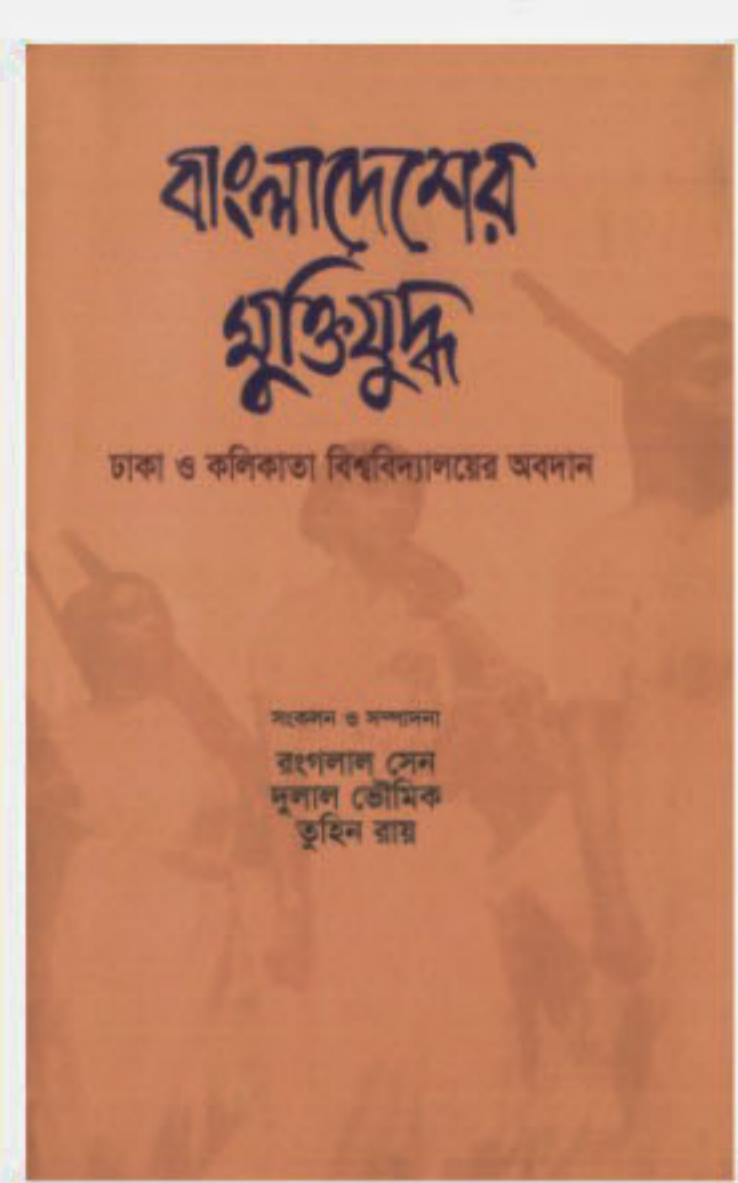


Two reviews from Syed Badrul Ahsan

Dhaka University and the Bengali ethos . . .

THE growth of Bengali nationalism in pre-1971 Pakistan had a whole lot to do with the various struggles put up by students and teachers of Dhaka University. And that was clearly a reason why during the War of Liberation the university would be made the target of the Pakistan army's particular wrath. That, of course, is an obvious truth. But what Rangal Sen, Dulal Bhowmik and Tuhin Roy have come forth with in this work is a comprehensive study of the role Dhaka University has played in the shaping of Bengali nationalistic aspirations, beginning especially with the Language Movement of 1952. That is quite a departure from the title of the work. At the same time, for all the stress on the role played by Dhaka University and Calcutta University during Bangladesh's war for liberty in 1971, information on the contributions of the latter does not much go beyond an enumeration of the efforts its academics and students made towards assisting the Bengali movement. But, to be sure, it is invaluable information, a necessary reminder to Bengalis inhabiting the people's republic of the powerful wave of support that had come their way in clearly the darkest moment of their collective life.



Bangladesher Muktiyuddho Dhaka O Kolkata Bishwabidyalyalor Obodan Eds. Rangal Sen, Dulal Bhowmik, Tuhin Roy The University Press Limited

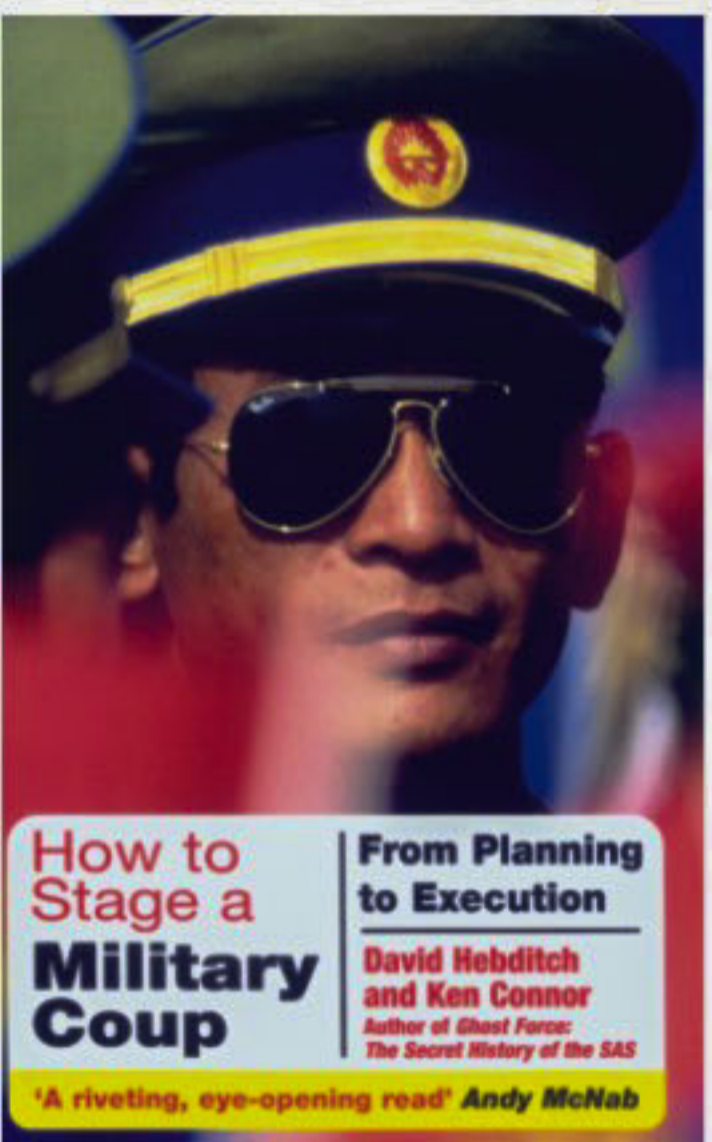
Pakistan army and then its local collaborators. A refreshing aspect of Islam's observations is the bare truth he reveals about the collaborationist role adopted by a number of reputed academics. Syed Sajjad Hussain, Mohor Ali and Hasan Zaman come in for severe criticism, naturally and justifiably, because of their clear looking away from the genocide perpetrated in 1971. Hussain, appointed by Tikka Khan as vice chancellor in early 1971, remained indifferent to the many misfortunes students and his fellow academics were regularly subjected to by the occupation army. Sent on a trip abroad by the Pakistani junta to speak for it, he indulged in barefaced lies. The army, he told a disbelieving world, had not indulged in any atrocities in 'East Pakistan'. For himself, Islam had a narrow escape. Taken under arrest by the army, together with other teachers, he was eventually freed. But Giasuddin Ahmed, from the department of history, was not lucky the second time. The first time he was abducted by the army, he was allowed to return home. The second time, on the eve of liberation, his fate was sealed: an al-Badr killer squad of the Jamaat e Islami seized him and murdered him, along with others, most viciously. Reports have circulated all these decades (and they do not come from Rafiqul Islam in this work) of some of those very young al-Badr elements rising to prominent bureaucratic positions in Bangladesh. Perhaps they are yet there? Perhaps a checking of the records in government ministries will yield these killers up?

The shaping of the Bangladesh nation-state through the periodic political ferment Dhaka University went through forms the theme of Abul Maal Abdul Muhith's essay. In essence, Muhith's thoughts go back to the earliest instances of student revolt and all the way through the

gathering steam of the 1960s and early 1970s. It is a theme Rangal Sen builds on in his admirable article on the 1962 student movement. There is another gem of a write-up from him, this one on Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury's role as vice chancellor and then as special envoy of the Mujibnagar government in 1971. Mohiuddin Ahmed expands on the Chowdhury theme in a separate chapter on the man who would subsequently take over as president of Bangladesh. You then go back to Rangal Sen for some rich background information on the first twenty five years of student politics at Dhaka University, with particular reference to the times of Aditya, father of Madhu-da, he of Madhu's canteen. But if you need a more detailed account of the canteen and Madhu-da's supreme sacrifice in 1971, you cannot but pore through K.M. Mohsin's informative essay on the subject. Bangladesh Muktiyuddho is a comprehensive, objective account of a significant part of national history that you ought not to ignore. It explains, in substantive form, why winning in 1971 was so important for the Bengali nation.

. . . and lessons in overthrowing governments

HOW do you plan a coup d'etat? The answer could come in either of two forms. A coup just happens or careful, meticulous planning goes into it. And then, of course, there are the many kinds of coups which have, especially in modern times, put paid to politics proper across the globe. By that you could mean Asia, Africa and Latin America. Indeed, there was a time when coups were quite the fashionable thing, with some country or the other going through it through the week or the month. Think of 1958 or of 1960. In the former period, two coups made noises around the world. There was, in July, the violent overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq, with the coup makers led by Abdel Karim Kassem murdering King Faisal and his prime minister and humiliating their corpses through having those dragged through the streets. In October, Iskandar Mirza and Ayub Khan placed a wobbly Pakistan under martial law. Not a shot was fired, no one was killed and twenty days after the coup, Ayub packed Mirza off to exile. But what happened in Turkey in 1960 was truly bloodcurdling. General Kemal Gursel, taking a leaf out of Kassem's book, overthrew the civilian government and had the top leaders of it murdered. David Hebditch and Ken Connor



How to Stage a Military Coup From Planning to Execution David Hebditch, Ken Connor Frontline Books, London

pf coups are concerned, first sit back and we will then go on. It is actually Hebditch and Connor who go on. They inform us that the breakthrough coup was what happened in China in 1911, Egypt in 1952 and Cuba in 1959. And in only Turkey do they spot instances of guardian coups, through 1960, 1971 and 1980. For veto coups, you go to Argentina as it was when the military struck in 1943, 1955 and 1976. The bloodless coup and that with less blood are what you think of when you recall the way in which Pervez Musharraf ousted the elected government of Nawaz Sharif in 1999. Accidental coups are what Sierra Leone confronted in 1992 and 1996, while you may chance upon a faux coup d'etat

in a country like Equatorial Guinea. So much for coups in terms of definition. Have you ever reflected on some of the rulers overthrown? Think back on Egypt's King Farouk. It was not just that he was a deeply flawed man in moral terms. He was also a reputed kleptomaniac. Known, after the Second World War, as the Thief of Cairo, Farouk earned the dubious distinction of having stolen a ceremonial sword from the Shah of Iran. Shocked? But how would you react when you are informed that he also snatched a fob-watch from Winston Churchill as the latter was bidding him farewell on the steps of 10 Downing Street?

Farouk was overthrown in July 1952, to the relief of Egyptians. And the Shah of Iran? It was a beautiful moment in 1953 when the Mossadegh government saw to it that the young monarch was shown the door. But, of course, the Americans and the British did not appreciate that at all. Iran's oil, yet under London's control, was something the West did not want to be trifled with. And so British and American intelligence got to work. Mossadegh was a communist and so needed to be put out of action! In no time, demonstrations were organized, heavily bankrolled by the CIA, and soon the Shah was back. Twenty six years later, the monarch was not so lucky. The ayatollahs ejected him lock, stock and barrel. That said, has it ever occurred to you that the United States has been deeply involved in nearly every coup of significance around the world? The gory details of the coup that ousted Chile's Salvador Allende need hardly be repeated. And, just so you remain aware of it, the Americans, in the person of Henry Kissinger, were in the know of what was happening in Bangladesh in 1975. Ask Christopher Hitchens.

What is so good or so bad about coups? Well, a good coup is often a revolution. You have Fidel Castro in Cuba to demonstrate that fact. The bad coups have generally occurred in Africa, where even teenagers have emerged as leaders, soon to be gunned down by more responsible power-hungry men. In Latin America, coups have been a whole series of horror stories right from the 1960s and all the way into the late 1980s. The four coups Pakistanis have gone through have been relatively peaceful affairs. In what should have been a decent, human rights-based Bangladesh, coups have simply been another name for endless bloodletting. Ah, but let us not keep you from making your own assessments of what it is to send governments packing, through the barrels of guns. This work will show you the way. But here's a warning: do not try it at home . . . or in your country. It could prove harmful for your and your country's health.

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

Divided loyalties, betrayed love

Jackie Kabir reflects on a complex tale of 1971

KARTOGRAPHY is a book about Karachi, the spider plant city where you might find, according to the narrator, fossilized footprints of Alexander the Great. It is a heartbreaking love story, depicts the ethnic conflict which pervades Pakistani society and yet at the same time the resilience of its people. The story revolves around four friends and their lives in Karachi during 1971, which they call the 'Civil War'. The couples Zafar and Maheen, Yasmin and Ali swap their partners. While they handle the situation somehow, it is their children who can't accept the fact that one of their parents had betrayed the other.

war of independence of Bangladesh. She was alienated, ostracized from the very society she grew up in. It was a nightmare she was going through when her fiancé declined to go through with their marriage and chose to marry her best friend instead. Maheen was a Bengali, who grew up in another language. In 1971 Zafar's friend Shafiq asked him:

"How can you do it? You are going to marry one of them. You are going to let her have your children. How?"

Shafiq's baby brother's body was found in erstwhile East Pakistan and could not even be identified. So he thought Zafar was being a traitor by marrying a Bengali woman.

With that and the pressure of society he had to let go of Maheen. But when he had a girl he called her Raheen, the suffix borrowed from his ex fiancée's name. He wanted Raheen to be friends with Karim, Maheen and Ali's son.

Half of the book describes Karachi in 1971, while the other half focuses on Raheen and Karim's friendship.



Kartography Kamila Shamsie Oxford University Press

The war of independence in Bangladesh is something around which the novel revolves.

"71 was madness", says a friend. After the war was over Zafar said: "Happy? Why should I be happy?..... Three days ago we surrendered to the Indian army. Of course we are not happy. We've lost half the country and most of our souls."

Karim, Maheen's son, who had always thought of himself as a Bengali and thus a minority like the Muhajirs from the Muhajir Qaumi

Movement, said to Raheen and her friends:

"We didn't learn anything, did we, from '71?"

The generation of children born after 1971 hardly know anything about the war, as evident from a letter Raheen writes:

"We are nearly forty-eight years old as a nation, young enough that there are people who have lived through our entire history and more, but too old to put our worries down to teething problems. Between our birth in 1947 and 1995, dead bang between our beginning and our present, is 1971, of which I know next to nothing except that there was a war and East Pakistan became Bangladesh, and terrible things we must have done then to remain so silent about it. Is it shame at losing the war, or guilt about what we did try to win that mutes us?"

Towards the end of the novel there is a letter from Zafar to Maheen explaining what made him betray her after the war, what made him decide not to marry her. At one point he says:

"Pakistan died in 1971. Pakistan was a country with two wings. I have never before thought of the war in terms of that image: a wing tearing away from the body it once helped keep afloat --- it was a country with a majority Bengali population and its attendant richness of culture, clothing.... Oh, everything. How can Pakistan still be when all of that, everything that East Pakistan added

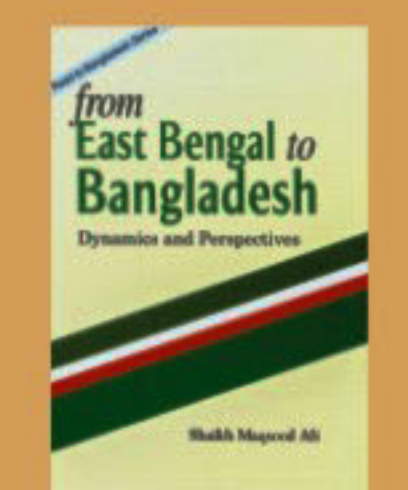
to the country?..... How can Pakistan still be when we so abused that image --- first by ensuring that the Bengalis were minimized and marginalized both politically and economically, and then by reacting to their demands for greater rights and representation with acts of savagery?"

Zafar's confession does make one wonder who Kamila Shamsie had in mind while describing the events. Maheen could grow out of her character to become the pervasive national identity that was so abused, humiliated at the hands of the Pakistani military. Born in 1973 Shamsie may represent the post-71 Pakistan generation's view. The parallel story is about Karim and Raheen, describes their love for a complex and violent city, a death city, according to *Newsline*. The suffering of city dwellers, the atrocities of communal riots, explosions. All of which make the book very exciting and hard to put down once begun.

It is a highly recommended book for people of all ages, especially those of us who think that the injustices done to us by Pakistanis is unpardonable. It will help us to understand that there are people in Pakistan who feel that they have lost more than just a part of their country. It may help bridge the gap between the two nations.

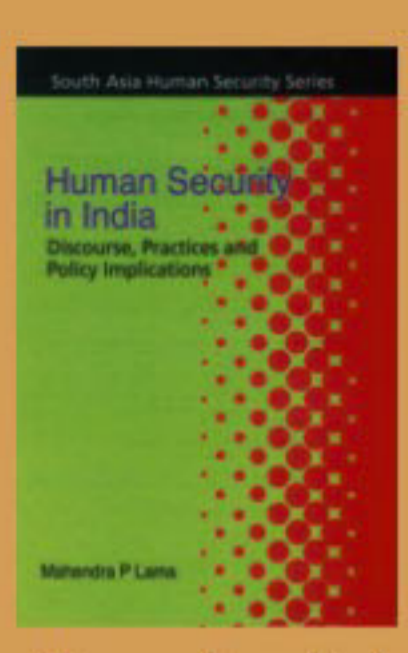
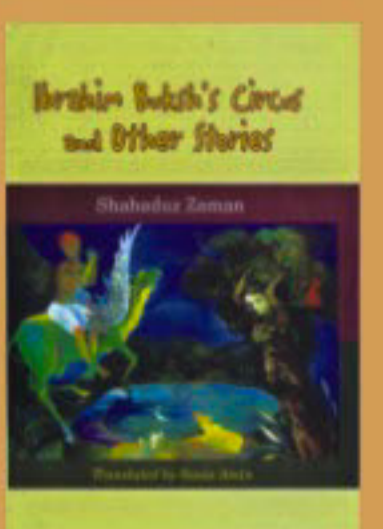
Jackie Kabir is a teacher and critic.

Book Choice



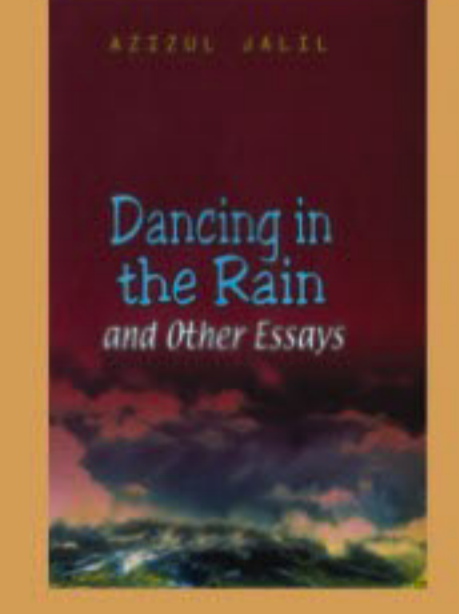
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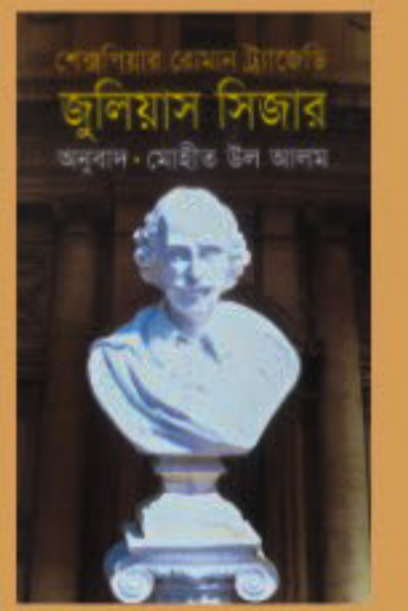
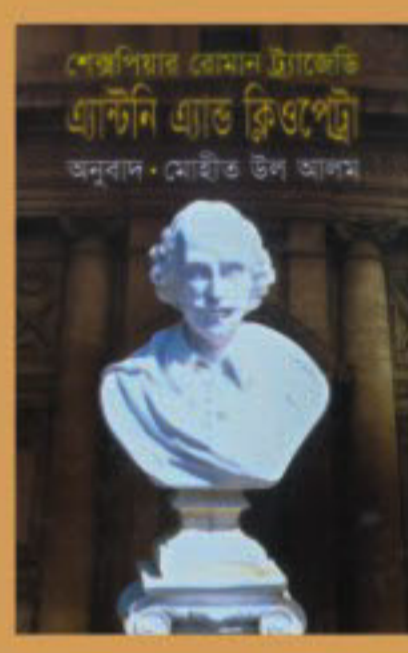


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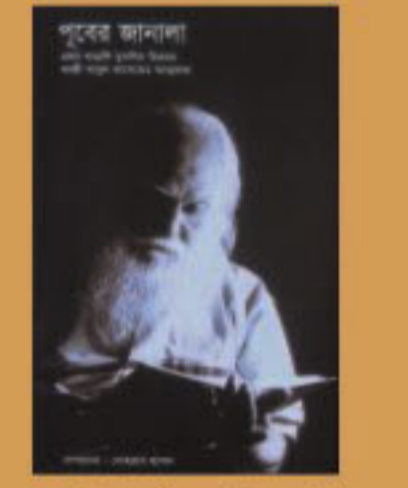
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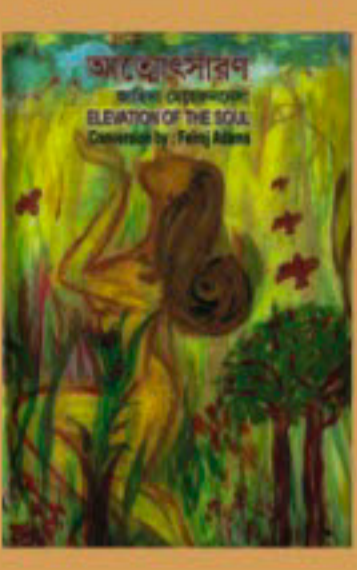
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