

The horrors of people trafficking

Charles R. Larson recounts a tale of endurance

In an author's note at the beginning of *In the Sea There are Crocodiles*, Fabio Geda states that at an event when he was talking about his first novel, he met Enaiatollah Akbari. The younger man said that he had had an experience similar to the one Geda had described: fleeing his homeland and seeking refuge in Italy. At the time, Enaiat was fifteen. Several years earlier, he had been secreted out of Afghanistan by his mother after the Taliban took over their village. His mother left him in Pakistan, and from there he fled through Iran, Turkey, and Greece, until he finally reached Italy.

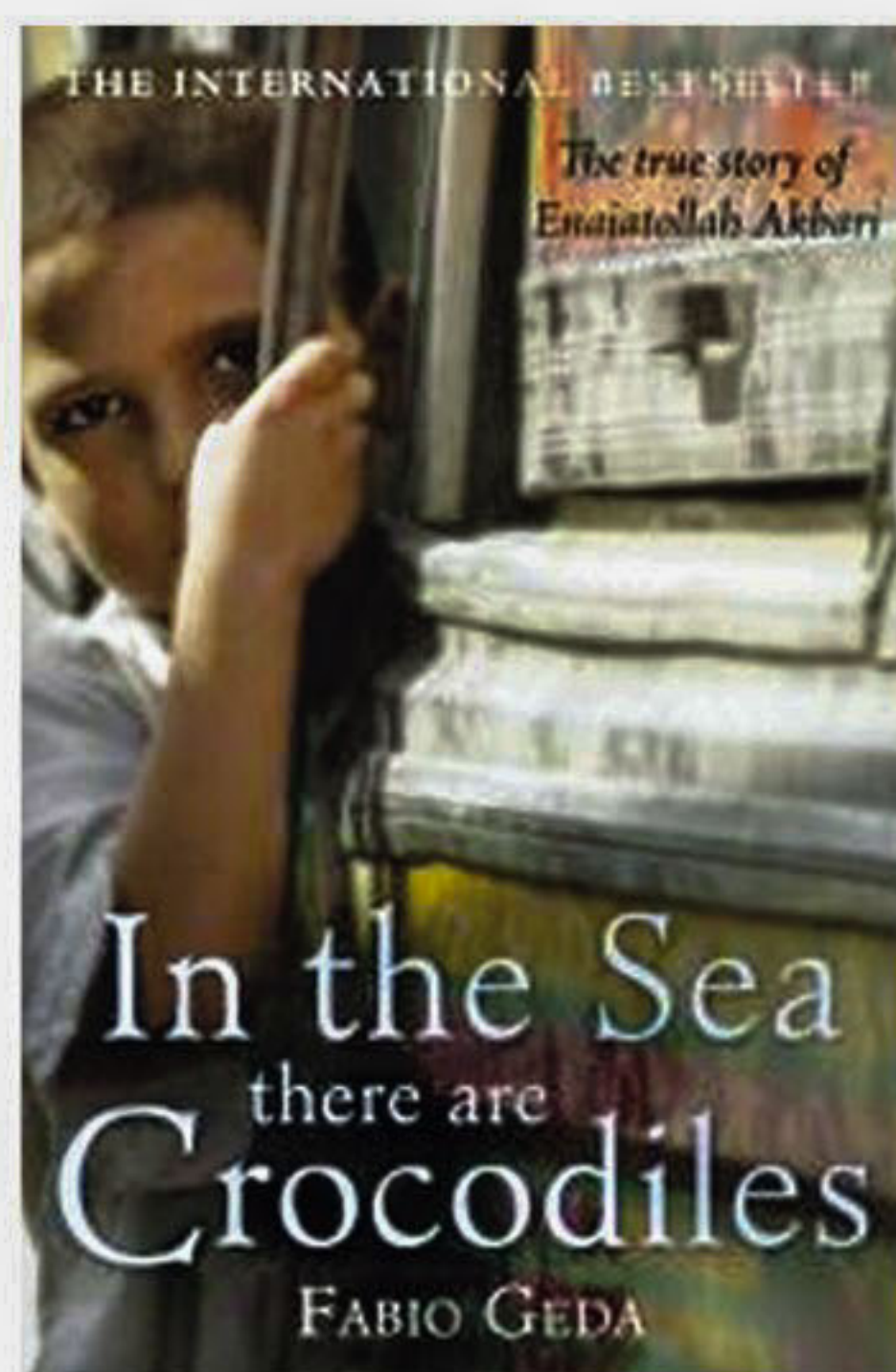
Geda, an Italian novelist, works with distressed children, often immigrants, employing storytelling to get to the root of deep-seated emotional problems. On the cover of *In the Sea There are Crocodiles*, below the title, is the following line: "Based on the true story of Enaiatollah Akbari," which would seem to imply a memoir of the young man, but the title page refers to the book as a novel. Geda explains the categorization by calling it a "re-creation" of Enaiat's experience; hence, a novel that has allowed the Afghani "to take possession of his own story." If this explanation is fairly convoluted, it is within the context of several recent memoirs that have been questioned for their authenticity and, in fact, called hoaxes. Whatever the fusion of Geda and Akbari's voices, the result is a horrific account of an

ordeal too common in our contemporary world: people traffickers aiding young men (and sometimes women) in their quest for asylum in the West.

The core of the story is Enaiat's indomitable will to succeed, once he understands that it is his own mother who made the first move to save her son's life. In an early flashback, the boy describes the closing down of his school by the Taliban, the cold blooded murder of the school's teacher, shot in front of the students. As terrifying as that incident is, it is nothing to what Enaiat will undergo in situation after situation during his long flight to Italy.

Pakistan is easy, after the initial experience of staying in a windowless warehouse with other illegals. He works at several brief jobs in Quetta, including selling cheap goods on the streets. Many of us have observed young children selling chewing gum, shoe laces, socks or other objects on the streets of Third World countries. Probably, we never considered that they may have been illegals even at that age moving from one country to the next.

The details that take him into Iran are much more revealing. The trafficker will smuggle Enaiat into the country for no up front money; but once in Iran, he has to give his first three months' income at a construction site to the trafficker. Barely has he paid off the debt when the police apprehend him and send him back to



In the Sea there are Crocodiles
Fabio Geda
Trans. Howard Curtis
Doubleday

Afghanistan, but Enaiat (and we are led to believe hundreds of other young men) simply begins the process all over again. Eventually he ends up stonecutting in Qom, after being repatriated twice, each time paying off the traffickers.

Getting into Turkey crossing the mountains between Iran and Turkey is a much more dangerous and hair-raising experience. But the traffickers are there at every stage of his journey, willing to take illegals to their next destination. Enaiat becomes part of a group of seventy-two people from several Asian countries who are told by the traffickers that the crossing over the mountains will take three days. They're provided with food for a few days and told they need a sturdy pair of shoes, which Enaiat purchases with some of the money he's earned from stone cutting after working three years in Iran. But the trek takes twenty-six days to the top of the mountain pass. Twelve people do not survive. Rounding a corner high up in the mountains, they encounter a "group of people sitting on the ground. They'd be sitting there forever. They were frozen." Enaiat takes the shoes from one of them, since his own have worn out.

It's not any easier getting from Eastern Turkey to Istanbul. First, there's the wait for the next method of conveyance: three days in the false bottom of a transport lorry, where he's

packed like a sardine with dozens of others, trying to control his kidneys because there's almost no possibility of movement for three days. Then, finally, in Istanbul, in "an underground garage, filled with hundreds and hundreds of people. A kind of marshaling yard for immigrants, or something like that, a cave in the belly of Istanbul." For several weeks in Istanbul, his urine is red with blood.

There's still more the most harrowing part of the journey but I've related enough, I hope, to whet your interest in this unforgettable narrative. From Istanbul, Enaiat has to get to Greece and that has its own complications because the trail is no longer over land. Then from Greece to Italy, working in all of these countries in the underground economy to pay off the traffickers and earn a little more for incidentals for the next phase of the impossible journey.

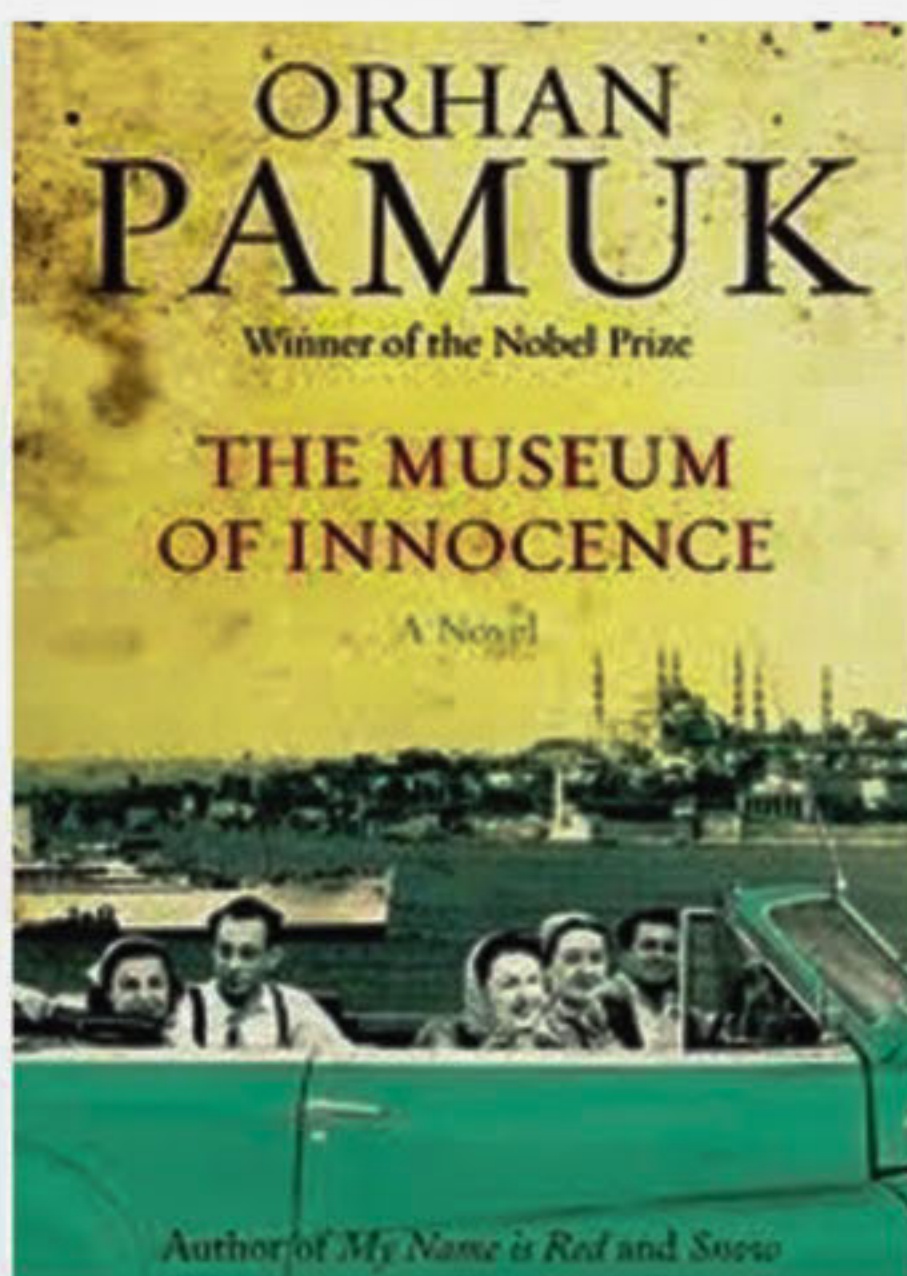
In the Sea There are Crocodiles is an eye-opening account of human endurance, of overcoming the most difficult obstacles for freedom and a better life. The loss of human lives at every stage is horrendous. And, yes, without the help of numerous sympathetic strangers, Enaiat's ordeal would have been even worse much worse.

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Love's pain is indivisible

Abdullah Shibli speaks of one man and two women

Nobel Prize winning novelist Orhan Pamuk's book *The Museum of Innocence* provides a vivid picture of the pain of love, or more accurately, the pain of losing a lover, and offers an interesting account of the narrator's efforts to get her back. In the meticulous reconstruction of a lover's anguish and despondency, Pamuk's book also provides rich details of the pleasures of Istanbul --- his home city --- its night life and restaurants, tourist attractions, the treasures hidden under the blue waters of the Sea of Bosphorus, and the cultural and social settings of this historic city. But the most captivating narrative of his latest novel is the amazingly nuanced moment by moment chronicle of a love affair: the magic of falling in love, the ecstasy of being in love, the insecurity of love and the fear of losing it, the agony and total destruction brought about by separation and the incredible journey of coping and recovery.



The Museum of Innocence
Orhan Pamuk
Trans. Maureen Freely
Alfred A. Knopf

Pamuk does not mince words when he describes the love scenes. The book opens with the author defining his mood, as the two lovers lie in bed: "It was the happiest moment of my life, though I didn't know it. Had I known, had I cherished this gift, would everything have turned out differently? Yes, if I had recognized this instant of perfect happiness, I would have held it fast and never let it slip away. It took a few seconds, perhaps, for that luminous state to unfold me, suffusing me with the deepest peace, but it seemed to last hours, even years. In that moment, on the afternoon of Monday, May 26, 1975, at about a quarter to three, just as we felt ourselves to be beyond sin and guilt so too did the world seem to have been released from gravity and time."

He then goes on to describe in his inimitable

style the encounter with his lover Fusun in the privacy of his apartment. Without giving away the story, let me hint that the love affair between the narrator, Kemal, the scion of a rich Turkish industrialist family, and a younger woman of humbler origin, begins like any other affair of the heart but soon turns torrid as they meet secretly in his apartment near her workplace in the heart of bustling Istanbul. Although he is a few years older and is soon to be engaged to another woman from a well-established family, he finds himself lost in the arms of this young woman. During his

engagement party, where he invites his lover, he promises, "No one will ever come between us ever again." Unfortunately, little did Kemal know that Fusun would break up with him and fail to show up for their pre-planned tryst the following day. What follows next is one of the best-documented literary accounts of forlorn love. Pamuk's command of the language, and his no-holds-barred description of the pain, suffering and desperation of a repentant lover, will take the reader from one realm to another, and none of the fervour is lost even in the translation from Turkish, done admirably by Maureen Freely.

What grabs the attention of the reader is the break-up, and the very meticulous chronicling of Kemal's state of mind, his wanderings from one location to another as he searches for his lost love, and his struggles to overcome helplessness and despondency. One has to wonder if Pamuk is a psychotherapist or has himself ever suffered the loss of a beloved at some point in his life to be so fluent and knowledgeable of the painful world of lost love. To quote, he writes, "Life had receded from me, losing all the flavor and color I'd found in it... I felt that whatever I was doing during those days without Fusun, it was vulgar, ordinary, and meaningless. Time had not faded my memories (as I prayed to God it might), nor had it healed my wounds as it is said always to do. I began each day with the hope that the next day would be better, my recollections a little less pointed, but I would awake to the same pain."

But the book is not only about Kemal's obsession with Fusun, his interactions with her, and his valiant fight to win her back. For an armchair traveler, the novel includes

breath-taking views of the various quarters and lifestyles of Istanbul, the contrast between the new and the old generations, and the class divisions inherent in any ancient civilization. Pamuk also goes to extraordinary lengths to give the reader a bird's eye view of the new and the old in Turkey. For example, one of the longest chapters is entitled "The Engagement Party" and it offers glimpses of Turkish upper-middle class society, the comings and goings at the party, the tension between Kemal and his fiancé when his lover Fusun makes an appearance, and his state of mind as he is torn between the two women in his life. Each episode is rich with contextual details of different strata of Turkish society, family feud, and all other sociological nuggets that make this book so appealing to readers of different tastes. However, for those who enjoy reading love stories in the genre of Tagore's Shesher Kabita and Sharat Chandra's Pandit Mashai will find great joy in reading about Kemal's painful journey through the land of romance and love. I end this review with another memorable section on the agony and ecstasy of falling in love.

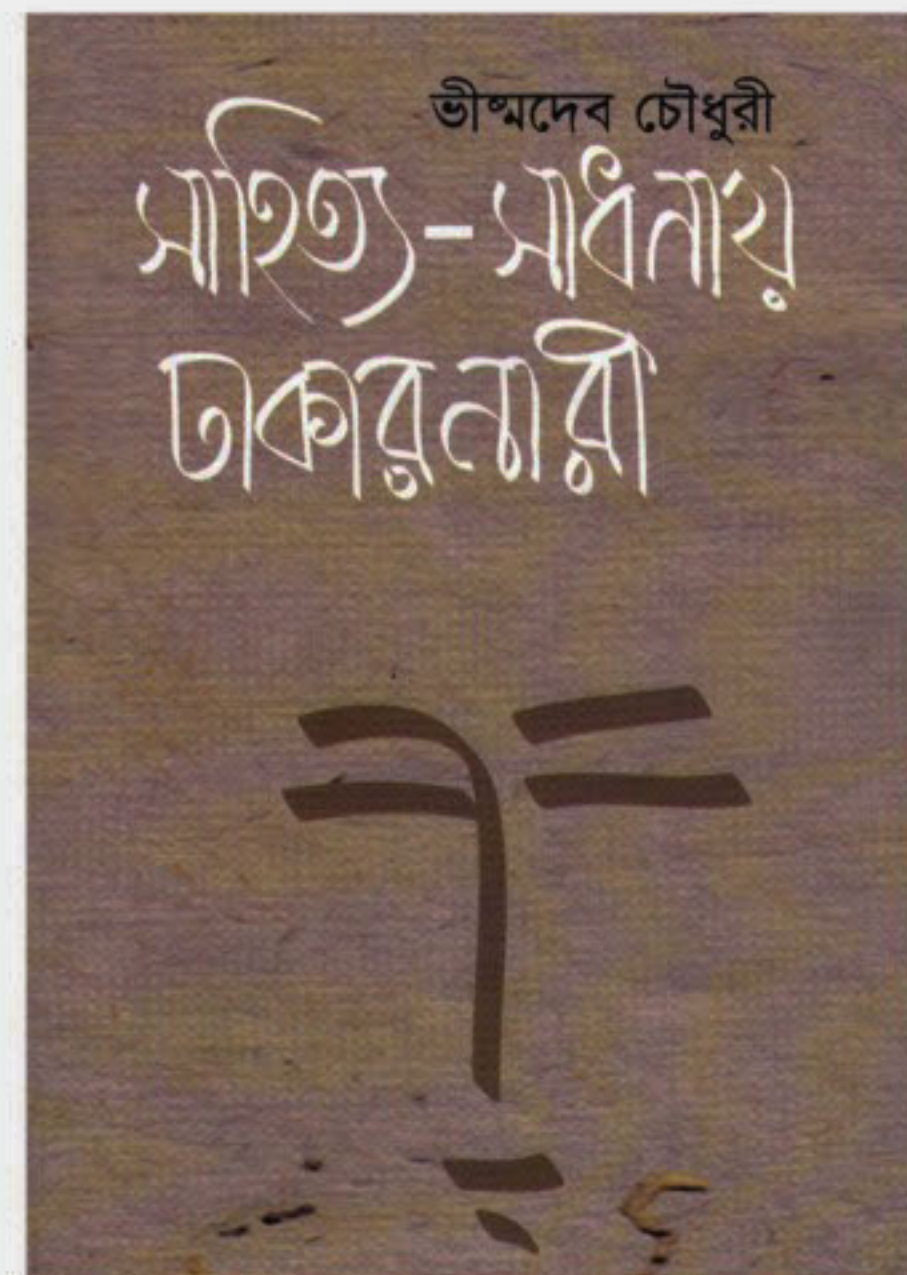
"... the pain of love is indivisible. The pains of true love reside at the heart of our existence; they catch hold of our most vulnerable point, rooting themselves deeper than the root of any other pain, and branching to every part of our bodies and our lives... People whose lives have, like mine, been turned upside down by love can become convinced that all other problems will be resolved once the pain of love is gone."

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Women, writing and Dhaka

Subrata Kumar Das is thrilled by literary discoveries

The general conception that only women of the then Kolkata contributed to a flourishing of Bangla literature will need to be revised through a reading of the research-based *Shahitya-Shadhonai Dhakar Nari* by Prof Bishmadeb Choudhury. A slim work yet pregnant with a load of information, it is a must read for the people involved with Bangla literature as well as the historic perspective of Dhaka, a four-century old city and today the capital of Bangladesh.



Shahitya-Shadhonai Dhakar Nari
Bishmadeb Choudhury
Dhrubapada

over to the recently gone decade.

The first chapter of the book gives sketchy images of such women poets as Chandravati (1550-?), Hemlata Devi (seventeenth century), et al. There can be little doubt that the long list relating to the nineteenth century

can easily give rise to the knowledge that we have had so many authors from among the female sex. We also had *Rupjalal*, by Faizunnesa Choudhurani (1834-1903), something about which any Bengali can be proud. Published in 1876, it is considered to be a pioneering work from the world of Dhaka women.

Let us not forget that it was Dhaka which produced such prestigious periodicals as *Bandhob* in 1874. But before that, edited by Kaliprasanna Ghosh (1843-1910), there had been many newspapers and periodicals from Dhaka and other district towns of the then eastern Bengal. Let us not forget that it was East Bengal from where *Dhaka Prokash* was published in 1861. However, before that there were many other periodicals from such places as Bikrampur, Jessore, Mymensingh and Sylhet. All these are mentioned with a view to suggesting that there were many periodicals also which promoted writing by women. The subject thus demands a deeper study into women's writings in the nineteenth century from Dhaka. We believe a further study can only add to Sanghamitra Chowdhury's findings in her book *Adhunik Bangla Shahitye Mohila Rochito Rochonar Kromobikash* (Chronology of the Writings of Women in Modern Bengali Literature, Kolkata, 2002), which have been cited at length by Bishmadeb.

The chapter on the period 1901-1920 has pointed out many hitherto unknown facts,

including the publication of a periodical called *Protibha*. This monthly, subsequently turned into a quarterly, periodical was the journal of the Dhaka Shahitya Parishad. It was published from 1912 for nineteen years but could not draw the attention of the historians on Dhaka to date. We get the citation of Hariprabha Takeda (1890-1972), and her book *Bongoromonira Japan Jatra* (Visit to Japan by a Bengali Woman, Dhaka, 1915) along with updated information centering on the book. And thus the thin volume of *Shahitya-Shadhonai Dhakar Nari* turns out to be a treasure trove for readers.

The following eras, such as 1921 to 1947, 1948 to 1970 and 1971 to 2000, have been substantiated with necessary elaboration. It seems no significant women writers have been left out and Bishmadeb's work becomes a useful handbook for readers who are eager about the historic development of Bangla women's contributions to the literary arena in Bengal, particularly in the eastern part of it.

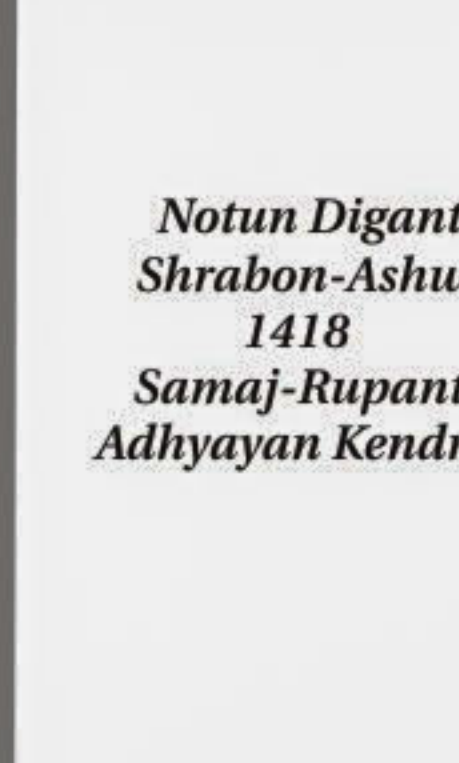
It is a well researched book, though often it appears to be a mere list of writers and books. Many a time the huge number of footnotes causes agony as well. One assumes the writer wanted to make the book authentic and more informative, which could not have been done in any other way.

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BOOK choice



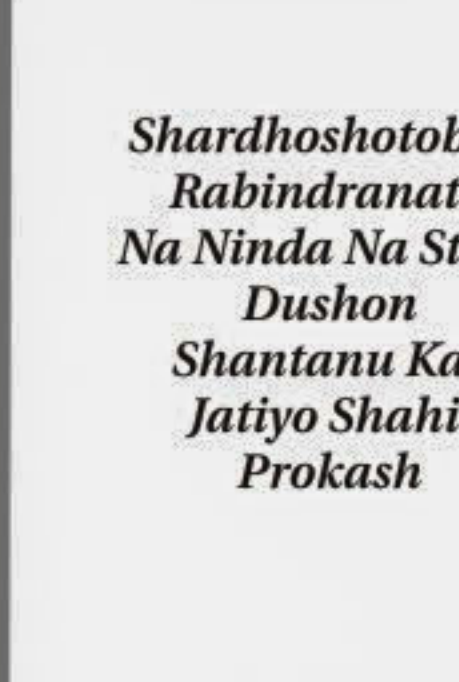
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Altafur Rahman
Agami Prokashoni



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