

# The necessity of a Tagorean philosophy

Md. Abu Zafor appreciates a new work on the bard

FAKRUL'S Alam's *Rabindranath Tagore and National Identity Formation in Bangladesh: Essays and Reviews* is an excellent critical work on Tagore written in excellent English. Although the book is primarily meant for the non-Bengali reading public who want to know of Tagore's relevance to the world in general and Bangladesh in particular, it has special significance for Bangladeshi readers as well. The book demonstrates some aspects of Tagore's writings, especially his essays, lectures, speeches, letters, dialogues, etc, that were less or little explored before. The opening chapter is most important to understand the causes of an anti-Tagore sentiment among some sections of people in post colonial Bangladesh territory. Fakrul Alam shows how the Pakistani government tried to eliminate Tagore in a bid to destroy the Bengali speaking people's cultural heritage and make them impoverished as a language-based community. In the context of the Language Movement, Alam states: "Rabindranath is the architect of modern Bengali, he would inevitably become a key rallying point for the activists of the movement. Bids to eliminate him from East Pakistan's cultural history would only fuel the resistance to the Pakistani state. In trying to minimize his presence in East Pakistan, the government of the country only succeeded in making East Bengalis realize that he was central to the formation of their distinctive identity." Alam's essay, however, clarifies why an anti-Tagore sentiment among a section of people, who are mainly Islamists or fundamentalists, continues to prevail more or less in independent Bangladesh though in reality Tagore 'was never a communal thinker and that he never sought wittingly to subvert or humiliate the Muslims.'

The second chapter of the book focuses on how Tagore tried to promote universalism and humanism through his essays, lectures, speeches, letters, etc. Alam's essay "Beyond Fragmented Worldviews and Narrow Domestic Walls: Rabindranath Tagore and Universalism" illustrates how Tagore was against the concept of narrow nationalism that breeds chauvinism and conflict; how he opted for intellectual cooperation between cultures; how he urged the people to be citizens of the world being rooted to their own countries and cultures at the same time; how he urged people not to restrict knowledge so that one culture can accept the best from other culture; and above all how he called people not to allow patriotism or any other 'ism' to triumph over humanity.

Many Tagore readers in Bengali are not aware of Tagore's writings in English and the worth of these writings. In fact, this area of Tagore's genius was less explored before. It is Fakrul Alam who made an in-depth analysis about the range and variety of Tagore's English writings and assesses their quality in content and style. Chapter Three titled "An idealist on the Lectern: Rabindranath Tagore's Lectures and Speeches in English" analyzes the lectures and speeches that Tagore delivered in

English across the world for over a decade. Fakrul Alam evaluates these lectures and found that they have temporal and permanent significance. The lectures, Alam says, 'reveal Tagore's intense idealism, his wavering commitment to humanism as well as his fervent belief in the world of the spirit.' Chapter four titled "Some Qualities of Permanence: Rabindranath Tagore's English Prose" starts with a question, 'How good is Rabindranath Tagore's English Prose?' Alam's approach is a holistic one rather than fragmentary. He makes a survey of Tagore's early prose piece to the last one before his death, and finds that Tagore 'kept growing as a writer of English prose and was able to express himself in it eloquently, imaginatively, and variously...judicious selections of his prose works should be brought out so that the English-reading world can re-discover the extent of his achievement as a major thinker and an important writer of English prose of his time.'



Rabindranath Tagore and National Identity Formation in Bangladesh: Essays and Reviews  
Fakrul Alam  
Bangla Academy

In many of his writings and speeches Rabindranath Tagore expounded his thoughts and ideas about education. Tagore implemented much of his education philosophy through the establishment of Shantiniketan. Fakrul Alam has gleaned all such thoughts of Tagore's ideas regarding education in chapter 5 titled "Rabindranath Tagore and the Idea of a University". Alam says: "What Rabindranath wanted to achieve through Visva-Bharati was to create an institution that would be a model for higher education throughout India... his university was also to be a place where students could explore the positive aspects of enlightenment learning without adopting the pervasive materialism or pursuing the knowledge-power nexus of the west..., though near the end of his life Tagore seemed to have realized that he had not succeeded completely in realizing his ideals." Also in chapter 6, Alam compares Tagore's educational thoughts with those of the American writer Henry David Thoreau

(1817-1862) under the title: 'Luminous with Vision' Rabindranath Tagore, Thoreau and Life-Centred Education amidst Nature'.

Three chapters of the book (chaps 7,8,9) are on translations of Tagore's works—Tagore's own translations of his writings, translations by others and lastly Alam's scholarly demonstration of how to solve some problems of translating Tagore's verses into English. Any reader willing to know the phenomena of Tagore translations for a period of one hundred years (from the beginning of the first decade of the twentieth century till the first decade of the twenty first century) can find these chapters a valuable resource.

Over the past few decades ecocriticism has become an interesting theoretical study in the humanities in university level. Perhaps it was Fakrul Alam who first wrote such a brilliant essay on Tagore's eco consciousness under the title: "Rabindranath Tagore and Eco-consciousness" (chapter 10). Here Alam illustrates how Tagore's writings emphasized on caring for nature and learning from it to keep life on earth flowing. Tagore, Alam says, is 'a forerunner of eco criticism and a storehouse of wisdom about the environmental problems besetting the region and ways of overcoming them.'

The essay "Rabindranath Tagore in the Twenty-First Century (chap 11) is perhaps more insightful and thought-provoking. Here Alam has more specifically highlighted the importance of Tagore for the people of Bangladesh to be 'Bangladeshis in hearts and souls'. Alam says "...the language that we take such pride in and that was the ultimate determiner of our national identity was to an immense extent his creation. As we move forward in this century, striving to make the language the perfect vehicle for our creative impulses, he will be the model that we will have to follow no matter which genre we choose to work in, the archetype that will set the pattern for all our future artistic endeavour...his works have kept sustaining us as we move forward in the twenty-first century.'

Apart from the above the book includes some more essays, conference papers and reviews. All these pay close attention to focus on the contributions of Tagore, the relevance of his works today and the power of his works to form, sustain and delight us for ever.

In this age of globalization keeping one's own identity has become important more than ever. Whatever is ours is our identity. In a brief history of Bangladesh as an independent nation, we have crossed many hurdles. Much of our progressive ideals were, and are, at threat in the face of religious extremism and fundamentalism. Hopefully, Fakrul Alam's book will contribute to clear up the misunderstandings that still exist in a section of people, and remind us all how indispensable is Tagore for the Bangladeshi culture and identity.

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## RE-READING

# Old tales of romance

Tulip Chowdhury goes back to the past

LUKE Carey, a retired army officer, woke up one morning to a phone call that changed his life. His daughter, Dani was behind the bars, charged with murder of Ricco, her mother's personal assistant. He knew deep down that somewhere, in the picture was his ex-wife, Nora, and her endless philandering. The riddling question was how did Dani get involved in this?

*Where Love Has Gone* holds the reader captive with its story of love and betrayal. Lust broke mother and daughter apart and crumbled the family to pieces. Dani, Luke and Nora, standing on three corners of a family triangle, were faced with unpredictable challenges. Complexities of life took them to a point where they seemed to be surrounded by live volcanoes. Malice, revenge and failed love send lava shooting to heights that is about to destroy their lives unless the truth is found.

"Did he rape you?" That was Nora asking her daughter Dani.

"No, mother it was I who asked him..." Dani replied. Their eyes met and there was nothing else to be said. The teenage daughter and the mother in her late thirties, both knew why they were talking about a particular man and his physical relationships.

Nora was a well known sculptress, the rich and social elite. Dani was the only child she and Luke had in their troubled marriage. However, Luke was happily married to Elizabeth, his second wife. When Luke got the news of his daughter Elizabeth was expecting a baby at any moment. But Elizabeth convinced Luke that Dani needed him and so he should go to her. Luke had not seen Dani for the past ten years but he needed to be by her side in the crucial time of her life.

When Luke met Dani in prison, she refused to open up to him. She said that it was useless for him to know any details for he would leave her again as he had once before. She told him that her stepfather who had been good to her had left too. Her mother always won, she kept people who prized her only in the house. Luke asked her,

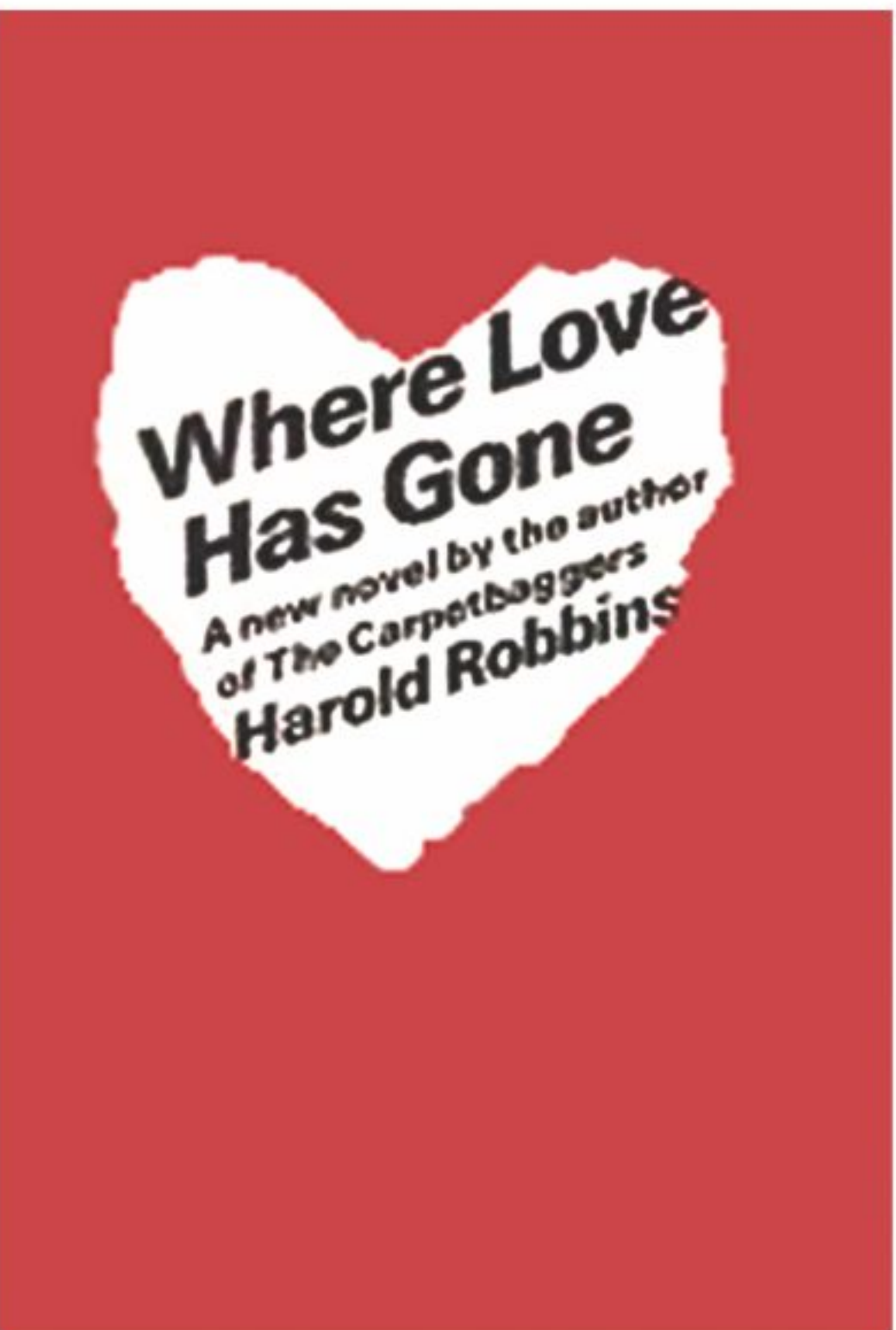
"Exactly whose boyfriend was Ricco, yours or your mother's?"

She gave her answer and then said, "You know mother. She wants to be the wheel of everything. Just this once I wanted to show her that she wasn't."

"Why, Dani, why particularly him? Why not someone else?" Luke asked

She looked at him wide eyed, as if wanting to know how much he knew. Dani was a girl growing up with too many adult secrets revealed to her. Luke felt more useless knowing that he had not been there to protect Dani from Nora whose voracious sexual appetites were like an open book to those around her. Margaruite, Nora's mothers had no control of her daughter though the old lady could manage two huge fortunes without losing on a penny.

Luke shuttled between his hotel and Dani at the prison. At the back of the mind he prayed that Elizabeth and the coming will be okay. Nora's grandmother was trying to be helpful in his efforts to get Dani out of the mess and to have the law serve her with a shorter sentence. To add to the troubles, some explicit pictures of Ricco with



Where Love Has Gone  
Harold Robbins  
Trident Press

some women came to surface and landed in the wrong hands. Those pictures could mean bigger trouble for Dani. But for Luke, salvaging the pictures could be risking his life. When Luke was pinned to the wall with all the troubles, Nora was back to one of those sudden desires she had, she wanted Luke back in her life.

Luke was well aware that Nora was jealous of his happiness with Elizabeth, that somewhere she still felt the flames of love flickering for him. But time had hardened the heart that had once desired Nora all the way. He could now reply to her with words that could burn and kill love with the language of hate and recrimination. But would that end Nora's endless adventures with men, adventures that seem to be the juicy part of her fame as a top sculptress in the world of art? Would those words save Dani from further emotional upheavals from her parents?

Luke was faced with the challenges of saving his daughter from capital punishment and saving her from a mother who burned any obstacle to getting her ways, not even her own daughter. In this saga, the twists and turns of human nature are woven into a remarkable tapestry that leaves a profound mark on the readers.

*Where Love Has Gone* was on the bestseller list on the British best seller list in 1965. The American author is known to have sold more books than J.K. Rowling with the reported sale of 750 million. History, melodrama and sex are artfully presented in his books. In fact his first book *Never Love a Stranger* was in controversy due to its graphic sexuality. *The Carpetbaggers*, another sensual novel was also on the best sellers list and made into a major film.

TULIP CHOWDHURY WRITES FICTION AND IS A TEACHER. SHE IS CURRENTLY BASED IN AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS, USA

# History in its objectivity

Pallab Bhattacharya sifts through a work on Bangladesh's founder

ONCE you finish reading Syed Badrul Ahsan's work, *From Rebel to Founding Father: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*, you get a deep insight into not only the evolution of Bangladesh's independence architect but also the entire fascinating political journey of the country from the Partition of the Indian subcontinent and East Pakistan phase. Seldom has the evolution of an individual so intertwined with the history of a nation.

Syed Badrul Ahsan focuses on the political career of Mujib, one of the most charismatic leaders of South Asia, and his transformation from being a supporter of formation of Pakistan in 1940s to someone who came to realize that Bangladesh in Pakistan must return to their secular traditions and have an independent country.

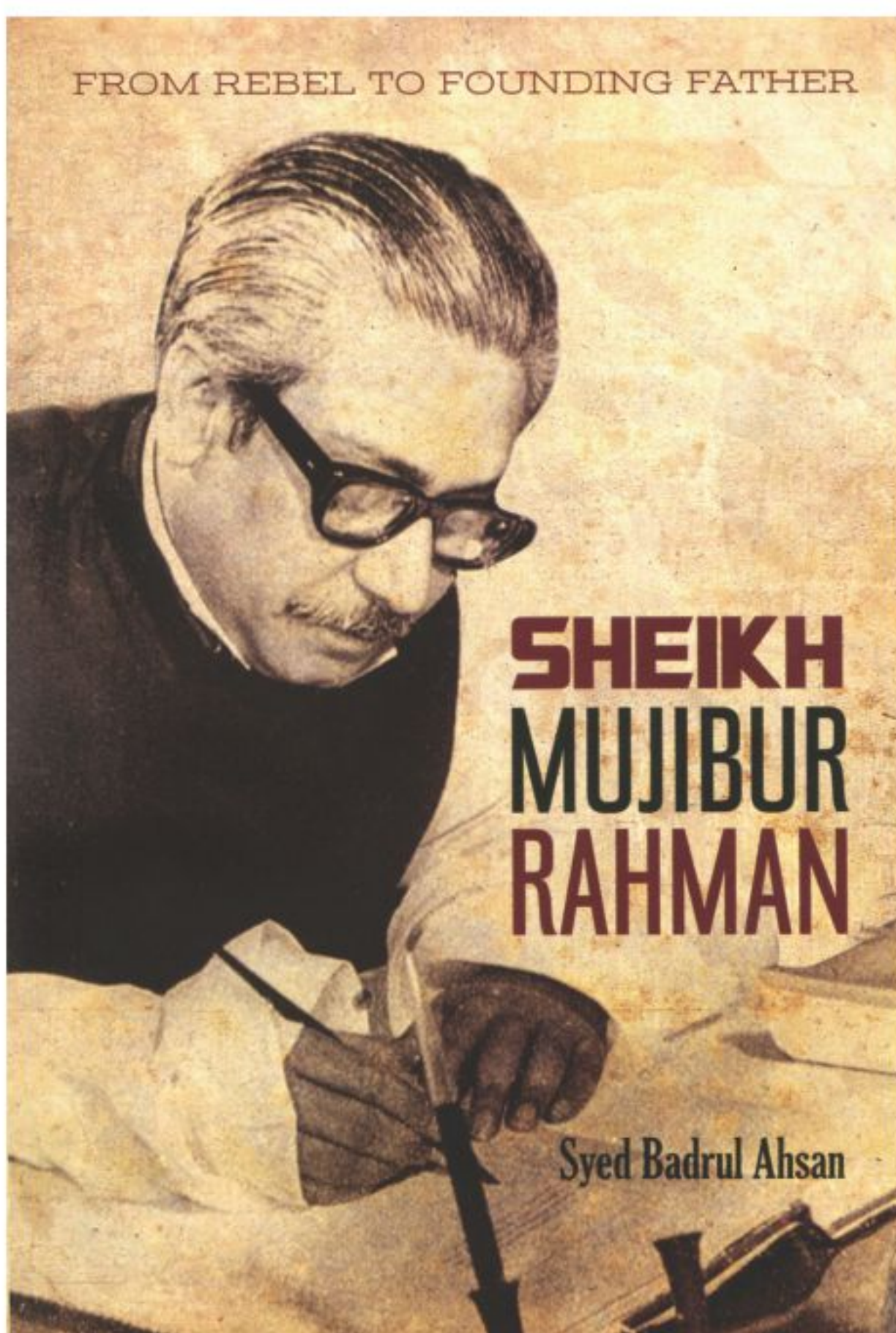
Opinions have remained divided about Mujib as the top administrator of an independent Bangladesh which emerged from the ravages of an 11-month genocide waged by Pakistani troops, faced acute food scarcity, high prices and lawlessness and a highly controversial shift from multi-party democracy to one-party authoritarian rule in just four years.

However, few would dispute Mujib's status as the tallest leader of his country, a powerful orator whose speeches had an electrifying effect on the masses and above all a politician with a remarkable ability to read the pulse of the people.

Ahsan's book discusses in detail with fair objectivity Mujib's evolution as a political leader who fought the rulers of West Pakistan and suffered years of imprisonment before leading Bangladesh's independence struggle. And that is something truly remarkable in a country where the media and journalists, as many other walks of life, remain sharply polarized along political lines often showing little accommodation for others' views and liberal space.

One of the most engrossing chapters of the book is the one on Mujib and his Awami League party's "Six-Point Programme" in the 1960s in undivided that is seen by many as the starting point of the then East Pakistan's march towards independence. Was Bangladesh's independence by chance or choice? Did Mujib want autonomy or independence for Bengalis in East Pakistan? These questions have often been debated in academic and political circles.

The chapter also other parts of the book leaves one with the conclusion that religion could not be the unifying factor between the two wings of Pakistan and the economic neglect of East Pakistan, denial of political aspirations to its people and imposition of Urdu on an overwhelming Bengali-speaking population, particularly a ban on the writings of Rabindranath Tagore in the 1960s, pointed to inevitability of Bangladesh's independence.



From Rebel to Founding Father  
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman  
Syed Badrul Ahsan  
Niyogi Books

The book gives a clear answer to those who believe that Bangladesh's independence struggle was more by chance than by choice.

The Six Point Programme, unveiled by Mujib at a convention of Pakistani opposition parties in Lahore in February, 1966, was aimed at securing autonomy but it had at that time itself "struck many as a veiled and yet unmistakable attempt at weaning East Pakistan away from the state that had been cobbled together in 1947", says Ahsan.

"The Six Points were in effect a point of departure for the two wings of Pakistan (East and West), the first signs of which would be seen in a raging wave of Bengali nationalism poised to hit hard and without remorse the old concept of a Muslim state as defined by Mohammed

Ali Jinnah in the 1940s", says Ahsan.

According to the book, in fact, it was as early as 1957 when Mujib had begun wonder if Pakistan, as it was turning out to be, would be where the Bengalis wanted to be and this strain of thought in him had shocked even his political mentor Hosseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy who asked him not to entertain such ideas. The 1965 India-Pakistan war further convinced Mujib that East Pakistan was being administered by the West more like a colonial territory.

But publicly, according to Ahsan, Mujib sought to give the impression that his Six Point Programme was aimed at dismembering Pakistan and drove home the point that it was meant for strengthening the federation through decentralization of political authority. But authorities in the West Pakistan saw in Mujib seeds of sedition in him and in the three months since the declaration of the Six Points, he was arrested eight times.

However, even in as late as early March 1971, says the book, Mujib, though "did indeed weigh the pros and cons of a Unilateral Declaration of Independence", was "not ready to be branded a secessionist by his enemies. He was drawn to the broader principle of arguing the case for his Bengalis within the parameters of Pakistan".

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According to Ahsan, Mujib had kept at bay hardliners within Awami League demanding independence at bay as "he had not yet lost faith in negotiation", partly out of a fear of a crackdown by Pakistan army.

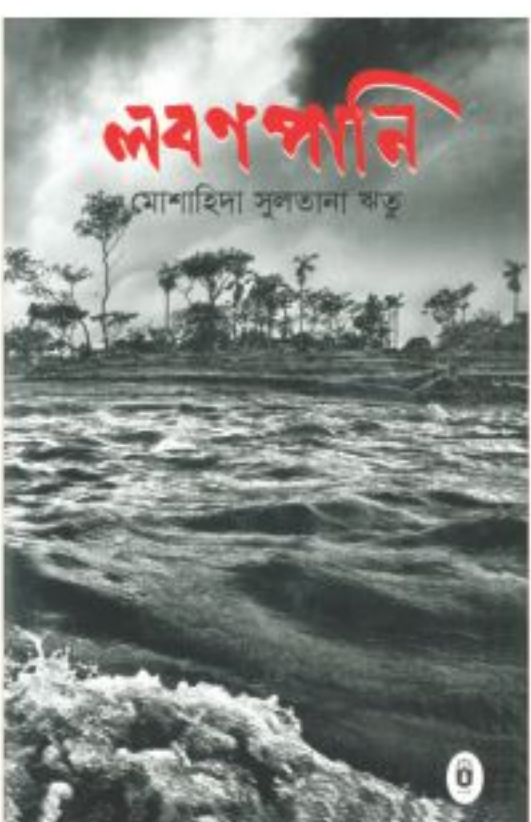
Another fascinating chapter in Ahsan's book is the appraisal of Mujib as a politician and administrator in independent Bangladesh when the country faced a near-famine situation, cracks appeared between Mujib and a few of his cabinet colleagues, especially with Tajuddin Ahmed, on policy matters, growing authoritarian tendencies leading to formation of extra-constitutional authority like Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini and finally abolition of multi-party democracy about which Mujib had been passionate.

All in all, Ahsan's book is of as much importance to researchers as to laymen who are keen on studying Mujib and the history leading to emergence of Bangladesh.

The book retains all the hallmarks of Ahsan as a writer, racy style, sharp analysis with proper perspective and a high degree of respect for Mujib without being biased and losing no opportunity to point out where he had gone wrong.

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA IS A SENIOR INDIAN JOURNALIST BASED IN NEW DELHI

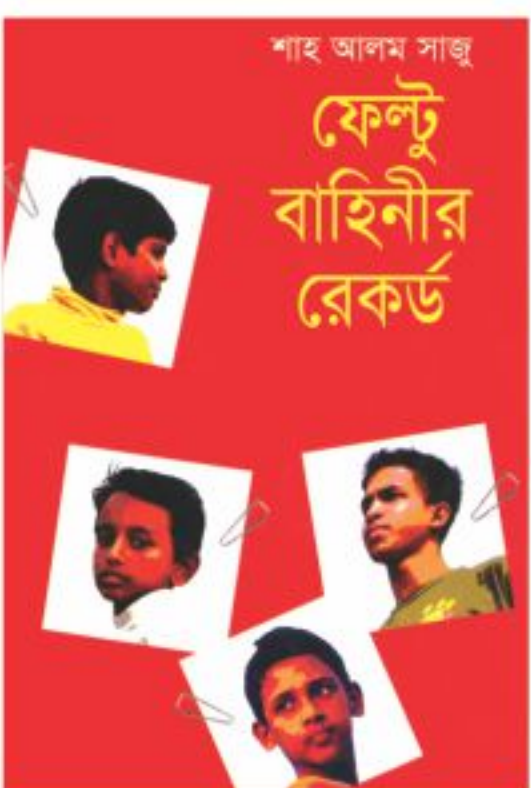
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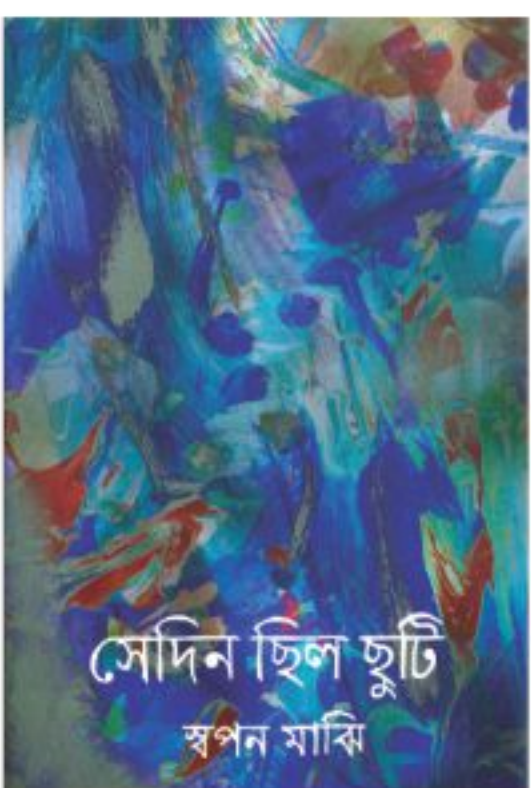
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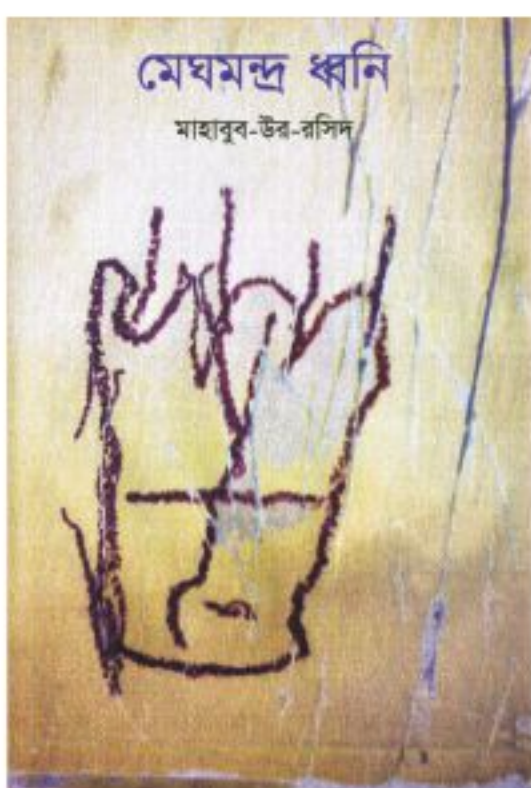
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