

# Bangabandhu's aesthetic thinking

ATIUR RAHMAN

Every thing in this country, ever so small, ever so trivial, was precious to him.

The only thing of no consequence, to him, was his own life. His ever expanding figure measured the map of our motherland.

Rafiq Azad (The Stairs) (Original in Bangla: "Ei shiri")

THE fifteenth of August is certainly the saddest day for the Bengalis. Thirty-one years ago on this day, the greatest of our national heroes, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated. Rafiq Azad rightly says that, save his life, everything that is Bangladesh he cherished as most dear. Indeed: "His ever expanding figure measured the map of his country." This stalwart of a man "could clasp fifty thousand square miles with his bare hands/entwine seventy five million hearts/ reach out to the squalid storm of Baisakh with ease." (Bablu Joridar: "And a tall man he was") (Original in Bangla: "Shey chilo dighal purush")

His fond, caring attention is showered on the face of Bangladesh, much as Tagore or Ibanananda and Nazrul's did. The dream of a free land epitomizing all our desires, alluring and eluding our people for a thousand years, suddenly surrendered in his hands and materialized. "His enraptured eyes envisioned the countenance of a Bangla with placid beauty, a golden Bengal." So his heart conjured up a cherished dream of freedom. (Nirmalendu Gun: "Mujib Again") [Original in Bangla: "Punascha Mujib"]. That's why Bangladesh and Sheikh Mujib are isomorphic.

This August I would like to pay homage to this complete Bengali by unfolding some of his thoughts on art and culture. An artist, in a traditional sense, he was not. But great contemporary political observers did not exaggerate when they called him "an enduring poet of politics." Defining art, Tagore once said: "With the propensity of his heart a human reveals his personality. Personality entails variety. Good that it is so." (Rabindranath's Thoughts on Art, Collection of Tagore's Writings edited by Satendranath Roy). The collective emotions, dreams and dreads of a people find expression in poetry, song, drama etc. The conversation, public address or way of life of a great public leader can also be a work of art. The surfeit in human feelings/emotions find outlet in different ways at different times. If it is aesthetically satisfying, if it can resonate in other hearts, we can call it artistic. The ultimate expression of a personality may also fall into the domain of art.

## An immortal poet of Politics

In the entire period after the fifties, Bangabandhu held the reins of the political, social, cultural powers. His clarion call, his direction to turn every house into a fort, the raising of his finger, his firm, erect and confident posture—everything influenced the emerging nation. His unique address on March 7, 1971 is itself a super political lyric. A tall figure like Tagore or Satyajit Ray, his very gestures in that address added a new dimension to our national culture. In this famous address, Bangabandhu unleashed his compassion for the poor and the downtrodden of our country in

a passionate yet restrained manner. He, like a political bard, sounded his thunder-like voice, parched on the roof-top, as it were, on every Bengali dwelling. In short, he declared an all-out war. He said, "This time we will take up arms for our liberation, our emancipation... we offered blood, more blood will be offered, until, by the grace of God, we liberate the people of this country." He did not want to be a premier, he said, he wanted people's rights vindicated. The address proved him a son of the soil, an offspring of our heritage.

"You can no longer subjugate us," he said in a mix of provincial dialect, local intonation and an all-embracing feeling loudly verbalized. Many lauded this address as an epic in politics. Such epics are not made in a day. Because he was ever committed to the culture and politics of the soil, he could utter impromptu the rhapsody of his heart to the millions listening to him that day. His contribution to the efflorescence of the Bengali psyche was so great!

**A patron of Bengali culture**  
Bangabandhu was the chief guest at the founding ceremony of Hotel Purbani on December 31, 1970. His address reveals his deep love for Bengali language and culture. He said: "Artists, poets, literati must reflect in their work the aspirations

of the common man. They belong to their people, country and culture. I appeal to them to devote wholeheartedly to mould anew our language and culture for the benefit of common man. I assure them that my party and I will fight any obstacle to their creative expressions. Gone are the days of conspiracy against our culture, of control and guidance. Artists will no longer work for a small number of elite beneficiaries. I appeal to them to make common people, the deprived, their struggle and joys and sorrows, the motif of their art and literature." His incremental love and bias towards the common man found poignant expression in every speech he delivered.

He loved to co-opt representatives from literati in all his organizational activities. He patronized our own culture, as exemplified in the aesthetic presentation of the copy of our constitution. Eminent artists of the country were given responsibility to embellish a handwritten copy -- an artistic homage to the 3 million martyrs. The formal presentation of the 'six points' made at the conference in Eden Hotel on March 20, 1966 was beautified by artist Hashim Khan among many others. The artistic presentation of '6 points' reveals the depth of his aesthetic sensibility.

**Tagore's influence on Bangabandhu**  
The influence of Tagore on Bangabandhu was pervasive. In an interview Begum Mujib said: "Kabi Guru presides in the heart of his heart. During the ups and downs of

his political career, he drew solace from the recitation of Tagore. The magical words of Tagore's songs such as 'O, Lord, I do not pray to be sheltered from danger/Rather make me fearless in the face of all odds' or 'If no one hearkens to your call/Walk, walk, walk on alone' -- helped him through the calamity-stricken days. He hummed them and drew strength from them.

Apparently, the emotion-throbbing recitation from his powerful voice was in tune with the realities of his own life. His lifelong motto was to transform the Golden Bengal of Tagore into a sacred placidity. For this he fought, for this he lived. Sayings by Tagore were his constant source of inspiration. Every time he was put to prison, he took with him his copy of Tagore's Shanchayita (collected poems). In the loneliness of the prison cell, Shanchayita was his only companion. The copy is defaced with many censored seals from the prisons. His love for Tagore is spelled out in a speech delivered on the birth anniversary of the poet, organized by the Bangla Academy. There he said: "Tagore's birthday is for the first time observed in a new environment and consciousness in a freed Bangladesh. Bangladesh was liberated at the cost of millions of lives, immense sacrifice. The idea of truth, goodness, justice and patriotism that the Bengalis

time for our traditional art and culture. He assigned artist Rashid Chowdhury to embellish Gana Bhaban, an architectural emblem of the Bengalis' pride.

## His death, a Himalayan burden

Thirty-one years ago fate cut short his life. Since then the Bengalis are in a slush. We are immersed in a bottomless pit. A country won with such a blood-bath is difficult to identify. A secular, human and just nation whose emergence was blessed by Ravi Shankar, George Harrison, Ginsberg, Annada Shankar, has reverted to communalism and violence. We have earned world wide notoriety for bombing and terrorism. It seems like it has become a "Bangladesh."

A country where the killers of her founding fathers walk free, even thirty-one years after the crime, will inevitably condone any crime. That is reality. Lives of people -- leaders and the led, sell very cheap here in Bangladesh. The August 21 grenade attack on the opposition leader Sheikh Hasina spared her miraculously but claimed the lives of 21 people, Ivy Rahman being one of them. The killing of AMS Kibria, Ahsanullah Master, Kazi Arif, Manjurul Imam strengthen the culture of internecine killing. The simultaneous detonation of five hundred bombs on August 17 is a part of the continuum.

On the cultural front much is done and much is to be done. Great poets have dedicated their best verses to him. Other branches of literature should follow. Timeless stories, novels, dramas wait to be written on him. If a Robert Paine can write a novel titled The Tortured and Damned, why can our writers not immortalize him? Let it be remembered that a struggle for liberation is a continuous process. Individuals die, nations rise and fall but an ideal is never obliterated.

Our war of liberation is an ideal and a process. It cannot end. Its light will not be extinguished. It will go on inspiring other exploited people in other times. And Bangabandhu will lead those continual wars. Oppressive governance, poverty, disease, terrorism, war and injustice are our "common enemies" against which we must fight together. This is an "enemy within and without. This is the undying message of liberation war -- a message we received from the life long struggle of the father of the nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Our aesthetic workers cannot evade the responsibility of transmitting these messages to the future generations.

It is expected that literateurs and artists of this country will re-create Bangabandhu in their art. Let it be remembered that the travail of freeing this country was entirely borne by Bangabandhu. If it had not been for him, the name "Bangladesh" would not have manifested on the world map. We could not have been free citizens of a free country. We owe it to him to honour him in our song, poetry, novel, drama, cinema, painting and sculpture.

derived from Rabindranath contributed a lot to our independence. Our struggle was crowned with success. I can not think of a greater example of Bengalis practising Rabindranath."

Simultaneously, he was inspired and charmed by Nazrul also. Immediately after liberation, he made arrangement for bringing him over to Bangladesh on the occasion of his 73rd birthday. Here is an excerpt from his letter to Nazrul: "I invite you on behalf of the people of a free and sovereign Bangladesh. On the occasion of your birthday, allow Bangladesh to be saturated with your ideals. We are eagerly awaiting your arrival." The poet responded to his call. He landed in Dhaka, showered in a rain of flowers. In a touching scene the two giants met.

## An insatiable soul

The deprived people of this country imbibed the basis of his ideas of culture. His eager questions to artist Qamrul Hassan made him give birth to the pristine art forms of Bangladesh on his canvas. On advice from artist Zainul Abedin, he made an ambitious plan to erect sculptures depicting the liberation war in every nook and corner of our country. But, he did not live to see that happen. He loved to discuss art with Zainul whenever time permitted. Inspired by Bangabandhu, Zainul Abedin organized at Sonargaon a folk arts and crafts foundation. The idea was to identify folk art specimen and popularize them internationally. Extremely busy though he was, he yet made

time for our traditional art and culture. He assigned artist Rashid Chowdhury to embellish Gana Bhaban, an architectural emblem of the Bengalis' pride.

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# The historic 7th March (1971) speech



My brothers, I stand before you today with a heart overflowing with grief. You are fully aware of the events that are going on and understand their import. We have been trying to do our best to cope with the situation. And yet, unfortunately, the streets of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur are awash with the blood of our brothers. The people of Bengal now want to be free, and the people of Bengal now want their rights.

What have we done that was wrong? After the elections, the people of Bangladesh voted as one for me, for the Awami League. We were to sit in the National Assembly, draft a constitution for ourselves there, and build our country; the people of this land would thereby get economic, political, and cultural freedom. But it is with regret that I have to report to you today that we have passed through twenty-three tragic years; Bengal's history of those years is full of stories of torture inflicted on our people, of blood shed by them repeatedly. Twenty-three years of a history of men and women in agony.

The history of Bengal is the history of a people who have repeatedly made their highways crimson with their blood. We shed blood in 1952; even though we were the victors in the elections of 1954 we could not form a government then. In 1958 Ayub Khan declared Martial Law to enslave us for the next ten years. In 1966 when we launched the six point movement our boys were shot dead on June 7. When after the movement of 1969 Ayub Khan fell from power and Yahya Khan assumed the reins of the government he declared that he would give us a constitution and restore democracy; we listened to him. A lot has happened since then and elections have taken place.

I've met President Yahya Khan. I've made a request to him not only on behalf of Bengal but also as the leader of the party which has the majority in Pakistan; I said to him:

"You must hold the session of the National Assembly on January 15." But he did not listen to me. He listened to Mr. Bhutto instead. At first he said that the meeting would take place in the first week of March. We said: "Fine, we will be taking our seats in the Assembly then." I said we will carry out our discussions in the Assembly. I went so far as to say that if anyone came up with an offer that was just, even though we were in the majority we would agree to that offer."

Mr. Bhutto came here; he carried out discussions with us; he said that the doors of negotiations had not been shut and that there would be further negotiations. I then had talks with other leaders; I said to them: "Come and sit down with us; let's create a constitution for ourselves through discussions." But Mr. Bhutto declared that if West Pakistani members came here the Assembly would end up as a slaughterhouse. He claimed that whoever came here would be slaughtered. He said that if anyone showed up here all shops from Peshawar to Karachi would be shut down. I declared that the Assembly would continue to meet. But suddenly on the 1st of March the Assembly was shut down. Mr. Yahya Khan called the session of the Assembly in his capacity as the President and I declared I would be attending it. Mr. Bhutto said he wouldn't be part of it. Thirty-five members of the Assembly came from West Pakistan to take part in its proceedings. But it was dissolved all of a sudden. The blame was put on the people of Bengal, the finger was pointed at me!

After the Assembly's session was prorogued, the people of this country protested. I told them: "Observe the general strike we have called peacefully." I told them: "Shut down all mills and factories." Our people responded to my call. They came to the streets spontaneously. They expressed their firm determination to carry out the struggle peacefully.

What have we got in return? Those who brought arms with our

money to defend us from external enemies are now using those arms on the poor, the wretched, the down-trodden people of the land. Bullets are being aimed at their hearts. We constitute the majority in Pakistan; but whenever we Bengalis have tried to assume power they have used force on us.

I have had a talk with Mr. Yahya Khan. I told him: "Mr. Yahya, you are the President of Pakistan; come and observe how the poor people of my country are being mowed down with bullets; come and see how our mothers are being deprived of their children; how my people are being massacred. Come, observe, and only then pass a judgment on what is going on. He has apparently said that I had agreed to attend a Round Table Conference on the 10th of March. Didn't I say a long time back: what is the point of another Round Table conference? Who will I sit with? Should I sit with those who have shed the blood of my people? Without carrying out any discussions with me he has dissolved the Assembly suddenly; after sitting in a secret meeting for five hours he gave a speech where he has put all the blame on me. He has even blamed the Bengali people!

My brothers, The Assembly has been called into session on the 25th of March. But the blood spilled on our streets has not yet dried. About the 10th I have told them: Mujibur Rahman won't join the Round Table Conference because that would mean wading over the blood that has been shed or trampling it. Although you have called the Assembly into session, you'll have to listen to my demands first. You'll have to withdraw Martial Law. You'll have to return all army personnel to their barracks. You'll have to investigate the way they have been murdered. And you'll have to transfer power to the representatives of the people. It is only then that I'll decide whether we will take our seats in the Assembly or not.

I don't want the Prime Minister's office. We want the people of this

country to have their rights. I want to state clearly that from this day Bangladesh's courts, magistracies, government offices and educational institutions will be shut down indefinitely. So that the poor don't have to suffer, so that my people don't have to go through hardships, all other things will be exempted from the general strike from tomorrow. Rickshaws, horse carriages, trains, and launches will be allowed to move. Only the Secretariat, the Supreme Court, the High Court, Judges Court, and semi-government organisations such as WAPDA will not be allowed to work. On the 28th, employees will go and collect their salaries. If their salaries are not paid, if another bullet is fired, if my people are shot dead again, I request all of you: turn every house into a fort. Confront the enemy with whatever you have. And even at the risk of your life, and even if I am not around to direct you, shut down all shops and make sure that traffic on all roads and ports are brought to a standstill. If need be, we will starve to death, but we'll go down striving for our rights.

Those in the armed forces: you are my brothers; stay in your barracks and no one will bother you. But don't try again to aim your bullets at our chests. You can't suppress seventy million people forever. Since we have learned to sacrifice ourselves no one can suppress us any more.

And as for our martyrs and those who have been wounded, we in the Awami League will do everything we can to assist them and their loved ones. If you have the means, please give what little you can to our Relief Committee. Owners of factories whose workers had participated in the General Strike the last seven days: make sure that they are paid wages for those days. To government employees I have this to say: you'll have to listen to my directives. Till our country is liberated, taxes and custom duties won't be collected. No one will pay them either.

Remember: the enemy is amidst us to create chaos and confusion, to create anarchy and to loot. In our Bengal Hindus and Muslims, Bengalis and non-Bengalis are all brothers. We are responsible for their safety; let us not taint ourselves in any way.

Remember those of you who work for radio and television: if the people running the radio station aren't ready to listen to us, no Bengali will report for work there. Banks will be open for two hours every day so that people can collect their salaries. But we won't allow even a single poisha to be transferred from East Bengal to West Pakistan. Telephones and telegram services will continue as before in our East Bengal; if we have to transmit news abroad you will see to that. But if any attempt is made to exterminate our people all Bengalis must take appropriate action.

Form Revolutionary Committees under the leadership of the Awami League in every village, every community. Be prepared to act with whatever you have in your possession.

Remember: since we have already had to shed blood, we'll have to shed a lot more of it; by the Grace of God, however, we'll be able to liberate the people of this land.

This particular movement is a movement to liberate ourselves -- this particular movement is a movement for our independence. Long live Bengal!

Translation: Fakrul Alam

# The life and death of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

FAKRUL ALAM

THIS, surprisingly, is the first biography in English of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of Bangladesh, even though more than 30 years have passed since he was assassinated in a bloody military coup on August 15, 1975. Known to most Bangladeshis as Bangabandhu, or Friend of Bengal, a title bestowed on him by acclamation in a mammoth public meeting in Dhaka on February 22, 1969, he was truly a man of the people, someone who had made the cause of his countrymen and women his own through endless trials and tribulations. And yet he had been assassinated in the country he had championed ceaselessly soon after it became independent. Also, he had disillusioned quite a few people in record time in governing it. How did he win the hearts of his people as "the father of the nation" and secure a place in their history as Gandhi did in India or Jinnah did in Pakistan? What caused him to slide in their esteem? But also, what was he like as a human being as well as a leader? And now that three decades have passed since his death, is it possible to arrive at a real estimate of the man and his achievements?

It is to S.A. Karim's credit that he has tried to raise these questions implicitly and explicitly and answer them succinctly and objectively in his biography, *Sheikh Mujib: Triumph and Tragedy*. Drawing on published sources, a few interviews with people who knew Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his own encounters with him as the first Foreign Secretary of independent Bangladesh, Karim has striven to give a balanced, accurate, and thoughtful portrait of the man. His conclusion is that he was a leader whose triumph was on a heroic scale but whose ending was, at the very least, tragic. Karim begins his biography by

## Book Review

**Sheikh Mujib: Triumph and Tragedy**  
By S.A. Karim  
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providing us with the background to Mujib's rise to fame, the partition of India, and the rise of the Muslim League. He was barely twenty years old in 1941 when he first encountered Fazlul Haq, the Chief Minister of Bengal, and more importantly, Shahid Suhrawardy, the Minister of Commerce, when they visited Mujib's hometown Gopalganj, then in the district of Faridpur, for a public meeting. He was immediately drawn to Suhrawardy's brand of politics and Kolkata, where he became a student of Islamia College. Here he began to attract attention as a Muslim League activist, working indefatigably to

rally Muslim students of the region to work for Suhrawardy's faction of the party, which, ultimately, joined the movement for Pakistan.

After partition, Mujib relocated to Dhaka, but found himself becoming increasingly alienated from the conservative politicians of the Muslim League who had arrogated power in East Pakistan. Inevitably, he became involved in the movement to establish Bengali as a state language of Pakistan, and the movement in turn led to the creation of the Awami Muslim League. In quick time, he became the General Secretary of the increasingly secular Awami League (it dropped "Muslim" from its name in 1955), and a minister of the United Front government that drove the Muslim League from power in the provincial elections of 1954.

From this point onwards, there was no stopping Mujib, except by confinement in jail. As Pakistani politics more and more became the preserve of the military, as the military conspired with a few West and East Pakistani politicians and bureaucrats to deprive Pakistan of democracy, and as the numerically superior Bengalis of East Pakistan found themselves increasingly thrust out of power, Mujib was in the thick of the action to wrest back the rights of his people through a secular, organized, and democratic movement, even as a succession of military generals attempted to rule Pakistan through martial law.

Karim suggests that it could have been his admiration for Subhas Bose that led Mujib to take a secret trip to Agartala in January 1963 where he met Satindranath Sinha, the Chief Minister of Tripura, to see if Indian assistance would be forthcoming for a separatist movement. But according to Sinha, whom Karim quotes without citing the source, Nehru was not interested and the trip was inconsequential. It is ironic, then,

that it was for a trip to Agartala that he never took that the Pakistani government would try him for treason in what has come to be known as the Agartala Conspiracy case in 1967. Unfortunately for them, the effort at concocting a conspiracy backfired, for not only were they unable to sustain their case in front of the special tribunal that was set up for the purpose, they were also forced to release Mujib in the face of increasingly violent agitation against them in both wings of Pakistan. Indeed, the Pakistani dictator of the period, Ayub Khan, was forced to resign, and Mujib left the jail triumphantly in February 22, 1969, widely acknowledged by this time in his part of Pakistan as the man most suited to lead it forward to autonomy and prosperity.

The next two years saw Mujib at his best: inspiring his people through fiery speeches in countless meetings, seemingly inexhaustible energy, and an indomitable will. He kept highlighting his party's demand for complete autonomy in East Pakistan until the message went home: in the elections held in December, 1970, the Awami League won 167 of the 169 seats in the province. But Mujib, committed to negotiations through democratic channels, was mistaken in his assumption that the Pakistani generals and Zulfikar Bhutto, the clear winner in West Pakistan, were going to hand over power to his party merely because it had a clear majority when it was bent on getting the maximum autonomy conceivable for East Pakistan.

In fact, Yahya Khan, the general who replaced Ayub Khan, colluded with Bhutto to postpone the March 3, 1971 opening of the National Assembly. The result was a spontaneous and angry civil disobedience movement in East Pakistan which, in effect, negated the Pakistani state, making Mujib the *de facto* ruler of

East Pakistan. As if to show that he was worthy of the part, Mujib gave what is undoubtedly his finest speech to his people on March 7, stopping just short of independence, but claiming self-rule in almost all matters.

The date in which the Pakistani army moved to destroy Mujib and thwart the Bengali desire for complete autonomy was the night of March 25. As far as Karim is concerned, Mujib and his party leaders had "ignored signs of the gathering storm" and thus an unsuspecting, unprepared people were brutalized, the movement for autonomy stunned, and Mujib himself captured. Here again Karim is critical of Mujib's decision to let himself be arrested to deflect the Pakistan army from wrecking havoc in his country. Mujib, reportedly, told his followers who wanted him to flee: "If I leave my house (Pakistan) raiders are going to massacre the people of Dhaka. I don't want my people to be killed on my account." But his decision did not prevent genocide; on the contrary, it exposed his people to the wrath of the Pakistani army.

While the Pakistani army went on the rampage, Mujib himself was taken to prisons in West Pakistan where he underwent a trial at the end of which he was found guilty of trying to break up Pakistan and was awarded the sentence of death by hanging. Meanwhile, Bengali troops who had defected, political activists of various parties, and students and refugees who had fled to India came together to organize a guerrilla campaign against the Pakistani army and to launch a war that would liberate their country. Inevitably, India was drawn into the conflict, and on December 16, 1971, the Pakistani army in East Pakistan surrendered in Dhaka to the combined Indian and Bangladesh forces. This was how Bangladesh was born after nine

blood-soaked months. With the Pakistani army in disgrace, and Bhutto calling the cards, and in the face of international pressure, Mujib was released from jail and flown back to Dhaka via London in a RAF plane on January 10, 1972.

Mujib's homecoming marked the most triumphant moment of his career as a politician who had worked steadfastly and wholeheartedly for his people. But the next few years saw him sliding in popularity and having a torrid time coping with the innumerable problems facing a poor nation that had been denuded for over two decades by the West Pakistanis and that had hemorrhaged steadily for nine months. The prescriptions that he got from his advisers in the Planning Commission, inclement weather conditions that led to a terrible famine in 1974, rising global oil prices, growing lawlessness, his unwillingness or disinclination to be firm with party men and women and relatives who were clamoring for benefits and sinecures, underground movements that appeared to be gathering momentum and threatening the state, all appeared to conspire to show Mujib as unable to cope with the responsibility of steering a nation from political independence to peace, stability, and prosperity.

The stage was set, in other words, for triumph to turn into tragedy. The man who had staked his life repeatedly for democracy now attempted to create a one party state, proscribe newspapers, and stifle dissent. A radical leader died mysteriously while in police custody. Members of Mujib's extended family suddenly began to assume more and more power. People who had shown total devotion to him and Bangladesh like Tajuddin Ahmed was dropped and important positions. The air in Dhaka was rife with rumors of con-

spiracies and coups but Mujib chose to ignore them, convinced that the people he loved and had been ready to die for would never harbor conspirators against him. And so it was that he rendered himself completely vulnerable and was murdered by some adventurous, resentful, and ambitious military men in the early hours of August 15, 1975.

Karim's verdict on Mujib's rise to fame and the darkening world in which he died and his assessment of his subject's personality, career and contribution to Bangladesh is surely sound. His Mujib is a gracious and compassionate person, generous almost to a fault. His love for his people and willingness to sacrifice himself for them is never in doubt. He had more or less "single-handedly" spearheaded the movement for Bangladesh in its climactic phase and until his incarceration in 1971. And he had struggled to cope with extremely difficult situations the best he could till desperation forced him to adopt undemocratic measures. He was, in short, a "tragic hero" flawed and yet great and even grand.

It must be said though that Karim's book is not the "comprehensive biography" he claims it to be in his Preface. For one thing, he spends far too much time sketching in the background and often loses sight of his subject in dealing with the historical contexts. At times, a few chapters might go by without any reference to Mujib and in scores of chapters he makes only a fleeting appearance. Indeed, one may occasionally even be misled into thinking that one is reading a political history of Bangladesh where Mujib is the main actor and not his biography. Moreover, Karim appears to have not realized that a biographer's task includes looking at archival material and contemporary newspaper reports and tracking down unpublished written sources as well as

perusing published books and documents. He could have, for example, tried to include excerpts from the many speeches Mujib gave on public occasions that have been surely recorded in parliamentary proceedings; talked to his admirers, tracked his path to power doggedly instead of spending most of his time giving sketches of the political history of East Pakistan.

But what appears to be the singular defect of this biography is Karim's reluctance to imagine himself into positions, crises and situations Mujib had to negotiate or to come close to his subject through what Keats had once characterized as "negative capability." In his introduction to his incomparable biography of Samuel Johnson, James Boswell had claimed that the "more perfect mode of writing any man's life" involved "not only relating all the most important events of it in order, but interweaving 'it with the subject's words and thought till 'mankind are enabled to see him live'."

Karim follows Mujib from a great distance and almost never allows him to speak for himself. There is little or no effort to see Mujib from up close and there is definitely no attempt to get into his mind. The result is a biography that does not make us "see him live" and think and feel that this is a pity for by all accounts Mujib was a passionate, loving and caring man.

Nevertheless, there is a lot to be thankful for in Karim's *Sheikh Mujib: Triumph and Tragedy*. At the very least, a sensible effort has been made to present the life of a great and generous even if flawed leader; surely others will now follow to give us a more intimate, imaginative, intensely realized and fuller portrait of the father of Bangladesh and the friend of all Bengalis everywhere. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman deserves no less!