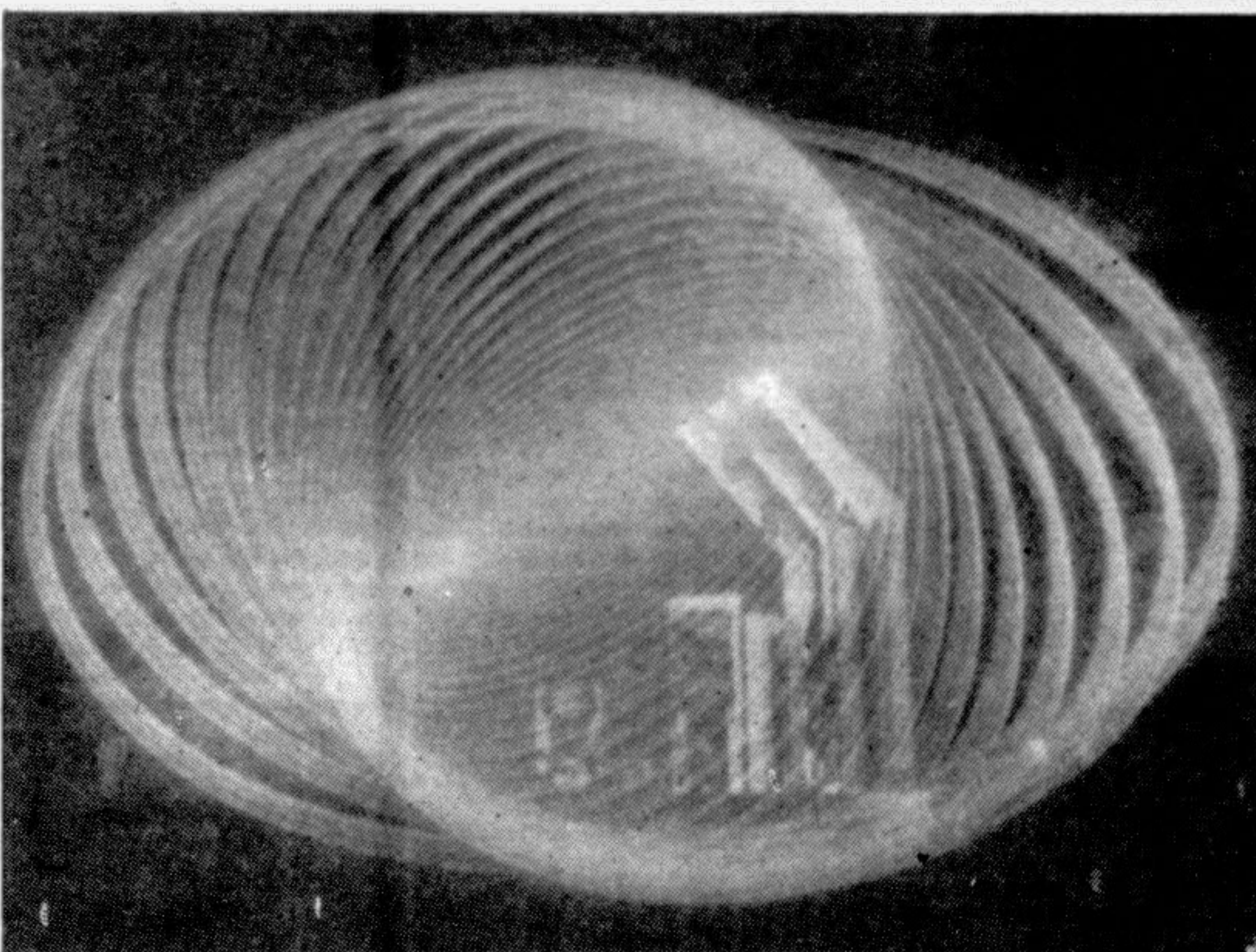


Music that Lives in Every Heart

by Waheedul Haque

The song in its entirety is a gothic creation unmatched in our history of music. And the first part will continue into the centuries to come as the melody working strange alchemy on the Bengali soul.



Effect photo by M Hartsuddin

and meant for the mind. When we look for the other inseparable element attending the observance of Ekushey we go straight to the heart of the sentiment of the day — there being nothing to stand between us and our feeling. Ekushey is hardly what it is without the songs associated with it. Here again we come up before something said to be proscribed by religion. But more than the idolator the religious zealot needs something tangible if only to break. And he is helpless, as he had indeed been, before these songs that made the day what it is.

There is no attempt here to give a history of these songs, so very small in number — why one doesn't know — but so immensely powerful in their pull on the heart-strings of a Bengalee. This is rather in appreciation of their beauty, strength and good work. The one song that swept all others into the background was rather late in coming. It's writer was a student preparing for his intermediate exams in 1952 and the composer was still in his Barisal lair. Two songs preceded the immortal *Amar vaiyer rokter rangano Ekushey February* of Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury and

Altat Mahmud. One was by that famous fighter Gazil Huq. He was no writer or composer of songs — he was only a voluble student leader having a winning broad grin and a touch of charismatic appeal. The demand of the hour got him to write and perhaps also set it to tune the first song that caught the fancy of the *probat fery* marchers. It was *Bhulbona Ekushey February Bhulbona* — it was a forceful song of fast beats matching the rhythm of processions marching early in the morning towards the Azimpur graveyard. These processions in the earliest of Ekusheys did not move in sombre doleful steps. The temper was one of defiance and agitated denunciation of a possible police swoop that could any moment slide into a good beating if not outright firing. Gazil Huq's song splendidly, almost heroically, sustained that defiance rings in the resolve of not to forget Ekushey.

Mosharruf Uddin Ahmad's song was come from a completely different world. Set in a morning *raga his Mrityu-ke jara tuchcho korilo bhasha banchabar tore, Ajikey smortyo Tare* brought out all the pathos that was there in

the remembrance of the '52 firing. As was fit, this song was sung more in 'functions' than in marches. Even then whenever the mood suited it, marchers fell to it. Mosharruf Uddin was an interesting man — and it will be quite relevant here to pay him homage. An engineer in the employment of the Muslim League government, this brother of the noted educator-psychiatrist M U Ahmed and the politician Mohiuddin Ahmed, cared little for his job. He not only penned songs then deemed to be sacrilegious — for they were all about Ekushey and the rise of the oppressed masses — he got them set to tune by people he organised into the first ever cultural organisation given wholly to motivating people into awareness of the fraud that was Pakistan and the necessity that was the Revolution — with a capital R. Baluchar — a none-de-plume it was. Mominul Huq and Nizamul Huq were his recruits and the first named set to tune Mosharruf's song for Ekushey. And the last, and most illustrious addition to the group, Altat Mahmud, was to become the composer of the greatest song on Ekushey. Mosharruf Uddin very conspicuously gave her talented daughters and also

his untiring wife to further the mission of the group — by way of singing and dancing and organisation. Perhaps there was in that pioneering thing 'an echo of the work of the IPTA — Indian People's Theatrical Association. It remained ever a mystery how this high-placed government engineer came to take his cue from the communists across the border when communists at home were being persecuted and were always on the run. It can quite be that his was no case of taking cue from anywhere else — he went for his own stuff out of his conclusions and convictions.

Altat Mahmud was a kind of *enfant terrible* — musically and perhaps politically too. Of a mien of sculptured features done in ebony, his reticence spoke of a subornness well described by the epithet *Durbasa*. He was primarily a violinist, the best of the students of Barisal's legendary Suren Babu. He also sang in a husky but melodious voice — but hardly spoke a word, — ever. Gaffar and Altat were compatriots from Barisal. Altat came to Dhaka in 1953. How it fell to him to tune Gaffar's immortal and lengthy piece has remained unclear. By the time he did the job — a Titan's job done with prophetic inspiration — he had established himself as a fine singer specially of the other popular Ekushey song — *Bengalee, Dhaka shohor rokter bhashadli*.

There are many wonderful and yet strange features to *Amar Bhayler*. Before this song the only other patriotic song to earn immortality in spite of being couched in western melodic idioms was *dhano-dhanyo-pushapa bhawra*. It is a mystery why and how the first section of this song — done purely in the western mood — succeeds so tellingly in evoking tearful sentiments in even people completely unexposed to western airs. Then again there are very cheap devices of art and the like in this section. But the song transcends all this and lifts the singers to some heavenly perch of melting into a thousand souls.

There are then other sections — musically other movements — to the songs. And they are set in pure *ragas* and there is a plethora of stimulating rhythmic variations there — bringing out the heart of the lyric. The song in its entirety is a gothic creation unmatched in our history of music. And the first part will continue into the centuries to come as the melody working strange alchemy on the Bengali soul.

Let's Translate Our Way to a New Self-esteem

by Shah Husain Imam

FROM the beginning of the sixties until today Bangla Academy has published 3000 titles, reprints included. Of these, 500 are translated books. Since taking up publication of text books and compendia of administrative terms in 1972 with the dual purpose of using Bangla at all levels of education and official work, the academy has developed insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the language. In the process, what has come to light is the practitioners' inadequacy rather than the language's in adapting it to the present day needs — as quickly as we would have liked to.

Obviously it is not digging up from the hoary past that the linguistic pursuit has been all about. The deeper and shrouded vitality of the language had to be brought out from a subjective mould and steered to a state of practical and applied efficiency. The tuning of the language into day-day administrative and business activities has been rather easy but when it came to catching up with the rapidly multiplying quantum of world knowledge we seemed stuck on the lower step of the elevator. A decade ago, world knowledge — actually meaning the corpus of deductions — had doubled every 25 years on an average but since that point in time it has been increasing two-fold every six years.

One way to get a peek at it would be to translate from that brimming repository of knowledge. The other means to do it would be for us to write original books based on our understanding of the strides being made in various branches of world knowledge.

But that is obviously aiming too high at this stage, even though the bemoaning is full of sighs at being left out in the race with the marching global advancement in different disciplines. While Bangla Academy could so far enlist the services of only 10-15 first rate experts able to translate from English to Bangla, its problem with other world languages — barring of course some oriental ones — imaginably looks formidable. If not insurmountable. So, the teaching and the use of foreign languages have to grow, not just of English but also of some other major languages, with an eye to developing a breed of multilingual academics or professionals. They could be maintained at state expense or in financial cooperation with private trusts. The smattering of a

foreign language that we learn solely to go abroad just won't do.

This is also important from another point of view. The record of translation of Bangla titles into other languages is a paltry 20-25 books. We are beaten to it hands down by the USA and former Soviet Union which have translated some of our major authors. Japan, China, Germany have evinced some interest. Of the countries in the region, India, Pakistan and Nepal present opportunities for literary and other forms of exchanges.

Thus knowing other countries' languages would help us fulfil not only the high objective of sharing their knowledge, including the scientific and technological variety, but also enable us to sell our books duly translated into their languages.

It is interesting to note that books translated by Bangla Academy have recorded a good sale, although the first edition had nearly always been a hesitant 1000 copies. The other principal translating agencies Franklin Publications and Biswa Shahitya Kendra have had a reasonably good market for their translated books.

But this pales into insignificance before what the Chinese are displaying at the moment by way of an insatiable appetite for the translated diet. Since robustly opening up to the outside world, China has pleasantly gone about translating anything useful she could lay her hands on. Like even brochures on health, sports, wildlife, travelling brought into the country by the tourists, leave aside the serious translation works.

Translating the latest books on the stands has been problematic for Bangla Academy because of the high royalties that go with the proposition. Thus it has had to be content with publishing classics obviating thereby copy-right stipulation holding good for new publications, but not for the old treasure.

Even so, Bangla Academy has published 150 books in Physical sciences. The editions on computer, digital electronics, nuclear physics, quantum mechanics and chemistry have sold well. Except for publishing H.G. Wells' 'Time Machine', the academy lags behind in the science fictions area, where Bangla versions could have given a leap of the mind being so very interestingly futuristic.

The structural set-up in Bangla Academy for the publication of text books is made up of three sections: social sciences, law, commerce and arts; physical sciences, engineering and technology; and bio-sciences, agriculture and medical sciences. The overall task has been taken up under a five-year plan to be implemented by a select body of university teachers for each group of subjects. Books on engineering in particular remain in short supply. The drawback is that while specialisation may not be lacking it is the highly required grasp of adequate Bangla which is sometimes found wanting.

Of translation generally, the basic thing to realise is that while there may be a mismatch or a qualitative gap between literal translation, and conceptual translation, the predicament is compounded by the fact that there are only a few who have mastery both in Bangla as well as over the subject in question. There can only be a turn-around in the situation by developing a corps of original writers in sciences who may be pressed into service as translators, when required.

We have to find out how the translation bureaus are working abroad, particularly in our region and in South East Asia. It is good to know that a bilateral agreement has been signed with the education ministry of the Malaysian government to undertake some translation work. Preliminary talks are presumably going on with German and French governments for executing some translation projects. These must be pursued.

We have translated a plenty of foreign books not from the languages they were originally written in but from their English versions. This obviously makes them less authentic, even less readable perhaps, than these would have been were they rendered into Bangla directly.

Translation is a painstaking job. But Bangla Academy's fee for it is Tk. 300 per 1000 words; although it gives royalty with the second edition if the translator so wants. This is meagre, far from being ideal, if we are to give the stimulus for translation. Since the academy's rate is followed by others as a standard there is a greater need for raising it for an all round effect. How can the translation bureaus themselves be any thriving concerns without offering a decent remuneration to the translators; in the first place though the bureaus would need to be bank-rolled. For quality control, we need to develop a cluster of good editors — quite frankly.

The book publishing and marketing industry has to be made viable as a whole with preferential terms accorded to it, so that books are widely translated and they sell much better, even though the latter have had a better luck than many original books.

As the last Ekushey book fair had proved, some of our titles, particularly the latest English to Bangla dictionary which was adjudged as the best 'in both Bengals,' had sold like a hot cake among some West Bengal visitors to the Mela. While we can have a good market for Bangla books in West Bengal — as a departure from what has been a one-way traffic from that neighbouring Indian state — our books translated into other languages could do good business elsewhere, too.

tion on earth has experienced such tragic events to establish rights of the majority people. We pay homage to the martyrs of the language movement on 21 February which is a national day. The world 'Ekushey', however, is ironically associated with the English calendar date. It is an irony that we recall Ekushey but not 8th Falgoun, the Bengali calendar date that coincided with 21 February of 1952. If we take stock of the development of the rate of literacy and production of Bengali literature as well as translations of scientific and law books during the last 40 years, we will be soaked to notice that not much progress has been achieved as it should have been.

We write and talk in Bangla on Ekushey or at best during the month of February and virtually and erase episode from memory quietly in the following month. Sad of course, but this is how we pay

Continued on page 9

Ekushey: Some Reminiscences

by Mahmud Hasan

I see it as I close my eyes. Sometimes I see it even without closing my eyes. It is ever-present in my mind's eye. I see the 21st day of February, 1952. It happened so many years ago but still it seems as if it had happened only the other day. The spirit of 21st (Ekushe) February does not belong to a particular time. It transcends the temporal and finds its way to the timeless.

If one looked at the incidents of the day, one could see in what direction it was leading a nation and its people to. Events followed one after another pushing the country to the inevitable — freedom. The date 21st February, 1952 was fixed as on that day the then East Pakistan Legislative Assembly was to begin its session. Leaders of Pakistan earlier declared that 'Urdu and Urdu alone would be the state language of Pakistan.' The Bengalis of the country did not accept this. They wanted that Bengali, the language of more than half of the people of the country, should be accepted as one of the state languages of Pakistan. So, they demonstrated against this decision in front of the Legislative Assembly in Dhaka.

On the 20th of that month an announcement was made in the name of the District Magistrate of Dhaka that 144 Cr PC was being promulgated in the city from the next day and that as long as Section 144 existed it would be unlawful for five or more people to move together in public places. The announcement was made from a horse-drawn carriage going round the city — and, especially, around the university.

All Party Committee of Action sat that night to discuss what should be done in view of the Government announcement. Representatives of all the political parties except the

Muslim League (which was in power) were present in the meeting. After a long discussion it was decided that Section 144 was not to be broken the next day.

It should not be broken, because the people of the country were not well-organised for such action! They had to be organised first and then only it was possible to have strikes, processions, demonstrations and mass, non-cooperations etc. The time was not yet thought to be ripe for such actions. We came to know later that all except four present in the meeting voted for the resolution of the All Party Committee of Action.

The next day, students began to assemble at the *Amatala* of the Dhaka University. Some of them were not aware of the government announcement. However, everybody came to know about the enforcement of Section 144 as soon as they arrived on the campus. It was for them to decide now whether to break Section 144 and demonstrate before the Legislative Assembly. I was then a first year Honours student of the University. I also joined the crowd at the *Amatala*.

I have been to meetings of various kinds before and after that day. I have attended larger gatherings, but never experienced one like the 21st February's. Those who were there did not need to speak among themselves to reach the decision. They knew what they were going to do. Their decision was already taken. Only waiting to come out from their lips — words and sounds that would soon be transformed into action. Every student harboured fire in his/her heart. And when brought together there was bound to be a volcanic eruption. It was impossible for any power to stop the

Continued on page 10

21st February

by Razia Khan

What miracle have we wrought
Out of your sacrifice, what
promise of golden moments
Out of young lives
Cut down before they could blossom?
The legacy now twisted out of shape
Leaves only regrets
Of wasted passion.
Your grim procession
Retreats in quiet rejection
Glad to be forgotten
By a pack of liars
Who have squandered
Their best hours
In careless laughter And bloated pride
Pugged of your torch flame
With empty words.

Duel for a Finger

by Rezauddin Stalin

Lisa has cut her finger
This was announced in its repeated circuits
by the green wind
I didn't heed this intensive publicity
from envy
Why did the knife run riot
Through that small dainty finger
Never for once did I like to think
of the unjust spiteful bloodshed

When the helpless tent
of men stricken by flood and lightning is blown away
service and charity are dispatched gratis
The news of her injury moved nothing
Not even his private initiative stirred
Bloodshed, however minor, is still bloodshed
A murder, however insignificant may it be, I protest
Once that finger had been strangely creative
It worked itself into many dancing poses
like Uday Shankar
In the cavernous darkness that reminds me
of our prehistoric habitat

I have a responsibility towards that finger
Let the killer knife adopt numerous disguises
Let it link with murderous glare
This time I am sure
I will challenge in a duel

Translated by Zakaria Shirazi



—Star photo

The Spirit of Falgoun

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

WE have been observing Ekushey February judiciously for the last 41 years since 21 February 1952 — the day the language martyrs laid their lives to establish Bangla as one of the state languages in the erstwhile Pakistan. It was a memorable event indeed in the history of language and literature. The people of this country stood like a solid rock to register their voice against the imposition of an alien language on the majority segment of the population.

Rulers of the erstwhile Pakistan made futile attempt to impose Urdu as the only state language of the country — the language virtually spoken and understood by only seven percent of the total population. The people of this part quite legitimately demanded that

Bengali, the mother tongue of 55 per cent of the total population, be one of the state languages at par with Urdu.

The resentments over the question of language increased over the years and finally exploded in 1952 when police fired upon a huge rally in Dhaka during the period of provincial administration of Nurul Amin who identified himself with the policies of the Prime Minister Khawja Nazimuddin. Khawja Nazimuddin being a Bangalee from the Nawab family of Dhaka evoked sharp reaction from the people of former East Pakistan, for advocating the cause of Urdu. Ultimately the Central Government had to yield to the demand, and in the constitution of 1956 Bengali was incorporated as one of the State languages of Pakistan. It

was a victory for the courageous people who sacrificed their lives for the mother tongue.

The consequence of the martyrdom was the turning point unifying the Bengali nation's feeling against the government in power. The action of the government, which ran counter to Bengali emotions and aspirations, turned into a mass movement in less than two decades. Therefore, the language movement in the process gave birth to the autonomy movement which culminated in the war of liberation. And after nine months of traumatic development, we achieved an independent and sovereign state on 16 December 1971.

We are proud of having established our language and an independent state. No na-