

A poet of Language Movement

Mahbub Ul Alam Chowdhury on his poem on Ekushey

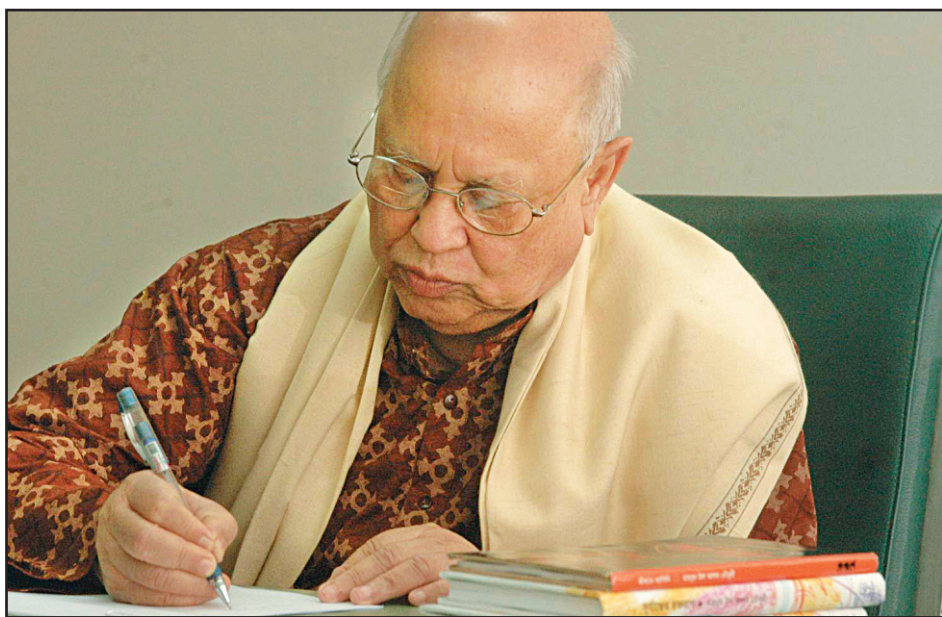
HARUN UR RASHID

POETRY has always been a popular medium for expression of national events of Bangladesh especially the Language Movement of 1952 and the Liberation War of 1971. One such poem is Mahbub Ul Alam Chowdhury's Kadley Ashini Fashir Dabi Niye Eshchhi.

The poem pays tribute to the incomparable sacrifice of the brave sons of the nation as well as it poses an undaunted protest against the gruesome killings of that time.

What was the feeling or inspiration that led the poet to compose the poem? "I wrote the poem at one sitting on the evening of February 21," says Mahbub Ul Alam, but the poetic bent of mind had developed over a decade, he believes.

A youth of 14 or 15 years in 1942, Mahbub was a worker of the District Students Congress in



Poet Mahbub Ul Alam Chowdhury

PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Chittagong. The tremendous excitement of the Quit India Movement led him and his fellows to burn the Sub-Registry office at the Chittagong Court.

The following years were also similarly eventful. Mahbub Ul Alam brought out a little magazine named Shimanta. In 1944, he joined the first celebration of Rabindra birth anniversary in Chittagong. In 1945 he participated in the All Bengal Students Conference.

Many revered writers and political figures like Annada Shankar Bhattacharya, Manik Bandyopadhyay and Sukanta Bhattacharya took part in that conference. In August, 1946, Mahbub took part in cultural activities protesting the riot that broke out in Kolkata, Bihar, Noakhali and Chittagong.

Mahbub brought out the November 1947 issue of Shimanta as a strong protest against religious fanaticism and racism. The acclaimed issue featured writings by renowned poets and writers such as Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, Abul Fazal, Buddhadev Basu, Subhash Mukhopadhyay and Jasimuddin.

Since 1948, when Urdu was proposed as the only state language of Pakistan, Mahbub Ul Alam got actively involved in the protest activities. On February 20, 1952, Mahbub fell ill while working in the dock and railway areas of Chittagong to mobi-

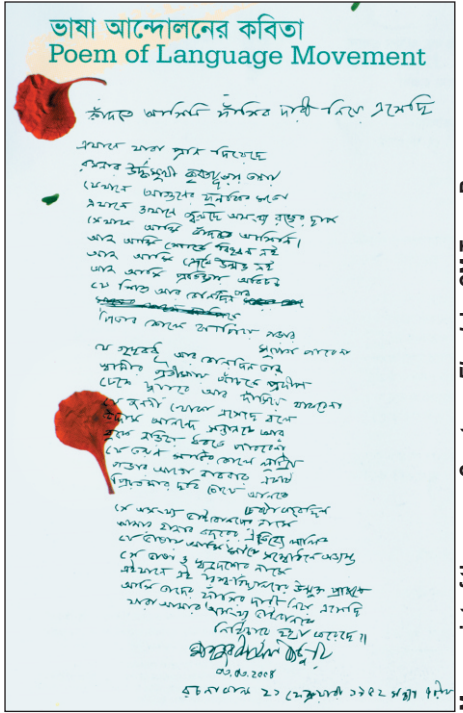
lise the labourers in the strike called the next day.

On the evening of February 21, Mahbub Ul Alam learnt that the police had opened fire on processions which caused death of "40 activists" as mentioned in his poem.

Initiatives were taken to print the poem on leaflets which they planned to circulate the next day. "When almost everything was complete at the Kohinor Electric Press, the police cordoned and raided the press. Fortunately, they failed to discover anything as all copies were hidden before hand," recalls Mahbub Ul Alam.

On February 23, worker leader Chowdhury Harunur Rashid recited the poem at a meeting. "On February 24 the government banned the poem, issued a warrant against me, and arrested Dobir Ahmed Chowdhury for publishing the poem, Krishna Gopal Sen for circulating and Harunur Rashid for reciting it," says Mahbub Ul Alam Chowdhury.

Mahbub had to go underground and wait for February 21 next year before returning to normal life. "I believe I am the only poet after Kazi Nazrul Islam whose poem was banned," claims Mahbub Ul Alam. The poem remained banned till the birth of Bangladesh in 1971.



Manuscript of the poem. Courtesy: Ekushey by CN Tareq Roza

A glimpse of Ekushey songs

SADYA AFREEN MALICK

I tried to catch a glimpse of the bright shimul tree at the cross-roads of Tejgaon industrial area as our car sped by. The blood shot clusters of shimul stood against the shrivelled tree, which held the flowers in its bosom.

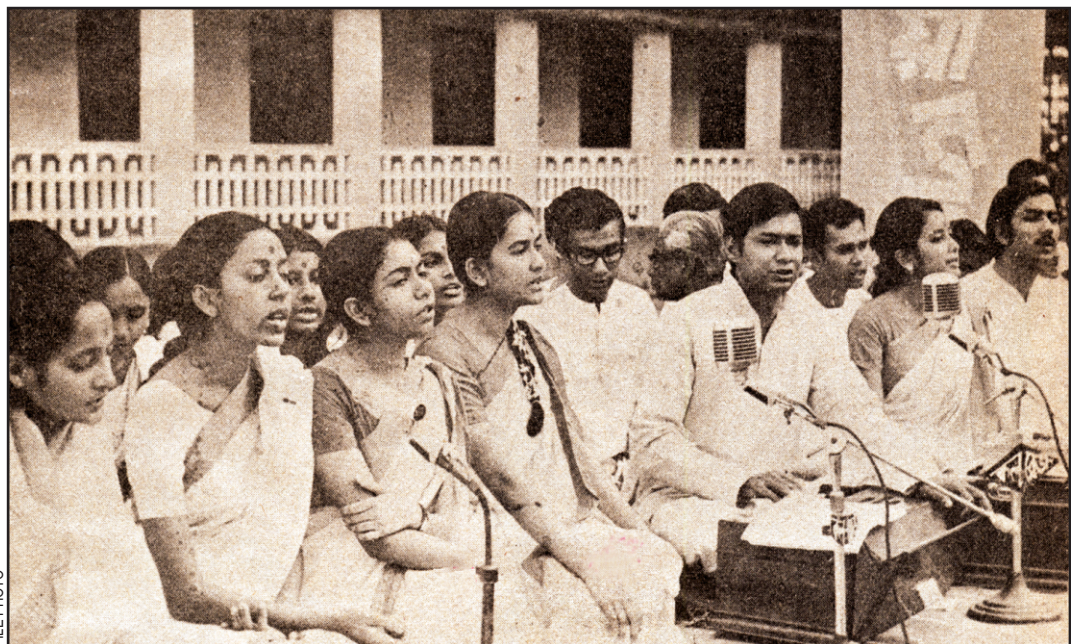
It was a time when people were seen frequenting the Shaheed Minar during the pre-dawn bustle. Times may have changed since then, but the poignant memories of that era are still fresh in our mind. As midnight struck, the Shaheed Minar soon turned into an endless sea of emotions.

Veterans of the Language Movement, families, teachers, siblings arm-in-arm, the slow march to the Shaheed Minar continued throughout the day. The stage would take on a different look as barefoot people streamed by with flowers in hand.

Even the glistening teardrop dew on the leaves seemed like an extension of the collective grief-as if nature herself was bowing down to honour the spirit of the martyrs.

In no time, the foot of the Shaheed Minar would be covered in mountains of flowers. Despite the massive conglomeration of people, there would be no jostling, no conversation--the only sound would be that of soft petals being gently swept aside.

Ekushey itself is of course the culmination of a month-long programme. Artists would gather at the altar every evening with poems, skits, drama and songs. The first song of Ekushey composed by Mosharrafuddin Ahmed on Febru-



Artists of Chhayanaut rendering songs held during the 1970s in front of the Science Annex building of Dhaka University

ary 24, 1952, Mrittuke jara tuchho korilo bhasha bachabar torey, a song by Abdul Latif Ora amar mukher kotha kaira nitey chay, composed in 1952, Bhubona shei Ekushey February bhubona written spontaneously by Language Movement veteran Gaziul Haque in 1952, are sadly by and large unheard nowadays.

During pre-Liberation times, rehearsals on Ekushey were rather comprehensive and often continued for a month at Chhayanaut. Wahidul Huque, our esteemed teacher, would stress on the inner meaning of the songs while teaching the patriotic songs of Tagore.

The songs seemed to spring to life as Sheikh Luthfur Rahman, the composer of several timeless songs, infused

heroic sentiments in the songs. Himalay thekey Shundorbon hothath Bangladesh by Sukanta Bhattacharya, Phul khebar din noi oddo by Subash Mukhopadhyay, Jonotar shongram cholbei by Sikandar Abu Zafar were amongst his brilliant compositions. We as students never failed to become totally captivated by the moods of such songs. There were other unforgettable moments as well when eminent artist Quamrul Hasan performed the songs by Guru Shoddy Dutt and imbued us with the spirit of love for our motherland.

Dr Anisur Rahman, an economist, and an ardent music lover would at regular intervals teach us at Chhayanaut. Eminent composer Abdul Ahad and singer Kalim

Sharafi as visiting teachers would teach us other compositions as well. Obak prithibi/Obak korley amaye, Kalim Sharafi would often perform the song with devotion. Golam Mustafa recited Sikandar Abu Zafar's Tumi Bangla chhoro with passion. Zahedur Rahim and Sanjida Khatun apart from music lessons gave us guidelines on Bangladeshi culture.

One can only wish that whenever Eukushey February comes around, it only re-affirms our sense of patriotism, draws people, young and old, once more to the Shaheed Minar. One can only wish for those age-old songs to reverberate once more and revitalise the spirit of Ekushey. One can only wish that the lives of so many patriots were not lost in vain.

Should the martyrs be remembered only on special events?

Sara Mahmud reminisces on Altaf Mahmud

KARIM WAHEED

"It has been 34 years but I still remember that ill-omened day vividly," says Sara Ara Mahmud, wife of Shaheed Altaf Mahmud who became a legend for composing the timeless song to venerate Ekushey February--Amar bhaier roktey rangano ekushey February/Ami ki bhulitey pari.

"August 30, 1971, was the day I saw my husband for the last time," she recalls. "My marriage with Altaf has an intriguing story. My family was not too keen about Altaf wanting to marry me. Begum Sufia Kamal intervened and made the marriage viable and in 1966, Altaf Mahmud and I got married."

"During the five years I had been with Altaf, I never had a chance to complain. Although he was primarily a music composer for films, his preferred genre of music was Gono Sangeet or peoples' songs. He had also composed tunes for the dance-recital--Rajpath Jonopath and many more. Amar bhaier roktey rangano ekushey February was initially composed by Abdul Latif. Later, Altaf modified the tunes, which were more heart-wrenching and imbibed the spirit of Ekushey effectively.



Sara Ara Mahmud

"Besides participating in the armed movement against the Pakistan army, Altaf was also composing inspirational songs for the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. On August 30, 1971, some Pakistani military men stormed our house, looking for ammunition buried in our yard by the Crack Platoon, one of the urban guerrilla groups. Abdus Samad, a former acquaintance of Altaf, had informed the military of Altaf's links with the Crack Platoon.

"Altaf was then arrested along with others. After December 16, I looked everywhere possible, but failed to trace any sign of my husband," pauses Sara.

Is this the state Altaf Mahmud and other martyred freedom fighters had envisioned? Sara retorts, "Where are the values the martyrs struggled for? The martyrs have sacrificed themselves for Bangla, but we still do not have a standard format of the language. The same word is spelled differently in different books."

Should February 21 be one of the special occasions in a year when we ruminate on the inestimable gifts the martyrs have bestowed on us--our language, our identity? For our own sake as Bangladeshis, let's hope not.

Ekushey on T-shirts



One of the T-shirts featuring the famous cartoon by Dopeyaja

AFSAR AHMED

"They were here.../They are lying here forever.../Let them sleep in peace.../If you feel like, shed a tear for them." At first sight, these few lines may seem simple epitaphs but when one notices the portraits of the five martyrs of our Language Movement--Barkat, Salam, Rafique, Jabbar and Shafiur--embossed

above those lines, the lines convey a deeper meaning.

Designed by Anisuzzaman Sohel, the black and white rare portraits of the five martyrs on a cream background of a black T-shirt titled Aa mori Bangla bhasha are undoubtedly a great tribute to our heroes of the Language Movement on the occasion of Ekushey by Nitya Upahar.

To capture the spirit of February 21 and to observe the International Mother Language Day, Nitya Upahar displays 10 new designer T-shirts.

Prachin Bomomala is the sole design of popular graphic artist Dhruva Esh. This time the artist is inspired by history and archeological facts. Artist Shabyasachi Hajra designs three T-shirts. Among them, the piece 50 Years of Language Movement depicts the luring Alpna.

Another artist Kanak Aditya's two designs are unique too. In one T-shirt Kanak emblazoned cartoon strips of the first Bangalee Muslim cartoonist Kazi Abul Kashem, popularly known as Dopeyaja. Many of his cartoons were published in the newspapers and magazines like the Daily Azad, Shaugat, Mohammadi and others. "With the picture and a small biography of Kazi Abul Kashem projected on the T-shirt, our younger generation will get exposure to our glorious past," says Bahar Rahman, the owner of Nitya Upahar. A black T-shirt with Alauddin Al Azad's famous lines "Smritir Minar Bhengechhe Tomar?"--can be a testimony of history.

Apart from these, on a light brown background the composition of a

painting of Shaheed Minar--is a detailed piece by Najib Tareque.

The piece Aami Matribhashay Kotha Boltey Bhalobashi, portraying the 16 different languages of the world, is a cut above the rest.

"Each year we have planned to add one or more extra language on this T-shirt," concludes Bahar smilingly.



A message of Ekushey for the young generation on T-shirts

TV GUIDE

All programmes are in local time. The Daily Star will not be responsible for any change in the programme.

20-02-2005

CHANNEL-i

- 11:30 Hridoye Mati O Manush
12:00 Ebong Cinemar Gaan
01:00 Bangla Feature Film: Jibon Thekey Neya
01:25 Public Reaction
01:30 Shyangbadpotrey Bangladesh
03:20 Banglar Gaan
03:45 Aim In Life
04:20 Live From Ekushey
04:45 Sa Re Ga Ma
05:30 FCT Business Talk
06:00 Music Plus
06:30 Flop Show
07:50 Amar Shwapno Amar Bari
08:25 Rupkatha
09:35 Drama Serial: 69
10:00 Drama Serial: Ekti Timir Tara

ntv

- 11:30 Ki Kotha Tahar Shathey
12:05 Drama: Mumukha
01:05 Potrikar Khabor
01:30 TVC
02:35 Drama Serial: Urey Jay Bak Pakkhi
03:15 Koti Taka
05:20 Apnar Jigyasha
06:20 Shubho Shondhya
06:50 Ain O Jibon
08:15 Drama serial: Jhut Jhamela
08:50 Right Click
09:40 Drama Serial: Akashy Anek Raat Dindarpan

ATN BANGLA

- 11:35 Cine Aha
12:50 Smritir Monikothay
02:30 Drama Serial: Biborton
09:30 Drama Serial: Mohona
10:35 Business This Week
12:20 Live Telecast From Shahid Minar
03:05 Kheladhula
03:30 Shukhi Poribar
05:30 Special Programme on Ashura
06:10 Ujjibon
06:35 Programme From Chittagong Centre
07:00 News Headlines, Share Market and Weather Forecast
07:05 Hamd O Naat
08:30 Special Programme on Ekush



Karimunnesa

On ntv at 2:35 pm

Tele-film
Written and directed by Shakur Majid
Cast: Tarin, Taquair Ahmed, Shubhrodev, Joy, Khalilullah Khan

The story of the tele-film dates back to the 19th century. The story is about the daughter of Langla Zamindar, Karimunnesa who was married to the Dewan of Ita, Katumiah. However, all the wealth did not make her happy because she was in search of a different life.



Anya Ekush

On Channel i at 1:30pm

Drama
Story: Rabeya Khatun, Direction: Saidul Anam Tutul
Cast: Raisul Islam Asad, Afroza Banu, Litu Anam, Shams Shumon, Mim and Rokeya Prachi.
The story dates back to the early 1950s. The story revolves around a young girl named Kunkum. Her love life, along with the political turmoil of that time, has been portrayed in the telefilm.



Shekor

On ntv at 8:50 pm

Drama
Written and directed by Morshedul Islam
Cast: Litu Anam, Joya Ahsan, Abdullah Al Mamun, Ataur Rahman, Lucky Inam
Atiqullah Chowdhury, a freedom fighter, tries to bring up his children in the true spirit of patriotism. His elder daughter Shampriti's betrothed Shumon is an engineer from an affluent family. The problems begin when Atiqullah publishes the wedding card in Bangla.



Jibon Thekey Neya

On ATN Bangla at 12:15pm

Bangla Feature film
Directed by Zahir Rayhan
Cast: Rowshan Jamil, Khan Ata, Anwar Hossain, Razzak, Rozi Samad, Shuchanda, Amzad Hossain
The award-winning film is based on the context of our mass up-rise, Language Movement and Liberation War.

PICK OF EKUSHEY

- 02:30 Drama Serial: Ghunpoka
03:15 Drama Serial: O Amar Chhokhu Nai
03:50 Children's Programme
04:30 Shayla's Recipe
05:00 Gram Ganjer Khabor
05:45 Jibon Jigyasha
06:25 Three Stooges
08:00 Danish Pothey Pothey
08:30 Drama Serial: The New Shajib Opera
09:00 Drama Serial: Biborton
09:30 Drama Serial: Mohona
10:35 Business This Week
12:20 Live Telecast From Shahid Minar
03:05 Kheladhula
03:30 Shukhi Poribar
05:30 Special Programme on Ashura
06:10 Ujjibon
06:35 Programme From Chittagong Centre
07:00 News Headlines, Share Market and Weather Forecast
07:05 Hamd O Naat
08:30 Special Programme on Ekush

- 08:40 Special magazine on Ashura
10:25 Teknaf Theke Tetulia
10:30 Special Programme on Ashura
11:00 Bhashar Gaan
12:05 Satellite Programmes
21:02-2005
CHANNEL-i
06:00 Live Telecast From Shahid Minar
09:45 Triloyo Matra (Ekushey

- Special)
Ekushey Kobita
Boimela Protidin (Live)
Aj Dupurey O Citycell
Tarokkothon (Live)
Ebong Cinemar Gaan (Ekushey Special)
Shangbadpotrey
01:30 Special Programme
02:15 Banglar Gaan
03:00 Telefilm: Anyo Ekush Sa Re Ga Ma

- 06:00 Music Plus
06:30 Bhasha Amar Ahankar
07:50 Tusharey Agnishikha (Ekushey Special)
09:35 Muldharar Agrajrayam Banglar Ganamadhayam
Special)
Bangla Feature Film: Jibon Thekey Neya
Drama Serial: Ghunpoka
Bomomala (Ekushey Special)
04:25 Bishwa Toroney Bangla (Ekushey Special)
05:10 Adda Kobita Ekush (Ekushey Special)
05:45 Islami Sawaal O Jawab Au Thekey

- Chandrabindu (Ekushey Special)
08:00 Ekushey Gaan (Ekushey Special)
08:45 Drama: Charanrekha (Ekushey Special)
Katha Mala (Ekushey Special)
ntv
09:30 Dukkho Joyer Gaan (Ekushey Special)
Bishwa Shahityey Ekush (Ekushey Special)
10:30 Probhat Phen (Ekushey Special)
10:35 Telefilm: Kamimunnessa
11:35 Ithasher Ei Diney
05:20 Aapnar Jigyasha
06:00 Dasher Khabor
06:20 Shubho Shondhya
06:50 Shoda Matir Gandho (Ekushey Special)
08:15 Drama Serial: Sporsher Bairey
08:50 Drama: Shekor (Ekushey Special)
11:20 Dindarpan
BTW
05:00 Live Telecast From Shahid Minar
12:15 Shangbadpotrer Pata Thekey
01:05 Lal Golap
02:05 Computer Round
02:30 Onu Paromanu
03:05 Shuro Lahori
05:05 Children's Programme
06:10 Swarochito Kabita Paath
07:15 Ekush Tumi Bishyomoy Special Drama on Ekush: Rokto Polash
08:30 Shei Phalguneey
10:25 Teknaf Theke Tetulia
10:30 Ekushey Shantigalokhya