



Mourning the martyred intellectuals

REBECCA HAQUE

MOURN a cold, dark, bloody day in distant December. Dawn, dusk, dew, and nightfall. Silent death squads knocking at the door, targeting noble names on the assassin's hit-list.

Lament the loss. Weep the tears. Cry for the slaughter of the illustrious sons of the delta. Wait at the memory of the dead desecrated in the ditch.

Feel the agony of grief. Our teachers and our seers, taken from us to the sequestered pit. Freedom on the horizon and the marching *Mukti Bahini* carrying the flag of liberation could not save them from the savage ambush.

On the fourteenth of December, raise your arm to salute, to remember the martyred intellectuals. Murdered with such diabolical, secret strategy to cripple the new nation.

Dare to shout. Dare to accuse. Dare to punish the craven killers. Your Nation asks this of thee: do not flinch, seek justice.

Remember the 'Rape of Bangladesh'.

In 1971, Anthony Mascarenhas was an eyewitness to the brutal acts of torture and unholy massacres of innocent civilians. This brave Pakistani journalist, hounded out of his own country for the truthful account published later in that year in London, ended his reportage from Dhaka in October 1971. But the final lines of his book are ominous in the prescient knowledge of the horror that was to follow. He writes: "Bangla Desh is too big, too explosive and has too many outcroppings to be either swept under the carpet of international opinion or to be painlessly swallowed by all parties concerned. Each of its aspects—the refugees, famine, genocide, the total alienation of the millions of Bengalis, the shattering effects independence would have on West Pakistan — by themselves are major international problems. Together they constitute a greater disaster and a graver threat to peace than Biafra and Vietnam or anything this generation has known.... We are only just entering a new area of darkness. It will be a long time before the light begins to show at the end of the tunnel." (Vikas Pub.: India, 1971, pp.145-6)

In the Preface, dated London, 1

October 1971, Mascarenhas comments, "What I saw in East Bengal was to me more outrageous than anything I had read about the inhuman acts of Hitler and the Nazis. This was happening to my own people. I knew I had to tell the world about the agony of East Bengal or forever carry within myself the agonizing guilt of acquiescence." (p.v). The writer here is unequivocal about his political affiliation and equally firm in his moral judgment. However, it is a travesty of history that even after more than four decades since the atrocities were committed in 1971, after the gruesome carnage of the night of 25 March 1971, and the satanic ritual killing on 14 December 1971, so many perpetrators of evil have not been identified and prosecuted. In recent times, a few known collaborators have been tried and sentenced, but we have yet to see signs of guilt or true remorse in them. How can we offer forgiveness in the face of an absence of a moral conscience? It is unnatural for the perpetrator to expect clemency when there is no clear attempt at redemption through confession of participation in crimes against humanity.

The children of Bangladesh have this heavy burden of a legacy of a holocaust. For us all, there can be no closure until there is full redress, until there is full disclosure about the events of 1971 to the people of Pakistan, until their government discards the cloak of denial and offers a formal apology for future generations to exist in mutual trust. It is not enough for scholars to enter into research and debate on Partition and Liberation War studies. Facts of recent history cannot, and should not, be confined within academia. History is for each of us to know in its authenticity from eyewitness accounts and scholarly documents. We may not know it whole at once, but we can weave the torn fragments into a tapestry of truth. This is necessary to guard against fabrication, or willful 're-writing' of history as has happened in fascist dictatorships in the past. Democracy, by its very definition, guarantees its citizens free access to information, to liberty of movement and speech, to justice and equal opportunity for work. These are the



precious objectives and values for which millions of Bangalee civilians, University students, young *Mukti Bahini* men and women, and visionary intellectuals, were martyred. They died for a noble cause; they shed their blood so that our children would be born in an independent nation. A supreme sacrifice for a supreme purpose.

Mascarenhas has equated the horror of 1971 with Hitler's regime, as have so many since then. It is a natural comparison between similar states of evil. We are today constantly comparing our War Crimes Tribunal with the Nuremberg Trials of post-World War II. The German-Jewish philosopher, Hannah Arendt, chose to be present at the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, and in her book wrote the famous, now oft-quoted, words, "the main lesson to be gleaned from [Eichmann's] life was one of the *sear-some, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil*." Arendt's argument about the relation of obedience to authority parallels the argument of the American social psychologist, Professor Stanley

Milgram. After controversial experiments conducted at Yale beginning in July 1961, the year after the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem, Milgram tried to answer the question "Could it be that Eichmann and his million accomplices in the Holocaust were just following orders? Could we call them all accomplices?" He concluded that people obey through coercion, and obey either out of fear or out of a desire to appear cooperative — even when acting against their own better judgment and desires.

However, there is recent dispute about this theory. In *The New Psychology of Leadership* (2012), Alexander Haslam and Stephen Reicher extend their "BBC Prison Study" series of experiments and collaborate with a number of researchers to develop a social identity analysis of leadership. This work focuses on the role of perceived shared identity as a basis for mutual influence between leaders and followers. It argues that leaders' success depends on their ability to create, represent, and advance a social identity that is shared with those they seek to

motivate and inspire. Haslam and Reicher contest Milgram with regard to one crucial point. They argue that Eichmann, a committed Nazi, nonetheless 'took on organisational challenges with fervor and imagination. If he thought orders were not sufficiently "on message", he would likely disobey them, and where none had been given, as was often the case, he would still "work towards the Führer" in a creative way. He was convinced that the cause he was advancing was right. The truly frightening thing about Eichmann and his ilk is not that they didn't know what they were doing, but that they knew full well what they were doing and believed their actions to be justified, worthy and noble.' (*New Scientist*, 13 Sept. 2014, p.28)

Rational consideration of these new scientific studies by social psychologists, as well as research work undertaken by anthropologists in the last two decades on conflict studies in the "killing fields" of South Asia, make us posit significant political and ethical questions regarding the relationship between the occupying military army

and the East Pakistani collaborators. Who provided the names on the hit-list to the local goons on the eve of Bangladesh's victory? Did the collaborators work for the military junta in a 'creative' way to advance their careers? Did they justify their actions on religious grounds? Surely, one point is clear to all of us who lived through the travail of those days: none of the collaborators were coerced.

The nation mourns the loss of the intellectuals on December 14. Memorials embody memory, and material objects of art and architecture memorialize both valour and losses of war. Around 50 top intellectuals of the country — doctors, engineers, lawyers, litterateurs, academics, journalists, and also top bureaucrats and business elites, were killed in cold blood. The intellectuals were both Hindus and Muslims. Their bodies were found in a brick kiln in Raybaraj, in Dhaka, lying face down, blindfolded, hands tied behind their backs with red pieces of cloth.

There are two Martyred Intellectual Memorials in Dhaka, the one in Mirpur, built in 2002, is the site of all official commemorations on Intellectual Killing Day, *Shaheed Dibosh*. The Raybaraj Memorial was built from 1996 to 1999 after the prize-winning design submitted jointly by architects Fariduddin Ahmed and Jamil-Shafi. In an interview with a research scholar in 2005, Fariduddin explained the symbolism of the architectural and spatial dimensions of the Memorial: "Rather than seeing this memorial as a war memorial, the architect defined it as a *sritishoudho* — a monument to memory. Unlike the Taj Mahal, which is a mausoleum, tinged with the pathos of romantic love, Ahmed clarified that this was different. This was a tomb that upheld tradition while also announcing the demise of empire and imperialism and the deaths caused by it. This makes the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial both a memorial and a shrine, drawing its inspirations from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Ahmed emphasized." (*Space and Culture*, May 2007)

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The Heroes of a Forgetful Nation

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IN 1947, people of Bangladesh (then East Bengal) voted for Pakistan which resulted in its geographical union with Pakistan as one state. Their aspiration was to live in an independent and harmonious land with dignity and rights. But soon after the partition of Indian subcontinent, it became evident that Pakistani leaders had other plans on their mind. The colonialist Pakistani leaders mostly of military background wanted Bangladesh's soil, not its people. By this principle they started to exploit the country ruthlessly. Bangladesh's (then East Pakistan) jute and agricultural harvests adorned West Pakistan's new capital Islamabad, fed its 50 million people, but the majority 70 million people of East Pakistan remained deprived and left out as before.

To make matter worse those Pakistani leaders decided to annihilate Bengali culture by inserting and imposing their alien cultural dogma. Thus a cultural war between Bengalis and West Pakistanis broke out as early as in 1948 when the question of state language was put forward. Bengali scholars, academicians, students, journalists and cultural activists formed cultural groups, organisations and protested against Pakistani's aggression on Bengali culture. The historic language movement led by Bengali intellectual community was the brightest illustration of this cultural war.

So this community of intellectuals who had been working as the guardians of Bengali cultural heritage were blacklisted by the Pakistani military dictators. When Pakistanis finally attacked the Bengalis on March 25th 1971 the first victims of the atrocity were these golden sons of our soil. One of the prime objectives of Pakistan army's operation searchlight was the occupation of Dhaka University campus, the home of Bengali intelligentsia.

On 25th March, armed with tanks, mortars and armoured vehicles Pakistani military convoy encircled Dhaka University campus from three sides (Witness To Surrender: by Siddiq Salik; Chapter: Operation Search Light-1). After devastating bombardment from tanks and artillery, infantrymen marched into the campus and

started the brutal massacre. On the first night they killed 10 teachers of the university with hundreds of students and other staff. Professor Fajlur Rahman and his two relatives were killed at building 23 situated in Nilkhet Teacher's Quarter. The soldiers called on Professor Abdul Muktarir of geology department and shot him at point blank range. His body was found at Jahurul Huq Hall (then Iqbal Hall). Professors A.R. Khan Khadim and Sharafat Ali of Mathematics department were killed in Dhaka Hall

Chakrabarti). In a video secretly filmed from Jagannath Hall's adjacent Engineering University rooftop, we can still see a part of the dreadful massacre. Some unarmed people were lined up and one of them fell on a soldier's feet and begged for his life. Kicking him off to the line the indifferent soldiers gunned them down and bayoneted the bodies to ensure that they were all dead.

Many teachers escaped the massacre fleeing from their home in the university area. There were also jour-

list and he requested Gauhar if he could do something to save his friend. Gauhar then took the matter to one of his close friends who was a common friend with Major General Rao Farman Ali. Gauhar's friend met with Farman and requested him to drop the name from his hit list. "Farman took, said Gauhar's friend, a diary out of his drawer and crossed the name out. The name was of Mr Sanaul Huq and he was spared." After the war the half burnt diary was recovered from the ruins of the Governor's house. The copy of a page from the diary shows the list of intellectuals from Dhaka University. 14 of them were killed on December 14, 1971. (Mamoon, Muntassir; translation by Kushal Ibrahim (June 2000). *The Vanquished Generals and the Liberation War of Bangladesh* (First ed.). Somoy Prokashoni. p. 29).

The Pakistani intention behind this massacre was evident. When they realised that they were going to lose the war, they decided to eliminate the brains behind the liberation movement. They began this job in 25th March and on 14th December they draw the finishing line by murdering most of the intellectuals. They also killed many other scholars and intellectuals who were not at all politically involved. They killed them to wipe out our intellectual resources to quench their racial hatred towards Bengalis.

Unfortunately now it seems that we have almost forgotten their contributions to our nation which ultimately cost their lives in the war. Dr G C Dev was one of the leading philosophers from this subcontinent whose works on Idealism and Humanism had been acclaimed around the world. His memoirs *The Philosophy of My Life* (1960) and his analytical work *Parables in the East* were of great research value. But apart from academicians very few people of this generation know about this great scholar.

We all know Altaf Mahmud's epic work *Amar Bhaier Rokte Rangan* thanks to the global recognition of 21st February as the International Mother Language Day. But how many of us know about this great musician who composed for 19 films in Bengali and Urdu? His patriotic songs aired by Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro inspired

millions of Bengalis and freedom fighters. He turned his place at 370 Outer Circular Road into a secret hideout of an elite guerrilla team of the freedom fighters called 'Crack Platoon'. The house has been destroyed a long time ago. Couldn't we preserve that house to remember the struggle and sacrifice of our freedom fighters?

Jogesh Chandra Ghosh's lifetime effort *Shadhana Aushadhalaya*, one of the pioneers of alternative medicine in this subcontinent, has been running dimly without any support from the government. Shahidullah Kaiser the journalist and author who had shaken the citadel of Pakistani dictators through his novels and articles is now remembered only occasionally on 14th December. We can republish his novels and articles. We can translate them into English and other languages to disseminate his spirit of independence to this generation.

Whenever our youngsters hear the name of Munier Chowdhury they can only recall two of his plays *Raktakto* and *Kobor* as they have to read these two to pass the SSC and HSC exams. A large part of our youth doesn't need to utter his name during their entire student life. But this great personality had worked all through his life to shape our people's mind for the struggle of independence. His literary works such as *Dandakaranya*, *Mir Manash*, *Palashi Barrack o Annanya* were the conveyers of the essence of liberation. Many of his books and articles contributed a lot to develop a standard Bengali language and that contribution was vital at that time to protect our language from the cultural aggression of West Pakistan. But nowadays very few people know about those contributions of Munier Chowdhury.

Without Mofazzal Haider Chowdhury's efforts and extensive researches a large part of Bangladesh's folk art would be lost forever. We are losing a lot by neglecting his research on Bengali language, Bengali folk literature and colloquial Bengali linguistics which could teach us a lot about our national culture and identity. Anwar Pasha was one of the leading literary figures in the history of Bengali literature. His contribution in translation of ancient and medieval

Bengali poems is remarkable. His literary works including novels, essays, short stories and poems played a vital role in the rise of Bengali nationalism. But in today's literary festivals or in book fairs, nobody discusses about his works.

All through his life Jyotirmoy Guha Thakurta, a renowned scholar of English literature of Dhaka University has tried to instil humanist ideals among his students. But it seems that we have erased his ideals from our mind along with his memories as well. Not only these scholars and literary figures but also many journalists like Nizamuddin Ahmed, Selina Parvin and Shahid Saber sacrificed their lives but did not compromise with the oppressors. Doctors like Mohammad Fazle Rabbi have been killed for providing medical treatment to the freedom fighters. Teachers like Dr MAM Faizul Mahi and Dr Sirajul Huq Khan have been murdered for helping the freedom fighters. So forgetful a nation we are that we have almost forgotten many of our intellectual's name and contribution who were killed for their contributions during the liberation war. They are the people who silently worked for our independence and sacrificed their lives. All of them died during the nine months of the liberation war. Even dead bodies of many of these intellectuals could never be found.

Today we have only their names and scholarly works with us. Now it is our duty to disseminate their works among our current and future generations. It is their literary works which once had sparked our movement for liberation and it is their works which actually contained the true spirit of our great liberation war. We have been offering floral wreaths to the martyred intellectual memorial on 14th December which we leave in garbage all the year round and clean hastily on the eve of 14th December. But besides offering this symbolic honour we have no noticeable initiative to recognize the contributions of these great sons of our soil. We shall be able to pay true homage to these heroes if we can keep them alive among our people through their works and ideals.

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(now Shahidullah Hall). (80 Years of Dhaka University by Professor Rafiqul Islam)

The army then attacked Jagannath Hall with meticulous brutality. The army killed former Provost and famous professor of philosophy department Dr Gobinda Chandra Dev with his Muslim adopted daughter's husband. Then they killed Dr. A.N.M. Manirujjaman, Professor of Statistics department, along with his son and two relatives. Professor Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta the then provost of *Jagannath Hall* was severely injured by the initial attack and died in the hospital later (Muktijuddhe Shaheed Jagannath Hall by Ratanlal

analysts and cultural activists who had been supporting the liberation movement through their diversified activities. So after the purges of 'Operation Searchlight', Pakistan army prepared a blue print to eliminate all of these intellectuals systematically. Major General Rao Farman Ali prepared a list of those surviving Bengali intellectuals. Pakistan army and its local collaborators were instructed to kill the intellectuals according to the list. Pakistani civil servant Altaf Gauhar recounted the incident from his memory. One of Gauhar's friends told him that a hit list had been drawn up for elimination of certain Bengalis. A friend of that person was also on the