borders of Bangladesh. More importantly, these two books, when read in conjunction with R C Majumdar's magisterial study of the History of Bengal, reawaken in us the whole history of Bengal, including the five hundred years when islam was the most dynamic and progressive force in the Indian subcontinent. These five hundred years are the formative ones for Bangladesh and it is these years that are most important in understanding the outlook and practices of this country.

And yet it seems to me that among my secularist friends, including many that have been interviewed by me recently, history ends with the Pala dynasty and the coming of the Senas and then resumes with the Bengal Awakening with Ram Mohan Roy and the Brahmo movement. From there it runs quickly to De Rozio, liberalism and utilitarianism and socialism, and thence skips over Hindu intellectual awakening that took place in Calcutta around Vivekananda and Bankim Chatterjee at end of the last century, and resumes with Tagore, the socialist movement of M N Roy, and then Partition, communalism, and Pakistan, the liberation war up to BAKSAL. But it is precisely the Hindu awakening at the end of the last century and the five hundred years of the Islamic past that is most crucial to today's political philosophy. We need only recall that next door in India that Hindu civilization is undergoing a great rejuvenation, on a scale unimaginable by either Ram Mohan Roy or Tagore or Vivekananda and Bankim, to see the need to once again take up the issues and opportunities - and problems - of Islamic civilization in Bengal and in Bangladesh, particularly, One does not belittle the contributions of the modern era.

of which it came. Many of us are well aware of the work of Dr Enamul Hug on Sufis in Bengal and his deep understanding of the role of this most liberal and often sympathetic strain of thought to both the idea of a secular state and to the spiritualism found in the subcontinent

in my opinion, by understand-

ing the pre-modern world out

among Buddhists, Hindus, and Jains, and its often found kinship with yogic practices. The beauty and the depth of the spirituality, coupled with its sense of tolerance, are forever a part of our heritage that even from which Lalan and Tagore benefited. More importantly he drives our attention to certain preconditions for the acceptance of modern ideas among Muslims in the nineteenth century by showing how in previous centuries before the coming of the British there existed a vigorous philosophical life among the various orders. especially the Surhawaddy in the west of Bengal and the Chisthi's in the east of Bengal. Indeed, one can argue that this strain of Persian and Indian thought accounts for much of the toleration that exists between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal, especially between Bhakti and Vaishnavite Hindus and the followers of the Prophet (PBUH). He reminds us that prior to the Farizi and other Wahab movements in Bangladesh during the nineteenth century, that in the five hundred years prior to that century that tolerance and acceptance of Indian philosophical traditions was the norm. while during and after the nineteenth century, communalism replaced that norm down to the final partition in 1947. Even more importantly. he emphasizes the local adap-'tation of Sufis to Bengal, and what is now Bangladesh, so that he speaks not of some abstract set of ideas, but, rather, concepts that became rooted in the traditions of this country - and in this reviewer's opinion still are rooted despite attempts by po-

Hinduism and secular fundamentalism, to replace them. That this book is almost unobtainable in the book stalls of New Market and Old Dhaka and is only rarely available from many libraries is a pity of the highest order. For it should be reprinted and made available because its contribution to the heritage of this country during those five hundred dynamic years. For after all, the greatest prosperity ever known in these parts came during the Islamic era when the subcontinent represented one large market and Bangladesh contributed textiles, garments, paper, chemicals like saltpèter, and implements, not only to the west, but to the whole of Bay of Bengal and beyond to the east. It was during this era that Ibn Battuta, the Chinese travellers. Marco Polo and the early British and Portuguese and Dutch explorers and merchants called Bengal, "the Paradise of Nations". And it is this era that the author wants us to re-explore. Richard M Eaton's book deepens our appreciation of this era in such a way that it greatly expands on the work of Enamul Huq and Majumdar. For Eaton asks a

litical ideologies of Islam,

## Those Five Hundred Years **BOOK REVIEW**

The Rise of Islam on the Bengal Frontier 1204-1760 by Richard Maxwell Eaton

the new religion, a process

that took several centuries be-

He notes that Arvan Hindu

civilization had by the time of

the arrival of the Muslim

General Bhaktyiar reached on

the frontier of the Hooghly-

Ganges and the Karatoa rivers

Beyond that settled frontier.

Bhati, or what now is repre-

sented by Bangladesh, was a

forested area barely penetrable

by civilized forces. Because

the Moguls brought axes with

their army, and were capable

riverine sailors, and because

the Ganges at the end of the

sixteenth century had changed

its course to the Padma sys-

tem, that settlement of east

Bengal — and Dhaka — became

possible. For the new course of

the Ganges, the Padma,

opened the area to riverine

transport and brought Bhati

into the mainstream of the

Further, he notes that it

rest of India for the first time.

was mainly in the Mogul era

that Bhati was settled; and that

tolerant Mogul policies, in co-

operation with Marawari fi-

nanciers, made the opening of

the Bhati frontier possible. He

explains how the Moguls

worked by cooperation with

Hindu and Muslim princes and

other Ashraf to create an era of

mutual toleration; and spells

out how they not only provided

that every land grant have a

mosque but that Hindu zamin-

daris were required to provide

for Hindu mandirs and shrines

as well. In other words, there

was a proto-secularism in the

government, that kept the

government free of religion

and which also practiced a

steady toleration. He even

notes that Mogul toleration

and practical secular rule re-

sulted in the creation of more

Muslims than did the more

orthodox rule of the Sultanate

and Independent Bengal peri-

ods. For the Moguls combined

religious 'laissez-faire with

economic improvement and

thus won more converts in

Bhati than the previous Muslim

rulers at Gaur and Lakanauti.

For it is in the East, the East of

the Frontier, that the most

Muslims are to be found and

where industry around Dhaka

flourished right up until Clive

won at Plassey and the devasta-

fore it was completed

University of California Press, and Oxford Press, India, 1994 and,

History of Sufis in Bengal by Dr Enamul Huq Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1975

Reviewed by James J Novak



scholars : why Islam proved so potent in the Indus and Punjab river valleys in the west, and in Bengal in the east, both of which were so far from the seat of Islamic power, under the Sultanate and the Moguls, in Delhi. Indeed, he proves quite dramatically that Islam was a "frontier religion" that helped settle what had hitherto been fringe areas of settlement prior to the coming of Islam, while it never caught on near the seat of Islamic power around Delhi. He concentrates his attention, however, on the "Bengal Frontier area" and particularly of Bhati,

the area that the Moguls

opened up, the old name for

what is now called Bangladesh. He paints an exciting picture of pioneers clearing the land. building shrines and mosques and gradually becoming Islamic in religion so that today Bengali Muslims represent the second largest ethnic group of Muslims in the world after the Arabs. Indeed he argues that east Bengal, Sylhet, Comilla, Noakhali, and Chittagong, became the most thickly settled area of Muslims after the Mogul conquest because the Moguls gave land grants to zamindars to precisely clear the jungle and make it productive. It was this spread of wet rice agriculture accompanied by land grants that provided for the building: of local mosques, often hutments, not made of stone, that led to the gradual adaptation of the people from their worship of Chandi, Manasa, and other fults of the jungle people, to

Cornwallis.

What he does is present a picture of the Mogul past very different from the British historiography that painted the Islamic era as one of backwardness - a historiography that justified British rule but which did not provide sufficient attention to the contribution of the Moguls to the creation of the wealth and the industry and agriculture of Bengal, especially, East Bengal, which was the prize that Clive won at Plassey

This reviewer admits to

being less than an unbiasedreader as Richard Eaton often lived at my home in Banani when doing the research for this book and where he discussed firsthand the results of his work. Many the evening did my wife. Naomi, and myself spend on the terrace listening to his developing research. For Dick had spent much of his time in District offices examining the original land grants of the Moguls as preserved by the British for tax purposes. And he studied the history of the rivers, the methods of Mogul conquest. and the oldest contemporary documents to base his case. A Persian, Urdu, Bangla, and Arabic speaker, he was able to penetrate documents, especially Persian and Arabic ones. with an ease that many researchers would envy. Since reading the book in its finished form represents a great refinement of the original research, this reviewer can only say that the reader is treated to one of the most exciting pieces of research detective work, told in a highly readable style, that rivets the reader to the pages until the very end. It is not only the best book that he himself has written but should definitely take its place as, one of the most important books on the heritage of Islamic . civilization of

Bangladesh. The point is that the Islamic civilization that came to Bangladesh was not a communal one but one based on the separation of religion from the state and on mutual toleration of all religions. It was not a secular fundamentalist state nor an Islamic fundamentalist one. Rather it was a rich commercial state with magnificent trade with the world, not only in goods, but in ideas, and connected to the Islamic middle east as well to the orient and the rest of the Mogul Empire. On the one hand it was agricultural and on the other industrial - in silks and taffetas, garments and cotton goods Bangladesh became, under the Moguls, a crossroads of trade that invited businessmen and scholars from around the world. It was a state of private enterprise and property and commercial and financial liberalism. And it was this very liberalism that attracted the colonial powers. Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British.

the world that attracted the likes of a commercial company like the East India Company to come here and gave that company access to its wares and markets. And tragically despite its superior army, the forces of 'Sirajadullah were defeated not by force of arms, for only treachery could have defeated a country that had held off the Marathas for decades before

the British arrived This history of the spread of Islam to what is now Bangladesh is one that will make Barigladeshis proud of their heritage, not in a communal way but precisely because the heritage is not communal

It also should make those in the largest Islamic party in Bangladesh examine whether their policies, that is those based on the thought of Maududi, are in line with the Bangladesh heritage or not, or whether they need to learn the lesson that the Moguls taught the British in India, and that is that toleration, and not force. leads to more conversions than the use of state power for religio-ideological purposes. It should also teach Islamic Socialists that Islam can be successful when combined with free enterprise, agricultural and industrial and financial progress. This does not mean that Islamic banking and business practices not be followed. On the contrary, for after all Islamic Banks are profit making business as well.

who admire the beauty of Islam that religious freedom leads to more religious participation and faith than does its absence.

Finally, it teaches all of us

Further this book teaches us of the Hindu and Buddhist contribution to the heritage of Bangladesh so that when we read Lalan and even Tagore. we understand that the tolerance and outlook they fostered was not created out of whole cloth, but was indigenous to Mogul India.

Lastly, in this post cold war and post modern era, secularists might learn to take a more understanding approach to the contribution of Islamic civilization to this land we call Sonar Bangla — for it was this civilization that made at least Bhati, or what is now Bangladesh, the Paradise of Nations. Islamic civilization, taken in its state of grace. of fers all of us basis for a new era of prosperity and peace, providing we have the vision today to bring the ideas of science and technology and, more importantly, a better understanding of the past, to bear on the situation of today.

It is this reviewer's hope that University Press Ltd Dhaka will hurry in its effort to make this book available in this country so that a wider readership can take look at the "frontier and pioneering" spirit of our ancestors.

Mr Novak is author of Bangladesh Reflections on the Water, University Press Ltd and soon to be printed in Bangla by Ittefaq Press. He is a Senior Fulbright Scholar. \*Last week he reviewed "The Hindu Phenomenon" by Girilal Jain.

# Viewing Video

by Lenin Gani

penter introduced a film L that would revolutionise a Hollywood moribund horror scene. Carpenter's Halloween became an instant horror classic, establishing the stylistic form that has dominated the field for the past two decades. Now with country his latest horror entry. In The Mouth Of Madness. Carpenter once again hopes to reinject

The story begins with Sutter Cane, the world's bestselling horror writer (an obvious bow to real-life horror king. Stephen King) disappearing on the eve of the publication of his new book.

Cane's publisher (Charlton Heston) sends his agent (Julie Carmen) and a cynical insurance investigator (Sam Neil) to find him. The two eventually track down the missing novelist to a place called Hobb's End, where they soon find themselves trapped in the middle of the writer's latest storvline.

In The Mouth Of Madness promises to give the horror buff a real ride.

After Blair Underwood a bright black law student.

N 1978 director John Car- picked up by police who suspeci him of murdering a 12year-old girl somewhere in

Florida in 1986. Eight years later his mother delivers a letter to Sean Connery, a renowned human rights lawyer, who now, gives lectures around the

in the letter. Underwood claims his confession was the result of police brutality. And some vigour into a style gone she pleads for him to take up

> If the idea of this is an open and shut case for Connery we are badly mistaken because the producers of the action/thriller Just Cause show how Underwood is the real

Sharon Stone takes on a new role in the western The Quick And The Dead.

chameleon

Briefly. Stone arrives at a sleepy town to participate in a gunfighters' contest for a specified sum of money,

However, she didn't anticipate on meeting Gene Hackman, the murderer of her father there too.

Obviously it doesn't take two and two to predict what Stone's course of action will ul-

timately be.



John Ahys Davies/ David

Warker/ Eric McCormack

Tim Thomerson/ Anthony

Richard Burton/ Peter

	ENGL	JSH	
NAME	TYPE	CAST	
Above	(Rom/	Christopher Ree	ve/ Joe
Suspicion	Thriller)	Mantegna	
Camp No Where	(Comedy)	Christopher Jonathan	Lloyd/
15 F4	- //e	Jackson	9
24 Hours to Midnight	' (Action)	Bernie Pock/ Myra/ Rothrock	Cynthia

(Historical)

Jurassic Terror In The Light (Action) of Shadow

Beckett

Mozart The (Musical) Magic Flute The Jerky (Comedy) Boys

Murder in (Drama) The First (Based on a true story)

Christian Slater/ Kevin Bacon/ Gury Oldman

Finetti/ Lura Reed

O'Toole

## HINDI

NAME TYPE Naajayaz Source : Film Fair Video and other clubs.

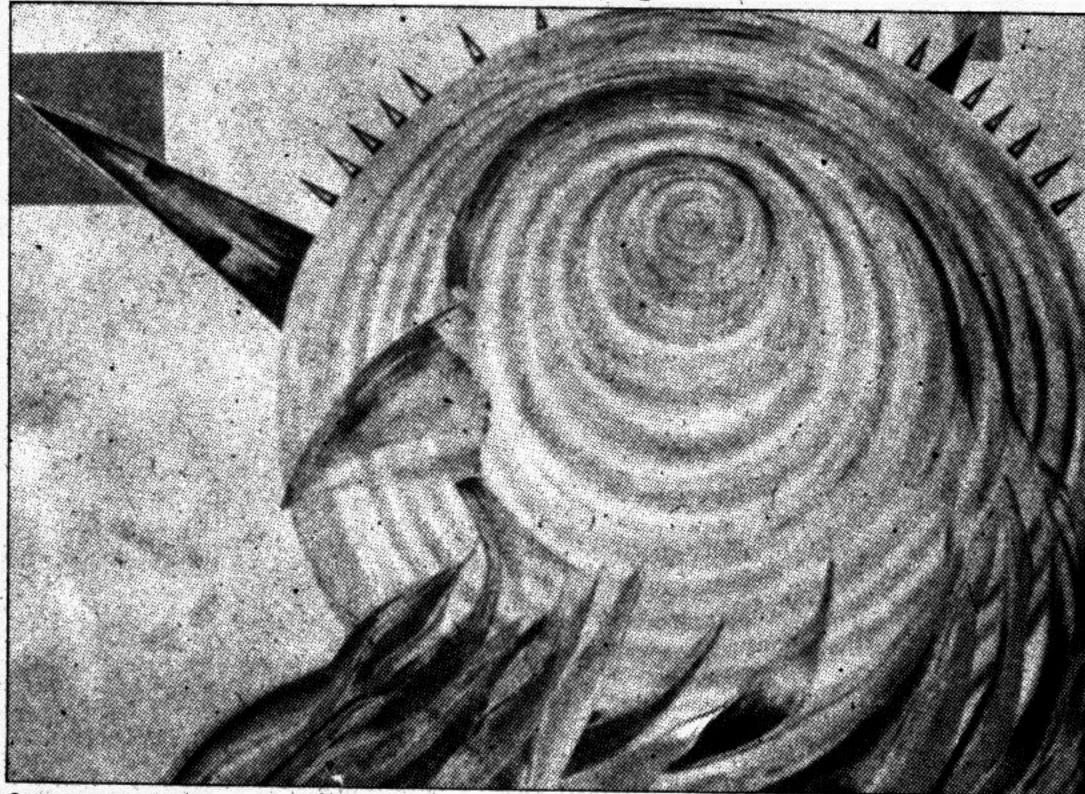
Nasiruddin Shah/ Juhi Chawla/ Ajay Devgan

### question that has puzzled many tion of Bengal began before the And it was this emporium for Poetic and Spiritual Surrealism on Large-scale Canvas

by Fayza Haq

AJOL. who recently had his painting exhibition of acrylic on linen at the National Museum, put his stamp early on the world in '91. when he in coherence with 19 other artists from different countries created the longest mural in the world. This was a 1.200 metre long creation on the walls and floors of a canal in the town of Elche, Spain.

This spurred him on to create the longest street painting "Heaven on Earth" - a 525 metre work - in Sweden's Landskrona city. "This was in connection with a festival. So I put in folk forms bringing in Latin American masks and combining the happy elements of the East and West with basic colours and designs from nature that included birds, animals, fish, comical faces and spirits. I had 30 young Danish artists to help me with the layout and designs," 39-year-old Kajol said. This received rave reviews in both the Danish and Bangladeshi press. The artist explained, "I have done 'alponas' on the streets of Dhaka quite often in the 70's and this gave me the confidence to handle the massive work, the aim of which was to transfer the ugly and banal cement and concrete into



Song of Loneliness, acrylic on cotton canvas 1995

permanent carnival colours." in '92, when Kajoi had a



Dream of Life II, oil on linen 1994

dynamic display of his three dimensional images out of flat surfaces through the use of lines in the striking exhibition "Imbalanced World" at La Galerie, he also helped paint the walls of the Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka. Last year he experimented with the national flag in his exhibit at "Jojon" in which he showed how "in the name of peace" people are trampling the dreams of next door neighbours.

The artist makes, it a point to come and visit his homeland every year during Baishak bringing his exhibition along with him in acrylic which he finds easy to transport. "It is not difficult to do something that will be easily sold. I want to present something that is unique and speaks of my individual style. I admit that for six years I have had to do odd

jobs, even though my paintings are sold in Denmark, in other Scandivanian countries and also in USA". Kajol is now settled with his Danish wife Lis Rasmussen in Copenhagen. Lis, incidentally, does overseas development work that deals with Asia, Africa and Latin America.

To make ends meet the

painter works as a guest teacher in schools and so far has held seven workshops for children in Copenhagen. He is also the founder member of the group "Wall Street Painters" which consists of eight artists. The group will paint on the walls and will be sponsored by cultural subsidies or building owners. "Our aim is to present something multicultural," Kajol explains. "Right now I have to be contented . with translation jobs part time workshops, and private com-

mission of tempera on walls. In painting one brings in one's own heritage. I do not represent Danish art, and so it is difficult to have overnight success in the Danish market. However, I am sure that acceptance will come gradually, with time. At present I am regarded as a 'resource person'."

Kajol in the recent exhibition, his 26th, has combined various strains of Subcontinental art with the abstraction and Surrealism of the West. "Social realism remains a part of my paintings. My type of Surrealism is poetic and spiritual rather than the conventional grotesque," the artist comments about his work. Accurate and decisive lines delineate his uninhibited flow of imagination. Due to the linen background being left empty, and the artist often working on rectangular panels of colours, the effect is collagelike and geometrical. There is both realism and symbolism combined in his work. The birds in his works stand for ever-present hope, while the geometrical nails stand for pain and disappointment. The artist is still preoccupied with the enchantment of dreams. fragrance and the ever-present lure of nature as seen before in his earlier works. This is despite the predominance of portrayal of agony and suffering, as is obvious in the title of his exhibition "Song Loneliness".

In the piece "Song of Loneliness," the bird that represents the human soul's quest for happiness, is outlined by red and brown arrows that immediately bring pain to the mind's eye. This is elaborated by geometrical patterns which mingle with the bird's feathers that are shaped and coloured like leaves

Three female dancing figures, seen in rippling curves. can be spotted in "Dream of Life 1." Surrounding them can be seen sails of a boat, outspread wings a series of stars. the head of a white bird and organic forms of flowers and



Red Moon and the Birds, acrylic on cotton canvas 1993

fish presented as circular and wave forms that result in neat motifs. A pigeon with curled feathers framing its face has an ochre sun at one end in "Dream of life II". At the opposite side is a female form seen in a seated lotus yoga position. Layers of multicoloured clouds seem to droop and endeavour to devour the sun. Copper tones enter on both. sides of the painting. More organic patterns in swirls com-

plete the mind-boggling creation. Both the paintings usher in the basic elements of human feelings.

The non-figurative paintings "Red Colour in the Black River" I & II have black to stand for the mysterious depth of the river and red to symbolise the blood ensuing from the slings and arrows of life.

One finds a personal vision once again in Birth of an

Angel." The multicoloured wings and the beatific face of the angel are combined with the symbol of the swirling sun, standing for dynamic forces, and flames of fire which represents purity.

What is apparent in this ex-

hibition is an admirable confidence in handling colours and images on a large-scale with the freshness and exuberance of a child.

# Politically Biased Academy Awards

Continued from page 9 seen heights. Writer and director Quentin Tarantino, who is meticulous and obsessed with details, leaves nothing to coincidence, allowing the viewer to extract new interpretations with each viewing. Above all. Tarantino's story about redemption is beautifully formed, with no loose ends dangling, and a determined pace that never stalls. It is intelligent without being overbearing, and stylish without being pretentious; it is an

achievement in every aspect. If Tarantino had given one of his characters a handicap, it might have won an Award.

The question returns now to the actual merits that the Academy honours: This is what essentially distinguishes the Oscar from other prizes. particularly the Cannes Film Festival Awards which appear to have a less political bias. It is inconceivable to imagine Cannes Winner of 89. Sex Lies, and Videotape winning an Oscar, not only is it a small

budget independent film, it is a story about voyeurism and extramarital exploits. The fact that it is an excellently acted, scripted, and directed film could not overshadow its subject matter. The time has come for the Academy to realise that endorsing a film with a high morale will not correct American society

Nupu Chaudhurt has recently graduated in Visual and Environmental Studies from Harvard University, USA