

DELINEATING REALITY WITH LIVED EXPERIENCES: A CONSIDERATION OF SELECT SHORT STORIES OF HASAN AZIZUL HUQ

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ABSTRACT

Hasan Azizul Huq in his long writing career spanning over fifty years have exquisitely woven his lived experiences of a life enriched by multi spatial and temporal dimensions into short stories and novels of highest acclaim at home and abroad. In his creative works especially short stories, he with utmost care has portrayed the interior lives and exterior activities of the characters which provide us a transparent window to look at the harsh realities of human life and nature in almost perfect totality. His stories with omniscient narration, day-to-day dialogues, extended descriptions, familiar characters picked up from around, major focus on the working class with their afflictions, peculiarities and inner strength manifest the artistry of a consummate artist striving for comprehensiveness. In his journey, he has responded to the major upheavals resulting from socio-political transformations. He has felt and comprehended what he has gone through, concentrated on portraying life faithfully to turn his works into a convincing reality. In his whole gamut of literary career, Radha¹ Bengal where he was born and brought up till youth occupies the most significant room. Among others, the major political events like division of Bengal, Pakistani period, the Liberation War and the post Liberation War periods have featured significantly in his short stories as a spontaneous response to the changes, expectations, frustrations and prospects. This paper is an attempt to look into Hasan Azizul Huq's select short stories² as presentations of reality around life and activities of the writer himself and his time.

Key Words: exquisitely, reality, harsh, responded, transformation, transparent window, faithful

REALISM AND WRITER'S RESPONSIBILITY

Realism in literature began in Europe in the mid nineteenth century and had hey days in the late nineteenth century to early twentieth century. In French, Stendhal, in Russia, Alexander Pushkin ushered and enriched the genre and writers from other countries around the world also produced remarkable masterpieces in this style. According to Dictionary of Literary Terms by Coles, "Realism, in literature, is a manner and method of picturing life as it really is, untouched by idealism or romanticism. As a manner of writing, realism relies on the use of specific details to interpret life faithfully and objectively."

In Bangla literature, Sarat Chandra established himself as one of the most popular writers of all time and his masterpieces are basically the real pictures of the

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then society. Manik Bandopadhyay, Syed Waliullah among others have realism depicted prominently in their major writings. Hasan Azizul Huq can be among the latest writers who have fed this genre with some excellent short stories. He has created his own world furnished with his proactive personality, embeddedness in soil, sympathy, diverse experiences, responsiveness to the major historical events and life like portrayal of the characters and landscape. He thinks literature is an admixture of what a man goes through. According to him, "Literature gets its form from a chemistry of experience, feelings, understanding, and thoughts coming together bit by bit." (Interview with Jafar Ahmed Rashed, 92). He has his own understanding of realism, and he has capitalized on that. Hasan in his essay 'Realism in Contemporary Fiction' says,

"Realism aspires to show the basic truth about man and society which emerges from the warp and woof of poverty, despair, struggle and desperate hope: basic truth which appears within a time context and yet is timeless. This realism transcends reality and transcends appearance. It analyses the innumerable conflicts within society at the micro level, at the level of molecular dialects." (211)

His observation quite similarly goes with Khan Sarwar Murshid³ who thinks, "Surely it is the responsibility of the writer to overturn conventions and give recognition to new values, the healthy new pressures and demands of the present." (xiii) In the similar tone, the writer boldly declares, "Changes are coming, more will come." (Interview with Choudhury Salahuddin Mahmud, 78)

But all the efforts are directed towards humanity and its welfare. We find this reflection while Selina Hossain puts her thought about a writer's responsibility in her essay 'The Writer's Responsibility', "Speaking for humanity is the basic condition of his work; and his own time and his own place are what he writes about, though his ultimate concern must be with what is universal and what goes beyond a particular time." (279) With this responsibility, Hasan also goes for creating a world which is often filled with injustices and oppressions. He takes us to a realm where the marginal earns sympathy and keeps hope alive. Again what Syed Akram Hossain in 'The Novel in Bangladesh: A Consideration of Form' says about a writer's consciousness is in line with Hasan's works, "Social consciousness in a divided society is, in an important way, also class consciousness, for our political and religious thoughts, our artistic and literary ideologies, our moral and ethical life and our ideas of individual and collective well-being are all defined by the position each of us occupied in the social hierarchy." (98) Hasan too thinks himself to be a man rooted in rural areas. "I am basically extremely rural" (Interview with Al Mamun and Bokhtiar Ahmed 24), and to him, literary works are combination of all

what happen in our life and society. "Any literary work almost like cobweb remains entangled with everything of politics, culture and society of that time." (Interview with Anupam Hasan 11) What Mulk Raj Anand thinks about realism in novels sounds pertinent,

The novel should interpret the truth of life from felt experience, and not from books. And one should adventure through new areas of life and always try to see, in the intricate web of circumstances of human existence, the inner core of reality, or at least attempt to probe the depths of human consciousness. (5)

Hasan has done exactly the same. He is from head to feet a conscious citizen who nourishes the country at heart and thinks of it with head and works relentlessly for the people and the country through his pens. He believes we all must get united to change ourselves and change the existing social structures and "the aim of literature is to spread this call, this conscience, follow it and show it to the people." (Interview with Choudhury Salahuddin Mahmud 72) Literature to him is to take life as a whole where not a single element however tiny or whatever meanest it may be he wants to eschew. So his clear statement goes, "I can write. I can trace life in complete form there." (Interview with Zakir Talukder 81) And as a citizen of the third world country, he feels extra duties automatically coming on the writers. "We have to be social workers, reformers, fighters, men with anger." (Interview with Zakir Talukder 90) Thus he has shouldered the responsibility as a writer to take up pen to depict life as it really is with a view to bringing about changes and better days for the common people. So he unhesitatingly passes the comment, "Literature gets formed bit by bit as a chemistry of experience, feelings, realization, and thoughts." (Interview with Zafor Ahmed Rashed 92) And for the same reason, he cannot disentangle the artistic entity from the social existence of creative persons in general and writers in particular, "the artistic entity of an artist is also social or if there is an existence of such entity, then that keeps mixed in the artist's social entity." (Interview with Nurul Kabir 103)

LITERATURE REVIEW

The short stories of Hasan Azizul Huq have been acclaimed and discussed from the very beginning of his career. All discussions go with his mastery over language, subject matter, unflinching portrayal of characters and forms of the stories. Sarifa Saloa Dina in *Hasan Azizul Huq O Aktaruzzaman Eliaser Chotogalpo: Bishoy O Prokaron*,⁴ a book from her PhD dissertation has made a detailed analysis of the form and content of the two writers' stories. She has also evaluated many of the stories, scrutinized the strengths and weaknesses and pinpointed the aesthetics of the writers. According to her observation, "The focal point of Hasan Azizul Huq's

short stories is human being. They are the inhabitants of the rural areas, poor and of lower class. By presenting the ins and outs of human life, he builds the crafted structure of his short stories." (381) She finds in Hasan a comprehensive soul to understand and portray the marginalized people, and through her analysis, she has justified her stand. Hasan as a writer has the keenest observations of the society and the people. He has the power to portray reality in the crudest form. Hayat Mamud finds him so in his short stories, "He has presented almost an unforgiving world...Not symbolic, but unimaginably sharp." (7)

One seminal study on Hasan Azizul Huq is Harun Pasha's *Hasan Azizul Huqer Golpay Nimnobarger Jibon*⁵ (*The Life of Subaltern in the Stories of Hasan Azizul Huq*) where he traces the subaltern in Hasan's stories. To him, Hasan Azizul Huq is the 'Prince of Bangla short story' and "he has given importance to the subaltern people in terms of variations in subject matter and characterization." (11) He also finds Hasan exception as he always doesn't go with the subaltern theory specially in case of women. The leading subaltern theoretician Partha Chatterjee thinks, "All women in the male dominated society are in one sense subaltern." (20) But Pasha finds the writer much ahead and exceptional. He thinks, Hasan rather has empowered women. The writer himself said, "Among all my short stories, three out of four are written with priority for the female. I have written stories one after another about the females." (quoted in Pasha 101, Interview with Maruf Raihan). (133) Almost similar observation can be found in the essay 'The Craftsman of Fictions' where Annoy Ovimonyu says, "The lamentation of the uprooted people features in his stories prominently and the world is varied and multi-dimensional." But the major focus of the writer is to portray human life and other related dimensions objectively. He has hardly any subjective stand. This is clarified by the writer himself. About his approach to writing, he says, "I never get busy to put forward my opinion personally. I want to analyze, I want to explain." (Interview with Anupam Hasan 16)

LIFE AND WORKS

A glimpse of the life of Hasan Azizul Huq⁶ can give a deeper understanding of his mental formation and creative inspiration. His life has gone through several major historical events of this subcontinent and he experienced diverse situations in diverse locations that prepared the seed bed of his writer self and provided the basic elements of his creative writings. He considers his childhood and youth passed among mostly the marginalized people in crude nature of Radha Bengal very precious in understanding human conditions and social structure. So as a writer, he often recurses to those memories and sew them with utmost care and sympathy in the form of short stories. But the time he lived and has been living in

different parts of Bangladesh after migration from West Bengal has also provided him ingredients that made him create some masterpieces in Bangla literature. So he deserves a serious biographical discussion for the convenience of analyzing his texts.

Hasan Azizul Huq was born in 1930 in the district of Burdwan in West Bengal. He spent his childhood in the crude nature of Radha Bengal like a kid free to roam in crude nature without any control from the father's side. So he could, from a close quarter, observe the daily life, poverty and crudity of nature. Besides, his childhood went through different incidents of riot. He experienced the Second World War, its aftermath, terrible experiences of communal riots and above all, the division of the country.

He showed much talent in his educational life. At his youth, he shifted⁷ himself to Khulna of eastern Bengal. Here he came in contact with progressive politics at his college life and got involved. This gave him new insights into the plight of the common people. At that stage, he married Shamsunnahar, an inhabitant of Burdwan. Though he shifted from Radha Bengal, his family got tied forever with it through the marriage relation. Finally he got his MA degree from the University of Rajshahi in Philosophy in 1960.

In eastern Bengal, he had totally contrasting experiences as Khulna was a fertile place with greeneries and riches while Rajshahi was almost similar to the crude nature of Radha Bengal. This reminded him of his days of childhood spanning over 16 years. He always thinks that those days continue to be valuable for his writing as he got a very intimate experience of poverty stricken natural life there. In his career, he joined Rajshahi University, Department of Philosophy in March 1973. And he retired from there.

His writing career started much earlier in his school days. However, he was exposed to greater readership with his short story titled 'Shagoon' ('Vulture') published in the Samokal in 1960. The readers instantly accepted and appreciated this great talent. In the same year, he published another short story titled 'Ekjon Charitrahiner Sopokkhe' ('In Favour of a Characterless Person'⁸). After the publication of these two stories, Hasan never had to look back. Rather he came on the high-way of creative world in Bangladesh.

He published his first short story book titled *Samudrar Swapno Sheeter Aranya* (*Dreams of Ocean Forest of Winter*) in 1964 with both the aforementioned stories. Through this book, he also itched out a place as a distinguished voice in the creative literary world of Bangladesh. He has woven reality in all the short stories of

the book. The common and marginalized people of Radha Bengal occupy the whole canvas of the book.

His second book titled *Atmoza O Ekti Korobi Gach (Own Daughter and an Oleander Tree)* got published in 1967. In this book, he has explored the dark world of the people shattered in riots, war and division of Bengal. He reflects on the problems created because of the division of Bengal, the afflictions of the people who left their motherland, emigration problems, economic depression etc. and all these he incorporated and transformed into short stories directly from his own experience of emigrated life and observations of the people who emigrated and suffered its aftermath.

His third story book titled *Jibon Ghoshe Agun (Fire from Rubbing Life)* was published in 1973. The focal point of this book is the oppressed and exploited farmers who got determined to get united against those practices. In the book, he has tried to capture the time around the mass movement of 1969 when the people showed extreme enthusiasm and zeal for fighting against injustice with the dream of better days. Shahduzzaman too finds that in the book, "We find that in the stories of the book *Jibon Ghoshe Agun (Fire from Rubbing Life)*, the aspects of the united power of the starving and deprived people have been presented clearly." (222)

His fourth book was published in 1975 and it was titled *Naamhin Gotrohin (Nameless Clanless)*. The book is about his direct and indirect experiences of the Liberation War and the conscience of the time. He tried to go deep into the psychic condition of the freedom fighters, their disillusionment after the Liberation War as well as the shattered humanity of the time.

In 1981 Hasan Azizul Huq got his fifth short story book titled *Patale Haspatale (On Earth in a Hospital)* published. Here the writer again tried to catch up with the contemporary period when the military government was running the country with high-sounding words resulting in almost nothing. He delineated the plight of the common people especially those from the rural areas.

His sixth short story book named *Amra Opekha Korsi (We're in Wait)* was published in 1989. Here again he was trying to explore how the people were being shattered in the state's oppressive structure, how the state was unleashing oppression and suppression on them.

His seventh short story book titled *Rode Jabo (We'll Go in Sunshine)* got published in 1995 and the next book was published in 1997 titled *Ma Meyer Songsar (Ma and the Daughter's Family)*. The writer experimented with language, subject

matter and style leaving marked differences and deviations from his earlier works. Here also he could not come out of his forte, the cruelty, oppression and suppression unleashed on the common people.

The writer as a conscious citizen of the country is always responsive to the major issues connected to the politics and other affairs of the country. So he has produced in response to these issues some of his great writings. But he never forgets his childhood and juvenile days he passed in West Bengal and so he often resorts to the crude nature of Radha Bengal, communal riots he saw that time, division of Bengal and its aftermath. He is quite outspoken in this regard because he feels that the experiences of childhood and juvenile days will always weigh high than the experiences of the later part of life. During the Liberation War of 1971, Hasan Azizul Huq was staying in Khulna. Though he was not a direct participant in the war, he had support and mental attachment with it. To portray the war days with the understanding of the psychic formation of the freedom fighters, the harsh reality of the common people, barbarism and torture unleashed by the Pakistani military on the countrymen, he has faithfully and realistically crafted *Naamhin Gotrohin*.

LIVED EXPERIENCES IN THE SELECT STORIES

From the rich world of Hasan Azizul Huq, eight of his most successful stories have been selected from different books. Four stories namely 'Shagoon' ('Vulture'), 'Trishna' ('Thirst'), 'Ekjon Charitrahiner Sopokkshe' ('In Favour of a Characterless'), 'Mon Tar Shonkhini' ('A Serpentine Mind She Has') have been taken from his first book *Samudrar Swapno Sheeter Aranya (Dreams of Ocean Forest of Winter)*. Two stories namely 'Amrityu Ajibon' ('Till Death, As Long as There's Life') along with the title story have been selected for the study from the book '*Atmaja O Ekti Korobi Gach*' ('Own Daughter and an Oleander Tree'). The title story 'Patale Haspatale' ('On Earth in a Hospital') along with 'Khanon' ('Digging') has been considered for the study from the book '*Patale Haspatale*' ('On Earth in a Hospital'). The stories above have been considered for the study as they showcase reality tinged with the writer's lived experiences in the highest degree.

One of the most discussed short stories of Hasan Azizul Huq is 'Shagoon' ('Vulture') which captures some common activities of the village teens around a stray vulture that fails to reach its abode in time and grope in darkness. The boys catch that 'ugly looking' vulture and stuff its mouth and throat with straws. As a result, the vulture dies and to the surprise of the villagers, they find a dead baby lying by it next morning. To feed on it, other vultures have swarmed around the baby. In the short anecdote, Hasan captures artistically the social structure where the exploited and the exploiter, the suppressed and the conscious, usurer - money

lenders and the borrower come together to show the whole gamut of the social phenomenon. The boys talk about the vulture, "Just the moment you set eyes on it, you will be reminded of the money lenders, usurers. That's why, then, the money lenders are addressed as vulture." (14) The boys represent the exploited as well as the protesting proletariat who, if get chance, do not spare the oppressor, and in doing so, they themselves turn into tyrant as they do to the vulture. The writer goes even further to say, "a vulture doesn't eat another vulture's flesh" (15) which clearly makes a comparison between the money lenders and the vulture where men are worse. The baby lying dead implies much more than just an abortion of an illegitimate baby, rather it clearly implies to the moral decadence of the moneyed people like Jamiruddi, and the plight of the poor like the widow sister of Kadu Sheikh who, if on the right track, could usher a brighter future, but they rather choose to block and blacken the prospects. The way the boys treat the vulture, talk and pass time is common phenomenon in the backward remote areas. Hasan confesses to write it from an actual incident.

Another significant story is titled 'Trishna' ('Thirst') which reminds us of his experience of hunger, poverty, sufferings of the people in Radha Bengal. He explores how hunger shapes outlook and philosophy of life. The story reminds us of the extremely poverty stricken people whose dreams get narrowed down just to eat satisfactorily.

The central character is Bashed who is unusually tall, has the habit of pilfering and extreme desire for eating food to his heart's content. After being caught in theft, his hunger even gets extreme. He says, "How happy I feel to eat! Every morning after getting up, it seems, I am alive for eating only." (20) His birth is illegal resulted from illicit affair of his mother with someone else rather than his father. This is known only to his poor aged mother. She says, "Bashed's father is not Bashed's father. ... O Allah, I could not understand. Do punish that man; please don't consider me sinner." (21)

Bashed can't fulfill his dream of love with Sokhi who asks him about his ability to feed her. Bashed fails in love as he fails in ability. Sokhi perches on moneyed man's hand, the exploiter head man of the village and his son Sohrab who offers her money and she yields her body after hard bargain, "No, first take out your paisa, then I will give. The girl laughs with a ripple on the body, not two annas, no, not two annas, you must give me three annas." (29) Bashed attends a religious occasion, has a glimpse of the food, gets smell. His stomach starts burning and then he even wishes the death of all so that he can eat alone all the food arranged there. He starts gobbling as soon as the food arrives. And he gets stuffed in the throat. He eats more than he can carry. So he finds his death imminent and makes a monologue, "I don't want to die,

by no means, I don't want to die, I won't die, I won't die, O Allah, I fall at your feet, I don't want to go to the grave, I don't want to die, I'll go near the thicket, I will fling the siki⁹ to Sokhi's fringe of sharee, and say, here take it, I am Bashed- I." (29)

Hasan shows hunger at its height. But sensuality is always an essential element in his stories as he finds it a fundamental desire of human beings. He also loses no chance to show the moral degradation in the society.

'Ekjon Charitrahiner Sopokkshe' ('In Favour of a Characterless') is another story from his first book *Dream of Ocean, Forest of Winter* (*Samudrarer Swapno, Seeter Aranya*) set in Radha Bengal and revolves round a polygamous moneyed man Satinath. He is not intelligent, but that doesn't create any problem. He says, "I have learnt to use other women. I have learnt the names of some of the cultivable items- I have learnt to think about a few things. ...As long as I keep awake, I have perverted thought ... I can't abhor the women. Fie! Fie! I don't have devotion for religion ... I am afraid of God. But the fear doesn't sustain in my mind." (37) His concubine is Vamini who fascinates him and he gets attracted to her. He provides her a secured life by building a new room for her, and she keeps away from her husband Tusto Bagdi. Though Tusto comes to bring her back, she doesn't. Times lapses, they both get aged but as a part of his habit, he steals into Vamini's room. She is rather grateful to Satinath whom she says when he loses extra interest to her for age, "Can it do, master, that you would not like me? You reared me. You provided me food, cloth. I can't go when my husband comes to bring me home. You built a room for me." (40) The story shows two harsh aspects of the society of Radha Bengal where the moneyed men can keep concubine even if that woman is a wife of someone else. The villagers are supposed to protest, but they don't, rather they indulge in cheap talks about it and enjoy. Another side is that the starving people offer themselves to be exploited by those who can provide livelihood. The writer's task is to show pointedly to the necessity of a handful of food and power structure of the society where the cycle of exploited and exploiters go on and on.

In the story, 'Mon Tar Shonkhini' ('A Serpentine Mind She Has'), he has combined reality of contradictions in a subtle way where tradition and revolt come together to make a new dimension of the harsh reality of the people with the spirit to demolish the structures. But for lesser ability, they fail to cope with power of the established practices. So the protagonist goes to her husband apparently abandoning the lover, but she startles us with the expression and confession, "I am going to my husband's house. Your son I am carrying at my womb." (83) With this statement, she shocks the readers and amuses them too with her rebel spirit.

This is another story where a miserable picture of the agrarian society is

portrayed with utmost care with the complexity of poverty and sensuality. Shadu is a poor farmer with one bigha of land to feed himself and his mother. But that does not suffice, so he has to work as a day laborer. His love, Hamida is not of good character. He knows about her serpentine nature. Still he loves and desires to get her. She asks him, "Will you marry me? What food will you provide me?" (81) Shadu's dreams of love gets shattered for financial insufficiency and has to bear the brunt of other's prick as his grandmother taunts him saying, "You yourself can hardly manage two days meal, why do you dream of marriage?" (82) Hamida too feels for him but consents to marry Tara, a wealthy boy of adjacent village. Before she leaves for her husband's house, she tells Shadu about carrying his child.

The story tells us the mind of a compromising rebel in the character of Hamida who has the courage to have physical relation with her former lover only to relate to him that she also has love for him. The consciousness she shows may sound self-centered, but it also shows another side of the coin where a handful of grain matters for them throughout their life. In fact, money matters more to them than love only.

This very picture reminds us of Nirmalendu Goon's 'Nekabbarer Mahaproyan' ('Nekabbar's Great Death') where Fatema too asks Nekabbar, "How would you rear me? Do you have even a rag?" (126)

Two stories have been selected for the study from the book '*Atmaja O Ekti Korobi Gach*' ('Own Daughter and an Oleander Tree'). The title story is the most anthologized of all his stories and commonly read and studied as an exquisitely crafted literary piece in terms of language, imagery, plot construction and historical representations. While paying attention to the artistic aspects of the story, he never budes an inch from the harsh reality that he wants to portray.

The writer himself unveiled the rationale behind writing the short story '*Atmaja O Ekti Korobi Gach*' ('Own Daughter and an Oleander Tree') saying, "A terrible disaster took place after the division of Bengal. If I could make people understand a bit of that disaster! With that intention the story was written." (Interview with Ahmad Mostafa Kamal 33) The story revolves round three depraved young boys, named Inam, Feku and Suhas who all are school drop outs, have grown apathy towards education, teachers and the system itself, got upset about the socio-economic condition and their future, resorted to immoral and base activities like theft, pickpockets, snatching and the like, pursue carnal desire in exchange for a little money capitalizing poverty of the poor people. They know about the scarcity of job and so Inam says, "Jobs are yielding in the tree." He adds, "I piss in the face of education." To supplement him, Feku says, "Standing on a high place, I piss on

everything's face. Where is work? No alluvial land, no money to do any business-what nonsense will I do?" (13) They are on the way to a house of an old man in a jungle with two other members. One is the daughter Ruku, and their pursuit is Ruku with consent from her father who emigrated from India during the division of Bengal and finds himself in a miserable condition for his inability to eke out a living there. Therefore, the boys go there off and on regularly. The father says, "You don't have time or off time, son." (15) Still he welcomes them as he says, "Were you not here, my son, we would starve to death." (16) They are deep in despair and so depraved in morality. They spare none, not even the maternal aunty. That becomes clear when Suhas talks highly about the beauty of his maternal aunty and her sister, Feku picks up, "O, that's why you visit your maternal uncle's house five times a month? You needn't any penny there; you are really enjoying." (11)

That night when they arrive at the house, they find that the old man is in wait for them. He welcomes them, tells them to go and meet Ruku in one side room. The old mother shouts, curses the old man and protests. However, that yields no fruit. Though the old man sells the daughter's time for eking out a living, he burns at heart. Therefore, he shares with the waiting two boys a story of his planting an oleander tree not for flower but for the seeds that produce quality poison.

The writer throws light on the education system, plight of the poor and marginal, destiny of the emigrated people and decadence among the rising generations. The writer shows harsh reality at its most naked stage, but he opens up the possibility even in the face of extremist depravation, decadence and degradation through the pathos he arose in the reader by the weeping father, shrieking daughter and the shouting mother.

'Amrityu Ajibon' ('Till Death, As Long as There's Life') is another story about the subaltern who struggle for living thoroughly without any sign of better days or life. The story set in the southern Bangladesh revolves round the agriculture based family of Karmali, his old mother, wife and son Rohomali who live by farming on a small cultivable land and as sharecropping and day labour. One day while trying to prepare the piece of fallow land near home, he saw a python which he took for a sign of good luck. Getting back home, he finds his ox, one of the pair for ploughing his land was killed by snake biting. He gets confounded as it will make the land owners get their land back. He even feels had his son been bitten to death, it would be better. He thinks of managing money to buy one to make a pair with the remaining weak cow. His son waddles forward to rescue him by offering himself as a part of the pair. He proposes, "Father, can't we do one thing? In place of Dhola, can't I pull plough? In one side is the old ox, and on another, me. Can't I do, father?" (134)

The father feels shocked and confounded. The son as a fighter at the core takes reverse role and tells his father, "Would you die otherwise? Have you money that you would buy a cow? If you leave the pieces of land, what the shit would you eat?" (80)

The mother doesn't fall back, she rather comes up with a stronger proposal supported by practical precepts. She says, "Won't it do using me? I have seen you plough the land using milking cow if no ox was there. Now can't you do using me? I bore Rahomali in my womb-I am dragging your family till now. I'll be it, you'll see." (82)

However he with his son attends to plough the fallow land and sees the python again. They fail to kill it as it disappears with a hissing sound. The villagers come forward to kill the snake, they are thwarted and a boy named Sadek loses life.

Karomali then settles to manage money by lending his land. While returning home with a happy mind, he is thunderstruck to death. His son brings the dead body with utmost calmness implying his forthcoming fight and his preparations for that. The story keeps the fight for life open, at the same time, the writer leaves the future fighters prepared.

Hasan Azizul Huq sometimes attempted to capture the marginalized people with more depth and greater dimensions in an epical scale and he as usual succeeds in doing so. One such story is 'Jibon Ghoshe Agun' ('Fire from Rubbing Life') that focuses on society, economy and nature with equal importance. This is the only story from the book of the same title for this study.

The spatial setting is again Radha Bengal and its rough nature as well as the people. A story of two days describing a village fair and different activities and arrangements, ensuing clash between the gentle group of the society and the protesting bagdis, the marginal people working as fishermen and farmers with a primitive touch of life. Ghontababu with an intention to satisfy his carnal desire starts for the widow living in one side of the village, but he stops to see Kali, another woman whom he fixes at two taka at the pretext of having water to satisfy his thirst. Kali has some pithy observations while talking to Ghontababu, "Even death has apathy towards us, the low caste ... we left our ancestral work. We are no longer fishermen; we have taken to farming ... All are fault with the low caste. But in one case, there is no fault, is it babu? No fault to have the low caste girls. Am I right, babu?" (79) The crippled husband of Kali protests but that can't stop it. The bagdi youth can sense it and chase Ghontababu and he gets killed. The gentlemen on his

part come to revenge for the death and set fire on the houses of the bagdis. They get united to protest the gentle class who continue to exploit them. So we find them utter, "Whose is this land? Is it ours?" (59) His is the conscience of communism and so he shows the inner strength of the common people and sets them in protesting field.

The society he portrays here is poverty stricken and the sufferings are beyond description. One character, Monohor says, "Our stomach burns. The potbel-lied babus keep us starving and lick the women, people take to hanging due to hunger, hang themselves in the branches of the trees, our children withered to death." (74)

The story 'Patale Haspatale' ('On Earth in a Hospital') is temporally set in the post-independence era of Bangladesh where the writer concentrates on the mismanagement in one crucial area of public hospital with the deficient aspects of unlimited negligence towards the patients, unacceptable attitude and behavior of the doctors and officials towards the patients, scarcity of medicine, space, bed, doctors, self-centered approach of the people in a service oriented institution like a hospital and failures in treating the patients but holding them in hostage pushing them to the jaw of death. In the story, Jamiruddi, a farmer from the village Beltoli comes to the hospital with a gangrenous leg which resulted from a barber turned quack's operation of a thorn stuck in the foot. He tells the doctor, "the day before, the barber attempted to take the thorn out by cutting the feet, then in one day it turned like this." (47) He is admitted in the emergency unit with utmost negligence and left on the floor with no bedding element or support. Around him, the patients moan all the nights and days. One patient says, "This unfortunate country is like this hospital-it can't even manage my death. What a pain in failure to die!" (65) The doctors and the officers talk loudly about the imminent death of the admitted patients with the least care to the psychology of the patients. Only one youth patient admitted named Rashed protests against the inhuman condition. But that yields nothing. Sensing death, Jamiruddi's family tries to seek release, he is denied the right to die peacefully at his home with their near and dear ones. But the marginalized people are not without their spirit, as the doctor shudders at the sight of the "dead like cold eye" of Jamiruddi's wife. The story ends with harsh reality and common phenomenon where the patients are held hostage and they only count days for death without having any care or better times for which they come there. The story thus unpeels the gangrenous society that can be rotten at heart even in a hospital, which is generally thought to be the place of service to humanity and the last hope of the suffering people. The purpose is to show nakedly the failures of the newly independent country unreservedly in every respect, morally, socially, politically and humanistically.

The story 'Khanon' ('Digging') is a scathing criticism of the political culture of the post independent military Bangladesh where the opportunity mongers were reaping the harvest of the hugely invested projects initiated for the common people. The focal point of this story is the Green Revolution¹⁰ initiated by Ziaur Rahman. The president to bring a ripple in the society and to gain popularity started Canal Digging Project as part of the revolution. The story is presented as observations by the journalists, old and experienced Shahed and his young assistant Munir who were assigned to report on the project for which they came from Dhaka to a remote village. What they saw was nothing but a farce. In one side, canal digging was on. On other side five tents have been set up to support the works. In one tent, gramophone was playing, in another tent, the benefits of canal digging were being announced, and in other three, there were arrangements for sitting. The school students were preaching, "a revolution has begun in the rural areas." The fact the two journalists found was horrible. The project did nothing for the poor and marginalized, begging remained unabated, unemployment went on increasing, the youth and the day laborer were selling their labor at cheap rate just to support their stomach. Only the landowners by the canals got benefits. The farcical situation made Shahed frustrated and he drank whisky for forgetting the pains of direct experience. So his assessment is, "The land owners are making arrangement for irrigation in their land, at the expense of the government, right? Those who are digging canal by digging the river are neither the land owners nor the owner of harvest." (80) But Shahed can hardly come out of the cocoon of his class position and so he failed to protest and took to drink. He only divulged, "My means of living is hypocrisy. In the name of journalism, I am bluffing one after another. Listen, if the people of the country make me stand in the crossing of the road, unpeel my dresses and kick on my ass, have I then anything to say? Nothing to say." (86) Hasan's credit is that he never leaves the chance of better days forward by raising consciousness or at least the prick of consciousness. Shahaduzzaman comments on Digging (Khanan) by Huq where he finds "the worthlessness of the canal digging revolution of this country is exquisitely portrayed." (221-222)

Hasan Azizul Huq has thus explored the wretched plight of the land based marginalized people and shows the perpetually ongoing struggle that sustains in Bangladesh for centuries. But he has his vision of the inner strength and all time preparedness of the farmers and other subalterns which may usher affluent days for them at any stage. Chondon Anwar, one scholar of Hasan's writing, finds a distinctive colony of the writer in his creative world. "As a writer, Hasan Azizul Huq has succeeded in creating his own colony. The experiences of the character of his colony, life style, philosophy, language, movements-all taken together, Hasan Azizul Huq is the creator of a distinguished colony." (23)

CONCLUSION

In Bangla literature, Hasan Azizul Huq has already itched his name permanently with his short stories, novels and essays. Among all his contributions, short stories stand apart as creations of an artist of highest order. While ensuring his responsibility as a writer to the people and society by portraying lifelike pictures of the marginalized people, their sufferings and afflictions as well as inner strengths, he has thoroughly maintained literary norms and values. His concentration revolves round the people in the periphery, and his intention is to bring out the prospects and enliven the hope of brighter days. In doing so, he observes all elements and aspects of the society with keen eyes and sharp ear and uses creative genius and humanitarian mind to create a realistic picture where the marginalized suffer from the established structures and practices handled by the moneyed ones. His unforgiving nature in presentation makes the characters and the plot as intolerably true to life as the life of the marginalized in reality is. Thus we can with emphasis consider Hassan Azizul Huq a realist writer and we can pronounce, 'here is God's plenty'¹¹ the term used by John Dryden about Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*.

Endnotes

1. The region where the stories are mainly located is spelt differently in English. I chose the one from Banglapedia where it is written 'Radha'.
2. Hasan Azizul Huq has written almost hundred short stories along with other forms of writings. The stories selected here are commonly acclaimed by the critics as his best creations.
3. Khan Sarwar Murshid's edited book Contemporary Bengali Writing in two volumes have collection of writings by almost all the luminaries in literary world of Bangladesh, and so the book is singularly a most important one.
4. Sarifa Saloa Dina's Hasan Azizul Huq O Aktaruzzaman Eliaser Chotogalpo: Bishoy O Prokaron is one seminal book on Hasan Azizul Huq. Surprisingly enough, the last name has written wrongly in English 'Haque'.
5. Harun Pasha's Hasan Azizul Huqer Golpay Nimnobarger Jibon (The Life of Subaltern in the Stories of Hasan Azizul Huq) is one of the commonly used reference books on Hasan Azizul Huq's short stories, and this is the book version of the writer's dissertation for masters degree.
6. Despite being an eminent writer of contemporary Bangla literature, his last name has been written surprisingly in different forms like 'Huq', 'Haque' etc. even by the recognized scholars writing and researching on him. Huq is the spelling used and approved by the writer, and the researcher has used this form.
7. Hasan Azizul Huq has diasporic experience of migrating from West Bengal,

India to Khulna of eastern Bengal and finally settling in Rajshahi. These lived experiences have always been haunting him and also providing him materials for his major creative works.

8. The short stories under this study by Hassan Azizul Huq have been written originally in Bangla. The titles of the books, stories and necessary sentences as well as passages quoted here have been translated by the researcher himself.
9. 'Siki' is a unit of money in Bangla which is one fourth of one taka, that means, twenty five paisa.
10. Ziur Rahman came to power in 1975 and initiated to develop the farmers and the rural areas in his own way. Those endeavors were often termed as Green Revolution.
11. This is perhaps the most quoted sentence regarding the merit of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* which John Dryden used collecting from proverbs.

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