

REFLECTION OF BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR, 1971 IN THE MEMOIRS OF TWO WOMEN WRITERS

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Abstract: "In The Letter Is Written,
Only One Word--
'Take It,-Independence'
Sender Is Brother, Father,
Receiver Is Whole Nation,
The Letter Began With One Sentence,
It is Also the Ending". [1]

What could have been a more appropriate verse for an article on autobiographical novels by two authoresses? Is all such anguish futile? The martyr becomes famous through the glory of his death. The readers of "Ekattorer Smriti" (Memory of 1971) and "Ekattorer Dinguli" (meaning- Days of 1971) (English: Of Blood and Fire, translated by Mustafizur Rahman), will remember Jyotirmoy Guha Thakurta, a prominent teacher of Dhaka University, a responsible Provost and Rumi, the 'son of Revolution' because a living document of a glorious liberation war has been created by the pen of two writers with those deaths as reference points.

Keywords: letter, independence, authoress, Bangladesh.

Introduction: It has been said about the English women writers while discussing them that there is an intimate connection with home and in their novels too, the connection with home is intimate. The home that is the centre of household framework is also an emotional anchor. As Virginia Wolf famously said, a woman writing thinks back through her mother.

Women not only think/walk back through their mothers, even like men, women also walk backwards with many others like here --mother, the blind aged father-in-law, husband, daughter, sons, helpers, relatives, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Motia Chaudhury, the fiery woman leader of Bangladesh liberation war. Women and men both thus walk on the shadowy road of history backwards.

During 1970-71, in the then East-Pakistan, the private and public sphere then was in a state of confusion. A room within a room was being built parallelly. Politics was entering the home and people of inner household were crowding the political field. Motherland had entered the interior household. Women had flung themselves in national work. The world of women, of literature, of nation --all mingled together gradually was building a seven storied palace, where the inner room was the outer courtyard and the courtyard was the room.

The year 1971 is an inseparable part of the life of Bangladesh and the Bengali race. That year saw the fulfillment of the finest dreams of the Bengali race. In this year the Bengalis composed their greatest Epic. In this year the Bengalis as a community exceeded their noble struggle to become nobler. This year the Bengalis as a nation upheld a thousand years old heritage to become best of all. [2]

The struggle against the rule and exploitation of West Pakistan developed centered round Dhaka University. That is why the university, which had provided leadership for 1952 language agitation and 1969 mass uprising, was the inevitable target of killers. The blueprint for killing intellectuals there was drawn up. Intellectuals were becoming martyrs. Jyotirmoy Guha Thakurta, the Provost of Dhaka University was conscious till his last moment and never shaken with fear of death. Rather he accepted his unnatural death as a natural process.

"Sir asked, 'is everything well? If they (students) are well, then all is well.. do not grieve for me.' These were his last words". [3] His mentality was modern, democratic, liberal, humanitarian yet rigorously analytical. Deep knowledge about vernacular language, literature, culture and mastery over foreign languages, literature & culture combined to create the ideal teacher of English in Dhaka University—not bowed down by the burden of knowledge but burning with the flame of knowledge.

Bashonti GuhaThakurta's husband requested her to write a history of this freedom movement. He was shot by the Pakistani army on 25th March, 1971 and died on 30th March, 1971. What Bashonti wrote during these five days as the wife of a dying husband, the sole guardian of a daughter studying in class x, was not only a document of personal anguish, but a whole picture of a movement from small personal sphere to a greater outer sphere. The truth and facts rising from such prose, satisfies both the historical sense and literary sensibility of the reader.

After his death, Mother and daughter left the hospital for shelter with a sympathetic family. It was the beginning of the uncertain insecure journey of the wid-

ow of the humanitarian martyr of the university professor, with her adolescent daughter. She changed shelters repeatedly. But her distinction is that, in spite of various adverse circumstances, she never thought of leaving the country. [4] She lost her near and dear ones; saw the enchain condition of her beloved motherland and sometimes was deprived of constant sympathy and support. That agony, anger, plea have perhaps come out—but so had her helpless belief in fatalism sometimes. Her writing was never a plain ordinary diary.

Ekattorer Smriti (Memory of '71), the autobiography is not just a canvas of tears and laughter. It is also of delight of looking at life from various angles with hope or sigh of despair. "When I lie at night on the bed sleepless, all kinds of thoughts swirl in my mind—the war is still going on at villages and rural areas. Those who listen to radios say,' this means war is going on'. That means ordinary innocent peoples are being slaughtered." [5]

Bashonti GuhaThakurta, Headmistress of the High School, while protecting injured husband, an insecure home, daughter and helpers simultaneously protected the school's typewriter and official files. She carried out her work in black chiffon sari, ignoring the warning of well wishers. This history is not about the solitary struggle of a woman. It is about the brutal murders of the founder of Shadhma Pharmacy, Jogesh Chandra and Pandit Dr. Harinath Dey. The book breathes page after page of memories of killing fields.

But it is not only about death. The attempt to save the children of the orphanage run by the widowed Rani Mitra is also recorded here. The desire to live and the history of saving people is also a powerful presence in the book. All classes of people who helped her are evident here.

There are also details of certain kinds which are not found in writings of male authors. The feminine touch shines out in descriptions of cooking recipes, the reference of crocodile shaped golden bangles and the good old days of Chameri house of university campus.

Though not hysterical at the death of her husband, after closing Jyotirmoy's Income Tax file, the author comments, "on 31st October was audited my husband's account. His reckoning with this world is finished." The worldly duties of the long married life are over at last. The closed file at Income Tax Department is its metaphor.

This memoir of Bashonti is not just an attempt to touch history, not a lofty work of literature. It is not known before that a memoir can be so dispassionate yet as clear as a film. It is not realized that a history of the genesis of a nation can be so quiet yet reverberate such inner passion. Such a cruel yet beautiful description of the Liberation War can only be written after

internalizing suffering and grief beyond description. [6]

"From Himalayas to Sundarban, Suddenly , Here is Bangladesh"

"Which memory of '71 is more terrible? The whole span from 25th March 1971 to 15th December, 1971 is a sustained hell ; the memories of those hellish torments march past hand in hand in the eyes of the mind ". [7] From March 1971 to December, 1971, Bangladesh was a prison, where every person had survived from moment to moment with death in front of them. Those who witnessed the awakening of Bengali race at this moment of mortal insecurity are burdened with a heavy responsibility. For the sake of new generation and coming age, the truth arising from their experiences must be recorded; the heart-beat of Liberation War be generated from rainbow lights of multiple perspectives from age to age, from generation to generation. [8]

The agony of human hope and despair flows strongly in the factual history of Jahanara Imam's "*Ekattorer Dinguli*" (meaning The Days of 1971), (English: Of Blood and Fire, translated by Mustafizur Rahman). The emergence of her eldest son as a warrior in Liberation War and his disappearance had bestowed on her the glory of being the mother of a martyr. The untimely death of her husband, the disappearance (perhaps death) of eldest son, the gifting of her youngest son with arms in spite of it, to make him a responsible citizen of an independent country, the revolutionary mother, to put the welfare of the community above one's own private good—such a daily chronicle reminds us repeatedly of Maxim Gorky's 'Mother'. A beautifully & very carefully arranged household, the detailing of daily life, the intimate ties among relatives, friends, and sincerity, all in the noble background of Liberation War is a great find.

Through the description of another freedom fighter, the character of Rumi, revolutionary son of revolutionary mother becomes clearer. "We first met Rumi in the assembly hall before lunch time. I asked him to lunch with us in the Mess. He smilingly refused. Perhaps his heart objected at deserting his companions to enjoy the relative comfort of Officer's Mess. I like it. He has come from upper-class family; he is bubbling over with vitality, always smiling". [9] This young man is the one who had left behind the comfortable sheltered future in America. Is it not evil to save oneself deserting millions of fellow countrymen under the savage claws of hyenas?

"Now My Days are covered In Cold Mist,
The Characters Are Wrapped In Flashing,
Fires of Bullets and Bombs,

Now I sleep while Awake & awake while Asleep,
Answer Bullet for Bullet with Joyous Anxiety" [10]

Basanti GuhaThakurta's book displays through profound political analysis, a picture of struggle to save

oneself, her daughter and professional life. Her journal is about her individual experience at struggles to save other people. This family was not an active participant of Liberation War. This is the story of desperate struggle for survival, of nine month long afflictions.

On the other hand, in Jahanara Imam's book, the mother sacrificed for the country the elder son in the Liberation War who was supposed to return from America as an engineer. It is followed by the internal struggle in the mother's mind, along with detailed analysis of the political situation of the country. Unable to bear the pressure, her husband, a civil engineer, died of heart attack. Nevertheless, the mother with pride gave permission to the younger son Jami to join the political struggle of a free country. It is also the autobiography of other thousand of mothers of the war.

Ekattorer Dinguli (The Days of '71) is an extraordinarily powerful and affecting book. Just as the holocaust needed a Diary of Anne Frank that brought the numbing total of deaths down to an individual, human case, so the Bangladeshi massacres are brought down to the feelings of a mother for her son. Jahanara Imam, a highly educated successful Head teacher, and her family were in no doubt that the Bengalis needed their own homeland. [ii]

The diary's magic resides in its combination of issues of huge political importance with small domestic concerns. As curfews are imposed, and more and more young firebrands start turning up at their house

to argue deep into the night, Jahanara Imam worries about where to get food to feed them. This book is a transfixingly powerful that does not dwell on horrors, but does not avert its eyes, either.

Both books portray moment by moment struggle between West Pakistan and present day Bangladesh. It is a struggle between ferocious desire to banish nobler feelings and desperate effort to snatch back the right to lead an honest life; the inner struggle that at every moment whittles away at inner conscience. These two writers have held up this ruinous moment of civilization. From the dawn of human civilization, man has continued this struggle for existence in the hope of new life. That struggle has been enclosed in an epic framework. They had set at naught all negativity, darkness, dying society; life led in the bright light of morning has found its language in these writings.

In the middle of twentieth century, Camus had tried to understand the reality of contemporary life in his book "the Rebel". That reality he labeled as 'Logical Crime'. He wanted to understand how 'Logical Crime' justifies its criminality. In this context one should mention the relevance of those two books because the rationale behind 'Logical Crime' is becoming more strident. The truth is in the blade.

The Liberation War took place in 1971. But the war is not yet ended. The consciousness of the war is still alive. Today's battle is with hunger, poverty, illiteracy and religious fundamentalism, a war imbued with the spirit of Liberation War.

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