



Bangladesh: Writings on 1971, Across Borders

edited by Rakhshanda Jalil and Debjani Sengupta, Hyderabad, Orient BlackSwan, 2022, xv+276 pp., ISBN: 978-93-5442-212-6

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Although this book has significantly extended the extant literature on women entrepreneurship, the domain of women entrepreneurship still remains largely at an emerging stage, expressly in relation to theory building and cross-cultural or cross-country studies. The directions for future research posited in the book (by means of research questions), including the call for a national as well as the global level database with gender and social variables, can serve as a guide towards bridging the existing research gap (theoretical as well as empirical) in the field.

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Bangladesh: Writings on 1971, Across Borders, edited by Rakhshanda Jalil and Debjani Sengupta, Hyderabad, Orient BlackSwan, 2022, xv+276 pp., ISBN: 978-93-5442-212-6

Bangladesh: Writings on 1971, Across Borders curated and edited by Rakhshanda Jalil and Debjani Sengupta, is an intense book situated at the intersection of literature and history. Placing value on Urdu and Bangla creative writings across borders, this anthology captures and makes sense of the moments and memories, madness and mayhem shadowing the birth of Bangladesh. Through essays, fiction and poetry, the anthology addresses the birth of a nation either as a historical event or the (new) nation as a retrospective site for collective self-reflection.

The introductions, one each by Jalil and Sengupta, point out how West Pakistani imagination portrayed Bengali Muslims as an inferior breed. The justification for this stereotype was far and wide – such as Muslims in East (read Bengali) Pakistan do not speak Urdu, eat fish and share a greater cultural affinity with Kolkata (read India). An example of West Pakistani attitude is visible in Raihana Hasan's *The Beginning of the End* ' ... the smell of *maachh* everywhere and *Bangla bhasha* coming out of our ears'; 'Passionate people, these Bengalis; they get all worked up' (218). The book contends that it was the demeaning attitude of West Pakistan towards Bengali identity, culture, and language that eventually led to the downfall of Pakistan. For instance, the compulsion of Urdu is cited as a telling example. The West Pakistanis were unperturbed by it but the move created uproar in East Pakistan and led to massive resistance.

The book embodies three essays, 16 short stories, and 11 poems. All the essays are presented as 'memory texts' showcasing varied understandings of the war. For instance, Kaiser Haq discusses the unsung heroes and salutes the 'ordinary people of the country who risked everything (many becoming *shaheed*), to do their bit for the country' (34). Manas Ray's essay draws parallels between the Naxalite Movement in Kolkata and the Bangladesh Liberation War –reading them as not isolated events but products of a shared predicament. Meher Ali's essay carries a rhetorical tone. Foregrounding her grandfather's journey, a Pakistani soldier in the 1971 war, Ali concludes that eventually people on both sides gained nothing but an 'inheritance of losses'.

Likewise, the short stories and poems build on this theme of inheritance of loss by laying bare the graphic violence, agony, anguish, fear, and suspicion that the war entailed. One witnesses a display of these emotions in Akhtaruzzaman Elias' story *The Raincoat* where Professor Nurul Huda is a 'miscreant' and constantly under surveillance for his anti-government activities. The extract from Sorayya Khan's *Noor* aptly brings out the futility of war when Ali reveals 'we were fighting for our lives. Not for



you. Or this country. For ourselves ... fighting stingers, Indians and Bengalis alike' (235). Selina Hosain's *The Story of Amina and Madina* is a horrifying depiction of violence inflicted on women under military regimes. Nations have a conflicting and relative understanding of their historical truth is another common thread in the anthology. It can be inferred by how Urdu and Bangla writers process the same material differently. Stories such as *She Knew the Use of Powered Red Chilies* and *The Odd Bird of the Cage* are examples of this conflict and difference.

The poetry section is equally evocative and pushes the semantic possibilities to develop a nuanced understanding of war as a social and political reality. Moushumi Bhowmik's *Joshor Road* is one such poem. Afzal Syed's *We Should Forget* and Bimal Guha's *The Poetry of 1971* place value on memory. Reconciliation, peace, and at times their impossibility are the recurrent themes in the poetry section, more particularly in that of Naushad Noori and Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

The book is also an exercise in translation from Urdu and Bangla into English. The quality of translation should be assessed independently for there are issues of consistency and copy editing in many places. Expressions like, 'carried away by her husband's deep sigh, Johra Bibi slapped her forehead and cried out' (98) hamper readability and on occasion, comprehension. It is intriguing that the editors did not bother to reflect on translation(s). Finally, the anthology is yet another addition to the vastly growing literature on Partition and the Liberation War. The book will be of interest to scholars working in interdisciplinarity, more particularly in literary studies, South Asian history, and culture.

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Himalayan histories: economy, polity, religious traditions, by Chetan Singh, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2019, xi + 303 pp., \$95.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-438-47521-9

India's regional history and culture as a field are filled with underexplored customs, traditions and practices. *Himalayan Histories* focuses on political economy and ritual life and their dimensions in Himachal Pradesh. The book consists of two new chapters while others are republished essays. There are two main focal points of the book. First, the book focuses on the prominent role of *deota*, that is, the regional gods in contemporary and traditional politics. Second, the book looks at the Himalayan agrarian ways of being-in-the-world. Chapter 1 of the book discusses the importance of oral history in Himalayan communities that have limited written records and describes the central role of local deities called *deotas* in these communities. Although Himachal Pradesh has grown in various sectors, 'the continued authority of village deities', Chetan adds, 'decide important matters of secular (and sometimes even political) concern in large parts of Himachal' (11). Chapter 2 demonstrates how the western Himalayan region has a distinct approach to social living compared to the lower altitudes. Chapter 3 explores how different regions are governed by *deotas* residing in their distinct temples and how the movement of communities is connected to the travel of these deities. The book also highlights how community integration is established through associations with *deotas* and how this element of solidarity is present in Hindu festivals and popular protests.