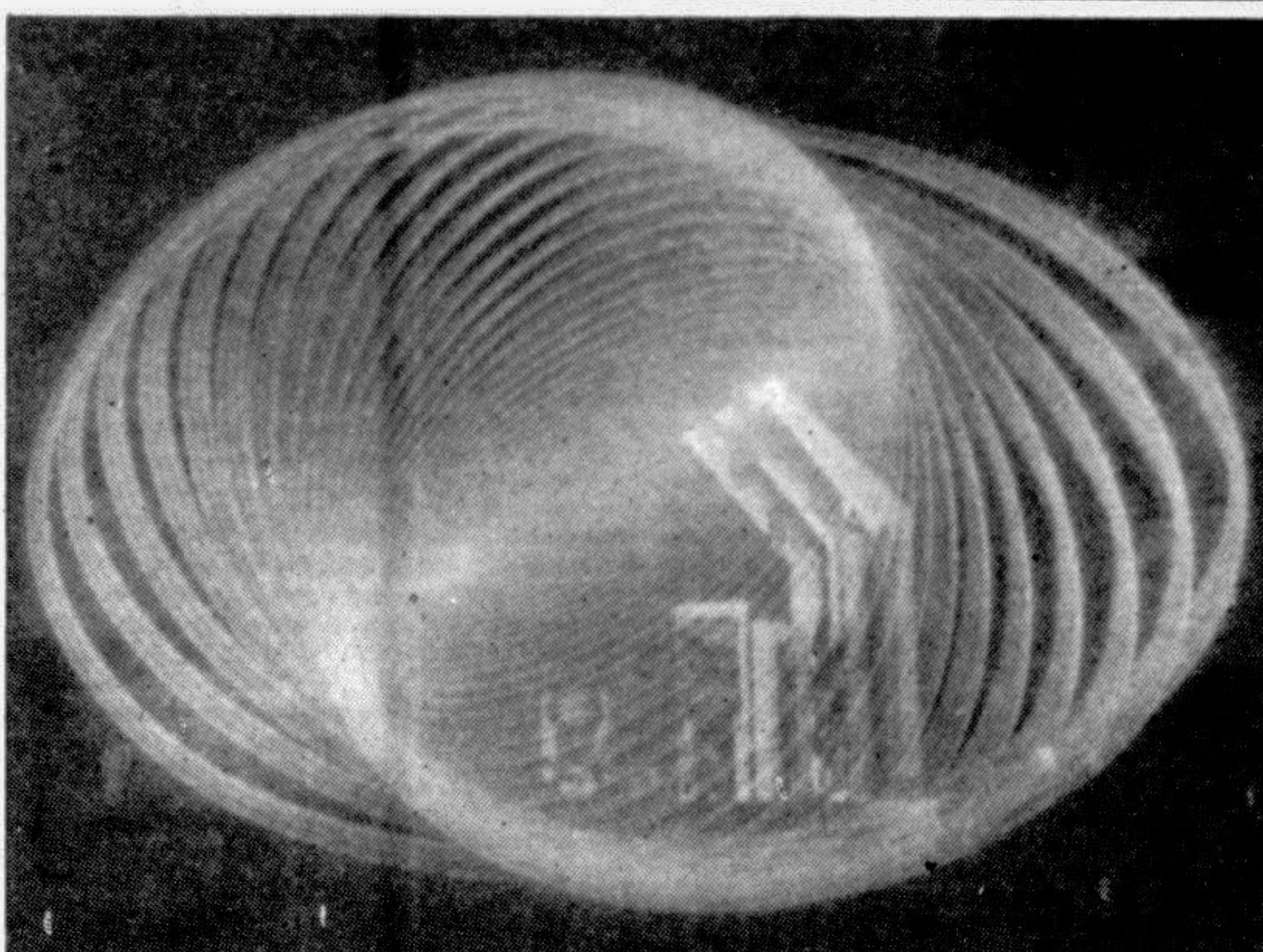


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Music that Lives in Every Heart

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

HERE are many items decking the observance of Ekushey February. Or the institution itself. Two from among them have become inseparable from the Day and its yearly visit. The first is of a durable nature — the Shahid Minar. Barring mosques this is undoubtedly the most ubiquitous structure in Bangladesh. There is hardly an educational institution worth its name that does not have a Shahid Minar. These tens of thousands of constructions, made after the pattern of Hamidur Rahman's partly realised monument known as the Central Shahid Minar, are no dead things. At the schools and colleges and at prominent points of housing and traffic these form a part of the landscape. From the middle of February they undergo a change culminating in their becoming the focal point of their areas of situation.

Most if not all of these Shahid Minars embody some history. Representing always a collective initiative to be responsive to the politico-cultural unfolding of the Bengalee people's national entity, these also in most cases involve endeavours supervening various kinds of resistance to the setting up of these memorials to the language martyrs of 1952. Hurdles made inordinately difficult because they were put up from religious and political pleas had to be overcome. And the resulting story was nothing less than heroic in almost all cases. Shahid Minars still continue to be an eyesore to the bigots who, as in Rajshahi, miss no opportunity to mount an attack of demolition. This is both interesting and ironic. The point of objection is that the Minars are but godless temples where worship is offered to god-knows-what. A Muslim cannot participate in such a worship, offering flowers and respect and love to an inanimate object as the Minar. When they raid the Minar, what do they want to break? Why are they lured by something that hasn't any life or value? They prove by their action that they believe the Minars have both. Yes, the Shahid Minars from the point of their coming into being together with their being centre-points of the people's cultural and political resistance to loss of liberty and imposition of injustice and a cultural straitjacket for decades, have come to represent the toughest of all things that sustain this nation and its clan.

The Shahid Minars appear to be tangible structures in brick and mortar. But in truth they are things of the mind

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 valyer rokeye rangare* Ekushey February of Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury and

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