

Images of the Language Movement

In conversation with artist Emdad Hussain

FAYZA HAQ

"In the early 50s there was unrest among the people of the then East Pakistan," says senior artist Emdad Hussain. "The majority of the people were Bangla-speaking, which gave us the right to assert ourselves. The people of East Pakistan demanded Bangla as the state language," says Hussain.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan and its first governor-general, declared in the Dhaka University convocation that while the language of the province could be Bangla, the "State language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language."

The remark sparked an agitation among the youth. The Dhaka University campus became the focal point for student meetings in support of Bangla.

The students, says Hussain, took to making paintings, posters and banners. They illustrated the right to speak in their mother tongue. There were demonstrations in the street and people were taken to jail, he says. The sketches, drawings and posters were for freedom of speech and movement. "We drew a barbed wire against the depiction of free speech and movement."



Emdad Hussain (Back-C) at a procession on the Shaheed Day, 1952

Songs of the masses

Ekushey epitomised in tunes

Saying that Bangladesh is a domain opulent with tunes and lush greenery would not be an exaggeration. One gets a demonstration of this if he/she contemplates just the innumerable folk tunes -- *baul*, *thatali*, *bhaowaiyya*, *jari*, *shari*, *mursidi*, *marfate* and others -- resonating in nature. Since time immemorial, the country's masses have expressed their heartfelt emotions, ideas and aspirations through songs. All these elements and the depiction of our struggles to uphold our identity, culture and values in Bangla songs have made our tunes enduring. Hence Bangla songs have attained a notable significance in music of this part of the world.

Music has proven itself to be a force to be reckoned with through the ages in all corners of the globe. The oppressed, wronged and ill fated have all found a place in music of and by the masses. In fact, songs have often become instruments to speak out against tyranny, injustice and social evils (*Imagine* and *Give peace a chance* by John Lennon for example; he sang at political protests against the Vietnam War).

These songs, popularly known as 'songs of the masses', have helped mobilise nations in times of dire straits. Songs written during, right after and even years after the Language Movement in 1952, have served as an immense source of inspiration for Bangalees throughout the decades. This article is a homage to all the gifted lyricists, music composers, artistes, namely musicians who have enriched our musical heritage with the timeless 'songs of the masses', specifically songs on the Language Movement or *Ekushey*. These songs have truly embodied the values and soul of *Ekushey*.

The 'songs of the masses' made an intense impact at the public processions and movements against the Pakistani oppressors. The then government tried to



(L-R) Language Movement veteran Gaziul Haq, Kamal Lohani, Ajit Rai and Fakir Alamgir

FILE PHOTO

shove Urdu down Bangalees' throat. Songs like *Ora amar mukher bhasha kaira nitoy chai* written and composed by Abdul Latif inspired the nation to confront the tyrants and continue the struggle to earn what rightfully belonged to us.

Soon after February 21, at a programme held at the Britannia Cinema Hall, Abdul Latif presented a poignant rendition of a song written by Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury. Apparently, Latif noticed the lyrics on a pamphlet. The tune of the song, *Amar bhai-er rokter rangoно Ekushey February, ami ki bhalitey pari*, later modified by Altaf Mahmud carved an everlasting impression on the Bangalee psyche.

Rastrobhasha andolan korilitey Bangalee - tora Dhakar shohor rokter bhasha by Shamsuddin Ahmed became popular. Manirul Islam Manu, Rathindranath Rai, Shimul Youssuf and this writer have performed the song at several occasions. The upsurge and movement was not limited to establish Bangla as our state language any more, gradually the struggles gained momentum as Bangalees realised the need to become sovereign. And though it all, these 'songs of the masses' have encouraged the morale of the nation.

However, many of us are not

familiar with the brilliant songs Indian artiste Hemango Biswas wrote on our Language Movement. Through the lyrics of the song -- *Shono desher bhai bhogini, shono anchan kahini, kandey bangalee jononi Dhaka shohorey* -- Biswas made a remarkable display of his emotional attachment to his Bangalee brethren in East Pakistan.

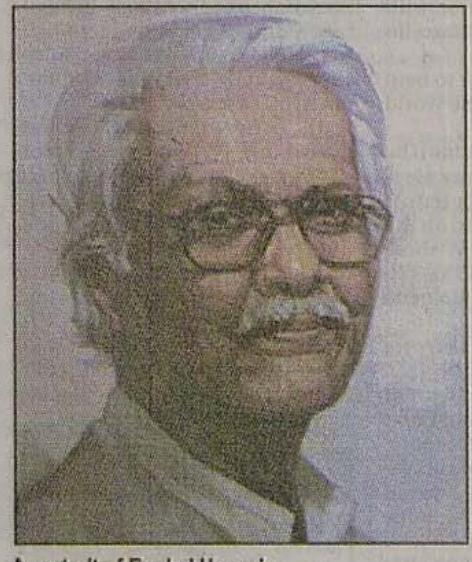
Mosharrif Uddin Ahmed penned *Mritiyuke jani tuchio* Translated by Karim Wahed

korilo bhasha banchabar tarey, aji shmarilo tarey, which received accolades for its lyrical depth. Besides these songs by the virtuoso lyricists and musicians, families songs like *Moder Garob moder asha a-mori Bangla bhasha* by Atulprasad, *Amar shorar Bangla, Bandh bhenghey dho*, *O amar desher mati* by Rabindranath Tagore and *Karoi o lauho koput, Durgamo giri kantar moru, Shikol poror chhah* by Kazi Nazrul Islam, rendered with zeal boosted the spirit of the nation.

These and scores of other songs of this genre acted as a crucial force during those days that molded the nation. These 'songs of the masses' continue to inspire the people -- even in these turbulent times.

By Fakir Alamgir

Translated by Karim Wahed



A portrait of Emdad Hussain



The Bangladesh Centre of International Theatre Institute's eighth biennial theatre festival, titled 'Theatre: Creating Space for Harmony' begins today. The festival will be held at the National Theatre Stage, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. State Minister for Cultural Affairs Begum Selima Rahmat will inaugurate the festival. International Theatre Institute Worldwide President Manfred Beilharz and Executive Director Jennifer Walpole will be guests of honour. After the inauguration ceremony, dancers of Nrityadhara and Nrityanchal will give a performance. Two plays -- *Aharkandal* and *Mandar* -- will be staged at the Experimental Theatre Stage on the opening day of the festival.

Today's plays: *Aharkandal* and *Mandar*

On one foggy winter night three anguished youths, Akmal, Bahar and Danu are engaged in conversation at a Chai. However Danu, the leader, has a secret plan: A murder

for which they will be paid and gain a better social and financial status. This gives rise to a conflict in the minds of the youths.

Badruzzaman Alamgir's theatre of absurd, *Aharkandal*, throws light on the depression, hope, helplessness, childish attitude of the three youths. It also reveals inner cruelty of human beings.

Emdad Hussain's *Mandar*, a Janmasutra production, will be staged today after *Aharkandal* at the same venue. Rahul Anand is

on the theatre festival

Ramendu Majumdar

Ramendu Majumdar is the founder president of Bangladesh Centre of the International Theatre Institute.

Moreover, he is the vice president of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) Worldwide committee.

On the theatre festival

Ramendu said, "For the last few years we have been regularly arranging biennial theatre festivals in Dhaka. The title of the eighth edition is 'Theatre: Creating Space for Harmony'. The title has significance: We are apprehending global tension as a fall out of the conflict between 'cultures', 'religions' and other facets. We believe theatre can be a platform where many cultures conduct discourses as a way to reduce the gaps and hostilities. The festival will help cultural exchange."

BY ERSHAD KAMOL

for which they will be paid and gain a better social and financial status. This gives rise to a conflict in the minds of the youths.

Badruzzaman Alamgir's theatre of absurd, *Aharkandal*, throws light on the depression, hope, helplessness, childish attitude of the three youths. It also reveals inner cruelty of human beings.

Emdad Hussain's *Mandar*, a Janmasutra production, will be staged today after *Aharkandal* at the same venue. Rahul Anand is

on the theatre festival

Ramendu Majumdar

Ramendu Majumdar is the founder president of Bangladesh Centre of the International Theatre Institute.

Moreover, he is the vice president of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) Worldwide committee.

On the theatre festival

Ramendu said, "For the last few years we have been regularly arranging biennial theatre festivals in Dhaka. The title of the eighth edition is 'Theatre: Creating Space for Harmony'. The title has significance: We are apprehending global tension as a fall out of the conflict between 'cultures', 'religions' and other facets. We believe theatre can be a platform where many cultures conduct discourses as a way to reduce the gaps and hostilities. The festival will help cultural exchange."

BY ERSHAD KAMOL

for which they will be paid and gain a better social and financial status. This gives rise to a conflict in the minds of the youths.

Badruzzaman Alamgir's theatre of absurd, *Aharkandal*, throws light on the depression, hope, helplessness, childish attitude of the three youths. It also reveals inner cruelty of human beings.

Emdad Hussain's *Mandar*, a Janmasutra production, will be staged today after *Aharkandal* at the same venue. Rahul Anand is

on the theatre festival

Ramendu Majumdar

Ramendu Majumdar is the founder president of Bangladesh Centre of the International Theatre Institute.

Moreover, he is the vice president of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) Worldwide committee.

On the theatre festival

Ramendu said, "For the last few years we have been regularly arranging biennial theatre festivals in Dhaka. The title of the eighth edition is 'Theatre: Creating Space for Harmony'. The title has significance: We are apprehending global tension as a fall out of the conflict between 'cultures', 'religions' and other facets. We believe theatre can be a platform where many cultures conduct discourses as a way to reduce the gaps and hostilities. The festival will help cultural exchange."

BY ERSHAD KAMOL

for which they will be paid and gain a better social and financial status. This gives rise to a conflict in the minds of the youths.

Badruzzaman Alamgir's theatre of absurd, *Aharkandal*, throws light on the depression, hope, helplessness, childish attitude of the three youths. It also reveals inner cruelty of human beings.

Emdad Hussain's *Mandar*, a Janmasutra production, will be staged today after *Aharkandal* at the same venue. Rahul Anand is

on the theatre festival

Ramendu Majumdar

Ramendu Majumdar is the founder president of Bangladesh Centre of the International Theatre Institute.

Moreover, he is the vice president of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) Worldwide committee.

On the theatre festival

Ramendu said, "For the last few years we have been regularly arranging biennial theatre festivals in Dhaka. The title of the eighth edition is 'Theatre: Creating Space for Harmony'. The title has significance: We are apprehending global tension as a fall out of the conflict between 'cultures', 'religions' and other facets. We believe theatre can be a platform where many cultures conduct discourses as a way to reduce the gaps and hostilities. The festival will help cultural exchange."

BY ERSHAD KAMOL

for which they will be paid and gain a better social and financial status. This gives rise to a conflict in the minds of the youths.

Badruzzaman Alamgir's theatre of absurd, *Aharkandal*, throws light on the depression, hope, helplessness, childish attitude of the three youths. It also reveals inner cruelty of human beings.

Emdad Hussain's *Mandar*, a Janmasutra production, will be staged today after *Aharkandal* at the same venue. Rahul Anand is

on the theatre festival

Ramendu Majumdar

Ramendu Majumdar is the founder president of Bangladesh Centre of the International Theatre Institute.

Moreover, he is the vice president of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) Worldwide committee.

On the theatre festival

Ramendu said, "For the last few years we have been regularly arranging biennial theatre festivals in Dhaka. The title of the eighth edition is 'Theatre: Creating Space for Harmony'. The title has significance: We are apprehending global tension as a fall out of the conflict between 'cultures', 'religions' and other facets. We believe theatre can be a platform where many cultures conduct discourses as a way to reduce the gaps and hostilities. The festival will help cultural exchange."

BY ERSHAD KAMOL

for which they will be paid and gain a better social and financial status. This gives rise to a conflict in the minds of the youths.

Badruzzaman Alamgir's theatre of absurd, *Aharkandal*, throws light on the depression, hope, helplessness, childish attitude of the three youths. It also reveals inner cruelty of human beings.

Emdad Hussain's *Mandar*, a Janmasutra production, will be staged today after *Aharkandal* at the same venue. Rahul Anand is

on the theatre festival

Ramendu Majumdar

Ramendu Majumdar is the founder president of Bangladesh Centre of the International Theatre Institute.

Moreover, he is the vice president of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) Worldwide committee.

On the theatre festival

Ramendu said, "For the last few years we have been regularly arranging biennial theatre festivals in Dhaka. The title of the eighth edition is 'Theatre: Creating Space for Harmony'. The title has significance: We are apprehending global tension as a fall out of the conflict between 'cultures', 'religions' and other facets. We believe theatre can be a platform where many cultures conduct discourses as a way to reduce the gaps and hostilities. The festival will help cultural exchange."

BY ERSHAD KAMOL

for which they will be paid and gain a better social and financial status. This gives rise to a conflict in the minds of the youths.

Badruzzaman Alamgir's theatre of absurd, *Aharkandal*, throws light on the depression, hope, helplessness, childish attitude of the three youths. It also reveals inner cruelty of human beings.

Emdad Hussain's *Mandar*, a Janmasutra production, will be staged today after *Aharkandal* at the same venue. Rahul Anand is

on the theatre festival

Ramendu Majumdar

Ramendu Majumdar is the founder president of Bangladesh Centre of the International Theatre Institute.

Moreover, he is the vice president of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) Worldwide committee.

On the theatre festival

Ramendu said, "For the last few years we have been regularly arranging biennial theatre festivals in Dhaka. The title of the eighth edition is 'Theatre: Creating Space for Harmony'. The title has significance: We are apprehending global tension as a fall out of the conflict between 'cultures', 'religions' and other facets. We believe theatre can be a platform where many cultures conduct discourses as a way to reduce the gaps and hostilities. The festival will help cultural exchange."

BY ERSHAD KAMOL

for which they will be paid and gain a better social and financial status. This gives rise to a conflict in the minds of the youths.

Badruzzaman Alamgir's theatre of absurd, *Aharkandal*, throws light on the depression, hope, helplessness, childish attitude of the three youths. It also reveals inner cruelty of human beings.

Emdad Hussain's *Mandar*, a Janmasutra production, will be staged today after *Aharkandal* at the same venue. Rahul Anand is

on the theatre festival

Ramendu Majumdar

Ramendu Majumdar is the founder president of Bangladesh Centre of the International Theatre Institute.

Moreover, he is the vice president of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) Worldwide committee.

On the theatre festival