

# That waterfall sound in her voice ...

## Syed Badrul Ahsan travels through artistic timelessness

There has always been a flowing stream imagery about Ferdausi Rahman's songs. That slight tremor in the voice, coming with that particular sense of femininity, has been a defining point about the professionalism she has consistently brought to singing. And do not forget that music has been a strong underlying theme with her family. The trendsetter was of course her father; and then there has been her sibling. In our times, a niece too has made waves in this particular genre. In a very large sense, therefore, Ferdausi belongs to that select band of music makers whose roots lie as much in their individuality as in their being part of clans made illustrious by their contributions to the shaping of melody and its various nuances.

In *Banglar Gaaner Pakhi*, therefore, emerges the story of Ferdausi Rahman's rise to stardom and the elements that have kept her on the heights that she was to reach. Extend the picture and you will arrive at a point where it is a whole generation of Bengali song makers and singers that stands ready to acquaint you with the many ways in which it moulded the world of modern Bengali songs. There is that unmistakable generational quality about Ferdausi Rahman, Anjuman Ara Begum, Fauzia Khan, Farida Yasmeen, Bashir Ahmed, Abdul Jabbar, Syed Abdul Hadi, Anwaruddin Khan, Mahmudunnabi



**Banglar Gaane Pakhi**  
Ferdausi Rahman  
Ed Rafiqul Islam  
Anyapokash

and a host of other artistes who truly came of age in the 1960s and were destined to leave an assertive imprint on the collective aesthetic consciousness. In Ferdausi's case, something of the phenomenal has been at play, given particularly the fact that she was one of those few Bengali singers who were

to become subjects of adulation in both wings of pre-1971 Pakistan. The ease with which Ferdausi sang Urdu songs (you recall here such movies as Chanda, Talash and Chakori) has not quite been matched in all the decades since she and the world of music have moved on. The heart stirs *through kuchh apni kahiye / kuch meri suniye*. Or you could go back to humming *akhian tori raah mein haari / o pardesia*.

You will not miss the waterfall in Ferdausi Rahman's songs. An energy is what has generally defined her romantic songs. At the same time, poise and grace have been a hallmark of the songs she has sung (and which artistes like Shabnam and Shabana have liped in the movies). Recall the calm *wo mere saamne tasveer bane baithe hain* or the frantic *ye arzo jawan jawan ye chandni dhuaan dhuaan*. Ferdausi takes you by the hand as it were into a world of sad, sweetened romantic mist. Much the same quality is to be spotted in her Bengali songs, many of which have by now acquired the quality of the perennial. For those now in their mid-fifties and even later, songs like *jar chhaya porhechhe / monero aaina te* is yet a potent symbol of love at its most intense. Conversely, the *tragic ke amar ondho moner bondho duaar fello khule / jaante cheyo na* thrusts your way the old lesson of the heart being a constant prey to threats of breakage. It splinters; it leaves the world of

the one who loves cracked beyond measure.

*Banglar Gaaner Pakhi* is, therefore, a tribute to Ferdausi Rahman's versatility. And the tributes straddle a wide range of personalities in Bangladesh's cultural ambience, each of whom has carved a niche for herself or himself on the socio-cultural canvas of the country. Atiqul Haq Chowdhury spots in her the essential artiste, while Anisuzzaman understands the substantive tones in which she has always approached music. Ashraf Siddiqui marvels at the humility which has underpinned her songs. M. Shamsheer Ali recalls the interest he has taken in the artiste's hold on the popular imagination. Sadya Afreen Mallick ascribes to her the image of a floral representation of the land, and Mohsena Reza Shopna finds in her a friend to be proud of. There are others, indeed a whole procession of figures whose fascination for Ferdausi Rahman, for the quality and range of her music stand as testimony to the reputation she has earned over the decades.

In this work, therefore, comes a telling of the story of a music maker who has not been beaten by time or pushed into the sidelines by the rise of the new. Ferdausi Rahman has endured. To understand how ... read the book.

Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Star Books Review.

# Reflections of a sage

## Syed Ashraf Ali feels happy reading of lost times

SYED ASHRAF ALI

Swimming against the current requires skill and strength, but one requires still greater skill, clarity of ideas, deep insight, analytical ability and courage of conviction to wade against conventional thoughts, especially on complex economic phenomena. A K N Ahmed, who is gifted with those sterling qualities in ample measure, stands out conspicuously from his peers when it comes to expressing his thoughts candidly. His frank opinions often earned inevitable wrath of his detractors in the past after the traumatic events of 1975; they wasted no time in seeing him off from his favourite milieu of banking and finance in Bangladesh.

A K N Ahmed's latest publication, aptly titled *Against the Current*, is studded with sixteen articles on such diverse subjects of topical interest as Financial Crisis and Regulatory Deficiency, New International Financial Architecture, Global Subprime Mortgage Loan Crisis, Dr. Yunus and Grameen Bank, dot com, e-Trade, etc.

As Governor of Bangladesh Bank in the turbulent and crisis ridden seventies, Ahmed earned the admiration of the government and the donors by demonstrating his acumen and untiring zeal for rebuilding the country's fragile financial structure literally from scratch. He particularly proved his mettle by initiating crucial measures for revamping the payment and banking system, printing of new currency notes, massive devaluation of the national currency and demonetization of higher denomination notes. These measures reined in the runaway inflation that had been seriously afflicting the nation's fledgling economy. His later stints with the World Bank, a multinational commercial bank and assignment as Bangladesh ambassador to Japan provided him an opportunity to witness, from a vantage point, the changing panorama in the international financial landscape on a bigger canvas.

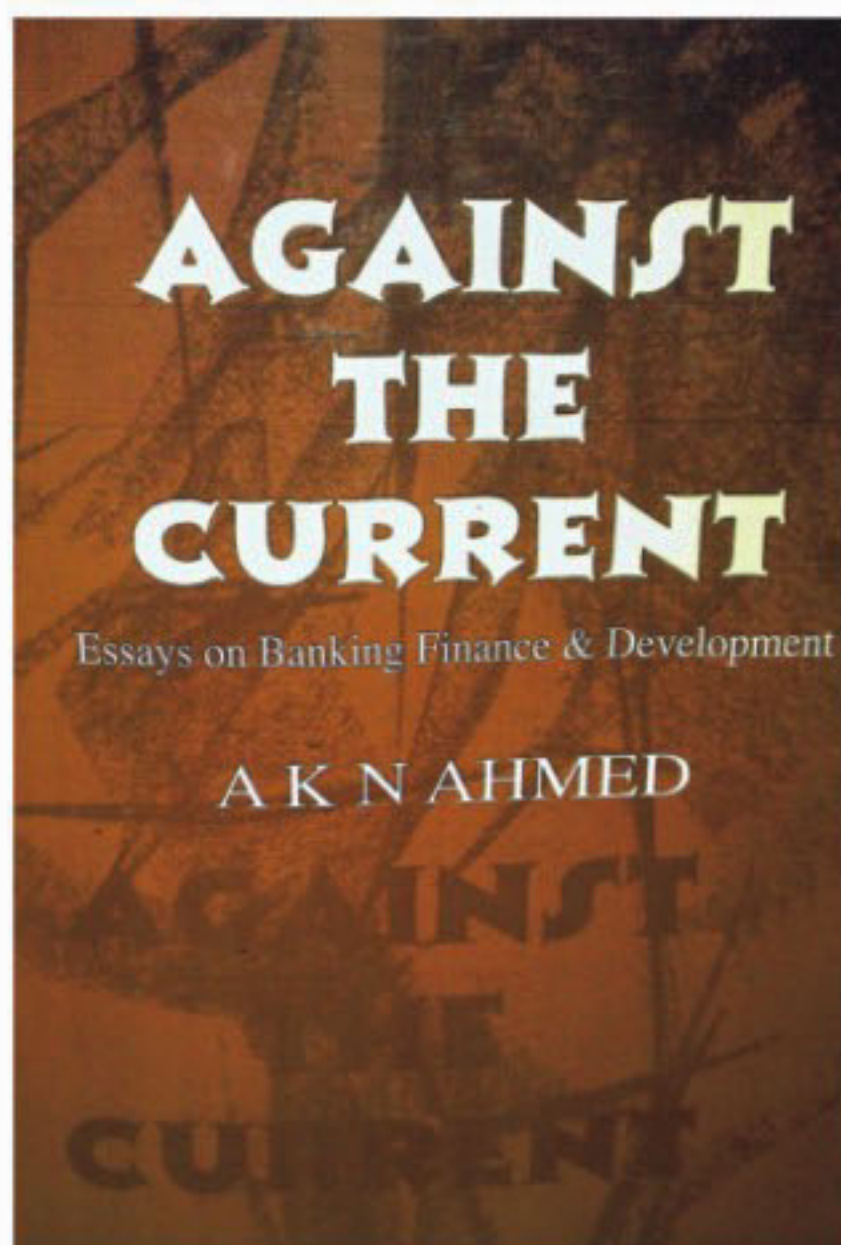
The recent global financial meltdown and financial crises occupy a great deal of attention in the veteran banker's work. The author cites specific instances of financial crises that afflict nations across the world at

one time or the other with almost unerring regularity. The crises, he says, are triggered by 'massive shocks to banks' liquidity, payment system and solvency'. The crises are exacerbated by what he calls 'panic and dramatic loss of depositors and investors' confidence. These twin menaces of financial shocks and panic have had a debilitating impact on the economy and society of many countries. The author has cited the instance of Indonesia whose cost of financial crisis in 1997-98 amounted to a staggering 34.5% of GDP. The crisis of 1997-98 that engulfed other South East Asian nations too made Malaysia poorer by 19.5%, South Korea by 24.5% and Thailand by 34.5% in terms of their respective GDPs. Bangladesh also had its share of crises but nobody bothered to fathom their impact on productivity or welfare of people in different strata of society.

Financial crises have been regular visitors in advanced economies too. What distinguishes these crises from those of less developed countries is that the crises quickly spread their wings to affect the economies of nation both poor and rich. The classic instance of the financial crisis, dubbed as financial meltdown, in 2008 that reverberated across the globe is especially put under the scanner in *Against the Current*. While the fallout of that crisis nearly crippled the world economy, the factors that triggered the financial maelstrom remain a mystery to many people. The author has tried to look for an answer by tracing the world's financial history since World War II. The breakdown of the strictly regulated financial system of the IMF-led Bretton Woods system in the early seventies provided an unprecedented opportunity to financial market players to lead a procession of fortune seekers by creating pyramidal structures with artificial assets mainly through financial derivatives. This made room for financial bubbles to inflate beyond their sustainable limits. The author compares this phenomenon with the 'gold rush' that drove millions from the American east coast to the Wild West in the nineteenth century. According to him, the 2008 recession was triggered in the US by a crash of the mortgage market that ballooned under the weight of the much

talked about subprime loans. The impact of the crash ricocheted from financial markets to capital markets across America and countries far beyond its shores. The author's realistic diagnosis of the affliction is followed by a prescription of what regulators and players in the financial system should do to avert catastrophes of this nature in future.

Dr Yunus and Grameen Bank that have



**Against the Current**  
Essays on Banking Finance and Development  
A K N Ahmed  
Mowla Brothers

now literally become the 'talk of the town' do not escape the focus of the author. While realistically assessing the positive impact of Grameen Bank in empowering poor people, particularly hitherto neglected women, 'to get out of their poverty trap and stand erect and get their confidence in themselves in order to survive as human beings', the author has attributed its success to strict supervision and monitoring of loans and the inspiration it provided its borrowers to cultivate frugality, savings habit and timely repayment of

loans. He, however, does not join the bandwagon of avid admirers or diehard detractors of the GB system and points out that the Grameen Bank 'system of micro-credit is not unique'. He cites instances of countries that have long been experimenting with one or other form of micro-credit systems on scales bigger than even Grameen Bank's. Ahmed also questions whether 'the efforts of a few individuals are enough to make permanent change in the poverty landscape without changing the political and economic structure of a society and without bringing about profound changes in the manner the economies are administered now'. He has reminded readers of Yunus' own admission of the limitations of the GB system in his acceptance speech of the Nobel Prize 'Rules of strongest takes it all must be replaced by rules that ensure that the poorest have a place and a piece of the action without being elbowed out by the strong'.

Banking and finance are exactly not the only things that occupy the thoughts of A K N Ahmed, whose towering presence in the country's financial horizon has made him a legend in his lifetime. He does not hesitate to delve deep into issues that transcend the domain of money and credit. In this book, he points out the supreme importance of technology for survival in this tech-savvy age but warns against too much reliance on developing software without erecting a strong platform for developing hardware. Growth, he says, is not the *sine qua non* of development and well being of the ordinary masses and advises against placing too much faith in the existing form of capitalism as a vehicle of progress and prosperity.

The country has lost immeasurably by denying Ahmed an opportunity to contribute his talent when it was needed most. Belated though it is, one only expects that the authorities will draw a lesson or two from this book to fashion their financial and monetary policies towards translating the government avowed objective of freeing people from the abyss of poverty in which they have long been mired.

Syed Ashraf Ali is former Executive Director of Bangladesh Bank.

# Book Choice

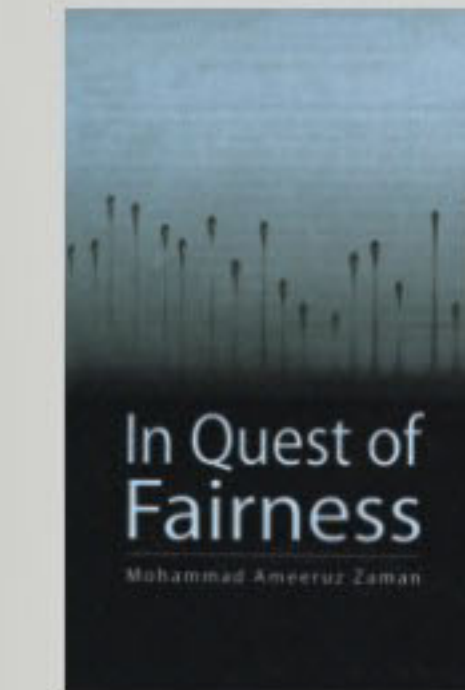
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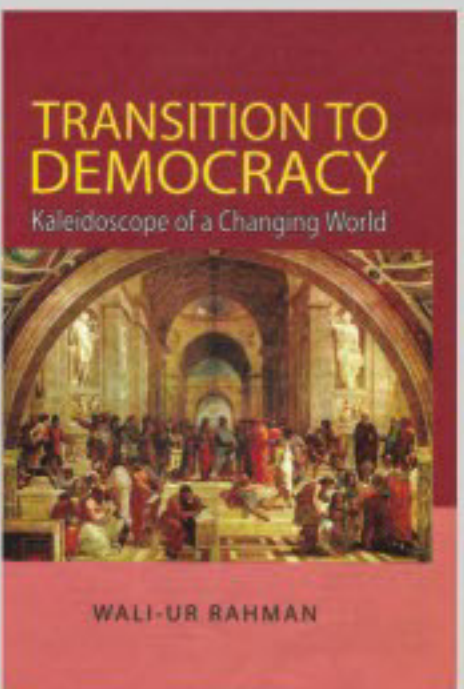
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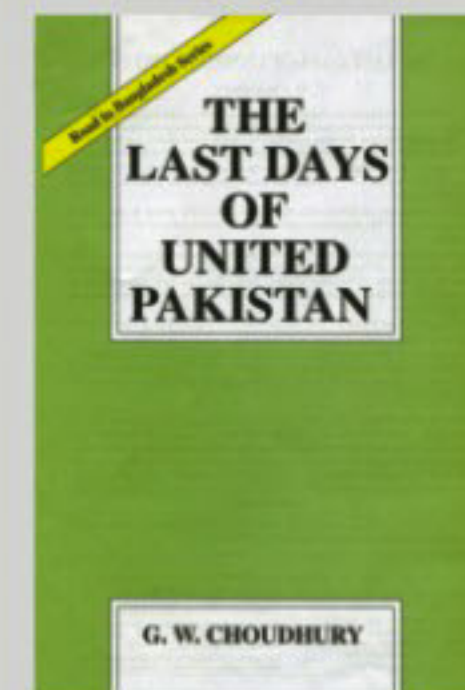
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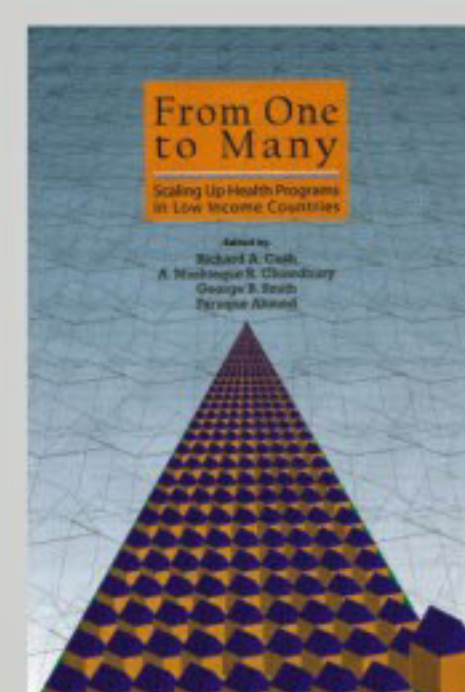
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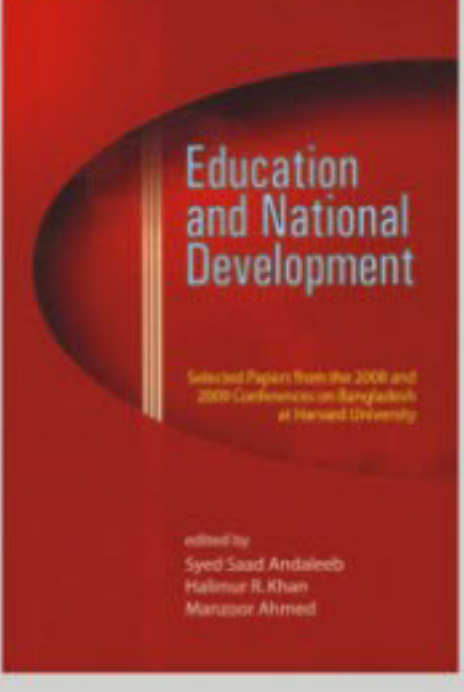
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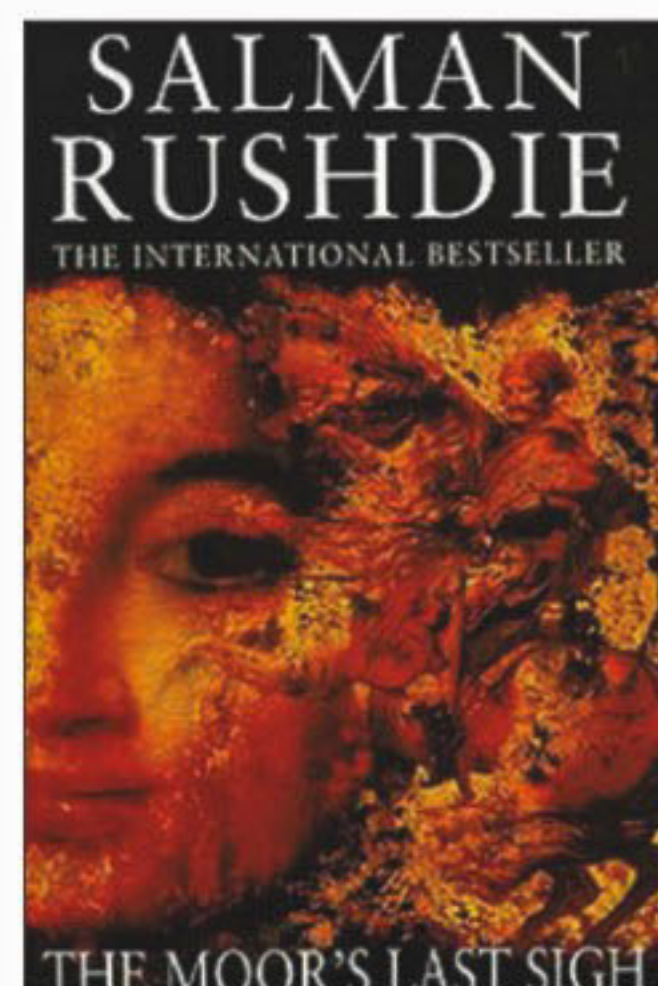
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# Opening up possibilities and creating brainstorming

## Efadul Huq rushes through a mad ride of a book and likes the journey



**The Moor's Last Sigh**  
Salman Rushdie  
Vintage

Salman Rushdie, the biological son of the mystic East and the adopted son of the rational West, gives to the confused planet a brilliant family saga in his true style through *The Moor's Last Sigh*. So read on as I review this book in a Rushdie-ish way.

It is said when Hades was heralding Rushdie he penned *The Moor's Last Sigh*, slipping from place to place, hiding and never appearing in public. His protagonist, Moor Zogoiby, is a lot like him spending a life in banishment from normal society. But there's a major difference as well Moor ages twice the rate of normal humans!

So our Moor is now mentally in his

thirties but has the body of an old man. He, not Rushdie, is writing this novel, leaf by leaf, and nailing each leaf to a different door or tree as he rushes through the woods, fleeing his final captors.

Most complain that Rushdie's language is flowery and the narration is overloading if that's you then don't pick this book. To cut a long explanation short, Rushdie has done it again in the same so-called complex way. And what is that? Abundant puns, allegories, word play, allusions, Spanish-Hindi language, local dialect and so on. For example, the nailing-to-doors is a reference to Martin

Luther's posting of his 'theses' on the doors of the churches, sparking the Protestant Reformation. Ambiguously, it could even be a reference to Rushdie himself, running from place to place and writing this book while his pursuers were chasing him for writing *The Satanic Verses*. That's the beauty of Rushdie's writings; it is open to many possibilities and definitely creates brainstorming.

Sadly, there is a certain drawback in his novels. He gives his works an extra local flavour which makes it unfathomable to the person who has never been in that place. In the case of this book, it is Bombay. But I can

assure you that any reader can get over with it. Just omit the words you can't comprehend!

Aurora, a budding artist, takes an overlooking yet possessive attitude toward her four children, to the point that she gives them names that sound very much like 'Eeny', 'Meeny', 'Mynie', and 'Moe'. Among these, the last one is Moor, whose bigger than age physique is a matter of entertainment for his early teacher a frustrated romance. And later on, a more matured romance delights the readers where Moor is asked to kill himself by his lover by taking a pill!

The novel doesn't offer conventional suspense. There are no

surprises. The end of the book is previewed in the beginning. The effect is that we focus not on what happens or why but on how. This inward chase and alienating style takes you closer to the characters more than what the traditional style can do. Magic realism is how you may describe the environment but honestly, tears and laughter never leave your side in this read.

Full of wit, spiralling sentences, it is a mad ride through the mind of an eccentric character. Have you fastened your seat belt yet?

Efadul Huq is a young writer and reviewer of books