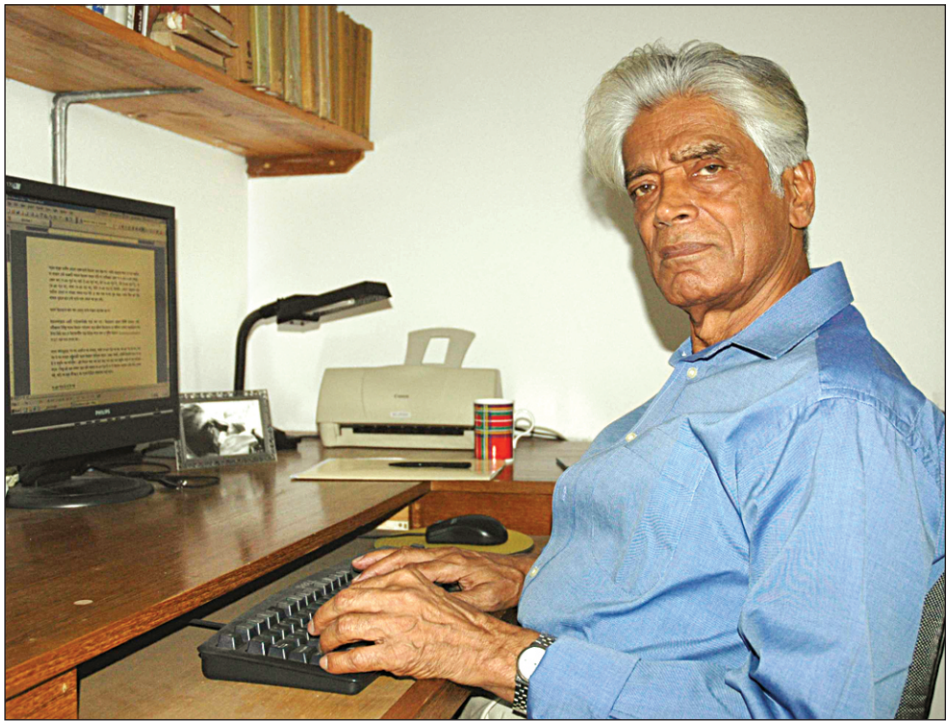


37th Independence Day

Act 1 Scene 1

Jamil Choudhury on BTV : How it all began



Jamil Choudhury

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

It all began with a survey doomed to fail. Jamil Choudhury, one of the chief personalities behind the inception of BTV, had no idea that he was at the crossroads of an illustrious career when 42 years ago he was asked to conduct a feasibility survey for setting up a TV station in the erstwhile East Pakistan. At that time in 1963, he was a young lecturer at Dhaka University.

The guidelines he was given by the central government seemed strange. He was to take count of the number of neon signs, traffic signals and Chinese restaurants in the city and use that as a standard for a recommendation. With 3 signals, 3 neon signs and 2 Chinese restaurants in the city, it didn't take a genius to realise that this would seal the fate of the planned station in seconds.

Determined not to let the opportunity slip by, Choudhury made his case to the authorities pointing out the rich heritage and the innate consciousness people had towards their culture in this part of the world, that would ultimately make the project a success.

After a gap, "quite unexpectedly", as Choudhury puts it, he was asked by the Managing Director of the Nippon Electric Company (NEC) to take charge of the new TV station that was to be launched in 90 days. The other station was to be built in Lahore. Very few people here were familiar with the concept of a TV station then.

On April 1, 1964, Choudhury took charge as the first Regional Head of the Pilot TV NEC (now known as BTV). The DIT-building in Motiheel was chosen to house the station, simply because it was the tallest building in Dhaka at that time and

was ideal for setting up the TV transmission antennae.

"The first office was set up in a small room in my apartment. From the very onset our aim was to project and uphold Bengali culture, as opposed to Urdu programmes. However, occasionally English films were to be shown."

This obviously was seen as a rebellious move by the ruling junta. "Therefore, from the very beginning the central government was suspicious about all our moves," goes on Choudhury. "I guess we were the first state-run organisation at that time, to start conducting our work in Bangla -- from official correspondence down to writing cheques."

"At this stage Professor Muhammad Yunus and Professor Munier Chowdhury helped us with renaming the transmitter room to '*Preron Kokkho*' and control room to '*Niyontron Kokkho*' and more."

"President Ayub Khan was to inaugurate the opening ceremony on December 25, 1964. To mark the occasion we made plans to greet the President with a silver plate. What no one else knew was that I made an addition to the plan -- I had the commemorative message on the plate inscribed in Bangla. After consulting with Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin, I decided the message should read '*Aj shubho udbodhone amader antorik shubhechha grahon korun, Pilot Television Dacca, Poush 10, 1371*'."

"This was kept a secret till the last minute. When ultimately we went ahead with our plan, the authorities were livid. My response was simple: 'Bangla is one of the major languages in the country, and it would be a crime to ignore the values of the land.'"

"Television was the only visual media then, and a major source of information. The central govern-

ment, as expected, kept a strict eye on us. However, working as a team, Kalim Sharafee, engineer Khaled Salahuddin, Monirul Alam, AKM Fazlul Huq, Syed Ibne Imam, Mustafa Monwar and several others took every opportunity to airing programmes that project our traditional culture -- songs, plays, dances and so on."

In Choudhury's words, "As the political situation worsened in March 1971, the project of shifting TV from DIT to Rampura came to a total halt. Meanwhile, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had declared a non co-operation movement from March 1.

"From March 3, Pakistan Television Service Dacca was renamed Dacca Television. Under the able guidance of Mustafa Monwar, the programmes now focused totally on the Freedom movement."

"As the country united for independence, on March 23 the flag of Bangladesh was officially hoisted. The Pakistani flag was raised in the cantonment area only. The officials of TV also decided not to raise the Pakistani flag or play the national anthem on that day. We were threatened by the Pakistani junta that no one would be allowed to enter or leave through the building if we went through with our plan.

"Instead of shutting off the transmission we telecast a Tagore song *Aji Bangladesher hridoy hotey* rendered by Fahmida Khatun till midnight. When it was one minute past midnight we switched off the transmission thus, avoiding hoisting the flag or playing the national Anthem of Pakistan on its National day.

"The authority did not take this lightly. On March 24, we refrained from telecasting any programme in protest. From March 25, onwards the regime took over the TV station. It was on that brutal night that the Pakistan army massacred several staff members of the TV station." In April, Jamil withdrew to Kolkata. There he set up an Information Bank and with the help of Dhaka University students collected newspaper clippings to facilitate the foreign press on war reports. The documents were later handed over to the National Museum.

After December 16, at a cabinet decision, Choudhury was reinstated in BTV.

Choudhury is quick to give credit to all his colleagues who worked tirelessly to develop BTV and uphold the national culture across millions in the country.

Back from Shanti Niketan recently, he fondly remembers Dhaka 40-years back, when the city boasted scores of *Krishnachura* trees blazing in its crimson beauty. *Krishnachura* trees dwindled down -- a fate he likens to BTV that has seen difficult times in recent history due to multiple forces at work.

But personalities like Jamil Choudhury will always be linked to the country's heritage like the *Krishnachuras* are to Dhaka -- intertwined and inseparable through history, even in memory.

Independence Day celebration at Liberation War Museum

Achievements in education sector examined

AHSAN HABIB

As part of the Independence Day celebration, Liberation War Museum organised discussion, readings from witness accounts and cultural programme on March 24. Former Governor of Bangladesh Bank and founding Vice-Chancellor of East West University Dr M Farashuddin delivered a speech on 'Expectations and Achievements in Education Sector'.

According to Dr Farashuddin, Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission report is still relevant and applicable as it reflects the fundamentals of the then newly framed constitution of Bangladesh. The report was formulated and is based on the socio-economic and political state and cultural heritage of the country. "We are yet to fulfil our dream to build a modern, scientific and effective education system as the later governments were reluc-

tant to implement the recommendations," he observed.

In his views, the achievements in the education sector have been the inclusion of female students with greater percentage at primary and secondary levels, establishment of 79 universities including 53 private universities and above all, privatisation of tertiary level education system.

According to him, rescuing education itself and its administration from all devouring corruption is the challenge of the day. He also noted that the education sector lacks specific policies for decentralisation and management. Substandard education is another concern for him.

Dr Farashuddin believes that collective efforts incorporating the ideals of Liberation War by government and non-government bodies, intellectuals and business leaders are essential for fulfilling the dreams of building a self-sufficient



Dr M Farashuddin speaks at the programme

PHOTO: STAR



Students of Siraj Mia Memorial Model School sing at the programme

democracy.

After the speech, Laila Anjuman, a student of Chandipur Monsha High School, Laxmipur; Meherunnessa Mita of Banglabazar Govt. Girls' High School, Dhaka; Soheli Rana of Ramdia BMBC High School, Rajbari; Mansura Khanom of Dhaka Mahanagar Mahila College, Dhaka and Roksana Akhter of Paniala High School read out collected accounts of war witnesses. Under the 'outreach programme' of the Museum, students from different parts of the country have written these accounts interviewing individuals who had first hand experiences of the war.

Students of Siraj Mia Memorial Model School, Dhaka; Ramdia BMBC High School, Rajbari and Khilgaon Model University College, Dhaka performed at the cultural programme. A recital performance by Shrot Abritti Sangsad titled *Muktijuddho Rupkotha* noy ended the day.

Patriotism unlimited: Samar Das and his tunes

A prolific musician and composer, Samar Das' contribution cannot be confined to just the aesthetic aspect of music, he was deeply involved with the Liberation War as well.

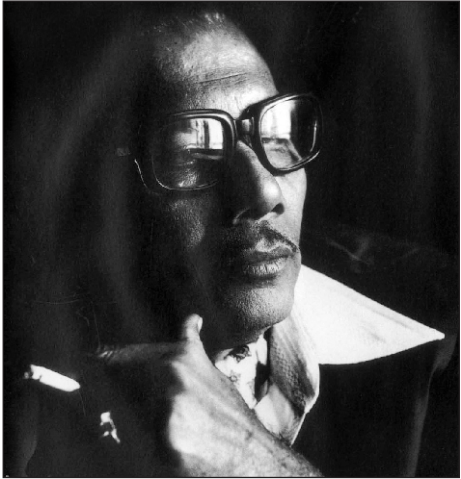
Das was born on 10 December 1929 to a family of musicians at Nabadwip Basak Lane in old Dhaka. Initially, he received music lessons at home. His skills became apparent at the age of 16 when he was enlisted as a flautist at the Dacca Centre of All India Betar in 1945.

In the '50s he joined the HMV Gramophone Company as a pianist. In 1967, he was appointed as the music producer of Dacca Betar. Many singers found their way to success and fame under the guidance of this composer/musician.

Samar Das played a major role as an artiste in the War of Liberation in 1971. He was one of the chief organisers of the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, the clandestine radio station that inspired millions of Bengalis under Pakistani occupation. He was appointed the chief music director of the radio station. During that time he composed several patriotic songs that became immensely popular. Among these were *Purbo digonhey shurjo uthechhey, Bhebo na go ma tomar chhelela* and *Nongar tolo tolo shomoy je holo holo*. He composed the signature tune of the newly founded Bangladesh Betar after Independence.

When Rabindranath Tagore's *Amar Shonar Bangla* was chosen as the national anthem of Bangladesh, Das transcribed the song into Western notation for orchestration, as is common for national anthems.

Das composed music for over 50 Bengali and Urdu films in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.



Songs composed by him from the Indian Bengali film *Lottery* attained huge popularity. Das also holds the record of being the music director of the first Bengali film -- *Mukh O Mukhosh* -- made in Pakistan. Other acclaimed scores under his direction were from the films *Asia* and *Nabarun*. He composed the haunting melodies for one of the first films made in independent Bangladesh, *Dhirey Bahey Meghna*.

Samar Das was also recognised as a musician at the international level. He directed music at the South Asian International Music Conference in 1954. In 1964 he directed and produced the music for a Bangla ballet-drama *Shonar Shabuj Gnaey*, performed at the Afro-Asian Music Con-

ference in Lahore. He also led the Pakistani cultural team at the Commonwealth Festival held in London in 1966. He was awarded a gold medal by Queen Elizabeth II for excellence in music direction (of a ballet-drama *Sons of River*) at the festival. He was the music director at the South Asian Federation (SAF) Games, held in Dhaka -- both 1985 and 1995 -- where his orchestrations were seen and heard by an estimated audience of over 500 million across the SAARC countries during the opening and closing ceremonies.

Das' endeavours in preserving songs of the Liberation War were also remarkable. In 1972 he directed music for a long play album containing twenty-six patriotic songs released by HMV Kolkata. Eminent artistes from both West Bengal and Bangladesh took part in the rearrangement of some of the classics. Later, at the initiative of Muktijoddha Kalyan Trust, Das compiled popular songs of the war period in two LP discs titled *Mora Ekti Phulke Banchabo Bole Juddho Kori*.

It is estimated that he composed music for over two thousand songs aired on radio and television.

In recognition of his contribution to our music, he was awarded the prestigious Ekushey Padak and the Swadhinata Padak. He died on 25 September 2001 and was buried at the Christian cemetery in Wari, Dhaka.

Through his classic patriotic tunes still aired on radio, TV and performed by numerous artistes, Samar Das lives on in our collective mind.

Compiled by Cultural Correspondent

FAYZA HAQ

Lutfun Nahar Mousumi says that she has been working on her documentary *Onyo Joddha* for the last three years. It was her husband Hussain Md Omar who made her aware of the role Mumtaz Khan Pathan played in the Liberation War. Kader Siddiqui had sought Pathan out when he first returned to the country. She says that it was not easy to make the film as Pathan is quite camera shy.

"Very few people are aware of the role played by this individual in the Liberation War. I want the new generation to be aware of his contribution," says Mousumi. "Studying his life one realises that he has done a lot for our country and received very little in return."

Mumtaz Khan Pathan moved to the then East Pakistan immediately before the Liberation War. His lucrative business in tobacco was in the remote areas of Tangail district. When the Pakistani military regime began the blood bath, killing every Bengali in sight, on March 25 1971, Pathan could not help being moved. His acute sense of what's fair and rationality ruled over his loyalty towards the oppressors, his own people. He decided to participate actively in the war against the occupying Pakistani forces and joined

the Kaderia Bahini of Tangail.

His work included supplying food and clothes for the freedom fighters of Kaderia Bahini, managing supplies for the *Ronanggon Patrika* of that time, and most important of all, accumulating medicines for the wounded fighters. He often risked his life to free prisoners from the clutches of the Pakistani soldiers. Towards the end of the war, the

Pakistan army found out about his actions; he was arrested and tortured. A death warrant was issued against him and Pathan could never go back to his family in Pakistan.

"He had earned thousands of takas through his tobacco business and gave it all to the freedom fighters. He married here and has four children. He gets a grant of Tk 600 from the government for his contribution to



Mumtaz Khan Pathan in a scene from the documentary

the war, which is nowhere close to enough to support him and his family," says Mousumi.

Mausumi came into the documentary scene when she did a course in films at Steps Towards Development, an NGO. Her first film was on potters. Then she did *Naho Mata Naho Konya* on sexual harassment of women. She did two years of video editing. At present she is working for Rtv. Bajjit Kamal and Afzalul Hassan Tipu have worked with Mausumi in *Onyo Joddha*. She hopes to do more work on sensitive issues, including one on clowns in Bangladesh.

Before the screening of *Onyo Joddha*, Dr MA Hassan admired Mumtaz Khan Pathan's contribution to the Liberation War. Professor Kabir Chowdhury said that the film did a commendable job of projecting the main character. Catherine Masood commented that it was a very moving film and it was a reminder that regardless of ethnic background, the Liberation War affected all in the country and we can all identify with it.

The film was financed by Media Desk.

Special TV programmes on Independence Day

ATN Bangla



Jayanot Chatyopadhyay in Mitur 71

At 2:30pm a documentary titled *Muktijuddhey Dhaka Bishshobidyalay* will be aired. The documentary highlights 'Operation Searchlight' -- mass murder of Bengalis by the Pakistan army on the fateful night of March 25, 1971. The programme will also provide an insight to the historic sculptures at DU campus.

At 4:20pm *Shaljong*, a special programme featuring freedom fighters from the *adibashi* communities, will be aired. At 6:20pm *Shaheed Nari*, a special programme on female freedom fighters will be shown. At 8:00pm a special TV play, *Mitur 71* will be aired. Written by Iqbal Hossain Chowdhury, the play is directed by Dipankar Dipon. The cast includes Sumaiya Shimu, Jayanto Chatyopadhyay and others.

Channel i

A special episode of the popular talk show *Tritiyo Matra* will be aired at 12:05pm. At 2:30pm Channel i will telecast a special programme *Rangtulitey Muktijuddho* featuring veteran artistes painting on the theme of Liberation War. The programme will be aired live. At 6:20pm a special magazine programme *Swadhinota Tumi* will be aired. At 7:50pm *Apod*, a special TV play will be telecast. The play is written and directed by Ferdous Hassan.

The cast includes Litu Anam, Aupee Karim, Shahidul Alam Sachchu and



A scene from Apod

others. At 10:00pm *Swadhinotar Gaan*, a special musical programme will be aired.

Ntv

At 7:30pm ntv will air a special talk show, *Ekatturer Itihashey Nari* highlighting the contribution of women during 1971. At 9:00pm *Shatyomontro*, a special TV play will be telecast. The play is written and directed by Manik Manobik. The cast includes Aly Zaker, Dr Enamul Haq, Tazin Ahmed and others. At 11:00pm a special musical programme *Jonmo Amar Dhonyo Holo* will be aired.

Banglavision

At 3:10pm *Shurjodoyer Kabyo Chitro* a special programme on poetry will be aired. At 4:20pm a special episode of *Agnihora Din* will be aired. A special poetry recitation programme *Bondishibir Thekey* will be aired at 8:15pm. At 9:10pm *Khola Janala*, a special play will broadcast. The play is written by Abdus Selim and features Dilara Zaman, KS Firoz, Sharmin Shila, Mahmudur Rahman Shubho and others.