

Al Mahmud's SonaliKabin: A Sketch of Bangladeshi Rural Landscape

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ABSTRACT

This paper intends to focus the pictures of Bangladeshi villages drawn in Al Mahmud's SonaliKabin, a celebrated tome of poems published in 1973. SonaliKabin, the magnum opus of Al Mahmud, has conceived the rural landscape and the culture of the village people. It has introduced Al Mahmud as a rural poet who has made a contrastive analysis between the city and the village by his poetic brush. At the same time he upholds the pristine simplicity of village people. The material urban life always haunts him and he craves for going back to his beloved hamlet but the harsh reality grips his feet. Being entangled in suffocating city, he visualizes the images of his beloved village and portrays the rural landscape in the big canvas of poetry. This poetic portrayal of idyllic rural landscape in SonaliKabin is the spotlight of this paper.

Keywords: Sonali(golden) Kabin(muslim marriage contract), Bengali Literature.

INTRODUCTION:

Al Mahmud, a legendary poet of Bengali literature, was born in 1936 in the Morail village of Bramhonbaria. He left school while he was in class ten. Then he chose journalism as profession. Besides, working in a renowned daily as a proof reader, he started writing poetry. Bit by bit he became popular among the people of Bangladesh as a poet. Scarcely had his first book of poetry *LokLokantar(The World and Beyond)* published, when the readers of poetry were enthralled to observe its distinctness. Then he published his second book *KalerKalash(The Pitcher of Time)*. His master-piece *SonaliKabin* was published just after the liberation war while he was staying at Chittagong, the second largest beautiful city of Bangladesh. With the publication of this book, he became great and earned international acclaim as a poet. Ahsan rightly says, "Al Mahmud with his crafty, imagery-laden poetry has been at the forefront of the literary scene of the 1950s and 1960s. After the liberation war, the book *SonaliKabin(The Golden Marriage Contract)*, his most celebrated tome of poems, was published, and since then he never had to look back." (Ahsan, 2006, p. 12)

Nature has been, very naturally, reflected in the water-color of the poetic imagination of Al Mahmud in his *SonaliKabin*, a well celebrated book of poems in Bengali Literature. The book basically deals with the pastoral landscape and the conventional rural culture of Bangladesh. All the poems of this book very clearly speak of the strong passion of Mahmud for returning to the village where he was born and brought up. Though harsh reality compels him to leave his beloved hamlet, he always carries with him the sweet natural images of the charming village. His romantic feelings for the village actually represent the feelings of all who come to the town for the sake of livelihood. In 'The Dome of Straw', he reveals the agonized sentiment of a boy returned to his village from town;

“Nobody knew why he returned.
Seeing him, all the peasants got surprised.
.....
Spreading the straw on soil, someone called him by name, and said in affectionate tone,
“Get seated, O boy. Why do you feel ashamed?
You’re none but a child of our village, our own man.
.....Going to get seated on the heap of the golden straws,
the returned man noticed that sitting became a problem for him,
the dress of city without a wrinkle gripped his two knees,
as though, from the muscle of thigh to the waist
he had been thoroughly arrested in a cruel stitching,
that would not let him sit on the heart of his country’s soil accompanied by his kinsmen.”
(Abubakar, 2012, p. 97)

Al Mahmud is a minute observer of the enthralling beauty of the idyllic villages. His eyes are nothing but a mirror that can conceive the exact images of his surroundings. His poems, especially of SonaliKabin, portray “the pastoral life, rivers, villages He provoked the core of poetic appeal through wielding common/colloquial words from local dialects and created a new trend.” (Islam, 2008)
His life encircles around the Titash, a river close to his village. He left his footprints on the bank of this river. Being in hustle and bustle of the city life, he cannot forget the memories of his childhood. The images of the river Titash and the people around it frequently crowd in the mind of the poet. We find his melancholic reminiscence in his lucid poem ‘Titash’:

“This is the river of my childhood.
Her waters erode and lash her banks all day.
She swirls and eddies, and her current brings
To the sails of innumerable boats
An onrush of speed like the symbol
of an exuberant youth.
Salim’s wife fills her earthen pitcher with water
And walks on her feet back to her cottage.” (Chowdhury 1981,pp1)

Like Mahmud many of his contemporary poets draw the picture of villages in their poetry. But Mahmud is distinct in his style and attitude. His images are cautiously fashioned, and though mostly culled from the rural world of Bangladesh, any reader can easily find them striking and graceful. (Chowdhury 1981,pp,iii)

Mahmud has come out of the complexity of poetry rather he has made it simple and easy, readable for the common people. So he has shared his experiences he gathered from his surroundings in his poetry. (Ray & Maddern, 1974), critics and philosophers of Bengali language rightly says in ‘I have seen Benge’sFace’; “Al Mahmud has an extraordinary gift for telescoping discrete level of experience; in his poems, I find a marvelous fusion of passion and wit.....”

We can justify this observation if we read the poem ‘Poetry Such As’. This poem is lucid and simple in language but is pregnant with profound passion for the village where the poet was born and brought up. The childhood memories are so craftily drawn in the imaginary canvas of poetry that a reader cannot help reading it till end and at the same time he will fly towards his own village through the wings of poetry. Some worth quoting line are;

“Poetry springs from childhood memories. It's mother's pale face
Surfacing. It's a yellow bird perched on a neem branch;
Siblings warming themselves around fires stoked by dry leaves
All night long; father coming home, his bicycle bells ringing
And mother's name, “Rabeya, Rabeya”,
.....
“Poetry is a sandbank bird, gathered duck eggs, fragrant grass
A wife looking glum-faced because her calf vanished when its rope tore;
It's a carefully written letter in a blue envelope secretly delivered;
Poetry is the school girl Ayesha Akhter, her hair all unfurled!” (Alam, 2017)

Pastoral scenes are very frequently reflected in Mahmud's poetry. His language is also lucid and simple comprehensible for the common readers. His diction is the diction commonly used by the common country people. Hossain rightly observes;

"His poetic language is also simple, unadorned and direct, often having the vibrant freshness of colloquial speech. His subject matter is the romantic nostalgia for the village life he has left behind the pristine innocence of life lived amidst the sights and sound of Nature." (Hossain, 2010)

Mahmud again and again craves for returning home while he stays in town. The materialistic urban lives, conflict of interest, mechanical hue and cry of the city penetrate the mild heart of Mahmud. In these circumstances of torture, he longs to leave city for his beloved village. In his poem 'The Longing for Returning' we see;

"32 Sayedabad, Dhaka—where is the window
In this desolate building that can show
The winding rivers and the homebound women-folk
Floating in the tide?"

(Hossain 2010, p160)

SonaliKabin contains symbolic statement, transparent description, and individual pretty lines. He has made a bridge between the past and the future and has emphasized the use of colloquial diction. He has collected the strong force from the ploughmen of the village, boatmen of the river, vagabond of the streets, birds and housewives. We find, in his style, the humbleness and the profundity of perception and at the same time we perceive strong protest against urbanization. His every individual word shows honour and respect for the pristine simplicity of rural people. "Al Mahmud has a pair of keen eyes that have fed on the colour, the smell, the feel of life, and nature he has known so intimately since his childhood. He builds his imagery around his own experience of the people and the places he has known as a young adolescent." (Rashid, 1991, p. 11)

In 'Into the Deep of My Eyes' belonging to *SonaliKabin*, Al Mahmud painfully focuses the deplorable circumstances he encounters in the suffocating city life. Though simple but vivid and lively narration of the situation touches the heart of any conscious reader;

"Now-a-days I seldom get chance to meet my mother.
Now and then she comes from the village, carrying fine rice,
Ghee, pure mustard oil and adulterated remorseful cry.
She thinks, in the adulteration of the city, I am losing my health.
And my sons are not growing properly, as I think;
One day the current of pure people
coming from the village will occupy the city." (Abubakar, 2012, p. 94)

Mahmud never feels to advance in life like a materialist mind. He wishes to stay close with nature. He is deeply immersed in the beauty of rural life and so wherever he goes he carries the image of his little hamlet, his kinsmen and in the leisure he dotes over his sweet natural landscape of idyllic beauty. Nature is his beloved and so his intense desire to stay close to nature is reverberated in his poem 'Nature' belonging to *SonaliKabin*:

"How far has man advanced!
But here am I crouched in the falling rains.
I plant tender paddy seedlings
In soft creamy earth and think of it as my
darling peasant wife, a girl who reveals all her
fertile stores in pleasing bashfulness
like the vast expanses of water-soaked land in a marsh." (Chowdhury, 1981, p. 22)

Urban is not Mahmud's dwelling place but he is staying there out of reality. His ultimate address is his village where he passed his memorable childhood. Al Mahmud considers the urban as his workplace, not as the centre of his mystic mind. And so he expresses his agony of urban suffocation in his poetry. His mind always craves for returning to the vast paddy-fields, rivers, canals, birds, yoke, and farmers. In his "The Shame of Return", we see his affinity to the soil:

“My mother, with a pile of unwashed dishes in her hand,
 will break into a smile at the sight of me.
 “Good that you have come back,”
 She will say, the whole house, you know, seems so empty without you, go now, have a wash
 And let me get you some breakfast.
 And I’ll throw my arms around my mother,
 hug her to my bosom, and wipe out clean all the shame of my return.”
 (Chowdhury, 1981, pp 26)

Finally, we can say that Al Mahmud, in his poetry, shows his all out efforts to uphold natural landscape, visual images of the rural beauties and the simple life of common people of Bangladeshi villages. The way he has depicted the pictures of villages is obviously a modern and praiseworthy and indeed he is successful in framing the verse in simple lucid style. “The language itself is bold in its liberal use of words long paused out of currency, and the verse has a liquid flow, a relaxed quality and easy felicity of rhyming...” (Siddiqui, 1984, p. 185)

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