



POETRY

Poetry

BY FOUZIA MAHIN CHOUDHURY

The Swains and the Sea
What is a sea to a fisherman's eye?
A giving friend? A savior?
Or a killer in disguise?
A fierce monster
to deal with...
to duel with...
Or is it a she to a moonboat sailor?
A mistress full of mystery
So cruel...so beautiful...
An enigma she is
Never to get over with.
And the man who dries her gifted fish,
How indispensable her existence is
to him?
In that stinginess he smells life!
Even their women in the shore,

has taken the truth of being a second priority.
But what do her lovers mean to the sea?
Who knows what secret she keeps
in her deep!
But if you could grasp the voice
of the splashing waves, the breeze,
seagulls noise,
they would tell you a tale
of how she is bound by her lovers spell;
that devoid these swains on her coast
her invincible magic is somewhere lost.

Fouzia Mahin Choudhury is a freelance creative writer, lyricist, and an emerging poet. She is also a media communications professional; currently working with a research based audio-visual production hub Empty Yard.



THE MUSE

HASAN MARUF



Each writer born must have a muse,
Or so I'm told, for if they do,
And if they should, do they know how
To let it in or haven't found

A way to hear it whispering
Like mine, who tells me everything,
And always watches after me
To heed the way I ramble free.

For years before I touched a pen,
It's always loved the little wren
That plays, and sees me in this way,
Both in the dark and light of day.

And when I don't know what to say,
It doesn't coddle me per se.
In fact the muse is very wise
Unlike myself when I surmise,

And get in trouble; to the point,
For when it sees I'm out of joint
It doesn't wear dark robes to judge
Or lets me hang, it doesn't budge.

And never does it find me dull,
To serve a life without a lull;
This poet's mind is quite Byzantine
And that's because the brain is mine.

No other like it will you find;
I never seek, or gravitate.
Just like the charge it acclimates,
The muse is on my family tree;

A special branch; some will agree.
For what it knows is every truth
Since the time of birth & from my youth,
It doesn't need to pull a tooth.

It doesn't care for rational,
It loves me unconditional.
From setting moon to rising sun
The Muse, the Mind & I are One.

Hasan Maruf teaches English in DPS STS School, Dhaka. He entertains himself by looking at things from odd angles.

Nation, Identity and Alternative Bangla Cinema: Conversing with Tanvir Mokammel (Part II)

INTERVIEWED BY SABIHA HUQ

SH: In 2011 you made a mega-documentary on 1971. What research on governmental policy documents went into the use of firearms by the Muktiyoddhas as shown in your film, or as generally shown in films on the Liberation War?

TM: There existed different positions of freedom fighters in the more professional Bengal Regiment of the Pakistan Army: members of East Pakistan Rifles (EPR), police, Ansar, Mujahid and purely civilian freedom fighters, mostly students and young men from different walks of life. The freedom fighters from the armed forces had their professional guns and weapons, generally 303 rifles, some Chinese automatic rifles, light machine guns (LMG), even 2" or 3" mortars. But the ragtag civilian forces had all kinds of weapons, 303 rifles, mostly bore rifles, single or double barrel shotguns, pistols, even air-guns, used for shooting birds. You can see those weapons in their hands from the archival footages of that period. But after the guerillas got training in the Indian camps, the quality of their weapons supplied by the Indian Army improved which included Sten guns (mostly made in Czechoslovakia) and hand grenades.

Historically the Bengalis were a non-combatant nation. So, firearms were more than exotic. The freedom fighters, mostly ragtag guerilla units, used any kind of gun they could marshal or lay their hands on, especially during the first phase of the war. Later when the liberation war began to gather momentum and trained guerilla units were being sent inside the country, each team would generally have some average rifles, along with a few Sten guns, one or two mortars and some hand grenades. My films, or all other films on the Liberation War for that matter, have to show those weapons. But to collect those for filming was never easy. For example, during the shooting of my film Nadir Naam Madhumati, as the then government was an anti-liberation one, we could not collect any firearms from any government sources to shoot the film realistically. We approached the Bangladesh Army, the BDR, even the police, but failed everywhere. That is why the battle-scenes or the action-scenes of Nadir Naam Madhumati have seemed so weak.

SH: How would you view films on this subject made in India/West Bengal?

TM: Unfortunately, not many films in India were made on our Liberation War. The few endeavors made in fiction in Bollywood were

mostly what I would call crude commercial attempts. So the firearms or the characters presented in those were not that realistic or research based ones. But some worthy efforts were made in the genre of documentary. I could mention Sukhdev's well-made documentary Nine Months to Freedom. We must also remember that three documentaries made by three Bangladeshi film-makers on our Liberation War were made in West Bengal. These are Zahir Raihan's Stop Genocide, Alamgir Kabir's Liberation Fighters and Babul Chowdhury's Innocent Millions. As they were documentaries, the right kind of arms and ammunitions were displayed in those films.

SH: Talking of firearms, what do you feel about the way commercial films in Bangladesh present them as part of the contemporary visual culture?

TM: Very poorly, I would say. Actually, the commercial filmdom of Bangladesh hardly does any research for a film they make, including those of 1971 war. So, the weapons or the characters used in their films are mostly anachronistic that do not represent the historical reality at all. For action-scenes they hire cheap artificial toy weapons from the shops in Karwan bazaar near FDC, which hardly represent the real weapons used during that 1971 war, or in that case, in any war. Their films dwell in a make-belief world and crudely lack any sense of reality that might be involved in any sort of creative venture.

SH: Going back in historical time, your film Seemantorekha (2017) privileges Bengal partition over the more documented Punjab partition. I have read your interview in The Daily Star (25th August 2017) on this. Given that we too have worked institutionally on oral history and amnesia (I coordinated an international project at KU in 2017-2018); I'd like to ask how you view Partition in the light of memory studies from the perspective of the common people whose narratives are still largely undocumented.

TM: The significance of 1947 Partition can hardly be overemphasized. It has so many ramifications. Most of our present day social, political and cultural problems are rooted in the Bengal Partition. You know I have made quite a few films, both fictions and documentaries, on the war of 1971. The deeper I look into our history, the more I find the ever-widening significance of 1947 Partition in our socio-cultural and political history. I already made a fiction film Chitra Nadir Pare on the backdrop of 1947 Partition. On after-thoughts, I felt that the epochal

events of the Partition and its far-reaching effects warranted a research-based documentary.

The ruling circles of Bangladesh are generally beneficiaries of the 1947 Partition. Due to Partition and massive migration of the Hindu population, possibilities arose for them to grab Hindu properties, land, jobs and social positions. The Muslim academia, too, have benefitted by the vacuum created due to the departure of the Hindu intellectuals from this land. So there seems an uncanny silence about the 1947 Partition even in academic discourses in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, to the common people of both sides of Bengal, the memories of 1947 have remained indelible. The Czech novelist Milan Kundera once said; "Struggle of people against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting". Notwithstanding the eerie silence among the ruling class of Bangladesh



about the Partition of 1947, common people from both sides of the border have kept those memories afresh in their minds. There is no amnesia in them, but their voices are not heard much. I believe as a film-maker my job is to give voice to the voiceless. Hence my film Seemantorekha [The Borderline].

SH: Bangladesh Short Film Forum, Bangladesh Federation of Film Societies, Bangladesh Film Institute, and Bangladesh Film Centre – your contribution to cinema in the country has been boundless in different capacities. How do you view the evolution of visual culture in Bangladesh over the last five decades?

TM: For the creation or day-to-day functioning of some of the organizations you have mentioned, I may have some contribution, but there were also others involved and our

work was always collective. I had been involved in film society movement since my student days. One particular contribution of mine that you can single out was the realization that we needed to get beyond routine activities of a film club (holding film shows, seminars, workshops, and discussions about films, or publishing film journals) if we were to change the film culture of this country. It was necessary to make films by ourselves. So I initiated to make the short film Hooliya, a pioneering work at that point of time.

Another contribution seems to be the highlighting of the need for film education. I firmly believe proper film education is a must to develop a positive film culture in this country. I have decided that when I am not making a film, I will try to make film-makers. With this aim I established the Bangladesh Film Institute

long lost, especially after the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib and the four national leaders in 1975. The present day Bangladesh state has made too many compromises with the utterly corrupt and super rich business cliques and with the regressive Islamic forces of this land. Not too much positive things, at least in culture, can be expected from the state of Bangladesh, as it stands now.

Not only my documentary film on the Chittagong Hill Tracts titled Karnaphulir Kanna, the then censor board also banned the fictional work Nadir Naam Madhumati on our Liberation War. Only by writ petition and verdict from the High Court could both films be released. It is true that later my films were given a number of national awards by the state, and I myself was given the prestigious Ekushe Padak. However, I guess the state did not have much of a choice as not doing so would be too much a disgrace for the government. Besides, there are always some well-meaning individuals in any system, and that holds true even for a crude and philistine state machinery.

But from my part, I have always tried to stay away from the affairs of the state. I always believe what the medieval Sufi saint from Persia, Alem Mawri Sufian had said: "The best among the kings is one who mingles with the artists, and the worst among the artists is one who mingles with the king".

SH: As we conclude, I would love to hear from you about your project on alternative education in Bangladesh in some detail. Do we, as academics, have the scope of being part of your efforts?

TM: I always believed that our formal education was not good enough, and that it has been failing our society. My interest in alternative education grew since my youthful left-wing days. After perusing Tagore, Paulo Freire, and especially the Scandinavian pedagogue N.E.S Grundvig (on whom I have even written a small book), I thought I might as well embark upon establishing some schools to impart the right education to our children. Mine is a very modest affair. I run two non-formal cultural schools for the children where subjects like song, dance, theatre, computers etc., which are not taught in formal schooling, are taken up. You, or anyone, who is willing to contribute her time and talent, are most welcome to be part of these schools.

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