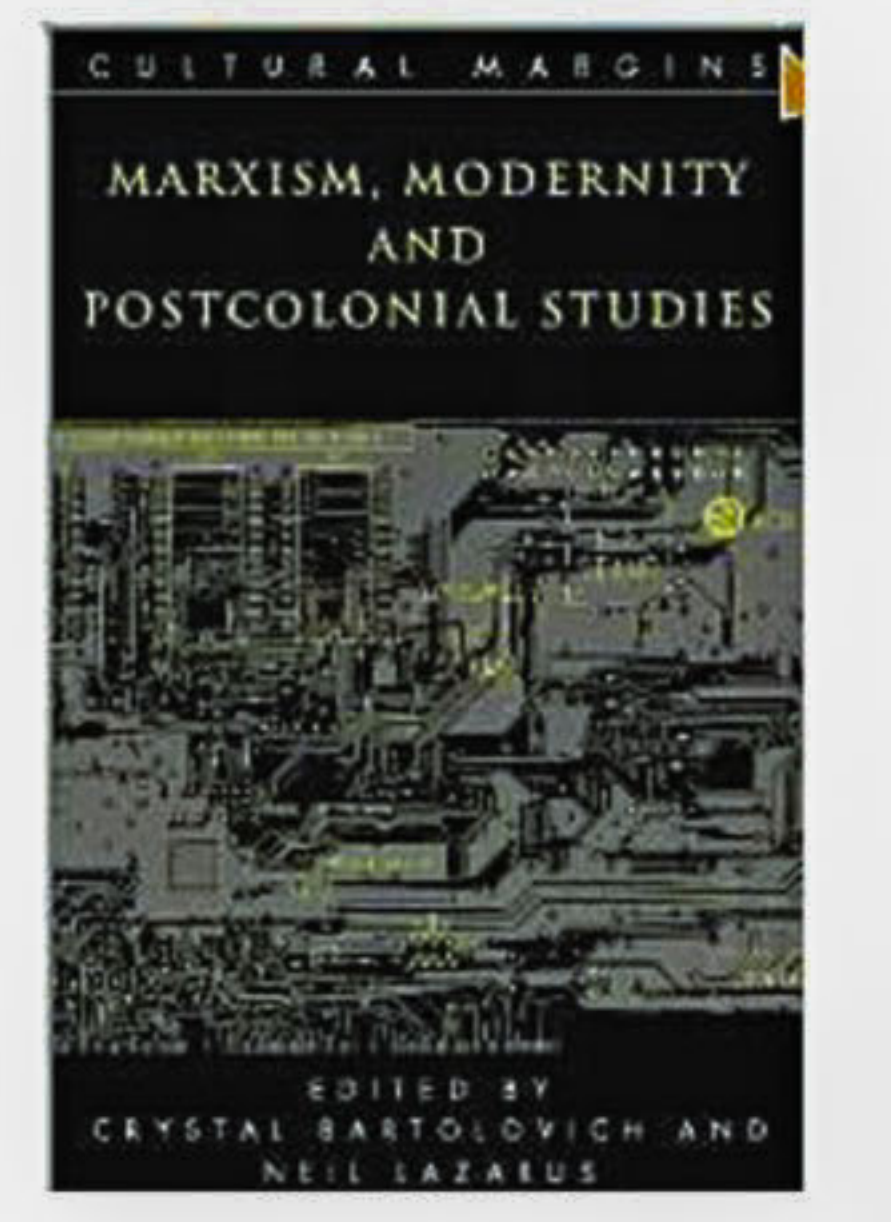


Two profound books set Kajal Bandyopadhyay thinking Of post-colonial theory and global capitalism

IN Bangladesh at least, theory has lent radical-sounding voices to many. Even some bookworms and careerists have turned vocal all of a sudden. People caring little for the motherland or the teeming millions have started talking a lot with support from theory. This is all the more true for Bangladesh where nationalist and radical traditions of intellectual exercise have rather been weak and slender. But, as fervor or uproar doesn't go unchecked in any area for an unlimited time, so a phase of reviews and assessments is what appears to have set in in recent years. This again has happened, lamentably, first abroad or in the West. We remain peripheral. Of course, there were important critiques from leftwing giants like Aizaz, Eagleton and others who never let theory go unchecked or unchallenged. Recently there have been many more joining that counter-current.

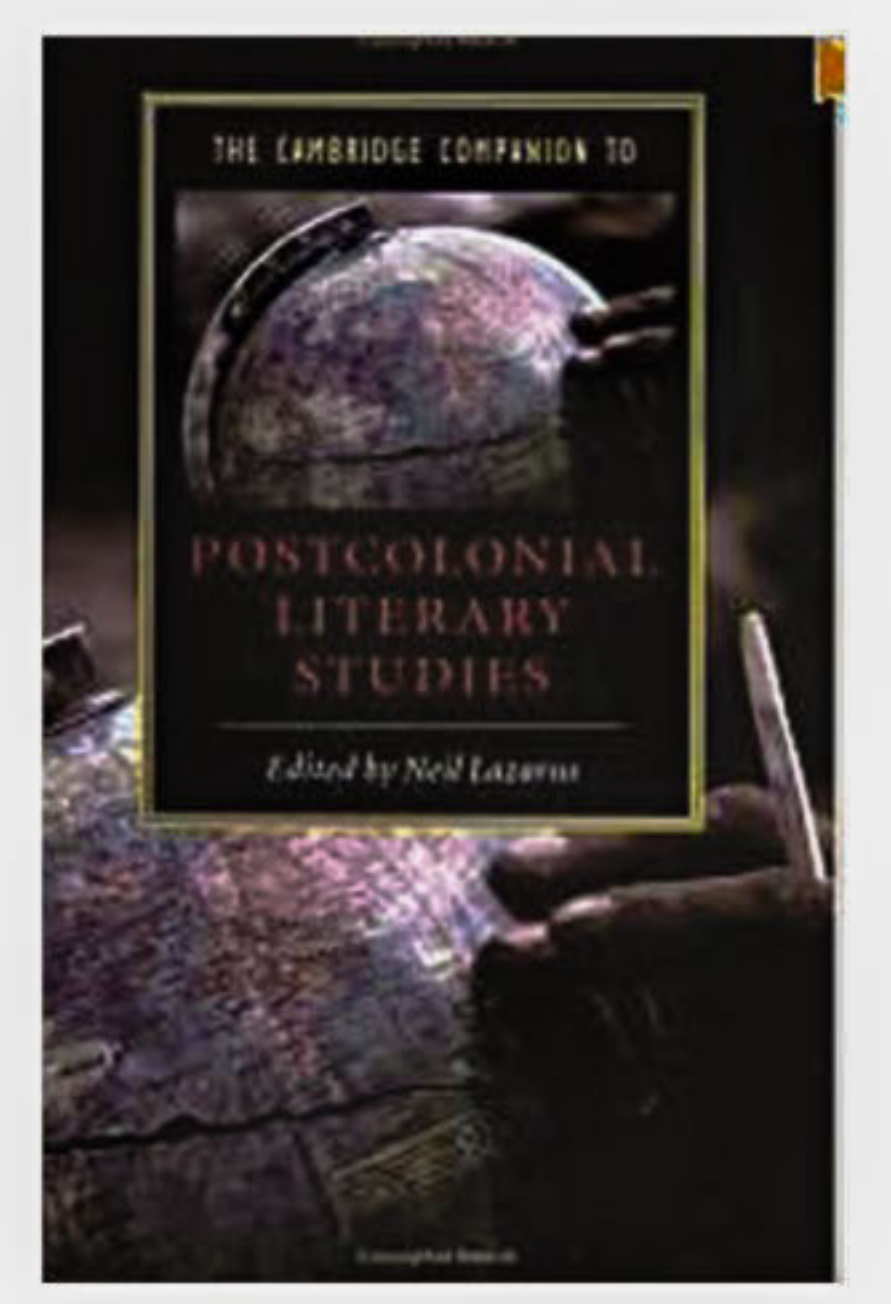
"the traditions of the sociology of underdevelopment or 'dependency' theory" Neil Lazarus demystifies a lot as he continues to discuss as follows about Bhabha's formulation and enunciation of postcolonial criticism: (1) "it evinces an undifferentiated disavowal of all forms of nationalism and a corresponding exaltation of migrancy, liminality, hybridity and multiculturalism"; (2) "it is hostile towards 'holistic forms of social explanation' (towards totality and systematic analysis) and demonstrates an aversion to dialectics..."; and "it refuses an antagonistic or struggle-based model of politics in favor of one that empha-



sizes "cultural difference," "ambivalen[ce]..." (2004: 4) The anti-nationalism and anti-Marxism in present-day postcolonial criticism thus becomes clear like daylight, as to its propagators and their political interests and motivations. Though our academics pose to be patriotic, nationalist, radical or neutral in university departments and elsewhere, the syllabus they follow there tells one more truly about them.

Crystal Bartolovich, also correctly apprehending opposition to the privileged role of Marxism in case of the book he has jointly edited with Neil Lazarus, raises the point of the ideological swing of postcolonial studies. In the introduction to the book, he writes, "unquestionably... this field has been deeply and constitutively informed by theoretical protocols and procedures Foucauldian discourse analysis, deconstruction, Lacanianism which are not merely indifferent, but in their dominant forms, actively and explicitly hostile, to Marxism." (2002: 3) Bartolovich mentions how Stuart Hall has conceded that the postcolonial theorists have failed to attend to recent "developments in global capitalism" and "any of the larger questions of political economy", because of its "massive, gigantic and eloquent disavowal" of Marxism. And, as for the charges of reductionism, determinism, etc., brought against Marxism, Bartolovich claims that it is not only that "reductionistic" versions of Marxism had critics within Marxism all along, "but Marxists have been working in a number of ways from the start on the very issues and concernssuch as imperialism, nationalism, racism, subalternity, and so on which have become central to postcolonial studies, though you would be hard pressed to find much acknowledgment of this in the work of many of the scholars active in the field." (2002: 3) So, what particularly becomes clear from the two books under our present discussion is how hegemony of certain classes goes on in new and clever ways of knowledge and academies disseminating it. And, while most of us could not develop due awareness of the ongoing activities, plans and tricks in these fields the world over, some others have been working as agents or tools, conscious or unconscious. What is more frustrating is that the questionable roles of syllabus, departments or disciplines and academics in this more significant respect is rarely a question of scrutiny, however much a tug of war may go on over various petty issues. At university English departments in countries like Bangladesh teachers with anti-Liberation mindsets enjoy a big following and bright image, and that is also what can explain the uncritical acceptance there of or enthusiasm over the coming of anything like the postcolonial studies which is said to have divested itself of the spirit of nationalistic and class struggle. It is then rather the Gramscian, and Marxist, for that matter, idea of hegemony/hegemony of anti-nationalist and anti-Marxist outlook and ideology—that can effectively explain the mysteriously huge welcome accorded to post-colonial studies there. To make out the big gap between "Alavi's and Saul's "post-colonialism" and

Bhabha's", Lazarus, in his first essay in Cambridge Companion, finds it necessary for one to "operate on so many levels simultaneously" and first of all to mark the "re-assertion of imperial dominance beginning in the 1970s, that is, of the global re-imposition and re-consolidation botheconomicallyof what Samir Amin has called "the logic of unilateral capital" and politicallyof an actively interventionist "New World Order," headquartered in Washington DC." (2002: 4) In this connection, Lazarus mentions the year 1975, which is much more significant for us in Bangladesh; for, happenings here in that year bear amazing testimony to the truth of what he finds to have happened after that year—"the West tended to turn against nationalist insurgency and revolutionary anti-capitalism." Basically, the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by army officers in August 1975 had exactly an anti-nationalist and counter-revolutionary impact. One may rather appreciate that the pretentious aura of radicalism connected with postcolonial studies is made to go by Lazarus; for, though he discourages "reductive" commentary on postcolonial studies, he gives some examples of opinions that contain residual truths more important for people in Bangladesh. As such, he places first the fiercely oppositional definition of "postcoloniality" by Kwame Anthony Appiah: "postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a compr-



dor intelligentsia: of a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery." And then ArifDirlik's reformulation of it: "I would suggest... that postcoloniality is the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism." (2004: 5)

I place all these exactly to sensitize people never opening their eyes, and continuing this way or that in their pro-establishment and conformist stances. They create the impression of nothing being there before or beyond theory or to question our performance, awareness and position in academies, press and politics. I remember how at a symposium jointly organized in 1994 by the English Department, DU and Bangla Academy, Dhaka, Aizaz Ahmad presented a very significant paper, "The Future of English Studies in South Asia." The proceedings of the symposium, published as Colonial and Post-colonial Encounter, includes that paper, but who can say that any one of us mentions Aizaz's views there about theory in general or about postcolonial studies, in particular.

Personally I am not totally decided against Postcolonial Theory, and that's another reason for me to bring these two books into focus. For, their editors also do not consider repudiation of Postcolonial Theory a necessary precondition for an upholding of Marxism. In his introduction to Marxism, Bartolovich writes, "... if it is indispensable to retrieve Marxism from its contemporary disavowal (not least in postcolonial studies) it is arguably also important not to commit oneself either to an undifferentiating (Marxist) disavowal of postcolonial studies", Bartolovich expresses readiness to "recognize the structuring conceptual and historical weaknesses of postcolonial studies as a field of inquiry." Still he feels that "categorical repudiation of postcolonial studies" by Aizaz Ahmad or Arif Dirlik is "deeply misconceived." (2002: 10) Finally, his proposal is that "Marxist theorists can and should engage with postcolonial studies in mutual sites of concern, and concede to the field the authentic insights and advances that have been generated within it." Something else I have liked is what Bartolovich claims about all the essays in Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies:

"What they all share, however, is a resistance to the devaluation of Marxism so evident in mainstream understandings of the world today, and, increasingly in the academy as wellnot least in postcolonial studies... and the contemporary social order." (2002: 16) Bartolovich appreciates that the contributors of essays to this book, "see the ongoing critique of capitalism as necessary to any project for social justice, and view the Marxist tradition as providing the conceptual tools and analytic frameworks essential to such a critique."

The other book, Cambridge Companion, lacks any editorial introduction. But the two essays by the editor there can compensate for this absence. We have already quoted from one of them, "Introducing postcolonial studies." What is important about the other, "The global dispensation since 1945", is Lazarus's very important pointers there to the portion of liability of the "world system" for what are so often termed as the "criminality and ineptitude" of postcolonial rulers. Lazarus very rightly writes, "To lay the blame for the destruction of the environment, the impoverishment of communities, and the exploitation of workers in Nigeria, Malaysia, Venezuela and Trinidad on corrupt and autocratic national rulers, without also taking into account the central roles played by the massive and hugely powerful Western-based oil conglomerates, for instance, would clearly be to invert reality." And then another pointer from him is as follows, "The same truth holds in the political realm. Thus it takes nothing from the revulsion that we rightly feel for Pinochet, Suharto, Mobutu and Saddam Husseinbrutal dictators who used all of the resources of the police states which they commanded to maintain themselves in power and to crush oppositionto observe that it is likely that none of them would have been able to come to power, and that it is certain that none of them would have been able to have been able to stay in power for as long as they did, without the direct, active, and sustained support of the United States, self-proclaimed "keeper of the peace" in the post-1945 period." (2004: 20) What is amazing is that some postcolonial theorists have so often found fault with and downplayed only nationalism and rulers in the third world, and have not on gone to mark the world-perspective that Lazarus indicates. And this clearly exposes their ideological alignment.

Lazarus raises another vitally important point as he goes to write about Eurocentrism. In this, he refers us mainly to Said and Foucault. I, however, would like to discuss again here what troubles us more in Bangladesh. Nowadays, all of a sudden, we find a big number of people turned totally and blindly anti-West. This may have simpler reasons and motivations--of both anti-imperialist and conservative interests and thoughts. But, in academic areas, the situation is much more like what Lazarus finds to be sort of an equating of Eurocentrism with "the very fabric of modern thought, scholarship, knowledge production, disciplinaryity". He mentions critics like Dipesh Chakrabarty, Jan Nederveen Pieterse, Tsenay Serequeberhan, and Robert Young of White Mythologies, and comments that in their works "we encounter the argument, not that the dominant modes of thinking in the modern West have been rationalist, modernist, and Eurocentric, but that this is the only kind of thinking to have been elaborated in modernity, or in the Westthe only kind of thinking, indeed, that is conceivable in those orders." Lazarus then writes as follows, "On the basis of this (to my mind, false) inference, these critics then move in terms of their conviction, it must seem only right for them to do disavow modernity, Europe, and rationality themselves, as all inherently imperialistic and totalitarian." And thereafter comes his description of a situation quite widespread in Bangladesh, "From their standpoint, not just rationalist thought but reason itselfand mutatis mutandis, not just Eurocentric thought but Europe itself, and not just modernist thought but modernity itself" becomes unmasked as the subordinating and at the same time itself subjugated subjectivity, as the will to instrumental mastery." (2004: 13) In Bangladesh, mostly in conservatives, we encounter also what Lazarus places by quoting Habermas: attempts on the part of critics to "pull away the veil of reason [or of modernity or "the West"] from before the sheer will to power." It is for some kindred reasons that Francis Bacon is sometimes reduced here to ideas of approval of colonialism only.

The above are some of the valuable ideas that surely make the two books rather appealing. They deserve our urgent and close attention.

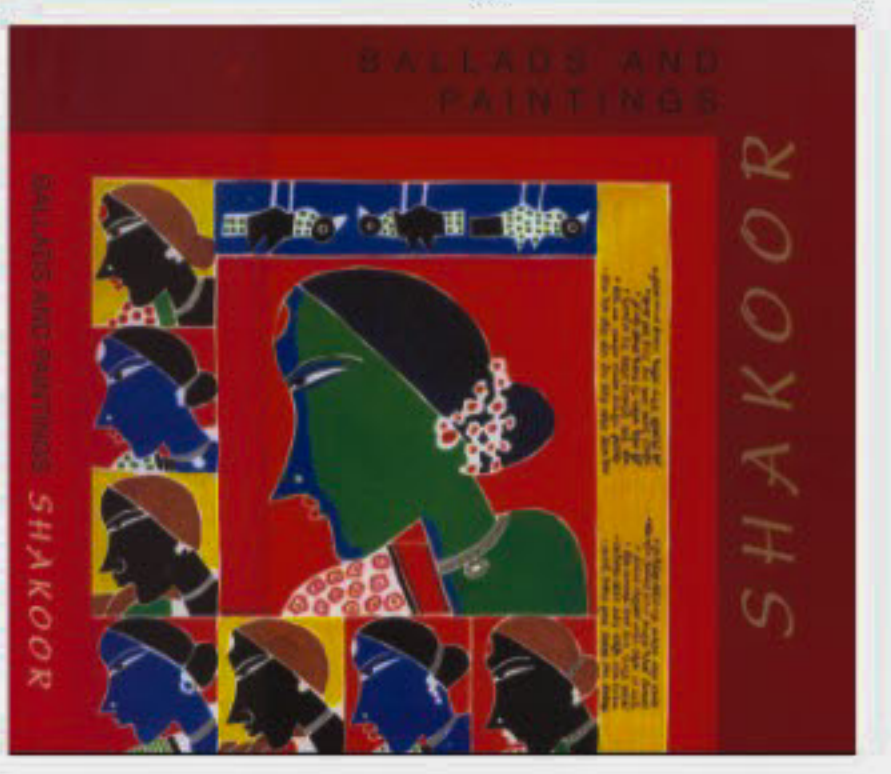
Kajal Bandyopadhyay, poet and critic, teaches English literature Dhaka University

'Rural faces, universal tales'

Reviewed by Enayetullah Khan

SOME often say, what's in a face? Well, everything really. Faces and expressions are the reflection of the life that we lead. Of course, mankind has perfected the art of camouflaging true feelings to opt for a more passive social image. But what happens when we are alone? Do we mask our inner feelings then? Or maybe secured in solitude we feel that since no one is here, the real expressions can now come out. Shakoor's Ballads and Paintings is a compilation of human expressions from different social settings from the one where we are always on guard to the one where we just let go and allow the real 'me' to emerge.

Among the post liberation generation he is an icon and one of the masters representing a new wave of artistic thought in a free country.



Ballads and Paintings
Abdus Shakoor
Publisher: Cosmos Printing and Publications

In 1970, Shakoor graduated from the College of Arts and Culture and so it is safe to say that his artistic impulses developed as Bangladesh moved on through turbulent periods after liberation. So, not just as an artist, as a human being too the artist is a witness to the ups and down of Bangladesh.

This compilation is in fact a look into human faces and true to all artists who study faces, Shakoor has also examined the subtle nuances in human expressions. Here, happiness does not vary too much from sadness and the difference is for the discerning to identify. But therein lies the adventure the thrill of deciphering possible human expressions painted by the artist.

Solemnity is a recurrent theme and at first glance, all expressions seem sombre and pensive. But it is the closer inspections that open up the subtle differences. Rest assured, there is no chance for you to get lost in melancholia because all that solemnity is thoughtfully balanced by a generous dose of colour. No, there is no place for drabness here.

Shakoor is the champion of rural life and the rich shades of village life are always there,

providing the powerful background, sustaining a psychedelic charm.

And his subjects are inevitably women. An undeniable connection between women and earth is felt, though the feeling is purely philosophical. There are birds, animals, crop fields and all that rural Bangladesh stands for a visual celebration of the basics of Bengal rural life.

Interestingly, in the photo album where Shakoor is seen over the ages, his expression of choice is solemnity. Perhaps there is a link as to why his subjects are also the same?

Or maybe, growing up through volatile times, Shakoor has seen too much of the dark sides of life to keep on laughing like a joker. Whatever the case, for his works the seriousness becomes a power, but like this reviewer said earlier: look for the hints of happiness, they are there. You just can't miss them!

The album is available at Cosmos Centre, 69/1 New Circular Road, Malibagh, Dhaka-1217.

Enayetullah Khan is Editor in Chief, UNB.

New Books

Shwadhinotar Chhorha
Dr. Hafizuddin Ahmad
Apon Bhubone
Khaleda Manzur-
e-Khuda

দিন শুধু চলে যায়
Din Shudhu Chole
Jaaye
M. Faizur Rahman

Publisher:
Academic Press and Publishers Library
Dhaka
Tel: 8125394, 0666 260 3254

Government and Rural
Transformation
Policies of Public
Spending and Policies
In Bangladesh
Mohinder S. Mudahar,
Raisuddin Ahmed

Human Security in
India
Discourse, Practices
and Policy Implications
Mahendra P. Larma

Water Resource
Development in
Bangladesh
Historical Documents
Eds. Salim Rashed,
Rezaur Rahman

Publisher:
The University Press Limited
Tel: 9565441, 9565444

Bangladesh
An Intercultural
Mosaic
Anwar Dil

Bengali Nursery Rhymes
An International
Perspective
Afia Dil

Publisher:
Adorn Publication
Tel: 9347577, 8314629
Intercultural Forum
San Diego, California, USA

Brush Up Your
English
M. Ahsanullah Khan

Step Towards
English
A Comprehensive
Book for the Beginners
M. Ahsanullah Khan

Publisher:
Panjeree Publications
Tel: 9335825, 9360094

Peshawar Express
Riot Tales
Krishan Chandar
Trans. Zafar Alam
Prothoma Prokashon

সুৰ্ণা
তুমি জানোনা
Shuborna Tumi
Janona
Iqbal Kabery
Laboni

Naushad Noori'r
Kobita
Eds. Ayub Hossain,
Shamim Zaman
Hakkani Publishers
Printed at Mass-Line
Printers
Tel: 8123446,
9125077

নওশাদ নূরীর
কবিতা
Eds. Ayub Hossain,
Shamim Zaman
Hakkani Publishers
Printed at Mass-Line
Printers
Tel: 8123446,
9125077