

## Searching for God in one's inner being Nazma Yeasmeen Haque analyses a writer's emphasis on faith

**I**n *Spirit Driven Success*, Dani Johnson presents a subject matter that is as old as time itself but in a sparklingly refreshing manner. Her overriding message throughout the book is that human life has a definite purpose which a person may not be aware of because oftentimes we tend to live or rather prefer to live in a status quo, but for the realization of which we must seek God, the Supreme, the Ultimate. From her deep conviction, the author avers that in spite of one's having ability, skill and other qualities, one shall not have wholeness of life until and unless one surrenders oneself to Him and puts in efforts to be the best according to His will. The advice 'submit oneself' to God recurs throughout the book and Johnson makes the meaning of the word 'submit' very explicit, that is, to respect and honour. She urges, 'accept instructions from His mouth and lay up His words in your heart.' Then again she adds, 'God doesn't make you submit. He gives you the choice'. And whenever a person chooses to submit to Him, miracles occur in life. She further says that one has to ask for His help and for miracles to happen in one's life, to one's people. The word 'life', according to the author, refers to all areas of life that are physical, mental, emotional, social, relational and, she adds emphatically, financial as well. Her resounding advice is to seek God wholeheartedly and totally unconditionally for all time so that the maxim, "Many are called but few are chosen" flashes incessantly in one's vision and one is

ready to be chosen. Dani Johnson is a successful speaker before large audiences, a trainer to show the ways and means to mitigate and overcome the ills and misfortunes of life. Throughout the book, one hears a very potent, loud and clear optimistic voice to lift people up from a life lived by a set formula, a mediocrity, a complacency, status quo, and in a rut. Johnson ennobles people by asserting that there is skill, talent and ability lying dormant in every life, buried in them that ought to be discovered and re-discovered because that is precisely what God has made us for. To her, anointing is not the monopoly of a priest, a pastor or an evangelist; rather every soul is capable of influencing others and bringing about changes that are for better for them. In this sense, everyone is a king. Her bold utterance that making money is spiritual warfare may be startling to many but her rationale behind this is substantiated by her quotations from the Bible. She goes further and asks, "Do you know there are even more scriptures supporting wealth and money than there are those talking against it?" Dani Johnson enunciates ten steps to God's formula for wealth and reminds readers that it is his blessing to us for a much bigger purpose than we might think. In a booming voice and very tersely, she talks against hoarding, greed, jealousy and other vices in human character that makes one less than human. She repeatedly warns people about their intentional oblivion of not tithing at the

rate of 10 percent of God's Kingdom for those who are deserving. As a teacher on the lessons of life, she draws the attention of the elders to the need to teach youngsters to tithe from their own earning, which is very relevant to our society as many in our young generation have been



Spirit Driven Success  
Dani Johnson  
Call to Freedom Int'l, USA

earning from their student days for quite sometime. This precept when put in a little different way equals with the teachings on charity in other religions. Her words are overwhelming and colossal when she pronounces that we ought not to rob God or else we shall not be trusted with

what we have and eventually get robbed.

Johnson is in a trusted position to lead others to success not in the stereotyped sense of the term but in its true spirit because she herself has risen to this height from a very miserable, wretched life in her parents' home and also in her short-lived, turbulent first marriage. She claims to have heard an inner voice, a calling she awoke to and organized her life accordingly. Her merit as a writer lies in the fact that by not articulating anything new about constructing one's life in keeping with its purpose that is most magnificent and fulfilling, she makes what is already known to us most palpable. It ignites us and rocks us to a re-awakening. The messages in this book are coherent and graded in terms of arrangement of the lessons and corresponding edicts in the chapters primarily because they are meant for teaching and training. Added to the content and its presentation is a spirited voice that makes the words, phrases, dictums and quotations fully audible to us. Johnson has shown that presenting something in a laconic way is much more effective in driving a point home than when it is verbose. It is one of those 'how to' books that spells out every step in striving to attain a goal whatever realm that might fall within. In this regard there is a strange coincidence of her book with the Silva Mind Control Method propounded by Jose Silva as far back as the mid 1960s and, therefore, this reviewer feels that this point should have been recognized by

Johnson. Both Dr Silva and Johnson's works are on discovering ultimately one's inner kingdom through some initial training on mastering some simpler objectives. Johnson is lucky in receiving a calling from the Creator before she asked for or prayed for it. Thus she was rescued by Him which to many unfortunate souls remains a distant cry. Also the writer does not accept the fact that circumstances may hold back a person from making steps forward and pronounced, "... it is never the circumstances, but it is how you choose to deal with the circumstances that determine the outcomes in your life." It is a bit simplistic in the sense that although things may be different and perhaps surmountable in her surroundings, it is never the same for everyone elsewhere because of certain constraints that could be unimaginable by some like her in a progressive society. One may overcome one's distressful circumstances but at a very high cost, in the latter situation.

Considering the subject matter and its inherent essence that is spiritual, it does not look nice to see the cover page and also some inner pages being used for publicity to sell the book and CDs of it, however free initially they may be. It definitely mars the purpose of the book. This reviewer concludes that the foreword written by the author's husband is a boon to any wife in her endeavour.

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### AT A GLANCE

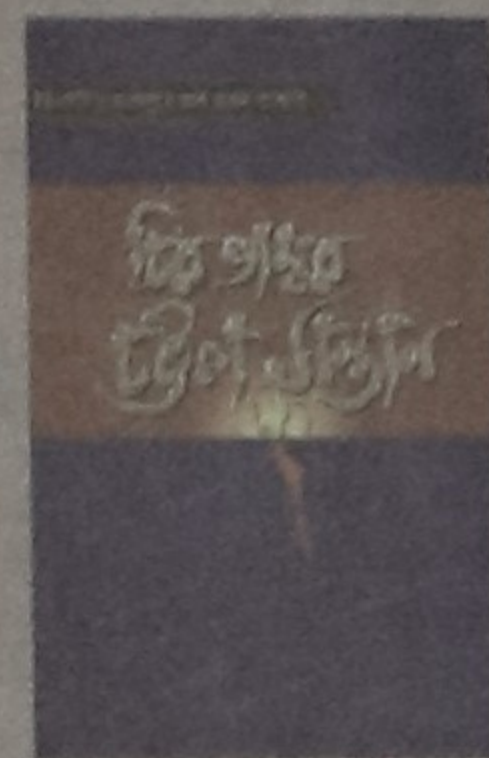
Amar Golpoguchcho  
Jafar Ahmed Chowdhury  
Batumul



These are readable short stories from an individual whose responsibilities as a senior government official have not detracted from his sense of aesthetics. The stories are redolent of the culture that has shaped itself around Bengali life, which is a sign of the author's --- and the characters' --- sense of roots. It is good holiday reading for you.

Chiro Bashhor Chottol Shontan  
University of Science and Technology  
Chittagong

The work gives you an idea of the many personalities who have lent their names and reputations to Chittagong because that has always been their home. Yes, some of the personalities noted in the work are controversial. But it is the others that arrest your attention. Read it. Read on. Go back to history a little.

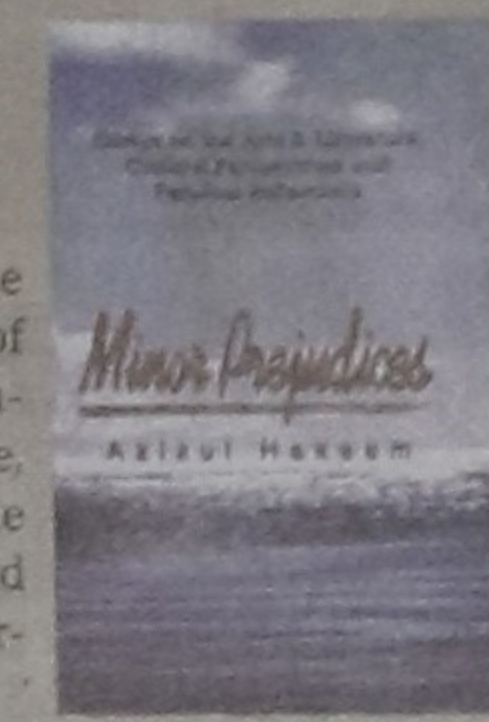


Pankaj Manohar-er Kobita  
Shomoyer Pendulum  
Aulad Hossain  
Batumul

In essence, it is poetic criticism that you come across here. The writer's dedication to poetry is unmistakable, as the tenor of his analysis makes clear. It gives you new insight into the concept of modern Bengali poetry. And, by the way, the author dedicates the work to APJ Abdul Kalam and Muhammad Yunus.

Minor Prejudices  
Azizul Hakeem  
The University Press Limited

These are essays, as the sub-title of the work makes clear, on a wide range of subjects. Obviously the author has traversed a whole trajectory of experience, which is why he comes forth with some masterful explorations of literature and the arts, culture and reflections of a personal nature. A charming book, this.



## Insights into an old culture

Tanveerul Haque cheerfully goes through a work on a rising power

**T**HE more one reads the more one is convinced of how less one really knows. Kudos to Raana Haider for her wonderful work. The slimmest of the volume belies the depth of knowledge and wisdom embedded in it. The work is a wonderful appetizer/eye opener to a more in depth appreciation of China. Indeed a savoury appetizer with delectable observations and morsels of wisdom interspersed at regular intervals. Development economists have been saying with some conviction since well before the curtain was brought down on the 20<sup>th</sup> century that "the 21<sup>st</sup> century belongs to China". Well, even before the first decade of the new century has come to a close we know how correct the prediction is turning out to be. The writing is on the wall. The global citizen --- rather the global "village dweller" --- ignores China at his or her own peril! That the author's work has been based on painstaking research and first hand observations is evident even before one has read a fourth of the book. The book is loaded with vignettes of information, observations and anecdotes that will appeal equally to the casual reader and the devoted Sinologist. Indeed, western historians have until now successfully denied China its rightful place in history, principally because they - western historians - have been transcribing history and also because fortuitously English came to be the

global lingua franca. Hence, the trumpeting of the virtues of Europe, "the new world" and "the west". Just imagine, what might have happened if the Chinese language had the position and status of the English language! Almost all inventions, philosophies, marvels of engineering, medicine and the sciences would have had Chinese authors! Over the centuries China has been visited by intrepid Western, European and Middle Eastern travellers, scientists and philosophers, all of whom lived to tell the tales of a wonderful China. Alas, their works were overtaken or obscured by developments in the West, Eurocentric Europe and the New World. Raana Haider's tome helps to bring this glaring oversight into sharp focus. The observations in the book that I have found most thought provoking are:

1. Around the Middle Ages trade routes that were land based for centuries gave way to maritime trade and the overland "Silk Route" lost its primal importance to the blue water "Spice Route".
2. Fascinating theory on the discovery of the Americas by the Chinese long before Columbus discovered America. Enough scientific evidence is now at hand to substantiate this hypothesis.
3. The invention of porcelain in China in the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Nothing is more Chinese than porcelain the very word "china" has been incorporated in the

English language. "Pottery belongs to all mankind but porcelain is China's invention" - is a thought-provoking dictum.

4. Impressive, provocative, intricate and elaborate description of the genesis and history of the "Forbidden City".
5. Other items that are genuinely



China: Contrasting Contours  
Raana Haider  
The University Press Limited

Chinese and immediately evoke images of China are "Acupuncture", "Feng Shui" (also known as Geomancy), Chinese food, tea, opium, bamboo, the sensuous "Cheongsam", calligraphy and Tai Chi. All have been touched upon and leave the reader with an appetite to learn more.

6. Between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries China was ruled successively by the Tang, Song, Ming and Qing dynasties each with its own distinctive phases and imprint on history. The book describes the writer's peregrinations in three cities of China and their surroundings: Beijing, Shanghai and Kunming. Beijing takes in an evocative description of the city itself, its history, the peculiarities of its hardworking population. A visit to the Forbidden City. A visit to the Great Wall. A visit to a Tea House. A visit to a Chinese Restaurant. Elaborating upon these would rob the future reader of the scintillating details and the passion and brilliance of the author in providing her unique insight on matters that are centuries old. Shanghai takes one's breath away. It is a "new city" in the sense that "it was a small town that lived off fishing and weaving" until the East India Company "discovered" it in 1832 and commenced commercial operations in 1842. The British 'taipans' arrived from Hong Kong and through the introduction of the opium trade gained a stranglehold on the city, converting it into the gateway of China. And Shanghai has since never looked back. It usurped the position of the engine of China's growth gained such tremendous momentum, in the last couple of decades only, to propel the entire Chinese economy headlong into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such has been the

Shanghai driven phenomenal growth that other global economies are still reeling from its impact. The author describes the cheek by jowl coexistence of the old with the breathtakingly new. The expose is brilliantly done peeling away layer after layer of the magic of this enchanting city. The information is presented in a very authentic and well documented manner comparing and contrasting the city with other global metropolises. Giving new meaning to China's obsession with the "greatest", "oldest", "largest" and other such superlatives. Kunming brings to a close the author's visit to China being her port of exit therefrom. Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province, is an industrial heartland now, though it has been an important trading portal for centuries. The flourishing of a wide variety of bamboo makes it the sanctuary for the Giant Panda. It is the birthplace of the greatest Chinese maritime navigator Zheng He. This 15<sup>th</sup> century Muslim admiral is credited with the 'discovery' of the Americas decades before Christopher Columbus landed there. The author has conducted extensive research followed up by a focused and introspective visit to provide the reader with this remarkable armchair travelogue.

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## A simple matter of the environment

Farida Shaikh bores into an issue of public concern

**A** world heritage site, Tanguar Haor is one of the largest freshwater inland wetlands; it is important and is of national significance, was designated as the second 'Ramsar' site, and was released from the 1930 leasing system on January 20, 2000. Earlier the government of Bangladesh designated 59,600 hectares of the Sundarban Forests as the first Ramsar site. Tanguar Haor is now managed by the district administration of Sunamganj. The Ramsar Convention proposes involving the local people in the ownership of haor resources. However, much remains to be done for the implementation of this policy. Tanguar Haor is also significant for its biological diversity and is also 'a unique habitat for the largest number of waterfowl population in the country'. In February 1971, the Ramsar Convention was adopted in the city of Ramsar in Iran. Its 'Wetland of International Importance' list by 2003 consisted of the names of 138 countries, with more than 1310 wetlands covering 111 million hectares. The broad objective of this convention was to stop the progressive encroachment and loss of wetland, to recognize the fundamental ecological process and their economic, scientific and recreational values. Tanguar Haor occupies an area of 100,000 hectares with nearly 46 villages, which are home to an extremely poor population. These

people are the direct stakeholders of the water body. The adjacent river Patlai and Rarti flood every year before the wet season, causing damage to agricultural products. The villagers depend on the haor for fishing, grazing, farming and firewood. The haor area also provides the winter crop of rice. The total area of the wetlands in the country has been estimated at 7-8 million hectares, consisting of rivers, streams, freshwater lakes and marshes including haor, baor, and beels, cultivated fields, estuarine systems with extensive mangrove swamps. Mostly found in the northeastern part of the country, in the greater Sylhet and Mymensingh district, it is collectively known as haor basin and covers an area of nearly 24,500 sq.km. That is about 50% of the country's land surface. Haors are bowl-shaped depressions subjected to seasonal flooding every year and remain under water for several months. Tanguar Haor consists of nearly 50 beels of various sizes. Many are uninterrupted, in a near natural state with flood tolerant trees *Hijol* and *Koroch*. This is a village based study to 'access the economic importance of Tanguar Haor resources' and community participation in the management of the haor. More specifically, the study makes a review of the physical conditions of the haor, importance of its biological resources and its connection to economic activities,

constraints and opportunities for participation. To access future direction, the study also makes an appraisal of the implementation status of the Ramsar Declaration in comparison with national level policy and laws.



Tanguar Haor  
A Diversified Freshwater Wetland  
M.H. Kabir & S.M.N. Amin  
Academic Press and Publishers  
Library

The study is distributed into 10 chapters with 9 major tables, figures and pictures to explain more. On the human resources side, Chapter 6 is on the people of Tanguar Haor, which is located in two upazillas, namely, Tahripur and Dharmapasha. The popula-

tion of the area was 18,231 in 1981, 23,395 in 1993 and is at present about 50,000-60,000. There has been outward migration of the population in the past on account of natural calamities. In recent times migration from Kishoreganj /Mymensingh to the area has been common. Predominantly the population is Muslim, with small ethnic numbers of Garo and Hajong in the northern villages of the haor area. The chapter further elaborates on the resettlement of the local people, socio-economic profile of the respondents in terms of household size, occupational status, physical assets, land ownership and status and predicament of Tanguar Haor. People's Reliance on Wetland Resources, in chapter 7, deals with natural resources, economic activities of the local people, the annual activity calendar, dependence on Haor resources and economic potential of the area. Community Participation in Haor Conservation, in chapter 9, is the most elaborate of the study. It deals with information sources on Haor degradation, awareness raising activities, local people's participation in conservation practices, people's interest in participation, potential nature of participation, people's activity preference, and benefits of local people's participation and constraints of local people's involvement. A useful reading is chapter 2 on

wetland; the least understood ecosystem and chapter 3 on wetlands of Bangladesh. Chapter 4 is on Tanguar Haor and its description as a diversified wetland. The closing chapter is on the major findings and possible future direction. The bibliography consists of nearly 100 citations; of these directly related are the draft final report, 2002, Ministry of Environment; and IUCN Bangladesh 2004 report on introduction to community based Haor and Flood Management. The Daily Star in February and September 2004 carried write-ups on Tanguar Haor. The same year the subject was covered in Prothom Alo, Daily Jugantar, Inqilab, Naya Diganta and Sangram. The study on Tanguar Haor by the two social scientists deserves the attention of erudite readers. It is a commendable work on the environmental aspects of the country, which are the most important area of study after that of poverty alleviation. However, the study methodology applied to the survey and participatory rural appraisal turned out to be short on analysis and interpretation. The next edition of the book may take that into consideration to further improve this useful study. Farida Shaikh writes on politics and development issues and is a reviewer.

### REREADINGS

## Old gods displaced by the new

Efadul Huq takes readers back to a seminal work

**T**HINGS Fall Apart is one of the thinnest books on my shelf and yet one of the most precious ones. Plainly and colourfully, Chinua Achebe, in this book, shows how a rigid thing like tradition falls apart under stubborn alien powers. In a native village called Umuofia, villagers were living steady lives that were full of woes and delights, little joys and little sorrows. But... unexpectedly the native village suddenly becomes the stage for the conflict between Christian missionaries and polytheistic Igbo villagers. Okonkwo, the valiant warrior of the clan, sees his beliefs, rituals and age-old lifestyle crumbling down as churches are set up and courts are established by the missionaries. The title of a great wrestler no more gives him respect. People from the village are taught at school and for them such titles hold no value. Some of the Igbo villagers get jobs as clerks and start to compare their social status on a different scale a scale of education. The converts from the village revolt against the ancient elders who are supposedly the judges under the guidance of their creator. But the definition of the Creator is different for the white strangers. Okonkwo and the others believed in many gods. Although Chukwuka is their main god, they had gods for crops, weather, health and children. They sacrificed animals to satisfy the gods. However, for the holy men, the white missionaries, God is but one entity in the universe. Through schools, hospitals, churches, Mr. Brown preaches his philosophy of the one God. Such a simple policy of the one God who is all-forgiving and all-loving makes some villagers admire the religion of the white men but there are some who look upon it as an enemy of their forefathers' beliefs. Change has to take place and only one can emerge victorious out of the conflict. So it happens. With cunning tactics the missionaries fortify themselves while frustration and hopelessness shroud the Igbo. How all of it happens and what comes in the end is for you to discover. Throughout the novel Achebe navigates the readers through the vibrant Igbo culture. Here's one of his descriptions: as night fell, burning torches were set on wooden tripods and the young men raised a song. The elders sat in circle and the singers went round

singing each man's praise as they came before him. They had something to say for every man. Some were great farmers; some were orators who spoke for the clan. Okonkwo was the greatest wrestler and warrior alive. When they had gone round the circle they settled down in the centre, and girls came from the inner compound to dance. At first the bride was not among them. But when she finally appeared holding a cock in her right hand, a loud cheer rose from the crowd. All the other dancers made way for her. She presented the cock to the musician and began to dance. Her brass anklets rattled as she danced and her body gleamed with cam wood in the soft yellow light. The musicians with their wood, clay and metal instruments went from song to song. And they were all gay. The simplicity in Achebe's



Things Fall Apart  
Chinua Achebe  
Heinemann

prose elevates his position as a writer and for a moment the innocent aura that Achebe creates seems to rightly answer Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Perhaps this novel wishes to convey that things are not as dark as we feel they are. Achebe requests us not to be like the fictional author of The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger whom we find at the end of the novel, belittling the self-respect of an Igbo villager. To state generally, every culture has its own value system; its laws and its traditions based on the psychology of that particular community. And after reading this book I realize that if heaping one's own tradition on another was the right thing, then the world would be paradise by now. Efadul Huq is a critic and freelance writer.