

DSC Prize for South Asian Literature, 2019

Instituted by Surina and Manhad Narula in 2010, the US \$25,000 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature is one of the most prestigious international literary awards specifically focused on South Asian writing. It is a unique and coveted prize and is open to authors of any ethnicity or nationality as long as the writing is about South Asia and its people. After announcing its winners in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India, the DSC Prize 2019 Award ceremony is to take place in Nepal Literature Festival in Pokhara on December 16, 2019.

The felicitation ceremony is planned as the finale event of the Nepal Literature Festival which takes place from 13 to 16 December, 2019. True to its South Asian essence, the peripatetic DSC Prize announces its winner at a different South Asian country every year by rotation. The DSC Prize 2016 winner was announced at the Galle Literary Festival in Sri Lanka whereas the DSC Prize 2017 was awarded at the Dhaka Lit Fest in Bangladesh, and the DSC Prize 2018 was presented at the Tata Steel Kolkata Literary Meet in India. This year the prize is travelling to Nepal where it will celebrate the shortlisted authors and announce the ninth winner of the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature.

Speaking about the partnership, Surina Narula, co-founder of the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature said, "We are delighted to partner with the Nepal Literature Festival to announce the winner of the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature 2019 in the picturesque city of Pokhara in December. Both the prize



and the festival share a common vision to promote and highlight South Asian literature, and there is a rich literary landscape in Nepal which I hope will benefit from this partnership."

Administered by the South Asian Literature Prize & Events Trust, the DSC Prize prides itself on a thorough and transparent judging process and is modelled on global best practices. At the core of the process is the 5 member international jury panel comprising literary luminaries drawn from

diverse geographies and expertise, which is solely empowered to adjudicate on the entries received, and their decision is final.

Past winners of the prize have been H M Naqvi of Pakistan, Shehan Karunatilaka of Sri Lanka, Jeet Thayil and Cyrus Mistry from India, American author of Indian origin Jhumpa Lahiri, Anuradha Roy from India, Anuk Arudpragasam of Sri Lanka, and Jayant Kaikini along with translator Tejaswini Niranjana of India who won the prize last year.



The Fifteenth of August

SYED SHAMSUL HAQ

TRANSLATED BY HOSSAIN AHMED ARIF ELAHI

The crimson hue is still in the morning sky.
The earth too smearing a deep blood on the colossal wings
Has been floating in the air since time unprecedented.
Awaiting - the voice - with the voice itself she will be
eloquent - once more
The slogan of *Joy Bangla* suffused with the sunlight
Will fall on the wings
From the history after a while.
Man obviously becomes frightened of the speechless death
alone.
Thus it raises itself
Along the green boughs and foliage occasionally.
The leafage gets rejuvenated,
Reverberated, and also the pages of the annals are being
Driven by turbulence - when to roar -
The commotion of *Joy Bangla* - confer upon him
The umbilical cord! Look, from the placenta
The blood overwhelmed is yet flowing
Through the nibs of pens of the Bangalees.
History never remains silent! On Bengal and on the far
distant
Thirteen hundred rivers even today the boat there from
visibly
Resurrects the blood-stained father, indeed a wonder!

Hossain Ahmed Arif Elahi is Professor of English at a government college. He likes to muse on the workings of his heart and head, thereby incorporating them into literature.



FICTION

Ghoulish Sentiments

MARJUQUE UL HAQUE



Slumped with our luggage we got off the train looking apprehensively at the quaint sight before us. Saplings and balding grasslands carpeted serenely with occasional trees of variety here and there. The scenery struck me with great unfamiliarity in contrast to the city life that I was used to. How long had it been since I visited a village last? I had to admit villages are quite beautiful, even if strange. My sole companion was my cousin Shakil who had unquestioningly taken up the task with me. With a sense of dreary foreboding and the vague anxiety one feels when facing the unknown we went towards the thickets of distant trees shadowed by the diffused specs of yellowish-orange clouds dyed by the incandescent setting sun.

"Why would two young men take trouble to go to villages unless they are visiting their grandparents?" One may ask. Our answer would be quite disturbing. It was no pleasure trip. Recently a cousin of mine (Shakil's brother) went to visit Daripara village and was unfortunate enough to go missing. Daripara village, as I've been told, was a place supposedly famous for people going missing. It was a notorious spot that my cousin was sent to investigate. It frightens me to think about all the things that may have happened to him. There is of course no

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question of speculating notions that he may have been a victim of some supernatural event but rather simply that something had happened to him. When I say "something," I refer to the natural elements. Ghosts, apparitions and such are for ignorant village folks. Whatever it might have been we would have to be prudent during the search, especially when we were going to a place of which we had no knowledge. Even prudence itself may not be enough in such circumstances.

We had crossed a few miles before reaching the bazaar. It was sparsely populated at the hour. It struck me how awkward the two of us must have

appeared to the villagers. The glance they bestowed upon us was that of a native upon a foreigner—curiosity mixed with distrust. I suppose people from the outside world did not come here often. Spotting a group of vans stationed near the end of the road Shakil asked the nearest van walla if he would take us to Daripara. The van wallah stared at us for a moment and then mumbled something like, "Harrumph! Bad place." Shakil and I looked at each other and went on to ask the others but like the first one they also declined. One of them, an old man we had approached earlier, suddenly asked, "Why do you want to go there?" His face was expressionless as he

spoke. Shakil answered that we came on some business. He stared at us for several seconds, possibly wondering what the two of us might have to do with such a place. He named a sum that was exorbitant, but we had no choice but to agree. We were helpless; there was not anyone who would take us there. What was it about this village that everyone was so scared?

We rode off towards the supposedly cursed village apprehensively. Our anxiety roused once more, not by rumours but by the people with grave expressions we encountered when we mentioned our destination. It almost reminded me of the adventures of

Jonathan Harker riding to the palace of Count Dracula. From the beginning, I was convinced that whatever might have happened to my cousin was not some fabled tale of death or the supernatural. However, as the dusk receded into nightfall my firm conviction eroded to skepticism and I started to think about things I did not believe existed. At that point, I completely understood why the village people believed in such and such. A person who has lived in the cities would never understand the gravity of a fearsome atmosphere and would naturally turn a skeptical eye on ghosts and spirits. Whereas the radiance of daylight unraveled mysteries, colour and certainty, the pitch-black nightfall introduced fear and uncertainty. We were benighted with no stars to guide us. There was just a faint yellow hurricane swinging by the van's handlebars illuminating a foot of the narrow path surrounded by groves and bushes allowing just enough light to make way in the darkness. Who could tell what was what on such a night when the darkness that mingled with all else were inseparable from the other?

The cricket choruses around us suddenly died as the distant ones took charge of their chirping. It seemed to me that these creatures had the noble duty of making the nights less frightening through noises and took turns to perform the duty. I was soon to know that I was wrong.

"What's that?" Shakil whispered.

"What's what?" I asked.

"Don't you hear that, the sounds like someone's following us," he sounded alarmed.

I could not see his face but I could tell that he was frightened. I turned right straining to hear something. Was there something? Did I hear the sound of foot falling? It was a light and shuffling noise. What was that glint of green? Was I seeing things? The light foot falls had been audible in my mind just as Shakil had suggested.

Inspiration struck me like thunderbolt. "Dogs!" I hissed. In my mind, at least, the silhouettes were distinct. We told the van walla about our predicament but he didn't answer. The shadows of countless dogs followed us. As the wheels creaked away the interminable hours, I imagined them scraggy and virulent, waiting to spring upon us at any point. Indeed, nobody would save us in this god forsaken wildernesses.

Marjuque ul Haque is a student at the Department of English & Humanities at ULAB.