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**Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib : The Icon of Bangladesh**

The untimely death of Hussain Shahid Surwardi in the 60s brings Mujib at the helm of Awami League. Mujib's immediate challenge was to strike a delicate balance with the experienced socialist leader Bhashani and his leftist ideology. Young Mujib's political maturity and insight helped and his party to find the right balance.

However, Mujib became the target of Ayub Khan's anger. During Ayub's 10-year tenure in power, the military ruler forced Mujib to spend almost eight years in jail. Some time, the imprisonment would last more than a year at a stretch. That did not stop Mujib to speak against Ayub's autocracy, albeit at the expense of getting persecuted and imprisoned. The lessons learnt from Indo-Pakistan war in 1965, led Mujib to sculpt his six-point demand in 1966.

A careful analysis of six-point demand reveals that the seed of independence began to germinate with this set of demands. Ayub realized that Mujib was a threat for him who needs to be eliminated. On April 21, 1968, a special tribunal was formed under Supreme Court Justice SA Rahman. Mujib was charged as the main convict along with 35 others in what now known as 'Agartala conspiracy'; the case is known as Mujib vs. State.

During the trial, one of the convicts Sergeant Zahurul Haq was shot dead inside a military prison in cantonment on February 15, 1969. In protest, a countrywide hartal was observed on February 17.

The next day, Prof Shamsuddoha died in army attack while trying to protect his students at Rajshahi University. The whole country erupted into anger, and Ayub was forced to withdraw charges against Mujib on February 22. A round table was convened to address the political stalemate.

After the acquittal of charges, Mujib was awarded a public reception at Race Course the next day. The leader of central student alliance Tofayel Ahmed termed Mujib as "Bangabandhu". Bengali nation has adorned Mujib as Bangabandhu ever since.

Bangabandhu, along with nine of his associates, went to Lahore on February 24, 1969 to join the roundtable. His entourage included his closest associate Tajuddin Ahmed, the then general secretary of Awami League. Mujib went to Pindi the next day where he received a grand welcome at the airport. The roundtable meeting with president Ayub Khan began on February 26. Pakistani rulers did not agree to Mujib's demand for autonomy; they offered him the Premiership of Pakistan instead, which Mujib declined.

Following the failed meeting, Ayub resigned on March 25 and General Aga Mohammad Yahya Khan came to power. Mujib continued to remain an eyesore for Pakistani rulers; Yahya was no different. The non-compromising attitude of Mujib forced Yahya to call for a national election in December 1970. AL bagged 167 in the national council and 298 posts in the provincial council. The poll performance put Mujib to a new height not to the liking of Pakistani junta. They tried to cheat AL of the results. By then, Bangabandhu had become the uncrowned emperor of Bengal. Yahya and his associate Bhutto came to Dhaka



to address the crisis, but it was obvious that the discussion was a sham. Bangabandhu had assumed total control of the local administration. On March 7, in his historic speech, he told the nation, "The struggle today is for freedom. This struggle is for independence." On March 23, he hoisted the flag of Bangladesh and signaled it to the nation that independence was no longer a distant dream. On March 25, he decreed the Proclamation of Independence of Bangladesh.

The events between 1971 and 1974, political analysts argue, have their epicenters in the faultline of global politics. The world was divided into two camps: democracy and socialism. Bangabandhu was essentially a democratic person who respected the hope and the desire of the majority. Thus, while drafting the constitution he did not ignore the demand of the opposition parties. Socialism thus became the second of our four principles. He kept the option open to pursue socialist beliefs to liberate the economic shackles if necessary.

Bangabandhu, the father of the nation, was not only a political visionary but also a 'superman' with rare humane qualities. His patriotism and his love for the oppressed were exemplary. In one public rally, noted educationist Mazharul Islam writes, Bangabandhu appeared very upset. The enthusiastic volunteers were driving away a small child from the venue. The little boy fell over and got himself hurt. Bangabandhu rushed to the boy and embraced him to show his concern for the child. He started his speech with the child next to him. (Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib, Bangla Academy, 1974, p 1070).

Bangabandhu's dream of making Bangladesh the fabled golden Bengal led him to adopt socialist reform through the inception of BKSL. Before the dreams could be materialized, Bangabandhu along with most of family members were brutally killed on August 15, 1975—allegedly as part of intricate local and global conspiracy. The killers thought Bangladesh would once again become Pakistan and AL would be uprooted. The conscious citizens of the country, however, foiled such conspiracy. The able daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Hasina came to power to fulfill her father's dream of Golden

Bengal. The visionary outline of political reform as presented in the election manifesto reflected the will of the people.

Historically, the shackles of slavery and colonial rule had subjected "Bongal" to humiliation and trivialization. Under the dynamic leadership of Bangabandhu, Bangladesh earned its self-esteem and proved its real power and potential to the world. Since he is the one who sculpted the freedom of the nation, we call him the Father of the Nation. In India there is Mahatma Gandhi; in America, there is George Washington, and in Turkey, there is Kemal Ataturk. Bangabandhu is our Father of the Nation.

Bangabandhu was born on March 17, 1920. The birth of the nation and the birth of this luminary individual are intertwined. He is the true icon of our nation. Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu!

Professor Abdul Khaleque [former Vice Chancellor, Rajshahi University]

Translation: Dr. Shamsad Mortuza.

**Bangabandhu and the Historic Mango Tree**

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In 1972 Bangabandhu called upon the people to plant trees at the adjoining areas of roads and highways, at the nook and corner of houses and on fallow lands. He knew that trees with timber value would grow in the forest. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has also urged the people to plant fruit trees. Once, Bangladesh was one of the main mango producing countries in the world. Then there was not much population in the East Bengal. Today, Bangladesh's position as a mango producing country is perhaps fifth or sixth. Per capita mango production is about 1.5 kilogram.

Again, surprisingly enough the mango tree has become our national tree. It is learnt from the ancient Buddhist literature of two thousand and a half years back that the mango tree is a natural tree of the Himalaya - Bangla - Myanmar region. The mango tree has been declared the national tree by the present government of Sheikh Hasina.

Bangabandhu then studied in Gimadanga G T School. His class mate and childhood friend Syed Nurul Haq writes, 'just see the Jamrul tree, we used to play together under it, we also had its fruits. There was blackberry tree at this side. We used to have blackberries climbing on it. We played "Swim and Dive" game in the lake. We had our golden childhood and you can easily realize how deep the attention to games and sports was during childhood!'

Bangabandhu's paternal Uncle Sheikh Mosharof Hossain, maternal uncle Sheikh Ashraf Haq and Syed Nurul Haq played football very well. Bangabandhu was also a good sportsman. Having been recovered from beriberi disease Bangabandhu had a good return to sports. He became the football captain during his Mission School time. He got seriously involved in the Student Muslim League. He collected fund and begged handful of rice from door to door for helping the students. He worked as volunteers in agricultural fairs. He used to bring his football team in different places and took part in football competitions.

I took the photograph of the mango tree of Bangabandhu on 20 July 1999. I have seen the festival of thousands of fireflies in the Hizal and mango tree bushes at the darkness of night after the functions of local child artists and cultural workers.

While walking on the east side of the new road towards Bangabandhu's monument I became astonished. The pond and the homestead still lie prominently at the left side. The century - old Hizal trees are standing one by one around the pond. There are short trees with wide small and thick branches. They are, as it were, "Bonshai" in the natural environment. Five or six 'honorable' mango trees- the play mates of Bangabandhu's childhood are also seen scattered. There is delicate pond with bushes nearby. At night the fireflies sing the psalm of life keeping their lights on and off. Do they celebrate anybody's birthday with festivity? What would happen if this lovely environment continues for ever! The gateway has been made wide and high through earth filling. On the road there are some small trees along with 5-6 old Hizal. Later, I came to know that these Hizal trees would remain there. My skin pores started dancing in excitement. In today's world living with nature in villages, suburbs and cities is the expectation of all irrespective of naturalists and thoughtful minds.

I wonder one decade later now whether Bangabandhu's contemporary mango tree is still there! I saw huge parasitic plants on it. Bangladesh is also getting stuck with many "parasites". Our feelings and emotions are becoming blunt day by day. I could not manage to go to Gopalganj after 1999. I know the brick-built Tungipara ghat where once the business boats anchored still exists there. What about the one or two coconut trees which were even older than Bangabandhu? Are they still there? Bangabandhu had limitless affection for trees, people and nature. Should not we accept his lesson?

Long live Bangabandhu ! Long live the mango tree, the hizal tree and the fireflies in our memory!!

Translation : Nasrin Alam

**From Khoka to Father of the Nation**

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He began to realize that the liberty of mass people is achievable through the participation in political activities. The childhood, adolescence and early youth of Sheikh Mujib were spent during the reign of the English. He witnessed the miserable condition of the villages during the English rule. He got himself involved in the active politics to drive away the English. The three chief reasons which urged Sheikh Mujib to get himself involved in the politics are: i) to liberate the country from the subjugation to the English, ii) to stop oppression of the feudal lords and the land lords on the poor tenants and iii) to eliminate sorrows and miseries of the helpless general people.

India was partitioned on August 14, 1947. Sheikh Mujib returned to Dhaka, the capital of East Pakistan. On 25 February 1948, the Prime Minister of Pakistan Liaquat Ali Khan proclaimed in the constituent assembly, Pakistan is a muslim state and the state language of Pakistan shall be Urdu only, not any other language. On March 21, 1948 in the Racecourse field of Dhaka's Ramna (currently known as Suhrawardi Udyan) and three days later on March 24 at the convocation of the University of Dhaka, the Governor General of Pakistan Mohammad Ali Jinnah also declared- 'Urdu and Urdu shall be the only state language of Pakistan, no other language.'

It becomes easier to deprive the people from their political, social and cultural rights if they can be deprived from the right to their own mother language. This understanding prompted the young political leader Sheikh Mujib to get himself involved in the state language movement. He became rebellious against the

Pakistani rulers as he did against the English.

Henceforth, Sheikh Mujib participated in and gave leadership to all the movements including the movements for state language, autonomy and finally the Independence. He was imprisoned in different terms for fourteen years. The rulers in the face of fierce mass protest, had to lift the Agartala conspiracy case and release Sheikh Mujib on 22 February, 1969. On the following day February 23, two millions of people in the Racecourse field decorated him with the Bangabandhu title.

The first general election was held in the country in 1970. The Awami League under the leadership of Sheikh Mujib won absolute majority by bagging 98 per cent votes. But the rulers refused to hand over the power. Bangabandhu called the movement of noncooperation. On March 7, 1971 in the vast public meeting at the Racecourse field in Ramna, Dhaka, he declared, 'the struggle of this time is the struggle for our freedom, the struggle of this time is the struggle for our Independence.'

On March 25 night the Pakistani rulers started mass killing in the country. Bangabandhu gave declaration of Independence just immediately before his arrest. The nine-month long liberation war was waged in the name of Bangabandhu while he was interned the prison cells of Pakistan. Bangladesh became free from the enemies on December 16, 1971 after a long war of nine months. Three millions people were martyred in our war of liberation. Bangabandhu returned home on January 10, 1972 after being freed from the prison in Pakistan.

On returning Home, Bangabandhu found his golden Bangla has been turned into a totally devastated land. The country was beset with innumerable problems. The occupation forces killed not only the three millions of people, but also burned the shops, houses and crops. The occupation force turned the country into a waste land. The road communication was shattered and the transports were destroyed. The occupation forces also plundered the currencies, gold and valuables from the banks. In short, the total economy of the country was destroyed. In spite of all these problems, Bangabandhu was not shaken - he started rebuilding the country in a planned way.

Translated by Saleh Ahmed Shelley

**The Heart Dweller**

Asad Mannan

Madhumati dips deep under endless darkness  
Who will salvage her and take her to the wedding bed in Meghna?  
Fields after fields echo the hungry outcry of the vultures  
Who will drive away the predators from the sky of Bengal?  
Thousands of years have slipped simply in waiting  
Somewhere a fire-child dreams of the full moon:  
With voice of thunder He returns to the weary world;  
With deep love for His motherland  
He wanders through the forest and collects stardust in millions  
Was there anyone like Him? ...None that we know of.  
The stars above and the flowers below watch with wonder  
How the child pieces together the stardust and forms  
The red ball of liberty

|| 2 ||

The navel of the earth has yielded crops for centuries  
The fertile mindscape is rippled by the rise of Madhumati  
The full moon of Jatin babu rises behind the bamboo bush  
The exiled full moon prostrates on the prayer mat and cries  
While the bleeding hearts join in the festive freedom  
From the charred soil they dream of the fabled future-  
The land will be filled in with crops of light  
The tales of freedom will blazon in its own right  
The young girl wears red sun on her forehead  
Holds a bunch of roses and of keys of the household:  
With fire in eyes, the young man approaches the tents of clouds  
The silts embalm his eyes and seduces him to slumber  
The injured love returns to the den of dreams  
The sultan of love kisses the river as if it is his lover

|| 3 ||

The bold boy survives the sea  
His old ship floats like a turtle and moves forward  
Dwindling in darkness  
Its dock is filled with hungry islanders  
The lamp offers rays of hope, of work.  
The hungry souls howl in the damaged city—  
Where death traps are everywhere...  
For the boy finds everything appears trivial though;  
The thundering voice roars: Joy Bangla.  
What a delightful memory. The floodgate of freedom changes the  
dreamscape:

The boy is no longer a boy; the savior of the nation hands him a colorful  
sword; its sheath is charmed by the blood sworn oath and guided by the  
promise of  
Some distant milky-way

|| 4 ||

The barren mountain lays wide open in Kadamtoli, as evening sets  
The rickety rail whistles through the debris  
And moves into a town that promises to be changed soon  
The father-god will do magic  
The boy braces to face the sea with deltaic dream  
The boy enters the race-course through the gates of the sun  
Father stands atop: Fear not oh boy, victory is ours!  
You are my son  
The boy remembers the indestructible instruction:  
Return now, enough of bloodshed. No more blood for blood...go back home.  
Spread the sky, not with blues, but with the hues of your flag  
Soothe the stains of your mother  
Through words of love and unity.

|| 5 ||

Then suddenly history hits the abyss. The growing boy's  
Eyes are blinded by some murderers  
The holy shrine of the nation suddenly becomes the  
brothel for floating creatures.  
Shame! Where can I hide my shame?  
The invisible hands keep on writing  
the tale of the father and the dirge on the damned doomed city.  
The ditties soak the dale of consciousness:  
Yet March 17 let the magpie of hope fly in the sky.  
Everybody dies. Some lives on.  
Just like there is one sun in the sky  
There is just one father god in the land of mine

|| 6 ||

The stream of light is haunted by the assassin dark moon  
It flows on: the city that fails to save its father, now puts on a new pledge  
Those who were living life-in-death for thirty-three years  
And hiding the word 'freedom' has now come to the isthmus  
To clear the fog and to relive the love for the country  
In songs of Tagore  
Who lights the fire in the heart?...ye dream bird,  
Aloft and awaken the dead river below  
The curses of the damned city need to be lifted. The children  
Have come from the Children park to unearth the suppressed glory of the  
nation. They will  
Rescue their father with hues of the flag  
And make him dwell in their hearts.

Dr. Shamsad Mortuza