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O, THOU VILE GENERALS, GIVE ME MY FATHER!

By Saleem R. Noor

It has been 30 years now that from the 'table of my memory I wiped away all trivial, fond records' but the abduction and killing of my father by the planning and inspiration of war monger Pakistani so called generals and religious zealots Jamat-i-Islami's brain child Razakars and Al Badrs. In the name of 'religion' and 'for the sake of country's unity some brutes came out to the streets of Bangladesh, erstwhile East Pakistan, on this very night 30 years ago and engaged in a pre planned and methodical killing of unarmed innocent Bengali people to eliminate them from the earth, who were solely responsible to give birth of the country named 'Pakistan' just 24 years ago! People of Eastern part voted overwhelmingly for Pakistan by over 90% while Western part voted little over 50% for the formation of Pakistan in 1947. All promises to us in 1947 were broken right after the inception of Pakistan: majority rule was denied repeatedly, our language, culture and heritage were subject to demolish, our patriotism was questioned. Moreover, the basic principle and success of 'Pakistan' idea was remained in the Lahore Resolution of 1940 but for the vested interest quarter and establishment that was misinterpreted, truncated and ignored. Our demand of autonomy remained a far cry! Conspiracy and cliques of Pakistani generals and vested interest quarter totally doomed the country called Pakistan, which is being totally deviated from the promises and principles envisioned in 1947, so, the heavy price was paid by the people. 24 years' continuous oppression and breaking of promises and denial of power could produce nothing but mistrust. After overwhelming victory in 1970's election our unprecedented leader Sheikh Mujib and his party Awami League was denied power in most shameless way. Pakistan's conscience is awaking after long last, and its civil society and mavericks are now questioning the prudence and implications of those suicidal acts of Pakistani 'night of the Generals!' Their evil tasks have been started to come out from Pandora box of Hamudur Rahman Commission's one-sided report! Though one sided, vague and partial this report is enough to portray the harrowing vicious chilling acts of Pakistani army and their compatriots Razakar, Al Badars in their expedition of saving Pakistan in 1971! People is now knowing the facts, which were craftily hidden from their eyes so far and gave them the distorted version of the facts! "Foul deed will rise, though all the earth O'erwhelm them, to men's eyes", and that process is now going on in Pakistan, so, I do not need to say anything more.

On this very day I just recall the event, which totally change our lives, made us orphans! My father Serajuddin Hossain was the News and Executive Editor of largely circulated Bengali newspaper daily Ittefaq and the Senior Vice President of Pakistan Federal Union of Journalist (PFUJ) in 1971. He did not carry any weapon in his life; but became the victim of that, he had only a pen in his hand! That, only that, made Pakistani conspirators and generals fearful., so, they had killed him at the prime of his life; he was just 42 years old! It is still very fresh in my memory: evening of 25th March 1971, my father came back from the office and discussing with visitors and neighbors. Total country was in tense; no body knew where the country was heading. My father got a sudden phone call, which asked him about a strong rumor in the city; though could not confirm but he got some smell in the air,

so, hurriedly got ready to be his office. Just told my mother that something was going on behind the scene but not clear whether good or bad. My father instructed my mother to send my eldest brother Shameem to get enough rice from the market. Around 10p.m many neighbors rushed to our house (due to my father's profession and high contact with leadership and government our house had been treated as information center.) to know any development. My second eldest brother Shaheen was trying to contact Ittefaq office to get the latest from our father but line was not getting through. We received a call from Chittagong Ittefaq correspondence Mr. Mainul Alam, who told my brother that his repeated try to contact Ittefaq Office had been failed, so, he urged my brother to write down his message and convey it to my father at any cost. His reporting was the first clue that in the guise of discussion Yahya-Bhutto were just killing time to make us fool. On the fateful night of 25th March they let loose the Army to the innocent civilian peoples of the Eastern part, and in Chittagong army just began to move and there were sporadic army shooting and peoples resistance going on. Around 11 p.m. my brother succeeded to contact my father and read out whole news of Chittagong correspondence, which was given to him earlier. My father told my brother that situation was very clumsy and nothing was certain, and my father just concluded from his Chittagong correspondence's reporting that some thing sinister would come! He told my brother that he had been trying to reach our leader and his friend Sheikh Mujibur Rahman but no one was picking up telephone there at his residence. He assured my brother that he would contact Mujib and exchange my latest news coming from all over the country with his and then might get a total picture of the situation and let us know. The phone was disconnected suddenly. At office my father instructed one of his reporters to "get Mujib immediately I have to say him something," so, the reporter was trying to get line without any success. Around quarter to 12 midnight telephone call went through, the reporter told the man on the other part, " I am calling from daily Ittefaq, our Seraj bhai wants to talk with Bnagabandhu'. Unfortunately before both friend start talking the telephone was disconnected, electricity was turned off, heavy artillery firing was heard, Army convoys were noticed on the street, peoples resistance and cacophony of slogans and screaming were echoing all over the city. Within a moment everything was silenced by brute force using modern arms over unarmed innocent civilians, just for the time being! By daybreak the city turned to a city of dead! There was confusion at my father's office whether paper should be published in such circumstances. My father gave decision to publish the newspaper to inform the country that what really was going on the city on that night. Though there was question how the paper would be circulated to public in the morning, my father 's argument was that if only one copy of his paper could go out then people would know the situation and could take their decision in that total darkness. On that night of the mass killing all over the city my father's prophetic soul cried out and gave the heading, " EI GONOHOTTYA BONDHO KORO" (Stop this Genocide) long before the actual genocide began! At the daybreak Pakistan army tanks took position across the street of Ittefaq and aimed at the newspaper, the voice of the muted nation in our long struggle of freedom. Few minutes later a jeep took position along with the tanks aiming machine gun towards Ittefaq. My father, News Editor Mr. Asaf- ud- Daula, Reporter Abed Khan and 6 others trapped in the office without any food and communication with outside world came out to the balcony to assess the situation. Others were cautioning my father that Ittefaq was target of this brute army and the tank would open fire to Ittefaq. My

father just told them that Newspaper was the safest place in the world, so, no one could dare to attack their office and insisted his colleagues to stay inside of the office, because going out to the street at that time means nothing but death! My father's that confidence was proved totally wrong in a moment. Aiming machine gun at Ittefaq was roared, narrowly my father and others escaped the bullet, they just ducked and crawled to inside but one newspaper delivery man, who just arrived to pick the paper for delivery, and a peon of Ittefaq struck by the bullet and instantly died. Right after the machine gun fire, Tanks opened fire twice and shook up the total building, thereafter few 'Jawans' got in to the down stair of Ittefaq building and spread petrol and lit fire. There was no way to stay there, so, every one had to escape the building, which was miracle exit and another story. My father was certainly could not believe that any civilized force could attack any newspaper office and try to burn its employees! My father's error of judgement was that he thought Pakistan army was that civilized to abide by all civilized norms and ethics! Our nine months to freedom showed how cruel and inhuman was their acts. After 30 years we are still getting numerous scaffolds all over Bangladesh! That was the beginning of the genocide and my father escaped that but could not avert it totally.

Despite my father's severe reluctance and objection junior partner of the owner of Ittefaq, Anwar Hossain Monju ex minister of corrupt Ershad and now Minister in Hasina's cabinet, made a secret deal with Islamabad and started publishing Ittefaq from the ashes. In the midst of envious circumstances and severe censorship my father again took up his pen and started writing series of political analyses. He justified Mujib's demands and actions and unveiled the face of other political leaders along with Bhutto, Quayum, Maududi, Gholam Azam. He proved that if Mujib was traitor in light of his words and deeds then all other "Patriot" leaders of Pakistan were traitors too by their own words and deeds. Jamaat paper Sangram attacked my father severely and threatened him to eliminate as the 'India and Hindu loving traitor'. Whenever Bengali nation spoke about their rights and demands in 24 years of Western occupation always we were termed as Indian and Hindu loving people! So, that was nothing new to my father and he took it as a complement but again failed to understand the vicious cruel nature and severe hatred of Yahya-Tikka-Niazi-Rao Farman -Jamshed and their collaborators Muslim League and Jamat-e-Islam's inhuman cadres!

It was December and all out war began with India. Sometime in the first week Governor Malik called for a news conference in Governor House and mainly Rao Farman Ali briefed the journalists. My father was there and he had certain concern for the safety of journalist, because day before Pakistan army along with Razakars and Al Badrs invaded Ittefaq news Editor Asaf-ud-Daula's house and created havoc and panic. After the news conference my father met Rao Farman Ali and complaint Pakistan army and collaborators' acts of intimidation on the previous night to his colleagues' house. My father raised the issue of safety and security of news paper men otherwise it would be impossible to publish newspaper! Rao Farman gave my father assurance that "Ittefaq people has nothing to worry about and if any thing happens next time then just inform me right away." He apologized for that incidence. That event made my father very suspicious and could read his own fate. Just 3 days later, 10th December after midnight a gang of thugs knocked at our door. It was blackout, curfew. Around 1:30 after midnight we heard first time knocking at the door. My

second eldest brother Shaheen, myself and one uncle were in the living room; we asked "who's there?" but no one answered. 10 to 15 minutes went like that and we were repeatedly asking, my father woke up and asking from his bed room "who was knocking the door?" and later my father and others came in to our room. We lit the lights and tried to see out side through window but only we saw total darkness. After waiting few more minutes my father decided to open the door to see the matter. My mother and aunt told him not to do that but my father convinced them that may be some needy person was asking for help. So, we need to see that. He opened the door and saw no one there but a white street dog leaned at the door! We went back to bed.

That was 3:30 a.m. and again we heard knocking at the door! That time little harder. We woke up, lit the light and asked the same question, my father woke up too and calling us by the name to get the situation out there. That time we got response from out side, we recognized it was our landlord, who asked to open the door. We thought they were in danger, may be my father could help them, so, we opened the door. My brother just opened the door half way and in lighting speed a barrel of rifle got in, some one screamed "hands up". In thundering speed near about 10 armed men entered in the room. Most of them were in masks. Keeping us in gunpoint they were asking our name one by one in Urdu language. Then they took us to out side verandah, where we found the whole family of our landlord stood in gunpoint. By that time my third eldest brother Fahim rushed to my father's door to let him know that the embodiment of death, Pakistan army and Razkars, Al Badrs were there. We had a great confidence that if my father came out and reveal his identity then they would not do any harm to us! My father got up from the bed and rushed to get his Panjabi , my mother opened the door to see what happens to the screaming children but Alas! Armed Razakars, Al Badrs and army personnel entered the bedroom of my father and asked his identity. My father only could say, "Serajuddin Hossain, Executive editor of daily Itte...." A harsh voice screamed "hands up, Auo hamara sath' (Come along with us). My father could not wear his panjabi, he was just wearing a Sando Genji, Lunghi and bare footed and holding a torch light in his hand. They brought him out and hurriedly told us to go to inside of the room and shut the door, they threatened us not to look through windows or follow them they would shoot if we did not follow the instruction! My father at that point only was asking to take his torch light from his hand. One of my brothers went and got the torchlight. One of armed persons asked for a piece of cloths at one point, I handed over him my gamchcha (towel). Then they walked away, under the severe December cold they took my father barefooted wearing only Lunghi and sleeveless Sando Genji. We did not see our beloved father any more!

What happened next? The scaffold fields of Rayer Bazar and Kata Shur revealed the aftermath of that kidnapping. Innocent unarmed Bengali people's tragic fate showed the brutality and tortures of the Pakistan army, which is unmatched in human history! Their crime against humanity is evident in all over Bangladesh. I can not wipe out that memory for a moment. I can not go further, I can not imagine what happened next, I wish my father could escape that inhuman torture and cruelty of Pakistan Army, Razakars and Al Badrs, which were evident in found dead bodies of those thousands scaffold fields all over Bangladesh!

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