



SADAT HOSSAIN

*Sadat Hossain studied Anthropology at Jahangirnagar University. He has authored popular novels, namely Arshinagar, Andarmahal, Manabjanam, and Nishongo Nokkhotro, and several poetry books. His short films include Bodh, The Shoes, and Projotne. Sadat was awarded the Junior Chamber International Award, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy's "Best*

SARAH ANJUM BARI

and a poem I had written. I had created my name in print. I also couldn't watch films, so I would listen to them from a distance and imagine the scenes unfolding using my imagination. That's how I started creating stories in my head.

My frustration is my inspiration, because I was discouraged to write by everyone around me—my parents, my friends, the people on my social media, everyone. I had stopped writing fiction and gotten involved with photography by the time I completed university and started working for a newspaper. A senior colleague, Mr. Azizul Rahman, encouraged me to write stories accompanying my photographs. That was my first book, titled *Golpochhobi*.

When I published my first novel *Amar Ar Kothao Jawar Nei*, my publisher told me that it had to be a small and affordable book, otherwise people wouldn't buy it because I was a new

someone who was criticised, discouraged, laughed at, and exploited as a writer by almost everyone around. Our literary scene is too quick to dismiss people who want to write, or are too prone to competitiveness and jealousy. There is a lack of constructive criticism. I think it is the responsibility of senior writers to notice and cultivate budding talents. Maybe someone isn't an excellent writer, but maybe he has potential to grow if guided properly. Of course, one can't always blame the senior writers because there are so many people entering the market every day.

**SW: Yes, and this is where book marketing comes in. Where do you think book publicity in the country stands and how can it be improved?**

**Sadat:** This is something I've been fighting for since the release of my first book. I started releasing abstracts of my texts on Facebook to attract readers; I shared countless book release notices by other emerging writers. I was heavily criticised for it then. I believe that Facebook is one of the most helpful platforms for book marketing today because it reaches such a wide audience.

At the same time, I've also been pushing publishers to advertise books on billboards, in addition to speaking in radio shows about upcoming releases. I understand that publishing, being such an unprofitable industry, can't afford such means of advertisement. But this is why we need more initiatives from the media, from the government, and from other organisations. We need to inform the public of the kind of literature being produced instead of just announcing annual events like the Boi Mela. We're going through a huge transition period—there is so much noise around us, so many entertainment avenues. How else will literature survive if we don't help keep it alive?



MARIA SALAM

*Maria Salam studied English Literature at Rajshahi University and Journalism at the International Institute for Journalism (IJJ) of INWENT, Berlin, Germany. In addition to working as a journalist since 2006, her love for literature led her to found the online literary periodical Chharpatra. She is currently in charge of the English version of Kaler Kantho newspaper.*

**SW: Neelkanthi, released at the Boi Mela this time, is your first short story anthology. How did you decide to write this book?**

**Maria:** It was all because of my parents, my brother and my colleagues at *Kaler Kantho*, who encouraged me to write something for myself after 12 years of writing as a journalist.

# EKUSHEY BOI MELA

## In conversation with 4 young authors

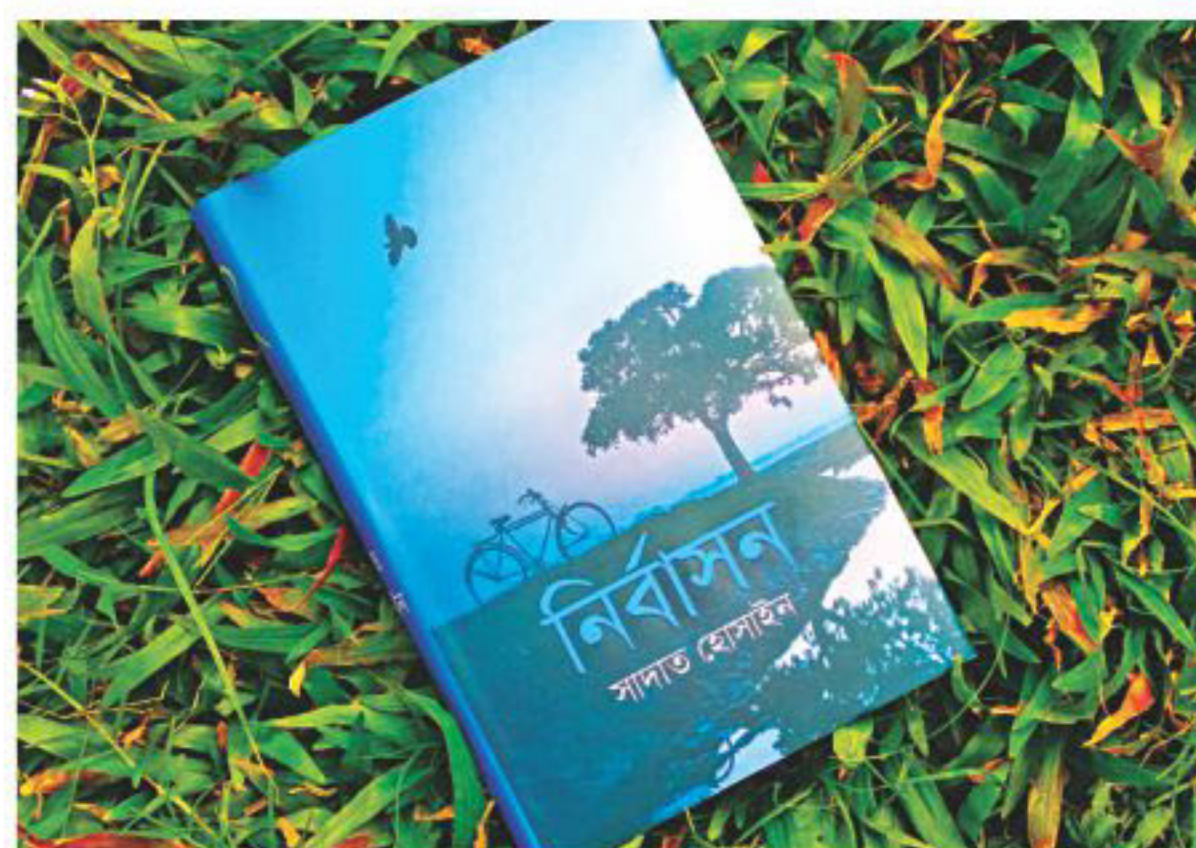
*Star Weekend speaks to four young writers about launching their books at this year's Ekushey Boi Mela, about what influences their work, and their thoughts on the state of the literary scene in Bangladesh. A consensus emerged on the inspiration they receive from their childhood and the world around them and on the need for better editing, book marketing, and royalty payments in the industry.*

*Short Film Award", and SBSP-RP Foundation Literature Award.*

**SW: How did you enter the world of writing? What influences you to write?**

**Sadat:** I was obsessed with reading from a young age. We lived in the village and couldn't afford books. So, I used to steal the newspapers wrapped around the *saris* my father bought for my mother and read them. One day, I found an issue of *Kochi Kachar Ashor* and found the name of a young writer called Sadat Hossain. He too, like me, was a student of Class 4. It made me both happy and sad, because I realised I would never see my name in print like that.

We couldn't afford paper in the village—we used the same piece of paper over and over again, writing first with pencil and erasing it and then using a pen, until it tore into pieces. So, on one night, I cut out alphabets from newspapers and glued them together with starch to make a collage of my name



*Nirbasha* by Sadat Hossain  
Onnodhara Prokashon

author. But I wanted to write a long novel whose characters the readers would grow attached to. Since then I have always chosen to write big books—300 pages, 500 pages—inspired by stories and anecdotes from my childhood.

**SW: Can you tell us about *Nirbasha*, the novel you released at the Boi Mela this year? Was that also inspired by a childhood story?**

**Sadat:** Yes, it was inspired by a story my Nani told me. The novel is set in 1987, when activist Noor Hossain was killed by the police while protesting against Ershad's rule. It explores the dacoit culture in villages at the time—the way they plundered houses and sent out letters with threats of robbery. My story starts when a man receives such a threat and how his son and then his granddaughter live with that trauma. I've also tried to explore the political climate and the media unrest of the time and tried to draw parallels to the current climate of the country. Many twists and turns in the plot follow afterwards. A few years ago, I would've had to go through countless books to educate myself on such a historical background, but now, the internet has been a priceless source of information for me.

**SW: You talked about being discouraged from writing by your family and friends. Do you think the younger generation of writers in our country get enough motivation to write? How can they be better encouraged?**

**Sadat:** Motivation is integral, I say that as

Continued to page 11