

The Daily Star

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Thursday, August 27, 2009 02:40 PM GMT+06:00

Published On: 2009-07-04

Star Books Review

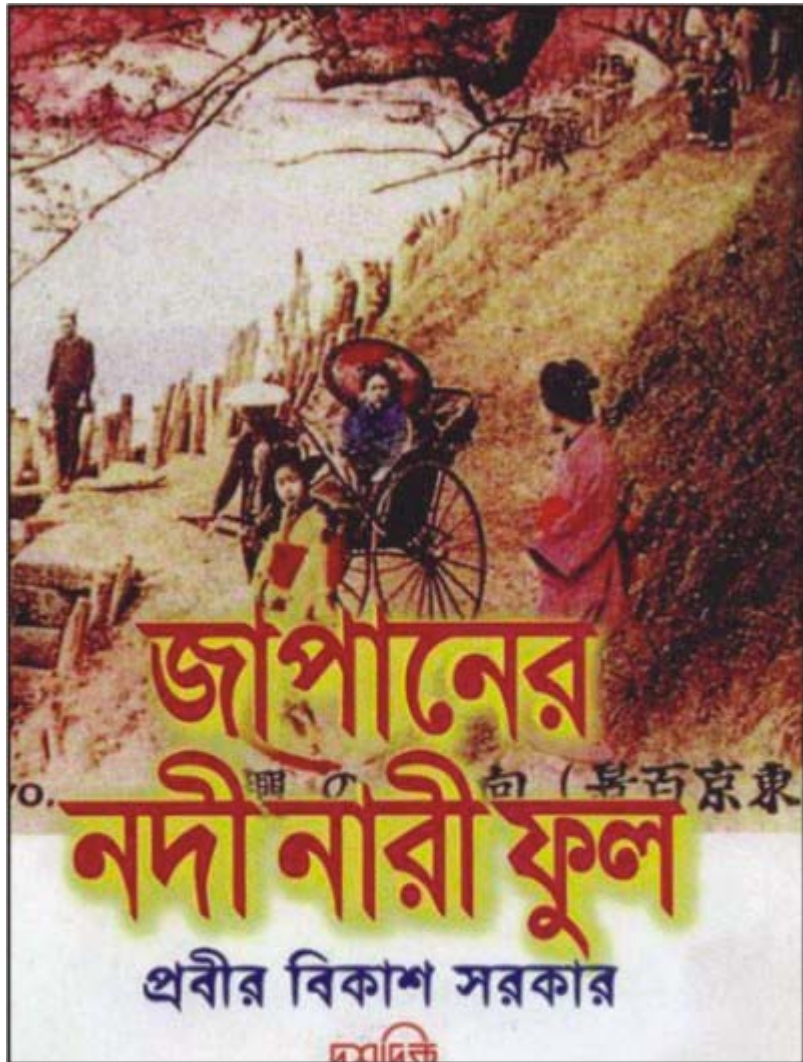
Retracing Japan's legacy

Pratyay Banerjee finds a beautiful world

RETRACING the singularity of a race or a linguistic community poses to be one significant challenge of our time, the world of globalization. Though equally modern in terms of industrial development and living standards, tradition and cultural integrity finds an important place in the life of Japan. Viewed from this perspective, Probir Bikash Sarker's *Japaner Nadi Nari Ful*, a book chiefly on Japan's traditional past, (River, Geisha, and Sakura) appears to be a significant effort to make us familiar with this aspect.

The first section of the text delineates with the rivers of Japan or more particularly how down the ages Japanese life had been dependent on them. There are around seventy rivers in Japan, Sarker notes, and of these five, which are bigger than the rest, may be noted . They are Tonogawa (16, 840 km.), Ishirigawa (14,330) Shinanogawa (11,900) Kitakamigawa (10, 150) and Kisogawa (9,100). The word for 'river' in Japanese is Kawa or Gawa (?).

The author has rightly pointed out how even in our time, the word kawa is used in many place names or in surnames of men and women, as in the case of Kawamura, Kawabata and many others. This informative prose in detail discusses how in the past fishing had been one of the oldest trade activities in Japan , in the Meiji Restoration period how most of the modern cities and harbours were established by the side of these rivers, and in the post-war period not only in Tokyo but in other cities as well dams were erected to resist floods. The legacy of indebtedness to the river still continues. People in Japan during the Golden Week enjoy fishing goldfish and crawfish in rivers; those who can afford enjoy a House Boat (Yakatabune) on the river. The writer refers to Basho, the eminent Haiku poet of the 17th century, whose Sumidagawa river journey is famous. A statue of the poet has been erected by the river bank to commemorate the poet's experience of the river journey 300 years back in time.



Japaner Nadi Nari Ful
Probir Bikash Sarker
Doshdik, Dhaka

The next subject Sarkar touches upon is the world of the geisha in Japan. The writer's detailed analysis points out how since the 7th century the geishas or court entertainers came up in Japan. It had two aspects; they were cultural activists as well as sex workers. Although today only women can aspire to be geishas, in earlier times, the author notes, there were also male geishas, a strange fact which we are ignorant of. This custom flourished during the Edo period chiefly. The author observes that by the 1780s women geishas surpassed their male counterparts. Finally in the post-war period, with prostitution having been banished by law, geishas regained their social status. The concluding part of the essay deals with how geishas have been treated in various literary works, which includes Nobel laureate Kawabata's famous novel, *The Snow Country*.

The last section of the text is about Sakura or the cherry blossom, Japan's national flower. At the beginning the writer quotes a line from Basho, which states that the poet is reminded of many things, Sakura as well. Musing on Sakura and the fondness of the Japanese people for it, the writer has touched upon a number of subjects --- the etymological source of the word Sakura, Sakura and other flowers of Japan, Sakura as part of flora, institutions named after Sakura all over the world and finally the festival of Hanami or cherry blossom viewing festival. Truly, few other races can be found to be so sensitive regarding flowers.

Apart from the subject of the book, the illustrations the writer includes deserve praise. There are altogether forty-one pictures on the above-mentioned subjects.

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