Waheedul Haque ... our Renaissance Man

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

He was the man who brought me into the enlightening world of journalism. He educated me on the nuances of politics. He gave me new insights into Tagore, into Bose, indeed into the ever-widening expanses of Bengali music and literature. He reflected on Marxism and delighted in the achievements of communism in the Soviet Union and China. He marveled at the transformation of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Bangabandhu. From him I learned of plants and trees, of the history behind them. On sultry summer afternoons, he spoke of physics, of space science, of the ubiquity of the universe.

Waheedul Haque was my guru. I was and I am proud to have been his disciple.

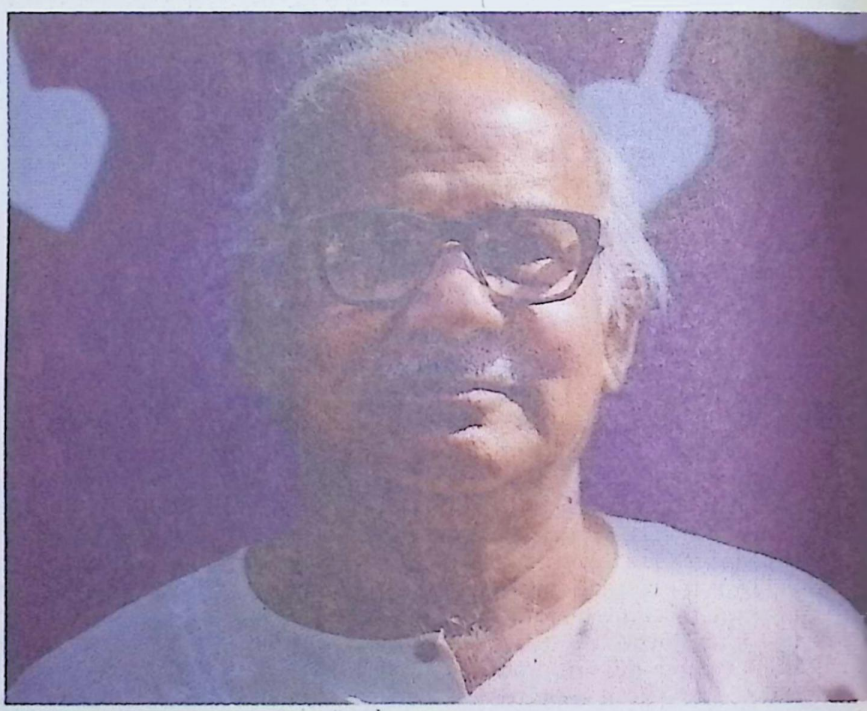


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Waheedul Haque

To his thousands of admirers, students and friends, he was always Waheed Bhai, our very own Waheed Bhai. It could be a seventy year-old man. It could be a teenager ready to take the plunge into Tagore music. It was forever Waheed Bhai they turned to. There was the reassuring about him. He was accessible to everyone. There was not a shred of the humbug about him. Hubris did not touch him.

He was a celebrity who refused to have anything to do with celebrity status. With that ubiquitous jhola, slung on his shoulder, he was regularly off on a journey to the interior of Bangladesh or sometimes to the quiet environs of Shantiniketan. When he was not doing that, he was going off to the newspaper offices he had worked in for decades. In the final years of his life, it was the columns he sent from home to the Bangla newspapers in the city that served as a reminder that Waheedul Haque was yet very much around.

There was a courageous soul in this small, almost frail-looking man. For him, humility did not have to translate into the meek. That was a point he made early on in his life in the world of Bengali culture. We are talking here, of course, of all the efforts he expended into making a success of the Tagore centenary celebrations in what used to be East Pakistan in 1961. Consider the risks Waheedul Haque and his friends deliberately went through. Waheed Bhai, through the newly formed cultural group *Chhayanaut*, put up a spirited defence of Bengal's heritage. He invited Justice Syed Mahbub Murshed, the culture-conscious Chief Justice of the East Pakistan High Court, to preside over the celebrations. The rest is certainly history.

It was in organisation that Waheedul Haque excelled. *Chhayanaut* had proved conclusively his mettle in the field. But nowhere were his organisa-