



IN HIS HEART AND SOUL

His endeavours on the Liberation War first calls for a context.

Let's start with Adam Surot, then, one of his earlier works. This documentary, about the legendary Bangladeshi artist S M Sultan, is a must-watch if you are an art aficionado.

Tareque Masud had attributed a lot to Sultan.

"Whatever I learned of filmmaking, and life, or of the rediscovery of agrarian Bengal; all of this I saw through Sultan's eyes...Through the making of Adam Surot, I matured and evolved as an artist," he explained in an interview.

"The films that came after, whether Muktir Gaan, Muktir Kotha, or particularly Matir Moina — whatever I could express through these films as an artist — all credit goes to Adam Surot."

He was very influenced by S M Sultan, a painter well-known for his portrayals

of pastoral Bangladesh and struggles of farmers and peasants.



Furthermore, his wife and colleague Catherine Masud's contribution ought to be mentioned. "In any of our productions, our contributions are equal," he had informed in another interview.

Indeed, we often see her name alongside his (as directors, for example).

Another person closely tied with him is of course Mishuk Munier — the brilliant cinematographer who also embarked in many of the projects by the Masuds.

Now there, with a context set, let's dive deep into Tareque Masud's art and war!

AN ARCHIVIST EXTRAORDINAIRE

If you have not already, you should watch Muktir Gaan, a film on a musical troupe

who travelled from one place to another during the Liberation War, entertaining and motivating refugees and freedom fighters.

At first impression, it is just a well-made documentary film. But just delve a bit, and the genius of Tareque Masud will become clear.

Muktir Gaan was made by painstakingly collecting and stitching footages of 1971 shot by an American filmmaker, Lear Levin (plus other archival footages).

Levin's footage, a goldmine, sat in his basement for many years. And when approached, Levin allowed their usage for Muktir Gaan for free!

Tareque Masud was not just a filmmaker. I would argue that he was an archivist as well.

And a fantastic storyteller he was too! Muktir Gaan wholly absorbs the audience into the story. The songs and the first-person narrative (by one of the members of the singing troupe, who read a script many years later for this film) had surely contributed to that.

The result of it all? A marvellous feat well-received by the people.

THE CINEMA FERIWALA

In a sense, Muktir Gaan paved way for Muktir Kotha, which is a film featuring various stories of freedom fighters, as told by them — an oral history project, you may say.

The way this project came to be is very fascinating. After Muktir Gaan was released, Tareque Masud and his team went far and wide, throughout Bangladesh, in remote villages, to screen the film; to bring it to the grassroots level.

Tareque Masud actually had a curious nickname, 'Cinema Feriwala' — he was a vendor of films!

He was not simply a director; he was much more: a film activist, a researcher, a patriot.

Anyway, that experience, or the journey throughout Bangladesh with Muktir Gaan, led him to make Muktir Kotha: "The audience of the film Muktir Gaan became the protagonists of Muktir Kotha...When they saw Muktir Gaan, they said, it is very good but we have also fought; our stories are not there in Muktir Gaan; we will tell our stories," Tareque Masud explained in an interview.

"While screening Muktir Gaan we were shooting its audience; they are telling their stories," he continued. "Almost two years later, I realised, wow! They are saying so many unknown stories. Hence, we started shooting in a more organised way."

The film tells about the sufferings, struggles, and resistance against the Pakistan army, told directly by those who experienced it themselves.

Its usage of 'September on Jessore Road,' an iconic poem on the refugees of the War, deserves a separate mention by itself. The Bangla translation, sung by none other than Moushumi Bhowmik, accompanied by scenes of devastated refugees shown on the screen, sparks a sense of horror, morbidity, and melancholy in the audience; an impact which lasts for some time even after the film is over.

Another work, which is somewhat similar to Muktir Kotha, is Narir Kotha; also an oral history project.

Narir Kotha presents the stories of the roles of women during the War of Liberation, from the atrocities they faced to the resistance against the oppressors.

TRIBUTE

Film and war: A tribute to Tareque Masud

It is the ill-fate of not only his family and colleagues that Tareque Masud's life was cut short by that unfortunate road accident in 2011, but a huge loss for Bangladesh itself, for Masud had made several outstanding films and had represented the country in the global map of cinema. On the occasion of the upcoming Independence Day, Star Lifestyle looks back at the life of this fascinating filmmaker, through his works on (and surrounding) the Liberation War.