

Special Supplement

National Mourning Day

Friday 15 August 2014

Bangabandhu's Philosophy and Modern Bangladesh

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accepts the minimal condition of remaining in subjugation. By uttering these infallible words before the nation, Bangabandhu had asserted that such an incident would not be repeated in the lives of the Bangalis.

He was the first among the Bangla-speaking people of the world to address the United Nations General Assembly in mother-tongue Bangla in September 1974. After the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, it was he who had established Bangla language on the global podium. This huge achievement of the Bangalis could be possible due to his state philosophy. After Bangladesh obtained membership of the United Nations on 17 September, he addressed the UN General Assembly on 25 September in Bangla. At the start of his speech he said, "Standing at this august gathering before you today, I share a comprehensive satisfaction with you because the seven and a half crore people of Bangladesh are being represented at this assembly. This moment is a historic one for Bangladesh, as it marks a completion of the right to self-determination of the Bangali nation". Bangabandhu also said, "Millions of our people had made supreme sacrifices for the ideal that is embodied in the charter of the United Nations." In this way, he could establish the prestige of the country and its people within a very short time.

He was imprisoned during the language movement of 1952. In his 'Unfinished Memoirs', he wrote: "One of the windows in my cabin faced the ward. I told them to meet me after 1 a.m. Since no one used to visit me then they allowed me to walk on my own. The police would lie down quietly knowing that I wasn't going to run away. The detective branch people tended to nod off to sleep. We could therefore talk in the veranda. I told them that we should form an all-party united front. There was conspiracy afoot to thwart the demand for establishing Bengali as the state language. Now if there was no protest the National Assembly would introduce legislation to make Urdu the only state language. Mr Nazimuddin had not only talked about making Urdu the only state language, he had also come up with many new arguments to buttress its claim. We decided in the meetings in my room to observe 21 February as State Language Day and to form a committee that day to conduct the movement to establish Bengali as the state language. The convener for that movement would be a member of the Students' League. A campaign would be launched from the beginning of February to mobilize public opinion. I told them, I myself will go on a hunger strike from the 16th of February demanding my release from prison."

He could equate the honour of the mother-language with that of our political right. The glory of mother-tongue is destroyed if one is deprived of this right. Today, 21 February – the day when lives were sacrificed for language – is observed as the 'International Mother Language Day' on a global plain. UNESCO has made a declaration for observing this day. A modern state wants to see her achievements within the fold of world heritage. Bangladesh has emerged victorious in this endeavour. The contribution of Bangabandhu from the sidelines in this achievement is memorable.

'Distressed people' were not merely two words in Bangabandhu's life. From the very beginning of his adolescence and youth, his political journey commenced with the commitment of bringing smiles to the faces of suffering humanity. While returning from school, he gave away his own wrapper to a poor old man for protecting his body from the cold. He gave away umbrella to a poor student who was his friend. During difficult times, he gave away paddy to the needy people from his father's paddy-bowl. All these were not done from any theoretical concept. They were part of his natural tendencies.

After assuming office following the independence of our country, Bangabandhu started multi-dimensional activities for reconstruction of the country. The physical infrastructure of the war-ravaged country had broken down, the refugees had started to come back, the cries of the people who lost their near ones had not subsided. He took back the weapons from the freedom fighters. He made arrangements for helping those who had suffered losses during the war. He issued instructions to rebuild the damaged roads, bridges and railway lines in order to restore the communication system. He formed the 'Qudrat-e-Khuda Commission' in order to make the education system time-befitting. The Planning Commission was constituted. Taxes for up to 25 bighas of agricultural land were waived. Rural electrification was launched. Arrangements were made for running industries under state management. He had plans to carry forward the journey of the new nation in a well-considered manner. A Constitution was framed within 1972. Nationalism, democracy, socialism and secularism were the fundamental principles of that Constitution.

He had earlier returned to the country via London after getting freedom from the Pakistani prison. The journalist David Frost took his interview in London. He asked: "When your grave was being dug in the Pakistani prison, whom did you remember then?" He replied: "My countrymen." After returning to his country, he revealed in his address, "I was ready to die in Yahya's prison. Because, I knew that the people of my Bangla would certainly be freed. In the history of the world, no country had to sacrifice so many lives for independence in such a short time. I knew they would kill me. But I had only one request for them – you please send my corpse to my 'Sonar Bangla'."

Secularism was a vital feature of his philosophy. He took a position against communalism ever since his student days. This was a fundamental condition in the definition of any modern state. When communal riots broke out in Kolkata in 1946, he engaged himself in

relief work in the riot-affected areas. He stood beside the distressed people. Bhabatosh Datta, a famous economist of India, used to teach at Islamia College from 1943. In his book titled 'Shat Dashak' (Decade of Sixties) he reminisced about the riot episode: "We got the proof of what the Islamia students could do for us during the bloody communal riots of 1946. Danger was lurking throughout the path from Baliganj to Islamia College. The students used to help us cross this path. They used to wait near Baliganj and then took us to the college at Wellesley Street. Then they used to take us back in the same way. I would like to recall here with gratitude those Muslim students of Islamia College who used to escort us over that dangerous area. The name of one of those students was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman."

He volunteered by risking his life during the Bangali-Bihari riot of 1964. His own security was jeopardised during the terrible violence at Narayanganj. He then distributed the leaflet, 'Build up Resistance East Pakistan' on behalf of the anti-riot committee. The convenor of this anti-riot committee was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He was arrested for violating the Pakistan Press and Publications Ordinance and Pakistan Penal Code after distributing the leaflet 'Build up Resistance East Pakistan'. He was later released on bail.

In this way, he stood in favour of the masses by risking his own life. The humanistic philosophy was at the core of his existence. For this reason, the religion of man irrespective of faith and colour was the chief ingredient in his drive for helping the distressed. Bangabandhu was a believer in the empowerment of women. After independence, he awarded the title 'Birangana' to those women who had undergone torture. The 'Women's Rehabilitation Board' was constituted for providing care and housing to the tortured women. He tackled this difficult problem during the post-war period with an open mind. He tried to restore the social status of the womenfolk.

On the other hand, he made the provision of reserved seats for women in the Jatiya Sangsad in 1973 for political empowerment of women. He appointed female ministers in the cabinet of independent Bangladesh Government. The Muslim Marriage and Registration Act was passed in 1974. Article 17 of the Constitution spoke about the equality of men and women. The dream of today's Bangladesh is not violence; rather the goal is to move forward through equality of men and women.

He thought about welfare of the people ever since his juvenile days. He dreamt about doing something for them. He thought about establishing an exploitation-free society keeping in mind the deprived masses. With this goal, he founded a new political organization 'Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League' on 24 February 1975. Its shortened name was 'BAKSAL'. For its sake, all political parties including the Awami League was banned. Bangabandhu termed BAKSAL as the second revolution. BAKSAL had four major goals: a) pro-people administration; b) pro-people judicial system; c) compulsory multi-purpose village cooperatives; and d) democracy of the exploited.

The massive work that he tried to accomplish in only three and a half years was mountain-like. Even then, he wanted to move forward by overcoming all challenges. But the end could not be salvaged. Bangabandhu was fearless in the face of local and foreign conspiracies. He was not concerned about his own life. He also did not have the inferior mentality of not trusting the Bangali nation. 'Losing trust in people is a sin' – he used to view this message of *kobiguru* (poet of the poets) Rabindranath Tagore as a constant truth. That is why, he did not think of leaving his residence and staying in government residence surrounded by sentries for the sake of his security. That would have created a gap with the mass people. He paid the price of loving his people by giving away his own life.

Bangabandhu was a farsighted man with a modern outlook on the question of the fundamentals of a modern state. He never explained the country and the nation with a backward mentality. Everything before him was open. One of his outstanding quotations was: "As a man, what concerns mankind concerns me. As a Bangalee, I am deeply involved in all that concerns Bangalees. This abiding involvement is born of and nourished by love, enduring love, which gives meaning to politics and to my very being."

Bangabandhu's diary contained a song. He had written it down as his favourite song.

Love isn't love till you give it away
Love isn't love till it's free
The love in your heart
Wasn't put there to stay
Oh love isn't love till you give it away.
You might think love is a treasure to keep
Feeling to cherish and hold
But love is a treasure for people to share
You keep it by letting it go.

This was a vital aspect of his philosophy of life – love is a treasure for people to share – the message of this extraordinary song had found resonance in his own philosophy.

Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed

Why Bangabandhu will remain bright in people's minds

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Rahman. She did it just to rejoice on his death day. Just think for once whether it goes against human rights or not. Later, when they came to power they removed Bangabandhu's images, changed the names of all the institutions that were named after him. Not only that, they also changed the textbooks. Last of all, they also announced that the national flag should not be lowered at half mast on that day. The national mourning day had been cancelled earlier. The civil society of Bangladesh did not raise any protest against any of these activities. Even if 40% people have supported this alliance, then almost half the people of this country have supported these activities. It seems that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had committed a big crime by creating Bangladesh and he should be punished for it in as many ways as possible.

But these 40% people and their descendants would have lived like slaves if Bangladesh had not been created. They have enjoyed all the privileges of independence but they want to be 'Pakistani' now. The question arises – did the Bangalis really want independence or did they want a golden cage? Or did they want freedom then and now they don't? Because, their main characteristic is ungratefulness. In this context, I remember a scene from Tarek Masud's film *Muktir Kotha*. There is an ordinary man's statement in that scene. A rajakar has been elected Chairman in his village. Then that ordinary man says, "As we have elected a rajakar, 90% of us have turned into rajakars. We would not have made a rajakar chairman if we had not been dogs".

Yes, we become shocked on 15 August to see that 40% people have still had this realization. However, the BNP-Jamaat alliance tries, they will never be able to erase the name of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from history and erect the name of Ziaur Rahman. The very name of Sheikh Mujib as the hero of 1971 is everywhere in the world. As a student of history I would like to add that even if the name of Bangladesh is sometime erased, the name of Sheikh Mujib and that of Bangladesh will remain intact in history, and the people of Bangladesh will rather go down in history as an ungrateful nation.

An analysis of the events that occurred before 1971 and during the period from 1971 to 1975 clearly shows where the position of Bangabandhu is both inside Bangladesh and in the outside world and where the position of the other agents is. It is impossible to write the history of the pre-independence and post-independence Bangladesh brushing him aside. The Bangalis got a dignified position in history only once and that was under his leadership. That is why, it now seems that in the life of this nation this was the lone exceptional event. It was under his leadership that the unarmed Bangalis for the first time were able to



Bangabandhu addresses the UN General Assembly in Bangla on 24 September 1974

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establish a complete civil society by defeating the armed forces. However, it also seems that as he was ahead of the Bangalis in terms of time, he thought that they were eligible for Bangladesh. Today the BNP and other parties of the alliance may think that it was a crime for Sheikh Mujib to create Bangladesh and he should be further harassed for it. They can do it but most people of this country are still proud of it and they will be proud in future too. Because, wherever the Bangalis live and in whichever condition, the names of two Bangalis will remain bright forever in their minds. One is poet Rabindranath Tagore and the other is Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The former whose song is the national anthem of Bangladesh sang the Bangla language and the latter turned the Bangalis' many years' dream into reality.

Translation: Md. Jahurul Islam

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Cry, August is the Month of Mourning

Nirmalendu Goon

The day of mourning has arrived, cry Bangali, cry. I know, you were bereft of the right to weep for a long time, O the luckless people of Bengal, I know, You could not cry for twenty-one years. Cry today. Cry now with all your heart, the day of grieving has come, The debt of grief piled over two decades – Repay today with unending cry.

Let your chest be swept away with emotional outburst Of wailing, let this delta of Bangla become inundated. How beautiful the combined sobbing of people can be, Men do not know, Inform them now, Let everybody know, Like the cry of crickets emanating from the soil Let the world hear your chorus of sobbing. Cry, please cry today by shaking the earth.

Depressed of the joy of crying, O the people of this luckless land, Please cry like the hungry child deprived of a mother's milk, Please cry like the lonely sister whose brother has been lost, Please cry like the affectionate daughter who has lost her father, Please cry like the penniless people who lose everything in tidal surge, Please cry like the mother of a new-born child who is dead, Like a father who collapses and cries falling on the ground After putting his young son inside a grave, you please cry. Cry with the pain of being unable to cry in helpless anguish And powerless rage, when you really wanted to cry!

After twenty-one years, the sun of Mujib has risen today piercing the cloud On the sky of Bangla; not in mirth, but with the crying sound of Good omen, invoke this today. Cry Bangali, cry. The day of mourning has arrived in this liberated Bangla, bereft of Mujib. Today, like the white fluid of the torn banyan leaf Let your tear-drops fall from your eyes. Today, like the warm juice flowing from the bark of a date-tree Let the sobs that piled up in the chest fall in the pitcher of clay. After twenty-one years, August has come today. August is the cruellest month. August is the month of mourning – sinful, cruel-heartless, Free her from her sin, by crying, by wailing.

Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed

O, the Bangali Jesus

Mohammad Nurul Huda

Forty years pass, your Bangalis do remember you, Forty thousand may pass, your Bangalis shall seek refuge to you. All the times in the veins of the Bangalis, from one birth to another, Your alluvial silts flow from the Himalayan crest, in playful gesture, Surfacing an island in the sea, extending Bengal's border, The sea, being your waves, flowing from one age to another: Bangali you're in your dawning, Bangali you're in your dying, Always undergoing an evolution in the birth-remembering Shadows and illusions of this Red-and-Green.

Long back you came down to the banks of the Madhumoti, Then as a revolving toy of childhood you went to the huts Full of joys and sorrows of this Nation-Mother, While recognizing the limitless, not the limit. In your youth you visited all the courtyards of Your Mother Country, apart from the rural mother, Your footprints are engraved in all the homes of Bengal, Regardless of religion, colour and odour, In all the estuaries Of all the Bangalis.

No, you're no more a corporeal being surviving in moments; No, you're no more an incorporeal shadow like death-laden silence. Eternally free, you stand for intrepidity, liberty and true humanity; Individual you're, you're the Nation, In the heart of a Coppery Nation, cuddling divine immortality.

Your body is a seed of soil, its crops multiplying at a geometrical rate; Within the limit of fifty-six thousand miles your body is no more contained. Your soul is sleepless and incorporeal,

A flyover bridging both the ends of time eternal, You're the sovereign flag in the hands of world-Bangalis for ages all. The killers are self-murderers, devoid of offspring at the verdict of time, Banished in the land of infertility, they no more take pride in their lineage; Bangalis are a heroic Nation, you're their all-conquering flame; Your flag upholds the sign of eternal victory on the cheek of time.

Child you're, in the homes of generations, born and unborn, Jesus you're, the Bangali Jesus, your blood redeems your children. Your innocent eyes view the butterflies, white sails, marshy lands, rivers, Lakes-walks-boats go on jingling, turning and turning in endless gyres;

Child you're, Jesus you're, the father of Nation, You're the flame of human religion, With no beginning and end, though burning on.

The Bangalis look for you, and you look for the good of them, It's only the light of Mujib that makes the Bangalis true human.

Translation: Poet himself

Father – the Son of Fire

Asad Mannan

It is not moonlight that bursts from the moon, the blood drops on the chest – This time and place, grief-struck sea and hill are swept away by blood-water; The luminous face of an immortal man spreads over the horizon Like the wingless cloud in sleep, the blue of the watery river dreams; Who is it that ceaselessly walks in the heart of a solitary blue fire? He is an immortal son of fire, forever walking alone in dreams and waking hours In the depths of our ethos, he lighted the torch of our freedom amid a sea of masses. Some bastard assassins raised their fangs like the poisonous serpent – On that accursed night of darkness the whole of moonlight was hit by bullet; In the deep forest the solitary mother of Bangla cries alone like a dark tree; There is no life in the wind, only the invisible fire burns in disbelief, This soil, this generation beyond that cloud, still burn in that fire. When the motherland became a mother after getting swept by blood On that day the faces of millions of martyrs were illuminated by stars; See, look, all the martyrs have today in perfect faith Become one – resting on the blood-drenched bed of the father; This bed of heart is spread over fifty-six thousand square kilometres – Our noblest father is sleeping on that bed in sleepless bliss; The mother calls out adoringly – come Khoka, dear Khoka! I cry – father! Wreathing seventy-one in my chest – Opening the coffin comes out drenched in blood-spattered water... In the ferry of Modhumoti river where the dark green waters flow In a new voice again – the heart wet with the fire of dream; Please come back to the habitat of distressed Bangla, Father, return to our homes! Come whenever you can, Come as incessant rain at the height of severe drought in the fields – Please wash away the sickness of a mother's soul with the fiery water of freedom.

Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed



Bangabandhu with his loving daughter Sheikh Hasina

Why Bangabandhu will remain bright in people's minds

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Rah