

Dr. Ashraf Ali's Personal Perspective on Dr. Jamilur Reza Choudhury

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I wanted to thank my BDI colleagues for selecting Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury as the recipient of 2017 BDI Lifetime Achievement Award. I am biased for sure. You will learn soon as I speak. But the remaining BDI members voted to select Jamil Sir as the recipient and I thank them for it. This time we decided to give the award to an accomplished Bangladeshi who has made tangible contributions towards the development of Bangladesh. Who else would be more qualified than Jamil Sir?

I entered engineering university BUET in 1975. First year in BUET was very hard. I couldn't raise my head to see anything around me. Heard through grapevine that our batch had the highest ever number of female engineering students. But I did not have energy to look up and see. I was busy surviving.

Sophomore year. I was now in the Civil Engineering department. Jamil Sir was one of the senior teachers remaining in the department. I heard about him and saw him. But no interactions. I was also busy courting one of the three female engineering students who came to Civil Engineering. Jamil Sir's classmate and friend Dr. Alamgir Habib taught us the most important class Strength of Materials in our sophomore year. He had cigarette on one side of his lip and talked through the other side. But he was heck of a good teacher though. We were lucky to have him as our Strength of Materials teacher.

1977. We were juniors. Professor Eusufzai was teaching us Concrete class. Some of you may remember he was pulled away that year to serve in the Planning Commission. That year Mizanur Rahman was teaching us Approximate Structural Analysis class. He missed the class one day. Jamil Sir came as a substitute teacher. This was my very first encounter and interaction with him. That day we were supposed to learn how to perform an approximate structural analysis of tall buildings. I was blown away by the way Jamil Sir formulated the analysis. I never knew before then that approximate structural analysis could be approached in such a systematic way. He organized the problem like a computer would do. Mizan Sir was good, but the contrast was mind-blowing for me.

Then the year 1978. We were seniors. We were learning Yield Line Theory from Ahmed Habibur Rahman. In his absence one day Jamil Sir came as a substitute teacher. Before Jamil Sir came, I used to think Yield Line Theory is a piecemeal ad hoc type subject. You come up with a specific solution for a specific problem. Jamil Sir cast the problem in such a systematic way that I never knew possible. It was nothing short of magic. Jamil Sir also taught us the most important civil engineering Structural Analysis class. It was magic every time he taught the class.

We graduated in February 1979 and I became a Lecturer in the Civil Engineering department. Now I was Jamil Sir's colleague before coming to USA in 1981. To me, Jamil Sir is a living computer. I have been in many schools in this country and been in touch with many professors here and across the world. But I have yet to find someone as systematic and methodical as Jamil Sir.

Jamil Sir made many tangible contributions towards the development of Bangladesh's infrastructure. You can read about them from the conference brochure. I just wish we could clone him. But since that is not possible, I wish he lives for many years with his mind intact. Let's say AMEN to that.

Dr. Ashraf Ali
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