

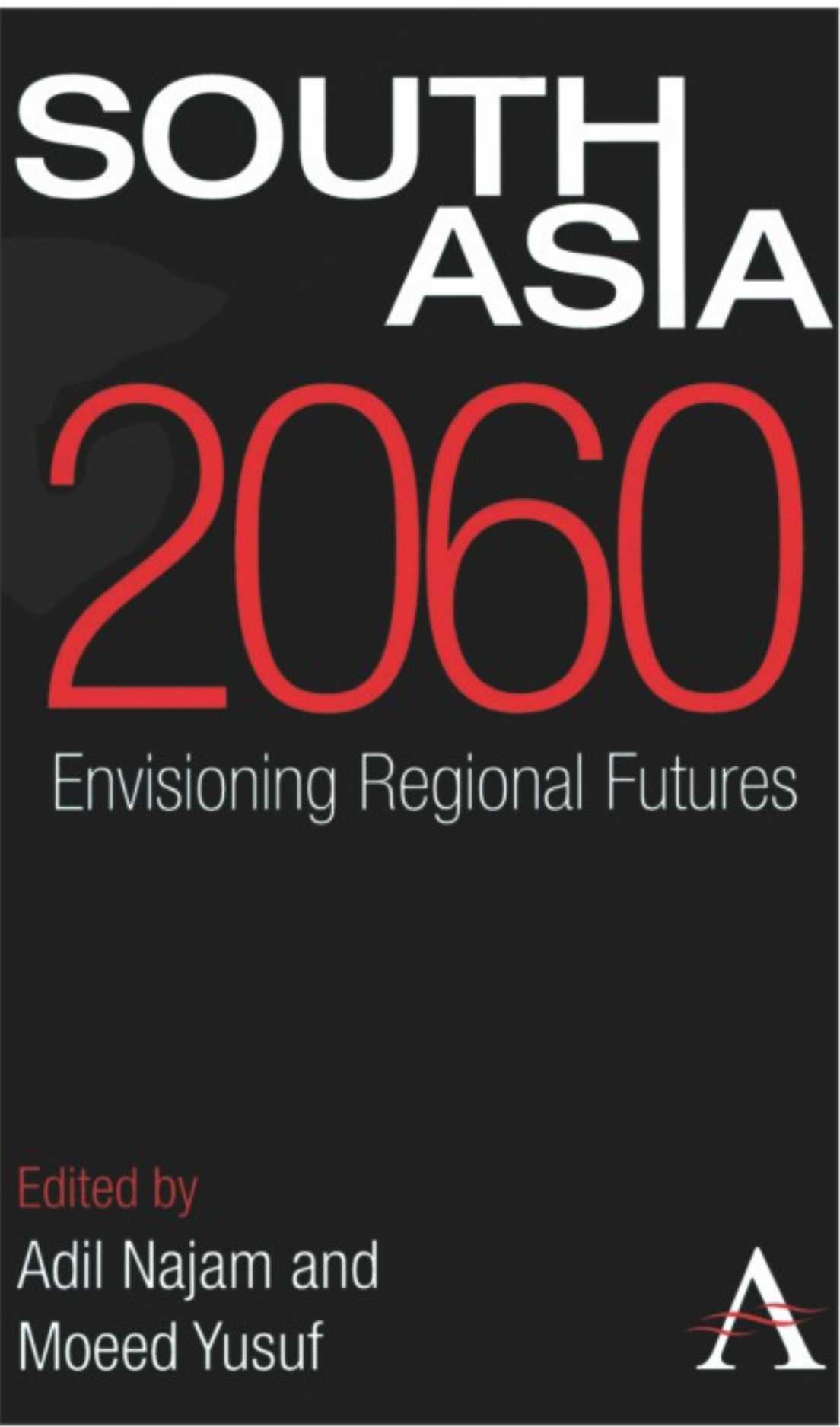
# The future's ours to see

Shahriar Feroze peers into the future

WHAT pops up as you look out of the window of your mind thinking of South Asia? A map, a densely populated region, poverty, political unrest, adverse effects of climate change, fundamentalism, cricket and football, small countries with innumerable political, cultural and social issues and diversified disputes. The list goes on.

*In the end the curiosity for knowing the future will always be there and so will be its readership. In the course of reviewing the book, a quote by Edward Weyer JR kept coming back every now and then: "The future is like a corridor into which we can see only by the light coming from behind."*

But what would you think about the yield in the shape of a book that presents an ongoing dialogue among 47 experts from a diverse range of expertise and backgrounds, forecasting how South Asia could look like some 50 years later or more specifically in the year 2060? Curious and thought provoking isn't it? South Asia 2060: Envisioning Regional Futures is a collection of futuristic essays based on the thoughts of leaders among policymakers, academics and civil society members as also visionaries. The contributors of the anthology are experts with long collective expertise and experience of South Asia. The experts have written their pieces from their own disciplinary and professional perspectives on an array of issues relevant to the region's future. But it would have been great to know about each of the writer's techniques and methodologies for determining their not-so-absolute future scenarios. Predicting the future is dangerous business, but the ones who make the effort for practising it based on knowledge perceived from historical track records and traits with some benchmarks deserve some credit. It should be clarified, though, that South Asia 2060 falls mainly under four categories – South Asia as a region, its state relations, development and human well-being factors. Let's go by categories. From the perspective of South Asia as a region, the essays demonstrate reasons drawn from geography, history and geopolitics. The aspiration of 'southasianness' is deeply entrenched in the South Asian mind – an idea that South Asian regional politics has often rejected and fought against. The term "Southasia" is coined by the writer Kanak Mani Dixit in chapter three.



South Asia 2060  
Envisioning Regional Futures  
Anthem Press UK

Regarding state relations, quite reasonably almost all the authors have directly or indirectly focused on the fact that no positive scenario for South Asia as a region is plausible, if India and Pakistan remain locked in their age-old rivalry. None of the contributors of this part seem to seriously question the idea of South Asia or propose that if regional identity will wither away soon. On development, coupled with security issues, the essayists focus on breaking the violent-like circularity of conventional arguments. Here the message is the relationship of security and development of the region is co-dependent. Though South Asia 2060 was not prepared with the aim of seeking optimistic viewpoints from its contributors, but fortunately a greater voice on human well-being is beginning to compel and also incline South Asian states to explore obvious complementarities among them. Concerning human well-being, much of South Asia's challenges and opportunities are common. In a single review it is not possible to touch on all the essays, but some of the more interesting ones deserve some mentioning. But each and every piece should be read if the reader is thinking to gain a comprehensive understanding on how South Asia may look like 50 or so years

from now. Why? Because 47 experts from a diverse range of expertise and backgrounds have taken the effort to predict the South Asian future through 47 lenses and in some cases more. It was a fascinating experience following which author has followed what regional trends, key factors and possible future trajectories. There are tips and guidelines by the writers for a better South Asia, and of course backtracking to historical events and changes that have played a key role in the transformation of the South Asia of today. Ramesh Thakur has focused on regionalism and gone back to its roots. He has outlined how regional connectivity and unity can be made through tourism and sports in the coming days. In conclusion, he stresses the need for quality in national leadership. Kanak Mani Dixit explores the geopolitical scenario and predicts that the seemingly South Asian regionalism that rests in the rise of federalism is likely to provide a win-win formula in the future. As a result, a strong platform of South Asian cooperation will be there. Thomson's approach is more technical regarding existing and future diversities on several issues encompassing the region. The historian Asif captivantly narrates his account of the future by adding in the role of Bollywood in community making. Regarding conflict and reconciliation issues, Amitabh Mattoo's emphasis on Indo-Pakistan relations as the 'single most critical factor for the region' may be interesting, but somehow predisposed to an extent. Badami and Haider write about population, human development, environment with the challenges of rapid urbanization. But their stress on urban policy, planning and strategies is important. Gupta and Shankar have a forecast, especially in terms of meeting electric power demand in the region. Ishrat Husain's focal point is that the region's economy in 2060 includes the failure and future prospects of intraregional trade. His inclusion of factors related to demography, climate change and bilateral problems to the region's economy also comes with a set of guidelines and the importance of reaping the benefits of technology. Enamul Haque has outlined the economic challenges ahead. Hoodbhoy, Zia Mian and Synnot all three explain their speculations on the sensitive issue of nuclear risk within the region. Ali Riaz's spotlight is on the implications for scholarships in and on South Asia and his analysis and viewpoints on policy and security oriented scholarships are important bits. And contribution of others follows..... Till you get hold of the book. In the end the curiosity for knowing the future will always be there and so will be its readership. In the course of reviewing the book, a quote by Edward Weyer JR kept coming back every now and then: "The future is like a corridor into which we can see only by the light coming from behind."

SHAHRIAR FEROZE IS WITH THE DAILY STAR

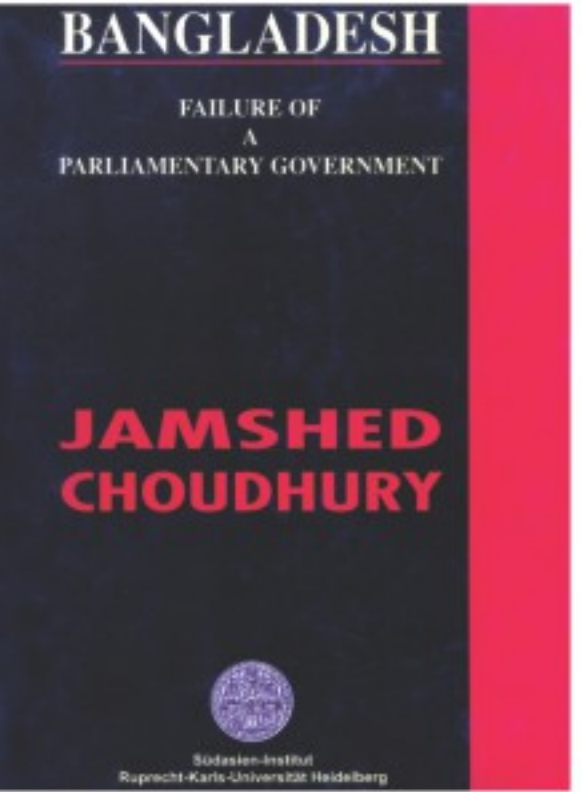
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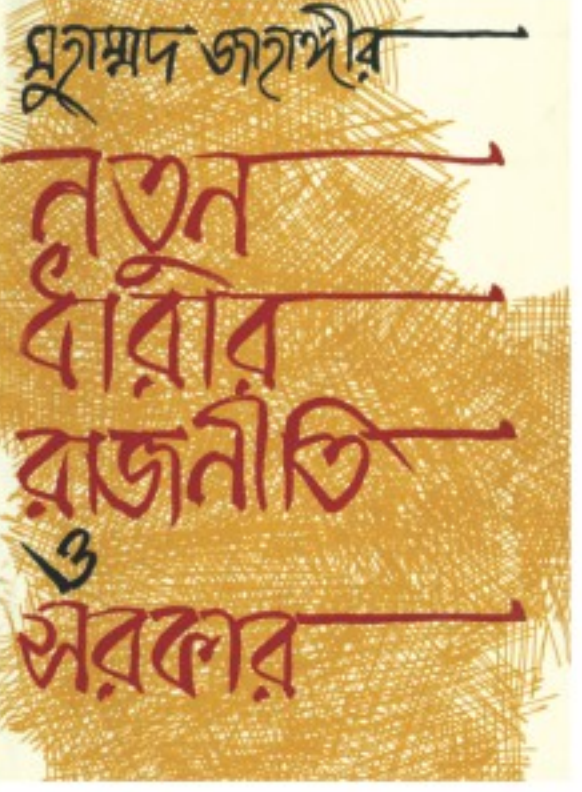
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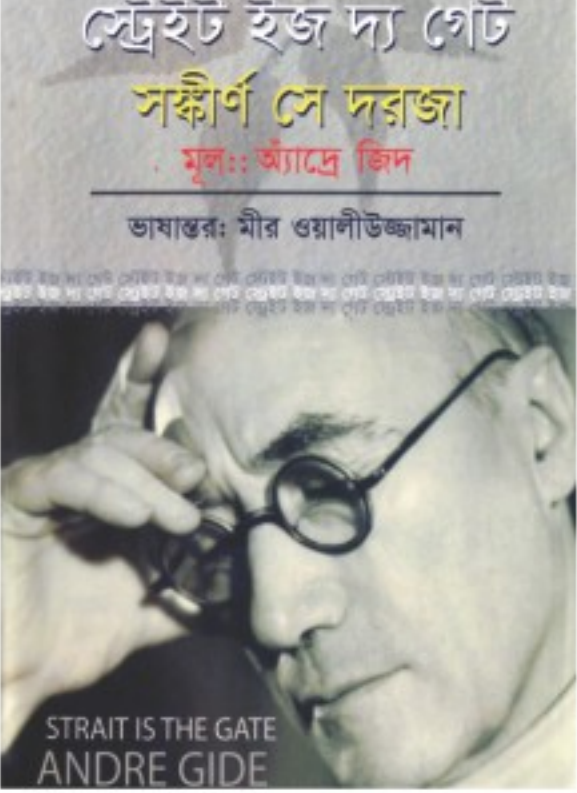
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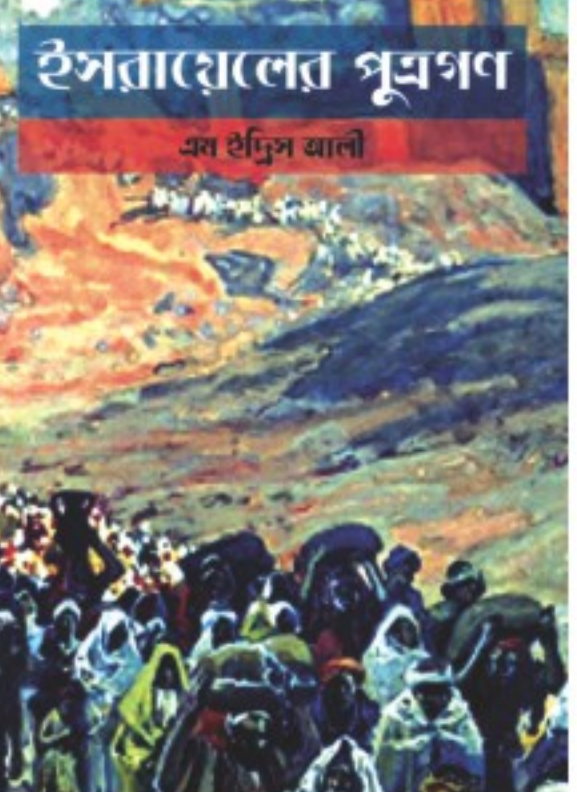
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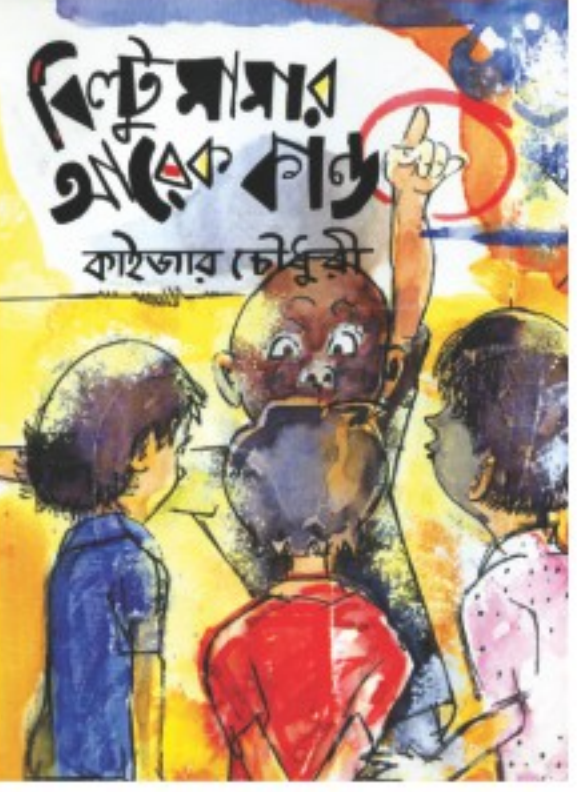
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## ESSAY

# Borderlands of creative imagination

periods of 'long, inefficient, happy idling, dawdling and puttering.' Moodling or dreamy idleness is to be distinguished from the sterile, inertia-inducing, fretful and uncreative worrying that characterizes writer's block. Quiet, inward searching and reflecting allows a writer to enter the birthing room of her creative imagination. It is a state of confident quietude. And when you've moodled quietly and confidently and long enough, you are likely to recognize the flapping of the dark imaginal thing within you. Ueland's practical advice to moodlers: "Take a long, dreamy time at dressing, or lie in bed at night and [let] thoughts come and go, or dig in the garden, or sew, or paint, ALONE; or sit with a pencil and paper or before a typewriter (she was writing in the 1930s), quietly putting down what you happen to be thinking....that is creative idleness." In the 21st century, you might dismiss such idling as useless. Who has so many hours to waste? But the modus operandi for awakening the creative imagination remains essentially unchanged. When you moodle earnestly, you enter the indistinct borderlands of the imaginal world. This is a shimmering, easily vanishing and reappearing boundary world existing between the conscious and unconscious mind, a space marked by its indefinable in-betweenness. I call it a birthing room because knowledge from the creative unconscious is given birth into the creative conscious in this imaginal room in the mind. Formless intuition assumes form here—ideas and images from the unconscious manifest as conscious knowledge. It is here that ideas and images begin their transformation into words.

A note about the term imaginal coined by the Sufi scholar and professor of Islamic Studies, Henri Corbin, in his essay Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal. He preferred it over the word imaginary, to distinguish the highly creative imaginal faculty from the pejorative connotations with which we associate the term imaginary. When people tell you 'it's all in your imagination' they are asking you to stop daydreaming and snap out of your fantasy world; to be more realistic, more pragmatic, more sensible. But if you pay no heed to their advice, and roam in the imaginal world it delivers wonderful fruits that the world of common-sense driven rationality can't. In medieval times, knowledge acquired from the imaginal world, what we might today call intuitive cognition, was considered the highest form of knowledge. It was believed that intuitive knowledge from the imaginal world became externalized as art forms. But this intuitive knowledge arrived if divine intention or intervention willed it. Thus humility on the artist's part was an essential trait. The artist was not the doer, she was merely a wasela or means for producing expressions of divine beauty through art.

**Ibn Arabi and the Barzakh**  
Ibn Arabi, a 13th century Andalusian mystic and one of the world's greatest spiritual teachers and poets, was convinced the greatest human endeavour was our search for self-knowledge and self-recognition. It is this knowledge that took us one step closer to God. The artist's

quest for self-recognition is her quest for self-transcendence. The dark thing that flaps about in her is imaginal knowledge. Ibn Arabi believed that true self-knowledge descends into human consciousness through the faculty of the imagination or the alam-al-khayal. According to Ibn Arabi, the spiritual heart has two eyes: imagination [khayal] and reason [aql]. Dominance of reason over imagination or the other way round distorts our perception of reality. The spiritual heart or qalb is the home of imaginal knowledge. The root meanings of the Arabic word qalb is that which is not fixed, that which is capable of undergoing continual transmutation. It is the spiritual heart, and not aql or reason, that undergoes constant transmutation in accordance with our intuitive cognition. Ibn Arabi described the faculty of imagination as an in-between world, a world of rapidly changing forms, which can only be perceived by the heart. By heart he did not mean the physical organ. He was referring to the non-logical, wisdom centres of our consciousness. He defined the imagination as a barzakh or an isthmus, by which he meant:

"something separating what is knowable and unknowable, existent and non-existent, intelligible and unintelligible, affirmed and negated.....it is intelligible in itself, yet it is nothing but the imagined-image (al-khayal)."

[quote is taken from James Morris's translation of Ibn Arabi's Futuhat-al-Makiya or The Meccan Revelations]. The linear, rational intellect can't handle much ambiguity and in-between-ness so the receptacle of imaginal knowledge has to be the non-rational centre of the mind. To Ibn Arabi, there was nothing fanciful or unreal about this alam-al-khayal, the faculty of creative imagination. His conceptualization of imagination as a barzakh, or that which is between two worlds bridging the corporeal and the non-corporeal world, a thin line separating the non-material world from the material world of phenomena, implied that entering the imaginal world could often lead one to a state of bewilderment or hairt. The formless intuitions of the imaginal world may initially be dismissed as inchoate messages, and their contrariness may baffle the person receiving them. This is where moodling comes in handy. Moodling acts as a catalyst, channelling imaginal intuition into recognizable and images or words acceptable to the rational mind.

Ibn Arabi compared the imagined-image to a person's image in the mirror. So what is this image, and where is it reflected from? Where is it actually located? For how can it be both affirmed and denied, existent and nonexistent, known and unknown? It is a paradoxical situation that the non-rational heart willingly accepts, but the rational intellect often rejects. The rational path of the intellect has to be complemented by the intuitive path of the heart. For a writer, living with messages perceived by both the non-rational qalb and the rational aql means to be comfortable with dissimilar realities, to co-exist with rational and intuitive messages, to live with that which seems undefined yet

is definite. Trusting the intuitive guidance of the creative imagination is an act of faith, an important part of life as a writer.

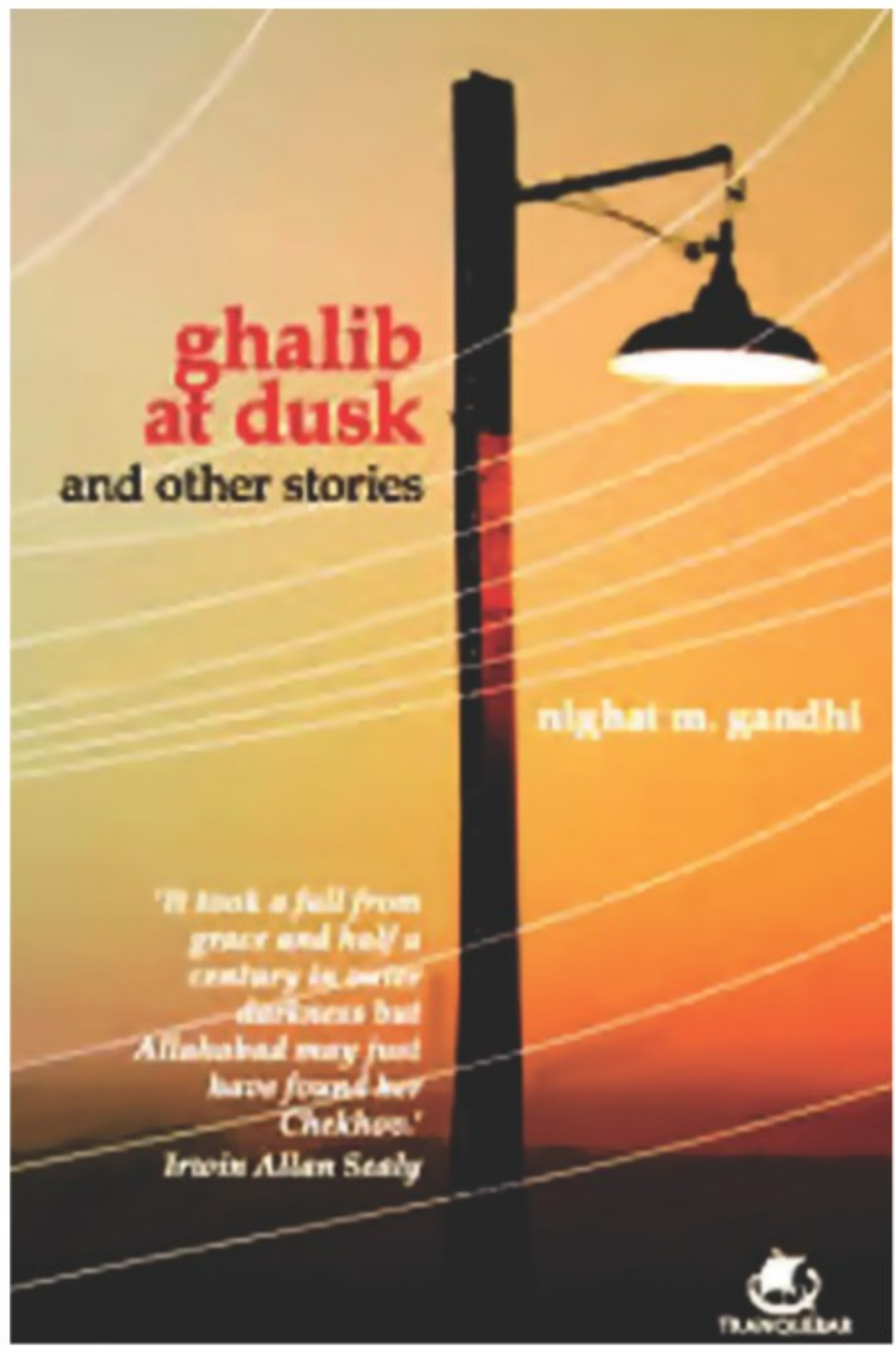
I remember walking home many years ago on an oozy, rained out-evening. It was a time of transitions, a boundary time, not quite day, and not quite night. There was a power cut, the street lights were out, and I was feeling out of time, and in the wrong space. The aql counseled: the right thing was to not be out on the street, but at home. I was feeling a deep anxiety. But as I picked my steps past puddles, the dark thing in the qalb/heart flapped about, whispering something incoherent: 'there's a story here.' Story? I asked. A story? In this unsafe street filled with foreboding, rain, staring men and vendors' carts? Or you mean in that white-washed, crumbling old house which I had just visited? The image of the dark street and that old, dilapidated house stayed with me. I had no idea why this was such an enduring image but it wouldn't let me rest for the next few weeks till I jotted down notes for what later turned into the short story, Ghalib at Dusk. At the time when I was making my notes and later, when I was writing first of the many drafts, my aql was convinced no magazine would want to publish it. Yet, my heart thought of it as one of my most tender, most mature and well-crafted stories. But who would want to publish or read a story about an old, crumbling house in a small north Indian town, the mind questioned. About the vanishing ways of life of a once-distinguished Muslim family? The heart won and I am glad I listened to its counsel and turned the images into words. I tuned in to the inchoate flapping of my imagination. Once the story was written, I put it away, and it remained unpublished for several years. A friend who really liked it, suggested I email it to the New Yorker magazine. I did. Three months later I received an e-mail rejection, just as I had expected. *Ghalib at Dusk* eventually found its true home in my first collection of short stories by the same name.

*Writing our deep, driving desires  
The Brihadranyaka Upanishad says:  
We live in accordance with our deep, driving desires.  
As our desire is, so is our will.  
As our will is, so are our acts.  
As we act, so we become.*

A writer's desire is nurtured by her imagination. Moodling nurtures her imagination and ambition injures it. But moodling is hard to sustain because it appears unprofitable. We live in an era which is profit and competition-driven, an era in which a book is a product with a limited shelf-life, and the writer is a brand name which, if the writer is lucky, will generate brand loyalty. There's pressure to become a brand name, to build brand loyalty. So whatever the formula, many a writer feels compelled to follow the formula.

(To be continued)

NIGHTH GANDHI HAS LIVED IN BANGLADESH AND PAKISTAN AND NOW IS BASED IN INDIA



NIGHTH GANDHI

*I am inhabited by a cry.  
Nightly it flaps out  
Looking, with its wings, for something to love.  
I am terrified by this dark thing  
That sleeps in me;  
All day I feel its soft, feathery turnings, its malignity.*  
--Sylvia Plath

THE dark, malignant thing Syvia Plath spoke of is the writer's creative imagination, the gift that sleeps in her and flaps about nightly, searching for the inner eye with which to express itself. It beats its wings until it makes itself known and finds expression in the writer's words. Until the writer honours this dark thing, it keeps her restless and stuck in a state of despondency. The dark thing is the creative imagination, it is our gift, our creative spirit, and the ideas that lie buried in the unconscious--- ideas that yearn to be born---are given birth through this creative imagination. Our creative imagination receives the slow-stirring, slow-arriving ideas from our unconscious mind and interprets them for the conscious mind. The medium of interpretation is language. Brenda Ueland considered 'moodling' necessary for nurturing our imagination. In her book, If You Want to Write, a deeply-felt and intimately expressed reflection on art, independence and the spirituality of writing, she defined 'moodling' as an essential writerly pursuit. Moodle for months if you must, she stressed, and allow your mind slow, quiet, and unfettered