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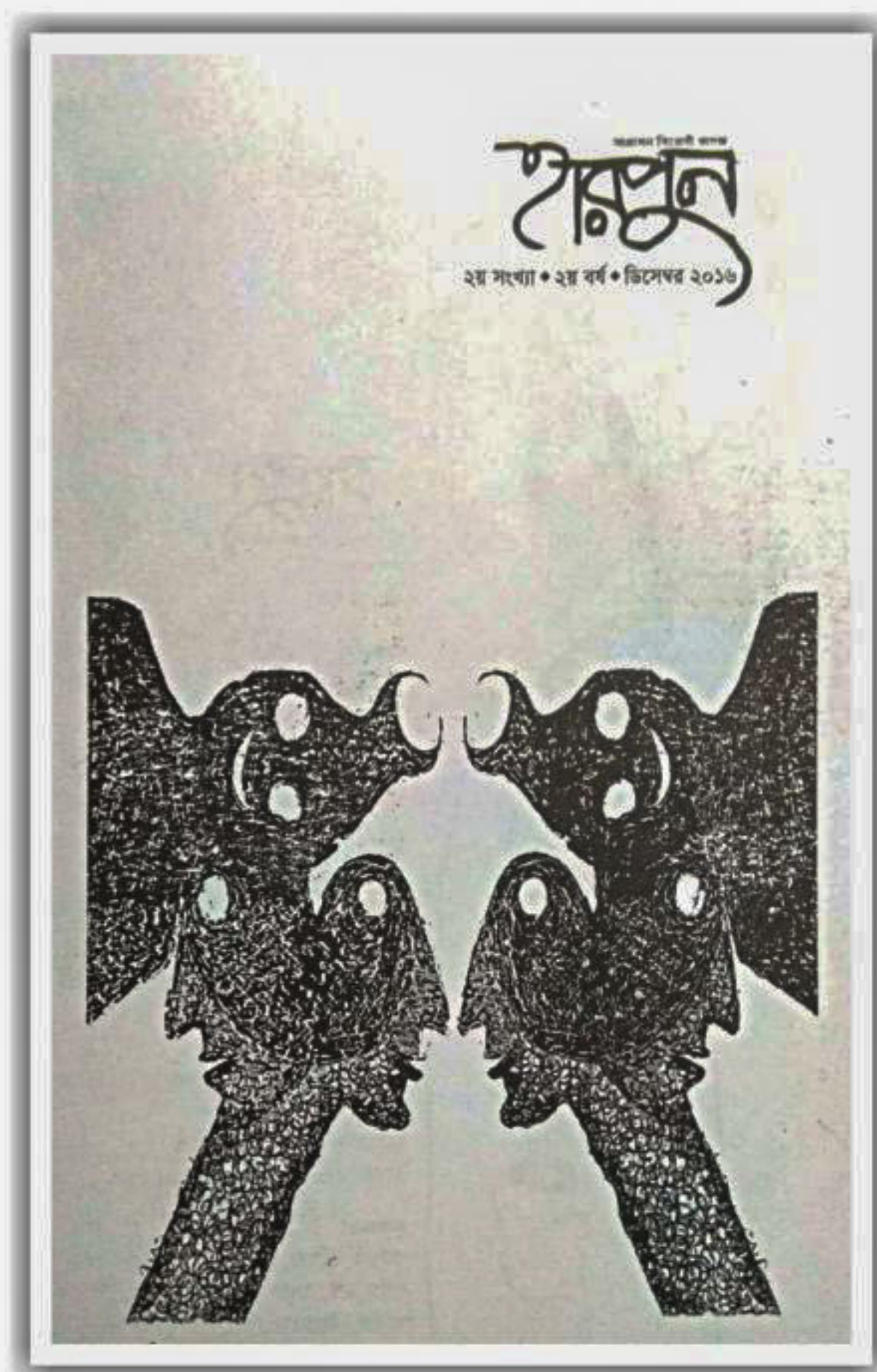
it was nothing short of rebellion born from literary aspirations, as he recalls how much anger his crew of 19 and 20-year-olds generated because they "criticised holy literary cows". *Purbopetro* was run by students of Dhaka College who had just come out of the '69 movement: Khan Mohammad Farabi, Hassan Ferdous, Monjurul Hoq, and Chowdhury to name a few. They were credited as some of the most brilliant young minds of the country who unashamedly challenged mainstream literature. Chowdhury remembers with fondness how, at such a young age, they not just but "savage" in the way they attacked big literary figures of the time, to the point where they not only offended but were also remembered for it. And we laugh together as he reminisces, "I was thrown out of a room once by Shamsur Rahman!"

Fast forward to the 90s and the atmosphere surrounding little magazines is far more dynamic as the Shahbagh-Aziz-PG intersection became the locus for charged young thinkers to gather. Rahee spent much of his youth participating in student politics as well as the literary circles of little magazines. He remembers that there was never any formal organising of people, ideas, and discussions for these publications. But what was constant around through the years of his youth was an atmosphere that welcomed and sustained "free-floating *addas*."

Aysa Jhorna, a writer and editor whose literary career is built on the little magazine culture of the 90s, is the only woman I managed to find to inform this article. She remembers the energy of the *addas* similarly, adding that the culture was largely influenced by left politics and the aspirations for new experimentations and forms in literature. "Little magazines gave us an alternative space to write, so we didn't have to depend on dailies to be published. We didn't have to justify our experiments to editors, or worry about space constraints. We didn't write solicited pieces. Little magazines were fairly regular but still took a while to be published because they were so independent, and that gave us time and exercised our patience. We were able to sit on our work and practice our writing critically with devotion."

The urgency for alternative political perspectives and practices of art-literature was often the drive, and it was executed by young practitioners of the forms, who were also often the readers of these publications. What came to be was a back-and-forth among writers, poets, artists and thinkers who were producing work for each other and themselves. "The planning itself, the very production of a little magazine, was a liberating experience—*kolponar mukti*," says Rahee.

But in romanticising such "freedom of the imagination", one must exercise caution, as Jhorna also remembers that she was only one of very, very few women in the scene. I am left wondering: why is this culture so full of men? She remembers that while these *addas* were open and women did frequent them every now and then, "it was easier to be a poet's girlfriend there than a female writer." She adds, "The trend at the time was that women wrote and lived for glamour. It was hard enough already because of our homes and families to venture into such



anti-establishment literary atmospheres. Added to that, the little magazine culture was so unwelcoming of females and so full of male chauvinism, that I took it as my fight to be there and keep writing in spite of all the internal hammering."

So what is a little magazine anyway?

And now I think we can finally touch upon the problem of definitions. Something like the culture of little magazines—snarky and rude, impatient to cause a riot and critique the establishment, eager to break forms that we have grown comfortable with—cannot simply be taken and defined by what you think the product should be.

"Much has been said and debated about what makes a little magazine, within the culture itself, among different publications and little magazine circles. But, in effect, a little magazine is *critical of everything*," says Rahee.

It is not so much about content or physical dimensions as it is about the process. A little magazine could contain different forms of literature, such as poetry, essays, stories, prose, or something new and unconventional altogether. But they are almost always devoid of advertisements, independently and crowd funded.

Naiya founded his publication, *Rashtriya*, five years ago because he saw the need to create a medium for critical political thought and knowledge that he believed was lacking in his own academic journey as a student of Political Science at the University of Dhaka. The latest volume of *Rashtriya*, which is built around the theme of "Language and Education" and contains only essays, is a rather thick volume and a little pricey at BDT 200 compared to most little magazines, which are smaller and cheaper. Would he call this a little magazine?

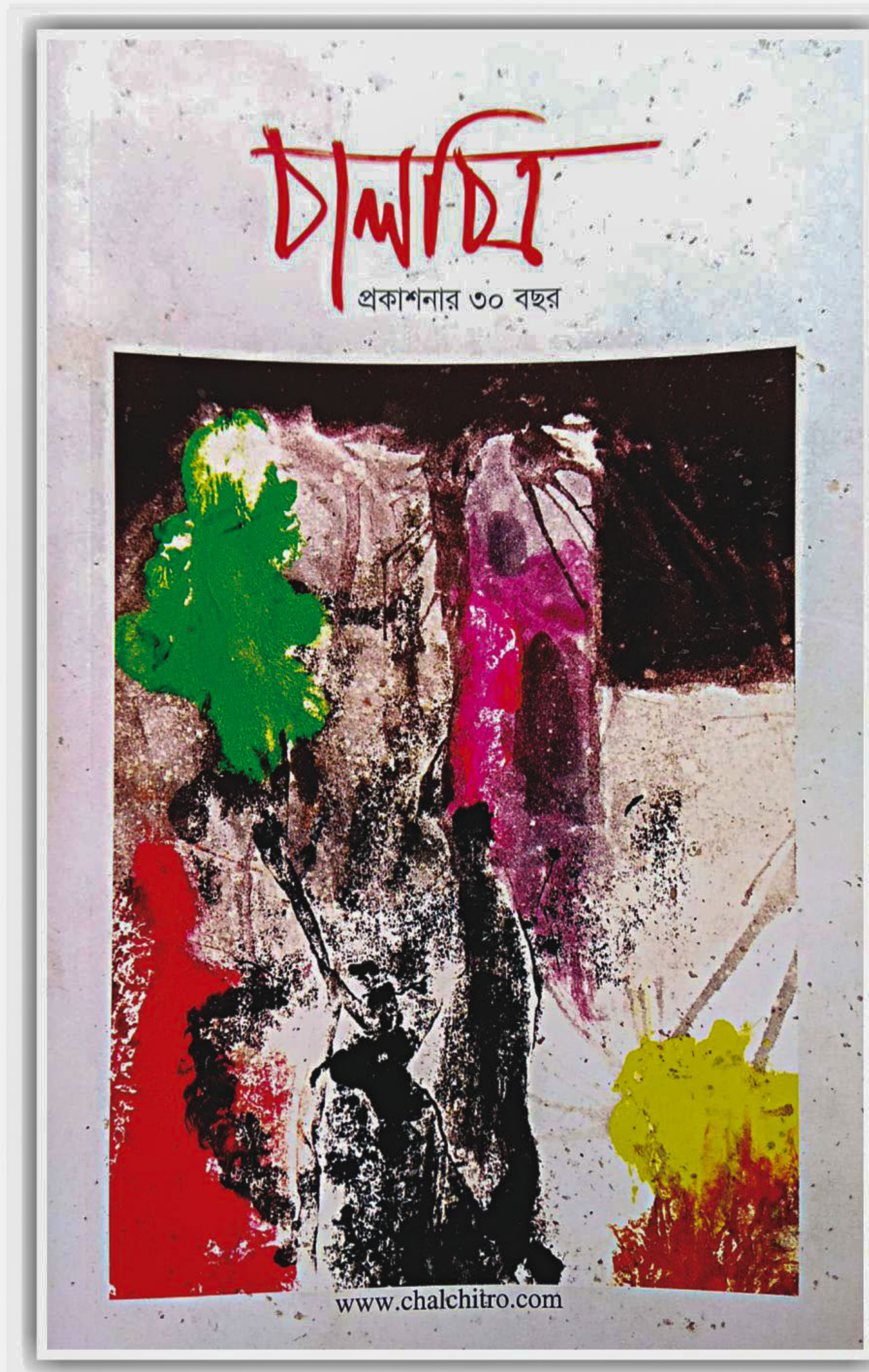
"Yes, I would like to call this a little magazine. Because the writings here don't compare to the format or guidelines of, say, a journal. This also takes submissions from teachers and outsiders, but we aren't affiliated with the department, even at the cost of losing possible donations, because we want to be independent."

Most magazines are so independently funded that Navil Maandar, editor of *Jangshone*, says, "It's a very normal affair for us to have dues at the press every year. We have many well-wishers who donate

to us generously, names you can see in the publication. But it's important that we don't take funds from any one person or entity, so that all our views can be represented freely."

In a profit-driven world where most new books are now self-published for money and donations buy you agendas, today's little magazine culture is still largely characterised by financial independence and self-sustenance.

Beyond finances, however, little magazines are sustained by small, tight-knit circles. Some are even run by single-person teams, in a DIY approach. Reach is always expected to be small, almost entirely within the community. And the circle of various publications maintain



relationships and dialogues with each other, as they also grow into their individual philosophies, politics and aesthetics as a literary group/publication.

What does the little magazine culture look like now?

If I were to look for a little magazine culture now as an outsider, where would I go? How would it manifest itself culturally, socially, politically in today's Bangladesh?

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