**Bangali’s Dream of Freedom and Immortal Bangabandhu**

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The most glorious days in the thousand year-old annals of Bengali-speaking people have been 26 March, 16 December and 21 February. These three days will keep the Bangalis forever illumined with ultimate glory. And 15 August will be remembered as the ineffaceable day of disgrace in the history of the Bangali nation. On this day, some treasonous, tyrannical, cruel men, who were worse than beasts, not only killed the Father of the Nation for covering up the shame of their political defeat, their conscience did not quiver as they did not even hesitate to kill a small child and the newly-wed brides.

The world knows, the Bangalis know, the great hero behind the creation of the above-mentioned dates was the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was Bangabandhu who had founded a homeland for the Bangalis. It was he who declared for the first time in the country’s constitution that the people were the owners of that state. That is to say, the people were the sources of all power, and their vernacular language Bangla was the state language. It was Bangabandhu who had given shape to the first nation-state in the history of the Bangalis. Bangabandhu was also the first to deliver the first constitution for the Bangalis on 4 November 1972. The main language of this constitution is also Bangla. Prior to 26 March and 16 December 1971, the Bangalis had to undergo two colonial rules. The first one was the 190 year-long rule under the British, and the second one was the 23 year-long rule under the civil-military bureaucracy of the Punjabis and Urdu-speakers. These two colonial rules had reduced the most affluent nation in the world (according to the descriptions of travellers like Bernier, Tavernier, etc.) to among the poorest in the globe.

Bangabandhu had spent 13 years of the 23 year-long Pakistani colonial rule behind bars for freeing the Bangalis from subjugation and poverty, and bestowing them with an affluent existence or life, a life bereft of hunger and rich in education and culture. This sincere wish and craving has been depicted in pages after pages of his ‘Unfinished Memoirs’. He had written in 1953: ‘On the one hand, a group of so-called central leaders of the west and top government employees were secretly working on how to develop West Pakistan swiftly by seizing the assets of East Bengal.....When the Awami League proved through calculations that East Bengal was being exploited, they became desperate and started to mete out severe punishments to the Awami League and its leaders’ (Unfinished Memoirs).

He further wrote: ‘On the other hand, they were helping to build up industries and factories in West Pakistan through programs backed by foreign currencies earned from East Bengal. As a result, a band of industrialists were groomed, who could extract as much unrestrained profit as they liked from the masses. They became millionaires overnight. Many became industrialists by earning money through selling licences in the name of import-export business while sitting in Karachi. That was a misdeed of the Muslim League government....The so-called leaders of the Bangalis failed to please Golam Mohammad and Chowdhury Mohammad Ali despite handing over to their Punjabi brethren the central capital, military headquarters, all the top government positions, trade and commerce. In the constituent assembly, the Bangalis were the majority despite giving away six seats to their West Pakistani brothers. They could have upheld the interests of the people of East Bengal. But without doing that, they threw down everything to their feet for clinging on to power. In spite of that, they could not hold on to their seats of authority’ (Unfinished Memoirs).

Bangabandhu was arrested along with seventy of his associates while observing a strike on 11 March 1948 after calling the first strike in the history of East Bengal as the leader of ‘East Pakistan Language Action Council’. At that time, he was in jail for five days. His prison-life had started with these five days of captivity in the first half of 1948 for ‘realizing the rights of the Bangalis’. It became three year-long by 1953. He had to repeatedly go to jail during these years. At one time, he even had to endure rigorous imprisonment during these years. As he had never compromised or displayed softness on the question of rights of the Bangalis, therefore the ruling class of Pakistan and the civil-military bureaucracy had always considered him as a ‘terror against the rulers’ of Pakistan. They viewed that keeping him in jail was crucial for upholding their class-interests. As Bangabandhu had made the interests of the masses his principal goal in political life, therefore he was even termed as a communist. After watching the state dedicatedly working for the welfare of the people while visiting China in 1953, he had written: ‘I myself am not a communist. But I believe in socialism and do not have faith in capitalist economy. I consider that to be a tool of exploitation. As long as this economy of creating capitalists remains in the world, exploitation of the masses cannot be halted’ (Unfinished Memoirs).

Although a believer in socialism, he wanted to realize the rights of the people through the masses themselves. The type of socialism he wanted resembled the Scandinavian countries, especially in the shape of socialism established in Sweden over three decades under the leadership of Olaf Palme. While presenting the constitution in the constituent assembly of the newly independent Bangladesh on 4 November 1972, a framework of socialism took shape for the welfare of the mass people. He had described that socialism, and that was incorporated in the constitution.

When the state of Pakistan was created in 1947, 56 percent people of that state were Bangalis. The West Pakistanis accounted for the remaining 44 percent, including the Punjabis, Sindhis, Baluchis and Pashtuns. Despite the Bangalis being the majority population in Pakistan, the capital of Pakistan was at first Karachi, later Rawalpindi, and lastly Islamabad. As a result, the centre of central rule remained in West Pakistan, and the rulers were West Pakistanis. In spite of having the majority population, East Pakistan or Bangladesh was merely a province (like Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, and the Frontier Province) and its capital Dhaka was a provincial capital; it was not the central capital, although it deserved the honour of becoming the central capital. About 50-60 percent of Pakistan’s central budget was spent for the military, and around 90 percent of this expenditure was incurred in West Pakistan.

About 90 percent of the military officers of Pakistan including Generals, Lieutenant Generals, Major Generals, Brigadier Generals, Colonels, Lieutenant Colonels, Majors, Captains etc. were from West Pakistan, mostly Punjabis. The number of Bangali officers was negligible. There was only one Brigadier, one Colonel, a handful of Majors and Captains from East Pakistan. About 75-85 percent of secretaries, additional secretaries, joint secretaries, deputy secretaries in the civil bureaucracy were from West Pakistan. The handful of Bangali secretaries who were sent to East Pakistan or Bangladesh had no power.

During the 23 year-long colonial rule of Pakistan, its main foreign exchange earning sector was (like today’s readymade garments industry) jute and jute goods. But this foreign currency earned by the jute sector was utilised for the industrialisation, agricultural development and services sector growth of West Pakistan. During the same period, all sectors of East Pakistan or Bangladesh including agriculture, industries and services sectors were hugely neglected. Immediately after the creation of Pakistan, the GDPs of East and West Pakistan in 1949-50 were Rupees 1237.4 crore and Rupees 1209.1 crore respectively. That is to say, the GDP of East Pakistan or Bangladesh was slightly more than that of West Pakistan. But due to the two decade-long exploitation by West Pakistan, the GDPs of East and West Pakistan stood at Rupees 2271.3 crore and Rupees 3156.3 crores respectively in 1969-70. It can be understood from the foregoing what ruthless exploitations East Pakistan endured over a period of two decades.

Bangabandhu put forward the 6-points in 1966 with the goal of freeing Bangladesh from the bondage of this inhuman exploitation. These six-points were the manuscript for an exploitation-free Bangladesh, and the charter of freedom for the Bangalis. The West Pakistani ruling coterie could never accept in any way that Bangladesh would escape from their exploitative net. Therefore, despite the Awami League winning a huge majority in the National Assembly elections of 1970, its session was never summoned. A non-cooperation movement then ensued all over Bangladesh at the call of Bangabandhu. Bangabandhu declared during his address at Suhrawardy Udyan on 7 March that he did not seek to become the prime minister of Pakistan in exchange for the rights of the Bangalis. He also called for building up fortresses at homes to carry forward the struggle for realizing the rights of the Bangalis. Considered to be the greatest speech for independence in world history, he declared in its last sentence: ‘The struggle this time is for our freedom, the struggle this time is for independence’. This sentence carried the connotation of an epic, because these extraordinary words gave expression to the thousand year-old dream for freedom and national aspiration of the Bangalis.

We achieved victory on 16 December 1971 through a nine-month long bloody struggle in exchange for 3 million lives and the honour of 200 thousand mothers and sisters. Bangabandhu returned to a war-ravaged country from Pakistani prison on 10 January 1972. After returning home, he concentrated his efforts on building the devastated country anew and advancing the country on the path of progress by infusing life to its economy. He presented the nation with an extraordinary constitution within ten months. The five-year plan was formulated forthwith. The communication system was restored by building thousands of culverts and rebuilding large bridges. About 10 million refugees were rehabilitated. He arranged shelters for the 20 million homeless and displaced people. Arrangements were also made for the rehabilitation of the tortured mothers and sisters. The Indian allied forces were withdrawn within three months at his request. This type of withdrawal by an allied force is rare in world history. The US soldiers still maintain a presence in Japan’s Okinawa and Germany, despite the end of the Second World War in 1945.

Bangabandhu was in power for only three and a half years. When he assumed office in 1972, Bangladesh had no foreign exchange reserve, no air force, and the rail and surface communication was in tatters. The Arab-Israeli war took place in September 1973. As a result, OPEC raised the oil price to 17 dollars from 1 dollar per barrel. This created an unprecedented stagflation in world economy; that is, both terrible recession and inflation occurred at the same time. This had never happened in the world-economy earlier. This stagflation caused a huge economic setback throughout the world, including North America and Europe. Bangabandhu could maintain the mobility of Bangladesh economy even in the midst of this global economic crisis through his wisdom.

During the same time, a devastating flood swept through 23 districts of the country. He could also tackle it very wisely. Besides, apart from the jute industry, there was virtually no industry in Bangladesh then. Bangladesh was previously a market for various consumer industries set up in West Pakistan, in fact a captive market. It was Bangabandhu who had started the real industrialisation in Bangladesh. As a result, the industries sector could achieve a 7 percent growth during 1973-74, which could not be achieved even after eight years of his death. He also attached priority to the agriculture sector in the Five Year Plan. For this reason, Bangladesh could achieve near self-sufficiency in agriculture soon after his death.

Bangabandhu was not only the great hero of Bangladesh’s creation, he was also the builder of the basic structures of the Bangladesh state, as well as the great artist of its advancement. But many great people like Lenin, Bangabandhu and Abraham Lincoln became victims of hatred of the tyrannical war-criminals.

The pro-Pakistani war-criminal tyrants not only assassinated Bangabandhu on 15 August, seventeen members of his family including women and children were brutally killed by them. They were such despicable cowards. Two of Bangabandhu’s daughters who were abroad could survive the massacre. The elder among them Sheikh Hasina returned to the country in May 1981 and took up the mantle of Awami League’s leadership. The country once again found a new path. Twenty-one years after Bangabandhu’s death, the Awami League was once again returned to the chariot of power under Sheikh Hasina’s leadership in 1996. Today, Bangladesh has become an extraordinary development model for the entire world since 2009 under her stewardship.

Food-grain production in the country was only 10 million tons when the country achieved independence in 1971. Today; food-grain production has now risen to 38.50 million tons under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina. Besides, almost all industrial commodities are being produced in Bangladesh for meeting the country’s needs. Not only readymade garments, many industrial products like medicines, tin, glass, ceramic, small ships, plastic products etc. are being exported outside. There has also been notable progress in the services sector. The seeds of self-reliance, the victory march that we are witnessing today through the economic progress of Bangladesh were planted by the Bangali nation’s greatest hero of all times – the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. His death anniversary is a memorable day for all freedom-seeking people of the world. He gave the Bangalis their abode of freedom. He is therefore everlasting, immortal in the lives of the Bangalis.

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