

# experimenter

NAEEM MOHAIEMEN

দূরে • *dui*

23 Aug - 5 Nov; Opening Preview: Friday, 23 Aug 2019 | 6 pm - 8 pm  
Experimenter – Hindustan Road; 2/1 Hindustan Road, Kolkata 29

Experimenter presents দূরে • *dui*, Naeem Mohaiemen's solo at Experimenter Hindustan Road. This exhibition builds new links between two works which first appeared in another format in a journal (*Volume Eleven*), and in Bengali (*Baksho Rohoshyo*).

In *Volume Eleven (flaw in the algorithm of cosmopolitanism)*, Mohaiemen looks at four essays the Bengali author Syed Mujtaba Ali wrote between the two World Wars, where he predicted the German army would defeat Britain, and liberate India. The project first appeared in *South As A State of Mind* journal (documenta 14), and appears here as framed pieces. Naeem translated several of Mujtaba Ali's stories into English, starting from *The Daily Star Book of Bangladeshi Writing* (2005). The stories he selected were how he wanted his grandfather's younger brother to be remembered—as a raconteur, teller of tall tales, late night *adda* companion. The stories were "Vacuum packed sweets" (an apocalyptic showdown at an Italian customs stop over a sealed tin of dessert), "Will we meet again" (a night encounter scuttled by chivalry aspirations), "Indian-British conversation" (dining cutlery as a metaphor for Quit India movement), and "Amphibian Man" (a compilation of his failed loves in Europe). Ali's short stories became a standard inclusion in post-1971 textbooks in newly independent Bangladesh, and so the appearance of these stories in English carried a touch of recognition and pleasure for those who had read them in Bengali. But the existence, in untranslated form, of essays where Ali expressed admiration for Germany in World War Two were a problem, rather than a discovery. In a series of typed pages, Naeem gradually lays out these essays, along with the problem of this discovery. Subhash Chandra Bose's hopes for the Axis forces is contextualized by a museum on Lala Lajpat Rai (Elgin) Sarani. But nobody is going to give the same effort or resources to try to understand why Ali put his naive hopes on Germany for liberating India. Certainly, no government is going to name an airport after Ali.

In *Baksho Rohoshyo (Chobi Tumi Kar?)*, Naeem returns to photographs his father took in the 1950s, documenting what family members can remember now about snapshots of a house, cousins, and scenery. The title comes from Satyajit Ray's Feluda detective novel, but the box here is a smaller one, with tiny photo strips. This project first appeared at *Longitude Latitude*

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ó in Dhaka, in Bengali, and appears here in English. Naeem's father was a surgeon in pre-1971 Pakistan, and post-1971 Bangladesh. He was also an obsessive photographer from the 1950s onward, very little of which survived the impact of weather and neglect. In *Rankin Street, 1953* (2013), Naeem made sculptures, blueprints, and a video responding to these photographs, using his own recall of conversations with his father. For *Baksho Rohoshyo*, he sat with his father, Mohammad Abdul Mohaiemen (b 1935, Mymensingh, East Bengal), and two of his sisters Suraiya Begum (b 1937, Diamond Harbor, West Bengal; d 2019, New York, USA) and Sadia Afroze Ali (b 1949, Pabna, East Bengal). In the transcribed conversations reproduced here, the multi-colored dialogue is between Naeem (black), his father (blue), and aunts Suraiya (green) and Sadia (red). The length of the answers gives a sense of who remembers what, and which details shine through. For this iteration, the text has been translated into English, and while this reaches a different audience, Bengali speakers know that something of the original meaning is lost. Sometimes, the transcripts have names—Bablu Da, Mejo Bua, Bhai Sab—of interest only to family members. At other times, small fragments of national history appear, marked by two partitions—1947 partition of Bengal and the 1971 liberation of Bangladesh. Small glimmers of larger arcs appear—neglected Hindu temples, 'Transfer of Property' between India and Pakistan, the appearance of Urdu, and the decline of the forms of address ('didi', 'da') misidentified as "Hindu Bangla" and their replacement with "more Muslim" forms ('saab', 'bhai', 'apa'). Along the way, the Christian-Hindu-Muslim team that invented fingerprints as policing technology. Small storms went over this family, as they did over an entire subcontinent. These stories are the last footprints of a once *ekannoborti* family now scattered by economics and migration.

Naeem Mohaiemen (b. 1969) combines essays, films, and installations to research Third World Internationalism and World Socialism. He is author of *Prisoners of Shothik Itihash* (Kunsthalle Basel, 2014), editor of *Chittagong Hill Tracts in the Blind Spot of Bangladesh Nationalism* (Drishtipat, 2010), co-editor (w/ Lorenzo Fusi) of *System Error: War is a Force that Gives us Meaning* (Sylvana, 2007) and co-editor (w/ Eszter Szakacs) of *Solidarity Must be Defended* (Tranzit/ Van Abbe/ Salt/ Tricontinental, 2019). The work recently exhibited at SALT Beyoglu (Istanbul, 2019), Mahmoud Darwish Museum (Ramallah, 2018), Vasas Federation of Metalworkers' Union (Budapest, 2018), and Abdur Razzaq Foundation (Dhaka, 2017). He is a member of *Bad Barcode* (badbarcode.net), a campaign opposing Amazon headquarters relocation to New York, due to its track record of destroying small business, driving up housing costs, and assistance in surveillance.

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