

# Story of that Soldier and Some Current Thoughts

Mofazzal Karim

The story is old and certainly known to many of us. That old story springs to my mind time and again over the last couple of months. Which is that story? It is the story of that soldier who while doing left and right at a parade, shouted out to his Commander, sir, nobody except me is obeying your command. Nobody's feet are following your order, sir. Please punish them all.

Some people before the general election took a pastime in outpouring their vituperation against the Caretaker Government, President and all concerned. The citizens of the country of course understood that it was nothing but a strategic stand of the policy known as "arbitration is obeyed, but the palm tree is mine." Consequently, that stunt did not work on the members of the public. No matter, what's of that? It does not mean that abusing the Caretaker Government and others has to be stopped. That tradition still goes on in full swing. That very tale of the baby goat and the tiger, why not if the citizens can be convinced by repeatedly calling the night as the day.

The historical election of the first October is over. The citizens of the country gave their verdict through ballots. And everybody appreciated that a free and fair election was held. People of all strata are happy more for the victory of democracy in an impartial election than for the result of the poll. It is natural that in a free and fair election held in a democratic environment, one party wins and the other is defeated. But it has to be watched that democracy is not defeated, freedom of people to express opinion, righteousness, law and order, rules and regulation and administrative impartiality are not discarded or impaired. The nation noted with satisfaction that the election had been held as they expected it. They are happy for that. Those who have won the election are of course happy. Even many of those who could not succeed are also satisfied with the impartiality, fairness and the efficiency of the authority. The election this time has commanded the commendation of local and foreign observation teams, diplomats and all circles from heads of state of foreign countries to the controversial NGOs. But those who always want to see that "the palm tree is mine" are not happy. They started shriek-

ing to make the general people understand how many kinds of rigging and design etc. are thereby repeatedly babbling out the theories of coarse-fine, thick-thin rigging and red-blue-yellow design etc. Everybody on earth except one particular group is saying that the election was free and fair. This is why at the beginning of this essay I introduced the story of that soldier, referred to the claim of the soldier is that nobody's feet can keep harmony, only he is doing left and right to the beats of the command. So, everybody, except he, will have to be punished.

Everybody expects that the prudent politicians have the moral courage to accept the truth as the truth. It is not a football game of the children of the local community that hue and cry would have to be raised to cover up the defeat. It can be compared to the final event of the World Cup competitions. Where if defeated even the favourite team like Brazil also has to bow down and quit the field. The defeated party - which ever is that - sits down to assess why they have been defeated? To find out the reason and to take action so that they are not defeated again. The very first stroke falls on the neck of the coach. The coach is said goodbye honourably and a new coach takes over the responsibility. Though we have the culture of changing the coach like a game of musical chair, that culture has not yet developed in our political field. In spite of too much speeches in favour of democracy, nobody can claim strongly that democracy is actually practised here. Rather many of them get engaged in finding out the scapegoat and measuring



whether the fields were curve or undulating. The purpose of which is to divert attention of the aggrieved crestfallen followers by triggering this kind of blank fire instead of facing the truth.

Whatever may be the case, the caravan will not care the hue and cry of the boys on the street and move ahead. The caravan will have to reach the destination. It cannot halt. So whatever is spoken against the election, administration and the law and order, nobody can turn the truth as lie by raising endless hue and cry. Citizens of the country actually know the fact. If people of the country are shown a goat to pass as an elephant, they may at the most remain silent out of courtesy or they may simply grin at that, but it will be futile to assume that the goat can be passed for a dog.

But there is an immeasurable difference between the announcement of reaching the destination and really reaching there. The matter is not all that easy. It is not a matter at all to taste pelao and korma in imagination. But one has to exude sweat from head to toes to earn a meal of "dalbhat". (Some unfortunate ones again have to exude sweat from toes to head). So one cannot play cards and dice by exposing oneself to Aghrahan sun assuming that "everything is ok" or "all will be ok in course of time". Especially, now the situation is such that, it will not be an exaggeration to say that the whole of the body is full of pain, where shall the ointment be applied? The language of ballots this time was clearer and stronger than ever before. Any stunt or showdown did not deceive people. People did not care the plea of pro-force or anti-force. People wanted more security of life, assurance of the dignity of women and safeguard from suppression and oppression than food for hunger and the clothes to wear. Those were the demand of the soul. They formed an alliance with a great hope to realize those demands. They sought shelter like sparrows caught in a storm. They should not be disheartened. The language of ballots this time was the language of dreaming a terrorism free frolicsome and beautiful life. This language has to be understood. There is a danger if there is a failure in understanding this language. It should be said in consideration of the goodwill of all concerned to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the general people that only goodwill will not do, the reflections of that have to be shown in deeds. "If wishes were horses, beggars would also have ridden". So there should not only be goodwill but also the ways and means to achieve things.

Of course, the purpose of this essay is not the academic discussion of these ways and means. However, here are a few of the broad lined words which have got to be referred to.

One. Cannot we bring a qualitative change in real sense of the term in the politics of this country by coming out from the culture of slinging mud at each other?

Two. I/we know everything, what the hell the public understands. Cannot we listen to their speech with patience without considering the public as stupid? Cannot we read the writing of the walls?

Three. Cannot we form a national consensus on the issue of law and order, good governance, education, student politics, foreign education, foreign investment, employment etc.?

Four. Cannot we reflect in all spheres of life the much talked about sentence - laws, principles, rules and regulation should be equally applied to all - by bringing that out of the page of the book?

I do not want to make the list long. This is much for this moment.

Another event must be referred to here. Especially in the wake of the blood-soaked day in our national life like the 16th December. How many more days we will remain engaged in the game of slinging mud at each other, spitting on each other, and biting mutually? How many more walls we will raise on this small country? It is like the funny attempt to cultivate an acre of land by dividing that into ten blocks. There are big dreams again of operating the tractors! How many more days we will waste resource and energy by doing research on the seniority of hen and egg? "Enough is enough. Stop it now please, let us now speak about some action, let us organise some work before the sun is down" - cannot we accept these and sit together some particular agenda? Enough has been done, there must be an end now.

Those who, leaving their parents, brothers, sisters, wives, sons and daughters, went to war during the nine months of Seventy One, fought risking their lives and embraced the death in happy mood from the bullet and bayonet of the enemies, or became crippled forever, they have sacrificed their lives certainly not for our mutual biling, quarrelling and transforming that into a banana tree by the "project of fattening the fingers", for the culture of palting at each other and earning some pennies by selling knowledge in the black-market. Even in exchange for their life, they wanted an independent and sovereign country for which people of the country will work untidely for a society free from starvation, poverty, deprivation, oppression and suppression. Question: Can we claim with firm confidence that we have been working ceaselessly to achieve that goal?

Before I conclude, let me tell you another story as a gift. This story is also likely to be known to all.

A few people asked scholar Lokman Hakim (some may call him Sheikh Saadi) where did you learn so much etiquette? The scholar replied, from the people without the sense of etiquette. The questioners were taken aback and asked, from the people without the sense of etiquette? How is that possible? Lokman Hakim said, see, I do not say or do whatever the people without the sense of etiquette say or do.

The government elected by the people must have to remember the remarks of scholar Lokman Hakim/Sheikh Saadi.

Translated by M. Liaquat Ali Khan

## The month of victory!

A collection of events burdened with memories and sadness. Those memories left out thirty years behind are still fresh in mind!

The sleeping people were dumbfounded when the Pak hyenas swooped on the innocent city dwellers in the deep night of March 25. They were absolutely taken over. The Pak soldiers shot down those who came out of their houses for the sake of life like the birds of prey. They set fire to hundreds of houses and killed the inmates one after another. Hundreds of tanks and lorries had rolled on the streets. The whole of the country at the moaning and groaning of the people, and gruesome sound of tanks and cannons. The darkness of night was passed away amidst the brutal activities. Even the pious mussalis who went out to mosques following the azan were not spared from the attack of Pak hyenas. Hundreds of still bodies of the mussalis were found beside the mosques at dawn. What a cruelty! How much cruel are those memories! On tuning in the radio on March 26, we could know that curfew had been clamped down. It was directed that nobody should come out of his or her house. Directive was issued to shoot on sight. The hyenas stormed into the houses and carried out murders indiscriminately. The day was spent helplessly as if in prison. All of a sudden the sound of helicopter frightened us. There was no sound other than the sound of cannons and rifles. We were choked by the terrible smell of fire and smokes. The deserted city was turned into a place of evil spirits. Thus the morning rolled into noon and then descended the fear of the night! Every moment was spent in pains of death "as if the hyenas would appear" break open the houses and kill the people indiscriminately! As if we were counting the time for death.

We remained confined in the same room with my mother and brother. Everybody was sleepless. Everybody remained speechless. Sometimes



Freedom Fighters on the prowl

thousands of questions had arisen on mind. Were there no leaders who could sense the impending carnage? The farsightedness of a leader is questionable if he fails to do that. The leaders did not care for the nation. They left the nation in the face of death and became busy after their own safety! Don't they have any responsibility to the general members of the public? Don't they have any sense of directions? We passed that dreadful night either by walking or sleeping inside the house with grim fear and concern. On tuning in the radio in the morning, we heard that curfew had been relaxed from 7AM to 9 AM. All on a sudden, we shouted out, 'get ready'. Then accompanied by my mother and younger brother went out in search of a safe place.

Out on the street we realized that waves of people had flooded the streets of the city. Everybody was leaving Dhaka. Everybody was looking for shelters and ran away wherever they could. We crossed Swamibag and leaving behind Maniknagar walked across the paddy fields. Thousands of people were trailing along the same line. Spoke to many people known



The dark night of 25 March

# The Month of Victory Some Memories and Sadness

Borhan Ahmed



April 12, 1971: Outside of Jessore town



Devastated Hardinge bridge

and unknown across the road. My colleague ANM Golam Mostafa was also running away accompanied by his newborn baby, wife and parents. We got on the road across the fields before the Sun had tilted. The weary body could not move further - there were many children, youngsters on both sides of the road. Some of them were carrying jars of water, some carrying glasses of water and some hand fans. Many of them were taking rest on both sides of the road. There was a gathering of young people under a big tree along the road. I went there and stood by them. It seemed to me they were listening to news on a transistor. I advanced a little to hear the transistor. A very faint sound rippled in - I, Major Zia, speak, .....

Everybody screamed with excitement to hear the declaration. I embraced my mother and said oh Allah, save us from the hands of jalmis!

We reached the village home after walking for two days. A new life had begun!

Training of war for children was being conducted in the villages. They

were using bamboo shafts for training. They also had several dummy rifles. All the relatives, and near and dear ones gradually took shelters in that small village. After that I roamed Dhaka, Munshiganj, Manikganj or Comilla on different occasions.

Pak soldiers were stationed at different corners of the street in Dhaka. In some places there were militia forces. They searched everybody including the passersby, rickshaw passengers, bus passengers as well as the passengers of the cars. Whomsoever they suspected, they took away to an unknown place. We lived the life in the face of death.

One day I was travelling by a bus. All of a sudden, the Pak soldiers encircled the bus when it neared the Lohar Bridge at Mirpur. All the passengers were offloaded and forced to fall on a line on the road. They searched the passengers for long two hours. Then boarded them on bus one by one. But five passengers were detained. Later, we heard that they were shot down and their bodies were floated on the rivers. They feared 'mukti' terribly. If they suspected anybody as mukti, they killed him instantly. That

was their rule and law. There happened many such occurrences everyday. Nobody had the courage to broadcast or telecast those occurrences on Radio-TV or publicize on newspaper. However, off and on secret bulletins would have come out. Sometimes, leaflets would be circulated.

The rural boy Akher had a job at Jheel Bangla Sugar Mill. One day a group of brutal Pak soldiers visited the Mill. They were startled to see so many workers there. They forced all the officers-employees and general workers to fall on a line in front of that big giant-shape machine. Then pushed them all one by one into that big machine. The cruel hyenas pieced them alive on the machine the way sugarcane was processed. The Pak soldiers perpetrated numerous such atrocities on the soil of Bangladesh. The stories of such numerous atrocities are still fresh on memory of people. The sad stories of the Independence of this country can be known by collecting and compiling those gruesome stories.

Those who were inside the country fought against such brutal forces every moments. They deserted their homes to sleep in the jute fields or under the boughs of bamboo. In monsoon they slept in the boats. Many warriors trained within the country fought valiantly without any help from outside. They finished many Punjabi soldiers bravely.

Chan Mian was martyred in a fight near Dhaka-Aricha highway just two days ahead of the Victory Day. Still his appearance pops up in my mind. Chan Mian was a student of Class IX at Arjiband High School. His parents had a lot of dream about him. Chan Mian will grow up - will be highly educated and placed very well in the society. Chan Mian has been mar-



The Guerrilla Forces inside Bangladesh

tyred. The country has been liberated in exchange for his life. His name will remain written in golden letters in the history of our Independence. Very likely, Manikganj was liberated just on the following day. All youngsters from the villages came forward with rifles and flags in their hands to capture the police station. They took over the seats of administration and flew the flag on top of the office of the Sub Divisional Officer.

The scattered events flush on our minds, when we see thirty years later today, that there are conspiracies for grabbing the history. The pictures of many near and dear ones including Chan Mian, Akher, Manik, Labu, Laltu and Haroon still come up on my mind alive. Still I hear that voice - "I Major Zia speak ..... hereby proclaim the Independence of Bangladesh. ...."

Translated by M. Liaquat Ali Khan



25 March: The horrors of the dark night