

TRIBUTE

Freedom fighter Tariq Ali: A man of great heart

MOFIDUL HOQUE

WITH the sad demise of Ziauddin Tariq Ali, a colourful personality of the generation of *Muktijoddha*, a life-long crusader of secular liberal nationalist values of the liberation struggle has left the arena of history. The loss is difficult to describe because he not only belonged to an epic chapter of the Liberation War, but tried to make the past relevant to our present in order to build a better future for all. He was a life long *Muktijoddha* in the true sense of the word, who dedicated himself to keep the flame of freedom burning.

Tariq Ali was a passionate person, apparently a man with contradictory identities. He was a chemical engineer by profession, who worked at home and abroad in running and constructing sophisticated pharmaceutical plants. As an engineer, he had to be engaged with pure science, technology and reason, but as a person, Tariq Ali was passionate and highly emotional, not for himself, but in relation to the Bengaliess at the core of the struggle for liberation.

He was an engineer devoted to music; songs were his means to expressing himself and communicating with others. It was through music that Tariq Ali embraced and upheld the cultural richness of Bengal. While studying engineering in Lahore, he created an island for himself and his friends where they continued to defy all odds and celebrated their cultural identity. His friend circle during those days in Lahore included Mohiuddin Ahmed of University Press Ltd., Engineer Mosharrif Hossain of Chittagong (ex-minister and AL leader) and a few of the young CSP's undergoing training or serving at the central ministry. On his return to

Dhaka, Tariq Ali joined his profession but more so the bandwagon of musical culture, as a disciple of Wahedul Haque and friend of Mahmudul Huq (Benu Bhai to others). Those were the days of the cultural upsurge of the Bengali nation and Tariq Ali was part of that journey, a humble participant in the musical circles, but a passionate and committed one.

In 1971, when the nation jumped into the Liberation War, Tariq Ali did not hesitate to leave his job and join the struggle. How he was united with the musical band in Kolkata and the Mukti-Sangrami Shilpi Sanstha was powerfully depicted in *Muktir Gaan*, recorded then and later lost by Lear Levine, which was then rediscovered and recreated by the young film enthusiast duo Tareque Masud and Catherine Masud. *Muktir Gaan* brought back memories of 1971 to the new generation, which earned more significance in the backdrop of the denial and distortion of history since the brutal murder of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. *Muktir Gaan*, along with few other glaring example of memorialisation, like *Ekkattorer Dinguli* by Jahanara Imam, electrified the country's young minds and created a bond with their pasts.

Tariq Ali, the central figure in the documented history of *Muktir Gaan*, came into the limelight as a result but as always, he made no claims to fame and meticulously avoided occasions of formal celebration or media exposure. He was a witness to history and learned his lessons of life from the experience of moving around the refugee camps and encountering the peasant guerrillas of the Liberation army. People's distress and the people's army became a part of his experiences from 1971 and he carried an intense respect for them.



PHOTO: TIMOTHY S GREEN
Ziauddin Tariq Ali (1945-2020)

I remember the deep understanding Tariq Ali developed with Julian Francis, an aid organiser during 1971 and now an honorary citizen of Bangladesh, a person still haunted by the tragedies he witnessed in the refugee camps. Julian had kept his painful memories hidden and had not spoken or written about them for long, until he met Tariq Ali and visited the Liberation War Museum in 2007. They established a rapport of their own. Julian Francis noted in an obituary that Tariq Ali phoned him two months before he passed away to inquire about his health during the pandemic and to encourage him once again to write down his memoirs. Tariq Ali was known for his wit as well—he once told Julian, "We are both connected to two wars, the Bangladesh Liberation War and because both of us were born in early 1945, Hitler realised that he had no hope as far as the Second World War was concerned."

Recalling this conversation, I wonder

about another connection Tariq Ali had with the Second World War when the people's cultural movement flourished in Bengal with the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), uniting talented young artists to launch a great musical movement of resistance to fascist forces. IPTA belonged to the golden era of protest songs, with their office at 44 Dharmatala Street in Kolkata. In 1971, the same place became the office of MuktiSangrami Shilpi Sangstha to conduct their rehearsals and plan their work.

When in 1996, we the eight friends embarked on the journey to establish the Liberation War Museum, Tariq Ali found a new lease of life. Saying adieu to his career abroad, he returned to his homeland not to look for another career but a meaningful existence. Gradually, Tariq Ali redefined himself, not an easy task at that age. He became a man of the museum, especially since the construction of the new museum at Agargaon began in 2011. The engineer in Tariq Ali took up the challenge of building the museum with state of the art technical facilities. Architect Rabiul Hussain, another trustee, supervised the design and its implementation and both of them were ably supported by a team of architects, civil engineers, structural experts etc. It was a landmark event in the nation's history, where the support of people from all walks of life helped the new museum to be constructed successfully.

Meanwhile Tariq Ali, as a civil activist, became more and more committed to protecting the rights of minorities, both religious and ethnic. The rise of fundamentalism and communal discord pained him deeply. He considered such cases to be the destruction of the core values of our Liberation War.

Tariq Ali, as a founder trustee

of the Liberation War Museum, felt comfortable to remain on the sidelines. He was always reluctant to be on the centre stage. He found great solace when members of the new generation were engaged with the episodes of history and evidences of the past. He was a passionate person, emotional about everything related to the Liberation War, and tears would roll down from his eyes whenever he witnessed a positive act or any small gesture eulogising the glory of the nation. He was driven by his heart, and his sincerity of purpose touched the hearts of many. He was not a man of the podium but he conveyed his message to people around him in the most heartfelt way.

While reading the condolences that poured in after his demise, one gets an understanding of how he touched other people as he was touched by them. Our good friend Barbara Thimm, a German museologist working in Cambodia, wrote to us, "When I received the message that Tariq died, my tears were running spontaneously. I am still feeling very sad. Feeling with all of you a great, great loss... I only had the chance to meet him twice, but he impressed me a lot, the way he was. Strongly committed. And I got the impression, that he was a very good observer, commenting on what he saw with a twinkle in his eyes. I will keep this in my mind and heart."

Tariq Ali was driven more by the heart than reason. He reminds me of what French philosopher and mathematician Pascal said, "The heart has a reason, but the problem is reason does not know that." To understand Tariq Ali, one has to know the reason buried deep in his heart.

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A toxic blend of Bollywood and politics



S ELDOM has a Bengali actress of Bollywood roiled the politics of three Indian states—Bihar, Maharashtra and West Bengal—for contrasting reasons. That

is precisely what is happening after Rhea Chakraborty was sent to jail after being charged in alleged drugs-related cases linked to the death of her friend and actor Sushant Singh Rajput. One has not seen such a toxic blend of Bollywood and politics before.

Bihar and Maharashtra were the first to be hit by the row over Sushant's death and Rhea's friendship with him before the flutter extended to West Bengal on September 9. The political dimension of the controversy can hardly be missed due to two main reasons. First, Bihar, ruled by regional Chief Minister Nitish Kumar-led outfit Janata Dal (United) heading the alliance that has the Bharatiya Janata Party in it, sees Sushant, who hails from Patna, the state's capital city, as the "son of the soil" while viewing Rhea as the "villain of the piece." Rhea has denied any wrongdoing and retracted her confessional statement given to the Narcotics Control Bureau which is probing the drug angle.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was instrumental in asking the BJP-led federal Indian government to let the Central Bureau of Investigation take over the Sushant Singh death case from the Mumbai police after the late actor's

family filed a First Information Report in Patna against Rhea. The BJP's Bihar unit released "Justice for Sushant Singh Rajput" posters and banners and the Nitish Kumar government sought to take the credit for the transfer of the Sushant case to the Central Bureau of Investigation. Later, two more federal agencies, the Enforcement Directorate and the Narcotics Control Bureau, were also deployed to probe possible money laundering and drug peddling aspects of the Sushant-Rhea saga. All this contributed to turning the case into a high-profile one that is getting unprecedented media attention, a part of which, according to some, is nothing short of a "media trial" even before the charge sheet in the case has been filed.

Secondly, in Maharashtra, the BJP's long-standing estranged ally, the Shiv Sena, shares power with the Nationalist Congress Party led by Sharad Pawar, and the Congress and the BJP are the main opposition. The Maharashtra government has defended the conduct of the probe by the police in Mumbai into Sushant's death and refuted the BJP's allegations of weak investigation.

The controversy over Sushant's death and his relationship with Rhea had not caused even a ripple in political circles in West Bengal until September 9, mainly because the leaders of ruling Trinamool and the BJP's Bengal unit have so far refrained from commenting on the issue and responding to Rhea Chakraborty and the outrageous social media trolls about Bengali women being "gold diggers" and being into "black magic." But the scenario changed when Congress party lawmaker from the state, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, took to Twitter recently and highlighted Rhea Chakraborty's

identity as a "Bengali Brahmin" while condemning her arrest. According to Kolkata media reports, Rhea's family has its roots in Purulia district with an ancestral home at Bagmundi. Purulia shares a border with Jharkhand, which was once part of Bihar.

In a series of posts on Twitter, Chowdhury described actor Rhea's arrest over drug charges as "ludicrous" and said the actress' father, a retired army officer, is "entitled to demand justice for his kids" and charged the BJP with "turning Sushant from an Indian actor into a Bihari actor" to derive political mileage ahead of the Bihar election. Interestingly, the Congress leader's remarks came on the day he was appointed by his party as the President of its West Bengal Unit to lead the party into the fresh assembly elections in the state early next year.

Chowdhury left no one in doubt about his decision to use the Bengal sub-nationalism card by using Rhea's identity to counter the BJP's plank of nationalism. Chowdhury's intention was further confirmed a few days later when the Congress took out a rally in Kolkata on September 12 in support of Rhea. Picking up from where Chowdhury had left off from his previous Twitter post on Rhea, the Congress' state unity on September 12 posted another comment on the micro-blogging platform: "Political conspiracy and vindictive behaviour against Rhea Chakraborty, the daughter of Bengal, will not be tolerated." In another proof—if one was needed—of the Congress plan to play up the identity politics involving Rhea, the party also let it be known that the rally was taken out on the instructions of Chowdhury.

However, soon after Chowdhury

waded into the sub-nationalism theme, Trinamool Congress and Communist Party of India (Marxist) too joined efforts to weave a "Bengali pride" narrative, with their leaders Saugata Roy and Sujan Chakraborty respectively attacking the BJP for making a Bengali woman the "soft target." Understandably, the BJP in West Bengal refused to be drawn into the Rhea-centric sub-nationalism discourse, apparently because of its high stakes in Bihar and Maharashtra.

The use of Bengal sub-nationalism is nothing new in West Bengal. The Trinamool Congress had done this from time to time in the past to checkmate the BJP, most tellingly during parliamentary elections in the state last year in the wake of the destruction of the statue of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in a college in Kolkata. It had paid off handsomely as the Mamata Banerjee-led party swept all nine Lok Sabha seats, which had gone to polls in the final phase in May. Mamata has, on more than one occasion, said that Bengal should be ruled by leaders of the state, in an apparent dig at the presence of a number of senior leaders of the BJP from outside the state who are in charge of party affairs in the state.

How potent is the sub-nationalism card going to be as a political weapon in the coming assembly elections? It may be used to blunt the growing criticism of the governance record of a ruling party, be it in Bihar or West Bengal. The Congress putting the focus on Rhea Chakraborty's "Bengali Brahmin" identity is only expected to add to the sub-nationalism plank, much like the hype in Bihar over Sushant as the "son of the soil." But it

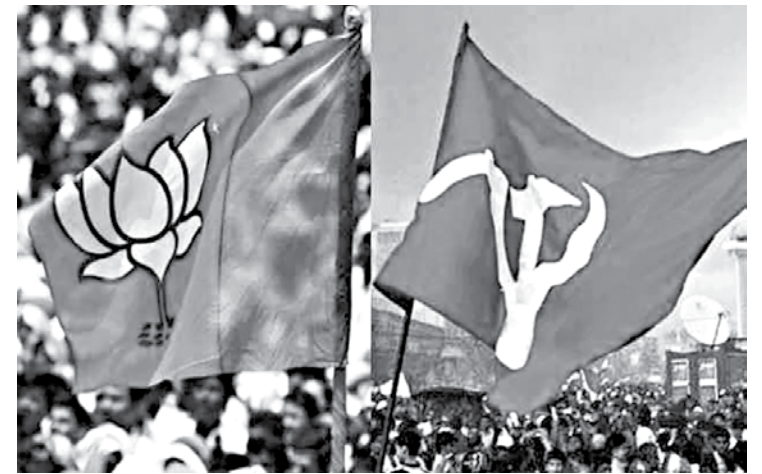


PHOTO: COLLECTED

remains to be seen if a party like the Congress, with national footprints and stakes beyond West Bengal, and the CPI(M), which claims to espouse socialism, can sustain the sub-nationalism campaign.

It is easier for a regional Indian party to quickly resort to sub-nationalism because its support base and political activities do not go beyond the borders of a state. There is recognition in both the Congress and the CPI(M) that for parties with political and electoral stakes outside the frontiers of West Bengal and imbued with a national vision, it becomes very tough to carry on with the sub-nationalism theme in a country with such varied linguistic, ethnic and religious diversities.

Given the political sabre-rattling over the Sushant-Rhea case, one hopes it does not influence the law enforcing agencies from discharging their duties in the conduct of their probe.

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QUOTABLE Quote

FRANK NORRIS
(1870-1902)
American author.

Truth is a thing immortal and perpetual, and it gives to us a beauty that fades not away in time.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Less dangerous
- 6 Sound-based
- 11 Nimble
- 12 Barrel piece
- 13 Does a yo-yo trick
- 15 Cain's mother
- 16 Stage prompt
- 17 Water cooler
- 18 Round-about routes
- 20 Beans buy
- 21 Signing need
- 22 "Shane" star
- 23 Intense beam
- 26 Angel toppers
- 27 Persia, today
- 28 Unruly crowd
- 29 Chestnut case
- 30 Seafood

DOWN

- 1 Did a carpentry job
- 2 Yucca's kin
- 3 Steak cut
- 4 Caribou's cousin
- 5 Firefighter, at times
- 6 Fire remnants
- 7 Salt Lake City
- 8 Extreme
- 9 Guacamole base
- 10 Popular tales
- 14 Go around
- 19 Start the bidding
- 22 Research spots
- 23 Broad-minded
- 24 Salad herb
- 25 Wrapped garments
- 26 Backpackers' stops
- 28 A lot of
- 30 Crew members
- 31 Hawke of film
- 32 Unfettered
- 33 Rat's home
- 38 Plopped down
- 39 Great expanse

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

S	P	I	T	S	F	I	V	E
C	A	N	O	N	A	C	I	N
A	L	L	E	E	C	I	N	C
R	A	E	E	Y	E	T	A	N
F	U	T	U	R	E	T	E	N
B	E	F	I	T	L	O	R	D
I	N	I	T	P	O	P		
S	T	R	E	E	T	S	E	N
S	E	E	V	A	T	O	E	D
E	R	A	S	E	A	L	I	V
T	E	X	A	N	R	I	S	E
D	E	P	T	E	E	N	S	

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

MY INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS LIKE TO SEE WHAT I'M EATING

I TAKE BEFORE AND AFTER SHOTS

THAT WAS QUICK!

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

I CAN DO IT! I CAN DO IT!

GO WANDA! GO!

YES! YOU DID IT!

WOO-HOO!

I JUST WALKED ACROSS A BEP OF LEGOS!

MY TUN TO TRY!

YOU GUNS REALLY NEED TO GET OUT MORE.