

"Endless Revolutions"

The sparks that keep coming back

MALIHA MOHSIN

The recent events in the global scene have awakened our consciences to stir from within. Egypt, Tunisia, America and even Bangladesh are some of the examples of how we've found ourselves in a world full of rebellion and revolt against the wrong and the fight for justice, equality and social welfare, in a time that almost seemed standstill and unimportant in the pages of history.

"Endless Revolutions" silenced the packed auditorium from 5:30-6:30pm on the second day of Hay Festival Dhaka 2013 (Friday), as it drew the audience into a dynamic conversation between Tariq Ali, Ahdaf Soueif and Pankaj Mishra along

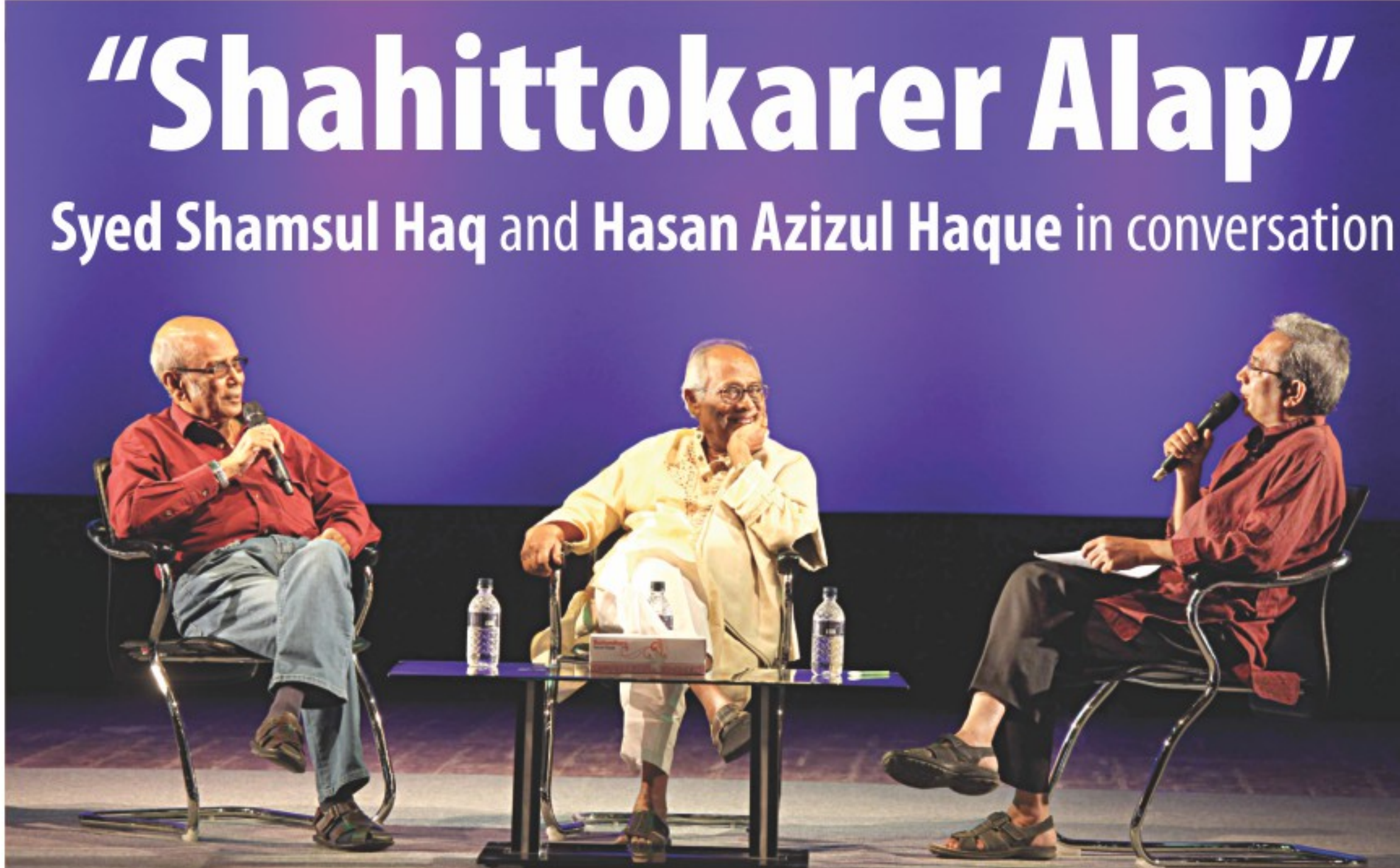
with Eliot Weinberger.

Revolutions of the past were recalled and the monsters wriggling within present societies and nations were talked of fearlessly. The parallels in the social wrongs present now and present in our past mistakes were highlighted. Bangladesh's journey from before its birth until now was unfurled by Tariq Ali. Egypt's circular struggle back into a regime was talked about by Ahdaf Soueif. South Asia's struggle to come to terms with fair democracies was brought into light. How revolutions have changed now, and what they can and cannot become were discussed about.

The world's revolutions and changes have shaped literature over the course of time in so many ways, and the session marked it well.



Eliot Weinberger, Ahdaf Soueif, Tariq Ali and Pankaj Mishra.



TAHJIB SHAMSUDDIN

Syed Shamsul Haque and Hasan Azizul Haque are the two most influential Bengali writers of the present time. Shamsul Haq, honoured with the prestigious Ekushey Padak and Bangla Academy Award, is famous for his fictions, poems and plays and played an integral part in the Language Movement of 1952 in Bangladesh. Hasan Azizul Haque is a critically acclaimed writer mostly famous for his short stories and experimentations with the language and introducing modern idioms in his writings.

As the discussion title suggested, the conversation between the two greats did not entirely follow an agenda.

Syed Shamsul Haque began by reminiscing the turbulent times when people were forced to write in Urdu and Arabic before the Language Movement. He struggled

to introduce modernism and contemporary styles among the readers to create a new platform for Bengali literature. Nevertheless, he wrote for the joy of writing, not from the urge to establish a new concept. Hasan Azizul Haque shared his involvement in political movements during the 1960's. As a writer, he reflected the scarcity of educated readers of that time for contemporary writing.

The natural way of speaking and subtle humour of the two writers entertained a packed audience who responded with frequent laughter and applause. Shamsul Haque often changed topics with flair -- when asked by the host -- to his own descriptions. He joked about his critics and described his duties as a person who seeks to combine pen and paper to produce meaningful arts. He questioned his works to the development of society and answered through a metaphor - of land rising up from the

riverbed to create a foundation for progress. When asked about his shift of writing from short stories to novels, Hasan Azizul Haque rejected to be categorised into a given definition. He claimed to be a natural writer who does not follow any structured path.

The authors took questions at the end of the session, where the crowd had the opportunity to involve themselves. Shamsul Haque used the example of his famous play "Payer Awaj Pawa Jaye" to describe how he deals with the dilemma to create a novel or a play from a certain idea.

He stated that it depends largely on the importance of the theme to the society. The session was a highlight of the second day at Hay Festival. However, like all good things, it ended too early, and a satisfied, but somewhat unfulfilled crowd returned home with the sense of unfinished prolonging.

Overheard at HAY

I feel so fresh here. I got to listen to some recitation here and that rarely happens. To be here, so close to culture, is so refreshing.
-- Sadafi Jannat, Attendee.

I'd thought that the turn up today morning would be low, but I'm surprised at how the imagination tent got packed with the puppet show. The children were so excited that they didn't even let the puppeteers talk!
-- Sheyuti Shahgufta, Organiser.

This idea, that language is bounded by nations, groups or borders, is outmoded, I think.
-- Romesh

Gunesekra (From his one-on-one session)

It's bigger. Last year was so great; people know more about it (Hay) now. This venue is packed despite the traffic and the road problems. And it reaffirms by beliefs that Dhaka is absolutely at the most critical and optimum stage for this.
-- Sadaf Saaz, Co-founder and Producer of Hay Festival Dhaka.

Granta- The Best Young Novelists

PRIMA GULSHAN

Granta is a magazine that celebrates new and young British writers by creating a list of 20 people each decade called 'Granta: Best of Young British Novelists'. On the most recent list are Ned Beaman and

Tahmima Anam. They were joined by Ellah Allfrey, former Deputy Editor of Granta, at a panel on the second day of the Hay Festival 2013. Tahmima Anam is best known for her first novel "A Golden Age" which has been



Tahmima Anam, Ned Beaman and Ellah Allfrey.

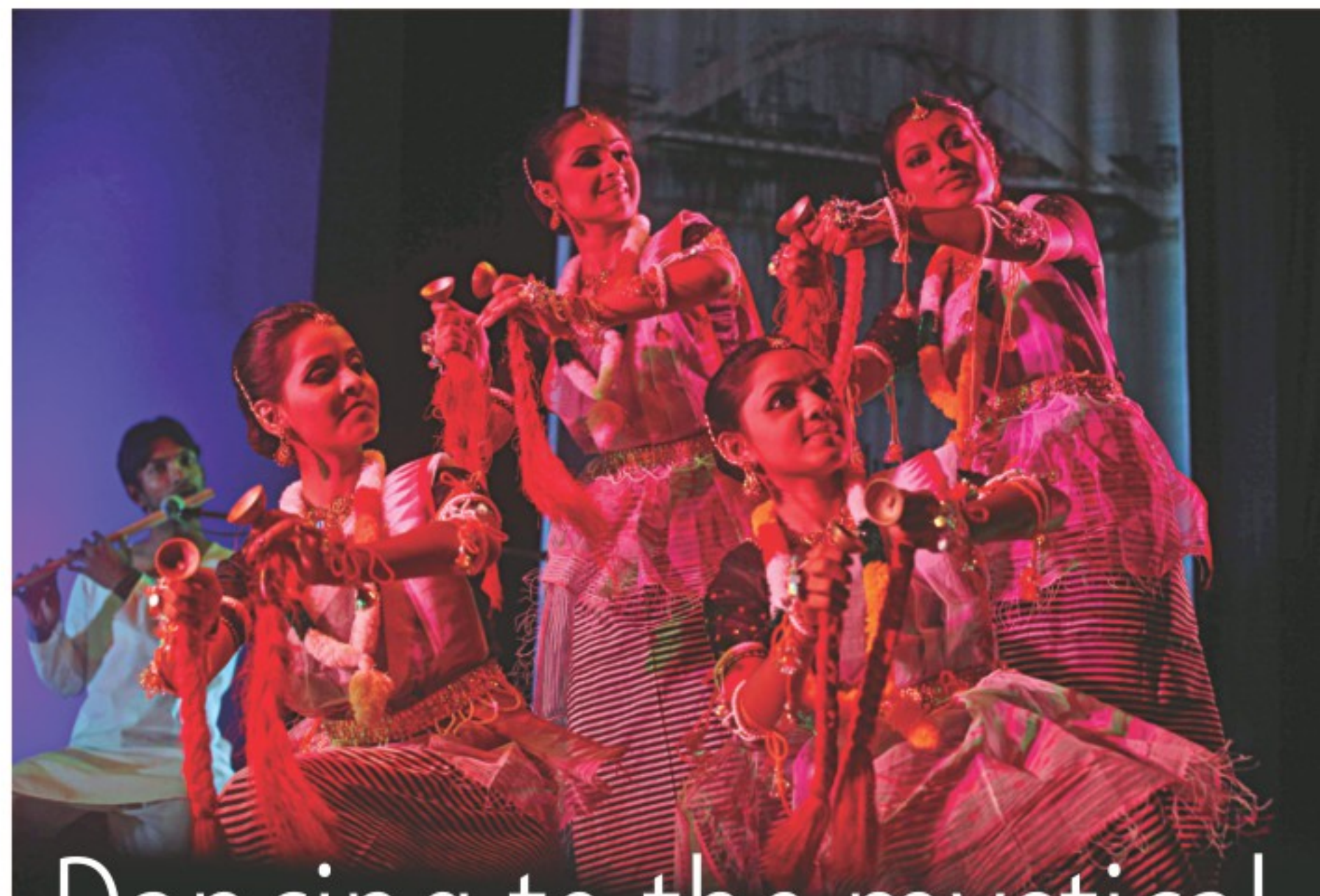
translated to 22 languages. Ned Beaman is little known outside of the UK but he is a critically acclaimed author; other than being placed on the Granta list, he was also on the long list (of 12 people) for the 2012 Man Booker Prize for his novel 'The Teleportation Accident'.

One very interesting theme of the event was writing about borrowed experiences. Ned Beaman has two books published 'Boxer, Beetle' and 'The Teleportation Accident' and they both have a lot of historical content. Beaman said that he writes about historical

events, which he took no part in, while sort of "acknowledging the bluff [that he does know what happened]". He likes to have fun writing and often re-writing history in his novels. His grandparents had to flee the holocaust but neither of them, nor his parents ever liked to talk about it; for him World War II was a topic that was always hovering in the air but never really acknowledged which is why he feels the need to write about it.

Unlike Ned Beaman and his family, for Tahmima Anam, the 1971 war of Independence for Bangladesh has always been present. It was always talked about in her family with several of its members being Freedom Fighters; and her country is forever defined by it. Tahmima Anam's father, Mahfuz Anam, worked for the UN when she was young and she, while born in Bangladesh, only came to live in the country when she was in her teens. She said at the panel that for her, writing "A Golden Age", which a novel set during the 1971 war, was about reclaiming Bangladesh as her own.

Ned Beaman and Tahmima Anam were asked near the end of the panel how it felt to be on the Granta list and whether they felt any pressure to be on the list on which so many great authors have been (such as Salman Rushdie, William Boyd, Ben Rice, Monica Ali etc.). Neither of them said that they feel any pressure. Beaman joked that there are 20 people on the list so the pressure is pretty evenly spread out, while Tahmima said she feels acknowledged for the work that she has done so far, and feels as though she is being told "so you have done all this, let's see what you will do next!"



Dancing to the mystical thoughts of Bangladesh

ZAHANGIR ALOM

Alongside holding a number of thought-provoking and interactive literary sessions, Hay Festival Dhaka had several unique showcasing of performing arts. The featured performing arts have embedded roots in Bangladesh's literary essence, as those significantly carry the connotations of our rich folk literature.

The festival featured performances of Jarigaan, mystic dances, Fakir Lalon Shai's songs, and kobi'r lorai (a spontaneous sparring of words).

The second day's (November 15) festival wrapped up with mystical dance performances by the artistes of Shadhona. Incorporating both classical and conventional dance forms, the artistes presented a series of meditative yet riveting dance performances under the title "From Finite to Infinite" encompassing the opulent heritage and mystical thoughts of the deltaic Bangladesh.

Translating the legacy of mystical thoughts, propounded by the mystic bards of Bengal, into performing arts like dance, is not an easy task. Artistic director of Shadhona, Lubna Marium conceived the idea and emceed the entire performance with her beautiful narration together with dance performances. Dancers-choreographers Amit Chowdhury and Sabbir Ahmed Khan choreographed the entire presentation.

The show was set off with the presentation of "Charya Dance", set on a Charya chant "Vajrayogini," the name of the greatest Buddhist master Atisa Dipankar's village.

Noted Nepalese dancer Rajendra Shrestha danced to a meditative genre called "Manjushri," the oldest of the Bodhisattavas, inspiring worship conferring on the devotee wisdom, memory, intelligence and eloquence.

"Bongshi Anurag" or the "Lure of the Flute", directed by Mou Das, came next. It dealt all about the spiritual call of the melodious tunes of Krishna's flute. Krishna symbolises the "Paramatma" or the "Infinite soul" and the devotees or the individual souls are "atma" who yearn to be united with Krishna. Several Shadhona dancers superbly performed pieces with apt devotion. Live music with the pieces was accompanied by the artistes of a Kamolganj (Moulvibazar)-based music troupe.

Dance presentations with Brahma Sangeet seemingly won hearts of many. For Bengal, the Brahma Sangeet emanating from the "Brahmo Samaj" is important, as it is from within the folds of this community that Rabindranath Tagore, the greatest Bengali Poet, arose. The artistes' offering of dance with the sublime melodic bliss of a Tagore song "Anandalok-e Mongolalok-e" mesmerised the audience.

Dance with baul songs, especially those composed by Fakir Lalon Shai, wrapped up Shadhona's hour-long dance show. The artistes' dancing to the bard's songs including "Parey Loya Jao Amaye" and "Emon Manob Janom Aar Ki Hobe" was evocative; the artistes' rhythmic and balanced throwing of mudra took the audience to the ecstasy of Vaisnava-Sahajiya cult that celebrates life in enigmatic styles.

Breaking new literary grounds

"The New South Asia"

TAHJIB SHAMSUDDIN

A diversity of panel writers gathered for a session to discuss about the movement of South Asian writers around the globe, on the second day of the Hay Festival (Friday). Rimi Chatterjee and Samit Basu are Indian writers who specialise in science fiction and children's stories. Prajwal Parajuly, famous for his novel "The Gurkha's Daughter", was born in Nepal. On the other hand, Tishani Doshi mostly writes poetry and comes from Wales, UK, but also has an Indian origin. The most common ground between the writers is that they all write in English.

Each of the writers briefly shared their views of the progress of South Asian writing from their own experiences. Rimi expressed her concern about the expectation of foreign publishers from an Indian writer and innovating in a difficult context. Prajwal contradicted the opinion of barriers for any certain theme and stated that now South Asian writers are acknowledged at other continents for writings based on different cultural contexts rather than their origins. Samit stated that writers, especially of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, are breaking away from the usual form of writing and experimenting other forms and social structures. Tishani feels it is a good time to be a writer in the sub-continent, where a large domestic crowd has developed a habit of reading through the help of social media, newspapers and better education policies



Rimi Chatterjee, Samit Basu, Prajwal Parajuly and Tishani Doshi.

compared to other countries.

Most of the session comprised interactive discussions with the audience on the topic. The authors excluded themselves to be sorted as activists upholding a specific problem based on their ethnic origins. They aspire for freedom of following their imagination to write and go beyond the probable. However, they all agreed on the fact that social problems of their respective cultures do affect their writing to some extent.

ing to some extent.

The outcome of the whole session may be summed by a question of an Indian woman from the audience, who stated it was heart-breaking to find a South Asian writer writing on a different context when she wants her children to be reading them to resonate themselves as part of the culture. Perhaps this is the "New South Asia".