

Bangabandhu-immortal in the Bangalees' memory

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The tragedy of the magnitude of the one that happened on the 15th August in 1975 rarely happens to a nation. That killing was a glaring example of treason and sedition. Bangabandhu was not only the president of Bangladesh but was also the father of the nation as well as the architect of the country. The 1971 war of liberation was conducted by the exile government but Bangabandhu, though imprisoned in Pakistan, was the declared president of that government. He did not lead the war of liberation. But despite his absence, his presence was conspicuously felt from the first to the last day of the liberation war. He was present in the collective consciousness of the Bangalees and obviously by being the source of inspiration for all the activities of the exile government. It was Bangabandhu in whose name the war of liberation was conducted. In his absence the vice president Syed Nazrul Islam shouldered the responsibility of the president. The killers not only killed the incumbent president but also all the members of his family present there. Nobody, not even the women and children, were spared from that massacre. That kind of cruel violence can hardly be compared with any other in the history of the world. That cruelty and violence were inflicted to two other families comprising his close relatives. Attacks were made simultaneously in three houses. The houses of Bangabandhu's nephew Sheikh Moni and his brother-in-law (sister's husband) Serniabat which were located separately came under attack. The number of persons including the members of the three families killed in that attack was 37.

Accomplices of the killers who were the member of Bangladesh Army carried the Bangabandhu's dead body by a helicopter to his paternal home at Tungipara. He was buried in the most insolent manner. The minimum formalities for burial that were observed perfunctorily were possible due to the demand by some village locals. In case of other deceased, even that minimum burial formality was not observed; the members of Bangabandhu's and two relatives' families were buried in Banani graveyard without any religious formalities.

That cruel incident was quite unthinkable. Bangabandhu never used to pay heed to any caution about probable attack on his life. He did not feel it necessary to live within the security blanket of Gonobhaban. The security system at his own house at Dhanmondi was not at all befitting for a president. He was certainly aware of that. But he firmly believed that no Bangalee would ever dare kill him. He had the good faith that those whom he loved with all his heart loved him as well. Only great men can afford to have that kind of faith. He paid the price of his good faith by sacrificing his own life as was paid by the Indian Prime minister Indira Gandhi. She too was warned against her Sikh bodyguards in her house but she did not care. Having seen the armed killers, Bangabandhu perhaps could not think that they had come to take his life. Otherwise, he would not have uttered in his characteristic style- what do you want here?

They replied to his questions by pulling the triggers of their guns. They turned his body porous with bullets. They did not stop there. And then they targeted the other members of his family. Even the immaculate boy Russel, Bangabandhu's youngest son, was not spared from the hands of those murderers.

Today, there is not that much of debate or opacity as to who masterminded the beastly massacre and what they wanted to achieve. Though they apparently killed the person of Sheikh Mujib but if we judge the extent of that killing and take the killing of four national leaders in November into consideration, there remains no shred of doubt that they did not kill any person, they rather killed the independence of the country. They claimed that by killing Bangabandhu they saved the country from destruction- a claim that they made quite publicly. Never did they deny the responsibility of the killing; rather they confessed with pride and uttered in arrogance- we are the killers, let them try us if they can.

The killers had firm conviction that they would remain above any trial for ever. And that conviction was not baseless. Those that came to power immediately after the assassination sealed the means of the trail by enacting a law. The Indemnity Act was their life saving amulet. Besides, the post –Bangabandhu killing government extended all cooperation to the killers. They were taken care of abroad, not in the country. That government was not satisfied with providing the murderers with legal immunity only, they also rewarded them. At the same time, they discarded the Bangladesh of the war of liberation and got preoccupied in building a new Bangladesh. That Bangladesh would be the Pakistan edition of Bangladesh. Right at the beginning of the process, secularism was to be abandoned as that was against the religion. The religion that occupied the exalted position in state system during the Pakistan regime was brought back pompously. The way for the return of the religion-based politics which was prohibited in the Constitution was paved for. The objectives of all the amendments made to the Constitution were the same- to re-build the Constitution befitting the new Bangladesh by wiping out socialism and secularism. They were yet to be appeased; the successor to Ziaur Rahman made Islam the state religion through the 8th amendment of the Constitution. He drove the last nail in the coffin of secularism.

All governments of the new Bangladesh maintained the singleness of their attitude towards the killing of August in 1975. They did not take the killing to be an offence. Nor did they take any initiative to bring the killers to justice. That initiative had to be taken by the government of Sheikh Hasina who won the 1996 election. During the first five- year tenure the Sheikh Hasina government brought the killers to justice under the normal law of the country. But that government could not witness the verdict of trial delivered. The Awami League could not come to power in the following election. The Jamat-e- Islami was a partner of the next Jote government. Naturally the task undertaken by the Awami League government remained incomplete. The Awami League led-Grand Alliance returned to power with landslide victory in the election of 2008. And the trial of the murder of Bangabandhu got complete in 2009, after 34 years of the killing. Those found guilty of homicide were executed, but partially. Because, the absconding convicted are still outside justice.

In one sense, the long nightmare of post- '75 frustration and waiting has come to end through the establishment of the rule of law by the present government. It is a great achievement in our history spanning about forty years. Criminalization of politics had been in force for more than twenty years after the murder of Bangabandhu. The inevitable result of that process was the retardation of judiciary. The most heinous crime could not be tried in that paralyzed judicial system. The most optimistic change

that has become evident today is manifest through the emergence of the judicial system being on its own feet.

The victory of the grand alliance led by the Awami League in the 2008 election would be considered the triumph of people's demand. That demand was to revive the 1972 Constitution and to bring the war criminals to justice. The obstacles to achieving the goals not only spring from outside but also from within. We must not forget that secularism in the 1972 Constitution is an indivisible conception. There is no room for any compromise.

What happened in August and November in 1975 pushed Bangladesh out its orbit politically. That deflection has left a terrible scar on our national life. Political criminalization does not remain limited to the gamut of politics only. It has escalated to all spheres of our national life. The Prime Minister has to warn her near ones almost every day so that they do not indulge in corruption. Though there are efforts to break away the net of corruption, in our every day life we experience the irresistible attraction of that net of corruption as well.

Why we could not turn about right after the terrible assault of August in 1975, why we had to endure the anguish of defeat and humiliation of long period of tyranny and misrule? - we are yet to get appropriate answers to these questions. Is our political consciousness still not deep-rooted? Our political organizations still weak? But if you look into the election results, who would argue that the voters in Bangladesh made blunder in casting their votes? Or, they delayed in reprimanding the rulers as they erred or failed?

Bangabandhu reposed his confidence on this people of Bangladesh. People were the source of his power. In him did they find their indisputable leader. The reactionary forces wanted the people of the Bengal to forget Bangabandhu. But they have not forgotten him. He is still crowned with their respect, bathes in their love. The black stain resulting from the killing of the father of the nation, the greatest Bangalee in the history, has been removed through the trial of the killers. Bangabandhu's place is eternal in the hearts of the Bangalees.

Translated by: A.M. Saleheen