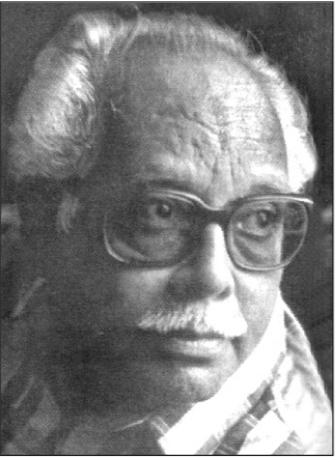


The voice of Mukulbhai is stilled, long live Charampatra

During the war days of 1971, his radio broadcast made millions find hope and courage

AFSAN CHOWDHURY



And now he is gone or maybe liberated from all the bodily ailments. I would like to think he is somewhere amongst the radio waves and ether, reading out Charampatra to an eternal audience who in its darkest days had found hope and comfort in his words and voice.

A roaring life

Mukulbhai led ten lives cramped into one. He had every kind of story to tell and they ranged from escaping to India to flee from police in 1952 to

he crossed the border bought some peanuts and chewed them and laughed in relief lying on the grass - to the frightening days of April 1971 as he made his way to India on a rickshaw with his family and came upon an insanely enraged mob who had killed all Pakistanis and Biharis, and one fellow whose father had been killed had ripped out the heart of an army officer and chewing it in revenge and grief cried.

"Pasee re pasee, captain saber koljeta pasee (I have it, I have got Mr. Captain's heart)." They were not nice times and he never flinched in retelling They were part of his life.

After returning to Bangladesh in probably 1980 and starting a transport business and later branching into publishing, he relished talking about his bloodied hands after a hard day at a leather cutting shop in London after 1975 when he lost his job as the Press Counselor in the BHC there. He would laugh loudly and share the irony and he was in a way as proud of his troubles as he was of his success. No regrets.

"I lived in the old city for long and knew the culture. The sense of neighbourhood and social camaraderie is high. In almost every para there was a Chokku Miah and a Meramot Mia -- and I just transplanted them into my script. They were part of my cultural ambience and had a universality that touched everyone."

Of course these two were the most celebrated characters not only in our history of radio but in the literature of 1971 as well. They found their way into his books too.

Of course he was a hustler in some sense too, but he never bothered to hide that. During the Ershad era he landed close to him, became important, and later led the final stage of the Liberation War History project. This was not a happy phase because he ran into management problems and in a way peace returned in his new life as a publisher of Sagar publishers, with his best friend and companion, his son Sagar in tow.

These were less rumbling waters and he slowly slowed down and as bad gained the upper hand, he too became slightly distant. When I met him he was on his final lap.

Radio's finest hour

I had told him that our research showed that the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra was the most popular radio at any time and his programme the most popular too. I suppose he knew it and didn't need a researcher to tell him that. But he had shown the immense possibility of radio too.

On that day when we were chatting, there was load shedding and we talked in candle light. I then asked him to recite a few lines from Charampatra. He refused. I gently pleaded. And then suddenly the voice, the words, the memory were all back. He was reciting the final script, the one read out on December 16 describing the end of Pakistan and it was yesterday once more. After all these years I could sense the power and the magic of that great broadcasting. I used that clip in the inaugural episode of my series and it was a big hit, coming across with all its aplomb, zaniness, crudity, and relevance. It was radio for all, I suppose the only time radio really became the voice of the people.

His final words were somber. "I don't think the poor peasant who gave the most in this war got a fair deal. We urban elite have no complaints, but it didn't become the poor peasant's state." I hope our book on 1971 will carry the full interview but nothing can carry the voice.

And now he is gone or maybe liberated from all the bodily ailments that plagued him. He is free now. I would like to think he is somewhere amongst the radio waves and ether, reading out Charampatra to an eternal audience who in its darkest days had found hope and comfort in his words and voice.

Good-bye Mukulbhai.

Circles of self-interest hide the truth in Iraq



HARUN UR RASHID

the US force that looks after the security situation in the country. It reminds me of what Shakespeare once said that a rose is a rose whatever name you call it.

On June 28, the US administrator Paul Bremer left Baghdad hurriedly and secretly. Meanwhile two changes have been made by the Bush administration in respect of its personnel in Iraq. The US strong man in Baghdad will be the US Ambassador Negroponte, replacing Paul Bremer. Another is the replacement of three-star

Furthermore, the US Secretary General Kofi Annan decided not to send UN team to Baghdad because of the serious security situation in the country. Obviously he does not

Minister Nasreen Berwari admitted, "The reconstruction story has not been all we hoped for." Rick Barton, a co-director of the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington reportedly said: "We haven't done what we said we would do."

In recent days, life in Iraq has reportedly come to standstill. Dozens of new security checkpoints have been thrown up across the country and foreigners were told to stay in their fortified compounds, Iraqis are being advised not to leave their homes and local curfews are being imposed. There is now a speculation that martial law may be declared in Iraq. People are asking whether martial law is a new form of democracy and freedom as assured by the Bush administration for new Iraq.

Barry Rubin, the director of the Global Research Centre in International Affairs in Israel reportedly says that the US blundering in Iraq has discredited the idea of democracy itself and set back for years the prospects for democracy in the region.

To restore infrastructures in Iraq, the World Bank said that it could cost US\$47 billion. A revised estimate figure is now thrown at US\$150 billion. This amount is far in excess of the US\$12 to 15 billion Iraq will receive in yearly oil revenue. But frequent sabotage of oil pipes both in the south and in the north of Iraq exposes the vulnerability of oil revenues.

It is reported that 54 per cent of Americans also believe that it is an error of judgment for President Bush to attack Iraq, a jump from 41 per cent early this month. About 55 per cent said that war had not made the US any safer from terrorism. US military deaths passed 850 since the war began and well over 5000 have been wounded. An estimated 11,000 Iraqis died and up to 40,000 are believed wounded.

Iraq has become a "hot potato" that President Bush is eager to toss to other hands. But he can't because from the very beginning Iraq's war had no approval of the UN. It is an illegal war under international law. Former President Clinton could not remain silent when he criticised President Bush for not allowing UN weapon inspectors to complete their search for Iraq's suspected weapons of mass destruction. Many believe that had there been no halting of Florida vote counting during the 2000 President election by the US Supreme Court, history would have been different for the US and Iraq.

BOTTOM LINE

Nothing will change from June 28 because the US will run Iraq with an "Iraqi face". Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi cannot hide the fact that the US is sending another 15 thousand soldiers to Iraq after more than one year since its occupation.

Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez (who has been allegedly involved by the Abu Ghraib prisoner scandal) by a four-star General George Casey. The very fact that a higher officer from the army has been assigned to Iraq demonstrates clearly that the resistance in Iraq has become such a serious problem for the Bush administration that it needs a full army General.

The new US Army General Casey, who will head the US armed forces in Iraq, came out with a statement that the US was surprised at strength of Iraqi resistance. Appearing before the Senate, General Casey conceded that "the insurgency is much stronger than I certainly would have anticipated."

Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi cannot hide the fact that the US is sending another 15 thousand US soldiers to Iraq after more than one year since its occupation. Iraq will declare autonomy or independence, setting a precedent for its own 15 million Kurds. In Saudi Arabia, the royal family sits atop a smoldering volcano of dissent and opposition that is fuelled by images of turmoil and torture in Iraq. At a recent programme on CNN with Arab media and others, it was clear that no one supported the US policy in Iraq and they all agreed that it was a mistake for President Bush to invade Iraq. In fact terrorism has increased across the world because of it.

The US planned its post-war planning poorly and has failed to meet many of its own goals. There is not enough electricity or sewerage facilities in cities, unemployment is unacceptably high and most importantly people don't feel safe. Iraq's interim Public Works

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