is the virtues of living a life based on Islamic covenants, despite all the odds of doing so in a foreign land.

Lascar, then, is in the romance mode too in addition to being a historical novel and a work designed to propagate the blessings of living a life according to Islamic tenets. For a while Ayan's life seems to be like a dream coming true, for this Sylheti ex-lascar appears to be settling down reasonably well in Victorian London with an English wife. But another twist in the plot sees Phoebe being forcibly taken away from him by her father who has him arrested for trumped up



charges of "theft and blackmail" After spending five years in prison, he is released to drift in London's streets for a while until he chances first on a ship painter named Malik and then a street urchin called Arthur who uncannily reminds him of the son he would have had with Phoebe and whose story of his parents is reminiscent of the life he had led in London with her.

Though Ayan is content to be reunited to what he is sure is his son, he feels he has had enough of England and plans to return to Sylhet with Arthur where he hopes Kazi would be still waiting for him. *Lascar*, however, ends in Casablanca, where Arthur and Ayan part ways, for the young man is impelled by wanderlust to sign on board a ship headed for North America, while his father is bent on returning home. What Ayan recognizes in the end is that we are all driven by our unique destinies, and no matter what he wanted his son to do, Arthur "would follow the path he was born to follow".

Shahida Rahman has written a work, then, which despite having many improbable moments in it hangs together as much for the author's skills in weaving a narrative as for the historical research and family legends underlying it. For sure, a new generation of readers who have read works of scholarship like Michael L. Fisher's *Counterflows to Colonialism* will have no problems in concluding that the story of a Lascar like Ayan wandering in London in the nineteenth century is not that implausible. For sure, too, Rahman has the kind of gifts that a storyteller needs to build on the scanty details available in historical records to create a novel in the romance mode. Moreover, she has the kind of audacious imagination a novelist requires to build on the slender threads of narratives embedded in historical accounts until they coalesce into a full-fledged novel. It must be said also that *Lascar* is a good read because it has narrative pace, affective passages and the kind of momentum that an entertaining narrative requires to take the reader from its opening pages to its finale. Despite being essentially serious in intent it is light in its movement and the messages it conveys thus does not impede the flow of the tale.

It must be said, however, that the reader is bound to be bothered by instances after instances that betray lack of careful proofreading and scrupulous editing in the book's production process. Especially in the first half of the book, the reader is going to be irritated by lines such as the following: "My father protectively pushed me back and shielded me from the crowed as they pressed away from the street" (19); "A snap woke Ayan from his daydream" (24); "The orphanage taught the new organized government, (24); "'Ayan, why do you struggle in the soil'"? (30); "Stood in the doorway, he looked around the fine house the brothers built with their own hands" (35); "The heat pressed down like heavy weighs making it difficult to breath and Ayan struggled to sleep" (42).

One could go on at this rate, but the point is that publishers of the book did Shahida Rahman a disfavour by printing the book without the kind of care that could have prevented such typos and lapses. Rahman's *Lascar* is otherwise a neatly written book and deserved a much better fate. It is to be hoped, therefore that *Lascar* will soon be available in a revised edition that will allow its readers to savour this tale of a Sylheti in nineteenth century London that will surely captivate them and bring an all but forgotten part of our history alive courtesy of the strength of the author's imaginings.

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