



PAINTING: SHAHABUDDIN AHMED

“Who Killed Mujib?” A Narrative with a Difference

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“Who Killed Mujib?” is a recurring question that has haunted the nation since the unfolding of the tragic events in mid-August 1975. The brutal killing of the Founding Father of the Nation, along with his wife and children, may seem absurd to many members of the new generation, but more absurdity followed the tragedy itself. The killers were given protection under the Indemnity Ordinance proclaimed by the self-declared President Khondokar Mustaque Ahmed and later endorsed by an act of the Parliament led by General Ziaur Rahman. The killers not only physically eliminated Sheikh Mujib but also tried to erase his name from the pages of history. Falsehood won this first battle, but truth had to wage a long war to prevail. The killers were finally brought to justice, and the judgment was delivered on 19 November 2009. Even then, not all the accused could be produced in court as a few were absconding, finding safe haven in Pakistan, the USA, and Canada. With the case deposited in the court of law, one can say that the killers were identified, and justice was delivered. However, the question of who killed Mujib lingers on. It is well understood that the assassination of a head of state or government is always a well-orchestrated, well-designed plot where those who operate at the scene can be easily identified, but their powerful masters remain outside the purview of the public and the legal system.

A. L. Khatib's book ‘Who Killed Mujib?’ published in Delhi in 1981 was the first major work written with a combination of academic research and journalistic skill that calls for serious study. First of all, we have to address the question of who this A. L. Khatib is. Not many people know him these days, but he was a well-known and respected figure among the journalist community in Dhaka in the 1950s and 60s. He was an outsider who fell in love with East Bengal and its people. Many stories circulated around this exceptional person, whose full name was Abdul Latif Khatib. He hailed from Maharashtra, India, but his father went to the sea and settled in Colombo, Sri Lanka. A. L. Khatib started his journalistic career in Ceylon and then, via Karachi, came to Dhaka in the middle of the 1950s, working at the Observer and Morning News. He was a bachelor who stayed in the old press club building in a room with a few essentials but lots of books and periodicals. He was a close friend of Sanjeeb Dutta, son of the illustrious politician Shaheed Dhirendranath Dutta, and the poet-journalist Sayeed Atiqullah. Eminent Bengali poet Subhas Mukhopadhyaya knew him well and wrote: ‘It never occurred to me to ask questions like where does Khatib hail from, who are the other members of his family, did he ever marry, is he a Hindu or Muslim, Christian or Buddhist. When he came to Delhi as the correspondent of the Bangladesh Observer, I became

close to him again.’

A. L. was a keen observer of the political and social development of East Bengal since the mid-1950s, when the nation embarked on a great journey to confront the divisive communal philosophy of the Pakistani state and establish the right of the Bengali people to be masters of their land. He was a voracious reader with a wide interest and a sharp memory. In many ways, he reminds me of A.G. Noorani, Abdul Gaffar, with his AG, a confirmed bachelor who lives in his Mumbai apartment among piles of books and writes a fortnightly column in ‘Frontline’ full of historical facts and knowledge. Similarly, the book by A. L. has taken a deeper look at the tragic event and analyzed it from local and global perspectives. Of course, he portrayed the ‘Killer Majors’ and their cohorts, but he analyzed the event not simply as a conspiracy of a few but as a Joint Criminal Enterprise or JCE, a term that is very much in circulation now, especially in the International Criminal Court and similar other domestic tribunals established to try the perpetrators of genocidal crimes. Unfortunately, national criminal courts remain focused on individual criminality and, at most, address the question of complicity in the crime, but the larger plot remains outside their focus. That may be okay with the national legal system but is inadequate to answer the question ‘Who Killed Mujib?’

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We walk your dreams and that towards our journey continues

“On a sun drenched morning you stood tall and glorious at Dhanmandi Road 32. Your light touch beckoned an enlightened future. My walking around and the love of elders used to be the essence of Road 32 then.

On 15th August 1975, they snatched Bangabandhu away from us which pushed us into emptiness, helplessness and an unknown world. But still, finding Bangabandhu in our memory always brings back that touch of life.

Today, at this memorable moment of country's ongoing development, you remain our inspiration as ever - gratitude & respect.”

(Reminiscence) – Tarique Afzal, President and Managing Director

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