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#### **DHAKA HAY FEST 2013**

# For the love of words

IFFAT NAWAZ

T'S that time of the year again. Monsoon has left town, the leaves are turning colours. Poets and writers are finding new inspiration with the transformation of the sky, musicians are playing new tunes. As if in perfect sync with nature, bringing it all together under the same umbrella, Hay Festival Dhaka 2013 will take off just four days from now at the grounds

international literature scene.

Under the slogan "Imagine the world" Hay Festival Dhaka this year will put together a series of different themes which include words and images, translation, spirituality and literature, politics and literature, graphic novels, screenplay writing and children's literature. Under these themes, different panels will present the enthusiastic Dhaka audience with discussions which



PHOTO: HAYFESTIVALDHAKA

the works published this year

RM: We have often seen

quite a few quality literary

magazines is a must to

support our budding

writers need appropriate

outlets and literary maga-

zines have always played key

roles in literary movements

everywhere all the time.

When we published three

issues of Six Seasons Review

in the first few years of this

millennium we managed to

provide space for such

writers and Bengal Lights has

done so earlier this year. I do

believe that the new series of

Six Seasons Review being

launched at this Hay will

showcase some quality

FA: Of course aspiring

abroad.

writers?

Those who will come to Hay this year will definitely be in for a treat as the line-up of writers, poets, change-makers, media personalities, filmmakers and publishers, both international and national, is

personalities, filmmakers and publishers, both international and national, is of a unique combination. There are those like Arundhathi Subramaniam and David Shook who have decided to return again to Bangladesh for the second time and then there are new comers like Tariq Ali, Pankaj Mishra, Rosy Boycott and Ahdaf Soueif -names which changed the face of the

of Bangla Academy. Following the

success of the last two years, Hay

extended itself to a three-day

festival this year, starting on the

morning of November 14th and

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this year will definitely be in for a

treat as the line-up of writers,

poets, change-makers, media

ending on the evening of 16th.

are highly relevant and interesting at the same time. Although most of the sessions will draw considerable attention, there are a few which should not be missed: "Is there a World Literature?" with Pankaj of a unique combination. Mishra, Eliot Weinberger, Florence Noiville and K.

> Anis Ahmed; a rare session titled "Shahittokarder Alap" where Syed Shamsul Haq and Hasan Azizul Huq will come together in conversation with Sajjad Sharif. Also, sessions such as "Two Americas: Writing A New Real" with Mario Bellatin, Chris Heiser and David Shook, and "Small is Beautiful" with Aamer Hussein, Prajwal Parajuly and Syed Badrul Ahsan marking the launch of

Syed Manzoorul Islam's translated short story anthology will offer one with multi-faceted perspectives.

There are also sessions featuring William Seighart, one of which will see him giving out poetry prescriptions to your very own problems. Rosy Boycott will discuss the future of publishing; Romesh Gunesekara will talk about his extensively successful writing career; Rahul Bose will be in conversation about words and screen and Arunava Sinha will discuss different aspects of translation and how to break the boundary of language.

Poets will also be a big part of the Hay scene. David Shook, Tishani Doshi, Arundhati Subramaiam, Jerry Pinto are some of the names which you will be sure to hear from.

Ned Bauman will be also part of the Hay team talking about the Granta's top 20 young Novelists with Tahmima Anam.

There are not only more publishers like HarperCollins and Penguin but also some literary agents from the United Kingdom will come this year to gauge the vibrant literary scene of Bangladesh. To add more excitement to the mix, there will be

launching of several books such as 'Partition' with editor Vishwajyoti Ghosh and Bangladeshi contributors Syeda Farhana, Khademul Islam and Kaiser Haq. Samir Rahman will be bringing out his comic book and Ronni Ahmed will also hold a session on his book "The Cosmic Ark."

Children will be a big part of the festival this year. A series of children focused programs will be running in the imagination tent where poetry, fiction and storytelling will be a big part.

Lastly a few sessions must be mentioned which will give the audience a lot of food for thought. These sessions are: "In other tongues" where the richness and diversity of our Bangla language will be

celebrated with activists, experts, and the people who speak them; and "Egypt and Beyond" where writer and politician Ahdaf Soueif and philanthropist William Sieghart will discuss the situation in the Middle East with Zafar Sobhan. Also, there will be a session on commonwealth writers which will surely benefit any aspiring writer in the country.

There will also be a number of performances by Shadhona on the 1500 years of mystical dimensions, lalon shah songs and baul performances spread out through the three days.

The Hay program schedule is now available at http://www.facebook.com/haydhaka. The entry is free this time. We hope to see you with us this weekend, and for the love of words, thoughts, future and past one must be a part of it.

> IFFAT NAWAZ IS A WRITER. SHE IS ALSO PART OF THE HAY ORGANISING TEAM.

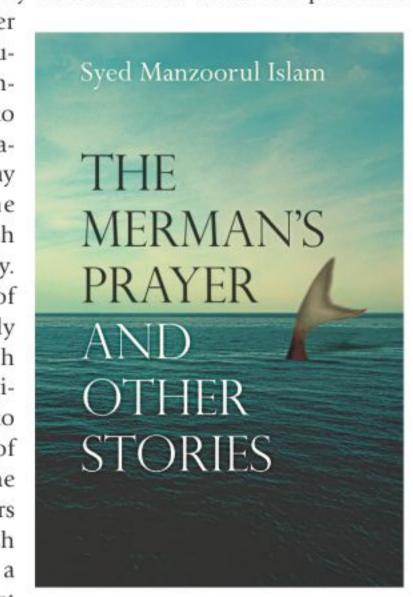
## English fiction by deshi Writers at Hay

FARHANA SUSMITA

NGLISH writing in Bangladesh, especially fiction, was usually considered as something which only a ✓ few selected people practiced and knew about. When more and more quality materials were coming out each year from other neighbouring countries i.e. India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, Bangladeshi writers, except a very few, failed to produce any remarkable work that would receive international attention. But this scenario started to change with the arrival of the Dhaka Hay Festival in 2011.

The way the 'Ekushey Boi Mela' has become a platform

for Bengali writers over the years, an opportunity for which publishers wait in order to highlight their publications, this year's Hay will serve the same purpose for the English writers of the country. The publication wing of The Daily Star, Daily Star Books, which began its journey previous year, is going to launch three works of fiction by some of the most talented authors writing in Bangladesh today. The first one is a collection of short



stories titled 'The Merman's Prayer and Other Stories' by Syed Manzoorul Islam. The writer is famed for his stories in Bangla, and the book is his first work of fiction written in English. The other two books are also short story anthologies by Sharbari Ahmed and Farah Ghuznavi.

Two new publishing houses, Bengal Publication and Bengal Lights Books, are going to be launched at this year's Hay. Bengal Lights Books will bring out a translation of selected stories by Hasan Azizul Haque, the literary giant of the country. It will also publish Kaiser Haq's new chap book, and Ahsan Akbar's The Devil's Thumbprint.

UPL is going to publish Sadaf Saaz's debut poetry collection 'Sari Reams'. Drik Publication will bring out Rahnuma Ahmed's book 'Tortured Truths'. Bangla Academy itself will publish Syed Waliullah's 'The Ugly Indian'; Mermaid art will bring out a book by Rony Ahmed. Apart from these, Qyayum Khan's memoir, Enam ul Hoque and Ihtisham Kabir 's books on birds and flowers will also be launched.

The prestigious literature journal, The Six Season Reviews which has been revived recently will also be launched at the Hay.

> THE WRITER IS AN ASPIRING WRITER. SHE HAS A MASTER'S IN ENGLISH LITERATURE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA

#### 'There are signs that indicate change is in the air'

Fakrul Alam is an eminent literary critic, editor and translator. He is the editor of Six Seasons Review, a literary magazine which will be launched at Hay. In this interview, Alam shares his views with Rifat Munim about the progress of English writing in Bangladesh and the need for literary magazines to provide budding writers with a solid platform.

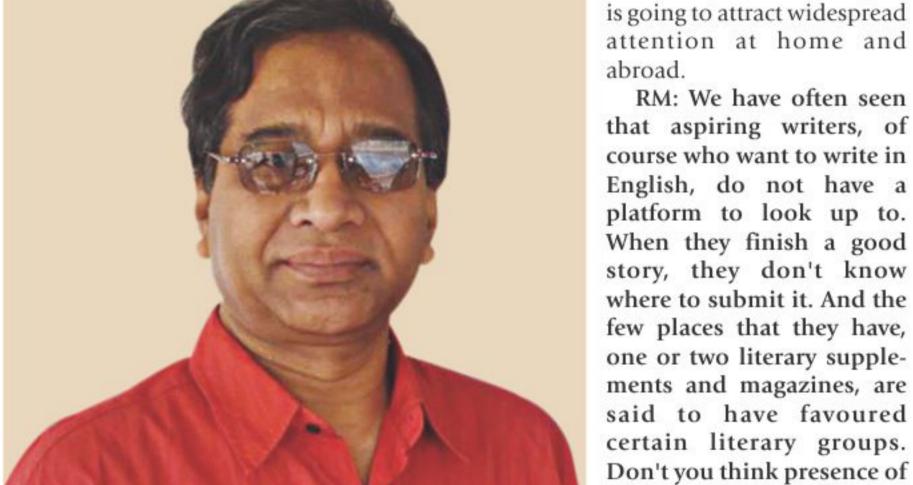
Rifat Munim: In one of your write-ups published in a supplement brought out by The Daily Star three years ago, you regretted the fact that Bangladeshi writing in English was not thriving. Do you think the situation is changing now?

Fakrul Alam: Well, we certainly haven't produced a major writer comparable to, say, Arundhati Roy or Vikram Seth and are still some way from doing so and for too long Kaiser Haq has been the only Bangladeshi writer in English whose work was read and anthologized internationally. In that way the situation hasn't changed very much. But there are signs that indicate change is in the air as far as Bangladeshi writing in English is concerned. For instance, Kazi Anis Ahmed's debut collection 'Good Night, Mr. Kissinger' last year and the publication of bengal lights indicate that we now have quite a few accomplished new voices making their presence felt. Members of have also published some quality writing in recent years. The fact that someone like published by Penguin India year's festival. suggest to me too that our

English writers are now attracting at least a little attention in the international writing scene.

RM: Do you think Dhaka Hay Festival has played an

important role in giving this boost? FA: No doubt it is too early to claim that Dhaka Hay Festival has already been giving Bangladeshi writing in English a boost but surely the success of the two events organized in successive years indicate that it is bound to do so soon. The enthusiasm on display, the new works published for the second Hay event and the number of books sold are no doubt going to encourage not a few writers and publishing houses to launch new works this year and I won't be surprised if at least a few good publications greet us in this year's festival. Indeed, I know that quite a few works in English are going to be launched at this Hay and it isn't too much to expect that one or two of



it is too early to claim that Dhaka Hay Festival has already been giving Bangladeshi writing in English a boost but surely the success of the two events organized in successive years indicate that it is bound to do so soon. The enthusiasm on display, the new works published for the second Hay event and the number of books sold groups such as Writer's Block are no doubt going to encourage not a few writers and publishing houses to launch new works this year and I won't be surprised if at Shazia Omar has had her work least a few good publications greet us in this

> aspiring Bangladeshi writers in English as will the next issue of Bengal Lights.

> > RM: Tell us something about the next issue of Six Seasons which is going to be launched at Dhaka Hay. Is it going to contain only fiction or non-fiction too?

FA: The next issue of Six Seasons Review will contain quite a few poems by Bangladeshis as well as fiction and non-fiction. It will also have what I think is a fascinating photo essay on Dhaka life. I believe that the variety and vitality of the writing anthologized will delight readers and indicate that there is much to look forward to as far as Bangladeshi writing in English is concerned. As the editor I must say I was encouraged by the number of submissions and it was good to have the opportunity to select the best from the many good poems and prose

### Fragments that make up an emerging mosaic

Farah Ghuznavi is a writer and newspaper columnist, with a background in development work. Her first collection of short stories Fragments of Riversong will be launched on the second day of Dhaka Hay 2013. She talks with The Daily Star about this collection.

The Daily Star: How do you feel about your first collection of short stories

being launched at Hay? Farah Ghuznavi: It's very exciting to have "Fragments of Riversong" being launched at the Hay Festival Dhaka! And it feels particularly appropriate to have the initial launch of my first story collection on home turf, because in many ways, this book is all about Bangladesh. In fact, we were so determined to have the book launched at this Festival that I worked with the Daily Star publishing team, racing against the clock, to get the collection ready in less than three months. That may sound like sufficient lead-in time, but in publishing terms, it's

little short of a miracle! that one of the story titles is selected as the book title, but your title is not chosen that way. Why did you pick this title for the

book? FG: I wanted to find a title that would do justice to all the stories in the book, story. This collection is an telling media. attempt to piece together

the fragments that make up an emerging mosaic namely, contemporary Bangladesh in all its chaos, contradictions and beauty. I also liked the metaphor of the river-currents that make and break up this delta of ours, occasionally conjuring up new fragments of land in the form of the 'chars'. And I wanted to merge older romantic traditions with the reality of Bangladesh today, to transition from the way that stories were told through the boatmen's songs in the history of this riverine country to today's 21st-century story-telling media. Hence the title "Fragments of Riversong".

TDS: How long did it take you to finish all the

stories compiled in this book?

FG: The stories in this collection were not written in a straightforward chronological sequence. I have written other stories in between writing these, which don't appear here for a variety of reasons. I selected these 12 stories carefully, because I wanted them to fit together and complement each other. The stories were written over a period of about six years - the oldest being "The



This collection is an attempt to piece together the fragments that make up an emerging mosaic namely, contemporary Bangladesh in all its TDS: We usually see chaos, contradictions and beauty. I also liked the metaphor of the river-currents that make and break up this delta of ours, occasionally conjuring up new fragments of land in the form of the 'chars'. And I wanted to merge older romantic traditions with the reality of Bangladesh today, to transition from the way that stories were told through the boatmen's songs in the history of this rather than singling out one riverine country to today's 21st-century story-

a very recent one being "Big Mother". TDS: Tell us something about your stories. Are

Guava Tree Rebellion", and

they spread over continents? Or rooted in Bangladesh?

FG: The answer is both. My stories can be set anywhere - some take place in Europe or America or India, while others play out in rural Bangladesh or in urban locales such as Dhaka, Chittagong. But whatever the setting, the stories still remain firmly rooted in Bangladesh, in that the situations they describe will be recognisable to most Bangladeshi readers and they will invariably feature Bangladeshi

characters in some form. TDS: Some of your female characters are struggling to find an identity of their own in a society dominated by patriarchal norms. Say, for example, Laila in 'Getting There'. Would you please expand upon this aspect of your characters?

FG: That is true, but I would rather say that many of my characters - both women and men - are

seeking to come to terms with their identities and options in a patriarchal society. So we see that Hashem, the street child in "Waiting", bears a disproportionate burden in trying to make life easier for his mother and sister, while the young man in "The Homecoming" has had to be strong and hold his family together in dire circumstances, simply because he is the only son and it is expected of

Conversely, a woman like Laila, in "Getting There", is trying to find a way to stretch her wings in a situation where too many people seem intent on clipping those wings before she ever gets to fly with them, because girls should not have too much independence. At the other extreme, Shilpa in "Old Delhi, New Tricks" doesn't seem to face any of those constraints in her day-to-day life. Yet on holiday with her friend in India, she unexpectedly finds herself in an uncomfortable position by virtue of being female, and writes to her fiance in England about the experience. So I like to look at characters as individuals, rather than simply as men or women, and to see