

Listen Bangali, Listen...

(Continued from previous page)

Sheikh clan were all happy, very happy. The adorable Khoka received so much affection, so much care! As if Khoka was the gem of the whole world. Come Khoka, Hey Khoka, O Khoka, Khoka, and Khoka. There was no end to his caressing. The mother of the child said to her father Sheikh Majid, Khoka cannot be a proper name, give him a solid name. After taking another day, the maternal grandfather suggested Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Mother said, what kind of a name is it, father! The mind is not moved.

The maternal grandfather said: It is a very good name. You will see, his name will illuminate the whole world one day.

That Khoka of Bangla ultimately occupied a place in the heart of the deprived and repressed people of the whole country, the whole world, after crossing Tungipara, Gopalganj, Kolkata and Dhaka. "There are two kinds of people on earth. One is the exploiter, and the other exploited – I am on the side of the exploited". The fiery leader of Cuba Fidel Castro had said after seeing Mujib, "I have not seen the Himalayas; I have seen Mujib, an equivalent of Himalayas. My heart and mind was filled up".

Khoka had much sorrow inside his breast, he had much burnings in his heart – I must stop the tears of my immortal Bangla. I have to uphold the honour of my dearest mother-tongue. "I shall say while stepping on to the gallows, I am Bangali, Bangla is my land, Bangla is my language". Mujib is Bangla's, Bangla is Mujib's. Mujib had to repeatedly face death for the sake of his beloved Bangla. His voice never trembled, Mujib never betrayed Bangla. He never compromised on the issue of Bangla. "I do not seek premiership, I seek the rights of Bangla's people". Mujib was held captive in a jail of Pakistan. He was the greatest personality of Bangla, the greatest architect of Bangla's independence. He watched in extreme cold while sitting in an isolated prison-cell that his grave was being dug nearby as per the orders of the Pakistani military ruler. Death was approaching him very fast. The uncompromising and fearless Mujib had only one request – "Please send my lifeless body to my mother Bangla. I shall sleep in the soil of Bangla".

Where did Mujib find such strength, such courage, and such fearless words? From which teachings did such articulations emanate? Who reinforced his mind with such all-knowing fearlessness? The answer is very simple – love and affection running all over his being. He had only one contemplation, one meditation – his country, freedom of his country, and his countrymen; the tears of Bangla must be stopped, smile has to be brought to the face of Bangla.

The boy who had repeatedly travelled to Gopalganj by pushing the oar against the current of Modhumoti river, the juvenile who became imbued with the spirit of freedom after coming to Kolkata crossing Gopalganj, the newly illumined youthful son of Bangla who was awash with the call for freedom by Netaji Subhash, who could stop him? He would cross all the walls erected before him, and his forward march would be unstoppable. That young man would certainly rush to smash the statue of hypocrite Hallowell. That heroic son would distribute the rice of Baker Hostel among his skinny hungry countrymen during the famine of forty-three in order to save them. That cleansed heart would jump for saving neither Hindus nor Muslims but humans during the bloody riot of 1946. Who would block this new life of resurgent youth? Who had the capacity to slow the speed of his journey?

The Pakistani general – characterless and drunkard Yahya Khan made different pretexts to deprive and silence the leader and friend of Bangla who had won absolute majority. The power-hungry mischievous General Ayub Khan had manufactured an iron cage of conspiracy to subdue the spirited son of Bangla; a trap was laid to kill him in the darkness, but that was not successful. An innocent Sergeant had to lose his life instead. The Agartala case was foiled. The Pakistani judge saved his life by fleeing. And the awakened people of Bangla, the awakened Bangali of Padma, Meghna, Jamuna rescued the valiant Sheikh of Bangla by breaking the jail-locks. All these are legends; all these appear to be myths. But this was the history of Bangla, this was the tale of Bangalis.

The principal witness and casualty of this blood-drenched melancholic history was Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He was repeatedly held captive in jail, stage by stage. After being set free in 1968, he was again detained at the jail-gate and then taken to the cantonment. He then realized that death was inevitable. He then picked up the soil of Bangla before the jail-gate and touched his forehead with

those. He put the soil inside his pocket so that he could have Bangla's soil in his hand when he climbed the scaffold of death.

When the voices of Bangali's aspirations were getting more and more subdued due to hundreds of big and small abuses and the darkness of rights' absence, then the vocal articulation of a voice was heard. "Give me the right of language, I want autonomy, we want equal rights – we seek equal participation in administrative and military branches"; that voice lit up the flames by its heat in parliament, streets and processions. The awakening of the Bangalis was expedited by the angry roar of that thunderous voice throughout Bangla. The strong winds of rebellion on the rivers and seas took the shape of a storm due to this pressure. December 5 of 1969 was the death anniversary of Shaheed Suhrawardy. Standing before the leader's tomb, the leader of Bangla uttered the victory slogan of the inauguration of Bangla: "From today, the name of East Pakistan is Bangladesh; desh is not a separate word, the name shall be Bangladesh by combining desh with Bangla".

There are many backdrops to the historical events. There were the 21-points, the 11-points, and the 6-points. All these backdrops combined and mixed together in the huge current of freedom



to give rise to a country named Bangladesh. Subhash Bose had written against subjugation under foreigners, "Give me blood – I shall give you freedom".

Bangabandhu had opposed the misrule by the West declaring, "As I have given blood, I shall give more blood, I shall free the people of this country by the grace of Allah". Nobody had spoken such fearless and unwavering words, nobody had recited such a fiery poem – no artiste had sung such a sizzling song, such a song of awakening.

Then came independence and the freedom of Bangla.

The subsequent events were the annals of jumping into fire. It was a history of sacrificing lives without hesitation. The students gave up their lives, the workers did so, the police, beggars, Hindus-Muslims, men and women – all came together in the battlefield; they had arms in their hands, slogans in their voice – "The address of you and mine, Padma Meghna Jamuna – Joy Bangla".

Freedom was achieved at the cost of three million lives, and the honour of two lakh women. It was an independence of profound grief. The freedom and independence of Bangla had endured excessive fires and burnings.

The luminous star of the nation Bangabandhu returned to his homeland, a devastated Bangla, from the darkness of prison and scaffold; the friend of Bangla returned to a shattered land. He looked at his dearest Bangla with tearful eyes. He would once again enliven his Bangla of Gold; he would diffuse the

sorrow of Bangla. Bangabandhu leapt to his tasks at hand.

Many sources at home and abroad had warned Bangabandhu at that time – a conspiracy was afoot. Mujib used to shrug off all such indications: No Bangali would kill me. My virtue is: I love all Bangalis; and my fault is: I love the Bangalis too much. Excessive love may not be good. Consequently, it may bring bad outcome; and bad outcome did materialise. That was what had happened.

On that day, the president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had gone to his road-32 residence from Bangabhaban. For unexplained reasons, the president's car went out of order twice during the journey. Why did the vehicle behave like that? Why didn't it want to go? May be it was as usual, no specific causes. Bangabandhu came home by walking the last stage of the trip on foot. It was a small distance; he had reached the main-road by walking this path so many times.

On that day he was very tired; but shrugging off his tiredness, he would have to go to that massive event, that joyous program the next day. The students and teachers of Dhaka University would be honoured to award him with life membership. He was the greatest Bangali of a thousand years. This university had once expelled him. He was involved with the movement for eliciting the demands of class four employees. He did not furnish any bond. It was a moment of transition. The dawn would appear after the night, the new sun would rise, and there would be a festival of new lives. There was an all-pervading serenity and satisfaction in his massive heart. None of the life's riches could be thrown away – a deep sleep slowly overpowered his being. It was not yet dawn, the sounds of Azan could not yet be heard, the chirpings of the morning birds had not yet started, and the rays of light had not yet blossomed in the east piercing the sky.

The killers of Bangabandhu and four leaders in jail were later sent abroad safely by the military government led by Khandakar Mostaque and Ziaur Rahman. They were also given jobs in overseas Bangladesh missions in order to rehabilitate them. The trials of the killers were stopped through the unconstitutional indemnity ordinance.

Hearsay has it, the military ruler Ziaur Rahman had gone to meet the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. He was then the president. Sadat said: "You killed Bangabandhu with the tank I gave to my friend. What audience can I have with you, what talks"? Most of the countries belonging to the Non-Aligned Movement had condemned this brutal murder. It was heard while visiting abroad – "You are a man of Mujib's land. The great man who brought independence for you, you killed that very person! You cannot be trusted, you are ungrateful people".

What kind of people we are, that pale identity had been established overseas. The great hero who brought us freedom, the fearless man who gave us flag, gave us the opportunity to sing the national anthem in a chorus, that individual was brutally killed by army members, some wayward vile people. Tremors are felt all over our chest when we recall such ghastly, such shuddering, such unbelievable incident; even today we cry at home and outside. I have repeatedly lost my composure while standing before the huge tomb of our greatest hero, the Father of the Nation. My disgust for the ungrateful assassins becomes vocal; I feel like smashing everything. I tear them up with the sharp teeth of a savage beast. At that very moment, I hear the voice of my Bangla mother from a centre of silence, that flute of my childhood is played in a mournful melody – the mother Bangla says, my greatest child is sleeping in my lap. He has walked a lot; tolerated a lot, allow him to stay in silence. Put your hands in completing his unfinished tasks, put in energy, pay attention. You have many tasks to do. Look, the savage reptiles, the evil spirits have erected a cave of intrigue around my mother. Devour them, eliminate them – around you; the derailed and foolish lunatics in the houses of affluent happiness-mongers, students in colleges and madrasas, are repeatedly kissing the machetes with wearing cloaks in the lust for heavenly nymphs. Beware, they have arms in their large pockets, their eyes are intoxicated. They are coming very fast, they would jeopardise your freedom, and they would once again make you even inferior to slaves.

The snakes are exhaling
Poisonous air all around
The charming message of peace
Would sound like futile mockery.

Listen Bangali, listen, listen to the thunderous call of the huge-bodied immortal friend raising his towering hands –

Build up fortresses in all your homes; you have to confront the enemy with whatever you have. Joy Bangla.

Translation: *Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed*

Bangabandhu and...

(Continued from previous page)

to facilitate his participation in the round-table conference. An intense movement was underway all over the country. And at this time Sheikh Mujib would go to sit with Ayub Khan after being freed under parole! Begum Mujib hurriedly summoned her eldest daughter Hasina. She put a chit in her hand. Sheikh Hasina also memorised its contents, in case the guards seized that from her! Begum Mujib's message was: People throughout the country are engaged in a movement demanding your release; beware, do not take release on parole. If you come out after taking parole, I shall hold a meeting against you in Paltan (Sheikh Hasina Kichhu Smriti Kichhu Katha, Monjurul Islam, Samay Prokashani).

The then student of Dhaka University Sheikh Hasina had conveyed that message to Bangabandhu. Sheikh Mujib took a decision on that day. He did not obtain his release under parole. Bangabandhu came out with his head held high.

Bangabandhu was on the verge of going out to join the historic public meeting of 7 March 1971. He was very restless. On the one hand there was the intense pressure of the students and masses, the declaration of independence would have to be made today. On the other hand, the whole world

was watching that address. We know today, it is seen even in American documents, even the centre of power in America was waiting sleeplessly to know what Sheikh Mujib would say. If a unilateral declaration of independence came, then the Pakistani military were ready to confront it. What would Bangabandhu do in this situation! He was pacing up and down in his room. Begum Mujib told him: Why are you so restless? Lie down and take rest for some time. Mujib lied down. Sheikh Hasina sat on a couch near his head, Begum Mujib was near his feet. Begum Mujib said: You will speak about your own conscience. Before you, there are the bamboo sticks of lakhs of people, behind you there are rifles. You should say whatever your heart desires. Sheikh Mujib got up after silently lying in bed for some time. Before he left, he kissed the forehead of Begum Mujib. He reached the meeting-stage a bit late. The people were then waiting eagerly; in the words of Nirmalendu Goon:

"When will you come poet?"
At the end of hundreds of struggles of a century,
Walking spiritedly like Rabindranath
The poet then stood on the podium of the masses.
...Shaking the stage of people's sun the poet recited his
Immortal piece of poetry:
"The struggle this time is for freedom,
The struggle this time is for independence".

That man gave us freedom with so much sacrifice, so much heroism, such love, such pragmatism. On that night of declaration of independence after the midnight of 25 March 1971, he told the journalist Ataus Samad, "I have given you independence, you now preserve it" (*Ajker Kagaj-22/1/93*). Ataus Samad told me more than once, Bangabandhu had said to him on the night of 25 March, "I am making UDI (Unilateral Declaration of Independence). I have given you independence, you go preserve it".

That declaration was transmitted via ether: Bangladesh is independent from today.

Journalist David Frost had asked Bangabandhu in 1972: "Which day of your life would you consider the happiest after looking towards the past at this moment?"

Which moment made you most happy?"

Bangabandhu replied: "The day I heard that Bangladesh was free, that day was the happiest day of my life".

Frost: The happiest day of your life?

Sheikh Mujib: The happiest day of my whole life!

Frost: When did you start dreaming about such a day?

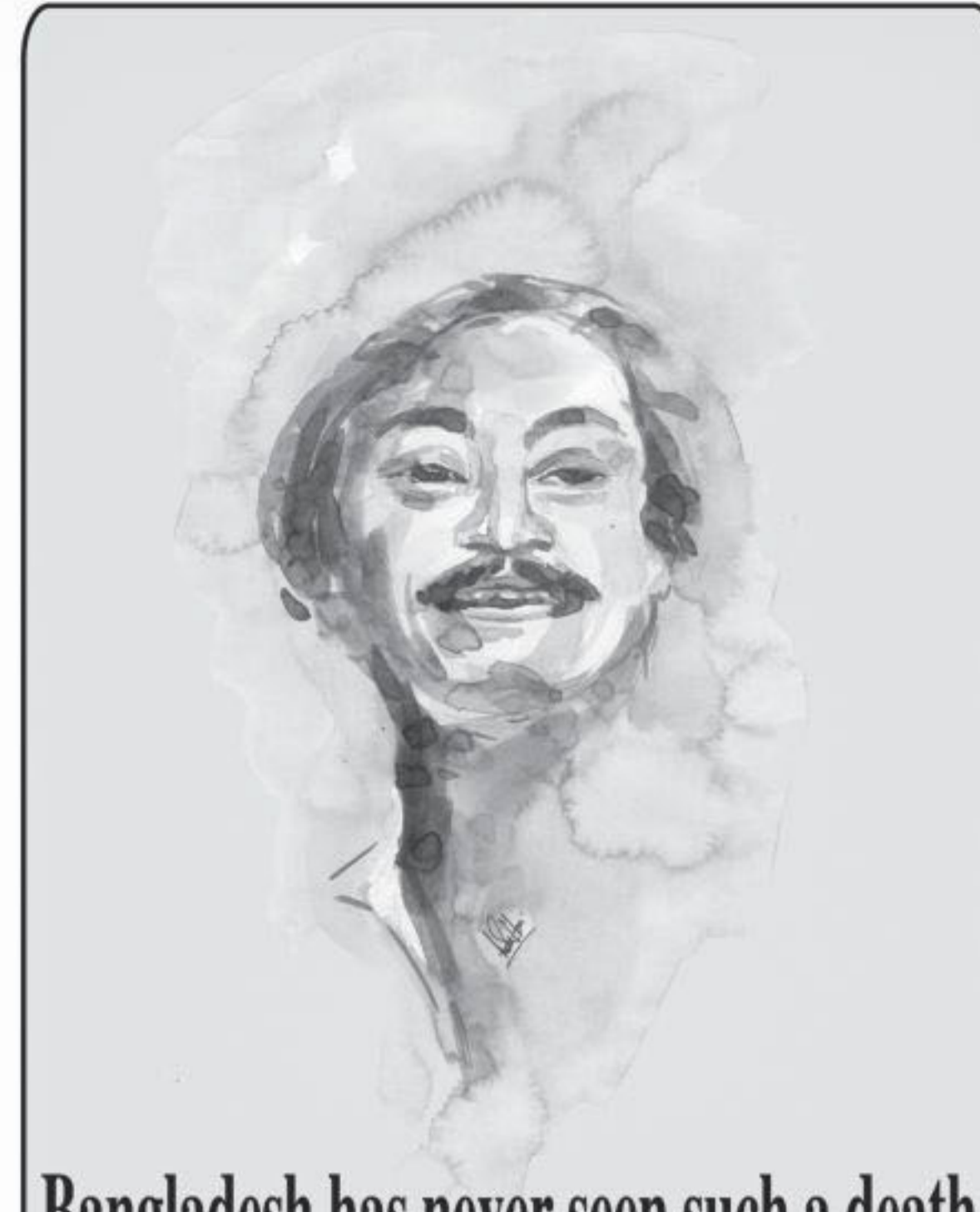
Sheikh Mujib: I had been seeing this dream for many years.

The Pakistanis could not kill him despite making repeated arrangements for his murder! Before handing over power to Bhutto, Yahya Khan had said, "Give me two days more, let me finish my last task, let me execute the death sentence of Sheikh Mujib.

That death sentence was not carried out then. It was done four years later. And Bangabandhu could never imagine that his life would be taken by the Bangalis. There were conspiracies against him, there were warnings of rebellion against him, these information did reach him through various means; even the Indians took special measure to inform him about it. We know that from the declassified documents of America. But Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib trusted the Bangalis more than himself. He was not afraid of death; and it was impossible to make him believe that any Bangali could hit him. He used to say, his greatest virtue was that he loved his countrymen excessively. And his greatest weakness was that, he loved his countrymen too much. That love and trust became the cause of his death. The language of those who killed him on 15 August 1975 was Bangla, in their hands were arms purchased by the hard-earned money from the toils of poor Bangalis. Not only Bangabandhu, not only Begum Mujib, even the child-son Russel, and pregnant daughter-in-law were not spared on that night of assassination!

Attempts were made to make the state of Bangladesh move backwards after the killing of Father of the Nation. Attempts were made in different ways to erase his name. But as time passes, the Father of the Nation of the Bangalis Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman becomes brighter and brighter. In a survey of the BBC Bengali Service, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman emerged as the greatest Bangali of all times; the exact reason for that was, he had gifted the Bangalis an independent nation in its thousand year-old history. Today, the independence of Bangladesh and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman are synonymous.

Translation: *Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed*



Bangladesh has never seen such a death

Sohrab Pasha

The sleeping city wakes up with your footsteps
Dawns open up the rusting windows of night
At the sound of your walk
Houses in colorful garbs laugh madly in gleeful moonlight
Bangladesh finds a wonderful sky of bird-wings
In the slogan of 'Joy Bangla'
That glowing voice of yours floats in air still today
Golden light from cloud falls on grass
And the face of Bangladesh brightens
With the divine light in the lost belief
Of all the stooping people.

Suddenly the beautiful dreamy sun of future is lost
The dazzling footsteps of the great hero of history
Stopped due to misdeeds of wild hatred
The world was stunned and shrouded in grief
The green cornfields of Bangla was soaked
In the blood-stream from Dhanmondi 32
The watercolor picture of fire got mingled
With the feathers of clouds
The day did not break with chirpings
That day all birds did not return
To their own nests woven with dreams
The metaphor of narrow eyes got wet
Not with water, but crimson blood
The sea couldn't contain that fiery river of deep sigh
Such a fatal death Bangladesh has never seen!

A dull silence descends on the sunny consciousness
The flood of night breaks down from the starry firmament
Birds also forget the morning practice
The appearance of sad Bangla covered with darkness
The eyes of the Bengali in mourning shed tears
With the only phrase 'Bangabandhu is no more'
Where will Bangladesh hide the tears and blood of rosy Russel
Who at the tender age used to play with butterflies?
Dawns haven't thrown light on dew and grass for long
Perplexed gloomy houses haven't opened their windows
What an evil time the fog of conspiracy all around!
Out of patriotism your melancholy daughter in wet eyes
Held up the flag of dream left by you
You witness from far in the hand of 'Deshrotno'
Your Golden Bengal now on top of fame globally
Bangabandhu, you have birthday only, no day of death
In the heart of Bangla and the Bengali.

Translation: *Dr. Binoy Barman*



Prison flowers

Sohrab Hassan

He loved rivers very much; in their tumultuous waves
He sailed his boat with consummate skill.
The fast flowing rivers with abundant waters have bathed the delta,
And their alluvial loads have turned it green, bright and fertile.
The river kept its word, paying back with crops and harvests.

He loved birds very much—birds that symbolize freedom.
How can the muzzle of a gun stop the flight of birds?
Or silence the everlasting song of a fiery March afternoon?
The sky and the stars know him; the heights of Chimbuk know him;
Birds still remember him in their choral songs.

He loved flowers very much; he made them bloom in his garden,
And even in his solitary prison yard; roses, chameli, jui—their fragrance
Spread in every village of Bengal, fanned by the soft winds.
No guard can lock up the fragrance of those flowers in a prison cell.

Flowers, birds, the soil—they have kept their word, but not man.

Translation: *The poet himself*

