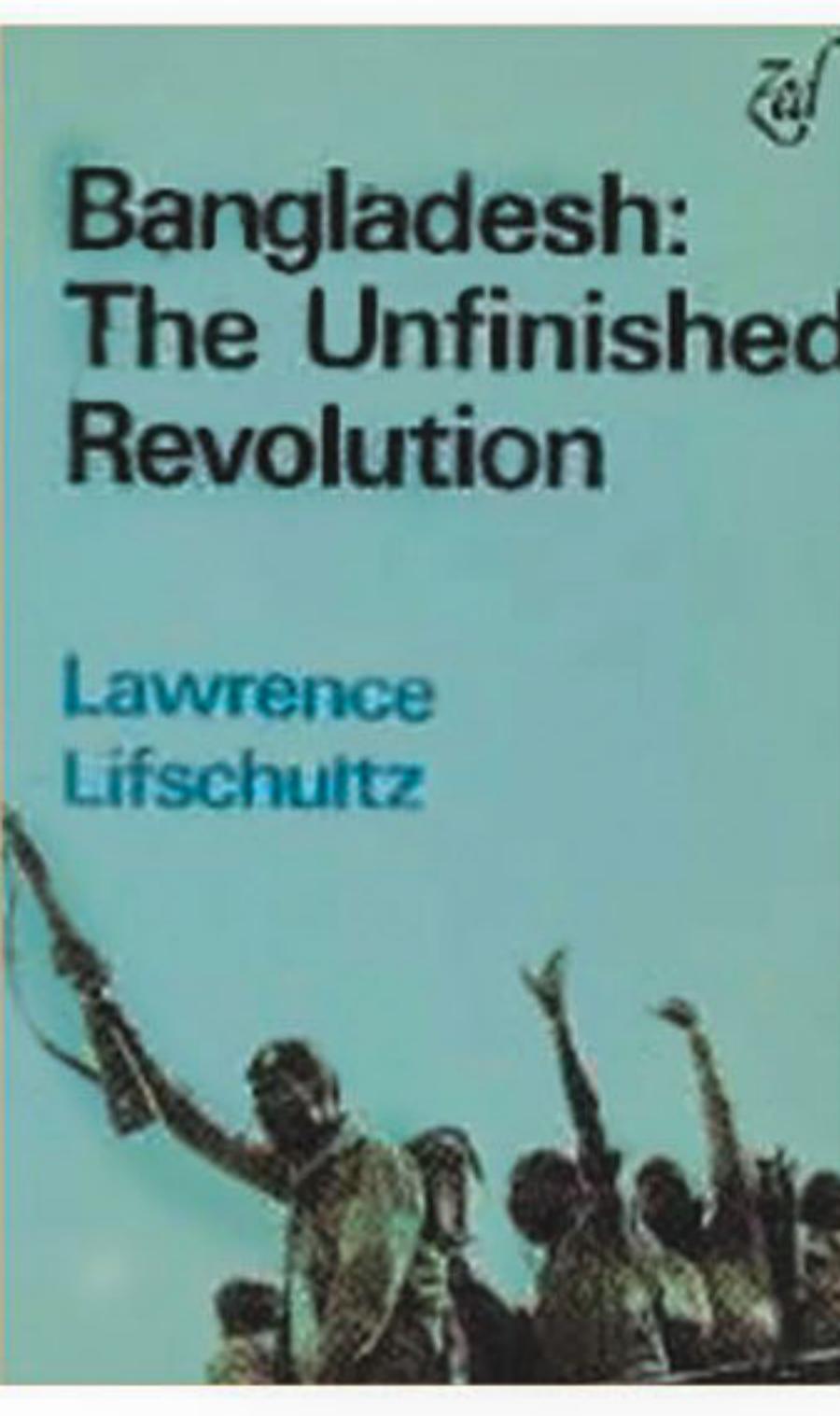


## REVIEW ARTICLE

## The written word on Bangabandhu

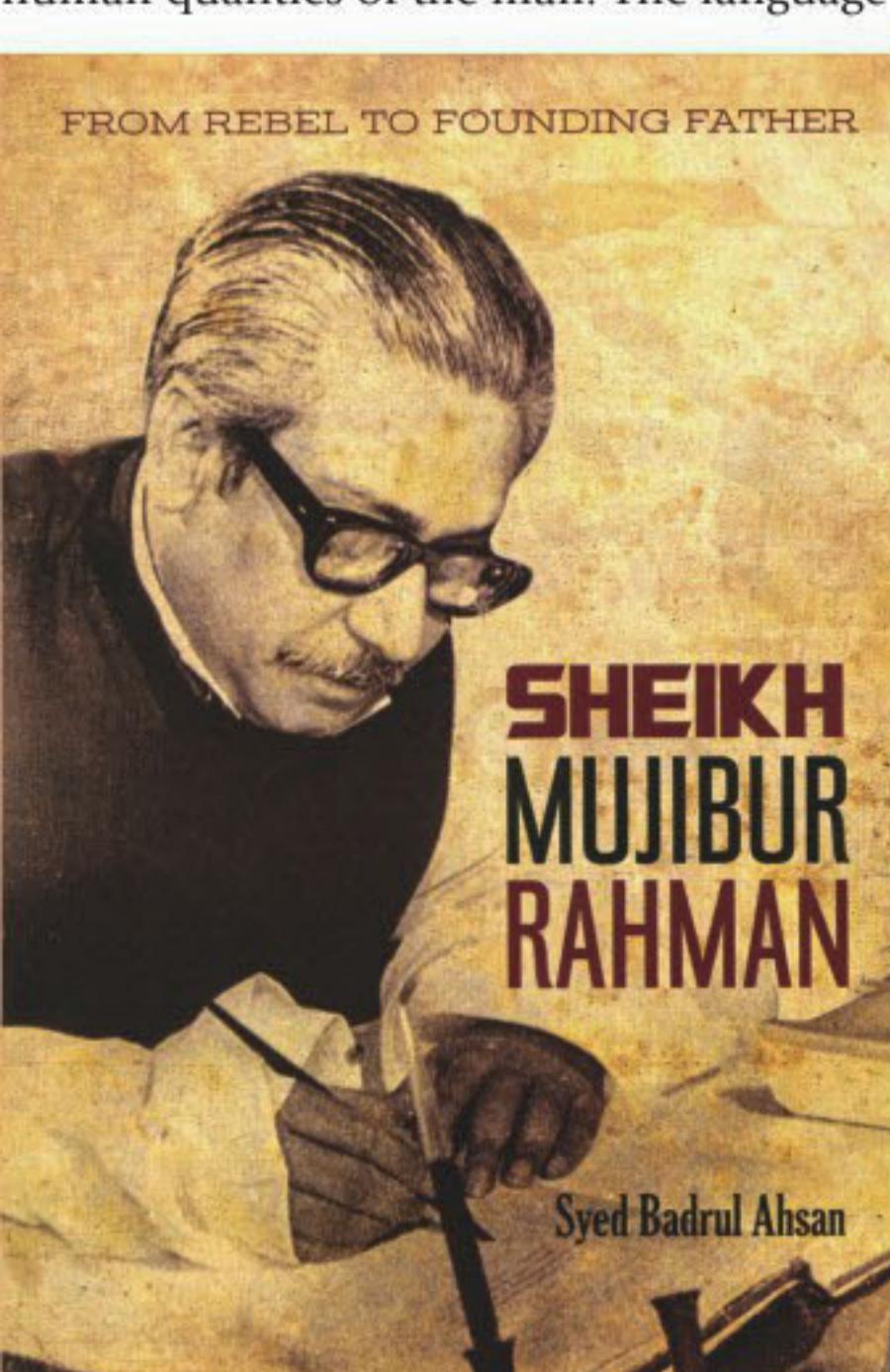


**O**n his final night alive, hours before he was assassinated, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman spent time reading George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*. Thirty nine years after the murder of the Father of the Nation, and the members of his family, Syed Badrul Ahsan makes note of some of the books that have been written about Bangabandhu since 1975. Here is a sample of the vast literature which has grown up around the historical personality of Bangladesh's founding father.

**Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib**  
Koekti Oithashik Dolil  
Abdul Matin  
Radical Asia Publications  
Abdul Matin, who died a few years ago, had been researching Bangabandhu's life and politics since the early 1970s. In this work, he draws extensively from documents previously in the hands of foreign governments, notably the United States, to explain the circumstances that led to the assassinations of August 1975. There are too some rich pickings from Keesing's, those that will be of immense help to anyone interested in studying the history of Bangladesh. It is especially the conspiracy that led to the killing of the Father of the Nation that arouses his interest. Included in the work under survey are some hard truths, those that political authors have sometimes pointed out. Among them are details pertaining to the letter purportedly written by the leftwing Bengali politician Abdul Haq to Pakistan's prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto seeking assistance in the matter of pushing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's government from office.

**Sheikh Mujib**  
Triumph and Tragedy  
S.A. Karim  
The University Press Limited  
The work happens to be one of those rare studies in the English language of Bangladesh's founding father. For years there has been a vacuum where presenting Bangabandhu to the outside world is concerned (not that much headway has been made in the matter). So what S.A. Karim, who served as a leading Bengali diplomat in the early years of a free Bangladesh and who saw many of the dramatic events unfold before his very eyes, does here is present an image of Bangabandhu and his leadership of the country in as realistic a manner as possible. The writer does not shy away from criticism of Mujib he feels is deserving. Mujib's role in the movement for regional autonomy and his leadership of the independence movement are commented on in great detail. And then Karim dwells on the issue of why Mujib went for a change from multi-party democracy to one-party rule in early 1975. In the manner of so many others, the author does not appreciate the transformation and ends up giving the impression that Baksal was a bad move for which Bangabandhu paid dearly.

**Shorone Bangabandhu**  
Faruq Choudhury  
Mawla Brothers  
The former diplomat is in awe of Bangabandhu. In this slim volume, he reflects on the politics of the Father of the Nation and, more importantly, on the human qualities of the man. The language



is simple and lucid and Choudhury properly gives out the impression that he is hugely impressed by the charisma of the leader.

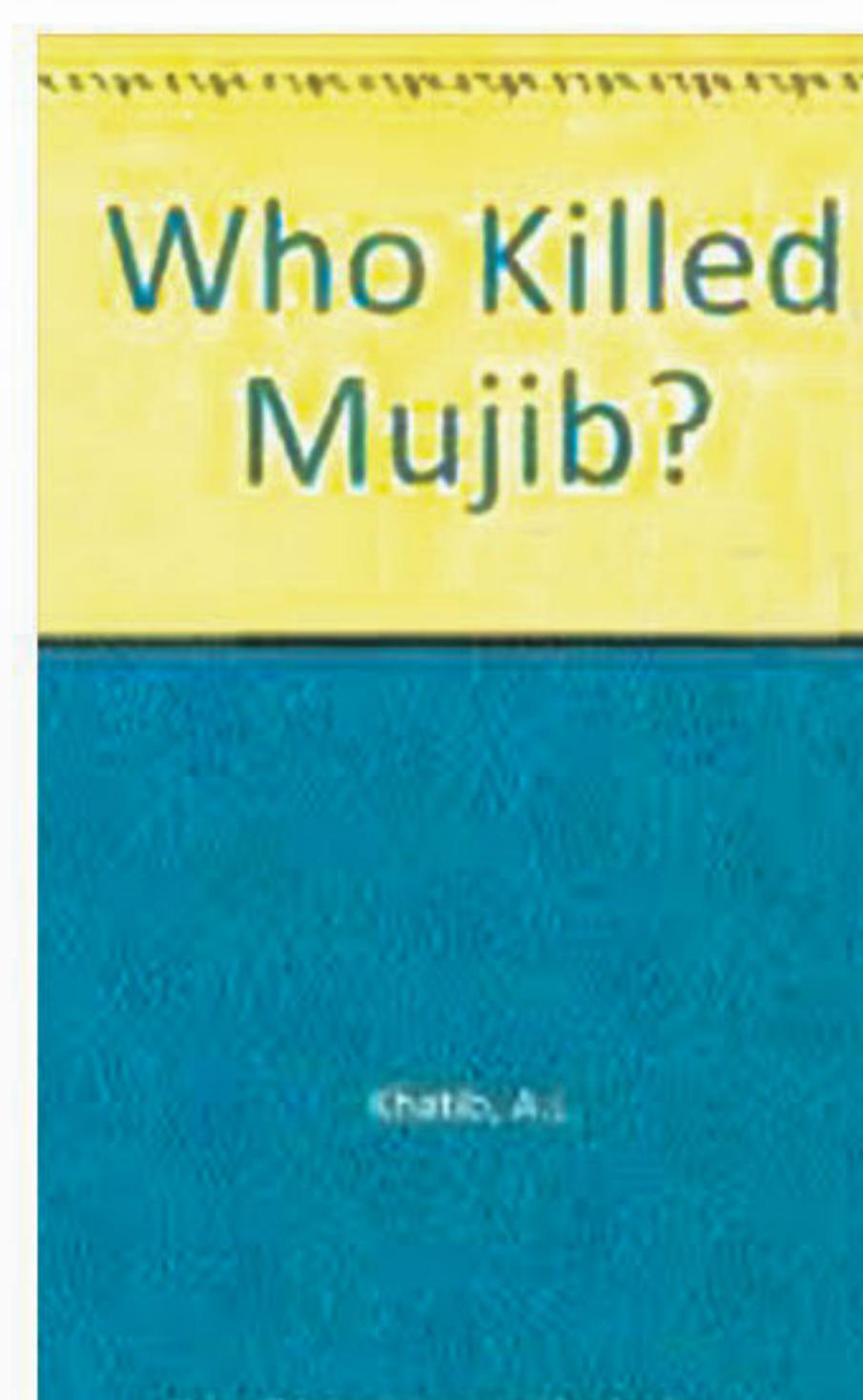
Faruq Chowdhury's work does not go into the intricate details of how Bangabandhu governed or how his government functioned. But that the government was confronted with a plethora of difficulties from day one to the end of Bangabandhu's life is made clear. And, of course, the vast conspiracy that was always at work in order to destabilize the government is broadly hinted at.

**Sheikh Mujib**  
Bangladesh Arok Naam  
Atiur Rahman  
Dipti Prokashoni

The work promises much to those who plan to research the evolution of East Pakistan into Bangladesh. The life of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, so Atiur Rahman conveys the impression and justifiably too, is fundamentally the history of Bangladesh, of the struggles its people have carried on through generations.

The author does a marvellous job of bringing together all the significant events of Bangabandhu's political career. But surely the beauty of the work lies in the detailed, chronological presentation of facts he engages in. It is thus that the Six Points, Eleven Points, Declaration of Independence, et cetera, come to readers in a form that enable them to understand the movement of history in this part of the world. On balance, it is a useful work, not to be ignored.

**Shotrur Chokh Bangabandhu**  
Dr. Mohammad Hannan  
Anupam Prakashani  
A work that is rather different from the usual assessments that are made of the Father of the Nation and his politics. Mohammad Hannan focuses on the views people not kindly disposed toward Bangabandhu happen to express about him. In a way, one could say, the author is coming forth with the other side of the picture, that which Mujib's opponents



have drawn up of his politics. You may not be convinced by what Bangabandhu's detractors have to say about the Bengali leader here. But it is worth a try reading the book. The book is, once again, quite a departure from works which usually flood the markets. Try reading it. You might end up liking it.

**Bangabandhu**  
Rajniti O Proshashon  
Bangabandhu Parishad  
Bangabandhu Parishad has been an intellectual forum for the Awami League or, more appropriately, its followers. As such, this work is in its totality a collection of essays from a wide range of individuals on the diverse aspects of Bangabandhu's politics and administration. Obviously, the write-ups are appreciative of Mujib's positions on the various issues he faced. You may not agree with everything, but you surely will get the drift of what the Father of the Nation tried to achieve during the brief three and a half years he was in power.

**Ekatturer Muktijuddho Roktakto**  
Moddho August O Shorhojonter November  
Col. (retd) Shafayat Jamil  
(with Shumon Kaiser)  
Shahity Prokash  
Shafayat Jamil was a key player in the dramatic events that were to unfold in November 1975. As part of the team led by Khaled Musharraf to reclaim the state from the predators who had commanded it barely three months earlier, he was instrumental in forcing Khondokar Moshtaq to resign and the killers of Bangabandhu and the four national leaders to quit Bangabandhu. The book deals with three historical aspects. There is the history, in however brief a fashion, of the war of liberation. That is followed by a comprehensive discussion of the tragedy of August 1975. And then, of course, comes an explication of the incidents and events leading from 3 November to 7 November 1975. Jamil is a survivor, a fortunate one. All the other leading figures of the Musharraf-led coup perished in the counter-coup spear-

headed by Colonel Abu Taher. Ziaur Rahman emerged as the eventual beneficiary, with such disastrous results.

**Father of the Nation**  
Bangabandhu Memorial Trust  
An admirable album of photographs and images of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, beginning with his schooldays and ending with the end of his life in August 1975. The pictures are interspersed with quotes from the Father of the Nation, all expressive of his thoughts regarding the course Bangladesh should be taking on its journey to the future. Copies just might yet be had at Bangabandhu Memorial Museum on Dhanmondi 32, the spot that is today part of Bangladesh's history --- of its glories, of its dark tragedies.

**Ekatturer 26 March**  
Bangabandhu Shadhinota Ghoshona  
Mohammad Shahjahan  
Bangla Prokashoni

Mohammad Shahjahan's focus, as the title of the book makes clear, is on the events surrounding the declaration of independence in March 1971. With various quarters trying to stir up controversy over what actually happened on 26 March and especially with the rightwing attempting to build up Ziaur Rahman as the man who formally announced the country's independence, the author presents the facts he thinks settle the issue once and for all. Shahjahan comes forth with documents, with news reports of the period in question and thus adds substance to his assertion that Bangabandhu did indeed send out the message of freedom to the country before he was taken into custody by the Pakistan army in the early hours of 26 March 1971.

**Geneva-e Bangabandhu**  
Abdul Matin  
Radical Asia Publications

Once again it is Abdul Matin, this time with an account of Bangabandhu's stay in Geneva following surgery in London in mid 1972. The Father of the Nation was in a state of convalescence in Switzerland, but that did not deter him from meeting any and every Bengali who came calling on him. Matin provides a fascinating account of all the men and matters that came to Bangabandhu's attention during that time --- the genuine ones, the insidious ones and the plain hangers on.

**Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Sharokgranthika**  
Jyotsna Publishers

This is a rich collection of articles on the life and achievements of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It comes in three volumes and brings together a rich assortment of ideas from diverse personalities, all of whom are united by a common position on the 1971 war of liberation and the ideals set by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman through the 1960s and 1970s. The volumes testify to the many facets of the Mujib character, those that have always made him stand out in the crowd and stand apart from his contemporaries. You really must appreciate the endeavour of those behind the compilations.

**Bangladesh**  
The Unfinished Revolution  
Lawrence Lifschultz  
Zed Press

The work comes in two segments. Lifschultz dwells at considerable length on Colonel Abu Taher and his ultimate end on the gallows in one. In the other, his subject is the personality and government of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the difficulties it came up against and the conspiracies which proved to be its undoing. Lifschultz writes with considerable bravery, which is again natural considering his status as a foreigner. He focuses on a number of salient points about the coup of August 1975 and while doing so points the finger at foreign governments he suspects clearly knew, if they did not exactly take part, in the programme to eliminate Bangladesh's founder.

**The Trial of Henry Kissinger**  
Christopher Hitchens  
Verso

This surely is an acclaimed book, not least because Hitchens made a reputation for himself as a plain-speaking writer. The work is divided into several chapters, the better to explain the nature of Henry Kissinger's sinister policies in places as diverse as Chile and Bangladesh. Where the matter is one of Bangabandhu's assassination, Hitchens leaves little doubt that the American establishment knew all about it before it happened. He comes down hard on then US ambassador to Bangladesh, Davis Eugene Boster (he misspells the name as Boster). The bigger significance of the work is the author's focus on Kissinger's deep hatred for Bangladesh, a nation that had the audacity to break away from the American client state of Pakistan. Kissinger snubbed Mujib in Washington by not being present at the White House meeting between the Bengali leader and President Ford, but a short while later he sought to make amends, by visiting Dhaka and calling on Bangabandhu.

It is a revealing book, a collector's item.

**Ponchattorer Roktokhoron**  
Major Rafiul Islam psc  
Afsar Brothers

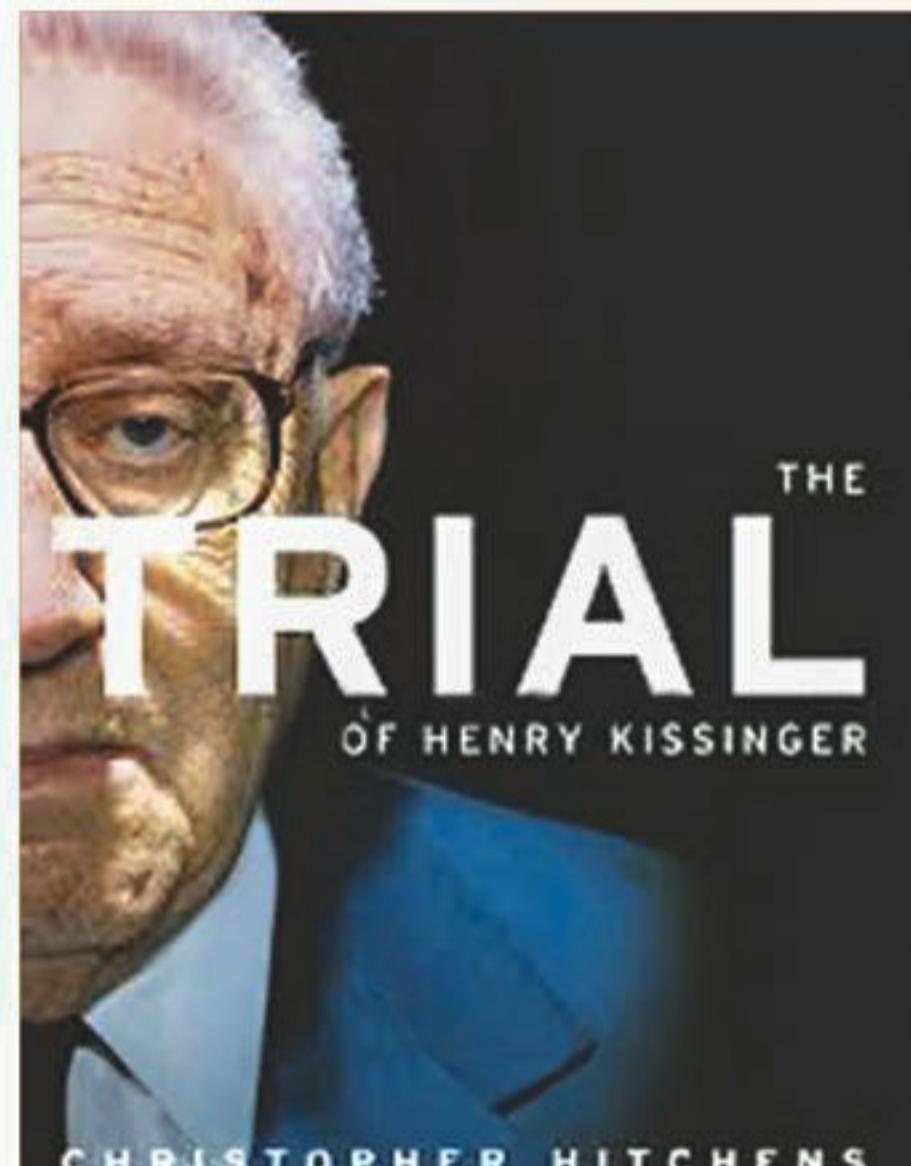
Rafiul Islam's book traces the entire history of the conspiracy that lay at the root of what happened on 15 August 1975. He names names and is often surprised that the very men who worked diligently for Pakistan in the days of rising Bengali nationalism or even after Bangladesh declared its independence in late March 1971 were chosen by Bangabandhu to be near him, and literally at that. It was these very men who destroyed the Father of the Nation.

**Who Killed Mujib?**  
A.L. Khatib  
Vikas Publishing House

One of the earliest books on the tragedy of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (the work was published in 1981), it explores the wide network of conspiracy that was to take the life of the Father of the Nation in 1975. A.L. Khatib, a prominent journalist with roots in Sri Lanka but based for the better part of his career in the South Asian subcontinent, brings out some intricate details of the plans shaped to do away with Bangabandhu. The criticism is there that the book was written in haste. Perhaps, but what certainly is of importance is that there is hardly any instance Khatib cites about the tragedy that one can be dismissive of. A whole range of characters people the book. Apart from Bangabandhu, there are all the other characters, notably the 'little sparrow of a man' that was Khondokar Moshtaq as also the political figures who constantly used to be around Mujib but at dawn on 15 August were found in the usurper's company.

**From Rebel to Founding Father**  
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman  
Syed Badrul Ahsan  
Niyogi Books, New Delhi

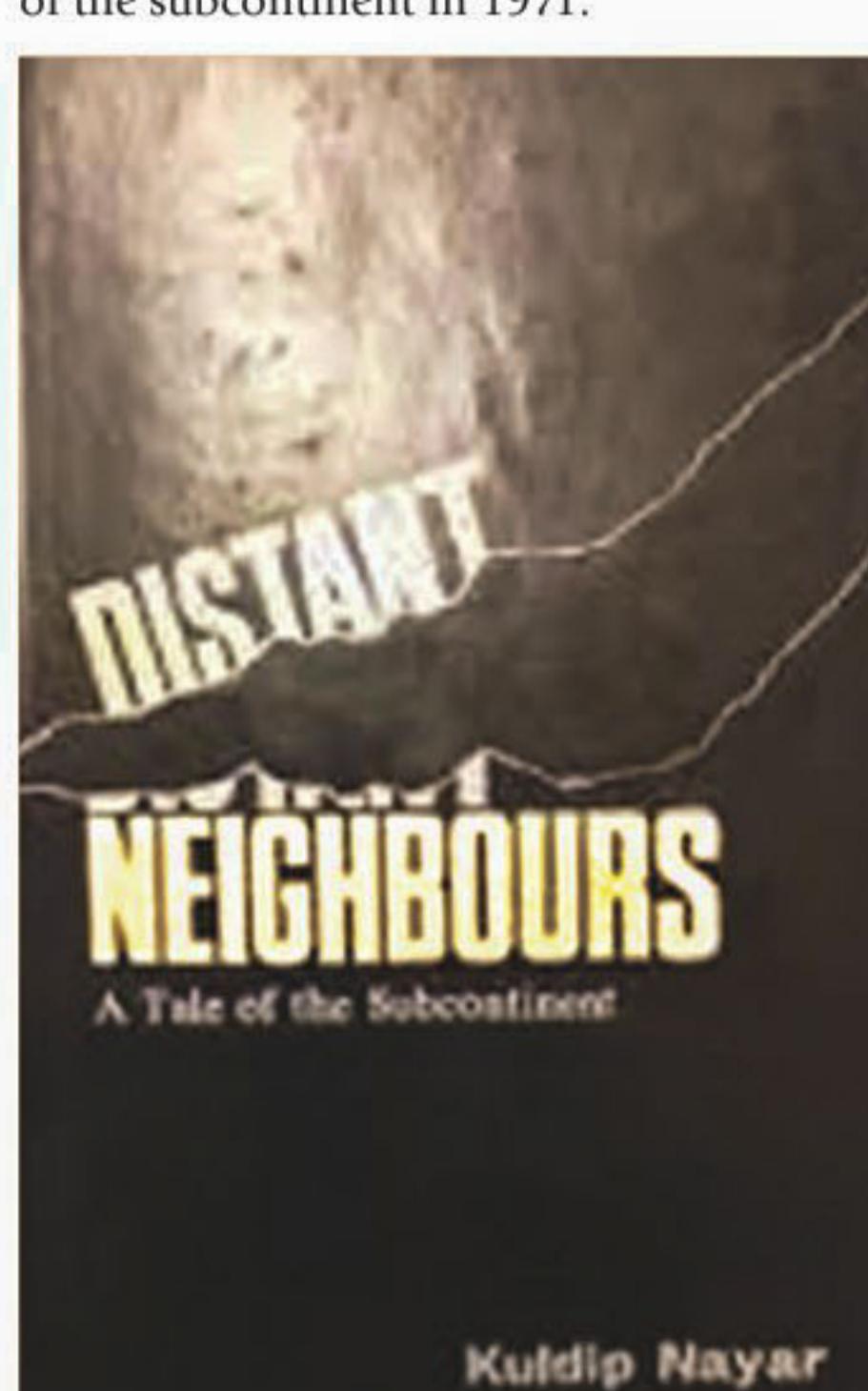
The work is a recent assessment of the life and achievements of the Father of the Nation, beginning with his foray into student politics in pre-partition Calcutta and ending with his assassination in Dhaka. In the process, the writer touches



on the philosophy that worked in Bangabandhu's gradual rise to pre-eminence in Bengali politics. Emphasis has also been placed on some of the crucial, and fateful, moves he made in post-Liberation Bangladesh, especially the growing rift between him and his steadfast lieutenant Tajuddin Ahmad.

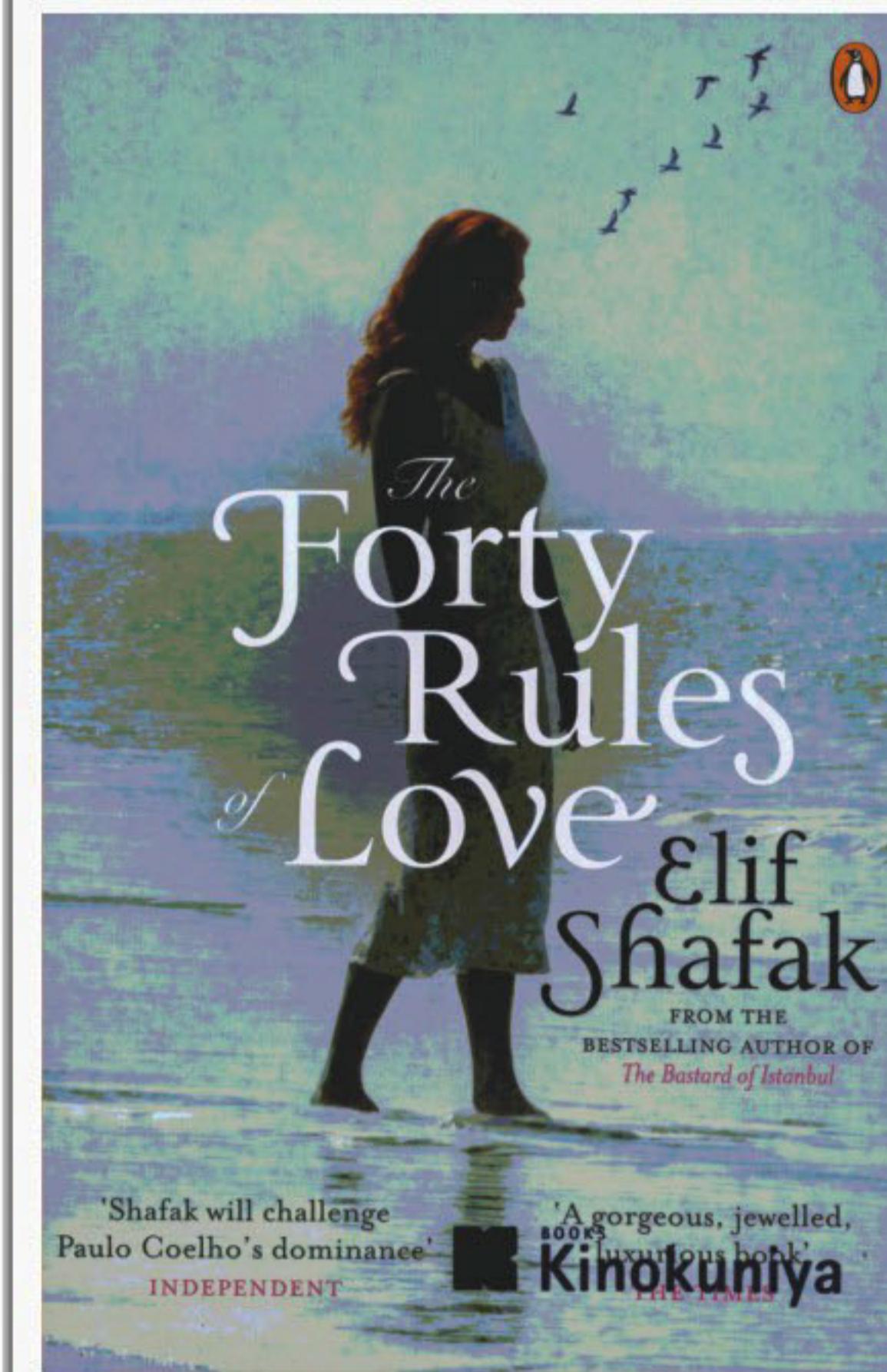
**Distant Neighbours**  
A Tale of the Subcontinent  
Kuldip Nayar

A book published in the early 1970s, months after the emergence of Bangladesh, it is essentially a series of interviews the veteran Indian journalist conducted with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Dhaka and Islamabad. The theme focuses on the interaction between the two men in the aftermath of Bangladesh's liberation in December 1971, when Bangabandhu was first placed under house arrest in Rawalpindi by his nemesis and then freed to return to a free Bangladesh. Nayar's conclusion is revealing: he finds Mujib's account of the talks to be truthful while Bhutto simply dissembles. The work is an interesting character study of the two men who played significant roles in the history of the subcontinent in 1971.



**Religions, like rivers, flow to the same sea**

*Nausheen Rahman is touched by love's variety*



**The Forty Rules of Love**  
Elif Shafak  
Penguin Books

**R**EADERS will find *The Forty Rules of Love* replete with sayings that seem to echo their wandering thoughts. These apparently simple words have profound connotations. This soul-stirring book talks about scholars (who deal with the mind) and mystics (who are concerned with the heart). The debates between the zealots and the sufis or dervishes, so very relevant and meaningful in today's confused and confusing world, make the book a godsend.

The 350-page novel swings back and forth - from the thirteenth to the twenty-first century. The link between these two eras is crafted skilfully by best-selling Turkish author Elif Shafak.

In the 13th century, the central characters are Shams of Tabriz, a dervish, and Rumi, a Sufi scholar. Their friendship, 'a union of two oceans', is the result of sharing the same quest, a quest for the divine truth, the ONE truth. In the present century is Ella Rubenstein, a Jewish mother of three teenaged children, living in Massachusetts. Her life, despite having everything it takes (or, at least, so we think), to be a happy, comfortable one, undergoes a sweeping transition - in a very unexpected way.

Ella, who is writing a report on a book on Sufism, *Sweet Blasphemy*, becomes very impressed with the writer, Aziz Z. Zahara. Over the days as they exchange emails and talk on the phone, she gradually falls in love with him. New colours begin entering her grey domain; and his story about divine love and true faith impacts her in a strong way. She learns about life, about relationships, and most importantly, about herself, while reading Aziz's book. She grows "wiser, calmer, more sensible".

The controversies surrounding not just Islam, but all Abrahamic religions, give rise to incisively-argued explanations in the sections of the book which are about the past. Modern-day infidelity, mother-children relationships, the craving for fulfilling love, are some of the issues dealt with in the chapters covering the present. Each chapter lays bare the thoughts of one or other character, thus letting us understand what they are all feeling.

The differences between religiosity and spirituality have been elucidated and, whether we agree with the beliefs written about, or not, we do end up pondering over them. We read a few pages, pause to ruminative, then eagerly continue reading. As we do so, we are also looking into our "self", our inner being: "Whosoever knows himself, knows the One".

Relying to a badly beaten-up drunk's question "But don't you Sufis ever doubt anything about Him?" Shams of Tabriz smiles a tired smile", and says "We do, and doubts are good. It means you are alive and searching".

*The Forty Rules of Love* is Eastern mysticism at its best. These rules are basically what all religions preach, but are expressed and interpreted differently; none of them sound preachy or soppy. They are eye-openers, delicate, subtle reminders of concepts or notions we are perhaps already acquainted with, but don't understand fully. Besides, as it is said, "Religions are like rivers: They all flow to the same sea".

It dawns on us that philosophers, saints, sufis, etc, are who or what they are because they are thinking, rational beings, but who also give a lot of importance to feelings and emotions - without harbouring any kind of bias or presumption.

*The Forty Rules of Love* is a handbook we can refer to, when in doubt about certain matters, or when in need of spiritual reassurance. That is not to say, that it can, in any way, whatsoever, be any kind of substitute for any religious book or writing.

Love, in its various forms, is the basis of the book. Love for the Creator is projected through love for fellow-humans, even if these humans are lepers, drunkards, harlots, etc. The many, interesting anecdotes cause the book to be even more readable.

Shafak has written about romantic love with as much ease and flair, as she has, about spiritual love. Ella's story tells us that love can be found in unlikely places, and at improbable times, and that it can prove to be deep and fulfilling. However, sorrow being an inevitable part of life, must also be accepted, for, as the maxim goes "Where there is love, there is bound to be heartache".

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