

Special Supplement

Great Victory Day



Sacrifice for Freedom of Speech  
Rezauddin Stalin

The first condition for freedom of speech is self-sacrifice  
The sound 'freedom' emerging from the tongue's oscillation  
Infects the towns and villages like the sounds of sea,  
But it was blocked constantly by the walls of blood-red eyes  
Even the prisons became research-labs of imposters in twenty-first century  
The years rolled on through the hands of my resistance  
And my entries for the diary got edited incessantly  
Like myriads of stars.

Where the humming of bees and the news of paddy-sheaf are not rare  
Nor are the ripples of rivers and the cries of hornbill infrequent,  
The sound of the farmer's footsteps wet with dew, unending stream  
Of tears flowing from the eyes of a child waiting for father,  
The fleeing of emperor, the shouts of grocery-owner,  
Or the rise and fall of the share market.

The second condition is the stirring of beauty filled with victory's feat  
Beauty implies love engraved on the letter of dedication for spring –  
Those who returned for vengeance – riding on liberation war's wagon  
Let them feel the caution of the secretive hunter while standing  
Before the burning coal of sunrise on Asia's coast,  
Let them see the fire in the eyes of wildcat, or read  
My poem flooded with the moonlight of alkaline ice.

The third condition is to seek a crown adorned with the diamond of pledge  
Removing the signal of traffic-rabbit on a path laid with tinsel of golden leaf  
Searching like the squirrel through the gaps of tree-leaves –  
And for that we need the self-sacrifice of Titimur or Khudiram –  
In whose crystal-clear eyes the whole of Bangladesh can bathe and cleanse,  
In real terms, the third condition is the inheritance of age-old tradition  
A bright essence like the sizzling geranium  
Made of copper, zinc, silver, and steel plates.

We shall have to traverse our path by turning the conditions centring  
Beehives of lungs into noun at one point and adjective at another,  
We shall have to take preparation like the ants' silent journey,  
I believe the gold-plated crown shall be found in a termites' mound  
Or inside the hole of rats, and then the time shall be transformed  
Into an amazing rosy season – the spring.

Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed



Inspiration of Victory Day in the context of July Mass-Uprising

between 1971 and 1975 threw the newly independent country into total darkness. Whereas the country needed a development-oriented humanistic leadership during the period, the masses got an inhuman and undemocratic autocracy. Thousands of opposition political activists were killed. No progress was made in developing the country's infrastructure. Initiative was taken to throttle and kill the democratic aspirations of the people. As a consequence, a terrible famine struck the country in 1974. In terms of gruesomeness, it was comparable to the most horrific famines that befell this land in history. Widespread corruption at all levels and inefficiency cum mismanagement in governance exacerbated the impact of famine manifold.

The citizens saw in bewilderment that when children were dying on the roads due to hunger and people were trying to cover their body with whatever they could gather, the members of the ruling party were spending their days in luxury. As if the sorrows and pains of the ordinary people meant nothing to them! The situation became more and more intolerable due to these exploitations, brutality, and misgovernance. Silent revolts started to take shape gradually. For strangulating and killing this revolt, the ruling party forcibly imposed one-party misrule on the country. Apart from four government-controlled newspapers, all periodicals were banned. Attempts were made to establish the one-party Awami-Baksali rule by suppressing freedom of speech throughout the land. The blood-spilling changes in the political apparatus in August 1975 took place as a response to that.

This change brought the great declarer of independence Ziaur Rahman to the centre of politics. He ascended to state-power by riding on the crest of a successful Sepoy-People Revolution. He launched a new democratic journey after assuming power by lifting embargoes on the opposition parties and opinions. He started a new brand of development-oriented politics; it was aimed at building a new Bangladesh by involving



Story of Liberation War and the Human Society of Bangladesh

as the lone constant. Or, they were jumping into the huge cavalcade of life from the lap of death. Stories were being created, whatever the situation might have been. Those stories were reaching the collective after passing through the individuals. They were being fused together. Joint stories were prepared and myths were created.

If war had arrived for the people of this country despite this segment of population being not part of the overall reality, even then stories would have been definitely generated, as during the First or Second World War. But the liberation war was no such thing. It was a reality embedded in the depths of existence for all the citizens collectively. Its all-pervasiveness was much more, as the event had taken place inside the framework of a modern state. The liberation war was a people's war for the inhabitants of East Bengal, the boundary of which was determined much earlier. The people of this region had to fight even during 1947. They did this almost likewise as the population of East Bengal. But the state-boundary that was created owing to that fight lacked the unity of a tale. The people of East Bengal shared only a bit of that story with West Pakistan. Human society cannot be created with such an insufficient story. Collective story cannot emerge from such dissimilarity of experiences. That was, however, related to the state. The stories of human societies also possess separate layers outside the state-experiences. Therefore, the people of East Bengal accumulated the raw materials for their own collective stories based on their experiences of centuries-old combats and liberation struggles.

The story was different during the Anti-British Movement. The movements against the British had unique dimensions due to own realities of the population and diverse arrangements of existence, which did not resemble those of the people of West Pakistan. Those experiences could be distinguished even from those of the people of West Bengal as well. When the peasant movements were taking place here under various names and ideals, did those resemble the experiences of northern or western India, or even West Bengal? In fact, the story of that long-running struggle resembled that of West Bengal only slightly. With the nomenclature of peasants-tenants, the people of this region could then become the owners of a beautiful story! That story was incomparable. The story was of people's own making. And when the people changed that story to align with the Muslim League for worldly reasons, that still had huge dissimilarity with All-Indian Muslim Politics. The trend of politics after 1947 could change so much because of the distinctiveness of those stories. None had to be told; it happens like this. The story that emerges from the core of existence provide fodder to the flow of subsequent story. Through the accumulation of their own story over a long period, people confronted a new story in 1971. Therefore, the raw materials of a long story piled up layer after layer in that tale. Variegated stories and directions accumulated over the previous decades left distinct imprints in the new silhouette.

Our historians must have tried to discover the order of that story in various ways. But it appears from numerous signs that many of them could not track the long accounts of previous stories in the tale of liberation war. They could not fathom the vital importance of that tracing. By prioritising ideological construction over the experiences and stories that piled up in public domain, they spoiled the multilayer significance of the story. Some even tried to reverse the assembly of fresh stories that happened before people's very eyes in such a way as if to give the impression that nothing like that had ever happened. It appears from various indications that many story-tellers lost the essence of the story while attempting to translate it in the context of mere power and state-structure, a story that pervades the core of a huge population. Can the essence be found if attempt is made to separate and fit the ingredients scattered in the public domain in conformity with one's preferred mould and measurement?

In this destitute nation of historical and political tales, the status of art and literature may be in a bit better position. Fine arts tell stories, the tales of humans. It transcends to a collective level from that of individual one. It places the person in the domain of the collective within natural and manmade frameworks. This genre comes very close to the stories prevalent in human society. Therefore, when our story-tellers, novelists or cinema-makers told stories about the liberation war, the tales from the public domain appeared with much more success in those structures. But it seems there were some flaws somewhere. Our liberation-war-based fine arts have seldom seen success for the same reasons that did not allow historical tales to become all-pervasive by coming out of small confines or through touching the variegated terrains of public life. Fine arts have also witnessed excesses in ideological dispensations. However, the main limitations of our fine arts in using the tales of liberation war have probably been a failure to access the intimate narratives of individuals. This needs some elaboration.

The stories become attractive only when the individuality of people get a chance to fly on its wings. Therefore, we always see in the outline of stories the inseparable organic relationships with the collective; the individuals appear in the collective symphony in such a degree within the framework of interpersonal relationships that the consumer can find a parallel existence for himself. If the bigger shapes get prominence in fine arts by attaching lesser importance to this aspect, if ideological moulds are set firmly like immobile stones in the tales of humans, then where can one find the real story, or how can fine arts prosper? Here, maximum number of fine arts have been created based on the lone event of the liberation war. Quite naturally so. Where else can one find such types of experiences, or the supply of experiences immersed in the blood of existence? Many people say that the experience of the liberation war is so near having such close proximity to real life that necessary distancing required for disenchantment has not yet occurred. That may be true. But there is no doubt that the naïve desire to bring all discourses under the cover of the liberation war has been a major reason for this failure.

Yet, what an infinite storehouse of stories is our liberation war! There may have been political mistakes in that. There may be numerous accounts in favour or against. The presence of innumerable episodes of intentional or unintentional fraudulence is also not surprising. But that does not nullify the innumerable micro and macro-level stories, the many colours of measurable or immeasurable feelings, the told and untold narratives of original or composite experiences that emanated from the liberation war as a profound and widespread occurrence in the routine lives of the public. The liberation war was a time of limitless fear; at the same time, it was a glorious tale of valour. The liberation war was like an unresolvable laboratory for testing our multi-coloured existence. It was an all-out people's war.

For many people, this war was a sudden event coming from the blue. It became a liberation war by testing the depths of our existence. For many people, the liberation war was an inevitable expression of their aspiration. However, that aspiration may have been transformed into infinite bitterness after passing through the experiences of reality. The stories of many people have been added to the painful experiences of others. They became united, or got involved in blood-feuds. Many went to the battlefields with meagre resources; maybe, some of them could not even see the battleground. It was such a profound experience that touched all inhabitants of this territory. The grammar of taking sides changed constantly. People could see the real faces of themselves and others. This kind of all-pervasive story does not happen in the lives of all communities.

The stock of this kind of all-pervasive stories is used by most communities of the world for building themselves. This task can be accomplished due to the presence of structural relevance in the experiences of public life. Not messages or words, it is the stories that touch the humans most intimately. The universality of stories quickly makes people unified. Therefore, this type of storehouse of universal stories is conducive for the endeavour called nation-building, or for the process called politics of state-formation. A sad aspect of our experiences has been that, we could not utilise this extraordinary depot of stories in building a human society.

This failure may be explained in this way. The parts of liberation war that we have used in history or fine arts or politics have been claimed by us as the whole thing. Some ideological conflicts or well-organized activities of ideal-based parties may be explained by claiming such wholeness within limited boundaries. But the event or activity that is linked to crores of people, where crores of people got involved by neutralising their personal wishes, how can that be explained through the delusion of 'for and against'? 'For and against' must be an important matter, as the liberation war was at the same time

all citizens irrespective of their party or opinion, who were kept at the centre of this novel politics. Zia was a resolute administrator. He pursued liberalisation of trade and commerce and adopted policies that encouraged investments in the private sector for economic recovery. Readymade garments industry and foreign remittances, which are today strong edifices of Bangladesh economy were both initiated during his rule. He brought about transformation in the rural economy through the canal-digging program. But the conspirators became active just when this great son of the soil was carving out a leadership role for Bangladesh in the global domain through a modernistic, inclusive, and future-oriented leadership. He had to embrace martyrdom at the hands of a group of derailed military men in May 1981.

Then at the end of a long autocratic rule by Hussain Muhammad Ershad, multi-party democracy was once again restored in Bangladesh at the beginning of 1990s under the leadership of Begum Khaleda Zia. Bangladesh Nationalist Party led by Begum Zia was at the helm of state power during the first halves of the decades of 1990s and 2000s. It facilitated not only a return to parliamentary democracy during those episodes, efforts were also made to strengthen the state-institutions and make the country stand on a firm footing by gearing up development activities.

But autocratic misrule once again descended on this country following assumption of office by Bangladesh Awami League through the Ninth Jatiya Sangsad Election held in December 2008. Far-reaching conspiracies were hatched for weakening the base of independence of this land through nullifying all significant achievements in all fields. Democracy was exiled by holding one unilateral cum rigged election after another. A cult was created around the autocratic ruler Sheikh Hasina and her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The only objective for creating this cult was to worship chosen individuals. By depriving the people of their democratic rights, an ethereal concept of 'politics of development' was floated. Behind this façade, a carnival of corruption was underway through nepotism, plundering of banks, and trafficking of money to foreign lands. All injustices, tortures, and misrule were perpetrated by packaging those with the so-called 'Spirit of the Liberation War'. Unbearable tortures were meted out if anyone dared to make minimum protest against this long autocratic rule. All instruments of state-machinery were indiscriminately used for the purpose. The people of Bangladesh even became familiar with a terrible nightmare called 'enforced disappearance'. Those who protested, especially the supporters of opposition ideologies, were abducted on a massive scale. Most of them could not be traced out again. After the fall of autocracy, people came to know that many of the abducted people were kept at a prison called 'Aynagar', from where only a handful of men could return.

The right of the people to express their opinion and choose their leaders was usurped through holding one-sided and fake elections one after another during 2014, 2018, and 2024. Attempts were made to silence the democratic movements of the opposition parties by applying muscle-power, filing cases, and attacking gatherings. But as the saying goes: the dawn comes nearer as the night deepens. A new sun of victory was rising beneath the dagger of the oppressor.



Song of Victory  
Abdul Hye Sikder

Tears and rivers of blood brought about the tidings,  
Triumphant song of Victory-Day in proud Bangladesh.  
Song of triumph in fields and towns, victory-song at heart  
That victory for freedom and ending exploitation.

After independence we had to bear unforgettable pain  
Hunger and deprivations after so many years.  
Even now spilling of blood, even now harsh deeds of misrule,  
Please dye our hearts with red and green for ejecting that ghost.

Victory is unfettered air, clouds above the open window,  
Victory is our terrain from Teknaf to Tentulia.  
Let victory arrive at every home – the biggest among all,  
Make this victory fierce and strong at every moment.

Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed

a political event; but the claims that are made in history, fine arts or politics of getting the whole in the partial mould of 'for and against' is akin to denying the huge expanse of the liberation war. It should also be said that the mistakes of those who provided leadership to the liberation war in various ways, or the crimes of those who opposed the war, are not sufficient for capturing the whole liberation war, as they represent only a tiny fragment of the story of liberation war.

This lack of comprehension has been devastating for our politics or state-building. The failure to utilise the extraordinary opportunity that we had and still have for forging the feeling of unity by discovering individual and collective lives in the shape of stories has been a terrible experience for our community. We are bound to be pained by this. But that is not the last word, nor is it a conclusive statement.

There are histories that remain beyond the ones written with pen and paper. It should also be said that aspects not captured in writing may be the real history. Only a small fragment of the stories in man's lived experiences are expressed through fine arts. It may often become impossible for fine arts to search for those complex knots in public domain that remain intertwined with the stories. But the tales of public lives endure. And to speak about politics, especially party-politics, it must be said that this arena usually remains active based on some narrow, self-centred, and motivated stories. Its objective most often does not include a commitment towards the stories of public lives. Therefore, what has been said about the liberation war in diverse forms and what would be spoken about it in future are only small parts of a whole – distorted in many instances.

The real liberation war exists in the public sphere; it will be even better if we say, 'in the stories of public life'. That story may sometimes lose its direction due to the pressure of influential narratives. That story may sometimes hide itself after becoming cornered due to the signals of directly-experienced reality. However, it can never erode as it has been obtained from life. It can emerge with all its appeal and full force on the fresh ground of dynamic life in opportune moments, because of its deep kinship with life beyond imposed relationships. Therefore, this vast and diffused liberation war holds promises for us. If the learned society becomes collectively pledge-bound to conserve these stories in the liberal arena of history or fine arts, if the liberation war of the common people starts to get translated at a higher rate through direct involvement of politics, only then can we advance on the path of people-centric state-formation. That would not only be an indication of our development, it would also be the chief catalyst for progress. The latent potential of the liberation war of Bangladesh's human society has persisted over the past fifty-four years; it will remain in the coming days as well. □

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Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed

Just as the people of Bangla irrespective of their age built up resistance against the intolerable tortures of the Pakistani invading forces in 1971, the common people of this country once again confronted the autocratic dictatorship of Sheikh Hasina that stretched from 2009 to 2024. The agitating students and masses came down to the streets protesting excessive quotas in government jobs. It was soon clear that it no longer was a movement of only students; people's grievances accumulated over one and a half decades then flowed to the confluence of a struggle aimed at ousting the autocrat. As if, those unforgettable days of the liberation war had returned. People irrespective of their class, profession, and age came down to the streets again by getting imbued with the fiery mantra of a revolution. Ignoring the blood-red eyes of the autocrat, they sang aloud in a chorus similar to the fiery days of the liberation war:

During the terrible storm of Boishakh  
When the sky falls apart  
The torn sail is shredded further  
The lighting beckons;  
Suddenly I hear the sound of conch  
And I see the bird of dawn singing.

The victory of the masses through an unforgettable 36-day-long people's uprising during July-August was finally achieved. Just as the intense resistance of the students and masses during the liberation war dug the grave of Pakistani misrule, the July-August Movement of 2024 also led to victory of the masses. It proved that a nation which emerged victorious in 1971 was bound to triumph again through the mass movement of 2024. The spontaneous jubilation of the people in all corners of Bangladesh when the autocrat was brought down generated extraordinary scenes. As Alexander Hamilton had said, 'There is a certain enthusiasm in liberty, that makes human nature rise above itself, in acts of bravery and heroism'. Extraordinary heroes were born from among ordinary citizens during this anti-autocracy movement. They proved by spilling their fresh blood the claim made by William Shakespeare: 'Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant never taste of death but once'. Innumerable heroes like Abu Sayeed, Meer Mugdha, Wasim Akram, Farhan Fayyaz brought back memories of valour witnessed during the 1971 liberation war. Extraordinariness was born out of the ordinary. They created a new history by opening up their chests before the bullets of the autocrat.

A one-sided narrative was prepared by keeping the War of Independence in the forefront during the 15-year-long autocratic rule of Sheikh Hasina. All anti-fascist initiatives were crushed through repression by labelling those as 'anti-liberation-war' and 'anti-independence'. The people's movement of July-August succeeded in rescuing Bangladesh from that narrative. This uprising has opened up a new possibility for fulfilling the unmet dreams of the peasants, labourers, porters, and workers who took up arms. The July Mass-Uprising has generated the inspiration for running Bangladesh in accordance with the real spirit of the liberation war. This inspiration must be nurtured and sustained at any cost.

The July Uprising has taught us that no particular party or group can claim the sole proprietorship of the spirit of liberation war. It belongs to all citizens, it is everybody's. Just as all Bangladeshis had contributed to the liberation war, similarly, the glory of victory belongs to the common people of this country. The people of Bangladesh shall never permit the reappearance of autocracy in this land under the garb of 'politics of development' or 'politics of spirit'. We shall have to take an oath on the occasion of Victory Day for building a Bangladesh that belonged to all its citizens by cherishing in our hearts the lessons of July 2024. □

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Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed