

Gobinda Halder (1930-2015): A Forgotten Lyricist of the Indian Subcontinent*

Dr. Rup K. Barman¹

¹Professor
Department of History
Jadavpur University
Kolkata 700032
Email: rupkumarbarman@gmail.com

Abstract: *Indian subcontinent is very rich for its own culture. Since the very beginning of settled historical period, Indian subcontinent has produced a galaxy of laureates, poets, dramatists and chroniclers. The trend of literary endeavors has equally continued in mediaeval and modern period. Nowadays, Indian literatures have established a distinct place in the literary domain of the world. Along with literature, Indian singers and musicians are also well-known in the entire world. It is unfortunate that the name of many composers and lyricists have been forgotten by the people of present generation though a small number of them are still considered to be the sources of inspiration. However, the poets, musicians, singers and performers of modern times have remarkable presence in the 'public memory' as well in our daily lives due to the growth of modern technology in printing, recording and preservation. In spite of it, we often forget many notable figures. In this context, Gobinda Halder (1930-2015) is notable one who is being forgetting by the people of India and Bangladesh in spite of his significant contributions in the 'Liberation War' of Bangladesh (1971). This article has briefly discussed about of the contributions of Gobinda Halder in the Liberation War of Bangladesh and the peoples' movement in West Bengal.*

Keywords: *Liberation War of Bangladesh, Gobinda Halder, West Bengal Fishermen Conference, Bhagirathi, etc.*

Indian subcontinent is very rich for its own culture. Since the very beginning of settled historical period, Indian subcontinent has produced a galaxy of laureates, poets, dramatists and chroniclers. Its excellent literary pieces starting from epics (like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata) to the Vedas, treatise on political thoughts, religious works and grammars of ancient period have received wide attention in all across the world. The trend of literary endeavors has equally continued in the mediaeval and modern periods. Nowadays, Indian literatures have established a distinct place in the literary domain of the world. Along with literature, Indian singers and musicians are also well-known in the entire world. It is unfortunate that the name of many composers and lyricists have been forgotten by the people of present generation though a small number of them are still considered to be the sources of inspiration. However, the poets, musicians, singers and performers of modern times have remarkable presence in the 'public memory' as well in our daily lives due to the growth of modern technology in printing, recording and preservation. In spite of it, we often forget many notable figures. In this context, Gobinda Halder (1930-2015) is notable one who is being forgetting by the people of India and Bangladesh in spite of his significant contributions in the people's movement and in the 'Liberation War' of Bangladesh (1971). In this article, I'll briefly discuss about of Gobinda Halder's writings for preserving his contributions for the future generation.

II

Gobinda Halder was born on 6th June 1930 in a Malo (Malla Kshatriya) family of Bongaon of Jessore district of British Bengal. He had studied in the University of Calcutta and completed Graduation and Post-Graduation in Bengali. Since his childhood, Gobinda Halder was very much interested in composing poetry and semi-classical songs (*Padabalis*). He had continued his passion for writing literary pieces even after joining the Income Tax Department of the Government of India.

Gobinda Halder was highly influenced by the literary pieces of Adwaita Malla Barman (1914-1951) for which he was very much inclined to the movement of the common people including the fishermen and peasantry. Along with Susanta Halder, Indrajit Malla Barman, RS Barman and many other fishermen activists he was involved in the foundation of the Paschim Bangla Matsyajibi Samity (1968-1969) or West Bengal Fishermen Conference (WBFC).¹ Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Gobinda Halder had written extensively for the protection of rights of the fishermen of West Bengal. Simultaneously, he had inspired the freedom fighters of Bangladesh. Though he lost his sights due to glaucoma, he was an inspiring figure for the activists of the Adwaita Malla Barman Educational and Cultural Society (AMBECS) founded in 1994.

III

As a poet and lyricist, Gobinda Halder was a familiar name among the fishermen and peasantry of West Bengal. He was the editor of the *Bhagirathi*, a mouthpiece of the West Bengal Fishermen Conference. In its first volume, Gobinda Halder raised the issue of deprivation of the fishermen of West Bengal. According to him:

‘It is due to the historical blunder the land of the *Ganga- Jamuna-Padma-Meghna-Bhagirathi* called Bengal has been divided into two parts. A considerable number of fishermen of the bank of these rivers have been uprooted and transformed into ‘migrant labourers’..... Those who have settled in West Bengal (with minimum provision for survival) are still suffering from innumerable problems. The government is silent about them.....the educated gentlemen and the *Bhadralokas* are not concerned about their miseries ...How long this miserable condition will continue? How long the fishermen of our country will remain silent?’²

After critically examining the socioeconomic background of the fisherman of West Bengal, Gobinda Halder had suggested that ‘the only way to resolve their problems and improvement of their socio-economic condition is the “united struggle” and to force the West Bengal Government to look into their issues.’³

He aptly argued that the ‘fishermen of West Bengal though living in distressed condition in the remote corners of West Bengal but they are not free from the impact of global trends of politics, international relations and movement of the poor classes’. He wrote:

‘We are moving towards future with a critical juncture of history. On the one hand, the oppressed, depressed, exploited workers, ‘primary producers’ and proletariats of the entire world are struggling --- on the other hand, the capitalists, bourgeoisie and selfish profiteering class are busy to ensure their domination. Thus two opponent groups are engaged in the protection of their respective interests..... though we the fishermen of West Bengal are living in a remote corner of the world, we are not free from this global trend.’⁴

Gobinda Halder, however, was inclined to the victory of the proletariats. He wrote:

Standing with the struggling masses, let us welcome the world free from all exploitation.’⁵

These works of Gobinda Halder are indicating towards his concern on the struggle of common people as well the fishermen of West Bengal under the global domain. His love for the fishermen and the rivers had motivated him to raise the condition of the toiling fishermen before the world. In this context we may cite a composition of Halder on the *Bhagirathi* (a branch of the *Ganga*). He had illustrated:

And, the Bhagirathi flows endlessly.

In the innumerable hearts, that name is still shining.

In the distant past, Bhagirath brought this stream
with a dream for resolving the curse of the Sagars.

Time flows then time goes by:

The *Bhagirathi* still flows in her own name.

We, the descendants of Bhagirath
have built their homes for ages on the banks of the *Bhagirathi*.

Our sorrow and happiness rest on this river.

Our birth and death are always retain in the hands of her.
We cast nets in this river; someone boats in its water
We cross this river from the sunrise to the evening.
Our livelihood is bestowed on it.
We are the 'sons of this river' grew with fish and rice.....
And all those happy days seems like an illusion today.
Bhagirathi flows with empty fish before the hungry face!
It does not provide adequate earning while hauling fish with nets for whole day.
We are still alive with endless pain.
Yet we listen to its flow in our vain.
The dried *Bhagirathi* still sings songs in my strings of the chest.
Where is new Bagirath? Free us from this bonded life.
Our all efforts have failed. And, the *Bhagirathi* still flows endlessly.⁶

It shows that Gobinda Halder has picturize the paucity of fish in the rivers like the *Bhagirathi* leading to the crisis in the lives of the fishermen. He was looking for a new hero (like New Bhagirath) to rescue them from the curse of poverty.

Apart from his concern about the economic subordination of the fishermen and other common people, Gobinda Halder had composed almost 3,500 semi-classical songs called *Gobinda Padabali*. Unfortunately we could not collect his all compositions on *Padabalis*.⁷ We are fortunately to review a few *Gobinda Padabali* as published in different periodical and magazines.⁸ However, the major portion of *Gobinda Padabali* has remained unpublished.

Gobinda Halder has received proper attention mainly for his role as an inspiring mentor of the Liberation War of Bangladesh (26th March to 16th December 1971). He composed several songs for the freedom fighters of Bangladesh in 1971. Among them 'Eksagar Rakter Binimaye Bangler Swadhinata Anlo Jara', 'Mora Ekti Phulke Bachabo Bole Juddho Kari', 'Purbo Digante Surya Utheche Rakta Lal', etc. were very much inspiring. In *Eksagor Rokter Binimoye Bangler Swadhinata Anlo Jara*', Gobinda Halder wrote:

At the cost of a sea of blood....
Those who you brought the freedom of Bangladesh
We'll not forget you ...
Along the thorny path of sorrow and pain
Those who you tear the noose of exploitation
We'll not forget you.....
From the cruel bondage of this age
Those who you brought the message of freedom
We will not forget you....
On the way to build a new homeland
You will guide us forever
We'll not forget you.....⁹

Similarly '*Mora Ekti Phulke Bachabo Bole Juddho Kari*' (We fight to save a flower. We hold weapons for a smile on one's face) was also a sensitive one. In this context, Gobinda's composition like '*Purba Digante Surya Utheche Rakta Lal*' was transformed into a 'marching song' for the freedom fighters of Bangladesh. He wrote:

The Sun has risen in the eastern horizon....blood red, blood red, blood red,
The tide has come among the peoplered blood, red blood, red blood.
It's a time to torn all kind of bonds,
It's a time...it's a time....it's a time to torn.
The tide has come among the people..... red blood, red blood, red blood
The days of exploitation are over...
The oppressors tremble today in terror the blood prevents the fire,
New Bengal's new morning... new morning... new morning.
The Sun has risen in the eastern horizon
And without any delay raise the flag.....
Tear off all enemy nets, enemy nets.....
The sun has risen in the eastern horizon. ¹⁰

These songs of Gobinda Halder used to be broadcasted from the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. As per the rules of this radio station, no foreigner was allowed to compose song for it. So Gobinda Halder's name was not aired in the radio as the composer of these songs on the Liberation War. However, the station authority had eventually acknowledged him as the lyricist of these songs when he visited Dacca in 1972. 'Ek Sagar Racter Binimaye' was so popular that the Bangladesh Television (the national Television Channel of Bangladesh) has accepted it as its 'signature tune'. In 2012, the Bangladesh Government has awarded the *Friends of Liberation War Award* to Gobinda Halder for his contributions. ¹¹Abdul Hamid (President of Bangladesh) met Shri Halder in 2014 (22nd December) and recognized the contributions of Gobinda Halder with the following words:

'You are a true friend of Bangladesh. You wrote many songs, you love Bangladesh. You had played a great role in our Liberation War'. ¹²

After the death (17th January 2015) of Gobinda Halder, Bangladesh Government had showed due national respect to him. A condolence motion was adopted at the regular meeting of the cabinet held at the Secretariat of Bangladesh with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

IV

The brief analysis of the major writings of Gobinda Halder shows that he deserves a prominent place in the history of India and Bangladesh. Thus the President of Bangladesh (Abdul Hamid) had aptly remarked at the Condolence meeting after Gobinda Halder's death:

'the songs written by Gobinda Halder during the Liberation War had inspired the freedom fighters. At his death, the nation has lost a true friend. The people of Bangladesh will always remember him for his contributions towards the country's Liberation War.' ¹³

However, the presence of Gobinda Halder in public memory of Bangladesh is gradually diminishing. Though his composition like "*Eksagor Rokter Binimoye Bangler Swadhinata Anlo Jara*" is extremely popular in Bangladesh but the present generation is silent about composer. It

is equally unfortunate that the people of Kolkata (erstwhile Calcutta) have completely forgotten Gobinda Halder except a few members of the AMBECS.

*** This article is the outcome of a research project titled “Historical Legacy and Regionalism in India: A Study on the Regionalism of postcolonial North Bengal” sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research [ICSSR, New Delhi, India, (Vide Letter No File No. 02/134/SC/2019-2020/MJ/RP Dated 13th December 2019)]**

Notes and References

1. The WBFC was formally founded in 1969 with altogether 21 members in its Executive committee. They were---President : Purnachandra Shastri ; Vice Presidents : Indrajit Malla Barman, Dwarikanath Barman, Bijay Krishna Biswas and Apurbalal Majumdar; General Secretary : Santosh Kumar Biswas; Assistant Secretaries: Susanta Halder, Ramakanta Halder and Sudhir Kumar Biswas; Treasurer : Suresh Chandra Halder; Office secretary : Ranabir Singh Barman (148 Keshab Chandra Sen Street, Calcutta 70009, the registered official address of WBFC); Members of the Executive Committee: Gobindalal Barman, Gobinda Halder, Manoranjan Sarkar, Sasanka Biswas, Amal Das, Khagendranath Halder, Sanat Kumar Patra, Jaynarayan Kirtaniya and Bikash Halder.
2. Gobinda Halder (ed): *Bhagirathi, 1st Year, No 1 (7th May 1969)*, p.1.
3. Gobinda Halder (ed): *Bhagirathi, 1st Year No.2 (7th June 1969)*, p.2.
4. Gobinda Halder (ed): *Bhagirathi, 1st Year No.3 (8th July 1969)*, p.2.
5. Gobinda Halder (ed): *Bhagirathi, 1st Year No.4 (8th August 1969)*, p.1.
6. Translated by Ms. Srijita Barman (A Research Scholar of Raiganj University, Raiganj, West Bengal).
7. Gobinda Halder had composed almost 3,500 semi-classical songs called *Padabalis*. In his own name these songs eventually recorded as *Gobinda Padabali*. Unpublished Records, preserved in Adwaita Malla Barman Educational and Cultural Society (AMBECS, Kolkata).
8. We have found four such *Padabalis* in *Bhagirathi, 1st Year No.4 (8th August 1969)*, pp.11-12.
9. Translated by the author and Ms. Srijita Barman.

10. Translated by the author and Ms. Srijita Barman.

11. *The Daily Star*, January 18, 2017.

12. Daily Observer, 23rd December 2014, retrieved on 19.05.2020 from <https://www.Banglanews24.com/articles/34639/p> dated 17.01.2-15

13. Daily Observer, 18th January 2015. Retrieved on 19.05.2020 from <https://www.observerbd.com/2015/01/18/67245.php>