

The life of a man of commitment

Junaidul Haque reflects on the dramatic career of an intellectual

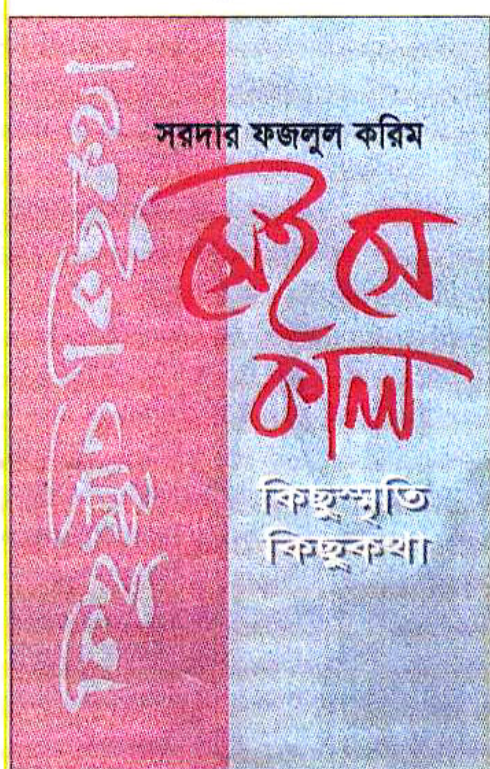
SARDAR Fazlul Karim is one of our most revered icons. He has been one of Dhaka University's finest products but a product with a difference. Born in 1925 in Barisal of lower middle class parents, this outstanding student and teacher has been a simple, humble and wise person all his life, dreaming of a state for the people and by the people and facing great suffering with ease and no complaint. Can we imagine that he spent almost the full Pakistan period in jail, this soft-spoken, frail, little man of high ideals? No wonder a library assistant of the Dhaka University had remarked that he was a 'dangerous' man, leaving his lecturer's job at twenty four and returning to the university in 1972, only after Pakistan broke up. It may be remembered that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and national professor Abdur Razzak brought him back to Dhaka University immediately after independence while Ayub Khan and Monem Khan had ensured that he could never return to his teaching job during the Pakistan period.

As one goes through these memoirs, one salutes him and his contemporaries for the great suffering they went through while struggling for the rights of the common man. They were the second generation of enlightened middle class young men of progressive thoughts coming out of Dhaka University. Sardar Fazlul Karim describes himself as a 'non-ambitious observer of life'. His memoirs are a bright and unforgettable account of the life lived by his generation.

Professor Karim stood second at the HSC examination. He came first in the first class in both his BA Honours and MA examinations in philosophy from Dhaka University. He became a lecturer in 1946 at the age of twenty-one. Involved in progressive politics as a student, he was an 'enemy' of the Pakistan government and in four phases spent almost the full twenty-four years of Pakistani rule in jail. He participated in the 58-day hunger strike of political prisoners demanding human treatment. He was elected a member of the Pakistan constituent assembly while in prison.

Sardar Fazlul Karim has written scholarly original books on philosophy, the best among them being his 'Darshankosh'. He has translated Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau and Engels for the benefit of Bangladeshi students, teachers and general readers. His memoirs are dedicated to 'Deathless Nazma'. He is referring to Prof. Nazma Jesmin Choudhury, wife of Prof. Serajul Islam Choudhury. She died of cancer in 1989 and was like a younger sister to him. The memoirs are in fact based on lectures arranged in her memory by the Modern Languages Institute of Dhaka University.

Sardar Fazlul Karim is always humble. At the beginning of his book he declares himself ordinary, weak, unfit and poor. He also declares that although people live in death he does not recognise death. He likes the concept of a martyr, a 'shaheed'.



Shel Shey Kaal
Kichhu Smriti Kichhu Kotha
Sardar Fazlul Karim
Papyrus

A shaheed is one who sacrifices his or her life in the struggle to create the human society of our dreams. Prof. Nazma Jesmin Choudhury was such a shaheed. He once raised full-throated slogans in favour of a people's revolution. What happened to the revolution? Has it come? He feels that it has come. We are living in a revolution. We should not despair, we should not be afraid of the devilish power of the enemy. Our strength lies in the fighting tradition of the oppressed people. We are heirs to a great tradition of struggle.

Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's Pather Dabi inspired him to dream of a revolution for the first time. He was in high school then. His friend Mozammel Haq had given him the book. Young Mozammel, a political activist then, died in the Cairo plane crash of 1965, when he was a famed journalist. The book greatly influenced the teenaged Sardar. Years later he learnt that the same book had inspired Jyoti Basu to be a revolutionary. Sardar Fazlul Karim was always an obedient child and even helped his father in agricultural work. He prayed a lot as a boy and even sounded the 'azan', the call to prayer. His parents were illiterate and very simple. They were

not supposed to send him to school. That they did so makes him feel grateful to them. His school teachers were committed, hard-working people. One of them, Lehaj Uddin Ahmed, was physically handicapped. He fought a great battle to live an honest life. This inspired the young Sardar a lot.

Sardar Fazlul Karim came to Dhaka to study IA. He entered the Govt. Intermediate College. Progressive students looked him up. They also zeroed in on Syed Nuruddin and Sanaul Haq. Sardar was more a nationalist than a communist then. He brought out wallpapers and had a good personal library. Friends borrowed books from him. Pearl Buck's The Good Earth also influenced him. His favourite teacher PC. Chakraborty was killed in a communal riot. Riots meant a few incidents of stabbing, quite a common occurrence in Dhaka at the time.

Sardar Fazlul Karim became a DU student in 1942. Why Dhaka and not Calcutta? Because Dhaka would be cheaper and his elder brother was known to many teachers. He studied English for a few days but shifted to philosophy because Haridas Bhattacharya's class lectures had attracted him. He would attend classes of other departments too. He passed his Honours in 1945 when the Second World War ended. TH Khan and Akhter Imam were Sardar's classmates. The 1943 famine influenced him a lot. The communists were very active during the Bengal famine. PC Joshi wrote a touching book, 'Who lives if Bengal dies?' Sardar read Socrates, Plato and Hegel in his room and travelled to remote villages with relief for the hungry.

Abdul Hashim led a communist group within the Muslim League. Sardar and his friends supported him in Dhaka. Munier Chowdhury also joined Sardar's group. Chowdhury taught English at DU then. He had a great sense of humour. He was a master speaker, a master debater. He had a bicycle. Chowdhury and Sardar were great friends and influenced each other deeply. Sardar nicknamed him 'King of Words'. Tajuddin Ahmed, Mohammad Toaha and Abdul Matin were dear friends of the Sardar. Pragati Lekha Sangha was established in Dhaka in 1938. Sardar wrote on Somen Chandra in one of the issues. He also translated Russian stories.

Sardar Fazlul Karim was not at all ambitious. He refused to go to London on a scholarship for the sake of his party. He became a lecturer in 1946. Pakistan came into being in 1947. Many brilliant teachers of Dhaka University left for India. Sardar left his teaching job in 1949 at the instruction of his party. His colleagues were shocked. Police went looking for him and his party advised him to go underground.

Sardar Fazlul Karim participated in the 1952 language movement. He attended both the meetings of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, whose comments angered the Dhaka students beyond measure. He describes his underground days and his long periods in jail in detail. He was a legend among com-

munists even as a young man. He was first arrested in 1949. He was in jail till 1955. Nobody seriously wanted to know how he had spent his days in confinement, in 12 feet by 8 feet rooms, sometimes under lock and key. He participated in the hunger strike of December 1949. All facilities given to political prisoners by the British government had been withdrawn by the Pakistan government. The prisoners wanted more humane treatment. They were kept in jail without trial for as long as the government wanted. Sardar entered Dhaka jail on the twentieth day of the hunger strike, when the jail authorities' inhuman treatment killed labour leader Shiben Roy. He joined the hunger strike immediately.

Sardar Fazlul Karim was released in 1955 by the United Front government. When he became an MCA, he noticed in the Karachi MP hostel that Pakistani politics started after midnight. He never attended such conspiratorial midnight meetings. Syed Azizul Haq alias Nanna Miah gave him a good compliment. 'Sardar, you are a dangerous person. While we run after power, power runs after you.' Pathans would call him 'The Sardar of the East', hinting at his little size. A few Pathans would say, 'He has wisdom.' Sardar spoke against the cessation of provincial autonomy in Pakistan. His election as a member of the assembly stirred both the wings of Pakistan. However, Washington didn't like a communist MCA. So they saw to it that he was again arrested during Ayub's martial law, this time from a plane which also carried Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib. In 1962 he was released under certain conditions.

In 1963 Sardar joined the translation section of the Bangla Academy. Communist-friendly Abu Zafar Shamsuddin was his colleague. From 1969 to September 7, 1971 he was in charge of the cultural section. On the latter date he was arrested by the Pakistan army. Earlier he had observed the mass upsurge of 1969 and the release of Bangabandhu from jail. 1971 stirred his soul. He attended office in 1971 only to save his family. Office meant talking about our liberation war and listening to Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. Freedom fighters set him free on December 17, 1971.

Sardar Fazlul Karim takes things easy. He can take all suffering in his stride. He can analyse difficult social changes with ease for his readers. In this work, he converses with readers. But he should have penned a more extensive autobiography for our sake, telling us about his difficult but beautiful journey 'spreading humanity and knowledge'. One salutes the little man's courage and sacrifice once again. He has shown us only the tip of the glacier, that is, his life. A fuller autobiography would be in order.

Junaidul Haque writes fiction and is in the travel business.

At a glance

**EMERGENCE
OF A NEW NATION
IN A MULTI-POLAR WORLD:
BANGLADESH**

Fourth Expanded Edition

**EMERGENCE OF A
NEW NATION IN
A MULTI-POLAR
WORLD:
BANGLADESH**

Mizanur Rahman Shelley

*Emergence of a New Nation
in a Multi-Polar World:
Bangladesh*
Mizanur Rahman Shelley
Academic Press and
Publishers Library

The book is the fourth expanded edition of Mizanur Rahman Shelley's earlier work. It explores the particular niche Bangladesh occupies in relation to the rest of the world and provides an insight into the difficulties a small country is confronted with in international relations. There is a fundamental scholarly approach the writer takes here.

Chhinno Papyrus
Taufiq Joardar
Ankur Prakashani

This is a work of intensity from a young poet. The poetry is largely romantic and deals with the relationship of man and woman. Waiting, separation, loneliness are all essential ingredients of the work here. The imagery employed is remarkable and gives signs of the rich promise Joardar holds for the future.



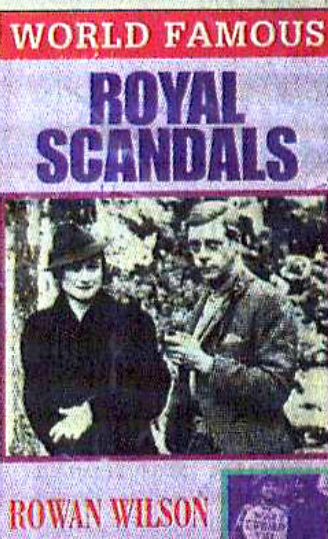
*Messenmedien in Bangladesh
und deren Pressefreiheit*
Monowara Begum Moni

*Messenmedien in Bangladesh
und deren Pressefreiheit*
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Publikations Service

The writer, formerly a journalist in Bangladesh, has prepared this little book on the nature and extent of press freedom in her native country. Now resident in Germany, she has opted to present the work in German, which might make matters a little hard for readers here. Even so, here it is.

World Famous Royal Scandals
Rowan Wilson
Parragon

For anyone interested in tales of royal peccadilloes, this is one book that will be enjoyed at leisure. In it you have such scandals as those involving Queen Victoria and John Brown and the ruckus that erupted in Serbia. Of course, there is the King and Mrs. Simpson. And annus horribilis? That is here as well.



Loneliness on e-mail

Z.A.M. Khairuzzaman recommends a collection of short stories to readers

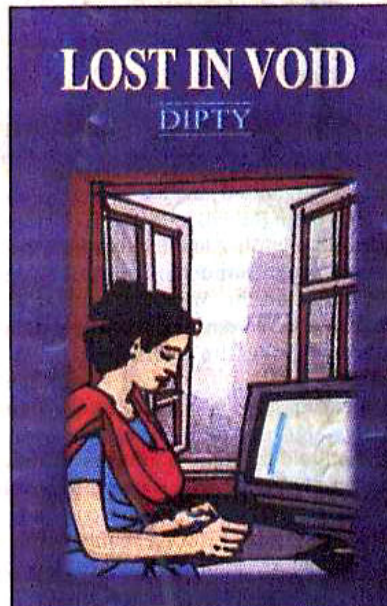
LOST IN VOID is the first work of fiction from Nazmun Nahar Dipty, a young writer. The book accommodates altogether five short stories. Being a teacher in an English medium school, Dipty has written the stories in English. She has depicted various aspects of life in the stories.

In *Lost In Void* one comes across a pen picture of the loneliness of a woman whose husband remains busy in his own work. She resorts to e-mail to get free of her lonely condition. She shares her daily experience with her husband's friend, covering such subjects as politics, economics, weather, indeed nearly everything under the sun. At one stage, Reema, the lonely woman, tends to get drawn towards Maher, her husband's friend, her e-mail pal. She loves to think that one day Maher will come to Dhaka, that more substance will come into the developing relationship. But suddenly Maher informs her from London about his marriage in the near future. On receipt of the news, Reema feels that the hopes and aspirations she has nurtured of late have suddenly been dashed into pieces. Not wanting pity, nor in a mood for self-pity, she gives Maher the false information that she now has a new boyfriend. She also tells him that most probably this is her last e-mail to him. It is then to the old loneliness that Reema returns. It is to a dull and drab life she goes back to. The lives of Reema and Maher thus run parallel, like railway tracks, never to converge, indeed away from each other.

The first story of *Lost In Void* is *Surma*. Five friends go on a visit to the tea gardens in Sylhet. In a lonely, isolated atmosphere, all of them unlock their minds, release their emotions as it were. They spend time on themselves, forgetting the family and social life they have so long been accustomed to. They discover themselves anew, a revelation of a truth which has been unknown to them during their entire period of friendship. They come to know about their joys and sorrows. All of

them seem to be happy outwardly but in reality they find an endless void inside themselves, until the trip to the tea gardens comes along. Dipty's stories have been published in an English language newspaper. Following an overwhelming response from readers, she compiled the stories in the form in which they now appear. Besides, the writer is aware that Bangladeshi young men and women living abroad are desirous of reading stories of their own land. 'Keeping them in mind, I published the book', says Dipty. Although the book is in English, it is easy to read because it comes in simple and lucid language. The book has the potential of earning wide popularity among readers with a working knowledge of English.

Z.A.M. Khairuzzaman is senior sub-editor, The Daily Star.



Lost in Void
Nazmun Nahar Dipty
Kakoli Prakashani

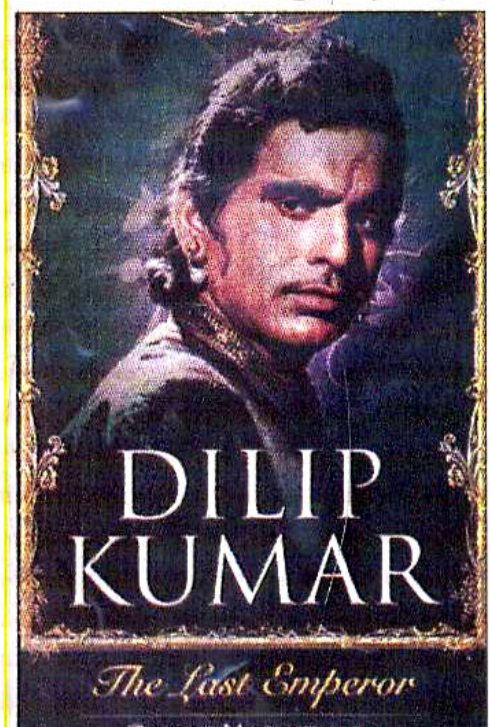
The making of a thespian

Syed Badrul Ahsan reads a biography and travels down memory lane

BACK in the mid-1990s, here in Dhaka, a group of Indian diplomatic wives waited on the lawn of the Indian high commissioner's residence to receive Dilip Kumar. They had set up food stalls on the occasion of their country's Republic Day, and incidentally the thespian happened to be in town. The women were thrilled that the actor would be before them and were quite taken up by the thought of the good conversation they would have with a man who had already morphed into a legend. Moments later, when Dilip Kumar appeared before them, the women lost, or so it appeared, their power of speech. Having done the usual namaste bit, they stared at him. It was the actor who broke the silence, in chaste Urdu, 'Aap log kiya mujhe dekhte-hi rahenge ya kuch khaane ko bhi denge (will you go on looking at me or will you give me something to eat)?' A burst of laughter greeted his words. Conversation, and not just from the women (wo)maning the food stalls, flowed.

It was vintage Dilip Kumar, soft-spoken, polite and therefore eminently respectable. It is that image which comes alive in this admiring biography of the actor. Sanjit Narwekar makes it obvious that Dilip is for him, as he has been for millions of people in the Indian subcontinent since the 1940s, a superman in the film industry. The sheer romance of his celluloid appeal has been the stuff of conversation for decades. The tragic roles he has played in a career that began in tortuous circumstances (because critics were only too ready to write his obituary every time any of his early movies were released) are even today cited as instances of purposeful acting. He has been put on the same pedestal by admirers as such western film men as Gregory Peck, Kirk Douglas, Richard Burton, Peter O'Toole and so many others. Indeed, had it been his fortune to be born in Britain or America, he would have shared the spaces of the halls of fame those others have always inhabited. Dilip Kumar, in effect, remains a point of reference where any dialogue on Indian cinema is concerned. There are the unforgettable movies, such as *Mughal-e-Azam*, which are pointed to as proof of his skills. His reputation as a tragedian on screen has endured through the ages.

And, to be sure, there are the reasons why tragedy has been Dilip's forte. In movies like *Madhumati*, *Aadmi*, *Daag*, *Devdas* and a host of others, he has been the very epitome of the suffering young man unable to resist the tide of gathering misfortune around him. And yet the stereotyped is



Dilip Kumar
The Last Emperor
Sanjit Narwekar
Rupa & Co.

not what he has been content with. In *Ram Aur Shyam*, where he plays a double role, that of twins, his ability to induce laughter through a comic, carefree attitude to life has remained unequalled. And do not forget that his acting in politically-oriented films like *Leader* have down the years upheld the high ideals of politics, particularly in the struggle of the common man against historical injustice. In all the movies that Dilip Kumar has been in, there has been a clear preponderance of the lover in his attitude to the society around him. He has loved his women on screen with the kind of quiet passion that is today a story of the past. In these times, the blatant demonstration of passion, with little of the subtle about it, is a truth Dilip Kumar and his generation would not look upon with equanimity. You only have to recall that intensely touching scene in *Mughal-e-Azam* where he caresses Madhubala's cheek with a feather. It is then, to the observant eye, the plainly organic that comes over Madhubala's face.

Narwekar recapitulates all these details, which a declining generation of ageing men and women have not quite forgotten, in this work. He does something more, which is to throw light on aspects of Dilip Kumar's personal life. That old tale of how he and Madhubala almost ended up getting married but did not, because the actress' father came in the way, is repeated here, together with the legal difficulties involving Madhubala's role in *Naya Daur*. It was Vyjanthimala who ended up playing the role. Of bigger importance is that the Naya Daur tale went all the way to court where, in a moment of emotional spontaneity, Dilip Kumar declaimed in the packed room on his feelings for Madhubala. 'I love this woman and shall love her till my dying day.' But the love, as subsequent events showed, did not last. Relations between the two turned towards the bitter, to a point where Madhubala's verbal message through a common friend to Dilip about her unending love for the thespian drew out a dismissive 'What love?' from Dilip. The actor would move on, at a point developing feelings for Vyjanthimala before marrying Saira

Banu. He was forty four. She was twenty two. Madhubala married Kishore Kumar, but there was always the sense that she had not got over her feelings for Dilip. She would die in 1969. The hole in her heart, a condition from her childhood, would finally do her in.

For all his devotion to Saira Banu, there was at least one moment when Dilip Kumar strayed. In 1982, unbeknownst to her, indeed to anyone else, he secretly married Asma Begum. As news reports began revealing the details of the marriage, Dilip went into denial mode. As Saira Banu was to report, 'In fact, he took the Koran and swore (that he had not married Asma)'. Nothing worked, though, and the actor quickly moved to dissolve the nuptial links with Asma Begum, of course on payment of the meher of Rs. 3,00,000. He pleaded with Saira for a second chance. 'Mujhse ghalti ho gayi. Kisse ghalti nahi hoti?' Saira Banu forgave him.

Narwekar's work is fundamentally a tribute to the versatility in Dilip Kumar. He straddled an era that produced the likes of Raj Kapoor and Dev Anand and yet in his performances on screen he convinced people he was a far better, far more involved actor than his contemporaries. His sense of originality has been remarkable. For the song *Madhuban Mein Radhika Naache Re*, he would insist on learning to play the sitar for weeks because he did not want someone else's hands to be passed off as his during the shooting of the scene. In later years, younger actors would, consciously or otherwise, try to emulate him. Most considered it an honour to work with him. Raj Babbar had the chance. And the same was true of Amitabh Bachchan.

The actor Dilip Kumar, born as Muhammad Yusuf Khan on 11 December 1922 in Peshawar, remains a formidable presence in the long historical canvas of Indian cinema. The old movies, with the affluence of the lyrics lispied by Dilip Kumar, promise, if nothing else does, to remind people that he will always matter.

Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star

The dilemma of secular man

Farida Shaikh reads a literary-political work and thinks of Fahrenheit 9/11

THE *Reluctant Fundamentalist* is what meets the eyes of a young native Pakistani when he intently looks at contemporary America. Similarly, in a juxtaposition of the situation, present day Pakistan appears like *Moth Smoke* to the same native who has lived in and loved America for so many years and in so many ways. There is a divide, and a difference and writing are the only bridge of explanation.

The design of the book cover tells the tale, in a fashion that rekindles the idea of beauty being in the eyes of the beholder. What America is like, therefore, comes through the eyes of the one who happens to be gazing.

Mohsin Hamid began writing his second novel during the summer of 2000 while working as a management consultant with a firm in New York. The narrative style of the novel is in dramatic monologue, delivered by a single person who is not the writer. The central feature is the revelation of the speaker's true character and temperament. Changez is the bearded Pakistani protagonist who speaks to an American listener in a critical moment: As for myself, I was clearly on the



The Reluctant Fundamentalist
Mohsin Hamid
Penguin/Viking

threshold of great change; only the final catalyst was required, and in my case that catalyst took the form of lunch.

And the young man is attempting to come to terms with the notion that he is a modern-day janissary serving the empire of American corporatism.

Then he asked, 'Have you heard of the janissaries?' 'No,' I said. 'They were Christian boys', he explained, 'captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army at that time the greatest army in the world. They were ferocious and utterly loyal; they had fought to erase their own civilization, so they had nothing else to turn to.'

Focus on the *Fundamentals* was the guiding principle drilled into the new recruits, meaning total concentration on the financial details...that determined an asset's value. Changez' devoted zeal to his job provided no niche for feelings of mercy towards the displaced workers. And a shift in this allegiance occurred soon enough and gave way to reluctance on the part of the foremost analyst of the company.

The writer's agent is puzzled by the protagonist's inner conflict: why does a secular and westernised Muslim man feel such tension with America? The

writer tells him there was deep resentment in much of the rest of the world towards the sole remaining superpower.

America's constant interference in the affairs of others, Vietnam, Korea, Straits of Taiwan, Middle East, Afghanistan, playing the central role in the conflicts, with intermittent periods of aid and sanctions, is intolerable... finance was a primary means by which the American Empire exercised its power.

Changez thinks it right to refuse participation in this project of domination, and becomes an ex-janissary, free of compulsion to evaluate a single part, rather to look at the entire American society.

To resolve the issue, the writer resigned himself to a process of writing that would mirror...the writer's first novel...

He leaves America, and from across the Atlantic in September... watched the World Trade Center fall in a place he still thought of as home.

In Manila, Changez sees the collapse of the twin towers of the New York World Trade Center on television. The symbolism of it all made him happy...

that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees.

Another layer of the narration is the love story centering on Erica, who resembles erotica, meaning erotic literature and art and minus the letters o, and t, is parallel to the main theme, necessary to awaken the erotic sensibilities for the protagonist's self-realisation; his willingly taking on the persona of Erica's past lover gives rise to the dual suffering, his own identity crisis and pushing Erica into deeper confusion about her past.

This is a book which I read to the end without interruption. I enjoyed reading the beautiful prose, the narration was free flowing, clear and cool water on a summer day. I re-read the beginning, the end and the middle sections of the book and found new meanings and thoughts. Maybe, soon, some film maker will write a screenplay based on the story and turn it into a movie comparable to and possibly more gripping and successful than *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

Farida Shaikh is a consultant on sociology management.