

Abdul Mannan Talib: The Lighthouse

Shah Abdul Halim

I know Abdul Mannan Talib, a humble servant of God, since 1958 when our family moved to Dhaka from Gaibandha. Talib was a friend of my elder brother Shah Abdul Hannan. Talib, Prof. Muhammad Motiur Rahman, Poet Nurul Alam Raisi and Shah Abdul Hannan were close friends. They all used to visit our residence at Shantinagar and discuss many issues. The topics would cover literature, culture, women empowerment, social engineering and what not. Talib, all the time, took keen interest in changing the mindset of our intelligentsia and religious scholars, and tried to persuade people through his inspiring discussions and writings. In later years, Talib turned up to be an intellectual ready to challenge any prejudice and malpractice that seemed to be against the pristine teachings and ever lasting spirit of Islam, its norms and ethics. Indeed he was a lighthouse.

The four friends together established 'Pak Shahittaya Sangha' and 'New Era Publications'. Talib, in keeping with group's yearning to work for women's empowerment and their rights, produced '*Abaruddha Jibaner Katha*' and later, in 1962, the New Era Publications printed this book. Abdul Mannan Talib, in his later life, turned up as a distinguished fighter of women's causes and he translated into Bengali the monumental work of Abdul Halim Abu Shuqqah, Musrshid-e-Amm of Muslim Brotherhood Egypt, '*Tahrirul Mar'ah Fi Asrir Risalah*' in Bengali '*Rasuler Juge Nari Sadhinata*'. Some people objected to the content of the manuscript and the book saw the day light after overcoming many odds and finally it has been published and marketed by 'Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought' (BIIT), Dhaka in four volumes. Any interested reader can go through these volumes to understand the vibrant outlook and attitude of Abdul Mannan Talib, his progressive and dynamic vision as also the stance and standpoint of those who opposed its publication and marketing.

Talib's principal craving, while translating notable works from Arabic and other sources, was to open the doors of research to the vast majority of *ulema*, religious scholars, who are not familiar with foreign languages and also common readers, who know only Bengali. One of his works however deserves publication in English for presenting the history and culture of Bangladesh to readers outside. This is '*Bangladeshe Islam*' (1979). In fact this book has already been translated into English by Muhammad Danesh, a former Director of Bangladesh Bater, Radio Bangladesh under the supervision of eminent cultural organizer and author Mahbubul Huq, then Managing Director of Srejon Prakashani Limited. The manuscript is lying with Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought. BIIT would accomplish a good job if it expedites the publication of this book. However after composition, this book needs to be edited by a very qualified and proficient editor

conversant with English language. Its publication in English shall be a great tribute and homage to Abdul Mannan Talib, a distinguished Islamic scholar, who did not get, during his life time, the due prominence as he was shy of publicity.

The other trait of his character was that Talib was not spoken and never raised his voice on any occasion. A silent, steadfast, consistent and unswerving worker, he never got frustrated and even when in hospital bed he spoke of the superiority of the Islamic lifestyle. He thought that real scholars of Islam will be born in future when the original and primary materials will all be translated into Bengali. Like Prof. Dr. Yusuf Al Qaradawi, he firmly believed that coming generation of intellectuals will be much superior to the academics and scholars of the golden days of Islam. On this, he believed, like Qaradawi who, when still a student of undergraduate at Al Azhar University, while refuting his teacher's claim that no Muslims like the Companions (may God be pleased with them) of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) will be born in future, said that Muslims better than the Companions of the Prophet have already been born and he cited the names of Salahuddin Ayubi, who liberated Jerusalem from foreign occupation, and Imam Ibn Taimiyah as examples. Talib was hopeful of the intellectual capacity of the future generation as was indicated by the last Prophet in the Farewell Pilgrimage address in which he urged his listener to convey his message to others and hoped that later generation would understand the meaning of his message more than those who listen to him directly.

He was indeed dynamic, always ready to accept new ideas that, he thought, will help to push the stride and forward march of the society. Although critically ill, a terminal patient, he read my 7000 plus words discourse explaining the failure of the mainstream Islamist party and the need and justification for launching a new Islamist political party and how it will theologically differ from existing Islamist parties. I thought, like an old guard, he would rebuke me for writing such a thesis at this national political juncture but, to my utter surprise, he appreciated my point of view and commented to Mahbubul Huq in my presence "Shah Abdul Halim is a mover of Islam. He wants reform and progress". Talib said so, I believe, as he was a mover himself, committed to social reform and change. Indeed he was a reformist dedicated to revival and renaissance. When doubting sincerity of the people has become the norm, Talib would never disbelief people but would rather try to understand the opposite view. This article of mine was published in the 'New Nation' on 7 July 2011 under the caption 'Do Islamists need a way out'. Muslim Brotherhood Egypt also posted the article in its webpage <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=28791>.

http://sonarbanglesh.com/blog/ebong_abd/50458 and <http://imbd.blog.com/?p=175> posted the article in their blogs and discussed and debated its content. The article was originally captioned 'Bangladesh Islamists Impasse: The Way Out'.

Talib was progressive in outlook, a man with open mind. This bears out from the fact that when I wrote an article stating that man is sovereign and not God for the

simple reason that God's power is never divided whereas under the modern concept, sovereign power is divided between executive, legislature and judiciary. God is therefore not sovereign as His powers are not divided. In that article, I wrote that God is Hakim and sovereignty is a new term and has no exact or equivalent parallel in Arabic. Talib appreciated my point of view although he did not seem to agree with me as he wrote an editorial on the concept of sovereignty in the journal 'Islami Ain O Bichar' published by 'Bangladesh Islamic Law Research and Legal Aid Center' and asked me to read it.

Talib was deadly against *taqlid* or blind imitation. In the book '*Baikaler Ashor*' with reference to the question of donating human limbs and organs of the deceased, the author sarcastically remarked: Relatives will be yelling for the dead and people will come to take organs. How could that be? It might appear from this comment that organ transplantation is not allowed in Islam whereas it is permitted if deceased made a will to this effect when alive. Even a living person can donate organs if no harm is done to him or her and there is no commercial deal. I asked Talib: How this could happen that such comments are still being printed by the publisher? I told Talib: May be at certain time the ruling was that organs cannot be donated. But now when scholars are unanimous of their opinion that organ transplantation is allowed, why the translator and the editor did not drop such a view from the book? Talib simply replied: It was not dropped by the translator or editor because of blind respect and following of the author.

How such a man was treated by our physicians. Talib was admitted at a hospital at Shahjahanpur, Dhaka. Before he left the hospital for residence one day there was sudden shivering while transfusing blood. At that time Mahbubul Huq and myself was present apart from close family members of Talib. Everybody was looking for the doctor in charge of the hospital but despite our best efforts he did not turn up. At this hour Dr. Fahmidur Rahman, an eminent intellectual and social engineer, came to visit the ailing Talib and advised the duty doctor to do the needful but as he is not a physician of this hospital Dr. Fahmid could not pass an order. The doctor in charge of the hospital however turned up only when a mid level political leader came to visit Talib. Now the question is: Does Talib deserve such a behavior?

Talib also was critical of the penetration of materialism among the socio-cultural and political workers. When Mahbubul Huq and myself visited Talib's residence, in reply to a question he admitted that money-theism or the worship of money has no doubt increased among the people than it was 40 years before. Today people are valued by the power they hold, their wealth and possessions, Talib lamented. He regretted from hospital bed that today there is no true Islamic movement.

I would not do justice to the subject I am discussing unless I mention the incident I shall narrate now for which some people consider Talib *WaliAllah*, a spiritual master. My younger brother Dr. Shah Mostafa Kamal, now residing in Canada, narrated this incident. In 1969 Talib was in the midst of a meeting at Bashaboo, Dhaka. There was attack on the gathering by some hoodlums. Everybody ran for

shelter but Talib still remained seated with a placard in hand despite hurling of bricks and surprisingly no stone touched him. Such was his dependence on God, his unflinching trust that ultimately God will protect.

Such was Talib. May the soul of Moulana Abdul Mannan Talib rest in peace in paradise. Amin. *

* The article prepared on 30.10.2011.