A Brush with Some Writers

ELITA KARIM

This year, the Ekushey Boi Mela is introducing a series of writers whose works include essays on national and international politics, science fiction, poetry, short stories, women's rights ssues, history and much more. Many of them speak about the current political situation in Bangladesh, portray the changes in relationships in the society, not to mention the redefined identity that the youth portray today -- all worldly and multicultural.

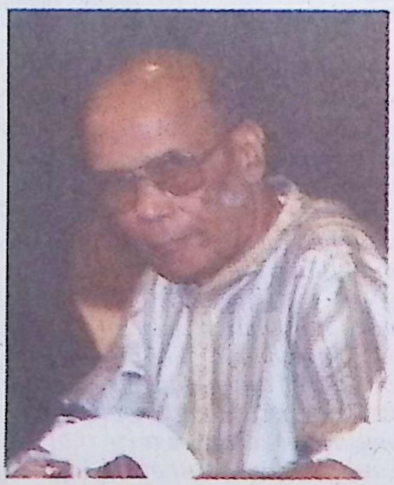
Selina Hossain's "Purno Chobir Mognota" was very recently published and launched at the Boi Mela, by Onnyo Prokash. The story revolves around the times spent by Rabindranath Tagore in Shahjadpur, Silahadha and Patisara a hundred years ago. Selina Hossain has been researching this subject since 1997 and claims to have been a little apprehensive before publishing the book. "My novel is based on Tagore, something that has never been written before in Bangladesh," she says. "Such novels, however, have been written in West Bengal. I mentioned this to Sunil Gangyapadhayay. He was extremely encouraging and exclaimed that a novel is a mere story threaded by the writer. Readers are intelligent enough to understand this concept."



Selina Hossain

Hossain says that she was blown away by the fantastic response that she received on the book. "I was fairly surprised with the fact that a number of young boys and girls read my book and loved it!" she says. "We have this perception regarding the young generation that they do not read or are not interested in our heritage and history. I believe we should not come to such conclusions. Several young people got in touch with me after reading the book and had several questions to ask. I was thoroughly impressed."

Yet another book written by Hossain is a compilation of stories on women written by writers from South Asia. "I collected a number of stories from the eight countries in South Asia," she says. "At one point, however, I needed more quality stories and did not know where to collect them from. That was when I got in touch with Debjani Sen Gupta, Professor from Delhi University. She helped me collect a few more stories for my compilation. Debjani and I edited the book together." This book, published by Somoy Prokash, has gained a lot of popularity amongst readers in a very short while. "Nowadays, there are many who are concerned about gender issues in the subcontinent," she says. Readers including elderly men, women and young students have positively responded to the book.



Syed Shamsul Haque

Much to the delight of children, "Chaander Buri Pantha Ilish", by Selina Hossain, published by Jonota Prokash was launched at the fair. "The main character in this book is a *daini* (witch)," she exclaims. This *daini* is not your everyday conventional witch with a hideous face who roams about the countryside looking for naughty children for dinner. In this book, the witch is a friend to the children and buys them sweets and ice cream. "Traditionally, in every other folk tale, a woman plays this negative role, scaring children," says Hossain. "I decided to bring out the positive elements in this woman, who is loved by the children. The old *daini* also spends time reading to the children as well."

Two more books by Selina Hossain are "Ghor Grihosthir Rajniti" published by Ittadi and "Nijeke Koro Joy" published by Shahittyo Bilash. Both these books are compilations of essays written on women issues by Hossain herself. "In one of the essays, I have discussed