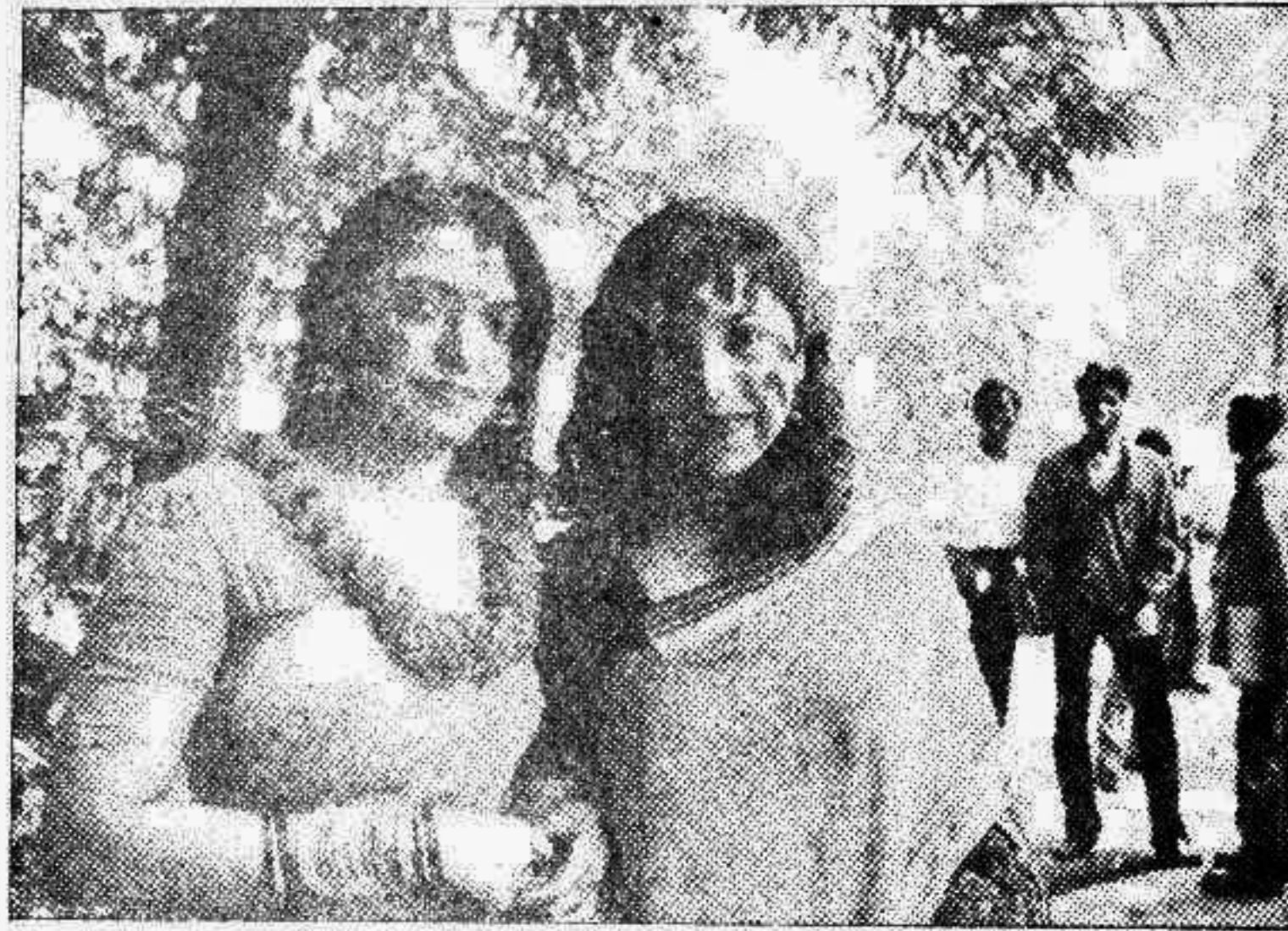


# Saying it with a Smile

A photo feature by Zahedul I Khan



The 1<sup>st</sup> of Falgoun in the Bangla calendar means the advent of springtime across the land washed by the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna. In Dhaka, spring comes with a smile as people of all ages through the Art Institute campus for a day-long festival of music, poetry and whatever else takes their fancy.



## Freedom Fighters They Were, Still Fighting They Are

From Delwar Kabir

**JHENIDAH:** Dreams of an independent motherland inspired them to take up weapons against the Pakistani occupation forces in 1971. They dared death in their struggle for freedom. They didn't even ask themselves what was in it for them. Urge for freedom swept away petty individual interest.

Now, twenty-seven years after the country won her independence, they are the ones in shackles, in the shackles of poverty, hapless and helpless, some of them have even taken to begging.

Golam Sarwar is one of them. Sarwar, a resident of Baroihuda village in Bogura



Chand Ali (left), Rowshan Ali (right) and Abdul Hakim (bottom) fought against the Pakistani occupation forces for the country's independence. Now they are neglected, condemned to death in misery.



union of Saikupa thana, went to Chakulia training camp in Bihar for guerrilla training and was provided with anti-personnel mine, anti-tank mine, jumping mine, various explosives and fire arms. A vibrant youth in his late twenties, Sar-

war fought against the occupied Pakistani forces and their followers at Abhatpur, Alfapur, Saikupa and other places under Sector 8 and killed many enemies of the land.

He used to be a farmer before the War of Liberation. Now an unemployed, he does not have a place to stay with his five children.

Independence has not brought good days for Abdul Hakim either. So hurt and humiliated has the 60-year-old felt for being ignored by the government that he no longer claims to be a freedom fighter.

There is no difference between the ruling party and opposition as the fate of the freedom fighters are not changed even after 28 years of independence," said Hakim, a resident of Panchpakhia village in Abhatpur union under Saikupa thana.

Hakim, 32 in 1971, trained with the Ansars and became a commander.

"I did not go to India. I was in Sector 8 and fought against the occupation forces under the guidance of late Abu, Ahmed (Sona Molla), Rahmat Ali Manta and Dabiruddin Joarder at Alfapur, Abhatpur and Saikupa," recalled Hakim.

The freedom fighter is now a gharani, engaged in making thatched houses. At times, when there is no work, he begs. Like Sarwar, he lives on the bank of the GK canal with his wife and four children.

Chand Ali of Kripalpur is 64. He leads no less miserable a life. The hands which once held arms against the occupation forces are now engaged in making baskets and other utensils made of bamboo. What he earns is hardly enough for his family. He has six children.

Chand Ali, like Hakim who was also trained as an Ansar and was part of Sector 8, gets one hundred taka per month as an allowance for senior citizens.

Syed Ali Biswas, in his mid-seventies, summed up the sentiments of his fellow Ansar warriors of 1971, who deserve quiet and secured life but are struggling for survival every day. "Independence was our dream. We fought the war to have our dreams come true. We are now neglected. Influential people in the village have even deprived us of the allowance for senior citizens."

Biswas trained for two months in Bihar and upon return he fought under the command of Dabiruddin Joarder and Golam Mostafa.

Biswas now works as gharani but his own house is in shambles. Struggle continues for the freedom fighter and his wife and four children.

More painful is the story of Rowshan Ali, whose very name triggered off fear among the Pakistani soldiers and their local allies. Now, his body partially paralysed, Ali of Panchpakhia village in Abhatpur union of Saikupa thana, depends on the mercy of local people for survival.

In 1971, he trained as part of the Mujahid Bahini and fought under the command of Sona Molla. He participated in at least 11 encounters with the enemies of the country and killed at least 40 rajakars, six Pakistani soldiers and two officers.

The hands that held a light machine gun (LMG) in those days are almost immobile. All now waits for death to put an end to his misery.

Golam Sarwar, Abdul Hakim, Chand Ali, Syed Ali Biswas, Rowshan Ali have all fought the war for the country's independence. They got rid of the enemies, risking their lives everyday in the nine months of war. In the twilight of their lives, they are neglected and condemned to death in misery.



Taking vows for a better tomorrow ... girls, mostly from poor families, during an assembly at a school in a remote village of Magura.

## Education Reaches Poor Girls in Remote Areas

From Monojit K Das

**MAGURA:** Enrollment of rural girls in schools has marked a remarkable rise in the district in recent times due to creation of social awareness of female education among the rural people including the landless and the marginal farmers.

Only a few years, girls from poor families in remote villages in Sadar, Sripur, Shalikhia, Muhammadpur thanas could not even think of going to schools like the boys in their families.

The government as well as non-government organisations (NGOs) like BRAC have established educational institutions in remote villages of the district to facilitate female education.

Mohammad Janab Ali, a day-labourer of Chaturia, a remote village, in Sripur thana, told this correspondent that girls in his families could only dream of taking the SSC examinations a decade back. In 1995, his daughter, Sufia Khatun, became the first girl in the village to pass the SSC examinations from Nabadaya Girls' High School. Inspired by Sufia's success, her younger sister and her friends are now more serious about school, he added.

According to sources in BRAC's non-formal primary education (NFPE) wing in

Magura, several schools have been established in remote villages to educate children of the poor families, especially the girls. A large number of girls have already been enrolled in secondary schools after completion of primary education from these schools. Several hundred female teachers in the NFPE schools are also a source of inspiration for the girls. The NFPE has also set up Grameen Library for the Children.

Hasina Khatun, a teacher at an NFPE school in Masalia village in Sripur thana, said the number of girls coming from poverty-stricken families in the area for education was on the rise.

According to Mohammad Nazimuddin, a secondary school teacher, the female secondary stipend project has gone a long way towards creating awareness about education and attracting girls to secondary education. Under the project a student gets not only free education but also financial assistance. Roy Himanshu Shekhar, an experienced teacher of Tikerbila High School, was of the same opinion, attributing increase in the number of female students in secondary education to the success of the stipend project.

In this profession since 1968, Shekhar has witnessed the change of parents' attitude towards female education. Only two decades, enrolling their daughters in schools was beyond their imagination, he said. Now many girls from poor families in these villages have not only completed SSC but also gone on to study in colleges and universities, he observed.

Mohammad Mujibur Rahman, chairman of Tikerbila High School, told this correspondent that a large number of girls from these villages did brilliant results in different examinations. His younger daughter has completed her university education and joined a government college as a teacher.

According to official sources at the district education office, several girls high schools have been set up in the rural areas. Number of women in the teaching staff has also marked a remarkable rise as more and more female graduates take teaching as a profession.

In near future, more girls will enrol in different schools, experts believe, as the importance of education has finally dawned on the poor parents of the district.

## In Ruins a Glorious Past

By Staff Correspondent

**MAGURA:** Raja Sita Ram Roy's archaeological antiquities of Muhammadpur in Magura district have been ruined for lack of proper preservation.

Raja Sita Ram Roy was one of the independent rulers of Bengal. By dint of heroism and courage Sita Ram became the ruler of Bhushna and he dreamt of making his domain independent.

According to the map of Mr Renel, the then Bhushna was situated in a portion of Jessore and Faridpur districts. There are many myths about Raja Sita Ram in the areas.

Mr Westland was able to recover some real information about Sita Ram. Sita Ram was born in 1628. Dayamoyee was his mother. Udaynarayan, his father worked in Rajmahal Nawab estate. He was then appointed Sajjal in Bhushna Paragana. Udaynarayan belonged to an estate latter. He set up his residence at Harihar village by the Madhumoti river.

Sita Ram received education in Dhaka. He became expert in art of fencing. After completing education he returned in Bhushna and engaged himself to check attacks by pirates. His struggle against the pirates and local anarchists, reinstated law and order in the area. He was titled Raja by the Nawab of Bengal because of his heroic feats. He became ruler the of Bhushna.

Raja Sita Ram shifted his capital from Bhushna to Muhammadpur. As the story goes, Muhammadpur was named after the name a pious fakir called Muhammad Shah. There, he built a well protected castle, a Palace, many temples and dighis. Sita Ram's contribution made most of areas of Muhammadpur flourish.

Raja Sita Ram Roy tried to expand his areas. He acquired many areas of the Parganas of Nasirshahi, Nasaratshahi, Mahimshahi Belgachi defeating the Zaminders of the said areas. He refused to pay taxes to the emperor of the Mughal and he declared himself as an independent ruler. As a result, the

controversy rose between Raja and Foudjar of Bhushna, who was appointed by Nawab Murshidkuli Khan. A battle took place on the bank of Barashi river between Sita Ram and Foudjar Abu Torab. Abu Torab was defeated and killed in this battle. To avenge Abu Torab's death, Bakhs Ali was sent as the Foudjar of Bhushna accompanied a large number of soldiers by Nawab Murshidkuli Khan. Another battle took place on the bank of Madhumoti river. Sangram Singh, Dayaram and other commanders of Mughal Bahini joined Bakhs Ali. Zaminders of adjacent areas like Dighapatia were also against Sita Ram as some parts of their lands were occupied by him. Sita Ram won in the battle of Bhushna in the first round. But the foudjar gaining strength by increasing the number of soldiers besieged the castle of Sita Ram.

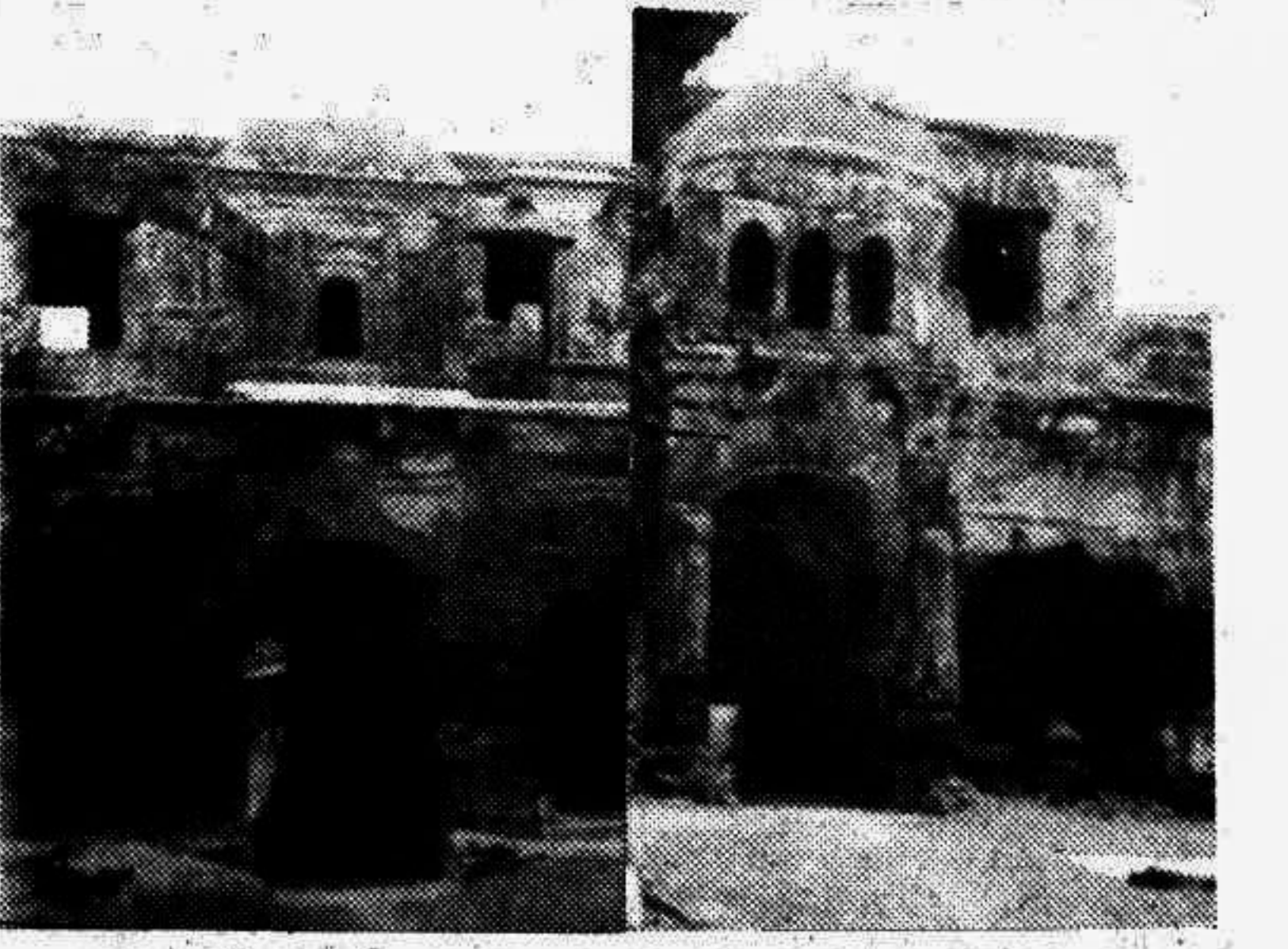
Sita Ram was able to escape towards Muhammadpur with some soldiers. He decided to fight against Nawab's Bahini with the help of Ramrup Ghosh who was also known as Menahati because of his strength and heroism. But for Sita Ram it only remained a dream as Menahati was assassinated by the Nawab's soldiers at Domancha in Muhammadpur.

Sita Ram was defeated and held captive by the Nawab Bahini in the castle of Muhammadpur. He was sent to Murshidabad and sentenced to death.

Today, most of the archaeological antiquities of Muhammadpur are in the ruins.

The British and Pakistanis did not take any initiative to protect the historical places of Raja Sita Ram. The Archaeological Department of Bangladesh did nothing to preserve the ancient places of Sita Ram Raja's period either.

This correspondent visited the areas and saw that most of the archaeological spots of Raja Sita Ram's have been ruined due to lack of preservation. Kachari Bari and temple adjacent to Muhammadpur Thana head-quarters are lying unheared.



Here lived once a great king and here is dying his memories.