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Why Taslima Nasrin is so controversial?



PHOTO: AFP

"Amar Meybela," "Lajja," "Utal Hawa," and at last "Ka" -- it is Taslima who has written so many controversial books in Bangladesh and has given so many people a chance to write something against her.

Now the question is why Taslima is being so criticised? Mostly because she has depicted incidents of sexual intercourse in her latest book so vulgarly that we think that it can destroy our moral values. If it is so, then why we don't criticise Humayan Azad and other male writers whose books also have unnecessary descriptions of sexual intercourse? And to some extent those descriptions are more vulgar and more rude than Taslima's.

Another allegation is that she has degraded our honourable intellectuals. If it is so, then where were these people who are now crying over the intellectuals' honour and intellectuality when Humayan Azad degraded Rabindranath Tagore and Rousseau in his books?

Another point is that has been raised is why Taslima has revealed her experiences of sexual harassment at the hands of some male intellectuals? Because it should be. Any girl can be sexually humiliated any time by any male whatever he may

be an intellectual in favour of the liberation or a fundamentalist. It is the duty of the victim to reveal it so that there may not be another victim. But girls of this country are taught to conceal all the sexual tortures of the males so that those males can get another chance to commit the heinous crime again. Taslima has broken this tradition -- that's why she is so controversial and being perceived as a pervert in the eyes of our male dominated society and unfortunately in the eyes of our females too.

Sharin Shajahan Naomi, Department of Law, DU

ernment and to the civil society to ensure due status/dignity of the Vice Chancellors (VC) of the universities. But he did not mention why the position of VC has been degraded, particularly since the 80s. May I request my teacher, with due respect, to read the article written by another teacher, Dr. Zafar Iqbal of Sylhet University, in the December 2 issue of the Bangla daily Prothom Alo. I think the article is very relevant to the subject matter. However, I would like to add further.

The persons who made VC before and soon after the independence, most of them were truly well known at national and international levels for proven qualities and achievements in their own fields of studies and contributions to the society. They were really imaginative and innovative. The chancellor (President/PM) had to make several requests to take up the positions. ASM Sayem Bose, Professor Matin Chowdhury, Fazlul Halim Chowdhury, MA Raquib, Osman Gani, Zillur Rahman Siddiqui -- are only few to mention. They really enlightened the universities as well as the society. Conversely, look back at the 80s and 90s! It is hard to single out a person made VC due to his contribution to original research or greater contribution to his own area of study or to the society. Rather we see all palm greasers knocking at the doors of the influential student and political leaders. The chancellor is embarrassed and has to bargain with the palm greasers. Now the appointment letter is not delivered to the appointed person proudly and openly, rather it is collected quietly at night with few bodyguards at arms. We know a VC only after he becomes a VC. The name of the VC is so unfamiliar to the society that someone has to research why that person is named as VC. May I request my teacher to look at his own backyard: how the incumbent VC of your university was appointed? The teacher community itself has to ponder why the position of a VC as well as of the teachers is increasingly less valued.

Tarik Zaman University of Sydney, Australia

politicising of this incident. As it appears from the news published in different dailies, some quarters are trying to colour it otherwise. They are trying to focus this incident in the international media as oppression of minority in anticipation of some political gain. Do they ever think at what cost they are trying to achieve a political gain?

In fact, it is at the cost of image of the country and nothing else. In the international arena, the country has already a tarnished image, which is again due to persevering efforts of some vested corners. Recent effort of publicising the Banskhalhi tragedy as oppression of minority by the vested corners would put another coat of defame on country's image.

They think that if this could be established as minority oppression, the ruling party would be in embarrassing position and this will pave their way to power. But which one is important to them, gaining power by hook or by crook or country's image?

Fakhrul Alam Siddeswari, Dhaka Banskhalhi: Echoes of Partition?

Partition riots. To take just one example, riots were instigated in 1926 to destabilize the status quo and empower openly communal leaders. Following riots in Pabna and Calcutta, the Dacca riots of September 1926 were a direct challenge to the secular Nawab's authority. Events centered on the Janmashami celebration, a symbol of Hindu-Muslim cooperation. By targeting this event, outsiders managed to invert the symbolism of Janmashami -- instead of being an example of syncretism, it became a lightning rod for new tensions.

As riots and counter-riots escalated, the role of outside agitation, money and deliberate agent provocateurs became obvious. In April 1927, Chief Secretary Prentice complained about travelling preachers who were fomenting trouble: "Events at Patuakhali have shown how a purely local agitation [which] would probably die-down if the local people were left to themselves is being fomented by outsiders who arrange for the supply of men and money."

75 years later, shadowy outsiders are at it again, threatening to destroy the communal harmony

I have two hypotheses to offer. First, the mugger wanted to get a rival mugger into trouble. Our unfriendly mugger in the proceeding of the crime found out who his victim was -- a retired secretary, diplomat etc. and thought that if he assumed the identity of his rival, the rival would get into trouble. Maybe he and Munna were fishing in the same water and what better way to get the other guy out of business and hopefully in some jail with the help of police! And even if we assume that police won't take him to custody, not so much out of sympathy, but for a payoff. Munna's transaction costs will increase and thus he would become uncompetitive and hence inconvenienced.

My second hypothesis is that the mugger told the truth. He is Munna. But why would he be so foolish as to draw attention to himself? Why not? Like all business enterprises, Munna also needs some advertisement. Advertisement or name recognition or brand-recognition is good for business. It increases productivity and saves transaction costs. Next time Munna stops a passenger of a rickshaw, he would not need to

up a company boss asking for some favor and all he had to do was to claim that he was from "Seven-Star," a fixture in Dhaka's crime horizon.

A reflection: It is also possible that all Munna wants is recognition. After all, he like many hard-working men on the street is just trying to make a quick buck and has chosen this (dis)honest path of living. And like many people, he is unsure about the line that separates honest from dishonest, which is quickly slipping and what is just and what is unjust is also rapidly becoming vague. Munna is as much a victim of a culture of violence, corruption and crime as some of the victims of his crime. Some philosophers contend that most people are driven to earn recognition. Whatever we do, we need recognition, which is sometimes deemed more important than monetary rewards. This is true for most people whether it is a street criminal or the writer of this letter. We need to find a way of helping people earn recognition but not at the expense of others.

Habib Khondker, Singapore

A question

Last week a student of mine who is in grade six asked me, "Sir, When Bangladesh Taka (BT) is so strong against the US Dollar, why is it so weak against fish and vegetables?"

Being a maths teacher, I couldn't give him an answer. I simply said, "Ask the Governor of Bangladesh Bank, or someone who understands Einstein's Theory of Relativity."

What else could I tell him to satisfy his curiosity!

Fayaz Khan Joar Shihara, Dhaka Cantonment

Our manners need work

Every society, in a wider sense, every country has certain manners and practices that regulate the life and activity of its members in order that a nation may progress in

harmony, discipline and peace. But it is sorrowful to say that in our country we notice a serious lack in showing courtesy/modesty among a large number of people's behaviour. Probably Bangladesh is the only country in the world where a courtesy campaign is needed comprehensively. Rushing to occupy seats before one another in busses, bumping women in a crowd, jumping queues are commonplace.

If you attend a ceremony you can find that some people have a tendency to overload their plates with foods and waste most of it. This habit of some of the people does not match with civilised norms at all. Coming late to ceremonies or parties without a genuine cause is another custom in the country. Then there are some people who choose to pick and blow nose in public which is gruesome and irritating. Some other people have a tendency to urinate

in roadside drains and spit on walls and streets after chewing betel leaves. Another annoying factor is people's mad rush to get on either in a lift or any kind of public vehicle without considering whether these are able to carry their load or not.

Countless examples can be given as to how a large number of our countrymen lack the sense of proportion. Like the title 'most corrupted country,' that day is not far away when Bangladesh will be considered to be the most uncivilised country unless there is immediate change and improve in our behavioural patterns.

Rubab Abdullah Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

VCs these days

I refer to the letter from Professor M. Zahidul Haque (Dec 2) of Shere-Bangla Agricultural University Dhaka. My teacher, Professor Haque, has appealed to the gov-

On third party

It is more evident than ever that the majority of people are disappointed with the existing two-party political trend. People are fed up with their endless baseless pledges and absolute failure in fulfilling them later. In this situation, I think, people will greet any new concept, movement or even a party from an educated person like Dr. B.

People want a change. They want betterment of their lots. There are reasons for people to be convinced because Dr. B is more interested about dealing with the civil society and the intelligentsia and it definitely promises better outcome rather than dealing with the current ones. For solving political problems, writing the history properly is a prerequisite. At the same time, we should keep in mind that we don't have much time to waste on arguing, "Bangalee or Bangladeshi" or "Allah Hafez and Khoda Hafez."

It is also true that no political party can bring good fortune for us if we keep on cheating, bribing, mugging etc. It is we, the people from all walks of life, who have to carry out our respective duties properly. We have to be sincere at first.

Gullive Department of Physics, Dhaka University

Living with Kalashnikovs

I must express my heartiest gratitude to the SI of Badda police station and four other members of police who put their lives on the line to recover those lethal weapons and at the same time I pray for their quick recovery who were critically wounded. Four AK-47 rifles, thousand rounds of bullets, time bombs and hand grenades were recovered. But what we are afraid of is, this arms recovery will also be forgotten soon. Not long ago about 90 thousand rounds of ammo were recovered in Bogra. The government has done nothing serious about it other than blaming the opposition. This time also the home minister did not waste any time to shift the monkey to the shoulder of the "Third Force." This is a stupendous statement by a responsible minister. I think the government will also do the same as it did in the case of Bogra.

The situation of the country is going from bad to worse everyday. And the ruling party is responsible for maintaining law and order. The opposition is supposed to monitor the acts of the government and take constructive actions for the country. But the careless attitude of the ruling alliance and the rigid ideology of the opposition is every day pushing the country toward a civil war, and we, the common people do not want that.

Romeo Ahmed, One-mail

Banskhalhi tragedy and its politicisation

The horror of Banskhalhi tragedy has shocked all of us. We condemn such an insensitive and shameful act. The criminals behind this gruesome act should be brought to light and given exemplary punishment. At the same time we sympathise with those who lost their family members in this inferno.

But we cannot support the

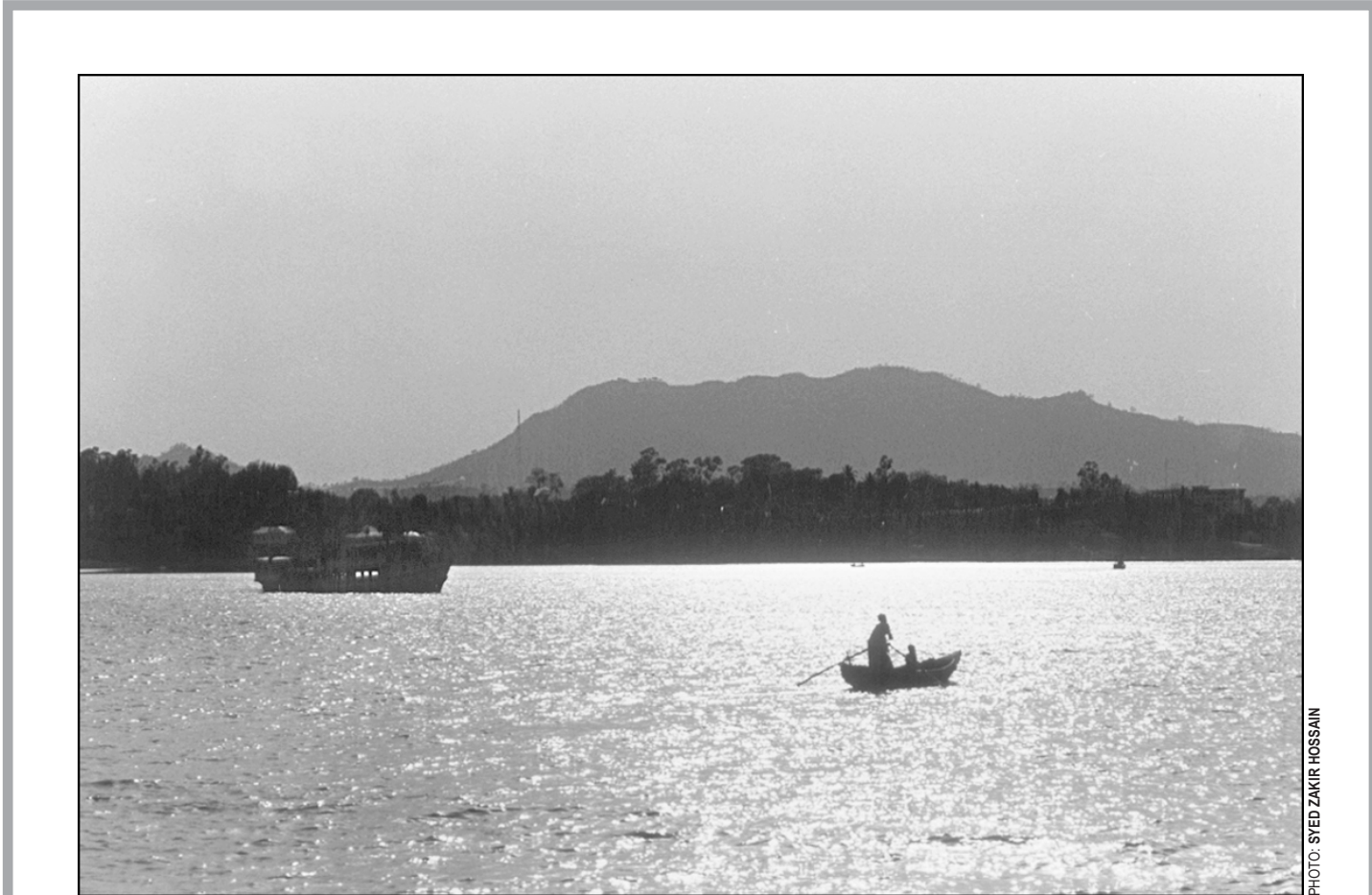


PHOTO: SYED ZAMIR HOSSAIN

Tension across the CHT

The plan of unsettling the CHT unless the government implements its pledge by December 31, as pronounced by Santu Larma, has stirred the debate once again that the governmental indolence in the implementation of CHT peace pact could spark violence across the turbulent CHT and, as a result, the peaceful atmosphere that we have seen in the area for the last four years could revert to a gloomy forecast.

But this agony of tribal people has not built up overnight, rather it is a gradual negligence of the government that has turned a small point into a circle that is simmering to burst.

After the BNP-led coalition government assumed power, it has shown sheer apathy to this critical issue and never considered the problems and uneasiness of tribal people. Santu Larma said, "The peace pact had never been accomplished with any particular party like the Awami League or BNP or Jamaat-e-Islami, rather it was with the government, and so the government -- whoever in power -- has to act according to the pact to expedite the development projects in the CHT."

The CHT has always been an burning issue and that the government should have given additional priority to iron out the wrinkles over it is the simple truth. The present government has fogged the issue which eventually has grown to the present level of frustration in the minds of tribal people.

I do not know whether the government has taken the threat seriously, but we, common people, have every reason to feel scared due to this development.

The atrocity in Mohalchari (Chittagong Hill Tracts) that took place a few months ago stunned all the peace-loving people at home and abroad and we have really been stewing over what sort of a game of conspiracy is being played ever since with the CHT to make it volatile and stormy by a certain guild who have been trying their utmost for long to keep the rift alive.

The establishment of a local administration -- the decentralisation of power -- is one of main pillars of the peace agreement. The AL government which initiated the peace process with Shanti Bahini agreed to establish administrative offices and development projects through

mutual discussion so that the interests of both the parties were taken care of. But, unfortunately, some administrative offerings in CHT have been made without having exchanged a single word with the local influential leaders. The government should not be ignorant of the fact that the whole CHT region is populated with tribal people and they are a majority out there. So, any administrative measure must be implemented with the consent of the tribal community.

Those who are indulging the idea of keeping up the unrest in the CHT to reap political benefits are living in a fool's paradise. They should not labour under the impression that a burning CHT means good business, smuggling and sabotaging. Rather, it means more carnage, fighting, shooting and the blood game.

The peace effort in CHT is a historic initiative in Bangladesh. It not only ensured the end of a bloodbath, but also helped people return to normal life. Moreover, through the termination of fighting, we have achieved the line to dig out the potential of the CHT which has given us a positive signal that we could get some natural resources like gas, coal and oil from this region. Bangladesh is a poor country ridden with foreign debts. So any possibility of getting natural resources means our economy will prosper.

When such a good prospect exists, why are some people creating problems in the area? Why cannot the government implement the peace pact? We can guess that the government has the muscle-power to quell the insurgency, but such an initiative could introduce a dangerous war within the country -- at least the threat from Santu Larma sounds really awesome. At the same time, we must ask Santu Larma and his people to understand that The CHT is part of Bangladesh.

Santu Larma is lucky enough that he is living in a democratic country which is why he has got away with light criticism after he had issued such an audacious threat to the country. We must request him to feel the matter with cognition and prudence instead of excitement and anger while appealing to the government to sit with the people of the CHT to implement the peace accord.

Sulav Barua, Middlesex University, UK

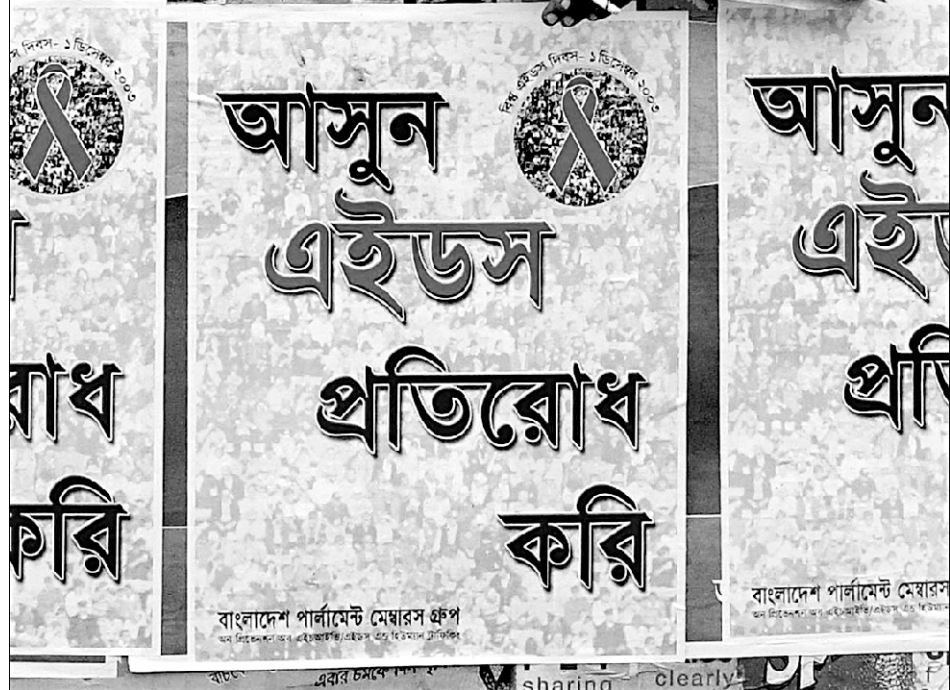


PHOTO: AFP

The Dec 3 issue of Daily Star printed a haunting interview with Dr Bimalendra Nath Shushil, the lone survivor of the arson attacks on a Hindu family in Banskhalhi.

In a revealing comment, Dr Shushil said: "I don't have any hostility or dispute with anybody in my area. Even nobody attempted ever to grab our land properties." He then added, "I have been practicing in my village for the last four years and everybody respects me there...So, I get puzzled and fail to understand why we were attacked."

Like the majority of working-class and rural population of Bangladesh, the inhabitants of Banskhalhi were generally tolerant towards all religions. It seems likely that outsiders, possibly with funding and support from local or national goondas and politicians, carried out this attack to create an environment of religious cleansing.

There are strong parallels to the deadly Hindu-Muslim riots that broke out during the 1946-48

that exists among the common people. Will we learn from history, or will we repeat it?

Naeeem Mohaleem Shubak.org

Munna of Dhanmondi!

"Before he left he shouted at me and told me that he was known as 'Munna of Dhanmondi' (as if I should have known of him or perhaps I should have)." During the Eid holidays, as the occasion demanded, I spent sometime reflecting on this line drawn from Kazi Anwarul Masud's post-editorial "An Encounter with Violence" (Nov 23). Why did the mugger on the street have to make his identity known? I am not so much concerned with the declining law and order situation in Dhaka here (or for that matter, Bangladesh simply because there so many people who are) as much as with the psychology of a common criminal. I explore psychology to find a window on the social context.

Munna has now become a brand name in the shadowy "surface world" (in the past, it was called underworld, but not any more) of crime and extortion. He has become a new star in the galaxy of the semi-outlaws (I use this new name because some of them are not totally outside of laws; in fact, may even work with some help from the enforcers of law!). I was told that someone recently called

Khoda Hafez vs Allah Hafez: A critical inquiry

(The writer answers)

To the best of my knowledge, the word 'Khoda' refers to 'one and only' God and has no polytheistic connotation. Mr. Tanvir Rahman's relative (Nov 24) is evidently wrong to read polytheism in 'Khoda'. I wish Mr. Rahman had done his own thinking in the matter rather than let others do the thinking for him -- a point that I took some pains to make in my article.

About the pronunciation of 'Khoda', I stand corrected, courtesy of Ms. Mahjabin Ahmad (Nov 21). It is 'Khoda', not 'Khuda'. My thanks to both Ms. Ahmad and Mr. Rahman for expressing their appreciation of the article in the midst of all those headline grabbing events of the past few weeks.

Mahfuzur Rahman, One-mail