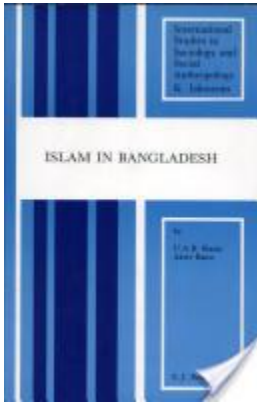


Personality



The Ever Smiling Razia Akter Banu

Shah Abdul Halim

Dr. U A B Razia Akter Banu (1948-2011), Professor of Political Science, Dhaka University passed away on 1st December 2011. *Innanillahe wainna ilaihi rajaun* - from God we have come and to Him we return. She was suffering from lung cancer that spread very fast without giving much time for treatment. With her demise I lost a friend, a guide and a sister and above all Bangladesh lost an eminent political scientist.

Razia Banu did her Masters on South Asian Politics in 1979 and Ph. D in 1988 from the London University. She joined Dhaka University as a Lecturer of Political Science in 1980. I still remember that I came to know her from an article she wrote in Bangladesh newspaper 'Dainik Banglabazar Patrika' about two decades ago. That was on the Muslim resurgence in South Asia. In this article she described, in a very lucid way, the challenges the South Asian Muslims are facing and more problems they are likely to face in near future in the wake of the intentions of global domination of the region by the western powers. I became utterly captive of her thinking while reading the article and finished it in no time. I then get in touch with her. Since then we had maintained contact that was further consolidated and strengthened because of our involvement with 'Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought'- a research organization studying contemporary challenges faced by the world Muslim community. She was Vice President of the organization. She was also

a founder member of the prestigious 'Center for Strategic and Peace Studies' which works as a think tank on security and defense related issues.

Both of us cultivated our relationship and she would not mind to ask me for reference materials anytime while writing academic papers. She once asked me to write two separate articles on 'Muslim Women Witness' and 'Muslim Women Inheritance' which are yet to be done although I have every intention to write on Women Witness soon. She reviewed two articles of mine – 'Islam & Pluralism' and 'Islam & Modernism' that was published in the BIIT Journal and made valuable comments on them.

I visited her residence several times along with foreign academics and researchers and she very kindly received the guests and answered their queries. Indeed she was an accepted academic referee among the scholars outside Bangladesh. Her books and papers published in academic journals were received by the scholars and researchers at home and abroad with warmth and insights. In this connection it would be befitting to mention her impeccable work 'Islam in Bangladesh' which is a reflection of her deep understanding of the conflicting mind and psyche of the people of Bangladesh. This study, done within the comprehensive Weberian framework, focuses on religion and social change in Bangladesh through an imaginative use of qualitative as well as quantitative methods of modern social research. It first provides a sociological interpretation of the origin and development of Islam in Bengal using historical and literary works on Bengal. The main contribution is based on two sample surveys conducted by Razia Banu in 20 villages of Bangladesh and in three areas in the metropolitan Dhaka city. Using these survey data, she gives a sociological analysis of Islamic religious beliefs and practices in contemporary Bangladesh, and more importantly, she studies the impact of the Islamic religious beliefs on the socio- economic development and political culture in present-day Bangladesh. She also shows how Islam compares with modern education in social 'transforming capacity'. This careful and rigorous work is a notable contribution to sociology of religion and helps to deepen our understanding of the interactions between religious and social changes common to many parts of the Third World.

She participated in many international seminars and conferences highlighting problems of the Muslim community, in some she presented keynote paper, in others she participated as discussant and in still many others she chaired the session.

Razia Banu was a colorful academic. She, with an illuminating academic career, was very much honest to her profession. Straightforward and upright, she was above all sorts of groupings and parochial bashing that exists among the academics in Bangladesh. She was above all political divisions, and friends and students could reach her at ease. She was liked by her colleagues and admired by students alike. She was above all sorts of narrow-mindedness and backwardness.

I would not do justice to Sister Razia Banu unless I mention about her ceaseless efforts to promote the call and guidance of Islam at all levels. Being an educator she made every effort to upgrade the quality of 'Bangladesh Journal of Islamic Thought' which she had edited with topmost care. Indeed the editorials of the journals speak about the depth of her unbundled academic mind. Besides as Vice President of 'Bangladesh Islamic Thought' she made invaluable contributions to its various on going activities. Her demise is a great loss to the area of Islamic activism in Bangladesh particularly in the field of teaching and research.

She comes of a highly respectable Muslim family of Pabna. Her father Moulvi Abdur Rahim, a distinguished social worker of his time, was keenly involved in spreading the message of Islam in the society. He was indeed a *dayee* - a caller of Islam. Like her father, Razia Banu, in the greater part of her life, wholeheartedly devoted her time to the study of Islam and made far reaching contributions towards the advancement of Islamic call and guidance in the society especially among the new generation youths. She firmly believed that the resurgence of Islam lies in hard work and that its revival is possible if our leaders are competent and taking the younger generation on board. She therefore sincerely tried to guide her students, in whom she saw the future leaders, taking extra interest in research to make them understand the contemporary world. She used to conduct training sessions to this end.

She left behind her illustrious husband Prof. Dr. Talukder Maniruzzaman, an eminent political scientist and thinker of our time, two sons, a daughter, two grandchildren and innumerable students, well-wishers, friends and admirers to mourn her death.

She was kindhearted, soft-spoken, amiable, loving, caring, majestic and above all always smiling. Such was the combination of the traits of her character. May the soul of Prof. Dr. U A B Razia Akter Banu rest in peace in paradise. Amin. May God give the members of the bereaved family the strength to bear this irreparable loss. Amin.