

I S L A M I C HORIZONS



Reimagine and Rebuild with Renewed Resolve

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Shah Abdul Hannan

An Exemplary Human Being and Teacher 1939-2021

BANGLADESH LOST ONE OF HER illustrious sons, a guardian figure on June 2.

I knew Shah Abdul Hannan for nearly 27 years.

Deeply involved in the Dhaka-based Islamic Economics Research Bureau, which was at the forefront of Bangladesh's Islamic banking movement, he was a key person behind establishing its first Islamic bank: Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd. (<http://www.islamibankbd.com/>; originally, the International Islamic Bank of Dhaka Ltd., est. March 30, 1983). After retiring as secretary to the government of Bangladesh, he served as the Islami Bank's chairman.

Among his many contributions are formulating the value-added tax (VAT) system and reforming the banking sector, both of which have contributed greatly to Bangladesh's economic strength.

Renowned for his personal integrity and as one of the country's finest and most astute civil servants, he helped establish universities and was chairman/president of the Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought, the Islamic Economics Research Bureau, the Ibn Sina Trust, the Board of Trustees of Manarat International University and other research and philanthropic organizations.

When I first met him in 1994, I was a second-year university student and he was a senior civil services officer and well known for his honesty, efficiency, sincerity and important government posts. Although I have always been a "regular" person, he always made me feel honored both as a human being and as his student. We had many meetings and traveled together in Bangladesh and the U.K. I had long stays with him to benefit from his intellectual guidance and learn from his immense knowledge and insight, as well as to attend his classes and lectures. He never imposed his views on me or stopped me from expressing mine.

A man of strong personality and force of character who respected others, his integrity manifested itself in his principled conduct, honest dealing and steady avoidance and disapproval of corruption and venality.

I was a regular at the weekly classes, which he conducted for young men and



women, separately, from November 1994 to September 2000, when I left to pursue my higher education in the U.K. In those classes, he introduced us to contemporary Islamic thought and various current questions about Islam and Muslims, with a special emphasis on gender issues.

I am deeply indebted to him for being a role model, a passionate and dedicated teacher who remains a source of inspiration for me. Before meeting him, I had aspired to a public service career. Ironically, this public official who shunned the power, pomp, and outward glory that accompanies such a career motivated me to become an academic. What attracted me was the depth of his knowledge and intellectual rigor. For as long as I knew him, I remained awestruck by his honesty, simplicity and humility.


In the U.K., the grounding I had received in his classes made it easy for me to understand the thoughts and ideas presented by renowned scholars of Islam. What I had learned from him as regards Islam and its worldview also helped me remain ahead of many of my contemporaries. His training has been extremely useful in my teaching activities at the International Islamic University Malaysia, for his scholarship has impacted both how I look at Western literature from Islamic perspectives and how I teach Islamic literature to both undergraduate and graduate students.

Upon learning of Shah Abdul Hannan's passing away, I remembered a poem by

Hassan ibn Thabit, Prophet Muhammad's (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) poet laureate, in which he describes his and others' sadness over the Prophet's demise: "The lands grow narrower for the Helpers, now / their faces are thrashed with antimony's hue."

Of course no one can ever be equated with the Prophet. Feeling an overpowering sense of loss, I approached the Quran for solace. Two verses put my heart at peace.

Among the believers are men who have [always] been true to what they have vowed before God; and among them are such as have [already] redeemed their pledge by death, and such as yet await [its fulfilment] without having changed [their resolve] in the least. [Such trials are imposed upon man] so that God may reward the truthful for having been true to their word, and cause the hypocrites to suffer — if that be His will — or [if they repent,] accept their repentance: for, verily, God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace! (33:23-24).

Based on my interactions and learning experiences with Shah Abdul Hannan, I can testify with good conscience that he was true to his covenant with God and that he was not a hypocrite. May God accept him among the righteous ones! 

Contributed by Md. Mahmudul Hasan, Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University Malaysia.

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