

MAULANA BHASHANI'S 136TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY LESSONS OF FREEDOM

LAYLI UDDIN

I shall begin with a story, to which I will return again. In 2013, on the occasion of the 37th death anniversary of Maulana Bhashani, I met the vivacious and spirited 84-year old Burhan Uddin in Tangail (passed away in 2014). Bhashani's *murid* of 50 years and a peasant for far longer, his dress of straw cap, white punjabi, lungi and a wispy beard mimicked that of his *Pir* or, in his own words, the '*maha nayak*' (great leader), '*maha bidrohi*' (great rebel) and the '*maha pralaykari*' (one who causes complete dissolution of the universe). In excited tones, he proceeded to me at length, stories about Bhashani, much of it would have many enthralled, especially his wonderful and fantastical descriptions of Bhashani flying over trees with his boat protected by an ambush of tigers and of the thwack of his *lathi* reverberating across the entire subcontinent. However, there was one story in particular that struck me the most. On the 21st night of Ramadan 2012, Maulana Bhashani visited Burhan Uddin and told him the 'villain' American imperialism would soon be defeated, and to carry out a *shongram* (struggle), modern weaponry were no longer effective. The next *andolan*, Bhashani informed him would be on electricity.

To quote Walter Benjamin and, hopefully, in a not-too-random way: "what has been forgotten... is never something purely individual." My academic research on Bhashani over the last five years stands as a testament to that. To forget Bhashani is to forget the histories of poor and landless peasants, sharecroppers, char-dwellers, and workers; it is to forget the rich and dynamic contributions of the secular and of the religious; our wider geographies, fraternities and networks; the progressive, radical and defiant voices that once were; and the possibilities and futures that people fought for until bodies were fatigued, battered, bloodied or just ceased to be. Our humanity, our redemption and our liberation must lie in the recovery of all our histories even the most obscure, reviled and rejected elements of it.

The intention of the article is not to offer a panegyric, faint praise, prescription or timelines, all of which have been done



PHOTO: STAR

elsewhere by others, but something different. Let us return back to Burhan Uddin. To others, his stories might have appeared as the byproduct of a semi-literate, irrational or senile mind. Burhan Uddin's ability to think and feel emotions his way through complex issues of injustice, power, resistance, and humanity using the complex figure of Maulana Bhashani, rather, spoke to me of the product of a powerful pedagogy: a pedagogy of emancipation. I offer then an outline of the pedagogy, or, rather, the lessons of freedom that can be found in Bhashani's politics. This is an incomplete pedagogy because it comes from the fragments of speeches, practices and relationships that I have been able to excavate. Bhashani, unlike many of his contemporaries in South Asia, has left us with few written footprints of his own ideas, thoughts or philosophy.

So, what are the lessons of freedom then? First is the non-deferential and irreverent attitude towards those in power. Bhashani

remembered nowadays as the 'Red Maulana' was known by other names during his time. The choice ones being the 'Prophet of Violence', the 'Pakistani Dean of Canterbury', 'Pakistani Ayatollah Kashani', 'Bharat's Dalal' (India's Agent), 'Hanuman' and 'Kafir'. All names given to him by the British, Americans, Pakistanis and Bengalis alike not out of admiration but contempt. A consequence of Bhashani's caustic, abrasive and coarse tongue, which spared no one, especially those in power, friends and foes alike. In September 1956, the Awami League came into power at the centre and at the provincial level – the only time in the history of Pakistan. However, the victory rally at Paltan Maidan was to be anything but that. Bhashani, flanked by his two distinctly uncomfortable chief guests on stage, the Prime Minister Suhrawardy and Chief Minister Ataur Rahman Khan, warned the crowd: "If the Awami League mandate is not fulfilled, we will throw out the Suhrawardy Ministry with our lathis." A

grimacing Abu Zafar Shamsuddin in his memoirs wondered why Bhashani had not been able to say those things in less 'uncivil' and offensive manner. Bhashani's performance, however, was not for the benefit of those who sat on stage, but for those who milled below in crowds. It was a lesson in holding those in power accountable, of being critical, of speaking truth to power, and refusing subservience to it even in democratic spaces. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and philosopher wrote 'the educator has the duty of not being neutral' and Bhashani was not. When confronted with excesses of power and injustices, Bhashani reminded the people that it was they who held the real 'whip' in their hands; the true sovereigns.

The second lesson is the unabashed embrace of the diversity and heterogeneity of cultures, identities, and spaces in Bengal. Bhashani's residence in a village in Tangail, outside the political capital of Dhaka; his work in North Bengal; the constant boat tours

to char-dwelling communities of Assam and Bengal; and his organisation of conference for Imams alongside the Kagmari cultural festival in 1957 was not just about Bhashani being the common or simple man. It was an affirmation of non-elite lives; that these communities mattered, and that they too possessed and produced rich and complex cultures, politics, traditions and histories of dignity, justice and freedom. It is for this reason that Bhashani was not too tortured by the question of whether he was a Marxist or a Maulana, or any real contradiction between making a *murid* signing up to a pledge to end capitalism, anti-imperialism and establish socialism and Marxists entering mosques and religious gathering to raise political funds. Bhashani showed that both traditions belonged in the soil of Bengal and could be brought into dialogue.

Third, was a lesson in what I would call a rooted humanity. In February 1957, Maulana Bhashani planned the Kagmari conference and a three-day-long cultural festival. Bhashani would go head-to-head with Suhrawardy over the latter's defence for military pacts. Where Suhrawardy made his case for being part of the military pacts in front of middle-class intelligentsia and students in Dhaka, promising the latter trips to Baghdad Pact countries, Bhashani made his case for international co-operation, friendship and solidarity to rank and file workers of the Awami League and to peasants and workers vis-à-vis the gates, songs, dance, lectures and debates at Kagmari festival. Bhashani showed that international solidarity and humanity were not abstract or complex concepts only to be grasped by the elite but were rooted and demonstrable through local practice, customs and traditions.

The affirmation of people power, of non-elite cultures and communities, and of humanity, which is at the heart of Bhashani's pedagogy still bears relevance. In fact it is perhaps more important than ever before, for where are the lessons of freedom in Bangladeshi politics today? If you cannot find it, then perhaps we all need to start talking about Maulana Bhashani.

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UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE DAY

Health challenges are more complex than ever



HOSSAIN ZILLUR RAHMAN

THOUGH billed as a successor to the widely-known Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the new global goals — SDGs or Sustainable Development Goals — push humanity's ambitions much further and much wider. A particularly striking feature of the SDGs is the scaled-up focus on health as a cross-cutting strategic agenda. Health is a poverty driver if unaddressed and can also be a growth driver if addressed holistically. Advancing effectively on this multi-dimensional significance of the health agenda requires a level of stakeholder mobilisation and engagement that goes far beyond traditional sectoral constituencies.

In recognition of the rising strategic importance of the health agenda, UN has declared December 12 as Universal Health Coverage Day. Universal Health Coverage or UHC is the new global vocabulary but this is hardly new since many constituent activities have been in operation in varying degrees. However, what is certainly new is the far greater emphasis placed on the strategic importance of the health agenda, and of aiming for results that are a sum greater than its parts.

Four meta-trends are converging to invest the health agenda with greater strategic urgency. Climate change is raising the spectre of new health risks. Unplanned urbanisation is producing unprecedented consequences for air and water pollution as well as elevating injuries

and road fatalities into a 21st century epidemic. Sedentary lifestyles, stresses of modern living as well as shrinking commons have ushered in an epidemiological transition. Non-communicable diseases or NCDs — diabetes, cardio-vascular diseases, cancer, respiratory diseases, birth defects, trauma — now pose the bigger health challenge accounting for over sixty percent of mortalities. The persistently high level of out-of-pocket (OOP) expense burden has elevated financial risk of healthcare into an entrenched source of economic shocks for the poor and middle classes alike. Each of these meta-trends individually and collectively are elevating health into a simultaneously more urgent and more complex challenge.

Advocacy on UHC in Bangladesh thus far have yielded four important insights: *firstly*, UHC is not a one-stop target but only meaningful if understood as a progressive goal for a country like Bangladesh, *secondly*, while the broad principles of UHC — access, affordability, quality — hold across countries, creating a contextualised and shared vision on how to advance on the path to UHC is equally important, *thirdly*, UHC success will lie not only in adoption of appropriate policies but also in the practical pursuit of innovative solutions both big and small, and *fourthly*, the UHC agenda can become a game-changing social agenda only if it simultaneously prioritises health promotion i.e. the preventive agenda, as much as accessible, affordable and quality healthcare i.e. the curative agenda.

Bangladesh already has many health sector successes such as in child and maternal mortality. However, many of the successes so far have come through stand-alone vertical programmes that progressed despite system

weaknesses. Today's UHC challenges such as those emanating from NCD and OOP burdens as well as the under-focused agenda of health promotion and healthy lifestyles present a different level of complexity that demand newer cross-sectoral conversations and coalitions. A narrowly sectoral vision is no longer adequate. Focused multi-sectoral conversations amongst the medical community, civic actors, local governments, economists, private sector and policy-makers are a 'must' if the right solutions are to be identified and carried forward. Such conversations are already underway but require far greater momentum and strategic focus.

A health balance-sheet for Bangladesh shows several pluses. These include reduction in child and maternal mortality, increased life expectancy, near-eradication of open defecation, a pluralistic healthcare delivery system that combines public, private and social sectors extending down to the grass-roots, growth of a domestic pharmaceutical industry, and, policy visibility on selected agendas such as disability. Important and striking as these achievements are, they are no guarantee for overcoming the critical challenges in the next round of health priorities facing Bangladesh such as non-communicable diseases, out-of-pocket expense burdens and new pandemic health risks of climate change. For example, Bangladesh has a reasonably adequate health infrastructure but it is producing sub-optimal outcomes due to poor inter-tier linkage, low workforce motivation, inefficiencies in resource-use and gaps in awareness particularly as they pertain to non-communicable diseases. At the same time, a rapidly urbanising Bangladesh is facing acute new challenges in

urban sanitation, absence of a comparable level of public health infrastructure for the urban poor and a largely unaddressed and rising problem of mental health among others.

Ministries and experts are no doubt at work. But success on the next round of health challenges hinges on a larger cross-sectoral conversation and effort. Not just about cure but also about prevention, not just longevity but healthy life. On this day of December 12 that the global

community has earmarked for the enhanced significance of the health agenda, it may be fitting to recalibrate the national ambition for graduating into a middle income country from a narrow focus on GDP growth rates to a more holistic dream that embraces a healthy Bangladesh.

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বাংলাদেশ মৎস্য গবেষণা ইনস্টিটিউট
স্বাদুপানি কেন্দ্র, ময়মনসিংহ
পত্র নং-৩৩.০৪.০০০০.১২১.৩৮.০১০.১৩-১১৩৮ তারিখঃ ৮/১২/১৬

দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

বাংলাদেশ মৎস্য গবেষণা ইনস্টিটিউট, স্বাদুপানি কেন্দ্র, ময়মনসিংহ এর হ্যাচারী ও বিভিন্ন গবেষণা প্রকল্পের জন্য জানুয়ারি-ডিসেম্বর ২০১৭ মেয়াদে সময়ে সময়ে চাহিদার ভিত্তিতে নিম্নবর্ণিত মালামাল সরবরাহের নিমিত্ত ঠিকাদার নিয়োগের লক্ষ্যে প্রকৃত ব্যবসায়ী/ঠিকাদার/সরবরাহকারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হতে দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছেঃ

ক্রমিক নং	মালামালের বিবরণ	গ্রুপ নম্বর	সিডিউলের মূল্য	জামানত/বায়নার টাকা
১	সরিষার খৈল (আস্ত), চাউলের কুড়া (অটো), ভুট্টার গুড়া (মিহি), সয়াবীন মিল।	গ্রুপ নং-ক	১৫০০.০০	৩৫,০০০.০০
২	ফিসমিল (চৈওয়্যা মাছের গুটকীর গুড়া), গমের ভুঁষি (মিহি), গমের আটা, ফিসমিল (আস্ত), ভিটামিন মিনারেল প্রিমিক্স, মিট এন্ড বোন মিল এবং প্রোটিন কনসেন্ট্রেট।	গ্রুপ নং-খ	১৫০০.০০	৩৫,০০০.০০
৩	পিজি, এইচসিজি, আর্টিমিয়া, ১৭ আলফা মিথাইল টেসটোস্টেরন।	গ্রুপ নং-গ	১৫০০.০০	৩৫,০০০.০০
৪	পাথুরে চুন, ইউরিয়া, টিএসপি (দেশী), মংক উড, মংক জ্বীন, ডিপটারেক্স এবং সুমিথিয়ন।	গ্রুপ নং-ঘ	১০০০.০০	২৫,০০০.০০
৫	বিভিন্ন মাছের বিভিন্ন তৈরী খাদ্য (নাসারী ফিড, স্টার্টার-১, ২, ৩, প্রোয়ার ও ফিনিসার।	গ্রুপ নং-ঙ	১৫০০.০০	৩৫,০০০.০০
৬	Passive Integrated Transponder (Tag), ফিল্টার নেট এবং পলিইথিলিন নটলেস নেট।	গ্রুপ নং-চ	১৫০০.০০	৩৫,০০০.০০

দরপত্র সিডিউল আগামী ২১/১২/১৬ইং তারিখ পর্যন্ত মুখ্য বৈজ্ঞানিক কর্মকর্তা, স্বাদুপানি কেন্দ্র, ময়মনসিংহের হিসাব শাখায় এবং সদস্য পরিচালক (মৎস্য), বাংলাদেশ কৃষি গবেষণা কাউন্সিল, ফার্মগেইট, ঢাকা এর দপ্তর থেকে অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে আবেদনের মাধ্যমে নগদ নির্ধারিত মূল্যে (অফেরতযোগ্য) সংগ্রহ করা যাবে।

দরপত্র আগামী ২২/১২/১৬ইং তারিখ বেলা ১২ঃ০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত মুখ্য বৈজ্ঞানিক কর্মকর্তা, স্বাদুপানি কেন্দ্র, ময়মনসিংহ এর অফিসে রক্ষিত টেন্ডার ব্যাগে গ্রহণ করা হবে এবং ঐ দিনই বেলা ১২ঃ৩০ ঘটিকায় ঠিকাদারের উপস্থিতিতে (যদি কেহ থাকেন) দরপত্র খোলা হবে। দরপত্র গ্রহণের দিন কোন সিডিউল বিক্রয় করা হবে না। কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা সকল দরপত্র বাতিলের ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।

মো. আসাদুর রহমান
উপ-পরিচালক

জিডি-২৫২৩

QUOTABLE Quote

BRUCE LEE
American actor, martial artist, philosopher and filmmaker.

Always be yourself, express yourself, have faith in yourself, do not go out and look for a successful personality and duplicate it.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Message targets
- 6 Rx amounts
- 11 Presentation aid
- 12 Mary's TV pal
- 13 Hold stuff
- 14 Not qualified
- 15 Break off
- 16 "Raging Bull" subject
- 18 Attach a patch
- 19 Snaky shape
- 20 Took the title
- 21 Thick cut
- 23 Bakery need
- 25 Reading and others: Abbr.
- 27 Golf goal
- 28 "Keen!"
- 30 Garden areas
- 33 Guitarist Paul
- 34 Solution: Abbr.
- 36 Match part
- 37 Coin-op eatery
- 39 Dos predecessor
- 40 "Gladiator" star
- 41 O'Connor's successor
- 43 Writer Blixen

DOWN

- 1 Cet at
- 2 Designer Coco
- 3 Place to find nuts
- 4 Work unit
- 5 Purloined
- 6 Solicits, as business
- 7 "Dear me!"
- 8 Set of programs
- 9 Paper worker
- 10 "Paradise Lost" figure
- 17 Wagon puller
- 22 Lingerie buy
- 24 Yak it up
- 26 Flower parts
- 28 Of axons and dendrites
- 29 Words before tear or dare
- 31 Insurance type
- 32 Bar seats
- 33 Is missing
- 35 Sender's need
- 38 Had debts
- 42 Shelter

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

LAST TEDPID
AREA NODICE
DIES EDITED
DARKMEAT
BODYHEAT
SALADS ABE
AFIRE LOREN
IRE TOASTS
LOVESEAT
DEADBEAT
COUGAR RATE
ARTERY ASIA
BRASS NETS