

On this holiday occasion of Eid -ul-Azha and Durga Puja, we offer our readers some excerpts from reviews we have published over the last few years. Enjoy. --- Book Review Editor

In search of the saintly

NAZMA YEASMEEN HAQUE

The Holy Prophet of Islam never gave less importance to the women in terms of their freedom of expressing themselves, their participation in battles and many other activities.

One cannot but mention the names of Khadeejah (Radia-Allahu Anha), the first person to accept Islam, and Sumayyah, the first person to be martyred in the way of Allah from among the companions of His Messenger. What is most

unfortunate is that most probably no one knows this sensational part of history about Sumayyah. Nusaybah fought valiantly with a sword, bow and arrow protecting the Messenger of Allah; she was awarded a medal for her valour in the historically

famous battle of Uhud! Umm Sulaym took part in a number of battles but she showed her highest bravery in the battle of Hunayn. It is also an established fact that she used to go out with the Prophet on military expeditions and was always one of the soldiers of the Muslim army. The other side of resoluteness in her character is manifest in her insistence on making her husband-to-be accept the faith of Islam as *mahr* (bride money), something unheard of for a Muslim woman. Another outstanding woman in terms of her

strong faith and integrity of character is Umm Kulthoom, who was one of the earliest Muslims. What is more confounding is the fact that she was not yet married when she decided to become a Muslim of her "personal freedom of choice and she was proud of that."

Another star is Rufaydah al-Aslamiyah, who set up a medical tent where she herself would treat the wounded at her own expenses. We come to know about Safiya bint Abdul-Muttalib, the first Muslim woman to kill an unbeliever in a situation when the man in charge of their security would not do so in fear. There is the poet Al-Khansa, whom the Prophet would greet saying, "Hey, Khansa! when he would

be eager to hear more poetry from her. He loved "refined and truthful poetry" naturally as an Arab and would regard poetry as a potent social weapon that "hurt the disbelievers more than do our showers of arrows upon them". The erudite Umm Mabad describes the Prophet in terms of his physical appearance, way of speaking, his countenance when he kept silent, reactions of the people around him as they observed and heard him.

Bless us, O you the saintly women!



Women Around the Messenger Muhammad Ali Qutb Trans Abdur-Rafi Adewale Imam International Islamic Publishing House, Riyadh

Failure is acceptable

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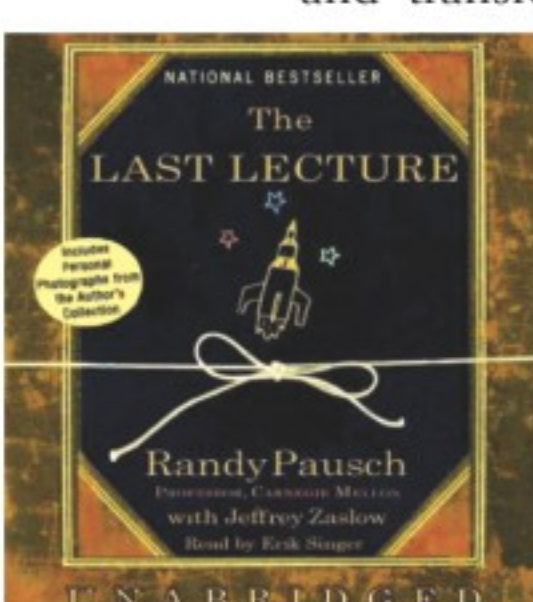
On September 18, 2007, Randolph (Randy) Frederick Pausch gave his last lecture titled 'Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams' in front of an audience of four hundred plus students, faculty and visiting members at the Carnegie Mellon University. The lecture series, previously known as *The Last Lecture*, 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 six-million 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 achieving childhood dreams and empowering others to achieve theirs.



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

She caused a flutter in young hearts

SADYA AFREEN MALICK

As the train whizzed past Dolly, director Mashiuddin Shaker noticed the terrified look of the train driver, his forehead glistening with perspiration. Within a few moments, though, Dolly was persuaded by the cast to come down from the railway tracks and a terrible accident was averted. Shaker let out a sigh of relief as he had managed to overcome yet another hurdle in the shooting for the film *Shurjo Dighol Bari*. He already had to cope with changing two previous actresses for the unconventional role and he couldn't bear another mishap.

Dolly won a National Film Award for her role in the film *Shurjo Dighol Bari*. But the story could have ended that very day if the determined Dolly had decided to end her life on the railway tracks while the shooting was in its infancy.

Coming from a family deeply entrenched in cultural activities, Dolly was eyed by movie directors from very early on as the potential lead actress for the ground breaking productions that were being developed at that time. She did not disappoint.

In post-liberation Bangladesh, Dolly's dedication to her art and her natural ability to get "into the skin" of her roles ensured her a meteoric rise to stardom. 'Ajmeri Zaman, Ferdousi Majumdar and Dolly Ibrahim were the most sought after actresses of the golden era of BTV drama",

says noted actor director Abdullah Al Mamun in the compilation.

Very few people knew at that time the deep-set issues that were affecting her personal life. While donning the role of Joigun in *Shurjo Dighol Bari*, her eyes seemed to have lost that ever-present sparkle as she started to struggle with her demons. A determined Dolly tried her best not to let that dampen her spirits. But as some people noted, she hardly called for the make-up man anymore when she needed to shed tears on the set

playing the role of distressed mother, an oppressed wife.

Dolly was a rebel at heart and far ahead of her time. Determined to be in control of her life, she finally cut her ties to her husband while working on the unconventional role of Joigun in her debut film. After sometime, she thought she had found her soul mate

in eminent photographer Anwar Hossain.

Aditiya Dolly provides an insight into how Dolly felt misunderstood by society, her friends and family. She started to falter in her beliefs until one fateful night when Dolly's younger sister answered a call from the Dhaka Medical College. The gifted actress had performed one last act from where there was no return. She had truly waved the world goodbye. But through these recollections of her life she seems to have left behind her script. So her story does not remain untold.



Aditiya Dolly Ed Rashid Haider Shomoy Prokashon

A voice speaks from the grave

SYED BADRUH AHSAN

There is little mistaking that the thoughts are quintessentially Ayub-like. 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) misfortune is that he has several 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 Pakistan are greatly shocked by the incident'.

There are the regular intervals in which the then military ruler denigrates

his former foreign minister 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 mind-boggling. Even when the writing 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 the flag of rebellion in East Pakistan, the Americans will rush to their assistance'. A few lines later, this is the acidic comment, 'It is quite 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.

On 26 February 1969, there is a perceptible change in Ayub's tone toward 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'.



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

Idealism and a determined woman

FARIDA SHAIKH

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 'Betancourt'.

Betancourt was taken hostage on 23 February 2002 by the leftist Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias 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.

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.'

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 chess-board.'

Betancourt won the election, 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 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.



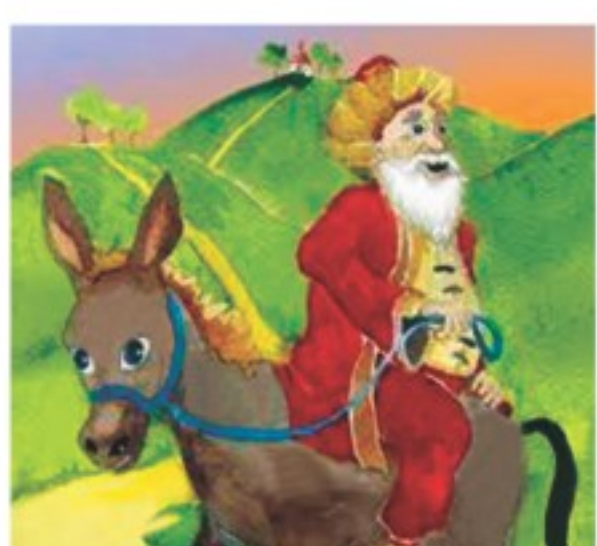
Until Death Do Us Part My Struggle To Reclaim Colombia Ingrid Betancourt Harper Perennial

Economics of Mulla Nasruddin

ALAMGIR KHAN

President Harry Truman asked to be sent a one-armed economist, having been tired of economists who say, 'on the one hand, this' and 'on the other hand, that'. *Pararthoparatar Arthaniti*, a serious Bangla book on economics of altruism, by Akbar Ali Khan is, on the one hand, enlightening, on the other hand, lightens the hearts of readers.

Following philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein who said, 'A serious and good philosophical work could be written consisting entirely of jokes', the author has interspersed this book on economics with many, many jokes, from his personal experience and stories of Mulla Nasruddin. *Pararthoparatar Arthaniti* could be titled equally well as a book of jokes. The jokes are sharp, intelligent and subtle. Mulla Nasruddin has come so many times in this book to give simple explanations of many complex economic theories that this book could as well have been 'by Mulla Nasruddin'. A person asked the Mulla, 'How old are you?' 'Forty' replied the Mulla. The other man reminded the Mulla that he had said the same thing even ten years earlier! 'Yes,' replied the Mulla, 'I always stand by what I have said.' On the one



Pararthoparatar Arthaniti Akbar Ali Khan The University Press Limited

hand, this one-word Mulla Nasruddin could have been the most favourite economist to President Truman. On the other hand, the British economist Keynes who used to change his mind with the moving hand of a good clock, in a reply to a question about the inconsistency of his mind said, 'When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?'

Like Keynes, Akbar Ali Khan has also changed his mind with the moving hand of a good clock. On the one hand, he blames the IMF and the World Bank for their enthusiasm in imposing illogical conditions upon the developing countries, which is compared to slapping the face of a boy, before delivering the much-needed cash to them, and, on the other hand, blames leaders of develop-

ing countries for being suspicious about the good advice the IMF and WB officials deliver to them. He has refuted Francis Bacon's claim that 'in charity there is no excess, neither can angel or man come in danger by it.'

In some way, *Pararthoparatar Arthaniti* is on the one hand this and on the other hand that. Yet there are many important things to learn from it. The author believes in what Oscar Wilde said, 'The truth is rarely pure and never simple.'

Making the real seem unreal

RIFAT MUNIM

While reading Syed Manzoorul Islam's short stories, the first thing that strikes one is the role played by the self-conscious narrator, who is sometimes a part of the story, makes sarcastic remarks about other characters, and remains somewhat unaffected by the major changes and shifts in the plot. More interestingly, Islam's narrator assumes both first and third person points of view. At times his narrator, one is apt to notice, is highly critical of assuming any knowledge of a character's unspoken thoughts.

However, in *Shukhdukher Galpo*, readers will find him at the height of his post-modern experimentation with his craftsmanship in both narratorial modes reaching an apotheosis.

Islam in his stories is continuously talking to readers, coalescing the playful with the serious, the inevitable outcome of which is the ludicrous effect that leaves one laughing yet pondering uneasily over the queer ending. Islam's endings are complicated, sometimes inconclusive. When readers envisage a sad ending, then he comes up with fantasies that apparently depart from the inevitable consequences of some bleak events in any

given context as one will find in stories such as *Passport*, *Ek Shandhya*, *Kannar Etihash* and *Gachher Bichhana*.

Kannar Etihash and *Gachher Bichhana* begin with a gradually disintegrating conjugal life of a couple, preparing readers to foresee their divorce. But both the stories end in two different kinds of catastrophe whereby the couple realise that true love lies under the surface distrusts and misunderstandings.

When readers expect something happy in the end, Islam will strike the most unexpected event, full of grotesque happenings, as in stories such as *Ghungiyajuri'r Math* and *Nolok*. Both are stories of love.

Apart from narratorial techniques, Islam's mastery in importing magical events adds quite a new dimension to the stories. Think of the stories *Kathalkanya* and *Telephone* which again give away two harrowing tales of female repression.

With his unique narratorial interventions in the form of occasional comments and so on, Islam intends to arouse in readers a deep-rooted empathy toward the suppressed, especially women, and resentment toward the perpetrators as well as the system that shelters and nurtures them.



Shukhdukher Galpo Syed Manzoorul Islam Nympha Publication

Spellbinding magic realism

TANVEERUL HAQUE

Life of Pi by Yann Martel won the Man Booker Prize in 2002. It became a literary blockbuster success which soared on to bestseller lists after it was published in the United States in 2002 and sold more than 185,000 copies in hardcover. In paperback it sold nearly two million copies. It won the Man Booker Prize, Britain's most prestigious literary award, in November of that year.

Bizarre and astonishing storytelling. At times you don't know whether to put down the book in absolute disgust or to go on reading, hoping to be rewarded with something more plausible. One has to suspend disbelief to be able to complete reading the book. Surreal, phantasmagoric, an affront to your intelligence - yet spellbinding. A difficult book to review or to explain, even to describe - but an experience quite out of the ordinary, nevertheless.

Macabre, zany, hilarious. Made me retch and almost throw up - a number of times. *Life of Pi* is an implausible story of a 16 year-old boy Molitor Piscine Patel, who is shipwrecked in the middle of the Pacific Ocean on his family's migratory trip out of Pondicherry, India, to Toronto, Canada.

Pi's father runs the Pondicherry Zoo with its menagerie of typical zoo

inmates - where Pi and his brother are having a quite typical and enjoyable upbringing. Financial misfortunes lead to the closing down of the Zoo when Pi's father decides to give away the animals to various zoos around the globe and to migrate with his wife and two sons to Toronto, Canada.

The story is a wonderful rollercoaster ride that can only be born of the mind of a hallucinatory writer. Philosophical, poignant, comic, uproariously hilarious at times - it keeps the reader's attention riveted.

Magic realism in the narration of the improbable, hypothetical and fantastic story keeps the reader spellbound.

Seven years after publishing *Life of Pi* Yann Martel has sold a manuscript for his follow-up for around \$3 million. Martel's third novel, as yet untitled, is to be published in the United States sometime next year. *Like Life of Pi*, the new book is an allegory - this time about the Holocaust - involving animals. It relates the story of an encounter between a famous writer and a taxidermist who is writing a play that features dialogue between a donkey and a monkey, both imprinted on a shirt.

Hmmm. Now, does that sound interesting! Yawn.



Life of Pi Yann Martel