

Special Supplement

National Mourning Day

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Some Words on The Unfinished Memoirs by Bangabandhu

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His father was never opposed to his son's involvement with politics. He rather encouraged him by saying, "Son, I have no objections to you engaging in politics; that you are participating in the movement to attain Pakistan is also a good thing; but please don't neglect your studies. If you don't study you won't become a good human being. And one other thing: if you have sincerity of purpose and honesty of purpose you will never be defeated in life." (p.22). Bangabandhu has indeed remained true to his father's words. Until his last breath, he had worked 'sincerely' for the betterment of his country and its people. He never got tempted or intimidated by any local or foreign power or threats.

When the news of Mujib's involvement with anti-government activities for establishing mass people's rights became known, a group of community leaders accosted his father Sheikh Lutfur Rahman and warned that Mujib bhai might be jailed. In response, Lutfur Rahman said: "He is working for our country. He isn't doing anything wrong, is he?

If he has to go to jail in the process, let him. That won't sadden me. And his life won't perhaps be ruined either. I certainly won't interfere. I believe that if we don't attain Pakistan Muslims will be wiped out." (p.22). A father such as Mujib's is rare in our society. Needless to say, without the encouragement received from his father, it would have been impossible for a boy from Tungipara to evolve into the father of a nation.

The memoir has repeatedly brought forward an all-enduring great lady who was disinterested in publicity. She was involved with all the political activities, despite she kept her behind the scenes. Although she was an intensely emotional person, she hardly displayed her emotion in public. This lady is Bangabandhu's life-partner Sheikh Fazlunnissa Mujib Renu. Personally, I have known her for a long time. Every time I went to Mujib bhai's house, I was amazed by Renu bhabhi's warmth and generosity. Renu bhabhi had lost her father at the age of three and her mother at the age of five; so had I (Md Zillur Rahman). Hence I could feel her state of mind.

Bangabandhu's commitment to his country and people led him to years of imprisonment. As a result, Renu bhabhi had to suffer immensely with two of her children. She had never made any complaint though; she made an exception when Bangabandhu went on a hunger strike. Her plea was not to convince Bangabandhu to waive his duty to the country and to become a family person, but to remain alive to dedicate himself in building the country. "Why did you go on a hunger strike? Do these people have any compassion? Didn't you think for a moment about us? Can you imagine what would happen to us without you? How would I survive with two little children? What would happen to Hasina and Kamal? You might say that even without you, we wouldn't starve. But is that all one wants? And even if you had died would it have helped the country in any way?" Commenting on his wife's outburst on that day, Bangabandhu wrote: "I kept quiet. I let her go on knowing that if we can give vent to pent-up emotions we would feel better. Renu was usually very composed but that day a dam seemed to have burst and words came out of her in torrents." (p.207).

Behind each success and event of Bangabandhu, including the writing of the memoir, the presence of Sheikh Fazlunnissa is felt. This is mentioned at the very beginning of the memoirs - "My wife told me one day while sitting with me in a room within the jail gate, 'Since you are idle, write about your life now.' (p.1). Bangabandhu further said, "Renu, my wife, had bought me some notebooks and left them for me with my jailers. They had vetted them and then allowed me to keep them. Renu too reminded me once more what I should do with them. And so this day I have started to write my memoir." (p.1). I would like to extend my gratitude to Renu bhabhi, on behalf of 15 crore people, whose insistence resulted in the compilation of this book. Otherwise, these untold stories would have remained unheard of.

Bangabandhu's political idol was Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy. For him "Mr. Suhrawardy was a generous man. There was no meanness in him and he wasn't influenced by partisan feelings or prejudices. He did not believe in cliques or coterie and did not try to work through factions. If he found someone eligible he would trust him fully. He had tremendous self-belief. He tried to win men's hearts through his honesty, principles, energy and efficiency. But his personality was also the reason he suffered humiliation and defeat again and again. It is good to be generous but if you are too nice when dealing with mean people both the country and the people will suffer in the end." (p.51).

Dear Father, you are right to point out that Shaheed sahib was humiliated and defeated due to the generosity he had shown towards a mean-minded person such as Khawaja Nazimuddin. Consequently, the whole nation suffered. Your decision to embrace your enemies has brought in similar results. The mean-minded individuals took advantage of your large heartedness and stigmatized the whole nation.

Bangabandhu explained Suhrawardy's love for him in the following manner: "That he really loved me and cared for me I knew through all his subsequent actions and in everything he did for me till his dying day. Now when I think of him in jail I remember what he had told me then. Even in twenty years he never veered from what he said that day. Indeed, from that day, every day of my life I was blessed with his love. In all these years no one could take me away from him and I didn't let anyone deprive me of his love." (p.31).

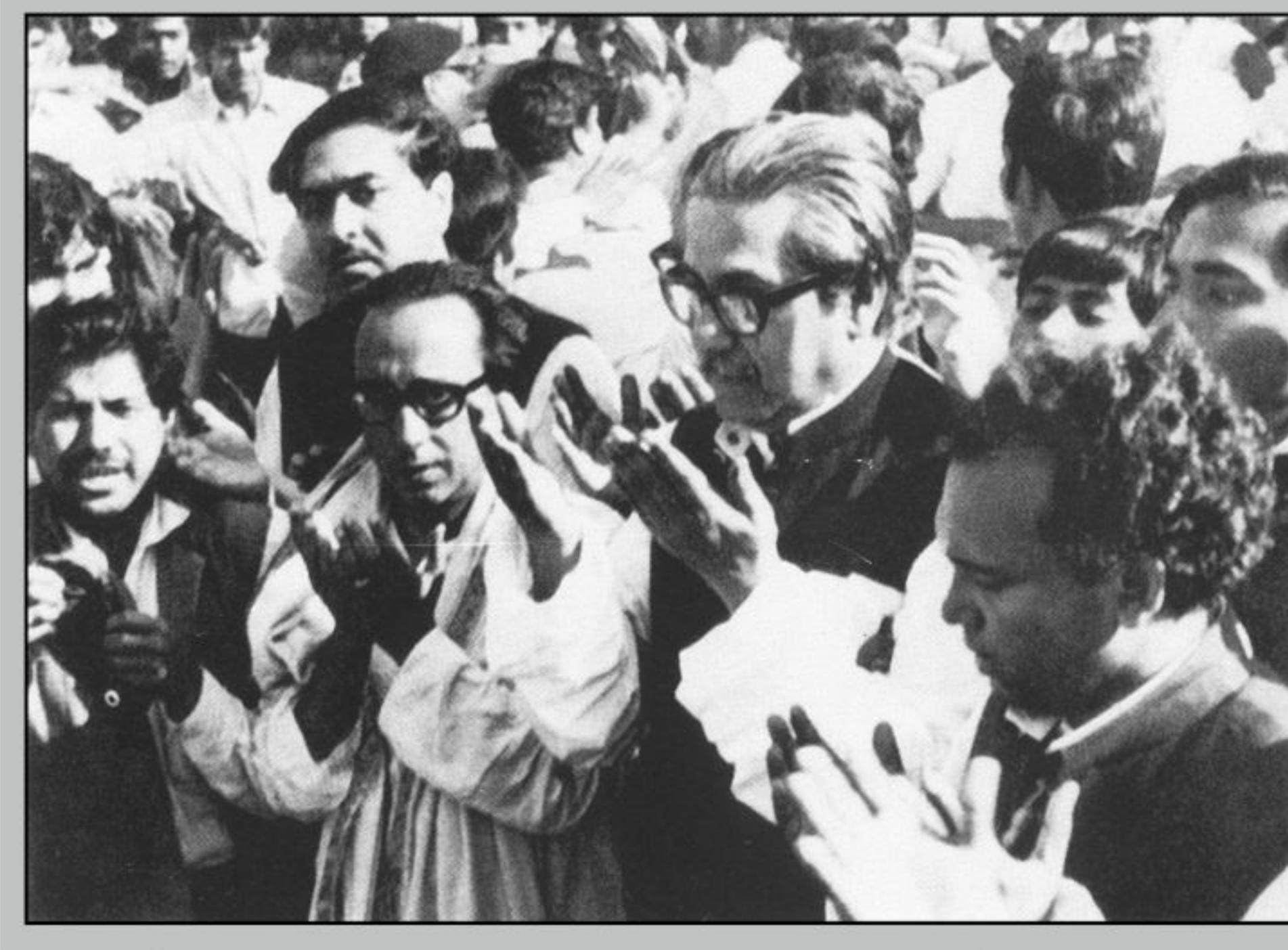
As a young student leader Mujib was deeply influenced by Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Huq. In his words, "And the fact was Mr. Huq hadn't earned the title of 'Tiger of Bengal' for nothing. The people of Bengal had indeed fallen in love with him. Whenever I attempted to say anything to slight him I would be stopped." (p.22). Huq Shahib, according to Bangabandhu, "was a generous man when he was not surrounded by conspirators. Because of his age, he had to rely on many of them. His affection for me made me believe that I could save this man from these conspirators."

As General Secretary of Awami League, Bangabandhu had the opportunity of working with, even being imprisoned with, the party president, Maulana Bhashani. Yet, Bangabandhu is quite direct in his assessment of Bhashani. In one meeting, Bhashani was upset when Shamsul Haq was asked to preside in his stead. Bangabandhu wrote: "This was the day I realized that the Maulana was not very broad-minded. Nevertheless, I used to respect him since he was ready to sacrifice and show

one's devotion. I believe that those who are not ready to sacrifice are not capable of doing anything worthy." (p.137).

Referring to a Bhashani convened meeting at Mymensingh, from which he later pulled himself out, Bangabandhu commented: "It was difficult to figure out Maulana Bhashani's political tactics. Three or four days before the conference, Maulana Bhashani let it be known that he would not attend it. However, he gave no reason for staying away. I was aware of his tendency to stay away from meetings whenever a major decision had to be taken." (p.250).

Bangabandhu had brushed with political struggles for the sake of his people. He had never compromised with his ideology. As for politics with ideals, he wrote: "When we have an unprincipled leadership at the helm of affairs we may make some progress for a while but such gains will vanish in times of crisis." (p. 280). He was deeply disturbed by the moral degradation of many MLAs: "Till that day, I had no idea that



Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is offering Munajat after laying the foundation stone of the National Martyrs' Memorial at Savar on 16 December 1972.

members of the Legislative Assembly were capable of being bribed in such a manner. These were the people who were representing the province and the masses!" (p.35). One MLA told us, "Let me go; don't worry. The Opposition is offering us money and if I make some money this way why should it bother you all? For, in any case I will vote for the Muslim league." (p. 36).

Bangabandhu described the moral degradation of the lawmakers in the following words: "I looked at him incredulously. He was an old man and looked impressive and was educated - how could such a man say such things to us? He would accept money from a party that wasn't his own and yet not vote for it despite being bribed to do so. To what depths had the people of our society sunk!" (p.36). Dear Father, the state-sponsored corruptions and nepotisms among post-75 governments had given the moral degradation that you despised an endemic proportion. Today when we talk of honesty and patriotism, the ones that baffled you look us in bafflement. One would hope that politicians would be inspired by your sacrifices, ideals and generosity and they would remain ever so ready to make sacrifices and to commit themselves to the development of the country.

Bangabandhu was an avid book lover who knew many local and foreign titles inside out. Mission with Mountbatten was one such book that recounted the way the central leaders from West Pakistan including Khawaja Nazimuddin sacrificed national interest for personal gains. Khawaja Nazimuddin conspired against Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy and became the leader of East Bengal. Without even consulting with his party peers, he declared Dhaka as the capital and came over with his followers. The writer maintained: "As soon as Mr. Nazimuddin was elected the leader he declared that Dhaka would be the capital and returned to the city along with his men. He didn't think for a moment about the fate of the hapless Muslims of West Bengal. He didn't even bother to pay attention to the things we could claim from Calcutta as our fare share. As a consequence, we didn't get what was ours." (p.82).

The rift within the central leaders of Pakistan allowed Mountbatten to give away some Muslim regions such as Murshidabad, Bongaon Junction of Jessore, Krishnanagar under Nadia and Ranaghat junction, half of Maldah, Balughat under Dinajpur to India. Instead of giving them to Pakistan, Mountbatten's gift allowed India to connect Jalpaiguri with Assam and to establish direct link between Hindustan and Assam. Even going against the referendum verdict, Karimganj under Sylhet and Kasar province under Assam were allotted to India. These places including Darjeeling should have been annexed with Pakistan.

As a dedicated supporter of the formation of Pakistan, Bangabandhu could not support Nazimuddin's negligence in upholding national interests. "If leaders make mistakes people have to pay! We had given up willingly the Calcutta that had been built with the money derived from the people of East Bengal, and we let it go. I believe that this happened because some people in the Central League wanted Calcutta to go to India. In other words, they had agreed to give the city up even before being asked to do so. They knew that if Mr. Suhrawardy had been made the leader this would have been difficult to accomplish and so they achieved their goal by subterfuge. If Calcutta had become part of Pakistan the country would have no other option but to make its capital since the people of East Bengal could claim that they constituted the majority and since it was the most important city in the whole of India. Calcutta, after all, had been the capital of the whole India during the early part of British rule." (p.83).

The zeal and enthusiasm with which the Muslims of Pakistan wanted Pakistan soon withered under the hostile and oppressive attitudes of Pakistani rulers. While giving an account of his visit to China, Bangabandhu wrote: "We had become independent in 1947 while China had attained freedom in 1949. The enthusiasm of the Pakistani people at the time of our independence had dimmed a lot by now. Instead of making good use of its people's energy, the government had been trying to suppress it. In contrast, the Chinese government was using its people to build the country. The big difference between us and them was that the people of China knew, and were made to feel, that the country and its resources were their own. On the other hand, our people had begun to comprehend that the resources of the nation were being enjoyed by a coterie while they themselves were getting no share of it. As a consequence the people of Pakistan were

becoming increasingly disillusioned. The only difference, they were now beginning to see, was that the white-skinned rulers had been replaced by dark-skinned ones." (p.236).

The deprivation of the Bangalees of East Bengal began even before the British rule. This continued till the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. Neither the politicians nor the people of Bengal protested the annulment of Juktofront cabinet and the introduction of 'governor system'. In the words of the writer: "Unfortunately, not one man protested against what had happened. As a result it was obvious to the conspirators that no matter how much noise these Bangalees made, and no matter how much popular support they were able to muster, it wouldn't be difficult to suppress them. They would be sure to flee to their burrows if the police flourished their sticks and guns. If they had faced opposition the oppressors would have thought a thousand times before ever daring to take action against Bangalees as a whole." (p.280).

The Bangalees will have to shoulder responsibilities for some of the misfortunes they have faced for centuries. Internecine clashes and personal jealousy are responsible for such misery, which the writer describes in his own words, "We Bangalee

Muslims have two sides. One is our belief that we are Muslims and the other that we are Bangalees. Instances of envy and treachery can be often found in our history. Surely no other language in the world has the equivalent of the Bengali word for envy. Translated literally, the word would mean 'mortified at another's good fortune'. You will find words such as envy and malice in all languages and these are qualities people all over the world have but only Bangalees are stricken by grief at another's prosperity. They are never happy to see their brothers do well. That is why Bangalees have been oppressed by other races throughout the ages despite being blessed with so many other good qualities. For ages others have dominated us because of our own fault. We don't know ourselves and till we do and learn to understand our mindset we will not be free." (pp.51-52).

The other significant cause of the misery of the Bangalee is their belief in dark superstitions. "Often

it has been seen that an illiterate man who is fair, who wears flowing clothes and has a well-groomed beard and can speak a few words of Arabic or Persian is hailed as a saint soon after coming to Bangladesh. Bangalees spend thousands and thousands of takas to get his blessings. But if you cared to get to the truth of the matter you would find out that the man is really an employee of some fruit shop in Calcutta or perhaps an accused in some murder case! Blind faith and belief in the supernatural are thus other faults of our people." (p.52).

Mujib bhai's mnemonic power is proverbial. Reading the book made me wonder how he could detail his family history, ancestral stories or daily events with such accuracy without the aid of any journal or supplementary books. From the dark cell of a jail, how could he recall the places such as Delhi, Ajmir or Agra that he had visited years earlier! His language touches the heart with its rare artistry and simplicity.

His narrative gave equal importance to nature while bringing out the inner features of thousands of characters. His early days were spent at Gopalganj. Nature of course played an important role in his growing up; until his death he learned to love his country and the people. His soul was connected to every tiny aspect of Gopalganj: its light and air, school and college, place and locations. In his own words, "It is difficult to forget one's childhood. There was hardly any Hindu or Muslim family in Gopalganj that I didn't know. I was reared by the light and wind of Gopalganj; my first lessons in politics took place here. There was the Court House and Mission School (which now has become a college) by the river. Students would come out of school to see me. There were these rows of shops; I used to know every shopkeeper by their names. Only after exchanging niceties, I would proceed towards the police station."

Such a magnificent narrative begins with a humble admission

We smell his Memories by touching the Pages

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He did not even try to hide how he went to Delhi without a ticket. I was at first puzzled while reading - father without a ticket! I tried to figure out his age at that time. It was conceivable because there was nothing wrong about it at that age. Young people do many things at that juncture. It was only a matter of ticket; the three of them were travelling with one ticket. He did not try to suppress even that as a non-event!



Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is among his family members in 1972.

How could he write such simple things so easily? That was possible only for a man like Bangabandhu. Many people would have written, "No, I never did anything wrong, ever". The days of his youth came to our mind while reading this book; the pages of this book bear witness to his simple lifestyle.

I and apa try to smell his memories by touching these pages. We have read these so many times. At first, we were fearful, but we then gathered courage by reading a line from these pages, when we felt bad. It has been our greatest asset; because we did not know he would be gone so quickly. He would have talked to us, given us direction. It seemed to us while reading that father was telling us to do this or that. Even now, when we read, it seems as if somebody is talking to us; as if father is saying after putting his hand on apa's head,

You are Everywhere

Nirmalendu Goon

Spread on the wall of my home
There is a portrait of you,
When darkness falls after the day
That picture speaks out.

In the water of turbulent river
Under the leaves of wild banyan
Near the firefly insect of night
There is a portrait of you.

When the lotus blooms in the pond,
The shepherd races home
As the dusk falls;
Then in the melody of the flute
I look inward
With the pull of my eye,
I see on the 'hijal-tamal' tree
There is a portrait of you.

A horn rings out from the mill
Two hands feverishly at work
Weaves textile,
Suddenly hearing a voice of thunder
Sees in the fold of a fabric -
There is a picture of you.

In the hands of a shy bashful bride
There is a portrait of you.
In the possession of a poet of Bangla
There is a picture of you.
Close to the hearts of the tormented
There is a portrait of you.

You are everywhere.
Your picture is like love
In a world of freedom.

Deathless is your portrait
In the annals of the ages;
Floats on the water of sea and river,
And the tears of our eyes!

Translation: Halal Uddin Ahmed



sacrifice a bit of me for my principles and ideals." (p.1). Such humility can only come from a great man such as Bangabandhu.

As a lay man, I can only say that millions of readers are waiting to read this memoir. Dear father, every word and every page of your book has moved the reader; the book will become an important document of contemporary political history, and it will benefit people from all over the world.

Writing an autobiography, while being alive, is bound to be incomplete by design. It is our misfortune that the book has narrated only 16 years of his life spanning between 1939 and 1955. I wish he had added twenty more years; that would have given us an insight into the mind of the sculptor of our country and made us aware of his ideas regarding the country at its labour pain and at its nascent days. I also wish the inspiration behind the book Sheikh Fazlunnissa - Mujib bhabhi - was alive to see the publication of this book! Well, there are some regrets for the Bangalees which would remain unfulfilled forever.

(Translated by Dr. Shamsad Mortuza, University of Dhaka)

"Hasu, you please do this, do it for the country's good". Apa probably derives courage and encouragement from it while executing so many of her tasks.

This autobiography will remain as the last chapter in the history of the struggles of the Beagleee nation. The younger generation can learn from this history. It shall remain a bright example of patriotism; it will provide courage for moving forward.

The Bangalee people were dear to him. He left behind a free country for the Bangalee nation. He made sacrifices galore throughout his life for the welfare of this country. While picking up the diaries, ordinary pages with simple margins, I could visualize him reminiscing about his life with an ordinary pen while in jail. It becomes evident while reading these diaries what unbearable pains he had to endure; despite that, his conviction was unwavering. That is why he is the greatest

Bangalee of all times, the apple of their eyes for the teeming millions.

(Like the memoirs of our father) The lives of our two sisters also seem to be incomplete. This is another 'Unfinished Memoir'. We know that prayers are offered according to our religious dictum when people die; faces of near ones are shown when they pass away. This is part of our religious tradition, our being. But we were deprived even of that opportunity; and this is why everything in our lives would remain unfulfilled, incomplete.

Translation: Halal Uddin Ahmed