LITERATURE

TRIBUTE

Surrealism in Alauddin Al Azad's poetry

In Bangladesh Alauddin Al Azad is perhaps the lone poet who often writes in surrealistic vein. In fact, surreaslism is one of the many streams that converged into his poetry, rich in thought and content, varied in perspective, style, tone and texture, writes A.Z.M. Haider in a tribute to the poet on his 69th birth anniversary

LAUDDIN AI Azad is a poet who has principally remained rooted all his life to the river, land, singing larks, his village primary school, sylvan surroundings of the sleeping hamlet he was born in and brought up with. The exterior beauty of the world with its variegated hues and diverse moods we view with our sensory perceptions not form the poets' milieu but also the inalienable elements of his poetry.

From the early dawn of his life when his mental horizon was overcast with patches of cloud waiting to burst forth into copious rain, as it were, in the shape of ceaseless downpour of poetry, the young Azad seemed vaguely aware of the mysterious realm stretching far beyond this evanescent world of ours. It is a world steeped in realm of the unconscious and the dream. Andre Breton, the chief spokesman of the surrealist movement in his book, entitled 'Manisfeste du Surrealisme' defined the ism as a pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or by writing, the true functions of thought dictated in absence of all control and exerted by reason and outside all aesthetic and moral preoccupation. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association, heretofore neglected in the omnipotence of dream and in the disinterested play of thought. It leads to permanent destruction of all other psychic mechanism and in the substitution for them in the solution of the principles of life

In western literature, particularly in painting and poetry, surrealism assumed the proportion of wideranging movement. But in Bengal it did not. Bengali poetry was not however completely free from it. An ardent student of Bengali poetry could notice streaks of surrealism in works of Biharilal and Rabindranath Tagore. In Biharilal's anthology of poems entitled 'Saradamangal' one comes across subtle touches of surrealism. Tagore's famous poem 'the dream' contains surrealistic elements, Jivanananda Das's poetry bears unmistakable marks of surrealism.

In Bangladesh Alauddin Al Azad is perhaps the lone poet who often writes in surrealistic vein. In fact, surreaslism is one of the many streams that converged into his poetry, rich in thought and content, varied in perspective, style, tone

and texture An able student of Bengali literature. Azad came under the spell of Tagore, Nazrul Islam, Michael



The poe Alauddin Al Azadt:

Madhushudhan Dutt, Jivanananda Das, Buddhu Dev Basu, Shudhindranath Dutt and other masters of Bengali poetry. Going side by side through Bengali poetry, Azad expanded the range of his study to western poetry. Later on, when he went to London for higher study, he got the opportunity to drink deep from the fountains of western poetry, particularly, those written in French and English. During his

masters of French poetry, he became familiar with surrealist movement launched by them. The familiarization with this movement left an indelible impact on Alauddin Al Azad, though it has a different connotation with him The scholar has all along been a non-conformist and left leaning poet

who has viewed life with all its grim realities. He has used pastiche and montage as technique to produce a

Rendezvous

ALAUDDIN AL AZAD

Though not a statue cut out of stone, I have A kind of stillness that designates steel mass As though a pillar or a part of structure. Even sometimes, seems to me, may existence Is but an ancient palace where History Has been playing patience-chess attentively Who will believe a chameleon? And when I shall disclose I can go anywhere Wish in twinkling of an eye, will prompt laughter. Still you need not have a Hubble telescope To observe my journey though spiral galaxy Though I am here awake late-night at the crippled freedom fighter centre.

The virtual arrow of time wavering in brain I failed to understand whether I am going Forward or coming back, diving into space Or falling down. Down and down. Oh. The pain frugal though, what a frivolous fuss Moving in frenzy stretching hands for a branch I wonder now whey I have been looking for The man so frantically. Doubtless he inspired Me, but was he responsible for my loss? The one who made me war wounded I shall see Him face to face, ask him what was the reason That he forced such a punishment-worse than death.

solourn to London be studied in kind of surrealistic poetry that

poetry of surrealistic type, or a variegated poetic pattern that has become a mixture of revolution and bizarre. Thus this poetic pattern of Azad contains the spirit of rich eastern tradition with that of the western or European poetry. The main strand of Alauddin Al Azad's surrealistic poetry lies in the fact that it seeks to transform life as well as the world itself. This is consistent with Marxian concept of literature to transform the world as well as Rimbaud's insistence on the change of life. In an effort to bring about transformation, surrealist trend comes as a strand that falls into the greater harmony of Azad's poetry. Just as a painter deploys patches of pastiche and montage in his pieces of painting to create a comprehensive impact on viewers mind, Azad similarly uses strand of surrealism in his poetry to create a melody and a feeling of sympathy and symmetry.

Azad, like any French surrealist, is never fully lost in realms of the unconscious dream world. In an impulse of poetic trajectory, Azad soars higher and higher, thus penetrates the mystical world of surrealism. He ascends that baffling enigmatic world, but at next breath descends upon the world of realism we live in, move and have our beings. He is too, deeply tied to this dusty, musty, muddy, cloudy world to depart from it once and for all. Azad's language and diction are unmistakably embodied in this particular poetic structure, one that is complex and melodious in expression to establish this kind of poetry at a singular space. A few lines from Azad's poem entitled 'Returns Every Day' are quoted below to exemplify the use of montage and pastiche that inevitably produces a fine piece of surrealistic poem

'Comes with the inevitability of death

Comes like mute tears Wakes up unaware in my lacer-

ated heart Like saga of immortality in her lips

In search of the lost procession

Returns over and over again every day."

In this stanza, revolution has been personified in a woman who comes to poet's life with the inevitability of death or with silence of tears. To convey the message of fiery revolution that tears asunder his heart, the poet deploys, with a

Two poems of Rabindranath Tagore

TRANSLATED BY FAKRUL ALAM

A Flight of Geese * **Balak**a

POEMS

At a bend, the Jhelum glimmered in the late evening glow, And then dimmed, like a curved sword flashing And then disappearing into its scabbard. At ebb of day, when the evening tide was in full flow, Flower-like stars floated in with the dark stream: Underneath mountain peaks Deodar trees were lined up in rows: It seemed that creation would speak in a dream But failing to do so was in distress Unuttered syllables smoldering in darkness.

Suddenly,

I heard in the evening sky, Lightning flash and thunder erupt in the open expanse And then dart into the distance. O flock of geese flying by, Intoxicated by the storm, your wings Flapped in gales of delight, Arousing waves of wonder across the sky!

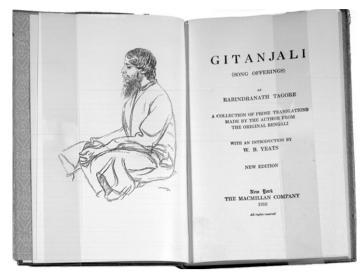
They flew away, wings fluttering, Like celestial nymphs interrupting The trance of some sage rapt in silence, And thrilled in passing, The dark mountain ranges And the deodar rows.

It seemed that those wings Bore away tidings Of stillness thrilled in its innermost being By the intensity of motion. The mountains wanted to be summer's wandering clouds The deodar rows wanted to spread their wings And follow the sounds, severing all earthly ties. The streaks of sound appeared startled, As they groped for the edges of the sky. Breaking evening's spell, a wave of pain leaped up To what was afar. O wandering wings! Your message fluttered in the soul of the universe that day, "Not here, not here, but somewhere far away" O geese in flight You lifted stillness' lid for me that night. Underlying the silence, I heard in water, land, and the empty expanse Indomitable wings sound with the same restlessness. The grass fluttered their wings On the earth that is their air. Underneath the darkness of the soil Millions of seeds too sprouted wings I saw also that day The mountain peaks, the deodar forests Unfold their winas To range over oceans and cross unknown lands. The stars themselves guivered their wings As darkness was startled by the cries of light.

I listened to the messages left behind By those flocks of birds for mankind As they flew over unmarked spaces, And sped from an indistinct past to an unclear future. I heard in my own innermost being Flutterings Of a homeless bird Soaring day and night With countless other birds In darkness and light. From shore to unknown shore. Across the open spaces of the entire universe Resounded the refrain that day "Not here, but somewhere else, somewhere farther away!"

Camellia Her name was Kamala

I saw it spelled on her notebook



Gitanjali (song offerings) / by Rabindranath Tagore : A collection of prose translations made by the author from the original Bengali. With an introduction / by W.B. Yeats. New Edition. New York : The Macmillan Company, 1916.

I found out there, however, that they wouldn't be coming that year. I was thinking of leaving when I met one of my fans, Someone called Mohanlal A skinny and tall chap, wearing glasses. Apparently he was here because the mountain air was good for his diges-He said, "My sister Tonuka won't let you go without meeting her." The girl was like a shadow, With just enough body in her to make her capable of surviving, More interested in reading books than eating, She was a great fan of my soccer skills She felt that it was good of me to come and talk to her. What an irony of fate! Two days before I was supposed to return, Tonuka told me: "I have a keepsake for you, something to make you remember me Aplant that flowers" What a bother! I kept quiet. Tonuka went on, "It is a pricey, rare plant, You have to work hard to keep it alive" I asked her, "What is it called?" She replied, "Camellia." Startled, I remembered the name hid in the dark corridors of my mind. I smiled and said, "Camellia? I guess you can't have it easily What Tonuka made of my words I don't know but she seemed happy and smiled too.

I began my journey back on the train with the plant, settled in its pot. The woman who was sitting next to me was not the pleasant sort. Because it was a two-roomed car I hid the pot in the toilet. But never mind the details of the journey, Or whatever happened in the next few months

The concluding scene of this farce took place during the puja festival In the district known as the Santhal Parganas. It was a small place. In any case, I don't want to give it a name. People who fanatically keep looking for change of air know about it though Kamala's uncle was a railway engineer and lived here Amidst sal trees and squirrels In the horizon you could see blue hills. Somewhat closer, a path went its way through the sandy soil. Silkworm cocoons were on view in frondosa foliages. While buffalo grazed under yellow myrobalan trees, With naked Santhal boys on their backs. There weren't signs of habitation anywhere And so I camped by the riverbank. There was no one to give me company Except that camellia plant.

Kamala came visiting with her mother Before the sun was up, In the pleasant but nippy breeze, She was out for a walk in the salforest, umbrella in hand, The flowers of the meadow appeared to brush her. But do you think she noticed anything? She crossed the shallow river And went over to the other side And lay down under a *sishu* tree, book in hand But that she had recognized me I could tell by the very fact that she seemed not to know me.

depth, Baudelaire, Malarme, Andre Breton, Rimbaud and others. As he went deeper into works of the great montage to create a new kind of

entirely new and novel. He has consciously blended pastiche with

forced to recall the necessity of

formal development in poetry over

Although sometimes Sikdar

Aminul Huq has become too per-

sonal, yet the poems in honour of

Akhtaruzzaman Ilyas and Shamsur

Rahman have considerable impact,

to a peculiar characteristic of the

volume: many of the poems have

literature, in one form or another, as

the '30s tradition, at time when poets

ously; infact, some of them are said

significant human activity. Times

less, those particular poems are

sprinkled the volume with myriad

references to Western, particularly

respect, he has been much more

liberal than his masters, with some

allusions to Central Asian figures

thrown in for good measure. It" very

distance may be part of the explana-

tion. Nevertheless, the mythological

figures fit guite comfortably in the

context, at least on most occasions.

exclusively for his obvious weak-

ness towards mythologies, Greek

and Hindu. The legacy continued

uninterrupted through the '50s, with

irrelevant references to Telemachus

Not that Hug can be blamed

True to his '30s heritage, Huq has

took their particular craft too seri-

measure of success, images of death and tears shattering his heart to produce a feeling of surrealism.

BOOK REVIEW All his yesterdays

Sikdar Aminul Hug's latest volume is characterised by remarkable formal rigour. He has tried to load meaning into a compact a space as possible. That he has succeeded on most occasions is mostly due to his mastery of Bangla metrical types. writes Faisal Shahriar



Bimorsho Tatar (The Gloomy Tartar) Shikdar Aminul Huq, Ananya (2002), Pp64, Tk. 60, ISBN 984-412-232-7

If all time is eternally present All time is unredeemable --TS Eliot

F Rabindranath was the envy of the poetic generation immediately succeeding him. the '30s poets have become the envy of the present generation, and with adequate cause. The first modern" Bangali poets tried desperately to find a poetic voice of their own; but as some of them were to admit later, no matter however hard they tried to develop their own diction, it was almost impossible to escape from underneath the shadow of Rabindranath, simply because much of modern Bangla poetic diction had been developed by Rabindranath himself. Apparently, the same is more or less true of the Bangali poets writing today.

Some contemporary poets are trying to develop their own poetic diction; a few claim that they have already done so. But most even now speak in the poetic voice of Buddhadev Basu or Bishnu Dey or Jibanananda Das. Not that they are exclusively to blame. Collectively taken, the '30s poets undoubtedly constituted the most influential group of poets in the post-Rabindranath era and it's sign of their literary ability that 70 years on, Bangali poets have not yet successfully shaken off their structural influence. In fact, the attempt to do particularly the former. That points so is of comparatively recent origin; as late as the '70s, Bangladeshi poets were quite happy to sit at the feet of the masters of the '30s. But in subject-matter. This is also part of spite of that, some of them wrote meaningful poetry within the '30s,

"modern" tradition. Sikdar Aminul Huq's latest volto have considered it as the most ume is characterised by remarkable formal rigour. He has tried to load have changed since then; neverthemeaning into a compact a space as possible. That he has succeeded on eminently readable. most occasions is mostly due to his mastery of Bangla metrical types. He obviously follows in the poetic tradition of Bishnu Dey as derived Greek, mythology. But at least in this from TS Eliot. That has provided compactness of expression and, on occasion, significant impact. But possibly, it has also forced him to restrict himself to a very specific interesting to note that, somehow, range of subject-matter. He is the Central Asian figures seem to be undoubtedly very personal, that more alive than Agamemnon or goes without saying, but he is also Artemis. Difference in geographical

purely urban in spirit. Thus far, he has been a faithful follower of the Eliot-Dey tradition. But going against the grain of both of them, he tends to get nostalgic on the most inappropriate of occasions. That is, formal rigour has not been supported by emotional restraint. Old age, the possibility, or rather the proximity of death and

and Achilles thrown in, some would nostalgia for the good, old 60s form the subject-matter of most of the say for the sole purpose of impresspoems of the volume. But on most ing readers, in the works of most occasions, he has handled his major poets of the period. Hug's material with remarkable formal references are undoubtedly more mastery. On the rare occasions on relevant. which he has failed, the reader is

But, in the end, the city overshadows everything else in Shikdar Aminul Hug's volume: the serene unassuming, provincial city of the '60s, For him, it's not an object of awe, as it was for Buddhadev Basu or an object of extreme nausea, as it was for Jibannanda Das; Shikdar prefers to view it as a more or less impersonal entity, possibly remembered by very few of its presentday inhabitants. He has adapted himself well to the changed urban reality of the past two decades, but nevertheless pays his personal tribute to the vanished city and everything associated with it.

Most probably, Shikdar's formal rigour is the perfect accompaniment for his subject-matter. He has used the comma quite effectively to bottle up the flow of latent emotions in his poems; it only goes to show the degree of attention he has paid to the tools of his craft. The only possible regret is that neither in form nor in matters of content has he chosen to explore new poetic territory. Most probably, he does not believe in any abrupt break with tradition. It has to be remembered that the attempts, over the last decade or so, to develop a radically different Bangla poetic diction have not been remarkably successful. Shikdar has obviously chosen to stay on familiar ground. That does not take anything away from the credit that is his due for using his chosen tools to the maximum possible effect. Time present is contained in time past, as Eliot himself would have said.

She was in a tram with her brother, on her way to college I had the seat just behind her. I could see her perfect features The soft hair on her neck trailed under the bun she had made. A few texts and notebooks were on her lap. I was so captivated by her I couldn't get down where I was supposed to.

From then on I tried to make sure I was always on time, Not really for my own work. But to be there when she would be traveling And I would meet her often I kept telling myself, we might have no other connection, But we were at least co-passengers. She looked bright and sparkling. She combed her hair so that it would curl away from her beautiful forehead

Her dazzling eves seemed to dart confidently. I wondered: why didn't some crisis come up, So that I could rescue her and become a hero Perhaps save her from some sudden commotion in the street, Or the insolence of some ruffian? After all, such things happened all the time! But my fate was like a shallow tank full of muddy water, There was nothing grand in it! My days passed indifferently, Like frogs croaking monotonously in such tanks No place there for a shark or an alligator or even a gander!

One day in a crowd when people were jostling each other, I saw Kamala sitting next to a half-Englishman. For no reason at all I felt like knocking the cap from the man's head And grabbing him by the neck and throwing him into the street. But I could find no excuse for acting, though my fingers kept itching to do somethina.

Just when the man took out a big cigar, lighted it up, and began puffing. I came close to him and told him, "throw the cigar. He appeared not to have heard me, And kept making smoke rings till the air was thick with them. I grabbed the cigar from him and threw it into the street. He clenched his fist and glared at me, But without saying anything, jumped out of the car, Apparently recognizing me. Which wasn't surprising since I was celebrated for my soccer skills, And had even earned a sobriquet for them The girl's face reddened, She looked down, opened a book, and pretended to be reading, But her hands were shaking, And she didn't even spare a glance for her hero! The office-going sort in the car said, "You did right mister!" But the girl got down before her stop came, Took a taxi and disappeared.

I didn't see her the next day, Or the day after. But on the third day I saw her on her way to her college in a rickshaw. I realized I had acted foolishly, And that she was guite capable of looking after herself And didn't need me at all. Once again I kept telling myself. My fate was like a shallow tank full of muddy water And the memory of my "heroic" feat kept mocking me I decided I would make up for my mistake.

I found out that her family spent their summer holidays in Darjeeling. I felt that I too needed a change of air. They lived there in a small house called Motiva It was a house hidden by a tree and a few steps down from the road. It faced a snow-covered mountain.

One day I could see that her family was having a picnic by the riverbank. I felt like going up to her and saving. "Don't you need me for anything? I could fetch water for you from the river, Or cut wood for fuel from the forest. Besides, couldn't there be a cuddly bear in the jungle nearby?" However, I could see in their picnic party a young man, Wearing shorts and a silk shirt of foreign make, Sitting next to Kamala, legs spread out, Smoking a Havana cigar, While Kamala, absent-mindedly, was tearing into pieces Petals of a white hibiscus flower Lying next to them was some foreign magazine.

Instantly, I realized that in this lonely nook of the Santhal Parganas, I was unwanted, that there was no space for me anywhere. I would have left immediately, but I would have to do one thing before leaving. Since in a few days the camellia plant would flower.

I would send her the flower and then my part would be over Till then, all day long I roamed the jungles and forests for game, gun in hand,

Returning to my tent just before dusk to water the pot, And to see how close the bud was to blossoming.

The time had come.

I sent for the Santhal girl who brought fuel wood for me. So that I could send the flower though this girl in a platter made from sal leaves.

Meanwhile, I was absorbed in a detective story. From outside came the sweet crv of her voice. "Master, why did you send for me?" I came out and saw the camellia flower Decking the Santhal girl's ear. Lighting up her dark complexion. She asked me again, "why did you send for me?" Replying cryptically, "for this precisely." I left immediately for Kolkata.

About the genesis of the poem, Rabindranath has this to say: "I wrote this poem while in Srinagar. I used to live in a boat on the Jhelum river then. One evening darkness was descending gradually on the river water. I was on the roof of the boat. The other side had become completely dark, the tide seemed to be dark too, and not a sound anywhere. Then, a flock of wild geese suddenly flew by. I had been similarly amazed by the flapping of wings that sounded very much like loud laughter while on board my boat on the Padma." As Krishna Kripalini notes in his biography of the poet, "the flight symbolizes for him the latent motion in all motionless things, the passage of the time-spirit, the unending quest of life and of the soul, the eternal cry in the heart of the universe: "Not here, not here, but somewhere else" (p.254 of Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography (Visva-Bharati, Calcutta, 1980).

* There is an allusion here to Apsaraa celestial nymphdisturbing the meditation of the God Shiva