# Remembering Architect-guru Muzharul Islam

**SHAMSUL WARES**

The Art College (now Faculty of Fine Arts) building in Dhaka University campus, designed by architect Muzharul Islam (1923-2012) and constructed between 1953 and 1955, is considered the first modern building in Bangladesh. Although Muzharul Islam adapted the Western ideals and thoughts in his works, due to his extraordinary sensitivity, creative power and deep understanding of our society, culture, economy and particularly the sub-tropical, climatic conditions of Bangladesh he was almost single-handedly able to create a distinct and useful modern architectural language for Bangladesh, which even today has not lost any of its initial vigour and relevance.



Muzharul Islam prepared himself for the task and was able to create a unique piece of architecture that is at modern and was at the same time rooted to its land, a parallel is yet to be found anywhere in South Asia.

During 1940-46 when Muzharul Islam was an undergraduate student pursuing civil engineering at Shibpur Engineering College in Kolkata, he was directly involved with political as well as cultural activities. Through these activities, he came in contact with two visions. One that of Marxism and the other was the cultural vision for a Tagorian elitist, purist but tender humanism of the 19th Century Bengal Renaissance. His whole personality took place in the balancing of the two.

It was in 1950, when Muzharul Islam, a young bright civil engineer, left Dhaka to study architecture at the Oregon University. After graduation in architecture Muzharul Islam came back to Dhaka from the US and joined the government (CB & I) service in 1953 as a special officer in Architecture under the Consulting Architect (Chief Architect) R McConnel. In 1950, it was decided to establish a College of Arts and Crafts with five departments (Painting, sculp-