Shanti: Gone with the wind?

IMTIAZ HUSSAIN

Icon emerging: Amar Sonar Bangla

Auspiciously hallowed Sanskrit term, shanti, denoting peace, became an early independence casualty. While T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" used it to mean more than peace, Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Prize-winning author of three past or present national anthems (Bangladesh, India, and once Sri Lanka's),institutionalized it throughVishwa Bharati from 1921 in, appropriately, Shantiniketan.

Bangladesh's golden shanti moment was in early March 1971, when Bangalees were protected from overzealous nationalists. With other teenagers, we built our own all-night crew in Dhanmandi, inspired by the 1968 anti-Ayub movement and the highly-charged February 21 Azimpur processions led by Mahfuz Bhai (Mahfuz Anam), and Ferdous Alam, among others. "Bangladesh" was not on our agenda until the midnight of March 25.

Icon Threatened: Of a Cyclone and Crackdown

On March 1, 1971, we rooted for Pakistan at the cyclone fund-raising cricket match against a Commonwealth XI, ecstatic that a new political trajectory would commensurately reflect the country's dashing new stars (our own Raquibul Hasan was selected, Azmat Rana was ready to join his elder brother, Shafqat, while Imran Khan was set to debut in the Lahore fund-raising game). Yet when the March 3 National Assembly inauguration was postponed, cricket became the cyclone's ironic victim. Between March 1 and 25, shanti bahinis, as in Dhanmandi, worked diligently to prevent Pakistan from going the same way. That failed when the first gunshot was heard about midnight of the 25th—but so too our shanti conception: Bangalees would henceforth be protecting themselves from other Bangalees. This Hobbesian twist with partial Mujibnagar fingerprints turned out to be the March '71 massacre's long-lasting consequences.

Icon in Intensive Care: India's Motherly Rescue

Recovering from the 1969 Naxalbari uprising, India heroically rescued a larger than biblical Bangladeshi exodus (75% of our 10 million refugees were Hindus). Foreign journalists also swarmed upon India. Many friends went, directly or through a muktijoddha transit. Due to a mixture of M.N. Roy training and nostalgia of prepartition Kolkata, so too my father, Muhammad Tajul Hossain (commonly known as Dr. T. Hossain).

Instinctually, top Awami Leaguers had nowhere to go but India. Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed went by way of our clinic, City Nursing Home, on Road #5. He checked in on March 27, after the curfew was lifted, as my father frantically went off in his ambulance to search for his long-time cohort, Jyotimoy G. Thakurta, on the Dhaka University campus. Sadly, he returned only with Basunti-Didi, Professor Guhathakurta's equally resolute, education-enhancing wife, and an overwhelmingly dazed Meghna, his young daughter and even more resolute future professor. Mushtaque persuaded my father to drive him to his Daudkandi constituency in the ambulance. This he did, but pondered on his way back why, since the three Meghna ferries were still plying, shifting the family to Chouddagram, Comilla, his village home, might not be a better option than a farcical Dhaka stay. Emboldened, the "radical humanist" went straight to the Airport Road military headquarters for travel permission on the pretext of seeing his mother. "Daktar Sahab, you are not going to India, are you?" the prescient officer pointedly joked.

We left the very next day, abandoning our Morris Oxford at Meena Bazar owing to a blown bridge. Rifle-toting teenagers perched on tree-tops along the highway were better prepared for the Pakistani military than their Dhanmandi counterparts–but also one unwitting step closer to martyrdom against Pakistan machine-guns. We continued in rickshaws, spent one night in Chouddagram, crossed the border, and headed for Kolkata (Mujibnagar) through Agartala.

Mujibnagar's Darker Side: Icon Betrayed

Two Mujibnagar buildings arguably encapsulated the emerging country's future: the Circus Avenue embassy, where Hossain Ali raised the first Bangladesh flag outside the country, encouraging other Bangalee diplomats in Pakistani embassies to defect, as he had himself done in Kolkata; and a Theatre Road building serving as the rallying and rotating point for the Acting Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed, other provisional ministers, the Commander-in-Chief, M.A.G. Osmani, and my father (appointed as Director General of Health Services). Even the Border Security Force (BSF)/Central Reserve Police (CRP) supervising the two buildings were aware of the cloak-and-dagger games within and between those edifices (not infrequently becoming our source of sensitive information).

Mushtaque worked through Foreign Secretary, Mahbubul Alam Chashi, and the Brahmanbaria MNA (Member of the National Assembly), Taheruddin Thakur, his Press Advisor. Thakur had two lieutenants: Aminul Huq Badsha (Bangabandhu's press secretary), and Barrister Moudud Ahmed. With my only credential—a working knowledge of English—I found a job with both: for Badsha Bhai, to escort foreign journalists to refugee/war camps, and for Moudud Bhai, to collect clippings from available foreign newspapers (ultimately appearing in two official volumes of Bangladesh Documents).

Both bosses had a contrasting work-ethic: Moudud Bhai evoked the calibrated scholarly refrain of lawyers, Badsha Bhai the social engagement relished by inquisitive foreign journalists. If Thakur had a different agenda than war, it was hard to tell; but Chashi's modus operandi resembled the CSP (civil servants of Pakistan) style at odds with the occasion.

Of all four, only Badsha Bhai evoked battlefield empathies. While he filled journalists with anecdotes about Bangabandhu, my job was to accompany those journalists through refugee/war-camps, hopping, skipping, and jumping over both human feces/urine in stench-reeked refugee abodes and landmines and military patrols in war-torn areas--navigating between Indian restrictions (as to where we could go and how much we should know); circuitously fending off journalist questions, like whether the Mukti Bahini was really Indian military men in disguise; balancing factionalism within both war/refugee camps and freedom-fighters, again jockeying as they were between "Mujibnagar" privileges and inherently discriminatory treatments otherwise; and dampening vested local groups from fanning both ideological and political flames in the refugee camps everywhere (West Bengal was brought under central rule in June 1971, but still had strong and stubborn naxalite sympathies among particularly Kolkata students).

Of the 10 million refugees settling in 825 camps, 7.25 million alone were across West Bengal in 492 camps (Nadia's more acute condition thrust 2 million population against 1.2 million refugees). For security reasons, Indian authorities opened only the Dum Dum refugee camp to all foreign journalists, though access to Basirhal, Bagerhat, Salt Lake, Hasnabad, and Taki camps was selective. Many visitors wanted to see them: British members of parliament; U.S. congressmen (Senator Edward Kennedy comes to mind); journalists like Telegraph's Simon Dring and Independent's Peter Jenkins, BBC's Mark Tully (before his knighthood), and so forth; and non-governmental organisations like Operation Omega.

Mujibnagar's Softer Side: Icon Reminders

Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (SBBK), the radio station, embodied the softer/lighter Mujibnagar side. Managed by M.A. Mannan, the MNA in charge of Information and Broadcasting during the war (and, as post-independence Health Minister, boss of my father, when he became Health Secretary), it functioned from a two-storied Ballyganj house, where our 7-member family was given a small room until the commotion of living with 60-70 other male residents drove us elsewhere (a sympathetic Indian family across the street took us in). They were all artists of sorts—singers like Appel Mahmud, Abdur Jabbar, and Badsha Bhai's younger brother, as well as satirists like Mukul Chowdhury, whose Charam Patra prompted soldiers, refugees, and civilians to build their daily agenda around his program. Kamal Bhai (Kamal Lohani) admirably managed this feisty flock, with, I believe, Shiraj Bhai (whom I did not know).

Parveen Hussain and Nasreen Ahmad (Shilu Apa) became our "Broadway" stars. Little did my mother know when she left her hometown, just after India's deadly 1947 partition, that another conflict would bring her back. With minor Radio Pakistan play experiences, this silent, small, God-fearing woman splashed, in my view, more waves with her English news than many of the more boisterous non-combatant Bangladeshis in Mujibnagar. Every day's news was for her like reaching out to the 5-month daughter she could not bring with her from City Nursing Home. As a noted singer, Shilu Apa (Nasreen Ahmad), daughter of Bangabandhu's next-door neighbor, MNA Badrunnessa Ahmad, was a more publicly-known figure, and her Bangla news rallied the public. Together, they deconstructed the hard-core Pakistani message that the war was unleashed by a handful of male "miscreants" and Indian "infiltrators."My mother's fluent Urdu news probably baffled Pakistanis more than Indian military strategies. Just by listening to cool, calm, and collected female voices, foreign journalists could not but conclude that the war was more home-grown than Pakistan was claiming.

Icon Dilemma: To be or not to be?

Successes along certain dimensions were matched by cracks along others. Regrettably, the unity sought so earnestly by so many was broken by betrayals. Since a good friend and valiant fighter, Qayyum Khan, meticulously chronicles the contours of the cleavages in his 2013 Bittersweet Victory (University Press Limited), suffice here to simply share his underlying apprehensive message that time was passing Bangladesh by: why Victory Day 2014 may be among the last opportunities to elicit and institutionalize the 1971 magic against cheap-skate sorcerers reinventing realities.

On Victory Day, 1971, men and women, boys and girls, stood side-by-side to salute more heroes and heroines than ever before in Bengal's recorded history: how they mixed and mingled with each other with joys and tears made our huge 1971 losses worthy—in spite of Henry Kissinger dismissing us as a "basket-case," an image George Harrison unwittingly caricaturized through his commemorative album cover-picture. True, we did not have much—but what we did have were sufficient to make that victory irreversible: (a) secularity, by which we embraced all minorities, since they stood alongside us in our gravest moment; (b) gender-equality so vividly displayed in refugee-camps, Swadhin Bangla Betar, and civilian support-base; and (c) an unprecedented democracy with which to build our own Rome from our own war-ashes and God-given resources.

These face threats today: (a) a fundamentalist Damoclean sword aims at our jugular, with more fanatics living off our freedom fighter's blood than the Pakistani soldiers captured as prisoners-of-war; (b) women, representing more than half of our population, being instructed to return to their homes from their state-building tasks, allegedly but blasphemously for scriptural reasons; and (c) noble democratic hopes battling both corruption and manichaeism.

With our folkloric shanti at bay, only the belief that all cannot be lost can spare us. Our inspiration comes from how our Guardian Angel has helped us at critical junctures: confronting Pakistan and befriending India in 1971; Mushtaque's betrayal being short-lived; Chashi and Thakur tripping in the same way they tripped our war-efforts; and justice is finally catching up with war criminals.

In the sunset of their lives, our freedom-fighters surely want no more than a glimpse of that rising sun we last saw on the March 25 morning of 1971—in the shanti with which we protected non-Bangalees in Dhanmandi, hoping it can prevail between us Bangalees this time; and a Sonar Bangla cleansed of traits of an empty 24-year Pakistani association. For every year we add to the 43 we have, a resplendent story cannot but emerge if Tagore's shanti is restored and Eliot's nirvana is the next generation's to relish.

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That unsung 'Philatelic war'...

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

DURING those moving days of 1971, it appeared like the number one duty of every patriotic Bangalee was to confirm the fact that - Bangladesh is a nation - in the true sense of the term. They wanted to establish the fact that Bangladesh has a definite area of its own, a population, and a government - upon which most of its people have their support. According to the then Pakistan Government, the people of the then East Pakistan, were acting normally under their rule. Whereas the Bangladesh authority claimed that the people of this area are paying allegiance to the Bangladesh Government and not to Pakistan Government. The more variety and wide range of correspondence, the greater is the proof that the area is under the control of the stamp issuing authority. Thus, was waged our philatelic war against a brutal authoritarian regime. During the Liberation War, the people, who supported independence, wanted to restore usual communication in favour of Bangladesh Government and attempted to establish an already-disrupted postal communication of both the urban and rural areas. The Pakistan Armed Forces, on the other hand, along with their collaborators , only succeeded in keeping regular communication among bigger cities, but they could only reach some of the far-fetched smaller townships, let aside thousands of villages.

During the early days of Mujibnagar government, it did not have a fully administrable postal service. But the Bangladesh Government in-exile established an External Services Department, headed by Barrister Moudud Ahmed. Other members of the department included artists Quamrul Hassan, Nitun Kundu and Mr. Ashraf Ali Chowdhury. Mr. L.N. Misra of India was requested to act as a consultant. Barrister Moudud Ahmed, after assuming the responsibility as the Postmaster General, started to set up field post offices, in the liberated areas and establish postal routes within the liberated units. With the establishment of such field post offices, Mr. Ahmed tried to reach the common people and to assist them in the war. With their combined efforts, five field post offices were initially set up at Kashipur and Benapole of Jessore district and Mujibnagar (Bhaberpara), Meherpur and Darsana at Kushtia District during the months of April and May 1971.

By the end of May, 1971, after the Mujibnagar Government had fully formed its Secretariat at 8 Theatre Road (presently Shakespeare Sarani) in Calcutta new initiatives were taken to make the postal department operational under the Ministry of Transport and Communication. Before the re-organization of the postal administration, the mailbags were dispatched to the nearest Indian Post Office for mails of India and abroad. From June onwards, the arrangement was re-organised, and all the mail bags from F.P.O's were dispatched at the central Post office, Mujibnagar, situated at the Mujibnagar secretariat 8 Theater Road (Now Shakespeare Sarani) Calcutta. It is difficult to assess the total number of post offices (including Field Post Offices established by the Mujibnagar postal administration, as no official record of this or of any list has yet been published. However during the war, accounts of some philatelists and eye witnesses were published in the Calcutta based Philatelic periodical "Stamp Digest" A rough sketch of the district wise distribution of the Field Post Offices" and civil post offices, can be formed from these sources, which suggests, an unproven number of 32 to 48 F.P.Os.

Letters and messages between different groups of freedom fighters and with the headquarters at Mujibnagar, were carried out mostly by the freedom fighters, scouts and common villagers and some staffs of that makeshift postal department. There were the deadly risks to be caught, tortured and killed by the Pakistan Army. Some laid their lives, but never gave way to tortures. These post offices were provided with a code number for the secrecy of their placements. The mails were carried usually in blue jeans cloth or leather bag (sealed with wax as was the practice of that time). These bags were carried by motorcycle, bicycle, and jeep and on foot. In the riverine areas boats were widely used. The carriers were given certain code words, with which they could pass all posts manned by liberation forces.

However, the first authentically important activity on this postal communication and one of the most major international publicity in favour of the nationhood of Bangladesh was initiated on July 29, 1971. The Bangladesh Government issued a set of 8 postage stamps depicting liberation movement of Bangladesh.

Relating to the first stamps of Bangladesh the late Justice and president Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, wrote in his memoir 'Probashe Muktijuddher Dinguli' (Days of the Liberation War in Exile): On behalf of WAR ON WANT, Mr. John Stonehouse a British MP visited Mujibnagar for recording the conditions of the refugees and to discuss different matters with the Prime Minister Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed and other ministers. It was then decided that postage stamps will be issued. As luck would have it, Bangladesh was liberated within five months of issuance of these stamps. Designed by the Gandhi stamp hero Biman Mullick - Bangladesh emerged into the world of philately –and long before it became officially independent.

The stamps were printed in lithographic process on white coated unwatermarked security paper, having 100 (10 x 10) stamps per sheet. The perforations on the sides of the stamps were 14 x 14.5 (in 2 cm length). In Bangladesh Mission of Calcutta the mint sets were sold for Rs. 21.80 per set of eight stamps and the FDC with the stamps affixed at Rs. 22.00. Those wanted the FDCs were requested to affix the stamps on covers and deposit against receipt for collecting the cover with the Mujibnagar cancellation in the following day. In England the stamps were sold at 1.09 pound sterling per mint set plus 20 p as handling charge. In England more than US$ 23,000 worth of stamps was sold on the opening day.

A First Day Cover was also prepared on this occasion, the proof of which was approved by Barrister Moudud Ahmed, then PMG of Mujibnagar Postal Administration. The FDC was printed in deep green colour from Swaraswati Press of Calcutta. The design depicts the words 'First Stamps of Bangladesh' across the lower end of the cover, 'First Day Cover' in smaller type on the left right hand corner and 'BANGLADESH' in large type lying vertically from the lower end to the upper on the left side. The cover prepared and put on sale in England was coloured Bright Orange-Vermilion and was printed form London. Naturally the quality of the paper used for these two covers differ considerably.

In this connection, Mr. A.M. Ahsanullah, first Director General of Bangladesh Post Office after Liberation of Bangladesh wrote, 'The external manifestations of the independent entity of an independent country, easily and effectively revealed among the people are its own postage stamps besides its coins and currency. Mujibnagar Government virtually issued their postage stamps to get international recognition of its independent status. These eight postage stamps of different denomination played an important role in history of Liberation War and this set of postage stamp will remain illustrious in the world of philately. Today a set of these stamps are preserved on a tray wrapped in golden cloth, in the Mukti Juddho Smrity Jadughar (Liberation War Memorial Museum) in Dhaka.

Thus we can see how these tiny eight pieces of coloured papers almost shook the world and played an outstanding role in the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

After the Liberation of Bangladesh, regular functioning of the postal service was urgently needed. Printing new postage stamps was not possible as there was no security printing press, proper technology or even adequate materials that remained in a war devastated country. To print stamps in a foreign country will take a considerable amount of time, also quantity required was huge. So what to do? The idea of overprinting was introduced.

Huge quantities of Pakistan stamps of the previous regime remained in stocks scattered all over the country in various treasuries and in almost all post offices. Due to lack of easy, prompt and proper transport and as well as for security reason, the recall of these postage stamps from each and every post office and overprinting those with a new name was not all a practical proposition. On the other hand, for obvious political and sentimental reasons, it was felt undesirable to continue the use of the previous regime's stamps without making any change, whatever trifles that may be which seemed feasible. And this gave rise to an interesting curiosity of philatelic history - the 'Bangladesh' rubber-stamps issues.

On 19 December 1971, a Post Office circular was issued, to the Head Post Offices instructing the Post Offices at descending levels of hierarchy, to use their own initiative in making and using rubber hand stamps to be used on all Postage stamps and Postal Stationary available at that Post Office.

The original circular reads:
Arrangements are being made to get the Bangladesh postage stamps printed. But as it will take sometimes, it has been decided that rubber stamps bearing the word 'Bangladesh' should be got prepared locally and impressed on the existing stock of stamps before those are put on sale. The rubber stamp should contain the word 'Bangladesh' both in Bengali and English in small type. (Para 1(b) of letter Ref. M/A-1/RLG).

In relation to the circular and other issues, the then Director General had decided to keep the rooms for , design, type , size of the rubber stamp and colour of prints to be open. As a result, the design and other marks of the officially made rubber stamps varied considerably. Some post offices used more than one design. Even when two or more rubber stamps of the same design were made, the individual applications can often be distinguished by small differences in detail. Various colours were used. Most common was violet, from commonly used stamp pads of divergent shades and densities; fairly common was black of the postmark ink, provided by the post office, this also varied in different shades; rare was the blue fountain-pen ink and very rare were green and red.

Beside a small number of rubber stamps, used by a few commercial firms and banks, there were designs developed by people with commercial interest in stamp collecting too. Some stamp dealers obtained older issues of Pakistan stamps and hand-stamped those with a large variety of designs, some of those were fanciful and decorative. Overprints were done on even those of first overprints (press-printed 'Pakistan' on British Indian stamps of 1947) marking them as 'Three Generation Stamp'. And also, since the Director General of Bangladesh Post Office did not authorise the use of any such relics in the new sovereign state of Bangladesh, such items were unofficial and postally invalid. Still these were made and used by the philatelists for their own collection and stamp dealers for their own financial benefit. Thus, the philatelic market inside Bangladesh and also world philatelic market was flooded with innumerable varieties of rubber stamps.

In this context, one of the outstanding events worth mentioning is that, some administrative districts bordering India were liberated before 16 December. Among the district towns liberated first was Jessore, where Liberation Army entered on 6 December. Jessore Head Post Office started functioning from 8 December. With good road linkage up to remote villages, good postal services were restored within a very short time. In case of remote areas, the Post Master in charge, by his own , overprinted eight definitive (regular) stamps of Pakistan available at his stock. The print was made from a local private printing press. These stamps were 1p., 2p., 3p., 5p., and 7p., stamps of Khyber Pass variety, 10p., 13p., and 20p. - Stamps of Shalimar Garden variety. One commemorative stamp (20p Children Day 1970) was also overprinted in the same manner. The print was done both in English in all capital type and in Bangla (English was placed upper). Black ink was used for printing. The Post Master immediately put these overprinted stamps on sale at the counters of Jessore Head Post Office and sent those to all other urban and rural post offices.

The history of our philatelic struggle could continue longer, but on the occasion of our victory day we remember those unsung patriots who had liberated Bangladeshi in the world of global philately. This piece is for those philatelic heroes.

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Bangladesh has to be a secular state

PROFESSOR MOHIT UL ALAM

AS I read the history about the role of the anti-Liberation people, who were active during the nine months of the Liberation War, I see that the leaders of this group of people opposed the existence of Bangladesh due to an anxiety they felt about the birth of this new country, by which they thought it would mean the end of Islam. This anxiety also helped grow in them an inherent mistrust in the Bengali language and culture. So their anti-Bangladesh attitude had a bi-focal origin: they thought Pakistan as a state was synonymous with Islam, and secondly, they thought, its survival also ensured the survival of Islam. And they had at best a dubious attitude to the Bengali language and culture. Their mother tongue was Bengali, but they had seen it as an obstacle rather than an advantage in their attempt to pursue the dream of a theocratic state in the form of Pakistan. The Bengali script looks so different from Arabic or Urdu script that they wanted to introduce the idea of writing Bengali in the Arabic or Roman alphabet so as to conform to the wrongly-conceived notion that Islam is inseparable from its language of origin. They also entertained the idea that the Bengali culture, having originated from the ancient Vaishnav civilisation was alien to Islamic culture. That is, they disregarded the fact of amalgamation of the Vaishnav traits with the Islamic middle-eastern culture in the practices and rituals of the Muslims, particularly with those of the Sufis, in Bengal that had taken place for a long time, since the time of the great conversion of the Hindus of the scheduled caste into Islam. Thus they were denying history, especially the processes of transition, transformation, acclimatization and appropriation that take place in a transcultural society.

Such reductive thinking that religion could be identified with a political state fails to take into account the impact on life from other potential sources as important as religion itself, which are history, geography, and economy. That is, the notion that religion can be an over-dominant factor in the context of reality is acceptable only in a theological sense, but the facts of history, geography, and economy do nullify this notion at every vital execution of life-force. I am deliberately excluding the prevailing debate between science and religion because in my understanding the three spheres of history, geography and economy provide as much a basis for a scientific argument as to make the science–religion dichotomy redundant. And, indeed, it may sound paradoxical, but science in itself does not proffer an anti-theological basis as history, geography and economy do. Science is neutral to application, and so it can be used as much as an aid to enhance theological practices as to destroy them. The priest's sermon is an example of how science cuts on both edges in relation to religion. In a religious sermon the priest can magnify his voice by using a microphone, and though it ensures greater audibility, it at the same time demystifies the spirituality of the priest's voice, proving the fact that he cannot be heard beyond a certain limit without technological embellishments.

Therefore, science is a malleable option for religion, but history, geography and economy are not. An example from the American history will clarify this.

President John F. Kennedy in a speech delivered on 9 January 1961 referred to a phrase used by John Winthrop, the Puritan founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, in his sermon delivered on the flagship Arbella in 1630, while they were undertaking the voyage from England to America. In this sermon, titled, "A Model of Christian Charity," he admonished the colonists by saying that they were not travelling to America for reinstitution of greed and lucre but for building the colony "as a city upon a hill" to be watched and followed by later generations of pilgrims and voyagers. Worth mentioning is that the phrase, "as a city upon a hill" was taken from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:14), where he tells his listeners: "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden."

Kennedy, in his turn, said, "We must always consider that we [America] shall be as a city upon a hill—the eyes of all people are upon us."

And Winthrop and other missionaries were vigorously preaching in Sunday congregations the dream (later to become known as the American Dream) about the very paradisiacal essence on which America was to be built. In one such congregation in Boston, while the priest was enumerating the virtues of God, a man stood up and said in a hoarse voice, "Father, we've come here for cod, and not only for God." The cod fish, presumably, was the most profitable catch at the time, but in the later percolations of American history, this anecdote took on the defining characteristic for America as it denotes the dialectical opposition between Winthrop's vision of the American dream and the shattering of the same by forces not included in the Puritan chapters of the missionaries. This duality is inherent in the history of America; on the one hand as a new land it was supposed to be a state to be built upon the biblical doctrines, which would have no similarity with the sin-infested European countries, and on the other the very landscape of America with its unbounded forest resources, river networks, the Prairie and the open seas on both coasts allured people to reconstruct the very material life (the cod fish symbolizing the material pursuits) which was despised and abandoned by the missionaries as factors ruining Europe.

The cod-God paradox does point out to the fact that religion can travel across boundaries, as Christianity and Islam have done, but it has an amenable dimension that adapts itself to the climate and culture it travels to. A great degree of acclimatization is the basis for a religion to succeed when it travels away from the place of its origin. And when it comes to basic needs, where man lives by bread alone, then geography, history, economy and culture become the determining factors. The cod fish is the leitmotif of such materiality.

Though it will be a slightly lopsided comparison, still we can say Winthrop's vision for a heavenly state upon the face of the earth had, in a different way, stirred the minds of the people who created Pakistan. At least, initially, it was the ideal dream people of the then East Pakistan cherished regarding the creation of Pakistan, that the new state would be a classless, poverty-free ideal Islamic state.

But as the cod-God paradox defined the disillusionment with the American dream, so did the East Pakistani people discover that they were on the receiving end of the cod-God paradox, that is, the Pakistan government dominated by the Panjabi military junta created an image of religion as if it bonded the two wings peacefully together, but whereas under cover the East Pakistanis were aggressively exploited. That is, the Pakistan government posed for the image of God, but actually they were exploiting the cod. So the resentment among the Bengalis grew, and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman led the Awami League in waging a movement against the military regimes of Pakistan, and finally the Liberation War broke out and the birth of Bangladesh was the resulting factor.

When West Pakistan exploited East Pakistan an economic disparity crept into the statehood, and the hold of religion on the people became tenuous, and in the widening gap, the more the government propagated the idea of religious harmony, the more religion became a matter of enforcement, which was the case in 1971, when Pakistan was breaking apart. When religion slides from its ethical dimension to function in a secular framework, it becomes inoperative, but then violent measures are adopted to enforce a make-believe religion. The traditional methods of subjugation that are deployed in the name of religion are characterizing the pro-people movements as anti-religion ones, thereby denying the verdict of election if any is held, and then initiating acts of violence, murder, arson and rape on the resisting people, and finally conducting genocide, all which crimes were instituted by the occupying Pakistani forces and their collaborators in the nine-month War of Liberation.

Blinded by the absurd idea of sustaining Islam in the form of Pakistan, which came into being denying the geographical and cultural absurdities in the first place, the pro-Pakistani Bengali nationals, later on to be known as collaborators, began to intensify their anti-Liberation activities from the beginning of the Liberation War. They refused to see the cod in the practices of the Pakistani rulers, which led them to misread the whole perspective of the Liberation War of Bangladesh from a distorted a historical, a-cultural and a-geographical view.

To illustrate this blindfold absurdity we will refer to just one episode which involves Matiur Rahman Nizami (a war criminal now awarded the death sentence) who was the President of the Islami Chatra Shangho in 1971.

On 7th November the Al Badar day was observed. On 14th November, a report in Daily Sangram covered a speech by Matiur Rahman Nizami, where he explained the reasons for founding the Al Badar squad:

In support of the Pakistan Army, the Islam-loving students of this country have formed the Al Badar Bahini following the glorious tradition of the Badar War. In the Badar War the number of fighting Muslim soldiers was three hundred and thirteen. In keeping with this tradition each unit of the Al Badar squad will also have three hundred and thirteen members. The virtues of the Badar fighters, which we have highlighted in today's discussion, we hope, will also be replicated in the character of the youthful Mujahids of the Al Badar Bahini. Inshallah.

The Al Badar members and workers have taken a high-spirited new oath on this Badar Dibash today to preserve the ideology and existence of Pakistan, and have shown the world that they mean what they have pledged to do. Inshallah, they will also be able to translate into reality the memory of the Badar War. Standing side by side with our armed forces these youths will be able to defeat the Hindus and finish the Hindustan, and thus will fly the victory flag of Islam. [Translation mine.]

The point here is that Islam had been the religion of millions of Bengali for many centuries before the birth of Pakistan. So the spirit of the holy Badar War with which Nizami tried to imbue the members of the Al Badar squad had not succeeded in this case because, as we have explained above, the Bengali collaborators failed to see the cod in the net, and because of this inaccurate reading of the situation, the Al Badar squad, instead of becoming the glorious soldiers of Islam, simply turned into the executors of precious human lives. And what is required now is the abolition of the eighth amendment that goes against the secular spirit of the country.

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