

ADULTERY: Paulo Coelho reexamines the sensual appeals inherent in all humans

Reviewed by Mahfuz ul Hasib Chowdhury

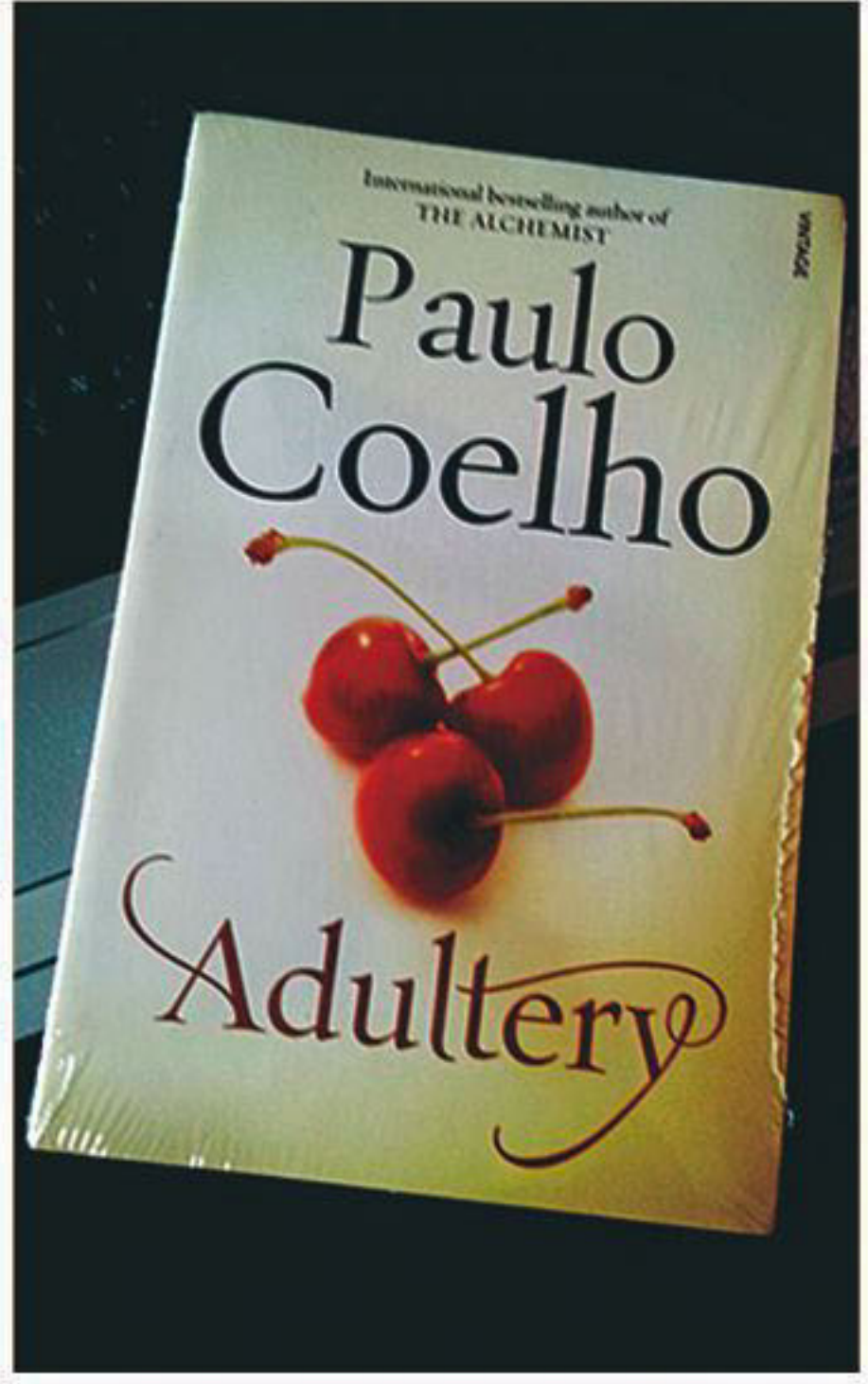
PAULO Coelho is currently the best-known Brazilian novelist. His novels *The Alchemist*, *The Fifth Mountain*, *Eleven Minutes*, *Veronika Decides to Die*, *Brida* have ornamented his profile with eminence and glory. Some of his non-fictional books are highly acclaimed too like *Confessions of a Pilgrim* and *Manual of the Warrior of Light*. This illustrious author came up with a catchy tale of despair, lust and sin in 2014 that sparked off considerable degree of sensation among readers and critics in the wake of its publication. The novel's title is *Adultery* which is suggestive enough to help readers prognosticate its thematic points. Linda, the Swiss narrator of this novel introduces herself as a woman who apparently seems complacent with everything she possesses. In her 30s, Linda has quite a well-off husband who loves her. She has two children and holds quite a good job at one of the most popular newspapers of Geneva. However, some words by Linda in this novel sound rather flippant when she confesses, "I arouse desire in men and envy in other women." It should be noted that some novels by Paulo Coelho examine different aspects of lust, sex and other carnal appeals inherent in human beings and this distinctive dimension is vividly found in *Adultery* too.

Despite all the wealth and good fortune around her, Linda feels tied down in her invariable daily chores, immersed in a life fully mechanized. She says to herself, "In the safest country in the world since I married ... time has stopped." She further adds to ignite speculation in the minds of readers, "Who haven't felt the urge to drop everything and go in search of their dream?" Linda, as transpires from these quoted lines, is an envoy of all the men and women of the current impassive world whose lives have been enclosed by depression and monotony.

Linda takes interviews of different people—businessmen, writers, actors and so on and while figuring out their visions of life, she compares her own life story to the variegated facts expressed by those

who speak to her of their own pleasures and agonies.

Linda explored the stolidity of her life when she heard one line told by a writer during an interview, "I haven't the slightest interest in being happy. I prefer to live life passionately, which is dangerous because you never know what might happen next." This remark by the writer etched a deep mark on Linda's mind and she became frantic to make her life a blithe one by seeking passion, amuse-



ment and mirth. Her quest for these things at one point challenged the moral principles of her married life, but she was too carried away to look back on morality.

Linda's grief at the bleakness of her glittering but vivid life is exposed through the following line extracted from the novel, "And yet, every morning, when I open my eyes to this ideal world that everyone dreams of having but few achieve, I know the day will be a disaster." The words "this ideal world" sounds ironical in this context as it is something we all crave for but very few

of us can get hold of it.

Linda talks to a politician in one interview who turns out to be her school friend Jacob. That man, as found by Linda during the interview, is totally focused on himself. All his words are unexceptionally linked with his career. But as at one segment of the conversation they recall their school-time hookups, their professional dissimulations evaporate and they kiss each other like a pair of lovers locked in full-on romance. This unforeseen event causes a dichotomously blended feeling of guilt, enchantment and piquancy in Linda's thinking stream.

This occurrence appears to Linda like a break from her tedious marital life. She becomes more and more inclined towards Jacob even though Jacob does not always reciprocate the same emotions. Linda identifies Jacob's wife Marianne as the only obstacle for a full-fledged affair between her and Jacob. She runs out of her wits so much that she conspires to get Marianne jeopardized by planting illegal narcotics inside Marianne's office.

Linda's predicament underlines the frequent instances of dissolved relationships, troubled marriages and gloomy conjugal lives that prevail all around us in today's world. She reminds us of Rosy in R.K. Narayan's masterpiece *The Guide*, Jennifer Parker and Lara Cameron in Sidney Sheldon's novels *Rage of Angels* and *The Stars Shine Down* respectively.

Paulo Coelho imparts a literary gloss to *Adultery* by making Linda comparable to some classic literary characters and thus allowing readers to trace her behavioral homologies in women like Sophocles's Electra and Gauri in Jhumpa Lahiri's latest novel *The Lowland*.

Towards the closure of the novel, Linda realizes that what she is doing is indicative of an imbalanced psychological state. She visits psychiatrists and tells them about the tempestuous phase she is going through and seeks remedies for her disoriented mental riff which is how the author reopens to her the gateway to light and sanctity.

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Saga of dysfunctional Parliaments

Reviewed by Shakhawat Liton

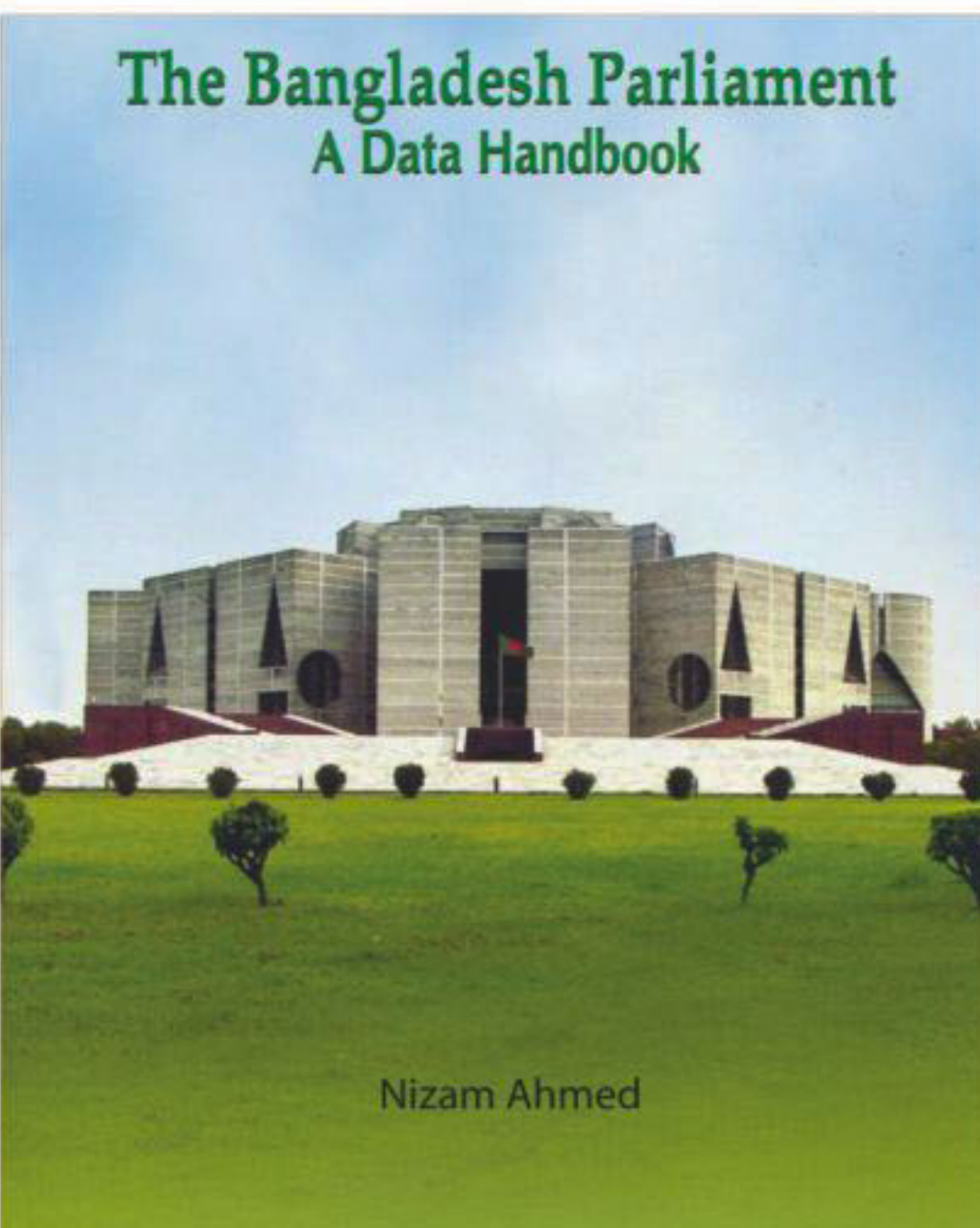
PROFESSOR Nizam Ahmed, a teacher of Chittagong University, has continuously been carrying out research on the functions of our Jatiya Sangsad. His latest book "The Bangladesh Parliament: A Data Handbook" is an excellent and massive research work. This timely handbook provides insights into understanding the functions of Parliament as an institution. It covers nine parliaments constituted in between the period 1973-2011.

One may question the necessity of studying a book on the parliament's functions at a time when the country is paralysed by political turmoil. But the book will help us get to the bottom of the present crisis which has not emerged overnight. Everything may go wrong when a parliament turns into a dysfunctional institution. The political turmoil the country has been going through for more than a month has proved this once again. And when such a situation prevails, owners of the state powers find themselves helpless and powerless. Nobody including parliament cares about their anxieties.

Without any ambiguity, our constitution announces that all powers in the Republic belong to the people. And people are empowered to confer the powers to some major political institutions to exercise the powers on behalf of them. Our parliament is the top political institution. People hold the power to constitute it by electing 300 individuals through secret ballots.

Each of the MPs is supposed to represent the will of the people to transform the parliament into an embodiment of the people's will. In an idle parliamentary democracy, people seek to realise their aspirations, urges and expectations through the parliament. Parliament is also supposed to act as a forum for ventilation of the grievances of the people, their difficulties and their passions, anxieties and frustrations. Parliament is supposed to discuss various grievances, aspirations and needs of the people and make necessary moves for legislations. But the situation in Bangladesh is opposite to the idle one. The present 10th parliament was not constituted properly. People were not allowed to exercise their right to franchise to elect their representatives. And thus the current parliament is miserably failing to deliver on people's expectations and to address the difficulties and anxieties people have been going through.

This situation has been prevailing over the years. The political culture has become confrontational due to unholy struggle for powers by the two major political parties since restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991. And the parliament has been made worst victim of this pervasive culture, resulting in making people helpless and voiceless. If we now want to overcome the present political crisis, we need to identify first the weaknesses of our parliament and to take necessary measures to transform it into a real House of the Nation. Professor Nizam Ahmed's efforts will immensely



help us as a source of numerous information to analyse the situation.

The book focuses on brief profile of MPs who were elected in previous nine parliaments since 1973. Information on their occupations and educational backgrounds show how the quality of parliament has deteriorated in the wake of alarming emergence of businessmen as legislators. The book also analyses the weaknesses in legislating process and parliamentary oversight functions. By going through the book it will be easy for one to understand how Parliament has been made a neglected institution. Through numerous data the book tells the saga of how our parliaments have been made dysfunctional.

The ugly politics to keep the parliament dysfunctional has not produced anything good for people. This has provided the government ample opportunities to emerge unchecked as an all-powerful executive by controlling the legislative powers of the state. The present political turmoil is nothing but a manifestation of deficiency of democracy and making the parliament dysfunctional.

More than 260 years ago, Charles de Montesquieu, a French political thinker, in his book "The Spirit of the Laws" says when the legislative and executive powers are united in the same person, or in the same body of magistrates, there can be no liberty; because apprehensions may arise, lest the same monarch or senate may enact tyrannical laws, to execute them in a tyrannical manner.

So, time has come to rethink how to keep our parliament out of ugly control of the government for the sake of democracy.

The writer is senior reporter of The Daily Star

Taking a look at Bangladesh cinema down the years

Shahid Alam reviews Zakir Hossain Raju's latest publication

"Bangladesh Cinema and National Identity: In search of the modern?"-Routledge

CONSIDER these lines, as quotations or as a paraphrase: "Bengali Muslims of East Bengal/Pakistan were a vitally important audience for the Bengali film industry of Calcutta during the 'golden age' of this industry (that is, from the 1930s to the 1950s)." The Indian film scholar Someswar Bhowmik attributes the decline of the Calcutta (Kolkata) film industry in the 1960s to the rise of the second Bengali cinema industry in Dhaka. "The Bengali Muslim middle class considered the foreign films to be a threat to Bengali cultural modernity." And, so, when one of the pioneers and stalwarts of the East Bengal/Pakistan film industry, Abdul Jabbar Khan, approached Mahmudunnabi, a minister in the East Pakistan provincial cabinet, in 1957 to take the necessary measures to establish a film studio in the province, he was asked to justify the need for filmmaking in such a poor country. Khan's riposte: "Do you want our countrymen, sitting in our theatres, always only watch Indian films and learn Indian culture, politics, lifestyle and ideology?" Zakir Hossain Raju's book, *Bangladesh Cinema and National Identity: In search of the modern?* works around these points in detail to do justice, with some dexterity, to the title, and then some.

In the event, Mahmudunnabi was convinced, and he requested Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to introduce in the Legislative Council the bill for setting up a film studio. The outcome was the formation in Dhaka of the East Pakistan Film Development Corporation (EPFDC), now more familiarly known as FDC. Raju explains the significance of this development: "As foreign-language films were produced outside the cultural arena of Bengali Muslims and had no direct cultural relevance to the Bengal delta and its populations, they wished to establish a film industry that would produce films reflecting a cultural-national modernity as well as defining the Bengali-Muslim cultural identity." This nationalist mission to uphold the local culture against the intrusion of foreign influences has endured even as late as 2002, as evinced by the official website of FDC: "FDC provided a film base to launch counter offensive actions to block the infiltration of foreign culture." The issue has cropped up in late 2014 and early 2015 as Bangladesh film producers, directors and artists have banded together to vociferously oppose the importation of Indian films by exhibitors. As of this writing, the standoff has yet to be settled.

The irony is that, during the days of East Bengal/Pakistan, foreign films from India (both in Hindi and Bengali, until their public exhibition was banned following the 1965 India-Pakistan war), the US, and Europe, not to mention Urdu films from West Pakistan, were regularly exhibited in movie theatres in this country. One reason, as mentioned in the book, was that prominent American and British distribution companies like MGM, Twentieth Century Fox, Paramount, and Rank Organization had their offices in Dhaka in the 1950s. It was relatively cheap for the local cinemas to collect English-language films and screen them as morning and midday shows. And the mass exhibition of popular Hindi films from Bombay (Mumbai) and Bengali films from Kolkata was so widespread in this country that, in the Indian film historian M.B. Billimoria's assessment, entire Pakistan was considered a part of the home market

for popular Indian movies.

Raju professes in the introductory chapter "to situate the function of Bangladesh cinema texts, from production to reception, within the broader social, political and cultural domain of twentieth century Bangladesh." His rationale is sound, as he goes along with Annette Hamilton's perspective that, "Film and cinema...can only exist within social, economic, and cultural parameters...." As such, the book concentrates heavily on studying the social, cultural and political mise-en-scene within which film and cinema operate in, rather than engage in a linear discussion on movies made in East Bengal/Pakistan and Bangladesh. He concludes that, "...the Dhaka-based Bengali cinema that developed as a vernacular 'cultural' cinema during the 1950s and 1960s transformed itself to meet state-national aspirations." The cinema further transformed itself by progressively letting go of "the cultural marks of Bengali-Muslim and delta-focused Bengali identities in order to become a 'Bangladeshi', Bengali cinema." Raju further elucidates on the theme of growing nationalism: "So this cinema, by constructing 'Bangladeshi' identity as the one-size-fits-all umbrella for all Bengali Muslims as well as non-Muslims and non-Bengalis living in Bangladesh, worked towards imagining the sense of a Bangladeshi modernity." Raju explains his rationale for taking the path he has chosen to in discussing Bangladesh cinema, and it seems to be a reasonable one, especially if it serves as a complement to the linear discussion of all the films that have been produced in East Bengal/Pakistan and Bangladesh: The "history of Bangladesh cinema emphasizes discontinuities, recognize that historical cause is non-linear and change is non-evolutionary. For this reason, I focus on a number of key film texts, institutions, personalities, trends and events in Bangladesh cinema history rather than imposing a linear model of evolution of this cinema." He identifies three discourses of film scholarship in Bangladesh, each of which could be located in distinct periods as to their origin. The first is popular journalism, which began in the late 1930s, and continues to the present day, with *Cinema*, *Chitrati*, *Purbani*, *Tarokalok*, and *Anondo Alo*, among others, as representative examples of defunct and circulating publications; the second is critical appreciation, which originated in the early 1960s, and is represented by film club movements and their periodicals and anthologies; the third is film-

historiography, or empiricist research and historical works, of which the book under review claims to be one. This last discourse began in the late 1970s and, the author avers, it is characterized by the deficiency of certain principles of film-historiography to be found in the academic West.

Having made clear in which category this book resides, Raju provides a comprehensive reasoning for writing it: "...for me, cinema is a process, not a product and I intend to present it through its texts and institutions as well as through its intertextual and contextual relations...." Following Elsaesser, I locate cinema as one of the discourses (or a certain combination of several discourses) competing or interacting with other discourses and/or combinations of discourses within the social organization; of many other aspects of social formation, like power, pleasure, knowledge, sexuality, representation, etc." From a theoretical standpoint, Raju studies Bangladesh films and their reception as being noticeably different from the films and viewing practices of the West. And this is a pragmatic approach. Otherwise, it would be like comparing apples and oranges. Or, to take the author's classification of approaches to national cinemas --- colonial political-nationalist and neocolonial cultural-nationalist --- the division between the First and Third Worlds is brought to focus. From a number of perspectives, such a division exists, including in cinema.

Raju subscribes to the revisionist-industrial historiography method, as initiated by Bordwell, Balio, and Gomery, in conducting his study, rather than a linear-teleological or a revisionist-industrial history. Having stated his preference, he proceeds to revise, taking off from the acceptance by many persons of *Mukh o Mukhosh* (The Face and the Mask, 1956) as the beginning of Bangladesh cinema. He questions this assertion, although he acknowledges that *Asiya* (1960) was the first film produced from FDC. The author believes that the early films of the East Pakistan film industry "were committed to visualizing a rural, idyllic East Bengal contributing towards a cultural modernity focused on the Bengal delta region." He will allow that identifying *The Face and the Mask* as the pioneering effort of Bangladesh national cinema fulfils the desire for the construction of nation-state modernity in contemporary Bangladesh, but is unwilling to accept it as the first film of this nation-space.

Instead, the author pinpoints three alternative

approaches to the beginnings of Bangladesh cinema history. One is from the standpoint of film production. That would take us back to the silent one-reel films produced by Hiralal Sen of Manikganj district between the years 1898 and 1900. Historians believe that his *Dancing Scenes from 'The Flower of Persia'*, shot in Kolkata in 1898, is the earliest example of a film shot not only by a Bengali, but by an Indian. An attempt at improved filmmaking by the Nawab family of Dhaka resulted in the silent feature *The Last Kiss*, directed by Ambuj Gupta in 1929, and was exhibited in the Mukul Theater in Dhaka in 1931. The second approach would consider the beginnings from the film-exhibition standpoint. That would make the Crown Theater in Dhaka, which first showed films (the author does not make clear if they were produced or distributed by the company) by the Bredford Cinematographic Company on April 17, 1898, the progenitor of Bangladesh cinema. From another perspective, it could be Picture House in Dhaka, which was the very first cinema theatre in East Bengal. The third approach would be from the standpoint of cinema as social institutions. From this perspective, Raju considers *Roopban*, released in November 1965, as the pioneer because, first, it supposedly saved the Dhaka-based Bengali film industry from extinction, and, second, because its widespread reception among the villagers of the 1960s East Pakistan may be seen "as cinema's earliest negotiation with active social and cultural practices of this area." He posits that the intertextuality and narrative style of the film made it very acceptable to the rural audiences.

The author also draws attention to the fact that a Bengali Muslim directed a film in the Calcutta film industry during the British raj. Obaidul Huq from East Bengal, however, had to adopt a Hindu pseudonym, Himadri Chowdhury (the reason is a combination of factors), in order to get his film *Dukhey Jader Jiban Gora* (1946) released in the movie theatres in that city. And *Asiya* is considered to be the first "art" film to be directed by a Bengali Muslim in Bangladesh. Furthermore, in Raju's estimation, in the context of Bangladesh, this attempt "can be seen as a step towards developing a cultural modernity through cinema as was the case with other media and cultural forms such as fine arts, drama and novels a decade earlier." The author ends his book with a discussion on "art" cinema discourse and its globalizing attempts, after having taken a critical look at the way "Bangladesh cinema transformed itself in the 1980s and 1990s to become an entertainment medium for the poorer and less-educated populations living in semi-urban areas...." He quotes the summation of this transformation of popular cinema in this period by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies: "With much higher capital requirements, it became critical to reach a mass audience. The result has been the transformation of the cinema into a vehicle of mass culture which is tawdry, cheap and vulgar. More sophisticated audiences now depend on the VCR for their visual entertainment." Those interested in the historiography of Bangladesh cinema would benefit from going through *Bangladesh Cinema and National Identity: In search of the modern*.

The reviewer is actor, educationist and former Foreign Service officer

