

EIGHT DECADES OF MY LIFE

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OF MY LIFE

Illustrious Autobiography of
Anwar Hossain

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*Dedicated to
Amena, in my tears...*

حَسْبُنَا اللهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ

*Allah suffices me, for He is the best disposer of affairs
(Surah Al-Imran : 173)*

نِعْمَ الْمَوْلَى وَنِعْمَ النَّصِيرُ

The best Protector and Helper (Surah Anfal : 40)

GRATITUDE

I am a businessman, an industrialist. Business is my constant companion while leisure is an illusion to me.

Still I get time to think about life and the people around me. When a bit of the late afternoon sun enters through the window of my sixteenth floor office and lands at my feet, I lean on my swivel chair and I empty my mind from equations of demand and power, and I settle for another Anwar Hossain.

Looking back at myself like this, I don't know when I realized that I needed to write my biography. In fact, I wanted my descendants to know where I came from. But who would write my words? I am not a person of literature. After a busy work life of fourteen to fifteen hours a day, I do not have time to sit down with a notebook and pen, nor do I have the patience.

But the ever-increasing urge in my mind kept

pounding on that I needed to write my memoirs.

My elder daughter Shaheen came to know about it one day. She has no lack of enthusiasm for these tasks, so she came to me. I talked about the matter with her, and made a plan on how to do it. It was because of that plan that I met Mohammad Nurul Amin, the writer of the initial manuscript of my biography.

I think my first thanks goes to him. The gentleman sometimes came to my house and sometimes to my office. Many times he had to wait for an hour or more to see me. But he always spontaneously noted my words, sometimes recorded them. I sincerely appreciate his hard work.

Afterwards, I had to talk to Shaheen again. After receiving the initial manuscript, she literally researched my life, discovering the unknown things about me which I didn't tell to Nurul Amin. She was also busy; she ran her own family and edited the "Jaya-Janani" magazine, looked after the "Azad Muslim Mahila Parishad", "Riyadul Muslimat", "Jamila Khatun Red Crescent Matrisdan and Shishu Kalyan Kendra" - besides the great work of spreading Islam, she worked on my biography day after day only owing to the own urge in her heart. She collected bits and pieces of information obscure even for me as I forgot numerous details, lost to the ever-growing fog of forgetfulness. The trouble she took to find pictures to match my memories was enormous!

She went to known and unknown people, gleaned information for possible and impossible places. If she did not get what she was looking for, she would chalk it down to her own inadequacy. I know many people said many things to her, some ridiculed her, others tried to scare her by predicting her failure, but the girl did her work with a smile on her face.

Hearing her smile and the satisfaction in her voice, I wondered if the girl would even realise the sweet debt she had burdened me with.

Can you understand my love for her?

Thanks also to Mohammad Solaiman - this nephew of mine lifted his eyes from the pages of the book and took pen in hand, then with natural indolence completed the difficult task of preliminary editing.

I also thank Badshah, Babu, Jewel, Liton and Shayla.

Now let's talk about Dr. Mizanur Rahman Shelley. I requested him to read my biography, then write down his opinion. I am very happy that he kept my request.

Many thanks to him from me and my family. I am also grateful to all the officials of his publishing house "Academic Press and Publishers Library" and publisher Mrs Shahina Rahman for their sincerity.

And I can't think of what to say, how to thank my grandson Saim Solaiman. He appeared by

chance in writing this biography, but later became involved with the work in such a way as if he was writing his autobiography! I heard through Shaheen how hard he worked. To verify the authenticity of the information provided, sometimes rushed to the Liberation War Museum, sometimes to the public library or an archive. Many other books including high-quality reference books like Banglapedia were perused. He even picked up a camera to take pictures of some stuff my parents used. Sometimes he went to my office over matters related to the book and sometimes he came to my house, all the while neglecting his own comfort. And it goes without saying the amount of work he put in after working at his bank job and then coming home to start editing.

A Thank You really won't be enough. But I pray from the heart that God give him a long life, that he establish himself in life and become well-known as a great writer and increase the glory of our family.

Let me conclude with a quote from the sixteenth president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln. He said, writing your own words is fun, but also difficult. For just as the writer hesitates to admit his own faults, his self-praise also annoys the reader. So those who took the time to read my biography, to evaluate me, a big thank you from my side.

Anwar Hossain

Dhanmondi, Dhaka

A FEW WORDS

A few words. When people say a few words, they go on to say a thousand. I won't do that. With this promise, I lift my pen. My varsity going boys ask me to feed them and pass the plate of rice towards me. That's when I remember my father. A scene of an orphaned boy floats before my eyes. He has taken upon the burden of his family on his shoulder, despite being the son of a businessman. Through his diligence, that boy has now given us a life of luxury. Although, he never allowed us, his boys and girls, to be arrogant. Like other ordinary families, we too were raised to be ordinary. Sometimes, he would point out people to us and say "Look. Once they had everything and now they have nothing."

Taking his daughter to the SSC examinations, right at the gate, and then joining the queue of other waiting dads, that was my father. Even though he would often get caught up in running his business empire, he would often try to make up for lost time during weekends and Eid holidays, where he would laugh and play with us, regaling

us with his presence.

When my father said that he wanted to write his biography, it made us very happy. His entire life would be preserved in a document for us to peruse at any time. Nurul Amin did the primary work. Father gave me the first draft and asked me if there were any mistakes. Truth be told, I did not feel too good reading it. It was full of compliments. But I thanked the writer from the bottom of my heart for conjuring the script out of a few hours with my busy father. What I have heard and seen from my mother and grandmother, I wrote a few more lines but I still wasn't satisfied.

So, I tried to remember someone who knew my father's history and had knowledge about Old Dhaka. I also wanted someone who had a knack for writing and the requisite experience.

Only one name came to my mind: Sulaiman bhai, my cousin. I contacted him and he agreed to do the work. This allayed my worries.

At the same time, my father tried to rush me to work faster. Incrementally, I motivated Sulaiman bhai to lose his apprehensions and write the book little by little. After many days, he arrived holding the script. He had fixed it, but was not entirely satisfied with it either. He could not give it much time as he had to take care of his grandchild.

He said that the best person for the job would be his older son, Sayem, who was also busy with his work and studies. Despite his commitments,

Sayem took on the task and did an exceptional job of reorganizing the entire manuscript, during the first Bangla Version. He transformed it into a well-structured and polished piece, effectively relieving me of the overwhelming responsibility.

My sincere gratitude to all others who have contributed to this book.

This book, in the end gave me both joy and a sense of accomplishment: for seeing the smile on my father's face.

Shaheen Begum

Lalbagh, Dhaka

THE WORDS OF A SUCCESSFUL & CONTENT PERSON

Janab Anwar Hossain was a successful and content industrialist. Anwar was the captain of Anwar Group of Industries. He made extraordinary contributions to the progress of industries in the country. He created job opportunities for many, established many industries and strengthened the economy of the country. Wearing a smile on his face, his infectiously sweet behaviour ensured that he made an admirer of everyone he met. He would always greet people by instantly calling them bhai and pulling them into a hug. 30 years ago, I met this man in Japan's Tokyo. I went there at the invitation of the Japanese government to cover the news. Anwar Hossain went there for business. During this journey, I also met him in Hong Kong and Bangkok. In a short time, we became very close. Whenever he saw me, he would say in Old Dhakaiya dialect, "Where is my step brother!" Our bond grew deeper in the next 30 years and his business grew further.

He started his business from the rented Boli

Yaadi mansion and came up to the expansive Baitul Hossain next to Pubali Bank.

His three sons Manwar Hossain, Hossain Mehmood and Hossain Khaled joined his business in the blink of an eye. Their father's industry began to expand rapidly under the three sons. Even though Anwar Hossain Shaheb did not have a degree, he ensured the highest of education for his sons. His sons with their modern mindset have begun spreading the conglomerate, setting up industry after industry. Now Anwar Group of Industries is a modern institution.

His youngest son Hossain Khaled is the president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce. He is perhaps the youngest president in the chamber's history.

Anwar Hossain Shaheb joined the business because of his father. But the business was still in Old Dhaka. It was he who expanded the business. He has established modern businesses and industries with his three sons. That's why I say he is a successful man. Anyone with three sons is also a content man. Alongside his business, Anwar Hossain Shaheb also continued his social work. Under the banner of Muslim Welfare Complex in Old Dhaka, he has many social projects. This includes Jamila Khatun Maternity Hospital named after his mother, Rahim Baksh Eye Hospital named after his father and educational and play facilities. There's also a free hospital. It is all

for the underprivileged of the society. He once gave me a tour of these facilities to show how they worked. He was truly a generous man. He was well known in Old Dhaka. He was elected a member of parliament. His older brother Nazir Hossain was a writer. Whenever Anwar Hossain Shaheb got the chance, he set up educational institutions and helped the poor. He donated a tin roof to one of our schools once.

There are many businessmen in our country who only amass money and forget social responsibilities. Anwar Hossain Shaheb was a different breed in this case. That his biography will be a valuable addition to any library is not a matter of doubt. How to struggle, while maintaining honesty, and set up a big industry which benefits all, Anwar Shaheb is a shining example of that. I wish him all the best. He is a loving father, everyone's brother and a friend to the poor.

Reazuddin Ahmed

Editor, News Today

Former president Jatiya Press Club

BIOGRAPHY OF ANWAR HOSSAIN : A COLORFUL STORY OF EIGHT DECADES

A successful businessman, renowned industrialist and well-known philanthropist Alhaj Anwar Hossain has been living a varied and successful life for almost seven decades. He has given his colorful experiences to readers in this autobiography. The book edited by Mr Sayem Solaiman is mainly based on the memories of Anwar Hossain's life. From that point of view, this biography is autobiographical in format and style.

By reading the book it becomes clear that Anwar Hossain is confident but not selfish or self-centered. He saw his whole life as an unbroken continuum and an integral part of the larger social and family environment. His memory is like a journey through time. It has a rich and diverse social and family history encompassing about a century and a half.

The undivided subcontinent known as British-India is deeply intertwined with the past of the people of this country. Anwar Hossain's biography brings that history to life. The lives,

times, hopes and aspirations, successes and failures, joys and sorrows of his forefathers are neatly expressed in the pages.

His family heritage is rich in religion but not tainted by fanaticism. His forefathers, brothers and sisters and he himself were gifted with the learnings of sensitive human beings, people of Islam who had an unwavering faith in Allah Almighty.

He transmitted this great spirit to posterity, to the minds of the next generation. He and his brothers and sisters have engaged in business, trade and industrial enterprises by adhering to their religious beliefs and having the humanitarianism of their predecessors. But their activities were not limited there. Anwar Hossain and his relatives fulfilled the vow of love for people, giving service to the poor and helpless.

Anwar Hossain's elder, prominent writer and dedicated philanthropist Nazir Hossain, wrote the widely circulated book Kingbadantir Dhaka. He himself became a legend in the world of social service as the founder and leader of the Azad Muslim Welfare Complex.

As the head of the Social Welfare Department of Bangladesh Government Principal from 1976 to 1980, I had the opportunity to be intimately acquainted with this simple-minded, self-sacrificing man. As the younger brother of the late Nazir Hossain, Anwar Hossain has successfully

followed the family legacy in social service. Talking about the various experiences of his life, he highlighted the outstanding contribution of Mr Nazir Hossain in social service.

Anwar Hossain's biography has vivid descriptions of his many enterprises. It is indeed a fascinating story of the brave and creative endeavours of a patriotic, persevering, thoughtful, well-organised personality.

Interested readers will not only be able to understand Anwar Hossain by reading this biography, but will also be able to realise the familiarity in the lives of many other great personalities.

Among many stories, there is one of the evolution of Bengali Muslim society for a century and a half, there is the real story of the transformation of the city of Dhaka. There is also a history of deprivation, oppression and torture by the ruling and exploitative groups based in West Pakistan on the Bengalis of East Bengal/East Pakistan after 1947.

Anwar Hossain worked as a prominent soldier in the independence and liberation struggle of Bengalis in Bangladesh. His field was business, commerce and industry. In this field, since the Pakistan era, he has made admirable efforts to establish himself as a Bengali and succeeded. His efforts have brought great benefits to the economic life of Bengalis in Bangladesh.

Anwar Hossain's biography reveals a deep sense of life. He faced various problems and complexities of life, but remained humble and pious. He realized the impermanence of life, wealth, and power, and saw that indestructible faith in the path of human service and social welfare was the path by which man can return to the great Creator in humility.

I enjoyed reading the well written biography of Alhaj Anwar Hossain. I hope that the wider readership will see the pulsating nature of the current times in this book. I hope this book will spread widely.

Dr Mizanur Rahman Shelley

Sociologist, academic and writer

Chairman, Center for Development Research

Bangladesh, and Academic Press and Publishers

Library

TABLE OF CONTENT

Lineage	23
Childhood	45
Family	167
Business Life	247
The Songs of Many Countries	284
First Hajj Experience	314
The DCCI & Me	327
Establishment of Private Banks in Bangladesh	336
Political Life	344
Bringing Mobile Technology to Bangladesh	350
My Role in DIT Trust	355
Memories of 71	356
Some Memories From 1971 : [letters]	365
Social Work	379
Memories of Becoming a Member of Dhaka Club	387
A Little Bit About Me	388
Memorable Incidents	398
Awards And Honours	432
The Final Poem	445

LINEAGE

I would like to start this book with a few words of renowned lawyer-journalist-politician Abul Mansur Ahmed. He said, writers need to have two qualities: a fearless and unflappable leaning towards the truth, and utmost respect towards their parents.

Every biography, thus, must begin with the origin of the author. A biography that doesn't cover or glosses over your ancestral background, your origin is a faulty and incomplete one.

Though The work I do everyday is far removed from the worlds of art and culture, I have never read of a Muslim cleric or any great man-, who contradicted these words of Abul Mansur.

Our family identity is our history. It is our story. So we must consider all of that which we have faced, all the stories we have heard, and take those into account. Those are our reality and only by acknowledging those realities can we tell our tale.

I was born into an influential family based in Old Dhaka on 30 October, 1938. It was a Sunday and I came

into this world during Fajr prayers.

At the time, we lived in a quaint house in Amligola, House-52, Jagannath Shaha Road.

But much had happened before that.

Tracing my roots, I can go as far back as my great grandfather Idu Miah. In fact, his very introduction would be fitting as the first chapter of this biography.

No matter what anyone has to say, we must begin by commemorating our past, our parents and our very roots.

Around 200 years before my birth, Idu Miah was born in the 1800s. His birth coincided with Eid, the largest festival for Muslims, and thus earned him his name, which sounded just like the auspicious day.

Back then, newborns were named after particular characteristics or special days. For example, if you were born with a dark complexion, you would affectionately be called Kala Miah or Kalimunessa. If you had fair complexion or were beautiful, then you would be called Shundor Ali or Shundori Begum. If you were born during the full moon, then you could be named Chand Miah or Chand Bibi.

Living up to his name, my great grandfather had been very pious since his teenage years. He had also memorized the Quran, which earned him the title of Quran-e-Hafiz.

As his spirituality blossomed, he earned a new moniker: Idu Munshi, with munshi meaning a learned man well-versed in religion.

He started working as an imam in Islampur Mosque, a historical location even at that time.

He married when he reached the right age. His relationship with my great grandmother was so sweet, people used to refer to them as Laila and Majnu or also known as Romeo and Juliet.

They had two sons and two daughters. I cannot recall the name of those two daughters, but the two sons were called Lakku Miah and Makku Miah.

Lat Miah, affectionately called Lakku Miah, was my grandfather. A lot of people also called him Lat Bepari. In a family will, I have also seen him referred to as Laku



• *Pride of
Dhaka,
Lohar Pul, 1880*

Ostagar. But, he was known to many others as Lakku Mohajon. Before narrating his story, let's begin with the historical context of the then Dhaka.

Before Dhaka became a capital city, and even long