



“Quota na medha? Medha, medha!”

This was the heartbeat. The chant that lit the match. At its core, the slogan was a plea not to be reduced to a statistic. It spoke not just to students but to a national anxiety: Who really deserves opportunity in a country built on sacrifice?

“We weren’t just fighting quotas,” says Dibbo, a 24-year-old protester from a private university. “We were fighting the feeling of being invisible in our own meritocracy. That chant? It gave me back my name.”

For many like Dibbo, “Quota na medha?” wasn’t just a slogan. It was an existential assertion: I earned my place here.

“Ami ke? Tumi ke? Razakar, Razakar!”

The former prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, referred to the protestors as “Razakars” — the historical traitors of 1971. For many, it was a rupture, and it stung. It rewrote their love for the country as betrayal. But the response wasn’t retreat.

“When the PM called us Razakars, we felt infuriated,” says Neela, a law student. “But also something clicked. We realised shame can’t touch you if you don’t accept its terms. We shouted it back. Louder.”

What began as a slur became a chant. What was meant to shame became armour. In reclaiming the insult, they neutralised it.

“Amar Khay, Amar Pore, Amar Boke Guli Kore.”

The line was raw, unfiltered. And it had a face.

According to reports, this slogan was born in the aftermath of the death of Abu Sayeed, who was killed by police gunfire during the quota reform demonstrations. His death — brutal, senseless, and state-sanctioned — became a wound the country could not ignore. The slogan quickly transcended its origin, becoming a symbol for the anguish and fury of an entire generation.

Nevertheless, it wasn’t aimed at just the state but rather was aimed at the parasitic intimacy of the state. A government that



took your taxes, your labour, your love, and paid you back in bullets. It described betrayal not as an anomaly, but as an everyday arrangement. The horror was not just that the state killed; it was that the dead had funded their own murder!

“Lakho Shohider Rokte Kena, Deshta Karo Baaper Na!”

Why did a hundred thousand martyrs bleed? The country doesn’t belong to your father.

It cut deeper than any chant. It shook the myth that has long held Bangladesh together. Not by desecrating the past, but by reclaiming it from political monopolies. This was no rejection of the Liberation War. It was a rejection of the idea that one family, one dynasty, or one party gets to own that history forever.

Shahjahan, a small grocery store owner who joined the march after seeing the videos online, said he had never shouted anything louder in his life. “My father and

uncle died in the war,” he said. “But now people like me are told to stay silent. Like my blood doesn’t count.”

For many, this slogan was the moral compass of the movement. Not anti-national — but anti-appropriation. Not anti-history, but anti-hijacking.

Yet, as arrests piled up and tear gas made the headlines, the question remained: how do you persist when your lungs burn and your fear multiplies?

That’s when the final blow to the head of state began.

“One Two Three Four, Sheikh Hasina is a Dictator!”

As batons swung and sirens drowned out voices, fear began to thread its way through the crowds like smoke. A new slogan surged forward: fierce, accusatory, and impossible to misinterpret, directly addressing the ousted PM.

The government’s response had abandoned all pretence of democratic

negotiation. Streets were flooded with tear gas, students dragged into vans, journalists threatened, and, perhaps most tellingly, the entire country was digitally gagged — its internet blacked out, as if truth itself had become contraband.

In response, the slogan didn’t just echo; it thundered. It took what the government wanted to hide and carved it into public memory. In a country being choked into silence, the chant became the country’s pulse. You could stop the Wi-Fi, but not the rhythm of revolt.

“Bhoy pele tumi shesh, rukhe daraley Bangladesh.”

This was the chant people repeated in holding cells. In rickshaw rides back home after dispersals. It reminded everyone that courage was not just for the stage. It was for the quiet moments. The moments between being seen and being silenced.

There was something fascinating about how these slogans functioned. Not just as protest tools, but as cultural texts. They gave people a script to reclaim identity, rewrite citizenship, and reframe grief.

They also refused to segregate. In the slogans, the elite university student and the slum-born gig worker stood on equal footing. Language, for once, did not discriminate. That unity, however brief, is what frightened the establishment most.

Now, months later, the slogans are gone from the walls. Scrubbed clean. Replaced with advertisements and warnings. But they have migrated elsewhere. Into songs, memes, and footnotes in journals. Into a sixth-grader’s memory.

Perhaps, that’s the real legacy of the July Movement. Not just what it demanded, but how it spoke. How it forged a new dialect of dissent. How it reminded us that revolutions don’t always begin with riots — sometimes, they begin with rhyme. With slogans!

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Collected