

TRIBUTE

‘JE JOLE AGUN JOLE’

was first published under the title ‘Kar Ki Noshto Korechilam’

The book had initially been published under a different name. But it wasn't a title I found satisfactory, though I had come up with it myself. It continued to pester me.

KAMRUL HASAN MITHON

It is a rather rare feat to find poetry composed in Bangla and compiled in the writer's only published book that has propelled both the poet and book of poetry to the height of fame and immortalisation, that too in the poet's own lifetime, as Helal Hafiz's *Je Jole Agun Jole* has done.

The first two lines of “Nishiddho Shompadokyo” – written during the 1969 mass uprising, in the period of unrest preceding the great pains of a nation waiting to be born – read:

“Ekhon joubon jar michile jaber tar sreshtho shomoy”

Composed on February 1, 1969, these lines then spread across the region, from the walls of Dhaka University to every nook and cranny in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), serving as a mantra for freedom and the Liberation War.

Helal Hafiz was born in Netrokona, a

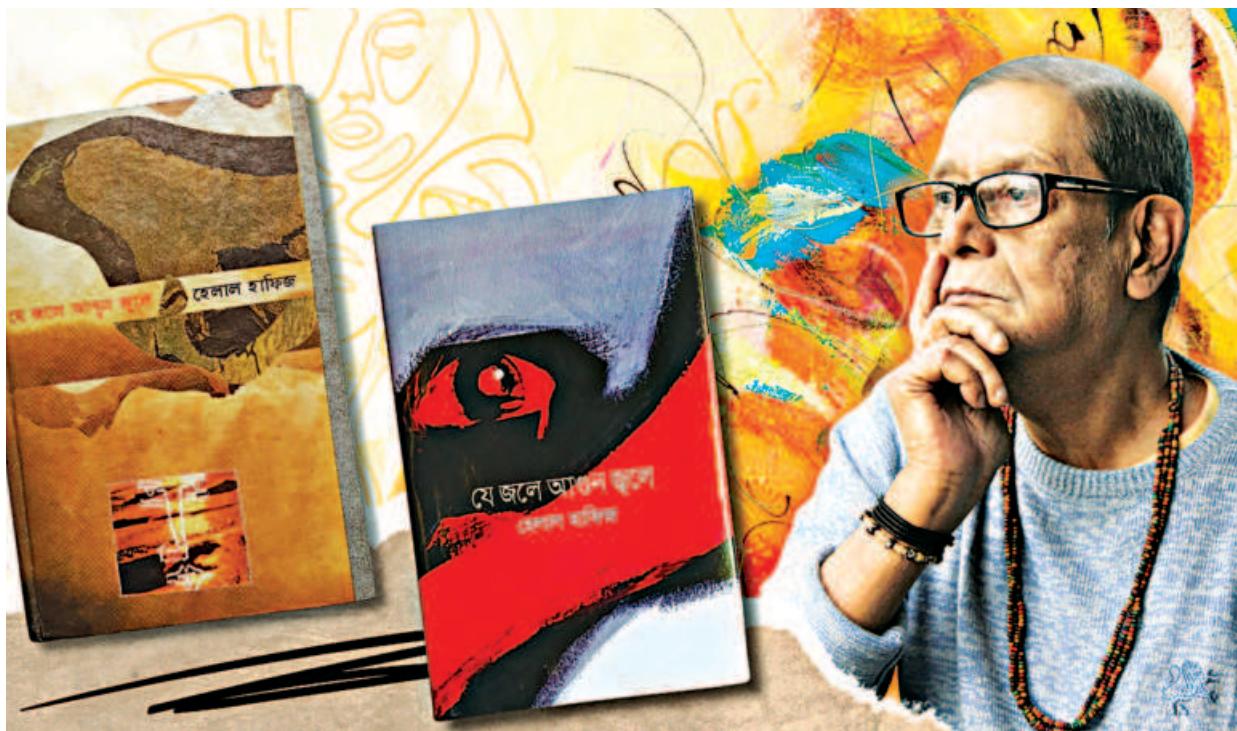


PHOTO: KAMRUL HASAN MITHON, DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

paradise where beels, haors, clouds, and hills converge. It was in this heavenly place that the poet spent his childhood, adolescence, and the early days of his youth.

In 1967, the poet set foot in Dhaka and enrolled in the Department of Bangla at Dhaka University, where he resided at Zahirul Huq Hall. After completing his studies, he took up work at the *Dainik Purbodesh*, *Dainik Desh*, and *Dainik Jugantor* newspapers, and spent much of his life in addas at the Press Club. Hafiz opted to spend his nights in a room at Karnaphuli Abashik Hotel, located on Topkhana Road, opposite to the Press Club.

In 1986, the poet published his first book of poetry, *Je Jole Agun Jole*, at the age of 37. In Dhaka's Bangla publishing scene of the time, it was the age of the letterpress. Each page was typeset using lead type, and the collection of 56 poems was printed at Modern Type Founders and published by Nazmul Haque of Anindya Prokashan. The cover illustration for the first edition was done by Khalid Ahsan. As the letterpress era drew to a close, computerised printing took over in its stead. Although Anindya Prokashan ceased operations, the book was reprinted in 1993 by Dibya Prakash, with a new cover by Dhruba Esh. Since then, numerous reprints of the book have been published.

Now, as the age of print itself seems to be reaching an end, future editions

of *Je Jole Agun Jole* are likely to be published as e-books. Of course, the book will only truly be imprinted upon its readers' hearts – etched in the many loves and sorrows of lovers' hearts, and in the marches and slogans of revolutions and their revolutionaries.

Several years after *Je Jole Agun Jole* was first published, in 1996, a collection of 12 new poems was published in *Ochol Premer Podyo*, illustrated by Khalid Ahsan. In February of 2012, a bilingual poetry book, titled *Kobita Ekattor*, was published at the Ekushey Boi Mela, featuring translations by Jubak Anarjo. Adding 15 new poems to the initial 56 printed in *Je Jole Agun Jole*, the book contained 71 poems in total, and as such was named *Kobita Ekattor*, or *Poems Seventyone*. It was published by Ramshankar Debnath of Bivas Prokashon. In October 2019, his second original poetry collection, *Bedonake Bolechi Keda Na*, comprising 35 poems, was released. It was published by Dibya Prakash with a cover design by Dhruba Esh.

We can derive much about the poet's life from his own words. On the 75th anniversary of Helal Hafiz's birth, his followers arranged a celebration at Dhaka's Bishwo Shahitto Kendro on October 7, 2022. Helal Hafiz spoke at the event, and I revisit a part of his speech for our readers today:

“Amake na chena maane
Shokaler shishir na chena
Ghashphul, rajhash, uldbhid na chena

waste, I am ashamed, sorrowful, and to my nearest and dearest here today, I ask for forgiveness without an ounce of hesitation.

I've written very little in my life. But I have spent my life writing. This was my intention, the destination I had set for myself. Back then, in the '70s and '80s, books would be released in the three or four hundreds, which has now surpassed the thousands. The day after Boi Mela ended, you would not hear of a single book again. You would not hear of a poem that had been published, or lines from a verse that had been written. This distressed and concerned me greatly. I decided to write very little. It did not matter if the number of books I wrote was very few. But I wanted to write poetry that would last beyond the transient fame of the fair, poetry that would be read at one fair after another. Books that readers would remember, which would lodge themselves and be given life between the readers' minds and hearts. In 17 years of writing, from among the five or six hundred I wrote, I picked out 56 poems in a year and put together the manuscript for *Je Jole Agun Jole*.

The book had initially been published under a different name. But it wasn't a title I found satisfactory, though I had come up with it myself. It continued to pester me. That was why, even after the first copies were printed, I paid out of my royalties for the book's title to be changed to *Je Jole Agun Jole* before publication.

We hear stories of divine inspiration. Believe me, that was precisely how this title had come to me. I can't express in words how I felt the day it struck me.

I dedicated a lion's share of the life I've lived to poetry. I've thought of poetry as a guiding star. And the love, adoration, and honour I've received from the people of this country is unrivalled. Incomparable. It is not just this generation, but rather the entirety of human civilisation that wants to earn and save money. But I didn't want to gain either wealth or status through my poetry – I only wanted to gather people.

In trying to do so, the experiences I encountered have also been woven into a history of unspoken pain. Poetry has given me so much. It is a debt I cannot pay off in this lifetime. Your love has transformed me from grass, from saplings to ever growing plants. I bow with a humble heart. I have only learned to bow. I only wish to bow; I only wish to bow.”

Kamrul Hasan Mithon is a writer and photographer.

POEMS SEVENTYONE

কবিতা একাত্তর

হেলাল হাফিজ
HELAL HAFIZ



POETRY

One who stands alone in the crowd

ARIFUL ISLAM LASKAR

A tribute to poet Helal Hafiz

A lonely soul treads on the street cultivating the sweet pain of defunct love; like a solitary artist, he rambles through the alleys of the city and paints the canvas of his heart with the bleeding unruly words to orchestrate the mirth of life out of troubled loving pain. His one and only amorous ship Helen deserted him once and landed in another selfish port shattering all his musical dreams. Out of those wounded dreams, words start to flow and a poetic vision breeds and brews in the mind of the mystery man in a shanty lonely small room in an illusory ill city. Poetry immerses the dead soul and Spring ushers in the all the damp and dull roots of poetry. With juicy and joyous pain embracing all wrecked lurid promises a poet is born to create garlands of Hellenic harmony in the raging odyssey of defiant poetic words. When pain kisses the jilted lips of the faithful loving words the delight of déjà vu begins to emerge – oh! The birth of a queer poet and king of lovers. O Helal! Helal!! how sweetly you leave alone winning all the heavy hearts on earth!



Helal Hafiz at the Dainik Purbodesh office, 1973.

PHOTO: SHAMSUL ISLAM

POETRY

The shabby turtl without a shore

MD. SAJID HOSSAIN

Some label you a poet of love so true,
And others say you are one of loneliness,
And some call you the covert lover of Helen,
But I will name you a shabby turtle, who,
wandered without a shore.
Your essence was like the solitary droplet of September rain,
That delicately knocked on the window,
While feeling the presence, all listened.
But never let you stay on their shore.
In talks, paused for thought,
You would hesitate to let go of your tongue,
However, your morning eyes, devoid of warmth, would show.
With slow steps, weighed down, towards the hostel lift you would come,
And some uninvited smiles you would gift, feeling low.
Though tears you dropped off from salient pain,
You still sought for love, as shabby turtles seek for shore.
Under the radiance of the hostel life,
The cheers around you many times echoed,
but could not throw the pain you bore.
But now, I wish you find what you once sought,
May the love await for you in the heights, you thought.

Md. Sajid Hossain is a student at the Department of English at University of Asia Pacific.

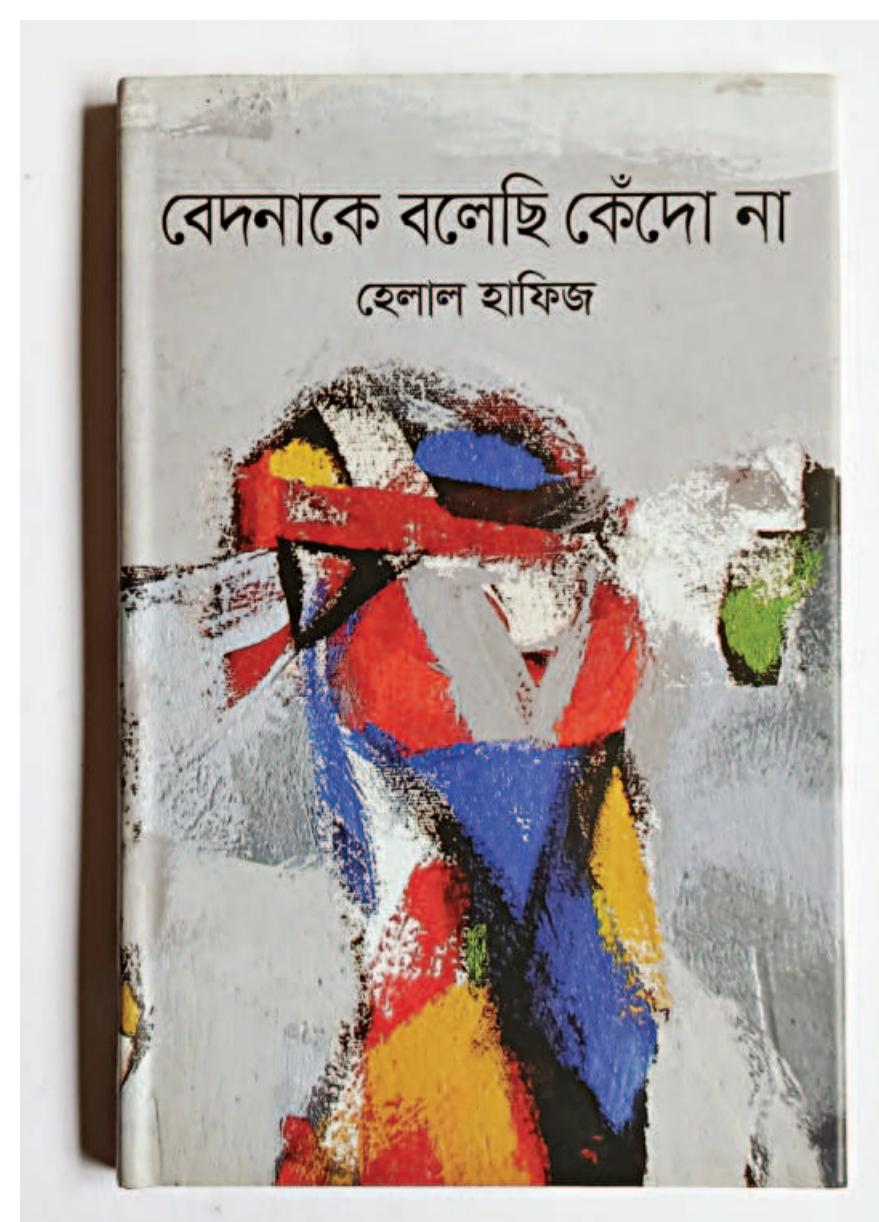


PHOTO: KAMRUL HASAN MITHON