STAR BOOKS REVIEW

Failure is acceptable, often essential

Ainon M reflects on life's core calling

HIS book reminds me of Kahlil Gibran's saying, "If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life."

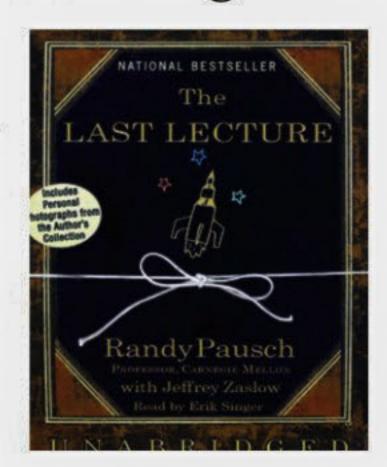
On September 18, 2007, Randolph (Randy) Frederick Pausch gave his last lecture titled 'Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams' in front of an audience of four hundred plus students, faculty and visiting members at the Carnegie Mellon University. The lecture series, previously known as The Last Lecture, now renamed as Journeys, is an academic practice at the university where select faculties deliver a final prelection to students - on wisdoms they wish to impart to students prior to the faculty's supposedly impending death. Ironically, Randy, a computer science professor at the university, did not hypothesize about his death. He was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and had only a few months of living to do. Randy Pausch died on July 25, 2008. He left behind a set of principles, captured in the book based on his lecture, which continues to make millions of people pause and reflect on matters that ground and define life. He did indeed open his heart to life.

Among the audience was Jeffrey Zaslow, a columnist with The Wall Street Journal, who paid heed to Randy's speech. He uploaded a five-minute video synopsis of Randy's lecture on the Journal's web-site. For Randy, it set the ball rolling for network coverage, interviews, a remarkable more than sixmillion hits on YouTube and more. And finally the book, The Last

Lecture, that has been translated in more than 18 languages. Randy did not write the book in a conventional manner of penning down his thoughts. The book is a product of verbal reflections on his life experiences that he shared with Zaslow through his head cell phone while on bike rides, fifty-three in total. In his life, time for him was compressed and of essence. Zaslow became Randy's partner in recording and transforming his words into a book that has few pages but is grand in its impact reminding us that a credible life is defined by both high and low points.

The theme of the book is living life. It is marked by a stream of deliberations on the author's passion for work and a set of moral codes he practised, as well as gained, while in the process of achieving his goals. His life's account leads to inevitable questions: What makes us unique? Are we defined by the work we do? What do we leave behind for our progeny? If life is a set of interactions, i.e., relationships, which ones are the most significant? What governs those interactions? Randy blends it all together. He takes 'the dreams anchored in childhood' as the starting point of his narration. The validation of life comes through the determination to live each day, achieving childhood dreams and empowering others to achieve

readers as these are expressions of his heart, the courageous emotions of one not defeated in the face of death. He reflects on lessons learned from parents while growing up; the discipline, the mores he absorbed; the values he upheld in



The Last Lecture Randy Pausch and Jeffrey Zaslow Hyperion, New York

relation to friends, colleagues, students and his family. He did not shy away from articulating the physical and emotional pains of dealing with cancer. He believed each challenge has a creative solution. His was to sort through time left, giving him a chance to reevaluate his priorities. His words carry living to its fullest.

He makes us aware that smooth sail in life is a misnomer. 'The brick His life anecdotes come alive for wall we encounter,' says the author, 'is a reminder that failure is not just acceptable but is often essential. They're not there to keep us out.' The off-track disappointments are a measure of how intensely we wish to achieve something and a reminder to follow through irre-

spective of adversities. He gives us a story from his reality. While teaching the 'Building Virtual Worlds' course at Carnegie Melon he created a 'First Penguin Award' for students. It was given to the team who took the challenge of trying new ideas or new technology and failed. His reasonings? 'It was an award for glorious failure and it celebrated out-of-the-box thinking and using imagination in a daring way.' That is what gives us the inroads to being unique, the slight

At some point in our lives we all wish to take a measure of who we really are. What defines us? That self-formulation takes shape in the context of others - all help shape our core beings! We are not discrete beings and life is not a solo journey. In Randy's words, 'I learned as I grew older that you can't get anywhere without help. That means people have to want to help you, and that brings up the question: 'What kind of person do other people seem to want to help?' What is the interconnection between I and others? What are the social values that define our beings, if you will? The quintessential answer, according to him, is simple: tell the truth; be earnest; apologize when you make a mistake; and focus on others. He adds, 'Find the best in everybody. You might have to wait for a long time, but people will show you their good side!' The elegant expressions of "never lose childlike wonder...show gratitude...never give up" are simple words of action, universal in approach to anything we wish to start.

"Time is all you have. And you

time than you think." For me, these words hit home in earnest. The essence of these words is beautifully interwoven in an instance where Randy ponders on the surprise he gave his wife, in front of a fully enthralled audience, by bringing a birthday cake on the stage where he gave his last lecture. She held him tight and through tears whispered, "Please, don't die." The words define the common denomination in the souls of two people, the warmth and bindings of love. Such captured moments make the book grounded in life's engagements. Indeed, how many days and nights do we allow to slip away in procrastination, dreaming of the ideal job, the ideal project or what we should have said to our dear ones, moments lost without expressing how much we love our children, family, friends, how much we care? All lost in the busy events of life. The Last Lecture is not a self-help book but a book that inspires us to think the world is given to us only once and in that we can create choices which make us unique. The words are musings of the heart that knew for sure it would beat for only so many numbered days and no more. What makes it an enchanting read is the fact that the book is a gift wrapped in the legacy of one man's love, his successes and challenges, and a set of precepts that he wanted to leave behind for his three young

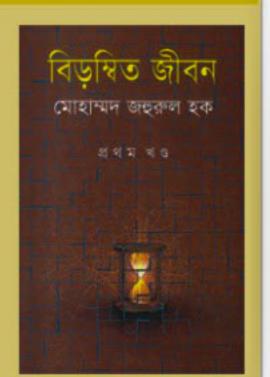
may find one day that you have less

Ainon M writes fiction, composes poetry and lives in Carbondale, Illinois, USA

At A Glance

Birhombito Jibon Prothom Khondo Mohammad Zahurul Haq Jagriti Prokashoni Tel: 8623230, 8624218

Memoirs are always a treat. Here in this work, Haq speaks about the long path he has travelled in his search for happiness, indeed for self-assertion. You might consider the narrative to be like any other. It is. And yet it is not. But there is little question that it will make your own memories come alive.



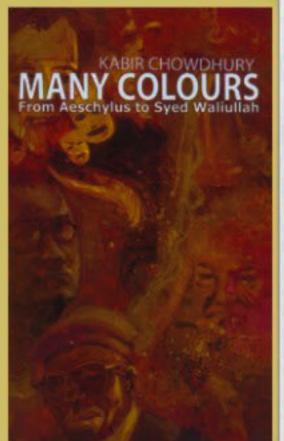


Abritti Bishoyok Probondhomala Ed Aminur Rahman Adorn Publication Tel: 9347577, 8314629

Here is a work on recitation, the proper term for it being abritti. And encapsulated in this fine anthology is a whole range of articles on what poetry is and indeed what it becomes in the hands of one who means to read it out loud. Some of the more illustrious of individuals in the world of Bengali creativity speak their minds here. You will love it.

Many Colours From Aeschylus to Syed Waliullah Adorn Publication Tel: 9347577, 8314629

Kabir Chowdhury's great passion has been a relentless study of the classics, especially Greek tragedy. But, then again, as a student and then as a teacher of literature, his travels through the literary landscape has been wide and varied. Which is why you will come by a range of colours, in the form of essays, that you cannot but admire.



Waltzing through literature land

Md. Shafiqul Islam captures creativity in a journal

TROSSINGS is a literary journal produced by the Department of English and Humanities, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh. The journal, published annually, rightly defines itself as a " peer-reviewed journal of scholarly articles and book

I was awestruck by some of the articles in this volume. This magazine presents reading material of great variety. This issue features articles contributed by faculties from many different tertiary institutions of Bangladesh and also two faculties from India.

Professor Mohit Ul Alam, the editor of the journal, himself elaborates the contents of the work in his very well-written introduction: "The issue has nineteen essays and five book reviews. The essays have been put into five sections in accordance with their thematic similarities. The sections are named as "Literatures Interfacing", 'Post Colonial Literature," "Diasporic Literature," "Imperialistic Legacies," and "Language: Theory, Practice and Mechanics" respectively."

essays dealing with some aspects interfacing between literatures, cultures and theories. This section juxtaposes titles with variety. It deals with Tagore's prose by Fakrul Alam and Kaiser Haq's poetry by Sheikh Mehedi Hasan. It also includes an uncommon topic titled, "What's Cooking?Cookery and

In the first section, there are five

Creativity in The Mistress of Spices, Serving Crazy with Curry and Book of Rachel' by Rajyashree Khushu-Lahiri and Shweta Rao from India.

The second section, named "Postcolonial Literature", contains three essays, the first of which is by Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam, a noted author and leading intellectual of the country. The other two essays on Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing and Achebe's Things Fall Apart by Mohammad Shahidul Islam Chowdhury and Nasrin Islam respectively have been a pleasure to

The third section titled "Diasporic Literature" also contains three essays, starting with a paper by Kaiser Haq on Nirad C. Chaudhury, the controversial icon-

The fourth section dwells on Shakespeare's imperial dimension, another controversial topic, and becomes lively in the hands of Mohit Ul Alam, an accomplished and amusing writer.

essays deals with the perennial problems of establishing English language learning on a sound pedagogical base. The essayists of this section make a praiseworthy effort as a whole to draw a comprehensive picture of the present state of English language in the country.

The edition of *Crossings* is lovely and appealing because it fulfills our longing for a well-composed and handsomely printed collection. While each piece is unique unto



Crossings **ULAB Journal of English Studies** Volume 2 No. 1 Fall 2009 Ed Mohit UI Alam

The last group containing seven itself, together they make for a satisfying romp through writers like Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam, Professor Kaiser Haq, Professor Fakrul Alam and Professor Mohit Ul Alam with substantial and impressive publication credits.

Re Fakrul Alam's article "Some Qualities of Permanence": Tagore's English prose, for example, attempts "to demonstrate how Tagore endeavoured to use the English language flexibly and imag-

inatively and how he was able to wield the language in diverse ways to suit the occasion, the audience, or the form of expression he had chosen." Alam tries "to produce a thorough re-evaluation of Tagore's contribution to English prose and affirm the value of his prose writings in our time."

Tagore felt unsure or cynical about his ability to master the pitfalls of the English language, "the definite and indefinite articles, the prepositions, the use of 'shall' and will'"---pitfalls which could not be "avoided by intuition" and could be acquired only through "tuition" he deduced. As he suggested wryly, he actually knew "well enough to say" that he "did not know it".

The journal features Kaiser Haq with his excellent and amusing article titled, "The Late Mr. Nirad C. Chaudhury, C.B.E.(Hony.), and the Twilght of Empire". Haq, a noteworthy and major poet composing poetry in English from Bangladesh, equally excels in prose too. He attempts here "to examine the philosophy of history expounded by Nirad C. Chaudhury, and relate it to the apocalyptic temper of modernism". He cites two amusing anecdotes revealing, "one aspect of Chaudhury: The show off. Complimentary to showing off is putting down; and Chaudhury delighted in it."

Before I leave it to the reader to read and appreciate the journal independently, I cannot resist the

comments. Mohit Ul Alam, in his essay on Shakespeare's "Imperial Design", asks some relevant questions on Shakespeare. Apart from the "imperial theme" or Poetic Geography of which I hardly have room to pass my opinion here, I would prefer to concentrate on the point his argument revolves around. Recognizing the debt to the critics he borrowed points from, his moving to the questions in the conclusion is significant to those who study Shakespeare in Bangladesh. We may not find all the answers here and so we may make more explorations but the questions are right. And if the questions are right, we may surely find the answers too.

temptation of making a few more

The journal encloses, among others, a couple of unique, wellwritten, and thoughtful literary reviews by Syed Badrul Ahsan, a columnist, poet and Literary and Current Affairs Editor of the Daily

To conclude, my sincere appreciation goes to the editor along with his entire team for his unassuming and unpretentious perseverance in bringing this journal out. This volume is engaging and satisfying but that makes me all the more eager for looking forward with much anticipation.

Md Shafigul Islam, a senior civil servant, writes book reviews and literary criticism.

The diaries are replete with

A clan in history

Muhammad Abdul Hai is happy reading about a family

UR imaginations run wild at the slightest hint of a mystery that possibly shrouds an event or a story. We forgo the comforting nap of the afternoon and peaceful slumber of the night for the excitement of watching a mystery movie or reading a strange story. Had there been no mystery in this world, it would have been a very dull place to live in. That explains why mystery stories of the Bermuda Triangle, Loch Ness monster, etc., are ever popular with young readers.

The Curies, written by Denis

Brian, is a biography of the Curie

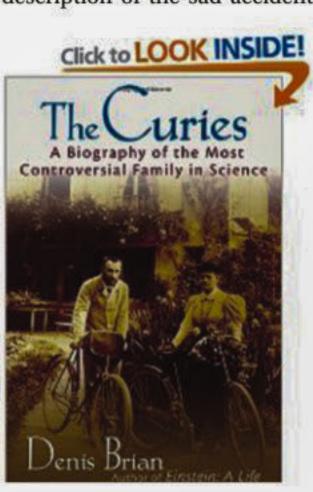
family that received a total of six Nobel Prizes in chemistry and physics. This momentous achievement alone has made the study of the life of the members of the family a fascinating experience. Every individual person of the family was a prodigy and what made them so is still an unresolved mystery. Only God seems to know the answer. The author has done a great favor to the mystery readers by producing such an invaluable document about the mysterious talents of the Curie family. The book contains lucid details of the less known side of their life, which include the controversy, the drama, the scandal and the tragedy that surround them. It is the first of its kind to provide a well-rounded, true look at both the private and professional lives of the world's most gifted scientific family.

The book is a passionate, enlightening and engaging insight into the entire Curie clan, and biographer Denis Brian has drawn the raw material from research, interviews, and correspondence with friends, families and associates of the Curies to paint such a vivid and lively picture of the Curie dynasty. Every single page is a step forward in the writer's honest desire, unlike many French news reporters, to hold bare before the readers, how these gifted individuals grew up amidst a hostile environment around them. Born in Poland, Marie Curie migrated to France where she was treated by many as a second-rate citizen since she was a foreigner. Nevertheless, the government of France rightly offered her the best possible environment and research facilities which Poland could not afford. Marie Curie was equally loyal to both the countries. She tried her best to help Poland with development in scientific research, and at the same time, she was helping the top seeded French scientists with their laboratory works.

Marie Curie was not well off in her early life. She had to work for years as a governess and tutor students outside classes to earn some extra coins to support her own education. However, the Nobel Prize money greatly eased the financial constraints in her middle age. The fame that was associated the prize, was marred by the shattering of the couple's

privacy. The discovery of uranium, which was a joint effort of Curie and her husband's, was not reported as such by some newspapers in France. They, instead, reported that Marie Curie had nothing to do with the discovery of uranium because she was simply an assistant to Pierre, while the research was being done. But the fact was, they both undertook the research jointly which led to the discovery. On one occasion, Marie had to get hospitalized due to some medical problem. Being allergic to news reporters, she decided not to make it public. The next day, one newspaper published absolutely false news stating that Marie Curie was going to give birth to a baby, fathered by Paul Langevin. Some people in the news media, in connivance with a few scientists of lower calibre, even devised a plot to exclude Marie from being nominated for the Nobel Prize in

The book has so many interesting details that readers will be extremely tempted to finish it in one sitting. The elaborate description of the sad accident



The Curies **Denis Brian** John Wiley & Sons

in which Pierre was killed under a horse driven carriage, will make readers deeply moved. Then you have the diary entries of Marie, which seem to be her intimate conversation with her dead husband. Even a quick reading of them will leave you sobbing. It will make you feel what it is like to have someone very dear missing from your life. However, when you turn to the next chapter, you will chuckle, to find how fickle minded human beings can be, when you read about the relation that develops between Marie and her dead husband's student, Paul Langevin. This relation received such hostile publicity in Europe that Marie once contemplated killing herself. So, dear readers, you can't afford to be indifferent to such an interesting biography.

Read with pleasure and learn about the most extraordinary family in science.

School, Narayanganj.

Muhammad Abdul Hai is Principal, ABC International

A voice speaks from the grave

Syed Badrul Ahsan has his questions about a dictator's thoughts

Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan's diaries, incredulity is what one is struck by. There is a reason for that. When towards the end of his decade-long presidency of Pakistan in the 1960s he came forth with his memoirs, bearing the arrogant title of Friends Not Masters, a goodly number of questions were raised about the ghost writers who probably had worked on them. And indeed there were the ghost writers, all of whom in later years were spotted explaining away their roles in the making of the memoirs which, incidentally, amounted to little that was enlightening or revealing.

Now the diaries are upon us, raising a wholly different set of questions altogether. Why do they cover the period from 1966 to 1972 and not that which came earlier, when Ayub was at the height of his powers? Again, why did his family, son Gohar Ayub in particular, wait thirty three years after the old dictator's death to let the world in on the misfortune is that he has several news that he had actually left his diaries behind? Perhaps the most audacious question of all relates to how much of the diaries comes in Ayub's language and how much of it extrapolation and embellishment by others. The American academic Craig Baxter has of course edited and annotated the diaries. But that is not the point. The more relevant issue is the authenticity of the diaries. F.S. Aijazuddin in Pakistan has mischievously pointed to the fakes that were Hitler's diaries in the 1980s. Like him, there are quite a few others willing to ask if some

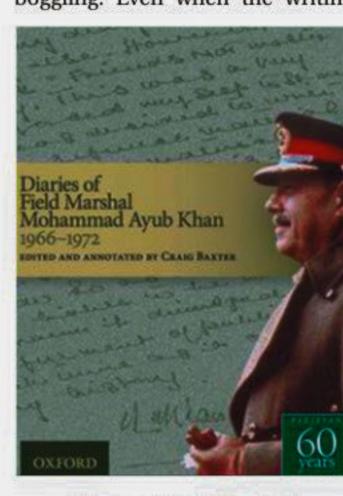
Khan's diaries were composed after his death. Take your pick. After Friends Not Masters, it has never been easy to trust Pakistan's first military ruler.

As for the entries in the diaries, there is little mistaking that the thoughts are quintessentially Ayublike. He respects no one and is forever ready to pronounce judgement on the reputation of all the good men who simply cannot take a liking to him. Of course he admires the likes of Justice Munir, a man who remains notorious for his ingratiating loyalty to the general who for no rhyme or reason began to call himself a field marshal. In life, Ayub admired few men. In death, his comments take on a vicious hue. Not even Abdul Jabbar Khan, the Bengali speaker of the national assembly, escapes his sarcasm. While commenting on Jabbar Khan's worry about the Agartala conspiracy case in a 9 January 1968 entry, Ayub has this caustic comment: '(Jabbar Khan's) sons who keep on going in and out of jail for their misdeeds. This must be a source of great worry to him'. In another entry on the same day, Ayub reveals his suspicious streak, this time about his own loyalist Abdus Sobur Khan: 'I sent for Abdus Sobur Khan and questioned him on the part he is alleged to have played in the (Agartala) conspiracy. He denied all knowledge and tried to show that the people in East

incident'. There are the regular intervals in which the then military ruler deniconsiderable portions of Ayub grates his former foreign minister

Pakistan are greatly shocked by the

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto at nearly every opportunity. Bhutto, he notes in a 2 December 1967 entry, had 'held a two-day convention in Lahore to launch his so-called People's Party'. The man's inability to read the writing on the wall is mindboggling. Even when the writing



Diaries of Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan 1966-1972 Edited and annotated by Craig Baxter

gets to be bold and the wall draws closer to him, he pretends not to see it. But of all the men and matters that leave his nerves on edge, it is Bengalis and a rising Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that exercise his mind. This is how he speaks of Mujib on 26 April 1967: 'One revealing thing that came to light was that mujibur rahman had been telling

his followers that once they raise gesture Mujib spurns. the flag of rebellion in East Pakistan, the Americans will rush to their fulminations against what Ayub sees as Bengali leanings toward assistance'. A few lines later, this is India in general and Hinduism in the acidic comment, 'It is quite particular. In May 1967, he is blunt: obvious that this man is a menace and will continue to mislead the Bengalis as long as he lives'. You tend to get the feeling that the dictator was already cooking up the conspiracy case that was to come in December of the year. It was a case that would eventually lay him low and catapult Mujib to the status of a Bengali national icon. By 22 February 1969, the day the Agartala case is withdrawn by the regime and Mujib walks out a free man, Ayub Khan is defeated. Amazingly, however, there is no entry in the diary on that day. On 23 February, though, Ayub notes, 'A serious political situation is emerging. Bhutto in West Pakistan and Mujib in East Pakistan are gaining ascendancy. Something has to be done to prevent such a dangerous combination'. The entry must have been made only hours after Mujib had addressed a mammoth rally in Dhaka, where he had just been them'. A little while later, this is how referred to as Bangabandhu, friend he insults Bengalis, '... the Bengalis of Bengal. Three days later, on 26 have no stomach for self-criticism February, there is a perceptible nor for listening to the truth about change in Ayub's tone toward themselves'. Mujib: 'Incidentally, Mujib came to see me last night. Our talk was cordial. He seemed conciliatory though making no bones that he was the uncrowned king of East Pakistan and he must be recognized as such'. In his twilight, the military ruler makes no mention of the offer

he makes to the Bengali leader, that

of taking charge as prime minister, a

. East Pakistan will go under Hinduism and be separated forever'. Ayub Khan's contempt for Bengalis is a constant refrain throughout the diaries. As early on as 11 April 1967, after a meeting with Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, his new foreign minister, he writes: '(Pirzada) said that East Pakistanis are incapable of seeing beyond their nose. In their hatred for West Pakistan, and especially the Punjabis, they were capable of doing anything stupid. They got an empire as a result of the partition of Bengal in 1905 with Assam included. They lost it through sheer stupidity'. The president must have enjoyed these crass remarks, for he seems to making his own at a meeting with Altaf Gauhar on 23 July 1967: '(Gauhar) asked me how long will they remain with Pakistan? I said till India was ready to swallow

Ayub Khan papers over the truth behind his departure from power in March 1969, trying to make it appear that he has opted to quit voluntarily. But bitterness is all over the place.

(The review is a reprint).

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