

On This Day of His Passing Away

By Mustafa Nurul Islam

“As long as the Padma-Jamuna

Gouri-Meghna flows on,

Your accomplishment will live on

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.”

- Annada Shankar Ray

In the light of the above lines, I have firm faith that history has no death; and Sheikh Mujib – the symbolic offspring of history – is immortal; he is forever luminous on the canvas of eternity.

ONE

The month of August has once again come back through yearly rotation, and today is that accursed date of fifteenth. Those emissaries of hell had killed the ‘greatest son of a thousand years’ of motherland Bangla, Sheikh Mujib along with his family-members. Again, history bears witness, he was that ‘Bangabandhu’ who was the noblest source of indomitable inspiration for us millions of Bangalis, and it was he who was the ‘Father of the Nation’ of a new-born state. They were the defeated enemies in the battlefields of 1971 – the local black-sheep collaborators of the marauding Pakistanis, the regressive, fanatical, fundamentalist groups – they had hatched conspiracies behind the curtain. And then like an ill-omened fate, they re-emerged on the scene on that accursed date of fifteenth. Naturally, I shall go back to that same answer – such an incident could not have happened all of a sudden. Or it could not be merely some terribly violent acts by a handful of power-hungry individuals bent on realizing their sinful designs. It has already been indicated before; and such instances have been observed in various countries at different junctures of time, history bears witness to that. Symptoms of a counter-revolution following the success of a revolution achieved through the liberation war are overwhelming. Example may be cited here of the termination of the regime of Emperor Louis, which yielded the fruit of equality-fraternity-liberty in post-revolution France. But it led to the emergence of another ‘emperor’ Napoleon. On the other side, people saw the all-devouring rise of fascist dictator Benito Mussolini in the land of Garibaldi – Italy. Similar rise of anti-freedom and anti-progress evil forces were observed in different shapes and forms in Sun Yat Sen’s China, Sukarno’s Indonesia, Africa’s Algeria, Egypt and Iran of the Middle-east. In some cases, fundamentalism and militancy had mushroomed quite dangerously.

Let us now consider our own Bangladesh; and our very own 1971 – which saw unprecedented, immortal and exceptional successes during the liberation war. Again, it was we the general masses who were the victims within a span of only four and a half years. The pronouncement, ‘The struggle this time is for our freedom’ was then sent into exile from the country of 56 thousand square miles. The period that followed showed they came out from the ditches of cantonment and demonstrated that a political ‘party’ in political attire swiftly rose due to direct patronization and protection of military camps. And after that, the horses of power have maintained their dominance by uttering the dialect of democracy; and in parallel, religion-based fundamentalists were allowed to thrive.

TWO

I am trying to relate everything, including the symbolism of Fifteenth August for Bangladesh and Bangalis in the above backdrop. They did not merely kill a bodied man Sheikh Mujib during that dark dawn. Deep inside their conspiracy was the design to eliminate our Bangaliness, which flowed throughout our history, and to uproot and completely destroy the spirit of 1971 liberation war. They wanted the medieval darkness of Pakistanism to return alongside unquestioned restoration of religious edicts. I believe, it is known to the honest and conscious Bangalis – ‘Bangabandhu’ was a person who had fought on the bed of ideals throughout his life. And even there, Bangladesh was the truth.

History gives shape to those rare personalities only occasionally. They are the offspring of eternity. Sometimes it is they who make possible the creation of history. And sometimes, these two are complementary to each other. We come to know about such luminous men from the canvas of eternity.

In the present context, we are looking at one such personality named Sheikh Mujib, who was the chief architect of a sovereign and independent nation-state. Let us present these words in a different way; that will make our articulation clearer. Let me cite example from the Asian landmass of the previous century – Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib was the last notable personality to be added to this sacred list, which includes Ata-Turk Mustafa Kamal Pasha of modern Turkey, Bapuji Gandhi of India and Uncle Ho of Vietnam.

Needless to say, the positions of these saviour men lie above their own names and beyond their state-boundaries. They have become transformed into assets of eternity. On the global map, we got such a person in our midst in a small country of the orient.

THREE

Let us consider the global scenario of 1971. The two most talked about countries then were Vietnam and Bangladesh. In one country, the American forces were carrying out carpet

bombings, and in the other an indiscriminate genocide was being perpetrated by the occupying Pakistani army. And resistance took the shape of armed liberation war of the masses in both the states. A question can be asked here, is there any other instance in history where an all-out war of resistance was organized and inspired in a mere nine months in the absence of the leader. Everybody knows Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib was captive in a remote West Pakistani jail at that time of Bangladesh liberation war with a death sentence hanging on his head. He was counting his last hours. Then a question of faith comes – what was that inspiration which motivated millions of battling Bangalis to wage a war for their motherland?

In the meantime, some decades have already passed. But we have not forgotten those noble words of faith uttered by Bangabandhu – “Before climbing the gallows, I shall pronounce, I am Bangali, Bangla is my country, Bangla is my language, Joy Bangla”. We repeatedly recollect how that deathless mantra had made us fearless and brave. The man named Sheikh Mujib then no more remains a bodied man with five senses; he gets transformed by representing all our hopes and dreams.

I would like to say in this context that although a mourning day is being observed today, it does not end there. We get the opportunity of looking at him again and again, because he is that father figure who has remained the torchbearer of our forward march.

Another question comes here: in the kingdom of nature, or in the realm of mortal human life, how far the role of destiny is acceptable in worldly existence? Or, what role sudden occurrences play, which do not have any cause and effect relationships? The science of logic does not support such contention at all.

The inquisitive scholars explore and search; certainly, the so-called destiny or sudden events do not work in the making of history or the emergence of great men from its depths. Therefore, it does not happen that one descends from outer-space at an opportune moment. The place of avatars shall remain in the mythologies, not in history. Our Sheikh Mujib is discussed in this backdrop.

FOUR

There was a gap of five years between his declaration of the 6-point charter of survival for the Bangalis in 1966 and his historic speech before a sea of people at Ramna Racecourse on 7 March 1971. We witnessed within this short span of time his swift rise to the ivory peak of people’s love and leadership, just like a meteor. I am speaking from my own experience; starting from the midst of leaders and workers of a political institution called the Awami League, he soon ascended to the position of Bangabandhu (Friend of Banga) in the hearts of the masses throughout this land. Certainly, there is no room for suddenness in history. And with

amazing swiftness, a huge transformation had taken place in the chronological context of Bangladesh.

I would like to comprehend, how that fearless leader of teeming millions could issue instruction in such a language, "Build up fortresses in every home. The enemy has to be confronted with whatever you have." We did not look back since then; we heard his call in an invincible voice of thunder – "You shall not succeed in suppressing seven crore peoplethe struggle this time is for our freedom, the struggle this time is for our independence." Did he become a superman on that day? May be that was possible. In the meantime, after traversing some distance over time, we now have the opportunity to analyze that 7 March Address of Bangabandhu. There were undoubtedly emotions galore. And people all over the country wholeheartedly wanted such a declaration. But this development did not take place all of a sudden, on a single day. It involved a huge work-load of channelling the sense of deprivation, anger and complaints of the people into a single current through massive organizational effort. In reality, the then history of Bangladesh flowed through the man named Sheikh Mujib during that period.

He was a victim of misrule and had to undergo tortures during the prime years of his life. His work was directed at upholding the interest of the people in his homeland. The arrest warrants of hostile governments had chased him from one corner of the country to another so many times! Frequent captivity in jails, and sometimes hunger-strikes inside prisons; leading anti-government processions outside in protest against misrule, confronting baton-charges by police, all these had become part of his physical existence. The man Sheikh Mujib had extraordinary organizational capacity, enormous courage and deep love for his countrymen. In return, the countrymen also held him in their heart as Bangabandhu by reciprocating that love.

FIVE

At the fag end of the first decade of the new millennium comes the Fifteenth August of 2010. We are today observing the Mourning Day in memory of the Father-Architect of the Nation. Instead, let us identify the event in a different way; today is the day of passing away of the greatest man in the history of the Bangalis. Needless to say, it is not merely a ritualistic observance. It has more depth. Bangla and Bangalism of a thousand years become manifested here. I propose that we study history. And a question arises within me, was that the final decree of destiny – for the noblest saviour of mortal men? Many of these great men had to perish at the hands of the evil forces from hell.

Here, I want to present some relevant examples. In ancient times, the great guru and guardian Socrates had to commit suicide by drinking hemlock in the Greek city of Athens. From Socrates to Jesus, their famous message had been, "Love thy neighbour". Jesus was killed at the cross.

Let us cross the sea of time and come to France. One of the principal symbols on the eve of the French Revolution – Saint Joan of Arc – was burnt to death in fire. And these were followed by the assassinations of the people's voice of 19th century – US President Abraham Lincoln, the proponent of non-violence in twentieth century India Mahatma Gandhi, and advocate of the rights of the black people in the USA Martin Luther King. The cruel acts of assassinations had befallen these personalities in different countries of the world. Now, in that list, the latest and brightest addition has been our very own Sheikh Mujib of victorious Bangla.

On this special day today, we remember him, who was the Father, the Architect of this new-born nation. And especially, in the backdrop of the critical times of the present, we repeatedly take inspiration from his unequivocal assertion – “I am Bangali. Bangla is my country. Bangla is my language.”

No more sorrow. Let us today sing the victory-song of this mantra, this conviction.

Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed