

# Otherwise

Stories you want to hear about Other Books

## Podcast Series: M Noushad with Nahla Nainar

The spirit in which we take these like Tuhfat al-Mujahidin and Arab Geographers knowledge of Southern India is timeless. Our spirit should be open to receive the facts, these texts are conveying, even today.

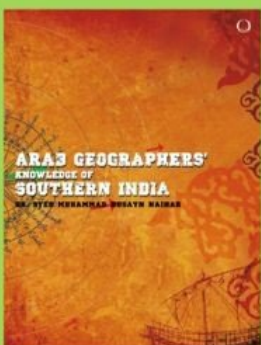
What many of us may not know, is that before English became Lingua Franca, we were extensively dealing with Arabic and Persia.

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-Nahla Nainar



Nahla Nainar, senior journalist and archivist, shares her reflections on the life and legacy of her grandfather, Syed Muhammed Husayn Nainar to M Noushad, educator cum storyteller. SMH Nainar was an erudite scholar, eminent historian, researcher, author, translator, publisher, traveler, polyglot, academician, and a family man. Here are some relevant quotes from the interview. To hear the conversation fully, kindly see our YouTube channel, Other Books.



The monograph of Dr. Nainar is the fruit of a courageous undertaking carried out with much ability and crowned with success. He has carefully collected all the references to India and Indian affairs which have been made by early Arab geographers and subjected them to a thoroughly critical study.

-Lionel David Barnett  
(English orientalist)

# Other Books will greet you from Karaparamba



Razeena Ayesha

Managing Director, Other Books

The summer of 2017. Eight years ago, to be exact. The searing heat was unbearable. I got down from the auto-rickshaw and rushed into the office. Power supply was disconnected for some maintenance work. Computers had to be forcefully shut down as the inverter back-up was short. Other Books wore a deserted look, with darkness enveloping the room from all angles. Thanks to the building contractor for an unplanned construction, Other Books, the publishing company and distribution store I have been heading since 2009, is situated on the first floor of this decrepit building.

Speaking of Other Books, it is a small publishing company (Basharat Peer called us as ‘two-room publisher’) started in 2003 by a group of friends, most of who lived far apart. It was initially managed by my uncle with the support of two staff members. The idea to start the company arose from the lack of availability of certain titles published by fringe publishers, when online selling was not an option and services like Flipkart and Amazon had not yet entered the market.

In 2006, Other Books stepped into publishing with its first release, *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin*. However, the venture did not unfold exactly as the friends had envisioned. When my uncle moved abroad, the company was entrusted to the staff for a year or two. During this time, the three part-time editors poured their hearts into the work, investing deeply to breathe life into the books. As someone who frequently visited the store to lend a hand, I eventually found myself taking on more responsibilities – until I gradually began leading the company. Every summer, we think about installing an air conditioner in the store but keep putting it off. Once the monsoon arrives, the humidity and intense heat fade from our minds. One summer, a friend visiting from the UAE was chatting with us and noticed how humid the store felt, even with two fans running at full speed. He strongly recommended installing an AC, pointing out that if we found it uncomfortable; our customers would likely feel the same and have difficulty browsing the books.

I often find myself boasting about and defending our store’s location, emphasizing its strategic position near the Calicut railway station. But it makes me wonder – should we focus on changing people’s mindset or market our titles in such a way as to draw attention to books rather than to the charm (or lack thereof) of the lane we occupy? Or perhaps, is this just a case of ‘sour grapes’? Once a lady came in, panting and puffing (climbing the staircase had drained her energy) and requested for the Malayalam translation of the book on ‘*Quran and Woman*’ (*Quran Oru Penn Vayana*) authored by Amina Wudud.

She said, she had a hard time searching for the store, and suggested that it was high time we moved to a 'better place'. And that was the nth time we were being asked to move.

From my little research, I found out that the area we resided was once quite popular for the heavily drunk and drug peddlers; so, 'decent classes' never ventured into this area. With much bewilderment, I understood that the stigma attached to the place had prevented walk-in metro-oriented customers including women and children as their engagement has been vital for the store's survival. Fortunately, the area has now shed much of the stigma related to its geographical, cultural, logistical, and other challenges.



Nonetheless, the railways have launched an expansion drive that is likely to impact our business in the near future. Since then, we have kept dreaming and searching for a better location. However, our budget never aligned with the market rates, keeping the idea of relocating just out of reach. Fortunately, 2023-2024 brought exciting developments for us. Several of our titles, such as *Rayyatuwari* by Abhilash Malayil, *Anubhavangal Adayalangal* by O.K. Santhosh, *Islamika Feminism* by Ummul Fayiza, received the Sahitya Academy Award. *Nalpath Pranaya Niyamangal* (Elif Shafak's *Forty Rules of Love*) which we published in 2020 became a bestseller this year. Sometimes, it feels like a miracle.

The same friend who once suggested installing an air conditioner recently proposed – alongside the store, we could create a beautiful library and co-working space. A place where people could come to read, spend time with us, browse our titles, share recommendations, and discover new books. Eventually, our dream is becoming a reality. We have found a spacious and beautiful location in Karaparamba, within Calicut's city limits. Architect Abhirami from Vettaths, along with her friend Anitha Kishen, is leading the project. If all goes well, we hope to move to the new space by February.

The 'Wayanad Literature Festival' was a delightful experience for the Other Books team. Our team thoroughly appreciated the diverse range of English readers and the unique nature of subaltern book purchases. The pleasant weather and delicious food added to the overall enjoyment. However, in the future, we hope that the organisers will make it grander event with greater participation of people...

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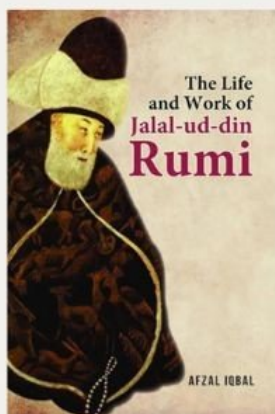
-Dr. Auswaf Ahsan  
Managing editor, Other Books



## Participation in WLF



# Introducing our Shelf



## ***The Life and Work of Jalal-ud-din Rumi***

**Afsal Iqbal**

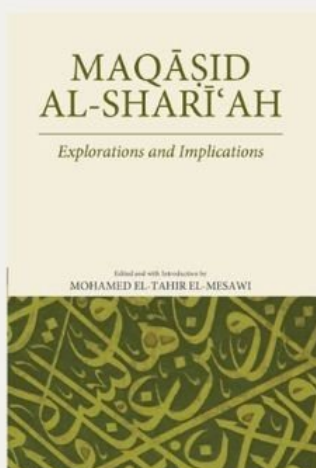
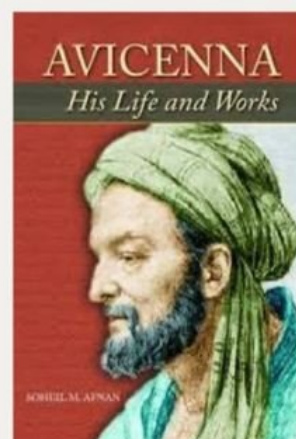
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## **AVICENNA**

***His Life and Works***

**Soheil M Afnan**

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## **MAQASID AL-SHARI 'AH** ***Explorations and Implications***

Edited and with Introduction by

**Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi**

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