



poem

The Rebel

by Kazi Nazrul Islam

Translated by Fakrul Alam

Say O hero
Say My head will be held high!
My head will tower over the snow-capped Himalayas
Say O hero
piercing the infinite spaces of the sky
Going beyond the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars
Plunging through the earth and the heavens
Bursting through God's very seat
I have emerged — the wonder of the universe!
On My forehead blazes God's fiery mark — the regal sign of victory!
Say O hero
My head will be held forever high!
I am forever indomitable, imperious, and remorseless.
My dance is cataclysmic, I am tempestuous, I am the destroyer,
I am terrifying, I am the curse of the earth
I am irrepressible
I smash everything to smithereens.
I am indisciplined, I am wayward,
I crush all bonds, trample on all bans, rules, and restrictions,
I obey no laws,
I sink heavily laden ships, I am a torpedo, a deadly floating mine.
I am the destructive Dhurjati, the dishevelled sudden storm of Boishakh.
I am the rebel, the rebellious son of the Creator of the Universe.
Say O hero —
Forever my head will be held high.
I am a tornado, a whirlwind,
I pommel all that lie in my path,
I am a dance-driven swing,
I dance to my own beat, I am a free spirit, high on life.
I am the musical modes Hambeer and Chayanot, I am the festive swing Hindol,
I am all hustle and bustle.
On the road I am all twist and turn,
I sway back and forth,
I am an ever-oscillating, lightning fast swing.
I do whatever I please
My enemies I embrace, with Death I grapple.
I am insane, I am a hurricane.
I am the plague, the terror of the earth.
I squash all tyrants, I rage restlessly.
Say O hero
My head will be forever held high.
I am forever in a frenzy, intoxicated,
I am irrepressible, my soul's beaker bubbles over with the liquor of life.
I am the sacrificial fire, am Yamadagni, the keeper of the sacrificial fire
I am the sacrifice, the priest, and the flame as well.
I am Creation and Destruction, I am human habitation, I am the cremation ground.
I am the Conclusion, the end of the night!
I am the son of Indra, the king of gods, moon in hand, the sun on my forehead,
On one hand I hold love's slender flute, on the other the trumpet of war.
I am Shiva, my throat blue, drinking poison churned by creation's ocean of pain,
I am Bomkesh, holding the freely flowing Ganges in my ethereal locks.
Say O hero
Forever will my head be held high.
I am a solitary Bedouin, I am the capricious Chenchiz
I acknowledge only myself and bow to none else.
I am a thunderclap, the OM resounding from Ishan's horn
I am the blast of Israfil's trumpet,



I am Shiva's bow-shaped drum, the trident, and gone of the God of death.
I am Chakra's ring, a strident conch, I am the primal scream!
I am a whirling dervish, a devotee of the sage Bishyamitra,
I am a raging fire, I will consume the earth in my flames!
I am care-free and full of glee — the enemy of creation, the principle of destruction.
I am the demon who eclipses the sun and ushers in the day of doom.
I am sometimes placid — sometimes torrid, sometimes unbelievably wanton,
I am a hot-blooded youth, I will even humble God's pride!
I am the exuberance of a gust of wind, I am the mighty roar of the ocean.
I am brilliant, I am radiant.
I am a rippling-bubbling brook — the splash of the wave — the sway of the swing!
I am the unbraided flowing hair of a maiden, her glowing ravishing eyes.
I am the sixteen-year old's love-stricken heart, wayward with passion, I am bliss!
I am distracted, indifferent to the world.
I am the grief-choked heart of the widow, I am the anguish of the frustrated.
I am the piled up pain of the wanderer, the forlornness of the homeless,
I am the agony of the insulted, the tormented heart of the jilted in love!
I am the anguish of the heart-stricken, I feel the pain of unrequited passion,
I am the tingling sensation of the maiden's first caress, the thrill of a stolen kiss!
I am the startled look of the secret lover, the glance forever stolen,

I am the fluttering heart of the restless girl, the jingling of her bangles.
I am forever the child, forever the adolescent,
I am the cloth covering the budding youth of the village belle.
I am the north wind, the breeze from Malabar, the wanton southern stream of air.
I am the wandering minstrel's soulful tunes, the songs played on his flute and lyre.
I am the parched throat of mid-day, the flaming, glowing sun.
I am a softly flowing desert stream, I am a shaded green sylvan scene!
I rush forth in a frenzy, I am frantic, I am insane!
I have discovered myself all of a sudden, I have burst through all bonds.
I am the rise, I am the fall, I am consciousness issuing out of the unconscious,
I am the banner of victory at the ramparts of the world, the flag of man's triumph.
I am a storm reverberating through heaven and earth.
Lively like the horse Borbak, swift like Indra's winged steed Uchbhaisrava,
Spirited and neighing my way through!
I am a volcano flaming in the earth's bosom, the mythical sea-horse spouting fire.
I am a fire coursing through the netherworld, uproarious, tumultuous.
I am lightning, speeding past, skipping and leaping forth in joy.
I am an earthquake striking suddenly and spreading panic everywhere.
Grabbing the hood of Vasuki the Snake-King,
Grappling with the fiery wings of Gabriel, messenger of heaven,
I am the God-child, vivacious,
I am impudent, I bite into the borders of my earth-mother's dress.
I am Orpheus's lute,
Lulling the restless ocean to sleep,
With the cares of soothing sleep I bring calm to a fevered world,
My flute's melodies enthrall
I am the flute in Lord Krishna's hands.
When angry, I shake myself up and dart across the boundless sky,
Cowering, the very fire of the seven hells flicker with fear and fade from my sight.
I carry the message of rebellion all across the earth and the sky.
I am the monsoon deluge of Shraavan,
Sometimes making the earth fertile, sometimes causing massive destruction —
I snatch from God Vishnu's bosom his two paramours.
I am injustice, an evil star, malevolent Saturn
I am the blistering comet, the venom-filled fangs of a king cobra!
I am the blood-thirsty goddess Kali, I am the revaging warlord Ranada,
I sit in the midst of hell-fire and smile with the innocence of a flower!
I am made of clay, I am formed of the Supreme Being.
I am ageless, immortal, imperishable, I am indomitable!
I am what humans, demons and even the gods dread,
I am invincible in this world,
I am Lord of the Gods of the Universe, the Ultimate Truth of Being!
I dance and frisk and gambol through heaven and hell and earth!
I am insane, I am insane!!
I have discovered myself all of a sudden, this day I have burst through all bonds!
I am Parshuram's hard-striking axe,
I will rid the world of all war-mongers and bring to it peace and harmony.
I am the plough on Balaram's shoulders,
I will uproot the earth to its foundations delighting in the joy of recreation.
A mighty rebel, wary of war,
I will stop creating a stir,
Only when the cries of the wretched of the earth will stop renting the skies,
Only when the oppressor's bloody sword will cease smearing battlefields,
A rebel, weary of war,
Only then will I not stir.
I am the rebel god Bhigru, on God's very bosom, I will stamp my foot-marks,
I will slay the Creator, I will tear apart his indifferent whimsical callous chest.
I am the determined rebel, on God's very bosom, I will stamp my foot-marks,
I will tear apart the Creator's whimsical chest.
I am the ever-rebellious hero —
Soaring over the world, all alone, head forever held high!

criticism

The Biographical Novels of Hasnat Abdul Hye

by Subrata Kumar Das

THOUGH biographies and autobiographies are plenty in number in all major languages, biographical novels are not many. The most outstanding biographical novels in English are Lust For Life (based on the life of the great painter Vincent van Gogh), The Agony and the Ecstasy (fictional recreation of the passionate life of Michelangelo) and Depths of Glory (spotlights the art figure Camille Pissarro), all written by Irving Stone. Among the good number of historical novels in world literature, Jenghiz Khan by the Soviet writer Vasilii Yan can be taken another one which sketches much about the historical personality of Jenghiz Khan, though they should not be categorised in the same genre as the Bangla novels Shashanka (1915) and Dharmapal (1916) and other historical novels by Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay (1885-1930) cannot be. Even Keri Saheber Munshi (1958) written by Pramathanath Bishie (1902-1985) cannot be termed as a biographical novel because it does not expose the title-character in full bloom. These historical novels have some episodes of those personalities' lives and delineate the canvas of their time. On the other hand, novels by Irving Stone, mentioned above, mostly portray their lives than their times, as we see in some novels of Hasnat Abdul Hye. Hasnat Abdul Hye (b.1939) has been contributing enough to Bangla fiction and travelogue for a long time. He authored novels like Suprabhat Bhalobasa (1977), Aamar Atotae (1980), Timi (1981), Jubaraj (1985), Prabhu (1986), Samay (1991), Morelganj Sangbad (1995), Bairey Ekjon (1996), Interview (1997), Babui Suniti (1997) and Moitrei O Rabindranath (1999). But with much surprise, the readers of Hasnat Abdul Hye observed once that he began to demonstrate 'biography' in his novels with innovative means. It seems Hye's started writing biographical novels with Mahapurush (1982), which brought him success in drawing a single character, named Syed Belal. It is worth mentioning that this first attempt took a fictitious character as its subject. But later on, Hye turned to characters who are real and well-known personalities like Aaraj Ali Matubbar, S M Sultan and Novera. Encompassing the uncommon

and dramatic situations of their lives, he wrote novels Sultan (1991), Ekjon Aaraj Ali (1995) and Novera (1995). With brilliant exposition of actual figures, Hasnat Abdul Hye has enriched this genre in our literature. Before discussing these three novels, let us have a look on the style of Hye that he adopted in Mahapurush. Syed Belal is the protagonist of the novel, though if we say the book is about only Syed Belal himself, it would not be wrong. All the characters and the whole plot are deployed there only to give this character a complete life. A high bureaucrat Syed Belal once was imposed with the responsibility of relief works in a cyclone-hit area. There he realised that the distribution system was quite faulty and he himself discovered some new ways. He decided to serve the distressed people and quitted his job. A government plan was also in the pipeline that he can materialise his ideas. But unfortunately, the government changed and all his labour and dreams ended in smoke. People who did not support his novel programmes now came forward and thus Belal began to be humiliated indoors and outdoors. He was termed 'mad'. But the irony lies in the incident that after the accidental death of 'mad' Belal, the people of the locality changed their minds. They became supporters of his activities and created a tomb on his grave where hundreds of thousands of people crowd every year. Hye introduces his plot with the craze of the people of Syed Belal's locality about the tomb and gradually goes in quest of different episodes of Belal's life from varied sources and thus finally the whole character of Syed Belal gets illuminated. Similar style Hasnat Abdul Hye continues in his later novels. In Sultan, he focuses light on the childhood of Lalu the son of a mason, who through different incidents, proves himself as Sheikh Mohammad Sultan and enriches modern art creating much amazement. Ekjon Aaraj Ali is written using the same form. Here he selects Matubbar's life as his topic. Using every necessary information, Hye creates Matubbar as a believable character, who had schooling only up to class two and at the end of his life upheld himself as one of the greatest thinkers. The revolutionary attitude and perseverance that en-

hanced Matubbar to find himself in such a formidable character has taken a magnificent presentation in the novel. Similarly we get Novera Ahmed, a major artist of the fifties and sixties in our country who went out of sight afterwards, in the novel Novera. The life of a Bengali girl Novera, here childhood and youth, ups and downs of her life, has taken an artistic form in the novel. It is obvious that Hasnat Abdul Hye has selected such personalities from our recent past, who did not pass a very usual and cliché life. Sultan, Matubbar and Novera — all of them had unique features in their lives. They are known to us by their intellectual and artistic accomplishments, but their personal lives had been mostly dark to us. Hye has focused enough light on those dark parts and made us grateful. Unlike in Mahapurush where we meet a journalist who comes to visit the tomb of Syed Belal and consequently meets with other people, talks with them and presents the whole life-sketch of Syed Belal, in Sultan, Ekjon Aaraj Ali and Novera we get Hasnat Abdul Hye, the literature himself, who broods over writing a new novel on Matubbar, Sultan or Novera. Afterwards, the character Hye himself talks with varied people, takes help from papers, etc., and thus we get a complete biography. As Mahapurush is a fictional endeavour, the other characters around Syed Belal are also fictitious and, to a great extent, all those characters fail to come up, barring Mrs Belal. But in the following novels all such side-characters are from our actual society. We meet Ahmed Sofa, Jaimul Abedin, Debadash Chacrabarty, National Professor Abdur Razzak in Sultan, Ali Noor and Syed Shamsul Huq in Ekjon Aaraj Ali, Shamsur Rahman, Khan Ata, Aminul Islam Hamidur Rahman, Fayeze Ahmed, SM Ali, Sayed Ahmed in Novera. Interactions with these highly appreciated personalities of our society help us believe the unbelievable events of Sultan, Matubbar and Novera's lives. Hasnat Abdul Hye gives every detail in all these three novels in such a way that we become respectful to them. And thus these books become not biographies in the ordinary sense, rather biographical novels with artistic qualities. About the writer: Subrata Kumar Das teaches English at Bangladesh Rifles College, Peelkhana, Dhaka

reflections

Thoughts from the other side of 50

By Syed Maqsud Jamil

Continued from last week

HUMAN body has so much fire in it. With death does it die. But it serves us well if the containment is well attended. It is often asked how does it feel to be 50. In fact, there is no well defined feeling to express with great detail. An awareness is surely at work. That the gifts of youth are leaving us. The margin of vulnerability is rising. Therefore guard well. Till you perish. And what happens to the mind. There is no way of pinpointing that with 50 years, the mind slows down, the feelings struggle. It is therefore not a wishful thinking, that the arrival of 50, in most cases, finds the mind ever eager, the feelings alive with their broad range, the imagination reaching beyond, and the same ardent look in the eyes seeking joy and happiness. At 50, nature does not stand in the way of loving the good things we love. Be it, love of books, music, gardening, movies, sports and many others. These are the things one picks up in the journey of life. No matter, whether you are 30 or 60. And the next. How does love fare in the years preceding and following 50? There is indeed a physical drive in love, when age advances, the drive understandably may longer have the priority of the youth. But the attraction remains

active for many more years. Even the intensity can be keen as ever. The drive, to be precise, originates in the head. So when the mind continues to be swayed by passion, and the body is sound and therefore, a willing partner, the drive is not likely to suffer at 50. The physical aspect by itself does not tell all the story about love. Emotional attachment and mental dependence are the other elements that give love a very important place in life. Aging, which is clearly visible at 50, thickens the finer texture of our looks. Eventually, the freshness goes away. A heavy, plain, and worn out look settles in the place. That is what I observe, from my side of 50. There is surely a feeling of deprivation in it. The pain, to be sure, depends on how we live our life and also no less on how we look at it. This is a matter on which the sense and the quality of sharing with our spouse speaks a lot. If it reaches 50, without being flawed by bitterness, hostility and incompatibility, one is likely to move on gracefully. So, when physical beauty fades away, it does not necessarily take away love with it. For the sharing of many years, in good or in bad, builds a good and caring habit. In it, love has a firmer ground to move on beyond the years. There is another popular line of thinking about becoming 50 and getting

old. It believes that as the years catch up, we tend to live for our children. In a way that is true, for all ages. When the babies arrive, when they are growing up, and even when they start lives of their own. The foremost thinking of parents, as we believe, is to seek and to work for a secure and comfortable future for their children. It is particularly true for our culture. And for that, the parents do not wait for the 50 year mark to take up the task. As I look at it, the difference is in the roles we play. Youthful parents play far more active and visible role for their personal world too. But in the years beyond 50, it is no longer a world that draws ready attention. The role obviously loses prominence and visibility. It functions mostly unobserved. The general perception is therefore to regard it as a time of life where we live solely for our children. I personally do not accept it as the whole truth. One can have one's personal world even at an advanced age and one can live it to the fullest. In spite of everything, at 50, and beyond, I understand people continue to be what they are. The same heart that longs for love, the mind that is eager to absorb, ready to explore, the imagination giving wings to our thoughts. With advancing years, our bodies decline, but the spirit within, carries us on — till our day has come.