

OBHOYNOGOR

'Where the mind is without fear'?

MEGHNA GUHATHAKURTA

"If they want us, we will stay." For Renu Bala of Chalna who had come to help members of her family in Obhoynogor victimised by the recent post-election violence, it was a big "If"! At the same time it was a challenge thrown to the Bangladesh state, a state which she had returned to after fleeing to India for her life from the atrocities of the Pakistan Army in 1971. Through crouching movements she described as if it was yesterday, how she with her family had crawled across muddy water full of leaches, their skin scratched and bleeding by the thorns of bushes they hid under until they arrived at



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the Indian border. When they realised they were safe and no longer hounded by Pakistani Army and their informers, they had given the uludhoni (the ritual ululating which Hindus uttered on auspicious occasions). They were handed slips which meant that they could get some rice and pulses as ration. Yes, they were refugees. Her daughter had lost her newly-wed husband and yes, they had a few relatives who lived around West Bengal and yet when the war was over in December of 1971, they had all chosen to return to this newly born country, borne out of the sacrifices of millions like them, because it was after all their home, and home is where the heart is. In short it was where they lived, where their families lived, where people know each other and came to help each other when in need, just as they had come to help their families in Obhoynogor. It was a place where she also

wanted her young widowed daughter to live instead of India. Why was that? Because she said, in India they did not take care much of each other as much as they do here. Relationships were distant, while here the bonds were close perhaps because they grew from a common belonging to their land and ancestral homestead (bhitemati).

But then, home is also a place where you should feel safe and sound, where what little you have should be protected. Did she feel that she had that here? For 42 years they had felt they had, but now she did not know anymore. She did not know whether the neighbors with whom she exchanged greetings with, wanted them there, she did not know whether the state would actually carry through their promises of finding the persons responsible for the attack and punish them so that such incidents never occur again. She did not know if when all the people who came to express their sorrow and console them leaves, and when special police protection have been withdrawn, whether they will be attacked in the dark of the night, not collectively, but one by one, brutally and in a cool headed way. That is why she said "if they want us." By 'they' she indicated the state: the government machineries and also those indicated in power relation, local government, administration, elites of the locality, political parties and above all the ethos emanated by the Bangladesh itself and all those who help to form it.

It is this ethos which is largely in question now. Many thought that Bangladesh was born as a result of the contestation of the two-nation theory, the theory that envisaged one state for Hindus and one for Muslims in South Asia. Bangladesh in its initial constitution envisaged a state where Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians would all be treated equally in terms of citizenship rights. The notion which illustrated this ethos was secularism. Yet this was the first casualty (along with socialism, another marker of equal citizenship in terms of wealth distribution) in the political developments that ensued in the independent state of Bangladesh after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In subsequent political developments not only has the concept not been able to regain its former stature but have been consistently misinterpreted by fundamentalist quarters either as atheism or defensively adopted in liberal civil discourse in its benign form as religious tolerance devoid of fundamental questions

of citizenship rights. In other words secularism in the liberal discourse in Bangladesh has failed to address and counter the two-nation theory that still reigns supreme in the politics of the sub-continent.

Are things about to change? Not if you consider that the current Government even in its last 5 year stint with three-fourth majority in the parliament had resisted reverting to the original 1972 Constitution in apparent consideration of political expediency. On the other hand the same Government in response to national demand had established the International War Crimes Tribunal for the trial of war criminals of 1971. The very process has had the impact of reviving foundational issues of identity and ethos raised at the moment of the birth of Bangladesh but interestingly raised by a new generation that had not even witnessed 1971. The Gonojagoron Mancha which was born out of a gathering together of people to demand the punishment of war time collaborators is also raising their voices about identity of the Bangladesh state in which they see their future. Contesting the culture of impunity, their struggle has now taken them out of Shahbagh in the long march to Obhoynogor, where they are raising slogans such as "Hindu Muslim bhai bhai, miley mishey thakthey chai" (Hindus and Muslims are brothers, who wish to live together); "Amar mati, amar ma, Pakistan hobey na" (My land, my mother, will not become Pakistan); "Muktijuddher Chetona Shamprodaik hobey na" (The consciousness of the Liberation War, will never become communal).

It is upon this trend in the new generation that the people of Obhoynogor is pinning their hopes on. The youth are asking the right questions. How far they will be able to resolve them is yet to be seen but the hope that was expressed by the millions who thronged to see them on the way and at the place of their destination was that Gonjagoron Moncho will act as a catalyst to create a space in the existing political culture that may help to light up many awakenings among the down trodden and voiceless. The road no doubt is uphill and laborious but it is the only way forward for those who wish to see Bangladesh in the image of 'Obhoynogor', a destination where the mind is without fear and the head is held high.

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EID-E-MILADUNNABI

Universal and democratic principles in Islam

RUBY AMATULLA

In laying down fundamental principles the Quran often addresses mankind as the 'children of Adam' thus establishing a greater bonding of brotherhood in humanity. The Scripture proclaims that there is one God and everything else is His creation and therefore all human beings are equal belonging to one mankind.

In his famous farewell sermon at Arafat on his final pilgrimage just before his death, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) summed up the essence of the social message of the Islam as anti-racism when he proclaimed: "All human beings are descendent from the prototype Adam, and Adam has been created from earth. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab or for a non-Arab over an Arab for that matter. Neither is there superiority for a white person over a black person, nor for a black person over a white person, except the superiority gained through piety. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one with the most righteous in conduct."

However, the universal messages of the Quran are often misunderstood both by 'Muslims' as well as by non-Muslims due to some misconceptions. Many erroneous ideas stem from the wrong interpretations of the two root terms 'Muslim' and 'Islam' in today's World that distort the entire religion, its universal messages and the spirit of brotherhood it promotes in humanity.

A renowned Muslim scholar of our time Muhammad Asad clarifies these meanings in translating the Quran:

"Throughout this work, I have translated the terms 'Muslim' and 'Islam' in accordance with their original connotations, namely "one who surrenders himself to God" and "man's self-surrender to God":It should be borne in mind that the "institutionalized" use of these terms - that is, their exclusive application to the followers of the Prophet Muhammad - represents a definitely post-Quranic development and, hence, must be avoided in a translation of the Quran." [Note to verse 68:35]

The word 'Islam' also means peace. The Quran alludes that one cannot attain true peace without submitting herself/himself to the Will and moral law of God. The Quran further expounds that the entire universe - seen and unseen - is in a state of 'Islam' as it complies with the laws of God. It is claimed that all babies are born in a state of 'Islam' irrespective of their family orientations. As one grows up in different religious and cultural background he/she becomes different.

Islam therefore, is a non-sectarian, non-racial, non-doctrinal, universal religion at the core: For Islam is just submission to the Will and Moral Law of God that would help one return to his/her original pure state. Whoever does this is a muslim irrespective of whatever one calls himself/herself.

The Quran proclaims that all human beings, irrespective of their differences in terms of creed, color, gender, etc., are 'khalifa' or viceroys or representatives of God on earth [Quran 6:165, 27:62]. One therefore comes into this world with certain God given or 'inalienable' rights that must be defended by the society. There are also inherent responsibilities assigned to this enormous position of 'khalifa' for which one remains answerable to God. In order to fulfill these responsibilities God has empowered a human being with 'fitraAllah' or the true 'nature' or the capacity that can discern right from wrong [30:30]. With this enormous empowerment comes the 'freedom of choice' for which one remains accountable to the Creator. The justification of the 'Day of Judgment' rests on the idea that God has given free will to a human as his/her fundamental rights.

God reserves the exclusive right to judge piety or righteousness of a person, and no human being should trespass that boundary to judge another. It is highly blasphemous to be judgmental and to call another human being infidel 'kafir'.

The concept of 'khalifa' or humans as God's representatives on earth naturally lead to the idea that a 'khalifa' cannot be a subject of a ruler [monarchical or otherwise] but only a citizen of a self-rule. Peoples' sovereignty then represents God's sovereignty on earth. Therefore the legitimacy of democratic governance was laid down in the Quran fourteen centuries ago. Furthermore, the spirit of seeking unity in diversity exhorted in many places in the Quran provides the basis for vibrant pluralism in a society.

The Muslims also forgot that the very first community the Prophet established in Medina was governed by democratic principles. The Charter of Medina [Sahifat al-Madina], the very first written constitution known in human history, under the leadership of the Prophet laid down a federal system of governance. The modern day scholars marvel at the similarities between this document and the American Constitution drafted eleven centuries later.

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Need for soul-searching

HABIBUL HAQUE KHONDKER

BA NGLADESH needs to regain its sanity and decency. This is the challenge for the new government however tenuous its tenure may be. May be Bangladesh needs a Sadharon Janata Party after the Aam Aadmi Party of Mr. Arvind Kejriwal in India. The entrenched political class is too busy fighting their own internal and factional battles to take notice of the plight of the ordinary citizens of Bangladesh. The behavior, language and actions of the politics of Bangladesh must change to help Bangladesh attain her desired goal to be a Middle income country by 2021. More than that, Bangladesh needs to return to its rightful civilised existence that it always has been. The derailment of civility calls for a national soul searching.

The twin problems of corruption and violence need immediate attention. Some sections of the print media have been forthcoming condemning the twin evils but the civil society has not done enough. The silence of the civil society on corruption is deafening, and their whimper on violence is regrettable. Both the leading parties have knowingly patronised the corrupt politicians. The attacks on the lives of ordinary people that included attacks on the passenger buses with petrol bombs, cutting of trees and setting fire on a truck loaded with animals were met with mild criticisms, not abhorrence. Talk show pundits, the

representatives of urban middle classes with decent jobs were too busy analysing the elections, which party gained, which party or who lost, future implications and so on to the utter difference of the horror in which many of their rural and poor compatriots are living their days and nights. Very few can be seen in the chat shows expressing their revulsion at the attack of the Hindu neighbourhoods in the districts of Jessore, Dinajpur and elsewhere in Bangladesh, far from the capital city. The urban bias and class bias in identifying national issues is glaringly blatant in Bangladesh. Imagine, if a high-class residential area

another journalist asking them about their 'feelings' after the trauma.

The fact that people choose to suffer rather than come forward reporting crimes is a reflection of their mistrust with the system. They accept such sufferings as a routine of life. After elections, the aggrieved parties and their loyalist or paid goons would ransack houses of the supporters of their opponents, set fire to their shops and properties and rape some of their women have become normalised.

Official inquiries followed by identification and arrest of the culprits and their trial and punishment would have

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such as Baridhara or Gulshan was attacked what would have been the response?

The rural communities that bore the brunt of the attacks were populated by the poor people who belong to the Hindu religion. They are the others for the urban elite. The Hindu women in one instance have been subjected to gang-rape. Only few women have come out in public, given the culture of shame in Bangladesh. It is quite probable that many women victims have chosen to suffer their agonies in silence out of the media glare. They did not want to face

deterred such heinous and cowardly acts. This exposes the systemic misgovernance of Bangladesh. In extreme cases, uniform forces would be deployed to take actions which often put the innocent villagers at risk. There is no substitute for the full implementation of the due process of law.

While at one level, it is problem of so-called law and order at another and deeper level it is a problem of the erosion of pluralism in Bangladesh. For centuries, Bangladesh, or the territory that constituted the present nation-state, has been a model of pluralism. It is only

since the beginning of the Pakistan movement the seeds of communal discord was shown and nurtured which reached its peak in wanton violence at the climax of the movement for a so-called "home land of the Muslims" in the 1940s.

Pakistan, the way it was envisioned by its founders, is dead. Yet the *geist* (German word for spirit or ghost) of Pakistan is still alive thanks to the religious turn in politics since the mid-1970s in Bangladesh. Some party leaders from overseas are busy rubbing the 1972 constitution of Bangladesh which, at least, incorporated the provision of secularism in the sense of religious tolerance. The American-style secularism that the framers of constitution incorporated is appropriate for Bangladesh, yet the usurpers of high political office in Bangladesh were blinded by their short-term gain thus deliberately jettisoned the principle of secularism which dented the spirit of pluralism and inclusiveness in Bangladesh.

In fact, religious turn in politics is a global phenomenon which is being dealt with in other parts of the world. Bangladesh is yet to develop a modality of dealing with this phenomenon.

A conversation on pluralism, non-violence and democracy is the need of the hour. Are the big two political parties up to it?

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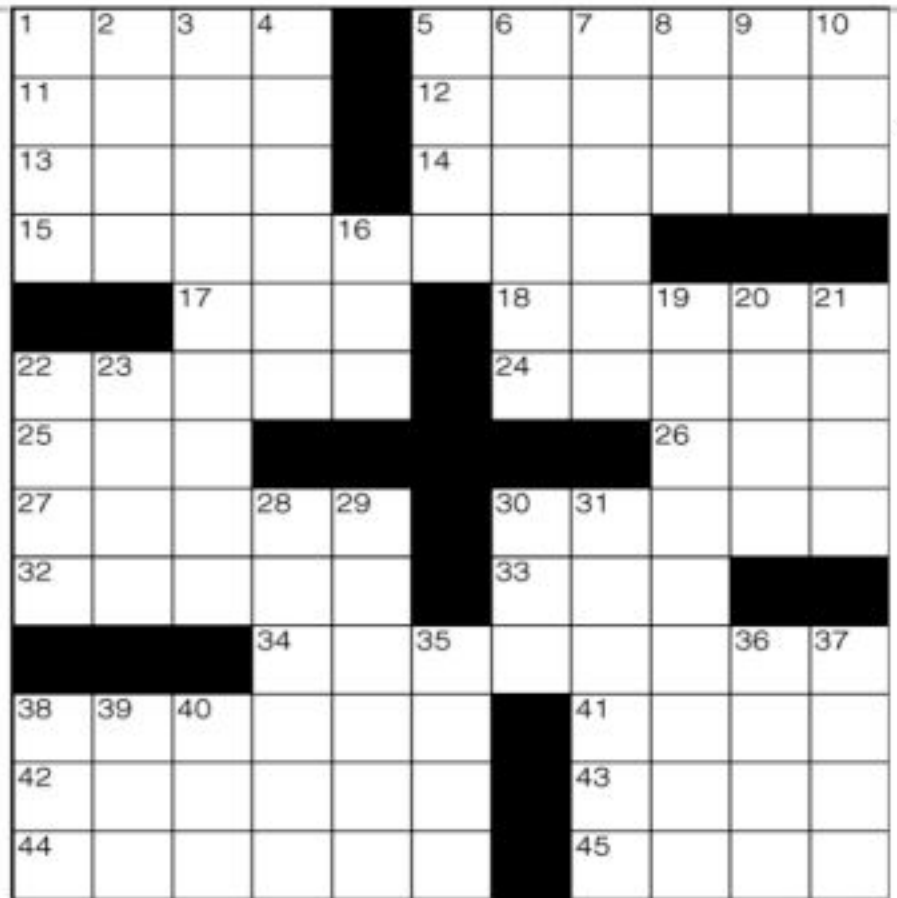
CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- 1 Pert talk
- 5 Moulin Rouge dance
- 11 Canyon sound
- 12 Mead-owlark's cousin
- 13 Harrow rival
- 14 Knock over
- 15 God of wine
- 17 Kickoff aid
- 18 Malia's sister
- 22 Novel ideas
- 24 Patriot Allen
- 25 Seine water
- 26 Many a time
- 27 Door sign
- 30 Fry lightly
- 32 Ranch rope
- 33 Halloween mo.
- 34 Potential pipes
- 38 Bagel choice
- 41 Franc replacer
- 42 Wed in secret
- 43 Wild guess
- 44 Ornamental shrubs
- 45 Swift jets

DOWN

- 1 Canary snack
- 2 Play start
- 3 Soccer game tie breakers
- 4 Shakespeare creation
- 5 Barracks beds
- 6 Kindle
- 7 Attacks, puppestyle
- 8 Beat walker
- 9 Completely
- 10 Once called
- 16 Agreeable answer
- 19 Public mentions
- 20 Knife handle
- 21 Poker payment
- 22 Zest source
- 23 Turner of film
- 28 Houdini feat
- 29 Tenant
- 30 Heir, often
- 31 Means of approach
- 35 Some wines
- 36 Baby sitter's bane
- 37 Shows sorrow
- 38 Sailing site
- 39 Wing
- 40 Lawn makeup



CRYPTOQUOTE

HPRCW ACRAZC GPR HPFEMU HPCJ
UMRG CNCDJHPFMB KDC K BDCKH
KMMRJKMTC HR HPRWC RY LW GPR ER.
- FWKKT KWFQRN

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE: NEVER, NEVER REST
CONTENTED WITH ANY CIRCLE OF IDEAS, BUT
ALWAYS BE CERTAIN THAT A WIDER ONE IS
STILL POSSIBLE.
- RICHARD JEFFERIES

Yesterday's answer

MUSH I C I C L E
ANNE D O M A I N
STOW L O P P E D
T O W G E L S
B L A D E S A D
A V A I L D A N C E
C E L L L O R E
M A L T A P O W E R
E L S D W E E B
H O U R E R A
O A T E R S A L E C
F L A R E S B L A H
F L U R R Y E S P Y

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.

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte



QUOTABLE Quote

A leader is the one who is determined when everyone else is doubtful.

Alaa Elsayed