

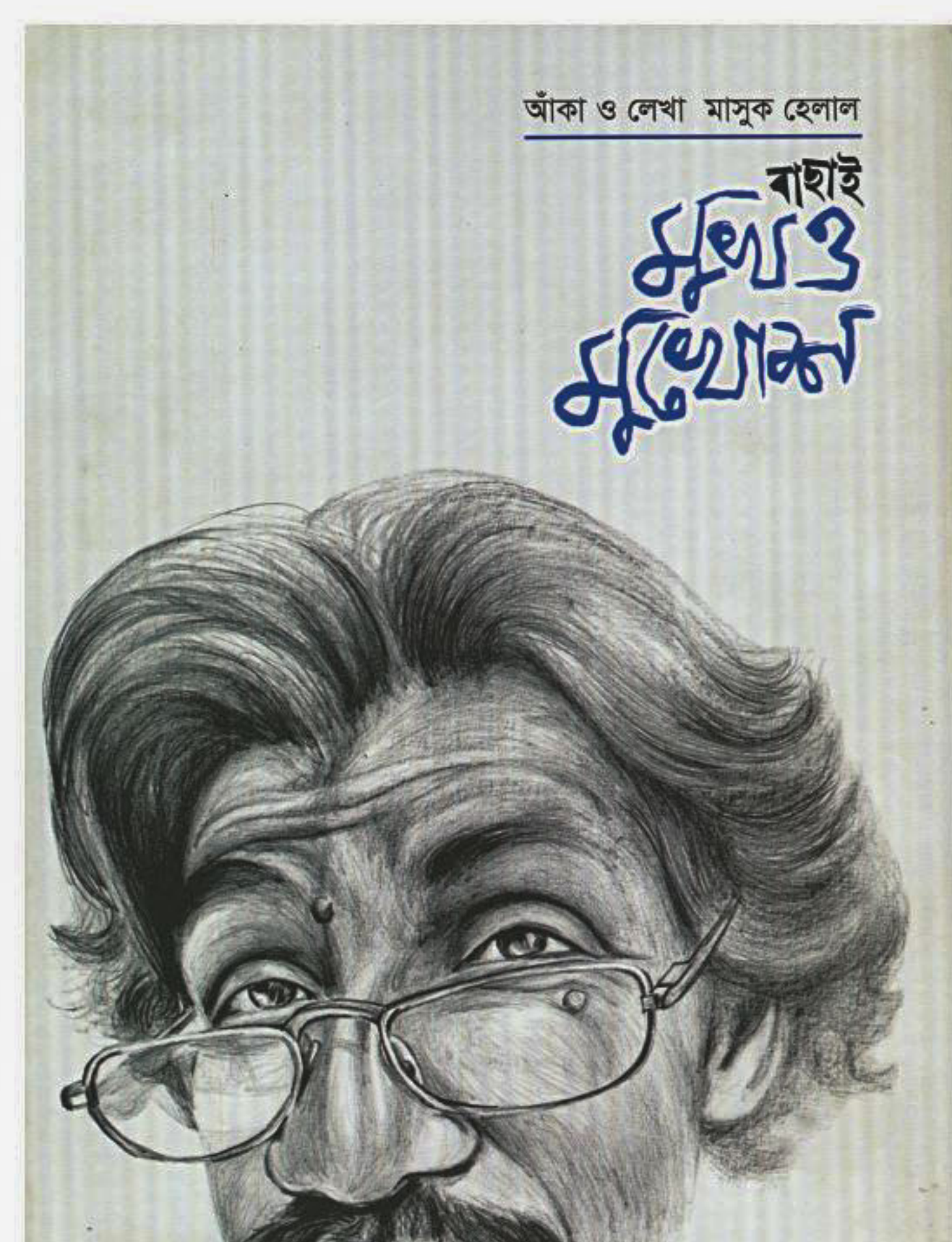
THE TALE OF FACES AND MASQUERADES

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

It is obvious that a newspaper is not the ideal place for publishing sketched portraits of unknown individuals. However, one artist with an impeccable hand in art and remarkable skills in writing made it one of the most popular features of one of Bangladesh's most circulated newspapers. Masuk Helal is one of Bangladesh's most talented artists who has been portraying the life struggle of the floating people of Dhaka relentlessly through his lively sketch and powerful writing since 2006. Slum dwellers living in wretched polythene shanties, rickshaw pullers, day labourers, street soothsayers, hawkers, food peddlers all these unnoticed and unheard dwellers of this mechanised megacity have been featured in Masuk's very popular creation called Mukh o Mukhosh (Faces and Masquerades) published continuously in The Daily Prothom Alo for almost 10 years.

With an impressive portrait and a short story about the person's life and his thoughts, this amazing rendition of Masuk titled Mukh o Mukhosh has revealed the inner soul of our society in a very artistic and comprehensible way. However, it was depressing for the readers that these artworks could not be preserved in a compiled manner as they are published in the daily newspaper which gets little attention after the day passes by.

Then Parijat Prokashani came forward to preserve these iconic stories of Dhaka and its people by publishing an epic book with Masuk's sketches and stories. This book titled 'Bachhai Mukh o Mukhoshi' (Faces and Masquerades Selections) includes the selected sketches and stories of Masuk that has been published in the Daily Prothom Alo in different times.



Started in 2006, Masuk has gathered hundreds of stories and drawn portraits of impoverished Dhakaites. It was the legendary artist Qayyum Chowdhury who selected the sketches for this book just before his demise. Another legendary artist Rafiqun Nabi's foreword on the book has depicted the book's unique features excellently.

The book contains around seventy sketches with stories. The titles of the stories are so attractive that a reader who once has read the title will be compelled to read the full story. And, with Masuk's



unique, creative writing style, the strange stories from some of the very typical but unknown faces of our very familiar city generates an insightful view among the readers about the eternal struggles of human life. The alignment of the stories and the sketches are so intelligently done that while reading the story and looking at the sketches the reader will have that illusion that the portraits, themselves, are telling their stories through the magical pen and pencil of Masuk.

Anisul Hoque, renowned writer and associate editor of Prothom Alo

commented, "Masuk Helal is an amazing portrait artist. However, his task is more than a photographer; he actually reveals the inner picture of a human mind." In fact, while featuring deprived and oppressed people of our country, Masuk has actually depicted the true picture of Bangladesh and its people. This book is a must read for anyone who wants to discover Bangladesh and its society through an artistic and human angle. Launched in this year's Ekushay Book Fair, this book can be obtained at only 500 Tk from any outlet of Parijat Prokashani.

| BOOK |

HERITAGE



A HISTORIC DIALOGUE WITH MODHU DA

APURBA JAHANGIR

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

From 1952 to 1971, our country bore its share of rebellion and the sadness that came with it. Throughout this time Dhaka University was the focal point of the movement. From Aam Tola, TSC to Dakshu Canteen, every place had its own share of history. One of the most prominent hubs was the famous Modhur Canteen, popularly known for holding major political meetings.

In 1971, East Pakistan Students' Union (DU Wing) decided to publish a compilation of writings, committing to the memory of the 1952 language movement. The compilation was named "Eto Bidroho Kokhono Dekheni Keo". Media analyst and talk show host Muhammad Jahangir was then working as the Dhaka University correspondent for *Dainik Pakistan*, a leading Bangla daily of that time. "While planning for the compilation, I had an idea of interviewing the illustrious Madhu Da of Madhur Canteen," says Muhammad Jahangir. "To me he was the best witness to what happened that day and let's not forget he was also a prominent personality regarding these movements." Though Modhusudhan Dutta (Modhu Da) was never involved in the movements, he was a common name regarding these actions as his canteen was where all was planned.

Using a pseudonym, Abul Abbas, Muhammad Jahangir published his interview with Modhu da with the title "Modhu Dar Sathe Kichukhon." In it, he wrote,



"February 21, 1952. From the meeting at the Dhaka University *Aam Tola*, to the road march; everything and anything that happened that day had a common associate, and that was Modhu Da.

The conversation with him took a turn to the historical event that took place eighteen years ago. He witnessed every bit of the tragedy and even after all these years, Modhu da still bares that sadness. I asked him to tell the tale of that day. What he saw and how he felt. The question took him by surprise and he answered with a



half smile, the smile which everyone was familiar with. He said, "That was a long time ago. My memories are quite vague." I again requested him to recall the day. Modhu Da stared at a distance, as if he was witnessing the past all over again. After a while he suddenly spoke, "Borkat was just having tea in my canteen before leaving for the march. After I heard he got shot, I wanted to see his body. But I couldn't. A lot of police were surrounding the body." I wondered how lucky he was to witness all of this.

Muhammad Jahangir's writing remains a historical document, in a very poetic sense. A lot of stories have been written about Modhu da, but he was the only one to signify the language movement through Modhu Da's eyes. In his article he also wrote,

"I wanted to know if Modhu Da can recall other faces of that movement, activists who once mesmerised others by their speeches. He brought to mind a lot of them. Oly Ahad, Abdul Matin, Mohammad Toha, Gajilul Haque, a lot of who were regulars in his canteen. They still give a warm welcome when they meet.

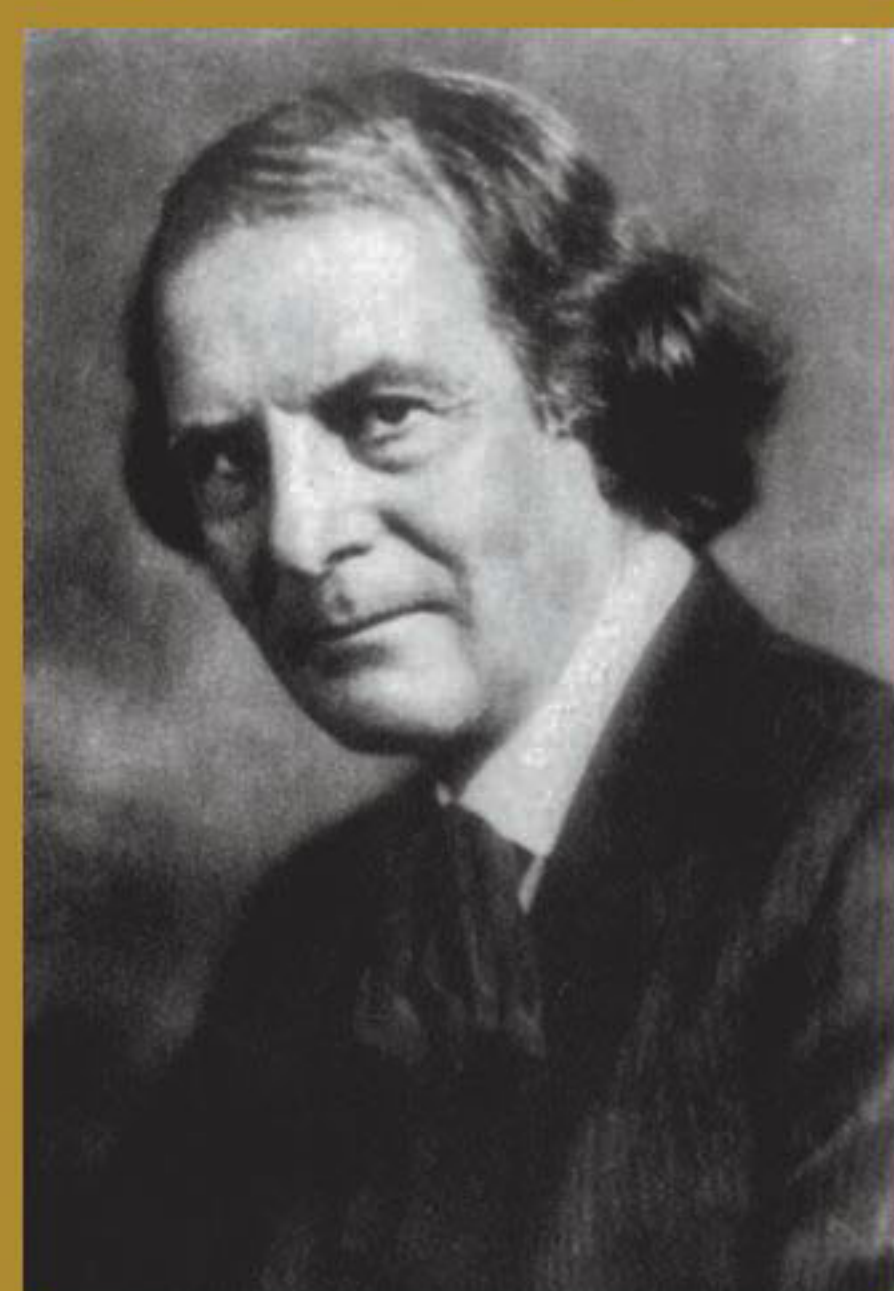
Whenever Modhu Da goes to the university grounds, he stops in front of the Shahid Minar, remembering little fragments of that day. He still cannot forget the face of Borkat. He still tries to find that innocent face in the crowd of his canteen."

This interview was taken in the month of February, in 1971. In the same year on March 25, Modhusudhan Dutta, with a couple of his family members, was killed by the Pakistani Army. ■

PEARLS OF WISDOM



"INJUSTICE IN THE END PRODUCES INDEPENDENCE."
ELBERT HUBBARD
American writer, publisher, artist, and philosopher



"FREEDOM CANNOT BE BESTOWED - IT MUST BE ACHIEVED."
TONI MORRISON
American novelist, editor, and Professor

"YOU WANT TO FLY; YOU GOT TO GIVE UP THE SHIT THAT WEIGHS YOU DOWN."
TONI MORRISON
American novelist, editor, and Professor

