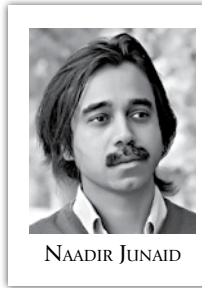


The misdeed of masquerading as a Muktijoddha



BANGLADESH emerged as an independent nation through the unconditional surrender of the Pakistani army to the joint command of Bangladesh and Indian forces on December 16, 1971. The nine-

month long Liberation War was marked by the monstrous massacre of unarmed Bengali civilians and heinous sexual violence committed against thousands of Bengali women. The jubilation of the victorious people of Bangladesh on December 16, therefore, was tinged with a sense of gloom as they faced the painful reality that the liberation of Bangladesh had been achieved at the cost of the lives of their loved ones. Describing the situation of Dhaka city after the surrender of the Pakistani army, Jahanara Imam wrote in her seminal book *Ekatotter Dinguli* that the people of the city were smiling and crying simultaneously.

But even after such a devastating war involving a great deal of bloodshed, some of our countrymen started trying to attain advantages by vile and devious means from the very first day of independence. After the surrender, the Pakistani troops were confined to the cantonment under the surveillance of the Indian army. Bengali collaborators such as members of Al-Badr, Al-Shams and Razakar units discarded their weapons and fled. By collecting the weapons abandoned by the Pakistani army and their collaborators, some opportunist Bengalis started masquerading as freedom fighters from December 16. During the war, these people resided in Dhaka comfortably and kept no connection with the *Mukti Bahini*. But from December 16, they started posing as *Muktijoddhas*. These evildoers came to be known as "Sixteenth Division" because they were seen in Bangladesh from December 16, 1971.

We do not get much information in our books and films about these extremely mendacious people who tarnished the reputation of real freedom fighters by looting and hijacking personal and official possessions from December 17, 1971. By pretending to be freedom fighters, many of them also attempted to hide their crimes committed as collaborators of the Pakistani army. Nazim Mahmood, a public relations officer in Rajshahi University,

was in Dhaka city on December 16, 1971. He wrote succinctly about a fake freedom fighter he had seen that morning: "a young man from our building who used to disparage the Liberation War so explicitly just two days ago came out of the house. Taking a rifle in his shoulder, this young man screamed—*Joy Bangla*. Then, he joined the jubilant crowd rejoicing the victory. In this way, the sixteenth division was formed furtively that day without anyone's knowledge."

A Qayyum Khan was commissioned in the Bangladesh Army during the Liberation War and he fought in Sector Seven as a company commander. At the end of December 1971, he came to Dhaka from his sector. During his stay in Dhaka, he visited the house of Habibul Alam, a valiant guerrilla of Sector Two. There, Qayyum Khan heard the term Sixteenth Division for the first time. Someone in that house told him that almost every neighbourhood in Dhaka had sixteenth division elements and these people were trying to take control of their locality. They were giving the *Mukti Bahini* a bad name. Habibul Alam also informed Qayyum that most of the armed young men in Dhaka were from the "sixteenth division"; only a few were genuine freedom fighters.

Then, Major Moinul Hossain Chowdhury entered Dhaka city with 800 soldiers of the 2nd Bengal Regiment in the evening of December 16. Next morning, he observed that crowds of people poured into the street. Many of them were armed and they roamed the city by car and on foot. Their physical appearances did not suggest that they were drenched by rain or burnt by the sun in the past nine months. Their demeanour showed no sign that they had taken part in the war. On December 22, then Lieutenant Nasir Uddin entered Dhaka city with a unit of the 11th Bengal Regiment. He also became surprised having seen the gathering of so many armed freedom fighters in the city. Certain questions struck him at that moment: "Where did so many freedom fighters come from? Where had they been during the war? If such a large group of freedom fighters existed in the country, why didn't the fight against the Pakistani army become far more intense in the past nine months?"

It was not difficult for the real freedom fighters to realise that the armed urban youth wandering the alleys and the main roads of Dhaka by hoodless jeeps were fake freedom fighters. Those youths wore fashionable

clothes, costly shoes and sunglasses. But, the freedom fighters could not afford the luxury of wearing new and expensive outfits during the war. On December 17, many people of Dhaka became extremely upset hearing the heartbreaking news of the killings of many people, including eminent Bengali intellectuals. But on that day, some city dwellers became as nasty as to start looting various stores located in Bangabandhu Avenue and New Market. Groups of people tried to break into the empty houses in Gulshan too. Zahirul Islam, a guerrilla of Sector Two, described that they had caught some looters red-handed on December 18 from Gulshan.

A few days later William A S Ouderland, the only foreigner who had received a gallantry award for his contribution to our Liberation War, called the guerrillas and informed them that a United Nations jeep had been hijacked by some armed youth appearing as freedom fighters. He also said that UN officials were given a very bad impression of freedom fighters because of this incident. The guerrillas started looking for the jeep without delay and soon found it. Having seen the guerrillas, the miscreants quickly ran away. The guerrillas returned the jeep to the UN officials and

Ouderland happily told the foreigners that the car was hijacked by criminals who were masquerading as freedom fighters. From December 17, Zahirul Islam and his fellow guerrillas were working 18-20 hours every day to maintain law and order and defuse anti-personnel mines from different areas of Dhaka. But in those days, having posed as freedom fighters, some Bengali youth started to commit crimes.

When the Bangladesh government instructed the freedom fighters to submit their weapons, many felt ambivalent about following the instruction, fearing that without the possession of their firearms, they would be vulnerable to attacks from pro-Pakistani elements, fake freedom fighters and other hostile groups. Khan Ataur Rahman's 1973 feature *Abar Tora Manush Haw* depicts such worries in the newly-liberated country. In a sequence, a radio broadcast is heard urging the freedom fighters to submit their weapons. This provokes a very angry reaction from a freedom fighter. He starts yelling, saying that how could they submit arms when the enemies still exist in society? He keeps saying that the son of a collaborator has become a sixteenth division member and he is now eager to take revenge

on the freedom fighter who had conducted operations in their house during the war. Another sequence shows two young freedom fighters wearing inexpensive clothes purchasing a packet of cheap cigarettes after liberation. Suddenly, another young man in a posh outfit appears. He is also wearing pricey shoes and sunglasses, and a sub-machine gun is slung over his shoulder. In front of two unarmed freedom fighters, he buys a carton of costly cigarettes. Then, he departs in a luxurious car. Two freedom fighters stare at the moving car without saying a word.

This scene was indicative of the situation of a post-independence society in which many genuine freedom fighters were ignored and marginalised, whereas some immoral and wealthy individuals started to gain power and privilege by disguising themselves as freedom fighters. Quazi Nooruzzaman, Commander of Sector Seven during the Liberation War, pointed out that approximately 125,000 people actively took part in the War of Independence. However, it was heard that 12 to 20 lakh freedom fighter certificates had been distributed. So, out of 12 recipients of freedom fighter certificates, 11 were fake. Moinul Hossain Chowdhury wrote: "without any verification, freedom fighter certificates were given to people who had made no direct or indirect contribution to the Liberation War." Due to such undesirable circumstances, anti-liberation elements gained a solid footing in a country liberated by the sacrifices and struggle of many freedom fighters.

Many people who collaborated with the Pakistani authorities in 1971 were allowed to continue their employment after liberation. But freedom fighters from an underprivileged background and with no connections with influential people experienced neglect. Freedom fighters living in rural areas were sometimes framed by the influential people who served the Pakistanis in 1971. Lack of effort of the administration to identify fake freedom fighters and the placement of pro-Pakistani individuals in various important positions justifiably created a feeling of anger and unhappiness among the *Muktijoddhas* in the newly-liberated country. Numerous problems that troubled our society in the following decades had their roots in the failure to prevent the pseudo-freedom fighters and pro-Pakistani elements from gaining influence in post-liberation Bangladesh.



A still from the film *Abar Tora Manush Haw*.

PHOTO: COURTESY

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Universities must do their part to improve teaching and learning

HALIMUR R KHAN

GIVEN the myriad of complex problems of higher education in Bangladesh, it's a miracle that anyone learns anything inside university classrooms; yet, many graduate and become quite successful. So, would that not be a reason to celebrate the success of the system and of the teachers? No, not quite: those who eventually become successful are exceptions to the rules— anomalies, naturally gifted and self-selected; and, they would have succeeded in any situation. Our education system has little, if anything, to do with their success. So what does that tell us about the quality of teaching at our universities?

Talk to the students and you will hear complaints about the poor quality of teaching, lack of care, preparation, attendance, and often about the rude and abusive treatment of students. And the instructors complain that students come to the university ill-prepared to learn, do not work hard, do not pay attention in class, etc.

It appears that both sides have legitimate issues, and none of them are being solved with any degree of efficiency or expediency. Reports over the past decade kept telling us that our university graduates are woefully unprepared to handle the challenges of the 21st century, and that they will fall short of the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Studies found that a majority of these students do not have the foundational literacies, competencies and the skillsets to be successful—skills like ICT and scientific literacies, creativity, critical thinking ability, curiosity or leadership ability. These skills

are acquired, the experts tell us, in the early years of a person's life. For the university students, it may be quite late. But the problem is: the students are here, in our classrooms, now. They'll graduate soon and join the already over 34 percent of unemployed university graduates. So what can the universities do?

One of the solutions will be to establish centres for professional development and help the teachers and students learn the basic skills of teaching and learning. Remedial learning should be fast-tracked. All teachers must be thoroughly trained. The suggestion to train the best of our university graduates, who typically become university teachers, might offend some; but, if it is any help, we should look at the universities in developed nations—every single one of them have a similar training centre. Besides, understanding the misconceptions in our society about teaching can help. A "good" student doesn't necessarily become a good teacher, *teaching* is fundamentally a different skill from *learning*, and a good teacher is not "born" but "made" through proper training.

We know that learning is a continuous process and that knowledge evolves continuously, increasingly at a faster speed (studies have shown that currently knowledge almost doubles every year). If teachers stop learning, they risk becoming obsolete, especially in functional areas such as science, technology, etc. However, given the amount of tasks university teachers have to perform, it's also a Herculean job to keep up with the profession, changes in technology and growth in the curriculum on top of other needs such as research, publication, etc. The teachers need help to

keep up. This is where a specifically designed centre for professional development at the universities can help the teachers to learn the best teaching practices; learn about the new technology, tools etc, to effectively and efficiently deliver their teaching contents; learn to become more organised and do more effective planning; and get access to the current knowledge about the industry. All of these lead to the students having better learning outcomes.

Recognising the urgency of precisely this problem, the University Grants Commission (UGC) established the Higher Education Quality Assistance Programme (HEQEP) in 2009, initiated and funded principally by the World Bank, with the objective of improving "the quality and relevance of the teaching and research environment in higher education institutions." In 2016, prior to the end of HEQEP, the UGC started something else called the Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC). This programme was intended to make universities ready "to meet the requirements for accreditation." While the overall goal of IQAC was "ensuring institutional quality," it included objectives to overhaul governance, curriculum content design and review, student admission progress and achievements, physical facilities, teaching, learning and assessment, and student support services, staff and facilities. The teaching and learning part, the two most important aspects of a university, seems to have gotten lost in a package with far too many objectives. And with no real support from outside and burdened with the responsibility to provide the resources for these massive tasks, most universities,

for the most part, abandoned the task and these Cells gradually became a "step-child" for the university and the bane of the teachers' existence.

In 2016, the IQAC official site reported the following—"the quality of education has not improved to the desired standards. Graduates coming out of the universities have been increasingly facing difficulties to get gainful employment in highly competitive job markets, within the country and abroad, where quality makes a difference." Every year, a large number of graduates with higher education degrees remain unemployed in Bangladesh. Things don't seem to have changed much from 2009 to 2016, and from the findings summarised above, it appears that even in 2020, the prospects look just as grim as it did in 2009.

Based on the data showing that investment in teaching and learning shows the highest rate of return and is one of the best remedies for the major problems of our universities, several recommendations can be made: Limit the IQAC objectives to only enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, or create separate professional development centres to focus only on teaching and learning; invest in these centres to make them effective; hire experienced professionals to design the centres; and allow time for the instructors to learn the skills and bring their knowledge to the classrooms. This effort may yet yield surprisingly helpful returns. Our universities must do their part if they want to remain relevant in higher education.

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Reports over the past decade kept telling us that our university graduates are woefully unprepared to handle the challenges of the 21st century, and that they will fall short of the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

QUOTABLE Quote

KAHLIL GIBRAN
Lebanese-American writer, poet and visual artist
(January 6, 1883 – April 10, 1931)

The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Health resorts
- 5 Organ parts
- 10 St. Louis sight
- 11 Painter's place
- 12 Antifur org.
- 13 Came to earth
- 14 Slapstick staple
- 16 Junior, for example
- 20 Pickled buds
- 23 Golfer Hogan
- 24 Manual readers
- 25 Heaped
- 27 Even score
- 28 Forearm muscle
- 29 Utah has a big one
- 32 Low-cal snack

DOWN

- 1 Easy targets
- 2 Get ready
- 3 Play start
- 4 Kirk's portrayer
- 5 Tent anchor
- 6 Airs
- 7 Unmatched
- 8 Cobbler's cousin
- 9 Lawn material
- 11 Criticizes
- 15 Sea dogs
- 17 Skilled
- 18 Retain
- 19 Some linemen
- 20 Meat choices
- 21 Seoul setting
- 22 Zest source
- 25 Long-snouted fish
- 26 Freezing
- 28 Supports
- 30 Hackneyed
- 31 Cruise vessel
- 33 Vicinity
- 34 Philosopher
- Immanuel
- 35 Otherwise
- 36 Game caller
- 37 Pipe bend
- 38 Calendar box

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

HOSTEL DARN
EXPEL RUPEE
ABIDE ELOPE
TON SPELLED
SWELLED LAY
STAIR COT
DEFONE
ABS UNLET
ATE SMELLED
SHELLED MAR
SEPIA GROPE
TARP METS