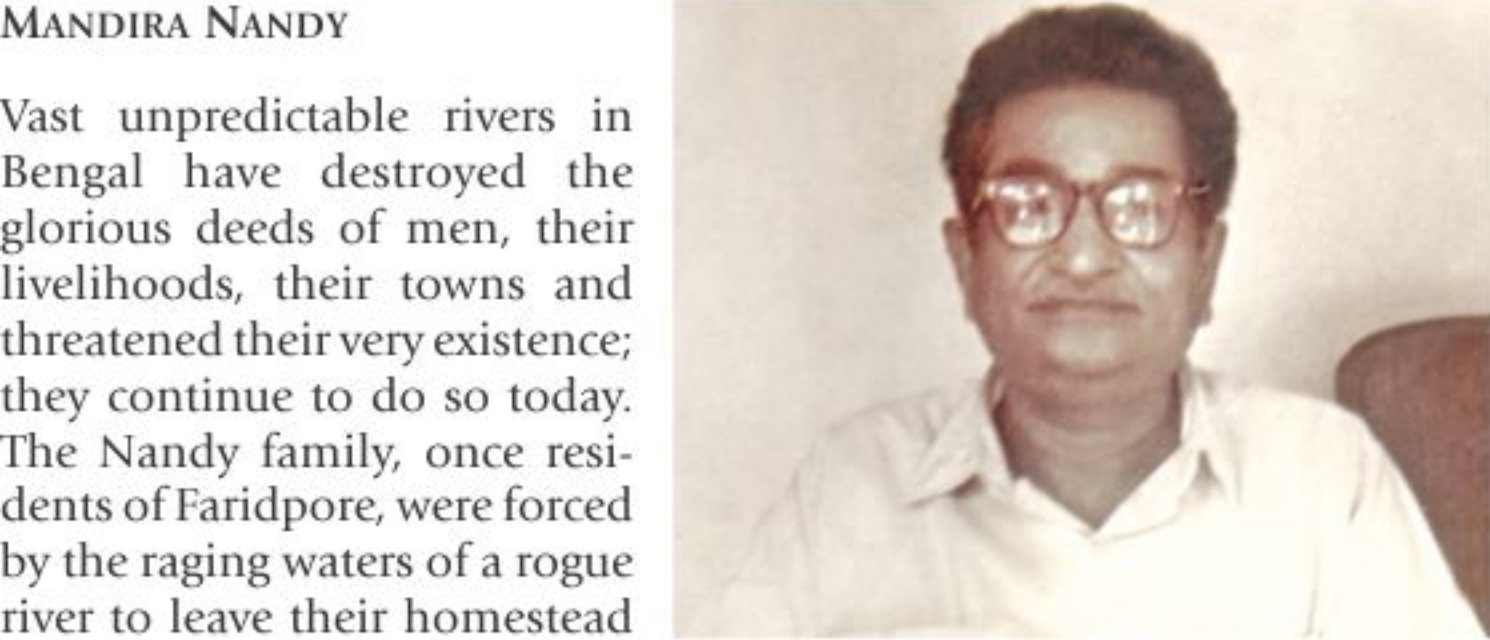


TRIBUTE

M N Nandy: Larger than life hero



MANDIRA NANDY

Vast unpredictable rivers in Bengal have destroyed the glorious deeds of men, their livelihoods, their towns and threatened their very existence; they continue to do so today. The Nandy family, once residents of Faridpore, were forced by the raging waters of a rogue river to leave their homestead and they went to settle on the other shore. After a time Mathura Nath Nandy, along with a few close relatives, came to settle in the village of Kushtia, P.S. Ghior, Manikganj town, in the district of Dhaka. He married Priyotama Dhar in the beginning of the 20th century. They went on to have seven daughters and three sons. The eldest son was named Manmatha Nath and given the 'daknam' (pet name) - Montu. The Nandy house still stands in Kushtia.

Mathura Nath Nandy finished his FA examination financially assisted by his elder brother. He intended to join a law course, but financial pressures made this impossible and he chose to join the Police Service. He took early retirement in the late 1930s and settled down as a farmer in Kushtia. His wife Priyotama, a devoted mother, had received no formal education but was an ardent reader of Bengali literature and was a subscriber to Prabasi. She took great interest in her children's upbringing. The ten produced two doctors, one lawyer, several headmistresses and a college lecturer in Physics. Many of her grandchildren recall hearing her tell them Bengali folk tales as well as stories from other lands. Mathura died in Kushtia in 1946.

Manmatha, the eldest son, was born in 1910, when his father was serving as a police officer at Feni, Noakhali. He matriculated from Rajbari School in 1926 and gained his ISc from Rajendra College in Faridpore and was admitted to Presidency College, Calcutta. He graduated in 1930 with honours in chemistry. While studying in Calcutta, he stayed in the Hindu Hostel of the Presidency College. Academically outstanding, he read widely and took an active interest in a whole range of sports, gaining Calcutta University blues in hockey, football and boxing; his boxing trainer was Mr Van Inghen. Manmatha read Vishnu De, Jibanananda Das and had a great liking for the works of Manik Bandyopadhyaya. Throughout his life he kept up his interest in sports, Bengali literature and Left politics. The politics led him, as it did many others at the time, to seek out and address social problems.

After Presidency College, Manmatha went on to study medicine at Carmichael Medical College (now R G Kar Medical College), Calcutta. He graduated in 1935, standing first in surgery and awarded the Lt Colonel S P Sarbadhikari Gold Medal. While in his penultimate year, he joined a voluntary group of doctors, commissioned by the army, who were rushed to Bihar to attend to the victims of the great earthquake centred around Munger that occurred on 15 January 1934. Completely destroying Munger and Muzaffarpur, this earthquake affected large parts of Bihar and Nepal, taking the death toll to over thirty thousand. Young Nandy along with the team of volunteers spent over three months working tirelessly in treating rescued people. Years later he told his children that it was the sight of such devastation that made his hair stand up – and it stayed that way! There was also a touching postscript in the mid-fifties in Dhaka: the family was visited by a young man named Manmatha, who claimed to have been saved from the debris of a collapsing house in Mungerr by Dr Nandy.

Manmatha married Santi Ballow Majumdar in 1934, when she was preparing for her matriculation examination from a boarding school in Jalpaiguri. Her family, though then based in Matelli, a small tea plantation town in the Dooars, was also from Manikganj, not far from Kushtia. After marriage she carried on her further studies at Scottish Church College. The couple lived in a flat in the Entally area of Calcutta. Having qualified as a doctor, Manmatha became a house surgeon and later a registrar at the Carmichael College. While still a student, he had come to the attention of Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy, the legendary physician and first Chief Minister of West Bengal post-Independence.

In 1939, the very prosperous and charitable family of the Bhagyakul Kundus (the Roys) asked Dr B C Roy to suggest to them a good doctor who would be prepared to help with organising a village hospital in Sreenagar, Bikrampur, Dhaka District. At Dr Roy's suggestion, the Kundus approached Dr Nandy.

Manmatha had a bright future ahead of him. His father-in-law had offered to help financially to send him to England for further studies. Calcutta was a city with plenty of opportunities and plenty of facilities. Sreenagar had no running water, no electricity, no roads. The source of drinking water was shallow wells or river water collected mid-stream. Hurricane lamps and Tilley lamps were the main sources of lighting. Wireless sets worked off car batteries, which needed to be transported to Dhaka for charging. Transport was by petrol driven boats and launches in the rainy season or by bicycle along high ground (saraks) at other times. There were no medical facilities nearby. These were some of the problems; more would become obvious later. But the wish to give his services to the needy persuaded Dr Nandy to accept the proposition of the Kundus. In 1939 he decided to take charge of the organisation of the hospital in Sreenagar named after Raja Srinath Roy. Santi, at this time, had given birth to a set of premature twins, a girl and a boy, in Calcutta. It was with his small family that Dr Nandy went to Sreenagar.

The first social problem he faced involved the local Zamindar, an upper caste Hindu, who resented the setting up of a hospital paid for by the Roys (Kundus) known to be Telis by caste. Many obstacles were created by the Zamindar and false allegations were levelled against the young doctor. The Nandy family have many tales to tell about the petty harassments. Dr Nandy overcame all the troubles that were thrown at him and the Raja Srinath Hospital began to function. In this task Dr Nandy was ably assisted by Dr Monindra Choudhury and Dr Barun Ganguly, who also sacrificed their certain good futures to serve the needy.

The hospital provided its services free and the financial responsibilities were borne by the Bhagyakul family. Later the Zamindar family also came to grow very close to the Nandy family with past problems forgotten and forgiven.

In Sreenagar, another son and daughter completed the family by 1942. A cow and well helped household hardly eased the family's austere domestic arrangements. The family acquired a boat with one Majhi (boatman); it was a convertible in the sense that in the rainy season it donned a chhai (covering). The boys were admitted to Sholaghar High School where they travelled mostly on this boat.

During this time Nandy organised football tournaments, a Bikrampur-wide sports event, a library named the Friends Association and a back garden badminton court. Dr Nandy had earned many medals for his own sports activities which he donated to deserving sportsmen. Although not playing football himself, he refereed many games.

Many tales are told about the operations Dr Nandy carried out successfully in dimly lit rooms assisted sometimes even by his wife, Santi. He travelled by boat and/or bicycle to the remotest of places where his diagnostic skills and healing powers came to be reputed as near miraculous. Many times he escaped from snakes and the hands of dacoits in the course of his duties. With the assistance of other doctors, he undertook the training of nurses, compounders, hospital cleaners and other paramedical officers. They had no official diplomas, but they were fit for purpose.

Although the doctor was not an official member of the Communist Party, he was an ardent fellow traveller. With the Party he agreed to the right of self-determination of Muslims. When he came to work in Sreenagar two young Muslim friends came to form lifelong bonds with the family. At the time they were both leftists, but over their lifetime they grew to follow completely different trajectories. Shamsuddin Ahmad, known to the Nandy children as Shamsuddin Kaku, later became a dedicated member of the Muslim League, once officiating as the Secretary. The other friend was the very young Faiz Ahmed whom the children, and in turn their children, called Faiz Da. Both these family members are dead now. Shamsuddin died in Pakistan where he had gone after the Bangladesh war of independence. Faiz Ahmed became famous for his Bengali poetry, political writings and journalism.

In 1943, when Dr Nandy was only 33 years old, Bengal witnessed the worst sub-continental famine in the twentieth century. It was a man-made disaster. In mid-1942, the British government under Winston Churchill feared that the Japanese would follow up their conquest of Burma with an invasion of British India from the Bengal Border. A 'scorched earth' policy was implemented in the Chittagong region, near the Burmese border, to prevent access to supplies by the Japanese in case of an invasion. Country boats, the main means of transport of people and foodgrains were systematically disabled and sunk under the 'Boat Denial Scheme'. Rice stored in godowns was confiscated and food deliveries from other parts of the country to Bengal were refused by the government in order to make food artificially scarce under the 'Rice Denial Scheme'. Valuable goods and most of the revenue collected were despatched home. Munshiganj, Sreenagar and all of Bikrampur suffered catastrophically. Later, estimates of deaths from this famine reached over four million.

At the time of this famine, Sri Asoke Mitra, ICS, was the sub-divisional officer headquartered in Munshiganj. Dr Nandy and Asoke Mitra co-opted a team and started relief work. Later Mitra recollected his memories of those days in his autobiography 'Teen Kuri Das', referring to Doctor Nandy as his friend, philosopher and guide. Dr. Nandy organised the godowns that were emptied of grains, set up temporary hospitals, medical clinics, relief centres and an orphanage. He trained volunteers and received help from St John's Ambulance. The orphanage was supervised by our mother Santi helped by other volunteers. It is rumoured that both Asoke Mitra and Nandy slept on their bikes. The extreme bicycling took its toll in later years. Nandy and Mitra brought out a small report on the famished mothers of the area. Unfortunately no copies survive.

After the famine, Governor Richard G Casey awarded Dr Nandy a silver medal for his work during this time. Dr Nandy's work was also mentioned in the Famine Inquiry Commission Report (1945).

In 1946, dark fearful clouds of partition loomed on the Indian horizon. Bengal was to be partitioned as it had been once before. Panic gripped the Hindu upper caste communities in areas that were to become East Pakistan, most of whom decided to migrate to West Bengal. In East Bengal, teachers, doctors, civil servants, lawyers, were mostly upper caste Hindus. Almost all of them abandoned their posts leaving East Pakistan without an adequate social infrastructure for schools, hospitals, law courts and various posts in the civil service. Mathura Nath Nandy had died just before independence. Manmatha would not abandon his Janmabhumi. Thus, he, along with his family, stayed on and accepted citizenship of Pakistan.

In 1948, Dr Nandy was transferred to Dhaka Medical College. Santi had temporarily gone back to her parents with her children to finish her graduation. She came back to finish degrees of Bachelor of Teaching (BT) and Master of Education (MEd) in Dhaka. She served as a headmistress in a number of Government and private schools in Dhaka and Mymensingh. At this time Dr Nandy rented a house - 16, Juginagar, near Thatar Bazaar (now known as Captain's Bazaar) in Dhaka. The two sons joined the Priyonth School (now known as Nawabpur Boys' High School) and the daughters joined the Nari Shiksha Mandir (now called Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Government Girls College), where Santi was the headmistress.

(The concluding part of the article will appear next week)

DR. MANDIRA NANDY IS THE DAUGHTER OF LATE DR. M N NANDY.

FICTION

SHAHID ALAM

The story seemed so outlandish that I could be forgiven for being incredulous even though I got it from the proverbial horse's mouth. That mouth belonged to a sixty-something man who was missing three upper and two lower incisors which lent an endearing quality to his disarming smile. His eyes, from under bushy eyebrows, had a delightful twinkle as they darted across my face. I was sitting across from him at an acquaintance's living room in a Bogra suburb. My friend, sitting next to me, interjected when I could not quite follow some of the words that were garbled and spoken in unfamiliar Bogra dialect (almost all of which, I hasten to add, I understand), as well as when he needed some explanation. The man was smallish, of spare frame, which was accentuated by a tight short-sleeve shirt and a lungi, and had a gaunt face covered with a salt-and-pepper full beard. He still proudly sported a full head of hair, also grizzled, marking a uniformity with his beard. He was sitting across from us because I had requested a meeting with him.

My good acquaintance had first told me the story, which aroused my curiosity, but also left a lot of unanswered questions and large gaps that could only be satisfied by the sprightly man sitting opposite us. He used to work as a guard at my acquaintance's parental home for a considerable length of time before finally landing the job of caretaker at a local socio-cultural organization's premises, which is situated within a short walking distance from my friend's place. He has continued at his job, and lives on the premises. And thereby hangs a tale.

The socio-cultural organization is housed in a very old building, dating back to the early twentieth century, which for a long time was a residence of a succession of Hindu families. It then fell deserted until the socio-cultural organization moved in. The caretaker lives in a small room all by himself as his family lives in their village home several kilometers away. He visits them at irregular intervals, but never fails to send them money each month. During daytime, including on weekends, at least one or the other of the organization's executives would spend time on the premises, if, for nothing else, than to delight in adda over cups of tea accompanying a variety of snacks bought from one of the several seedy eating houses in the vicinity. But, most days, the place would be full of activities, whether through organizing singing classes, or holding rehearsals for stage plays, or arranging other cultural programmes. Often they lasted well into the evening, but, inevitably, almost always before the onset of midnight, the last of the cultural activists and hangers-on left for his/her respective homes. Leaving the caretaker to savour the solitude, and look forward to a good night's rest.

Usually he would go to bed before mid-

night, after having dinner that he had cooked, or had shared the food that one or the other of the organization's executives/activists/hangers-on had bought. And then he would drift off into a peaceful night's sleep, to get up bright and early to begin the cycle of a day-in-the-life-of-a-socio-cultural organization's caretaker all over. One night, though, his sleep was interrupted. Or, rather, he just woke up and sat up on his bed, feeling a presence around him. He could not see it, but, all the same, he sensed that there was someone or something in the room. He sat absolutely still for a while, apprehending that a burglar had broken into the house and had come into his room.

"That fool! He'll only get some musical instruments. I just have a few pieces of clothing. Couldn't he find a rich house to burgle? He must be desperate!" He made up his mind to catch him, and then give him a hell of a beating. Just as he was about to shift his position, he heard a voice: "Look this way." He looked towards where the voice had come from, and gradually made out a shadowy figure. He was standing at the side of his bed. Eventually he got a clearer view without getting a definitive vision. With horror and amazement he realized that he could make out the hazy figure only because it was emanating some kind of a very faint light all around itself. It seemed that the figure was willing to show itself as a hazy outline, but not to reveal itself in full clarity. The caretaker's astonishment and fear grew as he saw another figure, equally indistinct, materialize as if from nowhere to stand next to the first. The second form spoke: "This is our place"

The caretaker finally found his voice: "Who are you? Where have you come from?"

"We are from this place. And don't talk so much. Otherwise, we'll break your neck."

At this point I interrupted the caretaker: "Did you believe them?"

"Yes, I did. They had such a cold hollow voice. By that time I was certain that they were not human. And I was afraid. They could be demons and could really do as they said."

"Please continue."

"Well, I said I was sorry. I was not going to anger them again. They seemed to be pacified. And then, why I don't know, I did a strange thing!"

"What?"

"I clasped my hands together and uttered 'Namashkar'."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Instinctively. I have heard that the house had been occupied by many Hindu families, and maybe these were two of their ghosts. I believe that the gesture saved me."

"How?"

"Well, they seemed to be pleased, and left soon after, vanishing into the air right in

front of my eyes. And every time they come, I always greet them with a 'Namashkar'."

"There have been other occasions?"

"Oh yes! Many."

"When do they come?"

"Between midnight and two o'clock at night."

"How do you know?"

"I look at my clock when they come and go. You see, I was no longer afraid of them as I could see they would not harm me. I believe they come just to make their presence felt and have fun with me. You know, they even said that they would wring the neck of anyone who would do me harm. I just have to tell them."

"Are they male or female?"

"Don't know. They have exactly the same hollow voice."

"What do they look like?"

"Don't know. They always come late in the night, and just show enough of themselves for me to make out their forms. Both seem to have dark robes covering them. And that hair!"

"Hair?"

"You can't imagine such hair. Thick, long, dark, flowing down from their heads to the bottom of their robes. To me, from what I have been able to make out, that hair even covers up their faces. Oh, that hair! You've never seen anything like it!"

He repeated his observation about the hair on several occasions.

"Did you ever ask who they are?"

Yes. Once. They warned me never to repeat that question. And I haven't!"

He went silent for some time, lost in thought.

He resumed: "I told you that they are having fun at my expense. You know, they often just scatter the rice and potatoes that I keep in that room. Once I went to see my family. One night I was outside my house, walking about, as I could not sleep. It was dark. Then I saw them materialize in front of me."

"Came to see you. When will you return?"

You must return. You can't stay here forever. This is a warning."

"So you returned?"

"I don't know if I can ever go back for good to my village. But, you know, I'm coming to the end of my life. I want to spend my last years with my family in my own house. If they come and wring my neck, so be it."

After he left, I just sat, incredulous. The caretaker must have been hallucinating about the whole affair! It was only a story. I have only related the story as he told me. I have tried to faithfully recount the tale as I had heard it. But it has got my curiosity going. I plan on going back to my good acquaintance's place in the near future, and spend a couple of nights at the caretaker's place from midnight till the break of day.

SHAHID ALAM IS AN EDUCATIONIST, ACTOR AND FORMER DIPLOMAT.

THOUGHTS

What is rhyme?

SHARMEEN RAHMAN

Poetry that rhymes relays a message through the music of the spoken word. It gives smoothness and flow to the poem; along with joy of reading.

A rhyme is a repetition of similar sounds in two or more words, most often at the end of lines in poems.

Poets use rhyme to help us remember the lines better, it basically aids our memory towards the poem. The rhyming words also help us in recalling words of the poem.

Rhyming creates copulation (coupling of lines with rhyme in the end).

Rhyme actually indicates and displays the technical skill of a poet.

Another purpose of rhyme in poems is that it helps us learn how a poem works, so that people can talk about it or describe it generally. Talking about and comparing rhymes help us know poetic skills better.

Rhyme in:

Adult poems- they show case poems about the constant need for self reinvention, relationships, joys of aging and about bloody edges. Rhymes in these poems create a soothing psychological effect and creates healing joy.

They all say she ain't no good
And I don't give a s**t
Maybe she's a loser
But she's got some tits!

Anyone that don't agree
Can suck my...lime
Why can't you just see
That loving her is not a crime?

Love poems- they basically have a romantic voice so rhymes in them give a happy and delighting feeling with a tone of pleasure:
Now just in case you're wondering,
what ages they could be...
Well, she's but two years younger than
his age of eighty-three.

So if assumptions, you had made -
in story told above -
you may have also missed the mark,
of true Agape Love.

Therefore, question all the writings,
discovered here and there,
that often miss the God of Love -
the hearer of each prayer.

wear blinders to 'believe' -
or come to some conclusion that
some well-known 'experts' weave.

Sometimes we think we know it all,
when all the facts we weigh -
but we do not create the God.

War poems- they usually have heavy words and disturbing voice along with a depressing tone. Thus, rhymes in them create attention and attractiveness which grasp us emotionally and touch us deeply (also psychologically):



Bullets thudding through thin fabric
leaving jagged tears in the camouflaged skin
As I haul firmly back on the stick of my
Hurricane

Turning to port on the edge of a spin..
Turning until blood drained from my cranium
surging deep down right into my boots
till finally the hun appears in my gun sight
and finally it is my turn to shoot

Peace when it came was a revelation
nothing to do, no war to be won
boredom the enemy, brandy the ally
I'd have been safer fighting the Hun
Women and whisky, Heroin Opium
Driving too fast in my little MG
No purpose to life now the hun is defeated
No place in the world for warriors like me.

I watch in my mirror as the Mig hurtles closer
closer and closer and closer until
reeling around in a stall turn manoeuvre
with cannon shells his belly I drill
He dies in a fireball, my Korean opponent
in a spam can thin coffin of Soviet jet
And I look down in pleasure at the smoking ruins
Knowing by rights that it I should be dead.

Demobbed again, no work for a warrior

Put out to grass by an ungrateful force
I sit by the phone waiting for the phone call
offering work that I know will not come
A Cupboard full of RAF memories
a chest full of medals are what use are they?
I take out and load my service revolver
Aim it fire it, blood and life ebb away.

Children poems- they always have cheerful and humorous words that create exciting and gleeful effects on children. So, rhymes in these poems give extra enjoyment to the children in reading, learning and understanding the poem:

I had a little nut tree,
Nothing would it bear
But a silver nutmeg,
And a golden pear;

The King of Spain's daughter
Came to visit me,
And all for the sake
Of my little nut tree.

Her dress was made of crimson,
Jet black was her hair,
She asked me for my nut tree
And my golden pear.

I said, "So fair a princess
Never did I see,
I'll give you all the fruit
From my little nut tree."

I danced o'er the water,
I danced o'er the sea,
And all the birds in the air,
Couldn't catch me.

Appropriateness

Appropriateness of rhymes in poems are never at its perfectness as there are no such thing as pure rhymes but just a combination of using the right sounding words with the right meanings at the right lines; creating the perfect sounding vocabulary. So, appropriateness should be thus appreciated at whatever pattern done.

Connection with theme and structure:

The connection between rhyming scheme and pattern is that they work together to emphasize the idea of the poem. Theme is the state of life or universal truth and structure is the pattern in the end of each line as well as the whole poem, since rhyme is also a pattern of the poem; theme, structure and rhyme go parallel. Thus, the are closely connected to each other.

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