



Uncollected poems of Jibanananda Das

Translated by Fakrul Alam

A Star Appears

(Ekti Nakhetra Aashe)

A star appears; and then ambles all by itself past
The tamarisk tree this star-filled late-autumnal evening.
It seems she will come this way — when will her practiced hands
Open my door in the darkness!
All of a sudden in the evening
She comes and shows how the touch of her hands
Puts to sleep the sea, the sun, and all motion.
And brings about nightfall.
Up above in the sky and far away
The movements of planets and stars, bright or dim,
Bring about Aghran's autumnal night;
Does history recall anything more vivid than this lustrous night?

The last tram has gone, the last sound fades; in Calcutta
Life, nature, and the world itself is in its final darkness;
Everywhere the press of houses, broken bridges, and tombs.

Fatigued, decrepit, she treads her eternal way
As if she has crossed innumerable oceans
The ancient heart of a woman in her newly full body.



Life's Transactions Have Closed Again

(Shesh Holo Jibana Lenden)

Life's transactions have closed again
Banalata Sen!

Where have you gone at this time of the day
The kingfisher hasn't forgotten its noontime play
The shalik to its nest has found its way
Excited, the river is foaming again
But you are nowhere, Banalata Sen.
Was there anyone like you anywhere?
Why is it! hat you are the first to disappear?
Why do you have to be the first
To go and make the world a desert
(Why are you always the first?)
The magician's mantaas have lost their hold over men
But you are far away Banalata Sen

Evening will always come and spread across the sky
Often I will go to sleep where slums are close by,
Often the winds will startle and go on a high,
In a station in hijal jam forests has stopped the night train
Late night's Banalata Sen!



Why Do the Stars?

(Keno Miche)

Why in vain do the stars shine again? Why in vain does the blue sky wake up?
Why does the moon drift our way: a golden peacock behind the aswatha branches;
Why does the smell of the moist earth caress the dew —
the downy white kash flowers bloom?
Why do the wag-tails dance? The bulbuli and the durgatuntuni flit from
forest to forest?
We keep ourselves busy with commissions — build bases — love the city and
The grass below our boots we consider only to be grass — nothing else alas —
we've made the motorcar our prized possession
Why do the wagtails dance then — the singa and bulbuli flit from forest to forest?

Where Could You Be Now

(Janena Kothai Tumi)

Where could you be now — when evening comes to the reeds —
When the river calms down,
When the white-breasted kite cries no more — flying all alone —
Then your features — the beauty of your face — bloom in my heart
Like magnolias fragrant in the dew.
The kite disappears into a palmyria forest — evening's soft colors
Bathe the reedforest in blue.



criticism

An Exploration into Humayun Azad's Novels

by Subrata Kumar Das

Continued from last week

BUT he innovates a fictional character, a propagator, who creates all sorts of means to satiate his lust and last of all upholds a new religion under the sun in his novel 'Shubhabrata, and His Gospel' (Shubhabrata Tar Shamparkita Shushamachar) which thrived in book markets in the following year. In all these four novels Humayun Azad generated a particular linguistic milieu that is completely of his own. Though the last novel of him 'The Politicians' (Rajnitibidgan) maintains such a language which is totally different from the preceding ones. To portray the people of our political atmosphere — their nature and behaviour, their ignorance and hollowness — Azad manipulated this distinctive speech for this novel and thus having dialect and slang, mother tongue and foreign tongue, rather a hotchpotch of all these 'The Politicians' proves itself as a document of our present politico-society.

From 1994 to the present is undoubtedly a very short time. Not that there did not happen any meritorious creative accomplishment of any new writer in this period. Akimufi Rahman's 'A Woman in the Domain of Men' (Purusher Prithibite Ek Meye), or Anisul Huq's 'One Hundred Years in Darkness' (Andhakarer Eksho Bachhar) could at least be worthy mentions if we are allowed to take the privilege of not remembering Manju Sarkar, and

Nasrin Zahan the prolific two of the ninety's and Sahidul Zahir, whose novel 'A Moonlit Night That Was' (She Rate Purnima Chilo) was published in 1994 excluding the earlier one 'Jibon O Rajnaitik Bastabata' (Life and Political Reality), wrote a good number of brilliant novels in this short period who started their novelist career much earlier, though all of them are junior to Humayun Azad in respect of physical age. It is true that of this time period Akteruzzaman Elias' highly appreciated novel 'Khoabnoma', Ahmed Sofa's 'Pushpa Briksha O Bihanga Puran' that innovates a new genre in novel or Shamsuddin Abul Kalam's 'Kanchangram' or 'Matir Jahaj' by another outstanding novelist Mahmudul Huq are all laudable publications by renowned novelists working long in this arena, yet the appearance and existence of Humayun Azad the novelist can nothow be ignored.

A keen observation proves that characterization is never a serious consideration in Humayun Azad's novels. Rather building up lofty ideas, illuminating them upside down, adding new dimension to common or uncommon thoughts and beliefs Azad created a new horizon in his novels. True, there is Rashed as the protagonist in 'Fifty Six Thousand Square Miles' or the first-person narrator Mahbub established himself as the worthy main character in 'Things Fall Apart', there appears Anis in 'The Wrongs I Did As a Man' or Shubhabrata himself in 'Shubhabrata, and His Gospel' but subsiding all of them the other things take the upper-

hand. Finishing any of his novel, the reader receives a deeper impression from the viewpoints incorporated in the stories than the characters.

'Fifty Six Thousand Square Miles' deals with a time under martial law which a few authors of this soil dared to administer. The story begins with the speaker-protagonist Rashed's daughter Mridu who makes complaints to her father about the closure of her school for some invisible reason. Rashed instantly guesses about the intrusion of a new martial rule which had been a usual norm in this country. The dark society, crippled by this unwanted power stagnates itself for years. Reason and prudence, creativity and liberty of press all get stopped down under the shackles of this roaring animal. Only reactionaries and flatterers expose themselves as successful in this cobwebbed pseudo-democratic atmosphere.

The main and the only theme that Azad treats much meticulously and realistically in 'Things Fall Apart' is the development of sensuality of a male human. Exposing two separate periods of 11 to 15 years and about the age of his 45 odds of Mahbub, an engineer who designs bridges, the writer tries to illuminate the 'libido' of him — the inner spirit in himself as well as the social existence of him. Taking no hesitation into consideration in exploring these two-fold feature of one's sexuality the author gradually illustrates the chronological upliftment of the protagonist of the novel.

Though in 'The Wrongs I Did As a Man', Azad fails to come out of the psy-

chological world of his previous novel which was rightly termed as 'monotony' and this monotonous manipulation continues to his fourth novel 'Shubhabrata, and His Gospel', not predominately but noticeably at least. This fiction characterizes one Anis, a bureaucrat with all his social interactions where most of his thoughts and happenings concentrate in his physical lust and closely related feelings.

As mentioned earlier in 'Shubhabrata, and His Gospel' this lust prevails with similar power, though as a main theme it presents a fictitious life-story of the title-character Shubhabrata who ultimately recognises himself as a pioneer of a new religion. In a convincing way Azad assimilates multifarious events — both in inner and social setting — to prove Shubhabrata as religious personality who, he and his disciples think, has been ordained by the Almighty Himself to form and lead an emerging human group. In this new society all exercises of intellectual and educational matters receive prohibition, as we observe as a usual phenomena in any state governed by orthodoxy, authority.

In all these above discussed novels any reader can trace some analogous characteristic in respect of narration at least. Stories deliberated in all of them establish a unique language which is mostly Humayun Azad's own. But in the last one (certainly we aspire more from him in the forthcoming days) that came into light in February '98 last the language and description take a dissimilar appearance. In this recently published

novel 'The Politicians' no traditional narration is seen, the people (Janagan) relates the whole thing. Different episodes (not in a formal way as in novels episodes are divided) varied people with unknown experiences take part in conversation. 'The Politicians' starts with descriptions of the existing political streams and consequently makes focus on inner thoughts and outer behaviours and activities of their leaders and supporters. And thus Azad pictures the whole gamut of the political world of our country stressing their mountainous ignorance and lovelessness and corruptions. Azad's inherent capacity in treating larger subjects with appropriate and necessary humour credits the novel with a pleasing tone.

This humour along with wit demonstrates Humayun Azad's novels always. From 'Fifty Six Thousand Square Miles' through 'Shubhabrata, and His Gospel' to 'The Politicians' Azad manifests this specialty with praiseworthy ingenuity. Handling themes with satirical vein, never so bravely treated earlier, he proves himself as a major novelist in Bangladesh, to speak true in the modern Bangla novel despite all his warts and weaknesses.

Simultaneously, we should not forget that Humayun Azad, the fabricator of stunning and courageous ideas thus depicts himself in his novels. As Milan Kundera (b. 1929) the Czechoslovakian novelist expounds in the essay 'Dialogue on the Art of the Novel' I don't show you what happens inside Jeromil's [The hero of his novel 'Life is Elsewhere'] head; rather, I show what happens in-

side my own: I observe my Jeromil for a long while, and I try, step by step, to get to the heart of his attitude, in order to understand it, name it, grasp it." (The Art of the Novel) Humayun Azad also in a similar way associates his own self with the thoughts of his characters like Shahed, Mahbub and Anis.

Monotony in expression of episodes dealing sexual affairs about which we talked before, some repetitive features in his language and description and less concrete characters may be marked as some negative elements of his novels. But it seems there are more room to examine them from other points of view. As the author feels necessary, he repeats his key words and ideas; as he emphasizes the elevated themes, he does not pay so much attention to create his characters in round forms and possibly in this way Azad may receive some excuse from his readers.

The absence of the time from 16-44 years of Mahbub's life which no one can deny as the prime time in one's sexual life, lack of other features in Anis' character without which a round personality could not establish, or the exaggerated description of Shubhabrata's early life are some few that diminish the magnificence of his novels.

Primarily a poet Humayun Azad authored much books on new and revolutionary ideas. He is always different from others as he is in his personal life. Unparalleled thinker Azad confirms himself unrivaled in his novels also. And thus he is playing a seminal role in the realm of Bangla literature.

fiction

Despair at the Door

by Mohit Ul Alam

Continued from last week

HE was completely deranged, shaking and tossing, as he stood in the middle of the yard yelling at his mother. A light bulb burnt inside the house, illuminating a portion of the yard through the open door, at which

Sakina Bibi was now seated on the same stool as she did in the morning while talking to Monu's father-in-law. She watched her son as one would watch a spectacle, begin soothed, as her inward suspicion got confirmed, as well as disturbed, as she understood who was instrumental behind it. Monu was a little darker than her other children. He had an irregular set of teeth, a little stuck out. In his ravings, his teeth flashed against the darkness. Sakina Bibi was not much educated, but her husband told her that the character in Monu's book was an evil genius. Sakina Bibi was not afraid, but she was afraid too. Who it was she gave birth to! She and her husband had done better if they hadn't indulged him from the beginning. Suddenly a nauseating feeling overcame her. But Monu would not stop there. He advanced a few steps and now stood in the full gleam of the light, and still swearing and threatening, and suddenly, before anybody could have any idea about what he was doing, he lunged at Sakina Bibi. There was a crashing sound. Monu's hitting his head at the wood piece of the door, followed by a heavy thudding sound caused by Sakina Bibi's tumbling off her stool.

The daughter-in-law was working in the kitchen. She rushed to the scene with a loud cry, and so did the tenants, and a few neighbours. They lifted Monu's unbalanced body from the ground, and taking no notice of his injury, gave him a good beating, while Sakina Bibi recovered the ground on her own. Fear has now replaced her suspicion. Without a word, she left the sympathising crowd, and retired to her room.

She could not sleep while the night was advancing accompanied by familiar sounds of dogs' barking, crickets' chirping and occasional warning calls from the patrolling guards. Her thoughts were rambling and flaring up memories, and she at one point lost track of time and felt that her humiliation of today had happened long ago, or as if she had already known that Monu would turn out like that. Though she could not determine at what point she or her husband could sense the change. How should a parent know which moves are definitely positive for her son! It's all so mysterious! She didn't exactly realise when sleep overcame her, and when her drifting thoughts got mixed up with real sounds — violently loud. No sooner had she been jerked to full consciousness than she realised that the sounds were coming from Monu's room. Monu was shouting, and beneath his voice could be heard the terrified cries of the wife. She was pleading for her life. As she sprang up a sharp pain ran through her back and she immediately collapsed on the bed. In the blink of an eye, however, she rose up again and hastened to Monu's room along the nar-

row corridor. Their door was closed but she was desperate, and without any delay began to hit at the door with a spade that she found near the corner. Before the door gave in, one of her tenants' sons who was preparing for his SSC examination, heard the commotion, and he came down just at the moment Sakina Bibi succeeded in breaking the door. Inside the room it was dark, but somebody by now switched on the light at the corridor, and what they saw their eyes were not experienced enough to judge the enormity of it. Before she lost her consciousness, Sakina Bibi actually had stepped into some kind of mossy liquid.

The police were thorough and exacting. Monu was charged under Section 302. The merchant tried very hard to convict Sakina Bibi as the accomplice. But the police took Tk 50,000 cash to drop her name from the chargesheet.

That winter the wind blew harsh and cold, and Sakina Bibi's asthma revived. The homeopathic doctor while preparing the doses with white powder soaked by drops of liquids from an assort-

ment of phials looked at her sharply and asked her in his cough-laden voice about her son. Sakina Bibi didn't defend, though inside her it burned as if she was put into a crucible.

The doctor had been living in the neighbourhood for a long time. He had seen the family and known it well. Sakina Bibi knew from his tone that his concern was false.

So, despite herself, as she talked, her voice became irate: "Doctor Shahib, nobody in the family had any bad habit, and their father, you know, was well-respected here for his virtues. And, this son comes, the last in the family, and, you see, he became a devil."

Seeing the doctor still more gratified at her selfless submission, she challenged, "What in your knowledge as a doctor tells this happens for?"

Some loud cough struggled in the doctor's throat, and he rattled like a cat when he talked. "Well, well, it's all punishment for a past hidden sin, though you cannot medically prove it."

"What do you mean, are we sinners, you mean, we hid sins?" She was both

angry and puzzled.

"Not like that, but you know, sometimes you commit sins unknowingly." In the doctor's voice there was a clear insinuation, but he stopped to give way to an emerging shot of sneezing, his whole face grimacing and his body violently jerking at the impact, while drops of cold spurted out through his nose and eyes. She only took a look at his wistful eyes to realise that he didn't know what he was talking about.

In the morning before she came to the doctor she had been cleaning the bedroom. The bedstead was a large Burmese teak, deep chocolate coloured. But the shine was gone. The mattress on it sagged on the side where Sakina Bibi slept. The bed carried the years of intimacy she had grown with it, looking calm and inviting. Sakina Bibi remembered that all her children were born in this bed. With each child the pains of delivery were intolerable. But each of them was born safe, without complications, and no sooner had a child been born, the father would stand in the front room, touch his earlobes and sing out the Azaan. Then he would go out to buy honey for the new-born. As a father he was distant, would never hug the children, nor lift them in his arms. When extreme affection moved him he would just shake their heads softly, brushing the hair. But with the youngest son he seemed to have forgotten his earlier rules. He would not only hug this boy, but would coax him, prod him and pretend dead. Sakina Bibi had her own choice pranks for the youngest in the family. Husband and wife occasionally

would warn each other about showing excessive affection. As the child grew up, he was more than fulfilling his parents' expectations. In school he was making good progress, and soon he became well known as a singer, and when a story by him got published in the school magazine, it soon attracted the attention of the Bengali teacher, who also enjoyed the reputation of a poet. He soon spread it everywhere that Monu was a genius.

The older children passed their exams regularly, and the daughters got duly married, and it soon transpired that Monu was not really attending the college anymore. The father had reached his last phase when Monu was involved in translating *D'Faustus*. The father got so enthusiastic about it that, intending to publish it with his own money, he went to the poet-teacher to write an introduction, who did so.

On the day when the book was finally published, he came home with the first copies under his arms, and two boxes of sweets in his hand. The house wore a festive look, and at night as they lay in bed together, he confessed to her that he had much hope in the youngest son.

Unfortunately, however, the translation, though it was praised by people in the family circle, didn't quite draw the critical acclaim that the father had looked forward to. He was disappointed, but died soon enough to do anything about it.

While sitting in the doctor's chamber, Sakina Bibi's eyes got filled with tears, and she opened a purse to fetch a tissue-paper.