

Mahakabi Kaikobad- his poetic role in awakening the lost glory of his community

¹Md. Golam Murshid & ²Dr. Shabnam Begum

¹Research Scholar, Department of History, Aliah University, Kolkata, WB (India)

²Part-time Teacher, Department of Islamic Theology, Aliah University, Kolkata, WB (India)

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*Corresponding Author

Email: gmurshid.gm@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In the first half of modern Bengali literature, there were three great Muslim literati – Kaikobad, Mir Musharraf Hossain and Mozammel Haque. Kaikobad got a long life which he utilized in the cultivation of literature. The whole literary life of Kaikobad can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, he concentrated on lyric, in the second phase on epic and in the third phase on multifarious poems - short poems, narrative poems, short epics and lyrics. The article is an attempt to highlight the role of Kaikobad who sacrificed his whole life in awakening his communities from the deep slumber of ignorance by his poetic talent.

Kaikobad was born in 1857 A.D. at AglaPurbapara village under Nawabgung Police Station in Dhaka district. He died in 1951 A.D. in Dhaka.¹ Kaikobad's original name was Muhammad Kazim al Quraishi. His father Shahmotullah alias Emad Ali used to practice law in Dhaka. His mother's name was Zomratunnesa. The forefathers of Kaikobad were the inhabitants of Baghdad.²

In the first half of modern Bengali literature there were three great Muslim literati – Kaikobad, Mir Musharraf Hossain and MozammelHaque. Kaikobad got a long life which he utilized in the cultivation of literature.

In his boyhood, he was the student of the famous 'Saint Gregori School' in Dhaka, afterwards he could not receive much institutional education but he had extensive personal studies. He also received education from Dhaka Madrasah and here he came into contact with a great teacher like Obaidullah al ObaidiSuhrawardi.

Before passing Entrance Examination he had to leave studies because his mother died of Cholera when he was of twelve years of age and his father died one and a half years after the death of his mother. So he had to join the postal service for the maintenance of his family. He had been in that service till his death.

The whole literary life of Kaikobad can be divided into three phases. The first phase spanning between 1870 A.D.-1894 A.D. was the age of lyric and the second phase spreading between 1894-1914 was the age of epic and the third phase extending from 1915-1952 A.D. was the age when he wrote multifarious poems - short poems, narrative poems, short epics and lyrics.

At the initial stage of poetic career when he was of tender age - about twelve or slightly more - he wrote three books on verse namely *BirohoBilap*, *KusumKanon* and *Ashrumala*. All these books were the compilation of short poems and based on the theme of patriotism, spiritualism and humanism.³ When he wrote *BirohoBilap* in 1870 A.D., he was merely an adolescent boy.⁴ He at that age had neither any experience

about the life or the world nor did he experience any agony of separation at that stage of his life. So his lamentation for estrangement was very much superficial having no profundity of feeling.⁵

Kaikobad wrote *KusumKanon* in 1873 A.D., when still in his boyish frivolousness, so it was not expected of him that he would tread new path in portraying the characters of his verse, he rather traveled along the traditional path in describing love, frustration, estrangement etc.⁶

He was greatly influenced by the writings of Haem Chandra and NabinChandra. The languages of the text of his verse namely *BirohoBilap* and *KusumKanon* was simple and lucid, the expression of passion was straight forward and unhesitant.⁷

Ashrumala published in 1894 A.D. was a more matured work. The agony of failure and frustration in love was more genuine and unfeigned in comparison with his other verses. *Ashrumala* was published at such a juncture when there was acute dearth of Muslim literati in the field of Bengali literature and the Bengali Muslim society was engaged and engrossed in DobhasiPunthi. When *Ashrumala* came out with its elegant and refined attire, almost every educated Hindu including Umesh Chandra Basu, Nabin Chandra Sen etc. were greatly astonished and they highly praised, someone even expressed doubt about its author.

About *Ashrumala*, *The Muslim Chronicle* wrote, "*Ashrumala* or the garland of Tears by Kaikobad is a Bengali poem of a highly imaginative, passionate and pathetic nature. It would not be too much to say that Mr. Kaikobad commands a vigorous and flowing style in Bengali and one that is perhaps well suited to the touching pathos and solemnity of the subject which is an apostrophe to a 'lost love' to whom the author appropriately dedicated the poem. The prospect of Bengali Literature among Moslems need not be very bad, if there are men who can wield poem as elegantly as Mr. Kaikobad".⁸

In *Ashrumala*, the poet had expressed his deep sorrow and shed his tears at the sight of the downfall of the Muslims.

He through his poems made an attempt to encourage his community by reminding them of their glorious past.⁹ As *BishadSindhu* made Mir Musharrif Hossain famous so *MahaSamshankavya* made Kaikobad remarkable in the field of Bengali literature.

BishadSindhu was based on tragic incident of Karbala and *MahaSamshankavya* was written on the basis of the third battle of Panipath which took place between Marathi Hindus who were dreaming of founding Hindu kingdom in India, and Rohila Nawab NazibudDaulah who was helped by Ahmed Shah Abdali of Afghanistan. This fierce battle resulted in huge loss of life and properties of both sides.

MahakabiKaikobad depicted the valour and courage, agonies and lamentation of both sides with equal fervency and sympathy. He did not unnecessarily exaggerate the bravery of the victor at the cost of the vanquished. He used to believe heartily that the vanquished should also be given due credit when they were fighting with equal strength against the victorious. A lion cannot claim credit for his win over a fox.¹⁰

As it was a history based epic, the author made an attempt to stick to as nearer to history as possible, not allowing his thoughts to fly on the wings of imagination. Of course, in some places he could not follow the facts of history, this kind of minor deviation is obviously pardonable in case of an epic.¹¹

The objective behind writing this epic, as told by the author himself, was to inspire confidence in the Muslim community and give them a sense of pride in the thought that they were second to none in heroism, prowess and greatness.¹²

Kaikobad's *MahaSamshankavya* could not inspire the Bengali Muslim readers as much as Bankim Chandra's, Ramesh Dutta's history based novels could encourage the Bengali Hindu readers.¹³ He must be given the credit for being the first among the Muslims to write an immortal epic.¹⁴

He was a man of genius but he was not very social and his association with all sorts of people was very limited which prevented him from acquiring a varied experience. He also could not keep pace with the time. When the age of epic was about to end in Bengali literature, he wrote his famous epic *MahaSamshankavya*.

When lyrics had attained a new dimension in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, he could not accept it. He was bit envious of the fame of Rabindranath Tagore, so he did not try to understand Rabindranath Tagore. When

Rabindranath wrote *Balaka* (1916 A.D.) and *GhareBaire* (1916 A.D.) - then Kaikobad wrote *Shibmandir* (1921 A.D.) - in old style of 19th century - and he even took pride in sticking to the old style.¹⁵

Though he was influenced by the verse of Michael MadhusudanDutta and Haem Chandra, he was actually the follower of Nabin Chandra in his poetic career but his language was more simple, lucid and melodious than that of NabinChandra, and after all, he was secularist to the core as compared to NabinChandra.¹⁶

Kaikobad had lived a long life and spent his whole life in literary pursuit. He wrote the following books in his entire literary career.

1. *BirohoBilap* (1277)
2. *KusumKanon* (1280)
3. *Ashrumala* (1302)
4. *MahaSamshankavya* (1311)
5. *Shibmandirorjibonto Samadhi Kavya* (1328)
6. *Ameodhara* (1329)
7. *Maharram Sharif or AtmaBishorjanKavya*
8. *Samshankavya* (1345)
9. *PremerPhul* (1376)
10. *Premer Rani* (1376)
11. *PremParijat* (1376)
12. *MandakiniDhara* (1377)
13. *GausPakerPremerKunj* (1386)

MahakabiKaikobad received many honours and rewards during his lifetime. He was accorded *KavyaBhusan*, *Bidyabhusan* and *SahityaRatna* by Nikhil BaharatSahityaSangha. He presided over the Bengali Muslim Literary Conference held at Albert Hall in Calcutta in December 1932 A.D.

MashikMuhammadi published the special Kaikobad volume in 1944 A.D. East Pakistan Government awarded him a scholarship in 1948 A.D.

After his death at Dhaka Medical College in 1951 A.D., he was buried at old AzimpurGraveyard.

With an aim to perpetuate his memory, Kaikobad Girls High School at his village Agla, KaikobadSahityaMajlish in Dhaka, Kaikobad library at Jinjirahave been established.

In modern Bengali literature subsequent to Michael MadhusudanDutta, Kaikobad as an epic poet, should be given due honour along with Haem Chandra and Nabin Chandra Sen.¹⁷

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According to Ali Ahmed (*Bangla Muslim Granthapunj*, op.cit., p. 355) he was born in 1857 and died in 1951. Abdul Mannan (*KaikobadRachanavali*, PrathamKhanda, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1994, p. 529) says Kaikobad was born in 1857 and died in 1951 in Dhaka Medical College.

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