

The intellectual in the guerrilla

Mohit Ul Alam finds a work on Khaled Musharraf riveting

BRAVE OF HEART is a 352-page book by Bir Pratik Habibul Alam (Sector -2 and K- Forces) on the guerilla operations conducted by him and his friends in Dhaka during the liberation war. The book provides a fascinating reading of the daredevil actions of the guerilla FF's that shook the Pakistani junta to its core. In a simple but thrilling way, reminding one of the style of either Mario Puzo in *The Godfather* or Truman Capote in *In Cold Blood*, Alam describes the incidents and happenings in a matter-of-fact manner though the reader will every minute while reading it be haunted by his language laden with a fictional quality. Though written, naturally, from the rival perspectives, Alam's book will also remind one of the Pakistani classic written on the Liberation War of Bangladesh, *Witness to Surrender* by Siddik Salik.

Guerilla operations in Dhaka started from May that year when resistance in its various strategic forms was contemplated by the Bangladesh government-in-exile and the military officers who had already defected from the Pakistan army and were stationing themselves across the border and planning full-scale war operations. It struck the brave Major Khaled Musharraf, commander of Sector -2, that if students from Dhaka University and other city institutions could be lured to participate in guerilla warfare within the city, the Pakistan army would remain unsettled and when the time came for a full-scale war the guerillas would by then have done much of the work of attrition.

Brave of Heart in a way is a paean to one of our greatest freedom fighters, Major Khaled Musharraf, who along with his most trusted adjutant Major A. T. M. Hyder ("with his left arm plastered and resting in a sling") had formed the first guerilla unit under K-Force to disable Dhaka from the beginning phase of the war. Khaled's planning and masterminding the operations one after another, recruiting guerillas irrespective of their political identity, organizing youth bands into professional guerillas through proper training and motivation, and at the same time instructing them on their own safety once they are inside the enemy zone, and making them see the difference between over-heroism and heroism based on calculated risk, and finally building up a rehabilitation hospital in Bisramganj, Tripura, where female freedom fighters took on themselves the role of the nurses in all these Khaled has left a strong imprint not only on Alam and his co-fighters but also on us readers. One only wishes Khaled and Hyder hadn't died in the fateful coup of 1975 by the 10th Bengal. Cry, my beloved country, for such great heroes you have lost.

Alam, the only son in the family of Engineer Hafizul Alam, left their Dilu Road house in the first week of April and along with three friends, Zia, Qayyum and Lichang, crossed the border to join the Sector-2 headquarters at Motinagar, Tripura, India. Sector Commander Major Khaled Musharraf came one day to meet the new recruits.

The following is an excerpt from Alam's description of this first encounter:
"A fair, tall and handsome man stepped out of the jeep the moment the sepy

opened the door for him.... He wore dark blue pinstriped trousers, yellow full-sleeve shirt and a belt with a holster holding a pistol.... Maj Khaled, a tall, very handsome young man, glanced at us for a few moments and started speaking fluently in Bangla and English.... He said that he would fight the Pakistan army and its government on three fronteconomic, political and military. Battles on all these three fronts would be fought simultaneously. Major Khaled spelled out his intentions in clear terms, explaining what he was going to do with the students who were joining his sector. He thanked the students of Dhaka and other districts for joining him and asked all of us present to have the courage



Brave of Heart
Habibul Alam, Bir Pratik
Academic Press and Publishers Library

and determination to understand what he called the guerilla warfare of Sector 2. The students would not only fight but would also ensure that the economy of the country was not crippled. This was only possible by planned insurgency at various places inside the country.... He rested his left elbow on his left thigh, like Rodin's 'Thinker', and then he spoke to us. From his right pocket he pulled out a packet of 555 cigarettes and lit one.... [and after a]... long puff, Major Khaled quoted Mao, "No government wants an alive guerilla".

From May onward, until the fateful night of 29 August when the Pakistani military busted forty houses in Dhaka suspecting them (in most cases accurately) as guerilla hideouts and picked up Alam's comrades Bodi, Baki, Chullu Bhai, Samad Bhai, Rumi (Jahanara Imam's son), Jewel and many other great FF's one by one, many of them never to return, the guerillas had thoroughly shaken the Pakistan troops and destroyed their morale. By that time, Alam and his team had already mission-completed at as many as twenty spots, and the major operations among them that caught the global headlines were the two attacks on Hotel Inter-Continental (now Sheraton), the blowing up of the five power

stations (including the one at Siddhirganj), the destruction of the power pump at Nilkhet and the ruin of the camp at Farmgate.

The operations had almost a similar pattern. First, planning at the Dhanmondi Road 28 hideout (Chullu Bhai's office of a foreign agency), then reconnoitering the targeted spots for a couple of days, then positioning the guerilla groups at the vital spots on the day of the charge, synchronizing all their actions to the minutest degree, and having them completed. Sometimes the guerillas needed to use other people's cars forcibly to run an operation.

Injury frequently happened. Mokles, FF Mukhter's brother, received a bullet in his chest, and it was Dr Azizur Rahman, a physician of the P.G. who operated upon the wound at Dhanmondi 28 hideout at the dead of night. Such help from the civilians was aplenty. Acting out a plan of Shahdat Chowdhury, Alam's own sisters, Reshma and Asma, made numerous Bangladesh flags to fly in the Dhaka sky from floating gas balloons on 14 August 1971, virtually turning Pakistan's independence day into Bangladesh independence day.

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Some of the recapitulations of these operations are sensational and hair-raising. The episode of fixing up explosives at a toilet in the Hotel Intercontinental by the rookie recruit Baki (of Gulshan, not the one of Khilgaon) amidst tight security is described with such verve that one would not only feel how intimately the Libeartion War is re-visualized by one of its frontline fighters but also how such descriptions can inspire us and elevate our spirit and make us so hopeful about our country. The book germinates a sense of rejuvenation that is so rewarding.

The busting of the hideouts happened, Alam records, from an all too-familiar scenario. Bodi, the great FF, was betrayed to the Pakistan army by one of his friends. By torturing Bodi the army extracted the next name, and the method continued.

When news of the 29 August debacle reached Melaghar, the K-Forces Headquarters, Major Hyder wept like a child, but not forgetting their mission, the second line of guerillas was soon formed led by Nasiruddin Yusuf Bachchu and included Sadek Hossain Khoka and Mofazzal Hossain Maya among others. They conducted operations from Savar until liberation. Their major thrusts consisted of operations at Green Road and Motijheel.

The book also records some very disturbing developments in the Muktiuddha camp even at that early time. Word spread that in the K-Forces most of the recruited FFs had been taken from leftist political student wings and not from Awami League student-front Chhatra League. Being under pressure from the government-in-exile,

Khaled in great dismay had to send Shahidul Alam Khan Badal, a compatriot of Alam from the beginning, to another camp, his problem being that he was the youngest brother of Rashed Khan Menon, a leftist politician at the time (as history will have it Menon today is an MP on a 'boat' ticket).

The other disconcerting bit of information that struck me as worth mentioning is the desire of Indian Brigadier Sabeq Singh for recruiting Hindus in the Mukti Bahini to give it a balanced composition. Accordingly, Major Khaled sent Shahdat Chowdhury, Badal and Alam to the refugee camps to recruit at least 100 to 200 Hindu young men. But the young men who were approached "were ready to do anything for Bangladesh except fight the enemy". Hearing this Brigadier Sabeq Singh became very worried. A footnote on the following page says that this Sabeq Singh later on, after retirement, masterminded the Sikh uprising at the Golden Temple and died with Bhindranwale in 1984.

Alam has also presented heroic portraits of many a freedom fighter, from "A Born Fighter" Ishraque, whose witnessing a twenty-year pregnant woman being slashed by a Pakistani with his bayonet and yet not betraying him, is the most touching description in the book, to Cadet Kamrul Hasan Bhuiyan, Commander of Muradnagar thana, who didn't allow the Pakistanis to recapture the Nabinagar road through a three-day battle, and the valiant Subedar Wahab of Belonia who never for a day crossed the border but became a nightmare for the Pakistani troops, and Captain Abdul Gaffar Halder, Bir Uttam of 4th EBR. Beside these glorious images, the book also records heart-felt salutations to the Tripura inhabitants for their support, and such warm personalities as Dr Sujit Dey of Agartala in whose house Alam and Shahdat happened to meet Major Zia for the first time.

Victory Day arrived on 16 December, 'butcher'-in-command Niazi surrendered. The next morning Alam came to know that an Indian officer would announce the independence of Bangladesh on radio and TV at 8:30 am. That couldn't be allowed to happen; the country's independence must be declared by a Bangladeshi. So Alam collected Fateh Ali Chowdhury and Shahdat Chowdhury and Shooheed and went to ex-DG Shamsul Huda Chowdhury's house at Eskaton and managed to have him make the radio station operational for them. They requested Maj ATM Hyder to do the announcement, who accordingly did it on both radio and later on in the afternoon on TV. The book has a picture of this announcement.

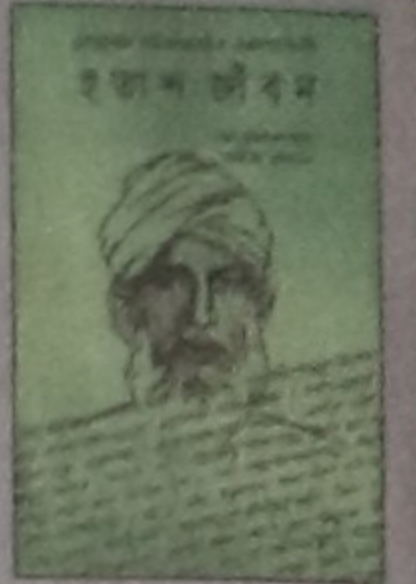
The epigraphs at the chapter heads are aptly inspiring.

One very minor factual mistake to note: the construction company, The Engineers Ltd., has been mentioned as having constructed the Kalurghat Bridge at Chittagong. It doesn't seem possible, because the said bridge had been there from the British period, when probably the firm didn't exist.

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AT A GLANCE

Hotash Jibon
Mohammad Moniruzzaman Eslamabadi
Edit. Ovik Osman
Adorn Publications

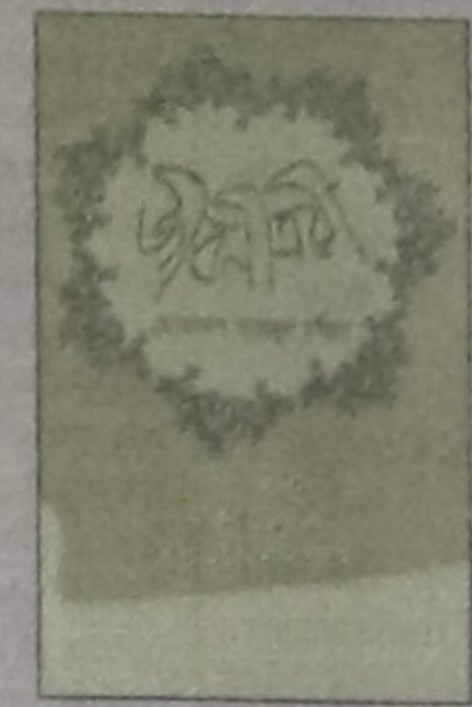


Feudal Forces: Reform Delayed
Moving from Force to Service in South Asian Policing
Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

This revealing work from Sanjay Patil is a profound study of the failings of the police systems operating in South Asia. You could say it is a severe indictment of the ways in which the police function, and they generally function in a manner that leaves citizens gasping for breath where they should be getting a breather. It is a bold analysis you have here.

Social Protection and Livelihoods
Marginalised Migrant Workers of India and Bangladesh
Edit. C.R. Abrar, Janet Seeley
The University Press Limited

With reports of migrant workers coming in every now and then, this study of such workers, marginalized by circumstances, promises to reveal a few more truths about social conditions in India and Bangladesh. It should be good, intense reading for anyone interested in the changing trends in worker migration.



Jibontroyee
Abul Hussain, Akbaruddin, Sheikh Habibar Rahman
Muhammad Abdul Mazid Shuchipatra

A respected civil servant, the author reveals a refreshingly new aspect of his personality in this study of three prominent Bengalis in the cultural arena. Of course, the insights are his own, but they do provide a new dimension to the study of aesthetics in Bangladesh. It is certainly cheering to see an individual in government going back to intellectual pursuits.

Romance, history, war

Tulip Chowdhury studies a strong woman

WHEN one starts reading a novel by Irving Stone it's like putting down the first step on a fascinating journey. The book carries the reader through heart gripping plots and soaring adventures. There are simply too many things happening and one cannot put the book down until the journey ends. The reader can be certain that he or she is onto having some wonderful hours of reading. *Immortal Wife* is a saga that will leave the reader feeling enriched and experienced with tales of human nature and fascinating realities of life.

Immortal Wife is the biographical novel of Jessie Benton Fremont. She was an American writer and a political activist. Her husband John C. Fremont was a well-known explorer in the armed forces. Midway in his life he became an active politician. And then when the land they had purchased at Mariposa, California, turned out to be a gold mine he became the owner of that mine. John met Jessie when she was sixteen and they fell in love at first sight. When John heard her vehemently opposing a decision of her school authority at a time when it was unadvisable to oppose any formal decisions in public, he knew that she was the woman for him. And when Jessie stared into his blue eyes as he kissed her hand she knew that he was the only man in her life. They were married immediately in secrecy for Jessie's father Tom Benton, a senator from Missouri, did not approve the union. That was Jessie doing what she believed in. That was the beginning of their life together, a life that resonated with war, peace, death, destruction and pieces of happiness in between it all.

Jessie's life as John's wife was a rollercoaster ride. They settled down in Washington expecting a blissful life. However, Jessie found that spurs of moments came for her unfolding unexpected adventures, life came with its bundles of surprises for her. Before her marriage Jessie had been closely associating with her father with his political activities. After her marriage she found herself beside her husband, advising and encouraging him on his expeditions. Jessie was a voracious reader and a very prolific writer. She kept herself well informed on worldly matters. John was sent to explore new trails in California. In no time Jessie was an expert on her knowledge of the details of the trail which John was expected to explore. She was able to advise him on what gears to take, which men to accompany him and was ready with a complete map of the trail.

Jessie was a strong supporter of her husband whether it was his political aspirations, his travel through California or his work at the mines. Both, Jessie and her husband were against slavery. Their firm stand against this exploitation of human beings started even before President Lincoln took his stand against it. In the great American Civil War Jessie and John stood united in their stand against slavery and earned the respect of the masses of people. John C. Fremont became the first candidate of the Republican Party for the office of presidential candidate of United States. He was the first presidential candidate of a

major party to run on a platform in opposition to slavery. In all his political upheavals Jessie was constantly beside John. She was called General Jessie for outstanding contributions beside her husband's during the Civil War.

As their life faced so many rough seas, Jessie and John rode the waves with all the strength of their love. Jessie a fearless, adoring rebellion swore in her life that marriage was only the beginning for a woman



Immortal Wife
Irving Stone
Signet

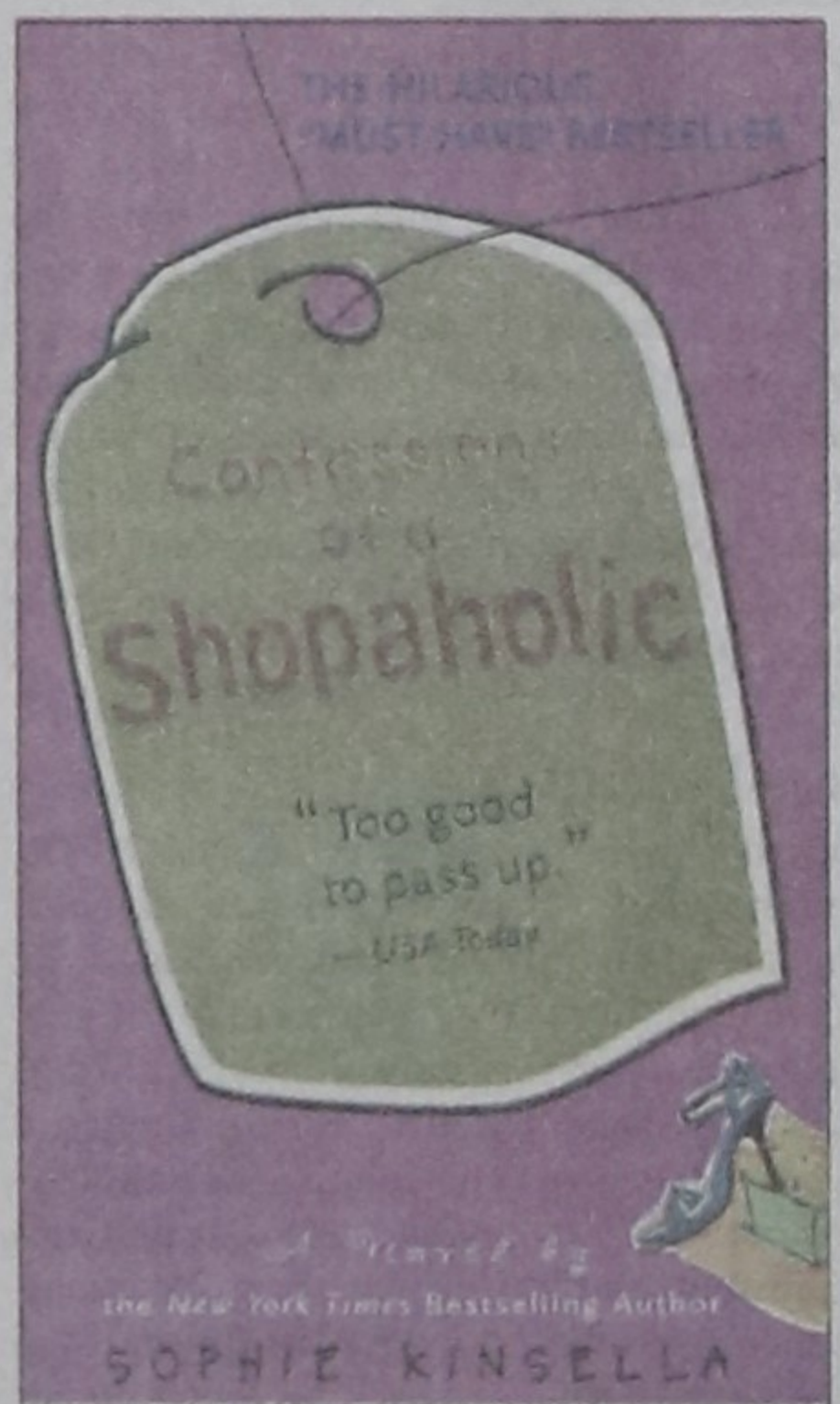
born to be much more than just a wife... a woman for all time. Many times they led through financial hardships but Jessie was too proud to ask for help from her father. It was their love that carried them like an angel's wings at all times. There was a time when John had to go through a court martial. Jessie's father told her that John should give in. However, Jessie stood by her husband and his stand that he had not committed mutiny as implied. And in the end the husband and wife came out victorious. The love between Jessie and John is an example of how a family can survive the oddest of circumstances with the towering strength of love. There was never a fraction of wavering where they stood firmly for each other. For them their marriage was a love affair without end.

Irving Stone writes factually and with a deep humanistic touch. While reading *Immortal Wife* you feel like you are there with the characters and are experiencing everything that they are going through. The story pulses with deep emotion and panoramic action. The protagonist Jessie Benton Fremont is a magnanimous character that does not fail to impress the reader. She wrote many stories that were printed in popular magazine of her time as well as several books of historical value. Her writings, which helped support her family during times of financial difficulty, were memoirs of her husband's, and her own, time in the American West, back when the West was an exotic frontier. The book comes with romance, history and a flavour of the American Civil War. It is informative and at the same time a love story carved in history. A great read for all times!

Tulip Chowdhury is a teacher, poet and writer.

Two reviews from Nausheen Rahman

Keeping readers on stitches...



Confessions of A Shopaholic
Sophie Kinsella
Bantam Dell

TIRED of all those tomes? Well, put the volumes aside and take a little time out for something light and witty.

In *Confessions of A Shopaholic*, Sophie Kinsella's very likeable but exasperating heroine has readers (especially us womenfolk) in stitches, on tenterhooks and in tears alternately, with her escapades. Many of us can identify with her at some point or the other. Being addicted to shopping is nothing alien to women in today's image-conscious, materialistic world. It's just not knowing when to stop that invites disasters!

As we read how Rebecca Bloomwood (Becky), the protagonist, falls deeper and deeper into debt, we cannot help

but sympathize with her while losing patience with her at the same time.

Becky is a compulsive shopper and comes across as a flippant "head-in-the-clouds" young lady. She is a financial journalist, apparently with nothing going for her. She cannot manage her money matters, her self-esteem seems to be ebbing and she invariably gets herself into knotty situations.

The really riveting part of the book comes when Becky discovers that she is capable of good journalism; it is at this juncture that she feels motivated and committed enough to turn in a really good story. Several other good things trail along as a result of this and our heroine undergoes a drastic change for the better.

It gives one a good feeling to read how someone can go through a perfectly credible change of personality particularly when the writer shows up the person's foibles without being at all didactic.

Kinsella's descriptions of Becky's scrapes, all of which revolve around her urge to buy and to keep on buying, are amusing, as well as thought-provoking.

The other characters and her interaction with them are interestingly portrayed. There's Suze, her flat mate, who's just as crazy as her when it comes to shopping, there's Luke Brandon, a very successful entrepreneur with whom her relationship goes through various stages, there's Tarquin Cleath-Stuart, the "15th richest man in the country" (who has a big 'crush' on her, but by whom she's not at all attracted). There's Derek Smeath, her relentless bank manager and several others.

The letters from the bank to Becky add a delightful flavour.

Some of Kinsella's other *Shopaholic* novels are: *Shopaholic Takes Manhattan*, *Shopaholic Ties the Knot* and *Shopaholic and Sister*. Sophie Kinsella, a former financial journalist, has been adjudged "The New York Times Best-Selling Author".

Read this book and who knows? You might become a Sophie Kinsella bookaholic!

... and humour as a panacea

WHEN I read Moni Mohsin's *The End Of Innocence* last year, I really liked it. I had no idea then that I would be reading another book by this writer which would be so very different.

The Diary Of A Social Butterfly is a compilation of selections from a column of the same name Mohsin used to write for the Friday Times of Pakistan.

Butterfly is a unique character, what with her various idiosyncrasies: her atrocious spelling and malapropism, her nicknames for people, her obsession with being a part of all big events in town, her total disregard for the serious happenings in her country's political arena, etc.

Against the backdrop of severe political strife in the country, is Butterfly's unreal world of riches and glamour. As shallow as it might be, this world depicts the lifestyle of a particular class and society (of "the rich and inane") everywhere, especially in our subcontinent.

Every entry in this socialite's wildly funny diary has two headings or captions, one about the state of the country and the other about her: (1) Pakistan becomes an ally in the U.S. War against Terror. Butterfly quashes her sister-in-law's attempts to rise above herself. (2) U.S. sends Desert Force to Gulf. Butterfly bemoans the lack of good New Year parties.

The book is replete with Butterfly's quotable quotes. "..... Anyways, I said to Janoo, why didn't he buy a book or something and read it to forget his sorrows about cricket and Bob Woolmer. And he said it was rich, coming from me, considering I couldn't name a single book if he asked me. So I said what nonsense he was talking. And he said, go on then, name one book you know well. And cool as a cucumber, I said, cheque book! Kaisa?" "Business



The Diary Of A Social Butterfly
Moni Mohsin
Random House India

typhoons", "textile magnets", "get knocked up by a truck", "laughed till I became historical" are a few of the gems.

This is a book one can finish in a couple of sittings and have a hearty laugh into the bargain; it is one that can be read aloud with friends and enjoyed thoroughly in a group.

The writer admits frankly in her 'Afterword', that the character of Butterfly is a combination of various women she's met and of herself; she is based on her own "hidden shallows", on one side of her personality, and on incidents that happen to others. As Mohsin narrates these incidents, other facets of Pakistan's violent period (Jan 2001 to Jan 2008) flash across the pages.

We see how life goes on amidst all the insecurity and the horror in fancy drawing rooms, at lavish parties and among all the glitz.

Nausheen Rahman has studied English literature and is a critic and teacher.