Mayuri is dancing. A blue rain, a white Mayuri.  
She is wearing a short white dress because her  
'character' demands it. And in this rain her dress  
is soaked through. A very wet Mayuri is doing a  
frenzied dance. No matter how fearful the  
image, can't a poem be written about it?  
Sure! There's no bar against it.  
*Rain rain Mayuri dances...*  
What should be the next line?  
Rifat thinks about it. *Rain, rain, rain, rain...*  
Behind him one of the women laughs.  
Rifat hears the laugh, and quickly returns to  
reality.  
It seems as if all the chatter among the people

who have taken shelter in the bus stop has come  
to a stop. Nobody is saying anything. The only  
sound is that of the rain. But now, the woman's  
laughter. Low but clear. The girl says, while still  
laughing: "You're blind, you unfortunate bitch."  
Did the other girl laugh too on hearing it?

Why?  
Blind? Who is blind? What blind are they  
laughing about?  
Rifat turns around. As far as he can make out in  
the gloom of the shed, there are two young  
women wearing shalwar kameez. A tiredness  
about them, a fatigue not erased by the bright  
lipstick or the powdered cheeks. The girl in the  
green shalwar-kameez, she has tied a red ribbon  
in her hair. A red-ribbon flower. This girl is  
looking at Rifat. Looking at him and laughing.  
Looking? At Rifat?  
Rifat's blood goes cold. In this gloom, no matter  
how little can be seen in this darkness, yet she  
cannot see it. She has turned towards him, in his  
direction. Has turned towards him.  
She cannot see, because she's blind.  
Rifat can see the white irises of her blind eyes.  
An empty white.

Can see it plainly even in this rain-heavy,  
untimely darkness.  
Rifat freezes. A keenly unpleasant sensation  
floods throughout his entire body.  
Blood races to every corpuscle. Is it distaste, or is  
it anger, or what is it?  
A blind girl, one who can't see...  
A blind girl, whom nobody sees...  
Who buys this girl?  
Who?  
Are they blind, too?  
Can one see their faces in the dark?  
Or in the ugly yellow glare of streetlights?  
Is it faces they see? What do they see?

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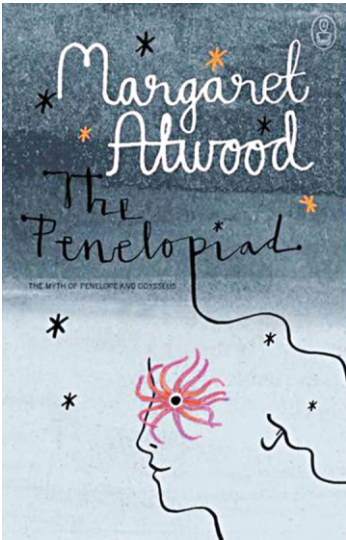
## (Un)weaving a Tale: Reading *Penelopiad*

RADHA CHAKRAVARTY

A man smitten by wanderlust,  
who is also a compulsive  
adventurer, a consummate  
liar, and a wily strategist with  
extraordinary survival skills. A  
woman who turns her long wait for  
her absent husband into a lesson in  
endurance, human resource  
management and ingenuous  
dissimulation. A host of suitors  
vying for the (unavailable) heroine's  
hand. The devastatingly seductive  
"other" woman, for whom  
thousands of men are ready to lay  
down their lives. Twelve serving  
women caught in a web of palace  
intrigue. Clashing egos, flashing  
swords, mangled bodies and tangled  
relationships. Rumour, scandal,  
blood, sex, violence and betrayal.  
The perfect formula, we could say,  
for an all-time bestseller. Homer  
certainly knew the secret of telling a  
good story, for since its inception  
many centuries ago, *The Odyssey* has  
always been in the news.

What happens when the same  
story is retold by a woman,  
especially when that woman  
happens to be Canadian writer  
Margaret Atwood, also a storyteller  
with a miraculous success graph  
and a penchant for staying in the  
news? What happens to the story  
when its central figure is no longer  
Odysseus but his long-suffering wife  
Penelope, that legendary icon of  
female constancy? Or make this  
twenty-first century remake comes  
interlaced with a chorus line  
comprising the plaintive voices of  
the twelve maids hanged for  
conspiracy after Odysseus' return?  
For Atwood's *Penelopiad* (Penguin  
Books India; 2005) sets out to  
explore two questions that persist  
after we have read the *Odyssey*:  
"what led to the hanging of the  
maids, and what was Penelope  
really up to?" (xiv). The possible  
answers lie very often in sources  
beyond the Homeric text, Atwood  
variables, highlighting the oral, locally  
variable versions of the myth that  
she also draws upon.

Myth, by some accounts, offers  
us ways of encoding and interpret-  
ing our experience of the world. The  
world that Atwood's narrative  
presents to us is simultaneously  
archaic and modern, remote yet  
heartbreakingly close to home.  
Atwood has acquired a global  
reputation as novelist, short story  
writer and poet, not to mention her



feminist and humanitarian leanings.  
All these facets of her genius are in  
evidence in this slim and deceptively  
light-sounding work, which  
brilliantly offsets the realm of myth  
against the cultural icons of today.

Irony is the primary mode of this  
gendered retelling of the time-  
honoured legend of Odysseus and  
Penelope. Seen through Penelope's  
eyes, the politics of the old-time  
world strike us as primitive yet  
recognizable. The world she  
inhabits is starkly patriarchal,  
double standards nowhere more  
visible than in the contrast between  
Odysseus's compulsive womanizing  
during his travels, and the  
constancy he enjoins upon his wife.  
Odysseus' possessiveness about  
Penelope is impressed upon her  
mind through the threatening  
presence of the bedpost carved from  
a growing tree in their bedroom, a  
secret never to be shared by her with  
any other man. "If the word got  
around about this post, said  
Odysseus in a mock-sinister  
manner, he would know I'd been  
sleeping with some other man, and  
then ... he would be very cross  
indeed, and he would have to chop  
me into little pieces with his sword  
or hang me from the roof beam"  
(59). Penelope pretends to be afraid,  
but as she confesses to the reader,  
"Actually, I really was frightened."  
Many years later, when Odysseus  
ruthlessly slaughters her suitors and  
disposes with her twelve maids, we  
realize that Penelope's fears were  
not unfounded.

In this men's world, women are  
sometimes allies, and sometimes  
their own worst enemies. As the  
young Penelope watches from the  
sidelines while prospective grooms

compete for her hand, Helen of  
Troy, her cousin and arch-rival,  
crushes her with a deliberately  
cutting remark: "She and Odysseus  
are two of a kind. They both have  
such short legs" (27). Painfully  
aware of her own plainness,  
Penelope laments: "Why is it that  
really beautiful people think  
everyone else in the world exists  
merely for their amusement?" (27).  
Even after both women have joined  
the dead in Hades, nothing really  
changes: Penelope watches with  
envy as Helen's spirit sweeps by,  
trailed by a host of admiring (male)  
spirits. In Atwood's mythical  
universe everyone, god or hero, has  
feet of clay.

During her struggle to survive her  
years of loneliness, Penelope  
emerges as a woman of ingenuity  
and great presence of mind, as she  
manages palace affairs, handles her  
difficult son Telemachus, and holds  
her suitors at bay. Her most  
triumphant achievement of course  
is the shroud she supposedly weaves  
for her father-in-law, unraveling it at  
night to postpone her decision to  
remarry. But her closest allies, the  
twelve maids, hint at a less innocent  
version of Penelope's story. The  
maids provide an earthy counter-  
point to the high-flown rhetoric of  
heroic myth, hinting at less-than-  
glorious secrets and constantly  
keeping in view the way they are  
exploited by those in power. There  
is much in *The Penelopiad* that is vivid  
and memorable. But the image that  
persists long after we have closed  
this delightful yet deeply disturbing  
book is of the row of hanged  
women, their legs twitching in a  
grotesque travesty of the modern-  
day chorus line, to the end  
protesting their fate:

*we are the maids  
the ones you killed  
the ones you failed*

*we danced in air  
our bare feet twitched  
it was not fair*

The maids, Atwood tells us,  
represent a "tribute" to the choruses  
of Greek drama, whose role it was to  
burlesque the main action; but the  
line dividing them from now, *The  
Penelopiad* suggests, is really very  
thin.

Radha Chakravarty is an academic and translator.

## Dhaka Book Launches: On Purabi Basu and sundry matters

KHADEMUL ISLAM

Book launches are getting to be quite the thing in  
Dhaka these days. I think Niaz Zaman gave the  
process a boost after founding *writers.ink*, her  
publishing concern, and realized that publishing books  
is only half the game. The other half is buzz, baby! -- pushing  
the product, publicity, getting people to know what's been  
published, and what better way than to do book launches.  
Smart move!

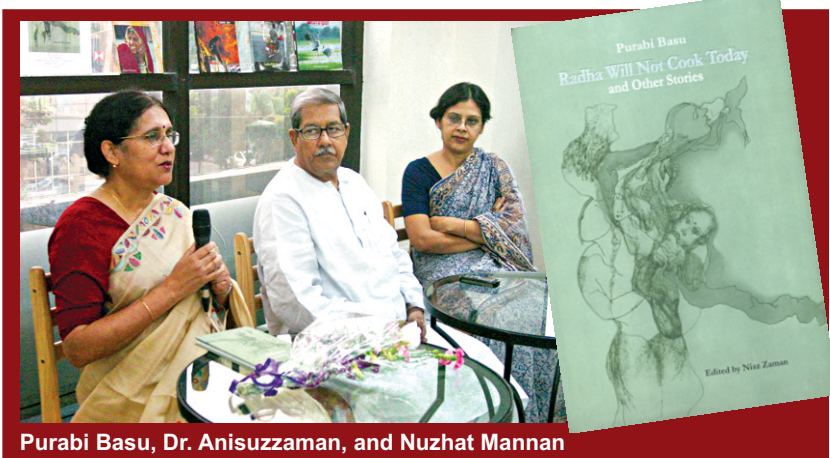
The launch of Rumana Siddique's poetry volume *The Five  
Faces of Eve* I remember well since it was held on the roof of  
Words 'n Pages in Gulshan, where in between the discourses  
the mosquitoes feasted on our legs. But then, this is Dhaka,  
what do you do? There have been a few more book  
launches since then, not all of  
which I could attend but what  
can I say -- I'm busy, man, I  
can't make it to every darn  
cricket match! The memorable  
do was at the Bengal Gallery of  
Kaiser Haq's *Published in the  
Streets of Dhaka: Collected  
Poems 1966-2006* -- with  
standing room only. After that  
there was Rubana's launch of  
*www.monsoonletters.com*, the  
website she's set up with the  
help of energetic youngsters,  
which is already a formidable  
database of Bangladeshi writers. She threw her bash at the  
Sheraton, and we tucked into dinner afterwards. I sat beside  
Tahmima Anam, then in town to talk about her *A Golden Age*,  
and she told me a funny story about Andrew Motion,  
England's poet laureate, whose creative writing class she  
took and whose debt in the development of her writing she  
freely acknowledges.

So it was on the evening of July 17, under a lowering sky,  
that I found myself at the launching of the English transla-  
tions of Purabi Basu's Bangla stories, *Radha Will Not Cook  
Today and Other Stories*. At Neo Mendez's Omni bookstore at  
Genetic Plaza (Genetic, which mall developer dreamt that  
one up?) in Dhanmondi. It is generous of Neo to provide  
freely the use of his bookstore for such events. I'd been  
emailing back and forth with Purabi and Niaz Apa when the  
book was being finalized since I had translated two of her  
stories and they were in the book. I had not known Purabi  
when I had translated them, though when I asked around,  
Afsan Chowdhury had informed me that she was now living  
in the United States. She had been a scientist at BRAC. I had  
translated Purabi's stories because I'd liked them - in our  
noisy, overbearing age where every writer, poet and artist  
coasts by on freewheeling notions of what constitutes that  
debatable word called 'art', I was drawn to her stories  
because she was a writer whose elegant Bangla was  
deceptively simple and who lavished care on her construc-  
tions.

People were already there at Omni, among them the  
panel's chair, Dr. Anisuzzaman of Dhaka University's Bangla  
department, as well as the lead discussant Nuzhat Mannan of  
English department, Dhaka University. The last time I'd seen  
Dr. Anisuzzaman was at a party of Bengali writers and artists,  
chatting with two lady literateurs from West Bengal who had

come over for a poetry festival. I'm a huge fan of Dr.

Anisuzzaman's regular column *Bipul Prithibi* in Prothom  
Alo's literature page, where some months back he had  
effortlessly etched the funniest and the most affectionate  
portrait of poet Shakti Chattapadhyaya that I have ever read.  
Then Purabi came and we got acquainted. A very dignified  
lady, who had graciously brought me a copy of Updike's  
latest novel *The Terrorist*. I flipped through it, thinking of all  
these middle-aged white novelists trying to cash in on the  
'Osama' market these days -- I think they call it 'exploring the  
Muslim mind' for the benefit of the gullible folks in the West.  
A few months back Martin Amis, a writer I otherwise admire,  
published a short story in 'The New Yorker' magazine based



on the last hours of Mohammed Atta - the Atta of Twin  
Towers fame! Damn piece of garbage! As Ziauddin Sardar  
(whose *Desperately Seeking Paradise* should be compulsory  
reading for all thinking Muslims), recently penned in 'The  
Guardian' newspaper, we should wise up to these "litcons" --  
meaning literary neons, i.e., literary clones of Dick Cheney  
and Donald Rumsfeld!

Anyway, the room began to fill up and Niaz Apa kicked off  
the proceedings. Nuzhat, who had studied the  
book/translations very carefully, discussed the book. I don't  
remember exactly everything she said, but it was very  
intelligent stuff. She had done a good job at Rumana's book  
launch too. I zoned out a bit looking out the big picture  
window because every time I look at gray skies it reminds me  
of Shahid Quadri's poem *Brishti Brishti*. Mohiuddin Bhai of  
UPL came in. Neo slipped in quietly at the back. Some other  
translators also showed up. Suddenly Niaz Apa also asked me  
to say something, so I rattled on for some time about why I  
had done the translations and how much I had enjoyed  
doing it, and that it was a distinct pleasure finally meeting up  
with the author. I tried to keep it light, because I agree with  
Kaiser Haq that such events should be 'celebratory' affairs. At  
Rubana's website launch he was quite funny about it. "I have  
no idea," he declared, "what the hell is upload, or what is  
download." He told us she still writes with a pen, then gets  
them typed -- which I think in this day and age is grody to the  
max, but hey, different strokes for different folks! In the  
middle of all this Hasan Ferdous, Prothom Alo's regular New  
York columnist, schlepped in with a Bengali Big Apple  
probabshi contingent. There was the writer Selina Hossain,  
there was Jyotiprakash Dutta, Purabi's husband, who's a  
well-known writer in his own right. Dr. Anisuzzaman then  
got up and gave his overview of things, mentioning the fact

that her training as a scientist seeped into her writings and  
made them unusual as far as Bengali fiction was concerned.  
The whole formal operation was then rounded up with  
Purabi thanking all of us translators and writers.ink.

Then we milled around for the tea and cakes and biscuits.  
I caught up with Neo, since I wanted to know about Thomas  
Ansell, an Englishman who had washed up on these shores  
and had written several volumes of poetry, among which  
were sonnets that I was interested in. This mingling and  
chatting is the best thing at these launches. Ferdous Hasan  
came up and introduced himself, and I was dismayed to see  
the amount of hair he was carrying on his head. While every  
time I look at the mirror...but ah, let us not go there, dear  
readers, this here is supposed to be a 'celebratory' article, not  
a disquisition on the ravages of Time.

This same after-discussion chatting and mingling was fun  
at the launch (belated, but done at Niaz Apa's insistence) of  
Fakrul Alam's *South Asian Writers in English* in the DLB  
series on July 28. Nearly everybody solemnly nodded their  
heads and agreed that it was a really solid piece of work.  
Except for Kaiser Haq, who again distributed light and  
laughter, while Radha Chakravarty told us about the  
discipline involved in writing such pieces. Then it was tea  
time again. It was good to meet up with Nazrul Bhai of  
Sociology, Dhaka University, whom I hadn't seen in some  
time -- still slim, wearing a black RAB shirt. There was  
Perween Apa of Islamic History, Dhaka University, whose  
book launching is on the 8<sup>th</sup> -- *Sultans and Mosques: Early  
Islamic Architecture in Bangladesh*. There was Shahid Alam,  
'GM' to his buddies. There were others -- Shahina Rahman of  
Academic Press with whom I discussed book publication in  
Dhaka, and Shamsul Alam, of Southern Oregon University  
who's now teaching in Dhaka. He told me about Sadek, again  
of Sociology, DU, who's now in Sudan. Back in the '70s we all  
used to sit in a wet-crow-line in front of Pedro's to drink  
Sharif Miah's tea -- Jesus, it's that tea, that's what blew away  
the hair! Alam didn't have a lot of it either, I noticed. Cool!  
There were a lot of young people who came over to me and  
said hi -- they knew me from my Daily Star gig. Which also  
went some way in solacing me over the air thing!

As they say, it's amazing sometimes what you see when  
you get out of the house more often!

Khademul Islam is literary editor, The Daily Star.

### NOTICE

The Literature Page of The Daily Star will bring out a Special Eid  
issue of English translations of Bengali short stories. All translators, as  
well would-be-translators, all those who have a favourite Bengali story  
s/he thinks ought to be translated should submit their entries within the  
next two weeks.

We are looking for stories that depict contemporary life in Bangladesh,  
by younger, edgier authors who otherwise tend to be given short shrift  
in standard translation anthologies and collections. Lesser known short  
stories by our classical authors will also be considered. The length of  
the stories can extend to 3000-3500 words, but translators should be  
aware that it is extremely taxing to translate stories beyond that length.  
However, allowances will be made for outstanding efforts.  
The translations, along with a copy of the Bangla original (if a  
photostat, then the reproduction should be clear and legible) should be  
sent to:

The Literary Editor, The Daily Star, 19 Karwan Bazar, Dhaka-1215  
Email: starliterature@thedailystar.net

Entries should be clearly marked "For Translation Eid Special."