

The legacy of RP Saha

RP Saha and his son, Bhabani Prasad Saha, were abducted by the Pakistan Army and their collaborators on May 7, 1971. On this day, we remember this great soul who made enormous sacrifices for the wellbeing of his countrymen.

MD GOLAM KIBRIA

PHILANTHROPY is derived from the Greek words "philos" which means loving and "anthropos" which means humankind. Philanthropy stands to improve the wellbeing of humankind by preventing and solving social problems. If we go through the life history of Ranada Prasad Saha, we will find a true philanthropist in him.

Philanthropist Ranadaprasad Saha, popularly known as RP Saha, was born in 1896 at Mirzapur village of greater Mymensingh. His father, Devendranath Podder and mother Kumudini Devi were very happy to see the baby born in a very auspicious time according to Hindu mythology. But when the boy turned seven, his mother died due to a lack of medical facilities in their remote village. This experience had far-reaching effects on his later life and it changed his outlook on how women were treated in society.

It also persuaded him to find ways of making women self-reliant socio-economically and provide the poorest of the poor in society with proper medical facilities so that no one else would have to face the same fate as that of his mother. He was determined to find solutions to the helplessness of his country and fellow countrymen from different walks of life.

After his mother's death, he was sent to his maternal uncle's home for schooling but it did not last long. At last, he reached Calcutta when he was about 12 years old. There, he worked as a day labourer, hotel boy, newspaper hawker, etc., to earn a living. To his good fortune, he came to know quite a few kind and noble people through his honest and honourable character, which helped him materialise his cherished dreams. During this time, he



RP Saha with his son and daughters.

became a political activist striving for the freedom of his nation and was arrested by the police and held as a political suspect for a few days.

Great Britain joined the First World War on August 4, 1914. It was a political decision made by the Indian leaders to support the colonial

regime. So, on February 25, 1915, the Bengal Ambulance Corps was formed. RP Saha was recruited and joined the 16 Rajput Regiment on April 1 at Alipur cantonment. On June 26, his corps was set to go to Egypt. RP Saha was determined to prove that his countrymen were not

cowards and had fight in them.

On April 29, 1916, the British Army had to surrender to the Turkish Army at Kut-El-Amara. Members of the British Brigade and the Bengal Ambulance Corps were sent to Baghdad as prisoners of war. There, the Ambulance Corps had to maintain a hospital for treating the wounded soldiers.

On June 27, 1916, the hospital caught fire from a nearby explosion. RP Saha risked his own life to save around 20 wounded soldiers from the blazing inferno. It was so courageous that his commanding officer wrote a comment in his service book, "On the occasion of magazine explosion near the hospital, he remained cool and worked hard being of the last to leave the hospital."

On September 26, 1916, RP Saha was freed from Turkish custody through a prisoner exchange programme and returned to Calcutta. He was given a heroic reception at the Calcutta Railway Station. RP Saha decided to join the Bengali Double Company which was upgraded to the 49th Bengal Regiment. There he was commissioned as an officer in the Indian (Viceroy) commission in February 1918.

In 1919, he was invited by the king to join the peace celebration in England. During the celebration he was given the sword of honour and citation of the king which glorified his regiment and made his nation proud. His legacy will remain forever in our military heritage.

On August 30, 1920, his regiment was decommissioned and RP Saha started another glorified chapter in his life. Through his hard work, discipline and management skills he became a leading businessman. As per his predetermination he founded the Kumudini Welfare Trust of Bengal (Bd) Ltd. named after his mother.

He also established the Kumudini Women's College in Tangail and the Devendra College in Manikganj during that period. He helped fund the establishment of the Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy College in Magura. Many educational and socio-cultural organisations flourished because of his contributions.

RP Saha used to say, "My institutions are my shrines." He first ensured the means to run his institutions without any help from others. So, his trust had two wings: one to earn and another to run his institutions. With versatility and charisma, RP Saha incorporated certain values, rules and customs into his trust so that it could adjust with time and achieve his ultimate goal — to help and serve mankind.

On May 7, 1971, during our great liberation war, RP Saha and his son were abducted by the Pakistan Army and their collaborators from the head office of the Kumudini Welfare Trust in Narayanganj. The days that followed were agonising for his family members and others close to him. But it could not stop the work of the trust even for a day. RP Saha's youngest daughter, Joya Pati, took an oath and did everything to bring her father and brother back. But every effort spent was in vain. RP Saha and his son sacrificed their worldly wealth for humanity and their motherland.

Kumudini Welfare Trust is still running its institutions according to its founder's philosophy and doctrines.

Today, May 7 is the abduction day of RP Saha and his son, Bhabani Prasad Saha. Let us observe the day with due solemnity. May their souls rest in eternal peace.

The writer is Senior Vice-Principal, Bharateswari Homes, Mirzapur, Tangail.

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Coping with 'otherness'



MILIA ALI

SOME years ago a South Asian friend shared an interesting anecdote with me. When she landed her first job in the corporate banking sector in London, she bought herself a new wardrobe of business suits and dresses. She boldly announced to her mother: "No more saris. Now that I am part of London's financial world, I have decided to dress in western style. It will help me blend with colleagues at the workplace!" Giving her a long hard look, her mother replied: "Really? But what are you going to do about the brown shade of your skin?" At the time I thought it was a quaint and funny story. But I am gradually beginning to see the deeply embedded wisdom in my friend's mother's reaction.

The truth is that we immigrants will always remain the 'other' in western countries — no matter how hard we try to blend in by wearing the 'right' clothes and acquiring the 'right' accent! I became sharply conscious of this reality once again when I recently came across Zia Haider Rahman's article, "Oh, So Now I'm Bangladeshi?" (*The New York Times*, April 8, 2016). Zia Haider Rahman rose to fame when his debut novel *In the Light of What We Know* was critically acclaimed in literary circles. In the article Rahman notes that while he is British in all aspects, when he was selected as a panellist for the prestigious PEN Pinter Prize, the

announcement described him as: "Born in rural Bangladesh, Zia Haider Rahman was educated at Balliol College, Oxford, and at Cambridge, Munich and Yale Universities." In fact, The Man Booker Prize administration went on to recognise him as "a Bangladeshi banker turned novelist." The author was riled by the fact that his ethnicity was singled out in the intro, whereas the same yardstick was not applied to other panellists.

Interestingly, Rahman has never lived in Bangladesh and speaks with a British accent that he claims he acquired from "imitating BBC News presenters on a cassette recorder." It is ironic that despite his efforts to Anglicise, he could not shake off his hyphenated Bangladeshi identity. He suspects, "Keeping me Bangladeshi has the advantage of enabling some people to tell me to go back to my own country." We could give the organisers of the PEN Pinter Prize the benefit of the doubt since casting Rahman as an English novelist of Bangladeshi origin could be a marketing gimmick to make him appear 'exotic'. However, the suspicion that this could be a precursor to something more ominous is not totally unfounded, given the prevalent hostile climate towards non-white immigrants in Europe and the United States. Women in hijab and men in turbans have been publicly harangued with shouts of "Go back to your country". The current wave of attacks has particularly traumatised second-generation immigrants, since they have never known any other 'country'!

To gain a fresh perspective, I decided to engage in a free ranging discussion with my daughter (a Bangladeshi-

American), as well as her friend who is an American of Indian origin. Both women were quite puzzled by what they called Zia Haider Rahman's "oversensitivity." My daughter responded rather strongly. "You, our parents, have always told us we should be proud of

to celebrate both cultural identities. It's unrealistic to think that in either Britain or America white people will ever think of us as anything but the 'other'. Because we are indeed different as whites appear different to us". I persisted. "Then why isn't a white

himself as Bangladeshi he should have that choice." My daughter's friend interjected: "No, it's not a choice — because we can't change our skin colour or who we are and neither should we want to. It's part of our DNA." She added quite emphatically, "Better we unearth our own subterranean demons as to why it hurts so much to be identified as Indian or Bangladeshi".

Both women asserted that living in the United States is about recognising 'otherness', in all its aspects — ethnicity, religion, colour, sexual preference, etc. According to them, the challenge is to make the racists, bigots and supremacists see 'otherness' as natural! "This won't happen by quitting and cowering into our own spaces and ghettos. We will integrate as a nation, but we must strive to highlight our differences with pride," they both said unequivocally.

Through the short dialogue I managed to peel off some of the emotional baggage that a first generation immigrant carries. But I also had this uplifting feeling that as parents we must have done something right to instil in our children a sense of pride in their ethnicity, their inherited values and cultural traditions. At the same time the exposure to a multicultural world has given them the confidence to accept their differences with equanimity. In fact, this 'otherness' makes them better equipped to address the complexities of today's diverse and uncertain world!

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.



IN THE CAVE BY SIDNEY NOLAN

our heritage and origin, so, why should we be upset about being recognised as Bangladeshi? We must integrate but we cannot blend because we are different. Much of our personal journey has been

man labelled as Irish-American or Polish-British. Why must coloured immigrants be singled out by their hyphenated identities? I think if someone does not want to project

"This won't happen by quitting and cowering into our own spaces and ghettos. We will integrate as a nation, but we must strive to highlight our differences with pride"

A WORD A DAY



LABYRINTHINE
adjective

Intricate and confusing; twisting and turning

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Punjabi princes
 - 7 Movie mutt
 - 11 Tilted type
 - 12 Ollie's pal
 - 13 Red Cross headquarters
 - 14 Hot, in a way
 - 15 Get excited
 - 17 Deep cut
 - 20 Plentiful
 - 23 Museum focus
 - 24 Plays out, as a line
 - 26 Cow call
 - 27 Set eyes on
 - 28 "-- Kapital"
 - 29 Very many
 - 31 Thurman of film
 - 32 Become narrower
 - 33 Neuter
 - 34 Annapolis grad
 - 37 Take apart
 - 39 Ready to strike
 - 43 Pucker-producing
 - 44 Salad green
 - 45 Guitar boosters
 - 46 Intensify
 - 9 Receipt addition
 - 10 Some amount of
 - 16 Singer Carpenter
 - 17 Full range
 - 18 Kitchen come-on
 - 19 Clogged
 - 21 Andean animal
 - 22 School paper
 - 24 Software buyers
 - 25 Maiden name

- DOWN**
- 1 Equip
 - 2 Had supper
 - 3 Painter Vermeer
 - 4 First Hebrew letter
 - 5 Bee abode
 - 6 Battle souvenir
 - 7 Take for granted
 - 8 Increased
 - 30 Some singers
 - 33 Insinuating
 - 35 Like cupcakes
 - 36 Vanished
 - 37 Mex. neighbor
 - 38 -- de plume
 - 40 Gloss spot
 - 41 Apple eater
 - 42 Relaxing room

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S	T	A	B	S	C	R	O	C
C	A	I	R	O	H	A	N	O
A	R	R	A	N	G	E	M	E
R	A	Y	N	E	W	S	E	E
C	A	D	E	T	P	I	V	O
O	X	E	N		L	I	F	E
T	E	N	T	H	S	K	A	T
J	A	B	B	O	A	G	A	S
A	R	R	A	I	G	N	M	E
R	E	A	C	T	D	A	N	T
S	A	G	E	S	S	T	E	E

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

