which, later during my university days, inspired me to write stories.

I can give one example: as a child I used roam around the village a lot. We used to have a boatman named Bari who would ferry us across Korotoa. Though he was thin, his wife was a stout woman called Shonamoye. One day their house was on fire and I saw the lady of the house carry a huge sack of rice on her back as she came out of the carnage. This scene would come back to me over and over again. The fight for survival, of saving one's possession with the last bit of strength enthralled me as a child. These incidents made me interested in the ordinary people and their lives.

What inspires you to write?

The landscape around the river Korotoa, the fields, the trees and the people inspired me to write. I didn't start writing till I was in university. My life in the village had already instilled the rural elements in me as a child. I took the ingredients from where I spent my childhood.

What is your view about the political situation of Bangladesh?

We have witnessed the military rule of the 60s, then the military dictatorship of Ayub Khan. To me we were always kept under the boots of the military men, and we have stood up against the oppressive forces time and again. Though it was not easy to revolt, we did get our independence at last. I have written a book named Gayatri Sondha which is about Bangladesh from 1947 to 1984. It gives a picture of the formation of the Bengali nation. In my other book Kalketu O Fullora, which is in fact a myth about a benevolent king who loves his subjects and his kingdom dearly, I tried to reverse the story by making the king a dictator depicting the military rule of Ershad in a symbolic way. Now if you ask me about the political situation of the country at present I would say that I am a bit disappointed with it. We could have done much more in 37 years of independence.

How do you think the situation can be improved?

The people have to become more conscious about the political system of our country. We must remember to speak up against the representatives even if they are elected. We must point out where they are going wrong; monitor what they are doing, if they are accountable to the people who have chosen them to work for them. If the general people are conscious about these issues then only our politicians can work for the people and also will not dare to do anything to fulfil his need alone. Some of the economists say that the remittance we get is enough to develop our economy. The policy makers must take this into account and work to give the people a better living standard. The government elected by the people must think about the people and may be then we will have a change in our society.

Can you tell us something about your personal life? How many children do you have?

I had three children. One of them is Lara whom I lost. She was a pilot.

I have written a novel named Lara. But I don't want anyone to see it as what she was like or what she did. I would rather see it as a novel about the relationship of a mother and a daughter. Not that all mother-daughter relationship will have the same kind of emotions but I did try to portray a picture to show the depth of a relationship. People have responded to this novel well. I always tell them to forget that I wrote about my daughter. In fact I ask them to read it to broaden their minds regarding our girl children; Educate girls, help them change their lives.

When do you write, any particular time of the day?

I write whenever I get time. But yes I write everyday and I always plan when I am going to write. It has to be everyday otherwise one can't finish one's work.

You were awarded the Ekhushe Padak this year, bagging the second highest award in Bangladesh, what are your feelings?

Ekushey Padak is like a part of my existence. It has pleased me immensely to be acknowledged. And Ekushey is to do with our language movement so it does inspire me more to write. I feel that I have been honoured. But I don't feel that I have been given any added responsibility because I have been writing more than forty years. And never have I budged away from writing about the people of Bangladesh and their surroundings. I am working on gender issues now; I am also work ing on compilation of a dictionary in Bengali. So you see I was already working out of a sense of duty to the society so I don't feel that the award changed that in any way.

What do you think about the female writers of Bangladesh? Have we achieved what we wanted or do we have to go a long way still?

We have not educated our girls as much as we should have. If one looks at the university one can understand the percentage of female students studying there. Considering that I think the presence of women in literature is not satisfactory. But then again one has to posses some quality to be creative. From that point of view the contemporary writers are doing very well. They are looking at things from a different perspective, doing a lot of experimentation and also producing good literary work. They are also trying to write in English. This is giving them an opening to the literary world out side Bangladesh. If we want our literature to be known to the world we must write them in English, make translations. If we have 25 writers in English I would be very happy. India has had them long time ago. And it is accepted all over the world as Indian literature in English.

Do you have anything to say to the new generation of writers in Bangladesh?

Yes, I want to tell them to get to know their roots. One can't do anything if they don't know their roots. If you want to stand anywhere one must not forget about his or her own identity and work on it. ■