



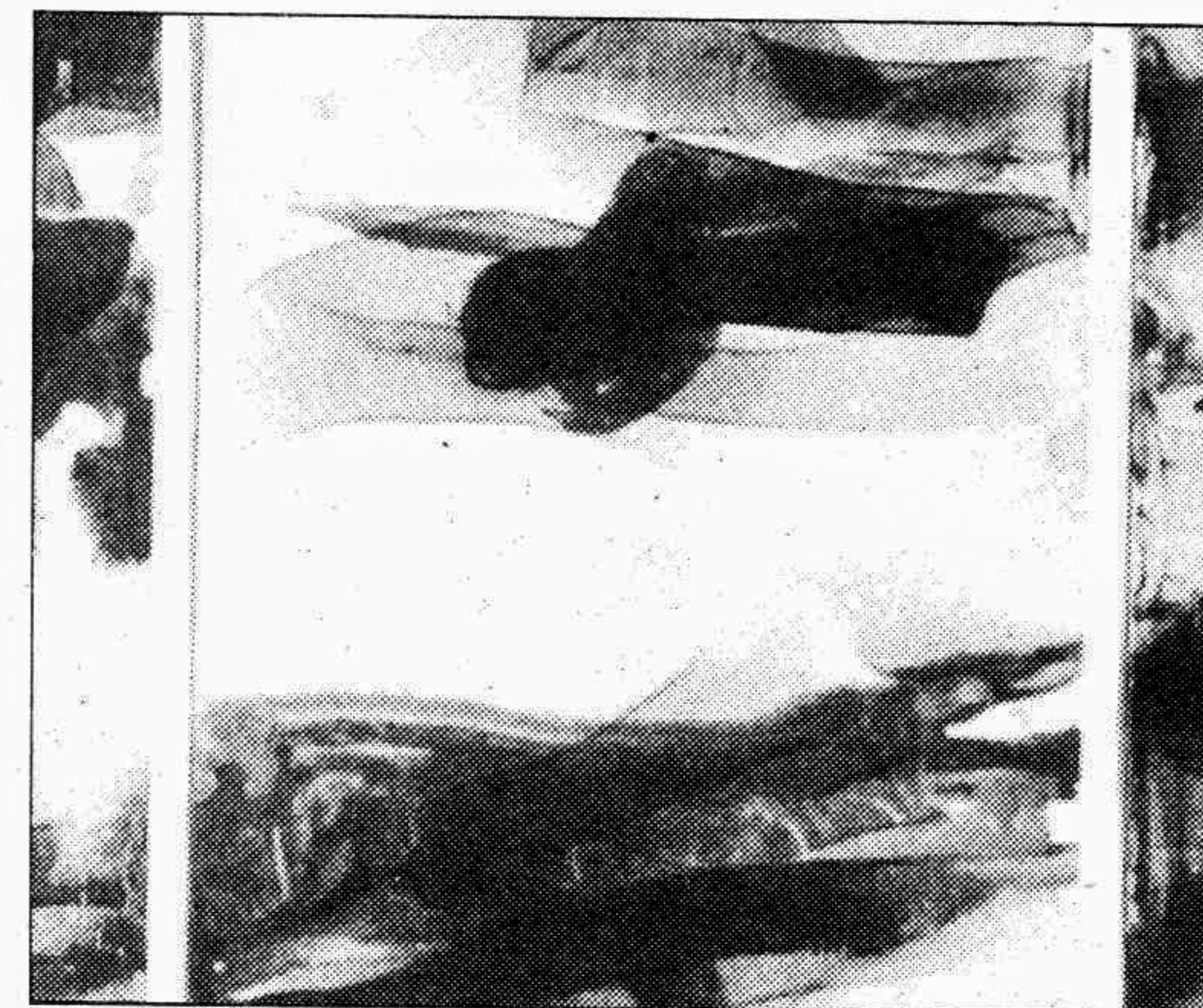
Combining Nostalgia with Preservation of Nature

by Fayza Haq

SHAMSUL Alam Azad, who won numerous accolades from his teachers such as Professor Aminul Islam and Mahmudul Haque, Director of Fine Arts Institute, DU, at the opening of his first solo exhibit at the "Gallery-21", has combined his nostalgia of his childhood at Pirojpur, Barisal, along with his experiences of the destruction of the environment, during his formative years in Dhaka at the Fine Arts Institute, Dhaka, and his present life as an art teacher at the Loreto School, Dhamondi. Having participated in 21 combined exhibits, at the age of 39, (but looking much younger than his age), he has presented 31 pieces in oil on canvas, oil on paper and mixed-media with remarkably ingenuity and dexterity. Even some of his work with a somewhat tragic vision have been presented in such a manner that they appear aesthetically soothing, and it is only if one speaks to the artist personally, that one can envisage the depth of gloom in his heart and mind. Azad, who won the best painting award from the Fine Arts Institute, DU in '90, has progressed to a mature individual who understands his material, remembers the guidances in his formative stage as an art student, and now presents as superb display of what a mature artist can present for connoisseurs, art-lovers and art critics.

Asked why he had delineated nature repeatedly in works, Azad explains patiently and with spontaneity, "The main source of human life comes from Nature and you cannot deny or contest this established fact. This inspires me to toil and grind and put down my emotions and my sensibility. Again, this brings in happy memories from Pirojpur, and it also provides romance in the far corner of my mind, soul and heart. I am basically a sentimental individual and my concern for my environment emanates from all these factors. When I dwell on the environmental pollution, it is normal, it affects me to the depths of my heart and I strive to something that will capture the imagination of the viewers so that they will spend some time before my works, and this me eventually bring harmony, worldwide, and not in Bangladesh alone, in the ultimate analyses i.e."

Dwelling on why he had chosen various mediums, Azad says, "My favourite media remains oil as it has such a vast scope, you can work at will, you can add or delete at will; and after all the great masters in painting in the past all worked in oil, and they have a tremendous impact on my work. Moreover, oil can be preserved longer than any other



Nature Revisited-22, Mixed Media, 1999, 24x8 cm

you cannot refute can be done by mankind only. This is a serious responsibility which we cannot shrug off our shoulders. Preservation of environment needs to be done in a more methodical and collective manner — and this is the vital fact that I wish to point out in my works so that they leave an indelible print on the minds of the viewers. In order to save mankind itself, Nature too has to be preserved simultaneously. It is imperative to have a balance of Nature, so to say. You cannot, by any manner, separate mankind from Nature — at least at this present juncture — despite all the outer space and UFO and Extra Terrestrial books and films like 'X-Files' or 'Star Trek'. Yes, man has been to the moon decades ago and have travelled in space, but the bottom line is, that greenery and mankind go hand in hand, and believe me, my vision is also futuristic and not a matter of mulling in the past only."

Asked to elaborate on his sentimental journey to Pirojpur seen in some of his paintings, Azad recalls, "My father was a bureaucrat there, and our house was besides a river where I went boating and fishing by myself. I sang and flew kites along the river banks, at times. Most people's happiest years are those of childhood and they try to recollect them when they reach adulthood, and this brings solace to the mind at that stage and gives a fillip to their existence."

Azad adds, "However, this nostalgia is sometimes a poignant one, as I stayed at Pirojpur till I was 21. My home-town is like a village. Coming to Dhaka in the 80s to study fine arts, I found no 'lines' such as those of the trees at 'home sweet home'. The gentle and soft horizontal 'lines', which I found in my childhood,

media. Yes, you do get satisfaction in mixed-media too. However, I take from Nature to delineate my impressions and views about Nature. Finally, oil is the highest form of art and has the most scope for a painter like myself, in my opinion, and I can best express myself in oils. True, mixed-media and acrylic are also fun things and do suit my purpose, but that is not enough. My intention is to work gradually and think deeply, as I paint".

Asked why he believes in minimisation and why he had departed to abstraction even years ago, Azad replies, "I believe in aiming at post-modern work, and in my paintings you do not find figures as the central focus of my works. When I stand on the ground, there is a relation between the earth and myself. If there are 'lines' there, I find them minimal, while my mind searches for a continued relationship with Nature. If this interrelation is destroyed, everything will be reduced to smothering, including Nature itself."

In 'Nature Revisited-17', oil on canvas, one detects the skeleton of a tree done in jet-black and flecked with occasional white strokes and dots. Below, one sees a segment of greenery which still prevails, while the sky holds the composition together. "This is a product of my present vision and thought-contents. Here I have aimed at capturing the surrounding beauty of Nature and was preoccupied with thoughts of the necessity for its preservation."

Azad explains, "I have tried to bring in the

works to which I put my mind to. As soon as I joined my Masters classes, I taught at Loreto School alongside my academic studies. Incidentally, Nasreen Rahman of the Loreto School is the financial backer of my present exhibit."

Asked why he believes in minimisation and why he had departed to abstraction even years ago, Azad replies, "I believe in aiming at post-modern work, and in my paintings you do not find figures as the central focus of my works. When I stand on the ground, there is a relation between the earth and myself. If there are 'lines' there, I find them minimal, while my mind searches for a continued relationship with Nature. If this interrelation is destroyed, everything will be reduced to smothering, including Nature itself."

In 'Nature Revisited-17', oil on canvas, one detects the skeleton of a tree done in jet-black and flecked with occasional white strokes and dots. Below, one sees a segment of greenery which still prevails, while the sky holds the composition together. "This is a product of my present vision and thought-contents. Here I have aimed at capturing the surrounding beauty of Nature and was preoccupied with thoughts of the necessity for its preservation."

Azad explains, "I have tried to bring in the

monsoon season in this with my touches of green, burnt-sienna and yellow-ochre and black." Triangles, squares and vertical sweeps can also be seen. The texture work and the balance of composition has been done masterful. Asked why his vision has been so pessimistic in this piece, Azad explains, "If you dwell on Nature for years this is the natural consequence. If you attempt to portray the inner self of Nature at this moment this is the true mirror of its condition. There is no *jou de vivre* as man himself is destroying what is essential for his existence. There is recycling and awareness of the necessity of conservation of Nature in the west, but surely that much of awareness is not there so much in our east."

We have another thought-provoking composition in "Nature Revisited-16". This depicts an angry woman, curled up with remorse in the forefront. I believe that women do a lot of agricultural work in the countryside, and are most aware of the need for conservation, which I have harped on repeatedly." The woman is presented in white and even her feet are done in white. She is surrounded by a field of grass studded with tiny flowers, which offset the focal white. "In order to create the necessary barrier between man and Nature, I have put the bar of barred cloud. However, there is Nature here, there and everywhere. This painting presents the agony of women at the destruction of Nature. I also wish to promote the importance of women in our society, as I back the feminist movements. I believe males tend to be destructive whilst women tend to be nurturing, gentle in Nature."

The oil on canvas, "Nature Revisited-13" has bright colours taken from Nature. The spheres of tones of the hues are placed in both parallel and square manner. There is a barricade of pitch-black all around. The symbol is easy to follow: the bereavement at the decay of Nature. One sees vermillion, yellow-ochre and sap-green bursting with promise along with a serenading murmuring brook effect, but this is marred with flecks and the outlining broad border. The dots of white, are hardened oil points over which more layers have been put. At times paints have been sprayed on to the canvas.

Going by Azad's present works in his "Journey through Nature" and his serious discussion with its gut-feeling and soul-searching comments and explanations, one feels that here is a talented and dedicated painter who deserves all encouragement and praise from far and wide.

reflection

Recalling May 1968 and the Agartala Trial

by Abedin Quader

1 Since mid-March '98 I have been keeping my eyes on the newspapers published from Dhaka for commemorative writings on the student-movement in the country but I came across nothing significant. We don't know much about the Agartala Trial except a few vague statements made by some political leaders. Lt Col (Rtd) Shawkat Ali MP had revealed in the parliament months ago that the Agartala Trial was framed by the Pakistan government against Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and some of his political colleagues because of their complicity in precisely mapped out but aborted plan to liberate the country from Pakistan with military assistance from India. I think the political leaders and the army personnel who were put on trial should come forward with facts they know for the greater interest of the national history. After thirty years when I look back through the tunnel of my memory I can still see the anguished torn Bengalees mobbing newspaper vendors in Dhaka streets every day before sunrise to know about the fate of Sheikh Mujib who was in prison then. At that time the Dhaka Collegiate School had its hostel housed at 26 Nababipur Basak Lane in Laxmibazar. It was a dilapidated house — decrepit and frail like a moribund patient and symbolic of the fate of the country. I used to live in that hostel, the only student among a cluster of most affectionate and caring teachers. They used to wake me up and send me for the morning newspapers. Groaning and tossing in the bed I could somehow raise myself to throw into a pair of trousers and stroll out to the newspaper vendor in front of 'Ruchira' hotel in Laxmibazar. Every single morning I found the newspaper vendor ringing by a crowd talking about the news of the trial published in the paper that day. It was, to quote an oft-repeated line of Dickens, the best of times and the worst of times for a people who knew that a

severe catastrophe was brewing for them. It was a time when the signs were everywhere of a revival and the eventual birth of a nation. People knew that things were moving towards a showdown, and they pinned all their hopes on one man — Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was therefore with a great deal of alarm and apprehension that they viewed the Pakistani attempts to strangle the voice of Sheikh Mujib. The trial became a test of both the Pakistani resolve, and the resilience of the Bengalees. Now, after thirty years, when I look back to those days of Agartala Trial event after event flash through my mind. My fatherly teachers of Collegiate School; the Dhaka-air thickened with rumours, tension, anger and wrath, my dreams as a young schoolboy, my shivering ambitions to be into a world of political commotion; my habit of burning midnight candle reading novels by Bengalee and European authors — all these images march silently down the memory lane that leads only to the labyrinths of the

severe catastrophe was brewing for them. It was a time when the signs were everywhere of a revival and the eventual birth of a nation. People knew that things were moving towards a showdown, and they pinned all their hopes on one man — Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was therefore with a great deal of alarm and apprehension that they viewed the Pakistani attempts to strangle the voice of Sheikh Mujib. The trial became a test of both the Pakistani resolve, and the resilience of the Bengalees. Now, after thirty years, when I look back to those days of Agartala Trial event after event flash through my mind. My fatherly teachers of Collegiate School; the Dhaka-air thickened with rumours, tension, anger and wrath, my dreams as a young schoolboy, my shivering ambitions to be into a world of political commotion; my habit of burning midnight candle reading novels by Bengalee and European authors — all these images march silently down the memory lane that leads only to the labyrinths of the

severe catastrophe was brewing for them. It was a time when the signs were everywhere of a revival and the eventual birth of a nation. People knew that things were moving towards a showdown, and they pinned all their hopes on one man — Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was therefore with a great deal of alarm and apprehension that they viewed the Pakistani attempts to strangle the voice of Sheikh Mujib. The trial became a test of both the Pakistani resolve, and the resilience of the Bengalees. Now, after thirty years, when I look back to those days of Agartala Trial event after event flash through my mind. My fatherly teachers of Collegiate School; the Dhaka-air thickened with rumours, tension, anger and wrath, my dreams as a young schoolboy, my shivering ambitions to be into a world of political commotion; my habit of burning midnight candle reading novels by Bengalee and European authors — all these images march silently down the memory lane that leads only to the labyrinths of the

severe catastrophe was brewing for them. It was a time when the signs were everywhere of a revival and the eventual birth of a nation. People knew that things were moving towards a showdown, and they pinned all their hopes on one man — Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was therefore with a great deal of alarm and apprehension that they viewed the Pakistani attempts to strangle the voice of Sheikh Mujib. The trial became a test of both the Pakistani resolve, and the resilience of the Bengalees. Now, after thirty years, when I look back to those days of Agartala Trial event after event flash through my mind. My fatherly teachers of Collegiate School; the Dhaka-air thickened with rumours, tension, anger and wrath, my dreams as a young schoolboy, my shivering ambitions to be into a world of political commotion; my habit of burning midnight candle reading novels by Bengalee and European authors — all these images march silently down the memory lane that leads only to the labyrinths of the

severe catastrophe was brewing for them. It was a time when the signs were everywhere of a revival and the eventual birth of a nation. People knew that things were moving towards a showdown, and they pinned all their hopes on one man — Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was therefore with a great deal of alarm and apprehension that they viewed the Pakistani attempts to strangle the voice of Sheikh Mujib. The trial became a test of both the Pakistani resolve, and the resilience of the Bengalees. Now, after thirty years, when I look back to those days of Agartala Trial event after event flash through my mind. My fatherly teachers of Collegiate School; the Dhaka-air thickened with rumours, tension, anger and wrath, my dreams as a young schoolboy, my shivering ambitions to be into a world of political commotion; my habit of burning midnight candle reading novels by Bengalee and European authors — all these images march silently down the memory lane that leads only to the labyrinths of the

severe catastrophe was brewing for them. It was a time when the signs were everywhere of a revival and the eventual birth of a nation. People knew that things were moving towards a showdown, and they pinned all their hopes on one man — Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was therefore with a great deal of alarm and apprehension that they viewed the Pakistani attempts to strangle the voice of Sheikh Mujib. The trial became a test of both the Pakistani resolve, and the resilience of the Bengalees. Now, after thirty years, when I look back to those days of Agartala Trial event after event flash through my mind. My fatherly teachers of Collegiate School; the Dhaka-air thickened with rumours, tension, anger and wrath, my dreams as a young schoolboy, my shivering ambitions to be into a world of political commotion; my habit of burning midnight candle reading novels by Bengalee and European authors — all these images march silently down the memory lane that leads only to the labyrinths of the

severe catastrophe was brewing for them. It was a time when the signs were everywhere of a revival and the eventual birth of a nation. People knew that things were moving towards a showdown, and they pinned all their hopes on one man — Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was therefore with a great deal of alarm and apprehension that they viewed the Pakistani attempts to strangle the voice of Sheikh Mujib. The trial became a test of both the Pakistani resolve, and the resilience of the Bengalees. Now, after thirty years, when I look back to those days of Agartala Trial event after event flash through my mind. My fatherly teachers of Collegiate School; the Dhaka-air thickened with rumours, tension, anger and wrath, my dreams as a young schoolboy, my shivering ambitions to be into a world of political commotion; my habit of burning midnight candle reading novels by Bengalee and European authors — all these images march silently down the memory lane that leads only to the labyrinths of the

severe catastrophe was brewing for them. It was a time when the signs were everywhere of a revival and the eventual birth of a nation. People knew that things were moving towards a showdown, and they pinned all their hopes on one man — Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was therefore with a great deal of alarm and apprehension that they viewed the Pakistani attempts to strangle the voice of Sheikh Mujib. The trial became a test of both the Pakistani resolve, and the resilience of the Bengalees. Now, after thirty years, when I look back to those days of Agartala Trial event after event flash through my mind. My fatherly teachers of Collegiate School; the Dhaka-air thickened with rumours, tension, anger and wrath, my dreams as a young schoolboy, my shivering ambitions to be into a world of political commotion; my habit of burning midnight candle reading novels by Bengalee and European authors — all these images march silently down the memory lane that leads only to the labyrinths of the

severe catastrophe was brewing for them. It was a time when the signs were everywhere of a revival and the eventual birth of a nation. People knew that things were moving towards a showdown, and they pinned all their hopes on one man — Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was therefore with a great deal of alarm and apprehension that they viewed the Pakistani attempts to strangle the voice of Sheikh Mujib. The trial became a test of both the Pakistani resolve, and the resilience of the Bengalees. Now, after thirty years, when I look back to those days of Agartala Trial event after event flash through my mind. My fatherly teachers of Collegiate School; the Dhaka-air thickened with rumours, tension, anger and wrath, my dreams as a young schoolboy, my shivering ambitions to be into a world of political commotion; my habit of burning midnight candle reading novels by Bengalee and European authors — all these images march silently down the memory lane that leads only to the labyrinths of the

severe catastrophe was brewing for them. It was a time when the signs were everywhere of a revival and the eventual birth of a nation. People knew that things were moving towards a showdown, and they pinned all their hopes on one man — Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was therefore with a great deal of alarm and apprehension that they viewed the Pakistani attempts to strangle the voice of Sheikh Mujib. The trial became a test of both the Pakistani resolve, and the resilience of the Bengalees. Now, after thirty years, when I look back to those days of Agartala Trial event after event flash through my mind. My fatherly teachers of Collegiate School; the Dhaka-air thickened with rumours, tension, anger and wrath, my dreams as a young schoolboy, my shivering ambitions to be into a world of political commotion; my habit of burning midnight candle reading novels by Bengalee and European authors — all these images march silently down the memory lane that leads only to the labyrinths of the

most parents, college administrations did not run their campuses as democracies. This was how universities had been organized since the first ones were created in the Middle Ages. Suddenly, though, students wanted a role in running campuses. And tragically, thanks to the occupation at Columbia and those that followed at other schools, they got it.

After 1968, university faculties increasingly gave up their parental role. They started to treat college kids as adults, even as consumers. But education is not about giving kids what they want; it is about giving them what's good for them.

Student power was a disaster for higher education. It led directly to the restructuring of college courses and, worse still, to politically correct witch hunts backed by fearful faculties. Now American students pay unimaginable sums of money to attend schools due to the changes that began at Columbia in the spring of 1968 — which were, in turn, engendered by the Prague uprising in quest for freedom. The Prague Spring was crushed by Soviet tanks, but now Prague is free — and the Czech Republic is part of NATO.

The Prague Spring should long live in the memory as a triumph of the human spirit. The other upheavals of 1968 are best forgotten.

3. But the sacrifice of Sheikh Mujib and the indomitable courage of the people of Bangladesh cannot be forgotten so easily. I don't know what Matia Chowdhury or Tofail Ahmed now think about the legacy of the 1968 student movement they once organized with life-and-death-promises and determination, but those most memorable days of the nation, the most significant trial against a leader who created a new country in world map should be commemorated with greater respect and with bowed heads.

Abedin Quader is a journalist living in New York.