

Now is the Time to Speak out Loud to Free Radio and BTv

THE occasion was UNESCO-supported, and globally observed, World Press Freedom Day, held at the Press Club, on 3rd May, at the initiative of the Coordinating Council for Human Rights (CCHRB). Nazmul Huda M.P., the former information minister, was at his usual plain speaking self. As the man who has held the helm of government's propaganda machinery for the longest spell under this government, it was natural that a lot of the discussion on freedom of the media was directed at him, or that is how he felt. This writer, being one of the speakers, made a plea for the decontrolling of the audio-visual media - the radio and television. Barrister Huda's reply was characteristically his own.

He began by chiding us for not expressing any gratitude to him for opening up our air waves to CNN and BBC, and thereby providing us with an opportunity to enjoy world class news reporting. (I think he has a point. He must have faced tremendous resistance from the usual interested groups, while he was planning to introduce the two international news bodies. The pressure must have continued even after, which he resisted to his credit.) As a reply to his chiding, Editor of weekly Holiday, Enayetullah Khan, one of the speakers on the occasion, pointed out that while the former information minister was quick to grant CNN and BBC permission to air programmes on BTv network, he never granted permission to local private bodies to do the same. If the government wanted to monopolise radio and BTv, then it should allow private radio and TV to operate side by side.

If I have understood Mintoobhai (as Mr. Khan is affectionately called by all his younger colleagues in the profession) correctly, he seemed resigned to the fact that governments will always monopolise official radio and TV, and hence it is futile to expect anything from them, and as such the public should go for private electronic media.

May be he is right. But for the moment, I hesitate to fully agree with him about giving up on BTv and the radio. I think as long as these institutions are being run by the taxpayers' money, the public must have a say on how they are being used. This is a public right which we have not yet been able to establish in Bangladesh.

Governments here seem to have failed to distinguish - deliberately I suspect, because it suits their needs - between government and the State. Radio and TV is NOT OWNED by the government of the day, but by the State. A government manages these institutions by virtue of the fact that it has been elected by the people, and that also, under well laid out laws

which are passed by the parliaments. There is no scope for arbitrary and whimsical use of these instruments of public information.

What we now see and hear on BTv and the radio is nothing but the continuation of the autocratic mindset, of which we have a rich legacy. This author had written on numerous occasions, that nowhere else has BNP failed itself, and the people who elected them, more than in its handling of the BTv and the radio. Everyday, at least twice if not more, the present government shows the people of Bangladesh that very little has changed, since the fall of autocracy, as far as government's use of state media is concerned.

A party that did not get a minute of air-time on state-owned media during the nine years of Ershad's rule and was yet able to win majority of seats in a free and fair election (four times

from mistakes, and chart out new courses of actions. Otherwise, civilization would not have advanced.

Then the former minister said something I had not heard before. He said, referring to the TV and radio personnel "We all have to become neutral first" before radio and TV can be decontrolled. "Otherwise it will not serve any public purpose" If I have understood the former minister correctly (and if I have not, then I invite him to write for us on this subject) he is implying that unless and until the people who work for the Radio and the TV are neutral, decontrolling these institutions would amount to playing into their partisan hands. Are we to wait until all officials of radio and TV become neutral, before we can expect the decontrolling of these vital organs of public information? Who will certify when some such

soul of communication is credibility. Even to get its own messages across, the medium through which it is communicating must be credible. One credible statement is worth more than a thousand words of propaganda. And no government controlled radio and TV will ever have credibility, unless and until it allows large, if not equal, access of the critics of the government. This fundamental fact is as valid for an autocratic government, as it is for one elected by popular vote.

Take for example the endless hours of Begum Zia's speeches that we have heard over the electronic media during the last four years. How much of all those footage had any real impact on us? How much of what she said did we take seriously? How often did we move away from our TV sets, and did something else, while that was on? More to the point, how often did we react with disgust, and uttered unkind words, as we saw the PM monopolising the state media. One minister told me, and I commend him for his forthrightness, that his family members turn off the TV whenever such things occur.

But imagine, instead of all the hours she was on the TV, the PM used only half of that time, and allowed opposition leaders to use the rest. I am confident that such a policy would have made Begum Zia's speeches far more convincing, and of much greater impact and lasting value. But to do so, a leader must have self-confidence enough to believe that "my record speaks for itself. Let the opposition say what it wants. People will know what to believe." Obviously the present leadership lacked such confidence. Why? That will be the answer people will seek in deciding their votes for in the next election.

Given the fact that another election is round the corner, I think we in the print media, should start a concerted campaign to free radio and TV from government control. We should create all sorts of pressure to bear upon the authorities to move on this matter.

We should try our best to make the opposition publicly pronounce on this issue. Skeptics may say that such public pronouncement does not matter, because after winning the election, they all forget it. But even then we must keep on trying. Sheikh Hasina recently said something to this effect. We, from the media, should insist that she elaborate on it, and give that maximum publicity, so that her public commitment is etched deeply in the public mind.

In my view, freeing the electronic media from government control, and placing under some autonomous, public interest body, should be a priority task before us at the moment.

WEEKEND MUSINGS

Mahfuz Anam

the seats of the party that monopolised air-time relentlessly for the said period, today is doing exactly the same thing - not giving any air-time to opposition news and views. We know that we do not learn from history. But this is not yet history. It is only yesterday. Just the preceding chapter of our long, torturous and painful political history.

The former information minister, in his speech, reiterated his views about government control of radio and TV. His first argument was and the one which is repeated often by many BNP stalwarts, that all previous governments did the same. BNP did not start this policy. "We were oppressed and punished, and never given a minute on government radio and TV, when we were out of power." So, was the ruling party getting even? "No. But can we be blamed if we are human?"

What did he mean? Is it his position that since previous governments controlled radio and TV so should his? Doesn't that push us into a perpetual cycle of control? Because all governments can use the excuse of the preceding one. Then about being 'human'. We know that it is human to take revenge, or to behave in the same manner as one has been treated. But it is also 'human' to move away from past mistakes. Human beings not only repeat the follies of the past but they also learn

officials actually become "neutral"? Will it be the Information Ministry, the government, the party in power? If not, then who? Who judges the neutrality of those who will judge the neutrality of radio and TV officials?

It is not unheard of that people working for government institutions have personal political views. However, if there is a system in place then all such tendencies can be checked. Instead of the present system, the radio and BTv can be controlled and run by independent media professionals, forming an autonomous body, under an Act of the Parliament, and answerable to a Parliamentary Committee. Such a body itself will be best guarantor against partisan tendencies of any staff members.

Given the obvious popularity of BBC among our people, why not use it as model to reform our radio and TV. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and some others from Europe could all serve as possible models to emulate from. But do we have the will to do so? As far as our politicians are concerned, the answer is a resounding "YES", only as long as we are in the opposition.

The problem, as I see it, is that once in power no political party wants to part with the means of self-propaganda. The curious thing is that, regardless of its own experience, no government seems to understand that the very

IN MEMORIAM

Syed Mozammel Huq

by Mohd Ekramul Haque

IT is a long time since I came across *Riders to the Sea* of Edmund Spenser. I could not really appreciate the one-act tragedy at the first reading. But when I learnt that it was a masterpiece, I felt impelled to read and re-read it to fathom its literary marvel. And I realised rather laboriously what a piece it was!

Though every so often strange things happen in this world, yet we accept certain orders as the norm. The departure of older people yielding place to the young is one such. The contrary isn't that exceptional but certainly painful. And Sygne draws one such picture that touches the heart so poignantly.

Although Sygne's contribution is limited to six plays, done in as many years before his death from Hodgkin's disease at the young age of 38, he is considered the major dramatist of the Irish literary renaissance. It is also said that Sygne would have been immortal even if he had not written any play other than *Riders to the Sea*. And how one feels when such tragedies happen in real life? The passing away of Syed Mozammel Huq is so painful to me for I had always looked upon him as a younger brother. His manners and human qualities attracted every one. The Bengali word *Ajatsatru* - without any enemy - is the appropriate epithet for him.

No wonder all factions of members of his own profession - journalism - converged at the funeral. Messages of condolence also flowed from the head of state and the government and leaders of political parties of all hues. Among those, who have issued statements, are Begum Khaleda Zia, Sheikh Hasina Wajed and Professor Golam Azam representing extremely divergent opinions. I can and do subtract little to what they have said.

My association with Syed Mozammel Huq had been long and there was an abiding fraternal feeling and understanding. I couldn't say if it was spontaneous or he had earned it all. May be both one and at the same time. But I really feel like sharing with others some of my earlier recollections as well as those of his last days.

I came to know Mozammel when I entered the Public Relations Department of the erstwhile government of East Pakistan in the 50s where I had his elder brother Syed Badrul Huq as a colleague and a friend. We had done many assignments together when Mozammel joined the then national news agency - the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) - and that brought us closer. With a Master degree in International Relations, Syed Mozammel Huq was academically well-equipped at the time of entry into the profession. He had later done courses under the Nieman fellowship Programme for Journalism at Harvard University and on Public Diplomacy at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. There are not many in the profession with such a background.

I and Mozammel were together at the funeral of Mohammed Ali, former Prime Minister of Pakistan and travelled to Bogra for the last rites. The companionship on the journey up and down, cooperation in gathering and dispatching news and the efforts to make the overnight stay comfortable, gave me the feel of his affectionate concern. We had been together covering the trial of the so-called Agartala Conspiracy case. But I miss him in my recollections of those days which is otherwise quite vivid. May be we were too busy with our respective assignments.

At the crucial turn in the nation's history, when Ziaur Rahman had taken over as Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA) both of us were detailed by our respective organisations to the CMLA's secretariat. There we worked for quite some time in close cooperation. We were in the first few of later President Ziaur Rahman's famous cross-country walking tours. We flew from Dhaka to Shamshearnagar and then followed the route Shah Jalal (RA) had taken to reach Sylhet. The reportage of that visit was instrumental in setting the trend and crating public interest. A series of such tours came in quick succession and created quite a stir in the country.

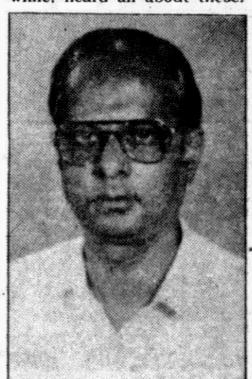
It was around this time that President Zia's China tour came off. It was expected that both Mozammel and I would be in the entourage and we were alerted. But the Foreign Office had other people in consideration. When it came to our knowledge, I took a stand. I said: I am a government servant and you can take liberty with me but Mozammel is a

guest. It worked. Col Olli Ahmed, then a Staff Officer (now a member of the cabinet) asserted and Mozammel was in the entourage. He proved his mettle and his position was consolidated.

But soon after he fell sick. He was diagnosed cancer and sent abroad virtually for confirmation of what can be called a death sentence. Only hours before his flight we had a long talk in the small car, he was driving as we were passing the Agrani School in Azampur. I had a feeling, despite expert opinion, that he was not suffering from cancer. One doesn't usually tell about such feelings. But, touched by Mozammel's optimism, I did. And soon after I was in the large crowd gathered at the (now old) airport to bid him farewell and there were many with tearful eyes. But to the relief of all his well-wishers, Mozammel returned safe proving the diagnosis wrong but meanwhile he had to go through several incisions.

Mozammel resumed his normal life and professional duties but the damage done by the wrong diagnosis and the treatment left a lasting impact. The decade and a half that he lived thereafter was marked by illness and he had to be hospitalised or taken abroad several times for treatment. On many occasions I visited him in the local hospitals and clinics and information about some of the hospitalisations and travels abroad came to me only after those were over. But as soon as we met we exchanged notes and put each other fully abreast with the developments.

It was early last month that I visited Mozammel in the Ibne Sina Clinic in the city. He had been to the States towards the end of the last year to attend the convocation at which his eldest son was conferred the graduation. He fell sick on return and had been to Bangkok for treatment. I had, meanwhile, heard all about these.



Late Mozammel Haque

But he began narrating everything in detail and with great interest. I tried to dissuade him. I told him I know the developments. He disarmed me saying: "I have the responsibility of communicating you personally."

Mozammel told me about the progress of his elder child in the US, and how the younger one was shaping. He was happy with both. Then he talked about his illness and treatment and showed me reports of the Bangkok hospital where he had lately been and the experience with ultrasonography he had just had. I asked one of his younger brothers who was attending him if it was desirable for the patient to talk as much. I appreciated the honest affirmative answer. Mozammel's face betrayed embarrassment. As I realised my presence would be a cause for continued conversation I took leave.

Mozammel was later shifted to the Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, but was released the day before I tried to look him up there. I presumed he was better and felt relieved. In the days following, I was too busy to keep track of the developments. The news of Mozammel's passing away came to me through a common friend of ours A B M Abdul Matin on the morning following the sad incident. I was in the motley crowd at different places for funeral and condolences and was amazed at the range of his well-wishers in the profession and among those in whose contact he came in the course of his long and rewarding career.

While departing for the peace of the departed soul and fortitude of the members of the bereaved family, we should also think of perpetuating his memory for he may indeed be an inspiration to the new generation. Despite his low profile he distinguished himself as a professional and a human person.

As I reminisce, I look through my window far and near. The summer sun is blazing mercilessly with no sign of cloud to usher rain in the sun-drenched soil.

The Dhaka Dictionary

by Wasif Islam

THIS is intended for unsuspecting foreigners, friends, foes, politicians, poets, philosophers, writers, travelers, and remnants of what used to be called the saner section of society etc.

Current socio-political environs of the city require familiarity with words and phrases unheard of before. I hope the ensuing will be of some help to bear with good grace whatever may befall the unwary at our beautiful/ugly megapolis-Dhaka.

A-Adda - Chat session; Dhakaites love it, men, women, & children. Adda is held at the drop of a hat, at tea shops, pan shops, sweet shops, at the markets in mosques, offices, schools, homes, farms, factories, Jatio Sangsad, Secretariat, you name it and we've got an occasion or a place for it.

B-Battala - Beneath the banyan tree: A gathering place for student agitators in front of the old Arts Faculty. This was the holy patch of students politics in the good old days of Pakistan.

Bombs - crude homemade hand bombs: very useful when *mastaans* make their getaways. Also used in hartals, *oborodhs* and strikes, it blows up in your face while being made.

Bureaucrats - The Government officers or public servants: They treat the public as if they (the public) are their (the bureaucrats) servants. The elite class of the dwindling, erstwhile CSPs followed by the EPCs and now the BCs. The majority religiously follow the legacy of the British masters, perpetrators of the infamous redtape, snobbish, arrogant, condescending, very friendly with business community at large, who always pick up *bhabhis* (you know who) shopping list before going to Singapore. Their sons and daughters almost 99% are studying abroad. They have businesses in someone else's name, houses in Dhanmondi or Gulshan in madams' name, an assured cut in every deal. Lifestyle shows that they are living way beyond their known income. Between themselves and the business community, they run the country. They get their way through *tadbirs* no matter how impossible it may appear. Their crazy drive for more and more power makes them work long hours, never delegating, because they trust no one.

C-Chinese Restaurant - Restaurant which sells Chinese food. Where you get forced to go by your arm twisting relatives and friends and come out with empty wallets. The food is normally cooked by Bengalis (no Chinese within miles). Watchout for food poisoning after visiting some of them.

Coasters - *Mirp* buses plying in the city. Also called human haulers, may I add human maulers. These are the hurtling projectiles of steel, rubber and poison carbon monoxide on the streets of

Dhaka. The drivers will put the most daring cab drivers of Paris to shame. They will kill, maim and injure without any provocation or qualms.

Consultancy - To offer expert advice: This is big business. The donors get a good name for dishing out aid/grant; the government gets a face lift for arranging the dole, and the big brother consultants from the west siphons of the juicy chunk of the aid money (70% of aid money) in the guise of beautifully packaged, jargonised, mostly unimplementable, consultancy reports. Case at point, \$150 million spent on planning for FAP. The local agents/consultants in collusion with the government officials settle for the crumbs/peanuts of course. They will one day we hope, be exposed as later day Mir Jafars for selling the country.

Clinics - Mini hospitals/health care centres: Another big business. This is the part of the unholy alliance between the Doctor, and the Pathological Lab. The Doctor sends you to the clinic which he visits and gets money from you as well as from the clinic for helping the clinic keep their cabins filled. Run purely on the profit motive, with a couple of raw, novice doctors on their payroll and a long list of names of Professors and Consultants hanging outside. Service is deplorable, the rooms are claustrophobic and their charges are astronomical.

D-Dada - This may mean brother or grandfather (on your father's side). **Dhaka University** - The largest University of the country: Only the insane and the very brave wander in the campus area after dark where mugging is the order of the day or is it night? For sure your children will learn more about hijacking, gambling, drugs, shootouts, molotov cocktails, murder, illicit sex than physics math & chemistry.

E-Elephant Road - A street in Dhaka. Favourite joint for Eed shoppers. You see the craziest traffic jams here during that part of the year. **F-stands for the Fool** who does not know why he came, what he should be doing and where he is going. **G-Gulistan** - a garden: an area on Bangabandhu Ave., named after a cinema hall on the same road. A haven for footpathvenders, pickpockets and pimps.

H-Hartal - Everything must stop, shops, schools, offices, factories, transportation etc. Do everything you were doing, just don't bring out your car/s. Its a call from opposition parties for non cooperation with the government. Used to be a powerful weapon applied by the masses during Ayub/Yahya/era. It also somehow toppled Ershad with a helping hand from his own doings. More recently Hasina is trying a lot with hartals *oborodhs* and strikes but Khaleda refuses to

budge. Now its only a pain in the neck.

I-I, me or myself: This word is the most frequently used in any adda, debate, argument, speech etc whenever or wherever we Bangalees have a chance to open our mouth.

J-Jatio Press Club - The National Press Club: where our brave or intimidated journalists meet. Also outside, the strikers, the frustrated communists, the Go Back to Pakistan Society, the women's lib, and other lunatics meet and blare their grief over loudspeakers. You'll also find on any given day men and women lying on the street trying to die for some dying cause by way of protest through hunger strike. I've yet to learn of a single death by this method.

K-Krishnachura tree - These stately trees line some of the better streets of Dhaka redeeming some of its ugliness, a colourful sight in late afternoons when the sun catches its bursts of orange flames between green leaves and the blue of the sky.

L-Lake - A tract of water normally man made. We have the Dhanmondi lake which used to be a clean place till some bright guy got the idea of opening all the drains of Dhanmondi into the lake turning it into a cesspool. Then we have the Gulshan lake which to my horror, I noticed was being choked up with earth. You think may be some people at Rajuk will be making some more money by allotting plots to high official, smugglers and such.

M-Miscel - A procession or protest march: Give a few takas to the bustee people and you can have your own miscel, then you clap and dance along the city streets singing, chanting, and, of course abusing America while wearing American jeans made in Bangladesh.

Mastaans: People who become *must* or intoxicated: These people are *must* in their quest for money, these are the thugs, the extortionists, the local self styled Mafia, the crooks and hoodlums, the bullies and murderers, the muggers mugging for their drug money, and the rapists. Average age 18, they come from all class of society, their lack of education is made up by putting on fancy (stupid) clothes, overspending ill gotten money etc. Who are these creeps anyway? Look again, he may be some one near and dear to you. There is at present a proliferation of *mastaans*. They come in all shades and sizes. There are the top political *mastaans*, then the student politics *mastaans*, the more mundane *mastaan* in every mohalla hanging around in street corners, the *mastaans* of the bustees, the *mastaan* at the *mazaars* not to forget the *mastaans*, yes indeed the lady *mastaans*, the *unobtrusive*, demure housewives. These are the insatiable women who

must have the latest in clothes, the fancy jeweleries, the new dining set, the shopping trip to Singapore, the biggest fish in the market, eating out 10 times a month with *her* whole family on her parents side, they goad, cajole, push, hammer, blackmail, claw and even punch, intimidating their poor husbands to greater and more daring acts of bribe, fraud and what not.

N-National Assembly - The first time since known history the Bangalees get a chance for self governance, and both the party in power as well as those in opposition set about systematically to erode its (INA's) face. Embroiled in petty politics and bickering, thereby reducing the highest seat of lawmaking in the country into a laughing stock before the nation as a whole as well as the international polity.

NGO-Non Government Organisation - Password for doing whatever you like wherever you like and whenever you like in Bangladesh. Of course 90% have Hqs in Dhaka, and guess who ride 90% of the Pajeros and Nissan Patrols? It's great business this NGO thing. Concoct a catchy programme, slap on a signboard about helping the downtrodden, then help yourself to the dollars that roll in. All in the name of aid to the poor. Thank God for the poor in whose name we can get rich.

O-Oborodh - To surround; At first we thought this was some kind of a super hartal. Then they were calling it a siege. You get immediate mental pictures of starving families, dying people all around, pounding artillery fire, etc. But to your relief nothing serious happens. The real picture is the parties calling the Oborodh hire some bustee kids

and riff raffs and make barricades on major highways at the city outskirts. They also lie down en masse at railroad-tracks and stop you from going to the airport except on your feet.

P - The Dhaka Metropolitan Police - Most of them are *mastaans* in disguise, you name the racket and they are in it. An honest cop? What's that? A theft, a mugging? The local police can solve it in hours provided you are ready to pay for services rendered. Guess who owns most of the 'coasters' in town? If some rooky cops wants to play honest he gets busted, the system forces him out.

Pajero - A Land Rover type care made by Mitsubishi. The hottest status symbol in town. Also a great bribe for ministers and big shots of the opposition.

Q-Queue - To stand in an orderly line: This is unheard of here, you'll only get angry stares if you try and establish one anywhere, at the bus stand, the railway station, zoo, stadium, anywhere.

R-Ramna Park - A park, rare green spot in the city, also a spot for streetwalkers.

S-Strike - When workers refuse to work on protest. Strikes have become contagious because it gives our leisure loving citizens a time to involve in the national pastime - *Adda*.

Suhrawardy Uddyan - A park in Dhaka; where lovers meet and sit around trees the whole day long. **T-TSC-Dhaka University's Teacher-Student Centre**: The teachers usually stay away from here, inhabited mainly by crazy gunslingers and their gals. Also by new (brave and curious) entrants to DU. **Tadbir**-Influence peddling.

Manik Bandyopadhyay

Continued from page 9

clude Nilmoni, the father and the husband; Neva, the mother and the wife; Shyama, the daughter and the lover; Nimu, the baby-son, and also Bhulu, the dog. In other words, it's a poor family under a weak, broken, thatched roof that suffers heavily in torrential rains. Manik, right at the beginning, almost fully tells us the story; his outline is readily provided in a single, unpretentious line of four words only: it has one noun, one adjective, one adverb, and one verb, and that's all. And rightly we see, the whole story turns out to be a story of sufferings in the rainy season. It is also interesting to observe that while providing such an outline at the very outset, Manik begins to slow-poison the elements of suspense in the story. These two things - outline of the story accompanied by suspense slow-poisoned and almost killed by the writer himself - are not always equally observable in the Western tradition of realistic fiction. But, Manik's brand of realism features them quite now and then.

This brand of realism makes his story more intense than one charged with drama and suspense; for, under such circumstances, one needs to

keep up the sustaining force of the language itself. Manik fairly successfully does this in terms of playing with a series of striking synecdoches like a worn-out, full-of-holes roof precariously hanging overhead, broken trunks, displaced pillows, pale lips, and so on. This point needs to be underlined. For, it is through such synecdoches that Manik projects a vision of a life which has only parts, indicating that the whole is yet to be restored, or at least, imaged. In other words, for Manik, parts are more real than wholes in life. This synecdochic imagination of Manik is yet another important stylistic feature to be found not only in this story, but also in other major novels he wrote. For example, in his famous *Padma Nadir Majhi*, there is no so-called 'classical' attempt on the part of Manik to evoke the 'whole' of the *Padma*, for such a 'whole' is an idealist illusion only; but there is an attempt to cling onto its parts - real, life-like, immediately accessible, and therefore, more intensely felt. The story *Atmahatya Adhikar* is tellingly replete with synecdoches that capture intense moments or drops of time, spots of space, and even voids more than any illusion of etern-

ity. The story's synecdoches also turn out to be metaphors and symbols at times. For example, the roof full of holes does not only stand for the whole house itself, but it also symbolises the quality of living. Nilmoni's family itself looks like that roof incapable of protecting itself from external dangers and attacks. It is indeed characteristic of Manik to work out a triple function of a single image: its synecdochic, symbolic and metaphorical functions. But, what is at the same time interesting to notice is that all such functions are intended to render the real as intensely as possible. In other words, the symbols and metaphors do never surpass or subvert the experiences and objects they symbolise and metaphorise.

Manik seems to be very careful about this, and never uses synecdoches, symbols and metaphors at the expense of realities. For example, in the story, what can be more real than man's direct confrontation with nature, with rains, with cold, with hunger and with threats of death?

This story is also one of existential and psychological struggles, not of course in the existentialist sense of the term.