

PROFESSOR SAFIUDDIN JOARDER

(B. 1936 – D. 1986)

By Professor Dr A K M YAQUB ALI

Dr Joarder was a profound scholar and renowned historian of Bangladesh. He was an authority on the history of modern Middle East. His reputation as a scholar was widely recognized at home and abroad. He explored many untapped materials and utilised them properly and with meticulous care for the reconstruction of some historical aspects of the modern Middle East. He had thorough access to, and understanding of, other branches of historical studies.

Dr Safiuddin Joarder is no more. He breathed his last at about 5pm on Wednesday, the 12th November 1986 after his gallbladder operation in the Medical College Hospital in Dhaka. He was laid to rest at Banani graveyard, Dhaka. May the Almighty forgive him and have mercy on him. I was in close association with Dr Joarder for twenty seven years, first as a student and then as a colleague. I therefore, feel it my obligation to write a few words about his life and works out of respect to his memory.

He had strong sociological background, and hence he laid much stress on social and economic factors in explaining the trends of particular events of history. His contribution to various branches of knowledge shows that he was a multidimensional scholar who pursued a multi-disciplinary approach. It will not, therefore, be an exaggeration to say that the void created by his death can hardly be filled. He was gifted with critical acumen, eloquent speech and facile pen, which was a rare combination for a scholar to have. He was a successful teacher who was well versed in around half a dozen languages including Bengali (his mother-tongue), English (his second language) and Arabic, French, Italian, German and Persian.

Safiuddin Joarder was born in Barishat of Sripur upazilla in the greater Jessore district (now Magura district) on January 1, 1936. His father, late Rahmat Ali Joarder, was an honest and respectable man of his locality. He was the youngest son of his parents among four children of whom three (one brother and two sisters) are still alive. He was a bright and meritorious student. He matriculated from Sripur Mahesh Chandra High English School in 1951 and was placed in first Division with high marks in all subjects. He passed the Intermediate of Arts (IA) examination from Carmichael College, Rangpur in first Division in 1953. He did his Bachelor of Arts degree from the same college under Rajshahi University (second batch of Rajshahi University students) in 1955, topping the list of successful candidates with distinction in History. He obtained

his Master of Arts degree in Islamic History and Culture (first batch in the subject) from Rajshahi University in 1957 and was placed in First Class when late Professor M.A. Bari (Chairman, Bangladesh University Grants Commission) headed the department. To this day, no student of the department had been able to beat Safiuddin Joarder in obtaining the highest number of marks in their Master's examination.

After completing his formal education, Joarder joined Rangpur Carmichael College as a Lecturer in 1957. He served at this college for two years and then joined Rajshahi College in 1959. Serving there for nearly two years, he moved to the Department of Islamic History and Culture, Rajshahi University as Lecturer in 1961.

Joarder received Fulbright scholarship in 1963 and obtained his Master's degree from Michigan University (USA) in 1964. The title of his thesis was "Trade and Commerce in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Eighteenth Century." This was graded 'A' and on the basis of which he was awarded Fellowship for Ph.D research at Harvard University and the University of California at Los Angeles (USA) simultaneously. He preferred to study at Harvard University and obtained his Ph.D degree with a thesis titled "The Early Phase of French Mandatory Administration in Syria" in 1967 (this was later published by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh in Dhaka.). He returned home in late 1967 and resumed his duties at the Department of Islamic History and Culture, Rajshahi University. He was promoted to the post of Reader (now Associate Professor) in the same department on September 1, 1969, and was appointed a Professor on July 23, 1976. Dr Joarder was offered Professorship in the Department of Islamic History and Culture in Dhaka University, and he joined his new assignment on September 1, 1985. Since then he had been in that post until his death on November 12, 1986. Within this short time he made his mark as a reputed scholar and devoted teacher in the University of Dhaka.

Professor Safiuddin Joarder was a gentleman of fine qualities and was respected by his colleagues in the University for his academic and scholarly achievements. Books were his close companions, and he used to spend several hours every day in the University Library in search of new materials on various subjects. He won the hearts of his colleagues in the University through his simplicity, honesty and erudition. He was elected President of Rajshahi University Teachers' Association in 1972 and held this office for a long period. In his capacity as the President he did some positive works for the common interests of the teachers of Rajshahi University. As an expert on research methodology, his services benefited the Institute of Bangladesh Studies, Rajshahi University at its inception when Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid was the Vice-Chancellor of the University. He was seconded to the Institute in January, 1974 for two years. His contributions to academic progress (especially developing the MPhil and Ph.D programs) of the Institute at its infancy was critical. Dr Joarder was an expert on various problems of the modern world including Middle East. Thus he was selected as one of the delegates to attend the session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1980. He presented papers on some burning issues of the time and participated in all important deliberations of the session from its opening in September 7 to its close in December 12, 1980. He proposed for the opening of an Information Centre of the UN in Dhaka, and was successful in convincing the house in favour of setting up such a Centre.

Dr Joarder was appointed as a Professor of History in the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria by a Selection Board of the Nigerian Government, thanks to his international reputation as a scholar on September 8, 1981. He graced the University with his valuable service for about three years. The Department did not admit students for research degree as there was no such program. Credit goes to Professor Joarder that he, on the request of the authorities, developed the MPhil and Ph. D programs, and a number of students pursued their research under his supervision.

He also inspired a number of his colleagues to undertake research on different topics. He supervised two Ph.D theses, namely late Lutfur Rahman who wrote on *Abdullah b. Zubayr and His Times* and other was A K M Yaquub Ali who wrote on *Aspects of Society and Culture of the Barind, 1200-1576 A.D.* Both of these research works were acclaimed by the examiners and were awarded the degree of Ph.D. Likewise, Nurun Nabi, a teacher of Rajshahi New Degree Govt. College was his student who worked for an MPhil degree on *The Development of Modern and Traditional Education in Rajshahi Town: A Study of the Role of Rajshahi College and Rajshahi Madrasah 1873-1920* under his supervision.

Professor Joarder was author of a number of books including his voluminous work on the history of modern Middle East in two volumes (written in Bengali) and was published by Bangla Academy, Dhaka. These two volumes were hailed as a major achievement. He and Professor David Kopf also edited a volume titled *Reflection on Bengal Renaissance* (a seminar volume published by the Institute of Bangladesh Studies, Rajshahi University). He and his wife Hasina Joarder jointly wrote an interesting book on the life and works of Begum Rokeya. A number of his research articles were published in reputed journals at home and abroad. Many of his articles are still lying unpublished. Below is an incomplete list of his articles:

Published Articles

1. "The Middle East: An Historical Background," *The Pakistan Observer*, March, 23, 1959.
2. "Lawrence and the Arab Revolt," *The Pakistan Observer*, May 18, 1961.
3. "Lord Palmerstone and the Near Eastern Crisis 1839-41," *Rajshahi University Studies*, Vol. III, January, 1970.
4. The Question of Arab Unity (An Arab Plan Considered), *Journal of the Asiatic society of Bangladesh*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, August 1973, Dhaka.
5. "Some Thoughts on the Labouring Classes in Rajshahi in the Later Part of Nineteenth Century," *Bangladesh Historical Studies*, Vol. III, 1978, Dhaka.
6. "Some Thoughts on Arab Nationalism," *Bangladesh Historical Studies*, Vol. IV, 1979, Dhaka.

7. "Minority in Power: The Dynamics of Contemporary Syrian Politics," Seminar Volume, *Society and Culture in Islam*, Chittagong University, October, 1986.
8. *Book Review*: Muhammad Mujiruddin, *Doctor Enamul Haq* (Chittagong: Doctor Enamul Haq Smriti Parisad, 1984), *the Rajshahi University Studies*, Vol. XIII, Part A, 1985.
9. "Ulema and Contemporary Muslim World: A Review", *Itihas Parisad Patrika* 15-20 years, Copy, January, 1987, Dhaka.*

*Prof Joarder had published many other important articles in Bengali literary reviews (Editor, J.I.B.S.)

Unpublished Articles

10. "Some Observations on the Historiography in India during the Sultanate Period."
11. "The Khilafat Movement and Muslim consciousness."
12. "The Revenue Administration of the East India Company in Bengal."
13. "Who is 'Dahm' in Sharf al-Zaman Tahir's Taba'i al-Hayawan?"
14. "Syria, 1920-1945: The Struggle for Independence," selected for inclusion in an anthology (*The Middle East Reader*) representing writings on the modern Middle East and edited by Professor Irene L. Gendzier of Boston University.
15. "Some Characteristics of the French Administrative System in Syria."

Professor Joarder was a member of many academic organizations at home and abroad including the American Oriental Society, the Middle East Institute (Washington D.C.), Itihas Samiti and Asiatic Society of Bangladesh. He was one of the Vice-Presidents of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh until his death. He participated in a number seminars and symposia in the country and outside Bangladesh. He had been one of the members of the Editorial Board of Rajshahi University Studies.

Professor Joarder was clear in his thinking and writing. He approached his subjects from different angles and cleared all possible points of doubt and ambiguity while analyzing any topic. He had an open mind and was free from any prejudice. He was methodical, analytical and critical in all his research papers and his articles were always thought-provoking. The students who were fortunate to have worked for their research degrees under his supervision received proper training in their respective fields. He was one of a few experts in research methodology and technique in Bangladesh. This writer was fortunate enough to complete his Ph.D thesis under his able guidance and received

thorough training in research methodology. He gave a lot of time for his research students and never complained or felt annoyed when he was approached by his students. He was a man of charming, polite and polished manners. He never lost his temper with anyone and had impeccable etiquette. He befriended people of all background and had a permanent smile on him. He was a man of good character and noble personality who never compromised his principles or convictions for personal benefit. He was a friend to all and foe to none. He will be remembered by all his students and peers alike.

Professor Joarder left behind his wife (Hasina Joarder, now Headmistress in Sirajganj Saleha Govt. Girls' High School), only son (Ishtiaq Shahriar Joarder, Graduated in Medicine and Surgery from Dhaka Medical College), many relatives and a host of his students, colleagues and admirers to mourn his death.

This article was obtained directly from Professor Yaqub Ali and it was edited by Muhammad Mojlum Khan.