

Two reviews from Syed Badrul Ahsan

War, suffering and those laws about them...

At a time when morality is being tested to the extreme and law is being subjected to rigorous interpretation, this book comes as a useful guide to an understanding of conflict situations and what the international community can do about them. If the world wars are part of the collective human memory now, if the Cold War is somewhere in the distant past, there is hardly any reason to feel complacent



International Humanitarian Law
An Anthology
Md Jahid Hossain Bhuiyan, Prof Louise
Doswald Beck,
Prof Azizur Rahman Chowdhury
LexisNexis Butterworths Wadhwa
Nagpur

about the circumstances we inhabit. Remember that it was only in the 1990s that history, to the extent that war defined a large part of it, was badly mauled in the Balkans in a conflict that lay rooted in the deep antagonisms of the past. Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, et cetera, are all reminders that the human capacity to inflict wounds on civilisation has not yet ended, that indeed conflict in its violent forms is but a truth we have all lived with and will continue to consider part of life. And then of course there are the innumerable hostilities which have left countries in Africa maimed. You could even argue that all the decency and respect for individuals you expect will define these post-modern times have simply not manifested themselves in that unfortunate continent.

That is the pity. And the pity is even more in the knowledge that all too often it is the innocent who are compelled to pay the price in a situation not of their making. To what extent they can be provided protection against capricious rulers and the like remains a question. There are other matters of grave import as well. Take, for instance, the damage that may be caused and is indeed caused to the natural environment when armed hostilities break out in some corner of the globe. In *International Humanitarian Law*, that is precisely one of the concerns which are expressed in all the seriousness

you can imagine. What Marco Rossini brings to the reader's attention is, therefore, a theme that, despite being of grave import, has not been given much consideration in all our assessments of conflict. And yet humanitarian law is not just about people; it is at the same time about all those aspects of life that concern people everywhere in the sense that the ramifications of conflict are wide and deep.

It is just such ramifications that the authors of this excellent compendium bring together along with a presentation of the laws and rules that are putatively to guide human behaviour in times of open, often bitter hostilities. Begin at the beginning. In every conflict situation there are combatants and non-participants. Or you could call the latter victims of a situation they had no hand in the making of. From that point of view, the burden of guilt is clearly on combatants. How then do you deal with them? In skirmishes, in open battlefield conflict or in street-by-street fighting, they may perish or may be left grievously wounded. But it is a different ballgame altogether when these self-same combatants are taken prisoner. Once that happens, a new situation arises in that you need to define a combatant and, having done that, you need to step away from the earlier fury of battlefield conflict and regard these combatants in terms of international humanitarian law. Annysa Bellal and Vincent Chetail offer a clear perspective on the broad concept of combatants under international humanitarian law here.

Obviously, the biggest need in times of conflict is a guarantee of the protection of civilians and everyone else who has been caught in the crossfire. Michelo Hansungule brings forth a well-reasoned case in defence of the rights of the non-combatant who almost invariably finds himself caught in the bitterness that conflict is all about. The provision of protection to civilians, to the wounded, to prisoners of war is one that is symbolic of the times. Behavioral patterns are such as to impress upon people everywhere the fact that it is only moral to come to the aid of those who have simply been trapped in a war.

The law, therefore, is the thing. To what extent you define certain situations and to what degree you can apply the myriad international laws geared toward a protection of people unfortunate enough to be caught in a conflict condition really enables you to know the state of the globe as it will be. There are sometimes humanitarian interventions in a conflict. Why such interventions are necessitated is an issue explained in patent manner by Peter Hilpold, Azizur Rahman Chowdhury and Md. Jahid Hossain Bhuiyan in their discourse on the legal status of humanitarian intervention. The instances cited reinforce their case: India's intervention on the side of the Bengalis in the Bangladesh war of 1971, Tanzania's entry into Uganda in 1979, Vietnam's role in the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in 1979, Belgian involvement on the Congo in 1960, et cetera.

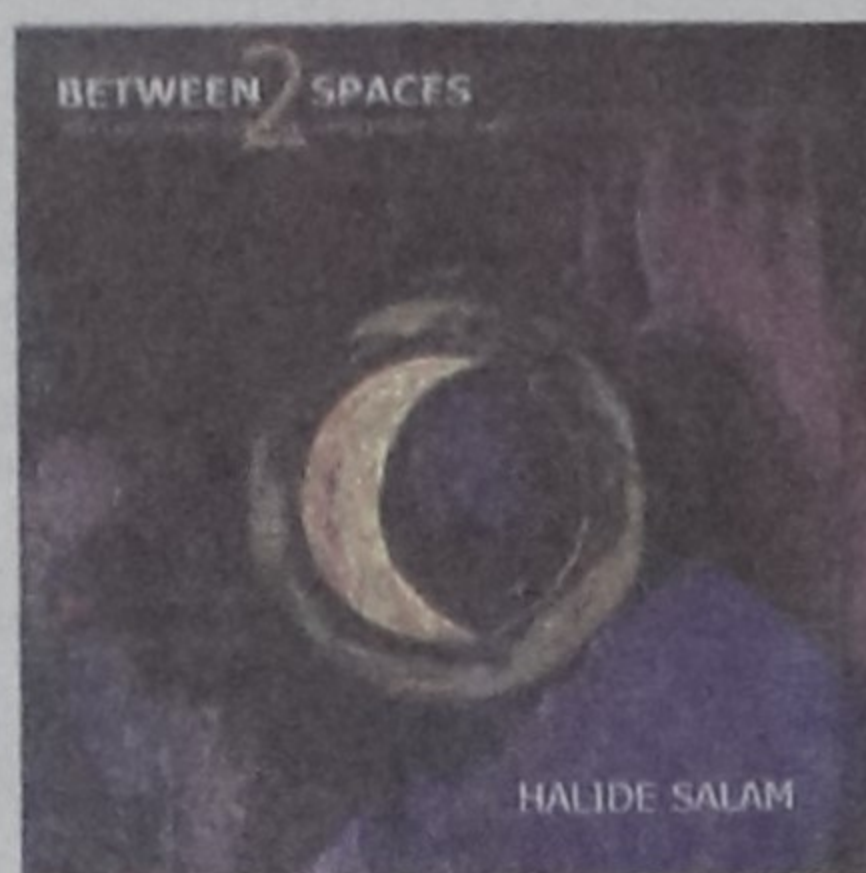
The work in review is, from a purely legal aspect, a detailed exposition of the

laws that operate, or should, in defence of the dignity of individuals who have had no role in the making of conflict situations. At the same time, it seeks to delve into the rights that necessarily will be applied in the case of those who create the grounds for conflict and then pursue it to the hilt. You get a rather enlightened idea of such situations through Hitoshi Nasu's ruminations on the status of rebels in non-international armed conflict. And within the broad spectrum of those ruminations come the Geneva Conventions, with all their necessary articles and additional protocols together with the role that the United Nations is expected to play in such circumstances of conflict.

This happens to be a work that statesmen and politicians need to keep within reach. It makes perspectives clearer.

... the artist in her landscape of light

ART springs somewhere in the depths of the soul. It is a calling almost religious in nature. Or, as Halide Salam makes it clear, there is about art a strong element of spirituality that gives it its inner meaning and strength. *Between 2 Spaces* is, therefore, a journey into the sublimity that spirituality can be, a journey that Salam has been engaged in for decades now. And what might be the origins of all this travel



Between 2 Spaces
Reflections On the Spiritual in Art
Halide Salam
Pocahontas Press, Virginia, USA

through the expanses of artistic time and space the writer has undertaken?

The answer to that query comes through Salam's reflections on her past, indeed on the roots she has clutched. The growth of the spirit of inquiry has generally to do with the way clans and families operate. And Halide Salam's sheer good fortune has been in being part of a family where the father has always operated on a higher intellectual plane than anyone else in his surroundings. And from her mother the writer (and remember she has been an artist for ages now) learnt the

value of observation. Her devotion to her parents says it all, in effect throws up the metaphor that is her life these days in the distant United States of America. Of her father, there is the warmth to be recalled: "Art is about feelings, my father insisted. 'Paint feelings through the objects but leave the objects far behind.'" If her father was the moon, her mother was to her the sun whose 'presence is constant, permeating and strengthening my actions, the source of my emotional comfort.' Salam goes beyond parents, looks farther back, to the grandmother she calls ammiyaan. It is ammiyaan she recalls in her reflections on her childhood associations of colour. There was white; and then there were the whites, with their different names. One of those would be explained in terms of fresh butter, or *taaza makkhan*; another would come as aged butter, or *purana makkhan*.

If that is the background against which Halide Salam has constantly been rediscovering herself, there is a bigger canvas in which she has been subjecting herself to reinvention. And that is her totality of religious belief, in Allah, in the Quran, in the Prophet. The correlation of the physical world to the realm of the metaphysical in her art is, in that sense, achieved through a fundamental underpinning of faith. Note her emphasis on spirituality being a guiding force in the shaping of destiny: 'In the Quran, the Eternal Guide, Al Khidr, guides individuals through their inexplicable journey, provided they ride life's forces with faith in providence and their destiny.'

This faith in Creation is a lesson that has come down to her from her father. He spoke of light, of its power, to her --- a cardinal lesson that was to be her driving force in her journey of self-discovery in America. She recalls her father's stress on the Quran, chapter 24, verse 35: 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass, the Glass as if it were a brilliant star: lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither from the East nor the West, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it. Light upon Light.'

Salam has travelled through towns and cities, through daylight and brilliant night, and has drawn on her experience to create her art. She informs us that in Ohio, in New Mexico, indeed everywhere, she has conversed with nature. In the process, she has gone out in search of knowledge. Muhyuddin Ibn Arabi, Rumi, Imam Gazzali, Henry Corbin, Martin Lings are some of the names she pushes our way. They are the many windows to her mind, or the varied apertures to her soul.

There is a spiritedness to Halide Salam's reflections. She crosses time zones and swims through space, to bring to fusion the scientific and the imaginative. The end is Creation. In Halide Salam's intellectual landscape, you are on a journey through the universe.

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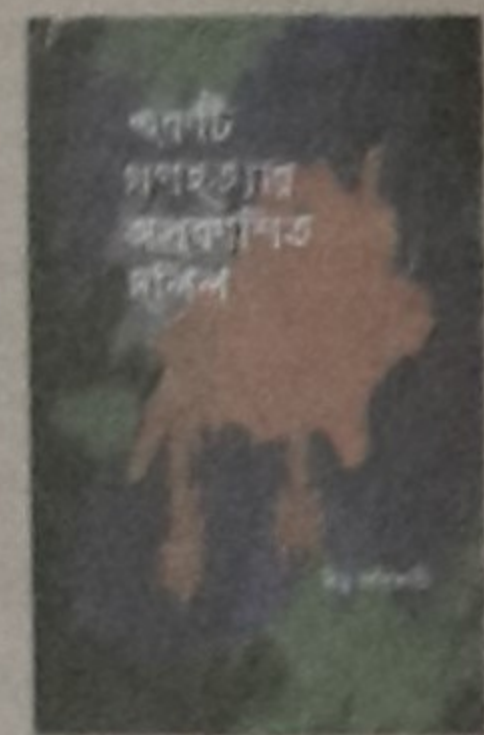
AT A GLANCE



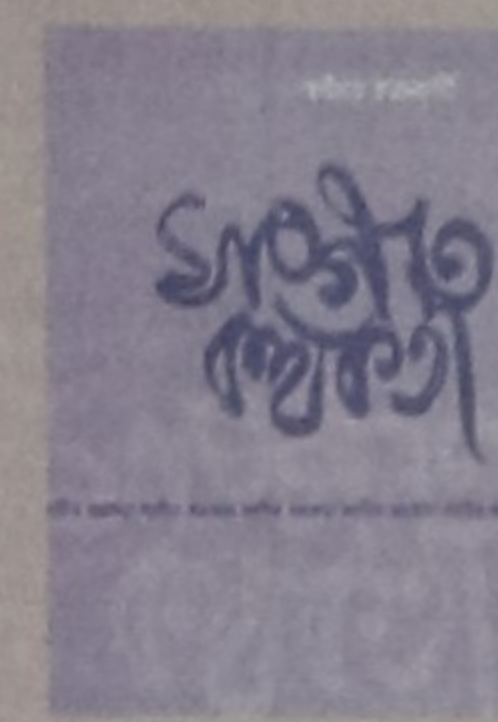
BRAC
Unnayaner Ekti Upakkhan
Faruq Chowdhury, et al
The University Press Limited
Tel: 9565441, 9565444

BRAC has since its inception been crucial in development-related work in Bangladesh. It has surely come a long way and has indeed branched out into a global ambience. This exhaustive study is but a recapitulation of the journey the organization has taken and the impact it has had on lives. It is a good analysis of NGO participation in the economy.

Ekti Gonohottar Oprokashito Doleel
Himu Adhikary
Porbota Printers



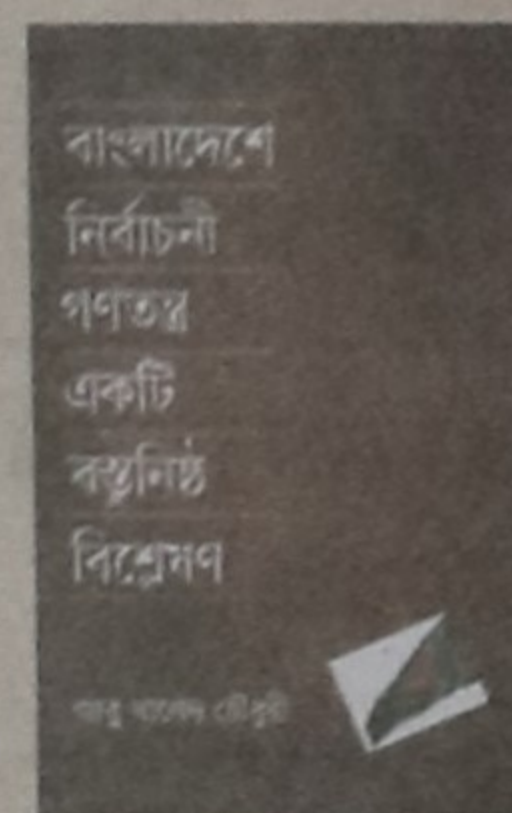
This work should rank as a valuable addition to the literature on Bangladesh's War of Liberation. As the title notes, the account here presented has not been seen or studied earlier. And yet it is important that the tragedy a village went through at the hands of the marauding Pakistan army be gone through, in the broad interest of morality and history.



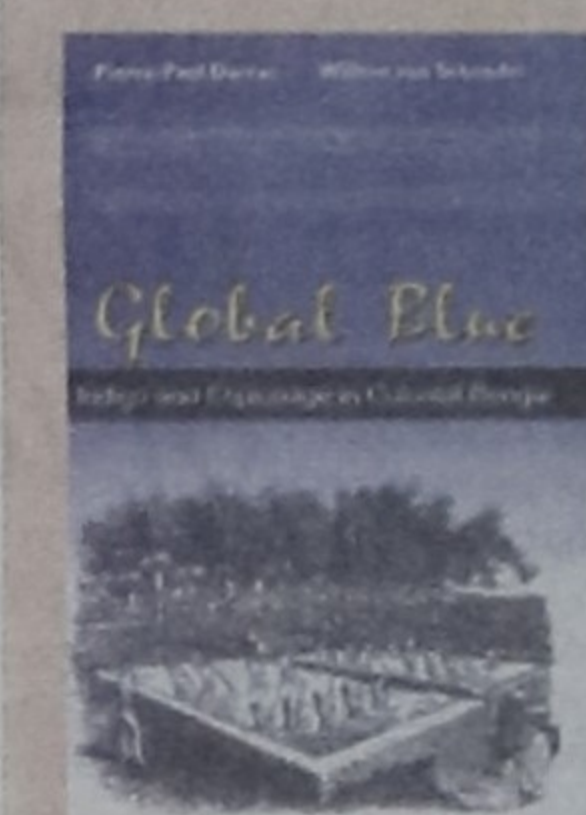
Shongheet Kothokota
Shwornamaoy Chakraborty
Shaile Prokashon
Tel: 636733

An excellent collection of essays, this work focuses on the importance of music in the growth of culture. The author covers a wide range of melody-related activities here, beginning of course with matters classical and moving on to the many genres which have defined the musical ethos of Bengal. For those in love with songs, here is an offering they ought not to miss.

Bangladeshe Nirbachoni Gonotontro
Ekti Bostunishtho Bishleshon
Abu Khaled Chowdhury
Nalanda
Tel: 0821 760245, 0191 2731649



Politics is rooted in the history of Bangladesh. And it is politics which the writer presents, in the form of a good number of essays, in this pretty engrossing work. He dwells on the nature and form of the caretaker government, human rights, democracy and electoral strategies. For good measure, he includes chapters on the Awami League and the Jatiyo Party.



Global Blue
Pierre-Paul Darrac, Willem van
Schendel
The University Press Limited
Tel: 9565441, 9565444

This work takes you back to times plainly exploitative in nature. In colonial times, indigo cultivation was regarded as one of the weapons the foreign occupiers of India used over and over to buttress their hold on politics. In this book, you come across the history behind the story. Additionally, there is the thrill of espionage you cannot miss.

An awesome compilation for children

Nausheen Rahman loses herself, again, in innocence

FABLES? Extracts from a memoir? Short stories? What is *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Other Stories* comprised of? We could say, in a way, all of the afore-mentioned.

The writer has dedicated this book to "the citizens of tomorrow who will bring changes in our (her) country."

Sudha Murty, a computer science teacher, social worker and best-selling writer from South India, has put together an awesome compilation for children but which readers of all ages will relish.

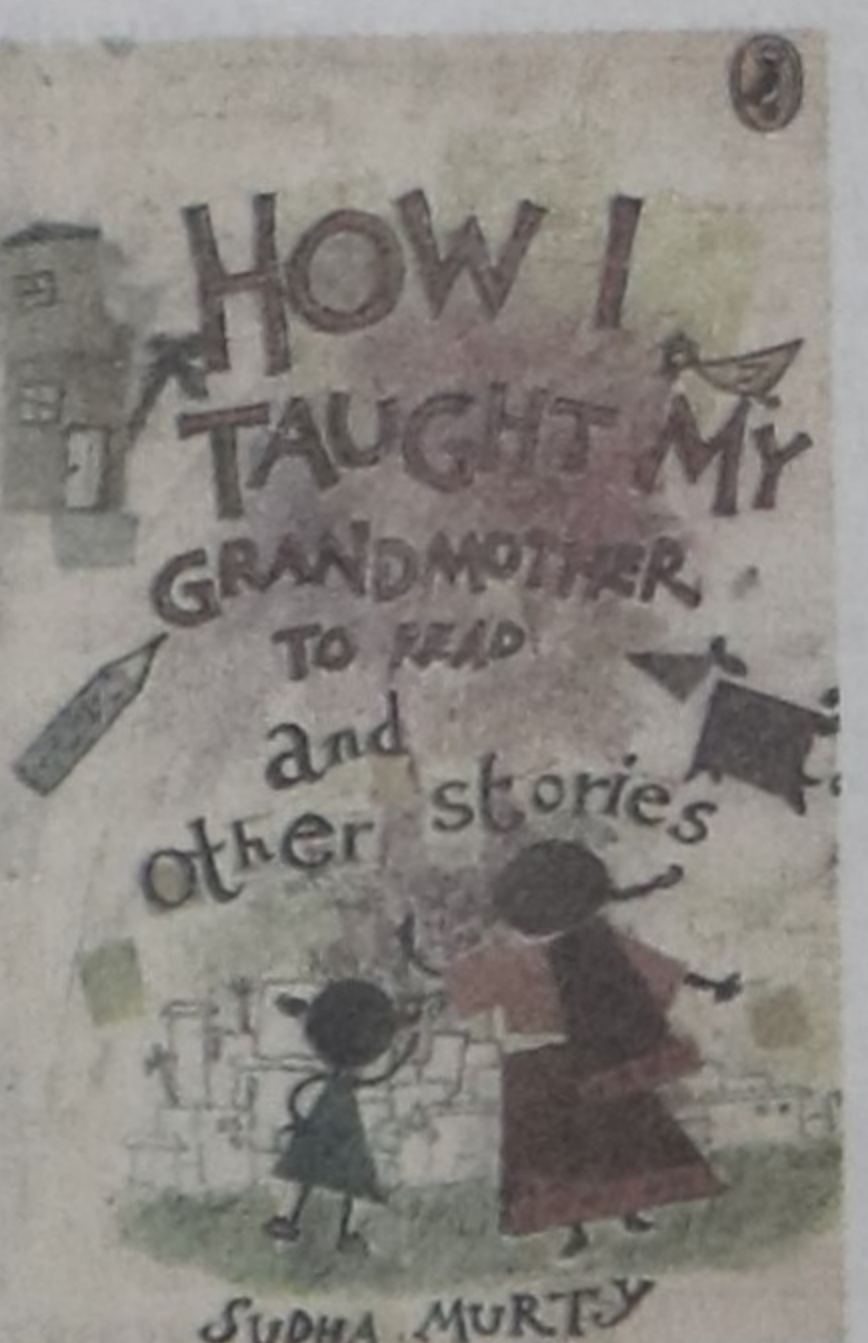
There are 24 tales, all of which give us something to think about, or to cherish in our memories, or something worth learning. They are all based on the writer's experiences and which, in their own ways, enriched her life (as she says in her foreword).

The writer's keen interest in listening to stories as a child probably gave rise to a passion for storytelling, a passion that has been honed into a remarkable skill. Her love of books and her desire to provide reading facilities and material to others led to her company's (INFOSYS FOUNDATION) donating books to thousands of libraries. It could have been a similar wish that caused her to write such refreshing stories.

Murty is not moralistic, but successfully passes on some values of life to her readers, values that she had, herself, imbibed.

The simplicity of the language, the directness of the style, the wise and catchy sayings, give us the incentive to go on turning the pages, as one fascinating story gives way to another.

We find wonderful portrayals of very different characters, and as we read on, we come face-to-face with a striking fact that life has so much to give us, often in



How I Taught My Grandmother
to Read and Other Stories
Sudha Murty
Puffin Books

the form of ordinary, everyday happenings. We just need to be a little observant and perceptive.

The first story, *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*, is a true account of how the writer's grandmother was adamant about learning to read and how she (Murty) taught her. This story reassures us that there is no age-bar to learning and that teachers deserve a lot of respect.

At *Least One Library* brings out an admirable trait of Murty's grandfather (who was a teacher). We also read how he instilled the love of spreading knowledge in her.

The Red Rice Granary has words (spoken by Murty's grandmother) which will reach out to people of all ages and religions: "Child, whenever you want to give something to somebody, give the best in you, never the second best. That is what I have learned from life. God is not there in the temple, mosque, or church. He is with the people. If you serve them with whatever you have, you have served God." The story is about how Murty's grandparents actually practiced what they preached, and about the pleasure they derived from giving alms.

Hassan's Attendance Problem is about one of the writer's students who was very irregular. A piece of advice she gives him confirms what we all know, but tend to overlook: "Please remember when elders say something, they do so because they want you to lead a better life than them. Excellence does not come by accident but by practice."

Simple, unassuming people, even children, can sometimes teach us valuable lessons. In *Amma, What is Your Duty?* we are shown how something the writer's daughter tells her makes her look at things in a new way.

The Real Jewels, while telling us about an experience the writer had as a guest in a house in South Canara, also gives us information about the importance given to education in that region where people believe that "If one man studies, only one person is educated, whereas if one lady studies, the entire family is educated."

Heart of Gold is a story which the writer had heard about an incident in New York. It ends with the moral "Help people without expecting anything in return."

A Wedding in Russia tells us about a lesson the writer wishes Indians could learn from the Russians.

The Story of Two Doctors: a tear-jerker, is an epitome of the nobility of sacrifice, a story everyone will enjoy.

A Journey Through Desert: shows us the power stories have to change people or to inspire them to do great things.

Deadman's Riddle: is a story about the division of a man's property among his sons. It illustrates how "Life is an eternal teacher, provided you have an open mind".

I Will Do It: is about someone who lives by the motto "Powered by intellect and driven by values".

Doing What You Like is Freedom: deals with over-protective parents and with letting go of children when they are "ready to fly".

Gowamma's Letter: tells us about a teacher who had influenced Murty to love stories and about the gratitude she feels when Murty publicly acknowledges her contribution to her success as a storyteller. We also read about the teacher's life. Murty ends this story thus: "Tears welled up in my eyes and fell on the letter mingling with the ink. I was unable to read further". We can't help but feel very emotional, too.

The other stories all have something or the other to offer.

We can use *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Other Stories* as a reference book to come up with appropriate quotes for different occasions.

More importantly, this book is a great source of short stories to read out to children (our own kids/and/or our students).

Nausheen Rahman teaches English and is a critic.

Hard realities of life

Z.A.M. Khairuzzaman appreciates a set of stories

THE term 'short story' refers to a work of fiction that is usually written in prose, usually in narrative format. This format or medium tends to be more pointed than longer works of fiction, novels or books. Many short story writers define their work through a combination of creative, personal expression and artistic integrity. The short story is an essential part of literature. Noted writers have attained maturity by writing short stories. Short stories are usually based on regular events occurring in our daily life.

Markin Hawa is a compilation of 14 short stories. The book is the writer's second one in its nature. *Markin Hawa* is a story of social evolution. It is centered on those Bengali young men and women who go to the United States for higher studies. In many cases, the younger generation gets de-linked from its own culture, religion, manners and rituals of the family to such an extent that it gets spoilt and even goes beyond the bounds of control. Those who constitute this generation do not remain within the bonds of affection and the love of their parents; and at times they get lost for good insofar as their families are concerned. Ultimately, family and social values get destroyed and love and affection among the members of the family peter out. Parents as well as dear and near ones of such children go through agony, and naturally too.

Besides, stories like *Dustor Dhap*, *Pak-Napak*, *Bibek*, *Chhayamurti*, *Protikar*, *Bhog-Bilashi* and *Jaliler Mritiku* are focused on clashes in family and social lives and erosion of values and as such are unique creations of the author. These are contemporary events occurring around us every day. Tragic stories like *Renu* and *Atokhed* have been shaped against the backdrop of our liberation war.

The stories in the compilation have been published in the last two years in national dailies like Janakantho, Ittefaq, weekly Robbar, monthly Sylhet

Bazar and little magazines. The stories are based on hard realities, which could be a reason why their language is very lively.

Ali Idris was born in Shaistanagar village of Habiganj in 1948. While in Jagannath College, he launched his writing career in the 1970s. Many of his stories were published in the weekly Bichitra. He is a regular column writer for Ittefaq and Prothom Alo. He won the Atish Dipankar Award in folk literature.

মার্কিন হাওয়া
আলি ইদ্রিস



Markin Hawa
Ali Idris
Ekushey Bangla
Prokashan

ture in 2003, Bangladesh Writers' Foundation Award in 2005, besides coming by other awards. He was also honoured by Sammiloni Mohila Samobaya in 2006.

A chartered accountant by profession, Idris considers literature as his passion.

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