

Revisiting films and recounting their history

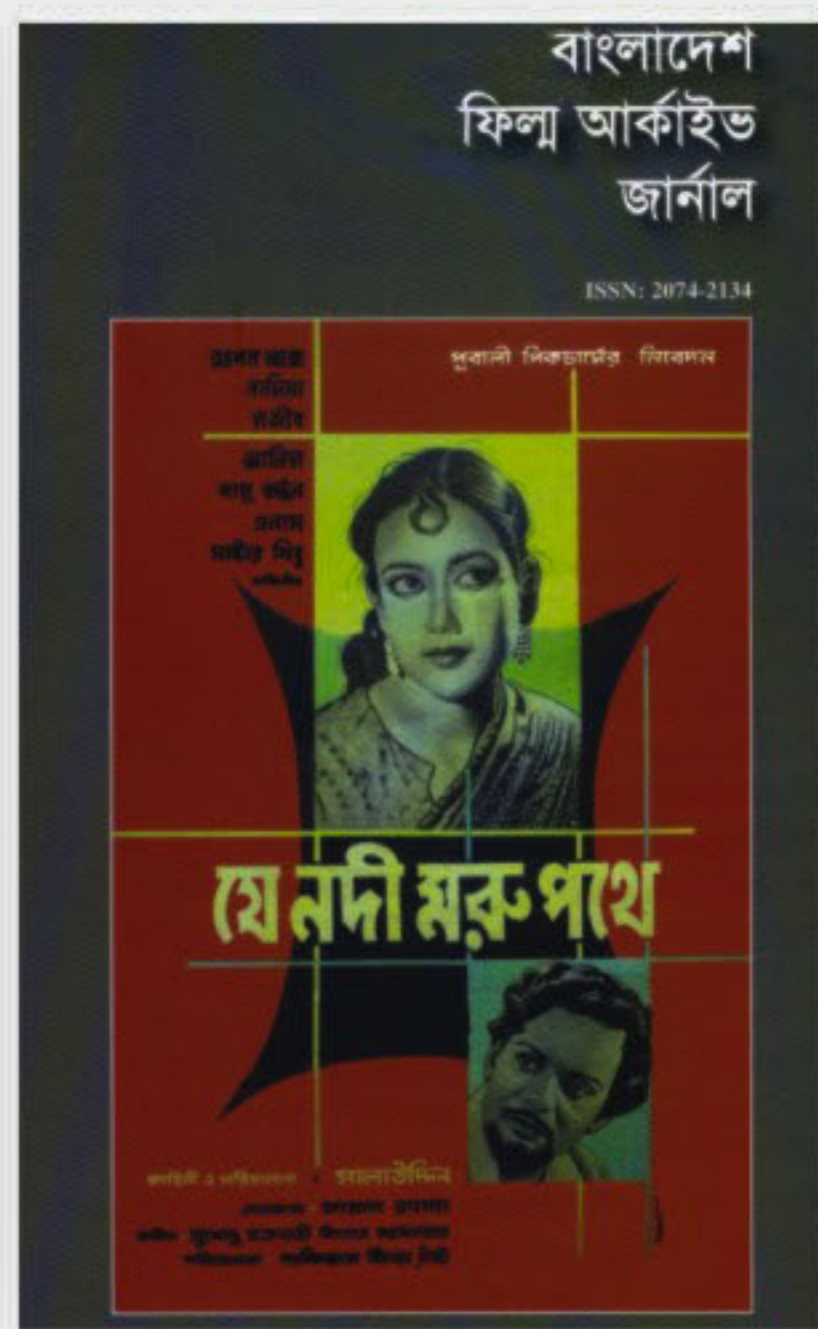
Subrata Kumar Das is all praise for a movie journal

A PART from a preservation of 2169 films in its vaults and 3053 books, 14575 photographs, 6677 posters, 1986 screenplays, 9950 film journals and other film related objects and documents in its library, Bangladesh Film Archive (BFA) has scaled new horizons by publishing an annual journal focusing on film and film-related issues on its 30th anniversary. BFA journal has already brought out two of its noteworthy issues for which its editor and the director general of BFA deserve appreciation from various segments of society.

The first issue published in 2008 enlisted eight articles, one interview and one film script. The second issue published very recently encompasses eleven articles, one interview and one film script. Both the issues have been able to include one write-up each from West Bengal, India. The Indian contributors are Someshwar Bhowmick, research scientist of St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, and Partha Raha, curator of Cinema Centenary Bhaban, West Bengal. Such inclusion will surely make the magazine rich in content and a collector's item from the multiculturalism point of view.

Most of the essays included in the volumes are by people who are surely authorities in this field. Essays on the films of Satyajit Ray by Nadir Zunayed and on background music by Syed Babab Ali Arzu in the first issue draw much attention as do the essays on censorship in films by Jamil Osman and on Zahir Raihan's films by Ahmed Aminul Islam in the second issue. Saibal Chowdhury has written elaborately on *Dhruopodi*, the cine magazine of the country.

Four films that have been meticulously reviewed in the issues are *Antorjatra*,



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Editor: Dr. Mohammad Jahangir Hossain

Nirontor, *Suryokonya* and *Chitra Nodir Pare*. These highly acclaimed films have been focused on in detail from various aspects. These articles here will surely help the general film watchers understand them in a more detailed and academic way. These reviews from Khondakar Shakhawat Ali, Prof Shaheen Kabir, Bidhan Ribero and Ashrafi Binte Akram will particularly remain worth mentioning

in the history of film review in Bangladesh.

The English language articles included in the second issue are 'Initiation into Film Making in Bangladesh: From Past to Present' by Muhammad Sajjad Ahsan and 'Reading Colours in Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Three Colours Trilogy*' by Humayun Farid. The two writers should be given special thanks as their insightful write-ups will pave the way for more writing in English on films in this country. There can be little doubt that such writings will help us place our knowledge of films in a broader perspective.

Dr. Sajedul Awwal, the executive editor of the journal, has, no doubt, enriched the issues by his interview of Baby Islam, the camera artist, and Subhash Datta, the film director. The tête-à-tête has brought to light many of the unseen or less seen facets of the film domain in Bangladesh. The issues have also incorporated articles from the editor, Dr. Mohammad Jahangir Hossain. 'Jatiyo Smriti Shongrokkhono Choloচিত্র Sangrahashalar Bhumika' (The Role of Film Archive in Preserving National Memorials) and 'Bangladesh Film Archiver Samprotik Karjokrom' (The Recent Activities of Bangladesh Film Archive) are well written with a plethora of information on related issues.

In this context, the question comes up as to whether it is possible for the BFA authorities to encourage more people who are connected with the technical aspects of film to write for this national publication. Write-ups covering technical aspects will help our cine-interested and cinema buffs in future to go for a better understanding of cinema. One may note that most of the books on cinema and its various aspects are written in English and

are more expensive as well.

Moreover, in the editorial of the first issue, Dr. Mohammad Jahangir Hossain has written about the BFA's expectation of creating a readership for serious films and developing a genre of film-critiquing in Bangladesh. For the last 37 years there has been a vacuum in this arena, though better films are not that much unavailable in our country. We believe BFA journal will satiate the demands of serious readership as well as common readers of film literature.

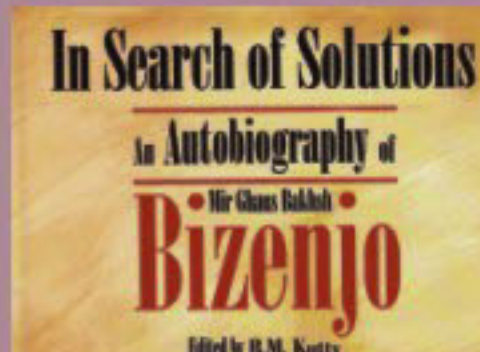
We are hopeful that film researchers and all professionals involved in filmmaking from Bangladesh and outside the country will feel interested in contributing to these journals and so disseminate their ideas and thoughts, experiments and experiences to readers. The two English language articles included in the second issue will open up a wider horizon in so far as international readership of the journal is concerned.

While trying to browse the online editions of the journal, this reviewer experienced some unexpected impediments, statements like 'This site may harm your computer'. May we request the BFA authorities to take initiatives for making the digital pages safe for readers from home and abroad?

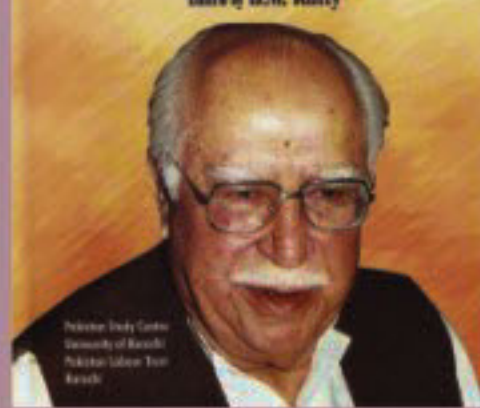
The price of the second issue being double than that of the first one will, no doubt, be a damper for the literati as taka fifty of the first issue was more reasonable and within the purchasing capacity of the common reading people.

Subrata Kumar Das, a teacher and essayist, has set up a web site called www.bangladeshinovels.com

AT A GLANCE

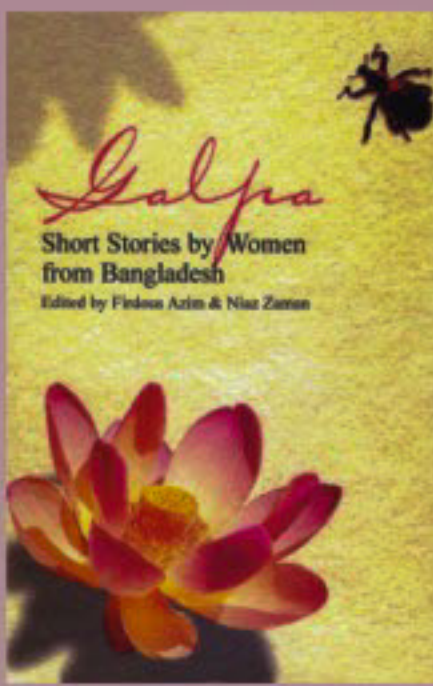


In Search of Solutions
An Autobiography of Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo
Ed. B.M. Kutty
Pakistan Study Centre, Karachi

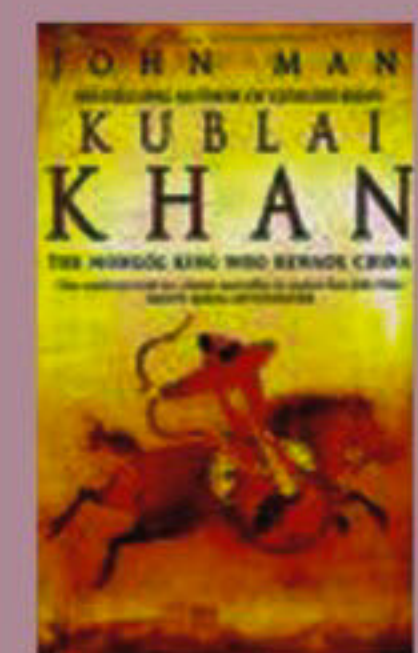


Your sense of history, especially with reference to Pakistan, will come alive through a perusal of this work. Bizenjo was a force to be reckoned with in his native Baluchistan and in pre-1971 West Pakistan as a whole. Largely in jail or busy battling the establishment, he caused Pakistan's dictators much headache.

Galpa
Short Stories by Women from Bangladesh
Ed. Firdous Azim, Niaz Zaman
Writers Ink



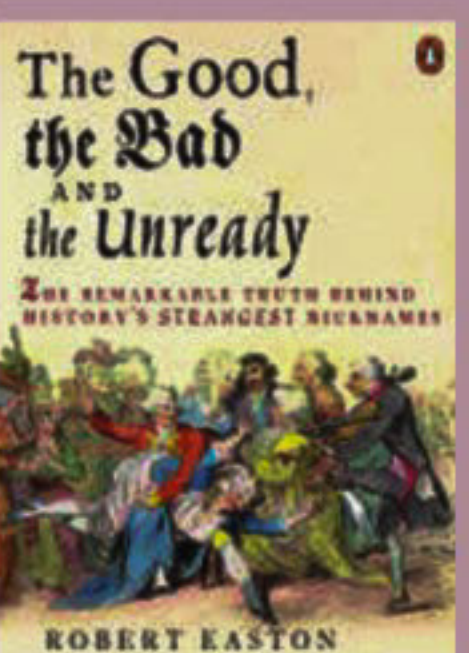
It is a collection of tales which bring out the richness of Bengali tradition. More than that, the work is a clear manifestation of the strides made since liberation by Bengali women in the literary arena. Indeed, all the writers whose stories appear here have certainly earned their places in people's hearts. Get a hold of the book.



Kublai Khan
John Man
Bantam Books

You have heard about the man. Some of you have remembered Coleridge's poem on Xanadu. But here, in our times, is a substantive biography of clearly the greatest Mongol who simply refined the tradition left behind by his grandfather Genghis Khan. The work is also an insight into a world the Mongols tried bridging into one whole.

The Good the Bad and the Unready
Robert Easton
Penguin Books



Nicknames are used aplenty, often in bizarre fashion, in Bangladesh. And here now is a book which deals with nicknames from a historical point of view. In many instances, the nicknames were misplaced or were a mockery. In some other instances, they simply made no sense. Nose Almighty? That's Oliver Cromwell for you.

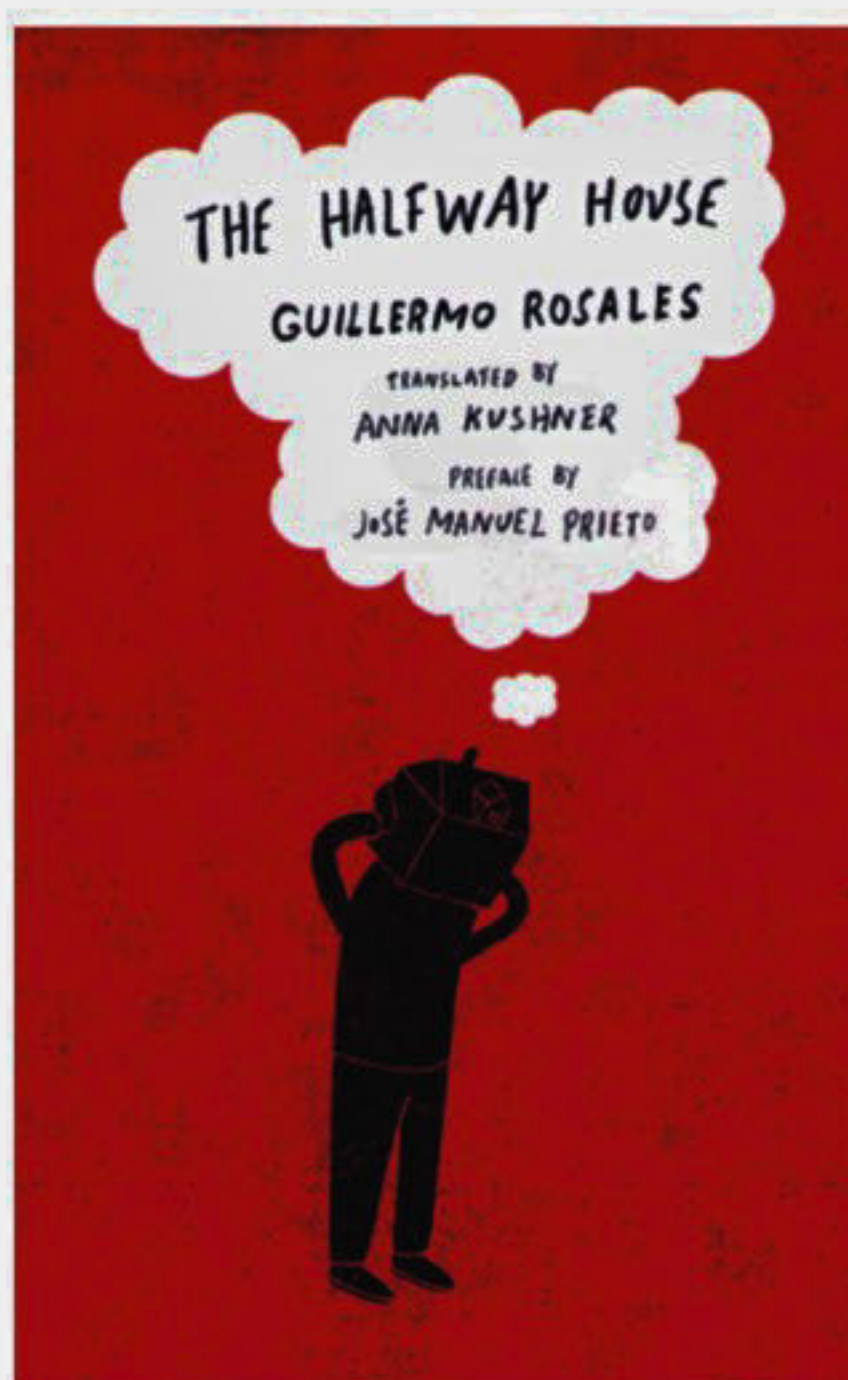
Bleak and dark, all the way

Charles R. Larson spots claustrophobia in a novel

NEW DirectionsThe facts about this novel and its writer are bleak. Guillermo Rosales fled Cuba in 1979 and shortly thereafter was placed in a halfway house, supposedly by his relatives, because of his schizophrenia. Born in Havana in 1946, he committed suicide in 1993, but not before writing a number of novels, some of which he destroyed before he took his own life.

The Halfway House (Casa delos naufragos) was published in 1987 in Mexico to "a luke-warm reception," according to José Manuel Prieto, who wrote the introduction to the English translation, but the 2002 French edition was "a resounding success." A subsequent edition in Spain the following year was met with "great acclaim," bringing further attention to the author's work, including the current English translation. Like so many novels of astonishing pain, the author did not live to witness the critical praise of his work. Like William Figuera, the protagonist of his sad story, his flame had long burned out.

The halfway house where Figuera is abandoned resonates with any number of comparable situations in world literature. The inmates/captives are at the mercy of sadistic overseers, pretty much left to their own meagre resources, and dwelling in unspeakable filth and squalor. Some of them are crazy, but others retain incredible lucidity in spite of the emotionally destructive environment. Rosales, thus, replicates Cuba and its repressive totalitarianisms suggesting that most of the patients have simply been



The Halfway House
Guillermo Rosales
Trans. Anna Kushner

shifted from one prison (Cuba) to another: the halfway house in Miami.

Most of the inmates are, in fact, Cuban, suffering from an acute sense of exile and alienation, with varying attitudes toward the country of their birth and Fidel Castro. They mirror a number of the "solutions" to the Cuban issue that many Americans were suggesting during the

Cold War. As one character states, "The United States has to wipe them out. Drop five or six atomic bombs! Wipe them out!"

Disturbingly, Figuera is not simply victim but also victimizerperhaps the most telling aspect of Rosales' novel. The weak prey on the weaker, instituting a brutal pecking order in which no one is guilty, except perhaps the aged and infirm who have little ability to fight back. Thus, as Figuera is brutalized by others, he, too, brutalizes those unable to defend themselves against his own rages. Although he makes the following observation about the people who manage the halfway house where he resides, the statement applies equally to him: "I also think that you have to be made of the same stuff as hyenas or vultures to own this halfway house."

For a brief moment, Figuera identifies the possibility of escape, as he and another inmate to whom he develops a romantic attachment plot their departure. But that plan is abruptly thwarted and the protagonist finds himself exactly where he has already been: victimizing others in order to endure his own victimization.

Interestingly, two other vehicles sustain him: reading and dreams. Twice in the narrative, the protagonist identifies himself as a serious reader: "...by the age of fifteen I had read the great Proust, Hesse, Joyce, Miller, Mann. They were for me what saints are to a devout Christian," and also influence his own narration. Moreover, throughout the story, Figuera refers to a volume of English poetry, quoting several times significant poems

(such as Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner") which offer an additional insight into his own situation, especially the way he views himself.

The half a dozen dreams to which he refers are equally revealing, especially two in which Fidel Castro appear. In the first, Figuera has a small cannon which he uses to shoot at a building where Castro has sought refuge. Although the shots continue throughout the dream, Castro keeps repeating, "You'll never get me out of here." The implications of Castro's longevity are obvious.

In the second dream, however, after Figuera believes his own escape from the halfway house is possible, he finds himself at a funeral parlor in Havana. A door opens and a dozen wailing women carry in a casket containing Fidel Castro. The women continue weeping as Castro climbs out of the casket and states, "Well, we're already dead.... Now you'll see that doesn't solve anything, either." Too bad that Rosales didn't live long enough to witness the possibility of the end of Castro's grip on Cuba, that Castro's eventual demise may, in fact, solve something. Too bad that Rosales' name has to be added to the list of Castro's victims.

Although *The Halfway House* has been proclaimed a masterpiece, I would describe it as something less. Heart wrenching, disturbing, claustrophobic and surreal, Guillermo Rosales' novella speaks for its author: an almost forgotten cry across vast distances, a faint echo of a plea for mercy and selfhood.

Charles R. Larson is Professor of Literature at American University, Washington, DC.

Tackling nature's fury

Rukhsana Sayeed finds substance in a new work

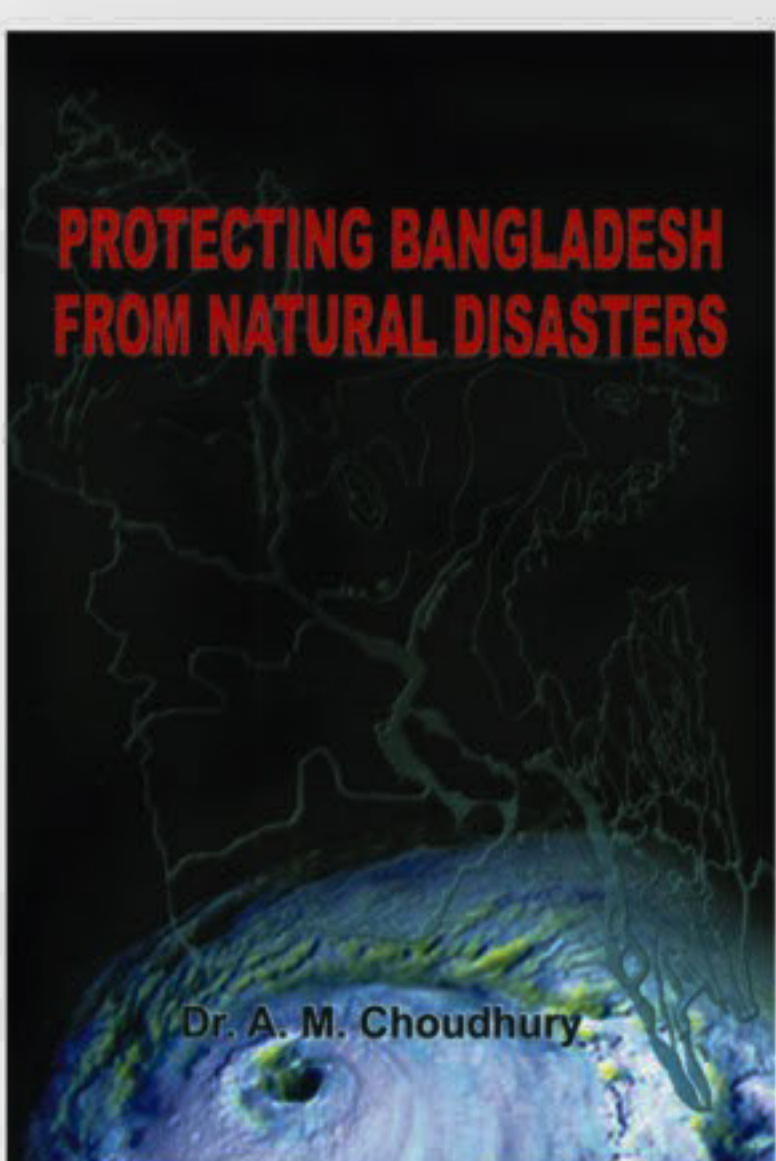
WORKS on technical subjects written by Bangladeshi authors to be understood by the common man are hard to come by. But an exception is to be found in the book written by Dr A.M. Choudhury, former chairman of Bangladesh Space Research and Remote Sensing Organisation (SPARRSO). He calls it *Protecting Bangladesh from Natural Disasters*.

The author was trained in Applied Mathematics, Space Science, Theoretical Physics and Remote Sensing. The colossal loss of human lives to the tune of some 500,000 and immense destruction of property due to a devastating tropical cyclone in November 1970 deeply moved him and he shared with empathy the sorrow and misery of the tens of thousands of victims of the disaster. In the words of the author, he gave up a lucrative assignment abroad and decided to devote his research on tropical cyclones. He mastered the subject on his own. He became an associate of the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) situated in Trieste, Italy; attended workshops on various kinds of disasters and organized similar workshops in Dhaka sponsored by ICTP (whose director was the Nobel Laureate Prof. Abdus Salam) and participated in by eminent international scientists.

Choudhury's efforts paid off. He developed his own theory about the prediction of cyclone tracks for the Bangladesh coast. He termed it as the Rose Petal Theory. His forecast on tropical cyclones is almost unparalleled. He has the unique distinction of having briefed three prime ministers of Bangladesh on tropical cyclones --- Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. He is the recipient of Bangladesh's highest civilian award, the Independence Award, for outstanding contributions to science and technology. His research on long term forecasting of weather in predicting floods or droughts through using atmospheric tele-connection theory is also very promising.

The book contains material on major natural disasters that affect Bangladesh, namely, tropical cyclones, floods, droughts, earthquakes, tsunamis and climate change. The author has provided an elaborate description of each topic, including the causes of the formation of the disasters and the protective measures to be taken to reduce the damage done by such disasters. As we have seen during the recent Copenhagen conference on climate change sponsored by United Nations, Bangladesh will be among the worst victims of natural disasters caused by climate change. Such a dire possibility has also been voiced by the prime minister and has been acknowledged by the international community. We may be given some international assistance to mitigate our sufferings but we have to face it ourselves.

This book will go a long way towards understanding climate change and natural disasters. Hence it will be of great interest to everyone concerned with natural disasters in Bangladesh, whether academician, forecaster, manager or field worker in this subject. In general, the book will draw the attention of all who seek knowledge as it has been written in language comprehensible to all. The publication of the book is very timely. The last but the final chapter contains a theory of land accretion by massive afforestation and small interventions like cross dams wherever necessary. The author has shown by simple calculation that if we can trap ten percent of the two billion tons of sediments that come through our river system, the rise in the sea level that will occur due to climate change can be averted and the measures suggested will do just that. In that case the international community need not have to worry about the thirty million environmental refugees that will be generated in Bangladesh because of the sea level rise.



Protecting Bangladesh from Natural Disasters
Dr A.M. Choudhury
Academic Press and Publishers Library

Rukhsana Sayeed takes interest in climate-related studies.

A river, a woman

Mozaffar Hossain praises a story of life

AGOONMUKHA is a terrible and turbulent river in the South Bengal coastal area. There are other rivers also of the same nature. But Agoonmukha has seen a rise in its intensity by the added flow of six other rivers like the Tentulia, the Lohadia, the Buda Gouranga, the Bannabad, the Darchida and the Degri rivers. Owing to the natural play of loss and gain of the river flows some strips of sandy land were raised out of the bed of the rivers or the sea above the water level where fortune-seekers made their shelter from time to time. In course of time the Burmese and Arakanese came to establish links with Bengalis.

The violent and untameable swelling of the sea waves and the deep roaring sounds with billows of the Agoonmukha have given birth to many myths and much hearsay. The coastal inhabitants have had no other way but to fight courageously with nature for their routine daily life. Capture of boats and loss of lives have been their common experience. Their struggling lives were at par with the nature of the restless and terrible rivers.

The Katakali was one of the islands of the coastal zone where Nurjahan was born to fight against the innumerable inimical forces of nature, society and fate. Her



Agoonmukhar Meye
Nurjahan Bose
Sahitya Prokash

misfortunes came rallying in, jousting with one another. Poverty, destitution, death of nearest kith and kin, including her father, her growing youth in a male-dominated society all tried to make her a victim of dejection and despondency. But she did not surrender as she was a child of

the Agoonmukha.

Every cloud has a silver lining. Nurjahan's urge, zeal and inborn thirst for knowledge and study brought her to Barisal town where she had to take shelter with her friends and relatives. Her feelings for the poor and the distressed drew the attention of the then young student leader Emadullah, who after sometime, asked for her hand. But the happy marriage lasted only for a short period of time. The sudden unfortunate death of that promising young leader of the 1950s of the twentieth century made Nurjahan a widow with one child, Jasim. Yet she did not lose her courage to stand on her own feet. In the course of her journey to a path of life full of struggle, she found Swadesh Bose, a communist-to-the-core worker, as her friend, philosopher and guide. Swadesh married her, taking upon himself the entire responsibility of Jasim, the living reminder of Emad. And thus Nurjahan became Nurjahan Bose. The couple joined hands to walk a long way in various progressive movements far and near. They had to go to Karachi and America for both studies and service. Nurjahan's humanitarian service in Catholic Charity was a resplendent study in the acquisition of varied experience.

During the course of the liberation movement, Nurjahan was in Bangladesh. Bangabandhu had deep affection for her. She had to go abroad again. For the second time she became a widow after the death of Swadesh. Nurjahan had to leave her village at the age of ten in 1949. Now she is again in her village on the banks of the Agoonmukha with her lifelong varied experience. She is a spent force now.

Nurjahan's autobiography *Agoonmukhar Meye* speaks not just of her own experience. She brings forth a panoramic picture of different countries, of home and abroad; an honest exposition of great personalities, social picture of many countries and a keen observation of mind, faith and culture. Her story speaks of her instinctive and indomitable spirit of serving humanity irrespective of caste, creed, colour and faith. This spirit of serving the poor and distressed inspired her to form many humanitarian organizations that gave her a myriad of experience. The book itself is a world in miniature in 307 pages. The reader can enjoy the pleasures of the journey by poring through the work.

Sahitya Prokash deserves cheers for such a great job.

Mozaffar Hossain is Chairman, Bangladesh Literary Resource Centre (BLRC).