

Mir Kamal Chowdhury A friend more than a brother

Shah Abdul Halim

About a decade back I told one colleague of mine that you are my friend. He was slightly perturbed and sharply commented: Only a friend. In reply I told that coworker: You are my friend brother and comrade. In fact that associate of mine thought relationship between Muslims can only be of brotherhood and a brother is above a friend. I was somewhat perplexed and thought that this is a stiff attitude and there is no meaning or justification in taking unnecessary extreme position on any issue when we should be more accommodative and flexible. I considered it nothing wrong in addressing someone as friend rather than brother. That was the end of our discussion on that occasion. Now reading the work of Algerian scholar Malik Bennabi, the most prominent Arab thinker since the time of Ibn Khaldun, I found strange similarity of our thoughts. Malik Bennabi in his book *On the Origins of Human Societies* wrote: I have a friend who is more than a brother [Malik Bennabi, *On the Origins of Human Societies*, Islamic Book Trust, Kuala Lumpur, 2002, p 103].

In truth in the passing way of Mir Kamal Chowdhury (inna lillahe wa inna ilaihe rajeun from God we have come and to Him we return) I lost a friend more than a brother. Unlike many of our friends and brothers I knew him only for a short period, about four-five years in connection to the socio-cultural activities of the CNC- Center for National Culture of which he was a Life Member. I knew him more as a socio-cultural activist than a political worker. In private political discussion he was more academic and would analyze issues objectively rather than behaving like as if a political campaigner, espousing political jargons and rhetoric.

The last time he visited CNC office was on Monday 28th February 2011 and presided over a seminar on Poet Banazir Ahmad. That day I was in Netrokona, approximately 170 kilometers north of capital Dhaka, to attend the Dua Mahfil arranged on the passing of Meharunnesa Chowdhury, mother of Syed A B Jafor, another good soul and confidant of mine. On Tuesday I returned from Netrokona and Mir Kamal passed away on the night of Wednesday. I was informed of his unexpected eternal journey by Muhammad Habibur Rahman, a close associate of Mir Kamal for more than twenty-five years; at about 11-30 night and in the absence of any personal transport I could not reach his residence at Mirpur to attend the Janaja.

Now how to evaluate Mir Kamal Chowdhury? His long time associates will surely be doing that. During my four-five years interaction I found him a man of open mind mixing with all

kinds of people. Although he had a different background he did not find it difficult to maintain intimacy with Dr. Shafiq Siddiqui, husband of Sheikh Rehana and I am told Dr. Shafiq attended the Janaja of Mir Kamal Chowdhury and wept like a child at the loss of a friend. Several years back Mir Kamal also arranged a meeting between Dr. Shafiq Siddiqui and me.

He was a dynamic person and a staunch believer of reform. Indeed he was a reformist, a man committed to revival of the pristine glory of Islam, Muslim culture and civilization. He was of the kind who is committed to renaissance of the Muslim community. Mir Kamal, a dedicated soul, firmly believed that no progress and stride is possible unless we open our mind. He would move to every quarter requesting them open up the organization, urging the leadership to open the closed doors and windows to new people and novel ideas and I can say he became somewhat restless in this matter and never missed an opportunity to influence whoever he can to this end. He thought Muslim leadership and activists must change their mindset for the onward march and advancement of the society and overcoming their terribly awful condition.

He was devoid of narrow and parochial mentality and did never take a tunnel vision while supporting or analyzing a certain issue. He was open to arguments and ready to debate openly and never doubted the sincerity of any person. He was dead against the tribal attitude of 'our people' meaning that those who are not with us are our enemy. He was absolutely against the Bush doctrine that you are either with us or against us, or inversely if you are not with us you are against us. He would never identify someone for political or other differences as enemy of Islam. He was also opposed to the culture of stereotyping people for their views and upright character.

He was vehemently against taqlid or the blind following and would not hesitate to debate and argue with anyone and everyone however powerful he might be. He was so sad about the current practice within different organizations of blind following of the U lil amr or blind following of the existing leadership or the establishment without question which he thought has practically become so to say subservient surrender. He thought Islamic organizations or the call and guidance of Islam can flourish only in a free and open environment. He was totally against the culture of close-minded thought and outlook.

Such was Mir Kamal Chowdhury, Professor of Political Science, Asian University Bangladesh. May his soul rest in peace in paradise. Amin. *

*The writer is the Chairman of Islamic Information Bureau Bangladesh. The article is the summary of the speech delivered at the Dua Mahfil arranged by CNC on Tuesday 8 March 2011 to offer prayers for Mir Kamal Chowdhury. Email: <sah1947@yahoo.com>Website: www.shahfoundationbd.org

