



A Broken Clock

Nilkantha Ghosal

The story was originally written in Bengali and translated into English by Subhajit Bhadra.

Sikander is walking. On the way there are inscriptions on the stones, countless sounds and seemingly sounds reverberate through his ears. The path is the receptacle of history. It is misty and devoid of light. In that deeper horizon a dot of light shines and reflects on the bright eyes of Sikander. At the call of that light he is walking on the way as if an ever-moving

wayfarer. He carries in hand a stick given by his mother. Handing over the termite-infected stick, his mother has said,

‘My son, you need to go to that Narora Patia, where they have killed your father by burning and you have to bring a piece of a bone of your father. You shall have to make a search to find out the bone of your father by removing the ashes with this stick. I need the bones at any cost.’

‘What an impossible task you have given me, O mother!’ Sikander failed to utter these words to his mother. His father is one among the ninety one martyrs of Narora Patia. His father could save many lives. But, he could not save himself from the attack alike that of the barbarians of the middle ages on him.

‘The bone of any martyr is the bone of my father. Perhaps I shall be able to bring that to you. Will you be able to bring the life back to it, mother? Moreover, the oil of religious fanaticism is smeared on the body of the stick. It cannot be depended upon. The stick has to be washed in the water of Sabarmati, and I’ll do it.’ Sikander uttered those words also in mind like the chanting of holy hymns.

Having arrived at Narora Patia and keeping the stick under a tree Sikander sits down there. The burning smells are coming out from every direction, stains of dried up blood are there. His eyes are burning. His body and mind are going beyond his control.

What is up there? Whose cry is this? It is the indistinct cry of a child! It is the cry of an unborn life! Is the death crying itself?

Sikander knows the cry of life. But he does not know the cry of death. It seems that someone has just told in a child voice like the semi-bloomed flower, ‘Can you all hear me? I am an unborn child of your Kausar Bibi. I would have stepped into your mother earth within three days. I thought how beautiful might be our green earth; it is filled with how much light of love! So, I was removing the darkness of my mother’s womb

with my both the hands. Meanwhile, the sword of religion pierced all through my heart. Thereafter, they have drawn me out by tearing my mother's womb in tatters and thrown me into the fire. I hardly have the time to cry. Would you cry a little at least for me?'

Wailing aloud Sikander rushes to like a demented one. There are heaps of ashes everywhere. Does it really contain the bony existence of an approaching life! He started rummaging and ransacking the ashes with his stick by both of his hands. It seems to him that the entire world has been covered with ashes. Suddenly the stick stuck somewhere. Sikander moved his hand in the ashes in a circular way. Having picked it up, he notices that it is anything but a wall clock. It has been wrenched and de-shaped. The hands of the clock are broken. It has been muted is now permanently non-responsive. Like a static piece of rock, Sikander is standing with the clock in his hand. He is the witness of time. The broken clock is now laid over his body like a rock inscription. With awe and amazement, Sikander notices that the hands of the clock are still moving.

Author's Bio Nilkantha Ghosal

Nilkantha Ghosal is a renowned Bengali writer, novelist, poet, short story writer and an essayist.

Translator's Bio Subhajit Bhadra

Subhajit Bhadra, born in 1980 in Guwahati, Assam, 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*

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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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