Chapter : I
Introduction

Sayed Mujtaba Ali (1904-74) is out and out an exceptional personality in Bengali literature. Twenty seven books contain his compositions, besides this, there remains a lot of unpublished writing in the form of books. A good number of rare composition has been gathered from different newspapers and magazines, and this act of collection is still going on. 'Mitra O Ghose', a renowned publisher of Kolkata, published the writings of Mujtaba Ali in eleven different volumes. We have had the diary, rhymes, bunch of letters, manuscripts, songs, newspaper-features, literary criticism, translations and many other literary materials of different genres of Alisaheb, in addition to many famous and popular writings like 'Dese-Bideshe', 'Caca Kahini', 'Pancatantra', 'Sabnam' etc. Writing travelogues, novels, fiction, story, memoirs, belles-lettess etc, Mujtaba has enriched Bengali literature. The writings of Mujtaba have unveiled before us a world of chequered literary taste. It is learnt from the sources discovered so far that his first published work was in the Bengali year 1338. In the very same year it was published in the issues of Baisakh and Jaistha of 'Muktadhārā' edited by Dinendranath Tagore and Nalini Roy. It is a story named 'Nere'. The first book of Majtaba called 'Dese-Bideshe' was serially published in 'Des' in 1948; and it was published in the form of a book in the year that followed. The very first book placed him at the peak of name and fame; and within a short spell of time he became popular in the reading circle. Since then his unparalled writings one after another began to be published. 'Pancatantra', 'Caca Kahini', and 'Mayurkanthi' were published in 1952.
The Bengalee readers through Majtaba have started enjoying a literary world of different tastes. The writings of Mujtaba, saying good-bye to all the traditional literary stereotypes, have set up a completely new style of expression. Mujtaba began to paint his world with variegated subjects and colours. Though the way of expression are very light, but a big world of knowledge lies behind it. The style blooms forth through conversations, nevertheless, there runs a strong undercurrent of scholarly thoughts and the style of delineation is pregnant with humour; moreover, the lines of descriptions are never overtaxed with the parade of learning. It was hardly found in Bengali literature, prior to Mujtaba, that the treasures of wisdom could be expressed in such a witty manner. Mujtaba was himself an excellent linguist. He came from Sylhet, East Bengal, to Santiniketan in 1921 for studies. Infact, he was the first year student of the college under ‘Visva-Bharati’. After that, he travelled extensively home and abroad and in regard to his service life, he moved from Bagura to Baroda, from Kabul to Cuttack—and in many other places. Hence, literature emerged from the very core of his life. His literature is, therefore based on the practical experiences of his personal life. Consequently, he touched upon from tit-bits of life to Rabindranath—he roamed about everywhere with equal sincerity. His sudden appearance in the sky of Bengali literature heralded a new dimension. He moved forward banking on personal works or what is called ‘personal essay’ in western literature. In course of time, that particular trend of writing established completely a new course of writing in Bengali literature. Many a pen followed him. Critic Saroj Bandyopadhyay commented about that particular period in this way:

"...প্রায় সকল সঙ্গে শুরু হয়েছেরমারচনার অজান্য ধারাবর্ধন। 'দৃষ্টিপাতের ও 'দেশেবিদেশের' জয়যাত্রা লেখকদের আকর্ষণ করেছে এবং সংখ্যাগণনার বাইরে চলে গেছে রমারচনার লেখকর।"
To speak the truth, the Bengali literature took a new turn after the publication of ‘Dese-Bidese’. Bimala Prasad Mukhopadhyay wrote in this regard:

“বাঙ্গালা সাহিত্যে যখন গল্প-উপন্যাসের প্রাচুর্য, কবিতা ও প্রবন্ধের প্রসার দেখা যাচ্ছিল এবং সাধারণ পাঠকের বহ ভোজনে অর্ক জমাচ্ছিল, সেই সময় আলী সাহেবের চোঙ্গ জ্ঞান আর রসিকতার ঝুঁকিকে দীপ্তি নিয়ে আকাশপ্রকাশ পাঠকসমক্ষে অভাবনীয় সাড়া জাগাল। ক্রমশ গল্প উপন্যাস পড়ে আর মাঝে মাঝে কবিতা ও প্রবন্ধের পাতা উল্টিয়ে পাঠে যখন ক্রমালং কথার কাছে যে পেয়ে গেল একাধারে দেশজ্ঞের অভিজ্ঞতা আর স্বীকৃতি সরস গল্পগুজ আলী সাহেবের ভাবায় ‘কেচ্ছ’—হারামো গোত্রের মতো কাহিনীর একটা গল্প, তার বাঁকে বাঁকে অপ্রত্যাশিত সরুজ জটলা, আর বর্ণনায় কাব্যের আমেজ।”

Mujtaba received the prestigious ‘Narasinghadas Award’ given away by the University of Delhi for his ‘Dese-Bidese’. If we take into consideration the literary activities of the whole life of Mujtaba, it seems to us that he should have received more awards for that. Sunil Gangopadhyay once thundered against it:

“জ্ঞানিতে কাব্যে একরবিন্তু পুরস্কার বা সাহিত্য আকাদেমি পুরস্কার দেবার কথা করার মনে পড়েনি, সেজন্য কর্তাব্যক্তির আজও নিষ্ঠ অনুশোচনা করে পাপধানালনের চেষ্টা করতেন।”

But since Mujtaba’s life is deluged with love and recognition from numberless readers, then it doesn’t matter whether he gets such award or not. Mujtaba, a pioneer of a new era in Bengali literature, is almost neglected from another angle also, and it is academic evaluation of his works. No researcher of our country has so far carried a through research on the life and works of Mujtaba Ali. It is to be admitted, that Nurur Rahman Khan of Bangladesh has done a research in this regard. His two research works are as follows:

1. ‘Sayed Mujtaba Ali: Jiban Kathā’
2. ‘Mujtaba Sāhityer Rupbaicitra O Racaṇā Sāilī’.

Except this there is no such example of any exhaustive research work at the topmost tertiary level of those sixteen Indian universities where Bengali
language and literature is studied and taught. It is indeed a big matter to note how Mujtaba Ali suffers academic inattention in this country.

Anyway, some research-type works on Mujtaba Ali carried in Bangladesh have come to our notice. But those in evaluating Mujtaba’s life and literature have failed to be considered exhaustive and comprehensive. Some works about Mujtaba done in Bangladesh are as follows:


3. ‘Mujtaba Prasanga’; Edited by Prof. Sunirmal Kumar Deb (Meen). 1st edn 1977. Published from Sylhet. It contains twenty two pieces of memoirs. It is most probably the first book about Mujtaba.

But the said works are not sufficient enough to throw light on tit-bits of Mujtaba’s life, his family background, the gradual development of his personality, his service life, his literature and his indispensible bond with it. Nevertheless, their importance of understanding Mujtaba to some extent is never-to-be-denied.

Though in India in academic field a complete research work on Mujtaba is nil, yet in some circles some sort of enlivening tempo is marked regarding Mujtaba and which indeed are very negligible in number. But even in such efforts no research-type works come to our notice. A few examples of endeavours in India in this regard are as follows:

and reminiscences are contained in it in two different parts.

2. 'Majlisi Mujtaba'. Edited by Tapash Bhowmick. It is actually a revised and enlarged edition of 'Korak Sahitya Patrika Mujtaba Issue'. Total p.240. 1st edn 2001. Three additional pieces of essay are included in it.


It is a point to note that in this land of ours works on Mujtaba are quite insufficient. Meditating minds on Mujtaba are confined to reprints of old books only. Barring a few exceptions, new horizon-searching write-up on Mujtaba is almost zero. For example, Prof. Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay in the recent edition (July 2000) of his 'Bangla Gadyarftir Itihas' elaborated over nine and a half page regarding the prose-style of Mujtaba Ali. But it is to be said that this brief elaboration bears no gravity in evaluating the mammoth literary activities of Mujtaba.

We can raise an important matter coming up to this extent, and the matter is that from our part in ascertaining the value of the literary principle of Mujtaba, we have left him untouched. Mujtaba had been on the glorious throne of Bengali literature from 1948 to 1974—a long innings of twenty two years. The graph line of his popularity has not slid down even after so many years of his death. The Bengali literary criticism has experienced a remarkable uptrend move during the second part of the twentieth century. But this time besides many books on principles of literary criticism by towering personalities of Bengali literature, a lot of other books of identical nature came to light. But all these books are without the mention of Mujtaba. Of course, many authors
ended up the reference of Mujtaba in just one or two words or sentences. But so far serious studies are concerned, Mujtaba is totally neglected and untouched. This is indeed a great worrying matter. We like to elaborate the point to some extent with an example.

Everybody knows that the world of humour is one of the facets in the literature of Mujtaba. He displayed humour in his works in different ways. To speak the truth, in his every sort of work—whether serious or not, humour abounds in many ways. Hence, in the tradition of humour in Bengali literature, Mujtaba is an indispensable name. But even the great writers belonging to both Mujtaba’s time or to present time have not done any justice in evaluating the humour of Mujtaba’s literature. The names of two great books of humour in Bengali literature can be cited in order to establish the authenticity of this allegation. The said books are—‘Banga Sāhitye Hasyaraser Dhārā’ by Ajit Kumar Ghose and Ajit Datta’s ‘Bangla Sāhitye Hāsyaras’. In Ajit Datta’s above said book (1st edn 1960, p.473) just two lines have been penned regarding Mujtaba. There is not vestige of reference about Mujtaba in the above said book of Ajit Kumar Ghose. Same allegations can be brought in respect to Mujtaba’s story, novel and essays also. The reference of Mujtaba has been absent from most of the books on criticism, except a mere mention in rare occasions.

Under the given circumstances, a fervid necessity of carrying research on the life and literature of Mujtaba happens to be quite natural. Therefore, we think that it is quite pertinent for the classification, evaluation and accurate analysis of the literature of Mujtaba Ali. It seems to be also an urgent duty on our part so as to ascertain the proper place of Mujtaba Ali in the gallery of
Bengali literature. Considering all these factors, we have earnestly taken up the responsibility of doing a research on the life and literature of Mujtaba.

Maximum importance is given in the present works of research in making a full evaluation about Mujtaba Ali. Mujtaba wrote to an extensive degree. So, his works need to be broken up into different categories, and their literary evaluation under classified order has to be done separately. So, we have not included all his writings randomly in our research work. Here we have taken upon some selective writings minus using some other works of minor standard. We have adopted only those works of Mujtaba for discussion which happen to be famous and well known. Here follows the list of books for our discussion: Dese-Bideśe, Cācā Kahini, Pancatantra, Mayurkanthi, Abisvasya, Jale-Dāngāy, Sabnam, Sahar-iar, Hitlar, Musāphir, Tulanāhīnā, Dhupchāya, Dvandvamadhur, Caturanga, Tuni Mem, Baṛabābu, Hāsyamadur, Kata-nā Aṣṛujal, Du-hārā etc. However, in course of discussion a few references have come up occasionally from Mujtaba’s letters and diary. Only a few unimportant newspaper-features or some unimportant essays and articles have been excluded. Similarly, a few representative stories have been chosen from the world of his stories for discussion.

This selection is undoubtedly very tough. Nevertheless, we have broken up the literature of Mujtaba into different types for their proper evaluation. We have divided the selective part of the literature of Mujtaba in five different divisions. It is needless to say, that these five different divisions are an appendix to Introduction itself.

These are as follows:
Chapter : II

Brief Life Sketch & Vision of Life

In this very chapter we have presented life and vision of the life of Mujtaba. The life of Mujtaba is eventful having been impregnated with chequered experiences. His personal mind has its reflection in his works. As a result, it seems to be quite relevant and necessary to throw a spotlight on his life while evaluating every nook and corner of his literary world. A complete research on the life of Mujtaba can also be done separately. As we have given importance in ascertaining the value of his literature, so his life and the vision of life have been delineated in a nutshell.

Chapter : III

Mujtaba Ali's Travelogue

The first book of Mujtaba is a travelogue. Besides this, his travel-related experiences are recorded in four more books. He came to Santiniketan from his native land Sythet in 1921. After that he travelled home and abroad. Since his accounts of journey are primarily confined in these five books, each of them is given equal importance for the purpose of our discussion.

Chapter : IV

Mujtaba Ali's Novels & Stories

The four novels of Mujtaba Ali are: 'Abisvasya', 'Sabnain', 'Salinar' and 'Tulanaghna' respectively. Apart from this twenty selective stories are subject of discussion in this chapter.
Chapter V

Essays of Mujtaba Ali

The serious essays of Mujtaba have been discussed in this chapter and evaluation of essayist Mujtaba has been done.

Chapter VI

Mujtaba’s Light works

Mujtaba throughout his life created many a light work. Some selected pieces written on strange subjects in varied styles have been discussed in this chapter.

We have actually based on the works of Mujtaba Ali in classifying the above said chapters. The works of Mujtaba published in eleven volumes by ‘Mitra o Ghose’ have been taken into account as the primary and salient source of our research works. Importance has been given primarily to those works of Mujtaba which happened to be published in the form of books in term of our source as we have been able to collect the original image of a good number of books of Mujtaba by courtesy of different libraries. Apart from that, we have, too, gathered the original edition of a few works of Mujtaba published in print media. Here follows a list of such works published in different print media:

1. Abisvasya; Bisvabani, Kolkata-9. 1st edn, Asar 1377 BS.
2. Caturanga; Bengal Publishers, Kolkata-12. 1st edn, Bhadra 1367 BS.
4. Dese-Bideśe; New Age Publishers, Kol-1. 4th edn, Paus 1358 BS.
5. Hitler; Bisvabani, Kolkata-9. 1st edn, 1377 BS.
6. Kata-Nā Aśrujal; Bisvabani, Kolkata-9. 1st edn, 1378 BS.
7. Mayurkanthi; Bengal Publishers, Kolkata-12. 8th edn, Bhadra 1361 BS.

8. Musaphir; Bisvabani, Kolkata-9. 1st edn, 1378 BS.

   11th edn, Magh 1407 BS.

10. Pancatantra; Bengal Publishers, Kolkata-12. 13th edn, Paus 1363 BS


Notes


