

Inspiration point

Chhokku Mia, the intrepid warrior

MAHMUDA AFROZ

We shall overcome,
We shall overcome someday.
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.

THIS was the anthem of the Civil Rights movement, and it captured its idealism inspiring millions to take to the streets demanding their rights and ending an era of discrimination. In our history of independence while there were many great personalities and even greater slogans and songs to inspire the youth rarely did someone come as close to Chhokku Mia.

Any country plunging into the thrush of wars, battles, revolutions or movements needs an inspirational point to go on and

not to lose hope. During those days of despair in 1971, every time Chhokku Mia said "aukkorey saaf" a few more young men decided that it was time to go to war to rid the country of the tyranny that considered ruling this nation its birthright.

Chhokku Mia remains incomplete unless we mention the name of his creator, M.R. Akhtar Mukul, language movement participant, writer of over two dozen books and one of the veteran Bangladeshi broadcast journalists.

In the heady days of 1971, M.R. Akhtar Mukul was that point of inspiration for millions of Bengalis who felt lost and helpless. Mukul inspired the freedom fighters and countrymen during the Liberation War by his oratory

popularly known as *Chhokku Mia*, aired on Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. Using the

dialect of old Dhaka, he could create the desired impact both on the Freedom Fighters and the

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collaborators of the Pakistani army. *Chhokku Mia*, an intrepid warrior, a patriotic Bengali youth whose lack of education and sophistication did not hold him back from spinning the tales of Bengali glory and Pakistani discomfiture which kept a nation at war going. It was, again, humour which was needed to keep the spirits of our young men and women charged.

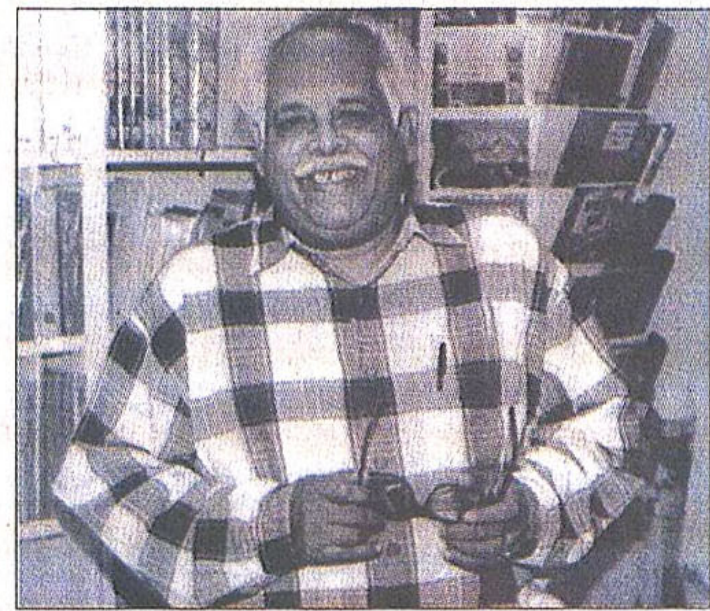
When Chhokku Mia broke into his slang Bangla to give the audience an idea of how the enemy was being routed all over the place, he made them leap in joy. An entire troupe of Pakistani army, he claimed, had been wiped out. "Aukkorey saaf!!!" There were fury and sarcasm in those two simple

words. By reaching out to people inside the country who had access to radio, Mukul literally became the voice of freedom and ultimately liberation.

Through his narratives, he spoke to those who didn't have a voice and gave them hope and courage when nothing else or no one could. *Chhokku Mia* was the voice heard, the most telling evidence of resistance.

Mukul's mortal life has come to an end but his many achievements will keep him alive amidst us. We could positively do with some more Chhokku Mias in a country where most of us find ourselves today searching for an inspiration point.

The writer is a freelance contributor



M.R. Akhtar Mukul

FILE PHOTO

A photographer looks back at 1971

In conversation with Naibuddin Ahmed



Photos (top-left and bottom-right) taken during the Liberation War by Naibuddin

AHSAN HABIB

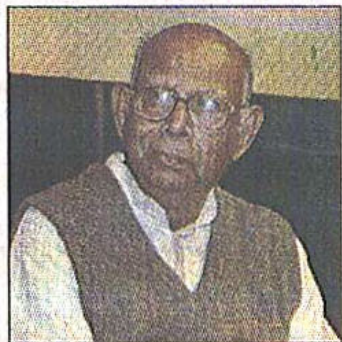
With great risk veteran photographer Naibuddin Ahmed captured scathing images of brutality and how people survived the terror unleashed by the Pakistani army in 1971 that helped publicise the war to the world. These images now survive as documents of the Liberation War.

Until 1971 Naibuddin was better known for his interest in rural and river scenes and the lives of ordinary people engaged in daily activities.

During the war he was working as the chief research photographer of the then East Pakistan Agricultural University in Mymensingh. One day a Pakistani army personnel asked him to take a look at his camera which was not working properly. Naibuddin found the camera was working just fine, only the lens was blocked. Pretending that it was still not operating, Naibuddin took photographs of nearby houses that were burnt down and ordinary people tortured at the camp. He then packed the

camera and asked the army officer to send it to his house so that he can try to fix it with necessary tools. The camera was sent to him the following day and Naibuddin kept the reel to himself. The reel was developed and with the help of a friend Shahadat, Naibuddin managed to send the photographs to Colonel Taher, commander of Sector 11. Taher sent the images to India.

When one of the photographs was published in the *Washington Post*, the Pak intelligence went mad. The photograph damaged the



The veteran photographer

occupying force's claim of "normalcy" as it exposed the general atmosphere of terror that prevailed everywhere. The international community was already outraged by the news of genocide. The Pakistani army searched every nook and corner of Naibuddin's house. They even went through his books but could not find the negatives, says the photographer.

Whenever Naibuddin heard some news of carnage, he would go out there with his camera. He mainly worked within Sector 11. Some of his moving images capture the sufferings of women at the hand of the Pakistani army and their henchmen. Naibuddin's images recount the atrocities unleashed on the ordinary people struggling for freedom.

Together with friends, he also formed a group to help the freedom fighters with money and medicine.

"Bangobandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's call to fight the enemy in whichever way possible, gave me the strength to move forward with my camera," says Naibuddin.

The photographer gets frustrated when he sees that the perpetrators of the genocide are not being tried and are living openly among us, some of them flaunting political power.

"The emergence of Bangladesh

as a sovereign state represented the implication of certain principles, but after 36 years one wonders if we have been able to execute and establish those principles at all. The young generation needs these principles as a guiding light. Each activity and aspect, including photography, should reflect that state of mind. We need to inspire our youngsters with the spirit that led a more or less unarmed nation to engage in a do-or-die struggle against one of Asia's most well-equipped and

trained military forces," Naibuddin says.

Naibuddin had his first camera in 1942. He exhibited his works for the first time in 1954 at USIS. He stopped taking photographs after the Liberation War.

Recently Ahmed Zaki made a documentary titled '71: In Frame and Out of Frame', celebrating the photographer's works during the war. The documentary is produced by the newly established audio-visual centre of the Liberation War Museum.



Martyred Intellectuals' Day observed



Poet Asad Chowdhury speaks at the programme

PHOTO: STAR

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

To mark the Martyred Intellectuals' Day, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA) arranged a discussion and cultural programme at the National Theatre Stage of BSA on December 14. The cultural programme featured recitation, music and drama.

Noted playwright Professor Selim Al Deen and poet Asad Chowdhury spoke at the programme as special guests. Professor Syed Anwar Hossain was the chief guest at the programme. Director general of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy,

Kamrul Hassan ndc presided over the programme.

Poet Asad Chowdhury, Kazi Rozi, Samudra Gupta and others recited poems at the programme. Artists of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy rendered songs at the programme. Veteran Tagore singer Ajit Roy rendered *Tonar ashimey pran*.

The last presentation at the programme was a play. Theatre troupe Bongorongo Natyadal staged *Maharaj*, an adaptation by Martyred Intellectual Munier Chowdhury from British play *Something to Talk About*. His son Asif Munier directed the play.

Erratum

In our article titled "Victory Day celebration" published on December 14, in the Culture Page, the word 'just' was inadvertently dropped. The text should have read "...In his speech Colonel (Retd) Kazi Nuruzzaman said, "Our Liberation War was not just a fight against the Pakistan Army..." We sincerely regret the error.

Reminiscence

Ahmed Imtiaz Bulbul talks about his Liberation War days

ERSHAD KAMOL

Popular music composer Ahmed Imtiaz Bulbul is renowned for his evergreen compositions. In his illustrious career, Bulbul has composed songs for over 350 movies. He is the lyricist of most of these songs. He has composed and written many remarkable *adunika* and patriotic songs. His contribution to the music industry has earned him several awards including the National Award, the President's Award and the 'Shikha Anirban' award -- the highest honour conferred by the Bangladesh Armed Forces. Bulbul has won the Bachsas Award 11 times.

However, many of us are probably not aware of his courageous experiences as a freedom fighter. Soon after the Liberation War broke out, Bulbul joined the guerrillas. Initially he participated a few guerrilla operations in Dhaka. Subsequently, he joined Sector 2. He was arrested twice by the Pakistani army during the war.

Recalling the war, Bulbul said, "I was a teenager then and used to play guitar at the Hotel Intercontinental (now Sheraton) when the Liberation War began. My elder brother Iftekharuddin Ahmed joined the crack platoon -- led by Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya -- that used to conduct guerrilla attacks in Dhaka city. One day, I along with my friend Fuad, initiated a guerrilla attack at the New Market with grenades collected from my elder brother. And that's how it all began for me."

In June, Bulbul joined Sector 2, comprising the districts of Dhaka, Comilla, and Faridpur, and parts of Noakhali. Major ATM Haider was the

commander of the sector. While reconnoitering on the Comilla Brahmanbaria road, Bulbul was arrested by the Pakistani army.

To quote him, "Our duty was to count the number of Pakistani bunkers on the road. We counted 25 bunkers. While returning to report to our group commander, Shojib, four of us

in the team -- Manik, Khoka, Mahbub and I -- were arrested."

Soon after the arrest, they were taken to the cantonment. At the cantonment Bulbul and his comrades were taken to the firing squad. Bulbul said, "We thought this is the end of our lives and started chanting the *Kalma*. But, they changed their

decision and took us to the interrogation cell instead, to grill information on the Sector 2. Later we were taken to jail."

In the jail Bulbul met about 43 freedom fighters. Bulbul made a plan for a prison-break. But, senior freedom fighter Shaheed Nazrul Islam discouraged him. According to Bulbul, "Nazrul bhai believed that our victory was knocking on the door. He believed that freedom fighters would rescue us, so we should not flee. But on the evening of 27th Ramadan (late November, 1971), a group of Pakistani soldiers came and killed everyone except the four of us from Sector 2. They thought that they would be able to extract more information from us. The following we break out from the jail."

After the escape, Bulbul came to Dhaka on a boat. But, unfortunately when he went home, he was arrested again. This time he was taken to Dhaka Cantonment. "At the cantonment, I, along with other arrested freedom fighters, was regularly tortured. It was so brutal that I lost consciousness. When I regained consciousness, I noticed I was in captivity in a dark small room," said Bulbul.

That was the Ramna Police Station. "An army truck used to come every evening to take freedom fighters away. They were then killed. Each day 15 freedom fighters were taken away, never to be heard from again. We used to sing *gano-sangeet* to keep our spirits up. There were only a few of us left alive when the joint forces carried out an air raid. Right after Victory Day, we were freed," Bulbul said.

Bulbul was free but he had to

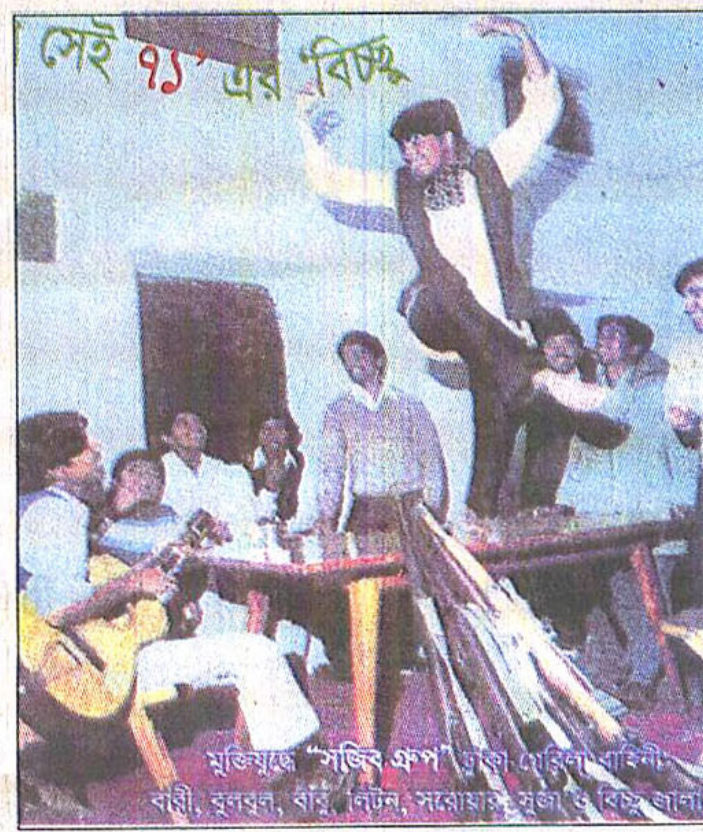


Ahmed Imtiaz Bulbul

suffer a lot; after effect of the extensive torture. As reward Bangobandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave him Tk 1000 and the Government of Bangladesh took the responsibility of his medical treatment.

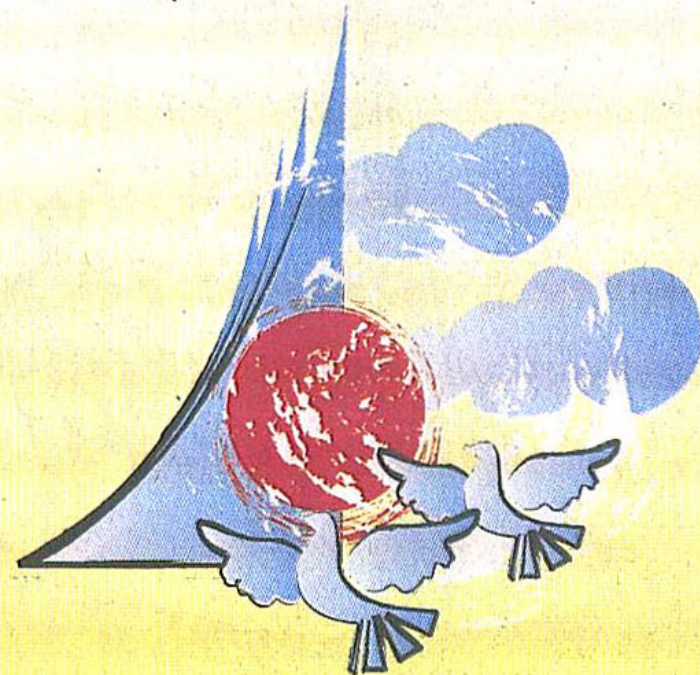
The experiences during the Liberation War left an indelible impression on Bulbul's artistic career. Bulbul said, "After Independence I composed patriotic songs for BTV. These songs were rendered by Sabina Yasmin. The songs include *Shob kota janala*, *Shundar shubarno tarunyo labonyo*, *Uttar dakhin purbo poschim*, *O amar aai koti phul*, *O majhi nao chhaina de*. In the 1980s, for eight years BTV used my composition *Shob kota janala* as a prelude to the news."

Bulbul is frustrated in regards to the issue of the trial of war criminals. He said, "The Pakistani collaborators were rehabilitated; it won't be easy to punish them. Nowadays, many of the war criminals are in high up places. Quite a few of the collaborators who regularly visited the Pakistan Cantonment in 1971, later became cabinet members in Bangladesh."



Bulbul (L) on the guitar with fellow freedom fighters celebrating the Victory

ভানবেষে দেশ
যাঁরা ঢেলে দিলো
বুকের রক্ত কণা ...



মহান বিজয় দিবসে আখো শহীদ স্মরণে



সৃষ্টির আনন্দে
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