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Investigating the killing of intellectuals in Bangladesh's struggle for independence: A study of a martyred intellectual

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Abstract

In 1947, the partition of India into two states, India and Pakistan, took place. After the establishment of the state of Pakistan, the Pakistani rulers started colonising the people of East Pakistan. As a result, political, economic and social disparity between the Bengali population of East Pakistan and the Pakistani rulers continued to increase. During that period, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the undisputed leader of Bengal, appeared as the savior. He made common people aware of Pakistani rulers. Along with this, the intellectual class started writing against the misrule and discrimination of the rulers. M. A. Mukhtar was a similar intellectual teacher at Dhaka University in the Department of Geology. He was politically aware, so he started discussing various issues on the Pakistani ruler with the students and people around him. Thus, he became an enemy of the Pakistani government, and on the night of March 25, 1971, when the Pakistani military carried out a mass killing of unarmed Bengalis, MA Mukhtar was targeted and killed from his home. This way, the Pakistani government wanted to turn Bangladesh into a talentless nation.

Keywords: Liberation war, intellectual killing, MA Mukhtar, Pakistan, Bangladesh

Introduction

After the partition of India in 1947, the people of East Bengal, especially the Muslim community, were very happy. They thought that the establishment of an exploitation- and deprivation-free state where social equality and justice would be established. But their latent aspirations didn't materialise; they were not freed from the dictatorial regime. Financial and political distances between East Pakistan and West Pakistan have continued to widen, and resentments have grown. Just as political leaders protested in the streets against the discriminatory rule of the Pakistani government, the intellectual class mobilized people against the dictatorship through writing and other intellectual means. As a result, the intellectual class was one of the targets of the Pakistanis from the beginning to the end of the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. Dhaka University was one of the centers of the carnage that was carried out on March 25 as per Rao Farman Ali's blue plan (Islam, 2016) ^[1].

When the independence of Bangladesh was assured, the murderers, out of revenge and ruthless outrage, carried out the intellectuals on the verge of victory on December 14 as the last effort to create a brainless Bangladesh. In the nine-month war, Bangladesh achieved independence through the sacrifice of millions of men and women, as well as the indescribable suffering of the entire country. The massacre shocked peace-loving people around the world. On that day, the valiant people of the nation-writers, scientists, painters, singers, teachers, researchers, journalists, politicians, lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects, sculptors, government and private officials-employees, people associated with films and dramas, philanthropists and cultural workers, including some professionals, are killed in a well-planned manner. Razakar, Al-Badr, Al-Shams and members of the Peace Corps of the Pakistani army blindfolded the intellectuals from their homes and carried out a hellish massacre on them. In the nine-month war, Bangladesh achieved independence through the sacrifice of millions of men and women and the indescribable suffering of the entire country. Among the three million martyrs, the intellectual class played an outstanding role. After the nefarious killings, dead bodies of intellectuals were left in various places, including Mirpur and Rajarbagh in Dhaka. The dead bodies of the intellectuals had injury marks on their eyes,

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hands and feet; some had multiple bullets; and many were killed with sharp weapons. Many could not identify the dead bodies of their relatives because of the scars on the bodies. Immediately after the victory in the Liberation War on December 16, the relatives of the victims were left speechless to find the dead bodies of their relatives in Mirpur and Rajarbagh slaughterhouses. The number of intellectuals who were martyred in the war of liberation exceeded a thousand. However, no government or private organization could collect the names and identities of the martyred intellectuals in full. It was not even possible to determine their actual numbers.

Methodology

This research employs a mixed-method approach. The researcher conducted a semi-structured questionnaire survey for data collection. The fieldwork of this research was started in November 2022. During the fieldwork, the author teamed up with a research assistant, who is a student of the University of Dhaka. All interactions have been recorded after getting their consent with no objection even if it required revealing of their identities. The research team transcribed and compiled all of the responses in written form, representing the raw data, and thus developed a comprehensive and well-organized database and utilized this qualitative data effectively in this research with the consultation of secondary sources. Thus the research paper is written based on primary and secondary sources.

Md. Abdul Muktedir

Md. Abdul Muktedir was born on February 19, 1940, in Seelam Paschimpara village under Sadar upazila of Sylhet district (Matriculation Examination Certificate, 1956). Father Moulvi Abdul Jabbar is a retired teacher. He was also a philanthropist and a scholar. Muktedir's mother, Begum Mosaheda, is a housewife. His father, Abdul Jabbar, dedicated much of his life to spreading education. His tireless efforts led to the creation of Seelam Padmalochar Junior High School. Prasanna Kumar Chakraborty donated land to the school named after his ancestor. Abdul Jabbar was the founder, headmaster and secretary of Seelam Junior High School. He was working as an honorary headmaster. In addition, he served as an honorary teacher in the Jalalpur Alia Madrasah of Sylhet Sadar for a long time. Abdul Jabbar's father, Abdul Latif, was also a scholar. His grandfather, Haji Masai Mia Saudagar, was a zamindar (landlord) and merchant. In 1994, a Sylhet-based writers' organization published a book on M. A. Muktedir, detailing his grandfather's donation to construct a bridge near Pargana Bazar on the Sylhet Sultanpur road. The bridge is still known as the Musa Mia Bridge. Musai Mia Saudagar built the then-only mosque in Seelam Chowkbazar, adjacent to Hazrat Shah Taiyab Chaiklani's (RA) shrine. The same book mentions that M. A. Muktedir was the third of three brothers, the youngest being Abdul Qadir Jalaluddin and four sisters.

Wife Tamima Hossain Muktedir was born in 1949. Tamima Hossain's two-and-a-half-year marriage with Muktedir. Tamima Hossain said that it was an arranged marriage. At the time of her marriage (1968), Tamima Hossain was a first-year student at Eden College. Father Tofazzal Hossain was an ICS officer. After the country's independence in 1947, he moved to Dhaka from Calcutta and eventually became Deputy Secretary. In 1974, Tamima Muktedir

graduated from Dhaka University with an MA in Bengal. After that, he earned a one-year diploma in library science. She began her career by joining an engineering university. She also mentioned that, after working there for one year, she became a librarian at Dhaka University Laboratory School and then served as a teacher at Agrani School and College. She retired in 2009.

Tamima Muktedir, wife of M. A. Muktedir, stated that her own four cousins were freedom fighters. Her mother's name was Fatema Begum. Shamsia Muktedir Elora is Tamima's and M. A.'s daughter. At Dhaka University, she studied in his father's department, i.e., the geology department. Her husband was NM Shamsul.

Shamsia Muktedir was born on October 19, 1971, at Mehrunnesa Clinic in Dhanmondi. Tamima Hossain has severe pain during pregnancy. Her cousin, Dr. Asmat Sobhan, took her to the clinic and mentioned Shamsia Muktedir. Shamsia also mentioned that she currently resides in America. Then Tamima Hossain's father-in-law arrived and named her Shamsia Muktedir. And Dr. Tuimud Hossain, a colleague of M. Muktedir, nicknamed her Elora. After Bangladesh gained independence in 1971, Bangabandhu gave some money to M. Muktedir's father. Tamima Muktedir kept that money in a fixed deposit and used it to marry off her daughter, Shamsia Muktedir. Shamsia Muktedir mentioned that, during the tenure of other governments, they did not receive any financial assistance, nor did they ask for it from anyone. When the Awami League government came to power in 1996, Shamsia Muktedir got a job. Since then, Tamima Muktedir has received relief.

Education of M. A. Muktedir

Despite facing financial hardship, M. A. Muktedir persevered in his studies, despite coming from a lower-middle-class family. He completed his education at Seelam Chowk Government Primary School and joined Seelam Junior High School in 1948. According to Muktedir's file at the University of Dhaka, he took the matriculation examination in March 1956 from Raja GC High School under the East-Pakistan Board of Secondary Education, securing the first division in the results published on June 27 of the same year (Matriculation Examination Certificate, 1956). In 1958 (Academic Year: 1956-1958), he passed the Intermediate (ISC) Examination in the Science Department from Murarichand College (Sylhet Govt. College) in Sylhet with a second division. In his honour, MC College still maintains a reserved chair. According to his MSC Certificate, MA Muktedir passed the Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) examination with second division in 1960 from the Department of Geology of Dhaka University during the academic year 1958-1960 (Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) Certificate). Then, in 1961, he passed the second division in the first year from the B-Group of the Department of Geology of the same university and passed MSC in the final examination in 1962. He was a student at Dhaka University's Dhaka Hall (now Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah Hall). M. A. Muktedir conducted research as an MSC course thesis on the subject "Stratigraphy, Structure, and Petrography of the Matamohury Valley" under the guidance of Abdul Latif, the former head of the Department of Geography, and obtained valuable scientific information from this research.

Service life

M. A. Muktedir joined the Water and Power Development Agency (WAPDA) as an assistant geologist in 1963-1964. I worked on the Water Development Board until October 1964. He published a circular for the post of temporary lecturer in the Department of Geology at Dhaka University, in opposition to Shamsur Rahman's study leave, in his lecturer application form. MA Muktedir submitted six sets of application forms for the post on September 17, 1964. On October 19, 1964, he joined Dhaka University's Department of Geology as a temporary lecturer for six months. He was then 24 years, 8 months, and 11 days old. He was a house teacher at Jagannath Hall. His monthly salary was 600 taka. M. A. Muktedir went to London for higher education in 1966. In 1967, he earned a DUS Post Graduate Diploma in Hydrology from London in the academic year 1966-1967. After receiving this diploma certificate, he also did a postgraduate higher specialized training course in hydrology in London for one year under the technical assistance program of the British government (Ministry of Overseas Development, 1967). After returning, he again joined the Department of Geography at Dhaka University and taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses. On August 22, 1968, he applied for the post of senior lecturer. The application mentions three articles in the list of research works.

Those are

1. Prepared an M.Sc. thesis on "Stratigraphy structure and petrography of the Mathamuhuri Valley" (unpublished); submitted it to the University of Dacca.
2. Hydrology of a part of the river catchment" submitted to the University College, London (unpublished)
3. "Hydrology of the alluvial deposit" (unpublished); submitted to the H.C.I. (Application form of senior lecturer at the Department of Geology, 1968).

His wife, Tamima, said he was working as a senior lecturer during the liberation war in Bangladesh. He was also devoted to teaching. In the same year, he received a promotion to senior lecturer. Russia offered him a Ph.D. degree in geology. But unfortunately, it didn't happen due to his death.

Behind the scenes of M. A. Muktedir's murder

On March 25, 1971, the Pakistani military brutally killed Professor Dr. Govinda Dev, Jyotirmoy Guha Thakurta, ANM Moniruzzaman, Anudvaipayan Bhattacharya, Aaur Rahman Khan and M A Muktedir, among others, in the halls and teachers' quarters at the University of Dhaka. On the late night of March 25, a horror-inducing chapter of incredible blood, destruction, and death began across the city of Dhaka (Islam, 2010) ^[4].

M A Muktadi lived in a flat on the ground floor of building number 12 in Dhaka University's residential area. On that night of March 25, 1971, he was in his flat with his three-month pregnant wife. Note that Iqbal Hall and SM Hall were located adjacent to his flat. He was preparing for Fajr prayer when suddenly there was a knock at the door. He left the bathroom and opened the door. Upon opening the door, a group of people dressed in civilian clothes stormed into his house's bedroom and forcibly dragged him out. As his pregnant wife attempted to defend her husband, the miscreants repeatedly beat her. The assailants shot MA

Muktadir in the chest before he fell to the ground for the third time. His wife was unconscious. As consciousness returns, blood splatters across the balcony, signaling the failure of the final attempt.

Shamsia Muktedir described how the Pakistan Army attacked Dhaka University at midnight. When the fire intensified, he took shelter in a three-story flat in the same building. In the morning, soldiers came to that flat and brutally killed him. His daughter, Shamsia Muktadi Elora, claims to know about the incident that day. "I have not seen my father; no one has ever addressed me as my father," she said. What is a father? I didn't realize my father's love for my heart." On the 14th of December, Shahid Buddhijidi Divas (National Intellectual Day), I came across my father's picture alongside other intellectuals in the newspaper. After that, my mother told me about her sad memories. She said the one you see in the newspaper is your father, martyr Abdul Muktedir. My mother said that on the night of March 25, 1971, Pakistani soldiers attacked the university hall and dormitories. At 11 p.m., the firing suddenly began. The sky turned red that day with people's cries and burning houses turned the sky red that day. The university area became a battlefield in a short time. My father lived on the ground floor. His mother was very scared, so his father took him to the ground floor of Syed Ali Naqi's building. A pro-Pakistani boy lived on the second floor. The caretaker was from Dhaka University; his name is not known. He did not like M. Muktedir.

Despite the terrible roar and fear, people were awake all night. The darkness descends, accompanied by the occasional crackling of gunshots, the sound of mortars, machine guns, flares of fire, soldiers' cars, and the screams of people. Thus it dawned. Suddenly, 10/15 sepoy, with a paper in hand, entered the teacher's quarter and came towards this building. They are very tall and muscular. Soldiers are calling them down. Ali Naqi Sahib (Sociology) went down; four or five soldiers came up with him. Shamsia Muktedir said, "Parents were standing on the balcony. He mentioned it to his father after entering, saying, 'Tum Jai Bangla Balta, Pakistan Nehi Chahta.' This means they believed in Pakistani ideology. Bullets immediately wounded my father's chest and stomach. When my mother screamed for his life, he scolded him and threw him away, killing another person in the same house. He did not stop killing the father; he wanted to drag his body down from three floors in front of the mother. But the servant, whom my father loved most and gave a good portion of food to, carried a dead body in his arms and brought him to the British Council. When the curfew broke the next day, my maternal grandfather and maternal uncle brought the dead body from Surja Sen Hall. After burial, they laid M. A. Muktedir in the family graveyard of my maternal grandfather, which is located near the mosque next to the residence on the 78/A line in old Paltan (Haider, 1993). Then Mahabul Haque, who is a reader in chemistry, lived in the senior lecturer's quarters. Naki sir called him and said, Come hurriedly, your sister-in-law is not well. Matiur Rahman said he was deeply shocked to see the destroyed Shaheed Minar after passing Nazira Bazar and Nimtala in the morning from Banshal's house and walking to Iqbal Hall. He also saw the dead bodies of 10-12 teachers and staff lined up in front of the canteen. Professor M A Muktedir's dead body from the Department of Geology was among them (Daily Prothom Alo, December 14, 2019). It is

never possible to forget the cruel memories of that day. Such a death should not come into people's lives again. He left the earth forever. He couldn't see his only daughter, Shamsia Muktedir Elora. After M. A. Muktedir's death, his father became blind from crying and did not receive treatment. His mother lost her mental balance and kept asking the same thing over and over again, finally getting mad.

M. A. Muktedir's Political Awareness

According to Tamima Muktedir, M. A. Muktedir loved politics, was a patriot, and was a protester. She also mentioned that her husband, Muktedir, explained politics to Tamima. After returning from the university, he used to go to the British Council to study and come back in the evening. He used to read the newspaper while eating and drinking. He also used to watch the BBC's news. Then he would give university-class lectures again. Muktedir used to read books on politics, as well as books on Russia and America. During this time, a lot of literature came from Russia. He was always busy with his studies. M. A. Muktedir very much believed in equality of rights, where everyone can get their fair share of opportunities. He used to discuss politics with the students. They used to tell the students about the discrimination against Pakistanis. Once, a Pakistani Urdu-speaking student at Bangla Academy asked M. Muktedir, "Assalamu Alaikum sir, what is your attitude towards Pakistan?" He bluntly responded, "We want freedom." He then questioned Muktedir once more about the numerous anti-Pakistan posters displayed at Bangla Academy. Could you share your thoughts on this matter, sir? Muktedir stated, "We face oppression, deprivation, and exploitation." He honestly expressed his opinion to students and the general public about Pakistanis' misdeeds. M. A. Muktedir was not an active member of any political party, but he was politically aware and well-liked. He had a good relationship with the left-wing Dr. Mortuja.

A combination of intellect and charity

M. A. Muktedir had a strong interest in studying. He used to bring books from his university and read them all day. He used to read newspapers when he came home. He had incredible knowledge. M. A. Muktedir's wife reported that the university library received some useful books from him. In addition, his watch, pen, and handkerchief are in the Liberation Museum. He was very naive by nature, and he was also philanthropic. Upon learning that his department was not granting leave, Muktedir asserted that his father's death warranted consideration. He had great compassion for people. If the students told him that they did not get a seat in the hall, he would call the provost and ask, "If the students do not get a seat in the hall, where should they study?" He helped everyone as much as he could.

Evaluation

Evaluating the contribution of intellectuals, Edward Said wrote, "There has been no major revolution in modern history without intellectuals; conversely, there has been no major counter-revolutionary movement without intellectuals. 'Intellectuals have been the fathers and mothers of movements, as well as sons and daughters, and even nephews and nieces' (Montaz, 2020) ^[7].

M. A. Muktedir was a very personable person. He thought about Pakistan's independence, the liberation war, and the

exploitation of its rulers. M. Muktadi went to Suhrawardy Udyan to listen to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's speech on March 7. He used to be overjoyed whenever he got any news of freedom. This implies that his thoughts blend with the spirit of freedom. When he met with his relatives, he talked about the exploitation of Pakistani rulers and Bangladesh's independence.

Before Bangladesh's independence, M. A. Muktedir built a mud house in his village of Seelam, South Surma. Subsequently, they paved and tinned the walls, transforming them into a bungalow. The people in the area respected M. A. Muktedir's family very much. Everyone in his family is educated. His daughter said there is a Muktedir corner in the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka. She added that the South Surma Riverside Auditorium is named after M. A. Muktedir. In Sylhet, a primary school named after him exists. Later, they upgraded it to class VIII.

Tamima Muktedir said, I always wish immense prosperity for Bangladesh. As long as Bangladesh persists, the Bengali nation will endure, and the intellectuals will remain revered and remembered. In honour of the martyred intellectuals, the government has released commemorative postage stamps, along with those of M A Muktedir. Besides, the Syndicate of Dhaka University has named a room in the Department of Geography as the 'Shaheed M. Muktedir Museum.

Conclusion

The intellectuals were victims of the Pakistani rulers' revenge during the Liberation War, and Professor Mohammad Abdul Muktedir is no exception in this regard. Intellectuals are the conscience of the nation. With their talent, they light up the darkness. The Pakistanis and their descendants considered it a crime. In the last days of the liberation war, when the defeat of the Pakistanis became inevitable, the killing of intellectuals continued. The martyrs' relatives know who took them, their identity, or whatever! After independence, the Bangabandhu government started the trial of murderers in 1971. The Bangabandhu government also arrested some of the intellectual murderers. But three and a half years after independence, as a result of domestic and international conspiracies, the judicial process stopped. It is pleasing that even after four decades, we still have to punish those who kill intellectuals. The hanging of several murderers from 1971 is already underway. A few others are in process, including those whose involvement in the killing of intellectuals was well known.

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