

Fifth anniversary of Syed Ahmadul Huq

The creative world of 'Banglar Rumi'

AMIT DEY

THE creative works of celebrated writer Syed Ahmadul Huq, popularly known as 'Banglar Rumi' throughout Bangladesh, are a perfect blend of erudition, historical consciousness, philosophical insight and poetic brilliance. It is gratifying to note that Allama Rumi Society Bangladesh has taken a praiseworthy initiative to systematically publish the collected works of this outstanding scholar. This also ensures the preservation of Banglar Rumi's creative experimentations in the domain of Bengali literature at a historical juncture when the world is apparently sliding towards the abyss of intolerance and exclusivism culminating in periodical outbursts of violence. Needless to say that such a tendency is hardly entertained in the mystical and humane world of the Sufis who are scarcely immune from the assaults launched by the representatives of hegemonic orthodoxy in the subcontinent and beyond. The collected works of Banglar Rumi is a timely publication in this larger context. He was genuinely motivated by the urge to promote inter-faith dialogue and transnational goodwill which is resonated in his creative ventures relating to the world of Muslim mystics, particularly when he escorts the active and imaginative readers through the improvising literary productions of the illustrious Persian poet Jalaluddin Rumi. The world is replete with literature on

Rumi and Sufism in English, German, French, Persian, Arabic and Urdu. But when it comes to Bengali, there is scope for massive multiplication of this genre. This is a painful experience because the Bengali speaking people constitute one of the largest linguistic groups of the subcontinent. Even the great Enamul Huq produced his magnum opus, A History of Sufism in Bengal, in English. This is true about other greats such as Abdul Karim, Abdur Rahim and Tapan Raychaudhury. Though Professors Karim and Huq left some works on the sufis in Bengali, those were not regarded as their major works. Seen from this angle, Banglar Rumi's vernacularising ventures in the genre are significantly praiseworthy, as it enables the commoners to access mystical poetry which spearheaded the Persian Renaissance in the pre-modern period. It goes without saying that this Persian Renaissance created ripples in the sub-continental intellectual world, spanning up to the era of Raja Rammohun Roy and the great Tagores. In this larger perspective, Ahmadul Huq's writings truly unveil the human face of Eastern South Asia's (which incorporates Bangladesh) socio-cultural world.

Long before the advent of Gandhi on the political map of the subcontinent, eclectic spiritual leader Kesab Chandra Sen realised the significance of comparative theology in the embryonic form of the nation building process which involved intercommunity goodwill. He deputised his disciple Bhai Girish Chandra Sen to dedicate his entire life to Islamic studies, which the latter did remarkably successfully. Bhai Girish Chandra



Syed Ahmadul Huq

Sen is credited with the successful translation of the entire Quran from the original Arabic into Bengali. He extensively wrote on the Sufis and Persian literary personalities. When he died in the early twentieth century, both Hindus and Muslims had joined that funeral procession, defying the communal disharmony that characterised the decade. We may recollect here that Jalaluddin Rumi's death was also mourned by Muslims, Christians and Jews which confirms his universal acceptability. Unfortunately, many valuable works produced by this prolific Arabic and Persian knowing Bengali scholar

have been lost since the posterity did not realise the significance of preserving them. Thanks to the noble initiative of Allama Rumi Society Bangladesh, a similar fate would not be embraced by Banglar Rumi's prolificity.

In one place, Ahmadul Huq has implied that like a genuine Sufi poet, Rumi distanced himself from reason (aql) which characterises the action of a demon and emphasised undivided loyalty to the Supreme Being. But I think we need not always rely on literal translations of Persian Sufi poetry because creative writers such as Rumi, Khayyam and Hafez used allegories and symbols to express their views. Moreover, translation from the original Persian into Bengali is an extremely challenging task. Thirdly, interpretation or translation is often situational. For example, during various challenges and uncertainties, reason often takes a backseat. But when Islam was strongly entrenched during its classical phase and even after, when the three great empires, i.e., the Mughals, the Safavids and the Ottomans were enjoying their heydays, reason occupied a dignified position in the madrasah curriculum. During the golden era of Islam, the Prophet himself emphasised ijthad [independent reasoning or the thorough exertion of a jurist's mental faculty in finding a solution to a legal question]. In the modern era, great Muslim leaders such as Muhammad Abduh, Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad recognised its importance for the betterment of mankind. In this broader context, let us see how Jalaluddin Rumi was celebrated in Akbaride South Asia. In tune

with Emperor Akbar's desire, a particular portion from Rumi's Masnavi used to be recited before him.

In this way, the great mystical poet blended rationalism with spiritualism. This creative experimentation of Rumi was translated into practice during the Akbaride regime through the Qadiriya Sufi doctrine of Sulh-i-kul or "Peace with all". Rumi's personal crisis unleashed his creativity. His qalandariyya murshid was killed under mysterious circumstances. He witnessed the unsettling situation in Central Asia and West Asia due to Mongol raids which was followed by large scale migration. Similarly, Banglar Rumi experienced colonial subjugation associated with the infamous divide and rule policy culminating in violent de-synchronisation of Bengali society during and after independence. Last, but not the least, during the continuation of political hegemony under the Pakistan regime, that was also characterised by direct assault on his sweet mother tongue, the Bengali language, eventually leading to the Liberation War, Huq coped with this crisis through creativity. This involved putting emphasis on symbols of harmony, humanity, mutual understanding and mutual appreciation as resonated in the endeavours of Sufis, Sufi poets and folk singers such as the Majibhandaris of Chittagong. On his fifth death anniversary, we pay tribute to his ideas and literary ventures by locating them on this broader perspective.

The writer is Professor of History, University of Calcutta.

The Literature of Economics

SARAH ANJUM BARI

ECONOMICS has long held a reputation of being an inaccessible social science. We are daunted by its intricacies, technicalities and ambiguities. It is, however, one of the most practical and socially relevant areas of expertise. We live not just in homes and societies, but in economies. We may rely on experts of respective fields to deal with matters of medicine and other pure sciences; but an understanding of economics is crucial even for laymen to function properly in the modern world.

What the overabundance of jargon hides is the fact that economics is no different from literature - the dearest of arts to the human mind.

"Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the story that we tell, all of which are reworked in that story of our own lives," writes Peter Brooks in his book titled Reading for the Plot. People have been drawn to stories like moths to flame from ancient times to today. Our days and daily discussions are claimed by movies, TV shows, songs, books and updates on our social media - a motley blend of storytelling channels. Empathy - an emotion most people tend to possess in different and often twisted forms - help us connect to different types of tales. Depending on our individual interests, we are fascinated and amused by history, fantasy, crime thrillers, romantic comedies, politics of Westeros and follies of past and present world leaders. Stories govern our lives.

As textbook definitions go, economics is the interaction of finite resources and infinite human wants. This basic disparity extends and multiplies into the innumerable issues tended to by economists, policymakers and governments worldwide, which in turn take over the news updates we pore over. We want to earn enough to be able to eat what we love, wear the clothes we admire, educate ourselves and travel to places that intrigue us, all in a safe and nurturing environment for

Mathematical diagrams and formulas including trigonometry, calculus, and algebra. Includes equations like x^2+y^2+z^2=1, y=2x, and various geometric diagrams.

our families and future generations. Our governments, in turn, want to be able to realise these wants desired collectively by a country of individuals. In its dealing of scarce resources for unlimited wants, economics is the most detailed story of human civilisation, capturing even the narrative's essence of blending into every aspect of our lives.

A good story is made up of wholesome characters, deep plots and a justifiable climax. Coherence; consistency; a functional

blend of the traditional and the fresh. We expect a story to portray characters that we can either relate to or be surprised by. Shaped by their own histories and made to face forces beyond their control, the characters fight to fulfil their end goals. The knight rides the horse, climbs the castle walls, slays the dragon and rescues the princess; and equilibrium is restored, but only for a while. New episodes bring new hurdles, and later seasons bring about reappearances of

previously defeated evils - be it inflation, unemployment or recessions reminiscent of darker decades.

As we know, the aforementioned forces beyond our control include a bevy of demand and supply dynamics which govern financial and commodity markets. Just as the brave knight makes use of his steed and swords, policymakers implement the various tools at their disposal to reach a (short or long-run) happy ending. These include

innovation, technology and monetary and fiscal policies used to stabilise prices, interest rates, foreign exchange rates and economic output. Incentives of higher profits, higher wages and greater equality drive the economic behaviour of characters ranging from politicians and businesspersons to garments workers and rural farmers, each with their own set of wants and limitations. Together, they make up the cogs and wheels operating the overarching themes of scarcity, cost-benefit analysis and utility maximisation driving an economy.

Every story has a theme. Hamlet thrives on revenge and the Great Gatsby on ambition. For Bangladesh, the theme of freedom has long been a favourite one. We have strived since our birth to embrace liberation, and that has been reflected in the continued dominance of export goods such as jute and ready-made garments in the country's GDP. New themes and new patterns are evolving to make the story an even more fruitful one, as initiatives to promote education, equality, public safety and women empowerment are flourishing even as we speak. London's BMI prediction of Bangladesh's growth trajectory by 2025 has set the stage for imminent plot developments in the economy's narrative, highlighting its oil imports and a 10.5 crore young cast of residents as potential catalysts. One hopes that the story will not disappoint.

There are of course glaring faults. Persistent poverty, corruption, pollution and inequality still run rampant, all of which are dwarfed by the recent emergence of demonic terrorism. Comparing economics to literature will by no means solve these problems, nor will it make the subject's many depths magically decipherable. It is alas more than metaphors and models. If we were to stop thinking of it, however, as the dismal science and instead see it as the representation of every nook and cranny of our own lives, our own world - we might be able to take a more wholehearted interest in the happy endings our country could aim for.

The writer is a student of Economics, North South University.

QUOTABLE Quote section featuring a portrait of Claudette Colvin and a quote: 'I knew then and I know now that, when it comes to justice, there is no easy way to get it. You can't sugar-coat it. You have to take a stand and say, 'This is not right.' And I did.'

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH. Includes ACROSS and DOWN clues such as '42 Bus units', '43 Pucker-inducing', '1 Scrooge cries', '5 Rapper Rhymes', '10 Seething', '12 Paquin and Pavlova', '13 They're removed from libraries', '15 Top card', '16 Neckline shape', '17 Lilliputian', '18 Countrified', '20 Household critters', '21 Ranch animal', '22 Fusses', '23 Skilled', '25 Brit's baby carriage', '26 Opera parts', '31 Pants parts', '32 Oklahoman', '34 Historic time', '35 Brood watcher', '36 "Golly!"', '37 Pantry staples', '40 Tribal leader', '41 Bender', '42 Bus units', '43 Pucker-inducing', 'DOWN: 1 Storybook elephant', '2 Early calculator', '3 "No kidding"', '4 Immoral act', '5 Paul Bunyan's ox', '6 First numero', '7 Deceived', '8 Grow fond of', '9 Rate', '11 Imposed, as a fine', '14 Lessened', '19 Bulls and Bears', '20 Cookout spot', '24 Plug parts', '25 Sites', '26 Entertain', '27 Meeting slate', '29 Sewater yam', '30 Farm device', '33 Stopwatch button', '35 Towel word', '38 Tennis need', '39 Be decisive'.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER crossword grid with words like ADAM, BITE, APHID, SOONER, TAMP, PLEASE, CHEERIO, SPIC, HORRORS, PIC, OWE, COST, SCARS, GATES, TONS, HEN, ART, CONTACT, TOE, ONTARIO, ENLIVE, TOTO, SAUCES, AMEN, SPENT, SASS.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker and BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott. Includes cartoon panels with dialogue like 'WE GOT YOUR CALL', 'YOUR BEAGLE IS STUCK UP A TREE?', 'NO, OUR BEETLE', 'WHAT ARE YOU SAD ABOUT, ZOE?', 'A BOY IN MY CLASS DOESN'T KNOW THAT I EXIST.', 'WHAT ARE YOU SO HAPPY ABOUT, SON?', 'GIRLS DON'T KNOW THAT I EXIST.'