



Victory Day Thoughts

by Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

The Victory Day has gained, in recent years, on the emotional plane, and has lost some ground on the political plane. There is a paradox here, and it will need some explaining.

For many years, the Victory Day, 16th December, commemorating the fall of Dhaka and the surrender of the Pakistan Army, was observed routinely, without arousing much public enthusiasm. There has been a change in recent years. It all started in Chittagong, and then the idea was taken up in some of the other cities. By now, besides Chittagong, the day will be celebrated as Victory Festival/Victory Fair in a number of cities. Elaborate programmes have been drawn up. Freedom-fighters of the area will assemble, will reminisce; both the glory and pain of those days will be recalled. It will be a day mainly of the war-veterans, for the old, to share in the feelings of both glory and pain. But for the young, the day will have a special significance — a peep into the past of which they were generally ignorant, thanks to the policy pursued by successive governments. It will seem that the present generation is asserting its right to know, its right to grow as heir to the great legacy. Typical of this feeling is the coming into existence of *Prajanna Ekattar*, an organisation formed by the children of the martyrs of 1971. They were very young, mere boys and girls, when they lost their fathers. They are now determined to revive the memories and they are determined to keep a flame alive. Their combined action has had a nationwide impact. In the process, the Victory Day is some thing much larger, much deeper than what the official celebrations tend to suggest.

Curious though it may look, official attitude for many years to the War of Liberation has been cool. The reason would seem to be purely political. The main actors and the main allies have been under some form of obloquy. The more you talked about the War, the more you had to bring them in. Better play it down. Films offering a truthful picture of the enterprise were pushed aside, in BTV, in favour of others less

explicit, more guarded and altogether less evocative. Naturally enough, the Victory Day suffered in official celebrations. Governmental timidity is now more than balanced by public enthusiasm.

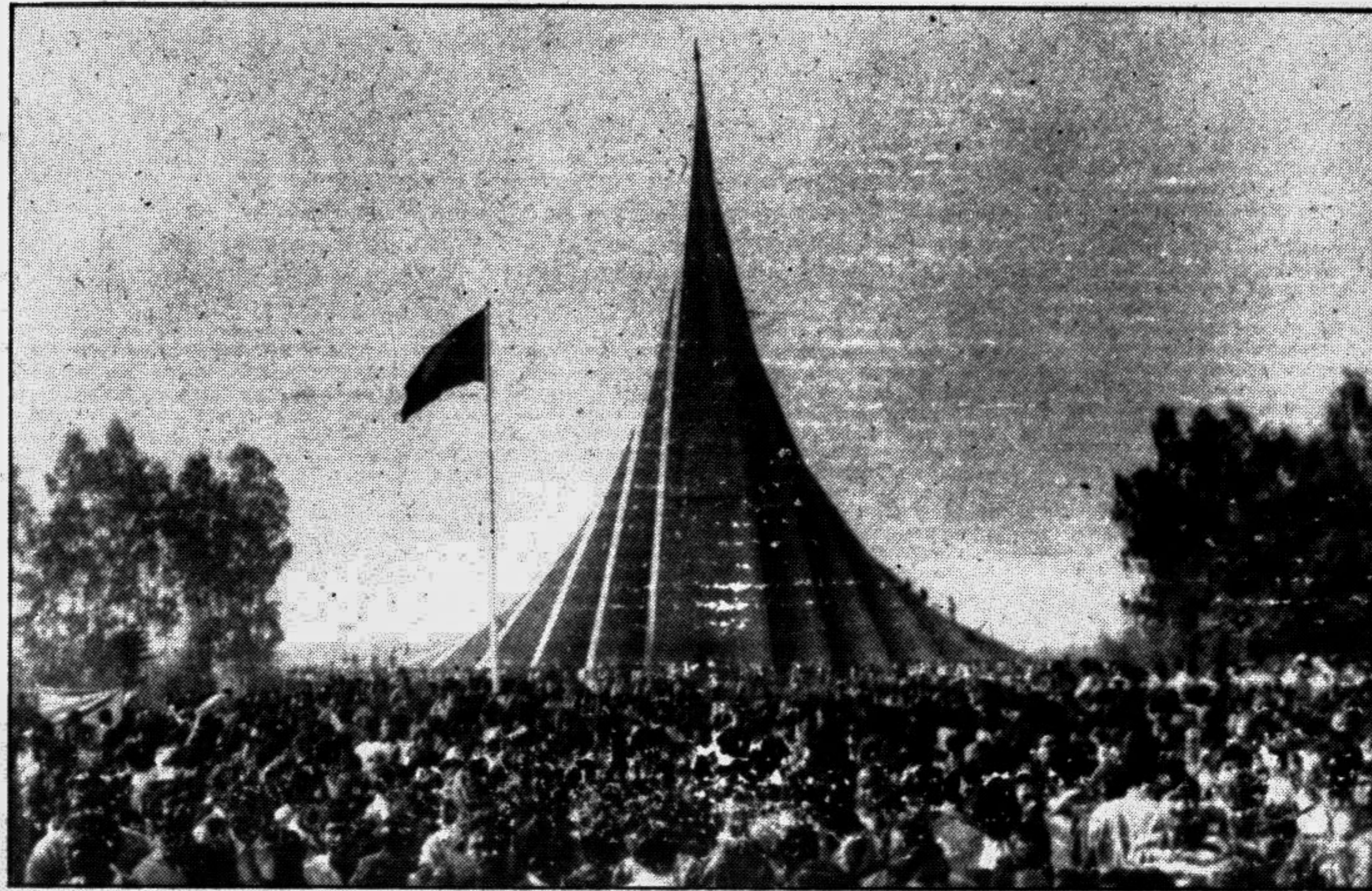
After this brief account of how the Victory Day has gained emotionally, let us have a look at it in its political aspect. The Victory Day was the culmination of the War of Liberation. The political expression of the War was the government established after liberation. The tenets, ideas and ideologies slowly taking root in our minds took a concrete shape in the Constitution of Bangladesh, which the people of Bangladesh gave themselves on the eighteenth day of Kartick, 1379 BS, corresponding to the fourth day of November, 1972 AD.

Now it is well-known that subsequent amendments to the Constitution have changed its content and nature quite substantially. Of the four basic principles, socialism has been substituted by 'socialism meaning economic and social justice', and secularism has been dropped altogether. The abandonment of 'secularism' was later bolstered by the inclusion of a pronouncedly Islamic 'Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim,' by a Proclamation of 1977, and further, through the 8th amendment, by making Islam the state religion of Bangladesh.

Though Islam was never decried, much less suppressed, in Bangladesh, these honorifics brought solace in the minds of some, desiring to bring the country back on the track they were familiar with. More importantly, democracy was given a hasty burial. The way this could be done only showed that political parties, as a democratic institution, were basically weak. This was further proved by the ease with which party-making and party-breaking could be done by Presidents. One of them had actually wanted that he would make politics difficult, and he was as good as his words.

Freedom of the press remained on paper. The government had several means at its disposal to effectively curtail the power of the press to

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National Mausoleum, Savar, Dhaka.

—Photo: Mohsin

How to Compromise a Victory

by Waheedul Haque

THE Liberation War was the culmination of two decades of struggle for democracy and economic justice, recognition of a people's identity and respect for its culture. Can such a war be over in a day after certain instruments have been signed. A war can cease after such an act but hardly the struggle. Our war was but only one, instrument to realise radical changes in state and society and there couldn't be any question of the struggle for those stopping with the cessation of the war.

In geopolitical and military terms the victory of December 16 was for sure a clincher and constituted one of the brightest things ever to happen to that historic-cultural entity — the Bengalees. It will be near impossible to reverse or even detract even by specks from what was achieved on that day — a military victory and the emergence of a new state on the political map of the world.

But what happened to the overall struggle — war was only one part of that — and the dreams for which that was waged? The dreams continue largely to be unrealised — much of these even receding further than these were in the bad Pakistani days — and the struggle, doubtlessly, continues but in a most dissipated and diffused state. In fact one can claim without fear of being controverted that the gains made by the military victory has largely been offset by continual losses on the struggle front. It is plain enough for all to see that the communal and Pakistani backlash — arising from the defeat of the anti-Bangladesh forces on December 16 — is on ascendance and is decidedly having the better of the fray.

How could this happen? The victory of December 16, by all logic, should have

marked a great great stride in our struggle for a decent social and individual life of honour and dignity for all, and should have paved the way for many and more frequent victories in our struggle. The opposite happened and society, with all of its economy and politics and ideological moorings and underpinnings started crawling back to positions imposed by Pakistan and its medieval ideology of theocracy pressed to service for benefit of a feudal-military oligarchy bent on transforming itself into a industrialist-capitalist cartel. In certain areas, specially on the crucial point of communalism, the society in independent Bangladesh did not take more than a couple of years to go back past the Pakistani positions. Then the state was progressively communal and sectarian as much as the successive governments could make it

and the people were fiercely secular and anti-communal. After liberation the new state, through its genesis, and the leadership that midwifed it into being were wedded inseparably to secularism and a political dispensation of the whole people, but the society fast deteriorated into a state of predatory communalism.

Two decades of nationalist struggle for democracy and socialism in less than five years of the founding of the new state and less than three of the adoption of the constitution — easily the most enlightened magna carta in all of the Bengalee people's history — democracy was done in by army takeover which threw socialism to the garbage bin and a counterfeit nationalism was imposed to replace that which led up to the liberation war. A question plagued every intelligent and patriotic mind — were Zia's and Ershad's

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In our context, clarity of vision for the future has been the worst casualty of a largely misinterpreted and distorted national history.

The Victory Day is the right occasion to re-iterate our national ethos and identity, not merely by recalling the first wave of euphoria that swept many of us off our feet on gaining independence, but more importantly, with the benefit of hindsight based on objectivity and dispassion which come as gifts of a long time passed since independence.

The genesis, development and culmination of our Liberation War into the emergence of free Bangladesh were all revolutionary in character. And, the ideals that a revolution establishes have to be immutable until these are reversed by a fresh convulsion of the whole people, and not by fiat and decrees. If we accept the fact that we are what we are because of the Liberation War then there could not be any unsettling of the settled facts to suit the seasonal demands of politics.

The war ended a co-religionist colonial rule upon the then East Pakistan and ushered in a People's Republic of Bangladesh constitutionally wedded to the principles of nationalism, secularism, democracy and socialism. The reiteration and embodiment of the principle of nationalism in the Constitution even though we had clearly acquired all the attributes of nationhood and sovereignty on attainment of freedom, were an unambiguous assertion of our distinct and inviolate national identity. From this stand point, the subsequent controversy and wrangling over nationalism appear to be an exercise in avoidable

Not a Dew-drop on the Lotus Leaf

by Shah Husain Imam

As for the principle of secularism which was watered down by a recourse to the 8th Amendment, Islam could not be in any conceivable threat in free Bangladesh where an overwhelming majority belong to this persuasion and are highly religious by nature. Thus the retention of a professedly secular status could not run counter to the majority interest by any stretch of imagination.

Economically, even die-hard socialist countries have switched over from command economies to free economies

in its earlier stages saw the adoption of a mixed economy and a gradual relaxation of collective ownership of the means of production. It is the establishment of an exploitation-free society that the people have aspired after since the Pakistani days. By embodying socialism as a state principle in the constitution we reflected that popular craving for a better deal as well as the cognizance that was duly taken of the sensibilities of the left parties which fought shoulder

to shoulder with the Awami League in the Liberation War. We have an unfinished job here the issues of land reform and workers' participation in management of industries, without affecting the privatisation or free market policies. The principle of pluralistic democracy has been re-established but the institutions which make it function effectively had atrophied through disuse and therefore needed to be virtually rebuilt from the scratch. Their re-start has been impeded by an undevel-

oped, and in many respects, a distorted, political culture that has grown fiercely self-righteous, and is largely given to narrow party interests.

The revolutionary character of our struggle for national independence can not or should not be undermined by any reference to India's supportive role or the former Soviet Union's sympathies for it. To the remark that India saw in this the chance to disprove Jinnah's two-nation theory, our view is inclined to giving India its due for providing shelter to countless refugees from our side and sacrificing some eight

thousand Indian soldiers in the war.

When the chips were down, at the final stages of the sub-continental war, the USA turned away the Seventh Fleet — from what moments earlier had looked like a threatening course — after the Pentagon had taken due note of the field situation mirroring the real state of affairs unmistakably. The People's Republic of China reportedly wanted at the emergency session of the UN Security Council that Pakistan reciprocate India's unilateral declaration of ceasefire on the western front. Pakistan did it bringing the war to an end and paving the way for the surrender of its troops on the eastern

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The document of surrender, 16 December 1971 (above) and (right) the Pakistani forces surrender. Photo courtesy— Dhaka City Museum, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.



I Remember

by Wasif Islam

I remember before the war, the hazy summer days and warm monsoon nights, nothing to worry about, life was a carefree river cruise, the earth was hurtling through its regulated orbit drawn by the sun and encircled by the shining moon.

I remember the night in '71 when all hell broke loose on a 100 million, the army rolled out into the streets of Dhaka on a Thursday night of March. The streets were littered with the dead, innocent blood once again was spilled.

I remember Poor Khokon Bhai's blood soaked, bullet riddled body perhaps not knowing why he died. I remember the silent vow that sprung from deep inside. "Khokon Bhai you will not have died in vain".

I remember, the fear in my mother's eyes, the twinkling of hope as more and more of our youth and armour trudged across the border, to return stronger, as warriors.

I remember the hectic training days. I remember the brilliant Khaled Musharraf, the businesslike Capt. Haider and hundreds and hundreds of the nameless and faceless comrades in arms. I remember the brotherhood, as young and old, man and woman, the child, the sick, the villager and the city slick all came together in an unwritten bond so strong so vibrant.

I also remember the treachery, the hate, the plunder and the rape, the agony, the nagging fear of being picked up, the torture stories, the selfish Bengali unwilling to part with some money for the cause, the arrogance and I remember most of all the failures.

I remember the hiding of arms under the ground at the back of our house; the army raid in the early hours of dawn five months later, and the month long hiding at Moni's house.

I remember, how brave my mother and some of her friends were, cooking for hungry freedom fighters, organising stitching of kathas by the hundreds, as winter was setting in, making money available whenever we needed it, encouraging us to go on when all seemed lost, the trip to Karachi to forge alliance with the sympathetic Sindhis, to study the possibilities of a hijack. I remember being arrested with the route map to India somewhere in my pockets, and being saved only by the Help of the Almighty.

I remember how we rescued Khaled Musharraf's daughter, the attack at the power stations of Dhaka, the hurling of the incendiary bomb as a symbol of freedom, the planning of raids, the elimination of traitors, arranging medicine and patriotic doctors for the sick and the wounded, locating hideouts in the city as more and more groups came in.

I remember the 4th of December as the sky lit up with flares and the air was filled by air raid siren and the earth shook with bombs dropped by Indian planes on friends and foes alike.

I remember the morning of the 16th, we drove triumphantly to the Intercontinental Hotel, with the banner of Bangladesh unfurled in my hands as people looked on incredulously and in bewilderment, Victory, Victory it was victory day, and everywhere people greeted us with flowers and tearful, thankful gaze.

I remember the tears rolling down the cheeks of the Pakistani Officers as they laid down their arms before the Indian Army brass at Dhaka Cantonment.

I remember the celebration we had in our house, when Khalid Musharraf came along with so many muktis and freedom fighters, also present were our friends from ABC and CBS news, relatives and friends and children. The sun had come up once again in Bangladesh.

Today I remember the dead, who were with us during those days and nights, Ashfi, Rumi, Bodhi, Khaled Musharraf, Khokon, Moni, and pray for their departed souls.

I remember the living too who may read this piece and remember along with me.

I remember 23 years ago today, we were full of hope, proud of our freedom, proud of our people, good bye, we thought, to corruption, to greed and petty politics, to injustice, to quarrels and strife.

23 years hence what have we gained, at the cost of the blood and sweat of our friends and fellowmen? Perhaps we were naive then, we did not win a war we had only won a battle, so the war goes on against the treachery and the hate, the corruption and the injustice.

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