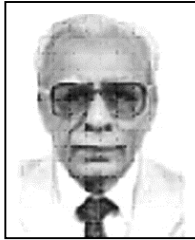


Obituary



Professor Dr Abul Khair Muhammad Siddiq

(1923-2018)

It is difficult for one to write an obituary of a person who had been one's teacher, colleague, friend, philosopher and guide. The person was no other than the celebrated gentleman physicist Professor Dr Abul Khair Muhammad Siddiq commonly known as A.K.M.Siddiq who had an eventful long life and had witnessed many developments in Physics in the Curzon Hall starting from the golden days of S. N. Bose of whom he was a student. Prof Siddiq produced dozens of very successful physicists who have been highly placed in different stations in Academic and Administrative Fields. And he always tried to be in touch with them as far as possible.

My interactions with Prof Siddiq have been in several fields: as a student, as a colleague and finally as a family friend. I first met him in the mid 60's when I registered myself for Physics Studies in the Dhaka University (1956-1960). I still remember the day when Dr Siddiq entered our class for the first time as a young smart teacher on return from Saskachuan University, Canada where he obtained his Ph.D in Nuclear Physics.

We learnt later that his first appointment in life was not as a university lecturer but as an officer first in the Patent Office in Calcutta (now Kolkata) and then after the partition of India in 1947 in the Patent Office in Karachi in Pakistan. He did not relish this job as his heart and mind had always been craving for research and teaching. Finally his dream came true when he was appointed as a lecturer of Physics in the Dhaka University in 1950 and later had an opportunity to do his Ph.D in Canada and come back to his physics department which he served in different capacities for almost thirty years. It is interesting to note here that his beginning of career was identical with that of Albert Einstein who also worked in a patent office in Switzerland, did not like his official work so much and later was placed in the most prestigious universities in Germany and USA. The only difference is that Einstein used his patent office job to do his ground breaking work in the theory of relativity and other areas.

Coming back to Dr Siddiq's first appearance in our class in the Curzon Hall. We were first impressed with his blue Nylon shirt in which he looked majestic. We found other teachers returning from abroad in Nylon shirts also. Actually, that was beginning a fashion with which we were not familiar. Later, of course, the fashion changed to mixture of polyester and cotton and now to 100% cotton because of concerns for eco friendliness. In his first class with us ,he told us that he would teach Classical Mechanics and the Book that he would follow would be that of Goldstein. Nowadays students start

with Resnick and Halliday. But in our times Goldstein's book was introduced. We requested Dr Siddiq to go slow as many of us had not a copy of this book. But Dr Siddiq started to use his lecture notes on Classical Mechanics which he prepared during his Ph.D Course in Canada. This gave us some relief. It is interesting that this practice encouraged me to prepare my lecture notes and preserve them. I still retain my lecture notes in Nuclear Physics which I prepared fifty eight years ago.

My next interaction with Dr Siddiq came when in 1960 I was finalising my thesis work in Nuclear Physics on the $Be\ 9(d,n)B\ 10$ reaction. My official supervisor was Prof M Innas Ali, the then Head of the department of Physics. But when the thesis work was ready for submission, Prof Innas Ali was away for some other work and Dr Siddiq was requested to overview my thesis before submission. I had been to Dr Siddiq's house in Fuller Road in which he resided till his retirement from the Physics department and came in contact with his Wife (Dolly Bhabi) who entertained me with food on every occasion. I say all this because this created a family relationship which lasted till the last day of Dr Siddiq's life. This teacher - student relationship is very hard to find these days and should be looked upon as an essential part of one's living pattern. My wife Saqeba who also studied Nuclear Physics was also loved by Dr Siddiq and Dolly Bhabi. We constantly worry about her present state of health.

My further interaction with Dr Siddiq came when I was doing my Ph.D (1961-1965) at Manchester University. Incidentally in the early sixties when the 3 MeV Van de Graaf Accelerator was going to be installed at the Atomic Energy Centre Dhaka (AECD, which I later joined in 1965 on my return from UK as an employee of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) since 1961. Dr Siddiq and Dr Muhtasham Hussain, also a Reader of Physics of the Dhaka University were sent by PAEC for training and research at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment (AERE) at Harwell near Oxford for familiarising themselves with the experimental Physics work that could be undertaken around the AECD accelerator.

While at Manchester, one fine morning I got a call from Dr Siddiq informing me that he would be attending a conference at Manchester and that his family (Dolly Bhabi and Pintu and Shabbu) would also accompany them. I invited Dr Siddiq to stay with us during the conference. It was a great pleasure to meet my teacher and his family. Gullu, the third son was not yet born. Incidentally, although the three sons of Dr Siddiq are well established in their fields (Economics, medicine, etc) and are known to me, I still do not remember their full names but simply call them by their nicknames. Pintu was a child and Shabbu an infant who in a photograph with us was in my lap. Saqeba entertained them as much as she could and we had a really good time. It all seems to be the just the other day. Before Dr Siddiq returned home from Manchester, he called me to Oxford where he was staying. A number of my other colleagues Daniel and Mizanul Islam (Mizan Bhai as I call him) and Mofizul Mannan were all at Oxford. One evening after a party was over at Oxford, I and Mizan Bhai stayed on with the family of our teacher. I remember we spent almost the whole night gossiping and telling many kinds of humorous stories. Very few people know that Dr Siddiq was actually a humorous person but his humours were rather subtle. In this connection, I cannot help but recalling that in 1974 while Prof Siddiq (he already became a Professor in 1970) was organising, as President of Bangladesh Physical Society, a symposium dedicated to Bose. I asked Prof Siddiq why there was not enough media coverage of that important symposium in which a number of foreigners

came, Prof Siddiq said "I informed the Media alright but the journalists probably thought a physical society conference would probably deal with matters relating to physical feats!!!"

Another important turn of events appeared when I was appointed in 1970 as the Director of the Atomic Energy Centre, Dhaka at an official age of thirty years, This was indeed a great challenge for me as there were many senior scientists working at the AECD. Dr Siddiq and Dr Muhtasam Hossain of Dhaka University were already working at the AECD as research Guides. I had to be extra careful lest any of my administrative decisions hurt the feelings of my teachers. Years later, I was comforted to hear from my teacher, a serious and prolific researcher Prof Hiranmay Sengupta that all enjoyed working at the AECD especially during the administration of Dr Anowar Hossain and myself. Prof Sengupta expressed this feeling at a meeting arranged by the Physical Society in the open space of the AECD for giving a lifetime award to the senior most physicist Prof A.K.M .Siddiq.

Talking of the year 1970 in which Dr Siddiq and Dr Muhtasam Hossain were both appointed as Professor of Physics by the Dhaka University against an advertisement of the University ,it is interesting to mention that Dr Siddiq himself a candidate for Professorship said to me "why don't you also apply ? You have good publications in international journals of repute". I declined but I could not believe my ears: a teacher asking his student to compete with him. Only a few years later in 1973, Professorship was awarded to me in a very interesting manner. Professor M Innas Ali, who was appointed as the first Chairman of the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission prevailed on the then Vice Chancellor of the Dhaka University Professor Abdul Matin Choudhury to appoint a syndicate sub-committee for the purpose of giving recognition to me as a Professor of Physics of the Dhaka University. I learnt later that the committee was presided by the Vice -Chancellor and the members of the committee were Prof M Innas Ali,Dr Quadrat -e-Khoda, Prof Kabir Choudhury,Professor Abu Hena, Professor Hiranmay Sengupta and Professor AKM Siddiq.On the basis of the recommendation of the committee, the University of Dhaka made me an Honorary Professor of Physics with a citation that this was as a mark of my academic achievements and original contributions to Physics, Needless to say ,this was a unique honour that the University of Dhaka bestowed on a scientist ,not repeated so far. Prof Siddiq told me later on my return from the ICTP(International Centre for Theoretical Physics at Trieste, Italy) that some teachers requested for a review of this decision, Prof Siddiq referred this matter against his will to the Committee which reaffirmed that this decision was final.And the dream of a teacher was to give professorial status to his student was finally realized.

My final interaction with Prof Siddiq took place when he was made President of the Bangladesh Academy of Science (BAS) for two consecutive terms 2000-2004. During this period Prof Siddiq who already got a Green Card to stay in Canada was leaving Bangladesh for Canada every year for an extended period of time and I felt a lot of pressure on my shoulder as Vice-President of BAS. The same pressure fell on me during the Presidentship of BAS of Prof Kamaluddin Ahmed. However one good thing happened during the tenure of Prof Siddiq. During his long absence abroad, I acted as the President of BAS and through some concerted and strenuous efforts was able to realise from the then Government a sum of taka 5 (five) crores for meeting the expenses of BAS. Prof Siddiq was simply amazed to hear about this. The reason was clear. Earlier, Prof Siddiq, Prof Naiyyum Choudhury and myself went to the Ministry of Science and Technology. When on our way, I mentioned that we should request the Ministry for an endowment fund of at least one crore, Prof Siddiq said "Shamsher

Ali has become mad, we would not have even ten lacs". So, no wonder .Prof Siddiq was surprised at the allocation of five crores for BAS by the government. He was, however, appreciative of my effort BAS never failed to recognise the efforts of Physics building of Prof Siddiq. The first Innas Ali Gold medal was awarded to Prof Siddiq. One of the members of the Award Committee, Prof Naiyyum Choudhury very rightly asserted that apart from looking for excellence in physics research, the organisational efforts of people in building up the Physics Department of the Dhaka University especially after the partition of India in 1947 should be duly recognised. Naturally, the first choice was Prof Siddiq. BAS also gave a rousing reception to this senior physicist as a recognition of his lifetime achievements. Prof A K Basak gave a sketch of the life history of Prof Siddiq while many others spoke about different aspects of his life including his responsibilities as Pro-Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University and also as Acting Vice-Chancellor of the same university for some time. Prof Siddiq is no more. During his last days he could not say much to his own family members or to his friends.

But what he said earlier during his active years was loud and bold: do your duties well, be kind to all, love your people and your country. Upholding these ideals would be the best way to cherish the memory of a fine gentleman physicist Prof AKM Siddiq.

Professor Dr. M. Shamsher Ali

Professor Emeritus, Southeast University

Past President, Bangladesh Academy of Sciences (BAS)

Founder Vice Chancellor, Bangladesh Open University

Founder Vice Chancellor, Southeast University