



# Remembrance: Shahid Ghyasuddin Ahmed

REZAUDDIN CHOWDHURY

As a student of Dhaka University I was fortunate enough to come in contact with a remarkable person like Mr. Ghyasuddin Ahmed, an outstanding teacher and a humanitarian. I do not have competence to write an essay on his scholastic accomplishment or a biographical note on his life and role in the war of liberation, only thing that I can do is pay tribute to his unforgettable memory by narrating a few incidents focusing on the humanitarian aspect of his character. This is also a vain attempt at soothing my guilty conscience.

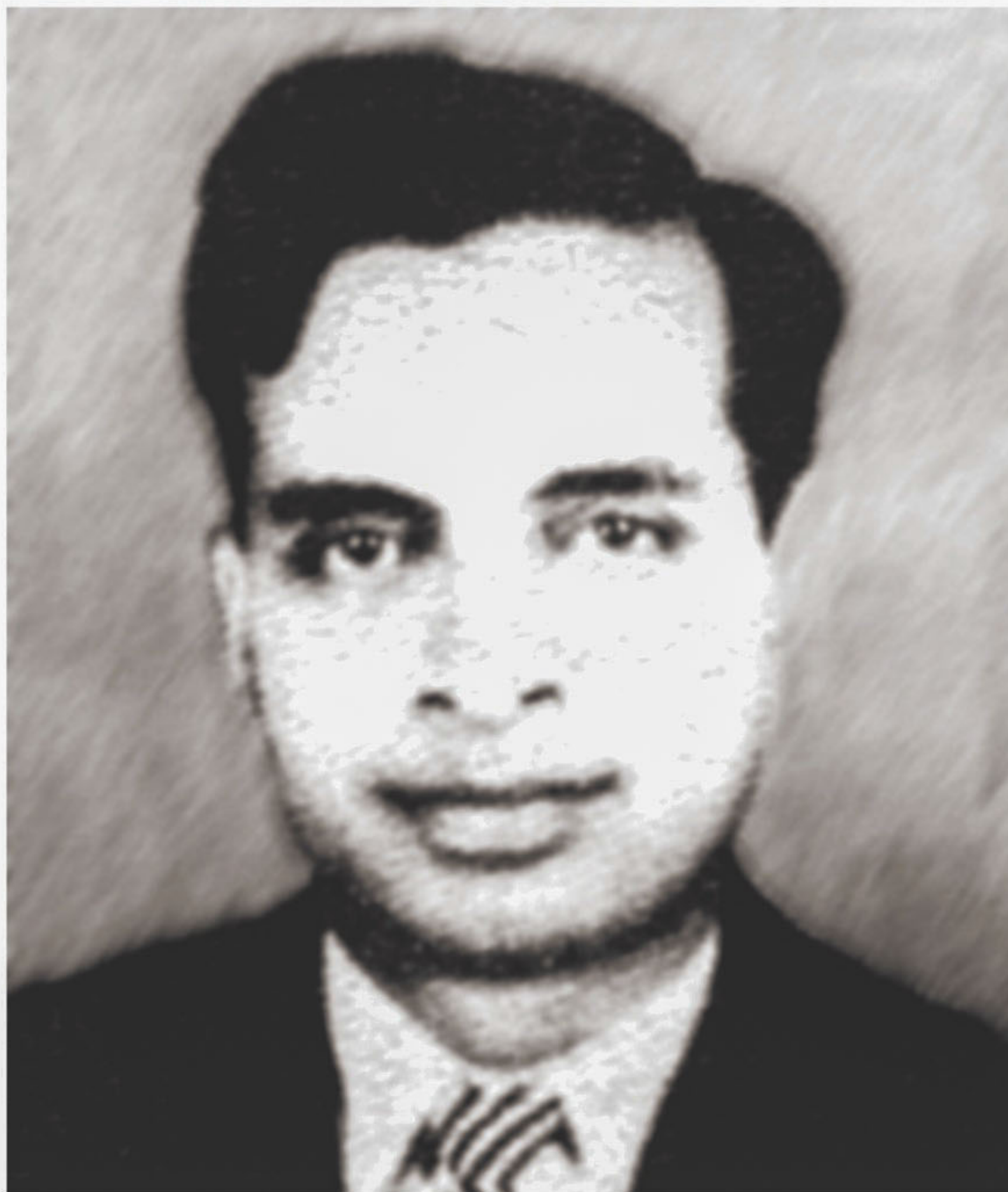
Professor Serajul Islam Choudhury in an article written in memory of his friend Ghyasuddin Ahmed recollected an incident of their boyhood. They were probably in class IX or class X in the St. Gregory's School at that time. One day during the course of a discussion in class a teacher used the Bangla word 'doroza' for 'door'. Ghyasuddin Ahmed immediately stood up and said, 'Sir, it should be darwaza, not doroza.' When the angry teacher showed him the door, Ghyasuddin Ahmed took no time to quit the class and walk out through the open door. That was Ghyasuddin Ahmed.

I came to know him in 1967 both as a teacher of history subsidiary class and a house tutor of my dormitory Haji Muhammad Mohsin Hall. We liked his way of teaching. He would narrate interesting events of history and sometimes display physical movements of his own teacher while describing such phrases as 'ups and downs of families' or 'chaos and confusion leading to uproar', in a sonorous voice. We could visualise the characters and the scenario from his description of events. Most of the students were very attentive in his class. I said most, not all, because there were yet some students who sought diversions to dispel their monotony. One of them tried to bring in irrelevant issues to distract the attention of other students, but Ghyasuddin sir never expressed his annoyance. Sometime in 1967 or 1968, that fun loving classmate of ours fell sick in the class room. He left the room and started vomiting blood. He probably had ulcer and had taken aspirin for relief from headache. I saw the crisis management capacity of Ghyasuddin Ahmed on that day. The student was taken to a hospital, given proper treatment, his relatives were informed and Ghyasuddin sir personally monitored the process from beginning to the end.

In 1967 I was a proud resident of the newly built HM Mohsin Hall, a modern six storied edifice with an elevator, a modern auditorium, a canteen and a common room. The only other building of its type was MA Jinnah Hall (currently Master da Surya Sen Hall), commissioned only a year before. My room was in the top floor of the hall from where I could see recently constructed Hotel Inter-Continental. I loved the company of my friends and I loved the hall. I had no intention to leave it and become a resident of a private residence. However, in 1969 my elder brother became a lecturer of the University of Engineering and Technology and rented a flat close to the university. I had to relinquish my possession at the hall and take shelter in the flat rented by my

brother. Not only that, I also applied for withdrawal of security deposit. Ghyasuddin sir, the senior house tutor of the hall, reminded me, "You may not get back a room in this hall once you decide to leave it permanently." I was not in a mood to listen to his advice as I already had chalked out what to do with the money refunded. My parents were living in Narayanganj at that time. After a few months my brother decided to check out of the flat and commute from Narayanganj instead. I was back to square one, only this time without a dormitory accommodation. Again I went to Ghyasuddin sir and appealed for a room, but he replied, "There is no space. I have to accommodate the newcomers first." I travelled from Narayanganj everyday to

accommodation in the hall unless I vacate the occupied seat. The empty seat was neither allotted to me nor was it given to any other newcomer. So, I continued to stay in the hall, met Ghyasuddin sir now and then, pleaded with him, my friends also pleaded for me, but he remained firm. At that time I was an underweight spectacled theorist with no political following, the house tutors of the hall could have thrown me out of the hall any time they liked, but I was not thrown out. Junior house tutor in-charge of our house paid me regular visit but never asked me to leave the room. It would have gone on like this for a long time, but for a severe attack of influenza. One night my body temperature rose up to 104 degrees Fahrenheit or above. My friends



attend classes, met Ghyasuddin sir every alternative day, pleaded with him for an accommodation every time I saw him but to my dismay, was turned down every time by him. In desperation I took refuge in a room of the hall where my friend Farid used to stay. Within a short time Farid moved to a single-seated room leaving his bed in the double seated room empty. We thought it would be easier then to convince Ghyasuddin sir of the availability of accommodation in the hall with an empty bed glaring before him. I was jubilant at the prospect of legalising unauthorised possession of seat. Both of us met with Ghyasuddin sir and requested him to allot me the vacant seat, but again he declined. He would not consider my appeal for

gathered around my bed, one friend was pouring water on my head; another one went out in search of a doctor. I was in a delirium. In the dead of night, I saw Ghyasuddin sir standing beside my bed, asking me, "Are you all right now? Do you feel better?" I nodded. I saw him again before dawn. He told me that he had informed my father. He was there again when my father came. I handed over the key to the room to him. "Come back to the hall when you are alright," he said smilingly.

My father shifted our residence from Narayanganj to Dhaka in the middle of 1971. Our house in Narayanganj was burned down by Pakistan Army on 28th March 1971 and we had to move from place to place in search of a safe home. At

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last, my father rented a house in Dhanmondi Road no. 32, near Bangabandhu's residence, as he thought that was the safest place during those days. I didn't go back to the hall. I avoided the university area like a cursed place. One day while I was walking along the Dhanmondi Lake I came across Ghyasuddin sir. He asked the rickshaw puller to stop when he saw me. There was a gunny bag on the footboard of the rickshaw. I heard from a friend of mine that during those turbulent days he was secretly helping the freedom fighters with food and clothes. Probably the gunny bag contained some of those items, but I didn't show any curiosity. He asked me, "What are you doing here?" "I live here, sir," I replied. The rickshaw disappeared at the other end of road 32 where Poet Sufiya Kamal lived.

Air strike on Dhaka city started on 3rd December 1971. Pakistan Air Force with three or four Sabre jets made feeble attempts to resist Indian air raids but stopped their vain efforts within a couple of days. Even the rattling of anti aircraft gun was silenced. No army personnel could be seen anywhere, only the black clad militia roamed around the city. One day, probably it was December 8 or 9, I saw Ghyasuddin sir in Elephant Road. He waved his hand form distance, I also did the same. He was laughing this time, not smiling. That was the last time I saw him.

Pakistan Army surrendered on December 16, 1971, but two days before the great victory on December 14, Ghyasuddin Ahmed along with other intellectuals was abducted from his house by the killer gang Al-Badr. We came to know of the event on 17th of the month. My friend Farid and I visited Mohsin Hall on the same day. A university security guard who had been there on the night of abduction told us that though the Al-Badr goons had their faces covered with veils he could identify one Jahir, an Islamic Chhatra Sangha activist of the hall among them from the familiar look of his trouser and black shoes. We asked our old hall mates if anyone had seen Jahir anywhere, we searched the casualty wards of the city hospitals and the clinics but failed to trace him out. Many years later we came to know that he fled Bangladesh with two other perpetrators of atrocities in 1972.

The writer is former Controller General of Accounts, Bangladesh Government and a former student of Moshin Hall.