

To our politicians

SHAMMA M RAGHIB

Dear Politicians,

I am excited to let you know that I am lawfully a voter this year. But... I am already in a dilemma. Only you could help me solve this impasse. I do not know whom to vote for. I represent the majority of Bangladeshi students (real students, not political party oh-so-fake-students), and as a youngster I need someone to look up to, someone like Mr. Mahathir to lead Bangladesh for a couple of years and turn my beloved country to a land of peace and serenity. You, dear politician, as a leader are teaching me some really cool stuffs-like the rule 'private property is public property, so break it will'. I have also learnt the blame game. I have learnt that it doesn't matter whether or not you did something good when you were in power, if the opposition does it, then it must be illegal or unlawful and there must be violent protests.

I am looking forward to be the future leader of this country and you are teaching me how to tell my party-men to call for hartals and violent protests every time we disagree with those who are in power. You are also teaching me that political parties need to be family based. So I am thinking my 14 year old brother will campaign for me as well. Maybe I will make him the party advisor. Another tactic that you have taught my subtle mind is that no matter how uneducated you are, you can still make it as a top-level politician. You have taught me corruption at all level of careers. This is so darn good! Come to think of it, you are earning extra cash through extra khatir! I mean ultimately I AM doing well even though my country has a name in the most corrupt list!

You are the reason young people like us are refusing to vote. YOU are the reason why young people like us think it is so cool to destroy private properties. YOU are the reason we

are learning the demeaning and oh-so-low crime called 'corruption'! YOU are making us afraid of being active in Bangladesh politics. YOU are making us think that any politician is corrupted. In truth, some are not. In each of the political parties registered in Bangladesh, there still are one or two remarkable ones who actually entered Bangladeshi politics in hopes of doing something good for their beloved country for which they fought nine months of bloody war! The system has become so corrupt that any man or woman who might truly want to get to a position to make the world a better, freer, saner place to live has to compromise with corrupt people to have a chance. Do this, and they become even more corrupt!

Sure, we the dumb people, will elect whichever of you will promise the best entertainment, cradle-to-grave security, or suppression of the opposition they think is having too much fun -- at the expense of

those of us who'd rather just be left alone! Democracy is when the whole country gets what the majority of voters deserve. But that 'majority' have NOT been voting for ages. You know why? Because they do not know whom to vote for! They very-darned-well know that all those beautiful sweet words you promise them are not to be fulfilled...rather the country is to be pushed to darkness and violence by your party people!

I have lost all my respect for you. And yes, I am still aiming to be a good politician!

There is a threat to you that someday someone might to force you to see what kind of a person you have become. The days of being a fresh-faced idealistic believer in freedom and the common good are longer behind you, aren't they? We, the people of Bangladesh, know about the exercise of power. We've felt the sting back in 1971 and many dates before that. I know what your attitude is right now - "If you don't vote,



you have no right to complain." Well, I am requesting you to please read between my fingers.

I am quite sure the law guarantees freedom of expression to us citizens, not just those who are registered, active voters. These self-righteous accusers who use this argument apparently are dumb.

Right now, at the end of this article, I am unwilling to vote. This is because there is a fundamental difference between the misfortune of being splashed by poop and deliberately soaking your head in an unflushed...The difference has to do with self-respect.

Dear politicians, show me someone worth voting for.

Deliver an honest, straightforward, freedom-loving, peaceful and able leader a respectable candidate who is running out a sense of duty, rather than a lust for power or a mission to turn Bangladesh to a desert. Do that and I'll wait in line to vote. I pledge my allegiance.

Shamma M Raghob is contributor, Star Campus.

Recollection: Reconciliation not Retribution

IMRAN H. KHAN

FOR the past 34 years, December 16 has been celebrated with numerous pledges to build a prosperous Bangladesh, glorious tributes paid to the heroes who liber-

ated our mother land, flowers and wreaths, vying in size and expense, placed at the National Mausoleum at Savar. There is no dearth of discussion rallies, processions, prayers, and lest we forget the "improved diets served at hospitals, jails and orphanages". Reading about it

in the papers, any patriot's heart would swell with pride at how worthwhile all the sacrifice has been. But these are mere words and gestures. The rhetoric and the reality are poles apart.

Look around you: the corruption, the poverty, the unaccountability is mind-boggling. Those we elect to serve the nation do not see this as their sacred duty. Rather it becomes a chance for them to wear the hat of the previous oppressors. No where is there such immaturity as in the political arena with violence and hartals a norm rather than the exception. As I get older the Chinese proverb, "It's better to be a dog in a peaceful time than be a man in a chaotic period" becomes less enigmatic.

Today is the 35th anniversary of the Independence of Bangladesh, our Victory Day. Our heroes handed this country to us on a silver platter and with it the greatest gift for any human being, independence.

They say history belongs to the victor and it changes according to who the victor is. Instead of seeing the victory of the liberation war as a victory of the whole nation, we fight for our own personal victories. We do not even hesitate to squabble over the data, the "facts" of the glorious war. To give an example, when I was in school and the Awami League (AL) was in power, the "facts" of who declared independence and who favored independence, differ from the "facts" as seen by the BNP government when it came to power. We have yet to decide who first gave the independence speech, Major Ziaur Rahman or Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and on who's order. And the history books reflect this. They change according to which political party is in power. And this is while the events are fresh in our minds and many who lived through it are still alive amongst us.

When a motherland demands the ultimate sacrifice from its children their lives

those in charge had better ensure that it delivers. Those martyrs who have laid down their lives had a dream, a country with out any foreign rulers, a country with out tyranny, a country where autonomy could be established and we as Bangladesh could have our own identity. Sadly, the people who are in charge of the country are the 'haves' and rest of the population are the 'have nots'. The people in control aka the 'privileged ones' seem to ride in fancy BMWs and Mercedes Benz while they 'inadvertently' make rules to abolish rickshaws, the only means of transportation for the underprivileged aka the rest of the population. This 5 percent of the elite 'haves' are controlling the rest of the population and some of them are sucking this country dry. Such is the Bangladesh of today.

Today, everyone wants some form of incentive for doing their job. This happened mostly in government jobs,

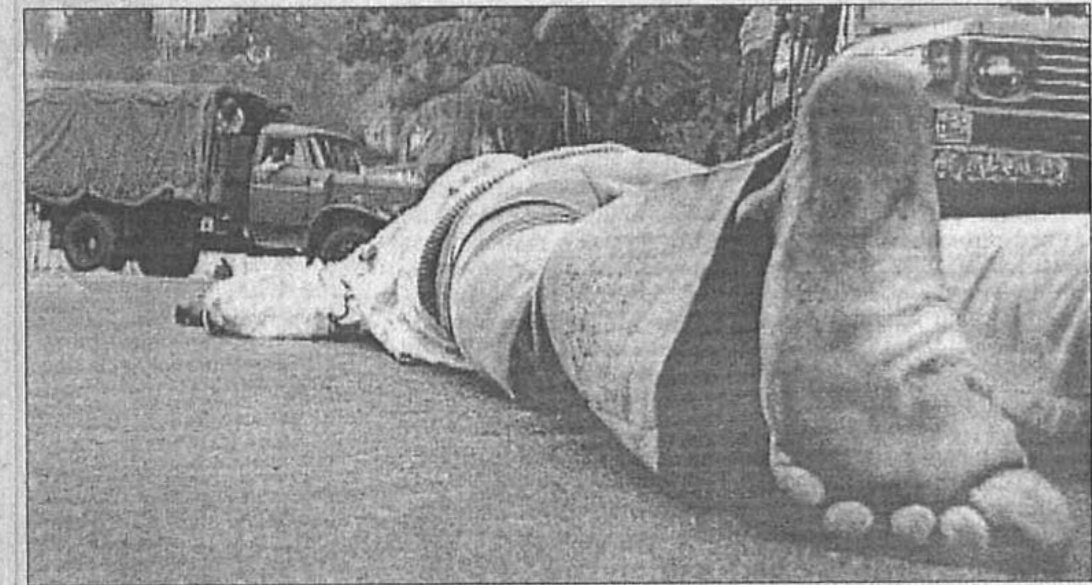
where people must be given some form of 'motivation' to grease the wheels of motion. If we think back to our martyrs, did they ever want anything in return for their lives? And what have we done to thank them? Every year around this date, some political parties, businessmen and influential people alike pay homage to the families of the freedom fighters for their 'contribution'. The families are usually given a small sum of money. What about the rest of the year? Did these families send their children out to battle for just a day? Or did the battle not prolong over 9 long months? I can never match the calculations, nor can I read between the lines.

Today as I balance the three million lives lost, possibly another million women raped, and tens of millions living with the trauma of having seen a loved one brutally killed or raped, against the corruption, insecurity of life, oppression of journalists, man-made-

poverty of the majority of my countrymen, my heart is far from rejoicing.

Bangladesh has come a long way and the hard working people of this country are sweating every drop of sweat to put this country on the map. But we have to ask ourselves if the dreams of the martyrs have been fulfilled. Have we achieved the goals set by those who so valiantly sacrificed themselves? Never doubt that a small group or thoughtful committed citizens can change the world and here we are talking of only one small nation. As we salute those who so boldly gave their lives, let us pledge to fulfill their dreams and use this freedom to take Bangladesh forward. This day is the first day of the rest of our lives. Let each one of us help in creating a Bangladesh that the future generations can be proud of. It's time to make a change.

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Liberation War in theatre

ERSHAD KAMOL

SPIRIT of Liberation War is one of the major characteristics of Bangladeshi urban theatre, as urban theatre took a remarkable turn after the country was liberated in December 1971.

Just after the Independence, an organised theatre movement was begun by educated and conscious cultural activists, who either directly fought in the frontline or helped and organised the freedom fighters. Consequently, it brought about changes in the themes of the plays and in their presentation and style of acting of the theatre presentations of the 1970s.

But, these stage plays usually do not directly focus on the Liberation War. In his thesis paper titled "Socio-political

reality in post-liberation Dhaka centric stage drama (1972-2000)", Salim Mozahar has found that the spirit of the Liberation War has played a prominent role in our drama trend raising several questions - Why did we take part in the Liberation War? and so on - several times in the plays to express the anguish or dissatisfaction after Liberation.

With the passage of time, the presentation of the spirit of Liberation War has been changing in stage plays. And what should be the approach of the younger theatre directors in case of presenting Liberation War in the contemporary theatre presentation? Before analysing the issue we need to know the role of social drama in theatre performance.

Anthropologist Victor Turner in his idea of "Social Drama"

says that after a certain period of a crisis social drama can play two roles--to compel schism between the opposing forces or to compel reintegration. Socio-political milieu should be transparent enough to analyse the crisis and specify the role the social drama will play. Otherwise the plays will be the expression of oversimplification and polarisation of a critical crisis and thus will not play the role of social drama properly.

And in the contemporary time if we analyse our Liberation War from Turner's theory on "Social Drama", 35 years after the Liberation War (crisis), we will find that the theory is not working properly as socio-political milieu is not transparent enough. As a result most of the theatre performances featuring the

Liberation War are either oversimplification or polarisation of a critical crisis. That is why the objectives of these plays are not clear what should be done with the Pakistani Collaborators and or with their followers?

"It's really difficult to find out any concrete answer in the present situation", said acclaimed director Syed Jamil Ahmed, a professor at Department of Theatre and Music of Dhaka University. Professor Jamil has presented papers in international seminars on role of theatre in place of war, said that the spirit of the Liberation War has been reflected implicitly in our plays. He raised the question--why is it not coming forth explicitly in our theatre? His hypothesis says, "After so many years of liberation we are still confronted with some basic questions such as the question of the nature of our nationalism (Bangali or Bangladeshi), events of 1971, and the roles of leaders during the Liberation War and post-independence period. That is why I think, to avoid any further crisis the playwrights intentionally or unintentionally avoided the facts of the Liberation War in the social drama."

But, young theatre director Debashish Ghosh is optimistic about finding out the objective of the theatre performances featuring the legacy of Liberation War. Debashish has directed about ten plays both street and stage performances on the spirit of Liberation War.

And his productions such as Katha Ekattur, Astitta, Punaruththan and Ekono Swapno features the rehabilitation of the Pakistani collaborators of 1971 as well as apathy of the younger generation on the legacy of the Liberation War. He said, "To take the legacy of the Liberation War to the younger people at the same time to give them a proper guideline through theatre performances, the productions must be balanced at the same time need the potential to communicate well with the audience. And the target audience should be the younger masses."

"The Pakistani collaborators of '71 have been spreading their 'message' to the younger generation, thereby the nation is divided. But, we have failed to present analytical works on Liberation to the masses. As a result the younger generation is not motivated well in the light of Liberation War properly. I believe theatre can play a vital role to motivate the younger mind to the spirit of the Liberation War only when we can communicate well with the younger generation all over the country. That's why the theatre performances must be balanced and at the same time must have clear objectives. That's why plays should not create any enigma or oversimplification of the critical crisis. Otherwise plays cannot touch the masses."

Another young theatre director M Bari who has directed the dramatisation of Zahir Raihan's popular short story



Samayer Proyojone, a performance featuring a freedom fighter's camp in 1971, which analyses the reason behind participation of the Bangalis in a war against the Pakistani Army and its collaborators, said, "The aim of our Liberation War is emancipation. That is why any play that delivers the message of freedom bears the spirit of Liberation War in an implicit way. After the 35 years of liberation, it is really tough to present the real picture of our fight for freedom in the present socio-political turmoil. As a result, it is really tough to depict an authentic feature of war: In most cases it becomes an over-

simplified presentation of complexity."

To solve the crisis both the young directors believe that the young generation must be communicated well by giving them an authentic analysis of the liberation war. To create the convenient ambience for creating quality, message oriented theatre performances, they have also emphasised the urgency of the reintegration of the nation relating to the crises on national issues. And here remains the question is it possible in the backdrop of a divided and polarised nation?

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