

CAMBODIA IN A SOLDIER'S VIEW

AUTHOR: BRIG. GEN. MD. BAYEZID SARWAR

REVIEWED BY DR. (CAPT. RETD.) SYED AHMED MORTADA

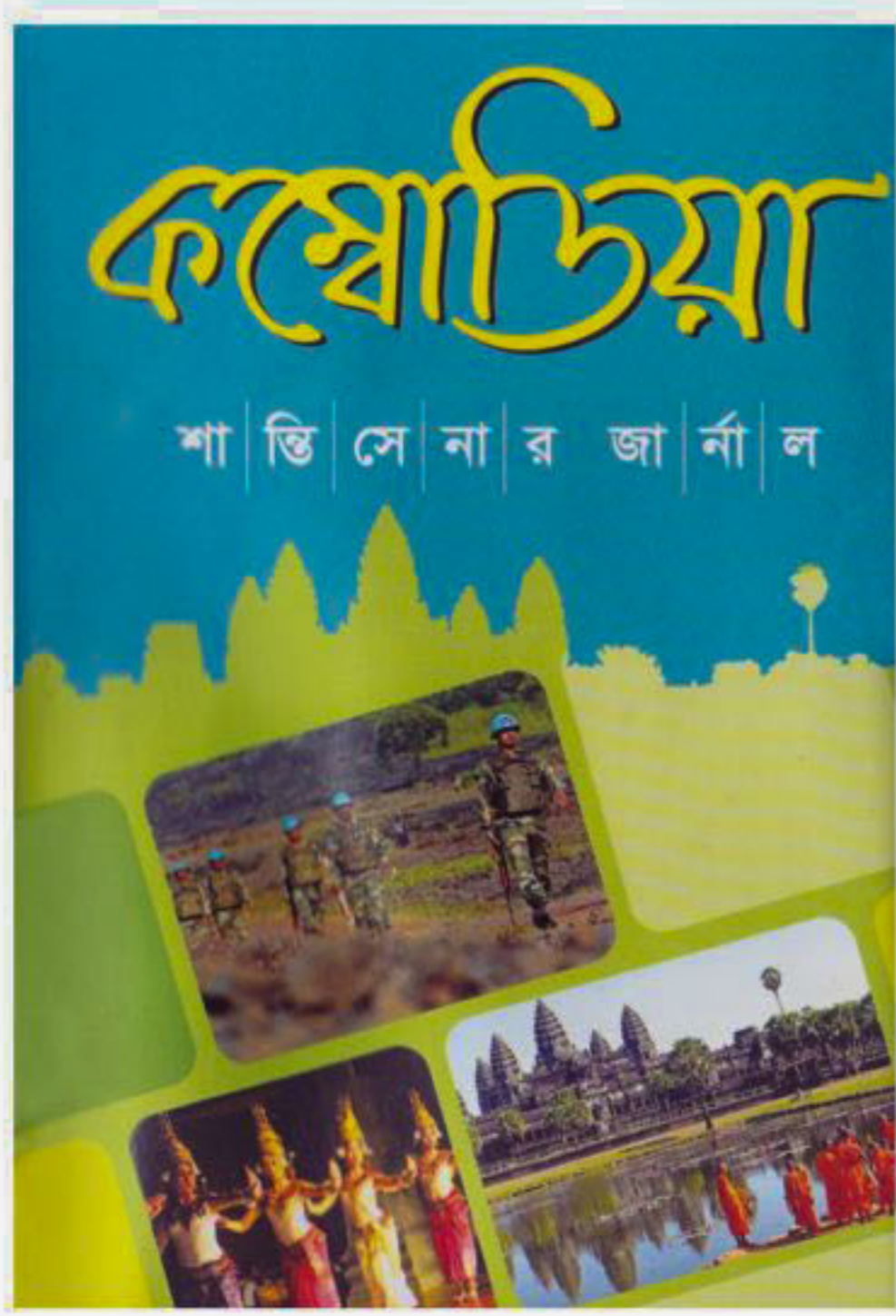
It was no one-off that the sword and the pen ran parallel. As a subaltern Sir Winston Churchill hardly twenty three made his maiden venture into the world of literature, "The Story of Malakand Field Force" published in 1897. This finally paved his way to the zenith of most coveted honour on the planet-The Nobel Prize in 1953. Gone are the days since the time of Alfred Tennyson who eulogized the British soldiers in the war of Crimea, The Charge of The Light Brigade

*Theirs not to make reply
Theirs not to reason why
Theirs but to do and die
Into the valley of death.*

This scenario has morphed a good deal brandishing the slogan of a good soldier. Now a good soldier is an all-rounder. "A good soldier is a good statesman, a good orator, a good teacher, a good planner, above all a good writer". That exactly what is revealed in a Bengali treasure-trove, "Cambodia" by Brig. Gen. Md. Bayezid Sarwar. "Cambodia" is an 800 page mini encyclopedia compiling the twenty-year research works of Brig. Gen. Sarwar. The writer should be applauded for presenting his own genre of description without following any prescription from any quarter. Beginning with the index, inclusion of a poem introducing every chapter, the footnote, cascading of the context like a natural flow of stream – all give testimony to his seminal thought. "Cambodia" is an assorted combination of history, geography, archeology,

architecture, travelogue, literature, demography and of course of peace mission. In style, in context, in language, in thought- it's a unique presentation. The soldier hit the bull's eye. The skill and the dexterity of the writer excels excellence in drawing the nexus between India and Cambodia vis-a-vis Bangladesh turning to first century AD.

Siem Reap is the gateway to Angkor Wat. It is the capital of the province of Siem Reap of north-western Cambodia. The literal meaning of the word, "Siem Reap" is defeat of the Siam (Thailand). It denotes the historical rivalry between the Siamese and Khmer kings. Although Siem Reap was known to the outside world even before, it was emblazoned on the world map by French explorer Henry Mouhot in 1860. Siem Reap is regarded as the world's fourth best city for travel and revel. The gate way to Angkor Wat, it is the main city ditching clusters of small villages along the river Siem Reap built around the pagodas. Here the river Siem Reap courts the big Tonle Sap lake in the north. It still holds an array of colonial structures. Siem Reap is not only the capital of tourism industry of Cambodia, it is also the UNESCO world heritage site. Landscaping over 400 Sq. Km. Angkor Wat is the biggest religious structure in the world and a top most archeological venue in the South East Asia. Once the oasis of peace how Cambodia turned into a bloody battle field in 1970- "Cambodia" is replete with history. Although 90% of the population belonged to the same race (Khmer) and 88% of the nationals enjoyed same religion (Buddhism) – how



that country divided into four political rivals fostering violence, enmity, mistrust, death for political and personal gain is so graphically penned by Sarwar in "Cambodia". History teaches us that lesson. With this backdrop, Cambodia has reverted itself to an almost stable country - a safe haven for investors attracting thousands of tourists. Cambodia has become a rival to Bangladesh in garment sector. It gives us an immense pleasure that the sacrifices of more than thousand Bangladeshi peace keepers and the death of

three dedicated souls along with the other global contributors didn't go in vain.

Everybody cherishes to reminisce his childhood, boyhood into his olden days-buoyant on the time-machine Sarwar takes us thousands years back to the perilous maritime voyages our ancestors partook from the beginning of the first millennium almost to the end of fifteenth century. The sea route from the eastern coast of India including Bangladesh promoted trade not only with Cambodia but also with other south-east Asian territories. They never intended to represent the vanguard of any military campaign. The legacy of that tradition as annual Bali voyage (Indonesia) is celebrated along the coast line of Orissa by the wives for the safe return of their husbands even today by tipping off lighted candles into sea water. The story of Chand Sawdagor can be traced in our folklore. In the ancient time hundreds of traders from our region used to travel with their merchandise to South-Eastern countries including Cambodia, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Malay, Sumatra, Java and Bali. Inadvertently those early explorers carried with them their religion, language, arts, philosophy, culture, political faith which greatly influenced the mind set of Cambodia culminating in the creation of Angkor Wat. The sculptures, engravings, base relief, sensuous female figures in the monuments mostly represent the cult of Hindu scriptures from Ramayana and Mahabharata. It was not only the merchants and traders from this part travelled to those regions but also India with present Bangladesh was the

recipient of visits by many legendary personalities of history. Ibn Batuta the Moroccan traveler (1344), Fahian the Chinese explorer (fifth century), Huen sung the Chinese traveler (seventh century), Xuan Zang the Chinese monk, Faxian the Chinese foot adventurer, all left their foot prints on the course of Indian history. According to legend, Chinese admiral Jeng Hey (1413-1431) visited Sonargoan two times. Scholar Atish Dipankar, a son of Vikrampur made a reverse journey from Bangladesh to South Asia, Java, Sumatra, Tibet to China.

The Muslim population of Cambodia is about 2.5% most of whom belong to Cham community who fled from Champa in Vietnam around 1471. It is believed that a few Sahabis from Abyssinia had set their feet in Indo-China in 617-18.

At times references have been repeated but sometimes such repetitions are necessary as a rejoinder for upscale readers. The authoritarian command of Bayezid collided with pundit Nehru's Glimpses of World History. Buoyant after the victory of battle of Al-Amin, Churchill said, "This is not the end, this is not the beginning of the end, this is perhaps the end of the beginning". Recalling Nobel Laureate Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill, I repeat for Brig. Gen. Md. Bayezid Sarwar, "This is not the end, this is not the beginning of the end, this is perhaps the end of the beginning".

The reviewer is a senior trainer of Associates in Training and Management (AITAM). He is a freelance writer.



Story of a subcontinent unchanged

AUTHOR: SHARATCHANDRA CHATTAPADHAY

REVIEWED BY SARWAT SARAH

BOLLYWOOD has implemented the idea in my mind that the world of Sharatchandra Chattapadhyay is one big glittering film set. Dancers swish and swirl on marbled floors, surrounded by music, hookah and intoxicants. Every man is a zamindar or a poet while every woman is either a beautiful courtesan or a rich zamindari with Kohl-rimmed eyes larger than life. Music, hookah and intoxicants are, of course, plentiful. I admit my ideas are naïve but, caught between songs that made me do the thumka and Shahrukh Khan's overly overacting, it never occurred to me to delve deeper. That is, until I started reading 'Srikanta'.

'Srikanta' is a semi-autobiographical novel of a wandering Brahmin living in pre-independent India crumbling under the weight of caste segregation, communal dissidence and the boot of British colonization. With no compass to his own life, Srikanta leads a life that is alternately freeing and constricting, molded by the women he encountered.

To be fair on the protagonist, he makes no qualms about who he is and paints a very ruthlessly honest portrait of himself. The story begins with the narrator as a little orphan boy, leading a pastoral life in a seemingly tranquil village. After being befriended by Indranath, a rebellious Brahmin who saves Srikanta from a group of village bullies, the two paddle around the river to embark on dangerous expeditions. In these adventures, Srikanta had his first glimpse of society's hypocrisy towards caste and gender. It was also in one of these adventures that Srikanta encountered Annada Didi, Indranath's high-born sister who, because of her marriage to a drunken snake-charmer, is shunned by the villagers. After the death of her husband, Annada Didi disappears into the vast Indian territory, never to be seen again. Nevertheless, her quiet patience and fortitude in the face of poverty cast a lasting impact on Srikanta's mind and for the rest of his life he sought women who would remind him of Annada Didi.

As Srikanta journeys through life trying to find the elixir to his confused soul, he encounters a host of individuals along the way who shape his ideas on life. His ideals are molded by the unique women who come and go in his life and leave a lasting impact. From the dancing girl Pyari (a woman as confused, lost and annoying as Srikanta and naturally the love of his life), to the determined Arannya who lived life following her own moral code, to the elusive Kamal Lata; each woman left her mark on Srikanta who struggles to make peace with the longings of his heart with the rigorous demands of Indian society, ultimately discarding the latter for the former.

Through the eyes of Srikanta we part the glittering veils and witness the imposition of centuries old traditions on common people and its effect on caste and gender. We see the caste system (a 'tradition' still enforced in India and many other parts of South Asia) and how it allows one man to think himself superior to his brother simply because of name. We see how women are maltreated based on religious hypocrisies and how society as a whole is united in making them helpless and marginalized.

It is the ultimate mark of Sharatchandra's genius, and a tragedy that, by writing a social narrative a hundred years ago, he captured the essence of modern Indian subcontinent that is still as regressive and cruel, with no lessons learned from the past. Perhaps, Srikanta's confusion and helplessness is a stark reflection of society, and us, as a whole. He is a reminder to us bystanders who quietly watch our world crumble around us, ineffectually screaming internally, our voices drowned by the more powerful around.

The reviewer is a fervent reader and occasional reviewer.

Contours of passion in poetic expression

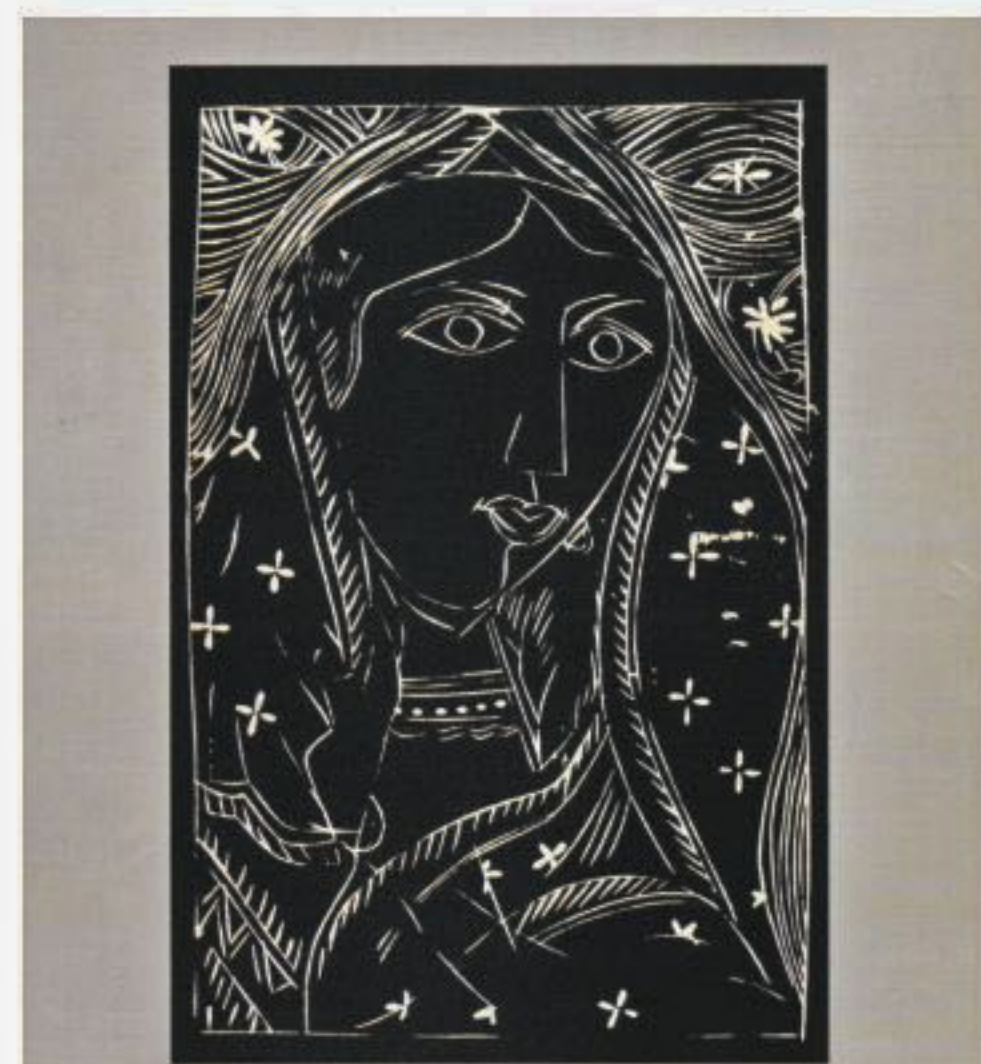
AUTHOR: SYED SHAMSUL HAQ

Translator: Sonia Amin

REVIEWED BY BINOY BARMAN

could not satisfy her mind, so she used 'simmering blue cloth' instead, as a translation of 'nil sari'. This way, bit by bit, with workings of brain and heart, she completed her mission, yielding a laudable work in translation.

The romantic relationship between man and woman, their love and passion, physical and mental attraction, union and separation, joys and pains, amid nature and rural culture, have been wonderfully depicted in *Deep Within the Heart (Poraner Goheen Bhitoy)*. I curiously went through the whole bilingual volume, comparing the Bengali poems with their English versions. And I was impressed with the quality of work. The translator has maintained the fourteen line scheme, as fixed in sonnet, with an accuracy of language, lexically and syntactically, capturing the inner message as much as possible. She has translated with recourse to apt metaphorical language with ingenuity. "My heart grows heavy – the sun sinks low". The image of the sun sinking low is much more vivid than "bikal" (afternoon) as it was in Bengali. We may read some other reverberating lines:



Deep Within the Heart
Syed Shamsul Haq

Preface and Translation
Sonia Amin

Why does the cruel wind toss the dry leaves about?

Who weeps there on the edge of the field?

Why do I see the corpses wherever I turn?

I have seen what there was to see, what now?

No book, no work of translation is fully free of flaws. This book has also its own limitations, though not of major types. In the Bengali form, a line is of eighteen *matras* (syllables) within what is called *Akshor Britto Chhondo*. This could not be, and practically cannot be, maintained in translation; just as one would not expect the maintenance of rhyme scheme. In English the lines have been of unequal length of varying count of syllables, not molded in any specific meter—iambic or trochaic or any other. Some lines have been made unnecessarily longer or shorter than others. For example: "Is there no journey where the mythical boat does not sail on the wings of the wind." Just it could be, for the sake of brevity, in consistency with the Bengali sentence: "Is there no journey where the boat of wind is absent (Sonnet-33)." Similarly, "The lure of the trees, the pull of the poison vine is greater than yours of mine" (Sonnet-31) could be

shortened as: "The pull of tree and poison-creep is greater than yours." The examples of oddly placed shorter lines are: "Dress in your loveliest" (Sonnet-9), "Won't you open the door?" (Sonnet-24), "From the sky above" (Sonnet-27), "Only one favour I ask" (Sonnet-29), etc. Poetry, in particular sonnet, is not simply the arrangement of meaningful words and sentences; it is also the beauty of structural symmetry.

In the last two lines of Sonnet-30, the translation has strayed away semantically, along with the problem of unequal lining: "Pay your debts now, woman, in the currency of love, for what you crushed underfoot / Those precious, golden vines – those rare suspicious roots." The original lines wanted to say something else. The similar problem has occurred with lines 10-11 of Sonnet-15: "Will this drive you out of your home, like a farmer, who has lost all? / Will you not be overcome then?" which does not conform to the original message.

In other places there have been little glitches of diction. For example, the last line of Sonnet-1 has been translated as: "Is one who unfurls colored kerchiefs deep within the heart" whereas there is no mention of the handkerchiefs being "coloured" in the original poem. In Sonnet-14, "Green fields" in the second line has been inserted superfluously. Similarly, in Sonnet-4 in the first line: "Whose counsel should I seek – he scorns me night and day", the phrase "night and day" has been added, over the original, probably in order to rhyme with the next line ending with the word "away". Obviously, the translator has taken the freedom to add words for aesthetic reason, but at the cost of trustworthiness.

The translator has often broken down one Bengali sentence into two English sentences. This freedom she has taken particularly to strike rhyming in the concluding couplet. For example, in Sonnet-15, the last line in Bengali literally means: "Whereas I remain at home, I cannot live in this doom." In Sonia's English translation it has been: "But helpless I stay rooted to the spot / My wretched, loveless, empty lot." In other cases, the translator has reconstructed the theme of the line while arranging into two. For example, the plain meaning of the Bengali last line in Sonnet-17 is: "I elope with him leaving everything behind." Its English translation has been: "Home, hearth, hope – leaving everything behind; / and sail with him into the uncharted wild." The translator has also rearranged lines. For example, in Sonnet-15 parts of the 9th and 11th lines in Bengali version have appeared as the 8th line (How should I respond?) and 9th line (What power have I?) respectively in the English version. Probably this sort of freedom for alteration may be enjoyed by the translator, and it does not transgress the norms of translation, I suppose, provided it adds some value to aesthetics.

Despite all the limitations, as mentioned above, I must say, it is a good translation. *Deep Within the Heart* is a pleasant work which should be appreciated by any reader having interest in poetic art, and it offers double benefits for those having command over the two languages concerned. It is a love of labor on part of Dr. Sonia Amin, a Professor of History at the University of Dhaka, who has a glaring passion for literature and an enviable poetic taste which has prompted her to undertake the difficult task of translation.

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