

A Translation of Zahir Raihan's "Mohamrityu"

A Great Departure

MOTIUR RAHMAN

They carried the dead body from the front yard inside the house and slowly laid him down on the floor.

The dusk outside thickened gradually into dark night. Lighting two candles beside the body, they sat around in circle, all in dead silence.

In shaky hands, Shomsher Ali pulled out a blood soaked letter and a photo from the pocket. Stealing a cautious glance over his shoulder Rahman asked in a hushed tone, "Whose photo is that?"

"His fiancé's," replied Shomsher Ali, "They were supposed to get married in the coming Baishakh."

"Why don't you leave that right where it was?" someone took a sharp breath and whispered.

The news spread soon all over the village. People came in groups to the house just to see him once. As they entered one by one, all took off their shoes at the door-side as if in reverence of a divinity in the other room.

Two girls sat silently before his feet, and one before his head.

The youngest daughter of the lawyer, Suren all on a sudden pricked her little finger and gently rubbed a droplet of blood like a tilak over his pale forehead.

The other two girls cleansed his feet with utmost care while the rest of the people sat quietly, motionless.

The incense was burning rather slowly. Shomsher Ali replaced the almost burnt candles with new ones. Sagir Mia beckoned Rahman to step outside.

"Any arrangement for the burial?"

"Yes."

"When will you take him to the graveyard?"

"At dawn, I suppose."

"Anyone went for the shroud?"

"Not yet."

"Then take this money," Sogir Mia handed a five taka note, and so did Suren.

Bad-tempered, usually a very close-fisted woman, Poltu's Maa offered a two taka note as well.

Taxi driver Fazal Sheikh gave away all

he earned that day.

"What to do with so much of it?" Rahman could not help asking.

"Just go to the market. Make sure you buy the finest one," replied Fazal Sheikh in a choking voice.

With tears brimming in his eyes Sogir Mia added, "Don't forget the attar and camphor! After all, what else can we do for him now?"

Not knowing exactly what to do,



they kept moving around aimlessly.

No one got a wink of sleep even for a moment all through the night. They could not, for what happened in that afternoon would have kept them in a daze for years to come.

The setting sun on the west spread a reddish tint over the white clouds floating all over the horizon, now crimson red. Pointing towards the clouds, a grandma over the edge of a wooded porch asked her granddaughter, "Do you know why the clouds are so red? You don't? Why would you? Ever mind reading anything from the religious scriptures? Do you know who Hossain was? Son of Hazrat Ali. Ezid murdered him wrongfully in Karbala. They tortured him to death.

Those blessed blood clots emerge now every day in the evening sky. You got my point?"

Few women jostled together at one corner squabbling over who would take water from the tube-well first for the bath of the dead. Poltu's Maa seemed to win flaunting everyone else while babbling nonsense to herself continuously.

The office-returned babus sat in a corner room of the first floor to play cards. Just beside that room bald headed Rahman was heard beating his lean ailing wife, as usual.

The daughter of the aged lawyer was playing her sitar.

But it all came to a halt much like a bolt from the blue.

The residents of the west facing two-story house were surprised to find a man entering through the main gate followed by three other people. They were carrying someone on a stretcher and walked forward with much caution to put him down on the yard.

Such a pale and calm face!

The women around the neighborhood tube-well came forward howling, "Whose boy is this? Is he dead?"

A subdued yet loud cry of mourning took over the place.

The four carriers were yet to answer. The people from the first floor came downstairs. Soon a small sincere gathering formed around the dead body.

L. D. clerk Shomsher Ali was the first one to identify him.

"Oh my God! This is our Nuru's son, Shaheed! Wait! How did he ... die?"

It seemed the four men were about to say something but for some reason refused in the midway.

"You shared a room with him once, no Shomsher bhai?"

"Yes, I did" said Shomsher Ali lowering his voice. "With inquisitive eyes he looked at the four and asked, "He is soaked in blood. How did it happen?"

One of them went out and came back closing the main gate. Then he whispered something to the crowd that they found impossible to believe.

"What!" All of them had the same thought racing inside, "How is this even possible!"

Fazal Sheikh couldn't hide it like everyone else. He asked loudly, "What! Who shot him? Why?"

"Has Ezid made a return again?" muttered the old grandma.

An eventual dead silence took over all. Their restless eyes were hanging about aimlessly only to end up on the lifeless body lying on the ground.

A shy, dark skinned boy lived here for over a year from now. He used to stay there and lead a routine life. No one saw him much other than the time he would walk to his college.

No one noticed him to be of anything special or different.

How would even he be noticed? Plenty of people live here with hundreds of them going out and coming in at a time every day. Who keeps an eye on another? Everyone is busy with their own lives. But on that day and at that very moment, all of them grew a great fellow feeling for the boy.

They were there all through the night.

In the morning, they washed the dead body and wrapped him in shroud. As he was being laid inside the coffin, the whole yard broke down with people of all corners.

Young boys from the village hoisted the blood-soaked shirt like a flag. They would carry it in the front leading the funeral procession. Sogir Mia feared whether they would be able to take him at all to the graveyard. He reported the presence of military and police forces across the street.

"They might snatch him away from us," he apprehended.

"Why would we give in?" the young boys countered strongly.

He has no parent, sibling or any other relative here. Parents are perhaps assured that their boy is studying here safely, that after the exams he would go

home, to his family!

For one last time, someone removed the shroud from his face. Poltu's Maa leaned forward and kissed on his forehead and stepped aside trying to hide her tears.

The old grandma wailed loudly. "Ah! How would his mother bear this when she learns about the death of her son?" asked someone.

All of the people present, young and old alike, wanted to carry the coffin.

Finally, they came to terms. None would be able to hold the coffin for more than ten minutes. There are about one hundred people there; and everyone has to have the honor.

By the time they got on to the lane with the martyr lying in his coffin, the sun was above the east horizon.

In front of everyone was Shibani, the youngest daughter of lawyer Suren, carrying the pole with the bloody shirt on top of it. By her sides were the two granddaughters of Hosen doctor, Ranu and Sufia. Some wanted them not to leave, but they were unyielding. They must.

"So be it. As they are willing so, let them," Sogir Mia meddled.

As the procession was moving forward in a slow pace through the narrow lane, women were tossing flowers at his coffin.

Flower and rosewater, rosewater and flower!

His coffin was covered from top to bottom with flowers. Someone from the nearby veranda spoke out tenderly, "He died for our language."

"He died for us," said another.

As the words reached his ears, S.D. clerk Shomsher Ali could not hold the tears back.

"Shomsher bhai! This is no time to weep," Fazal Sheikh mildly chided him.

Shomsher Ali approached Fazal Sheikh and said in a muffled voice, "I feel jealous, very jealous Fozlu! Why couldn't I die like him!"

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FROM EKUSHEY BOI MELA

Arun Kumar Biswas: The Creator of the Detective Alokesh Roy

TAPATI MANDAL

Just imagine, a detective character like Sherlock Holmes by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle or Satyajit Ray's Prodosh C. Mitra alias Feluda appears in the Bangladesh literary arena. Yes, I'm talking about Alokesh Roy, a practicing private detective (of course in literature only), who is engaged in solving criminal cases along with his teammates Ms Urbee Bose and crime reporter Shuvojit. Arun Kumar Biswas' first novel of this genre is *Jalpipi* (water jacana) published in 2018 from Anyaprokash that tells a story about the killing of a notorious goon Gagan Chowdhury. Here we can see a very seasoned private detective with extraordinary acumen Mr. Alokesh Roy, who established the fact that Mr. Gagan was not killed, rather he was unfortunately shot dead by his own firearm. Again, it was not a suicide even; it was an unusual case of misfire called ricochet bullet that bounced back and hit the killer himself like a boomerang.

Mr. Biswas was influenced by Edgar Allan Poe's story "The murders in the Rue Morgue" which dated back in 1841. At the same time, he is a great fan of Sharadindu Banerjee



who enjoyed sky-kissing fame in his lifetime as a detective writer for his well-acclaimed character Byomkesh Bokshi. In addition, Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes was like a sweet cake for him. Just to visit Holmes museum at 221/b Baker street, he had been to the City of London twice. He did his second Master's in HRM also over there in the University of London in 2010.

Arun Kumar Biswas, popularly

known as an adventure and detective novelist, was born on 27 December 1977 in the district of Gopalganj. Basically, he was a student of English literature graduating from the University of Dhaka in 1998, and subsequently he did his Master's degree from the same university in 2000. Hailing from a village of panoramic ambience, Mr. Biswas has all through been a true lover of the mother nature. He loves to spend

time in the lap of nature; you may find ample elements of fantasy and romanticism about nature in his writings.

As a writer, Arun Kumar Biswas loves to share his thoughts and aspirations with the people, specially the young ones. Some of his most popular adventures are *Spy*, *Peking man Mystery*, *Coffeemaker*, *Ora Detective*, *Gublu Goenda is in Danger*, *The Silhouette Lady of Bristol*, *The*

Revenge of the Lady Ghost.

Arun Kumar opines that a detective writer as well as the reader of this genre are of special brain and mental faculty. They are intelligent, inquisitive, logical (but not judgmental), avid and they love to take challenges. Mr. Holmes rightly says, "It's a capital mistake to theories unless one has enough data." The detective Alokesh Roy tends to focus on the story behind the scene, from scrutinizing the nitty-gritty of the crime scene, closely quizzing the suspects, analyzing and dissecting the circumstantial evidences and finally coming to a conclusion. He has a good command on Narayan Reddy's medicine and forensic science.

Our author believes that literature is the reflection of life. It reflects on the time and makes a correlation between the past and the present. Science fiction gives us intimations about the future as well. The writer basically hits the young and juveniles as his target readers. They have innate fascination for adventure, detective and suspended belief. I hope Mr. Alokesh Roy the detective, will be able to make a permanent room in the suspense-loving readers of our country. Arun Kumar's some other best loved detective novels are *Crisis*, *Jalpipi*, *The skull of Alim Beg*, *The darkest dome*, and *An unfortunate Death of Anal Mitra*. Mr. Biswas is very careful about his diction. He takes his words and coins phrases from variety of vocabulary known to the common people. To conclude, I must say, when you want a novel you simply cannot put down, just pick up a book by Arun Kumar Biswas.