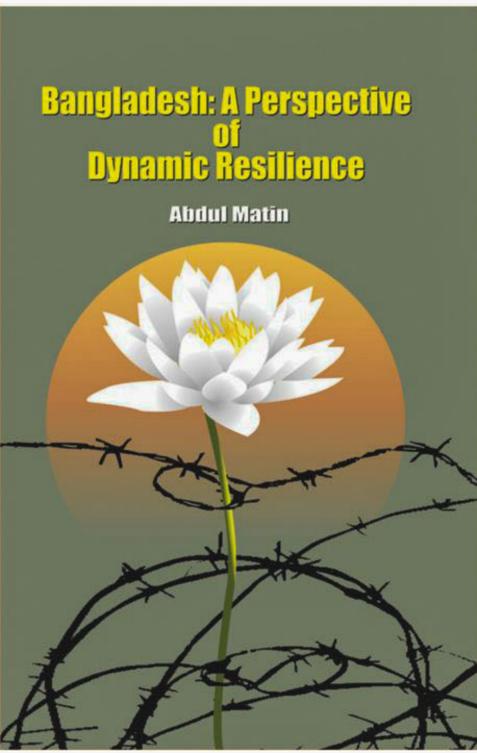


# A landscape of ideas

Muhammad Zamir appreciates a compilation of essays



**A Perspective of Dynamic Resilience**  
Dr. Abdul Matin  
Palok Publishers

MANY of us have had the pleasure of following Dr. Abdul Matin's views on various issues through his opinion columns published in different national newspapers. A nuclear physicist and an electrical engineer, he is best known for his articles on nuclear energy and effective electrical power system planning. He has also written on different national issues, including aspects of science and technology, economics, politics and the paradigm of climate change. While doing so, consistent with his training as a scientist, he has always tried to objectively analyse the subject under review on the basis of available facts and figures. Impartiality, non-politicization and pragmatism have been his benchmarks. These factors as we all know are not always available in the case of others.

His efforts in this regard are marked by a simple, straightforward and practical approach and in simple English. This has made his work eminently readable and easy to understand for not only professionals but also students and the general public.

Matin has written several books over the last few years and demonstrated his skill in being able to take an optimistic view with regard to the many challenges that we may have faced over the years in Bangladesh.

The book under review contains forty articles written between 2011 and 2013 and deal with diverse areas of contemporary interest. It starts with his appreciation that those responsible for framing our Constitution could do so within such a short time and that too, after a bloody independence struggle that lasted for nine months. He then goes on to recall how Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was able to persuade the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in March 1972 to complete the withdrawal of Indian troops from the territory of Bangladesh. One could add here that this important step by Bangabandhu was directly responsible for us being able to not only counter Pakistani allegations that we were an Indian colony but also subsequently encouraged many countries to recognize Bangladesh as an independent state.

In his other articles Matin has mentioned the need to be careful on the question of generating energy through nuclear power, to analyze the cost-effectiveness of rental power, the necessity to be more pragmatic in our approach to the Tipaimukh Project and also to carefully monitor the potential impact of climate change in view of our vulnerabilities. Similarly, he has made important observations on the prevailing status and challenges being faced currently by our RMG industry. These op-eds contain some practical suggestions that need to be considered carefully.

The article tracing the impact of our Language Movement on our national ethos over the last six decades is well researched. However, he appears to have failed to take note of the significant achievement of Ekushey acquiring international recognition as International Mother Language Day.

An engineer and a scientist, the author in another section of his book has correctly stressed the need for our relevant educational institutions and autonomous research organizations receiving higher funding to facilitate greater research in engineering and technology. I believe that this measure could be implemented through the concept of corporate social responsibility of our many private sector financial institutions.

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR IS A FORMER DIPLOMAT AND FORMER CHIEF INFORMATION COMMISSIONER

# The little reasons for joy

Tulip Chowdhury recommends a work to readers

THE title of the book would suggest a really long book review. How can you write about 14,000 things to be happy about without using thousands of words? But the author, Barbara Ann Kipper, has written about the blessings in her life with a straight list, in a cute little book. It's like driving the nail straight home, no beating about the bush about how each one of us has the eyes to observe the world with. Although she gives a number for happy things, to the reader happiness goes far beyond them. When one reads the list of ordinary things that come in the way, the mind just soars higher and you find countless happy things of your own. One realizes what a blessing it is to witness each sunrise, to wake up each morning and to have someone to say, "I love you."

Reading *14,000 things to be happy about* is like lighting the candle wick. It may be a small speck of light you touch but soon the whole surrounding is lit with a bigger light. The author writes about happiness with, *finally getting your hair cut so that they are out of your eyes, crayons for kids at restaurants, ordering French fries, looking on the world from the top of a Ferris wheel, extra rest, date bread...* She writes of so many other quirky, compulsive and irresistible things that make us happy. She writes of *drawing your own rainbow, of touching wet babies and of the delight of wearing Hawaiian shirts.*

The author's tapestry of wording happiness with touches of colours is like a painting from Van Gogh. The book, unique in its cover design and interior with a straight list of things, can also be called a "long list". The reader does not have a plot or climax to evaluate. There is no protagonist to discuss or characters to describe. And yet in *14,000 things to be happy about*, life comes with a complete story. It touches sorrow and joy through butterfly wings that make us smile. When the author writes of the things that make her happy, the reader reads between the lines and realizes that if we do not appreciate our blessings, we would have clouds of unhappiness hanging over us. Kipper shows us how to be grateful without preaching, she tells us that life is a package of small things bundled into big surprises without giving long sermons. The book also has 125 illustrations that are very witty and make the reader stare at the pictures for long. The reader's mind registers the lists and the pictures of everyday happenings and savours the lessons imparted. Readers will likely ask each other, "Oh, why didn't we see that a simple thing like a hug from a co-worker can set the day to peace and contentment?" Even humorous observations into human nature as ...



**14,000 things to be happy about**  
Barbara Ann Kipper  
Workman Publishing, NY

*sleeping naked between clean sheets, the mountain tops of love, high sexy heels, sliced tomatoes...* make one reflect on different life perceptions.

Kipper is a teacher imparting life lessons with a gentleness that is a touch without really extending a hand, speaking the words without really uttering any and yet you feel so good when you have this book to keep you company. The most remarkable thing is that it has an ending without a real ending. You read and re-read, thinking of how much more you can add to things that can make us happy, that is, looking at your own greener side of the field.

Looking for light on a blue day? The happy book, *14,000 things to be happy about*, by Barbara Ann Kipper is sure to snap you out and have you smiling.

TULIP CHOWDHURY IS A POET AND NOVELIST. SHE CURRENTLY RESIDES IN THE US

# The man before the controversies came

Pallab Bhattacharya reads a daughter's report on her father

IN the crowd and cacophony of controversies set off by tell-all books on some of India's top politicians since the run-up to the Indian parliamentary elections, a new book on former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh by his daughter Daman Singh, an author who is engaged in rural development work, stands out easily for two principal reasons.

First, it chronicles the journey of a man from a non-descript village named Gah (now in Pakistan), who rose to become a key economist-bureaucrat and finance minister, set India off on the path of economic reforms and liberalization before making his way to the top executive post—prime minister—and remaining

full of humour and banter when in the company of friends. It also tells us how Manmohan Singh, being prodded by his father, pursued a pre-medical course for two months and worked at his shop before losing interest in both and returning to college to study economics; his years of struggle with poverty while studying in school; Cambridge where he at times skipped meals and survived on just chocolates because the scholarship money was not enough. His father struggled to send him money from India on time.

Why did Manmohan Singh choose economics as the subject? "I was always interested in issues of poverty, why some countries are poor and why others are rich. I was told that economics is the subject which asks these questions", the former PM tells his daughter. When Manmohan returned from Cambridge, he was a highly suitable groom and the first question he asked the beautiful Gursharan, his would-be wife, was about her educational qualifications.

While Daman Singh's book avoids venturing into her father's tenure as prime minister, it compensates in large measure by making her father talk on a number of political and economic issues before he became the head of government and his views on some of them are not at all in sync with the Congress' official stand. For instance, Manmohan Singh says the imposition of the Emergency in the mid-1970s by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi came as a "surprise" and nobody expected that Indira Gandhi would "go that far". He talks about seeing "an atmosphere of fear in the country where there were many arbitrary arrests and detentions". Singh also tells the writer that "there was a lot of unrest in the country due to the way the family planning programme—the sterilization programme—in the country was implemented in some of the northern states and in Delhi". He felt Indira's son Sanjay Gandhi was "the most important extra-constitutional authority" at the time.

As a bureaucrat, Singh managed to survive in key posts under different dispensations whose views on political and economic issues were diverse. After the Emergency, when the Morarji Desai-led Janata Party government came to power through the general elections of 1977, many officers were shunted out but Manmohan Singh kept his job. "When Morarji Desai became the PM, he had been told that I was close to the previous (Indira Gandhi) government. So, he was quite rude to begin with. But after sometime, he became very fond of me. Morarji Desai was fairly balanced, although people misunderstand him as a very rigid man", Manmohan tells Daman Singh.

The first big break for Manmohan Singh came under Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao in 1991 when Singh was appointed finance minister of India, a move which, as Manmohan Singh tells his daughter, came "out of the blue". Manmohan Singh seized the opportunity to launch India on the path of reforms at a time when the international community's confidence in the country was badly shaken as India had to mortgage gold with the Bank of England, the value of the Indian currency nosedived and India ran the risk of defaulting on its international payment commitments. For effecting the economic turnaround of India, Manmohan Singh resorted to measures that militated against the traditional quasi-socialist principles of the Congress. According to Manmohan Singh, Rao was initially sceptical about liberalization but was later on convinced with that what was being done was right and that there was no other way out.

Daman Singh's book lets us know that Manmohan Singh, as a public servant, somewhere along the way retreated from family affairs and allowed his work to take over his life, leaving Gursharan Kaur to become the focal point in the family and the link between the economist-bureaucrat and his three daughters, all of whom have a standing of their own in different fields.

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA IS A SENIOR INDIAN JOURNALIST BASED IN NEW DELHI

# Partly nostalgia, partly agony...

Tusar Talukder strolls through a poet's world

TWO or three years back, I was intensely engrossed with the poetry of some contemporary young poets such as Obayed Akash, Binoy Barman, Mujib Erom and so on. Consequently I reviewed several books by some of them. Truly speaking, I got attracted to our contemporary short stories as well Latin American literature. Sometime ago, I came by a collection of poetry, *Nodir Nam Dushshomoy*, by Mashuk Chowdhury.

Allow me to jot down some words regarding Mashuk Chowdhury. A poet of the 1970s, he invariably tries to keep himself far away from our known poets' circles. Which is why very few of us have had the opportunity to get acquainted with his poetry. My opinion, if Wordsworth is right in defining poetry as a 'spontaneous overflow of feelings', is that Mashuk Chowdhury has rightly captured that feeling. Of late, it has been my habit, whether it is good or bad I do not know, to hand over any newly got copy of a book to one of my elder brothers, R. K. Saha, a sheer literature lover. In the matter of reviewing this book, his opinions also helped me stay on the proper track.

Surprisingly enough, I went through almost all the poems of the collection in one sitting. At the outset, the composition, 'Pherar Train Nei' (No Train to Return) portrays the days the poet left behind, bearing a nostalgic tone. I can assure you that many of us can relate to the tales of the poem. The poem encapsulates the poet like a train passing through the golden time of his life. And now he is living in an age of destruction. He believes time has thrown him into the chaos of this human civilization. Bad times come to the poet like a big question mark because he deeply feels there is no train left to go back from this terrible age. Thereupon he finds the present age enervating. The next poem, 'Dusomoy' (Bad Time) carries the essence of the preceding poem. Here the poet argues that as the days go by, the darkness of the human mind is getting deeper and deeper. This composition also projects the idea that lyricism has evaporated from modern poetry like the decaying nature of women's beauty. The poet laments this irreparable loss. Now 'poetry' has become synonymous with 'antipathy'. To clarify the matter, Mashuk Chowdhury has the following lines:

"Poetry can be attacked and avoided  
But it cannot be demolished"  
The lines conspicuously inform us of the poet's belief in the imperishability of poetry. Apart from, this notion of Mashuk is somehow similar to the belief of William Shakespeare regarding poetry. Mashuk also reminds us that a poet is committed to none; he/she is only committed to history and civilization. Nobody can share the happiness as well as the sorrows of a poet. His/her feelings are only stocked for himself/herself.

In 'Dusomoy' (Bad Time), the poet engages himself in a debate about who is a poet or who is not. In other words, what the responsibility a poet must have or must not have is the most talked about issue of the poem. Poems like 'Smritir Shohor' and 'Gochhito Smriti' are packed with nostalgic tones. Again, the poem

entitled 'Shishoswargo' (Heaven of Children) provides us with an idea of the utopian state which will be governed only by children. A child will be given the charge of prime minister. The poem allegorically focuses on the safety of children. The rights of children will be strictly implemented in that state. The state will guarantee the security of life for all children, even their right of vote. By the same token, 'Kobitar Sangbidhan' (Charter of Poetry) declares that there is no word like

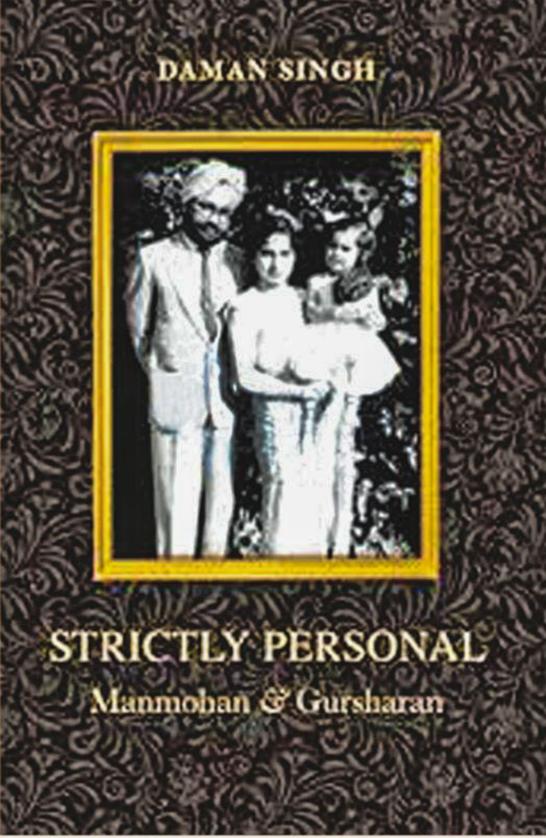


**Nodir Naam Dushshomoy**  
Mashuk Chowdhury  
Shahosh Publications

'forbidden' in the constitution of poetry. Poetry is free, untamed and wild. To decipher the idea, the poet here utters the following lines: "Like a freedom fighter I alone am enough To protect pure love" The book ends with 'Life goes on and on', informing us that only love can make a bridge among people. The end-note takes one aback. "People, deeply prone to love Repeatedly coming to the temple of love Got satisfied, With a thought of a token-less existence of immortality"

Overall, the book comprises of three parts. The beginning poems unfold the nostalgic thoughts of the poet, the middle part depicts his lamentation at not getting his desired universe and the concluding phase exposes the underlying strength of love.

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**Strictly Personal**  
Manmohan and Gursharan  
Daman Singh  
HarperCollins

there for a decade from May 2004 to May 2014 of the world's most populous democracy. Secondly, the book stops just before Singh became prime minister, avoiding the political landmine of having to deal with so many sensitive issues relating to politics, economy and diplomacy he had to face in ten years in the top post. For some, though, the second reason has come for disappointment for they thought the book would shed some light on at least some facets of Singh's tenure as PM. Maybe we can look forward to such a book by Singh himself at a later time.

Yet the book, based on Daman's conversations with her father and mother Gursharan Kaur, does make public many unfamiliar aspects of Manmohan Singh, usually a reticent personality and a man of very few words in public life, who is