



essay

Kabikantha and poetry movement in Bangladesh — III

by A Z M Haider

AS has been stated in earlier parts in the series, Kabikantha played a pivotal role in the poetry movement in this country. It stood like a big banian tree under the benign shadow of which little magazines like cherry plants sprouted, flourished and played their parts in advancing the cause of poetry movement in Bangladesh.

Kabikantha has all along been the rallying point of recognized and established poets who have made indelible imprint in the field of poetry in the decades of forties and fifties. But it has never discouraged, disregarded or cold-shouldered poets of younger generations. This poetry magazine, on the contrary, has always encouraged younger poets by accommodating their pieces in it.

Most of the elderly poets of the forties and fifties, who have withstood the rigours of age are still writing unabated. What is more, some of them, even after having reached sixties and seventies of their lives, are producing brilliant masterpieces to contribute to the enrichment of poetry in this country. These elderly poets are at the same time not averse to their successors. They do not lag behind in extending their blessings and back-up support to little magazines and poets of the succeeding generations to come up and make their mark in the field of poetry. They are found to be extremely generous in

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lending ungrudging support and encouragement to any new initiative in the field of poetry by younger poets of succeeding decades. Elderly poets like Syed Ali Ahsan, Abul Hossain, Shamsur Rahman, Fazal Shahabuddin, Al-Mahmud etc. not only make generous contributions to little magazines but also extend their unqualified support to younger poetry activists who sponsor little magazines.

In the decade of sixties Abdul Mannan Syed and Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed brought out two outstanding little magazines. The name of the little magazine brought out by Abdul Mannan Syed was "Charitrik", while Professor Abdullah Abu Syed's was "Khanthashar". It is a pity both the magazines died premature deaths partly due to paucity of fund and partly due to other difficulties.

The noticeable aspect of the little magazines including the ones stated

above was that they without exception tried to capture the ethos of the decade they were born in. The decade of sixties was a decade of rebellion against the prevailing political dispensation, economic exploitation and attempt at cultural regimentation. During that decade socialism, particularly of the Russian brand, raised hope in young poets of the sixties. Many of them thought mainly because of their ideological orientation that Russian socialism held key to their national emancipation from political and economic exploitations. The little magazines of the sixties, therefore made significant contribution to the national outcry for political autonomy. Thus their role in socio-political movement of the period was quite pronounced. But artistically speaking, the poets of the sixties pale into relative insignificance before their elders of the fifties. Nirmalendu Goon, Mahadev Shaha, Rafiq Azad etc. are major poets of the period.

The important poets of the seventies include Abid Azad, Shihab Sarkar, Rudra Mohammed Shahidullah, Al-Mujahidi. Abid Azad brought out a little magazine called "Shilpa Taru". This is considered the most remarkable magazine of the period. It is a decade of dramatic developments in national front. It was during this decade that Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign state committed to the inspiring ideal of democracy, human liberty and fundamental rights. Again it was during this period that this sublime ideal gave way to military dictatorship. The little magazines of this decade clearly reflected outright rejection of autocracy and despotism by the poets.

The decade of eighties saw the rise of a number of new poets including two women poets namely Nasima Sultana and Taslima Nasreen. Other notable poets of the period were Rezauddin Stalin, Aminur Rahman, Khandakar

Ashraf Hossain, Shakil Reza, Chanchal Ashraf, Raju Alim, Kamruzzaman, Mofazzal Karim etc. The poets of this decade continued with the tradition set by their predecessors. The most remarkable little magazine of the period was "Akabingsha" brought out by Khandakar Ashraf Hossain.

The conspicuous poets of the nineties are Pratarais and Sajjad Sharif. The notable aspect of the poets of nineties is that they have claimed to have set a trend towards, what they call, post-modernism in the poetry of Bangladesh. But their claim lacks logical explanation. The only plausible explanation that can be imparted to it is that some of the poets of the nineties by levelling themselves as post-modernists sought to assert their separate identity in the field of poetry. They want to impress upon their readers that they stand apart from their predecessors. The most remarkable little magazine of this period

is "Sundaram" edited by Professor Mustafa Nurul Islam. The poets of the eighties and nineties write side by side with their predecessors for this magazine.

The review of the poetry movement in this country will remain inconclusive without a reference to the role of the literary pages of our Bengali dailies behaving as it were like little magazines. Most of the little magazines are dead and gone. Only a few of them that have managed to survive are gaping for breath. The literary pages of the Bengali dailies are, therefore, required to plug in the vacuum left behind by little magazines.

But unlike little magazines, the literary pages of our Bengali newspapers, in particular have singularly failed to promote healthy poetry or, for that matter literary movement. They, on the contrary patronize groups of poets and writers of their own choice to draw them to their own camps.

Most of the Bengali newspapers have their own politics to play. Their literary pages are too inextricably tied to their politics to come out of it and take independent stand in the interest of nurturing sound and healthy literature in this country. In other words, the literary pages of our Bengali dailies tend to encourage writers and poets who subscribe to their politics. This trend will certainly impede growth of sound and healthy literary movement in this country.

book

Winding up of Jain Commission "smacked of a cover-up"

by Amitabha Roy Chowdhury

THE abrupt winding up of the Jain Commission by the I K Gujral government "smacked of a cover-up," as it sought to probe the financial dealings of controversial Godman Chandraswami and a key Tamil Tiger, says a just-published book on the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.

The commission asked for full details of Chandraswami's activities and the bank account of a key functionary of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Kumaran Padmanabhan alias "KP", in the now-defunct Bank of Commerce and Credit International (BCCI), says Rajeev Sharma in "Beyond the Tiger — Tracking the Rajiv Gandhi Assassination."

"The sit (special investigation team) hastily concluded that there was no link between this account and the assassination," he says.

"The Jain Commission had asked for further details about this account of KP as well as Chandraswami's seven accounts. Intelligence reports confirmed these were placed before the commission. The commission was constantly growing too uncomfortable for the political system," claims Sharma.

In the first week of February this

year, commission secretary D R Luthra sent a "secret" letter to union home secretary B P Singh seeking intercepts of LTTE coded message by Indian navy from 1988 onwards, complete details of Chandraswami's BCCI accounts and all intelligence bureau reports on Chandraswami from 1987 onwards.

The author maintains that the Chandraswami connection was 'murky' as a lot of damning reports were filed by the intelligence and revenue agencies regarding the activities of the tantrik.

"According to these intelligence reports, which were put up before the Jain Commission and find a mention in its final report, Chandraswami had at least seven accounts in the BCCI. These accounts were operated on his behalf by international arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi and Chandraswami's disciple R W Rolland.

"The accounts were in London and tax havens like Channel Islands and Monte Carlo. Chandraswami does not have any bank account in his name," the book says.

It alleges that inquiries by the Jain Commission have shown that from Monte Carlo massive financing was done by Khashoggi and others for gun-running from 1987 onwards.

"This leads to the vital question of financing of the assassination. Former

union minister Arif Mohammed Khan had in his testimony before Jain panel implicated Chandraswami and said the Godman had offered huge sums of money to an Israeli for assassinating Rajiv Gandhi.

"It is on record that seven LTTE front companies had accounts in the BCCI. During SIT's investigation one account of KP was found in the Bombay branch of the BCCI. The SIT hastily concluded that there was no link between this account and the assassination," it says.

Interestingly, the Jain Commission in its final report has recommended fresh investigations into the role of KP and Chandraswami in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination.

The A B Vajpayee government has already stated in parliament that it accepts this part of the Jain Commission recommendation and a Multi-Disciplinary Monitoring Agency (MDMA) would be constituted for the purpose.

"Beyond the Tigers" also gives details of the testimony of former cabinet secretary Zafar Saifullah before the Jain Commission which gave a sensational twist to the conspiracy probe. Saifullah told the commission that he was aware of the existence of certain wireless messages of the LTTE which were intercepted by the Indian navy and IB and decoded.

"These messages, intercepted between 1990 and 1991 before the assassination, had emanated from LTTE bases in Sri Lanka and offices in Western Europe and were meant for some parties in India. These messages indicated the nexus between the LTTE, Mossad, Chandraswami and Subramanian Swami," Saifullah told the Jain panel.

Saifullah, who was cabinet secretary for about a year in 1993-94, said this in a sworn statement on the basis of personal knowledge.

Beyond the Tigers: Tracking Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. Author: Rajeev Sharma, published by Kaveri Books, pp 278, Price: Rs 395)

"The centre denied there ever were such message and even refuted that the navy was ever involved in wireless interception. It virtually burnt its fingers when an affidavit was filed before the commission to this effect," the book says.

A former army general and top officers of the navy testified before the Jain panel on oath and maintained that the two services had been intercepting LTTE wireless messages.

Besides, from the records of the directorate general of military intelligence which were given to the commission for some other purpose, it was

found that the navy had intercepted some important message exchanged between the Tigers in Tamil Nadu and Jafna during May-June 1988.

According to the book, these intercepts revealed the attempts by the LTTE to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi in Madras. It was three years before they finally got him.

One message talked about planting of explosives on a bridge through which Rajiv Gandhi was to pass. Another pertained to the Tiger's plan to greet Rajiv Gandhi with a garland of bullets, the author claims in the book.

"Why did the government lie? By this stand it effectively prevented a deeper probe into the LTTE-Mossad web which is suspected to have entangled many prominent Indians in it," says Sharma. It was against this backdrop that the commission had asked Gujral government for another extension even though it had already secured 12 extensions.

"There were influential functionaries in the Gujral government who were desperate to wind up the commission," the book says adding "however, the authorities concerned kept telling the officials till the evening of February 27, 1998 that the request for extension would be granted and it was a matter of time when orders to this effect were issued."

"It was the most unexpected order which lay in store for the commission. Around 11 pm on February 27, 1998 the office of Nikhil Kumar, special secretary in the home ministry, was abuzz activity."

"Kumar wrote to Luthra saying that the government had examined the matter and had decided not to grant any extension to the panel... it was an unusual decision, more so because Gujral's was a caretaker government. It had no right to take such a major decision. The move smacked off a cover-up," the book says.

"Most surprisingly there was no official protest from the congress party."

However, according to the book, the matters did not end here.

"A senior minister in the Gujral government asked justice Jain over telephone to submit a draft report instead of a full-fledged one as the commission did not have much time left."

Obviously a draft report would have come in handy because a draft report does not have to be placed before parliament. It also does not warrant an action take report (ATR). The book says the Jain Commission remained undaunted by the stiff deadline of one week set by the government and submitted its final report on march seven this year.

fiction

The Abandonment

By Saeif Morshed

THE acid tab began its pulsating voyage around one thirty am during a programme showing music promos. It seemed to enliven Susan's senses from the right side of her body gradually acidifying its way to the controls at the top of the summit (the grey matter). Her floodlit eyes started to sharpen their vision whilst remaining in a rigid position. Body movements could only be done in a more robotic and slow-motioned process. Her ears seemed to deafen and then come back to normal ability in the same way when yawning. Moreover, the grey matter started to become devoid, waiting for input to process new thoughts.

Susan continued to be glued to the TV screen. Another pop video was showing, picturing images of children in Halloween masks who seemed to be lurching over trying to entice her into their 14 inch world.

Minor hallucinations such as these would have been fine to cope with, but something more foreboding was transpiring. Behind the visual display an internal maleficance was lurking. Her

body began to feel anaesthetised as if cursed by a lepers woes. It she tried to cross her emotionally dead legs together, the feeling that she was making an incision into of her limbs arose. Resting her slender back on a cupboard wall made the spine feel that it was bending beyond recognisable shape, to a certain point before the insurmountable pleasure would break it into pieces. The same process as a child bending a ruler waiting for its imminent breaking point. There was now no drunkenness in her tainted soul but an unknown sensation was billowing like chimney smoke through her insides. This macabre being could be felt breeding its sullen hatred.

The drug of the Woodstock festival had taken over the asylum. Susan knew she could not let the easy rider take control giving her the unwanted privilege of hallucinatory powers. Death was by her side, caressing her insensated body, giving it a white glow of extreme coldness. How she wished for the night to be over. For the sun to shine its hazy rays over her death stricken body.

In order to survive and see the morning sun, a battle would have to be commenced against her debutante drug. The



ability to hallucinate would have to be smothered by a determined attempt to transmit normal thoughts into her mind. With prayers of sugar — sweet saccharine levels of devotion to God — to console and keep her at ease a bout of

furious concentration was commenced to try and destroy this sinister being. The sound on the picture box was up to try and distract her from the turmoil within while the process of going to sleep turned was discounted in fear of it

being an eternal slumber.

The technicolour image provider however was doing its best to try and remind Susan of the anguish and the dark side that she was facing that mundane September night. A supposed salacious looking S&M woman was piercing her left nipple in order to place an earring on it. A feeling of vomit was threatening to emit from Susan's now sober month. All that was needed now was Darth Vader to appear on the screen and she would believe that the Dark Side had indeed infiltrated her room.

To overcome this despondency, Susan decided to avert her eyes from the TV and stare towards one of the poster on the wall, which seemed less threatening: a poster of REM's Michael Stipe during their Out of Time period. Usually this poster of the singer holding a rose under each eye was quite pleasant to look at possibly even quixotic. Tonight, however with acid in heart and mind it became the most terrifying thing in her room.

Looking through the vocalist's vapid blue eyes with hazy light obscuring the pupils-Susan was in a trance visualising flames, not signalling hell but for some unknown reason the beginning of

Apocalypse Now with the Doors 'The End' playing in her ears. Was Jim Morrison entrancing her to the other side in his own mystical fashion?

It was three o'clock in the morning and the suffering was still refusing to depart. Windsurfers were now strutting their stuff on the picture box, surfing through endless waves under a resplendent blue sky illuminating the 14-inch screen David Lean style. Susan was now on the verge of absolute despondence as the consternation was multiplying twofold causing a teenage girl to continually flashback through her past, isolating the good times and cherishing them whole heartedly due to the feeling that her last breath was near.

Memories were flooding in now. The time when she kissed her first boy friend holding the car park of the nearby multiplex cinema. The time when she won her sportsday award for best athlete in primary school. The time when she smoked her first cigarette and actually inhaled properly, leaving her head to swirl round for the next twenty minutes — the same feeling when swinging round and round as a kid to the point of sustained dizziness.

To be continued