

Spirit of Ekushey February

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EVERY year Ekushey February comes to us showering over us that sense of 'reliving' in an era when you think, write, dress and behave like a Bangali. For a month we are engaged in certain activities that take place only this month. Boi Mela and other cultural activities, workshops, award giving ceremonies, celebrating Ekushey February in schools, colleges, universities etc is practised by the young and old to pay respect to the sacrifice made by the sons of this country who did not hesitate to lay down their lives for the love of their language and motherland under hostile circumstances.

The Boi Mela, from the first day of February, is not only a fair for highlighting new publications, awarding writers or measuring the popularity of a writer, young or old, bold or timid, experienced or naive. It is a celebration of the identity of a nation. A nation that can hold on to so much of love and respect for its language, its culture and tradition, its music and literature, its art and lifestyle, its love for its people, for a month has the potential to take it to a level unimaginable by many. It is possible to have the model

Bangladesh we have dreamed of for years on. A Bangladesh where no one will go hungry, where there will be no injustice, no class discrimination, where there will be plenty in the fields, a Bangladesh where everyone will help everyone. We dream of a Bangladesh where honesty, integrity, honour and self dignity and dedication will be the soul of the nation.

As February sets in we get busy with superficial activities that is confined only to this month. We fail to take these practices and preachings beyond the activities of this month, as a nation as we haven't ever stopped and searched for our soul. It is retained and to some extent revived in March, and again in December, but by only those related to the Liberation War. Where and in who do we search for, in identifying the soul of our nation when our political leaders seem to be devoid of a soul. If SQC is considered by a political party to be so important for inclusion as a member for the party's participation in the parliament, if Ershad can still ramble as he has shown with audacity recently, as when certain reports in the newspaper shocks us and makes us wonder why it has happened, we

certainly must look into our selves and into the soul of our nation on which our identity exists.

A nation that has been born out of so much of bloodshed, rape, looting, burning down of village after village, insurmountable sufferings experienced by old and young alike, indiscriminate killings of the innocent and the intellectuals, humiliation met at the hands of Pakistani soldiers in every possible place; could not have emerged without a soul. So much of blood could not have just gone in vain.

The nation has been experiencing the acts of the 'evil geni' since the repatriation took place. The father of the nation with his family members and many others just perished in a series of events that followed over a long period. The machinations are still active. Through some of their speech and action they remind us of their role in the past and gives a warning for the future. This nation that celebrates Ekushey February with such pomp and fervour needs to be more vigilant, needs to retain and regain its identity.

The soul of a nation lies in the quality of the people. The quality of the people decides

the quality of the leaders. When the people are given incorrect lessons through wrong practices by powerful quarters, the very ordinary and innocent begin to have wrong values, becomes unethical morally and culturally. Since this practice has been going on by majority of the powerful quarters for decades, we have a sorry plight ahead.

There are citizens who are working unselfishly to bring back that sense of dignity and honour to the people in the nation. The younger generation has taken the lead role to correct our unfulfilled task and hopefully more will join hands. Our responsibility right now is to have role models for these dedicated enthusiasts. Let us not push them to frustration and force them to compromise.

The basic requirement in the character of an individual right now is respect and honour, humility, honesty and integrity. These qualities are inherent and needs to be nurtured. In no way can we make the mistake of putting in front of our youngsters: liars and imposters as leaders of tomorrow.

A nation that had a high illiteracy rate, problem with population and poverty,

could yet boast of strong moral principles. Its older generation had wisdom and helped the youngsters learn about religious teachings, ethics and morals. But that was yesterday. In today's Bangladesh we have to sit down and do some soul searching to get back our true 'self'. For this we must instill in the minds of our citizens the traits of a true Bangali, not only in February or in Pohela Baishakh but through practising good moral character as a Bangali throughout the year. Let us all work with honesty and dedication, let us truly love this land, its people and language and be proud Bangladeshis.

In an age when transparency is the prerequisite for survival, when a word, an action or a wrong decision is recorded for future analysis, when nations are taking decisions through technology, let all Bangalis separate themselves from greed, arrogance and pride. On Ekushey February let our leaders show us what the force of unity in a nation can help attain for its people. Let the spirit of Ekushey February be alive throughout the year.

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PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

The songs of Ekushey

SADYA AFREEN MALICK

I tried to catch a glimpse of the bright shimul tree at the crossroads of Tejgaon industrial area as our car sped by. The blood shot clusters of shimul stood against the shrivelled tree, which held the flowers in its bosom. The month of Falgun, (spring) February is back. It is the time when Rokto shimul topto polash, Ei polash ei Krishnachura, O kokil re and many other songs on Ekushey were written centring around this tree.

It was a time when people were seen frequenting the Shaheed Minar during the pre-dawn bustle. Times may have changed since then, but the poignant memories of that era are still fresh in our mind. As midnight struck, the Shaheed Minar soon turned into an endless sea of emotons.

Veterans of the Language Movement, families, teachers, siblings arm-in-arm, the slow march to the Shaheed Minar continued throughout the day. The stage would take on a different look as barefoot people streamed by with flowers in hand. Even the glistening teardrop dew on the leaves seemed like an extension of the collective grief--as if nature herself was bowing down to honour the spirit of the martyrs.

In no time, the foot of the Shaheed Minar would be covered in mountains of flowers. Despite the massive conglomeration of people, there would be no jostling, no conversation--the only sound would be that of soft petals being gently swept aside.

Ekushey itself is of course the culmination of a month-long programme. Artists would gather at the altar every

evening with poems, skits, drama and songs. The first song of Ekushey composed by Mosharrafuddin Ahmed on February 24, 1952, Mrittuke jara tuchcho korilo bhasha bachabar torey, a song by Abdul Latif Ora amar mukher kotha kaira nitey chay, composed in 1952, Bhulbona shei Ekushey February bhulbona written spontaneously by Language Movement veteran Gaziul Haque in 1952, are sadly by and large unheard nowadays.

During pre-Liberation times, rehearsals on Ekushey were rather comprehensive and often continued for a month at Chhayanaut. Wahidul Huque, our esteemed teacher, would stress on the inner meaning of the songs while teaching the patriotic songs of Tagore. The songs seemed to spring to life as Sheikh Luthfur Rahman, the

composer of several timeless songs, infused heroic sentiments in the songs. *Himalay thekey Shundorbon hothath Bangladesh* by Sukanta Bhattacharya, *Phul khelbar din noi oddo* by Subash Mukhopadhyay, *Jonotar shongram cholbei* by Sikandar Abu Zafar were amongst his brilliant compositions. We as students never failed to become totally captivated by the moods of such songs. There were other unforgettable moments as well when eminent artist Quamrul Hasan performed the songs by Guru Shodoy Dutt and imbued us with the spirit of love for our motherland.

Dr Anisur Rahman, an economist, and an ardent music lover would at regular intervals teach us at Chhayanaut. Eminent composer Abdul Ahad and singer Kalim Sharafi as visiting teachers would teach us

other compositions as well. *Obak prithibi/Obak korley amaye*, Kalim Sharafi would often perform the song with devotion. Golam Mustafa recited Sikandar Abu Zafar's Tumi Bangla chhoro with passion. Zahedur Rahim and Sanjida Khatun apart from music lessons gave us guidelines on Bangladeshi culture.

One can only wish that whenever Ekushey February comes around, it only re-affirms our sense of patriotism, draws people, young and old, once more to the Shaheed Minar. One can only wish for those age-old songs to reverberate once more and revitalise the spirit of Ekushey. One can only wish that the lives of so many patriots were not lost in vain.

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