

# Intriguing Statecraft and Enigmatic Politics

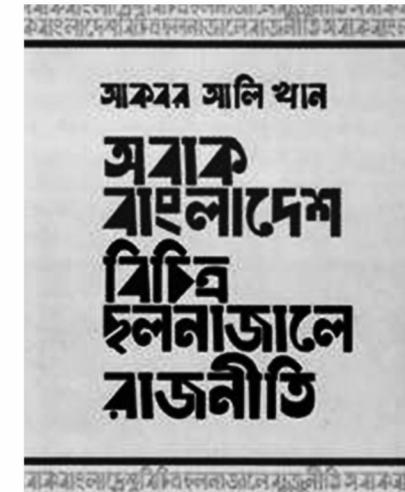
Abak Bangladesh: Bichitro Chholonajale Rajniti, Akbar Ali Khan Prothoma Prokashon, 2017

REVIEWED BY MAHFUZ UL HASIB CHOWDHURY

Looked at from a political perspective, Bangladesh will always seem to be a land of democratic upheavals and agitations that has characterized it since its birth. But looked at from an economic one, it will appear to be a country that has crossed immensely troublesome terrains and negotiated financial hurdles successfully. Indeed, Bangladesh has recently obtained the status of a middle income country. And yet, geopolitical analysts have repeatedly pointed their fingers at the lack of good governance in Bangladesh despite its progress in a number of sectors. Moreover, different international organizations have stated over and over again that the level of democracy in Bangladesh has not yet reached satisfactory heights. These are the thoughts that came to my mind while I was going through Akbar Ali Khan's book *Abak Bangladesh: Bichitro Chholonajale Rajniti*. My endeavors to translate the book's title into English have resulted in the following words: "Amazing Bangladesh: Where Politics is Entangled in Enigmatic Cobwebs." That is not exactly a verbatim translation. However, this English rendering gestures at the thematic streams of the book.

Khan has spotlighted well the political stumbling stones Bangladesh often confronts. In a scholarly manner, he endeavors to suggest remedies to these critical drawbacks from socio-economic angles. It needs to be said too that even though this book by Akbar Ali Khan refers to the country's complex economic and political woes, it has a piercingly humorous undertone throughout.

It is not the aim of Khan's book to convey answers to the country's political puzzles. Rather, it strives to make people aware of their rights and responsibilities a la democracy,



development and political reforms. Akbar Ali Khan's language in this book is very suggestive and not at all abstruse, which is why this book should be able to attract readers from all backgrounds.

The sayings of eminent political figures have also made this book a substantial and penetrative work. While writing about the political intrigues encompassing Bangladesh,

for example, Akbar Ali Khan recalls Winston Churchill's words: "A riddle wrapped in mystery inside an enigma." The words "riddle", "mystery" and "enigma" in this context refer to the intricacy and convoluted gridlocks that have transfused political affairs in the country. However, the author has no desire to intimidate readers with such metaphors; he has, in fact, presented his analysis, arguments and

interpretations in graspable ways so that readers can figure out the meanings of his deliberations without straining their imagination.

Another maxim applied equally powerful in this book by Khan is that of the French statesman Charles De Gaulle who had once declared: "Politics is too serious a matter to be left to the politicians". These words by Charles De Gaulle are indeed very thought-provoking. These words stress the fact that politicians should not be the only people in charge of a country's political activities. Rather, people from all walks of life have definite roles to play for the sake of the political stability of the nation.

Akbar Ali Khan has categorically asserted in this book that statecraft cannot be managed with just humbug and velvet rhetoric. Hard work, dedication, rationality, patriotism, far-sightedness and integrity are required to overcome political challenges. Akbar Ali Khan has also portrayed the vicissitudes Bangladesh had to go through after liberation. The drastic changes in Bangladesh's state mechanism during the 80s and 90s have been very keenly examined in this book. Bangladesh's progress in establishing secularism and a people-friendly civil service has been scrutinized too. The judicial service of Bangladesh and the bureaucratic complications which often slow down the pace of development both at personal and collective levels have been scrutinized as well.

Another vital point that Akbar Ali Khan addresses in this book is that of administrative decentralization. He has defined and classified decentralization in a lucid way by calling it "double delusion". It goes without saying that administrative decentralization is direly needed in

Bangladesh to speed up the government's development programs and to bring about a smooth and hassle-free service-providing system for ordinary citizens. Khan has also called upon civil society members to play their roles objectively to ensure justice, equity and transparency all across the nation.

Khan has laid emphasis on initiating reforms in the governance of Bangladesh. In this context he has underscored the idea of reforming the Police Act to modernize the police force and to make the police department more efficient and useful for the ordinary citizens. The forces implementing the law and maintaining order are the ones essential to ensure justice and establish discipline in everyday life. For this reason Khan believes finds it is very important to bring about required changes in the way police departments in our country work.

It is obvious that Akbar Ali Khan had to do a lot of hard work to write this book of over four hundred pages. In his references he has acknowledged his debt to a wide range of books, essays and other sources wherefrom he gathered his facts and figures to establish his thesis in *Abak Bangladesh: Bichitro Chholonajale Rajniti*.

It can be noted by way of conclusion that Akbar Ali Khan was born in 1944. He has served the Bangladesh government as both its finance and cabinet secretary. He also held the post of an adviser in the caretaker government of 2007–2008. He had already authored a remarkable range of books on economics, history and governance. At present Khan teaches at BRAC University, Dhaka.

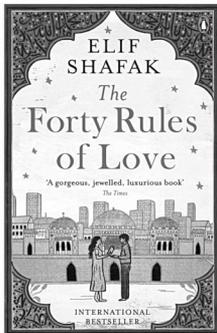
The author is a regular contributor in different English dailies.

## THUMBNAIL REVIEW

### The Forty Rules of Love

Elif Shafak, Penguin Books, ISBN: 9870241972939, 2010

REVIEWED BY ANIKA SABA



This Turkish author has made her presence felt in the global literary scene with her ten novels over the last two decades. Among her renowned works, *The Forty Rules of Love* is a delightful book of love, religion and Sufism. The story balances the present world of Ella Rubinsteins, a housewife in Massachusetts who has initiated a long-distance relationship with an author called Aziz, and the historical land of Konya in Asia Minor. In the process she brings together the two great minds of the poet Rumi and the dervish Shams of Tabriz. The latter strand of the narrative is parceled as a plot-within-a-plot for it comes as a novel that Aziz has written and that Ella is writing a report on for the literary agency she has recently joined. Aziz's novel takes both Ella and readers into a spiritual journey of understanding the forty rules of love as preached by the Sufis and explained by Shams of Tabriz in this narrative. These forty rules of love are the

same as that of Islam, which claims Shams, is the religion of love. Following these rules, she suggests, one can come closer to God.

At a time when the religion of Islam is being tarnished by media images of terror and violence, Shafak's novel breathes a fresh new light into the Islamic worldview and the practice of religious meditation by some of its adherents. Different chapters of the novel are narrated from the point of view of different characters, making the whole an unbiased narrative; this narrative strategy would appear to be crucial for a work concerning love, religion and spirituality. Shafak's personal interest and experience of Sufism is reflected in the richness of the work, making it noteworthy not only for her fans and but also compelling for all readers of compelling fiction.

Anika Saba is a lecturer in the Department of English & Humanities at BRAC University.

### How Cute Button Eyes Are, Really?

REVIEWED BY T. S. MARIN



*Coraline*, Neil Gaiman, Bloomsbury and Harper Collins, ISBN: 0-380-80734-3, 2002.

There are "children's" books which will make you travel down memory lane, and then there are "children's" books which will make you regret that you hadn't read them earlier. For me, *Coraline* is in the second category.

From Ali Baba's cave to Narnia, it's no secret to bookworms that MAGIC happens when you open a forbidding door and *Coraline* is no exception to that rule. Often compared with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, this dark fantasy novella has been awarded numerous British and American literary awards, and rightfully so.

*Coraline* Jones (not Coraline!) moves into a dilapidated house teeming with mysteries and secrets to be unraveled. Since neither of her parents has much time or attention to spare for her, she goes through that strange bricked-up door and reaches another house which is somewhat similar, yet disturbingly different than her own. Adventures within adventures

unfold while Coraline fights the Bedlam not only to save her eyes from being replaced with shiny new buttons but also to rescue her family and new-found friends.

In the quintessential Neil Gaiman style, *Coraline* is bone-chilling. The setting is enchanting; the plot magnetic and each and every character are exquisite in their own ways. However, my favorite is the black cat. Not to mention what an extraordinarily brave, honest, and intelligent little girl the protagonist is! She should certainly remind many a reader of Matilda, Hermione, Alice, and Lucy Pevensie.

Next time someone says that your eyes are as cute as buttons, my dear readers, beware!

T.S. Marin is obsessed about collecting and reading fantasy novels; she is lecturer of English at Primsea University, and Sub Editor of Star Literature and Star Reviews.