

My Days at Rajshahi Madrasah

(Or, as it is called now, Haji Md Mohsin Government High School)

Sultan Ahmad Ph D, Batch 1953



I entered Rajshahi Madrasah in third grade in 1945. The school then consisted of two main buildings – the red one and the yellow one. There were three other structures to the north of the red building – one used as a mosque, the second as living quarters for the guards and the third was urinal. Our class room was in the red building. As you face it looking north, our class room was the first one on the right. Now more rooms have been added to the east. As you pass one class you move to the next until you reach class eight and the building ends. Then you move to the “Office Building” (the yellow building) where classes nine and ten were held. It was called the office building because this building contained the Principal’s office, the administrative offices and the library. Now you have many more buildings in the campus including principal’s living quarters.

Rajshahi Madrasah then had, still has, the biggest open field. It was then used for sports, now it is popular for political events.

Rajshahi Madrasah was one of four high schools in town for boys – the Collegiate High School, Lokenath High School, Bholanath Bisweshawr Academy and Rajshahi Madrasah. Rajshahi Collegiate School was the school of choice; B.B. Academy was exclusively for Hindus and Rajshahi Madrasah for the Muslims. Lokenath High School was for both Hindus and Muslims. The Madrasah was then under the Madrasah School Board and was set up for Islamic education. The curriculum had just been changed under the “New Scheme” to bring it closer to high schools. We ended up being burdened with two extra papers in Arabic so that while the high school students had eight papers, we had ten. We heard, before the New Scheme, all teachers required to wear beards! As you may have guessed – there was no female teachers.

The Madrasah was established under a grant from Haji Muhammad Mohsin. The tuition was only five ‘Annas.’ That made it popular with poor Muslims. We lived three miles away and walked to school. Many students walked farther. We would wait for them and walked together. It was fun. In those days there were no rickshaws, only ‘Tomtoms,’ a horse drawn carriage.

The Second World War was ending and we felt the ripple of a brewing movement for independence from the British Rule. Pakistan was created in 1947 when we were in class 5. We all celebrated the event by skipping classes and joining the joyful parade of spontaneous crowd.

I recall several memorable events during my period in Madrasah. I was in class 9 when there was an essay competition. The subject was the poet Iqbal. My essay was selected to be second. In the annual prize giving ceremony, I was asked to read my essay. The crowd in front of me consisted of my teachers and students who were mostly junior to me -- nothing intimidating. Yet my knees started to shake uncontrollably, my hands were trembling and I was stammering. Somehow I finished reading my essay. That was a big lesson. Students should be made to make presentations in front of a crowd early in life. The next event happened when the teacher Lasker Biswas asked for a glass of water. The tube well was located just behind the building. When we brought him a glass of water, he kept looking at it.

The glass was made of aluminum. He asked why we can't have a glass made of glass. We answered because the glass would break. Then he said, "That's OK. You'd learn to be careful. A glass made of glass becomes like new when cleaned. You can see what you are drinking." From then on, we used only glasses made of glass.

Madrasah had a busy extra-curricular program. There was a physical instructor. We would assemble under the "nimtola" and had one hour of exercises every day. There was an annual magazine, regular essay completion, and functions on special occasions such as Independence Day, Eid-e-Miladun Nabi, etc. Cricket was not as popular then as it is now but we had a football team and there were regular inter-school competitions. We also had a scout team. The scout master was Moulana Abdur Rouf, a Wood Badger (a high rank in scouting). I was part of the scout team. We'd go home after regular school and walked back to school again to participate in various scouting programs. There was a "Jamboree" to be held in 1951 in Chittagong. A Jamboree is an assembly of scout teams from all over the country. In the midst of training for it, Raof sb. was transferred to Dhaka. I was the senior-most in the team. So I took over the training. Our team was placed number two in the then East Pakistan.

It is in the Madrasah that I developed love for the religion of Islam and Arabic. I often led Eid and Jum'a prayers, speak at what you call 'Milad' and do enactment of marriages. I call enactment because when a Bangladeshi bride or groom marries a non Muslim, usually Christian or Jew, Muslim parents or grandparents want a Muslim ceremony. I often do that. It is not legal but it serves the purpose of soothing Muslim parents and educating non-Muslims how Islamic marriages are performed.

We all respected our teachers. That sense of respect stayed with us when we grew up. We would not smoke in front of a teacher. In later life when I had a car, I would not pass a teacher walking. I would stop and offer to take him where he was going.

My advice to students: Respect your teachers and they in turn will love you.

