Al Mahmud
- poems -

Publication Date:
2012

Publisher:
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive
Mir Abdus Shukur Al Mahmud commonly known as Al Mahmud is a Bangladeshi Poet, novelist, short-story writer. He is considered as one of the greatest Bengali poets emerged in 20th century. His work in Bengali poetry is dominated by his copious use of regional dialects. In 1950s he was among those Bengali poets who were outspoken by writing about the events of Bengali Language Movement, nationalism, political and economical repression and struggle against West Pakistan Government.

<b>Early Life and Career</b>

He was born in Morail Village, Brahmanbaria District, Bangladesh. Mahmud started his career as a journalist. He came into recognition after Lok Lokantor was published in 1963. In succession, he wrote Kaler Kalosh (1966), Sonali Kabin (1966) and Mayabi Porda Dule Otho (1976). In addition to writing poetry, he has written short stories, novels and essays such as Pankourir Rakta and Upamohadesh. He took part in the Liberation War of Bangladesh as a freedom fighter in 1971. After the war, he joined The Daily Ganakantha as the assistant editor. He was jailed for a year during the era of Awami League government. Later, Al Mahmud joined Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy in 1975 and retired in 1993 as director of the academy.

<b>Literary Works</b>

Al Mahmud is one of the most important poets in Bengali literature. In his early youth he entered Dhaka city having a broken suitcase under his armpit, from which, like a magician, he showed us all the rivers of Bangladesh. The conscious readers of poetry have watched his magic spellbound and become his fan. Al Mahmud is one of those new poets who have contributed a lot to the progress of modern Bengali poetry. He is a very popular poet in Bangladesh. He has innumerable admirers at home and abroad. But it is a matter of sorrow that very few of his poems have been translated into English, for which the non-Bengali readers are yet deprived of having the taste of his poetry.

A good number of poetry books of Al Mahmud have been published. Lok Lokantor, Kaler Kolos, Sonali Kabin, Mayabi Porda Duley Otho, Adristabadider annabanna, Bokhtiarer Ghora, Arabya Rojonir Rajhas, MithyabadRakhal,Doel o Doyita etc are remarkable ones. But the book which has been accepted by the Bengali poetry readers as a classic piece is his
Sonali Kabin. The Golden Kabin is an English version of this very book. ‘Kabin’ means a matrimonial contract in Bengali Muslim society. Al Mahmud has picked up this very word ever-known to all but never allowed in poetry and used so successfully that it has got a symbolic meaning and has drawn the attention of scholars, both in Bangladesh and West Bengal.

Al Mahmud entered into the realm of poetry following the paths of Jasimuddin and Gibananando Das, his two preceding poets. Jasimuddin uniquely depicted the picture of rustic Bengal in his poems. People of the agro-based Bengali Muslim society first got their identity in literature. Their sorrow, sufferings, poverty, hunger and love, depicted vividly in his poems, attracted not only the Bengali educated society but also the whole world. Unlike Jasimuddin, Gibananando Das depicted the scenic and the spiritual beauty of Bangladesh. Another difference between them is that Jasimuddin followed the language of rustic people in poetry, whereas Gibananando Das was very sophisticated in using poetic dictions. Walking the paths of his two great forerunners, Al Mahmud had to struggle a lot to find out his own identity. At last he reached his goal; his distinction as a poet became obvious, in his third book the Sonali Kabin.

Philosopher Sibnarayan Ray commented:

“Al Mahmud has an extraordinary gift for telescopic discrete levels of experience; in his poems I find a marvelous fusion and wit which reminds me occasionally of Bishnu Dey. The complete secularism of his approach is also striking...he was born and brought up in a very conservative Muslim religious family; it is not a secularism forced by some ideology, but present naturally and ubiquitously in his metaphors, images and themes.

<b>Awards</b>

Ekushey Padak, 1987; The highest literature award of Bangladesh
Bangla Academy Award, 1968
Chattagram Sangskriti Kendro Farrukh Memorial Award, 1995
Kabi Jasim Uddin Award
Philips Literary Award
Alakta Literary Award
Sufi Motaher Hossain Literary Gold Meda
Abujher Someekoron

Al Mahmud
Ami R Asbona Bole

Al Mahmud
Batasher Fena

Al Mahmud
Bent On The Ground

It's not mere turning off
but keeping the genius of eyes closed
from the attack of sight bent on the ground.
Eyes touch severely the edge of deadly blood.
Binding the Nature, it observes the depth both of
women and rivers;
absorbs all the contexts of fishes, birds, animals
and insects;
penetrating all the correlative theories, brings out
strong witness.

Not within my brain, actually my adolescence is
sitting within my eyes
as if it were a tired green boy having a big bow at
his hand.

Yet in the boundary of my eye-sight,
I see my son dressing his hair in front of a whirling mirror.
Who knows whether it's myself or not?
Perhaps it's I who am parting the hair and setting it on the palate.
I have worn socks and rubbing the buttons of sleeve
brushed the shirt. Perhaps the steady glasskid
would uproot his father's age from the forty year.

[Translated by Sayeed Abubakar]

Al Mahmud
Borshamongol Nrityomukhor Borshon

Al Mahmud
By Your Hand

I wish I ate the ancient koi of Kurulia
fried especially by your own hand.
I wish sitting like a crow in the veranda of Munsi House
I enjoyed your scrubbing.

Would you say then, 'Who the bull there?'

Nobody realises more than me
the beauty of waves of your black hair
broken down on back.

Yet you waiving your hands
showed me the way to the city.

[Translated by Sayeed Abubakar from Sonali Kabin]

Translator's not: Koi: A kind of fish

Al Mahmud
Comes More Not

Keeping the stone of Paharpur on the left,
crossing the canal if anyone approaches the moat,
ever he comes back --- you knew it well,
evertheless why did you allow him
to enter the heart of the hut?

They who used to dye your Shika;
They who used to bring you cock-flowers
if you once reject their hands, they won't return
ever
in the village -- you knew it well, nevertheless you
made them float
on the water of deluge.

They who used to call you witch;
They who used to address you cobra;
Seeing whom, the pitcher on your waist
got broken into pieces; seeing whom,
you used to hide your face
why did you allow them, then, to laugh
into the black clamour of the bank of your tank?

[Translated by Sayeed Abubakar from the book Sonali Kabin]

Al Mahmud
Dhoyrjo

Al Mahmud
Din Sheshe

Al Mahmud
Ek Nodi

Al Mahmud
Ekhusher Kobita

Al Mahmud
Fugitive

People call me fugitive my heart aches.
Still I want to be a fierce salmon-trout into the tank of life.
Where will I flee when every night I feel
my beloved wife's breath on my face and eyes?
Where and how will I hurry away
when I feel the wearied body of my baby on breast?

So I stand by the door all day long in favour of life.

When chickens coming out from henroost in the morning
move to the mire crowing feebly, I quickly get up from my bed
and cover the face of fire with my hands.

Didn't I fearlessly jump into the water of the Bay of Bengal
when a tiny girl of the water-slaves suddenly got confined
to the waves going to search for the golden conch?

When my better-half embittered by the oppression of cockroaches
goes smashing the whole race of insects,
don't I then make her delighted by praising her sari?

[Translated by Sayeed Abubakar]

Al Mahmud
Harano Chheler Geet

Al Mahmud
Hayre Manush

Al Mahmud
Heart-Penetrating Sight

Last night Death drove its hand into my room.
Through the gap of window
that long hand, like the feeling-power of a blind man,
advanced a bit towards my bed.
My wife was pouring water on the head of our baby.
Her eyes were winkless as if they had been two pieces of stone.
Her two breasts were swinging in weight of milk
as if they had been two ripe fruits.
The shower of water, like the sound of cascade,
spread shivers within everything.
The light of lantern started shivering just like the
feathers of a peacock.

And that hand, I noticed, came near the pillow
its pulse swollen, nails uncut and fur shaggy.
I wished I had shouted.
But in front of Death I can never make any sound.
My anger tempted me to grasp that hand.
But I knew well about the energy of Death.
Would I then pray to Him? No.
Death is deaf and fast like the horse of Chengiz Khan ..
- Who ? Who ?

The shower of water suddenly stopped.
My wife stared at it.
There was only the waterless pot into her naked hands.
Buttons of her blouse set free.
In her tearless eyes, there was nothing
but a heart-penetrating sight.
I looked at Death and noticed
it's retreating towards the window, rolled up like
the tail of a dog
its nails uncut, pulse swollen and fur shaggy.

[Translated by Sayeed Abubakar]
In The New Year

The smell of rice hurts my nostril.  
As soon as I get back my conscience,  
I notice all the doors closed.  
When I dare open them all,  
the capitalists frown at me addressing as blind.

Blood within by breast gets silently injured.

My eyes are full of dreams for rice.  
When I demand to have my dreams fulfilled,  
the capitalists shout saying, 'Wild ! Wild !'  
When I pick up scythe at hand to harvest paddy,  
they cry, 'it's the most vile work!'

Yet the sun rises in the sky in the new year.

A bird of eternal peace calls to me in my dreams.  
Getting up from bed, I now on the way  
to look for that blue bird.  
I don't know where and how far she is.  
I wish I were all day long a body-gourd of her.

Had I surrendered my body to her in a solitary place !

[Translated by Sayeed Abubakar]

Al Mahmud
In The Valley Of Dreams

Once we went on a journey
through a dense opaque fog.
Suddenly our path became illuminated
by the flash of light in horizon.
The smell of paddy floated in wind.
Forests got sonorous with the songs of birds.
Our hearts started floating
being altogether a wonderful picture of Nature.

River! River!

The clean flow of water, which our offspring showed us
raising their fingers with joy, is our soul.
It's the stream
which design our women weave their saris in.
It's the turn which inspires our sisters
to envelope their bodies with tortuous lines.
Behold the flow of holy water
whose sweet murmur immerse us in songs.
Lo and behold!

It's the picture of the valley where we will go.
It has utterly devoured our hearts.
Wind of fairy tale is blowing on our flag;
Future frequently oscillating our hope
like a golden pendulum.
Overflowed with joy, we have set out towards our dreams.
Sorrow never fatigues us.
On a stormy night we have turned our face
towards a bright day.
Troubles have not paralysed us.
We will go out
escaping the riddle of shout, cry and despair.
May Death touch not us.

We will sow the grain seeds in the valley of dreams.
The water of silver river will flow on the left.
The sharp husky mountain will remain on the right.
[Translated by Sayeed Abubakar]

Al Mahmud
In This Fascination

Wandering over the whole world,
I come back for you
to knock at your door. For you
I defeat the maddened sword of poverty.

You are mine in this fascination
I go to unlock the darkness of death.
With unbarred kissing and humming
I embrace you and remain benumbed.

I stand as if I were a tree of green smell
or a crystal house where in the glassy darkness
black fishes take the golden stones
into their mouth.

My household is clean, white and small
like an aquarium;
who are you the sweet fish getting enlightened
into the blue water-house?

Lifting up the hungry mouth
how many drops of wind are possible to be collected --
would anyone ever protect these precious bubbles
on the body of moss?

Such a motion of soundless bubbles
turns into a flower of joy;
Behold, how nicely a beautiful mermaid
nibbles at my finger.

Al Mahmud
Jel Gete Dekha

Al Mahmud
Kaler Kolosh

Al Mahmud
Kapuni

Al Mahmud
Kobita Emon

Al Mahmud
Kodom Fuler Etibirtto

Al Mahmud
Loke Jake Prem Nam Kohe

Al Mahmud
Matrichhaya

Al Mahmud
Matsyonay

Al Mahmud
Na Ghumanor Dol

Al Mahmud
Namer Mohima

Al Mahmud
Nature

How far Man has advanced!
Hypnotised by ceaseless shower
I am sitting on my own heels
even today.

While planting the tender paddy seedlings
into the soil, thick and soft like khir, I thought
the soil to be my beloved wife who
like a piece of boggy land, uncovers all her fertility
with her pleasant watery shyness.

Fields getting wet in rain.
I feel a hand soaked in water on my back.
And losing all the feeling-marks of sense
I've made my benumbed sight remain vigilant.

All day long it rains incessantly everywhere
like the spell of khana. Silently I observe
the water-snakes running after fishes
fleeing away beside the edge of fields;
the green grasshoppers leaping in fright on my
arms.

It seems that the graph of fields tied with ridges
having the touch of rain's fog has changed
suddenly
in trance of my dreams by an unbelievable magicspell;
and the beautiful earth has been divided
in the shape of a triangle.
From that geometry
the flocks of fishes, birds, animals and human
beings
come out successively
and surrounding my sensation, start eating
picking up the contradictory foods.

[Translated by Sayeed Abubakar]

Translator's Not: Khir:. Porridge-like food, sweet and tasty. Khana: Astrological
predictions.

Al Mahmud
Pakhir Kothay Pakha Mellam

Al Mahmud
Pakhir Moto

Al Mahmud
Partition Of Heritage

Why don't forget if you can?
Forget our walking nights accompanied by the Moon.
Forget the dewy grasses in the Niaz field.
Setting cold fingers into my pocket
you used to say, 'Don't mind, dear, I can't help doing it.'
The nightingale on the bough of Bakul tree burst into laughter.

Why don't wipe off if you can ?
Wipe off the black marks of coal from the wall.
Once you used to redden my face with joke,
and suddenly got anxious thinking of my hidden rage;
your thin necklace used to tremble on your throat;
Is there allowed any partition, darling, in that happy game?

The full Moon rises now over your roof;
If you have courage enough, conceal the moonlight.

Behold, how the sports of ducks cause flood into
the river!
Divide the water if there lies any sin.
O my Love, tear the blood-thirsty trap of light and shade;
why don't tear  if you can?

[Translated by Sayeed Abubakar from Sonali Kabin]


Al Mahmud
Poetry Such As

Poetry is nothing but the memory of adolescence;
The melancholic face of my mother often remembered by me;
Poetry, the yellow bird sitting alone on a bough of Nim tree;
Poetry, my younger brothers and sisters, sitting sleeplessly
surrounding the fire of leaves; and the return of our father,
ringing bell of his bicycle and his call 'Rabeya! Rabeya! '
Poetry is the southern door kept ajar which got unlocked
by the name of my mother.

Poetry is nothing but going back crossing the foggy way
across the knee-water river. Poetry, the Azan of dawn
or the burning of stubble; it's the expanded smell of sesame
on the belly of cake, the acute smell of fish,
the net spread on the yard and the grassy grave of
my grandfather
in the cluster of bamboo.

Poetry, an unhappy teenager growing up in the
forty six;
Poetry, the meeting, freedom, procession and the
flag of a truant school boy,
and the plaintive description of the elder coming
back
losing all in the flame of tumult.

Poetry, the birds of pastureland, the collected eggs of
ducks and the fragrant grass;
Poetry, the lost calf belonging to the sad faced wife that
fled away snapping the rope;
Poetry, the decorated letters in a secret pad within
a blue envelope;
Poetry means Ayesha Akter, the girl of unfolded
hair at a village Maktab.

[Translated by Sayeed Abubakar]

Al Mahmud
Prottyabortoner Lojja

Al Mahmud
Rabindranath

Al Mahmud
Shonali Kabin - 1

Al Mahmud
Al Mahmud
Smritir Meghlabhore

Al Mahmud
The Foam Of Wind

Nothing lasts, behold.
Behold how the leaves, the flowers, the old villagers,
the pose of rivers' dancing, the brazen pitchers and
the fire of hookah
and the flock of grown up girls gradually diminish
like the monsoon of Hilsa fish!
The yellow leaves, sounding in the wind,
fall down on the droughty desolate land.
The foreign ducks too,
on whose bodies there are millions of bubbles, fly away
into the shallow blue cup of the sky.

Why doesn't anything last long?
The corrugated iron sheet, the hay or the muddy walls
and the undecaying banyan tree of village
get uprooted by the terrible typhoon of Chittagong.
The plaster splits and in the long run the mosque of our village,
like our Faith, collapses down with a heavy crash.

The nests of sparrows, the love, the twigs and tendrils
and the covers of books fall off twisted.
By the water's bite of the Meghna,
the crops' green scream of the horizon starts trembling.
The houses float, float the pitchers and the cowsheds.
Like the affection of my elder sister, the old
embroidered pillow gets also sunk.
After the decay of dwelling-houses, nothing exists more.
Only the birds, fond of water, flying in the sky
wipe off the foam of wind from their beaks.

[Translated by Sayeed Abubakar from Sonali Kabin]

Al Mahmud
To catch the last train I reached the station running.
I noticed the signal of blue light on.
The train, like Despair, suddenly left the station
playing on its cruel whistle.
They, with whom I was promised to go to city, got
anxious
and started staring at me through the windows.
They only consoled me by shaking their hands.

While coming from home, I was goaded by my
father
into hurrying off lest I should miss the train.
Mother said, 'Don't sleep tonight. Pass time
by reading books as you often do.'
But I fell asleep.
In a dreamless sleep I remained dead
on my bed.

But Jahanara never misses her train.
Forhad always reaches station
half an hour ago. Laily sends her servant
with all her luggage to book ticket.
Nahar never touches rice in excitement
before going anywhere.
But I'm one of their brothers, having walked seven
miles at a stretch,
trembling into fog at a dirty station at the late
night.

I have to go back home penetrating the white
curtain of fog.
My trouser will get wet with dews.
And suddenly the red sun, diminishing the winterdrops
gathered on my eyelids, will rise in the sky.
The sunrays will descend on my face and I, like a
defeated man,
will notice my ever known river in front of mine.
I will notice the scattered houses of my village.
The flock of cranes will fly away towards the bog.
Finally, like a horror, our old utchala will float into my view,
will float the small plantain garden.
Long leaves of the trees will tremble saying, 'Come not! Come not!'

My father, having noticed me, will set his eyes at the holy Quran
and will recite-- Fabi Aiyee Ala-ee-Rabbikuma Tukazziban.

Seeing me at the yard, my mother will smile happily having unwashed plates in hands.
She will say, 'It's fine you have come back. In your absence the whole house seems very lonely.
Go to the pond and wash your face.
Your breakfast ready.'

I will then, embracing my mother, wipe off the shame of my return, rubbing again and again, from my whole face.

[Translated by Sayeed Abubakar]

Al Mahmud
The Sound Of Bathing

I don't know how I, at this midnight, have become
two eyes
having all my existence within me, as if they were
a pair of twin bees
sitting abreast on the tepid flesh.

Darkness walks both on my consciousness and
unconsciousness.
Quick-shivering feelings of mine like the tongue of
a snake
run away touching the shed of my blood. It seems
that
melancholic parting moment of a boy has been
attached to all my senses. Affection of my mother
being the warm fragrant vapour
of my last food-plate collides with my nose.

Adieu, O Sight .O the born blind Past, don't come
near me.
O the trees, my dwelling house and river, be dark
forever
and disappear like the songs of birds into the deep
ever-bright green.

While walking ashore, suddenly I notice on the
opposite bank
the body of Day turning into a globe of light.
Making sonorous sound of bathing at the staircase
of wharf,
someone says to her companion,'See yonder a little
boy walking
penetrating the deep can a mother send
her child outside
in a morning of Magha
cold such as? Walking
alone into fog---
what a sight !'

My observation of birds' flying and the day behind
the river
turns to be something more than play. Sweat grows on my smooth forehead. Dust gathers on knees. By raising hands, it's not possible now to hide the light.
Being lofty, the god of Day has ascended the flaming sky.
The sound of water makes me realise that it's the sport of bathing.

The village girls, surrounding the wharf, say to one another showing me, 'Who's that guy? Which village is he going to? To some beautiful lady perhaps!'
When thirst dies, sweat becomes dry by the wind. At last the birds of pastureland, exchanging eyes with one another, fly away with their ruddy wings.

I feel tired. No sorrow, no solicitation, no thirst drives me more.
Even I don't know which wharf I have reached now.
Having eighteen pitchers on waists, the village wives go back home. Someone of them says in intense tune, 'Who knows where this old passer-by will go crossing the dark bog?'

[Translated by Sayeed Abubakar from Sonali Kabin]

Al Mahmud
Tyage Dukhe

Al Mahmud
Unoshottorer Chhora - 1

Al Mahmud
Vor Dupure

Al Mahmud
Voyer Chote

Al Mahmud