



MODHU'S TRAGEDY

'They've Destroyed My Every thing'

Since its birth in 1921, Dhaka University has played a pivotal role in the Bengalee people's struggle for political freedom and economic rights. Seeds of every great movement were sown on the campus, the collective fruits of which we enjoy today as citizens of an independent, sovereign nation. Unlike any other institution in the country, the history of Dhaka university is synonymous with the history of the awakening of the Bengalee people and the birth of Bangladesh. Modhu's Canteen has a special place in our history. If the university was the heart of the country's political struggles, then Modhu's Canteen formed its nucleus, where revolutionary thoughts were born, discussed and debated. And the man who ran the place, everyone's favourite Modhu-da, while remaining aloof from the politics, developed an inseparable bond with the young hearts who came to sit, talk and drink tea in his canteen. The Pakistan army wrought vengeance on this monument in the same way it attacked the Shaheed Minar and the banyan tree in front of the Arts faculty where the new flag of free Bangladesh was first raised by then DUCSU vice-president A.S.M. Abdur Rab on March 2. The Pakistanis shelled the canteen and riddled its tin roof with machinegun fire in the early hours of March 26, 1971. On this day 20 years ago, Modhu-da became one of the many victims of the carefully-planned mass murder carried out by Islamabad's army at Jagannath Hall. Today, 10 members of Modhu's family still survive — four sons and six daughters. Modhu's eldest surviving son, ARUN KUMAR DEY, who was not even in his teens at the time, narrated the story to Daily Star assistant editor SABIR MUSTAFA:

"A ROUND midnight of March 25, 1971, we woke up in our quarters next to Jagannath Hall. It seemed the whole city was shaking with sounds of gunfire and shelling. Soon afterwards, Jagannath Hall itself came under attack from the army.

There were 12 of us in the small flat — five brothers, four sisters, eldest brother's wife, our mother and father. Except our eldest brother, the rest of us were all kids at the time.

We were all frightened as we watched hundreds of bright red (tracer) bullets flying in all direction outside. They were also hitting the hall with mortars. We clung on to our parents. Two or three hours later, one side of the hall went up in flames and we began to cry and scream out of fear.

Around seven in the morning of the 26th, two groups of Pakistani soldiers came towards our building. One group went towards the bungalow of Dr. Govinda Chandra Dev (then chairman of the department of philosophy) and another group came to our quarters. At that time, my parents were carrying out their daily religious routines.

Troops then started kicking the door and shouting, 'Open the door, open the door', they screamed. As soon as father opened the door, they pulled him out and came inside. They spotted my baudi (sister-in-law) first. Now, baudi was only a village girl,

and she could not figure out why the soldiers were doing what they were doing. She started screaming. My brother quickly told her to stop and put her hands up instead. Suddenly, the soldiers opened fire on my brother. He fell and died instantly in front of his crying, bewildered wife. Next minute, another burst of fire ended her life.

After killing baudi, several soldiers went towards my father. At that point, my mother put her arms around father and started crying loudly. The Pakistani troops then killed my mother in a most brutal way. They pumped bullets into her until their rifle magazines were empty. Both her arms were virtually severed from her shoulders. Her gold necklace went to pieces as bullets hit her throat. She collapsed and died on the spot. My father was hit in one arm and a leg. The Pakistanis then left our quarters.

By then we were crying uncontrollably. Our father was clinging onto mother's lifeless body and saying 'They've destroyed my everything they've destroyed everything'. But the Pakistanis were not finished yet.

They came back around an hour or so later and started dragging father out of the room. We pleaded with them, we begged them not to take out father away, while some soldiers were smashing everything they found in the house, others told us they were only taking him to the hospital, and

that they would bring him back. But they never brought him back. My father, along with many teachers and students of Jagannath Hall were killed and buried by the soldiers in a mass grave near the hall.

"We waited and cried. There was nobody to comfort us, nobody to tell why it had to be that way. Later in the evening, an auntie, wife of a university employee who lived on the second floor of the building, came to see us. She tried her best to console us".

A friend of Modhu's came to the hall the next morning and took Arun and the kids first to Dhaka Medical College, and then to Savar. From there, the children moved to the countryside where their eldest sister lived with her husband and children. But there was no respite. The Pakistani army pressed ahead with its genocidal advance. And Modhu's children walked from one village to another, then across the border into Tripura, and finally to Calcutta via Assam.

There a maternal uncle looked after them. Modhu's youngest son, who was then a few months old, remained there in the care of his auntie. But the rest of the family returned to a free, liberated Bangladesh in 1972. Arun picks up the story again:

"On our return, we first went to the Sergeant Zahurul Huq Hall. We were given temporary residence in the reading room of the hall where

students normally read newspapers, books etc. Then the leaders of DUCSU and the Chattr League, mainly A.S.M. Abdur Rab, Nur-e-Alam Siddiqui, Shahjahan Shiraj, and Abdul Quddus Makhan, came to see us. They took us in their arms and tried to give us all the psychological comfort and material help we needed. They arranged living quarters for us, provided money to buy food and clothes with, and most importantly, those four student leaders spread the news, that Modhu's children had returned and needed help. The students received us like their own brothers and sisters.

"When we went to the canteen, we saw students had put up black-bordered banners reading 'Modhu-da, we haven't forgotten you, we will never forget you'. Since then, every year student leaders of every party and ideological line make



More than just a cafe: Modhu's Canteen has earned itself a place in the nation's history. (Right) Shaheed Modhu with wife. Photo: Mohsin and courtesy of Arun.

great efforts to keep my father's memory alive on the campus.

"Sometime later, my elder sister went to see vice-chancellor Dr. Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury. We wanted the right to run the canteen to be given back to Modhu's family. Dr. Chowdhury handed the canteen back to us, and university authorities rebuilt canteen (physical maintenance of canteen is the university's responsibility since it owns the property). Students, teachers and university employees all came and helped us start again".

Through the ups and downs of Bangladesh politics,

Modhu's canteen has remained the special place it always has been. The university campus has become more violent over the years, yet the canteen remains at peace, a hotbed of political talk, but no violence. Arun says that all student groups treat the canteen as an almost sacred spot, a place where free thought may flourish, but no war may take place. Arun, like his illustrious departed father, does not indulge in party politics, but feels part of every group.

But things have not been all smooth sailing since independence. University authorities gave them quarters, but they have been subjected to a good deal of harassment. Even recently, they were told to vacate their flat. When they enquired, they found that the university authorities knew nothing about the order. Arun cannot figure out who is behind this. He suspects there is an anti-independence force at work, who would like to erase Modhu's memory in the same way the Pakistanis tried to physically eliminate the canteen and its founder, because both were part of the history of Bangladesh's liberation struggle.

"In a television programme called Al Surja Al Prottoy, Mamunur Rashid tried to portray the history and



tragedy of the canteen and my father. (Rashed Khan) Menon bhai spoke at length about the canteen. But the previous government did not allow the programme to be shown. When it was shown on December 16, 1990, we found much of it was censored. Now, the canteen formed only a part

of that programme, as it is only a small part of our history of liberation. But the point is, if we don't let this and future generations know the country's history of struggles fully, about how we came to be a free nation, then might not that very freedom be jeopardised in the future?"

LIVE FOR THE WORLD

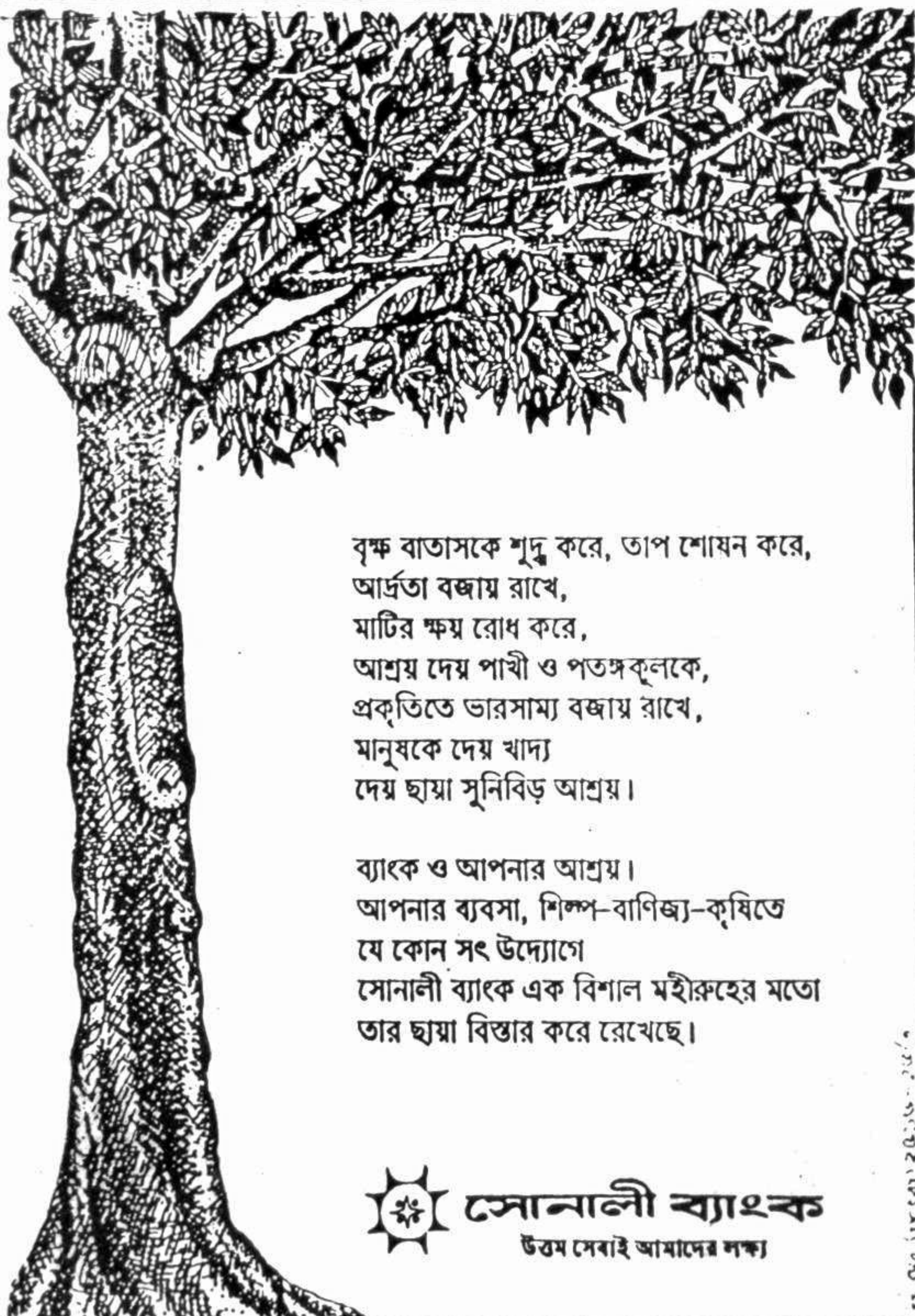
—Al-Mujaheedy

Oh men! Live for the World.
This is the cycle of your life.
Fauna and flora, greenery, sea, sky
The majestic Himalayan crest live only once.
You are sleepless.
Awakening is nationhood
You have no death, live once and endlessly.
In thick darkness and with a deep breath
Lively wind blows past,
Through generations of history and birth
Dig out human fossils from inside earth
Decipher your roots from under ancient relics.
The arch-way of Sri Lankan
mountain range is wide open
Infinite human avalanche
The bronze effigy of lizard
be removed from Eve's garden.
Fallen leaves of Dumur Trees,
Break the silent solitude of ancient fort.
And walk past streamlet leisurely
Shattering the old adage,
Oh dear motherland! inscribe victory notes
on a huge epitaph.
Oh man, now you live and look for the fountain
source

of existence — Oh you who

care for history
Look for your heritage again and again
Your national identity,
roots of your civilization.
Watch, where you stand today
in the vast horizon?
Your ancestors lived in the Panam city
So you live for the world
Vast stage this world is man's only place of
survival.
This is the only world we have
Bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, our dream,
our birth and death
Must we live here with our distinct heritage
You are not the only being.
Just an intermediary
And live for the world —
endless and vast stage of mankind.

Translation: Diwan Shafiul Alam



বৃক্ষ বাতাসকে শূন্য করে, তাপ শোষণ করে,
আর্দ্রতা বজায় রাখে,
মাটির ক্ষয় রোধ করে,
আশ্রয় দেয় পাখী ও পতঙ্গকুলকে,
প্রকৃতিতে ভারসাম্য বজায় রাখে,
মানুষকে দেয় খাদ্য
দেয় ছায়া সুনিবিড় আশ্রয়।

ব্যাকে ও আপনার আশ্রয়।
আপনার ব্যবসা, শিল্প-বাণিজ্য-কৃষিতে
যে কোন সং উদ্যোগে
সোনালী ব্যাকে এক বিশাল মহীকুহের মতো
তার ছায়া বিস্তার করে রেখেছে।

 সোনালী ব্যাংক
উত্তম সেবাই আমাদের লক্ষ্য

We play a vital role in augmenting
food supply by producing adequate
quantities of quality
UREA FERTILIZER.



POLASH UREA FERTILIZER FACTORY
GHORASAL



an enterprise of Bangladesh Chemical
Industries Corporation.