Man and Superman

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It was around 11:30 at night. The deserted streets of Dhanmondi take a ghostly look at this hour. Save for a group of mongrels curling up for some wink's sleep, there was not a single soul in the street. When the night-watchman saw a rickshaw at this time of the night he blew his whistle, the sharp sound which reminded Abdul Gafur, a rickshaw puller, that it was time to get back home.

Gafur was very worried about his passenger. He felt there was something wrong about him even when he hailed the rickshaw. After reaching his destination, when the man fell down from the rickshaw, Gafur and the guard rushed to hold him and at that time it dawned on Gafur that his passenger was drunk.

When the man got back to his feet he offered Gafur a note of Tk 500 instead of the fare – Tk 20. At first Gafur was startled, later he refused to take the money. Then the man threw a bundle of Tk 500 notes at Gafur. The guard and a few other men insisted him to take the money and leave the place quickly. Gafur says, "With almost Tk 50,000 in my hand, the face of my sons who are still studying came to my mind. It was more than my year's income. So I thought I would take it. But then suddenly I thought that it was not fair. I asked myself that if I took the money from this man what would my answer be to Allah in the day of judgement. So I refused to take the money."

Not only did Gafur refuse to take the notes, he gathered them all, put them into the man's pocket, and took the man to the entrance to his home.

Gafur says, "I have been pulling rickshaw in Dhaka for more than 10 years. I am happy with what I have. I am working hard so that my two sons get educated and can get a good job. My elder son is studying degree honours and my youngest son is in standard eight."

Originally he was a weaver in Boalmari, Pabna, which used to be a hub of the handloom industry. But some 15 years ago when electric handloom started to replace its traditional counterpart, hundreds of weavers like Gafur who could not afford to buy the expensive machine lost their job.

Gafur says, "My father thought that my skill as a weaver would be enough to run my family. So he never thought of sending me to school. I was taught to operate handlooms and knew a little bit of farming. When it became obsolete, I faced some real danger. A small chunk of land could hardly feed my big family. So upon the advice of my brother-in-law I came to Dhaka and started to pull rickshaw."

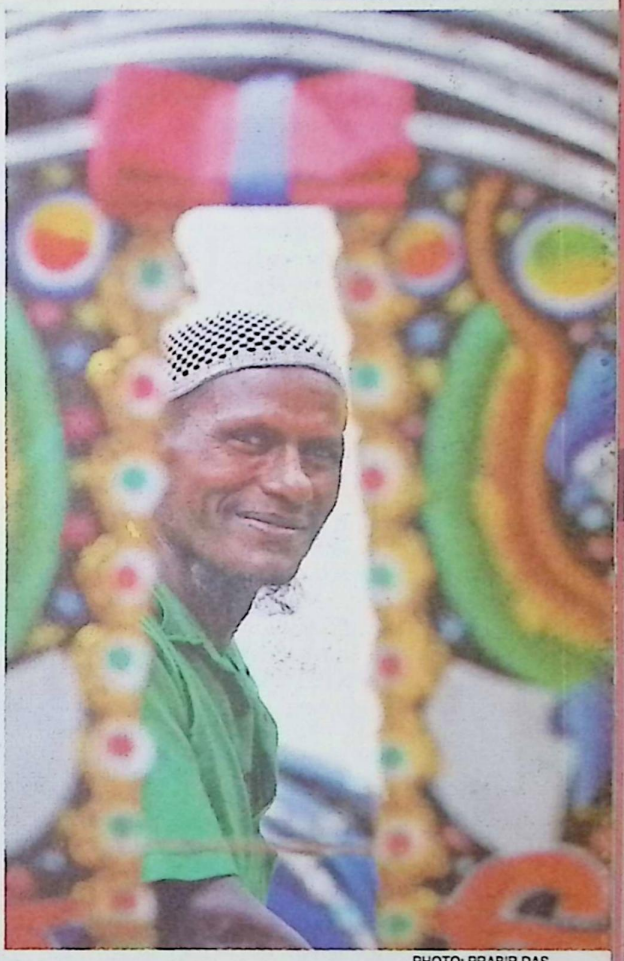


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Abdul Gafur epitomises the human values that are disappearing from our society.

The poor rickshaw-puller, with his hard earned money, has ensured his children's education. His eldest son Raihan is studying at Chatmohor Degree College. His only daughter has studied up to grade 12 and is now married to a young farmer. Gafur's youngest son is a student of class eight of a village high school.

At 47, Gafur sometimes wants to take some rest after a day's backbreaking work, but the thought of his sons' future makes him get ready for the next day's challenge. Amidst the reckless driving of luxurious cars, rushing buses and trucks of enormous size, Gafur's little rickshaw plies on the busy streets of Dhaka.

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