

## Keatsian Romantic Escapism in Syed Shamsul Haq's Short Stories “নাম” (Name) and “স্বপ্নের ভিতর বসবাস” (Living in Dreams)

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### Abstract

*One of the most prolific writers from Bangladesh, Syed Shamsul Haq, has shown his mastery over diverse genres of literature, and hence, he has proudly been called an ambidextrous writer. The nuance with which he has created a mesmerizing world of fiction is unique among his contemporaries. As a writer of short stories, he has never compromised in depicting the struggle of the middle class people. In two of his short stories “নাম” (Name) and “স্বপ্নের ভিতর বসবাস” (Living in Dreams), the protagonists, Ashraf and Badsha respectively, represent that struggle. They build their own worlds based on sheer imagination—a self-imposed identity and a lie—and occasionally escape into these worlds being bugged by the pangs of their middle class life. As a result, a fine thread of Romantic Escapism can be found in both Ashraf and Badsha. This sort of Romantic Escapism partially echoes one of the English Romantic poets, John Keats, whose manner of exhibiting Romantic Escapism, as seen especially in his “Ode to a Nightingale” anticipates much of the substance of Haq’s two stories we are treating in this paper, which aims at showing the extent of Keatsian Romantic Escapism that prevails over the characters of Ashraf and Badsha—the protagonists of the stories.*

**Keywords:** Keatsian Romantic Escapism, imagination, escape, return.

In the pre-1971 and post-1971 literatures from Bangladesh, Syed Shamsul Haq, also known as Syed Haq (1935-2016), is one of the versatile writers—not only because he has contributed to almost all of the genres of literature but also because he has done it in a manner which has scarcely been excelled by any of his successors. Being a widely-read writer in Bangladesh, he has achieved some of the most prestigious awards in his career—Bangla Academy Literary Award (1966), Ekushey Padak (1984), and the Independence Day Award (2000). The beginning of Haq's career as a writer is marked by short story, a genre which can capture larger than life moments in short length. Haq, as a short story writer,

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has often worked on the middle class city dwellers. His characters are presented vividly with all their pangs and struggles of life most of which are caused by reasons like migration, unemployment, economic instability, emotional crisis, etc., in the growing and changing social milieu. In Syed Haq's short stories "নাম" (Name) and "স্বপ্নের ভিতর বসবাস" (Living in Dreams) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015), the protagonists Ashraf and Badsha having a lot to share in common, at one point or the other, they express certain romantic exuberance often in the form of Escapism which resembles, to a certain extent, the Keatsian Romantic Escapism.

Escapism is one of the salient features of English Romantic poetry which started its journey with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Escapism in Romantic poetry is mostly known as Romantic Escapism. On a plain level, escapism means a tendency to escape from the painful and frustrating reality into some other world, often imaginary, where no such pain or frustration would torture the mind. Maurice Bowra in his famous book *The Romantic Imagination* highlighted the imaginary worlds of the Romantic poets this way:

"The poets were conscious of a wonderful capacity to create imaginary worlds, and they could not believe that this was idle or false. On the contrary, they thought that to curb it was to deny something vitally necessary to their whole being." (Bowra, 1966, p. 1).

It is that unrestrained quality that has led the Romantic poets to accentuate their poetry with the essence of the Romantic Escapism. Among the two generations of Romantic poets, John Keats is the one whose treatment of Romantic Escapism is noteworthy. His "Ode to a Nightingale" (Keats, 1819/2005) shows his treatment of Romantic Escapism in the profoundest style. Keats has escaped from "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" of this world, "where men sit and hear each other groan," into the world of the Nightingale, the "light-winged Dryad of the trees," where it sings "of summer in full-throated ease" (Keats, 1819/2005, pp. 255-256). In his other odes as well, this same leap or escape from a torturing reality into the imagined, crafted world of fantasy is present. On this, Peter Hollindale stated in his essay "Romantic Escape and Corrective Truth in Keats's Odes and Narrative Poems" (1988):

The odes are poems of imaginative meditation, exploring the poet's reactions to intense contemplation of an object, a creature, a mythical

goddess or a psychological condition, and all they signify for the writer in helping him to understand his own predicament as a human being and an artist. (Hollindale, 1988, p. 54)

In his odes, Keats has shown a state of mental anguish, in Hollindale's words 'predicament', from which he needs to escape. "Ode to a Nightingale" is one of his 1819 Odes, famously known as the Spring Odes written during his stay in his friend Charles Armitage Brown's house in Wentworth Place, Hampstead. This phase of Keats's life is marked with multiple personal losses and anxieties caused by the death of his brother Tom Keats whom he nursed in his deathbed and from which he himself got contaminated with tuberculosis, the troublesome stay of another of his brothers, George Keats and his wife, Georgiana in America, and last but not the least, the all-pervasive monetary worries in the family. All these worked as catalyst for the escapism found in his odes, especially in "Ode to a Nightingale." John Strachan (2004) said,

Tom's death was acutely traumatic for Keats. Whilst the psychobiographical claim that it prompted him into the poetic triumphs of early to mid-1819 (on the grounds that his brother's demise concentrated the poet's mind upon his own mortality) are perhaps overly simplistic, it is undeniable that Keats's bereavement underpins to some extent the profound meditations upon death, sickness and sorrow in the great odes and, later 'The Fall of Hyperion'. (Strachan, 2004, Chapter 1, p. 7)

A testimonial of this can be traced in a journal-letter from Keats to George and Georgiana Keats, written on 21 April 1819, a few weeks before the composition of "Ode to a Nightingale," where he wrote about the necessity of experiencing all these agonies in producing the poetic expressions thus: "Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?" (as cited in Strachan, 2004, Chapter 1, p. 20). However, the Keatsian Romantic Escapism is also about a certain return from that imaginative world into which the poet escapes, and Hollindale referred to this return as a "corrective truth" in his essay (Hollindale, 1988). The most befitting reflection of this 'corrective truth' is seen in the last stanza of "Ode to a Nightingale" where Keats writes, "Forlorn! the very word is like a bell / To toll me back from thee to my sole self!" (Keats, 1819/2005, p. 257). Bowra, too, said, "Keats accepted the works of the imagination not merely as existing in their own right, but as having a relation to ultimate reality through the light which they shed on it"

(Bowra, 1966, p. 15). Here, the word 'forlorn' brings out that 'relation to ultimate reality', and after taking the flight of imagination, Keats finally comes back to the reality from where he has escaped.

Syed Shamsul Haq's short stories "নাম" (Name) and "স্বপ্নের ভিতর বসবাস" (Living in Dreams) (Haq, 2015), too, show this aforementioned escapism to some extent. The protagonists, Ashraf and Badsha, are two representative young men from the middle class Bengali society. The portrayal of the crisis of the middle class people, their dreams, their failures, and their occasional escapes from the reality constitute the subject matters of most of Haq's short stories. Ashraf and Badsha from the two stories that are to be discussed here find routes to escape from the harsh and mundane realities of their lives. The thread of Keatsian Romantic Escapism runs throughout the phases of their escapes from and their returns to the reality. In the comparative analysis between the Keatsian notion of escapism from the Nightingale ode and these two stories of Haq, it can be seen that Haq's treatment of escapism in these stories has been customized to fit the demand of the plot in such a way that it marks brilliant endings for the stories, leaving an everlasting charm on the readers. He analyses all the essential units that constitute the psyche of his protagonists. In this connection, Shamsur Rahman's review of Syed Haq's stories, "সৈয়দ শামসুল হকের গল্পছন্দ তাস" "(Syed Shamsul Haq's Collection of Stories Cards) (Translation mine) can be recalled which was first published in the Bengali literary journal Saugat (Vol.37, Issue. 2) in December 1954. There he said, "সৈয়দ শামসুল হকের গল্প প্রধানত মনস্তত্ত্বমূলক। বাইরের ঘটনার চেয়ে মানুষের মনের অন্তর্লীন ঘটনাবলিতেই তার কৌতুহল উদ্দীপিত হয় বেশি" (Syed Shamsul Haq's stories are mainly psychological. He takes more interest in the internal incidents of human psyche than in the external ones.) (Translation mine) (as cited in H. Mamud & P. Mojid (Eds.), 2017, p. 81). Another similar note of appreciation is found in Syed Manzoorul Islam's remarks on Syed Shamsul Haq, "বহুমাত্রিক প্রতিভাবান জলেশ্বরীর কবি" (Multi-dimensionally Talented Poet of Jolesshwari), (Translation mine) where he opined that Haq has a capability of shedding light on his characters from the inside (Islam, 2017). This introspective art of characterization is what made Syed Shamsul Haq delve deep into sketching the psychology of his protagonists, Ashraf and Badsha, in the two short stories that this paper intends to discuss.

In the story "নাম" (Name), the protagonist, Ashraf, is shown to have lost his job at the beginning of the story. He shares this with none but his childhood friend, Hurmat Ali, whom Ashraf once helped by solving all the problems for him in



their mathematics examination at the Matriculation. Being the only bread winner of the family, Ashraf falls in the trap of an average middle class life where the definition of survival is determined by certain ideals based on honesty. The financial 'predicament' starts to ensnare his daily life and he asks for help from Hurmat Ali. Hurmat is a rich businessman now and promises to help Ashraf financially until he gets another job. Ashraf accepts that offer as he believes, "ওরা দুজনে সেই কবেবার বন্ধু। এমন বন্ধুত্ব যে সেখানে কোন ধার চাইতে লজ্জা নেই, যে দেবে বিস্ময় নেই তারও" (They have been friends for so long. This is such a friendship where the one who borrows is not ashamed, where the one who lends is not surprised either.) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, p. 11). Though Ashraf starts giving private tuitions to earn some money, Hurmat continues to help him as he has promised. Ashraf now spends his entire day in Hurmat's office. Haq writes, "সে বুঝতে পারে না তার নিজের অজান্তে তার পৃথিবী হুরমতকে ঘিরে ঘিরে কেন্দ্র করে তোলে" (He (Ashraf) does not realize that his world has centred on Hurmat without his (Ashraf's) knowledge.) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, p. 13). Ashraf depends on him for everything and anything, and Hurmat seems to be the one to control all his feelings. In Hurmat Ali, he finds solace; in Hurmat Ali, he looks for a resort of his existence. Nowadays, Hurmat has become the central character in his dreams (Haq, 2015). On a winter morning, Ashraf borrows a coat from Hurmat to attend an interview for a job. In that oversized coat, Ashraf feels as if he himself is Hurmat Ali. The warmth of that coat seems to be the most desired pleasure in his life. At this point of the story, the coat itself becomes a character—"হালকা, নরম, উষ্ণ একটা জীব" (a light, soft, warm creature) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, p. 15). Ashraf takes his flight of imagination as an escape from this cold life of financial insecurity to the warm life of success and wealth. His escape is an escape from his own identity to Hurmat's identity. This is shown in a beautiful narrative in the story when Ashraf is on his way to the interview:

"এতোদিনে যেনো সে স্পষ্ট বুঝতে পারে, হুরমত আলীর সঙ্গে তার ব্যবধান শীতের সাথে উষ্ণতার। ...ধার করা উষ্ণতায় গা ডুবিয়ে সে সপ্নগ্রহের মত পথ চলতে থাকে। ...হুরমত আলীর চেহারা চোখের সম্মুখে ভাসতে থাকে। হুরমত আলীর গায়ের গন্ধ তার হয়ে যেতে থাকে; তার নিজস্ব গন্ধটা তাড়া খাওয়া কুকুরের মত কখন পালিয়ে গেছে" (As if he (Ashraf) has realized after so long that the difference between Hurmat Ali and himself is the difference between winter and warmth. ... Immersing in this borrowed warmth, he proceeds like a dream-driven person. ...Hurmat Ali's face floats in front of his eyes. The smell of Hurmat Ali's body is becoming his; his own smell has already run away like a chased dog.) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, p. 15)

Ashraf reaches the office in this trance-like state. During his wait in the reception, he suddenly feels jealousy against Hurmat Ali. Despite the trance-like state of the momentary escape to an imagined identity, he gets a sweet fragrance which does not impress him in the air-conditioned room and this brings him back to his own reality (Haq, 2015). The fragrance works as the very 'bell to toll' him back to his 'sole self', to echo from the last stanza of the Nightingale ode. Ashraf can understand the distance between Hurmat and himself after that momentary escape. He considers himself to be deceived. He wonders, had he not helped Hurmat with the solution to the Maths problems in their Matriculation Examination, Hurmat would not have become today's Hurmat. He cries at heart, "সে কেন হুরমত আলী হলো না? সে কেনো আশরাফ হলো?" (Why did he not become Hurmat Ali? Why did he become Ashraf?) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, p. 16). Here Ashraf rushes to the conclusion that he has sacrificed his own opportunities of achieving a solvent life in the name of friendship. The thought that all that belongs to Hurmat Ali, including the coat, might have belonged to Ashraf, drags him for quite some time and makes him stand on the verge of forgetting his own identity again. In such a moment of repentance and confused identity, Ashraf's turn comes and his name is announced in the reception room. A spellbound Ashraf faces the interview board. Once again the coat becomes a living character here, "সেখানে হুরমত আলী কোট যেন জীবন্ত হয়ে উঠলো সহসা, তাকে জড়িয়ে ধরল আরও নিবিড় উষ্ণতা দিয়ে।" (As if there Hurmat Ali's coat became alive at once, as if it had enveloped him with more intimate warmth.) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, p. 16). This is the final step in the story where fate one more time mocks at Ashraf by presenting him with another moment to make a further mistake. When the interview board asks him what his name is, he, instead of saying his own name, blurted out, "হুরমত আলী" (Hurmat Ali) (Haq, 2015, p. 16). Immediately afterwards, he senses what a blunder he has made. He has been so much overpowered by some unknown forces associated with Hurmat Ali that now he cannot even rectify what he has done. A few minutes earlier, Ashraf was thinking over a moment from his Matriculation Examination with a sense of repentance. Unfortunately, his present throws him into another moment of mistake, this time with a heavier impact. The charm of Haq's style as a short story writer works best in the last two lines of the story when one of the interviewers, being confused, calls up the reception and orders, "আশরাফ হোসেনকে পাঠিয়ে দাও। আমি তাকেই পাঠাতে বলেছিলাম" (Send in Ashraf Hossain. I asked for him.) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, p. 17). Obviously, the candidate they are expecting is Ashraf Hossain, not Hurmat Ali. This has finally been a call for Ashraf to actually escape from the 'predicament' (in this case

financial insecurity) into a more factual and constructive way of life which he misses out on. The story ends with both a shocked Ashraf and a shocked reader. It does end but leaves a still hungry reader behind, a reader as desperate as Ashraf to know what he (Ashraf) will do now.

The second story to be discussed is “স্বপ্নের ভিতর বসবাস” (Living in Dreams). The protagonist, Badsha, is an unemployed bachelor. He, too, is from a middle class family. Badsha is one of those young men of the town who spend hours after hours over cups of tea in tea stalls by the highway to Dhaka. However, he is different from others. He is presented as a failure in the exams, in interviews one after another, in love, in his attempt at singing, and even in his addas (Haq, 2015). He is never the vocal one in an adda, rather he remains in the periphery as a mere insignificant member of the audience; neither his presence nor his absence makes any difference in the picture. ‘The weariness, the fever, and the fret’ in Badsha’s life have derived from all these failures. He has been unemployed for so long, has given up and been given up for so long, and has been berated in the family for so long that one day in the tea shop he quite desperately, yet in a very low voice, utters these words, “আমি যাচ্ছি।” (I’m leaving.) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, p. 47). He voices his inner craving for leaving and going to some hideouts. This announcement works magically and brings a pin-drop silence in the tea shop, which he did not expect (Haq, 2015). When being asked where he is going, he cannot answer initially as he is actually not going anywhere; he has just said so because he is so tired of being ignored by the people around him—both at home and outside. When his friends have already settled in life with job, marriage and family, he is still unemployed and still being cursed by his father every day. One young man from the group asks him in a mocking tone, “বাদশা কি মিডলইস্ট যাও?” (Are you going to the Middle East, Badsha?) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, p. 52). For decades, going to the Middle East as a worker has been one of the most pursued career options for any unemployed youth like Badsha in Bangladesh. Most of the time, they fly to the Arabian world of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Abha, and Muscat with jobs which usually include labouring on construction sites or being employed as salesmen in departmental stores or shops. Since this whole point of Badsha’s departure is not real at all, Badsha does not miss catching this suggestion of going to the Middle East, and then confidently says yes. That ‘yes’ acts like magic in his otherwise mundane life, and he immediately harps on escaping to a new place. Badsha gradually feels some kind of energy. He feels some kind of royal distance. He feels he has been placed on top of some height. He does not want



to let this happiness go away. The fact that even he can deserve such happiness was quite unknown to himself (Haq, 2015, p. 49). While returning home from the tea stall, Badsha dreams as if he had already become an expatriate. The news of this false prospect of going to the Middle East soon spreads in the town and Badsha is now treated with respect and honour. The people around him overnight change their perspectives about Badsha. His father who has always been so critical about him and his inability to take care of the family, boasts of his son now; his widow sister dreams of buying a sewing machine from the money that Badsha would send once he is abroad, so that she too can earn her own bread; his eldest nephew, Khokon, demands a toy plane like the one Abu's father has got from Dubai; even Jhumka who has been a heartthrob among the youth in the tea shop does not look away with negligence any more (Haq, 2015). All this attention and care justifies the meaning of his name 'Badsha' which stands for 'king' in English, which he thoroughly enjoys.

However, like Ashraf in the story "নাম" (Name), Badsha too, after a momentary ecstasy, comes back to reality (only to fly away again later) from the blissful yet fake opportunity that could change his and many others' lives if it really knocked at his door. He realizes the urgency of the situation that this falsity has aroused when his immediate elder brother stops sending any money to the family from the month following suspecting that their father must have financially backed up Badsha's trip to the Middle East. Badsha has to do something now as he is solely responsible for this new crisis. For his lie the whole family is going to suffer. At this very moment, the 'bell' of reality tolls and Badsha tries to solve the problem by a few vain attempts (talking to Abu's father and going to Dhaka to gather information about the trip), only to realize that the expense of the travel is too much for him to manage, while by that time things have gone beyond his control. So, instead of confronting the crisis, he tries to avoid it. At this point of the story, he has a conversation with Jhumka's younger brother. Hearing that Jhumka has not bought the pair of shoes of her choice because it is expensive, Badsha, out of sheer excitement of story-telling, asks her brother, "ধরো, যদি খুব ভালো বিয়ে হয়ে যায়, তোমার দুলাভাই ধরো মিডলইস্ট কাজ করে, তাহলে আর চিন্তা কিসের?" (Suppose, if your sister is married off well and if your brother-in-law works in the Middle East, what is there to worry about?) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, p. 57). This hint has been duly taken and conveyed, and within a week he receives a letter from Jhumka which takes him far away from reality with a renewed force. Whether it is a love letter or not, Haq does not reveal. However, he does point to the powerful emotion ignited



in Badsha's mind by one specific line in the letter, "বিদেশে গিয়ে আমাদের কথা কি মনে থাকবে?" (Will you remember us after going abroad?) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, p. 57). This acceptance and treatment from Jhumka rekindles Badsha's craving for escaping one more time and this time from being stuck in the recent crisis incurred by his lie. Thus, what has appeared to be a return from fantasy is wasted over the more alluring prospect of an affair. Badsha lingers in this trance till the end of the story and is not shown to have come out of it anymore. This leaves the reader to ponder over what may happen next and how long Badsha can stay put in this trance.

Haq's protagonists, both Ashraf and Badsha, share some stark similarities with each other. First of all, both are unemployed—Ashraf has recently lost his job and Badsha has been jobless from the beginning of the story. Thus, both represent the typical scenario in the lower middle class Bangladeshi families—a quintessential Syed Shamsul Haq feature prevalent in most of his earlier short stories like "তাস" (Cards) and "শীতবিকেল" (Wintry Evening), to name only two of the whole lot. As Masuda Bhatti quoted Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury in her essay "বাঙালি জাতীয়বাদের বাগানে গোলাপচাষী সৈয়দ শামসুল হক" (Syed Shamsul Haq—a Rose-grower in the Garden of Bengali Nationalism), "বাঙালি মধ্যবিত্তকে (অবশ্যই মুসলিম মধ্যবিত্ত) বাংলা সাহিত্যে স্থায়ী আসন দিয়েছেন সৈয়দ শামসুল হক, তাঁর প্রথম গল্পগ্রন্থ 'তাস'-এ, এর আগে কেউ এভাবে বাঙালি মধ্যবিত্তকে দেখেনি বা দেখায়নি" (Syed Haq has given the Bengali middle class (definitely Muslim middle class) a permanent place in Bengali literature through his first collection of short stories, *Cards*; no one else has ever seen or shown Bengali middle class the same way before.) (Translation mine) (as cited in M. Bhatti, 2017, p. 468). This particular social class is befitting for both the characters, Ashraf and Badsha, to experience the adversity in their lives. Secondly, both enjoy a sense of security to go with the flow and to remain in oblivion about what might happen if their crafted worlds suddenly shatter down with a single stroke of reality. Ashraf's ease in constantly taking money from Hurmat and Badsha's elated state of mind in being specially treated among family, friends, and neighbourhood testify to this tendency of them. Thirdly, both escape the situations of being crossed or interrogated. They feel comfortable to face people who will not pose any threat to them by doubting their words. In "নাম" (Name), we see Ashraf's wife believes all the excuses Ashraf gives her regarding the decrease in the monthly domestic budget. Even after Ashraf's being jobless for about a year, she still does not doubt anything and Ashraf rejoices over having a naive wife like her. In "স্বপ্নের ভিতর বসবাস" (Living in Dreams), Badsha feels the same kind of ease only with Jhumka's

younger brother, and no one else; because he, unlike the adults, will not ask anything about the dates and procedures of Badsha's trip to the Middle East. Fourthly, both transcend to higher level of fantasy and almost forget from where they have started. Ashraf transcends into the prospect of a solvent life like that of Hurmat, and Badsha transcends into the prospect of an affair with Jhumka. While on the way to the interview wearing Hurmat's coat, Ashraf feels so elated that he starts planning for the future even before facing the interview, "এবারে মাইনে পেয়েই এ রকম একটা কোট করতে সে দেবে। ...এবার শীতে সে এরকম একটা কোট করবে।" (He will get a coat like this with this month's salary. ...This winter he will get a coat like this.) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, pp. 15-16). The coat's being oversized is highly symbolic here which indicates the fact that Ashraf is a misfit in the position of Hurmat Ali, that he cannot just become as successful as Hurmat overnight only through flights of imagination, and that an entire identity and establishment cannot be borrowed from this childhood friend though his coat can be. Similarly, Badsha also weaves his own plot further while dropping the hint to Jhumka's younger brother about his having an expatriate brother-in-law, as a consequence of which Jhumka's letter arrives to provide him with another flight of imagination. Though both Ashraf and Badsha seem to have immersed themselves into their own trances, they also at times have tried to sort out plausible solutions of their own. In Ashraf's case, it would be his applications to several job vacancies and the two private tuitions he starts giving after going jobless. In Badsha's case, it would be his attempt to get information from Abu's father who has been working in Dubai for two years. In both these cases, the escapists fail as they bitterly realize how much more painful it would be in reality than running away from it. Hence they keep escaping from the reality.

Haq's use of escapism in these short stories and Keats's use of escapism in his Nightingale ode do match at certain points. Hollindale (1988) stated that in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" there is an "almost unbearable severity of extreme happiness induced by the nightingale's song" (Hollindale, p. 58). Keats expresses this 'extreme happiness' by comparing it with the mythical river Lethe. In the opening lines of the ode, the reference to "hemlock", "opium", "Lethe"—all substantiate this ecstatic and, at the same time, empathic state of the poet's mind (Keats, 1819/2005). It is empathic because Keats assures that it is not an act of envy to the nightingale's happiness but an expansion of that feeling in the poet's mind, "'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot, / But being too happy in thine happiness,—" (Keats, 1819/2005, p. 255). Hollindale

compared this feeling by comparing the nightingale's song "as a friendly poison or anaesthetic drug" (Hollindale, 1988, p. 58). Ashraf and Badsha experience the similar anaesthetic effect caused by Hurmat's coat and by Badsha's false announcement of going to the Middle East respectively. In the stories, Ashraf is referred to as a dreamer who enjoys some forbidden excitement after wearing the coat, and Badsha is intoxicated with a sense of victory over others who apparently are envious about his trip (Haq, 2015). Another point is that the initial "drowsy numbness" changes into somewhat more sensuous in the fifth stanza of the ode:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild; (Keats, 1819/2005,  
pp. 255-256)

This, in Hollindale's words, is a turn "from experiencing the nightingale's forest in a soothing coma to experiencing it in sensuously alerted wakefulness" (Hollindale, 1988, p. 58). As Brian Stone put it in his discussion on Keats's Spring Odes of 1819, "The senses of touch, smell, taste and hearing feed the imagination in the darkness, to induce a feeling of strong but tranquil exaltation" (Stone, 1992, Chapter 6, pp. 75-76). On this same note, both Ashraf and Badsha exhibit such sensuous experiences during their escapes. Ashraf can sense weighing on his shoulders "একটা প্রিয় ভার" (a dear weight) after putting on the coat; he also senses, "কোটের ভেতর হাত দুটো যখন দুলাতে থাকে চলবার তালে তখন সিল্কের আন্তরের শিরশির মসৃণতা যেন তাঁর হাত দুটোর সঙ্গে খেলা করতে থাকে" (As if the tingling smooth silk layers inside the coat keep on playing with his hands when they sway inside it following the rhythm of his strides) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, p. 15). Badsha, too, senses that in the neighbourhood "তার পিঠে এসে ...কারও ঈর্ষার তীর, কারও দীর্ঘশ্বাসের ঘুঘি পড়ছে" (On his back, he is being arrowed with envy of someone, being punched with sighs of someone.) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2015, p. 55). Considering the individual predicaments of Keats and of Haq's heroes, and also the sensuousness of Keatsian Escapism, the feelings of Ashraf and of Badsha are found identical with the feelings of Keats in his Nightingale ode at this level.

However, there are asymmetrical aspects as well. One essential side of Keatsian Romantic Escapism is the final return from the fantastic world of the Nightingale as seen in the last stanza of the ode. The word 'forlorn' has alarmed the poet and reminded him of the ethereal state of the Nightingale's world. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren in their essay "The *Ode to a Nightingale*" analyzed it thus: "...the listener (the poet) suddenly realizes that *forlorn* applies only too accurately to himself. The effect is that of an abrupt stumbling" (Brooks & Warren, 1968, p. 44). The result of that 'abrupt stumbling' is what Hollindale called "the poet's return to normal consciousness, and his uncertainty about what has happened" (Hollindale, 1988, pp. 58-59). The 'uncertainty' he referred to is in the line, "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep? " (Keats, 1819/2005, p. 257). What the poet has experienced in this flight to the Nightingale's world is doubted by the poet himself. According to Brian Stone,

That note of doubt constitutes an assurance that, wherever the poet's mind may soar, his feet will remain on the ground, where drugged oblivion must not be allowed to blur experience of human suffering and transience, and where the knowledge and acceptance of those gifts of fate and time are instrumental means by which the true poetic vision may be expressed and intensified. (Stone, 1992, Chapter 6, p. 79)

Which proves that in the return from this flight lies Keats's epiphany about the transience of life and time, and the process of the return starts in the seventh stanza where Keats addresses the Nightingale as "immortal Bird" (Keats, 1819/2005, p. 257). Surely, the return is a return to the reality of Keats's life as he names them "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" but the return is not a return merely to groan in that reality anymore (Keats, 1819/2005, p. 256). Rather it is to rejoice over the poetic exuberance—"the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"—as Keats's predecessor, William Wordsworth mentioned in "Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*" (Wordsworth, 1801/2007, p. 165). Now, if the escapes of Ashraf and Badsha are analyzed in this light, no such return is discernible. Both of them return momentarily—Ashraf returns after smelling the sweet but stale fragrance in the reception room, and Badsha after his brother's declaration of not bearing the domestic budget anymore. However, these returns do not necessarily make them experience any lasting epiphany in their lives. On the contrary, Ashraf plunges into another trance even when his name is announced for the interview and Badsha does so when he receives Jhumka's letter. Both the



announcement and the letter could be what ‘forlorn’ is in Keats’s case. Both fail to doubt the uncertainty of the flights of fantasy because those are mistaken to be more affirmative and less painful than even trying to come back to reality. That is the reason why they cease to confront the reality only after making a few vain attempts mentioned earlier. As Stone pointed out, “...doubt requires continuing consideration, while certainty may inhibit further thought, and can only be celebrated” (Stone, 1992, Chapter 6, p. 73). Being panged by reality of their lives, both Ashraf and Badsha prefer to celebrate the seemingly certain yet utterly deceptive bliss in their escapes, rather than doubting those to consider a return. Unfortunately, this preference costs Ashraf an opportunity, and what it costs Badsha is untold to the reader. Rightly did Hollindale call Keats “an explorer” and “not a fugitive” (Hollindale, 1988, p. 60). However, Ashraf and Badsha are not given with much of a choice to prove the same.

As the whole point of analysis in this paper is between a poem and two short stories, the styles in which these two different forms of literary works have dealt with the concept of escapism should be discussed. Written in the first person, the ode directly expresses Keats’s own perception of life and the eternal humanity embodied in it. So, the one who escapes into the Nightingale’s world is Keats’s poetic mind. On the other hand, in “নাম” (Name) and “স্বপ্নের ভিতর বসবাস” [Living in Dreams] it is not Haq who escapes from the reality but the protagonists of the stories. Since an ode is a more subjective expression of the poet’s thoughts, Keats is free to express his own idea of escape making himself the main agent in the poem. However, Ashraf and Badsha are two fictional characters whose thoughts and actions are designed and decided by Haq; they escape because Haq wants them to. In this regard, it can be said that Haq’s treatment of escapism is mostly generated by how as a writer he observes and perceives the society where people like Ashraf and Badsha belong to. Haq finds them terribly trapped in the failures of life from which, at some crucial points, they try to escape. In his book *মার্জিনে মন্তব্য* (Comments in the Margin) (Translation mine) (2017), Haq recalled the memories from his personal life and the contemporary politics of 1947, 1950, and 1954, and considered these as the formative years that have molded the poet in him. He said,

আর এ সবেৰ ভেতৰ দিয়ে যেতে যেতে আমি দেখছি আমাকে--ভাঙছি, গড়ছি, আবার ভাঙছি, আবার গড়ছি। আমি সমস্ত কিছুৰ ভেতৰই কিন্তু একই সঙ্গে সমস্ত কিছুৰ বাইৰেও যেন আমি। দৃষ্টি অন্ধ করে দেয় কোথা থেকে বাঁপিয়ে পড়া এক সৌন্দর্য, কিন্তু আমাকে পথ হাঁটতে হয় কুৎসিত মাড়িয়ে। আমি দেখতে চাই প্রতিদিনের জীবন থেকে মানুষেরা উখিত, কিন্তু দেখতে পাই প্রতিদিনের ভেতরে আশাহীনভাবে তারা প্রোথিত। (And while going through these I’ve been watching myself—I’ve

been breaking, building, breaking again, building again. I am inside everything but at the same time, as if, I am outside everything as well. A blinding beauty continues to leap out of somewhere, but I have to continue my walk stepping over the ugly. I want to see men emerging out of their everyday life, but what I can only see is how hopelessly they are buried in their everyday.) (Translation mine) (Haq, 2017, pp. 252-253)

The poet Haq talked about in these words is the one who created characters like Ashraf and Badsha who are two fictional representatives of the middle class people in the society. The escapes of Ashraf and Badsha, as depicted by Haq in the stories, are important to portray the reality of the middle class society and its crisis. Humayun Ahmed's reminiscence of Syed Shamsul Haq, "প্রিয় হক ভাই" (Dear Brother Haq), (Translation mine) (2017) can be mentioned at this point. He said, "একজন বড়ো লেখক চারপাশের জগত অগ্রাহ্য করে নিজের কল্পনার জগতে বাস করে না। ...হক ভাই এসকেপিষ্টদের একজন না, তিনি কখনোই বাস্তবতাকে অস্বীকার করেননি" (A great writer does not live in his own world of imagination ignoring the world around. ...Haq Bhai is not one of the escapists; he has never disregarded the reality.) (Translation mine) (H. Ahmed, 2017, p. 429). So, what is a subjective expression in Keats's ode is a fictional interpretation of reality in Haq's short stories.

To sum up all the points discussed in the paper, it can be said that both the protagonists of "নাম" (Name) and "স্বপ্নের ভিতর বসবাস" (Living in Dreams) show certain traces of Keatsian Romantic Escapism, especially in the mental anguish caused by their individual crisis and in the flights of imagination they take to escape from that anguish. However, unlike Keatsian Romantic Escapism, their escapes do not necessarily exhibit any specifically permanent return to the reality. In Ashraf's case the return is only implicitly suggested and in Badsha's case it is kept untold, which has produced brilliant endings in the circumference of the short stories. Such endings celebrate the mastery of Haq as a story-teller. His style of portraying the escapes of two middle class men through the characters of Ashraf and Badsha has allowed many other Ashrafs and Badshas among the readers to rediscover themselves in the words of Haq.

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