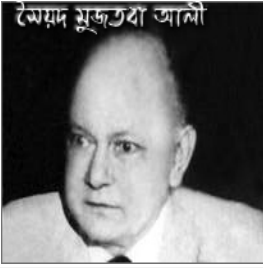


Syed Mujtaba Ali- Razib Ahmed



Syed Mujtaba Ali is mainly known for his humorous writing in Bengali. I came to know about Mujtaba Ali when I was in class VI. I first came across his travelogue 'Nil Noder Deshe' in my Bangla text book. It was really a beautiful writing. The way he described Egypt felt to me like he was actually painting pictures with his words. Then in class Nine read 'Rashogolla'. Still now, when I imagine Jhanduda, a big angry man grabs the collar of that thin custom agent and stuffs roshogolla in his mouth and yelling

'O Poran Khabini' I feel like laughing.

Recently, I read his novel Abishashya (Unbelievable) and a short story "Nonajol" (Salty Water). In the short story the central character is Samiruddin a simple village man who goes to USA to earn money and change his luck and the central character of the novel is O' Rally, a government officer, who worked in a small village of the then East-Bengal Assam and fell in love with its people. Mujtaba Ali has presented a portrait of East and West through these two characters in a very beautiful manner.

'Nonajol' was published in the monthly Desh magazine. The story starts with a beautiful description of the steamer that goes from Goalanda to Chandpur. During one of his journeys on this launch he saw a boatswain and tries to talk with him. He found out that the person knew his father very well and he lives in a village near by the author's. The two people grew close and started to talk. The author reads him a story titled 'Rupdorshi' from a monthly magazine where a young writer talks about the sufferings of the people working in ships. After hearing the story the boatswain said to him that what the story said was true. He then started talking about Samiruddin his close friend. They lived in Dhalychara village. Both of them got work into an ocean going ship from Khidirpur dockyard. In the ship they worked in the boiler room which was grueling and dangerous. They put coal in the boiler. In side the room it was very hot and working for a long time there used to make people sick. Very often they became unconscious because they sweat and with the sweat body lost salt. Then they were brought up and put under cold water and treated by feeding salt and sometimes they suddenly became insane. This madness is known as amuck. Samiruddin amidst of all these hardships managed to stay fit. He was determined to get into USA and earn money. When their ship reached New York he escaped from the ship. At night he came out of the ship swam half a mile to the shore and then went into the city. Since then for the next seven years he worked very hard and managed to make twenty thousand dollar. He used to send money regularly to his younger brother in the village. He never wrote to any one and nobody in his village knew where he was. His brother wasted that money after girls, drinking and gambling. After ten years when he returned home he found out that his old house was there still standing and there was no change. Later, he came to know from other people that his brother wasted all that money. It was a big shock for him. He left the village the next moment. In the launch he met with his old friend, the boatswain (the story teller). Seeing Samiruddin he was very excited but Samiruddin was calm and quiet. He showed no sign of excitement. The boatswain took him to his cabin and gave him food but Samiruddin was not interested in eating. He was like a lifeless person. After few minutes he told his friend his story. In the end he said 'All this time I was living in a dream'.

After that Samiruddin again returned to USA and spend the next ten year and this time he made around thirty thousand taka. On his way home he died in the ship and this time again all that money fell into his brother's hand and again he did what he did before. The story was presented in a monologue but the speaker who was telling the story said it with such an emotion that would make the reader feel very sad after finishing the story. The background of the novel 'Abishsashya' was set in British India before the first World War. O' Rallie an Irishman, was sent to a small town named Madhuganj of the then East Bengal. Compared to big cities the town did not have electricity or big streets but it was a great place for living. All the daily necessities were very cheap and the Madhuganj School was very famous in East Bengal and Assam. The school was run by the missionaries. However, the most wonderful thing about Madhuganj was its natural landscape. It was surrounded with small hills and through these hills flowed a river. So overall it was a picturesque place and the people were very simple and serene and very friendly. O Rallie, a police superintendent was then only twenty one and 'fresh from Christian home.' He instantly fell in love with the place. What the people of Madhuganj found most surprising was that O' Rallie started to play football with the local youngsters. In those days this was very unusual because O' Rallie was a 'Gora' (White race and superior race). This also bothered other local English people but later they also accepted O' Rally. After few months O' Rallie goes to London and gets married. His wife Mable was a very beautiful woman. Rallie and Mabel came to Madhuganj and they liked the place very much. Here the gives a twist. After marriage there was a sudden change in O' Rallies behavior. He does not go out and talk to the people that much and neither his wife Mable. After few years Mable gives birth to her first child. When Patrick was four years old he became seriously ill. After Patrick had come around Mable decides to leave for London. She wanted her son to grow up in a better environment. O' Rallie did not say anything. He started making all arrangements. Then on the day they were supposed to leave no body saw them. After that no body knew what had actually happened to Mable and Patrick. In the meantime, O' Rallie was transferred to Cox Bazar and a new superintendent Sommerset Dean took his place. Dean lived in O' Rallies quarter. On his first night he saw three human figures walking through the veranda vanished in side the garden. At first, Dean became very nervous. Then eventually he comes to know about the disappearance of O' Rallies wife and kid. Then one day he followed those human figures and discovered three dead body buried under the lichee tree in the garden. After this incident the inspector general called O' Rallie and asked him what happened. Then O' Rallie showed him a letter written by him to his subordinate and colleague Shom (a Hindu person). In this letter he describes that what actually happened. After coming to Madhuganj O' Rallie came to know that he was impotent and this turned his life upside down. Mable was very beautiful, O' Rallie loved Mable very much but could not fulfill her physical needs which haunted him. Then one day he found out that Mable was making love with the native house keeper Jay Surya and Mable's son Patrick was a result of that. This made him very angry and restless and when Mable wanted to go to London he decides to kill her. On the before their departure O' Rallie poisoned his servant, his wife and Patrick and buried them under the tree.

Now both the short story and the novel contains monologue. In the short story we hear the boatswain describing his friend Samiruddin's cruel fate. In the novel we see at the end O' Rallie writes letter to his colleague Shom who also knew about this murder but did not tell anyone. In those letters O' Rallie describes his feeling about India and Indian people their religion, culture. O' Rallie was an Irishman and his people also struggled against the English oppression and he found out that Indian people were same who were struggling for their freedom. O Rallie, knew the pains of an oppressed nation and this is what brought him close to the Indian people. In the novel we see when Shom addressed him as 'Sir' he was very angry and told him not to address him as Sir in future. On the other hand in the monologue of the boatswain, we see what the poor people of Bengal (the easterners) think about the west. To them it is a land of opportunity and money where people's luck changes. Both these writings are a deep insight into human psychology. Both protagonists go far away from their homes to change their luck and bring peace and prosperity in their lives but none of them gets it. In one way or other the become victims of their poor fate. The writer reveals a common characteristics of all human beings no matter which country, race, or religion the person belongs to whether a poor Muslim farmer of a small village of Eastern Bengal or a young Irish man every body wants peace and happiness in their lives. If there is no stability in life then no matter what religion the person belongs to will not bring any peace.

