



Aminul Islam, Genocide, oil on canvas, 1972.

Method in Madness

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BANGLADESH paid a heavy price for its freedom. There are few nations which have to make such sacrifice for its freedom. India has a long history of struggle against British colonial rule, on many occasions the conflict became brutal and bloody, but the independence came in 1947 as a negotiated settlement, being a peaceful handover of power. There are other countries where people have taken up arms to achieve their freedom. The war of liberation was bloody in countries like Algeria or in Angola, but there was no widespread and systematic attack against civilian populations like the one that Bangladesh experienced in 1971.

The very nature of the state of Pakistan made Bangladesh's struggle unique in character and many in the West failed to take note of this uniqueness. Pakistan was a country formed with two wings separated by more than thousand miles of physical distance. There was no such country before and one can be assured that there will not be any such country in the future. The only bond between the two parts of Pakistan was that of Islam, the religion of majority of the population. The founding fathers, in conjunction with the British colonial rulers, aspired to build a state based exclusively on religious identity, over and above the national entity.

In order to make possible the impossibility they had to destroy the linguistic-

cultural identity to create a new nationhood of Pakistan. This mission reflected the concept of "imagined community" at its extreme. This view is aligned with Benedict Anderson's theory regarding nations as what people imagine of themselves, or what they can be made to imagine. On the other hand, there are long historical, geographical and cultural processes which create the bond of nationhood, a nation not imagined, but rooted, inherited, re-discovered. If Pakistani nationhood is an imagined phenomenon, Bangali nationalism is an amalgamation of traits that are real. A popular slogan born out of the struggle for Bangladesh reflected this reality - *Tomar Amar Thikana, Padma, Meghna, Jamuna*. Rivers are where we belong. Such a national identity is real, reflects physical, historical, cultural entity consisting of tangible as well as intangible heritage.

The physical distance between the two parts of Pakistan was great but greater was the cultural, national, historical and social differences. In such case the State recognising diversity of its population could hope for a chance to be functional, but the state of Pakistan based on so-called "Two-Nation" theory recognised the Muslims of India as a 'religio-nation'. The centralised state had little chance to be functional and Pakistan as a nation-state tried to overcome its inherent contradictions not by compromise but by coercion.

The first coercive step of the state was the denial of right of the language of majority

of the population when Urdu was declared the state language with an inherent and false claim that this language is more Islamic than others. In face of growing opposition to this project the rulers resorted to the use of force to deny the national and democratic rights. This trend culminated in the attempt to achieve the solution of political problems with brute military might unleashed on 25 March 1971 with widespread and systematic attack against the Bangali people upholding their national rights.

This attack culminated in Genocide and Crimes against Humanity. This ideology of the perpetrator produces a mindset based on prejudice and the prejudiced mind creates the dehumanised entity which undertakes a mission to eliminate the others. Ideology of prejudice and hatred against Bangali people branded them as enemy of Islam, lackey of the Hindus, agents of India, etc. Such classifications lead to targeted attacks against the national group with an aim to reorganise the nation based on the ideology of the perpetrators.

How the Pakistani military rulers depicted the Bangali people can be an interesting exercise by itself and helps one to understand the journey from ideology to action to exterminate. General Ayub Khan in his autobiography "Friends not Master" wrote. "Bengalis have all the inhabitations of lower trodden races and have not yet found it possible to adjust psychologically to the requirements of

new-born freedom." Major General Rao Farman Ali in the very beginning of his book "How Pakistan Got Divided" wrote, "Bangali Babu, Bangali Jadoo and Bhooka Bangali : these three pronouncements were what we had heard about Bengal in our childhood." The discussion in the Dhaka Cantonment following the brutal attack on 25 March, 1971 was reported by Brigadier A R Siddiqi in his book "East Pakistan: The Endgame". He wrote about the staff conference held on March 27 where everybody exuded confidence and looked fully satisfied with the progress of the military operations. Thus spoke Brigadier Jeelani in the meeting: "Urdu script must replace the Bangla script which was the same as the Hindi script and all Hindu features of the Bangali culture should be erased. There was nothing wrong with the Bangali masses as such: they were a simple God-fearing people. It was the educated middle class - the teachers, lawyers, intellectuals, (mostly Hindus) who are behind all the un-Islamic ideas and motivation amongst the youth." The Pakistani Brigadier not only singled out the intellectuals and Hindus but attacked the Bangali nation as well when he said, "Too much freedom was not good for the Bengalis. They did not have it for centuries and were like to make a mess of it when they did."

Such a mindset took concrete form in the military attack, the plan of which known

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