# The legacy of Begum Zohra Tajuddin

Dr. Kamal Hossain

**7** E deeply feel the irreparable loss of Begum Zohra Tajuddin at a time when the country faces a major political crisis. We are reminded of her positive role in being able to unite and lead us successfully to overcome certain major crises in our history.

The assassination of Bangabandhu in August 1975 and of the four national leaders in Dhaka Jail in November had devastated us politically. It is relevant to remember the diversity of responses to such devastation. While we were shocked by the opportunist reaction of some of the leaders of the ruling party, Begum Tajuddin emerged as a leader by firmly putting her trust in people's power. It was because she mobilised and revitalised a people's organisation that we could face our future with confidence.

She inspired all of us who engaged in healthy politics and were involved in the liberation struggle, in particular the younger generation, to work tirelessly at the local level to reorganise the party. She travelled throughout the country and was able to unify different factional segments. Those who were privileged to work with her remember how she gained their confidence by her fairness and impartiality. She never compromised with what was manifestly wrong in order to gain some temporary advantage.

Two approaches to gain power had begun to compete in shaping the political process. Begum Zohra Tajuddin drew upon the history of our political struggles to rely on people's power to regain what had been lost. She worked from the bottom up to empower people. In contrast, there was an unscrupulous and self-serving political element, which compromised with those who seized power. The ruling coterie sought to consolidate its power by abusing the state's authority and resources. Their approach was top down, to establish a centralised authoritarian structure by disempowering citizens with patronage and repression. In the period from 1975 to 1990 the top down approach gathered strength.

Begum Zohra Tajuddin was one of the outstanding leaders in the political movement against authoritarian rule, who led a united people's movement for regaining people's power, and rejected sick politics that was fuelled by greed for economic and political power. Instead, she inspired citizens to fight for their rights by recalling historic people's successes in the Language Movement, in the United Front's victory over communal politics in 1954, and ulti-

mately in our liberation struggle. Citizens were inspired by a united movement for restoration of parliamentary democracy as its goal.

The presidential elections of 1978, 1981and 1987 showed how elections in themselves do not ensure a working democracy in the absence of healthy politics, the rule of law and functioning democratic institutions, including political parties drawing strength from a genuine mass base and committed to democratic values

It was at this juncture that Begum Zohra Tajuddin emerged as one of our respected political leaders. In the meeting of the Awami League Council in 1981, her significant contribution in re-organising the party was recognised and she emerged as the consensus candidate for the



party's presidency. It was fate combined with her magnanimity and selflessness that she proposed that Bangabandhu's daughter be elected to that office in her stead.

The dynamics of politics over the next two decades shows how the two approaches to power were pitted against each other. The struggle to restore honest and healthy politics was confronted by the sick politics of money, muscle and manipulation of state power in which the latter could manage electoral victories in 1978, 1979 and 1981. Assassination of the incumbent in 1981 and a coup were to prolong the people's struggle in the decade of the eighties. The engineered elections of 1986, 1988 and February 1996 were rejected by the people.

A united people's movement drew strength from political parties, professional organisations, women's organisations, as well as organisations of workers, peasants, cultural and human rights activists who courageously resisted autocracy. Many political leaders, veterans of the liberation struggle, faced persecution. The democracy movement has a long list of martyrs, including senior parliament member Moizuddin Ahmad, labour leader Tajul, professionals such as Dr. Milon and spirited young fighters for democracy such as Nur Hossain, and students Salim, Dilwar, Zainul and Dipali Saha. These sacrifices by the people in their united movement for restoration of democracy succeeded in ending the autocratic regime and initiating the process for restoration of democracy.

The dreams of our martyrs were for a Bangladesh in which all citizens would live in freedom and with dignity. Citizens would be constitutionally protected against religious, ethnic or gender discrimination, and equality of opportunity would be guaranteed.

The basic goals of equality and a working democracy are still to be realised. This is because political parties fell under the control of ruling coteries, opposed to the people. These elements cynically took advantage of people's sentiments by deceiving them through lip-service to the values of the liberation struggle. Securing the blind support of unsuspecting people, their greed for wealth and power has created a sick politics, which has resulted in gross abuse of power and rampant corruption. These anti-people coteries are destructive road-blocks obstructing the progress being achieved by the productive efforts of the overwhelming majority -- the millions who tirelessly toil in our fields and factories, and as migrant

Nelson Mandela's passing away brought back memories of his liberating rolein empowering the deprived South African majority to liberate themselves from apartheid. The passing away of Begum Zohra Tajuddin, at this juncture in our history, when we are threatened by destructive disunity and discord generated by sick, self-serving politics, reminds us of her selfless and principled leadership. We can derive hope from remembering with reverence the historic role played by her after 1975 in reviving people's faith in themselves and in building unity around the values and goals of our liberation struggle, for which our national leaders had, along with countless martyrs, laid down their

The writer is an eminent Jurist.

## Christmas: Birthday of Love



HAROLD B. RODRIGUES

ODAY, December 25, is celebrated throughout the Christendom as the birthday of Jesus. In this article I would like to suggest that the birthday of Jesus is also in essence the birthday of "Love" for Jesus embodies this fundamental characteristic of love. Christians believe that God is Love and that Jesus is the Son of God and He Himself is God. So, Jesus as God is also Love, and thus the birthday of Jesus is the birthday of Love

Birthday is the anniversary of the day a person is born, which comes once a year. In the records of formal birthday celebrations, as mentioned in the Bible, Pharaoh was the first in the history who celebrated his birthday for all his servants with much festivity (Genesis 40:20). In the Gospel it is also mentioned that King Herod Antipas celebrated his birthday for the Galilean noblemen and army generals by holding a great feast (Mark 6:21). Although there are differences of opinion among historians of the actual date of Jesus' birth, the Church at Rome started observing the "birthday of Christ" on December 25 since 336 AD.

The meaning of love is so vast and varied. William Shakespeare in his book A Midsummer Night's Dream speaks about love: "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind." According to Bertrand Russell: "Of all forms of caution, caution in love is perhaps the most fatal to true happiness" (The Conquest of Happiness). Gospel writer John looks at love as being something coming from God and whoever loves is born of God and knows God (1 John 4:7). According to St. Paul, love encompasses numerous attributes. In his letter to the Corinthians, he writes: "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7).

Christians believe that God's love knows no bounds. Although not always mentioning directly that God is love, there are many illustrations of God's love for His people both in the Old and New Testament texts. For instance, God says to prophet Jeremiah: "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3), and to the Israelites "..., the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Exodus 34:6-7). There are some texts in the New Testament that directly talk about God being love Himself: "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is Love" (1 John 4:8), "... God is Love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 John 4: 16), and so on and so forth.

Although people of other faiths may differ with this notion, but in Christian religion, it is believed that Jesus is the Son of God, and He is also God. Again, there are scripture verses that corroborate this concept. In the book of Prophet Isaiah (A book of the Old Testament written 712 BC), it is written: "... Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name 'Emmanuel' - God with us" (Isaiah 7:14: Mt 1:23). In the Gospel of John, it is written: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). The Gospel of Luke says: "Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and 'God has visited his people!" (Luke 7:16).

Thus, it is well established for the Christians that God is Love and that Jesus is the Son of God and He Himself is God. Thus, it can also be said that Jesus is Love as God is Love.

Christmas is the birthday of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, Himself God, who is love. Therefore, Christmas is the birthday of Love. What does Jesus, God, Love, want from us on his birthday? I am sure He wants His nature of "love" be a reality that transcends all limitations and shortcomings of the hearts of all people of our country and of our world. At this Christmas, it is even more specially deserved that all our leaders of the country come to comprehend the love of God to be patient, kind, truthful, bearing, believing, hoping, enduring, and not envious or boastful, not arrogant or rude, does not insist on its own way, not irritable or resentful, does not rejoice at wrongdoing (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7). This Love of Jesus summons, not only the leaders, but also peoples of all walks of life, to embrace its true quintessence at all times of life despite all the contradictory realities that they face in personal, family, social, political, economic, national and international spheres. Let this Christmas be a real birthday of LOVE and that it becomes a daily living of patience, kindness, truth, bearing, believing, hoping, enduring; and not envious or boastful, not arrogant or rude, not insisting its own way, not irritable or resentful, not rejoice at wrongdoings.

The writer is the Provincial Superior of the Brothers of Holy Cross in Bangladesh

## Dysfunctional democracy

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

ANGLADESH was born out of the heroic spirit of liberation and the ideals of democracy. The liberation spirit is still held aloft but democracy flounders in bitter partisanship and acrimonious exchanges. The wages of wrath is a heavy burden for common people to bear. They are but witness to this contest for power and for license to govern according to one's will. It is a tragedy which the people of Bangladesh want to live without but cannot do much to end.

It is a season of despair for Bangladesh. Many innocent lives have perished, but it does not move the heart of the holders and the contestants for power. The issue is the national election for the 10th Parliament. The holders and contestants have drawn the battle lines. The grisly furies of blockades and the all-out stand of the rulers have paralysed the country. It is all about who will reign over the country. The actors are the same, and they have changed sides over the modus operandi.

The government in power this time wants a multi-party government during the interim period. It will not have anything to do with nonparty interim or caretaker government. Ironically, it is the AL's baby, for which they agitated in alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami and the Jatiya Party during late 1994 and early 1996. They boycotted the parliament and ultimately resigned from it. In fact, the BNP-led government soured the taste of democracy by doctoring Magura bye-election. Bangladesh's 5th Parliament became dysfunctional midway through its term.

The party in opposition now, which will not have anything but the caretaker government, was in power then. The 50:50 formula that the government in power is dourly sticking to is in fact the proposal of Sir Ralph Ninian, a representative of the Commonwealth sent to resolve the crisis then. The then ruling government of BNP was also stubborn but ultimately caved in. But the AL-led alliance would not settle for anything less than a caretaker government. Like the turn of roulette wheel the BNP went ahead for a farcical poll. And there was "Janatar Mancha" (People's Court), a sort of civilian coup in the administration. The caretaker bill was adopted in the first

session of the short-lived 6th Parliament.

AL-led alliance was the victor in the national polls for the 7th Parliament conducted by Justice Habibur Rahman-led caretaker government. It was BNP's turn to boycott the parliament. They went to the streets to sweat under the sun and soak in the rain. The 7th Parliament ended its term with BNP-led opposition alliance boycotting it for much of it term. BNP-led alliance returned to power with thumping majority in the national poll for the 8th Parliament. With the massive majority they proceeded on a course of installing dynastic democracy and of developing the thinking that the days of bliss would never end, which was detrimental to cultivating demo cratic principle. Justice K.M. Hassan's choice as the head of caretaker government for the next poll was a hornet's nest and Late Professor Iajuddin muddled it further.

Democracy is the art of the possible where differing views can flourish.

Unfortunately, democracy in Bangladesh has become dysfunctional in the bristling thicket of contempt and unremitting hostility.

Hell was let loose in the winter of 2006 and turmoil followed. What happened few days back, 19 passengers being burned alive inside a bus, also happened when the present government (then in opposition) called a general strike in 2004. 11 passengers were burnt inside a bus. Only the actors changed. The rest is history, with the 'Uddins' at the helm.

Bangladesh moved ahead from those days. The 2008 national polls put AL-led alliance to power with brute majority. It was like a mountain settling on the BNP-led opposition. During the last five years the opposition was brutalised in all possible manner. Democracy was shelved with disdain. The prevailing situation appears to have pushed the BNP to the wall and to throw caution and discretion to the wind. AL wanted to marginalise them into a ragtag band. It did not happen. BNP has been shredded of its old guards and wavering ranks; a bunch of relatively younger and

low profile activists have taken over. It is going to be a no holds barred battle with little of democracy in it.

Democracy is the art of the possible where differing views can flourish. Unfortunately, democracy in Bangladesh has become dysfunctional in the bristling thicket of contempt and unremitting hostility with no bridge to build. It is more like a coarse rule of engagement, 'either I stay or you stay.' In such a situation optimism is a difficult virtue to cultivate. The prime minister can rightly talk of the constitutional process. Only the Holy Scripture is not subject to accommodation but a country's constitution always has room for accommodation when the greater good of the country and the people is an issue.

The verdict of the Supreme Court that quashed the caretaker system did not close the door for a way forward. It advises that the caretaker system can be used for conducting the next two national polls in the interest of the safety of the people and the country. Even the parliamentary standing committee recommended that the matter be reviewed further. But the hurry with which the caretaker annulment bill was passed was surely lacking in discretion. The hastiness, only 4 minutes, was most unfortunate keeping in view that the government has a greater responsibility to make democracy functional.

The last two decades of parliamentary democracy have been a history of dysfunctional democracy. For that matter, the first two decades of Bangladesh cannot be commended for raising a rose garden. The 1973 national poll under the founding father was lamentably tainted. General Zia's elections were held with a cornered AL offering less than adequate opportunity for unfettered participation. General Ershad the autocrat held two abysmally stage-managed national elections in 1986 and 1988.

It is a fact that the people of Bangladesh have shown a fair example of tolerating these unwholesome proceedings of dysfunctional democracy. They deserve more than what the two major parties have given. Even the most benign attitude has its limit. It is to be seen when and how the tolerance breaks down. Meantime, let sanity prevail over the contending parties.

The writer is a former advertising professional

### Christmas Day

SUNITA D'COSTA

On this day to this world Was born a child To bring the message to young and old To be humble and mild.

To shun arrogance; for only humility Makes way for peace Enlightens consciousness, banishes enmity For all discords to cease.

This world is a gift to all mankind To all animals, meek and wild A place for all to share and be kind For this is the law of the human mind.

Deviation from this will only bring Mental turbulence and misery But the heart and the spirit could always sing Hope is alive to set despair free.

Such is the wisdom Christ offers thee And such is the wisdom Christ offers me.

The writer workers at American Embassy



#### By THOMAS JOSEPH 40 "Auld Lang ACROSS

41 Walk 5 Passed with ease through water tourneys DOWN 11 Opera 1 Subjec 2 Verdi 12 Green works sauce 13 Treated 3 Dry expanse 4 Toronto's squeak 14 Anger

18 Bulls or 21 Shower 5 Dry 7 Made level 8 Avoid

11 Tennis

15 Club doorman chore 17 Hauler's work circular shape 20 Chophouse Bjorn 16 Resident order of Turkey's 21 Lawn material

22 Texas

24 Sleuth

Spade 26 Paper

packs

29 Determined

30 Grouser's forte 32 Doing the

Thanks-

honors 34 West of

forward to 36 Conjure up 38 Dagwood's

39 Romantic

35 Look

28 Moved like 23 Business highlight 29 Oodles 30 Mayor's 10 Gregarious 24 Ocean domain lane 31 Gaggle 25 Transpormembers tation 33 Shop in an Ellington clamp 37 Promise capital landmark

MBEJMB PBJUZJT LIZH

27 Cham-

pagne

drink

#### A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

CRYPTOQUOTE

Z KGAB LFBUO VZSGUM VGLOZSBL GL UEO EUKC VEJB IEUEJZPKB, PWO VEJB WLBAWK OIZU Z KGAB LFBUO TEGUM UEOIGUM.

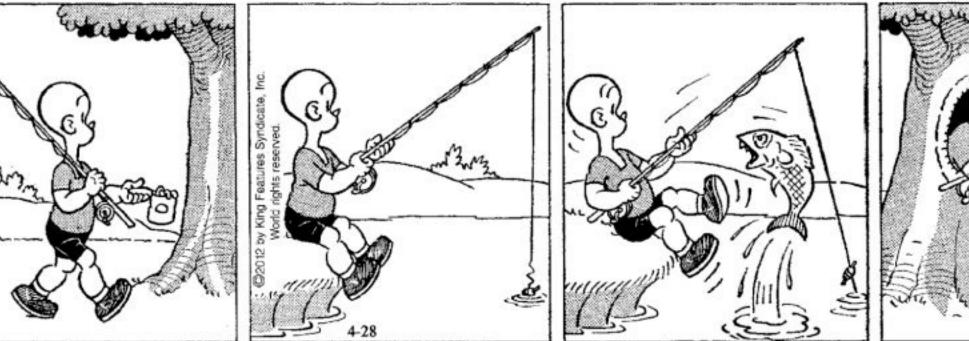
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: A WOSE MAN FIGHTS TO WIN, BUT HE IS TWICE A FOOL WHO HAS NO PLAN FOR POSSIBLE DEFEAT.

-- LOUIS L'AMOUR

**BEETLE BAILEY** THERE! I LET ME TRY THINKIGOT IT OUT THE GEARS FIXED 5-2



by Don Tranchte **HENRY** 



### QUOTABLE Quote

I remain just one thing, and one thing only, and that is a clown. It places me on a far higher plane than any politician?"

**Charlie Chaplin**