

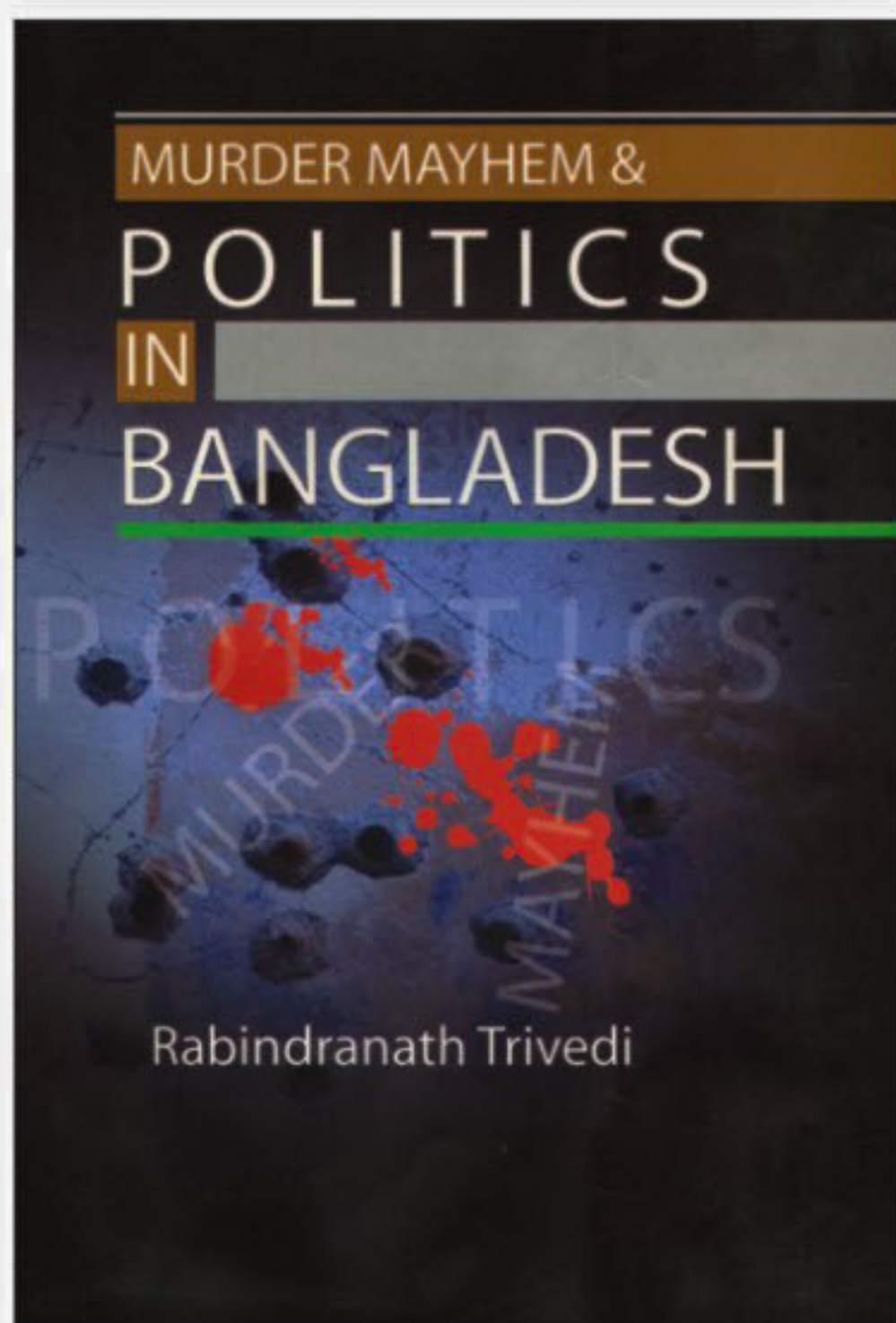
# When history needs careful retelling ..

*Syed Badrul Ahsan appreciates a new work on Bangladesh*

History matters in Bangladesh, for obvious reasons. The systematic manner in which it has been mutilated over the decades since liberation by military regimes and their civilian cohorts has taken a heavy toll on the nation, especially the younger generation. The good news, though, is that the return of the Awami League to power after a forced hiatus of twenty one years in 1996, followed by its second stint in office beginning in 2009, has been a boon for those whose interest in the events leading to the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 has never wavered. In all these years since Sheikh Hasina has led the government, in two distinct phases, a restoration of history has been a priority both for the political class and the broad mass of the population.

Of course, the difficulties have been there, for the good reason that those who went to war forty years ago as well as those who observed its prosecution in occupied Bangladesh have all aged. All the key individuals involved in the war have died. A good number, politicians as well as military officers, have been murdered. On a bizarre level, the deliberate move to undermine history, indeed to give it a distorted form, that commenced following the bloody military coup d'etat of 15 August 1975, produced a set of circumstances where the fundamental principles of the state as enunciated before and during the course of the war were grievously undermined. The concept of Bengali nationalism came under threat from quarters, led ironically by the well-known freedom fighter Ziaur Rahman, too eager to have the spurious idea of 'Bangladeshi nationalism' assume centre stage in Bangladesh's politics. The damage thus done has been grave. The price is yet being paid by the nation.

It is against this background that Rabindranath Trivedi's *Murder Mayhem & Politics in Bangladesh* must be studied. For those who were around during the war, the vast treasury of information contained in the work is pretty much a recapitulation of history. And yet for some of them, the book is a reminder of certain significant facts that may have been lost to the memory over a long space of four decades. From such a point of view, the work is an excellent opportunity for individuals belonging to the 1971 generation to undertake a journey back in time and relive an era that was as terrible in its darkness as it was luminous in the possibilities it held out. The biggest appeal of Trivedi's work lies elsewhere: in its being a record of the turbulent politics which has characterised the Indian subcontinent since the 1940s. Trivedi resists the temptation of having



**Murder Mayhem & Politics  
in Bangladesh  
Rabindranath Trivedi  
Kakoli Prokashoni**

history commence either with the Language Movement of 1952 or the Six Point Movement of 1966 or the War of Liberation of 1971. He adopts this refreshing approach of an understanding of Bangladesh's history through a looking back at the trauma of partition in 1947.

Which is as it should be. A comprehensive study of history is an imperative considering that there is forever a need to interpret events and nuances against a backdrop of reality. Trivedi does not miss a beat in his assessment of the personalities and trends that have influenced history in this part of the world. He makes a point of observing India and Pakistan as they came to be immediately after the deaths of Mahatma Gandhi and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The objective is simple: to give readers a feel of the uncertainty which set in after the demise of the two men. Along the way, Trivedi throws in nuggets of information. You read of Nehru's remarks made at Bongaon, sometime after the vivisection of the land. Partition, India's first prime minister noted, had brought many evils in its train. Nobody said it would not, but for Nehru (whose role in the collapse of the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 remains rather disturbing) to say it makes a difference.

Trivedi takes the reader on a clear, unimpeded survey of politics in the new state of Pakistan and then continues the exercise, to a point where Pakistan has already begun to atrophy through a slow but sure undermining of its political construct. By bringing up the details related to the growing disillusionment of its Bengali population with the state, the writer appears intent on setting the record straight. And he does that to good effect. The slow degree with which Pakistan was losing popularity among the Bengalis comes into sharp focus through an enumeration of the growing nationalist movement in East Pakistan. Trivedi recounts the events which led to such defining moments as the Language Movement of 1952 and all the way up to the war in 1971. For the writer, for a student of Bangladesh's history, Bangabandhu's non-cooperation movement in March 1971 remains a critical factor on the road to freedom. Trivedi revives the tale here and by so doing focuses necessarily on the events which could not but lead to a moment of reckoning, both for Bengalis and the state of Pakistan.

Trivedi weaves a careful pattern of the episodes which went into the making of a whole as also wholesome tale of Bangladesh between 1947 and 1971. He could have stopped there. He did not, which is indeed a boon for the reader. The writer, unlike so many others of his club, moves on. The critical mass of popular expectations which Bangabandhu's government attempted to tackle in the three and a half years it was in office, the long regression the country was pushed into after 1975, until the moment of truth arrived with the election of 1996, are themes Trivedi puts across. And yet, as Trivedi reminds us, that was not the end of Bangladesh's tragedy. Darkness was to return in October 2001 and would only be pushed into the woods with the imposition of a state of emergency and the rise of a military-backed caretaker government in early 2007. Trivedi's narrative does not end until he arrives at the year 2010. You can therefore expect, within that ambit of time, a coming together of all the significant moments in the country's forty-year history.

In *Murder Mayhem & Politics*, it is an offering of history you spot before you. And then there is something more: it is a record of all the heartbreak we as a people have suffered through, here in what we were given to understand would be a people's republic. Rabindranath Trivedi revives memories. He causes the old pride to rise again in us. For the historian, he has a rich plate of the past on offer.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN EDITS STAR BOOKS REVIEW AND STAR LITERATURE.

# Of a poet from Tangail

*Faruq H. Mallick traverses a landscape of drama*

Dr. Mustafizur Rahman's book, titled above, is an extensive research on the poetry of Raibinod, one of the most influential poets of the 16th century. Raibinod hailed from Tangail and his poetry *Padmapuran* or *Monoshamangal* as it is known in West Bengal was widely popular across Mymensingh and Dhaka. The Bengali poetry of that time had the elements of drama. The poetry turns into a story and the story turns into a play, *Padmapuran*.

Dr. Mustafiz was awarded a PhD for his thesis on Raibinod's poetry and subsequently had his work published as a book. He also wrote a number of dramas based on his thesis work such as *Bahurupini* and *Sankarkumari*. These were staged and also aired on TV.

The book consists of five chapters. The first chapter opens up the theoretical discussion on the elements of drama or theatre found in *Padmapuran* or *Monshamangal*. The writer follows it up with further analysis in chapters three to five. There is also an extensive analysis of western drama in the light of Bengali literature, more specifically poetry of the East. The poet Raibinod cast his poems on elements similar to those in classical Greek drama and Dr. Mustafiz's research establishes this link very skillfully. He asserts, that although the features are similar, they are not identical.

Dr. Mustafiz refers to factors of drama based on Aristotle's line of thought from "Art of Poetry" - that analyzed drama according to (1) plot (2) character (3) diction (4) thought (5) melody and (6) spectacle.

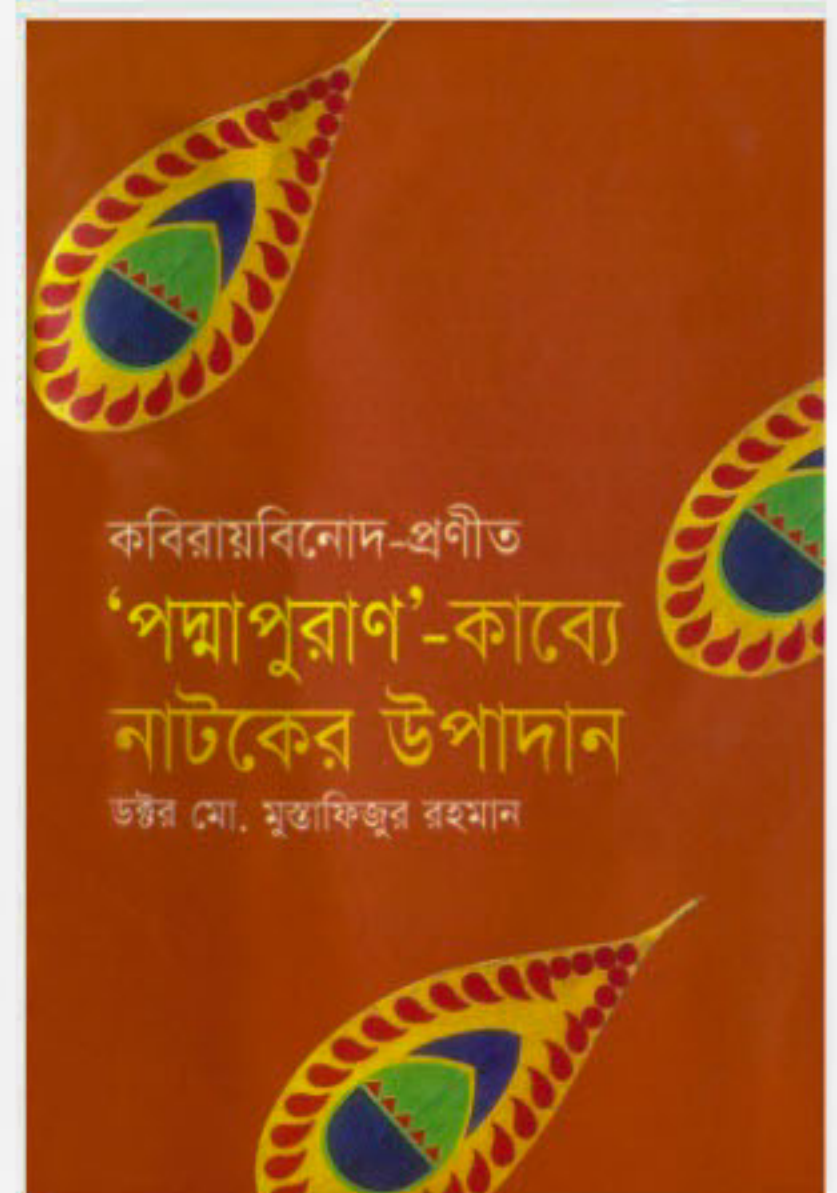
Further to that analysis, the writer finds the elements of dramatic symbols which turned into dramatic elements. Gradually, Dr. Mustafiz develops his arguments, giving further reference to German writer Gustav Freytag, and throwing light on the technique of drama written. Following that analysis he establishes the link to present day drama form, citing Martin Benham's edited "The Cambridge guide to theatre in 1992".

The analysis and discovery of the elements were vividly explained through graphical representation. Thus the writer explains different forms of drama in the present day context. The six basic thoughts from Aristotle's explanation as mentioned above are studied thoroughly in chapter four.

In the process of analysis, the writer has also mentioned different songs based on ragas and found in the poetry --- drama such as *Dhanshi-ro-dhanishree*, *Patanjori*, *Bhatiali*, *Gandhari*, *Karanat* and many others. Many of the ragas are still very popular. So the "ray" of drama elements from the 16th or 17th century ends up in present ragas. Thus from the medieval to the modern day, the ideology and vision appear to be similar but not identical. The changes are remarkable and well explained in the book.

The book is a rich source of material and thereby offers researchers the opportunity for further study. He surely deserves credit and congratulations from present day academics and readers alike.

FARUQ H. MALLICK IS AT PRESENT ADVISOR TO GMG INDUSTRIAL CORPORATION AND FOUNDING MANAGING DIRECTOR / CEO GMG STAINLESS STEEL.



**Kabi Raibinod Pranita  
Padmapuran Kabbye Natoker  
Upadan  
Dr. Mohammad Mustafizur Rahman  
Banglaproakash**

# Learning a subliminal lesson Tanveerul Haque studies woman as victim of war

Shaheen Akhter's award winning book *Talash* in Bangla has been translated into English by Ella Dutta and published by Zubaan in New Delhi, India. The translator has done a polished rendition which in my mind has been possible because she herself is a Bengali and hence accurately conveys the subtle nuances of the Bengali language and culture.

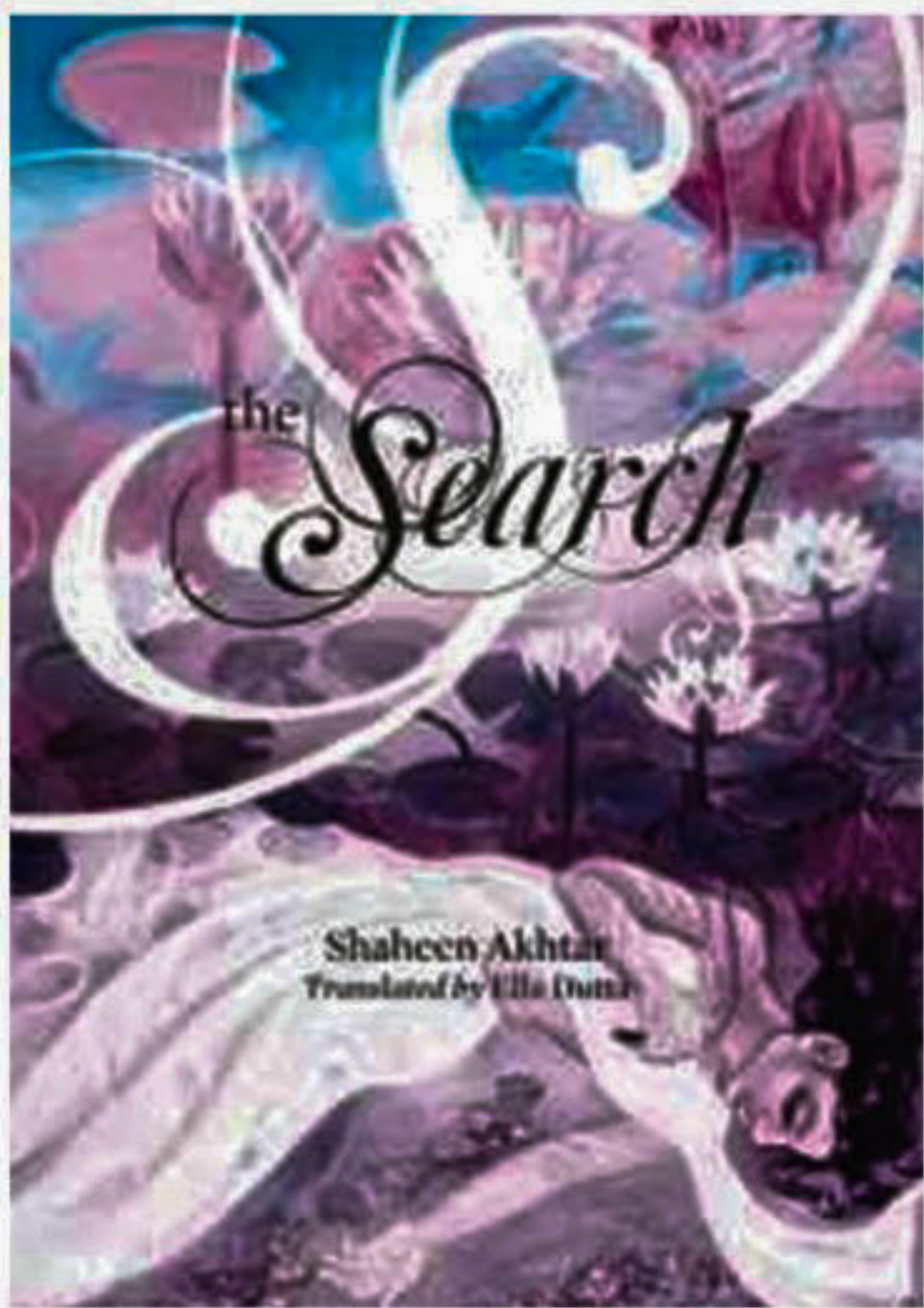
*The Search* portrays in fascinating, at times enchanting detail the travails of the central character Mary or Mariam as she is transformed from an innocent adolescent to a war ravaged woman who is tortured, raped, incarcerated by the occupying Pakistani soldiers and who teeters between sanity and insanity during her nine month ordeal that leads to the birth of Bangladesh.

History is replete with the stories of rapacious marauding armies following the path of least resistance to subject women of all ages to rape and murder as a means of asserting their supremacy over an occupied nation.

Mary's pathetic, heart-rending tale drives this truth deep into the readers' psyche. Much too deep for comfort and therein lies the success of this novel and its author. Weaving a myriad of sub-plots into the theme of the story, the reader is spellbound to turn page after page of this enigmatic tale. We who are native Bengalis and have gone through the cataclysm of the birth of Bangladesh will find innumerable episodes and characters that are immediately identifiable. Forty years after those horrific days we can possibly, through Mary's eyes, view things in a different perspective but let not that cloud the readers' view of the horrible atrocities of that war. Then again a thorough analysis, a self evaluation of those past events can set us free and finally put those demons to rest for Mary and her valiant "Birangana" sisters.

Visions of Bangladesh's war-torn countryside along with an enthralling description of marshy wetlands, rivers, villages and paddy fields will find resonance in every Bengali's heart. Mariam's tortuous and torturous journey is heart-rending. A beautiful but frail woman with "a moon-like face" is at the mercy of men, both friend and foe, and her inevitable violation in each relationship stirs the heart of the reader.

Through Mary's character the author has successfully portrayed a bitter truth that has fallen by the wayside in Bangladesh's war of liberation that the "Biranganas" as also other womenfolk who suffered in those times are no



**The Search  
Shaheen Akhter  
Translation Ella Dutta  
Zubaan, New Delhi**

less freedom fighters than those able bodied young men, the defecting soldiers and all those who could bear arms and gave their lives, were wounded or participated in the war.

All the human feelings/failings of hatred, greed, malice, covetousness, fear, anger, love, betrayal are enmeshed in this tale which is painted on a very broad canvas with a large brush applying myriad hues. A large number of characters are portrayed which at times makes it difficult for the reader to keep track of but that in itself is the orgy of war, the utter mindless destruction, the carnage, the rending asunder where the actual purpose is lost sight of. The cacophony of war, it seems, requires a commensurate upheaval of our thought process.

In recent times the Liberation War of Bangladesh has been portrayed from various standpoints in the English language which will give not only the Bangladeshi diaspora but also readers interested in Bangladesh a rare insight

into what really went on. Also these writings come from a storytelling literary viewpoint. Hence, fortunately they are shorn of political posturing or jockeying for ulterior motives.

The bloodshed, the shock, the turmoil is long gone. People have moved on, picked themselves up from the rubble and rebuilt their lives. This indeed is a time to ponder forty years after the War of Liberation. There is a subliminal lesson that needs to be learnt as we go along the twisted paths of Mary's journey. "Even though she lived in society, she was not a part of it. She was an exile in her own land." Her life remains incomplete and unfulfilled in so many ways. She is educated but the war shatters her dream, --- to become a "doctor when I grow up. I will not charge for visits to the poor."

Mariam narrates her story to Mukti, a young researcher, in 1999, twenty eight years after the emergence of Bangladesh. It is a poignant tale of a woman who comes of age just before the turmoil of 1971 that forever changes the course of her life as also that of the entire Bengali nation. She is at various times captured and raped by the rank and file of the Pakistan army, including a major who befriends her for a while, granting her temporary respite from a rudderless existence. She is married twice but marital bliss eludes her as she is deserted by both her husbands. She spends time in brothels and the author skillfully portrays Mariam even when she is aged over 50 as "a person who had succeeded in punting along her aimless life for over thirty years".

The ending of the novel is enigmatic, phantasmagoric and reflects the dilemma in the author's mind of synchronizing and dovetailing Mary's earthly existence and her journey into the after-world.

Shaheen Akhter deserves credit for a well researched, interesting and entertaining work on an aspect of the Liberation War upon which we had almost shut the door.

The book was recently discussed at the Liberation War Museum, where it was introduced by Akku Chowdhury and reviewed by Asfa Hussain of The Reading Circle. The book was also discussed at The Reading Circle regular monthly meeting on 17 December, 2011. On both occasions the author Shaheen Akhter was present.

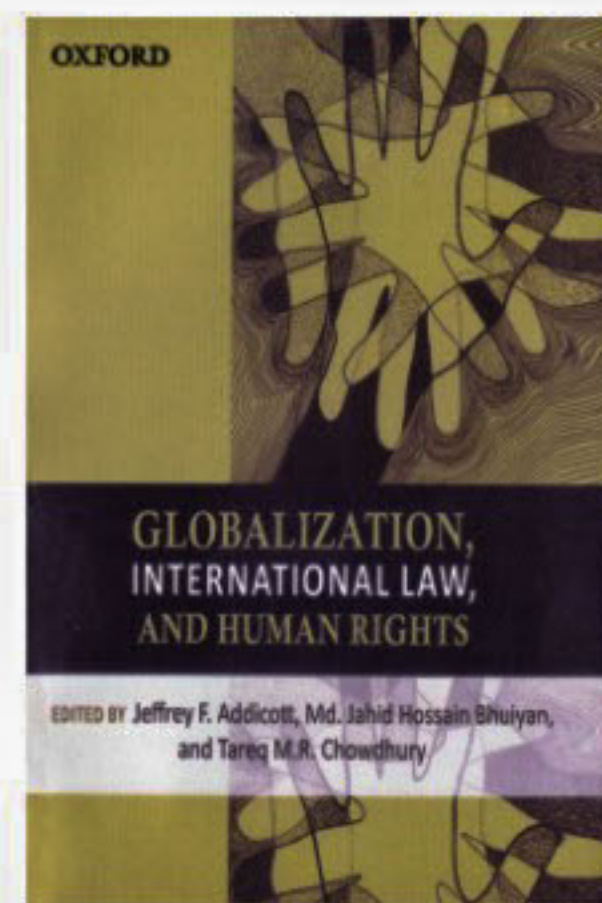
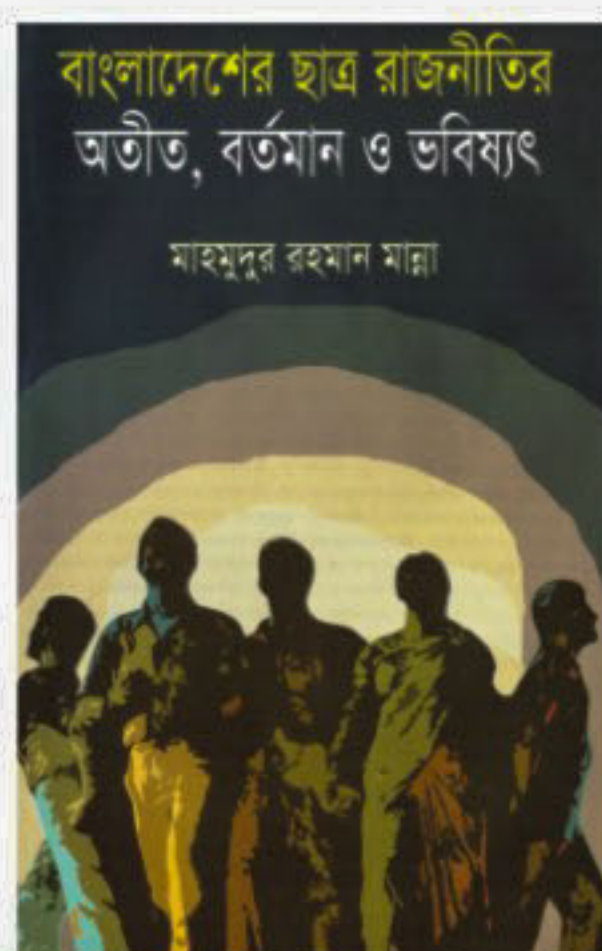
TANVEERUL HAQUE IS A BUSINESSMAN, REVIEWER AND A MEMBER OF THE READING CIRCLE . E-MAIL: TANVEERHQ@YAHOO.CO.UK

## BOOK choice

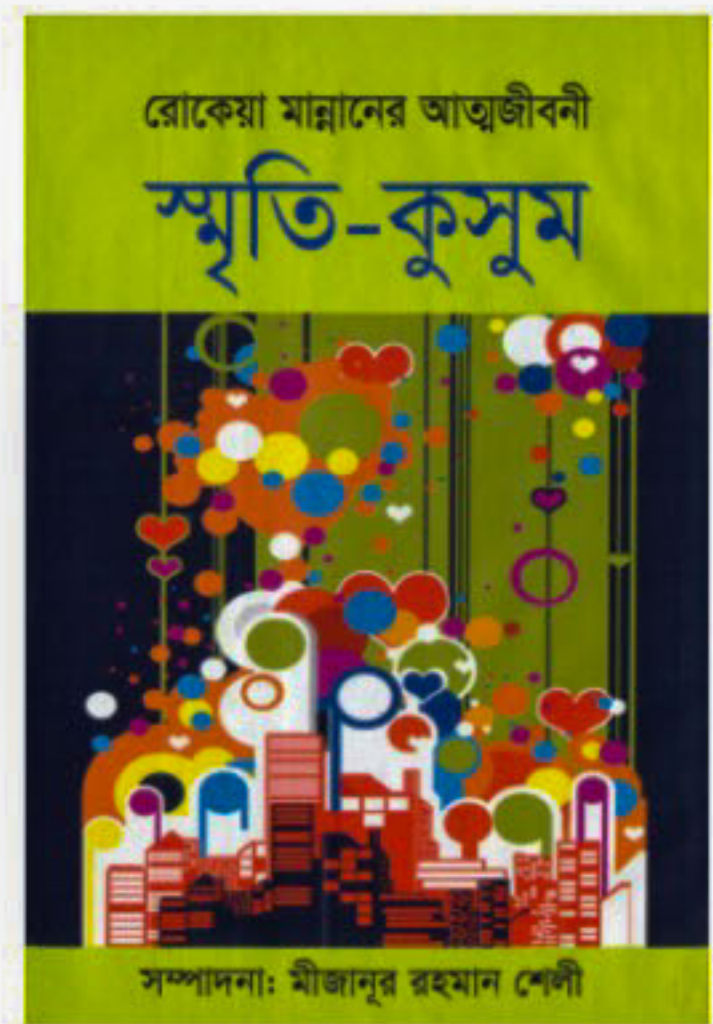
**Tajuddin Ahmed-er  
Alokhabna  
Udhriti  
Protibhash**



**Bangladesher Chhatra  
Rajnitir  
Oteet, Bortoman O  
Bhobishyot  
Mahmudur Rahman  
Manna  
Shikha Prokashoni**



**Globalization, International Law,  
And Human Rights  
Eds. Jeffrey F. Addicott, Md. Jahid  
Hossain Bhuiyan, Tareq M.R.  
Chowdhury  
Oxford University Press**



**Smriti-Kushum  
Rokeya Mannan-er  
Atyojiboni  
Ed. Mizanur Rahman Shelley  
Suchipotro**