

Longing to belong

By Mandira Nayar



(UN)SETTLED: NOTES FROM A SHIFTING LIFE

By Kamini Karlekar
Published by Tranquebar
Price Rs 295; pages 184

Detachment, for Kamini Karlekar, is not a state of mind. It is part of her job description and the only way she can keep her sanity. Karlekar has spent years working with refugees in far-flung places, which have braved civil war for so long that the stories have stopped making news.

Karlekar is waif-like—almost too tiny to go off to a war zone—but the moment she starts talking, you realise she is a survivor. She writes about her experiences vividly in *(Un)settled: Notes from a Shifting Life*.

The book, deeply personal, funny, sassy, informative and very readable, offers readers a chance to know Sudan and realise that there is more to the country with the four-wheel drives, beautiful villas, a Hilton and even watering holes.

“The second time I went to Sudan, they could not understand what to think of me. They watch Bollywood movies and the old ones from the time of Helen,” she says, laughing. Being single in Sudan is never easy and being an Indian woman working with refugees is even tougher. Her home in Showak was a row of prefabricated houses with a garden and “with a few withered trees and plants bravely fighting the heat of the sun”. But as she says, it is better than the refugee camps.

For India that started its independent journey with millions walking

across the border, refugees often get lost in the crowd. Karlekar’s stories, then, are particularly interesting. They offer readers a different side of the crisis—of life that goes on.

Karlekar has been listening to tales of lost homelands since she was a baby. “When I was a child, I was often made to do things that I did not want to do. My mother was working with Burmese refugees and I loved working with them. It triggered something,” she says.

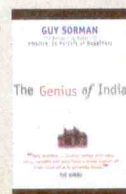
The relationship between refugees forced to flee their homes to another country and their hosts is complicated. In Sudan, the case is no different, with some people living in their temporary home for as long as 35 years. Karlekar explores their feeling of being outsiders with her own pursuit of constantly shifting and wanting to belong.

The book is also ultimately about people who tend to get reduced to numbers. There is of course the terror that goes with being an aid worker washing dirty toilets and the temptation of a grand romance “trying to recreate ‘normalcy’”. It is the search for normalcy which Karlekar is chasing as she listens to stories of violence every day.

Battling numbness is what keeps refugees hooked. This desperate need to belong and the eternal pursuit for permanence is what Karlekar best describes. The book was written as a way to survive while she was at the camps without any internet or cell phones.

Ask her what made her decide to work with refugees, Karlekar smiles and says, “I was 27 and was working with UNHRC where I got Rs 8,000. I was so excited that someone had given me a job. It was like an experiment and when I went to Sudan things fell into place.” ■

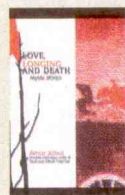
SHORT TAKES



THE GENIUS OF INDIA

By Guy Sorman
Published by Full
Circle
Price Rs 495;
pages 271

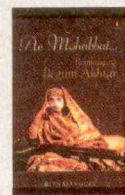
An insight into what is happening in contemporary India and what lies in store. Sorman finds that in India things don’t compete with each other; they just add up to complement. And this is the gift it has to offer to the world. A good mix of reportage and reflection.



LOVE, LONGING AND DEATH MYSTIC STORIES

By Amar Jaleel
Published by Biblio-
phile South Asia
Price Rs 425;
pages 262

Another one on Partition. The stories take you through the author’s journey through 60 years from 1947 to 2008. Amar’s stories are woven with mysticism.



AE MOHABBAT... REMINISCING BEGUM AKHTAR

By Rita Ganguly
Published by Stellar
Price Rs 695;
pages 357

Begum Akhtar’s was a life of sensitivity and of extreme love for music. This biography delves into the subtle nuances of transition in time.



THE ANGEL OF GOD

By Jyothi Menon
Published by Cedar
Books
Price Rs 195; pages 320
This is the first book of
fiction by an HR profes-

sional who has authored three books on her profession. The book explores the role of transformers—people who transform those around them as they transform themselves—in society. The book is also about the power that comes from caring.