

# Cultural activists recall the Liberation War

Hamiduzzaman Khan

## Victory reflected through sculptures

FAYZA HAQ

VICTORY Day is a special event for artist Hamiduzzaman Khan. In a nostalgic mood, he recalls those momentous days since the Liberation War: "After 1971, I tried to understand sculpture in depth and began this art form at that time. I've dwelt on the subject of the Liberation War, pondering over it in many ways; like other artists, I realised early that the subject was vital and one of great consequence. It was a great

source of inspiration for many of the Bangladeshi artists. I worked in my own 'language', sculpture, i.e., and I believe that sculpture is a powerful medium: it can express thoughts in a manner, perhaps more powerful than other medium in the fine arts. For 12 years I thought about the Liberation War and have done many works on it. I like to portray my subjects in metal, beginning with bronze (this was done in wax, and next cast in bronze). This was while I was in Baroda University, India, for four years, doing my Masters. I was

then experimenting on that theme." His thesis had been *Remembrance '71*, and Hamiduzzaman had done 50 pieces on the Liberation War.

Returning to Dhaka in 1982, Hamiduzzaman had his solo show at the Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka University and the subject was the Liberation War. He displayed some of the pictures from his *Remembrance '71* series. At that time he had a large commissioned work at Sylhet called *Hamla*, in which the bronze figure was 11 ft. high. There was a sea of viewers at the display. Shortly he did an installation based on his pet theme, and this too had drawn large crowds. In 1988 he did a sculpture in the Jahangirnagar University campus, in front of the library there. Always working with a purpose, then wanting to educate the young viewers at the university, he made a sculpture, again in bronze (sheet). This was 20 ft high x 15 ft and the subject was an armed force, moving on to the war front. It included many figures, both standing and seated, and it was called *Shangshaptak*. This stands on a brick pedestal. It took him six months to complete the work, and he enjoyed every bit of the time, working in the Institute of Fine Arts. It was installed in 1989. The work was dramatic and effective.

For 12 years the sculptor continued practicing on the same beloved theme; he made numerous monuments. One such work in the Mymensingh Cantonment,



Bijoy Gantha at Mymensingh Cantonment (2001)

was in stainless bronze; the next brought in Cubist forms: Another depicts two rectangles at the back, a hexagon, with two crosses at the back (19 ft. high, and placed on a red brick pedestal) at Tangail Cantonment.

His more recent work, in 2002 shows a modern shape, and this is found in the UTC Bhaban (Panthapath), and is done with steel pipes. This again depicts a soldier and includes a superb depiction of the subject in action. This took four months to complete, and the sculptor had a studio within the building premises. The figure is 30 feet high. The artist said, "I had no prob-

lems, rather, I was inspired by the people who wrote to me congratulating me. I had a sense of satisfaction with my work." The last sculpture pieces that he has done are found scattered within the Dhaka University campus. These are mostly in brilliant red, again Cubist forms and shapes.

Hamiduzzaman Khan, a sculptor of international repute, had been a professor of the sculpture section, Fine Arts Department, Dhaka University till last year, ending a nine year term.

Mustafa Monwar

## The "Puppet King" goes down memory lane

KAVITA CHARANJI

The scenes from the refugee camps in West Bengal in 1971 are etched forever in Mustafa Monwar's mind: Grim, distressed faces and a deathly silence which enveloped everyone, including the children. "They were getting basic necessities such as food and clothes but laughter, which is crucial for human beings, was missing. Even the children did not play together. The trauma was tremendous because of the inhumanity of the Pakistani Army. So I thought I would have puppet plays to boost the refugees' morale and bring back laughter in their lives," says Monwar, puppeteer, artist, director and producer of TV programmes and author of screen plays.

And he did do that through his puppet plays, such as *Agasha*, *Rakhias* and *A brave farmer*. The play with maximum impact was *Agasha*. The storyline: Drawing a parallel between unwanted weeds

and the Pakistani oppressors, the play shows how the farmer pulls out the weeds that ruin his crop and throws them away just like the Pakistani rulers need to be weeded out before they destroy the ethos of the country.

The greatest accolade for Monwar was the audience's spontaneous laughter in the camps, particularly in Kalyanpur. Young and old alike joined in mirth fuelled by the satire. Monwar, as he admits, was moved to tears at the response. "I was so emotional because I saw their laughter and joie de vivre had returned. I realised that it was almost as important to laugh as to have food," says the versatile artiste. One old man in the refugee camp said it was the first time that he had laughed after a month.

Another feather in his cap was when Lear Levin, an American documentary filmmaker, visited the country and made a film of these puppets. Later, Tareque Masud

added many shots to those taken by the foreigner and called his film *Muktir Gaan*.

Coming back to the present, Monwar says puppetry is a very good medium for satire. Though Bangladeshi politicians are not accustomed to satire, he says he uses it subtly to lampoon them. Now he is busy with reviving folk stories and great writers of children's tales through puppetry. Recently he has worked on Hans Christian Andersen's *The Nightingale* and *The Ugly Duckling*.

Meanwhile, Monwar is upbeat about his puppetry medium. As he says, "Puppetry is a great medium to learn aesthetics and painting. All art forms can be combined in puppetry—painting, voice and oratory, for example. It is a very important medium for children." And his delighted young and old fans would tend to agree.



Shangshaptak at Jahangirnagar University (1989)

Kabori Sarowar

## Memories ablaze

KARIM WAHEED

"I wasn't even an adult when I stepped into my acting career. When the protests led by Bangabandhu were in full gear during the late 60s, it wasn't possible for me to be involved in politics, as I was busy with movies. However, we used to get first hand accounts of the political activities from my father. He used to attend all the processions, public meetings and rallies," reminisces Kabori Sarwar.

"In the beginning of 1971 regular hartals and protests made our work irregular. This is when I could comprehend the full impact of the movement for our freedom. My friends in the film industry and well-wishers suggested that I should move to Chittagong (my parents' home) until the situation improved. I took their advice. On the night of March 25, I was stuck at Chittagong Cantonment at a friend's house. When we were able to go out of the house, we were shocked to see the changes overnight. The streets were abandoned, trenches were noticeable; it was obvious that a war was on," says the seasoned actor.

"Chittagong city didn't seem safe at that point, so I along with my family shifted to our village home near Sholo Shahar. Not much luck there either. The war had fully broken out by then and it pervaded our lives. We were repeatedly being told

to cross the border, like many were doing. Eventually we decided to do that and a group of about 30 people that included my children, some teachers and me, started moving towards the Sabroom border on April 19, 1971.

"Now when I look back, it doesn't seem that challenging but one cannot fully grasp what we went through during those perilous times. We had to walk for miles and sometimes we took ox-carts. Once we reached an area called Narayanhaat, near the Indian-Bangladesh border, Captain Qader who was in charge of the local guerrillas, recognised me. He and his comrades agreed to help us cross the border. But we had to be very cautious as the Pakistani Military closely guarded the whole area. Along with my children, I made it safely across the border. However, after a few days I received news of Captain Qader's death at the hands of the Pakistanis. I can still remember that valiant young man. It was because of the ultimate sacrifice of millions of people like him, that we can call ourselves Bangladeshis today," says an emotive Kabori.

"We were received in Agartala, India by Anil Bhattacharjee, a correspondent of *Daily Jugantor*. Several politicians from our country were staying at his place as well. It was Anil who motivated us to share our experiences and the brutalities of the War with the general people



Kabori Sarowar

there. After a while we went to Calcutta (now Kolkata). I was asked to deliver a public speech in Calcutta by Hossain Ali, in charge of the Bangladesh Mission in India and a few others. When speaking about the atrocities on our people by the Pakistanis, I broke into tears quite a

few times. It truly was an experience of a lifetime. Akashbani used to air excerpts from my speech during the War.

"From Calcutta, I moved to Bombay (now Mumbai) and started participating with a team of artistes in shows to raise funds for the

Freedom Movement. It was my honour to share a stage with legendary silver screen diva, Nargis. Sunil Dutt, Dharmendra, Shatrughan Sinha were among the others who participated. IS Johar wanted to make a film on the Liberation War named *Jai Bangla*. I was cast in the movie in the central character. I donated half of my remuneration to our Freedom Fighters. However, the movie didn't turn out the way we expected and we urged the Indian government to withhold the release of the movie. During my stay in Bombay, I worked with noted composer Saliil Chowdhury for an album titled *Ami Majider Maa Bolchhi*, where I recited poems penned by him. The album was released by Megaphone Company," says a gleaming Kabori.

"I was in Bombay till the end of the war. I came to know that the war was over and we'd achieved a sovereign country called Bangladesh when I was doing an interview with BBC. I remember crying when I heard the news; I was ecstatic! Moments more glorifying than our Victory in 1971 haven't occurred in our history as of yet but we should never forget the sacrifices we had to make," adds Kabori.



A puppet character depicting General Yahya Khan performs at a refugee camp during the Liberation War

## Victory Day special programmes on TV channels

BTV



Rezwana Chowdhury Bonna



Shakila Zafar

A special musical soiree featuring eminent artistes of the country will present patriotic songs by Tagore, Nazrul, DL Roy and contemporary composers. Titled *Tumi Robey Chiro Din*, the programme features Rezwana Chowdhury Bonna, Sadi Mohammad, Sadya Afreen Mallick, Subir Nandi, Shakila Zafar, Konok Champa, Baby Nazneen, Diruba Khan, Munir Khan and Selina Chowdhury. The special programme will go on air at 7pm.

Hosted by Keya Chowdhury, and music directed by Moinul Islam Khan, Kamrunnessa Hasan is the producer of the programme

ntv

To commemorate our Victory Day, ntv has planned some special programmes.

The day will start with a musical programme titled *Bijoyer Gaan*. Directed by Ithun babu, singers Biplob, Hasan, Alam Ara Minu and Robi Chowdhury will perform in the show. *Bijoyer Gaan* will be aired today at 6:55 am.

Noted poets of our country, Syed Shamsul Haque, Nirmalendu Gun, Asad Chowdhury, Rafiq Azad, Shamudra Gupta, Habibullah Shirajee, Ashim Shaha, Rubi Rahman, Tushar Das and Farid Kabir will recite their poems in *Bangladesh Swapno Dakhey*, to be aired at 11:30 am today.

Sabina Yasmin's solo musical programme, titled *Jonmo Amar Dhanyo Holo*, will be broadcast at 12:05 noon. The programme will feature five songs by the acclaimed singer. The songs are: *Ek tara, Ekti Bangladesh, Jodi moroner porey, Jodi moroner porey, Mago aar and Jonmo amar dhanyo holo*.

At 2:35 pm, a special programme on films based on our Liberation War will be aired. The programme, titled *Chalochchitrey Muktijudhho*, will feature filmmakers and actors speaking about their experiences in films focusing on the war. Clips and songs from the movies are also included in the programme. Chashi Nazrul Islam, Alamgir, Morshedul

Islam, Purnima, Agun and Tauquir Ahmed are among the guests in the show.

A documentary titled *The Concert for Bangladesh: Revisited George Harrison and friends* will be aired at 3:50 pm. The documentary features views of eminent personalities such as Kofi Anan, Ravi Shankar, Eric Clapton and others, on *The Concert for Bangladesh*.

At 6:50 pm, *Guerilla Raater Chokh*, featuring recitals by Asaduzzaman Noor, Pijush Bandyopadhyay, Shimul Mustafa, Dalia Ahmed, Naina Tarannum Kakoli, Ahkamullah and Mahidul Islam, will be aired.

Channel i

To observe our Victory Day, Channel i has arranged special programmes including musical soires, magazines, documentary programmes, special plays and others.

A special tele-film, titled *Ektattur Noe Mash*, will be aired at 2:30 pm. Written by Rabeya Khatun and directed by Hasina Ahmed, the play depicts the pathos, struggles and triumphs of the people during the Liberation War. The film features Tania Ahmed, Arman Pervez Muraad, Toru Mustafa and others.

The channel will air a special play *Jibonmrilo* at 7:50 pm. Featuring Raisul Islam Asad, Jayonta Chattyapadhyay, Najma Anwar, Jamaluddin Hossain, Jeetu Ahsan and others, the play is written and directed by Gazi Rakayet. The play revolves around two families residing on the bank of the river Buriganga.

A discussion programme, *Kora Alaap*, will be aired at 12:15 pm. Hosted by Dr Fazlul Alam, the Victory Day special programme will have anthropologist Professor HS Arefin as the discussant.



Tania Ahmed and Arman Pervez Muraad in the tele-film *Ektattur Noe Mash*

Poets Abdul Mannan Syed, Belal Chowdhury, Robiul Hossain, Rafique Azad, Asad Chowdhury, Md Nurul Huda and others will recite their own poems in the programme titled *Bijoyer Kobita*. The programme will be aired at 1:15 pm.

A special musical soiree, dedicated to our valiant Freedom Fight-

Cultural Correspondent

Tariq Anam Khan

## Boosting the morale of Freedom Fighters



Tariq Anam Khan

ERSHAD KAMOL

Though patriotic songs were the norm during the Liberation War, very few stage plays were presented at the camps of the freedom fighters. Among them were *Biplobi Bangladesh*, directed by Khairul Bashar and *Prothom Jatra*, directed by Mamunur Rashid. Likewise, Mustafa Monwar used to present puppet shows, while theatre activists from Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (SBBK) presented the war theme in radio plays to encourage Freedom Fighters.

Popular actor-director Tariq Anam Khan, was an actor in *Biplobi Bangladesh*. He gave regular performances at the different camps of Sector Nine during the Liberation War.

Going back in time, Tariq said, "From my school days, in 1969, I was involved with cultural activities of a troupe named Kollol Natya Goshthi, which used to stage patriotic plays at different corners of Shatkira. The troupe was active in different political movements against the then Pakistani military regime. In those days we staged *Shokol Bhangar Gaan*, which revolved around the political turmoil of

those days.

"In April 1971, I crossed the border and wanted to play an active role in the freedom movement. Later, I went to SBBK, as I was only a college student, I did not get any openings. Then I met Abdul Gafur, then a local MP, who told me about his plan to form a cultural team, which would present cultural events at the Freedom Fighters' camps. At that time Khairul Bashar and M Musa jointly wrote *Biplobi Bangladesh*. Khairul Bashar directed the play. It was a four-character play, which depicted the courageous masses who revolted against the military and their ultimate success. Along with Khairul Bashar and others, I performed in the play. I enacted the role of a Pakistani Major. We staged the play and rendered *Gono Sangeet* (song of masses) at the different camps of Sector Nine. Moreover to inspire the Freedom Fighters, we staged improvised motivational plays," added Tariq.

Recalling these eventful times, Tariq says, "These plays had a positive impact on the Freedom Fighters. I still remember the day when Major Jall, the sector commander of Sector Nine,

with about 2,000 Freedom Fighters watched our presentation. Encouraged by our performance, they cheered loudly."

Talking about the hurdles faced by cultural personalities, Tariq said, "With torn and tattered attire we spent four months (August- November) in sun and rain, travelling around different camps. We had no inkling about our future, but our confidence and youth were our only strengths. These helped us overcome all the hurdles."

When Shatkira was freed from Pakistani occupation, Tariq Anam Khan and other artistes of the play *Biplobi Bangladesh* returned to country and staged the play there. Tariq said, "It was a huge gathering of both freedom fighters and masses. The elated audience rejoiced, particularly in the scene when my Pakistani character was killed by the Bangalees."