

# A Tribute to My Martyr Teachers

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ABDUL MOMIN CHOWDHURY

The Pakistani occupation army wrote a black chapter in the history of our War of Liberation on the 14th-15th December, 1971 by killing intellectuals in Dhaka city in a planned way. December is a month of joy and celebration worldwide, including in Bangladesh. To me, December brings back the horrid memory of the killing of intellectuals on the 14th and 15th of December 1971. It was a time when Pakistani army generals realized the inevitable reality that they had no chance of keeping East Pakistan under their control and preventing the emergence of an independent country, which had already been named Bangladesh. They wanted to make Bangladesh devoid of learned people, who in their imagination were responsible for bringing the country to such a position when independence was a matter of few days. The military junta found good company in the Jamat-i-Islami and their creation, 'al badr' and 'al shams' cadres.

Among the victims of this heinous act of the Pakistani occupation forces were university teachers, doctors, lawyers, journalists, researchers, engineers,

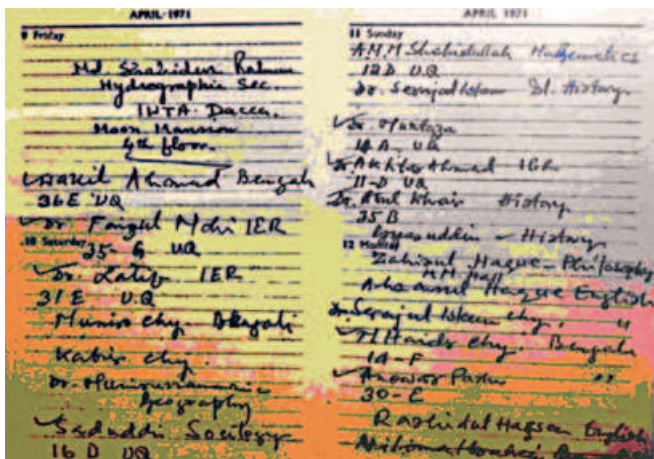


Rayerbazar Martyred Intellectual Memorial (Bodho Bhumi).



PHOTO: RASHID TALUKDER

The image shows a severed head at the Rayerbazar killing ground, the site where the country's eminent intellectuals were brutally murdered on December 14, 1971.



A list of Dhaka University faculty members, targeted for elimination. The notorious diary belonging to Major General Rao Farman Ali, recovered from the wreckage of the Governor's House, contained this ominous list. Those teachers with a checkmark next to their names had either already been slain or were slated for imminent demise. The abbreviations "UQ" denote University Quarters, and "30-E" designates the specific building and flat number. The departmental affiliation of each teacher is indicated beside their name.

cannot distinctly recollect whether we won the match. After the match, Ghiyas Bhai admonished me loudly and clearly, asking me to meet him the next day. The next day, I appeared before him, and he simply told me, 'You must learn how to behave with seniors.' In the match, one of my senior players did something wrong, and I shouted at him from a distance, possibly using some foul words. This admonition brought about a great change in my behavior.

In 1960 or 1961, a group of M. A. students went to India on a study tour (a regular feature), and three teachers accompanied the party - Professor Mafizullah Kabir, Ghiyasuddin Ahmed, and me. We reached Allahabad sometime in the evening and got down and stood on the platform before we settled with a group of Tangawallas to carry us to our hotel. We heard the shouting of a group of political rally: Ek Dhakka our do, Pakistan tor do. Ghiyas Bhai was alarmed, as was Prof. Kabir. When we reached our hotel, it was found that one of the students had smallpox. It was decided that he would return to Calcutta, where he had a relative. He would stay with his relative until we return to Calcutta. However, he could not be sent back alone. If it was found in the train that a certain passenger had smallpox, he would be off-loaded in the nearest town and sent to the hospital. So, the student had to cover himself with a blanket and sleep on the upper berth. Then came the question of finding someone who would accompany the sick student. Ghiyas Bhai was the first to express loudly that he would be the one to accompany the sick student to Calcutta and stay there until the touring party returns to Calcutta after completing their itinerary. He argued that Prof. Kabir wouldn't be able to handle the hassles of the tour. When I offered, he shouted at me, saying that he had never been to North India and did not have any knowledge of the places scheduled to be visited. As I had previous experience of such tours,

that is very personal. In early 1970, a post for the Associate Professor in the History Department was advertised. In the department, it was a usual practice that the senior 1 or 2 persons should apply, and the others should wait. So, I had clearly declared in the department that I was not going to apply. But as things developed, it appeared that S.C. Bhattacharya was also not going to apply as he felt that since he did not have a Ph.D. and his publication list was also very short, it would be futile for him to apply. The next candidate who would definitely apply was Dr. K.G. Asghar, an elderly person. He joined the department at the same time when I joined as a lecturer. He was promoted to the post of an Assistant Professor when I was in London for my Ph.D. On my return to Dhaka University, I was appointed as an Assistant Professor. At that time, Mr. K.G. Asghar was in London working for his Ph.D. He came back sometime in 1968/1969. He made it very clear that he was going to apply. When I asked Ghiyas Bhai, he said he might apply but felt that since he did not have a Ph.D. (he obtained a B.A. Honours degree from LSE, University of London, in International History with selected papers on European History) and he did not have any publications, he stood very little chance of being selected. It may be mentioned here that he was advised by Prof. Razzaq and other senior teachers to do B.A. Hons, which would give him a very thorough knowledge of European History, and he would teach European history with competence. Indeed, Ghiyas Bhai became a very competent teacher, and all students admired him as an excellent teacher of European history.

Ghiyas Bhai tried to convince me, arguing for a long time that the situation demanded that I should apply. Otherwise, K.G. Asghar might be promoted, or someone from outside would be selected. Still, I did not agree with him, and I tried to convince him that his excellent academic career and

and could not take my class. So, I must apply for one day's casual leave. He did put the application on the table of the head of the department. Such was his sense of duty.

I would loudly say that Ghiyas Bhai was not a political activist. His involvement in the Liberation War was rather indirect. He had a good relationship with all his students. As a house tutor in the Mohsin Hall, he had contact with many students who were involved in the Liberation War. Some of them used to come to Ghiyas Bhai for help. He used to help them with money, medicine, and even arranged medical help for injured students through his younger brother Dr. Rashiduddin Ahmed, a neurosurgeon.

That was the crime for which Ghiyas Bhai had to be a victim of the heinous act of the brute occupation forces. His straightforward nature, dedication, and love for the students made him a remarkable teacher. Even when he was picked up by the Al Badr/Al Shams people, Ghiyas Bhai was in the pump house of the Hall. As a house tutor, he felt duty-bound to attend the repairing of the water pump. Otherwise, the resident students would suffer. His strong sense of duty did not allow him to leave his house tutor's Quarter when many were leaving their homes, sensing the imminent action of the occupation Pakistani Forces.

## Santosh Chandra Bhattacharya

Santosh Chandra Bhattacharya, our S.C.B., was a true Brahmin in appearance and practice. He always wore a smile on his face and looked very graceful with gray-white hair covering his head. No student can forget his habit of standing in the corridor, enjoying the last puff of his cigarette, and entering the classroom right on time. Hardly did he miss any class unless he was seriously ill.

Soon after the 'operation searchlight' in March 1971, people from Dhaka began leaving the city, heading towards the villages, thinking that the Pakistani occupation army would find it difficult to move into rural areas. Possibly on the 27th of March 1971, I, with my wife, our seven-day-old daughter in her lap, and our three-year-old son on my shoulder, crossed the Buriganga and started walking southward towards my ancestral village home, about 25 miles away.

I heard from Ghiyas Bhai that one of our students, Selim, and he himself had succeeded in convincing S.C.B. to leave his university quarter (31 Isa Khan Road) and spend the first night in Selim's house in the old part of then Dhaka. S.C.B. always pleaded against this move, saying, 'Who will kill me and why? I have no connection with politics. Moreover, if I am killed, I would consider myself fortunate that I died in my motherland; I was born here and I die here. During the 1947 partition, I did not leave my motherland, even though there was a huge migration of non-Muslims to India.'

Selim arranged his journey into the interior of the country, from where one could come to Dhaka only by motorized river crafts. S.C.B., with his family, lived in the village until June 1971. The Pakistani administration announced an order in late May, asking all employees of government and autonomous bodies to return to Dhaka and reinstate their jobs. S.C.B.'s loyalty to Dhaka University prompted him to take the motor-launch and reach Dhaka early on June 1, 1971. He surprised everyone in the Department with his presence and signed a joining letter. He made this journey for a few days and then returned to his quarter with his family. His son and daughter managed to cross the border and escape the brutality of the Pakistani army. But S.C.B. and his wife refused to leave, even though Ghiyas Bhai and some Muktiyoddha students had arranged their passage through

Agartala. Even a burqa was purchased for Mrs. S.C.B. Even today, we admire S.C.B.'s love for his motherland and the valiant way he faced his departure from this world.

## Dr. M.A. Khair

When I entered Dhaka University in 1956 as a student, I found Mr. M.A. Khair as a teacher; he taught us in our first year. He was a soft-spoken gentleman and hardly friendly with his students. But he was one of the few teachers who believed in an independent Bangladesh. In 1952, he was an activist in the Language Movement and participated in the procession that broke Section 144, imposed on the 21st of February. In the encounter with the police, Mr. Khair was injured. He tried to inspire students by narrating the history of American independence. After his return in 1962 with a Ph.D. from Barkley, University of California, he became very straightforward and used to speak out his mind during the movements of 1966 and the Mass Uprising of 1969. Dr. Khair wrote articles on the concept of the welfare state, human rights, and the equality of humankind, which were absent in the state of Pakistan. He was very friendly with Tajuddin Ahmed of the Awami League, who used to visit Khair Sir's residence often.

Dr. Khair spent quite a few days in the custody of the Pak army, along with other D.U. teachers, including Professor Rafiqul Islam of the Bangla Department. Professor Islam wrote about their confinement in his book (published by Bangla Academy in 1973), where he (pages 157-58) wrote that Dr. Khair used to keep up their mental strength by saying 'it is certain that one day the country will be independent. Maybe he will not see that.' From the above statement, it is clear that Dr. Khair had a very strong mind and was an intellectual who was a firm supporter of the Liberation of Bangladesh leading to an independent country. The D.U. teachers spent 22 days in, what Khair used to call, a 'concentration camp.'

Let me share with the readers a personal incident. One day, maybe in August/September 1971, I drove my father to the treasury (situated in the present court area in Nawabpur) for collecting his pension money. While coming out of the court area, I was stopped by a few 'militia' of the Baluch regiment. They asked me if I would drop them at Rajarbagh Police HQ. I had no alternative but to agree. All three of them were fully armed. On our way back, they started a conversation with my father in Urdu. They said that they were told by their officers that we would be sent to Dhaka to kill the 'kafirs'. Where are the kafirs? We find here a lot of mosques and hear the call for prayers (azans) five times a day. Many people go to the mosques. We do not see any kafir here. We have been brought here on a false plea. They got down at Rajarbagh, thanking me profusely for the ride. When they got down from my car, I felt relieved and thanked Allah for saving us from the brutes. Also, I realized that the Pakistani Generals had to convince their soldiers by making a false plea.

I would finish my homage to my three martyr teachers by saying very loudly that East Pakistan could be liberated from the Pakistani occupation forces, resulting in the emergence of independent Bangladesh because of the sacrifice of such dedicated persons who embraced death gleefully and never surrendered to the brutes. I would only hope that the blood of the martyrs gets due respect from the present generation and the wish of the intellectuals for a welfare state with equality of humankind is fulfilled not only in words but also in action.

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artists, architects, social workers, cultural activists, singers, officials of the government as also of the private organizations, scientists and politicians etc. Two persons Mainuddin and Ashrafuzzaman were directly involved in the killing of the intellectuals.

Three of my teachers- Mr. Santosh Chandra Bhattacharya, Dr. Abul Khair and Mr. Ghiyasuddin Ahmed of the History Department of Dhaka University were among the intellectuals who embraced martyrdom. I was very intimate with Ghiyas Sir, whom I found as a teacher when I was a student of third year B.A. Honours class. Ghiyas Sir after his Masters in 1957 had a short stint as a teacher in the Notre Dame College. He joined the Dhaka University as a lecturer in 1959. We as students were attracted by his handsome figure, strong personality and commanding voice. He was in charge of the Departmental sports. In this capacity we became very close to him and soon he turned to be our Ghiyas Bhai. His intimacy with me was so close that I can recollect many occasions of our interactions, which make him to me one of the great persons I have met in my life of little more than eight decades. So I would take him first in my homage to my martyr teachers and I hope the readers would forgive me for the partial attitude. As the other two martyrs were quite senior teachers and my intimacy with them was rather formal and not that close.

## Ghiyas Bhai

In the family, he was Bacchu, and to his students, he was Ghiyas Bhai. I would narrate a few incidents just to highlight the 'greatness' of this handsome man. We were playing a cricket match in the inter-department tournament, and I was the Captain. After such a long time, I



I could not but accompany the party. Prof. Kabir agreed with Ghiyas Bhai. Ghiyas Bhai and I immediately rushed to the Railway Station for two tickets on any train going to Calcutta. Fortunately, we got two tickets, of which one was in the upper berth. The next night, Ghiyas Bhai and the sick student left for Calcutta. I narrated this incident just to give the readers the idea that Ghiyas Sir was a man always eager to help others and took things rationally at the cost of self-interest. When the touring party returned to Calcutta, we found the sick student fully recovered, and Ghiyas Bhai was also in good health. He spent most of his time in Calcutta in the bookshops and had purchased quite a few volumes of European and International history. By the way, it may be mentioned that in those days, Dhaka did not have a bookshop where you could buy foreign books.

After our return to Dhaka, within a few days, Ghiyas Bhai showed signs of the contagious disease. He confined himself to his D.U. teacher's hostel near the present Badrunnesa College. I used to visit him every day after my classes, and every day I would hear from him, 'Please don't come; you will get the disease, it is highly contagious.'

I would do injustice to Ghiyas Bhai if I did not write about an incident

his B.A. Hons degree would carry him above K.G. Asghar, who had a B.A. Hons degree in Persian from Calcutta University and a one-year M.A. degree in International Relations from Dhaka University. I insisted that when Ghiyas Bhai is an eligible candidate, I shall not get into the race.

Just a few (2/3) days before the closing date of the application, Ghiyas Bhai came to my quarter with an application form in his hand. He knew that I always have an 8.00 am. class and so had made sure that he would find my wife alone. He told my wife, 'Tell Momin that I want him to apply; this is my command,' and he handed the blank application form to my wife. I had no alternative but to act as per his command, and I submitted my application on the last date. When I told Ghiyas Bhai that I had put in my application, he embraced me and whispered into my ears, 'You will be selected.' Such a magnanimous thing can be done only by a person who has a 'large' heart. Ghiyas Bhai had one.

One day Ghiyas Bhai came to the Department at about 12 am and asked the Departmental peon to give him a leave-application form. I was just nearby. I asked, 'Are you going somewhere?' He laughed and said, 'Oh no. I had a class at 10.45, which I could not take. I had to go to the court for some family matters