

Two reviews from Syed Badrul Ahsan

Tales of a protean soul...

When Azizur Rahman Mallick took charge as Bangladesh's first high commissioner to India soon after the War of Liberation in 1971, the move was correctly seen as an endeavour by the government of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to project the new country in a properly intellectual light before the world. Mallick did not have a diplomatic background, in that professional sense. But, as so often happens in history when mondipomats are sent to speak abroad for their countries, Mallick proved the truism once again that scholars are almost always symbolic of their national heritage and history in the capitals they are sent to. And do not forget that Mallick served as Bangladesh's top diplomat at a time when it was necessary to let Indians, and others, know that a nation put to the torch by the Pakistan army through a nine-month war was finally ready, politically as well as intellectually, to claim its place in the global league. Mallick remained in touch with the Indian leadership, notably President V.V. Giri, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and everyone who mattered in Delhi's policy-making. Added to that was the confidence Bangabandhu had placed in him where speaking up for Bangladesh before the diverse sections of Indian society was concerned.

The War of Liberation was certainly a defining moment for every Bengali in that it reshaped perspectives and redefined perceptions insofar as the Bangladesh ethos was concerned. Mallick was one of those men who played a direct role in the war. As part of the nation's think tank, it was his

job to convince nations abroad that there was certainly an intellectual dimension to the Bengali struggle. He and others banded together in exile, thereby convincing people abroad that the struggle for Bangladesh was infinitely larger than everyday politics. That an entire nation had come together in the defence of liberty was a point Mallick hammered away at day after day as part of the Mujibnagar government structure. That was part of his persona. And it is this persona which now rises to the surface once more through this commemorative volume on him. As with every such volume, it demonstrates the nature and the number of lives he touched in a career which appeared to be shifting, almost pendulum-like and in that certain transformational way, from one to the other end.

The career was of course grounded in teaching. That was what he set out to do in the early stages, going all the way to a point where he became a pivotal force in the setting up of Chittagong University in the later 1960s. Those were interesting, albeit parlous times. The scholar in Mallick was unwilling to let Abdul Monem Khan, the Ayub loyalist serving as governor of East Pakistan at the time, patronize him. Monem was quite aware of where he stood in Mallick's scheme of things, but he had --- and this may seem rather surprising --- that ability too of knowing where intelligence and common sense lay. Mallick's commonsense approach to academe convinced the governor and all those who mattered in the state at the time that he could deliver. And deliver Mallick did, through

Chittagong University. On inauguration day, he made it clear that while the governor, as chancellor, would properly be there to set things into motion, none of his ministers could expect a place on the dais.

This commemorative volume rekindles memories of the man, through the eyes of colleagues and acquaintances and family. Prof. Salahuddin Ahmed speaks of Mallick with deep affection, noting that Mallick had already made an impression on his British teacher, the historian C.H. Philips, when Ahmed met Philips in July 1953. Philips, then with the School of Oriental and African Studies, made it a point to inform Ahmed, when the latter met him, of a thesis Mallick had written. To Philips, that thesis was an instance of excellent scholarship. That is what you cannot say about many people. The friendship between Salahuddin Ahmed and A.R. Mallick was soon to take off. And since both were scholars, it was inevitable that the friendship would come to rest on some strong intellectual foundations. Years later, towards the end of 1975 to be precise, it was Ahmed who would propose that Mallick be taken on board at Jahangirnagar University as an expert in research-oriented work. The proposal was accepted with pleasing alacrity.

That said, Zillur Rahman Siddiqui has reason to feel that Mallick's final days were sad, 'sad for him and sad for us who knew him and loved him.' The sadness is not hard to comprehend. Mallick, appointed minister for finance in 1974 upon the departure of Tajuddin Ahmed, was within months caught up in the



Dr. A.R. Mallick Smarokgrantha
Eds Salahuddin Ahmed, Anisuzzaman,
Atul Hye Shibly
Editorial Associate
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tragedy that would put an end to the lives of Bangabandhu, his family and the four leaders of the Mujibnagar government. Mallick was one of the ministers compelled to remain part of the administration when Khondokar Moshtaque seized power in August 1975. You could put the question as to why he did not refuse to have anything to do with the usurper regime. The answer would be hard to come by, for every member of Bangabandhu's government (with the exception of the Mujibnagar leaders, who would soon be incarcerated, and Kamal Hossain, who was abroad) would be compelled to stick with the

murderous regime at gunpoint. The ailing Phani Bhushan Majumdar was simply picked up from hospital and driven to Bangabhaban to be administered a fresh oath of office by the usurper president.

In his memoirs, Mallick relives those dangerous times, interspersed as they were with the comical. At his first cabinet meeting the day after Bangabandhu's assassination, the only item of business Moshtaque is interested in is the matter of a new national dress code. Obviously, he expects the dress to be what he has been wearing over the previous few years --- an achkan-like coat with trousers, topped with a skullcap. The times were truly out of joint. They threatened to turn into yet more unmitigated disaster in early November 1975, when Brigadier Khaled Musharraf mounted his own coup to get Moshtaque and the assassin major-colonels out of the way. That also spelt the end of Mallick's stint as a minister, a happenstance he quite cherished. But there was the immense sadness which remained. The scholar's restlessness was all pervasive and might have turned all consuming had Mallick not gone into newer exploration. He founded the National Bank and for the remainder of his life appeared to be making it his mission to transform the institution into a viable economic proposition.

Smarokgrantha is a tribute to an individual called upon to carry out a diversity of responsibilities at certain crossroads in Bangladesh's history. He trained the young in Rajshahi, saw to it that Chittagong finally had a university, gave a touch of grace and

sophistication to Bangladesh's diplomacy as high commissioner to India, confidently stepped into the role of finance minister following the resignation of the formidable Tajuddin Ahmed, agonized through the sinister Moshtaque darkness and then found a new niche in banking. The memories come from such individuals as Anisuzzaman, Ajoy Roy, AMA Muhith, Mustafa Nurul Islam, Sardar Amjad Hossain, Abdul Mannan and a host of others. That Mallick touched lives across the country is a tale which bubbles forth from the pages of this work. Azizur Rahman Mallick understood the workings of history, became part of it in a way few have been able to.

Mallick's sense of societal realities approximated the prescient. Speaking at Chittagong University on 27 March 1990, he warned of the dangers about to visit the land if nothing was done to roll them back:

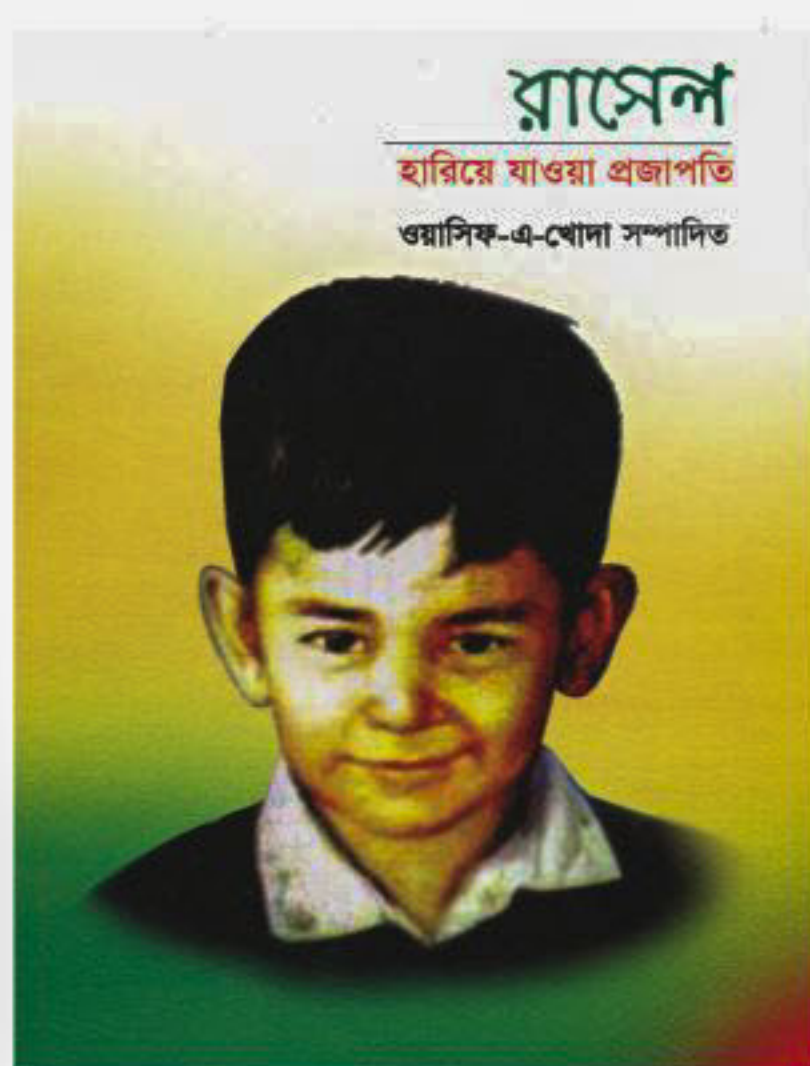
Those of us who in this country go for ill-gotten wealth or illegitimate seizure of power only help the process of the educated and uneducated employed alike taking to criminality. In these present circumstances, the swift proliferation of corruption is pushing the nation and society towards doom. And with all that has come the question of the modalities of elections and people's lack of faith in the administration. All around us lie scattered the scandalous contributions of many to this malaise. And that is a natural image of a society weighed down by affliction.

For all one knows, A.R. Mallick could well be ringing that warning bell for us today, twenty two years after he actually spoke the words.

... The murder of Bangabandhu's little child

Religion and all manner of decency do not allow you to take the life of an individual. And if the life taken happens to be that of a child, it is sin in its most sinister form that you commit. Such sin was committed on 15 August 1975 when the killer-soldiers, who had just murdered Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his wife Fazilatunnesa, his sons Kamal and Jamal, his daughters-in-law Sultana and Rosy and his brother Sheikh Naser, led his youngest child, the ten-year old Russell, past the bodies strewn all across the home of the Father of the Nation and then shot him in cold blood. Within seconds, the assassins were ululating, cheerfully informing their fellow assassins, then engaged in finishing off the families of Abdur Rab Serniabat and Sheikh Fazlul Haq Moni, that the mission had been accomplished. Grievously has Bangladesh paid for that crime. And etched powerfully on the collective conscience has been the tragedy which laid us low in August 1975, to a point where even today, despite the trial and execution of five of Bangabandhu's killers, the pangs of shame overwhelm us in our dealings with ourselves and with the rest of the world. This sad work, emotionally and yet superbly edited by Wasif-e-Khuda, tells the story of Russell. In a larger sense, it speaks of the story of

Bangladesh's most famous political family. This family has suffered terribly and continues to be under threat of death from those who have not reconciled themselves to the truth of Bangladesh. With Bangabandhu spending nearly his entire youth in prison, because of the nationalism he brought forth in his practice of politics, the family was almost always under government surveillance. Members of the extended clan, during the turbulent years of Pakistan, avoided visiting the Mujib residence for fear they could be suspected of treason through association with the rising Bengali nationalist politician. The Pakistan army always made sure that Mujib and his family did not come by the serenity families were supposed to have in normal circumstances. In March 1971, with Bangabandhu taken prisoner by the soldiers, his family was put through humiliation for nine excruciating months in an isolated residence on Dhanmondi Road 18. The Pakistan army, in the end, could not put Bangabandhu to death. The biggest irony for us, though, is that the Father of the Nation and his family died at the hands of the soldiers of the Bangladesh army. That is the shame. And the memory of the macabre death of the bright young child Russell is a shame. When Sheikh Hasina writes



Russell
Hariye Jaowa Projapati
Ed Wasif-E-Khuda
Islamic Foundation

about her youngest sibling, speaks of the first time she held him in her arms only moments into his birth in 1964, we are all enveloped in shame. It was this baby who would have bullets pierce his child's heart by men whom we can only hate, and then hate even more. He wished to be taken to his mother. He was taken past the corpse of his mother and the corpses of the others in his family, in stark medieval fashion, and

murdered in barbarian manner. There was history at work here, only evil. This was a child who had not had much of a father's presence in his life, for Mujib was constantly making the rounds of prison. Every time the family visited Mujib in prison, little Russell would refuse to leave without his father. He would be told by his siblings that the prison was his father's house and he needed to stay there. When Bangabandhu was freed following the withdrawal of the Agartala case in February 1969, as Sheikh Hasina informs readers, Russell would interrupt his games at home and repeatedly take a look inside the room to make sure his father was there. In later years, when Bangladesh had emerged as a free republic, Bangabandhu's first act on returning home from Ganobhavan was to look for Russell. The child, together with Sheikh Rehana, accompanied the Father of the Nation on a visit to Japan in October 1973. The Japanese authorities devised a separate set of programmes for Russell. Happiness was writ large on the face of the child, lovingly named after the reputed philosopher Bertrand Russell. In an important way, naming his youngest child after the philosopher was indicative of Bangabandhu's philosophical interests. Add to that his forays into literature. On the final night

of his life, he spent a good length of time reading George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*. It was a regular practice with him to note down statements from the famous he thought made sense. Family life was something that made sense to Bangabandhu. In his absence, he knew, his wife would carry the burden, and she did. When Russell constantly asked to be taken to his father, Fazilatunnesa told him to call her 'abba'. He did. And yet there was the obvious fact that he simply did not understand why his father was in prison, if indeed he knew that it was a prison. Hasina and Rehana loved him to distraction. Hasina speaks with deep emotion of the time when Russell learned to walk. Having spent days holding his sister's hand and tiptoeing along the verandah, he suddenly began, one fine day, to walk on his own. Hasina watched him wobble up the front veranda, go right into the inner passage of the house and walk on. His sister's cheerful screams brought everyone out. They watched the child walk, the baby whom Hasina describes as 'nadush-nudush' --- roly-poly. Kamal and Jamal would often simply lift him up and play games with him. In the early hours of 26 March 1971, Bangabandhu was feeding a dozing Russell milk from a bottle when a bullet fired by Pakistan's soldiers pieced the

window and landed near the bed. Bangabandhu picked up his child and put him down on the floor, the better to make sure the bullets did not hit him. Moments later, he was on his way to incarceration and to an uncertain future. Russell would have gone with Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana to Germany in July 1975, but a jaundice attack earlier precluded his accompanying his sisters. Hasina's agony turns vicarious: this little child would be alive had he gone away with his sisters. The story of Russell, indeed of the entire Mujib family, is a painfully modern playing out of tragedy, Greek as well as Shakespearean. Alive, Russell always hovered around his mother. Moments before his murder, he wished to be taken to his mother. And, as Rahat Khan tells us in searing manner, he has lain close to his mother all these years. They remain united in their graves. Where are the soldiers, those unleashed wolf-like on Bangabandhu's family, who put a bullet through Russell's heart, perhaps through his head? Couldn't it be that the beast-man who made Russell walk past the bodies of his family before shooting him is yet alive, grows old somewhere? Couldn't a search be made for this assassin?

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The rights issue

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was established by the National Human Rights Commission Act 2009 to bridge the people, deprived of rights or victims of violation of rights, with the State. The reconstituted Commission has been working since June 23, 2010. Since its inception, the NHRC's main concern has been to see a human rights culture created in society. The Commission believes that to ensure the dignity of human beings, full realization of human rights is essential and to that end a culture of human rights is necessary in every sphere of the society.

The need for a publication relating to a filing of complaints to the NHRC has been felt because of the requirement of a guideline on how the NHRC can work as a bridge between the State and the stakeholders or people deprived of their rights. Therefore, it can be said that this publication, as a guideline, is the first step toward the fulfillment of this necessity.

This publication is a practical handbook on filing complaints before the NHRC. Those who wish to know about the complaint procedure of the NHRC, especially those who are in need of filing complaints before the Commission directly, will benefit from this

publication. Considering the various spheres of society, simplicity has been prioritized in the use of language. But Ain O Salish Kendra does not claim a hundred percent success in this work. That evaluation is for the users of it to make. ASK expects opinions from users, which it will consider for the second edition of this work.

A number of methods have been followed in this publication considering selection of issues, use of language, etc. As a first step, the author of this handbook has behind him long experience of working as a human rights activist and has also closely worked with the NHRC. Sayeed Ahmad first prepared a list of contents upon discussion with the staff members of Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK). Then a sharing meeting was held on the draft contents of the publication with representatives of some non-governmental organizations in the presence of Dr. Mizanur Rahman, the chairman, and Neerupa Dewan, one of the members of the NHRC. A good bunch of suggestions emerging from that discussion have enriched the contents of this publication. Next, the draft handbook was prepared and shared with taskforce members, different professionals, CBOs in twelve districts of the country (Sirajganj,



Jatiyo Manobadhikar Commission-e Dayer
Manobadhikar Kormir Byaboharik Pustika
Ain O Salish Kendra

Gaibandha, Kishoreganj, Netrakona, Mymensingh, Naogaon, Joypurhat, Jhenidah, Pabna, Kushtia, Rajshahi, Sunamganj) with the assistance of grassroots partner organizations of ASK i.e. Manabadhikar Nari Samaj (MNS, organization of women leaders), Manabadhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad (MSP, organization of local opinion leaders, including men and women), Manabadhikar Ainjibi

Parishad (MAP, organization of local pro-bono lawyers) and members of local partner organizations. Opinion was gathered through a survey on the simplicity of the language of the manual, ease of understanding, and coherence of language with the illustrations, etc. Based on all the opinions gathered, almost a final version of the handbook had been prepared. At the end, it was finalized by incorporating the suggestions of the chairman, other members and concerned officials of the NHRC.

ASK already has formed a taskforce with 108 members of the community organizations from 12 districts. In total 36 persons, three from each district, have been nominated as focal persons for the task force. These 36 focal persons will be trained on the institutional structure of the NHRC, complaint procedure of the Commission and will be instructed on how to use the handbook practically. These members of the taskforce will systematically record the incidents of human rights violations in their respective areas and will send them to the NHRC.

Divided into four chapters, the publication contains in its first chapter some concepts regarding human rights, such as rights, responsibilities of the State and citizens in order to ensure human

rights. The second chapter underscores the powers and mandate of the National Human Rights Commission. The main part of this publication is the third chapter. In this part different aspects of filing complaints before the Commission have been explained through illustrations and conversations with questions. In the last part of the publication some important documents, including the biography of each member of the Commission, the National Human Rights Commission Act 2009, the 'form' for filing complaints in the Commission have been annexed.

Violations of human rights have been taking place in a continuous manner in Bangladesh. The violations have not been stopped yet by the legal machinery of the State; it is expected that this handbook will play an important role in strengthening the modes of realization of human rights. Human rights defenders can have a clear idea about their work by using this handbook. At the same time, people at large will know about the procedure of filing complaints before the Commission. As a result, the task of filing a complaint before the Commission following proper procedure will be relatively easier and more expeditious.

Health matters

This book tells the story of a package of public health interventions aimed at improving the quality of care of informal village doctors. The intervention took place in Chakaria, a rural area in rural Bangladesh, where village doctors are a major group of informal healthcare providers practising and dispensing modern medicines. Quite often, the drugs they dispense are inappropriate or even harmful.

Previous work from ICDDR,B established village doctors as an important player in Bangladesh's healthcare system, as they are often the first port of call for the rural poor. Considering this importance and the huge shortfall of a formally trained health workforce in the country, there is a clear need to improve the quality of the services offered by these semi-trained village doctors.

In response, a team of ICDDR,B researchers tested a package of interventions, which included training of the village doctors, establishing a community watch for improved accountability and establishing branded franchise of better trained village doctors.

This book chronicles the background to and design of the interventions, examines its outcomes, and outlines how lessons learnt have informed new approaches to improving the services of village doctors.

