#### RIFLES ROTI AWRAT

## Anwar Pasha's pursuit of freedom

KAMALUDDIN AHMED

IFLES 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 This book is the experiences that give us a historical document of our liberation war.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 Bangali 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 Armyon 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, plan-ning, 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writer and educationist, writes in the introduction to the original Bangla edition of this novel: "It is at once a historical document and successful literary creation....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 26°? 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

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

Sudipta was again asked What are You? A

Can Sudipta ever be a Muslim's name? This

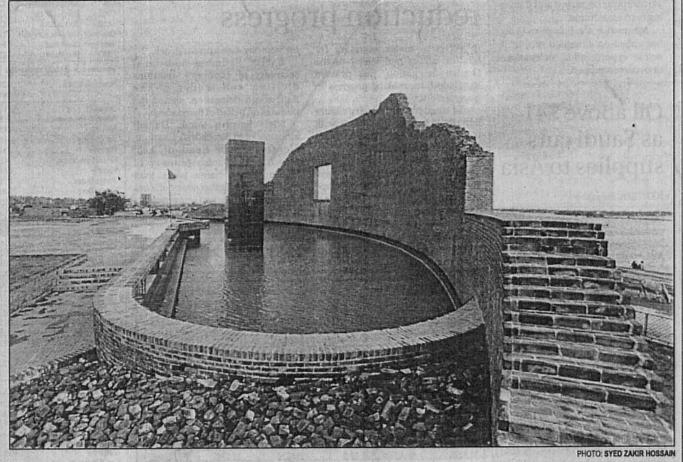
was the question of the interview board. A member of the board said stroking his beard, "What does the word Sudipta mean?" The impression that the board has that "what else if they use Bengali in this field everything automatically is Hinduised." In this way Sudipta was condemned at three successive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

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Martyred Intellectuals Mousoleum, Rayer Bazar

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 pro-Pakistani teachers were prospering. In this novel two brothers Dr Khaleque and Mr Maleque have been presented representing the characteristics of collaborators-cumuniversity 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 spoilt 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

Department and Dr Jytirmoy 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 Jawans, 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 Bangalees 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 jehad, a holywar."

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

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

#### 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.

O uphold the truth is dangerous. This will be a fitting epitaph in the case of renowned Bengali journalist, Serajuddin Hussain killedin 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 Amer-

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

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 Bengali morninger, 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 Oaiser 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.

In his capacity as President of the East Pakistan Union of Journalists (EPUJ) 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

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 bulldosed about 15 years ago, Mrs Davies Hotel bears no stalgic 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 antidemocratic 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 news room 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

Pakistani army and local razakars. 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

Das Gupta to learn the songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam and 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 wher-

ever 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

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 Banglis 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

DR MOHAMMED FAZLE RABBEE

# Remembering my father

DR NUSRAT RABBEE

R 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 strong identity of his Bengali descent. He was an avid connoisseur of Bangali arts and culture. He personally drove his children every week to lessons by famous artistes, like Mrs Firoza Begum and Mr. Kamol

them and understand their clinical symptoms.

peak. The outcome was violence. I tagged along with

Serajuddin right up to the Press Club, slogging through

dirt roads, lanes, by-lanes and dismal side-ways. On

the way we had to dodge bullets as anti-government

ralies drew adequate shooting response from the

troops. Serajuddin seemed disturbed at the deserted

club as a result of several telephone calls from his office

but he managed to give me company while I was

friends like Serajuddin. Working for a news agency,

United Press International (UPI), in the face of tough

competition from rivals, I found myself in the right

place at the right time to watch from the ring-side seat in Dhaka, the battle Bengalis were confronted with in

their bid to secure their due share in the Federal set up.

One mid-night I received a telephone call from

Serajuddin at the residence of my younger brother,

Aftab Hussain (a banker) at Nakhalpara, situated at a

stones throw from the Assembly Hall. He advised me to

book a room at Purbani Hotel. Similar was the advice

from other journalist friends, K.G. Mustafa, A.B.M.

Musa and Ata-us-Samad, because of close proximity

to their dailies, Pakistan Observer and Morning News,

my arch rival Arnold Zeitlin, correspondent of the

Associated Press of America (APA), had also taken a

room. Except two of us no other news agency

reporter was staying at Purbani, the headquarters of

Mukti Bahini (Bengali freedom fighters) where

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, lovingly called Jatir Pita

(father of the Nation), used to address his press con-

Serajuddin laughed from ear to ear, a rare feat, when

I enquired if it was safe to stay at Purbani. He said. "Our

advice is not wrong. This is to ensure your safety. This

also indicates the amount of confidence we repose in

I was stunned when he disclosed about Sheikh

Serajuddin knew that I used to telephone Sheikh

Mujibur Rahman's suggestion to my Bengali friends to

Mujibur Rahman invariably from Dhaka telegraph

office late at night to know whatever he could divulge

on province-wide violence and armed clashes to

drop hints on grisly parleys between President General

Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan's power-drunk negoti-

ators and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. At this juncture I

was convinced that PPP chief Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto,

Occasionally he would take me into confidence and

about the latest developments on the political front.

enable me to storify the events.

I was the only Pakistani journalist at Purbani where

I was fortunate enough to have the guidance of

having tea. This was hospitality par excellence.



sign death certificates for all the people who were

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 urduspeaking 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.

touting for General Yahya, was blocking Mujib's entry into the Prime Minister's office for obvious reasons How correct was Serajuddin's prophecy: "everything

that is not given is lost." It would be difficult to find Serajuddin's peer. To know him one has to go through his book "Look Into The Mirror", described as a "gem in political litera-ture". The book written about four years prior to his exit from this world justifies its title as it reflects the contemporary political scene, the excesses committed by Pakistan's armed forces to reverse the political verdict at the polls.

Greatness of Serajuddin lies in his stupendous efforts in correcting the distortions and suppression of historical facts, 'He exposed attempts by West Pakistani political charlatans to distort the Lahore Resolution which clearly enshrines autonomy for the regions and provinces destined to form part of Pakistan.

He laid bare the motives behind branding personalities like H.S. Suhrawardy and A.K. Fazlul Haq as traitors. These two leaders had the distinction of moving the Lahore Resolution which gave birth to Pakistan.

Serajuddin revealed the conspiracy behind seizure of Suhrawardy's membership of the first constit-

uent Assembly of Pakistan. The book also unmasks the design culminating in

the dismissal of Fazlul Haq from the chief ministership of the then East Pakistan and his house internment because he demanded autonomy for his home province. This tragic episode was weaved around an interview which the correspondent of New York Times, Jack Callaghan, and Reuters stringer, Tony Mascarenhas, both being too close to Prime Minister Bogra Mohammad Ali, had with Fazlul Haq. Both correspondents reported that Fazlul Haq demanded independence for the Eastern Wing.

The interview was read out at a session of the Assembly in Karachi. Fazlul Haq had stoutly denied the charge, which according to him, was based on "falsehood". Prime Minister Bogra Mohammad Ali, wasted no time in imposing governor's a rule on East Pakistan.

Serajuddin was pleased to know how Bogra Mohammad Ali was caught in his own web of lies. It so happened that soon after the dismissal of Fazlul Haq from the chief ministership of the Eastern wing, Prime Minister Bogra Mohammad Ali held a news conference in Karachi. He accused both Callaghan and Mascarenhas of misquoting him in a vital political issue relating to Pakistan. Both the enraged correspondents replied angrily that they wrote exactly what he had told them. The Prime Minister shouted back and called them 'liars." I took no time in questioning the Prime Minister: "Are you justified in dismissing Fazlul Haq's ministry on the report of these two liars?" The Prime Minister sank back in his chair for a few seconds. The conference room echoed and re-

echoed with rib-tickling laughter. It is a great tragedy that in Pakistan we are being fed on lies. The process continues unabated. Even the school and college text books have not been spared. I wish we had some writers and journalists of Serajuddin's integrity, credibility and commitment to expose our leaders who boast of law and order situation and economic health of the country while Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city, is soaked in blood and Pakistan's kitty remains empty besides

foreign exchange reserves depleted. Had Serajuddin been alive, he would be having some consolation following the insistence of a leading women's rights activist, Mrs Tahira Mazhar Ali Khan from Lahore, that an apology was due from the govern-Serajuddin never hesitated to give me a run-down ment of Pakistan for "atrocities" committed on Bengalis during the army action. The apology was demanded by Professor Sultana Zaman, one of the delegates from Bangladesh, at the International Conference of Writers and Intellectuals in

Islamabad in early December 1995. No doubt, Serajuddin's loss has rendered Bangla-

desh a great deal poorer.



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.