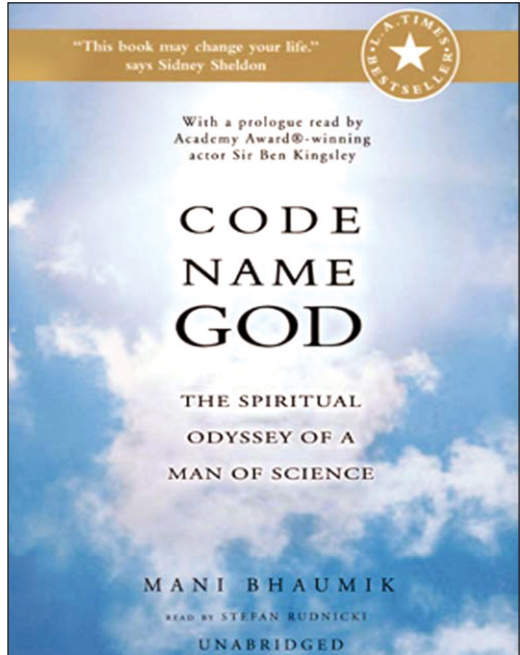


Mind-boggling concepts made easy?

Nerun Yakub is quite intrigued by a work that seeks to explore the idea of science with the larger concept of Creation



Code Name God
The Spiritual Odyssey of a Man of Science
Mani Bhaumik
Penguin Books India

Dr Mani Bhaumik's tantalizing bestseller is dedicated to 'Seekers of Truth of All Times', setting the

core theme with Einstein's famous words, 'Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.' Then follows a passionate prologue on the need to heal the 'wound of spiritual despair' in today's world, through a new kind of faith, a re-vision of humankind's place in the universe vis-a-vis God, Allah, Brahman, Yahweh, Tao. Call it what we may, the author's belief in the "one source of creation" and his search for empirical validation in the realm of advanced physics takes us on a tour of awesome, unfathomable, bizarre, beautiful abstractions.

Although God as One is at the heart of all great religious traditions, most human beings still perceive of the Idea as anthropomorphic and muddle through life blind and lame. Bhaumik thinks it is this that turns many thinking people away from institutionalized religion. Perhaps we need to call God by a new name, he suggests. Indeed, with science moving closer to the very heart of human spirituality, do we need God at all? Or can science restore this great Idea as what it is ----- the Primary Source of the known and unknown universe? Bhaumik clarifies the point: God is akin to that of a potentiality rather than a definable state. Such a potentiality existed at the beginning of time and exists today at the foundation of space. The discoveries of quantum physics indicate that "I" and the universe somehow participate with one another. Mind affects matter and matter affects mind.

Bhaumik's mission in his book is clearly to make God knowable, one might say, and he employs popular, simple language to get across even supremely esoteric ideas. Beginning with the story of his birth and boyhood in Bengal during Gandhi's

Quit India movement, Bhaumik tells us that he had an innate spiritual longing and it was strengthened by both experience and the influence of his heroes. Among them were his grandmother Sharada, Karamchand Mohandas Gandhi and an extraordinary woman called Matangini Hazra, a poor middle-aged widow who gave her life to rid India of British rule.

He went on to win scholarships and shine academically, acquire great fame, friends, wealth and social status in the United States. But he was profoundly unhappy with life in the 'fast lane'. Something was obviously missing. It did not take him long to realize what was ailing him. He had lost touch with "the undeniable presence of that living web from which all things are born and continually unfold. That presence, which the Vedic rishis called Brahman, and that Lao-tzu called the Tao: He that the prophets of the book called Yahweh or Allah, and that later in my own life would come to call the one source."

One of the pioneers of the laser technology that made the corrective eye surgery LASIK possible, Bhaumik's book is unabashedly motivational. It wants readers to participate, delve deep, go beyond the surface of institutionalized religions, beyond the anthropic symbolism, to access the power of the One Source behind all existence, 'that underlies and enfolds all orders, that unifies all field and forms, as well as consciousness'.

In other words, it is an invitation to tap humanity's innate spirituality and merge with the Universal One. Deep meditation is the key, he suggests, a revival of the ancient art through which the 'quantum leap' of consciousness can be made. Mystics of all faiths and

cultures have been doing this throughout the ages. Mani Bhaumik reminds us that many paths of deep and genuine belief converge. Then he attempts to explain "as painlessly" as possible some very mind-boggling concepts from advanced physics to show us how mind and matter are entwined. He does grant however, that even scientists, especially teachers of science, are still struggling to fathom these 'knots of abstraction'!

Einstein's revelation that every thing is made of energy and his famous equation which effectively does away with the sharp line between the material and the immaterial suddenly strike Bhaumik with a new meaning. The equivalence of mass and energy, by which a 'concrete' thing is presumed to consist of an abstract substance, means mind and body could comprise a whole that was simultaneously material and spiritual. As the old rishis said, we really might be "souls with bodies rather than bodies with souls"!

Mani Bhaumik sees himself as a spiritual unifier wishing to heal humanity through a new understanding of science. Today we have the means to see in dimensions beyond the familiar, even into realms of invisible reality where we find that everything is interconnected. This is something that Zen monks seemed to have known long before quantum physicists came along. Bhaumik recommends tuning in to God's 'frequency' to experience the presence of the infinite, the eternal One.

Nerun Yakub is a senior journalist and teaches at Dhaka University.

Beyond death arises poetry pure and poignant

Junaidul Haque reads a posthumous collection of Abul Hasan's poetry and recalls the genius of a Keats-like artiste

Megher Akash Alor Surya (The Sky of Clouds, The Sun of Light) is how a lovely book is known. Within its covers it holds forty four unpublished poems of Abul Hasan. These are poems of his adolescence.

The book was published in February, 2004 by Pathak Samabesh, which deserves our heartfelt thanks for this wonderful book of elegant get-up. Promising young painter and writer Selim Ahmed has designed the smart and beautiful cover. The book has been edited and its foreword written by Abdul Mannan Syed, creative writer, researcher and editor par excellence. He is a widely respected name in the literary circles of both Bangladesh and West Bengal.

Abul Hasan was in his time one of our finest poets. He is very popular with young readers and is also admired by the generation preceding theirs. As in the case of John Keats and Sukanata Bhattacharya, untimely death has given him extra popularity.

Abul Hasan was a student of the Department of English of Dhaka University. In June or July of 1966 he gave a diary to his friend and classmate, Shehabuddin Ahmed. It contained the poems of his early youth. It was Abul Hasan's wish that the poems would never be published. Many years after his death, Shehabuddin Ahmed decided not heed his friend's wishes, went to Pathak Samabesh with the diary and so made us grateful for the offering we have in hand. We remember that Franz Kafka's friend had also refused to listen to him and had thereby made us immensely grateful to him.

Abul Hasan was born on August 27, 1947. He died of a heart ailment on 26 November 1975 at the age of 28 only. He wrote for slightly more than a decade and earned the reputation of being one of our best poets. Abul Hasan portrayed the loneliness of man, his fond-

ness for the past and his sorrows with great skill.

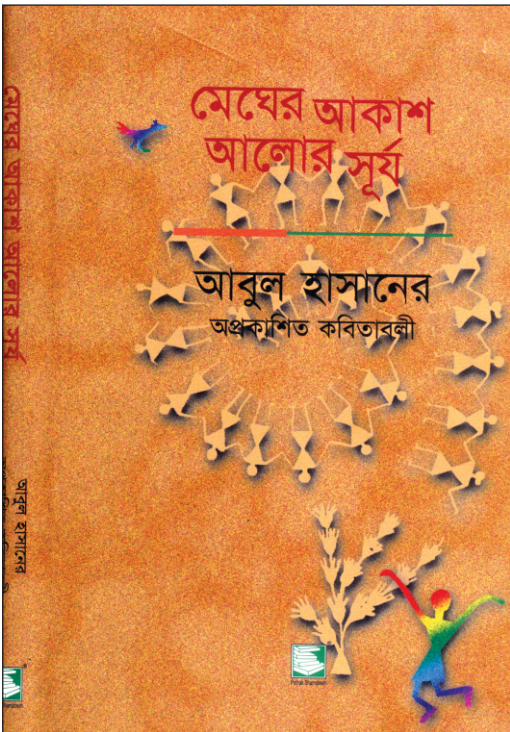
Abul Hasan published only three volumes of poetry during his short life. They were 'Raja Jay, Raja Ashy' (1972), 'Jey Tumi Horon Koro' (1974) and 'Prithak Palonko' (1975). 'Abul Hasan's Unpublished Poems' was published in 1985, edited by Mohammad Nurul Huda, Fakhru Islam Rocky and Zafar Wazed. His play in verse, 'Ora Koyekjon', was edited by Tarik Sujat and was published in 1989. The same editor published his 'Collected Stories' in 1988. 'Megher Akash Alor Surya' allowed us to read the poems of his early youth, the poems of his growth, the poems of his budding years.

Abul Mannan Syed's introduction is as well-written as ever. 'Some people are born to belong fully to poetry. They can think of nothing other than poetry'. One can't really disagree with Syed. He has bracketed Abul Hasan with John Keats, Sukanta, Rimbaud and Mayakovsky. All of them were deeply immersed in poetry and were quickly gone. Very true.

Born in Barisal, Abul Hasan was a born bohemian. He never had a fixed source of income. He worked for newspapers. He wrote innumerable poems on newspaper and with ball pens and threw them around. Many of his poems were printed in booklets and magazines which had a short life. These poems will now be difficult to find.

The title of the book is the first line of a poem in it. These poems of a youth indicate his years of blossoming. Abdul Mannan Syed writes that young Hasan appears to be swimming in dreams but occasionally he returns to hard reality.

The book has 44 poems. 'Pakhirey Tui' is the first poem. The storm to the bird is like life to the poet. A beautiful analogy, no doubt. In the last poem, 'Shadh



Megher Akash Alor Surya
Abul Hasan
Unpublished Poems
Pathak Samabesh

Hoy', the poet wishes to escape to the land where the big tree's shadow smiles and wipes away his pain. Abul Hasan had pain in plenty. Occasionally the tree's shadow comforted him no doubt.

The book has two articles by Nirmalendu Goon and Mahadev Saha, reminiscing about their poet-friend. 'Abul Hasan: O Friend of Mine' by Goon is a touching essay. We feel happy to learn about their close friendship and that Hasan was buried beside unfortunate but valiant freedom fighters. A short story by Abul Hasan, published in 1970 in 'Rupam', testifies that he was not a bad storyteller either. Late poet Anwar Ahmed, the editor of 'Rupam', also edited 'Kichudhawani', a magazine of poems. The latter's January 1976 issue was on Abul Hasan. Suraiya Khanam's article has been reprinted from there.

Khanam was Hasan's friend and well-wisher, a poet of great beauty and elegance. She called Hasan a controversial personality, a saint and a powerful young voice. She called him a poet of life and a lively poet. 'My Friend Abul Hasan' by Mahadev Saha is emotional, utterly readable and touching. Two letters of the poet, written from Berlin to his friend Mahfuzul Haque Khan, are there too. They are deeply sad letters. Quite a few photographs are there, mostly of Hasan in Berlin, going through treatment. A suffering poet is gracefully fighting death. Photos of the covers of his books are also there.

Abul Hasan will haunt Bangladeshi readers of poetry for a long time to come. His genius is what the world of Bengali literature has missed since his youthful passage into death.

Junaidul Haque is a novelist, literary critic and political commentator.

Love through a search for identity

Jackie Kabir sifts through a tale and brings enthusiasm into her observations

I started reading The Inheritance of Loss with a lot of enthusiasm as Kiran Desai became the Man Booker winning writer of 2006. The book has in some ways reminded me of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. This is another story set against the backdrop of a troubled community of Kalimpong, a small Indian town in the Himalayas. The struggle for independence, the processions of the Gorkha National Liberation Front resonate with the Marxist revolution depicted by Arundhati Roy in her novel.

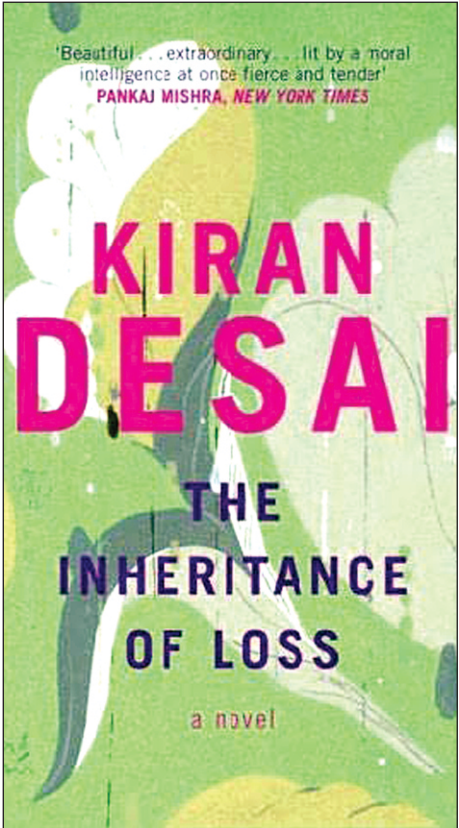
The Inheritance of Loss unfolds with the arrival of a young girl named Sai at her anglophile grandfather, a retired judge Jemubhai's house in Cho Oyu. Jemubhai who has rejected everyone and everything precious in life is very disturbed by his granddaughter's arrival at Cho Oyu. Not only does it bring back the painful memories of his past which had been in oblivion for so long, the past starts glaring at him with in an accusatory tone.

Set in the 1980s, Desai's novel depicts the post-colonial dilemma personified by characters like Jemubhai, Lola and Noni of the neighbouring house Mon ami. Lola is proud to have a daughter working for the BBC and is driven by irrational admiration and love for the English way of life. Mrs Sen's daughter's CNN job is a kind of counter-balance to Noni and Lola who have always demonstrated an air of superiority towards her.

Jemubhai's cat Matt is the embodiment of all his emotions. The adolescent love affair of Sai with her mathematics tutor Gyan is the theme on which the story evolves. Gyan is an active member of GNLF who later sends some miscreants to rob Jemubhai Patel's house one afternoon. The parallel story is of Biju, son of the cook of Cho Oyu, an illegal immigrant to the US. Biju has a lot of difficulties in immigrating to a land which he can never call his homeland. It is thus that the immigrant theme is woven in Desai's work. During Biju's stay in the US, a number of other immigrants are portrayed, such as Saeed who believes that the West lawfully owes Indians food and shelter. He gets married to a

westerner in order to get his legal papers.

"It was horrible what happened to the Indians abroad and nobody knew about other Indians abroad. It was a dirty little rodent secret. But Biju wasn't done. His country



The Inheritance of Loss
Kiran Desai
Atlantic Monthly Press

called him again...."

So Biju gets back home where he really feels that he belongs, but as soon as he comes near Kalimpong and is robbed off all his belongings, he realises that the imaginary

homeland he had dreamt of no longer exists. Biju's state of mind may remind the readers of Chanu in Brick Lane by Monica Ali. Ali's Chanu is an English literature graduate from the University of Dhaka (compared to Biju, who is ill-educated, being the son of a cook) who has always wanted to go back to Bangladesh, rejecting all the amenities the western world has to offer.

Kiran Desai addresses issues like multiculturalism as well as acts of terrorism with a question mark. She tries to show feelings of negligence by the upper class as being the main cause for the not so rich to revolt. Jemubhai's love for his dog but total lack of interest in his family members, especially his wife, is somewhat a reflection of Asian feelings of awe of westerners in contrast to their feelings for their fellow countrymen.

The parallel portraiture of both these narratives, one in the US and the other in Kalimpong, is drawn with superb dexterity by this award-winning young writer. An immigrant society's plight and its eagerness to gain the green card are aptly portrayed. The town of Kalimpong is virulent with slogans and posters demanding a home land for the Gorkas. Gorkha Land for the Gorkhas. This novel about love and passion turns into a demand by Nepal for a homeland of their own, for their right to have the Nepalese language taught in schools.

"The Neps have been encouraged by the Sikhs and their Khalistan, by ULFA, NEFA, PLA, Jharkhand, Bodoland....."

Kiran Desai has drawn both the narratives in Kalimpong and New York with unflinching details. The tragedies and pain of class distinction leading to the betrayal of love, pain of exile, urge to have a homeland within the homeland all these titbits are sewn together with extraordinary expertise, making The Inheritance of Loss a must read.

Jackie Kabir teaches English language and is currently doing her M.Phil. in diaspora literature.

The country, in all its rainbow colours

Arman Rahman appreciates a work of images by a journalist

Bangladesh has been an experience for one of its own, in this case the journalist Nadeem Qadir. He has travelled along country roads or its cluttered city streets in search of the multi-faceted beauty of his country. Qadir seems to have a genuine understanding of people, be they river gypsies or snake charmers or fakirs and sadhus, people who embody the charm and cheers of life in its spontaneous exposition. He writes admirably of the bauls, known for their unconventional lifestyle and their mystical songs.

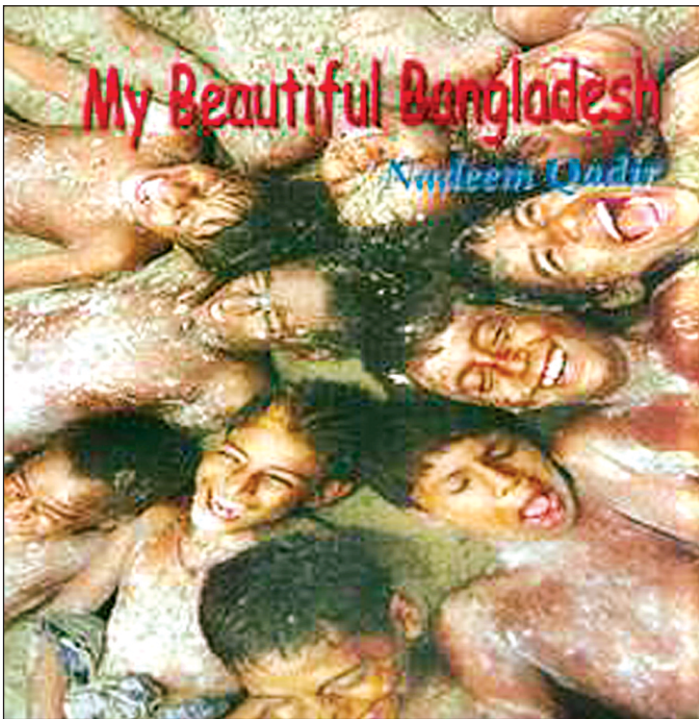
Nadeem Qadir's work, My Beautiful Bangladesh, is a collection of 32 essays on a wide diversity of subjects. All the articles had earlier appeared in various journals at home and abroad. The contents embrace many offbeat facets of life and living, fortune telling parrots, a cigar smoking club in Dhaka, a wonder water pump. And the list also includes people who rise above their limitations and challenge the forces of adversity, such as the fishermen in the Bay who brave the seasonal cyclones. He also has a fine appreciation for art, artists and artisans of Bangladesh. Consequently, the book includes entries, besides those of the not-so-well-known, on such celebrities as Mustafa Monwar, SM Sultan, Ferdousy Priyabhashini, Jewel Aich, Shahabuddin Ahmed and Tareque Masud. All of them are represented against the background of the cultural heritage of the country.

Syed Manzoorul Islam, an eminent writer and academic,

notes, "Nadeem writes with ease and flair. His style avoids the mannerism that characterises much of the 'journalese' here. His essays, besides providing an insight into places he is describing, are also informative

Bangladesh itself resonates with music, a lyricism that speaks of the beauty, the rich culture and heritage and the wonderful people of this country.

News reporters, as we understand, have to keep in touch with



My Beautiful Bangladesh
Nadeem Qadir
Focus Bangla

of the historical and cultural details that contextualize them. The photographs by Yeasin Kabir Joy and team aptly complement the mood and meaning of Nadeem's essays."

To Nadeem Qadir, the word

whatever is happening in a country. It can be about music or it can be the horrendous floods that ravage the lives of millions of people annually in many parts of the world. Qadir the journalist has had a view of all aspects of

the reality around him.

He has been writing about the many tragic episodes of our history, whether it is of the weather becoming unfriendly or of politics turning violent. However, along with it he has always tried to present the beauty of nature all around him in his beloved Bangladesh through this book. There are stories of Nadim Qadir visiting art galleries or frequenting photography shows several times outside his official assignments simply from a sense of love of beauty.

Nadeem Qadir notes in his book that the images of beauty across Bangladesh often miss the headlines in the press, both national and foreign. Elaborating, he states that most of such images do not even get space for a 500-word story on even the inside pages of newspapers. Thus they never reach the readers.

Qadir's mission is to portray the beauty of Bangladesh through the eyes of a reporter and news photographer, and change the mindset that looks at Bangladesh in an endlessly negative sense. The mindset, he argues in so many words, needs to be channelised into a rediscovery of the enchanting music that flows from this South Asian country. It can be said that Nadim Qadir has been successful in portraying, through a diversity of images, the soul of a country in his book. He strums the tanpura, as it were, and makes melody about the country he loves beyond measure.

Arman Rahman is a poet and a freelance reviewer of books.

At a glance

Shomoyer Kobita
Sinha MA Sayeed
Bangladesh Writers Foundation

This happens to be a pretty forceful collection of poetry from one who has explored diverse areas of experience. There are the contemporary themes he touches on here, those that many will relate to rather well. Good enough to be recited in public. You may well have a point of view to offer.

The Company of Women
Khushwant Singh
Penguin Books

The story here is simple: one man's love affairs, or brief entanglements with women across a country and beyond the seas. The work makes riveting reading, particularly for men, perhaps even some women, with a romantic turn of mind. Don't look for anything intellectual. It is all about raw passion.

Purbo Banglar Railway'r Itihas
1862-1947
Dinak Shohani Kabir
Academic Press and Publishers Library

Kabir has certainly taken up an unusual subject for analysis. But it is a job she ends up doing marvellously well. Not many will usually think of history in terms of what the railways in Bangladesh, or East Bengal as it used to be known, achieved within the time frame the writer has set for herself.

The Windmills of Your Mind
Mizanur Rahman Shelley
Academic Press and Publishers Limited

This is an updated version of the work Shelley produced a few years ago. Within its pages you will come across subjects as diverse as travel, society, politics and plain nostalgia. The writer has always made his readers take keen interest in his tales. He demonstrates his ability to continue doing so here.