

## Shaheed Day Supplement

## A SHORT STORY

For us there is no surprise ending to this particular story-essay: our man Kasimuddin, who has travelled to Dhaka from Jaleswari, will be thrown out of the National Museum; he will be run over by a blue minibus; the driver of the bus having been brutally manhandled by an angry crowd, will be taken to a hospital where he will give a statement to the police that the dead man deliberately ran into his bus, as though he was determined to commit suicide, and it was so sudden that he could not put his break on in time to avoid the man's death. What Kasimuddin himself has got to say about this, we have no way to ascertain now; where no question will ever reach him.

He was an ordinary man. He never said his prayers. He smoked cannabis. He visited cheap women in the bazaar whenever he had some extra cash. As is evident, he was not a God's man; and so we can not even hope that someday he will appear in some of our dreams to give his version of the accident, like we have heard from our elders that such and such pious soul had returned in other peoples dreams from the nether world to reveal this and that.

But why did Kasimuddin go berserk inside the National Museum? Why did the guards collar and throw him out so violently?

This year some boys came to me from Jaleswari where I was born. They wanted me to participate in a poetry reading session dedicated to the martyrs of the language movement of February 1952; that I could not accept the invitation is another story and irrelevant to this essay; but when I said I am unable to, explained that I am already committed to three poetry reading sessions and seminars in Dhaka on that particular day of the martyrs, it was evident from their faces that the boys from my home town did not believe me. I had a sneaking suspicion that they took me for a heartless man, a man who has made it big in the capital and does not want to be bothered by his humble past; to mend matters I invited them to tea and delicacies, and encouraged them to light hearted conversation. Soon tea came; I heaped up their plates with cakes and sweets. They began to eat with embarrassed gratitude. Good nourishment makes a man love this life a little more; it whispers to us that this life is an interesting situation after all.

Inevitably death is the other side of life. We hear about death everyday; we witness it, we read about it in newspapers; we hear about it on radio and we remember our dead occasionally. On a day when fog envelops the morning I think of deaths in my family; the fog appears to me as shrouds of the dead, still and cold.

The boys belched loudly and entered the land of the dead, at least one of them. He asked me if I remember Kasimuddin?

Kasimuddin? Yes. From the last year's 21st February. He did not elaborate further. I failed to connect this man with our glorious day of the martyrs.

He was from our town Jaleswari. He was a small green-grocer. His pitch was just outside the general store of Chandi Babu. Remember?

No, I did not. The boys collectively tried to jog my memory, but still I could not identify the man. I had left the town thirty years ago and though I returned occasionally, it was only for a couple of days. It was too much to ask from me to remember a Kasimuddin from among hundreds of green-grocers.

But I grew curious. Why would these boys bring up an ordinary man in our conversation? What possible connection could he have had with 21st February?

One of the boys looked visibly hurt. There was a note of accusation in his voice when he mentioned that Kasimuddin's news, along with his photograph, even if it was of his mutilated carcass, was published in Ittefaq, one of our leading dailies, and it was mentioned that he was from Jaleswari. If not the man, surely the very name of my home town should have left an imprint in my memory. The boy looked disturbed.

I could not bring myself to say that I do not read Ittefaq; nor could I observe out of deference to their innocence that what is a world-shaker in a sleepy town like Jaleswari may not be worth a casual sigh in Dhaka, the capital of the country.

Did he die? In Dhaka? I asked in a voice to match their sentiment. Soon they came forward with the story. When they had finished narrating, I asked them. But what made him to scream in the museum in the first place? I do not understand.

Well, we are not certain, sir. Was there no detail in the newspaper?

No. Not really. It was only mentioned that Kasimuddin went berserk, he let out a long angry scream at the display counter of ancient coins. He was immediately thrown out of the building. He tried to enter again, bashed his head against the iron-gate, shouted abuse in the vilest language, but the guard refused to let him in. Then the accident happened. He went under the speeding bus.

The boys looked lost; they stopped their narration; the tea was getting cold. I poured them some, and asked, Do you know what was he saying besides the abuses?

They looked at each other; without words, with a gentle nudge, they selected someone as their mouthpiece; he offered a suggestion. Perhaps Kasimuddin's dialect was not intelligible to Dhakaites and so nobody could report anything about his motivation.

But what brought him to Dhaka, a green-grocer like him, on 21st February, the day of the martyrs of our Language Movement? Surely for an uneducated man like Kasimuddin there can not be anything in the celebration of the day to urge him to undertake an expensive journey to the city.

Everyone was frozen at his blasphemy: Kasimuddin went as far as the exit gate of the holy tomb, stopped, and then, turning around, he addressed the Guardian and the believers, You, Sir, and you who lick his boots, hear you all, you come here and touch your forehead on the satin draped tomb, but the Koran says not to do that except to Allah, and yet you do that to a dead man. How come you do not lose your claim to be a Moslem by doing that?

there for the martyrs rising like a piece of heaven itself from an ocean of multi-coloured flowers on the 21st, yes, I will go and make my offerings there and salute the martyrs on the next 21st, go I will even if seventy thousand serpents chase and bite me. I shall have no regret.

Kasimuddin did come to Dhaka, he did go the Central Mausoleum for the Martyrs of the Language Movement; his son Jasimuddin who accom-

panied him reported that on 21st February there was a sea of people at the mausoleum, surging forward to make their offerings: Kasimuddin could not make any headway, begged with folded palms to the volunteers to make way for him, but to no avail. He drifted back in the sea of people. A young woman who was in a procession noticed him; she took his hand and firmly pushing the crowd, led him to the first platform leading to the mausoleum and helped him make his flower-offerings.

Jasimuddin narrated what had happened in the few hours between the flower-offerings and his father's death under a mini-bus. From the mausoleum, they took the road leading to Bangla Academy; there were many food stalls erected for the occasion on the pavement; both father and son sat for refreshments. Between bites Kasimuddin shook his head with silent laughter and said, Seventy thousand serpents indeed. He did notice the fear engraved on his son's face; he assured him, Listen, my son, if the serpents raise their ugly hoods, do not be afraid, each petal of those flowers will turn into a shield and protect us.

The sun climbed up and reached the middle sky; father and son reached the National Museum and there Kasimuddin remembered what the school teacher, his regular customer, had said to him: he repeated it to his son. Our land has a long history, if you go to Dhaka do not forget to visit the museum, and by the way, I got the report, that was served right that day by you.

Jasimuddin recalled later, that in the museum, when they

guard of the bungalow who was his friend since childhood. The guard informed him silently, by raising his thumb and bringing it down to his mouth, that the Sahib was busy enjoying his drinks and would raise hell if disturbed. But then he assured him by asking him to come back in the morning.

I will try my best, my friend. If it is with the Sahib. What do you mean by your blasted if? But Kasimuddin dared not raise his voice, fearful of the man from the government. He returned to the bungalow early next morning only to find the tyre mark of the Sahib's Jeep on the rain-soaked ground. The Sahib had left for Dhaka.

That was five years ago. Some people had suggested to Kasimuddin that he should go to the police station and record a diary of the loss. He would have done so, but wise people instilled fear in him by saying, It is the government of General Zia, the man in dark glasses and what does he care about an insignificant loss of an coin from a slip of a poor girl? He will beat you till you are blue for wasting his time.

Kasimuddin was dumbfounded to discover the selfsame coin behind the glass panel of the display counter at the National Museum. He could even recognise the cut mark left accidentally by one of its former wearers. He let out a violent scream and went berserk. The rest we know.

The boys told me that when the death news reached Jaleswari, Syed Abdus Sultan, the Guardian of the tomb of the holy saint, rose to the pulpit of the Friday congregation and thundered at the believers. Now you have all seen what came to that vilest creature; he made flower-offerings to the so-called martyrs like Hindus do to their gods; he was run over by a bus before you could blink your eyes; gone, gone from the face of earth which was created for Allah's and only Allah's worship; take lesson from Kasimuddin's death: repent and beg His forgiveness.

The believers returned home from the mosque like children struck with terror. Like them perhaps many of us will fail to see that one incident has no strength of proving anything anywhere. Millions of people in Bangladesh have gone to make their flower offerings to the Martyrs of the Language Movement; out of them only one, just one out of the millions, had met his death in a street accident, which is so very common in our capital city.

He lost his life because he was violently deprived of his family treasure, in fact his private symbol of life's continuation, by the people who wear dark glasses to please their private god.

We declare our Kasimuddin a martyr; another one in a long line in this Gangetic delta where rivers carry our people's blood to a sea of fire.

## A Man from Jaleswari

Syed Shamsul Haq



Small green-grocers in our country are mostly men without alphabet.

The boys did not know his reasons for making this, as it appeared, one-way journey. They met every afternoon at a tea-stall next to Kasimuddin's pitch for gossip; they grew familiar with the man; sometimes the man would join them for tea, and they had heard him day quite often. One day I will to Dhaka, cars and big building and everything there is to see I will see, even if for one time.

Now this story-essay must demand more careful handling, or should be left unwritten, for what I heard next touched a chord deep inside me; there were two aspects to the tale of this man, both of which made my heart bleed.

First: He came to Dhaka not to see cars and buildings and the fountains, but to witness the celebration of 21st February in the capital. There was the holy tomb of Hajrat Shah Kutubuddin at Jaleswari and its present guardian, Syed Abdus Sultan, a descendant of the Saint, had decreed that whoever went to pay his respects at the Shahid Minar, Mausoleum for the Language Martyrs, on 21st February, forfeited his right to be a Moslem, for offering flowers at such mausoleum was equal to performing pujas like the Hindus. The Guardian warned that these people shall have no claim on Allah's mercy, and would be thrown into the fire of hell; he cautioned them that in hell they will not only be roasted in fire for eternity to come, they will be constantly chased and beaten by seventy thousand serpents; when in great thirst they ask for water they will be given bloody piss to drink. The boys reported with embarrassment that Kasimuddin's mouth was foul and vulgar even in ordinary conversation; hearing the Guardian he was inspired to be his best, and simply left the gathering by observing with a chuckle. Your sharp words could do for a blade to shave my pubic hairs.

In great anger Syed Abdus Sultan, the Guardian of the holy tomb, shook; his voice trembled; he barely managed to say, You are a Kafir, a non-believer.

Kasimuddin simply replied with his earlier chuckle. No Sir, I am a man.

Immediately there began a series of quick service between the two an angry 'You are a Kafir; and a cool 'I am a man' After a while, Kasimuddin jumped up on an ancient stone and declared, 'I will go to Dhaka, I will go there for the celebration of the martyrs, I will make flower offerings at the Mausoleum, yes, I have seen photographs in the newspaper, the big Mausoleum

how come the great sir forgets to prescribe seventy thousand fangs for you?

Answer me. Is it because you bring gold and silver and goodies as offering to the Guardian? You, the great Guardian, you say to them instead, after placing your palm on these stupid heads in benediction. Come again, come for salvation, there is no one greater than our saint to help you cross the razor sharp bridge between the Judgment-day Field and the Heaven.

Jasimuddin narrated what had happened in the few hours between the flower-offerings and his father's death under a mini-bus. From the mausoleum, they took the road leading to Bangla Academy; there were many food stalls erected for the occasion on the pavement; both father and son sat for refreshments. Between bites Kasimuddin shook his head with silent laughter and said, Seventy thousand serpents indeed. He did notice the fear engraved on his son's face; he assured him, Listen, my son, if the serpents raise their ugly hoods, do not be afraid, each petal of those flowers will turn into a shield and protect us.

Where did you get it, little one? Will you give it to me if I give you a new and shining coin? Look, here it is.

It was getting dark; street lights were not on as yet; Kasimuddin tried to run away from the man's outstretched arm but before she could make a move the man caught her and snatched away her pendant.

Fear gripped Kasimuddin the man in the dak-bungalow must be a high government official; who knows, he could be a minister of the General. How could he recover the family treasure? He picked up his courage and went to see the

toured the Liberation War Gallery, his father wept bitterly and said to him, Dear son, there was a great freedom fighter from our Jaleswari, his name was Mahiuddin, just before he was about to liberate our home town he fell into the hand of enemy soldiers from Pakistan, they killed him by gouging his eyes, cutting his arms and legs and then they ripped open his belly; I wish I will be thrown in hell only to see how many thousand serpents bite those Pakistani bastards.

From there they went to the floor where old coins were on display, Kasimuddin saw a particular coin and let out a wail; both the father and son had immediately recognised the coin. It was a silver piece and was handed down through generations in Kasimuddin's family; it was made into a pendant and the eldest girl born in the family had been wearing it till she would be married off and then pass it on to next claimant.

Kasimuddin remembered one day his daughter Kazli returned home crying.

What's the matter, my little moon? You could not win in the game is that it?

Soon it was revealed that she had gone to play on the lawn of the dak-bungalow, where visiting government officials from the capital lodged. Now an officer, seeing this pendant hanging from Kazli's neck, called her to the veranda and enquired about it.

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Bhashani and again participated by the best minds of both the Bengalis - and this is where Bhashani talked of the eventuality of bidding West Pakistan goodbye; e. The revival of Pakistan. Sahitya Sangad who for a brief spell bore, to splendid effect, the mantle of the Shikha Group of the twenties and their Muktabuddhi Andolan. The eleven-day long celebration of Tagore Centenary - after Ekushey the most important turning point in the Bengali people's national denouncement, in 1961; g. The founding of Chhayansut the same year and start of a sustained and most fruitful cultural movement under its leadership; h. The pilgrimage to Shilaidaha Kuthibari by 78 leaders of the Bengali people's arts and letters in protest against Pakistani policies suppressing Bengali culture - in 1965; i. The formation of the Sangskritik Swadhihar Parishad - cultural self-determination group - to protest Khwaja Shahabuddin's fatwa banning Tagore Song from media and the three-day observance of Baishey Shrabon - the Tagore death anniversary - in 1967; j. The great and valiant work of Duroj Nirodh Andolan - a common front of the major cultural organisations - in mitigating the effects of the 1970 cyclone and tidal bore killing more than a million and rehabilitating the survivors; k. The inspiring squad work of Bikkhubbho Shilpi Samaj - the angry musicians and singers going about all over the Dhaka city and motivating masses to rise against Pakistan - 195 February-March-1971. On top of this there was the good work of the Central Theatrical Association (Kendro Natya Sangad) who fought for a national theatre and the pioneering work of Drama circle under Salahin and Bazul Karim.

Four

The bankruptcy of post-independence politics owes in large measure to the fact that it has so far very little track with Ekushey and its ideals, its cultural and socio political momentum. The stark truth that stares into our frustrated and tired mind is politics in independent Bangladesh has nothing to do with culture - not to speak of being led by the latter. The two outings from the barracks have seen to it that the rout of culture, if any living relation and reference to history, any continuity, any sense of movement and becoming - is foolproof and complete.

Ekushey has very deliberately and carefully weeded out or things politic in Bangladesh. And politics has as a direct result become as bankrupt as it has hardly been anywhere in man's history. An unresisted sway of such a situation may in time heal our culture of the Ekushey. Then we will be quite done for.

There are stalls galore in the Ekushey Book Fair. Those selling books exclusively are not all of these publishers - only some are. Following we take a pick from the books that the big houses brought to the fair. Most of these titles were published on the occasion of Ekushey. All of these were published in the year ending February, 1991.

Ahmed Publishing House published 12 new titles on the occasion of the Ekushey Book Fair '91.

Mandrashtoptok - novel by Humayun Ahmed. Shagotom Bhalobasha - novel by Alauddin Al Azad. Biggan Agley Choley, and Rohoshyer Shesh Nai - Popular science by Abdullah Al-Muti.

Ashchoriya Desher Kotha - fairytale by Nurul Islam Khan. Poradeshey Porobashey - travelogue by Mahbubur Rahman.

Probashir Smritikotha - travelogue by Abdul Mahmud Khan.

Amader Aie Bangladesh - by Subrata Barua. Akattarer Dhaka - by Selina Hossain. Bangalikey Kay Bachabey - political commentary by Dr. Sirajul Islam Chowdhury.

Good Earth - by Paul S. Buck, translated by Abdul Hafiz. The Grapes of Wrath - by John Steinbeck, translated by Kabir Chowdhury.

The Bangla Academy has published about 70 academic, literary and research oriented books since March 1990. Following is a selection from the big list.

Sri Roy Binod: Kabi-O-Kaboo - by Dr. Muhammad Shahjahan Mia.

Society and Politics in Bengal - by Shawkat Ara Begum. Buddhadeb Basur Kobita - by Mahub Sadek. Works of Md. Wazed Ali - edited by Abdul Mannan Syed. Works of Kazi Abdul Wadud (2nd part) - edited by Abdul Haque.

Biggan-O-Dorshon - by A. M. Harunur Rashid. Works of Md. Barkatullah (2nd part) - edited by Md. Abdul Quyum.

Works of Md. Enamul Haque - edited by Masood Musa. Ekal-O-Shekal - novel by Sarwar Jahan. Shahitya Shangkriti - by Dr. Nilima Ibrahim. Smrite '71 (3rd part) - edited by Rashid Haidar. Shahnama of Ferdousi (1-6 part) - translated by Moniruddin Yousuf.

Boris Pasternak - by Mobbasher Ali. Annyia Jater Fashal - translated by Abdul Hossain. Irish Rupokotha - translated by Abdul Salam.

Beauty Book house published two novels by Rashid Karim on the occasion of the Ekushey. Chini Na - Rashid Karim. Padotoley Rako - Rashid Karim.

CHALONTIKA BOIGHAR published 6 new titles on the occasion.

Bango Bhongo-O-Shamprodak Rajniti - by Badruddin Umar.

Shompeshu - novel by Fayeze Ahmed. Hochi Minh-er Kobita - translation by Fayeze Ahmed. Shiraj Shikdarer Rachona Shonkolon (4th part). Muslim Jahan Kon Pathay - by Sh. Rahmatullah. Kingdodonter Bangla - Dr. Ashraf Siddiqi.

Jatiya Shahitya Prakashani published some 21 new titles on the occasion. Mahadeb Shaha - Premier Kobita - Md. Rafik. Jibon Amar Bon - Mahmudul Huque.

Nirapad Tandira - Mahmudul Huque. Shamprodakota Birodhi Golpo - edited by Akhter Hossain.

Latin Americar Golpo - edited by Alam Khorshed. Shishu Mon-O-Shikya - Montaz Latif. Bangla Bananer Nyom - Mahbubul Haque.

Journal '89 - Hasnat Abdul Haye. Jail Theke Likha - Satyen Sen. Bhasha Andolon - Ahmed Rafiq. Namibia - Harun Habib.

Amader Jattiyatar Bikasher Dhara - Ajoy Roy. Shechacharitar Aurthority: Bangladesh - Selim Jahan. Smritimot-71 - Hena Das.

Muktodhara is publishing some 40 new titles on the occasion of the Ekushey. A selection from that.

Nobbuyer Abhuthaan - edited by Sirajul Islam Choudhury & Abul Hasnat.

Ganoandolon 1982-90 - edited by Syed Abul Maksud.

Ekushey Pickings

Gonoandolon - short story collection edited by Bipradash Barua.

Gonoandolon: collection of poems - edited by Nurul Huda. Gonoandolon: Not Bochor - by Ajoy Roy.

Judher Golpo - by Kazi Zakir Hassan. Rabindra-Rajniti - by Syed Abul Maksud.

Munir Chowdhurir Natak - by Ziaul Hassan. Ajoykumar Motrer Jiban-O-Shahityakarma - by Fazlul Haque.

Biddyasagar-Charcha - by Narayan Chowdhury. Shodeshey Probashay - by Dijen Sharma.

Matri Gaan Manusher Gaan - by Romnath Sen. Urm - novel by Umratul Fazal.

Shamudra Jar Ma - novel by Sharif Raja. Shondya Shesher Tara - short story by Amina Mahmud.

Moraviar Golpo - short story by Syed Mahtabuddin Ahmed. Firey Cholo - novel by Mirza Abdul Haye.

Nepothey Natak - short story by Abul Khair Muslehuddin. Shatghater Kanakori - drama by Montazuddin Ahmed.

Tintey Pathnatak - by Abdullah Al Mamun. Ustad Alauddin Khan - biography by Mobarak Hossain Khan.

Ghatoker Hatay Shongbidhan - collection of poems by Saifullah Mahmud Dulal.

Muktijudher Kishor Golpo - edited by Selina Hossain. Dakghorer Kotha - informative book by Nandola Sharma.

Chotoder Hazrat Osman - by Hossain Mir Mosharraf. Chotoder Hazrat Ali - by Hossain Mir Mosharraf.

Chotoder Tipu Sultan and Chotoder Kamal Pasha - by M. Abul Kader.

Chotoder Lenin - by Akhter Hossain. Ma - novel for children by Khaleda Adeb Chowdhury.

Pakey Lagey Hawa - novel for children by Mustafa Panna. Dakarti Alap - book on Medical Science by Dr. Subhagata Chowdhury.

Nirala Dupoor - poems by Muhammad Ullah. Charar Mela - by Ahmed Bashir. Bhorer Pankti - by Abul Ghani. Tutu-O-Tuntun Golpo - by Jhannadash Purokayasta. Jamon Khushi Shajo - drama by Najma Jesmin Chowdhury.



Nauroj kitabistan published 22 new titles at the book Fair. Akjon Mayaloti - novel by Humayun Ahmed. Sangskritir Katha - Motahar H. Choudhury. Humayun Nama - translated by Mostafa Harun. Hasman a Future - Bertrand Russel, translated by

Siddiqur Rahman. Harish Chandra Mitra - Syed Abul Maksud. Napoleon Bonaparte - by Madhkar.

Jiban Smriti - Hamida Rahman. Md. Farhad: Jibon-o-Shangram - by Nitai Das. Bonyar, Farakka-O-Bangladesh - by Bibhuranjan Sarkar.

Bangladeshin: Muktijudher Poray - edited by Dr. Anisuzzaman.

Arni Muktijodha Chulam - edited by Aatur Rahman. Pratikhyoda Darshir Chokhey Muktijudha - edited by Harun Habib.

Apu Bijoy Dekheney - Shirin Majid. Abar Ashibo Pherey - Shirin Majid.

Khudi Ram Jugay Jugay - Shirin Majid. Muktiyodhar Katha - Bipradash Barua.

Augubina Bajan Jini - Ashok Guha.

Shahityamala published 23 titles on the occasion of the Ekushey Book Fair '91.

Kirtiman Bangalider Jiban Kotha - by Samares Deb Nath. Daba Khelar Ainkanun - by Mahmud Ullah.

Chotoder Jagodish Chandra. Chotoder Biddiyashagar. Chotoder Jasimuddin.

Chotoder Biddiyani Edisoon. Chotoder Md. Mohsin. Chotoder Maulana Bhashani.

Chotoder Mohatma Gandhi. Chotoder Shetkhi Mujib. Chotoder Biddiyani Bhaba - by Kalipada Das.

Bhuter Rajley Gondogal - by Fazeel Ahmed. Shishutosh Mojar Golpo - edited by Barun Kumar Das.

Manishder Jibankotha - Kalipada Das. Gyaner Shera Golpo - edited by Md. Atiqur Rahman.

Abishkarer Kahiney - edited by Bikashranjan Bhounik. Cricket Khelar Ainkanun - edited by M. Rahman.

A Book of Knowledge - edited by Kalipada Das. Rupkathar Sonargaon - by Md. Kashem.

Rupkathar Desh - edited by Arun Das. Chotoder Golpey Upadesh - edited by Atiqur Rahman.

Chotoder Choto Golpo - edited by Barun Kumar Das.

Bangladesh Shishu Academy published 20 new titles at this years book fair.

Hamliner Raja - Md. Nurul Huda. Neempata Toi Toi - Moniruzzaman.

Tak Dumadam Chora - Jahangir Khan Yusufzal. Railgari Jhomjhom - Ahsan Habib.

Bitumantar Halchal - Kaiser Chowdhury. Aguntuk - Rokya Shahed.

Liliputero Bara Hobey - Moinul Ahsan Saber. Juboraj. Shahibaba-o-Paribanur Golpo - Kabir Chowdhury.

Moheshkhalitey Mukut - Mukubla Manjoor. Shopto Ratner Kandokarkhena - Belal Chowdhury.

Shamudra-O-Tukur Golpo - Mahmud Al Zaman. Janmodher Camera - Amzad Hossain.