

Surviving the slaughter of innocents

ABDUL HANNAN

EVERY year April 3, the most dreaded day in my life, sends a chilling shiver of panic down my spine. It is a poignant and sordid narrative of how on this day in 1971 my life, like that of many others, was shattered to pieces forever. We were caught unaware by the gruesome and grisly terror of death and destruction unleashed by the occupation Pakistan army on the unsuspecting civilian population in an outskirt neighbourhood of Dhaka city across the Buriganga river. Ever since then, this incident has been known as the Jinjira massacre. It is a lurid account of brazen ethnic cleansing, a ruthless execution of racial hatred and extermination campaign of Bangalis.

December 1970 was the happiest moment in my life in particular, and for the Bangalis in general. I had just returned to my work in Islamabad after nine months of training in West Germany and there was a happy reunion with my wife and children. Bangalis had won a landslide victory in the national election held in December, winning 67 seats out of 69 seats earmarked for East Pakistan in the constituent National Assembly. There were great expectations that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would soon be sworn as Prime Minister. The end of exploitation and tyranny, deprivation and discrimination of Bangalis was within sight.

But soon the joy evaporated and was turned into despair. President General Yahya, in collusion with the military clique and conspiratorial Zulfikar Bhutto, the PPP leader in West Pakistan in a nationwide broadcast on March 1 postponed the March 3 constituent assembly session.

These were the writings on the wall. I told my wife that we could not waste another minute. I applied for 10 days casual leave, giving the excuse of my ailing father.

On the appointed day of my departure, as I was preparing to leave my house, I saw my wife watering the vegetable garden at the backyard and the

flowers in the garden. She gave a long lingering look to take in the scene of her little home that she had built with care and fondness over the years. A look of sadness and melancholy in her face was unmistakable.

As we boarded the plane, we saw some rough looking men occupying almost the entire plane. These were



Debdas Chakraborti, '1971 as I saw it', oil on canvas

definitely soldiers in civilian clothes. I told my father about this as soon as I got home. He said he would duly arrange to inform Bangabandhu. Meanwhile Yahya and Bhutto kept Bangabandhu and other Awami League leaders engaged in dialogue negotiating the terms of the six-point demands with no result. It was clear that the

dialogue was a mere cover to gain time for an army crackdown. The Pakistani treachery and betrayal on the dark night of March 25 is now known to all.

People were leaving the city in panic. Soon our neighbourhood in Elephant road looked deserted. Rumours were rife about an impending house to house search, and detention by the

army. Our village home in Kasba, bordering India was a mud house not fit to stay in. My father decided to take shelter in the house of his Khan Bahadur friend in Faridpur where my father was a superintendent of police in 1949.

On March 31, the entire family including my parents, my elder brother Professor Momen and his wife and two

children, my younger brothers Hasnat and Abdur Rashid, my three sisters, my wife, our two sons and I left our Elephant Road house.

As we were crossing the Buriganga, my mother, who had high blood pressure, suddenly became very ill. We decided to stay put in Jinjira until my mother recovered. We took shelter, sharing a wide veranda with other refugees, in a two-storied building. We spent three nights in Jinjira. On April 3, at dawn, we were awakened by three loud bursts of mortal shells in our vicinity. Everybody ran helter-skelter in panic. I took my older son in my arms and my wife held our younger son in one arm and her bag in the other and started running towards the south as the shell fire was coming from the north. No sooner had we covered some distance towards the south, we heard shooting from the south. We then started running towards the east but soon found people running from that direction as well. We were trapped. My wife was lagging behind and fell down on the ground under the weight of our son and the bag she was carrying. I pleaded with her repeatedly to let go of the bag and finally though reluctantly, she threw it away. When we arrived at a mosque for shelter, we saw that it was filled to the brim. There was a graveyard behind the mosque and we found people hiding in the graves. There were a few vacant graves covered with creepers and leaves. We cleared the grave of grass and leaves and hid there. After about half an hour, the sound of gun shots stopped. People rose from the graves and gathered in front of the mosque. It was surreal. We too followed them. An elderly person asked us to follow him to his house nearby when he saw that my wife Shelly's sari was wet with clay. His wife gave my wife a sari to wear and he gave me a spare lungi to wear. He then sent for a boat to take us to Dhaka.

Early next morning the entire family returned home miraculously unharmed. Abba narrated how he ran some distance alone and took shelter in an abandoned hut. The army aimed their guns at him twice. He uttered, 'La

ilaha illah.' They spared him. After the army left Jinjira at noon, Abba went out in search for us. The village was littered with dead bodies. In the evening, he went to the house where we had taken shelter. There he met our entire family. Momin bhai explained how he and others took shelter in a mosque nearby as mother could not run. When the army entered the mosque in search of young people, Momin bhai, Hasnat and Rashid sat behind the row of women standing at the rear. The army picked a few young people and left.

In May, Hasnat went to join his duties in Patuakhali at the prodding of chief secretary Shafiqul Azam. Rashid disappeared to join the ranks of the freedom fighters. My older brother Dr. Momin left his job in Hammersmith Hospital in London and joined the field hospital of Melaghar under Major Khaled Mosharraf. I kept moving from Elephant road to Dhanmondi, to Shahjahanpur to Laxmibazar and back to Elephant Road to evade arrest.

An estimated 3,000 men, women and children were killed in the Jinjira massacre.

It is true that all of us barely escaped with our lives in Jinjira. But my life was not the same again. My wife gradually became silent, distant and withdrawn. Doctors treating her at home and abroad said she suffered the irreversible loss of her memory, stunned by the trauma of the assault in Jinjira. I sometimes think that she might have thrown away fragments of herself when she parted with her bag, containing her little world of precious possessions like her wedding sari, wedding photo album, and other personal knickknacks. She led a miserable existence of self imposed loneliness and isolation for the rest of her life until she died a few years ago. Shelley, my wife, indeed paid a heavy price for freedom. She is one of the many unknown heroes of the liberation war. As for me, I have been carrying the scar ever since and etching out a meaningless existence without purpose, colour and pulsation of life.

The writer is a contributor to The Daily Star and a former diplomat.

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The message of the Cross and the empty tomb of Christ

On the occasion of Easter Sunday observed all around the world today, let's reflect on the message of atonement and redemption

MARTIN ADHIKARY

FROM time immemorial, humanity all over - irrespective of climes and cultures, colour, class or caste - has prostrated itself at the altar of whimsical deities, unknown and mysterious powers. Numerous people still continue to do so by worshipping false and capricious gods trying to appease and propitiate their wrath. According to Greek Mythology, Prince Paris had abducted Princess Helen, wife of Menelaus, to Troy. Greek army had taken ships to rescue her, but was held up halfway due to tempest and very unfavourable weather. Helpless in such a situation, General Agamemnon sacrificed his darling daughter Iphigenia in order to mollify the hostile goddess Artemis. Consequently the favourable West wind blew again and the fleet reached Troy without further difficulty. It speaks of the idea of 'propitiation' of gods in ancient times all over the world when deities needed to be appeased or propitiated by man to avert dangers or make them propitious towards them. People, helpless in the face of natural calamities, took recourse to such so-called super-natural powers for the supposed good or benefit by means of offering or making sacrifices of different kinds including even their own lives and lives of their dear children.

The concept of propitiation (similar or near similar words are expiation or atonement) plays a vitally significant part in Christian Theology. It runs throughout the Holy Bible. However, it takes us right away from the world where man makes their gods. The Bible speaks of the one almighty creator, the only real God, in whom all goodness and truth find their source, and to whom all moral evil is repugnant beyond any question. God is righteous and just and there is no capriciousness or vanity. The "Trinity-holy" God of the Bible is kind and gracious. He abhors sin, but has unconditional love for the sinner, for the good of the latter. It might, therefore, appear that there would be no place for the idea of propitiation in Biblical world-view or faith. But in the Old Testament, it underlies the prescribed rituals of the sin-offering, guilt-offering, and the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 4:1-6; 7:16). In the New Testament, the propitiation appears par-

ticularly in the four passages of great significance (Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:1; 1 John 4:8-10). In New Testament Theology it is critically significant. In Christian thought propitiation has a really different meaning, a different perspective. The criticality lies in the fact that it is God Himself, who took the initiative for propitiation for human sin, not man attempting to appease or propitiate or mollify God. God is love and righteously just. Because he is just He must punish sin; because He loves man he himself took the initiative by sending His Son to pay the price for the redemption of man from the bondage of sin, and man is acquitted. God takes sin seriously and as such he paid the price for it. He judged our sins in the person of His sinless Son, Jesus Christ. All sins against man are but sins against God. So it is God, who took the initiative to squarely deal with the sin problem. He made the full, final payment for sin by giving up his sinless Son as the ransom price—the most expensive and most effective substitutionary payment in his vicarious suffering and death for mankind alienated from Holy God. The question of appeasing God or placating His wrath does not arise in Christian thought. It is more than anything else God acting in His eternal love and grace for reconciling man to Himself that man may get His image restored back in himself.

God's free, eternal and unreserved love for sinful mankind made Jesus Christ go to the cross and die that grotesque death on behalf of the sinner. As the Son of God he had the authority, the readiness and willingness to die for mankind. Jesus said, "The reason that my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:17-18).

All the Old Testament sacrifices find an answer in Jesus' supreme sacrifice. We need to sacrifice or kill our ego, pride and selfishness.

The dark disgrace and the crushing curse of the cross did not end in itself. The divine drama of man's salvation culminated in the glorious resurrection of Christ from the dead. This is how the cross found an entirely uniquely

new meaning. The instrument of cruel death became the universal symbol of Christianity. The cross means that we can look back and thank God that He gave His Son for our salvation from the grip of sin. It is the triumph of God's grace for man. The message of the cross, in Jesus' own word, is, "It is finished." This means, God's plan of

ously feel sorry, people who will repent for their wrong deeds, evil desires, hatred, jealousy and arrogance; people, who will leave their bad old habits and selfish lifestyles and make deliberate decisions for a complete turnaround for a new kind of life. The resurrected and conquering Christ wants to live in our hearts and lives in and through the



human salvation is accomplished.

The crucified and then glorified Christ speaks to our hearts. He bids us to repent for our wrongdoings and sins. Repentance is one of the few keywords in the entire Bible. The English word repentance is the translation of the New Testament Greek word, metanoia, which implies an entire change of mind, turning around. This means one's positive change in attitude, mind-set from bad to good. Today's world needs more and more people, who will spontane-

Holy Spirit that we may have new life: a life of love, peace, patience, justice, self-control, consideration for others, humility which are contrary to the work of the fleshly desires of lust and selfishness, pride and arrogance. This is our resurrection in this life: dying to sin, burying that past, and living in peace with God and with all His creation.

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QUOTABLE Quote

Yesterday is not ours to recover, but tomorrow is ours to win or lose.

Lyndon B. Johnson

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Get by
- Tussles
- Ship-to-ship call
- Asian capital
- Solemn act
- Passionate
- Cry from Homer
- Plunge
- Speculate
- Fido or Fluffy
- Witch trial town
- Tally
- Expansive
- Singer Redding
- Skilled
- Himalayan land
- For every
- Safari sighting
- Bearing
- Squid's squirt
- Lady of riding fame
- Actor Cumming
- Tooth layer
- Nautilus commander
- Principles
- Fearsome dino

DOWN

- King or queen
- River from Pittsburgh
- Cook's protector
- Pupil's place
- Laundry problem
- Does the Thanksgiving honors
- Carnival attraction
- King Kong, for one
- Farm enclosure
- Remain unused
- Slowwitted
- Small sound
- Hack novel
- Lake near Buffalo
- Ordeal
- Exchange
- Staff member
- Mint product
- Hot dish support
- Malleable metal
- Makes sound
- Silent actor
- Newborn's need
- Gold-filled Fort
- Acquire
- Count start
- Football's Marino
- Crumb carrier

Yesterday's answer

L	I	L	I	S	I	T	A	R
O	M	E	N	S	T	R	I	B
W	A	T	C	H	M	A	K	E
E	G	O	R	I	G	S	A	T
R	E	U	S	E	D	R	U	E
S	T	E	W	S	O	P	E	D
Z	E	S	T	A	S	T	R	O
O	N	E	S	T	R	U	S	T
O	R	T	R	A	W	K	E	A
M	A	T	C	H	M	A	K	E
I	N	G	L	O	S	Y	O	U
N	E	E	D	S	S	P	A	R

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REAL VIOLENCE AND CARTOON VIOLENCE?

I'LL SHOW YOU

POW!

IF THIS WAS REAL IT WOULDN'T BE FUNNY

THE JOKE'S ON ME...

HENRY by Don Trachte

TODAY EXHIBITION OF ROCKS

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, length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

CRYPTOQUOTE

JGQ EZWOZWXQ RE EHRSQZM MFZQWCM RAHV NA JGQ CNZQXJNRA RE JGQ SNAC. UPJ JGQ ORRCAQMM RE W FQZMRA MFZQWCM NA WHH CNZQXJNRAM.

-- XGWAUWVW

Saturday's Cryptoquote: THE FINAL PROOF OF GREATNESS LIES IN BEING ABLE TO ENDURE CRITICISM WITHOUT RESENTMENT. -- ELBERT HUBBARD