



Munier Chowdhury with wife Lily Chowdhury, 1957.

PHOTO: ASIF MUNIER

Kobor: A unique artistic representation of an unusual situation

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"You said the play, *Kobor*, has some influence from a certain foreign play."

"Oh yes. *Bury the Dead*. I just read it at that time. There was a dead person's protest—he didn't want to be buried, he screamed. If there is a thematic similarity, it's there. But none of this came to my mind when I wrote *Kobor*. I somewhat strangely discovered this connection a few years later. I think it was an influence of the subconscious."

"Did *Kobor* face any criticism?"

"There was enough. Many asked why I brought humour in such a spooky and mysterious environment. To those, I say, I have always found some form of morbid satisfaction amidst horror. When there was a tragedy, I prominently saw, or you could say I tried to see, its grotesque elements. This has always been my feeling. For instance, the leader's physical gestures in *Kobor* are really comical, which was also the reason why it was like this."

"Is that all? Is there any other belief/conviction that directed you?"

"Look, I got to know the Muslim leadership up close. In light of that intimacy, their characteristic pointlessness/banality became prominently visible to me. The comic nature of their activities became glaringly

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obvious to me. These must have influenced my writings. Those who come from the lower middle-class background, have resentment as unadulterated as their intense anger. Since I saw them from a different angle, what caught my attention was their characteristic emptiness."

Munier Chowdhury said he has yet to

see a good production of *Kobor*. The sloppy production in the country's theatre pained him.

"This is why I don't feel like seeing my own plays, you know. I barely ever go. University students staged my drama only a few days ago. I noticed that none of them memorised the dialogues well. It really makes me annoyed."

I had never seen Munier Chowdhury getting agitated. This time was no exception. He spoke indifferently, in a manner that he always did. However, he had a minor complaint.

"It will be a mistake to try to find only the significance of Ekushey in *Kobor*. Maybe I have tried to say more. Something more," Munier Chowdhury said, taking a little pause.

"Many comments have been made about your play *Kobor*. Which one among them has touched your mind?"

"That's right. I have heard a lot of comments and also read many criticisms. Raneshda made a remark on the notebook in which I wrote the play first. When he sent the notebook back to me, I saw a comment by him that still shines in my mind. What Raneshda tried to tell me was that if I had a clear political conviction, if I had not been in any doubt or hesitation, the play might have ended differently."

"Were you moved by Ranesh Dasgupta's comment?"

"A lot. Raneshda asked me in that comment if a writer should always remain in uncertainty. Isn't there the truth in front of us? Many now say if I were fully involved with politics, I would have been better-off and my country would also have benefitted."

"What are your thoughts on people's theatre (*gononatok*)?"

"As long as society is divided into different classes, the appeal of a particular writing will be different to different people. All sections of people in a society cannot enjoy the same artistic pleasure at the same time."

"The plays you have written are intellectual and the dialogues you have written are tactful. Will ordinary people understand it?"

I am a city dweller. I can't write for anyone except the highly educated people, because I have no clear idea about the sacrifices being made by the working class people. Their pain should be expressed, the price of their sweat has to be given in our writings. We have to understand the greatness of life, the greatness of being alive. But these cannot be and should not be written in the shelter of insincerity."

Translated from Bangla by Naznin Tithi.