

# Idealism and a determined woman

## Farida Shaikh appreciates an autobiography

IN 1986 Virgilio Barco, previously mayor of Bogota, is elected president of the republic. He wants to reform the economy and wage an all out war against the drug cartels. Carlos Galian 46, is assassinated. Ernesto Samper becomes president through the money supplied by drug traffickers.

After the initial publication of the book in 2002, Colombia's former president sued Ingrid Betancourt. He denied any financial transaction with the Cali cartel or dealings with Colombian drug lords or the killing of witnesses to the impeachment proceedings against him. Later a defamation campaign was also launched by the press to the effect that Colt Company had financed Betancourt's election. She was caricatured as Ingrid 'Betancolt.'

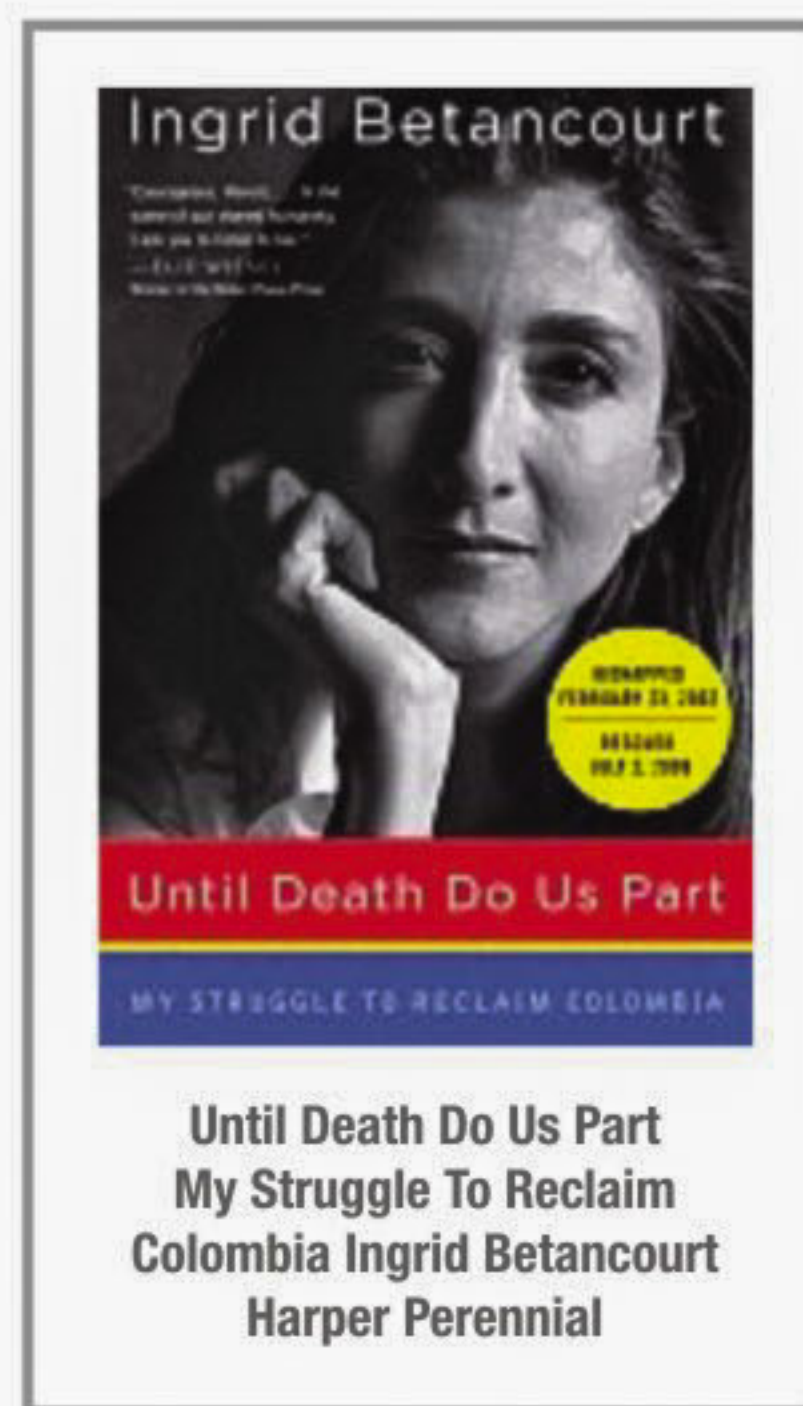
Colombia is rated as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, has always been headed by 'factional leaders.... real leaders have all been assassinated ....and mediocre men get themselves elected ...to enrich themselves.' Thus Ingrid Betancourt. She was campaigning to become president on an anti-corruption ticket.

Betancourt was taken hostage on 23 February 2002 by the leftist

Fuerzas Armadas Revolutionaries de Colombia or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). After six and a half years in captivity, on 2 July 2008, she and 14 other hostages were rescued by Colombian soldiers posing as workers of a non-government organisation.

Former President and television journalist Andres Pastrana negotiated with the guerrillas in what came to be known as the 'Pastrana method'. In his election euphoria, Pastrana had granted 17000 square miles of national territory to FARC. The guerrillas gave nothing in return; the contracting party became a hostage to the warlords. FARC smuggled in 10,000 weapons through pipelines in Peru, leading ultimately to the downfall of that country's President Alberto Fujimori.

Betancourt entered politics at the age of 32 and sought the endorsement of the Liberal Party to which her mother belonged; her father was in the Conservative Party. The ideological difference between the two parties was small; both had an equal number of corrupt officials. Her aunt discouraged her, as a woman, from becoming involved in messy politics. She responded, 'We want clean politics, and we are not



going to quit, we'll go all the way against corruption, against the mafia's takeover of our institutions, of democracy, all the way.'

The young politician sought to bring about changes from within; she believed that 'we can't hand over the country's destiny to men who take no interest in the misery of the Colombian people, who think only of

enriching themselves.'

Ingrid Betancourt is described as 'Courageous, heroic...In the name of our shared humanity, I ask you to listen to her,' by the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize 1986, Elie Wiesel, best known for his autobiography *La Nuit*--- Night, 1960, a 127-page book on his own imprisonment.

This book, the autobiography of Betancourt, is dedicated to her children, is labeled as 'deeply personal', with messages of hope, courage and change. She received threatening letters; and was told, 'Doctora, we have already paid the sicarios.... Sicarios are poor young men on motor bikes hired to kill people for a small sum.' Betancourt summarized, 'You are going to kill me ...' She gave up a life of comfort and security --- her happiness was meaningless to her being away from her country.

Equally accurate would be to label the book as a political thriller similar to Tom Clancy's *Clear and Present Danger* that narrates the operations of Colombian drug lords and the murder of the US ambassador.

Betancourt was a senator in Colombia's national legislature, founder of a political party, and was fighting for democracy which was

'being sacrificed for the well-being of the few...international criminals determined policy and political assassination....a way of life.' Her political party Oxygen was floated before her election to the senate and became 'an unavoidable force on the political chessboard.'

Betancourt's election campaign was based on her struggle against corruption. Her photo was posted alongside a picture of a condom, with the slogan, 'The best way to protect us against corruption.....Corruption is the AIDS of Colombia. In addition to the real AIDS, we're suffering from corruption.' She was fighting for one of the 18 seats in Bogota's House of Representatives.

Her parents, particularly her father, was shocked over her activities, and said it was disgraceful. However, she was able to overcome her anonymity; she linked herself with journalists who interviewed her for the newspapers and television. She listed the names of corrupt officials. Neither the Liberal Party nor presidential candidate Samper gave her any support for her campaign. She managed to obtain \$5 million worth of financial support from an industrialist in Bogota.

Betancourt won, by the highest number of votes, and proved that Colombia was ready to combat corruption. This was four years after her separation from her husband. She agreed to work on a commission set up to prepare a code of ethics. She learnt that the purpose of this exercise was only to prepare but not to execute, that principles did not matter much in Colombia. She prescribed Draconian sanctions for fraud which would lead to expulsion from the party. The code was nicknamed 'Ingrid's Code.'

Betancourt has been hugely influenced by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Pablo Neruda and other Latin American writers. She completed her education in France, married and later separated from a French diplomat in 1990. He never wanted to set foot in Colombia.

Betancourt's memoirs are enlightening in many ways, particularly in the context of Bangladesh, where corruption in the public sphere has played a dominant role, where democracy and the electoral process are always for the benefit and betterment of the elite in society.

FARIDA SHAIKH IS A CRITIC AND MEMBER OF THE READING CIRCLE

## TOURISM IN ASIA

# Achievements and challenges

Mohammad Shahidul Islam dwells on a subject of modern concern

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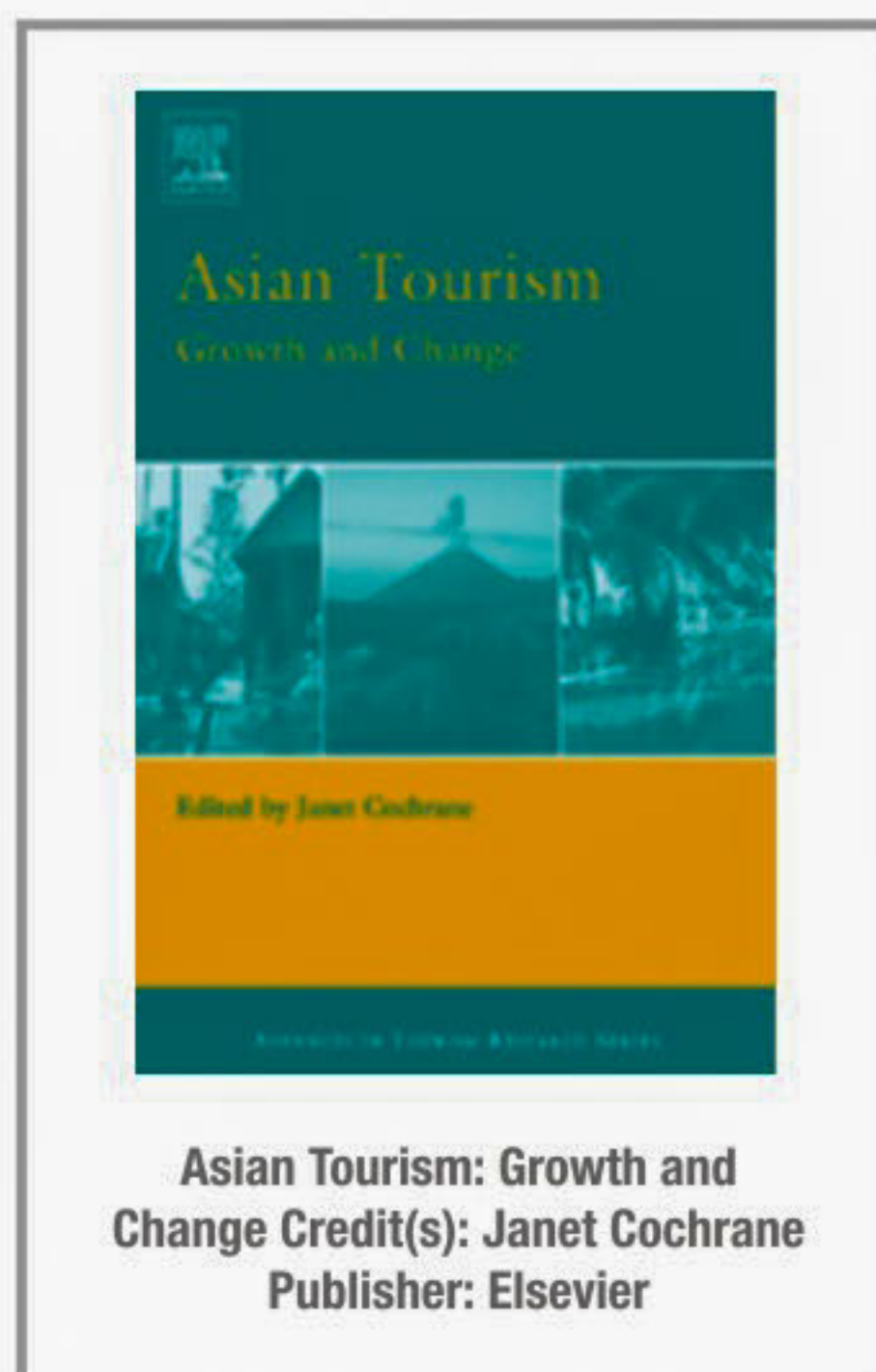
For last one decade Asian tourism has reached a considerable height of riches. It changes its tourism form from informal to formal. The western are now more enthusiastic than before for traveling Asia. ICT develops and tourism has been immensely promoted. The exchange of information has played a great role developing tourism in Asia. Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, Dubai and Malaysia are now hot destinations of the world for business travelers that really change the total scenario of Asian tourism.

*Asian Tourism: Growth and Change* is one of the upshots of the Leeds Met 2006 European Conference on tourism in Asia. A remarkable list of contributors brings much experience and many innovative approaches to its 31 chapters (14 written or co-authored by Asian researchers) based on conference papers, case studies and additional research. All have been endowed with a thoughtful observation of the changes, influences and impacts taking place in Asian tourism. It will be received warmly by a wide audience in industry and academic world.

In the preface, Janet Cochrane writes that the book 'sets out to illustrate the manifestations of tourism in Asia'. It does, and with the examples provided forms an invaluable and stimulating source of information for those studying tourism in Asia. It encourages the reader to look at tourism from the perspective of visitor and visited.

The book is presented in three sections:

First section depicts the politics (vulnerable issue for Asian Tourism) and policies of Asian Tourism. Fast transformation, competition and diversification in the Asian tourism sector are displayed, including chapters on tourism development and propaganda in contemporary Lhasa, Tibet and the growth of aviation industry



in Asia and frays to sustainability.

Second section puts light on market demand and supplier response. The section broadly includes papers which give detailed insights into consumer behavior of an increasingly diverse market such as backpackers, and those with strong interests in various forms of ecotourism such as wetland tourism in Hong Kong: from birdwatcher to mass eco-tourist.

The final section highlights destinations, industry and the forces of change. Here the notion and publicity of responsible tourism get priority. 'Responsible destination management' has been the key pointer. Besides, topics such as sex workers and tourism: a case study of Kovalam Beach, India and health and wellness tourism in Asia reproduce the blows of two contrasting and often hot dimensions of the industry.

This is sad to see in this book with no significance to tourism in Bangladesh. Since the subject is overlooked here; so to world compilers. Bhutan, Nepal, Cambodia and Sri Lanka are as usual growing and the concerned tourism researches comprehend to evaluate their tourism mobility. We need to produce frequent talks of this subject internationally.

*Asian Tourism: Growth and Change* is the first book to examine tourism in Asia - the fastest growing tourism region in the world. What about Bangladesh?

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# Palestinians are non-entities everywhere

Rehnuma Sazzad explores the reflections of a poet

ON 11 August 2008, Peter Clark writes in a Guardian obituary that as a poet, author, and politician, Mahmoud Darwish 'did as much as anyone to forge a Palestinian national consciousness.' While Clark's comment is undebatable, it is also true that Darwish's poetry transcends its national boundary by reflecting on universal humane values through the mirror of the Palestinian experience. It is one of the major reasons why Darwish now is a great name in world literature. Memory for Forgetfulness is his exquisitely written prose-memoir. Ibrahim Muhawi's adept translation brings out the delicacy of the piece. It is based on Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 that was aimed at wiping out the PLO's base from southern Lebanon. The fact seems most startling when one reads the memoir containing evocative details of Beirut under siege. Darwish, however, lifts up the sufferings of the invasion to an aesthetic level through his musings on reality, belonging, history, resistance and the role of art involving these. The entire book is an extended internal monologue (the poet's thoughts in his mind) about which Robyn Creswell writes in Harper Magazine's January 2009 issue:

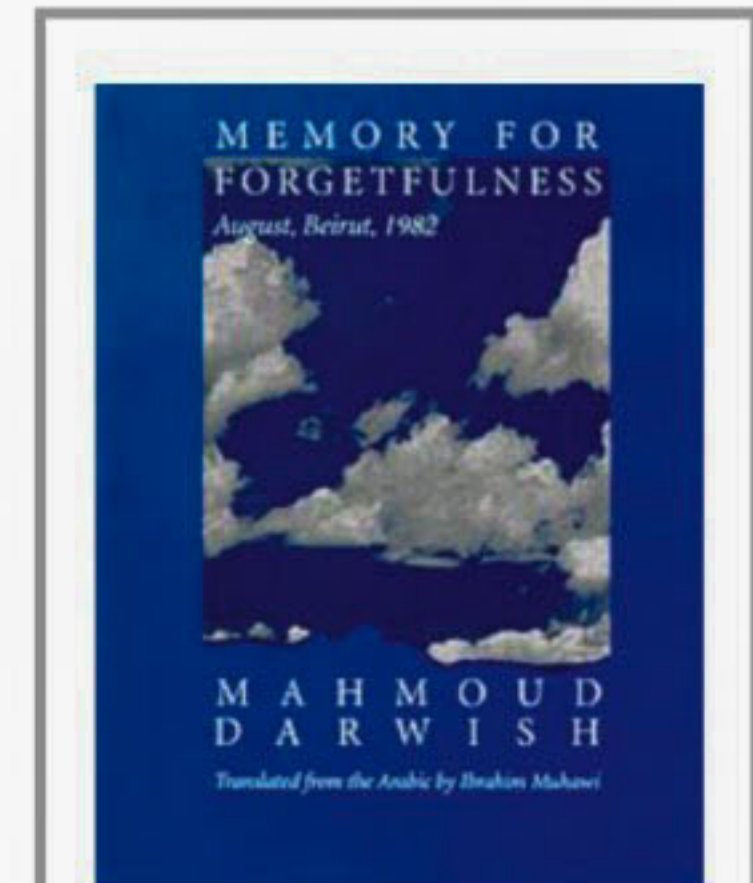
The experience in Lebanon also led to *Memory for Forgetfulness*, a classic of modern Arabic letters and one of the great war memoirs of the twentieth century.

And I could not agree more with Creswell on this.

Darwish writes this passionate memoir three years after the siege while he is living in Paris. He starts with the memory of bomb shells falling down relentlessly by destroying the normalcy of life. Desperately attempting to make some coffee in his eighth floor apartment with no water or electricity, Darwish realizes how mundane affairs like having a cup of coffee, relishing its aroma or just being alive in an ordinary sense become so costly, almost luxurious, in the life-in-death situation of the terrible siege. One remembers the black night of 25 March 1971, as Darwish's soliloquy begs to the forces of massacre for just a few moments of peace from sipping a cup of coffee:

What if this inferno were to take a five-minute break, and then come what may? Just five-minutes! I almost say, "Five minutes only, during which I could make my one and only preparation and then ready myself for life or death."

As the atrocities reign outside, during which I could make my one and only preparation and then ready myself for life or death. Since the attackers want to extinguish the Palestinian refugees and exiles like Darwish himself, he records this time under the siege so as to defy the attempt. As opposed to being erased from the face of the earth, his writing proclaims that he and his people 'exist', despite the



antagonism. Thus Darwish's poems transform the unerasable memory of the siege, which is both personal and collective, into a powerful opposition against the injustice against them.

This is where the political and historical dimensions of the memoir come into view. Understandably, Darwish achieves these dimensions by connecting his personal sufferings with those of his people. He does not only evoke the moment by moment feeling, passing of time, mixing of different sounds (e.g. sound of birds, water, and splinters) and changing of colours but also prove the heroism of his own and Lebanese people under the bombardment. Speaking of the bravery of Palestinian

children born in the refugee camps, who worked alongside Palestinian and Lebanese fighters to resist the invasion, Darwish comments:

But do they realize, these youths armed to the teeth with a creative ignorance... are correcting the ink of a language that... has driven the whole area east of the Mediterranean toward... nothing more than slavery...

Darwish alludes to the history of the Palestinian dispossession here. No matter how hard his people try just to continue to be, uprooting seems to be their preserved destiny. These marginal people, who are already living in exile in Lebanon, are going to be displaced again because of the invasion.

"You're aliens here", they say to them there.

"You're aliens here", they say to them here.

The Palestinians are the non-entities everywhere and yet they are brought to bear the brunt of the attack to be denied of an identity once again. Darwish steels his emotion to report on the Palestinian children born in the refugee camps: 'these youths are still being born without a reason, growing up for no reason, remembering for no reason...'

However, the truth remains that Darwish is one of them. However dire the situation is, his poetic mind resiliently brings their struggle for existence into focus. Darwish is bitterly ironic as he records the struggle of 'these outcasts':

Thus he who's expected to forget he's human is forced to accept the exclusion from human rights that will train him for freedom from the disease of forgetting the homeland.

Despite being ironic, Darwish's angry voice raises a serious question of 'freedom' and 'homeland'. From this viewpoint, the Palestinian suffering becomes comprehensible to anyone who has ever known the struggle for achieving a free homeland. However, Darwish is not interested in sentimentalising their case. That is why he combines his rage with an admirable wit: 'He has to catch tuberculosis not to forget he has lungs and he must sleep in open country not to forget he has another country.'

Not just the wit, Darwish's memoir is brilliant for being a

mixed-genre writing as well. Being a poet and journalist, Darwish adorns his writing with fragments of prose-poems, journalistic reports, dialogues (both realistic and surrealist), historical stories, familiar incidents, lists, eulogies, ravings, arguments, allusions (both to the Koran and Bible and literatures), graphic descriptions of the destruction and even quotes from his previous poems and editorials etc. But all the while his use of simple vocabulary and plain, recurrent images holds them all together and adds to the beauty of this sustained soliloquy. Some of the recurrent images are that of a sea, dream, death, sound, silence, blood and streets, stones, mirrors, etc. Clearly, the fragmentary writing represents the poet's search for a meaning to be attached to their exile existence through all the sights, sounds and thoughts. The mirror image is especially significant. Through the fragmentary style, the entire memoir appears as a broken mirror: it reflects on a nation in exile from varied perspectives so that the poet can give voice to his people's disconnected life and its painful but heroic continuity.

It is no coincidence that Darwish sets the writing on 6 August, though the invasion started on 13 June. Because the 6th is Hiroshima Day, Darwish wants to connect the invasion with a similar historical atrocity. In doing so, he renders history ironic; because the historical memory seems to be easily forgettable. Otherwise, writings would have been able to stop the barbarity. Darwish quotes his favorite author Robert Louis Stevenson in the title, as one of Stevenson's characters says in *Kidnapped*: "I've a grand memory for forgetting". Since Darwish knows that the Israeli invasion will also be forgotten in due time, he concludes the fragmentary memoir in a befittingly abstract way:

No one understands anyone  
And no one understands anyone...

I don't see a shore.  
I don't see a dove.

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