

## Back to beautiful basics

Farida Shaikh rediscovers heritage in the hills

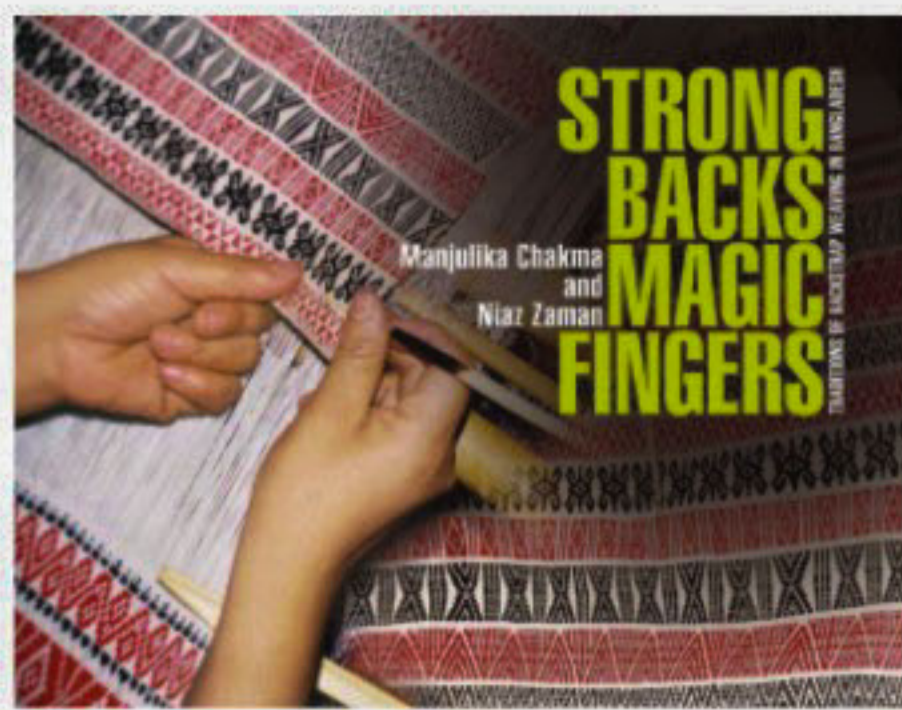
THE book is dedicated to those whose work forms the subject of the book. With due acknowledgement to the individuals connected with this study and UNDP, the book opens with BAIN by Chiranjib Chakma and translated by Niaz Zaman.

... Do not worry or despair / But learn to weave an alam/And your life will be full / If you know how to weave the pinon and the hadi / Everyone will praise you, say the girl is good / But if you do not know how to weave, daughter / Your mother-in-law will never let you hear the end of it / You will feel bad when people jeer at you / And you will always be unhappy / I hope that you will learn to weave / And pray that you will be happy all your life.

In these lines of the poem lies the social significance of Bain, the back strap weaving loom of the indigenous women weavers of Chittagong Hill Tracts. The rather significant title of the book carries the message that strong backed women bend, but do not break; they carry forward the tradition of weaving; the magic fingers that weave cotton colors, yarns into harmony and symmetry, beyond compare!

Weaving is a domestic affair, which in the past was done for oneself or one's family members, and for dowries in the royal households. Nowadays weaving is done to be marketed. The book is about the art of weaving among the Buddhist Chakma, Khyang, Khumi, Chak, Tanchangya, Marma, Mro, Hindu Tripura, Christian Pangkhao, Bawm and Lushai in Bandarban, Khagrachhari and Rangamati.

The Manipuris, who do not call themselves so, are Hindu Meitei, Vishnupriya and Muslim Pangan. The women weavers use back strap



**Strong Backs Magic Fingers**  
Tradition of Back Strap Weaving in Bangladesh  
Manjulika Chakma & Niaz Zaman  
Nymphae  
Co-publisher: Independent University, Bangladesh

weaving. They live in the district of Sylhet, in Maulvibazar, Habiganj and Sunamganj. In Dhaka, Manipurpara Tejoan still bears the name, where they were settled in the past.

Back strap weaving is tight, strenuous and time consuming as compared to weaving on throw shuttle and the fly shuttle loom. On page 49 is a photo by Niaz Zaman, a modern version of the loom with a wooden substitute for the leather back strap. Katin Chibar Dan, an occasion when Chakma weavers work all night, is included. Many colourful pictures show a Chakma woman wearing the pinon, a sarong round her waist, a hadi or breast cloth

tied round her chest, shiloom, a stitched upper garment worn when the woman goes to the forest for jhoom cultivation. The khabang is a long piece of cloth worn round the head to counter the gaze of onlookers. Chakmas are the predominant community, nearly 2.52 lakh in number, according to the figures for 1991. They live in Bandarban and Rangamati.

The book is an excellent product of Karunangshu Barua's Nymphae Publication. There are 256 full page and post card size photos to tell the Bain story. Amiya Kanti Chakma has shared some of the rare photos out of his 'store of photograph.' The picture on page 152 photo is on a Lushai weaver weaving a blanket at Battlepara Bandarban. Page 144 has Khumi weavers at Bandarban. On page 128 the photo shows the Chakma woman in naif, sarong, and baju blouse at Baishari, Bandarban. On page 125 is a Bawm woman in Pangkhao costume at Roangchhari, Bandarban. It is an all Bawm women's market in the photo on page 122, and the preparation for weaving is captured in the picture of a Mro woman winding yarn into a ball with the help of two gourds to hold the skein of yarn in Thanchi, Bandarban.

Barua is first an artist, and then a publisher. He dreams of a theme, and then sets about actualizing that theme through his editorial team, art director, design and graphic expert. All his works go through a long period of gestation. He started his publication work with The Festivals of Bangladesh in 2005. It is a picture gallery on 21 annual festivals of our country. His latest publication April 2010 is Bangladesh Six Decades 1947-2007. It is a historical record in rare pictures and scholarly texts on the past 60 years from the Bangladesh perspective.

This book is about indigenous women weavers. For nearly over four decades, Manjulika Chakma has been working, marketing and collecting items made on Bain, the back strap loom. Her endeavor in upholding our heritage has been rightly rewarded. She is a recipient of honours from the National Craft Council and UNDP, and has received The Daily Star-DHL business award. Her recommendation is that master weavers be given government recognition as National Craftpersons.

The Art of Kantha Embroidery is a piece of representative writing on these genera by Niaz Zaman. In continuation, this book on indigenous weaving is an ethnographic study. The findings are graphic, through a range of pictorial representations. The photographs by Niaz Zaman illuminate the art and culture of the Hill Tracts.

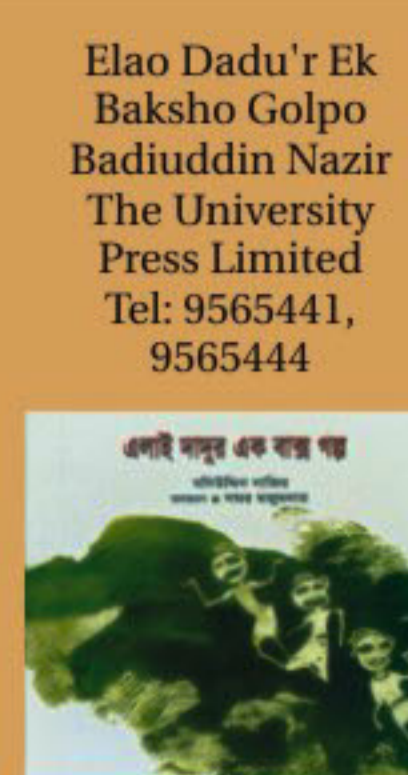
The researchers in Manjulika Chakma and Niaz Zaman have exposed the threatened environment of indigenous livelihood patterns in the hilly regions of the country. Through this book, the writers hope to raise awareness about the dire need for a revival of traditional tapestry. This is indeed critical, given the political process of marginalization of the tribal population in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. "The indigenous people who had never had any formal documentation about their rights to the land, found that they were strangers in their own home" (page 12). This reader friendly book is a warning against the near fading away side of a romantic Bangladesh, a compendium for the hitch hikers, tourists and travellers. So, get a copy!

Farida Shaikh is a critic.

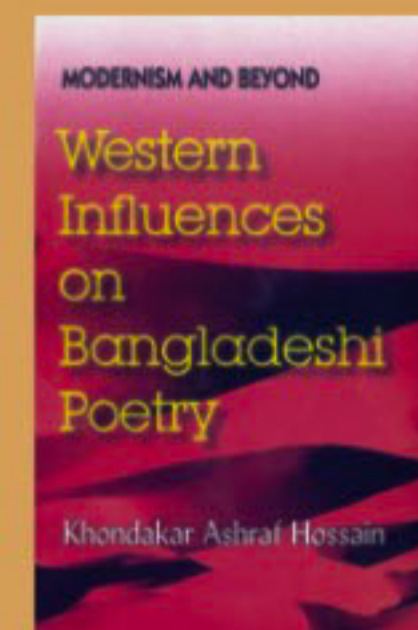
## Book Choice



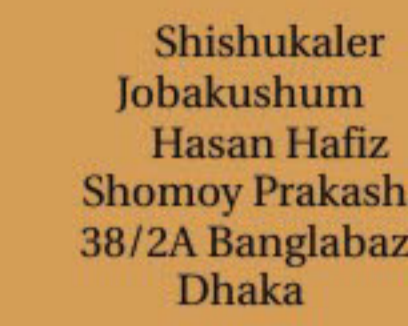
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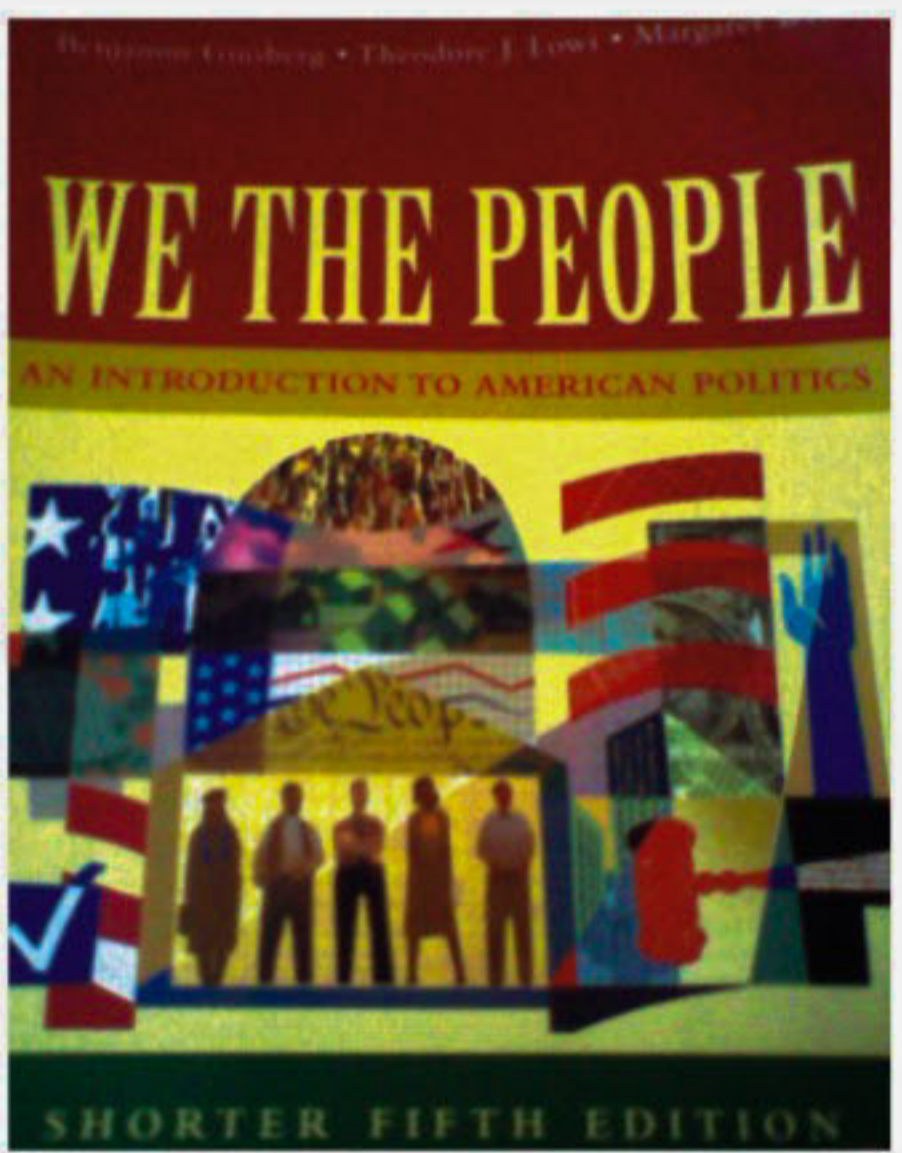
## How nations scale the heights

Muhammad Abdul Hai enjoys a celebration of America

THE United States of America is the fourth largest country in the world, both in area and population. The country covers the vast space between the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific. It also includes Alaska on the edge of the Arctic, and tropical Hawaii far out in the Pacific. The huge land that it contains is varied, and the long stretch of fertile soil that the country has been blessed with has made it possible to feed millions of people both inside the country and beyond.

This huge and beautiful country is unbelievably rich in resources. It has plentiful water supplies, it has great treasure stores of minerals, including coal, copper, iron, natural gas and oil. Above everything, America has the most valued hardworking and innovative population, which is why the world has seen many discoveries and inventions coming from this great country. In the field of science and technology, in the field of medical science and space research, America continues to play a pioneering role. Innovations and improvements on existing gadgets, tools and machineries are being brought to the world almost on a daily basis. The entire civilization owes much to it for being able to use technology in making life comfortable. The United States is still changing and expanding. Its great cities are growing both upward and outward. The towering skylines of the cities are changing frequently as Americans tear down and build.

The busy factories of this country produce the greatest abundance of goods, which in turn reach almost every door of the world community. Agricultural farms are the most produc-



**We The People**  
An Introduction to American Politics.  
Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir  
W.W Norton & Company

tive in the world. All these have contributed to the making of the nation into a super economy and also a super power. Today a minor ripple in the American economy jolts the earth, and minimum US economic progress brightens the world economy. Its impact is such that no nation can avoid being affected. No matter

what a nation's preference is, American policy, especially economic and political, has to be reviewed thoroughly.

Until about three hundred years ago, what is now the United States was largely a wilderness. Europeans saw in this almost empty land a chance of building new and better lives. They brought with them different skills and ideas. They also brought the ideals of freedom and equality. They came in the thousands, leaving their European homes, and finally established a government aimed at protecting the liberty of every man. They wrote their unique constitution in amazing rhetoric, guaranteeing freedom of speech, of religion, of political belief and of press. The preamble to the constitution pronounces the basic guidelines for every individual American as to what their collective political activities should aim at. We The People, which is a collaborative production of Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi and Margaret Weir, presents an in-depth discussion of the political aspirations and activities of the American people. Unlike what we see in our country, political consciousness and involvement in politics for a majority of Americans is a moral obligation. This explains why national elections in the US still remain largely free and fair, accepted readily by all parties. The work under review covers almost all that is related to the political behaviour of the American people.

Democracy, in order to be meaningful, requires that all educated people will be politically conscious, and also exercise their voting rights to make known what they really want.

They can have their say in government policies through their support for a particular political party. This very support makes many an individual politically active while many others remain passive supporters. The book, while introducing American politics, tries to lay bare the nature, thoughts and feelings of people who are popularly known as democratic citizens.

Many people are eager to know about the American people's understanding and interpretation of the reasons propagated by George W. Bush for invading Iraq, and this book gives an honest but interesting account of their views which readers will surely find insightful. The book also provides enough space for a detailed discussion of such issues as the Iraq war, gay marriage, liberty, equality and so on. The book will, of course, be difficult reading for casual readers, for one needs uninterrupted attention to comprehend the details and the profound logic that is attached to them.

The book cannot be taken lightly. It does not aim at making every reader a political scientist or a political activist. But it does make a systematic effort to restore politics as a subject of a vigorous and enjoyable discourse. However one does not necessarily have to be a philosopher to understand the basic requisites of democracy. It is, therefore, expected that this book will contribute to a restoration of the art of political awareness among people across the world.

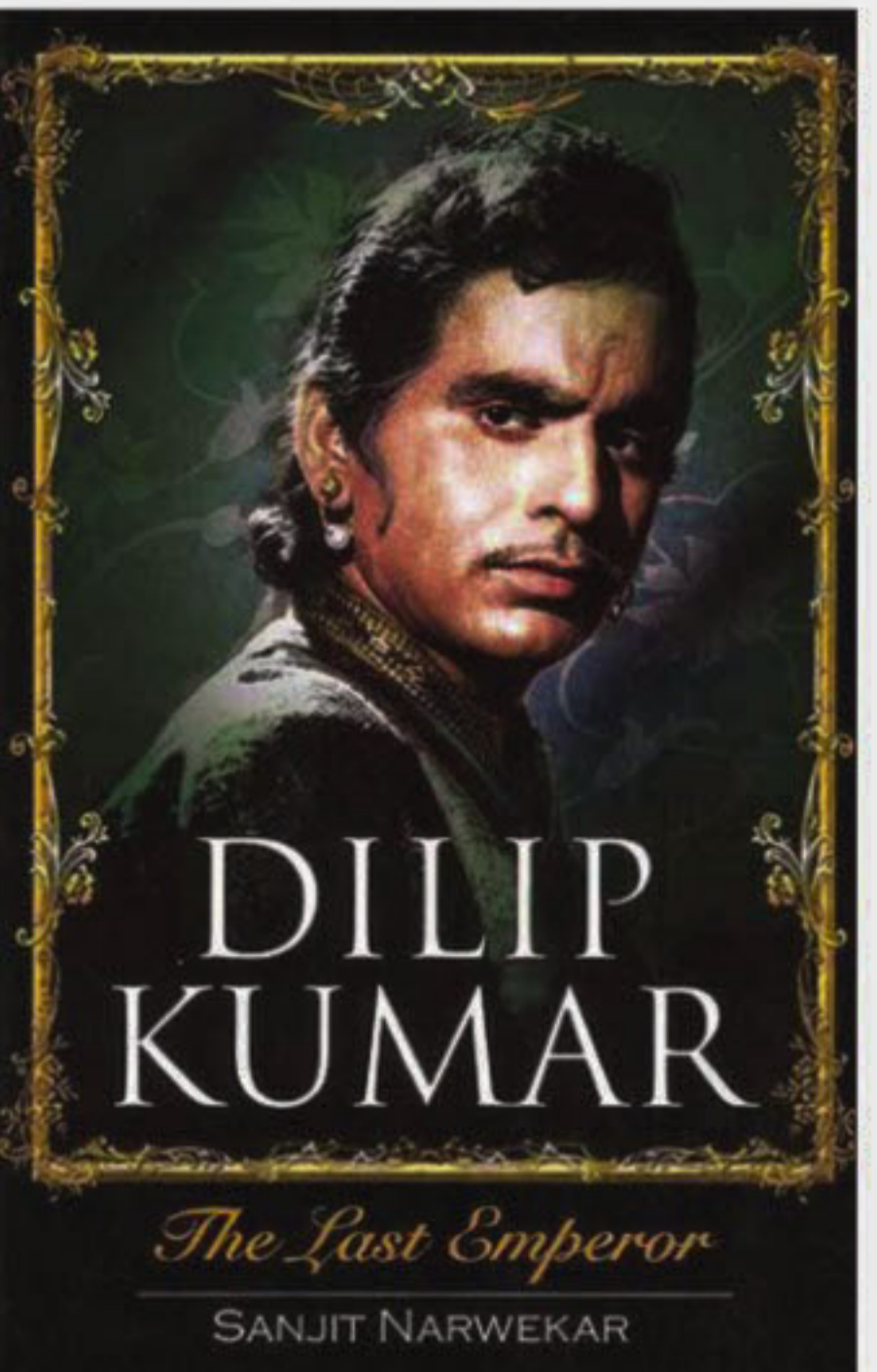
Muhammad Abdul Hai is Principal, ABC International School, Narayanganj.

## The making of a thespian

Syed Badrul Ahsan reads a biography and travels down memory lane

BACK in the mid-1990s, here in Dhaka, a group of Indian diplomatic wives waited on the lawn of the Indian high commissioner's residence to receive Dilip Kumar. They had set up food stalls on the occasion of their country's Republic Day, and incidentally the thespian happened to be in town. The women were thrilled that the actor would be before them and were quite taken up by the thought of the good conversation they would have with a man who had already morphed into a legend. Moments later, when Dilip Kumar appeared before them, the women lost, or so it appeared, their power of speech. Having done the usual namaste bit, they stared at him. It was the actor who broke the silence, in chaste Urdu, 'Aap log kya mujhe dekhte-hi rahenge ya kuch khaane ko bhi denge (will you go on looking at me or will you give me something to eat)? A burst of laughter greeted his words. Conversation, and not just from the women (wo)maning the food stalls, flowed.

It was vintage Dilip Kumar, soft-spoken, polite and therefore eminently respectable. It is that image which comes alive in this admiring biography of the actor. Sanjit Narwekar makes it obvious that Dilip is for him, as he has been for millions of people in the Indian subcontinent since the 1940s, a superman in the film industry. The sheer romance of his celluloid appeal has been the stuff of conversation for decades. The tragic roles he has played in a career that began in tortuous circumstances (because critics were only too ready to write his obituary every time any of his early movies were released) are even today cited as instances of purposeful acting. He has been put on the same pedestal by admirers as such western film men as Gregory Peck, Kirk Douglas, Richard Burton, Peter O'Toole and so many others. Indeed, had it been his fortune to be born in Britain or America, he would have shared the spaces of the halls of fame those others have always inhabited. Dilip Kumar, in effect, remains a point of reference where any dialogue on Indian cinema is con-



**Dilip Kumar**  
The Last Emperor  
Sanjit Narwekar  
Rupa & Co.

cerned. There are the unforgettable movies, such as *Mughal-e-Azam*, which are pointed to as proof of his skills. His reputation as a tragedian on screen has endured through the ages.

And, to be sure, there are the reasons why tragedy has been Dilip's forte. In movies like *Madhumati*, *Aadmi*, *Daag*, *Devdas* and a host of others, he has been the very epitome of the suffering young man unable to resist the tide of gathering misfortune around him. And yet the stereotyped is not what he has been content with. In *Ram Aur Shyam*, where he plays a double role, that of twins, his ability to induce

laughter through a comic, carefree attitude to life has remained unequalled. And do not forget that his acting in politically-oriented films like *Leader* have down the years upheld the high ideals of politics, particularly in the struggle of the common man against historical injustice. In all the movies that Dilip Kumar has been in, there has been a clear preponderance of the lover in his attitude to the society around him. He has loved his women on screen with the kind of quiet passion that is today a story of the past. In these times, the blatant demonstration of passion, with little of the subtle about it, is a truth Dilip Kumar and his generation would not look upon with equanimity. You only have to recall that intensely touching scene in *Mughal-e-Azam* where he caresses Madhubala's cheek with a feather. It is then, to the observant eye, the plainly orgasmic that comes over Madhubala's face.

Narwekar recapitulates all these details, which a declining generation of ageing men and women have not quite forgotten, in this work. He does something more, which is to throw light on aspects of Dilip Kumar's personal life. That old tale of how he and Madhubala almost ended up getting married but did not, because the actress' father came in the way, is repeated here, together with the legal difficulties involving Madhubala's role in *Naya Daur*. It was Vyjanthimala who ended up playing the role. Of bigger importance is that the *Naya Daur* tale went all the way to court where, in a moment of emotional spontaneity, Dilip Kumar declared in the packed room on his feelings for Madhubala. 'I love this woman and shall love her till my dying day.' But the love, as subsequent events showed, did not last. Relations between the two turned towards the bitter, to a point where Madhubala's verbal message through a common friend to Dilip about her unending love for the thespian drew out a dismissive 'What love?' from Dilip. The actor would move on, at a point developing feelings for Vyjanthimala before marrying Saira Banu. He was forty four.

She was twenty two. Madhubala married Kishore Kumar, but there was always the sense that she had not got over her feelings for Dilip. She would die in 1969. The hole in her heart, a condition from her childhood, would finally do her in.

For all his devotion to Saira Banu, there was at least one moment when Dilip Kumar strayed. In 1982, unbeknownst to her, indeed to anyone else, he secretly married Asma Begum. As news reports began revealing the details of the marriage, Dilip went into denial mode. As Saira Banu was to report, 'In fact, he took the Koran and swore (that he had not married Asma).' Nothing worked, though, and the actor quickly moved to dissolve the nuptial links with Asma Begum, of course on payment of the *meher* of Rs. 3,00,000. He pleaded with Saira for a second chance. 'Mujhse galti ho gayi. Kisse galti nahi hoti?' Saira Banu forgave him.

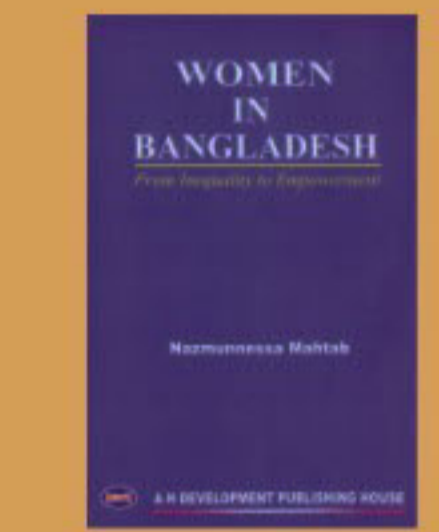
Narwekar's work is fundamentally a tribute to the versatility in Dilip Kumar. He straddled an era that produced the likes of Raj Kapoor and Dev Anand and yet in his performances on screen he convinced people he was a far better, far more involved actor than his contemporaries. His sense of originality has been remarkable. For the song *Madhuban Mein Radhika Naache Re*, he would insist on learning to play the sitar for weeks because he did not want someone else's hands to be passed off as his during the shooting of the scene. In later years, younger actors would, consciously or otherwise, try to emulate him. Most considered it an honour to work with him. Raj Babbar had the chance. And the same was true of Amitabh Bachchan.

The actor Dilip Kumar, born as Muhammad Yusuf Khan on 11 December 1922 in Peshawar, remains a formidable presence in the long historical canvas of Indian cinema. The old movies, with the affluence of the lyrics lispied by Dilip Kumar, promise, if nothing else does, to remind people that he will always matter.

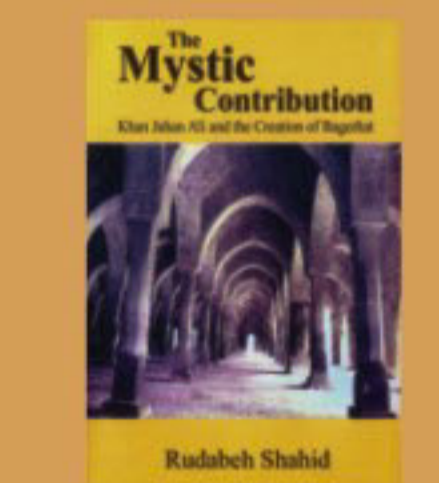
Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Star Books Review.



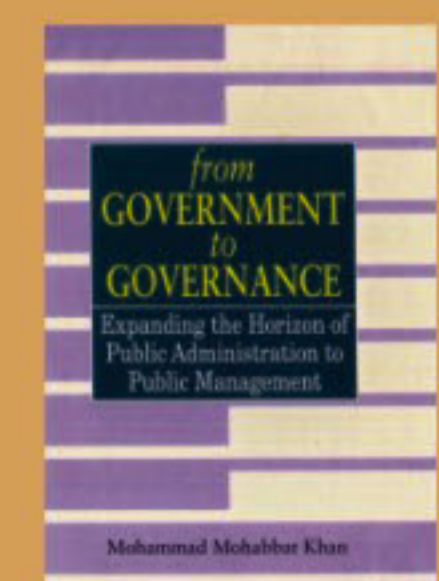
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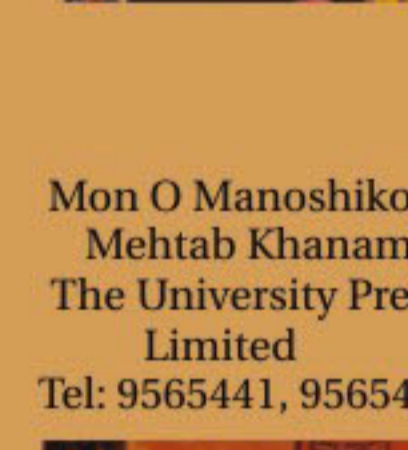
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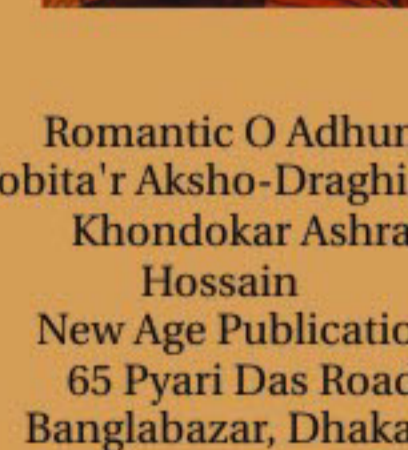
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## BOOK NEWS

The University Press Limited launches its Annual Book Exhibition 2010 at the seminar room of the Central Public Library, Shahbagh, Dhaka, on 17 May. The exhibition, which will remain open from 10 a.m. till 7 p.m., will go on till 31 May.

Besides books published by UPL, the exhibition will feature works published abroad.

To observe its twentieth anniversary, Shomoy Prakashon launched a book festival on 13 May at its premises at Plaza A.R. (fourth storey), Road 14 (new) Dhanmondi, Dhaka. The festival, open between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. every day (except Tuesday), will conclude on 22 May.