

BANGLADESH

Death of Those Garments Workers

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What's her name? And, his? His? Her?

What's the use value with their names? They had names. But those names are useless now. They are nameless. Or, they could be identified with any name. Shefalee, Halima, Rafiqul, Kabirul, Shohaagee. Below-ordinary guys they were. The names were below-ordinary. Humbled and shackled life bears no name. At terminal point, they just turn into number.

They were faceless. Do faceless souls bear any name? No. Even, names with faceless souls carry no name-value. Put on any ordinary or below-ordinary face on there. Any ordinary or below-ordinary face will fit in appropriately.

Yes. Those faceless faces smiled. Those faceless faces bore lines of pain, overflowing pains. And, at moments, silent signs of anger played on corners of those faces. But all those, pains, anger and smiles slipped into oblivion at regular intervals, into unknown unconscious universe.

They just embodied labor, a source of resource. They embodied labor-power. They were wage-slaves. And, also were sellers. They sold whatever they had. They had only that labor to sell. No commodity could be produced without their labor-power, and no profit could be pocketed without appropriating their labor. But they had no control on their labor-power.

They had liberty. They had no liberty. They were at liberty not to go to labor market and not to sell their labor power. But as hunger was their companion, as uncertainty was their associate, as fear was their yokefellow, as there were dependents on them back at home, they had to turn slave to wage, they had to mortgage their liberty, they had to forget the opportunities liberty offered.

What were the fears they carried in their brains?

The same fears all wage-slaves carry. A sense of "perpetual insecurity.... Fear of losing a job. Fear of not finding a job. ...Fear of boss's wrath." (Michael D Yates "Class : A Personal Story") The fear of, as Sweezy wrote, losing face if turned unemployed. Those were ordinary, simple, petty fears, the fears petty guys nourish: the Lilliputian fear of going hungry, going uncared and untreated if turned sick, the petty fear of eviction from rented home, the trivial fear of failure to maintain family of insignificant dependents. Those fears carry neither use value nor exchange value in markets that sell incensed candles and diamond ornaments and skin whitening cream.

Had they no dream?

Probably, they had. Probably, there was no space for dream. Only hunger, only empty stomach, only thirst for survival, only the desire to squelch an antagonistic time overwhelmed their dream. Or, probably, that thirst, that desire to squelch was their dream. Time worked like a wrench on their life, and pulled out whatever dream they had. Or, probably, needles, threads, buttons and hooks, constantly circling smaller wheels, sharp blades cutting cloth, or, bright lights over head, panes separating them from sunlight, or, railroad stripe, sunny side,

true blue, winter wheat, sunset pink, pitch black, white, yellow, green and sky blue colors overwhelmed their dreams. Probably, their dream fled away towards an absent crimson red. It turned fugitive. Fugitive dreams those were.

What the thoughts they had in their last moments?

What can they think of? The near-to-illiterate or semi-literate folks, almost a nuisance in an honestly crook world, don't think. They just produce, just consume, they just consume only to produce. A sub-human life bears no power to think of anything. How can a guy think if the guy goes down to the level of machine, if the fellow befriends machine and turns into part of machine? Machine's rhythm is their rhythm of life. How can a folk think if he sells out all his time to a merchant named mere survival? They join production line, come back to their dingy dens, consume vulgarly and sleep haphazardly only to turn fit for next day's production. They were miser enough not to allocate any space for reflection. Or, they were not masters of their time that could have allowed them to think or perceive or reflect. Their last moments probably failed to get separated from that time in cage.

Or, probably, they recollected some hopeless faces waiting for them. Probably, those were the hapless faces of their mothers, of fathers or wives, or of innocent faces of their children, minor, absolutely unaware of powerful tentacles of cruel reality. Probably, they thought of their fate abandoned even by fractions of fortune.

Or, probably, they had no intellectual capacity to think at all. That capacity has probably been forfeited long ago.

How many are they, those perished into flames and smokes in the garments factory there near Savar, Dhaka in mid-December'10.

The number, one or thirty-one, does not matter. Insignificant persons create no number. They have no power to generate that arithmetical articulation. Number-game doesn't take them into account. Their produce is calculated only. And, to ensure that produce their consumption is monitored. Their consumption creates markets. That is carefully calculated. They will fail to produce if they don't consume. Capital cannot be generated if they fail to consume. That consumption-failure will bring in failure in production, in productivity and consequently, in regeneration of capital. Their consumption up to a level is good news.

And, the perished-numbers there in a gutted garments factory near Savar is a mere single incident or accident, a simple addition to similar other numbers over the years. Taking into account will simply over-burden a sympathetic mind. It is better to forget those numbers. There is nothing to worry as long as there is a huge reserve army of labor in waiting. New numbers will join in the ranks behind machines. Perished-numbers are always gone with memories. Chariots of commodities will circle trade centers. Is not it better to forget those perished despite their strivings to survive? There are lots of Natha, the burned to death fall guy of Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan's *Peepli Live*. Forget them. Are not they forgotten? Doesn't it bring peace to a sound mind if they are forgotten?

But shall they be forgotten?

Difficult question to answer. Probably. Probably, they will not be. The perished are not necessary-numbers. There is a burgeoning reserve army of labor. Rather, some tricky accounting method will find out an extra niche for extra profit with a perish- puzzle.

A thin possibility of have-not-forgotten-you may reside in the fading memories of an old mother, an ailing father, a young widow with unfriendly world around, a sister, a brother, a daughter or a son. But the grieved will not be allowed to shed tears as a very powerful force

will push them out from the grave of grief. It is the force of hunger, the force of poverty, a major force that shapes lives of millions, that shapes politics. The certainty of uncertainty will pull them out and will not allow them to keep the memories of the perished-numbers alive for long. The grieved below-ordinary near ones have to dry down tears as soon as possible as the whip of survival will dictate that way and they have to run and rush for finding out food, for finding out shelter. It is like luxury to them to sit idle and shed tears. The competing forces in market economy cannot afford that inefficient use of body-power that creates tears.

But time will tick. Probably, someday somewhere someone will dig out facts of perished garments workers' last sleep from the pages of newspapers and from online-newssites and calculate the cost labor paid in search of a decent life. □□□