Chapter: VI

The Light Writings of Mujtaba Ali

Mujtaba Ali throughout his life wrote numberless writings in a lighter style. The number of his such writings is huge. Many of his such writings are not included in his anthology of works. We will discuss the light humorous writings in the first part; and the second part will include the thorough particulars of his other works, where we will briefly discuss his Diary, bunch of Letters, English compositions, Poems, Songs etc.

Part: I

Some people call a particular type of writings in literature Personal Essays and the others call it ‘Humorous Writings’. Debate seems to have no end over this issue of name. We can cite a quotation at the very beginning from Hirendranath Dutta in this regard:

“আপন ব্যক্তির সংখ্যা নির্দেশ গল্পে জিনিসের সৃষ্টি হয় তার লেখককে যথার্থ আপন দেয়, পাঠককে তথ্য ভাবেন। স্থানীয় বলেই এ জিনিস স্থতঃপুর্ক। যত কঠোর অধিবর্তণ করায়
এ জিনিস আয়ত্ত করা সত্ত্ব নয়—ন মেধায় ন বক্স শ্রমিত। কোনো এখানে বিদ্যা বা পুরোহিতের
প্রকাশ্য বড়ো কথা নয়, আসল কথাটা হল নায়কের প্রকাশ। এর নাম
হয়েছে Personal essay বা বৃত্তিকত্ত্ব প্রকাশ। সোজা কথায় জিনিসটি হল বাঁধনের ব্যবহারকে
খোলার চিত্রের ক্ষমতার বহুক্ষরণ। ইংরেজি মনোবৃত্ত একে বলেছেন—a loose sally of
the mind. আমরা এরই নাম দিয়েছি বর্ণমালা।

এ জাতীয় প্রকাশকার আগে বক্তা, পরে লেখক।” ¹

It is said that this kind of writings has it origin in the western world. Montaigne is the originator of Personal essay. He said regarding it at the very outset, “It is myself that I portray.” The English essayist JB Priestly declared regarding this very comment of Montaigne that it is the first and last remark about personal essays. ²
It is known as ‘belles letters’ in English and the same type of writing is called ‘Light Writing’ or ‘Fine Writing’ in the French literature. This kind of writing gained tremendous popularity in the English literature at the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century. The essays of Max Beerbohm or “Letters to Deal Authors” of Andrew Lang are the perfect models of its kind. Both Lamb and Stevenson brought excellence to this type of writing. We can name Chesterton, Beerbohm, Belloc, Leo, Gardiner as their successors.

Generally an essay means to present a subject by means of facts and philosophical touches. Here the subject matter is prominent; but in the personal essays the person or the individual himself/herself is prominent, the subject is secondary. The personality of the writers can easily overshadow the subject matter. This type of writer is very self-conscious; and they use first person in expressing the experiences of his personal life. From this angle, this will not be out of place to remark that it is a fragmented picture of the writer’s autobiography. They often present light subject in a tasteful way, and it becomes really enjoyable by virtue of its language and presentation. On other hand, many times many tough subjects even become interesting through such type of writings. In the words of Hirendranath:

“বাণিজ্যগত প্রশ্ন হচ্ছে এক ধরনের সাহিত্যিক বিশ্বাসঘাত—কেবলমাত্র কথার নেশায় কথা বলে যাওয়া—বলাটাই মুখ্য, বিষয়বস্তু সৌন্দর্য। ...এ জাতীয় লেখার মধ্যে লজিকের চেয়ে ম্যাজিকের প্রয়োজন বেশি। বলা বাঙ্গা এধানে ম্যাজিক মাত্র রস !”

Whatever the subject matter may be, the writer can give a new shape to it by means of his personality. And there comes the real test of the power of language. Nabenda Basu wrote in this respect:
It is Buddhadev Basu who first called this type of writing ‘Ramya Racanā’ (Bells Letters/ Humorous Writing) in the Bengali literature. But the real literature is nothing but ‘Ramya’ (beauty). So, is there any need of calling it by a different name? Mujtaba himself did not support the proposal, hence he wrote:

"...রসশৈলী বা রসপাঠিত্বকে বলার কোনো অর্থ হয় না। শিল্পীর রস বানাবে না, তবে কি কুঠুলোড়া তৈরী করবে। 'রমারচনা'ও এই একই দরের কথা।" ⁵

The trend of the personal essay is noticed in the Bengali literature from the 19th century. But the trend of the personal essay began to suffer losses with the advent of belles letters. We have seen the tendency of passing even an insignificant writing as ‘belles letters’. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay wrote about this trend in Bengali literature.

This is what Budhadev Basu himself said in his “Kabita”, 24th year, 4th issue. The practice of low standard of literature on the pretext of ‘Ramya Racanā’, that we notice, has led to the misuse of the word ‘Ramya Racanā’. It seems to us that by the use of this very word their talents have
not been perfectly highlighted. We can not accept the views of those also on the same ground who are interested to called Mujtaba Ali a bellettrist. That's why, this kind of writing to our view is nothing but 'Personal light literature'.

We find a few mentions of such personal writings in Bengali literature from the early stage of Bengali prose. We find to enjoy the thorough taste of personal writings Vidyasagar’s ‘Prabhābati Sambhāṣan’, ‘Atmacarit’, in different parts of Debendranath Tagore’s autobiographical sketch, in Sanjib Chandra’s ‘Pālāmāu’, Rajnarayan Basu’s ‘Sekāl O Ekāl’ and in different nook and corner of Vivekananda’s writings. We have also noticed the excellent use of this trend in the second half of the 19th century in Bankim Chandra’s ‘Loka Rahasya’ and ‘Kamalākānter Daptar’. Moreover, we notice the trace of it in the literature of Balendranath Tagore, Haraprasad Shastri, Lalit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, Abanindranath Tagore. The personal essays touched the point of higher excellence in the hands of Rabindranath, and his ‘Bicitra Prabanda’ is a glaring example of it. Later on, Pramatha Choudhury, Annadasankar Roy, Dilip Kumar Roy, Buddhadev Basu and others step by step added more beauty to this trend.

The arrival of Mujtaba Ali in the Bengali literature in the forties led the trend of personal essays towards a completely new path. Though Mujtaba wrote some personal essays under a pseudonym in the mid-forties, yet we have the noticed the exposition of Mujtaba due to this in the ‘Pancatantra’ column. Mujtaba let us know in “Bisnu Sarma” published in ‘Pancatantra’.

“হেজরৎ মুহম্মদের জন্মের দেড়শ বৎসর পর—জনকের আরব আলোচনার পঞ্জাবুল আরবীতে অপুবাদ করেন। আরবী সাহিত্যের তথ্য কৈশোরকাল। এই পুস্তক অনুবাদ করে সময় অনুবাদক আশুল ইবনুল মুকাফার প্রধান উদাহরণ ছিল তত্তাদের আরব সাহিত্যানুকুলের শৈলী ও সাধনের শেখানো—বিশেষ করে যারা 'ব্যান-ল্যাট্রু' রমারন্নায় হতে পারতে চান।’’
Moreover, after that Mujtaba wrote in ‘Foot note’:

"অধীন এই উদ্ধেশ্য নিয়েই বলল যৌন পূর্বে পাঞ্জাবী সর্বত্র দেশে পার্থিকক অরে ভ করে। নইলে বিশ্বে জীবনের অনুক্রম করার মত দেখা আমার কথা৷ ছিল না।" ৮

The tendency of Mujtaba’s writing such kind of writing is assumed from his such remarks.

‘Pancatantra’ began with Mujtaba’s favourite subject “Book”. Some of his writings related to books, readers, dealing in books etc. are found here, such as “Bai Kenā”, “Ajab Sahar Kolketā”, “Poplārer Magdāle”, “Murkher Upāsana Apekshā Panditer Nidrā Sreya” etc.

Mujtaba has expressed and expanded the subject excellently. What ever joke we create saying “Māchi Mārā Kerani” (one who copies blindly without exercising discretion)—but Annato Franch used to say in a sad tone that had there been eyes around his head, he could have seen the beauty of the world all at a time— as the flies see. Citing the references of Bartrand Russel and Omar Khaiyam, Mujtaba wrote that there personalities were able to make their own world of creations by means of books only. Book is the intimate friend of human beings. In the words of Mujtaba.

“বাইবেল শেষের অন্য বই—নই per excellence. সর্বশেষ পুক্তক— The Book.
যে-দেবেকে সর্ব মন্দকর্মের প্রারম্ভে বিন্যাসরূপে স্মরণ করতে হয়, তিনিই তে আমাদের
নির্জিত গ্রহ স্বতঃ দেখার গুরুত্ব আপন স্থানে তুলে দিয়েছিলেন। ‘গণপতি’ ‘গণ’ এবং
জনসাধারণের নেতা। জনপ্রিয় যদি পুক্তকের সম্মান করতে না থেকে, তবে তারা দেবতাই হবে
কিন্তু বাঙালী নাগর ধর্মের কাহিনী শোনে না। তার মুখে এক কথা ‘অত কান্তা পায়া
কোথায় পাওয়া, যে বই কিনব?’ ৯

Everyone knows that Mujtaba liked to make us laugh. He even did not miss the chance of mentioning the funny wordings of the greatest humorists of all ages. Mujtaba brought the references of Nasiruddin Khoja, Poldeer, Birbal, Gopal Ñhār, Sekh Chilli and Kutti of Dhaka. A beautiful portrayal of
such situation is found in his "Khos Galpa".

The subject of ‘Adda’ (friendly get together) has appeared in his life and literature repeatedly. We find the presence of juicy descriptions of this ‘adda’ in some of his writings; such as, “Cairo”, “Adda”, “Adda Passport” etc. Mujtaba even brought the references of the English ‘Club’, Germany’s ‘Pub’, Kabul’s ‘Cha Khana’, France’s, ‘Bisot Ro’ etc. According to Mujtaba, the charm of all the ‘adda’ of the world is a mere infant with reference to “Cairo’s” ‘adda’.

‘Des Bhraman’ is an excellent humorous writing of Mujtaba. It has been a tradition in this country from the ancient time to take to wandering asceticism. It was also a custom once upon a time that if anyone had apathy towards the worldly interests, he could have taken to ascetic mendicancy. Mujtaba showed that after renunciation of the world, nobody likes to come back to own society, as because due to extensive travelling someone gets familiar with many societies. As a result man is acquainted with an infinite atmosphere breaking the barriers of a specific society.

If we read Mujtaba’s “Pāḍā” and “Guide” we can realise that there lies a universal appeal even in a trifling subject. Visiting Jerusalem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, the writer realised in a new manner that the clergy of the whole world are one and the same. Mujtaba humorously narrated the greed for money, cleverness of speech, the factless and baseless interpretation of history by the clergy and the guide.

The essay “Culture” exhibits how a serious matter can be excellently presented being brushed with humour. The writer began with Kedar Chatterjee of ‘Parasuram’. Kedar was haunted by many fears and the writer was made
The writer beautifully arranged the subject even when speaking about the literature in translation. According to him, the lyrical qualities that are found in the songs and poems of Rabindranath are almost nil in the world lyrical literature. But Rabindranath translated very few pieces. Since Rabindranath did not give much attention and care and time to the subject of translation, so, Bengali literature is very weak in the field of translation. Nevertheless, the tradition of translation in the Bengali literature began to be enriched in the 19th century. The views of the writer at the end of the discussion read thus:

“...বাঙ্গলা সাহিত্যের মজলিসে যে অনুবাদ সাহিত্য আরম্ভ হয়েছিল, আজ তার সমাপ্তি দেখতে পাচ্ছি সত্তা, রূপরেখে ইংরেজী উপন্যাসের অনুবাদ। যেমন আর ‘ফিলিম গণের’ সন্ধে তার মিথালি।”

Mujtaba in many occasions presented the customary stories before the readers in a humorous way. We find in “Dâmpatya Jiban” the pathetically miserable stories of the husbands in China and India being frightend and threatened by their wives.

The essay “Darkhasta” bears the shadow of Mujtaba’s autobiographical sketch. We get the reference of that earnings of money for which Mujtaba was forced to write. There is ridicule of the education system which happens to be be-all and end-all in term of mere degree only along with other humorous subjects in ‘Darpan’. Moreover, there is the discussion of the domestic affairs and even philology. The readers have also come to know that word...
'rusticate' has been derived from Latin 'rusticari' meaning 'live in the country'.

Language is the most favourite subject of Mujtaba. We get the discussion of spelling, pronunciation features of spoken language etc in 'Redukotsiya Ad Absurdoom' and 'Bhāṣār Jamā Kharac' etc. In the first essay said above, Mujtaba expressed his views about Bengali spelling and pronunciation of foreign words making the mention of a Chinese Professor 'Eu'.

The style and art of a language has been discussed in “Chuchundar Kā Śīr Par Cāmeli Kā Tel". Language is to be according to subject, and a writer should be carefully attenting in enriching his vocabulary. Mujtaba showed that when Kali Prasanna Singha translated the Mahabharata, for the thematic reason there were a greater number of ‘Tatsama’ words.

Another identical essay is “Anukaran Ba Hanukaran?”. Many persons through do not have proper talent, yet they are able to attain a high position in life simply on the strength of backing-up, and the same also happens in the life of many writers. Mujtaba admitted that if somebody does not have any originality, the act of sophistry comes to light today or tomorrow. Someone who wants to follow should have more or less a conception about the subject matter and language.

Mujtaba wrote a good number of light essays on the art of language, pronunciation, modern poems, art, culture, literature, modesty and wantonness etc. Some of the remarkable ones out of these are “Puspadhanu” on rhetoric and art, “Niralankār”, “Hasyaras” and over the question of modesty and obscenity he wrote “Bhūṭer Mukhe Rāmnām”, “Sīlā Jale Bhāshi Jāy/ Bānare Sangit Gāy”, “Lady Chatterly”, “Dehi Dehi”, “Cumban” etc.
Once novelist Flabor’s “Madam Bovaree” was charged with obscenity. The country which is infavour of literature, art and freedom, that very country France experienced the new waves of debate on modesty and obscenity and as a result Mujtaba expressed his reactions against it in his “Bhuter Mukhe Ramnam’ and “Silā Jale Bhāsi Jāy/ Bānare Sangit Gāy”. The French Government filled a suit against Flabor. Watching all these unexpected incidents in Paris, Mujtaba rememebered a Hindi proverb :

“अारे तेरा लड़केकौ
आजन तरेह का खेल
छुछड़ेर का निरपूर
चामेली का भेष।”

Mujtaba said in the beginning in ‘Lady Chatterly’ that the question of modesty and obscenity had been on table from time immemorial and would also continue in future. Hence, it is difficult to come to a conclusion over it. In the opinion of Mujtaba:

“संस्कृत अलाबेसे हिल-हिल निये किछुटा आलोचना आहे। किती आकाकर केसे बाहि वाक करे देखार प्रस्ताव केहू करेहू बालः तूल न न। हयते को तार प्रधान कारण एक हे गुरुंदेर आमलीसे संस्कृत साहित्य जनने पकड़े करित भाषा हरे। दारिद्रये, से भाषा आयत करते करते मानुषे ऐतिहासि बोये हरे ये ते, तेथू कि पड़ते ना पड़ते तार दारिद्र तारबाह याते हाते। फाड़े देहो येत।”

Mujtaba read ‘Lady Chatterly’ in his young age. But it did not please him. It seemed to him:

“लरेन्स या प्रमाण करते चेयेर्मे से अति साधारण जिनिस। एवं ऐ को अति साधारण स्वतंत्र जिनिस प्रमाण करते गिये तिनी देगेर्मे बिरटी बिरट कामान। एवं कामांगोला परिपक्क नय।”

An allegation is often levelled against Mujtaba is that he held bitter stand against modern poems, ultramodern art and sculpture etc. Mujtaba called the modern poets ‘Gabikul’ and the modern poems ‘Gabita’. Mujtaba showed
his frownings against these in his different writings and for he was condemned in his own age. Some of the modern poets thought that Mujtaba’s concept of modernism was not perfectly matured. Later on, Mujtaba wrote some essays about it. These are—“Adhunik Kabita”, “Kabyalok”, “Not guilty”, “Adhuniker Atmahatya?” “Art Nā Accident” etc.

The clumsy vision of life of the modern poets and the artists pained Mujtaba. Side by side, he even thundered against their obscurity and vagueness. He wrote:

“As Mujtaba had interest in different subjects, so he wrote excellent essays on numberless subjects. Topics like bondage, patriotism, national integration, livelihood of the ordinary people, the society of Bengal, social consciousness etc did not escape his notice. Some of his remarkable write-ups on such topics are— “Bānglādesh”, “Enga-Bhāratiya Kathopakathnan”, “Bhāratiya Sāṅghati”, “Hāwor”, “Caturanga”, “Belgen”, “Statesman”, “Native State”, “Naba Hitler”, “Rādhi Meye Ki Cul ādhe Nā?”, “War M”, “Gyān Sancay Nā Cākuri Sandhān”, “Brain Drain”, “Autopromotion”, “Khālāsi” etc.

Two essays named “Bānglādes” included in ‘Bhabaghure O Anyanya’ were published. The writer searched the reasons of the Muslims’s control in the greater Bengal in these essays. Once the ordinary people adopted the Islamic religion in this country, as Mujtaba believed, for economic salvation, social security and status, but not for the spiritualism itself.

Mujtaba ventilated his negative attitude towards the British in his “Enga-Bhāratiya Kathopakathnan”, and side by side we also get the presence of his
When war for liberation was on in Bangladesh, Mujtaba wrote, "Hawor" and "Caturanga". The writer clearly exposed here how the extensive marshes, rivers pits and ditches of Bangladesh saved her many times from the hands of foreign aggression in many ways. The essay "Caturanga" informs the readers how Bangla Academy, Kendriya Bangla Unnyan Board, Asiatic Society of Dhaka, the Department of Bengali, Dhaka University of the then East Pakistan played an important and glorious role against the sinister motives of the Pakistanis.

Brain-drain is a much-hyped subject of today’s world. Mujtaba wrote many years ago regarding the matter in his "Brain Drain". Citing the instance of Dr. Khuran’s adopting the American citizenship, Mujtaba wrote that the Bengalees were not also lagging behind in the exodus of talents and genius, rather, it is to be said that the Bengalees are forerunners, as because there is enough scope for food and clothing (maintaining livelihood) for other people than the Bengalees in Kolkata.

Mujtaba discussed the problems like unemployment the personal life of the unmarried persons, this state of insecurity in the social life in his "Kālo Meye" "Svambar Cakra" "Raypithaurar Column" etc. Comparisons were also made between the native and foreigns circumstances in course of discussion. The pathetic and deplorable conditions of the lives of the middle class people have been portrayed in "Cāprāsi O Kerāni". Citing the instance of clerical life, Mujtaba scathingly condemned the whole social system.

Two outstanding light works of Mujtaba are "Sylheti Sāgā" and "Nattingham" and in these two works the writer has skilfully presented the
Mujtaba was, of course, not surprised at hearing such sentences in Sylhet dialect, because he knew that 80 percent restaurants in England were run by Sylhet based people of India and Pakistan. Once upon a time, the very ordinary people from Sylhet, Chitagang, Nuwakhali went to foreign land as a shipmate for economic reasons. Many people from Sylhet also went, and they were the original settlers of London from Sylhet. According to Mujtaba, these people were in demand in foreign land for four reasons—(a) they could work in low wage (b) they could work of double shifts or on holidays (c) they had no headache of Trade Union and (d) they were less addicted to wine.

Mujtaba was very conscious of political affairs. In this regard he was influenced by his contemporary world and his 'guru' Rabindranath. He observed the hypocrisy the Britishers from his very childhood. In many of his short writings he burst forth against it. We get the expression of his clear-cut viewpoints and ridicule regarding this matter in his "Caritra Paricay", "Dhabaldambha", "Ghare Baire Sramik Niti", "Pancajanya" or "Ha-Ja-Ba-Ra-La" columns. Moreover, the writer also pictured the evil designs of the Britishers worked at the background of the World War II in his books like "Yabanikantamale", "Bicar" etc. Besides this the policy of overlordship by the American-English and Russians, exploitation by the capitalist countries, loss of freedom of speech in the communist countries have also been discussed in the works of Mujtaba.
We get a few works of Mujtaba on ‘Dharma’. He was everywhere glorified that dharma which is free from narrowness coupled with a sense of universal humanity. Mujtaba was himself a Professor of comparative religions, yet he did not write any thing about it much elaborately. Without going into a deep discussion of ‘Dharma’, he rather aboided it on maximum accounts. The three chief religions of the World—Christiantiy, Islam and Jewish are supposed to have developed, according to Mujtaba, at the backdrop of social and economic needs. He beautifully discussed in this respect in “Arthaanartham” and “Khrista”. Discussion was made about the ‘Khoja’ community in his “Hirakutsab” and “Ritali”.

Even the queer and obsolete subjects have also got a place in his works. One of such topics is—cooking and eating. He had a polished liking for eating, and he had a good name as an able cook. He himself wrote:

“জৈলিটিরা যেকোনো যুদ্ধের পর যুদ্ধের কালানুক্রমিক নিষ্ট থেকে সে-দেশের ইতিহাস নির্মাণ করেন, এ-বচন-পূজারী রস্কান-পন্থার (কুইজিনের) উৎপত্তি, ক্রমবিকাশ ধরে ধরে সে দেশের ইতিহাস নির্মাণ করে।” 17

He also wrote on some other account:

“... আমার মতে ডোক্রনস সর্বভূর্ণয় রসরাজ। এই বিজ্ঞানের বর্ণনাতে ইলিশের উল্লেখ নেই বলে পাঁচ-বার নামাজ পড়ে সেথায় যাবার কথামাত্র বাসনা আমার নেই।” 18

Mujtaba presented many interesting facts about cooking and eating in “Bās Bane”, “Bāngālee Menu”, “Aharadi” etc.

Primarily literature has two main grounds—form and subject matter. But the form goes on changing in every age; and the number of subject is uncountable. What we see, what we hear, what we realise, what is imaginary or real, what does not exist but could have been—everything and everything has been used as literary ingredients. All the personal essays and these light works
of Mujtaba are rooted into such world-wide resources. Individual, nature, society, state, politics, sociology, economics, anthropology, home, family, daily course of events, language, literature, culture – nothing was left out by Mujtaba. Even insignificant matter with the blessing of his extraordinary stroke of pen was turned to be extraordinarily excellent. Moreover, these works also demonstrate how a complicated subject can be presented in an interesting but simplified way before the readers.

**Part II**

Mujtaba used to keep diary in different times. Once he wrote a good number of letters, too. His letters are still being recovered from different places. Many writings in English are being discovered. Though he wrote songs and poems now and then, yet their numbers is very negligible. Apart from that we have also got some translation works and critical works from Mujtaba. Taking everything into consideration including other short writings, we encounter with a different Mujtaba.

Mujtaba did not keep diary regularly. Pieces from his diary were published in the tenth volume of his works. Moreover, Samarendra Sengupta published Mujtaba’s unpublished diaries in ‘Bibhāb’ Asvin, 1387 BS and 1388 BS Sarada Sankhya. We have information that in addition to this he has some more diaries. 19

Besides the discussion on politics, sociology, education, language etc, many small incidents and facts of his family life are also there in his diaries. The editor of the published diary in Mujtaba’s works inform us that Mujtaba went Rajsahi from Kolkata in 1367 BS. He was there for one month and a half, and during this time he kept diaries. Mujtaba went to South India in 1947.
and stayed there for sometime. We get the description of that particular time in the diary.

One of the special sides of Mujtaba’s diary is that the description of the natural sight has been beautifully delineated; such as:

"27 শে বৈশাখ ১৩৬৭
কাল রাতে বাতাস কৃমই ঠাণ্ডা হয়ে এল বলে নিত্য হল ভাল।
ভোরে দেখি আকাশে টিকরে টিকরে মেঘ দক্ষিণ থেকে উত্তর দিকে মসৃণ গতিতে রওঁয়ানা দিয়েছে। পথার বুকে কিজ দুর্দণ্ড দক্ষি নের ঝোঁড়া বাতাস। সেই বাতাসে পাল তুলে দিয়ে চলছে
খান-চারেক বিশাল মহাজনী নৌকো। ..." 20

What we generally get in a diary is the accumulation of facts and particulars and that is of the daily life. In addition to that, we come to know the different stages of a mind. As is the thought, so is the recording. A diary-keeper, as if, here talks to himself. All these characteristics are present in the diary of Mujtaba. As he wrote on one occasion in English:

"CALCUTTA—ISHURDI—RAJSHAHI
12বৈশাখ, ১৩৬৭
Yesterday it was 107° here in Calcutta. Fancy catching the train at 16-00, hottest part of the day. Kendu, Mukuldi, Ghantu,
Saumen & Prof. Saurin Dasgupta at the station.” 21

Here we have received some particulars of Mujtaba’s life. In course of keeping the diary, he abruptly brought the reference of the death of Prince Ali Khan. Doubt peeped into his mind – whether it was an accident or anything else! He analysed it from different angles. His diaries are full of many remarks which have exposed his personality, confidence, social consciousness etc. In one place we get ‘ধর্ম জানেন আমি ধর্মের প্রতি প্রজ্ঞাশীল’ and in other place he remarked while narrating the paddling of boat in a river in a stormy weather ‘মনে পড়ল রবীন্দ্রনাথ ত্যার পুত্র রবীন্দ্রনাথকে এই আচমকা ঝড় সম্বন্ধে একাধিকবার সাবধান করেছেন’ and many
others.

He opened the diary in this way even when touching the serious matter:

"অমাবস্যা

১১ই জৈষ্ঠ ১৩৬৭

Birthday of রাসবিহারী বসু। আগুনের ৩৬ তম মৃত্যুবার্থকী। নজরুল ইসলামেরও
জন্ম ১৩০৬ সালে।

কাজী আমিন উল্লা মুনশী তুফাঙ্গেল আলী
ফকির আহমদ মুসমুম Zaheda বাহান

"নজরুল"

Many facts about Nazrul Islam are left just in ten lines. During his days along the (sea) coast of South India, Mujtaba wrote his ‘Desê-Bidesê’. He maintained the diary recording with the particulars of sea beach. Such excellent description of the sea is very rare in Bengali literature. He wrote in ‘Samudra Prakriti’:

"১২ই ফেব্রুয়ারী। ১৯৪৭

বাড়ির সামনে দিয়ে চলে গেঁছে পিছিয়া চওড়া কালো রাস্তা। তার সঙ্গে গা মিলিয়ে
একজন ঘন সবুজ মাঠ, ছোড়া ক্রিকেট খেলে— তার সঙ্গে গা মিলিয়ে ফের আরেক ফাঁটি
সোনালী বালু পাড়—এক পাশে জেলের বন্তি, গাছ নেই পালা নেই কতকগুলো কুড়েঘর—বালু
পাড়ির সঙ্গে গা মিলিয়ে আরেকফাঁটি লম্বা একটানা নীল সমুদ্র।"

Mujtaba did hardly try to compose poems. But the form of modern poem is absent in the few poems that he composed but these are influenced by Rabindranath. Mujtaba’s first poem was published under a pseudonym ‘Satyapir’ on 28th July, 1945. Here follows an excerpt from that poem:

"নতোয়ে দেখিব আমি জোড়িষ্ঠ রূপে।
আমার চরম মোক্ষ, আমি গন্ধ দূষে
ভূমি হব পরিলয়ে সে দীপে তিলক
অগুনে আছেন যিনি, জলে বিশ্বাসক–
অস্ত্রহল, ওষধিতে, বলপত্তি মাঝে–
মম সত্যবাদণ যেন তারি স্পর্শে বাজে।"
Another poem of ‘Satyapir’ was published in the ‘Ananda Bāzār Patrikā’ on 25th November, 1945. Its name was “Tapoh Santa” and which has a background of its own. When trial of Azad Hind Fauz began in the Red Fort, agitation and movement broke out in the entire country in protest of the trial, and the non-violence movement started. One young boy called Rameshwar was killed in firing while the British Police rained bullets on the agitators. The poem was written on this background. Some of the lines of the poem read thus:

“শান্ত তো মানি না আজ। হে তরফ তব পদাহাত
দেশের তর্কার দিল করু রাহা। ...”

Besides this, “Mārjānidhan Kabya” published in ‘Pancatantra’ and “Prabāsir Cithi” of 1943 are also remarkable. “Prabāsir Cithi” was addressed to the son of his brother. Though the first part of the poem composed after Mujtaba’s own style, but the second part was touched with true literary significance. Memories of his childhood, natural sight of Sylhet, those golden days became ingredients of the poem: Mujtaba wrote:

‘হৃদেলের উত্তরেতে সোজা গিয়ে চলে
চোরামে, মিঘারের, উজ্জয়ে সুরমা,
গাযে সারি, গান–
ধবিয়া পালের দড়ি করিবারে ধারণীর মান
মেলা দৃশ্য দেখিয়াছি।
রূপে পারে
তার পরে
কী রূপালী কিলিমিলি সোনালী ধানের।
যেন যে হীরার মালা হাজার হাজার
— কাতার কাতার'
Mujtaba wrote some poems and prose-pieces for the children also. Though his travelogue 'Jale-Dangay' is fit for the children, yet the literary qualities befitting the adult are, too, sometimes noticed. But so to say, ten number of writings are truly juvenile literature.

Mujtaba let us know through his "Ghare Baire" published in the 'Ananda Bazar Patrika' on 24-9-1945 that his age began lowering down. Citing an example from Sukumar Ray's 'Ha-Ja-Ba-Ra-La' that he wanted to a member of 'Ananda Mela'. He presented the first story for the children based on the incidents of Santiniketan, where the philosopher Dwijendranath Tagore told the headmaster of the ashram against the flogging of the students:

"শোনা হে জগদনন্দ দাদাক।
গাধারে পিঠিলে হয় না অর্থ
অশেখারে সিটিলে হয় যে গাধা!"  

Mujtaba's 'Klain Erna' and 'Bidesi Bhasha-Klain Erna's in 'Ananda Mela' of the 'Ananda Bazar Patrika'. On 8th and 29th March, 1971 respectively. After that, Klain Aarna (2) was published on 5th July 1971. It was mentioned for the first time 'Lekha O Chabi: Sayed Mujtaba Ali'. Mujtaba wrote about Klain Erna:

"ক্লাইন এর্না জরমনির ছেট্টি একটি মেয়ে। আমাদের যে-রকম গোপা তাড় দারুণ চাঁদক; এই মেয়েটি সে-রকম ভীষণ রোকা। তবে, মাঝে মাঝে সে এমন কথা করে যে তার উত্তর : 'তার। যেমন ধরা, এরনি মা করে, 'হেই ক্লাইন এর্না। বেড়ালের ন্যাজটা মিছে মিছে টানছিল কেন? এরনি বললে, 'আমি টানছি কোথায়। কি যে বলো মা। বেড়ালটাই তো খাপি খাপি টানছিল।
আমি তো ন্যাজটা ধরে আছি।"  

Mujtaba also composed poems suitable for children. He composed an excellent poem on cricket staying at his sister Asma's residence in Dhaka. Some of the stanzas of the poem are as follows:
"হঘুকে মেতে ক্রিকেট খেলা দেখিতে যদি চাও
মাথাটি মোর খাও—
গাড়েল-পানা প্রশ্ন মেলা খেড়ে না খালি খালি
খেলাটা যদি না-বোঝা তবে দিয়া না হাতভালি

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যেমন ধরা, জানে না কিছু শুধু তবে তবে
যে শুধী পাশে আছে বসন—"দিন তো মোরে কয়ে
কাঠের ঐ ডাঙ্গাগুলো, কি নাম হয় তার?" 31

When ‘Guṇī’ said that these were called "Wicket", he was returned with
a question as for what purpose these were. Now the answer from ‘Guṇī’:

"হঘরিয়া ইছন শোনে, ‘ওগুলো কার তবে?’—
খেলাড়ি সব বসবে বসে কাঁদ হলে পরে।” 32

Two songs, some poems and translated poems are available in his diary.
One of the songs was used in his novel ‘Tulanāhūną’. Some of its lines are as
follows:

"চন্দ্রমূর্ধ গ্রহে গ্রহে
সাজাও আলিম্পন
তারা তারায় বংশ তুমি
অলখ আলিম্পন।” 33

It was recorded in Mujtaba’s diary, 4th September 1960: ‘আজ সকালে হাই-নের
কবিতা অনুবাদ করলুম’. It is given below:

"সদ্ভি সত্যি আমারা দুজন মিলে
অতুত এক গড়েছি প্রেমের জোড়া
প্রিয়া মোর পায়ে না পারে দাঁড়াতে ভালো
আর আমি? আমি একবারে হায় ঘোঁড়া।” 34

12th April, 1961 — Rabindranath’s Birth Centenary. Mujtaba wrote in
‘Rabindra Janma Satabarse.’

"শতাব্দী হয়েছে পূর্ণ। আজি হতে শত বর্ষ পরে
নরনারী বালবৃদ্ধ কাব্য তব বঙ্কোপরি শরে
We also get a few poems such as “Bar Kane”, “Modern Kabita” composed in conversational style in dialect.

Despite being a linguist and though he emphasised the importance on many occasions, but he did not himself render the translation works so much. His personal opinion is that as Rabindranath did not spend time in translation works, so the trend of translation in the Bengali literature is very weak. Mujtaba believed that in case of translation the publisher, editor and writer have some sort of unwillingness. They do not like to expose that translation is translation. Only the knowledge in two languages does not help the translation works. One should know the behavioural traits, culture, social conditions, customs, style of speaking etc of the people of both the languages. Without knowing all these things very well, the translation will be like ‘কাশ্মীরি শালের উল্টো পিঠ’.

Mujtaba rendered some translations. His ‘Kato-nā Asrujal’ was serially published in ‘Des’, 27th Paus, 1375 BS. ‘Kato-na Asrujal’ is a translated bunch of letters with commentary. There was a great hubbus after its publication. A lot of letters were also published in ‘Des’. The fame of the writer overlook that which he earned after ‘Dese-Bidesê’. Mujtaba wrote:

“...ধনাবাদ জানিয়ে অগণিত চিঠি আমার কাছে আসে। তাদের অক্ষুংকলে ‘কত এ’ অক্ষুংকলে’ তোরা ছিল। একাধিক মাত্র, ভাষা আমাকে পুত্রের, ভাতার শেষ পত্র পাঠান। বস্তুতঃ যখন ‘দেশ’ পত্রিকায় অথাবের ‘দেশে-বিদেশে’ প্রকাশিত হয় তখনো এত পত্র আমি পাইনি।”

The subject matter of the book is excellent but pathetic:

“এই বইয়ে আছে গত বিশ্বযুদ্ধে যায়া জড়িয়ে পড়েছিল, অর্থাৎ ইচ্ছা-অনিচ্ছায় সৈনিকদের একে অন্যকে নিধন করতে হয়েছিল, তাদের শেষ চিঠি, ভাবতির শেষ পত্র”
Parimal Goswami rightly commented while editing the works of Mujtaba (Vol. IV):

"চিঠিগুলি ব্যবস্থাই মূর্তপ্রণী। মুক্ততার প্রধানত হলকা মেজাজের নিচের ভাবে নে। একটি গভীর সংবেদনশীল মন আছে, তার প্রতিটি জ্ঞানসূত্রে যেন এই চিঠিগুলির বেদনা দিয়েছ, তাই তিনি এগুলি বেঁচে নিয়েছেন বাঙালী পাঠকদের দেখার জন্য।" 38

A French boy of 16 was caught by the Germans and later on he was awarded with death sentence. Here follows an excerpt of the translated letter by Mujtaba which that very French boy wrote to his parents just a few minutes before his death:

"আমার জন্য তোমরা কোনো চিঠি করো না, জীবনের শেষ মুহূর্ত পর্যন্ত আমি আমার সহজ রসদাহ্য ও হিতকর বাণ্য রেখে যাব; আমি যাবার সময় সেই 'সীমার সাদা মাটি' গানটি গেয়ে যাব, যেটি তুমি, আমার আদরের মা আমাকে শিখিয়েছিলে।

...দেখা দেওয়া আসছে আমাকে দেখতে। আমার হাতের লেইখা হয়েছে অনেক একটি কাপা-কাপা হয়ে গেল; তার কারণ পেনসিলটি বন্ধ হয়ে গেল; মুত্তায় আমার নেই।

...বিদায় বিদায়। মুত্তু আমাকে ডাকছে।" 39

Address is written at the bottom:

আরি ফের্তুত, সর্গোলক, কেয়ার অব ভাগবান।'

Another identical letter reads thus:

ইদুন তুলাপ্রফুল: বুলগেরিয়া।

জন্ম প্রিয়ানন্দে-তে হলা জানুয়ারী ১৯১৫।

মৃত্যু ২২ নভেম্বর ১৯৪৩, বুলগেরিয়ার পুলিশ কর্তৃক নিহত। ২১ নভেম্বর ১৯৪৩

যে একটি মাটি বাসনা আমার আছে সেটি বেরে থাকার। তোমার ঘাস চেপে ধরে রাখ
করে দিল, তোমাকে ছিনে নিয়ে গেল, ধীরে ধীরে তোমার চোখনা লোপ পেল; গায়ের
কুটির আরো ছোট হয়ে গেল, এ কুটিলতে কথনো বাংলা চোখে না। তৎসমতে বেরে থাকার
জন্য কী আমার প্রস্থায়।

আর আমার ছোট ছেলেটি... যে কথাগুলো সে আমায় বলেছিল এখনো আমার মনে
চঞ্চল করে তেলে: বাবা, তুমি যখন ফিরে আসবে তখন আমার জন্য একটা দীর্ঘ লাইন 'বলে।

dেনে আর ছোট একটী গাড়ি, আর এক ঝোড়া জুতে।..." 40

One Pijush Kanti Chandra and Tushar Kanti Chandra wrote letters in 'Des' that the last letter of Dinesh (Gupta)—One of the popular trio—'Bimav-
Badal-Dinesh’ deserved to be remarkable along with last letters of those martyrs who were killed in the Second World War.

‘Kato-nā Asrūjal’ is completed with the description of the pathetic story of the suicide of Karl an elder brother of Mujtaba’s classmate Pawl.

Mujtaba translated a Russian story into Bengali and whose original writer was Nikolai Semonovich Lesskof (1831-1895). The original story is entitled ‘Matsensk Jelar Lady Macbeth’, but Mujtaba named his translation “Prem”. The original story was published in 1865. We do not know Lesskof as much as we know Tolstoy, Turgeneff, or Dostoyefoski. But it is due to Mujtaba that the Bengalee readers enjoyed the taste of his literature. It is indeed the most remarkable translation works of Mujtaba.

If we look at the original name of the story, we can easily understand the significance of the naming of it as “Prem”. A woman named Kathereena like Lawrence’s Lady Chatterly was locked into a biological relationship with a desperate young employee of their farm house. Kathereena had a desolate life with a husband who crossed over youthful days, an old father-in-law and a palatial building. It is indeed a shattered love-story, yet Mujtaba was charmed with the intensity and sincerity of Kathereena’s love. He did not like to call it a story, on the contrary, a novel.

Mujtaba did some more works of translations here and there. There are some poems and short poems in translation. But at last remarkable work of translation by Mujtaba is the war-song of the Azad Hind Fauz:


"এগিয়ে যা এগিয়ে যা
যুথের গীত গাইতে যা।
দেশের তার জীবন ধন
দেশের লাগি করবি নে পণ?
কদম কদম বরায়ে জা
যুথের গীত গাইয়ে জা
ইয়েহ জিন্দগী হায় কৌমন্তকী
তো কৌম পে লুটায়ে জা।"
Mujtaba also wrote in English. He used to write under a pseudonym of ‘Ray Pithaura’ a column in the ‘Hindusthan Standard’. Though a few of his writings in English are included in his works, but most of his works in English remained out of print.

The written dissertation that Mutaba submitted to University of Bonn, Germany for D. Phil degree, entitled “The Origin of the Khojahs and their religious life today” was published from Germany in 1936. This unique research work was not included in the anthology of his works, hence, the readers are deprived of a huge English writing of Mujtaba.

Mujtaba wrote a long ‘Foreward’ in 1946 to a booklet named ‘Pakistan and Self Determination’ by Sudhir Kumar Dasgupta. From it we get a clear picture of Mujtaba’s political notion and vision.

‘The Spirit of Tagore’ is included in the anthology of his works. Actually, Mujtaba wanted to assess Rabindranath through the poem “Tapobhanga” and along with it “Rogasayyay”, “Arogya” and “Seš Lekha”.

Inviting a foreign friend to visit Delhi, Mujtaba wrote “A letter from India.”

Moreover, he wrote ‘Love and Friendship’ based on the romantic experiences of his student life.

Mujtaba believed that one’s own creation in one’s mother tongue is an easy as it is not in other lanuages. That’s why, even knowing so many languages, as well as having proficiency in English, Mujtaba primarily wrote in his mother tongue Bengali.

Lastly, with a few touches to the critical works of Mujbata, we will wind up this chapter, that is, our research work.
Of the critical works, Mujtaba mostly did criticism of books.

Mujtaba criticised under the title of 'Rabindra Racanābali' those works of Rabindranath which the Government of West Bengal published on the occasion of the poet's birth centenary. The readers faced difficulty to the works of Rabindranath published by 'Visva-Bharati' as in it both poems and songs were mixed together. Mujtaba wrote regarding the present works of Rabindranath:

“প্রথম আড়াই বা তিন ধোঁকা আয়ুরের কবিতা ও পঞ্চম গান একসঙ্গে পেয়ে
যাচ্ছি। ...এতে প্রচলিত রচনাবলীর মত চার রকমের জিনিসের (১. কবিতা ও গান, ২. নাটক ও
প্রহসন, ৩. উপন্যাস ও গল্প, ৪. প্রবন্ধ) পৌষ্পীধর্ণ থাকবে না।”

Mujtaba’s another remarkable critical appreciation is Upendranath Bandyopadhyay’s ‘Nirbasiter Atmakathā’. Mujtaba noticed a few things in the writing of Upendranath: (a) Deep patriotism and (b) Bengalee-like cogitation. Mujtaba also noticed another aspect and that is the excellent language used in the book. Even Rabindranath himself highly appreciated the book.

The introduction to Abadhut’s travelogue ‘Nilkantha Himalay’ is ‘Pathaker Nibedan’ and this ‘Nibedan’ (humble submission) is very long. It seemed to Mujtaba after reading Abadhut’s ‘Marutirtha Hinglaj’ that leaving out Rabindranath, it is the greatest book as a travelogue after ‘Palamau’. Mujtaba wrote in his criticism about that very Abadhut’s ‘Nilkantha Himalay’ that restrained but lucid description is the heartthrob of the book. According to Mujtaba, above all, there lies ‘milk of human kindness’ in that book.

To speak the truth, the greatest characteristics of the whole range of Mujtaba’s works is this ‘milk of human kindness’. And here he is a great creator perfectly transcending time and space.
Notes

2. Ibid. p. 184.
3. Ibid. p. 182.
8. Ibid.
21. Ibid. p. 252.
22. Ibid. p.260.
23. Ibid. p.265.
24. Ibid. p.292.
32. Ibid.
40. Ibid. p.156-57.