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Books

A Young Poet's Dreams

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It is human nature to be fascinated by things that do not make complete sense. That is why dreams are so intriguing and warrant quite a bit of self-analysis and retrospection. For isn't it in dreams that we find some hidden parts of ourselves, sometimes disturbing, sometimes delightful but often taking a surreal form? Reeshad Rabbany, at age nineteen managed to capture the unearthly, mysterious elements of dreaming in his book of poetry, the second title of which, 'Ballads of the Soul', seems more apt than the first as it really does expose the poet's innermost desires and frustrations.

In the introduction, Reeshad confesses, 'Most of these were penned down during a rather turbulent period in my life when nothing would make sense and no matter how far I stretched that black ribbon, it never seemed to encompass the trail left by all which seemed unexplainable'. Reeshad in his poems, most of them soaked with pathos, dwells on that agonising question 'What if'. "So what if they are not true," he writes, "It helps me to put aside the reality for a while and wallow in the mire of my dreams; and they are dreams. They are not supposed to be real."

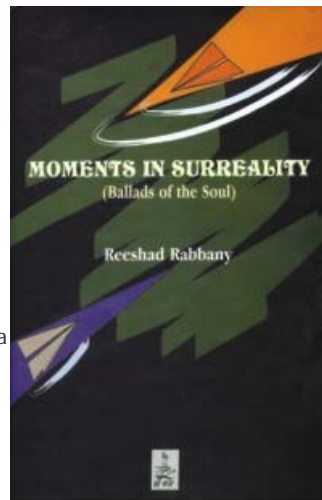
Yet there is enough reality in these poems to wake up the reader. 'Street Child' for example gives a vivid picture of kids living on the streets, dependen and uncared-for. It is a life where there is no respite where a meal is from the garbage can:

...The bread has probably been stale
for more than a fortnight,
but then again,
his menu never listed
anything that came,
'right out of the oven'

But Reeshad's preoccupation seems to be in recapturing dreams that reflect his deepest feelings. There is more sadness than irony, a certain sense of being haunted by some disturbing recurrent theme. There is often the story of separation and loss of a loved one, which can neither be accepted nor endured. Thus the need to imagine that they are alive or will someday come back. This is only possible in dreams that Reeshad has painted into his poems. The natural surroundings are described like an impressionist's dabbling on canvas and the words are warm, passionate as well as infinitely sad. In 'The Ballad of A Nymph' he writes:

"She wrapped her saree around him
trying to keep him warm
Though drenched,
He felt a warmth emanating from her"
'Wishful Thinking', another love poem describes the adulation of a young man in love:
"To me she is the virtue of
purity and chastity,
an eternal lustre
shimmering on everyone around her."
In Love's Wait, love takes a more intense form:
"The wait is too intense,
like always,
and the feeling is still so fresh,
even after all these years
The yearn for her touch,
the longing for her voice,
everything is so intact
and still so fragile."

Unfortunately this sensitive and talented young poet will always remain so as he died recently after battling with Thalassemia all his life. Actor Aly Zaker's introduction of the poet, who is also his nephew, written when the young man was still alive, belies this



Moments in Surreality
(Ballads of the Soul)
By Reeshad Rabbany
BDT: 100; pp 43

imperding tragedy and is filled with hope and admiration for a budding poet. Serajul Islam Chowdhury, in the foreword, describes his poems as anecdotes or stories, which are 'the characters themselves'.

Although, not as meticulously edited as one would hope for, 'Ballads of the Soul' has enough emotion and charm to make one ignore such flaws and join Reeshad in his search to answer the question 'What if':

"I wonder what it would be like
to wander through the emptiness,
flying on wings
to feel the warmth of
the sun on my face,
to see my shadow cast upon
the whiteness of the clouds
and the winds scouring
over my body"

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