

Special Supplement

Independence and National Day of Bangladesh

Saturday 26th March, 2022

Song of Victory

Nirmalendu Guna

My motherland was not free,  
Not at all an unfettered country  
Only after centuries of devotion  
Would I get you—Bangladesh!

Mother dear, queen of my heart  
Eternal one, your reign is forever!

I pay my homage to you  
O ever-triumphant one

You are unique, incomparable  
Forever familiar, forever new

I'm fortunate in my birthland  
Blessed by the sacrifice of millions  
In the smile of your freed face  
My soul becomes fully content  
In loveliness, glory and floral scents

You are heavenly, paradisa  
O forever beautiful Bangladesh  
You are incomparable, eternal!

You are awake, that's why

Minar Monsur

You remain awake by my head, so  
I walk on  
And continue to walk  
Because you are awake at my head.

I cross the impassable hills and desolate deserts  
I pass the thunderous clouds that roar on.  
I do not care about any supreme power  
Please listen to the rumble of that thunderous voice all around.  
We walk together on our feet  
We walk together by our feet  
So many wolf-traps of new moon's night over the centuries  
The moon bows today before Sakhina Bibi's ramshackle hut.

You are awake beside my head, that's why  
I keep on walking  
Leaving behind the dusts of thousand years, only dusts  
The black-hole of skulls, only skulls are left behind!  
Leaving behind the dead python – guileful water of rivulet  
The rage of Manasa – the broken chains are all left behind!

You are awake at my head, that's why  
I keep on walking  
On the path of earth  
Riding the chariot of dreams  
I hoist the flag of Joy Bangla  
I sing the praise of humanity  
The Atlantic salutes – The Himalaya bows its head  
You are the sun; you are the forte of brave Bangali forever awake.

Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed



Bangladesh – Our Love

Muhammad Zafar Iqbal

1. Siddiq Salik was a very important man in Pakistan Army. In his book ‘Witness to Surrender’, he had described the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state on 26 March 1971 in the following manner (translated from Bangla), “.....While standing on the veranda of General Tikka Khan’s headquarter, I was hearing spirited slogans. Within a short time, sounds of firing from rifles were heard over and above the ‘Joy Bangla’ slogan. Then came the harsh sounds of automatic rifles, and lastly intermittent sounds of light machine-guns. The noises of people were heard no more, the slogans also stopped. The fiery slogans conceded defeat to the killer weapons.... I saw that horrific scene during the next four hours while standing on the veranda. The principal feature of that terrible night was the blazing flames of fire touching the sky; ring-shaped black smokes were rising above, but the next moment the flames appeared to transcend smokes to reach for the stars. The luminosity of stars and the moonlight had to concede defeat to the rings of fire ignited by humans on that night. .... It seemed as if the door to hell was opened up.”

“When the first bullet roared out on that night, the voice of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was vaguely heard immediately afterward from a frequency near that of Radio Pakistan. That voice must have been recorded earlier on – where Sheikh Mujib declared East Pakistan as the People’s Republic of Bangladesh....”

Bangladesh was born through a formal declaration of Bangabandhu during one of the cruellest genocide and destructions in world history perpetrated after the midnight of 25 March. That helpless child called Bangladesh was then covered with blood; ferocious animals were rushing forward to tear it apart; there were hostile environments, uncertainties and panic on all four sides. Then commenced the struggle to keep that helpless new-born alive; the liberation war had started.

2. The history of the nine-months of liberation war was a history of immense sacrifice, incredible courage and heroism of the people of this land. It was a history of huge achievements. Bangabandhu was waiting for death at a Pakistani prison after making the people of this land dream about their independence. The peasants-labourers, students-masses, the country’s military, police, EPR, Ansars, inhabitants of hills and indigenous background all participated in this people’s war on the soil of this land. The freedom fighters did not have attire on their body; they lacked shoes on their feet, food in their stomach and modern weaponry in hand. They even did not have training for the war – the sector commander Khaled Mosharraf had said, ‘their training would take place on the battlefield’! It may appear beyond belief, but their biggest weapon was intense love for their country. Before going for face-to-face combats, when they sang the song ‘Amar Sonar Bangla’ while standing in line with arms in their hands, they could not fathom why tears had started rolling from their eyes.

Those who had witnessed the war with their own eyes, and those who had participated – they are now leaving this world one by one. May be, none of them would remain alive after a few years. The liberation war would then live in the pages of history. When someone would speak about the liberation war then, they may pronounce only a few numbers: three million martyrs, four hundred thousand raped women, ten million refugees, thirty-five million homeless people. By any account, the numbers were huge, especially when the whole affair had taken place within a mere nine months. The London Times had correctly written, ‘If freedom has to be bought with the price of blood, then none else had bought freedom at a higher price than Bangladesh!’ The writer of the book ‘Rape of Nanking’ Iris Chang had committed suicide on getting distressed after writing about the genocide committed at her homeland. In the language of Iris Chang, Bangladesh was the other place apart from Nanking where such horrendous rapes had occurred.

But these numbers are not merely statistical numbers. There are heart-rending stories behind each of these numbers. Can the vacant gaze of a person looking at the black barrel of a rifle just before his death fade from the memory of those who witnessed it? Can a person who had heard the screams of a girl while she was being raped ever forget that episode? Can a mother rid herself of the memory of turbid eyes of her child who passed away due to cholera while in the refugee camp? There would be none to tell these horrific tales after two decades – these would then survive only in the pages of history as mere information.

The Pakistani forces had surrendered to the joint command of the allied forces and freedom fighters in Bangladesh at the conclusion of the liberation war. That day was the most joyful in our lives. A similar joyous day was the 10 January 1972, when Bangabandhu returned to the country. People of the world watched in amazement on that day how a single man could become a whole country. When we were dreaming about our land following independence, the then US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had sarcastically said, ‘This country is a bottomless basket’. That was not surprising. Henry Kissinger was one of the key conspirators against

Bangladesh. In his book ‘The Trial of Kissinger’, Christopher Hitchens demanded the trial of Kissinger because of his role as architect of the genocide in Bangladesh.

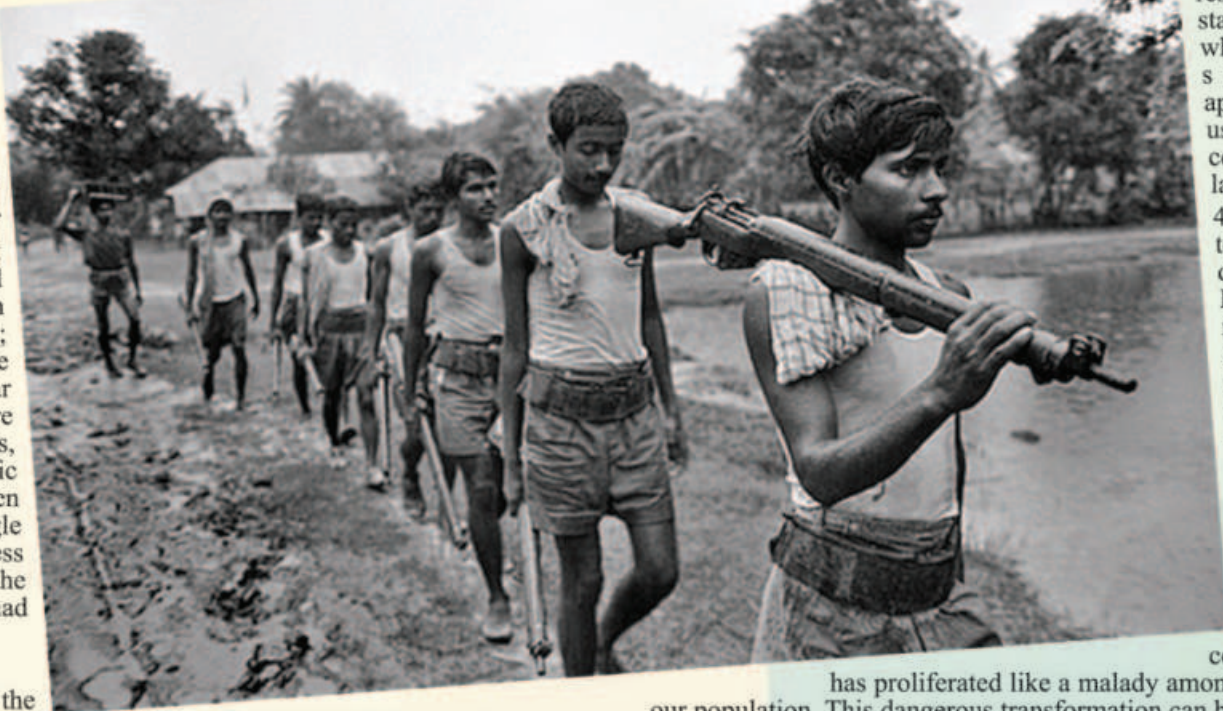
It is undeniable that we had to pay a huge price due to internal and external conspiracies. It did not stop even after losing Bangabandhu along with his family. Efforts were made to erase the name of Bangabandhu in this country for about two decades. Some generations of this land had grown up without knowing the contribution of the person whose name was synonymous with this land. It is a matter of great fortune for us that Bangabandhu has now become luminous in his own glory during his birth centenary because of the leadership of Bangabandhu’s daughter.

The economic base of Bangladesh has become sufficiently strong now proving Henry Kissinger’s assertion wrong. Nowadays, nobody cites our country as an example of a poor nation. When the Pakistani prime minister dreams of making his country a Switzerland, then his parliamentarians tell him to opt for making a Bangladesh by taking advice from our prime minister Sheikh Hasina. We feel amused when the Indian intellectuals lament after our GDP surpasses that of India. Bangladesh is also capable of extending help by supplying foreign currency when Sri Lanka faces danger. When the World Bank tried to issue threats to Bangladesh, Bangabandhu’s daughter showed them the thumb and built Padma Bridge through self-financing. When a so-called civilised country erected barbed and electric wires to halt the inflow of people, we provided sanctuary to 1.3 million Rohingya refugees.

But it is not true that all problems of the country have been resolved. In recent times, there has been a downslide in the global economy because of the Russia-Ukraine war. We have already been hit by it. Innumerable people have become poor due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They are now facing a tough time even in buying essential commodities. Corruptions of some businessmen who remain outside the law are behind the rise in commodity prices. The poor people are quite helpless; they do not know where to seek redress. The government should stand beside these people immediately. Everybody is waiting breathlessly for that.

In spite of everything, we can find many things to feel proud about our motherland. However, it is also true that some big issues like education and research still remains at an unsatisfactory level. A process has been set in motion for imparting genuinely creative education in a joyous environment in place of joyless studies based on memorisation, coaching, and guide-books. We are eagerly waiting to witness its success.

Education and research will move forward hand in hand. Innumerable research scientists from our country are working at laboratories of numerous universities in various countries of the world. But a culture of research has not yet been established here. We had to seek vaccines from the outside world during the corona-virus pandemic; we could not invent our own vaccine like the Cubans. We feel ashamed when we find that not a single university from our country has been included among the top few thousand universities of the world, as we lag behind in research. This was not expected. This face of Bangladesh hurts us. Time has come to ensure a thriving research environment in this country even through ‘jump-starting’ the process if needed.



Whether earlier or later, our education and research will surely stand out one day; but what creates suppressed apprehension among us has been the rise of communalism in this land.

4. The events that took place in Cumilla during the last Durga Puja festival were a matter of sadness and shame by any standard. But what was genuinely alarming was the speed with which it spread from one place to another in the country. We could understand from that experience, a communal outlook

has proliferated like a malady among a large segment of our population. This dangerous transformation can be observed when we cast a glance on the platforms that expose the polluted views of people under the guise of social networks. If we ask the minority population of the country how well they are faring, I think they will say with deep pain that they are not well. Whatever the economic indices or development yardsticks may indicate – a country where the minorities do not fare well cannot claim wellness. This problem will not get resolved on its own. Its solution should be explored by considering it to be the biggest problem of this land.

I do not know whether anything can be done about those who are already immersed in the poison of communalism. But the new generation must not be allowed to get polluted by this poisonous air. Before loving one’s own religion, they should be taught to respect all other religions. They should be made to understand that love for all human beings irrespective of their religion, colour and language is the biggest beauty and wealth of this world.

We are fortunate that a leader like Bangabandhu was born in this land, who gifted us this country. He was non-communal from head to foot. He removed the word ‘Muslim’ from his party back in 1955 in order to make it a non-communal entity. Therefore, if this country of our love does not become fully non-communal visibly or invisibly, then due honour cannot be shown to Bangabandhu.

We do not want to dishonour Bangabandhu in this Bangladesh of our love. □

Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed

