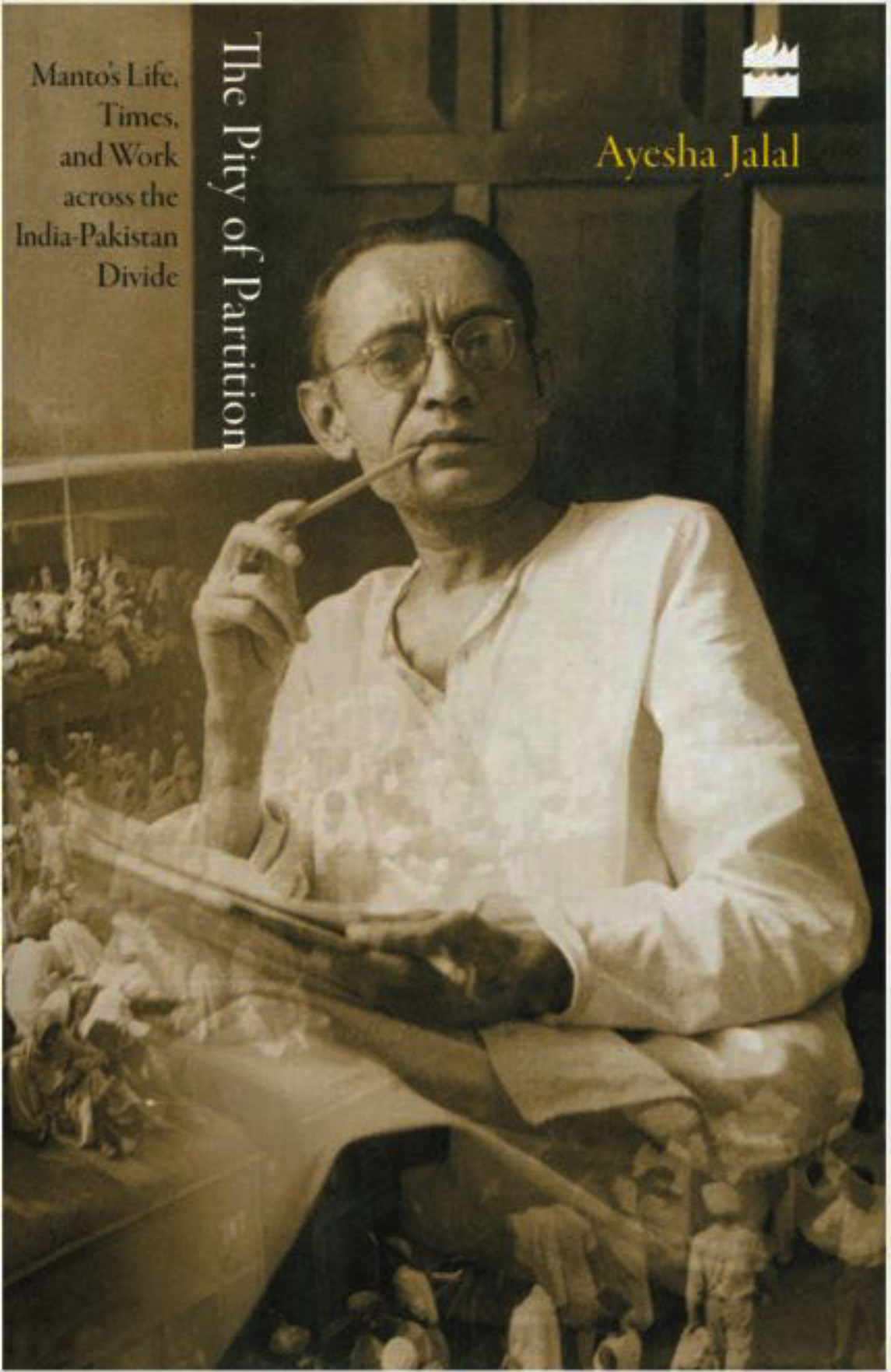


Two reviews from Syed Badrul Ahsan

The agony of the writer The making of a legend



The Pity of Partition
Manto's Life, Times, and Work
Across the India-Pakistan Divide
Ayesha Jalal
HarperCollins Publishers India

ALMOST every account of the way Saadat Hasan Manto's final years of life in Pakistan were spent raises the inevitable question: what compulsion was there, really, for him to leave Bombay behind and opt for a country that did not look promising for a writer of his intellectual range? While it is true that he was persecuted by the British colonial authorities on such charges as obscenity in his writings in pre-1947 India, there were reasons to think that conditions for literature, indeed for the arts, would be somewhat more encouraging in a free India. Perhaps it was a truth easily acknowledged by Manto. All truths in 1947, however, were subsumed by the bigger, uglier truth of communalism. Manto moved to Pakistan. He would suffer there in a way few writers in modern times would suffer.

Ayesha Jalal's *The Pity of Partition* is, in a broad manner of speaking, a narrative that speaks not just of Manto but of all those forces of creativity condemned to suffer the agony of Partition and its attendant displacement of population. Two million people perished in the process of the vivisection of the country. Millions more were left hearth and home. Women, on all sides of religious faith --- Muslim, Hindu, Sikh --- were abducted, raped and killed. Those who survived had little hope of living a normal life. In short, Partition was that eerie moment in time when collective madness, engineered by parochially-oriented politicians, when indeed civilization was brutalized in the Indian subcontinent, was rampant.

For Manto, nothing could be more poignant than an observation of the unfolding tragedy. Partition became for him a literary weapon through which he decried the mauling of culture and tradition in the country in the 1940s. *Toba Tek Singh* remains, of course, a point of reference. And there were others too. *Thanda Gosht*, again the story of a woman abducted in the frenzy of communalism, was one more manifestation of the macabre nature of truth. The new, ideology-driven authorities of Pakistan did not see it that way. Manto, they made it abundantly, and indignantly, clear, was undermining the cause of the new state through referring to Muslim women being subjected to abduction and rape by Hindu or Sikh men. Off with his head, said they, in that metaphorical sense of the meaning.

And it was Manto's head that the state was always after post-1947. It did not matter that Manto happened to be the most prolific, truth-telling writer the state of Pakistan ought to have been proud of claiming as its own. As it happened, his fellow-writers, many of whom had like him migrated from the old India to settle in Pakistan, were irked by his ceaseless attacks on their so-called progressive credentials. For their part, they

thought they saw in Manto a willing spokesperson for the state. Such ironies are what Ayesha Jalal, all these years after her much acclaimed *Sole Spokesman*, a work on Mohammad Ali Jinnah, projects in *The Pity of Partition*. She does it with feeling, seeing that she is related to Manto and has therefore had access to various facts about him from the family cellar.

Manto's was a mind, as Jalal would have us know, consistently expanding through wide reading. In his youth (he was still a youth when politics and illness claimed his life in his early forties), his room 'was filled with the works of Victor Hugo, Lord Lytton, Maxim Gorky, Anton Chekhov, Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Leonid Andreyev, Oscar Wilde, and Maupassant.' His interaction with Abdul Bari Alig was a turning point in his life, for in Bari he spotted all those elements he thought could be principles on which aspiring intellectuals would need to construct their lives. And yet Bari, for all his fervour, at a point disappointed Manto. When the police came looking for the young men who had put up a 'subversive' poster announcing a theatrical presentation of Wilde's *Vera* in translation, Bari slipped away. Manto and his friend Hasan Abbas were carted off to prison. It was a brother-in-law of Manto's, a former deputy superintendent of police, who scolded the policemen who had come to ask him questions about the detained young men: 'These are our children, go and do your work.' Manto and Abbas were freed. Some years later, it would be Manto's misfortune to find Bari employed in a lowly position at the British consulate in Lahore. It was a bad coming down.

The Pity of Partition is history encapsulated in the story of Saadat Hasan Manto. The march of characters, all of them literary, is revealing of the trauma Urdu literature went through in the course of the division of India. The instance of *Thanda Gosht* must come in once more. The case against Manto was brought before the Press Advisory Board of Pakistan. The poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, who himself would soon be a victim of the communal state, was at the time editor of what was a progressive Pakistan Times and convener of the PAB. At one point of the inquisition, for that it is what it really was, Faiz attempted to defend *Thanda Gosht*. That elicited an angry roar from a self-professed defender of the Pakistan ideology, Maulana Akhtar Ali (the editor of *Zamindar*): 'No, no, this sort of literature will not work in Pakistan.'

Manto was eventually acquitted of the charge of obscenity in the *Thanda Gosht* affair. An unknown admirer from Gujranwala, thrilled by the judgement, wrote to Manto: 'Your victory is for the betterment of literature, how can a donkey know the value of saffron?' Apart from Manto's run-ins with the state, there are the details of his skirmishes with the Progressive Writers Association which Jalal provides in the work. In 1948, the PWA, obviously influenced by Soviet communism, decreed that a non-Marxist could not be considered a progressive. That effectively put Manto and other writers, such as Mohammad Hasan Askari and Rajinder Singh Bedi, on the PWA's exclusion list. It did not bother Manto.

It was despair more than drink that killed Manto. His alcoholism led him to rehabilitation centres for treatment. But it was a malaise that did not keep him away from his principles. He remained, to the end, a proper husband to his wife Safia and a loving father to his daughters. By the age of thirty nine, he had authored twenty two books and yet he did not own any property, could not afford it. Poverty stalked him all his life. He has, since his death in 1955, largely remained taboo --- except for the early 1970s when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto presided over Pakistan.

Manto wrote his own epitaph before death claimed him:

Here lies Saadat Hasan Manto. With him lie buried all the arts and mysteries of short story writing... Under tons of earth he lies, wondering who of the two is the greater short story writer: God or he.

His bereaved elder sister would not have the epitaph put up at his grave, for fear it might cause fresh outrage among an increasingly conservative Pakistan. The alternative was, again, in Manto's words:

This is the grave of Saadat Hasan Manto, who still thinks his name was not the repeated word on the tablet of time.

Ayesha Jalal gives you reason for refreshing new pain. After all, Manto's was a life lived in unmitigated pain.

ONE of Dilip Kumar's earliest childhood memories is of discovering himself beside the bodies of three young Pathans killed in a war of the clans. It was in his native Peshawar and Yousuf Khan, the yet to be famous actor, had trailed his mother to the neighbouring house where she had gone to offer her sympathies to the bereaved family. No one had noticed him in the room. Someone had locked it from inside and did not open it until a British colonial police officer turned up to inquire into the incident.

The incident, apart from its macabre aspect, was to be seen as a sign of the devotion in which Dilip Kumar would always hold his mother. He would follow her all over the house, one that had a good number of brothers and sisters. Throughout this very readable autobiography, the thespian's love for his mother, the depths to which he keeps missing her, comes through. With his father, Mohammad Sarwar Khan, the relationship was more formal, a hint of what generally happens to subcontinental children when they deal with their fathers. Closeness is largely an association with mothers.

The Substance and the Shadow gives you, for surely the very first time, the real Dilip Kumar in the sense that he not only details the long life he has lived but also clears some of the many misconceptions that have for years been aired about his life. He recalls the old home in Peshawar's Kissa Khwani Bazar and speaks movingly of mountains in their majesty and the freshness of the air, the varied fruits of which land his father made an economic enterprise of. The move to Bombay by the family in the interest of having the fruit business expand is narrated in minute detail. In the process, a teenaged Yousuf Khan shines. He carries romantic notes from his elder brother to a neighbouring girl, who rewards him with goodies to eat. For himself, he remains shy and especially in the company of women. It is shyness that will stay with him for long.

As a young man, Dilip Kumar once walked out of the family home after an altercation with his father. He refrains from informing the reader about the exact nature of the incident, save only to mention the deep hurt it caused him. Landing up in Poona, he quickly finds a job at the army canteen, which is frequented by English officers of the British India army. His manners and skill in preparing such eatables as sandwiches endears him to the officers. His flawless English surprises them and naturally makes them happy. For Dilip, though, there comes a day of shock when he goes to his room, to find a fully nude young English woman he thought was enamoured of a young British officer. He runs off to call the manager, but when they come back, the girl is gone. Moments later, she is spotted, stark naked, at the swimming pool.

The Substance and the Shadow is an elaborate enumeration of the manner in which Devika Rani of Bombay Talkies fame drew Yousuf Khan into the world of the cinema. She it was who suggested that he adopt the name Dilip Kumar. Initially hesitant, he eventually went by Devika Rani's advice. It was to become a famous name. But the way to fame would be long. Dilip's good fortune was that he came in touch with such established artistes as Ashok Kumar, whom he always addresses as Ashok Bhaiyya in the book. There were also Prithviraj Kapoor and his son Raj Kapoor, Pathans like Dilip Kumar's family. Prithviraj, later to be Emperor Akbar to Dilip's Prince Salim in *Mughal-e-Azam*, was a friend of his father's. And Raj Kapoor went to college with Dilip Kumar.

There are all the anecdotes that the actor throws along the way. The actor Mohammad Umar Mukri, who had been known to Dilip since their young, non-movie days, once made the mistake of entering the actress Nadira's hotel room at night, imagining it to be Dilip's. Nadira's expletives, accompanied by screams, set Mukri scampering off. And Vyjayantimala was always accompanied on the sets by her grandmother, who had her consume large quantities of fruit and milk during breaks in shooting. Dilip and the others on the set wondered where all that milk Vyjayantimala drank actually went.

And then came the day when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, on a visit to Madras, sent out word that he would visit the cast of *Paigham* then shooting in the city. That set Yadugiri Devi, Vyjayantimala's grandmother, talking. As she related the story, at an occasion in Delhi, Nehru and Papa (the word, meaning baby in Tamil and used for Vyjayantimala by her grandmother) were present. Vyjayanti was, of course, centre-stage. Dilip, asked by S.S. Vasan, owner of Gemini Studios, to head the reception line that would receive the prime minister, responded that since Vyjayantimala knew Nehru, she should do that job. When Nehru arrived, he ignored Vyjayantimala and, seeing Dilip Kumar, strode over to him. 'Yousuf', he said loudly, 'I heard you were here and I decided to drop in.'

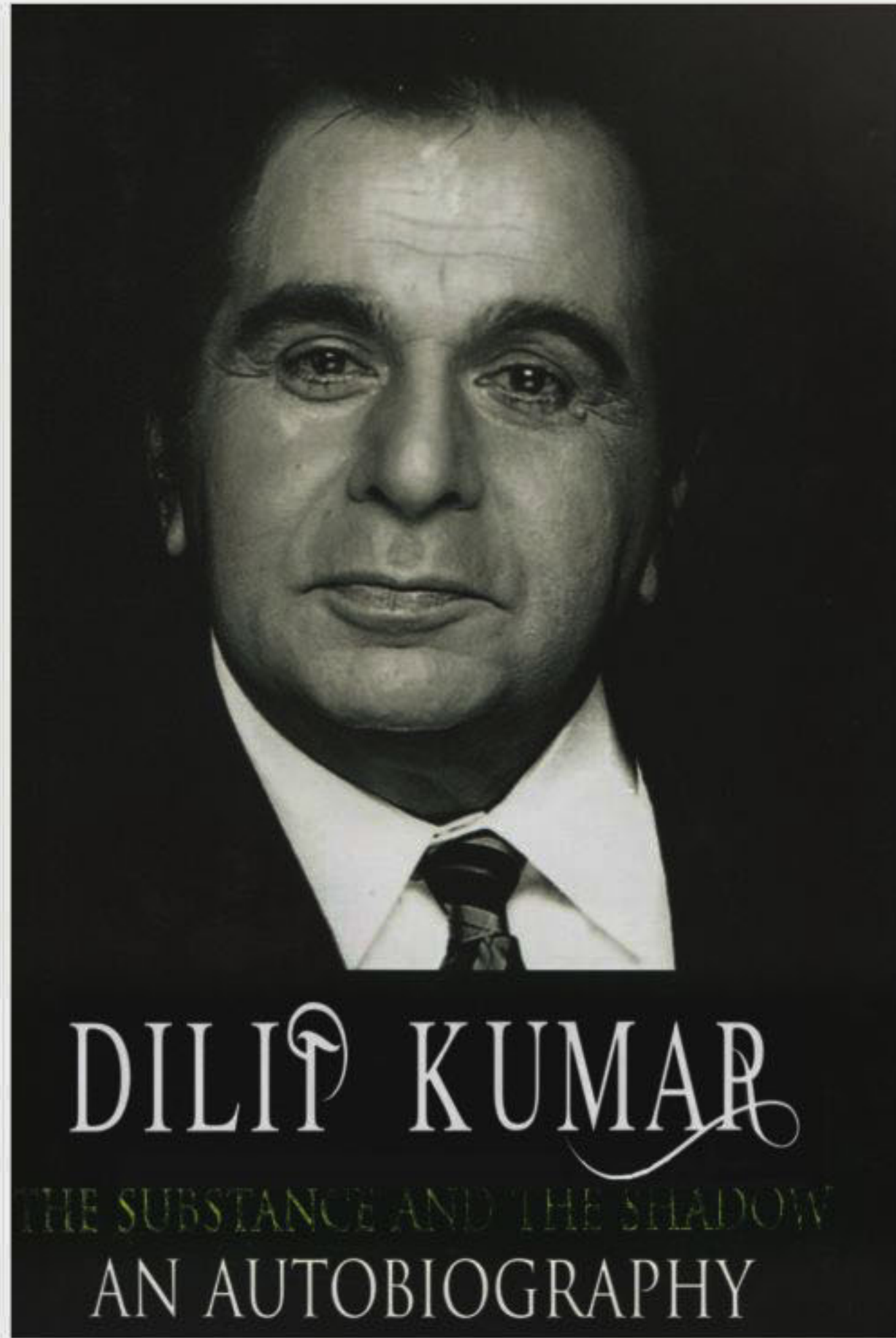
As Dilip Kumar tells it, 'After that, we never heard the Panditji-Papa story from Vyjayanti's grandmother.'

The thespian's reflections on Madhubala provide the details of how their relationship did not work out. Dilip lays the blame squarely on Madhubala's father who he thinks was more concerned with making money out of a marriage between his daughter and the actor. Dilip was surprised at Madhubala's silence, indeed her seeming agreement with her father. Observe Dilip Kumar dwell on the situation:

'Contrary to popular notions, her father, Ataullah Khan, was not opposed to her marrying me. He had his own production company and he was only too glad to have two stars under the same roof. Had I not seen the whole business from my point of view, it would have been just what he wanted, that is, Dilip Kumar and Madhubala holding hands and singing duets in his productions till the end of our careers.'

That was a forthright Dilip Kumar, who would go on to marry the actress Saira Bano in 1966. He was forty four and she was twenty two. Throughout the book, Dilip gushes over Saira. Simply put, he goes overboard in his praises of her, in his assessment of her as both an artiste and a wife. And yet there remains the truth of how, years after his marriage, he secretly met Asma Rehman, ended up marrying her and then, once the secret was revealed and Saira Bano had taken him to task, gone ahead and divorced Asma. Dilip's account of the whole affair sounds unconvincing, given especially his clear propensity to pin the blame for the fiasco on Asma Rehman who, he says, had a husband when she met him. Here is the way he puts it:

'Well, the one episode in my life that I would like to forget and which we, Saira and I, have indeed pushed into eternal oblivion is a grave mistake I made under pressure of getting involved with a lady named Asma Rehman whom I had met at a cricket match in Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh) where she



Dilip Kumar
The Substance and the Shadow
An Autobiography
As narrated to Udayatara Nayar
Hay House India

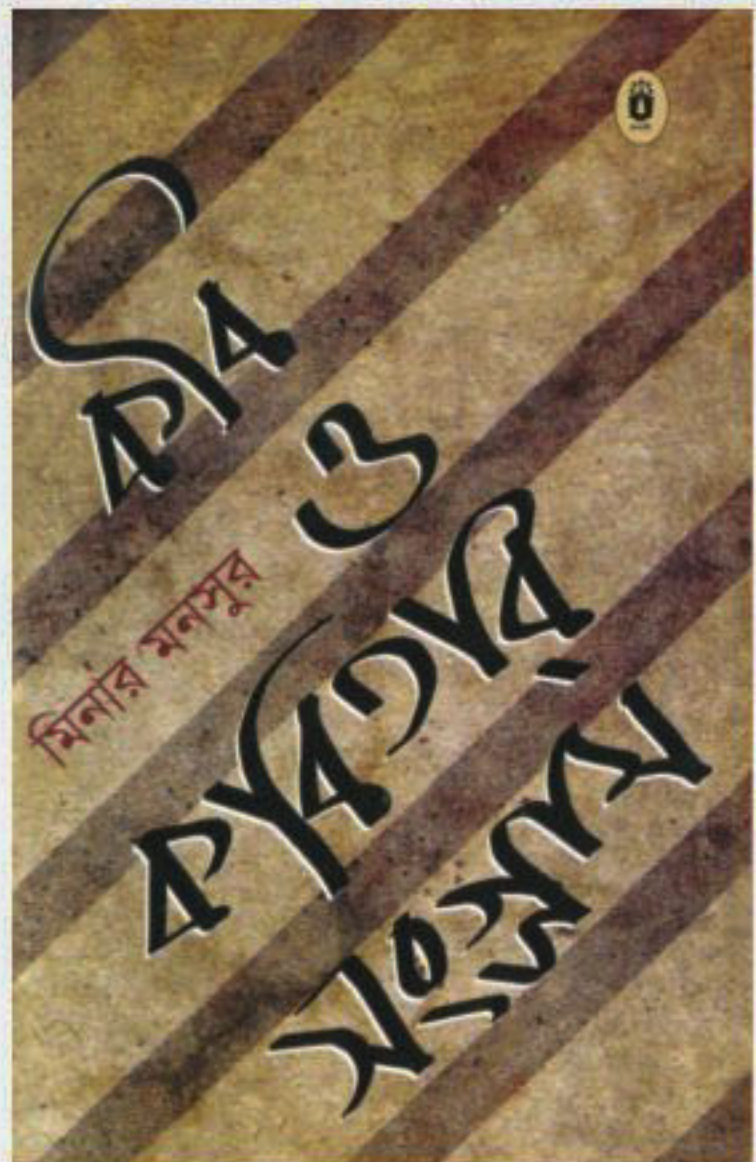
then lived with her husband. She was a mother of three when she was introduced to me as a fan ...

... In this case, however, I was completely unaware of a connivance that was being mischievously perpetuated and a situation being cleverly created by vested interests to draw a commitment from me ... my wife Saira stood by me when I admitted the grave mistake and asked her to give me some time to undo the wrong through proper legal processes and restore the sanctity of our marriage of sixteen years ... as a human being, I was not infallible and I became a victim of a situation that was set to precipitate a deep crisis in my marriage with Saira.'

That blunder apart, *The Substance and the Shadow* is the story of a humble young Pathan, who his father had thought would come by an OBE someday, striking out on a path not many Pathans look upon with equanimity. Dilip Kumar has been a good family man, having acted as a parent to his siblings following the death of his father, whom he called Aghaji, and his mother. He is well-read and speaks a number of languages --- Urdu, Pushto, Punjabi, English and others --- fluently.

Long years ago, when a beggar --- a fakir --- saw him at his childhood home in Peshawar, he told his grandmother to keep him away from the evil eye because he was destined to make his mark in the world. The prophecy was to be fulfilled. Yousuf Khan would become the legend Dilip Kumar.

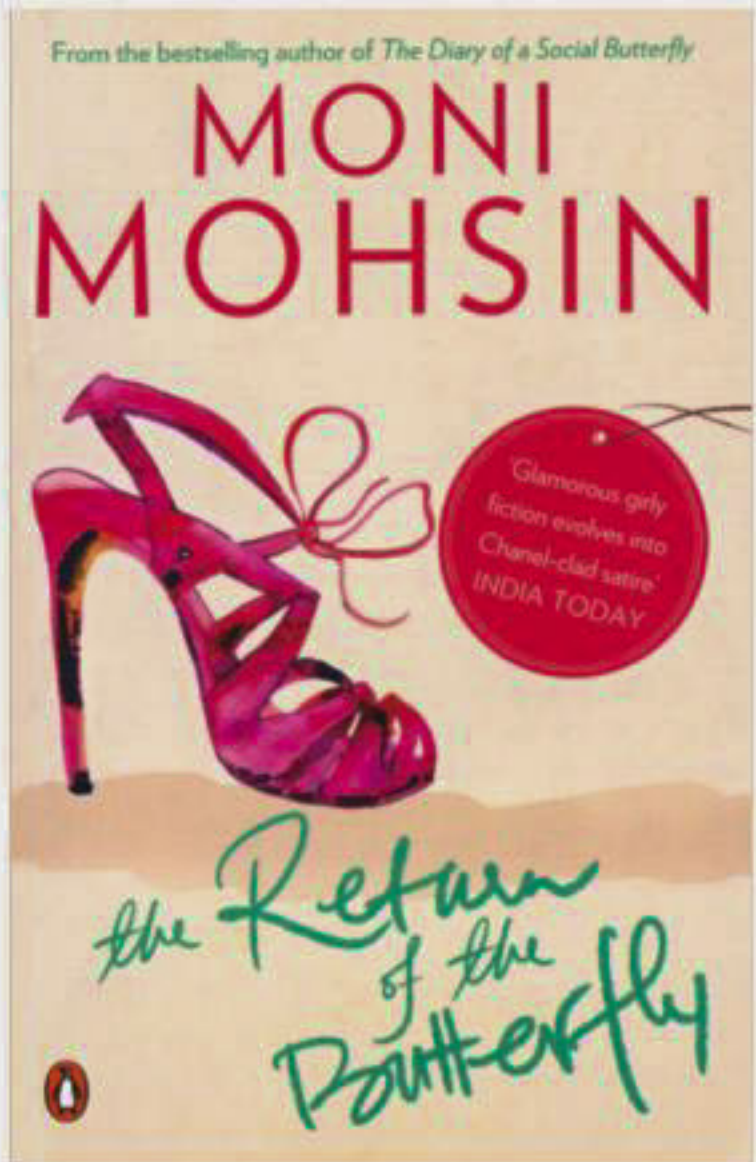
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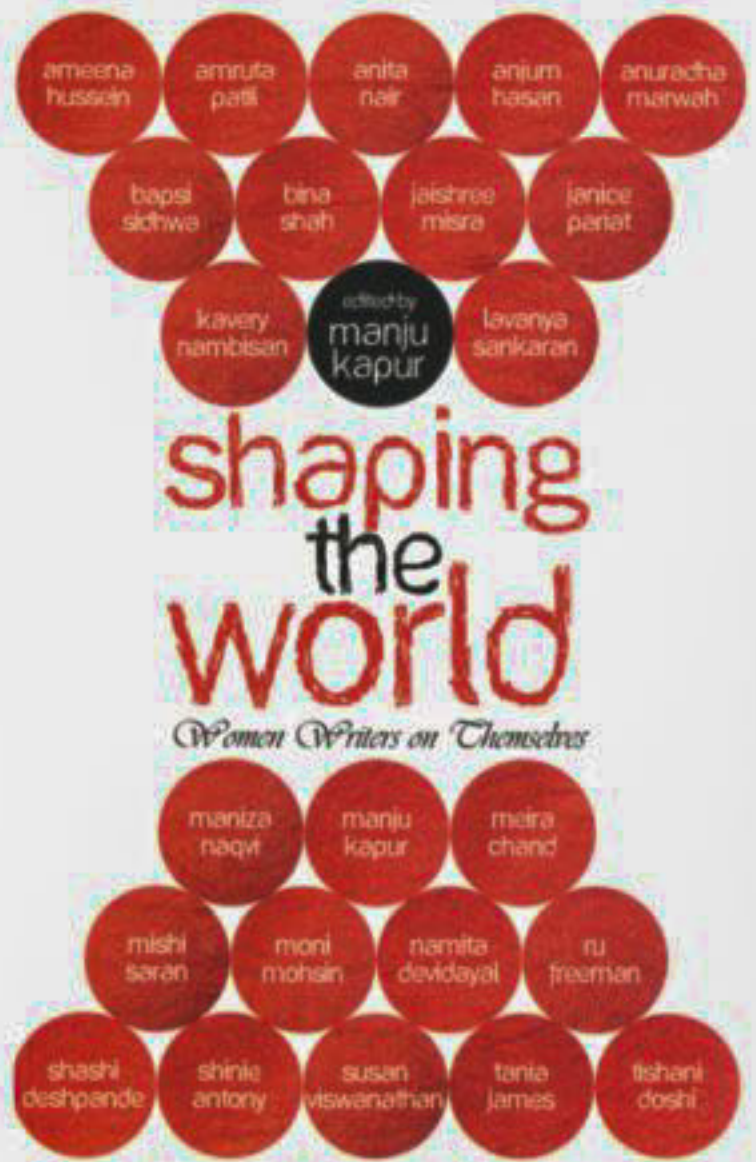
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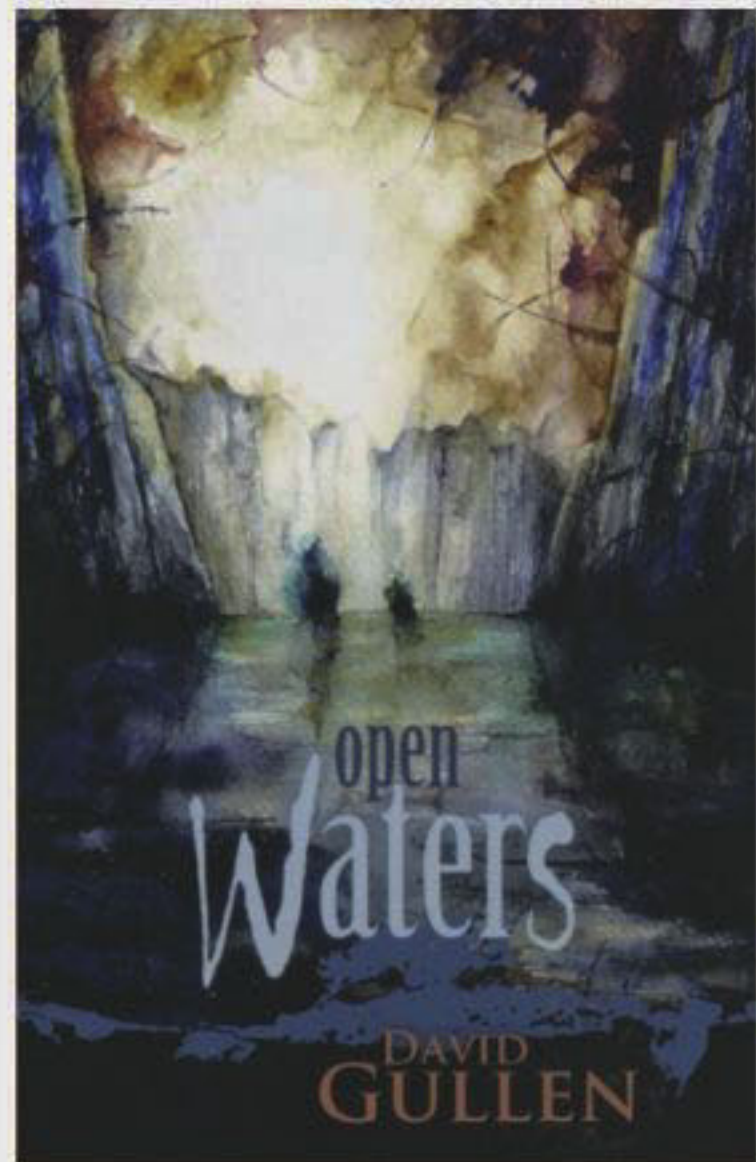
A Stranger's Tale
Mahbubar Rahman
Academic Press and Publishers Library



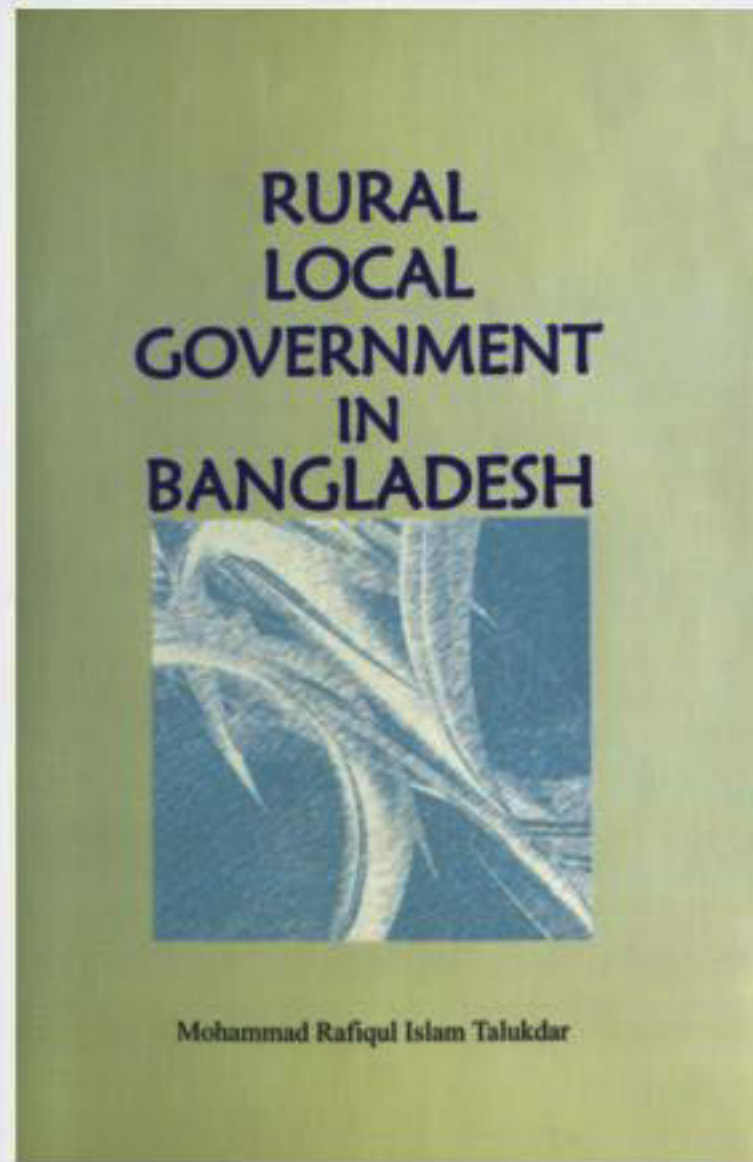
The Return of the Butterfly
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