



From Sheikh Mujib to the Architect of the Nation: A Study of Father of the Nation by Mohammad Nurul Huda

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Abstract: Mohammad Nurul Huda is one of the leading poets of Bengali literature and is often termed as ‘Poet of the national identity’. He is widely read and appreciated as a bilingual poet writing both in Bengali and English that has helped him to pocket many national and international awards including SAARC Literature Prize (India 2019), Ekushey Padak (2015), Poet of International Merit (USA 1995) and Bangla Academy Prize (1998) for literature. A critic, cultural activist, translator and academic by profession, Mr. Huda is an ardent lover of Bangabandhu and Father of the Nation is a reflection of his unconditional love and devotion for him. This paper focuses on how Sheikh Mujibur Rahman grew up from a promising school leader to the unanimous leader of the Bangalees, achieved the title “Bangabandhu”, and how his able and apt leadership helped to grow Bangladesh as a sovereign and independent nation.

Keywords: *Bangabandhu, Unanimous leader, Architect, Bengali nation, Father of the nation*

Father of the Nation is a biography of Bangabandhu written in poetic idiom by Mohammad Nurul Huda. The author has presented how Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1920- 1975) alias Khoka, a young lad born in Tungipara, in the words of the author ‘a small cottage, rather a happy home inside a village’ (Huda: 09) grew up, involved in politics, became a leader, sufferings and tribulations he underwent, overcoming all the tests and trials became a leader of the masses and led the nation towards War of Liberation against the inhuman colonist West Pakistanis. In the opening section of the book the author traces back to the lineage of Bangabandhu and we come to know that his forefathers were ‘mystic saints’ who had migrated to this land from Yemen. M. R. Akther Mukul writes;

“It can be told unhesitantly that Sheikh Mujib was the 7th generation of Sufi Dervish Awal and fourth generation of Sheikh Burhanuddin, born on March 17, 1920. He is the architect of independent and sovereign Bangladesh and father of the nation of the Bangalees.”(M.R. Akther Mukul: 37).

In his early years Bangabandhu was a bit sickly which belated his formal education. Overcoming all the obstacles he continued his studentship and later became a prodigious student leader. Pointing towards his prodigious traits of character Huda writes; “Mujib was gifted with inborn love for humankind since his boyhood. He developed courage to protest against injustice, disparity and exploitation of all kinds.” (Huda: 17).

The seeds of leadership were inherent in Bangabandhu. In his school days Bangabandhu had been a rebel figure. His first protest was against a money-lender to save his tutor Chintaharan. This humanitarian zeal gradually developed in his personality deep- rooted and helped him becoming a glaring example of leadership in the history. He met a great tutor in his early years named Kazi Abdul Hamid, and he ‘was an active worker against the British regime’ (Huda: 19). This tutor inspired him to his best and instilled an aura of leadership and rebel in the tender mind of Bangabandhu. It should be at the same time noted that ‘his father taught him the lesson of daring dissent against British rulers and their home grown collaborators’ and was a great patron of his rebel personality and leadership zeal. Lutfur Rahman can be compared with ‘Ulysses’ of Tennyson and his son Bangabandhu with ‘Telemachus’, who appreciates his son’s qualification and puts trust

2 Mohammad Alamgir. From Sheikh Mujib to the Architect of the Nation: A Study of Father of the Nation by Mohammad Nurul Huda. upon his individuality. Bangabandhu was also influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, Khudiram and other freedom fighters of the Anti- British Movement and all of it occurred due to the teachings of his very mentor Kazi Hamid. In this connection it should be mentioned that his leadership grew in the hands of two foremost leaders of the undivided Bengal namely Shere Bangla A. K. Fazlul Hoque and Hossain Shorawardy. He met these two maestros while he had been a student of class nine at the Christian Missionary School. In his first meeting with these two he came forward with a righteous demand for his school. "Our school goes soaked during rains. It damages students' books and other utensils. If you do not solve this problem we will not clear way for you."(M. R. Akther Mukul: 21).

The first person to utter the phrase 'Long Live Bangla' was Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam in his poem 'Purna-Ovinandan' on the day of freeing of Purnacharan Das, a valiant freedom fighter from Madaripur from the British prison house. Bangabandhu came to know about that rebel and also was influenced by the activities and ideals of Netaji Suvash Chandra Bose, who, 'like the rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, demanded unconditional freedom of undivided Indian sub-continent'. Thus, it can be said that his orientation as a political activist was done at the hands of the all time great personalities of Bengal.

Socio-political state of a nation plays a vital role in making a leader. After the birth of Pakistan as a nation state in 1947, the eastern part of it had fallen prey to the neo-colonialist regime. Exploitation and disparity in distribution of wealth caused severe uproar among the freedom-loving people of the Bengal. That the creation of Pakistan would cause more discrimination and injustice was realized by Bangabandhu in 1947- 1948. In the inauguration meeting (1975) of Bangladesh Krishok- Shromik League he uttered: "I dreamt of independence in 1947- 1948." (Shamsuzzaman Khan: 21) In the national conference of Bangladesh Chatroleague on 19th August, 1972 Bangabandhu spoke: "India was divided in 1947. It was not difficult to understand that it has been done for further exploitation and oppression. So far I remember we sat to a house- meeting in the Sirajuddola Hostel in Calcutta Park road... I came to Dhaka from Calcutta after passing B.A. After coming to Dhaka seeing the political environment it was not insurmountable to realize that the Bangalees are undone. On that I swore that we need to liberate the Bangalees. 1947 was the beginning of our independence."(Shamsuzzaman Khan: 21).

He joined the Language Movement actively and when Awamileague was established he was elected as one of the focal persons in the party and by turn he integrated himself with the national identity of Bangladesh. From a student leader he became 'a full time fighter, never compromiser' (Huda: 33). 1948 and 1952 are two important periods in our history. The colonialist attempted to remove our existence and identity. About the beginning of Language Movement Bangabandhu spoke: "In 1948 the Pakistani ruling party attacked on Bangla... We could not tolerate this attack on our tongue. As a consequence Bangladesh Chattroleague was founded on 4th January, 1948. On 11th March we started protest in the banner of Bangladesh Chattroleague along with other cultural organizations."(Shamsuzzaman Khan: 22).

He further added we should know the actual history of 1952. He had been a captive then under treatment in Dhaka Medical College where decided that the attack that has come on our language has to be challenged on the 21st February. In a secret meeting it was decided that he will go on hunger strike on 16th February in jail, and on the 21st protest will begin.

Bangabandhu participated actively in almost all the protests against all sorts of anarchy, injustice, bad government, exploitation and above all he was a champion of Bangladesh's freedom from the shackles of the neo-colonialist Pakistan who ruled us for long twenty- four years. His far-sightedness helped him proceed in due manner in a non-violent way. To him 'Bangalee', 'Bangla' and 'Bangladesh' are trinity in number but one is existence. Realizing the importance of maintaining harmony among the people of various religion and beliefs he said: "While going to scaffold I will utter, I am a Bangalee, Bangladesh is my motherland and Bangla is my mother tongue."(Shamsuzzaman Khan: 22) His struggles for the liberation of his countrymen were run simultaneously both in the political field and in the parliament. Standing in the parliament of Pakistan on 25th August, 1955 he uttered: "The word 'Bengal' has a history, has a tradition of its own. You can change it only after the people have been consulted. (Shamsuzzaman Khan: 24).

The road to War of Liberation was followed thus gradually through the protest of 1958 against the autocrat Ayub Khan, Education Movement of 1962, Six Points Charter of 1966 , Mass Upsurge of 1969 and the Election of 1970. Sheikh Mujib was arrested in the Agartala Conspiracy Case and had been put behind the bar for three years. But the ruling autocrats were forced to set him free before massive protest. Afterwards he was titled 'Bangabandhu' in a mass reception on 23rd February 1969 in the Race Course premises. Cyril Dunn, one of the journalists working in the London Observer commented regarding this:

“In the thousand year history of Bengal, Sheikh Mujib is her only leader who has, in terms of blood, race, language, culture and birth, been a full blooded Bengali. His physical stature was immense. His voice was redolent of thunder. His charisma worked magic on people. The courage and charm that flowed from his made him a unique superman in these times.”(Shamsuzzaman Khan: 27)

For his protest and out-spoken speech he was put behind the bar for countless times and it is said that the Pakistan jail became his second home. One can get to know about his prison life by reading ‘Prison Diaries’ where he has detailed his jail life with living humor. In absence of Bangabandhu his wife Mrs. Fazilatunnessa Mujib took the helm of family with a skilled hand and there is no denying the fact without her all out support and skill for ‘the way of the world’ it would be impossible for Bangabandhu to be what he has become and to do what he did for this once rudderless nation. By reading Unfinished Memoirs one may come to know what hardship and sacrifice Mrs. Mujib had to do for Bangabandhu’s very often going to jail and being confined there over a long period of time caused it so that his children could hardly recognize him. In the opening section of the third book by Bangabandhu titled New China 1952, honorable Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina writes:

“All the time I recall my mother’s words. Mother was very politically conscious and it is her far sightedness that inspired her telling my father to write about his life, struggles and political life. She used to buy notes for Baba while he had been in jail and after his bail she had collected those notes. Certainly she hoped them to be published.”(Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman: 15).

His speech of 7th March signaled the end of Pakistan as an ‘absurd state’ and blew the whistle of birth of a new sovereign-state called Bangladesh. Addressing the assembled masses as ‘ My Brothers’ he gave this historic speech, which, in the long run played a vital role in guiding the freedom- loving seven crore Bangalees to fight the enemies with all out efforts. As the unanimous leader of the nation he provided guidance for the people of Bengal. Pointing out towards the history of twenty-three years of oppression and exploitation he said:

“What have we got in return? Those who brought arms with our enemy to defend us from the eternal enemies are now using those arms on the poor, -- the wretched, -- the downtrodden people of the land. Bullets are being aimed at their hearts. We constitute the majority in Pakistan; but whenever we Bengalis have tried to assume power they have used force upon us.” (EFT Classes xi- xii).

In the end of the speech he declared independence indirectly mentioning the fighting spirits and heroic nature of the Bangalees. “Remember: Since we have already had to shed blood, we’ll have to shed a lot more of it; by the grace of God, however, we’ll be able to liberate the people of this land. The struggle this is a struggle for freedom—the struggle this time is a struggle for emancipation.” (EFT Classes xi-xii: 10).

He ended the speech wishing the Bengal “Long Live!” This speech of only nineteen minutes is often compared with the Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln (1863) or “I have a dream”(1963) by Martin Luther King. But considering the background other related aspects this speech by Bangabandhu carry much significance other the aforementioned two. On 5th April 1971, the leading newspaper of the USA ‘News Week’ termed Bangabandhu as ‘Poet of politics.

“Mujib can attract a crowd of million people to his rallies and hold them spellbound with great rolling waves of emotional rhetoric. He is a poet of politics. So, his style may be just what was needed to unite all the classes and ideologies of the region.”(News Week, April 5, 1971).

We believe he was not only the poet of politics, at the same, an architect of politics too. Shamsuzzaman Khan, President of Bangla Academy Dhaka in his essay “The 7th March Speech of 1971: An extra-ordinary Achievement of Bangabandhu” states:

“Hegel used to regard the construction of a state as a paramount job. Bangabandhu has performed such holy job of founding the Bangladesh as a free and sovereign state and thus he has become the greatest Bengali for one hundred years and father of the nation. And in every aspect his speech on the 7th March 1971 is incomparable. (Shamsuzzaman Khan : 41).

It is Bangabandhu who ushered the Bengalees to the path of freedom from the shackles of oppression and wheels of exploitation. After the victory in the War of Liberation fighting for a long nine-month long war, he came back to Bangladesh on 10th of January, 1972. Then he took the charge of the war stricken nation in order to implement the principles of independence that read democracy, socialism, nationalism and secularism. (The Bangladesh Constitution).

4 Mohammad Alamgir. From Sheikh Mujib to the Architect of the Nation: A Study of Father of the Nation by Mohammad Nurul Huda. His all time pursuit was to keep the motherland high over everything and he used to believe that the people of Bangladesh loved him unflinchingly.

But it is our misfortune and sheer bad luck that we failed to keep our superhero alive. Conspiracies from home and abroad caused the most hideous killing in the history of Bangladesh on 15th August 1975. Bangabandhu and most of his family members were brutally killed. “Bangabandhu’s dream of living in a peaceful Bangladesh with all his friends and foes upholding minimum tolerance and co-existence thus ended in absurdity. It seemed that he was crucified like Jesus Christ. This is why poets of Bengal metaphorically call him Jesus Mujib. (Huda: 54).

We got our freedom by the charismatic leadership and the sacrifices of the valiant souls of the nation. But our ungratefulness cost our ‘Superman’! Renaissance writer Thomas More in his seminal book ‘Utopia’ proposes three things are required to make a utopian state; they are: ‘Liberty’, ‘Fraternity’ and ‘Equality’. So simple and just are the requirements to have a ‘utopian state’. (William J. Long: 94) Bangabandhu in the declaration of independence mentioned three such requirements for the construction of the nation. They are: Equality, social justice and human dignity. Sardar Fazlul Karim rightly remarked on Bangabandhu saying:

“Sheikh Mujib is a human being. We know it. He is a man of flesh and blood. He is not free from sickness and has also near and dear ones. He has old parents and innocent children. Still, the luminary of struggles and fights of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujib has crossed the boundary of individual Sheikh Mujib. This luminary had been working as a dream of the Bangladeshis irrespective of age, caste and creed since the dark night of 25th march, 1971. (Fazlul Karim: 215).

As the basic principles for running the state he chose Democracy, Secularism, Nationalism and Socialism for the newly born country. This proves how luminary and ignited Sheikh Mujib had been back in the second half of the twentieth century. He has been unique and proponent in this case in South Asia for it was not that much viable to form a newly independent and least developed country based secularism and democracy. Austin Daicy comments; “Thomas Jefferson could have learned a lot about secular democracy from Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.”(The Daily Star, March 17, 2006).

The freedom of Bangladesh and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman these are twins; one cannot be thought of leaving other. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the architect of independent Bangladesh. Those who deny this fact, we won’t go for any debate with or protest against them. We must acknowledge the role of Sheikh Mujib in creating a new potential force in South-East Asia through the evolution of Bangladesh as a free and sovereign country.

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