

# From Zahir Raihan's Arek Phalgun

TRANSLATED BY SOHANA MANZOOR

The British Marin camped here in the dead of night when people were in deep sleep. There was no human residence here back then; only lines of upward looking trees graced the vicinity. Woodcutters came during daytime, and at night, ferocious beasts prowled around. There was unrest in the city—the sepoys at the Lalbagh fort were at a point of insurgence. A few British families that were still around took refuge in green boats on the Buriganga.

Hearing the news, the members of the British Marin came and camped in this area. The place then became known as “Under Gora Maidan.” The locals called it “Anda Gorar Maidan.” At the end of one night they attacked the unarmed sepoys at the fort. The ground of Lalbagh turned red with human blood. Some of the sepoys were able to march off to Mymensingh. The captured ones were hanged on the trees of Anda Gorar Maidan.

Let everybody see—that was the idea. Let the natives realize how terrifying the punishment of treason can be. All these happened a hundred years ago—in 1958. The Maidan is still there; they call it Victoria Park. But the forest is gone. A terrible storm had flattened the forest and the trees were completely uprooted. People had nodded and said that even the trees had lives and hence could not accept such a heinous crime.

Then houses and buildings were built in the area. They made a park out of the Maidan and renamed it after the Queen Victoria. At some point, public meetings were held here. Not any more, though. In the late afternoons, young boys came to play around the place and grown-ups sat chatting while shelling nuts. It was, however, the scenario in summer or spring. During the winter the place turned desolate.

The winter this year was weird—it was hot during day-time and terribly cold at night. That morning was enveloped in winter haze. One lone cloud was gliding by slowly much lower than the usual—from the north to the south. Its colour was like frozen mist.

At that point a young man was seen walking by the side of the park, from the south to the north, to Nababpur. He was garbed in freshly laundered white and was walking fast. The bus services had begun and people were all going to work places, but this lad was surely different from them all. He

also wore nice clothes had pen stuck in pocket, wrist watch, but the one difference that anybody would notice was that he had no shoes on. He was walking bare-foot

They hurled tear gas shells inside the compound of the hostel. The boys from the medical college certainly were not fools. They picked up shells before they could burst and threw those back at the police. There were some small restaurants and hotels on the other side of the road. The police took

what are you doing, what are you doing?”

Barkat and I were standing by the mike. Barkat said abruptly, “Wait, I will be back soon.” Saying so he walked toward the gate where the boys had congregated and were shouting. The sun had reached the western sky. The cloudless sky was afire. The trees were dressed in green and spring flowers. Suddenly, there was sound of rifle firing.

I turned to look back. The skull of one boy was tearing through the air and it fell about thirty feet away. A second boy dropped on the

He died that night due to hemorrhage.

It was a little before 8:00 in the evening. The golden stars twinkled in the canvas of the sky. The mists were rising. The chilly north wind had started to blow.

Salma climbed to the rooftop holding Shahed's hand. It was a small roof. There were other people on the rooftops on other buildings too. Salma heard Mr. Razzaque talking to his wife: “Hey listen, don't let the kids go out tomorrow. No matter what, keep

reached a balance, that some kind of peace has been reached. But then again everything was destroyed with a deadly blow of jealousy and envy. And they wailed, “We cannot bear it anymore.”

Salma heard Mr. Razzaque saying again, “What's point of asking how long? Just look after the children tomorrow.”

His wife said, “I will.”

Right at that moment, the entire city burst into a chorus of millions of voices: All that had fallen asleep woke up asking, “What happened? Did they start shooting again?”

The sky was cloudless. Still, storm was very near.

There was no wind. Yet, there were waves of strife.

Voices rose and fell: “We won't forget the martyrs. We won't forget Barkat.”

It was as if the sky was falling down. The earth trembled. It was as if a terrible earthquake shook the world around them.

It was not just from the north, or from the south, or from the east and the west. The world trembled and the roar from the student body rose higher and higher from all the rooftops: “Remember the martyrs. Never forget the martyrs.”

Everybody understood what was happening. There was curfew on the streets. Slogans and processions were banned. Hence the students had gathered on rooftops to voice their protests. All the student halls—Muslim Hall, Medical Hostel, Dhaka Hall, Chameli House, Fazlul Huq Hall, Bandhon Kutir, Eden Hostel, Nupur Villa—everywhere students had risen and were assuring the country in one voice, “It's my land and you do not need to be afraid.”

Shahed asked, “Didn't you do something similar during the election last year, Apa?”

Salma replied briefly, “Yes.”

Shahed said, “So, what came out of it? The people you elected are all silent. Don't they have a say in this?”

Salma was about to open her mouth when she heard Mr. Razzaque speaking again to his wife, “Not everyone is a Mir Zafar, you know. There are all kinds of people. It's just that we have to recognize people for who they are.”

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temporary shelter behind them. Some of the boys had surrounded a jeep on the road that ran by the Assembly House toward the race course. They had dragged down an MLA who was trembling like a wet crow and looking this way and that. If only the police were around!

The boys dragged him down from the jeep. One of them thrust his fist into the pocket of the man's loose dress and tore it out. Another lad snatched away his cap and flung it on the street. The man muttered in frustration, “Ah,

ground. Another round of bullets was shot.

And then another. One boy covering his midriff stumbled in front of the veranda of no. 12 barrack. His eyes had a stunned look in them. Three more boys came crawling toward the place. Blood dripped from their hands.

Barkat was shot in his upper thigh. His white pajamas had become red with blood. Four of us carried him to the hospital. He was chatting with us normally. “I'm okay—it's my thigh only. I'll live, you'll see. It's nothing.”

them inside the house. God knows what might happen. What if they open fire on the crowd like they did last time, eh?”

It was not only Mr. Razzaque. Everybody was worried. Something was bound to happen tomorrow. Will there be bloodshed? Salma heard Mrs. Razzaque asking her husband, “How long will this go on?”

Mr. Razzaque replied, “I do not know.”

Nobody knew how much longer they would continue amid such tension. Sometimes it almost felt that they had

## The Spirit of the International Mother Language Day From the Perspective of the Youth Today

SHAH TAZRIAN ASHRAFI



**2013 Shahbag Protests**  
The memories are still fresh. My neighborhood lit up with candle holding inhabitants as they chanted slogans in solidarity with the protestors in Shahbag. The news channels regularly covered the events, interviewing the activists. The social media people ceremoniously expressed their opinions and shared images of the protests. I remember being stuck in traffic for a long time, for a cause. I remember my friends say how the mobs were so jubilant and many people extended their support for the protestors by offering them food and other necessities, and motivating them to go on.

Many civilians took to the streets demanding death penalty for the razakaars infamous for their war crimes. It was a turning point in the history of our country as it conveyed the message loud that those who had active participation against our liberation didn't deserve to breathe without death penalties. The voices of the protestors made sure that the razakaars had no place in the country.

The protestors' lungs became one, their voices one, and Shahbag more alive than ever.

Songs were sung in unison—a sea of singers driven by patriotism, speeches were given by commoners, activists, prominent writers, flags were waved and

worn, candles were held, plays were staged, celebrations were in co-existence with protests, and both Qader Mollah and Sayeedi were given death penalties.

The souls of those who had died at the hands of the traitors shed tears of happiness. The memories of the 11-year old girl who had been raped, the 344 people who had been killed in Alubdi village, Hazrat Ali, the poet Meherun Nesa—were revived.

**2018 Road-Safety Protests**  
After the tragic deaths of two students a series of protests broke out demanding justice, soon after the quota reformation movement.

Students boycotted their classes and came out in the streets protesting peacefully. The protests took a violent turn when the police and other groups tried to dismiss the unarmed protestors. It was at the backdrop of the protests when Shahidul Alam had been detained, which caused outrage within an outrage.

I remember how the circumstances were back then. At times, they were tension filled. At times, ceremonious. Alongside students, teachers and guardians hit the roads too, extending their support, standing in solidarity with them. The protestors controlled the streets dethroning the original controllers; our so called traffic police. They made lines so that vehicles as per their categories

maintained their lines, not busying the streets. Ambulances and emergency vehicles were given priority. The faces of kindness and warmth floated up and down the newsfeed as did the faces of horror and injustice.

The protests caught the attention of the international media like every other protest staged by the mass and made our eyes open to the fact that the inhumane conditions of our roads need to change. After all, the lives of those who were meant to be the future of the country were at stake.

We have lived through the movements. We have spoken the language of defiance. We have seen what solidarity looks like. We have seen how powerful resistance can be. Even though it didn't bring the desired results in some cases, it did shape our country's history. Our RMG workers

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are constantly asking for pay raise as they aren't paid well despite being vital economic contributors. They have taken to the streets too. What binds all the protests and movements despite being different from one another are the resistive sentiments of '52.

I see the spirit of '52 manifesting itself in different protests and movements that our youths participate in. And I hope that they never yield.

Shah Tazrian Ashrafi is an occasional contributor to The Daily Star Literature Page.



POETRY

Ekusher Kabita

AL MAHMUD

(TRANSLATED BY MD MEHEDI HASAN)

At the noon  
Of 21st February  
It wasn't raining, was it?  
No, it was the blood of Barkat.

The scorching heat of the sun  
Through thousands of years  
Caused the red  
Of the twigs of *krishnachura*!

Morning procession will march on  
Flood the road with flowers  
Titumir's daughter is singing a dirge  
Standing on the street.

Did you know the golden boy  
Khudiram? Heard of him ever?  
Who breathlessly laid down his life  
To buy a breath of freedom?

On the death peak of Paharpur  
Jumped a spark of fire,  
In February, it's his sister  
That wears white sari.

O morning procession,  
Will you take me with you?  
Bangla is my language, I  
Was born here in Bengal.

Md Mehedi Hasan's writings have been published in The Daily Star, The Daily Observer, The Independent, The Wagon Magazine (Chennai, India), Arts & Letters- Dhaka Tribune.

