



Sharafat Ali- A Hero's Humility

A N M SHAHIDUL

It was the year 1967. The six-point movement was gaining momentum nationwide. I was conducting a class for the third-year students on the second floor of the Science Annex Building, but the commotion caused by some students in the verandah served as a means of distraction. Upon inspection, I noticed a boy with a light goatee, surrounded by a group of people, as he voiced his support for the six-point movement and at the same time expressed his support for East Bengal. The irritated crowd claimed that the man's actual motive was to revoke the six-point movement.

The boy was a student of mine enrolled under Masters of Science. His name was Sharafat Ali, a first bencher who rarely spoke. When he was questioned during class, he would simply reply with a smile. I was curious about his bizarre personality. The university administration at that time was under the influence of the National Students Federation (NSF).

I rescued Sharafat from the raging horde of students and brought him to my room. Since then, I began to learn more about him. Born on July 1, 1943 he hailed from Cumilla's south Rampur village. His father was Ali Azam. When asked about his involvement in politics, Sharafat replied, "I am not into politics sir. However, while in college, Khayer sir stated that Bangalees are in dire need of a separate state."

A reserved person, Sharafat Ali attended



Sharafat Ali

Cumilla Victoria College from 1960-1964, where he completed his Intermediate of Science and Bachelor of Science respectively. He later joined University of Dhaka during the 1964-1965 academic year for Master of Science, where he ranked first class first in the first part. Despite his commendable start, he shocked everyone by absenting himself from the last part. I later learnt it was due to financial constraints. Owing to his high self-esteem, he would not accept aid from anyone, all the while maintaining an exceptional charisma.

During class, Sharafat would not answer questions but always managed to excel during

the examinations. Later in 1967, he took a re-examination to complete where he left off, and surprised his peers with outstanding results. Following that, I asked him to apply for the position of a lecturer in the mathematics department of University of Dhaka. Then I noticed another side of his unique character when he said, "Why will they offer me the job? I am not one of them (NSF)." He was right. The university authorities did not provide Sharafat with an interview call letter.

Admired by many for his sincerity, even NSF leader Saidur Rahman Khoka came forward with a helping hand to assist Sharafat's employment, but he humbly rejected the favour saying, "What am I going to teach the students by securing a job in this manner?" Later an influential mathematics teacher requested the Vice Chancellor to invite the

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talented Sharafat for an interview. The next day Sharafat secured a job as a lecturer of mathematics. During the start of his new career, he resided with Mohammed Isa, a teacher from BUET.

In 1970 Sharafat was appointed as the Assistant Residential Teacher at Dhaka Hall and also shifted his residence there accordingly. Ever since his employment as a lecturer, Sharafat was seen attending every major programme surrounding the protests.

On the night of March 25, 1971, Sharafat succumbed to the brutality of the Pakistan army. When the military fired cannons at their residence, Physics teacher Aatur Rahman Khan died on the spot. Later at dawn when Sharafat wanted to put out the fire at the quarter, the military spotted him and riddled his body with bullets and bayonet-charged him. Isa called me afterwards and recollected, "Sharafat Ali was a pious Muslim who recited the Holy Quran every night after Esha prayers. He looked after his family with love and devotion and also helped others in need. He had planned to visit his hometown earlier in March, but could not make it because he had to provide shelter for a poor patient who came from his hometown. May the Almighty grant him paradise in the hereafter."

Now, whenever I recall Sharafat Ali, his unique smile is what comes to my mind and I can hear his infamous dialogue ring in my very ears, "What am I going to teach the students by securing a job in this manner?"

Translated by Minam Haque, member of the Editorial team at The Daily Star.

Lutfun Nahar Helen ...

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So, in coordination with the communist party of Jashore and the progressive leaders of the leftist parties, we decided to run the war against the Pakistani occupation army and their associates – the razakars and al-badrs...

.....Our force had gained strength by taking control of the armory in Norail town, by releasing the inmates of Jashore central jail and by running small-scale operations. Many of the Bengali police and soldiers who had fled the cities and took refuge in the villages joined our force to take part in the war...

... Till August, 1971, Helen used to stay at her parents' house in Magura town and at my village home alternately. One day, the razakar and al-badr forces in coordination with the Pakistani army barricaded Helen's parents' house to kill her elder brother Mahfuzul Haq and other brothers. But luckily, they went into hiding and saved themselves. Amid such risks, Helen stayed at her parents' house in Magura town with our two-year-old son Lutfun Ali Dileer. At that time, she was entrusted with the responsibility of informing us about the activities and plans of the razakars and the Pakistani army...

One day, we attacked the razakar camp

in Mohammadpur thana and killed a lot of razakars. Right after that, we attacked the thana, took it under our control and seized all the weapons. After we freed the area, we made a camp in the southern part of the thana for providing training to the freedom fighters.

Around this time, Helen joined us to directly participate in the war. Our only son Dileer was also with her. In the camp, Helen's responsibility was to encourage girls, particularly of the landless peasant families, to participate in the war; discuss with them the ways and the expected result of their participation; take care of the political and war-related books; take care of the meals and assist the sick freedom fighters.

After we took control of the Mohammadpur thana and destroyed the razakar camp there, the Pakistani army and razakars started attacking our force at various camp areas all across Jashore. At one point, they attacked our main base at Pulum. In order to strengthen our force in Pulum, we then joined all our forces together. At the end of September, when we joined the forces of Mohammadpur with the forces of Pulum area, Helen was staying at the southern part of Mohammadpur thana.

As we started our journey towards Pulum from Mohammadpur with the stronger part of our force, one of my fellow compatriots informed me that Helen came to a village adjacent to our village to meet me. But considering the risks our force might face if we waste time here and the fact that there was no one else except me to lead the force at that time, I decided to be with the force than to meet with Helen...

.....It was a day in the second week of October, when the Pakistani army and razakars suddenly attacked our Pulum base in the morning and continued until late in the afternoon. They did considerable damage but failed to defeat us. I was talking to some of my comrades that evening about the state of the war when one of my former students appeared and said he wanted to give me some news. But he stood in silence. I asked him what had happened. He said it was bad news and he was at a loss for words. I said bad news were expected in times of war. Then he told me how Helen was caught by razakars and got brutally killed. I remained speechless for a while. Then I told him, "We are really busy fighting this war. You don't have to tell me anything more. Please leave."

While our forces from Mohammadpur was staying at a village in Pulum area, Helen, along with her two-and-a-half-year-old son Dileer, were detained by razakars. She was taken to Magura town and handed over to high officials of Pakistani army for interrogation. Learning about her misfortune, her old father and relatives begged for her release. But the pro-Jamaat dalals of Magura became the most difficult hurdle for her release. They told Pakistani officers that since Helen was the sister of leftist leader Mahfuzul Haq and wife of Ali Kadar, chief of the freedom fighters of Mohammadpur and a leftist leader, there was no question of releasing her.

So the extremely communal, anti-liberation collaborators got what they wanted. Helen died on the night of October 5, 1971. It was *shab-e-barat*, a holy night for all Muslims. They snatched the crying infant Dileer away from her mother and sent him to his grandfather's house. Helen was tortured to death. They tied her body to a military jeep and drove it to a diversion canal of the Nabaganga river on the outskirts of Magura town, dragging her all the way.

Translated from Bangla by Naznin Tithi, member of the Editorial team at The Daily Star.