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Forgotten tales of THE INKPOT

Inkpot has more or less disappeared from our homes, schools, and offices. All one needs now is a ballpoint pen and a piece of paper, or just the phone or laptop. Even this article was typed out on a keyboard! That's why we hope that we do not sound hypocritical as we are now about to look back into a world without these gadgets, even ballpoint pens -- a world where the inkpot reigned supreme whenever writing was concerned. First things first, have you ever used an inkpot in your life? You may have in your childhood, of which vague memories now remain. But ask your parents or grandparents, and they shall tell you all about inkpots, be it their favourite brands or personal anecdotes they fondly cherish.

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PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED, FROM THE COLLECTION OF NAZMUL HAQUE MONTU

#PERSPECTIVE

Why is black the colour of mourning?

Black, as a colour, has been a component in the expression of a variety of human emotions. It is a colour associated with a diverse range of symbols and is predominantly associated with mourning in different cultures and countries. The shade has left its stamp on everything, whether it is evil, death, loss, mystery, melancholy, or terror. A long-standing custom associated with funerals is the donning of black attires as a sign of respect for the departed. But, where did this connection originate?

A look back in time

From the time of the Roman Empire, people have been wearing black to funerals. Many civilisations adopted the hue as a symbol of respect for the lost soul. It was also utilised to openly show sadness and lament the loss. However, it was not until the passing of Prince Albert in 1861 that it became a common funeral dress. Black was the colour the bereaved Queen Victoria wore to signify her status as a sad widow until her own passing 40 years later.

Victorian women wore black mourning for prolonged lengths of time after their husbands passed away. It was also anticipated that males would don black for three to six months after their wives' demise. During this period, black mourning jewellery, such as lockets with a relative's hair in them, also rose in popularity.

The present era

The way people mourn has evolved. Some individuals adhere to the practice of wearing black to funerals, while others choose to wear other muted shades that were once thought to be inappropriate for the occasion. Nevertheless, black is still seen as a mourning hue all around the world.

Countries that grieve in this colour

Black is the customary hue of mourning in Italy, as it is across much of Europe.

Italy adopts Catholic mourning customs because of its sizable Catholic population. Black is traditionally worn as the colour of mourning in numerous non-Western cultures as well.

Traditional mourning customs in Japan involve the widespread use of the colour black. Both traditional kimonos and mourners wearing Western attire may be identified by this colour. Thailand had a year-long period of mourning following the passing of its revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej in 2016, during which time everyone donned black clothing and footwear. In fact, many businesses had a scarcity of black clothes during the months of mourning.

Black in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, black is a shade commonly connected with mourning. Black is represented as the colour of darkness in our lives. In fact, due to its past, 21 February, a day engraved in history as our nation's Shaheed Day, is represented by the colour black. On 21 February, we continue to remember the beloved language martyrs of the nation as we observe International Mother Language Day and wear black ribbons as a reminder of the tragedy.

The colour white is frequently adorned with black to show a suggestion of peace, calm, and better days ahead of the mourning. Even as a mere shade of colours, black and white resonate in our hearts as we sing for the lost lives and our cherished mother tongue.

By Samayla Mahjabin Koishy
Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

#HOBBIES

Inkpot a reminiscent of the past

In this day and age, these are hard to imagine. Picture this: school desks once upon a time had small pits on them to hold ink; acquaintances used to gift inkpots to their loved ones who scored good results in exams, or even during weddings and other such life events; inkpots could also reflect the social status of a family.

These are some of the forgotten stories of the past that Nazmul Haque Montu narrated when I went to see his collection of inkpots. His home has a room, especially reserved for collectibles, aptly named 'dowatbari,' meaning the house of inkpots.

The hobby of collecting inkpots is arguably unique. We all know of the hobby surrounding stamps or currencies, for example, but have you heard of someone doing the same with inkpots?

Well, now you have, about Nazmul, a businessman by profession, who is a collector of inkpots (among other items). From the showcases and cabinets of Dowatbari, he showed us one inkpot after another.

The sheer variety is mindboggling. There are inkpots of all shapes and sizes imaginable, featuring a plethora of themes and motifs.

There are animal-shaped inkpots, so you have your fish, rabbit, elephant, peacock, and so on. Many others are inspired by the flora, so you have your flowers and leaves and so on.

Nazmul also has in his collection several inkpots themed on religion. To illustrate, a vintage inkpot has idols of deities on both sides. There are also inkpots where the shapes will remind you of temples and pagodas.

Another fascinating inkpot is the one that looks like a building. With designs of doorways and pillars, it is an embodiment of elegance. This inkpot is made of bronze.

Usage of a wide range of materials can be seen in inkpots — clay, brass, copper, stone, silver, bronze, glass, crystal, etc.

There are clay inkpots of antiquity, which were found in various regions such as Pabna, Cumilla, and Bogra. These are small and simple enough, but even in their simplicity, they radiate beauty, like the one shaped like a 'motka.'

As he groups together the clay inkpots, your eye may catch a curious feature found in some of them: tiny rings. Nazmul explained, "Not just those made of clay, many inkpots indeed come with three rings on their sides, most likely serving the purpose of hanging them with threads."

It is yet another picture that is hard to imagine today!

"Some of the oldest inkpots found in our country were discovered in the Buddhist-bihars," Nazmul said. Dowatbari is also home to a Mughal-era inkpot that features exquisite bidri work, the art of engraving and inlaying.

But surely, not everyone in the olden times owned an inkpot, let alone an intricate one. Well, you have to consider the literacy rate. We cannot take writing as an ordinary activity the way we do now. And even in households where at least little or some writing was done, they had to take into account affordability and other such practical issues.

Nazmul offered cheaper substitutes. To my surprise, he brought out a kotbel!

"Whenever I meet elderly people, despite their level of education or income, I always ask them what kind of inkpots they saw or used in their childhood. That is how I came to know that back in the day some people even made their inkpots with whatever came in handy.

"They took things like coconut shells and shells of kotbels, made a hole in them, and poured ink made out of vegetation and other everyday things," he explained. "And so, I have modelled out replicas based on research. If I hold an exhibition, these will be helpful to raise awareness on how diverse the world of inkpots is."

The other side of the story is of course opulence. Those who could afford went for fancier options.

In his collection, there are inkpots with names engraved on them: Nitai, Nimai, and so on.

"These represent how cherished inkpots were to people. After purchasing an inkpot, they might ask an artisan to engrave their name or a name of their choice," he said.

Clearly, there was much fervour surrounding this item. "From about 1950s to around 1970s, there were approximately 60 inkpot companies in Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) alone," he informed.

Dowatbari has inkpots from many regions of the world; France, England, China, Thailand, Iran, etc. And there are special inkpots for calligraphers too, with wider openings. His collection extends to various inkpot-related objects as well, like bottles of ink and containers capable of holding larger quantities of fluid.

If all of this sparks too much of an interest, the question comes, how can you become a collector?

"You do not need to buy expensive items in the beginning. You can start by trying to collect the more common inkpots of different countries," Nazmul advises. "You can even try out New Market. It is also important to gain knowledge about various metals and other materials."

Dowatbari did not happen overnight.

Nazmul was born in Pabna. His journey in this field began in 1983. He eventually settled in Dhaka in around 1989. Visits to 'bhangarir dokan' and crafts and antique shops, approaching hawkers, building credibility among stakeholders -- he has done it all, the reflection of which is today's Dowatbari, housing many rare specimens.

Did you know that ink was even sold in mediums of powders and tablets?

Take for example a tiny paper-wrapper by the brand Sulekha Kali, of Sulekha Works Dhaka. One side of the pack contains these names and a simple visual that show things like inkpot and pen. On the other, instructions for the user -- essentially you have to mix the powder in a water-filled inkpot -- along with a few words of caution that one should wash out any leftover ink from the pot before doing this procedure.

We can only imagine those days!

There were varied tastes, preferences, and trends companies catered to. Perhaps no example could be better to convey this than the so-called Maradona Ink, with a crude visual of the football legend on the packet, probably made in 1980s.

The '80s most likely saw the last dominant blobs from the inkpot. The '90s generation dabbled in it too, but arguably since then, it took a dip.

How times have changed! Today, the inkpot can still be found in some stationery stores, catering to a niche. It is now a charm of the bygone times, a reminiscent of the past, holding tales very few amongst us can imagine.

By M H Haider
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed, from the collection of Nazmul Haque Montu

#LITERATURE

A tribute to Akhtaruzzaman Elias

Born on 12 February, 1943, Akhtaruzzaman Elias was much like a firework. His presence was short-lived but that took nothing away from how brightly he shone during his time. With only two novels and twenty-two short stories, he was far from being prolific. However, *Khoabnama* and *Chilekothar Sepai*, his two novels, are often mentioned with admiration amongst ardent readers. Elias built a multi-dimensional world in both of these novels; the epic-like compositions host the different classes of people that we see in society but what stands out most is the realism depicted in both of these books.

Definitely, his preferred approach to writing is the detailed depiction of reality. Reading his prose feels like one is present in the very scene in their physical form because of the way he successfully composed every individual scene in his novels. The characters were always memorable because they showed various colours.

His use of colloquial speech in the dialogues and the unashamed depiction of the physical world in all of its glory and ugliness, the flawed characters like real humans, and the wise use of important historical events like revolutions, yet unyieldingly making the story about something more than just the revolutions themselves, has given him a spot amongst the most influential fiction writers in Bangla literature.

In addition, what stood out about both of these novels is that there is no real closure in them. It's left for interpretation and up to the reader; inviting them into this intricately built dynamic worlds as if another character from the real would fit right in.

Another thing that elevated his prose was the use of political, sociological, psychological, historical, and even mythological themes. Combining such critical elements is a herculean task, even harder to do in a way that makes sense in the dimension of a fictional world. Yet, Akhtaruzzaman Elias did so with eloquence. That is probably why both of his novels can be expressed as less of fiction and more of a study of human nature and their dynamics in society itself.

Some people critique his work as 'difficult' and 'bombarded with complex ideas,' but any realist will tell you that realism consists of both of those characteristics and Akhtaruzzaman Elias was very fond of depicting realism above all.

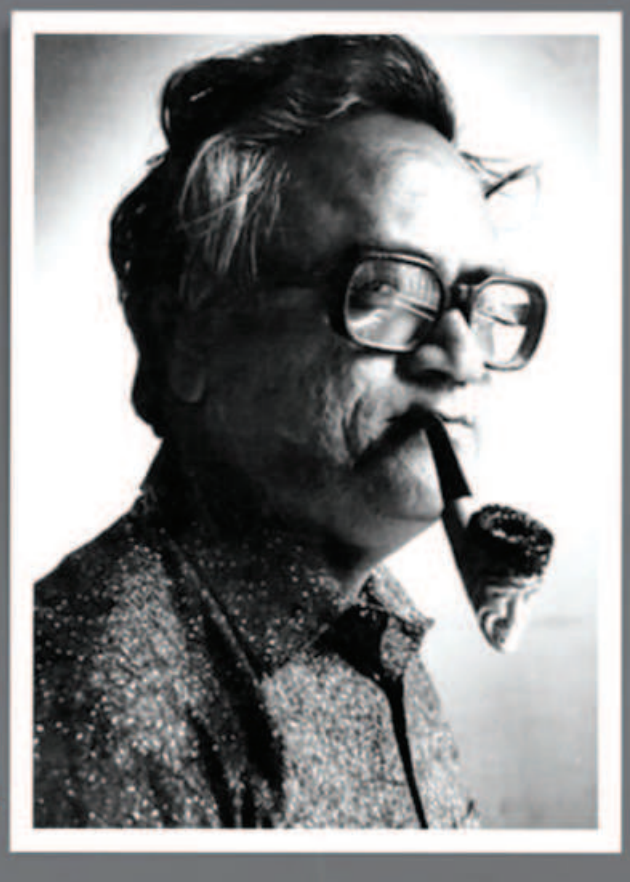
Other than his two novels, there are a few short story collections — *Dojokher Om* (The Warmth of Hell), *Dudhbhate Utpat* (No Peace in Milk and Rice), *Onno Ghore Onno Shor* (Another Tune in Another Room), *Khoari* (Hangover) and *Jal Shopno*, *Shopner Jal* (Fake Dream, Illusion of Dream). And an essay collection named *Shongskritir Bhanga Shetu* (Broken Bridge of Culture).

The author received numerous awards such as — Humayun Kabir Smriti Puraskar (1977), Bangla Academy Sahitya Puraskar (1983), Alaol Sahitya Puraskar (1987), Ananda Puraskar (1996), Sa'dat Ali Akhand Puraskar (1996), Kazi Mahbubullah Gold Medal (1996), and Ekushey Sahitya Padak (1999, posthumous). The novel *Chilekothar Sepai* was turned into a film, and several other of his works have been translated into other languages.

In his personal life, Akhtaruzzaman Elias was humorous, witty, eloquent, curious, and even a little bit sarcastic from time to time. He drew inspiration from his curiosity about even the mundane things in life. In his words, he used to get surprised by everything because even when he's seen something a hundred times, he discovers something new every time he encounters it. This might explain his keen interest in details and approach to description in his writing.

This 12 February, Akhtaruzzaman Elias would have been 80. His early demise deprived our literature of many masterpieces that he might have produced. We offer our tribute and recall him with great reverence in hopes that Akhtaruzzaman Elias gets the recognition that he deserves.

By Ashif Ahmed Rudro
Photo: Star Lifestyle



Into the Shonku universe

As Bengalis, we have grown up reading Satyajit Ray. Who does not remember the clever, witty, and adventurous detective, Feluda? Or the highly revered Professor Shonku, an eccentric scientist, inventor, explorer, and polyglot?

Today, we celebrate one of these characters, Professor Trilokeshwar Shonku, paying a humble tribute to the Bengali maestro that is Satyajit Ray. For many of us, Ray was the entrance to Bengali literature, and the Shonku series -- an influential work of science fiction in the Bengali language.

And so without further ado, we present to you our attempt in recreating Shonku in our studio, along with some thoughts and opinions about this beloved scientist who continues to capture our imagination.

Flip to Centre to dive into the fascinating universe of Professor Shonku...

Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Model: Mohammed Monsur Ali

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What makes PROFESSOR SHONKU so special to us?

Since the publication of the first story of the Shonku series more than half a century ago, the science fiction classic has become a cult created by Satyajit Ray. The elderly scientist Trilokeshwar Shonku won hearts and minds. Here you had this Bengali eccentric scientist whose talent and knowledge were unparalleled anywhere in the world, whose expeditions to faraway places presented thrilling adventures, and whose inventions were incredibly powerful.

Presented in diary format, Shonku's stories kept generations of children busy in a world of curiosity and science.

I know someone from my childhood who once had a cat named Newton, influenced by Professor Shonku, as the scientist also had a cat of this name. Such is the love for Shonku!

What makes Shonku so special? The bounty of science fiction or science fantasy is virtually endless. So many novels and movies around the world have been made. While plenty of them are indeed great, it is Professor Shonku who reserves a special place in our hearts.

One reason is surely about the literary genius of the great polymath Satyajit Ray — author, filmmaker, illustrator, magazine editor, music composer — which, I shall not try to dissect, because I will most likely fail.

Instead, let's delve in as a layman, a fan.

Professor Shonku is deeply embedded in the Bengali culture, which means that we as a people can directly relate to him. Sure, the scientist travels to many alien places and also teams up with people from other countries in his adventures, but he usually returns to his house in Giridih, Jharkhand where he works in his laboratory, often accompanied by his pet cat, Newton.

He teaches Bangla language to his robot, which later hums the tune of 'Dhonodhanno pushpo bhora' during a journey through space.

He also has a housekeeper, Prollad, who, according to Shonku, is rather unintelligent. And yet, the scientist also made him embark on that spaceship journey. He wrote in a diary entry, "I definitely do not believe that only intelligent people are needed in this kind of expedition. People with low intelligence often have a lot of courage..."

Comic reliefs indeed make reading the sci-fi series even more entertaining. Shonku's annoying neighbour, for example, is someone who really gets on his nerves. Abhinash babu is engrossed in trivial things, and is not at all of scientific mind, oftentimes challenging Shonku or making a mockery of his projects. But our good-natured scientist still tolerates him.

In a way, this neighbour may be argued to represent people in our society who are superstitious or those who downright discredit science.

And of course, there is the element of travel in a lot of the stories. Not just any travel, but adventures into the mysterious or undiscovered — strange islands, deep jungles, Egypt, Tibet, and so on — where he meets the strangest people, under the most unusual circumstances, sometimes amidst fantastical flora and fauna, and encounters dangers which he has to navigate. Really imaginative stuff!

Speaking of Shonku makes one want to walk down memory lane. There is a huge nostalgia factor for those who grew up reading Satyajit's works like Shonku and Feluda.

Moreover, even though Shonku is often labelled as children's fiction — and perhaps rightly so — it does not mean that you will not enjoy it anymore if you revisit it again, or even if you read it for the first time now.

If you have read it already, it is sure to have left a lasting impression.

"My science teacher introduced us to Shonku in school, perhaps to increase our interest in the subject," Sabbir, a third-year BBA student remembers, and then smirks and continues, "No, it was not a life-changing moment which made me pursue a career or at least higher education in science but what did happen was that Shonku made me much more inquisitive as a person."

Meanwhile, Sazia, a mechanical engineer in her thirties who hails from Chattogram, attributes Shonku as the catalyst for her interest in chemistry and physics: "Reading those stories, I fantasised working in a laboratory myself. I always used to look forward to the very few lab classes when I was in school."

Shonku is about crazy experiments and even crazier adventures. Add to that children's lively imagination, and you have something magical!

Another Satyajit Ray fan says, "Although I was more into Feluda, I remember how a few of my friends even till the end of college days used to fervently talk about the Shonku books, discussing his many antics and adventures. It was a time when mobile phones were still a rarity. There was no Facebook, Netflix subscriptions. It was a different era; I think that the habit of book reading is dying down."

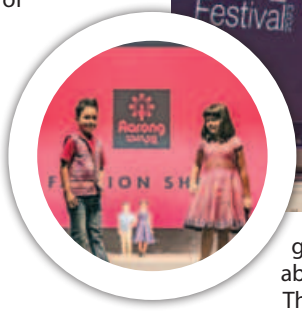
How much you agree to the last bit is up to you. But, do introduce your children or younger siblings to Professor Shonku. Not necessarily in the hopes of getting them interested in science or even in Bangla fiction, but because they will treasure these stories forever.

By M H Haider
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Model: Mohammed Monsur Ali

#EVENTS

Brac Hope Festival 2023: A celebration of resilience and empowerment

The Brac Hope Festival was a celebration to remember. The event was a riot of colour, vigour, and enthusiasm that took place in the Bangladesh Army Stadium. The three-day ceremony marked the end of a yearlong commemoration of Brac's 50th anniversary as one of the biggest development organisations in the world. The celebration, which took place from 9 to 11 February, brought together people from all occupations to celebrate Brac's remarkable achievements and to look forward to the future with anticipation.



The first day of the festival was a celebration of Bangladesh and Brac's extensive development network. The stadium was buzzing with excitement as visitors explored the various exhibitions, stalls, pavilions, and workshops displaying the different aspects of Brac's ecosystem.

Children were in for a treat with interactive workshops, learn-with-fun zones, and an architectural workshop hosted by the Brac University architecture department. One of the highlights for children was the Play Lab, an innovative solution by Brac Institute of Educational Development (BIED) that focuses on indoor games for early childhood development. Children in cities often lack space to play, so the Play Lab provides scientifically proven games to boost their cognitive abilities.

The cultural programme in the evening was the main attraction, with Fazlur Rahman Babu's "Puthi Path" performance combining poetry and music, taking many back in time with its kerosene lamp on stage. Arnob and the band Lalon also performed, entertaining the crowd with folk songs and popular tracks.

The Brac Hope Festival's second day was packed with fun activities. The day's theme, "Power of People," emphasised people's capacity to alter their lives. Participatory workshops on a variety of topics were offered, such as rickshaw painting, urban gardening, robotics, and children's Play Lab. The audience took part in games that were run by several Brac environmental projects. Both Brac Institute of Educational Development (BIED) and Brac Seed produced events for children called "Worlds of Play."

The presentation by Brac Enterprises, which celebrated the success stories of its businesses, was one of the main draws. The triumphs of Brac Microfinance customers were also emphasised. Students from the Government School for Deaf and Hearing Impaired, PHT Centre, gave a demonstration of sign language. The crowd enjoyed the musical performance by the Jatrik ensemble, which was based on true accounts of bravery and optimism. A stunning fashion show by Aarong that honoured Bangladeshi culture and heritage marked the end of the second day.

The three-day Brac Hope Festival culminated in a lively celebration of poetry, music, and dance performances, participatory workshops, and discussions on climate change. The festival was a gathering of people from all occupations, with a special focus on young change-makers.

Five young innovators were awarded the "Amra Notun Young Changemakers Award," while the newly launched "Taaga Outstanding Young Professionals Award" was presented to three outstanding working women aged under 35.

Brac Executive Director, Asif Saleh was a speaker on the panel discussion on Climate Change and Adaptation Strategies. The festival also featured a screening of documentaries, including one by renowned British photographer Platon on Sir Fazle Hasan Abed and another on Brac International. The festival ended on a high note with captivating performances by Nemesis, Artcell, and James.

The Hope Festival was established with the goal of motivating Bangladesh's youth by sharing actual accounts of people who, on their own, changed their life for the better with only a small rekindling of hope. Brac witnesses the realisation of this conviction every day, from the front lines to the last mile. Each of the roughly 100 million people Brac works with—teachers, healthcare workers, business owners, artists, farmers, producers, and partners—is proof that optimism can triumph over adversity, from the heart of Bangladesh to the furthest corners of the world.

By Feda Al Hossain
Photo: The Brac Hope Festival

TAAGA Outstanding Young Professionals Award:

CELEBRATING WOMEN WHO DRIVE CHANGE

TAAGA is making strong statements in a society where women are frequently underrepresented in leadership roles and their achievements are frequently ignored. Young female professionals, under the age of 35, who are breaking down barriers in various fields were recognised by the brand through the introduction of the TAAGA Outstanding Young Professionals Award, as part of the Brac Hope Festival that marked the end of a yearlong commemoration of Brac's 50th anniversary as one of the biggest development organisations in the world.

Nine outstanding female professionals were chosen as finalists for the award. They were Anika Meahnaz, Assistant Manager, MRP Unilever Bangladesh Ltd.; Forhat Nazib Chowdhury, Manager, Climate Responsive Infrastructure, Save the Children International; Labiba Mustabina Oishee, Business and Clinical Development Associate, Renata Ltd.; Maria Kibtia, Area Leaf Manager British American Tobacco Bangladesh; Dr Nazmee Kabir, Specialist Orthopaedics and Trauma Surgery, Evercare Hospital Dhaka; Sahida Fatema, Operation Manager Foodpanda Bangladesh; Shabnam Rafat Ummey Sawda, Business Analyst,

MyGP Product, Grameenphone Ltd.; Tasnia Tasnim, Territory Manager Berger Paints Bangladesh Ltd.; and Zeba Samiha, Category Demand Planner, Berger Paints Bangladesh Ltd.

"It felt really good first to be nominated by my organisation, it meant that they believed I deserve a platform such as this one, and then being selected as one of the top finalists from so many other young women was itself a great achievement for me. Hats off to TAAGA for coming up with this unique way of inspiring the new generation by recognising young outstanding professionals. Stories of the winners will definitely motivate young professionals positively," said Dr Nazmee Kabir, one of the finalists.

The jury panel consisting Moutushi Kabir, Senior Director, People, Culture and Communications, BRAC; Shwapna Bhowmick, Head of Region Bangladesh & India, Marks & Spencer; and Zaved Akhtar, CEO and Managing Director, Unilever Bangladesh Limited, picked three winners in Forhat Nazib Chowdhury, Labiba Mustabina Oishee, and Maria Kibtia at the award show which was held at the Army Stadium, on Day three of the BRAC Hope Festival 2023.

TAAGA was launched by Bangladesh's premier lifestyle brand, Aarong in 2003. Since then, TAAGA has carved out its own identity, finding its place amongst young consumers who resonate with its ability to be responsible, versatile, and modern. With this award programme, TAAGA is taking its commitment to women's empowerment to the next level by recognising and celebrating the achievements of young female professionals.

The Outstanding Young Professionals Award recognises women who have strong work ethics and a drive for excellence. All the nominees show courage by pursuing options that may be risky, new, or untried, but they are not afraid to implement new methods, ideas, and opportunities. The award recognises young women who stand out for their extraordinary performances and are setting performance benchmarks in their respective fields.

By Feda Al Hossain
Photo: The Brac Hope Festival

#TRAVEL

Top 7 travel destinations in Narayanganj

Many of us long for a rejuvenating outing after a tiresome week. Nevertheless, to our utter disappointment, we realise that all popular tourist spots are either too far or require more time and money to visit than we are ready to spend. But you should not look very far as Narayanganj, located on the banks of the Shitalakshya River and the outskirts of Dhaka, has many picturesque travel destinations that will make your weekend getaway special. To help you have an amazing time and a relaxing vacation, we bring you the top 7 tourist spots to visit in Narayanganj.

Panam Nagar

Once, the historic Panam Nagar was a crucial township of the administrative and commercial centre in eastern Bengal, Sonargaon. The ghost-town atmosphere and assortment of abandoned buildings of Panam Nagar easily conjure curiosity among its visitors. The architectural design of the buildings in Panam Nagar displays both native and western styles and the area has also other places of historical interest making it a perfect place for a day trip from Dhaka.

To visit Panam Nagar, you can board a direct bus heading to Narayanganj from Gulistan in Dhaka. And if you have a car, drive directly towards Narayanganj and enjoy the scenic view along the way.

Tomb of Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah

Situated at Mograpara of Sonargaon upazila, the tomb of Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah is a beautiful structure of the Sultanate period in Bangladesh. The tomb is credited to Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah who had been the third Iliyas Shahi ruler of Bengal and it stands on the banks of a dried-up pond named Magh Dighi. The dargah of Panch Pir is located just about two or three hundred metres away from the tomb.

You can visit the tomb of Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah by taking a rickshaw from the Mograpara junction of Sonargaon.

Jamdani Palli, Rupganj

The traditional art of Jamdani weaving is praised by all; UNESCO has declared it an intangible cultural heritage of humanity. The Jamdani saris of Narayanganj have been celebrated by people from all walks of life. So, why not plan a day trip to the Jamdani Palli of Narayanganj and enjoy the delicate art of weaving Jamdani saris?

The place is situated in Noapara village under the Tarabo Paurashava at Rupganj Upazila. Moreover, while coming back from the Palli, you can also visit Demra Jamdani haat if you are travelling on a Friday.

Zinda Park

Zinda Park, also known as Oikotan Eco Resort, is a very popular tourist destination located in Rupganj Upazila of Narayanganj. It is a beautiful amusement park and leisure centre that features reservoirs, tree houses, cottages, a restaurant, and a library. There is also a mini zoo to entertain visitors. Families regularly come here for picnics.

Built with mud and straw, the cottages of Zinda Park display the rustic infrastructure of Bangladesh and they can be rented for a day.

Zinda Park is sited only thirty-seven kilometres away from Dhaka and you can go there by taking the Purbachal Expressway.

Mayadeep

Mayadeep is a triangular-shaped islet sited at the heart of the mighty Meghna River. The slow rhythmic waves of Meghna that crashes against the sandy shore of Mayadeep are truly mesmeric, and you can also take a refreshing bath in the water of this islet. Sitting beside the Meghna River with your feet in the water while gazing at the passing boats will certainly make you forget about the monotonous life of the city.

To visit Mayadeep first you need to go to Sonargaon and then travel to Baidder Bazaar by auto or rickshaw. After reaching Baidder Bazaar Ghat, you can hire boats to visit Mayadeep.

Murapara Rajbari

The picturesque Murapara Palace is located in the Rupganj Upazila of Narayanganj. This magnificent two-storey building was built by Ramratan Banerjee during the British colonial period. Having a unique mix of exposed red bricks and white plaster of colonial influence, the palace effortlessly emanates a majestic vibe and attracts tonnes of tourists throughout the year. The palace is also surrounded by three vibrant ponds and not far away from the palace stand two stunningly built temples.

Murapara Rajbari is an ideal place for a day trip and you can easily visit the palace by local buses from Dhaka or simply by driving a car.

Hajiganj Fort

Quadrangular in size and very beautiful to look at, Hajiganj Fort is located in the Hajiganj locality of Narayanganj. The fort is located on the western bank of the Shitalakshya River. This splendid fort is made up of a pentagonal curtain wall and in a corner of the fort, a tall square column of brickwork stands, which is regarded as a guard tower. A walk around this striking fort will make you feel nostalgic about our past and glorious architectural establishments.

As Hajiganj Fort is situated in the centre of Narayanganj, you should not have any difficulties locating the fort. BRTC and other local buses are always available from Gulistan and other bus stands, and they will directly take you to Narayanganj.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Mainul Hasan Foysal

Benefits of reading BENGALI LITERATURE

Is reading becoming a leisurely activity of the past? Perhaps not, but people most definitely read much less than they used to. In a life characterised by uninterrupted 24/7 visual entertainment, books compete for our undivided attention all the time. We believe, however, poems, short stories, and novels deserve the same amount of attention, if not more, that we give films, dramas, music, and YouTube content.

Today is Ekushey February. On this auspicious occasion, we can make a resolution to enjoy some Bengali literature. It can be in the form of physical books or electronic ones — the choice is yours. As a matter of fact, the wide availability of e-books now means that poems and fictions can travel with us any time any place.

In addition to all the cognitive benefits associated with reading, reading in your first language has plenty of other benefits, including knowing about your country and countrymen in the language of the land.

Finding out about how you became who you are is of utmost importance, especially in the modern world, where elements of different cultures overlap and more than often, elements of dominant and Western cultures overpower other less dominant cultures, resulting in the loss of cultural identity, especially among people in developing countries. However, in order to thrive as a people and a nation, it is of grave importance not to lose our footing in this ever-changing world; we can maintain our individual identities and still work collectively as one big global society.

A loss of connection with and a lack of awareness of one's culture, language, history, and heritage can result in questioning where one's place is in this culturally diverse world. One way to build one's individual identity and be proud of it is by reading the literature of one's land.

We would never know how we became who we are if we do not delve into our own literature. By reading Bengali literature, we can recognise and understand how our society has evolved into its current state.

Unlike history books, where facts are often related in a serious tone, storytellers put forward facts and figures differently; they lift their readers and carry them into bygone times by drawing vivid images of people and their emotions, events and their importance. It is much easier to imbibe facts and lessons from good literature because a great book communicates directly with its readers. The readers, too, can connect with different characters and travel with these characters to other ages and places.

Our part of the world, the Bengali-speaking regions of Bangladesh and West Bengal, has one of the richest and most developed literary traditions in the world. If you have not yet dived into the sea of Bengali literature, then as a Bengali, you are missing out on a very beautiful and rewarding experience.

You may be fluent in English or any other foreign language, and you may have travelled to a great many countries and eaten cuisines of different parts of the globe, but when an outsider, an enlightened one, asks you about your country, history, heritage, and literature and you cannot answer with confidence, rest assured that it will most certainly ruin your repute.

Did you know that children who have a strong foundation in their native language tend to learn a second language better? Hence, even in order to learn and appreciate other languages, we need to know our own first!

A person's first language is his or her personal, social, and cultural identity. You will always question who you are and where your place in this world is until you have embarked on a journey to know yourself. Aside from giving pleasure, exploration of Bengali literature will help you form a self-identity and find your place in this globalised world; it will teach you to think deeply and critically, help you understand people and politics, shape your thoughts, and last but not least, aid you in your efforts to create a better version of yourself.

By Wara Karim
Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

#PRESS RELEASE

ISHO launches pop-up restaurant

The pioneer of modern furniture and lifestyle in Bangladesh, ISHO, has unveiled the ISHO Beachclub, a pop-up restaurant for the audiences, in the idyllic location of Mawa, mentioned a press release.

Perched on the white sands and overlooking the serene Padma River, the ISHO Beachclub is a must-visit for families, couples, lovers of food and travel, and people who want to enjoy a memorable day trip and plan out night events under the stars, away from the city.

Rayana Hossain, Founder & Managing Director of ISHO, said, "The ISHO Beachclub has been designed to become a coveted getaway for unwinding, celebrations, and memorable events, away from the bustle of city life. We envision it becoming a destination for lively experiences with great food and good times for all Bangladeshi audiences alike."

ISHO's Beachclub introduces a fresh concept of pop-up dining to the people. It is bound to become a culinary escape that gives consumers a chance to be one with nature as they engage with ISHO's well-thought-out design, products, and experiential setup.

For those craving mouth-watering international flavours with a local touch, the menu of the Beachclub has been specially curated to offer handcrafted burgers, appetisers, grills, assorted platters, and artisanal mocktails — beautifully plated, so every dish is served as a work of art.

Featuring decked wood-style architecture with gorgeous indoor and outdoor seating and an inviting ambience, the pop-up is also a stop for people who are looking for a place to plan out their date nights, anniversaries, grand parties, corporate offsites, employee gatherings, family get-togethers, pre-wedding photoshoots, engagements, including a plethora of different events.

Situated alongside the brimming Padma River, the ISHO Beachclub allows people to enjoy quality downtime with boat-riding adventures, unforgettable sundowners with live performances by well-known singers and bands, and evenings with outdoor barbeque and live grill.

#PRESS RELEASES

Le Reve Launches Summer 2023 Collection

Summer has arrived, and Le Reve has launched its latest 'Summer 2023 Collection' with new colours, print stories, summer-friendly designs, and comfortable fabrics. The collection features summer casual and party-friendly designs with the season's trendiest patterns.

Monnujan Nargis, the Chief Executive Officer of Le Reve, states, "When it comes to summer clothing, there are three key ingredients: relaxed and bright colours, weather-appropriate fabrics, and overall comfort. Our Summer 2023 collection prioritizes these three elements."

The women's summer collection from Le Reve includes casual and party-ready shalwar kameez sets, single kameez, short and mid-length tunics, shrug-style tunics, tops, cotton saris, gowns, Koti, shrugs, tops, and casual shirts. The bottoms section includes printed and summer-colour-highlighted palazzos, leggings, skirts, harem, denim, culottes, and formal pants for office wear.

For men, there is a collection of comfortable and trendy panjabi, t-shirts, polo shirts, gym vests, and various types of shirts, including casual shirts for hanging out, comfort shirts for lounging at home, premium shirts for parties, and formal shirts for the office. The boy's bottoms section includes pant-cut pyjamas to wear with Punjabi, as well as denim pants, Bermuda pants, and traditional lungis.

Le Reve also designs tunics, frocks, dresses, salwar kameez, ghagra choli sets, and comfortable leggings for girls' summer wear, and polo and shirts, casual shirts, panjabi, and pants for boys. There's even a special summer program for new-borns.

In addition, Le Reve's home decor and accessories section has added attractive new merchandise, including summer slippers for everyone, bed covers, curtains, flower vases, photo frames, matching handbags, and wallets.

Le Reve Summer 2023 collection is available at every store in Dhaka, Khulna, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Narayanganj, Chattogram as well as their website (www.lerevecraze.com).

For details, visit Le Reve's official Facebook page www.facebook.com/lerevecraze

HOROSCOPE

ARIES
(MAR. 21-APR. 20)

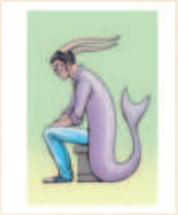
Your partner may infuriate you. Don't hesitate to look for alternatives to get the job done. Focus on professional ventures. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

CANCER
(JUN. 22-JUL. 22)

Your diplomatic nature will get you out of unsavoury situations. Your partner will need extra attention. Entertainment will be expensive. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.

LIBRA
(SEP. 24-OCT. 23)

You can have difficulties with the opposite sex. Family members can set you off. Consider making an investment. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.



CAPRICORN
(DEC. 22-JAN. 20)

Take prompt action in order to reach your highest potential. Be cautious when operating anything this week. Make plans to travel. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

TAURUS
(APR. 21-MAY 21)

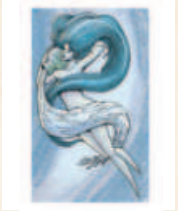
Don't let others persuade you. Your co-workers will cooperate with you. Insincere gestures of friendliness may occur. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

LEO
(JUL. 23-AUG. 22)

You will be the centre of attention at social gatherings. Take time to develop your hobbies. Don't spend carelessly. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

SCORPIO
(OCT. 24-NOV. 21)

Spend time with loved ones. Put your efforts into money-making ventures. Consult with loved ones regarding personal problems. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.



AQUARIUS
(JAN. 21-FEB. 19)

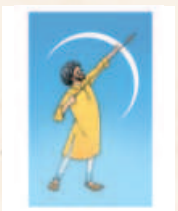
Make money by pushing for your ideas. Be careful before signing binding contracts. Don't let others put unreasonable demands on you. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.

GEMINI
(MAY 22-JUN. 21)

Problems with in-laws can cause friction with your partner. Verify everything before you commit to anything. Deceit with co-workers is apparent. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

VIRGO
(AUG. 23-SEP. 23)

Seek advice regarding your personal problems. Pleasure trips will be favourable. Don't deny yourself this week. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.



SAGITTARIUS
(NOV. 22-DEC. 21)

Deal with colleagues carefully this week. Things will be hectic at home. Find an energetic outlet to dissipate your anxiety. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

PISCES
(FEB. 20-MAR. 20)

Your partner won't understand your needs. Your new friends may not be trustworthy. It's time to re-evaluate your motives. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.

Star LIFE Style

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#PERSPECTIVE

How nursery rhymes affected my childhood

Hattima Tim Tim
Tara mathey parey dim
Tader khara duto shing
Tara Hattima Tim Tim

I cite these immortal lines from Jagindranath Sarkar's 'Hashikhushi,' published back in 1897. It was where the author included a group of popular folk rhymes, including a few of his own. This verse, immortalised by Sarkar, especially through inclusion into print, has over the years become a huge part of the Bengali literary heritage, influencing children of every generation, including myself. This particular rhyme is extremely important to me, perhaps because it introduced me to the colourful world of the Bengali language, and developed an innate love for wildlife,

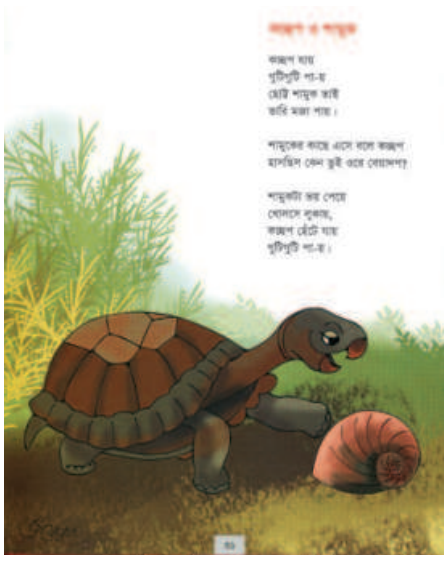
whether real or imaginary.

As an adult today, I know that my most favourite nursery rhymes mostly made no sense at all, because it was speaking about make-believe characters that had no presence in real life. And yet again, as an adult, I also know that nursery rhymes are meant to be magical; its logic and aesthetics built in such a way that it resists the traditional way logic seeks to present itself.

Khokon amar kaadena
Juju esheche
Jujur haathe mota lathi
Daway bosheche
Kaak palao, cheel palao
Aar palao ki?
Murgi bole bhoy korina
Ghomta tenechi
---- *Kaji Latifa Haq*

Its' true that while growing up, I had the privilege to grow up in the suburbs, which meant a lot of exposure to farm animals and household pets. Every vacation involved making friends with these living beings and developing a special kind of compassion towards them.

And while all families have few big issues to discuss at every gathering, ours was mostly about the birds and animals



surrounding us. Instead of cricket or politics, my mother and I mostly talked about how my favourite hen laid eggs or the bees formed into a group to protect their produce – honey**.**These discussions, which we called 'small talk,' today were made every day since my toddler years.

Tiye pakhir biye hobe
Shajte bosheche
Lal tuktuk Gaye onek
Goyna poreche
Alta diye paa duti tar

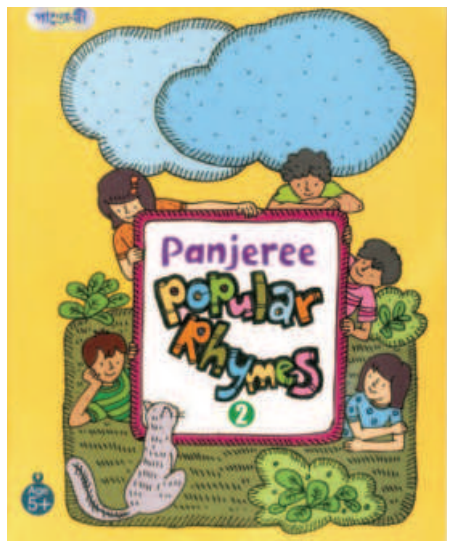
Ranga koreche
Taina dekhe moyna pakhi
Gaan dhoreche
---- *Lutfor Rahman Sarkar*

At every family gathering, there's a favourite discussion amongst members and it wasn't any different in ours. None of the Eids were or even are complete without making reference to one special story and episode.

Today, this, is even discussed with my children. The grandparents make it a point to let my children know about my obsession with nursery rhymes and hence with birds, bees and all kinds of animals.

So, here's how the story goes; my father wanted to make me a wooden rocking chair and colour it pink for me when I was four. To his annoyance, I threw a tantrum immediately because I wanted the rocking chair to be shaped as a parrot based on my favourite rhyme and coloured green. What happened next need not be disclosed here, but much to my parent's displeasure, I had to be wooed in with a replacement that involved a cute furry animal.

This may have been my personal story with rhymes, as everyone has their own. But at the end of it all, one thing is for sure; these very nursery rhymes evoke immediate nostalgia and maybe even had a huge impact on my becoming.



Why nursery rhymes?
Children develop literacy skills at birth, and for some time before they learn to read. Here's how "Hattima Tim Tim," could help in the learning process:

Literacy:
Dim and Shing. Rhyming words help children pick out smaller sounds that make up language.

Speech:
Repetition helps develop pronunciation.

Vocabulary:
Kids learn to count: *ek, dui, tin. Hattima tim tim er duto shing*. They also learn complex words like *mathey pare dim*. Can be related to the hens and ducks and taught how 'Hattima tim tim' may be of the same breed.

Fine motor skills:
Acting out with fingers pointing upwards and representing the *shing.*

Social skills:
Acting it out together with parents or other friends.

Nursery rhymes are fun, easy and impactful. By introducing them to our young ones early on, we encourage improved literacy and articulation.

By MMC
Photo: Collected