

Powerful lyrics can be turned into lethal weapons. Even today we are moved by the songs of 'Joy Bangla'r Gaan' (The songs of freedom). These songs have remained in the hearts of countless individuals since their creation in 1971. *Mora Ekti Phul Ke Bachabo Bole Juddho Kori, Purbo Digonte Shurjo Utheche* and *Ek Shagor Rokter Binomoye* have inspired generation after generation of Bangladeshis. For these gems, we, the nationals of Bangladesh, will forever be indebted to Govinda Halder – the man behind the immortal words.

On March 25, 1971 – the war broke out in every corner of the country. With limited resources and abilities, people from all walks of life joined the struggle for freedom. By the end of May, Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, a clandestine radio station of the resistance, started its second phrase, as it aired revolutionary programmes from Baliganj Circular Road, Calcutta (now Kolkata). And this became an invaluable instrument of inspiration during the war.

Apart from the news bulletins, it was the fiery, emotion-filled songs inspiring people to protest for a free Bangladesh that became an indivisible part of the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. For freedom fighters and thousands fighting for their rights, this station and its patriotic songs were the only way they could endure the trauma, bloodshed and agony of war.

At that time, radio officials thought of introducing



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Kamal Lohani

“WHEN I TOOK A LOOK AT HIS LYRICS, I KNEW I WAS AT THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME.”

“NOW IT IS TIME TO RETHINK ABOUT IT AND THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD RE-RELEASE THE SONGS WITH THE ACCURATE TUNES AND NOTES.”



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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something new for their audience – something that would break away from the tradition of playing old recorded songs and regale them with rousing music performed live. Renowned activist and the news editor of the revolutionary radio station, Kamal Lohani, shared his desperate search to find strong lyricists with one of his friends Kamal Ahmed, who lived in Kolkata. Ahmed informed him about a young man, who wrote songs about the struggle of

the people.

Lohani asked him to set up a meeting with the young lyricist. “While we were searching for a lyricist who could capture the essence of our country's struggle, Govinda Halder appeared like a saviour with two notebooks loaded with 24 to 30 songs,” Lohani says.

At the beginning, Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra mostly broadcasted songs written before the war broke out. But the scenario changed completely during the war. Thus, there was a pressing need for

new words and expressions. And that's exactly what Lohani found in Govinda Halder's diary.

The three of them met at a cafeteria in Esplanade, Kolkata. Govinda, wearing a kurta and a pair of simple trousers, took out two diaries from his bag. A label was boldly stuck on the face of the white cover – ‘Joy Banglar Gaan.’

The lyrics had a sense of rhythm and went with the spirit of the war. Lohani liked the title but it was the intensity of the lyrics that left him dumbstruck. “In the sixties, during our movement against the Pakistani regime, we sang songs mostly written by Abu Bakkar Saddique, Akter Hossain and others. But during the war, the situation changed drastically. When I took a look at his lyrics, I knew I was at the right place at the right time,” says Lohani.



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Artistes of Bangladesh Mukti Shangram Shilpi Shangstha listen to the radio in 1971.

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Hours passed, as one round of tea was followed by another. The young writer recited lyric after lyric from his diary, grabbing Lohani's undivided attention. At the end of the recitation, Lohani asked Halder for the diaries straight away. “He was a sensitive person and for that reason alone, he could sense the essence of our war and beautifully portray it in words,” explains Lohani. When asked for the diaries, Govinda Halder smiled quietly before handing them to Kamal Lohani.

At the revolutionary radio station Samar Das was one of the senior composers. Lohani gave the diaries to him for his consideration. Weeks passed. Das didn't have the time to even open the notebooks. One day Lohani asked composer Apel Mahmud about Halder's diaries, inquiring as to why nothing was being done about them. Hearing the details, Mahmud found his interest growing.

After going through Govinda's diary, Mahmud felt the pull of the inspiring words, and chose *Mora Ekti*