

The College Professor

SOMDATTA MANDAL

My cousin Nirmalya was born and brought up in Delhi. He would visit us in Kolkata occasionally while visiting his ancestral home and relatives in Midnapur. The first time he really began staying in Kolkata was when he got enrolled at Jadavpur University to do his M.Phil in English. After the successful two-year course was over, he started applying for jobs. Soon he got enrolled in the West Bengal College Service Commission panel and went on eagerly waiting for a posting. Bitten by a sort of patriotic bug he had given Midnapuras his first area of preference and then Kolkata. As luck would favour him within a short period he received an appointment letter to work as Lecturer in English in a newly established 'mahavidyalaya' in a town called Chandrakona. Quite elated, when he went to join he found a small tin shed built in the middle of vast tracts of agricultural land as the college building. That, and nothing more. There was no principal but only another lecturer in Bengali who had joined a few days before him and so by default became the teacher in charge.



Among many of our discussions Nirmalya would often tell me how he would feel ashamed to ask for pocket money from his father even after six months of joining in his post. He asked for advice as to what could be done. I, too, was clueless and did not know how to bail him out of his problem. One evening I realized that he had not visited our house for a few weeks. My husband too enquired about his absence. In the pre-mobile scenario of those days there was no way I could contact him.

"See his endurance has paid and his pay-pocket problem has been solved. That is why he is not coming to Kolkata so frequently," I replied confidently.

About a month after that there was Nirmalya visiting our house once again. "So when did you receive your pay packet? How was everything resolved?" I asked.

"Oh didi, after I went back to Chandrakona last time we two teachers sat wracking our brains to sort the problem. Suddenly, we realized that the huge tract of land that the college now officially possessed was overflowing with a bumper harvest of potatoes.

So we sold them and divided the six hundred rupees we got between the two of us. That can take care of my bills for a couple of months. But please don't tell Baba. He will be shocked."

Surely I kept my word and didn't disclose the facts to anyone. But as a footnote to the story I must add that Nirmalya went back to Delhi and joined as a lecturer in an evening college at the first available opportunity.

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He tried to learn how to make the files move from one table to another, went on keying new letters in his typewriter every day, but nothing seemed to be happening. "Come next week," was the standard answer he received. As months rolled by without any positive result I could feel that his earlier enthusiasm was gradually fading away.

Undaunted by the hardships of ground reality, he soon rented a mud house in the nearby village with a monthly rent of fifteen rupees and arranged a monthly system where food would be supplied to him in tiffin carriers from another local household. He started enjoying the great respect that the village folk started giving to the 'mastermoshai.' A young man from the precious portals of the capital, at first he did not feel demeaned but tried his best to adjust to ground realities. Without any office staff, except a peon, soon the task of doing all official work fell

on his shoulders. This was because he possessed a personal portable typewriter and knew English well. Since the teacher in charge was more adept at composing poetry in Bengali than anything else, Nirmalya was entrusted to run to the government office in Kolkata to see how he could arrange to regularize everything so that the coveted salary pay packet would come in due time.

It was at this juncture that he started frequenting our house almost every evening after chasing the babus at Bikash Bhavan for the whole day. He tried to learn how to make the files

move from one table to another, went on keying new letters in his typewriter every day, but nothing seemed to be happening. "Come next week," was the standard answer he received. As months rolled by without any positive result I could feel that his earlier enthusiasm was gradually fading away. Frustration with the ideology of the communist government started peppering his talks. Nevertheless he didn't stop making the rounds in the office on almost every working day. Once a week he would go and visit Chandrakona to report to his in-charge about the state of affairs.

"Novels cannot always be made only with the Imagination and the Pen":

A Talk with Mostofa Kamal

A synopsis from an interview conducted by Masud Ahmad

Novelist Mostofa Kamla was born in the village of Andharmanik under Barisal district on 30 May 1970. He started his career as a journalist after completing his Masters in English from the University of Dhaka. He worked in various capacities in the leading dailies of Bangladesh. Currently, he is the Executive Editor of *Daily Kaler Kantho*. Recently his collection of Three Novels has been published from Notion Press of India.

MA: Recently a collection titled *Three Novels* has been published from Notion Press of India. This is the collection of three books that got published separately from Dhaka. Now it is published in English from another country. How are your feelings regarding this?

MK: My feeling is extremely good as this is the first time when any of my work has been published from outside the country. All the three books first got published in Dhaka. The first novel of this collection is *The Flaming Eventide* which was published from Anonnya Prokashoni under the name of *Barud Pora Shondhya*. I myself got it translated into English and it was later on edited by Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam. Its English version was published by Pearl Publication in Dhaka.

The next book titled *Hello Colonel* was published by Abshor Prokashoni and Dulal Al Mansur translated it into English. Anonna Prokashoni published the third book titled *Telbaj* which was translated into English by Masum Billah under the title *The Flatterer*. The collection has been released from a different country means they will reach the readers of different countries and different people that must be a matter of great pleasure for me.

MA: How have these three books been selected separately?

MK: When the book *Barud Pora Shondhya* first came out, it received huge responses from the readers. Naturally, it inspired me to get it translated into English. The two other novels are also full of special features. I sent the

novels to several publishing houses, and finally, the Notion Press of India accepted the collection with much interest and told me to send the manuscript. After the completion of all the formalities, the book came out though I did not think it would come out so soon.

MA: What kind of response are you receiving after the publication of the Three Novels?

MK: Excellent! I have about one hundred books published so far but the after the publication of this collection, I felt overwhelmed. The collection is now available on rockomari.com in Bangladesh and on amazon.com, amazon.uk, amazon India, and a few other places. Readers from home and abroad have given positive feedback

MA: Please, tell us something about your novel titled *Janani* that has come out from Olympia



London barely one year back. Then they contacted me letting me know that they liked the book and requested me to send the manuscript. At first I was hesitant in sending it as I was not sure of the establishment. After being assured by different quarters, I sent them my manuscript and after six weeks the head of editorial board wrote me a letter saying that they wanted to publish the book. I went through the deed and found that it a planned document explaining about the right-royalty of the author.

MA: The famous and well known publishers of the country have published your books. Now it is from abroad. How do you find the difference between these two?

MK: Many of my books have come out from the famous publishers of Dhaka but being published by an international publishing company I feel honoured. It's a great achievement, I think. It has helped me evaluate myself in a new way. *The Mother* was published in January. They would print five thousand copies in the first edition and would give me twenty percent royalty from the first while twenty five percent from the second edition. As a Bangladeshi writer I am really very pleased and happy.

MA: You have composed the trilogy based on the theme of time and events

ranging from 1947 to the Liberation War. Tell us something about the book coming to the Book Fair of 2019.

MK: I have had a desire to work under a big canvas. For this reason, I collected books for seventeen to eighteen years. It is a huge canvass of history—time, events and various ups and downs, division of the country in the 1947 till the Liberation Movement through which I have worked. I had to read and understand history, events and characters to give them life. I have presented historical characters as flesh and blood. I have utilized my imagination and desire of creativity. I have tried so that readers can relate with the events and characters while reading. The rest of the events could be told by the readers. Two phases of this novel have been published—*Agnikannya* and *Agni Purush*. The last phase titled *Agnimanush* will come out in the coming book fair.

MA: What is the principal problem or risk for a novelist to write a novel based on a famous person or history? Have you faced any such risk?

MK: The risk is whether the event or character is presented inaccurately. I had to remain alert of this. By reading books, doing field work and watching different videos I tried to feel and perceive the period and personalities and giving it a reality. I had to develop the plot of the story perceiving the ins and outs/inside and outside of Maolana Vashani, Suhrawady, Nehru, Zinnah and Bangabandhu. I had to remain conscious and careful so that wrong information does not appear anywhere. I had to be careful also to present the characters in their right perspective without belittling or magnifying anyone. I wrote about the Language Movement of 1952 living in 2018, or the six point's demands. I tried to do it in consideration so that readers can feel at one with the characters and events of these periods.

MA: Are you working on anything right now?

MK: Several write-ups are being prepared but mainly *Agnimanush*—the last phase of the trilogy is being written.

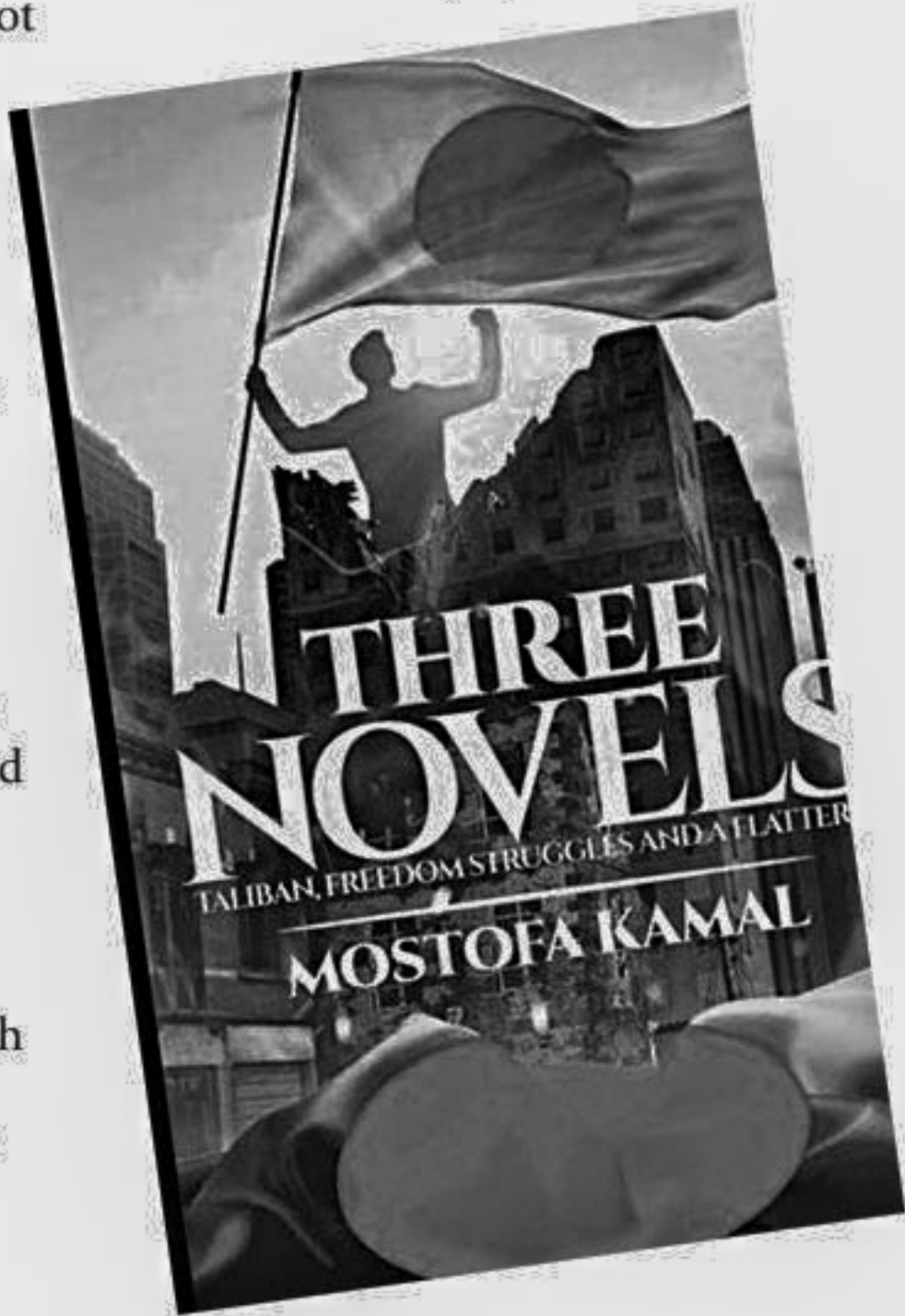
In this long novel I want to show the struggle of men and women—how they overcome time and adversity together. At different points of history how famous and accomplished men worked for freedom and language, etc. The novel has accommodated different types of people, their struggles and fights. This country achieved freedom through freedom struggle and the novel closes with Bangabandhus's homecoming.

MA: You are a journalist by profession. How suitable is the profession of journalism for a writer, you think?

MK: I once asked the same question to fiction writer Shawkat Osman. From my childhood it was my dream to be a writer. After completing the institutional education which profession should I choose? I must choose the profession which will help me continue my writing. I went to Shawkat Sir at his Old Dhaka residence with one of my friends.

He used to live then near Tikatuli. He suggested that I should choose teaching as a profession to continue my writing. I asked him how it would be if I chose journalism as a profession. Sir said that it would kill much of my time but I could do it if I wanted. I would learn a lot and to be a writer it is necessary to learn and experience many things. I also thought it would give me opportunity to visit many countries that other profession might not. And to speak the truth, I have visited many countries of the world because of being in this profession. It has enriched my experience. I have written my novel *Hello Colonel* in the background of how Taliban emerged in Pakistan. I then used to work in the *Prothom Alo* and went to Pakistan with an official assignment. It is really very valuable to see, learn and experience things both at home and abroad. And it is possible to write something good utilizing those experiences. That convinces me that journalism has given me some extra advantages to be a writer.

The interview which was taken in Bengali, has been translated by Masum Billah.



Publishers in London in English.

MK: *Janani* is my most favourite novel. It was first published by Pearl Publication. I sent the synopsis of the novel to the Olympia Publishers,