When Words Became Weapons

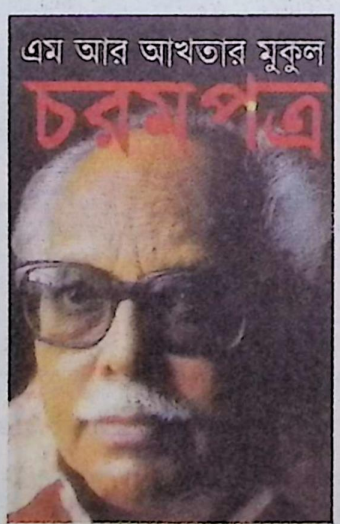
The broadcasts from Shwadhin Bangla Betarkendra of '71, gave the people a sense of what was happening in the battle fields. While the news bulletin helped people to follow the progress of the war on a day-by-day basis, lively patriotic songs and plays instilled a nationalistic spirit in people craving for freedom. Formed on the 26th March, 1971 the Kalurghat radio centre was discarded when it was wiped out by the Pakistan Air Force on March 30. The centre, however, recommenced its second phase of activities from 3 April 1971 at Bagafa (Tripura State) with a short wave transmitter. The centre was later shifted to Shalbagan and Bagafa-Belonia Forest Hills Road, Agartala. The third phase of the centre commenced on the 25th May in a house in Baliganj, Calcutta. At the very critical juncture of our nation, different programmes broadcasting from this legendary radio centre helped to keep the nation's spirit high.

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA

It was 1971. Fifteen-year-old Shajeda Ali, sitting with her parents and some of her distant relatives were trying to catch the frequency of a radio station called *Shwadhin Bangla BetarKendra* on the radio. "During those months, I remember my father used to remain glued to his radio sets, and so did we," Shajeda Ali recalls her early teen days of wartime.

"I remember him struggling with the knobs on the radio attempting to hear the broadcasts from *Shwadhin Bangla Betarkendra*, especially the latest war news bulletins and *Charampatra*, a very popular programme. *Azrail a dhaoaise, Kufa lagse, khel shuru hoise*- those were some of the catchphrases we used to pick up from *Charampatra*."

Like Shajeda Ali and her family, millions of Bangladeshis from all over the country used to be mesmerized with that 8-10 minute monologue of *Charampatra*, presented by a charismatic and gifted public speaker called M. R. Akhter Mukul.



***Charampatra* by M R Akhter Mukul used to be very popular.**

In a satirical tone he used to mock the Pakistani army while praising the bravery of our freedom fighters. An added attraction was the Mukul's use of local dialects which made this programme popular among the villagers. Through storytelling, he would narrate the latest war related news or the heroic raid of the troops of liberator bombers over an enemy-held territory. He used to simplify the critical political situation and military tactics for the general people all over the country. Airing almost every day during the war days, those ten minutes of dramatic commentary came to an end on December 16 like this- "*aaij sholoi December. Charampatrar shasher din apnago Bandar namta koiya jai. Bandar nam M. R. Akhter Mukul.*"