

Classic Poetry Series

Abdul Mannan Syed

- poems -

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Abdul Mannan Syed(3 August 1943 - 5 September 2010)

Abdul Mannan Syed was a renowned Bangladeshi poet, author and researcher. A versatile writer and poet, he was one of the most prolific Bengali literary personalities of post-Partition India. Until his death on 5 September 2010, he was regarded an authority on Bengali literature. Popularly regarded as a poet, he is most notable as a literary critic and editor. Born as Syed Abdul Mannan, he assumed the pen name Ashoke Syed at the debut in literature in 1960s. He published more than 150 titles to his credit during his lifetime. His works on poet Jibanananda Das and Kazi Nazrul Islam are not only seminal but also monumental in form, content and quality.

Life

He was born in a village called Jalalpur, on the rivulet Ichamati, in the district of Chhabish Paragana, in West Bengal of undivided India. That was 1943, the year of great famine. In 1946, just before the partition of British India, a lethal Hindu-Muslim riot took place and forced many Muslims to leave West Bengal to settle in East Bengal, now Bangladesh. A less discussed but equally fearsome riot took place in 1950 that drove the family of Mannan Syed from West Bengal and to settle in Dhaka of then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. He lost his motherland for ever and always felt like a refugee. They first lived in Gopibagh of Dhaka town. Shortly his father bought a piece of land on the Green Road, formerly called Kuli Road. Since then 51 Green Road has been his address till his sudden death in September 2010. His father Syed A. M. Badruzzodoza was a public official who served in many places of the then East Pakistan. He was very strict about the formal education of his children. He had six sons and four daughters. Mannan was married to his cousin Syra Syed Ranu. His only child was a daughter named Jinan Syed Shampa. In 1958 Mannan Syed passed the Matriculate examination from the Nawabpur High School. In 1960, he passed the Intermediate from the Dhaka College. He studied Bengali language and literature in the Dhaka University from where he obtained his B. A and M. A. degrees, respectively, in 1963 and 1964. Most of his life he earned his livelihood as a teacher of Bengali language and literature in government colleges. He started his career as a lecturer in the M. C. College of Sylhet town. He also taught in the Sheikh Borhanuddin College in Faridpur. However he served in the Jagannath College for a long time from where he retired in 1998. He also served as the District Gazetteer for a period of time. Later he was appointed the executive director of the Nazrul Institute (2002–2004).

Works

Abdul Mannan Syed is best known for his research on Bengali poet Jibanananda Das. Although he is most renowned for literary criticism, he is a versatile writer and poet. He taught as a faculty in the department of Bengali in the Jagannath College, Dhaka. Later he served as Director General of the Nazrul Institute. He was the first Scholar-in-residence in Bangladesh at North South University. For a long time he was associated with the Shilpataru, a monthly literary magazine published from Dhaka by poet Abid Azad.

Death

He had been suffering from diabetes and cardiac troubles for a long time. On 27 August 2010, he fell sick while participating in an event of Channel Eye. On 5 September 2010, he was having an afternoon sleep when he suffered a massive cardiac arrest and succumbed to death just before Iftaar. On the following day he was buried at the Azimpur Graveyard after three Salat-ul-Janazas at Green Road Jam-e-Masjid, Bangla Academy and Dhaka University mosque. His death was widely mourned across the country. All national dailies carried obituary on the following day. Next Friday, all dailies carried in the literary essays on his life and works. Electronic media also featured his death in a befitting manner.

Awards

Bangla Academy Award (1981)
Alaol Literary Award (1981)
Kabi Jasimuddin Award (Chattagram Sangskriti Kendro)
Farrukh Memorial Award (1991)

Jibanananda

On the streets, I sometimes see Jibanananda Das:
A sturdy figure with slightly dirty panjabi and dhoti hanging upon his knee
And a pair of obscure sandal embracing his feet
Steps slowly along the footpath with a relaxed gait.
And inside his two eyes
The green prism that I've lost in my childhood
Broken apart burn bright.

One day I saw him in the end of the green road,
One day in the stadium market he passed by me on the stairs
When I was running upstairs to the bookshop,
One day as on a hurry I was galloping through the crowd
I saw him standing reading a book on the pavement in Nilkhet.
One day I saw him walking self-absorbed along the lake,
One day I saw him whirling in the circular fish market.

One day no sooner had I seen him with my curious eyes
Than I lost him in the midst of the crowd
He dissolved in desolateness.

Only once as he was passing by
Giving me a blank glance
Said as if he'd spoken a soliloquy
"Where have you been so long? "
And without waiting for a reply
He dissolved in disillusionment.

One day in the evening I saw him
Ashamed like a star caught red-handed
Standing on the most desolate field of the capital
On a rickshaw I was passing by the field
I saw the night harboured on his hair
Grasshoppers were jumping out of the prisms of his eyes.

The needles of the cold dew of late autumn surround his legs
Like the obscure people kneeling in prayer around a primitive deity.
I saw him wearing dhuti-panjabi woven of fog
I saw the stars were rising out of his mouth when he was speaking alone
I saw the moon was shining inside the loose pocket of his panjabi.

Then Jibanananda began mooning
Every which way and moving away
Further and further away from my sorrow of life.

Translation by S M Maniruzzaman

Abdul Mannan Syed

O Fish

The city is asleep.
Midnight. The enormous sky is full of stars.
Only a bright fish is coming out of the mirror.
My eyes see only him.
With silence unbroken my eyes say:
O fish, are you Harun ar-Rashid, in your nightgown
Are you wandering- from the palace to the thatched cottage,
Watching how the wheel of stars is whirling round and round?
O fish, where are you going?

The city is asleep.
Only a born-blind singer along with thieves, harlots, and police is awake,
And a strange silent fish. O moving fish.
My eyes see only him.
With silence unbroken my eyes say:
O fish, are you the very eyes of mine?
Midnight. The wheel of nature is whirling round and round on the waterfall.
O fish, where are you going?

Translation by S M Maniruzzaman

Abdul Mannan Syed