

A COLLECTION OF POEMS AND STORIES YOU CANNOT READ ANYMORE

SHUKHER LAGIYA
GYANDAS

PALAMAU
SANJIB CHANDRA CHATTOPADHYAY

AMAR SHONTAN
BHARATCHANDRA

SHADHINOTA
RANGALAL BANDYOPADHYAY

SHAKOTA DULCHE
SUNIL GANGOPADHYAY

INFOGRAPHIC: SHAHRUKH IKHTEAR

LEARNING BIGOTRY FROM THE TEXTBOOK

AZMIN AZRAN

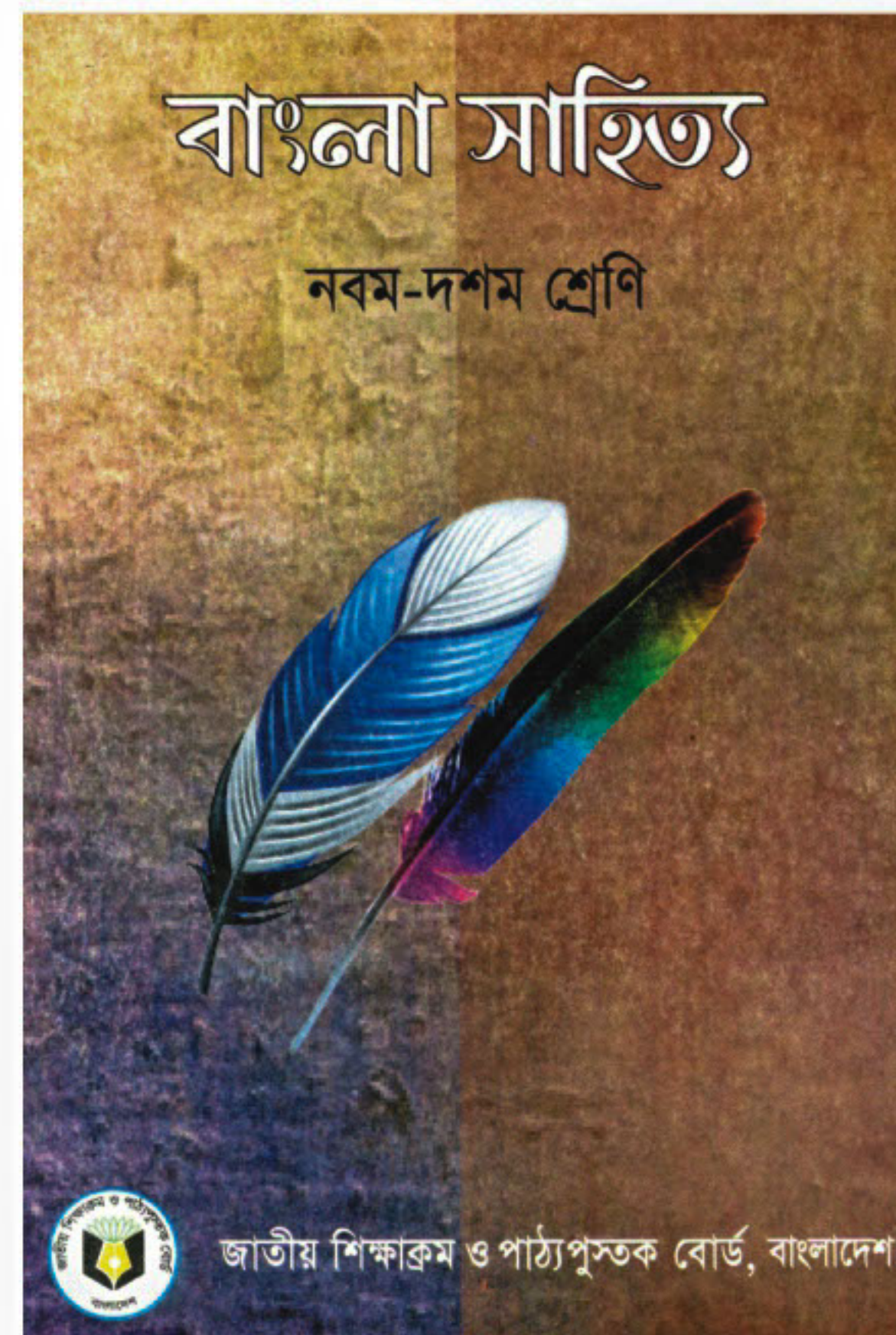
News had emerged in local media over the last couple of weeks about the changes in the new NCTB textbooks in circulation at the beginning of 2017 academic year. These changes, with unmistakable similarity to the demands made by a conservative interest group last year, have irked educationists all over the country. But a New York Times report making rounds on the internet points out exactly what sentiments went into the demands and execution of these changes. It paints a bleak picture for people like me who like to tell people Bangladesh isn't going one step forwards and two back, like many believe.

Among the changes that have everyone sitting up and taking notice is the exclusion of chapters from secondary level Bangla literature books depicting, according to the conservative interest group, "atheistic values". A chapter that was removed was a travelogue written by Sanjib Chandra Chattopadhyay, brother of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, about his travel to a small town called Palamaou in the Indian state of Bihar. It's from a book that's one of the first ever

travelogues written in Bangla and yet, its literary value was lost on the concerned authorities over the writer's name.

Another chapter removed is an abridged excerpt from Bharatchandra's *mongolkabya* "Onnodamongol", called "Amar Shontan". The genre, *mongolkabya*, is a major contributor to the history of Bangla literature and inclusion of one of the famous works of that period in the secondary curriculum is vital for the understanding of our language. Even a Lalon song, preaching the need to make the most of every breath man takes, didn't make the cut. The people making the changes were either driven by outside influence, or worse, they didn't realise why these works are necessary for a secondary level anthology of Bangla literature. Either way, the only ones losing out are the students.

In Madrassa books distributed among young impressionable minds earlier this month, no conversation between a girl and a boy has been included. "Non-Muslim names" have been changed to "Muslim names", and any mention of "period" from Physical Education textbooks has also been removed. It'd be a waste of words to explain why and to



what degree these changes are daft.

The NY Times report further delves into demands made by the above mentioned conservative interest group that they want to see the removal of lessons teaching children how to draw living things. They

want to see pictures of females doing exercise removed because "there are things women can't do". The ultimate goal is the abolishment of co-education of boys and girls past class 5 because that apparently encourages premarital sex. Such proposals wouldn't usually be taken seriously but seeing what has already been achieved, I can't help but wonder how far this can go, and shudder at the thought.

It's shocking that notions so bigoted could ever be presented in an office of the state, a state which was founded on the grounds of equality.

I am only a 19 year old who hasn't finished college yet, and there are definitely people who know better. But I can say with full confidence that the alienation of minority groups in our country, and encouraging segregation of boys and girls instead of supporting healthy social interaction and religious harmony will only take us, as a country, back to a place we've fought to escape over and over again.

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