

A Personal View of Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid

TAZEEN M. MURSHID

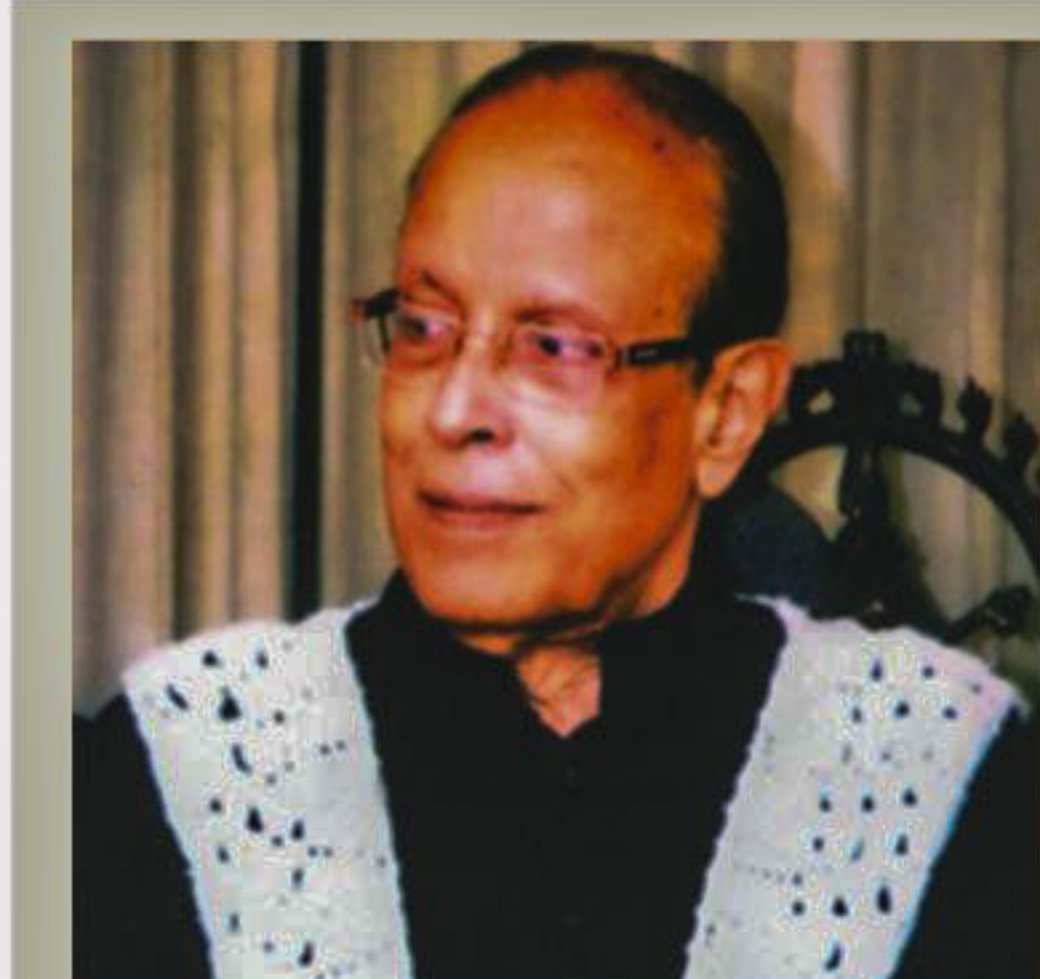
I have been contemplating about how my father, Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid, became an aesthete. Over the years he came to embody a personality that combined refinement and sensitivity alongside a Herculean pursuit of knowledge. Often referred to by former students as the best dressed man at Dhaka University, where he taught several generations of them, he also was idealised as a national icon, a role model, and 'the conscience of the nation' as he struggled for a sane society in Bangladesh. While these aspects of his life have been discussed, the image of him as an aesthete is less explored.

I have wondered about what made my dad special, made him stand out, be a cut above the rest. How does a shy, frail home-schooled child become so eloquent, so erudite, so charming, so principled, and so upright? How did he come to be so noted for his use of language, his oratory in both Bangla and English, his style of dressing, bearing and manner of speaking - all the hallmarks of an aesthete?

There is no other from his family or generation that could match him in this regard. Yet some influences are traceable. Beauty and looks were household topics of discussion. His father and grandfather were tall and handsome men. As an MLA in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, his father Maulvi Ali Ahmed Khan cut an impressionable figure as the handsomest and most presentable, so the saying goes in Brahmanbaria circles. Ali Ahmed Khan

had few clothes, but whenever he went out, he was impeccably dressed in his starched white kurta-pajama, or dark sherwani for formal occasions.

Some have wondered whether Sarwar's style and taste derived from his foreign travels to the UK and the US in the fifties and sixties; he had studied for his PhD in Nottingham and enjoyed a fellowship at Harvard, subsequently. To



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an extent for sure, his taste for sober suits owes to English influences, while his interest in colours probably can be traced to his stint in America where colourful summer wear for men was common. But he developed his own style and colour combinations that matched his personality, the demands of the weather alongside his quest for beauty and perfection.

garish colours, the lack of symmetry wherever he found it, the local idea of beauty as fair and limited to the face only, the petty criticism of neighbours common in provincial towns and villages. In fact, he decided that the only way out of such a world was to create one in your own image of the ideal; in which, through personal example, you demonstrate how a refined and cul-

teel language and the pursuit of perfect speech in English. He learnt the Queen's English from no other than Richard Burton, listening to his records, and repeating the phrases again and again to achieve the most sophisticated pronunciation possible. He looked up the phonetic spelling of words to ensure that he uttered the right sounds.

A friend arguably commented that he was perhaps a 'dandy'. This is to

Paying A Hefty Price

The sorry state of consumer rights protection in Bangladesh



NAHELA NOWSHIN

The state of protection of consumer rights in Bangladesh is in shambles. The implementation of CRPA has been extremely poor and there's no serious political commitment towards the protection of consumer rights.

We, as a nation, are so accustomed to market inflations that expectations of price hikes, especially on holidays or festivals, have become deeply entangled with our consumption habits. Eid is around the corner, and as per tradition, shoppers are scrambling to get fresh, trendy outfits before prices skyrocket at the end of the month. We expect prices of ilish to soar on the eve of Pahela Baishakh, of flowers on February 21, New Year's Eve and Valentine's Day, of clothes and bus fares for those who are homebound before Eid, and so on. It is now "normal" to pay double or triple the amount for a product which wasn't so costly just a month earlier. But (false) promises made by businessmen and politicians of keeping prices stable are heard year after year... and more often than not the "best case scenario" is one where prices increase at a slower pace.

In a customary speech of assurance, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed had said at a review meeting earlier in June, "No one will be able to create an artificial crisis to make extra profit, as there is adequate supply of the essentials." But as expected, prices of essentials such as onions, brinjal and spices hiked during the month of Ramadan. The price of about 30 types of commodities used in the preparation of Iftar and Sehri is said to have risen sharply.

How reasonable are such prices that we have come to expect and accept? What do we know about the products

we're buying? In other words, what do we, as consumers, know about our rights as buyers? Are the responsible bodies in charge of ensuring consumer rights doing their part?

Until 2009, when the Consumer Rights Protection Act (CRPA) was introduced, no unified law with regard to consumer rights was in place. Prior to that, there were about 40 different scattered pieces of legislation in the field of consumer rights such as the Bangladesh Standard Testing Institute (BSTI) Ordinance, 1985, and the Control of Essential Commodities Act, 1956. However, with the enactment of the CRPA in 2009, consumers were finally given statutory rights to address malpractices in the market that violate these laws. Among many things, it gave ministries the right to take action against sellers for the production of goods or services deemed harmful. Now, how successful has the CRPA been in protecting the consumer's rights six years later?

To put it simply, the state of protection of consumer rights in Bangladesh is in shambles. The implementation of CRPA has been extremely poor and there's no serious political commitment towards the protection of consumer rights. There is no central regulatory body fully dedicated towards monitoring market prices. Whenever the responsible parties are under the media's spotlight, bodies such as the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) are seen to regulate prices when the latter reach an astronomical high (perhaps to placate the masses... one wonders).

Just recently, BSTI conducted an anti-adulteration inspection at the Iftar market in Chawk Bazar where a mobile court fined five food shops for a total

Tk 3.4 lakh. Due to their wide media coverage, the public gets the sense that "something's being done" to address these crises. But in reality, apart from such sporadic inspections, these ad hoc regulatory bodies remain missing in action for the most part.

After hollow assurances are made by politicians and other "responsible" parties to maintain stable prices, the forces behind price manipulation soon become evident. And they rarely have anything to do with demand and supply. Unethical practices of hoarding leading to artificial crises result in the ultimate burden falling on the consumer for which s/he pays the price, literally, as retailers and wholesalers continue to point fingers at one another for price hikes. Businessmen and traders, under the guise of piety, speak against exploiting the common people, while taking advantage of the masses during Ramadan—one of the holiest times of the year.

As a general rule, it should be noted that a consumer protection law does not guarantee consumer interests. For instance, in Germany, there is no such law in place but there is a national policy which means it actually gets implemented. In contrast, here in Bangladesh, we have no central effective institution tasked with the regular monitoring of the marketplace and no cohesive plan of action.

The CRPA has its drawbacks, the biggest one being its bureaucratic nature. Although the Act itself is for the protection of "consumer" rights, the scope for citizen participation isn't nearly sufficient. In most countries, consumers can file complaints through a designated institution but in Bangladesh, under the CRPA consumers

TYPES OF ACTION NEEDED TO PROMOTE CONSUMERS' INTERESTS

1. PROTECTION AGAINST RISKS OF PHYSICAL INJURY TO PERSONS OR PROPERTY AND AGAINST USELESS PRODUCTS
2. PROTECTION AGAINST IMPROPER MARKETING MEASURES
3. PROTECTION AGAINST ONE-SIDED CONTRACT TERMS
4. PROVISION OF EFFECTIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCEDURES FOR CONSUMERS
5. MONITORING OF THE MECHANISM WHEREBY PRICES AND RATES ARE FIXED
6. SURVEILLANCE OF JEOPARDISING AND UNETHICAL PRACTICES
7. PLANNING OF A CONSUMER EDUCATION PROGRAMME

SOURCE: <http://www.asaub.edu.bd/data/asaubreview/v3n2sl15.pdf>

have to obtain the approval of the Director General (appointed by the government) to file a complaint. Not only are the members of the National Consumer Rights Protection Council and National Consumers Protection Directorate all appointed by the government, but there is also a severe lack of

representatives of consumers and legal expertise which only crystallises the reality that is low citizenry involvement.

Workshops, reports and suggestions are rarely followed up. For instance, were the recommendations made in the joint analysis report (in collaboration with government of Bangladesh, UNIDO and others) of the CRPA ever implemented? In a failed bid to find some answers, I tried to get in touch with members of Consumers Association of Bangladesh but gave up after being handed wrong, out-of-service numbers.

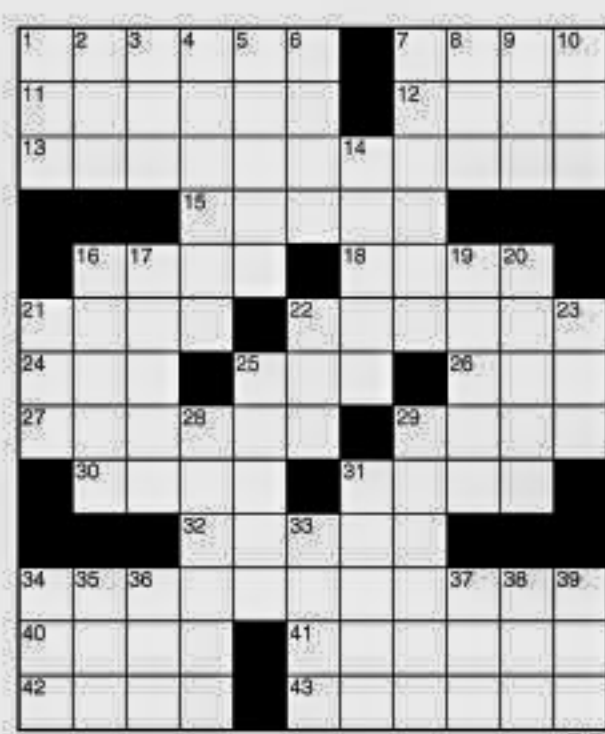
Apart from the indifference of organisations which seem to have been set up for show to give the impression that the government is dedicated to comply with "international standards" of consumer rights, widespread apathy and illiteracy among the masses are to blame for low consumer awareness as well. Not only that, people want to avoid the legal battle altogether due to a sluggish, inefficient judicial process and the risk of enduring harassment at the court.

The general paranoia that we all have of the marketplace, especially when it comes to food adulteration (thanks to epidemics such as formalin abuse), largely stems from the failure to properly implement the CRPA and protect our rights as consumers. Given the extent to which we are apathetic about health in general as a nation, it's of little surprise just how desensitised we have become to news about melamine in baby food and children dying from pesticide contaminated litchis. And that's not normal. With a growing consumer base, the need to raise consumer awareness and safeguard consumer rights has never been more urgent.

The writer is a journalist at The Daily Star.

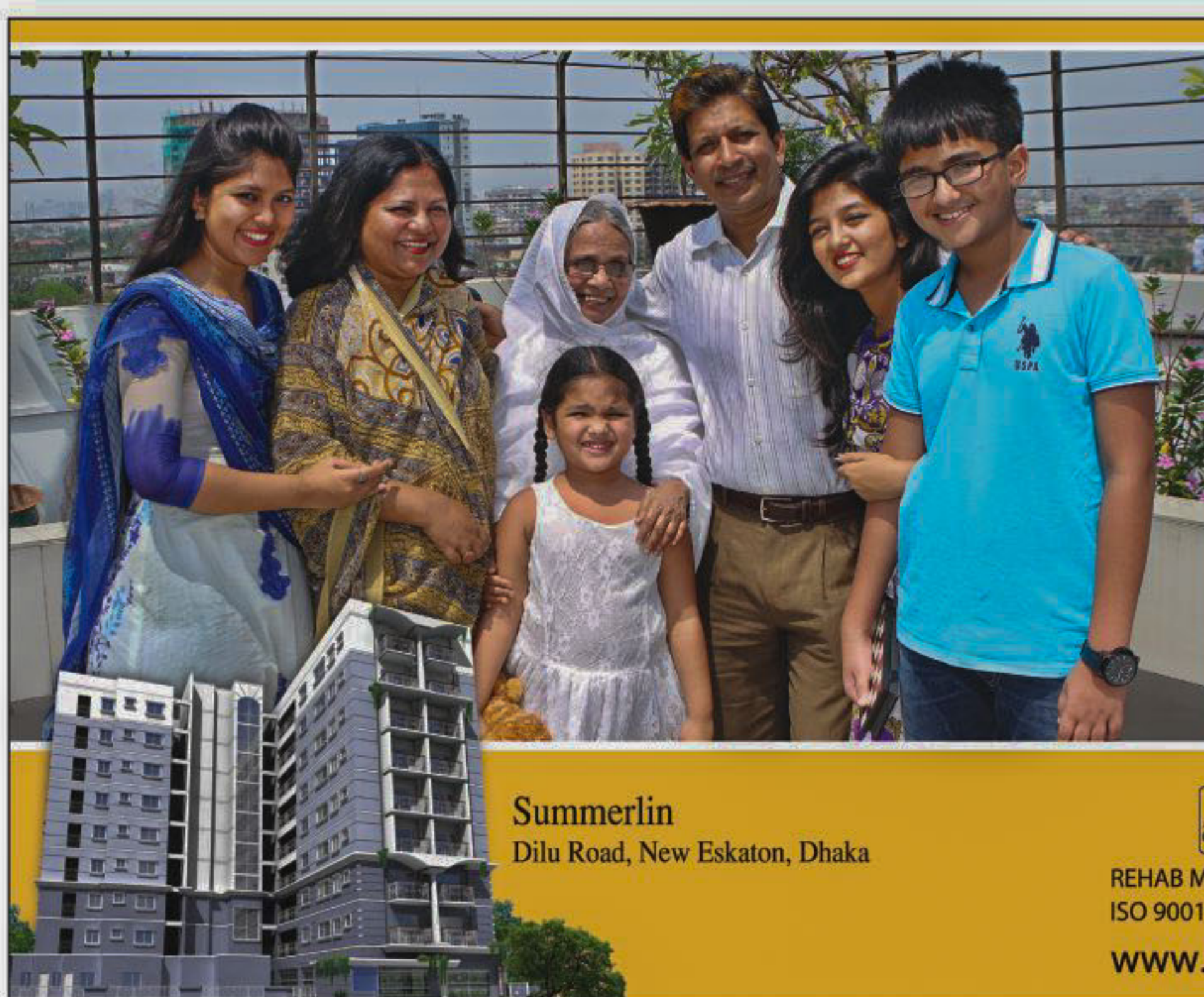
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS
- 1 Nursery item
 - 7 Like stallions
 - 11 Baltimore player
 - 12 Egyptian goddess
 - 13 Coastal grasslands
 - 15 Danger
 - 16 Ump's call
 - 18 Ring out
 - 21 Clock reading
 - 22 Falsified, as figures
 - 24 Boxing's "Greatest"
 - 25 Bunny move
 - 26 "The Matrix" hero
 - 27 Baseball's Jackson
 - 29 Floe
 - 30 Tooth part
 - 31 Church event
 - 32 Lipstick slip
 - 34 Pungent plant
 - 40 Storybook monster
 - 41 Pilot Earhart
 - 42 Swimming spot
 - 43 Pay
- DOWN
- 1 Parties
 - 2 Radio's Glass
 - 3 Feel poorly
 - 4 Dish with a crust
 - 5 Bugs' rival
 - 6 Caboose setting
 - 7 Deceived
 - 8 Cigar remnant
 - 9 Tell tales
 - 10 Twisty letter
 - 14 Tatter
 - 16 Office clerk, at times
 - 17 Baja buddy
 - 19 De Mille of dance
 - 20 Lusty looks
 - 21 Road goo
 - 22 Enemy
 - 23 Beagle or boxer
 - 25 Blackjack player's request
 - 28 Church reading
 - 29 Gun part
 - 31 Molten rock
 - 33 Historic times
 - 34 Cork sound
 - 35 Sense of self
 - 36 Debate side
 - 37 In the style of
 - 38 Knight's title
 - 39 Utter



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

W H I S T A R O M A
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