



SPOTLIGHT

Bangabandhu and I

Memories of an artist

Today marks the birth centenary of our Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -- the visionary who made us dream of an independent Bangladesh, the powerhouse of charisma who ignited hope amongst the oppressed Bengalis, the legend whom the nation shall forever remain indebted to.

On this extraordinary occasion of his birth centenary, Star Lifestyle spoke to Shahabuddin Ahmed, artist extraordinaire, who frequently portrays Bangabandhu on his canvas.

The highly celebrated painter is a living legend in his own right. Prestigious accolades like Independence Day Award (highest state award given by the Bangladeshi government), Knight in the Order of Fine Arts and Humanities (awarded by the French government), and recognition as one of the '50 Master Painters of Contemporary Art' (enlisted by the Olympiad of Arts) speak volumes about his works.

And his works on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman are indeed iconic. He pours his love for his leader onto the canvas.

Bangabandhu is a muse of the artist — and a vivid fragment of his memories too, comprising of the interactions he

had with the legend himself.

And hence, without further ado, we present you -- Bangabandhu through the eyes of Shahabuddin.

WHEN A PAINTER WAGES WAR

In a training camp, a freedom fighter once suddenly woke up from his sleep, utterly disarrayed and confused, wailing out loud. Those around him had woken up to his cries. What had happened to this young man, they inquired.

In that pang of despair, a young Shahabuddin managed to say only one thing: "I will probably never become an artist. What have I wanted, and what had happened?"

Quite possibly, he saw a nightmare. This anecdote, which occurred in 1971, tells us the burning urge of an arts student who had dreamt of becoming a painter one day. That's Shahabuddin for you! That even during the War, the dream continued to live on.

But the war itself he was fully committed to indeed, as a platoon commander.

His inspiration? Bangabandhu.

"There was of course thrill and excitement during the days of training, but it was also immensely exhausting and excruciating," he

remembers. "But whenever the 7th March speech was played in the camp, our tiredness and despair vanished."

WHEN A WARRIOR PAINTS

Shahabuddin's reputation was rather fascinating in the camp. He was a freedom fighter -- even a platoon commander -- but a painter too. The interesting combination did not fail to register in the minds of his fellow freedom fighters. Shahabuddin informs that it was most likely during those times when he first started to draw the image of Bangabandhu.

Times were hard. He got hold of ivory pencils and kajol — and calendars, of which he used the empty backsides as the canvas. He made makeshift hardboard with things like banana leaves and thorns and branches from the jungle.

"And hence I started drawing Bangabandhu, relying on my imagination," he says.

And his reputation in the training camp began to spread. "An artist freedom fighter... an honour," he muses, walking down the memory lane.

MEETING BANGABANDHU

Eventually, the artist dived into the bloody war.