

MOJAFFOR HOSSAIN’S

All the Sadeqs are getting killed

Allah knows the truth. But if evidence turns up to prove that he was in fact an atheist, will you be able to stay in your village? You have two girls who are of marriageable age. Will you be able to marry them off? Tell the reporters that you have accepted what has happened.

TRANSLATED BY NOORA SHAMSI BAHAR

The most naïve boy of Dhabaldhola village had been murdered. The decapitated body lay on the demarcation line between the Bangari field and the Taro crop-field. The last person who was killed in this village was Dr. Mukul, and that too, about a decade back. He too had been found beheaded on the street. He was an adulterer who had to face his merciless fate. But none of the villagers knew why Sadeq had been murdered. Their assumptions were based on other murders which had taken place. This belief was strengthened when the IS claimed responsibility for the murder on their website, which was then broadcasted as a news ticker on television. But the IS had provided no specific reason, which was why it remained a mystery. A few of Sadeq’s friends were talking about it atop the half-broken boundary wall of their high school, which was where they always gathered before school ended for the day, situated across from the girls’ school.

“What the IS did was not right. They could have at least mentioned the reason!” said Shafiq.

“Listen, if the IS kills, the reason is crystal clear. Have you ever heard of the IS killing over petty disputes, ransoms, or squabbles resulting from romantic affairs? They kill for one reason only,” said Barkat, the wisest of the lot.

“Yes, but the ones beheaded were all atheists!”

about to beat me up and asked, ‘Where? I didn’t see anything in the midnight sky!’ So tell me, why would this person get killed? He didn’t even know how to sing. Once, when he was asked to sing in school, he ran away, don’t you remember?” Hadisur asked.

“Say what you will. The IS is not the kind of group to make mistakes when it comes to their targets. I’ve heard they’re more powerful than America. They spy on their targets for years before taking any decision,” Habel said.

“Hmm. They’ve been spying on twenty-one-year-old Sadeq for twenty-five years now!”

“Stop ridiculing me, Barkat. The IS will overhear our conversation. It’s not like I’m saying anything against them! There’s nothing for me to be afraid of!” Habel cowered as soon as he uttered these words.

“Why? Shah Rukh, Salman, Amir... then Irfan, Zaheer... They’re all Muslims. Hindus put them up on a pedestal.” Akbar the dimwit repeated himself. When he has an idea, he keeps repeating it now and then. The others had gotten used to it by now and were not bothered by it anymore. But upon hearing Shah Rukh Khan’s name, Asad couldn’t sit still.

“Hey, have you guys watched the movie *Fan*? I tried watching it several times, but I just couldn’t sit through it all. It’s just not *masala* enough!” Asad complained.

“Hmm. They could have included an item song. Sunny Leone’s *Mastizaade* is so much better!”

boy, they run away.”

“Sir, he used to pray all the time. People are just too scared to say anything. But Allah is my witness.”

“That’s what I say too. Allah knows the truth. But if evidence turns up to prove that he was in fact an atheist, will you be able to stay in your village? You have two girls who are of marriageable age. Will you be able to marry them off? Tell the reporters that you have accepted what has happened. If needed, I will make an announcement and give you ten thousand taka. I don’t always have cash at hand. Take two goats as well. They will come in handy at the time of your daughters’ weddings.” MP *sahib* always had to have the last word.

On the day Gofur returned from the district capital, he was visited by one of the MP’s own men, who was joined by the local leader of the village. It was around midnight and Gofur had finally been able to get some sleep. The restlessness and hostility that had been ignited within him upon hearing the MP’s words had fizzled out. He had vowed not to seek justice from anyone besides God,

You know... There’s no proof of whether your son was a believer or non-believer. If he turns out to be an atheist, what’s the point of praying for him?

despite having concluded that there was no point in looking heavenward either. He didn’t know how to react when he saw these two powerful men entering his home like thieves.

“Listen, Gofur, you’re in luck. In fact, I envy your good fortune.” Gofur fidgeted at the local leader’s words. No one said such words to him anymore. The local leader went on, “MP *sahib* has a proposition. He will give you a shop in the city, and with it, all the goods you’ll need. Instead of farming on someone else’s land like you’re doing now, you’ll be running your own store. What do you think?”

“Yes, good,” Gofur responded fearfully.

“Not just good, damn good!” This was the first time the MP *sahib*’s man had spoken. Gofur wasn’t so sure about owning a shop in the city.

“But you will have to do one thing,” the leader said.

“A very minor little thing,” added the MP’s man. Silently, Gofur waited, still wary of the offer.

“You will just have to point your finger at Monsur Mullah as the culprit behind your son’s murder. We will do the rest. You will just have to go to the police station tomorrow and accuse Monsur Mullah’s men. We will fill in the rest of the story. You won’t have to do anything else.”

“And don’t you dare tell anyone what we’ve asked you to do here. People might understand what’s going on, but that doesn’t matter as long as you keep your mouth shut,” the local leader added.

“Sir, may I take a few days to think it through?” Gofur asked.

“We haven’t come here to give you time to think! We haven’t come here to ask for your permission. This is the MP *sahib*’s order. We’ve come here to tell you what to do.” The leaders left just as they had come in – silently. Gofur’s wife had stood hidden in a corner and heard everything. Otherwise, Gofur could have passed off the entire episode as a nightmare and put it behind him.

“Let’s sell off our land and move to another village. It seems that we can’t live here anymore,” his wife said.

“It’s not like we can leave the country! Besides, do you really think we can sell our land if we leave the village? The chairman is planning to build a mill here. He won’t buy the land, and he will not allow anyone else to buy it either.”

3.

A month or two had gone by. Justice for Sadeq’s murder was far from anyone’s mind; instead, the villagers had concluded that he must have been an atheist. Gofur somehow managed to leave the village. Just then, there was another incident. A Sadeq in the neighboring village was also found dead, killed in the same way. A different Sadeq. He had been studying in the city and had come home for the holidays. When the weapon struck his neck, someone had heard one of the killers say, “*Shala*, no mistaking you this time!”

Mojaffor Hossain is a notable fiction writer of contemporary Bangla literature. He has published seven books of short-stories, which, in recent years, have attracted much acclaim from both general readers and literary critics.

Noora Shamsi Bahar is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of English and Modern Languages, North South University. Ms. Bahar is a published researcher and translator.

POETRY BY MANU DASH



A Topiary of Time

You thought Time would play thumri while in the outskirts of desire someone hums a tune in silence.

Have you ever thought why you wear the shirt the way you always do tucked inside the pants?

What lyric the moon composes tonight beneath the placid calm waters surrounded by shapeless shadows?

Time chooses to appear as the topiary across the dark horizon of a dream.



Grief

A loner with collapsible dreams; no one is ready to walk along with you. The silent prayers follow to keep you at bay.

Goodbye is not a solution when it occupies the backseat of anxieties. Like a flamingo you appear on the brackish lake of silence, and I keep on watching stars of hope twinkling in the periphery of darkness.

It hibernates like a dry faded petal between the pages of an ancient book or old and yellowed butter in the fridge.

I look for it to change the address of an aadhar card I never had.

Poet, editor, translator, publisher and curator of the annual Odisha Art & Literature Festival, Manu Dash has published 30 books in Odia and English.

Reflections

TASNEEM HOSSAIN

Far away from the crowd,
far from the glaring chaos;
out of the blaring car horns,
out of the shrieks of loneliness,
out of all the madness that surrounds;
Out of the city, out of the cacophony
I chose to go and find solace.

I lay on the bench in the park.
The red krishnochura smiled
spread beauty and love around.
The cuckoos on the trees sang to me.
The green tree above lazed, gave me shade.
The winds whispered lullabies,
crickets and grasshoppers chirped in harmony.
The bright blue sky enveloped all with light and energy.
The white heavenly sky angels danced for me.

The two little tattered barefoot children
laughed and played,
brightening life with joyous laughter.

Echoes of their laughter spoke to me.
Don't you see?
Don't you hear?
Within the boundaries of the broken walls,
open your inner eyes to the universe.
Nature waits for positive affirmations,
The lovely essence of beautiful thoughts;
The peace you desire waits to be discovered.
Happiness lies only within.

Tasneem Hossain is a multilingual poet, columnist, op ed columnist and training consultant. She is the director of Continuing Education Centre, Bangladesh.



“Not all of them. Priests and clergymen have also been killed. They may be infidels, but they were not atheists.”

“Same thing. Is there even a difference between infidels and atheists?”

“That’s not the right attitude to have, is it, Asad?” Barkat questioned.

“I don’t know what’s right or wrong. I’ve heard that the Hindus in India are burning the Muslims alive!”

“Why? Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Amir Khan... then there’s Yusuf Pathan, Zaheer Khan... They’re all Muslims. The Hindus practically worship them,” retorted Akbar, the dimwit in the group. As usual, Barkat and Asad pretended not to hear him.

“Alright, let’s agree they’re killing infidels and atheists. But what about the professor from Rajshahi University who was fond of music? He wasn’t an atheist. Why was he killed?”

“Music is forbidden in Islam. The students went there to receive an education, but that man would teach them how to make music and show them foreign films. You know what foreign films mean? Remember the time when we watched two films with one ticket? You know the type,” added Habel.

“I don’t know if music is good or bad. But in the *Hadith*, I’ve yet to see a part where our Prophet told the *Sahabis*, ‘Come, let’s indulge in merriment with some music.’ Nothing of the sort is mentioned anywhere.” Skinny, aka Chiku Mokles established his own argument in agreement.

“Fine. But why Sadeq? Only a week ago, Sadeq and I were standing next to each other during the Friday prayers. I had whispered to him, ‘Today is a special day. Whoever performs 50 *rakats* at a stretch today will see the shadow of Mika’il in the skies at the stroke of midnight.’ He gave me a look of surprise, but he didn’t utter a single word. The next day, on the way to school, he ran towards me, putting up his fists as if he was

“Have you seen the music video of Sunny Leone’s ‘Pink Lips’? It’s on my phone,” said Habel, and Sunny became the focus for the whole group.

2.

Friday, Gofur Mian, – Sadeq’s father, had gone to the mosque a little early. Gofur Mian is the kind of man who wouldn’t pray regularly. But it was the first Friday after Sadeq’s death. He hurried to the mosque to ask the *huzoor* to dedicate a prayer to Sadeq after the usual Friday prayers. He had planned to sit at a corner and pray ardently after the Friday prayers were done. The police and the journalists had harassed him with questions the past few days and he barely had the chance to grieve over his son.

The request for Sadeq took the *huzoor* aback. “Will that be the right thing to do?” He asked.

“Why wouldn’t it be right?” Gofur felt anxious.

“You know... There’s no proof of whether your son was a believer or non-believer. If he turns out to be an atheist, what’s the point of praying for him? The current situation of the country is not safe and I don’t want to get involved.” The *huzoor* was being rational. Upset, Gofur got done with the prayers and came straight home. He went to his room, shut the door, and sat on the prayer mat. He eventually got out after sundown, his eyes swollen. He had gone to the MP *sahib* of his district to seek justice. A day prior to that, the MP *sahib* had told the reporters that no matter who the killers were, they would be brought to justice. But he had summoned Gofur to tell him something else entirely – he would not get involved in any atheist’s business.

“Sir, everyone in the village can testify that my son was a believer. We didn’t even know what or who atheists are!” Gofur implored.

“The villagers will testify, you say? But no one has! Whenever anyone asks about your

