

The confronting of a rise and a decline

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REMARKABLY, over the years two things have happened in Bangladesh. One is the rise in inequality; the other being a parallel and simultaneous decline in patriotism.

Inequality has never been unknown in this land of ours; but what has been achieved in the field since liberation is unprecedented. In the past we have been a patriotic people; time and again we have risen against the state, but not against the people. What is new is that since independence as individuals we have turned against our compatriots, and become self-centred, if not selfish.

agriculture; but it has only a limited scope for employment. New industries are not coming into being both because of infrastructural and bureaucratic hindrances and the flooding of foreign goods, produced cheaply and advertised effectively.

the state and society. Revolutions come and go, but inequality continues to grow, relentlessly though often quietly.

of several things happening simultaneously, and none of them is disconnected with the form of capitalist growth that has taken place in Bangladesh. Capitalism has become a system as well as an ideology. It has, as it always does, nurtured a sense of individualism, which can very well deteriorate into self-centredness, even selfishness.

The unprecedented flow of patriotism which was noticed everywhere in 1971 and had tied the people together in invisible threads of fellow-feeling had seemed too strong to be stemmed even by the cruelest pressure imaginable of murder and bloodshed perpetrated by the occupation army. But, alas, it has ceased to flow. What the enemy could not do has been done by our own selves. And that, too, we did voluntarily.

nation is endemic in both our culture and society; but today girls are doing well in most sectors and in public examinations their performance has been, in some cases, better than that of boys.

before. There were traitors, too; but they were few, and were looked down upon even by their own kith and kin.

The fact of the matter is that the old ideology of patriotism has been replaced by the new ideology of putting the self before the country. Indeed, it is as simple as that. Dark self-interest has overtaken enlightened self-interest. Enlightened self-interest teaches the individual the very important lesson that no one can flourish without the help of others, and that when others become hostile the individual flounders and falls.

We won independence to build a just and free society

Why does this goal still elude us?

DR. KAMAL HOSSAIN

PEOPLE the world over celebrated with us our victory in 1971 as a victory against injustice and denial of freedom. I well remember on arrival at London Airport from prison in Pakistan in January 1972 with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, he was greeted by a tall policeman who stood guard outside the VIP room saying: "Sir, we have all been praying for you."

rule had been imposed to suppress what was a powerful popular movement for freedom and justice. The shared commitment among the urban middle class, the growing numbers of university students and the rural masses through the sixties challenged authoritarian military rule.

minds of people at large who saw themselves as engaged in a just struggle. The status quo, namely, the military-dominated authoritarian rule and the social and economic injustice which it imposed was vigorously challenged.

was unleashed upon them. This prompted the declaration of independence and the launching of an armed struggle in which countless lives were sacrificed in order to achieve the victory which created Bangladesh.

The election of 1970 was truly a victory for the forces which stood for freedom and justice and for a non-communal nationalism against those who had tried to use religion to divide those forces in an unsuccessful attempt to save the authoritarian rulers and their proteges.

gated. The protest by Dhaka University students against martial law was expressed in their refusal to accept degrees from the Chancellor who was the provincial Governor seen as an illegitimate appointee of the military rulers.

were drawn into the movement. The proteges and clients of the authoritarian rulers, the nouveaux riches of the period as beneficiaries of military rule were looked down upon as self-seeking opportunists. Social forces isolated them. The legitimacy of the popular movement was derived from its principled commitment to human rights and the rule of law.

Today, thirty years later, we must do soul-searching to answer why the goal of a free and just society has eluded us. I suggest it is because self-serving predatory groups have emerged in society and seek to pursue their selfish ends by undermining the core values of our society. Nothing is sacred to them.



Prevailing inequality: It's hard to make a meal

PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN



Violation of human rights: Excesses continue

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Independence, yes! But liberation? A woman's view

HAMEEDA HOSSAIN

BETWEEN the first attack by the Pakistan military on 25 March and the recent spate of violence, lie 30 years of vast structural and systemic changes in Bangladesh. It is customary to commemorate a national anniversary with euphoric rhetoric of progress and advancement.

11 million have access to micro-credit. This means roughly 50 per cent of adult women receive small loans in Bangladesh. These figures are often trumpeted to project gender equality in Bangladesh. But calculations of total credit in the country indicate that women fall way below the mark.

The gender balance of public power is totally skewed, notwithstanding political tokenism of representation in state institutions and rhetoric borrowed from international declarations. In their personal lives, women become victims of a political and social order that refuses to recognize the principles of justice.

glaring example of the inequalities in production relations based on gender was the urgency with which government aides discussed support to the industry following the drop in import orders from the US, but had no concern for the many women who were laid off, sometimes without compensation or wage dues.

sector. However, the slide downwards in female/male ratios in higher education does not indicate that education is considered as essential to women's advancement, or that women are perceived as professions. The state and multi-lateral agencies have deliberately pursued their agency for change through use of contraceptive use.

is supposed to be considering a bill to raise the number of reserved seats to 62, but all of them to be selected by members of the Parliament. Which would only bring a bigger majority for the BNP and a sprinkling of seats for their allies.

that when issues of concern to women such as violence are raised, they are usually met with derision by the members in the House; that charges of sexual harassment of Bandhan led a member of Parliament to target women in general rather than indict the perpetrators, or that Shimi's suicide instigated by sexual harassment will never be discussed in Parliament.

rhetoric borrowed from international declarations. In their personal lives, women become victims of a political and social order that refuses to recognize the principles of justice. The prevalence of domestic violence, particularly marital violence, across all classes, ethnic groups and generations is well documented in the media.

laws. Women's personal lives are increasingly becoming subject to political controls and politically instigated violence. Accounts by victims and witnesses to the post election violence have illustrated the fragility of the lives of Hindu women who became targets or had to take cover in paddy fields to avoid rape. Recent newspaper reports of suicides by young women following gang rape, harassment or murder are proof that women's bodies will be increasingly used as territory for gang fights.