

The Tragic Death of Bangabandhu: Analyzed through a Shakespearean Trajectory

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Abstract

My aim in this essay is to explore some striking similarities between the circumstances of Bangabandhu's killing and some of the plays by Shakespeare where usurpation and regicide are the themes. The closest bearing that the assassination of Bangabandhu has on any play by Shakespeare, in my opinion, is Julius Caesar, written in 1599, and the first play to be staged in the newly built Globe Theatre, when it started functioning in the same year, that is, 1599. But usurpation and regicide are themes Shakespeare has dealt with in many other plays too, viz, Richard II, the Henriad plays, Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear in tragedies, and As You Like It and The Tempest in comedies, whereas Coriolanus can also be mentioned as having shown the rise and fall of fortune in the life of a champion soldier-leader.

I have devised to discuss the analogical features between Bangabandhu's assassination and that of a Shakespearean hero, here Julius Caesar, by suggesting that I will mainly concentrate on Shakespearean scenes with the minimal similarity they may sustain with the stages of Bangabandhu's murder. Minimal, because it is never possible to find out absolutely clear-cut resemblances between the events of the killing of a king or public leader in Shakespeare and those that led to Bangabandhu's murder.

"How many ages hence / Shall this our scene be acted over / In states unborn and accents yet unknown?" (Shakespeare, 1599b, 3.1.111-13) Cassius in *Julius Caesar*

This is quite a challenging topic I have willfully chosen to explore. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the architect of the country Bangladesh, adorably called Bangabandhu, was cruelly murdered in his own house along with his wife, three sons, two daughters-in-law, and a younger brother in the early hours of August 15, 1975. It was a small contingent of some junior to middle-ranking disgruntled army officers who masterminded the offensive at the execution

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level. Along with Bangabandhu's house at 677 Dhanmondi, Road Number 32, they also separated into groups and attacked two more houses in the same hours to kill Bangabandhu's close relatives, Abdur Rab Serniabat, who was Bangabandhu's own sister's husband and a minister at the time, living on Minto Road, and Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni, Bangabandhu's another sister's son along with his pregnant wife, who was a Dhanmondi resident. In total 20 people were killed in those three houses. This macabre happening was an outcome of a deep-set conspiracy plot led by one of Bangabandhu's close allies and long-time party leader, Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad, with tacit support from the then Deputy Chief of Staff, Major General Ziaur Rahman.

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The paper might take the form of pairings according to concepts like popularity, conspiracy, killing itself and the duality of the body—as the body natural and the body politic—as these have been dramatized by Shakespeare in his plays as focal points which, somehow, in an arcane way, reflect prophetically on the events that led to Bangabandhu's assassination. And this may not require any explanation that while I refer to Bangabandhu's killing, it automatically includes the plurality of the killings of others.

The Return of the Native: Popularity: blessings or bane!

When Bangabandhu returned from his imprisonment in Pakistan via London and New Delhi to Dhaka on 10 January 1972, millions of people filed on both sides of the road from Tejagaon Airport to the Race Course (now Suhrawardy Uddyan) to receive him. In a memorable address to the mass people there, among highlighting many basic issues for the development of the newly-born country, he also made certain prophetic remarks on the possibility of conspiracy raising its head: "I know, the days of conspiracy have not ended. Be careful, my Bengali brethren, the conspiracy is still on. Once I asked you to build a defensive fort in every house, didn't I say that? I told you to wage the war with whatever you have, didn't I? In this very spot, I told you that the struggle this time was for independence, this struggle was for liberation. On the 7th of March, I said all this. I'm again repeating today, you be all right, be united, don't listen to anybody, Inshallah, as we've become independent, we'll remain independent. This country's independence won't be snatched even if a single soul remains alive (Noishabdia, 2017, p.22).

Compared to this magnificent reception accorded to Bangabandhu, the opening scene of *Julius Caesar* is rather anticlimactic. Caesar has returned to Rome after achieving a victory against Pompey and causing his death in a battle. Common people, symbolized by the presence of a carpenter and a cobbler in the play, have thronged just to have a glimpse of their returning hero, Julius Caesar. But a body of the Senators, led by Brutus, have already begun to show resistance to Caesar's phenomenally growing popularity. Two tribunes of the republic, namely Flavius and Murellus, are seen desisting people from making a gathering. "Hence! home, you idle creatures, get you home! / Is this a holiday?" (Shakespeare, 1599b, 1.1.1-2), says Flavius to the carpenter. The other tribune, Murellus is more emphatic:

Wherefore rejoice? What conquest brings he home?

What tributaries follow him to Rome

To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels?

You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things! (Shakespeare, 1599b, 1.1.33-36)

Popularity is a theme in Shakespeare's plays that cuts on both edges. We, for sure, understand that Shakespeare has given a most dubious treatment to this

aspect of social life. But on the other hand, Bangabandhu had a very nonchalant view of dangers that might, contrarily, accrue from popularity. There are great passages across Shakespeare's plays where popularity has been viewed as rather a bane than a benefit because on top of everything it is very fluctuating. After his defeat at Actium, Antony discovers that his followers have deserted him, and then he utters:

The hearts

That spanieled me at heels, to whom I gave
Their wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets
On blossoming Caesar. (Shakespeare, 1599a, 4.12.20-3)

When Hamlet learns from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that the adult theatre companies like the Globe Theatre itself became less popular than the children's companies, Hamlet opines that it is not very unlikely as people whose allegiance was committed to his father when he was alive have now shifted their allegiance to his uncle, the usurper, the reigning king. They are now readily buying his uncle's portrait at any cost:

It is not very strange; for my uncle is King of Denmark, and those that would make mouths at him while my father lived give twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred ducats apiece for his picture in little. (Shakespeare, 1599-1602, 2.2.364-67)

Bangabandhu was a perceptive man. He could have anticipated such a gruesome death even as back as 1958 when Martial Law was imposed for the first time in the-then Pakistan. A. L. Khatib records a conversation with Sheikh Hasina, Bangabandhu's eldest daughter, and currently the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, where she said that Bangabandhu had asked her to take a good note of his birthmark and other distinct spots on his body, because "they might murder me. But they might not hand over the dead body to my family. In that case, you will have to find out my corpse. But because of decomposition, you might not be able to recognize my body. Then, you will be able to identify my corpse by looking at these marks" (Khatib, 2014, pp. 66-67).

The Warnings Disregarded and the Wives' Roles

But Bangabandhu was like Caesar, disregardful of the possible betrayal. In the very first scene of Julius Caesar, which we have touched upon above to discuss the unreliability of people's support, there appears the Soothsayer warning

Caesar of the Ides of March: “Beware the Ides of March” (Shakespeare, 1599b, 1.2.18). Interestingly, the coincidence between Caesar’s assassination and that of Bangabandhu is noteworthy. Caesar was killed on the Ides of March, that is, the 15th of March, in the morning hours, Bangabandhu was also killed on August 15, 1975, at the breaking of dawn.

The night before Caesar would die there was a severe storm, and his wife Calphurnia cried three times in sleep, “Help ho: they murder Caesar” (Shakespeare, 1599b, 2.2.3). Caesar sends a servant to the augurers to tell his fortune. Calphurnia asks Caesar not to go out of the house: “You shall not stir out of your house today” (Shakespeare, 1599b, 2.2.9). Caesar is adamant: “Caesar shall forth” (Shakespeare, 1599b, 2.2.10). Then Calphurnia says that the watch had seen a lioness giving birth to a young in the street, dead men rising from the graves, blood pouring down on the Capitol, and such other unusual sights which were ominous. So, Caesar should not go to the Senate House. Caesar’s reply became one of the all-time favourite quotes from Shakespeare: “Cowards die many times before their deaths; / The valiant never taste of death but once” (Shakespeare, 1599b, 2.4.32-3). The servant reports that the augurs had not seen the heart in a beast that was offered as a sacrifice, and, therefore, “They would not have you to stir forth today” (Shakespeare, 1599b, 2.2.38). Caesar changes his mind and refrains himself from going to the Senate House, but then Decius comes and interprets Calphurnia’s dream in the reverse way that says that Caesar must go. And Caesar goes like a chicken going to the fox’s den.

Bangabandhu famously goes in history as one not having taken enough care to secure himself. At the death of Chile’s President Salvadore Allende on 11 September 1973, Altaf Hussain, a veteran political leader and friend of Bangabandhu warned him by saying that “If you’re not careful, your fate may be the same as Allende’s.” But Bangabandhu smiled in such a way as if he had heard a joke and said, “Bangladesh isn’t Chile, I know the people of this country” (Khatib, 2014, p. 67).

Fidel Castro too warned Bangabandhu by saying that “If you don’t control your foes with a strong hand, they will remove you.” And, on top of everybody, India’s Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi cautioned Bangabandhu many a time that conspiracies were rife against his life. And again, he ignored all these warnings wearing his customary smile on his face, though he often maintained that “a bullet was chasing him.” (Khatib, 2014, p. 67). Looking back, such

nonchalance by Bangabandhu seems like an obtuse failing of understanding human nature. In the later months of 1974, after Tajuddin's removal from the cabinet, a friend warned Bangabandhu about Taheruddin Thakur. Bangabandhu asked him, "Who is he a follower of?" The friend replied, "Of Mostaq." Bangabandhu then dismissively replied, "Mostaq is my follower" (Khatib, 2014, p. 99).

While we noted that Caesar's wife forbade him not to go to the Senate House, in a comparative perspective, we see Begum Mujib performing a role, that unknown to her, not only was contrary to Calphurnia's but perhaps was partly responsible for Bangabandhu's being exposed to the murderers because of the thin security measures which probably would have been otherwise if the President had stayed either in Ganobhavan or Bangabhavan. The late Dr. M. A. Wazed Mian, who was Bangabandhu's eldest son-in-law, that is the husband of our present Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, records an incident in his book, *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibke ghirey kichu ghatana o Bangladesh* (Some Events Concerning Bangabandhu and Bangladesh) (1993) that when on 25 January 1975 Bangabandhu came home after passing the 4th Amendment Bill by virtue of which the country came under one-party-rule and he became the president, Begum Mujib confronted him angrily, and said, "You've brought about so major a change in the constitution, particularly turning the country to one-party-rule and you didn't feel like discussing this with me, and, moreover, what was the so great need for you to take oath as the president then and there in the Assembly Hall? If you had waited for a couple of days would the *Mahabharata* have become imperfect (that is, nothing would have been the matter)? Whatever it is, I'm telling you in clear terms that I'm going nowhere from this house, not even to your state house, Bangabhavan" (Mian, 1993, pp. 239-40).

This might be her momentous decision declared in a heated moment, but elsewhere too, there is evidence that Begum Mujib never (probably Bangabandhu too) fancied living in a well-secured posh house leaving their own tenements at the Dhanmondi Lake. It cannot be discerned whether Bangabandhu and his family could have been saved if they had lived in a protected house, but I read some military analysts suggesting that it would have allowed time to the government to advance troops to resist the attackers. But the roles of the two wives, Calphurnia in Caesar's case and Begum Mujib in Bangabandhu's, though contrary to each other, are a testimony to their being devoted to their husbands.

The Portraits of the Villains

On the other hand, when Caesar is marking out Cassius to Antony whom he must be cautious about, he describes him as a man “who has a lean and hungry look,” who “thinks too much,” and therefore “such men are dangerous” (Shakespeare, 1599b, 1.2.193-54). Cassius to him seems further dangerous because he “reads much,” observes people, sees through their deeds, and loves no plays, “hears no music.” And the most fearful trait he notices is “Seldom he smiles,” and if he smiles, he considers it as a fault as if he was a man not to be moved to “smile at anything.” Such men, Caesar says, are “never at heart’s ease / Whiles they behold a greater than themselves, / And therefore are they very dangerous” (Shakespeare, 1599b, 1.2.197-211).

Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad, the chief architect behind the conspiracy, does fit the description above in a great way. L. A. Khatib, in his book, in the Chapter with the heading “Such men are dangerous,” gives a sharp contrastive description of the two leaders: “Sheikh Mujib was a generous man, whose humorous smile warmed everybody’s heart, while Mostaq was a reserved type of man, whose cunning smile would put everybody to disquiet” (Khatib, 2014, p. 86). Another writer describes Mostaq as a small-statured man, and when he wore his black tupi and black sherwani he looked like a penguin bird (Shadi, 2020, p. 112). In some descriptions, Mostaq has been described as possessing a set of cruel eyes.

If Cassius is bodily a prototype of Mostaq, the arch-villain in the play is Brutus not Cassius. With Brutus too Mostaq can both be compared and contrasted.

There is an arcane similarity between Brutus’s anger and disillusionment with Caesar and Mostaq’s becoming disillusioned with Bangabandhu.

In Shakespeare’s play, it is Cassius who first induces the idea of removing Caesar into Brutus’s mind, though Brutus claims that Cassius is merely repeating an idea that he has been hibernating for long:

Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius,
That you would have me seek into myself
For what which is not in me? (Shakespeare, 1599b, 1.2.63-5)

Both Cassius and Brutus fear that Caesar, because of his extreme popularity, will turn into a despot, "Like a colossus" (Shakespeare, 1599b, 1.2.135) as Cassius says, or as Brutus feels that the republican democracy would be fatally harmed if Caesar is allowed to ascend further. So, Brutus soliloquizes, "It must be by his death" (Shakespeare, 1599b, 2.1.10). Yes, but it won't be a personal matter for him: "and for my part / I know no personal cause to spurn at him / But for the general" (Shakespeare, 1599b, 2.1.10-12). Brutus philosophises that he is planning to kill Caesar not because he is dangerous at the present moment, but he might become so in the future. Therefore, it is better to kill the adder in its embryonic stage rather than later: "And therefore think him as a serpent's egg / Which hatched, would as his kind grow mischievous, / And kill him in the shell" (Shakespeare, 1599b, 2.1.32-34).

Brutus is basically an ideologue, and he understands that removing Caesar by murder would not be a crime as he is doing it for the greater good of the community. So, he instigates his fellow senator-killers that they should remember that they are going to kill Caesar not for a personal cause but for a public cause, and then to consider the homicide as an act of sacrifice rather than a slaughter:

And, gentle friends,
Let's kill him boldly, but not wrathfully
Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,
Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds. (Shakespeare, 1599b, 2.1.170-73)

With this absurd mindset, but seemingly morally perfect to him, Brutus finally proposes to his fellow murderers: "We shall be called purgers, not murderers" (Shakespeare, 1599b, 2.1.179).

So, Brutus is determined to kill Caesar because he has appeared to him as a threat to Roman republicanism. A shred of such idealistic thinking can be seen as taking root in Mostaq's mind too. From the following summary of Wazed Mian's description, this can be inferred that what irked Mostaq was the formation of the one-party system in the name of BAKSAL or Bangladesh Awami Krishak Sramik League. In a party meeting held on 18 January, 1975 Bangabandhu let it be known that there would be a new system of government introduced. But instantly some members raised their objections. They were Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad, Rtd Major General M. A. G. Osmani, Taheruddin

Thakur, Shah Moazzem Hossain, Obaidur Rahman, Nurul Islam Manzoor, Nur-e-Alam Siddiqui, Barrister Moinul Hossain, etc. General Osmani in his speech said, “We’ve seen Ayub Khan and Yahia Khan, but we don’t want to see Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as Mujibur Rahman Khan.” In reply, Bangabandhu said to him in English: “Don’t be excited my old friend, people are fed up with fiery speeches. They want some revolutionary changes in the social, political and economic system” (Mian, 1993, pp. 233).

Wazed Mia further relates that on the evening of 24 January, the day before the 4th Amendment would be passed, he found Khonadker Mostaq leaving Bangabandhu’s house quite agitated. On seeing him, Mostaq drew him apart under the mango tree and told him worriedly: “Baba [my son] Wazed, tomorrow your father-in-law is going to change the constitution, if it’s done it wouldn’t be only his greatest blunder, but it would cause irreparable damage to his image both at home and abroad. So, go right now to him and make him understand the extent of the crisis. I tried to the last to convince him, but I failed and am returning home with a saddened heart” (Mian, 1993, pp. 234).

So far Mostaq’s contention appears idealistic like Brutus’s as they both felt the immediacy of removing the figures who were posing threats to each of their ideological position: Brutus for Roman Republicanism and Mostaq for the multi-party democratic system. But then the differences between them grow sharper. While Brutus prominently maintained that he had no personal ambition in killing Caesar, Mostaq’s position in this regard is hazy, he is being culpable of greed for power for himself.

During the Liberation War Mostaq goes on record as having gone against the spirit of the Liberation War and proposed to establish a loose federation with Pakistan instead, in which he was apparently boosted by foreign powers, and as a result of which Tajuddin removed him from the foreign ministry (Khatib, 2014, p. 91). After independence, a section of army officers became disgruntled at the creation of Rakhshahi Bahini and the rampant increase in smuggling and corruption. The immediate cause, as is rendered by many historians¹³, was that at the house of Gazi Golam Mostafa, an Awami League leader, in a marriage ceremony Major Shariful Haq Dalim and his wife, Nimmy, were insulted. Dalim then, along with some cohorts vandalized Mostafa’s house (or office). Dalim, consequently was sacked from the army, and, thereby, he bore grudge against Bangabandhu, thinking that he did not get justice. Along with Dalim

joined Mostaq's close relative Major Khondaker Abdur Rashid, and his brother-in-law (his sister-in-law's husband) Lieutenant Colonel Syed Faruque Rahman. They discussed the matter of how to topple the Mujib government. They were soon joined by others like Captain Bazlul Huda and a few others. The conspiracy was set on. Taheruddin Thakur, an accomplice in the conspiracy, teased Mostaq at the BARD Centre, Comilla, by saying that they wanted to see him as the next President of Bangladesh. Mostaq gave out a grin and said that they first had to feel the pulse of Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Ziaur Rahman (Shadi, 2020, p. 96-7). Lawrence Lifschultz in his 1979 book, *Bangladesh: The Unfinished Revolution* states clearly with documents that Mostaq-Zia conspiracy was aided by the CIA to topple the Mujib government. On the operational level, however, Faruk met Zia at his Dhaka cantonment residence in the evening of March 20, 1975 (Lenin, 2020, p. 50). He said to Zia that they had made a plan, but since they were junior officers, they sought his help. Zia said that he did not want to get involved personally, but if they had taken a plan, they had to see to it that it is executed but let him be outside it. Like Mostaq's approval grin to Taheruddin Thakur, Zia's non-committal attitude was, sure enough, a green or go-ahead signal (Shadi, 2020, p. 96-7).

So, the difference here between Brutus and Mostaq is that Brutus's conspiracy was non-personal, his having desired nothing but the common good, whereas Mostaq's aim was fulfilling his long-cherished dream of becoming the President of the country – which he really did, though for only about ten weeks or so.

Another difference between Brutus and Mostaq as villains is that while Brutus only thought of removing Caesar from the face of the earth, Mostaq's drive was dynastical. When Cassius, Casca and other conspiring senators suggested to Brutus that Mark Antony, who was Caesar's most reliable friend, should also be killed, Brutus rejected the idea with disdain arguing that when Caesar will be killed, the main target will be achieved, so why go after people in secondary position!

Cassius suggests, "Let Antony and Caesar fall together" (Shakespeare, 1599b, 2.1.160).

Brutus replies

Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius,
To cut the head off and then hack the limbs –

Like wrath in death and envy afterwards –
For Antony is but a limb of Caesar. (Shakespeare, 1599b, 2.1.161-64)

And then he reiterates that killing Caesar for him is a sacrificial job he is accomplishing, not an act of murder: “Let us be sacrificers but not butchers, Caius” (Shakespeare, 1599b, 2.1.165).

But for Mostaq it was a mission aiming at the destruction of the whole dynasty. By extension, before he was pushed out of power, he passed an order to kill the interned four national leaders: Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Captain Mansur Ali, and AHM Quamruzzaman were brutally killed in Dhaka central jail on November 3, 1975. Such heinous was his revengeful motive!

The Killing Houses

In Shakespeare’s play, Caesar is stabbed to death by the senators in 3.1. First Metellus Cimber pleads to Caesar to withdraw the order of banishment on his brother Publius Cimber. But Caesar adamantly refuses, saying that he is not to be moved by lowly pleadings. He proudly utters that he is “constant as the northern star” (Shakespeare, 1599b, 3.1.60). Then other senators including Brutus beg or pretend to beg mercy for Publius. Thus, they procure bodily proximity to assault Caesar. After being assaulted by thirty-two senators, when lastly Brutus hits him, Caesar collapses to the floor, uttering “Et tu Brute” (Shakespeare, 1599b, 3.1.76) (thou too Brutus) and dies. But Bangabandhu did not have the time to utter ‘et tu Mostaq’!

In Shakespeare, the murder scene is rather brief, though on the visual rendering on stage or on screen it can be as vicious and gory as it is described in Sir Thomas North’s translation of *Plutarch’s Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (1579), which was largely Shakespeare’s source.

So Caesar coming into house, all the Senate stood up on their feet to do him honour. Then part of Brutus’s company and confederates stood round about Caesar’s chair, and part of them also came towards him, as though they made suit with Metellus Cimber, to call home his brother again from banishment: and thus prosecuting still their suit, they followed Caesar, till he was set in his chair. Who, denying their petitions, and being offended with them one after another, because the more they were denied, the more they pressed upon him, and were the earnestest with him: Metellus at length, taking his gown with both his hands,

pulled it over his neck, which was the sign given the confederates to set upon him. Then Casca behind him struck him in the neck with his sword, howbeit the wound was not great nor mortal, because it seemed, the fear of such a devilish attempt did amaze him, and take his strength from him, that he killed him not at the first blow. But Caesar turning straight unto him, caught hold of his sword, and held it hard: and they both cried out, Caesar in Latin: O vile traitor Casca, what dost thou? And Casca in Greek to his brother, brother help me. At the beginning of this stir, they that were present, not knowing of the conspiracy were so amazed with horrible sight they saw: that they had no power to fly, neither to help him, not so much, as once to make any outcry. They on the other side that had conspired his death, compassed him in on every side with their swords drawn in their hands, that Caesar turned him nowhere, but he was struck at by some, and still had naked swords in his face, and was hacked and mangled among them, that every man should give him a wound, because all their parts should be in this murder: and then Brutus himself gave him one wound about his private. Men report also, that Caesar did still defend himself against the rest, running every way with his body: but when he saw Brutus with his sword drawn in his hand, then he pulled his gown over his head, and made no more resistance, and was driven either casually, or purposedly, by the counsel of conspirators, against the base whereupon Pompey's image stood, which ran all of a gore blood, till he was slain. Thus it seemed, that the image took just revenge of Pompey's enemy, being thrown down on the ground at his feet, and yielding up his ghost there, for the number of wounds he had upon him. For it is reported, that he had three and twenty wounds upon his body: and diverse of the conspirators did hurt themselves, striking one body with so many blows. (Shakespeare, 1599b, pp. 328-29)

If that is one of the most ghastly descriptions of a historic killing, what went on in the fateful night of August 15 at the Dhanmondi house seems more macabre, because not only one man was killed but it turned into mayhem, and to know about this, we now depend on the eyewitness version of Mohitul Islam who submitted his F. I. R. statement to the Dhanmondi Thana on 2 October 1996, that is 21 years after against the killers of Bangabandhu and his family. As said earlier, the killers divided themselves into three groups. One group was led by Major Dalim to attack Minister Serniabat's house at Minto Road, and the second group was led by Risalder Muslehuddin to attack Sheikh Moni's house at Dhanmondi. And the third group went to attack Bangabandhu's house at Dhanmondi, Rd 32, house 677 led by Huda, Noor, and Mohiuddin (Dulal, 2020).

The statement is the following:

I A. F. M. Mohitul Islam . . . state that I was employed as a receptionist-cum-resident P. A. at the house of President Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975.

I was on duty from 8 P. M. on 14 August to 8 A. M. on 15 August. So, I went to report my duty at 8 P. M. on 14 August. At that time the telephone operator Abdul Matin, the cowherd Abdul Aziz, an electric repairer, and a maidservant were present along with the house errand boy Md. Selim, alias, Abdul, and Abdur Rahman, alias, Rama who were also on duty. On that night in that house Bangabandhu's three sons, Sheikh Kamal, Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russell, respectively, and Sheikh Kamal's wife Sultana Kamal, Sheikh Jamal's wife Rozy Jamal, and Begum Mujib were present. In addition, Bangabandhu's younger brother Sheikh Naser, who came to Dhaka for business purposes, was also present.

On the security side, there were DSP Nurul Islam Khan, Inspector Khorshed, an officer from SB, and policemen of several designations who were on duty that night. Besides, there were some members of the army who were on duty too. Bangabandhu returned home around 8 to 9 P. M. His security contingent left after escorting him to his house.

After they left, I was gossiping with the sentries on duty. Around 1 o'clock, I went to my designated bed to sleep. I don't know when I fell asleep. Suddenly, the telephone operator Matin jerked me to wakeness and said, "The President is calling you over the telephone." It was possibly 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning. All around the daylight was just appearing. Some electric lights were still burning in the house at several points. I picked up the telephone quickly. From the other end Bangabandhu said, "Miscreants have attacked Serniabat's house, quickly get in touch with the police control room." I at once tried to connect, but the line was not clear. Then I tried to connect with the Ganabhavan exchange. At that moment Bangabandhu came down from upstairs and entered my room, and asked me, "What happened, didn't I ask you to contact the police control room?" I said, "Sir, police control room isn't receiving the call, I'm trying to connect with the Ganabhavan exchange. Yes, they have picked up, but not answering." I was shouting 'Hello, Hello'. Then Bangabandhu snatched the receiver from me and hollered, "I'm President Sheikh Mujib speaking." At that moment a shower of bullets crashed through the windowpane on the south side and bounced on the office wall. On the other phone, chief security officer Mohiuddin was calling, and I picked it up. And right then a broken glass gored into my right elbow and blood

started to flow. At that time bullets were coming in through the window uninterruptedly. Bangabandhu instantly lay down on the floor beside my table and dragged me by my hand asking me to lie down. I lay down beside him. Within some moments firing stopped. Bangabandhu stood up, and I also stood up. The errand boy Selim brought his panjabi and spectacles from upstairs.

He put on his panjabi. He came to the veranda and asked, "Army sentry, police sentry, so much of firing is going on, what're you doing?" After saying this, he went upstairs. At that moment Sheikh Kamal came down to the veranda, and said, "Army-police brethren, all come with me." As soon as he said it, three to four men in black and khaki uniforms with arms suddenly turned up and stood in front of him. I and DSP Nurul Islam sahib were standing behind Kamal bhai. Then Nurul Islam sahib tugged me from behind and entered my office room with me. From there I wanted to see what was happening outside. Then we heard gunfire again. Then Kamal bhai being hit with a bullet jumped up and made a dash into my office. Kamal bhai said, "I'm Sheikh Kamal, the son of Sheikh Mujib, you tell them that." Among the attackers were men in black dresses and men in khaki dresses. I told them, "Brother, he's the son of Sheikh Mujib,--Sheikh Kamal. They at once fired again aiming at Kamal bhai. Kamal bhai was again hit with bullets and a scattered bullet hit me on the knee. DSP Nurul Islam was also hit on his leg. Then I realized clearly that they were all army personnel, and they came here to this house to execute a massacre. DSP sahib then pulled me away to his room, where we found another SB officer. His revolver was at his feet, and he was shaking with fear. DSP sahib tried to push both of us outside through a back door. But there were some army men standing. Bazlul Huda led us near the gate and filed us in a line. There the policemen and the telephone operator were also filed in the same line. By the side of the telephone operator, Abdul Matin, they made me and DSP stand in the line. Just beside me was standing the SB officer, but suddenly an army man came and shot him, and he crumbled to the ground. Putting some army men to guard us, the rest of the armed group climbed the stairs firing. Sometime after, we heard the loud voice of Bangabandhu. And at the same time, howling and lamentation of women were heard from the upper floor rooms. Then from the cooking room and the cowshed on the ground floor, they dragged out the old woman cook and the cowherd Aziz and filed them in the same line with us. They also brought down Sheikh Naser from upstairs. He was bleeding from a bullet wound on his hand. Sheikh Naser said to one of the attackers, "Sir, I don't do politics, I thrive on trading." Then an army man standing beside us said, "Sheikh Mujib is better than Naser." The armed man who brought Sheikh Naser from upstairs, said, "Ok, we won't tell you anything, you go and sit in the other room. Saying this, he took Sheikh Naser to the attached bathroom of our office and shot him. Then the armed man came back to our line. Sheikh Naser was crying out,

'water, water'. Then one army man asked another army man: 'Go, give him some water.' That man returned to that place and shot him again instead of giving him water. In the meantime, they brought down the child Russell and Rama from upstairs. The child Russell at first clung to Rama, then to me, and asked in a trembling voice, 'Bhaiya, wouldn't they kill me!' I had an idea that they wouldn't kill Russell as he was a mere child. Under that impression, I told him, 'No, bhaiya, they wouldn't kill you.' A khaki-clad man unclutched Russell from me by force. As Russell said he wanted to go to his mother, the man replied that he would take him to his mother and went inside the house. A moment later we heard the gunshots. At this time, I saw Major Faruque asking Major Bazlul Huda about something. Then Bazlul Huda said, 'All are finished'. When we were filed in the line, we saw tanks plying to and fro in front of Bangabandhu's house. We saw army personnel in black uniforms couched on the tanks. Around 8 o'clock a driver drove Colonel Jamil's dead body in his (Jamils') car to Bangabandhu's house. And at some point, I saw Major Dalim in an army dress being present there. He talked to the army men. (Dulal, 2020, pp. 106-07)

From Mohitul's statement the outside happenings in the yard have been made known, but in what circumstances the people inside the house were killed may be known from another eyewitness, who is Havilder Kuddus.

On 15 August morning, at a quarter to 5, when the bugle was played and the national flag was hoisted, at that time from the south side of the lake bullets were fired at Bangabandhu's house ceaselessly. The guards under his charge were taking position behind the boundary wall to resist. But they didn't have any bullets as they were taken from them earlier by Subedar Major Abdul Wahab Joarder. Then soldiers in black and khaki uniforms entered Bangabandhu's house shouting 'Hands up, hands up.' Captain Huda, Major Noor, Major Mohiuddin (Lancer) were seen at the gate. When they saw Sheikh Kamal at the veranda, Captain Huda shot him. Being shot at, Sheikh Kamal fell into the reception room. When Sheikh Kamal's identity was given, Captain Huda fired again and shot him dead. And then Captain Huda and Major Noor piled up the policemen and house servants in a line against the gate. Major Mohiuddin went up the stairs to the first floor with his Lancer forces firing. Then Captain Huda and Major Noor also rushed up to the first floor with some more forces. They ordered their forces to follow them. When they reached the landing of the stairs, they saw Major Mohiuddin and his men forcing Bangabandhu to climb downstairs. Then Major Noor said something to Major Mohiuddin in English, and Major Mohiuddin moved to one side with his forces. At this point, Bangabandhu shouted out: "What

do you¹ want?" ["Shut up, you are under arrest," said Major Noor. "Where will you take me?" asked Bangabandhu. "Come along with us" said one of the assaulters.²] After that Captain Huda and Major Noor shot at Bangabandhu point-blank, and he died instantly falling on the steps.³ After some time, Major Aziz Pasha, Risaldar Mulsehuddin and the lancer and artillery forces gathered in front of the gate. Major Aziz Pasha along with his troops went up to the first floor, and the witness also followed them from behind. When Aziz Pasha reached the first floor Begum Mujib pleaded to them not to hurt anyone inside the bedroom. But not paying any heed to her words, a group of soldiers compelled Begum Mujib, Sheikh Russell, Sheikh Naser, and a house servant to come outside of the room. Seeing Bangabandhu's dead body lying on the stairs Begum Mujib cried out in tears. Then they took her back into the bedroom, and Sheikh Naser, Sheikh Russell, and the servant were led outside into the yard. Then Major Aziz Pasha and Risaldar Moslemuddin with their stenguns killed Begum Mujib, Sheikh Jamal, Sheikh Jamal's wife, and Sheikh Kamal's wife inside the bedroom. Then Aziz Pasha left the room with his forces and came down. (Dulal, 2020, pp. 137-38)

The Fake Euphoria

Immediately after killing Caesar, Cinna, one of the conspiring senators, cried out, "Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead! / Run hence, proclaim, cry it about the streets" (Shakespeare, 1599b, 3.1.78-79). Cassius adds: "Some to the common pulpits and cry out / Liberty, freedom and enfranchisement!" (Shakespeare, 1599b, 3.1.80-81). He further speaks out a prophetic line: "How many ages hence / Shall this our scene be acted over / In states unborn and accents yet unknown?" (Shakespeare, 1599b, 3.1.111-13) To Cassius's idea of continuity of their 'brave' (?) deed, Brutus offers a similar futuristic speech: "How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport / That now on Pompey's basis lies along, / No worthier than the dust?" (Shakespeare, 1599b, 3.1.114-16).

Parallel to this euphoria manifested by the leaders of Caser's killing is the boastful reaction of Bangabandhu's killers. In the report of Colonel (Rtd) Shafayat Jamil, who was at the time commander of the 46th Brigade in Dhaka Cantonment, and under whose charge was actually the tank division manned by Faruqe, it is narrated that he was woken up by Major Rashid, one of the key

¹ In Bengali, the English 'you' has three forms: 'apni' for respect, 'tumi' for friendly address, and 'tui' for affection as well as for trivializing. Bangabandhu by habit used to show his affection to everybody by using the affectionate 'tui'. But here, moments before his death, the implication of 'tui' is veering from affection to trivialization.

² This snatch of dialogue is a translation of the description written by Shadi in his book on page 139.

³ The exact time of Bangabandhu's death is 5:45 am, as mentioned by Shadi on page 139.

men in the assassination of Bangabandhu, who said to him with firearms in his hand, “We’ve killed Sheikh Mujib, [and] we’ve taken over the control of the government under the leadership of Khondaker Mostaq, so you better not take any action against us” (Rahman, 2021, p. 45). In another development, Major Dalim, who was expelled from the army earlier, but who was given uniforms by Lt. Col. Syed Faruque Rahman on the 15th night just before their coup d'état took place, came over to the radio centre and declared, “I’m Dalim speaking, the dictatorial government of Sheikh Mujib has been overthrown by a military coup d'état, and martial law has been imposed across the country. Under the leadership of popular leader Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad the army has taken over, and from right now Bangladesh will be turned into an Islamic republic.”

Justice Prevailed

But as ironic as every phase of human history is the euphoria displayed by both gangs of killers, neither Brutus and his fellow conspirators nor Mostaq and his cohorts could stay in their usurped positions for long. In fact, in Shakespeare’s play, Brutus lost control of the situation the very day by virtue of Mark Antony’s famous speech, “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears” (Shakespeare, 1599b, 3.2.74ff)⁴, by which he could agitate the Roman mob to chase Brutus and his party out of Rome. And in Bangladesh, a similar kind of turnabout took place by the beginning of November. As mentioned earlier, on 3 November 1975 by a heinous move the killers of Bangabandhu arranged to kill four national leaders in Dhaka Central Jail, then they left the country by a ‘safe passage’ created by General Osmani on the order of President Mostaq, whose stay in power was also shortened as through another coup d'état led by Major General Khaled Mosharraf, the anti-Mostaq forces took power, and Mostaq was forced to resign on 5 November, and on the following day, 6 November evening the new President Justice Sayem delivered a speech to the nation (Rahman, 2021, pp. 111-14).

Another significant similarity between these two killings is that the killers ended up their lives in frustration, for which the very idealistic goals, in the case of Brutus, and the materialistic goal in the case of Mostaq, were found to be nothing but an illusion

In Brutus’s camp opinions soon widely vary between Brutus and his chief ally Cassius. Brutus detects some improper solicitation sought by Cassius for

⁴ In actual history, Brutus held onto power for nearly three days.

Lucius Pella, who was accused of taking bribes. Brutus again clarifies his ideological position. As the quarrel between them gets to a heat, Brutus says,

Remember March, the Ides of March remember:
Did not great Julius bleed for justice' sake?
What villain touched his booty, that did stab
And not for justice? (Shakespeare, 1599b, 4.3.18-21)

However, the quarrel is soon patched up, because as Shakespeare insinuates, both these friends were erotically tied to each other, and they decide to lead their forces on to Phillippe to meet the joint forces of Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar. However, before their forces will be defeated, they both choose to die the Roman way, which is to command a slave/servant to hold his sword erect and the person, wishing suicide, to jump on it and die-i.e., a kind of hara-kiri. Cassius dies by asking Pindarus, his slave, to hold the very sword with which he stabbed Caesar: "Guide thou [Pindarus] the sword – Caesar, thou art revenged / Even with the sword that killed thee" (Shakespeare, 1599b, 5.3.43-4). And, before Brutus follows the same path, he has already been warned by Caesar's ghost that he would see him at Philippi. The striking thing is that at the end of the play Antony makes a laudable speech in honour of Brutus:

This was the noblest Roman of them all:
All the conspirators save only he
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar.
He only, in a general honest thought
And common good to all, made one of them. (Shakespeare, 1599b, 5.5.68-72)

But no such panegyric on Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad can ever be imagined, let alone compose. So, this makes a characteristic difference between Brutus and Mostaq. The basic difference between Brutus and Mostaq can be realized in this sense that as the above passage by Antony gives testimony to, he went for the killing from a republican thought that Caesar might be a threat to democracy, whereas Mostaq's initial goal was to disagree with Bangabandhu on the question of the 4th Amendment, and when this disagreement got extended in the form of an army coup d'état, he did not discriminate or perhaps such necessity never did dawn on him that the push might include a whole dynasty, where innocent people could be killed, including children and fetus.

The Body Natural versus Body Politic

If we want to understand Shakespeare's take on the forceful removal of a legal king or national leader or public figure, we can refer to the play, *Macbeth*, where Macbeth realizes that after killing Duncan he has become like a courier, who has taken the crown off the head of Duncan to place it on Banquo's children:

Upon my head they plac'd a fruitless crown,
 And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
 Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,
 No son of my succeeding. If't be so,
 For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;
 For them the precious Duncan have I murther'd;
 Put rancours in the vessel of my peace,
 Only for them; and my eternal jewel
 Given to the common Enemy of man,
 To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings! (Shakespeare, 1599b,

3.1.60-69)

Shakespeare's usurpers such as Richard III, Henry Bolingbroke (Henry IV), Claudius, Macbeth, Duke Frederick, Antonio, etc., have all been punished either with a horrible death or with biting of the conscience (Henry IV) or with conversion (Duke Frederick and Antonio).

Another major link that can be established between Caesar's death and Bangabandhu's is with regard to the Renaissance concept of the king's two bodies: body natural and body politic. Body natural indicated the king's physical body in which he is like any other subject in the kingdom, that is he is subjected to every ailment that 'flesh is heir to'. On the other hand, his body politic embraces his royal dignity which is imperishable and unkillable. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, whose path-breaking book, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957) is the source of my discussion of this idea quotes a passage from the Law Report that explains what the king's two bodies is all about:

The King has two Capacities, for he has Two Bodies, the one whereof is a Body natural, consisting of natural Members as every other Man has, and in this he is

subject to Passion and Death as other Men are; the other is Body politic, and the Members thereof are his Subjects, and he and his Subjects together compose the Corporation, as Southcote said, and he incorporated with them, and they with him, and he is the Head, and they are the Members, and he has the sole Government of them; and this Body is not subject to Passions as the other is, nor to Death, for as to this Body the King never dies, and his natural Death is not called in our Law (as Herper said), the Death of the King, but the Demise of the King, not signifying by the Word (*Demise*) that the Body politic of the King is dead, but that there is a Separation of two Bodies, and that the Body politic is transferred and conveyed over from the Body natural now dead, or now removed from the Dignity royal, to another Body natural. So that it signifies a Removal of the Body politic of the King of this Realm from one Body natural to another. (Kantorowicz, 1957)

This may be the case with Bangabandhu too. Mostaq and his gang had killed Bangabandhu's body natural, but his body politic did not only sustain but also proved imperishable, because today his daughter Sheikh Hasina is the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and most of the killers have been brought to book and death sentence has been passed on them. Though Mostaq had ended up with natural death, it was an uneasy life he spent, full of ignominy, and his name, in popular consciousness, is coupled with Mir Zafar another infamous traitor in the history of Bengal. Ziaur Rahman, who later became the President of the country, lost his life to bullets when a counter coup was staged in Chittagong in the early morning of May 30, 1981. Lt. Col. (sacked) Syed Faruque Rahman, the mastermind of the conspiracy from the officers' level, who once boasted to a British newspaper, *Sunday Times* in 1976 that he killed Sheikh Mujib and let the government of Zia dare to arrest him, that Faruque was actually arrested and tried and convicted and then put to execution on January 28, 2010. Along with Lt. Col. Syed Faruque Rahman, the others hanged were Lt. Col. Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan, Lt. Col. Mohiuddin Ahmed, Maj. Bazlul Huda and Army Lancer A.K.M. Mohiuddin Ahmed. But many of the culprits are still to be brought to justice.

In conclusion, we would like to say that it is not very difficult to discover a palimpsest of morality beneath the textual surface of Shakespeare's plays that sinners must be punished; in real life, however, such a pattern does not always exist, but this discussion drawing on parallelism between two events in history, one happening on March 15, 44 BC, and another on August 15, 1975 with a distance of 2019 years in between, has shown that there seems to be a method of justice at work even in real life--that the assassins would be punished.

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