

## Special Supplement

## Great Victory Day

Thursday 16 December 2021

## Victory Festival of Golden Jubilee

Muhammad Zafar Iqbal



## Bangladesh Beside My Head

Nirmalendu Goon

When I turned twenty-five  
You were still in my dreams.  
I told you after opening my ribs:  
Take everything my bosom has.

When I became twenty-five years old  
You were still in the mother's womb,  
Hiding you like an armament  
I made and kept you in arrow's case.

When I finished twenty-five years  
You were still hoping to be born.  
I didn't surrender to women's love  
As I viewed you as something bigger.

When my age was twenty-five  
I took up arms in my hand.  
Went to fight in a forest on distant hill  
Although I did not want to kill.

When I completed twenty-five years  
The bosom's blood was boiling red.  
What better option was there for me  
But to free you from that hell?

When my age was twenty-five  
There was no pride of triumph in your voice.  
I made you victorious through victory  
On that Sixteenth of December day.

When you turned twenty-five  
I ran towards fifty with you.  
That race shall end in gold – not in silver,  
You are still beside my head – Bangladesh.

Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed

## The Father and Flag

Asad Mannan

The flag of victory means  
Mujib's eternal standard

The Mujib Flag means the banner of Bangali's freedom  
The flag that spread the dreams in water, land and sky  
Scattering the seeds of glory in the womb of drought-hit soil.  
Like the boat of Noah In the unremitting flood of blood  
A thousand rivers floated boat on the water in his name;  
The Krishnachura bloomed in blood, the buds of stars glittered,  
The valiant nation holds the flag of Mujib in its bosom.

When the Tagore songs resonate in the heart  
In a flow of melody, I then feel like lighting the lamp  
Made from sun by putting it on our father's tomb;  
As if someone unseen says a mantra in my ears incessantly:  
That is not a grave – it is Bengal's nest – your address;  
Keep the father and flag with you before falling asleep.

2.

Years one to fifty have passed quickly amid storms and gales  
Ignoring the poison-teeth of snakes, killer-bullets of bastards,  
Even the dead wake up in the language of rippling waters  
By spreading the fragrance of eternal glory.  
The flocks of varied birds flutter their wings in great festivity  
Engrossed in the colours of greenery; embracing the winds –  
How fearlessly the sailor stands beside the coast of sea!  
Mujib's blood-drenched flag flutters inside the hearts.

The garden of life resonates today with the song of victory  
The thunderous words of immortal father float in the garden.  
Disregarding death in his luminous miraculous steps  
When the father arrives to stand on a scorched habitat  
The roars of lion are paused by the cries of deer –  
Who can stop someone who sings the song of triumph!

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1.  
I do not know of any experience more amazing in a man's life than that of witnessing the day 16 December 1971. It was a day of unbelievable joy; but astonishingly, there were tears in the eyes of many during that juncture of real triumph. Although a floodgate of euphoria was opened up in the hearts of millions of people of this land on the occasion of victory, many wiped their eyes unknowingly by remembering those dear ones who were lost while snatching the moment of triumph.

We have not forgotten that day the slightest even after the lapse of half a century. The generation of people among us who could watch that day with their own eyes is gradually shrinking. They would leave this world one day while holding in their bosom the sheer joy of directly experiencing that day. The people of this land may read about those experiences in books and periodicals, but they will never be able to feel that fully. Actually, it is not possible to even imagine that sheer ecstasy of achieving independence by defeating the cruellest monsters in the world.

When the common people went out of their homes for the first time after achieving victory in 1971, they did not know that a terrible pain was awaiting them. There was no communication among the people in besieged Dhaka during the last few days of the war. The Indian fighter jets were flying in the sky throwing out leaflets for the Pakistani military. The leaflets read: 'Surrender to us, otherwise the freedom fighters will catch you'. The treacherous tyrants were also not sitting idle. When they realized that our victory was certain, led by the Jamaate Islami's affiliated organization Islami Chhatra Sangha and the Al-Badar force, these traitors detained and killed many prominent poets, litterateurs, doctors, engineers and journalists of the country. That killing process was also inhuman; e.g. the heart of a heart specialist was cut, the eyes of an eye specialist were gouged out. I am astonished when I find that some mainstream political parties of this country do not have the slightest hesitation in doing politics with the Jamaate Islami!

There was another apprehension among us during that Victory Day of 1971, which revolved around Bangabandhu as he was still in Pakistani prison. Ultimately, the Pakistani government was forced to release Bangabandhu in the face of global pressure. Bangabandhu returned to his countrymen on 10 January 1972. I do not know of any other occasion in the world where such incomparable scenes of people's spontaneous love could be observed.

At that time, there were millions of uprooted people. Families were bereft of fathers, mothers had lost their children, and there were dishonoured women, crippled freedom fighters, and people sunk in extreme poverty. They did not have houses or dwelling places, no apparel to wear, no food in their mouths. The country suffered from



absence of roads and ports, bridges, transports, schools, colleges, textbooks and writing papers. The economy was in tatters. There was only a huge expectation in the hearts of the people. Bangabandhu busied himself then for the reconstruction of the nation.

But he was not allowed the time to build up a country that was accorded birth by him. Bangabandhu was killed along with his family members through one of the most brutal killings in world history at dawn of 15 August after a mere three and a half years. Even a child, newly married wives and pregnant woman were not spared. The soil of this wretched land was dyed by the blood of Bangabandhu. As Bangladesh and Bangabandhu was synonymous, therefore attempt was actually made to demolish Bangladesh by assassinating Bangabandhu. Born with the ideals of the liberation war, Bangladesh then lost its way in the blind alleys of illusion.

The war-criminals came out of jails within one year after that; the country became a safe haven for the anti-liberation elements. A huge frustration engulfed the freedom fighters, which was accompanied by intense pain and perturbation.

Finally, Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina took charge of the country. She has revived a country that was sliding backward instead of going forward, on its main path once again. Not only that, she has freed the country from any stigma by holding the trials of the war-criminals. We can again observe our Victory Day by holding our head high on the occasion of the golden jubilee of Bangladesh.

But has all our dreams really materialised? Has everything that was supposed to be achieved really taken shape?

2.

Alongside economic progress of the country, resolution of the problems related to food, clothing and housing of the people was initiated. If we try hard after looking at the faces of our children and teenagers, we shall surely be able to free our children who are captive in coaching centres pursuing memory-based joyless education. Our universities will certainly be upgraded to international standard if their responsibilities are reposed on genuine educationists. Areas of research will have to be developed in this country. It may also become possible one day to put clinical and health services on a solid footing. The country may be saved from the bite of climate change through implementation of proper plans. We may be able to witness healthy democracy in the country when all political parties – large and small – start to believe in the dreams of the liberation war.

But as long as victory is not attained in overcoming our biggest challenge, we shall not be able to take pride in our country in a loud voice despite so many achievements. All of us now know what that big challenge is; it is nothing else but the poisonous air of communalism. Can everybody feel the bleeding in the country's heart due to this venomous air?



3.

Nobody can deny that despite remaining in a dark domain during a major part of the past fifty years, we have ultimately accomplished many great achievements. But these huge achievements would become pale if even a single child of this land has to spend the night with suppressed fear because of having a different religion. One of the easiest ways to gauge how a country is faring is to ask someone belonging to the minority community about their wellbeing. If they say they are fine, then it can be understood that the country is fine; if they feel that they are not okay, then it has to be inferred that the country is not well.

Based on that simple criterion, we can recognise that our country is not well. Memories of the incidents at Ramu, Nasirnagar and Cumilla are actually mere visible components of the core problem, which is not observable like an iceberg. A huge problem that still prevails is eating away our dreams, and that problem is the horrific poisonous air of communalism.

People across the globe now know that among all assets in a country, population diversity is the biggest one. We can realize that after looking at the world. We ourselves also know very well how beautiful a flower looks when surrounded by green leaves of a tree. There would have been no beauty if the leaves, flowers, and buds of the tree were of the same monotonous colour. In fact, it is from diversity that beauty emanates. That holds true for the people of our country as well. If the Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Santals and Garos of the hills did not live side by side with the larger Muslim population of the country, then we would have been deprived of our greatest asset. It is really unfortunate that population diversity in our country is minimal. Therefore, whatever remains should be guarded wholeheartedly – for our own sake!

We can dream of a second victory on the occasion of the golden jubilee of our Victory Day. That victory shall be against communalism. For

achieving this new victory, we shall have to wage another war like the War of Liberation – even without arms. We also know the pathway for winning that war. That war shall be multi-faceted; justice, governance, and law shall be the arenas of that visible war; and the accompanying long-term war shall be through education. While noticing the comments of ordinary people in the social media, none can fail to understand how polluted their minds have become due to communal outlook. The new generation must not be allowed to get polluted by that poisonous air. They should be taught to respect other religions before they are taught to love their own religions. We shall have to teach even the infants that the greatest beauty of this world is the love of the people for others belonging to other religions, colours and languages.

We are really fortunate that a leader like Bangabandhu was born in this land – who gifted us this country. He was non-communal from head to foot. We shall fail to show due respect to Bangabandhu if this country does not become fully non-communal – both overtly and covertly.

Nobody should harbour any doubt that the victory of golden jubilee will have to be over communalism. That is required not only for our success – but also for our survival. □

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