

121ST BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF POET JASIM UDDIN

Jasim Uddin’s 1971

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There has not been much research on to what extent the shadow of 1971 has been reflected in Bangla literature. But at least at one genre—that is especially in poems—this shadow could not help leaving its traces. As an example, poet Jasim Uddin’s name can be mentioned. This great poet was still living in 1971. With the resources from his experiences of 1971, he published a thin compilation of poems named *Bhoyabaha Shei Dingulite* (*In Those Horrifying Days*) sometime before February of 1972. In the preface of this book, Jasim Uddin informs that “Under the pseudonym of Tujambar Ali, these poems were sent to Russia, America and India” (Jasim Uddin 1971:6).

The poet continues to narrate, “My daughter, Hasna, translating some of these poems under a pseudonym, has had them read by the learned society of New York. In Russia too, these poems were highly praised. Some of these poems were translated into the Russian language. When these poems were published in India, they drew respectful attention from Mulkraj Anand, Premukh Basu, and many other litterateurs and poetry lovers” (“Lekhoker Kotha,” *Bhoyabao Shei Dingulite*, Poem collection 2:386).

It must be acknowledged that even today, many people do not know about this poetry collection. And those who are aware of it might feel embarrassed to acknowledge this collection, I think. Sunil Kumar Mukhopadhyay, a scholar of Jasim Uddin, can be remembered as someone belonging to the second group of those embarrassed people. In reference to this collection, which was published in 1972, he wrote, “This must be agreed upon that, bearing the brunt of ulterior motives here and there, these poems have lost their liveliness” (Mukhopadhyay 2004:144).

I would politely say that this complaint from a scholar on Jasim Uddin’s works cannot be fully supported and accepted. We propose that, before passing such judgment, it should also be mentioned where ‘the liveliness’ of Jasim Uddin’s poems lies, and this is what we are trying to analyze in this article.

Almost thirty years before 1971, around 1940, a famous professor, Humayun Kabir, from India expressed his sorrow that, just like Kazi Nazrul Islam, Jasim Uddin’s creative



faculty also came to an end soon. He assumed that, similar to Nazrul Islam, Jasim Uddin did not develop any further in his ‘mental construction.’ According to Humayun Kabir, the rebellious nature in Nazrul Islam’s poems is merely a revival of old traditions, simultaneously failing to influence the new world of imagination.

Kabir speculates that Jasim Uddin’s accomplishment in crafting poems came from the ‘underlying strength of common people.’ However, according to Kabir, Jasim Uddin could not progress much in reigning over new worlds of imagination and emotions. Regarding two great poets of Bengal, West Bengal’s Kazi Nazrul Islam and East Bengal’s Jasim Uddin, Humayun Kabir lamented, “Today, their accomplishments are limited only in self-centered repetition” (Kabir 1365:91). It’s worth recalling that when Humayun Kabir was writing his well-praised article “Banglar Kabyo,” Nazrul Islam had not yet fallen under his fatal illness.

The poets and literati among Bangalee Muslims of the 1940s were mainly divided among three groups. The first group comprised conservatives. Regarding the prominent figures of these conservative literati, Humayun Kabir opined, “Their inclination is towards the past, and the nature is to conserve the conventional forms. This obstructs the inherent social equilibrium in Islam” (Kabir 1365:92). He further believes that because of this backwardness at that time, the Muslim community of Bengal turned into an ‘unstable mind’ and also became ‘obdurate’ to move forward.

The second group of literati was reactionary. The rowers, or the significant figures of this group, row against the current in an attempt to return to their old port. Despite knowing that their self-sacrifice would be in vain, they still sacrificed the



Jasim Uddin (January 1, 1903 - March 13, 1976)

entirety of their social psyche in the hope of achieving the impossible.

Last but not least, there was yet another group. Both in number and power, they were the weakest. But at the same time, they were the dreamers for the future. Probably about this group, Humayun Kabir wrote that “There might be fear in the journey towards the future, but there are more possibilities. Still, the youths of Bangalee Muslims hesitate to embrace that courage.”

On this third group, Humayun Kabir had as much faith as possible. He wrote, “The ongoing movement of the world also directs towards future. If that flow pushes the Bangalee Muslims towards a new society then the inherent nature of unity and strength of Muslim society will become irresistible and at the same time a new horizon of Bangla poems will appear as well.” However, before this hope and blessing of Humayun Kabir could turn true, 1971 came. New horizons of Bangla poems were seen after the birth of new poets like Shamsur Rahman and Al-Mahmud.

If we judge Jasim Uddin’s poems on the basis of these three groups, then we can say that his poems overlap two groups at the same time. If we consider the forms then we can say that his poems fall under the conservative group. And then if we consider the intentions of his poems then they can also be accepted under the third group.

Considering this self-contradiction, Humayun Kabir was writing in 1940; “Almost all the contemporary Banagalee Muslim poets are backward and in spite of their new endeavors they are traditionalists. They do not have any passion to create new artistry for literature. Their imaginations also avert from inventing new situations for the reformation of social customs” (Kabir 1365:91-92).

Precisely speaking, this is the history— the last tale of our new dances. However, there is always something more to tell even after the last tale is told. There is a proverb which says even the ruins of greatness is great. Amidst the old forms of poems of Bangladesh, Jasim Uddin’s spirit had not yet been completely extinguished. The evidence can be found in his thinnest or “the smallest” (as Sunil Kumar Mukhopadhaya describes it) book.

II

In this book, there is a poem called “Banga-Bandhu.” The date mentioned under the poem is 16th March, 1971. Commenting on this poem, Sunil Kumar Mukhopadhyay said, “A strange personality was this Bangabandhu, on whose command the oppressive hands of rulers stopped functioning, on whose command Bangalee men and women smilingly accepted bullets of ruling armies.” This was not at all a lie. Jasim Uddin’s metaphor can be seen here:

At your order trifling all the fears and threats

We Bangalees are walking in the steps of death

To bring about the victory of the conquest. (“Banga-Bandhu” *Bhoyabaha Shei Dingulite*. *Kabitashangraha*. p.388)

Jasim Uddin has told us another victory of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, although it escaped the attention of the respected professor. What Deshbandhu Chittaranjan wanted to achieve but couldn’t—what a wonder—Bangabandhu could accomplish. He could unite Hindus and Muslims in harmony. Even Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, sacrificing his own life, could not achieve that, but Bangabandhu made it possible.

In this Bengal we have heard, sacrificing all Monk like Deshbandhu’s sweet soothing call.

We have listened to Gandhi’s words—even giving up his life—

In the same loving knot; Hindu-Muslims he couldn’t unite.

What they all had failed to do you did it so well.

The children of Bengal regardless of creed or caste

Have forgotten all the differences they have amongst.

(“Banga-Bandhu” *Bhoyabaha Shei Dingulite*. *Kabitashangraha* p.388)

A poem called “Kabir Nibedan” was written on 27th March, 1971. A few verses of the poem are these:

More fatal than a flood or an epidemic disease

The killers are who’re sent by Yahya these days.

Every day the picture they draw of human killings

Make Taimur Lane and Nadir tremble in shame.

(*Bhoyabaha Shei Dingulite*. Poem Collection p.390)

A profound symbol of Pakistan’s scorched earth policy was the event of burning down the Dhamrai chariot. Jasim Uddin has depicted the burning down of this Dhamrai chariot in the hands of the armies of Pakistan. It is very difficult to choose verses from this poem. Yet we will just try to read here three stanzas of this poem.

The chariot’s fair would take place twice a year

So many stalls, crafts, and circuses would come here!

With the sweet beats of khol from a gazi’s soiree somewhere

How so many princes and princesses would stroll in the fair!

By weaving the tales of morals in the music wreaths,

In the heart of listeners would invoke many great deeds.

Doll-like boys and girls with dolls in their little hands—

Would spread joy while roaming with brothers and dads.

Out of a scanty wood this chariot was Crafted by what a wizard!

Enchanting it with the halo of love Wrenching out his heart!

Every year by the spell of that loving illusion

Millions of people would come to see the chariot

To lit up their lamps of pleasant smiles in the front.

The protectors of Pakistan under the guise of morals

Burnt this very chariot and turned it to a pile of ash.

What a barbarian could have destroyed within a moment

The eons of great solace that the artisan-hands had once crafted!

(“Dhamrai Rath” *Bhoyabaha Shei Dingulite*. *Kabitashangraha* p.397)

Under the poem it is written “Dhaka, 16th May, 1971.”

Not only “Dhamrai Rath” but altogether 16 poems (including the dedication poem it will be seventeen though) have made Jasim Uddin’s *Bhoyabaha Shei Dingulite*. Most probably “Kabir Nibedan” written on 27th March, 1971 is just another version of his poem “Dhamrai Rath.”

The face of golden Bengal adorned by crops of varied nature

Was drawn amidst the silver lines of Padma Meghna, Jamuna

Watching varied lines and colors would never tire one’s heart

As throughout the twelve months a year Every season anew would decorate her.

This Bengal now embracing the garland of burnt villages

Tremble and shiver bearing the scorching pain of flames.

As brutal armies are killing her children with fatal arms

This Golden Bengal is now nothing else, but

A prison-house of corpses or a crematorium vast.

(*Bhoyabaha Shei Dingulite*. Poem Collection p.389-390)

In 1971, poet Jasim Uddin was almost 70 years old. No doubt his creative ability was also getting hampered. But hope is the greatest delusion of all and so when the country gets independent, the poet sings the song of hope.

The home that is shattered by storm will be built again

The lamp that is blown off in a windy night will be lit again

Designing the fields by the songs of crops of wheat, rice and corn

We will flap our butterfly wings coloring them by twilight and dawn.

“Jagaye Tulibo Asha” *Bhoyabaha Shei Dingulite*. *Kabitashangraha* p.389-390

Years ago, even before reading this collection of simple verses, Humayun Kabir mistakenly remarked, “Today all their accomplishments are limited only in the self-centered repetition.” While it may be true in the context of writing poems, the openness of the poem reveals an unwavering roar that is beyond expression in language.

III

14th August of 1970 was the last Independence Day of undivided Pakistan. Urdu poet Riaz Anowar wrote a poem on observing this Independence Day. In the pretext of translating this poem called “Azadir Dine” poet Jasim Uddin seemed writing his own unexpressed sorrows. This sorrow, this torment is not possible to be retold.

Today is the twenty-third year of being free

But what developments do we see! Hundreds of wires of new roads touch the sky.

It seems that these roads are just nets of traps

And a means to rule and oppress as Lurking behind them is the Lord to watch on us.

If anyone dares to make any slight mistakes

A fair justice would be given by tangling him in the nets.

Why, on this anniversary of freedom I feel again and again

That this green beautiful country is not at all mine!

“Azadir Dine” “Padma Nadir Deshe” *Kabitashangraha*. 2. 304-305



The Morning of 26th March by Abdur Razzaque, Medium: Charcoal

At the auspicious moment of independence war in 1971, one organization called “Lekhok Shibir” was formed. This organization with the aid of Bangla Academy published a three-volume book called *Hey Swadesh* in February, 1972. In one of these volumes, at the Poem Section, one of Jasim Uddin’s poems was there. The date of the day when the poem, “Ekusher Gaan” (The Song of 21), was written was not mentioned but with the help of some internal clues from the poems we can deduce that it was written around 1952. At that time the East Bengal province of Pakistan had four million of population. And Jasim Uddin was also writing in his poem, “Four million of brothers/ will satiate her desires.”

After referring this poem I will start drawing the conclusion of this essay. The metaphors used in this poem were as explosives as fresh grenades. There are almost 22 lines in the poem, “Ekusher Gaan.” Let me publish the whole poem here.

Such is my language Bangla Warm with sibling’s caring And love of a mother’s heart. Riding on a rainbow This language showers the golden hopes. On this world; For eons and eons She is wandering. From the bank of east Bengal We have brought its music. Waves of crop fields Have given her the sweet words. Thunder has given her light Storm has given her the movement Padma has become her disaster. Coloring her clothes By the fresh blood of heart Building flying worship-places

By the smoke-web of bullets; To keep the honor of this language If lives must be taken Then the four billion brethren By giving blood Would sure satiate her heart’s desire. (*Hey Swadesh*. 1972. 25)

The metaphors used by Jasim Uddin to depict the strength and ‘beauty’ in Bangla language are simply incomparable. According to the poet the tune of Bangla language has come from rivers of East Bengal and the taste of this language (‘sweet’ does refer to taste) has come from its breeze, the wind that swings the grains.

I will not comment any more. I will just ask you to look at the Bangla word “*dechhe*” by which he expresses ‘give’ in Bangla. Like this word many other pure colloquial Bangla words are scattered in Jasim Uddin’s verses. Another such word is “*ere*.” Another courageous metaphor is “*orna bihar*”—“*buleti dhumrajale orna bihar bune*.” Describing this sentence as “extra-ordinary” will not be enough. I have got another similarly strong metaphor in the poem, “Jagaye Tulibo Asha” in the same book, *Bhoyabaha Shei Dingulite*.

O! Listen, starving brethren and sisters!

Building a bridge over the aerospace An aircraft is arriving with foods for us. (*Kabitashangraha*. 2. 2018. P 404)

I will admit that “*urojahajer shetu*” (bridge over the aerospace) has not gone beyond the strength of the metaphor “*uronto dhormasrom*” (flying worship-places)

IV

Except a few villages near the borders almost the whole Bangladesh was turned into a concentration camp in “those horrifying days.” Shamsur Rahman was in Dhaka at that time. From Dhaka he sent some of his poems to Kolkata with the help of some of the freedom fighters. Those poems were written in the styles of French poet Paul Eluard and they were published under the pseudonym Majlum Adeeb in a weekly magazine, *Desh*, in Kolkata. And Jasim Uddin’s poems were smuggled out of the country at the same time under the pseudonym “Tujambar Ali.” Shamsur Rahman’s metaphor for the state of the country was “concentration camp.” And the metaphors used by Jasim Uddin were “graveyard,” “crematorium,” or grave-house/ prison-house of corpses. Ah! The phrase “*koboragar*/prison-house of corpses” seems to be directly coming out of the dictionary of Sigmund Freud, the gift of unconscious mind. How “*kobor*” (the grave) and the “*karagar*” (prison-house) indeed embraced each other in the seized Bangladesh in 1971! Who knows how for these poets, the spirit of poems could still remain alive in the midst of prison-house of corpses! Jasim Uddin further wrote:

Graves have stretched towards the borders of the country

The fires of the pyres are dancing nakedly in fury.

“Ki Kahibo Ar”: *Kabitashangraha* 2.392 Or

The whole village has turned into a pyre burning—

Turning into ashes in the wind; our sighs are flying.

“Dagdha Gram” *Kabitashangraha*. 2. 395]

Earlier I have once already mentioned: As brutal armies are killing her children with fatal arms

This golden Bengal is now nothing else but

A prison-house of corpses or a crematorium vast.

“Kabir Nibedan” *Bhoyabaha Shei Dingulite*. *Kabitashangraha* p.389-390

Jasim Uddin dedicated the book, *Bhoyabaha Shei Dingulite* to one of his known but not so famous martyred freedom fighter. Repeating few lines from that dedication poem, “Shahid Samad Sharane” I too will bring an end to my article.

I’ve gleaned for you a few of the stories of those

For whose sufferings you’ve sacrificed this life of yours.

In the memory lane of you and all the others,

Those who’ve accompanied you in your voyage,

Today at the deluge of time, I float my offers of flowers.

(*Kabitashangraha*. 2. 384)

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