

“Rathinda”

Translated from a write-up in Bengali by Dr Sankar Sen, published in “Basudhara”, 24th June. 2007 edition.

Rathinda studied at BE College in Shibpur from 1943 to 1947. He was one year senior to me. You can understand, we were young at that time. We had completed Intermediate of Science (equivalent of Higher Secondary at present), before joining college. I got introduced to Rathinda soon after joining Shibpur. The British were in power during this period and rules were very strict. We had to pay fines for bunking classes or staying overnight without information. There was an institute which was called "Students' Institute" where there was a library. This library was run by a few students on a rotation basis, annually. My acquaintance with Rathinda took place in this library, when he was in charge, along with two other students. He had a magnetic personality and I do not know whether you will feel this or not, at that young age, I felt I was introduced to someone very dear to me.

Rathinda spoke very little. It is difficult to describe him. He was like a calm and unperturbed sea. One striking quality which I observed in him was his ability to love everyone. The three years we spent together in college, we had bonded extremely well. He passed out in 1947, a year ahead of me.

There were two hostels in our college and the students perennially fought among themselves. But Rathinda was always found in his room, reading a book. He used to live in a 'Slater' room which had eight seats. At that age, we used to read story books or poetry. But Rathinda would read essays, literary compositions, religious discourses, etc. Once he asked me, "Have you seen this book? It is Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita. Get this issued from the library. There are several volumes - one volume is missing. You will find very interesting stories here." I had heard of the book but had never seen it. This was Rathinda, who could present very difficult things in a simple way to us.

I can recollect so many things. Everyone knows about his sincerity and honesty. To me, his greatest quality was compassion. Once I met with an accident in college. Rathinda was in the Civil Engineering Department and I was in the Electrical Department. Somehow, he got the news and rushed me to a hospital in Howrah in an Austin car, along with another professor. Rathinda wanted to put a pillow at my back to reduce the impact of jerks while coming back from the hospital. But unfortunately, the doctor did not allow this as it was not permitted to carry a hospital pillow outside the premises. I got the news that the very next day, Rathinda had lodged a complaint with the Principal Mr C.V. Miller and requested him to take action. Mr Miller was the Head of the Electrical Department and a serious kind of a person. When I asked Rathinda about the incident, he said he was quite friendly with Mr Miller! I wondered how Rathinda had made this possible.

Another incident - once we had boycotted classes in BE College on 26th January, following the instructions of our seniors. You will realise, the atmosphere was a little tense after the movement of 1942. Rathinda had joined in 1943 and I had joined in 1944. Our scholarship amount was deducted for that day. Our classes were held from 7 am to 11 am and again from 12.30 pm to 3.30 pm. The fine amount for these seven hours was Rs 2. Rathinda took the leadership role in our support and went to protest against this action, along with a few others. This was Rathinda, a man of courage, with a magnetic personality.

After passing out from BE College, Rathinda joined DVC. I met him at "Development Consultants" when he was there. Thereafter, I didn't have many opportunities to meet him.

During my tenure at Jadavpur University, I received an invitation from Joyadi to be present on the occasion of putting up Sri Aurobindo's plaque at Bowbazar. There I met Rathinda after almost 40 years. I had not recognised him. But Rathinda hugged me, held my hands and said, " Can you not recognise me?" I told him, "Rathinda, sometimes I wonder, why you did not take up the teaching profession. You have so much compassion and calmness - students would have benefitted." He replied with a smile, "It is too late, dear!" This was Rathinda. There I observed Joyadi actively organising the programme, paying attention to each and every detail. But Rathinda stood calmly in the background, as a solid but silent support.

As I got closely associated with Lakshmi's House, I observed Rathinda more closely. He would never approach anybody, neither would he crave for recognition, but he would always be there silently, for any kind of support. He was an amazing person - I have never seen him lose his temper - Sadhan Babu (Dutt) will confirm whether he ever got angry. He was extremely meticulous in his work and conscious about time management. He was strict about punctuality, meeting deadlines, qualities that were rare in those days and even now.

I feel very sad when I think of Rathinda. At the age of 16 or 17 when I had joined Shibpur, I had found him as a very close friend and senior. Later when I started coming to Lakshmi's House, I observed the same Rathinda - always in the background, quiet, not bothered about accolades. I had once asked Rathinda whether the poet had written the following lines after observing him, " I should not publicise myself in my own work" Rathinda told me affectionately that I was joking. This was Rathinda.

I would like to join you all in expressing my respect and best regards for Rathinda. Once again let me tell you, as a teenager, for the first time when I went to a hostel after joining college, I found Rathinda as one of my very good friends and I will remain grateful to him forever.