The continuing saga of the Mau Mau revolt

Shahid Alam studies a new work on Kenya's history

since the end of World War II, talks about S.M. Shamsul Alam to have undertaken the intent of white settlers in colonial the project that has resulted in Rethinking Kenya and Southern Rhodesia: that the Mau Mau in Colonial Kenya. whatever the devolution of powers by constitutional means, power should go to sion: A Presentist Approach to Mau Mau", them as a group rather than to the black the author poses the question, as much to majority. "Indeed to ensure that this was himself as to interested readers: "Why so," he explains in a 1972 article, "white write a book on Mau Mau so many years settlers sought to achieve federations of after the revolt?" He believes that "the the strong settler territory with its need to write and rewrite the history of immediate neighbors, among other Mau Mau has become even more urgent." reasons lest power be turned over to black He offers, as an example, the view of Africans in the neighbors and thus affect Michael Chege (2004) that scholars have by example the settler territories. In East yet to decide on the precise nature of the Africa the federation was to bring together revolt. Alam might have presented his settler-dominated Kenya with Uganda own instance in the book under review, and Tanganyika." However, the where he undertakes an exercise that federation idea faltered in East Africa draws rather heavily on post-modernist because of spirited resistance in Uganda writers for providing theoretical coverage and the outbreak of Mau Mau to the Mau Mau rebellion against English insurrection in Kenya in 1952. Now a new colonial rule, and beats the drum rather book, Rethinking the Mau Mau in heavily for Mau Mau exploits and that of Colonial Kenya, takes another look at the the movement's supreme military com-Mau Mau revolt, where the author aims to mander, Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi. explore two broad theses: that colonial While bringing up Michel Foucault, power and resistance to it are intertwined Antonio Gramsci, Ranajit Guha and with each other, and that, as a fallout from Partha Chatterjee to provide a theoretical such entanglement, both are transformed cover might appear to some as having in various ways.

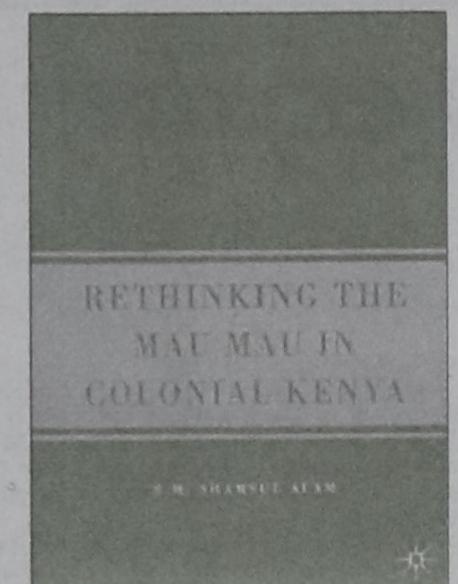
Bangladeshi by birth, and is an Associate and Kimathi in abashedly heroic, even Professor of Sociology at Southern Oregon University, Ashland, Oregon, USA. From 2000 to 2002, he was a Fulbright Senior Fellow at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, which partly explains the topical nature of the book under review, and he is currently on a same fellowship at Independent is worth quoting: "...the roots of the University, Bangladesh. In a nutshell, the Kikuyu ethnic group-led nationalist movement of the 1950s in Kenya resorted to violent resistance against British colonial rule. In response, the British Kenya administration proscribed the movement in 1950, and conducted a series of military loyalists. The Mau Mau insurrection spearheaded the independence movement, and Jomo Kenyatta, jailed as a Mau Mau leader in 1953, became prime minister of independent Kenya in 1963. This digest of a significant revolt against British colonial rule is blandly stated, but is difficult to expand in its various ramifications,

MMANUEL Wallerstein, in the except as a matter of agreeing to disagree, process of discussing accelerating or not even that, among scholars. And this L decolonisation of much of Africa factor has provided an opportunity for

In his final chapter, entitled "Conclubeen overdone, and, at times superfluous, The author, S.M. Shamsul Alam, is a his attempt at presenting the Mau Mau romantic, light might be hotly contested by other writers.

Before going to the beginning of the book, a particularly relevant (in the context of the current post-election violence in that country) conclusion of the author present predicament of Kenya are located within its colonial past." He hastens to qualify that such crisis of governance "is not unique to Kenya; it is, indeed, symptomatic of all postcolonial societies." In the context of Kenya, Alam pinpoints the primary reasons for this state of dysfuncoperations between 1952 and 1956, which tion as "how the war against colonialism resulted in the death of several thousand was fought and how, after the departure of Kikuyus, Europeans, and their African the colonial forces, the nation-state was

Here is Alam with his opening salvo: "The present book...aims to explain Mau Mau essentially as a revolt against colonial hegemony and an attempt to construct a counterhegemony. Furthermore, though the goal of the revolt was to end colonial rule in Kenya, it would be wrong to frame



Rethinking the Mau Mau in Colonial Kenya, S.M. Shamsul Alam Palgrave MacMillan

it in terms of a nationalist project propagated by Kenyatta, the nationalist leader who eventually became the first president of independent Kenya. And finally, though armed struggle was a part of the revolt, it was fought on myriad fronts --cultural, ideological and political; the Mau Mau rebels always had a clear-cut idea of what kind of postcolonial Kenya to state that, "Although the colonial they wanted to establish." Ah, but did they? Someone could carp, or be at pains to find from the book, other than the usual rhetoric one finds so often from revolutionary groups/organisations, or even established political parties. Others would hotly contest the author's relegation of Jomo Kenyatta to a secondary, even opportunistic, position (a recurring theme in the book) in Kenya's anticolonial

Alam briefly mentions that various forms of resistance, like the Griamma uprising of 1913-14, the Nandi revolt of 1895-1905, and the Kikuyu opposition between 1880-1900, preceded the Mau Mau (incidentally, as the author expounds in note 2 to Chapter 1, a word that is neither Kikuyu nor Swahili, but, curiously, an anagram of a warning term --- uma uma --- devised by children, and popularised by

trates on the Mau Mau, which he purports to analyse from dialectically linked and mutually reinforcing concerns of "the issue of autonomous subaltern consciousness, the question of structure, and, finally, resistance." He dwells at length on various aspects of Mau Mau consciousness but less so, though quite comprehensively, on structure, and more perfunctorily, on resistance.

The author's perception of Kenyatta sometimes appears confusing and selfcontradictory. In Chapter 5, "Mau Mau and the Critique of Nationalism", Alam, in his own words, "argues that Mau Mau stands outside of the mainstream nationalist movement led by the Kenya Africa Union (KAU) and Kenyatta. Furthermore (he) attempts to show that Kenyatta's relation as a nationalist leader with the Mau Mau movement was one of ambivalence and suspicion, if not outright hostility, and that Mau Mau should be viewed as revolt by itself outside of the conventional nationalist movement." Clearly, he places the Mau Mau on a loftier pedestal in relation to Kenyatta. On separate occasions he has mentioned that Kenyatta's relationship with the Mau Mau was dubious and contradictory, later reinforcing his contention with reference to Kenyatta's statements at different times, both before and after he became Kenya's chief executive, where he had denounced the Mau Mau as terrorists. Alam has gone so far as authorities tried to portray him as the leader of (the) Mau Mau, Kenyatta was reluctant to put his support behind it wholeheartedly for various reasons, mainly because the leadership of the Mau Mau came from a different class background than his...."

His assessment of Kenyatta also betrays his preference for armed revolutionary strategy to get rid of colonialism: "Kenyatta was inherently a conservative person whose overwhelming concern was stability and order, whereas revolutionary violent decolonization was the key strategy of Mau Mau." And, yet, in an interview with him, Anna Wamuryu Kabubi, alias Cinda Reri, a proud Mau Mau veteran, recalled that at an important KAU meeting in 1952, Kenyatta had publicly supported the Mau Mau. And, although Alam characterises Kenyatta's position regarding

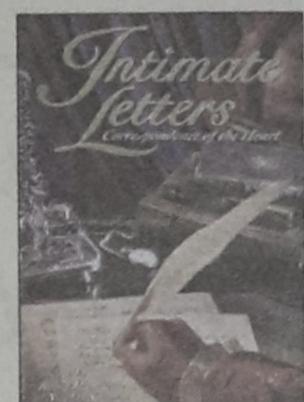
European newspapers!). But he concen- the Mau Mau as "opportunistic", he also observes that, "For Mau Mau, Kenyatta was a powerful symbol of resistance and a messiah." The issue is fascinating; he might have been both: an opportunist as well as a symbol and a messiah, or he might have been neither, but something else altogether. Such tantalising prospects of finding the ultimate truth about the Mau Mau and Kenyatta's relationship with it should keep scholars going for a

Alam includes a chapter (4), written with Margaret Gachihi, entitled "Women and Mau Mau", where he attempts to show that the forest fighters were not exclusively male, and that the women in the organisation were not merely passive participants engaged in support activities, but were, in several cases, active in armed combat. However, since the fighting arm had relatively fewer female combatants, Alam's observation is important in the context of the overall contribution of women: "Indeed, in the Mau Mau struggle the activities of the "passive wing" were as vital as those of the military wing for the survival of the revolt itself." And, in consonance with his admiration for Dedan Kimathi, he devotes an entire chapter (3, "Rebel Yell: The Field Marshal's Story") to him. As proof of the supreme military leader's perspicacity, Alam offers: "Though Kimathi was Kikuyu himself, he consistently sought to provide Mau Mau with a broad perspective on the anticolonialist struggle." And yet, in providing a clear indication of Kimathi's selfcontradiction, as well as Alam's going out on a limb to lionise him, the author refers to a letter where the supreme military leader seems to hint broadly at a role for white people in postcolonial Kenya.

Such intriguing information and interpretations make the book interesting. However, for a well-known American publisher, it contains more than its fair share of careless editing. Nonetheless, Rethinking the Mau Mau in Colonial Kenya is worth reading to gain an interesting perspective on a phenomenon that was militarily defeated over half a century ago, but continues to have a major impact on independent Kenya's politics and history.

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At a glance

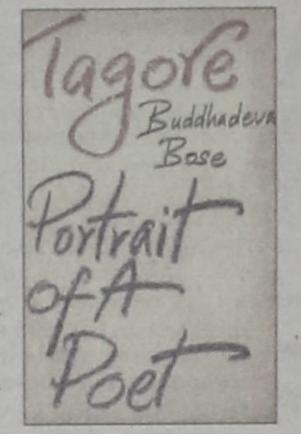


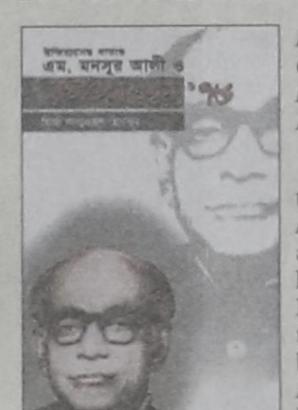
Intimate Letters Correspondence of the Heart Eds. Robin Hamilton, Nicolas Soames Marginalia Press, London

This happens to be a book for anyone who has been in love or for one who dreams of a world of passion. That missives of a romantic kind can be invigorating for the soul is a truth brought out by the diversity of letters, from an equally diverse array of individuals, in this compilation. The letters recreate a sense of old idealisms and unforgettable desires.

Tagore Portrait of A Poet Buddhadeva Bose Papyrus, Calcutta

An intellectual whose careful, purposeful staying away from the influence of the Bard is today part of history, Bose analyses in all his lucidity of style the life of Tagore and the ideals he lived by. Bose's English, always a point of reference for lovers of good prose, climbs to rather soaring heights here. A perfect read on a quiet afternoon.





Itihasher Dharaye M. Mansoor Ali O Roktakto November '75 Mirza Sakhawat Hossain Palal Prokashoni, Dhaka

Mansoor Ali remains one of the great tragic heroes in Bangladesh's history. Associated with the long movement for autonomy and then national freedom, he shared an abiding faith with Bangabandhu in the ability of politics to turn things around. In Mujibnagar, he became an indelible part of heritage. And then he was murdered in an annus horribilis.

Lalon Selected Lalon Songs Translation Haroonuzzaman Adorn Publication, Dhaka

In a very long time has emerged a satisfying collection of Lalon songs. Haroonuzzaman, an academic whose classroom teaching has combined with scholarship to lead him to newer explorations of literature, presents the mystic poet in new light with his rendition of the soul searing poetry here.

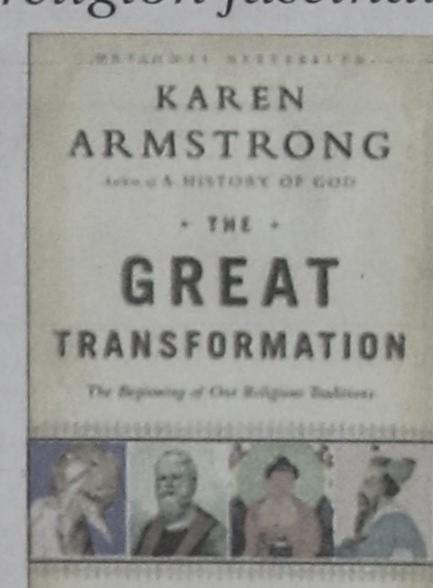


Spirituality that determined history's course

A new work on religion fascinates Farseem M. Mohammedy

N this very lucid narrative, Karen Armstrong, by now an accomplished writer on comparative religion with such works as A History of God, Islam: A Short History, The Bible, and important biographies of Muhammad and Buddha behind her, explains how and why people of varied environment and cultures took to developing the fundamental spirituality that shapes the world even today. They did it without even knowing each other, their actions were based on very different realities, but there is a surprising coherence in the core message they left for us. Armstrong writes in a chronological storytelling fashion how people from different regions went about developing the core spirituality defining the Axial Age. In the very first chapter (The Axial Peoples: 1600 to 900 BC), she tells the story of the journey of Aryans from the south Russian steppes into Northern India, how the terrain and the social realities gave rise to the Vedic sages' spirituality which would ultimately lead to the later very mature Upanishadic spirituality.

She speaks of people under China's Shang dynasty and their ritual behaviour that gave rise to latter day Chinese versions of the Axial Age spirituality. Also in the twelfth century BC, the eastern Mediterranean was engulfed in a crisis of mysterious origin (maybe climate driven). "Two of the Axial peoples emerged during the ensuing dark age. A new Greek civilization rose from the rubble of Mycenae, and a confederation of tribes called Israel appeared in the highlands of Canaan". These two peoples would give rise to Axial Age spirituality in two different regions of the world. Having introduced us to the



The Great Transformation The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions Karen Armstrong Vintage Canada

peoples who would ultimately shape the Axial Age, Armstrong tells us in wisdom common to the very Axial Age that she so admires: "(before the beginning of The Axial Age) ... All these traditions were characterized by a high level of anxiety. Before life on the steppes had been transformed by the violence of the cattle rustlers, Aryan religion had been peaceful and kindly, but the shock of this unprece-

to find inner peace in the face of turmoil.

detail how all this happened. Chapter 2 spirituality. In the final pages, she summachapter 7 (Concern for everybody: 450 to dimensions of the greater truth. 398 BC), chapter 8 (All is one: 400 to 300

Axial Age finally got under way after the visions were sometimes so radical that engaged in electrical engineering research.

to evolve a polarized, agonistic vision. In an end when Qin unified the warring messages and in turn created something Israel and India too, insecurity and the states. The Indian Axial Age occurred after which the Axial sages wanted to get rid of difficulties of maintaining a society in the disintegration of the Harappan civilinew, hostile territory introduced violence zation and ended with the Mauryan and aggressive imagery into the cult. But empire; the Greek transformation people cannot live indefinitely with this occurred between the Mycenaean kingdegree of tension. Ritual taught them to dom and the Macedonian empire. The ential religious scriptures (Rig Veda, look into the abyss, and realize that it was Axial sages had lived in societies that had Upanishads, Avesta, etc) were compiled. possible to face up to the impossible and been cut loose from their moorings. ... Among these books, we come to learn survive. In the ninth century (BC), the Even the Jews, who had suffered so horri-Greeks, the fourth of our Axial peoples, bly from the imperial adventures in the Testament part) when Jews were en masse

age; their experience showed how the Axial Age by the terrifying freedom that dramas of ritual helped the people of the had followed the destruction of their ancient world to deal creatively with homeland and the trauma of deportation historical catastrophe and despair". This is that severed their link with the past and forced them to start again. But by the end history of the different layers of the Bible very essence of this book understand- of the second century (BC), the world had ing the social context that gave rise to stabilized. In the empires that were estabtension, and then the use of rituals that lished after the Axial Age, the challenge helped to tackle the situation and going was to find a spirituality that affirmed the on to a gradual reinvention of spirituality new political unification". She ends her story of this human saga with mention of In subsequent chapters, Armstrong Jesus and Muhammad, who she thinks develops her narrative to describe in were the bearers of the true Axial Age great texts.

spiritual revolution of the Axial Age had and "were all latter-day flowerings of the of comparative religion and history. occurred against a backcloth of turmoil, original Axial Age". In retrospect, it is most

dented aggression had impelled Zoroaster collapse of the Zhou dynasty and came to later generations diluted some of the core in the first place.

Within the narrative, the author also explains the social, cultural and spiritual settings in which some of the most influabout the compilation of the Bible (Old were starting to emerge from their dark Middle East, had been propelled into their deported to Babylon, which is where the Old Testament is believed to have been finally written down after being orally transmitted for centuries.

> Armstrong does not explain the full the or how it was translated and the various versions seen now (for which please read Karen Armstrong's The Bible or Harold Bloom and David Rosenberg's The Book of J). However, the point is that on many occasions, it was contemporary emotions that influenced the compilation of the

If you are interested in the history of (Ritual: 900 to 800BC), chapter 3 (Kenosis: rises the importance of the Axial Age to the how some present day spirituality or 800 to 700 BC), chapter 4 (Knowledge: 700 present day context. The Axial sages religion evolved, then this book is for you. to 600 BC), chapter 5 (Suffering: 600 to 530 showed us path to overcome pain, fear, It speaks the saga of peoples as they try BC), chapter 6 (Empathy: 530 to 450 BC), suffering, turmoil and look for the inner making sense of their surroundings, from very ancient times until today. The book The Axial Age is a guiding beacon for has about 35 pages of notes providing BC), and chapter 9 (Empire: 300 to 220 BC) people to search for enlightenment. In original references, a glossary of imporslowly and in exquisite detail unveil the such a context, we can understand that tant terms and an extensive bibliography. Judaism, Christianity and Islam were With maps and illustrations, this book is a Chapter 10 is a summary of it all: "The logical responses to their respective times real page-turner for the true connoisseur

migration and conquest. ... in China, the shocking to see that those Axial Age The writer is a full-time bookworm and

The artist, in his black and white moments

Takir Hossain admires a photo collection

artist of Bangladesh. The photos atmosphere. have been snapped by Nasir Ali Mamun began photographing the renowned creative figures and helpedhim to build on the images. personalities of the world and his camera has captured many easily recognise Sultan's diverse outstanding moments in the lives of moments preserved for posterity in rare personalities.

preferred to be away from the crowd. varying moods with dexterity. The His creative intensity and passion innovations are highly thoughtabout art positioned him to being provoking and are projected by one of the outstanding painters in images that testify to his use of techour country. The legendary artist had nique and skill. Black and white a unique style of living and had an photography does more to evoke an approach to animals and birds emotion and freeze a moment in different from that of others. It is time than any other medium. The often said that he could understand subtle tones of grey, the strong their language. Nasir Ali Mamun has emphasis on the black and the softbeen to S.M. Sultan's Narail home a ness of the white make one look number of times, when the artist was much closer at the subject and comalive, with the objective of portraying position. That would not be possible him. He has captured Sultan in a with natural colours around. the floor, sharing with the villagers, black and white because of the stark at the tea garden, listening to contrasts and the sharp focus placed otherworldly music, contemplation, on the subject. Black and white playing a bamboo flute, smoking photography can also help portray a pot, drawing paintings, playing sitar, more personal point of view or add a strolling in the local market and what dash of nostalgia to the story of one not. These photographs disclose who was in love with stories all his many concealed and hitherto life. unrevealed aspects of Sultan's life. The artist had a great affection for pure scenic beauty, animals, birds, plants, rural people and disadvantaged community in our bucolic ambience. These are the prime subjects on his canvas. Sultan was a mysterious figure for us as long as he lived. It was only after his death that many aspects of his life have gradually been discovered.

In the village of Masimdia in Narail district, by the banks of the river Chitra, Sultan lived in a century-old, dilapidated house in the company of animals, birds, turtles and snakes. The painter had already abjured the idea of family. He cared for birds, animals and foliage. In the house where the master painter

TURU is a publication lived there was no electricity and relebrating a good number matters were compounded by a lack of outstanding images of SM of hygiene. And yet Sultan was fully Sultan (1923-1994), a legendary accustomed to being part of such an

Mamun, who spent ten years in artist in 1978. At first, he was surpursuit of this loner artist and prised to find him playing with a recorded his sufferings, struggle and cobra. Mamun was frightened and ecstasy. For me personally, could not take any photograph of photography is pleasing not only as a that rare moment. He gradually got matter of aesthetics but for the used to the environment, however, technical aspects of it as well: the and started to make use of the cirlens choice, focus, shutter and cumstances in his own way. The aperture selection, film rewind, et intricate atmosphere did not at all cetera. He is very sensitive about the create any disturbance for him. connection between subjects and Mamun loved Sultan's mysterious techniques. Mamun's themes are and bohemian life which certainly

Guru is a work in which one can black and white images. Mamun has Sultan was an introvert and depicted the subject's personality in

> Takir Hossain is a journalist and reviewer.



Guru Nasir Ali Mamun Neer and Sharanee Ltd

Friendship with its sense of belonging Tulip Chowdhury celebrates a bonding in a tale

AN cannot live alone. We live in Nan, coming from a humble family, is there at the scene of the horrific can count on in all kinds of troubles. On cannot be put down until the ending LV L our friends and relatives are

"The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship." It was William Blake who said it. And indeed, A Circle of Friends by The three girls are bound in a lasting Maeve Binchy is a testament to this friendship. Eve tries to establish her rights saying. The wordmaster not only weaves over family properties left by her mother. sizzling plots to keep the reader on toes but builds characters that seem to voice the very thoughts and dreams of that reader as well. While reading the book one has a feeling of spending time in the company of loving friends and wellwishers. The love and laughter inject joy into the heart as one reads the novel.

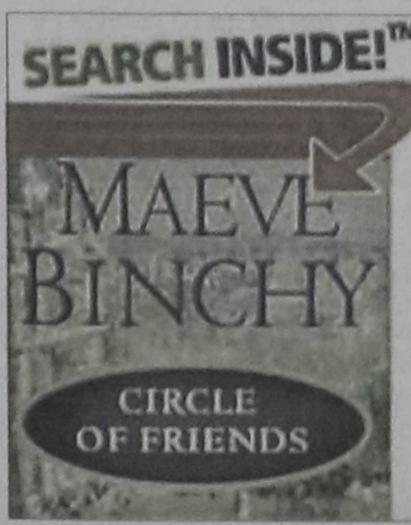
begins with the protagonists Benny Hogan and Eve Malone busy with their life in the quiet Irish countryside of Knockglen. Benny lives with her overprotective parents. Eve, an orphan, grows up in a convent with nuns. The beginning of the book focuses on Benny and Eve's school life in Knockglen but the story soon moves on to their school life in Dublin. Eve moves to Dublin but Benny's parents refuse to send her so far away from home.

Benny finds a new life as she journeys back and forth between Knockglen and Dublin. She meets new people in Dublin. There is Nan who is smart and ambitious. Benny is a rather large over-weight young woman who is self-conscious, whereas Frank Benny and Eve happened to be

perfect manners determined to make it to essential to our living a happy, peaceful the top rung of society. Eve is small and dark. She is tormented by her grandfather who had a long time back abandoned her mother for marrying into a lower class. In the process, she meets her cousin Heather and is very much drawn to her. However, her grandfather is there to stand as a barrier in any kind of reunion with the daughter of his abandoned child. Benny stands by her friend as Eve struggles to put her head up in society. Benny meets the handsome Jack Foley,

The opening chapter of the book the son of a local doctor. She falls in love with him on their first meeting. She has doubts that Jack can fall for a girl like her with somebody as beautiful as Nan hovering around. Eve has Aidan, a handsome young man and a goodhearted soul, beside her as she goes through the struggles of her life. On the other hand, Nan is determined to catch Simon Westward, the son of the squire. All the three girls have other friends who surround them in times of joy and sorrow. There is Sister Claire who is there like a mother for Eve. Sister Claire has all the warmth of her heart for Eve, who lost her mother at childbirth. There is Kitty who faces the tragic death of her teenage son

some consolation in her company. There heart of a saint. are Fonsie and Clodagh, two friends who dress like punks but have hearts of gold. Benny and Eve are two rare friends Fonsie and Clodagh can always count on. Bill Jack starts dating Benny. Benny is happy friends who thrive in the society of the ecstasy, sorrow, leisure, drawing on are always much easier to portray in Dunne and Johnny, two boys from Benny's school, are two friends that Benny



A Circle of Friends Maeve Binchy Dell Publishing

friends, Nan, Benny and Eve soon find facts and enjoy the story. themselves entangled in the riddles of life. and yet she is not certain if it is a passing phase or it is the real thing. She is sometimes confused and troubled. If Jack misses a date she forgives him easily when he gives out the reasons. She wants to believe that he really loves her. She wonders how she can be sure. There are friends to turn to when one is in trouble. But in matters of the heart? How does one find the truth? Things become complicated when Nan finds herself burdened with an unwanted pregnancy. However close the girls have been, Nan refuses to disclose the name of the father. There comes the sudden and sad demise of Benny's father. It throws Benny and her mother Isabelle into a deep void. They emerge out of their sad turn of fate with the help of the friends who stand by them. However, after Nan's pregnancy is confirmed and the father remains and contemporary in style. The novel has anonymous Benny and Eve realise that the reader completely absorbed with its human nature is very complex indeed. All characters that seem to be a circle of of a sudden Nan seems to become a friends for the reader as well. A highly stranger. The friends are threatened with recommended read. disparity. There the climax of the story comes with its breathtaking suspense. The Tulip Chowdhury is a teacher, poet and reader's interest is aroused. The book shortstory writer.

beautiful. She is a young woman with motorbike accident that kills Kitty's son. the other hand, the two boys respect her comes with a sublime blending in of all the Kitty decides to live with Eve as if to find for what she is: a gem of a girl with the characters. There are surprising twists and turns that make the reader stop and re-Life has its ups and downs. The three read the last pages to ascertain the existing

All these friends make up a circle of | diversity of moods and emotions --- Emotions, illusions and sensations small countryside of Knockglen. Their sharing of life unfolds into interesting stories that certainly justify the title of the book. The characters have real life antecedents. This is one of the savviest stories of people sharing life in a small community that holds life in its richest form. As always, there is a huge cast of characters in this Maeve Binchey novel. The plot twists get resolved at the end. The book carries the reader back and forth between Dublin and Knockglen with subplots to keep the reader wondering what will come next. The book's main emphasis is on friendship, loyalty and betrayal. The characters in the story are unpretentious, believable and strong and their presence seems to linger long after the novel ends. Its period details are fresh