

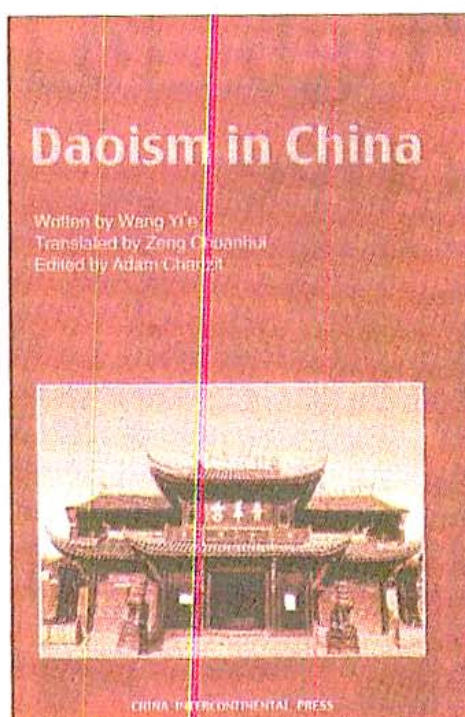
In quest of immortality, peace and happiness

Binoy Barman studies an ancient philosophy and finds it valuable

DAOISM (or Taoism) is one of the most ancient philosophical and religious doctrines in China. Institutionally, it is about two thousand years old, but out of institution, it is as old as Egyptian and Mesopotamian traditions and older than the Greek and Roman ones. Daoism developed through a natural course of events from the practices of life of the common people. So it is naturalistic and simplistic in its outlook, which reflects the profound human aspirations in a balance of pragmatism and spiritualism. Daoism has incorporated all the essential elements of traditional cultures of China deep-rooted in its soil patterning localised socio-psychological traits. That is why it is said, "If you want to know China you must know Daoism."

Wang Yi'e informs us that Daoism was officially established as a religion through the unification of the Five Bushels Sect and the Supreme Peace Sect in the period of the Han Dynasty in the second century AD. Earlier it represented some cultural practices indigenous to China, stretching back more than ten millennia before the birth of Jesus Christ. The early Daoist spiritualism ensued from animism and totemism. Later spiritual thoughts developed and matured with the introduction of agriculture and feudal system of governance, which gave rise to polytheism. Daoism is still a polytheistic religion endorsing the existence of many gods and goddesses along with deep mysticism, although it has several divisions varying in beliefs and customs.

In its historical development, Daoism has come in contact with Buddhism and Confucianism, with whom it has largely integrated. It is curious that the three great traditions did not come to confront each other in the Huntington sense of a 'clash of civilisations'. Rather they embraced each other with open mind and got intermingled in the most amicable way. Such kinds of integration without bloodshed are rare in world history. Many Chinese now read 'the Daoist Jing', 'the Heart Sutra' of Buddhism and 'the Filial Classic' of Confucianism together. The triangle of Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism now form the mainstream of Chinese life; in a true sense they form the ideological pillars of China. Three great sages of the first millennium BCLaozi, Buddha and Confucius have found a common niche in the Chinese mind with the highest order of veneration. The tripartite relationship is beautifully



Daoism in China
Wang Yi'e
China Intercontinental Press

depicted in an old saying: A Chinese wears a Confucian crown, a Daoist robe and a pair of Buddhist sandals.

To understand Daoism, one has to know what 'Dao' is. Literally 'Dao' (or 'Tao') means 'the way' the way the universe exists and functions. Dao is the root and essence of all existence. It permeates everything and every time it is permanent and infinite. (Notice, with this definition, Dao bears a similarity with the Western idea of 'God' and the Hindu idea of 'Ishwar'). The ultimate goal of a human being is to establish unity with this Dao. Dao is nature's way expressed in effortless action comparable with the flow of water in the river. That is why Daoism suggests effortless and simple life in the lap of nature. Any kind of intervention with nature must be avoided. The more we intervene with environmental nature the more it becomes polluted; just look around for evidence: air pollution, water pollution and ozone layer depletion. Again, with the inter-

vention of human nature, the mind is distorted and the body diseased. Daoism believes in action but without any effort. For a Daoist monk, acquiring knowledge is acquiring it without any effort at all. Understanding of Dao will come from a direct observation of nature, rather than scholastic theological studies. According to Daoism, the life of human beings comes from the harmonious co-existence of 'shen' (spirit) and 'qi' (energy). And hence people must live in harmony in society and natural environment. A Daoist will live in meditative tranquillity and refrain from violating the peace of nature.

The ancient Daoists wanted to be immortal, to be uplifted to the status of gods, by cultivating Dao. For this they exploited both external and internal ways. The two-way mystic search is called 'Dan Dao' which subsumes 'Wai Dan' and 'Nei Dan'. Externally, the Daoists attempted to prepare 'elixir' and internally, they improved the condition of their body and mind. Though they failed in meeting immortality, it inspired people to attain good health, physically and mentally. The human search for immortality is not over. One day men will find the desired elixir and become gods themselves. With the tremendous development of medical science, they will solve the puzzle of life and death, thereby stopping the process of ageing. Breakthroughs in genetics and pharmacy may lead us to the shores of immortality, in the far future.

The frantic search of the Daoists for elixir had some direct contributions to medical science, chemistry and metallurgy. The elixir-hunters developed alchemy just like the medieval Muslims who wanted to transform all metals into gold. In the process they developed herbs and other ways of treatment, for example, acupuncture. 'Qi gong', the Daoist way to keep in good health by deep breathing exercises, is widely practised today all over the world. The technique bears a similarity with the Indian breathing practice of 'Pranayama'. The Daoists had their own 'Kamasutra' of various sexual techniques aimed at nourishing life through the promotion of internal actions of 'yin' and 'yang'. They also discovered gunpowder while experimenting with different substances in search of elixir. What a paradoxical accident! The destructive gunpowder is the outcome of the search for ways of defying death.

Daoists aspire to peace and happiness. They seek personal as well as societal peace. Whenever they gather in temples, they pray for the

wellbeing of mankind and for world peace. According to Daoism, if one has to be happy, he/she should have lack of effort, lack of desire and lack of partiality. One has to act naturally ('wuwei') rather than in a contrived way. Daoism discourages killing, stealing, immorality, bragging and drug addiction. People are advised to perform more benefactions, as it is said longevity is the reward for virtues and death is the punishment for crimes. Daoism ensures equal status for men and women in temples and families. They eat together, work together, exercise together and worship together. Unlike all other established religions, male domination is absent from Daoism.

Daoists believe in many gods and goddesses, like polytheistic Indians. All of their deities live on mountains as the Greek deities used to live on Olympus and the Hindu pantheon on Kailash. However, the Daoist deities do not like to concentrate on one mountain; they are rather dispersed on many mountains. Some important mountains are Mount Tai, Mount Heng, Mount Hua, Mount Song, Mount Mao, Mount Qingcheng and Mount Wudang. The famous Azure Cloud Temple is located on Mount Tai and Emerald Cloud Temple on Lotus Peak. The naming of Daoist temples is full of aesthetics. Feel the beauty of other names: White Cloud Temple, Eternal Spring Temple, Eternal Happiness Temple, Supreme Clarity Temple, Supreme Harmony Temple, Temple of Ecstasy, Temple of Emptiness, Temple of Original Sublimity and Temple of Accumulated Blessings.

Daoism is the root of Chinese culture and its study is an excellent way to penetrate the depths of Chinese civilisation. Daoism has contributed significantly to the compendium of human knowledge in medicine, biology, chemistry, physics, literature, music, art, culture, architecture, sculpture, philosophy, mathematics, geography, geology and astronomy. Daoist practices are an integral part of world cultural heritage invaluable wealth of human antiquity.

Daoism in China helps us enrich our knowledge of some ancient beliefs of immense anthropological value. Familiarising the readers with Daoist rituals, culture, canons, organisations, architecture and mythology, it offers them a Daoist sense of transcendentalism.

Dr Binoy Barman is a writer and Assistant Professor at Bangladesh University.

At a glance



Talking Books
The Thirsty Shore
Yasmeeen Murshed
Printcraft Company Ltd.

Yasmeeen Murshed likes to describe herself as a fulltime bookworm. An academic and till months ago an adviser to the caretaker government, she has always taken avid interest in writing about what she reads. This work is actually a compilation of some of those articles, all of which are based on wide-ranging erudition. The essays are a delight to read.



Shurjaster Kanna
Mumtaz Wadud
Banglaprakash

This work is actually a play, in that very modern sense of the meaning. The playwright, also known for her fiction, presents an image of society that is both contemporary in its theme and traditional in the ideas it espouses. It comes in highly readable language, testimony to Wadud's wide experience of words and images.



Amar Shomalochok Amar Bondhu
Rehman Sobhan
Centre for Policy Dialogue

Rehman Sobhan's place in Bangladesh's history is assured, owing specifically for the role he played as a young economist putting up the argument for Bengali autonomy in Pakistan in the 1960s. In 1971 he travelled throughout the globe soliciting support for the national movement for freedom. And since the emergence of Bangladesh, he has been a foremost thinker and maker of policy. This work gives us a hint of the way his mind works.



Confessions of an Indian Woman
Eater, Sasti Brata
Penguin Books

Really an old book, dating back to the early 1970s. It keeps you engrossed in the story it relates. There are all the scenes of elemental passion, of the charming animal instincts of a man who cannot do without women. Indeed, it is the libido which comes alive here. This happens to be one book you can read at one go, for it causes your own fantasies to come alive.

The passions that drive our souls

Z.A.M. Khairuzzaman sifts through feelings in a poet's heart

MUMTAZ Renu Farook Uz Zaman's writings and thoughts are based on the human touch, indeed based on truth, purity, beauty and the divine touch of love. Her poems spread the message of peace and love among mankind at a stage in our history when peace, within oneself and in the world, is most desired.

Behind all her artistic works there is a message for humanity, that a bond of love and purity exists between the Creator and His Creation. Love can transform human nature. It is through this consciousness of pure love that one can purify the human mind, body and soul.

A uniquely gifted poetess, Renu has composed poetry not only in her mother tongue Bangla but also in Urdu, Farsi, Hindi and Arabic, languages in which she has no formal training. Her works are enriched with an admixture of pearls of wisdom in many languages which she is even unable to read for that matter. She has no exposure to the grammar or syntax of Arabic, Farsi, Hindi, Sanskrit or Urdu. But the poet is made to understand every syllable, every word, every verse and every poem to its deepest meaning of inner essence. The poet reproduces what she is inspired to write without any reference to any denomination or religion.

Renu began writing Bangla poems in 1993. She has narrated the background in this way.

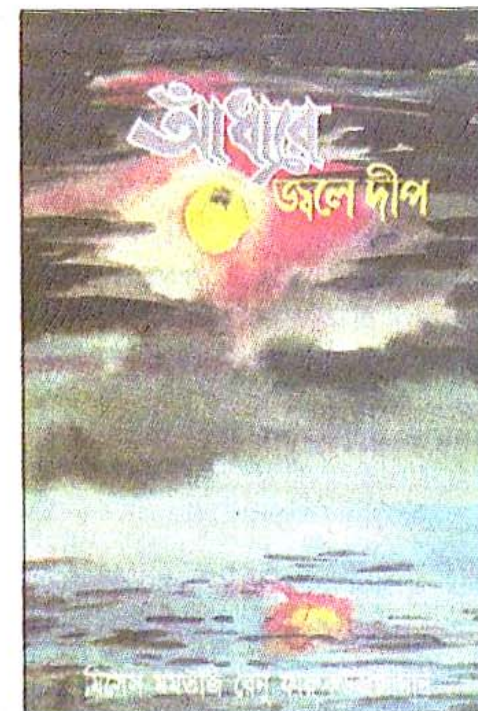
'It was in April 1993. I was sitting in the dining room of my residence in Toronto, Canada,

glancing at the garden. As I looked across, my neighbour's rosebush caught my attention. The roses began to sway back and forth in the wind as if they were dancing with happiness. Instantly, some Bengali lines emerged in my mind. Surprisingly, the meanings of many words of those lines were unknown to me. At that moment I felt I was born again on this earth. While I was making my way upstairs towards the bedroom, nine lines appeared in my mind. Those lines were God-gifted and my inspiration to begin writing in Bangla. I wrote nine poems by using each of those lines as the title. It was the beginning of my attachment to poetry and it seems that ever since then I have not been able to distance myself from poetry as I got my ultimate reconciliation in it. I firmly believe that my poetic works are inspired by the divine. All that I write, I write for human nature. I have a mission to preach the divine message of purified love and sympathy. I want to complete my mission because I was asked to do so by the Almighty.'

Renu not only presents herself as a poet but also as a spiritual preacher. She has produced five books of Bangla poems. Adhare Jale Deep is her first such book.

Lamp Glows in Darkness, the English translation of the poems, is Mumtaz Renu's theme as told to her daughter Ambreen and son Adnan Farook.

The theme of the book comes in Mumtaz Renu's words. She believes that love and purity



Adhare Jale Dip
Mumtaz Renu Farook Uz Zaman
Publisher: Mumtaz Renu Farook Uz Zaman, Dhaka

exist between the Almighty and His creations. Love and sympathy can change human nature. Through love and sympathy one can be transformed from dishonesty to honesty, from bad to good. Through consciousness of love, pure love can purify the mind and it is through the truth that one cannot harm another being. If we observe the creations of the Almighty closely we can see that everything is unified with the bond of love.

Renu is a priest of nature wanting to show her healing power to humankind. She is a visionary wanting to have a visitor of the spirit behind nature. Her attitude towards nature is unique. She observes a life of spirit beneath the eternal beauties and phenomena of nature. She links nature with people and links human associations and minds to natural landscapes. She delicately harmonises nature with the moods of human life and most artistically paints nature's changing and complex moods with poetic verses.

Born in a village on the banks of the Meghna in Shariatpur, Renu has been an intimate lover of nature and beauty since her childhood. She completed high school from Edilpur before the Liberation War. Later she continued her education at Eden College and in 1973 graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in psychology from the University of Dhaka.

Z.A.M. Khairuzzaman is Senior Sub-Editor, The Daily Star.

When serious thoughts come in easy language

Subrata Kumar Das appreciates a translation on Greek philosophy

PHILOSOPHY, in our country, has always meant something of accessibility either only to the intellectual class or to people who study it as a course subject. We never thought that it should be studied in class, or be mandatory. Yet it has always been an inseparable part of our life. Prof Mozaffar Hossain has done a creditable job in encouraging us to read something on philosophy at a leisurely pace. More credit goes to him as he has done that difficult job particularly on the school of Greek philosophy.

It is not only that. Books, quality books, on philosophy written in Bangla are very rare. Of course one can cite the huge production of such books in the book bazaars even of Dhaka, not to mention those of Kolkata. But the point that always draws one's attention relates to their readability. Almost all those books, written and published on philosophy in Bangla, are very tough nuts to crack. Indeed, they actually keep readers away from readings on philosophies by diverting their attention to other, easier to read subjects. In the present circumstances, it is clear that owing to his forty years of experience in teaching philosophy at different colleges, Prof Mozaffar Hossain has felt the craving in him to write a book that could generate interest among students and teachers in this outwardly difficult subject.

The book opens with an introduction that clearly focuses on the different facets of Greek philosophy. The writer begins with a definition of philosophy and gradually has pointed out

how this branch of knowledge emerged in



Greek Dorshoner Ruporekha
Prof Mozaffar Hossain
Agami Prokashoni

Greece and flourished so encouragingly. In this small chapter, he has shown the timeline. The phases are: Pre-Socratic Age (600 BC-430 BC), Socratic Age (430 BC-320 BC), Age of Decadence (320 BC-AD 529). Moreover, the writer has pointed out how mythology developed in that earlier society and where the similarities between the gods and goddesses of their myths and that of ours lie.

To speak the truth, the book does not have chapters as we generally notice in books of this genre. It has rather been written as a compilation of entries. The major entry, though given with a very short and simple note, in the book is 'Ionic school of philosophers'. After this gradually come Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Pythagoras, Eleatic Philosophy, Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno, Gorgias, Heraclitus, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Leucippus, Democritus, Protagoras and Socrates. After looking into the less significant ones, when Socrates appears, the reader feels a jerk and to satiate the reader's thirst the writer has rightly made the entry much bigger so that it can provide essential information on the wisest philosophers of all ages.

Then comes a long entry under 'Plato'. It is worth noticing that the subsequent eight entries, to a great extent, contribute to the entry on Plato, the great philosopher who is remembered even after twenty-two hundred years of his death. The main entry on Plato provides biographical information on the great philosopher who wrote about thirty-six books in the form of dialogues among which the *Republic* is the most

widely read. The other entries which, this way or that, help one know more about Plato include Theory of Knowledge, Ideas, Classification of Ideas and its Hierarchy, Evaluation, the society in which Plato lived and his political theories, Philosophy of Education, Immortality of the Soul, the Mystery of Creation, etcetera.

A similar major entry is on Aristotle, the great disciple of Plato. To illustrate Aristotle's thoughts and ideas, the writer has included some more entries like 'Logic', 'Metaphysics', etc, for the readers.

The post-Aristotle philosophers have been packed in afterwards: Epicurus, Lucretius, Arcesilaus, Pyrrho, Aenesidemus, Agrippa, Cicero, Seneca, etc. The last entry tells us about the fall of the worldwide acclaimed philosophical trend of the world.

Greek Dorshoner Ruporekha can easily function as a very helpful handbook to people who wish to have a very clear conception about this particular area of philosophical thinking. The Bangla language readership of philosophy will surely be grateful to the writer of the book for presenting the most difficult thoughts of the world in easily readable language.

We must thank the publishing house for taking necessary initiatives to invest in such a book, one that does not belong to the popular genre. And yet more care could have been given to it in certain areas.

Subrata Kumar Das, a teacher, is the author of the website on Bangladeshi Literature www.bangladeshinovels.com

How travellers can enjoy more

Mohammad Shahidul Islam explores the changes that have come into tourism

LOVELY Planet is a name of the biggest institution in the world travel industry. It has acquired much reputation worldwide for promoting and boosting the industry, basically through travel service publications. From its publication house, every year serious, dedicated travellers get a chance to enjoy many classical books on the travel industry and thus they find their travel easy and comfortable beforehand. Last year Lonely Planet published Code Green which has already been reputed as a guide to ecologically responsible world travel. It is a significant addition to its sizeable collections of travel service literature for which it remains unparalleled round the world.

Code Green, compiled by Kerry Lorimer, contains 100 write-ups from 100 global spots. They range across Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, Europe, and North, Central and South America. All these write-ups speak of environmentally sustainable travel experiences. The one-page accounts of each of these destinations, put together from independent travellers, incorporate "Responsible Travel Credentials" for the locale that is, details of how both hosts and visitors are admiring of the health of specific ecological and human communities and, in many ways, keenly working to bring back habitats, ecological veracity, and community verve.

Apart from these write-ups, beautified by dazzling photographs, Code Green offers common counsel that relates to many places and modes of travel. For instance, readers are offered tips on how to tread lightly in flimsy ecosystems, hunt for alternatives to fossil-fuel-reliant transportation, and differentiate authentic ecotourism from "greenwash" companies employing the "eco" tag to make a dollar.

The reader may be predominantly overwhelmed with Lorimer's stress on the complicated, holistic nature of "green" travel. Code Green makes it lucid that the environment includes not just flora and fauna but also living human communities facing real social and economic challenges. For instance, Lorimer confronts the ongoing quandary of how to reply to begging, rightly placing the question within the larger issue of sustainability and responsibility. Many of the contributors to Code Green encourage travellers to eat local food, stay in locally-owned accommodations, and buy responsibly produced local products. Frequently, travellers are urged to use their dollars in ways that nurture communities. The reader may recall, in particular, the feature encouraging travellers to take

drumming lessons in Senegal in doing so they would not only be choosing low-impact travel but also spending time with locals and supporting them in the maintenance of their conventional skills and ways of life.

Code Green will definitely lend a hand to travellers in enriching their world whilst elevating their life. Sustainable travel and responsible tourism are practices that are achieving esteem around the globe as people distinguish the frailty, as well as the wonders, of our planet. Code Green can be for sure a knowledgeable guide that identifies the questions we all should be asking, regardless of whether we travel or not. What are the consequences of our choices and purchases? Who benefits and who loses? How might our actions change a place? In short, how should we live? Representing the values that Lonely Planet has all the time authorised and conveyed in its publications, Code Green offers a guide for people who are looking for exclusive and culturally authentic travel experiences that shield and preserve the ecological and cultural environment. Code Green is arranged with a bounty of humour in order to stir the reader to awareness of the challenges the world comes across.

Mohammad Shahidul Islam, a travel writer and UNESCO heritage guide trainer, works for Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation.



Code Green
Experiences of a Lifetime
Compiled by Kerry Lorimer
Lonely Planet