

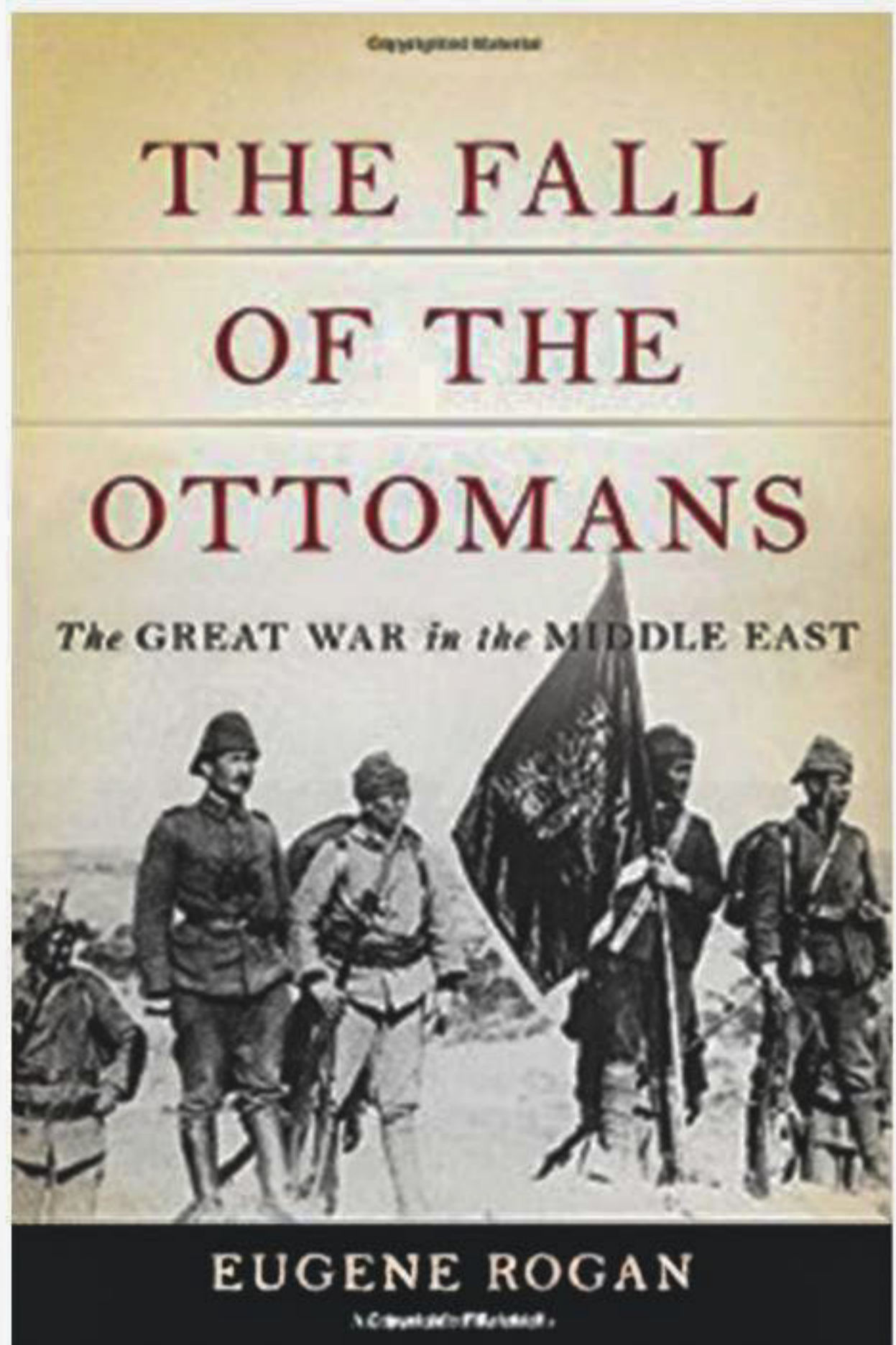
The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East

Author: Eugene Rogan

Reviewed by Dr. Shibli Jabir

THE book, "The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East", is a popular history book by Oxford historian Eugene Rogan (Basic Books, 2015) and covers the period 1908-1919. It offers a glimpse into some of the major events of the early tumultuous decades of the last century, particularly in the Balkans and Anatolian regions of the Ottoman Empire, and the Armenian Genocide. It is an easy to read volume suitable for the general reader, although very well-documented with end-notes and references using primary sources in Turkish, Arabic, and European languages. This book comes at a very important moment in world affairs as it touches upon some very current and relevant hot topics debated around the world: the upheaval in the Middle East, the rise of Islamic State militant group, and the controversy surrounding the treatment of religious and ethnic minorities in Turkey.

Eugene Rogan is a fellow of St. Antony's College, Oxford and lectures in the Modern History of the Middle East at the University of Oxford. He is a well-known Middle Eastern scholar and author of the book "The Arabs". While growing up in Bangladesh, our interest in Turkey and the Middle East were limited to the rise of modern Turkey under Kamal Ataturk and Pakistan's participation with the anti-Soviet military alliance CENTO of which Turkey was a member. Recently, my interest in Turkey and its geopolitical role was reignited by the recent upheavals in the Middle East which has affected Turkey closely and tested its relationship with the USA. Turkey is at the center of the ongoing US war with ISIS, Syria, and Iraq, and this book is an essential read for any scholar and world citizen watching the developments unfold in that segment of the world.



Moudros Harbour leading to troop landings on April 25, 1915. British aircraft in the air directed naval bombardments towards Turkish worksites or troop concentrations during the day forcing the Turks to dig trenches for their defensive positions only at night. The Turkish nation which had in the last decades found that the European powers and Russia were either seizing land, or inciting citizens of its colonies in Africa, Europe, and Asia to take up arms against Turkey or declare independence, was determined to repel attacks on Gallipoli at the cost of their lives to save the existence of the Sultan, and fought to defend it at all costs. As Rogan writes, Kamal Ataturk who was a young commander gave a speech in which he said, "I don't order you to attack, I order you to die. In the time which passes until we die other troops and commanders can take

our places". And they listened to their future founding president of the Turkish republic. The story then carefully paints the war of attrition that led to the withdrawal of the Australian and New Zealand forces known as Anzacs.

The book also provides a very convincing rationale for Turkey's alignment with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. During the rule of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the Ottoman ruler who reigned between 1876-1909, Britain seized Cyprus and Egypt between 1878 and 1882, France occupied Tunisia in 1881, and Russia annexed three provinces in the Ottoman Caucasus in 1878. While Sultan Abdul Hamid was deposed by the Young Turk Revolution, the new leaders and the Parliament felt that their chances of preserving the sovereignty was best served if they joined forces with any entity fighting Britain, France and Russia.

The Armenian Genocide is an issue hotly contested by the Turkish government and the Armenian Diaspora in the west. According to some estimates, more than one million Armenian Christians living in the Ottoman Empire died during the Great War, most of them roughly around 1915. However, as Rogan documents, the conflict between Turks and the Armenians had a very long history. And, as confirmed by Cemal Pasha, a leader of the Young Turks, "between 25 and 28 April, 1908, some Armenians were killed in a frenzy of bloodletting" in Adana. However, the most egregious and large-scale killing happened just after WWI started and some Armenian leaders in Istanbul had openly declared their support for the Allied campaign against the Ottomans and Germans, right after the Allied forces launched their invasion of Gallipoli. What is in dispute is whether the Armenians died in the hands of Turkish government troops and officials or because of starvation and disease as they were displaced during the war that Turkey fought against the Russians. And also, whether there was any official declaration from the government, the Parliament, or the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), a secret society of civilians and military, to undertake mass killings or "final solution" akin to the pogrom ordered by Hitler to eliminate the Jews. Rogan very methodically goes through archives in Turkey and outside, to uncover the truth and present the evidence that indicates that mistakes were made on both sides. The Armenians sided with the enemies of Turkey in the hope that they would be accorded a better treatment after the war. They also took up arms in many locations, particularly in Van, to defeat the Turkish forces. However, while the numbers are in dispute, there is convincing evidence and argument that Turkish population and the leaders feared that the presence of Armenians and Assyrians, who were Christians, and

ethnically closer to the Slavic Russia, were acting as "fifth columnists" and felt that the presence of Armenians in frontline areas would compromise their ability to wage a war both within and without. Rogan has a chapter entitled "The Annihilation of the Armenians" but appears to be sympathetic when he says "In the Spring of 1915, the empire faces invasion on three fronts simultaneously: in the Dardanelles, on the Caucasus frontier, and in Mesopotamia." (p. 183)

Rogan gives credit to the Turkish army for forcing the British, French, Australia, and New Zealanders to withdraw from Gallipoli. He writes with a sense of humor, "As they withdrew from their trenches, the Tommies and Anzacs left notes for the Ottomans, promising to meet again" in war, and cites the following poem written by a withdrawing soldier:

"I reckon the Turk respects us, as we respect the Turk; Abdul's a good, clean fighter, we fought him, and we know"

And meet again they did; in Mesopotamia, where the Balfour Declaration indicates the desire to establish a Jewish homeland. The region known as Mesopotamia covers a vast area ruled by the Ottoman Sultans including Syria, Iraq and Jordan. Rogan faithfully documents the methodical way the Brits snatched away vast territories from Turkey and this campaign to avenge for their defeat in Gallipoli is meticulously described and grimly recounted. The Turkish and the British forces finally shake hands on December 9, 1917 with the surrender of Jerusalem which Lloyd George dubs as the "Christmas present for the British nation". By the end of 1917, the Ottomans had surrendered three cities of great symbolic value: Mecca, Baghdad, and Jerusalem.

Rogan to his credit is not shy to speak his mind. He is critical of the post-war partition of the Ottoman Empire. "After four centuries united in a multinational empire under Ottoman Muslim rule, the Arabs found themselves divided into a number of new states under British and French domination. ... These outlandish agreements were concluded solely to advance Britain and France's imperial extension. Had the European powers been concerned with establishing a stable Middle East, one can't help but think they would have gone about drafting the borders in a very different world". Bold but sad statement! One that future world leaders must remember after the dust settles down in the conflict-ridden Middle East that we see at the dawn of the 21st Century.

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Reform for Economic Development

Author: M. S. Siddiqui

Reviewed by Masud Ahmed

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THIS book is a build-up on the theories and experiences of a patriot, teacher and business thinker. Constructed in the fashion and architecture of a durable edifice, the chapters are so well-apportioned thematically that the load bearing pillars, beams and spars have been quite balanced and grooved deep into the earth of reality.

Presented into forty four major topics, the arguments as a reader might suspect from the title of the book, are not all economic but suitably weighted on other realities of a habitation.

The strings running through the book linking all the stakeholders have been twined by the writer with such practical insight, elasticity, tenor and temper that the book has been able to dispel any chances of extremism anywhere. As a consequence the status quo, the analysis, interplay and interfacing of potential factors have taken a capitalistic though, well-fare oriented evolution. So the brick-laying and mortar work of this edifice have been scientific but not linear. Thus first things have appeared first and then the next ones have followed suit. The author, in spite of being a patriot has credited the West with the genesis and development of society, law, ethics, morality, government, governance, inventions and innovations under which any society can benefit and thrive. The book is thus replete with western thinkers, bankers and their creations. CRPC (1898), Evidence Act 1872, Bretton Woods, IMF, ADB, WB, JP Morgan, Goldman, Merrill Lynch etc. After tabling a process, system, law or instrument, he has also shown how these have had kick-offs in the comity of nations and then calculated the standard deviation Bangladesh is standing at. He has actually shown all the items of this expansive book as juxtaposition with the major countries of the world. That has been a great pointer which will be advantageous for the users of this book to appreciate and measure how practical the writer's analysis is. He opines the impact of international law in the legal system depends on the source of the international law in question. Many would agree with the writer on this point. There are many further points and topics where readers would find affinity. His tracing of the past, i.e. genesis, evolution, assessment and rationale for furthering the current definitions to betterment are logical and understandable. In spite of linking the topics to their international origins the writer has shown com-

mendable realism in being practical about the country specific situation of Bangladesh. In essence, accordingly no reforms would be considerable here which are poised beyond and above the culture and sociological realities of the populace. However there are probably one or two disclaimers. It is about the chapter on Bangladesh's competitiveness. Due to the same cultural lineage i.e. mongering profits beyond

being provided by state owned banks by allowing wavering of interest and loans profoundly. In China it is partly the same i.e. state loans and partly accepting marginal profits. On the other hand in India it is just marginal profits. On the whole there are ample grounds in the history of Bangladesh's economic development, for the writer to have admitted in this book that its appearance and reality are both

mainly contribution of the government. Being comparatively low paid, the bureaucrats will somehow share a part of the booty by causing impediments in the path of doing business is a reality. It is equally unethical as the businessmen's inordinate appetite for profit is. So the cheerful story of the private sector is being told by ones while the creator of the story is mainly someone different (the government). I also tend to say something on the writers' stand on 'ADR' chapter. Agreeing with his analysis, two additional major factors could be considered here. One, the population size (175 million actually) must be reduced as it is the main driving factor for the concomitant litigation. Two, our culture is mainly one of self-defense and little of prosecution and indictment. Self-defense is very profitable and

that is why all eminent lawyers belong to this side. Prosecution is a totally different skill and not at all profitable. Even the judges are adept in self-defense instead of prosecution and indictment. It is evident in their innumerable expressions on feeling embarrassed in many cases where punishment would be the only verdict. Witnesses and judges are equally scared. When the national consensus is "I agree with the verdict but the palm tree is mine" the ADR is not going to be fruitful.

This appropriately sized book is a significant contribution to not only recording the history of these important public issues but also in analyzing and proposing practical improvement and way out with the common strategic objective of the nation's economic welfare. The casing of the book is sedate.

The diction and vocabulary are well chosen and easy to understand. The only weak part of the book is its typos. Interestingly, correcting that is the easiest job to do. Business leaders, academics, legislators and bureaucrats will find this book quite useful.

quality and contributions, our competitiveness in business has not been able to show growth and on a net basis it is not growing. This concept/perception can be validated with the export earnings through a big reporting period. e.g. 1995-2015. It shows her import bills have steadily been much higher than her export earnings. This has been taking place in spite of all the success story of the garments and other sectors in the banner of private entrepreneurs. The import bills which are thrice as much as the export earnings are being paid by wage earners' remittance. Within the domestic market, the meaning of competitiveness does not carry much weight as the same cake is being eaten by one or the other company or cluster of companies. The author inter alia reinforces this perception in "Barriers to building industries" episode at pages 105-109. He quotes, "Bangladesh is falling behind China, India etc."; here he has attributed this to ineptness of bureaucracy, corruption, scarcity of utilities etc. But he has not touched on the amount of profit that private entrepreneurs are earning compared to India, in spite of their barriers and more importantly how much of that profit is

Reform For Economic Development
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Rabindranath: Ashukh Bishukh

(A Book on Tagore's Ailments)

Author: Mihirkanti Choudhury

Reviewed by Mahfuz ul Hasib Chowdhury

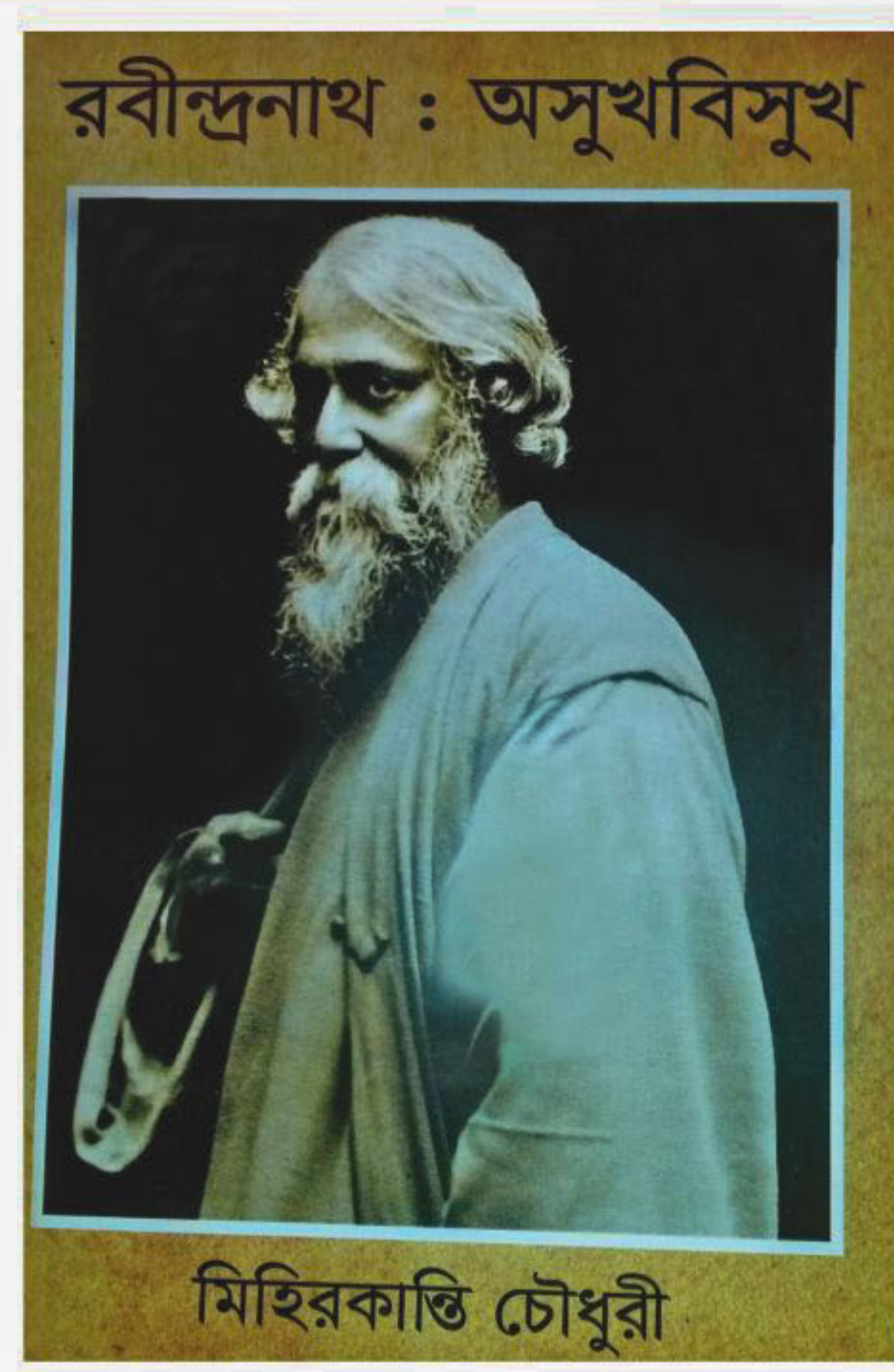
RABINDRANATH: Ashukh Bishukh is an outside-the-box but well-written book on Rabindranath Tagore by Mihirkanti Choudhury, an eminent author and researcher who has so far penned a prestigious number of scholarly publications including Haunting Rays: Tagore Miscellany, Tagore's Passage to Germany, Tagore's Works in European Languages, The Oriental Sun and so on. In *Rabindranath: Ashukh Bishukh* the author has touched upon the health hazards that affected Rabindranath Tagore and his family a number of times while the poet was alive. The psychophysical maladies that troubled Rabindranath Tagore at home and abroad have been addressed in this book. Most of the readers are familiar with the biography and literary creations of Rabindranath Tagore, but there are very few people who make efforts to look into the diseases the greatest ever Bengali poet had to live through. Moreover, these diseases had a broad impact on some of the stories and poems by Rabindranath Tagore. So, Rabindranath Tagore's health-related issues moved beyond his body on some occasions and secured a place in his literary works too.

According to this book, Rabindranath Tagore fell sick several times while he was travelling overseas. He was invaded by severe sea sickness during his sea voyage to London in 1878. A similar form of illness knocked him down for some days during another trip to London in 1890. An acute influenza sickened Rabindranath Tagore in 1924 while he was travelling to Argentina. Diseases came back to imperil Rabindranath Tagore once again in 1928 and this time it happened in the middle of his holidays in Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka). A mild cardiac problem jeopardized him in 1930 while he was in the United States on his last trip to that country. Rabindranath Tagore wrote letters to some of his nearest people describing his physical predicaments, this book tells us. As found in this book, the poet had a special leaning towards homeopathic and herbal treatments.

During the era of Rabindranath Tagore medical science had made much progress but still it was not as fast and efficacious as it is in the present world. Lots of diseases such as cholera, typhoid, malaria, flu, and uremia were difficult to be treated. So, diseases known as mild problems today used to cause big health damages during the middle of 20th century and earlier times. Some family members of Rabindranath Tagore were also immensely distressed by such diseases as narrated in *Rabindranath: Ashukh Bishukh*. In Rabindranath Tagore's autobiographic book *My Boyhood Days*, the poet recalled some of the diseases that got hold of him during his tender age.

Some other famous authors and poets also struggled with various diseases. Anton Chekhov suffered from tuberculosis all his life and finally he succumbed to this disease. George Orwell was also trailed by this ailment throughout his life. Joseph Conrad was frequently assailed by gout, neuralgic pain and toothache. Sylvia Plath suffered from an incurable form of depression all her life which afterwards compelled her to commit suicide. Robert Louis Stevenson had chest pain, cough and chronic fevers as long as he lived. Rudyard Kipling had persistent intestinal problems and some bronchial diseases continued to pester D.H. Lawrence till his death.

Mihirkanti Choudhury, the author of the book *Rabindranath: Ashukh Bishukh* is a widely appraised biographer of Rabindranath Tagore, particularly among



readers with deep inquiries about Tagore's life beyond literature. Some of his books on Rabindranath Tagore have been published by Lambert Academic Publishers, Germany. In professional life, Mihirkanti Choudhury is Deputy Registrar in Metropolitan University, Sylhet and a veteran pedagogue of English language. In *Rabindranath: Ashukh Bishukh*, Mihirkanti Choudhury has worked on such an angle of Tagore's life which has been so far highlighted by very few authors. The connection between ailments and literature as far as Tagore is concerned and the range of references cited by the writer in *Rabindranath: Ashukh Bishukh* has made the book a highly informative, insightful and entertaining authorial feat.

Kahlil Gibran wrote in his masterpiece *The Prophet*, "Much of your pain is the bitter potion by which the physician within you heals your sick self." Pains and sufferings bridge up human souls with God, "the physician within you" as stated by Kahlil Gibran with a spiritual allegory. Most of the physical and mental hardships confronted by Tagore enhanced and deepened his authorial and poetic dexterity and his ailments could not curtail his power to create classical stories, plays and verses. The agonies caused by corporeal maladies cure the indispositions within us and sanctify our thoughts and visions. Sufferings are a test of one's worth and capability to stand before life with an intrepid heart. All pangs of life leave a lesson to learn to boost the spirit with which we keep on striving for progress and enlightenment.

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