

Mir Masoom Ali: A Distinguished and Dedicated Statistician Who Never Gets Old – Even at Seventy-Five

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I first met Distinguished Professor Dr. Mir Masoom Ali at the International Conference on Mathematics and Statistics held in Athens, Greece in 2007. He was there as an invited speaker and he also chaired my session.



Professor Ali chairing my session, Athens, Greece, 2007

After my session we had a chance to chat on our way to the restaurant where the banquet was held. Even though it was the first time we had met, he was very kind to me. He was there with his wife Firoza (Leena) Ali. They looked great together. Family is the most important part of our lives. It was immediately apparent to me that Professor Ali, apart from being an outstanding statistician and a great teacher, is also a dedicated husband, father and grandfather. We have always kept in touch since our first meeting. I am very lucky to have had a chance to recently collaborate with him in a research paper. It is also a great honor for me to have been asked to serve as a guest editor for this special issue and to be able to be part of this undertaking to celebrate Dr. Ali's 75th birthday anniversary. To some people, age is only an indicator of the year they were born but inside they feel much younger. Professor Ali is one such person who not only looks very young both physically and emotionally for his age but who also has the personality and

mentality of a very active younger person. That is why I have chosen the title "Mir Masoom Ali: A Distinguished and Dedicated Statistician Who Never Gets Old - Even at Seventy-Five."

Professor Mir Masoom Ali was born on February 1, 1937 as the fourth child of an eminent lawyer Mir Muazzam Ali of Patuakhali, British India (presently Bangladesh) and Azifa Ali, a great advocate of women's education of her time. Since Dr. Ali grew up in a family full of respect and free from prejudice, he reflected those qualities to all people he came across during his life. After graduating from the Patuakhali Jubilee High English School in 1951, he received I.Sc. degree from Dhaka College in 1953. He then obtained B.Sc. (Honors) degree in 1956 and M.Sc. degree in 1957, both in Statistics from the University of Dhaka. While he was a student in the Department of Statistics at the University of Dhaka, he even had a rare chance of meeting Sir Ronald Aylmer Fisher in 1954.

**TEACHERS AND STUDENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS
DACCA UNIVERSITY
PHOTOGRAPHED WITH PROFESSOR SIR RONALD AYLMER FISHER Sc.D., F.R.S.
NOVEMBER 18, 1954**



*Sir R. A. Fisher seated on chair sixth from left
Professor Mir Masoom Ali seated on chair second from right*

After graduation, he served at a variety of positions in the erstwhile Government of Pakistan, including the Agricultural Census under the Ministry of Agriculture in Dhaka, Karachi, and Lahore, the Ministry of Commerce in Rawalpindi and the Central Public Service Commission in Karachi. But, if you are born to be an academician, your destiny finally takes you there. This happened in 1966 for Professor Ali when he came to the University of Toronto for advanced graduate studies. At the University of Toronto, he completed his second M.Sc. degree in 1967 in Mathematical Statistics just in one year as was his first one from the University of Dhaka. After only two years, he then obtained his PhD degree in Mathematical Statistics at the University of Toronto. Completing a PhD program in just two years is not an easy task that an ordinary person can accomplish, especially with a wife and four children on top of that. Dr. Ali had married Firoza

(Leena) Ali in 1959 and he already had three children when he arrived in Toronto where they had their fourth child, their only son, during his course of study at Toronto. There is a saying that "Behind every successful man there is a woman." Leena Ali is that great lady whose encouragement and sacrifice paved the way to Professor Ali's distinguished career.

It was Dr. Ali's destiny which prompted a surprise call from Ball State University in 1969 offering him a position as Assistant Professor to teach Statistics. This was the beginning of a long career that brought much recognition for his great contributions as an academician, scholar, teacher and researcher. After hesitating for a while but finally accepting the offer, he joined Ball State University in 1969 and then founded the graduate program in Statistics in 1971 and later on the undergraduate programs in Statistics. Dr. Ali was promoted to Associated Professorship in 1974 and after four years he became a full professor in 1978. In 2000, he was named George and Frances Ball Distinguished Professor of Statistics and Professor of Mathematical Sciences. This honor was given to him for his outstanding contributions to the university, to the profession and to his students as well as for his international reputation in the field of Statistics. At the time of his retirement in 2007, Dr. Ali was appointed George and Frances Ball Distinguished Professor of Statistics Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Mathematical Sciences by the Ball State University Board of Trustees.



Dhaka University Statistics Department, after Dr. Ali's Lecture, with few students and teachers, January 2012



Dr. Ali's retirement conference, with Madan Puri and Ali Hadi, Ball State University, 2007

These are not the only honors Professor Ali received from his university. He also received the *Outstanding Researcher Award* in 1984, the *Outstanding Faculty Award* in 1992, the 20-years, 25-years, 30-years and 35-years *Service Recognitions Awards* in 1989, 1994, 1999, and 2004, respectively. In my opinion an academician should be very good in both teaching and research and Professor Ali perfectly combined both. Teaching has always been his love and his first priority. He has taught a wide variety of courses in both statistics and mathematics. His outstanding teaching and his respect for his students earned him *The Teacher of the Week Award* in 1997. He was awarded a Plaque for *Outstanding Dedication 1969-2007* by the Ball State Department of Mathematical Sciences in 2007.

Dr. Ali has also been recognized outside his university for his many contributions and achievements in the field of Statistics. He was the first recipient of the *Qazi Motahar Husain Gold Medal* of the Bangladesh Statistical Association in 1990. In 2005, he was awarded the *ISOSS Gold Medal* of the Islamic Society of Statistical Sciences. The

Bangladesh Community of Indiana (BCI) awarded Dr. Ali the *Outstanding Achievement Award* in 2007. In 2005 the Bangladeshi-American Foundation Incorporated (BAFI) presented him with the *Our Pride Award*, at a function in Washington, DC, where dignitaries from the US State Department and many prominent Bangladeshi Americans were present. By far, the most coveted award that Dr. Ali received is the *Sagamore of the Wabash Award*, the highest award given by the Governor of the State of Indiana, USA in 2002. Dr. Ali received the award from Governor Frank O'Bannon for his significant contributions to Ball State University, to higher education in the State of Indiana, and for his significant contributions in the field of Statistics.

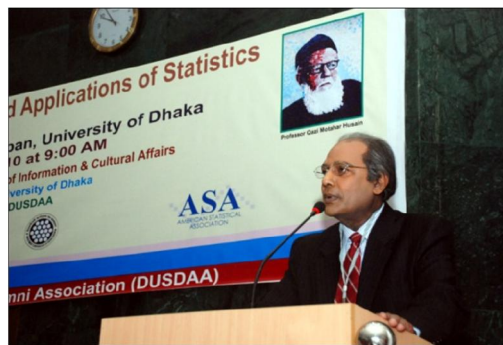
Professor Mir Masoom Ali is a Fellow of the American Statistical Association, the Royal Statistical Society, and the Institute of Statisticians. He is an elected Member of the International Statistical Institute. Dr. Ali is also an Expatriate Fellow of the Bangladesh Academy of Sciences. Dr. Ali is listed in various editions of *Who's in America*, *Who's Who in the World*, *Who's Who in Sciences*, *Who's Who in American Education*, *Who's Who in Science and Engineering*, *Who's Who of Asian Americans*, *Who's Who in the Midwest*, *Notable Americans*, *Men of Achievement*, *World Directory of Mathematicians*, and *Personalities of the West and Midwest*. In the past, the Journal of Statistical Studies (2002), the Pakistan Journal of Statistics (2004), and the International Journal of Statistical Sciences (2007) had published Special Volumes to honor Dr. Ali. The Pakistan Journal of Statistics and Operation Research is publishing this Special Volume in Dr. Ali's honor to commemorate his 75th birthday anniversary.

Professor Ali had a 50-year career as a practicing and teaching statistician when he finally retired in 2007. He was a very loyal faculty member at Ball State University for 38 years and he still is. He is a perfect example of an ideal teacher who maintained a true balance among the three major areas, namely, teaching, research, and professional service in which an academician is expected to be constantly engaged. He has been an outstanding teacher during his whole career. He was a very demanding but at the same time very friendly teacher and he was very popular with his students. He not only founded the graduate statistics program but he also spent lot of his time in recruiting students and faculty for the program. He was the director of the statistics program until his retirement. Many of his students are now well placed in academia and in industries.

Dr. Ali's early research was in finite sampling following the line of work of Paul S. Dwyer of the University of Michigan. Later, his research focused on order statistics and he made significant contributions to the area of estimation and testing based on optimal spacing. He also has publications in diverse areas of statistics; such as ranking and selection, multivariate statistics, characterization, mixtures of distributions, survival analysis, parametric estimation, and Bayesian inference. He has published over 180 papers and also over 225 reviews of articles. He has presented over 130 papers and chaired many technical sessions at statistical conferences and academic institutions all over the world.



Dr. Ali giving the Opening Ceremony Golden Jubilee Keynote Lecture, Rajshahi University Stat. Dept. Golden Jubilee Celebrations, 2011



Dr. Ali giving the Opening Ceremony Keynote Lecture at the International Conference on Theory and Applications of Statistics, Dhaka University, 2010

Dr. Ali held many important positions on his university and department committees including serving two terms on the University Senate. Besides, he served two terms as President of the Central Indiana Chapter of the American Statistical Association (ASA) and also served on the ASA national committees. He organized several conferences and is a co-founder of the Midwest Biopharmaceutical Statistics Workshop which has been held on Ball State campus annually since 1978 for 35 consecutive years. The workshop is co-sponsored by the ASA. Dr. Ali has served as editor/associate editor of many international journals and has reviewed papers for many national and international statistical journals. Professor Ali has personally helped in building the careers of many statisticians from Egypt, Pakistan, South Korea, China, Bangladesh and several other countries from that part of the world. His contributions to his students, colleagues and research collaborators are noteworthy. Professor Ali is the Founding President of North America Bangladesh Statistical Association.

Dr. Ali has been a regular speaker at statistical meetings and universities in many countries such as U.S.A., Canada, Mexico, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Holland, Egypt, Sweden, France, Italy, Korea, Japan, Morocco, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Portugal, Australia, and Greece. During almost all these trips his wife always accompanied him. They are still very young at heart and still travel a lot every year. Professor Ali was also a visiting professor at universities and institutes in USA, Canada, India, Japan, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea. Wherever he went, people liked him very much for his friendliness and approachability. His international travels exposed him to many diverse cultures and allowed him to have a better perspective of the world and as such as a teacher at Ball State he could relate to all his students of diverse backgrounds and he was loved by his students of all races, colors, gender, and religious practices.



Dr. Ali and Mrs. Leena Ali, Madrid, Spain, 2010



Dr. Ali and Mrs. Leena Ali, Vatican, Rome, 1993

Dr. Ali is a great connoisseur of songs and music. In his free time he loves to sing and at home he relaxes by spending few hours a week singing and practicing Bangla (Bengali) songs. He regularly performs at Bangladeshi cultural functions in the State of Indiana.



Dr. Ali singing at a Bangladeshi cultural function in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA



Dr. Ali dancing in Funchal, Madeira, Portugal at the 23rd European Statistical Meeting, 2001

Dr. Ali retired in 2007 from Ball State University. The Department of Mathematical Sciences organized in his honor a two-day international statistics conference on campus. Many prominent statisticians presented invited papers and the department presented Dr. Ali with a copy of the *Festschrift* at the banquet ceremony. Two of his colleagues wrote a song to honor him and sung at the banquet. The lyrics are on the last page. It shows in how high esteem Professor Ali was regarded by his fellow colleagues. Since his retirement in 2007, Dr. Ali has already published over 25 papers and spoke at several universities overseas.

It is this passion for hard work, songs and music, world travel, and enjoyment of ordinary life that keeps Dr. Ali so young and going. He is a great source of inspiration to many of us. We deeply value his friendship and he is a true and living example of “giving without expecting anything in return.” All of us have enriched our lives by crossing his path. We like to see him as active and as productive for many more years as he is now.

Dr. Ali – continue to do what you do best! Enjoy life and good luck with your future!



Reflecting back on his long life – Dr. Ali in a café in San Sebastian, Spain, 2010

“MIR Ali” – Song Sung at Dr. Ali’s Retirement Banquet, 2007

*Make way for Mir Ali
Say hey, it's Mir Ali
Hey, clear the way in the old
classroom!
Hey, let him through,
This is Mir Masoom Ali
Be the first on your block
To catch his eye!
Make way, here he comes!
Ring the bells, bang the drums!
Are you gonna love this guy!
Mir Ali, fabulous he!
Prince of professors
Genuflect,

Show some respect,
Down on one knee!
His intellect is so keen;
Four sigma over the mean.
His arguments are so clean!
That's Mir Ali!
He's got dozens and dozens of
papers;
Of the Wabash,
He is Sagamore*

*Read his vita,
And you'll get the vapors!
Has he got a few?
I'm telling you,
It's a world class biography!
Mir Ali, mighty is he!
Prince of statistics,
Smart as ten regular men,
Definitely!
He's worked with "goodness of
fit"
And made a study of it.
How good a fit can you get?
Ask Mir Ali!
He's worked with Weibull's
famed distribution,
And the gamma of Becker and
Roux.
He has been at the same
institution,
Since sixty-nine.
That is a sign,
He's brimming with loyalty!
Our Mir Ali.*

[This article is partially based on information from Professor Ali's Website, his Wikipedia page, from articles about him in previous Special Volumes published in his honor in other statistical journals, and his retirement Festschrift.]