Chapter : IV
Mujtaba Ali's Novels & Stories

It is indeed a tough task to put some of the writings of Mujtaba Ali under proper and definite literary type; and even it does not seem to be easy to define them according to the principles of literature. Consequently there may be division of opinions among the critics. In this regard four books of Mujtaba can be cited as examples. Though these four books are entitled as novels, but question has been raised whether these four books can be called novels on over-all considerations.¹ These four books are:

1. **Abisvasya**: Published in 'Des' from 7th November 1953 - 3rd April, 1954.
2. **Sabnam**: Published in 'Des' from 14th May 1960 to 27th August 1960. Published in the form of book in 1960.

It is better to have a few words regarding novel before the analytical considerations of these four books.

Out of the various trends of literature, novel comparatively belongs to the present age of ours. The definition of novel goes on changing with the space of its development. Novel can not be restricted to any definite arena of definition. New analytical studies on novels synchronise with the change of times. As a result, it is undoubtedly a harder task to decide a comprehensive definition of novel which can be acceptable to all.

Nevertheless, we may try to roughly determine the real character of novel. World famous writer Sommerset Maughm has written while defining novel:
"The story the author has to tell should be coherent and persuasive; it should have a beginning, middle and an end; and the end should be the natural consequence of the beginning. The episodes should have probability and should not only develop the theme, but grow out of the story." ²

An English critic has given alongside a methodical definition of novel. It is cited here:

"Novel is a narration in prose, based on a story in which the author may portray character and the life of an age and analyse sentiments and passions and the reactions of men and women in their environment." ³

Some of the features of novel come to our notice from this very definition:

a. A novel should have a plot of its own.
b. A novel is to be written mainly in prose form.
c. Particular characters as a particular age are to be delineated in it.
d. Some men and women from the world of fancy and the analysis of their sentiment, emotion and reaction are also to be portrayed in it.

That is, representing a particular period of time the characters of a novel with an honour to a particular sort of realism will speak and behave. Secondly here the ‘environment’ indicates a particular period of time. Thirdly, psychological analysis is the central point with reference to the nature and behaviour of the men and women of the novel. Keeping all these definitions in mind, it can be said for the nonce – Plot, character, dialogue, environment and criticism of life – a prose-fiction studded with these five ornaments can be called a novel. ⁴ In this regard we remember Henry James (1843-1926), a noted novelist of English literature. He wrote in his ‘THE ART OF FICTION’ 1884:

"A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life." ⁵
This "direct impression of life" is the actual point about a novel. Novel reflect a life. It analyses the pros and cons of life. In the words of Henry James 'try and catch the colour of life itself'. The plot of a modern novel develops through the characters, and by unveiling the finer aspects of the psychological world of the characters. For which we have to take the help of 'internal monologue' or 'stream of consciousness'. It is only then the main motif of a novel does not lie in mere narration of the story.

All the age old conceptions regarding novel have gone on shifting from the very early part of the 20th century. Though prior to 20th century there had been the practice of reflecting human life and of making a peep into the mind of man in novels, but up to date assessment of the new ideas and conceptions of human nature had not been so much as it is today. There has been a world wide tremor following investigative studies on human nature during the initial part of the 20th century and so naturally there comes radical change over the style and development of the novel. Because by this time the novel has become a portrait of life in the form of narration and dialogue of those human beings who are brought up in a particular society and environment. At that time an important event occurred in the history of the world. Sigmund Freud and his disciple Young explained their psychoanalytic theory in 1909. The method and theory of such psycho-analysis have helped tremendously to change the course of later novels.

It is indeed our good fortune that Bengali novel right from the very beginning was not confined to mere narration of stories. The practice of peeping into the inner world of mind was also there. Right from the appearance of 'Biṣabṛksa', 'Krisna Kānter Will', 'Cokher Bāli', 'Caturanga', Bengali nov-
els gradually took up a stable tradition due to contributions of Saratchandra, Tarasankar, Manik and Bibhutibhusan etc. It is 20/25 years ago from the publication of the first novel of Mujtaba Ali, the Bengali novels began taking new turns. It is to be kept in mind that the time referred is significantly an important one that falls between the two world wars. By this time the theories of Freud and Karl Marx have throughout the world put a question mark in the world of consciousness of human beings. A radical change went on occurring in Social, national, economic, moral and intrinsic life of man during both pre and post world war periods. Sense of values is ever changing. These elements have also influenced Bengali novel in more than one way. There appears one after another—'Pather Pancali', 'Padmanadir Mâjhi', 'Putul Nācer Itikathā', 'Secher Kabitā' and many more novels. It is really a matter of great boldness to engage oneself in the authoring of novels at such particular time. Mujtaba exhibited that boldness. He showed a different sort of taste even in the selection of subject matter. He maintained his own style in the world of creations. But it is crystal clear that Mujtaba has not made his novel as his sole world of literary activities. It was against his nature to confine him in the so-called creative works. That’s why without learning to novel and poetry to a maximum degree, he rather completely introduced a new tradition on the basis of his acquired experiences. Nobody preceded such tradition, nor did any one follow it. This is the biggest reason on the part of Mujtaba of restricting him to just four novels.

A. Abisvasya:

The story of Mujtaba's first novel 'Abisvasya' is wonderful and of exceptional character. Madhuganj is a small sub-divisional town. coming here
young Irish chap called David-O-Rally of 20/22 years old as a newly appointed Superintendent of Police felt attracted towards its natural beauty and men. The novel ‘Abisvasya’ consisting of sixteen chapters has its beginning in this way. The story has gradually taken an interesting turn from the second chapter. In exact words of Mujtaba Ali. "প্রেমচতুর্ক ধরনীতি হল। এর মহকুমা শহরটি ও-রেলিকে দেখে প্রথম দর্শনেই ডালোয়েসে ফেলো।"

Apart from being a Superintendent of Police, he is also a European. Nevertheless, O-Rally breaking the barriers of prevailing traditions as well as freeing himself from the shackle of aristocracy began by degrees to be closely intimate with the local people as well as with the low-born persons too. Such type of nature and behaviour of O-Rally faced scathing criticism in the English society; but O-Rally time and again proved to be a man of exceptional nature. Sneering at the amorous offer of the girls of the English society, he came to Maddhuganj from England within a year along with his newly married wife Mebbol. Spending a fortnight at Kolkata, when he returned to Madhuganj, he seemed to be comparatively of grave nature. Avoiding the club and friends, he started somewhat a secluded life. Even mild-natured Mebbol also happened to be criticised in the society for the abrupt changes in the life of her husband right after their marriage. On the other hand, a dangerous rumour was in air that Mebbol seemed to be inclined to native Butler. The talk of the unnatural way of life of O-Rally and Mebbol got to be shelved for sometime owing to a murder case and the incident of a suicide case of an officer of a tea garden. By this time, Mebbol became a mother of a son-child. For the baptism of the new born child O-Rally arranged a pompous function. But problem arose that clergyman Jones was a Protestant, so how would he baptize a
catholic child? There came a big problem in the selection of the ‘Godfather’ of the child. O-Rally was a catholic. A ‘Godfather’ of a catholic child ought be from catholic section. At last, the only catholic Butler Joysurya of Madhuganj became the Godfather of Patrick – the son of O-Rally. Even keeping in mind all sorts of frownings of the English society, O-Rally adopted it as the last means. Thus went away four years. It was decided that Mebbol would go back to England with her child. Patrick would get his education there. It was planned that O-Rally would cause his son and wife to board a train at a station which was twenty miles away and afterwards Jaysurya would help them to board a ship and then they would start for their respective country.

Days elapsed away. O-rally spent a solitary life for a year. He even did not attend the European club and he tried to human contact as far as possible. Hush-hush whispers spread far and wide gradually that Mebbol and son did not seem to have reached England. When such whispering was going on, O-Rally was transferred to Radhapur; and that very vacant post was filled up by one Sommerset Dean who happened to be trained from Scotland Yard and Dean had O-Rally’s bunglow as his residence. After a few days at dead of night, while Dean was sitting on the varandha he got frightened seeing a supernatural sight. Same incident repeated in the second night, too. Three persons coming from the bedroom of that old bunglow were going down the stairs. Dean chased them with pistol in the second night. But the three figures mingled in the air under light darkness near the big rose-apple tree of the garden.

Meanwhile, Mr. Dadny, Inspector General of Police, came to Madhuganj. By that time many a rumour about O-Rally’s family had already spread everywhere. Mr. Dadny in order to rescue O-Rally from this slander started making
inquiries about Mebbol and her son Patrick. It was learnt from Joysurya’s Ceylone-based home that it was seven years Joysurya had not to gone back to his village. Doubt appeared to be obvious for the I.G. He order Dean to make an inquiry of the matter very secretly. Taking the incident of three vanishing figures in mind seriously, Dean exhumed three pieces of skeletons from the garden of the bunglow. One of them was of large size, and the other was of medium size and the third one belonged to a child.

The final part of the incident took a sudden turn. Smiling palely, O-Rally handed over to I.G. a long letter addressed to his colleague Mr. Shome. It was actually not a letter but a long note of confessions—a secret plan of murdering the son, wife and the employee. Almost half of the novel is decorated with the description of this tragic letter. It bears the narration of how O-Rally being defeated at the hand of some unseen power advanced towards the path of sins. The novel ends with the description of the tragic catastrophe of O-Rally.

O-Rally started the tale of the tragic catastrophe of his life from the 14th chapter through the writing of a letter to Shome.

The biggest event in the life of O-Rally, who was almost alone in the world, was his meeting with a woman named Mebbol.

"...আমার জীবনের সবচেয়ে স্বর্ণধর্মী ঘটনা, মেবুলকে দেখা, তাকে পেয়েও না-পাওয়া।
... আমার সঙ্গে সমুদ্রের চারি চক্ষের মিলন হল নিন্দা মধ্যে—নীলামুখ আর নীলাকাশ সেদিন বর্ষপূঞ্যে আত্মীয় কিশোর রৌদ্রে দেখানি প্রসারিত করে দিয়েছিল।
সে সমুদ্র মেবুল।" 6

Love was transformed into marriage.

The ultimate truth of life was unveiled before O-Rally as soon as the newly married couple came to Madhuganj—O-Rally was impotent. All the
advice of the doctors proved abortive. Passing night after night hungrily, Mebbol at last once at dead of night came to butler Joysurya’s abode. Thus it began and ended with a son-child-Patrick. The course of life of O-Rally took a rapid turn. Through the birth of Patrick and of Joysurya’s becoming Patrick’s godfather—and many more pushed Mebbol far, far away from O-Rally. Being unable to carry the unbearable load of the accursed life, O-Rally adopted that very extreme decision. O-Rally invited also Joysurya to a farewell dinner arranged for Mebbol on the night prior to her departure for England. He mixed arsenic secretly with pudding, and then he himself served it to them as the last item of the menu.

It was described in the long letter—the tale of the agonies of his life and the means of untaxing him from the burden of such agonies. The unspeakable helplessness of O-Rally resulting from his sexual imbecility has touched the readers’ heart. Sexual inability and the psycho-neurosis that came into existence from such inability—and at last the murder—such subject had rarely been used in Bengali literature. So, from the point of subject matter ‘Abisvasya’ is first of all a novel with exceptional character. That the subject itself stirred Mujtaba to some extent is apprehended from the comments of the critic Dr. Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay:

“অবিশ্বাস্যায় উপন্যাসটি ‘দেশ’ সামাজিক ধারাবাহিক প্রকাশিত হয় কার্তিক ১৩৬০ থেকে ২০ চেত ১৩৬০। এই সময়ে (১৯৫৫) তার পার্চ রোডের বাসায় বর্তমান নিবন্ধকরকে অলীসাহেব বলেছিলেন, দেখেন এমন একটা বিষয় নিয়ে লিখছি, যা একই সঙ্গে অবিশ্বাস্য আর সামাজিক। পরে মনে হয়েছিল, তার মন্ত্র কেবল একটা দায়ী নয়, যথাযথই একটা উপস্থাপনক স্পর্শকর্তার বিষয় নিয়ে তিনি জীবনের ছবি একেছিলেন।”

Mujtaba wrote in another letter addressed to Sagarmay Ghose:

“Sex নিয়ে লেখা যে কত শক্ত তা আমার কম্প্লার্ট ছিল। শেষ কোন অধ্যায় লিখতে
Infact, the whole novel is woven with the threads of sexual problem. Sexual unsuccessfulness and the complex state of mind resulting from it are the main materials of the novel. The author has shown in ‘Abisvasya’ how two innocent man and woman being blunt in a normal and healthy sexual life advanced towards the unkind realities of life. It is to be kept in mind, when this novel appeared, then Sigmond Freud had already become a wellknown name in the world of psycho-analysis.

“সব সমস্যার সমাধানই হয় ঘুমে, স্পষ্টে কিছু অবচেতন মনে।”

And he knows about the conditions – before the crime and after the crime.

“এই হল আহির মনের সবচেয়ে বড় শয়তানি। তোমাকে আত্মপ্রতায় দেবে, সাহস দেবে সব বাধাবিপ্লব হবে হাজারে সক্ষমতা বাতাসে দেবে, তারপর যে মুহুর্তে তার ইচ্ছামত কর্মী সমাধান হয়ে গেল, অমনি তোমাকে তোমার বিভীষিকার হতে সমর্পণ করে চলে যাবে।”

The conflict between conscious and subconscious minds has excellently been unfolded in the novel.

So far the characterization is concerned in the novel ‘Abisvasya’, the novelist laid stress upon a particular character and that is undoubtedly the protagonist – O-Rally. Infact, the novel has been embroidered with the threads of the tragic catastrophe of O-Rally’s life. The author has obviously spoilt the character from different angles – both externally and internally (Psychological aspect).

Outwardly O-Rally is a Police Super– responsible, ssincere, dutiful and strict. And so far the inner world of O-Rally is concerned, he is soft, emotional, a self-forgetful person with the sense of humanism and conscience. 
tender human sense works in the chambers of his heart. That's why, even being an employee under the English Government, he developed his intimate relationship with the local people. The heart of the readers has been drenched with sympathy for O-Rally because the other side of his being is more mightily influential. How a handsome, strong and stout and magnimous person was turned into a cold-blooder murderer— the mystery has been little by little unfolded by the novelist.

As he feels, the pangs of conscience, so he suffers from the state of inner conflict. The author exposed the mind of O-Rally through a long letter. He understands everything, so he analyses. Even his thinking related to sex was undistorted. So he very easily cited an excellent stanza for Shome from the Bible on sex. He described the picture of sex of the world. So, he was not surprised to see the naked idols on the walls of the temples of India, rather the real picture of this hidden but beautiful truth of life amazed him. His inner poetic mind was delighted. 11 His poetic mind was thoroughly engrossed in the unique beauty of his wife, but that very beauty turned to be unendurable to him. Every thing was upset totally. His physical inability maddened him.

Here O-Rally was defeated by ownself. Even understanding and knowing everything, yet a state of topsy-turviness ran through his life. The life of
O-Rally started to inch towards a dangerous catastrophe from that very night when Mebbol deserting impotent O-Rally went to the house of Jaysurya. Conflict, agony, frustration – particular by his physical inability meanwhile exasperated him. Now there stands a man called Jaysurya in between O-Rally and Mebbol. An unseen enviousness toward Jaysurya maddened him.

"ঐখানেই তো ভুল। জয়সুর্যের ধাক্কার মত কিছুই নেই, কিন্তু তার একটা সম্পদ আছে যেটা আমার নেই। সে সম্পদ কুকুর-বেড়ালেরও থাকে...!" ¹³

O-Rally comforted him time and again. Nevertheless, he wrote candidly in a letter of 22nd August to Shome:

"সব জেনে বুঝেও আমার মন অহরহ এক অস্বাভাবিক ভরে থাকত।" ¹⁴

Even after that he did not lose patience. He lived on the contrary with the load of agonies. But he could not keep himself in an unwavering position, when Mebbol began going far, far and faraway from his life. He only understood that this conflict would never be over, nor peace would prevail. And thinking in this manner, he took an extreme decision at a certain dawn in his drowsiness under the influence of his subconscious mind.

Mujtaba portrayed the character of O-Rally in such away that even after committing three consecutive murders, he did not fail to enjoy the sympathy of the readers. So, the compassion of the readers erupted at the end of the novel.

Quite a bunch of minor characters also helped to push the main story of the novel towards its catastrophe. Through the characters like Inspector Shome, Roy Bahadur Kashiswar Chakraborty, Somerset Dean, I G Dandy and others are associated with main and basis motif of the novel, but the novelist did not place emphasis on them, they were brought to focus if and
when needed. But the major female character, that is the heroine Mebbol even not getting much elaboration as well as not being a well developed character did not remain turbid before the eyes of the readers. The revelation of Mebbol's conflict and of her tender heart have also been bloomed here and there. In the words of O-Rally:

"সেই বাতে ভোরের দিকে মেব্বল জয়সূর্যের ঘরে যায়। সেই ভোরেই সে আমার পায়ের উপর তার মাথা রেখে অনেকক্ষণ ধরে কোরেছিল। তার চুল ডিগ্গে গিয়েছি, আমার পা ডিজে গিয়েছি। আমাদের মুখনের মুখ দিয়ে কোনো কথাই বেরয়নি।" 15

This very wild wailing of Mebbol saved the novel ‘Abisvasya’ from being a mere story of sexual debauchery. Mebbol reminds us Lady Chatterley’s Lover. In that very story of Lawrence, the wife surrendered to their family gardener owing to sexual impotency of the husband. Of course, it was being compelled to some extent. The novel ‘Abisvasya’ is nothing but of that ilk.

We want to cite another matter here. A special of a woman attained importance in the mind of Mujtaba Ali. Mujtaba closely observed many times in many occasions the loneliness of a woman, her emptiness, her helplessness and frustration in conjugal life, as the character of woman had been portrayed who happened to be forlorn, depressed and dejected in the translated work named ‘Prem’ of the Russian writer Nicholai Semonovich Leskof (‘Sayed Mujtaba Racanābali’ Vol V, p.229-289) or in the travelogue (‘Bhabaghure O Anyany’, Ibid Vol VII, p.191) and the novelist allowed the entrance of sex in his novel ‘Abisvasya’ through this companionlessness and unhappy psyche that prevailed in the conjugal life.

Infine, we want to mention a few points from the overall consideration of the novel ‘Abisvasya’.

1. Question arises regarding the title of the novel. The story of the novel...
is definitely liable to be believed. The psychological complexity, his problems, intricacies, of O-Rally and his search for the means of getting rid of such problems— all these bear the seal of unvarnished realities. And this is normal conclusion of psychological conflict. Anyway, but why is the novel entitled ‘Abisvasya’? In term of title of the novel, we find the careless bent of mind of the novelist.

2. The supernatural experience of Dean also points out one’s finger towards the title of the novel. The supernatural experience of Dean is quite redundant for the novel. Dean nodoubt helped in unveiling the mystery of O-Rally, but that could have been possible in some other way also. There was no importance of seeing the three supernatural figures.

3. Extraneously long discourses or description now and then hindered the novel from getting its solid structure. (For example, O-Rally’s discussion on religion in his letter and identical discussion in some other else)

4. As the writer is accustomed to light works, so this feature is also marked in the novel. Sometimes humour bloomed up.

5. The writer was himself linguist and scholar, so the parade of his learning had been exceedingly obvious in some occasion; and even redundently. It actually kills the charm of enjoying the novel.

**B. Sabnam:**

‘Sabnam’ is widely read novel of Mujtaba Ali. Sunil Gangopadhyay, a distinguished author of prose fiction and stories of modern era, wrote about ‘Sabnam’:

“শবনম উপাসনাস পড়তে পড়তে যে অবরত চোখের জল মোছে না, সে পাপ্ত্ব ছাড়া আর কিছুই না।”

16
‘Sabnam’ is primarily is a novel full of pathos. If we keep aside ‘Abisvasya’, the other three novels that succeeded it are woman-centric. In the process of analyzing ‘Sabnam’, a few words come to our mind first of all. Firstly, he wrote the novel keeping a remarkable part of his experiences in his mind and thought and that was his sojourn at Kabul. He upheld the incidents of those two years (1927-29) of his teaching career at Kabul in his two best books. The first one is ‘Desé-Bidjlese’ and the second one is ‘Sabnam’. And the most remarkable point to mention here that he completed both these at a stretch. So to say, he was equally attentive to these twin works. It is presumed that these two works appear to be like a fragmented picture of his autobiography. As ‘Sabnam’ is a novel – so it is quite abortive to search for autobiographical elements directly. But the more we read, the more we feel as if the writer is describing ownself. Like ‘Desé-Bidjlese’, we have that loyal servant-cum-friend Abdur Rahman, that young Bengalee teacher, that very Amanullah and that Kabul.

The second point, ‘Sabnam’ is abit different even from the angle of subject matter. Very few works are done in Bengali literature about Muslim women-out of the fewest, ‘Sabnam’ is unparalled. In the words of Prof. Sedesha Chakraborty:

"বাংলা সাহিত্যে অনেকবার পর্যবেক্ষণ সংগঠনের নারীরা তেমনভাবে আবহ্নিমাক
করেনি। জীবনের মত সাহিত্যে যেন অবরোধের অন্তরালে ছিল। ঐতিহাসিক উপন্যাসের শাহজাদি
প্রমুখের কথা ভিন্ন। যদী সকলের বর্ণানুরূপ নারীবাদ, যদী কেউকেও তার অবিশ্বায়ায়
চিত্র অন্তরের মধ্যে আশুতোষ মুসলমান সাংস্কৃতির অন্তরমহলে প্রবেশ করতে পারেননি। শব্দগুচ্ছ
চালিয়ে আমিনা ও মুসলমান নেতার মুখে বিলাসীকে সৃষ্টি করেছেন। এবং আরো কোন
কোন ঘটনার সংস্কল্প নারীর প্রজাতির সমস্ত দিকে চিত্রিত করেছেন। এই পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে
‘শব্দম’ ও ‘শহরইয়ার কে বিচার করতে হবে’।"

Though Ms. Chakraborty identified Sabnam as a woman of ‘minority’
community, but in reality Sabnam belongs to majority community, because the background is Afghanistan — it is neither Bengal nor India. From the perspective of such background Sabnam can not be ignored. The culture in which Sabnam was brought up was not at all conservatively an orthodox Islamic culture. Out of her nineteen years of age, she spent ten years in Paris and where she was reared according to the education, culture and fashion of that country. Sabnam does not belong to the class of Saratchandra’s Amina, nor to that of Bankim Chandra’s Jebunnisa or Ayesa. Sabnam is purely and genuinely Mujtaba’s own creation. In the domain of Bengali literature this creation is completely new and unprecedented.

The background of the novel ‘Sabnam’ is Kabul and moreover Afghanistan of 1927-29. Everybody knows that during that period the socio-political conditions of Afghanistan were at its peak. So in this novel can easily notice a historical background also. In fact, ‘Sabnam’ from A to Z is a love-novel. The use of this very background has repeatedly put the love story at stake and in reconcilement and vice versa.

The meaning of ‘Sabnam’ is ‘Sisirbindu’ (dewdrop). The heroine of the novel Sabnambanu is also like a dewdrop. She was just a young girl of nineteen. She spent long ten years of her childhood in Paris. She was the only favourite child a rich and aristocratic Afgan General named Aurangozub Khan. Since she had been in Parish, her education, culture, philosophy of life happened to be influenced with westernism. Particularly French culture was very much prominent in her. But still then both mullahcracy and conservatism were in vogue in Afghanistan. Of course, emperor Amanullah started reformative works all on a sudden as soon as her came to power. So, it is learnt at the very
beginning of the novel that he had already arranged ball-dance even in an orthodoxly queer and ugly country like Afganistan. The waves of madness swept over Kabul in the name of reforms.

At such back-drop as well as in an atmosphere of gently blowing cold wind, the meeting and love of Sabnam happened and bloomed with a young Bengalee teacher who was an emigrant in Kabul. The name of the boy is ‘Maznoon’, which means ‘mad’. Sabnam built and developed her emotional and dreamy bond with this poetically thoughtful young man. They two used to recite poems for each other. Lines from Hafiz, Iranian poet or Satyendranath Datta or wandering minstrel or Rabindranath were recited by these two innocent lover and beloved.

Sabnam recites:

“দিল তোমার দারায় কি পরীক্ষায় অজ্ঞ রাহ-ই ইশকরা
শিশুরাখনুস পন্দরদ কি পিনতাত্ত করলে অজ্ঞ।
সরো হৃদয় মনে করে প্রেম লুকায়ে রাখিয়ে পারে।
কী চার ফানুস মনে মনে তায় লুকায়েছে প্রেমকারে।”

The Bengalee lover tells:

“গুরুহিনী ‘হে কবিনা,
তাবলাবাস মোদে কি না?
রাজা হল তার মুখখানি; 
প্রেম ছিল হৃদয়ে ঢাকা।”

Thus went away the dreamful days. Conversation was through poetic lines. Love deepened and that ultimately led to their wedlock. First it was solemnized secretly but then overtly and publicly. Meanwhile, political instability began growing up in Kabul. Amanullah went beyond the limit in the name of reforms. He wanted to make the people of Afganistan ‘modern’ in term of costumes and etiquette within a short time. He gave importance to
female education and their liberation. The conservatives mustered strong against such abrupt efforts of Amanullah. The network of conspiracy began to be active in order to dethrone him. Seizing the opportunity a dacoit-leader called Baccha-e-Sakaw invaded Kabul. Rule of anarchy prevailed in Kabul. No sooner had we got a wink of such instability in the fourth chapter through the lips of Sabnam, than we got at the opening of the fifth chapter.

Yet this political instability could not obstruct the bond of love. But the hazards stepped in through some other window. One of the generals of Bachha extended his lusty hand towards Sabnam. Aurangazeb lived with last hope that since his daughter married an Indian citizen, so the help from the British Legation would have been enjoyed. But before that, the man of Bachha took away Sabnam. She went into hiding after gunning that accomplice of dacoit Bachha who craved to have Sabnam. The protagonist Maznoon prowled through out Kabul in search of Sabnam even braving those dreadful days. When Sabnam was not traced out even after searching the probable addresses, the hero at one time lost mental balance. The great uncle of Sabnam consoled him. This uncle was blind; but a great scholar and philosopher. Maznoon opened his enlightened eyes (awareness) at the words of this uncle. It seemed to him that Sabnam was not lost, but she lives and will live in the realm of his mind.

This is in brief the plot of the novel. The story is not developed with events and counter events, rather is to a greater extent it is having one direction. As it moves towards a single direction, so it is drab. The last phase of
Maznoon has been compared by some critics to mystical avowed activities.\footnote{Besides this, there is one more aspect in the novel to notice and that is the influence of Rabindranath. In course of reading the novel, it seems to us as if Amita and Labnya of ‘Sešer Kabita’ are talking. Though there is similarity between ‘Sešer Kabita’ and ‘Sabnam’ with reference to their poetic and romantic structure, yet Mujtaba applied wholeheartedly and abundantly many a Persian couplet in ‘Sabnam’; and along with it he used numberless Arabic and Persian words. The elements of Arabic civilization that were used by Nazrul Islam in his songs and poems were also employed by Mujtaba in his novel, and prose. He himself wrote in one of his letters:}

“‘Shabnam’ paše tomer dālo na lagākeo tār ekta ekta jhinīs tomer dālo lagār katha. Viskher dōkṣhaṭhā pāke muhr muhr fālsī dōkhā toshāpārī mōgha dāl kono bāngla tār anubād kore o upanāsē lāghīchī. Anubāde ektaikār shṇ bāḍāhi khamāi ni, guhō bāngla yādībhūt dēi bāl fālsī hṛn bājārā rākha asakha.”\footnote{Of course, in some particular occasions, the readers may think that this sort of application is imposes upon. For this reason the structure and characterization of the novel could not have been solid and flawless. The presence of the influence of Rabindranath also marred it in some cases. In this regard the comment of Gajendra Kumar Mitra deserves close attention:}

“ব্যবহারে তাকে অভিলভ্য করেছেন, প্রভাবিতও করেছেন। তাই তার উপন্যাসের মধ্যে যেটি প্রথম ও বোধ করি সমাবিক জনপ্রিয়—‘সই ‘শব্দম’-এ তার অজ্ঞাতসারেই ‘শেষের কবিতা’র প্রভাব এসে পড়েছে। সুভাষিত কথার মালা পেঁচে গেছেন, নেটা ক্রমশ ফেন নেশার মতো পেয়ে বসেছে তাকে। তাতে উপন্যাসের কাঠি হয়েছে। কাহিনী দৃশ্য বাঁধতে পারেনি তোমান। রূপহার লেখকের সে সর্বনিবন্ধটা হয়ে উঠেছেন, শেষের ট্রাজিক ঘটনাটি দিয়ে তার সামলাবার চেষ্টা করেছেন—তবু, উপন্যাস হিসেবে যাত্রা সার্বভৌম হওয়া উচিত ছিল তার মতো বহ-সাহিত্যাদিদী লেখকের পক্ষে, তা হ’লে পারেনি।”\footnote{In spite of that, the heroine of the novel ‘Sabnam’ named Sabnam is a different, exceptional and extraordinary character in Bengali literature. Such}
Type of female character is hardly found in Bengali novel. Infact, the novel has its two successful sides. Firstly, its romantic but pathetic appeal, and secondly, it is definitely the brightness of Sabnam’s character.

Sabnam, is well-educated, brave, extraordinary, intelligent and of personality. On the other hand, we get the expression of her tender heart every now and then. Above all, she is full of queerness, romantic and intelligent and reserved. In the words of the protagonist:

"আমাদের এ মেয়ে। সেবি আর বিশ্বয় মানি। ভয়ে আতঙ্কে তামাম কাবুল শহরের গা নিয়ে যায় দেখেছে—এই পাথর-ফাটা শৈতে শহরের রাস্তার মুখ পর্যন্ত পরিশ্রম হয়ে গিয়েছে, আর এ সেয়ে তারই বাচ্চাদের আনন্দের মোহরাও ছড়িয়ে কলকল খুলে করে হাসছে। প্রেমসাগরের কতখানি অতলে ডুব দিলে উপরের ঝড়ধুলা সম্বন্ধে এরকম সম্পূর্ণ নির্দিষ্ট উদাসীন হওয়া যায় না।"  

"কিন্তু সঙ্গে সঙ্গে আবার সবকিছু খবর রাখে" or ‘কবিতা শুনলে সে তারী যুশ্চী হয়।’ She took out revolver from under the yashmak and on the other hand, she deluged the life and heart of Maznoon with love. Taking everything into consideration, it is to be said that Sabnam is a unique woman. The protagonist Maznoon in comparison with Sabnam to a greater degree is lustreless. Since the autobiographical elements of Mujtaba are latent in the background of the protagonist, so the character could not have been of different type.

How deep and sincere were the thoughts of the novelist regarding the character of Sabnam are known from the own words of Mujtaba:

"বঙ্গলী মুসলিমান মেয়েদের নিয়ে লেখার মুখ্যকিল এই কারণে যে, যেখানেই পর্যায়-পুর্থা চালু সেখানে কোথেকে মেয়ের সঙ্গে সরল বন্ধুত্ব পর্যন্ত হয়ে পারে না। ... তবে বলতে পারো, শবনম লিখনী কি করে? সে তো Phastasia, কল্পনার তৈরী। অবশ্য তুর্কী রহষ্যের ইতিহাস অমিতমন দিয়ে পড়েছিল এবং আমানুৰ্বার মায়ের রং রং মায়ের কথা জানতুম। সেটা অনেক সাহস করেছে।"
C. Sahar-iar:

Mujtaba wrote 'Sahar-iar' after nine years of the creation of 'Sabnam'. It is also a female dominated novel. The hesitation that Mujtaba had of writing something centering a Bengalee Muslim girl had been overcome in this very novel. The novel was formed under the umbrella of his autobiographical properties. The protagonist is the writer himself. The background is both Kolkata and Santiniketan, and at the centre of the novel both Rabindranath and his songs had appeared time and again. Gajendra Kumar Mitra commented finding the direct involvement of Mujtaba in this novel:

"রাবিন্দ্রনাথ তার প্রেমনিত্য সমুদ্রে নিমজ্জনে চিহ্নিত করে দিয়েছেন। এতে যেমন 
একটা প্রচণ্ড বিষয়—যেমন কি 'মাটিতে' বলের বিশেষ অপরাধ ঘটে না—তেমনি বিপুল 
অসুবিধারও কারণ হয়েছে।" 26

The novel is also of exceptional type from the angle of the story itself. To speak the truth, in the novel of Mujtaba, episode did not get so much importance. Tale was invented just to carry the inner significance and 'Sahar-iar' is not an exception to this. Sahar-iar is a wonderful type of woman. It is her problem which is the nerve-centre of the novel. What is her problem? Externally she did not have only problem. The readers can clearly realise the true nature of her problem at the end of the novel. Prior to that, the novelist step by step in a slow manner led us to the vicinity of that particular problem.

The writer had a talk with Sahar-iar in a train. She was accompanied by her physician husband Julphikar Ali Khan. The husband is rich and belongs to an aristocratic family. Though he is a doctor, he does not have a medical practice, rather he is heavily engaged in research works and what and what is his meditation and cognition. As a result, he looks indifferent. Sahar-iar is a lady in full bloom of her youth. Their married life has so far witnessed long
ten years. Sahar iar is highly educated, and is a woman of refined taste and
culture as well as of exceptional personality. But the important matter, above
all, is that—a dedicated soul to Rabindra Sangit. She sings well and under­
stands the essence of song nicely. The only companion of Sahar iar in her
weal and woe, either at union or in separation is the song of Rabindranath. In
her own words: "আমার জীবন-বন্ধুর সঙ্গে যাত্রা করা ভালো। এই একটি মাত্র জিনিস।"

She has everything in her life, yet she seems to be without something.
Only husband and wife live in a palatial building a family consisting of just two
souls. The husband is absorbed in research works; and Sahar iar is alone and
moreover, she belongs to a Muslim family. Hence she wrote in a letter to the
writer:

"স্বাধীনতা বড় সম্পদ। আমারা, মুসলমান মেয়েরাও ক্রমে ক্রমে স্বাধীন হচ্ছি কিন্তু সে-
স্বাধীনতার ফল আমাদের করার সুযোগ পাচ্ছি কোথায়? মনে হয়, আমি যদি এককী কোনো নির্জন
ধীরেঢ়া বাস করচ্ছি, পাঁচালিয়ে তলক টাকা কিছু কিছু কি?" ।

The writer keenly observed her at different times in various ways. The
writer discovered an exceptional woman within his short spell of acquain­
tance. She is in reality a different kind of woman – self-confident, outspoken,
emotional, dutiful, sensible and a free-willed woman. The writer felt her in this
way:

"এমন কাজ কি করি? সামাজিক আত্মায়ক নিয়ে বাস্তু বলি সে তার সম্পাদ বায়
না—কাকটাই দুঃখ? উঠে, তা নয়। এ মেয়ে গতানুগতিক অর্থে শিক্ষিত নয়; এ মেয়ে বিদশা এবং
এর কর্মশাস্ত্র আছে। দিন-যাদি অন্তহীন প্রতিদিন প্রচুর নিষ্ঠুর নিষ্ঠুর তার থেকে বি
করে আনন্দ-বন্ধু বের করতে হয় সে সেটা খুব ভালো করেই জেনে।"

She is even indifferent to religion. The religious side of Rabindra Sangit.
dearer than her life, does not attract her. A terrible turn is notice in the middle
of the story. Sahar iar suddenly has become a disciple of a Muslim Saint. She
has started to overlook both husband domestic life due to her adherence to
this Muslim Saint. The writer was surprised, and to some extent, he was envious also of. Doubts began peeping into mind that the saint might be actually a hypocrite or a debauchee. Coming to the abode of the Saint, the writer discovered that the saint was already a known face to him. He is perfectly a philosopher-type of man and a friend of the writer himself. It was known that the Saint did not initiate anyone. So, on this ground, Sahar-iarr is not his disciple. She comes to the place of the saint without any cause. A letter played an important role to the conclusion of the novel. Sahar-iarr in a long letter unfolded herself from the very core of her life. Sahar-iarr became restless like a caged bird because of the agonies of her companionless life as well as being confined to a stereotyped way of life. She studied her circumstances of life thoroughly. She understood something and while something else appeared to be unintelligible to her.

"আমি এখনো ঠিক জানি নে, 'এ আমার কিছুর বাধা'; আমার অভাব কোনো নে, যার ফলে বিলাসবৈচিত্রের মাঝখানেও যেন কোনো এক অসম্পূর্ণতার নিপীড়ন আমাকে অশান্ত করে তুলেছিল। ...

আমার বিপর্য্যয়, আমার সমস্যা—পুরুষমানুষ কি কখনো নারীর মন বুঝতে পারে, চিনতে পারে, হদয় দিয়ে অশুভ করতে পারে?" 30

She was stricken with so many other questions of identical nature; and even she directly raised question about sexual life.

The last phase of the novel is unexpected and almost hard-to-be-believed. Simultaneous occurrence of three different events led the life of Sahar-iarr to a course of new turns. First, the big brick-built house which was ruining the very existence of Sahar-iarr at every tick of a clock was burnt to ashes. Secondly, the doctor made up his mind to go to Sweden along with Sahar-iarr for further improvement in his research works. And thirdly, she was going to
bear a child. When the writer asked Sahar-iar whether they would be able to meet again, she replied in an undertone “কী জানি কী হবে।” The novel progressed with Rabindranath and ended with Rabindranath, too.

The critic Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay has observed four different phases of the life of Sahar-iar.

“প্রথম তোর বাড়ির মসজিদ ঘরের মেয়ে অবরোধ ভেঙে কলেজে লেখাপড়া শিখে।

বিতৃত্য তোর সুগুহিনী,মমতামঝি সেবাপরায়ণা সদিশী, রবীন্দ্র-রাসিকা, মামী থাকলেও সঙ্গীত তোর সীমারহিত। পরিপূর্ণ চিরহ্রদুঃখে বিবেশ্যারিণী অতৃত্তব্য নারী।”

The assemblage of all the trait made her an unparalled woman. According to a pronouncement of one of the characters of the novel, Sahar-iar is ‘Agni Kanya’ (A fire-brand woman). The proper application of Rabindra Sangeet played an important role in the creation in characters or in the field of characterisation of the novel. The writer used Rabindra Sangit one after another according to the gravity of situations. The song were well-selected such as:

क. “क्यों वर्तना। बिहारी नवल ला बलिया कुसुम चिशने”
ख. “तोमार आमार ऐसे विरहेर अंतुरले कह आर सें ढूँढी बीढी”
ग. “आमार नयन”
घ. “यह मरने स्तारे पारे, चुपे चुपे भूमि एले”
च. “केन चेढ़े कुड़े तुम्मे दलिये दिलम ना”
छ. “जय करे तुम्हारे तारे कुड़े यदा ना”
ज. “बिन्दु तुम्ही अधारे ज्ञानीहे ध्वनितारा”
झ. “तोमार साजू संग्रह यतन कुमु रतने”
ञ. “हाटपुर कुड़ा सल्ला ना ये आर, कातर करे ग्राम”
ट. “हाओयाउं हाओयाउं बरा ये दान”
ठ. “भूमि नम नम रूप एस पारे”

इत्यादि।

These song only can open and expose the weal and woe, loneliness attachment of life of Sahar-iar in smaller limits. Even the poem “कुसुमनन्दा,’’
that belongs to the last phase of Rabindranath. Only the world “কুলে” (border) turned to be as “কোলে” (lap) in her life. This very novel is the perfect model of declaring that truth that how much elixir the song of Rabindranath can be in one’s life.

As the novel is dominated by the role of the heroine, so the other characters remain confined in. Only two other characters are prominent in the novel. First, the writer himself and the second one is Dr. Zulphikar Ali. Of course, Peer Aminur Rashid Majumdar and Bhutnath Khan played an important role to create an atmosphere for the formation and development of the sub-plot of the novel.

The greatest quality of the novel ‘Sahar-iyar’ is its reference to many autobiographical elements. Some pictures associated with the days at Santiniketan of the last part of Mujtaba’s life are present in it.

The second characteristic of the novel lies with the tendency of garru-lity. Hero also one finds the presence of unwanted philosophical discussion as well as the spread of unbraked talks; and as a result the structure of the novel has got interrupted. Besides this, the other remarkable side of the novel is that it has been pregnant from A to Z with philosophical thoughts and perception of life; and due to presence of this particular element, the mention of Rabindranath has been repeatedly in some way or other. The theme of the novel is that how a woman saying goodbye to depression, emptiness and opulence of life and breaking the barriers of fake traditions has again come back on the decent and beautiful track of life.

D. Tulanāhīnā:

Nakul Chattopadhyay wrote in ‘Grantha Paricay’ regarding the last novel
‘Tulanahina’ of Mujtaba Ali:

"‘তুলনা’নায়না’ সৈয়দ মুজতবা আলীর শেষতম উপন্যাস। এই উপন্যাসটি কোন পত্রিকায় প্রকাশিত হয়নি। পাত্রগুলি থেকেই সরাসরি গ্রহণকারী প্রকাশিত। এই গ্রহ সম্ভবতঃ যত্নের জন্য যায়, প্রকাশক কৃত্রিমক্ষেত্রে মণ্ডল এই ধরনের একটি উপন্যাস রচনার জন্য লেখককে অনুরোধ করেন। ‘তুলনাহিনাঃ’ বাংলাদেশ-ধার্মিকতা-সংগ্রামের অব্যাহত পরের রচনা। কাহিনীকন্ঠনাকাল বাংলাদেশের ধার্মিকতা আন্দোলন ও সংগ্রামের সময়। তৎকালীন বাংলাদেশের রাজনৈতিক ঘটনাবলী এই উপন্যাসে অনেকগুলি জায়গা নিয়েছে।”

‘Tulanāhīnā’ was published posthumously. As because after the composition of this novel Mujtaba took to his bed and passed away in 1974.

‘Tulanāhīnā’ was published in the form of a book in the month of April of the very same year of his passing away. So, let us make two decisions regarding the novel itself at first. Firstly, the novel was written at the request of the publisher. It was not created at the urge of his own heart. Secondly, it appeared without being corrected and revised and edited. Hence, it is comparatively lusterless and has fallen flat.

The background leading to the writing of ‘Tulanahina’ belongs to almost contemporaneous period. The pictures of a few months of the early parts of 1971 are found herewith reference to source of a personal relationship. The main sources of the novel are Kolkata, Agartala and Shillong. Along with it, we also get side by side the picture of instability in East Pakistan. Then Yahiya Khan was running the bulldozer of inhuman oppression on the people of East Pakistan. Many Hindus and Muslims of India have their ancestral roots in East Pakistan, so the anxiety of this country knew no bound. Even the kith and kin of Mujataba Ali were then in East Pakistan. So, the writer was analysing the situation as per the anxious state of his own mind. However, ‘Tulanāhīnā’ failed to be an informative creation in spite of its bases on the contemporary events.
The main theme of 'Tulanāhīnā' is love. Both the hero and heroine are Hindu—Kirti Choudhury and Sipra Roy. The hero and heroine of the first novel of Mujtaba are Christian and in the second and third novels the chief male and female characters are Muslims and in the fourth it is Hindu. It is indeed an example of wonderfulness. The novel ‘Tulanāhīnā’ is, too, heroine-dominated creation. Sipra, a woman of towering personality, has been the apple of eye of aristocratic circle of Kolkata. She also spent some time in Paris with her father. [In this respect a little bit of similarity is marked and found in between Sipra and Sabnam]

In the words of the writer:

“এমনিতে মনে হয় সে আর পাত্রটা টপ ক্লাস সোসাইটি গার্লেরই মতো—গার্ল বললে ব্যর্থ হয়, লেখিব বললে আবার অতিশোরোঝি হয়, যায়। ...পরিচিতি, নাতীয়তা, আচারসম্পত এ ধরণের শক্ত তার অভিধানে ছিল না, ...

...সামাজিক আচরণে কাউকেই খুব কেশী কাছে যেখানে নিজ না, আবার হৃদ যায় হৃদ যাও সাহেবীয়ানা সে ছেলেবেলা থেকে বাড়িতেই কখনো দেখেনি বলে লেগে গাড়া তার গাড়া ছিল না।

কিশোরের পুরো একটি বছরের অধিকাংশ সময় কেটেছে প্যারিসের ‘ল্যাম্ব্রিয়া’ লড়ড়ে গরীব পেষ্টারের সঙ্গে।”

The personality of Sipra has been veneered with queerness and wonderfulness as she was brought up in a different type of environment right from her infancy. As she likes to make a clean breast of everything in the twinkling of an eye before her object of love, so, even being a “society girl”, she suffers from loneliness now and then. She feels depressed and dejected. She has herself built up her own culture and likes and dislikes. Her father is the source of all knowledge and learning; and with it she has amalgamated the philosophy of life as propounded by an aged French General who happens to be her father’s friend. Kirtinath Choudhury is Sipra’s god of love. Sipra calls him ‘Kitā’ affectionately in a sylhetean accent.

On the other hand, the war-condition has started becoming horrifically
critical in East Pakistan day by day. Its influence was felt in this country. This is the focal point of discussion. Kirti, Khan and Jimi has already filled their with sympathy and fellow-feeling for East Pakistan. During this explosive situation, Kirti, Khan and Sipra have set out for Agartala. The atrocities by the Pakistan army reached its climax in East Pakistan. Some people crossing over the border took shelter in Agartala. One of such victims is Hazi. While inspecting the border area along with Hazi, Kirti collected all thrilling information regard war. He learnt from Mukti Bahini (Liberation Force) of the inhuman atrocities committed by the Pakistani army. Kirti wanted to send Sipra to Shillong as there was possibility for Agartala to be engulfed by the flame of war. Shillong was safe for her. So, she came to Shillong. On the other hand, both Kirti and Khan arrived Shillong touching Karimganj and Silchar. Kirti became restless inwardly. He was moved by the random killing of the innocent Bengalees in East Pakistan. Sipra’s childhood friend Bilkis sent hair-raising information regarding the heinous killing-spree in Bangladesh. As a result, Sipra, too, became restless. Both Sipra and Kirti were seriously anxious about the dreadful game played against humanism. As innocent Kirti resolved to stand by the war-torn people, so also did Sipra promise to be hand in glove with Kirti during those hard times. The signal heralding the new days of free Bangladesh and happy ending of the amorous life of both hero and heroine are pronounced at the end of the novel.

Rabindranath, too, is enjoyed in many ways in the novel. The readers find the shadow of ‘Seher Kabita’ in the novel in respect of description and dialogues. We sometimes find a similarity among the characters namely Kirti and Sipra with those of Amit and Labanya. The romantic elements and the
way of expression of the poem ‘Seṣer Kabita’ have even greatly influenced the novel. Nevertheless, here and there the personal style of expression of Mujtaba has bloomed excellently. While we read it, it seems to us that Mujtaba is narrating the memories of his motherland during the last days of life. For example, the phase that followed after his journey by air from Bagdogra:

“নিঃশল হিমালয়, সচল ব্লন্ধপুরুষ, বুকের উপর কত শত জীল শিশুর মতে প্রতিদিন বেড়ে বড় হয়ে উঠেছে, জলের উপর ফোলা পালের অক্তরক বিশাল নিত্যা মহাজনী সৌনার সারি যেন তিনির খোসার সাহিব আর ওনেরই মত হেলে সুলে নির্ভুল্যে এগিয়ে যাছে, চরের পরিবর্তে হঠাৎ জেগো উঠছে, মাথা উঠু করে ক্ষুব্ধাতন তুমানান্দ পাহাড় কিন্তু তার আকর্ষিত অবিভাজ্য বুকে লাগো চমক, গোয়ালে পাড়ার ধন সবুজ বীশ বেত আম-কুঁঠালের মাঝখান থেকে দৌড়িয়ে উঠছে হাজার হাজার বদ্বী শুকাক বুকের শুকন।”

The unjustified stretching of conversation has unnecessarily enlarged the novel. Consequently, the story could not have been perfectly developed.

We find some common features in the four novels of Mujtaba Ali:

a. His urge to create personal humour.

b. Use of philosophical discussion.

c. Presentation of various facts or data.

d. The style of the accounts of journey.

e. The occurrence of digressions.

Actually, these features are the main excellences of the literature of Mujtaba.

The various applications may not be perfect in all the streams and trends of literature. That’s why, in spite of having the probabilities, we notice the limitations of the novel of Mujtaba.
The Stories of Mujtaba Ali

40/45 tales of shorter size are found in the world of Mujtaba Ali’s compositions and out of which 25/30 pieces can be directly called stories. Though the remaining pieces may not be called stories in the true sense of the term, yet they are not without story-like characteristics. Not a single story of Mujtaba has been framed in the traditionally defined path of story, rather, it can be said that they are arranged in according to Mujtaba’s own style. The stories are pregnant with both his personal humorous traits and his personal style of conversation.

Mujtaba’s teacher Rabindranath had already placed the Bengali story in the gallery of world class before many years of the arrival of Mujtaba in the domain of Bengali literature. Henceafter, though many story-writers walked on the path made by Rabindranath, the Bengali story took completely a new turn in the hands of Trailakyanath Mukhopadhyay (1847-1919) and Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay (1873-1932). In later year, the two persons who introduced a new tradition mingling elements of pure humour in Bengali story are ‘Parasuram’(1880-1960) and Mujtaba Ali respectively. Trailakyanath brought to light the mood of mind maintained in the majlis of olden times as well as the social draw backs. Prabhat Kumar portrayed the picture of the domestic life of the Bengalees; and then Parashuram mixed up pure humorous elements with the world of his imaginations.

There is another remarkable point to note in the stories of Mujtaba. He has kept his experiences in mind while writing stories. His experiences are indeed multihued. Through out his life right from the school life when he left his house, he whiled away his days coming in contact with so many queer
persons in so many places. He gathered his experiences from the entire world itself travelling Sylhet-Kolkata-Santiniketan-Delhi-Baroda-Mumbai-Kabul-Cairo-Paris-Bonn-Berlin-Geneva. Mujtaba used those small incidents of life and the little memories of life which happen to be primary constituents of stories. So, his stories have become of different taste due to his multihued experiences.

We know that Mujtaba adopted literary activities and creations as his main profession in his matured age. But we have already pointed out in the chapter of his life-story that his literary career began in his student life. Infact, his first printed work was a story called “Neře”. It was published in ‘Visva-Bharati Patrika’. The very first story was perfect in its style and structure. Then after a long gap of twenty two years he wrote “Cāfe-de-Jeni” (‘Deś’, Bhadra, 1352 BS) Mujtaba wrote consequetively a few stories in 1948. At that time the stories of ‘Cācā Kāhini’ series began to be published serially in ‘Matribhumi’. Meanwhile, a good number of his stories with ‘footnote’ was also published. The first anthology of stories called ‘Caca Kahini’ was published in 1952. Apart from this, two more books are ‘Dvandva-Madhur’ (1958, jointly with ‘Ranjan’) and the ‘Srestha Galpa’ (1961). Besides these three books, the other books in which the stories of Mujtaba are scattered over are namely ‘Pancatantra’ (1952), ‘Dhūpchāya’ (1957) ‘Caturanga’ (1960) ‘Bahu Bicitra’ (1962) ‘Tuni Mem’ (1963), ‘Hasyamadhur’ (1964) ‘Du-hārā’ (1965) ‘Pachandasai’ (1967) we may for the sake of our discussion pick up afew remarkable stories in a chronological order from his total number of stories.

1. Neře/Wall Magazine, Visva-Bharati/1923
2. Cāfe-de-Jeni/ ‘Deś’/8th September 1945
3. Tīrthahīnā/ ‘Kālāntar’/1948
4. Padatikā/ " / 1948
5. Kornel/ 'Matribhūmi'/1948
6. Mā Janani/ " / 1948
7. Bidhabā Bibhāha/ 'Des Saradiya'/1949
8. Bēce Thāko Sardikasi/ 1953
10. Mesedini/ 'Deś'/29 December 1951
11. Nonajal / 'Deś'/ 7 February 1953
15. Gājā / 'Ananda Bāzār Patrika'/ 21 Nov 1959
17. Tunimem / 'Deś'/ 1962
18. Ek Purus / 1963
19. Sabitri / 'Deś'/ 13 November 1965
20. Sricaranesu / 1965
21. Adhunikā / 'Deś'/ 20 November 1965
22. Dvija / 'Betārjagat'/ 22 September 1965
23. Puccha Pradarsan / 'Amrit Saradiya' / 1965
24. Natarājaner Ekalabyatya / 'Kathā-Sahitya Saradiya'/ 1965
25. Trimurti / 'Deś'/ 1969

First of all two important factors come to our notice in the stories of Mujtaba. First, Mujtaba assimilated varied tastes in his stories. The two core qualities of the literature of Mujtaba are his humour and pathos. So, naturally Mujtaba has left behind a good number of humorous as well as tragic stories.
Besides, there are amorous stories too. Sometimes he wrote stories on a particular subject. He even wrote some awful stories, and in some stories we enjoy a mixed taste – sweet but acidic and biting.

The second point to note in his stories is that almost in his every story the writer is himself the speaker or the character called ‘Caca’ is the speaker or the stories are told by some other person. That is, the importance of telling the stories has been stressed equally. This natural inclination is prominent in the literature of Mujtaba. Consequently, there reigns a mood and atmosphere of talking in the assembly of talkers almost in every fold of his stories. Stories are told, as if, just for the sake of stories only. Mujtaba himself remarked:

“গল্প বলার আর্ট, গল্প লেখার আর্টেরই মত বিশিষ্ট প্রতিভা ও সাহিত্য সহযোগে শিখতে হয়—এবং দুই আর্টই ভিন্ন। ... আর বায়ন তো আদৌ কোনো প্রকারের গল্প বলতে পারি নে। প্রোট ভুলে যাই, কি দিয়ে আরও করেছিলাম, কি দিয়ে শেষ করবো তার থেই হারিয়ে ফেলি, ...”

It is needless to say that this is the main feature of the stories of Mujtaba. Another important side of his stories is that the range of Mujtaba’s personal experiences is so wide that he hardly visited the world of imaginations. Even his celebrated ‘Hindusthan House’ belonging to ‘Caca Kāhinī’ is not based on mere imaginations but on reality is also evidenced from the source of his writing.


The first five stories of this very collection are through the words of ‘Caca’ himself, and the remaining ones are through the lips of the writer himself. The tales of chacha are the incidents of Germany; and the tales of the
writer are based on an incident of Germany, two of Paris and three of India.

‘Hindusthan House’ was established in 1929 on the Uland Street of Berlin. It is a rendezvous of the Bengalee emigrants living in Germany; and the central figure of such assembly is ‘Cācā’ himself. He is a Bengalee from Barishal. His followers are – Ghošai, Muhujye, Sarkar, Roy and others. The youngest member of the assembly of talkers is Gulam Mula alias Mujtaba Ali himself. Jitendranath Chakraborty write about such adda of ‘Cācā’:

"...শুনেছি বারিন্দে এই রেডিওর টাইম ছিল এবং এই বাঙালী চা চাঁচাঁচিও নাকি লেখকের কব্য-সূত্র মানুষ মাত্র না। অধ্যাপক নিয়ম সরকার মানুষ নাকি বারিন্দে অবহিতকালে মানুষ মাত্র আছে নিয়ে এখানে আসতেন, এবং অবানী হলেও সর্বনাশের সোহিরা। নিয়তিত হুকিয়া দিতেন। আরও শুনেছি, চা ছিলেন শাহভর্তার কেন এক অতি-পরিচিত ও অতি-সম্মানিত পরিবারের ছেলে—ইইলরের অভ্যাসের পর নান্দী প্রতিক্রিয়া-প্রাপ্তর মধ্যে জোয়ারের সোহে যাওয়া তৃণক্ষেতের মত তিনি কোথায় হারিয়ে যান, আর তার কেনাম সঙ্কায় পাওয়া যায়নি।" 

Let us discuss a few stories from ‘Caca Kahini’.

The story “Kornel” is worthy of claiming its own place in Bengali literature. It is indeed the brightest story of ‘Cācā Kāhinī’. Just to avert starvation Nazi Colonel Har Weberst Duttenhofer reluctantly kept ‘Cācā’ as a paying guest even during the severe economic deflation of Germany that followed in the post-era of the first World War. The marks of aristocracy still then glorified the palatial building. Colonel used to teach ‘Cācā’ Goethe. He was a great scholar. Not only literature, culture and history, but also the knowledge of anthropology, sociology, religion, language, and even the German version of Manusamhita were well stored in his memory. Nevertheless, he held a strong view against crossbred, and the purity of the German race He was second to none in term of humility and gentleness. He lost his only son in the war and the only daughter now survived. One day that very girl came to his
house with the little child in her arms. Father forbade her harshly to visit his	house any time in future. Colonel even drove out ‘Cācā’ from his house as he
showed sympathy to the girl. As a result Colonel even closed the last source
of his income. What is the offence of the girl? She married a French Profes­sor, and hence she paved the way of crossbreeding in an aristocratic Prussion family.

“যে-কৌলীন্য ও জাতাভিমান শ্রূ পরের অবমাননা ও পরপীড়ন মাত্র করে না, যার
তদক্ষা আশী ভাগই হল আত্মনিঃশ্রুত ও ক্ষয়নাধন, তার মধ্যে এক ধরনের হেওিস্ম তীর্থ
আছে—কর্নেলের চরিত্রের মধ্য দিয়ে লেখক এই কথাটিই প্রমাণ করতে চেয়েছেন।”

The story “Padatika” is fit to be cited for many a reason. First, it has a
new and amazing theme. Second, it bears exception to its form and structure.
Third, the story is a meeting ground varied wits and humour.

When English culture and education began deluging our societies, ill-omened days, too, started eroding the prevailing ‘Tol-Catuspāthi-Maktab’. Consequently, the Pandits and Maulavis were forced to be a class of have­nots and oppressed. Such is the story of a Pandit. He is a village Pandit of
queer character. The writer exactly portrayed the character of the Pandit through
storm of humour. He sleeps most of the time in the classroom than teaching
the students. He brought the students to book using Sanskrit words. He was
always bare to the waist. In this way he passed his days. But one day there a
great readiness in school that the chief commissioner was expected to visit
the school. On that very day the Pandit wore a vest. The religious scriptures
prohibit one from wearing the sewn-clothes, hence the Pandit wore the vest.
But he felt an itching sensation through out his body due to unwontedness.
He used the vest for the first time in his life. But scratching of the body could
not be done before the Saheb, so he was in a state of having his teeth clenched
to tolerate this unbearable itching sensation. However, then followed a big
turn in the story. The Pandit came to know from a reliable source that the
Saheb had to spend monthly Rs. 75.00 after his paralysed dog. Citing the fact
before the students, the Pandit wanted to know from them:

"...আমি, ব্রাহ্মণী, বৃদ্ধা মাতা, জিন কন্যা, বিধবা পিসি, দাসী একুশে আত্মজন, আমাদের
সকলের জীবন ধারণের জন্য আমি মাদে পাই পাঁচশ টাকা। এখন কল, তো দেখি, ... এই ব্রাহ্মণ
পরিবার লাত সাহেবের কুকুরের কথা ঠাঙ্গের সমান?" 6

What a severe agony it was that forced him to put this question! Mujtaba
in a humorous way very abruptly portrayed the picture of an unbearable diffi­
cence that came due to social change. The Pandit, as if, put this question of a
particular set of circumstances. The humorous way in which Mujtaba pre­
sented the hard fact can be called the personal style of Mujtaba. Some more
stories such as ‘Nere’, ‘Adhunikā’, ‘Dvijā’, or ‘Senior Apprentice’ etc—
where this very style is present. The sudden mixing of pathos with the pure
humorous atmosphere has made the stories balanced; moreover, the blending
of wit and humour has, too, made the stories perfect.

The other stories of ‘Cācā Kāhinī’ are also interestingly attractive. Some
of them are never-to-be-forgotten; for example the fifth story ‘Beltalāte Du-
Du Bār’. While ‘Cācā’ was staying as a paying guest in the house of an
orthodox young Nazi of ruffian type called Oscar, the young Nazi got irritated
with ‘Cācā’ discovering an untrue mind in ‘Cācā’ of insulting the Nazis. But
the boy made friendship with “Indian Black Man” or “Inder” ‘Cācā’. ‘Cācā’
left his house being perplexed at his aggressiveness. But it is a surprise of
surprises. When ‘Cācā’ after some days was going to be physically assaulted
by another Nazi goon — this is Oscar saved him then. Oscar was than intoxi-
cated. The very story shows how the seed of humanity remains latent even in
the heart of a fundamentalist. The character of Oscar is unparalleled indeed.

Mujtaba is a great witness of the ups and downs of Germany. He has witnessed the rise of Nazi and the extreme form of the race-consciousness of the Germans. A particular period is thus reflected in both ‘Kornel’ and the above said story.

Besides ‘Cācā Kāhinī’, Mujtaba has some other stories which need to be mentioned here, such as ‘Moni’. It is actually a love story. The main theme of the story is the non-fulfillment of love. The secret thoughts and feelings and intentions of a Pathan-girl have been unlocked in this story. Mujtaba, during his stay at Kabul, saw Moni in his friend Mehbub Ali’s residence. Moni was a maid-servant of that house. Seeing the writer at a glance, Moni was inclined to him. She did not like to respect any law. She knew that a girl did have no obstruction of marrying a boy as per the established tradition of the Pathans, but it was not to her knowledge that this practice was not permitted beyond the lineage of the Panthans themselves. So, she made a clean breast of her intention of love unhesitantly. While everyone in Kabul was unnerved at the invasion of Baccha-e-Sakaw, Moni even then became frantic to know the well-being of the writer, moreover, she became indifferent to her daily needs of life at the fanciful marriage of Mujtaba. Moni’s joy knew no bound finding no marks of marriage. However, Moni had to leave Kabul along with the wife of her master just for the sake of security. Mujtaba got a relief for the time being from the appeal of an unrequitted love. Moni was seen for the last time at the residence of the father-in-law of Mehbub. She was not present at the departing time.

"টাঙাতে উঠে উলটা দিকে মুখ করে বসতেই নজর গেল মোডলার বারাদার দিকে।"
Some of the stories of Mujtaba are of pure humour, such as, ‘Bidhabā Bibāha’, “Bēce Thāko Sardikasi”, “Sricaranesu”, “Gaja” “Puccha (pra) darsan” etc. Humour is the main element of Mujtaba’s literature. So, in these stories the writer has spontaneously presented wits and humour. In some occasions such wit and humour have crossed their limit too. And then the writer said that these are not “Galpa” (stories) at all, but “Gul” as it is called in Bengali. Mujtaba himself wrote:

“প্রথম আমি পরীক্ষান ছিলুম গুল-ই-বাকাঁলী, তারপর লন্ডনে নেমে হলুম ডিউক অব গুলারিল, তারপর ফ্রাঙ্কে হলুম দ্য গুল, তারপর পাকিস্তানে হলুম গুল মহমদ, এখানে এসে হলুম গুলারিলাল নন্দ।”

The story “Gājā” is such a ‘Gul’. Mujtaba’s ‘Mejda’ (middle brother) was then an administrator of a certain district of North Bengal. The story was known from the experience of the ‘Mejda’ himself. The cultivation of ‘gājā’ was in force in some places of the erst while East Pakistan. India was the biggest purchaser of this ‘gājā’. When the export of ‘gājā’ was stopped due political partition, tons of ‘gājā’ were heaped up in the godown. On the one hand, new collection of ‘gājā’ continued pouring in, but new collection could not be stored up, unless the old stock had been sold out. So, it was decided to burn the old stock of ‘gājā’ due to lack of storage. The burning of ‘gājā’ was to be done under the care of ‘Mejda’. The smoke of ‘gājā’ enveloped the encircling atmosphere. But the ‘Gul’ carries the interesting description of the condition of those persons present at the burning site when they inhaled the smoke of the ‘gājā’.

There is flood of humour from the very beginning of ‘Bēce Thako
Entering into a subject from a mere cold—here lies the significance of the structure of the story. The beautiful expression of the maddness of love and emotions has been in this story. The characters of Eva, the heroine and that of the doctor are truly accurate.

The story “Sricaraṇaṇu” is based on the character of a child. A boy called Yusuf of 7/8 years old of Kabul is the central figure of the story. Yusuf is the student and neighbour of Mujtaba. The interesting story developed as how he befooled his master.

Mujtaba also wrote some large stories. Two of these stories deserve to be mentioned. First, “Tuni Mem” and secondly, “Ek Puruṣ”. The first one depicts the non fulfillment of love and the second one is a memento of patriotism and communal harmony.

Mujtaba himself mentioned “Tuni Mem” as factual account of events. There is a striking resemblance between the character of the protagonist and his catastrophe of this story and the novel ‘Abisvasya’. In both the cases the protagonist is an Irish. Both of them were locked in love-marriage. One of them being unsuccessful in the conjugal life at last murdered the wife and the second one did not even hesitate to murder just to keep up the dignity of the lover and for her unhindered right.

“Ek Puruṣ” is a new annexure to the Bengali literature. Sunil Gangopadhyay commented on the story:
The theme of “Ek Purus” is very excellent. A Delhi-based Muslim Subedar after the ‘Sipai’ Mutiny took shelter in a village of Birbhum in the guise of Vaishnab. The villagers called him as their own. Gul Bahadur Khan spent his days in the guise of a ‘Gośai’ (a title of the Vaisnaba Gurus) and dreamt of fighting against the English mobilizing again these lowly Hindu caste people. That time he came to know Moti. She is a widow of a Muslim person and a supporter of ‘Gadar’. The imperfection and loneliness of life gradually turned to be a burden to Moti and so she in a desolate moment wanted to know from ‘Gośai’ why he did not like to lead a domestic life... Gul Bahadur replied:

Mujtaba’s stories in many an occasion finished with such a jolt. It is as if like the ending of Maupassant’s stories—whip-crack conclusion. This sort of propensity and characteristic are marked in many of his famous stories like “Padotika”, “Kornel”, “Nere”. Besides this, almost in every story of Mujtaba, his personal style is noticeable. Humour, ground realities, the manner of conversation have repeatedly come in his stories. In the word of literary critic:

The biggest quality of every story of Mujtaba is that his every story has developed perfectly. His stories by no means seem to be imposed upon. The scriptural and mythological stories of Bengal have been expressed in his stories with the modern brush of painting, and even the language, too, was equally susceptible. Mujtaba has presented a mixed vocabulary of various words

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such as 'Tadbhaba' (a Bengali word derived from Sanskrit but used in a corrupted form), 'Tatsama' (a Sanskrit word used in the unchanged form in Bengali), native words, foreign words, Islamic words and spoken words before the readers. And for this excellent manner of conversation the readers of his stories never feel exhausted, moreover, his story is, as it were, an album of many a chequered characters. From the road leading to the residence of Nawab of Sylhet to Kabul and from the village of Birbhum to the highways of Berlin—everything has come up as a topic of delineation in his stories.

Mujtaba is undoubtedly a completely different artist in the tradition of Bengali stories.
Notes

10. Ibid. p.142.
13. Ibid. p.122.
15. Ibid. p.119.
19. Ibid. p.116
20. Ibid. p.143.
32. Ibid. Vol. VI, “Granthaparicay”.
34. Ibid. Vol. VI, p.74.

**The Stories of Mujtaba Ali / Notes**

1. **Sayed Mujtaba Ali Rakanābali, Vol. XI.**
8. **Sayed Mujtaba Alir Šrestha Galpa, 11th edn. p.80.**
9. Ibid. p.31.
13. Narayan Gangopadhyay, **Sāhitye Chutagalpa, 1363** BS, p.141

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