

## **Tribute to Professor Mir Masoom Ali: A Distinguished Statistician and A Proud Son of Bangladesh**

**A.H.M. Rahmatullah Imon**

*Dept. of Statistics*

University of Rajshahi

Rajshahi-6205

Bangladesh

It is a great privilege for me to write this tribute for Professor Mir Masoom Ali, George and Frances Ball Distinguished Professor of Statistics at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, USA, on the occasion of his 70th birthday anniversary. Professor Mir Masoom Ali is undoubtedly one of the most outstanding statisticians and educators of Bangladeshi origin I have ever come to know. As a student of statistics, I know his name for over twenty years though I first met him personally in August, 2004, when he arranged a visiting professorship for me in the Department of Mathematical Sciences at Ball State University. He first came across my name about four years ago while he was reviewing one of my papers for an international statistical journal. A few months later I contributed an invited paper for the special volume of the *Journal of Statistical Studies* in honour of his 65th birthday. After that he wrote me a personal note giving me lot of encouragement to pursue my research work. In reply I inquired if there was any possibility to visit him to do some joint research work. I simply could not believe when I received his reply the same day intending to offer me a visiting professorship in his department. Needless to say, I was excited to be offered to work with him and was happy to accept this offer. Since the first meeting in August of 2004, I have come to know him quite well. I must say that he is one of the most inspiring individuals that I have ever met. He has since become one of my and my family's most sincere well-wishers.

Professor Mir Masoom Ali was born on February 1, 1937 in an enlightened family of Patuakhali, Bangladesh. He is the fourth of eight children born to Mir Muazzam Ali and Azifa Ali. He started his schooling at Jubilee High English School of Patuakhali and spent the most impressionable part of his life there. His father was a very eminent Muslim lawyer of the city, but he was a very secular person. That is why Professor Ali got an opportunity to grow up in an atmosphere that was full of harmony with all ethnic and religious groups and free of prejudice. He was fond of music and drama and his passion for music is still there today as he spends his leisure time at home singing

Bangla songs. He had a number of great teachers in his school and gratefully acknowledge their contributions in building up his career. After graduation from high school, he came to Dhaka in 1951 and got himself admitted to Dhaka College for Intermediate Science degree. He took active part in the historic Bangla Language Movement in 1952 as a student of Dhaka College. He became a student of the University of Dhaka in 1953 and obtained his Bachelor's degree with honours in 1956 from the Department of Statistics. He obtained his M.S. degree in Statistics from the same department in the following year. He started his career in the Socio-Economic Research Board of the University of Dhaka in 1957. In 1958 he joined the Ministry of Agriculture for the Government of Pakistan. The Ministry assigned him to posts in Dhaka, Karachi, and Lahore. He then joined the Ministry of Commerce in Rawalpindi and finally joined the Central Public Service Commission in Karachi. He came to Toronto, Canada in 1966 for higher studies and received his second Master's degree in 1967 and Ph.D. in 1969 in Mathematical Statistics from the University of Toronto under the guidance of Professor D.A.S. Fraser. He had married Firoza Ali (Leena) in 1959. Mrs. Ali has played a highly significant role over the years in all the accomplishments of Professor Ali. Their first child, Naheed (Nancy) was born in Dhaka, the next two children Fahima (Nicky) and Farah (Mimi) were born in Karachi, and the fourth child Ishtiaque (Ishti) was born in Toronto. They have seven grandchildren from their three daughters and only son.

Professor Mir Masoom Ali's professional career took a sudden turn in 1969 when he was preparing to go to Islamabad from Toronto to return to his service with the government of Pakistan after receiving his Ph.D. degree. Dr. Ali received a call from the Department of Mathematical Sciences at Ball State University offering him the position of assistant professor of statistics. At that time a massive freedom movement had already started in the then East Pakistan and he was advised by his relatives and friends not to return to Pakistan. He somewhat reluctantly decided to accept the offer from Ball State University. Thus began a very long and distinguished career in academia. As soon as Professor Ali came to Ball State, he established himself as one who has made outstanding contributions in each of the three traditional areas of academia, namely, teaching, research, and service. He was promoted to the rank of associate professor position in 1974. He became a full professor in 1978. He founded the graduate program in statistics at Ball State University in 1971 and subsequently the undergraduate program in statistics. He has served as the graduate adviser of the statistics program since the creation of the program and also served as director of graduate programs of the department. He also provided tremendous support to the actuarial science program of the department especially during the early years of that program. He served his university as a senator of the University Senate, as a chair of the University Research Committee, as chair of the University Publication Committee, as chair of the Asian Studies Committee and as a vice chair of the University Graduate Committee. He was awarded in 1993 by Ball State University the *Outstanding Faculty Award*, the highest award for teaching, research, and professional service, given

to only one faculty member each year by the university. In 1985, Professor Ali was also awarded by Ball State University the *Outstanding Researcher Award* by his university, which is the highest award given to a faculty member each year for excellence in research and publication. In recognition of his outstanding contributions to the university, to the profession and to his students, and for his international reputation in the field of statistics, Professor Ali was named by his university the *George and Frances Ball Distinguished Professor of Statistics* in 2000, named after George Ball, one of the founders of the university and his wife Frances.

Professor Mir Masoom Ali has contributed significantly and impressively to broad areas of statistics. Since joining Ball State University he has published close to two hundred articles in different reputed journals. His early work centers on analytic results concerning distributions, especially the “Student’s”  $t$ -distribution. He contributed significantly in finite sampling methods. He later focused his research on order statistics and estimation based on optimal spacing. He has also published in diverse areas, such as, ranking and selection, multivariate statistics, reliability, characterization, and mixtures of distributions. More recently his publications have focused on parametric and non-parametric estimation and Bayesian inference. He has presented papers and chaired many sessions at national and international conferences and universities in the USA, Canada, Australia, Holland, France, Sweden, Portugal, Egypt, Italy, Japan, Korea, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Mexico, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Morocco, and Greece. Professor Ali is one of the co-founders of the Midwest Biopharmaceutical Statistics Workshop (MBSW) which has been held annually on the Ball State University campus since 1978. The American Statistical Association is a co-sponsor of this workshop and it is considered as the best and longest running statistical conferences in the United States that concern biopharmaceutical statistical research. The Thirtieth Annual MBSW was held in May, 2007 at Ball State campus. He has been active in journal editorship from the very beginning of his career. He has refereed countless articles for more than twenty-five statistical journals. He has published over two hundred reviews of articles and books in *Mathematical Reviews*. Professor Ali helped found and was an editor of the journal *Parisankhyan Samikkha*. He also served for many years as the Overseas Executive Editor of the *Journal of Statistical Studies* and as an Associate Editor of *Journal of Information and Optimization Sciences* and he is currently an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Statistical Research*, the *Pakistan Journal of Statistics*, the *Aligarh Journal of Statistics* and the *Journal of Statistics and Management Systems*. He also served as an associate editor of the *Journal of Information and Optimization Sciences*, the *Journal of the Korean Data and Information Science Society* and the *Journal of Statistical Theory and Methods*.

Professor Ali has been active in numerous professional associations and societies. He is the founding president of the North America Bangladesh Statistical Association (NABSA). In recognition of his wide ranging accomplishments in statistics, the American Statistical Association (ASA) named him a Fellow in 1998. He is also a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society, a Fellow of the Institute of Statisticians and a Fellow

of the Bangladesh Academy of Sciences. He is also an Elected Member of the International Statistical Institute. He served twice as the President of the Central Indiana Chapter of the ASA and served as the Vice Chair of the ASA Council of Chapters. He has also served as the President of the Ball State Chapter of Sigma Xi - The Scientific Society. He has served on advisory panels of National Science Foundation to review grant proposals. He has been an external reviewer for promotion of faculty members at universities in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan, Oman, Bangladesh, Canada and the USA. Professor Ali cherishes interaction with other statisticians. He travels worldwide to attend conferences, to present papers, to teach statistics and to do research with his collaborators. He has held visiting appointments at the University of Windsor in Canada, Purdue University, the Institute of Statistical Research and Training of Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, Yeungnam University, Korea, the Institute of Statistical Mathematics in Tokyo, and King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Professor Ali has been honoured frequently with awards and recognitions over the course of his fifty-year-long professional career. I have already mentioned many prestigious awards and honours he has earned in his career. In addition to those awards, in 1987, 1997, 2002, and this year, Professor Ali also received the *Meritorious Service Award* from the Midwest Biopharmaceutical Statistics Workshop. In 1990 he was honoured as the first recipient of the *Qazi Motahar Husain Gold Medal Award* of the Bangladesh Statistical Association. He was awarded the highest award of the State of Indiana, USA, the *Sagamore of the Wabash*, by the Governor of the State of Indiana in 2001. He was honoured as the most distinguished Bangladeshi-American statistician and as one of the most accomplished Bangladeshi personalities living in North America by the Bangladeshi American Foundation, Inc., (BAFI) twice, first in 2001 and again in 2005. The Islamic Countries Society of Statistical Sciences (ISOSS) awarded Dr. Ali a Gold Medal in 2005 for his outstanding contribution to statistics and ISOSS affairs. In recognition of his lifetime accomplishments in statistical education and research, the *Journal of Statistical Studies*, and the *Pakistan Journal of Statistics* published special volumes felicitating him in 2002 and 2004, respectively and the *International Journal of Statistical Science* is publishing this Special Volume to honour Professor Ali on the occasion of his 70th birthday anniversary.

Professor Ali is one of the very few famous Bangladeshis who has been listed in various editions of the *Who's Who of America*, *Who's Who of the World*, *Who's Who in the Sciences*, *Who's Who of Asian Americans*, *Who's Who in American Education*, *Men of Achievement*, *World Directory of Mathematicians*, *Who's Who in the Midwest*, and *Who's Who of the West and Midwest*. Professor Ali is going to retire at the end of this academic year from Ball State University after serving as a statistician for fifty years of which 38 has been served at Ball State. The Department of Mathematical Sciences held a two-day statistics conference on the occasion of his retirement and a *Festschrift* in his honour was published. The *Festschrift* includes forty papers which have been contributed by over eighty authors and co-authors. The Board of Trustees at

Ball State University has appointed him as the *George and Frances Ball Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Statistics and Professor Emeritus of Mathematical Sciences* with effect from June 16, 2007.

I feel myself extremely fortunate to work with him and for having the opportunity to know him intimately. I have seen that in spite of all his accomplishments, mainly in his adopted homeland - the United States, Professor Ali has never forgotten his root and his country of birth. Bangladesh is always in his thoughts and in his dreams. He has brought Bangladeshi statisticians as visiting professors in his department and he has brought many Bangladeshi students providing them with graduate assistantship to pursue higher studies in statistics in his department. His former students from Bangladesh are now well established in Bangladesh and in the USA. He has currently a number of Bangladeshi students in his department. He is a unique and most loved person among his fellow Bangladeshi statisticians because of his contributions to statistics programmes at universities in Bangladesh, his genuine concern for statistical education in Bangladesh, his willingness to give the Bangladeshi students and faculty members opportunities to improve their careers, his dedication and devotion to the Bangladeshi community in the United States, and above all, for his profound love for his mother land. Bangladesh is indeed proud to have a great son like Professor Mir Masoom Ali.

[This article has been prepared with the facts which are available from sources listed in the following References Section and from the web site [www.cs.bsu.edu/homepages/ali/](http://www.cs.bsu.edu/homepages/ali/) of Professor Ali.]

## References

1. Ahmed, Shahid (2002). Dr. Mir Masoom Ali - Pride of Bangladesh (in Bengali), *Porshi*, New Jersey, USA, December 2002 Issue No. 8, page 27.
2. Azim, P. (2003), A Renowned Bengali: Dr. Mir Masoom Ali (in Bengali), *Chhutir Diney - A Special Supplement of Prothom Alo with feature article on Professor Ali with photo on front cover*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, February 1, 2003, pages 4-6.
3. Beard, Stephen, J. (Chief Reporter), (1997), MAN OF NUMBERS: Teacher of the Week - Mir Masoom Ali uses his abilities to serve governments, students and colleagues worldwide, *The Ball State Daily News*, page 10, April 18, 1997.
4. Hanif, M. (2004), *Pakistan Journal of Statistics*, Special Volume in the Honour of Professor Dr. Mir Masoom Ali.
5. Hofer, J. (2005), 2005 Midwest Biopharmaceutical Statistics Workshop (MBSW) - The Tradition Continues, *AMSTAT NEWS*, Issue # 337, pages 23-25.

6. Hossain, M.F. (2002), Professor Mir Masoom Ali: An International Scholar and An Inspiring Statistician, *Journal of Statistical Studies*, Special Volume in Honour of Professor Mir Masoom Ali, pages 1-7.
7. Kaes, S. (2003.), Mir Masoom Ali: A Tale of A Renowned Bengali (in Bengali), *Taroka Kagoj - A Special Supplement of Ajker Kagoj with feature article on Professor Ali with photo on front cover*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, March 2, 2003, pages 4-7.
8. Kaykobad, M. (2002), Professor Mir Masoom Ali (in Bengali), *Ajker Kagoj*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, November 3, 2002.
9. Sullivan, Eileen, Chief Reporter and Staff Reporters (2002), Governor, journal recognize Professor: Bangladesh native receives award for contributions to BSU (Chief Reporter). Journal celebrates statistics professor's 65th birthday (Staff Reporters), *Ball State Daily News*, pages 1-2, November 20, 2002.
10. Umbach, D. (2002), A Tribute to Mir Masoom Ali, *Journal of Statistical Studies*, Special Volume in Honour of Professor Mir Masoom Ali, pages 9-11.
11. *Weekly Probashi*, (1991), Dr. Masoom Ali receives Qazi Motahar Husain Gold Medal, New York, USA, page 10, March 22, 1991.