



Vol. 10, No. 2
CLRI May 2023

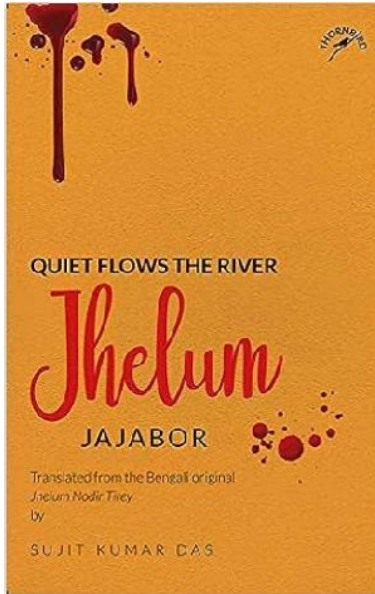
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Book Review of Jajabor's *Quiet Flows the River Jhelum* by Subhajit Bhadra

Reconstruction of History through Memory: A Critical Review
of Jajabor's *Quiet Flows the River Jhelum*

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The very title of the book under review can remind any devoted reader of World literature of Mikhael Sholokov's ground breaking and classic Novel of Russia titled And Quiet



Flows the Don. Such similarity in title is not meant to prove any borrowing on part of Jajabor who originally wrote his book under review in Bengali. But anyhow it can be commented that while the Russian novel is a classic of World literature, on the other hand Jajabor's book is non much known or widely read. Jajabor (pen name), whose real name was Binay Mukherjee was a journalist cum creative writer, a dramatist and also a writer of entertaining literature because of the sprinkling of funny interludes within the domain of his books

But his pen name gave him the scope to camouflage his real identity which also enabled him to make comments within his fictions and non fictions without any fear of being banned, arrested or forced to live in hybernation. His original Bengali classic, like Drishtipat and Jonantik are major literary miletones.

As a journalist he obviously excelled in non fiction and the book under review is a restrospective reconstruction of history. The book combines elements of history, politics, literature, anthropology, investigating journalism, an ardent expression of thorough research and many such elements, which, in turn, leads to the arrival of the book within the domain of the hands of common readers. It is a book of part history, part-fiction, part nonfiction and part-thriller. It is not often that any serious reader would find such a book that can provide mental food to them and the detailed perusal of the

book strikes the readers with action pronged narration of the book. The writer uses history as his story and often incorporates elements of fiction to make it palatable to the readers belonging to almost every level. It is a retrospective reconstruction of history and one can remind oneself of Alan Munslu's book **Deconstructing History**.

The book is about Kashmir and its troubled history since its inception and the publisher gives a comment on the front cover, "A compelling narrative on the history of the Kashmir dispute." Kashmir has always been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan and situation has not changed yet. Jajabor adopts the technique of the sub-altern authors long before this sort of history made its appearance. Kashmir's problem is not merely political or historical, is also related to its demography, religious conflict and uncertain mixture of wonderful natural beauty and constant militant aggression. One should remember that Kashmir was made a bone of contention originally by the Britishers for their own interest. Many thinkers, ideologists, politicians, sociologists, archaeologists, historians, creative writers and journalists have written about Kashmir which is not morely a disturbed zone, nut also an ever remaining discord. In the recent years A.G. Noorani and Bashrat Peer have produced good books on Kashmir and its problems. In Jajabor's book also we find all these elements and he actually tries to unravel the mystery behind the ever lasting animosity between two separate and independent countries who also happen to be neighbours.

Jajabor's standpoint is totally historical and his journalistic aura makes it authentic. But he deconstructs history and shows how partition led to the emergence of India and Pakistan and during the time of this great divide Kashmir remained neutral as the Maharajna in charge of this disputed land Hari Singh refused to accede his dominion neither to India, nor to Pakistan. Jajabor laments the fact that Kashmir's natural beauty is unparalleled and in this context one can

remind oneself of the famous Indian English poet, who also belonged to Kashmir and later on wrote his ode or elegy on Kashmir through these poetic lines "It there is a Paradise on Earth, it is this, it is this, it is this". But immediately after partition Pakistan started surrounding the land of Kashmir through several bunches of troops whose intention was to snatch Kashmir from the reign of Hari Singh and make it belong to Pakistan. Hari Singh was a titular Head and himself was a fellow who followed and always fulfilled his hedonistic urges and he gradually lost almost all his wealth because of his lavish and extravagant life style. Jajabor tries to trace the etymology of the region of Kashmir since its early days and throughout the book we are reminded that it is human beings who destroy the beauty of Nature. In this context one can say that Jajabor was looking at Kashmir from eco-critical perspective. So this attitude was timely but subsequent attacks and war on the land between India and Pakistani troops made it a less eco-friendly zone.

Finding no other alternative as Kashmir was invaded and military forces started entering the hinterland, Hari Singh was compelled to seek the help of Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the first Prime Minister of India and in this connection Hari Singh directly sought military help from Nehru who obliged the former on the ground that Singh would have to merge with India once Kashmir was made free from trouble. Hari Singh agreed and Nehru immediately sent military to liberate Kashmir from the Pakistan military forces forcefully and also from the daily entering intruders who were either religious begots or insurgents by nature. A number of historically famous characters make appearance in this book - like Jinnah and Mountbaten. Mountbaten tried to placate Jinnah regarding Kashmir dispute but Jinnah remained very aggressive. Hari Singh's decision to enter into the protection of India and become its integral part, enraged Jinnah. He vehemently argued with Mountbaten and said that if any country deserves Kashmir within its domain, than is non other

than Pakistan. The appearance of historical characters adds authenticity to the narrative and we see how Sardar Ballavbhai Patel wanted to capture entire Pakistan by defeating it through Indian military power. However when Hari Singh had decided to accede to India and Indian soldiers marched and gheraoed Kashmir than Jinnah also took it as a challenge. Gradually the Indian soldiers were killing Pakistani armies and intruders who were also carrying arms. Initially a few confident officers of India became martyrs but there was no power after that which could seize Kashmir from India and all the intruders were driven out within a longer number of days. Kashmir ultimately came under the dominion of India and started to follow the dictum of patriotic soldiers. But a time came when Kashmir became an International issue which is not transparent in Jajabor's book. The communal conflict bordering on absolute fundamentalism never stabilized Kashmir and even with the passing away of two decades of the twenty first century, Kashmir has remained a troubled zone. The book under review shows how Kashmir came to be a part of India and the subsequent trouble in which India Government found itself. As a reviewer I have read both the original book written in Bengali and the translation into English which is under review. Jajabor happened to be a writer who preferred wit, humanism, nostalgia, pleasure etc. but the present book is actually a deep meditation (even though it is short) of what it means to be a Kashmiri? The book's translation is very timely and we should try to retrospectively reconstruct the history of Kashmir. Jajabor's book is biased but he utters what is truth as narration. The book is not free of Jingoism but it retains its balance as the author has meticulously juxtaposed fact and fiction. Jajabor brings about the issues of identity crisis, communal disharmony, lack of due emphasis on the commonalities of both the countries, but he also shows how too much partisan politics crappies the backbones of the nations who were once one.

The English translation is superb and rollicking and Jajabor's original signature style is visible here. It is not easy to point out the merits and demerits of such a book where history threatens to cross to the border of fiction and fiction cancels its admission within its domain. The narrative is lucid, economic, timely and also deeply humanitarian in approach.

Title: Quiet Flows The River Jhelum

Author: Jajabor

Available: [Amazon](#)

About the author: Jajabor

'Jajabor' was the pen name of the author Binoy Mukhopadhyay (1909– 2002). Born in East Bengal (presently Bangladesh), he completed his Masters in Commerce from Calcutta University. He started his career as a journalist in a number of Bengali dailies, and subsequently joined the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. He was the Deputy Secretary of the British Press Information Bureau when his first novel *Drishtipath* (1946) burst into the literary scene to the wide acclaim of the readers. It was followed by several other novels, short stories, essays and dramas, including *Janantik* and *Laghukaran*. He has also written two books on cricket, which was another of his passions besides Rabindra Sangeet. *Jhelum Nodir Tirey*, a politico-historical novelette on the transfer of power in Kashmir, was published in May 1954.

About the reviewer: Subhajit Bhadra

Subhajit Bhadra is a gold medallist in M.A from Tezpur University. He is a freelance writer, poet, critic and translator. He has published a number of books including The Masked Protagonist In Jewish American Fiction, The Man Who Stole The Crown, The Rising Sun, a book of poems in Bengali and a translated work titled Selected Stories of Arun Goswami.

He has written a book on History of English Literature. He has also been published widely in Indian literature, a bi-monthly journal of Sahitya Akadami. At present, he is an assistant professor in the Department of English at Bongaigaon College, Bongaigaon, Assam.

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