

## The making of a superman

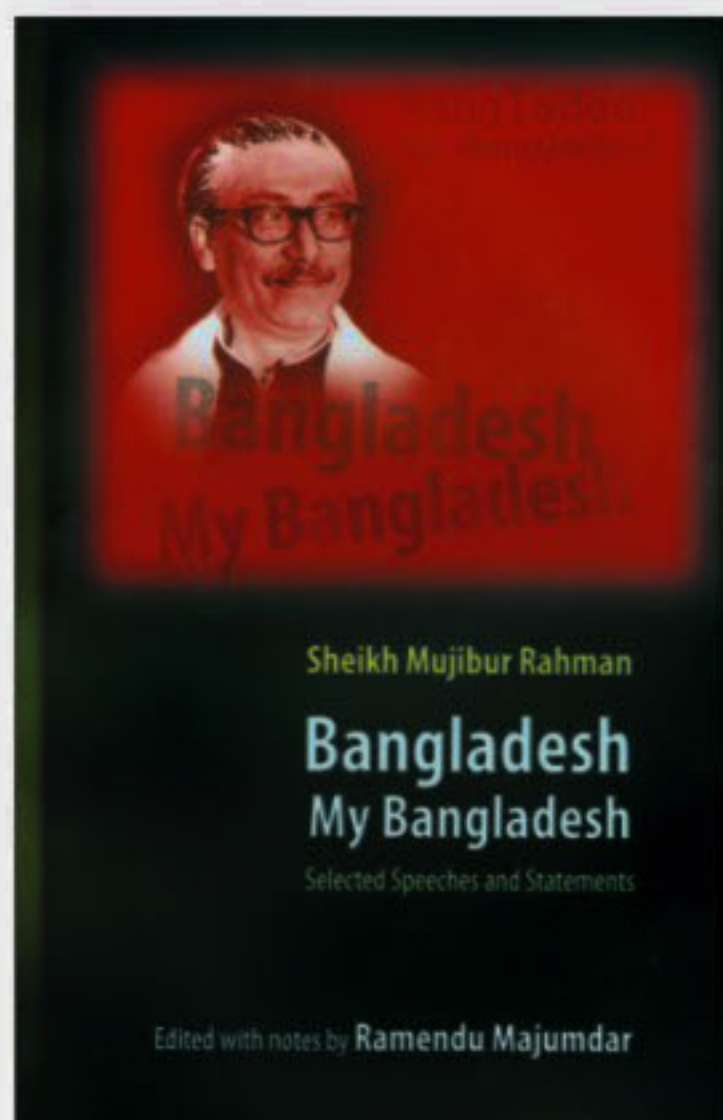
Muhammad Zamir re-observes Bangabandhu's place in history

THE period between the beginning of December and the end of March, these four months, symbolize for the Bengalee ethos several aspects --- joy, loss, pride, dedication, patience and courage. These few weeks encapsulate many historical events that are sign posts, that are inter-related and fuse together to create for us the very foundation of our nation.

This book was first published in India in January 1972 by Orient Longman Ltd. This current revised and enlarged edition has been published from Dhaka.

The book presents in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's own words an unusual view of the events and circumstances leading up to his return from a Pakistani jail to an independent Bangladesh. Forty speeches and statements made by Bangabandhu between October 28, 1970 and January 10, 1972 in Bangla have been translated into English. They help to unfold for readers the story that transforms a people into a nation. It also reveals the evolution of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from being the chief of the Awami League to the status of being the father of a newly independent country.

What adds to the quality of the book and makes it special are the ten appendices. They will be particularly useful for the younger generation



Bangladesh My Bangladesh  
Edited with notes by Ramendu  
Majumdar  
Muktadhara

desiring to know a bit more about the important steps that eventually led to 1971. They contain, some in original English and some in translation, extracts from the resolution adopted by the All India Muslim League in Lahore on March 23, 1940, the Six Point Programme proposed by the Awami League on March 23, 1966 (?),

the Eleven Point Demand of the then East Pakistan Students All Party Committee of Action, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's defence statement before the Special Tribunal of the 'Agartala Conspiracy Case', the text of the broadcast declaring independence in the early morning of March 26, 1971 and the proclamation of independence as made from Mujibnagar on April 10, 1971. In addition, there are statistical data pertaining to comparative development expenditure in the then East and West Pakistan, the share of exports and imports of both the wings of Pakistan and the election results of the Pakistan National Assembly (held on December 7, 1970) and the East Pakistan Provincial Assembly (held on December 17, 1970).

This book is a treasure trove for anyone interested in keeping track of history as it emerged in Bangladesh. It is also fascinating for the way it reveals the efforts undertaken by Bangabandhu towards the eradication of deliberate discrimination that was being meted out to the people of the then East Pakistan by the armed forces-bureaucratic nexus of Islamabad, Pakistan.

One statement in particular (made during the press conference held in the Awami League central office in Dhaka on December 9, 1970, after the emergence of Awami League as the

majority party in the newly elected Pakistan National Assembly) deserves special attention. Here, the democratic spirit in the Leader comes out through his inclusion of all the people in Pakistan in his address by adding 'Joy Pakistan' to 'Joy Bangla' at the end of his statement.

This book is also valuable for including the full text of the speech delivered by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the then Race Course (now Suhrawardy Uddyan) on March 7, 1971. A difficult undertaking, at a sensitive juncture, but the Leader, with his innate political wisdom succeeded not only in pacifying the angry masses who had gathered to hear him speak but also through his inimitable oratory was able to call for positive and decisive action aimed at obtaining freedom with clear connotations of independence.

Ramendu Majumdar, a former teacher of English literature, now associated with the world of advertising, is a cultural icon. He has done all of us a service by editing this publication and re-printing an enlarged version. Nearly 40 years after 1971, it will help the present younger generation to understand our past and also answer many of their questions.

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## Two reviews from Syed Badrul Ahsan

### Words behind the making of history

ORATORY has since the beginning of civilised existence kept people in thrall. Shakespeare provided a clue to the riveting nature of speeches in his plays. You think here of Brutus and Mark Antony in *Julius Caesar*, of the many ways in which they played with words to convince the audience of the justness of the causes they held dear. But that was literature. In life lived from day to day, through the vagaries of politics, oratory has often been raised to the level of art. In Bangladesh's case, the speeches of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were ammunition, over the years, in the defence of liberty. Gandhi was not a rousing speaker, but the calm religiosity he brought into his words drove the point home. And then there was Syed Badrudduza, whose command of Bengali, Urdu and English was demonstrated to huge effect in his speeches, particularly in pre-partition India.

Now comes this admirable tome of a work. In *Speeches That Changed The World*, it is a lost age, or many lost ages that once were steeped in ideal-

November 1863 that Lincoln demonstrated the heights he could scale. 'Four score and seven years ago', he said with quiet insistence, 'our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.'

Great speeches come with a flavour of the literary; and Lincoln put literature in plenty into his speeches. Much a similar tenor was noted in Winston Churchill in his 13 May 1940 address in the House of Commons --- 'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.' Words flowed, like a stream, from the wartime British leader. In August of the same year, it was again an interplay of words that fired the patriotism of the nation when Churchill spoke of the sacrifices being made in the war against Nazism, 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.' Oratory takes the collective imagination to new heights, as Jawaharlal Nehru demonstrated through his 'tryst with destiny' speech in the opening moments of a free India in 1947 ('At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom'). Blood was being spilled in the aftermath of partition, but that reality did not deter India's first prime minister from lighting the path to hope for his people.

*Speeches* is fundamentally a journey through political experience straddling the globe. If there are the lofty perorations that find a place here, there are too the manifest lies that do not find an escape route. And thus, more than a year before he would get tangled in his venality, Richard Nixon tells Americans in April 1973 that 'there can be no white-wash at the White House.' It was, in truth, a contaminated world that Nixon created, and lived in. Morality did not matter to him, but it did for Vaclav Havel, who tells the people of Czechoslovakia in 1990, 'We live in a contaminated moral environment.' That takes you back to the moral superiority that General George S. Patton personified in his times. His speech, wherein he vows, 'I am personally going to shoot that paper-hanging sonofabitch Hitler', is one of the items in this anthology. The same holds true for Nelson Mandela, who defiantly tells the court trying him in apartheid-driven South Africa in 1964, 'I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities.'

And so the caravan of history moves on. Along the way, Charles de Gaulle finds his own place in it. As France falls to Nazism, he takes flight to London, from where he sounds the clarion call that would rejuvenate his dispirited country: 'France has lost a battle. But France has not lost the war! Thoughts of war then give way to ruminations on peace, as in this placidity of a statement from Mother Teresa in 1979: 'Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do, but how much love we put in the action that we do.'

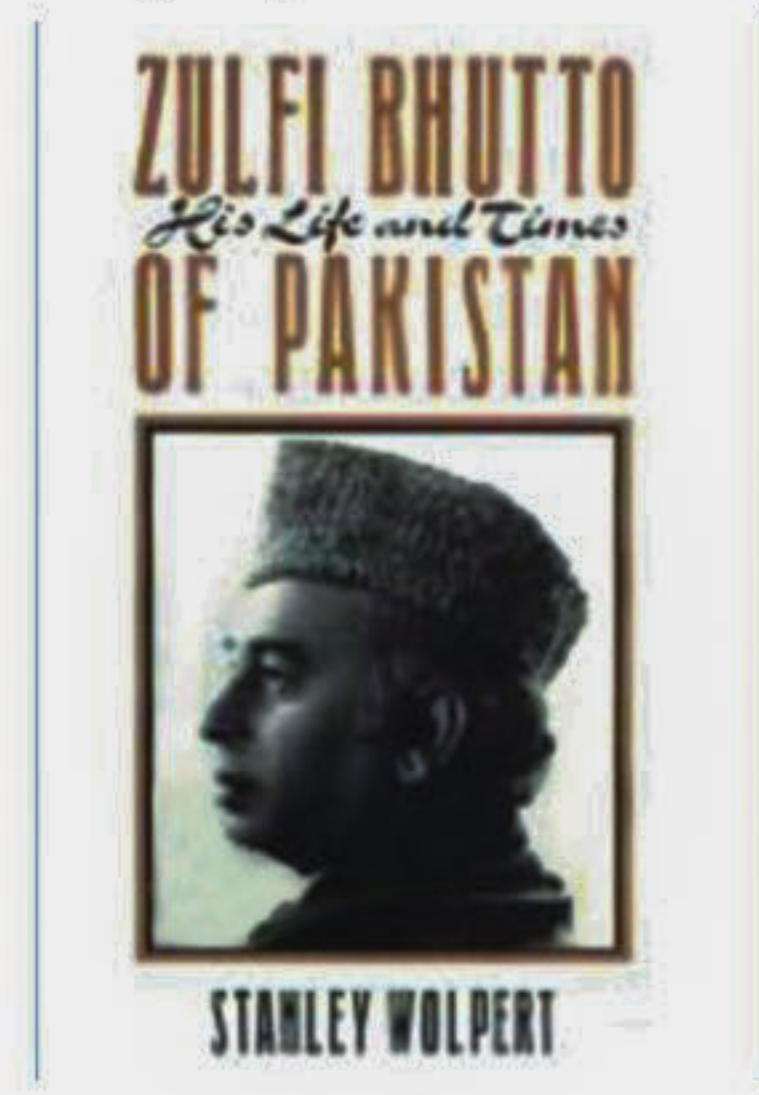
It is a moving kaleidoscope of the ages you have here. For sometime, you go beyond the mediocre, to recall a world once epitomised by sublimity, larger-than-life individuals. Remember Oliver Cromwell? As he dismisses the Rump Parliament in 1653, he rails against the lawmakers: 'It is high time for me to put an end to your sitting in this place, which you have dishonoured by your contempt of all virtue, and defiled by your practice of every vice... His voice rises to a

crescendo, as he sends the legislators packing, 'Take away that shining bauble there, and lock up the doors. In the name of God, go!'

### ...Of a man of great hubris

WHEN he lived, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was a complex figure for those who observed his rise and fall. Thirty years after his execution by a military regime, he remains that way. There are his fans, largely within Pakistan, who have consistently believed that he is a shaheed, a martyr, in the defence of democracy. And then there are those who remain convinced that having ridden to power on the slogan of democracy, he did everything he could to bury it under his civilian dictatorship.

A fairly large number of books on Bhutto's life and career have appeared across the years, with the promise of more to appear in the times ahead. And especially since the assassination of his daughter Benazir in December 2007, the Bhutto myth has taken on a new and expanded dimension. And do remember that we are speaking of the man who almost behaved like a maniac when he spoke to the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci in the early 1970s. Megalomaniac he surely was before her, but the extent to which certain streaks of madness manifested themselves in him left even the shock-proof journalist surprised. Bhutto's aspersions on Indira Gandhi, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and nearly everyone else were too outrageous for polite ears. And even he realized that, subsequently, which is when he sent



Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan  
His Life and Times  
Stanley Wolpert  
Oxford University Press

Pakistan's diplomats in Italy scouring for Fallaci, to ask her to withdraw the interview or to 'admit' that she had made it all up!

What appears in the Fallaci interview is what the essential Bhutto was. And that is the point which comes through in Stanley Wolpert's *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*. Wolpert, the American academic celebrated for such seminal works as *Gandhi and Jinnah of Pakistan*, was provided with all manner of facilities, including access to Bhutto's library and papers, by the Bhutto family. That being the basis of the study, it follows that Wolpert's analysis of the Bhutto character is by and large a sympathetic study of a man who could have done much better as a politician than

what he actually did. The author traces the rise of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, essentially after his return to Pakistan following higher studies abroad, and the many factors that went into facilitating it. He was a bright young law professor in the early 1950s. By 1958, he was a cabinet minister, happy to be under the tutelage of General Iskandar Mirza, a man not too well-disposed toward democracy. And yet, when only days later, Mirza was sent packing by General Ayub Khan, Bhutto swiftly transferred his loyalties to the new big man in town. It is a picture that you come by in the excellent biography of Mirza by his son Humayun Mirza a few years ago. Bhutto, recalls the young Mirza, earned General Mirza's admiration at the very first meeting he had with the president, so much so that Mirza found a spot for the young lawyer in Pakistan's central cabinet.

And Bhutto was keen to demonstrate his gratitude to Mirza in return. He fired off a fawning missive to the president, informing him in unabashed fashion that history would record that Iskandar Mirza was the greatest man Pakistan had produced, greater than the founder of the state, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. By late October 1958, with Mirza and his wife Naheed on their way to unending exile in Britain, Bhutto made sure that Ayub Khan kept him on. For the subsequent eight years, he was never to look back. He was minister for commerce, for industries and natural resources. In 1960, he worked out a deal on energy with the Soviet Union, impressing almost everyone in Pakistan and outside. By early 1963, upon the death of Mohammad Ali Bogra, he was foreign minister in the Ayub regime. Added to that position was the job of general secretary of the Convention Muslim League, the clutch of pro-Ayub politicians propping up the dictatorship. It was Bhutto's finest hour, from the point of view of guffaneer. He proposed that Ayub Khan, already in occupancy of the presidency, remain in power for the rest of his life. It was thus also a moment that made others mock him.

And yet, as the Wolpert book makes clear, a moment would come when Bhutto, grown ambitious and decidedly hubristic, would begin to mock Ayub himself. Informed by foreign secretary Aziz Ahmed late on a January 1966 night in Tashkent that 'the bastard is dead', Bhutto asked, 'Which one?' That was one of the many indications of the disdain, even hate, in which he viewed not just his mentor but Indian politicians as well. But Wolpert notes too the confidence Bhutto brought back to a post-1971 Pakistan, a time when the emergence of Bangladesh and the surrender of 93,000 Pakistani soldiers had left his people traumatized. He understood the grave nature of the situation, of the realities that stared him in the face. One needed little persuasion to understand that he had been one of the principal elements responsible for the disaster that had befallen Pakistan, but it was one thought Bhutto was unwilling to accept. He blamed everyone else, including Mujib, for the country's break-up, but he would not bring himself to acknowledge his own guilt in the genocide that led to the Bengali armed struggle for freedom. But he did eat humble pie in the end. He freed the incarcerated Mujib and saw him off at Chaklala airport. As the Bengali leader flew off into the night sky, Bhutto murmured, to no one in particular, 'The nightingale has flown.'

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

## Of life's mysteries

Farida Shaikh goes philosophical over a tale

LIFE of Pi is a survival story by Canadian writer Yann Martel. Ironically, it is perhaps, if not more, a survival story for the writer himself!

The book is about Pi of Pondicherry who with his family on board a cargo ship sets on a migration journey to Canada. A sea storm strikes, the ship sinks. Pi is the sole survivor on a lifeboat in the company of animals, including a Royal Bengal Tiger.

Martel named the tiger Richard Parker after an Edgar Allan Poe character from *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838). This was 'a clerical error,' and the given name of the animal, 'Thirsty,' was dropped for 'of hunger and thirst, thirst is the greater imperative.' This is one of the many instances of satirical humour in the book.

Martel is grateful to Piscine Molitor Patel whose life story he narrated in the first person. He is thankful at meeting accidentally Mr. Francis Adirubasamy in the coffee house on Nehru Street who got him the connections to Patel, the main character of the story and made him 'believe in God.' This happened in Pondicherry, a town with a zoo and a botanical garden and was the capital of French India for long.

The Penguin India edition of the novel is like a textbook with class assignments on each of the chapters to make it suitable for a college curriculum. The cover design and illustration is by Anoop Patnak. Croatian artist Tomislav Torjanac has illustrated the new 2007 edition after publishers and newspapers launched a worldwide competition to find an artist to illustrate *Life of Pi*.

In 2003 and again in 2008, two theatre groups in England produced the adaptation of the novel into a play. Alfonso Cuaron, director of the third Harry Potter movie, expressed interest in making a film from the novel. For the French version of the book, Martel was also awarded and he wrote the text of the musical composition 'you are where you are'.

The book in three parts presents the life of Pi as an adult in the first and last part; the second part is the major section and deals with Pi as a lone teenager struggling to survive.

Martel also expresses his gratitude to three Japanese professionals for help in completing the book. In a letter, Mr. Okamoto of the Japanese Ministry of Transport notes that investigation on the accident failed to locate the possible cause for the sinking of the ship--- 'Tsimsum'. The points examined were major hull breach, major weather disturbance in the region on that particular day, other ship mishaps in the area, and one ship colliding with another ship. Tsimsum was 29 years old and refitted in 1970.

This refers to the end part of the book. The reader by then has sailed through 227 pages of Pi's struggling survival experience, and the long drawn climax of the story. The reader begins to believe that it was *fait accompli* that Pi and Richard Parker survived the shipwreck; only to be jolted back by the finding that there was no plausible cause for the cargo ship to sink and turning Pi into an orphan! Is this then only a make believe story? Is it what Kierkegaard

## Just cooked corpses

Efadul Huq is intrigued by a story

HOW does a writer affect his society by writing? What should an ideal writer write about? More importantly, where does a writer's words come from? These are the questions asked and discussed by J M Coetzee, from both ends of the spectrum, in *Elizabeth Costello*. The novel insightfully explores the many aspects of writing and writers, about the capability of evil in goodness and about the neutrality of the one who writes.

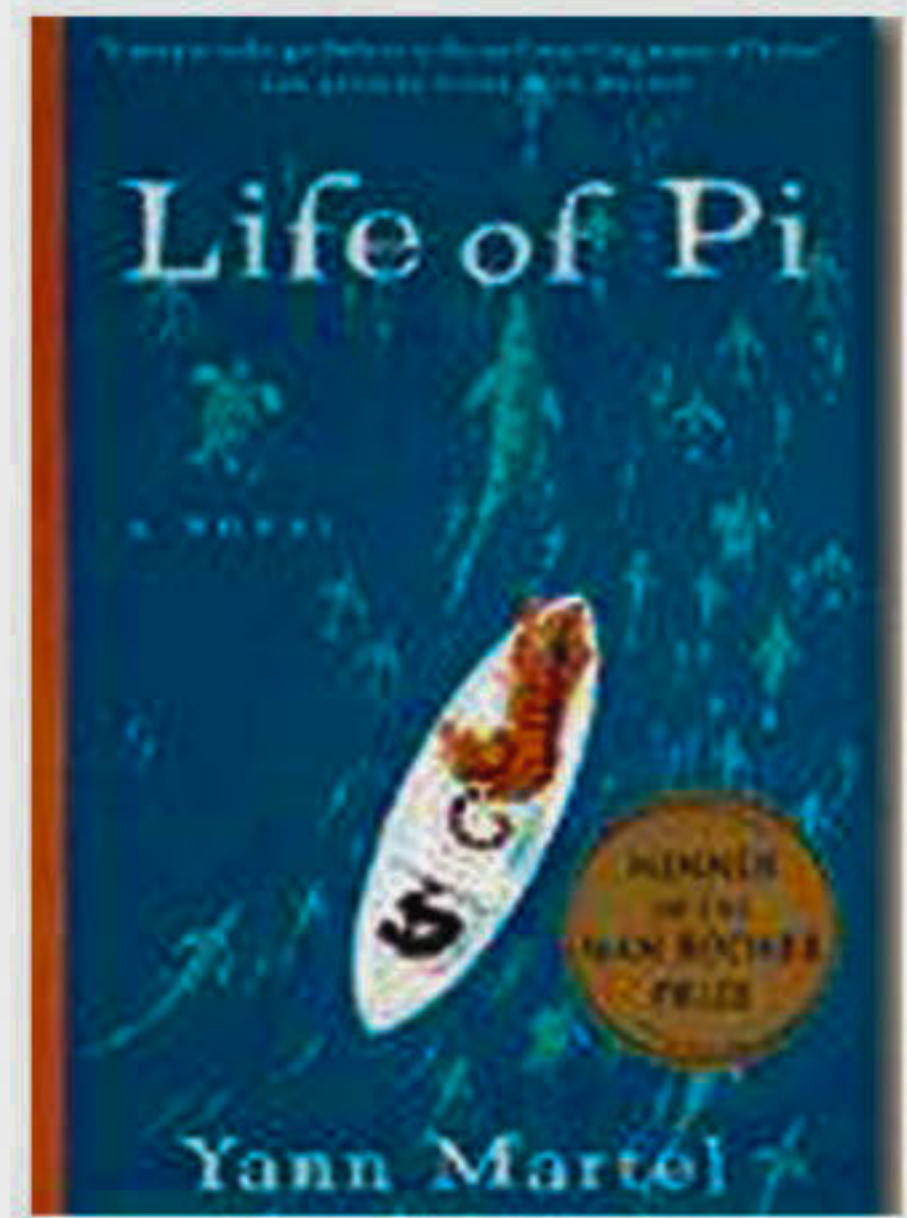
Elizabeth Costello, the title character of the novel, is a famous writer who is invited to lecture at several universities and gatherings throughout the book. While doing so, she finds herself battling with her evolving thoughts as she discovers that there's more gray than black and white in the universe. Consequently, the novel becomes a collection of eight lectures given by this aged author who, in the twilight of her life, realizes her true identity but remains misunderstood by her son, daughter-in-law, journalists, critics, fellow authors and, of course, the audience.

Through the intriguing character of Costello, J M Coetzee attempts to come to terms with many controversial issues of this age. In the first lecture, when asked to speak on the subject of 'realism', a disillusioned Costello refers to one of Kafka's stories. The story is about an ape who speaks before a learned society, in civilized tongue. From there, and also going through a complex philosophical rigmorale, Costello concludes in the end: 'We don't know and will never know, with certainty, what is really going on.'

Having proved reality untrustworthy and gathering a lot of controversy, some of which are crudely offensive, Costello moves on. The next lecture, on a cruise ship heading for Antarctica, is about novels in Africa. While one of her contemporary Nigerian writers claims that African novels don't flourish in Africa because 'the African novel, the true African novel, is an oral novel', Costello provides a bolder perspective. She argues and points out the problem as: 'But the African novel is not written by Africans for Africans. African novelists may write about Africa, about African experiences, but they seem to me to be glancing over their shoulders all the time they write, at the foreigners who will read them.'

The story proceeds and we find Costello lecturing on animal rights. A vegetarian by choice, Costello finds it appalling that animals are killed to be eaten. To her animal meat is nothing more than cooked corpses. She believes in her cause to such an extent that she compares the slaughter of cattle to the massacre of Jews in World War II. This, however, agitates her audience and they question her grounds with much vigour. To their questions she doesn't have any concrete answer. In fact, she wonders if this evil is essentially omnipresent as even she wears leather shoes.

A few pages later, Costello's thoughts on evil move beyond wonder when in a lecture in Amsterdam she raises unsettling inquiries about the very profession of writing. If a writer can instill virtues in us, she asks, can he also not instill in us vices? If writing can bring us the realization of truth, she ponders, can it also not



Life of Pi  
Yann Martel  
Penguin Books India

mean when he said, 'Life is not a problem to be solved but a reality to be experienced'? The end of the story is anticlimactic.

The novel has a philosophical flair similar to Martel's up coming work in 2010. It comes together with an essay with the same title, 'A 20th century shirt' that deals with holocaust and talk between a monkey and a donkey over a shirt.

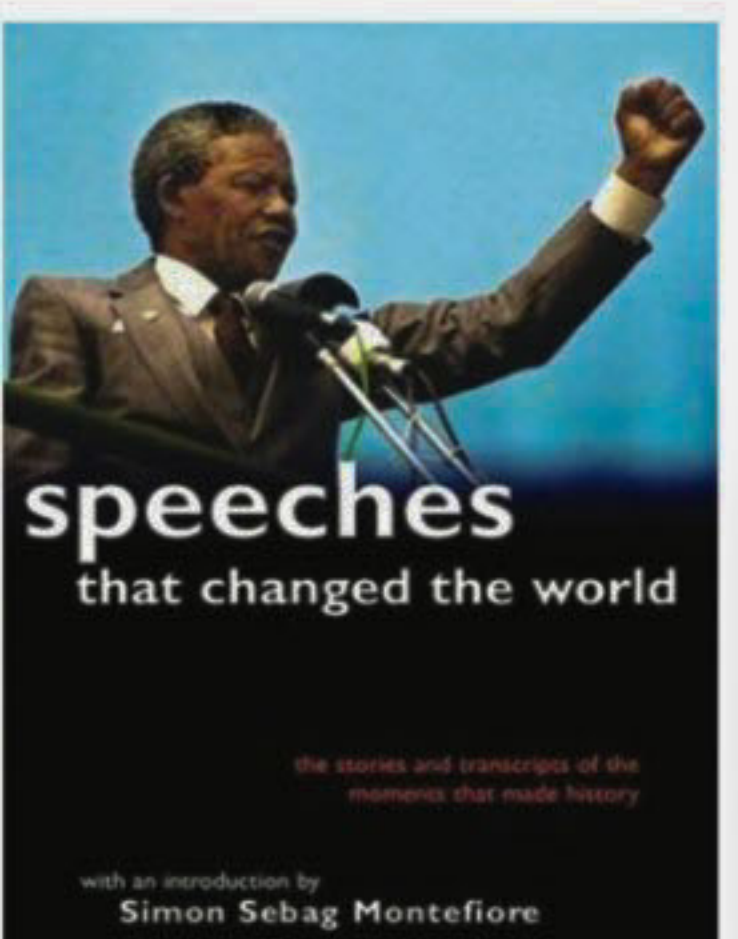
Pi is an agnostic; he is born into Hinduism, then he transfers himself without a qualm to Christianity, and then he gets drawn to bonds of brotherhood in Islam.

Pi as a young man, takes a double major in religious studies and zoology. He chooses to study sloth because all these are 'calm, quiet and introspective,' and 'sooth my shattered self.'

Martel in beautiful text makes the reader aware of the abundance of wealth in the Pacific. '...Life is a peephole' and 'only fear can defeat life.' The conscious realization that 'the presence of God is the finest of rewards' and 'I felt I saw her I don't quite mean it literally, I felt I saw her' is Pi's revelation, sense of peace, unity, harmony, of science and religion. And also 'I felt like a small circle coinciding with the centre of a larger one.' According to Martel, Islam is a beautiful religion of brotherhood and devotion; and then he questions, 'Was there any reward greater than life, and any punishment worse than death?'

*Life of Pi* is an imaginative story of survival and faith, on man's relationship to God and nature---animals. Man's survival is deeply rooted in faith, 'believing something sincerely can make it, if not completely real, at least close to it'. Martel's book is a metaphysical exploration into the deepest of life's mysteries.

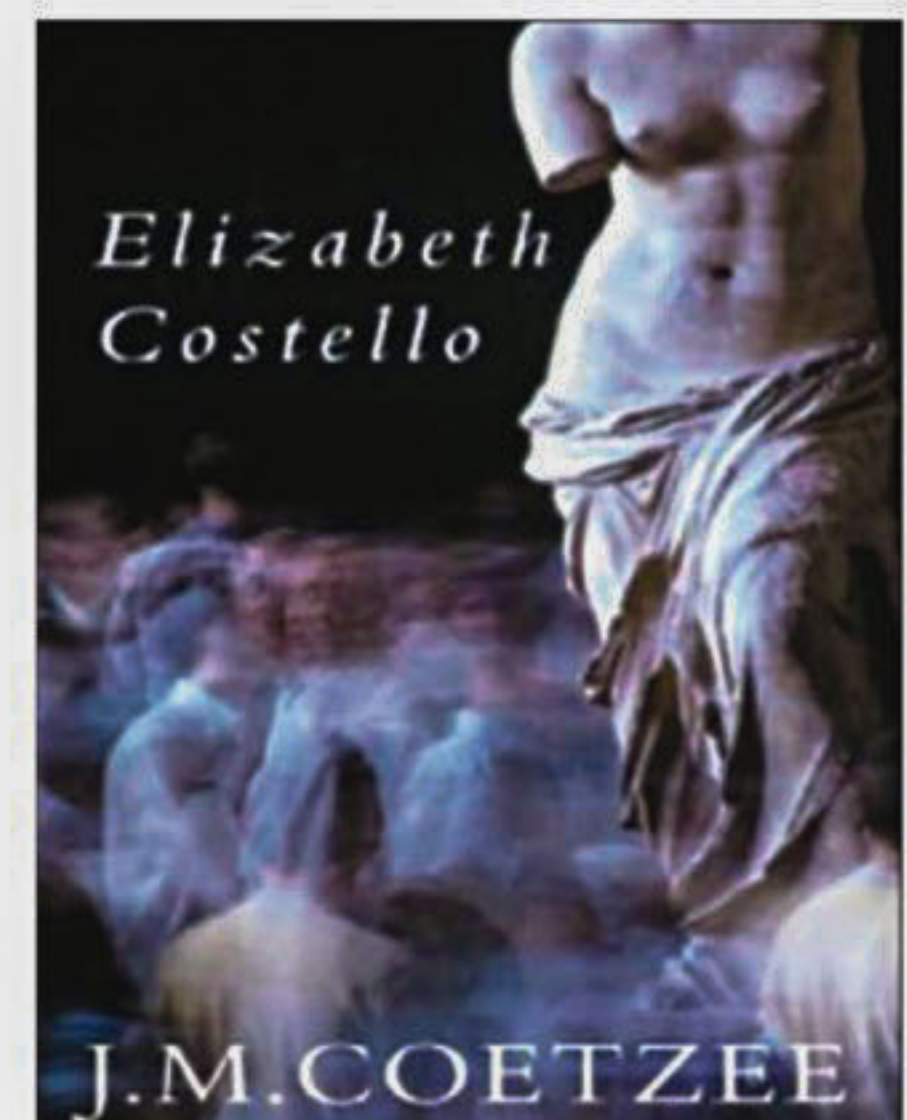
Farida Shaikh is a critic and social analyst.



Speeches That Changed The World  
Introduction by Simon Sebag  
Montefiore  
Quercus, London

ism that come alive. You could argue with the editors, though, about the speeches they did not include in the anthology. Even so, there are all those specimens of the mind that recreate the past. History buffs will not quarrel with the inclusion of orations rendered by men of divinity. Read here Moses, coming forth with the Ten Commandments ('Thou shalt have no other gods before me') as also Jesus with his 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'. Muhammad too makes a desirable entry ('Turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque'), followed by the Sermon to the birds by St. Francis of Assisi ('My little sisters, the birds, much bounden are ye unto God').

A particular characteristic of speeches, good speeches (for there have also been millions of tedious ones), is the inspirational. That is how John F Kennedy, otherwise a not very dynamic figure on the broad canvas of history, galvanised Americans through his inaugural address in January 1961. 'Ask not what your country can do for you', he declaimed, 'but ask what you can do for your country.' It is a speech much quoted by JFK fans around the world and yet it somehow loses its brilliance once there is mention of Abraham Lincoln. The Civil War-era American president was clearly a natural when it came to oratory. The concluding words in his first inaugural address ('With malice toward none, with charity for all...') were a pointer to what was to be. And, true enough, it was with the Gettysburg address in



Elizabeth Costello  
J M Coetzee  
Secker & Warburg

bring us the realization of falsity? If a writer delves into the darkest region in history or of human psyche to make his novel authentic, will he come out of the experience unscathed and without any evil? Led by these questions Costello decides perhaps some experiences are better left unwritten. Invited to speak against censorship in the lecture, she ends up endorsing censorship!

Near the end of the novel, our confused writer finds herself in an imaginary courtroom, quite Kafkaesque, waiting for her trial to commence. Before she is allowed to pass through the heavenly portals to the other side, she must make a confession of her belief. It is then that she comes face to face with the ever-present dilemma of her life: to believe or not to believe. She appeals that, as a writer, she cannot believe in any particular entity or idea, that she must wear belief like any garment.

It hardly remains to be said that the Nobel-winning J M Coetzee masterfully tackles highly complex philosophical viewpoints under the guise of a story, weaving non-fictional arguments into the fictional lectures of his protagonist. The plot is loose and there is no central driving force per se, but Costello's outpourings, oftentimes poetic but charming nevertheless, on life and its several aspects keep the readers entranced. Despite the novel being a bunch of lectures, it never ends up being didactic. It is rather involving because Coetzee provides both sides of the issues at hand as angry audiences or fellow writers argue with Costello.

Indeed, J M Coetzee, by writing this novel with contradictory opinions, exemplifies that in the end a writer has no belief to call his own. He only writes what the invisible voice dictates, as did Elizabeth Costello.

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