

Lest we forget....

IT has been exactly 34 years since the very unfortunate night of 29th August, 1971, when Rumi, like many other freedom fighters, was arrested by the Pakistani Military.

Rumi or Rumi Mama, as he had first been introduced to me, was rather a household name for us. When I was really young, my mum (like all mums) used to put me to sleep by reading out books to me. I could never construe what led her to recite Jahanara Imam's 'Ekatturer Dinguli' to her 3 or 4 years old daughter, but regardless of the reason behind it, I thank my mum for having done so; for having introduced me to my beloved hero Rumi, at so early an age. I admit I understood nearly nothing of what my mum read out (except for imagining him as a guy clad in a cloak, like that of Batman and running and flying around with a gun). Mum's terming Rumi as my 'mama' and her relentless crying while reading the book, had made me firmly believe that, Rumi really was someone somehow related to me. But though his name remained somewhere embedded in my heart, his valor faded away in the crowd of 'Superman's' & 'Batman's' that I came across, as I grew up.

Last year, however, considering me old enough to at last be re-introduced to 'Ekatturer Dinguli' my father bought a copy of it, from the Ekushey Book Fair. Having indulged myself into 'Ekatturer Dinguli', I believe, a ride down the fiery months of 71 enabled me to look at Bangladesh from some very different viewpoints.

One may ask that leaving all other heroes, why am I talking about Rumi, who neither could come out of the war alive, nor was he able to acquire a place in our Bengali board textbooks as a 'Birsrestha'. It is solely because, Rumi had left for war at the very tender age of 19 or 20, the age I would be reaching, in two years, and somehow because of this I find it easier to relate and connect to him. He belonged to the same strata of society that I belong to; he read the same books I now read; he listened to music, as classy and catchy that we listen to, these days; he used to regularly hang-out with his ultra-cool friends (most of them are now renowned freedom fighters), like us. Then, what was different about him? What made him stand out amongst the crowd? The exclusive reason being that, what he did for this country, we would surely never be prepared to do. Tell me, how many of us would be eager to leave all our luxuries, our homely comfort, to take as life-threatening a risk as fighting for our homeland? I would without doubt never consent to it. True, that there were a lot of such Rumis in 1971, but not all Rumis had mothers as bold as Jahanara Imam to jot down their deeds, to capture their love for their country and to keep

account of their enormous sacrifices that led to the creation of Bangladesh.

Rumi mama, to a child of 4 years, had appeared as a superhuman character, but having actually read the book at the age of 16, Rumi, to me, became the flesh-and-blood picture of spirit and gallantry. A true apostle of Mao-Tse-Tung, I wonder if Rumi had, in his very brief life, foreseen that, his deeds, his experiences as a freedom fighter, would be later on read and relived by us, in his absence.

The eldest son of a modern, well off family, Rumi, had planned to leave for America to pursue higher studies at the Illinois Institute of Technology that very year, in September. A good student, an obedient and loving son, a trendsetting brother to his younger brother Jami, a friend to all he knew,

returning from training, quoted his sector commander to his mother, as saying "No country wants guerillas alive; countries are thirsty for bloodshed." I wonder if Rumi had taken this saying to his heart, and had thus, let himself be brutally killed by the Pakistani Military being accused of dissidence.

Forbidding his family to inquire about his whereabouts, Rumi would go on 'operations' with his fellow guerillas, and would return home to his mother, with loads of 'censored' information and aftermaths to share with her. Nights after night, when Rumi would fail to return from his 'operations', Jahanara Imam, would sit up all night, thinking and writing of how the war had changed her perfectionist young son to a compromising man. Melaghar would materialize in front of my



and above all, a true patriot, Rumi had, seeing the events of March 1971, vowed to avenge the mass killing of innocent people by the Pakistani armed forces. It was as if, the "crackdown" on the night of the 25 of March had changed him—the otherwise jovial Rumi, had become silent; his suppressed expressions and clenched fists, had told Jahanara Imam, of what was coming, beforehand. But after a lot of persuading and convincing, she finally let go of him, terming it as a 'Qurbani' for the country and thus Rumi soon set forth to look for war, and to become a 'Muktijodha'.

On two attempts, he finally reached 'Melaghar', or Sector-2, as it was called, and met, the inspiration of his very short lifetime, Major Khaled Mosharraf, the sector commander; Rumi, after

eyes as I read her descriptions—people of all ages and sizes sleeping under the open sky, with scorpions, leeches, creeping over their bodies; food would be served in the empty boxes of grenades cut from side to side; the trainees mostly lived off fruits collected from the neighboring farms or on only rice and pulse.

Most of these freedom fighters were missing from home (having escaped fearing their parents' reactions) and considered 'dead' by their parents, while they were in veracity fighting for their beloved motherland. It was, at such gruelling times that, these gallant heroes needed the support of their families, and Jahanara Imam had been a such mother who not only financially supported the freedom fighters, but also allowed arms to be

stored at her house at Elephant Road, just for the sake of her son.

The guerilla group that Rumi belonged to, had been specially sent from Sector-2, to enable 'psychological warfare' amongst Pakistanis in Dhaka. Blowing up Siddhirganj PowerStation had been a part of their plan to disable Dhaka and Rumi had been one of the guerillas, first assigned to do the job. One night, while patrolling in boats, in the river next to the power station, they had their first narrow encounter with death, having unconsciously confronted a Military Police boat, but courtesy their fast reflex, been saved. Reckless as they were, it was this, and the killing of some Military Police in front of some Brigadier's house, in the then Dhanmondi Road # 18, that led to their arrest.

29th August, at midnight, Rumi, his father, brother and cousin, along with innumerable other patriots, were collected from their homes, along with gathering the various ammunitions secretly stored there. Rumi's father, brother and cousin returned home a day or two later, but Rumi never returned.

Jahanara Imam and her husband, attempted innumerable times to at least know whether their son was alive, but to no avail. Neither could they file, a mercy petition for Rumi, if in case their freedom-fighter son came out of jail and questioned them on why they had dishonored his cause that way. Amidst all this, Rumi's parents came to know that, the night before, the then President of East Pakistan, Yahyah Khan announced a general mercy for all 'dissidents' as he termed them, the Military Police killed some hundreds of freedom fighters. Though they had never lost hope of Rumi's return, it was, from here onwards that, Rumi became a past tense to his family.

34 years have passed since, Jahanara Imam's wait for her son continued with her death some years back, following her long struggle with cancer. Her younger son, Jami, now resides abroad, and their house 'Konika' at Elephant Road, from what I have heard—remains no more. Several times I have thought of collecting a photograph of Rumi, but knew not where and whom to go.

See, the imprint of 1971, on a family? Are you now able to feel how much sacrifice lies behind the scenes of Bangladesh? Do you now acknowledge the sacrifice of this family and innumerable such families who still wait for their loved ones, who had each, contributed something to the war, but never returned? Is such freedom really worth it, I wonder—the amount of bloodshed involved does not, in any way match the so-called 'freedom' we experience.

By Reesana Sifat Siraj

Horrific Appendages

Mythical creatures unleashed

THROUGHOUT the years mankind has been baffled by many mystical creatures. Some say they were real while others claim the fables about them to be absurd and they never existed. Whether they are real or not—I believe there is always some truth in myths. Human imagination is so feeble that it cannot simply conjure magnificent creatures like the Griffin or Chimera in mind.

All or most of these creatures were generally found in Greek mythology. The reason behind that is in such ancient times only the Greek civilization was literate and cultural enough to share the great stories of these wonderful beasts. The stories were usually told to people by flamboyant adventurers who dared venture beyond the borders of their homeland into unknown territories. Some believe that strangers from outside would make up such farfetched fables only to be accepted in a kingdom. But they didn't need to because at that time people welcomed strangers in their land for they thought if they didn't the Gods' wrath might befall on them. But there are other stories where thousands of people sighted one or more of these monsters. Although there are many mythical creatures of divine grace, we will only look into the ones that are atrociously grotesque in this article. And what better to start with than the terrifying half-breeds that were once feared and revered by men for many eons.

The Griffin:

The Griffin (also called Gryph, Gryphon,

Gryphen, Gryphin or Griffon) was a creature with the body and tail of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle. Instead of the front paws of a lion it had talons and had the ears of a horse. Even though the Griffins were enlisted in Greek myths it actually lived in Asia (then known as Scythia, which stretched from modern Ukraine to central Asia). Scythia was abundant in gold and precious jewels and these celestial beasts used to guard this treasure. If any stranger tried to steal any of it he would be torn apart by the sharp talons. Many Greek Gods used Griffins to drive their chariots. Griffins were consecrated with the sun but they were never seen to drive Apollo's chariot (Apollo is the god of the sun), which was driven by horses. Perhaps this is the reason why Griffins were mortal enemies with horses. Crossbreeds of Griffins and horses were extremely rare and they were called Hippogriffs.

The Griffin didn't only exist in Greek myths it was also seen in the medieval art of heraldry. Heraldic creatures were drawn on the armors and shields of the warriors to identify them in battle. Different creatures expressed different battle tactics. For instance the eagle represented wisdom and the lion fortitude. So the Griffin was an excellent heraldic creature, which meant, "in a battle wisdom should lead and fortitude should follow". There are still many sculptures of Griffins in the world, most of which are in Greece and England. The English Griffin however was also depicted as a dragon with a serpentine rear in some artworks. The Griffin was included as one of the Ten Queen's Beast for the

coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. London refers to the heraldic Griffin as the supporter of their coat of arms and marks its boundaries with single Griffins holding up the coat of arms. But these Griffins look more like heraldic Dragons and have no eagle's head and feathers.

Many scientists wrote about Griffins to be myths, some even tried to prove them wrong. Whatever the truth about Griffins is we will never be certain about it. Since Griffins were able to fly their bones must have been hollow like that of birds, which are easily decomposed. So even if they did exist fossil evidence would be hard to find.

It is believed that Griffins were attacked over and over again by human for the gold they protected and soon they fled and nested as far away from humans as possible. Maybe one day they will come back and take revenge on the humans, who ruthlessly slew them. Or maybe there are darker fates in store for us.

Chimera:

The Chimera, also known as Himera, was the fire breathing offspring of the monsters Typhon and Echidna. Chimera was thought to have the body of a goat, the head of a lion and the tail of a serpent. She earned her bestial form from her mother Echidna, who was prized creation of the goddess Hera (queen of the Olympians). Typhon was another creation of Hera, who was powerful enough to defeat Zeus (the king of the Olympians). Typhon and Echidna also gave birth to the Sphinx, Cerberus

(three-headed dog guardian of Hades, the land of the dead) and the Lernaean Hydra.

It is said in the myths that Chimera used to terrorize the city of Lycia, where lived a brave hero called Bellerophon. The Lycian king Lobates was envious of this arrogant warrior and prayed for his demise. He finally came up with the idea to put Bellerophon up against the powerful Chimera. Undoubtedly this would be the death of Bellerophon. But fathoming this the Goddess of battle Athena intervened. She gifted Bellerophon a golden bridle, which enabled him to tame the winged horse Pegasus. He flew over Chimera so she couldn't reach him with her fire and shot arrows at her.

Unlike the Griffin, Chimera and her siblings had distinct ties to the Gods. There were few statues of Chimera discovered. Many of them sculpted Chimera with two heads one of the goat and the other of the lion. There are two tails as well. One is a snake with the other, a goat's tail, in its mouth.

So, that's about it for this week. Join me when I come back with more deadly ancient monsters.

Next Week: Hydra, Cerberus, Half human, half beast and absolute monstrosities: Archaic Evil Emerges

[Note: Questions, comments and criticism directed towards the author can be sent to the following e-mail address: voldemort2099@yahoo.com].

By Knafice-Man