AT A GLANCE

Therese Blanchet

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domestic servants there.

Lost Innocence, Stolen Childhoods

This happens to be a book about children

who unfortunately do not enjoy the state of

being children. Their childhood goes missing

and one fine morning they wake up knowing

that the world does not look upon them as

children at all. For proof, visit a middle class

home and observe the state of the young

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capital of a free country.

Lost innocence,

Stolen Childhoods

Therese Elincher

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Breaking the Barrier

DaSMI, Nabodhara

Tel: 8113769

Ed. Mohiuddin Ahmad, Cho Hee-Yeon

Dhaka Smriti Shonkhya

A truly enlightening issue, especially

when celebrations are about to get under-

way around the 400th anniversary of Dhaka.

The many articles in the journal reflect the

memories of those who have been part of the

city as it has moved on from being a provin-

cial backwater to a modern, albeit confused

# Adding new substance to historical discourse

Syed Badrul Ahsan finds the enlightening in two works on a politician

URJAHAN Murshid was one of the more articulate political beings in Bangladesh. There was suavity about her, a readiness and an ability to be part of the wider world around her. If cosmopolitanism was the requirement in an era when Bengali politics gradually passed into the hands of the middle class, Murshid demonstrated it in plenty through her view of the issues, indeed of the social canvas which she observed before her and of which she was an integral part. The qualities that defined her in her career --- as a politician, as an editor, as an aesthete --all come encompassed in these two commemorative volumes on her five years after her death.

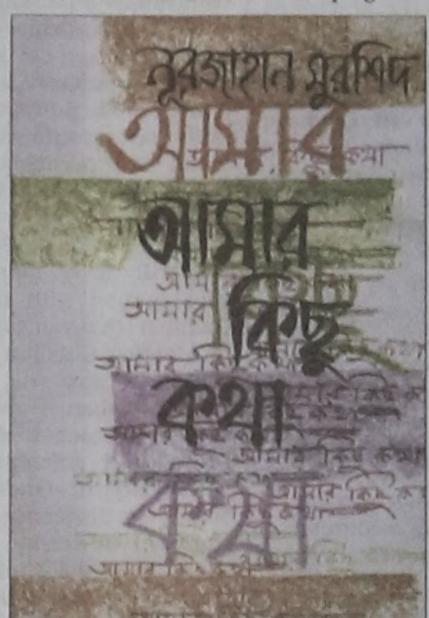
In Nurjahan Murshid was symbolised an era of Bengali idealism that would in time graduate to Bengali nationalism. Brought into politics, with no little effort by her doting father-in-law, she saw herself stepping into the East Bengal provincial assembly in 1954 on the ticket of the Jugto Front. She had defeated Shamsunnahar Mahmud and quite logically seemed destined for greater glories. She was young, she was educated and intelligent and, of course, she was beautiful. Appointed a parliamentary Serajul Islam Choudhury, Selina Hossain secretary following what was a landmark election in this part of the world, she clearly demonstrated a flair for getting work done according to the standards she set for herself. But, then again, those standards marked the era she was part of. As she notes in an essay in Amar Kichhu Kotha, she came in touch with the legendary Dhirendranath Dutta, who was clearly impressed with her. And, again, those were times when she worked in the company of Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and



Nurjahan Murshid Sharok Grantha Eds. Anisuzzaman, Kamal Hossain, Sardar Fazlul Karim, Anyaprokash

all those stalwarts who had just set out on a mission to lead Bengalis into political sunshine.

In a bigger sense, though, Nurjahan Murshid, in that defining year when the Jugto Front unnerved the Pakistan establishment through its rout of the Muslim League at the provincial elections, was part of a generation of politicians beginning to come of age. She was young and with her there were other young politiTajuddin Ahmed, Syed Nazrul Islam, et al --- who increasingly began to reflect the shape of things to come. And just how effectively that future would be shaped was to be spotted in the early 1960s, when this generation of Bengali politicians, led by the fire-breathing Mujib, would embark on a mission to revive the Awami League following the death of Suhrawardy in December 1963. That job done, there would come time for a greater show of courage. It came, through the Six Points. Murshid threw herself heart and soul into the campaign to



Amar Kichhu Kotha Nurjahan Murshid Anyaprokash

cians --- Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, popularise the points throughout what had always held dear. In 1979, she spoke still used to be Pakistan's eastern prov- on Bangabandhu at a conference in ince. The Six Points were a metaphor for Bengali demands within the state of Pakistan. But even Murshid must have known that beyond the points lay a wider world of freedom and democracy. The path to that world would of course lie through much bloodletting, in March 1971 and the months that would follow. It would be a world of darkness, one where uncertainty would reign, at least for a

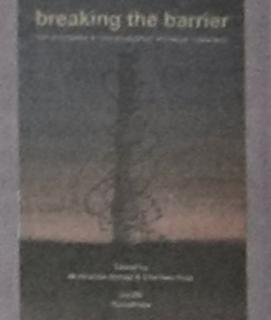
The uncertainty came to an end with the formation of the government-inexile in Mujibnagar in April 1971. Nurjahan Murshid, having made her way of out of enemy-infested Dhaka, saw a new role thrust upon her. As part of a team entrusted with the job of presenting Bangladesh's case to the international community, Murshid knew what needed to be done. She met Indira Gandhi, who made it a point to welcome her and her team at the gate of the prime ministerial residence in Delhi. Murshid acquitted herself well in 1971, dealing with relief and medical supplies and at the same time making an endless, consistent intellectual case for the country abroad. The coming of freedom saw her as part of the Bangladesh government. Idealism defined the spirit of the new country and secular politics promised a new dawn. That promised dawn did not quite arrive, or was nipped in the bud. August 15, 1975 left lives battered. Dreams lay scattered in pieces.

Amar Kichhu Kotha is an offering from Nurjahan Murshid that takes the reader back to a world of possibilities eventually hurled to the ground with brute force. Yet she never lost sight of the principles she

London, Her poignant reflections on the rise and fall of her journal Edesh-Ekal are fundamentally a commentary on the perils faced by intellectually-oriented journalism in Bangladesh. Murshid's exposition of Plato, her world of poetry and her remembrances of the great and the good are part of this hugely readable work. And with that comes Sharok Grantha, a deserving collage of tributes to Murshid. And yet it is more than a commemoration of the achievements of an individual. It is a celebration of the age Murshid inhabited and the morality that underpinned Bengali aspirations in her era. Ajoy Roy, Atiur Rahman, Mohammad Anisur Rahman, Serajul Islam Choudhury and Syed Anwar Hossain reflect on the world as it used to be, as it yet might be. And with their views of the world of the Bengali come a wideranging discussion on culture, poetry, women. Waheedul Haque's tribute to Nurjahan Murshid is a touching piece of the poetic; and so is Hayat Mamud's. Add to this richness the thoughts that come on fundamentalism and feminism, women and parliament and, to be sure, women and partition, topped by a learned disquisition on violence-prone women in South Asia.

Amar Kichhu Kotha and Sharok Grantha are a substantive addition to the continuing discourse on Bangladesh's history. There is little question about that. And these works bring forth some more of the answers we have always sought through our many queries over the years.

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



Democracy and development are the perspectives offered --- and covered --- in this insightful volume. It is not just South Asia but the continent as a whole that is brought under the microscope. The more appealing aspect of this work is the enumeration of the many conflicts, some guerrilla-style, that have often defined political conditions. Democracy, Governance and Security Reforms

DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE AND SECURITY REPORTED: EANGLADESH CONTEXT

Bangladesh Context Ed. Mufleh R. Osmany Shaheen Afroze Academic Press and Publishers Library Tel: 8125394

A work on the many problems that Bangladesh has lately been confronted with, it attempts an answer to many of those issues. The issue of democracy, based as it is on the concept of governance and topped by matters of security, is deftly handled. Even so, there are always the new questions that arise. Quite serious reading.

# A demonic manifestation of political power

#### Nazma Yeasmeen Haque is moved by an account of state brutality

thing may or may not be beautiful but it certainly is powerful when it speaks the truth. With a clear and loud voice of conscience, it transforms itself into a most reliable and, therefore, a valid document mirror imaging atrocities most barbaric and nefarious. And this exactly is recorded in Marudyaney Nandigram 2007, by Kabir Sumon, formerly known as Sumon Chattopaddhaya. The book is a compilation of only nine not so elaborate writeups that appeared in three different newspapers of West Bengal over a period of roughly one year.

It is a depiction of a real life story, the consequence of a policy of the government concerning acquisition of land of the common people who are poor yet contented with their life and livelihood on land that has been theirs for ages. The same old story of land grabbing by the high and mighty in some form or other with a total disregard of the disturbance, disruption, dislodging and destruction brought about in the lives of the dwellers has been repeated here at Nandigram in East Midnapore of West Bengal. And the purpose? It is acquisition of land for industrialisation that is synonymous with development policies and its concretisation.

This act at Nandigram followed a similar one at Singur in 2005. Although people launched an agitation there trying to resist the government's plan to acquire their arable land, the latter was successful in fulfilling its purpose through some political scheme.

Although this particular problem has not yet been resolved completely, yet perhaps by an apparent sense of success, the government went on applying the same policy in Nandigram a year after, which was sometime in late 2006. The whole



Marudyaney Nandigram 2007 Kabir Sumon Bikalpo Publishers, Kolkata

plan and procedure for implementing it backfired.

People in rural Nandigram would not simply acquiesce, as a result of which a mass uprising and all-out resistance took place. It was a sequel to police brutalities, atrocities and macabre tactics at the 40 small size pages) describes him as diktat of the ruling party. There was a demonic manifestation of political power; the rulers mutated into oppressors and became the perpetrators of the most brutal kind. Killing, arson, looting, rape, intimidation and similar other tactics had a free reign at the hands of the police force with the blessings of the Marxists. The writer has drawn an analogy between the most barbaric act of the British colonial police on the unarmed, non-violent march of the common people, historically known as Salt March in Dandi, with that of the police force at Nandigram. Here he has echoed the first sentence of a report by an American reporter in the New York Times on this incident, stating that the civilisation of the west has been obliterated today. The writer resolutely notes that on 14 March 2007, civilisation in West Bengal, and therefore, India too met with the same

Marudyaney Nandigram is a poignant tale of human misery. The writer's knowing it as an eyewitness has rendered the language spirited, as if it is impregnated with fire, a fire that can consume all ills by reducing them to cold ashes. Kabir Sumon, being a thoroughly conscious man, does not keep himself limited to armchair rhetoric. He rather puts to practice whatever he feels ought to be done in an hour of crisis caused to humanity. He can make others march with him for a justifiable cause and there he is a fearless leader. No wonder the back cover of this book (comprising only someone who is radioactive.

This reviewer had an opportunity of talking with the writer of this book while the following points emerged. The majority of Nandigram's population are Muslims, the rest being Dalits. This gives a communal tinge to the whole incident from the government's side, but its reverse is seen in the unity of Hindus and Muslims in protecting the latter's right to their property. The role played by women was most courageous: they took up whatever household implements they had at their disposal to combat the very sophisticated firearms of the marauders. This reminds one of the awakening of Indian women who fought side by side with men during the civil disobedience in 1930. The Nandigram incident has been termed a victory of peasants against the beastly might of the government.

The writer has not put down his pen once he has reported on such a gory incident. Indeed, he has leavened the whole account with much laconic humour, transforming parts of it into a satire. One such example relates to hear ing about the death toll at Nandigram caused by police brutalities. The chief minister comments that he is not aware of so many people living there. The writer mocks it, noting that ignorance is sweet! Sumon expresses his utter indignation at the character of politicians across India, adding that had there been a TV show called 'Who will be a politician?' modeled after the show 'Who will be a crorepati?' God knows what bizarre things would have come out of that!

Kabir Sumon wears multiple feathers in his cap, shining brightly in near every sphere --- as a composer, lyricist, singer, novelist, columnist, and broadcaster. But the quality that describes him best is most probably his concern for the underdog, across the globe. The same concern and involvement he had shown in 1984 when he travelled to Nicaragua to see for himself how the Contras had been ravaging village after village. His fellow feeling for the oppressed sans borders is most

Kabir Sumon cannot just accept that rehabilitation and/or compensation, for that matter, can be a remedial measure for the great sense of loss and grief for these simple folk who have lived in Nandigram for generations. On top of this, this historical place called Tammrolipti or Tomluk had its own independent government side by side with that of the British way back in the '40s and could not be accessed by the colonial army. Ironically, what the British government could not do has been done by the CPI (M) in a predatory manner. And here lies his woe, erupting in a volcanic tremble through his words and acts as a TV journalist. In spite of all this, Kabir Sumon is not content with himself and his role at Nandigram. He feels a sense of profound unfulfilment that in this reviewer's estimation is the characteristic of a committed social warrior.

Dr. Nazma Yeasmeen Haque is principal, Radiant International School.

### Silent, tortured soul Z.A.M. Khairuzzaman wallows

# in some poetry

HE book contains 43 selected poems of Poet Al Mahmud, one of the leading poets in the country. The poems included in the selection are taken from ten books of poetry published over a period of 32

In an introduction, Zakeria Shirazi on the bank of the Titas.He began said for the last forty years or so Al Mahmud's place as one of the leading poets in the country is unassailable. He is a modernist with a perennial appeal because, his admirers say, he has his roots firmly grounded in the soil. Al Mahmud is an heir to the rich literary tradition as well as the heroic struggle to establish the rights of the Bengali language.

Al Mahmud strove to rediscover the racial and cultural identity of pristine Bengal as rooted in history and tradi-

In 'Reaction,' one of the poems, Al Mahmud says,

Iam an exile from a twilight zone where every live tree was nonresponsive.

In 'Destination', another poem, the inwardly exiled, solitary and tortured soul of the modernist, begins its day in a state of listlessness and tedium, or what may be called Baudelairesque ennui. Where will the poet go? He seeks company, thinks of friends with whom he could share the joy of writing a new poem. He badly needs spiritual support. After roaming the impersonal city, he fails to find a friend and instead confronts a padlock hanging over all his destinations. The beleaguered soul finally remembers the sufferings of Christ while being crucified.

The profound tedium that Baudelaire celebrates is tellingly represented in Al Mahmud's 'The dragging days in the woods' where in the forest recesses nothing happens.

In 'The shame of returning' the poet has returned to his village, to his mother's loving embrace. Return to the village does not imply any nostalgic craving for the pastoral past. He celebrates his native surroundings not in the style and idiom of the pastoral poets of yore but with his assiduously crafted technique and blend of the modernist philosophy. In the poem, the poet has missed the train to the city. Was it the train to urbanisation, industrialisation, modernisation? But modernism makes him city-conscious as well. In fact, he is an exile from both city and village.

In 'Solace', the city pavement is scorched by the daylong sun and darkness is like a defiled harlot that invites him to walk into her boudoir. In 'Route map,' Al Mahmud's destination is the city, the port. After a tortuous journey 'you look south/slightly to the south of the sun/At the foot of the mountain/at sea level you will find/ the illuminated line of the port,/ and the bustle/and the wide welcoming

embrace.' In Al Mahmud's 'Reaction'

Academy literary award in 1968 although by then only two of his books of poetry had appeared. He took active part in the movement for independence and the Liberation War. In 1971 he returned to

we get a sense of 'brindy wind' and its

'salty tang' and in 'Home coming' the

wind wafts a salty smell. In the poem

'My destination' 'the dry tunic is exud-

1936 in Brahmanbaria, a small town

writing poetry from his school days

when the literary magazines of Dhaka

and Kolkata were publishing his

poems. As his poems kept appearing

zines of the two cities, he soon

attracted the notice of the literati.

When Kobita, the highbrow poetry

journal of Kolkata edited by

Buddhadev Bose, published a few of

his poems, his place as a rising poet of

the country seemed assured. He

became a recipient of the Bangla

in the most prestigious literary maga-

Al Mahmud was born on 11 July

ing the smell of sunlight."

# Selected Poems of Al Mahmud Translated from the Bengal with an Introduction by Zakeria Shirazi

Al Mahmud Translation Zakeria Shirazi Rhythm Prokashona Sangstha

Selected Poems of

the country victoriously and published a daily newspaper titled Gonokontha. As the newspaper held anti-establishment views, he was arrested and the newspaper was proscribed. In 1975 after release from prison he joined as assistant director of the Research and Publication Department of the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. In 1993, he retired as director of the department. He has to his credit more than 30 books, including, besides books of poetry, short stories, novels and essays. He has edited a number of journals and periodicals. He is a recipient of a number of awards, including the state award Ekushey Podok.

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

# Moustache half burnt but still twirled

#### Farida Shaikh spots Zia ul-Haq rising, ghost-like, in a tale

N August 17, 1988, a plane carrying President Zia ul-Huq, American ambassador Arnold Raphel, US Brig. General Herbert Wassom, and 28 Pakistani military officers crashed. Nearly twenty years after this catastrophic event, Mohammed Hanif presents a military satire. The book is based on home grown

conspiracy theories, 'that a bomb or a canister of nerve gas hidden inside a gift of mangoes was responsible for bringing down the C130.' And the personal experiences of the writer, the views and opinions of friends and relatives. There was no mystery surrounding it,

no bigger mission, no courage involved.' Working with not an original plot, Hanif decided to pick up on the fated crash of the Hercules C130. 'Trying to unlock the mystery of how a super fit C130 aircraft could come tumbling down from the skies only four minutes after take-off.'

Hanif had no luck getting any facts from any quarters. He decided to turn it into a fictional piece of work. 'The only fact in the book is the plane crash. The rest is all the product of his imagination....and no hidden agenda, no hatred of the army, no revealing of secrets that became known to him through Deep Throat or anything like that.

Mohammed Hanif, a graduate of the Pakistan Air Force Academy Risalpur, took to journalism and creative writing. Now head of the BBC Urdu service, he commented recently, 'We still know nothing about the incident.' Himself a pilot, Hanif added, 'We know the make of the aircraft, we know the passengers who were on board and we know that four

minutes after it was confirmed, and there was a wave of relief across Pakistan.' The book starts with a sad joke about

'these bloody squadron leaders ....without any squadron to lead.' Medals are like fruit salad, given to a person because he is there, for hard labour, like tree planting week and 'a haj medal too.'

Hanif's work is an excellent military satire; much of it is narrated in typical armed forces lingo that makes vivid the regimented academy and mess life of the officers. Central to the novel is the country's defense establishment and more than a decade-long period of autocratic rule that resembled medievalism prompting young Muslim men to join the jihad in Afghanistan.'

General Zia confined himself to Army House, fearing to shift to President's House. Obsession with assassination ruled the twilight period of the military dictator's life. The book captures the period, June 1988, accurately, with hyperbolic military discipline. After eleven years in power he is convinced that someone is planning to kill him.

On 15 June General Zia paused while reading the Quran, his index finger hesitated on the verse 21:87 --- And remember Zun-nus, when he departed in wrath: he imagined that We had no power over him! But he cried through the depth of darkness, 'There is no god but thou: glory to thee: I was indeed wrong!'

Two months and two days later, he overruled the security alert, left Army House and was killed in an aeroplane crash. Afterwards, a soldier searching for signs to confirm the evidence on a 'decapitated head with glistening hair parted in the middle... moustache half

burnt but still twirled' also noticed a copy of the Quran intact, opened on the same

Throughout the book Hanif is clear in blaming General Zia for the Islamisation of Pakistan's society and armed forces. He uses the case of a woman called



A Case of Exploding Mangoes Mohammad Hanif Random House India

Zainab, to mock shariah law. General Zia picks up the clipping of the New York . Times with the heading, Blind justice in the land of the pure.

Zainab has been accused of fornicating and must be stoned to death. General Zia would call the ninety-year-old Qadi in

Mecca when confronted by legal dilemma.

But the truth is that Zainab is a blind woman who has been brutally raped by four men. To turn from accused into victim, she must either visually identify her attackers or find four Muslim male witnesses of sound mind to testify to her innocence

Hanif refers to the founder of Pakistan, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who he says never performed the haj, while General Zia awarded medals to serving officers who undertook the journey. The famous slogan, 'Faith, Unity, Discipline, appeared meaningless, and too secular, close to being heretical. The founder had civilians in mind and not the armed forces. To replace the motto befitting the soldier's mission, Zia thought of Allah and jihad.

"Before General Zia, yes, we were a struggling democracy but a fairly secular state... There were problems before him, but nobody thought that bringing in religious laws would be the solution. They were imposed on Pakistan and we are still struggling with the bizarre laws." The list of suspects included fellow

generals, CIA, ISI, torture and deplorable cell conditions, RAW and under officer Shigri who wanted to avenge the death of his father, a colonel who was General Zia's chosen man to run operations with the mujahideen against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Also the geopolitics of that period gained new heights with the presence of Osama bin Laden at a July 4 party hosted by the US ambassador in Islamabad.

The publishers make quite a pitch about homosexuality, especially the involved with The Reading Circle.

Farida Shaikh is a critic and closely

relationship that the main protagonist Shigri shares with fellow cadet Obaid-ulllah, called Baby O. Same-sex relationships are common in every system, and Hanif overlooks the "naivety" of the publishers using this for a sales pitch. "It just happens. That a friendship that

is born out of being thrown into situations away from families. There is only one person you can completely share everything with and rely on. Most boys do go through that phase at some point of time at military academies, madrassas or boarding schools." That explains the homosexuality in the PAF officers' living

Of the three publications of the work, the European edition cover has been the most creative, with the dynamite sticking out of the mango and an overfed crow perched on the fruit. The Indian edition has the face of the dead general. A very limited number of copies of this edition were available during June-July in Dhaka. More than being a military episode, the book is a hilarious and humorous narrative on the claustrophobic social conditions that defined the decade long autocratic Zia rule.

Hanif is a brilliant writer with an unusual ability to see small details, and make sense of all he hears. (This writing is in memory of my

husband, Late Wing Commander A.M.M.Enayetullah, GDP, who introduced T-33 for jet conversion flying at the Pakistan Air Force Academy, Risalpur, in 1962-63).