

## Commemorating the 38th Independence Day

### The art of recreating the past

In conversation with Selina Hossain |

KARIM WAHEED

Historians and fiction (in particular historical fiction) writers are strange bedfellows. Where does one draw the line? According to author Selina Hossain, "When you want hardcore facts, you should go for history or news reports. The purpose of historical fiction is to provide the reader with a feel of being present at a particular event through the perspective of characters. This is essentially an art of recreating the past, entirely dependent on the literary prowess of a writer."

Hossain, a recipient of numerous national and international honours (including a Bangla Academy Award in 1980), delves deep into Liberation War in Bengali literature. "The end of 'Hangor, Nodi, Grenade' is a true story," she says. The novel is considered an outstanding specimen of Bengali fiction on the theme of Liberation War. "One of my teachers told me the story of a woman who gave up her own son to Pakistani soldiers to save two freedom fighters. In the process of writing a novel, centring this incident, I had to give the protagonist a past which is obviously fiction," the author continues.

"Akhteruzzaman Elias' 'Chilekothar Sepai' gives accounts of the Mass Uprising (1969) through perspectives of its protagonist. Literature can also address historic events through allusions or analogies. In the novel, 'Neel Mayur-er Jouban,' I've narrated the story of a poet from the Charjapad era whose hand is severed by the King as a punishment for writing in the language of the masses. This



Selina Hossain at a mass grave in Kasbah, Brahmanbaria. This burial ground near the border has 51 graves (including two unmarked ones) of people killed during the Liberation War.

is a reference to our Language Movement," Hossain says.

In another novel, "Juddho," the author describes a mass slaughter of Bengalis by the Biharis in Syedpur during the war -- a true story. Apparently, the Biharis living in that area made announcements that they have arranged a special shuttle for Bengalis and Hindus that would carry them across the border. Many showed up and were mercilessly butchered.

"The depiction of the war in our TV plays and films, however, is often commercialised and incomplete. It seems this historic event has not been translated well on celluloid. I'd give Chashi Nazrul Islam credit for his sincere efforts in adapting 'Hangor, Nodi, Grenade' for the big screen but unfortunately the film didn't shine in its own merit; the essence was somewhat lost in translation. But these efforts are commendable nevertheless, as the core facts and values of the war have not been

distorted. Besides this is an effective way to educate the illiterate portion of our populace on the national history," Hossain remarks.

"We need other perspectives on the war as well. I met Pakistani writer Atia Dawood at a writers' forum for SAARC countries. She gave moving accounts of the last days of the war. When the news broke that General Niazi has surrendered, Atia's parents cried. There was no resentment but a sense of loss -- the kind one endures when a relative is lost, that's how Atia put it," she says.

The author is hopeful that the post-Liberation War generation of writers will further enrich this genre of fiction with fresh, new ideas and viewpoints. She specifically mentions "A Golden Age" by Tahmima Anam. "Her (Tahmima's) debut novel has been translated in several languages and lauded internationally ('A Golden Age' won the 2008 regional Commonwealth Best First Book prize), thus drawing the attention of a wider, global readership to the Liberation War. From someone who has not experienced the war firsthand, this is a remarkable accomplishment.

"However, on page 271 in 'A Golden Age,' the surrender of the Pakistan army is mentioned with a misinformation. One of the protagonists says, 'We have to be at the Shaheed Minar for the treaty.' The surrender took place at the then Racecourse Maidan (now Suhrawardy Uddyan). When mentioning historic events, a writer should be extra vigilant," Hossain says.

Selina Hossain is currently working on a novel on 'chhitmahal' (enclaves), which would address the Liberation War as well.

### Independence Day specials on abc radio

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

On the occasion of the 38th Independence Day, abc radio fm 89.2, will air several special programmes. A documentary titled, "Gano-hotyar Prothom Raat," will be aired after the news at 2am, 7am, 1am, 6pm and 9pm. Mahmuda Sultana Roma is the producer of the show.

Special programme "Shobk'ota Janala Khuley Dao Na" will be aired in the 'Bhorer Janala' segment (from 6am to 9pm). RJ Shaon will host the show. As part of the 'Mukhorito Jiboney' segment (aired from 9am to 12pm), special programme "Shobdo Shoiniker Juddho" will be aired. Belal Mohammad, Shujee Shyam and Naila Khan will reminisce on their experiences during the Liberation War in the programme hosted by RJ Pompa.

"Jiboner Joygan," a special programme featur-

ing singer Samina Chowdhury, journalist Rafi Hossain and lyricists Chandra and Tomal, will be aired in the 'Daron Dupurey' (from 12 to 3pm) segment. RJ Sami will host the show.

Special programme "Naton-er Bhabnaye Swadhinata" will be aired in 'Duranta Bikeley' segment. Akku Chowdhury is the guest of the programme that will be hosted by RJ Kibria. Hosted by RJ Shoily, special programme on guerrilla training during the Liberation War titled "Banglar Juddho-Banglar Joy" will be aired from 7 to 9pm.

"Dhakar Guerrillara" will be aired from 9pm to 12am. Nasiruddin Yousuff, Habibur Alam Bir Pratik, litterateur Anisul Haque and chief of news and programme of abc radio, Sanaullah will take part in the programme. Musical programme "Songs of Freedom" will be aired from 12 to 2am. RJ Shoily will host the programme.

### Amanul Huq: A chronicler of history



Photographs by Huq: Victorious freedom fighters walk past the base of the Central Shaheed Minar on December 16, 1971. The Shaheed Minar was obliterated after March 25, 1971 (left). A freedom fighter.

TAKIR HOSSAIN

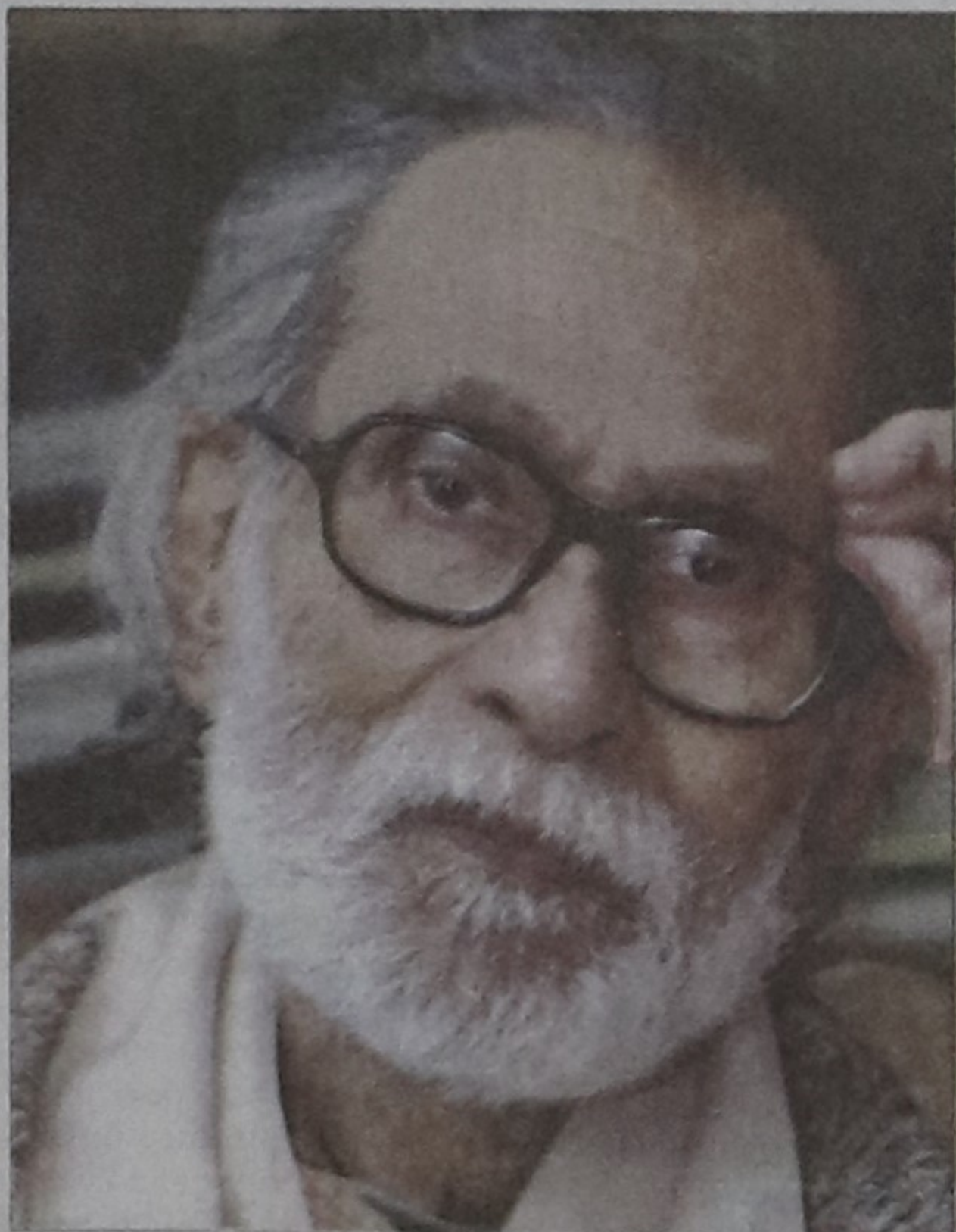
Amanul Huq's camera has captured many remarkable images of the Language Movement and Liberation War. His valorous photographs document our glorious history and the saga of its people -- valuable assets for post-Liberation War generation. These rare photographs help us explore our identity and existence. During national crises, his thought-provoking images help us to see things in perspective. Amanul's unmistakable talent is also apparent in his professional relationship with legendary filmmaker Satyajit Ray.

Tenacious, courageous and patriotic -- these epithets best describe Amanul. He photographed Language Movement martyr Rafique's distorted face, enraging the authorities. Soon afterwards, the police was after him. After many trials he managed to come out of this dragnet. Lanky, white bearded and outspoken, Amanul is very disheartened that his photographs are often published in various documents, journals and historical books without credits.

Amanul's tryst with the camera began when he was a student of Class VIII, even though cameras were a rarity those days. As he recalls, "Back then I used to take photographs of sailing boats, fishermen, children wading in a pond -- in general, the panoramic beauty of rural Bengal. As a novice photographer, these themes were very attractive to me and persuaded me to carry on in this direction. Once, I sent my photographs to The Azad, then a recognised Bangla newspaper (first published in 1936 from Calcutta). The first editor of the newspaper was Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan. After Partition, the paper shifted to Dhaka and came out on the stands in 1948. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin was editor at the time.

"My photographs were frequently published in The Azad and earned recognition and accolades. I became completely dedicated to photography. My passion, dreams and hopes were immersed in it.

"In 1954, the East Pakistan Literary Conference was held at Bangla Academy. Manoj Basu, Devi Prasad, Subhash Mukhopadhyay and other leading literary figures attended that conference. Fortunately for me, one of my solo exhibitions titled, 'Amar Desh Chitramala,' was being held at the Bangla Academy premises. The exhibition was lauded, and introduced me to



Amanul Huq

the Indian writers. My photo titled, 'Alosh Modhano,' was published in an issue of 'Notun Shahitoyo' (edited by Anil Singh), a literary journal published from Calcutta. The photo featured the plight of a refugee family. The image moved many. I was completely drawn to Marxism by that time.

"In the mid-'50s I moved to Calcutta from Dhaka and met Subhash Mukhopadhyay. Subhashda was very close to Satyajit Ray. He introduced me to Ray and I showed him my photographs. Ray told me that he had seen the images in one of the earlier issues of 'Notun Shahitoyo.' This intrigued me and encouraged me to work with him," the photographer reminisces. The low profile and introverted Amanul says, "In my view, Satyajit Ray was a complete human being. To find such a character is rare."

Bijoya Ray (wife of Satyajit Ray) was greatly appreciative of Amanul's talent. In her book, "Amader Kotha," she wrote, "A young man named Amanul Huq came to our house in 1959. His good manners won us over. Manik (Satyajit Ray) liked him and allowed Amanul to photograph him. Amanul became very close to us, even though for a short period."

In a journal, Satyajit Ray wrote, "I have known Amanul Huq for more than 20 years as a photographer of imagination, skill and enterprise. Over the years, he has kept pace with technical developments and has used them to further his aims as a creative interpreter of actuality. For over a generation, he has virtually recorded every aspect of life in his country, revealing a deep love for Bengali life and culture in all its manifestations. He also has the potential to portray it in film in documentary form, having been a keen student of the cinema and an observer of my working methods in the early sixties."

Marie Seton wrote a book on Satyajit Ray titled, "Portrait Of A Director Satyajit Ray." Recalling her meeting with Amanul, she said, "Early in March 1962, and for approximately a year, I saw a considerable amount of Mr. Amanul Huq and his work. I met him with Mr. Satyajit Ray in Calcutta when I went there to stay for the purpose of writing a book on Mr. Ray's work. I am very deeply impressed by the range of his work, his compositions and the way he captures authenticity at a single moment. I think Mr. Huq is a very outstanding photographer. Mr. Satyajit Ray has the utmost admiration for Mr. Huq over a period of many years."

### "Through our songs, we were able to keep the dream of independence alive"

-- Bipul Bhattacharya

NADIA SARWAT

The Liberation War was the outcome of a mass effort to acquire an independent Bangladesh. The war was fought both in the cultural arena as well as on the battlefield. Our literature, poems and songs were a major source of inspiration to the valiant freedom fighters who took up arms against the Pakistani military.

Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, the radio broadcasting centre set up by the Bangladesh government in exile, was at the hub of this momentous epoch. Noted folk artiste, Bipul Bhattacharya, was among those who used their creative abilities to inspire the nation during the war. This cultural personality recently conversed with The Daily Star and

in the programmes of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra."

The troupe's journey was documented on film by American filmmaker Lear Levin. Twenty-five years later, Tareque and Catherine Masud recovered the footage from Levin's basement and used it in their award-winning film "Muktir Gaan." The success of the documentary once more put Bipul Bhattacharya and his comrades in the lime-light.

"I didn't participate in the travelling troupe to gain anything; it was my mission as an artiste. Even when Bangladesh was freed, I never shared my war-experiences. Nor did any of us think that Levin's footage would be used in such a wonderful film. After the war, people started to recognise me and wanted to hear those patriotic songs. I found it a chal-



shared his experiences and opinions on a range of issues.

Bipul embarked on the interview by talking about his experience as a lead vocalist of the troupe 'Bangladesh Mukti Shangrami Shilpi Shangstha.'

"Led by noted Tagore exponent Sanjida Khatun, the troupe's main intention was to raise funds for the guerrillas and alleviate the misery of the countless refugees who lived in camps set up in India. We travelled to the border areas and in this regard, we were so driven by our mission that we hardly bothered about sleeping and eating. We saw at close quarters how the war affected people who had nothing left, but still dreamt of an independent country. Through our songs, we embodied the dreams. We were 'Shabdo Shamik' (warrior of words) with only one dream: a liberated Bangladesh. In between, we participated

to popularise these songs among the post-war generations," said the artiste. Now, however, he is convinced that these generations that have not seen the war, are showing interest in the history of the Liberation War.

"Though this generation didn't witness the war, they are keen to learn about this period in our history. After almost four decades, the renewed interest in Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra songs demonstrates that. In my opinion, this popularity will further increase," the artiste says.

As a music producer of Bangladesh Betar, Bipul now leads a musical organisation called 'Mallika Sangeet Shamroho.' Also a talented classical and Nazrul artiste, Bipul regards folk songs as his forte and says that he has discovered his roots in this genre. His recent music album, which is underway, will feature several new folk songs aimed at contemporary listeners.