

**Dr. Shamsuzzoha: The First Bengali Martyred Intellectual of the Country in  
the Mass Uprising of 1969**

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**Abstract:** *Dr. Shamsuzzoha was the first Bengali martyred intellectual to commit suicide in the mass uprising<sup>2</sup> of 1969 at the dawn of independence. He is the pride of the people of Rajshahi University and Bangladesh, a teacher with a sense of responsibility and duty to the young generation, a true patriot who is better known as Dr. Shamsuzzoha or Zoha. The day in history, when a great Bengali teacher said (February 17 at ten o'clock at night), 'Before the students are shot, they will hit me in the chest.'<sup>3</sup> The next day, on 18 February, with the assassination of Dr. Zoha, the mass uprising in the country resulted in our liberation war. He was the first university teacher to be martyred at the main gate of Rajshahi University between 1947 and 1969. Today there is a great need for student friendly teachers like Shamsuzzoha Sir in every campus. He will continue to be our source of inspiration. Zoha Sir is unique not only as a teacher, but also as a liberating man. His sacrifice and ideals did not go in vain. Two years after the death of Dr. Shamsuzzoha, the rise of independent Bangladesh on the world map.*

**Keywords:** *Freedom Struggle, Independent, Liberation War, Martyred, Patriot, Teacher.*

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## **Introduction**

February 18, 1969 is undoubtedly an unforgettable day in our national history. The day is very important in the context of Bangladesh's freedom struggle. Dr. Shamsuzzoha was the first Bengali martyred intellectual to commit suicide in the mass uprising<sup>2</sup> of 1969 at the dawn of independence. He is the pride of the people of Rajshahi University and Bangladesh, a teacher with a sense of responsibility and duty to the young generation, a true patriot. Who is better known as Dr. Shamsuzzoha or Zoha. The day in history, when a great Bengali teacher said (February 17 at ten o'clock at night), 'Before the students are shot, they will hit me in the chest.'<sup>3</sup> The next day, on 18 February, with the assassination of Dr. Zoha, the mass uprising in the country resulted in our liberation war. He was the first university teacher to be martyred at the main gate of Rajshahi University between 1947 and 1969 or during the mass uprising by the Pakistani invaders (11 a.m.). That is why, As news of Zoha's murder spread, people across the country erupted in anger. Ignoring the curfew, thousands of people marched on the streets of Dhaka.

Dr. Zoha did not engage in active politics, but his death enabled the country to achieve a stable political goal. The harvest of long-standing political wisdom is our freedom. The Six-Point Movement (1966)<sup>4</sup> has been identified as the most significant event of our freedom struggle. The Six-Point movement, the Agartala conspiracy case (1968) against Bangabandhu<sup>5</sup> and his followers, the assassination of Sergeant Zahurul Haque<sup>6</sup> in jail, the mass uprising and the assassination of Dr. Zoha are not left to be seen in isolation. All events seem to be tied together. His sacrifice must be a new addition to the dictionary. The green grass of Motihar turned red with the blood of a young teacher who was martyred to save the lives of students. He is Dr. Shamsuzzoha. 50 years have passed since the martyrdom of Shamsuzzoha; he was also a Bengali educator. He is a role model for the teaching community throughout the ages. After receiving offers from the best universities in the world, Dr. Shamsuzzoha preferred to teach at Rajshahi University in Mufassal. He loved Rajshahi, he loved Bangladesh.

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## **Early life and education**

Dr. Syed Muhammad Shamsuzzoha (1934-1969), was born on 1 May 1934 in Onda, Bankura, West Bengal (British India). Bankura was not only Hindu-dominated, but also a caste-Hindu-dominated district and city. In places like Bankura, where Muslims were terribly a minority. The identity in this community there was normal. Father Abdur Rashid retired from a small job and received a low salary. He also lost the retirement allowance due to leaving the country. Dr. Zoha was admitted to the first year honors class of the Department of Chemistry, Dhaka University in 1951 and was a resident student of Salimullah Muslim Hall. At this time he became directly involved in the language movement. Despite financial hardship and family catastrophe, he passed the BSC Bachelor of Honors examination from the Department of Chemistry in 1953 and passed the MSC in 1954. As soon as the results of the graduate examination came out, Dr. Zoha became interested in joining the thesis group in the department of Chemistry. Professor Khandaker Mokarram Hossain, president of the chemistry department, called him and told him that if he wanted to be admitted here, he would have to leave the game. Zoha said he agreed to study at another faculty but did not leave the sport. However, under the supervision of renowned chemist Professor Khandaker Mokarram Hossain, research was continued in the thesis group for a postgraduate degree. The title of the study was 'The oxidation process of chromite minerals by electrical method'. The study was later published in a 1954 article in the London journal 'Chemistry and Industry'. Another part of his dissertation was published in the journal Pakistan Science Research in 1955. He did research on iron and zeolite and published several articles in various journals. He was also conducting a program on 'Separation and Safe Elimination of Radioactive Materials' with the Nuclear Center in Dhaka.<sup>9</sup>

## **Professional Life**

Towards the end of 1955, Dr. Shamsuzzoha overcame unemployment and was elected as a trainee as an associate factory director in the Pakistan Ordnance Factory. On 14 December of the same year, Great Britain joined the Royal Ordnance Factory in South Wales to receive

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training on explosives. From 1956 to 1959, he studied at the Imperial College of Science and Technology, London, and earned a BSC (Special) Degree (1957) from the University of London and ARCS from the Imperial College. The subject of his scientific skills and research was 'Chemistry of Explosives'.<sup>11</sup> He later joined Wah Cantonment in West Pakistan on 4 August 1959 as an Assistant Director. He also worked there for two years. Zoha resigned from the Royal Ordnance Factory in February 1961 and came to Rajshahi University in search of work. At first he was appointed as the development officer of the university for a short period. On 23 February he joined the Department of Chemistry as a lecturer.<sup>12</sup> At the end of August, he again traveled to London with his wife. From 1961 to 1964, he spent three consecutive years abroad with his wife in research work. During this time, he taught for some time at Rabbit Street Technical College, Regent Street Polytechnic and West London Commerce College. He later returned to Rajshahi University with a PhD and DIC degree and resumed teaching in 1964. He then continued to teach at the university permanently. He became a Senior Lecturer in Chemistry in 1965 and was promoted to Associate Professor (then Reader) in 1966.

In 1965, Zoha became the resident teacher of Shah Makhdum Hall and in 1966, the Provost. When the administration is in the midst of a fierce student movement centering on the Agartala conspiracy case, the university authorities call for the proctor to take charge. During the turbulence of April 15, 1968, the University placed on its shoulders the vast and great responsibility of the Proctor; he held the post till his death. In January 1968, he received a one-year scholarship for higher research at the University of Oslo, Norway. But the department did not want to leave him due to lack of experienced teachers in physical chemistry. From 1964-1968, he devoted himself to the teaching, research, training and supervision of postgraduate students, the expansion of his field of research, and the associated responsibilities of university sports, residential teaching and proctor.

Glad Stone's book on 'physical chemistry' was his constant companion when he went to teach. Fluent, be it in Bengali, English, Urdu or Hindi; was skilled. He was very successful as a timely teacher. It can be said without hesitation that those who have come in contact with him still remember him as a brilliant person. He was liberal and progressive in thought and consciousness. His personality was a mixture of Eastern and Western cultures.

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### **The mass uprising of the sixty-nine and Dr. Shamsuzzoha**

Bangladesh was agitated by the mass uprising of 1969. At one stage of the movement, on 20 January 1969, Pakistani forces assassinated the student leader Asad<sup>13</sup> in Dhaka. On 15<sup>th</sup> February, Sergeant Zahurul Haque, the accused in the Agartala case, was killed in the Dhaka Cantonment and another accused Sergeant Fazlul Haque<sup>14</sup> was injured. A nationwide protest against the assassination of Zahurul Haque erupted on February 16. The mob set fire to the residence of the Chief Justice of Agartala case. Seeing the unfavorable situation, the evening law was issued in Dhaka on that day and it remained in force till the 17<sup>th</sup>. These movements spread like wildfire; the wave of which is also in Rajshahi University. Many students were injured in a police attack during a protest at Rajshahi University on 17 February. Dr. Shamsuzzoha said in an unequivocal voice, showing the students' blood-stained shirts in front of everyone at a function of the Bengali Department at Kala Bhaban of the university that evening, 'I am aroused by the touch of the holy blood of the injured students. Then if there are more shots fired at the university, they will pierce my chest before hitting any student.' The next day, 18 February, the students marched towards the city. Then the police, EPR, army and students were in a confrontational position. Dr. Shamsuzzoha was calming the students on the one hand, and on the other hand he was telling the army personnel, 'Please don't fire.' My students will be back now. At one point being able to convince the students, they began to return campus. Ignoring the request, the lieutenant said, 'Fire and kill them.' Dr. Zoha went ahead to shoot. Then the soldiers fired at him.<sup>15</sup>

Two more teachers Dr Mollah and Abdul Khaleq were injured at that time. Abdul Khaleq said, 'He was charged with bayonet when he was running to find out about Dr. Mollah and me. His shirt is soaked in blood, I am a prisoner in the hands of the jawans. The soldiers dragged me into a military van. I called the officer-in-charge and shouted, Dr. Zoha is dying, let him be rushed to the hospital.'<sup>16</sup> During such a situation, he was martyred while trying to protect the university students in the face of attack by the Pakistani army. The army left him

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injured on a municipal office table until 3:30 p.m. After a long time, he was taken to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital at around four o'clock; There was a lot of bleeding by that time. Several of his associates, including Dr. Dutt, were busy with the operation. Zoha's entire abdomen is open, even to the heart. Doctors are stitching the liver and spleen. The stomach is also injured. As a result of which Dr. Dutt could not save him despite many attempts. At the age of 34, he passed away. Note that when he regained consciousness in the operating theater, his muffled voice once said, 'I need to survive.' The last moment was, 'will I live?'

### **Dr. Shamsuzzoha's love of sports**

Although a university teacher in his professional life, Zoha had another identity. He was a skilled athlete. He was equally proficient in all sports from school life. He played in the inter-school football competition in the colorful jersey of Bankura District School till 1948. Later, as a student of Dhaka University, he was a regular member of the football, hockey and cricket teams of Salimullah Muslim Hall. In the academic year 1951-52, Salimullah Muslim Hall emerged as a very strong team in the inter-school and inter-college football competitions. His high quality of play and the exuberance of his pure soul fascinated everyone. The years 1953 to 1955 were significant in terms of sports victories for Salimullah Muslim Hall. In this case, Dr. Zoha, the soul of Salimullah Muslim Hall and an interesting name of Dhaka University. He was the right-winger of Victoria Sporting Club in Dhaka Football League till 1955. From 1966 to 1968, he returned to Britain twice to play for the Gandaria Cricketers, a team of young teenagers in the First Division Cricket League in Dhaka. He has played cricket and football for a long time for the chemistry department of Rajshahi University, but he has been seen in the role of goalkeeper in football due to his age.<sup>17</sup> Zoha was once a member of the East Pakistan cricket team. In addition to regular practice with students, he regularly played in various competitions, especially in the Rajshahi District Cricket League. He also won by organizing a competitive football match with the best student XI of the university.

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### **Zoha's bizarre fancy**

From adolescence, Zoha was obsessed with various fantasies, hobbies and luxuries. Everyone used to call him Montu. Being the eldest, he was the object of special affection of his relatives. As a child, he used to have polao and a chicken broth every afternoon. It is to be noted that at that time 16 chickens could be found for one taka that means sixteen annas. Among the sweets, especially rasgolla was his favorite. He loved the big fish, lime fish and Shoal-Boyal did not touch at all. He did not eat beef as a child, but later became interested in shik-kebab, kofta and roasted meat.<sup>18</sup> Other hobbies included listening to music and reading mystery novels. Favorite artists were Hemant Mukherjee and Mohammad Rafi. The costume was very simple. Impossibly simple and open-minded, this man mingled with everyone with a smile.

### **Family details**

Dr. Shamsuzzoha was married on June 11, 1961. The wife's name was Mrs. Nilufar Yasmin Zoha. Nilufar Zoha was the daughter of Hayat Ali Khan, a resident of Gazaria village in Dhaka district. He was a teacher at the University's Child Education Center. On February 15, 1966, the Zoha couple gave birth to a baby girl. Her name is Sabina Zoha. The nickname was Dalia. Dalia emigrated to the United States in 1986 to pursue higher education in computer science. He came to Rajshahi University once before leaving the country. Visits his father's memory, his department, the place where his father was shot, and the grave. On July 23, 1990, Dalia once again met her father. Zoha visits places intertwined with memories. This time he had a question mixed with anger, which he uttered with tears in his eyes, 'Who deprived me of my father's caress?' They have been living in America for a long time. Now it is known that he is living there permanently as a citizen. There was no limit to the happiness of the family with the only daughter, Dr. Zoha. The married life was very happy and joyful. Dr. Zoha's sister Professor Akhtar Jahan Anar, niece Professor Mamtaz Begum and Shalika Hasina Muktadir.<sup>19</sup> One day while bathing in the river, his second brother drowned. Two sisters lose their sight due to malnutrition. The family was not sure about the future of other two siblings.<sup>20</sup>

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## Evaluations

In that tumultuous tide of the mass movement of the sixty-nine, Dr. Zoha's sacrifice has given unforgettable strength to the entire country. This sacrifice seems to be a historic event. 18 February is observed as *Shahid Zoha Dibos* (Martyr Zoha Day) in Bangladesh, which is known as Teacher's Day. The country's teachers have long demanded that Zoha's death be observed as 'National Teacher's Day'. Martyr Memorial Museum Dr. Zoha has some memories. A memorial has been erected at the place where he was killed.



Dr. Shamsuzzoha was shot dead by Pakistani Forces at 11 a.m. on 18 February 1969

In 2008, 39 years after the death of the martyr Dr. Shamsuzzoha, the state posthumously awarded him the Independence Award<sup>22</sup> and issued a commemorative stamp in his name worth four taka's. Dr. Zoha was not given Ekushey Padak. Rajshahi University has been applying for this for a long time. It is rare in the history of the world for a teacher to give his life in this way



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for students. A student hall on the RU campus is named after him. In front of Shaheed Shamsuzzoha Hall there is a spark of memorial sculpture, called ‘Sfulinga’ for Dr. Shamsuzzoha Sir as a symbol of respect.



Memorial sculpture was built right beside the Shahid Shamsuzzoha Hall, called ‘Sfulinga’ Besides, the Department of Chemistry of Rajshahi University holds Zoha Symposium every year. If you enter through the main gate of the university, you will see Zoha's tomb in front of the administrative building. Zoha memorial plaques have been erected there; which is known as Zohachattar. A college named ‘Bilchalan Shaheed Samsuzzoha College (1969)’ was established in the heart of Gurudaspur upazila of Natore. A park has also been named after him in Meherpur.

### **Conclusion**

Dr. Shamsuzzoha will stay as long as Bangladesh lasts. He is the teacher and guardian of the entire student body. Besides teaching and research, he has also gained a lot of fame in sports. This great sacrifice of the teacher for the student will survive among the students for ages to come. Today there is a great need for student friendly teachers like Shamsuzzoha Sir in every campus. He will continue to be our source of inspiration. Zoha Sir is unique not only as a teacher, but also as a liberating man. His sacrifice and ideals did not go in vain. Two years after the death of Dr. Shamsuzzoha, the rise of independent Bangladesh on the world map.

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2. The mass uprising of 1969 was an important chapter in the political and historical liberation struggle of the then East Pakistan and independent Bangladesh. The coup overthrew the Ayub Khan government, which had been in power for more than a decade. (Note the mass uprising of 1969: Rahman, Md. Mahbubar *Bangladesher Itihash: 1947-1971*, Dhaka: Somoy Prakashan, 2000, pp. 204-206)
3. An inscription inscribed from his mouth on the tomb of Dr. Shamsuzzoha.
4. Note the Six-Point details: Kashem, Abul, *Mukti Sangrame Awami League: Dalilik Itihash (1949-1971)*, Dhaka: Kathaprokash, February 2021, pp. 300-314
5. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (17 March, 1920–15 August, 1975), abbreviated Sheikh Mujib or Bangabandhu, was the first President of Bangladesh. He took an active part in the Partition of India movement and later led the struggle for the establishment of East Pakistan as an independent country. He was initially the President of the Awami League, then the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and later the President of Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was hailed as the "Father of the Nation" the most important figure in the struggle for political autonomy in East Pakistan and later as the central figure behind the Bangladesh Independence Movement and the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. (See the details: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, *Ausamapta Atmajiboni*, Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2012)
6. Sergeant Zahurul Haque (February 9, 1935 - February 15, 1969) was born in Sonapur village of Noakhali district and was one of the accused and martyred in the Agartala conspiracy case. He received the Independence Award (posthumously) in 2018 for his special contribution to the war of independence and liberation of Bangladesh. (*bdnews24.com*, 9 February, 2020)

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8. 'After the partition of India he migrated to the East Bengal', 22 December 2015, at the Wayback Machine, see the details: <http://www.bdlinks.net/biography/Shahed-Shamsuzzoha.php>

9. Rahim, Zillur, 'Ami ki batchbo', Mansur Ahmed Khan (ed.), *Unasatturar Shaheed Dr. Shamsuzzoha*, Dhaka: Sahitya Prakash, 1993, p. 62.

11. Ibid, p. 64

12. Ibid, p. 74

13. Shaheed Asad's country home is in Hatirdia of Narsingdi district. He was a history student of Dhaka University. Gives postgraduate quality improvement test. At the same time he was admitted to Dhaka Central Law College. Organizationally, he was the president of the Dhaka Hall (now Shahidullah Hall) branch of the East Pakistan Students Union Menon Group. Politically, he was associated with the East Bengal Communist Revolutionary Coordinating Committee of various factions working within the Menon Group of Student Unions. (Hannan, Mohammad *Bangladesher Muktijuddher Itihash*, Kolkota: A Hakim and Son's, 1996, p. 164)

14. Flight Sergeant Fazlul Haque Talukder (November 2, 1942 - January 16, 1994) was an organizer and politician of the Liberation War. During the War of Liberation, he served as an Adjutant in the rank of Flight Lieutenant in Sector-9 and was a member of the Bangladesh Liberation Army. He was arrested as the 11th accused in the Agartala conspiracy case. On 15 February 1969, the Pakistan Army shot him and Sergeant Zahurul Haque. Sergeant Zahurul Haque died. Fazlul Haque recovered after a few months of treatment. (See the details: Colonel Ali ,Shawkat, *Satya Mamlā Agartala*, Dhaka: Prothoma Prokasan, 2011, pp. 144-145)

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17. Khan, Mansur Ahmed (ed.), *ibid*, pp. 45, 52 and 59-64
18. Quader, Fazlul 'Dr. Zohake Jevabe Dekeci ', *ibid*, p. 47
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