

MOVEMENT AGAINST INDUSTRIAL SHRIMP IN HARIN KHOLA LED BY LANDLESS LEADER KORUNAMOYEE

MANIK SAHA

It was 13th November in 1990. A mammoth gathering of ten thousands agitated mob of both male and female, led by, Khushi Kabir assembled at Bigardana to protest against the death of Karunamoyee. It also demanded justice for her murder. The armed police tried utmost to disperse this mammoth gathering. Later amidst thousands of struggling poor people, Khushi Kabir firmly declared, "We must go to Harinkola. The valiant lady Karunamoyee has become a martyr there. So we marched three kilometers with chanting slogans and reached the historic place of Harin Khola. Khushi Kabir, the chief coordinator of a voluntary organization *Nijera Kori* laid the foundation stone of the monument in memory of Karunamoyee, the valiant martyr of Harinhkola movement. In a solemn ambience, she declared that every year on 7th November people would gather in this sacred place to pay homage to Karunamoyee. They also took oath to resist shrimp cultivation in that locality.

Harin Khola, a remote village of Khulna lies at Deluty under Paikgacha *Thana*. With the financial aid of Delta Development Project 22 No. polder has been set up in this area. A high embankment has been erected here covering the entire polder to prevent saline water. The project aims at social upliftment of the local people through agricultural development. 17 km. long embankment has saved 22 No. polder from saline water. Nearly eleven thousand cultivatable lands cover the area where more than ten thousand people live.

One Wazed Ali Biswas, a controversial business figure of Khulna town, selected this prohibited area to set up his 30th shrimp enclosure. To materialize his scheme he took the consent of only the owners of 600 *bighas* out of two thousand *bighas*. He left no stone unturned to push saline water in 22 No. Polder through the neighboring Harin Khola *beel*. As a result people of all walks of life, including landless ones, middle class farmers, chairmen of Union parishads, DDP project official reacted violently and they began to mobilize people against shrimp cultivation. Despite knowing every thing a few solvent and some wicked people helped Wazed Ali Biswas to fulfill his dream. A sort of revenge and class struggle instigated them to do so. Under the worthy management of 14 female organizations, 14 landless organizations mobilized all the male and female people of water development board authority and leased 176 acres of *khas* land and began to earn money through co-operative activities. It brought a change in the field of power and influence at the polder. At this the landowners got angry with the landless organizations. Wazed Ali exploited the opportunity and he befriended them. In this circumstance on 16th November '99 at midnight Wazed Ali along with his gang of hooligans rushed to 22 No. Polder by five trawlers and built some watching hut. He even dug some bunkers to protect the probable attack of the local people. The local people came to catch fish at daybreak as their usual course but they were interrupted by the hooligans of Wazed Ali. The news spread fast. On 7th November at 9 a.m. the local

people decided that they would go to Harin Khola and ask Wazed Ali how and on what basis he wanted to make a *gher*. According to the decision, around 9 a.m. thousands of people comprising both male and female of Bigordana approached towards the embankment to make a protest rally. On the other hand the agitated people began to approach from the other side also. When the procession came closer the hooligans suddenly attacked the unarmed village people. Defying the attack the landless women of the front part of the procession boldly advanced ahead. Then the hooligans began to blast bombs. As a result the valiant leader of the landless people, Karunamoyee Sarder fell down on the ground with her blood-smeared body. Her dead body was torn into pieces. At the same time Rupban Bibi, Rahima, Koushalla, Sima, Rahela, Urmila, Haripada and Noor Ali Gazi were injured and they were admitted into different clinics of Khulna city.

The hooligans of Wazed Ali not only used guns and bombs, but also machete, iron rod, stick, and other sharp weapons. Finding the situation unfavorable they left the spot carrying along with them the dead body of Karunamoyee and wounded Rupban Bibi. They thought like Karunamoyee Rupban also died. But as she was alive they threw her on the bank of the river at night.

On 8 November early in the morning, people discovered her lying half-dead and admitted her into a clinic at Khulna. Later even she was arrested because of her participation in the procession. The police of Paikgacha Thana visited the spot one hour after the massacre was over. The whole situation was so tragic that the spot seemed to be a battlefield. Police was not far away from Harin Khola, but according to the local people, Wazed Ali bribed the police earlier. That is why they played a passive role. Later on police arrested ten villagers and seized two trawlers left by the hooligans of Wazed Ali.

7th November was a government holiday. So naturally the administrative activities were almost nil. This is why Wazed Ali chose the day and took the advantages of his armed hooligans to try to occupy 22 No. polder of Harin Khola under Delta Development Project. Soon the news reached the concerned authority of Paikgacha and Dhaka. Especially Netherland Embassy, the central office of *Nijera Kori*, high police officials, journalists and politicians got very anxious about the attack. They reacted seriously. For this reason the DIG of Khulna range Mr. Shohudul Haque, other high officials, Dr. Subinoy Nondi, a socio-economic advisor to DDP, political leaders, journalists Manik Chandra Saha and some other journalists reached the spot on 8th November. Even at that time the very embankment of Harin Khola seemed to be a battlefield. The used shell of bullets, bunker and innumerable traces of bomb blasts were still visible. The bloodstain of dead Karunamoyee and so many others wounded people looked fresh. Teeth and torn hair were found hanging on the branches of a nearby Babla tree. A heart-breaking situation was created after the recovery of these things. On the other hand a tense situation engulfed Harin Khola, Bigordana, Noai and the entire 22 no. Polder. Most of the people left home to escape arrest and harassment of the police. After the occurrence police was deployed there. But due to their partial role people could not trust them. Despite the assurance given by the high police officials the police of Paikgacha

thana forced Ajit , the son of deceased Karunamoyee to put a signature on a blank white paper and filed a case with Paikgacha *thana*, In this case Wazed Ali and his fellow accused the people and police began to harass innocent people of the village. Even the wounded ones, who were admitted into different clinics of Khulna, were deprived from proper treatment due to police harassment.

After the demise of Karunamoyee people of Harin Khola, were so much agitated against the illegal *gher* owner and their oppressive activities that as a result, various organizations held meetings, brought out processions, submitted memoranda, and arranged press conferences. Consequently people of Paikgacha and Khulna also held meetings. On 9th November to observe the situation in person the first secretary of Netherland Embassy J.C. Vandarlan came to visit Harin Khola. At that time the officials of DDP and the Deputy Commissioner of Khulna accompanied him. Keeping the importance of the matter in view Mr. Gaen, Ambassador of Netherland in Dhaka visited Harin Khola. He talked to the villagers. His visit played a positive role among the local people as well as the local administration. The newspapers published the news of his visit with top most priority.

After the death of Karunamoyee the members of the landless organizations guided by *Nijere Kori* assembled themselves to expedite the movement. They worked relentlessly. On 13th November a protest demonstration was arranged at Bigordana primary school premise to make the people of the polder confident and to stop police harassment. The demonstration demanded immediate arrest of the killers of Karunamoyee. In this demonstration Khushi Kabir, coordinator of *Nijera Kori* spoke as chief guest. Among others Mohiuddin Ahmed, Rashiduzzaman, Advocate S.M. Yusuf, Somendra Nath Halder delivered speeches. Md. Barek Gazi presided over the meeting. In this protest demonstration Khushi Kabir declared that Wazed Ali, murderer of Karunamoyee would be resisted at any cost because he had violated government rules and ignored public opinion. She also demanded the immediate arrest of Wazed Ali and his fellow murderers.

At the end of the protest demonstration Khushi Kabir led a mammoth gathering of thousands of people and reached Harin Khola from Bigordana crossing a distance of 3 km. There she laid the foundation stone in memory of the martyr Karunamoyee. A huge agitated crowd led by Khushi Kabir, ignoring a band of armed police barricade, moved ahead. They took oath to materialize the dream of Karunamoyee. Their endeavor made the local people emotional and inspired them. It was November 16 in 1990. They vowed to continue combined movements to the last drop of their blood.

Various political and socio-cultural bodies, under the banner of Paikgacha Thana Annoy Protirodh Committee (Unjust Action Prevention Committee) unitedly demanded arrest of Wazed Ali and his gang, the killers of Karunamoyee. They also demanded exemplary punishment of the killers. Besides, they expressed their voice against the illegal shrimp cultivation in the cultivable land.

On November 19 this organization arranged a huge protest meeting at the *Shaheed Minar* premise of Paikgacha. Among others Advocate Sohrab Ali Sana, Advocate S.M. Yusuf, Narayan Chandra Chanda of Awami League (AL), Sultan Ahmed and Sarwar Tarafder of Communist Party, Mominuddin Sarder and Kalu Saha of Communist League, Somendra Nath Haldar, Chairman of Deluti Union Parisad, Madhab Roy, Shyamolie Bairagi and Tara Mia, Central executive of *Nijera Kori* spoke in the meeting. The meeting claimed judicial inquiry of the killing of Korunamoyee within ten days. At the end of the protest meeting a large demonstration went round the important roads and submitted a memorandum to the *Thana* Executive Officer.

Wazed Ali earned immense money through shrimp cultivation. He also enjoyed much influence under the banner of Jatio Party (JP). But his influence deflated after the fall of General Ershad through mass movement. As a result Wazed Ali had to face pressure from different quarters. For this reason Khulna District Police arrested Wazed Ali as the murderer of Karunamoyee and sent him to the court. But he was granted bail on 14th, a Friday, though the day was a weekly holiday.

Against this all the political parties reacted strongly. Later on 18th December the Deputy Commissioner of Khulna withdrew Thana Magistrate Monsur Ali due to the protest movement of 8, 7 and 5 party alliances and all student fronts. Prior to this, all political leaders boycotted the programme on 16th December's victory day as a protest of the bail of Wazed Ali.

On 24th December people of all walks of life of Divisional city of Khulna gathered at Shaheed Hadis Park. The gathering aimed at making the news media and District Administration active against the cruel killing of Karunamoyee and mischievous activities of the *gher* owner and his paid hooligans in 22 polders.

Thousands of people both male and female carried posters, festoons, placards and banners demanding the hanging of Wazed Ali and end of shrimp cultivation. They began to gather at Shaheed Hadis Park chanting different slogans. Students, laborers, youths of the city and many leaders and activists of different political parties joined them. Khulna city burst into chanted slogans. By 2 p.m. the park was brim full. About fifteen thousand people assembled there. Most of them came from villages and they belonged to the have-nots class. In fact they were the real power of the anti *gher* movement. In this huge gathering 8,7 and 5 party alliances, United Communist League, all student front, combined cultural front, youth movement front, volunteer organization *Nijera Kori* participated spontaneously and the gathering was really an exceptional one after the fall of Ershad, the then autocrat. Even Jatio Party leaders who lost their power only 18 days back supported the anti Wazed Ali movement and demanded his arrest. Communist Leader Rashiduzzaman, the convener of Annoy Protirodh Committee presided over the protest meeting in which Khushi Kabir, the chief of *Nijera Kori*, Prof. Sardar Abdur Razzaqu and Adv. S.M. Yusuf of Awami League (AL), Nazrul Islam Manju of BNP, Sheikh Moniruzzaman and Advocate Firoz Ahmed of Communist Party, Azizul Islam of JSD, Ashrafuzzaman of NAP, Zillur Rahman of United Communist League, Ruhul Azim Rumi of combined student front, Dr. Ganendra Nath Bala of combined cultural

organization, Shymal Singha of youth front and Somendra Nath Halde, Chairman, Deluti Union Parisad addressed the meeting. In this gathering a proposal was taken in which the arrest of Wazed Ali, dismissal of S.P. Khulna, A.S.P. Paikgacha circle and the immediate transfer of Divisional and Deputy Commissioner of Khulna were strongly demanded. AL leader Advocate Sohrab Ali Sana read out the proposal and the proposal was accepted with huge clapping by the people. Next day on 25th December on stand release order of the transfer of Z.I. Talukder, SP Khulna was passed.

On 14th December SP Khulna accepted the charge sheet of Karunamoyee murder case. Perhaps he was earlier informed of his transfer. Besides he could not ignore anymore the political pressure and public opinion.

The charge was framed against accused Wazed Ali, the main murderer. Another 35 men were also included in the charge sheet. Paikgacha *Thana* court duly accepted the charge sheet.

Then Wazed Ali began to chalk out plans how he could get rid of the charge of murder. At last he became successful. He was able to influence the high police officials to transfer the case to CID. As it is known from the complain of Ajit, Wazed Ali managed the police by bribing them huge money. The CID police brought the charge sheet back from Paikgacha court for further investigation. Thus the accused got rid of punishment for the time being.

The CID police began the investigation and after a few days the people could realize the fact that the investigation of CID was nothing but a bluff. It was merely a time killing ploy. By this time Wazed Ali joined BNP with the direct help of two high-ranking leaders, though he was earlier beaten by the agitated activists of BNP at the circuit house in Khulna. His new political identity helped him a lot to influence the CID.

The CID began to investigate the case but the complainant of the case complained against the investigation officer himself of conspiracy and partiality. Despite this the CID made a charge sheet in 1994 sitting on the case for long three years. In this case 18 people were accused but Wazed Ali was excluded. It was completely an illegal charge sheet. According to the prevalent law, if a charge sheet is once submitted, it can never be changed even if the investigation is done for the second time, no accused can be excluded and none gets rid of the charge, Rather more accused may be included in that very charge sheet.

In support of this provision of law the learned magistrate of Paikgacha court took the charge sheet. He also took the previous one and passed an order for all the accused including Wazed Ali to appear before the court. He added in that order that in case of failure, their goods would be seized. The learned magistrate took proper as well as lawful action in spite of heavy administrative and political pressure. It was possible because of his honesty. Besides he was an upright justice and later he had to pay heavily for this step. He was transferred from Paikgacha in two days after he had passed the order. On the other hand Wazed Ali challenged the order and filed a criminal case

with ADM court, Khulna. Though the learned ADM is not entitled to administer this sort of case, he passed an ambiguous order illegally at the time of his transfer from Khulna.

The lawyers nominated by *Nijera Kori*, on behalf of the plaintiff, submitted a revision suit to the District Judge court against the judgment. After that Wazed Ali adopted various devices so that the hearing of the case would be delayed. Besides he tried his best to transfer the case to the Additional District and Session Court. He did so only to bid time. Later on 18th August 1996, the learned justice conferred the judgment in favor of the plaintiff. As a result a warrant was issued against Wazed Ali but he put an appeal to the High Court against the judgment of Khulna Judge Court. The honorable judge postponed the order of the lower court. At present the case is waiting for hearing. On the other hand the case filed by the manager of Wazed Ali against 47 innocent villagers is going on. All these 47 accused are the leaders and activists of the anti *gher* movement. This case was framed in two folds. Firstly they were accused of killing one *gher* watchman and kidnapping his dead body. Secondly they were blamed for possessing explosives. The accused have been released of the first complain but the other one is continuing. As a result, these 47 people of 22 No. polders have been suffering a lot as they have to appear before the court from a long distance of nearly 60 kilometers. The explosives case is still under trial.

Karunamoyee was murdered at broad daylight. But the judgment of this case has yet to come to light. Long seven years have passed but the justice is yet to be delivered. Apart from conferring judgment, the accused of these cases are yet to be traced. As a result, a sort of ambiguity is working among the family members of Karunamoyee as well as the people who participated in the movement.