

Stall number 582 is different from some of its neighbouring stalls at this year's Amar Ekushey Grontho Mela. The stall is owned by an emerging publishing house, Dhaka Comics, a name that has already become somewhat popular among comic buffs around the country.

It's a small stall without any sort of fancy décor. But the real gems that it consists make it, without a doubt, one of the most impressive nooks, especially for comic lovers, to visit at the fair.

Dhaka Comics is more than a publishing house, believes Mehedi Haque, the mastermind behind the publishing house. "We have also been able to start a new wave of having our own deshi comic characters and



PHOTO COURTESY: DHAKA COMICS



IKUSHEY GRANTHEMELA

# INTO THE WORLD OF DESHI COMICS

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA



PHOTO COURTESY: DHAKA COMICS

storylines, which initiated a revolution against imported comic series. Tarikul Islam Shanto, who passed away during the Shahbag protest, was an instrumental part of setting the project. We might be the first ones to have a stall dedicated for only comic books, but before us, Shanto bhai had a stall of his publishing house Kalpodut at the Boi Mela, which offered fictional books alongside comics."

Three years are not enough to establish a loyal reader base, but Dhaka Comics has successfully achieved this feat. "We have different genres so that people can explore and find what they want," says cartoonist Asifur Rahman. "Also a distinct set of themes - action, horror, teenage comedy, and children's fantasy - have been able to attract people from different age groups."

When you visit the stall, you will find how right Asifur is. Starting from an emergent reader aged seven to eight years to a comic enthusiast studying in a university - everyone has been visiting the stall, requesting their favourite comic books written by our very own deshi comic writers.

Five books published by Dhaka Comics are exhibited at this year's Grontho Mela. The titles include: Durjoy-2, Newton er tin Shutro, Chhotokaku, Science Fiction digest and a graphical adoption of

Comics could save a spot for itself in the country's largest book fair. This is of course a great achievement on its part, as it has proved detractors, who argue that comic books cannot be considered as "real" works of literature, wrong. In fact, to avoid being categorised as a comic book, publishers often bring out comics in book format.

Muhammad Zafar Iqbal's Ruhan Ruhan.

"We try to present something new to our readers. Keeping that in mind, with an aim to encourage science education, cartoonist Nasreen Sultana Mitu is publishing her new book on Newton's laws, where she presented the laws in the form of the scientist's interactions with readers," says Asifur.

Dhaka Comics has been publishing a great range of comics since 2013. This year, for the first time, team Dhaka

"Last year, we did not get permission as we were told that Bangla Academy does not deem comics as actual books. This year, we finally could convince the authority that we too deserve some space." Keeping that hair-splitting debate aside, as I flip through my newly bought Ck Jacky series, I am more and more convinced that the publications from Dhaka Comics will surely go a long way.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## HERITAGE

Doyel Chatter — a more or less familiar and a popular place for all. However, for those who don't know, Doyel Chatter is basically situated in front of the Curzon Hall, Dhaka University, with two big symbolic magpies (our national bird). But the place is mostly famous for its outstanding markets of our indigenous artefacts.

There are more than 30 to 40 shops near the Doyel Chatter, with large collections of homespun decor artefacts. Wooden products like lampshades, plates, toys, photo frames, glasses, jewellery — and more! Earthen products like pottery, flower vases, small banks, glasses, toys, different types of pots, wall mats, along with decor items made of jute, cane, plastic and bamboo are also in plenty — carpet, artificial flowers, bags, shikas, dolls, snakes, baskets, sofa, cradle and so much more.

The history of the market is a bit antecedent. According to many shopkeepers, the market has been there for the last 30 years. Though primarily, the number of shops was less, eventually, the market has become popular for gifts and home decor. In view of this, the market is still popular to Dhakaites for its good quality products with a variety of designs.

"I have been here for the last 25 years", says Muhammad Shahidullah, a 62-year-old shopkeeper. "My products are basically wooden, jute and bamboo made", he adds. He usually brings his products at wholesale rate from Jessore, Bogra and Comilla.

"Usually, I sell a large size jute carpet at 1200 takas, bamboo made baskets at 200-300 takas depending on the size, jute made dolls at 40 takas, cradle 500 takas and small toys at 20 takas", he explains. According to him, as the price is reasonable here, people usually feel comfortable to buy from him and the other shopkeepers in the area. Most of the time, many wholesalers buy these products from him and sell to the aristocrats of the city.

Rafiqul Islam (35), another shopkeeper has a big collection of pottery with approximately 60-70 items. He is actually

# A 'DESHI' MARKET

NILIMA JAHAN  
PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



looking after his father's business as his father is one of the oldest businessmen around. "We have earthen products like flower vases, wall mats, pots, small banks, jewellery and showpieces", says Islam. "We usually bring our products from Patuakhali and Shariatpur based on the direct connection with the potters, also some items are from Savar and many other areas of the country."

On a regular basis, a large number of customers crowd here for the exclusive hand made products. These decor items are mainly bought for homes and offices. Also, women come here to buy their wooden and earthen jewellery and different types of



bags made of jute, and also for household materials. As there are different toys for children, the market has turned into a place of reunions between old friends of all ages and lifestyle. But during Phalgun, Pahela Baishakh or other occasions, the businessmen earn most of their profits.

"I have bought two big flower vases today for our drawing room and a set of wooden jewellery", says 22-year-old Afroza Akter, a 3rd year student of Department of Bengali at Eden College. "I think the price is very reasonable here compared to other markets in the city and the quality is obviously good", she adds.

"Every day, when I return home from office, I usually stop here to see what's new", says 30-year-old Abdus Sobhan, a very jolly minded service holder at a private company. "If I find something that is new and attractive, I tell my wife and then come here to buy those things during off days and weekends", he explains.

The crowd at Doyel Chatter has always been a happy one, ever since the establishment of the market. The traditional handwork, designs and colours still manage to attract the attention of the Dhakaites, simply because they have a deshi touch to them!

