



Prof Moazzem Hossain: Sacrifices of a martyred freedom fighter

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OUR house was in the compound of Bagerhat P.C. College – beautiful and green, surrounded by grape vines. My father, Prof Moazzem Hossain, was the Chair of the Department of Economics. He remained busy all day writing books and teaching students, yet gladly fulfilled all our demands whenever he had time. He was a formidable teacher in college, but a loving, hearty spirit at home. Our house used to be filled with his songs, stories and laughter. His students were awed by his appearance at the college but whenever they came to our house to discuss politics or some other study topics, they became his friends. My father loved his students, and tried to help them in whatever way he could.

Father returned home with his group after a month and half with some training and experience in several border fights in October 21, 1971. They made a camp in Badokhali School. Although we were over the moon to have him back, my mother was very unhappy with him since he left my eldest brother, who was only seventeen, in Kolkata for training.

I remember during the mass uprising in 1969 the police opened fire on the students of P.C. College in the presence of the DC of Khulna, a man from Punjab. Students ran for their lives trying to take shelter in the teachers' quarters. While many of the teachers refused to help in fear of putting their own lives in danger, my father calmly opened his door and let his students in. Two students were killed that day in Bagerhat; many more were injured or arrested. He used to visit the hospitals and district jails several times a day, trying to see what he could do for the students. It was since then an acute sense of disrespect against the Pakistani Government started to grow deep within him.

Then came the dark hours of March 25, 1971, which completely transformed my father. He forced us to leave Bagerhat, and sent us to our grandparents' house in the village Badokhali. Like most of his colleagues, he could easily have accompanied us at the village home where the tumults of the war had not reached yet. He, however, chose to stay back and followed us after fifteen days with at least thirty five Hindu men and women from Bagerhat. Father

told us that the Pakistani army had entered Bagerhat town, and with the help of local collaborators begun massive murder, rape and plunder. The local Hindus were in great danger as they were the initial target of the army, which was why he brought many of them with him. Our house in the village was spacious, so there was no problem of accommodation.

However, within a few days, the Pakistani army began to attack village after village. Killing and ravaging seemed never to end. As the army found it difficult to enter our village due to its location, the local collaborators took over and continued to kill and rape as well as loot. Those helpless people came running to our house asking my father's help.

Within a short time he was able to form a small group that would guard the lives and properties of the villagers. Father was the leader of this group. Therefore, he became the prime target of the collaborators who started to conspire against him. His salary from the college was stopped. The army had no way of entering our village, but one day they shot from a long distance using mortar and machine gun, in which a small part of our house was damaged. Father rented two boats for us, so that we could flee to a safer place whenever we would hear gunshots. He himself remained in the house saying that he was capable of killing at least thirty men with one gun. But within a few days the situation became unbearable. The army was destroying nearby villages. Every day we used to hear news of more murder, more rape, more arrests and torture. At last, Father decided to give training to the local youths so they could fight the army. They however had no weapons. Therefore, he set off to India with several hundred youths, including my eldest brother and some of the young relatives.

Father returned home with his group after a month and half with some training and experience in several border fights in October 21, 1971. They made a camp in Badokhali School. Although we were over the moon to have him back, my mother was very unhappy with him since he left my eldest brother, who was only seventeen, in Kolkata for training. Mother was always critical of father's involvement in the war. In fact, to leave one's children behind to go to war wasn't very practical especially when apart from me and my eldest brother, all the rest of my five siblings were mere babies. Besides, we didn't have anyone else as a guardian who would look after us in father's absence. But this logic wasn't enough for father, who said to my mother quite clearly, "If I keep thinking about my personal problems, I won't be able to do what I need to do for the country. Everybody has problems". My mother never said anything else about this.

Father was made the chief administrative officer of sector 9. He had several groups under his command. Amidst all these, he came to spend time with us and told us stories about his training, his experience in border fights, and how he went to India on foot

without much food or sleep. He told us what an enthusiastic reception he got in Kolkata. He had a lot of students there, and his books on Economics (both in Bangla and English) were quite popular in both parts of Bengal. Therefore, nobody wanted him to leave Kolkata, warning him over and over again that the Army and its collaborators wouldn't let him live if he came back. It seemed my father didn't have much care for his own life as he had for his village, family and his country. So he returned home but they didn't give him more than seven days to live.

It was the night of October 28, 1971-- the most dreadful night of our lives. In the morning when Father left home none of us realised that we wouldn't see him again. He took my little brother Zakir in his lap and kissed him on his forehead. Before going out, he said he'd be home early.

We were anxious the whole day as we could hear gunshots from all sides. Yet, we received no news from father. At night a man from the camp came to our house saying that father would be late, since he was busy receiving news of battles in several places on wireless. Therefore, we went to bed after having dinner.

The sound of heavy gunshot woke us with a start. We felt as if the house itself would come down on us, thinking probably the army finally attacked our house. Then it all became silent. We didn't know what else to do except waiting for father to come home. But, the waiting seemed endless. Then, we heard a groaning from the riverbank which was a few yards away. Somebody must have been injured severely. The voice sounded so familiar but it was nearly three in the morning, so mother didn't let us go out to see who it was. We were still waiting for father, so we could go out with him to find out what the matter was. I cannot quite remember how much time went by after that, but suddenly we heard people screaming and crying. Then we heard the news. Then we realised it was father who kept groaning till dawn.

We ran like madmen to the riverbank. Father was floating in a pool of his own blood, my formidable yet loving father. I kept looking at him, unable to realise what had happened. Then we, all the brothers and sisters, started calling him as loudly as we could, in a futile hope that he would respond to us. But he didn't, as if calling us for such a long time made him tired. So he fell asleep.

He was coming back from the camp in a boat. He never kept any guard with him. He had immense faith in his own strength. His enemies also knew they wouldn't be able to fight him face to face. Therefore, they shot him from the other bank, hiding in the dark when his boat reached our bank. He didn't get any chance to face them. Bullets pierced his belly and back, and he fell in the boat. It was a very narrow river after all. May be he was calling us, his beloved children. Who knew what he had to say to them in his last moments on this earth.

Many years have gone by. Like many other families, we also suppressed our agony and tried to



Prof Moazzem Hossain

cope with a life of tremendous pain and struggle. But that's another story.

When I look back on those days, sometimes I find myself pondering over my father's life. He's respected as a martyred freedom fighter today. But how many of this generation, or even from his own generation, know about the sacrifices he had made. He was a famed intellectual in the Khulna region and he was a very courageous person. But I think what turned him into a freedom fighter was his love for his countrymen and his sacrificing mentality. The extent of his sacrifice and contribution becomes obvious when I visit my village, though not very often, and find out to my utter surprise that this is perhaps the only village in the country where you will find a freedom fighter in every house. I cannot help but take pride in the fact that it was my father who organised them, trained them, or sent them to training camps in Kolkata.

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A king's kingly fight

GAZI MOHAMMED TAUHIDUZZAMAN

THE Liberation War of Bangladesh was truly a people's war. People from all walks of life irrespective of their politico-economic, ethno-cultural and socio-religious identity spontaneously joined the war to achieve a common mission. The grand triumph of 1971 was the result of a tremendous synergy produced by great heroes of this soil. There were a few collaborators too who were active in hatching machination against the liberation of Bangladesh. Many tribal people of Bangladesh had also contributed gloriously for our independence. The aspiration of emancipation from every oppression and

disparity compelled them to fight against the aggression of Pakistan Army. Mong King Mompru Sain was one of the great heroes of the Liberation War. His kingly contribution war had positive effect in the struggle for emancipation.

On being terrified by the heinous atrocities of the Pakistani attackers that started from the dead night of 25 March 1971 many people had to leave their homes for safe asylum. The fear of war left thousands of people internally displaced and they were forced to move to the countryside for their safety. By the first week of April 1971 Pakistani troops took control of the Chittagong city and started looting, killing and conduct of other heinous crimes in the city. To escape from death and humiliation many people from the city left for hill tracts. Mong Raja Mompru Sain was moved and touched by the plight of these fleeing people. He provided shelter to the distressed people knowing full well that his sympathetic action might create wrath of the Pakistani marauding army. Kindness of the Raja overtook all the possible threats and challenges. Emboldened by humanity and stimulated by patriotism he defied all the risks. Raja opened up his granary and exhausted it to feed the refugees who took shelter in his palace. Affected by the horror of the ravaging war, many traumatic people were mentally and physically shattered and suffered from various ailments. Moreover the exhaustion of the haunted journey had terrible effect on those asylum seekers. In those distressful days the Raja established a hospital to ameliorate the sufferings of people. The queen and womenfolk of his tribe on being encouraged by Raja also joined this noble effort and devotedly treated many ailing patients. Their nursing was immensely helpful and appreciable.

Raja Mompru Sain was an ardent supporter of Liberation War of Bangladesh. To thwart the possible Pakistani attack in Khagrachari area he along with his followers joined the efforts of East Bengal Regiment, East Pakistan Rifle and young patriots in developing a defence in the hill tracts. At the initial phase of war the freedom fighters did not have enough supply of arms and ammunition to resist for long against the attacking forces. To augment their military capability he opened his own armory and gave 33 rifles to the freedom fighters. He also

donated his private car and jeep to the Mukti Bahini to ease up their communication and movement. Many people of his region on being encouraged by the Raja joined the Liberation War. Infuriated, Pakistani Army engaged armed Mizo cadres to eliminate this audacious Raja for his all out support to the Mukti Bahini.

On 27 April 1971 Pakistan Army launched attack in Mahalchari to rout the defence taken by Mukti Bahini. They started pounding the area mercilessly. Because of such ruthlessness, the defence of Muki Bahini in this area became untenable. At this juncture they decided to abandon their defence for tactical reasons. Raja Monpru Sain finding the situation extremely unfavourable left his palace along with his family and took shelter in Rupaichari Camp, India. After the abandonment of the palace Pakistani Army and their collaborators established their camp there in the palace. The unexpected departure from own circle could not sap the unflinching determination of the Raja. Immediately after reaching India Raja established close contact with the Bangladeshi training camp established at Harina, India and involved himself in training young enthusiasts on guerrilla war. He extended his efforts for the recruitment of the guerrillas. He also contacted Indian Boarder Security Force and confirmed their military assistance in favour of freedom fighters of Bangladesh. He, in a radio talk in BBC, called upon the people of the world to extend their support for the liberation of Bangladesh.

While other two Rajas of Chakma circle and Bomang circle collaborated with the Pakistan Army side and acted against the interest of Bangladesh during the Liberation War, it was only the Mong king Mompru Sain who at one stage physically joined the war which had positive effect on the Mukti Bahini. He also played important role in organising the guerrillas in youth camp. The dauntless Raja alongside other freedom fighters carried out many minor operations inside Bangladesh against enemy troops. In the final offensive he entered into Bangladesh with the allied force and participated in Bhairab and Ashugonj operations. Fighting the enemy courageously he could advance up to Dhaka on December 17, 1971 and relished the victory of allied forces. This hero was awarded with honorary

ranks of colonel during war for his courageous contribution in the Liberation War. After the war the king went back to his palace which was looted, destroyed and burnt by Pakistani troops. The Raja practically found nothing in his palace after the liberation as the wrath of Pakistani troops badly destroyed his palace and their gluttonous stomach ate up everything.

Mong Raja Mompru Sain contributed enormously to the Liberation War of Bangladesh. He not only opened his treasury to help the refugees who took shelter in his palace but also

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mobilised, encouraged and organised tribal people of his circle to join the Liberation War. Being an expert shooter he utilised his skill through imparting training to the freedom fighters. The Raja is a brave hero of our Liberation War as well as a great source of inspiration for the young generation to be imbued with the true ethos and values of our Liberation War. His kindness, efforts, patriotic zeal and courage all are exemplary to us. He is a great son of Bangladesh and we are all proud of such a great Raja. Raja Mompru Sain will live in the hearts of people forever for his glorious contribution and sacrifices. Such a great hero of our liberation is yet to be formally rewarded. His enormous contribution needs official recognition that will otherwise encourage future generations to make sacrifice during the crisis of the nation.

The writer is presently working at Army Headquarters, Dhaka Cantonment.



Mong King Mompru Sain