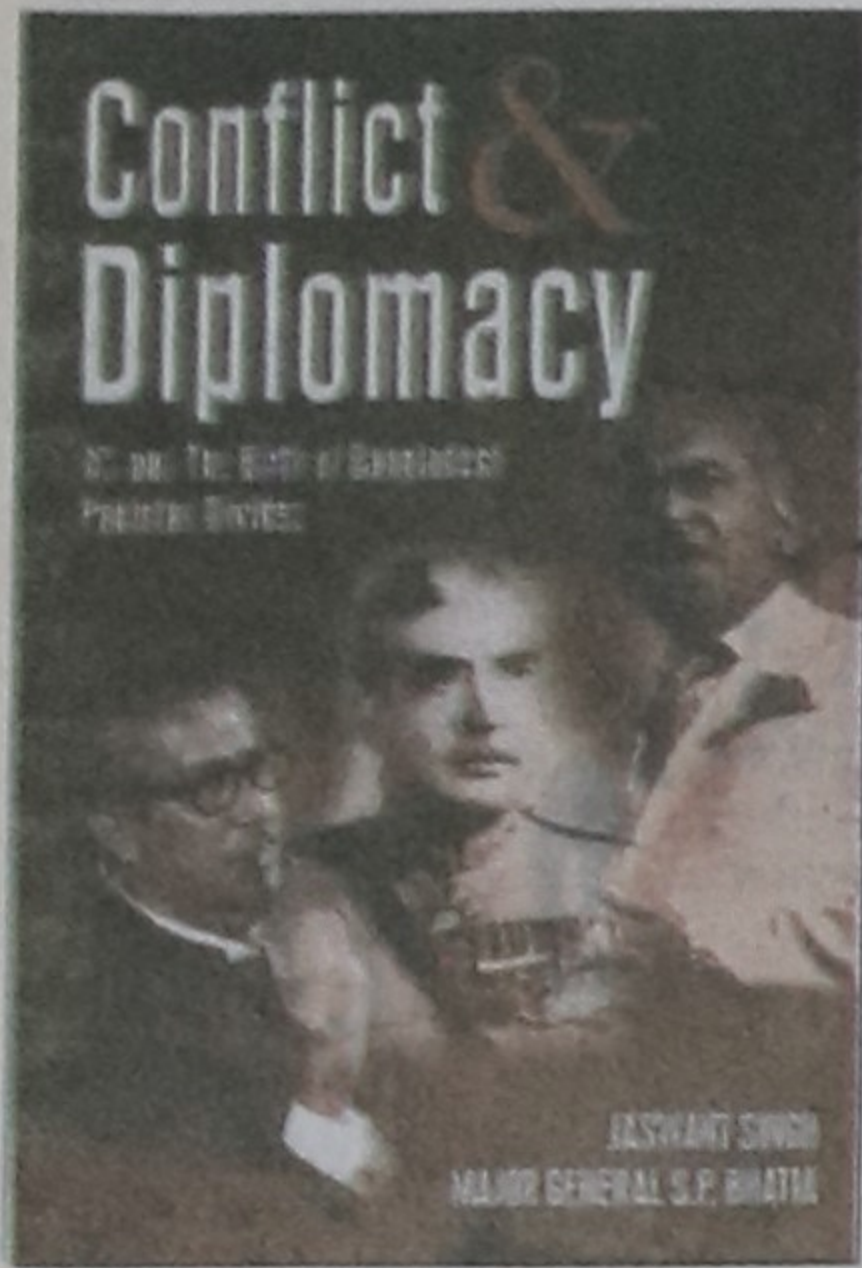


Two governments, a war and memories of a teacher

Syed Badrul Ahsan is happy connecting with politics and a personality



Conflict & Diplomacy
US and the Birth of Bangladesh
Pakistan Divides
Jaswant Singh, Major General S.P. Bhatia
Rupa & Co.

THE war for Bangladesh continues to be a major concern for people intrigued by the history of the Indian subcontinent. And then there are people, notably in Pakistan, who would rather look away from the 1971 story largely because of the deep embarrassment it still causes them. For one thing, the war signified a break-up of Pakistan through its eastern wing reasserting itself as the independent republic of Bangladesh. For another, it was a military defeat for an army that had always prided itself, however delusionally, on its bravery in the battlefield. In 1971, that bravery was sorely tested before the Mukti Bahini, the Bengali guerrilla army, and then the Indian army towards the end of the Bangladesh struggle for liberation.

Much of what happened behind the scenes and across the capitals of the world as Pakistan lurched toward disaster remains unknown, despite the plethora

of information that has emerged of events since the end of the war in December 1971. The infamous American tilt toward Islamabad, ostensibly in return for Pakistan's services in the opening of a road for Washington to Beijing and obviously as a way of punishing India over its sympathy and support for the Bengalis, is by now a documented fact. But it is the details of the episode that have not quite filtered down to the level of the general masses of the subcontinent. It is these details, as they have gradually come to be revealed through the release of classified documents in Washington, et al, that underline *Conflict & Diplomacy*. Jaswant Singh and Suraj Bhatia are seemingly a curious combination, a rather improbable duo considering the weighty subject they deal with here. And yet Singh, as a former foreign minister of India, is quite well equipped to explore the feverish diplomacy which dominated the Bangladesh issue in 1971. Bhatia's expertise in military matters qualifies him to come forth with matters related especially to happenings on the battlefield.

The narrative is intense and loaded. A flurry of activities, nearly everywhere, is the focus. And here is an instance: Indian Foreign Minister Swarn Singh visited Washington in June 1971, clearly to try to convince the Nixon administration that his country as well as the hapless Bengalis of an evolving Bangladesh were up against a crisis of major proportions. Soon after Singh's visit, General Yahya Khan writes a letter to President Nixon stating Pakistan's side of the story. And it is a story that America's ambassador to Islamabad Joseph Farland not only buys but tries to sell his president in turn. Nothing matters then, not Kenneth Keating (he was US envoy in Delhi) or his worry-laden dispatches or the tales of horror coming from Consul Archer Blood in occupied Dhaka. At a White House meeting with Nixon in July, Farland is asked for his assessment of the 'terrible stories' being spread by the Indians about the refugees and the horrors perpetrated by Pakistan's army. Farland's response would make any apologist for Pakistan happy. The Indians, he tells Nixon, were 'past masters at propaganda.' Fast forward to November. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's tense meeting with President Nixon is now part of history. Even so, the US leader solicits her opinion on how a solution to the crisis could be arrived at. Gandhi is blunt. For her, 'the crucial issue remained the future of Mujib who was a symbol of the imperative for autonomy...'

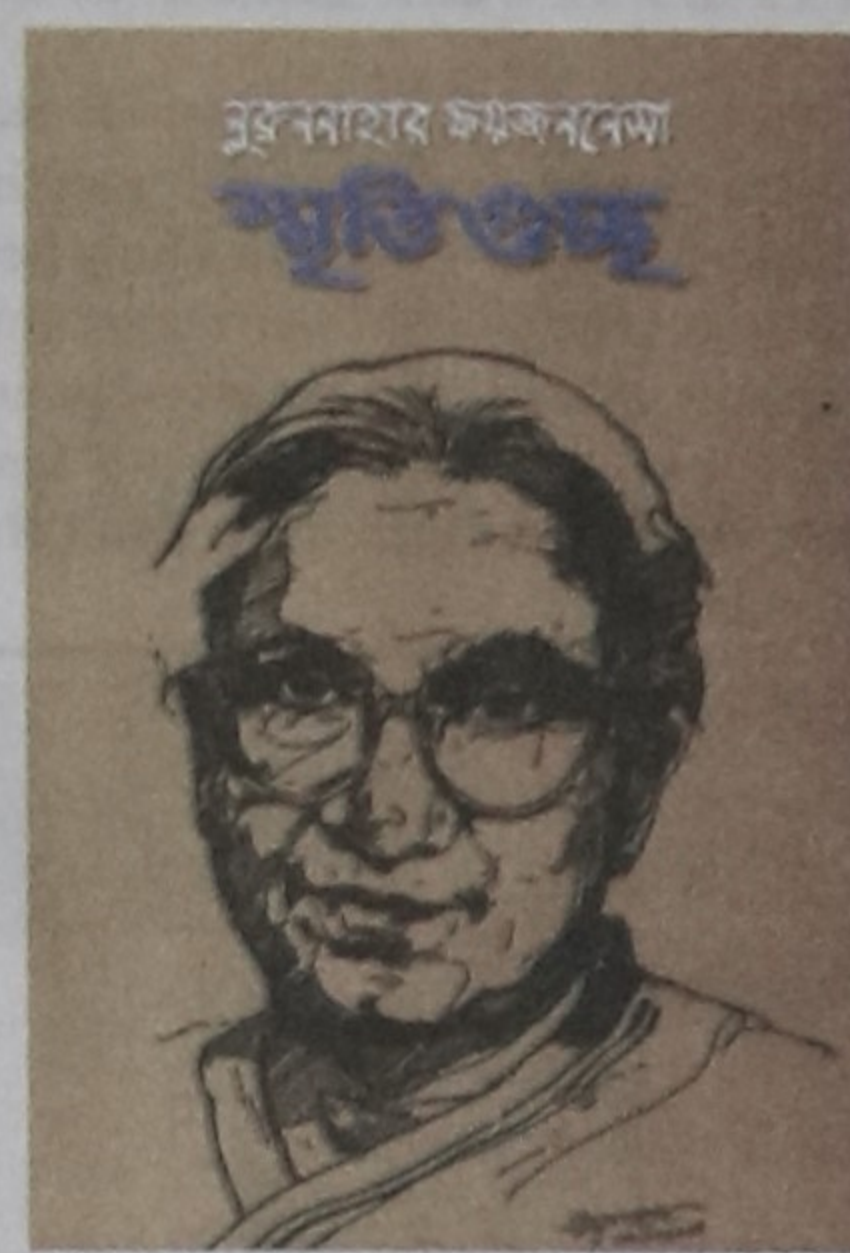
The next day, as Nixon and Henry Kissinger meet for an assessment of the meeting with India's prime minister the previous day, the national security adviser goes crude. For him, 'the Indians are bastards anyway...'. Nixon can hardly contain his glee. 'We really slobbered over the old Witch.' That is his way of insulting Indira Gandhi.

But nothing that the White House does can slow or even prevent Pakistan's slide to defeat. On 11 December, as Indian and Mukti Bahini forces gain greater swathes of Bangladesh territory and the UN Security Council strives to put a ceasefire in place, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is in a state of desperation in New York. He needs to see Nixon but finds the door blocked. As Kissinger tells the president, 'We haven't heard from the Russians yet but I've had a call from Bhutto who insisted on seeing you tonight anywhere.' At one point on the day Bhutto does get to speak to Kissinger on the phone. From Bhutto's side, it is all ingratiating talk. 'I want you to know that it is deeply appreciated what you are doing and we are eternally beholden.'

But nothing works. A few days later, Kissinger prepares a situation report for Nixon, to apprise him of the surrender of the Pakistan army in Dhaka. He notes Bhutto's emotional outburst before the Security Council and then proceeds to inform Nixon of a long letter received from Mrs. Gandhi, who sets out her points detailing where the Americans had gone wrong in their assessment of the Bangladesh crisis.

Conflict & Diplomacy is a worthwhile addition to the literature that has so far emerged on the Bangladesh issue. The documents cited here, principally Indian and American, recreate the gravity of atmosphere that underscored the conflict in 1971. The appendices as also a separate chapter on the state of Bangladesh as it

happens to be in present times can only delight a student of history.



Nurunnahar Fyzennessa
Smriti Guchchho
Publisher Syed Ferhat Anwar

Nurunnahar Fyzennessa never stopped smiling. That is how her students and her friends and her acquaintances recall her. And for that reason alone her death in 2004 came as a blow, an unexpected happenstance from which not many have quite recovered. In this warm portrait of the late educationist as seen by her family and friends, she comes across in death as she always did in life. She was vibrant, bursting with energy and full of the capacity to strive toward the fulfillment of causes she held dear.

It was of course as a teacher at Dhaka University, as also elsewhere in her long academic career, that Fyzennessa made her mark on the people and the circumstances around her. But in this commemorative volume, perhaps the most poignant of tributes to her comes from her husband, Syed Moqsd Ali, himself an

academic of repute and a noted writer. No love can replace that which subsists between a wife and a husband, especially when such love comes on the wings of shared intellectual pursuits. Both Ali and Fyzennessa pursued higher education abroad before coming back home to be part of the charmed circle of socially committed academics. And they raised children who remain linked to the traditions set for them by their parents. Ali's tribute comes as a conversational monologue, as it were, to his departed spouse and within the periphery of it he recapitulates his life with Fyzennessa, dwelling on the joys and sorrows they together lived through. And the times they lived through were momentous, politically. Those times were idealism symbolised, in culture-driven Bengal.

Fyzennessa's daughters pay her the tributes only children reared in the cool, satisfying shade of parental brilliance can. Nazia Jabeen's poem, *Aami Maa Ke Pai*, is in essence the celebration of an ideal mother. And it is a mother that is hers, that could be anyone else's. And that elevation of mother's love, of love and remembrance of the maternal, is carried to newer heights by Sadya Afreen Mallick in *Chokh Muchhi To Jol Mochhe Na*. Mallick goes into a brief yet enlightening study of Fyzennessa's early years and recalls too that it was her mother's enthusiasm that was eventually to lead the daughter to explorations of the world of music. Mallick is today a reputed expert of Nazrul Sangeet and a respected journalist in Bangladesh.

The tributes in this simple collection come in compactness enriched by the quality of the articles. Halima Khatun, Sanjida Khatun, Ayesha Khanam, Maleka Begum, Khaleda Salahuddin, Meherunnisa Islam, Selina Chowdhury, Roushan Ara Feroz, Mohammad Farashuddin and Aziz Mallick are a few of the innumerable individuals whose lives were touched by Nurunnahar Fyzennessa. They seek to repay that debt through their fond memories of the educationist.

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

AT A GLANCE

Tumi Dak Diyechho Kon Shokale
Sanchita Akkharbrito



A short novel based on the friendship and increasing closeness of basically three individuals, two women and a man. An early work by Sanchita, the story is an exploration of growing sensibilities in the young. And within the tale come all those sentiments that reveal the issues the young are expected to handle as they cope with life.

ABDUL KARIM
COMMEMORATION
VOLUME

Abdul Karim
Commemoration Volume
Ed. Shamsul Hossain
Adorn Publication

The work is a rich collage of tributes to an eminent scholar. Abdul Karim was noted for his studies of medieval and archaeological history within the context of Bengal, particularly in relation to Muslim life. His written works have always been highly acclaimed, fundamentally because of the thorough research that went into them.

Krishi Khadya Nirapotta O Daaridra
Bimochon
Jafar Ahmed Chowdhury
Asia Publications

কৃষি, খাদ্য নিরাপত্তা ও দারিদ্র্য বিষয়
জাফর আহমেদ চৌধুরী

The writer, a senior government official, has found time to focus on issues that matter in the public realm. This work happens to be one more addition to his wide repertoire of expertise. The issue is self-explanatory and the essays in the collection make obvious why agriculture, food security and poverty need to be handled through a focused approach.



Jum Paharer Jibon
Eds. Mohiuddin Ahmed, Mangal Kumar
Chakma, Sohrab Hasan, K.M. Abdul Awal, Rashed Iqbal
CDL

Of late a growth of interest in indigenous culture has underscored some new socio-political realities in Bangladesh. In this work, a number of scholars focus on the plight of people engaged in jum cultivation, indeed on the historical deprivation they have suffered from through the decades. The work should serve as an eye opener.

REREADINGS

Condemned by fate, persecuted by politics

Farida Shaikh finds much that is philosophical in an old work

MILAN Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is an exploration into the philosophical concept of lightness, used in ontology and associated with existentialism. Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal return is used to illustrate lightness. The idea, according to Kundera, is 'a mad myth.' Its reverse shows that 'a life which disappears once and for all... does not return... is like a shadow without weight.' Life's 'horror, sublimity and beauty mean nothing.'

Kundera rejects Nietzsche's optimism by presenting the story of the painful love affair of Tomas and Tereza, condemned by fate, people who compromise to live together, never ceasing to cause enormous pain and suffering to each other.

The Franco-Czech novelist argues that if the French Revolution were to have endless occurrences, would the historian be less proud of Robespierre and the bloody years thereafter? Since there will be no return, the revolution has turned into mere 'words, theories and discussion... lighter than feathers.' The same argument, if extended, explains the War of Liberation in Bangladesh.

The novel, set in 1968 Prague, depicts how artists and intellectuals lived in Communist Czechoslovakia, the uprising, and the invasion by the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies during the Prague Spring. Tomas, a surgeon living in Prague, is an incorrigible womaniser, unable to resist his unending stream of meaningless sexual flings. Tereza is drawn to him, sent to him by fate. Tomas' constant infidelities numb her with pain; yet her unending love and need draw her to him inexorably and him to her.

From the text of a Beethoven composition Tomas takes the line: 'Es muss Sein'

(it must be). He even leaves the safety of Switzerland to follow her back to Prague, sealing their fate to that oppressive regime following the Russian takeover.

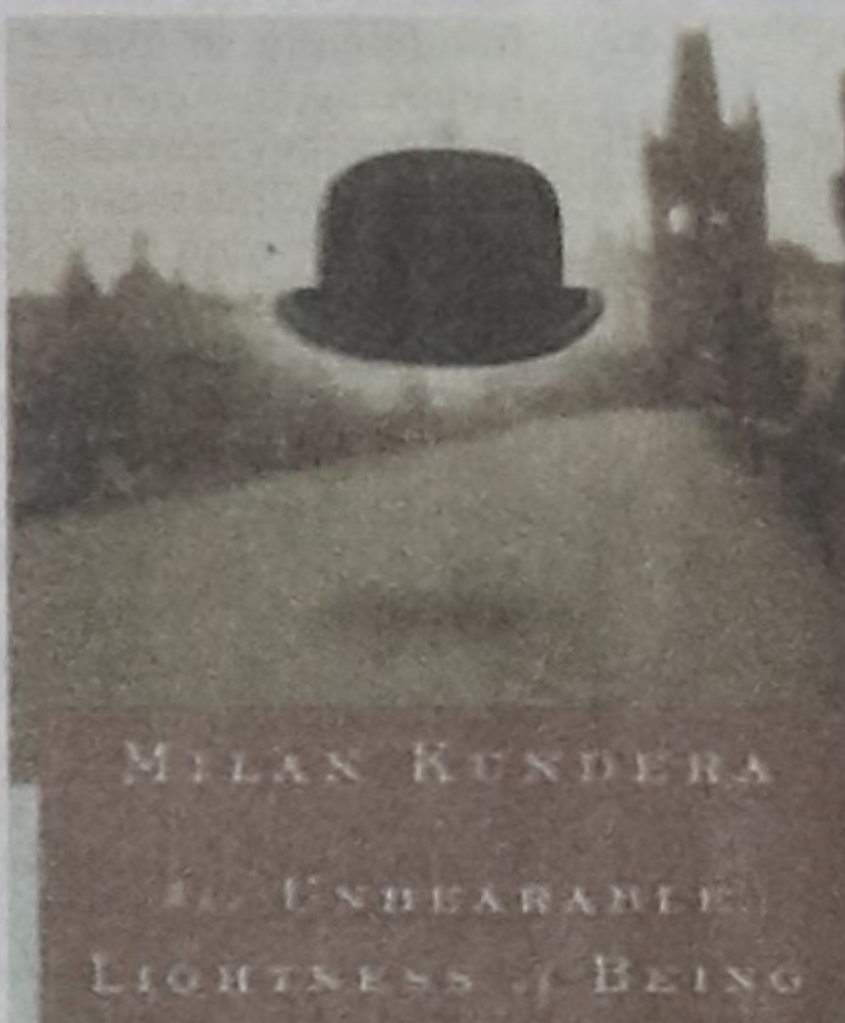
Kundera considered his novels unsuitable as movies. The transformation led to loss in their essential qualities in the process, leaving only the accessory stories to produce any intrigue. However, Kundera served as an active consultant during the making of the same film with the same title and composed the poem Tomas whispers into Tereza's ear while she sleeps.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being was rated as 100% 'fresh' (positive) and listed as one of the top 100 love stories in American cinema by the American Film Institute.

Kundera settles on a compromise: that the idea of 'eternal return' means adopting an attitude from which things appear different and not as 'we know them,' without the rationale or justification for the impermanent nature of things; which in turn prevents us from arriving at a verdict or judgment. And so the philosopher writer demands to know how we can condemn that which is 'ephemeral', transient and momentary.

This then gives rise to a perverse moral order in which 'everything is pardoned in advance, therefore everything cynically permitted.'

Sabina, the Czech artist, is fascinated with aspects of incomparable images in which the interface of the images betray one another. In her own life, including her love affairs with Tomas and Franz, she is the eternal betrayer, not unlike the tensions in her own paintings. The emptiness of Sabina's life is 'The Unbearable Lightness of Being': that she wants to 'die in lightness' which is to say that she is



The Unbearable Lightness of Being
Milan Kundera
Faber & Faber

indifferent to her life shows that she would not want to repeat her life and would not accept an eternal return.

Franz is the idealist, the man who dreams the dream of the great march of history toward some better state and ends up being killed in a trivial mugging while in Thailand on a large but failed humanitarian venture.

The idea of eternal return is heaviest in burden and is deplorable. It 'crushes us,' even so it is 'an image of life's most intense fulfillment.' The idea in the figurative and literal sense indicates that 'the heavier the

burden the closer our life comes to earth, the more real and truthful they become.' On the reverse, 'absolute absence of burden causes man to be lighter than air, to soar into heights, take leave of the earth... his movements as free as they are insignificant.'

A central theme which runs through the novel is the possibility of being having weight -- something to give it serious meaning. First, Tomas does find meaning in his 'Es muss Sein' in relation to Tereza. They are safely in Switzerland after escaping the Russian invasion. But eventually Tereza, wishing to free Tomas for his mistresses, unable to bear the pain of it and feeling lost away from Prague, leaves -- to go back. Tomas follows in a few days, knowing that somehow this is crazy and he is condemning himself to misery. But he must go. It is his fate. And he returns.

The choice between weight and lightness has reference to the pre-Platonic philosopher Parmenides, who said that 'lightness is positive, weight negative.' How correct this is remains a question... for sure 'most mysterious most ambiguous of all.'

Kundera then asks: Should one live with weight and duty or with lightness and freedom? A Nietzschean answer would be, weight is life-affirming, with positive intensity, and to live in a way you'd be prepared to repeat.

The novel is an attempt to understand the need for companionship in life, understand the relationships between the conflicting desires that humans possess and act upon. What makes a man leave the woman that he loves and seek something intangible in the arms of a mistress? Why does the same man sacrifice everything he has - freedom, social status, and his life's work - only to go back

to the woman he absolutely had to leave before?

Is the absence of any responsibilities and ties in life really 'lightness'? Could this absolute lightness turn into absolute emptiness and thus become unbearable at some point - a burden pulling us to the ground? It shows how vulnerable we are, and how miserable we can be made by our contradictory desires, aspirations and impulses. If you read deep enough into this novel you'll repeatedly think, 'he's talking about me.'

Kundera plays with opposites --- life and death, heaviness and lightness. The reader decides which life is happier: the light or the dark? *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is the realisation that, with no hope of knowing the right path from the wrong, there can be no wrong path. One is necessarily absolved of mistakes.

The search for meaning in life leads to the necessity of significance, which comes from a sense of weight. Are events forgiven in advance because they happen only once? But, is it also not unbearable that events only occur once as we can never go back and rectify our mistakes? Everyone wishes he could replay a past error, a lost opportunity, a lost love, a relationship that should not be. Is this not unbearable? Is this not a weight we feel pressing down on us every day?

Published nearly a quarter century ago, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is recognised as an outstanding modern classic. The novel is totally European in essence; the Czech translation of *Nesmetina lehkost byti* by Michael Henry Heim is beautiful English reading. It freshens the mind and cheers the heart!

Farida Shaikh is a critic and writer on contemporary issues.

Tangail's brave young guerrilla

Z.A.M. Khairuzzaman is happy with the story of a soldier

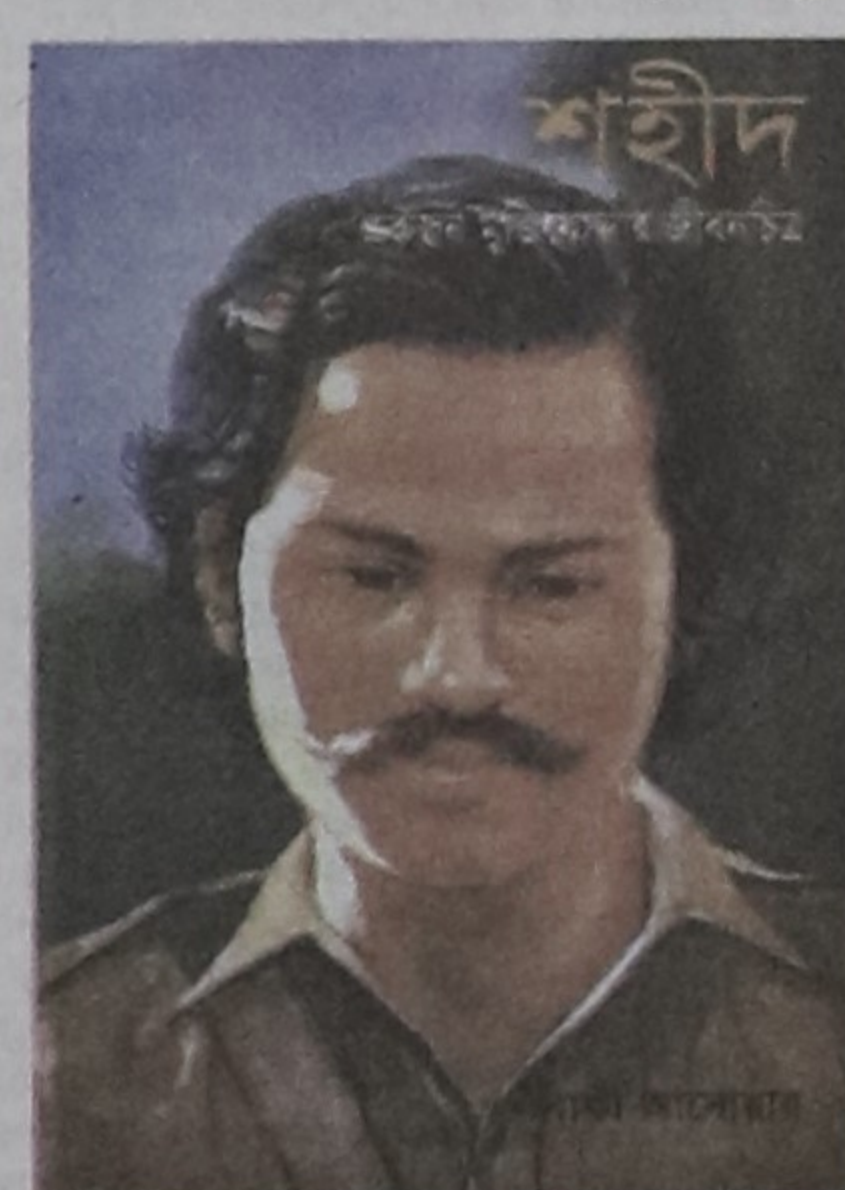
SHAHEED is the nickname of Anwar-ul-Alam, who is one of the two great heroes of Tangail Mukti Bahini during the War of Liberation in 1971. Shaheed was the deputy commander and civilian administrator of Tangail during the war. History bestowed upon him the great task of leading the war in the area, a job he accomplished with great wisdom and selflessness. The military commander of Tangail Mukti Bahini, Kader Siddiqui, depended a lot on this intelligent man.

The book is a recollection of the eventful life of the deputy commander of the guerrilla war. He led the war through utilising his organisational skills, which he had acquired as a student leader in school and college in Tangail and subsequently at Dhaka University. The book is Saqi Anwar's sincere tribute to the great guerrilla leader. It is a reflection on Anwar-ul-Alam's capability, honesty, dedication, patriotism and his pivotal role in the liberation of Tangail. The book comprises his brief biography, memorable achievements as a proud member of

Kochi Kanchar Mela, social organiser, national and international scout, student leader, a pioneer in the struggle for self-autonomy for Bengalis and above all as a freedom fighter. He has a sharp, analytical mind. His honesty, patriotism and love for the country remain exemplary.

Anwar-ul-Alam was born in a respectable family of Tangail. He was reared in the environment of a political family. His father Moulvi Abdur Rahim Ichhapuri was associated with the struggle against British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent. He was a veteran leader of the Krishak Praja Party founded by Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq. Shaheed's mother shouldered the responsibility of the family in the absence of her husband, who remained busy with his political activities.

Shaheed passed the Secondary School Certificate examination from the renowned Bindubhashini High School in Tangail. In his boyhood, a fire incident in his hometown shook him to his roots and turned him into a devoted social worker.



Shaheed
Ekjon Muktiyoddhar Jibonchitra
Saqi Anwar
Adhuna Prokash

As a student, he edited magazines and regional newspapers. He also brought out a newspaper titled 'Rangan' which kept the morale of freedom fighters as well as people high during the War of Liberation.

In his youth, Shaheed identified with the Bangladesh Chhatra League. He actively took part in all Bengali nationalistic movements. He came in contact with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in August 1962. Bangabandhu had come to Tangail to address a mammoth meeting at the historic Park Maidan. Their links grew and lasted till Bangabandhu's martyrdom on 15 August 1975. Shaheed was in the forefront of the struggle in the turbulent 1960s, leading up to the historic 6-point movement, 11-point movement, mass upsurge in 1969 and then helping to sweep the 1970 elections.

While he was a student of the Social Science Department of Dhaka University (1968-70), Anwar-ul-Alam became general secretary of Sir Salimullah Muslim Hall Students' Union. He was a sober

student leader who welcomed suggestions from and respected the opinions of others. It was at this stage that he acquired the rare quality of running organisations skillfully. He applied just such a quality during the armed struggle in Tangail.

The author's vivid depiction of Shaheed's struggle against all odds during the War of Liberation are exciting as well as delightful. Anwar-ul-Alam's firmness nullified the Mujibnagar government's reservations about the Tangail guerrilla commander Kader Siddiqui. His patriotism and administrative skills were incomparable. As an able administrator, he took quick decisions in complicated situations. Above all, his respect for the rule of law was incomparable. As second-in-command, Shaheed ran the civilian administration in a vast area of Tangail successfully. And Tangail, one will recall, remained free of the Pakistani occupation army during the nine months of the War of Liberation.

Z.A.M. Khairuzzaman is a working journalist of The Daily Star.

The songs of a mystic

Takir Hossain goes soul searching

THERE is a certain pleasure in reviewing works on Lalon and his songs. This work on the mystic by Haroonuzzaman is a rare publication. The book only reasserts our feelings of debt to Lalon. His songs have always enriched and nurtured our souls and minds. It is certainly true that Lalon's is one of the most talented and philosophically insightful minds as revealed in oral and textual traditions. He disseminated his ideas in mind-boggling songs, through a remarkable multitude of musical compositions. The main musical instruments *ektara* and *dugdugi* for Lalon music are easily found anywhere in Bangladesh, for the culture he upholds defines the quality of life here. Lalon songs are philosophical, contemplative and thought-provoking. The language of the songs is very simple but the essence of the language is very contemplative, powerful and rich. The songs project before us a heavenly and mysterious world.

Lalon's songs are symbolic of ecstasy and adoration. Without love and affection, for the individual as also for divinity, it is rather difficult to think of the nature of existence. And that is where Lalon's songs come in. The songs can easily relate to the soul of man, and they do. They are tranquil, quiet, mind-boggling and based on adoration, confidence, the mystery of life and death and involved in the search for truth. A cardinal lesson emerging from the songs is that in a purposeful life, indeed in love, there cannot be any room for jealousy, distrust, conceit, snobbery and unfairness. Loving humankind and feeling empathy, delight, liberty and setting out on a search for truth and beauty are the main aspects of Lalon songs. The subject matter, the themes of his songs run the entire gamut from the ideological to the practical to the radical to the metaphysical. They hold out the truth that the most important aspects of religion are not based on blind, reflexive practice, but rather on arriving at spiritual enlightenment through a questioning, reflexive process.

Lalon's music has inspired generations of *bauls* and common folk who have been drawn to its universal message of unity and self-exploration. Lalon intentionally kept his place of birth and the identity of his parents unknown. Around the age of sixteen, he was found floating by the bank of the Kalliganga river, suffering from smallpox. He was taken to the home of Seraj Shah and his wife Matijan, who

brought him up. Through a lifetime of mysticism, Lalon composed numerous songs and poems which underscore his philosophy. Among his favorite songs are *khhachar bhoir achein pakhi, jat gelo jat gelo bole, dekhna mon jhokmaria duniyadari, paare loye jao amare, milon hobe koto dine, aar amare marishne maa, and tin pagoler holo mela*.

Haroonuzzaman does a creditable job here with Lalon. His translated works have been highly acclaimed



Lalon
Selected Lalon Songs
Trans Haroonuzzaman
Adorn Publication

because he has created a new dimension and quality in his approach to those he has undertaken to present in translation. He has translated thirty three songs from Bengali to English. All the songs are very popular and well known and so add substance to the selection. In his translation, he has taken the songs from the book 'Moromi Kobi Lalon Shah: Life and Songs' by Dr. Khondokar Riazul Huq and put the songs under different categories, as the writer has done. Attempts have been made to translate into English some selected songs of Allahototo, Rasultotto, Sristotto, Murshidotto, Attotto, Dehototto, Manushotto, Montotto, and Poromotto, Jatitotto, and Parapotto, Chandotto, and Ropotto, with a bit of description about each genre.

Takir Hossain, a journalist, is an art critic and book reviewer.