

The identity of the Martyred Intellectuals of 1971

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THE martyred intellectuals of 1971 did not suffer from any 'crisis' of identity. They knew who they were, as did those who killed them. The intellectuals belonged to different fields of activities and were men and women of ability and eminence; but they had one thing in com-

nationalism but to ensure the perpetuation of their 'right' to plunder our resources. Forgetting that Pakistan would not have come into being if the Bengali Muslims had not voted for it in 1946, the dastardly rulers and their shameless collaborators called the Bengalis traitors when the Bengalis refused to be exploited.

A very heinous attempt was made to impose Urdu as the only state language, ignoring the plain fact that 56 per cent of the citizens were Bengali-speaking. The Bengali language itself was subjected to every conceivable distortion through the channels of education and mass media.

Naturally there were protests. East Bengal refused to be a colony, demanded autonomy and Bengali as one of the state languages. The intellectuals had to be, and were, in the forefront. The democratic and patriotic intellectuals wrote, spoke and agitated. The state language movement began in 1948, reached its climax in 1952, with forebodings of a disaster for the rulers to be materialized in the form of complete routing of the Muslim League in the 1954 provincial election. The ruling clique became alert, its first move was to foist central government rule on East Bengal, and, not being sure of itself, in 1958 the clique imposed Martial Law all over the country with the principal design of keeping the Bengalis under control.

One of the disturbing problems for the rulers was that East Bengal had a larger population than West Pakistan, which meant that under any direct election held on the basis of adult franchise it would have been necessary to hand over the reins of power to the Bengalis. This the rulers were not prepared to do. To forestall that eventuality they introduced the unjust system of parity in representation between the two wings of the country and basic democracy, denying the citizens direct role in the governance of the state. They brought the four provinces of West Pakistan under a single unit with the purpose of establishing Punjabi domination over the three weaker provinces and preventing them from establishing political contact with East Bengal. Meanwhile, the exploitation of East Bengal continued unabated. Unnerved by the

announcement of the 6-point demand for autonomy, the military regime of Ayub Khan made Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the principal accused in a hatched-up case of treason against the state.

But whatever the rulers did proved to be counter-productive. The refusal of the Bengalis to be exploited gained momentum, leading to the mass uprising of 1969s, obliging Ayub Khan to hand over power to Yahya Khan and forcing the new army dictator to hold a general election -- the first of its kind in Pakistan -- on the basis of adult franchise.

The outcome of the election made the army generals and the crafty politician Z A Bhutto crazy. Fearful of the prospect of handing over power to the Bengalis, the army pounced upon them and began what was, for all intents and purposes, a calculated genocide. Needless to recall that right from its inception Pakistan had the support of the Americans -- which support it enjoyed even in 1971 when there were two killing attacks on the intellectuals -- the first one more or less indiscriminate, the second one selective. In the first attack university teachers, students and even 'employees were put to death. As usual, the brawn hated the brain, and the army thought that the universities were the brain centres of all anti-Pakistani movements and that the intellectuals supplied the public with ideas of rebellion. The second attack came on 14 December, just before the Pakistani army's final surrender. The local army authority had prepared their own list of the intellectuals whom they considered to be subversive of the perpetuation of Pakistani exploitative designs and handed it over to the Al-Badr -- an organisation of religious fanatics and army collaborators. The instruction was to eliminate as many as possible. Anticipating their defeat, the military hordes were acting on

two motives -- one of revenge and the other of debilitating the new state that was on the threshold of emergence. With the curfew and military firepower to back them, the Al-Badr acted quickly, knocked at as many addresses as they had been able to collect, took away some of the best men and women of the country and made an orgy of massacre.

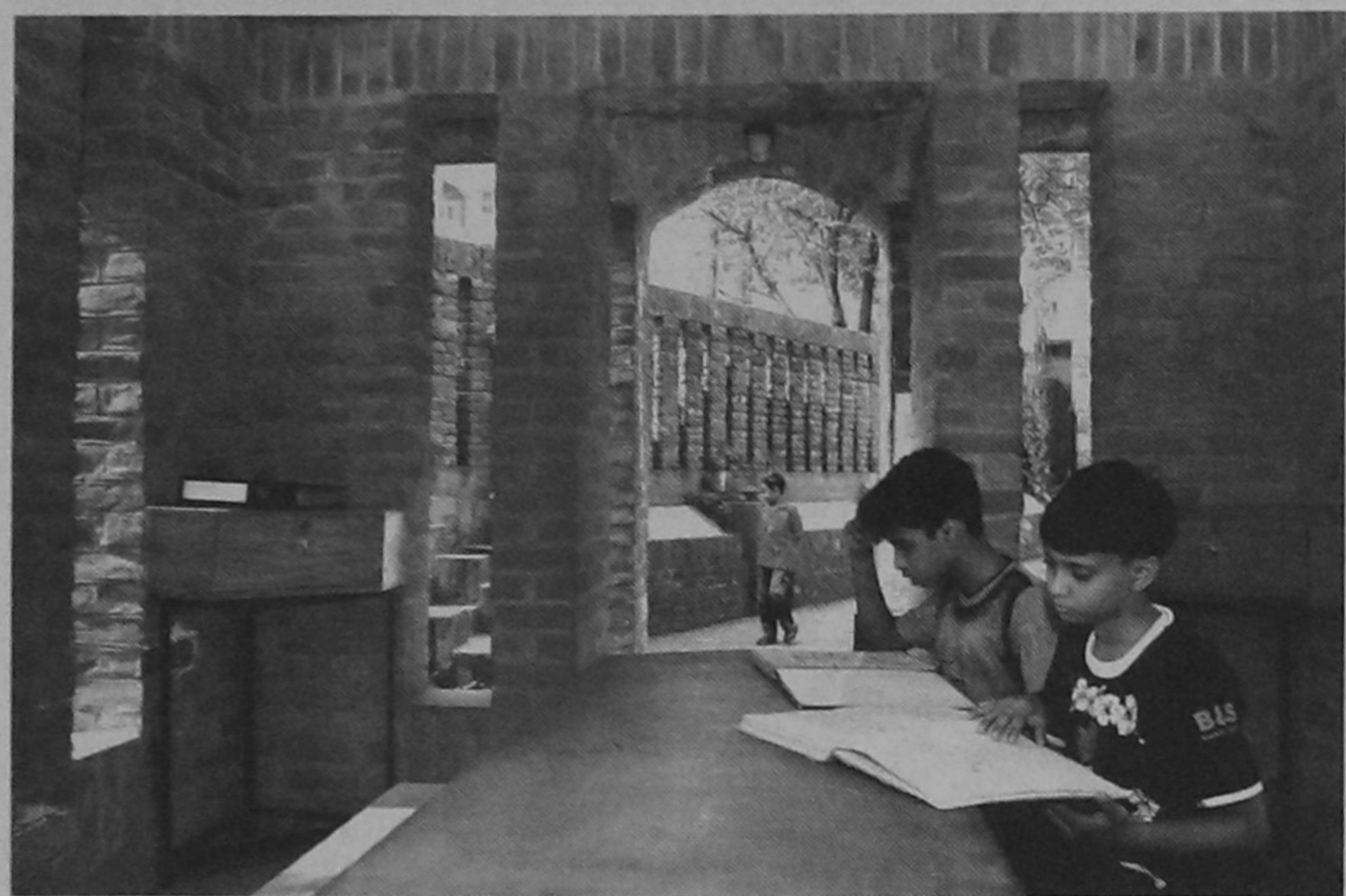
The intellectuals we have lost stand out in sharp contrast not only to the Pakistani killers but also to those among the educated Bengalis who had collaborated with the rulers. To be sure, all intellectuals were not alike; there were some who had been pro-establishment because of their spinelessness, and others who had helped the Pakistani rulers for material gains. But there were also those who believed that Pakistan would be an Islamic utopia bringing prosperity and happiness. They had written, spoken and sung about, and in praise of, their dream. Among them were those intellectuals who had misguided the Bengali Muslims in the 1940's, talking of Pakistan ecstatically as the road to emancipation, without realizing that Pakistan was an absurdity. Perhaps we should not also forget those who were, to a great extent, responsible for making the Anti-British struggle turn into communalism, by their bringing in elements of Hindu revivalism in a movement which was, and should have remained, because of its very nature, secular in character. Indirectly, they helped the so-called Pakistan movement to grow and, consequently, Bangladesh to be partitioned, tragically.

But the sharpest contrast to the martyred intellectuals of 1971 is to be found in the bigots of the Jamaat-e-Islami of which the Al-Badr was an outfit. These reactionaries expected the Pakistani military junta to help them in achieving their dubious dream of an Islamic

state. It is unlikely that they were unaware of the truth that army generals were no practitioners of Islam, and that some of them were famous for debauchery. They must have seen and known that the Bengalis that the Pakistani army was killing were, in general, better Muslims than, the killers. In fact, the occupation army was using Islam as a weapon to supplement the power of their mechanical arms. How and why did the Jamaati Islamwallahs unite with the tyrannical Army? The question is not difficult to answer. Both parties were materialists and were bent upon gaining and consolidating political power. In this they were friends and fellow travellers and found themselves mutually useful.

The martyred intellectuals are no longer with use, and the vacuum their absence has created will be difficult, if not impossible, to fill up. But their legacy remains. All of them belonged to us, the question that is important now is do we belong to them? If we think we do then it would be our duty to work for the realisation of their dream of a democratic state and society. The nationalist war against the Pakistanis has been won, but the struggle for a social revolution, fighting the powers of capitalism lies ahead of us. And for that a unity between the intellectuals and the public is essential. That is precisely what the martyred intellectuals of 1971 had done; they had become one with the public. We must follow that example, if we want to liberate ourselves. Without working for the achievement of that goal, our efforts to pay respect to them would be mere words without substance, as they are already showing signs of becoming. Their identity should be ours too.

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The infamous Jalladkhana is now open to visitors.

mon, which was their belief in nationalism of the Bengalis together with a firm commitment to democracy. These patriotic and democratic intellectuals belonged to us, and had to lay down their lives on our behalf.

It is easy and helpful to contrast them with the killers who perpetrated a genocide on the Bengalis in 1971. These agents of the panjabi-dominated ruling clique of Pakistan also called themselves nationalists, but their nationalism was of an entirely different kind. It was based on religion. The martyred intellectuals believed, as did everyone who fought for the liberation of East Bengal, in a nationalism which was essentially secular and linguistic. And what is more important is that the Pakistani army was on our land not to establish their

The Bengali Muslims had voted for liberation and not for a new bondage. But as soon as Pakistan was established, the Bengalis found, to their utter frustration, that they had been betrayed and that state power had been transferred not to them but to a clique of non-Bengali civil and military bureaucracy. The new administration was quick in setting up a machinery of exploiting East Bengal in a manner not less ruthless than the one the British colonial rulers had developed. In almost all fields of life -- economics, politics, jobs in the army and civil services -- West Pakistani hegemony prevailed. There was plunder as well as drainage.

Efforts were also made to subjugate the mind. There were loud slogans of Islamisation.

Remembering the dead, redeeming the pledge

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

IT is time to remember once more. It is especially so because we live in times where the propensity to forget often gets the better of the proclivity to remember. In these thirty eight years that have gone by, we have recalled the sacrifices of the brave men and women who went to their deaths only days before the liberation of the land. And these were individuals who, like the rest of us, knew freedom was on its way, that indeed it was only steps away, that the wild men come from the mountains far away had lost the nerve to fight against the determined onslaught of a people unwilling to give away its land or its values.

Martyred Intellectuals Day is thus about some of our best and brightest who were picked up and then picked off by the local

collaborators of the Pakistan occupation army, in the sinister expectation that an emergent Bengali state would find itself badly bruised at birth, that it would not be a state proper but would be reduced to being a statelet. You recall the arrogance of the Punjabi army captain, who brazenly informed Anthony Mascarenhas in April 1971, that the Pakistan state meant to keep the rebellious Bengalis in subjugation for no fewer than thirty years. You remember too Roedad Khan's self-satisfaction on the morning of 26 March 1971 as he approached a fruit-laden table for breakfast with Tikka Khan and all the other men whose soldiers were busy shooting down Bengalis all across Dhaka. Yaar, imaan taaza ho gya (friend, faith has gained freshness). That is what he said; and that is what all Pakistanis and their Bengali collaborators

believed in the nine months between March and December 1971. Yahya Khan vowed to punish Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for his 'act of treason'; and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto crowed that Allah had saved Pakistan! The Bengali academic Syed Sajjad Hussain went abroad, to tell disbelieving people that the army had committed no genocide in 'East Pakistan'.

In December 1971, we believed that the end of Pakistan was nigh. So did its defenders, with blackness in their souls. You think of the Muslim League, of elements like Sabur Khan. Only a couple of days before liberation, even as the al-Badr and al-Shams murder squads of the Jamaat-e-Islami went around abducting Bengali men and women to murder, Sabur Khan told his fellow collaborators that Bangladesh would be an illegitimate child of India. General

Niazi vowed that Pakistan would last, that the Indian army and Mukti Bahini would take Dhaka over his corpse. And all the while, Pakistan's soldiers were retreating everywhere, making a desperate rush for Dhaka. Many of them died, in line with the calling of poetic justice. Many more trundled down to Dhaka and other 'safe' places, to witness the surrender of the world's 'best fighting force', their own.

But marauding armies do not give up in decency, in the dignified stillness that comes to soldiers who have lost a war for a cause they have believed in. In 1971, Pakistan's army and Pakistan's razakars had no cause to live for or die for. Which explains their stubbornness when it came to killing Bengalis and raping their women. Soldiers who have murdered, whose rapacious nature has destroyed the moral fibre in them, will not yield

until they have sunk their teeth, for one last time, in the flesh of their victims. And that precisely was what was done to Bengali physicians, academics, journalists and others in the terrible darkness enveloping the country between 13 and 15 December. Young men trained to murder for Pakistan went about hunting down their own teachers. Professor Gyasuddin was picked up. Dr. Aleem Chowdhury was taken away. Ladu Bhai was abducted. Selina Hossain was led away. If you recall history, if you know how it was in the Stalinist era in the Soviet Union to be kidnapped and murdered by the state, to be purged, you would get a sense of what the Pakistanis and their collaborators did throughout 1971 and especially on the eve of freedom. If you remember the Nazis, if you think back on what the Japanese did in Nanjing in 1937, you would have a clearer idea of what Pakistan did to

Bangladesh's brightest sons and daughters even as battlefield defeat stared it in the face. If you cannot prevent history from opening a new chapter on a nation's struggle for liberty, so the Pakistani reasoning went, you can wield the machete and maim somewhat that history. And that was when they went looking for Bangladesh's intellectuals, found them, through the cover of a curfew, and swiftly went into the gory business of torturing them to death. There is Rayerbazar, its killing grounds, to speak to you of those horrible times.

This morning, it is time to redeem the old pledge, to rededicate ourselves to the cause of a secular and therefore democratic Bangladesh we waged war for in a long-ago season of hope and courage. It is time for renewal.

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