

# "South Asian" is Launched in Hong Kong; a Booming Publishing Trade in Singapore; and a Guest Writer of The Daily Star Holds an Art Show in Calcutta.

IMMIGRANTS from South Asia who have made their homes, some for generations, in other developing countries, from the Caribbeans to Fiji, have had a difficult start, some over a century ago, followed by hardship and racial discriminations. Then, in many cases, came success stories, flourishing trade and commerce, well-deserved recognition in professional classes and even hard-won places in the political life.

Not surprisingly, at this moment of success, many of them would look back on their ancestral homes in South Asia with a mixture of aloofness and indifference rather than with nostalgia and admiration. The result, one gets a book like "The Area of Darkness" by V S Naipaul, that superb writer of Trinidad who shakes up the conscience of India, but stops short of seeing the real South Asia with its vibrant culture that survives all kinds of misfortunes and tragedies.

It has always been the place for making a fast buck, for dabbling in the stockmarket, for backing horses at the jockey club and, finally, for finding your own definition of gracious living. Affluent South Asians easily became part of the scene, and have remained so.

One grey area has been publishing. Talented South Asian journalists, with Kerlans easily constituting the single biggest group, have been working for British-owned publications for decades, publications which have been lately taken over by the US interests and Australians. For a decade and a half, Amitabha Chowdhury, the Magsaysay Award winning media entrepreneur from Calcutta continued with his heroic battle to make the Asian Finance a profitable operation and recently sold it to a London-based British publishing group. However, it is good to know that Chowdhury's other venture, the monthly Executive remains with an Asian group, with the

glossy art paper and full of colour photographs and a good many full page advertisements, there still remains the need for a SAARC journal, brought out from one of the capitals of the region. Meanwhile, good luck to Menon and Co.

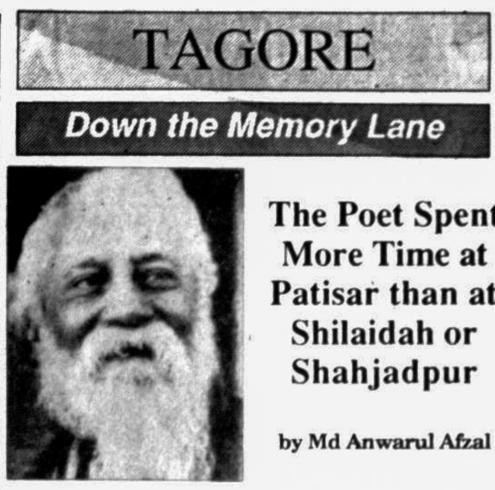
It seems that these Newly Industrialised Countries (NICs) in Asia will leave us behind — the LDCs and the non-NICs — virtually in everything, except perhaps in political freedom, meaning, everything that relates to one form of economic activity or another, or, to put it a little crudely, in anything that makes money.

A report in a recent issue of the Far Eastern Economic Review talks about a boom in book publishing in Singapore, and that too, in English. Until about a decade ago, the number of book publishing firms could be counted in

reforms. No longer a MP, "Jaya", as he is popularly called, remains a model to follow for other solitary members in the opposition, the lone voice of a single party, in other parliaments, including in Bangladesh. His was — and indeed still is — an example in tenacity, hard work and commitment.

A former colleague in Manila, a personal friend and a guest writer of The Daily Star, Barun Roy has one more distinction that I, for one, had been only vaguely aware of, although we saw a lot of each other in Manila in the late seventies. Maybe, in those days, he was either a Sunday painter or too reticent about inviting his friends to his studio.

Now, I can make up my lapse with the announcement that a solo exhibition of paintings



## The Poet Spent More Time at Patisar than at Shilaidah or Shahjadpur

by Md Anwarul Afzal

MONTHS ago, the state level celebrations of the birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore at Shahjadpur in Sirajganj district and at Kuthbari in Kushtia town had undoubtedly stirred much interest of the people at large on the life and contributions of the great poet. Shilaidah has become very prominent because of wide publicity and its association also with Lalou Shaah. Both Shilaidah and Shahjadpur have become so because of the easy road and railway communication with Calcutta and later with Dhaka. But it is only at Patisar Kacharbari in Naogaon district where Rabindranath spent the longest time while he was in this part of Bengal, now Bangladesh.

Rabindranath in his early life, at 27 years, was asked by his father to take over the administration of the Zamindary situated in Kushtia, Pabna and Rajshahi districts. This Zamindary was part of the vast Zamindary of famous Rani Bhawani which was purchased by the grandfather of the poet in default of payment of revenue. The poet first came to visit Shahjadpur and Patisar to supervise the work of these two Kacharies in Pabna and Rajshahi respectively. The vast Zamindary was after several years partitioned and the Zamindary under Shilaidah in Kushtia came in possession of one of his cousins. So, the poet shifted his headquarters to Patisar, a remote village in interior of Atrai (now upazila) under Naogaon (now district).

Patisar is not practically well known to the present

generation. Patisar stands on the bank of a river which becomes dry in the summer. As the Kachari was under construction, the poet lived most of his time in his boat "Atrai". Later on he used to stay in a part of the big Kachari with his wife Mrinalini Devi at Patisar. Mr Loken Palit, then District Judge of Rajshahi and a close friend of the poet, used to come to Patisar to enjoy the tranquillity of the surroundings. Mr Andrews, an ICS, also accompanied the poet from time to time. Patisar had no society for the poet nor a "Post-Master" of Shilaidah. So when he felt bored he rushed to Calcutta. But he did not like the humdrum of the city life and soon returned to Patisar.

In 1894 the poet first came to Patisar. During the rainy season the village looked like an island and a vast panorama of dark green paddy fields all around gave a picturesque view. Nature opened a new vista of scenic beauty which inspired the poet to write many of his poems at Patisar. He extolled this scenic beauty in "Chhinnapatra" many times. During his stay at Patisar the poet composed several of his best poems such as Chaitali, Duranta Aaha, Purnima etc. In Chaitali, Rabindranath gave a vivid description of Patisar and its surroundings.

While at Patisar, the poet was very much shocked to see the sufferings of his poor tenants. As a benevolent and secular Zamindar the poet had always the welfare of his tenants in his mind. In those days there were only two high schools in the entire Naogaon sub-division, one at Naogaon town and another at Dubalhatti. Rabindranath established a high school at Patisar in 1915, the third in the whole sub-division, which was inaugurated by his wife Mrinalini Devi and was named after his eldest son Rathindranath. It opened the gate of knowledge in a very backward place of a vast inaccessible area where Muslims were in majority. The poet was grieved to see his tenants oppressed by the village Maha-



Now, the fortunes of South Asian immigrants have started changing — and changing for the worse — in many countries they had helped to develop with their sweat and tears. In some places, in the Pacific, local ethnic nationalism is pushing the immigrants to the corner, often out of jobs. In other places, say, in some Caribbean islands, the economic downturn has hit everyone very hard, the immigrants — or their children — in low income groups proving to be the worst sufferers.

Where does Hong Kong fit in on this scenario?

By and large, it is a success story, and continues to be so. There is hardly a part of South Asia which has not provided some immigrants for the British colony, hardly a religious sect that has not set up its own place of worship.

## MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

editorial team headed by Sri Lankan veteran journalist, Gerald Dellikhan.

It is against this background of somewhat mixed performance of sub-continental journalists in Hong Kong that we must give credit to a group originally from this region that has just launched a monthly, somewhat daringly titled, South Asian, daringly because to give a particular regional identity to a Hong Kong-based publication is a challenging proposition.

The Publisher-Editor Venu Menon has given good reasons for taking up this challenge. To quote from the journal's opening editorial, "When international news media talk about Asia, they conveniently omit South Asia... even in the daily weather report of the two TV stations in Hong Kong. Then, the magazine which includes a good coverage from Bangladesh from its correspondent, Sabir Mustafa, says, 'Yes, the region has its problems, but the developmental programmes initiated by the governments, opening up of the markets and the changing lifestyles of its citizens will be recorded by the South Asian'."

The magazine, I hope, will meet its expectations. The first issue, just received, contains a wide-ranging coverage of developments in South Asian countries, with the focus on trade and investments. Indeed, anxious as they are to attract foreign capital for their countries, the trade missions of South Asian governments in the British colony should treat the journal as an ally. It is just the kind of journal that one of the guest columnists of The Daily Star, Tarzie Vittachi of Sri Lanka had suggested we should bring out from within the region for worldwide distribution. Well, all I can say is, while Menon of Hong Kong has stolen a march on us with an attractive publication, printed on

fingers, virtually all struggling to survive, except The Times publishing co, the stable companion of the leading English language daily of the same name.

Now, with new titles, in English, appearing on the bookshelves of the city state's thriving bookstores, nearly competing with imported publications, the local publishing trade may be all set for what the Review calls "a roaring success." This may not be much of an exaggeration. After all, a new firm called by what certainly sounds like a catchy name, "Flame of the Forest" has just sold 65,000 copies of its first publication, a collection of stories in English. When the firm's boss, Alex Chacko says a similar book might have sold only 5,000 copies a year ago.

Different kinds of books, all in English — the common language for the multi-racial city republic — are making the best of the publishing boom. An anthology of political cartoons, mildly teasing Singapore leaders, not excluding the island's ever-lasting father figure, Lee Kuan Yew, has sold 40,000 copies in first two months; a memoir of a Singapore model, titled, "Excuse me, are you a model?" too has been a roaring success; and there comes another best-seller, "Raffles Place", a fiction by young Philip Jayaratnam, a young attorney whose academic record in Oxford would be the envy of many other talented young persons of Asia. And, lest we forget, Philip is the son of that highly durable Singapore politician, J R Jayaratnam of the Workers' Party who, for a few years served as the lone opposition member in the Singapore parliament, putting up one fight after another in defence of rights of his people, freedom of the press and social

### Barun Roy

An Exhibition of Paintings

by Barun opens today, August 7, at the Chitrakoot Art Gallery, at Presidency Court, 55 Gariahat Road, Calcutta. Inaugurated by eminent journalist Gour Kishore Ghosh, the exhibition will remain open until August 17. If any of our readers happens to be in Calcutta during the next ten days and pays a visit to the exhibition, do please show Barun a copy of this column. We do not forget a native son — or an artist — of Bangladesh all that easily.

Born in Bangladesh, settled in Calcutta where he was an Assistant Editor of Jugantar, Roy now lives in Manila, with his wife Dipi, while their two talented daughters study in the United States, both on scholarship.

While we hope that one day Barun will have an exhibition of his works in Dhaka, let us wish every success to his show in Calcutta. Next time I am in Manila, I will certainly walk into his studio, even without any invitation.

THERE is no way to compare Satyajit to Tagore — indeed there is no need to. Comparisons are odious — more so when made at that level. Conscious of this all, one, however, cannot help drawing in Tagore in a discussion on Satyajit if only to say that the colourful son of the genius Sukumar Roy was the most world-renowned Bengalee after the only Nobel laureate this ancient nation has so far produced. And in this perhaps there wouldn't be much of contrary opinions.

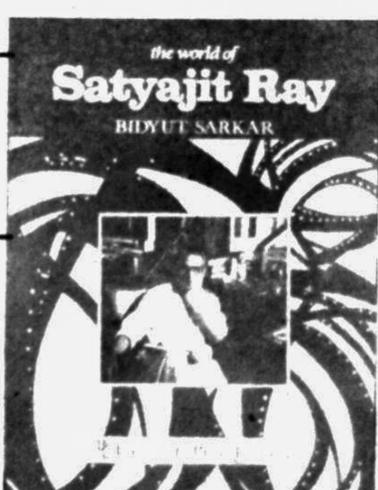
What did Satyajit do to world cinema that so much honour came his way? Can his films, specially Pather Panchali, be set apart from the better products of Italian neo-realism or vintage Rosellini and de Sica? Is his camera more candid than that of those masters or the leaders of the French New Wave or the ones that created the multitude of great films coming out of East Europe? No, his greatness lay elsewhere. In some unanticipated unsuspected region of creativity. First, he set a tempo — lays, as they say in Indian musicological discussions — all his own and unprecedentedly new, to all his cinematic output. If slowness alone dis-

## A Timely Tome on Satyajit

by Waheedul Haque

### Book Review

The World of Satyajit Ray  
by Bidyut Sarkar  
Published by University Press Limited, Dhaka  
Price Tk 200/-



And coming to the question of humanity and beauty, the body round which Satyajit wove these charms was always one — Bengal and Bengalees and Bengaleeness. And it was then necessary to create beauty and humanity out of situations of pervasive poverty — abject and cruel and, all by itself, ugly. The new-fangled idea that Satyajit was, beside the best-known Bengali after Tagore, indeed also the best Bengali after the great one — is also a meaningless proposition. But in one respect one would tend to agree that he was the best minstrel that Bengal had to sing the celebration of Bengaleeness throughout the world — and sing it with unsurpassing appeal. Satyajit was doubtlessly a great Bengali — one of the greatest.

There has been a literal spate of meetings and discussions after Satyajit's death. It was only natural that this would soon be supplemented by things of more permanent value. It is very gratifying to see that a Bangladesh publisher — the University Press —

## Depicting the Freedom Fighters

### The Liberation War Sculpture at Rajshahi University

the importance of the subject being understood, by seeing them from afar or while passing by. The justification of creating a sculpture of enormous size is lessened if it needs to be evaluated through studying its objective and history of creation written on its base.

The excellence of a realistic work of art, such as a sculpture, lies in whether or not the facts are represented visually. If the message fails to reach those who examine or see the piece, then the artist has failed. So, it would possibly have been wiser to curve more representative figures. Why the females who also made supreme sacrifice for the cause of the holy war, not represented? Judge from this perspective, this sculpture is an incomplete one.

The physical structures of the two figures are inconsistent. The front leg of the figure at the front seems to have come out of the lower abdomen. It is natural that, while



running, a close fist hand may be raised, but in an angular way and in front — not straight sideways as has been there in this Rajshahi sculpture. Also, the position of the Lungi appears a bit natural, in such circumstance, it should have been a bit furled. Men are not inert but mobile. So, even in creating a standing figure, the hands or legs should be positioned and the facial expression portrayed in such a way that the feeling of mobility is generated. Though these figures are created to look as if they are running, they seem to be cramped and frozen — lacking dynamism and spontaneity. The composition of the two figures is not also well balanced: maybe due to frail construction, one side seems completely empty in a way which could have been averted had the figures been placed side by side.

There is an auxiliary column on to which the lower portions of the two figures are placed. This is rather unseemly for a realistic art work — nowhere in the world perhaps be found an example of this kind. Anything presented alongside a realistic sculpture should be meaningful. The large wall like column in the background to an extent hampers the gravity

SCULPTURE is an important and durable art medium. By placing a three-dimensional figure in an open square, the beauty of a city can be enhanced. By the same action, it is possible to preserve, in tangible form, the memory of events of national importance. A sculpture can be considered — by all factions, and by the illiterate as well as the literate — a vivid and reliable document.

To keep the memories of Liberation War ever memorable for coming generations, Rajshahi University Central Students Union (RUCSU) determined, after twenty years of freedom, to have a suitable sculpture.

How far is the work successful artistically, and how honest is it as a sculpture on the Liberation War, however, remains a question. If one scrutinises it, he may see that it has been created in the Russian social realist style. One man advances with a pointed rifle. He is followed by another with a rifle in one hand, while his other close-fisted hand is raised in the air.

In open spaces, monumental sculptures are generally created with the objective of their elegance being felt and

hasn't lost a minute and come up with a number "The World of Satyajit Ray" — a lavish production of 134 one-eighth double-crown pages filled with hundreds of illustrations laid out in a most imaginative manner. The text written by Bidyut Sarkar, a foreign-based film-insider, provides a good specimen of racy journalistic writing — telling the story in all its essentials without being overbearing. This is nothing to compare with the earlier tomes of Marie Seton and Andrew Robinson, but the Sarkar book scores over the others through capitalising on the writer's first-name intimacy with the subject. Eight pages of colour photographs and 19 pages of appendices covering 1. Books by Ray 2. Ray's books in translation 3. Books on Ray 4. Short list of journals devoted to Ray 5. Filmography 6. Films on Ray 7. Videography 8. Discography — make the volume necessarily a collector's item.

"The World of Satyajit Ray" has been published in association with the UBS Publishers Distributors of New Delhi and adds definite prestige to the UPL, by far the best publisher of authoritative and expert material in the land.

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USA. As the machine roared, thousands of people from far and near assembled to see the "devil" ploughing the land.

On the occasion of Purnah ceremony of Kaligram Pargana an address of welcome was read by late Mr Kalluddin, a prominent tenant of Ratoal and a close relation of ours. Rabindranath used to be called by his tenants "Babu Mahashay" — a loving epithet, and his tenants loved their benevolent Zamindar dearly. After Purnah ceremony was over the tenant who was alive till 1976 told Rabindranath emotionally — "Babu Mahashay, we have grown old and you are also leaving us soon." The poet embraced him when he heard this pathetic remark. Soon after, however, the Zamindar changed hands and Rabindranath was then deeply engaged in his work at Shantiniketan spending the entire amount of Nobel Prize for its development.

There are two tanks near the Kachari and one is called Rabi Sorobar. The present state of Kachari and the high school is extremely deplorable. No attempt has yet been made for the preservation of the memory of Rabindranath at Patisar.

Patisar is a backward place in Naogaon district having no road communication like Shilaidah and Shahjadpur. But it was a part and parcel of the life of the poet. It is now up to the government to take the steps so that the rich relics with which the poet's life, literature and aspirations were marked could be kept living for present and future generations.

The regular weekly column "Write to Mita" has been held over for next week due to unavoidable circumstances.