

Md Mukul Hossine, *Me Migrant*. Singapore: Ethos Books, 2016. 68 pp. ISBN 978-981-09-9254-5.

Md Mukul Hossine, like many other Bangladeshis, is a construction worker in Singapore where he started writing poetry. Hossine is not a conventional poet whose creative talent had been discovered at home before he had immigrated to the Southeast Asian country. We are also not aware of his writings being published in newspapers or magazines in Bangladesh before he had decided to go abroad to earn a better living for himself and his family.

The anthology *Me Migrant*, published by Ethos Books, Singapore begins with an Editorial note by Cyril Wong, a prize-winning poet of Singapore. Wong has re-written and edited the translations of the thirty-five poems written in Bangla by Hossine during his stay in Singapore. As Wong says, the translations had to be edited because they reflected raw emotions of the poet who had written in “Colloquial Directness” resulting in the “personally honest versifications.”

In all his thirty-five poems in the collection, Mukul Hossine expresses his yearning for his motherland and mother he has left behind voluntarily. The poems are nostalgic, reflective and to some extent melancholic.

Mukul’s transition from a migrant worker to a poet entailed challenges and difficulties that he could set aside in order to foreground his creativity. According to Michael Wong, Mukul transforms his emotions into poetry and takes them into a greater height where myth and imagination coalesce (6).

There could be arguments as to whether a common person can think creatively; or rather, can such a person understand what can result in creative thinking? While these debates can continue for long without providing any specific answer, Hossine’s simple ideas have bloomed into touching poems in this collection. His first poem, “Today My Mind’s Sky” is about his own sadness and loneliness that make him feel isolated in an unknown world. In this state of mind, he can hear someone calling him with a waving hand. The reader can easily feel the pain in the poet’s heart because it’s obvious that he is separated from his mother who is perhaps thinking about him back home. The poet’s unwavering love for his mother reminds the reader that mothers everywhere in the world have unconditional love for their children. This is how Hossine’s personal emotion becomes more than personal and reminds readers of motherly love which is common to all for sure, but also a treasure for every son and daughter transcending cultures.

In the next poem, called “Loneliness,” Hossine once again expresses his feelings of solitude and love before getting into an introspective mood. He knows his identity which is that of an immigrant and can understand, “Any life without love is that of an immigrant, a loner” (11). Devoid of love, the poet can see “Birds flying across a sky of dreams, my own pain chasing their happiness”

(11). The free birds wandering around the sky are happier than the poet: for, he is far away from home leading the life of an immigrant in a land that has little in common with the country of his origin where he has left behind his beloved mother. It's a touching poem that strongly reminds us about the importance of the motherland and the mother. Estranged from both, humans may feel that even free birds in the sky are better off than them because they are unable to break the soft chains of emotion that bind them and make them suffer.

Although the poet wants to free himself and find happiness, he realises the futility of his wish remembering the reality of his being an immigrant who cannot withstand the occasional beckoning of love. His mind is constantly in search of home where apparently his mother's love is far stronger than the love he can find in Singapore where he works only to earn a living. In the end, the poet realises he's only an emigre trapped in loneliness forever.

Yet another poem where the poet poignantly misses his mother is "Eid Abroad." It's on this day of celebration that he recalls his mother along with his father, brother and sister, who are all far away from him. Eid is when family members get together; even those who live in larger cities rush back to their villages to find happiness in the midst of their family. For the poet, Eid is simply one of recollection when his heart sinks thinking about his mother's eyes filled with tears. On Eid day, away from his mother and motherland, the poet's pain is so acute that his "inner mind" keeps throbbing ceaselessly with a sense of loss. Again, he thinks of his mother, and shedding two drops of tears, he wishes her a happy Eid.

The poem "Me Migrant" for once moves out of the constant remembrance of his mother, as Hossine describes his migrant life. A thousand miles away from home, he works from dawn to dusk, and again waits for sunrise that marks the onset of a new day. In this existence, life assumes a new meaning; it's a life without love or any emotion that humans need to live a life of joy and fulfilment. There is no one to take care of the poet or look after his needs or find out the cause of his pain. This is because he is a mere migrant, who lives away from home trapped in loneliness.

In a poem, "I will be a firefly," there is a sudden glimpse of romantic love that leaves a beautiful fragrance behind as the poet wants to turn into a rose planted in the hair of his beloved. He wants to fill the night air with the fragrance of jasmine. He wishes to become Spanish cherries which his beloved would make a garland from and hang around her neck from dawn to dusk. This is one of the most romantic images used by Hossine which makes the reader understand the poet as a complete human being: longing for his mother and motherland, as well as yearning for the soft touch of his beloved. The last two stanzas of the poem evoke images of death as the poet speaks about his leaving, of course, the final departure, no longer in the company of his dearly loved ones who gradually come

alive in his memory. In the final stanza, Hossine speaks about his unhappy life ending in gloomy darkness: a death without any ceremony or mourning.

The poet's unqualified love for his mother tongue finds expression in the poem "My Ekush." In this short poem he condenses the long history of the sacrifice of so many people that ultimately regained the honour of the Bangla language and established it as the official language of the then Pakistan. (Muhith 6). Only a few words are sufficient for Hossine to give the readers an impression of how important Bangla is to him. It's more than a language; he looks at it as "gems and jewels" and "Eyes of the simple heart" (48).

One important aspect of Diaspora writing is the creative writer's eagerness to adopt some of the culture of the host land. Hossine in almost all his other poems in the volume is extremely sad about leaving behind Bangladesh, his mother and other members of his family; but in the poem "Singapore's Golden Jubilee," the poet is in an ecstatic mood of festivity. The city state is now possessed with an "inner light" that joins it with the rest of the world. This country offers new dreams to people who were born elsewhere. Hossine's "beloved Singapore" is ideal in terms of law and order, peace and tranquillity. The poet respects this country for it harbours no religious rivalry or hatred. The streets are safe for passersby on a moon lit night without any fright or trepidation. Singapore is a country that has become a dreamland for immigrants; it has provided shelter to thousands of workers awakening new dreams in their lives. For this, they have to always sing songs of praise for this country.

As Md Mukul Hossine tells his readers, his life has changed for money. He left behind his country, his parents, other members of his family, and also his studies, only because he could not make ends meet in his home country. In Singapore he found writing poetry as a means of dousing the flames in his heart whenever the going became too difficult for him. Mukul Hossine's confession of writing poetry as a therapy is common with many other creative writers the world over.

After finishing reading the poems of Hossine, his patriotism and love for his mother and family continue to linger in the reader's mind for a long time. Hossine's poetry is the result of his emotion that he expresses in simple verses without any lofty ideas or unique images. Thanks are due to Cyril Wong for his time and interest that helped in transcreating the poems. Fariha Imran and Farouk Ahammed also deserve credit for translating the poems from Bangla.

Works Cited

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