

BOOK REVIEW: FICTION

Rage is not singular for teenage immigrants

MALIHA HUQ

“What’s the word for when someone drinks so much, they are ruining your best friend’s life? Or the word for a man so vengeful about his own past that he wants to destroy your future? What’s the word for a woman who was sick for months, but refused to go to the doctor until it was too late? The word for the girl at school whose personal mission is to mess with your head?” Tahir writes.

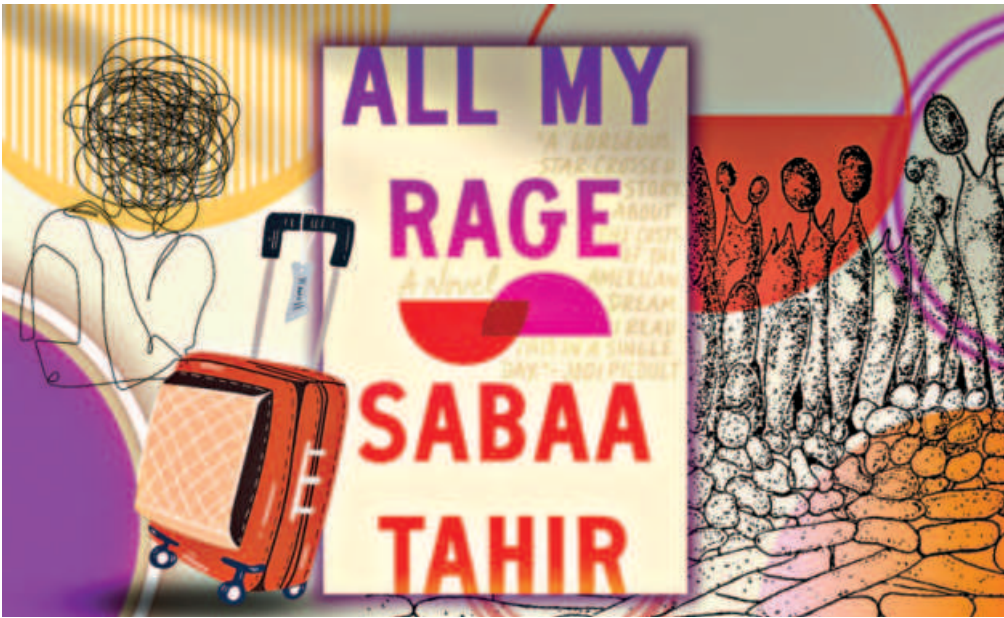
Sabaa Tahir is a Pakistani-American young adult novelist best known for the *An Ember in the Ashes* quartet fantasy, a *New York Times* bestselling series that has been translated into over 35 languages. Tahir grew up in California’s Mojave Desert in her family’s 18-room motel. There, she spent her time devouring fantasy novels, raiding her brother’s comic book stash, and playing guitar badly. She began writing books while working nights as a newspaper editor.

Right from the dedication page of the book, Tahir implies that *All My Rage* (Razorbill, 2022) is a story of survivors. It opens with the disclaimer that it contains subjects related to addiction, Islamophobia, and assault, among other things. And she does an excellent job of handling such sensitive topics.

Hers is not a preachy mental health awareness novel. Instead of throwing around terms like “trauma” and “abuse”, Tahir nudges her readers with imagery. She creates the scenarios a survivor—of racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, domestic abuse, and bullying—goes through, and how their experiences culminate in mental health issues such as PTSD and depression. At the end of the book, Tahir adds the hotline numbers of organisations which deal with abuse survivors.

All My Rage is a character-centric novel with three main characters: Sal, his mother Misbah, and Noor. Misbah moved to Juniper, California many years ago with her husband from Pakistan and started running the Clouds’ Rest Inn Motel. A Pakistani orphan, Noor came to Juniper with his father’s brother, the only relative she had. Noor later became Sal’s best friend and an honorary daughter to Misbah.

The state of being othered by the mainstream American society, and the interminable identity crisis faced by the Muslim immigrants, are crucial themes in this novel. Being the minority in school, both Sal and Noor have to face numerous difficulties. With time, they create their own coping mechanisms. Sal turns out to be a bookish young man who enjoys writing. Noor dreams of becoming a doctor and clings to music like it’s her lifeline. She is determined to create her own identity no matter what. Misbah is the symbol of motherly affection, guiding her children along the way. Every chapter is a first-person narrative of any of these three characters. Misbah’s voice—which echoes her Pakistani identity, nostalgia



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

for ancestral roots, and love for the Punjabi culture—primes the background for Sal and Noor’s story. The chapters are short, each segueing smoothly to the next.

Every section is neatly paced, giving readers enough time to breathe in the story. For instance, the slow-paced love scenes of Noor and Sal help engage readers effectively. The skillful balance between a character’s action and its consequent outcome is remarkable. This, too, piques the curiosity to continue reading.

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“Anger’s not the right word. Rage. That’s what this feeling is, eating me up.”

But *Rage* is not singular, it is underpinned by a plethora of emotions. There is grief of losing loved ones, disappointment of expectations unmet, fear of being denigrated, hope of rising above the misery, and love. All of these boil down to the question of inheriting, losing and

creating an identity. Identity as an overarching theme, not just a philosophical idea, but very political, social and economic, especially for emigrants. Tahir, being an immigrant herself, has highlighted the real issues immigrant teenagers in America face. The constant tug of opposing cultures—South Asian versus American—puts the youngsters in a dilemma and hinders a smooth development of identity. Tahir uses stanzas from Elizabeth Bishop’s “One Art” to express the universal feeling of loss. In the case of *All My Rage*, these stanzas help the readers empathise with Sal, Noor and Misbah—people on the fringes of mainstream society in the book:

“I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster, some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent. I miss them, but it wasn’t a disaster.”

Not just Bishop’s poetry, but also the appropriate use of mixed media, references from literature (*The Lord of The Rings*), music (U2’s “With or Without You”, Florence & the Machine’s “Cosmic Love”), movies and series (*Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *The Simpsons*) all make the novel more relatable. *All My Rage* is a contemporary YA novel about family and forgiveness, love and loss, in a sweeping story that crosses generations and continents.

Maliha Huq is a contributor to Daily Star Books.

BOOK REVIEW: NONFICTION

A cookbook for a cause

TASNEEM TAMBAWALA

I belong to a time when cookbooks were in high demand. In higher demand were the recipes passed down from generation to generation—I have a diary which contains recipes that I have collected from aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, my mother, and mother-in-law.

American civil rights activist Cesar Chavez once said, “The people who give you their food give you their heart.” *Celebrating Relationships* (Onnoprokash, 2022) is a compilation of around 200 recipes

from across the world with contributions from 75 individuals—friends, colleagues and family members, whose preparations have been loved and savoured by Dr Naushaba Singh, who was born in Bangladesh and studied in Viqarunnessa School and Holy Cross College. Singh has put her heart and soul into this collection of recipes, spreading her love and passion for food across the world.

Celebrating Relationships is a set of three books with an eclectic mix of recipes for appetisers, snacks, salads, soups, kebabs, desserts, bhartas, beverages, and delectable vegetarian and non-vegetarian main course dishes. It boasts of recipes from 32 countries—from Afghanistan to Greece to Ethiopia, along with staples from South East Asia.

The first book has a section with a small introduction of each of the countries the recipes are taken from, along with the food habits of those countries. Every recipe is credited to the

person it is inspired from and the country it is staple to. The method of preparation of the dishes is detailed and very well explained, especially for amateur cooks. What I love most about this collection is that it is a personal recommendation of all these wonderful recipes. It shows that the recipes included here have been loved and savoured and have consequently found a place in these books.

The collection also consists of many Bangladeshi staples with a personal spin, such as aubergines with amchoor, stuffed karala, fish biryani, and the kulli shake that I am looking forward to trying

In my opinion, this collection would be useful to seasoned cooks and novices alike, because of its diversity of local and foreign recipes.

out. Mehreen Rahman has done a wonderful job of curating this rich combination of recipes, which also includes Russian dumplings, creta salad, apple soup, chicken on a bottle, with an assortment of breads, puddings, and cakes.

In my opinion, this collection would be useful to seasoned cooks and novices alike, because of its diversity of local and foreign recipes. I have to admit that I hadn’t even heard of some of the dishes—like kluski śląskie from Poland, and gado gado salad from east Java—that were presented in the book. But now, I can see myself buying more copies as gifts to my loved ones.

Notably, all the proceeds from the sales of *Celebrating Relationships* will be going to The Sameer Trust, which is a charitable organisation founded by Dr Naushaba Singh in Bangladesh. The organisation has been working towards providing for the underprivileged ever since its inception in various ways through support from patrons across the globe.

Tasneem Tambawala is feminist, educator, learner, with a belief that she can change the world one book at a time.



FROM PAGES TO PIXELS

“Fire and blood”—the ancient words of House Targaryen—quite literally ruled the fictional continent of Westeros, long before Ned Stark’s much foretold “winter” sank its icy jaws deep into the Seven Kingdoms. The most notable difference between the source material for *Game of Thrones* and that of *House of the Dragon* (2022), adapted from George RR Martin’s 2018 novel *Fire & Blood*, is that the text for the latter isn’t a work in progress, unlike the two final novels in *A Song of Ice and Fire* which are yet to be released.

Read Rasha Jameel’s article online on *The Daily Star* website and on *Daily Star Books’* Facebook and Instagram pages.

DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

THE SHELF

What to read if you liked watching ‘Hawa’

STAR BOOKS REPORT

Contemporary scandals, biopics of national heroes, a return to folk mythology—these are exciting times for moviegoers in Bangladesh, with storylines of the films developing on par with stunning cinematography and tasteful promotions.

Among these recent successes, Mejbaur Rahman Sumon’s *Hawa* has been running successfully in 56 halls across the country as of this week, since releasing on July 29. The film is a deep dive into Bangladesh’s rivers and the fishermen who hold up the country’s underbelly, along with the revelry, the mythologies that run across the folk culture of majhis and Bede communities.

For book-lovers, the magic of *Hawa* can be found in the following books and stories.

NAGINI KANYAR KAHINI
Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, 1952

Much like Gulti, the woman who washes up on Chaan Majhi’s boat in *Hawa*, Tarashankar’s novel takes place amidst the religious customs



and beliefs of the Bede people. A young Nagini becomes embroiled in a power struggle against the Shir Bede (head of Bede community); the plot shines light on the history and trajectory of the Bede people in Bengal, particularly on the rituals through which a young woman transforms into a Nagini.

THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1798

Towards the end of *Hawa*, Chaan Majhi’s interaction with a captivated Shalik bird has drawn media attention after representatives from the Wildlife Crime Control Unit decided to sue the director for how the antagonist treats the bird in the scene. Chaan Majhi’s treatment of the bird is symbolic of the way he treats Gulti and all the other fishermen on his ship. The film, therefore, becomes a story of accountability and repentance.

Coleridge’s iconic poem focuses entirely on this same encounter—how a Mariner, a man on a ship, learns to reckon with his actions after killing an albatross. It is a crime that comes to haunt all the remaining on the ship, seeking and demanding divine retribution.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE SNAKE GODDESS
Kaiser Haq, 2015

Snakes and snake goddesses have long held a place in other parts of South Asian culture. Scholar and poet Kaiser Haq’s translation is the “first comprehensive retelling” of the myth of the goddess Manasa in English.

Haq retells the myth in prose from five surviving verse narratives of the story of Manasa, the snake goddess and miraculous child of God Shiva. Haq’s prologue to the edition is a vital and useful survey of the Bengali oral, poetic, and manuscript traditions surrounding this folk epic. This is accompanied by an Introduction by Wendy Doniger, in which the scholar explores the history and importance of snake worship in classical Sanskrit texts.

LIFE OF PI
Yann Martel, 2001

The story of shipwreck and adventure is long familiar to us since the rousing success of Ang Lee’s 2012 film adaptation starring Irrfan Khan, Suraj Sharma and Tabu. There are differences here—Martel’s shipwrecked characters are novices in the ways of the water unlike Chaan Majhi and his fellow fishermen; his protagonist, Pi Patel, is the voice of human compassion and resilience after he loses his family at sea, stranded for 227 days on a boat with a Royal Bengal tiger.

It is the moral and philosophical undertones to both stories that align. In both *Hawa* and *Life of Pi*, the audience can “choose” a certain version of the story. They can choose to believe either in fantastical events that transcend the human capacity for imagination—that a young boy can outlive a wild orangutan, hyena, zebra, and seaskip tiger—or they can lean towards a tale of natural human selfishness, which evolves from fear to murderous violence when survival is at stake.

Read about the remaining books on the list online.