

MAHABHARATA VIEWED IN A NEW PERSPECTIVE

AUTHOR: SUBRATA KUMAR DAS

REVIEWED BY DR. DILIP CHAKRABORTY

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MAHABHARATA, an ancient Indian epic, literally means 'Great India' and propagates 'eternal truth' for humanity. Of all the epics of the world, the Mahabharata is the second oldest (next only to the Ramayana), and the second largest (next only to the Gilgamesh). The Mahabharata is a circle whose centre is everywhere but circumference nowhere. It was the purpose of the author Subrata Kumar Das in this book Aamar Mahabharat (My Mahabharata) to explore the outwardly unseen facets of the Indian epic, which is universally appealing and immensely popular to the Bengali literati as well.

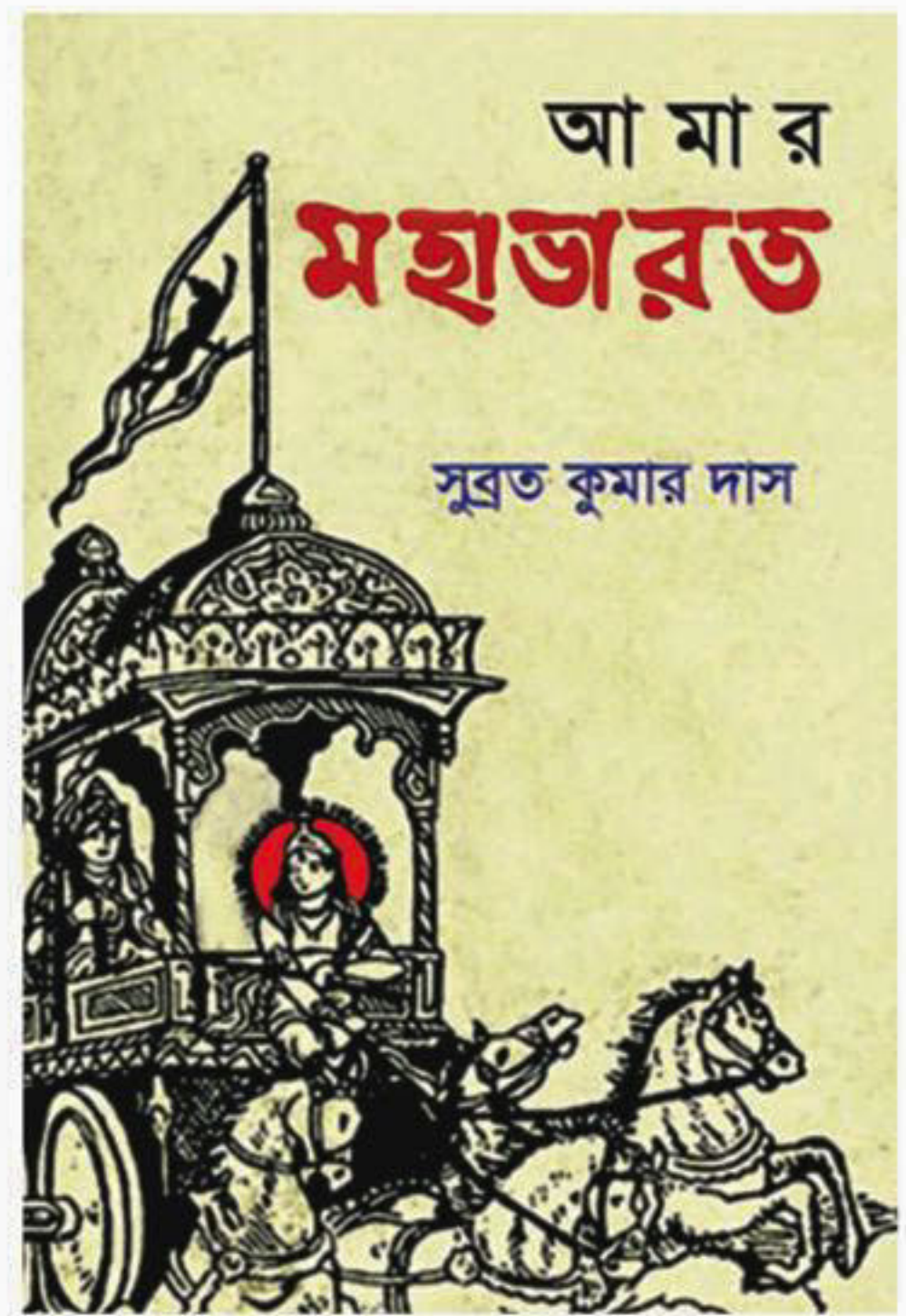
Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore considered the Mahabharata as India's history of past thousands of years. Tagore did not consider it as a book; rather it was the subtotal of the experiences of the inhabitants on earth. Tagore considered the Mahabharata as a great tragedy as it ended with the death of so many people. But its uniqueness is that when the Pandavas decisively won the battle of Kurukshetra, the real tragedy began. The protagonists realized the 'defeat in victory' as we can see darkness in light, experience silence in sound and death in life. Subrata has tried to see the five-millennia-old book as a documentation of the bygone history that represents the spirit of the whole nation.

It goes to the credit of Subrata that in his late forties he could delve deep into the labyrinthine mystery of this ancient epic and feel the pulse of the presumably greatest book of the world. In a book only of 112 pages, he has tried to discuss the whole gamut of the Mahabharata, which is several hundred times bulkier. He has succeeded in this mission with singular devotion. To appreciate his book, we should read inside the lines, between the lines and beyond the lines. Only then we will be able to have a feel of the vast canvas that is the Mahabharata. Subrata has touched the fringe of the epic and has presented before us the Mahabharata in miniature, preserving its essence.

We are bewildered by the super-human qualities of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa, the author of the Mahabharata. He was named Krishna because he was black-complexioned; he was named Dwaipayana because he was born in a Dwip (island). He was popularly known as Veda Vyasa as he divided the Vedas (earliest scriptures of the Aryans) into explicit categories. It may be worth mentioning that Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa authored not only the Mahabharata but also most of the Puranas. Considering the bulk of volumes, scholars were forced to surmise that Dwapayana Vyasa was not a single person, rather it was the collective name of many writers writing for centuries. Subrata has rightly drawn our attention to the enormous

knowledge of Vyasa, who knew mythology, history, politics, war-strategy, apart from sociology, anthropology and many other disciplines millennia ago. For Subrata, it was surprising how even a group of writers could write such lofty pieces with appreciable coherence.

The Mahabharata is a gold mine. Subrata has endeavored to penetrate its layers to show its contents. The light emanating from this gold mine simply dazzled our eyes and baffled our senses. It is easier to say what is not in the Mahabharata than to say what is in it. The Mahabharata is the epitome of human experiences manifest in different taboos, totems, and customs. The Mahabharata was relevant five millennia ago; no doubt it was relevant to the times of Gautama Buddha and Jesus Christ as it is relevant today, in all the ramifications of the



global family of the Homo sapiens called 'man'.

Subrata has thrown penetrating insights into the narratological acumen of Vyasa. Mythical references claim that originally Vyasa composed a Mahabharata of six million shlokas (verses). Of them, three million were preserved in the heaven (Devaloka), 15 hundred thousand reserved for the ancestors (Pitrioka), 14 hundred thousand for the demigods (Gandhorbaloka) and only one hundred thousand were publicized in the world (Noroloka). We know that the Mahabharata developed from the 8,800 shlokas of 'Joy's' 'Bharata' chapter which ran into 24,000 shlokas. And the one hundred thousand shlokas known as the Mahabharata were narrated by Ugrashroba Souti. The original listeners of Souti's story

were the Sounak Rishis (sages) and others. Such an epic of universal dimensions would not suffice to be narrated by one person, however super-intelligent and extra-meritorious he or she might be. So, Vyasa engaged different narrators to convey the episodes in the Mahabharata. It speaks of the pragmatic sagacity of Vyasa. In the book Aamar Mahabharat Subrata has analyzed the narratology from a literary point of view.

Subrata has hinted at a very significant coincidence about the numerical number 18 (eighteen). It may be noted that the Mahabharata has 18 chapters (Parvas); the Kurukshetra War continued for 18 days; there were 18 Akshouhini soldiers – 11 in the Kaurava side, and 7 in the Pandava side. Furthermore, there are 18 chapters in the Gita, which is told in the Mahabharata also. And thus how this number took a special value in the ancient India has been evaluated by Subrata. At some stage of history this number 18 earned spiritual and religious overtones, as numbers did in many scriptures of other religions. Even today there are many temples where devotees have to ascend 18 stairs to have a glimpse of the Lord.

Subrata has again enlightened us when he elaborately describes Vyasa's war strategy. In his small but worthy book, Subrata has referred that what one Akshouhini is. We know that three million people took part in the great war and all but seven died. Such a huge 'dance of death' could not have happened in a small arena. Here lies the pragmatic wisdom of Vyasa that he spread the area of battle over seventy three square miles. Also mind blowing is the hierarchy of the soldiers. There were nine cadres among soldiers very much like the present day army ranks of Lieutenant, Captain, Major, Lt. Colonel, Colonel, Brigadier, Major General, Lt. General, and General, though in different names. No doubt, Subrata deserves thanks for making such a comparison between the old and the present systems.

I fully agree with Subrata that throughout the history of mankind there is no such multi-dimensional character like Krishna – the profound scholar, clever diplomat, wise counselor and superb war-strategist. Krishna is the central figure and the dynamic force behind the Mahabharata. All events in the epic revolve around him. So, our author has written a chapter on him.

I feel happy to see the book, published in Dhaka, available to buy on Amazon that Bengalis across the globe can reach it. I wish, some organization could come forth to encourage the writer to render the book into English.

The reviewer is formerly Principal of Women's College, Nawalgarh, India; and now lives in Brampton, Ontario, Canada.

Bangabandhu rejuvenated for children

AUTHOR: HUSNE ARA SHAHED

REVIEWED BY TASRIFA RUPA

Publisher: Nikhil Prokashon

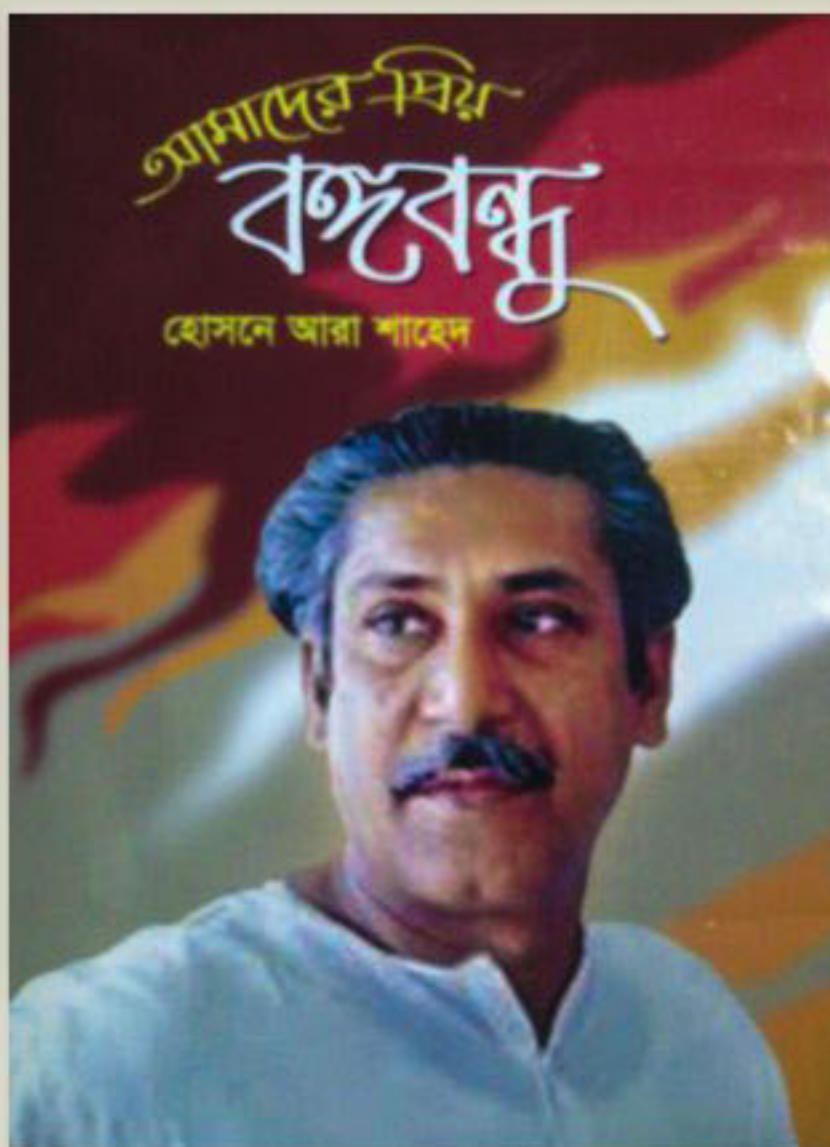
AMID a plethora of books on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Husne Ara Shahed's "Amader Priyo Bangabandhu" comes as a praiseworthy venture. She has written this as a children's book which makes it unique. Kids will find it smoothly readable because of the author's percipient organization regarding all the facts. This book wonderfully covers the entire life and events of Bangabandhu in a lucid, lively language.

The author deserves admiration for the technique she applies in the book. As it is mainly for children, it was the author's duty to make it comprehensible to them. So, the most important thing of the book is its diction, and she has done it in a very well-planned fashion. Avoiding austere vocabulary, she has used catchy sentences for children to grab easily. This will surely attract even the parents of the little readers.

The author's use of an extremely attractive story-telling method will generate a ratifying feel in readers' minds. Children are curious for listening to stories, not prose, and here they will get a wonderful story. There are also rhetoric questions which will prepare infants as self-conscious persons. They will start to question about rights and wrongs, about rationality and irrationality and moreover, about the world.

Another salient feature is the sufficient explanation of the complicated terms. For an instance, in page thirty, the author uses a difficult term 'sedition' that is very possibly unknown to a child. She then explains how it implies to do something against nation. Thus, the entire book proves her craft in creating a dainty work from technical perspective.

In this book, it is clear that Bangabandhu was instinctively extremely honest and kind toward the suffering mass. He was named as "Khoka" by the fellows and from the very beginning he was the role model and leader of the local boys. He was sympathetic and had a very clear, keen and thirsty soul which could easily win the heart of millions. Another momentous issue was the representation of Saira Begum, the mother of Bangabandhu, and his wife Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib. The writer has depicted how Saira Banu was always caring to her children and how Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib had played the most crucial role in February 1969. Pakistan government wanted to release Mujib on parole. But it was Fazilatunnesa Mujib who was adamant to accept the overture. Thus the role of



women power in Bangabandhu's life was immense, something many biographers haven't highlighted much.

Bangabandhu's meeting with Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Haq was a turning point in his brave journey. Hamid Sir has turned out to be a key character in constructing his socio-political knowledge and a kind of left-leaning political view in him. Along with Bangabandhu, the book begins with the British period in 1920 and covers the great division of India in 1947, 1952's Language

Movement, 1962's movement for education, 1969's mass movement, election of 70's and Liberation War of 1971, leading to August 1975. Therefore, the book gives an approximate political overview of 55 years. By reading such kind of books, our next generation will definitely get a crystal-clear knowledge about our own history. They will have a clear concept about their own identity and will be able to relate themselves with the spirit of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The book portrays the Liberation War vividly as well as the Mujibnagar Government and Bangabandhu's numerous outstanding activities as the president of independent Bangladesh.

The bibliography at the end ensures that the provided information have solid footings. From every standpoint, the book is inimitably successful in portraying the father of our nation. I would like to congratulate Husne Ara Shahed for undertaking such a mammoth, difficult task particularly as a woman when women's participation in our writing arena is not still deemed equal. I wish a wide readership of this book.

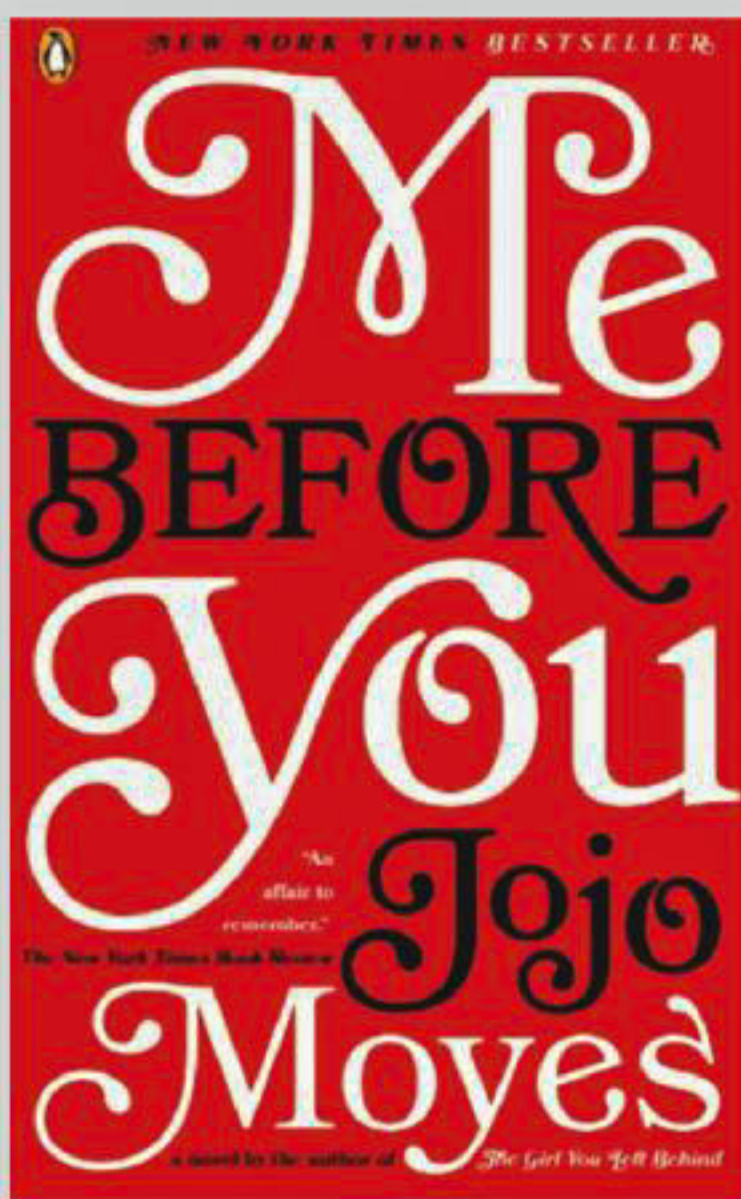
The reviewer is an M.A. in English, University of Dhaka and an occasional contributor to this page.

NEW BOOKS

ME BEFORE YOU

BY JOJO MOYES

A woman who has barely been beyond her English village finds herself while caring for a wealthy, embittered quadriplegic.

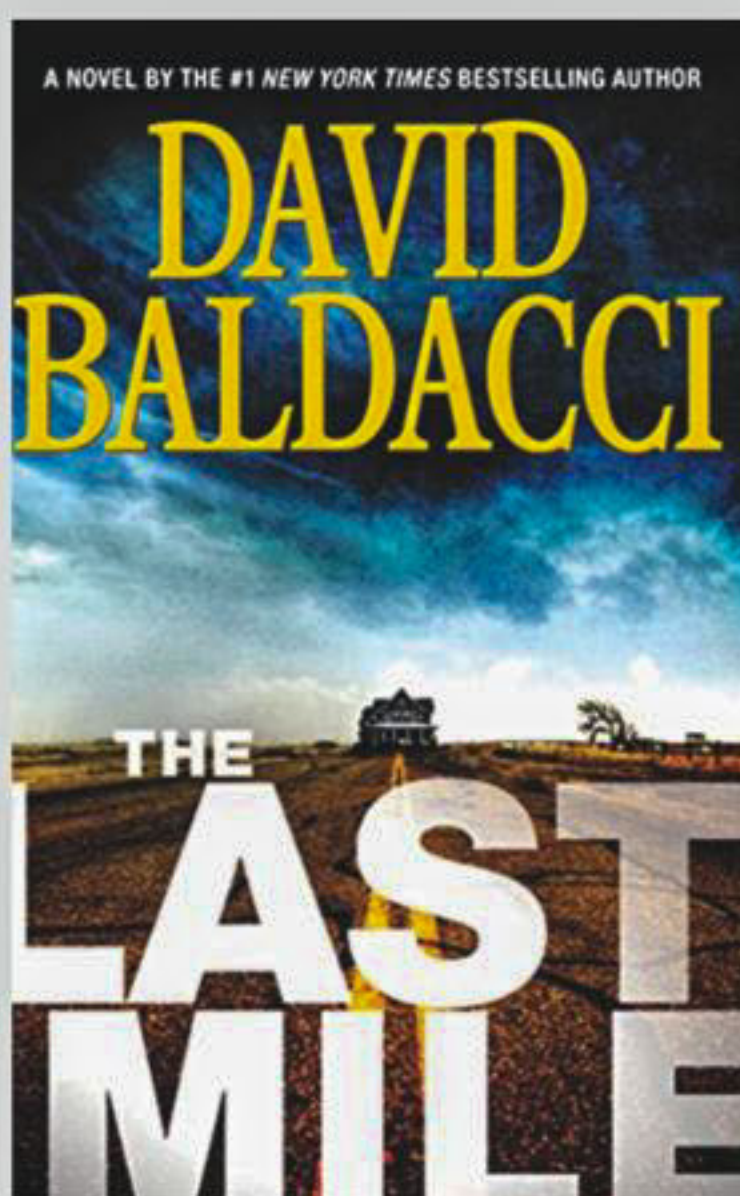
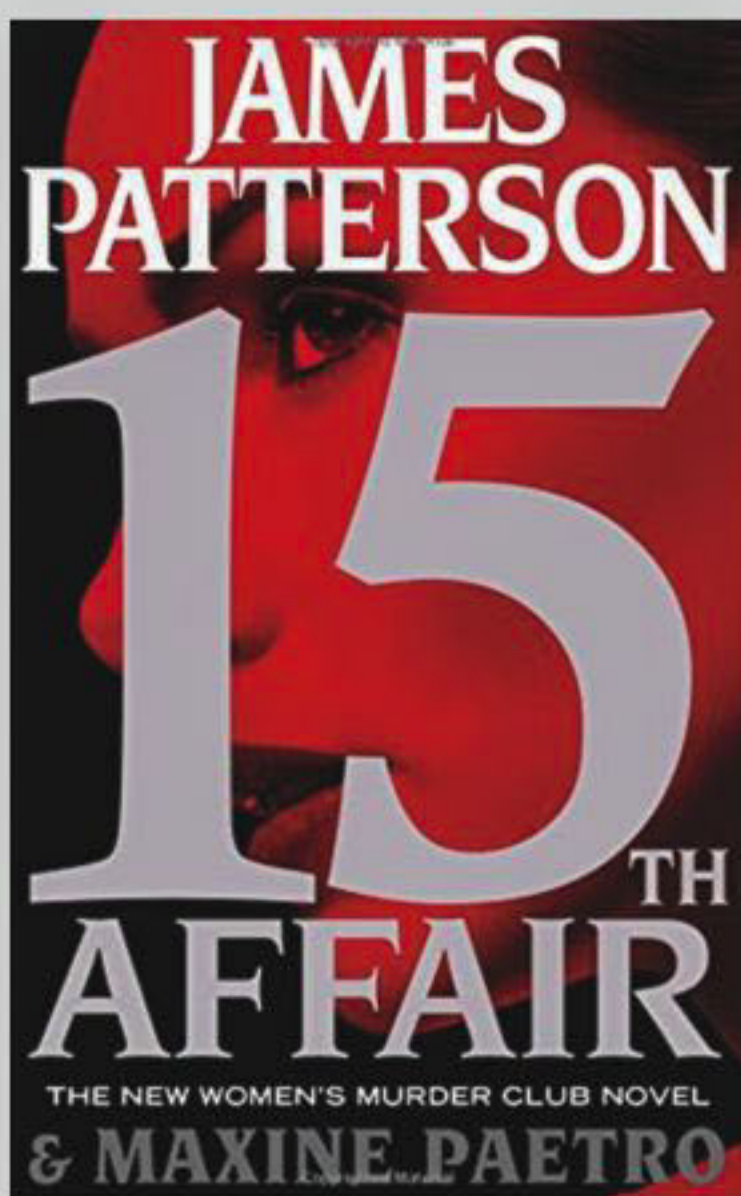


THE NEST BY CYNTHIA D'APRIX SWEENEY

Siblings in a dysfunctional New York family must grapple with a reduced inheritance..

15TH AFFAIR BY JAMES PATTERSON AND MAXINE PAETRO

When a brutal murder threatens the domestic happiness of the San Francisco police detective Lindsay Boxer, she turns for help to the Women's Murder Club.



THE LAST MILE BY DAVID BALDACCI

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CLASSICS CORNER

Mankind's power to overcome adversities

AUTHOR: JULES VERNE

REVIEWED BY SAYEED HOSSAIN BHUIYAN SHUVRO

THE novel "Mysterious Island" by Jules Verne is an adventure fiction which mixes mystery with mankind's power to overcome hostile circumstances. It was first published in 1874 written in a classical narrative form. This is really exhilarating for me to review this book after 150 years of its publication. Certainly, its writer Jules Verne has been successful that people still remember his works with honour which are still alive and unquestionably entertaining.

"Mysterious Island" indeed explores and spreads the pleasure of imagination in the minds of readers. If readers want to have a ride on a balloon over the oceans and fall on an unknown, remote island thousands of miles away from home, they will find this book thrilling enough!

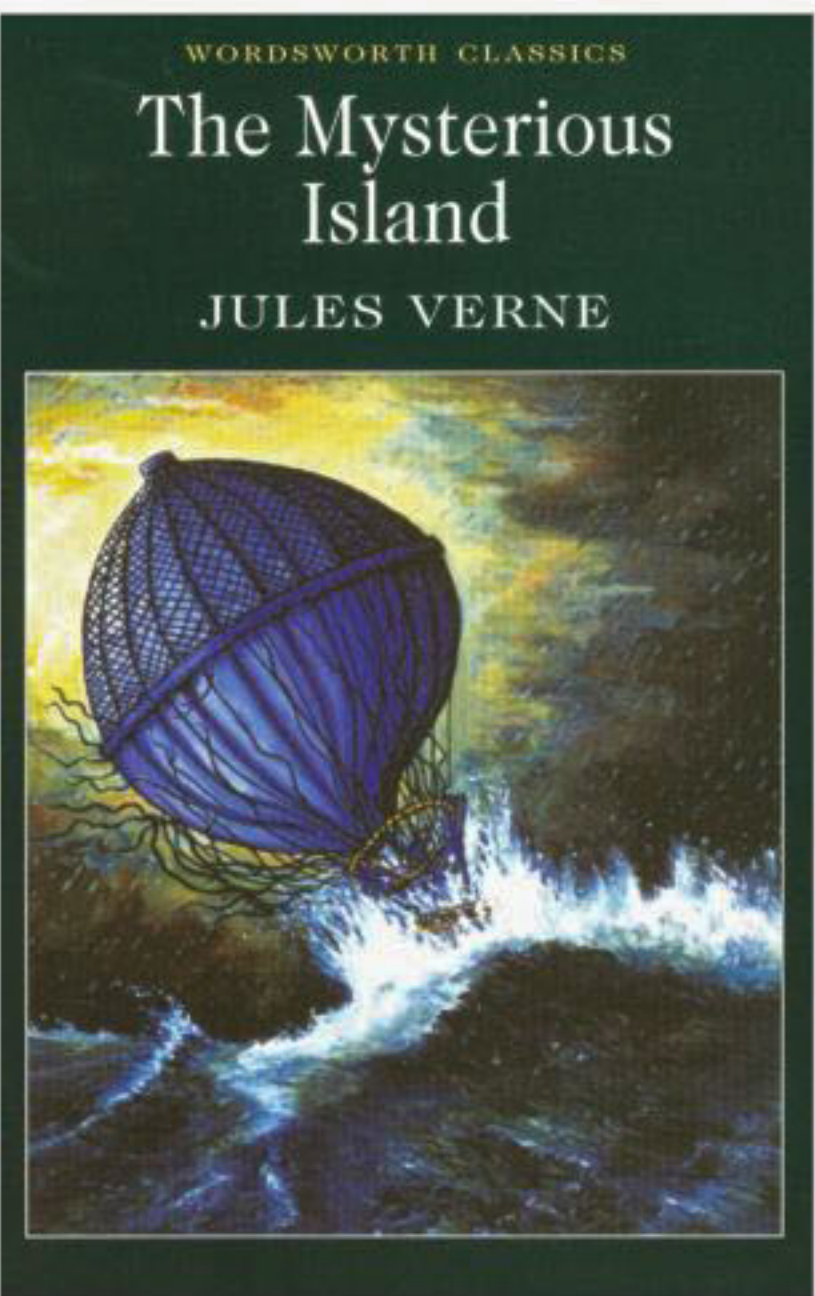
During the American Civil War two men Engineer Cyrus Harding and journalist Gideon Spilett imprisoned for working against slavery escape from Richmond by an air balloon with three helpful followers and a dog and crash down on an undiscovered island in south pacific. They name the island after President Lincoln. As the novel progresses they explore and develop their needs with the great intelligence of Captain Harding and with the help of an unforeseen force. They find this unforeseen force following them since their arrival and save them from troubles. This phenomenon remains a mystery to them until Captain Nemo dramatically appears with his submarine Nautilus towards the end.

This book gives the readers a glimpse of development of human civilization and struggle of mankind with adverse nature. The logical scientific

explanation behind every creation of Captain Harding from lighting fire to making dynamites is surprising and sounds close to reality which includes educative elements in the story. The scenario of nature and natural disasters Jules Verne portrays through his narrative quality is an evidence of his masterful storytelling expertise. The islanders fight with Orangutans, pirates, wild animals and these things make the novel more adventurous and interesting.

From saving Captain Harding to providing quinine for Herbert, the islanders get the help of an unforeseen force which keeps the readers guessing till the end. The ending part reveals all mysteries and islanders meet the mysterious old man Captain Nemo under the sea in Nautilus. Captain Nemo had earlier appeared in Verne's 20000 Leagues Under the Sea. At the end of the book, the islanders are rescued by another ship.

The determination inside Captain Harding's mind reflects the potentiality of human beings that they can do anything they dream of if they can explore their hidden power. Moreover, this novel bears a theme of colonialism through the occupation of the island by Captain Harding and his companions. Captain Nemo is the prime attraction of the book who spends an isolated life in his submarine equipped with sophisticated features. The wonderful blend of technology, primitiveness and mankind's unique power is another striking angle of this novel.



The reviewer is a student at the Department of Media and Communication, Independent University, Bangladesh.

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