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I was born at **Tara**, a little village on the bank of the **Kaliganga**, about 64 km. west of Dhaka, the capital of [Bangladesh](#) (then East Pakistan) on December 25, 1964 (due to some mistakes at the primary school in all my documents including passport my date of birth appears to be January 2, 1964). My father **Brindaban Ch Saha** was a businessman and was highly respected in our area (Manikgonj subdivision - now district) for his honesty. My mother **Santi Rani Saha** was a house-wife. I was the youngest of seven brothers and a sister. I don't remember much about pre-liberation period. I remember, in early '69, most probably in January, I first went to Tara Primary School. The Head Master, Mr. Haran Sutradhar then came to our house as a private tutor (it is common practice in Bangladesh). Sometimes I also sat with my brothers and sister. We used to sit on a mat that was put on the veranda of Barda's house. It was a very lovely place, especially in the winter morning with the Sun heating it from dawn to dusk. There was a rose in front of it. For some reason that I can't remember now, some one of my brothers rebuked me. I was the youngest and beloved one in the family, so took it seriously and threw a piece of dried cow dung at him (In our country, mainly in the villages cow dung is highly rated. We had then some 30 cows, most of them bulls for ploughing purposes. The major part of cow dung goes for fertilizer, some are dried as small pieces sometimes with jute-stick and used as fuel together with wood. People also wash their back-yard using a mixture of water and cow dung). Okay I missed the goal and it fell on the glasses of our head master. He just told me what would happen if he got his glasses broken. All that occurred when he visited us last. In that first day at school I sat near Samad, who was some 5 to 10 years older than me (as far as I know he was in class one before me and he was still there when I left the school in 1974). As usual Samad could not answer to the question and our Head Master beat him with a stick. I was extremely shocked, remembered everything I had done just the previous day and ran home. I came back to the school only next year, in 1970. I remember in 1969 we went to India. For the first time in my life I saw a military man from Panjab who argued my mother to leave all gold at the border. In India we stayed with our grandfather. Though we visited our brothers, I remember only about my visit to Bokharo steel city to my eldest brother. I can't recall if I met Swapan da (though I am sure we did it certainly) then. From Hindmotor, where we stayed, we went to Puri (my mother used to visit temples all over India, every

year she went to India for three months and made bus trips from temple to temple). I was very arrogant and wanted Kali uncle, the neighbour of my grand-father, took me to the station. He ran a shop at the station and could not come in time. As a result we missed the train and took the next one. The train we missed went off the track, a large number of people died in that accident. On our way to Puri we went by that terrible site. In 1970 I went to school. Soon my elder brother married. Actually the gossip of wedding was in the air for long. Though I visited my uncle at Mirzapure many times, this time was a special one. For some reason unknown to me our guardians did not make the trip. So the wedding party was headed by Borda, the eldest among the brothers and cousins. Then we had to go there via Dhaka, the new road through Navinagar began to work only after liberation. I remember the rail crossing. Within a month after wedding decoits (robbers) attacked our house. I remember we locked at the house putting sacks full of rice near the door. Our uncle was alone fighting with the decoits throwing at then N numbers of woods and pieces of broken plates. Another uncle was terribly beaten by the decoits. At one stage when mother opened the window to see if they left someone hit her on the face. It was the second time she was hurt by the decoits. As I was told our house came under attack when I was just six months old. As they tried to snub my father my mother stood in front and got her chin cut. During that episode someone covered me with cloths, poured kerosine and wanted to burn. It was my brother Swapanda came forward and saved my life. After that he got so afraid that he left Bangladesh forever. He is now a doctor living in Kolkata. He also had to pass through fire and water. For involvement with Naxal (Maoist) movement he spent many years in jail, tried to suicide and ultimately came out of jail. He is now a successful doctor with two daughters. After that episode I found it hard to get asleep. Every time I closed my eyes, I found dark sky full of stars falling down and from the horizon coming the decoits dressed in red with big red dots on their forehead. Then the infamous cyclone rushed over East Pakistan. A motor race was organized to help those suffered. It was a long race, may be Tehran-Dhaka. Since still there was no bridge on the Kaliganga, all the cars had to wait for the ferry. We all spent hole days near the road and looked at those marvellous cars running past. Then came '71. I remember we used to hoist black flag. To maintain general strike the daily market was shifted to another place. Ultimately war came. Though everybody was waiting for something unusual, nobody was ready for the war to come. It came as a bolt from the blue. I remember my father was then at

Narayanganj. He used to go there twice a week (Monday and Thursday) to buy cotton, which we (some twenty men overall worked at our house, some of them took care after land and cattle, others dyed white cotton yarn) sell after processing. I can't recall which day it was. One morning we saw people coming from Dhaka full of buses. Even I being a five years old chap supplied them with foods that elder persons in the village collected from the villagers. Our house was the center of it all. Women were busy with cooking, we were busy with supplying. After two or three days of expectation father came back. He came all the way on foot, through a number of unknown villages. He came with pains on his legs. I can still see me and my brothers massaging his legs. Next morning we left our house. I remember the fields yellow with mustard flowers. People, men and women, old and young, all running towards the west (they were mainly Hindu population of Tara, heading for the nearby Muslim village). At noon we came back. It was thanks to the boatmen who removed the ferries from northern bank of the Kaliganga that halted the pak army. On our way home I saw somebody (policeman) standing with a pipe gun on the market place and encouraging people to stay back. It simply gave us a little time to collect necessary goods and left the house for about a year. Only after nine months we came back. Our village, where more than half of the population were Hindus was looted by the rajakars (those who supported Pakistani Army). A few were killed. Many left the village for ever and settled in India. In that sense I had the taste of war, experience of loosing friends from the very childhood.

My first school was the Tara Primary School where I studied from 1970 to 1974. Though the school has long been shifted to another place, when I go back to those days, I found myself plying beneath those familiar Mango and Banyan trees at the back-yard of my old school. Then I moved to Baniajuri Union High School. It was about 1 km from our house and we had to go through paddy field. In 1997 when I went home for few days I found those fields totally missing. Now those fields become residential area. It gives a good idea about the population growth in Bangladesh. I passed SSC Examination from Baniajuri High School in first division (star, with 6 letters) in 1980. After that I got admission into Manikgonj Govt. Devendra College. Unlike primary and high school, college life was full of politics. In my school days my social activities were limited to club functions and other voluntary services as a member of **Tara Progoti Shangha**. Now, being a college student, influenced by brother Tapan Saha and Comrade Azaharul Islam Arzu, I got involved in student politics and became a member of Bangladesh Stu-

dent Union, student wing of the Communist Party of Bangladesh. Though after the fall of Soviet Union most of my comrades reviewed their political stand, still now I remember them with admiration. Only recently I came to know that one of them, Latiful Alam Siddiki died few years back. We were all young then and wanted to change the world. Well, now, when I look back and try to understand, I see only love for people (poor people) that motivated us to become communists. In 1982 I passed the HSC Examination in first division (2 letters, physics and mathematics) and got admission into Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) as a civil engineering student. But due to political situation (student movement against military ruler Ershad) BUET was closed until late-July, 1983. During this time I actively took part in children movement (Khelaghar), since all political activities including student politics was banned and organized **Hizal Khelaghar Asar** in our village. My BUET life was short. On September 5, 1983 I came to Moscow to continue my study in the Partice Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University also as a civil engineering student. Though, during those days I supported student politics, but now I think it is harmful for Bangladesh. Certainly we need our students to be politically conscious, but they way they give them handled by the political parties do no good either to them or to the country. During the colonial era they really played a wonderful role, but now they should look forward and prepare themselves as one who really can contribute to build a better Bangladesh. I hope our political parties, mainly BNP and AL, will show enough maturity and wisdom to root out politics from the campuses.

My student life in Moscow was full of social activities. I remember how deeply I was involved in *Zemlyachestvo* or Organization of Bangladeshi Students (OBS) in the USSR. When I was made the education secretary of the PFU branch of the OBS, I took it too seriously. I was clear cut. I believed, once we come to the USSR, our main duty should study and get well education. I did not understand, how someone can fail or miss the classes. I even hung the list of everyone with their results and attendance. Many were against, but I was arrogant as well. It was all due to my faith in Communism. Many of us really believed in it and we did it as faithful believes in God. Now, when I look back, I find it ridiculous. Many unnecessary problems with fellow students that could be avoided with a little flexibility, arose in the long run.

Many in Russia believe that had Gorbachev followed Chinese way, the country would prosper as China. I think it is not the case. First, because

of Soviet Union the West, mainly USA, needed China as partner and did enough for what China is now. Hardly America would help USSR to become an economically strong country. Without that help it was impossible for China (and the USSR) to become an economic power. So those who believe in Chinese path in my view are living in a world of dream.

Here we often hear about freedom of press, freedom to speak. But the way people do it is not convincing one. People who think them liberal often appeals to Western leader for help. When some high profile politician from America visit Russia, them try to get support from them in the struggle for democracy. Can we imagine an European politician or social worker seeking help from Bush, or say, Michael Moore seeking help from any world leader in his struggle against Bush. In this sense Russia and Bangladesh have a few things common.