



# Serenading the sublime souls of the soil

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

Qayyum Chowdhury devoted his time to making posters and took an active part in demonstrations after the March 1971 crackdown by the Pakistan Army. Not only was his own life in danger for his active participation in the freedom movement but that of his family and friends too. Qayyum Chowdhury worked feverishly, motivated by his emotion and mind, drawing inspiration from what he saw before his eyes. At first bitter and full of angst, in 1971, with independence in hand for the nation that had suffered from one of the worst genocides in recorded history, Qayyum then brought in the portrayal of war with joyous victory in mind. His paintings and sketches then were like Delacroix's Victory in theme and Goya's other remarkable pieces on burning images of war. In his works, with the theme of Liberation War, one finds dancing lyrical lines, colours of protest, agony and suffering. The furious energy, the determination and dedication of the freedom fighters were perhaps not delineated better except by Hashem Khan or Shahabuddin Ahmed on canvas, much later on.

A freedom fighter, Hashem Khan was wounded in the 1971 war. He witnessed many painful incidents on the battlefield. 'The Revolt of Bengal', 'The Speech of March 7', 'The River of '71' and 'The Letter of '71' are some of his painting series on this theme. The series delve into a nation's longing for freedom. Animated male and female figures are visible in the works.

Apart from individual attempts, a group of artists who were living in Kolkata during the liberation war arranged an



Painting by Quamrul Hassan.



Sculpture at Bangladesh India Moitree Park.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

exhibition titled 'Paintings and Drawings of Bangladeshi Artist' at 'Birla Academy', Kolkata, in September 1971. This exhibition, showcasing 66 paintings by 17 artists, was important. The entire world came to know about the carnage launched by Pakistani Army through that exhibition.

Three things -- the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the glorious Liberation War of 1971 and the world of art -- play significant roles in the conscience and lifestyle of internationally famous Bangladeshi artist Shahabuddin Ahmed. A Freedom Fighter, he exhibited

paintings in the war camp in 1971. His canvas has been full of motion and movement, vigour and liveliness while his bold brush has depicted the epic of our glorious Liberation War in a magnanimous way.

Shahabuddin hoisted the Bangladeshi flag in erstwhile East Pakistan radio at 11:30 am on December 16, when the Pakistan army was yet to surrender. But, he knew what was going to happen. "This was the indomitable spirit and I kept that up. I take pride in that," says Shahabuddin Ahmed. "I fought a nine-month battle to free my motherland. This is the glorious part of my

life. Freedom is becoming more priceless as days go by. The birth of Bangladesh would not be possible without the birth of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Pakistani army acted like fools. They thought their conspiracies and atrocities would bear fruit. But the freedom-loving Bangalees proved our victory over them," said Shahabuddin Ahmed, whose famous series includes 'Freedom', 'Platoon', 'Le Victoire', 'Arreter Le Genocide' and more.

The contributions of our women artists to the Liberation War and the post-independent Bangladesh are no less important than their male counterparts. Artist Hashem Khan regards the life of eminent sculptor and Freedom Fighter Ferdousi Priyabhashini as a great piece of art. Ferdousi Priyabhashini was the first one to publicly announce herself as a Birangona, a term coined by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for women who had survived sexual violence during the war. As an honest and courageous personality, she struggled through her entire life for the justice of anti-liberation forces. Thus she established the status of Birangonas as Freedom Fighters in our society, and we published the testimony of her persecution. She held war children close to her heart and proudly declared that she was their mother. As a sculptor she took her artwork to new heights. She transformed many discarded raw materials into art. Renowned sculptor Lalarukh Selim and prominent painters Farida Zaman, Nazlee Laila Mansur and Rokeya Sultana depicted artworks on the theme of Bangladesh's Liberation War, beautiful landscapes, political aspects and people's struggles in their artworks.

Eminent artists Rashid Choudhury, Samarjit Roy Choudhury, Monirul Islam, Kalidas Karmakar, Nisar Hossain, Shahid Kabir, Jamal Ahmed, Sheikh Afzal Hossain, Ahmed Shamsuddoha and others too portrayed paintings and prints on Bangladesh's Liberation War. Monirul Islam portrayed a famous print titled "The Birth of Bangladesh" in Madrid, Spain. Politically conscious artist Nisar Hossain depicted a number of artworks on Liberation War.

Artist Biren Shome's book titled 'Bangladeshi artists' contribution to the Liberation War of 1971' is a bit of a rarity. What truly sets it apart is the rich trove it provides of the imagery associated with the war, as seen through the eyes of the nascent state's mostly young, ragtag band of artists, expressed in a variety of mediums. Many of the works, especially the posters, will be familiar to readers. For example, the famous print proclaiming the unity of all religions among the Bengali Freedom Fighters that has adorned many a university student's dorm wall, we now know, was the work of artist Debdas Chakraborty. Similarly, it was Pranesh Mandal who put a name to the iconic image of the woman freedom fighter above a proclamation that Bengal's mothers and daughters were all Freedom Fighters.

Sculpture is considered one of the most important and lasting genres of art. After the Liberation War, sculptures in Bangladesh mainly focused on the theme of the independence movement. Many significant sculptures were built in the mid '70s and early '80s. Abdur Razzaque is regarded as one of the greatest sculptors

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15