



Hello, kishor bondhura

Tin Goyenda's influence on the Bangladeshi reader

THE KOWALSKI ANALYSIS



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As a child, my one and only after-school activity was reading. I was extremely unathletic and I only got to watch TV for a limited amount of time before the adults in the house took over with their news and Ekta Kapoor shows. None of this was a problem for me, because there were always enough books.

My mother would sometimes just leave books around the house for me to find. One summer afternoon in 2005, I returned home and found a small paperback. It said "*Tin Goyenda*, Volume 1/1," and it had a teaser at the back, the all too familiar "Hello, kishor bondhura." At the time, I didn't know who had left it there or who it belonged to. I didn't know the writer, Rakib Hasan. I just found the book, and I devoured the three mysteries in that volume. I had never read anything like it before, and when I finished it the next day, I called my mom at work, and asked her to bring me more of these.

She happily obliged, and for the next two years, reading new volumes of *Tin Goyenda* was the only source of happiness in my life. Countless other Bangladeshi children have similar stories. Kids who grew up in small towns didn't have access to bookstores or libraries that carried a large variety of books, but Sheba Prokashoni publications were always there.

Why exactly was *Tin Goyenda* so

special? The stories weren't original, the books were newsprint paperbacks, and if you judge the literary value, there were better books available.

Sheba Prokashoni started out with an aim to make stories more available and affordable for the average Bangladeshi reader. In the eighties, an original *Three Investigators* book probably cost thrice as much as an entire volume of *Tin Goyenda*. So despite the plagiarism, the writer improvised the language and characters to make them more relatable to Bangladeshi readers: Musa Aman used to say "khaise" whenever something exciting happened, but Pete Crenshaw from *Three Investigators* said "Gleeps!"

I highly doubt that any Bangladeshi child was familiar with the expression "gleeps." *Tin Goyenda* was easy to read and widely available—it only cost around 47 taka for three whole books and no literary masterpiece could ever match that price or quantity.

As I grew up and my purchasing power increased, I moved on from *Tin Goyenda* and read many genres of books in Bangla and English. I haven't touched a *Tin Goyenda* volume in many years, but I keep them safe in a bookshelf, organised chronologically. My favourite volumes are battered and torn.

Most of us haven't re-read *Tin Goyenda* in our adult life, but the series helped me

grow a reading habit. I might not read about Kishor pinching his lower lip and Musa being scared of ghosts anymore, but I'm always reading something. Books like *Tin Goyenda*, despite being unoriginal, teach children the joy of reading, and the habit stays with them for the rest of their lives. They grow up, read other books, and buy *Tin Goyenda* t-shirts and merchandise because it makes them nostalgic. This one series, along with other creations from Sheba, are quintessential to Bangladeshi popular culture.

Despite all the good things that came out of *Tin Goyenda*, there's something that Sheba Prokashoni continues to get wrong. Since 1985, the series' famous back page teaser uses the word "negro" to describe Musa Aman. It is possible that the writer and publishers were not very socially aware 33 years ago, but they continue to use the racial slur in the latest instalments of the series published in 2019.

Just as *Tin Goyenda* taught many children the habit of reading, it might have taught some of them the n-word. Seeing the word being thrown around in your favourite book doesn't quite give you the idea that it is, in fact, offensive.

In the last 33 years, the series' writer changed, TV channels made bad adaptations of the books, and kids who read the first *Tin Goyenda* in 1985 now have children of their own. Just as I had come across the book in my 4th grade, some of these children may discover their parents' old stash of *Tin Goyenda* volumes. They too deserve to know the magic of these books and how it shaped their parents' childhoods.

Sheba Prokashoni revolutionised the country's publishing sector and its become a part of Bangladeshi culture. In every Boi Mela, you will see that Sheba, with its simple stall and newsprint books, attracts more customers than publishers who build fancy multi-storeyed stalls with dead writers' cut-outs inside. Sheba has a special place in readers' hearts, so it's important that they be a tad bit more responsible about the words they're putting in children's books.

The writer hopes to visit Rocky Beach someday. Reach her at aanila.tarannum27@gmail.com.

