

# Quader Mollah: fact versus fiction

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QUADER Mollah, the most infamous classmate of mine in my student days in Rajendra College (1964-66,) has become a part of history and probably, nationally and internationally, the most known individual of our class of 1966 superseding even the former cabinet minister of Khaleda Zia's government, Ali Ahsan Mohammed Mujahed who, incidentally, also is facing the gallows if the Supreme Court (SC) does not overturn the verdict. In addition to studying in the class, Quader was my home mate in a student home where dozens of us used to live, eat and pray (it was made mandatory by the Superintendent) together for two years until I left for the Engineering University after passing the H.S.C. Exam. in 1966 . I wrote a piece on him for DS (February 9, 2013) after the shocking verdict when he was spared on February 5 from the much-expected capital punishment by the honourable judges of the International Crimes Tribunal.

I would not write this piece had I not come across a piece published in the online version of the now defunct much-controversial news daily the Amardesh whose editor's second-in-command from London wrote a piece and that was republished in amadershomoybd.com on Quader Mollah, illustrating his 'glorious' past. He has written an absolute cock and bull story about him. In fact, nothing could be further than the truth. Of course, this is what the Amardesh all about and this is the forte of this so-called news daily. The newspaper of this sort would never exist in a democratic and civilized society. I would be failing to my own conscience and to the posterity if I do not put the fact about my former classmate in true perspective. It is more so for the fact that it was his verdict that gave rise to the renaissance of patriotism among the younger generation of Bengalis all around the globe and the emergence of the much acclaimed Gonojagoron Mancha.

The cock and bull story of the second-in-command of the Amardesh about Quader Mollah could be condensed as follows:

He stood first class first in M. Sc. at Dhaka University (DU) in 1972.

He was a freedom fighter. Sheikh Mujib appointed him in Islamic foundation in 1972.

He was associated with leftist students union and Rashed Khan Menon and Matia Chowdhury was his leaders.

Before I rebut the fallacy of the Amardesh's second-in-command, let me summarize what Quader's own family has disclosed today (September 19, 2013) about his past, published in the same amadershomoybd.com.

After finishing his S.S.C. and H.S.C. he came to DU in 1969.

After 7th March speech of Sheikh Mujib, he went to his village and remained there for the whole duration of the war (liberation was not mentioned).

He came back to DU in 1972 and studied there until 1977.

He joined the Jamaat-e-Islami in 1979.

The information given by his family is to a certain extent is true except for very well crafted fact-hidings to fit the time line, that include his activities during the war . His family did neither claim that he was freedom fighter, that he stood first class first in M. Sc. at DU in 1972 nor that he was involved with leftist politics.

In my recollection of Quader Mollah, he was a below average student and his H.S.C performance in 1966 was not good enough to come to DU to study Honours, just like our other classmate, Ali Ahsan Mujahid. So he continued with his B. Sc. at Rajendra College, the fact his family chose to hide. After passing B. Sc., he came to DU in 1969, as claimed by his family, for M. Sc. This makes sense. But his family's claim that he stayed in DU from 1969 to 1971 and then from 1972 to 1977, 8 years for a two-year M. Sc. degree does not add up.

The actual chronology goes like this. To start with his political affiliation, it would be pertinent to describe the landscape of the student politics of Rajendra College of that time. Aside from the NSF, there were two other student organizations at the College at that time (1964-66), the Progressive Student Front, PSF (EPSU in disguise) and the



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Student League (SL). The PSF was the strongest and was considered communist and the SL was anti-communist. Kader Mollah was a supporter of SL as a staunch anticommunist. In 1967 (I was then at the Engineering University) the Islami Chattrra Sangha (ICS) was formed in the College at the behest of Ali Ahsan Mujahed (his father was the President of Faridpur district Jamaat-e-Islami, Moulana Abdul Ali) and Kader Mollah joined the ICS. That was the beginning of his association with the ICS and later the Jamaat-e-Islami. Naturally, he continued with his ICS politics at DU as well.

He joined the Badar bahini during the liberation war along with Ali Ahsan Mujahed. After 16th December he went into hiding and surfaced when Ziur

Rahman became the CMLA in 1976. So his continuation at DU until 1977 adds up.

As I recollected in my earlier piece, when I left Bangladesh in early 1973, I had a no knowledge Quader's whereabouts. In 1979, when I was visiting Bangladesh, I was walking in a Dhaka street when he suddenly came from behind, grabbed me and said: "Are you not Mozammel? I am Quader." My immediate response was: "Quader, are you alive?" His response was: "Yes, I am very much alive and am currently executive editor of the Sangram. This is our country now. Your Joy Bangla is dead; our zindabad has come back and is very much alive." Since what Quader said was right, I had no response. A few months later, when I returned to the US, I read

that Quader was a special guest in a Victory Day seminar in Dhaka's Press Club, what an irony!

However, no matter what Quader and Mujahed had been rewarded with in independent Bangladesh, their classmates did not forget or forgive their felonious past and barred them from joining the reunion of the class of '66 of that college happened when Mujahed was a cabinet minister during the last BNP-led alliance government and flew the hard-earned green-red flag of my country whose creation he opposed tooth and nail.

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# Saga of trampling people's voting rights

SHAKHAWAT LITON

IN the preamble of our constitution, which became operative forty-one years ago on December 16, 1972, democracy along with nationalism, socialism and secularism had been emphatically pronounced as one of the high ideals "which inspired our heroic people to dedicate themselves to, and our brave martyrs to sacrifice their lives in, the national liberation struggle."

In light of the spirit of the preamble, Article 11 of the Constitution emphatically states that the Republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental human rights and freedoms and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed. This is one of the fundamental principles of the State policy.

Democracy means a system of government in which all the people of a country can vote to elect their representatives. So, significance of election is immense and it must be free and fair to allow people to exercise independently their franchise to

choose their representatives who will govern the country on their behalf. Their representatives will exercise the powers for welfare of the people and the country.

But, during the past 41 years the people, who are the owner of all powers of the state according to the constitution, could not exercise their franchise to elect their representatives because of major deficiencies in our representative democracy. The parliamentary elections held in 1979, 1986, 1988 and February 15 of 1996 were largely influenced and rigged in favour of the then incumbents led by BNP and Jatiya Party. The then ruling parties -- BNP and Jatiya Party -- had got landslide wins in those polls, destroying the credibility of the electoral process.

Even the first parliamentary election held in 1973 in independent Bangladesh was also not free from allegation of undue influence. The Awami League, the political party that led the country's

Liberation War, could not refrain from exerting undue influence on the election though there was no strong party to prevent the AL from wining a landslide in that battle of ballots.

There were some more nationwide elections which contributed further to destroy the people's confidence in the electoral system. The two referendums held in 1977 and 1985 to justify and legitimise General Zia's and General Ershad's illegal takeover of state power were nothing but farce.

In the 1977 referendum the then regime claimed that 88.5% voters cast their vote and of them a whopping 98.88% supported Zia's rule. In the 1985 referendum the then regime-led by Ershad claimed that 72% of the country's voters exercised their franchise and of them 94.14% favoured his rule. At that time, voters did not require to go to polling stations to cast their votes. The two presidents' men stuffed ballot papers in the boxes and gave a fictitious figure for voter turn out.

Zia and Ershad, who were chief martial law administrators and also grabbed the presidency, held two presidential elections under the martial law regimes in 1978 and in 1986 respectively. They contested the polls to get legitimacy as the presidents. They did not bother about the constitution and electoral laws to contest the polls, and abused all the state facilities for their own purposes.

On the contrary, the parliamentary polls held in 1991, June of 1996, 2001 and 2008 were largely free and fair, and contributed to reviving the people's confidence in the electoral system. All those elections were held under non-partisan election time governments, portraying the political parties' inability and deficiency in democratic norms and values.

But the good practices could not be continued. The caretaker government system had drawn huge support for the 1991 parliamentary polls as that election was held under a makeshift caretaker government. The caretaker government system was introduced constitutionally in 1996 following violent street agitations by AL and others, and the controversial February 15 polls in the same year. The caretaker government was able to hold two parliamentary polls in June 1996 and in 2001 until the system was tempered with by politicians.

Before the parliamentary polls scheduled for early 2007, the then BNP-led government had doctored the system to get benefit in the polls by making an individual whom they liked as the chief advisor of the caretaker government. Their ill intention gave birth to a political catastrophe. The ninth parliamentary election could not be held on

time. A state of emergency was declared in January 2007 in the wake of growing political turmoil, for the first time since the restoration of democracy in 1990. And the armed forces again intervened in politics. Finally, the stalled parliamentary polls were held around two years later in December 2008.

Assuming office after the 2008 polls, the current government led by Sheikh Hasina made the biggest blunder by abolishing the caretaker government system in 2011. By doing so, Hasina cleared the way for her to remain in power during the 10th parliamentary election. This triggered the political crisis which the country is now going through. The BNP-led opposition alliance has boycotted the general election slated for January 5. If no major and dramatic change takes place, the January 5 election, if held, will take place amid boycott by the BNP-led opposition parties. This will in no way contribute to strengthening and consolidating the country's democracy and people's right to choose their representatives.

A smooth and peaceful transition of power through election demonstrates the maturity of a country's democracy. But what has been happening in our country during elections only exposes the fragile state of our democracy. The political turmoil ahead of elections seems to be a curse for the people. Their voting rights have been trampled for decades. And the political turmoil jeopardises their existence as they are not safe anywhere in their beloved independent motherland. This situation also shows how the politicians and mighty people have been running the country against one of the high ideals, democracy, "which inspired our heroic people to dedicate themselves to, and our brave martyrs to sacrifice their lives in, the national liberation struggle."

This state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue anymore. It must end here and right now. For this, we need leadership to start bringing about a change. The political turmoil centring on the election should be ended by developing the electoral process, and strengthening and democratising electoral institutions like the Election Commission and the political parties. We do not expect a sudden change right now. What we want wholeheartedly is a beginning and the sincere commitment to continue the process for the change. That will stop lengthening of the saga of trampling the people's right to elect their representatives to exercise state power on their behalf and for their welfare.

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