

An insulated literary voyage

Rifat Munim reminds readers of some notable men of letters

February 2011The latest issue of *Kheya*, a literary magazine with a fairly prolonged lifespan, was gathering dust on my shelf, being placed quietly underneath my recently bought English and a few Bengali titles. As one corner of it uneasily jutted out, I pulled it out from under the stack. Its cover, stripped of any glitz, is unadorned with a cluster of pale leaves and gives off gloomy light in the foreground of which is put a vertical portrait of the versatile author Abdul Mannan Syed. He died in 2010. Nearly half of the issue is dedicated to his life and works. As I kept browsing through the pages, I met writers and poets who are barely known to readers but seem to have taken up writing as a calling, as an end in itself.

Having read their poems or essays, anyone would be impressed at the sight here of writers of rare literary and intellectual capacity. One would be aptly reminded of the reclusive Jibanananda Das, who would have remained largely unpublished if it were not for Buddhadev Bose and his magazine *Kobita*. Although much in common with Jibanananda in terms of distancing themselves from the hullabaloo of mainstream literature, their steady voyage through nearly three turbulent decades while clinging to an apparently pure, aesthetic standard of literature and that too as a group is precisely what sets them apart from numerous other literary or little maga-



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Editor Pulak Hasan

zines of the time.

After finishing the last poem, I was wondering how I managed to slide the book virtually into oblivion. This was more so because I had read some of their poems and essays, especially those written by Kashinath Roy, Nurul Haq and Golam Faruq Khan. About three or four years ago, one of my departed friends

insisted that I read a magazine called *Nirantar*. It was there that I first came across their works. Anyone may think I am emotionally enthused, but as far as my reading is concerned, I must say *Nirantar* is one of the few quality literary magazines I have ever seen in this part of Bengal. The same applies to *Kheya* too. Both of them contain essays, criticism, scholarly articles, poems, short stories and always some excellent translated works that are selected on the basis of originality and perfection, two standards that are so noticeably missing in many of the poems and essays published in newspaper-based literary supplements.

The prose section of this issue of *Kheya* boils down to Mannan Syed who, it turns out, had been a mentor as well as a companion of the group in focus. But I have chosen to begin with others who mainly represent the group. As we all know, Mannan Syed has never been an unfamiliar name in literary circles despite all his seclusion. But let me ask you if you have ever heard of Pulak Hasan, who is the editor of this magazine and a gifted poet himself. Did you ever hear of Selim Sarwar, a poet and critic? Or consider Nurul Haq and Golam Faruq Khan for that matter.

When it comes to literature in our country, the Department of English at Dhaka University takes a special place.

The legacy had begun from Buddhadev Bose. Be it in Bengali or in English, you will have to name writers who belong to the faculty of this department. And all of them are quite familiar names. But did you know that Kashinath Roy also has taught English here and that too, for several decades? Did you know that his poems are so arresting that you will be transported to a world where all your mundane experiences are given a new life, a new meaning?

My dear readers, I'm not a writer as such but I'm a reader who at least has kept himself in touch with mainstream literary supplements and magazines for the last ten years. Based on that experience, let me speak for you: no, you have never read or heard of any of the aforementioned names. Or even if you have, it did not take you long to forget them because of their extremely sporadic appearance. This is true of the group in general; and this is precisely why I have written this piece not to review the magazine but to introduce these writers and to let readers know of a world where dedication to creating literature is all that matters and the race for outstripping others in the media or at the book fair is all that does not count.

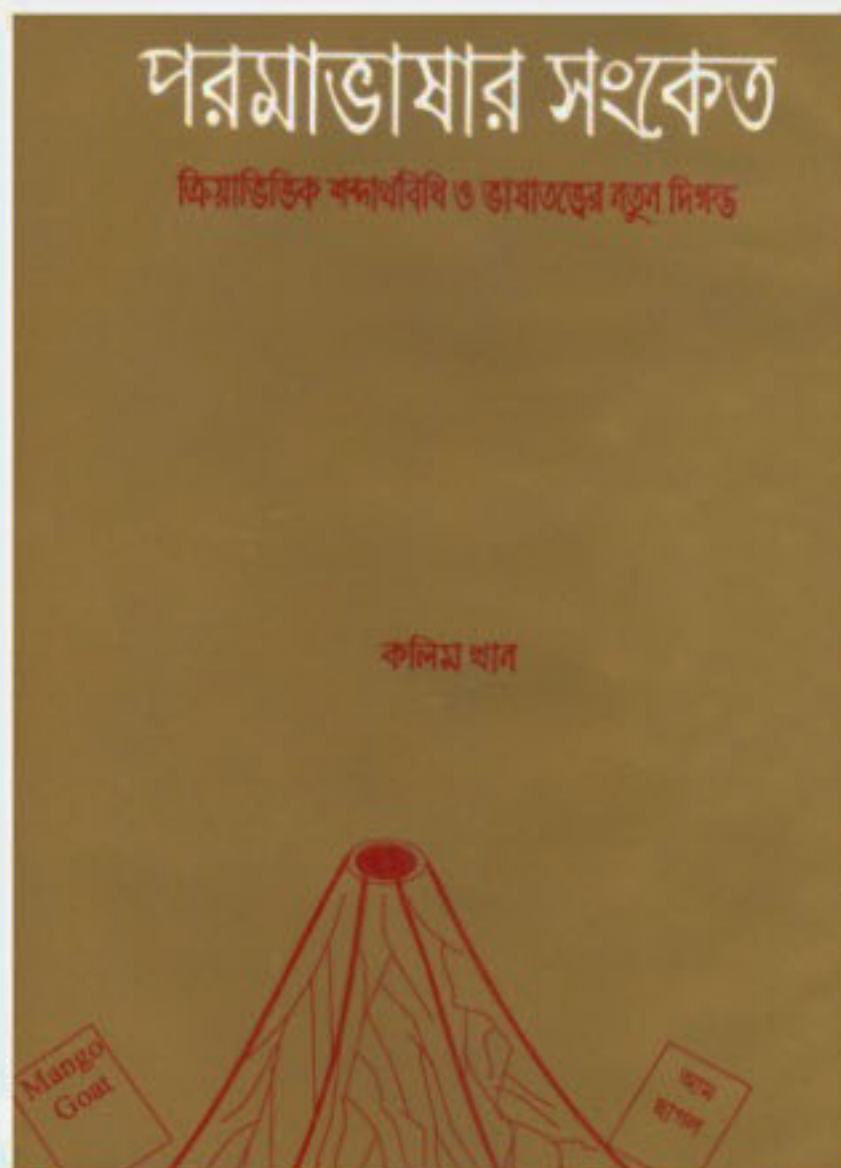
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Semantics and the Bangla language

Alamgir Khan goes into verb-based semantics

Why something is called aam (mango), something else called pata (leaf) and another boi (book) seemed to be arbitrary, accidental, so long to linguists in the world. It was for long believed that people of a certain community accepted the meaning of these words as such. It seemed those people could have accepted the same words to mean something else like aam (mango) for books and so forth. Modern linguists have discovered a common structure of sentences in all languages in the world. But to them all seems arbitrary beyond the structure of sentences.

Not so, says Kalim Khan of Paschimbanda, India. His journey in linguistics began with the essay *Bhashatatter Purbo Diganto* (The Eastern Horizon of Linguistics), in which he proposed the greatest breakthrough in linguistics and a way to look into the old history of India along with mankind. The key is verb-based semantics with which the door to that ancient history can be opened. Rabindranath Tagore believed that there is the history of India in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. But these two epics appear to be but fiction, if studied with the knowledge of modern language, which is logo-centric, one word carrying only one meaning with some synonyms. In verb-based semantics any word in the world is formed from a basic action word. There can be many actors for one action and such a word means many things at a time. Kalim Khan says that Sanskrit is that language, and its greatest heir is Bangla. In his view, the key to understanding history in those two puranas is this verb-based semantics.



Paramo Bhashar Sanket: Kriyabittik Shabdarthobidhi O Bhashatatter Notun Diganta
Kalim Khan
PapyrusM. Abdul Hai is overwhelmed by a collection of verses

Every alphabet in Bangla holds a meaning. And the the meaning of a word is in the alphabets the word consists of. For example, in the word JaGaT (world): Ja means origin, Ga means movement and T means revolutionary change.

From this point of view, the basic difference between Bangla and all other languages in the world, except Hebrew that also carries part of this characteristic, is verb-based semantics. According to Kalim Khan, this has made Bangla the

most important and unrivalled language in the world. Bangla holds the key to building a universal, super language of the future global village. Modern science cannot do without such a language and physicist David Bohm felt the need of such a language long ago. 'Paroma Bhashar Sangket: Kriyabittik Shabdarthobidhi O Bhashatatter Natun Diganto' by Kalim Khan, published by Papyrus, Dhaka, in 2001, tells this humbly, but boldly and unhesitatingly to the world. It is a collection of his essays first published in 'Mizanur Rahmaner Troimashik Patrika' (55 56 issues, March and June in 1999).

Let's take the Bangla word Ga, derived from Sanskrit. It means 'who goes', and within it can come many beings --- from the cow to the earth, because all this goes. 'Bangiya Sabdakosh' (Calcutta, 1932), compiled and edited by Haricharan Bandyopadhyay of Santiniketan, has mentioned 41 objects under the word 'go'. Later Bengalis under the rule of British imperialism had to discard all these, except the one meaning of cow. The rule of commodity is to have a single label for a single product. Therefore in the modern Bangla language only 'go' (cow) goes now, nothing else. On the other hand, the word 'go' has settled into the English language that means only the action of going, discarding its actors. Kalim Khan believes that all languages in the world have been born out of one ancient language belonging to an undivided humanity. And the words of that ancient universal language still survive in Bangla with almost all its treasures. Therefore Bangla

has the potential of becoming a key part of the universal language in the future. English is certainly the frontrunner in the race to become the global language. But to be a universal language for all mankind, Bengali along with English will lead the way to that, with due shares for all major languages. A universal language will not be hegemonical, but something that is owned by all because of its common base.

Kalim Khan thinks that Bangla is the only language in the world that gave birth to a state, and so Bangladesh is unique in this regard. Now Bengalis have a greater role to play in leading the world into a new, universal language based on verb-based semantics.

In Kalim Khan's view, development of human language runs parallel with the development of science, economics, society, etc. In the verb-based semantics of old Bangla, every word is multilinear like every human being. In logo-centric language, every word is unilinear, deterministic, fundamentalist, like every human being who is either a teacher or a farmer or a clerk because of division of labour. Karl Marx said, '... the human race made clothes for thousands of years, without a single man becoming a tailor.' (p. 131, Paroma Bhashar Sangket). This degeneration of social man has also its parallel in man's language. The time is ripe for humanity to achieve a higher integrity in all aspects. Verb-based semantics can open a door to this.

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The magic in poetry

M. Abdul Hai is overwhelmed by a collection of verses

The combination of thoughts, feelings and imagination tinged with appropriate light and shade go into making a real poem, a poem which evokes interest and provokes thoughts of readers.

A poem, characteristically, ignites fire in the mind. We draw indescribable pleasure while embarking on a flight, spreading our wings of imagination. A poem is not only a source of pleasure but also a vehicle that lifts us above the mundane affairs of our lives. A poem is worth reading when it is able to play the catalytic role of bringing about ecstatic pleasure, suspending the pain of worldly burdens and, above all, purifying the mortal minds.

Nirbachito Kobita is a selection of poems written by Mujibul Haque Kabir. The poet is a high-school teacher in Narayanganj. He is respected by young readers, and loved by his friends and colleagues everywhere. His poems have already created a huge number of readers who grab the earliest opportunity of reading his poems whenever they are made available in the market.

With the publication of *Nirbachito Kobita* the poet has very truly met the demand of readers who particularly enjoy being on their wings flying above the vast azure expanse of the sea. A cool, fresh breeze and the pristine beauty of nature which find their un-adulterated exposure in the poems leave a long lasting effect. The serene composure of your mind continues to make you feel an unearthly comfort.

Mujibul Haque has been extremely imaginative. Emotion also has added colour to his imagination. These two have played the trick and almost all of his poems have a kind of mystery. The elated state of mind of the poet has given the poetry an ecstatic touch, and his poetic treatment makes an earthly thing an unearthly one.

The poet takes unlimited freedom and privilege in portraying a thing with his own logic, own thoughts. He resorts to his own preferences in colouring a thing or a situation. It, however, goes without saying that the poet's maturity and wisdom have always had the upper hand, which is why all his poems compel the



Nirbachito Kobita
Mujibul Haque Kabir
Oninda Prokash

undivided attention of readers. The readers also very desirably or willingly separate themselves from the discord of real life to enjoy the feeling of being lifted in the vast azure sky. At times,

while going through the book, some readers are also likely to seek solitude for creating an atmosphere to experience the poetic ecstasy. The poet is there in his poems. His feelings --- good, happy, lonely and sad, are all visible in his poems, absolutely without any camouflage.

Readers are sure to be taken to new heights if they realize how the poet has seen the relation between man and nature. His gratitude to nature for its contribution to developing his physical structure, has been remarkably presented and readers will find a different taste in it.

The poet may not have known the identity of the ultimate power, yet his curiosity which is evident in the poem "Ishshor-o-charbak" will have long lasting effect. It will further consolidate your trust, confidence and faith in the Supreme Lord.

One very important thing that pervades the pages of the book under review is the poet's uncompromising bravery against arrogance. While admitting the fact that conflict between right and wrong is

unavoidable, he expresses his firm commitment to resisting it through creating awareness among readers. His appeal to readers may not be very poignant but it is not difficult to take the message either. "Porajito Noie" is a short poem which has an evident tone of inspiration. Readers are drawn completely into the smooth rhythm. They easily figure out what the poet has to tell them. It is, like most of the poems, short and easy to comprehend.

The struggle that brought freedom for us, is undoubtedly the most important and colossal event in our national history. It touched who ever witnessed it and also continues to influence the posterity through its accounts in history, literature, movies, paintings, etc. Mujibul Haque Kabir is not an exception. Being a conscious and sensitive person, he was tremendously attracted towards the struggle. The poet was at his prime age of 18, and the event left an indelible mark on his mind.

"Muktijhodhar Golpo" is a brief yet powerful reflection of poetic

sensibilities. Readers will find interesting elements to ponder over.

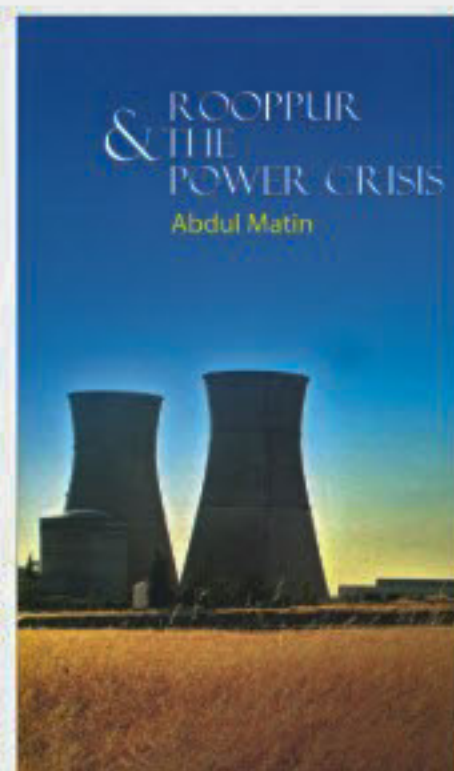
Mystery and ambiguity which lie between the lines in almost all the poems have given the poetry a sort of hypnotizing effect. You will feel like having a stroll along the passage of the poems. You will remain spellbound but not feel drowsy, as long as you hear the low whisper of the pebbles along its way. The smooth and silky journey through the poems will make you aware of the technical excellence of the poems. The magical feeling will also transport you to a world, free from all worries and anxieties. The rhythm, the words, figures of speech are all blended in such harmony that you will never feel exhausted even after strolling for miles. Exuberance never fades.

The poet is always meticulous in maintaining a pure and holistic atmosphere in his book. The canvas is entirely wrapped in modesty and decency. The book will surely be a valuable read for all.

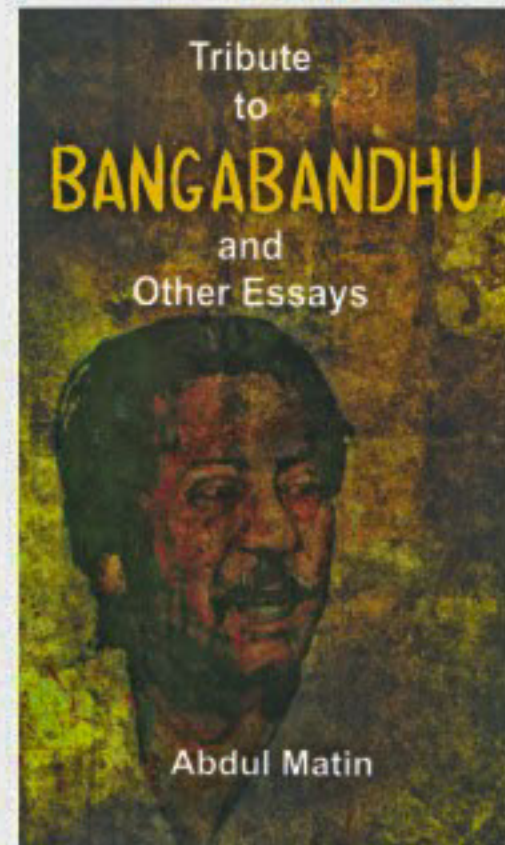
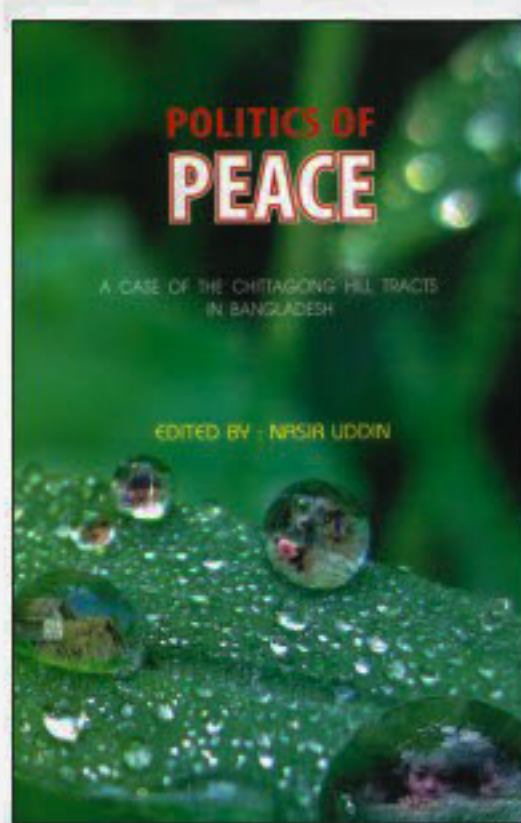
M. ABDUL HAI IS PRINCIPAL, ABC INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, NARAYANGANJ.

BOOK choice

Rooppur & The Power Crisis
Abdul Matin
Media and Publications
Limited



Politics of Peace
A Case of the Chittagong
Hill Tracts in Bangladesh
Ed Nasir Uddin
Institute of Culture and
Development Research



Tribute to
Bangabandhu
And Other Essays
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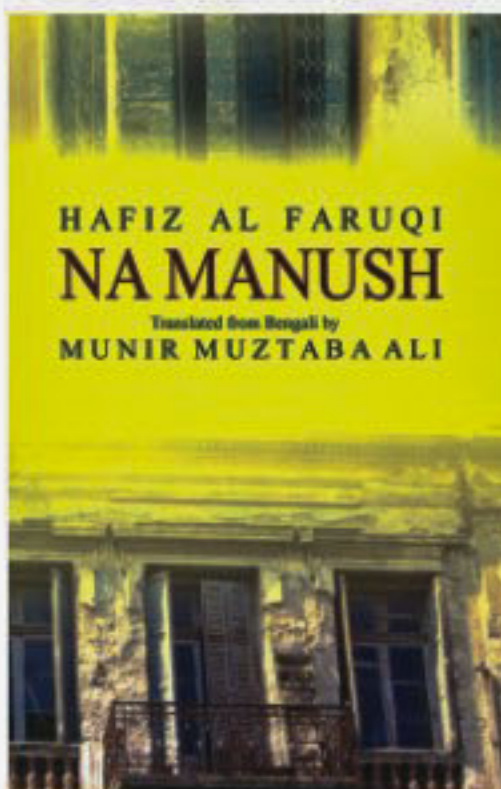


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Lech Waleśa'r Deshe
Shakur Majid
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