

The stellar role of cultural activists in our Liberation War

Rekindling hope through music

Anwar Pervez talks about his invaluable patriotic song

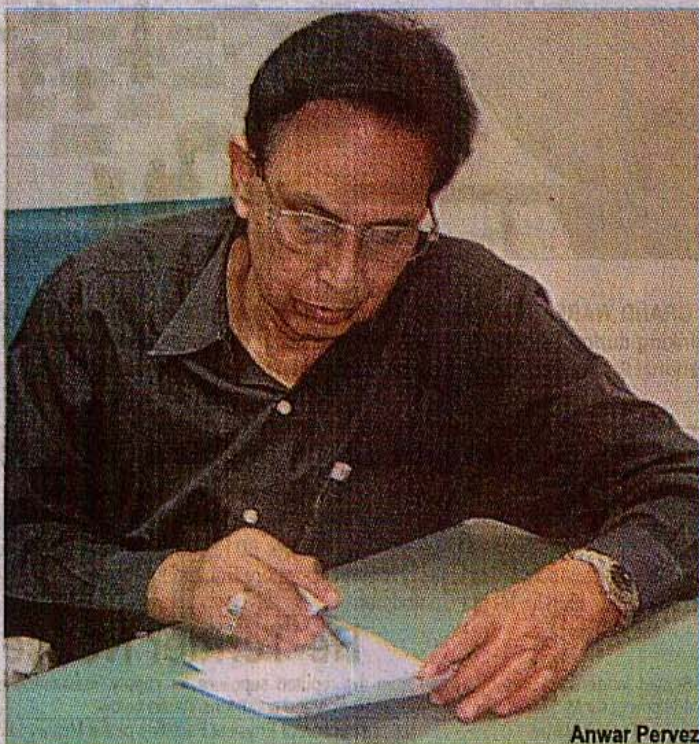
SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

It was late in the night, sometime during October 1970. The entire country was going through a tumultuous time during the non-cooperation movement.

Anwar Pervez, a composer of hardly 26 years of age, had by this time, gained acclaim. Director Fakhrul Alam had asked him to compose a song for his film *Joy Bangla*. The song would have to reverberate with the emotional storm that was cloaking the country at that time.

While I hummed a tune, Gazi Mazharul Anwar was quick in writing the lyrics. The house where we sat to write the lyrics was situated right beside the Sangsad Bhaban. While we worked on the tune, we could hear the footsteps of the military somewhere around the corner. Fearing arrest we waited till the heavy steps faded away. Each second seemed like a lifetime. But our excitement spurred us on and within the next half-hour, we had put the finishing touches to what would later become a priceless song. It was not that the song was composed for any particular party. It was rather composed at a time when people were united under a single banner for a common cause— independence, says Anwar.

When a composer sits down with a song, he has to depend on his basic instincts and his "third eye". That is his vision must not only focus on the context of the song, but also on the impact the song would have on the listeners. So, when I was asked to compose a tune for the particular film, the first thing I visualised was the half-fed and half-clad people in distress, having lost all hope of livelihood, but still holding dear the hope of independence. And I wanted to create a tune that would



Anwar Pervez

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re-ignite that hope into an engulfing flame.

I could not hold back my emotions as I went over the song, chord by chord. The air around the artists was highly charged. Abdul Jabbar, my sister Shahnaz Rahmatullah and a few other artists lent their voice to the song. The song was recorded

throughout the chilly night on a mono-recording system, at the International Recording Studio at Indira Road. Given the extreme limitations in the facilities, the final magic came from the chief recordist Abdul Majid. The song *Joy Bangla Banglar Joy* took less than an hour to materialise from simply an idea into

rolls of tape' went on Anwar Pervez. 'When we came out of the studio it was almost dawn. To our amazement we found out that a huge group was waiting outside the studio, chanting slogans. We had to disperse quickly, fearing army intervention. And our fears were not misplaced: Such was the tension at that time, the movie title had to be temporarily changed to *Sanghar*'.

But despite all the hurdles, it brings me to tears when I realise the millions of muktabahinis who had probably listened to that song, bruised and bloodied, lying camouflaged in the trenches. Even if for a moment that song had brought hope and inspiration, that would be an achievement worth a lifetime to me.

The Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra played a vital role during the Liberation War. Apart from news, it presented skits and the inspirational songs to keep the spirits high at the camps. *Joi Bangla Banglar Joy* was the opening and closing song of the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra for nine months. Then there were countless other invaluable songs of other composers like *Purbio Digontey Shurjo Uthechey*, *Jonotari Shongram Mora Ekti Phul Key Bachabo Boley*, that continued to inspire.

Having contributed so much to his priceless songs, such as *Ekbir Jetye De Na Amaar Chotto Shonaar Gaye*, *Amai Jodi Proshno Koro*, *Ektara tui Desher Kotha Bolre*, *She Jey Keno Elo Na*, and many more, it's perhaps strange that Anwar Parvez has rarely come into the public eye. No awards decorate his bookshelves, no plaques his walls. He seems visibly moved when asked why for the last 30 years the audience has not had a chance to see him, especially at the podiums of the Bijoy Dibosh celebrations. Maybe he has chosen to shy away. Should we?

Keeping alive the spirit of Liberation War on films

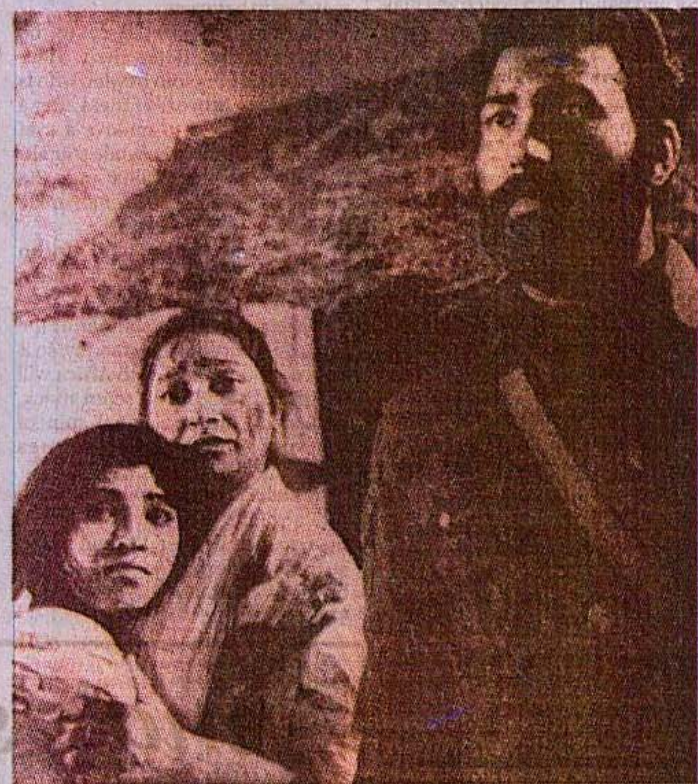
Chashi Nazrul and his inspiring creations

ERSHAD KAMOL

Chashi Nazrul Islam is the director of the first full-length movie on our freedom struggle— *Ora Egaro Jon*. This mainstream cinema director has also made few other popular films on the Liberation War such as *Shongram*, *Hangor Nadi Granade* and *Megher Pore Megh*.

Commenting on *Ora Egaro Jon*, Chashi says, '*Ora Egaro Jon* is a milestone in our film industry. If this film had not been made the masses would have missed the spirit of the freedom struggle. I got the idea of the theme from the 11-point demand of the students, which motivated our

of the performers and crew of the film are freedom fighters. In February 1972, we started work on the film. In those days, it was really difficult to make a film on the Liberation War. We had no dummy ammunition or explosives to picture a credible war scene. I got huge support from two people— cinematographer MA Samad and actor Khosru. We did not have much technical support. However, by using his experience and vast knowledge, Samad Bhai could overcome the limitations. Khosru lead all other performers in the war scenes by using real arms and explosives, which is the main aspect of the film.'



R-L: Khasru, Sumita Devi and Sabita in *Ora Egaro Jon*

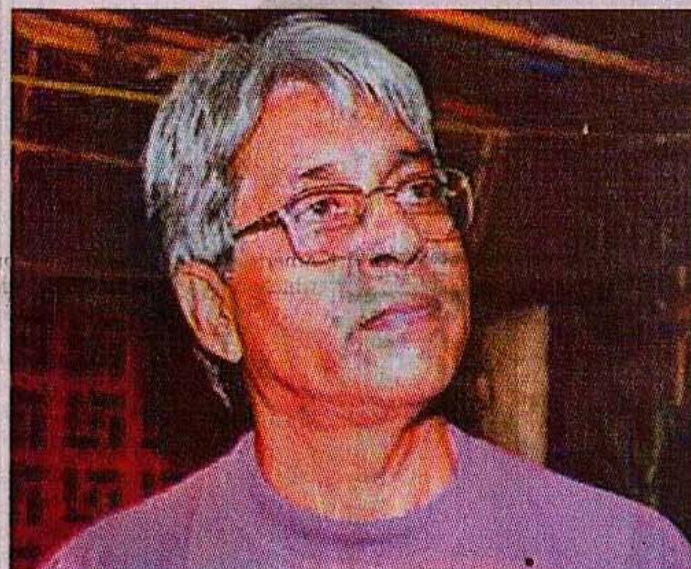
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leaders to call for Independence. Moreover, the 11 heroes in the film represent the 11 sectors of our freedom struggle.

I formulated the plan to make the film during the Liberation War. Most

heads.

But, Chashi was fortunate to get support from the Bangladesh Army during the making of his second film on our Liberation War—*Shongram*, which was made in 1973. *Shongram*



Chashi Nazrul Islam

depicts the contribution of the military personalities, who made a immense contribution during our Liberation War. And it was a better work than the earlier one.

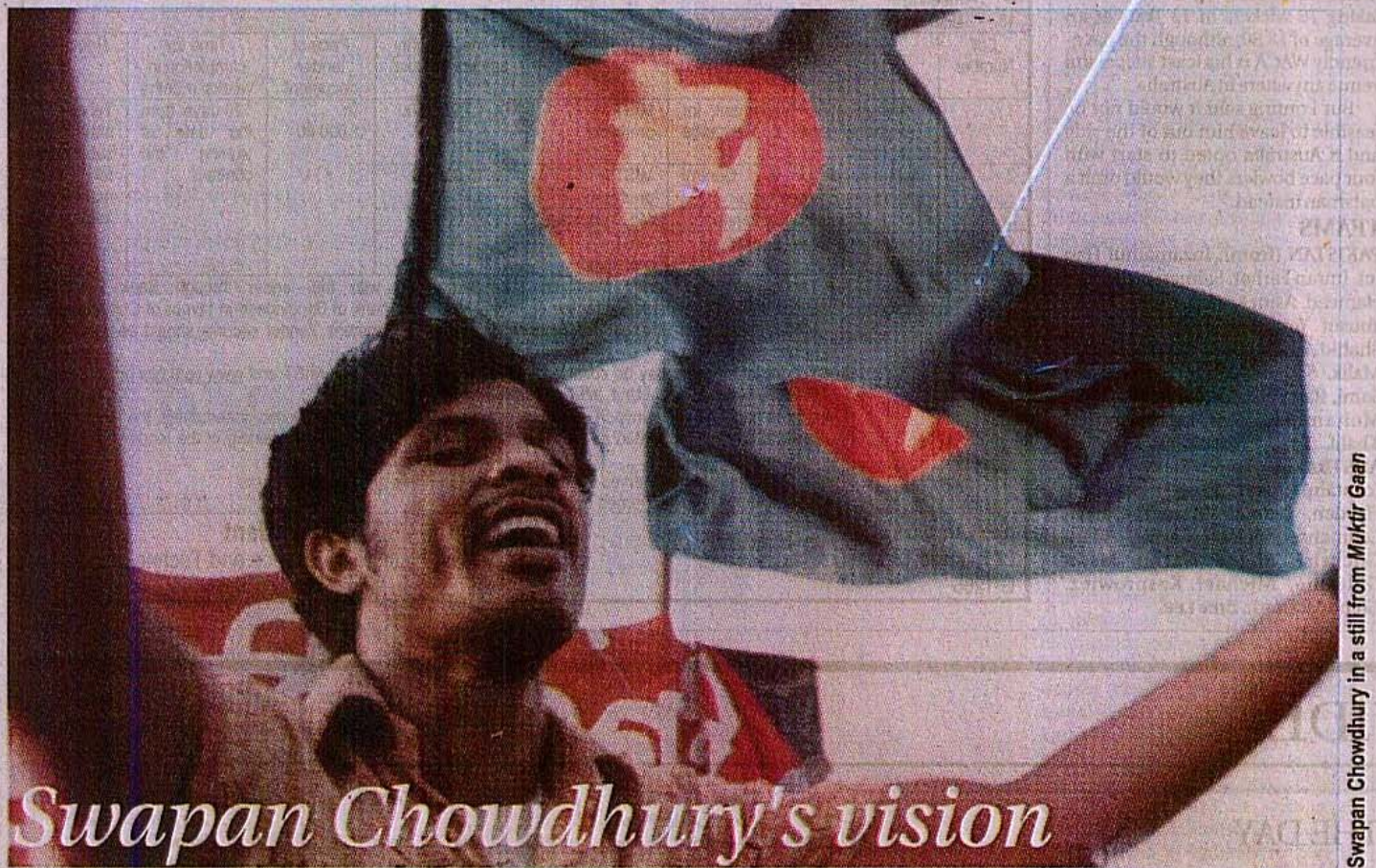
In *Hangor Nadi Granade*, based on Selina Hossain's novel, Chashi has presented the freedom struggle from a different angle. The film is basically narrative and few war scenes were shown logically. More than reality, Chashi tried to catch the emotion of the viewers in the film. *Hangor Nadi Granade* is the tale of an elderly lady who sacrifices her only son to save the life of two 'freedom' fighters. For this movie, Chashi got an award at the national level. Chashi says, 'National award was introduced in Bangladesh in 1976. As I made the other two films before introduction of national award, I did not get an award.'

Recently, Chashi has made another film on our war for freedom. Based on Rabeya Khatun's story, the movie *Megher Pore Megh* presents the contemporary time, though the Liberation War plays a

vital role in the film.

However, Chashi Nazrul Islam is frustrated with the preservation system of these films at Bangladesh Film Archive (BFA). According to Chashi, BFA is a kind of 'warehouse'. He says, 'BFA has no proper preservation system. As a result many good movies, which serve as important documents, in the process are destroyed. Maximum films like *Ora Egaro Jon*, *Shongram* and others are not in a position to be screened. After taking the reprint of the negatives of these films, those reprinted negatives should be preserved properly in the archive. Otherwise there will be no documents for the future generation.'

Chashi is currently not making any new film on the Liberation War but intends to do so in the future. He thinks, more films should be made on this issue to generate awareness among the future generation. 'The history of our Liberation War should be regularly screened in the electronic media,' says Chashi.



Swapan Chowdhury in a still from *Muktr Gan*

Swapan Chowdhury's vision of the warfront

FAYZA HAQ

'When the War of Liberation began there were many artists working in Calcutta, Delhi and Patna in 1971,' reminisces Swapan Chowdhury, sitting at his Parjatan office. 'With me were Devdas Chokroborty, Nitun Kundu, Nasser, Kaji Ghias, Hashi Chokroborty and Biren Shome. I had graduated from the Dhaka Art College and sang on trucks and painted pictures. Most of the artists left their paintings behind but I brought all

my paintings to Dhaka,' he said. Swapan Chowdhury said that he was a firm believer in art for art's sake. He doesn't believe that there has to be social or political drive behind a painting. In his view, the quality of good paintings have been maintained since the ancient times as seen in Ellora, Ajanta (both in India) and Altamira (Spain). 'I did not want to take my paintings to the battlefield but to bring the war to my canvases. There is love and romanticism even in the war scenes. I have

also expressed my hate for my enemy. I have depicted this through lines, colours, symbols and posed figures. There is not a single delineation of a gun in all my 200 paintings. I haven't brought in tanks or planes. I have shown woman's figures, eagles, vultures all fighting against the common enemy. I show every one fighting against a monstrous animal, the enemy.'

Swapan Chowdhury hasn't shown just the rape of a woman but her torment and screams. After the war, when he went to paint, he found that the people who were fighting against terror and injustice were themselves involved in wrongdoing. He found that the freedom fighters had joined hands with the Razakars and so he had no desire to paint anymore on the theme of the Liberation War.

Swapan Chowdhury hopes to give his paintings on the War to a new Liberation War Museum. The only understanding would be that the pictures be preserved properly. Asked why he had not given his paintings to the existing Liberation War museum, he said that the authorities did not want them, perhaps due to lack of room to preserve the paintings. On the occasion of the 25th year of Bangladesh's existence the paintings had been exhibited at the Shilpakala Academy.

In Swapan Chowdhury's works, a good number of drawings have

topsy-turvyed forms in tempera and pastel as well as abstractions. In them we feel that the artist has metaphorically walked through the roads of Calcutta with the bleeding map of Bangladesh labelled on his chest. Forms of suffering human beings have been transformed to have new meanings on his canvas. Deformation of shapes brings new meanings to ordinary figures and shapes. The fineness of his lines together with the many dimensional shapes gives new meanings to his subjects. As he breaks his figures he gets stylised forms. In *War in Bengal* we find human forms, birds and animals fighting against a common enemy, a giant black horse. In *Mother* we see a woman fighting with her child against a demon serpent. *Horrible city* presents nude women swimming through a blood drenched city. *Love and war* is an amalgamation of forms in the shape of horses, serpents and humans to show the struggle of the war. *Joy of victory* has simple human forms, spears in hands, leaping and floating to victory.

He had painted a 27-foot painting and this work, inaugurated by Sufia Kamal, was signed by 5,000 viewers including six sector commanders. He has done such paintings for Chittagong and Faridpur exhibitions also.

Swapan Chowdhury says that the greatest pride in his life is his role in the Liberation War Movement.



Love and War: the many faces of war

Concert for Bangladesh

A tribute to the musical greats

NOVERA DEEPTA

Raqui Ahmed and his wife Rebecca like many others in the audience had never seen the *Concert for Bangladesh* before, although they had heard of the concert which was the first and greatest rock 'n' roll concert for a cause. So when they watched the historic event on a recorded tape after 33 years, they craved to have a copy of it for their personal collection. Like all other Bangladeshis they were extremely moved by the greatness of the master artists Ravi Shankar and George Harrison who arranged the concert to raise funds for the starving people of Bangladesh during the Liberation War.

Dhaka Film Society arranged a screening of the concert on the occasion of the Victory Day at the Russian Centre of Science and Culture Wednesday last.

Concert for Bangladesh was held on August 1, 1971, playing in front of a total of 40,000 people at the Madison Square Garden in New York. The concert was the greatest example of noble endeavour of musicians without any political motivation or intention at that time.

When political turmoil caused East Pakistan to break away from West Pakistan to become a separate state for the Bangalees, a large number of people had to flee to the neighbouring country for shelter. The problem was compounded by torrential rains causing devastating floods and threatening a humanitarian disaster.

Indian *sitar* maestro Ravi Shankar, who was born in Bangladesh, was distressed by the situation and consulted his friend George Harrison, a member of the legendary band The Beatles, regarding means of providing help. Harrison recorded the single *Bangladesh* to help raise awareness and also had Apple Records release Shankar's single *Joy Bangla* in a dual-pronged effort to raise funds.

Shankar also asked Harrison's advice regarding a small fund-raising concert in the United States. Instead, Harrison took over and persuaded his other friends to join him at a large concert at Madison Square Garden. The event was organised within 5 weeks. Harrison asked his fellow Beatles to appear. Ringo Starr readily agreed to appear but others couldn't on personal grounds.

Shankar opened the concert with a 25-



L-R: George Harrison and Bob Dylan performing at the concert

minute recital of Indian music titled *Bangla Dhum* where he was accompanied by master of *sarod* Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, *tabla* maestro Ustad Allahrakha and K Chakravarty. Before starting Ravi Shankar conveyed the message to the audience about the cause of the concert and to make them empathise with the war-stricken Bangladeshis.

Clad in an angelic white suit with a guitar in his hand, George Harrison appeared on stage amidst huge applause. He performed *Wah-Wah*, *My Sweet Lord*, *Awaiting On You All* and *Something*. He ended his session with his special song *Bangladesh* dedicated to the people of the soon-to-be-born country. In this song Harrison portrayed the distress of Bangladeshis people and appealed for help.

Musical help was also on hand from Eric Clapton who performed *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*. Billy Preston, Leon Russell, Klaus

Voormann and Badfinger were also there on stage to perform along with Jim Horn, Carl Radle, Jesse Ed Davis, Don Preston and a host of backing singers organised by Don Nix.

Bob Dylan performed his all time hit songs including *A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall*, *It Takes A Lot To Laugh / It Takes A Train To Cry*, *Blowin' In The Wind*, *Mr. Tambourine Man* and *Just Like A Woman*.

It was a unique experience for anyone to watch the recorded version of the concert. Although none from the audience had been present at the real event for sure, and most of them had not seen it before, the impact of the event on the whole world can be perceived in the emotion and enthusiasm it created among the audience.

The people of Bangladesh will never forget the contribution of these great personalities while celebrating the country's Victory Day.