

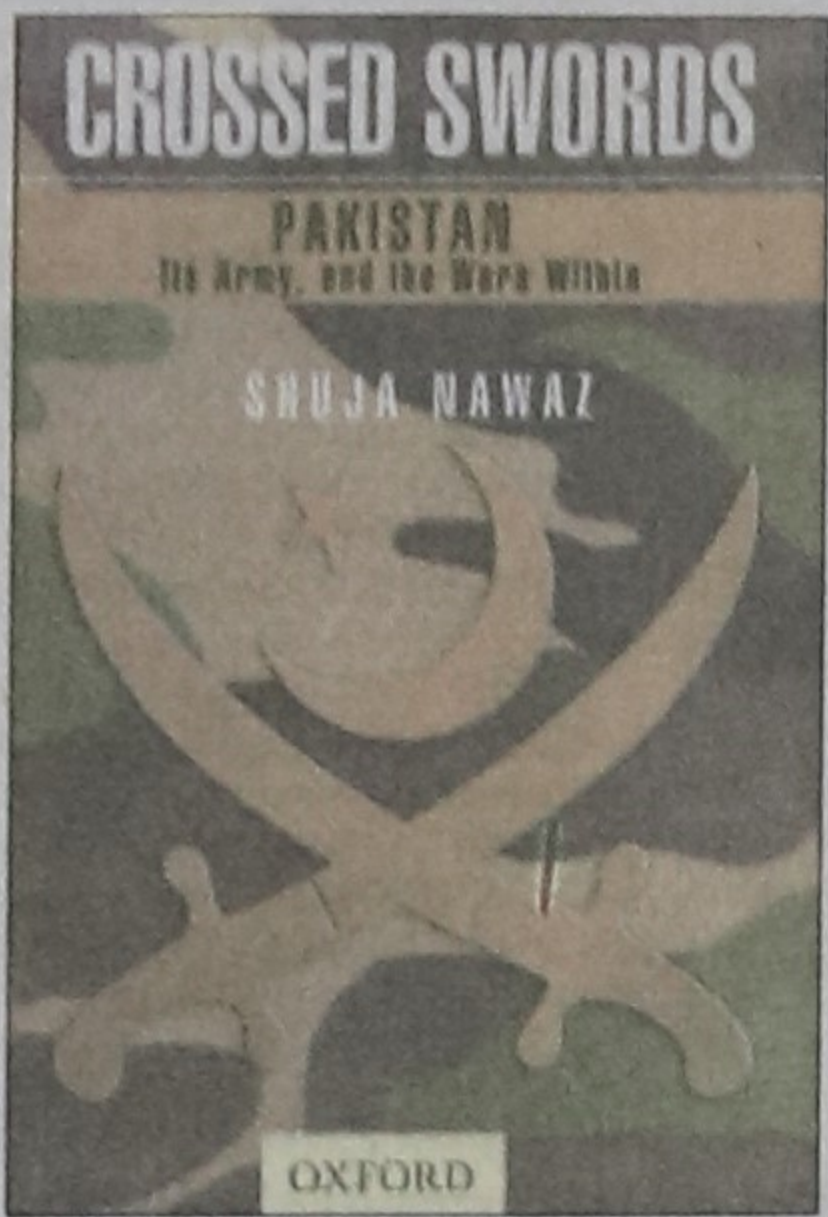
Ambitious soldiers, ineffectual politicians, coups and destroyed dreams

Two strands in recent history are studied by Syed Badrul Ahsan

INSTANCES of an army continually occupying its own country are rare. Yet the Pakistan army has systematically been engaged in the job for the past fifty years.

his work, there remains little doubt as to the kind of friends he has in the military establishment.

In Crossed Swords (which is actually the logo of the Pakistan army), the writer throws up intriguing bits and pieces of information on the doings of powerful men over the years. Take the matter of



Pakistan: Its Army, and the Wars Within Shuja Nawaz Oxford

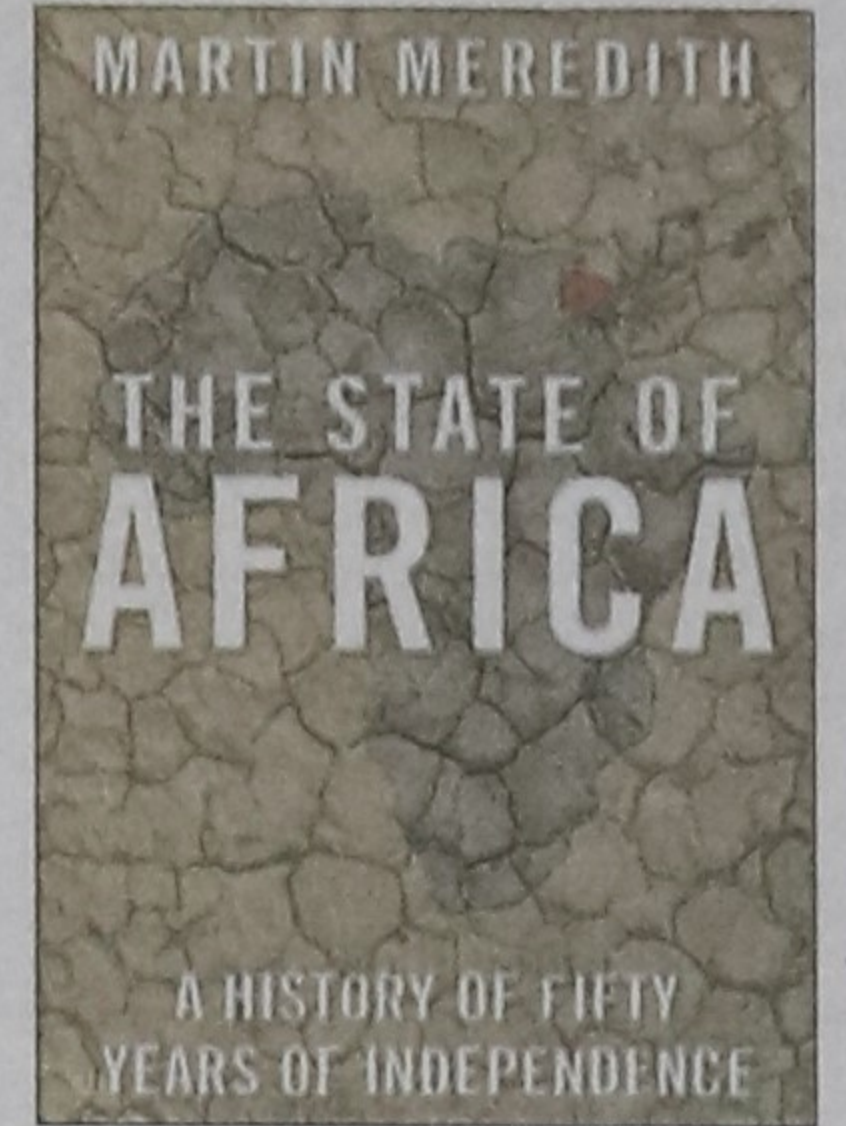
Kutch episode in early 1965; and then he raises the matter of how the army may have miscalculated the strategy and intelligence of the Indian army in the run-up to the September 1965 war.

If in the ten years of Ayub Khan's rule Pakistan's army became a well-entrenched presence in the Pakistan state structure, in the brief period of General Yahya Khan it certainly mutated into a morally decadent force.

The section on the Z.A. Bhutto administration and the prime minister's zeal for the army, to the extent of appointing Ziaul Haq over a whole range of senior officers to the position of army chief of staff, brims over with unknown details.

cell at the hands of majors and colonels. It makes morbid reading. And similar is the experience with the author's enumeration of the rise of army's Inter-Services Intelligence, a body noted for the sinister way in which it has undermined politicians at home and destabilised conditions abroad, as in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's army, never a well-meaning body of soldiers, comes off even worse in Shuja Nawaz's work. The book is a smooth study in how an army can leave a country writhing in perpetual suffering.



The State of Africa A History of Fifty Years of Independence Martin Meredith Free Press

It was a disbelieving Kwame Nkrumah who was taken out of jail and installed as prime minister of what had been the Gold Coast in 1947.

visit to China. He spent the rest of his life in Guinea, where his friend Sekou Toure had given him sanctuary, before dying forlorn in 1972.

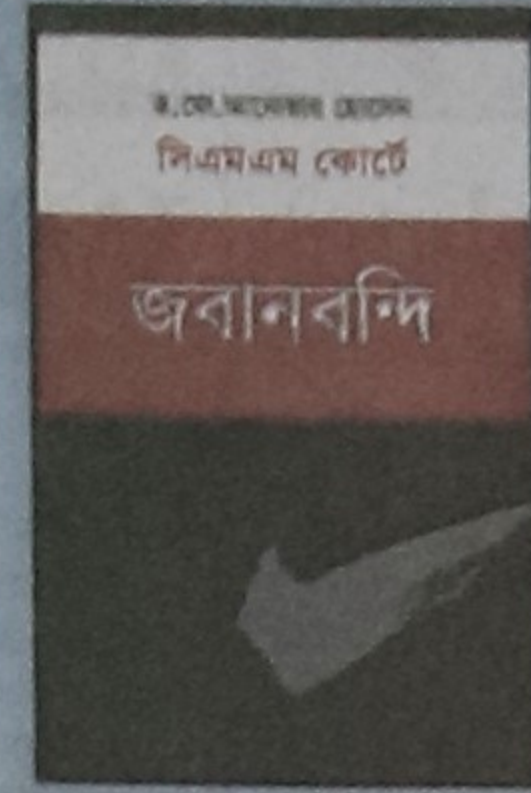
Martin Meredith brings into focus the long tale of Africa's political evolution, or its decline, in the fifty years between 1957 and 2007. There was promise when the process of decolonisation began, indeed when Harold Macmillan spoke of the winds of change sweeping across the world.

Nigeria remains corrupt. And the Congo, where Patrice Lumumba launched a blistering attack on King Baudouin and his ancestors on the eve of independence in 1960, soon gave notice of what was ahead.

Only Senegal's Leopold Sedar Senghor and South Africa's Nelson Mandela were to prove the exceptions to the rule.

Read on. Your interest will not wane.

AT A GLANCE

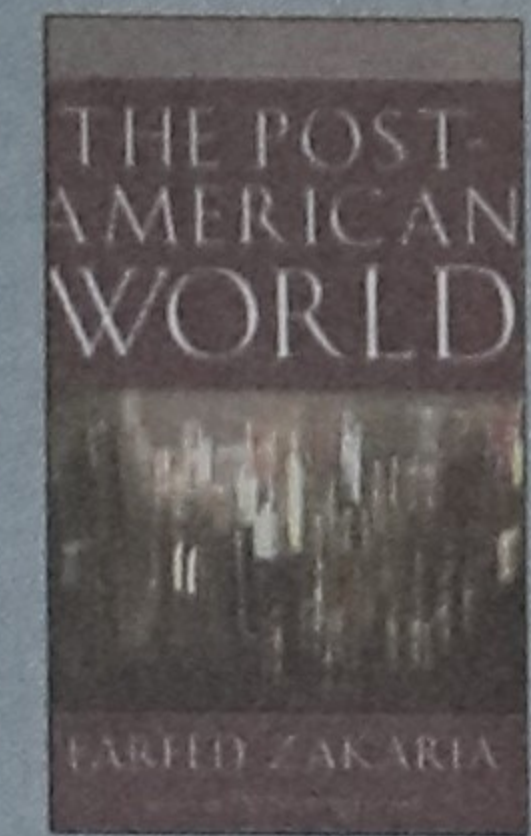


CMM Court-e Jobanboni Dr. Mohammad Anwar Hossain Agami Prokashoni

It is now all part of history. The respected academic, so recently under conditions of suffocation, now throws up before readers the story of his stout defence of himself in court.

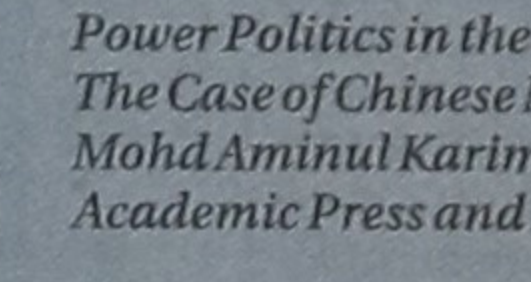
Binoшто Shomoyer Column A.Z.M. Abdul Ali Agami Prokashoni

Having been part of the civil service, Abdul Ali is today a respected commentator on various national issues. In this compilation of articles earlier written for local newspapers in Dhaka, the author makes readers sit up and reflect on the issues he deals with.



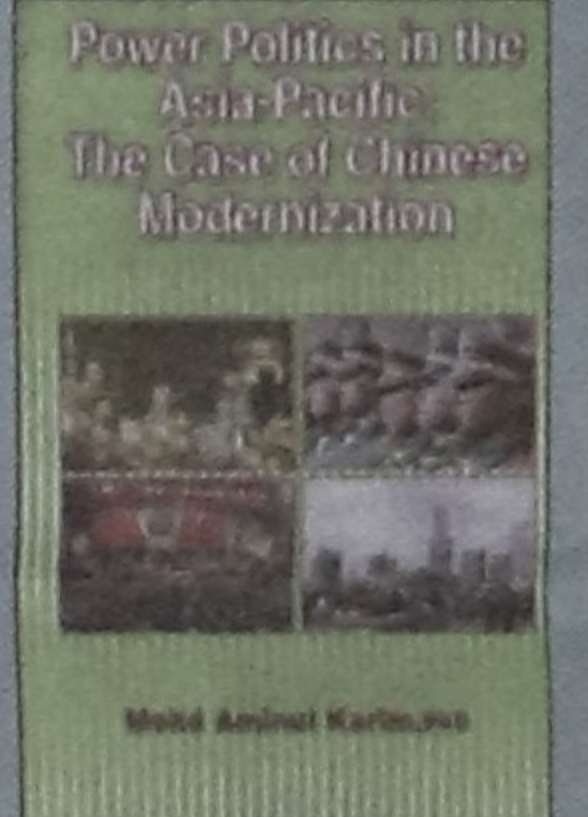
The Post-American World Fareed Zakaria W.W. Norton and Company

These are reflections on a world as it promises to be in a post-America situation. Zakaria notes that the issue is all about nations poised to rise to prominence in a time when American influence will likely wane.



Power Politics in the Asia-Pacific The Case of Chinese Modernization Mohd Aminul Karim Academic Press and Publishers Library

As the title makes clear, the work wrestles with the idea of a growing China and everything that comes with it. Based on research work, the book examines the question of the country's rise to strategic prominence, economically as well as militarily.



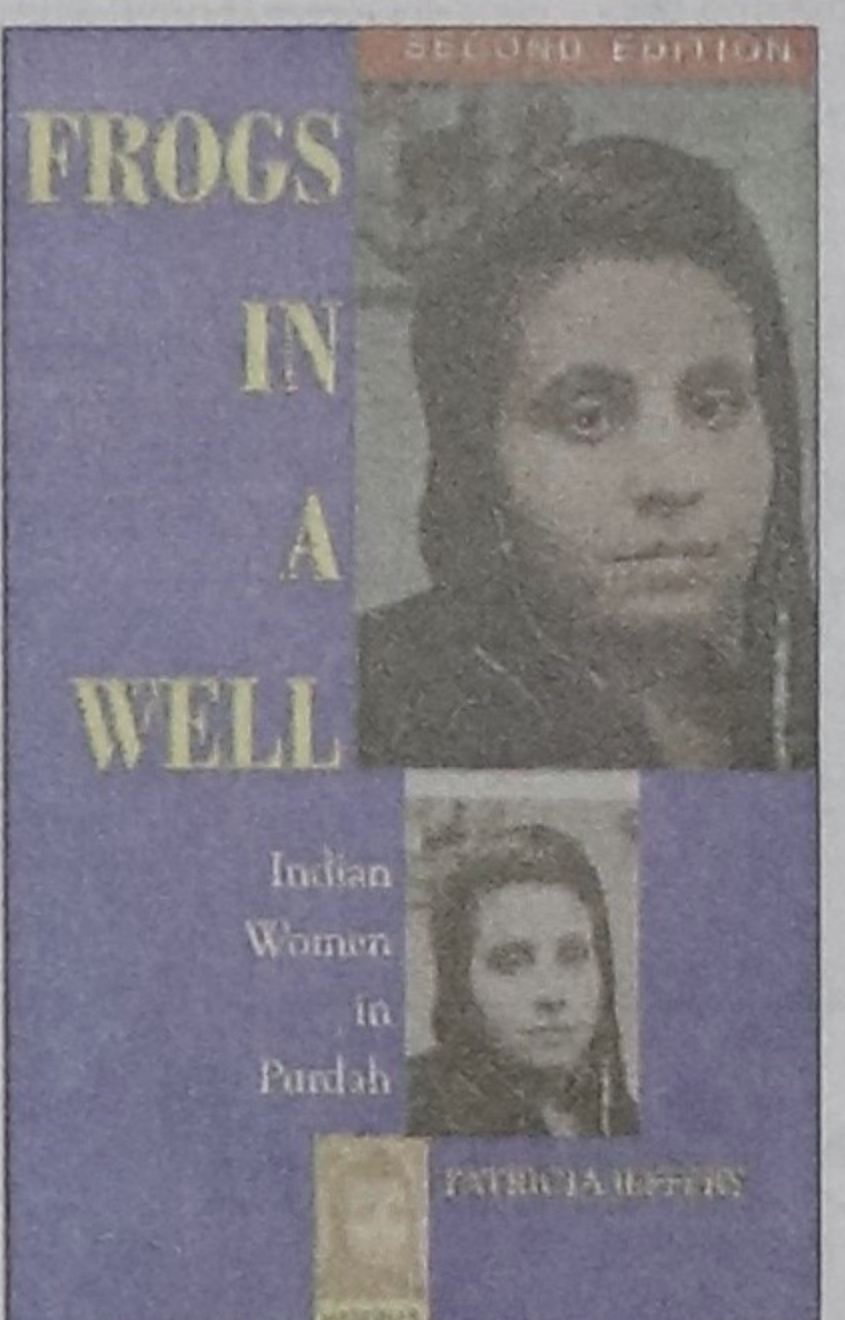
Trapped in the darkness of purdah

A study of prisoners behind a veil interests Tulip Chowdhury

FROGS in a Well is a case study of the women of the pirzada families. The pirzadas families are the custodians of one of the most sacred Sufi shrines of India, that is, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya.

clothes with the burqa, especially in hot weather, about the shame they feel when strange men taunt them in the streets and their total seclusion from the affairs of the shrine.

The author is of the view that the seclusion of pirzade women appears to be a particular type of social system rather than being a purely religious tradition. The system of purdah is accepted by the women as social and religious aspects of their lives.



Frogs in a Well Patricia Jeffery Manohar

she? She is far too busy with housework for me to bother her about how the festivals are organized."

In all ways women are marginal to the shrine. They are in total ignorance of what goes on there or how the shrine is organized. From a very early stage of life a girl is taken care of by her father or brothers until her marriage and then her husband becomes her guardian.

husband. The daughter has to be given movable goods as her dowry. She receives trickles of gifts from her parents or brothers until she dies.

The purse strings are in the complete control of the pirzade men. The income from the shrine is totally in the men's hands. The men buy the food and other requirements of the family.

The village is the world where the men are marginal, for they spend most of their waking lives at the shrine or conduct business elsewhere, meeting guests, buying stocks for their stalls.

economic roles outside the home are the concerns of men. The main resources of the pirzade are solely derived from the cash which pilgrims present at various points during their expressions of devotion to the saint.

According to the writer, economic dependency throughout life is a prudent course for the pirzade women. There are some women who remark that their present comfortable life makes inheritance rights and marriage settlements unnecessary.

While holding up the life of the pirzade women, Patricia Jeffery examines laws relating to purdah, laws of inheritance and many other aspects of Islam. She also holds up the social aspects of Indian women's lives and their roles in the labour force.

Tulip Chowdhury is a poet, short story writer and teacher.

Homes abroad, hearts being the same

Jackie Kabir has some points to make about Lahiri's new book

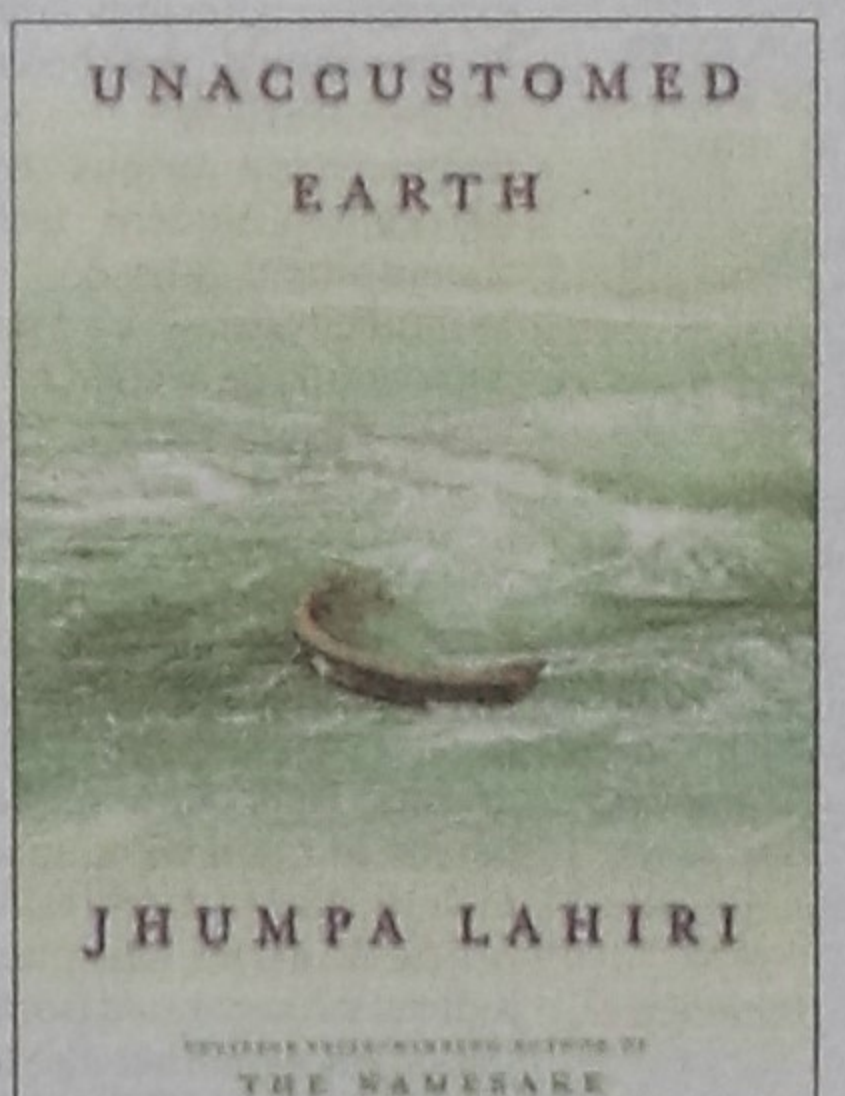
THE writer of Interpreter of Maladies and The Namesake has yet produced another book to satiate her readers' thirst.

stories have some very interesting and intriguing facts in them. The element of assimilation has been always a keen subject for her. Another aspect of her writing which makes her book interesting is her point of view.

The collection of eight short stories gives an insight to the immigrant consciousness once again. The first story is Ruma's unwillingness to accept her widower father who comes to spend a holiday with her family.

"My mother was wearing the red and white bangles unique to Bengali married women, and a common Tangal sari, and had a thick stem of vermilion powder in the center parting of her hair....."

Apart from that, her new book has an easy flow which attracts readers. All the



Unaccustomed Earth Jhumpa Lahiri Random House India

that blossomed between Pranab and his boudi. But it is of a kind that never means to cause any harm to anyone.

inter-racial marriages are pointed out with utter accuracy. What this reviewer finds most interesting about Lahiri's writing is that she is bold enough to show some events that would normally be left out as unpleasant.

"He placed his hand on her hips, over the stretch marks that were like inlaid streaks of mother of pearl that would never fade, whose brilliance spoke only for the body's decay.

The stories evoke the predicament of Bengali students' assimilation in the US as in all her writings. Even though Amit was born in Massachusetts, he had always been complimented for his English and his accent.

the relationship, even though they have spent all their life together.

The book is divided into two parts. The author may have had felt that the last three stories are loosely connected to one another. The first story of this part had appeared in The New Yorker a while ago.

In the third and last story, Hema and Kaushik meet and spend a week in a sweltering relationship that does not have any promise of a future. They are only linked by some threads from their past.

Jackie Kabir is a teacher and critic.

Crystal clarity, or what?

A novel leaves Efadul Huq thinking

A house with a ghost! If you are thinking that's an indication of an ordinary horror story then you are gravely mistaken.

rooster has more freedom than he has. She portrays through the states of women how sexuality is a foreplay to power.

At times, in Morrison's mystical prose Beloved stands for a gloomy memory or perhaps a sin that is better left alone and

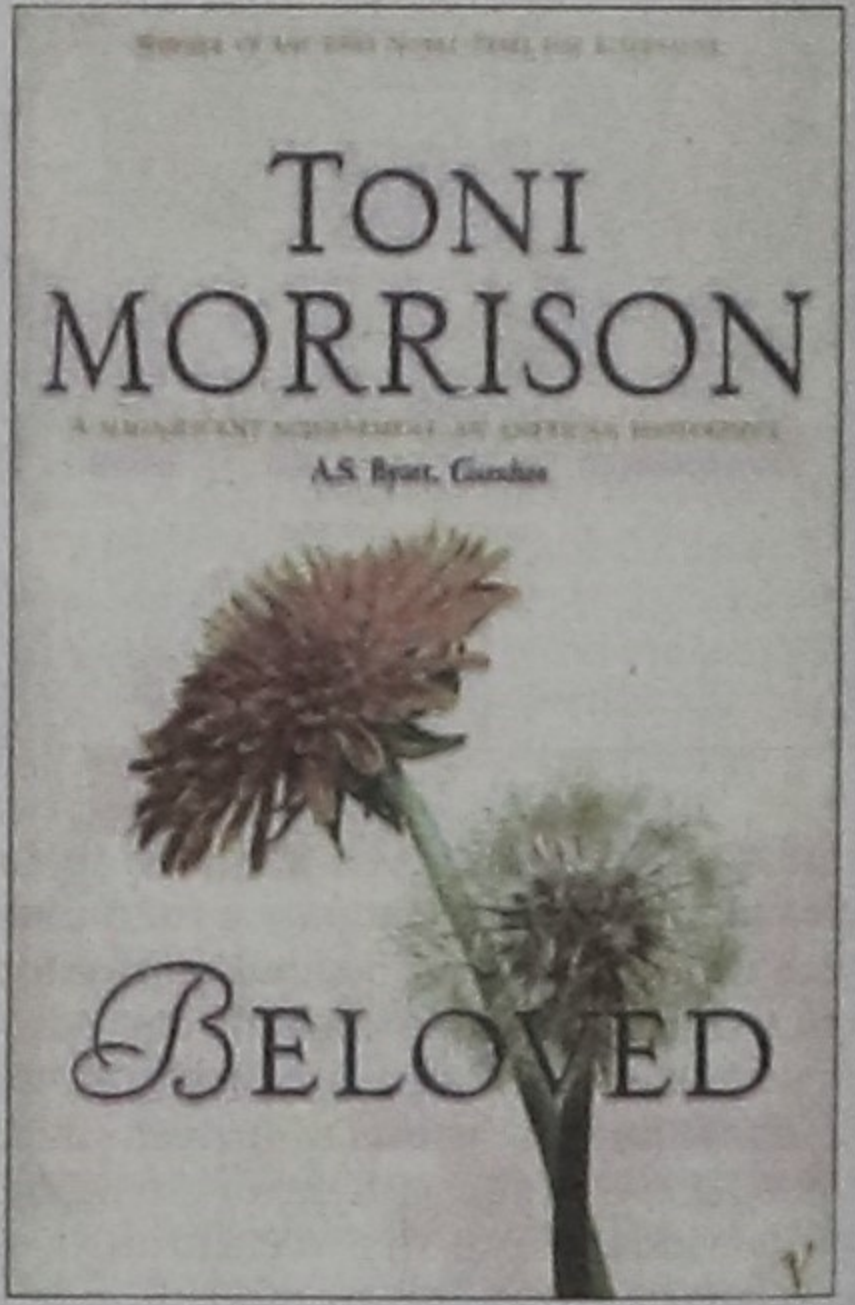
The resident ghost is violent towards the inhabitants of the house, breaking items, throwing things and ruining food. Afraid of the ghost's violence, the two sons of the family have left their mother, Sethe, and their sister Denver behind.

Left alone by themselves, Denver finds comfort in her friendship with her ghost sister but when Paul D, a former slave and companion of Sethe, enters the lonely life of Sethe he is frightened of the ghost at first and then later on violently chases the ghost out of the house.

Beloved is obsessed about Sethe and is jealous about sharing Sethe with anybody. She follows Sethe around and she wants Sethe to tell her stories.

While keeping the story alive with its haunting plot, Morrison tells the story of slaves and plantation workers and the mistreatments that every slave ever faces in a harsh world of arrogant masters.

Say, for instance, what will Denver and Paul do about the strange Beloved? How does Sethe view Beloved's infatuation for her? Above all, who is Beloved? Did the ghost of Sethe's dead daughter return to claim its mother? And what is the mystery lurking behind the death of Sethe's baby in the first place?



Beloved Toni Morrison Alfred Knopf

repented for than to be carried along forever; Beloved stands for obsession, cruelty and the frailties of human nature that ultimately lead to madness and destruction of a person's soul.

Some of the chapters are crystal clear in narration and some of them are pseudo-spiritual ramblings or self-conversations that might be a little bothersome to read.

So if you are ready to run, grab the book as soon as you see it.

Efadul Huq reviews books regularly.