

That is why in this Land till Eternity...

Nasir Ahmed

Why is today Children's Day, can any of you say?
Only he can - who treads the path of Bangabandhu.
Whose heart was equal to the size of Bangladesh, can you say?
You can, if you can burn like the sun in protest.

Those who can walk inaccessible roads by loving this land,
Whose heart melts in love and compassion like a child,
Who can trample beneath the feet even the fear of death,
- I know very well, only those brave ones can tell.

On this day in Nineteen-twenty, in the green shade of Tungipara
A child had come to a mother's lap with soft tenderness.
Amid the affection of all during childhood, the little 'Khoka'
Was a friend of the poor and distressed, but resolute and bold.

That Khoka's soft heart shared the sorrows of all
He felt happy by donating his own shawl to those bitten by cold.
Khoka's heart cried out at the sadness of his captive motherland
He therefore burst into protest when he grew old.

He spent captive-life galore in jails, torture and prisons
Even then no compromise, who else could be a hero like him!
Through his fiery speech of Seventh March Nineteen Seventy-one
The throne of the autocrat Yahya started to shiver and shake.

At his single call we all joined the Liberation War
Can a free country obtained through blood be dubbed poor!
Those who opposed independence were angry in this land of the free,
That is why our soil became hallowed by the blood of the nation's father.

He gave up his life like a child out of love for his country
That is why this land bows its head to him in reverence till eternity.

Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed

(Continued)

The Southern Door of Memory

a large pond in the village. When we shook its branches, the ripest plum showing reddish hue fell deep inside the pond. When none of us could pick it up, the sorrow we felt for that plum still remains fresh in my mind.

We used to move about on a dinghy boat through the jute field. My granddad had a large boat, which also contained two rooms with big windows. There was a rudder behind the boat with two oars in front. I very much liked to watch through the window the clear blue sky and the village surrounded by dark green trees at a distance. That boat was wrecked during the 1971 liberation war. That village which I left behind during my childhood still appears like a perfumed picture to me.

My father's birthplace was also Tungipara. He now sleeps in the soil of that very village in a cool and shady setting. The graves of my grandparents lie by his side. Those who had filled my life with infinite affection and love, today they mingle with the soil of my village. I lost my mother, father, brothers and many relatives by the brutal bullets of the assassins on 15 August 1975. The country and the nation lost all possibility of living with dignity after losing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman - who was the embodiment of all hopes and aspirations for freedom. The band of assassins had buried the great man at that secluded soil of the village after removing him from the heart of Bangla - Dhaka. They made an unsuccessful attempt to erase him from the pages of history - but have they succeeded?

I used to spend most of my times near my father. I also got the opportunity to take part in discussions on his future plans. I vividly recall one of his utterances. He told us quite often, 'I shall live in village in the last part of my life. You will take care of me. I shall live near you.' Those words still resonate in my ears. This back-pull of my father's tomb in the secluded atmosphere of a village will bring me back to that village over and over again wherever I may be on earth.

I have now got myself involved in politics. I am proud to have dedicated myself for the welfare of the country and its people. I want to spend the last days of my life in Tungipara. I have a fond wish to build a house beside the river. I also intend to write memoirs on my parents. Everybody knew my father as a politician. But I want to write about this hugely big-hearted man that Mujib was as a person.

I wish to go back to my village, in the same condition as it was during my childhood days. But wishing is not enough. Time is now passing very fast. The simple ordinary lifestyle of the village is becoming busier after getting the touch of mechanisation; there are other thrills as well. People are also getting habituated. There is no scope to deny the blessings of science while living in this century. Modern technology is being applied for raising the quality of life and work-environment in developed countries of the world. We also shall have to forge ahead.

Whatever busy schedules I may have, I go to the village whenever I find time. If only I could get back to the village of my childhood - it occurs to me! When I lose sight of the rural path at a distance, I feel like singing at the top of my voice, 'That coloured path of clay leaving the village, oh makes my mind captivated.....'

I could easily memorise the poems about villages included in our school texts during my childhood and teenage years. I still recall some lines here: 'There are little homes in my small village'; 'Will you go with me, brother, to our small village'; 'I recall the lap of my rural mother after so many days'; 'A moon has risen over the bamboo garden'; 'I am a boy on the bank of the river Meghna'; 'Three long oars, three boatmen'; 'The palm-tree stands on a single feet'.

I was a mere teenager when I entered the realm of Bengali literature and culture as a reader. Later, I became a student of literature. I read the village-centred novels, stories and poems whenever I got the opportunity. Initially, it was 'Pather Panchali' of Bibhuti Bhushan which had a great impact on me. Even now, I turn its pages whenever I get the opportunity. The love and affection between the two siblings Durga and Opu, their interactions and walks around the village, sharing food with each other when they got something, Durga's sense of responsibility towards Opu, illness of Durga and her subsequent death; Opu's sorrow and pains at losing his sister, hurt state of old grandma, sadness-pain, helplessness; Opu's mother Sarbjaya - whose constant companion was misery and poverty and whose life was full of struggles, her love and affection for her children; work-life of Opu-Durga's father abroad, sari brought for her by father after Durga's death - many of these small and sad episodes can be observed in the real life of Bangladeshi villages even today. 'Pather Panchali' reminds me of my own village. It is the greatest novel in Bengali literature. The village-based short-stories of Rabindranath are also my favourites. The sketches on villages by artist Zainul Abedin are also realistic. I still remember the picture of a bride wearing nose-ring and standing beneath a banana tree. Our cultural heritage is quite notable. The songs of Baul, Vaishnab, Bhawai and Bhatiali are our pride since time immemorial.

The village is our life. The rural economy and people are keeping alive the modern illuminated capitals and towns. We shall have to build up our small and large villages as modern and ideal ones in accordance with our tradition.

Proper electrification is needed for developing the villages. All villages should have hospitals having modern equipment, schools, maternity centres, agricultural and technical training centres, cultural centres, playing grounds, etc. The conditions of homesteads should be robust and clean. The roads would be wide and pucca; communication with towns should be made easier by making arrangements for movement of transports.

Initiatives will have to be taken for a balanced distribution of the agricultural system and its output, marketing of produced crops at specified price and making the food storage system hygienic after combining agricultural lands through cooperatives. Proper supply of those products which would be exported and those which would go to factories as raw materials will have to be ensured under public management. The agricultural work will have to be modernised and brought under scientific management. The production of all crops should be doubled or tripled through cultivations round the year. No land should remain fallow. Fish production should be increased by cultivating fishes in rivers, canals, marshes, lakes and ponds. Farms should be set up for increasing the production of livestock and poultry. Newer methods are being invented throughout the world for increasing food production. I believe, food production should be attached top priority in this country of misery, poverty and famines. The rural people will not crowd the towns if food production is raised. They will have to be kept busy round the year by imparting training and making agricultural inputs readily available. The rural cottage industry should be expanded and its quality improved in line with our culture and tradition. Avenues will have to be opened up for the flourishing of rural agricultural commodities, businesses and industries. Employment opportunities will be generated as a result. I hold the view that a modern and time-befitting agricultural system can be the principal tool in enhancing production. At the same time, the lot of the famine and poverty-stricken peasants, who have been exploited, deprived and neglected throughout the ages, must be changed; their basic needs and rights for a decent living must be ensured.

Our rural women are the most backward. Ways will have to be

found for flourishing their talent by overcoming social restrictions, religious fanaticism and walls of superstitions. Their labour will have to be utilised in productive pursuits on the basis of equal status. They become victims of many abuses and injustices in society. If the girls get the opportunity of universal education, if they become economically self-reliant, if they get the chance to become established based on the merit of their intellect, personality and courage, then the repressions and exploitations would no more be a bar to their uplift. The girls themselves will have to take up their struggle for establishing their rights with a firm hand. But all official cooperation should be extended to them for ensuring their safety.

I am also awe-struck by another aspect of rural development. It is the excessive number of neglected and helpless, skeleton-like and malnourished children, who are now a majority in our population. I have seen these children in all villages of the country I visited. As the births of these children are taking place, we must make their future promising and secure. We will have to take initiative for making their childhood and youth joyful and happy. We should nurture a mentality of sacrificing our present for their affluent and prosperous future. And everybody will have to be selfless. The capable population will have to be engaged for increasing production after containing our population growth.

I am not a believer in any small or stop-gap arrangement for developing the villages. We shall have to build up modern villages by reforming the prevalent notions of traditional agricultural system, which went hand in hand with the darkness of regressive lifestyle over the ages. I do not want any grant-dependent or pledge-based development; I seek 'total' development. For this, we shall have to wage a countrywide movement if needed and the educated and conscious youths will have to be involved for the purpose.

I have seen numerous characters of our village-life from a close distance. I remember one lady called Akkel's mother. She has grown old now and has three sons. She became a widow at a tender age. She had free entrance in all areas and households of the village. She had information about every house at the tip of her finger. She was like a village gazette. Akkel's mother was available for cooking, making cakes or producing sweets made of palm-fruit, whenever the need arose in any household. If anybody knocked on her door on the way, she would offer a seat and serve betel leaf with nut.

Many people used to come from the south during the harvesting season. They were known as 'outsiders'. They used to perform tasks like cutting paddy and threshing. They stayed the whole season in small dwellings. After harvesting, they left the place with their shares of paddy. The snake-charmer women used to come during monsoon. They used to fit our hands with glass bangles of different colours. They arrived at specific time of the year with ribbons, dyes, comb, mirror, different kinds of toys and equipment. Sometimes they played with snakes and sang different varieties of songs by playing flute. The womenfolk in the village crowded around them and took indigenous medicines. They used to provide so many types of charms and amulets. In return, they took paddy-rice or vegetable-eggs-chicken.

There are innumerable and varied characters in the fields, farms and pathways of rural Bengal. The peasant who toils from sunrise to sunset for two fistful of rice, pulls his plough in a field burnt by the heat of summer, cuts jute tree by diving under chest-high water during monsoon, harvests crop by withstanding the biting cold of winter - is his life's struggle of less value than any other endeavour?

I know, those beautiful days in my village will never come back. Everybody has left us one after another. That forever familiar village of mine is no more; neither are those humans, who were shattered by the ups and downs of life. That mind, that human life no more exists. It is as if everybody has lost the battle. That soft existence has perished. Today, there is only the competition for living. And that is why, selfishness and clashes have increased. The brotherhood of humans is gone; the extended hands have been withdrawn. I do not know where it all ends.

I was born in a village; I enjoyed the colourful days of my childhood. I have deep linkages with the rural behaviour, manner, ways of life and mentality. Even now, I go to the villages whenever I find time, as I become fed up with urban chores. When I move to the secluded and peaceful environment of my village after taking leave from the mechanised and busy city life, my eyes fall asleep in peace. It is difficult to get such a sleep in the capital. Here, the air is very heavy and it becomes difficult to even breathe. The starlit open sky appears much bigger in the village. The open wind swoops in with a rhythmic sound by touching the leaves of margoosa, rubiaceae, palmyra-coconut trees. My village resembles the 'Beautiful Bangla' of poet Jibananda - my eyes are calmed when I look at the dark-green nature and the crop-laden terrain. During desolate noons, the sound of doves float in the air; the kingfisher succeeds in catching a fish after diving into river-water. Nothing is more attractive, captivating or pleasing to me than this. The dust-laden rural life is my eternal love. It evokes the deepest feeling inside my heart.

Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed

(Continued)

Bangabandhu: Hero of People's Politics

of the conspirators and power-cliques, and to open it up for the masses. Meanwhile, the terrorists got themselves involved in the conspiracies. They became powerful by getting patronisation from the BNP-Jamaat alliance government during 2001-2006 period. They struck at the progressive forces; attempts were even made to kill Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina - who was showing the people the dream of a modern Bangladesh. In the backdrop of this reality, the task of transforming and mainstreaming the politics of the masses introduced by Bangabandhu is very hard indeed. Bangladesh is now striving to move forward under the leadership of Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina on that tough terrain.

There is no alternative to knowing Bangabandhu and understanding his politics in that journey. And childhood is a good time for starting this job; getting acquainted with the man Mujib can commence from here. In that respect, declaration of his birthday as National Children's Day has been a good decision. Children will celebrate the birthday of this great leader with joy and festivity. They will engage in creative and joyous pursuits including painting, singing and recitation amid the joy of celebration. They will become familiar with Bangabandhu through this and know about his life. At the same time, they will get acquainted with the liberation war and the history of Bangladesh, and with it other heroic soldiers and leaders of that past.

If a happy, beautiful and prosperous Bangladesh as dreamt by Bangabandhu is to be materialised, the new and coming generation has to be enriched with religious tolerance, humanism, deep patriotism, knowledge about our own culture and heritage, universalism, rationalism, awareness about contemporary issues and foresight for the future.

If today's children get the opportunity to practice these progressive ideals and awareness since their childhood, then they will become suitable soldiers for building the country tomorrow. The Golden Bengal of Bangabandhu's dream and his daughter's Digital Bangladesh will get concrete shape in their hands.

Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed

Do You Remember, Bangabandhu?

Jahidul Huq

I have a Mujib Coat

Kept in a wardrobe packed with countless stars,
Wet with dew, drenched in blood,
A veritable grief!

Khaju Mian of Feni

Had introduced me to you,
The crowded heart of our homeland
Was then throbbing like a ball of fire,
Do you remember, Bangabandhu?

On the day when Bangladesh was floating

Like a gorgeous ship in a sea of blood,
You sat on its bosom like a dream,
Do you remember?

At Ganabhaban one day

You addressed me as a poet -
It was as if a tiger had descended there like a metaphor,
That sunny day of March was in a flux
After hearing your deep-throated voice,
I had with me the Saula Pagla of Manik Nagar,
Do you remember?

One afternoon, a sapphire ring given by the astrologer

Could not fit your long finger,
You were very busy at your residence of road thirty-two,
You asked the guests to take tea,
You shouted,
Do you remember?

Once you came to our Radio station at Shahbag

For addressing the nation directly,
I held on to a studio-door for you
So that you could enter with ease,
You spoke about transforming Radio-TV altogether,
You talked about the songs of stars
You dwelt on the programme
Soaked with the dream of a soggy night,
Do you remember, Bangabandhu?

The night-time balcony of Capulet's garden-home

Had seemed like the east to Romeo
And Juliet had resembled a Sun,
Similarly, throughout Bangladesh
Wherever Sheikh Mujib had gone or halted
That place became the east to the Bangladeshis,
And he was the Sun.
Then the birds used to chirp at daytime or night,
The children of the new age woke up by saying
Wake up child, open the door, the dawn is here,
They washed their faces in the white light of dawn as if in Eidul Fitr!

One day

On our cores of bosoms came down
An unending stretch of Race-course ground
Covered by the people like a dense forest,
Where the Seventh of March comes to life even now, and pronounces
That the struggle this time is the struggle for freedom,
The Seventeenth of March falls like a sweet tear-drop,
The flag flutters in the air on Twenty-sixth of March
On the blue sky of an independence tower,
And on Sixteenth December descends
The aeroplane of our blood-drenched victory!
Do you remember, Bangabandhu?

Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed

Tribute to Mujib
Lutfur Rahman Riton

The soil of Bengal, the water of Bengal
Meditates interminable the name of Mujib
The aspiration of Bengali, the language of Bengali
Is love for Mujib

The buds of Bengal, the flowers of Bengal
Are eager to blossom in the name of Mujib
The tree leaves of Bengal, the birds of Bengal
Sing the glory of Mujib

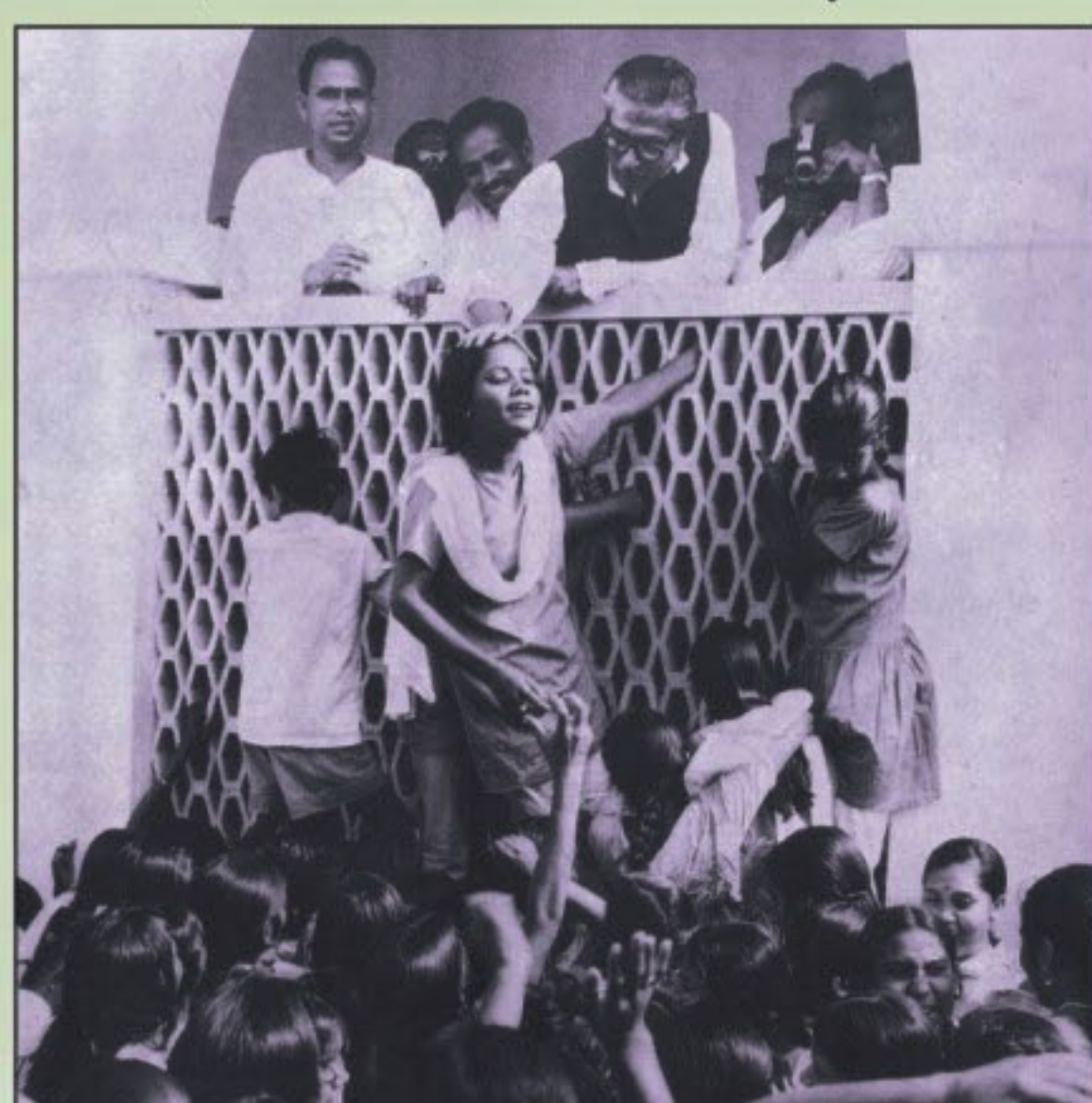
The cloud of Bengal, the river of Bengal
Flows endless in the name of Mujib
The wise of Bengal, the poet of Bengal
With affection paints the picture of Mujib
In Bengal in every home of Bengalis
Burns the lamp in memory of Mujib

This dear independence of Bengalis
Speaks about Mujib every moment
The song of Bengal, the love of Bengalis
Carries the memory of Mujib
What can wipe out the name of Mujib?
Mujib remains immersed in the flag

Look, Mujib is present all around
In six seasons and twelve months
Look, Mujib is present everywhere
In the music of Bengal, in the life of Bengalis
How can the day of Bengal, the night of Bengal
return the debt to Mujib?

The name of Mujib is everlasting
I love Mujib very much
In one breath without effort
I write again and again
The name of Mujib
the name of Mujib

Translated by Abdul Hannan



under the auspices of the UNICEF and International Child Welfare Union. Presently, World Children's Day is observed on first Monday of October. Countless children were orphaned during the First World War that flared up in the second decade of the last century. They had lost their shelter, security of life. In 1924, League of Nations held its convention in Geneva. It declared that the children deserve to get whatever precious things humanity possessed. Again, in Second World War millions of children were rendered orphan and vulnerable. Not only that, innumerable children were crippled with atom bomb radiation. On November 20, 1989 UN Charter for Children's Rights was adopted at the General Assembly of the United Nations. Bangladesh is a signatory to the Charter along with other nations. Bangladesh is the dream land of Bangabandhu.

It is true Universal Children Day helps the children to develop in them the spirit of internationalism. National Children's Day, in its turn, helps the children bloom in their national identity, inspires them to cherish their own culture. Any child wherever he might live, he needs to sustain his existence with his national identity. Viewed from this perspective, the observance of the birthday of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is an occasion of great significance in our national life.

Until now children's condition in Bangladesh is pitilessly on the fringe. It is our responsibility to unitedly resolve their problems no matter how we are placed in life. In the past our collective achievement had been enviable. Language movement is our national glory. Liberation war significantly adds to our national honour and dignity. We all were united in that great battle. Bangabandhu called upon us to join the liberation war in his 7th March speech. In the annals of world history that was an unique speech. On his birthday, each and every citizen of the country must take a pledge to say 'Whatever precious things humanity possesses, children have every right to get them.'

Translation: Syed Badrul Haque