

Sufia Kamal

By Maleka Begum
Prothoma Prokashan
Published in 2015

Reviewed by Tusar Talukder

A tale of revolution and enlightenment



institutional education, her inquisition to know the outside world was not stopped. She prepared herself as a self-educated woman who came out from the cocoon of traditional and superstitious society. At the very beginning of her teenage, Sufia had come across almost all the substantial works of Kazi Nazrul Islam. She was also introduced to Rabindranath Tagore's works that time. Sufia Kamal's vast reading helped her a lot to be a writer. Apart from reading, she would send her stories and poems to different newspapers and magazines. This way she got familiarity in the then literary arena.

tion. Her husband suddenly died on 9 December, 1932. In this regard, Maleka Begum, much relevantly, mentions that Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, who gravely influenced Sufia Kamal's thoughts through her revolutionary notions, died just ten days before the demise of Sufia Kamal's husband. Perhaps, the sudden demise of these two influential figures dampened Sufia Kamal's spirit to a large extent. However, her mother helped her overcome the shock. Afterwards, she stepped into a new world of Kolkata where she had to struggle a lot to lead life in her own way.

This phase of the review discusses the way Maleka Begum brings into focus the role Sufia Kamal played during different mass movements. She has deciphered how Sufia Kamal became a unique figure in the society during the times of crisis, how she led the nation staying at the forefront of various protests of mass people, how she played the role of a guardian to the people of the then East-Pakistan during the language movement in 1952 and how she helped and inspired the freedom fighters during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. In a word, Sufia Kamal showed her utmost bravery during times of crisis.

Last but not least, Maleka Begum's book helps us recollect the struggles and achievements of Sufia Kamal. It purveys us the information that Sufia Kamal hugely reinforced the women's movement in Bangladesh. Her brainchild, Begum Patrika undoubtedly represents her thoughts for the progress of women. The book, overall, embellishes us with the synopsis that Sufia Kamal was a self-enlightened woman who, throughout her life, relentlessly worked to spread the sparks of enlightenment all around.

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Novera Ahmed

Edited by Abul Hasnat
Published by Bengal Publications Limited
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Cover design: Rafiqun Nabi

Page: 160

Price: Taka 250.00

Reviewed by Supriti Sarkar

THE book encompasses Novera Ahmed; the sculptor and individual through the eyes of many well known writers such as Mehboob Ahmed, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Abdus Salam Choudhury, Rabiul Hussain, Rezaul Karim Sumon, S.M.Ali and many more.

To many she is a reknowned artist but very few know much about her personal life. The book is a perfect collage of her academic, professional and personal life. Novera Ahmed is a force to be reckoned with. Edited by Abul Hasnat, the book embodies memories that the writers had with Novera Ahmed. Without diminishing the individual style of the writers, he harmoniously sews their accounts of her in such a manner that it almost seems like a biography of her life.

Novera Ahmed is considered larger than life; her work is deemed to be ahead of its time but that has never allowed the sculptor to lose sight of her roots and traditions. Novera Ahmed's use of material for her sculptures ranged from cement, marble to plaster, wood and stones. Her works are described in the book as unique, feminine, natural and exquisite and her sense of architecture is praised and considered by many of the critics as aesthetically beautiful. Novera Ahmed was a major contributor in the erection of the Shaheed Minar and also has a 3 part installation appropriately titled the "Seated Woman" that is compared with Switzerland's Matterhorn (a natural almost perfect pyramidal peak of a mountain in the Alps). Her first exhibition was a major success. There was no denying the brimming creativity of the artist and the success that she would go on to achieve in the coming years. Her work of art let that be paintings or scul-



tures are famous amongst art circles in London, Pakistan, Bangkok. S.M Ali described Novera Ahmed as a beacon in the world of sculptors. Novera Ahmed experimented with different mediums and these pieces are considered symbols of raw art. The artist herself believes that every work of art is about its architecture and aesthetic beauty. Readers will not only be enlightened but get a peek into the mindset of one of the most well known artist's of our time. Novera Ahmed's sculptures display extremities of human emotions without losing its grasp on reality.

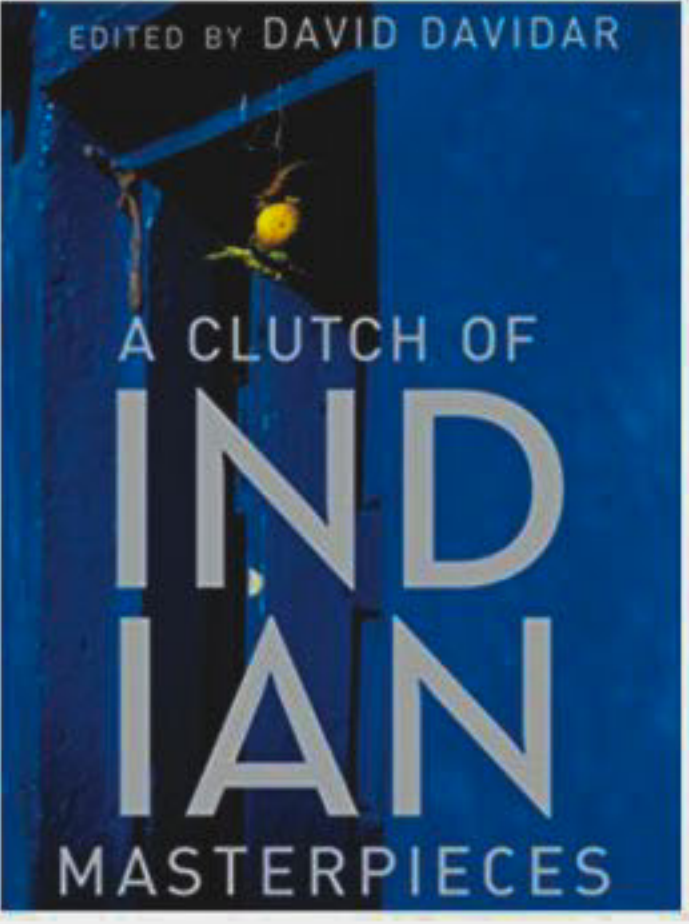
The reviewer works at The Daily Star.

A Clutch of Indian Masterpieces

Extraordinary Short Stories from the 19th Century to the Present

By David Davidar

The stories in this collection will make you see the world differently as the greatest stories always do. The thirty-nine short stories in this book will blow you away. Starting with a ghost story by Rabindranath Tagore, India's most famous writer and ending with a fable by Kanishk Tharoor, a writer who has come of age in the twenty first century, these literary masterpieces showcase the extraordinary range and diversity of our story telling tradition. The first recognizably modern Indian short stories were written in Bengal (by Tagore and others) in the second half of the nineteenth century and writers from other regions were quick to follow suit, often using the form to protest colonial oppression and the various ills afflicting rural



and urban India. Over the next century and a half, some of the finest writers the world has seen produced outstanding fiction in every conceivable genre. Many of these stories find a place in this volume, as does work by emerging talent that has never been published in book form before. Here you will find stories of classical realism, ones rooted in folklore and myth, tales of fantasy, humor, horror, crime and romance, stories set in villages, small towns, cities and the moon. They will entertain you and shock you, they will lighten your mood and cast you down, they will move you and make you reflect on life's big and little questions. Most of all, they will make you see the world differently as the greatest stories always do.

These books are available at Omni Books. Reviewed by the publisher.

Private Life of the Mughals of India

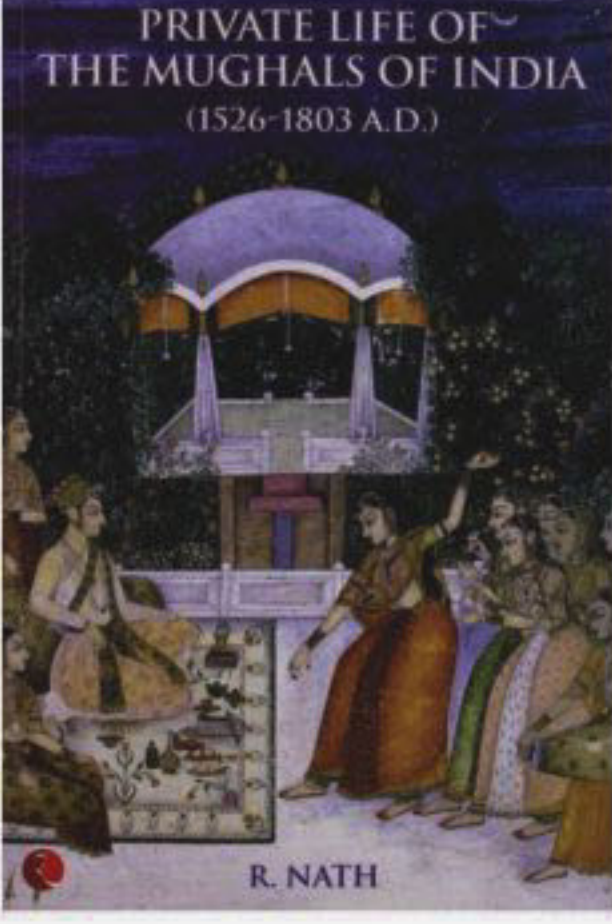
(1526-1803 A.D.)

By R. Nath

Rupa Publications India

(2005)

Bringing to life the opulent, sometimes scandalous, private lives of the Mughals of India, Private Life leaves no detail untouched: their food, drink, clothes ornaments, intoxicants, amusements, marriage and harm-life are all vibrantly described a suitable backdrop for the intriguing personalities of the period. Well-written with color illustrations and photographs, this book will delight all connoisseurs of Mughal history.



A shooting star leaps to oblivion

Shahriar Feroze peers into Shams Monower's latest collection of poems...

A convincing explanation of the title of Shams Monwar's latest collection of poems is not known to this reviewer. But he knows for sure poets have a tendency to remain ambiguous on purpose. Judging by its content the title isn't misleading but somewhat a message about the poet himself which is eerily similar to the tone of grievance for not being taken seriously.

Since the subject of grievance has been raised, so I can't resist quoting a famous saying by Percy Bysshe Shelley, he once quoted - *Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.*

So Shams along with countless other poets shouldn't lose heart.

'Among all my previous works it's in this set of poems where I have given my best' said the poet when he handed over the book to me. The truth is: the poet's best may not conform to readers' yardsticks of best. However, in this collection of 53 poems Shams has focused on various subjects. From the pains of a love lost to eulogising poetry; courage in sacrifice, loving Mother Nature to the agonising torments in the Middle East; from unfulfilled dreams and insomnia to an agnostic mind's resentful cry; exploring redemption, gratitude to tranquility and many more.....one may call it 53 dreams dreamt by a grumpy and restless mind.

But these dreams have somehow been let known in the form of poetry.

What make Sham's latest set of poems pleasing are his attempts to create a resonance between disparate images and thoughts complemented by a layering of meanings. Not new in poetry, but the poet enriches the resonance further by including historical facts and everyday reality. Also none of the poems are very specific to a theme but carry multiple messages - as if the messages were not pre-planned and appeared rather suddenly as the pen kept striking. Nevertheless, deciphering the mind of a poet could be a startling task at times.

Messages tried to convey through the poems are not new but it's the language in the poems that's self-styled and inherently straightforward, though some intense retorts are tricky to comprehend. Not only the poems are non-traditional in nature but cheekily drafted as far the choice of words are concerned. Shams appear as one of those who care little about norms and rules. As far as poetic canons are concerned he keeps reminding - rules are made to be broken.

It's just difficult for Shams to write without the mention of the late S.M. Sultan. Inspired by the latter the poet's pen is still running while the gratitude to that inspiration seems endless.

The poems *Faith*, *Mississippi Blues*, *Shukria* and *Insomnia* speak of the poet's style and depth of imagination. Some are deep, some shallow while some appeared unidentifiable to this reviewer.

Poem 09/07/05 drafted maybe some 10 years ago cries out the rebel within the poet seeking justice against the massacres in a war torn globe, an emblematic subject about a decade ago. As a matter of fact a number of poems in the book have been composed on

the grounds of a powerless and frustrated plea for change.

Also worth noting, a number of poems are hugely influenced by global events being focused in a scattered way. Had a particular event been chosen as a definite theme, then the poet, perhaps, could have developed a particular culture or genre of his own.

However, poets like Shams or many for that matter deserve a special thank for keeping their pens rolling in a country where not too many dares to write in English. Poetry and especially if it's in English goes hugely unnoticed here, since neither publishers nor poets have any knowledge about marketing, sales or promotion. Collections of works are usually published at the cost borne by poets themselves.

So in reality, in a country like ours, one must have skills, perseverance, passion and also money. As a matter of fact, writing and publishing poetry in Bangladesh reminds me of that famous quote by Robert Frost - *To be a poet is a condition, not a profession.*



In an age of extreme materialistic ambitions people like Shams struggle to uphold and convey the teachings of the old school of self discovery, soul searching, spirituality and of course a personal meaning of existence. So their success, too, cannot be measured in terms of monetary gains or fame. It's the unseen and unheard impact that calls for a change within and the humane poet craves for it.

Published by Agamee Prakashani the book is priced at Taka 200. The cover page has a nice abstract artwork but like the poet's previous book the book doesn't contain an introductory note or preface - it's annoying. Moreover, writers and publishers in this country will have to get out of the 'offset paper and cheap printing' culture.

Let the changes begin with 'A shooting star leaps to oblivion'.

The reviewer is a journalist.

Classics Corner

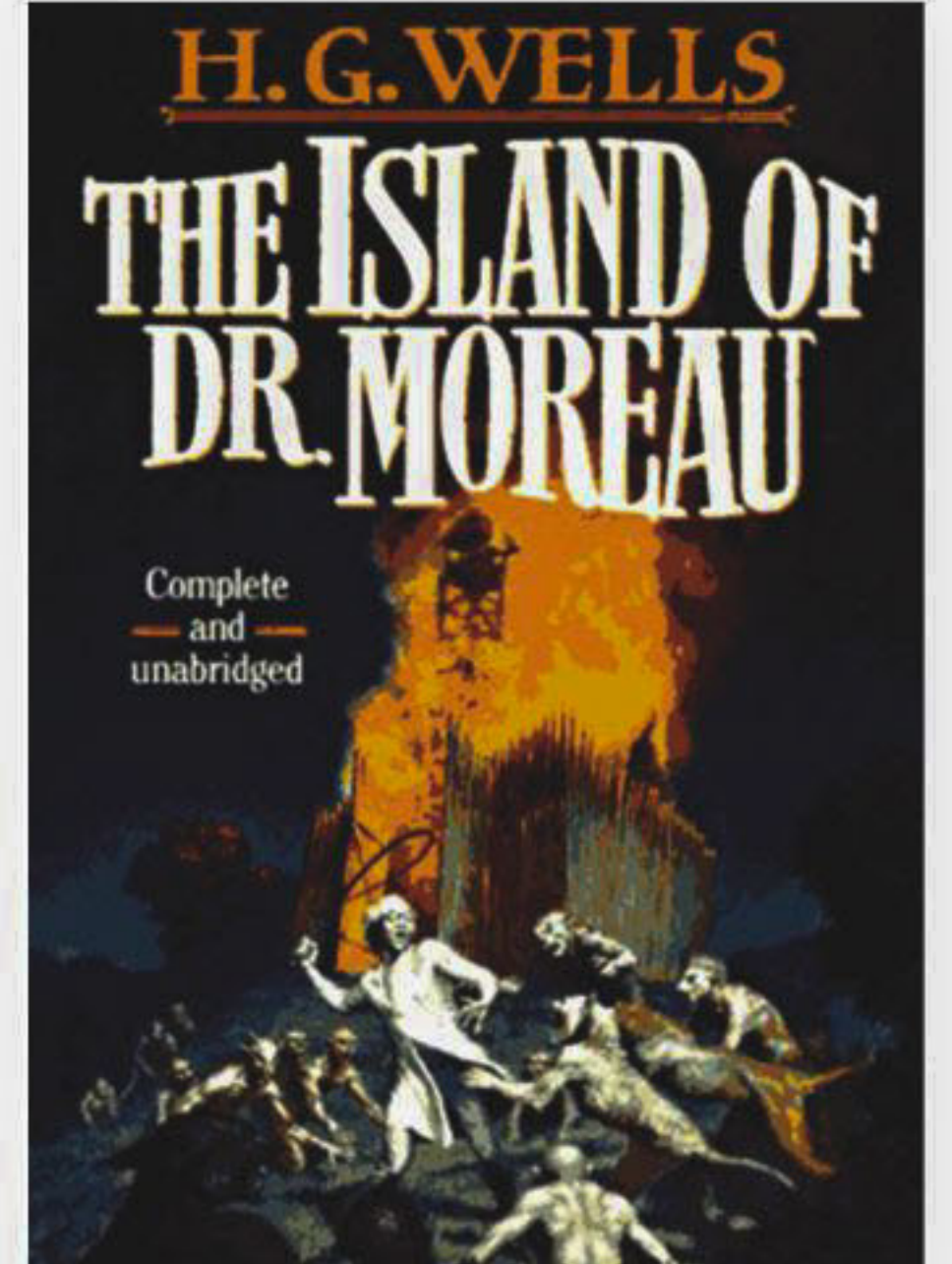


The Island of Doctor Moreau

By H G Wells

Reviewed by Mahfuz ul Hasib Chowdhury

I bought a copy of The Island of Doctor Moreau by H G Wells several years ago from a bookstore in Dhaka New Market. The Island of Doctor Moreau sketches an eccentric scientist whose name is part of the book's title. Dr. Moreau, to view from a wider angle, tried to move into the shoes of God. He was obsessed with the macabre experiments of blending up the psycho-physical features of humans and beasts. He had been exiled to this island from England a few years earlier for this sort of anatomical activities known as vivisection. We get introduced to Dr. Moreau through the details given by Edward Prendick, a survivor of a shipwreck who was picked up by a sea cargo which was on its way to the mysterious island of Dr. Moreau. During Prendick's stay inside the home of Dr. Moreau on that island, he saw strange and horrible things that Dr. Moreau used to do in the name of anatomical assignments. Dr. Moreau mutilated wild creatures in order to implant human organs and instincts into their bodies which he thought would transfigure these animals into better ones. Prendick met some striking instances of Dr. Moreau's conversions: the Leopard Man, the Hyena-Swine, the Swine Folk, the Ape Man, Bull Men, Horse-Rhinoceros, Wolf-Bear, Ocelot Man, Dog Man and the Monkey Man. He learnt of the Law and the House of Pain that were used to keep the beast folk under a constant state of panic and thus held them subjugated to their master. Earlier I



commented that Dr. Moreau in fact wanted to resemble God because he created a weird island of all those blended creatures over whom only his rule existed. He wanted to become the unanimous Lord of the converted animals on that island. And indeed he was. He was feared and held in awe by his creations. But he failed in the long run. All

these animals were gradually turning back into their wild forms which Dr. Moreau had sought to eradicate from their nature. The story ends with the unfortunate death of Dr. Moreau at the hands of the beast folk. I found The Island of Doctor Moreau somewhat similar to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein which also tells us about the creation of a monster by a crackpot scientist. Both the books end in the same tragic way with the murders of the focal figures at the hands of their own creations. These two books match from another thematic angle—impractical ambitions can hardly avoid severe consequences. One more aspect of the book is quite noteworthy. When Edward Prendick came back to England, he found everything around him different. As if all the civilized masses of London were moving, talking, behaving, even saying prayers like the beast folk he had seen on Dr. Moreau's island. H G Wells proves his fictional expertise with the portrayal of the savage island actually as an allegory to expose a bitter truth: human beings have made the world a far worse place than it was meant to be. The world around us today is so bleak and adverse with mistrust, vengeance and terror because of the derailment of human beings from the track God had shown them to follow.

The reviewer is Senior Lecturer, Department of English, Metropolitan University, Sylhet.