



## **Sanjeeb Chowdhury: Kept on knocking at the wrong door!**

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All on a sudden Sanjeeb Chowdhury, beloved popular singer of the land bidding farewell to his innumerable fans and friends of home and abroad has left for the eternal sojourn. No doubt, his untimely and unexpected demise has shocked our cultural realm, especially in the domain of popular songs. But his sudden departure has created a vacuum which is never to be fulfilled in the mindset of some of us, who were very near and dear to him at some points of his journey in this temporal world.

I forget to remember the specific day when I first met Sanjeeb. But it must be any day in 1981, the year when we started to pursue for our honours degrees in Dhaka University. Perhaps Kazi Shamim Sultana (now a professor of Chittagong University), a close friend of Sanjeeb had introduced me to him. Within a short span of time we became close friend. Soon our closeness reached to that extent where one can freely open up one's mind and does not hesitate to share secrets, and it persisted throughout our university life. Although academically, we were not in the same discipline (I studied physics while he started studying mathematics and ended with journalism!), it did not retard our proximity in our relationship. This was because, due to his magnetic personality, I could not but love to seek his agile company. The autocrat regime of General Ershad elongated our student life by enforcing much hatred 'Ershad Vacations', especially in the Dhaka University. Perhaps the solo positive aspect of Ershad vacation in my personal life was that it enabled me to spend more time with my beloved friend. Sanjeeb also could share much time with me as till then he neither joined any profession nor emerged as celebrity.

Rewinding the past, now I can see many events that I shared with Sanjeeb, many deeds of him which revealed his versatile qualities. During the autocrat regime, for obvious reasons, as the students of Dhaka University we were proactive in politics and took part in the mass movement against Ershad to topple him from the power centre. During this movement, in the processions on the streets Sanjeeb was one of the frontiers. He was a strong activist of Bangladesh *Chhatro Union*, the student front of CPB and worked for its cultural wing.

The first and foremost requisite attribute of a true leftist is to be declassed and perhaps this is the hardest task on part of anybody, especially in a class-based society like ours. To my surprise I witnessed Sanjeeb could easily gain that attribute. While he interacted with the people from lower strata of the society, never did I observe any influence of his class consciousness. So, it was natural on his part to keep close friendly relationships with the peons or even cleaners of Jagannath Hall. Influenced by him, I also joined *Chhatro Union* and started to work as one of his comrades in the organisation. Activists must politically conscious and understand the dynamics of socio-political issues, was the doctrine of *Chhatro Union* at that time. Now I recall Sanjeeb

suggested me the titles of many books on politics and left revolution to read and those readings have helped me much in understanding the phenomena of complex social discourses. He explained Marx's dialectics and Marxist economics so vividly that still I can remember his ways of analyses.

His vast reading on different domains of knowledge, especially in literature at that stage amazed me so much. By that time he started to write in different newspapers and little magazines. I could guess the power of his pen while once late Ahmed Sofa, the eminent intellectual of the country at that time praised one of his write-ups highly. Frequently, he used to do experiment with poetry and the rhythm of the poetry. Perhaps, these experimentations, in his later life turned him into a brilliant lyric writer and wonderful composer of his band group Dalchhut .

My long stay in the UK took me away from his amazing company. None of us were very keen to write letters. So, over the time a gap had been created between us. When I returned to Dhaka, I found him as celebrity with a busy life. Still, sometimes, I met him at the office of the *Bhorer Kagoj*. We discussed different issues along with the memories of our university days. Years ago, he left the *Bhorer Kagoj* and by this time I also became busy with my profession. Eventually we lost all sorts of communication although we were in the same city!

May be, it was the act of God. Just before a few days of his death, on the 8<sup>th</sup> November, his band *Dalchhut* rendered a concert at my workplace, AIUB. He was surprised seeing me there as he had no idea about my present employment. We spent some time behind the stage of the concert. Introducing me with Bappa, his co-singer in Dalchhut he started recalling our university life. Particularly he mentioned our efforts in publishing and editing *Mainak*, a tiny little magazine on the occasion of the 21<sup>st</sup> February in 1983. The magazine was jointly edited by Sanjeeb, Zahid (Zahid Hasan Mahmood, now a professor of Applied Physics of DU ) and myself. Still I remember, in that *Ekushe Boi Mela*, his efforts of selling our *Mainak* by singing *gono sangeets* playing harmonium. However, in the concert of AIUB, Sanjeeb and Bappa sang their popular songs. But I observed that among the students, Sanjeeb's song attracted most. At that day, Sanjeeb's group had another programme in Satkheera and so they had to go. We exchanged cell numbers and Sanjeeb assured me to ring me soon. We didn't know that it was our last meeting. How cruel the life is!!

Sanjeeb was completely different from us. His unique bohemian life style, his vigour, courage to break the tradition placed him in different position. Perhaps he was aware of it and so sometime he felt loneliness in the deep of his heart. It is reflected in one of his lyrics, *Ami tomakei bole debo / ki je eka deergha rat /ami hete gechhi biran pothe* . A poor effort of translating this lyric by the writer is as below:

I'll tell you only  
How long a solitary night maybe  
I walked through by myself  
Through a lonely path.

I'll tell you only  
The story full of mistakes  
I kept on knocking  
At the wrong door  
Touching the colour of tears  
Touching the shade of moonlight.

Sanjeeb, may be you were right, you kept on knocking at the wrong door. Yet, we need the persons like you who had the vigour to knock at the wrong door, who had the courage to go against the tradition. Sanjeeb, my dear *dost*, I keep an optimistic view. With your proverbial genius, perhaps one day you may be turned into *kingboadanti* (a legend) among the generations to come. But I am quite sure that those generations definitely will respond to your wakeup call at the door. Hopefully, Kingbadanti, your lovely little daughter will witness those days.

*(The article is first published in the Daily Star. The author is an educationist, working at the Computer Science Department, AIUB and a freelance writer)*