

# “Amar Shonar Bangla . . .

**50th Independence Day  
Bangladesh**

**Bangabandhu  
101st Birth Anniversary**

**Women on the Frontlines**

# ... a treasure-trove! ”

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## A TROIKA OF THEMES

This month of March is very auspicious to all Bangladeshis, especially women, as a group. As we celebrate the country's 50th Birth Anniversary, on March 26 (to continue until December 16), we are also delighted to celebrate Bangabandhu's 101st Birth Anniversary, falling on the 17th, and the historic 7th March Suhrawardy Udayan Speech of Bangabandhu. To keep the 1971 memories intact, given the genocide the country faced in its quest for independence and to spread the spirit of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (as the founder of modern Bangladesh and one of the most influential and courageous leaders of the 20th Century), the Global Studies & Governance (GSG) Program at Independent University, Bangladesh, decided to dedicate these special occasions to 'women': it was not because of International Women's Day on March 8, which is a single-day celebration, but to spread that gender concern throughout this entire year as part of greater relevance in the next 50 years. Many articles explain why, as to its relevance to this very sacred month. Against that backdrop, the GSG Program stepped in to collect oral memories of the 'Past' and 'Present', spraying 'Hopes for Future' along the way. This collection, in fact, projects the GSG identity [the first of its kind in Bangladesh (set up in 2017)], as the most interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary knowledge-mode to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of Bangladesh.

We believe the souvenir subtitle, a 'Treasure Trove,' lives up to our own hopes and targets. Inside one will find not just collection of memories and stories, but also clustered into three overlapping segments: Bangabandhu, Women, and the 50th Anniversary of Bangladesh. Intellectuals and professionals, officials, social workers, women activists, and women entrepreneurs share vivid memories of all three themes, starting from the December 1970 elections, which also helps us project our women pioneers: the first women elected representatives and *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra* voices, which had the largest audience, to today, when our women assert leadership in a wide variety of arenas. Our underlying purposes are two-fold: First, to preserve first-hand stories, memories of the 1970s generation, their reflection on Bangabandhu, martyrs, as well as their/family contribution in the Liberation War and most importantly, how to teach our new generation the spirit of '71. Second, it presents our women leaders' an illustrative collection of celebrative achievements, raising awareness against gender norms and taking action for more equal society.

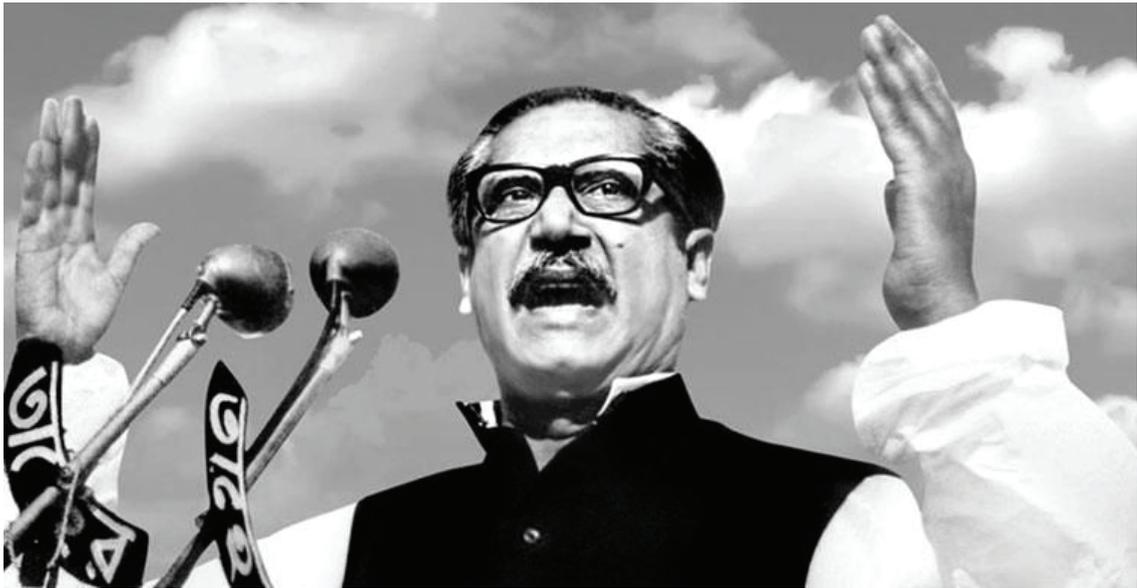
I conclude with the expectation that 50 years from now, GSG/IUB students will lead students across the country in softening traditional gender boundaries, associated norms, and spearheading innovation and critical governance rooted with the same pride of '71. Our martyrs gave their lives for that. Our freedom fighters dearly wish to bequeath. In the name of Bangabandhu's philosophy and vision, which underlay all of the above, our heartiest *Joi Bangla* for the occasion.

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## SECTION ONE THEME: **BANGABANDHU**



*March 7, 1971 Speech*

*“I have not seen Himalayas; but I have seen Sheikh Mujib”*



*With Fidel Castro, President of Cuba at Non-Aligned Summit, Algiers, 1973*



## Muhammad Zamir

Former Ambassador & Distinguished Fellow, Bangla Academy  
first-hand Bangabandhu experiences ripen still

# **BANGABANDHU SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN & BANGLADESH : THE FOREIGN POLICY FILLIP**

A charismatic leader, dedicated and committed to the cause of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu described his journey to a free Bangladesh as one “from darkness to light, from captivity to freedom, from desolation to hope.” In Delhi, on 10 January, 1972, he also reiterated that he was going back to his independent country “not with hatred in my heart for anyone, but with the satisfaction that truth has at last triumphed over falsehood, sanity over insanity, courage over cowardice, justice over injustice and good over ill.”

Bangabandhu’s magnanimity and belief in the people of Bangladesh was reflected in his optimism. It was also this spirit that would inspire him to face up to the many difficulties that he would have to overcome in the coming months, not only with regard to reconstructing war-devastated Bangladesh but also in being able to provide relief and rehabilitation to more than 10 million Bangladeshi refugees returning home from India. There was also the unfolding paradigm of the newly independent country’s engagement within the matrix of international affairs. He understood he would have to tread this difficult path with care and sensitivity.

Bangabandhu, a statesman and a gifted orator, reflected this in that 10th January speech at Suhrawardy Uddayan. He warned no one should “raise” their “hands to strike against non-Bangalees,” while displaying his concern for the safety of the “four hundred thousand Bangalees stranded in Pakistan.” While re-affirming that he harbored no ill-will for the Pakistanis, he also clearly pointed out “those who have unjustly killed our people will surely have to be tried.”

He also appealed to the United Nations “to constitute an International Tribunal to enquire and determine the extent of genocide committed in Bangladesh by the Pakistani army.” On 17 April, 1973, after the completion of investigations into the crimes committed by the Pakistan occupation forces and their auxiliaries, it was decided to try 195 persons for serious crimes, which included genocide, war crimes, crime against humanity and breach of Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions—murder, rape and arson.

Bangabandhu took keen interest in foreign policy and encouraged the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to undertake initiatives not only to get Bangladesh recognized by other countries and in the establishment of diplomatic relations, but also to make Bangladesh a member of important international organizations.

Bangabandhu believed strongly in the sovereign equality of all countries, and laid particular stress on the promotion of close cooperation with India in the fields of development and trade “on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.” It was this approach that led him eventually to persuade India to agree to the establishment of a Joint Rivers Commission. In the Joint Declaration of the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh and India on 19th March 1972 at Dhaka, there was also a reference to examining the feasibility of linking the power-grids of Bangladesh with the adjoining areas of India. That is being achieved now.

Consistent with this principle of brotherly relations, Bangabandhu signed the historic “Land Boundary Agreement (LBA)” with the then Indian premier, Indira Gandhi, on May 16 in 1974, to settle the land boundary dispute between the neighbors. Bangladesh quickly ratified the agreement that year, though India failed to do so. Indian Parliament however took 41 years to subsequently unanimously pass the LBA on May 7, 2015, thanks to the persuasion of Bangabandhu’s daughter and present prime minister, Sheikh Hasina.

Similarly, Bangabandhu enacted “The Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones Act” to establish Bangladesh’s sovereign rights in the sea. The law was framed in 1974 when there was no such law in large parts of the world. Nearly eight years after the enactment of “The Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones Act” by Bangabandhu, the United Nations (UN) framed “The UN Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS)” in 1982.

This vigorous effort enabled us to move forward in external relations. By 26 March, 1972, when we were celebrating our first anniversary of independence, 54 countries from Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America had already recognized Bangladesh (as opposed to less than 10 before his return to Bangladesh). It took time for the United States to accord recognition which came about the middle of 1972.

Within a short time after that, Bangladesh became a member of the Non-Aligned Countries, the Commonwealth, the International Labor Organization and the World Health Organization, and started playing an important role in the diplomatic arena. We obtained the status of Observer in the United Nations but were however unable to become a Member because of China’s veto (a close ally of Pakistan). This was particularly disappointing for Bangabandhu as he held China with great respect and often recalled his own visit to that country in 1956.

This smooth process of transition was however considered incomplete because of the stubborn decision by some countries not to recognize Bangladesh, including Pakistan and some of its major friends—the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, People’s Republic of China, Iran, Turkey and the then Libyan Arab Republic.

The number of states which recognized Bangladesh however increased sharply by the end of 1972. I believe this was largely due to the positive measures undertaken by Bangabandhu, and also because of the fact that he was able to persuade India to withdraw its troops from the territory of Bangladesh.

Our not being a Member of the United Nations, however, did not deter Bangabandhu from seeking the humanitarian intervention of the then United Nations Secretary General Dr. Kurt Waldheim, on 27 November, 1972, in arranging the repatriation to Bangladesh of innocent Bangalees detained in Pakistan in different camps. These efforts on the part of Bangabandhu and indirect pressure from Egypt, the then Soviet Union, Afghanistan, India, Iraq and Japan, led to the U.N. Secretary General Waldheim visiting Bangladesh on 9 February, 1973, to discuss with Bangabandhu how to help Bangladesh in its reconstruction efforts. This eventually led to the formation of the United Nations Relief Operations, Dhaka (UNROD), and subsequently United Nations Relief Operations Bangladesh (UNROB ) after we became a Member of the United Nations in 1974.

With his foresight, Bangabandhu understood that the best way forward would be to seek the direct support of Egypt, Iraq and Syria, whose leaders were significant in terms of the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Conference, whose headquarters was in Cairo, Egypt and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia respectively.

The necessary opportunity presented itself through the 1973 Egyptian-Syrian-Israeli war. Bangabandhu demonstrated Bangladesh’s active interest in supporting the efforts of Egypt and Syria *vis-a-vis* Israel, which led Bangladesh to proactively engage with Egypt and Syria to reaffirm that Israel should withdraw from Arab territories occupied since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. This became a conscious principle of our foreign policy, and one reason why we have such international acclaim today.

Bangabandhu’s and Bangladesh’s courageous step was greatly admired not only by Egypt and Syria but also by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq and Jordan, eventually leading the King of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, Algeria and Syria to exercise their influence on the Organization of Islamic Conference and Pakistan to not only invite Bangladesh to participate in the OIC Summit held in Lahore in February, 1974, but also for Pakistan to recognize Bangladesh on a reciprocal basis.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman played a critical role in overcoming obstacles, in unifying the war affected population and branding Bangladesh throughout the world. A pious person, who believed in non-communalism and was averse to sectarianism, he became, through his foreign policy, the symbol of successful secularism throughout the Islamic world.

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## COMMENTS ON BANGABANDHU SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN: “ONCE MORE IN THE PAST”

After the Caretaker Government came to power in Bangladesh, democracy was suspended. But I started working closely with Baby Moudud on the autobiography of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, which was published in 2012 under the name *Unfinished Memoirs*. After a short break in 2017 *The Prison Diaries* was published, which was the translation of *Karagarer Rojnamcha*. I have also translated the historical 7th March speech of our country's father.

I have always been associated with Bangabandhu through my translations, so I have been invited to write in newspapers, journals and also provide lectures. One of the most memorable lectures I gave was in Bangla Academy, which was subsequently published. After contributing various articles to *Daily Star*, a book of mine was published in February 2021 under the name of *Once more into the past*, containing four of my published articles from the newspaper.

So if I had to summarize my contributions, it would definitely be the translated works of Bangabandhu and the various books that have been published over the years.

The answer will be very long. I joined Dhaka University as a student in 1969, and we had no classes for one year of 1971. Because of that my graduation happened in 1975, but even before my M.A results were published I had already joined DU as a teacher. I taught in DU from 1975 to 2017, and after I retired I joined East West University. But I wasn't inclined to teach at East West as teachers from my generation are extremely passionate about protecting our own academic autonomy. So, I again joined DU, assigned as a UGC professor. I eventually became the Director of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Research Institution for Peace and Liberty, so my relation with DU continued.

I came to the department never wanting to be a teacher, rather I wanted to become a part of Civil Service of Pakistan. From my perspective, students still join the English Department to become a part of Civil Service. Nevertheless, the demographic of the student body has changed. Back in our days most students would be from the upper stratum of the society, but I am very happy to observe the fact that our public universities are catering to students from all over the country. One of the wonderful consequences of this is, students have to work much harder but not necessarily to be only a good student of English Literature and Language, rather to do well in competitive examinations. Many of these students eventually join the banking sectors, NGOs and international sector. As a whole, I would like to say is that they work really hard.

Back in our days, even students from local schools or schools from outside of the capital had a good standard of English. But now due to the change in language policies, the standards have drastically been reduced. It is not the fault of the students, because many students with lower English speaking skills were extremely serious about their education. Still it cannot be denied that the students are eager to learn, and their skills eventually improve. So, they strive to become better and are keen learners.

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### **BANGABANDHU & THE BANGLA LANGUAGE: LOVE AS CENTERPIECE**

“As a man, what concerns mankind concerns me. As a Bangalee [sic], I am deeply involved in all that concerns Bangalees [sic]. The abiding involvement is born of and nourished by love, enduring love, which gives meaning to my politics and to my very being” (*Ausamapta Atmajiboni* xvii).

The Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's, and for that matter Bangalees' resolute commitment to establish Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan topped the election manifesto of the United Front which contested the East Bengal Legislative Assembly polls in 1954. It secured a landslide victory, bagging 223 seats as against a paltry 9 managed by the then party-in-power, Muslim League candidates. The Constituent Assembly on 29 February 1956 approved a new constitution, establishing Pakistan as a republic, albeit Islamic, with both Urdu and Bangla as its state languages.

That Bangabandhu was always passionate about protecting the interests of Bangla and Bangalees is evident in the speeches he delivered in different phases of his life. In this short account I will revisit the speech Bangabandhu gave on the immortal Shaheed Day of 1971 at the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka. In this speech, he rapidly zoomed in on how the people of East Pakistan were being pushed towards destruction because of the torture inflicted on them by the West Pakistani colonial overlords:

People are becoming martyrs in every home of Bangladesh today. They are not becoming martyrs by taking bullets. They are becoming martyrs from hunger. They don't have anything to wear; they have nothing to eat. They are being exploited; exploiters are turning us into a bazaar (*Omkarshamagra* 12).

Could he remain unmoved when people, his own people, were subject to exploitation? In a very moving part of this speech? Bangabandhu reflected on his need to repay the people who have made sacrifices for him. He said, “the blood that the people of Bengal shed to break me out of Agartala [case], I can promise you today, on the Martyrs Day, in the name of Allah, I will try to repay their sacrifices with my blood (ibid). And he wants to leave a country behind which would make future generations proud so that “[o]ur offspring will be able to say before the world with their heads held high: – I am a Bangalee, I am a human being, I have my own rights, I have my rights (ibid). He paid a glowing tribute to the language martyrs, and closed his speech by raising the slogan, “May the memories of the martyrs live forever.”

Bangabandhu's is that rare postcolonial voice in history which duly recognises the role of language in creating nationhood. The “nation-state” which Bangabandhu struggled to found all his life and finally established had at its core “Bengali nationalism” (Chowdhury 32) in which Bangla has a resounding presence. Pakistani colonial regime carried out a series of systematic attacks on Bangla which also included the regime's plot to write Bangla in Arabic alphabet ever since its inception in 1947 with a view to disempowering Bengalis. Bangabandhu helped organise Bengalis' resistance; he orchestrated their fight back which culminated in the glorious war of independence in 1971, making his beloved Bangladesh a free, sovereign nation.



*Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain*  
1880-1932



*Begum Sufia Kamal*  
1911-99

**SECTION TWO THEME:**  
**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**



*Sheikh Hasina*  
*Honorable Prime Minister, Bangladesh*



## Professor Dr. Imtiaz A Hussain

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# WOMEN: “LARGEST UNTAPPED RESERVOIR OF TALENT”

Hillary Clinton might have opened too mysterious a box with her title quote. From Auld English to Modern (today's) English, we seem to have come a long way in placing women in the human pantheon, but still remain unsure if that placement is universally correct. Stemming from the *wimman* original usage to 'woman-man' today (or *wifman* to wife-man), the 'woman' term could, at first sight, be interpreted as 'a man's woman', a subject. Historical analyses and literary/musical anecdotes shy away from such caricaturing: since man could not have tamed forces like agriculture, home-building, partitioning homes, and so forth, without an equal partner, nor could the male world have gone 'round without the muses emanating from women. This second interpretation sees 'woman' as doing the man's job. It adds flair and flavor to man's preference for the spoils and savoring of competitiveness. Why, wars even keep our juices flowing by titillating romance.

Fast-forwarding to today's technologically fattened world, clichés carry intrinsic messages to listen to. Take "Love is a 'many splendored' thing." Perhaps the most dominant image stemming from that phrase cannot but be a woman. If, contrariwise, a man, wouldn't one expect the "many-splendored" component to change to something less attractive. Fashion-designers and retailers spend/earn more money on/from women attire/gadgets than men, if a lesson is there to learn.

That is not the only phrase we simply swallow without recognizing the pivotal place of women. Another could be Valentine's Day, when bouquets, chocolates, and lunch invitations target women far more than men. In the same *sense* Mother's Day tops popularity over Father's Day. Let's not miss the underlying messages: anything 'finesse', an aesthetic concept, gets overtaken by everything material, like 'money' among humans, or 'development' between countries.

A rose-bush analogy helps deepen this portraiture. Roses can melt a woman's heart more than they do a man's. One takeaway could be: the more of them, the longer the woman's purr. Another: this begins the slow start of the woman's full conquest. Disarmed women ain't the way to wager 'empowerment'. Thorns take over, if only to prickle the subject to realities. Bills have to be paid, and nowhere in the world outside a Venus image or Mona Lisa painting has identity been built upon the quicksand of purring. The rose-bush moral is simple: the more the Valentine Days, the farther the seduced woman will be from any 'empowerment' cause.

'Empowerment' itself opens another landmine: it carries a caste-system, peculiarly exposed. Since a bulk of our 'empowered' army consists of loftily-perched women, RMG women workers (accounting for over half of the industry's workers), who rarely touch the 'empowerment' campaign because 'bread-and-butter' issues top their agenda, end up depicting far more 'empowerment' than their upper-echelon sisters without barely opening their lips.

Closely examined, our privileged women-groups invest more impulses and efforts to find a commensurate husband/partner than new encumbrances or wage empowerment campaigns. We see this in the eyes of just about every girl entering university life, with education (what their parents pay big *Takas* for), being just a nuisance of a chaperone. When she finds her 'Prince Charming', more time gets spent on preserving and/or projecting the emergent privileged lifestyles. This takes its toll on 'empowerment' advocacy, since preparing better lunches/dinners/parties than their close friend's, or winning the attractive *sari* contest, takes over.

Both plunges ditch ‘empowerment’ in the nearest drainage. Ultimately, of course, those empowerment issue-agenda becomes too sparse: who, for example, prefers campaigning to recruit women graduates or pilots, or enhancing women driving-license holders when decorating the house, preparing family lunches, and receiving flowers than planting the bushes in their garden to cultivate roses, carries more dividend? Just entering any ‘empowerment’ cause may necessitate male approval, certification, or support, it seems.

Which, of course, makes no sense, since it is the female touch that makes the country more attractive to begin with (going back to the Valentine discussions), and ultimately more efficient: compare women spring-cleaning their own residences with those spring-cleaned by men. At the limit, coal could become a less preferred energy source, as too gas, if women made the final choice, since the shift to solar would clean the dirt-filled air and accelerate their children’s growth. More flowers and trees would dot the streets instead, and voila, even males would live longer!

Cultivating sense may be the fitting closing theme. Over the 50 brief years of this country, glimpses of our own “Christine Columbus” opening new opportunity-lands/windows have been anything but sparse. Once, they had no over-riding social media as an ‘empowerment’ platform. Today there are plenty. Grabbing this as the instrument helps propel the 51% of the country’s population who are women, that’s right, a full majority capable of outvoting males on any issue. Men could compromise by opening more administrative and decision-making jobs for women: one lady-led activity encourages another to join, with the ultimate chain institutionalizing the authority Clinton had in mind.



Enough hardcore traditional boundaries have been diluting or disappearing: extended families lead more and more to nuclear lives; arranged marriages today smuggle in pre-nuptial trysts; the divorced *femme* population is expanding faster in the marriage-market than two unknown individuals dominating the wedding-vows tapestry as before; and the society where any married couple will live today is rapidly becoming more unbeknown to its denizens than the predictable neighborhoods of yesteryears.

The list goes on, but so too the awareness of potential openings that empowerment soldiers can explore and consummately exploit. New boundaries must be spelled out by them sooner than later, just to drive the nail behind International Women’s Day, Mother’s Day, Valentine Day, and, most thunderously, our own 1971 gender-free liberation war, irretrievably home. Your inspiration-base is ample: the common male-female 1971 experiences are the very shoulders you must stand. For ‘empowerment’ to grow, become institutionalized, and unleash the change one corner of your mind undoubtedly desires, you must first soften any ‘lord of the house’ resistance platform. Without two, as another cliché goes, no tango at all.

“Our country right or wrong” is a companion-hungry phrase. Try: “Our Ladies, fettered or unfettered,” as one. Future blossoms may come faster than not with thorns too *impotent* to bite.

## YELLOW SIGNALS

### Women in the last 50 years?

We can see that women are so visible in our own eyes; they are holding very important positions. Two of the prime ministers of Bangladesh have been women, and women play a vital role today as politicians, police, army, and civil servants. We still tend to see the challenge for women. Due to the traditional mindset and difficulties, women, even today, suffer by not continuing their education, especially higher education. Also, changes seem to be underway: forms only used to ask the father's identity previously, but now, as things are getting changed, not only mothers' names are asked, but rather, to begin the form with. Even though we continue to face many challenges in women development, we have kept firm belief and keep moving forward.



### Professor Dr. Nasreen Ahmad

Former Pro-Vice Chancellor  
University of Dhaka

### Women in next 50 years?

Disappointment dangles, especially when religious extremists still get away after giving bad remarks about women. Also, how the *waz* and *mahfil* picture and women are so nasty. Despite a lot of development day by day, the environment is becoming worrisome for women due to insecurity, such as rape. Once in living memory, parents never used to take their child to school, collages or art school. Today this is a topmost pattern due to insecurity.

Helping hands in the house were so friendly and reliable then, but there is a lack of such reliance today's when we want to see human behaviour as a proper human being. Women should be strong, and education is the greatest weapon; this will automatically earn them respect and decision-making capability. Wherever they are, women should make use of the government's ongoing effort to build themselves. This is a competitive world where there is a lack of opportunities, so women should face such challenges.



## Ms. Mahfuza Liza

Additional Deputy Commissioner at Counter Terrorism & Transnational Crime, Dhaka Metropolitan Police

# GENDERING THE POLICE FORCE

The wide-ranging involvement of women in different sectors has shifted the status of women in Bangladesh over the 50 years of our independence . . . to increase female participation, reduce inequality, and raise responsiveness about the positive impacts of empowering women. Bangladesh Police is also thriving . . . through the performance and professional excellence of women police challenging the traditional perception of women's roles. Today it is an unquestionable fact that women police have accomplished distinction . . . becoming an integral part of the socio-economic escalation with an equal and shared responsibility to institute an inclusive social order. As a proud member of Bangladesh Police, I am delighted to see that it has become an active actor in recognizing the role of women in law enforcement to ensure a safe and secured society.

Contemporary world policing is about prevention of crime through community consultation. This proactive approach of community policing is specially making women police a crucial component as they possess these qualities inherently. While this is imperative to policing as a whole, it is especially helpful in situations where victims feel more comfortable discussing the details of a crime with women police officers. With the employment of 14 women in Bangladesh Police, women police commenced its activities in 1974. The first female officer was recruited directly in cadre service in the year 1986. At present, 15,163 women officers of different ranks, ranging from Deputy Inspector General to Constables, are serving Bangladesh Police with enthusiasm in all police units in different capacities, including both operational and administrative roles. Not only at national level, they are contributing to ensure global peace and security as well. Bangladesh is the highest female troop contributing country in peacekeeping missions, which has become a matter of pride. They have placed themselves as the key driving force to reduce gender-based violence, particularly in case of conflict and confrontation. In coming days I would like to see the participation of more women police in the service, their empowerment and contribution in policy making process, as well as in different sectors within the periphery of their job in countrywide and international milieu.





## Ms. Nasima Haider

Former Ambassador &  
Secretary to the Government

# WEARING MANY HATS . . . MULTIFACETED WOMEN

Women are the frontline fighters against the pandemic, and its impact on them is stark, simply because they are over-represented in health systems. They do the majority of work-caring for patients in hospitals as well as in their households. They also face high risks of violence, exploitation, abuse and harassment during times of crisis and quarantine.

Some of the greatest challenges facing women and girls worldwide are access to secure livelihoods and technological innovations, political security and protection during conflicts, involvement in peace-making and war prevention, protection from damaging effects of global warming and environmental destruction, such as pollution of ground water, involvement in all decision-making processes that affect their lives, and access to health care and education.

. . . among the women empowerment mainstays are education, skills training, leadership training and access to microcredit . . . yet many women in rural Bangladesh are still required to take out high interest loans through informal money lenders to earn a living and care for their families.

Having said that, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in the last 20 years in improving the lives of women and girls. In a recent article titled "What Biden can do to reduce child poverty: Look to Bangladesh", the *New York Times* columnist, Mr. Nicholas Kristof, said the secret to Bangladesh's success in the last 15 years was education and girls. He amplified this point by saying . . . "still more astonishing for a country with a history of gender gaps, there are now more girls in high school in Bangladesh than boys - the most dramatic thing that happened to Bangladesh has to do with transforming the status of women, starting with the poorest women . . ." Indeed, nearly three million Bangladeshi women are employed in the lucrative ready-made garment sector, which is Bangladesh's largest export industry.

Ready-made garments is not the only industry that employ women. Today, a segment of women work in challenging professions like defense, army, navy and air force, UN peacekeeping missions, civil, judicial (justices of the High Court) and foreign services (many of them ambassadors and high commissioners), police, airline pilots, drivers of the train, bus and taxi, building construction, brick field and also in fire services. They are also participating in such sports as cricket, football, shooting, martial arts and many more alongside men. The number of female personnel in education, politics, business, social development, agriculture, fisheries and other fields has increased significantly in the last 20 years or so.

In global power and leadership, many women have proved their capability to lead the world alongside their male counterparts--with strong education and constructive background, they have arisen to important and influential positions in the power equations of world politics and economy. Most notable are the Prime Ministers of New Zealand and Bangladesh, Chancellor of Germany, President of Taiwan, Vice President and Speaker of the House in the USA, Heads of the European Central Bank and US Federal Reserve Board, to name a few. Their compelling personality and great leadership quality should serve as an inspiration for the future generations of women.

On the diplomatic front, female diplomats are coming to the forefront. In Bangladesh missions abroad, women representation as ambassadors and high commissioners in six continents are now higher than ever before. This is a reflection of increasing empowerment of about half of the population of the country. It is noteworthy that no preferential treatment is meted out to female diplomats while posting them to Bangladesh missions abroad. I was posted as Deputy High Commissioner in our Deputy High Commission in Karachi way back in 2000, and Karachi, at that time, was known as the hot bed of terrorism. I was the only female head of mission in Karachi. And, as a professional diplomat, I have never faced any institutional discrimination till such time I retired from the foreign service. Women diplomats are performing equally with their male counterparts.

The United Nations announced this year's History Month (March) theme as "Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a Covid-19 World".

## Ms. Khushi Kabir

Social activist, Feminist, and Environmentalist



### “WHAT TO DO?”

Women’s organizations and movements began from ‘71. Those who fought directly in the war came back and continued, and they were the ones who were also in the movement for the autonomy of the eastern wing, against the military rule before.

My work concentrated in the NGOs (Non-governmental organizations), and at the time, the NGOs were not working with women particularly, except maybe giving out sewing machines and things like that. But 1975 was the UN (United Nations) Women year, and then it became a decade of contribution. There were certain things that had to be done, like adopting a ministry for women’s affairs. And that was the time women’s issues came forward. After Bangabandhu’s death, there was a shock of “what to do”. But I was living and working in the villages, and I continued my work. There were things happening around me. I saw the way the army was behaving in 1975 through 76, but at the same time I was also working with women and finding out that the traditional thought that people had about women in rural areas were not really true. After ‘75, the economic association had a very big conference, and I read out a paper called “exploding some minutes,” which was what men usually thought about women and what the reality in the villages were. Those were important points because the *Nari Punorbashon Kendro* stopped after Ziaur Rahman came into power. After having to form a national women’s directorate or women’s ministry, all that when it was being done, there were also the women’s organizations talking about women’s movement. The women’s movement initially was more about creating spaces and opportunities for women than empowerment. That’s when the microcredit came about, working with women came about, education for women came about and all this was linked with the UN declarations.

In Bangladesh, the women’s movement became quite strong and visible during the Ershad period. In ‘82, when Ershad took over, again, the first group of people to stand up and protest were the women’s groups who came together to end violence against women all over the country. This is important because this was the first protest in a way against the power. Before that, there was a certain numbness that persisted except some of the left political parties which kept on protesting. In ‘85 there was a Nairobi Women’s conference to mark the end of the decade and the continuation of going forward more years to come and become integral.

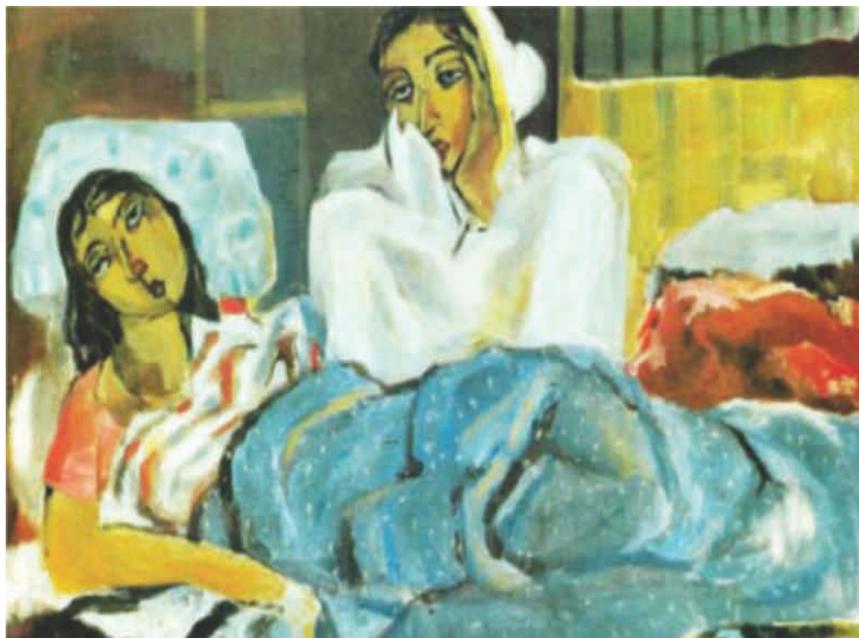
The women’s movement started taking up a lot of issues, like issues of fundamentalism, rape, violence against women, equal pay, access of resources all these happened at that time. And later, it became even stronger and out on the streets, very clear of not creating a women’s agenda, but a feminist agenda. This was the women’s movement starting from the 70s to the 80s, creating unity and a vision of women’s empowerment and movements. And that idea that traditionally women are passive and would not want change, and that in the rural areas they are even more dogmatic and more conservative was proven to be not true because by then there were hundreds of NGOs working and many of them were working with women only, showing that women very often were willing to bring forward the changes. So it was something that came out very strongly. And when secularism was taken out, this was something that the women’s groups reacted to very strongly. When the state religion was brought in with Islam, it was the women’s groups which again, protested very strongly about it.

There was also acid throwing and violence of all kinds, and a collective effort was coagulated to fight against that social pandemic. Acid was being thrown as a means of revenge or as a mean of punishment. There were a few high profile cases in Dhaka and also some of women being raped or killed in villages. The women’s group took these up very strongly and the women’s movement became the strongest at that time, during the 80s.

I broke traditions in many ways of what was expected. I didn’t have to fight for it, I just did it. So the challenge was to prove that I can do it, and I can do it better than the man. So, I think those of us who took the first step had to be very clear and good. Because any weakness on our part would be looked at like women cannot do it, whereas there were

so many more weaknesses in the man that was overlooked. And women didn't have the luxury to make mistakes. So we had to work very hard, those of us who took up the challenge of changing stereotypes and roles. So that is one big challenge. So, I think those of us who took the first step had to be very clear and good. Because any weakness on our part would be looked at like women cannot do it. Whereas there were so many more weaknesses in the man that was overlooked. And women didn't have the luxury to make mistakes. So we had to work very hard, those of us who took up the challenge of changing stereotypes and roles. That was one big challenge. Secondly, it's okay that a lot of people may feel intimidated that yes, you have the strength of character, you have the ability to be able to do it, I don't. You are different and we women are different. For all women to feel that everyone has the ability to make changes was a challenge. It is just to have that faith, trust and belief in themselves. And for men to say that it's not just me, I'm a woman, don't say I'm one of the men. And I've shown that it's possible for women, so it's possible for all women. To say that for you it is possible but not for all is untrue. These have been the major challenges of the times.

Acceptance of the average citizen, people who have to travel within buses, trains and launches was another. People whom I've worked with in the villages had no such challenges of being accepted by them. They were receptive as much as I had accepted them, and they were very close to me, as I was close to them. In fact, as a woman I felt I had an advantage, because the men accepted me and I could talk to them and the women would come and tell me all the details of their stories they wouldn't tell the man. So I had the best of both worlds, being able to talk closely with both genders. I never felt insecure physically or mentally or have been violated some way, but I would be stared at quite a lot. I learned how to deal with it. I'm unsure if that was a challenge or not, I learned how to deal with it.



Even in the village, when I first went, it was not just the man, I'd wake up with a group of villagers staring at me, auditing my moves with no privacy. Even though I grew up with privacy, in the village I had to learn how to deal with it. Unlike the cities, in the villages, the concept of privacy did not exist. So that was a personal challenge of not letting it bother me and learning how to deal with it.

What would be the keyword for seeing women empowerment in the next 50 years of Bangladesh?

I used to wonder what the new generation is thinking. I think the Shahabag movement changed a lot of things for me. I learnt a lot during the Shahbagh movement because I used to go there everyday and the movement was charged by the young people and we were on the outskirts. But they liked me, they used to talk to me, we would sit together after. So I found there is spirit amongst the youth. It just needs the time. At this moment we don't see it because I don't think that a movement is there, but Shahbagh movement triggered off over the decision of Kader Mollah's death penalty. So I just hope that it is lying latent within young people and they're willing to change, the moment there is a chance. But I think young people need to know.

I think we have to think beyond ourselves and not just our own personal change. The feminist movement says the person is political. But the person is political in the sense that if you have faith and belief and stand up for yourself, you can stand up for others. But if you only look at a person as political as you change yourself and not think of the greater society and what is the system of patriarchy that makes it what it is, just making personal changes is not of much use. So the only take I have now is that a lot of young people have been wanting very much to change themselves, outlook and views but they're not willing to take up the job of wanting to learn and work with all women of all classes and categories. That is something I feel we need to work on.

**Ms. Sharmeen Murshid**  
Chief Executive Officer, *Brotee*



## REVITALIZING FOUR PILLARS



*The Murshid Family*

soon became one of the top election watchdog organizations in the country.

I think the four pillars that we talked about in 1971 were as relevant as it is today because we haven't really completed that journey. So I will quickly say what it stands for me and why my work reflects some of that. Socialism I see as social equality and social justice that we wanted. Nationalism I see as patriotism, a love for our culture, our heritage, our patriotism, everything we are proud of in our culture. Democracy I see as our commitment to a comprehensive participation of all our people in decision making, in governing this land. Secularism I see as religion being whatever it is to the individual. State must be free of religious bias and state must be run neutrally without any religious bias. So that all people have a fair chance.

So we come here in 2020, we see that democratically we are weak, our institutions are extremely weak. Nationalism as a patriotic country, we are so corrupt. I question our patriotism, I question our social justice and governance and rule of law. I question this participation and equal opportunity for all people. So human rights and democracy became very important parts of the work I was doing. I started with elections, I worked with that and I think that people like us, civil society organizations, had spent on the electoral process and had seen its rise and its fall. So we continue to struggle with

our electoral process and perhaps we did what we could, perhaps for rations to come, there has to be more work on this field. I also chose to work with human rights. I worked with 17 *Addibashi* communities. I discovered that our people didn't have safe water: 61 districts out of 64 were arsenic-contaminated ground water. I started working with water. As I was campaigning with legal campaigns for safe drinking water, I decided to do application research and move towards the use of surface water, and I proved that a river can be made highly potable. After 2 years of application research through

I think the path I took, I always say the direction of my career has been determined by the environment in which I grew up, my family, and the Liberation War. I studied in Europe, in Poland, and I got into Oxford for my MPhil, but I never did it. I just came back home, saying that if I stayed any longer abroad, I wouldn't be coming back home. So I wanted to get back home and I dove into rural development work and from there I evolved into developing my own organization called *Brotee*. I focused on democracy. What I found was that, consciously or unconsciously, I felt that the path that we were supposed to take, that society was supposed to evolve, had not gone quite so well for us and that's where I should work. So I started by strengthening our electoral process and became a watchdog for elections and studying electoral process. With that, I think I wouldn't be wrong in saying *Brotee*



*Team Brotee*

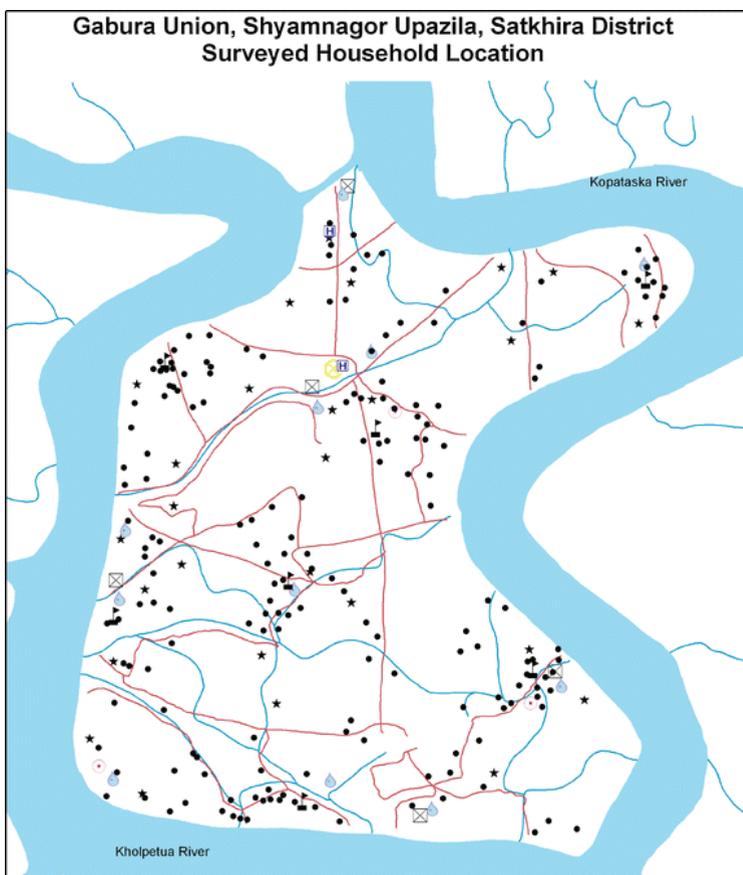
a natural process, I was able to make the river Mahaganda potable and provide this drinking water to arsenic affected villages through pipelines. I can tell you that the quality of this water meets that of the World Health Organization and the Bangladesh standards.

Why this is important for me to reiterate? Because Bangladesh is one of the richest countries in the world in surface water per capita, and yet we are not harnessing this water, we are not protecting this water. I am a member of the National River Conservation Commission and, as such, I have been working with rivers for the last 6 years. While our rivers are dying and being destroyed, it's a uphill task when one is faced with corruption, when one is faced with men in governance, when one is faced with lack of commitment, despite the fact that our prime minister has announced again and again her commitment to protect rivers, our rivers are dying. There are hundreds of rivers that still sleep and they need to be harnessed. Drinking water, the crisis of drinking water in Bangladesh, can be largely resolved and we proved that. Now I think that my job as a conscientious citizen of this country, with whatever little ability that I have, my job is to demonstrate that important social problems that address those, find solutions, and present them. I look at myself as a social architect that is working with the problems and finding solutions. I have been working with People's Action Research in 260 villages now and with young people, adolescents. For 12 years, these young people, the same young people who have been working with me and today we have more than 120 villages that are absolutely a child marriage-free, I would say.

I would like to conclude that a small organization like *Brotee* can only demonstrate, can only show that certain things can be done through social research, through action research, but it is the job of the government to identify these good examples. There are brilliant young people doing wonderful work, these need to be recognized, taken over by the government and replicated.

If you ask me, I ask myself this question, and I say this to you as well. In 1971, few hundred thousand women were destroyed by the Pakistani army. I ask you, how many hundred thousand women have Bangladeshis destroyed in the last 50 years, and we continue to so destroy. How? What are we doing? Today in 2020, the statistics show a huge rise in violence on our girls. How do we justify that? How have we emancipated ourselves? How have we freed ourselves from these monstrous cultures? Now, I have proved that child marriage can be controlled within 2 years. Look at Dr. Zafarullah. Without him, would we have had this wonderful health policy that we have? The drug policy? No. So there are a lot of good things that are happening. I

think what is not happening is that these are not being tapped on. Bringing the private and public sector together helps. I would say that my work focuses on human rights and water as a basic human need, and therefore basic human right. My work is in the Coastal Belt, where I am working with one of the most climatically vulnerable areas, Gabura. I call Gabura our social laboratory. We're working on resilience, we're preserving water, every year there's a cyclone. We have adopted the children of Gabura to protect them. We organized the communities. It's an area where children cannot go to school, where there is no health care, where there is no livelihood, it's an absolutely marginalized area. So what we have done recently after many years of effort, we started a floating health care service. So we have a boat and 2-3 doctors and what we do is that Gabura is surrounded by rivers and we take the river routes and they stop at junctions and people come and we provide them health service. The young people who we organize in all these villages, they develop leadership. These young people are actually the ones who organize the villages and undertake these tasks.





## Ms. Bibi Russell

Fashion designer &  
Former International Model  
*Bibi Production Owner*



## ‘DESIGNER FOR DEVELOPMENT’ DREAMER

I think the path I took, I always say the direction of my career has been determined by the environment in which I grew up. Since I was a young, I had a dream. I couldn't understand why Bangladeshi people were thought of as poor. For me the country was a rich with colors and music! When I went to Europe, my dream went with me. One day I knew that I was mentally and physically ready to go back home.

I believed that the people of Bangladesh needed me as much as I needed them. You need two hands to clap. Today, after more than twenty years of experience, I know I was right. They know I respect them and help them restore their human dignity. That is the most important thing. On the other hand, they give me so much love and affection! This gives me the strength to go forward. Nothing in the world can take me ever from this work.

I have never turned my back on my country. My parents always lived in Bangladesh, so I returned home regularly even when I lived abroad. I was born in Bangladesh and spent my childhood there. I think childhood has a major impact on your life.

I have a wonderful family. My parents taught me to appreciate our culture as well as the culture of other countries. Bangladesh used to be a part of India, which was governed by the British and the Moguls. Thanks to the education my parents gave me, I learned all about the greater India and about the culture of the other countries as well. I think parents must teach their children more about their culture and tradition so that this tradition does not die.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Russell was born in 1950 in Chittagong, Bangladesh to Mokhlessur Rahman and Shamsun Nahar. She grew up in Dhaka studying in Kamrunnessa Govt Girls High School, and later, College of Home Economics, Azimpur, Dhaka. She earned a graduate degree in fashion from London College of Fashion in 1975. In the next five years, she worked as a model for different magazines including *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Harper's Bazaar*. She also worked as a fashion model in fashion shows until 1994, working with Yves Saint Laurent, Kenzo, Karl Lagerfeld and Giorgio Armani. Returning to Bangladesh in 1994, Russell opened a fashion house named *Bibi Productions*, which fused indigenous Bengali cultural elements into her design. As of 2004, her company employed 35,000 weavers in rural Bangladesh



In 1999, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization) designated me as a Designer for Development. Then, in 2001, I was made an Artist for Peace. What I am today is thanks to UNESCO. But also, thanks to my work, people realize that Bangladesh does not only have problems, it is also a wonderful country. When I was designated designer for development. I returned home and showed the certificate to the weavers. I told them that they were the owners, not just myself. You can change people's minds when you respect their human dignity.

Any recognition gives me strength, I am a fellow of the University of the Arts, London. This recognition is given to me for the contribution I have made to promoting handloom. I have received the highest award from the Bangla Academy. And the biggest designers in the world have also recognized the work I do for Development. The international recognition helps me a lot in my work of promoting Fashion for Development.

Everything we do at *Bibi Production* is natural and homemade. I have never used synthetic fabrics or artificial colors. I don't expect people to wear natural and homemade all the time, but even if you have four or five outfits, wear them every now and then! My models are inspired by traditional design. Of course, I change colors, I simplify the design, but I never change the traditional way of weaving cotton or silk. Among my biggest sellers are my accessories and scarfs. My bangle is made out of water hyacinth, a plant that grows widely in Bangladesh. I have women in six villages making these bangles. And my *gamuchas* are promoted by the Spanish actor, Antonio Banderas, so I do not spend money on publicity. I would never do that.

I was inspired by the rickshaw art in Bangladesh to make spectacle frames that I personally wear very often. By the real revolution was brought about with our design for young people. We do jeans in different colours, *sarees* in a different way, modern blouses etc.

I know married life, I have two children. When my kids were around 9 to 10, I had to make them realize that I have a dream, and that if I do not pursue it, I would be frustrated. Today, my parents have both passed away, my children live abroad, but the craftspeople I work with never allow me to feel alone. These are ordinary people, who need their wages on the first day of the month to pay rent. They are not my family, but they mean more than anything to me.

Since I returned to Bangladesh, I started to support street children. I gave them some money on the condition they went to school. I became their guarantor for NGO (non-governmental organization) schools, where street children are not usually accepted. It was first one child, then another—now they are more than a hundred! They are my source of joy when I am in Dhaka.



**Ms. Samira Himika**  
Entrepreneur & Investor



## **CHALLENGES, JOURNEYS & CHALLENGES: STRATEGIES FROM REALIZATIONS**

As a serial entrepreneur and investor, I have been educated, and have been working as a Communication Specialist. Hmmm! When I started my career, and I was born in a *Grameen Bank* family. My background, was very much with the developed sector, even though I am an amateur artist who paints, sings, and takes photographs.

That's how I rejuvenate my soul. When I say that I am a serial entrepreneur, I refer to having a portfolio of companies which are running independently. Currently, the main role that I have is to create a growing one-technological company with a vision to become a tech company of Bangladesh, and possibly to become a global company soon. It's called, "*Giga Tech Limited*". As the Managing Director, most of my focus and time is dedicated to *Giga Tech*, although I also work as an advisor for Bangladesh's Operation of British Asian Trust, which is a charity organization by His Royal Highness Prince of Wales, "Prince Charles", which is an amazing charity organization that is doing a lot of innovation in terms of development and charity work in a very innovative way. I am also a board member of Friendship NGO which is an international award NGO, for its amazing work. It has taken the river as one of the main ways of reaching out to disabled and marginalized people, especially to the women and children, and addresses climate change in a very innovative way. In a nutshell if I look back, I have been too curious a person. I think innovatively very naturally or as a spontaneous search and quest of my life so far. I am very intrigued by people who are doing something differently than others; expressing creatively in a very creative ways or thinking big or breaking ceilings, or breaking stereotypical so-called definitions.

I have a purpose, and God has sent me to the universe for a certain purpose, and my purpose is to actually enable people the innovative way in my lifetime. Whatever I can do.

So, it's a long journey for me. I do work because I love it. When I don't like it. I at least ensure, they are sustainable by themselves and go for my next chapter.

I think this is a core nature of a woman as well, where women are builders and women are caregivers, where women are compassionate human beings, we love as women, and we love creating things and taking care of it.

We are multi-taskers. I think we can take a lot, and we can manage a lot of things simultaneously.

So what do I embrace about being a woman.

The second most important realization that I also want to share with the younger generation is that I think being a woman in this world is to overlook thinking it's a very male-based society or a country. This is one way of seeing it. The other way of seeing it, we have to prove little more than men and we have to try harder than men in many cases. But, it's also true that men have their own challenges as well.

They have different challenges. We have different challenges. So in many cases, I don't actually think we should be seeing ourselves as weak or not privileged or without skills. That is not the way I see other women leaders in the society.

I think we are extremely courageous, bold, and headstrong well. And any woman who has come to a point where she is seen as a leader, she has genuinely earned it with extreme hard-work and a lot of sacrifice. I think women leaders are more holistic persons.

They manage the home, the external world, and even create institutions and a team for helping people as well. So, I think, I see that I am a woman and I am blessed being a woman. Instead, I see it as a weakness or a challenge.

As a serial entrepreneur and investor, I have been educated, and have been working as a Communication Specialist. The third realization is the way we present ourselves to the world, how the world sees us. Initially, we know people may try to see weakness in us, our limitation that happens to men and women both. It's a marathon. After a certain time, one realizes it's the work that actually counts. It's the work that gives us the honor. It's the dedication that shows our strength and its the skillset and virtue, that we bring to the world. That makes us. We know that put us in the better situation in life.

The other point I also wanted to say is that, "I also feel that woman at work might be seen as leader and successful people or woman". The women who are staying home and helping the family, to fulfill their dream, are champions. They are also a very important part of the society, and the family, without their support, cannot have everything.

Certainly, a big number of women who are not at work are not actively working but passively so. There is a bigger responsibility I feel that to encourage their life and sacrifice as well when we celebrate international women's day. I think this is one of those days in which all kinds of roles that women played in a family or a community or a country get to honor them, one way of giving right respect to everyone contributing, to all women contributing.

If I had to say anything to the younger generation, whether women or girls: "You know our generation before us", they used to see the world differently. There were extremely strong women leaders who are in their 60s or 70s age wise, who have broken their own ceilings and that stereotypical definition of women at work. Women in any work and any thing have broken that definition and have shown the county, "Bangladesh", because they have shown it is possible and a way to express it is by getting involved and take initiatives.

Because they have done it, we of this generation below 40 have at least the foundation.

It's very important to for us to have, really, a strong bond and understanding, respect for our previous generation.

That's why I have mentors who are 20 years older than myself and 50 years older than myself, who have achieved a lot in their own terms. It's very important to understand them and learn from them, and acknowledge that they've given us the foundation.

And at the same time, what are we doing now? It's my responsibility for holding hands with the younger generation. Actually, students who are passing now or going to pass soon are 10 or 15 years younger than myself. I am actually on hold for quite some time.

I wanted to give my entrepreneurial platform to women, girls who want to explore that to show what they are capable of. Of course! They have to be skilled and to have willingness, or they have to show they can or want to deliver.

From the previous generation we know Rokeya Abzal. She is my most favorite human in Bangladesh, and maybe all over the world. She is on the board of an amazing organization as a chairwoman or a board member, and she honestly gives time to women entrepreneurs wherever possible, be it half hour a week or twice a year.

I don't get to learn from much people. There are few of my colleagues women and friends who are working now, and have fantastic companies, running business, and also successfully in their own terms.

Apart from Rokeya Apa, I think when I have to spend really less time, I feel Khitihara Safin is one of the person who is gracious and loving, and extremely capable to build an *adcom*. She is continuing to doing it. She is amazing and beyond explanation. Sangeeta Apa is another person. I adore her beauty, her presence, and the way she thinks, the way she has. She is an extremely graceful women. Again from our generation, a little senior than me; and I love to talk with Farzana Apa. Farzana Apa and the head of Green Delta.

I love hanging out with Sonia Apa and Rhuba Thola. We are all working now, and of course they are a little senior than me. We are all working extremely hard and we don't get to hangout, to discuss or explore a lot of things together. But, I think there is a positiveness among ourselves that if we really want to reach out to someone.

They will actually also be available for us, that's a sort of network or a relationship that there is, and there should be. So, that we can actually share our story, share how we have dealt with certain challenges, and I think it's one of my responsibility again. Any girl or any women!

## What to do to improve women's participation?

I took a different approach because I said, "I don't see and I don't want to represent myself as a women woman. As I see, I want to represent myself as a human being first. I also want to search out. If it is a young person, my eyes are open for both boys and girls, so there are no discrimination.

I tried to share my knowledge that I gathered experience and told what I would have done in their position. This is one way. A second way, that I have done through my initial companies, is build a team engine a social enterprise. Its motive was to enable young entrepreneurs who want to start business, but don't know much about the market but have good products or good thinking or good ideas.

So, during that time: I think almost 4,000 or 5,000 young peoples have reached out or gotten some kind of discussion, or workshops, or mentor ship, or whatever you say in a very small scale tool and bigger scale as well during that time, between 2011 till 2015. Later on, I changed my approach that the approach is when somebody is doing something. I think it's important to recognize their work. Later-on, it's like helping them to perfecting their business or helping them to getting more client, or lead to something that we constantly do, from the other companies.

The third approach that I also have taken is, "I am slowly trying to increase women in our companies". So, it gets very difficult time when, even though we want more girls in our team, we are not getting enough. From an employer point of view, I would say that, I have long way to go

Women-friendly environment prevails in our company. We have girls who have gotten married and have kids. They can bring their kids here, in a very open office. The kids can run around while mother is working in that kind of environment. We've established!

The first step has to be taken by that person, that girl or woman to show the determination she is willingly to step up, and willingly level up, even do more. She is willingly to work extra because that's the only way.





## Dr. Rifat Rashid

Founding Director (Chief Executive)  
France-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industries, &  
Professor, French, IUB

### “TO PARIS WITH LOVE”

I finished my studies in International Relations from Dhaka University, and then I was blessed enough to achieve a scholarship. I went to France to pursue higher education, and I came back to Dhaka with my husband and children to get re-connected with my roots. Even though I could have stayed back abroad, I wanted my children to grow up in a social setting similar to mine.

After I came back I could have joined as a teacher in the International Relations Department, but my children were still young and teaching is extremely time-consuming. So, I began my first job as a research assistant in Bangladesh Institution of International and Strategic Studies (BISS). But within six-months, another job offered by the Embassy of France in the Centre of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) attracted my attention because it was an organization which focused on developing relationships between different entities. I started working on behalf of Bangladesh to collaborate with different universities and researchers, and for the first time in our country’s history, an archaeological mission started. A group of archeologists from France started its excavation in Mahsthanagar of Bogra. Of great pride, that mission is still on-going. Whenever it needs any assistance, I try to provide it.

I was promoted as the Director of CSIS, and visited many universities for collaboration and government offices for event and program permissions. Sometimes people would be surprised to interact with such a young chamber director, but within a year or so I started receiving a more positive and supportive attitude. I left CSIS after five years.

After the academic and archeological collaboration, I was instructed by the French Embassy to start working on developing a business relation between Bangladesh and France. With the help of the Trade Commissioner Chamber, I initiated the formation of the First Joint European Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh. We fought hard to develop the chamber, but once the France-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry was established, we arranged a single country fair in France. I represented thirty Bangladeshi entrepreneurial companies in the fair. Soon Bangladesh participated in the *Foire de Paris* Fair for the first time, where I represented women entrepreneurs. Even though most of these



women-led businesses could be considered a part of the cottage-industries, their journey of establishing themselves inspired me. They did not have large investments, but still they strived to build their own identity. But I also represented many independent women in decision-making positions of the garment sector in other fairs. I observed various motivating stories of women fighting for themselves, sometimes with support from their family.

I believe by increasing representation of Bangladeshi companies and products, I played an important role in forming a separate and unique identity of Bangladesh.

There is a lack of training and resources for women, but I feel hopeful since there are various private associations that try to make women more self-sufficient. I think concerted efforts by these associations will be more effective. I believe talent is present but more training on planning and projection is necessary. While private initiatives have done significant work, government assistance will also be helpful for different communities.



Times have changed, so I will not be criticizing the present generation. My generation had to go through a war of independence, which made our perspective towards life different from the present generation. But I do feel the latter generations do not understand the struggle we had to go through during the war. Many can't even grasp the experience of running from one village to next, or understand the trauma resulting from military attacks. We saw how we were treated before the war first-hand. So, the way we feel intrinsically connected to our country and language is different.

Today's generation, is more focused on breaking division through cross-cultural exchange. I don't think this is an entirely negative phenomena, because there are entities which also try to make people aware about the Bangalee identity and spirit. I observe cultural blending in clothing and music, but it has to be done in a way that Bangalee culture is expressed as well. Bibi Rusell is doing a wonderful job in the fashion sector, for example.

I have a very positive outlook towards life. I would say Bangladesh has come a long way within these 50 years. Of course we have negative sides, but if we remained a part of Pakistan we would have achieved nothing. We would be exploited, and private universities with aspiring women wouldn't exist. We wouldn't be speaking Bangalee. Corruption and other negative sides have to be sorted out from time to time, but the private sector of Bangladesh is blooming. It is a growing country, and more privileges are arising. We have to do more, and we will do more for our country in a more organized manner. While the garment sector has played a great role, more prospects are arriving in the pharmaceutical, IT and even leather sector.



## Ms. Shireen Huq

Social Activist &  
Executive Director of *Naripokkho*

### **WOMEN IN POST-INDEPENDENT OF BANGLADESH: “MOTHER-DAUGHTER BONDAGE CRUCIAL”**

The journey of women since independence has not been linear . . . like everything else, as democracy, economic growth. State interventions and measurements adopted facilitated women's advancements. Social forces, or what has been happening in society, have been enforced or challenging . . . Macro figures show tremendous achievement, for example, life expectancy rate, of 1971, doubling.

On the other hand, maternal mortality rate has also come down, but not to the extent, we would have wanted to see . . . (unless) maternal mortality becomes a policy priority. We have been concerned with the mortality reduction rate, but we have not given enough attention to movability. I think whatever the reduction is also an achievement for us as a country . . . Maternal deaths happen to women at the prime of their life . . . at the age at which women are becoming pregnant and giving birth, which is, being at their peak point in terms of their life, dreams, aspirations, this could become a vast loss for a country . . . the child will suffer without a mother, and is simply not part of a policy priority. So my question is, do we have the program of trauma counseling for the child whose mother passed away while giving birth? Sadly, the answer is no. We are not aware of what kind of trauma the children bear, or how the child would become a human being? That psychological damage is permanent, and a scare. Results in undesirable behavioral patterns. So I think this is one of the areas which requires a lot of attention, and is urgent. We are discussing a large group of young, enthusiastic women who will be a part of the nation-building process and represent Bangladesh globally. My sister used to work on this issue and did lots of campaigns. She narrates through a comparison with a massive air crash. We lost 500 people, it becomes headline news, no matter in which part of the world it occurred. Maternal death rate is like that of a jumbo jet air crash which is occurring every day, yet this is not in the news as it is being treated as commonly as violence against women.

If we look at the education sector, we can see achievements on a large scale. For example, enrollment of boys and girls at the primary school level has achieved parity . . . in some cases . . . more girls now go to school than boys because, at a very young, age boys from poor households have to attend the economic activity and are not able to remain at school. So there are more girls are you know staying at school.

We see a drop-out at . . . secondary schools and high schools . . . [but] . . . priority in primary school enrollment is an achievement. We [now] need to focus on the quality of education. Girls who are hitting puberty . . . have a tendency to drop out . . . [because of] insecurity . . . Parents are . . . worried about the honor of their daughters . . . [pushing them] to get the [girls] married to reduce the burden.

[With Bangladesh ranking 4th in child-marriage] . . . parents are scared, worried, and anxious about the safety of their girls . . . [as] they become more vulnerable to male attack and male aggression . . . [making eventually marriage the obvious solution].

Even today we have to hear that, especially in March and December, the speech of politicians about the war and the cost of independence is achieved by sacrificing the honor of the 200,000 women. Is their honor in sexual organs or the body? No, this is not, if I had been attacked, my honor would not be lost. So all of this concept is constructed to drive to keep women deprived of making women advanced or step forward.

Expansion where women are entering occupations that they have not participated in before . . . is one of the factors in [our last] 50 years [in which] we have made lots of progress. Since the 80s . . . use the expansion of women going out and seeking formal employment, whether it is in factories, offices, educational institutions, and government sectors . . . are . . . achievements with *buts*. Both society and the state [fall] short [fall].

Support services [should grow] . . . safe public transport . . . the number of incidents of rape by the bus conductors, drivers, or even by the other passengers have affected the mobility of women . . . We have lots of parks, but who gets to enjoy the parks? Women affected . . . psychologically as well as physiologically, making them less confident, less sure about themselves [their], insecurities [and], lowers self-esteem.

Women's movements have recognized very late about . . . violence within the home . . . our grandmother would say 'don't go out as it is not safe or don't stay out after 6 pm or sunset, it is not safe, or don't go anywhere except university and college'. Women are not free to move around, women are not capable to enjoy public places. That is a huge problem itself.

But now . . . homes are not safe either . . . making women think of freedom . . . 'if I am not going out or not safe at home, what do I do'?

Of course, the other area is a more formal area of laws and justice . . . discriminatory laws . . . in Bangladesh . . . our bookshelf . . . our court . . .

Bangladesh gratifies all kind of discrimination, for example, UNHCR Conventions on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 1974 (CEDAW) that 37 years ago. We gratify but require specific reservation, but the one main reservation remains in "Article 2", which is known as the heart of the convention as it obliges that the state party, like the country which has signed on . . . adopts concrete measure from laws, constitution, policies [against] any kind of discrimination . . . [but as] one will see, we have not done [that], and the government can say I'm not obliged to them, I have not committed myself to initiate any measurements to eliminate this convention in the law, policies on constitutions.

Often I hear people saying we have been granted equal rights in the constitution, but if one reads it carefully, one can analyze equality in the public sphere because we have personal laws, or what we called family laws, which are based on religious objective, whether it is Muslim personal law, Hindus, Christian or Buddhist. Whatever they are, they discriminate in terms of inheritance, marriage rights, divorce, rights of guardianship.



We need allies with social organization, trade unions, educational institutors and even governments and work together and bring change. We also work with rape law reform coalition . . . we want to see marital break recognized, we have to talk about these things. We also need to work with young boys to change perception, understanding about consent. What comprehensive sexual education can do is [to] teach them it is important for boys to learn that they need to control their sexual urges. And girls also need to learn to say no even if their friend, boyfriend, neighbor, or uncle they have the right to say no.

We are monitoring *upazila* health facilities. When we started working, we noticed a huge insufficiency. The doctors, health workers don't always come to the facilities . . . and the use of medicine . . . they are being sold to black market. We monitor with the help of a local organization. We work to help a local organization by capacity building and how to create report, present that report to authority, to civil servants with the attitude of these being gaps and that these gaps needing a change of attitude. We do not flash them in the media but rather to help improve the system. We are also working to create a woman-friendly hospital. *Naripokkho* was to showcase the use of acid substance. The acid and corrosive substance law is created, which is why the acid availability is so rare now, which is an achievement for *Naripokkho*. Our middle-class values [carry] prejudices [that] prevent us from any kind of affinity with the sex workers. We invited them to events. When in 1997 the brothel on English Road was evicted, the women from that brothel came to us [for] help. We helped them to form the first organization, to form ULKA, we trained Momtaz to become an activist. We are in regular contact with ULKA, then one day it came to us . . . it was evicted by government. We had to provide temporary residence to these women in our office. It made us think that there is a very thin line between them and us. These women were doing [what they did] because [there was] no other shelter. The debate [goes] on whether prostitution should be an occupation or if it should be abolished. The women who are sex worker should be given the same rights as all other citizens. Democracy in families is a big issue for us, so is decentralization. Decentralization is absolutely key. Democracy is a human issue.



## Ms. Vidiya Amrit Khan

Director, *Desh Garments*

# EDUCATION & EMPOWERMENT: FUTURE KEYS

Nurul Quader [my father] was incredibly patriotic. During the war he saw women were raped and abused. So he had a special place in his heart for women, I would say. And he always wanted to improve them. I even had the opportunity to have equal education and things like that. He never discriminated, never said that oh you're a girl you can't do that. It was quite the opposite and I think that partly comes from the fact that from my father's side of the family, *my dadi* was a very strong woman. She held fort in the house. *My dada* was a cool-headed man. So *my dadi* held court in the house. My three *fuppus* were all educated, modern women. My youngest *fuppu*, she is now 90 years old, used to drive her own car in Dhaka city till the age of 70. She was married into the army. They did all...they sew, they sang, they went outside, they drove, from a very long time ago. So they were very forward thinking. The women members on my father's side of the family, they are all very, very strong. He was influenced by that a lot too. And he would always tell me, learn from your *fuppus*. They've seen so much, done so much,

yet they are so strong. And you must always be out there. Which is why he also sent me to a female girls' boarding school because I always studied in a co-education school here in Bangladesh but then when I went to England he said no, go to a girls' boarding school. So I started crying, I was like I won't have any boyfriends. He said there is still a lot of time for you to have boyfriends. So what he told me then was no, you go to a girls' boarding school, you'll have no distraction, and you'll just become a stronger person even more because then you are surrounded by women, you understand the unity of women, and you understand how women can help you. So, you know, putting me through all kinds of very equal male and female situations, surroundings all my life, he chose to send me to a girls' boarding school because he thought those would be my formative years and that's when I would get...you know, on my own I would develop myself. So that was something that was well-thought out and I am grateful for that because the friends I made, the girl friends I made at boarding school, 20 years later they're still [some] of my best friends. All are foreigners, British, but with all of them I am regularly in touch.

This was his approach, I would say, for *Desh Garments*. The inspiration he got for women were from two things. Firstly, it was his own personal respect for women, and what he saw happen to women over time during the war, he wanted to empower them, he wanted to set them free, that they should have their own sense of being and privilege and skills. And the other they were his sisters. He didn't see women being pushed to the corner. His other logic came from the villages. We always see women wake up early in the morning, after the *Fajr azaan*, they prepare the food, they feed the cows, when their husbands wake up their in-laws, and children. Everything is being done by women. When the husbands go out to the field to work, the wife has to go and give him the lunch. Then they come back and bring the cows back. It's a lot. So he saw for whatever reason a lot of empowerment within women, he saw a lot of skill in women, he saw a lot of resilience in women and as a result he had a deep respect for women. I know in the villages *BRAC* or *Grameen* are the two biggest NGOs, and we give them all the credit for the betterment of what has happened in this country. But as far as women empowerment go, I think it's the garment sector: 80% of the workers are women. When by father sent the first batch to Korea for training, in 1977, he selected 18 women. It was unheard of. In those days women going to Korea, staying there for 6 months, and receiving training, all being unmarried. It was unthinkable. But my father spoke to their fathers. Actually, he used to say, 'I was interviewed by their parents. The 18 women who went, their parents came and interviewed me and asked where are you going with our daughters?'



And he signed bonds to take those girls and bring them back. So that is where the journey began. And he was so forward thinking, he was so modern thinking, that he sent women abroad when in the whole country no women were going abroad. *Riaz Garments* . . . claims a lot that it has done many things before. It did, yes. But it was not 100% export-oriented. On Women's Day it said we gave women jobs first. I said, providing jobs is something else; *Riaz Garments* did not start a revolution. My father started the revolution in the garments industry. My father sent people to Korea. So that day people from the AFP news agency came and the man, the senior bureau officer here in Bangladesh, said a wonderful thing: 'Maybe you don't notice but in that plane among the 130 people and the 18 women that went, your father sent the entire country in that plane.' I asked how.

He said, 'There was a Hindu, Muslim, Marma, a girl from Rangamati. He sent all these women, who else would he send? He sent from the whole country, be it in the tribal sect, he managed to pick one lady up and send.' So I didn't realize but the man pointed it out to me very nicely, and I thought that is true and now with him I am trying to find those 18 women, trace them, hear their stories, maybe even record it. That would be great I think. So that is a part of documentary work that I now want to do.

It's a very, very, very male dominated society and business structure. Regardless of how empowered women are meant to feel or made to feel at the end of the day, I would say a lot of it is eye-wash because at the end of the day when it comes to... let's say, for example, now I have foreign clients who come here, and I take them to eat at restaurant. Now my foreign client wants to have a glass of wine. So now me being a woman, sitting with 4 men, I open a bottle of wine. Whether I am drinking the wine or not is irrelevant. But the bottle is at the table. Tomorrow someone while make the comment that Vidiya does business like this, she's so daring, she's drinking wine with 4 men at a restaurant. I don't even have to look very far, my mother's friends will say these. It's not like a woman from the village will say this; the people living in Gulshan society will say this. So we have to be very careful.

I am a *hijabi* person without a *hijab*. I did the BGMEA elections 6 years ago. I took my *saree* and wrapped it tightly around myself, and made sure not an inch of my body could be seen because I am with men, and because generally I am a very decent person. I don't show skin. But you know, at the end of the day, why can't I go campaigning wearing a sleeveless blouse? Who made this rule? Where in our Bangla cinemas can the women dance in the most obscene way and the men can see that, why can't I wear a sleeveless blouse with a *saree* pulled? They will also make a comment about that and tell me not to wear it. Why? Can you wear shorts to IUB tomorrow? No, you can't and neither can I. And those who do wear shorts, women like me say, what is she wearing, is she crazy? Why am I saying that? When I go to England and see women wearing shorts I don't say that. So why in this country are we so? Is it cultural? Is it cultural, is it social, is it religious? What is it? Because religious norms have been broken a long time ago.

To be a strict Muslim I should be wearing a *borkha*, but I am not doing that. So why can't I do the alternative? It's not a question of decency or indecency... We belong to good families, we will not do anything indecent. But even then we are subject to all of this. Yesterday (March 14, 2021) at this bank, it was a laughable situation. I went to meet with a MD of a bank. He was this big man. I told him, this is the time of the pandemic and for any business our strongest partner is always the bank. You are my business partner. And he said, 'No, no, no, I am not your business partner.' Can you say something like this to a man? Like you saw, Mr. Sikder's son shot the MD of a bank. But we can't. We can't get mad, we can't get angry, we can't scold, we can't even decide what we want to wear. The MD of the bank heard me talking for 30 minutes and did not give me any business related answers and instead there were a few chocolates on his ashtray on his table, you know what he said to me, he said, 'Madam, you came this far, please have a chocolate.' Could he have said that to a man? He would not have the guts to do that. I feel that I come from a very, very unique place because what I have is the name of my father. I don't have my father next to me.

For big businesses houses like myself, being introduced to a minister, introduced to some important person, these are things that are done by the husband, or the brother, or the father. In my life, my brother is absent, my husband is absent, my father is absent in the garment industry. Because my brother does not run the garments factory; my husband is a painter, artist, photographer, he is nowhere near businesses; and my father is dead. So till now, I have used my name to survive. Why, because I am *Desh Garments*, I am Mr. Nurul Quader's daughter. If I was alone I don't know how far I could have gone. I have to say my name, otherwise I am like everyone else. How many are there in the BGMEA (Bangladesh Garments Manufacturing & Exporters Association).

The industry is 80% women, but how many leaders are there who are women representing them? One woman, ever, Rubana Huq. Before that when I was the director, I was the only woman. After me in the board there was Rubana Aunty but no other women were there on the board. And even then we are like '*mohila, mohila.*' Why? We are not giving taxes as women. Is my income tax less because I am a woman? No. Is the price of my ticket low because I am a woman?

No. Is my Internet price low because I am a woman? No. Just during Women's Day, the men MD of the banks will say send them a Women's Day package. They will send a package with flowers and everything. The whole country, the whole world is happy we got one day highlighted, that's it. Women are not on an equal footing. How can women be on an equal footing? Women will be on an equal footing only when we can walk on the streets at midnight like men do and when we walk on the streets no one will cat-call us or whistle at us or make comments about us. So where is women empowerment? How far has women empowerment come? How much of it is real? And how much of it is just for show? As far as women empowerment goes, if you look at the garments factory again the workers are women, how many managers at the factory are women, how many mid-level supervisors are women? How many? There aren't many. So the empowerment of women is a very, very, very, slow process. Not only in Bangladesh but in the world.

And I believe Norway is the most women empowered country and equal country. I know women have a lot of problem. They have to look after their families, but why aren't the men responsible as well? Why does the woman have to come home and cook? So actually, how are you defining women empowerment? Just because nowadays there is some women empowerment? The village girl who is working in the garments factory, who is she giving her salary to? She is working day and night and giving her salary to her husband. She does what her husband tells her. When she marries she has to leave her job. When she has children she needs to leave her job again. So actually how empowered are we?



How much are we actually empowered? How real is it, how tangible is it? I myself have fought, I have worked in the public sector with the government, I have definitely worked in the private sector. And there is always this segregation that 'women.' As a woman, am I doing anything less than you? But yes, me sitting on the top, I am saying this. There has been an absolute revolution as far as our village women are concerned. For them there has been a dynamic shift. Most of the women used to cover themselves. The girls in my factory, when they enter the factory, they wear *borkhas*, when they leave they put on their *borkhas*. When working inside, their *borkha* is gone. If you are a real *hijabi* then you are supposed to work wearing the *borkha*. But they are not *hijabis* because they are working, they earned a place in their home, even if they are giving their salaries to their husbands, their husbands won't leave them because she is earning some money. So because of this in the village there has been a revolution. They have to go to work to the garments factory, and working here they have learnt some things, they became skill-based, they gained skills, they can take loans from us when they wanted to, they were able to get their children married, and one family member earning by working in the garments factory means she supports at least 4/5 members in the family – her husband, her in-laws, her children; minimum 4/5 dependents.

Here her value has increased because today she can walk out and come to work. Tomorrow if she wants to divorce...and you know among them divorce is a matter of two days...if after divorce, with their own salaries, they want to live in a women's hostel or stay in a mess, they do that. There the girls have become very smart. It is very nice to see them like that. Now when the garment factories close for the day, most of the workers coming out are women. Since this is my industry, and since my father was such a dynamic personality in this industry, he formulated it, he gave birth to it, that's why of course I will be biased towards the garments industry. I will always be biased. But of course *BRAC* and *Grameen* did a lot too: they opened up schools, provided education to the people; encouraged children to go to school; they have shared a lot of knowledge about birth rate, child abuse and the most wonderful thing is that they sent children to school because our literacy rate has gone up tremendously. And the incidence of female children turning up in school is huge. My *dada* set up the first Muslim girls' college in Mymensingh for women in 1835, I think.

My *dada's* name was Abdul Latif Khan. And his father's name was Alimuddin Khan, and he set up the Khatijhuli Mohamman Girls' School in Mymensingh. It was established in 1911. So Mymensingh was primarily a Hindu area and the British were there. So I think in my *dada's* house there was a girl servant who wanted to study. So this was my *dada's* father, my great grandfather. He took that girl to the local school, and they said she's Muslim, we won't take her.

And then he said education is for everybody. They said no, she's Muslim, we won't take her. He had his own property in Mymensingh, so he then gave up his own land, donated it and set up the first Muslim girls' school. So I think maybe without realizing, I think the concept of women empowerment, pushing women to the front, was practiced from my great grandfather's time. If you think about it, my *dada* also made sure all his children were educated. Then my father made sure that women were pushed right to the front. So maybe I don't know it was a genetic thing that they always believed in women empowerment and therefore, pushed them forward. And that's the legacy that I go by. I know women have issues because they are expected to be home at a certain time, they are expected to do certain things at a certain time, but why this expectation? This expectation is in contradiction to real women empowerment as we know it, as we speak of it. So at the end of the day, our Prime Minister is a woman, the Speaker of the House is a woman, our Education Minister is a woman. There are people like Sonia Bashir, Rubi Gaznabi, Rukeya Aunty. There are people like Mrs. Lubna Chowdhury. But when she gets mad, people say she's crazy, but when men show more anger than her, men are not called crazy. My mother scolds me. My mother is a strong woman, but she tells me, 'Women don't get so mad.' I was like really, seriously, women don't get this mad, you do not know what getting angry is. Because I get very angry; I can shoot people. But then we can't get angry, we have to just conform to this image that we are supposed to portray.

Now I will tell you two business related things. The first thing, what can we do, it's all about education. Whether its education through a social studies class...when we were younger in Green Herald we had this class called Moral Science. Now similarly like Moral Science there is Social Science. So every school I am guessing has a Social, Moral Science class or something. You know what you can even do it in a History class with a history lesson. You have to pick four words – the role of women.

We read about Auraungzeb, and Akbar, and Babur and Genghis Khan and all that. And in our school at that time we read about Florence Nightingale. That's it. She was the only one. And Joan of Arc who was burnt because everybody thought she was a witch. But what about modern women? What about having the likes of the Queen, or Margaret Thatcher or other strong women? And see the knowledge is so little, the visibility is so little. A lot of it is photographic memory. We see women so less, it's all just about the men, and we end up forgetting about the women. So it's not coming to my mind immediately; I'll remember Hitler before I remember another woman. So with children, it's all about putting it in their heads. In the children's heads, it will not work on the adults. By then their mind has already been formed because they are even seeing the society where women are not given the right level of respect. So children from an early age need to be taught what role the women had – what Mother Teresa has done, what Florence Nightingale has done – as far as what young women are doing. Malala, I don't like her, she's selfish and attention seeking. She has more bodyguards than Jennifer Lopez. She got so much money, so much fame, but has she returned to her village even once? Some people say it's the fear of terrorism but that's bogus. The United States needed someone to highlight and make themselves look better, and they found a victim. What has she done? She has not opened any schools for girls, she didn't go back to her village, she didn't even start any scholarships to bring girls from her school to educate in New York, and not even an orphanage?

So what has she done? So forget about her. Even the women in our country. My eldest *chachi* even went to jail during the war, then she became a doctorate and then a professor. So back then taking those steps were a big thing. There are many in our Bangla literature who have done tremendous amount of work or fought in the war. There are many women in this subcontinent. So I think there should be more knowledge given about women in the textbooks, the schools should teach [about women]; women should be given value, women should not be viewed in such a sensitive manner because we are much stronger than men. Men can't handle 10 things at once, but we as women are doing that day to day. And at the same time it's education, it's change of mindset, it's a social change; it should be put in their heads from their homes that women should be given equal respect. So I don't see the mindset of the next generation change in any other way. You can't say by putting women in important places, right now we have to work for it, so you can't say put us in important places. So that's not something that is necessarily going to work. Our Prime Minister is in a very privileged position. Nobody will speak above and beyond her but whether that is a show of equal respect to another woman, that's not a good example because she's the Prime Minister. Everyone respects her because of her position, not because she's a woman. She gets an added mileage because she is a woman Prime Minister, but first she is a Prime Minister.



Desh garments

You know on Women's Day I was not sent any packages or cakes from the bank. All my friends were flooded with these. How did I get missed? It could be because I speak very bluntly. Everyone tells me that I am a man trapped in a woman's body. Why because I am outspoken, because I don't give a damn, I will not look back if I think something is beyond my principle, I won't look back. But then they will say that women, she was just like a man. What men? I don't think the men I know have half the guts I have. So now if we want to compromise that we are being able to work, my husband is letting me work, if that is woman empowerment then we are very empowered. But if it is a question of how we are dealt with, how we are respected, then I think there is still a lot of work to be done. But it's happening so that's a good thing. The generation after ours is very daring. That's good for them. They don't care at all.



The generation after ours is stronger than us. We are in between. Me, being 40, I am definitely in between. I still obey my elders, still old-fashioned, wherever I go I try to cover up, my mother still says take a *shawl* even though it's 34 degrees outside. Why? To hide my body. I accept all those, quite happily, because that is how I am. But the generation after mine, they are very, very empowered. They want to live alone. When they get older they want to take their friends and live alone. We can't even imagine that. World Bank was supposed to give Bangladesh 50 million dollars, I think, then because of the pandemic we got stuck, and it was all for training. So, of course, there will be a massive skill development there, and many foreign companies are coming through. The industry is also changing; it's moving away from just garments. It's going into electronics, mechanics, and things like that. There will be betterment of course. So I will tell you an interesting story and finish with this. I was in the Chittagong port for four days. I was standing under the sun and working because it was some work on the ship. I had a whole bunch of mechanics with me who had all come from Canada. This is my non-garments work. On the first day after a few hours I said, where is the bathroom? They said, 'Ma'am, there is no women's bathroom here.' Where do I go then? They said, 'You have to go outside of the port.' It is a very tedious process to go in and out of the port. There's a lot of security and this and that. So I said do I have to go out every time, and they said yes. I asked why there were no bathrooms for women, and they said it's because no women ever came to the port. So am I the first woman here? They said no but women do not come here and work for 4 days straight like this. I had to find a way. I asked the ship captain, who was a Russian, and I said to him, can I use the toilet in your ship while we are offloading. Then he asked if I was with the port authority, and I said that I was not. So then he asked if I was from the suppliers' party, and I said that I was. That is when they gave me the permission to go to the bathroom. So this is how it is. There are no bathrooms. In the whole of Dhaka city there are no bathrooms for women.

## INTERVIEW WITH DR. NAOMI: A “TOP-DOWN” BUG?

In Bangladesh, many laws favour women . . . and these laws are being revised every few years, however, the effect of these changes have not been felt. This is a barrier to empowerment.

Some laws still need to be reformed. One . . . is the law for preventing marital rape . . . the division that has been created based on the difference in religion, that is something that certainly can't be accepted . . . because it infringes the vision of a secular Bangladesh that was established after the 1971 liberation war. Currently, the Muslim laws in Bangladesh segregate between Hindu, Buddhist and Christian women.

. . . achieving women empowerment is measured through economic indicators, like presence of women in the workforce compared to the past and the increase in the wages of women in the working field. While there are women working in the public sector, how many women are actually in leadership roles? And for the women who are in leadership positions, how many women have entered the role through their own will and how many women have gotten the access through family backgrounds?

. . . the struggles the women have to face even now in our country or the south-east regions are not the same and often a lot more difficult to overcome. These issues need to be more nuanced . . . If we take a look at the social, religious, patriarchal as well as cultural barriers that women have navigated through and has been able to achieve empowerment, in comparison to a lot of conservative countries that have a Muslim majority, the empowerment achieved in Bangladesh is applaudable.

Even in comparison to rural areas in India . . . Bangladesh is in a far better position.

### Dr. Sharin Shajahan Naomi

Assistant Professor, Department of Gender Studies  
Asian University for Women



Positives also abound, The movement circulated within elite women in society, however, these days the movement has expanded to rural women as well. Labour rights was included in the advocacy level of the feminist movement in Bangladesh. If we consider the last protest that occurred in front of *Sangsad Bhaban*, a lot of seeming radical ideas were integrated in the movement, like consent, integration of sex education in the curriculum and so forth. Conversations regarding consent that did not happen before are happening now as a part of the feminist movement's agenda for advocacy. And with diversity of opinions, many clashes and conflicts may arise as well, but it may be for the better since these conversations would be helpful to extend the reach of feminism to the grassroot level. Otherwise, feminism turns out to be a top-down approach.

On a policy level, women's participation that increased through the current government's regime is quite praise-worthy. UN peacekeeping, armed forces push us to the idea that the participation of women increased due to the vision for women's empowerment through policy. Even though we have a law to prevent violence against women, the law itself isn't decreasing the number of cases of abuse that occur.

Gender next 50 years? During COVID-19 a conversation sparked around how much men contribute to tasks at home . . . and fully gained momentum during the quarantine. Now conversations centering around maternity leave have emerged as well. Many factories do not have provisions for childcare available while the mother's working. This goes to show the mental and physical environment for working women are not ready yet.

## Snippets from Dr. Naomi

... woman empowerment and its Bangladesh success (really means) how many women go out and work, how many women admitted in educational institutions and completing graduation.

At the same time, anti-feminist backlash has also increased.

... another success ... women's presence in government service and judiciary.

[About] ... the garments sector ... the number of women who wouldn't have been traditionally employed elsewhere ... is itself an achievement.

... women's presence in public spaces can be considered a success ... but dying out ... "rape cases, cases of abuse" ... and digital harrasment are not exactly decreasing but actually deflating women empowerment ...

... the biggest objection against the Bangladeshi Feminist movement is the top down approach.



## Ms. Jessica Tartila Suma

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# THE ‘NEW WOMEN’: AS LIBERATED, AS THE COUNTRY?

The depicted ‘new women’ is a contemporary social issue coming cross as a question of coping with change. It begets another question: who is to do the coping? The 1870s’ most eminent literary Bangalee figure, Bankimchandra, wrote in one of his essays, “self-interested men are mindful of the improvement of women only to the extent that it furthers their self-interest; not for any other reason”. Bankim’s point is clear about the social agency in question when considering the character of women, which clearly implies that if modern women are different from the traditional ones, it is because of the social policies made by men. Therefore, men’s attitude and actions are contested. No, this is not to make a comparison of women in Bankim’s time and women of the 21st Century, rather a reflection on measuring how much women are able to control their own lives and on their own terms and conditions in 2021. Have we moved beyond the *Laxman Rekha*, or still remain imprisoned in the cocoon of our patriarchal audacity?

To begin with the nationalist ideology of 1971, the women subject to rape and torture during the war were honored as freedom fighters, a historical initiative worthy of note, and their sacrifices were glorified. Yet, these freedom fighters were identified and labelled as ‘*Birongona*’. The intentions behind the acknowledgement of their struggle during the 1971 war, were indeed positive, however the mindset of the paradigm was not ready to take it positively. Thus, one might agree with Partho Chatterjee that women appear in the history of nationalism only in a ‘contributive’ role, and we do not intend or rather are not comfortable to find them in the external domain of political conflict, rather more in the ‘inner’ space. Even after her supreme sacrifice, *Birongona* too was not out of the manacles of societal shame. She was not liberated despite being the pride of a country that struggled for its liberation from 24 years of its repression.

We have moved on ... from *Birongona* to *Renu*, *Josna*, and *Rohima*. The *Laxman Rekha* has been unstiffened by the microcredit’s women empowerment programs that offered loans to women only. The marginalized and the socially excluded women came in the forefront to be caught up in the safety net above the abject poverty line to support their family. But was she able to decide anything for herself? May be she was, but was she liberated? The *Laxman Rekha* was again assuaged by the women’s conquest, no, not by any war but through the instruments of global forces of liberal economy and the rise of the ready-made garment (RMG) industry. Rural emigration took off and women found themselves in the urban slums working day-in and day-out. This time she was in the public sphere, literally away from home. This time she took decisions and very confidently. But was she liberated?

We have moved on ... from *Birongona* to *Renu*, *Josna* and *Rohima* . . . to today’s corporate world, multinational companies and west-like academia. We have climbed up the ladder of economic emancipation, and yet to reach the threshold, how far are we socially, intellectually and culturally liberated?

While we find no hope in the ideological movements that reached a stage where if they did not receive the blow from project identity, they would have been rather destroyed. Since the identity movements rose out of indifference and neglect, it helped the women to know their own identity, strengths and weaknesses. We are all aware of that. But we need to realize in what stage of social change are we in. Where do we find ourselves on the continuum of Zero to One on a scale of ‘*Liberation*’?

‘*Liberation*’ is what will characterize the ‘new women’ of next 50 years, consequently Bankim’s assertion on men’s virtue to characterize women and prescribe her behavior, would be thawed. Finally, not to tamper with mythologies, it was *Sita* and only *Sita*, who decided to transgress the *Laxman Rekha*—which was a socially constructed obstacle for a woman not to follow her will, and in a globalized era such obstacles could be demolished with strong will to break-free. Hence there is nothing to cope with these changes, rather to be the agent of that change. Imbued in the spirit of 50 years of Independence of Bangladesh, to all the woman out there: “When we do the best we can, we never know what miracle is wrought in our life, or in the life of another.” – Helen Keller.



## Ms. Farzana Shakil

Owner of *Farzana Shakil*

### **CORPORATE CONQUEST?**

To say women in Bangladesh have come a long way in the last 50 years, would be stating the most obvious of understatements.

It is an accepted fact that Bangladesh has set newer benchmarks for the empowerment of women. Women have branched out from their traditional roles in society to soaring in the skies, fact and figuratively. Gone are the days when Bangladeshi women were content to remain in the background, while their menfolk lapped up the accolades and basked in the limelight.

The Bangladesh economy has grown immensely over the years, we are now universally acknowledged as the forerunner among the emerging tigers of the global economy. This has been in large measure because of the dynamism of our women workforce. The garment sector which has for many years been the strongest of pillars of our economy, is predominantly dependent on the hundreds of thousands of women engaged therein. It is not just women behind the machines, we now have a woman entrepreneur heading the apex body of this sector.



It is a reflection of the confidence and trust that is now being bestowed on women in every sphere of economic activity by the respective stakeholders.

The corporate world is now replete with our women in every strata of activity, holding positions of consequence. The sector that I am currently engaged, namely beauty and lifestyle, has traditionally been women driven. The difference that is now starkly evident has been the fact that we have succeeded in raising it to not only the next and higher levels, but also we have set higher standards for the nextgen entrepreneurs.

It is a matter of pride that what was once considered as just a pastime, is now recognized as a bonafide industry, at par with many others. It speaks volumes for the positivity that women have inspired that the present government has decide to give us this recognition. We cannot thank the government enough for new-found identity!

It also speaks highly of our government's concern and consideration for our sector, that in this time of a global pandemic, financial support in the form of stimulus packages were provided to our sector, if required. It is up to us now to make the most of the current situation.

50 years of women's emancipation and empowerment is a short span of time, considering our compatriots in the developed countries, who had been reaping the benefits accruing from such status of women in economy and society, for a far longer period than we have been.

It is for us now to embark on the journey into the future, setting not only higher goals for ourselves, but also achieving them.

We have come up scratch, needless to add, the sky is the limit.

We have the acumen, we have the motivation and we the numbers, to make that happen.

## “SECOND LIBERATION?”

We came to Bangladesh in 1973. Before the war we were in Pakistan. My husband was an army officer and we were taken to the camp over there. We won our independence which was very good, we were very happy. We used to think that if we don't survive here, at least one person of our family will be there to hold our name. We were repatriated because of the 93,000 Pakistani POW exchange. Bangabandhu was already there, and lots of work was underway. We returned to a war-torn country facing famine. Infrastructure wasn't good: everything was broken, people had lost family members. Freedom fighters had come back, some were normal, some were not. We had nothing in our pockets, no savings. I think we had 6,000 takas and we stayed with our parents. My husband decided he was not going to serve this army. He wanted to reside strictly and didn't want to serve, but other generals and all they told him “we need people like you, we have the army.” So he continued with the army but he had said that, “I will resign”. He helped the first army cadets graduate from Comilla.



### Ms. Ameenah Ahmed

*KhoborerKagoj, AjkerKagoj,*

*Ameena Bazar, Dhaka Tribune, Bangla Tribune, ULAB*

Bangladesh Military Academy was there, and he was one of the very popular platoon commanders under General Munathand. They raised the first soldiers of Bangladesh to which Bangabandhu came in '74. Then he served in the Navy, building the naval headquarter. After he resigned in '79, we started our business, with Castle Construction Company Limited, then construction, the *Gemcon* poles, and the shrimp factory.

My husband also opened a weekly paper called *KhoborerKagoj* 1988, when we got our second liberation, winning back our democracy with the fall of Ershad's government. We had another daily paper, *AjkerKagoj*, from 1991, when people could speak openly or wrote openly of Bangabandhu, of *Muktijoddha*, and about our four pillars . . . and we could talk about the *Rajakars* . . . and encouraged many women writers. Dr. Nileema Ibrahim was one. People . . . could talk of our liberation war and what happened and our independence. [Both in 1991 and 1996 we had] very good free and fair elections; and we branched to the Dhaka Tribune and Bangla Tribune online, run by my sons.

We built a tea garden in Pachaghar in 2000. Tea gardens are usually all in Sylhet or in Chittagong. But there is a tea indicator plant which is called *Phutki*. It's a purple sort of a flower. Wherever that flower grows, there tea can be planted . . . . The honorable prime minister suggested, “ask KaziShahid (my husband) to do the tea garden there.” He said, “who can do it here.” because it was all sand. So my husband went forward with that. Now, we have a Kazi Shahid Foundation. Our tea garden is on 1,500 acres in Tetulia and the main part of the garden is Roshanpur. In South East Asia now it's one of the largest organic tea gardens. There was one small bit in Darjeeling Makai Bari with a good legend and a story, but this is the largest one in South Asia.

Women who lived there in their own houses with their own families, not like the bonded labour you have in the other tea gardens when the British were here. So we would choose 5 women and make a committee and they would get 5 lakhs and training. These women will give us cow dung, which we will buy. And the milk of the cow that comes they will sell in the market and if they cannot sell we will also buy it. So by that time the cow becomes their own and these 5 people are again being monitored by our staff and other trainers that they're feeding the cow properly, that the cow is being looked after, that they are selling the milk properly, that they're giving the manure properly.

There are sixty committees of 5 women in each committee. These cows are given only to women, not to men. As a result what has happened over there is that the men have left their job and they're helping the women. One woman started with one cow, and now she's got 18 cows. We also gave them safe latrine, how to use soap, hygiene was done. In their work time, there is an adult literacy program for them and their children. We have schools for their children also. So this is about the story of the tea garden and nowadays we have this organic, many kinds of tea.



We started Meena Bazar in a small way, in Satmasjid Road in Dhanmondi but now we have many branches. And for the first time we took women workers in there. The marginalized women and poor people are working in our tea garden, jute mills and even in Meena Bazar. That is a big progress and success in this last 50 years I think. ULAB, our university, University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh, is also there. In that, we have given 100 crores takas, without taking any back. We have substantial amount of women working as lecturers and professors.

To me, whether a man or a woman is occupying it, the pay should be the same. As a country we should work towards that. We paid equal to men and women working in our project.

We are all Bangalees mostly, with a religion, Islam. But there are other religions are here to Buddhism or Hinduism or Christian. We have our same dress, same food, same clothing. Above all we have that language. We have the Bangla language . . . a language that we have, we fought and we earned.



The number of professors and intellectuals we lost in the war, maybe 20 or so [left] a big gap. We miss them when we see our young generation and boys specially going a bit astray and what we see in the society- the violence, rape, or eve teasing towards the girls. I think if we had these intellectuals we would not have this big of a problem. It is the mothers and fathers (parents) who have to give the proper training to their sons and to their daughters how to respect women and also it has to be introduced in the schools from the primary level. Primary education is available everywhere now. It should be a subject to teach how to behave towards the opposite sex, how to respect each other, how to mix together, how to respect even elders, take care of your elderly parents. I feel that a moral or ethical lesson could have been given because just the house or following religion alone isn't working. A moral, ethical training is needed on how to be a more good citizenship and know the values of life. Of course there are meditation and many other things, yoga and all. But if these can be introduced from the primary level, then people, all the learning of our great prophets, philosophers and sages, the morals they share, can be instilled from home and the primary school and into the secondary, then I think we will have less of these social tension.

Finally, we need to decentralize Dhaka . . . it is bursting in its seams. So the government officers who are posted out, they go alone and they leave their families here. Of course we don't want to lose our villages. We love our Bangla villages, but if schooling, hospitals, marketing, medical care could be available there, then families with children can live there. We are just a few thousand square miles in size, right? By getting Padma bridge . . . connectivity will increasing. Soon we'll have the metro rail. So 50 years ahead, I can see maybe people are coming to work from far away, you know, and then going back home.



## **COMMENTS ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: "DYING & VYING SPECIES"**

Back in our days, there were very few female students, but now I joke in English Department meetings that males are a dying species. The number of female colleagues are also close to the number of males, and female students tend to do better. However, while I am enthusiastic about women's empowerment personally because of my family structure consisting of an extremely strong mother and four sisters, what I feel is that society at large needs to ensure that female faculties do not have to worry about their children and family. Females in society still carry most of the burden of child rearing, and I wish the DU administration would do more than developing only a daycare. Women faculties should have the opportunity of working without having added pressure, so that they can reach their full potential. Our country is changing but the state infrastructure has done more, as they have come a long way by themselves and sometimes with the support from their family. So, with more more state support, they can achieve much more.

If you go through the newspapers, women are being subjected to rape and violence on a daily basis. Still, I am happy to see women with placards resisting on the streets. These women resistors have been there for a long time, because they participated during the Six-point movement, in the 1960s, in Shahbagh protests, and so on. On the other hand, there is also different types of intimidation they are subjected to from orthodox families which obviously worries me. Women are working in large numbers in every sector, and so they deserve protection from society. Even though we are being led by a female Prime Minister, I still think the number of women in decision-making positions should decrease. I am hopeful about women's empowerment, but the negative factors must be countered.

**Professor Dr. Fakrul Alam**

Director, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Research  
Institute for Peace & Liberty  
Formerly Professor/Chair, English Department  
University of Dhaka

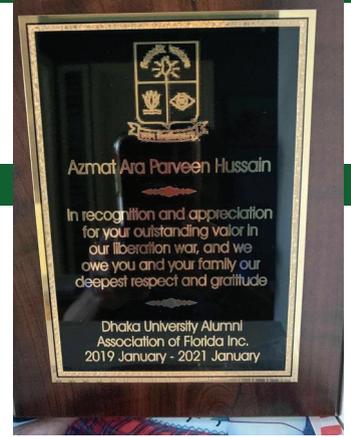




## Azmat Ara Parveen Hussain

English/Urdu Newscaster &  
Professional primary-school teacher

*Parveen Hussain, with Muna, her 4 month daughter she left behind because of Liberation War*



## ... interview of a 92-year Freedom Fighter by her daughter, Ms. Tazeen Rashid

**Being a woman news caster in Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra how much did she cherish the work?**

In my mother's own words, those were hard times for her as she had left her 3 month old baby back in Dhaka. But my father constantly assured her that she would be united with her baby soon. She was passionate about contributing to the war and felt comforted that she could contribute to the war by reading the news in English. Sometimes she would have to report very late at night, even at 2-3am at night. But they had a dedicated team that worked closely to prepare the English news. My brother, Ajaz Hussain would prepare the English news, which would then be rehearsed and her reading would be recorded by mother.

**Could you share your memories of women's situation in job or at home before the Liberation War and during the war?**

During the war: Women artists were quite involved in the Liberation War. Though in the newscasting area, there were not too many women, and it was a male-dominated field, but women were always respected and valued for their contributions. My mother was the leading news reader at that time, and due to this, was always respected both in SBBK and in *Bangladesh Betar*. As mentioned above, she had to report to work at all odd hours, but she always got the respect and collaboration of her male colleagues.

At home, my mother, at least, was a liberated woman who not only had completed her Bachelor's (Lady Brabourne College in Calcutta) and also her Master's (Dhaka University). My mother participated in plays in the university and was a prolific writer for university newspaper. Her life was in no way limited due to her gender. The force behind her was my liberated father, Dr. T. Hossain, who encouraged my mother to complete her Master's degree and encouraged her involvement in areas of her interest.

A 1972 discussion with my mother's female colleague, Shireen Mustafa or Shireen Aunty, led her to say this about Amma: "... she was very sophisticated, balanced and polite colleague and being much younger than her, I would like to be around her, learn from her, get her advice and chat with her as we were only a few females there at that time.

**How did you envision the role of women and how far we come these past 50 years?**

Amma cannot speak much now: But I am giving a reflection on her life and may be that will shed some light on how she sees the role of women: the way she lived her own life playing many roles:

She was a liberated woman even in times when cultural norms were stricter for women. How? Amma was patient in challenging times, she was expressive in times that required one to stand up for what is right, she took responsibility of her ownself (such as doing her studies well, excelling in her various roles at home, in society, for the war, etc.). She never saw herself as the marginalized gender or in any way disadvantaged because she was a woman. She had the backing of her liberated father and liberated husband who also promoted the same. These I feel are timeless qualities that can keep a woman liberated.

# BETAR KENDRA (SBBK):

**Professor Dr. Nasreen Ahmad**  
Former Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Dhaka



## FROM “ZERIN AHMED” TO “NASREEN AHMAD SHILU”

Even though Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested on 25th March, a radio provided news on 26th that he was free and not arrested, which a piece of intentional fake news, circulated. People used to be very excited the whole day to hear SBBK and had to take precautionary measures at home to tune in. After Bangabandhu was arrested initially, everyone thought the movement would stop, but getting to know news about multiple resistance at different places made everyone realize something is happening. All this news made Nasreen Ahmad feel frustrated about what she was doing sitting at home, while many of her known ones are already in SBBK.

In May, one day, Banu Bhai, husband of Shaheen Samad, came to their home at Moghbazar. A freedom fighter, she assisted in escaping to India. One-day previously, Nuruddin Ahmad [her father], was taken to Cantonment and was interrogated about Ms. Nasreen Ahmad. Not everyone went together to India; at first, Ms. Nasreen Ahmad and her brother went, later the rest of the family members went. After reaching Agartala, Ms. Nasreen Ahmad reached Kolkata to take part in *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro*. When she heartfully agreed to do so, Mr Aminul Huq Badsha invited Ms Nasreen to conduct programs in *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro*.

After getting into the building of *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro*, she came across many known people like Alamgir Kabir, in charge of the English program. She went through a small audition round for conducting an English news program. She was paid 250 tk every month as remuneration for being part of *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro*. Due to secrecy and security, her name code name at *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro* was Zerin Ahmed. After Bhutan and India recognized Bangladesh, the news anchors were allowed to use their own name, which she proudly said thereafter, 'Nasreen Ahmad Shilu'. During 12th, 13th or 14th December, different slogans in Bangla and English were used to broadcasted asking Lt General Niazi to surrender. She enjoyed to take part in the programs and read out such slogans.

After the Victory, she returned to Bangladesh and continued to read the news, but did not enjoy it as much as *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro*. Ms. Nasreen Ahmad never mentioned she ever thought, about women as an issue: she always believed there was nothing about a gender division as practiced in our family, student and social life.



## FORERUNNING PARLIAMENTARIAN

... by Professor Dr. Nasreen Ahmad (her daughter)

Begum Badrunnessa Ahmad became a MNA (Member, National Assembly) woman pioneer in 1954, from the *Jukto Front*. Until died, she was part of the Bangladesh Awami League under Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from 1954. After she was elected as MNA in 1957 or 1958, she represented Pakistan in the UN for Women's Women's forum. Her political life was challenged numerous times due to the Pakistan government's restrictions that civil servants' wives cannot participate in politics. Begum Badrunnessa Ahmad was the founder member of Lalmatia Mohila Collage. When the West Pakistan authority restricted Awami Leagues politics, my mother gathered a few of the intellectuals to form *Sanshritik Parishod*. In 1971 when the family went to India, Begum Badrunnessa Ahmad was in charge of women's rehabilitation. In 1972, after coming back, she was involved in forming the women care centre in New Eskaton, later to establish similar centres in other parts of the country. In 1973 she was made the State Minister of Sports, Education and Culture. Unfortunately, Begum Badrunnessa Ahmed passed away on May 24, 1974. Elite politicians like Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Sahara Khatun and Ivy Rahman all came into politics under the guidance and leadership of Begum Badrunnessa Ahmad. In 1968 she was the founder president of the Mohila Awami League.

Begum Badrunnessa Ahmad was a very open-minded, friendly person. When Mohila Awami league was formed, she went to different women's homes to take them for any political activities and made sure to drop them back at home on her own as they were growing up at that phase, and Begum Badrunnessa was busy with her work commitments.



Begum Badrunnessa Ahmad

- \***Fathers name:** Syed Abdul Muqtadir
- \***Mothers name:** Syeda Mahmuda Khatun
- \***Husband:** Nuruddin Ahmad, Secretary, Ministry of Forest, Fishery and Livestock.
- \***Education:** Matric, Sakhawat Memorial High School (Kolkata).
- \***L.A** Lady Brabourne College (Kolkata), 1942.
- \***B.A** University of Dhaka.
- \***B. E.d and M.E.d:** 1959-1961.
- \***MA ( Political Science):** 1960
- \***1954** being nominated as a candidate of Jokto Front she got elected as an MLA in provincial council election.
- \***1954** she was jailed for proving a speech in a labour gathering, breaking Section 144.
- \***1957** she participated in the United Nations women rights seminar.
- \***1960-1972** she was involved in the formation of Lalmatia Mohila College. Before taking up the ministerial position in charge, she was appointed as vice-principal and principal of the college.
- \***1966** she participated in the Six-point movement.
- \***1967** she was the founder General Secretary of Mohila Awami League. During that time, she was also the president of Mohila Awami League (1969- 1972).
- \***1970** she was elected as a member of parliament.
- \***1971** she was the leader of the Mujibnagar women rehabilitation activity and women organization of Mujibnagar.
- \***1972** she was the patron of the Bangladesh governments women rehabilitation and welfare foundation, and again she got elected as president of Mohila Awami League. She was also the president of the India- Bangladesh friendship association.
- \***1972-1974** she contributed to establish some school and collages in Kustia. She used to participate in every women emancipation and progress movement in Bangladesh.
- \***1973** she was elected as a member of parliament. She took part in the world parliamentarians summit in Rome.
- \***1974** while serving as Minister of Education, she passed away.

# PIONEERS

## “Bangalee Renaissance”

By Sharmeen Murshid (her daughter)

My mother was born in a family in Mushidabagh. There were 7 sisters, and in those times, daughters were married very early. So my grandfather was determined to educate his girls. When the first three daughters were married off due to family and environmental pressure, he put his foot down, went into fasting, and said “I am not letting Nur Jihan get married off”. His determination protected her from early marriage and (helped her) get into education. She did brilliantly well, studied in Kolkata, in a Victoria institute, Bramoshomaj University. She was, the first Muslim woman in India to be the All India Radio at an official level, at a very young age of twenty-something years old. The program was extremely popular amongst Muslims, and others who would wait to hear her. When she came to East Pakistan, as a student, she was involved in left politics with the protests and the movements *Shodiji Andolon*. She also visited Gandhi, so she had her own political and cultural slow evolution and context.

My mother also broke important social taboos. In those days, women would travel in *rickshaws* covered with *pardas*. In our mother’s generation, there was a cluster of very highly educated women who actually challenged that conservative norm. They came out changing the image of the women in East Pakistan. She, as early as 1949, broke the taboo of men acting on stage as women. She was the first woman to act on stage, opposite Munier Chowdhury, and a very good organizer. In 1954, she was directly elected, voted by women. Today, in 2020, after so many years, we are still struggling to get women directly elected, and my mother was directly elected along with some other women, I think 3 or 4 other women. That is what made her a woman pioneer.

In 1970, she was directly elected in the famous election, Also in 1973. She was the first woman minister in Murjib’s government. As I saw her, I would call her the matriarch of the family. She was very active in the 1969 movement, and the 1954 movement, and was instrumental in developing Pakistan Awami League Women’s Wing. The 50s and the 60s, when I look back, I see a brilliant time when young men and women with great talents came together in a moment of our history and actually transformed that period into a vibrant cultural awakening. That period actually was created by people like our fathers and mothers and many others . . . the politicians of the time, the social activists of the time, the educationists of the time, brought in . . . a period of Renaissance, Bangalee Renaissance. It awoke our nationalism, there was a great deal of national awakening and I think what these people did actually led to our national movement.



## Begum Noorjehan Murshid

Former Cabinet Minister &  
Social Activist

- \*Students’ movement against British rule (*Swadeshi andolon*).
- \*First Muslim woman in Indian Radio as program producer and in Pakistan Radio.
- \*Husband, Dr. Khan Sarwar Murshid, a young lecturer in the department of English at DU and her father in law, Ali Ahmed Khan, was a lawyer and a journalist bringing out a daily, was an elected member of the West Bengal Assembly, before partition, and a leader in Muslim League which became Muslim Awami League and later Awami League.
- \*Become MLA in 1954 from *Jukto Front*, directly elected, one of her four.
- \*First woman in Pakistan to perform on stage (opposite Dr. Munier Chowdhury) in 1949.
- \*Headed and built up women’s wing of all Pakistan Awami League; and, directly elected again in 1970.
- \*Both Noor and Sarwar soon became targets of the 1971 Pakistan military regime. Both joined the Mujibnagar government.
- \*Hallmark speech in the Indian Parliament; Foreign Office formed a three member Parliamentary Team (Phani Bhushan Majumdar, Shah Muazzem and Noorjehan Murshid) to launch a diplomatic campaign to gain recognition, meeting Indira Gandhi, VV Giri, the leaders of the opposition and the Speakers of the Parliament.
- \*Participated in Zia regime elections, from the Awami League (the lone candidate from the party).
- \*Led Civil protest in the 80s along with her husband.
- \*Brought out the first gender journal for equality (in 1980s) *Edesh Ekaal*.
- \*the cause of democracy, to the values of the liberation war and the Constitution of the country.



**SECTION THREE THEME**

**50<sup>TH</sup> INDEPENDENCE DAY**

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## Professor Dr. Imtiaz A Hussain

Head, Global Studies & Governance (GSG) Program  
Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB)

# GAME CHANGING 1971: “THERE BUT FOR FORTUNE”

“Show me the prison, show me the jail;  
Show me the prisoner whose life has gone pale.  
And I’ll show you young man, with so many reasons why,  
And there but for fortune go you and I.”

This was not the song Joan Baez first sang for us in 1971, though the song that she did sing lit up more than a sky. It did because of her “there but for fortune” trailblazing mindset from a decade earlier. It is amazing how we were also working towards some such crossroads ourselves from so much earlier.

That rendezvous with destiny came in 1971, but for the last ten months of that year, I don’t believe any one of us could envision a future. Contrast that with 2021, when, on the 50th Birth Anniversary of our heartfelt country, there is no sky high enough to limit our vision: a developed country on track for the 2040s, and who knows what thereafter?

Leaving well-entrenched Dhanmandi in April 1971 for a newly-created Mujibnagar was as much of a plunge into the abyss as a flight of fantasy, with fear and hope joining hands as constant 1971 partners. When the contours of Mujibnagar took the shape of Calcutta streets and neighborhoods, critical anchors could finally be seen. Just as freedom fighters served as one critical anchor of the future Bangladesh on the war-front, so too did those of freedom-mobilizing civilians: They helped to rally forces and the public and disseminate vital information to the nooks and crannies of Bangladesh. Mostly they helped acquire Indian support to function in that country so that the maternal support given during the birth-pangs of the future Bangladesh government could play that pivotal role to what the country would eventually become.



*Aminul Huq Badsha*  
Press Secretary

*External Publicity Division*

At least three such platforms come to mind. The first was the Theater Road building where our Provisional Government clandestinely worked, each minister at a different time and duration. There were four of them: Tajuddin Ahmed (Prime Minister), Kamruzzaman (Home Minister), Khondokar Mushtaq (Foreign Minister) and Captain Mansur Ali (Finance Minister). They would come and go, secretly so. So too the Commander-in-Chief Major M.A.G. Osmani, later Major General.



*Hossain Ali*

*Deputy High Commissioner*

Entrusted as Director General of Health, my father, Dr. Tajul Hossain, passionately took this as his workplace after abandoning his own City Nursing Home (along with a 4-month sister, whose name, Muna, defined precisely why we were there: with a hope, wish, and prayer). All ministers were housed in another singular building in another part of Calcutta, under constant vigil and protection.

A second would be the *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra* (SBBK) house in Ballygunj, where we lived for 3-odd months, but from where 60-70 other Bangladeshis propping up the radio worked 24/7, including my mother, Parveen Hussain, the English newscaster.

My parents and three other sisters lived in one tiny room, which had a private bathroom, while my brother and I found any other empty spot on the bottom floor, alongside the common dining-room was. All the recordings and broadcasts would be upstairs, also fitted with spacious spaces for sleeping cots. Mostly we would “*adda*” downstairs after dark, until, out of boredom, singer Abdul Jabbar or Apple Mahmud would propose venturing out to see Calcutta. I was lucky going one day, since, I believe in Mocambo music joint, just off Park Street, I found a recent Dhaka friend, Robin. He was a popular *Time Ago Motion* guitarist and vocalist, next to whose house we would “*adda*” by Dhanmandi Lake. But here he showed me something brand new: strumming the guitar behind his neck. Bangladeshi styles caught kolkataian eyes then.



**Abdul Jabbar**  
Singer

A third anchor would be where I worked. My English was good enough for a still-teenager to be put in charge of all foreign journalists covering the Bangladesh war. India gave this permission once Pakistan Deputy High Commissioner Hossain Ali had defected in April, and his lovely family and he made the Circus Avenue Bangladesh Mission a home for all of us working for the cause. I was to work under the supervision of Bangabandhu’s Deputy Press Secretary, Aminul Haque Badsha. He was dashing enough to keep the *crème-de-la-crème* crowd to himself, but my share was nothing to grumble about. Besides, the fieldwork was all mine, and that was all journalists needed, the war and refugee camps. Indian officials restricted us to which we could go to, but the Dum Dum refugee camp was pointed enough to carry the message across dramatically: I still remember how a Scandinavian reporter fainted from the squalor and stench. Luckily she did not see what I once saw: vultures pecking away at a human body. But what used to be Dum Dum Airport has since been renamed Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Airport.

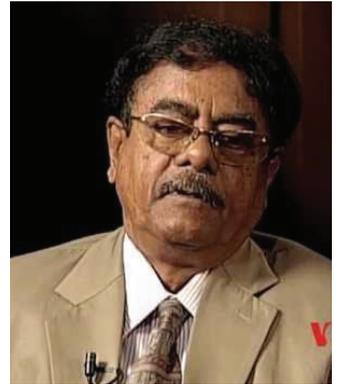
Of course, the Petrapole-Benapole border was also smack on the list: without seeing where the action unfolds, journalists feel under-accomplished. It was here where we said “*bon voyage*” to *Opertion Omega*, which came, saw, and conquered the Pakistan Army by exposing the deep social angst and anxieties. Once covered, which took the entire day, our Calcutta return often meant going to one or another of the numerous civil society activities on behalf of Bangladesh, by, I might add, not just a fleet of local groups, but also foreigners falling in love with India. Night visits to Rabindra Sarobar became a weekly affair.

Both the SBBK and Theater Road buildings were well coordinated by India’s Central Reserve Police, in the former catering for all food and beddings, in the latter, keeping at bay the huge crowd from whom the customary ministerial privacy could not be safeguarded. All refugee camps and border controls were also very effectively staffed by India, but the boom in the number of foreign relief agencies for the former also played a part in crowd control.

Calcutta’s hustle-bustle lifestyles were anything but disturbed, in fact, enrichment might be a more appropriate adjective.

Circus venue duties of clipping daily newspaper items helped feed the *Bangladesh Documents* volumes when the Foreign Ministry brought them out, while Calcutta socializing probably enlivened local circles. Badsha Bhai and I would meet after work by night to *reassess* progress, though *forging* plans was out of question completely. We just didnt have the time.

India’s declaration of war upon Pakistan on December 3 supplied the first breakthrough to returning to Dhaka. One MP from Chandina, Mr.Sirajul Islam (I believe), requested my friend, Shamol, and myself, to escort his wife back to Dhaka. We grabbed the proposal, and flew to Agartala, crossed over to Comilla, and with the regular Daukandi ferries blown up, we headed south to Chandpur, where the Mukti Bahini put us into their own steamboat to avoid the massive crowd waiting to also return to Dhaka. It was that night of sailing to Naraynganj that I truly felt, first-hand, every syllable and tone of Rabindranath Tagore’s *Aamar Sonar Bangla*. It was the right tune to baby-taxi (CNG) into Dhaka with on December 16, our escortship of Ms. Islam and her child ending on the corner where the Naraynganj road enters Hatkhola. Shamol and I kissed the street (in those cleaner days, barefoot walks and smooches like this were all part of routine life). We missed the surrender, but the something else we had not surrendered mattered more. And *Joi Bangla* captured it all.



**Apel Mahmud**  
Singer

**Shamol Ullah**  
Freedom Fighter



## **100 YEARS OF FREEDOM**

Imtiaz, or Imu, as we fondly know him, just now messaged me on *Facebook* to “write a few lines on 50th anniversary of liberation. Just the feeling today, compared to what you did then, but mostly for our young generation, what the next 50 might look like.” So here goes my take as ‘100 years of Freedom’.

Bamboo telegraph was the instant messaging platform in the halcyon days of 1971, by virtue of which I had the humble privilege and gratifying honor of joining a fellow band of brothers and friends on an arduous and potentially life-ending trek into Bangladesh’s war of independence. I call it a singular honor because we kind of pioneered urban guerrilla warfare under the leadership and tutelage of some incredible military heroes of the Liberation War. My role was minimal, but some of my fellow-mates are today household names, belonging to the now famous Crack Platoon, emblazoning their path out of the proverbial Motinagar and Melaghar guerrilla camps to ultimate victory over a truly nefarious enemy. As I now reminisce those days before and after the night of March 25, 1971, there is a lingering inner pain of suffering, yet an enduring faith in the hopes dreams and aspirations of our beloved Bangladesh.

To pull ourselves out of the economic misery and overwhelming squalor of years of abuse and exploitation by a military junta based on the other side of the subcontinent, while overcoming the extreme rigors and mindless violence of a 9 month long war to the present prospering country is no mean feat. Indeed it warms one’s heart to see the “Opinion” page on yesterday’s (March 10, 2021) *New York Times* headlined “What Can Biden’s Plan Do for Poverty? Look to Bangladesh”. Pride for the country blossoms when the World Economic Forum tells us Bangladesh is now running ahead of the United States and Russia in gender parity. Yet we should never forget the monumental sacrifices or demean the mass empowerment engendered by our long struggle from 1947 to 1971 for basic political and economic rights. I remember wistfully the magical mass movement through 1969 to March 25, 1971, which brought all of us out: children, teens, women and men, all of us except the proverbial traitors and innocent bystanders, on to the country’s streets from our homes, schools and offices in a spontaneous and joyous affirmation of our basic rights. All genders and ages marched shoulder to shoulder day and night in full respect of each other’s space and security in tandem with love and grace to bring the cruel and power hungry junta from the other side and their “homegrown collaborators” to their knees. We, Imu, a whole generation and I had to miss a full year at a critical juncture of our school life 50 years ago in the midst of this epic struggle, somewhat like the present sacrifice for the ongoing pandemic by Generation C (Covid). I have a firm belief that we will see this generation 50 years from now bring more fruition to the struggles and glories of the past five decades by setting a shining example to the free world of humility and perseverance. Our inherent technical aptitudes and acclaimed intellectual capacity as a country, coupled with our ‘strategic’ climate change frontier statehood, and the burgeoning young, will surely propel us to the peace and prosperity envisioned and nurtured so heroically in the last 50 years of independence.

## MONITORING THE MALAISE

*Swadhin Betar Kendra* began regular broadcast in April 1971, but before that it would broadcast programs in late March and early April 1971 from *Chittagong*, Agartala and Kalurghat. My mother, Parveen Hussain, joined the station as the English newscaster when the regular broadcasts were recorded from Ballyganj Street (Calcutta). I also joined the station at the same time as the English News Monitor. My job was to monitor all broadcasting stations as per the schedule I had drawn up. I prepared elaborate transcripts of all the news relating to our Liberation War. Copies of the transcript were then submitted to the News Department of *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra* as well as to the Foreign Ministry of the Provisional Government. The News Department was headed by Mr. Kamal Lohani who had great faith in my newswriting ability and entrusted the task to me. Others involved in the English News Department were Mr. Alamgir Kabir and Mr. Ali Zaker who were mostly involved in the selection process.

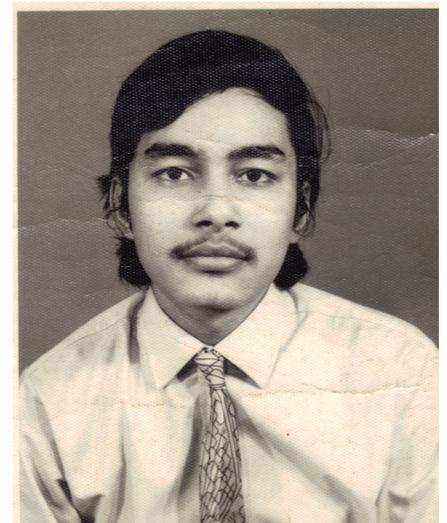


**Ajaz Hussain**

English News Monitor, *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra*  
*Bangladesh Betar*

During this time I also had to extend news coverage to dignitaries visiting the front line. Prominent among them was the British Labour MP Mr. John Stonehouse, whom we interviewed for *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra*. We also provided extensive coverage to the fact-finding mission of US Senator Mr. Edward Kennedy, who was then a member of the Senate subcommittee on refugees. He however declined our invitation to interview as he said he just wanted to visit refugee camps and get first-hand information on the sufferings of the refugees. The News Department worked diligently during the nine months of our Liberation War, and our audience following was amazing.

After liberation I continued as a News Monitor at *Bangladesh Betar*. I had wanted to resign to pursue my higher education at Dhaka University but the then-head of the News Wing, Mr. Tasdiqul Alam, said they needed my services and encouraged me to stay on. He suggested my duty hours to be 3:00 AM-07:00 AM so that I could go to Curzon Hall for my classes at 8:00 AM. I used to get picked up by *Bangladesh Betar* transport at 2:30 AM from our Sher-e Bangla residence every morning. I had to monitor and then write the English news which was broadcast at 7:00 AM each morning. I continued this until 1976 when the family had moved to Iran and I put up at Najmu Auntie's home at New Eskaton.



# BETAR KENDRA (SBBK):

## “FROM TODAY BANGLADESH IS FREE”

“From today Bangladesh is Free!” he quoted This was broadcasted through the world press in different areas. Within them, Chattogram people and other local people came ahead and spread the whole news that Bangabandhu has called for liberation. Not all the news were shared from internal sources, but from different international media agencies like *British Broadcasting Centre* or *Indian Akaashvani*. It was all the opportunity we had to get news. Though the March 26th speech was not broadcasted from Chattogram city radio station, picked up the broadcasting by evening. Kalurghaat, where there was only one transmitter. Because of the security as it was against the existing governmental set up, we started our campaign from Kalurghaat. March 26th was a long day as we were assembling.

By the early 27th we called an Army major from that area to read out the speech in English on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Before the date, name of *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra* was *Swadhin Bangla Biplabi Betar Kendra*. But the name was not correct as we were not revolutionaries. We were the people related to the war of the public. From the 28th of March we renamed the institution as *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra*. As you all know, within five days March 30, from 2:30 pm noon, for the first time Pakistani Air Force attacked our radio station at Kalurghaat circular road.



**Mr . Monwar Hossain Khan**

After the incident all the poets ran away to save their life. Our machineries were damaged, our broadcasting mechanism failed, our electricity was sabotaged, finally our broadcast totally collapsed. There were 10 people in total who came back again the very next day to the *Swadhin Betar Kendra*. Then they managed a 1 Kilowatt transmitter to transmit the messages, which was there to use under any emergency. Then they carried the transmitter via truck through Raamgar to Tripura. Where they installed the whole radio transmitter setup in a jungle under supervision of a 10-people group. This group consisted mostly of intellectuals, engineers and critics.

India helped us to get shelter in Tripura and two 200 watts radio transmitters. By April 10, our parliament was formed. On April 17, 1971 ministers of *Mujib Nagar Sharkar* took oath in Chuadanga (Meherpur District, Kishitia). All these news used to be aired on national and international radios. All the members of *Mujib Nagar Sharkar* felt the emergence of radio communication. That is why they asked for a powerful radio transmitter to Indira Gandhi and Information Minister Mr. Tripathi. And they gave us a 50 Kilowatts transmitter, which was used in our secondary stages. Our Agartala campaign went on till May 24, 1971. Our experts then went to Kolkata as an advance party to receive the radio transmissions to spread their messages in full phase. The Indian government gave us 2 tape-recorders, 1 headphone, 2 microphones and multiple Indian tapes called Joy. On May 25, 1971, one of the leading producers of *Shadhin Bangla Betar*, Mr. Ashfakur Rahman Khan, for the first time pronounced “Bismillah” and took his speech on the history of liberation war. T.H Shikdar was the script writer of that program.

### Why May 25, is so special to us?

Bangabandhu used to love the substance of poetry by our National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. In one of his poetry these two words are found, “*Joy Bangla*”. As our motto was to fight for liberation and tribute, we programmed our show on May 25, as it was the birthday of the great poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. That is how we started in Kolkata. The house was on Ballygunj Road, 57/8 no. house. It was a two-storied building.

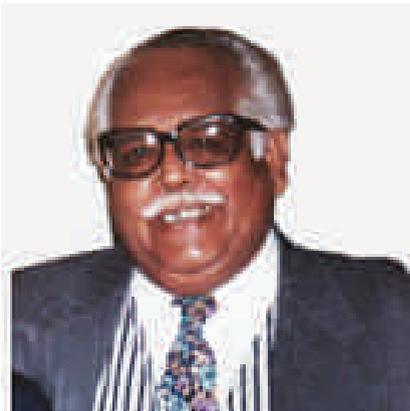
We had no specialized studio or any scientific tools to work on automatically, we had to do all work manually. There were two rooms, where from one we used to broadcast, the other for planning and editing. Primarily it was tough to manage our productions with non-specialized staff, but later on it went well with training. Many people from different faculties came to share their knowledge, poetry, music and news. Many Bangladeshi refugees in India gave us news on what was going on in their localities and concerns about war. There was propaganda we conducted through radio to manipulate the war. Propaganda helped us to build motivation within or outside the country. It was a very successful plan for us. Those two rooms was our everything back then. We worked there reluctantly, we were working with or without shirts, wearing lungis, we slept on newspaper pasting on the floor . Even there were not enough foods sometimes, which never stopped us. As we were acting in a war, we were warriors.



**Group Photo of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (SBBK)**

As you know we had not enough Bangla news reporter in earlier programs, but our renowned actor, Syed Hasan Imam came along with the name Saleh Ahmed. He changed his name to hide his identity. There were two prominent female English news reporters in our station. One was Ms. Parveen Hussain and the other Ms. Nasreen Ahmad. Ms Nasreen Ahmad was a Rabindra Sangeet artist too, she was later on the Pro-VC of Dhaka University. Ms Parvin Hussain used to report news on Urdu language too. Absurdly , Ms Parvin Hussain’s name was not on the list of Freedom Fighters though she was active during the whole war, but she was enlisted in *Laal Mukti Barta* for her contribution on Liberation War as a prominent news leader of *Barta Bibhag*. Her enlistment on *Laal Mukti Barta* was no. 0700001280. I was actually a practicing singer back then. When we used to sing, Ms Parvin Hossain used to report news, and we had pretty much less to talk as I was not from the news department , but I have seen her multiple times. I am proud to be a part in the same battle with such leaders. More to add , there were multiple strategies which were implemented in details into each sessions. One strategy was the March 7th speech by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in specific sessions of news or any broadcasts. “*Bajra-kantha*” was the special news session by *Bangladesh Betar Kendra* which was internationally broadcasted, heard and recognized .

One thing I would liked to mention with sorrow, Mr.Imtiaz Hussain, do you know what is that ? We are unable to curate all those important history facts in our tapes and records. Collecting them was an important matter , because those materials have become extinct, like cotton dust, more than 20 years ago. Otherwise we would have collected or played our liberation messages for years and years. Even after all these struggles I have curated multiple amount of usable and unusable tapes.



**M. R. Akhtar Mukul  
(1929–2004)**

Lately, I forgot to introduce myself lately, I am Mohammad Monwar Hossain Khan. My father was a businessman by profession , he did multiple types of business under a big single store . Our village is Fashirhaat , our village’s name was given by the British colonial time by my grand father . My father used to do business, and even he used to sing “koler gaan”. Back in 1971 my parents allowed me to go to war.

I used live in 28/ Shegun Bagicha which was a music college, where I used to study . When we could approximate the situation I left our halls. On my way back home I saw Pakistani force robbing Hindu families’ houses. By that night I migrated to Calcutta, and carried my war.

If I talk about December 16, 1971, it was a day of victory which we pre assumed. We smelled the victory on the air. Shadhin Bangla Betar had a special day to act upon which was December 16, 1971.

I speak his name again, Mr.Ashfakur Rahman Khan, who made the whole program design of the day of broadcast which took place on our victory day. We do still have the records of those on air sessions. Finally, I would be glad to share it with our generations.



## Abul Hasan Chowdhury

Former State Minister

Son of Abu Sayed Chowdhury, former Acting President of Bangladesh

### **MOBILIZING THE WESTERN WORLD**

My father and the greatest Bangalee fountain, Bangabandhu, the Father of the Nation, were students in their early teens in Kolkata, and also lived in the same hostel [which still stands]. I believe Bangabandhu's room has been separated from the others to show respect to this great man at Baker Hostel in Kolkata. Their personal relationship goes back to the 'thirties and forties'. Bangabandhu decided to dedicate himself to Bangladesh's language movement, Liberation War, and economy, and on the other hand, my father practiced for several years and was a judge. At that critical moment, he was the Vice-Chancellor at the University of Dhaka. Had he not been DU Vice Chancellor, whatever little he had to do with the Liberation War would not have been there. He was sent to Geneva sometime in March 71 to represent the country by Pakistan at the Human Rights Commission. There he came to know that two of his students were killed. He resigned on the 15 March of 1971. This is also recorded in the documentary of Liberation War, and I think he said since my student has been killed, I had no right to remain as the VC of the university. He then came back to London to meet with the senior leaders of Awami League [Mr. Sultan Mahmood, Mr. Kasu Khan]. Still nobody compares with the freedom fighters because every moment of these 9 months, they could have been killed as they were risking their lives, prepared to sacrifice their life, and all of the gallantry needed. Of course, none other than the father of Dr. Imtiaz Hussain, Dr. T. Hussain, was in the first, secretary in Mujib Nagar, which was the key pillar that led the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

Mujibnagar people were very gracious to ask Abu Sayeed Chowdhury to become their special representative, headquarter in London. I must record here that today I am told that Bangladeshi restaurants in the UK at that time had collected nearly £400,000 as aid. And this was handed to Bangabhandhu on the very day he returned from Pakistan. Even though victory day was 16 December, on the 27th of August 1971 Bangladesh was allowed to open a mission at 24 Pembridge Garden, Notting Hill, in London by hosting the flag of Bangladesh. The Prime Minister was Edward Heath. Pakistan's



High Commissioner, Mr. Norman Ali rushed to him and showed his anger and he said that if this is going to be the case, then we are going to leave the Royal Commonwealth club. Heath said "I told him, so be it". I must say that Bangladesh did get a lot of support and, of course the great support came from our neighbor, India. It magnificently and uniquely took 10 million refugees. None of them came back to say that they were made to feel welcome. So the gap may have been huge. Our freedom fighters shed their lives, and there were many thousands of Indian soldiers ready to do that too and they did. What was happening interestingly in England is that a large delegation was conducting a campaign for Bangladesh within England. No student who belonged to East Pakistan faced any financial problem.

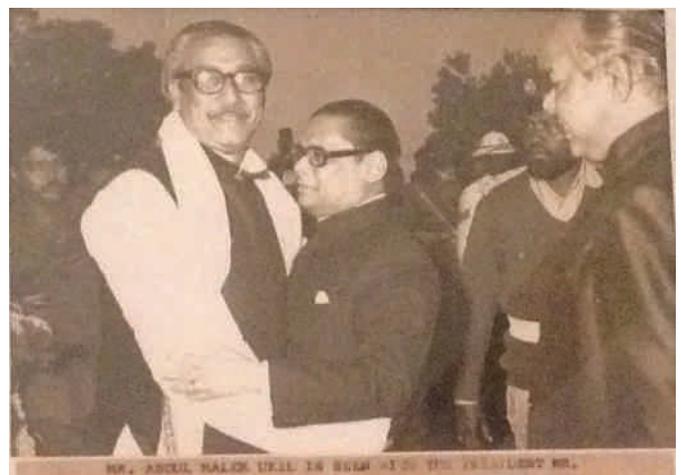


The Parliament would deal with that problem, and the government would take that. Bangabandhu, after being released from Pakistan, reached London to a huge ovation welcome. He told the British government that you never know that our country will become independent within 9 months so I would request you kindly continue these benefits that you are giving to our students. Surprisingly the British government not only agreed, but also continued to give these financial benefits and it was a huge advantage for our nation.

Bangabandhu was received by Mr. Reazul Karim and Mr. Mohiuddin Amen. A British Team was sent to Yahya Khan who was told, "if you touch Mujib all western world will be mobilized". These were the things that were done abroad. There is a special kind of bonding between the UK and the US, so look at what Edward Heath did. He clearly said I would not go against the Liberation Work of Bangladesh. That was the Conservative government, but of course, the Liberal Party was there too to support. We were all campaigning within, and it was a collective effort of everyone.

The country was in shambles. Everything was shattered, in shambles, with disastrous conditions. Bangabandhu was so independent-minded, many governments visited the country as well as he did. Mr. Gandhi expressed her desire to visit the country on his way home, and it was requested to him that the guard of honor be presented by Bangladeshi troops, not by the Indian that is kept.

Alhamdulillah, we are doing so much better, there was a time when people make assumptions about us, that we will not last for very long at that time, we were in a deficit of food, economy. But now look: we have survived, and we are doing well and achieved a lot, look at our exports or GDP now improved a lot. We have moved forward or are in a better position compared to Pakistan. Even the participation of women at that time as well as at this time remarkable. They are working in every sector.



# BANGLADESH: A 'SECOND' COMING?

My short thought from 2009 December to 2021 as we celebrate the 50 years of our Liberation War: I feel so confident with the leadership of Sheikh Hasina because our country is moving forward to a greater height under her firm leadership. She has the vision, stately disposition, and selfless love for Bangladesh and its people. In 1971 the youth fought and brought a country; today we need the generation that can take us forward with that spirit of 1971. We don't have to go backward but stand on the learning of our Liberation War to take the country forward. We don't have to live in the past but make that gore but glorious history our strength is our formula to move forward.

The year 2009 was the most significant for Bangladesh after our Liberation on December 16, 1971. The 38 years of chaos and confusion reached a crescendo towards the end of 2006 when the different political parties and other interest groups (civil society, bureaucrats, businessmen and interestingly the foreign diplomats too) scrambled to get a foothold in the 'power base'.



## Akku Chowdhury

Freedom Fighter  
Nature Lover

The whole drama of 'power transfer' reached a climax and the ending 'shell shocked' most people so much that everybody accepted it very calmly. If one is a chess player, a 'check mate' would have been a very clever outcome. Although we have not seen the end of it all yet, we can only pray and hope we don't have to see such ruthless violence as witnessed in October 2006. All said and done, our political forces talk about democracy, but in practice it is autocracy and totalitarianisms. As a result, to meet their goals or demands, dictators and totalitarians feel more comfortable in using the politics of streets and violence rather than their house of parliament. This has resulted in the people being totally disgusted with politicians and the political system, a sad part of our history: when democracy is only in an embryonic stage, being merely 15 years old, there is already apathy within the public about politics, the system and the value of democracy.

All our values that came with our thousands of years of heritage, culture, history is being drowned in the degradation of our society which has overcome with greed for power and money, nepotism, intolerance, perversions, intellectual bankruptcy, socio-political degradation, and so on and so forth. I know I am drawing a very negative picture, but looking deep down into our society one can see where we have sunk to: in reaching the bottom of the pit, we have burned the ladder to get out. This is all our own doing and we cannot put the finger at anyone.





*From Battlefield to Homefront, December 1971 . . .*

It is most unfortunate that even after 50 years of independence we are still struggling to put our history in the right perspective. Although most of the freedom fighters are still alive, we as a country have not bothered to set the records right. Instead they have been used to serve the interests of power-hungry leaders and their cronies. The new generation is being deprived of knowing the glorious history of our liberation struggle, which would only imbue them to become patriots and dedicated to serve the country. The present leadership in power has called for a country building with the spirit of the Liberation War as the foundation of our freedom struggle. That is great for me because to me that is the driving force in my life. I understand this spirit of 1971 as putting the 'people first and serving the nation or humanity without self-interest or motivation. It's the sense of self-sacrifice rather than possessing'. To be able to achieve that is not an easy task and we must adapt an inclusive mindset rather than exclusive. The first task will be to tell our children the true history of our Liberation War which will teach them the sacrifices the freedom fighters made for us to be citizens of a free country. Since our independence we have been like 'nomads', and the country, had neither a direction nor a vision. As a result, we have engulfed ourselves in corruption, cronyism and moral degradation that have made us politically, socially and economically bankrupt. After 2009 the country has a whiff of fresh air and like a 'second coming' looks forward to the rebirth of the country to move towards building a 'Golden Bengal' that the freedom fighters fought for. This can only be achieved if we get leaders with the right vision to move forward and the belief in the 'spirit of '71' which is that of sacrifice and selflessness to build a 'Golden Bengal'.





## **REFLECTIONS, 1971 AND NOW**

### **(50TH ANNIVERSARY OF LIBERATION OF BANGLADESH):**

# **HOSPITALITY BEGINS AT HOME**

In 1971, I was a 18 year old second year ISC student in Notre Dame College in Dhaka. Little did I know the events that followed March 25, 1971 would change the trajectory of my own life. Some of my memories are very clear and some are dulled by the passing of years. How we crossed the border and seeing so much suffering of simple villagers in refugee camps living under the worst possible conditions has been permanently etched in my brain.

One thing that remains with me to this day is the hospitality of the villagers of Bangladesh. No hesitation whatsoever, they welcomed us and opened their mud houses and shared what little food they had. How can the military justify killing these unarmed people? How can I forget the teams of Bangalee youths going out on operations during my training in Sector 8 and subsequently Sector 9 assignments? Speaking only for myself, I cannot say enough about the sacrifices of the Banglaee youths from the villages.

When I think of my own thoughts during my time in the field, I felt intense fear at times, especially during night marches through rice paddies or when we jumped into a ditch to take cover from a Pakistani counter attack near Dowlutpur, Khulna. I also felt a great sense of satisfaction when we liberated Sathkhira and how the people rejoiced when we marched into town

Although, I have been residing outside Bangladesh for over 46 years, I am a frequent visitor. Over the years, I have seen the progress the country has made and when I compare it to Pakistan, I am filled with so much pride! During my many visits, especially in the last 20 years, sometimes I wonder when I am in a *rickshaw* or CNG that most of the people that I see around me were not even born in 1971. If I could tell them one thing from 1971, I would say our liberation came at very high price and no matter where I live now or how long I have been away, I always feel that I belong here.

Thinking back to 1971, it was a defining moment for me and I can truthfully say now that my reason to fight against the military was not so much for the country as it was for the unarmed people (villagers, rickshaw pullers, students and all of the working class) who were being mercilessly killed in the name of religion and in some cases their political affiliation.

**Arif Husain**

Freedom Fighter, Sector 9  
Orca Biosystems, San Francisco Area



## A. Qayyum Khan

Adjunct Faculty, School of Business,  
Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB)

# REFLECTIONS ON THE LIBERATION WAR

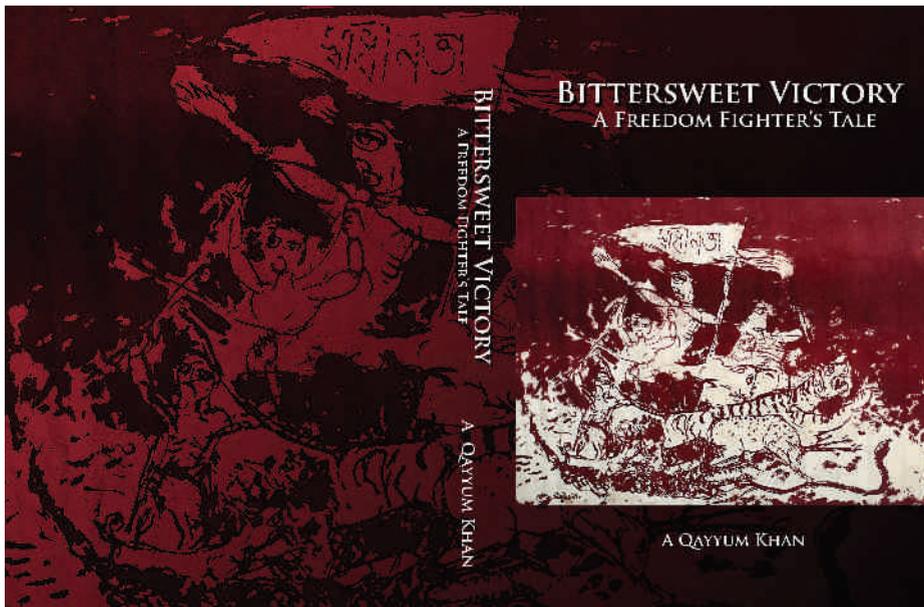
Excerpted from author's *Bittersweet Victory: A Freedom Fighter's Tale*  
University Press Limited, Dhaka, 2013.

How did we force the Pakistan Army to surrender in nine months? Whatever may be the myth of the Pakistan army, it was not a formidable enemy. It was a Third World army whose senior commanders were inept. Terrorizing unarmed civilians of one's country with guns is neither an act of courage or sacrifice, nor an appropriate response to a political crisis. The mere fact that no Pakistani military officer in East Pakistan refused to carry out unlawful orders to kill unarmed civilians *en masse* or conduct systematic rape, explicitly prohibited by the Geneva Convention and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, is the clearest indication that the Pakistan Army was not professional. In East Pakistan, it had deteriorated into a collection of thugs that thrived on murder, loot and rape. Such an army could not accomplish its mission.

General Yahya, Pakistan's Chief Martial Law Administrator and President, and his associates also read the international scenario incorrectly. They seemed to have put too much hope on their Cold War alliances; SEATO (Southeast Asian Treaty Organization) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organization), buttressed by the Chinese initiative brokered by Pakistan. The Nixon Administration did all it could to help Pakistan by proclaiming that the events in East Pakistan were the internal affairs of Pakistan. This was an untenable position totally devoid of compassion for the human tragedy of genocide and mass rapes. It had no moral ground on which its support could be explained to the U.S. people. Besides, 1972 was a presidential election year and Nixon could not afford to get the U. S. military (dependent upon conscripts) involved in another Asian conflicts before the end of the Vietnam War.

The *Awami* League had no preparedness to conduct an armed struggle/guerilla war against the Pakistan military. In March, when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Yahya and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the *Awami* League's chief political rival, were holding the futile talks that were only a ruse to complete the troop buildup, the *Awami* League rebuffed all efforts by Bangalee military personnel to organize resistance. There was almost a naïve expectation that Bengali soldiers would automatically revolt and resist the Pakistan Army in an organized manner. Even if that were to happen, actions would have to be planned and coordinated. The lack of planning and coordination cost the lives of many Bangalee soldiers at the East Bengal Regimental Centre, and in the First and Third battalions of the East Bengal Regiment, as well as the lives of EPR men in Peelkhana and policemen in Rajarbagh. The only preparation that the *Awami* League had taken was to send Chittaranjan Sutar to Calcutta for liaising with the Indians. What Sutar accomplished in Calcutta is not easy to assess, but the facts show that even after Mujib had called to organize a fortress in every home on March 7, there was no contact between Sutar and the *Awami* League high ups. The fact that Tajuddin Ahmed and the BSF could not find him in Calcutta, only illustrates the lack of planning and preparedness to put into effect the call for "building a fortress in every home".

What would have been our fate without Indian help? Without the Indian assistance, it is doubtful that the Pakistanis would have surrendered in nine months. India provided us with the essential ingredients to bring a revolutionary guerrilla war to a successful conclusion. It gave sanctuary, training, weapons, and logistics for the *Mukti Bahini*. Most importantly, the Indian Army fought the conventional phase of the guerrilla war to rout the enemy once it was weakened and dispersed without giving it the opportunity to reorganize. The Indian help was not entirely out of altruistic reasons. With an independent Bangladesh, India would have a friendly neighbor on its eastern borders as opposed to a hostile one. It would also put an end to the clandestine support the Pakistan Military was giving to secessionist movements in Nagaland and Mizoram. This, in turn, would discourage other secessionist movements in India. Thus, the creation of Bangladesh was of strategic importance to India.



Finally, the breakaway of the eastern province proved that Pakistan's Founding Father Muhammad Ali Jinnah's two nation theory was wrong; religion was not a sufficient foundation for the creation of a nation; shared ideals and aspirations, language and culture were. There was also the potential of huge economic benefits for India since Bangladesh would create a burgeoning market for Indian goods and services.

Throughout the Liberation war, the *Awami* League was burdened with petty political issues. In the absence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, no leader commanded the kind of respect and allegiance that he had. *Awami* Leaguers, who opposed the provisional government, couched their position in such a manner so as to give the impression that it would benefit the great leader himself. The majority of leaders were unwilling to make the sacrifices that were expected of them. Everything was *ad-hoc*. Had Tajuddin Ahmed not taken over the responsibility of the government, what could have happened is difficult to conjecture. In spite of the opposition from the youth leaders, Tajuddin derived his authority through a democratic process; he challenged and debated the youth leaders in the *Awami* League Council. He did not conspire to eliminate those who opposed him although his opponents had put out a contract on his life. Tajuddin kept his focus on the issue at hand without being bogged down emotionally or politically. Most importantly, his personal relationship with Indira Gandhi and senior members of her staff went a long way in overcoming difficult issues between the two countries.

The *Mukti Bahini* was a rag tag army with limited capabilities; there were glaring shortcomings in terms of deficiencies in weaponry, limited skills and inexperienced leadership. With so many weaknesses, how did we succeed? The *Mukti Bahini* succeeded because of the support of the ordinary people of Bangladesh and the dogged determination of its fighters. By December, the *Mukti Bahini* was about a hundred-thousand strong; out of which four to five thousand were regular Bangalee soldiers who revolted and deserted the Pakistan Army; another seven to eight thousand were former EPR men. The rest were volunteers. University and college students had played a pivotal role in various anti-government movements in Pakistan. They were, however, reluctant to undertake roles that would put them in harm's way during the Liberation War; they were the 'intellectuals'. My estimate is that no more than three to four thousand college and university students joined the *Mukti Bahini*. Fewer actually fought. Most of the sacrifice and fighting was done by the sons of poor rural farmers of Bangladesh. These boys remained dedicated throughout. On many occasions, they took huge risks by putting their lives on the line and willingly made sacrifices for their country. They also bore the brunt of atrocities of the Pakistanis; whenever Pakistan army found out that an individual from a certain household joined the *Mukti Bahini*, their homes were burnt and their family members targeted. The rural people not only fought; they provided most of the assistance the *Mukti Bahini* needed. They gave the *Mukti Bahini* shelter, acted as guides and informants at great personal risk, helped in digging trenches and crossing obstacles, provided food and water to the hungry fighters when they did not have enough for their families and even showed the traps and mines laid by the Pakistan Army. It was ordinary people who were the true heroes of the liberation war. They did all this without the expectation of any reward, except the liberation of their homeland.



**Ms. Dalia Naushin**

Daughter of Famed Architect Mazharul Islam

## ROADS TO NO WHERE?

A very progressive politically active person, my father also taught my mother; and she was also a very progressive person. My father also had another side which was cultural. He was deeply involved with Bengala cultural movement. I remember during the 60s. My fathers friend used to come over to our house and we used to have frequent cultural gatherings like Sikander Abu Jafar and well known people of that time . . . Suninder Sen started teaching me singing at the age of 5 . . . . At that time holidays were on Sunday and we always had some cultural event going on. Our house was always packed up during those times. We cousins used to get together. When I was in class 7 in the Holy Cross school mass uprising of 1969 happened at that time, my parents were very busy people, but were always coming over house to hold meetings. My parents decided to switch my schools to *Agrani Balika Bidyalaya*. Holy Cross at that time was English medium, so curriculum change was a big event for me. I was initially very sad but my parents decided to shift my school so that I could develop a strong footing in Bangla. My mother, my *Khala* Nurunahar Faizunessa, Mrs Mansur and Tulu Apa, Ranu Apa were the founders. It was very nice experience for me as I got to learn many new things like Arithmetic is called পাটিগণিত and History is called ইতিহাস.

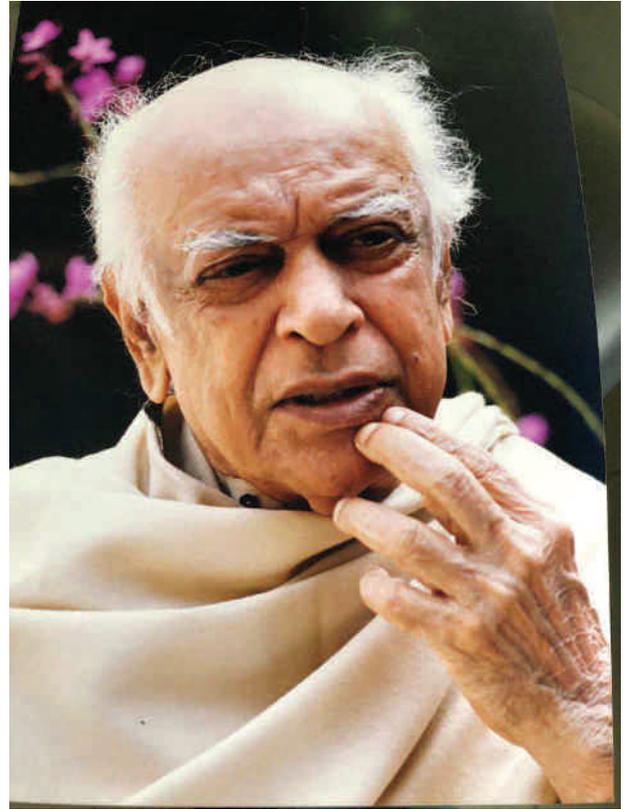
1971 started at that time all the schools were closed. My father was already very politically active. He was maybe involved in left leaning politics like Communist party and NAP (National Awami Party).

My father was architect Mazharul Islam, a very progressive politically active person, He is often called *sthapotocharjo* Mazharul Islam. He initiated the architecture department in BUET and designed many renowned buildings, like Chittagong University, Jahangirnagar University, Art College, Nipa Building. He designed these in 50s.

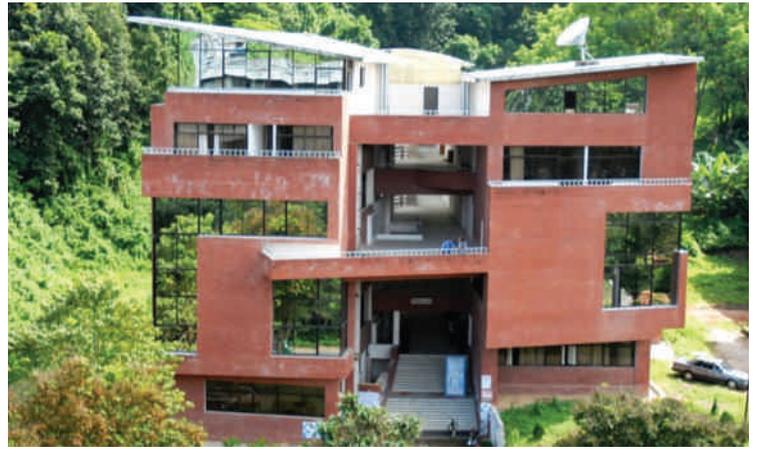
Abba was very involved with politics and culture. 1971 started as a very bad nightmare for us. We already had people over our house as there were a lot of activities going on.

On the night of 25 March, at 9pm, our *Boro Phupu* called us from Chattogram informing us that Independence had been declared. We actually hail from Chattogram. My dad was very excited hearing this and all of us got pumped up, and just after this the electricity went off. At that time we were living in Dhanmondi Road 24, just opposite of Abahani playing ground. We could also see fire and hear gunshots coming from that direction.

That was scary. We feared for our lives. Our *Abba* decided to abandon our house and leave for our *Phuppu's* house on March 27. Her house was in Wari. On the road I saw everyone rushing for safer shelter whoever got the chance didn't stay in their home. Everyone was in utter panic. But our *Phupu* couldnt accommodate us as it was already filled with people looking for safe haven since last night most of the people seeking refuge in my phupu's place were Hindus. My *Phuppu* told my father that she could not give him a place to stay as it would be a risk for them and also my father. My father was very disheartened but we had to leave when curfew was again lifted on 27th we shifted to our *Choto Phuppu's* house was in Gulshan. We stayed there for 2-3 days and on 29th we moved to Karatia, Tangail. We stayed there for a month and a half.



*Architect Mazharul Islam*



***Charukola & Chittaging University designed by Architect Mazharul Islam***

Everyday we stayed there we stayed under a lot of stress and fear the only time we felt good was night time as the village was quiet and we never stayed in any village. Many of us took shelter there, including around 70 of my relatives. We heard the broadcasts from *Swadhin Bangla Betar*. We used to wait all day to listen to it as there was news and also MR Akter Mukul's *Charampatra*.

My father all along had a plan to shift to Kolkata, and after one and half month we left for Kolkata. Before reaching Kolkata, we had to go to Agartala. Journey to Agartala was a historical event as we had to go through Comilla. In Comilla's Chandina, there was a army cantonment. We had to travel 22 miles from the border to Agartala by *rickshaw*. Me and my mother was wore a *burqa*, and you can guess the rickshaw-wala's condition. Anyway when we reached after evening we had to wait for an hour as a car or truck was supposed to come to receive us. A truck came and took us to Arts and Crafts College. There was a refugee camp set up there for people coming from East Pakistan, and we stayed 2-3 days there, then left for Kolkata by plane via Meghalaya. The first people we met there was my *Chacha* Kamal Siddique Bir Pratik and Benu Bhai who taught me at *Chayanut*. He gave me an address and asked me to join from the next morning because they were trying to set up a soiree. Sanjida Katun and Wahidul Huq were there too. My parents and I went there the next day. Going there felt good. I could sing again, I learned *Gana sangeet*, many new songs were also created.

There was another guy there, Deepen Bandyopadhyay, who was the owner of *Bangla Shahitto* in Kolkata. He introduced daily remuneration for people who went alone. We sang in Kolkata, then we went to sing in other big cities riding on the top of a truck. We even sang in Puja ceremonies.

As our team started getting heavier, Hassan Imam and his wife Laila Hasan, joined us. Mustafa Monowar, Shahriar Kabir, Aly Zaker was there

Everyday I used to feel that I want my country back. Later I started working for *Swadhin Bangla Betar* it felt good because now we could let the world know about the genocide and war crimes as at that time. It was the only media still active. This feeling that we are contributing for something great was exceptional. Only singing was not important for me, but contributing to the cause was there. Many children were orphans, who were worried about their family back home.

The reason that we fought for wasn't being reflected. We had a lot of *Razakars* with us. My father at that time was involved with the exile government. My father had contacts with Indira Gandhi's right hand man, and was offered to take charge. But he declined. He could collect funds from abroad and he had many foreign connections. But the national leaders, Tajuddin and Nazrul Islam, worked hard. Many people among us later turned out to be enemies who used to just join meetings with agendas but didn't attend full meetings. They used to go out and inform the enemies and used to disrupt the meetings. I saw Major Dalim there. He was pretty close to Dalim, Nur, Rashid. These 4 came all the way from Pakistan, and told us a very rough description of how they reached here, which I later found out to be false. I knew a lot more than my fellow singers mainly due to my father. A lot of secret meetings took place in our house. I would say we were right at the centre of the scenario, but we never bragged about it. And these 50 years we have been asked every year how do you see it in the early years? We used to be very excited and share our expectations.

I sang songs roaming place to place, but what about the men who went to the front and lost lives? My husband was also a freedom fighter; he worked in the front. We have two sons. We used to tell them stories of liberation. They used to listen to them eagerly, like operations raids, use of plastic explosives, and blowing up Habib Bank. These were pretty exceptional things.



## Professor Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta

Executive Director  
Research Institutes, Bangladesh

### “WRITING HISTORY”

My father (Professor Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta: in a conversation with Dr. Marufa Akter), as your sir knows, and his father, were not only good friends but also close comrades of the same clan, they were both humanists. That time, Manobandronath Roy (M.N. Roy), who was an Indian revolutionary, worked against the British, then he became a member of Second International which was an international communist movement. In fact, he was responsible for setting up Communist Party in India as well as in Mexico. But he had a fallout with Vladimir Lenin after the Second International. Then he (Roy) started the radical Democratic Party after coming back to India under the auspices of radical humanism. Humanism was always had a secular opinion from the west, but he started it basically for developing countries like India, Pakistan, and

South Asia as the colonialists were being driven away, the whites were also being driven away. As the black people cannot be in a same society as white people, he put his emphasize on rational thinking which is at the heart of radical humanism. This is where my father was being influenced in every aspect, which is not easy to do in a country just seeing the partisanship and also after the World War Two. It was not easy to think rationally, but he still wanted to do that, and it was the core of his thinking. At every problem Pakistan faced, he wrote article on provincialism as East Pakistan was a province, and the importance of the province as a post of central leadership. From this position stemmed his discourses. It was not anti-Pakistani, but it pointed the way how East Pakistan and West Pakistan should be with their own culture and language. As he was a student of literature, he took the form of literature where we should transform the society to be more meaning for us. But the Pakistani government did not like this at all. He was a student of Mymensingh Zilla School where he wrote a poem on Netaji Subash Basu, as he was very excited about Netajis’s leadership. He also started a newspaper called ‘*Mukti*’, which reflected the freedom of spech, freedom of thought and freedom of expression that he believed, with all his heart, as the Ayub regime went against these, accusing my father for being an Indian agent. This is my father’s background, I remember his having a lot of conversations with Tajul Hossain, father of Imtiaz Hussain, who was little bit close to the Awami League party, but my father was not a member of any party. Once he started MN Roy’s party, but MN Roy disbanded his own party saying that party leadership was not needed, but the readiness of the people for leadership was needed as this was his philosophy which my father also believed. Party leadership was an example of Lenin that how proactive positive leadership gets negative, gets Stalinist. To stay out of party politics, he thought that we must educate the general people. So, he started mass education programme, study circle and seminars. My father was very keen on that. When Bangabandhu delivered his speech on 7th March, my parents and I went down there at the Suhrawardy Maidan. My father was emotionally affected by the speech and said he (Bangabandhu) had a sense of sincerity the way he spoke as we are discussing the political implication, whether it is heading towards independence or not as this was the hot discussion for everyone. As lot of people thought that on the 7th March, Bangabandhu would declare independence, but he did not, rather he talked about getting prepared for a struggle. There was a lot of discussion about it and my father sincerely believed what Bangabandhu said. As he was motivated by all this, he said he was feeling like writing a poem like he did for Subash Basu. He was also constantly worried about his students, and about us as he was thinking about his students staying in the dorm saying that a captain cannot desert his ship. He was doubtful about the protection but stayed put at his belief.



*Basanti Guharthakurta*

My father was taken outside our house, where as other people were being shot. Professor Moniruzzaman of Statistics, who was living in the 2nd floor of the same building along with his family, was shot in front of us. We did not know at that moment that our father was being shot, but later when the soldier had left the scene, some of the other family members told us that my father was also shot. Initially he was conscious, saying how he was being shot and how he was being questioned by the military as he got shot in the neck and got paralyzed instantly. As he was still not dead and we took him inside our house, getting ready to take him to the hospital but couldn't because of the ongoing curfew. My father bled all night (25th) and the whole next day as my mother tried to stop his bleeding. In the morning of 27th, when the curfew was breaking for a while, we asked, random strangers in the street to carry my father across the road to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, laying on a mattress. We followed him to the hospital where the doctor said we cannot do anything but make him feel comfortable. Then he took his last breath on the morning of 30th March.

Professor Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta was conscious for first two mornings (first night and first morning). After that he became weak and said - "he will not make it unless he was taken to any hospital", that was one of his directions as well as asking us to continuously listening to the radio. He knew that history was being made as he were aware what had been conspired. We did not understand why we were being attacked, may be the Army was looking for somebody else, instead decided to attack us. So, we kept listening to the radio to know what was really going on, and finally heard the declaration of Independence on 26th March over the radio. Then I said to my father that Bangladesh is being declared independent. Then my father said to my mother "write". My mother replied "write what?". My father replied- "write history." My mother again replying that I am not a student of history but literature, as my mother thinking of my father being delirious. However, it took 10 years for my mother to write about it, called "*Eqattor Smirity*" as a memoir, all the nine months of the struggle.

After the independence, actually the first thing occurred to us that we could speak freely. As we did not go to India even though Imtiaz's father requested us to go to India with them, as they were leaving for Comilla, very close to the Indian border, promising us to help cross the border. But my mother did not want to go.

He felt that she had to prove her husband's death here. Also, my mother was a teacher, so had a responsibility to her students and all that stuff, she decided not to go. We were living in disguise at Dhaka, taking up a Christian name, staying in hospital and other places. After all that at last, at the beginning of December, we thought the killing had stopped but no: on 14th December we were very disheartened as the *Al Badar* started taking way all the intellectuals. My mother was very sad. On 16th December, we were almost in the middle of a crossfire as we were staying in a care center, then moved to the present-day Intercontinental Hotel where the Indian army and *mukti bahini* were camping and considered to be the safe ground. This was our 16th December.

Later on, we went to Calcutta to our relatives by plane with the help of Mr. Henry who was doing a documentary. Later on, we came back to Dhaka with my grandmother and three of us started a new life. My mother started working as the healing process had begun, the new government under Mujib made commitment to take care the widows of the freedom fighter, specially the widow of the intellectuals to be posted in the important positions. My mother played a critical role along with Munier Chowdhury's wife in women' Rehabilitation's center during the Mujib and Zia's regime. In 1972, she received a letter of appointment from the Ministry of Education, and she was the member of first education commission. She got herself involved in all these activities, and she was very curious women as all her friends, students, and colleagues all rallied behind her initiative. I was always an independent person, and had a college to go to as I took my Matric (SSC) in 1972, I was very busy with all this. I think the proper healing was the independence itself. At last, we were living in an independent country and we say and talk about our identity. And the country was also making identity of its own. First passport, first travelling, being introduced as Bangladeshi, were the big expression which were a part of our identity, and it was a big deal as it was the beginning of healing. Our vision was that the country will grow big.



*Professor Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta*

My father's thinking was that independent alone could not change things, people will also have to change themselves. He also wrote a poem on that emphasizing on the same point that real change doesn't come just from the independence but real transformation comes when people change their values. Being a teacher, my mother always worked towards that. I was a student, then following their footsteps, I guess. Not just independent, my experience allowed me to think in a different way that is also true.



***Dr. Md. Tajul Hossain***

After 50 years, we did not get the country that we were hoping as we were started with the four pillars, secularism was one but it got dropped, socialism brought the equality but couldn't last long. Here the gender equality, the constitution and personal laws were not reformed, therefore the women aren't getting their equality and in terms of inheritance. We still couldn't transform our values as my father talked about it. I believe that we have come a certain amount of way not enough as we need to change our social practices especially *dowry* and its laws. Violence derives from this, and we need implication of the *dowry* laws. But no one wants reform because nobody wants letting go the male privilege when it comes to inheritance, patriarchy and therefore the economy. Free participation of men and women in a free market still has a taboo for women as law, practices and shame surrounds women where men enjoy privileges over them. Women are getting lower-level jobs not in the decision-making level. Current Prime Minister Shaikh Hasina once talked about the equal inheritance of women while she was not still Prime Minister, but got denied by her own party members. So, it is not an easy job even for a Prime Minister of a country. We want to see society where there is meaningful participation of women in higher level and if not, at least the decision must not be made to a disadvantage from a women's perspective.

From the critical mass, there must emerge a critical actor. Actors cannot be all (Sheikh Hasina). Critical actors will arise when there is a critical mass behind them. For example, union council election participation, NGO preference for women to run for positions, which is a big struggle because a woman's family has to be on board for her to run for the leadership. Then when she asks for vote in society, her acceptance depends on her family, which is male dominated. With all this struggle, women are still running for office and winning elections which is a part of critical mass. Women who use money and muscle to win election are not considered to be the critical actors. Critical actors are those women who win election through the acceptance of social practice and struggle, not through party money and muscle.

**Dr. Laila Parveen Banu**  
Freedom Fighter  
Vice Chancellor, *Gono Bishwabidyalaya*



## **GENDER GATEWAYS & SLIPPERY SLOPES**

Before becoming a VC, I was the principal of a social medical college *Gono Shasthya* for nine years. Earlier than that I was the department head of Anatomy in *Gono Shasthya*. Back In 1971, I was a third year student at the Rajshahi Medical College. We are five brothers and one sister in my family, myself as the eldest. I was born in 14th April 1949. My paternal ancestral place is at a village near the border area in Kushtia district named Dhormodoho under Doulotpur Thana.

Dhaka's 25th March 1971 crackdown did not happen in Rajshahi where I was staying at that very moment. Rajshahi cantonment had all their troops under control and ready for the Liberation War. People in jail were freed and joined in *Muktibahini*, while Pakistani forces installed mines under soil of cantonment area so that Bangalee force couldn't sabotage them. Pakistani force tried attacking Rajshahi University at first. Then by 13th April we saw Pakistani jets flying over the sky of Rajshahi. As my father was an intelligence officer, they officially conducted a meeting on safety and security, where they decided to shift their homes to the office of CIB as it was a royal house of the colonial landlords. We shifted there with our family on 13th April 1971. By the afternoon of that day we heard sounds of bombs and bullets. Many people even left Rajshahi to India by crossing Padma River to save their lives. From 12th May to 24th many Pakistani forces applied strict rule to clear the lands within 3 miles near to the border, And on 24th May Pakistanis invaded our villages in Kushtia.

One of the four distinguished leaders and then MP, Kamruzzaman Hena (the Provisional Government's Home Minister), was a close friend of my father. I met him on Theater Road in Calcutta, and he told me he knew about my father's death. Then I was introduced to Mr. Khaleq, who was the IG of police, by Uncle Kamruzzaman. My father was trained under him. He remarked that I looked like my father. I used to call him Khaleq *Chacha*. Additionally, I was introduced to Barrister Aminul Rahman, who was then in charge of Kushtia. He told me to submit an application officially. Then Khaleq *Chacha* gave me the certificate stating that my father had died in the liberation war.

The next day, the PS or PA (whatever he was called) of Kamruzzaman told me he had good news for me. He said I would work for them and get 150 Indian Rupees. I asked what my duty was. He said I was to maintain and look after the official papers. I told him that as a medical student of the third year, I had not come so far to do these things. He said to go to Colonel Osmani. So, I asked him where that office was and how to get to him. I was told the office was in Kollani. Kollani was the biggest refugee camp. There were 9 or 10 camps. I asked him how to get there. He told me there was someone in Krishnagar, probably a teacher who was the head of the freedom fighters of that area. I was told to go with him at a given time.

The teacher told me not to worry. His family was in Kushtia, who would come soon, and then I would be able to live with them. He also mentioned that he would give me 50 Rupees. Then I told him that I was not there for the 50 Rupees, nor could I be a teacher for his children. I went there to join the Liberation War, and he was told to arrange that.

Back in Calcutta, Kamruzzaman *Chacha* told me to sit down and introduced me to Shajeda Chowdhury, who had just opened a camp in Gobra. Kamruzzaman *Chacha* was the head of the relief department. He was arranging for Shajeda Apa to open a training camp for female freedom fighters. He told her I was his friend's daughter and to take me to the camp.

I went to Shajeda Apa's place the next day; it was on Theatre Road

The camp was in Padmapukur, Gobra. It was a remote village, most people do not go there. We used to go by *rickshaw* and sometimes by foot, and it was pretty safe. The Nakshal's used to sleep on those empty grounds. There were a few people, not much.

So, my job was to bring one month's medicine from Theatre Road to the camp. The camp was sanctioned by both the provisional Government of Bangladesh and the Indian Government. Saint John's Ambulance Association used to teach everyone how to provide care and do bandages, and so on. Shajeda *Apa's* brother was a Captain in the air force. He used to come in the morning and supervised the PT and arms. Three sisters from Jadavpur University and Lady Brabourne University used to come every other day to the camp. They told us liberation stories from around the world to motivate us. There were a total of 400 girls.



*Gono Bishwabidyalaya Campus in Savar, Dhaka*

At first, 16 girls were trained in the first batch in B R Singh Hospital of Sealdah. People from Saint John's arranged for their practicals. They were sent to the hospital in Agartala, which was established with the main contribution of Zafar *Bhai* (Dr. Zafarullah Chowdhury, later of *Gonoshasthaya Kendrain Savar*). It was a hospital for the wounded freedom fighters, and the girls were sent there. It was not an easy task. A few months after, the country achieved its independence. We trained a total of three batches. Then I came back to Rajshahi after some processes, and when the college opened, I completed my studies. In 1973 I passed, and in 1974, I did my internship. Since I was good at anatomy, I had honours. I was made a lecturer of Anatomy. In 1976, I was awarded a scholarship. I had applied earlier for postgraduate in Dhaka.

However, I was in Savar, in the *Gono Shasthaya Kendra*. Many of my friends were there, including Gita. I recognized that Zafar *Bhai* was again a part of war; it was a social war. There were 10 girls among the 16 whom we had sent earlier. So I went to Zafar *Bhai* and told him that I wanted to work with him. He suggested that I should complete my post-graduation first. But I was determined if I focus on those things, then I would not be able to come there. So, I gave up my government job, and up to 1980, I did every kind of works in *Gono Shashthaya*.

In 1980, I got married and went away. Again in 2003, I joined the Anatomy Department of *Gono Shasthaya Samaj Vittik Medical College*. From there, the Professor of Anatomy. Then for 9 years, the principal of the medical college. After that, for three years, the trustees have appointed me as the Vice-Chancellor, and I am pretty busy.

I am also a member of many different organizations. After independence, in 1996, Shajeda *Apa* called us all and form *Mohila Muktijoddha Shongshod*, and I was a part of that. I was then in the Anatomy Department of Shikdar Medical College.

I have seen so many things. After so many sufferings, this independence came. I have seen people in Theatre Road; I have seen people on the border who starved for three-four days fighting the war in water, land or forests and then they came to this part of the border. I have talked with them and seen their frustrations. I have also seen the lifestyles of people on Theatre Road.

I just wanted to say, after the independence, those who could make an impact were not considered for the formation of the country; if they were considered, the country could have been more advanced. And because of all these, Bongobondhu had to lose his life. Then we all can see the current situation.

In 1996, for the first time, a reception program was arranged for the female freedom fighters who were engaged with songs or *Bangladesh Betar* or in Godra camp. With them and Shajeda Apa, *Nari Progoti Shongho* was formed, who made a massive stage in Shahbag. And on that day, we realized we were freedom fighters. To me, my mother is also a freedom fighter because she had to take care of all six children with only half months' salary of my father. Her war began on 14th April of 1971. She died in 2012 of cancer. All my siblings are established now.

Now, if you want to know my life, I used to struggle in sweats in the tents of *Gono Shashthaya*, and now I am struggling because the education system is not fruitful for every ordinary citizen. Technical and other skills developments without typical jobs are never parts of our education system. Another thing is that now our girls had to go to the Middle East to work. And all of us are watching. Now we see them getting murdered, beaten and in tears.

So now I think that in education there is freedom for the poor. We are yet to operate education for all. Our education system is still divided into three types: *Madrasha*, English medium and Bangla medium. And the main focus is on what CPA one gets; everyone is running after that. We are memorizing, we are doing coaching classes. The corruption is not only with the teachers. It is everywhere. We are lobbying; human trafficking is going on. Those things were not supposed to be.

However, I am satisfied; I am working. Students from poor families come here, and we offer them scholarships and other facilities. Also, there are 47 sub-centers. In private medical colleges, most of the students who come are primarily wealthy; some are middle class. Most of them haven't seen villages in their lives, and they barely know about villages. So how could we blame them for not wanting to go to the villages? Even a poor student from a farmer's household who lives in cities like Dhaka or Rajshahi in air-conditioned rooms of medical colleges for five years, will it be possible for him to go back to his father and practice medicine there? We are instructed on how many students should live in a dormitory and how the rooms should be air-conditioned from WHO (World Health Organization). So, our development is in the buildings. But we should have focused on our education system, whether it will teach us to stay in our community and offer our services there comfortably.

In *Gono Shashthaya Kendro*, we took our first-year students to Savar National Martyrs' Memorial to take an oath. Both medical and dental students go there to take the oath. Then for a month, they live at our sub-center. The teachers, who were responsible for covering up the syllabus for that month, go there with them. They are shown the village, they are introduced to the living freedom fighters, they live with a destitute family for a day, eat and cook with them. They are again sent there in the third year, and finally in their final year. when they learn everything. They come here to learn everything practically.

Girls are making progress in terms of education, talent, but after post-graduation, they can not progress. Either they get married, or the in-laws do not support them. .

Nevertheless, I have seen many things, but I am really shocked during this pandemic to see the cases of 8 years old, 3 or 5 years old. Why is this happening after fifty years? We girls are being educated, but for what?

Now, I rarely see the 1971 sacrifice spirit among girls/women today, I have my doubts about the feminists, they always talk about female empowerment, but at the end of the day, they abuse their house help, they throw them away, burn them. So, I don't see such spirits, but I think it must be there. Otherwise, women could not have come this far. In every sector, women are progressing. They have become a judge and everything else. But how much they have grown mentally; I cannot say that.

That day someone called me a female freedom fighter. I said there is no female freedom fighter or child freedom fighter. There are only freedom fighters. There are humans. Humans fought for other humans. Then there was no division; why should we divide now?



## Mr. Asif Munier

Rights & Cultural Activist Development Professionally, & youngest son of Martyr Professor Munier Chowdhury & Mrs. Lily Chowdhury

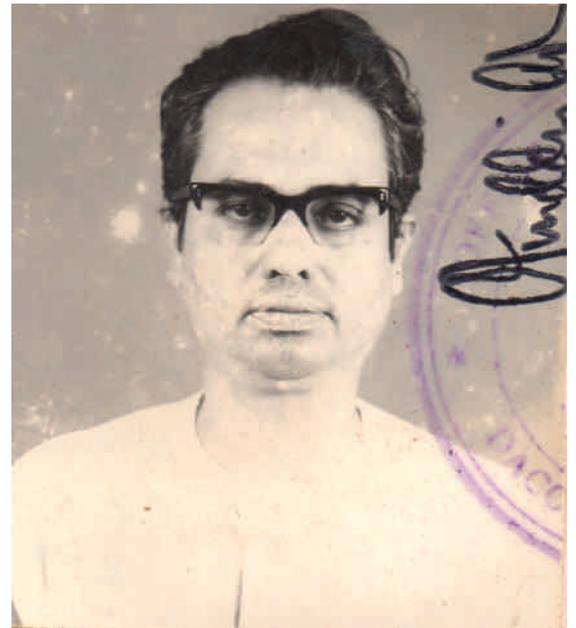
## “STORIES TO TELL” . . . STORIES WE MISS

Dear ones are always special ones, unique ones for everyone. Parents are even higher up on the pedestal. It is only natural. Parents also feel the same, that their children are special and different than all other children. The bonding between siblings, between parents and children can be unexplainably strong. Exceptions prevail. Families break up, siblings stop talking to each other, children and parents become distant. .

Talking about my parents in the year of the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh feels like a double special effort and benefit. Me and my siblings grew up hearing from others, or reading from others, how special our parents were, how even as a duo, were a unique power couple. It is a mixed bag of feelings for that matter, feelings of joy, pride, sadness, humbleness, anger, shyness and maybe more. When friends, family, well-wishers and foes talk about our father Martyr Professor and Playwright Munier Chowdhury, it's a different set of emotions for conversations or comments of different constellation of people. It is also a different set of emotions, particularly as I write this, when in the back of my mind I hear and remember what is said about our mother, Lily Chowdhury, who passed away on 1 March 2021. The emotions are still raw, as raw as it can be for weeks after a close one passes away. We all have experienced the loss of loved ones, more than one in some cases, in the time of the pandemic. Nevertheless, feelings are still special and unique for the son of such bright luminaries such as Munier Chowdhury and Lily Chowdhury. It is difficult to talk about such larger than life parents, so I write snippets of information from here and there.

Munier Chowdhury was born in 1925 in a large family of 14 siblings, though he was the second. Although his parents were from Noakhali, Munier Chowdhury was born in Manikganj simply because that is where his father was working at the time. He studied briefly in India, where our grandfather sent him, but mostly he studied, lived and later worked and be a creative writer in Dhaka.

Lily Chowdhury was born in Tangail in 1928, but mostly had her school and college in India because that is where her father was working. She came with her family to Dhaka soon after the partition in 1947. and continued with her studies at the University of Dhaka. That is where Munier and Lily met, in Dhaka, and their love story began. Until it was abruptly halted by the brutal abduction and killing of Munier Chowdhury by the *Al Badr* forces on 14 December. It is of course a national loss, but also a very personal loss for Lily Chowdhury and her sons Bhashon-Mishuk-Tonmoy. Each of us have been processing that loss and pride of a Martyr for the last 50 years.



*Photo of Professor Munier Chowdhury*

We are surely fortunate to have had our mother till the age of 92, during which we were part of her struggles as a widow with three sons. We also take pride how brave she has been over time, including dealing with the blow of also losing one of her sons and my brother Mishuk Munier, prematurely, in a road accident. Much is talked about Munier Chowdhury and his multi-layered talents, but less is known or said of his other half who was also multi-talented.

Home-maker, development professional, radio and TV drama artist Lily Chowdhury at least was well known in the 60s to the 80s with her own persona. We know from family stories that many times she was the inspiration behind some of the creative writing of our father. With her passing . . . it is an end of an era. We the two remaining sons continue as torch-bearers of their legacy, but definitely we do not shed much light as our parents did over the people around them and to the country as a while.



*Family Picture of Munier Chowdhury*

I conclude these short ramblings with a small story of the connection between Bangabandhu and my parents. It is perhaps to provide a befitting tribute to the Father of the Nation from a personal point of view on the year of his 101st birth anniversary. Of course young writer and activist Munier Chowdhury and Sheikh Mujib knew each other through common contacts among intellectuals and politicians. One would find reference to Munier Chowdhury's father and sister in the memoirs of Bangabondhu. They were both in prison for the language movement in the 1950s, even though in separate prison units.

Dear ones are always special ones, unique ones for everyone. Parents are even higher up on the pedestal. It is only natural. But it was in 1958 that they finally met up-close for a few days and possibly that was the only time of such duration. Munier Chowdhury was able to utilize a scholarship to study linguistics in the United States, at Harvard University, so was living there with his wife and first son, Bhashon. Bangabondhu was visited the United States for treatment, and my parents actually hosted the great leader at their residence for rest after hospital stay. The two men talked about their common topic of politics and books, while the lady of the house was the perfect host. We know for sure how the young charismatic politician Sheikh Mujib inspired Munier Chowdhury at that time and beyond. The family fondly remembers those few special days.

All the three I mentioned had also perhaps something else in common. . All three passed away suddenly. The two men had a brutal death and their killers still remain at large, at least some of them. My mother had a more peaceful passing away, but nevertheless sudden. So sudden that even after few weeks of her death, it still feels surreal. She had a lot of stories to tell and we will never know what stories we missed.

Long live Bangladesh.



## COMMENTS ON 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF BANGLADESH: “I FEEL LONELY . . . AS A CLOUD”

### Experiences with Dr Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta & Dr. Sarwar Murshid

I have written some articles on my university life, because I am very fortunate for having the opportunity of being the student of Dr. Sarwar Murshid, Prof. Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, and Dr Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta

When Dr. Guhathakurta was martyred, I was his direct tutorial student. While I was not an exceptional student, I was passionate about English Literature. After reading one of my class essays titled “Nihilism and King Lear”, he called me separately and discussed with me about radical humanism along with giving me various suggestions on my essay. His guidance inspired me immensely. I still remember how, on our first picnic, he invited girls and boys to dance together, which was something very unusual back in the days. And in our first class, he asked us all “what is poetry?” After a while he answered: I feel lonely as a cloud, and that’s poetry. His murder shocked me immensely, as he would always get out of his way to reach out to people who could stir his inner fire.

Dr. Murshid was not only the Chair of the English Department, but he also had a great style and sense of fashion. We students were always in awe with him. He had an unusual reputation as he would openly speak against the ban of Rabindranath Tagore in radio and syllabus. He shared a close connection with Bangabandhu, and so played a great role in developing the Six-points and the constitution as well. Before his murder, we grew much closer as both of his sons are my close friends, and so I had the opportunity of interacting with him.

### Comments on the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh

It is a great privilege to be alive in the 50th anniversary or the Golden Jubilee of Bangladesh. I have written about my nightmares of 1971, because I experienced the murders of my best friend, mentors and classmates. I have first-hand experience of Bangabandhu trying his level best for a war-stricken country, which was labelled as bottomless basket. Then the country had to go through his assassination and the socio-political madness that followed, but now Bangladesh is doing so much better in so many ways. So, now in the Golden Jubilee year, we can proudly say Bangladesh is going places, and will continue its progress. I hope in the next 50 years the country will also achieve Bangabandhu’s democratic aspirations, as well as his secular beliefs, and strong nationalism. I have an intuition that he was aiming for the social welfare system we see in countries, like Norway.

**Professor Dr. Fakrul Alam**

Director, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Research  
Institute for Peace & Liberty  
Formerly Professor/Chair, English Department  
University of Dhaka



## Ms. Khushi Kabir

Social activist, Feminist, and Environmentalist

### “TRAPPED IN DHAKA”

In 1971, I was a student of Art College and I had already graduated from there. I did do some work with an advertisement agency in 1970, but I left it after a while. And then there was the cyclone work, and election. In March 1971 when the Operation Searchlight crackdown happened, I was in Dhaka, a young woman of about 22 years. I remember the events leading upto the 25th of March, the speeches and the kind of excitement there was, every house, we would put up the *Joy Bangla* flag (the original flag which had the map on it). And I remember, being an artist, I very meticulously drew the map on a yellow cloth and painted it in gold on the red circle.

We had it hoisted on our roof along with a black flag, Every house had it. It was a protest against not allowing the parliament to sit, and against the events that had transpassed on the 25th of March, the Bangalee soldiers not being given a role and were being disarmed. We all realized, things were not moving in favour for us but the feeling of protest of fighting back was strong. Our role as citizens, given Bangabandhu’s speech and everything, was to boycott everything to the central government and to Pakistan. Buying soap, toothpaste was a big thing because they came from Pakistan, everything was manufactured there. There was *Henna* chemicals, a local company that brought out a new toothpaste brand call *Piya* toothpaste, so everyone started using *Piya* toothpaste.

It was basically just looking at everything that we would do. Before that I used to wear more masculine clothes, either jeans or some kind of *pajama*, a *Kurta* or top. But ever since the end of ‘70, I started wearing cotton sarees all the time. It was like a protest for us.

The 25th night was quite terrifying. I remember because we were living in Dhanmondi, we could hear everything that was going on at Pilkhana where at the time, the East Pakistan Rifles was. Nilkhet halls were not that far away. The skies were red and the crows were cawing all night and we were all sitting at the veranda, hearing, watching and trying to understand since all the telephone lines were cut already. There was no way of ringing up people to ask if they were safe or what was happening. The whole night, we were watching.

Very early morning the army trucks came in and very rudely asked everyone to pull down the flags and would shoot at walls to frighten us if we were a bit late. All the flags were brought down, and we settled into the Liberation War.

I myself did not go to India, my friends did, but like everybody else in Dhaka, we didn’t choose to go to the villages either. Mostly because we didn’t have a village to go to and we were 6 brothers and sisters and my father felt it wouldn’t be fair just to leave. Also, we didn’t know how secure it would be. Many friends who went to the villages for refuge, had to come back.

All the foreign missions people used to live in Dhanmondi. Gulshan was very empty in those days except for the British Deputy High Commission. Most of the ambassadors however, lived in Dhanmondi, and very near on the same road as ours. So we felt that they would not do an operation in this area because they didn’t want the outside world to know what was happening. The Pakistanis wanted to give an impression of things being normal.

In Calcutta, my uncle’s house was a base for a lot of freedom fighters and generals. They were majors then. It was filled with people who needed a place to stay since their families were being arrested. So their needs were much greater since their lives were in such imminent danger.

The only radio we would hear at the time was *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra*, *Akashbani* and *BBC*. Those were the three we always listened to. There was a curfew till the 27th of March, and they’d relax the curfew for people to buy daily necessities. My father was then coordinating relief operations on Monpura island in Bhola.

He was going to return on the *Rocket* steam-ship, but the *Rocket* was not allowed to enter Dhaka. So what he did was, when he reached Narayanganj, he took a country boat and went to my brother who was living in the Narayanganj dockyard. We were naturally very worried.

It was not just the people who were targeted. Professors at universities, students, the police headquarters, the EPR (East Pakistan Rifles), and also the average students in old Dhaka were too, Shadhona Oushodhaloy was almost bed ridden, and he was also killed. The massacre at Shakhari Bazar was random. And this was something we all saw. When the curfew was relaxed to make everything seem normal, no one got out of their houses.

We had sheltered people once or twice. We used to have the army, and later the *Rajakars* who would come and search our house. So when they would come to search the house, my sister and I were sent upstairs to the roof and when we came down, our cupboards, drawers - everything was ransacked. They used to search everything. So each time the army came for a search, we had to put things back to order again and again.

We hardly went out and this was the time I took up indoor games, something I had never done before. The 9 months went by with that. At times we would receive notes, if a freedom-fighter could be sheltered. The person was brought in. When the raids would happen, my mother would always handle the army officials. My father had retired by then but he used to work for the central government of Pakistan and my mother would say that we were with the government and we had just come back to Dhaka from Islamabad. And anyone who was staying with us then, seeking shelter, she informed them that they were a part of the family.

I kept hearing which of my friends moved across the border and became freedom fighters. We used to hear of who has been caught and imprisoned. We used to hear of who had been killed because throughout the 9 months, people were being targeted, picked up and killed. And I think that feeling of fear was always there, but I remember a great belief persisted within us that at someday, some time, we will not give up and win.

From October, people were knitting mufflers and sweaters and trying to make blankets. We didn't have blankets, so jute sacks were used and stitched with a layer of old saree on top. A lot of houses were doing that to support the freedom fighters. People in the cities were trying to do what they could to support the fighters. There were many internal refugees who moved from one village to another.

My mother, who was astute, noticed that the beggars were different people. Usually in some areas when you've lived there long enough, you know the beggars, vendors. After the 26th of March, the new faces had propped up. We realized these were people who were actually spies, who were undercover to discover which house were sheltering freedom fighters.

The awareness of the student movement was within us. And since I was in the Arts College, so of course it affected me. I remember a friend of a family came with his car and said, "Let's go, on March 7, to the speech". We were on the outskirts and it was crowded. I wasn't wearing a *saree* that day and yet I never felt anyone was looking at me or making any comments. We were all mesmerised and together for the cause of the liberation of Bangladesh. At the time, there was no petty thievery, there was no attack or harassment on the streets. The feeling of togetherness came through in March. I remember an incident where a truckload of Biharis were chanting "Pakistan zindabad," and I remember the feeling that was left with me when I heard it. The distance between Bangalees and Biharis became stronger. As somebody who grew up in West Pakistan, I had Bangalees as friends. Even then, the divide wasn't that strong till I heard them on the 27th of March. From then on I had no sympathy for them as a consequence.

I think the spirit was strong in December. And the spirit of the 16th of December is something that is indescribable. Everybody spilled onto the streets and whether we knew each other or didn't, *Joy Bangla* slogans were everywhere and we were so happy.

Immediately after the war, there were a lot of expectations and not everyone's expectations happened immediately. I started working at an NGO. It wasn't called an NGO then, it was a voluntary agency that did relief rehabilitation work. So I was first placed in Dhaka, immediately after the liberation war in early 1972. I went into the field to stay in one of the most remotest areas of Bangladesh and worked and lived there. There were no proper roads, bridges or culverts so you had to take little ferries and come across. Money was looted totally from the central bank reserves to Pakistan, before the Pakistanis left. Apart from killing the intellectuals, villages were pillaged to the ground. People came back from the refugee camps to nothing. They had none of the resources required for farming so whatever their occupations were, they came back to everything gone.

Unless one lived through that period, one didn't know that in '72, even though we were excited that we were liberated, the country was in devastation and we were working with that. But there were some young people who had fought in the war who believed that things would change immediately. And politics is not a very simple thing. Within every political party, especially the mainstream political parties, one had different views and opinions.

Some who were socialistic, some who were less socialistic. There was no opposition, so Awami League was the main party and there was the left, which used to raise its voice and whose voices were of some influence. But there was no resistance. After '72, there was a period of some people having too high an expectation and some people who were pragmatic and understood that after a war this was something that would happen.

They were some friends of mine and people who I respect, like Begum Sufiya Kamal, Badrunnesa Ahmad, Nawshaba Sharafi, Nilima Ibrahim, all of them who were working for the rehabilitation center (*Nari Punorbashon Kendro*) which was for all the women who were rescued and brought. There was all that because, people I knew like Maleka Khan and some of my friends faced issues, like the families of the women would not take them back if they were traced and found. This is because society wasn't ready to accept them.

It was both a time of hope, trauma and depression. And then we had the famine of '74. Because our infrastructure wasn't good enough, the government didn't have the provision to move food everywhere. There were certain pockets where the famine was very severe, and it was a distressing time in Dhaka as well as the situation was quite deplorable. I had gone to the villages by then and I had started working in the villages with some of the women and people who were very directly affected by the famine and its aftermath. There was also a movement happening inside Bangladesh, between the freedom fighters, who had not given up their arms and wanted an arms struggle and wanted complete communism. *Bakshal*, the one party system, was created, which again, angered many people who believed in democracy, since democracy was one of the founding principles, and so was secularism.

After the famine, when a group of ex- and present army officers killed Bangabandhu and his family and some of his relatives who were in politics then, like the Sannyabad family.



**Ms. Shireen Huq**  
Social Activist

## **FORGOTTEN 1971 WOMEN**

I remember the 16th December of 1971. I was 17 years old, full of dreams of what Independence brings with those dreams, including what Independence brings for women and girls. I remember I was feeling so initiated, that Bangladesh has become independent and won its Liberation War and immensely expected a different country and the various culture . . . where women [would be] treated as human beings, respected as equal citizens, [and] providing dignity that every human being deserves, but did not see these happen, not even in 50 years. The one good thing that happened within six days of victory, on 22nd of December on 1971, the Social Welfare Minister Mohammad Kamruzzaman [said] that all women who were subjected to sexual violence during the liberation war [would become] "*birangona*", which means female warriors, within six days.

A victim of sexual violence bears all the blame [and] shame, [is] casted out of the family and village, and if it is possible to throw out of the country. So this gesture . . . was . . . revolutionary justice for women country [too] . . .but his intentions and declaration were not supported by positive campaign and activities which would restore the honor of this woman. Once you have been violated, you have nothing to look forward to in life.

We were working for the last 11 years with them. [Through] our program "the forgotten woman of 1971" . . . we met many . . . interacted with them . . .[and heard] two things [from them]: "what did the Pakistani Army do to me one day, what did you do to me for 40 years for that?"

This imposes lots of shame, as well as pain . . . Why we are not providing them respect? It is wiser to acknowledge that, as they have been already going through horror and painful circumstances which becomes a collective memory for them. They would carry the baggage of someone's wrongdoing for the rest of their life. Rather than supporting them we as a country, we only make sure they live with this pain, and shame.

Even . . . a term in Bangla, "*Dorshita*", is forcefully imposed on them . . . making their identities which they denoted for their life. My question is: why should they be called by such word? Why should we stigmatize *dhorshita*? A woman in Sirajgong, Safina Lohina, who just passed away a few days ago took the initiative to take care of 23-24 women. She has supported those women, and we [*Naripokkho*] have also tried to take some responsibility to take care of them. We don't feel good that we were not able to help them much. Families do not treat them well. We are a small organization, but we tried to do what we can for them. For me liberation and these women are related to each other.

We are trying to include them in the gadget. But a lot of the times it is not possible because the government wants to take all the procedure since there is money involved but the women don't really understand why they have to prove so much after suffering so many years. *Naripokkho* is working on a program on post violence on women . . . [conducting] prevalence research in the late 90s. We found that whether its the police station or public court, the women don't feel safe in these places. We are doing a lot of police training, but we do not see much improvement.



## Ms. Vidiya Amrit Khan

Director, *Desh Garments*

Daughter of Nurul Quader, CSP, Freedom Fighter & RMG Pioneer through *Desh Garments* in 1975

## Triangle of Trust : Business Success Formula

My *dada/dadi* were from Mymensingh, living in Old Dhaka. My father went to Kurmitola High School, then he joined the Air Force for a short amount of time in the 60s. He studied in Dhaka University, got a Commonwealth Scholarship to study in Trinity College, returned and joined the air force, but eventually became a CSP Officer, first as SDO in Chandpur, then ADC in Chittagong, later DC in Pabna. The Liberation War started. He fought 17 'khondo' wars. Pabna became the first liberated part of Bangladesh under his command. From Pabna he moved to the Mujibnagar Government in Calcutta. Tajuddin Ahmed was his reporting boss, and he was his right-hand man. There is this famous story of how my father stole the train. In those trains, the Pakistanis were taking all the money from the Bangladesh Central Bank, so he stopped the train, he exchanged the currency on time so that it was still valuable to us and with that they funded the Mujibnagar Government and many other things. So literally the train was going and, like in a Western film, he went round the side of the train and with his troops he hijacked the train, fought and drove the train back to Bangladesh. So he was a very colorful, dynamic individual.

He became the first Establishment Secretary of the Mujibnagar Government. And finally when the war ended he returned. In 1975 he resigned from the government position; right before that he was the founding chairman of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation. For the BPC logo, he commissioned the *Kalidash Kormokar*, just like *Kalidash Kormokar* was commissioned to make our *Desh Garment, Desh Group's* logo. So basically that's how we started. That's how Desh Garments started. He was in Singapore for two years, and then decided to come back to Bangladesh. By chance at the same time, U.S. President Richard Nixon declared the Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA), in 1974, and that put a quota on countries, especially Korea. So by chance my father also had the opportunity to meet President Kim of *Debut Corporation*, and they established a joint venture whereby my father would send 130 people to Korea's factory for Busan for training for six months in all skills of sewing, commercial and marketing of *Desh Garments*. He set up the first 100 person export oriented readymade garment factory (RMG) in Bangladesh.

When Nurul Quader first started, he saw he needed working capital. He didn't have any, Bangladesh Bank could not give it to him. So his colleague, who was a CSP officer, Mr. Nurul Islam, was also the governor of Bangladesh Bank at that time, and he managed to convince Mr. Nurul Islam that let's have a concept of a triangle of trust within the financing system. And thereby, he came up with the back-to-back letter of credit banking system. That is his invention. He formatted the whole concept and he sold it to Mr. Nurul Islam, who bought it. Today we have the back-to-back letter of credit banking system. The duty-free bonded warehouse at the factory level this was also a concept that was introduced by him. He had seen this in Korea, and he replicated it in Bangladesh so that we had a tax free way of bringing in the raw materials, stitching the garments, and then sending it all out without any tax being imposed so that our garments would continue to become competitive.

In our garments factories, in the front scale, in taking care of the factory, how many women are there? Everyone is a director because of their husbands. Again it comes to the concept of what is real women empowerment. In that case it has happened to the women in the village. In that way, industry 4.0, or automation that you were talking about, about training. Well, various NGOs or people like them have always promoted training, they have given a lot of money to our government, to our private institutions, to BGMEA to set up skill development, training and all that. I don't know what happens, honestly speaking, because we are still fighting, crying, undercutting our neighbors, factories, just to get workers and they don't have the skills.



Anyone can give a running stitch but when you talk about real skill development that is a different thing. That should be an examination, that should be a progression, how many skills do I have or what difficult skills do I know. Anyone can give a running stitch, that's not a skill development. For industry 4.0 many factories have taken their own initiative where they get the software, and are trying to get the workers who are women to work on a tab or to understand the different settings of a factory, things like that. And it's coming about, but the really effective training is coming about from the private sector because the private sector is driven. We work on profits, we are driven by the money, we want result from the money we spend. So our work I believe is more efficient. Bangladesh is where it is today because of the private sector, obviously supported by the government but the initiatives are all private and that is why or how the country has come this far. I am not a very pro-NGO person, not really. For them it is easier work. They might think that their work is hard and ours is easier but no. They might think our money is more but no, NGOs are so rich. They can get money when they want at zero percent interest, or two percent interest but who is giving that to us? We do our business by giving banks 10% interest. There are some women banking benefits.



**Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid**  
Educationist, Diplomat and Intellectual

## **“BORROWED LIFE”**

**(written by Sharmeen Murshid, his second daughter)**

My father became a very close ally of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was then Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and not Bangabandhu. The academia, not so much as I would say the intelligent, that actually supported the work of Mujib at that time, people like my father, people like Dr. Kumal Hussain who came in later, Professor Rehman Sobhan, Professor Anissuzaman, they were legal experts.

Many may not know, but the press draft of the 6-points charter was actually made by my father on Mujib’s request, and of course, it underwent consultations and changes, but it also shows the confidence that he had on people like our father. My father had also accompanied Mujib, then he had already become Bangabandhu through the round table conference. The theme that presented itself on the basis of the 6 point . . . was the East Bengal demand for autonomy. So interestingly, Mujib worked very closely and had brought together the academia and intelligentsia very well in working together with him. I think this probably is linked to the movement of the 50’s and 60’s and the period of enlightenment.

My father did not get a promotion for ten years from a lecturer. He didn’t get his professorship for many years and it was fundamentally because of his political activism, which the Ayub regime saw as a threat to what it stood for. We lived through those tiring days. It became obvious when, in 1970-71, when the war was about to break out, that both my parents were targets of, first, Ayub’s regime, and later on, of Yahya Khan’s regime. We lived in the university campus, in 37 Fuller Road. In that area, that road, the university campus was always a vibrant, politically and socially vibrant area. It has always been the place where all great movements of our country began.

Both my parents being publicly visible and very active with the politics of the country, in 1971, just before the war broke out, the university campus was very disturbed. There was lot of unrest, lot of spirit people coming and going out. The teachers’ wives in March came to our house and said to my mother, “apa, can we shut down one of the gates?” We had two gates and my mother felt that it should be shut down and just a week before the war broke out, that gate was sealed.

On the night, afternoon of the 25th, when the country was very tensed, very frightened, my mother had rushed to Dhanmondi Road 32 to speak to her leader about what guidance her party workers could be given in view of what they all feared was about to happen. I don’t know how to say this, but this is exactly what had happened. When she had gone there, Bangabandhu was very busy with people and he really did not have much time to talk. She tried to discuss this, and in a way, she realized he was not really willing to talk about this and she left with a feeling of anxiety. She decided to go to her colleague Tajuddin Ahmed. Tajuddin saw her and said “Misses Murshid, the intelligence has it that the campus will be under attack, so you and Murshid should leave that place”. So she did get some directive from there and “you should leave that place as early as you can. I think we all will have to move out.” My mother came back home . . . in terms of what to do, how to act, as a political activist, it was very unclear. She came back home full of anxiety. It was my bedtime, almost 8 o’clock in the evening and she related this story to us, and while coming, we found there were students in the streets barricading the roads with whatever they had. My mother looked at my father and said, if there is a military attack, what is this barricade going to do and what are these unarmed young boys going to do? By that time, it was becoming clear there would be a serious attack on the university campus, in these areas, and news began to come with a lot of disquiet as the night grew. People from the neighborhood had come to my mother, had also asked her to see how it works. She wanted directions from her leaders and her neighborhood wanted direction from her, and truly there was not much that could be clearly said. On the 25th, she couldn’t say much.

After the night of the 25th, the whole area was under attack. The whole night, we experienced a terrible night of killing and attacks and gunshots. We lay on the floor like many other thousands in our area did. In the early morning, we saw from our window how people were killed and being thrown onto the trucks and there was blood in the drains, and we realized something terrible happened to our country and there was going to be a bloodbath. That night we survived and I just want to go back to telling you that on the 25th and 26th and 27th morning, curfew was lifted and my brothers left the house because we came to know that teachers were shot and my father wanted to go out and meet his friends and colleagues to find out what was going on. You know, the war took place and the war ended and when we came back to Bangladesh, we came back to Road 37 again, Fuller Road, House 37, one day, again Tajuddin Ahmed came to our house and he saw the gate sealed and he asked my mother, Misses Murshid, when did you seal this gate. She said about a week or so before the war. He said that there's a blueprint that had a map giving direction to your house, showing the location of your house and the intelligence had given me that, and the house through the second gate, the house on the left, second story, that was the house that was air-marked. You survived because you sealed that gate. My mother was taken aback and then he said "the house parallel to yours, the back of your house, the people living in that house were actually killed instead." My mother shouted for a moment and said "so I am living a borrowed life?" and he said "yes."

The context that I mentioned, the role of my parents in the movements, the major movements of this country, was only to tell you why both my parents were wanted once the War of Liberation began. Our journey from our home in the campus to the borders of Bangladesh, leaving our country to go join the exile government, taking shelter in India. The pains of leaving this country was also a very painful experience, but let me just give you another example of how we survived.

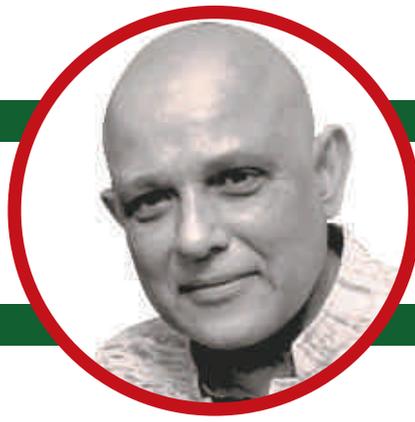


***Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid & his wife***

As we traveled through the river, we couldn't take shelter at our father's home because people were frightened seeing us. We couldn't take shelter at his maternal home, and there are many stories why. We had

move out and as we went, we took a boat early in the morning and my mother told my father that there is no other alternatives. We will just go towards the border and take shelter in one of the villages. We had no other option. And we got into a boat and we were sitting down. Suddenly a gentleman started shouting "Sir, Sir, Sir!" He said to my father, Salam, as one of his students, "We thought you were killed! Where are you going?" My parents said "we don't know where we are going." We're 4 brothers and sisters and our parents, the 6 of us. He said "I have this little house in Chowra village, which is near, across Brahmanbaria. You can take shelter there." So while many of our extended family members couldn't give us shelter, this young man came out of the blue, said *Salamualaikum*, and gave us shelter. We stayed in that place for about 10 days, that was in early April when Brahmanbaria had fallen. One of the neighbors came to our house and she said to my mother, "look, they are coming. If they come and ask us about you, we will have to tell them. We will tell them that you are here." That day, my parents did not want to leave Bangladesh at all. That day, that evening, my mother decided that we had to leave. We took the journey out of the country. At that point, it became clear to us that we couldn't stay. In the family, we often say that we were pushed out of our country. All around, inside this country and beyond to India, I have always felt that there were lot of good angels and gods of good fortune had really protected us. There were many families that were separated, who couldn't return or be reunited. Our parents had decided that no matter what, whether we lived, died, or survived, we will stay together, the 6 of us. We survived that war. My mother's role, I will give one example of her role with the exile government.

My father, from an academic and diplomat to a civil society leader, I saw how he protested against the military regime, and how he organized civil society. He was a voice of conscience. He always took up a very forthright position. He was actually a great teacher. We saw that from the school books, the way they loved him, treated him, admired him, and wrote about him. A teacher of teachers.



## **BANGLADESH AT FIFTY: “THE [HEARTWARMING] SURPRISE”**

It was a question of honour for us in 1971. We refused to remain a part of a country that wanted Bangalees to remain subservient and obedient. It was a fight for justice, equality and self-respect, and it is these values that ‘socialism’ represented for us at that time. That socialism has fallen from grace today does not mean that these basic values have become irrelevant or worse. Indeed, if anything, the reverse is true as we today see dramatic changes before us – changes that we could hardly have predicted.

Bangladesh has indeed made dramatic strides across numerous fronts. These changes often came about quietly and surreptitiously, catching us by surprise (and thus evoking the phrase ‘the Bangladesh surprise’). With hindsight, we can see that Bangladesh just could not go wrong. We succeeded in every sector and broke records in many. The question that is often asked is how did it all happen – we had no resources, there was a huge governance deficit, the political culture was undeveloped and institutions were weak? Nevertheless, Bangladesh overcame all the odds and took on challenge after challenge and notched up victories.

Let us quickly start with two fundamental sectors: agriculture and population. One should note that these sectors were intensely supported by foreign aid, and despite a rather mixed literature on aid and development, Bangladeshi farmers and Bangladeshi women responded. Farmers, rich and poor, large and small, adopted the Green Revolution technology and ushered in an area of self-reliance in food. On the other hand, women disappointed the pundits who had argued that ‘Islam’, tradition and lack of education meant that family planning would not work, by actually adopting modern birth control practices quickly. These two ‘successes’ actually established the fundamentals on which Bangladesh could move towards industrialization (further supported by the unplanned, opportunistic emergence of the international migration sector).

It is in this backdrop that we have to see the emergence of RMG initially, and later pharmaceuticals – both required interesting policy changes and government policy support – and thus it was pretty much until the late 1990s. As the economy expanded, growth rates accelerated, poverty began to decline. Similarly, nutritional status of children improved, and major gains were made in women’s health, education and empowerment – directly through the feminization of the labour market but also through a policy of concentrating on education of girls. As now universally recognized, the focus on women by government and NGOs ushered in a culture that was far more tolerant of girls and women in public spaces.

The development journey has remained on target through a combination of policies based on professional advice, a pragmatic, realistic attitude, and an openness to listen to key stakeholders (yes, ‘lobbies’, if you like!). Today, Bangladesh has a solid, even if controversial, capitalist class, a political economy that appears to be fixated on growth, and general perception that the country is headed for big things. The only drawback appears to be that questions of growing inequity remain inadequately addressed. This will not be resolved by safety nets and poverty-targeting but will require innovative ways to bring the poor into the economic mainstream in a more robust manner.

**Dr. K A S Murshid**

Director General  
BIDS (Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies)



## Professor Dr. Imtiaz A Hussain

Head, Global Studies & Governance (GSG) Program  
Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB)

### **TORCHES & GORJES:**

Dr. Marufa Akter was not even born when guns blazed across Dhaka on March 25th night, all of the 26th, and until dawn of the 27th, or even across what would become Bangladesh during the rest of 1971. Yet, I put her in charge of the souvenir interviews for at least two reasons: to get her hands ‘dirtied’ in commanding the GSG ship when I retire in December; and to pass the torch of what the last 50 years meant for the 1971 activists and believers to generations of the next 50 years of our fair and green land.

Her capacity to do so at the scholarly level was measured by the three themes of this souvenir: Bangabandhu, an appropriate golden anniversary mindset to celebrate the occasion, and gender. To me these translate as identity, deep-sinking emotional attachments, and a future-oriented platform.

Like the mammal spine, any identity strengthens over time. Once we disconnect with the greatest Bangalee in recorded history, we become brittle enough to be blown by the wind: Bangabandhu was just a normal human being, but what set him apart was his constant feel for the common lot, which is so robustly documented in recorded history, the sacrifices he made, particularly under Operation Searchlight, not to mention how he rose to the occasion on March 7, 1971, and the image he left behind of blending the *crème de la crème* Bangalees before him, among his contemporaries, and set the future model for our youths to emulate, are simply breathtaking, unparalleled, and a pride to remember.

With that comes savoring the 50th Birth Anniversary for all that it is meant to stand. Brooks we have crossed, mountains we have climbed, and swamps we have successfully waded—reasons enough to emblazon the sky. When we add to that the richer endowment for our children and future generations, there might not prevail a more illustrious alternate country. We are not out of the woods, not by a long shot, but this challenge is ‘peanuts’ compared to 1971: we have never been better prepared to confront the devils than right now.

Finally, we come to one of our most crucial tests ever: loosening the strictures of our family, religious, or social life, not to weaken our bonds, faith, or heritage in one bit, but to strengthen them by cultivating a gender we relish to have under our thumb. Given progress on many other fronts, and some truly dismal performance report-cards on the home-front when men steer the wheel, we do not have the luxury of swapping a future in which women will not be our country’s savior. Demographic trends and efficiency yardsticks predict we have no choice but to prepare our women to steer more ships than they have.

I am confident Dr. Marufa will handle these with her heart, mind, and soul, though the devils lurking will be beyond her human capacity.

Those devils already fester in apathy, with technology to fire them up.

*Apathy* was not a 1971 term. Opulence feeds it as much as letting the status quo dictate the day. Nowhere can these be more visible and better measured than in educational institutions. After 40-years behind the pulpit, I have reasons to fear the sunset's fading glow could be lesser than larger. We are educating more children than ever before proportionately, even making global waves on this front for doing so, but the accompanying quality collapse is dramatic. Alliterating or bastardizing English may be a global phenomenon, but it rings sharper bells for a country at the developmental cusp, since it could throw that curve-ball derailing our fortunes; and our passion to turn to Bangla, the heart of our very heritage, risks ourselves dropping out of the frontiers of sprouting knowledge. Finding that delicate balance has been difficult and neglected, in turn, bloating our baggage at those frontiers.

If we turn to online education, as the pandemic forced many institutions to from 2020, we find another rudderless arena: the infrastructure to facilitate 24/7 Internet access is just not there, negative Internet outlets attract more student attention than the positive, a coherent examination program or structure still escapes us, depriving us from beefing up intellectual know-how, plagiarism and copy-pasting have skyrocketed, and power-disruptions or disconnections automatically adds to the growing stockpile of student indifference, breeds unnecessary excuses, spikes mendacity, and the very integrity of education slips even when mentioning that term, not to mention turning to its modalities or researching to take it higher.

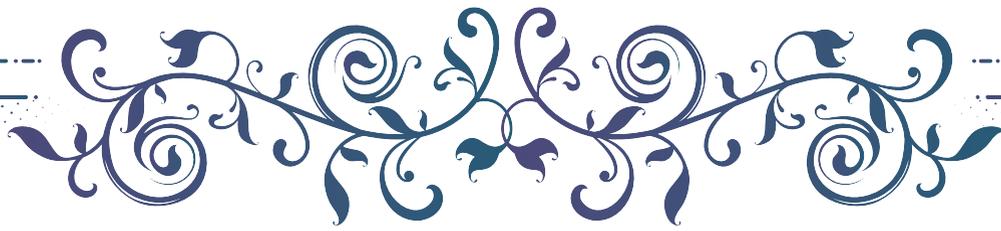
As it is, student interest in education has been declining or been subordinated to other interests, so to think tech-savvy online education would change that trend is both presumptuous and fallacious: social media language has infected both student and faculty mindsets, and with admissions standards disappearing and original scholarly publications declining in proportion to educational outreaches, the future looks bleak.

This is the message stemming from the gender section of the souvenir, elevating gender education as a last-stop measure none can postpone for long. Given the natural assignment of child-bearing, women carry more than the normal load for child-rearing, with education the *sine qua non* of that equation. The last-stop measure to break that bleak future outlook of education is simply to turn over more of the reins to women.

That is our underlying mission, and why Dr. Marufa Akter is presently best suited to give this a shot in the GSG Program.



*GSG Family, 2020*



# **SALUTE!**

**(who contributed immensely in 1971)**



**Kamal Lohani**  
*Journalist*



**Aly Zaker**  
*Actor*



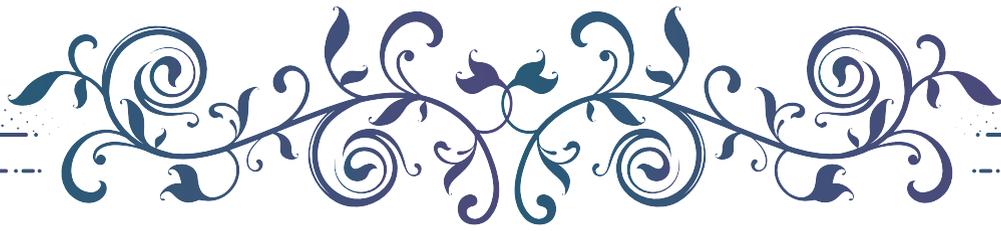
**Barrister Moudud Ahmed**  
*Foreign Ministry Publications*



**Apel Mahmud**  
*Singer*



**Abdul Jabbar**  
*Singer*



# PILLAR OF GLOBAL SUCCESS: MICROFINANCE

**BRAC**

**(Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee)**



BRAC is an international development organisation based in Bangladesh. In order to receive foreign donations, BRAC was subsequently registered under the NGO Affairs Bureau of the Government of Bangladesh. BRAC is the largest non-governmental development organisation in the world, in terms of number of employees as of September 2016. Established by Sir Fazle Hasan Abed in 1972 after the independence of Bangladesh, BRAC is present in all 64 districts of Bangladesh as well as 11 other countries in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. BRAC states that it employs over 90,000 people, roughly 70 percent of whom are women, and that it reaches more than 126 million people with its services. The organisation is partly self-funded through a number of social enterprises that include a dairy and food project, a chain of retail handicraft stores called Aarong, seed and Agro, and chicken. BRAC has operations in 11 countries of the world. He was knighted in 2010.



**GRAMEEN BANK - Bank for the Poor**



Grameen Bank is a microfinance organisation and community development bank founded in Bangladesh. It makes small loans (known as microcredit or "grameencredit") to the impoverished without requiring collateral.

Grameen Bank originated in 1976, in the work of Professor Muhammad Yunus at University of Chittagong, who launched a research project to study how to design a credit delivery system to provide banking services to the rural poor. In October 1983 the Grameen Bank was authorised by national legislation to operate as an independent bank.

The bank grew significantly between 2003 and 2007. As of January 2011, the total borrowers of the bank number 8.4 million, and 97% of those are women. In 1998 the Bank's "Low-cost Housing Program" won a World Habitat Award. In 2006, the bank and its founder, Muhammad Yunus, were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

## **NOTE ON 50<sup>TH</sup> INDEPENDENCE DAY: FROM “SURVIVAL” TO “STRENGTH”**

Bangladesh is to celebrate the 50th anniversary of independence, commemorating the country's declaration of independence by the Father of the Nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in the early hours of 26th March 1971. The country will be eternally grateful to the millions of martyrs who have laid down their lives during the Liberation War. This 50th anniversary is marked as a stepping stone for us, particularly special because of Bangladesh's recognition as a Developing Country. Over the past 50 years, we have witnessed the country go through major shifts, both in terms of socio-economic development and culture. The transformation of Bangladesh highlights enormous advances in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and market economy, setting exemplary standards for emerging economies around the world. The economic growth, especially due to the RMG industry, has shed a beacon of hope for its people. But with this rapid development comes towering challenges that we need to overcome. Bangladesh has tremendous potential to become a key actor in global politics and trade, especially due to its geopolitical location. And to fully realize the untapped potential, we first need to bridge the gaps between policymakers and researchers. Reprioritizing our goals for a sustainable future is crucial for our development as a country. Through infrastructural development, in sync with an efficient policy framework and proper utilization of resources, along with environmental consciousness and accountability, we as a country can reach new heights.

I look forward to seeing Bangladesh develop its institutions, as the establishment of inclusive political and economic institutions is essential to help us tackle these ensuing challenges and move towards a sustainable future, where the promotion of democracy, protection of citizens' rights, and rule of law are at the forefront. It is high time that we move collectively, turning our weaknesses into strengths through cooperation, consideration, and commitment. Therefore, bearing Vision '41 in mind, I would like to end on the note saying, the past 50 years were about our survival, and the next 50 should be about our strength.



**Armanul Karim Abir**

President  
Global Gatekeepers  
GSG Program  
IUB

# GLOBAL GATEKEEPERS

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2021



**PRESIDENT**  
Armanul Karim Abir



**VICE PRESIDENT**  
Mahmudul Hasan Joy



**GENERAL SECRETARY**  
Abrar Mahmood



**TREASURER**  
Allin Mohana Biswas



**EVENTS DIRECTOR**  
Hosen Andalib Ankur



**SPONSORSHIP DIRECTOR**  
Anwarul Ansari



**SOCIAL MEDIA DIRECTOR**  
Ishmum Fatima Syed



**LOGISTICS DIRECTOR**  
Jannatul Afrida

# List of GSG Students Who Have Helped Transcribe the Interviews



**Subaita Fairouz**



**Nazifa Raidah**



**Taslima Tariq**



**Tahira Jahan**



**Mahmudul Hasan Joy**



**Abrar Mahmood**



**Hosen Ankur Andalib**



**Anwarul Ansari**



**Aarbab Zaman**



**Antranig Sameen**



**Jannatul Afrida**

## "GSG FACULTY: THE 'CUTTING-EDGE' CROWD"



### **Dr. Imtiaz A. Hussain, Professor**

(Ph.D. 1989, University of Pennsylvania, with about 20-odd book publications, many more journal articles; contributor to *Daily Star* and *Financial Express* under *Scopus* and *Kautilya Kronicles* columns; and winner of several teaching awards in 3 countries, and with fellowships from also about 4 countries).



### **Dr. Md. Shanawez Hossain, Assistant Professor**

(Ph.D. 2011, Waseda University, Japan, with about 15-odd journal articles and working papers; 9 book chapters and 2 books and around 15 research reports; contributor to *Daily Prothom Alo*, *Financial Express* etc.; and with fellowships from about 3 countries).



### **Dr. Marufa Akter, Assistant Professor**

(Ph.D. 2019, University of Bremen, Germany with about 6 journal articles; 4 background papers; 2 books/book chapters; 2 research activities and fellowships from about 3 countries).



### **Senior Lecturer Jessica Tartila Suma**

(M.A 2018, Rutgers University, USA, with 2 journal articles; few research projects involvement; contributor to *Daily Star*; and fellowships from about 2 countries).



### **Lecturer Zerine**

(She came for a term or two, but went for her Ph.D. to the BUP institution).



### **Lecturer Hossain Ahmed Taufiq**

(On study leave, PhD Candidate, Oregon State University, USA with 2 book chapters; around 15 research reports; fellowships from about 2 countries; and the winner of the Teaching Excellence Award, IUB 2020).



### **Lecturer Amjad Hossain**

(Left us in November 2020 to join as Assistant Superintendent of Police, but had Dhaka University Lecturer position in Public Administration, and got short-listed in Fulbright Award list for 2020 until he withdrew; was also the top-most student evaluation in all of IUB during 2020).



### **Md. Ohidujjaman, Lecturer A**

(MSS 2010, University of Dhaka, with 4 journal articles and about 15 Research projects for different national and international development organizations).



### **Raian Hossain, Lecturer B**

(M.A 2021, University of Nottingham, UK, with 1 journal article and fellowships from 2 countries).

# Global Studies & Governance

Independent University, Bangladesh

The Global Studies and Governance (GSG) Program responds to what is unfolding as a century of change and problems: 9/11 redefined security policies and paradigms; the 2007-10 Great Recession reshaping banking, investment, and economics; world leadership challenges are more frequent and unpredictable than before; and, of course, environment, refugees/migrants, narco-trafficking, human rights. technological problems demand attention.

They also demand problem-specific governance: some managed by governments, others by a spate of non-state actors, and just about all of them with prescriptions that continue to defy enforcement to this day. Governance cries are everywhere!

Enormous classroom changes have accordingly, modified course contents, sometimes drastically to meet new job market needs of greater interdisciplinary training. "Global Studies and Governance" (GSG) Program is inter-disciplinary, transdisciplinary, and multi-disciplinary: it retains extant theories and methods, but explores the spaces between them for its own theories and methods. Our cardinal concepts, "global studies" and "governance", (a) increasingly influence today's dominant developments at every level; (b) boast their own pedagogical pedigrees; and (c) stridently characterize contemporary job-requirements.



**Global  
Gatekeepers**

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### Academic Excellences of GSG

Year	Publications <sup>1</sup>	Awards <sup>2</sup>	GSG Conferences	Conference Presentation
2017	5	.	1	3
2018	5	.	1	7
2019	5	.	1	10
2020	7	3	1	3
2021	1	.	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>25</b>

<sup>1</sup>Peer-reviewed book, book chapter, journal article or working paper with no payments from GSG faculty members

<sup>2</sup>The Employee Recognition & Awards program has been introduced at IUB in 2020

For details: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/14dlg519A9DQX9WIUEym9ykarSvEoUJm/view?usp=sharing>

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