

ABUL LATIF

They want to snatch away
the words of my mouth.

They chain my hands and feet
for sheer fun.

What my grandfather spoke
that too my father spoke
and now tell me, brother mine
can any other tongue adorn these lips ?

We won't have it, no we won't
We won't speak in an alien tongue
We'll lay down our dear lives if need be
to hold high
the honor of the tongue of my forefathers.

Where else but here in Bangla can you find
songs dear like my mothers
and heart soft like hers.
How can I forget, brother mine;
my mother's honeyed words ?

Those whose songs still call
the flood to a dead river,
how can I afford to forget them
their peerless gifts through ages ?
Mukund Das, Pagla Kanai
Hason, Madon and Laloni - all;
Their voices are also muzzled
Can this sorrow be borne ?
To uphold the honour of these gifted souls
who is ready to give his life ?
Come in groups all of you
or else you'll have forever
courted your own disaster.

Don't be misled by their words.
brother, I forbid
Don't be dumb, you have your tongue **1**
or be blind when you have eyes.
They befriend you, brother
and want to make you a washerman's mule
That is why in meetings galore
they whisper soft and sweet words.

Two centuries have you slumbered>
Bengalees, sleep not any more !
Rise, there's no more time now
Haven't you yet understood
without Bangla there's no way out ?
(abridged)

Translated by, Mohamed Mijarul Quayes

**1. Mukund Das, Pagla Kanai, Hason, Madon and Lalon
are celebrated bards of Bengal.**



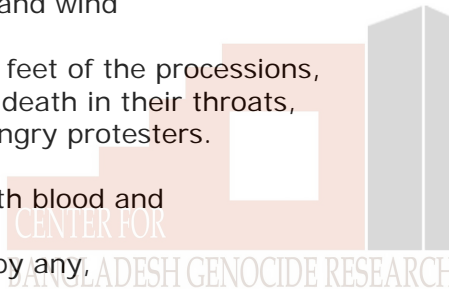
SUFIA KAMAL

Such a wonderful day today,
nobody laments for the dead, none
fears death's grim face. A strange gleam
lights the weary body and face ; in each footstep
the glittering light of determination is aglow.

As if,-they have signed their names
in Bengali
On their own death-sentence;
"I have taken up my mother from the dust
to my bosom."
There have been Salam, Barkat and thousands
of unknown names,
They were their father's only hope, their mother's
last possession, someone's partner for life
or a lone brother of some hapless sister -
They are no more now.
They are no more? No, that's not true ?

They are here in the sky and wind
very close to our hearts.
They are in the marching feet of the processions,
with the undying song of death in their throats,
in the fiery looks of the angry protesters.

Ekushey is now mixed with blood and
the Bengali tongue.
It is now unconquerable by any,



Translated by K. Ashraf Fiossain

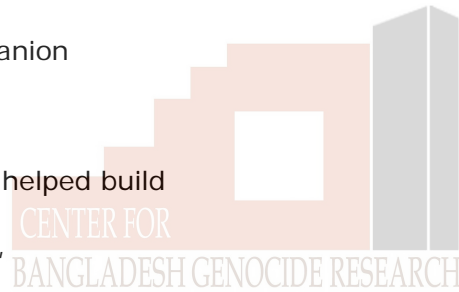
SHAMSUR RAHMAN

In my very being you live
Fluttering your flag like a cluster
Of shining stars:
A soothing tenderness always holds you
in a loving embrace.

From my very childhood
You and I have lived inseparably,
Wrapped in each other's love.
You have been my companion
since my birth.
Every moment you have helped build
the bridge of my dreams,
and that is why the whole universe,
turning into a ship, anchors today at
my port.

You visit me even in the bower
of my sleep.

From the little hollow of a huge big tree
You come down jumping
in the shape of a squirrel,
And, dressed as an elephant, you descend
From a bouquet of clouds.
You are always there.



I feel your presence in the very depth
of my heart,
An eternal green spot of bliss,
the rhythmic fifty-one letters
Of my remote school days
of early childhood
Or, some times turning into a beautiful
Parrot with a scarlet beak,
You suddenly come and softly touch
the rim of my dream-laden consciousness.
You are the precious pupils
at the centre of my eyes.
In the raging fire of wars,
In the holocaust of epidemics,
in deluge or drought,
in the ringing steps
of a dancing girl,
in the tender embrace of a loving daughter
in anger and hatred,
in the hulabaloo of anarchy,
in the profusion of creativity,
O the pupils of my eyes;
you are always open and awake,
every moment of my life.

If you are plucked out, tell me,
what of me remains ?



Nursing at your breast
the floral offerings of a few martyred youths
you live in eternal glory.

Today I shall allow no one
to pluck a single petal of those flowers.
But at present they are playing with you
a dirty game,
they are engaged in a low, lascivious prank,
the bastards are having the time of their life,
and I cannot bear to look at your face,
O my sad, suffering alphabet.

(abridged in translation)

Translated by Kabir Chowdhury



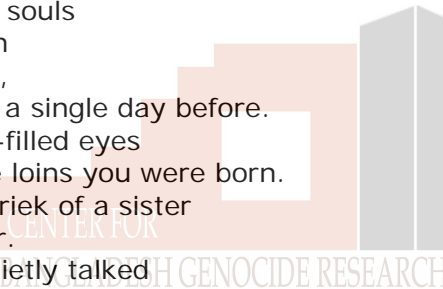
HASAN HAFIZUR RAHMAN

Won't mother then ever call him again by his name ?
That name will rise up again and again
in the meadow of her hearing mind.
like a whirlwind,
but won't it come out of her two lips
like a bright rounded pearl
ever again in all her life ?

How will you bear this heavy weight,
O, how long ?
Abul Barkat is no more,
that oversize big-bodied boy
whose tall frame nearly touched the roof
of Madhu's stall.
Salam, Rafiquddin, Jabbar
what a sad cluster of names,
a row of names that now strikes at our heart
like the sharp point of a spear.
We lost them before we were ready to part,
for the jaws of reaction feared not life and humanity.
We lost them before we could organize our thoughts,
for the vile strategy of reaction
through one death ushers in a thousand deaths.
This time we lost some persons
whose memory we shall cherish till eternity,
who will never let us rest in peace.
Those we have lost have expanded us, spread us over,
from one corner of the country to the other;
even as they sank in the darkness of death
they scattered themselves in a million particles
in the fiery soul of our land
Abul Barkat, Salam, Rafiquddin, Jabbar,
What a cluster of amazing, sad, flaming names.

Like a peasant sowing his paddy seedlings
in rain-drenched silt enriched land
hoping for golden grains to sprout
I, too, sowed my fine sensibilities
in the very core of the crowd.
O my native land,
from the knowledge vouchsafed me
by history in its inexorable process
I sow in a single day

your heart bathed in a divine light
Whose sudden touch splintered the Kohetoor 2
into innumerable fragments
and showered them generously on our parched souls.
O my native land,
this time I have bathed in the still
deep waters of your soul
wrapping around my consciousness
the petals of immense satisfaction
that engulfs a worker
when he succeeds in blending the sweat
of his genius with his handiwork
I looked up at the sky.
Dipping my eyes in the muddy currents
of your rural streams
I saw the multitudinous green flames
of bubbling life stretching to the horizon
like the endless expanse of a transplanted paddy field. >
And with great wonder I noticed the fire of life
you had enkindled all on a sudden, >
the slightest hint of which I did not get
even a day before.
You firece flame lit up the souls
of millions of your children
and O native land of mine,
I had no idea of this even a single day before.
Think for once of the tear-filled eyes
of your father from whose loins you were born.
Think of the frightened shriek of a sister
robbed of her only brother.
Of those two who once quietly talked
to each other in the privacy of Time's peaceful temple,
talked of the integrity of their hearts,
today one is no more.
Of the loving pair of birds one is gone forever,
The sad-eyed doe has lost her tender baby.
Now only heart-rending wails reign everywhere
like the ocean's ceaseless waves.
Now only tears-flow that could wash
all away in a mighty flood.
The people have lost their eye-sight,
They can't see any more.
O my knowledge,
give me the venom of a lone utterance
that can travel from one heart to another
lighting up an undying fire of bitter hatred.
They had stood up together
to protect the honor of the sound
that issued from the lips of a new-born babe
churning the very core of his existence,
the utterance that sanctified for him
his first lesson of humanity.
They shone like the effulgent gaze



of Buddha and Mohammed.
Their emotions seethed in the depths
of some subterranean stream.
They were unique like the seven stars
marked apart from the rest of the galaxy,
in the wide blue sky -
and those devils, the enemies of life,
cruelly snatched their sacred bodies away
And now we cherish their souls in our hearts
in a blaze of glory and love.

3

One of them is no more today -
No, fifty of them are gone.

And for those immortal martyrs,
for their dearly beloved language Bangla, >
We have turned into a rocky mass.
We have grown big and invincible
like the mighty Himalayas.
O my native land,
gathering the silt of all experience
like the gift of a benign flood
I have made fertile a single awareness.
Here is the meeting point of life and death.
like the sighs of a distant wind
Whistling through the skull of a dare-devil
sailor on a lonely beach
You can hear at this spot the laments
of a heart-broken desolate tender woman.
Here you can find parents, brothers, sisters,
grieving near and dear ones,
and here too do we stand, You and I,
O my native land.

We are face to face here
With the arrogance of the last few years
of Pharaoh's life.
Here we stand for the final duel on the earth.
O my native land,
reaching the edge of this fight
of silence or of chirping voices,
We raise a tremendous shout
aligning ourselves on the side of our mother's love:
Now we are all yours.

4

We have found you, mother,
and finding you we have forgotten the pain

of the death of our fifty martyred brethren
in the same way that a slum-dwelling mother
forgets the pain of numberless deaths
when she holds close to her breast
a healthy robust living child of her own.
O mother mine

today we do not have the least little
doubt left of what you want,
What you want,
What you want.

Translated by Kabir Chowdhury

Note:

1. Madhu's stall is a popular canteen in Dhaka University which has been the hub of student politics since 1947 to-date,

2 Kohetoor is Mount Toor which was burnt to ashes when God appeared in His flaming glory before Moses.



ABU ZAFOR OBAIDULLAH

"The vine is weighed down
with pumpkin blossoms,
'Sajna' legumes
are a-plenty on the tree,
and I have stored away
dried pulse cakes,
Khoka, my son, when will you come ?
When will your holidays begin ?"
- The letter was in his pocket
torn, and drenched in blood.

"Mother dear, they say
they'll snatch away all our words,
will not let us lie in your lap
and listen to stories any more.
Tell me mother, can that ever be ?
That is why I'm delayed.
I'll come home only when I have
my bushel full of words for you.
Mother dear, don't be cross,
'its only a few days more."
"Crazy boy",
mother smiles as she reads,
"Can I be cross with you ?"



She prepares chipped coconut,
fries crispy popped rice,
This that and what not
her son is coming home,
her tired Khoka.
The pumpkin blossoms
are all withered,
the legumes have all fallen off;
the 'pain' vine grows listless,
"Khoka, have you come ?"

With hazy eyes, mother looks out
toward the yard, the yard
where vultures dissect
Khoka's lifeless form.
Now the summer sun in mother's eyes
burns up the hungry vultures.
And then,
sitting on the threshold,

mother again thrashes rice,
fries `binni' rice into `khoi',
her Khoka
could come back anytime, anytime.

There's now
a dewy morn in her eyes,
the homestead basks
in affectionate sunshine.

Translated by Mohamed Mijarul Quayes



SIKANDER ABU ZAFOR

All the people got united in a second,
they anointed their sinews, ribs and muscles
with a new-born pledge.
The history of the land pulsates on the horizon
of time.

February 21 is a fearless Journey
On the road of consciousness,
February 21 is a united being
of million men.

February 21 is written with the sleepless terror
of the conscience-stricken egoist,
who starts at the sound of falling leaves.

February 21 is the tearing explosion
of rage, of hatred,
with her black flags, posters and blood-red
scribblings of tears.

She is much changed now, alas !
The unseen magic hands of treachery
stifles her; the black vampire of prudence

spreads its wings;
a shrouded giant stalks the stage
of sorrow every year!
(his name is foresight)

A great popular upsurge,
a strong faith in life
is now nothing but a corpse of vows.

February 21 is a mere silent memory
of the past,
a mis-spent tear of people's pride,
a pale history of an atrophied urge.

Translated by K. Ashraf Hossain



SYED SHAMSUL HUQ

Come, let us wrest our liberty,
the liberty to speak,
the liberty to place one letter
to the right of another
and make up words,
the liberty to sing a hymn to life,
the liberty to make a glowing utterance,
full of meaning and reason.
Come, let us wrest with, our strong hands
the liberty to say something
one can see and touch,
something like flowers or birds or ships.
Come, let us utter the word "Liberty".
No, no prayer at the altar of the goddess of Muse,
No, no gift from far away.
No lonely dedicated study.
Nor any solitary struggle within one's inner self.
Now at this hour
I call all my senior poets,
I call all those who think and feel like me,
All the thunder that lies hidden in my bones,
All the venom that resides in my hatred
All the love that breathes in my soul,
All the hurt that festers in my heart.
I call them all, Now, at this hour
of pitch black darkness.
I say, "Come, poet ; Come, love ;
heal my wounds.
Turn men into poets.
Come, turn poets into men.
Come, come, come."

Translated by Kabir Chowdhury

MOHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

Men are not rivers, yet in their hearts
Burns the raging thirst of rivers.

The youthful blood that was spilled in Fifty-two
With its tidal thirst suddenly becomes
A river of humanity across the Dravidian delta;
See how on its alluvial soil is slowly built
An un-Aryan homeland, like a cascading stream
The habitat of a vernal race.

The language dearest to man lives on
in the sound of the rivers.

Translated by Syed Manzoorul Islam



AL MAHMUD

Procession of memories all around me
like a band of pursued sorrows.
In the clenched fists
and on the lips
of my blood soaked friends rose
fierce shouts
like the thrusts of sharp pointed spears
Bangla, Bangla !

Who takes the name of my sleeping mother ?
Pressing my face on the window pane
I saw in a momentary flash
Time's white lotus rise
Over the edge of the horizon.

And I heard the twitter
of February's fearless birds
on all the main streets
of the metropolis,
And I saw the faces
of my singing brothers
glowing like so many fresh pink flowers.
Bangla.... Bangla....
Rose my mother's name from various parts.

Translated by Kabir Chowdhury



ASAD CHOWDHURY

When the month of Phalgun arrives
birds chirp and give out intermittent calls,
you like to call it the cuckoo?
All right, I do not complain.
I have given it the name of `Hope',
I call it my speech,
I give it a thousand names
yet I'm not fully content.
Phalgun brings wreaths of flowers,
and waves of protests.
Phalgun is an untamed horse
that breaks its halters.
When the month of Phalgun arrives
bees come in a throng
and the buds drop on our feet.
You call it the Shahid Minar. ?
I do not complain.
But I call it "Return"
return to one's own home,
just as the birds return to their nests !
Phalgun is like my auntie's mirror
wherein I see my face,
Phalgun teaches us the lesson
of correcting our life's errors.
When the month of Phalgun arrives
a little bird chirps on the branch
and gives out intermittent calls,
you like to call it a cuckoo,
Well, I do not mind.
When Phalgun comes
the bees come in a throng and
the buds drop on our feet,
you call it Shahid Minar ?
Well, I do not complain.

Translated by K. Ashraf Hossain



ABDUL GAFFAR CHOUDHURY

Can I forget the twenty-first February
incarnadined by the blood of my brother ?
Twenty-first February, built by the tears
of a hundred mothers robbed of their sons,
Can I ever forget it ?

Wake up all serpents,
wake up all summer thunder-storms,
let the whole world rise up
in anger and protest against the massacre
of innocent children.
They tried to cursh the demand of the people
by murdering the golden sons of the land.
Can they get away with it
at this hour when the times are poised
for a radical change ?

No, no, no, no,
In the history reddened by blood
the final verdict has been given already
by the twenty-first February.

It was a smooth and pleasant night,
with the winter nearly gone
and the moon smiling in the blue sky ,
and lovely fragrant flowers blossoming
on the roadside,
and all on a sudden rose a storm,
fierce like a wild horde of savage beasts.

Even in the darkness we know

who those beasts were.

On them we shower the bitterest hatred

of all mothers brothers and sisters.

They fired at the soul

of this land,

They tried to silence the demand of the people,



They kicked at the bosom of Bengal.
They did not belong to this country.
They wanted to sell away her good fortune .
They robbed the people
of food, clothing and peace.
On them we shower our bitterest hatred.

Wake up today twenty-first February,
do wake up, please.
Our heroic boys and girls still languish
in the prisons of the tyrant.
The souls of my martyred brothers still cry.
But today everywhere the somnolent strength
of the people have begun to stir,
and we shall set February ablaze
by the flame of our fierce anger.
How can I ever forget the twenty-first February ?

Translated by Kabir Chowdhury



ALAUDDIN AL AZAD

Have they destroyed your memorial monument Don't you fear, comrade,
We are still here,
A family of forty millions, alert and wide awake.

The base that no emperor could ever crush,
at whose feet the diamond crown, the blue proclamation,
the naked sabre and the tempestuous cavalry
crumbled into dust,
We are that simple hero, that unique crowd,
We who work in fields, row rivers, labour in factories!

Have they destroyed your brick monument?
Well let them. Don't you fear, comrade,
We, a family of forty millions,
are alert and wide awake.
What kind of a death is this ?
Has any one seen such a death
When no one weeps at the head of the departed ?
Where all sorrow and pain form the Himalayas
to the sea
Only come together and blossom
into the colour of a single flag ?
What kind of a death is this ?

Has any one seen such a death
Where no one laments aloud ?
Where only the sited turns into the
gorgeous stream of a mighty waterfall,
Where the season of many words leads the pen on to an era of poetry ?

Have they destroyed your brick monuments?
Well, let them, we forty million masons
have built a monument with a violin tune
and the dark deep eyes of
rainbows and palash flowers.
We have etched for you their names through
the ages in the foamy stone of love.
That is why, comrade,
On the granite peak of our thousand fists
shines like the sun-

The sun of a mighty pledge.

Translated by Kabir Chowdhury

1. a three-string musical instrument.

SHAHID QUADRI

When I hurl abuses at enemies,
shout without reason, or
in ecstasy wallow in bed,
when our cries of accumulated anger
at the midnight street-corner
I take as the ill-omened owl
and chase away like an anxious house-holder;
Short of breath in the mid-river
in a swimming competition,
like the petering out of cheap festival crackers
I cry out desperately for on-looker's help ;

Or when I get a rare chance
of making a public speech and unaccustomed tongue
throws a shower of spit on the listeners ;
Or when I hurl unspeakably obscenities
in a darkened dramatic hall;

When I carry a tragic news to darken
the bright faces of my dear friends
and laugh loudly in sadistic glee,
chide my younger brother who has just returned
from a procession ;



Or when I burst my sides with scornful laughter
seeing the pitiable plight of a rustic
who has just escaped from the wheels of a
speeding taxi ;

In short, whenever I shout,
there fall in an endless flow
the letters of the Bengali alphabet;
Though I have always dreamed
of being a sailor dressed in blue on an unknown
stormy sea
and day after day
have roamed among the known towns
and the stream of crowds in my
shirt-sleeves and trousers,

Yet I know for sure
that beyond my known geography
there are more affluent cities, the verdant steppes

Steeped in a strange beauty
there are bright beckoning valleys,
glittering shops opening, on the foreign footpaths,
The thronged cafes bustling beyond midnight,
snow-covered white trees like Santa Claus
lining the sides of the avenue,
shoes and dresses of latest fashion,
the parted lips of grief sitting calm
beyond the restaurants' glass-fronts
and -rows of sky-scrappers soaring like
human desires.

And yet
I'll never say 'good bye' and
with a cheroot pressed between my lips,
brief-case in hand, in a brown three-buttoned suit
and a wind-tossed necktie, queue up before a
ticket counter.
I'll never run breathlessly towards the airport,
I'll never board a foreign-bound plane
that brushes shoulders with high-flying clouds.

Translated by K. Ashraf Hossain



THE FIRST POEM ON EKUSHEY

Mahbub Ul Alam Chowdhury

I have not come, where they laid down their lives
under the upward looking Krishnachura trees,
to shed tears.

I have not come, where endless patches of blood
glow like so many fiery flowers, to weep.

Today I am not overwhelmed by grief

Today I am not maddened with anger

Today I am only unflinching

in my determination.

The child who will nevermore get a chance

to rush into his father's arms,

the house-wife who, shielding the lamp

with her sari, will nevermore wait

by the door for her husband,

the mother who will nevermore draw

to her breast with boundless joy

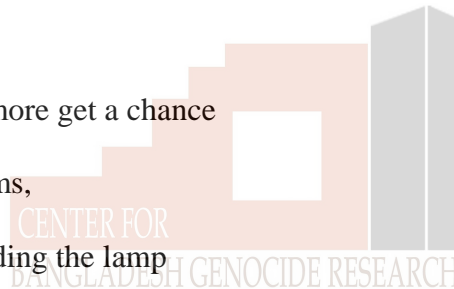
her returning son,

the youngman who, before collapsing

on the earth, tried again and again

to conjure before his eyes the vision

of his beloved,



in their name,
in the name of those brothers and sisters,
in the name of my language,
nourished by the heritage of a thousand years,
in the name of the language in which
I am accustomed to addressing my mother,

in the name of my native land,
I say, I have come today,
here on the open grounds of the university,
to demand their death by hanging,
the death of those who killed
my brothers and sisters indiscriminately.
I have not come here to weep for them
who gave their lives under Ramna's
sun-scorched Krishnachura trees
for their language,
those forty or more who laid down their lives
for Bangla, their mothertongue,
for the dignity of a country's great culture,
for the literary heritage of Alaol,
Rabindranath, Kaikobad and Nazrul,
for keeping alive the bhatiali, bawl,
kirtan and the ghazal,
those who laid down their lives
or Nazrul's unforgettable lines:
"The soil of my native land
is purer than the purest gold"

Forty blooming lives fell
like innumerable Krishnachura petals
on Ramna's soil.

In the husks of the seeds
sprouting therefrom I can see
endless drops of blood,

the blood of young Rameswar and Abdus Salam,
the blood of the most brilliant boys of the university.

I can see each drop of blood

shining on Ramna's green grass like burning flames,
each boy a piece of diamond,
forty jewels of the university,
who, had they lived, would have become
the most precious wealth of the country, in whom
Lincoln, Rolland, Aragon and Einstein had found refuge,
in whom had flourished some of the
most progressive ideals of this century's civilization.
We have not come here to shed tears
where forty jewels sacrificed their lives.
We have not come, either, to plead
for our language to the killers
who had arrived with their rifles loaded,

with orders to shoot our brothers and sisters.

We have come to demand the hanging
of the tyrants and the murderers.

We know that our brothers and sisters were killed,

that they were mercilessly shot,

that one of them was perhaps called 'Osman'

just like you,

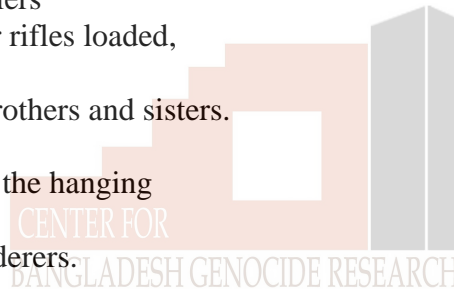
that perhaps one of them had a clerk for his father

just like you, or that one's father was growing

golden crops in some remote village of East Bengal,

or was a government functionary.

Today those boys could be living just like you or me.



Perhaps one of them had his wedding day fixed
just like me.

Perhaps one of them had left on his table,

just like you, his mother's letter

received a moment ago,

hoping to read it when he got back

from the procession he went out to join.

Those boys had harboured concrete dreams
in their breasts,

and they were killed by the bullets
of the cruel tyrants.

In the name of those deaths

I demand that those who wanted to
banish our mother-tongue be hanged,

I demand that those who ordered
the killings be hanged,

I demand that the traitors
who climbed to the seats of power
over the dead bodies of my brothers and
sisters be hanged.

I want to see them tried and shot
as convicted criminals
on that very spot in this open field.

Those first martyrs of the country,
those forty brilliant boys of the university,
each of them had dreams of building
a quiet home in the bosom of this earth
with his wife, children and parents.

They dreamed of analysing
the scientific theories of Einstein with greater depth,
they dreamed of finding ways
to put the atomic power to man's service
in the cause of Peace.

They dreamed of writing a poem
more beautiful than Tagore's 'The Flute Players'.

O my martyred brothers,
the spot where you laid down your lives .

will continue to glow

even after a thousand years.

No footprints of civilization can wipe out



the marks of your blood from that soil,
although procession after procession
will one day converge here
and shatter its vague silence.
The tolling of the university bells
will daily announce the historic hour of your deaths,
even if one day a violent storm
erupted and shook the building's very foundation.
Whatever came to pass
the brightness of your names as hallowed martyrs
would never grow dim.
The cruel hands of the murderers
can never throttle your long cherished hopes.
Some day we shall surely win

and hail the advent of justice and fair play.

O my dead brothers,

on that day, your voices,

the strong voice of Freedom,

will soar from the depths of silence.

The people of my country, on that day,

will surely hang from the gallows

those tyrants and murderers.

On that day, your hopes will shine like flames

in the joy of victory and sweet vengeance.

Translated by Kabir Chowdhury

The poem was written at 7.00 pm on 21st February 1952

