

Tagore and the Japanese experience

Subrata Kumar Das spots good scholarship in a new work on the poet

RABINDRANATH Tagore (1861-1941), one of the most widely travelled persons of his age, visited Japan three times: in 1916, in 1924 and in 1929. It is worth mentioning here that Rabindranath's visits may be counted as five since on his way back in 1916 and 1929 he landed in Japan. Before him, we had some more people from the Bangla-language zone visiting Japan and writing on different aspects of the country, but Rabindranath's visit became a milestone in the timeline of Japan-Bangla, i.e., Japan-India relations. During his five tours the myriad-minded author met a huge number of people, from the prime Minister of Japan to lesser mortals, among whom were writers, artists, musicians, educationists, politicians, and journalists. He delivered a good number of lectures and befriended a number of Japanese. All his lectures, explanations, references and related information have been bound in two covers by Supriya Roy, a dedicated worker of the Rabindra-Bhabana, the Tagore Memorial Museum and Archive and Research Centre of Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, India.

"It was some time in 2003, when Prasanta Kumar Paul, the Tagore biographer, told me that Rabindranath had expressed, in a letter to Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, a desire to see all the lectures in Japan collected in a book to be called *Talks in Japan*. In fact, an attempt was made because two files exist in the Rabindra-Bhabana Archives entitled, 'Japan I' and 'Japan II'. These files contain scripts of some of these lectures, mostly in handwriting of Leonard Elmhirst with corrections by Rabindranath. There are also typed scripts and some incomplete newspaper clippings. Prasanta Kumar suggested that I work on these and complete Rabindranath's unfulfilled wish." The editor of the book has thus acknowledged the source of inspiration that encouraged her to take the initiative.

The lectures, delivered by Rabindranath on his 1916 tour of Japan, include 'India and Japan' (first speech in Japan, before an audience of 3000 people

on 01 June), 'Ideals of Art' (10 June), 'The Message of India to Japan' (11 June, reprinted with a few changes as 'Nationalism in Japan I' in Rabindranath's book *Nationalism*), 'Address in Bengali' (13 June. As most among the Japanese audience could not understand English,



Talks in Japan Rabindranath Tagore

Edited by Supriya Roy



Talks in Japan
Rabindranath Tagore
Edited by: Supriya Roy Shizen, Kolkata

Rabindranath thought of delivering the speech in Bangla which was translated in Japanese by Rikhang Kimura), 'Paradise' (14 June), 'The Spirit of Japan' (02 July, later published under the title 'Nationalism in Japan II' in Rabindranath's book *Nationalism*).

Among all the above-mentioned speeches, 'Ideals of Art' is not a complete one; it is simply a paragraph. It is the synopsis that Rabindranath spoke on the occasion. What Rabindranath wrote to Rathindranath in this respect was "... I had spoken on art at the Art School here. I send you a copy of this. Ask Pramatha to translate this for Sabuj Patra. But do not publish the English version in *The Modern Review*. I plan to enlarge it." The editor of the current book has commented: "However, this did not appear in *Sabuj Patra*. The enlarged version of this speech was later published in *Personality* (1917) as 'What is Art?' The address given on 13 June was actually given in Bangla and so was given such a title.

Kabiguru started his second tour of Japan on 29 May 1924, which ended on 22 June in the same year. The lectures on this tour included: 'To the People of Japan' (3 June), 'Address to Women' (5 June), 'To Women' (5 June), 'Address at The Imperial University, Tokyo' (9 June), 'Address at The Imperial University, Tokyo-2' (10 June), 'Women's University, Tokyo' (10 June), 'International Relations' (11 June), 'My School' (12 June), 'To Japanese Artists' (12 or 13 June), 'The Place of Science' (16 June), 'The Child World' (17 June), 'The Schoolmaster' (18 June), 'Freedom and Education' (18 June), 'To the Indian Community in Japan' (20 June), 'The Soul of the East' (on board, someday after 22 June).

The third trip of the poet started in January 1929. This time he left Japan for Canada on 28 March and reached Yokohama on 10 May again. In *Talks in Japan* these two visits have been counted as a single one. The speeches delivered during this period are: 'The Scared Mission of Women' (27 March), 'The Philosophy of Leisure' (12 May), 'Traveller through Life' (13 May), 'On Oriental Culture and Japan's

Mission' (15 May), 'Ideals of World Politics' (17 May), 'Ideals of Education' (3 June).

Talks in Japan is a very handy anthology of some of the speeches of Rabindranath. It is true many of these speeches have appeared in many other anthologies of Rabindranath. Many were published in different periodicals and newspapers in Japan or Bangladesh. But in *Talks in Japan* we have some speeches that were never published earlier. Moreover, the other point obvious is the editor's open confession on which speeches could not be compiled in this book owing to unavailability. These are:

1. Address at Otani University on 17 June 1924
2. Address at Miss Tsuda's school on 16 May 1929
3. Address at Nichi Nichi on 23 May 1929

The editor has included three different articles: '1916: The First Trip', 'The Second Trip', 'The Third trip' along with 'Acknowledgement' and 'Introduction'. The twenty two photographs of Rabindranath taken in Japan have, no doubt, elevated the quality of the book. Rabindranath's sketch by Mirra Richard done in Tokyo and two paintings by Rabindranath on board S. S. Shanghai Maru recall many more moments associated with the poet. Along with all these there is a small annexure with some news clippings published in some Japanese newspapers on Rabindranath's visits. 'Personalities' helps readers get quick references of the people talked about in Rabindranath's speeches or in related issues. As for the titles of Rabindranath's speeches, there is much scope for questions as well. Did the poet himself decide on such titles as 'Address in Bengali', 'Address at the Imperial University, Tokyo', et cetera?

There is little doubt Supriya Roy has done a great job in bringing all the available speeches of Rabindranath before us. It will inspire similar interest in the poet, which can only contribute enormously to Rabindranath research in relation to Japan and Bangladesh.

Subrata Kumar Das is a researcher and critic.

AT A GLANCE

China
Contrasting Contours
Raana Haider
The University Press Limited

You are likely to get a whole and wholesome idea of China in this hugely captivating work. Haider is one of the more eloquent of Bangladesh's writers in English and brings to this tale a subtle, simple narration that will keep you spell-bound. History, heritage, politics, et al, is what you put your finger on, about China, in this book.

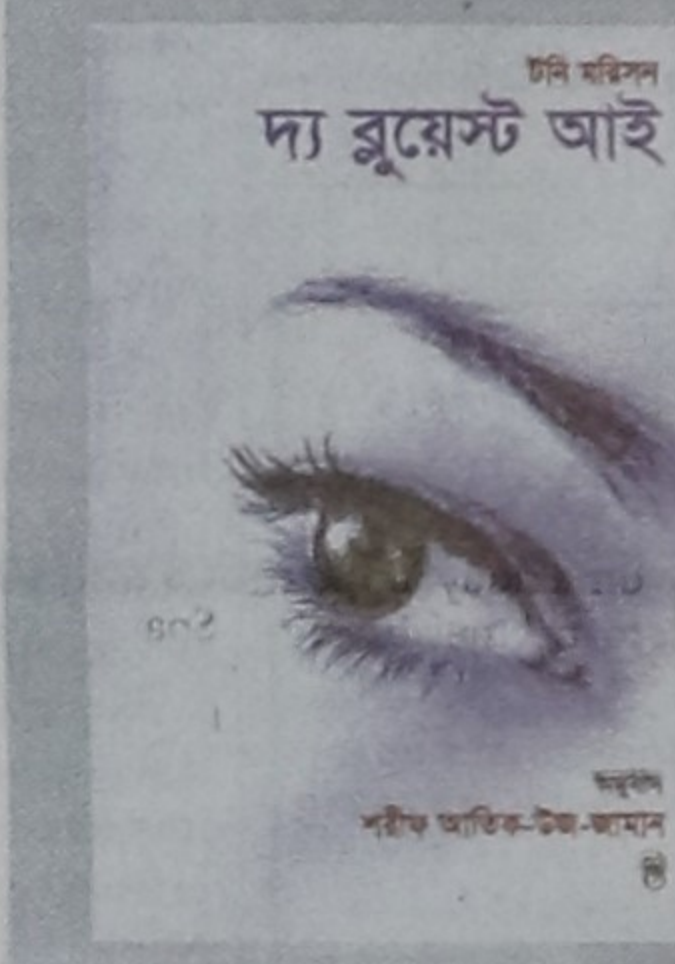
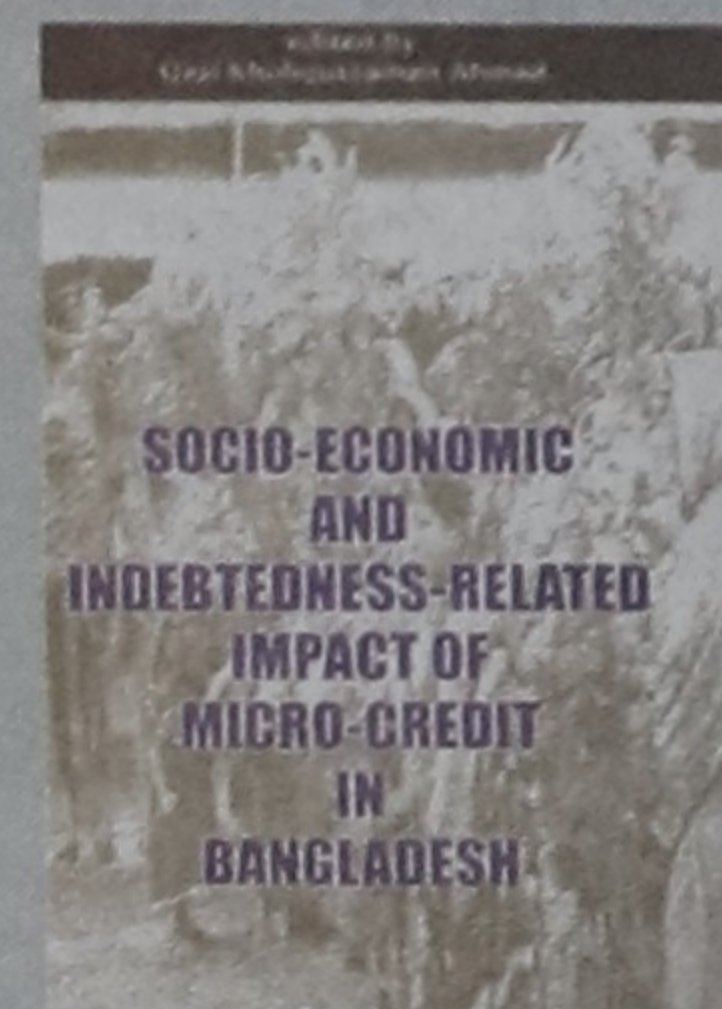


Cholochitro Nirmaner Nepoththe
Kothokota
Abdullah Zeyad
Rhythm Prokashona Sangstha

A refreshingly detailed work on cinema, indeed on the making of cinema, from a young writer. In the process, what you get is a history of movie making in Bangladesh. The articles rekindle memories. And when you add to those the black and white images of artists who captivated us in years gone by, you know what treasure you have in hand.

Socio-Economic and Indebtedness
Related Impact of Micro-Credit in
Bangladesh
Ed. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmed
The University Press Limited

Micro credit may be becoming too used a term, may in fact have turned into a cliché for some. And yet the impact it has had, for better or worse, in Bangladesh cannot quite be ignored. In this loaded work on the subject, edited by the capable scholar that Kholiquzzaman is, a whole new perspective on micro-credit issues is what you will get.



The Bluest Eye
Toni Morrison
Trans. Sharif Atiq-uz-Zaman
Friends' Book Corner

This work happens to be a rather good translation of Morrison's original tale. Dealing with racial prejudice, with the subtleties that come with such attitudes, the writer projects in quiet detail one of the more disturbing of human characteristics in modern times. Sharif Atiq-uz-Zaman has surely done credit to the original. You will love it.

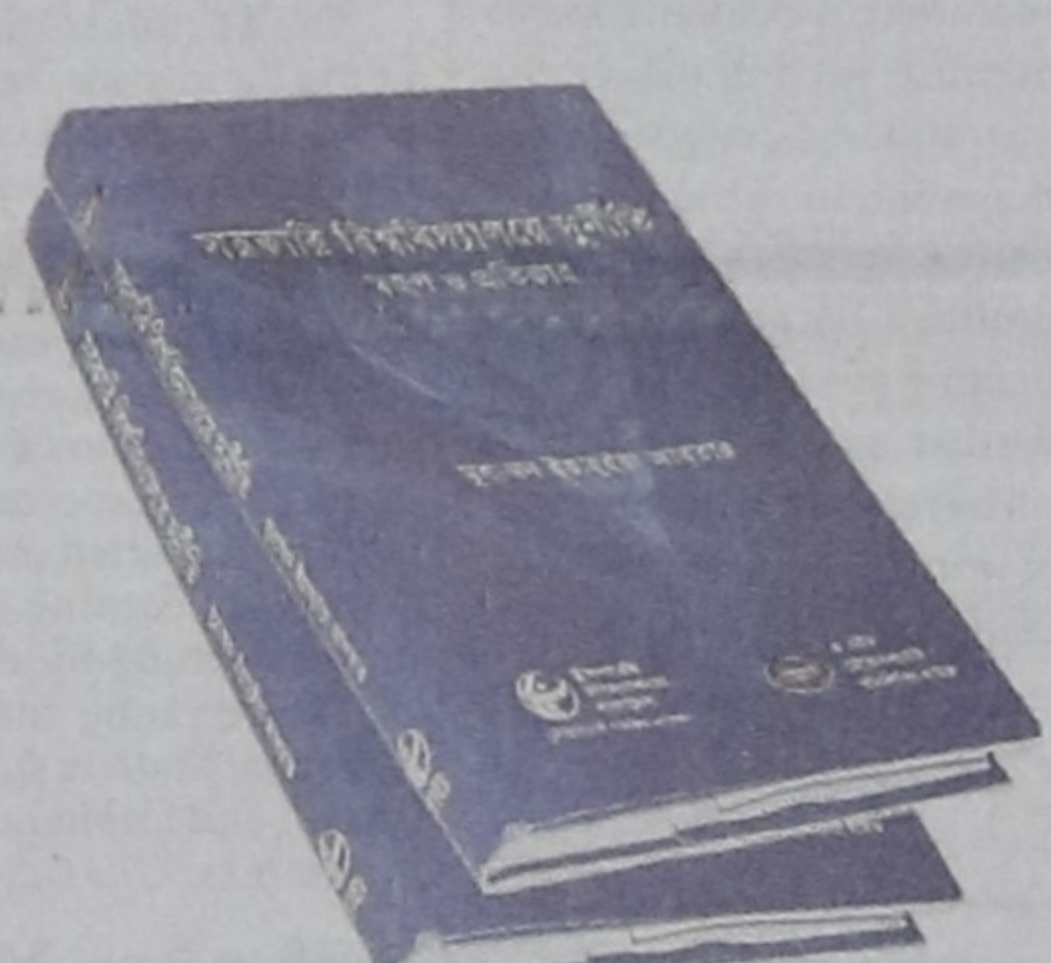
Those ailing public universities

Mahfuzul H. Chowdhury finds much that is revealing in a rare study

THE book under review is a pioneering work in the area of corruption in public universities in Bangladesh, although corruption and public universities are both old institutions in Bangladesh. This work basically originated as a research report on corruption in the public universities sponsored by Transparency International Bangladesh and conducted by Muhammad Yeahia Akhter. The author himself is a professor at a premier public university in the country and has been working in the area of corruption studies in Bangladesh. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) also is a very familiar and prominent organization working in the area of corruption. TIB has been working very sincerely in this field in the form of conducting research on corruption at the macro and micro levels in the country. It has focused on many nationally important institutions and organizations, such as the Chittagong Port, government ministries, departments, etc., and on preparing reports, publishing them and disseminating systematically gathered information to the public. Muhammad Yeahia Akhter also has done other work on corruption in Bangladesh and has published books on diverse issues in this area of national importance. The present work therefore is the result of a laborious effort on the part of both TIB and the author.

The public universities of Bangladesh, especially Dhaka University, have long been the centres of national focus for various reasons. Those reasons include their role in the political developments of the country at crucial moments --- the language movement, autonomy movement and the Bangladesh independence movement. Dhaka University and the other public universities, such as Rajshahi and Chittagong universities, also have

produced most of the political leaders, administrators, teachers and lawyers of the nation. So when the question of corruption arises regarding these institutions of national pride, naturally it draws the attention of any conscious citizen of the country. Moreover, to my knowledge, the book is the first of its kind to address the issue with an inquisitive mind and an objective method. It contains six chapters, appendices, tables and index. The first



Sarkari Bishwabidyalaye Durniti:
Sawrup O Protikar
Muhammad Yeahia Akhter
Transparency International Bangladesh and A H
Development Publishing House

chapter discusses the concept of corruption, introduces the issue of corruption in the public universities in Bangladesh and the rationale of the study. The second chapter is built up on the problem of academic corruption, which concentrates around campus politics, connection of students and teachers to national and partisan politics, absence from classes of teachers and students, copying at examinations by students, appointment of unqualified teachers and irregularities in the promotion of teachers. In table one of this chapter, it is noted that at the Chittagong and Dhaka universities' faculties of social science and arts 61.67 per cent, 59.15 per cent, 51 per cent and 54 per cent of scheduled classes were not held because the respective teachers/professors did not show up during the period of the study. In this chapter, it is also reported that some of the students of the public universities were involved in corrupt activities such as extortion, absconding from classes, and cheating in the examinations. But there is a section in this chapter on private universities which does not fit into a context where the author discusses the corruption of the public universities.

Chapter three of the work focuses on administrative corruption in the public universities. The practice of administrative corruption is spread over the areas of admission of students, management of departments and dormitories of students, fabricating the dates of birth of the staff, officers and teachers. The study reveals the nature of corruption in the examinations' office by way of a doctoring of the results of examinations in return for money, corruption or irregularities in recruitment, promotion and retirement of teachers, officers and employees. Chapter four of the book deals with financial corruption in the universities

on various counts in the areas of transportation, buildings and constructions. There have been financial irregularities in the vice chancellors' offices and in the non-payment of dues owed to the universities by teachers who did not return from abroad. These facts were also published on several occasions in various newspapers.

Chapter five gives an account of the opinions of various stakeholders on the issue of corruption in the universities. However, the table of contents of the chapter is very long and detailed where it should have been rather precise and short. Chapter six is the conclusion. The author has rightly pointed out that the Acts relating to the four public universities need to be reviewed and any or some parts of the Acts should be amended to make the universities more efficient in the light of the present situation.

The work is a very timely study on a subject of critical national importance and a courageous initiative on the part of the author. He systematically exposes the irregularities at the highest seats of learning in the country. But certain other issues, notably salary discrimination between the public and private universities, procedural differences in the evaluation and grading of the students could have come into the context in the discussion on corruption in the public universities. There are some printing errors, unfortunately; and overall it could have been a better production. The report also could have been a better edited work to be produced in book form. That said, the author and TIB deserve to be congratulated for undertaking this study.

Mahfuzul H. Chowdhury is Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Chittagong.

REREADINGS

Celebration, laughter and trail of butterflies

Farida Shaikh takes a peek into a world of magic and reality

ONE Hundred Years of Solitude is 'perhaps the greatest revelation in the Spanish language since the Don Quixote of Cervantes' - Pablo Neruda...

It is an epic work that examines the cultural history of a people. It is about a community, its founding, development and death. This novel is about a Latin American country--- Colombia, its independence from Spain (1810-1825) and the civil wars that followed (1825-1902).

Colombia was under the control of the United Fruit Company of Boston (1900-1928) during this period labour trouble culminated in a mass strike of 32,000 workers. At Cienega the author and his family witnessed the massacre of men by government troops.

The Thousand Days War (1899-1902): Guerra de los Mil Dias, was a civil armed conflict in Republic of Colombia, between the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and its radical factions. The ruling conservatives were accused of maintaining power through fraudulent elections. The economic crisis of falling coffee price in the world market affected the opposition Liberal Party, which had lost power. This novel has connections with this particular people's historical reality, the country's independence from Spain, the civil wars, and the central character of Colonel Aureliano Buendia has many affinities with General Rafael Uribe Uribe, under whom the author's grandfather had fought.

Uribe's struggles ended in 1902 with the Treaty of Neerlandia, an event in this novel and in his later novel *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*.

The novel chronicles 100 years in Macondo, a fictional Colombian village, the involvement of Colonel Aureliano Buendia, in the conflict between Colombia's Liberal and the Conservative parties.

On the political significance of the novel, many opinions and views have been noted and there is no agreement about what is the political 'message' of the writer. According to writer-critic Bell-Villada, 'The novel's appeal is to all ideologies: leftists like its dealing with social struggles and its portraits of imperialism; conservatives are heartened by the corruption and/or failure of those struggles and with the sustaining role of the family; nihilists and quietists find their pessimism reconfirmed; and the apolitical hedonists find solace in all the sex and swashbuckling.'

The twisted and meandering world of politics is a gloomy one. There is little difference between the Liberals and the Conservatives; both parties kill and exploit the people. Although Marquez has a definite

anti-capitalist bent, his purpose in portraying the politics of the region is not to be polemical. He comments on how the nature of Latin American politics is towards absurdity, denial, and never-ending repetitions of tragedy.

Other than the social-political themes, readers like the novel 'because it's a great escapist read.' One can enjoy without having any particular awareness of its historical roots or its political implications.

There are powerful images of paradoxical bodily disgust, ambivalent celebration and laughter, ironic distance and reconstruction of human shapes, the colourful, like the trail of butterflies, the evocative beauty, the satiric, erotic scenes of bawdy and prodigious sex, like characters whose farts are so strong they kill all the flowers in the house or the man who runs through the house balancing beer bottles on his penis, all of which exemplify the characteristics of magical realism.

Other writers of similar style are Ben Okri, Isabel Allende, Toni Morrison, and Mario Vargas Llosa. Time moves in circles and cycles, and people are not always progressing.

For the characters in the novel, time alternatively moves quickly and stagnates for years. Children grow up quickly, but when they are adults (particularly the males), time abandons them, leaving them to sit with their own nostalgia and bitterness for years on end. Time abandons Colonel Aureliano Buendia after the civil wars, and Jose Arcadio Segundo, both of them locked in Melquiades' laboratory, refusing to join the living, moving world.

For the main female character Ursula, time appears to be moving in a circle. New children turn out to be like their ancestors, only horribly exaggerated in some flaw or strength. Time is indeed moving in a circle in this book, but instead of expanding outward it is collapsing in on the Buendia family as their eventual demise draws closer.

The theme of women's sexuality is described by women who have unconventional relationships. Rebecca, Petra Cotes, Amaranta Ursula are happier and more sympathetic than the women who cling to society's standards of behaviour. Aureliano Segundo's coupling with Petra Cotes dramatically increases the proliferation of his animals, which is a signal that free love can be healthy for society at large.

The words 'solitude' and 'solitary' appear on almost every page of this novel. Incest is a secondary theme of solitude. It plays an enormous role in the novel, from the very beginning with Ursula's warning that children born of incestuous relationships may be born with the tails of pigs. And indeed, at the

very end of the novel, a Buendia is born with the tail of a pig. For most families, incest is not a great threat. The fact that it is something the Buendias have to keep dodging marks them out as a family unable to escape the family homestead, unable to look outside them. They are too solitary. Essentially, incest is the practice of keeping family members within the family; so it marks the Buendias as too disengaged from the world around them.

Critic Regina James has accurately noted that no matter what types of dating are used, the book does



Gabriel Garcia Marquez
One Hundred Years of Solitude
Trans. Gregory Rabassa
Penguin Books

not fit neatly into one hundred years. Marquez purposefully uses hyperbole regarding dates and times. For the one hundred years of the title to stand as a cycle, a numerical symbol in the tradition of the Bible, the 'one hundred years' of the title stands for the ever-repeating cycle of time.

This theme is particularly important for the

chapters dealing with the banana plantation. In the span of only a few years, Macondo is transformed from a sleepy backwater to a frighteningly modern town via the influences of technology, economic exploitation and foreign invasion. But the arrival of new machines and farming techniques do not make Macondo a better place to live in, in fact things only get worse. The point of this is that modern technology is meaningless without a concurrent improvement in ethics, and 'progress' turns brutal without a plan to lessen economic inequality.

The theme of solitude runs through much of Garcia Marquez's works. As Pelayo notes, 'Love in the Time of Cholera, like all of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's work, explores the solitude of the individual and of human kind... portrayed through the solitude of love and of being in love'.

In response to Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza's question, 'If solitude is the theme of all your books, where should we look for the roots of this over-riding emotion? In your childhood perhaps?' Garcia Marquez replied, 'I think it's a problem everybody has. Everyone has his own way and means of expressing it. The feeling pervades the work of so many writers, although some of them may express it unconsciously.'

In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, 'Solitude of Latin America', he relates this theme of solitude to the Latin American experience. 'The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own, serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary.'

The essence of the Nobel Lecture concluded on a note of hope and dream of all mankind.

'On a day like today, my master William Faulkner said, 'I decline to accept the end of man'. I would fall unworthy of standing in this place that was his, if I were not fully aware that the colossal tragedy he refused to recognise thirty-two years ago is now, for the first time since the beginning of humanity, nothing more than a simple scientific possibility. Faced with this awesome reality that must have seemed a mere utopia through all of human time, we, the inventors of tales, who will yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth.'

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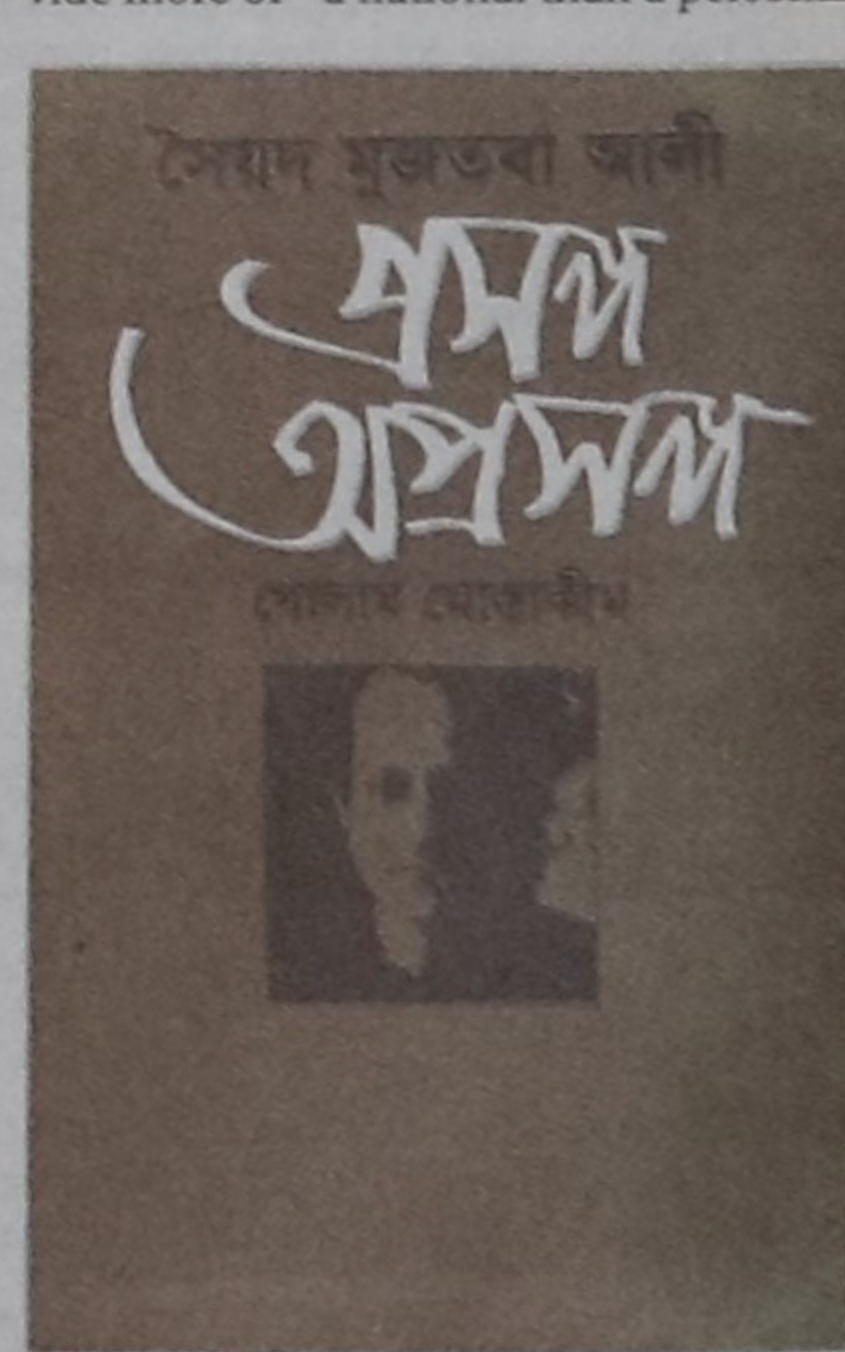
Memories of an erudite man

Mahbub Husain Khan appreciates a work on a noted scholar

A fortunate concatenation of circumstances has enabled this reviewer to know about and meet some of the most famous literary and intellectual personalities of Bangladesh and West Bengal since the 1950s. Among them is Syed Mujtaba Ali. And because of this chain of circumstances and blessed by good fortune, I was able to attend the wedding ceremony, in 1951, of Syed Mujtaba Ali with Rabiah Ali, who was my mother's friend and classmate. And then, only last week, quite by happenstance, I came across Golam Mostaqim, who presented me with his book on Syed Mujtaba Ali (first published in 1995). This memoir of Syed Mujtaba Ali by a 'civil servant' is an unlikely delight. Mostaqim is now a senior officer in the Bangladesh administration, but I have known him for long, as he hails from my ancestral home, the sub-divisional town of Manikganj, now a district headquarters.

Though the word 'bureaucrat' has a markedly negative overtone in this day and age, and, in our country, intelligent and essential civil servants are often denigrated as 'bureaucrats', Mostaqim has proved, with this book, and through his many published research papers and newspaper columns, that he is really a 'savant' in the literary field and in his 'bureaucratic' career. This is a magisterial account of Syed Mujtaba Ali's life and times, particularly in the period April to December 1971, when Mostaqim had crossed over to West Bengal as a freedom fighter. This memoir combines a deep respect for the principal character's ethical probity and resourceful intellect, with a far from inevitably complimentary eye for the telling details of Mujtaba Ali's personal habits and deportment. Mostaqim manifests a rich dramatic talent and a precise ear for conversational rhythms in his recapitulation of his meetings with Mujtaba Ali at the time of his stay at his flat in Kolkata, and then till Ali's death in 1974. His orchestration of the discussions and debates lies at the heart of this remarkable memoir.

A little daunted by Mujtaba Ali's brusque rebuff at their first meeting on April 28, 1971, at Ali's Patwar Bagan Lane flat, Mostaqim was nevertheless encouraged by friends of Ali, including Abu Sayeed Ayub and Shubhash Mukopadhyaya, to persevere. And just over a week later, he waited, with some apologies, upon Mujtaba Ali. Mujtaba Ali is, for all his erudition, and also idiosyncrasies, a unique and intermittently profound voice. Mostaqim should be congratulated for bringing an extraordi-



Syed Mujtaba Ali
Proshongo, Aproshongo
Golam Mostaqim
Studentways, Banglabazar

history', which centres around Mujtaba Ali, but brings into sharp detail other literary and intellectual personalities of India, Bangladesh and Europe.

This reviewer feels that Mostaqim has acted in a manner similar to that of James Boswell waiting upon Samuel Johnson. And by so doing given us both Mujtaba Ali as an individual and the dimensions of the personalities with whom Mujtaba Ali spent the most profitable and pleasurable years of his life. One looks forward to Mostaqim's next book, which is one is given to understand will be published late in 2008.

Mahbub Husain Khan is a former civil servant and critic.