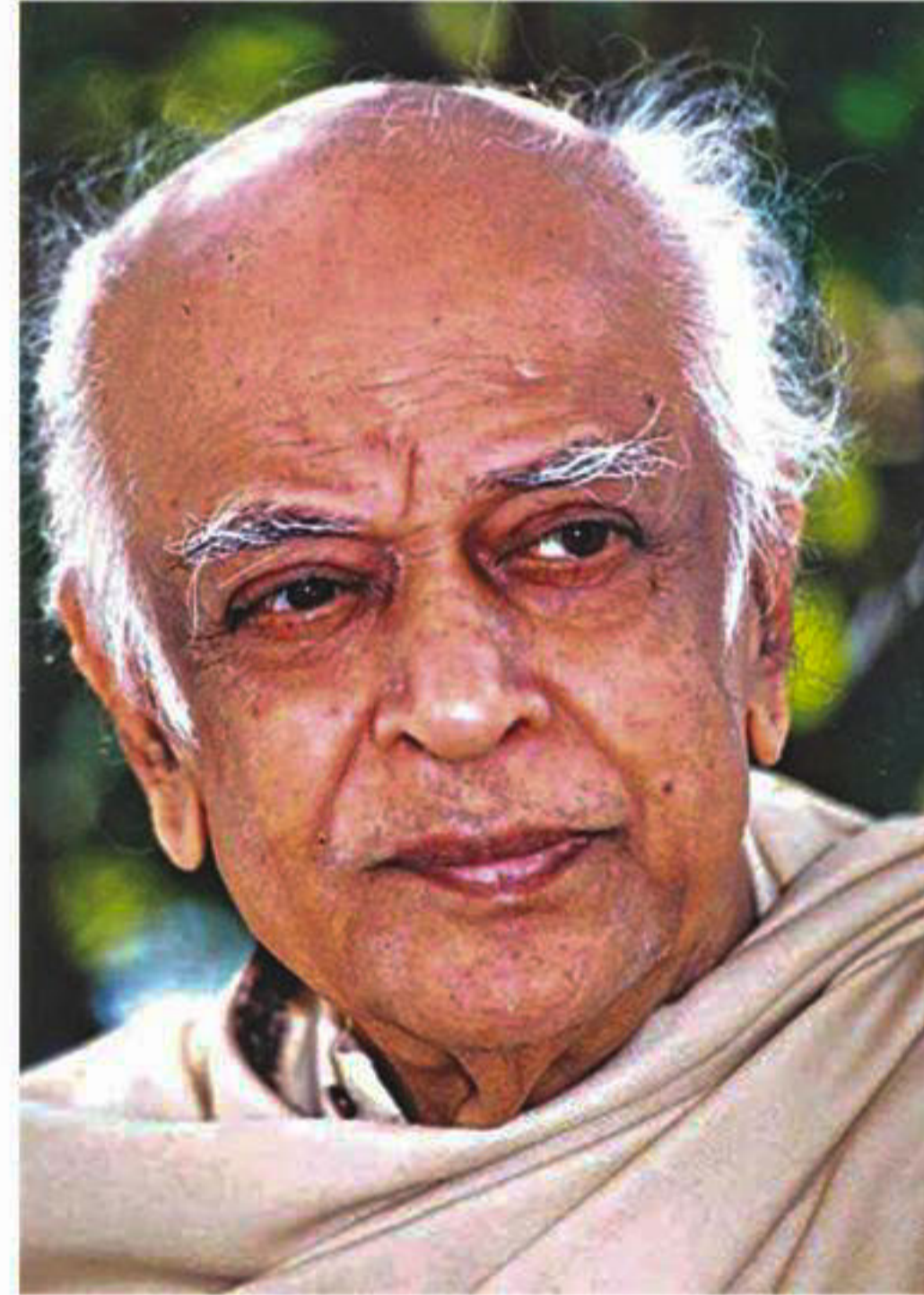


The 19th to the early 20th century witnessed the rise of the Bengali renaissance. Not only helped modernise Bengali culture, but also established the base of modern Bengali art and literature. From this period onwards, Bengal started to slowly step into a modern era. Everything from poems to architecture was a part of this change. Bangladesh, though a big part of this shift, witnessed very little, especially in the architecture department. Modernity was not often seen in Bangladeshi architecture—not until Mazharul Islam came to the scenario.

It was through this man's single handed effort that Bangladesh saw the beginning of modern architecture. Eyes were turned when this maestro designed the Institute of Fine Arts and the Central Public Library. This was the first time universal modern principles of architecture blended with the nation's own character. Chittagong University campus and Jahangirnagar University campus can also serve as an example of Islam's far sighted brilliance. His designs can be credited for starting Bangladesh's renaissance in contemporary architecture.

Though Mazharul Islam started his career as a trained engineer, he opted for further study in architecture and went to the University of Oregon in the United States and to Yale University where he received a Masters degree under the

supervision of Paul Rudolph. It was upon his return to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), Islam designed Dhaka Public Library and Institute of Fine Arts. These two designs also established the characteristics of Bangladeshi architecture. We are talking about a person who was a socially and politically conscious activist. His designs were a reflection of Bangladesh itself, keeping in mind the geography, climate and the



Mazharul Islam

expressions of its own culture. Islam always kept our climate in his mind for which his designs always played around shade and shadow. One of the primary examples of his thinking can be seen in Charukala (Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka University) where the design echoes the influence of the out house and inner house designs of rural Bangladesh.

Islam is one of the reasons why Architecture transcended into art in Bangladesh. In an interview given to Shamsul Wares, he once said, "While architecture starts with specific practical day-to-day necessities, it has to, at the same time, transcend to the level of art. Architecture must inspire the people, for whom it is built, by creating spaces that incite the finer, more gracious aspects of the mind."

Mazharul Islam is also credited to be the advising designer of Jatiyo Sangshad Bhaban. The proposal was first passed to him. Islam was the one who suggested the famous Louis I Kahn to be the main architect of this project. Islam also invited architect Stanley Tigerman and Paul Rudolph to join him in Bangladesh. The three architects became popular as the American Trio, and between them they designed a huge number of high profile buildings. Islam was the designer of the Dhaka city's master plan.

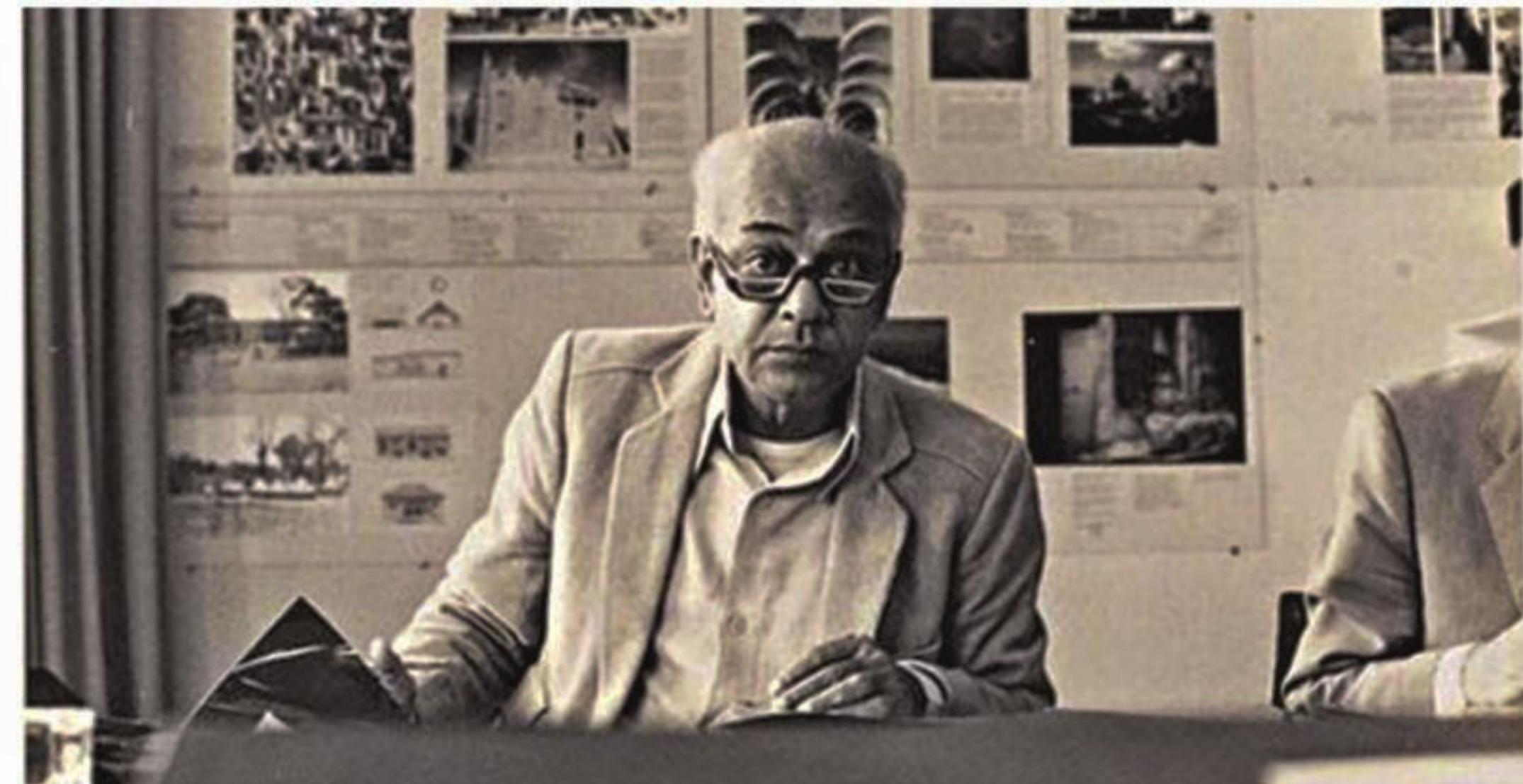
One of the main aspects of this maestro was that he did not only consider

architecture as a functional art form but as a medium to achieve better life. He rejected all outdated elements in architecture and avoided conventional enhancements which were useless and expensive. Islam insisted on creating an open and straightforward design, illuminating the value of local materials without chauvinism, "Although he used simple methods, Islam's genius and creative powers abled him to create a thoughtful architecture, expressing the characteristics of the educated middle class," says Afroza Parvin, Professor of Department of Architecture, Khulna University.

Islam was awarded the Bangladesh Gold Medal from the Institute of Architects; the Honorable Fellowship from the American Institute of Architects; and the Independence Day Award.

Muzharul Islam is the single most dominant influence on modern architecture in Bangladesh. Fifty eight years since he began his practice, the influence is still seen around us. Only calling him an architect, is like calling Rabindranath Tagore just a litterateur. He was a philosopher, a great mentor and an activist—to create Bangladesh's own style in architecture. Even though Islam passed away on July 15, 2012, his contribution will forever be remembered in developing our country's own identity.

Most of the information was sourced from [www.muzharulislam.com](http://www.muzharulislam.com)



TRIBUTE

EMPOWERMENT

I still can't believe how I describe myself as a mom-in-the-making when someone asks me who I am instead of using any catchwords, like I used to do even one year ago. Being a first time mother possibly overshadowed every bit of me and gave me a new identity in the coolest possible way. I now do anything and everything to ensure the wellbeing of my little one and I definitely know that in this world noone can do this job better than me. I'm sure every mother feels this way and this realisation gives us enormous strength and willpower. But, does our society and surroundings give enough effort to make us feel empowered during motherhood?

I'm a breastfeeding mom. I stand by my decision to exclusively breastfeed my daughter till her sixth month and continue up to two years. Living abroad comes with various regrets but one thing I'm absolutely grateful about is the option to feed her whenever she demands when I'm outside. All I need to pack is a nursing cape in the diaper bag & I'm good to go (that cape is as powerful as any superhero cape I tell you!). I would definitely know no matter where I'm going I'll find a nursing room nearby, and even if I fail to locate one no one will give me a judgemental look finding me feeding my daughter under the cape.

I plan to visit my beloved Dhaka city with my daughter very soon. While planning I tried to locate nursing rooms around Dhaka city, so that I can be the old Anika going anywhere with my friends and family and not being tensed about feeding my daughter. Unfortunately I couldn't find any. We have huge shopping malls, massive office blocks but a small space couldn't be spared to build a nursing room.

Bangladesh claims to have one of the highest rates of breastfeeding success, yet it comes with a cost for city moms. If she decides to exclusively breastfeed her child and doesn't want to introduce bottle or formula early, she has to stay confined. Though postpartum depression is not well recognised in our country, it exists. To fight it, a mother needs to feel that she has not lost her sanity, she can get back to her previous life anytime she wants. To ensure she has her options and to make her life easier, the society and our

# 'MOMPOWERMENT'

ANIKA BINTE KASEM

PHOTO: COURTESY



policymakers need to step up. If we are campaigning for breastfeeding, we need to make sure we have infrastructure to provide the environment. It doesn't take much to leave tiny spaces for nursing rooms in shopping malls or important office buildings. The government can come up with some public breastfeeding policies so that mothers have the courage to ignore all the judgemental eyes. The website Bangladesh Breastfeeding Foundation doesn't cater Bangladeshi mothers' queries enough; their FAQ section is full of copied-pasted lines of different breastfeeding

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associations around the world. The number of NGOs and government agencies working with breastfeeding awareness campaigns is incredible; but we also have to provide solid platforms to mothers (especially city mothers) to make these campaigns successful – ample amount of nursing rooms in the city and concrete policies on public breastfeeding can be the foundation.

Keep the mothers happy; they will raise happy children.

The writer is a Research and Development Manager at SDI Academy, based in Singapore

# A MAESTRO OF DESIGNS

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