

Eid-ul-Azha Enjoins Self-sacrifice, Elimination of Enmity

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

IT appears that the Ministry of Religious Affairs has performed its duty in a routine way, pertaining to Eid-ul-Azha. Nice, the National Moon Sighting Committee, presided by Religious Affairs Minister Keramat Ali, declared the date of celebration of the holy Eid-ul-Azha on May 11, 1995. Previously, they arranged for the Hajj pilgrims under the Government management, as an annual feature; the expenses of which are borne by the pilgrims themselves. Last year also, the Hajjis, on their return to Dhaka, expressed disgust and disappointment over Government mismanagement in Saudi Arabia. We don't know what will happen this time! Now, a Hajj delegation, at the Government level and fund, from Bangladesh is in Saudi Arabia. At the invitation of the Saudi Government, the higher-ups in the political arena of our country such as Deputy Leader of the Parliament (one-party, indeed!) with his family and Acting Chairman, Jatiya Party — have gone to Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj. No doubt, bonanza for the party leaders!

Is that all the Government of Bangladesh can do for its Muslim citizens? The services they have rendered are for the privileged few, the moneyed men and the political mentors of the country! It's an infinitesimal number; having no relation whatsoever with the weal and woe of the people. What will happen, and is happening, with the down-trodden millions of Muslims? The electronic media are awfully busy to display and inform the public about the religious (?) deeds of those in power on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha. The poor people look with awe and wonder at the magnificent buildings of their Government and the alleged majestic movements of their leaders. After all, they have voted them to power. These are the hard realities of life that one can hardly ignore, and not rhetoric to trounce anybody. Will the influential persons ask their own conscience if what they are doing are really Islamic or falls in the category of "demonstration to people", which is, however, forbidden in Islam?

After the seventh summit meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) at Casablanca, Morocco, and the decisions taken therein, we thought that the Government of Bangladesh would more this time fight out fundamentalism and communalism, at least to honour the election of Khaleda Zia to the post of Vice-chairman, OIC. Most of our expectations fell through. Two recent cases deserve mention. The reception ceremony arranged in honour of poet Shamsur Rahman, by the people of Sylhet, was torn asunder by the fundamentalist forces, while the law-enforcing agencies, i.e., police force remained passive. Second, in a mosque in Demra Thana, near Dhaka city, Khaleque Majumder, a Jamaat leader and the man accused in the case of the killing of Shahidullah Kaiser in 1971, let loose terrorism on the 'Musallis' (those who said Juma prayers) and formed a new committee for the mosque. Except protests against the inflicting injury, we do not find any positive action by the Govt, or the leaders of the Nirmul Committee against this dastardly attack to impose a Jamaat Committee for the mosque. Street demonstrations and slogans will not suffice, unless the Muslims, who say prayers in the mosques, are imbued with the real spirit of Islam for elimination of fundamentalism and communalism. I remember that the chief of the Awami League, in one of her public addresses at Bangabandhu Avenue, Dhaka, implored her party men to go to mosques; so that fundamentalists can not indulge in nefarious politics in the name of religion. I think this would be the right step, instead of staging demonstrations only, here, in the country or outside the country. We cannot lose sight of the connections of the fundamentalist clique in our country with their counterparts in other countries. It has come to the press that even in England those Bangalees (erstwhile East Pakistan, Bengali speaking) who fought against liberation as the collaborators of the Pakistan Army, have found footing there to indulge in fundamentalist activities. But, the British TV in channel IV 'despatch' pro-

gramme on 3rd May, 1995, exposed three killers, during Liberation War 1971, now residing in England. This programme, reduced by Twenty-Two vision, has attracted the attention of the British government and there is every likelihood that the killers may be prosecuted under the "Geneva Conventions Act". The British people deserve appreciation of the Bangalee nation for their just decision to expose and try the war-criminals.

But, what about our own responsibility, our government, particularly the Ministry of Religious Affairs, our political and cultural leaders? Frankly speaking, these organisations and their leaderships, stated to be opposed to fundamentalists and communal forces, are yet to prove their credibility and put an imprint in the mind of the general people about their integrity and steadfastness to eliminate killers and collaborators. It is now correctly assessed by the concerned that after the death of 'shaheed janan' Jahanara Imam, the anti-fundamentalist movement is not as sharp, as it was in 1992. Obviously, the people could put faith in Jahanara Imam in unequivocal terms. Anyway, let the leaderships take a look at themselves and find a way out.

If we look at our history of Bengal, we find that the people, at large, were never communal and that there was a perfect communal harmony among Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Buddhists, etc. It is only a few at the political helm, who have/had no conviction about the real spirit of religion, used the name of religion to incite the illiterate people, to climb to power and positions, and enjoy those unfettered, to meet their egoistic ends at the cost of the poor people of their own religion. How many of the rich Muslims do care for the poor Muslims? The selfish manoeuvres of the Muslim League and their lackeys in one name or the other grabbed the properties and positions of the minorities, the Hindus from 1947 and the non-Bangalees from 1972 alike, in the name of abandoned property, enemy property and vested property, it is widely alleged. One thing is sure that no poor Muslim or poor Bangalee could get an iota of those properties; and it is all for the cunning, clever, well-to-do Muslims or Bangalees. Religion was always a weapon, with them, to hoodwink the people and guise their selfish motives. It is so, still to-day!

Such lust for power and the exploitation of people are thoroughly against the spirit of Islam. 'Islam' means peace, justice and tolerance. The vested interests, by bribing or inducing the illiterate or half-educated Mullahs, spread the venoms of communalism, to protect themselves irreligiously, in the name of religion. We find in Islamic History that good Muslims like Ibrahima Sina, Al-Beruni, Omar Khayam, Rumi, Hafiz, Taimiad & Al-Zohair were tortured by the religious fanatics of their times. In our country, poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, litterateur Mir Mosharruf Hossain, the fore-runner of women liberation Begum Rokeya were persecuted by the religious bigots.

Eid-ul-Azha means self-sacrifice. But instead of remembering that, some are making frantic efforts to get the skin and meat of sacrificed animals, through leaflets, posters and requests. The fundamentalist parties are also in the run. But, it is not what is desirable. Eid-ul-Azha reminds us of the supreme example of self-sacrifice established by Hazrat Ibrahim and Ismail (AM). As ordained by Allah, Hazrat Ibrahim (AM) was about to slaughter his affectionate son Hazrat Ismail (AM), who placed himself without any hesitation. Surely, the Imams will narrate this holy event in Eid congregations with a view to imbuing the ideas of self-sacrifice among the Muslims. The sacrifice of animal by way of sacrifice of the self means slaughter, or in other words, elimination of evil instincts in persons; so that no person becomes a cause of agony to another person. In that way, we are to observe Eid-ul-Azha in a befitting manner as a festival of sacrifice which also means that we have to dispense with religious exploitation and communalism that only tend to perpetuate discrimination and hostility between man and man.

Eid Mubarak



Star photo by S. K. Erumul Haq

Eid-ul-Azha and the Spirit of Our Festival

by Azfar Hussain

THE daily man — the man inescapably caught in the ritual of living — is perhaps small, poor, or even alone; but, he becomes large, rich and strong, only when he is part of a festival that celebrates the union of a man with a man. This was what Rabindranath Tagore strongly felt almost a century ago in his brilliant, sparkling essay called "Festival". It was in this essay that Tagore rediscovered the meaning and significance of festivals which, according to him, mirror in the union of man a combination of truth, beauty, and *ananda*.

Indeed, a festival is more than a routine ritual — more than a symbolic construct normatively evoked and repeated. What a festival actually does is that it brings men and women and children together on a plane where one responds to, and mingles with, another spontaneously. A festival, thus, celebrates the image, the spirit, rather the reality of a whole when its parts are not insignificant but are meaningful only in terms of their relations to each other, realized in the very whole itself. True, the most revealing glimpses may come in one's private, off-the-cuff moments; but, then, it is also true that one's *elan* and energy, meaning and movement are best felt in one's active contact with the many; and a festival, ideally, ensures, facilitates, activates such a contact. The Fosterian dictum of "only connect" has, in fact, many a point to make, of course with regard to the festival also, for a festival connects things with things, spirit with spirit, joy with joy, and the few with the many. And this is the truth which Tagore saw ever alive in the rhythm and ritual of a festival.

We know that Elliot once spoke in his great poem called *The Waste Land* of an anonymous woman who could connect nothing with nothing. In fact, she was shown to represent an unreal world where language itself failed, where communications were made impossible, where all relations were dismantled and disrupted beyond recognition and redemption, and where the 'whole' was lost once and for all. This world, Elliot's world, as one can see, was one without men and women. Yes, here, one does not come across men and women but only ghosts, whose tentative, non-real existence did not require connections and contacts, but only their disruptions. In Tagorean terms, one can also say that this was a world without festivals, for a festival essentially demands real men and women and not ghosts; it not only demands men and women but also their union energized by love which makes a festival truly meaningful. Using a couple of apt metaphors, Tagore made his point succinctly in his essay

"Festival" thus: "Love is the god of a festival, while union is its temple". Tagore further emphasized the point, while also historicizing it, that the immense strength that a festive unity can draw and irradiate, the truth that love alone can establish are what can be seen in a man's active contact with a man. If someone can conquer fear, if someone can turn all that the stunning odds against himself into fiddling little things, if someone can deny and defy damage and death, he or she then exhibits nothing but love. We know that selfishness is a hard reality, undeniably riding roughshod over all of us enmeshed in the complex relations of the family; but it is love which hoes up the excesses of selfishness. Thus, Tagore kept suggesting the force and strength of love,

It is the slaughtering of the animal *within* which is more important than the routine and ritualistic slaughtering of the animal without... And let us celebrate man!

while at the same time maintaining that those unfortunate countrymen who do not know how to get united either in times of adversity or in moments of joy and jubilation deviate from the richest truth of life, and hence, from beauty. "Those who do not know how to make sacrifices do not know the joy of having received the gifts of life", added Tagore, while indicating that a festival calls a man to meet a man so as to realize this truth which is love and beauty made visible in the celebration of man's togetherness.

Unfortunately, in this part of the world, we are many times removed from the Tagorean ideal of the festival. True, only a day later, we are going to celebrate the Eid-ul-Azha festival, we will have Eid congregations here and there, and, cows and goats will be slaughtered, if not sacrificed, to make a show — this show is particularly cinematically, or perhaps more appropriately, melodramatically exhibited by the upper and middle-class participants in the festival — of who can notch up a slaughtering record as it were! On the other hand, the poor, sacrificing characteristically and essentially all the time as they are, remain helpless witnesses to such a melodrama. And, thus, in the process, the very spirit of the festival gets defeated, for such a festival renders class-discriminations, economic abilities or inabilities, and even hedonism visible to the extent of clinching the point that economically or otherwise unequal men and women cannot be united on a plane that can possibly combine Tagorean love, beauty and *ananda*. Well, I do not intend to suggest that true festivals are

always impossible in a class-divided society. It is true that with acute class-divisions characterizing the social dynamic, a festival fails to forge a spontaneous and joyous unity; for, in a variety of norms, forms behaviours and symbols, classes begin to manifest themselves having their conflicting ways with the festival itself. But, then, with understanding and empathy, with a strong sense of unity accompanied by the spirit of sacrifice, it is at least momentarily possible to initiate that festive moment of union — the moment of love, beauty and *ananda* — when discriminations are dissolved, when class-consciousness is dispensed with. Yes, such a moment is possible through a fes-

tival. But, what does one need to sacrifice then? The answer is, of course, not to be found in the mere slaughtering of a cow; the symbol need not surpass the ideal or the idea the symbol stands for. Here, sacrifice means the sacrifice of one's power, position, privilege, prerogative, ego-consciousness and class-consciousness at the altar of the very truth, namely, man's equality. This, in fact, is a spiritual exercise in a kind of *negative capability* at the ex-

ercise of *negative capability* at the expense of the animal *within* which is more important than the routine and ritualistic slaughtering of the animal without... And let us celebrate man!

ercise of *negative capability* at the expense of the animal *within* which is more important than the routine and ritualistic slaughtering of the animal without... And let us celebrate man!

A Real Life Journey in Boldness and Weakness

by M Atiqul Haque

THEY say man proposes and God disposes. We say, or Ismail says, man has no power to do anything, it is Allah Who empowers him to do anything. At this, the sceptic will come out to argue, then it is Allah Who makes a man steal or commit a murder. No, it is the man who steals and who commits the murder, and Allah only empowers him to do when he decides to steal or to commit the murder. So it is his decision that makes him responsible for what he does with the power given by his Lord.

It is like this. Mrs Alia wants to marry Mr Alia, but she is not finding words and courage to speak to him about it. Allah sends Mrs Rafiq to her who is equally friendly with Mrs Alia and Mr Alia. So she does the job of an intermediary, and thus through her mediation, she is married to Mr Alia. This whole decision lies with Mrs Alia and she is responsible to her and to her Lord for this decision. Allah has only enabled her to fulfill her decision.

Again, Mrs Nadia wants to marry a drunkard, she wants to marry him, because, she has fallen in love with him. All her friends and well-wishers persuade her not to marry him, but she is adamant, she is determined to marry him. When Allah finds her so willing and decisive about her intention, He permits her (against His wish) to go ahead and to marry her man of choice. As a consequence, she suffers, because, a drunkard cannot make her happy in life. And she will face difficulties in the Hereafter for

her choice (against the wish of all her friends) instead of several other good proposals.

Having understood this delicate point of 'lot' and 'unlot', I will now take my valued readers to a personal experience of mine which, even now, appears to me an impossible event, but I did it, and I wonder how I did it! It was in 1945 or 46 while I was a boy of 12 or 13 that I came home one morning from my Mama's house at Anwarpur, Gauharpur, and I found all my brothers and cousins, about 15 or 16, collected together and were being threatened by about 20 or 25 young boys of the two villages of Sheikhpara and Fakirpara, on the other side of the river Barabhaga, concerning the ownership of a 'Vela'.

"When I arrived, my brothers and others jumped on their feet and greeted me with the following observation: 'Now that you have come, we have no fear to face them. Will you like to see that we are humbled by these boys of the other side of the river?' I replied: 'What? They want to humble you and to take the 'Vela' by force? I will see them! I threw away my bicycle and threw away my clothes from the body. And with my 'lungi' tightened to the thighs, I jumped into the river with a *dau* (a sort of a knife) in my hand.

The river Barabhaga was not a big river, but in the monsoon, it becomes very wide with the onrush of water from the upstream. It was about three to four hundred yards wide, but I swam it in 3 to 4 minutes (I was a good swimmer in my boyhood), and stood there before the boys and challenged all the young boys with my *dau*. They all became nervous and panicky. And instead of attacking me with their sticks, spears and other weapons that they were armed with, all the twenty-five boys started fleeing away crying for help from their village elders. The village elders saw none but me, a boy of their age, who was alone pursuing them. What a joke! What a fun! But it was literally true. I pursued alone a village full of boys with a *dau* in my hand, and the 'courageous' boys with spears and sticks in their hands were fleeing! And my brothers and cousins were enjoying the scene, standing on the other side of the river!

After pursuing them quite a distance, I turned and swam back to my brothers and cousins with the *vela*. Then, the following evening, all the elders of the three villages of Kadirpur, Sheikhpara and Fakirpara sat down in a jury to analyse and assess the aftermath of my adventure and to award me a punishment for my too much bravery and gallantry. How and why should I dare challenge two villages full of boys alone? There is something definitely wrong with you!

Yes, this has become my weakness all through my life. My boldness is my weakness. I was bold enough to have swum in the Baldah canal between Kadirpur and Jafarabad, once when I was boy of nine or ten, and faced the consequence of death; I was bold to have come voluntarily out of the affection of my parents when I was a boy of 12 or 13, for the sake of study, and faced the difficulties and humiliations of staying in *jalirs* for long 12 years, and so on.

This 'boldness' or 'weakness' is nothing but a man's submission to his Lord.



Eid congregation.

Star photo