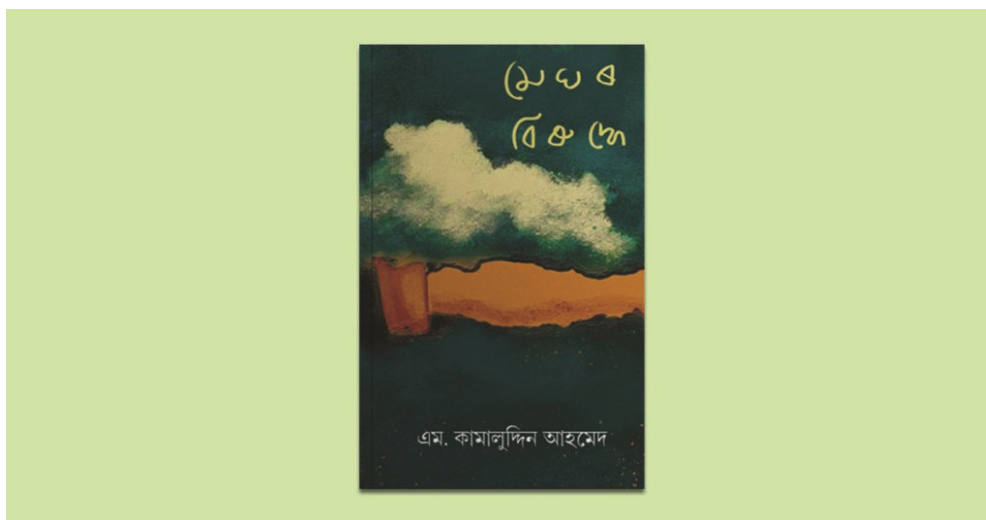


M. Kamaluddin Ahmed's 'Meghor Biruddhe'

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M.Kamaluddin Ahmed's *Meghor Biruddhe* is a remarkable collection of ninety-eight poems having a smorgasbord of themes that are very relevant in our troubled times. The book situates itself in the thick of the Anthropocene, where human ambition, environmental crisis, and the pain of living in an increasingly alienated space converge into poetry that speaks more through images than words. With thematic concerns that address environmental degradation, urban decay, historical retrospection, and the ennui of everyday existence, Ahmed's collection symptomatizes the ills plaguing humanity due primarily to their unquenchable, indefatigable greed. The poems have a cautionary tenor, haunted by loss, nostalgically yearning for the past, and the impossibility of reclaiming it.

The collection *Meghor Biruddhe* (meaning, "Against the Clouds"), which is eponymous, is based on a poem of the same title. The cloud perhaps symbolises lack of clarity and purpose in adolescent subjects, trying to come to terms with physical and psychological issues. The lines from the poem imply this unstable condition:

শৈশৱতে
মোৰ দেহত খোদিত হৈ আছিল মেঘ
মই জনা নাছিলোঁ

মেঘবোৰ
আন্দোলিত কৰিছিল

(In childhood/My body was penetrated deeply by clouds/Which I didn't know// These clouds/Would agitate my hormones...)

The title “Meghor Biruddhe” could be symbolic of resistance – against erasure, against what Rob Nixon termed “slow violence” of development, against the fog of post-truth that blurs moral and ecological clarity, and against cognitive dissonance that a majority of the muddled citizens presently experience. The poems stand as a witness to what has been done to the earth and to the human soul, speaking in a voice that is at once intimate and universal. This eponymous poem encapsulates the spirit that pervades the entire collection.

Environmental crisis, which forms one of the strongest thematic axes of this collection, has a local context, which appears to be a part of an immediate, lived experience. In poem after poem (“Kotona’s Shil”, “Sarbabhowm”, “Kallol”, “Patmadoijoni”, “Hritur Bepari”, “Hie Daagtu”, “Botor Khahania”, etc.) Ahmed invokes the imagery of floods, deforestation, and the deaths of rivers – all of these associated with the unsustainable practices in the Anthropocene. The poet’s tone is not shrill, or angsty; instead, it is elegiac, almost prayer-like. He understands that devastation is not just out there in the world, but also within the human heart that has lost its rhythm with nature. His critique of developmentalism is precise and poignant. For instance, in the poem “Khudita,” the awareness of the loss of a vulnerable ecosystem is accompanied by the realisation that there is no turning back, no restitution of nature to its bucolic past state, as the culture of consumerisation of society has taken hold, and shows no sign of abating in the foreseeable future. The lines from the poem illustrate this quite profoundly:

কেইবাটাও দশক
আলফুলকৈ ৰাখি-ঝাঁয়নি

কিন্তু যোৱা দশকৰপৰা
সি ক্ষীয়মান হৈ আহিছে

দ্রুত প্ৰসাৰিত
অনুভূতি তৰংগ

ভাৰুৱেল পৃথিৱীত
তুমি তিতি আছা

আৰু মই

উষ্ণগ্ৰামৰ আশাত
জীৱন পাত কৰিছোঁ (খোদিত)

(For several decades/I have nurtured with tender care/ The chattering sound of crickets// But since the last decade/ There has been a lull/ of the shrill note/...and I, In anticipation of material prosperity/ Am working relentlessly towards achieving it.)

Another defining feature of this collection is its urban consciousness. The city, in Ahmed's imagination, is a site of noise and numbness, a dystopia where human desires and aspirations multiply. The poet captures the clamour of the urban space with a tone that oscillates between irony and melancholy. There are images of squalid surroundings, crowded streets, and the alienation of people going through their motions with metronomic precision. In the poem, "Poth and Pukhuri" (Road and Pond), the dismal, decadent urban space with its filthy alleys and waterlogged streets, is evocatively depicted. Reminiscent of T S Eliot's poems like "Preludes" and "The Love Song of Alfred J Prufrock", the city seems to be a sharp encapsulation of the capitalist malaise that reduces life to transaction, and space into a reified, depersonalised object. The poem's critique of the miasmic urban space arises from his awareness of how unplanned developmental activities can wreak havoc upon peoples' lives, turning streets into waterlogged canals.

However, within this bleakness, the poems often pause for moments of wonder and beauty. The change of seasons, another recurring motif, acts as a reminder that transformation, however imperceptible, is constant. The poet's acute awareness of mutability, that is, of time, body, and space gives the collection its haunting beauty. The changing weather becomes a metaphor for emotional flux, for the passage from innocence to irony, for the evolution of human consciousness itself. The poems, at times cast in the haiku form, capture fleeting moments of perception with telling precision. For instance, in the poem "Ulah" (Happiness), the three stanzas are framed in a structure approximating the haiku form, with its emphasis on distilled imagery, than verbal aesthetic:

তোমাৰ
ডেউকাৰ ধপধপনিত
মোৰ কামীহাড় কঁপি উঠে

এটা মাদকতাময় গোলক
বিয়পি পৰে
মোৰ দেহৰ বাহিৰ-ভিতৰে ('উলাহ')

(Your/ Flapping of wings/ Makes my rib bone tremble/ This intoxicating essence/Spreads everywhere/Within and outside my very being)

This and several image-laden poems written in free verse, produces a rhythm of alternation between brevity and reflection, silence and speech, that is a hallmark of Ahmed's poetry in this collection.

There is a poem titled “Gauhati University” inspired by W H Auden’s poem “Oxford”, which is on the evolution of the institution since its inception. Ahmed traces the institution’s journey – from the early days of planting saplings in its campus by hallowed institution builders like Birinchi Kumar Barua and Krishnakanta Handique to the present digital era manifested by cloud computing and big data. It is a poem of memory and hope, of a shared cultural space slowly giving way to virtual hyperreality.

The political undertones in *Meghor Biruddhe* are subtle yet unmistakable. The poet observes mindless studio debates on bigotry with a tone of weary amusement. The post-truth world he sketches is one where noise masquerades as discourse and facts drown in rhetoric. The poems do not preach, but mirror the absurdity of our times where opinions outpace understanding, and hatred is televised in prime time. The poem “Leketia” illustrates this clearly, and it finds a more powerful expression in the poem “Slogan”, which critiques the toxicity pervading in public sphere through noise masquerading as debates, whataboutery masquerading as “intelligent” responses, and bigotry getting valorised as a value necessary in the contemporary geo-political climate.

In a fascinating poem titled “Paramananda” (supreme joy), there is the call for self-reflection, which is a reminder that before loving others or nature, one must first learn self-love, and pamper oneself with what Foucault theorised as “technologies of the self.” Ahmed’s concern with hunger threads through several poems. The poet sees hunger as the most fundamental truth of existence, one that connects all forms of life. His empathy for the marginalised and the dispossessed infuses the collection with moral gravity, even when the language remains controlled and meditative. The poem “Sajibata” (Spiritedness) forcefully enunciates it:

ফুলৰ সকলো ব্যঞ্জনা নিপাত যাওক
অভিধাৰে জিলিকি উঠক
ভাত আৰু
ভাত

ওপৰৰপৰা
সৰি পৰক
ব্যঞ্জনহীন ভাত

(Let the bloom of the flower wither away/Let the tenet “Food and Food” shine forth//
Let it rain from the sky/ bland, unflavourful rice)

The collection is also marked by its intellectual curiosity. Some poems pay homage to great writers and thinkers, for instance, Auden, Eliot, Kundera, Foucault, and even painters like Titian. These are intertextual exchanges, where Ahmed reimagines their ideas in the context of his own world. The poems inspired by Auden and Eliot carry echoes of their modernist sensibility – the ironic distance, the fractured voice, the play between myth and modernity. The influence of Foucault surfaces in the poet’s awareness of power and discourse, while the reference to Titian’s art gestures

toward the sensuousness of perception and colour. There is also an unmistakable resonance with Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams in the poet's style, especially his faith in the image as an instrument of thought. Like Stevens, Ahmed finds abstraction in concreteness, and like Williams, he captures the poetry of ordinary life with lyrical precision. The poet's preface to the volume also provides valuable insights into his theory of poetry, and those responsible for shaping his poetic vision.

On the level of form, Ahmed's poems move fluidly between blank verse and haiku, between meditative passages and flashes of imagistic brilliance. The blank verse gives the poems room to breathe, allowing thought to unfold with the rhythm of natural speech, while the haiku form distills experience into essence. The absence of rhyme or strict metre frees the poet's voice, enabling him to explore silences, pauses, and breaks as integral parts of meaning. This imagistic density gives the poems a visual vividness, making reading them akin to watching a landscape slowly emerge through mist. Ahmed's diction remains simple, conversational, and free of ornamentation, but beneath its surface lies philosophical depth. The commonplace becomes revelatory through his careful attention to detail, his ability to see the extraordinary in the ordinary.

What makes *Meghor Biruddhe* compelling is the balance it maintains between thought and emotion, between critique and compassion. The poems are intellectually grounded yet emotionally transparent. They do not offer solutions; rather, they provide the symptoms of the malaise. At its core, the collection is a meditation on survival – of the self, of memory, of the environment. The speaker knows that he cannot turn back time, but he can bear witness. And in that act of witnessing lies the beginning of renewal. The final impression the reader carries is one of quiet defiance, a belief that poetry, even in an age of post-truth, can still make us listen, and that against the clouds of confusion and bluster, the human voice can still rise, steadfast and clear. In the end, M. Kamaluddin Ahmed's *Meghor Biruddhe* stands as a significant poetic articulation of our time. It is rooted in place yet open to the world, personal yet political, lyrical yet philosophical. It compels us to confront the dissonance between progress and peace, to question what we have lost in our race for more, and to rediscover the fragile beauty that still remains.

Meghor Biruddhe

M. Kamaluddin Ahmed

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