

The rise and steady decline of our cinema

Nazma Yeasmeen Haq recommends a scholarly work on movies to readers

ALTHOUGH not unprecedented, yet *Bangladesher Choloচিত্র Shilpo* assuredly is rather unique in the sense of its being the product of a research work carried out systematically and that in turn attains academic standard as a thesis. The book raises a number of questions, diagnoses the malaise that has been eating into the vitals of our film industry, in particular since the 1980s. Once the diagnosis is made correctly, etiology is determined and thus very confidently the writers come up with a prescription to be administered to cure the ills of the disease prevalent in the films that are there.

The factors that are inextricably related to the making of a film that ideally ought to cater to the taste of a wide spectrum of viewers, thus qualifying it to be of a popular genre, have very ably been dealt with by the authors. One can accomplish this only when one has a full grasp of the subject one is involved with. Only those with an intention of delivering things beneficial to society can be so succinct and painstaking in their endeavour, as we see the authors progress in their work. Trying to mend or fill a cavernous hole in our film world that has apparently come to exist demands much tenacity on the part of its doers. As the writers themselves have stated, coming back to trends that are healthy in essence might, although they can be

considered as an achievement, nevertheless cause a feeling of a sense of complacency about it that must not be there in the right frame of one's mind. That is because it would only mean moving to zero from a minus from where it is a very long way to reach the positive. This assertion tells us, the readers, about the abyss we are in in terms of having access to one of the vital social outlets of recreation in our lives.

The authors have been much methodical in tracing the history of film making in this part of our region through a synoptic treatment of it in a chronological order, which is very useful to a reader to check for quick reference. As it is, in these days of haste, most people go for reading things that are presented in a concise form and exactly this is fulfilled by this particular presentation. One gets a very clear view of the growth and development of films both in terms of their quality, quantity and genre along with the proceedings of the chapters that are arranged as claspstick 1 to claspstick 7. Designating the chapters with terminologies of film thus keeps reminding one of what the book deals with that often transforms it into a film in print.

The authors have applied primarily a methodology of survey research to collect data for their purpose. Content analyses supplemented by audience



Bangladesher Choloচিত্র Shilpo
Sangkote Jonnosongshkriti
Gitiara Nasreen and
Fahmidul Haque
Srabon Prokashoni
Dhaka

analysis have revealed the quality of the content of three films of the present time that are absolutely devoid of any sense of purpose, let alone some residual sense of beauty which is part and

parcel of any creative work. To a sensible person such a job is truly a product of empty-headed people who think that they can make viewers consume whatever they feed them. This myth that keeps film makers engulfed in their daydreams has been altogether dispelled by analysing the responses of the audience statistically. Demand for a good film has been indicated even by people from lower income groups. Such viewers are more often than not taken as primary consumers of low quality films. The indication of the authors regarding this make-believe perception of the film makers is most palpable in their strongly worded utterances.

The latter part of the book deals elaborately with the erosion that has consciously been brought about by many associated with the film industry. A regression of a vicious nature thus has taken place, creating an abyss. When the authors wistfully talk about the lost glory of cinemas, one feels a kind of frustration knowing that there was once a time when the cinema hall was not only a centre for entertainment but also a hub for social interaction in a community.

The most vital lesson one learns by going through this book is that the audience by and large demand good films the same way they ask for other amenities of life since wholesome enter-

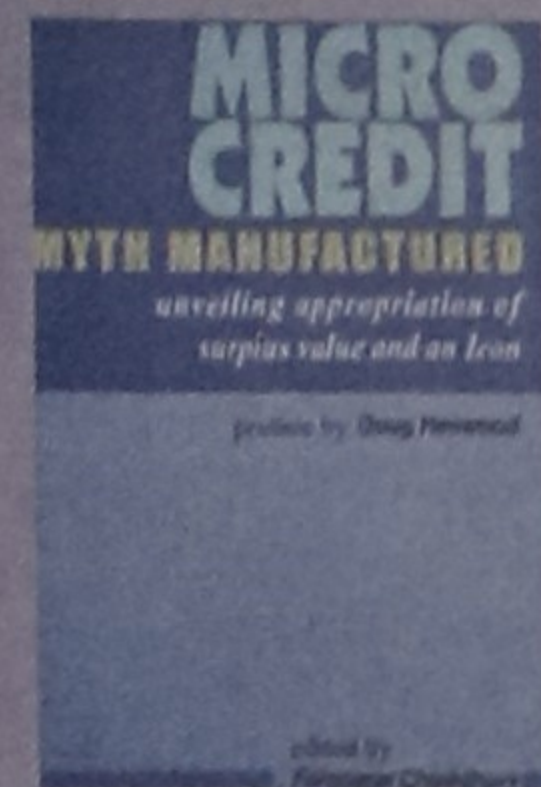
tainment is part of life, society and our culture. Dedicating this very recently published book to the memory of the unforgettable Hiralal Sen is laudable, although his production is not recognised as the first film of Bangladesh owing to some debatable issues.

Since the focus of the book is on the intensity of decay in popular culture in terms of film making, the prescriptive approach contained in the last chapter is most useful as a set of recommendations. To highlight the contrast between present day films and quality films of yesteryears, the authors could have incorporated content analysis of a couple of films from the latter. Also the photo frame on the front cover page could have had a display of the same to draw a distinction between these two classes of films rather than having all from a bunch of incredulous ones. This would have been more in keeping with the sub-title of the book.

We wholeheartedly agree with the authors that we too love to see films and therefore would like to see how early things can be put back on the right track. Let us raise a slogan echoing the authors that we demand healthy entertainment through films.

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AT A GLANCE



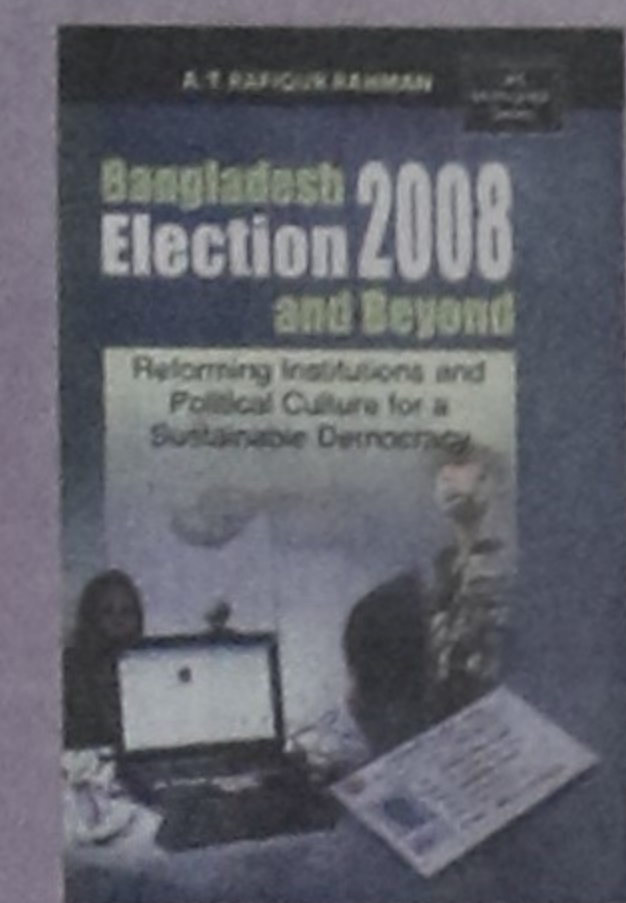
Micro Credit Myth Manufactured
Ed. Farooque Chowdhury
Shrabon Prokashoni

Here is a collection of essays that are a dissent on the generally accepted ideas about micro credit. Some of them may even be described as harsh criticisms of the Grameen concept and its basic postulates. But they do make a good read, for they bring to focus a lot that remains unknown about the dark side of the moon.

Selected Poems/Shamsur Rahman
Trans. Kaiser Haq
Pathak Shamabesh



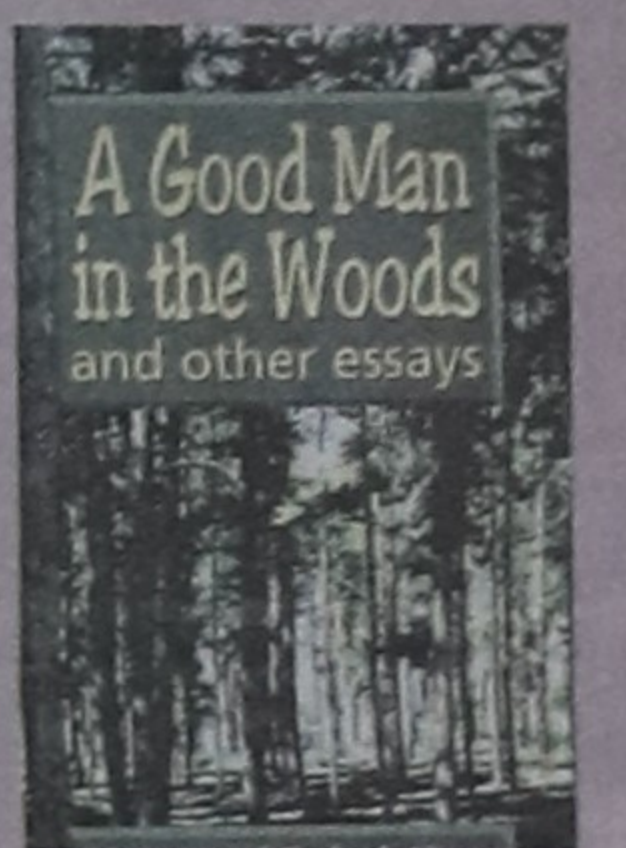
Kaiser Haq's poetry, in English, has been immaculate. Here, in this translation of Shamsur Rahman, he proves once again why his use of English remains impeccable. The work is unlike any other translation, for Haq brings into it a modern use of language and so keeps the reader spellbound. You might even be tempted into recitation.



Bangladesh Election 2008 and Beyond
A.T. Rafiqur Rahman
The University Press Limited

A work in touch with the moment, it focuses on the reforms programme undertaken by the caretaker government as a step toward holding the next spate of general elections. It identifies some critical areas where reforms are called for. At the same time, it stresses an accompanying shift in political culture as a way of upholding democratic values.

A Good Man in the Woods
And other essays
Mohammad Badrul Ahsan
The University Press Limited



The writer has been a columnist for years. And this is the work that brings together some of the essays which have so impressed his readers over a period of time. There is a sense of reflection in the articles, almost bordering on the philosophical. It is, as some would say, a kaleidoscopic journey that takes account of contemporary issues.

Brick Lane observed in great passion

Ekram Kabir marvels at nonfiction with elements of fiction

THE first question that would possibly pop up in one's mind even before one starts reading *Salaam Brick Lane* is why Tarquin Hall wanted to write a book on Brick Lane. But, then, when you begin reading the book, you will discover the fact that the writer must have felt passionately about the whole of the East End neighbourhood. His *Salaam Brick Lane* is an honest account of what led Tarquin to be in Brick Lane and what happened once he was there.

How did he end up in Brick Lane? He says: "For the past ten years, I had been living away from England - the last three in India. On my return it had been my intention to put down roots in the leafy suburb of Barnes where I had grown up. But London property prices had shot up; I was broke; and this was where I had ended up, Brick Lane."

He knew why he went to live in Brick Lane, but he did not know what lay ahead - how he had become prudent in his understanding of East End. He narrates every aspect of the people who live in Banglatown. Most Bangladeshi immigrants coming from Bangladesh's northeastern district of Sylhet now inhabit Banglatown. In his effort to dig into its history, the writer spends a lot of time in the library, finding out Brick Lane's past.

Initially, *Salaam Brick Lane* looks like a work of nonfiction, but Tarquin has crafted the structure of the book so carefully that it feels like a work of fiction when you read through the book. Almost all elements of fiction are there and he does it with utmost sincerity.

Tarquin presents a few very admira-

ble characters that are by no yardstick flat. Staring from his landlord Mr Ali to his new friend Nazir Afroze - all of them are pretty much thinking souls. Mrs Suri his fiancée's superfluous self-proclaimed Indian aunt - might seem a flat character. Tarquin has all the reasons to dislike Mrs Suri, as she perennially tries to convince his fiancée to marry none other than an Indian guy. But the writer does not portray Mrs Suri as villainous as she seems to him.

The writer meets a Bengali anthropologist from West Bengal, Aktar. This man, Tarquin says, changes his life, possibly when he asks "Are the Bangladeshis becoming English...?" This leads him to notice various aspects: Bangladeshi ladies continue to wear Bangladeshi in dress, in mind and also in attitude. Hijabs were one of the most common things among Bangladeshi girls. They do not speak the Queen's English; rather they speak in the cockney accents of the East End. Although they can be criticised in many different ways, at the end he realises that a generation of East End Bangladeshis is really trying to become British.

The writer meets these people - eight to nine to focus upon - during his one-year phase at Brick Lane. He must have been lucky to meet all these lively people who show an ability to grow out of what they were.

One of the main aspects of this page-turner is the presence of Anu Anand, his would-be wife. This book has a lot to do with his relationship with Anu. Her cover-to-cover presence in *Salaam Brick Lane* is an interesting way to portray someone. She is in his mind when

he decides to stay in Brick Lane; she is the reason he develops a deep liking for East End; she is even present when he tries to make his flat liveable. He thinks about her more than he thinks about all



Salaam Brick Lane
A Year in New East End
Tarquin Hall
John Murray

these people he has met. The reader will discover this uncanny link between Brick Lane and the presence of Anu in the writer's life. Writing this book and keeping her present all the time must have been a good feeling for the writer.

Tarquin follows a good technique to make his readers involved in the lives of

those who live in Brick Lane. With his strong narration, he tells the story of their lives. He talks about how they speak the English language, how they feel about their parent-country, how they look at the Londoners, and how they make it possible to live with a 'hybrid identity'. The writer also relates a lot of things with aspects from the lives of famous writers such as Jack London.

Tarquin actually observes and listens to the people he is writing about. His association with the Brick Lane-dwellers is amazing. He enters their lives, making them understand that he cares. Being a Briton, no one would have accused him of anything if he did not mingle with these people. But he did. Either out of his own interest or his situation leads him to be close to them. His portrayal of them seems quite impassioned, but when you read between the lines, you are bound to discover a strange sort of affection for them. He feels sad with their sadness; he is excited with their excitement; and he is even happy when he sees them happy. The writer does not say that he is sad, but it is clear enough from his attempt to look at the brighter sides of their lives. It is as if he wants to pull them up from their unwanted misery-like lifestyle.

The writer delineates a great many negative features of the Banglatoan immigrant community, but ultimately develops a slice of admiration for them. This admiration compels him to elaborate the importance of East End and the making of today's Brick Lane. The writer's knowledge of Bangladesh is immense. He knows how Bangladeshis from Sylhet make it all the way to

England. But they fail to pick up many good things of England. The state of women continues to be the same as that of women in Bangladesh, in cases even worse. The state of women among Brick Lane's Sylheti community becomes palpable when the writer attends a Bangladeshi wedding at the request of his landlord Mr Ali.

At this wedding he finds out the hybridity of the young generation Bangladeshis in UK. This book is also evidence of the writer's realisation as to how the new East End has changed his idea about Englishness. All these years, Englishmen decided what Englishness means but Tarquin realises in the East End that being English is a state of mind. It is not a genetic thing and it changes over time.

Writers of Bangladeshi origin have written on Brick Lane. Manzu Islam's *Burrow* and *The Mapmakers of Spitalfields* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* are some instances. What they depict is the struggle for survival by Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK. Tarquin, on the hand, gives them an acceptable character.

This actually makes *Salaam Brick Lane* a must-read for, possibly, all Bangladeshis and British-Bangladeshis interested in coming by a solid account of London's Brick Lane.

This book should also draw the attention of Bangladeshi publishers to thoughts of translating this fantastic piece of work into Bengali.

Ekram Kabir, a journalist, has interviewed Tarquin Hall.

Depicting the power of the male

Jackie Kabir is touched by tales of women's sadness

ZAITOON, a young girl of sixteen, is going to the hilly regions to be married to a "tribal" whom her father has chosen for her. She has been brought up by Qasim since the partition of India in 1947. As the British led the country after ruling for over 200 years, they sowed the seeds of communalism. The Muslims and the Hindus have since been rivals. There were riots in every part of the subcontinent in order to make it their respective strongholds. No one knew which part would belong to whom even till the last minute while the country was being demographically changed. Lahore, a stronghold of the wealthy Hindus, was supposed to become part of India. But it went to Pakistan. Jullander, Sikh territory, was allocated to India. Qasim flees from Jullander; on the same train travel Sikander and Zohra with their two children from Ludhiana. When the train reaches Lahore men squatting on both sides torch the train and kill as many people as they can. Munni loses her parents and holds on to Qasim, who finds solace in holding a child who reminds him of his lost one. After that they live as father and daughter.

Qasim befriends Nikka and Mirium during his stay in Lahore. They become something like his family. As Zaitoon grows up Qasim takes her to his ancestral home to be married to a "tribal" boy. Zaitoon, having been brought up in the plains of Lahore, finds it difficult to assimilate in the hills' way of life. The family she marries into also does not understand her way of dealing with

things. Bapsi Sidhwa depicts the journey of the girl towards the hills in meticulous detail. The girl's "bold and large" eyes meet those of an aspiring Punjabi soldier from the army, both knowing their paths would not merge into one. In *The Pakistani Bride* the desert life of Dubai and Pattan is compared with city life, with great dexterity.

"Unlike the sluggish, muddy Ravi that sprawled through Lahore, the river here was a seething, turquoise snake, voluminous and deep and for the hundredth time she (Zaitoon) thought of Mirium and Nikkah."

Zaitoon's story is paralleled with that of a white woman living in Pakistan. Carol, an American, marries a young, vibrant Pakistani she earlier falls in love with at college. They come back to Pakistan. Carol loves her city life where she is among the cream of society. She attends all the high-profile dinners with her husband. There is a party every evening and "she felt like someone from *Gone with the Wind*." The best part comes in her sentiment: "I don't feel I'm programmed. People are kind and hospitable. I'm having a ball."

Regarding the city she lives in, she declares: "I love Lahore; it's beautiful and ramshackle, ancient and intensely human. I'm a sucker for the bullock carts and dainty donkey carts. They get all snarled up with the Mercedes, bicycles, tractors, trucks, and nasty buzzing three-wheeled rickshaws. The traffic is wild."

The restrictions on her behaviour, however, makes her quite tired. She is

shocked to hear that her husband is ashamed of her; that she laughs too loudly and touches men. To her dismay, she is informed that "if you only look a man in the eye it means he can have you."

They enjoy the hospitality of a Major



The Pakistani Bride
Bapsi Sidhwa
Penguin

Mushtaq working at Dubai, close to which are the hill tracts. As Carol is frustrated with her husband's obsession with her she gets entangled in physical intimacy with the major, who has also

been deprived of any female proximity. But when Carol asks the major to get a divorce from his wife and marry her, he explains the intricacy of his familial niche. He says he is married to his cousin and so if they even think of filing for a divorce their families will make both their lives more complicated. Even though Carol feels betrayed she finally comes to her senses and sees that her desire to leave her husband for the major has been whimsical and impractical.

While depicting Qasim and Nikka Pehlowan, Sidhwa does not forget to uncover the nature of politics in her country. The political parties often adopt mean ways to win or defeat their opponents. People like Nikka Pehlowan become prey to their stratagems. Bapsi Sidhwa also portrays the Hira Mandi: men's age-old desire to enjoy nights at the feet of beautiful and charming dancers. Nikkah and Qasim go to Shahnaz's quarters. As soon as her sensuous dance arouses the passions of her admirers, she retreats into the darkness of the background. The men have to quench their desires by drinking of her beautiful, naked body with their eyes before succumbing to inescapable slumber.

Zaitoon and Carol's paths only cross once in the entire story. They seem to have shared a secret that no one else has shared. Carol gives some presents to the girl who will soon be a woman and like herself will learn the convoluted ways of married life. It seems that the author has bound them together just by that meeting. They both inhabit a society where woman are need to be protected by their

male counterparts. In every situation a woman needs a man to make her life smooth, make the decisions for her, maltreat her yet love her at the same time, put her in situations she has no control over. This is what the power of the male is all about --- power to make the choices for a woman, be it for a simple young girl from Lahore or a free spirited American-born white girl.

Sakhi, the boy Zaitoon gets married to, treats her as one of his possessions. He has been brought up to behave or think in that way; the society he lives in has taught him thus. It has also prescribed how a girl should act at her 'in laws'. Zaitoon finds it extremely difficult to abide by the rules. Which is why she sits near the brook and looks ahead in the desert with a longing she never knew existed. She even waves at a distant truck looking like a toy in the faraway horizon. And her husband, stalking her, throws a stone at her. She is hurt and determined to leave him and eventually it is her only desire. Hope keeps her going. She waits for the right time. Will it ever come? Even if it does, will she be able to make it to the place, where the army patrols? How can a girl of the plains find her way in the formidable hills of Pakistan? And if she gets caught she will have to pay with her life, for that is the price exacted of a runaway bride. So will she take the chance?

This the readers will have to find out for themselves. It is a fine book that must not be missed.

Jackie Kabir is a teacher and regular reviewer of books.

The state of a state

Mozaffar Hossain is impressed by a work

THE Bangla terms 'darshan' and 'darshonic' imply very grave meanings which are related to philosophy and philosophers respectively. The inner meanings of these terms are comparatively clear to students and teachers of philosophy. Ordinary men's understanding of them is of course rather different, perhaps even difficult. And yet ordinary people can understand 'darshan' easily when it means 'to look at' or 'to see'. But a 'seer' or 'onlooker' cannot be a 'darshonic' in any sense. The author of the well-known, notable prize-winning book *Pakistaner Jannomrittu Darshan* has rightly claimed himself as an onlooker of the birth and death of Pakistan and also as an expositor of the philosophy of its birth and death in light of the traditional socio-political history of our subcontinent.

The author has rightly claimed himself to be prematurely clever as he earned the favour of sitting and even gossiping with elderly people when he was only a minor schoolboy. This favour in a feudal oriented family pattern earned for him the chance to widen his mental horizon at an early age. Thus he acquired the ability to look at a wide stretch of village landscape and was able to read the minds of different individuals coming from different creeds, castes, religions and societies, with all their distinctive roles in forming different socio-political views on the varied transitional moments of history.

I have had the opportunity to go through some of the pages of the epic-like 'magnum opus' of Jatin Sarkar when he was preparing it in long hand in 1988-90 in Mymensingh. Now I have come by it in Dhaka in its full form and have observed the author's keen acumen in reading the minds of unlettered village cultivators, folklorists of natural humanism, of village bards, of non-communal Hindus and Muslims prior to the birth of Pakistan which ultimately 'came to stay' with a fatal fate of dying prematurely due to the suicidal blunder of its creator 'father'. The magic charm of the 'father' soon evaporated on the question of the state language issue. None came to save the lone 'father' at the time of his depressed mental condition. The futility of the 'two nation theory' was proved first by the death of its creator father and then by the two historical murders, one of Gandhiji's killing at the hands of Nathuram Godse and the other of Liaquat Ali Khan's assassination by a fellow Muslim.

Who planted the seeds of the destruction of Pakistan? It was the heroic political gambler, the father of Pakistan himself - a man of megalomania and idiosyncrasy. None of the giants of the Congress, the Communist Party or anyone from

among the rank and file could stop him from doing what he wanted to do. The net result was a mass exodus from both countries - Pakistan and Hindustan.

Both the craze of creating Pakistan in the decade of the 1940s and the craze of destroying it were equal in balance. The first craze was of mass hypnotism engendered by the 'two nation theory', and the second one was a calculation from a utilitarian point of view, developing gradually from 1948 to 1971 through the language movement of 1953, the general elections of 1954, the mass upsurge of



Pakistaner Jannomrittu Darshan
Jatin Sarkar
Jatiyo Shahityo Prokash

1969 encapsulating the demands of autonomy and eventually leading to the birth of Bangladesh. All this epic history is depicted through a dialectical world outlook and proper analysis of party men and masses of different castes and creeds. As the author is well equipped with Marxism and Pavlovian psychology, he has no possibility of committing the fallacy of over-simplification in analysing the model character of Nasir Sarkar or the unlettered "full man of gem of purest serene" in our villages.

The book is much cheaper than any middle class luxury prestige symbol in the drawing room, but far more valuable than any diamond. It is a must read for all, and especially so for the new generation.

Mozaffar Hossain, essayist and translator, is chairman of Bangladesh Literary Resource Centre.