

Reflections : A Memoir



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Reflections : A Memoir

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kaiser Haq', is displayed on a light purple rectangular background.

(Kaiser Hamidul Haq)
Professor
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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.



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Dedication

My nonfiction piece 'Reflections: A Memoir' is dedicated to my spiritual guide, an eminent Sufi and valiant freedom fighter of Bangladesh, Hajrat Sayed Mahbub-E-Khoda, who illuminated millions of thirsty hearts with his spiritual love and wisdom. He left this mortal world on 28 December 2020, on the age of 71, keeping his beloved devotees in unbearable agony of separation.

*In the existence of your love,
I have become non-existent!
This non-existence linked to you,
is better than all existence!
-Rumi*

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Introduction

When I enrolled myself in the Literature and Creative writing program of ULAB, I was not sure about which genre will I choose for my dissertation. After doing the 'Poetry Writing course' in my first semester under the guidance of Professor Shamshad Mortuza, I thought that poetry was my genre. Poetry became an essential part of my life. When Nishat Atiya, the former lecturer of ULAB taught us 'Advanced Critical Reading 2: Poetry and Drama', I thought drama could be my genre. Then came Rifat Munim, the ex-literary editor of *Dhaka Tribune* to teach us creative non-fiction. He sent us an excerpt from Maria Chaudhuri's memoir titled '*Beloved Strangers*'. After reading that magnificent piece, I got stunned thinking how can someone write about her/his own life in such an interesting manner. I thought, "My life is so boring and unattractive, I can never be a good nonfiction writer. Come on! Who will ever read the monotonous description of my life?" Then Rifat Munim gave us an article titled *Writing Personal Essays: On the Necessity of Turning Oneself into a Character*. It was written by Phillip Lopate, an American film critic, essayist, fiction writer, poet, and teacher. In that article, Lopate brilliantly focused on various aspects of writing a personal essay. He articulated in that article, "The second response (my life is so boring and I'm so boring) requires a reeducation so that the student essayists can be brought to acknowledge just those moments in the day, in their loves and friendships, in their family dynamics, in their historical moments, in their interactions with the natural world, that remain genuinely perplexing, vexing, luminous, unresolved. In short, they must be nudged to recognize that life remains a mystery- even one's own so-called boring life." (Forché, 41) This essay helped me to look at my life from a different angle. I could realize that my life had not been so boring, I just need to look at it from distance. I need to observe my life objectively. In his course, Rifat Sir made us read excerpts from Joseph Mitchell's *Joe Gould's secret*, Lee Gutkind's *Becoming the Godfather of Creative Nonfiction*, excerpts from Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *Birth of a Dream Weaver*, excerpts from Paul Theroux's travelogue *The Great Railway Bazaar*, excerpts from James Baldwin's memoir *Notes of a Native Son*, excerpts from Kaiser Hamidul Haq's translation of Mirza Sheikh I'tesamuddin's travelogue *The wonders of Vilayet*, and some other nonfiction pieces. The more I read those pieces, the more I fell in love with nonfiction. At the same time, I was doing the 'Advanced Critical Reading 1: Fiction and Nonfiction' course under Kaiser Hamidul Haq Sir. He taught us the basics of nonfiction writing. Once, while giving the lecture, he said that he didn't like fiction that much because fiction was so predictable, he could predict the whole story of a fiction just after reading 10 to 15 pages of it, whereas nonfiction seemed more interesting to him because it was unpredictable and true. I felt like he just said my inner expression. I am not neglecting

fiction, but to me, nonfiction is a genre where reality becomes a fine piece of literary work. Isn't it magic?

While preparing myself for my dissertation, I thought that I would write a memoir about my childhood and teenage in some chapters. In the final chapter, I would tell the story of my spiritual awakening. I drew a mind map of what would be in the chapters of my memoir. I shared my plan with my supervisor Professor Kaiser Hamidul Haq and he also appreciated me. But when I started to type, I was feeling hopeless. After a whole night's attempt, I could just write 512 words. Then I talked with my old pal Nayer Sultana Kumu who is a ULAB graduate. She tried to console and inspire me. She said, "You may not always stick to your plan from the beginning. So, write with the flow, and eventually, you will reach your destination." I liked the tips and started writing. I tried to relive the past by closing my eyes. I tried to remember how my house was, how was the ambience, how did my mom look like back then? Slowly, I was getting into the past. I was thinking deeply about the incidents from my childhood and choosing the important ones for building my character in my memoir. Writing *Reflections: A memoir* had been a wonderful experience for me. In this cruel world full of harsh realities, we do not get a scope to concentrate on ourselves often. We are either busy with work, or with our smart devices. While writing this memoir, I revisited so many beautiful memories; went through the narrow, broken lanes of my mind, and discovered many unnoticed things. This piece compelled me to reflect on my life through different lenses, that is why I named it *Reflections: A memoir*.

The first chapter of my memoir is 'Beginning'. Here I gave a brief introduction about my parents, siblings, and friend. In the second chapter titled, 'Heaven in my village', I tried to portray my childhood vacation times spent in the village which was a blissful experience for me. The third chapter 'Education or Pain' describes my mental pain while getting introduced to the faulty education system of our country. In the fourth chapter, 'How I became a Gangster', I described the cause and events which made me engage in gang fights in my teenage. The fifth chapter, 'Getting Back on the Track' portrays one of the shameful events of my life which made captive within a shackle and forced me to become serious with my study. I showed in this chapter, how a spoilt teen like me got back on track and obtained good marks on the SSC exam. In the sixth and Final Chapter, 'Spiritual Awakening', I described how I became addicted to drugs. I also portrayed how my Spiritual Guide Hajrat Sayed Mahbub-E-Khoda mentored me to give up the drugs and return to a normal life.

1. Beginning

As I was the youngest child of my mother Mrs. Suraiya Khan, she used to love me more than she loved my siblings. She would often kiss on my cheeks, and my immediate response was to wipe my cheeks with my hand because most of the time, the kisses would leave the mark of her red, pink, and marron lipstick on my cheeks. She would ask me with fake sadness, "Am I so bad to you that you wipe your cheeks after I kiss you?" I would remain silent in childish disgust. It's not that I did not love my mother. I loved her a lot. Whenever any relative or acquaintance asked me, "Who's your favorite? Mom or Dad?" I always voted mom. My Dad's native home was in Satkhira and my mom's native home was in Mymensingh, but whenever someone asked where my native home is, I answered proudly, "Mymensingh." Once I went to my maternal aunt's home with my mom. I was 4 or 5 years old then. We were all eating together at the dining table. Suddenly, my cousin Sunny made a remark to my mom which was insulting. Hearing that I started crying loudly as I was extremely angry and hurt. I was crying and saying, "Why did he insult my mom?" Everyone tried to console me, but their attempt failed. After that event, I did not talk to that cousin of mine for 1 month.

In my childhood when load shedding occurred, I used to lie on my mother's lap and talk with her. I loved to share every childish thought of mine with her. She would hear my gibberish with full attention. She would often give me advice in a loving tone. Sometimes she would sing a kid song in Bangla, which translates into English, "If you want to listen to a story, come to me, stopping the mischief, please sit calmly." The song was mesmerizing and educative at the same time. While lying on my mother's lap and listening to her songs, sometimes a horrible thought came to my mind, "What if my mother dies? What will I do? How will I live?" Tears rolled down instantly from my eyes. My mom would ask, "What happened, dear?" I would tell my mom with hiccups, "Ammu! if you die, how will I live without you?" Hearing this unanswerable question, mom's eyes would also become teary. She would hug me tightly and say, "I will be always with you dear. Even if I die, my soul will be always looking you.

Not only my mom but my elder brother and sister also loved me a lot. I was closer to my sister Lima, who was 10 years older than me. I have heard from my parents and relatives that she

used to groom and nurse me when I was a kid. She had motherly affection towards me. When my parents would go out sometimes leaving me asleep and waking up I found that I am alone in the room in the dark evening and I trembled in inexplicable dread and terror, my sister would get out from beneath the bed and touch my cheek with her soft hands from behind. Though with that sudden touch, my fear would reach the pinnacle at first, when I realized that It was my sister, my heart would get filled with joy and assurance. I admired my sister Lima so much that her choice was always my choice. In cricket, she supported Pakistan (she changed it later), I also supported Pakistan; in football, she supported Brazil; I supported Brazil too. Her favorite singer was James, my favorite was James too. She used to take extra salt with rice and curry, I also adopted this bad habit, for which my mom would scold me. My sister was a book lover. She would often read storybooks, hiding them behind the textbooks. So, she was the one who inspired me to build a reading habit. She was the one who taught me that the scent of rain-soaked soil is the best fragrance in the world.

My brother Rajib, who was 11 years older than me, used to taunt me out of love and affection but I was too small to realize that he was doing that out of affection. So, whenever he taunted me, I became angry and started punching his back with my soft hands. Sometimes, I teased him saying 'Lazy Boy! Lazy Boy! Lazy Boy!' when he was sleeping. Sometimes, I used to reflect the sunlight on his face through the little mirror of my pencil sharpener and he would beat me out of disgust. I would often play cricket with him. We used to make a ball with paper and the broom was our bat. So, our bondage was not that bad. In a nutshell, we had a sweet and sour relationship. But One day, when he was teasing me, I got angry and complained to my father. My father was an angry man. He beat my brother immediately with the broom. Maybe from that day, my brother was holding a grudge against me.

My father Mr. Iqmal Khan, was a third-class government employee, to whom honesty was always the best policy. For this reason, he had a low income, with which, meeting the family needs was quite tough. To increase his income, he took another part-time job in a private company situated at Dhanmondi. After doing the government job in Motijheel from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., he would go to Dhanmondi, and work till 8 or 9 p.m. He went through this tremendous struggle only to support his family. He loved his children a lot but his hot temperament did not allow him to show it ever. Still, I could feel his love, when he used to take me for a walk and hold my index finger with his 5 fingers. I could feel the warmth of his heart through the touch. A feeling of assurance would spread in my heart. Nobody held my finger like this ever. Even

if anyone did, I know that I wouldn't feel the same. At night, when the clock struck 8 o'clock, I would count the time, when Abbu will come. When I heard the sound of footsteps on the stair, my mind would be filled with joy. I would run to the door and open it for him, and he would ask me smiling, "How did you understand that it was me?" I would smile back and say, "I heard the sound of your footsteps." He would pat my head and enter the room. My father was too simple and naive, and sometimes his choice did not match ours. I remember I used to think 'Why my father doesn't bring storybooks for me as other dads do.' One day he did bring a book of a fairytale but that book was published from a very cheap publication and the quality of writing was very poor. So, I never finished reading that book.

I had only two friends, Rafi and Sunny. Rafi was my mom's friend's son. He was one year older than me. He was of a slightly brown complexion, with a chubby figure. I used to admire him a lot. Together, we would play cricket, WWF wrestling, hide and seek, etc. As he was a bit older than me, he would always have privilege over me. He was a fibber but I used to love his fibs. Playing at his home in Moghbazar was more fun than playing at my house; as his father was richer than my father, he had fascinating toys like remote control cars, trains, fishing games, Robocop, etc. He also had a real bat and balls. Sunny was my maternal aunt's son. He was 1.5 years younger than me. Playing with him was also fun but our bond was not that good. I used to neglect him a bit but he was a fan of mine. I still cannot find out why did I neglect such a nice child. Maybe I was jealous because he had shinier, silkier hair than me. Maybe I was jealous because my sister would always show more affection towards him than she did towards me. Maybe I was jealous because my sister would call him 'My Hero'.

So, this was my life when I was 5 years old. With my parents' and siblings' utmost love and affection, I was passing my days happily in a tiny flat of a simple building in Ahmedbagh, Dhaka.

2. Heaven in my village

Though I was living happily as a kid, with no major illness or accidents. I would sometime feel empty. I could feel that there was a hole, not very big, but it was there. Sometimes, I would feel so empty deep inside that I used to stand at the window, holding the grills of it, and gaze at the horizon or the setting sun for hours. Sometimes, I felt so lonely that I would just crawl on my bed aimlessly. My mom would understand me, I don't know-how. Maybe she also had the magical power all moms have. With which, she would sense that I had stolen and eaten powder milk or condensed milk. With that magical power, my mom would sense the loneliness inside me also. She would sit on the bed and say in a soft voice while patting my head, "Ah! my son is so lonely. Dear! are you feeling bad? go play with Jamy." Jamy was our house owner's son, who was 2 years younger than me. I wouldn't get much fun playing with him as I used to get while playing with Rafi and Sunny. Still, I would go to Jamy with the hope of riding his toddler Cycle. But he wouldn't let me ride it. So, emptiness prevailed in my mind.

To get rid of that emptiness, I would turn my bed into a huge bus or truck and drive it like a pro driver. Like the bus drivers of 'Eagle Paribahan' drove the buses from Dhaka to Satkhira. I used to watch their driving with overwhelming astonishment while going to my native village. No other profession was deemed greater to me than bus driving at that time. Because they had a sense of authority, a power to control such a monstrous vehicle in which 40 to 50 precious human lives were sitting. They had speed and adventure; they had freedom and boldness. I tried hard to remain standing on the bus for 8 to 9 hours, just to enjoy their skill of driving. The way they overtook other cars, would give me thrills. But my rigid father would often compel me to sit on his lap. Watching the bus driver was not the only entertainment of going village. A village trip was like rain in drought for me. It was an escape from my monotonous world to a fantasy world. Our village, Rasulpur, was a small one, situated near the police line, Satkhira. Though it was not blessed with much natural beauty, to me, it was like heaven. Through the long, tiring journey from Dhaka, I would continuously ask my father, "When will we reach home Abbu?" and when we finally reached Kadamtala bus stand, Satkhira, my heart would dance like Nataraja in endless ecstasy. We would take a rickshaw van from there to go home. When the rickshaw van entered the village roads, the scent of cow, hay, grass, and the green tree would mesmerize my whole entity. Reaching the alley of our home, I would immediately get down from the van and run towards the home. After riding the 6-step stair, I would land on the outside veranda which went to the veranda attached to the drawing-room in a paved way.

Running from the outside veranda I would shout, "Brother Tomal! Sister Tomaaaa! Auntyyyy!" They would get out of the home, hug me tightly, and take me inside.

Morning in our village started with the extra slim roti, delicious omelet, and fried vegetables. Elders would drink milk tea which children were not allowed to drink. After breakfast, I would rush to the huge field surrounded by gigantic trees for playing cricket. When I played with the seniors, my role was fielding only; I was not given the scope to bat or bowl. But when I went to play with my nephews who were either my age or younger, I would certainly bat and bowl first. After playing for at least 2/3 hours, when it was 1 pm, we would go to the pond for the bath. I think even fishes feel bored staying in the water all time, but I did not feel tired. Time passed in the pond- 1 hour, 2 hours, 3 hours. My paternal aunt (uncle's wife) would come to call me, but who hears! When she failed, she sent another aunt (father's sister), and finally came my father. He would scream at me, "Shuntunu! get up from the water now or I will break your bones into pieces." With sadness and frustration, I had to bid farewell to the pond.

As I became ravenous after a lot of hard work, I would eat like a monster. Lunch items used to be Parshe fish (Flathead grey mullet) or Tangra fish (Mystus Tenggara) cooked with eggplant, potato, and daal er bora (lentil chop); fried vegetables, fried bitter gourd, the meat of village chicken, and sometimes beef. After lunch, it was mandatory to sleep but we were the mischievous children, so, we would not sleep. I, my elder cousin Tomal, another elder cousin Sonju and other children of the village would go to the canal side, where there were plenty of Bamboo bushes. We would make arrows with jute sticks and bow with bamboo sticks and play with those. At about 4 pm, it was again time to play cricket in the playground. My father, his friends, and nephews would also play volleyball or football at the Rasulpur Playground. My sister, other female cousins, my aunts, and my mom would roam the playground, sit there and chat with each other for hours. As everyone went to the village on the Eid Time, the field would get filled with my relatives. Everyone is meeting everyone, saying hi with a charming smile, and talking with everyone. Somebody would ask me, "Hey! aren't you the son of Choten (my father's nickname)." Some village relatives would scream with unconditional affection, "Hey! Shuntunu! How many years have passed since your last visit to the village? Don't you miss the village?" It was like a fair of relatives and within them, we were playing. Sometimes, I would rush to the calves or yeanling to cuddle them, and I would fail to catch the ball. Seniors would yell at me, "Hey Shuntunu! what are you doing? A boundary has been added to the opponent's

score for your mistake" I would try to put attention to the play, but the calves and yeanling always snatched a big portion of my attention. With the Maghrib's Ajan (call for evening prayer), we went back home and had our snacks. After that, the play would start again, but that time, it was indoor play. We would pass our time by playing Thief-police-robber¹, Ludo, Carrom; and sometimes by acting, saying jokes and stories. I invented a new kind of indoor play which I named Freedom Fighter-Traitor. We would divide ourselves into two teams, freedom fighters of the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh and traitors who helped the Pakistani army at that time. My prime goal was to be in the freedom fighter team and as I was the inventor of that play, I was always given that privilege. After dividing ourselves into two teams, the traitors would hide in the ancient bedroom which had a huge wooden beam attached to the roof. Then we, the freedom fighters would attack them from another room and victory always went to the freedom fighter's side.

At night, after a delicious dinner, we would have rice with milk and Patali Guur (Date Molasses), the taste of which was mouth-watering. Though we used to stay awake till 10 to 11 p.m. in Dhaka, in the village it was quite tough to stay awake till 9 p.m. So, after having dinner, we would get our beds ready with mosquito nets. We would sleep immediately after lying in the bed with the soothing sound effect of crickets chirping and foxes barking. I remember, once I mimicked dogs barking in a loud voice standing on the premise at night for at least 1 hour. The next day, one of my distant grandmothers came to our house and told my aunt, "Anju! Last night, so many foxes were barking at a stretch! Strange! haven't heard such unified barking recently. Sleep is been a scarce thing in my old age, moreover, the foxes didn't let me sleep for a moment." My Anju Aunty (paternal uncle's wife) giggled looking at me and said to my grandmother, "Aunty! Shuntunu mimicked the dog's barking last night for an hour at least. maybe the foxes thought their territory was filled with dogs. As dogs are their enemies, they may have had special security meeting the whole night." Hearing that, my grandmother also laughed looking at me, and said, "Crazy boy!". I was always doing something fun like this

¹ Thief-police-robber is an interesting indoor game that is played with pen and paper. It can be played with 4 or 5 people. Rules for 4 persons- You cut 4 pieces of small paper and write police in one, thief in one, robber in one, and president in another piece. After that, you wrap each piece in a way so that the inner writing is not visible. Then shuffle the pieces and put them on the table. Each person will take one piece of paper not knowing what is written inside and read the writing individually, not showing anyone. President and Police can reveal their identity but the thief and the robber must be silent. S/He who got president written on his/her piece gets 100 points instantly. Now, it's the police's turn to guess who is the thief and who is the robber. The thief and robber try hard to mislead the police. If the policeman successfully catches the thief and robber, s/he gets 50 points. If he fails, he gets 0, the thief gets 20 and the robber gets 30. A target point is set at the beginning, and s/he achieve the target point first by playing several rounds win the game.

when I was in the village. I liked the fact that everyone gave importance to my childish thoughts and acts. I miss being the center of attention like this.

After one week, when it was farewell time, our relatives' eyes were filled with tears. In Rabindranath's language, "Won't let her/him go. Still have to let go. Still, s/he goes." At the time of returning to Dhaka, I would reminisce the blissful moments I passed in the village. When we reached Dhaka, it was again the machinal city, again the loneliness, the empty feeling inside me.

3. Education or Pain?

Despite my loneliness, life in Dhaka was not that bad. Occasionally I would go to Rafi and Sunny's house. Sometimes, my mother would take me to the houses of various neighbors, friends, relatives, and acquaintances of hers. The other times, my sister and brother would take me to their friend's house. Once my brother took me to The Ekushey Book Fair along with some of his friends. The memory is so distant that I can just remember that I went there on a rickshaw, sitting on the lap of my elder brother. We roamed there for many hours and my brother's friends bought me a cartoon magazine named 'Unmad' (crazy). Unmad was the most famous cartoon magazine of then which was edited by Ahsan Habib, younger brother of Humayun Ahmed. I wasn't able to read then, but the comic pictures gave me pleasure.

Another prime source of pleasure in my childhood was BTV (Bangladesh Television). MacGyver, Alif Laila, Thief of Baghdad, Hatem Tai, Captain Planet, Samurai, Banana cartoon, Ghost Busters, Moner Kotha (Words of Mind), and Ittadi (Etcetera) were my favorite shows. Once I missed MacGyver because I slept early. After waking up in the morning, I cried like a lunatic. Alif Laila would take me into a wonderful imaginary world. I would get thrilled knowing the magicians, monsters, angels, Jinn, and such imaginary beings. Hatim Tai's generosity would make me cry. MacGyver's skill would give me goosebumps. Ittadi was the most popular magazine tv program and was considered the purest source of entertainment. The mockery and sharp intellect of Nati (the grandson), foreign comic videos dubbed by Hanif Sanket in funny Bangla accents, other original comic short clips made by him, noteworthy achievements of a common guy- all these segments of Ittadi were spectacular.

Friday was the time to watch Bangladeshi melodrama films. Though the screenplay of those films was cliché and predictable, we loved to watch those movies. Movies were shown at 3.15 p.m. on Friday and the telecast on BTV started at 3.00 p.m. But we kids would switch on the tv at 2.30 p.m. and tune on the BTV channel when the screen was blue and only a continuous beep could be heard. Even the monotonous beep sound was alluring to us. At sharp 3.00 p.m., a program announcer would appear on the screen and announce the program schedule. The program started with the recitation from holy books, someday from Gita, someday Bible, someday Tripitaka, and someday Quran. Even my childish mind could understand from hearing the recitations that all the holy books' gist is the same, but the mature persons of today's world don't understand that and engage themselves in communal riots. After the recitation, the film

would begin. We would watch from the beginning to the end. We would not even move in front of the tv during commercials because TVCs of that time were aesthetic and enjoyable. Some favorite movies I watched at that time were, 'Dipu No. 2', 'Hangor-Nodi-Grenade' (Shark-River-Grenade), 'Boro Valo lok chilo' (Such a good person he was), 'Jibon theke neoa' (Taken from the life), 'Sareng bou' (wife of a ship captain) and 'Keyamot theke Keyamot' (from resurrection to resurrection).

When I was 6 or 7 years old, Ekushey Tv (ETV) started telecasting. We didn't need to have a cable satellite subscription to watch that channel. Once I was tuning the channel tuner knob of our 17-inch small and old black and white TV randomly though I knew that no other channel except BTV would come because we did not have a satellite dish connection. But arising my utter wonder, Ekushey Tv appeared on the screen. I was extremely happy to find a new channel. Ekushey Tv changed the color of my life then. Its programs were unique, creative, and attractive. Their tv dramas, magazine programs, cartoons, other children's programs, movies, and news were extraordinary. Bandhan (Bondage), Biprotip (Contrary), Pret (The Spirit), Pother Pachali (Ballad of Roads), Montu Miyar Obhijan (Expedition of Montu Miya), and The Lost World were some notable programs on Ekushe TV of which I was a big fan. On an Eid in my childhood, Ekushey TV telecasted a special episode of the much-acclaimed animated series 'Montu Miyar Obhijan'. I just started watching that episode and all of nowhere, my brother came and changed the channel. I protested that injustice as hard as I could, but my brother was determined in his choice. I felt like my heart had been broken, I felt a precious gift had been snatched away from me. Going to another room, I sobbed for 1 hour at a stretch. Later, my brother came and tried to console me but my grief did not vanish.

Life was good before my education started. There was no pressure, no stress, and no anxiety. I could do whatever I liked and I could do that all day long. Sometimes, I was driving the bus sitting on the bed, sometimes, I was driving a rickshaw holding the arm panel of the sofa, and sometimes, I was talking with my mom about stupid things. Sometimes, when my brother used to listen to the songs of his favorite singer Hasan, I would go to my brother's room and keep shouting from a safe distance, "Hasan is a goat! Hasan is a goat! Hasan is a goat!" and my brother would chase me in the whole flat with the broom to beat me, but catching me was impossible as I could easily hide beneath the bed. I had the liberty at that time, though I was a captive among the four walls of our little flat as my parents didn't feel safe allowing me to go outside. But when my education started, that freedom, that peace, that happiness started to fade

away from me. So, when my parents thought that I have had enough entertainment in my life, they admitted me to a kindergarten on nursery class. I was only acquainted with 7 or 8 letters of The Bangla and the English alphabet then. When the teachers used to write something on the blackboard, I would keep watching those writings with utmost surprise. When I was given a task, all I could do was chew the pencil and scribble on the notepad. My teachers would ask me, "Dear! Please tell me what you don't understand. what problem are you facing?" But I had no answer to their question, all I could offer them was a blank stare. So, after studying there for 3 to 4 months, I told my mom that I couldn't continue as I was feeling ashamed in every class. Then my mom took the responsibility into her hand. She started teaching me the alphabet and numbers of Bangla and English. She taught some easy math. But my mom lost her patience after some days, as I was a slow learner. Therefore, my mom handed the responsibility to Najnin Apa. She was a neighbor and our family teacher. I used to go to her house every day in the afternoon and study for 1.30 hours. Learning from her was a sweet experience as she was a nice person. She had no children, so she used to treat me as our child. She would prepare delicious food for me and serve it after my study. She was also strict sometimes when I failed to do my homework. Her husband Tuhin also liked me a lot. He would very often engage in a friendly chat with me. I would express my future dream to him, "Tuhin Bhai! I want to be a cricketer in the future." He would appreciate my dream by saying, "Cricket is a prestigious profession. If you can become a cricketer, you will not only earn from playing but also doing TVCs will bring you money." No one except him supported my dream of being a cricketer.

Under the guidance of Najnin Apa, I learned elementary things within 6 months. Then my family thought I was prepared for taking part in the battle of getting admitted to a reputed school. An admission form was taken from Motijheel Central Government High School and on the due date, I appeared for the exam. After getting the exam question, all kids around me started writing in their scripts fast, but I was bewildered reading the questions. They seemed so unfamiliar to me. I felt like I have come to the wrong planet. So I wrote nothing in my script and waited for the exam hour to be finished. When I got out of the exam hall, my mom asked anxiously, "How was your exam? Have you answered all the questions?" I lied, "Yes mom. The exam was fine." After the result was published, definitely my name was not on the merit list. So, my parents had no other option than to admit me to an ordinary neighborhood school named, "Ahmedbagh Adorsho Uccho Biddaloy" (Ahmedbagh Ideal High School). I don't remember the first day at school but I remember a very awkward experience. After a few days of getting admitted to class 1, one friend of mine came to me and said, "See that girl, I like her

very much. Go to her, and give this letter to her." Saying this he handed me the letter. When I went in front of that girl, she was chatting with the other girls. I felt so nervous that I thought I could not approach her directly without any introduction. So, I cleared my throat and asked with hesitation, "Will you be my friend?" She got angry at me and said, "What audacity! go and stay at the boys' side." I felt so embarrassed that I could not give her the letter. So, I went back to my friend like a defeated soldier. When I told him the fact, he ridiculed me saying, "What are you! Are you an idiot? You could just go and give her the letter!" Hearing him, I realized, 'Yes! I could do that!

My experience at my first school was not sweet. I was an average student and I was beaten randomly by my naughty classmates and could not protest at all as I was a mere idiot. One day I lost my notebook in school. When I went back home, my mom wanted to check my notebook as her regular habit. I told her that I lost it. She became furious and started beating me with a Punkah. If you had not been born in the Indian sub-continent, then you do not know the flavor of Punkah beating. It gives you a burning sensation and makes small cuts on your skin. My 40 years old mother was beating 5 years old me so mercilessly that our neighbor plus house owner aunt came running to our flat with a frightened face and asked my mother, "Sister! Why are you beating him like this? What did he do?" Giving her hand a bit of rest, she answered with a snake hissing, "He has lost his notebook in the school!" and started beating me again. Maybe our house owner's aunt did not expect such a silly fault to be punished in such a grand manner. Being astonished, she said, "Well, you should not beat your son so cruelly for a trivial mistake like this. Don't beat him anymore!" But her authoritarian voice did not have any impact on my mother. She may have been the house owner, but in our family, my mother was the boss. I was trying to protect my childish face with my hands and she was restlessly striking my hands with the half-broken punkah. I was crying and screaming, "Ammu! Please don't beat me! Please pardon me this time. I won't lose my notebook again. Ammu! Ammu! Ammu!" But my tragic cry and scream were not touching her at all. At last, our house owner aunty held my mother's hand and stopped her.

My mother was so strict about my study that my life had become hell. I could not meet her expectation no matter how hard I tried. Hence, she handed over the baton to my elder brother. So far, I used to like, love, and admire my elder brother a lot. But when he became my teacher, I started seeing him as a monster. He was a bright student of the prestigious Motijheel Ideal School and College. He expected as a brother of him, I carried the same gene and I should have

been a brilliant student also. When he explained a math problem to me, I found it very difficult to understand. He could not withstand the fact that my processor was a slow one and I needed more time and effort. So, he used to beat me. He used to blow on my back with his rigid fist so hard that I would scream in intolerable pain. I would seek help from my mother, but she supported my brother's treatment. With my mother's support, my brother continued his teaching and beating. I was so afraid of him that I would forget a well-learned thing just by seeing his face. Therefore, I started avoiding him and after many emotional attempts, my mother agreed to manage another teacher for me.

I kept changing teachers one after another, and no one succeeded in pleasing me. I would create a reason for changing the teacher every time. Every time it was a new reason which seemed valid. I could not cope with the education system of our country where schooling takes away children's freedom and joy, where education puts a child into a stressful and horrible situation. I was looking for salvation, but there was no way out.

4. How I became a gangster

When I was in class 3, my mom got to know that one of my father's relatives Nargis Khanam was the headmistress of Khilgaon Government High School. After knowing this, she kept pushing my father to contact the headmistress about my admission to that school. My father was not ambitious like my mother. He was pleased with little. So, he did not give importance to my mom's proposal. But when he realized that my mom's desire to see me as a student of a reputed school would not stop, he went to that relative and talked about my admission. Normally, a kid had to seat for an admission test to get admitted to that school. But the headmistress got me admitted without any admission test through her power. The school was huge, at least 4 times bigger than my previous school. It had two fields, one large field outside the school and one medium field inside the school. At the entrance, a question was written in big font- "Today's question: What I have learned? What I have learned?"

I passed class 3 successfully and made friends with Sultan, Shams, Rakib, and Abir. But my bad times were about to begin. In class 4, we got Rahima Khatun, a middle-aged beautiful woman with a reddish-white complexion as our class teacher. She was generally very kind and had the most amusing English pronunciation amongst the teachers. She was not very pleased with me because I was not good at English. Once, during her class, I was painting a peculiar half-human, half-monster figure and writing some gibberish in my notebook. Suddenly, she noticed that I was not giving attention to her lecture, so she came near me and wanted to check my notebook. Watching the figure and writing she got angry. She told me, "Why do you write nasty words in your notebook?" I could not understand what nasty thing I had written. I had only written some gibberish things. So, I was unable to answer her. My silence made her angrier. She told me in a rough voice, "Bring your guardian to me tomorrow." I was shocked. I felt like a lightning had struck me. I knew if I told my mom about this, she would beat me. If our headmistress got to know about the event, she would have got hurt also. So, I didn't go to school next 3 days saying I was sick. After 3 days, when I went to school, I was afraid that my class teacher would scold me. But thank God, she forgot the thing and I was saved from facing a disastrous situation.

My math teacher Golam Ajam was another fear of mine. He was an unethical teacher who used to run a coaching center after school. He told us that if we don't get admitted to his coaching, he wouldn't let us pass the final exam. Hearing this warning, maximum students got admitted to his coaching, but I did not, because I did not like him as a person. He would not explain the

math solutions in the class, rather he commanded us to memorize the problems. Whenever we informed him that we were not understanding the solutions, he would beat and scold us. He would tell, "You guys don't want to come to my coaching, but want to get a full explanation from me? huh! you and your expectations." So, being failed to understand math problems fully, and I failed the final exam. I obtained only 26 out of 100. I was terrified to show the report card to my mom. But finally, I had to do it. Watching the F mark beside math, my mom became furious. She squeezed my ear so hard that I felt like my soft ear would rip from the root. I had to endure the scolding from my mother and brother for a few days and then my mom went to the headmistress and requested her to allow me to get admitted to class 5. Out of sympathy towards relatives, the headmistress allowed me. From that point, I always had a mental pressure that the headmistress is my relative and almost every teacher knows it, so I should not do anything which spoils her prestige.

My mom used to drop me at school and pick me up from there regularly. I felt jealous of my friends who came to school and went home on their own. I was feeling suffocated. I wanted freedom. I knew that my mom did it for my betterment so that I don't get spoiled, still, I wanted to break the shackle. I would say to myself, "If I get freedom once, I won't take advantage of this. I will be a good boy." At last, the long-awaited freedom came in 2005, when I read in class 7. My parents mutually decided that I can now go to school by myself. I felt like I had been an adult, fully free and independent. I was given 30 takas per day for rickshaw fare. First few days, I went to school by rickshaw. Later, one friend of mine showed me the way to the local bus 'Turag'. He said, "You can go home with one taka by bus, why will you spend 15 takas on a rickshaw then?" That tips made me Richie Rich. From then, I had to spend only two takas on my transport, with the rest of the 28 takas, I would eat chips, fuchka (one kind of snack), spicy rice puffs, pickles, and ice cream. I felt like I had just got an Aladdin's lamp.

Soon I started taking advantage of that freedom. I had been enrolled in my school's scouting program. I had done one camping and I would go to school on Friday morning for scouting class. When our school announced summer vacation, I got tensed, "What will I do during this vacation? I have no books to read." So, I made a plan. I told my parents that our school's scout unit will conduct a training every day while on vacation and I need to do that training. My gullible parents believed my lie easily. I used to get out of my home every morning and go straight to my friend Salman's house. Salman was a tall, handsome boy who loved to fib. He could fib so confidently that it was very hard to recognize. He was a good singer. Teachers of

our school would often call him to the front of the class and tell him to sing. He used to sing various songs, of which he claimed one was written and tuned by him. Hearing this, we would get amazed and think, 'How can he write and tune a complete song at such a young age!' But later I found out it was a famous kid song written by a renowned lyricist. Salman's father and mother both were private employees. He was raised by her grandmother mostly. His parents would leave home in the morning and come back in the evening. So, there was complete freedom in his house. We could do whatever we wanted. He was also a bookworm. So, sometimes, I would read books with him; we would watch a movie together, and sometimes, when we got bored, we used to shoot people with his toy air gun from the balcony. His parents were very friendly and welcoming, they did not bother that I went to their home every day. Rather, they were happy that their only son is having company. His grandmother also liked me very much. She would not let me go from their home without having lunch. This is how I passed the whole summer vacation at Salman's house.

There was freedom and entertainment in my life, but I was stupid. I was so weak and an idiot that my devilish classmates would often beat me without any reason, and I could not do anything. I would just cry and complain to my mom. My mom also got bored with my complaints. Once, after the class, a naughty boy took my bag and started running in the class. I was shouting, "Give me my bag! Give me my bag!" but he was not responding to my request. He would stop for some moments and tell me, "You want your bag? Come and get it. Come near buoy!" When I advanced toward him, he would start running again. After chasing him for 10 or 15 minutes I felt so helpless that I started crying. Watching me crying he might have felt pity for me and gave back my bag. While leaving, he said, "Such a sissy!". There was a classmate named Jony who always wanted to influence me. In class 7's midterm exam, I got a seat in front of him. He used to copy my script for each exam. One day, I denied to show him the script. He got angry about that and after the exam, he pushed me with such a force that I fell to the ground. All students started mocking me. I felt I was just a cockroach to him, so powerless and so small. I did not realize why these kinds of injustice happened to me. Why I was always the target? I had recently made a friendship with a dominant boy named Sunny. I started to observe his behavior, wherefrom he gets that boldness? Not only him, but I also started observing the other dominant boys in the class. I found one common factor that they all had shelter from a senior gang leader in that area. The gang leaders had their territory divided. For example, Shams Bhai had power in our school's surrounding area; Tanvir Bhai had power in the C Block, and Rifat Bhai had power in Bagicha. They had their seniors too; their seniors

were getting power from the M.P. of that area and the power source of that M.P. was The Honorable Prime Minister. So, this was a big gang network. I realized that if I wanted to stop injustice being happened to me, I need power. So, I started seeking power. I was searching for a way for getting connected with a gang leader in that area. But this was tough for me because I did not live in Khilgaon. However, if you desire something with utmost intensity, you will get a way to achieve it.

When I was in class 8, my school's scout unit announced that there will be a scout camp in the nearest school, "Khilgaon Uccho Biddaloy" (Khilgaon High School) and they invited novice scouts of our school to join that camp. I enrolled my name in that camp. I went to that school with my bag and baggage on the due date. I was made a patrol leader for my confidence and scouting skill. The camp's activity was thrilling and interesting. On the last day, I went to the washroom and saw Anwar and Rakib, who were scouts of that school, smoking cigarettes there. Watching me suddenly, they got shocked and afraid. They requested me, "Shunto! please don't tell the teachers. If they know, they will rusticate us." I was a smoker too, so I assured them that I wouldn't tell anyone. Hearing this, they got relieved. Later within a short period, I met Anwar and Rakib several times and they talked to me happily and expressed their gratitude.

I had started mingling with my naughty and dominant classmates in search of power. I started bunking the class and playing football with them. Once I went to a billiard center with them and found Anwar and Rakib there. They got surprised to see me and invited me to go there regularly. So, I went there often, with or without my classmates. I could sense that the billiard center was a source of power. Within a few days, I got acquainted with Rony Bhai through Anwar and Rakib, who was a vegetable seller in the Khilgaon Taltola market. Rony Bhai was a short guy with curly hair and a muscular body. He had always a smile on his lips. He was a small gang leader of Khilgaon. He had connections with the powerful gang leader. Getting introduced to him, I understood, that this is the guy I am searching for, he could be my power. So, I went to the billiard center every day instead of going to school. I would stay there for the whole day and go back home in the evening. When my mom asked, "Why are you so late?" I would answer, "I had scouted." though I had quit scouting. I had not only met Rony Bhai but other rotten kids who were into drugs and gang fights. I tried to build my network by keeping in communication with them.

A boy named Noyon, who was a mutual friend of mine used to ask for money from me very often. I felt very shy to say no to people even though I could feel that they were using me. One day, While I was playing cricket on the school field, Noyon called me. I went to him. He said, "How are you?" I said, "Fine." He said, "Give me 20 takas." I said, "I have no money." He said, "What? Don't you lie. Bring out the money." I was getting angry inside, but resisting that anger, I said, "Told you. I have no money." Hearing this, Noyon slapped me in the face. I was shocked. I said, "Why did you slap me?" He said, "It's my wish. You wanna hit me? come ahead." I said in a cold voice, "You should have not slapped me." He said "If you have power, show me tearing a pubic hair of me. Go sister fucker! Go!" Saying this, he left. I was feeling like thousands of needles are piercing my heart. I was angry, hurt, and heartbroken. I knew I don't have enough strength to fight him alone, and even if I win in the fight with him, he would bring his friends to beat me. So, I went to the Taltola market, bought 5 pieces of triple-star cigarettes, and went to Rony Bhai. Giving him the cigarettes, I told him about the whole incident. I told him that I want to hit Noyon. Rony Bhai called Anwar, Rakib, and other boys. They came quickly. I got my classmates with me also. We all went in search of Noyon. On our way, we got to know that Noyon was sitting in the field of Khilgaon Uccho Biddaloy. We all rushed there. Entering the field my eyes were searching for Noyon, 'Where's that son of a bitch?' Suddenly I saw him. He was sitting on the southeast corner, smoking a cigarette. I showed Noyon to Rony Bhai. He said, "Go ahead and beat that motherfucker! We are behind you." I was hesitating a bit and thinking, 'Can I beat a boy alone? Am I that strong?'. Rony Bhai interrupted my thinking, "What are you thinking? Smack that motherfucker!" I don't know from where I got extreme courage. Maybe this is the power all my friends used to talk about. I ran towards Noyon, when reached him he stood up seeing me. His eyes were full of wonder. To add more to his wonder, I slapped his face with all my power. The cigarette fell from his hands. His eyes were emitting fire in rage. He raised his hand to slap me back but Anwar reached there already and he kicked Noyon so hard that Noyon hit the wall. After that, I hit Noyon for 10 to 15 minutes. I punched his face so many times that his face got swollen. I was feeling a beastly joy in beating him. When Rony Bhai saw that I was doing extreme, he stopped me and said, "You have hit him enough. Now let's go back."

After that day, my whole personality was converted completely. I became confident, bold, and violent also. One day, my friend Arefin told me that Jony has misbehaved with him. Jony was the boy who pushed me once for not letting him copy my exam script. Hearing Arefin's complaint, I remembered Jony's misbehavior with me. So, I went to Jony and beat him with

my steel ruler. The boy who treated me like a cockroach a few months ago, himself became a cockroach in front of me. He got beaten by me, but could not utter a single word. Thus, I was becoming popular as a rising gangster in my school. The boys who previously ridiculed me for my stupidity came to me seeking my friendship. Whenever there was a fight, I was called. I would start the fight by slapping the opponent. As I was not good at playing cricket, I could not fulfill my dream of becoming a successful opener, but I had become the first hitter in my gang. To show my power and boldness, I had hit many innocent boys. I had become so ferocious that if any boy even stared at me for a long time, I would go forward and hit that boy. I could feel the power within me, the power I was seeking to resist oppression against me. But after getting the power, I became the oppressor.

5. Getting Back on the Track

The more I was improving in gang fights, the more my study was worsening. I passed class 8 with poor marks and the school authority chose the arts and humanities group for me. When I showed the report card to my parents and siblings, they all got frustrated. They knew I could not study in the science group as I was not good at math, but they hoped at least I would study in the business studies group. In their opinion, the business studies group had a better job market than the arts and humanities. So, my mother went to the headmistress and requested her to transfer me to the business studies group. Like the previous time, the headmistress kept my mother's request and transferred me to the business studies group.

I did not like to study then. Instead of the questions of textbooks, these questions would roam around my head- "How to hit the opponent gang? How can we become the most powerful gang in the area? How to take revenge on the seniors of class 10, who beat us a few months ago? How to increase our political power?" So, I was getting poor marks on the exam consecutively. My parents did not know that I had started gang fights, but they could sense that I was having bad company. When I was in class 10, my sister-in-law Shohag Bhai came to Bangladesh from Spain. I was very happy because he brought many chocolates with him. He was staying with us because his family did not approve of his marriage to my sister. One day, when my sister and Shohag Bhai went out, I went to the drawing-room where they used to stay at night. I was searching for a Tin Goyenda book that my mom kept hidden somewhere. I opened a drawer and with utter surprise, I saw that there was a bottle of Vodka inside the drawer. I realized that Shohag Bhai brought this bottle from Spain. I could not resist my desire to see the bottle, because I have never seen a bottle of alcohol in my life.

So, I closed the door of the room and took the bottle in my hand. It was a slim and long white bottle made of glass, on which, "Absolut Lime Vodka" was imprinted in big fonts. I was thinking, "Why not take a sip? My sister-in-law wouldn't notice if I take a sip." I opened the container and took one sip. It seemed like lemon flavor fire passed through my throat. I never felt such a burn inside. I could feel smoke coming out of my ears. My heartbeat increased. I went out of home, bought a gold-leaf cigarette, inhaled just 4 puffs of the cigarette and it was finished. Normally, I would take 15-20 puffs, but after drinking the vodka, the cigarette seemed like just paper. I fixed that I would make my friends feel the warmth of alcohol too. So, I went back home and pour half of the bottle's vodka into a water container and put it in my schoolbag.

The next day, I went to school with that water bottle containing vodka. When I entered my class, some of my friends were chatting and laughing loudly while sitting on the backside benches. Shuvo, who was not a close friend of mine was sitting on the left corner, gazing apathetically at the tree outside the window. Shuvo's nickname was Gaja (Weed) as his complexion was black and his eyes were always red, though he didn't even smoke a cigarette. Going near to my friend, I told them, "Do you want to see a funny thing?" They said, "Why not?" I said, "Wait and see." Saying this, I called Shuvo, "Hey Gaja! come here!" He came. I brought out the bottle from my bag and told him, "Drink it." He said, "I am not feeling thirsty." I asked, "Why are you looking apathetic? Are you tensed?" He said in a sad tone, "Yes, my accounting exam's been not good. I think I will fail the exam!" I said, "Oho! I see! hear, this bottle you see in my hand, contains holy water from a Hujur (Islamic scholar) Drink it. You'll surely pass." Shuvo's face glowed with a smile. He said, "Is this true? If I drink this holy water, I will pass?" I nodded and said with confidence, "Yes! You will." He took the bottle and drink one sip from the bottle and immediately threw up what he took inside. His eyes became teary and with surprise, he asked, "What the hell is it? My heart is burning." I said, "Holy water! The Hujur has got this from a Jinn. Jinns are made of fire, maybe this is why the water is fiery. Go, wash your mouth." Being confused, he rushed to the washroom. My friend was already laughing loudly. When they were done laughing, they asked me, "What's the matter friend?" I said, "Man! I have got Vodka for you!" All my friends cheered together. Then everyone sipped that vodka and thanked me.

Meanwhile, my sister-in-law opened the drawer and saw the bottle was half empty. He immediately informed my sister about the fact. He was shocked because he brought it for his uncle. My sister informed my father and all were doubting me, of course! no one in the house can do such a thing. When I got back home, I saw my father sitting on the sofa in the drawing-room. He looked serious. From his facial expression, I could sense a storm was coming. My father asked me, "Why have you stolen your sister-in-law's thing?" I said, "What thing? I didn't steal anything." My father got angry and screamed, "You rotten boy! how could you drink alcohol! Don't you know it's prohibited in our religion? You have already started smoking, now will you be an alcoholic also?" I realized that there was no scope for denying my crime. So, I kept my head low and listened to my father's scolding. That time, my maternal cousin sister Shaon Apu also stayed with us. She came from Canada on a vacation. I was feeling ashamed thinking that Shaon Apu, Shohagh Bhai, all have known I had stolen Vodka. I was thinking, how would I show my face to them. When my father saw that I was not responding at all, he

stopped for a while. In the meantime, my sister Lima came and gave a lecture to my father on "How he should control his son". From her lecture, my father got a clear Idea. So, my freedom was snatched away again. I had to come back home within 1 hour of school closing. I was admitted to a coaching center, where teachers were very strict about homework. My every behavior got scrutinized by my father, mother, and sister. My brother was busy with his job in Grameen Phone then. So, he did not get the scope of beating or scolding me that much. With the strict guidance of my father and sister, I got back on track. I started giving less time to my rotten friends and studying hard for the SSC. Because I took good preparation, my SSC exam was excellent and I passed with GPA 4.94 in 2009.

6. My Spiritual Awakening

28 march 2012, 2 nights before my Higher Secondary Certificate exam. I was laying on the footpath of Green Road at midnight. Buses, Trucks, CNGs, and occasionally some rickshaws were passing by. I could not sleep at all because of their sounds. I was starving since afternoon. Previously, I had passed the whole day walking on the streets of Dhaka. At night, I had not felt like going home. So, I had gone to my paternal aunt's house at midnight. The collapsible gate was locked. I pressed the calling bell. No response. I pressed the calling bell again. After a while, my aunt came to the balcony of the 3rd floor. She screamed, "Who? Who?". I said, "It's me, Shunto. Aunt! give me the key. The gate is locked." She was not expecting me at her house at that odd time as my image was already hampered amongst the relatives. She cried with an irritated frown, "Why have you come so late? Go to your home!" Immediately after saying this, she got vanished from the balcony. I waited for half an hour, but my aunt did not come back. So, I went to the nearby footpath and lay there.

I was passing through a very critical time. My whole life was a complete mess. I had been taking Yaba pills for 3 months. Human beings have an intense attraction toward forbidden things. I was not an exception. Besides, my drug-addicted school friends tempted me to indulge in the dark fantasy world of that crazy pill. Other personal issues made me frustrated about life and I thought Yaba could be a way of salvation. But ultimately this addiction led me to hell. My family got a hint of my addiction and they became desperate. My father beat me several times, but I could not give up my addiction. During that gloomy period of my life, I could not stay home. I hated staying at home. If I stayed one night at home, I would stay the next 4 to 5 nights in my friends' houses. Sometimes, I would create a story about staying at my friends' houses. In Bangladesh, it is not acceptable for a college boy to stay at a friend's house. So, I used to go near my friends' houses, call them on phone and tell them- "My family members had gone to Gazipur at a relative's house. They had given me the key to our house. I got out of the home in the afternoon and lost the key. Now I need to stay at your house for one night only. I have called my parents; they will come back tomorrow." They felt awkward, but as they loved me, they somehow managed their parents and let me stay at their houses. Each time, the story would be different. I did not have to create stories for some friends. Their parents were so welcoming that they permitted me to stay in their houses happily. After staying at friends' houses for some days, I would go back to my home. Returning home, I would see my father's angry face. He would scream at me, beat me. But the next day I would repeat the same thing. Sometimes, I truly wanted to overcome this addiction. I craved a normal life. My HSC exam

was ahead and I was even unaware of the syllabus. Previously I had sold my books and bought a pet cat from the Katabon market. So, I did not even have my books. I had been so whimsical that I did not have a life goal. I did not know where I was going.

My father was a devotee of Hajrat Sayed Mahbub-E-Khoda, a prominent Sufi of Bangladesh who actively participated in the liberation war of Bangladesh from sector no. 3. In my childhood, my father used to take me to his holy darbar sharif (monastery) every Thursday night. The darbar sharif was situated at Arambagh, Motijheel, Dhaka. After getting off the rickshaw, I would enter the narrow alley opposite of Arambagh petrol pump holding my father's hand. Immediately after entering the alley, heavenly peace would fill my heart. We would keep our shoes at the shoe counter of the darbar sharif, enter inside, perform ablution and wait for the Murshid (spiritual guide). When volunteers announced that Honorable Murshid had come to the meeting place on the 2nd floor, we would go to meet him. After seeing his holy face, I could feel divine tranquility as if blessings had been showering me. At that time, I did not know what Sufism is, who Sufis are, and what is religion, but I felt that he was known to me, dear to me, as if I had met him in my previous birth! Whenever he saw me, he would look at me with a charming smile and pat me with inexplicable affection. After meeting him, we would go to the 8th floor and listen to the speeches of various speakers. After the night's prayer, Murshid Hajrat Sayed Mahbub-E-Khoda would give his closing speech in a soothing, honey-sweet, and kind voice. He would talk about self-purifying, awakening the spiritual consciousness, and the way of becoming a real human in nature. As I was a child of 5 years old, I could not realize the depth of his speech, but hearing him was a wonderful experience. When he started the final prayer (munajat), I do not know why, tears rolled down my eyes like a stream. I would cry so loudly that people would often stare at me. That spiritual experience cannot be expressed in words. It is not believable until you experience it. When I got back home, I would take with me a profound feeling of satisfaction and happiness. That blissful feeling would stay in my mind the whole week. I would wait the whole week for Thursday night and go to my murshid. On Thursday, I would request my father to take me there, and he happily accepted my request. I was so strongly attached to my Murshid's heart that, if I could not see him in a week, I would cry for hours. I had heard from my father, elder brother, and many other disciples of him that visualizing his face was a tough task. Even sitting in front of him, many could not visualize his face closing their eyes. But it was an easy task for me, whenever I closed my eyes, I could him smiling at me. My father used to say, "kids have a pure

soul that's why you can visualize his face so well, but don't tell it to anyone, if you do, you'll fail to visualize him."

However, the graceful spiritual experience did not last long. My mom was brought up in a cultural atmosphere, so she thought that if I go to the darbar sharif very often at this early age, I would become orthodox and I will not develop a cultural taste. She fought with my father over the fact and it was decided that I will not go there again. Years passed, and I grew up and reached my teenage. I would get the scope of going to the darbar sharif rarely but the connection I built with my murshid was becoming weak. After obtaining a good result in SSC, I got admitted to BAF Shaheen College. I was so happy with my SSC result and my college was so fascinating that I completely ignored my study. I would hang out with friends, bunk the classes and go to different areas of Dhaka City. Time flew quickly, the 1st-year final exam came, and my preparation was zero. So, I skipped the exam and did not even contact the college. After 2 months, I told my father that I had skipped my exam and I needed to be enrolled in the first-year class again. My father was tremendously shocked. He scolded me a lot. But finally, he went to college and readmitted me in the first year. This was a terrible turn in my life. I did not even think in my dream that I would do class with my juniors. After doing classes for 2 to 3 months with my juniors, I got severely depressed. I passed a horrible state for about 6 months and later when I was in my 2nd year, I started meeting my old bad pals from school who were already addicted to Yaba and Marijuana.

When I started taking drugs, life became very colorful at the beginning. Methamphetamine of Yaba would produce dopamine and it would give immense pleasure. The caffeine of Yaba would give me vitality. After some days, I started feeling depressed, frustrated, and broken. At that time, I used to think, If I could go to my Murshid and submit myself to him, he would have purified me with his 'Ettehadi Tawajjuh' (Supreme Spiritual Attention). But I could not go to him because I was feeling ashamed. How could I show my sinful face to him! At last, after passing the whole night on the footpath of Green Road, I decided to go to him. Only two days were left of my HSC exam. I was addicted to Yaba and my life was ruined. Some laborers laid beside me at night. I asked for some money from one of them for breakfast. He pitied me and gave me 20 takas. I bought a bun and ate that with one cup of tea. The sky was cloudy, cold breeze was flowing, I started walking towards Arambagh. I was feeling that remedy is closer. Before noon, I reached the darbar sharif. Entering there, I was eagerly waiting for my murshid

sitting on the ground floor. I was meditating and crying. All I wanted was peace and stability. Waiting did not seem so long before. Time was not passing at all. At last, my waiting ended. My Murshid Hajrat Sayed Mahbub-E-Khoda came. The moment I entered the meeting room, I looked at my murshid with intense emotions. He also stared at me for a long time, though other devotees were standing in the queue. When his eyes met my eyes, I could not take my eyes off him, though some devotees told me earlier that staring at murshid's eye when he is looking to the eye is not courteous. I was sobbing like a child. When every devotee was seated in front of him, he started giving his speech. I could not hear any word. I was crying and crying. After his speech, he asked if any devotees had something to say. Many men went to him and shared their worldly and spiritual problems. He provided a solution to all of them. After everyone had finished sharing, I went toward him in small steps. He was looking at me with unworldly kindness and an affectionate smile. I felt like he was waiting for me. When I went closer to him, He asked me before I could say anything,

“What’s your name?”

I said, “Shunto”. (Calm)

He asked me again, “Are you Shunto (calm) or turbulent (oshanto)?”

I replied, “Oshanto. (turbulent)”

He asked, “Why?”

I said, “Please forgive me my murshid! I could not come to you for many years as my mom prohibited me. Now my life is a total mess. I am addicted to Yaba. I can’t stay at home. Two days after is my HSC exam. I want to get well Murshid! Please cure me! Please permit me, I want to stay in your darbar sharif. I strongly believe that if I stay in your darbar sharif, my addiction will be gone.”

He was hearing me with the utmost attention. Listening to my appeal, he smiled and said, “Do you think that you will be able to give up your addiction if you stay in my darbar sharif?”

I strongly affirmed, “Yes!”

He said, "Okay then. Talk with your parents and come here. Bring your clothes and books with you."

He was about to leave. I said to him nervously, "Murshid! I have another appeal."

He said, "Tell me."

I said, "I want to stay with you as your volunteer. I want to stay with you when you come to this meeting room from your home. I want to stay with you until you leave this 2nd floor and go to your holy home on the 3rd floor. Please accept my prayer."

He smiled again and said, "Do you think, you will be able to stay with me?"

I said, "Yeah, if your grace falls upon me."

This is how I started staying at my Murshid's Darbar Sharif before my HSC exam. Every day, I used to wake up in the morning and go to my murshid's meeting room. He would come at about 11 a.m. I volunteered him the whole time he would stay there. I would get enough free time when he went to the research center for research or home for having lunch. Finally, at 9 p.m., I was completely free. After that, I would study for a while. Within 11 p.m., I would fall asleep. At 3.30 a.m, I would get up from my sleep and perform meditation as it was believed in Sufism that this time of the night is a special moment, God's blessings shower the universe during this portion of the night. I would get immense Fayeze (flow of Godly love, spiritual blessings) whenever I performed meditation and other rituals of my murshid's spiritual method. I would cry for the sins I committed; I would repent for the injustice I did to innocent people. It was really hard to stay without drugs as Yaba is a badly addictive drug. Whenever I felt bad, I would tell my murshid. He would tell me with a fatherly smile, "Whenever you feel bad, meditate. You were with bad company. That bad company has made you bad. Rumi has said, 'keeping a good company leads you to heaven, keeping a bad company leads you to hell. Spending one moment with a Sufi is better than 100 years of worship'. You have started to stay with Sufis. Soon your beastly instincts will dissolve." I increased the meditation time after this advice and it helped me a lot. I could resist my urge for having a Yaba pill easily. Not only

that, the more I meditated, the emptiness I used to feel inside from my childhood, started to fill. I could feel a spiritual awakening within me.

I attended my HSC exams from the darbar sharif. With limited preparation, I surprisingly got GPA 4.20 out of 5.00 from the Business Studies group. Day by day, I was getting away from bad pals and addiction. Finally, my drug addiction was completely cured with my murshid's spiritual attention. After that, Whenever I went to my murshid, he would ask me with a charming smile, “Shunto! Are you calm (shunto) or turbulent (oshanto)?” I would answer with tears, “Calm! By the grace of you.!”

Conclusion

The Graduate Program in Literature and Creative Writing of ULAB has opened a new dimension in front of me. The best English writers of our country have taught us the techniques of creative writing in different genres. In my opinion, having a creative spark within a writer is the most important thing for becoming a successful writer. Besides it, if we can learn various aspects of writing, we can improve our writing. There is no end to improvement. Even legendary writers always try to improve. Writing is such a world, where the 'Writer' is the creator. For a great writer, the pleasure of creating is the prime motive for his writing. One may have other motives like correcting the society, getting money, getting fame, etc. but if a true writer does not feel satisfied after writing, s/he may throw it into the trash can.

I don't think of myself as a writer with a creative spark. I am just a novice writer who wants to express his feelings and reflection through literature. Writing is a remedy for me. Remedy from the hardships and pains of the modern competitive world, where everyone is busy making money, where everyone is thinking about their interest. I want to keep writing throughout my entire life to escape from this cruel reality where a human being is a human being's biggest enemy. But expressing thoughts are not that easy. We need to fix what should we tell and how should we tell. We need to give life to the words. We need to engage the reader's senses. That skill is well taught to us by the honorable faculties of ULAB. In the future, I want to practice those skills while writing. Nonfiction is my favorite genre, so I will try to write more memoirs, travelogues, personal essays, and portraits. I will try to write some plays and poems also.

Works Cited

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