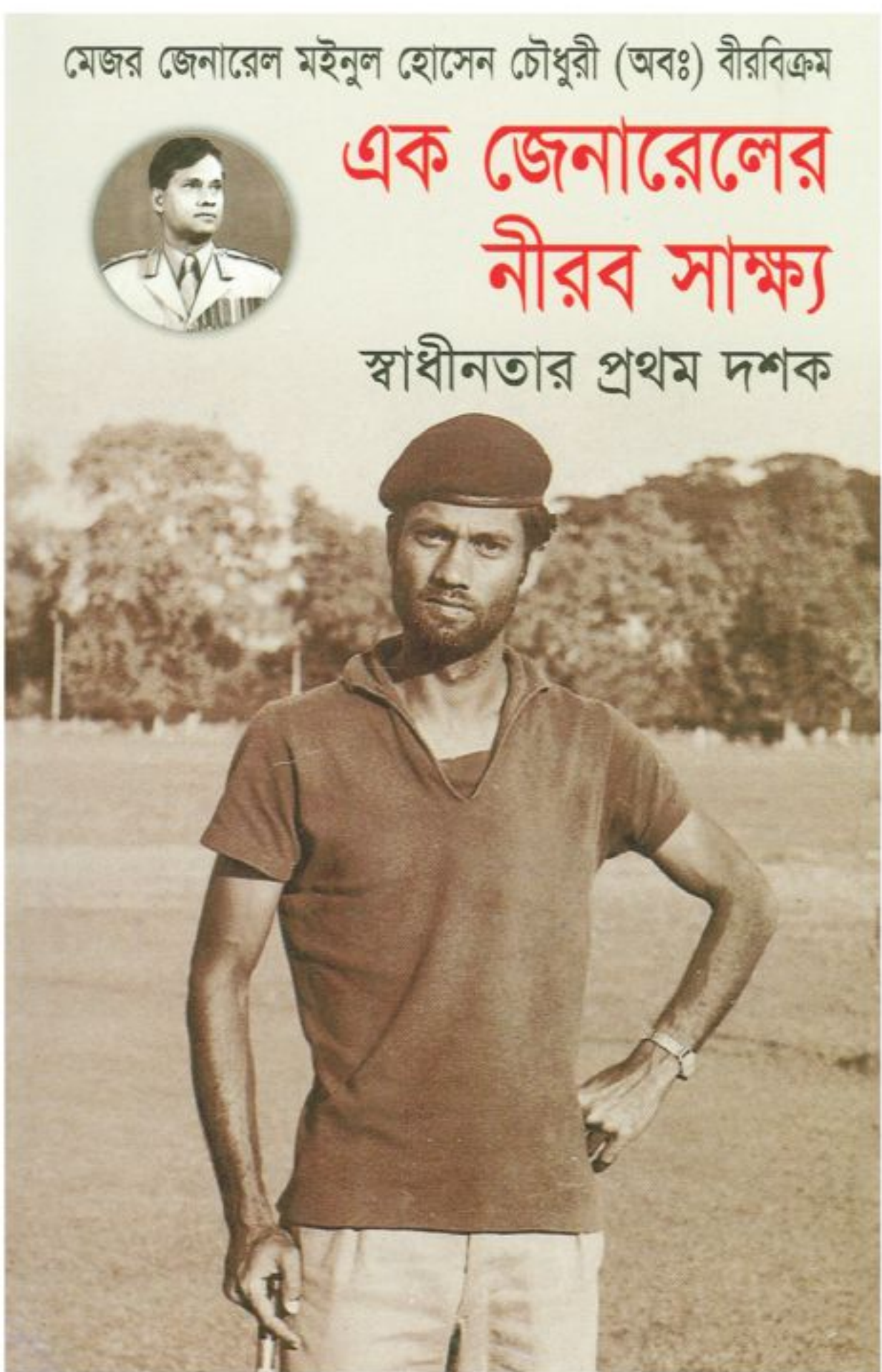


Behind the curtains

Alamgir Khan dwells on a tale of liberation

Ek General-er Nirob Shakhya (The Silent Witness by a General) by Major General Moinul Hossain Chowdhury 'is a gold mine of information for readers with a discerning eye. It is especially revealing with respect to General Manzur's death and how Manzur was falsely accused and deliberately slandered by General Ershad and his associates.' Lawrence Lifscultz thus wrote in this newspaper on the murder of Major General Manzur. As the Manzur murder case has become a burning issue now, this book along with a few other ones has come to prominence, which it fully deserves. Though the murder of Manzur is the kernel of this book, it has dealt with the



Ek General-er Nirob Shakhya
Major General Moinul Hossain Chowdhury
Mowla Brothers

broader issue of the nature of the Liberation War and the conflicts among high ranking army officers.

General Moin possessed a broad vision about our Liberation War. This book is not simply a military account of what happened during the war and thereafter. Though he was a high ranking military officer and always wanted to serve his country in that role, he never projected the Liberation War as only a military affair. Instead, he recognized the key role people played in determining the outcome of the war. It is clear from his account of an incident, mentioned by the Pakistani Major Salek in his book, at the Rohanpur army camp in Rajshahi. A boy with his hands tied was brought before the Pakistani major, who

as a result of the failure of torture upon him tried to cajole him to reveal the whereabouts of his freedom fighter comrades. The boy touched the ground with his hands and put the soil to his lips. Then he stood upright and said, 'I am now ready for death. My blood will certainly bring nearer the freedom of my motherland.' He was taken outside and the sound of bullets split the air. Nothing more is known about this brave freedom fighter. Moin has paid his highest tribute to war heroes like this young soldier of freedom.

Major Moin along with his comrades joined the Liberation War with full mental preparation. According to him, the seeds of Bengali rebellion in the army was planted on 7 March, when sometime before Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered his historic speech, Bengali officers of the Pakistan army sat in the office of the Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. Masudul Hasan Khan, and decided to plunge into the War of Liberation if Bangabandhu gave a call for it. On March 19, they were certain that the Pakistani occupation army was readying itself to inflict a deadly blow on the Bangalis. At the outbreak of the Liberation War, the Second East Bengal Regiment under him with others mutinied against the Pakistani army.

Once into the war, Major Moin with the force under him alternately suffered defeats and won victories against the Pakistanis. And at last on 16 December 1971, he with all others watched the sun of Bangladesh's freedom rise on the horizon. But he felt the haughty attitude of the Indian army and watched them loot military weapons and non-military valuable goods in Bangladesh and smuggle them into India. In free Dhaka, he watched people, many armed wit weapons, moving across the city, some by car and some on foot, people whom the sun and rain seemed never to have touched during the life-and-death struggle of the nation for nine months.

Major General Moin became a silent witness to the not-so-tasteful historical events happening thereafter in his beloved motherland. The clouds of corruption, conspiracy, petty interests and political errors began to cover the sun of freedom. The formation of the Rakkhi Bahini and training of their officers in India, dissatisfaction within the army, conflict between senior army officers, the anomaly in declaring gallantry awards for those who fought in the Liberation War, the rise of 'Friday Fighters' or '16th Division' who turned into freedom fighters only on 16th December and the next day (Friday), assimilation in the army of non-freedom fighter soldiers repatriated from Pakistan, the food crisis, political instability caused by the extreme left groups, etc., have been touched upon briefly but deftly.

The writer had to be a silent witness to the waste of \$2.5 billion foreign aid Bangladesh received in the first three years of its freedom. He writes that this amount of aid was more than what East Pakistan received in twenty three years and West Germany received under the Marshall Plan after World War II. President Ziaur Rahman appointed General Moin as chief advisor of the Muktiyoddha Sangsad, but soon he was replaced by General Ershad in that position.

Then what happened behind the assassinations of President Zia and General Manzur, 'all acts committed in the space of four days', as Syed Badrul Ahsan has phrased it, one can learn from Lifschultz's writings based in large part on Moin's book in this paper --- until one preferably reads the whole thing from Mowla Brothers' third edition of the book itself.

ALAMGIR KHAN WRITES ON THEATRE, EDUCATION
AND SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES

Stitches for the dead and the living

Nahid Khan dives into tragedy

THERE are books one can start anytime anywhere and they are hooked not only because of the simplicity of the prose. Also the storytelling remains interesting till the end and above all it relates to the reader in a bond that is hard to relinquish. Those are the books by Anisul Hoque. The other aspect, hence this write up, I realised after reading 'Shelai' and 'Amaro Ekta Prem Kahini Achhe', is that the writer strives to offer something different to his reader. These two books were published in this year's Boi Mela, offering not just two different stories but mostly two different styles of writing. Novels that deviate from the conventional way of storytelling inherently become interesting to read, like the journey taking a different route. No matter how different the route is, the destination has to be reached, the story has to be told. So taking the different route remains difficult --- to capture continuity, cohesiveness and conclusion. So any book takes that path is to be applauded for the effort.

Anisul Hoque's epistolary, 'etodin kothai chhilen' was different from 'drishtipaat' by Jajabor, where the story developed from letters, or '84 Charing Cross Road' by Helene Hanf, a collection of two-way letters between a book-seller and a reader. Anisul Hoque wrote letters to the great poet Jibananada Das, related the poet's biography in his own creation, with facts, fiction and imagination. This mixture of all these three things blended in 'etodin kothai chhilen' is remarkable in the way that one can devote love or affection to someone non-existent, ends the need for being close though there are yearnings. This is how that book is different in its style of prose. I felt it was astonishing. As an aside, I feel compelled to mention another amazing style of prose I read called 'Notes to My Mother-In-Law' by Phyllida Law, which truly was a collection of little sticky notes by the writer to her mother-in-law, who was deaf. The notes were just an everyday reminder for meals, chores, appointments. But, amazingly, it produced a full fledged novel with a story to tell where there were characters of interest, events of variety, sorrows, joys and an ordinary family's ordinary daily lives that propelled an extraordinary love of duty and care.

Shelai by Anisul Hoque is based on the very recent tragedy of Rana Plaza that is still like a fresh wound to a many. A novel that is very short in physical dimension cuts pretty deep into the heart, not easy to read in one sitting, tears would stop you at every corner where darkness comes surrounded in hopelessness. The sheer name of the novel is in the core of the story that devastates life and in the end reinstates life. Rana Plaza is the cursed name of a demolished building that used to house many readymade garment factories, convenience stores, banks where thousands of

people worked everyday to make their living, fulfil their dreams. On 24 April 2013, the eight-storied building collapsed on those humble people due to no earthquake or cyclone but owing to human negligence. Of course the writer does not dwell on the despicable deed of the human beings involved but only portrays the sheer suffering of the victims, the sheer blessedness of humanity. On the one side, the unfortunate rubble struck people plea for life, even sacrificing one of their limbs, to see the light of the world again. On the other, true human beings jump into the rubble to save these people without thinking of their own safety, as the author puts it, 'saving life also becomes an addiction'. Ironically, just as the reality, the miscreants who caused all the chaos are not in the scene, which becomes simply unnecessary in the story of the combat between life and death.

The description of the mayhem, the severity of the loss of loved ones, the agony of identifying dead bodies, the struggle involved in rescue efforts will be known to all from various media, which have been presented in one perspective in the story of Shelai, where the author's made up characters go through the whole process. He has literally stitched together media information and developed the story into a novel. The clever thing to admire in the novel is how some of the newspaper articles were blended into the story without compromising cohesion. The story starts with one readymade garment worker, Bijlee, who is now on leave, for she is at an advanced stage of pregnancy. Her husband Najibor is also a readymade garment worker. The story is set in a simple daily life scenario that reveals a lot of love between the couple. There is dream of a new life, starting from the keeping the name of the baby to meeting means and ends.

On that accursed morning, Najibor goes to work and never comes back to Bijlee again. At her state of physical and mental health all the uncertainties of life are in front of her. This is the story of Shelai. This comes as a metaphor when Bijlee needs some stitches while giving birth and ironically the work of stitching causes her husband's death and a thousand other deaths. There are a few other characters to capture the whole series of events unfolding on ground zero that are very nearly sewn into the story. The devastation of the destitute does not stop lives from thriving. The heart is touched when in one room two helpless women comfort each other.

Anisul Hoque being Anisul Hoque, he finally lights his lamp of hope in the last two sentences to tell the world the mother and son are doing well. In other words, life will go on; even after the biggest stumble, it will move on.



Shelai
Anisul Hoque
Shomoy Prokashoni

Islam in its fundamentals

Sarwar Md. Saifullah Khaled finds a new book on the subject instructive

AT the very outset I humbly confess that I am no authority on the subject the book is written on, though I have to continually study and learn Islam in my pursuit in research on Islamic economics. However, it is to comply with my desire that I expressed to the author, who has studied advanced Public Administration and written several books on his field of study and Islam also, that I will try to write something on the book. I congratulate him for taking keen interest in the religion he belongs to in a comparative religion spirit and taking the pain of writing on Islam. As a Muslim I feel it my duty to be true to my desire -- and this is the result.

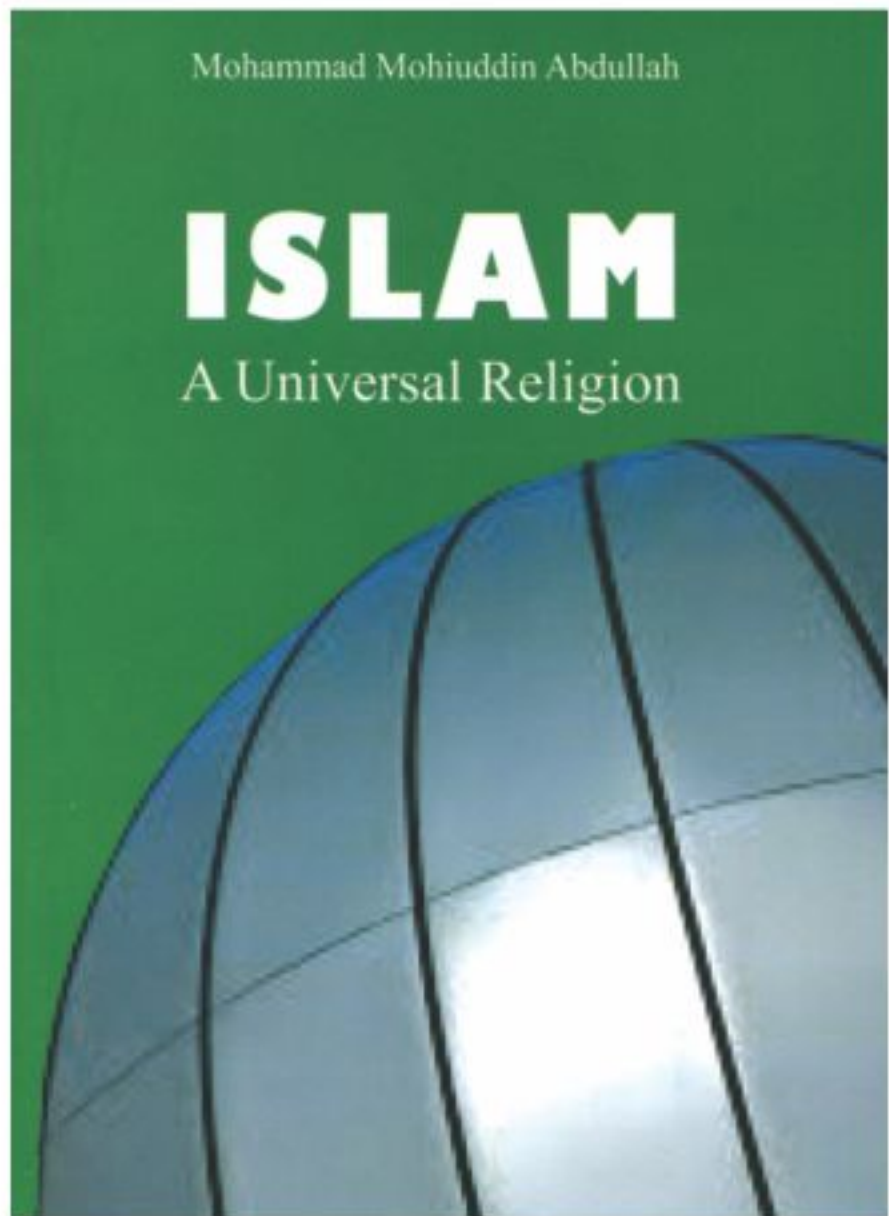
The book has been arranged in six chapters. I intend to touch them one by one. I want to make it clear that I am not going to review the book in the true sense of the term, but my purpose is to present the book per se to interested readers.

Chapter one deals in Islam per se. Chapter breakdown has been made as "Divine guidance, Comprehensive code of life, Oneness of Allah, Concept of Religion, Philosophy of Islam, Socialism in Islam, Islamic Culture, Religion of Mankind, Fundamental Obligation, Human rights and fundamental freedom, Concept of Property and Justice, Representative form of Government, Family life, Equality of Man, Hoarding, Dishonesty and corruption, Islamic Law of Sharia and Theory of Sovereignty". The author made measured discussions on all the topics mentioned so that the reader may get the idea about Islam in the author's words: "Today, the message of peace and brotherhood and belief in Almighty he (Mohammad (sm)) disseminated in his lifetime remains the focus of our dream of what our lives should be" (P.40).

Chapter two deals with the situation in Arabia prior to Muhammad (SWS). In this chapter the readers will find: "Status of the Arabians before the advent of Islam, Religions status in Arabia, Origin of the name of ARAB, Climate of Arabia, Products of Arabia, Inhabitants of Arabia, Age of Ignorance, Political Condition, Economic Condition, Cultural Condition, Religious Conditions, and Qualities of the people". Here the author truly observes: "When the whole of Arabia was groaning under the pangs of oppression and torture, injustice and cruelty, vice and superstition, Muhammed (SWS) appeared as a blessing of Arabia, nay of the whole universe" (P.53) and "Faculties which have remained dormant for ages seem awake suddenly, under the proper stimuli, and develop into dynamic powers" (Hitti, History of the Arabs, 2006, P. 28).

Chapter three deals with Hazrat Muhammed (SWS). Discussions have been made on: "Need for a Prophet, Family linkage of Hazrat (SWS), Birth of Muhammed (SWS), Childhood, Cleaning of Hearts, Death of Aameena -- The Mother of Muhammed (SWS), Organization of peace, Marriage of Muhammed (SWS), Rebuilding of the Kaaba, Meditation for fifteen years, The first Revelation, Preaching Islam and the First Muslim, Migration to Abyssinia, The conversion of Uthman Umar and others, Pilgrim party from Madina, MIRAJ -- the Ascent to Heaven, HIJRAH/ HIJRAT: The Migration to Madina, Socio-Political condition of Yathrib (Madina), Importance of Hijrat, Introduction of Azan and Change of Qiblah, New Revelations for the complete way of Life, Jihad/War Begins, Family life of Muhammed (SWS), The Farewell Pilgrimage, Last days of the Prophet (SWS) on Earth, Achievement of the Prophet (SWS)".

Under the above titles the author has tried to portray the necessity of the Almighty's last messenger on earth and his birth, family, spiritual and socio-political activities as a practical guide line for humankind to follow for salvation here on earth and the hereafter. The author rightly asserts:



Islam
A Universal Religion
Mohammad Mohiuddin Abdullah
Osder Publications

"The prophet of Islam was the greatest reformer the world has ever produced. Before his advent, Arabia, nay the whole of the known world, was steeped in vice, superstition and barbarism. Social inequality, degraded womanhood, slavery, drunkenness, debauchery, gambling, rapacity, blood thirstiness and such other heinous vices were prevalent among the Arabs. Never were the people as low as the Arabs were, never was idolatry so deep rooted as in Arabia, nowhere on the globe was so dark a spot as in Arabia. No Prophet before Muhammed (SWS) seems to have thought of tackling these horrible problems. He ruthlessly attacked them one after another till they were gone" (P.121). The author is historically true: "Undaunted through these dark days of persecution by temporary loss of so many followers, Muhammad fearlessly continued to preach and by persuasion convert men from the worship of many and false gods to that of the one and true God, Allah" (Hitti. Op. cit. P. 114) Who sent him on earth "but as a Mercy for the peoples" (Surah Al Anbiyaa, 21:107) to teach mankind the right conduct revealed through Al Qur'an.

Chapter four, The Holy Quran. Here the author discusses the "Main Issues of Holy Quran, Revealed to Muhammed (SWS), Characteristics of Allah (God), Allah is the light or Nur, Halal (Lawful) and Haram (Forbidden) Foods, Drinking wine, Adultery, Ramadan (Fasting), Marriage, Family and Divorce". The Holy Qur'an is necessary reading for mankind because, in the words of the author, "The Holy Quran describes in detail all these duties. Acquiring knowledge about the basic duties becomes the fundamental duty. Unless one has the basic knowledge about fundamental duties, how can one correctly carry out these compulsory duties?" (P.189). True. In emphasizing the necessity of the Holy Qur'an the Prophet (SWS) in his speech in the Farewell Pilgrimage said: "O people, reflect on what I am saying, I leave behind me two things: the Holy Qur'an and my Sunnah. If you follow them you will never go wrong". The Prophet (SWS) knew full well that he is mortal but the Holy Qur'an and his Sunnah shall live forever to guide people to righteousness and virtue till the Dooms day come.

Chapter Five dwells on the Pillars of Islam. Here the author candidly discusses the importance and significance of "Iman and Kalema, Prayer, Zakat, Fasting or Siam, and Hajj". And, finally, in Chapter Six the author convincingly discusses the omnipotence of Allah in "Universal God and Al Qur'an" and at the same time he does not forget to mention all the 99 revealed names of Allah the One with their literal meanings.

The book is a handy one, with an elegant cover, and contains almost all the relevant fundamental aspects of Islam, about which Allah Himself has said: "This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favor unto you, and chosen for you as religion Al Islam" (Surah Al Ma'ida, 5:3). The author has enriched his contention by freely quoting the relevant verses from the Holy Qur'an throughout the book wherever necessary and relevant. I shall be failing in my duty if I do not mention three small things i.e. (i) the author could a bit more carefully have arranged the sub-sections in each chapter of the book, (ii) he could hint at the references of the facts to enrich the book, and (iii) the printing mistakes which usually embarrass almost all writers in the first edition of a book. I hope the book will be free from these shortcomings in its subsequent editions. I feel the book -- a product of hard work -- is instructive and worth reading for people of all walks of life and religion to know Islam.

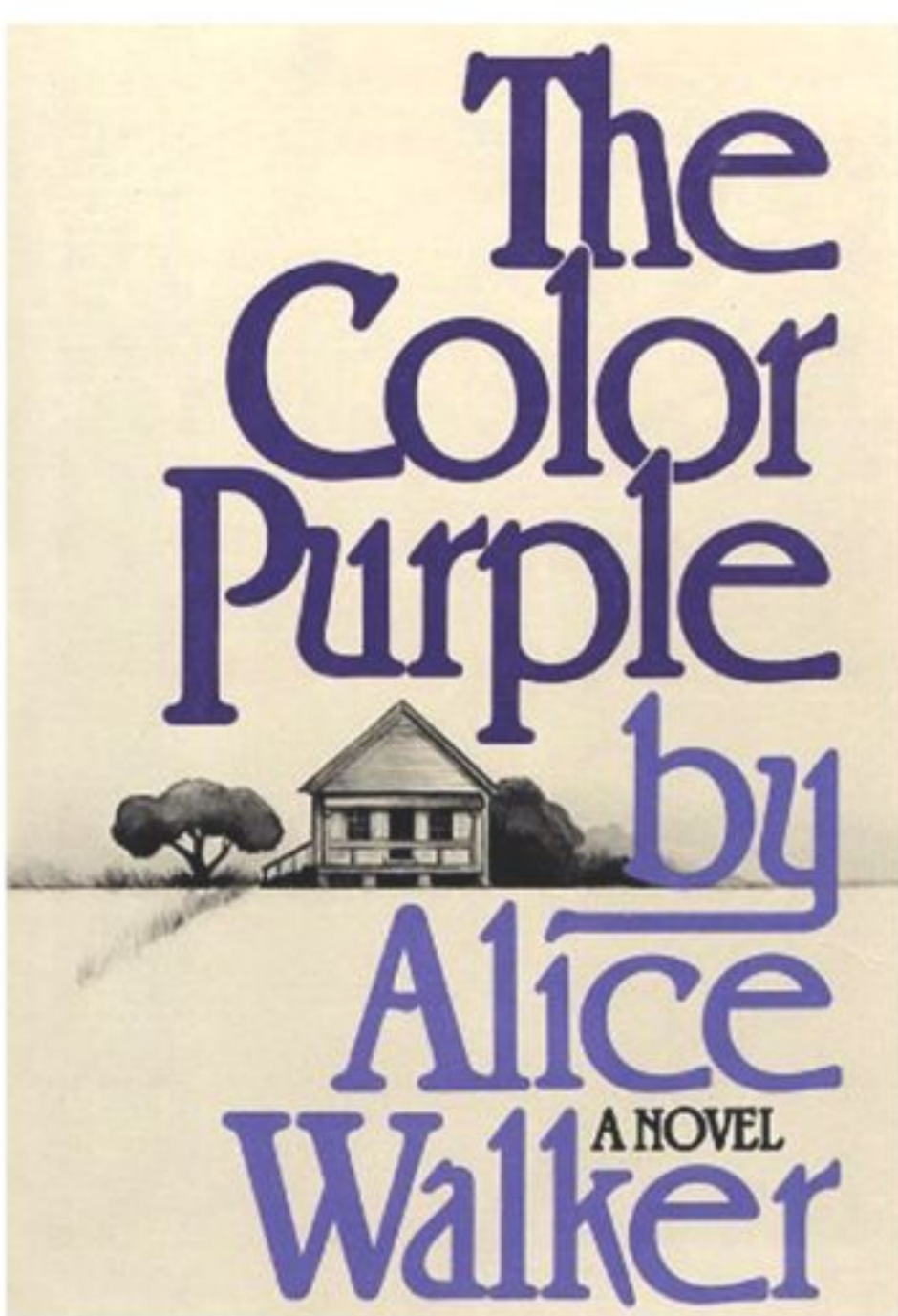
SARWAR MD. SAIFULLAH KHALED IS RETIRED PROFESSOR OF
ECONOMICS, BCS GENERAL EDUCATION CADRE

Going beyond the seen

Barnali Talukder experiences the reality of the unseen

THIS time, before I began wandering around my newly bought novel, I thought of having a glimpse at the preface. It is something very different for my reading history as I always finish the novel first and then gather information on what the novel actually deals with. And this exception I particularly did out of sheer curiosity about the title of the novel, *The Color Purple*, which, I believe, can all at once sparkle a panorama of a blissful realm of colors in the reader's mind. In reading the preface I found the writer, Alice Walker, singling out purple from other colors as it appeals to her as a surprising color and ironically is present everywhere in nature. And this color, she presumably wants to say, has much aptitude for reinforcing the idea of oneness in nature. Alice Walker thinks everything in nature is strung together to concoct a complete harmony from where anything can be exempt for some time, but it is sure to re-mingle sooner or later with the greater resonance of the world. And this idea of hers gets a much unpredictable depiction in the novel as she chooses a blistering real-life situation to release her thoughts.

Placing circumstances in a periphery of South America, Walker creates Celie for the main character of the novel. She is an illiterate, black and incredibly tolerable girl who is raped several times by her so-called father and gives birth to two children. However, her children are snatched away from her. And later she is married to another person who has four children left by his previous marriage. Amid all these uglinesses of life the only comfort to Celie is her sister Nettie. Nettie is also helpless like her sister, but she is determined not to yield to any situation-bound-dichotomy of life. And that's where these two sisters get separated in thought as well as in practice, and Nettie leaves in search of something unexplored and uncompromising. In the meantime, Celie meets electrifying Shug Avery, the lady-love of her husband who is also a singer by profession. This ravishing, unbending and self-sustained lady opens a new window to Celie to encounter life with new understanding. Nettie, on the other hand, experiences a totally different discourse of African life, being part of a missionary campaign over there. Finally both of them embrace life in their own ways and are able to interpret the meaning of life



The Color Purple
Alice Walker
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

in the preface, stresses the presence of mystery everywhere which, she thinks, can find a gateway of expression only through nature. In this respect, I could remember a story by William Faulkner, titled 'A Rose for Emily', where the protagonist Emily leads a very mysterious life, provoking tremendous curiosity in her neighbour's mind, but all her mystery is dissolved at a blink of an eye after her death. Emily's mystery is something which enralls the reader and ultimately limits the meaning of life.

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