

MUSINGS

Metamorphosis of an Artist as a Heroic Man

NABILA MURSHED

The night of November 20th, 1993 was in many ways Kafkaesque for Rashid Karim, one of the major novelists of Bangladesh. The single, pregnant word that succinctly captures his metamorphosis is horror. With the swift debilitating stroke or apoplexy, he plunged into the life of a caged bird and became trapped into a nightmarish destiny of partial mobility.

Initially it was a life of tremendous physical and psychological loss comprising of terror, pain and disgust, cries out loud for death before proceeding to surrender, acceptance and gratitude. In the face of it all he was able to retain his resilience. He was able to conclude his life with courage, which enabled him to become the legitimate hero of his own dignified life.

The cerebro-vascular arrest cut without mercy many of the important aspects of Karim's life. It significantly squashed his power to hold with words and with touch; his love of languages. He had to bear the excruciating pain of not being able to reach or express what was near, dear and within him. He became a one-armed man, partially blind, with one functional leg. It was hard to see his creative hand become still and hang like a dead limb of a tree. His fingers curled, they could not grasp, and they could not hold a pen. In his head, his thoughts became fragmented, disjointed. His eyes ached when they tried to read. They saw only half lines. Despite such disadvantages he wrote his autobiography, some poems, and reviews and gave a few interviews. Even though he had not lost the artist's nagging urge to create, he refused to write the three conceptualized novels through an amanuensis. There is something very special about holding a pen and writing with one's own hand, his wife reflected.

After the devastation, his family started anticipating the arrival of Godot, Samuel

Beckett's fictional character who is supposed to usher the final fulfillment. They maintained the delusional hope of Karim returning to his accustomed life. They goaded, insisted and compelled him to do physical therapy so that he could immerse himself in his writings, go to his literary haunts, go back to collecting music and visiting family and friends. He would

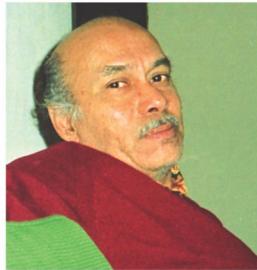


PHOTO CREDIT: ABU KAMAL

affectionately, irritatingly and desolately offer his family this consolation, "I have tried. Nothing happens." He would sometimes ask with an unflinching gaze "Do you want me to live?" And then thankfully respond at the end of the scrutiny, "Okay. Let me try."

With anticipation and determination Karim reconstructed his irreversible damaged life with a tightly knit routine comprising of waking up

late, going to sleep early, having regulated meals, waiting for the insulin man thrice a day, waiting for his daughter's call once a day and waiting for his wife to retire for the day. When his daughter called he would have a set of questions for her, adding occasional humor. "What are you having for breakfast? Send some over!" He would speak pleasurably about showering and shaving as the big events of his day.

Gradually age and progression of ailments led him to slink out of a fuller life. He confined himself to two rooms of his rented flat. He spent most of his waking hours in his bedroom, at his desk, looking at a pile of books and newspaper clippings and a family picture. Occasionally he would call a friend in the morning. They would listen to the sound of the *kolkol* over the phone while he would relish a *daulpuri* with piping hot tea. After lunch, he would walk over to the living room counting the thirty steps and either take a nap sitting upright on the sofa or ask his wife to find him a good Rabindra Sangeet on TV. From the afternoon onwards he would start losing energy. In the evening he would return to his desk to have dinner. After that he would go for his hour-long bedtime ritual, return to the living room to say good night before retiring for the night as a cocoon by drawing the quilt all over his body.

Beneath this regimented surface played the inner monologue of loneliness, existential concerns and the astonishing light of gratitude. In his poem "Ebebe Chinta" (Stray Thoughts), Karim describes the yearning for company and how in the absence of fellow human beings, the sounds of a fading conversation on the street and the imagined cursory look of the passer-by become good enough to fill the lonely heart

with gratitude. He then goes on to mention that even when the desired visitor does visit, "The mind and body of this lonely man etherized./ Then the barking of the dog/ In the dead of night./ Becomes very dear/ For some unknown reason." But the coarse sounds of the honking cars remained bothersome and in the absence of testimonials the curiosity to discover what lays yonder surfaced.

James Joyce, one of the best Irish writers, could have sketched Karim's life insightfully in *Ulysses* as he could depict the "grandeur of ordinary life" and could celebrate "all things rude and true." Had Joyce delivered the eulogy at Karim's funeral on November 26, 2011, he would have no doubt said, "Cheer up man! You have gone through the highs and lows of life on your own terms. You have experienced the odd thing called stroke with valor. You have loved and disliked passionately, you have appreciated and forgiven, you have dreamt, you have lost, you have worried, you have feared, you have yelled, you have cried, you have laughed, you have withdrawn. You have created. You have protected. You have immigrated. You have traveled. You have learnt languages. You have eaten steaks and *biryani*, sipped tea, whiskey, gin and beer, defecated, sang songs, conversed, felt sorry for yourself and others, you have looked at people, waited for people, shopped, paid careful attention to style.....these aren't little things, they are beautiful, serious, deep and fascinating" and brave. You can respect and appreciate your fragile and eventful life. You can see yourself as a heroic man who struggled with adversity with dignity without losing the zest for life."

Nabila Murshed is an occasional contributor to this page.

Three Untitled Poems

TISHNA MOHIUDDIN

I slick-silvered fish its skin - oily plump, inviting it sings glorious from the pan with the peevish potatoes and sulky tomatoes she hoped to be wrapped up in a sari that same shade of reddish gold assembled with care with the same tenderness carefully swaddled as the freshest salmon in the marketplace strange aspirations of a girl whose heart was muddled by the river water

II she steals away in softness bare footstep on the hardwood floor the stirrings of early morning a quiet pulse in her veins still moonlight reflecting in her eyes captured the way the world can be trapped in a drop of dew how she trembles in the wake of it all



III when she looked in the mirror she could not see herself only emptied eyes and a mouth painted in regret on the other side of the looking glass was everything she dreamed she'd be when she was five and the color of her skin was a fine earth from which beautiful things could grow

Tishna Mohiuddin is an occasional contributor to

A Backward City I'm in Love with

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Honk, honk the automobile keeps sounding. The road is in shambles, a disquieting bluish light Keeps flashing on and off. Wild speed breakers rattle bones, Suddenly, an odd brake screeches- A mad man, angry at lovers Who've taken over a children's park hollers: 'How can you smile, knowing this is the world we live in?' A broken brick on his hand, he looks furious! He's coming forward and I freeze But my driver holds my hands tight: 'He has no guts, Mr. I'm here.' Tea stalls across the street go wild With the music of late 80s drums: 'Wearing discolored jeans Lighted cigarette on his lips Buttons of his red shirt wide open' Dolly sings on. Confused by the smile of a high school girl, And seeing the red lights on the flooded street- I fall in love again with my moribund city I fall in love with Khulna yet again.

Md. Meheddi Hasan is a student of English at Khulna University.

POETRY

Rebel Poet

SHAH TZARIAN ASHRAFI

One day he will sing his song, And words will drip from his lips. Ripened with strength. Strong plants will grow from the seeds His aging hands are sowing. He will hold your broken hand In his mouth like a wolf, Then tell you what you write is admirable. He will spin a mountain out of the dust Your bones have turned into. Then tell you what you are made of is intense. And when an oak tree will stand proudly While flaunting its branches, He will be its long roots, sinking into the earth. He will slither to his home deep within the ground While growing far more Than the oak tree. And when he will sit on his throne inside the earth, One lingering fox will wonder What's saving the tree from wilting. Just like an unruly mob wonders How a poet can hold their feet captive While writing from a cave.

The writer is a grade 11 student of Birshreshtha Noor Mohammad Public College.

Enchanted

SYED IBRAHIM SAJJID



You remind me of the ocean, Calm yet so powerful; Its utter vastness of tranquility mimics your heart. When your waves hit the shore, I feel engulfed in its embrace. Like the warmth of your cozy arms.

You embody the sun, Burning bright above constantly. When you kiss me, The touch of your lips Shreds through the darkness of night, Like the first rays of the sun kissing the earth.

You resemble the west wind, Sweeping me off my feet with your charm, When your gentle breeze caresses my body, My whole world immerses into a trance. The euphoria of being with you Is like the first sight of spring after winter.

I realize then you are like the earth, A silent protector, a forgiving lover. When life hurls adversity at us, You are there embracing me, loving me, Guiding me home.

Syed Ibrahim Sajjid is an occasional contributor to this page.

