

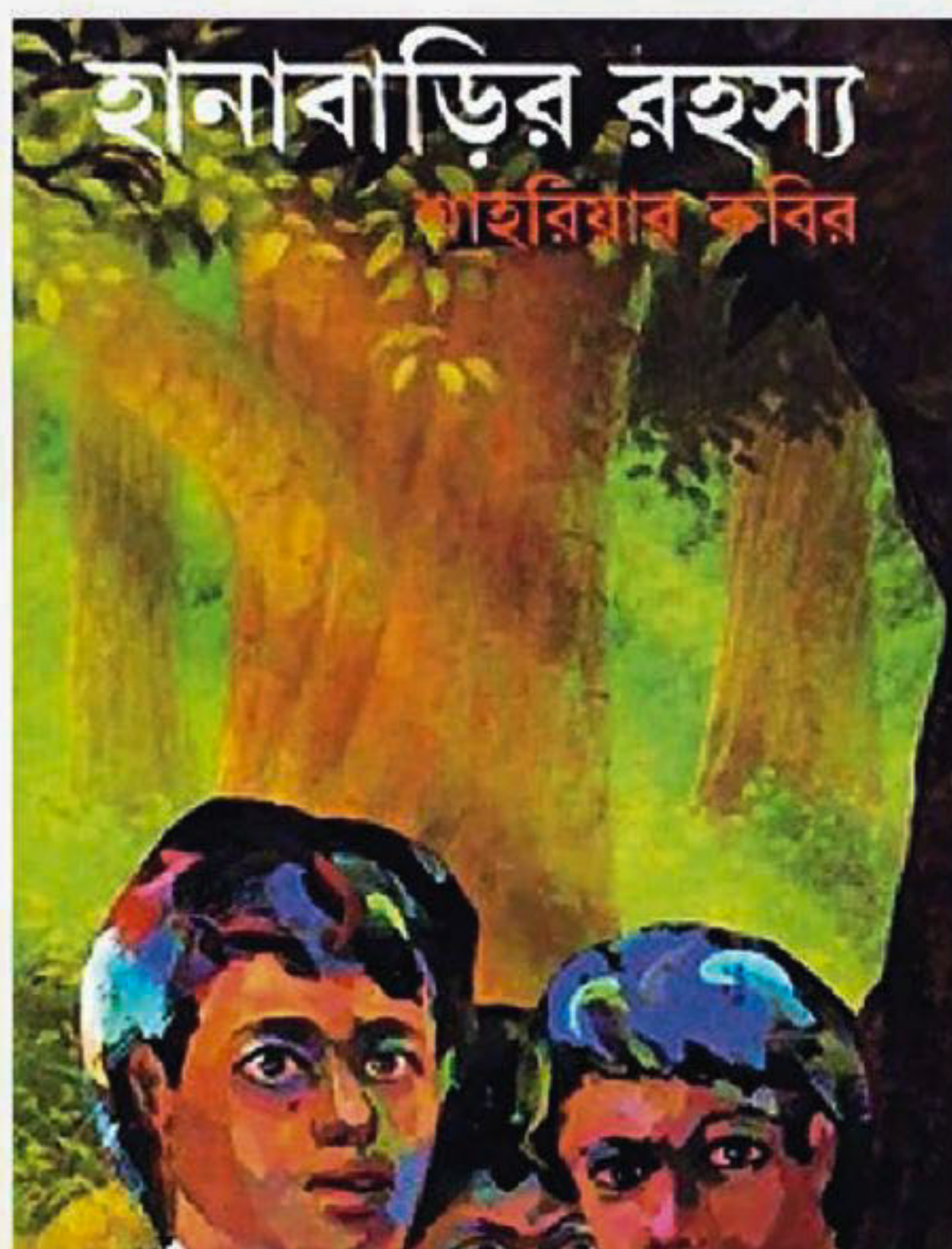
From Patharia to Lusai

Unearthing the mysteries of Shahriar Kabir

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The books we read as children have a much stronger influence on us than the ones we read as adults. When I was little, my only goal was to finish one book and get started on the next. I probably wasn't mature enough to think too deeply about the underlying themes of a book - until I read *Alor Pakhira* by Shahriar Kabir. The book shows the friendship between a Muslim and a Hindu boy, during a tumultuous time of communal riots.

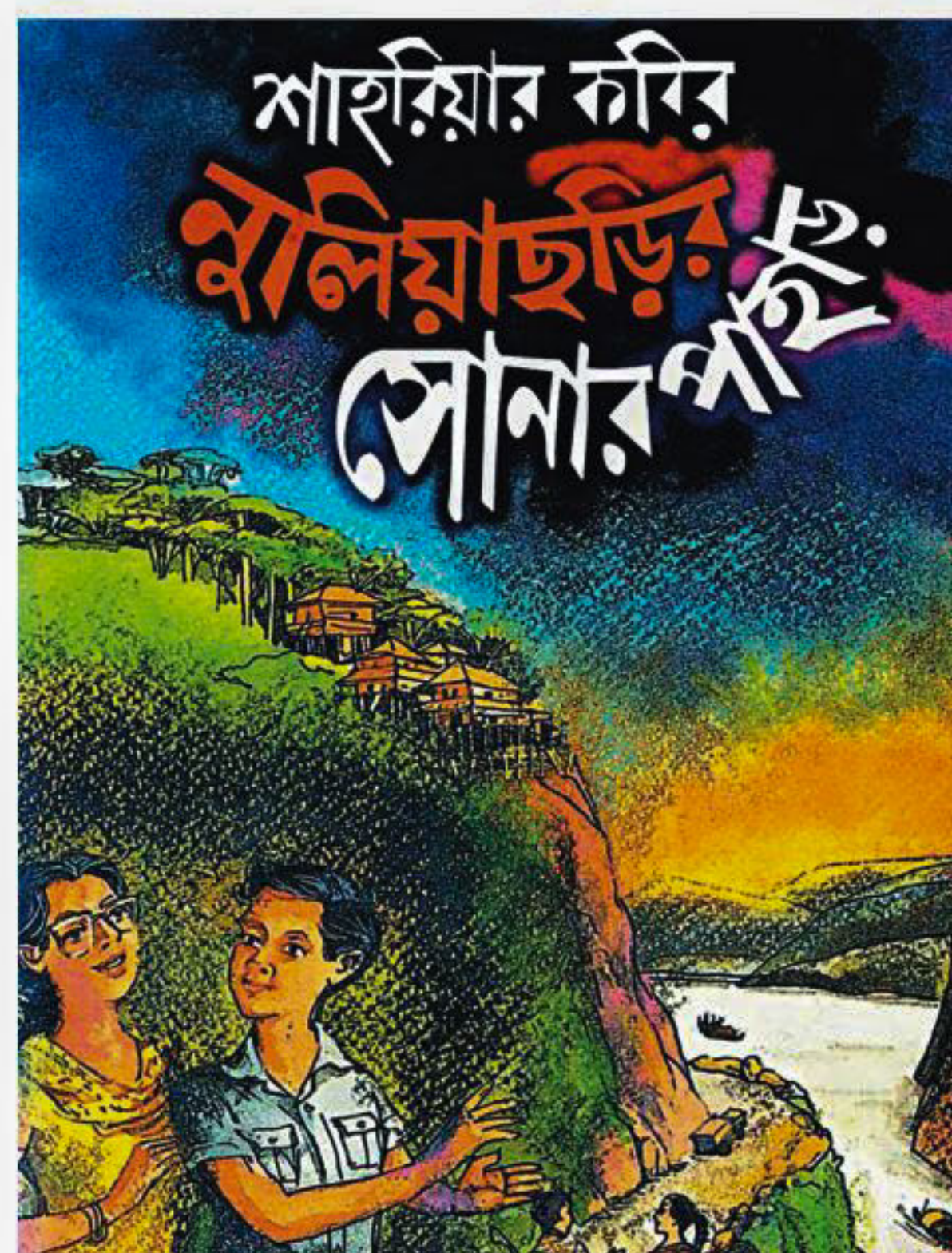
I went to a missionary school with kids of all religions, and I had never seen anyone being discriminated against solely because of their faith. *Alor Pakhira* burst my utopian missionary school bubble. Kabir says in the introduction of a *Kishor Shomogro* that he thinks that young readers can handle heavier themes like communalism and politics. He finds it important to talk about certain issues in these books, because it might just have a



positive influence on kids. While many of his books are deeply influenced by leftist ideologies and 20th century politics, he has also written lighter memoirs, short stories, mysteries, and thrillers. I read all of it when I was young, and every one of his stories was an experience in itself.

Very few writers manage to bring diversity into their work - be it in terms of character, story, themes, or background. Most of Kabir's protagonists were boys, but he says in the introduction of *Kishor shomogro 4* that once he noticed this, he tried to incorporate more female characters in his novels. Quite a few of his books, such as *Rajprashad e Shorjontro* and *Ratneshwarir Kalo Chhaya* have strong female characters - something that Bangladeshi writers get wrong or fail to incorporate even to this day.

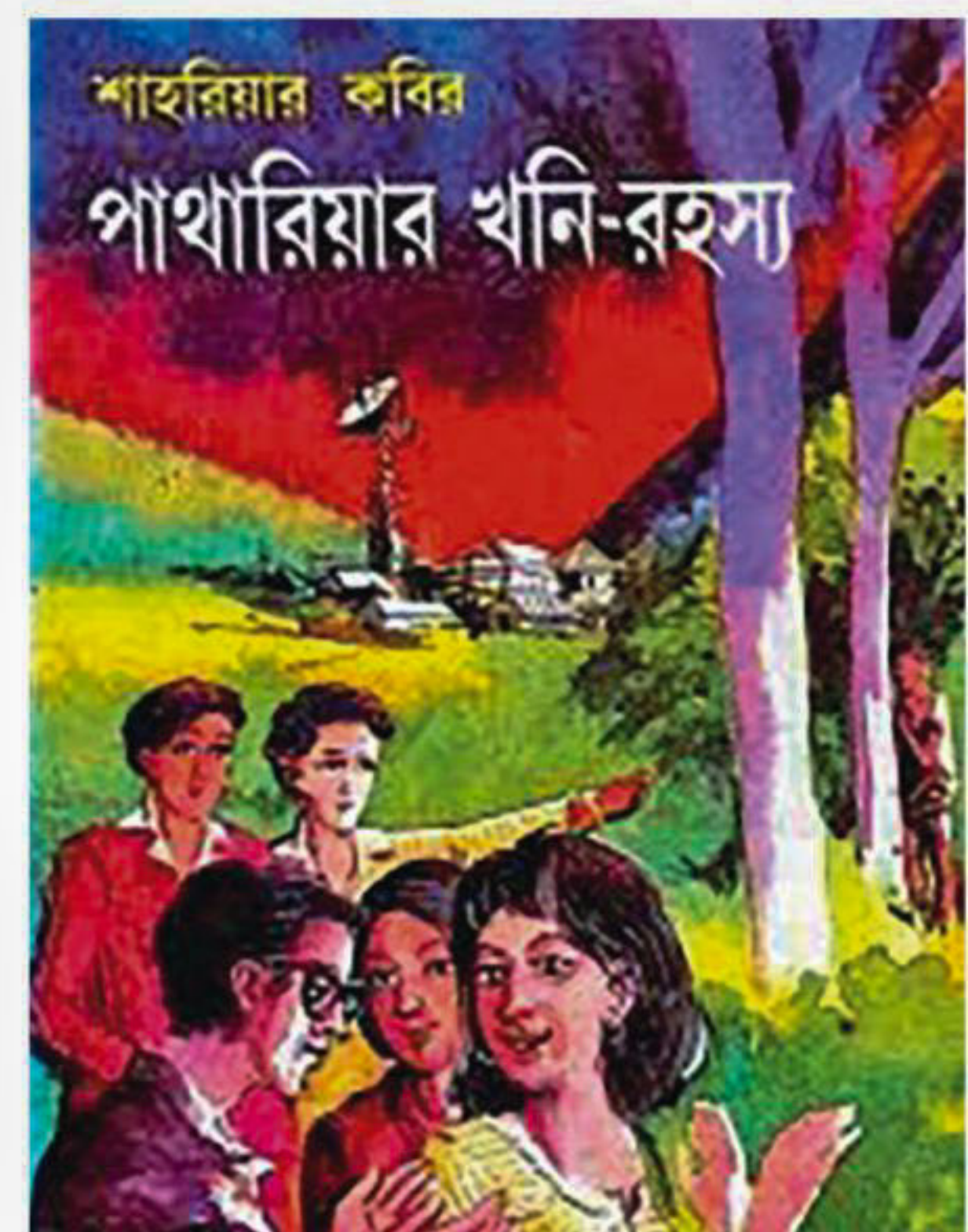
Shahriar Kabir once mentioned that he wanted to write original stories that



Bangladeshi readers had never read before, and I think he was one of the first people in the country to successfully write young-adult (YA) novels which had in them a sense of novelty. One of his most famous works, *Hariye Jawar Thikana*, came out in 1976. My mother loved it back then, and made me read it when I was a teenager. The book explores into communism and glimpses of young love. The storytelling is masterful, and I would recommend it to any young-adult who loves to read.

I grew interest in travelling to Europe because so many of Kabir's novels are set in places like Poland, Romania, Germany, etc. The book *Bavaria'r Rohosshomoy Durgu* put Munich's Oktoberfest on my bucket list.

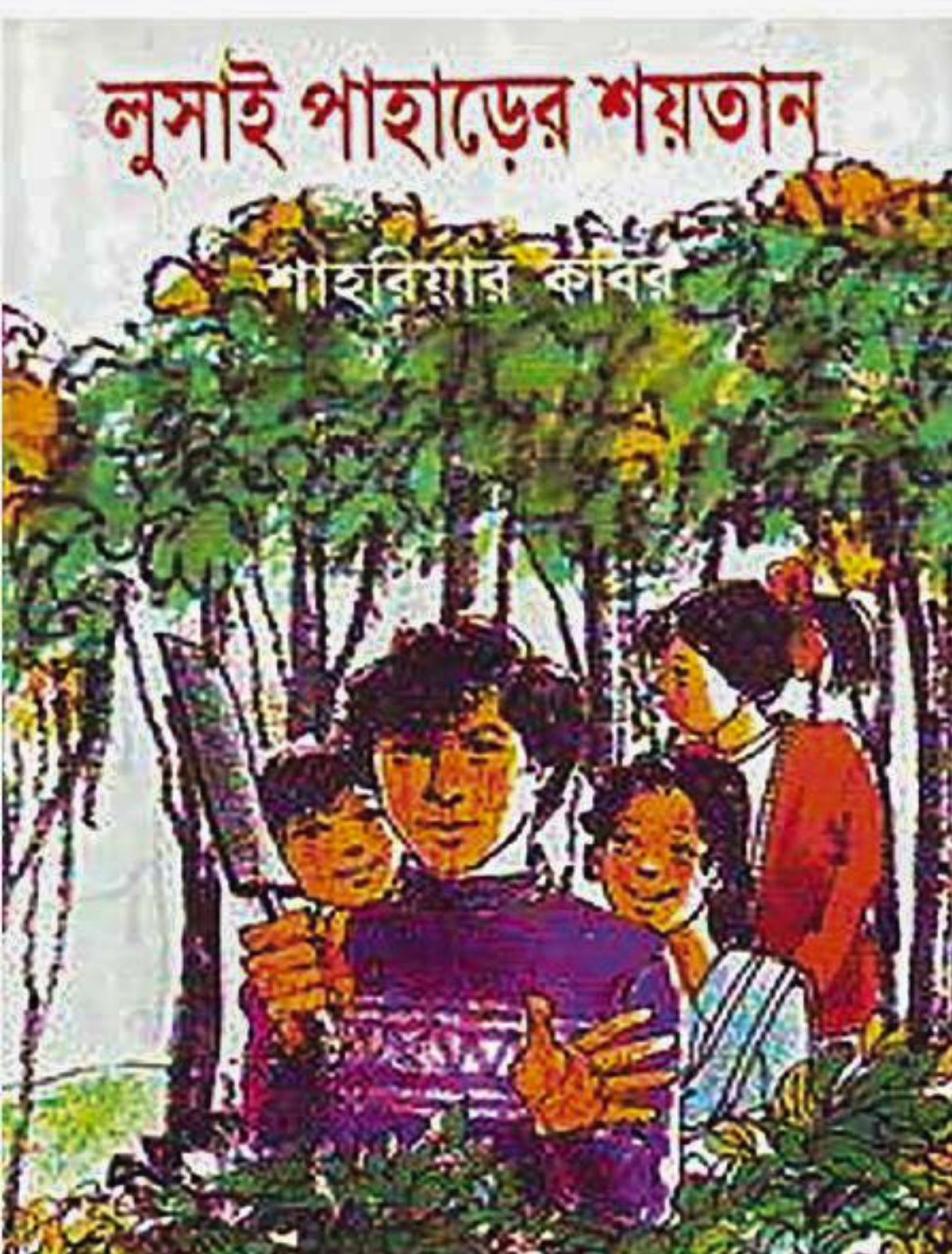
The first book I had read by Shahriar Kabir was a little novel called *Nicholas Rozario'r Chelera*. I was in primary school



then and I had just joined a girls' scout programme called "Yellow Birds" at school. In my daily hunt for old books around my house, I found a torn copy of this book that belonged to my aunt. The first page had a note from my dad - he'd bought it for his sister from the Ekushey book fair in 1989.

Every time I found a book with a note in it, I cherished it a bit more. I still treat these books as family heirlooms. So, I read that torn book with a wonky cover illustration, and I was amazed to see that there were other people in the world who experienced all the strange rules of missionary schools and participated in scout activities. The book remained a favourite throughout my childhood, and I've read that same copy so many times that the spine has fallen off by now.

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