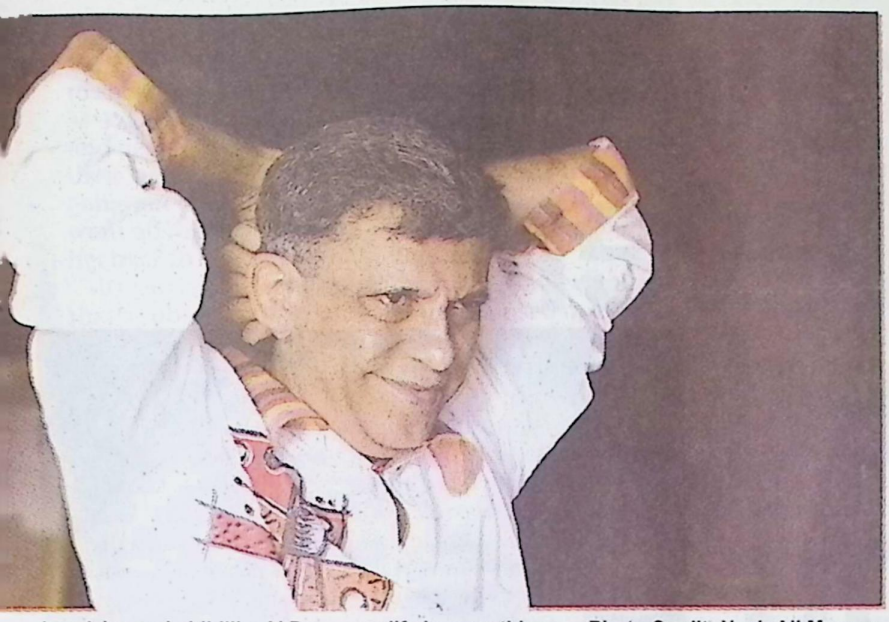


Impulsive and childlike Al Deen saw life in everything. Photo Credit: Nasir Ali Mamun.

he managed to get dramatics as a subsidiary and then an honours course under the Bnagla department. By this time he had found a comrade in one of his students Afsar Ahmed who later became his colleague and close friend. With the help of Afsar, Al Deen managed to convince a sceptical senate to introduce a dramatics department at Jahangirnagar University.

His way of teaching was quite out of the ordinary. Says Dr. Afsar Ahmed: "Once when I was still a student he called me for a customary walk and said: 'let me baptize you,' he made me go up a Shimul tree to pick a flower. It was not easy as there were many thorns. Then he told me that this was my initiation into gaining knowledge and to keep me seeking it outside the textbooks. 'Go near nature' he said."

Al Deen would often take his students for such nature walks where he would be actually taking the class. He would ask his students to hear the music of nature, the notes of leaves, trees and breeze.

"He did not want a formal, stilted relationship with his students" says Dr Sajedul Rahman Chanchal, a dramatics teacher at JU who was a second batch student of Al Deen's. "While we walked till 8 or 9 at night, he would be constantly talking about literature and culture. He was like an encyclopaedia and would think about every aspect of a play. He made us do pieces from the Mahabharata which was highly appreciated.

"Now I feel really bad that as students we really didn't appreciate his depth and dimension."

"Sometimes Sir would make us take his class as early as 830 am which was very difficult for us," says Ehsanur Rahman, a Dhaka Theatre member and who was Al Deen's 4th batch student, " but once he started talking, we would be mesmerised and would want the class to go on. We could never get bored, even when he took three classes altogether...He would always be experimenting with techniques and was also very demanding. We had to read a lot and research extensively to prepare for his classes. He would always insist that you must practically apply what you have learnt and it must be done perfectly. I have learnt everything I know from him."

For Begumzadi Meherunnessa, Al Deen's life partner whom he called by her nickname Parul, there is little consolation that he has left such a legacy of love and admiration. Always a big fan of his work, she tried hard to give him the support he needed for his intellectual endeavours. "He was always extremely hardworking and sincere about his work" says Meherunnessa, a teacher of Jahangirnagar School and College. "He was always full of new ideas, theories and would work at all odd hours, sometimes before dawn."

According to Meherunnessa, Al Deen had little time for social obligations and hardly went to any dinners or weddings. The only TV channels he watched were National Geographic and Discovery. The best time was spent at Meherunnessa's village home where his mother-in-law doted on him and where he would be constantly up to something going fishing with his younger inlaws, going to the village fairs or markets, meeting the local bards and mystics, going on date-juice procuring expeditions or with his companions a boat ride on a full moon night.

His illness and death was a rude shock to his wife and other loved ones. "He use to say, 'I just want another ten years to finish my plays", says Meherunnessa. He still had a few unfinished plays she says including Rupborno, Moyurjan and Har Haddi. "He was not conventionally religious but had great faith in the Creator. He always asked me to pray that he could finish what he had started."

Lately, says Meherunnessa, Al Deen had been preoccupied by death. He had gone to his mother-in law's grave and taken a leaf from a plant growing there and touched it to his forehead, a symbolic gesture of taking her blessing before leaving. He had in many ways said goodbye to his friends but no one was ready to let go of this remarkable, exceptionally gifted man who had touched so many lives with his intellect and endearing personality. ■