CHAPTER- II

Life and Works of Ahmed Ali and Humayun Kabir
Chapter-II

Ahmed Ali and Humayun Kabir

AHMED ALI’S LIFE AND WORKS (1910-1994)

Novelist, poet, critic, diplomat, Scholar Ahmed Ali was born in Delhi in 1910. Educated at Aligarh and Lucknow Universities, standing first class and first in order and merit in both B.A. (Honors), 1930 and M.A. English 1913.

Ahmed Ali taught at universities of Lucknow, Allahabad, and Agra from 1932-46 and joined the Bengal Senior Educational Services as professor and Head of the English Department at presidency College, Calcutta (1944-47). He was B.B.C’s Representative and Director in 1946 as British Council visiting Professor at the National Central University, Nanking. He was a distinguished visiting professor at Michigan, State University, in 1975 and Fulbright visiting professor of English and History at western Kentucky in 1978-79 and lectured extensively in the United States.

Ahmed Ali became famous in 1932 with the publication of ‘Angary’ in Urdu. His co-founded the All India progressive writers Movement and association and pioneer of the modern Urdu short story. After the India sub-continent was divided he lived in Pakistan and established embassies in China and Morocco. Ahmed Ali’s many works included the well-known and theology of Urdu poetry “The Gold Tradition and ‘Al Quran’s ‘A contemporary Translation. Ahmed Ali
became well known with his three novels in English they are ‘Twilight in Delhi’, ‘Ocean of Night’ and “Rats and Diplomats’.

*Twilight in Delhi* is set in the great Indian centre of Muslim civilization, Delhi, and the plot revolves round a simple love story of Asghar and Bilqeece. One day, when Asghar goes to his friend’s house he accidentally falls in love with Bilqeece. But he feels that he cannot marry her because of his father’s strict notion of class hierarchy. His father Mir Nihal, a man looking into the twilight of his life, is a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad while Bilqeece’s father is a Mughal. Later they go through the cyclical joys and difficulties of having their love accepted, formalized, and renewed despite social barriers or death. Around this story is built a whole way of life – customs and ceremonies that sustain a colorful though declining feudal culture, including the father’s (Mir Nihal) pigeon-flying pastime, the *zanana*, and wedding rituals. In the outer circle, round the old house in a by lane of old Delhi, history is seen at work in the Great Durbar held by the King-Emperor in 1911, the public reactions to the First World War, the influenza epidemic of 1919, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 in Amritsar, and the political turmoil of 1920 in Northern India. Ahmed Ali thus uses the historical-cultural-symbolic complex as background, with the people of the *mohallah* in the foreground and the family of Mir Nihal centre stage as the story of decline unfolds. Edwin Muir stated in his review of the novel in *TheListener* (London): The atmosphere in which the story passes . . . has a striking resemblance to that of the French
Romantics: there is the same exaltation of feeling, the same resignation to the impulses of the heart, especially in love, and the same readiness to embrace death, at least in contemplation, when the heart’s impulses are frustrated. . . . But if we accept the sentiment, we become aware that Mr. Ahmed Ali expresses it with a distinction and purity of which a western writer would be quite incapable. Every accident of life, pleasant or horrible, is touched by it. The description of a horrible influenza epidemic in Delhi after the Great War is so deeply moving because of this union of horror and tenderness and something resembling romantic pity . . . the relations between the various characters are exquisitely felt; the detail of life, wonderfully clear and yet quite strange. The writing produces a curiously pictorial effect, yet is itself as clear as water. The end, where innocence is drowned by experience, is intensely moving. The novel, due to its excellent subject matter and innovative style, received much critical attention from a number of prominent litterateurs. In a letter to Ahmed Ali, E.M. Forster stated that “It is beautifully written and very moving. The detail is almost all of it new to me, and fascinating. It is a sort of poetical chronicle. At the end one has a poignant feeling that poetry and daily life got parted, and will never come together again.” This comment was used as a blurb on a paper band around the book. Bonamy Dobree (1940), a noted Critic, called the novel “poetic and brutal, delightful and callous.” David Anderson (1971) stated that it is a novel about people, about life, and about time; it makes pertinent, often profound comments about them; and it makes them with grace and clarity. It effectively narrows the gap between two alien
cultures and it points the way toward a further narrowing in the future.

(86) Maurice Collis (1940), another critic, said that The book is so
delicate and charged with such colour and
emotion, that a bold statement of what it is about can give no ideal of its
equality … It may well be that we shall not understand India until it is
explained to us by Indian novelists of the first ability, as it was that we
understood nothing of Russia before we read Tolstoi, Turgenev and the
others. Ahmed Ali may be the vanguard of such a Literary movement.

Actually what she needs is love and kindness. Perhaps the society will not
give her these things. This makes her hate the rich who just use her and
throw her. Ahmed Ali says, Huma "had grown not only in years, she felt,
but also in experience. She was mistress of herself and would not allow
anyone to lead her."30 What we notice is that feudalism victimizes people
like Huma and Kesari Bai.

Ocean of Night projects the theme of Hindu-Muslim unity. Ahmed Ali
tries to say that the two old cultures of the country can co-exist with peace
and harmony. The novel depicts the religious conflicts between Sia and
Sunni sects of Islam. The Moharam festival which stands for an inter-
religious harmony turns into a conflict. Not to speak of the novel depicts
the change in Indian society, especially Hindu-Muslim relationships.

Ocean of Night is a novel about social change. For instance, Roza Ah
Khan though illiterate, dresses and behaves like an intellectual. He drives
a Mercedes Benz. He uses European drinks. He wants to marry a modern
woman, of course, at the cost of his old fashioned wife who wears purdah.
There is also a contrast to this. Azizan, Huma's mother regrets for the change in society. It is observed:

There were so many patrons of art. Now there were other things to attract men's attentions; the Radio and the Cinema. The emphasis was shifting to the patronage of a different kind of dancing, where in society women learnt a few turns and gestures from the ancient books and old masters and danced on the stage charged a high fee for their performances. Azizan likes tradition. She thinks the revolt against tradition is a revolt against life itself. Like Mir Nihal, she opposes English ways of entertainment. It is observed: Woman had come out of Purdah and moved about freely in the streets. Western dancing was growing popular and cinema had popularized jazzy tunes... Very few patronized the courtesans... The Nawabs and the Rajas went in search of perverted emotions or exotic European beauties. The courtesans had become the dancing girls, the dancing girls, common prostitutes... Everything is cried for hurry and more hurry. Love was but flirtation, for there was no time for memory, for the contemplation of the charms of the beloved which alone gave colour to passion, intensity to desire, tenderness to the call of sex for sex. Ocean of Night may be compared with K. A. Abbas's Reflections in a Mirror which depicts the so-called social rigidity of feudal order.

Accordingly, "The daughter of a prostitute, even if she were theist and the best dancer in the town remained a prostitute to be kept the permanent mistress of a rich young handsome Zamindar." Ahmed Ali's writings reflect social commitment. According to some critics, Ocean of Night is
not only a social novel but also a romantic love story of Huma and Kabir. These two characters are the symbolic representatives of love, humanity and freedom. "The novel marks a significant shift from naturalistic to the extra-rational and lesser known realities of human life."34 The rigidity of social rules and voluptuousness of feudalism are the basic causes behind the tragic end of Huma and Kabir's sentimental love. It is said feudalism negates secular life. Ahmed Ali appeals the readers to reconsider social practices. He wants the rationalists to create a new social order of life, which will foster happiness and peace to one and all.

Rats and Diplomats (1586) is Ahmed Ali's third novel. Actually it is an Urdu translation into English. Prof. Ahmed Ali has used a fable-technique in the novel. Rats and Diplomats is a kind of document about his life as an Ambassador in China and Morocco. Critics think the novel is not well-written.

According to Ahmed Ali, Rats and Diplomats is a satire on the perversion of human values. He Reality is not what it seems or is made out to be; the bestial in human nature glares in the task of culture like a raw wound. The minds of the mighty are wrapped by corruption, greed and power, and have distorted the face of humanity into grotesque shapes. Think of the self-styled emperor Bokasa or Idi Amin, the racist perpetrators of apartheid of Auschwitz, Vietnam, the Shatila refugee camp.

Human beings have turned human beings into rats and pigs. Do not forget that this novel is a satire. Jonathan Swift made regional feuds, the war, the emperor, ridiculous; inhabitants of the island, pygmies or giants or yahoos; George Orwell turned them into pigs. When Pandora's Box is opened, the grotesque shapes multiply and abound. Today's world is an
apt subject of satire; for good sense has failed to prevail. When asked about the relevance of the novel Ahmed Ali said that life itself is full of absurdities. The novel, in fact, reminds us of the modern absurd drama or the literature of post-structuralism. The people are unhappy and restless especially in the East. Art is the result of a struggle in life. The author feels evil succeeds in changing man's destiny. Ahmed Ali writes, The horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would pale into insignificance in the face of horrors that may be unleashed by the secret weapons developed by the atomic and technological revolutions and the star wars threatening the world, especially the less developed for so-called developing countries with their own terrifying experience of unrelenting dictatorship and mounting squalor, disease and ignorance, the worst exploitations of man by man, which is the subject of this new novel.

Rats and Diplomats begins with two quotations—one from Amaury de Riencourt i.e., "in the world of politics, there are no ethics, no morality, no divine guidance or spiritual sanction," and the second is from the Mahabharata i.e., "the last word of social wisdom is never trust." Ahmed Ali worked on the novel after World War II. Rats and Diplomats opens with the picture of a newly created nation. It develops through the fable structure. Finally it proves to be a profound commentary on one of the most influential political philosophies of the post-war situation. It is a book both for the youngsters and elders.

Ahmed Ali narrates the story vividly. Rats and Diplomats begins with the dismissal of a General who is appointed as an Ambassador of Bachusan, and, later posted to Micea, the capital of Ratisan. This recollects us the
division of India into India and Pakistan. The hero of the novel was born in Pischewanbur. This imaginary city sounds like Peshawar in Pakistan today. Now the hero lives in China and he is addicted to opium. Here Ratisan is an imaginary country. The Ambassador is fond of architecture though he lives in an unattractive quarters. There are many other ambassadors staying with him.

Rats and Diplomats reads interestingly. Mr. Ambassador is voluptuous and arrogant. Still he wants to lecture about culture and the norms of co-existence in Ratisan. It is a formality that every Ambassador has to follow him. The Vice-Foreign Minister of Ratisan, who is a young and beautiful lady, has eloped with Touchle Beau, the Ambassador of Sarnia. The latter is not handsome and he is a rascal womanizer. We come to know that he has already deceived Madame Chiang. In Ratisan everything is out of control and order. For instance, the Ambassador of Philippines had to wait for a month to present his credentials. The Vice-Minister of Ratisan made him wait. Tauchle Beau's girl friend Chiang's is bewitching in look. He used to take her out to nightclubs and bars. When Mr. Ambassador starts his speech, it is 11 o'clock night. In fact, the time given for the presentations of credentials to Mr. Embassy is 10 o'clock night. He is tired of waiting. But finally he delivers a lecture successfully, and his lecture earns an appreciation from other ambassadors. Burmese Ambassador congratulates him while Serpentine Ambassador feels jealous. Meanwhile the Ambassador of Bachusan falls in love with a Ratisanian beauty. She is extremely beautiful and she lives as his neighbour. However, she is not suitable to him socio-politically. Still Mr.
Ambassador tries to rape her and she creates a scene. Not to speak of Mr. Ambassador does not feel shy. Finally when an enquiry starts, he rejects her complaints and goes scot-free. Even CDA defends him. Once an important meeting takes place in Ratisan. The subject of the meeting is the discussion of the problems of fast-growing rats in the country. The Director of Foreign Trade of Ratisan says, We understand you have cats that are capable of eating rats and wiping out the menace we are faced with. We have tried various remedies like traps, pesticide etc., but the rodent population has only increased instead of diminishing. We have avoided the use of poison for fear of destroying other useful life. If you think your cats are capable of destroying the rats, we would like to know at what rate they would be able to kill them off...that our rats are not mice. They are bigger, much bigger, both vegetarian and carnivorous. They can eat up birds, alike green finches and budgerigars and even pigeons. From your opening remarks, I feel that your cats would prove inadequate against our rats. They are capable of attacking civets. Every Ambassador visiting the country shows great respect for Ratisan. Already Sarnia has started to give 3.2 million tons of food grains to Ratisan every six months. But the problem of Ratisan is so horrifying that it has nearly 650 million rats that are four times more than Ratisan's population of 160 million people.

The French ambassador and his wife have their own experience about rats. There is a difference of opinion between the French husband and wife about the eradication of rats. Mr. French Ambassador is of the opinion that human beings themselves should eat rats. He thinks it is a
better remedy. In another instance he says humanity is a meaningless philosophy. But his wife disagrees with him when she says, "How bad you are to lump rats and human beings together." She tells the story of a counsel's daughter. The girl was nineteen years old and pretty. The two black rats backed her. She ran inside a room though they followed her. Then she ran to a dressing room and bolted the door. Again the rats appeared there through a window. She was horrified and began crying. The people had to break open the door to reach her. After hearing this, the Ambassadors in the meeting came to the conclusion that somehow a common path should be followed in the eradication of rats in Ratisan.

Ahmed Ali brings in some romance in the novel. Here the theme of love is balanced with the theme of politics. Mr. Ambassador of Bachusan falls in love with a beautiful lady from Zoroastria who has recently come to Ratisan. Though she is married, she is not happy. So she loves Mr. Ambassador. Meanwhile, there is a clash between Ratisan and its neighboring country Sacerdotia. The international organizations and media support Ratisan. But the government of Ratisan recalls Mr. Ambassador.

However, the Government of Ratisan fails to control its rats, because its citizens turn into rodents. One fine morning everyone of the nation finds a tail behind his back. Mr. Ambassador says when I woke up in the morning I had a peculiar sensation of something moving at the end of my spine, something stiff and long, yet elastic like a cord. A strange fear came over me. It ran through each nerve and artery, and tingled through my being. It was a feeling of something horrible I had seen but could
never imagine in my wildest dreams would happen to me, which had transferred itself to my person. I lay still in bed, afraid of moving lest the impossible proved to be real, holding my breath, unable to shut or open my eyes, something whispered in my ears it was a nightmare, and God Almighty had come and was saying, 'This in truth is your semblance, and verily of all men. How long can you escape your destiny?'... Then suddenly I cast fear out of mind and pushing the blankets aside, jumped out of bed. There indeed was a tail dragging behind me. I looked into the mirror and was horrified.

Interestingly the cat-Ratisans turn into human beings at the end of the novel. The change implies the Marxian philosophy that all the ordinary and insignificant characters will turn into major characters and the major characters will turn into minor characters. As Ahmed Ali was associated with progressive movement for a long time, he was well aware of Marxian philosophy. So Ali satirizes mankind here. A fable is a story which, with the help of animals, illustrates human nature, passions, feelings, success and failure. Long back it was the Buddha, who successfully used the fable-technique to convey his doctrine of peace and co-existence. But among the pre-and post-independence novelists, K. A. Abbas and Prof. Ahmed Ali are the two important novelists who have used fable-technique in their works. There are a number of similarities between Abbas's Cages of Freedom and Ali's Rats and Diplomats. As rats are the major characters in Rats and Diplomats, sparrows are the major characters of Abbas's Cages of Freedom. K. A. Abbas has used difficult words like Quit Jungle Movement, which means Quit India Movement,
Parrotistan, meaning Pakistan and Birdemocracy meaning democracy in India. Similarly Ahmed Ali uses the same in the novel.

The ultimate aim of the novelist is to combine the high seriousness of political philosophy with the humour of romance. Ahmed Ali shifts the tone from the seriousness of philosophy to the farcical confusion that results in the image of cats chasing human beings. It is a very sarcastic and funny situation as it is animals' predictable behaviour. Really the fable is a critique of human society. Rats and Diplomats is both profoundly serious and delightfully light. It achieves a remarkable success in conveying a message. It throws light on the contemporary national and international politics. In order to understand Ali's Rats and Diplomats, one should know the post-war political developments in the world. One may say Rats and Diplomats is a serious political allegory. In order to understand it one must know the political views of Ahmed Ali and the differences between Socialism and Communism and Bureaucracy and Democracy.

CONCLUSION:

Ahmed Ali was mainly a novelist. His fiction is about Muslim community and Indian culture. Though he went to Pakistan after Partition, he wrote on Indian life. In most of his writings, Ali speaks of fundamentalism, cultural degeneration and westernization. He writes about the past. Most of his characters are modern men and women. Some of them are gloomy and pessimistic. Indeed, they suffer from a sense of alienation. Ahmed Ali, as a socially committed progressive writer as a writer of avant-gard
comes before the world readers as a significant writer who firmly believes in the betterment of social life. His literary achievement is substantial in fiction and in poetry as well. Being progressive, his writings receive and welcome the innovativeness from all directions so as to give us a unified whole with myriad shades. A reputed critic who made some contribution on Ahmed Ali, rightly remarks thus: Firstly, in the formal aspect of his fiction, we find him a strict realist who is concerned above all with the social reality of his group. Secondly, in terms of content we find in him a sharp satirical critical of the life of his society and at the same time a positive upholder of the cause of social change. Both these characteristics endure throughout in his writing, indeed till the very end. To conclude, one may easily say that Ahmed Ali was a great man and a towering literary personality of merit and achievement.

**HUMAYUN KABIR (1906 -1969) life and works**

Humayun Kabir a great scholar, academician, educationist, administrator, politician, writer, philosopher, Trade Union leader these were only some of the many roles of distinguished and successful career.

Humayun Kabir was born on 22nd February 1906 at Komarapur village near the district town of Faridpur. Kabir was a versatile man, combining intellectual brilliance, literary talent, and political acumen with active leadership and a non-communal outlook. Apart from his other contributions, Kabir is remembered as one of those Muslims who decided to stay behind in India at the time of partition. Kabir’s given name was Humayun Zahiruddin Amir-i-Kabir. His father, Kabiruddin Ahmad, was a deputy magistrate and a man with a liberal outlook and
independent mind. Both Humayun Kabir’s father and grand father were awarded the title of khan Bahadur by the British government. Humayun Kabir had seven brothers and sisters; Humayun Kabir was an exceptional talent in many ways. He topped the list of successful candidates in the Matriculation examination of 1922 with star marks. He studied at Presidency College for the next two years and passed the Higher Secondary examination standing third in the first division with letter marks in English.

He did his Honours and Masters in English from Calcutta University and set a new record by standing first class first in both examinations. The most brilliant students of the time were his friends among them Shanti Devi who later became his wife. Kabir decided not to enter government service. He opted for teaching and went to Exeter College Oxford in 1928 on a scholarship. There he took up honours in ‘Modern Greats’ that is philosophy, political science and economics. Here too he stood first class first in 1931. He also established himself as a student leader and orator.

In 1932, Kabir joined Andhra University as a lecturer in philosophy at the invitation of Dr Radha Krishnan. A year later he joined Calcutta University, from then on he began a very active life alongside teaching he devoted himself to literary activities and became associated with trade union politics. He joined Akfazlul Huq’s Krishak Praja Party and was elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly (1937-1947) although an intellectual of high caliber he was a strong advocate of the rights of peasants and workers. He was president of three large Indian trade
unions in 1946, Humayun Kabir became private secretary to the Congress President Moulana Abul Kalam Azad after Partition, many Muslims opted for Pakistan, but Kabir stayed behind in India. When Abul Kalam Azad became the Education Minister, Kabir served as joint education advisor, education secretary and chairman of the University Grants Commission. The Moulana dictated to him in Urdu his famous book ‘India Wins Freedom.

In 1956 Humayun Kabir was elected member of the Indian Rajya Sabha or upper house. Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru appointed him State minister for Civil Aviation and, after the death of Moulana Azad in 1958, made him Minister for Education. Kabir was later appointed minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs. From 1957 until his death in 1969 he was a member of Loksabha from Bashirhat constituency of west Bengal. When Lal Bahadur Shastri became Prime Minister of India after Nehru’s death, Humayun Kabir was again made Education Minister, When Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister after Shastri’s death, Humayun Kabir was offered the governorship of Madras but he declined the post. He quit Congress and became involved with organizing the Bengal Congress Party. He played an active role in 1967 in dislodging the congress government in West Bengal and forming a United Front government in its place.

Humayun Kabir achieved Success in every sphere of his life. This is true about his literary activities too. Although he was restless person with a constant smile on his face, he was thoughtful writer and developed an attractive style of editor from his school days. In 1920 he edited his High School Magazine,
In 1926 he edited the Presidency College magazine, at Oxford he edited two journals, sis and Cherwell on his return home, in 1932 he started editing Baromashi, a monthly journal. However, in the history of Bangla periodicals he will be remembered for the high quality quarterly chaturanga (1939-69). He also edited reports and books for many local and foreign organizations. A collection of Bangla Short Stories and poems, Green and Gold (1958) deserves special mention.

Humayun Kabir in his editorial work of “Green and Gold” says this collection of writings from Bengali which is perhaps the richest of the modern Indian languages. It is proposed to follow up with similar selections from writings in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Gujarati and other Indian languages. It is hoped that publication of these anthologies will not only make the world outside conscious of vitality and strength of the literary tradition in the different Indian languages, but also help to draw the different languages groups closer to one another by creating the corpus of a common Indian literature for all. It is my belief that once the Series is completed, it will be recognized that contemporary India has writers who in richness of experience and fineness of perception are not inferior to their compeers any where in the world.

Humayun Kabir was a poet, novelist, and essayist. He made his literary debut in 1928 with svapnasadh, Sathi (1930) and Astadashi (1938) followed the poems in these volumes reflect his romanticism in which he followed the tradition of Rabindranath Tagore. Equally fluent in Bangla and Urdu, he translated Musaddas-e-Halli in Bangla.

Humayun Kabir was also a fiction writer of some note, writing both short stories and novels. In the thirties a number of his short stories were published.
His novel Nadi O Nari was published in 1945. This novel which tells about the lives of Bengali Muslims, who dwell on the banks of the Padma, was made into a film in Dhaka in 1956.

Humayun Kabir was however, known primarily as an essayist. He wrote equally fluently in both Bangla and English, very readable essays on philosophy, literature, education and society. Some of his well known books are Imanuel Kant (1936), Sharat Sahityer Mulfatva (1942), Banglar Kavya (1945), Marks Bad (1951) Naya Bharater Shiksa (1955), Shiksak O shiksatari (1957), Mirza Abu Talib Khan (1961), Delhi- Washington Moscow (1964), Kant on philosophy in General (1935), Poetry, Monadas and Society (1941), Muslim Politics in Bengal (1943), Rabindranath Tagore (1945), The Indian Heritage (1946/60), Science, Democracy and Islam (1955), Education for Tomorrow (1968), Minorities in a Democracy (1969) etc. In early life Kabir also wrote some plays-while these staged, they have not been printed.

Kabir was well known as an orator; Humayun Kabir was invited to speak by many Universities at home and abroad. At Oxford he delivered the Herbert Spencer lectures on Einstein and Russell. He was the first Asian to have this honor. In 1957 he spoke at the Kagmari Conference Of Maulana Abdulhamid Khan Bhasani as leader of the Indian delegation. For his contribution in the field of culture he was honored with awards by Universities such as Aligarh (1958), Annanmali (1959), Kahairagarh (Madhya Pradesh 1961) Vishwa Bharati Mahishur and Athens. He died of heart attack in Kolkata on 18 August 1969.

Men and Rivers, his only novel in English is not to be mistaken for a translation of his Bengali Novel, Nadi-O-Nm River and a woman.
This new edition of Humayun Kabir’s Men and Rivers brings back into print a classic that not only received critical acclaim in India and England on its first publication in 1945, but also broke totally new ground in at least two directions.

Firstly, while regional novels had become a fairly common feature of fiction by the nineteen-forties in most Indian languages, the English language fiction of India had no yet ventured into the back woods as confidently as this work did. Set on the banks of a river deep inside what is now Bangladesh, the novel presents people who live and events that happen as if the British had never conquered India. Also of course, it needed a particularly venturesome publisher to put such a book into print. Its publication was a feat by itself amid the acute shortage of paper that prevailed in wartime India, and the publishers did not know from former to former whether enough paper would be available for printing to reach the last page even of such a slender volume.

Secondly, this was a greater achievement; this novel invaded some bastions of orthodoxy carefully nourished by Englishmen. India was still part of the British Empire and leading Indian university s were academic purists in their approach to the study and teaching of English literature. Yet “Men and River” became the first novel in English by an Indian author to be prescribed for reading as a non detailed text in English by Madras University for its inter – Arts students. Mysore University followed suit soon after, that this should have happened long before the author was appointed Educational Adviser to the Government of India as creditably upon him as it does upon these Universities.

The University prescription set an academic seal on the critical acclaim the book had enjoyed on first publication and vindicated the idealism of its
publisher. A generation of University students also were enabled to study a text totally native to their terms of reference, and discovered to their joyous surprise in the English classroom that the rivers and East Bengal were much nearer to them in spirit as well as in reality that the Thames or the Mississippi.

This new edition is homage to that brave new world of Indian Publishing and of Indian readership. The text remains unchanged, but a glossary has been added to explain the words and terms of a land that is now a foreign country but was once the author’s home

Humayun Kabir has dedicated this novel “Men and Rivers” to his Apa, and Bhai Sahib Jahanara Begum and Abdul Majid.

****

MEN AND RIVERS: An Analysis

Humayun Kabir is a multi talented writer. Through his novel ‘Men and Rivers’ he has beautifully presented different point of views of life. There is optimism, pessimism, reality, comedy, tragedy, picturesque description and very touching emotions and feelings. The novel has ‘Men and Rivers’ covered the story of many generations, many families and the village life.

The novel begins with the description of a small village of Bangladesh called “Rahimpur”. There is a picturesque description of village life and village people and the keen observation of the author about the village life is clearly indicated in the novel.

Being a Muslim writer Humayun Kabir has subjectively as well as objectively presented the Muslim life style, Muslim philosophy, culture, beliefs, celebration, traditions etc., we can understand the knowledge and point of view of the writer about the Islam religion. The writer has used novel “Men and
Rivers” as a media to exhibit the Islamic philosophy of the rustic, ignorant Muslims.

The writer Humayun Kabir has very clearly presented a true picture of Indian poor farmer’s life, their problems and sufferings. The Nature to which they considered to be “God” they admired, worshiped. Nature which is life giving source for the man is at the same time life running source also. Nature is so powerful and it has abundant strength. Man is so weak, helpless before nature. Here has in the novel also nature though in the beginning makes the lives of men, later causes total destruction of the villagers who depend on nature.

The writer is successful in presenting the wonderful description of different seasons, the rustic life, the peasants how they begin and end their hard working days, and how they work throughout the day all, this is presented so nicely that when we read the novel we will start imagining the beautiful pictures before our mental eyes.

“Men and Rivers” also deals with the uncertain miserable life of coastal area people, the fishermen, sailors and the people at the sea shore. Throughout the novel, the characters and the story revolve around the river ‘Padma’. The river ‘Padma’ is playing a dominating role in the novel. It changes and ruins the lives of people at large. So Ayesha an important character says, “one can never trust the Padma, she is a witch, that has swallowed hundreds of villagers and men, she puts on an appearance of calm only to lure unwary boat”. Nazu mia a prominent character until the last breath was fighting with the waves of the river Padma. The ups and downs, the waywardness of the water are portrayed very touchingly. And even the minute changes of the river can not escape his observation.
In the novel, we find a fine description of draught and its effect on the lives of innocent people the village folk suffered severely due to failure of crops and shortage of food grains. The formers, their womenfolk and children wandered about seeking roots and grass with which fill the sense of emptiness in their stomach. The children for the whole day would hang around their mothers asking for the food. But what could the poor women do? They threw a handful of rice in a pail of water and boiled it till turned into a thin gruel. This gruel more water than rice, they gave to the children, but they were not satisfied and cried for more, like skeletons the men moved about shadows of their farmer slaves. They cursed their fate. Some of the more reckless among the farmers killed and ate their cattle for they argued we have food neither for the cattle nor for ourselves. The cattle will die in any case and perhaps we shall also die, which is better that we to live ourselves or that we should all punish together? Such a miserable condition was the farmers of that time.

Men were anxious to sell their land for a bag of grains but where were the buyers? Men wanted to see their homesteads, and in some cases even their daughters and wives infact, everybody wanted to sell but nobody was willing to buy. It shows how helpless is man before nature. Inhumanity, cruelty, violence and social evils spread in the society because of the inevitable, helpless situations of life.

The farmers were suffering and desperately looking towards the sky with a hope of a single drop of rain, but at last they were happy that the rain started. But soon the men who had welcomed the rain felt their joy turn to fear. The rear to anger to bitterness, and despair as they saw the water rise on all sides. The
tanks filled out the fields we submerged and gradually the water crept up towards their homesteads.

On the forthright, the rain grew in intensity, a strong wind blew from the east, churning the waters of the Padma till they burst the banks and overflowed the land. The water rose steadily and soon the houses were full of water. Men woke up from their sleep to feel the cold waters lapping round their beds. Mothers hurriedly clasped their babies in their arms, and rushed out to escape, but where could they go? As far as eye could see in the blinding shower of rain, the land was one vast sheet of water. Only the trees stood out here and there like islands in an inland sea. Houses were washed away those that with stood the first rush, of water soon crumbled down. Men climbed on the roots and sat shivering in the rain while the carcasses of dead cattle floated past.

When morning broke at last, it was strange and desolate world that the survivors saw. Familiar landmarks had been swept away. There was hardly any trace of the village. A few fallen in roofs indicated where the houses had been on the vast desolation water floated a few of boats black sports that were a pathetic symbol of man’s insignificance before the elemental forces of nature

Thus we can see the suffering, problems and miserable condition of man in the Indian countryside life. We can also observe man is just helpless before the vast strength of nature. And all the characters and the story of the novel “Men and Rivers” undergo these incidents.

Humayun Kabir in his novel “Men and Rivers “ deals with the life of two simple peasants cum sailors, who were great friends and achieved richness through their hard, sincere and continuous work throughout their lives. They
went through lot of sufferings and problems in their life. They represent the common poor farmers of India and how they became successful at last.

The novel begins with the description of the beautiful river ‘Padma’ and Nazu Mia was watching that Nazumia a heavy, sincere, proud, dignified, confident self respected man. Nazumia remembers his past and takes a flash back of his memories and remembers how he has entered and built a new place called ‘Rahimpur’. His hard and continuous struggle he remembers. Then we find the other characters “Ayesha mother of the Nazumia and ‘Malek’ was son of Nazumia are being introduced. It is said to Malek that since the death of his mother, Malek was brought up with lot of care and affection of his granny Ayesha and father Nazumia, Malek was a young naughty boy doing adventurous things. His father wanted to make lot of money, lands and property for Malek Thus Nazu mia frequently used to visit different unknown, unnamed islands, by crossing the dangerous river Padma Once, while crossing river Padma suddenly Nazu mia and his companions get drowned in the river, they all died except ‘Bashir’ fighting the waves of river.

The new of Nazumia’s death spreads very fast in the village. Malek and Ayesha suffered a lot; the writer is successful in arousing tears in the eyes of the readers by explaining the pitiful, miserable condition of young Malek and old Ayesha. Ayesha unable to bear the shock of her son’s death, she herself dies on the seventh day near the river Padma.

Then Bashir an old man and two maids called Kulsum and Gulabi were taking care of the young orphan Malek. But Bashir an intelligent fellow, soon realized that Managing young Malek and his property will not be possible for them. Hence he went to Panchyat and declared the problem. That time Asgarmia
honest, and faithful, dynamic person, but a big enemy and rival of Nazu mia had become the panchayat.

Though everybody in the village knew that once upon a time Nazu mia and Asgrmia were great friends but later turned to be so big enemies they used to become furious even to listen the name of one another. But nobody knew the reason of their enmity.

But Asgarmia as an honest, trustworthy man, and no one in the village was capable as well as willing to bring up and take care of young orphan Malek and his property, all the villagers together made an agreement and gave responsibility to Asgar mia. Hence Asgrmia brought young Malek to his home and brought up him like his own son.

Asgar Mia’s wife Ameena a very beautiful, mild, soft natured, caring woman. She too loved and brought up Malek like her own son. She bethroded all the motherly affection to Malek. Malek at home also got a sister ‘ Nuru’ a pretty, young, innocent daughter of Asgar mia. Both Nuru and Malek were friends and brought up like brother and sister.

Asgrmia, Ameena Nuru and Malek were living happily, meantime another big problem arises. The draught and unlimited heavy rain brings tragedy not only to Asgrmias family but also to all the villagers of Bangladesh.

Hence all of them with great efforts remained alive with this natural calamity but their condition was miserable, they sailed to a different place.

By the time Asgrmia had become old and tired with the struggle of life he had become pessimistic and despair. But young Malek was hopeful, he had become youth Ameena could not live for a long time as she died of her ill health.
‘Nuru’ the young innocent, charming but matured girl was taking care of all her mother’s responsibilities at home, after the death of her mother. And Malek was looking after fields under the guidance of Asgarmia.

In the meanwhile Malek and ‘Nuru’ unknowingly, fell in love with each other. Their love was deep and relationship was infatuated. Asgar was least aware of all this. But this secret affair was at last revealed. Asgar mia came to know the love relationship between Malek and Nuru. He straightaway denies the marriage and love affair between Malek and Nuru.

Both the young lovers ‘Malek’ and ‘Nuru’ become distracted greatly disturbed and shocked. They do not know what to do where to go and whom to say but they are eager to know the reason why Asgrmia refuse their love affair or marriage.

Though Asgar mia was very reluctant, they forced and compelled him to tell the reason.

Ultimately Asgar mia inevitably reveals the secret or the reason, the writer till last maintains the secret, suspense and arouse more and more curiosity to know the secret. And at last the secret was open to both the lovers and the readers that, Malek and Nuru are actually brother and sister in their blood relations. They are the children of same mother ‘Ameen’ AsgarMia’s wife.

Nazu mia and Asgar mia were great friends. They worked and lived like brothers. But when they grew young Asgar mia liked and loved his cousin Ameena. He was aspiring to marry her. But Asgramia’s aunt refused it, as Nazu mia is richer and had more property. She married her daughter Ameena to Nazu mia. Though Asgar mia tried to convince Nazu mia not to marry Ameena, but adamant Nazu mia did not listen to his friend’s problem. He was least bothered and got married to Ameena.
Thus the close friendship of childhood broke into enmity. Ameena though loved Asgar mia, after the marriage she forgot her love and lived a pious, faithful married life with Nazu mia. But Nazu mia by nature was a suspicious man. He started doubting on Ameens, that she has continued her love affair with Asgar mia. He went on torturing, troubling and punishing Ameena. Ameena in the mean while gave birth to a baby boy that is Male. The clashes continued at last Nazu mia divorced the innocent Ameena. Ameena by that time had lost her mother and no one was there to take care of her, she was disparate and attempting for suicide. At that time Asgar mia stopped her, tried to console her brought a hope in her life. And infact, soon he convinced her to get married him and both Asgar mia and Ameena got married. And the fruit of their union was Nuru.

Thus listening to all this truth and secret by Asgar mia, both the young lovers Malek and Nuru stood stupefied, movement less and they were totally helpless. Like Thomas Parady’s novels. Humayun Kabir brought a pessimistic note at the end. The characters are helpless before the fate. He proves that man is just a puppet in the hands destiny.

Even Asgar mia was helpless at last Malek leaves both Nuru and Asgar mia and sails to the unknown place as he was unable to accept Nuru as his sister. Nuru being a responsible daughter followed her father. And helpless Asgar mia stands still with the situation. They still continued their lives with a new hope and positiveness as they all were the sons of soil.

Humayun Kabir’s is basically a good story taller. His fictional narratives are very interesting enter and entertaining. The way he has women the plot of the novel “Men and Rivers” . He has used a unique style of Presenting remarkable presenting the modem tarp, resend to the past the incidents from Past to past.
through the flash back technique and also so from Past to Present. He seems to be artistic and creative at constructing plot for his fictional writing.

Humayun Kabir has focused and mainly emphasized on the poor Indian farmers, their lives problems critical condition etc, he begins the story describing a river called Padma and then move the village life and the character one by one when he went on explaining the character we readers start imaging the character and pictures before our eyes. Thus we can the write Say that is successful in presenting a picturesque description.

Another admirable quality about the writer's writing is that he was able to arouse and sustain the interest and curiosity among the readers till the end of the novel. Especially towards the end the curiosity increases in multiplication.

The Plot is simple, clear and it is women with an interesting technique and a interesting story. There is a triangle love story between two close friend Nazumia, Asgar Mia and Ameena. Ameena and wished married but it would not become possible and Ameena Asgarmias loved and gets married to Nazumia their married life was not happy, hence they got divorced and again Asgar Mia and Ameena gets married lived a happy married life. Later the son of Nazumia and Ameena that is ‘Malek’ and the daughter of Asgar Mia and Ameena that is ‘Nuru’ unknowingly falls in love, but towards the end, young lovers realized that they are helpless before the blood relations. They cannot marry as they are actually brother and sister. It was a touching sympathetic and pitiful condition of both the young lovers. Even Asgar Mia stands still unable to do anything. All the characters at the end helpless before the destiny.

Thus we can remember the novels of Thomas hardy in which destiny plays very important role and Man is just a puppet in the hands of destiny.
Through novel the writer Humayun Kabir has presented the very serious problems of Indian farmers and sailors, like drought, heavy rainfall Poverty. He has also discussed the tragedies and suffering of these people so effectively that when we read about them we get tears in our eyes. Such sensitive touching description Humayun Kabir’s has presented.

In Men and Rivers’ Humayun Kabir has used different settle beautiful techniques to describe the novel. Here we can see the optimism of Robert Browning. Pessimism of Mathew Arnold, ‘Realism of Thomas Deckens’, Picturesque description of Tennyson, emotions and feelings like Wordsworth. Thus Humayun Kabir was successful in bringing the different parts of life in the same novel.

The writer has used “flashback” technique to describe the important incidents. From the present the characters take us to the past incidents and again we come to back to the present situation. For example in the beginning of the novel itself Nazumia from his present takes us to his past how he began his career in that unknown island. Similarly towards the end Asgarmia takes a flashback and present all the situations, incidents and fact which have happened in the past again and brings back to the present situation.

The greatness of Humayun Kabir lies in arousing and sustaining the interest of the story till the end especially the readers become more and more curious towards the end to know the reason why Asgar did not permit both Malek and Nuru to get married.

The use of ‘irony’ made in the novel is admirable. The writer has presented a real picture of man and life and irony between man and nature very effectively.
 Though the novel has a serious problem some minor characters like Kulsum, Ramzan, Aziz are created to make situations lighter. They please the readers they make the readers laugh through their foolish actions.

The language used in the novel is simple but very clear even a common man can easily read and understand the concept of it. This simple language Humayun Kabir has used because he is presenting the life illiterate rural peasants. And the illiterate peasants cannot use the scholarly language.

We can see the use of colloquial words here and there in the novel which gives a native touch and much deeper meaning to the situation.

The writer has used very knowledgeable, scholarly, philosophical ideas by creating the character like Faqir. Every word he had spoke a great meaning and a philosophy behind it.

Similarly we can see the use of simile in the novel for example when Ayesha was speaking about the river Padma she said “Today she is tense like a tiger about to spring upon its prey”. We also see the use of metaphors and personification in the novel most of the time.

Thus we can say the writer has a unique style of writing. He made the readers laugh, he made them to cry, he made them to think, and he made them to feel along with the characters. The writer presented a real picture of Indian Society. He holds a mirror to the life of Indian common man through the novel Men and Rivers.

The novel “Man and Rivers” is not a comic novel. The novel begins with a serious note and also ends with a serious note. But it doesn’t mean that there is no humour in the novel. Because there are many incident, many situation and characters which arouse and create humour among the readers.
Kulsum, Aziz Bashir, Ramzan and many other such characters through their foolish talks stupid actions they create humor throughout the novel for example Aziz was one of the famous humorous character. For every instance and any situation by remembering his wife Kulsum he used to irritate the other characters. But this irritating behavior and talks create humor among the readers. But whatever he speak may look foolish but actually he was speaking with intelligent things. Thus once Asgarmia said Aziz, “you are a good fellow, but don’t know when to talk and when to keep quiet”.

Similarly the character of Ramzan though he was healthy like devils like appearance he was using his mind very less. He was physically a strong man but mental like a small child. Thus his actions and speech was arousing humour.

Even the attitude and behavior of Kulsum with Malek, Ayesha and Bashir chacha was foolish and some time meaningless. Everybody around her used to make fun of her, as she was little foolish. These foolish actions and behavior of others with her makes the readers laugh. But it is Aziz her husband who was equally foolish used to say that actually she was very wise ad she spoke very intelligently every time.

There is light humour and some time there is intelligent humour through the main characters like Nazumia and Asgar Mia. Though the novel has serious note there are some incidents which make the situation lighter by arousing humour among the readers.

Humayun Kabir was really very strong in presenting the irony of life through his novel Men and Rivers. Irony present here in the novel is mainly between Man and nature. Human life is depending on nature. It helps man in all the ways; it gives him a beautiful, comfortable, peaceful, prosperous life. And the
same nature also has a destructive negative effect. Here in the novel it causes
total disaster; it ruins the lives of many people who depend on it. It makes lives
miserable and critical. The river Padma plays dominating and dangerous role,
thus it is said in the novel,” Padma in Bisak is hungry Padma, Padma, Padma in
the rains is angry and Padma in autumn is treacherous Padma”. Ayesha after the
death of her son is asking the river Padma ironically, “return my son to me, O
witch stop your mockery”. Thus the river swallowed and ruined many lives and
Nazumia and his family is also one of them.

Similarly the wide spread draught and over burst of rain also damaged the
lives of thousands of people. They suffered miserably. Thus the writer with the
detailed description present the irony of man and nature. Humayun Kabir proved
that nature is life giving source for the man, was also life taking source.

Another irony in the novel is Nazumia and Asgarmia were friends from
the childhood. They lived close like brothers. But unfortunately both the friends
liked the same girl called Ameena and Nazumia gets married to Ameena. Thus it
becomes the main cause or reason for ruining their friendship and also it changes
the lives of many people.

Similarly we see another ironical situation in the novel Men and Rivers
wherein Nazumia who was so proud of himself and was becoming furious, even
to listen the name of Asgarmia, such a persons son ‘Malek’ later has to depend
on Asgarmia and Asgarmia who hated most to his rival Nazumia took care of his
son as if his own son. He showered all the love and affection on Malek. This is
we can say an irony of destiny before man.

We also find Irony at the situation where, Ameena who was snatched
away by her son and sent out of the house to the same Ameena later life plays
such a drama or that she herself took care of her she got the opportunity to bring up her child but not as Malek’s mother but like Nuru’s mother.

We can also find irony at the situation where the two bitter enemies and rivals children Malek and Nuru falls in love with each other. They were least aware of their the reason of enmity between their fathers and they were also unaware about their blood relations and later when they come to know that both Malek and Nuru were actually the children of the same mother. They were just helpless. In irony of life dancing before them. Such a beautiful irony the writer has presented. an

Thus in many more situations of the novel Men and Rivers, writer Humayun Kabir was successful in fact made a remarkable contribution in presenting the irony of life. These ironies indicate that man purposes and god disposes, life is very uncertain though but something unexpected thing happen and that is the way of life.

Though we have pessimistic note in the novel towards the end we also find positiveness in the character who accept life as and how it comes to them. Humayun has created bold, courageous, strong willed, characters but not the weak coward to accept the defeat of the life.

CONCLUSION:

Humayun Kabir wrote only one novel which is considered an embodiment of Indian ethos. Many Indian characters are treated here symbolically. The river Padma stands for the Ganga and the two villages for Pakistan and India. The Faqeer represents the great Indian tradition of saints and Ammajan plays the role of an Indian matron. Chacha stands for hope and aspiration, while Asgar and Nazumia for enmity. Especially the end of the novel is symbolic and meaningful.
Malik leaves his village as Muslims left for Pakistan. So the novel reads like an allegory. Basically Humayun Kabir is a poet. His career as a novelist is secondary. Maybe this is the reason why his prose is poetic. As far as Humayun Kabir's writings are concerned, the poetic style and the rich imagery drawn from nature and rural characters play a vital role. This is why Humayun Kabir's literary career is unique in the history of Indian writing in English.
Works Cited:


Tariq Rehaman, The Nation, Karachi, op. tit., p. 49.


Anita S. Kumar, "Twilight in Delhi - A Study in Lyricism," Indian Literature, pp. 30-31.


K. A. Abbas, Reflections in a Mirror - Rice and Other Stories, op. tit., p. 103.


http://english.aizeonpublishers.net/content/2014/2/eng56-61.pdf