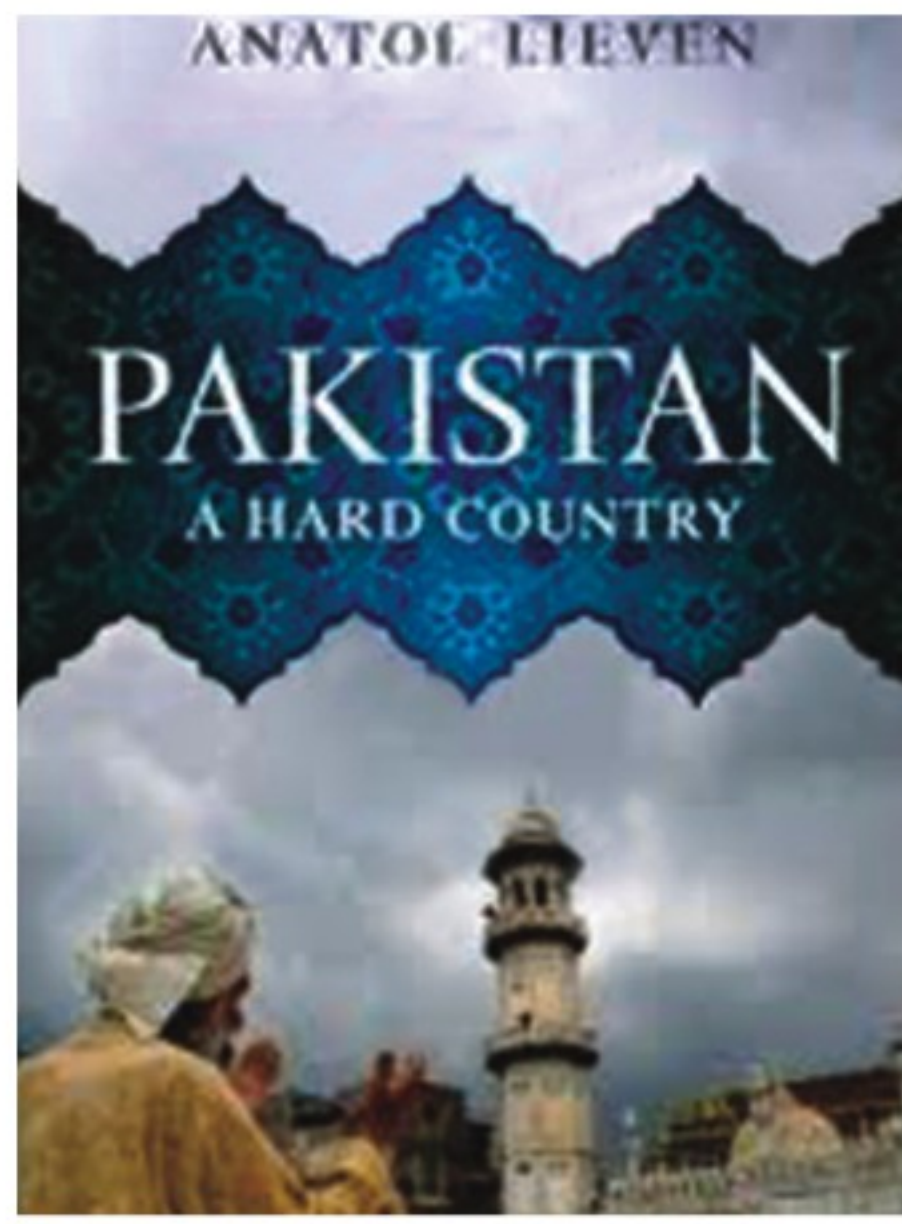


# A country in existential struggle

Ali Ahmed recommends reading a new work on Pakistan

I must confess I had felt as much drawn as repelled when I first set my eyes on the book. The massive volume with 560 odd pages even in paperback and 481 solid reading materials without notes, appendices and a not-too-short list of books consulted is, no doubt, intimidating. Added to this was the mental list of a considerable number of books I already have read on different facets of life, living, history and on many other aspects of the countries of the sub-continent. But the desire to know and understand the people of the region ever more thoroughly, especially of Pakistan in the wake of the threatening rise and expansion of religious fundamentalism there ultimately made me go for the book. And I must put on record my deep sense of happiness at having read it.

Western interests in matters sub-continental have always been considerable for various reasons, but the global rise of what many call political Islam, the devastation of Afghanistan by US forces and the resultant scattering of the *jihaddists* and the Taliban forces inside Pakistan, thus rendering an already volatile country more vulnerable, made the region, especially Pakistan, a matter of great concern. And the concern did no longer remain only Western; a fundamentalist take-over of Pakistan, which at one point seemed not that unlikely, cannot be looked at with unconcerned detachment by those who would like to see a secular democratic dispensation prevail in this region. The desire to understand Pakistan socially, economically, historically and, of course, politically-----in fact, in all possible aspects-----grew to an unprecedented intensity, in the wake of an ever-widening reach of the forces of religious fundamentalism in that country. Anatol Lieven, a one-time correspondent in Pakistan of *The Times* of London and certain other newspapers and periodicals for nearly twenty years and now a professor at King's College, London, appears to have catered just to



Pakistan  
A Hard Country  
Anatol Lieven  
Allen Lane / Penguin India

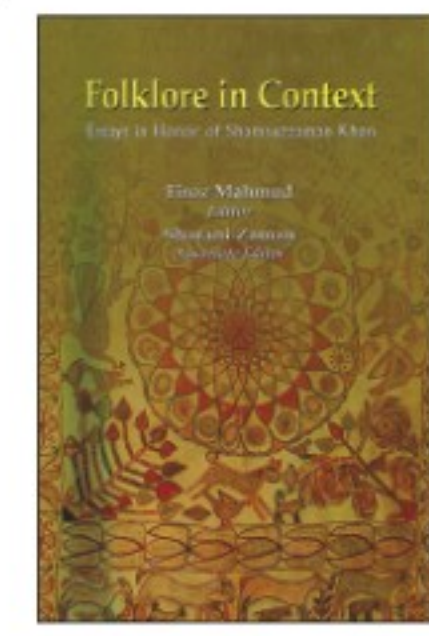
that need by this book of his. When the Pakistani Taliban, probably in July 2008, occupied the red mosque in Islamabad, and appeared to threaten the existing state structure of that country, none probably required to wait for American Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's declaration that Pakistan was engaged in an 'existential struggle' to understand that it was facing one of the gravest dangers to its existence as a modern state as we think of it today. Although the recapture of the red mosque in Islamabad by units of the Pakistani army and their subsequent 'raids' in greater parts of Swat and other tribal areas helped roll back the Taliban to their original strongholds in the Federally Administered Territories, the question still remains as to what ultimately will happen to the state structure of Pakistan. And if

Pakistan succumbs to a fundamentalist dispensation, India and Bangladesh will not be at peace within themselves, and the world beyond would surely be quite a few notches more unlivable than it is today. Anatol Lieven, in order to effectively address this universal concern to understand what would become of Pakistan and beyond, has delved very deep into Pakistani society. After a good enough introduction to the land, people and history of the country touching upon its background, the author has gone into a dissection of the basic social and state institutions like justice, religion, the military and politics. All these are dealt with in separate chapters as are the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (formerly the North-West Frontier Province). The fourth, and the last, part of the book deals with the Taliban, and it is divided into two chapters: *The Pakistani Taliban* and *Defeating the Taliban*? Yes, he forms it like that, with a question mark. A dispassionate analysis of the different ethnicities of the people of the different provinces of Pakistan, and divergences between urban and rural as well as between tribal and non-tribal peoples of the same ethnic background makes for very interesting and educative reading, even for the initiated. The separate chapters on different provinces of Pakistan are not just a travelogue writer's attractive descriptions of a country and its people, nor are they a researcher's pedagogic presentation in rather difficult-to-understand prose. They are, in fact, the sweet amalgam of a researcher's findings served in a seasoned journalist's suave art of writing interlaced with personal experiences and anecdotes. The author's sufficiently lengthy stay in the country, the prestigious newspaper he was assigned by and his intellectual curiosity to thoroughly understand the people and the country, making him undertake often very risky sojourns in extremely dangerous

areas, finally gave him the material to write this book. The nature of his job took him from the very highest to the lowliest in society, often making him rub shoulders with some of them in all categories. This gave him firsthand knowledge of what they think and do, how they lead their lives, both public and private, and what their plans for the country and themselves are. His enviable erudition, razor-sharp intellect and a facile pen (nay, the nimble fingertips on his laptop keyboard) helped him come out with this volume. The author appears to have been aware all throughout the book, and shared the concern of the informed reader, as to what ultimately might happen to the polity of Pakistan. He has taken pains to understand and analyse the society and politics of Pakistan to come up with the very confident conclusion that given Pakistan's socio-political structure, and its history, Pakistan will not fall into the hands of the religious fanatics, nor will it disintegrate or dismantle as a state by any internal or external forces save and except by a concerted invasion by India, the US or a combination of both. And the author strongly suggests that any of those eventualities would ultimately be suicidal for either of those possible (though, I believe, not probable) aggressors. I think readers having some interest in matters related to the sub-continent, especially in the wake of the dangerous rise of religious fanaticism and terrorism there, should read this book. This definitely is an exceptional title, and I would say this even if I were not aware that *The Economist* only last week included this one as one of the best books of the year 2011.

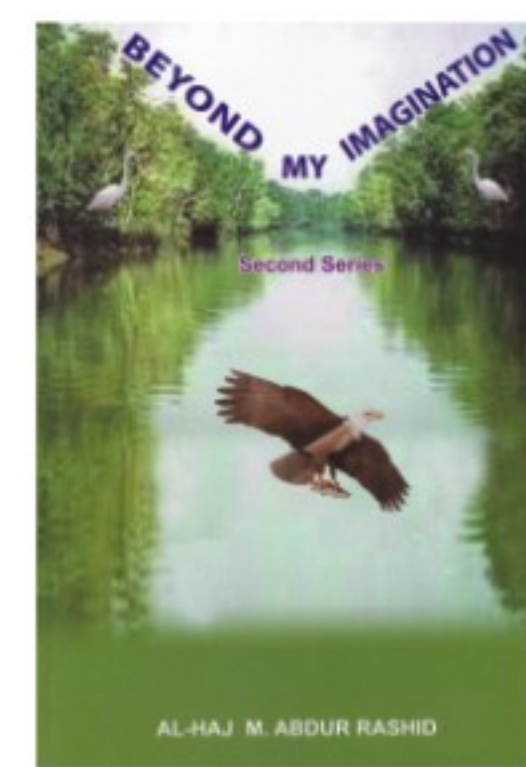
ALI AHMED, A FORMER MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL BOARD OF REVENUE, IS AN ESSAYIST, A TRANSLATOR AND A CRITIC. HE ALSO WRITES ESSAYS AND SHORT STORIES IN BANGLA.

## BOOK choice



Folklore in Context  
Essays in Honor of  
Shamsuzzaman  
Khan  
Ed Firoz Mahmud  
The University Press  
Limited  
Tel: 9565441, 9565444

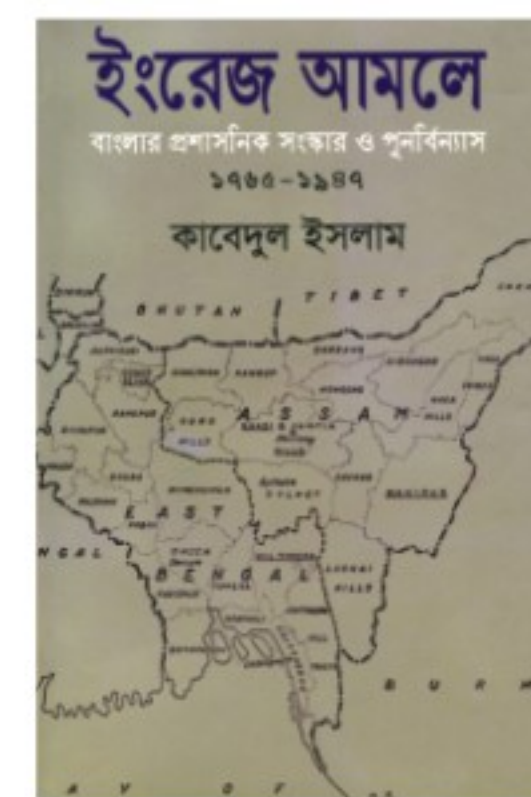
Beyond My Imagination  
Al-Haj M. Abdur Rashid  
Distributor: Dik Darshan  
Prokashoni  
Tel: 7115618, 01711 172 518



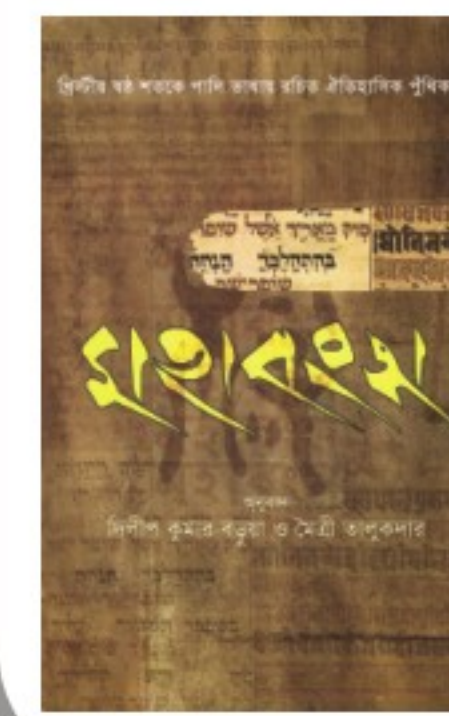
Ingrej Amoley Bangla'r  
Proshashonik  
Shongskar O  
Punorbinayash 1765-1947  
Kabedul Islam  
Adorn Publication  
Tel: 9347577, 8314629



Anonyo Jibananda  
Clinton B. Seely  
Prothoma Prokashon



Mohabongsho  
Trans Dilip Kumar  
Barua, Maitri Talukder  
Adorn Publication  
Tel: 9347577, 8314629



# An emotional tale

Tulip Chowdhury studies a family catastrophe

A mother is supposed to love her children equally. But for Sara Fitzgerald this is a twisted truth. Her elder daughter Kate is a patient of leukemia and her younger daughter Anna is genetically programmed to be an organ donor for Kate. Anna is the sibling who can save her sister. For Sara and Brian, her husband there is the choice of saving Kate through using Anna as the donor or save Anna from the pains of undergoing countless surgeries, transfusions and shots that her role as the donor requires. They wonder, can a parent love a child too much or is too much love never enough?

Anna never questions her role as a donor and goes to the hospital to donate blood or be the donor to bone marrow transplants. Then one day when the question of donating one of her kidneys comes into light, Anna, now a teenager begins to question who she really is. Unlike most teenagers Anna has always been defined in terms of her sister. Anna decides that her opinion does matter and approaches an attorney to file a lawsuit on her parents. She does not want to donate her kidney. With the help of her attorney, Campbell Alexander, she seeks medical emancipation. Sara, a non-practicing lawyer herself is devastated and tries to confirm Campbell that it is all a misunderstanding, that Anna would not file a lawsuit in her right mind. But when Campbell approaches Anna, she is determined to go ahead with the case.

The story in *My Sister's Keeper* takes the reader on an emotional roller coaster. The day Anna decides that she has a right to decide whether to be a donor or not, there begins the Fitzgerald family's catastrophe. Kate has to be admitted to hospital off and on. One day she has developed an infection and another day she has nasal bleeding that soaks her whole bed. And then another day she has cardiac problems. And all through these she needs Anna, needs her blood, her stem cells, her tissue and her kidney. Sara has to coerce Anna to be there for her sister. Anna has difficulty in finding her own existence without filling in for her sister and that is what annoys her. Can't her life be worth for her own self?

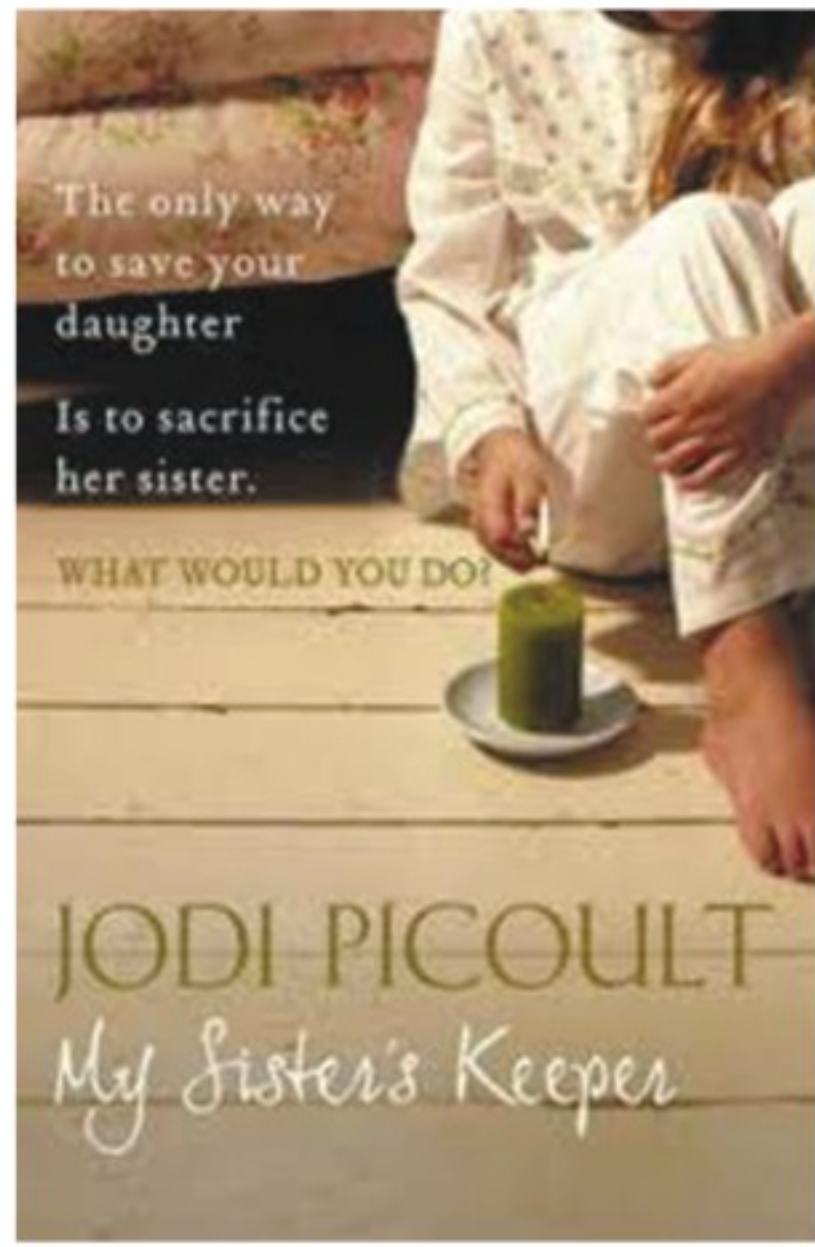
The story shows that love conquers mountains of anger and gives peace in the most tumultuous moments. Anna knows she is hurting every time she has to donate something from her body. Yet when her mother takes her to Kate, when she sees her sister, frail and pale, slipping away from them; she forgets her pains and agrees to be the donor once again. Anna gets a chance to play for the national soccer team and that means she has to go to another state. But Sara refuses to let her go for Kate may become sick any moment and Anna might be called in to donate blood or stem cells. At first Anna is bitter. But when she goes to the hospital and Kate smiles at her, Anna knows that she cannot go away, that she has to be there for Kate.

For a thirteen year old like Anna, it's extremely frustrating to be used by her mother for a sister and yet she loves Kate dearly. Brian, on the other hand takes Anna's side and agrees that she has a right to file the law suit. Though this brings rift between Sara and Brian but Anna finds some solace that one of her parents may be thinking of her over Kate's needs.

There are times when life becomes overwhelming and Brian, a firefighter sometimes feels that every day he has to fight an invisible fire at home. As Brian and Sarah are whole time occupied taking care of Kate, they fail to note that Jesse, their teenage son has taken to drugs and alcohol. Then he gets into the jail for stealing a car. Anna takes her lawyer, Campbell to bail him out. Campbell asks Anna why her parents are not looking into Jesse's problems. Anna replies that Jesse is "like a squirrel in an elephant's cage". The squirrel is insignificant because the parents are too busy with the elephant of the family, meaning Katy. The Fitzgerald family seems to be plunging into deeper crisis every day as Jesse runs into other problems with the law.

Life is a constant uphill battle for Kate, every day she sleeps knowing that she might not wake up the next day. And in the frail life enters beautiful romance. She meets Taylor, a quiet, gentle young man who is also a patient of leukemia. Taylor and Kate fall in love at first sight. The parents watch on, their hearts lurching with pain. They wonder how long life will bless these two young hearts to love each other? Both of them have lost their hair for the chemotherapy. One day Sara catches them kissing and thinks that the look "... beautiful, those alabaster heads bent smooth as statues, an optical illusion, a mirror image that's folding into itself."

The story continues with Kate's battles for survival and the courtroom scenarios opening into Campbell's fights for Anna. Sewn into the story of this provocative novel are some important ethical issues that make the reader ponder and debate. The Fitzgerald family does not know how far their tumultuous life will go. Indeed will Anna win and stop her role as the donor for Kate? Will they be able to find another donor to keep Kate alive? Sara could not stop hoping that Anna will come out of her stand and agree to donate a kidney for her sister. All these issues keep the reader on emotional upheavals and it becomes impossible to put the book down until the word of the story is read. The climax waits to be discovered and relished on. The language of the storyline is lucid and explicit, giving the reader sublime reading hours. Jodi Picoult won the American Library Association's Alex Award for the novel *My Sister's Keeper*. A must read for Picoult fans!



My Sister's Keeper  
Jodi Picoult  
Washington Square Press

TULIP CHOWDHURY WRITES FICTION AND IS A POET.

# Of the roots that clutch

Masum Billah observes a reclaiming of heritage

The book *Korokdi Ekti Gram* (Korokdi is a Village) bears testimony to the deep love of one's motherland and one's desire to learn its glorious history. Subrata Kumar Das has brought together the glorious history and famous personalities his village has produced. With the passage of time many of these personalities have opted for a life in Kolkata. Das has photographed the remains of the homes of these famous personalities and posted them on Facebook, which has in turn aroused their interest in seeing the village they left in their childhood. A big reunion was arranged by Das. The book contains a vivid description of the gathering, the reminiscences of expatriates, renowned Bangladeshi litterateurs and local leaders. A few kilometers from Bagaat, off the highway and some two kilometers through the open field lies this culturally rich village called Korokdi.

The thought that prompted Subrata to arrange such a coming together and indeed bring it to realization is rather intriguing. His father had picked up a book called *Madhyabharata Manjari*, published in 1928, from a pavement in Kolkata. Das discovered that the book had been written by Bankim Chandra Lahiri of Korokdi. Leafing through the book one day, Das was properly surprised. His interest in Korokdi awakened, he began to research the place and its people. What he found amazed him. This small and very remote village once produced many people who had excelled in their diverse spheres of activity. Many of these stories he had earlier heard from his father. Now he was all the more intrigued at the diverse talents that had emerged from Korokdi.

The comments of the guests who participated in the Korokdi Samabesh give one an insight into the events which took place in Korokdi, all of which has been vividly portrayed in the book. "We landed in Dhaka on the 29 January 2010 not really knowing what to expect. All of us, my sister, my cousin, my children and I, have grown up on tales of Korokdi, of the Padma, of Goalondo Ghat of Bagaat, and so much more. Here we were actually going to see it all. But what came before us took us by surprise. Subrata had told us that he had arranged a press conference that morning. To our amazement, when we reached the Dhaka Press Club, we found that it was packed, not only with journalists but also with many renowned intellectuals, civil rights and political activists." Subrata Kumar Das had invited me too to participate in the

programme but some preoccupations did not make it possible for me to join it. My learning of these exciting events through a reading of the book makes me feel sorry at not being unable to enjoy the whole ambience of the Korokdi Samabesh. Clearly like me, many friends at the Press Club, there are these ordinary men and women also felt an urge, a curiosity to know and connect with the past and spontaneously came to Korokdi to make the whole programme a success. They were people who sought to reclaim the past that had been theirs but were now fading into oblivion. It was an enriching experience. The warmth and friendliness of the people, their consideration, their hospitality and their simplicity left



Korokdi Ekti Gram  
Edit Subrata Kumar Das  
Koli Prokashani Banglabazar,  
Dhaka

us deeply touched. Another participant from Kolkata says, "Korokdi was really a small village surrounded by mustard and jute fields, even in my father's time. By the time my father was born it was a pretty prosperous and relatively modern village. My grandfather had installed the first tubewell in the village and someone actually had a fridge that ran on kerosene! There was library named after a Battacharya which had a rare collection of ancient texts, besides other books."

Roman Rolland (1866-1944), the French Nobel Laureate for literature in 1915, was one of the pioneering western philosophers who played a role in disseminating Indian spiritual philos-

ophy in the West. He developed links with many Bengali figures, such as Rabindranath Tagore and Jagadish Chandra Bose. His memoirs called *Vie de Ramakrishna* and *Vie de Vivekananda* (1930) promoted Indian spiritual ideologies across the world. All such facts have meticulously been researched by the Bengali writer Abanikumar Sanyal, who was born in the tradition-rich village of Korokdi in district Faridpur and who has two books on Rolland and two translations of Rolland's books to his credit.

Sulekha lived for a short while from 1928 to 1962 only. Apart from her major work *Nabankur*, she wrote a second novel, *Dewal-Padma*, along with some short stories. A third novel was published posthumously. Though her output is relatively small, any sensitive reader of Bangla fiction will accord Sulekha a special place in literature. The plots of her stories were rather exciting. Most of these short stories are set around the time of the Second World War, the 1905 partition of Bengal and the infamous Bengali famine of 1943. Almost all the stories are capable of drawing tears in sensitive readers. When Sulekha was a young woman of twenty-six, she was noted for her courage and outspokenness. She came of age in Korokdi and later became a communist, refusing to submit to the conventions and rules of the day. She took part in some many social and political activities in the 1940s. Sulekha was born in a zamindar family of declining fortunes in Korokdi on 5 June 1928. The whole family was known through her involvement in the anti-British movement. She spent her childhood and early adolescence in Mashima's Chattogram. In 1942, when the city was bombed by the Japanese, she returned to her village and sat for her matriculation examination as a private candidate in 1944. Sulekha later was admitted to Rajendra College, Faripur, and after passing her intermediate examination in 1946, went to Kolkata and enrolled herself at Victoria Institute there. She got married in 1948, but the marriage does not seem to have been a happy one. It ended in divorce in 1956.

The reading of the book will make one familiar with the rich cultural and historical heritage of village Korokdi, tinged as it is with the patriotic feelings of the writer.

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