

RIFLES ROTI AWRAT

Anwar Pasha's pursuit of freedom

KAMALUDDIN AHMED

RIFLES Roti Awrat (published 1973), a Bangladesh Liberation War memoir translated by Kabir Chowdhury as *Rifles Bread and Women* (1976) was written by Anwar Pasha, a professor of Bangla department of Dhaka University. It was written about what happened to Dhaka on and after March 25 crackdown. Instead of an imaginary recreation, he produced a memoir with literary intentions. This book is the experiences that give us a historical document of our liberation war. It is a history -- a story about war, about things men and women do during a war and the things war does to them. More strictly, it is an intellectual's account of our nine-month liberation war. *Rifles Bread and Women* began in April and completed in June (1971), is the last work, not ever to be followed by another, for the author Anwar Pasha was brutally killed by the collaborators of the Pakistani Army of December 14, 1971 two days before his prophetic dream of free independent sovereign Bangladesh became a glorious reality. This novel also shows how the evils of communalism gave rise to the feeling of Banglali Nationalism aspiring for a more respectable homeland, Anwar Pasha dreamt of such a respectable homeland in his *Rifles Bread and Women*.

Sudipta Shaheen, a poet professor of English, found the indiscriminate mass killing of Dhaka's innocent citizens by the Pakistani Army on the night of March 25, 1971 too shocking for words. During the next three days he mentally travelled through decades and over many miles -- reminiscing analysing, planning. *Rifles Bread and Women* is a story of those three days (March 25, 26, 27), but it is much more. As Professor Abul Fazal, a critic writer and educationist, writes in the introduction to the original Bangla edition of this novel: "It is at once a historical document and successful literary creation.... The hero Sudipta Shaheen is Bangladesh. He seems to be the hopes and aspirations, the beliefs, determination and dreams of the Bangalees...." Anwar Pasha (1928-1971) projected a considerable part of himself, often quite thinly disguised, in *Rifles Bread and Women* in the character of Sudipta Shaheen.

Sudipta is an image of Hana and Shaheen in the novel. He had to be homeless; he was compelled to leave his small flat. The novel begins with the words of leaving home: "Dawn descended on Bangladesh. Sudipta always woke up from his sleep early in the morning... This night he spent at his friend's place. Professor Sudipta Shaheen of Dhaka University passed the night following the 27th day of March in the year of our Lord 1971 and arrived at the dawn of the 28th March. What about the two nights followed, 25th and 26th? Were they two nights only? More like two decades. The quintessence of two decades of Pakistan. Firm concrete revelation of Pakistan's attitude towards Bangladesh during the last two decades."

In this novel Pasha through different incidents shows how Pakistan has exploited and tightened the strangle-hold of domination for two decades. When their exploitation is protested they unleashed the rule of rifles, of canons, of machine guns. This rule of arms had been drawn very artistically by Pasha. In an act of treachery unparalleled in the contemporary history and programme of calculated genocide was unleashed on the peaceful and unsuspecting population of Dhaka by midnight of 25 March, 1971. This black night was the outcome of Pakistan's exploitation and domination for two decades.

The problem with his name Sudipta was too shocking for him. The issue that Sudipta Shaheen was a name unacceptable in Muslim society could have cropped up even then. After taking his MA degree Sudipta tried to get a job in a college and the problem was felt very strongly. The communal feeling is noticed in the following conversation that took place during an interview for a job:

"So you are Sudipta Shaheen? I never I heard of such name before."
"Well, you can hear it now," Sudipta wanted to retort.

Sudipta was again asked What are You? A Hindu or Christian?"

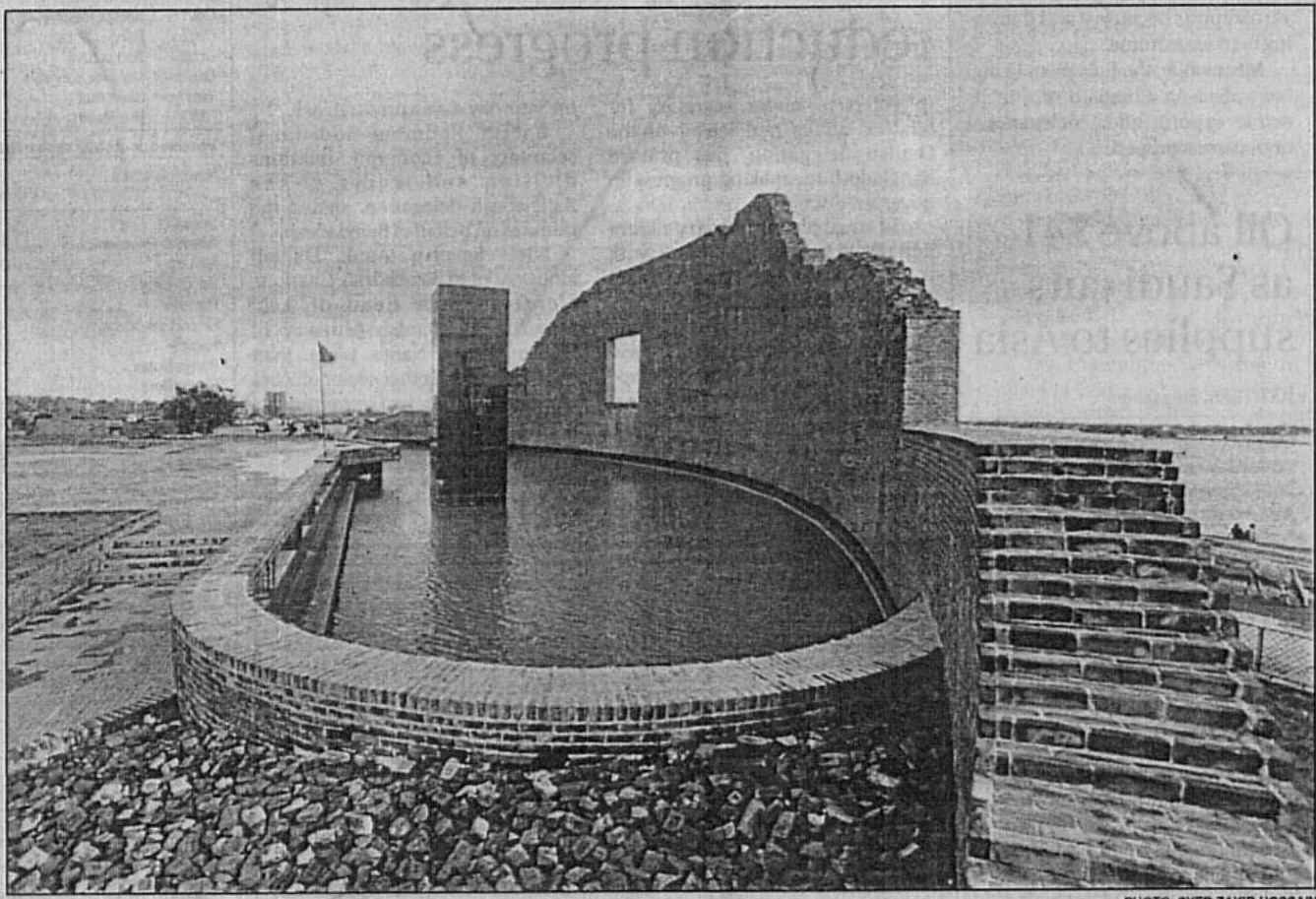
Can Sudipta ever be a Muslim's name? This

was the question of the interview board. A member of the board said stroking his beard, "What does the word Sudipta mean?" The impression that the board has that "what else if they use Bengali in this field everything automatically is Hinduised." In this way Sudipta was condemned at three successive interviews for his name every time. He had to change his name by making and affidavit so

in the same row and then were shot. Two bodies fell side by side on March 25, 1971. Father and son. They did not have the same blood. It was only after death that their blood was mingled and became inseparable. In the same fashion the blood of two other had also been united. They were two well-known teachers of the Dhaka University Dr Maniruzzaman, head of the Statistics

fear...". In that new world there would be no Ayub Khan who would say you were all slaves of the Hindus, where there would not be any curfew during the Friday prayers, where the 'muazzins' would not be stopped from calling from the minarets.

Kamaluddin Ahmed is Associate Professor Department of English, University of Chittagong



Martyred Intellectuals Mausoleum, Rayer Bazar

Department and Dr Jyirmoy Guha Thakurtha, reader of the Department of English. They were forced to stand in one row and then shot at. Their blood had flown only to mingle and form one stream.

The consequences of Maleque were very sad, although he served the Pakistani rulers with utmost sincerity. On the 25th March his house was ransacked by the Pakistanis. This tyrants whom he cooperated all through his life did not spare him. His wife and daughters were raped by them.

The brutal atrocities of the Pakistani army on the 25th March have been drawn like a craftsman in *Rifles Bread and Women*. On that dark night the whole Dhaka was awakened by machine-gun firings. General Tikka Khan, the new commander in chief of Pakistan, ordered his army to loot, burn and rape. He said: "Go and kill the Bengalis, loot their shops, burn their homes, rape their girls. Dear Javans, your president is proud of you. You are the glory of Pakistan. On you rests the supreme responsibility of preserving Pakistan and Islam. All these Bengalees that you see are becoming Hindus forgetting Islam under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. So war against these people will not be just an ordinary war, but a jihad, a holy war."

A holy war to Pakistani army meant setting fire to people's homes, killing men and women and children indiscriminately, abducting girls. To them life had a different definition. The best thing in the world was a belly, a woman and then bullets "Eat a lot of bread, get strong, hale and hearty, take a rifle and bullets, wipe out your adversary, and then take the women and have fun. That was "life".

Rifles Bread and Women was basically a historical document of the first phase of our liberation war. The period was between April-May 1971. The war did not end then. But Anwar Pasha was very much optimistic about the victory. In the language of Pasha "A new acquaintanceship had just begun. The old life came to an end on the night of March 25th. Ah, let it be true. New men, new friends and the new dawn. How far away were they? Couldn't be very far. There was nothing to

that he could get a job in the university. As a university teacher he was very much conscious of his community. He has revealed the masks of the university teachers. The teachers who were brutally killed on March 25 night and the collaborators-cum-teachers are equally mentioned in this novel. Sudipta Shaheen had seen how the collaborators in Pakistan were rewarded and how the Pakistani teachers were prospering. In this novel two brothers Dr Khaleque and Mr Maleque have been presented representing the characteristics of collaborators-cum-university teachers Dr Khaleque, a famous science teacher, had gone to England with his wife's money for PhD. After independence when Pakistan was achieved Mr Maleque began to conduct researches on Muslim culture and tradition. According to Dr Khaleque "Pakistani Muslims have five pillars. They are Allah, the prophet of Allah, the Quaid-e-Azam of Pakistan and the Pakistani Army." To him Pakistan means Islam. Pakistan was brought into being by Quaid-e-Azam and the army was Pakistan's protector Dr Khaleque wants to destroy all the Shaheed Minars of the country. He thinks Bengalis conduct all kinds of idolatrous ceremonies over there. After destroying them he wants to build mosques there. Even he said: "If necessary we will turn the entire Dhaka city into a huge mosque."

Dr GC Dev was a renowned teacher of Dhaka University. He was philosopher and non-communal. Dr Khaleque considered him to be a Hindu and anti-Muslim. Once a function was held on the occasion of the birthday of Prophet Mohammad (SM). A milad was held at the mosque. Dr Dev attended the milad. Dr Khaleque thought that the infidel had spoiled the sanctity of the mosque. To him all this is Hindustan's trickery. He questioned: "Wherein lay the distinction between Pakistan and Hindustan if you wiped off the distinction between Hindus and Muslims." To Khaleque Pakistan was basically a communal state. He considered Dr Dev to be an enemy of Pakistan. Dr Dev and his adopted Muslim daughter's husband were ordered by the Pakistani army to stand

in his capacity as President of the East Pakistan Union of Journalists (EPU) in 1964-65 and Vice-President of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) in 1970-71, he strongly defended the rights of the working journalists and fought for the press freedom with equal zeal because he believed that freedom of the press constitutes outer defence of everybody's freedom.

Turning the clock back 30 years, journalists would recall get-togethers of the PFUJ leaders especially from the Eastern Wing of Pakistan at Mrs Davies Hotel in Rawalpindi. Though bulldozed about 15 years ago, Mrs Davies Hotel bears nostalgic memories. Serajuddin was, not doubt, a quiet type but his very presence at the PFUJ meetings was a source of great inspiration for the journalists because of his principled stand against anti-democratic forces.

If my memory serves me right, I flew to Dhaka from Islamabad in early March 1971 by a PIA plane which was packed with parliamentarians including Wali Khan amidst threats from Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chief, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, that those attending the National Assembly session in Dhaka will not return in one piece.

By then Serajuddin had a dual role. He was not only fighting against press censorship but also crusading for autonomy for his province, lovingly described by Bengalis as Sonar Bangla.

More than a week after my arrival in Dhaka in early March, I visited daily Ittefaq where I found Serajuddin in the newsroom besieged by a junk of newspaper files and a telephone glued to his ear. As he kept down the receiver and turned around, he found me standing behind. He literally jumped from his seat and embraced me warmly. After a quick exchange of pleasantries, he wished to accompany me to the Press Club. Anti-government demonstrations were at their

SERAJUDDIN HUSSAIN

Upholder of truth

ASRAR AHMAD

Asrar Ahmad, former president of PFUJ wrote this piece back in 1995. But it remained with Shaheed Serajuddin Hussain's son unpublished till today.

To uphold the truth is dangerous. This will be a fitting epitaph in the case of renowned Bengali journalist, Serajuddin Hussain killed in the thick of a massive campaign in 1971 to achieve provincial autonomy for his compatriots whom he left behind to live in independent Bangladesh.

I am afraid if I have the ability to evaluate a journalist-cum-writer of late Serajuddin Hussain's stature but there is no escape from it in view of repeated requests from his son who resides in the United States of America.

I was emotionally shocked. Tears welled into my eyes on receiving several letters in quick succession from his son, Saleem Reza Noor, to write how much I knew his father.

Though the pang of separation spans 24 years, I vividly remember slightly-built, self-possessed, suave, sensitive and highly dignified Serajuddin, occupying the news editor's desk in the reputed *Bangladesher Ittefaq*, in Dhaka.

I was told Serajuddin was abducted on December 10, 1971 and later killed by religious shenanigans and arch enemies of democracy. In this connection I cannot help mentioning another illustrious journalist and novelist Shaheedullah Qaiser who also met Serajuddin's fate. Both of my friends lost their lives at the height of their intellectual pursuit. Bangladesh is a living testimony of their historic struggle.

The journalists still remember the leading role Serajuddin played in journalistic as well as democratic and humanitarian movements. Serajuddin, a man of few words, had sharp eyes. He had no blinkers. He did not differentiate between Muslims and Hindus, Bengalis and Beharis. He was always on the side of the disadvantaged humanity, opposing Hindu-Muslim communal riots, Bengali-Behari sectarian clashes and political persecutions. He was also a great champion of human rights.

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DR MOHAMMED FAZLE RABBE

Remembering my father

DR NUSRAT RABBE

DR Md Fazle Rabbee, an internationally renowned cardiologist, was lifted from his house at 75 Jalpaiguri Lane in Shiddeswari, Dhaka on Wednesday, 15 December, 1971 at 4PM by Pakistani army and local razzakars. His wife, (late) Dr Mrs Jahan Ara Rabbee, risked her life by appealing to various Pakistani army officials, but to no avail. He was a brilliant man of science and had limited participation in organised religion. However, he maintained a strong identity of his Bengali descent. He was an avid connoisseur of Banglali arts and culture. He personally drove his children every week to lessons by famous artists, like Mrs Firoza Begum and Mr. Kamol Das Gupta to learn the songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam and Rabindranath Tagore.

Dr Rabbee designed clinical studies of communicable diseases that are the main causes of death of children and adults in developing countries, like Bangladesh. As a clinician, he took a holistic approach to medicine and identified the roots of illness wherever possible, for example, poverty or psychological distress around family issues. He believed in combining the best of medicine with compassion for the patient. For his poor patients from around the country, this popular doctor, gave free medical treatment and often medicine, transportation and hospitalisation costs. He was also extremely well liked by child patients, because he took the time to interact with them and understand their clinical symptoms.

At home, this popular doctor was a kind and compassionate father and husband. Even though he worked from 7am to 10:30 pm most days, he often rushed home to read bedtime stories to his own children or to go to find ice cream at midnight in the city with his beloved wife.

As 1971 approached, Dr Rabbee became very concerned about the increasing ill treatment of Banglals by the Pakistani government. He himself faced such prejudices when he was questioned about his success in medicine and popularity as a professor by Pakistani government in 1969. Before his death, he was selected to receive the Best Professor award in Pakistan, which he declined. On 27 March 1971, he was very disturbed when he visited Dhaka medical college with his wife and saw the extent of the massacre. He asked the attending physicians not to



sign death certificates for all the people who were massacred.

Dr Rabbee envisioned a country where poverty is eliminated and the people are free to choose which language to speak and which God to worship. On 15th December, before he was lifted from his house by the Pakistani army, he risked his life by driving his own car in the middle of the curfew to make a house call on a patient, who was his trusted employee and an urdu-speaking individual, hailing from West Pakistan.

Dr Rabbee and others like him were killed in 1971 because they believed in a free and modern society where people are empowered to live a better life and where dreams come true for the common person. Even though these people have been silenced, their vision of peace and prosperity of Bangladesh must live on in current and future generations.

Dr. Nusrat Rabbee is the daughter of Dr Md Fazle Rabbee. She works in statistical genetics at the University of California at Berkeley.



PHOTO COURTESY: 'DHAKA 1948-1971'

As part of their preparation to kill the intellectuals, members of Al Badar hold street corner meetings in different places of Dhaka city from the first week of December 1971. Daily Purbodesh 5.12.1971.