

The thespian and the politician

Syed Badrul Ahsan reads of a Pathan in the movies

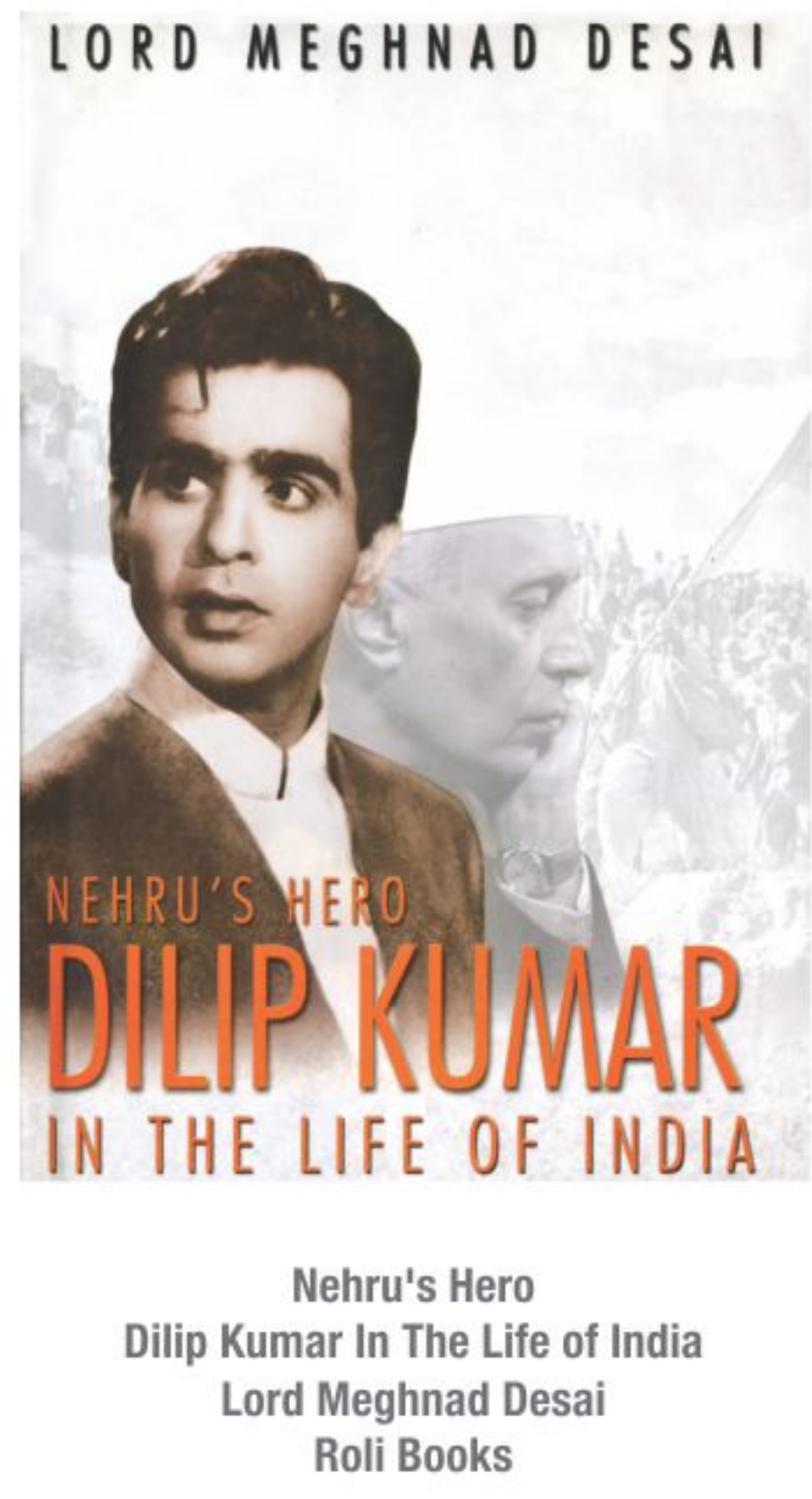
Dilip Kumar keeps stirring your emotions. And that despite the fact that his era of heroism, on celluloid of course, is long past. But there is that certain addiction we all suffer from, at certain points of our life or for an entire lifetime. For people of my generation, Dilip Kumar belongs properly to the era of our fathers. That is easy to follow, seeing that he was born in 1922 and grows into an increasingly ripe age. These days one does not quite see him as one used to. But that inimitable charm, the memory of the impeccable Urdu with which he regaled us both in the movies and outside, the manliness he symbolized before his screen women --- all of these have remained firmly implanted in our minds.

And that is a huge reason why Dilip Kumar never ages. If Suchitra Sen has been uncompromising in her belief that her image, as it used to be in the movies, should be the standard to which we should hold her and her memory, Dilip has done precisely the opposite. Where Sen has not been seen in public since she went into seclusion long ago, Dilip has been a figure constantly on the move. Till recently, when the clear encroachment of age began to tell upon him, he was out there on stage cheering a new generation, for which he is a repository of grandfatherly affection, on. The seasons have taken their toll on Dilip's generation. Most of his contemporaries --- Raj Kapoor, Dev Anand, Rajendra Kumar, Guru Dutt and others --- have moved on to a region beyond life. Dilip has gone on. And yet the bells have begun to toll for Dilip Kumar.

Even so, Dilip remains an iconic representative of the glorious past that was Indian cinema. Lord Meghnad Desai, unlike the usual biographer, gives us a refreshingly intellectual perspective on the thespian in *Nehru's Hero: Dilip Kumar In The Life of India*. The title of the work is wide open to interpretation. He was a favourite with India's first prime minister; or Desai's story consists in a juxtaposition of Dilip Kumar's career on screen with the reality of an India being administered by Jawaharlal Nehru. The prime minister was busy steering the ship of state toward newer, often unknown shores. In much the same manner, Dilip Kumar was beginning to cast a long, benign shadow over all of us by his educated portrayals of men in the movies. Desai points to the parallelism which appeared to be working in any assessment of Dilip's movies vis-à-vis Nehru's politics. A point of

reference here could be Dilip's populism-based role in *Leader* and *Naya Daur*. In these movies, Dilip or, more specifically, his characters clearly seemed to be going hand in hand with the populist pitch Nehru was pushing in actual life.

Dilip Kumar's movies were watched for more reasons than one. And, of course, they were not all box office hits. Not all stories were of the riveting kind. But there was that certain tragic quality in his appearance which, translated into a tragic appearance on screen, turned him into an eminently



lovable, even magical character. How that love came to be transformed, in our perceptions of ourselves, into self-love in us is what Desai gives us a glimpse of: 'Dilip Kumar towered over that era and filled our lives. We emulated his dress, his hair, his mannerisms, and his dialogues. But above all, the characters he played in the various roles portrayed ideals, which we absorbed.'

The writer does not let go of the bonding which Dilip Kumar enjoyed with the Nehru era. That, you will admit, is certainly a new, different kind of thought. Perhaps it is the

only time in recent history or in the entirety of history when an actor's rise to artistic prominence has coincided with the energy a head of government has brought into the business of running a government. In simple terms, the years between partition in 1947 and Nehru's death in 1964 were a celebration of idealism. Here was Nehru presenting India in all its cultural-political resplendence before the world. And there was Dilip Kumar reaching out for the peaks of stardom. It was in the Nehru era that 36 of the actor's 57 films were made. The characters he played in the movies were a splendid study in human life, giving Dilip an aura of invincibility. His versatility was in the demonstration of his power to portray human suffering as well as human failings.

Meghnad Desai takes the reader through the entire gamut of Dilip Kumar's life. The child of a Pathan fruit dealer with roots in the North-West Frontier Province (today's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa), the young Yusuf Khan was to easily come to terms with his dual role as a son helping his father in business and at the same time looking for an opportunity to carve a separate area of activity for himself. He became, in the movies, Dilip Kumar. His command over Urdu was to be remarkable, even unassailable. It was his chaste use of the language that would turn out to be an important factor in his unstoppable climb to stardom. It all began with *Juwar Bhata* and over the years such films as *Andaz*, *Aan*, *Daagh*, *Gunga Jamuna*, *Ram Aur Shyam*, *Kohinoor*, *Leader*, *Mughal-e-Azam* and *Sagina Mahato* streamed into the Indian consciousness.

Not for Dilip Kumar the vain battles waged by other actors, his contemporaries actually, to defy age and continue playing the dashing young man beside all those damsels in distress. Not for him a replication of Raj Kapoor and Dev Anand in what should have been their middle age and then dotage. Desai draws a long portrait of the actor in league with movies that conform to his age.

Read on. There is good research done here, turning Dilip Kumar almost into a school of thought. Culture, in its more sophisticated form, has always defined the man. And that is just as it should be.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN IS WITH THE DAILY STAR.

Ah, Reader's Digest!

Tulip Chowdhury is in ecstasy

The earliest of memories of taking up books to read come with picking up those Reader's Digest monthly magazines. At first I used to read the humour sections and feel myself doubling up with ripples of laughter. And then I started turning to the other pages and became an addicted fan of the magazine. Once you get into the habit of reading them they become irresistible! You request the hawk to deliver it to you every month or else run to the nearest bookstall in the first days of the month for your copy. Your mind is restless until you can open the new copy and delve inside those rich and memorable writings.

The varieties of topics included in the magazines are truly amazing. Science, health, medicine, true life stories and hundreds of other topics come each with its own relishing deliverance. The first thing I open up is "Laughter the best medicine". The short but deeply funny stories seem to quieten the heart and pull it away from the daily hassles of the day. Next go on to the jokes about kids or life in the office scenario. You feel as if someone is tickling you to accept life as it is. You remember that beyond the harsher world of reality so many funny incidents can take place. You cannot miss reading the Nury Vittachi column "Unbelievable", for every word the guy writes carries mirth and wit beyond and between the lines. There are famous quotes for you to read and remind yourself of the lessons left by our ancestors. You have social or family problems? Go ahead and write to "Ask Auntie" for advice from the heart. Financial troubles? Again there is Reader's Digest to give financial advice from "Money Savvy". Want a good recipe to bake or cook something you open up to "What's Cooking". "Health Equations", some simple additions and subtractions about a healthier life inform you that long hours at work may raise the risk of heart disease for you. Peppermint contains an ingredient that quiets pain-sensing nerves in the colon and may help you out of an irritable bowel syndrome. You learn that men who drink plenty of coffee may have a substantial lower

risk of lethal prostate cancer. All these and still awaiting more information for you to read! You can be certain that there are substantial amounts of up to date health tips from the coming new additions! "Health is wealth" and so you can hardly wait for the next edition! You get insights into enjoyable pet stories too and the hazardous on-line dating scams!

In real stories you learn of amazing survival cases after two days of being adrift in the sea or of being lost on a mountain for a whole week. There are personal stories beyond the call of daily life, headed under "My Story" from which you learn of the rich experiences of life. There are amazing accounts of neighborly kindness that have helped people in distress pass through difficult times. To make you smile and

relish your reading through each and every nook and corner of the magazine manages to put in jokes or other useful life tips. For instance, after reading about the humorous incidents of life at the office a newcomer asks, "How do you make a lawyer smile for a photo? A: Say "Fees". You treat yourself to an additional wise smile.

The learning curve in life is supposed to go higher and higher and build your vocabulary with solving the "Word Power" quiz, but don't look up the given answers before you even

try! Tips on saving your marriage or want some good advice on sleep? Maybe the very next issue of Reader's Digest may be coming with just what you want to learn. And in addition, the magazine welcomes contributors for its various sections with handsome payments but does not acknowledge or return contributions. And so get Reader's Digest, read and enhance your knowledge about the world around you. And you might even try your hand at sending in an article or two! The widely covered subject matter puts into you the courage to write and even practise the heroic deeds or take some acts of kindness you read about. A truly life giving magazine to read regularly!

TULIP CHOWDHURY WRITES FICTION AND IS A POET.



Existentialist horror at play

Rajiv Ashrafi explores a difficult old book

Samuel Beckett is the literary equivalent of an Olympic gymnast. His words and sentences flip, roll, and jump about constantly. While this may leave you dazed and confused at first, the technicality and proficiency with which he carries out his exercise leaves you dumbfounded and amazed. This level of ingenuity is best experienced in his novels, the second of which is *Murphy*. It is Beckett's most "conventional" novel till date, though you shouldn't hold that against this brilliant piece of work.

Murphy is a difficult book to describe. It is full of obscure, referential language, and the vocabulary will leave you gasping for a dictionary. Existentialist horror is here in full swing; there is also a feeling of utter dread and a sense of "life's fragility." The off-kilter narrative also raises questions about mortality and human purpose, both of which ultimately lead to nothingness, or so it seems. Heavy-handed cryptic remarks are aplenty, and, as you can imagine by now, the book demands your whole attention and concentration lest you miss something.

So, why do I love it so much? The first reason is its exploration of dissociation. It is clear in this work that Beckett was discovering his mastery over the disunion between two polar absolutes. He celebrates dementia and craziness, consecrating "outer reality" and "personal reality" to the point where both are subjective and are lost in the ravines of memory where they are distorted and no longer matter. There is a marked distinction between the body and the mind. This is explored in detail in the titular character's "unredeemed split self" throughout the book. Beckett, quite brilliantly, dedicates

a specific chapter analyzing this feature, thus breaking the fourth wall, which is quite a regular, yet subtle, phenomenon within the confines of the text. Another reason why I love this book is that it invokes both terror and humour at the same time, pushing the reader into deep existentialist dread while making fun of the situation simultaneously. Enlightenment is near and yet so farsweet unachievable enlightenment. This is what the book explores thoroughly, and it is exactly what the reader feels while enjoying the clear lucidity of the text. Murphy is a hollowed-out character who is simply going nowhere and has given up in the face of life's doggedness. I feel that Beckett plays on this lack of motivation as a commentary on the unchanging and indifferent nature of life and the universe. In fact,

the opening line encapsulates this idea and sets the tone for the text: "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new." The characters are drawn out yet incomplete. They certainly feel fleshed out by the end of the novel, yet they lack true depth to their actions and motivations. That may have been intentional, though, as I believe it reflects on the fragmentary nature of our reception of the world. Certain aspects of these characters are terrifying and, at the same time, humorous. Take for example the following lines in which Murphy discovers the pleasure (and subsequent bitter letdown) of sitting down:

"The sensation of the seat of a chair coming together with his drooping posteriors at last was so delicious that he rose at once and repeated the sit, lingeringly and with intense concentration. Murphy did not so often meet with these tendernesses that he could afford to treat them casually. The second sit, however, was a great disappointment." The humour, as you can see, is reminiscent of Charlie Chaplin. It is designed to fit the contrast between the characters' inabilities to avoid complications against the inflexible nature of the world that they inhabit. If dry, ironic, black humour is your thing, *Murphy* is right up your alley.

You should have noticed by now that I haven't written anything about the plot or the story. As I mentioned before, *Murphy* is difficult to describe since it's a rather surreal and cerebral novel in terms of content. However, it's still grounded in reality thanks to the physical and absolute settings and locations Beckett masterfully

uses as backdrops against the characters' perceptions of reality. All these are bolstered by the language that has multiple layers of meaning. The novel clocks in at less than 200 pages (Faber edition), but they are dense and rife with meaning that you will want to explore again and again. Paragraphs will delight you with their wit and charm, make you laugh at their absurdity, and fill you with dread and trepidation in the face of dispassionate life and perpetual rigidity of the world. *Murphy* is not an easy read. Nevertheless, if you can stick through and embrace the language, it is one of the best novels you will possibly come across in the brief period of sentience you have.

RAJIV ASHRAFI IS LECTURER, NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY .

AT A GLANCE

Nandan
June 2012
Ed Nazib Wadood
Lipika, 106 Octroi More, Kazla,
Rajshahi
E-mail: nazibw@gmail.com



work with his name is associated, in addition to all his other creations.

It is this powerful writer the literary journal Nandan honours in its June 2012 issue. Among those who have contributed articles on Mahmudul Haq to the volume are Nazib Wadood, Kamruzzaman Jahangir, Moni Haider, Khurshid Alam Babu and Abu Noman. Of the various themes Haq dealt with in his works was the War of Liberation and its aftermath.

Those who have not read Mahmudul Haq or know little of him will be egging themselves on to a rediscovery of the scholar through this issue of Nandan. It is rich in substance.



Kali O Kolom
Muzharul Islam
Shonkhyia
Ashwin 1419
ICE Media Ltd
E-mail:
mail@kaliokalam.com

The architect Muzharul Islam died not long ago. It appears, and quite naturally too, that the country is yet to tide over the grief caused

by his death. That has to do with the pretty iconic status he came to acquire, in his lifetime, as an architect. A dash of the poetic defined his structures, dotting as they do diverse regions of the country.

The degree to which Islam is missed by those who knew him and who obviously profited from intellectual and professional interaction with him in diverse ways, now comes encapsulated in the Ashwin 1419 issue of Kali O Kolom, published by ICE Media. The tributes flow, in different directions, from a remarkable set of individuals for whom Muzharul Islam was essentially a point of reference. Among the contributors are Syed Shamsul Huq, Burhanuddin Khan Jahangir, Pankaj Bhattacharya, Shamsul Wares, Santosh Ghosh and Rabiul Husain.

The journal is a celebration of the man. It is also occasion to recall the times when idealism was at the core of Bengali thought.

We Owe an Apology to Bangladesh
Ed Ahmad Salim
Shahitya Prakash
87 Purana Paltan
Line, Dhaka 1000

Contrary to general belief, there are enlightened Pakistanis who have always felt embarrassed about the doings of their army in occupied Bangladesh in 1971. Indeed, in that year of blood, toil, tears and sweat for the Bengalis, a good number of eminent Pakistanis made their disapproval of the military action from March to December known to the Yahya Khan junta.

And proof of that comes through this work, ably edited by the Pakistani politician-cum-poet Ahmad Salim. Those who have expressed their sentiments about 1971 certainly do not constitute the majority among Pakistan's intellectual circles. But they surely are individuals whose voices cannot be ignored. And so will you read in this volume articles by I.A. Rehman, Tariq Rahman, Mazhar Ali Khan, Ahmad Salim, Asif Farrukhi, Akhtar Payami and a whole range of others. The work gives you another perspective on Pakistanis as they were and as they felt in 1971.

