

“WHAT I LOVED READING IN 2016”

The Daily Star asked eminent writers, intellectuals, activists and cultural figures of the country what books they read and loved in 2016. The answers we received varied across writers from all genres and countries. Here's what they had to say.



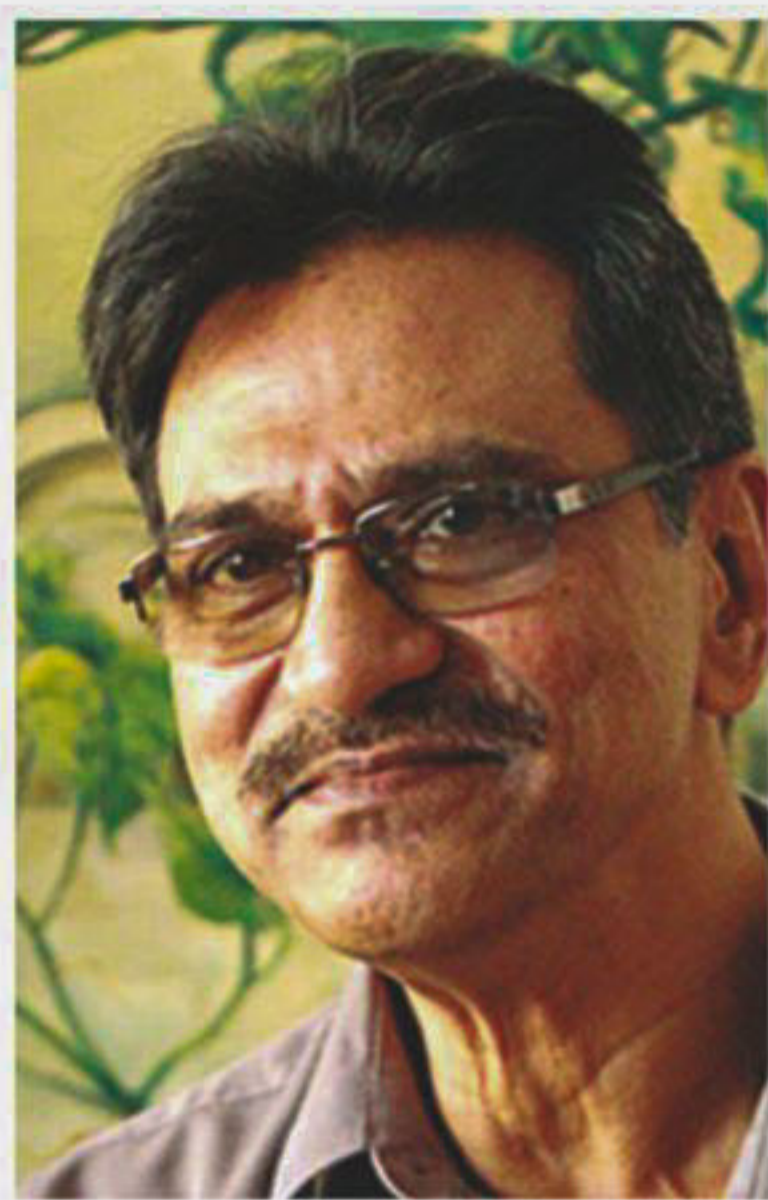
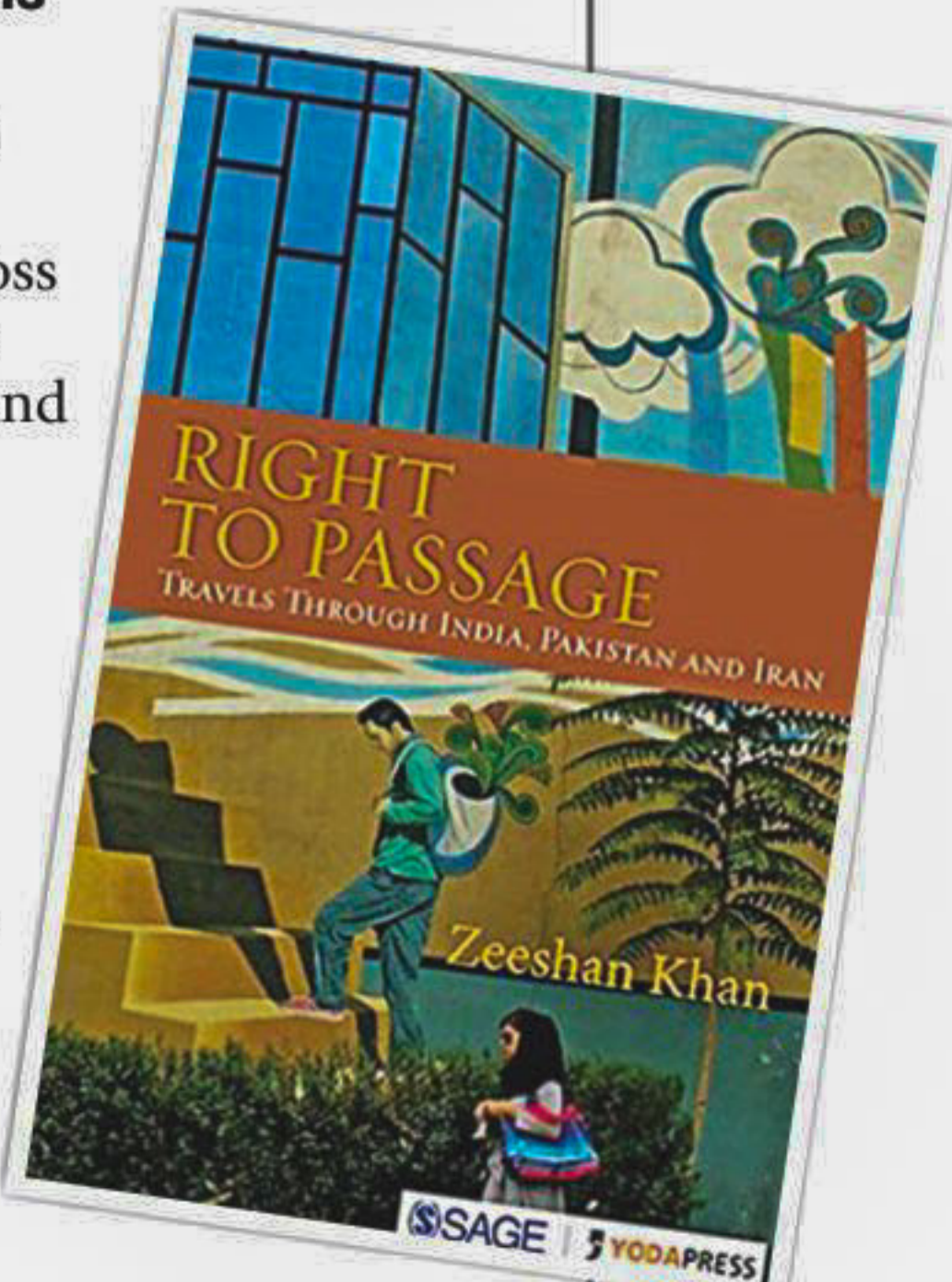
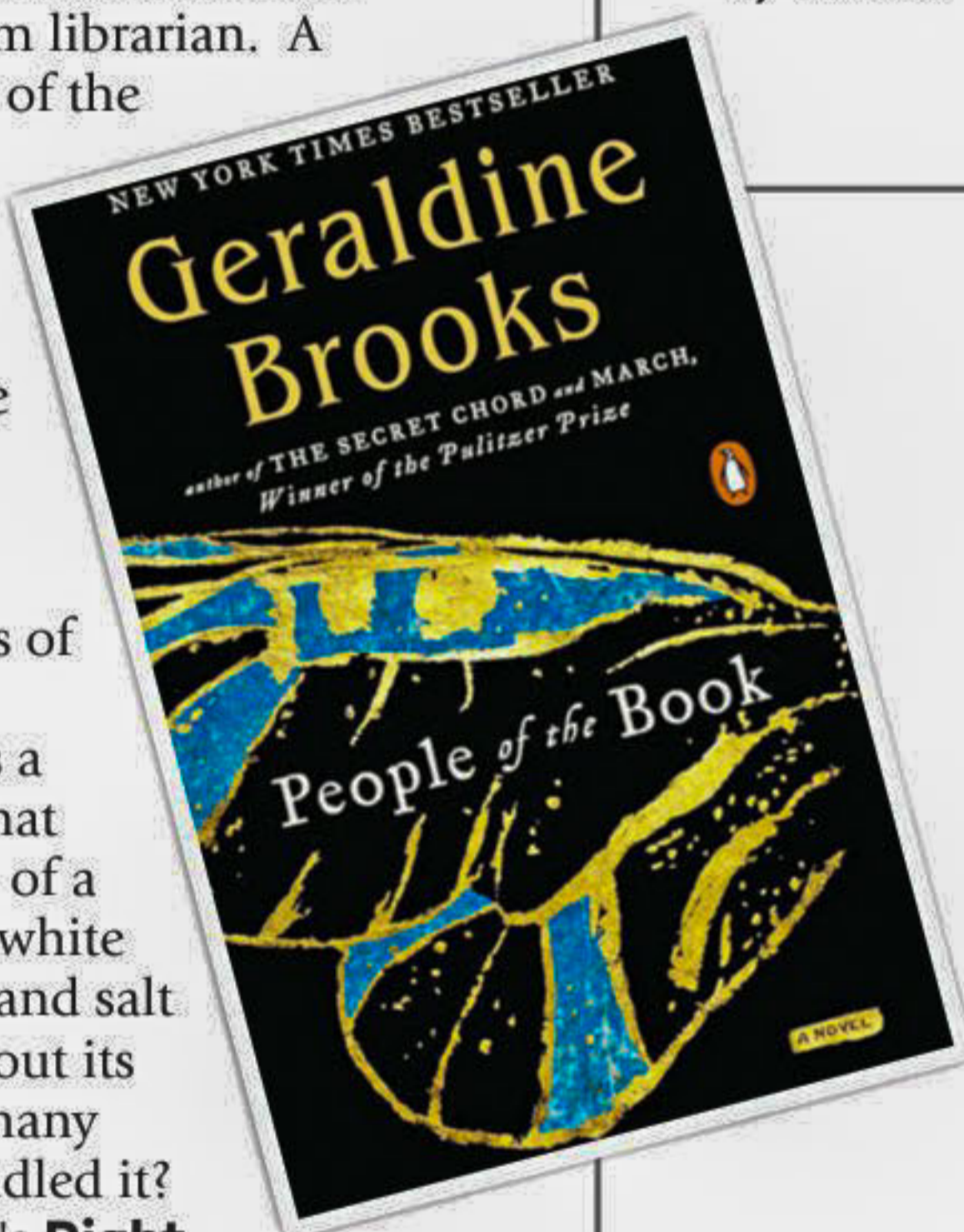
NIAZ ZAMAN

Author, Editor & Supernumerary Professor at the University of Dhaka

Geraldine Brooks' **People of the Book** (Penguin) was inspired by the Sarajevo Haggadah, a Hebrew codex, which was saved from the Nazis by a Muslim librarian. A fictional account of the many people – Jewish, Christian, and Muslim – involved with the codex, it is a reflection on the political and religious conflicts of the past and the present as well as a mystery story. What do the fragments of a butterfly wing, a white hair, wine stains and salt crystals reveal about its history and the many persons who handled it?

Zeeshan Khan's **Right to Passage: Travels through India, Pakistan and Iran**

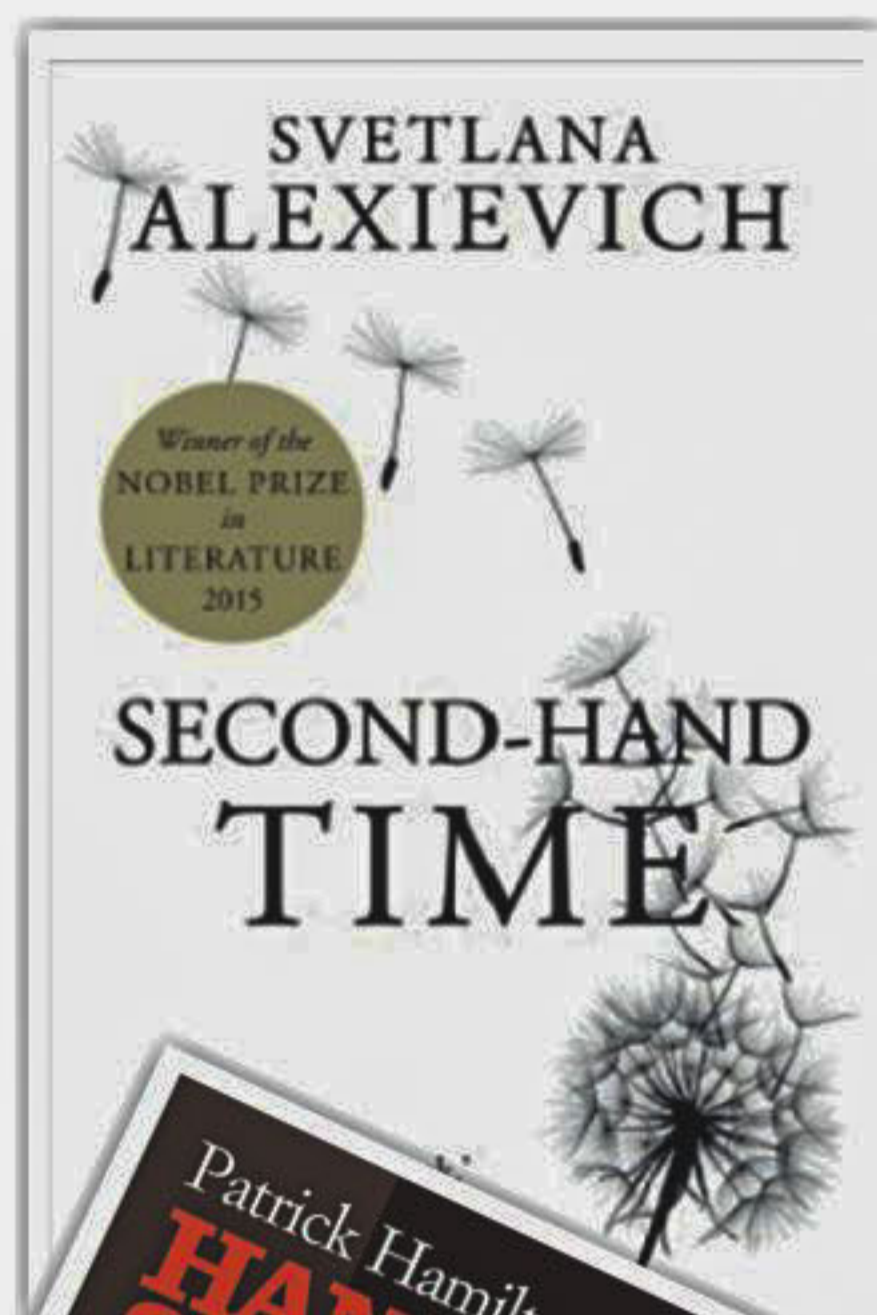
(Sage) is about the writer's journey across the subcontinent to Iran. Merging past and present, historical narrative and vivid description, philosophical musings and more than a touch of humour, the book wafted me to many places that had only been names. It reminded me of the rich cultural, culinary, linguistic and religious heritage that we share but also that, while one can watch the ceremonies at Attari, one has to go back to Delhi to take a plane to Lahore.



KAISER HAQ

Poet, translator, essayist, critic and academic

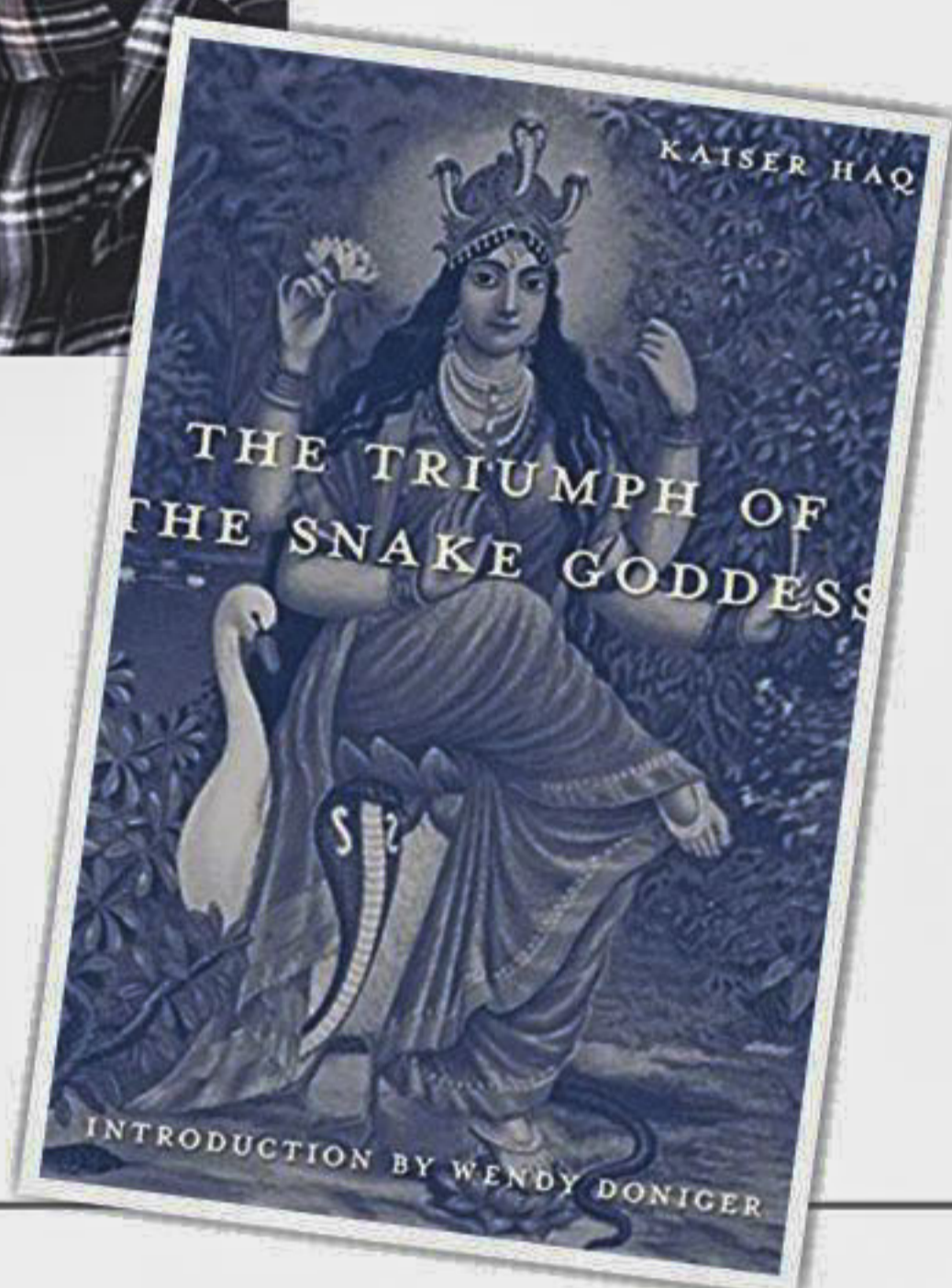
Second-Hand Time by Svetlana Alexievich
Hangover Square by Patrick



FAKRUL ALAM

Academic, writer, and translator

The Triumph of the Snake Goddess by Kaiser Haq



REBECCA HAQUE

Professor of English, University of Dhaka

Of the many books of several genres – fiction, non-fiction, criticism, biography and memoir – that I read during the past twelve months, only one book, a novel, was published in 2016. Hilary Standing's **The Inheritance Powder** (UPL: Dhaka, 2016) was formally launched at the Dhaka Literary Festival in November 2016. I was very impressed by this first work of fiction by an academic, who has a doctorate in social anthropology and has worked extensively in Bangladesh, Nepal, and India in the development sector.

Hilary Standing writes about the slow arsenic poisoning of millions of rural people of Bangladesh, and what impressed me especially was the extent to which the writer has identified with ordinary Bangali men and women. The subtle, sensitive sketches of the major and minor characters reveal the author's keen insight into human psychology and individual motivation. The description of Dhaka, with its marked rich-poor divide



and its obvious hypocrisy, is so honest and graphic that to me it felt like a blow to the head telling me to wake up and be more proactive in improving the social condition of the marginalised.

Marina Warner's **Signs & Wonders: Essays On Literature & Culture** (Vintage: 2004, pbk., pp. 516) is a book I bought in 2015 and have been dipping into occasionally, savouring the rich variety of critical essays on subjects

ranging from myths and fairytales to Shakespeare, from words and symbols to magic, faiths, and marvels. Some essays on specific works or historical periods, genres or cultural trends are long and insightful, while pithy journalistic comments on contemporary writers are highly original and both entertaining and edifying. Warner is a critic, historian and a novelist, and this anthology is one book that has influenced me in my capacity as both academic and creative writer. I discovered Marina Warner a few years ago in the course of

my research on Culture and the Female Imagination, and she has become a source of inspiration in as strong a manner as Camille Paglia had been for me throughout the 90s.

