

there was a perilous whirlpool generating a dreadful sound in the centre of the river. Although Mohan was very heedful about the whirlpool, he fell into its calamitous range while he was playing a swimming-game with his friends. The circulating water of the whirlpool drew Mohan in itself and in an instant Mohan reached the bottom of the river and again he came up. The process of dipping down and coming up was being done very rapidly. Hence, nobody dared to save Mohan from the sinking of his life. All of the friends who were taken aback and terrified were watching his friend, Mohan struggling with the last moments of his life. In some moments, the game of life was over and Mohan had taken place somewhere in the bottom of the river. But his friends were shouting: "Mohan is sinking. Mohan is sinking. Bring some nets hurriedly to save his life." Very soon many divers were called out from the neighbouring villages and a number of nets were brought on the bank of the river. The divers spread the nets across the river and they began to search Mohan's body. As soon as Mohan's parents heard the news, they fell on the ground and became unconscious. Then they were brought to the river-bank by a bullock cart and when they came into consciousness, they started weeping and crying: "O my son! Where have you gone? Come back soon! Come back soon! We cannot live without you." Moreover, they tried to jump into the river, but they were caught by the gathering people. In a very short span of time, there was a large crowd on the river-bank and most of the people were crying and praying to God to save Mohan's life.

As soon as the news reached the old woman and Gauriya who were managing all the house-hold workings, they started weeping and ran towards the river-bank. On the way, the old woman became unconscious many times while she was crying: "O God! What have you done? O God! What have you done?" Besides, more than half of the dwellers of Kashipur emptied the village and came on the river-bank with the old woman and Gauriya. When Gauriya and her mother reached the bank, they saw that Mohan's body that was swollen with water had been found out. The doctor who had already arrived at the river-bank examined Mohan's body and declared him dead. Mohan's mother took her son's head in her lap and plunged into crying: "O son, you have left me. We'll come to you very soon as we cannot live without you." Mohan's father was sitting beside his son and muttering: "Mandakini, you have taken my son. Take me now forever." Seeing this bewailing sight, the old woman again became unconscious and did not get up again while Gauriya was sitting beside Mohan's feet and taking them repeatedly in her hands with a cry: "You have left me forever. Where would you meet again? ... in the garden or anywhere else?" While Mohan's dead body seemed to be saying: "Don't weep Gauriya; we'll meet again in the valley of God."

The doctor who was, even then, present on the bank investigated Gauriya's mother and stated that she had died due to heart attack. Hearing this, Gauriya's sadness knew no bounds. Now she was so shocked that she could not understand what had happened with her. After some time, the villagers of Kashipur brought the old woman's dead body to Gauriya's home where everything that was being prepared for

the marriage party was lying scattered here and there. Gauriya followed the dead body of her mother and cried again and again: "Mother, you have also left me alone. Both of you have left me. I'll come to you very soon. How can I live without you?" There were a number of people and they were trying to console her, but all the efforts were in vain because Gauriya had lost her living goal and there remained nothing in her soul. Since, it was getting late, the villagers decided to perform the funeral rites of the old woman on the next day.

On the contrary, Mohan's dead body was brought to Rampur and all the villagers were gathered around his body. Some of them were weeping, some of them were trying to console his parents and some were whispering: "All the villagers were preparing for his marriage as he was going to be married today and Gauriya became widow before her marriage. What has God done?" Some persons were sent to the relatives of Mohan and they came weeping as they heard about the mishap. The atmosphere of mourning spread throughout the province and gradually a large crowd from the neighbouring villages gathered in front of Mohan's house where his dead body was lying on the ground. In fact, it was the time when the marriage procession had to depart, but God had changed the situations and the villagers were making arrangements for Mohan's funerary procession that would take place on the next morning.

It is the bitter truth of life that the palanquin of a newly married bride had to come in Rampur on 31st October, 1980 but Mohan's bier "dead body on a rectangular frame" was being carried away for cremation by the villagers. On the contrary, Gauriya's palanquin was to be lifted on this day but the old woman's coffin was being carried away from Kashipur. Thus, both the dead bodies were brought on the same crematory place of the river bank and cremated within three hours.

Gauriya had lost not only her mother but also Mohan who was going to become the only source of her living. After bidding last goodbye to her mother, she went straight to the garden where she had met Mohan twice. Watering the garden with her tears, she was standing under the same tree that provided shelter and fresh fruits to both of them. She, then, ran into the hut in which the cot was still lying. Loudly lamenting, she embraced the cot in her arms. Now everything whether it is the garden or the hut was dejected and depressing for her as Mohan, the power of her soul, had stepped into another world from where none returned. Hearing her bewailing sound, a hermit who was returning from Rampur and had heard everything about the event, entered the garden and tried to console her: "Don't weep my child. This is the eternal truth of life that we lose the things in the crucial moments when we are badly in need of them. We are just like players playing our roles according to the will of the director that is sitting with a universal remote in the garden of Eden. In fact, the director is none but the magician of the whole universe. Nothing happens without his will...." Gauriya didn't seem to listen to anyone and only God knows where she slipped away from the garden.





Painful Monument

- Sayantan Pal Chowdhury

When the bell stroke for twelve times in the King's fort, Shahinur stepped out of his house in search of his father who had not yet returned. His mother was sobbing in their mud-walled kitchen. The door of the kitchen was open and in the moonlight she could be seen sobbing, resting her head between her knees. Shahinur peeped at her and stepped out of the house. He didn't know where to go because his father had not told them where he had been spending most of his time for the past two weeks. Whenever his mother asked his father where he had been till late at night, he only smiled and replied vaguely, "I am at the service of the King. He's a noble man. Don't worry about me. We'll have a lot of money when the project of the King will be complete. Please don't ask anything about the project now. It should be a secret." So, only from this it was not enough for Shahinur to get his father's trace at the midnight when only a few street dogs could be heard barking from some darker and unseen passages.

Out of his house he could not decide where to go and how to get his father. It would not be fruitful to knock at the doors of their neighbours. Rather, they would be tensed and anxious in this way. So, he decided not to ask for his father to the neighbours. He went straight to the market where his father used to spend most of his evenings. But at this hour of night all the shops were closed. He stopped for a while. Before going to anywhere else he tried to guess some places where his father could be. In this town where could he be did not come to his mind. Though in the moonlit night everything wore a garment of dark visibility, but many of his time went in deciding the places where he could get his father's trace. He stepped to the far end of the town. Far away the fort had surrounded most of the area of the town. Sometimes the kings come with their wives and ministers and slaves. Shahinur had come to know from his father that in this huge fort the kings continue their counselling. His father had the chance once to get into the fort and to visit the king. But Shahinur could not have this chance as he was only eight then, and the outer persons were strictly forbidden in that huge surrounded area of the fort. From the banks of Yamuna the fort looked so amazing that on his return from bazaar he spent many times watching the big wall and imagining the inside of the fort.

His father once told him that the fort had been surrounded by a deep canal so that the inside of the fort could be safe and protected from the attacks by the enemies. To Shahinur it sounded quite wrong. He thought the kings were very selfish. They had only thought about their own safety and nothing for their prajas. If the enemies attacked, they would not leave the prajas. So, why the kings should always be surrounded by a safe wall? After all, the prajas were the children of the kings. For this reason,

Shahinur did not like the kings. One morning when his father was sipping his tea, he asked his father about it. His father laughed and advised him not to think about it.

Stepping slowly he had come to the deep surrounding canal of the fort. The huge gate of the fort was closed. But the outer gate that worked as a bridge had connected the street with the fort. Two guards were protecting the gate of the fort in a dozy manner. At first Shahinur hesitated to approach to them. But his anxiety for his father led him to them. "Have you seen my father, bhaiya?" he asked abruptly. The two guards looked at each other astonishingly and repeated in the same manner, "Your father? Who the hell is he?" Shahinur felt ashamed. But he had no way to go back without facing them. So he said, "Yes bhaiya. My father had not returned home since this morning. I have heard the king has come here. Is he inside? May I have a chance to meet him?" The guards laughed at him noisily.

"Go home you dirty little kid. Your father is no child that he could be kidnapped. Go and sleep easily. He'll come back if he wants. The king has not much time to look for your father. He is not inside by the way."

"Where is he?"

"He is somewhere in his privet places."

"Is he in the big garden surrounded by the huge red wall?" asked Shahinur.

"May be or may not." The guards started walking again crossing each other.

An idea flashed in Shahinur's mind. His eyes dazzled. His father might be with the king inside the garden. He had heard from his friends that a secret project was going on inside the garden. Many of his friends' fathers and relatives were working there under the king. The king was generous and kind. He had paid a huge amount of gold coins to the workers there. The king was so eager about the project that he used to supervise the making of the work from the fort also. Even sometimes when he visited the town, the workers had to work hard for the whole night. His father could be newly appointed there. This idea gave Shahinur an immense pleasure that his father might have become a worker of the king. Now, he could tell his friends that his father was not an unemployed. Rather, he could take pride on his father.

He walked towards the garden speedily. Though the distance between the fort and the garden was not much, still it seemed to him miles and miles to reach his destination. He stepped as fast as he could. In front of the garden there was an iron gate. He entered the garden stealthily. A windy alley had gone straight from the gate to the far end of the garden and vanished at the end. In the moonlight the garden looked like only a drawing made by a piece of burned wood. He went straight through the alley.

Turning right he faced another gate. It led him into a square ground surrounded by a huge wall. Inside the ground he felt helpless and