

drama

The Tartar Pipe

Golam Ahmed Khan was my classmate for four years at the Dhaka University in the department of English from 1940 to 1944. I recall him as a soft-spoken retiring young man, but with sharp intellectual mettle and a highly developed sense of literary appreciation. He got a first class in M.A. and would have made an excellent university teacher but circumstances made him a bureaucrat, an officer of the government in the Industries department where he rose to a high position. He died several years ago.

I never knew that Golam Ahmed was a poet. A couple of weeks ago Sabrina, daughter of late Golam Ahmed Khan, brought me a manuscript, a lyric drama called *The Tartar Pipe*, which her father had written in 1944 while a resident student at the Salimullah Muslim Hall, which was my 'Hall', too.

It is a fine piece of creative writing, a lyric play with a tightly knit plot, apt characterisation, beautiful images and verses of a charming musical grace. Had I known of this piece during Golam Ahmed's lifetime I would surely have urged him to continue his literary pursuits, but there is no point in regretting the irreparable.

As I write this foreword for *The Tartar Pipe*, I pay my respect to the memory of my departed friend. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

A Lyric Drama
Time-348 AD Place-China
by Golam Ahmed Khan

Scene I
The Palace Chamber of Chin-Yang. Time: Afternoon
(Enter Chin Yang, Liu Kun and Au Ling).

Chin Yang : Liu Kun, O great General.
Hast thou any further tidings of this Siege?

Liu Kun : O Illustrious Majesty,
Whom thy forefathers bless from their abode
Of peace eternal on the Mount Tiesh-win!
These six months the Tartar army vast
Led by the two valiant Generals Mungus & Rabbat
Has kept us within the confines of the four walls.
This capital city of Lientang, whose breadth
Almost equals its length, stretching
From the Sit-fang river to the plateau of Zingul
And from Wat-lun to the snowy Tien shin,
This great ancient seat of glory and love
Has suffered in terrible measure.
Our city gets no fresh supply of food
From any of its rich bordering provinces
And our stores have been reduced to nothing
And tomorrow, every man-child of this land
Within this confine shall go without his meal.

Chin-Yang : Desist, O great General!
I am the Father of These 30,000 men and women
And far from starving my people to death.
I shall surrender to the insolent demands
Of Mungus and Rabbat, the dread Tartar
Generals.

Liu-Kun : O Imperial Majesty — Give me leave
Before thou act, to put an end to my base self.

Chin-Yang : Nay, thy valour stands undisputed,
O thou brave General! But human endurance
Should not be put to such extreme tests.
For the common people are the ashes of the
Ancients.
While thou art a direct descendant from them,
These six months the Siege have fully drained
All the resources, reserves and stores of the land.
Dread Famine shows its fleshless smiles
At the skinny victims falling down to its feet,
And Mungus and Rabbat wait patiently out.
They know the end is near, though not when.

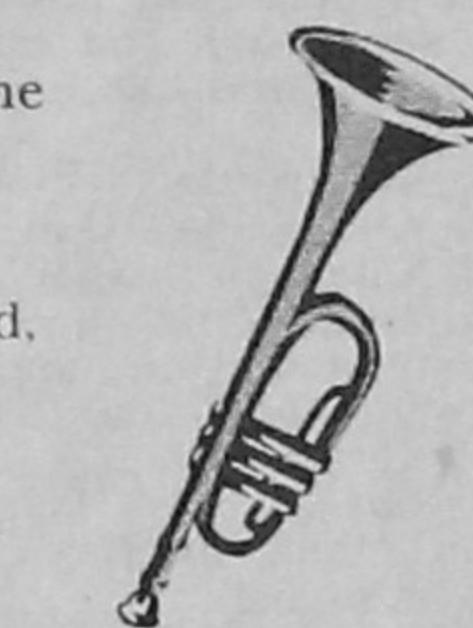
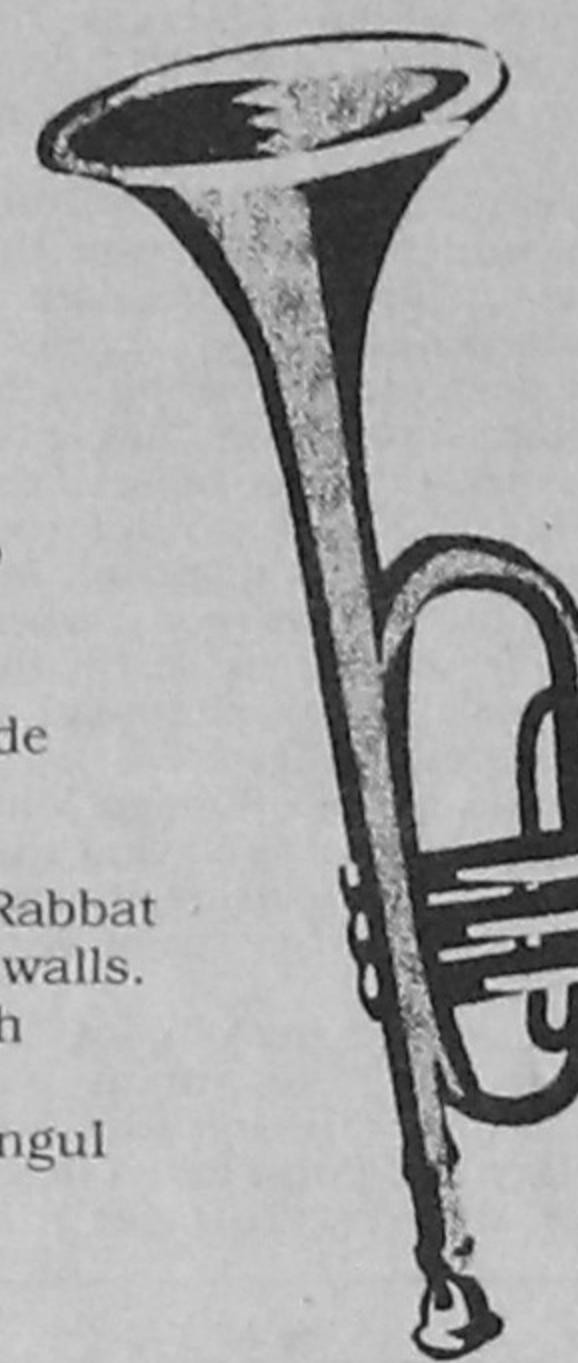
Liu Kun : O Gracious Majesty! I have heard
From some sources that discontent spreads
Among the Tartar rank and file. Plunder
Has satiated their greed and lust, and they
Pine for the land of their birth, But O misery!
We have only food for tonight.
And tomorrow, we reach the end of all striving.

Chin-Yang : Alas, there's no way out,
Of this the gravest crisis in our lives.
To-morrow we have perforce to open the gates
Through which the Tartar hordes will rush in
Like the swelling waters of the Si-Kiang
Overleaping the minor cataracts at Alf-syn
We reach the end of the cliff.
And to-morrow jump down the precipice.

Au Ling, stay with the General
I shall retire myself. Farewell, O General.

Liu Kun : Thim-Shawn bless thee, O Majesty.

(Exit Chin Yang.)
Nay, Au Ling, you must not look sad or dejected.
Be cheerful. That which must be,
Must be, and save the glorious Ancestors
None can bar the progress of Fate.



But, it's dull, sitting here in the gloomy eve
and death at the hands of Mungus & Rabbat.
Let's away.

(Exeunt Liu Kun & Au Ling)

Scene II
The Balcony of The Palace. Time: Evening

(Enter Liu Kun)

Liu Kun : So the end is come, and life's breathless
Struggles pant and puff in swollen
Upheavings, to reach the journey's end.
The moon is floating up and up the cedar
And in a little while will flood the whole
Countryside from Riasunto Thulhan.
But to-morrow, these eyes will view her cold
Beauty no longer, for to-morrow I die,
Rather than serve under Mungus and Rabbat
I shall scatter my dust on the four winds.
Fate ordains the defeat of this land
And my death! I embrace it in a calm spirit.
Au Ling!

(Enter Au Ling)

Au Ling : Your pleasure, Oh noble Lord!

Liu Kun : Au Ling! Worthy Friend!
You have served me long faithfully
These fifteen years, with unflinching devotion.
To-morrow this tie shall break asunder
To be reunited in the Eternal Region.
My last command to you is only a trifle:
Bring me my Gold and Ivory-bound flute,
The same that years ago I got in Tartar Land
And I shall pipe on my flute this whole night
To hold communion with the distant stars.

Au Ling : O gracious General, thy will I shall
Execute at once.

(Exit Au Ling)

Liu Kun : The blue calls me
And I pine to converse with those starry vault.
And to merge my being in rhapsody of song.

(Enter Au Ling, with pipe)

Au Ling : O high master, here is thy jeweled pipe.

(Exit Au Ling)

(Liu Kun takes the pipe and seats himself on the projecting balcony from where the whole Tartar camps with the intervening space is visible. The white camps are dotted in the distance. He seats himself comfortably, gazes at the distant horizon, and fondles the pipe which he then puts to his lips & pipes.)

Liu Kun pipes : The moon on the cedar top,
The moon on the cedar top.
Floats, swims, Hovers,
On the eyes of Lovers
She will never stop.
She never has any stop.

The distant hills with their snowy peaks,
Send back her beams over the plains
They smile a-gleam as if to speak,
Their myriad's of unknown joys and pains.

The same moon shines over all the lands
She sends messages of hopes and fears,
Over hills, forests, plains and sands.
To men, women, children-smiles or tears.

In the land of Tartary,
Under the shadow of pain and worry
A maiden weeps salt bitter tears
For all her absent warrior dears,
For she is deprived of all revelry.



In the land of Tartary, no maiden ever sings
For her lover is away gone, from dales, hills
and springs.
She stretches her warm, soft body on the sands
Of the Lake Kunju under the shadow of mount
Lamands
Her trilling laughter no longer enchanting
rings.
"O'Come, O'Come, O' Come, my Warrior."
Thus she fumes at all barrier.
"My low-throbbing bosom that ere long panted
At your touch in that valley, fully lily-scented,
Your presence made the larks sing merrier.

"O' where have you gone, my charmer?
O' why don't you come back to make me
warmer.
O, spring is near, the cuckoo is in cheer,
The roe has her deer, my heart is a-sere.

The wind from the silvery lake,
Whispers through the reed and brake,
Soft, rippling, love ditties, low
From the heart's core, that ever flow.

In liquid cadences, ever warm and awake,
I pine for sorrow,
Missing you every morrow....

(The stage darkens for a few moments)

Scene III

Before the Tartar Camps—
An open space before the tent of the
Tartar Generals Mungus and Rabbat.

(Enter Mungus and Rabbat)

Mungus : O Rabbat, How long it is since
The Emperor Shakatan sent us on this venture?

Rabbat : Time has lost all count for me O Mungus.
But I think it is nearing three seasons.

Mungus : So, I think. But see the stubborn city shows
As yet not sign of surrender. Who knows
If they can't resist for another three seasons
And foil all our efforts, for the Tartar
Army loves not to stray away from homes
Where the spring brings mirth and jollity
And pleasure beyond measure.

Rabbat : Yes, and our worthy rival Liu Kun,
Whom the city-folks adore like their very Tombs
Wherein are kept the Scared Dusts of their
Ancestors.

Will rather take his own life than
Submit into our hands. Though they
Get no supply, they would one and all
Starve to death rather than surrender.

Mungus : It is all true. Our soldiers are excellent
So far; But who knows when the germ of
Discontent will burst forth?

Rabbat : Already there's some sign of that.
And though our officers had no difficulty
To nip all dissents in the bud, yet, I fear-

Mungus : Say, O Rabbat, what is it thou fearest.

Rabbat : That if by this moon the city-gates
Are not opened, they will declare themselves
The Master here.

Mungus : Indeed, I feared as much.

But hark! Can't thou hear? A flute!

I pine for sorrow

Missing you every morrow.

What's that? A Tartar Pipe? Strange!

Call the Officers.

Rabbat : Ho Abbas, Rifat, Ho Taus and Jamut.

(Enter Abbas, Rifat, Taus, Jamut)

Mungus : Did I not prohibit everyone, on pain of death
To pipe an a Tartar flute during this siege?

Abbas : O General, There's none in the army who would
dare break thy stern command. It appears the
sound comes from a far from the north, Taus, go
you, and inquire and bring word quickly.

(Exit Taus)

Mungus : Whoever, has-broken command shall die You all
know the meaning of my strange command.

Mungus : Yes, Mungus, A Tartar pipe would evoke
Soft memories of the land of our birth
And make us wish for home.

Mungus : Yes, I much dread this Tartar Pipe.
Whoever has started this knows has started this
knows what he is about

For hark! Again the Pipe...

The Lotus blooms in the lakes

The rose-bud from its slumber wakes

My little heart pants and heaves,

A Kiss my soldier no longer gives.

My bosom, alas, oh ever aches.

I pine for sorrow

Missing you every morrow...

About the writer G A Khan died on April 30, 1976 at the age of 53 while he was serving as the Deputy Director General in the Ministry of Industries

poem

Poems of Shamsur Rahman

Translated by Andalib Rashdie

From a Distance

It can be seen in all seasons from a distance
that at the cynic end of the town
a two-storyed building that was raised three years ago
stands like a beautiful lonely lady.

The residents in the house are very neat and clean,
and a couple they are,
let their names remain unmentioned.
They are, of course, man and wife.
Often they go for a ride
sometimes here and sometimes there
sometimes to the parties do they go to return at midnight
and enjoy a profound sleep in the bed they share.

Silence reign the house almost all the time.
None has ever heard din and bustle and clamour of children,
only two rabbits play on the soft and green lawn
sometimes in the morning and in the evening in other times.
The rabbit couple rub sun and shadow in the folds of existence.

Nobody has ever got a clue of a quarrel and
domestic maids did not leak any story of their conjugal conflict.

Then why did the wife have to lie benumbed on the table of the morgue
in a thickened darkness.
Yet the rabbit couple plays in that house in sheer delight, while
the sun kisses the green lawn inside.

A Boatman

The boat loaded with poverty was advancing
reaping the river in a night of silence

A boatman, almost old and sun-burnt and rain soaked was
rowing the boat unshaken.

To the surprise of night, bandits encircled the moving boat
and messed up everything in their search for treasure
the helpless boatman endangered got a violent strike of a lethal weapon
and he tumbled down on the wooden platform.

The bandits failed to find treasure, spitted hatred around and ran away
When the first light of the dawn embraced the whirling boat
the hidden treasure dazzled under the broken platform
and nursed and bandaged the wounds of the boatman.

Slowly came the hymn of birds floating in the air
No one knew where would the boat go
and where the landing stage was.