

Special Supplement

THE GLORIOUS VICTORY DAY 2007

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FROM PAGE 29

Victory Day

illiteracy and inequity threw challenge to the nation enlivened by the 'revolution of rising expectations'. The people of Bangladesh know that victory in the war of liberation that ended on 16 December, 1971 was a great achievement. But they also realised that its true meaning lay in realising the full potentials of independence and that implied winning the many struggles that lay ahead of the nation. These struggles also were against life diminishing forces (poverty, disease, illiteracy) that were no less intractable than the group who wanted to keep them in thrall through a master-client relationship. There was little doubt that unless the struggles to overcome hunger, illiteracy, disease were successfully ended, the victory heralded by 16 December would be meaningless for the majority.

Unfortunately, though the obstacles were known and the need for removing those were felt, there was deficit in the sincerity of propose, lack of determination and a limited vision. The power that were knew what was to be done and how, but remained indecisive, hesitant thought it better to temporise. Moreover, group interest took precedence over collective interest which rent asunder national unity. The determination and commitment to win, which characterized the war of liberation, were conspicuous by their absence. The sources of strength and formidable asset represented by unity and

determination were found lacking. The struggles, the various 'battles', that waited to be waged and fought after the victory in the liberation war remained pending or were inadequately addressed.



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TO THE YOUNGSTERS

undeveloped Tejgaon Airport was minimal. Disembarking from the aircraft, I found a group of some 50 young men standing at one place, each of them wearing a wrapper. I was apprehensive that these young men might have been crowding there to protest at my role in the Assembly in support of Bangla, and that they might even be carrying arms hidden under their wrappers. Worried, I paced forward. But, when I reached their vicinity, all of them brought out flowers from under the wrappers and began showering them on me. They were students of Dhaka University. (My Grandfather: Arma Goon; Smriti 1971; Vol-III; P-9; Publisher -Bangla Academy.)

The youngsters - the Dhaka university students - did correctly appreciate what great role Dhiren Dutt had performed for the Mother Language, and for that matter, for East Bengal. This event was followed by what we got as the 'Language Day'. The Day was observed on 11 March 1948 to press home the demand for Bangla Language. Consequently, a meeting of student leaders was held on the bank of a pond west of the Dhaka University Fazlul Huq Hall in the night following 20 February 1952. There, the agenda was discussed for the meeting of the students of schools, colleges and the university, to be held the following day - 21 February - at Amtala at the Dhaka University Arts Building premises. Indeed, the student leaders did not rush to any obstinate decision on that historic 21st day of February; they were rather guided by their appropriate sense of time to go for the right decision. And it was the youngsters - and even the adolescents - who sacrificed their life. Had the students failed to take the correct decision at the Amtala meeting, it would have still remained an aching question as to when our war of liberation would have materialized!

That the 1952 Language Movement had brought a tremendous change in the mental make up of the younger generation was evident in the comprehensive defeat of the ruling Muslim League to the United Front of Huq-Bhashani-Suhrawardy in the 1954 elections. It was due to the youngsters, who flooded the remotest of villages and towns to depict the picture of misrule and the treachery to the mother tongue by the East Bengal government of Nurul Amin, that the Chief Minister was handed a shameful defeat by a young student leader, Khaleq Newaz Khan. It is not a simple example, it is in itself a glowing mausoleum of truth. Here I have a humble message for our youngsters. The history of this small country the size of a paw is characterized by so much bloodshed, devastations and very frequent rises and falls that could hardly be compared to events in any other country of the world. The most striking feature of the Bangladeshi soil is that it is as soft in the monsoon as it is hard in the summer. This characteristic admixture of solidness with softness of the soil is obviously reflected in the mental bearings of the country's population; and this uniqueness of our character had helped us win our War of Liberation against the mighty Pakistan army. Ayubs and Yahya had tried utmost; but none of them succeeded in suppressing us. And, all along, our youngsters took the lead in our struggles.

Indeed, Ayub's military regime had almost completed all preparations to make slaves of us; and then Yahya thrust a war on us a war to complete



the vicious circuit they designed. Had we not won that war, we would have ended up as slaves for ever. But the young people of Bangladesh did not let that happen. That they would stand firm in their defiance was evidenced - at least twice - in the early 60's. The Pakistan government had then constituted two Commissions, one under Justice Sharif and the other under Justice Hamudur Rahman, to frame a Policy for the education sector. But the mighty Ayub government was forced to decommission both of those bodies in the face of a valiant opposition from the student community in the then East Pakistan. Youth makes the students the front-runners, and turns them into an uncompromising force. The agitation against the Sharif Commission reached its climax on the 1st of

September, 1963. While the students were in a procession on the day in defiance of the Section 144, the police opened fire on them, killing three promising youngsters in Mostafa, Babul and Waziullah. This had led to the cancellation of the Sharif Commission.

Another monument of the students' rejection of any compromise was witnessed in the Dhaka University. The Pakistan Foreign Minister Manzoor Qadir came to visit the University and was to deliver an address on the country's foreign policy. The intent of the program was to assess the popularity of Ayub Khan. But, in an unbelievable manner, the students foiled the lecture session. As Mazoor Qadir reached Room 104 of the Dhaka University Arts Faculty Building near the Medical College, he was greeted by such a barrage of questions and shouts and boos that he had to leave the venue without delivering the speech.

Is there any lack of the students' uncompromising heroics in the history of Bangladesh?

The incident of the aborted attempt by Governor Monem Khan to make a Convocation Address at Dhaka University in 1960 deserves a mention here. As the Chancellor of the University, Monem Khan had fondly nursed a dream to attend the Convocation ceremony. But the students had other plans for him. They forged a unity to resist him from attending the Convocation and handing over certificates. So it happened that the moment the Governor reached the decently raised podium at the Curzon Hall premises, the students started chanting slogans and burling shouts. As a bonus, fiery speeches from student leaders continued booming through amplifiers set on the roof of the then Dhaka Hall (now Shahidullah Hall). The speeches were full of criticism of the Ayub-Monem misrule and rejection of the military regime.

A tragic phase of our national life was endured in that same year as a violent, lopsided, communal riot occurred in the country at the instigation of the Pakistan government. The whole of Bangladeshi rose to the occasion with unequivocal resistance to the cruelty. Yet again, the resistance was piloted by the young students' community. They worked over the nights to stand guard at different Halls and residential localities, rescue the victims as well as collect relief material for distribution among the distressed people. Their dedicated services during the crisis became an inseparable part of our history, as was evident in the newspaper headlines like: 'East Pakistan, stand firm in resistance.' While this courageous role of the Press had terrified the Pakistan government, the very base of the rulers was shaken by none but the young ones.

The State of Bangladesh is but a direct crop of the deeds of valiance by the young students of the 60's. It was on the language issue in 1948 that we became aware that we were being deceived. And the same issue did make it crystal clear in 1952 that it was no more possible for two regions 1200 hundred miles apart to keep united. The reality that the bondage of religion was not enough for a people to maintain unity then became clear enough. The Bangladeshi had been proud of their secular and non-communal traits for hundreds of years. But the rulers, in their evil designs to serve their own cause, had launched repeated attacks on our culture and tradition. We faced the first barrage of that attack on the language issue; and then the attacks came in waves on Pahela Baishakh, on Rabindranath. Even Nazrul was not spared. After failing to replace Bangla by Urdu, they tried to introduce Bangla script in the Roman alphabet; and then in the Arabic alphabet. They tried hard to run alien phrases like 'Tahjib' and 'Tawaddun' in their package for our culture.

Despite the strictest of bans during the Ayub regime, a group of young students of the University of Dhaka demonstrated the outstanding courage to celebrate, in 1961, the centenary of the birth of Rabindranath. They were successful. We had witnessed the victory of the immense force of culture over military power in 1961; a similar victory came our way in 1967 as well. When Khwaja Shahabuddin, the then Information Minister of Pakistan, slapped a Radio-Television ban on Rabindranath, the decision was loudly protested by the progressive intelligentsia. The torch-bearers of Bangladeshi culture - the young people - were rock-solid in their opposition to the move. This valiant resistance had compelled the Pakistan government to swallow their own obstinate

Dreams of people have never die. The vision of a happy and prosperous life based on equality, unity and justice and the establishment of a welfare state for the same remained alive in the hearts of people, though there was a lull in respect of its fulfillment. Victory Day on every 16 December that followed the one in 1971 refreshed that dream and reminded people about the struggles against hunger, disease, illiteracy etc, that remained to be waged successfully. The Day inspired people to address the challenges and overcome those without which freedom won was incomplete.

After 16 December in 1971, the gap between expectation and achievement widened in the political and economic life of the people. Only in the cultural field there was some success to be proud of. In politics, democratic values were trampled upon by most of the political parties. Instead of becoming the institutional means to build the nation, politics became the handmaiden of self-aggrandizement, violence and intolerance. Good governance and rule of law lay by the wayside, while politics of power triumphed. Matters came to such a pass that total anarchy was about to be unleashed, by the turn of this year. Attempts are now being made to stem the political rot through various reforms. It is hoped, on the basis of these reforms, that healthy politics can be restored and rule of law and good governance can be established.

On the economic front the record of the past was mixed.

Economic development took place by fits and starts and failed to maintain a steady pace. Fluctuation in policies, lack of determination and wastage of resources did not allow development to gain momentum. Economic reforms took place in a desultory manner. As a result of this, major goals like poverty reduction, removal of illiteracy and improvement of health for all remained unfulfilled. On the other hand, inequality between the rich and the poor widened. At present the strategy for economic development has been thorough and put in place with a seriousness of purpose. Unfortunately, rising prices in world market and natural disasters like flood and cyclone have been a setback for the current economic management. But the determination to achieve a reasonable pace of development remains. Sacrifices will have to be made through austerity before fruits of development can be enjoyed.

The celebration of Victory Day in 2007 will not be confined to the remembrance of past glory i.e. triumph in the liberation war. The Day will make a renewed pledge to win the remaining battles in future. The nation has to be united irrespective of race, caste, creed and class to become victorious in the battles against hunger, illiteracy, disease and poor governance. The Victory Day this year has a special significance because of the additional effort to be made to overcome the ravages caused by two floods and the cyclone Sidre. A nation that won the war of liberation in 1971 against heavy odds cannot fail to win in these battles shape its destiny. The nation is not alone in facing natural calamities and in the struggle against hunger, disease and illiteracy. 16 December, by drawing attention to this has become a day of regeneration of the nation this year. Its message is loud and clear: victory is for the valiant, in peace and war.

Forever Pleasant, Eternally Sweet

Original : Asad Chowdhury

The drum-beats sounded in the king's realm
- Dakkhinaranjan Mitra Majumdar

Won't it beat again?
All dwellings - in towns or villages,
Are today the realm of a king;
The long hours of nightmare have ended.

After washing the face with tears for nine months
Cursing within one's own mind
For whom the long wait
Tearing the darkness into pieces
Victory has come with a smile.

From the sounds of poems and songs
Smoke and smell of gun-powder emerge,
The lips of Barkat still demand Bangla
Wearing a thick turban of red colour
Given by mother,
For every inch of the country's soil
Lives were lost ... thirty lakh ...

They shared death and sorrow
In the tidal-bore and floods of Seventy-one ...
When the mother's face paled
Took up arms while adrift on tear-drops
Bravo Bangladesh!
The world looks in amazement,
The flutes of victory dances with the drum-beats,
Bangladesh - forever pleasant, eternally sweet.

Translation : Helal Uddin Ahmed

Below My Chest

Original : Rafiq Azad

You won't find me in the Dal-lake of earthly paradise Kashmir,
Nor at any stunning tourist-spot of Switzerland,
Not even on the gondola of Grand Canyon,
Don't look for me in France - in a Parisian Cafe, at midnight
On the banks of Rhiine or Mien, vast garden of fruits...

You won't find me on any jumbo jet,
Inside the compartment of a fast-moving Japanese train
Or on the deck of a big ocean-going ship...

After searching and crossing a dark alley by mistake
If you come to this dark cell
You shall see on the map of Bangla
I lie face-down, for thirty-six years...
My thirsty lips touch
The surface of Padma
And the ceaseless flow from my two eyes
Fill to the brim all dried out rivers,
And you will see
The fields of golden harvest
I guard below my chest...

Translation : Helal Uddin Ahmed



did in fact begin just a little after the birth of Pakistan. It was not without movements and struggles along all the phases that we have earned the right to our mother language and achieved recognition to the International Mother Language Day. We have endured cruel repressions while trying to protect our cultural heritage; and were subjected to police brutalities in the course of our struggle for upholding civil rights. Above all, we needed to fight an all-out war to land ourselves to the 26th of March, from where we reached the culmination on the 16th of December.

It is but a folly to talk about the 26th of March or the 16th of December without knowing all the phases of history.

Translation : Deen Mohammad