

BOOK REVIEW: NONFICTION

A memoir that retraces Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana’s days in exile



Sheikh Rehana’s dream of studying at Viswa-Bharati also remained unfulfilled as the state government refused to take responsibility for their security. The next government, that of Indira Gandhi, reduced their monthly allowance and benefits. Sheikh Hasina worked in Akashvani Delhi under a pseudonym without revealing her identity.

AHMED SHAFI UDDIN

When a character from history becomes a significant figure in the state, it is difficult for a researcher or writer to write about them. They have to tread very carefully while composing a book with unknown, yet important, collected information.

Author Sharaf Ahmed, however, does just that in his book, *15 August Hottakando: Probashe Bangabandhur Dui Konnar Dushhaha Din* (15 August Assassination: The Miserable Days of Bangabandhu’s Two Daughters In Exile), published by Prothoma Prokashon in 2021. After the death of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family on August 15 of 1975, the details of how his two daughters, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana, spent their days miserably in exile are documented in this book with reference to valid sources.

Sharaf Ahmed, who has been living in Germany for three and a half decades, has brought to light previously unknown information, recovered documents, unpublished letters, press clippings, and photographs, such as those of Indira Gandhi, Wazed Mia, Sheikh Hasina, and Sheikh Rehana.

He has translated an article published in an archived German newspaper into Bangla. The author has also kept in touch with sources and eyewitnesses, via phone calls and emails, situated across Berlin, Bonn, Frankfurt, Karlsruhe, Vienna, Brussels, Amsterdam, Washington, Bangalore, and Dhaka, and also contacted the German journalists who met the daughters of Bangabandhu in Bonn on August 16, 1975.

It was then that rumours circulated across the media that Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana have been detained at the ambassador’s house in Bonn. The

ambassador had to present the two sisters to prove that they had not been taken prisoners, but when the journalists were present in the house, the sound of people crying was still coming from the upper floor.

“The two daughters survived because they arrived in Germany two weeks before the incident”, the author writes in the preface. “I kept thinking about how and where they were, who their companions of danger were during that tumultuous time, [...] and [how] the newspapers, the German

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politicians at the time, or [...] the German people saw it”.

“I feel compelled to present [these things] to the new generation and researchers”, the author adds. Perhaps it is from this thought that he has dedicated the book to the two children of that day, Joy and Putul.

When Bangabandhu was the President, he handed over USD 50 to his daughters during their trip to Germany. Then came that brutal murder, and the search for a safe shelter for the daughters continued.

In the worst of times, some people left and some came forward. Secret diplomatic activities began; Indian embassy officials escorted them to the airport and they reached Delhi from Frankfurt without informing anyone. The two sisters were in a safe shelter in Delhi but there was still a panic of insecurity. Both of them had to take on pseudonyms for privacy.

Sheikh Rehana’s dream of studying at Viswa-Bharati also remained unfulfilled as the state government refused to take responsibility for their security. The next government, that of Indira Gandhi, reduced their monthly allowance and benefits. Sheikh Hasina worked in Akashvani Delhi under a pseudonym without revealing her identity. The arrangement of Joy and Putul’s education was ongoing.

1975 to 1981. Six years in exile. Breathless days. Incident after incident. In the meantime, an attempt had been made to form world opinion to demand justice for the brutal assassination. The task of collecting and covering the details of these events was not easy indeed.

Former Ambassador, Tariq A Karim, and researcher, Dr Shaheed Hossain, were the partners of that difficult time. Brief memoirs of these witnesses of history have been added to Sharaf Ahmed’s book, which further strengthen its credibility.

The book is arranged in 10 episodes. It has already intrigued readers and researchers alike. The third edition has already been printed.

Ahmed Shafi Uddin is the former Head of Public Relations and Publication office of Rajshahi University, and a former correspondent of Dainik Bangla and Weekly Bichitra.

Translated from Bangla by Ayesha Anu

WHAT TO READ

50 women poets represent Bangladesh internationally

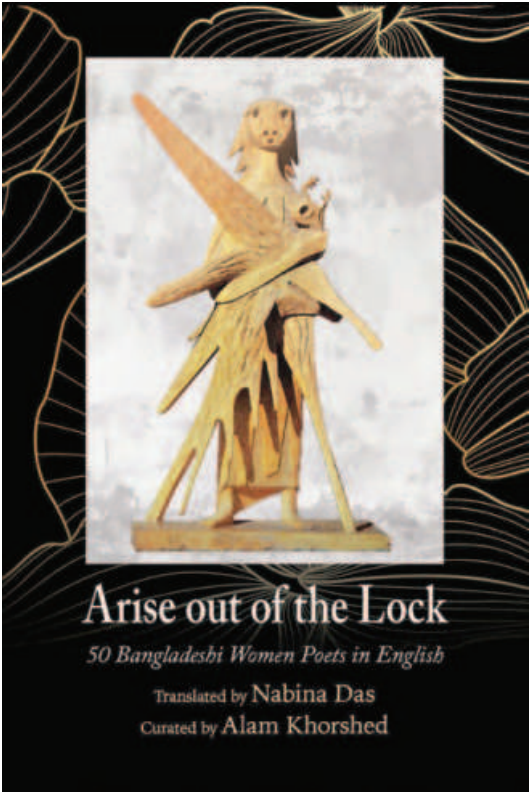
STAR BOOKS REPORT

On February 21, 2022, the poetry anthology *Arise out of the Lock* was published by London and Singapore-based publishers, Balestier Press, to commemorate the International Mother Language Day and 50 years of Bangladesh’s independence. The translated work of 50 “representative” women poets of Bangladesh has been curated for this book by writer, translator and critic Alam Khorshed, with the translation done by Nabina Das, a Bangla-speaking Indian poet, professor and translator based in Hyderabad. Das has also written for Bangladeshi platforms including *Dhaka Tribune* and *Six Seasons Review*.

The anthology includes poetry by literary icons such as Sufia Kamal, Anwara Syed Huq, Farida Majid, and more, alongside more contemporary poets and writers including Jahanara Parveen, Jharna Rahman, Novera Hossain, Leesa Gazi, and others.

“Certain themes and imagery traditionally coded feminine, such as flowers and fabric, recur with surprising and thought-provoking variations in their treatment”, reads a blurb for the anthology written by Deborah Smith, the critically acclaimed translator of Han Kang’s 2016 International Booker Prize-winning novel, *The Vegetarian*. “[F]requent references to characters from Islamic and Hindu mythology point to the lived experience of a shared cultural inheritance”, Smith writes of *Arise out of the Lock*.

The book contains a foreword by writer and activist Sadaf Saaz, co-founder of the Dhaka Lit Fest, and it is available to order on Amazon.



WHAT TO READ

Rudra Goswami’s ‘Bishonno Roddur’ is a song of conscience

SHARMIN JOYA

People often struggle to express themselves in the era of digitisation. It is a time when we are convicted by censorship, causing the decay of emotion and the loss of the ability to stand out against oppression. Humans, as a result, struggle to survive meaningfully.

Bishonno Roddur (2022), the 7th poetry book by celebrated poet Rudra Goswami, is a song of conscience that touches one’s sense of morality in a subtle way. The book has been published simultaneously in Kolkata by Obhijan Publishers and in Dhaka by Anindyo publishers at the 2022 Ekushey Boi Mela.

Goswami infuses some fundamental questions—about realising one’s social strength, reacting against oppression, building empathy and so on—through the form of quatrains that try to raise awareness of what it is to be socially awake.

“I don’t call these poems, they are consciences”, Goswami told this reporter. “I always want to spread love and provoke

our inner soul through my works, hoping to see a bigger change”.

The 108 page-book consists of 100 quatrains exploring themes of love, nature, politics, and society, language, self-consciousness, the notion of existence, and so on.

“I will consider myself successful when these series of thoughts expressed in my book will start affecting people, and they will reflect through action”, the poet said.

The wonderful cover illustration of the book is done by Charu Pintu, while Komol Pal, an emerging artist working on his first big project with this book, has drawn the line art that beautifully complements each of the poems.

“I would like to congratulate and express my heartfelt gratitude towards Komol for his excellent work”, shares the writer.

The book is available at BDT 250 (\$10), at pavilion no. 25, Anindyo publishers at the Ekushey Boi Mela.

Rudra Goswami will visit the fair from March 14 to 17 to meet and greet his readers.

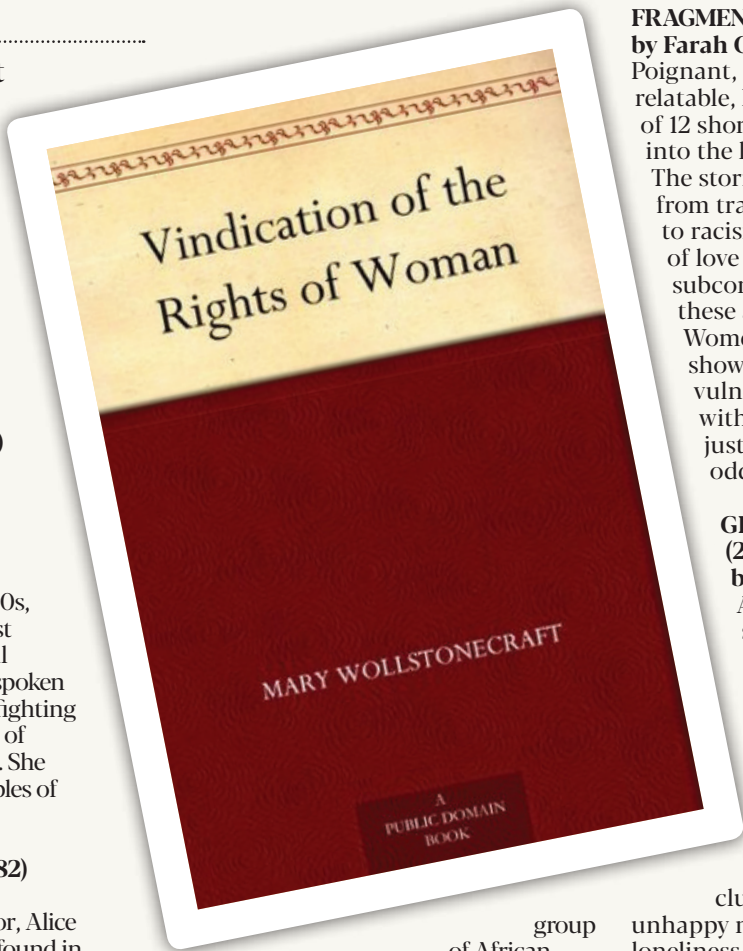
4 spellbinding books written by women, about women, to read for International Women’s Day

SARA KABIR

Each book in this list features strong, fearless, bold, multi-faceted, creative, inspiring, vulnerable, witty, and most importantly, real women from all walks of life.

A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN (1792)
by Mary Wollstonecraft
Established as the mother of modern feminism, Mary Wollstonecraft produced her declaration of female independence in the late 1700s, an age when women were just starting to stand up for equal rights. Wollstonecraft is outspoken and passionate in her book, fighting to change the prevalent view of docile, decorative femininity. She instead lays down the principles of emancipation.

THE COLOUR PURPLE (1982)
by Alice Walker
Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Alice Walker’s novel, can often be found in the list of banned books in America. What makes this book so controversial, yet so well-loved, is not its language or violence, but its depiction of the racism, love, religious beliefs, sexuality, sisterhood, loyalty, and domestic abuse faced by the



FRAGMENTS OF RIVERSON (2013)
by Farah Ghuznavi
Poignant, heart-breaking and all too relatable, Farah Ghuznavi’s collection of 12 short stories offer a fresh look into the lives of South Asian women. The stories cover a range of topics from tradition to treachery, rights to racism, weaving a narrative of love and loss throughout the subcontinent. But most of all, these are stories about women. Women who are not afraid to show their intelligence, their vulnerability, their ability to withstand diverse situations, and just be themselves despite all odds.

GIRL IN WHITE COTTON (2020)
by Avni Doshi
Avni Doshi’s 2020 Booker-shortlisted novel begins with the protagonist, Tara, expressing an unusually blunt sadism towards her mother’s pain. Through fractured flashbacks and stories told in real time, we find out about Tara’s childhood in an ashram, a place that her mother clung to as she was evading an unhappy marriage. The thirst, hunger, loneliness, and anxiety of Tara’s childhood lies repressed in the art she produces. Through the back and forth of her flashbacks and her adult life, we find a story that teases out the complexity and paradoxes of mother-daughter relationships in South Asia.

group of African American women the book is centred around. Intensely compassionate and beautifully crafted, Alice Walker’s novel takes readers on a page-turning journey of love and redemption.