

Resurrection

Punorutthan (Bangla) by JATIN BALA
Translated into English by MRINMOY PRAMANICK

People of B. G. colony look at Atul Mistri when he walks in his own rhythm. It seems people cannot refuse to take notice of Atul Mistri's walk. His body is like a thin, dry, old bamboo stick. Like a skeleton. Strong wrist, long hands and little bended legs. It seems he throws those legs in every step and walks like an aimed arrow. He is like a smooth skin *Pnakal* fish staying in a muddy water of pond. A bunch of black and white deep curly hair on his head - a loose torn full sleeve shirt on his body. Fifty-years old Atul Mistri is a poor peasant. He is a *Namashudra*. The Mistri surname is an extra word. He is one among the hundred crores people of India who pray to mother-Earth for livelihood.

Forcefully, people made colony after demolishing the temporary refugee camps. Each family gets too small space to live and it was given by rationing. Atul Mistri has been refused from many places and at last he left his shack beside the rail line when he got a small piece of land to stay. He made a hut with mud walls, covered with red mud tiles at B. G. Colony. It is his great fortune. Fug and dark area, looks like a fat human being, no colour, no shape; though better than that dirty shack which was made of waste plastic covers.

He had to walk a long way for thirty-five years. His life is full with interesting and unbelievable narratives as fairy tales are. His life is as overstrung as a detective story. It filled with many dramatic conflicts and tensions. His surname is Mistri but nothing is there what he had not to do for livelihood. Once

he went to commit suicide but failed. Attraction towards his family brought him back to the slum.

His daily life went through tremendous labour, hard work and uncertainty of future. He is a victim of partition, religious fundamentalism and caste system. Not only he, but also crores of Indians who had to leave their parents' land once. After having suffered with all these hazards, Atul Mistri is still alive! Strange! Strange! Leaving all these tiredness of life, he owned all the strength to live, he is changed - he, he himself did it.

Consciousness to resist, to protest, a step towards a strong move, changes a human being. You have to know it, as eternal truth. Experiences make a life as the life of a human being should be. Human being! Atul feels immense pleasure to think about this word. There are thousands of rhythms in this word.

The man, the man is an eternal truth. Breaking the cover of a seed and becoming a tree, becoming a human being, achieving a life, a complete life. Everything is there inside the man, everything is for human being. He cannot control himself, and his heart floats into the tears of eyes, the old memories break his landscape of mind like a storm.

Our land is made of alluvial soil. Black, ash coloured clayey soil. Whatever colour it may be, it is our mother, mother earth. So I did not see any other land. I have loved this soil. This is my mother. There is no comparison of mother's beauty. This land seems to me like that. So, when mother land is divided, it cries, it gets pain and we too. Heart is divided. I have bloodshed. I have bloodshed of my brothers.

Hanging Bait from Hook

Bongaon to Sealdah, lakhs of people are homeless, staying in slums, in kennels. They are living every moment fighting with death. Rootless, aimless, foodless people! They do not have shape, do not have beauty, they have only open mouths. Hunger! Hunger makes a human being inhuman. A man kills another because of hunger. These slums are really jungles. Jungles of the man.

Man-eater, ferocious animals are moving here and there freely in this jungle. Tigers, lions, leopard, poisonous snakes and many more. Each moment needs a conscious step. Poor men are often killed by these animals. They will eat your bones and flesh. If you do not believe my words, ask somebody else. Ananda Mandal who came back from Dandakaranya-Pilvit, was saying these. Atul Mistri can understand that the story is true. He can see in the dark, a living creature appears in skeleton, from heath, infertile, grim land. The last local train, blowing its whistle, left for Bongaon, long ago. Maya did not come back home. Tension makes him impatient. Maya is the daughter of Aloka and Atul Mistri. What happened to her! Who knows! Maya is damsel, beautiful. Parents become unrest, walking mindlessly, sometimes becoming like stone in fear, cursing their fate. Atul Mistri is going out of kennel in the dark. Alok sat on the entrance of it. Atul Mistri cannot think about his fate. What will happen to his daughter! Dark galley and narrow lanes beside the rail lines. Atul stumbles on the dark way. Somehow he controls himself from falling down.

Slowly and silently she goes back to the kennel. Suddenly she gets shock after seeing a dark-shaped shadow. She calls in a loud voice with fear, 'who? Who? Who is there?' 'Me, me',

Atul Mistri says. Maya recognises the voice and asks with anxiety, ‘why are you here? What are you doing?’

Atul was tensed too out of breath, he replied, ‘I was waiting for you’. He stopped because he could not able to speak continuously. He was anxious and worried.

‘For me? In this night? Why?’ Maya was so surprised.

I had to tell you something important. I was thinking to tell you but I could not. Atul expels a deep breath. It seems echoed.

‘You could have said it in the morning’, Maya hid her sorrow and said in a normal tone. ‘Yes, I could have told. But you are always busy. Atul tried to hide his ransacked mind but he failed. Atul sat on a cement pedestal near to his kennel and said Maya in an unrest voice, ‘sit here’. Maya becomes irritated though she said, ‘no, it is okay, you please tell me’.

Atul Mistri looks for words. He is a man having no destination. It seems his inside is facing a continuous bleeding from old wounds. His unorganized words reflect his inner world, “I am a broken man, failed everywhere. An agony of my life struggle burns me, I am rootless, moving here and there, from one camp to another, stayed in slums, I broke stones, I had to dig soil for livelihood. I am tired after back-breaking work. I am just floating on the river of life. Your *Ma* says it very correctly, ‘I am a man who does not possess any meaning’. I do not have any value. It is my mistake, I married your *Ma*, gave birth to you. There is no limit of my guilt”. It seems he has to take immense effort to talk, something is resisting his voice. Atul is sweating. He is taking long breath. “*Ma*, please do not go for any work tomorrow onwards, you

please be here at home. I will go to dig stone-soil. You stay at home *Ma*, stay at home”.

Bitter voice of Maya came out with anxiety, ‘you are waiting here to say all these, at this night’? Atul tries to stand, his legs are weak. ‘No, no, not because of that. You are growing now, if you are late to return home, we become very much tensed. All the bad thoughts dig our heart. I cannot bear with this anymore’.

Maya can understand what her father means. Maya needs to make him understand. Life struggle! Endless struggle makes this man faithless towards life. What is his fault? He is still alive, that is enough. Maya resists her anger. She knows when hunger eats your nerves; you have to eat the bait, though you know bait is hanging from a hook. It is a living truth.

Young Maya demurred at the beginning. She hesitated to see herself as a commodity of male sexual desire. She felt it is an insult to womanhood. Hunger made her cry several times. Human being can insult its’ soul or humanity only because of getting some food to live. Maya knows the difference between to live and to live without food. She realised it very particularly.

Tensed Aloka sits like a stone. Her twenty-year old son is in jail for last three months because of false charge. She always feels burning sensation. Her children are still alive with so many hazards. If they leave her now, make her alone, how she will accept it. Tears fall from her eyes. How unfortunate is her life! Her husband, her daughter and her son. Where they will be lost, who knows! If one leaves the home, whether s/he comes back again! Her heart cries.

Maya crosses the light darkness and stands in front of their kennel. Aloka reaches to the heaven, she jumps on her daughter and ask where she was still this midnight. Maya rejects her mother's emotions with a bitter sound. She comes out from Aloka's arms. She saw a broken face in the dim light. She looked at her Ma with an irritation. Aloka is surprised. Her lips are wounded, it is bleeding. She tastes her own blood. She realised her own blood which is there in her daughter's vein, is floating with some other current...

Another World Behind...

Myakrel Work Site Camp. Anil Ghatak was telling, "*Babumoshai* How much you pay for us, why do you kill me slowly? It is better to shoot us. You will not be punished and we will be free forever'. Atul Mistri was strong then. He could speak too. *Namashudra* never dies easily. He added, 'who divides motherland only to get pleasure of power, sends us to the forest of Dandakaranya they are posterity of Mirzafar. The chair of Delhi is much more favorite than greater patriotism".

Those great people who were behind the Dandakaranya plan did not have to go there. They did not get any chance to enjoy extreme political power also. Only they had punished *Namashudras*. Atul Mistri could not tell all these things that day but he organized the labours of Myakrel Work Site and called for a strike.

Shyamal Mukherjee who was one of the masters to send people in Dandakaranya was looking that scenario. Small yellow coloured tents, narrow lane full of stones, jungles and ferocious animals. They sent people here to be died, to be killed. Whose conspiracy is this?

There was only one tube well for thousands of families. No way to preserve rain water. Tents were in worst condition. At the time of raining, people had to take shelter under the tree. Government takes care of animals in zoo but they did not show sympathy towards the refugees. Motherland is wounded and many poisonous insects are moving there.

Shyamal Mukherjee, accompanied by many others came towards the tents, ‘who is Nikhil Biswas?’ He asked it in bitter voice. Weak Nikhil Biswas became tired to reach to Shyamal Mukherjee, after a long breathing, he asked, ‘what happened?’ ‘As if you will be seating for indefinite hunger strike’, Shyamal Mukherjee asked sarcastically. “There is nothing to call for hunger strike, we are hungry. I get twenty rupees per month and you take the money. You have said that we will get subsidy, but when? My stomach does not listen to anything”. Shyamal Mukherjee was about to move. Three four refugees came and told him, “Please listen to some other stories. There is a scarcity of water, stool is overflowing from the latrine, and tents are already torn. There is no limit of complains. If you want to kill us please do it on our motherland. Why are you killing us in this natural jail?”

Shyamal Mukherjee, Dasharath Mitra, Abinash Chatterjee looked at each other. One among refugees shouted, ‘workers came to repair tube well and tents, you people sent them back’. People started asking together, ‘what happened? No answer? Why? Tell us’.

These masters of refugees shouted at them and started to show their power verbally. There is no other way for these refugees. They have to live. All the men, women, children came and hold masters’ legs and requested again and again to earn their right to live. But who cares! Shyamal Mukherjee,

Haren Chakraborty, Madhusudan Dasgupta became angry, lower caste people touched their feet. Shyamal Mukherjee said, 'you should not do this. I am trying to afford best for you people'. Someone from the crowd spoke, 'you have done a lot for us. Next time you please come to see our dead bodies'. Shyamal Mukherjee took his jeep and said in a cruel voice, 'whether you want or not I have to come to visit you. I have taken your responsibility'. Crowd said, 'yes you do that we will not dig stones in the name of soil. If you are able to offer us food and shelter, please give otherwise we will go back to Sealdah station. At least we can survive there'. Shyamal Mukherjee looked at other members and said in English, 'some political provocation is going behind this; we have nothing to do for these people, let us go. They are eating our nerves.'

Jeep rushed towards Jagdalpur on national high way. Atul Mistri looked at red dust in the air and cursed his fate. Bengalis are doing harm to Bengalis, cold blood, well planned. A plan, so well, so organized, which includes three states: Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. Atul Mistri could not realise it initially. Now it is very much clear to him, division of society based on caste. He opened the mask of the society. Once who had helped Radcliff to draw the line now they are killing *Rajputs* of Bengal, *Namasudras*, otherwise they will not achieve the taste of power of Delhi. Atul Mistri still can hear those words of dream, 'there is no sufficient land for cultivation, no ladders, cows, seeds, if you go there, you will be given all these'. Showing the balloons of hope they were brought here in Dandakaranya, from the fertile land of the Padma River, the Meghna River and the Ariyal to here on the dead land.

Atul Mistri took shelter in a reception centre near to India-Bangladesh border when he first came to India. After that he

stayed in many small centres in Barnpur, Bongaon. It is a thirty five years old story but written in blood. Name, profession, family members, original dress, everything were written on a piece of yellow paper. Masters stamped a number on his forehead, registration card number. That yellow paper with government seal was everything. That was only identity and gate pass to get ration, loan everything.

Now Atul Mistri can see the cruelty of caste system which is written on his palm. Higher caste refugees were given land, shelter and jobs. Their own people were there to offer them all the comforts. Lower caste people, peasants, they lost their land and everything else as soon as they lose it. There was no space for them in West Bengal, hence, they were sent to Dandakaranya. Many people died on the road. Much more people were died because of hunger than the riots. Those, who were still alive in Dandakaranya, nobody could kill them, they came back to West Bengal, took shelter beside the rail lines, high ways. Atul Mistri is one among them, who is still alive combating the death. Atul Mistri cannot think any more, his eyes are full of tears.

Stomach does not listen to anyone, has to fulfill its own demand. Again, another conspiracy. Swapan Mistri, Atul Mistris's son. Biren Moitra made him a hired murderer by showing greed of money. His parents did not know where he used to go every night. Aloka noticed changes in his behavior. He did not have to wait for more. He engaged with wagon breaking group. Now he has been caught and he is sent to jail. Upper caste Hindus had used him to make profit in wrong way. Casteism is such a thing which moves in a circle. It always chases. A question hits Atul's mind, the weak always be under the feet of upper caste! He looks for answer but does not get.

Resurrection of Existence

A hut and a small piece of land make a family. Red tiles made of burned mud make the roof of the hut. People from exile start their new life. This is not a complete life but this is not earned excluding anyone. Life teaches chapters after chapters. Atul Mistri had seen many things, he observed, he realized. Now he searches the truth in his life, from his living experiences, from his earned experiences. Sometimes, he gets it.

The man is not bad, bad is that darkness which covers human being. Life can be reorganized. This realization makes Atul the first inhabitant of the new world. Not a single life, he finds many lives within him.

Looking at the darkness, Aloka was thinking about her past. She can remember the incident of their marriage. She went to a marriage ceremony and Atul brought her to a dark place and aggressively asked her, 'tell me whether you will marry me, I will send my father to your home'. Aloka was ashamed of herself, she tried to unbind her, but Atul held her with arms. Atul chafed, clutched Aloka's breast with all his strength. Aloka was dying of insult. She tried a lot to go away from Atul but she could not. Atul's warm breath was touching her face, neck and breast. Atul shouted, 'where are you going, answer me and go'. In the mean time someone reached there, so Atul had to free Aloka. 'Monday is a good day. We will decide about marriage on that day', Atul Said.

After seeing this situation of her children, Aloka discovers her husband in a new world. After such a long time her heart is crying badly for Atul. Every family takes special care of husbands because husbands earn money for livelihood. Aloka

thinks that man is tired to walk such a long way of his life, his health is weak, black hair turns into white, eyes are sunken, cheeks are only covered with skin, and suddenly he becomes old. Oh god! Aloka's heart cries.

Aloka can remember the words. It will be there in her mind forever. Once Atul was so emotional that he was shaking, 'ah! How beautiful you are! Do you like me?' Aloka just smiled. She did not reply. There was no need of that. The man hugged her and said, 'why are you afraid? I am your husband, is not it? You, you will be my children's mother'. Aloka found a new world in the word mother.

Since then, none of the worst they had to face could break their relation. Aloka has expended herself with Atul in every single step of their life. She has been with Atul like a shadow. She is his comrade of every single moment, every single struggle of their life. What you believe is truth. This is the principal *Mantra* of life. If you believe this you can overcome all the hazards of life.

Atul Mistri found a solid soil under his feet- only a piece of land. There is no better living than the one with the thought that all the souls as one and all the souls as one's friend. What I want, crores of other people also want the same. This is the social justice. Every soul is equal, no caste, no colour, no gender discrimination- the Man, only one word. Atul can hold whole world in his palm. He is the source of all the power. He removes all the darkness of his mind, looks at human being with a complete vision. He gets pleasure in watching the people. All the men are in his eyes. New panchayat promotes him. All souls are within him, all human beings.

His son returns home from jail- as if coming from thousands of mile and stands in front of his father and says, “I have come. This is my resurrection. Nobody can use me in wrong way. Who is my friend? Who is my enemy? I can see that like a day light. Forgive me, please forgive me *Baap*. I have found the truth of life in human being. His words do not get completed...”

Thousands of people of B.G. Colony are around Atul’s house. Tomorrow is his daughter’s marriage; they are celebrating bachelor rituals today. We have found a fresh air of life, an air that refreshes, the house brightening with lights it removes all the darkness. Atul Mistri goes ahead, as if he wants to say to the crowd about the truth of life. His eyes are so living. His milky white hair reflects a peace among the people gathered there. The man is eternal. The man cannot die.

The good moment of marriage approaches. Atul meets the guests with a smiling face. Man hugs man. Everybody asks, ‘where bride’s father is, please come finish the *Kanyasampradan*’.

Many things happen to life. Human being forgets those. This is the eternal truth.

Young Maya is covered with red *Cheli*. Marriage ceremony is done. Bride and groom kiss each other.

Aloka and Atul Mistri gets unbound happiness, tears cannot be resisted!

Note

Original story *Punorutthan* (Bangla) written by Jatin Bala.

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Jatin Bala, is a prominent author of Bangla Dalit Literature. Some of his writings have been translated in different collections and anthologies. He was born in Parhiyali, Manirampur, in the Jessore district of the then East Pakistan on 5th May, 1949. He wrote several short stories, novels, plays, poetry and his autobiographical novel *Shekhar Chnera Jiban*.
