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## [Rubana Huq](#)

# The Professor vs. the Parliament?

June 5, 2012



We are an impatient nation; almost too eager to speak, eager to bash, eager to side with or oppose, eager on shoe slinging and of course eager on hyper-speculation. So, when it comes to a public platform, many of us get carried away and do what we ought to do the least: vent.

On the 2nd of June 2012, a Professor vented and on the 3rd of June 2012, a few members of the parliament vehemently reacted. Both the outbursts were uncalled for and unhealthy for a democracy that is struggling to come on course after many years...

On the 2nd of June 2012, it was just another scene from the newsroom of a television channel. There was nothing special about the manner that the news was broadcast; there was nothing really that evoked any reaction other than "Oh, sir!"

I saw Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed participating in Transparency International of Bangladesh's two-day long national convention of the Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCC) and Youth Engagement and Support (YES) which focused on combined efforts of the government, political leaders, civil society and all to strengthen anti-corruption movement for establishing "dreams of independence, democracy, good governance and human rights." (Source: TIB website).

On the 3rd of June 2012, it was a scene from the parliament with a few members referring to Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed's remarks in that convention as "contempt of parliament and democracy." (Source: Bangladesh news 24 hours).

Prof Md Ali Ashraf, who was presiding over the sitting was of the opinion that the Parliament should summon Professor Sayeed and have him stand in the House and demand an unconditional apology. Prof Ashraf also shared that he anticipated an ominous turn in democracy if no action was taken against the educator. His suggestions also included submission of a notice to bring a censure motion against Sayeed. Prof Ashraf, most possibly was referring to a report of a newspaper which is published daily by a corporate house with which Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed has had multiple head on collisions with in the past on issues of environment and land grabbing. Mr. Fazlul Azim also raised a point of order and stated that Prof Sayeed had "undermined the lawmakers' dignity and the sovereignty of parliament". Mr. Mujib-ul-Haque Chunnu, a JP lawmaker followed the same tune and finally AL lawmaker Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim came down heavily on the Professor. He raised a number of questions:

1. "Intellectuals like him [Prof Sayeed] give certificates to lawmakers, ministers and the government. But who will give them certificates?"
2. "They bring a lot of money but on whom do they spend that?"
3. How can TIB officials and all associated with TIB lead posh lives?

Now, what was it exactly that Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed had said?

In the convention, the educator had specifically said that ministers and lawmakers take oaths for not doing corruption. He also referred to the thieves and the robbers having no “neeti”, therefore the question of them engaging in “durmeeti” did not arise. But yes, if the lawmakers and police end up being violaters, then that would be considered “durmeeti”. Abdullah Abu Sayeed had also said that the “Law enforcing agencies’ which had violated their ideals in recent times should be punished heavily, adding that the government had failed to control the police and that the government was weaker than the police.

He had also said, “The state machinery in Bangladesh indulges in plunder and rights violation, abusing both pen and weapon.” He further added a suggestion for the law enforcers who violated the law would have to be punished “five times higher than that in the case of an ordinary citizen.”(Source: The Daily Star, June 03 2012)

I have quoted sources in almost every paragraph of this article as a new fear has set in. If newspapers are to be read and quoted in the parliament, then we have every reason to assume that all columnists, journalists, intellectuals, educators, thinkers should put on their crash helmet and take a decision to take a leap of faith and jump off the mountain of Free Speech, looking for a safer place to land or crash into.

Now, in reality, beyond the glare of the camera, what was it that Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed believed that he has said?

According to sources close to him, he had categorically said that a daily Bangla newspaper had misreported what he had said at the TIB convention venue. He privately shared that not even for once had he uttered the word: Shangshod (MP). Therefore the question of him insulting the Parliament did not occur. When he actually spoke to his friends on the night of the 3rd, he sounded concerned about the misrepresentation of his statements as reported through the print media. He was hurt, stunned and completely taken aback by the whiplash he had suffered in the House.

Reality 1: Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed is an educator who started way back in 1978, with only Taka 35.00 in his pocket, enough to buy 10 books to form a reading circle. Thirty-four years later, Prof Sayeed has over 1 million members in Biswa Sahitya Kendro, spread over 1700 centers in 55 upazilas. “Alokito Manush Chai”: We want enlightened people: is the slogan that Sayeed promotes. I know not of one person who would deny the impact that BSK has had over young minds. I know not of one person who will argue the fact that Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed is a modest man, who is yet to own a property. The last and only gain has been through a recently inherited plot of 5 kathas shared by 13 of his siblings, in which he will eventually manage to get one tiny flat. I know not of one person who can call Abdullah Abu Sayeed “a thief”, “a robber” or a violator of social justice. To the best of my knowledge, he owns a modest car, which is mostly driven by him with the driver sitting by his side, as he fears increase in operational costs will occur lest his driver misuses the car.

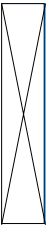
Reality 2: Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed **did** point his fingers at governance, indicating clearly that law enforcing agencies were to be blamed for various lapses and abuses that had occurred in recent times. Sitting in Bangladesh, he could not have spoken of any other government, any other political parties which consist of elected lawmakers or any other system of corruption. He was referring to this land of ours for sure. What he was doing was simply venting his frustrations out and sharing it in public. Unfortunately, Professor Sayeed had underestimated the gravity of his statements. An educator who was always known for his lecture on “Haimanti” in Dhaka College, an idealist who had always stood by issues of rights, justice and environment, he perhaps, for a moment, forgot that electronic and print media wait to gulp news down with the bitterest pill, and that breaking news matters much more than reporting what is right for the time. At the same time, Professor Sayeed should have had thought thrice before uttering such statements, phrased in the most casual manner, devoid of cautious phrasing. He should have known that real Professors mesmerize students and create generations of followers. Therefore, he ought not have shared his perceptions in such a carefree manner and he should have known better to stay out of the quicksand of political analysis. Politics is not his land, by any means. Education is.

Reality 3: The lawmakers in the House perhaps, could have reacted to Professor Sayeed’s statements by being a little more tempered and could have asked for the recording of the TIB session instead of relying heavily on the Bangla daily which ran the headline in a provocative manner. The honourable lawmakers could also have shown some restraint instead of asking Professor Sayeed to apologise outright before the House. The lawmakers should have also thought thrice before raising questions on Professor Sayeed’s “posh” lifestyle and riches.

Reality 4: A fear is building up within our system; a fear of speaking up openly in public; a fear of being callous with our statements; a fear of not being politically correct and above all, a fear to critique.

At the same time, another fear is also stealthily settling into our social psyche: the fear of our intellectuals like Professor Sayeed straggling without considering consequence, and the fear of the powerful coming down on them, with the strongest hammer possible, waiting to crash the credibility that educators like Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed have taken a lifetime to create.

States ought to nurture intellects instead of shunning them. Figures like Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed are hard to come by. Therefore, bringing a censure motion in the



House or harping on demands of apology from the Professor may scare many.

It is after all, difficult and painful to watch mentors put their palms together and seek apology while it is equally disheartening to watch lawmakers' outbursts dominating the parliament with the honourable Prime Minister almost nodding her head in approval.

After all, neither Fear, nor Aggression is a healthy indicator of democracy.

[Rubana Huq](#) is a poet, researcher, columnist and an entrepreneur.

Tags: [AL](#), [Bangladesh](#), [media](#), [parliament](#), [Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed](#)



This entry was posted on June 5, 2012 at 5:50 pm and is filed under [Democracy](#), [Politics](#), [media](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed.

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## 25 Responses to “ The Professor vs. the Parliament? ”



Dr. Mahbub Jamal, Maryland, USA on June 9, 2012 at 10:25 pm

I had not read this informative article. Thanks for sending me the URL. Yet sadly, if we are to believe what Ms. Huq said, she will quite likely be their next target. You know what, it was just a couple of days ago that I read something about the House getting all-agitated over “seditious” comments by a “professor.” Didn't know then that it was Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed. Yes, I remember him and his fun-lectures and commentaries on literature as well as topical issues. Probably the only Dhaka College professor I remember with such fondness. He doesn't seem to have changed much, both in terms of his being a social critic, or the way he looks (not aged at all, unless it was an earlier photo). And his dress...exactly the same! In my book that is what I'd call commitment/courage/simplicity/etc. I'm sure, given the change the country has gone during its short life, he could have easily joined some govt., made a bunch of money and lived “happily ever after.” But since he is special, not like one of us, he has made sacrifices that we couldn't even imagine or deal with. Just don't know why our short-sighted and totally ignorant politicians cannot handle the truth. Or, real achievement (which excludes climbing some damn mountain that hundreds have already done). Professor Yunus knows that too well, doesn't he? Take care and ignore the arduous path of true greatness.

Note: The above email is from one of the highly respected Professor's students at Dhaka College (year 1969), written to his Dhaka College buddy. Dr. Jamal is teaching in Maryland, USA.

Like or Dislike: 1 0

[Reply](#)



Akhlak Ahmed Rubab on June 7, 2012 at 1:13 pm

I don't like the author's “Reality 3” para where she requested the Professor not to say anything about politics. But as a concern citizen of Bangladesh any people I will emphasize any people have the right to criticize the lawmaker. It's our right isn't it? I appreciate the writer's unbiased way of writing though.

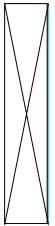
Like or Dislike: 1 0

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Fuad Hasan on June 7, 2012 at 8:49 am

So many comments! So many plaudits! “Good piece of writing”, “Well written” ...I wish to join them keeping a bit reservation. I can find out the amount of caution taken by the writer while writing this article. To my opinion it's a well discussed but canopied with fear. The writer is afraid of being humiliated by those blubbers. It makes me surprised to think how long we will go on with this situation? Why those elected self-protected fail to understand the reality? I would be happy if Professor Sayeed really said what is said to be misrepresented in the newspaper or. If the Professor said publicly that “I didn't exactly said that but I should have said that then”. Dear professor you could



leave an example for us by saying so. Those oppressors will always try to throttle the freedom of speech but not for long. Truth must be revealed and we must march forward and those oppressors be thrown to the dustbin.



Like or Dislike:  2  0

[Reply](#)



Dr.Kishaloy Sur on June 6, 2012 at 9:02 pm

Very nice discussion indeed. Exposes weakness of democracy in Bangladesh. To my knowledge Prof Sayeed is a role model, one of the most honest persons that Bangladesh should be proud of. Leading a very simple lifestyle, with few personal possession. MPs at parliament used obscene words & demanded apology without knowing what he actually said.To my opinion it is now the MPs turn to seek apology to Prof.Abdullah Abu Sayeed!



Like or Dislike:  2  1

[Reply](#)



[Asraful Forhad Chowdhury](#) on June 6, 2012 at 8:23 pm

A good analysis to go through. Thanks to the writer for her unbiased and analytical writing .



Like or Dislike:  0  1

[Reply](#)



Mr. Bystander on June 6, 2012 at 3:26 pm

By humiliating this intellectual, govt acts like a fascist. Mr. Ashraf should say “sorry” and the Parliament should take an action to expunge the opinion of that outrageous critique.

Like or Dislike:  1  0

[Reply](#)



Quazi on June 6, 2012 at 3:07 pm

Loved this unbiased analysis. I got here what I needed to know and now it's much easier to form my own opinion on the issue: I thought I was living in a democratic country but now I am sacred of the government!

Like or Dislike:  1  0



[Reply](#)



Shams Reza on June 6, 2012 at 3:00 pm

We live in a country where a person is encouraged to earn black money and where people who speak out against corruption are in fear of being charged for treason.

It's totally upside down.



Like or Dislike:  2  0

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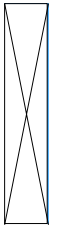


Boby on June 6, 2012 at 1:48 pm

Ms.Rubana you are 100% right. We need to learn how to honour a gentleman like Prof. A. A. Sayeed.



Like or Dislike:  2  0

[Reply](#)




[M.Mozammel](#) on June 6, 2012 at 12:56 pm



They are two professors one is working with the public to search talents and another got the mandate for only five years to speak in a national gathering where decisions are made for the betterment of the state.  
Now the recent development of remarks battle gives us this view that one professor cannot match the other one.  
And I ok you not-mental faculty prevailed up and gave rise to the confusion nationwide.  
The best way would be denial of the self for bigger interest and tolerance and forgiveness and discussion on the personal level on the tea table. If it was done the two professors could become assets for this nation. God bless. Amen

Like or Dislike:  0  1


[Reply](#)

 Syed Imtiaz Ali on June 6, 2012 at 10:37 am



“After all, neither Fear, nor Aggression is a healthy indicator of democracy.”  
I think, like myself, many are in tune with the statement made by Ms. Rubana above.  
May respect for the deserving people reinstated.

Like or Dislike:  0  0


[Reply](#)

 Akhtar Shah on June 6, 2012 at 10:36 am



Raw nerves have been caught here! You are quite right! Be careful who and what you write/speak about(subsequently embellished or not). There is freedom of speech about!

Like or Dislike:  0  0


[Reply](#)

 sakhawat on June 6, 2012 at 5:49 am



It is like the story of a fox, a tiger and a banyan tree.

Like or Dislike:  0  0


[Reply](#)

 [Wasi Ahmed](#) on June 6, 2012 at 2:16 am



From what one can sense following the reactions outside the parliament is an indication, and quite a positive one that, there is still a trickle of fresh blood in the rotting culture we nurture. For the lawmakers who vented their anger to the point of almost flinching Sayeed Sir had an opportunity offered to have him around, it was a lesson to learn that try as they might, they are yet short of the strength to molest human dignity that education confers on the human kind.

Like or Dislike:  1  0


[Reply](#)

 [Kazi Saifuddin Hossain](#) on June 5, 2012 at 11:30 pm

Nice analytical write-up. In my view, the professor is an elderly and respected person of the society. He is an honest man and practises what he professes. It is quite natural for a personality like him to speak up against corruption. Members of the parliament, on the other hand, should not be involved in such vitriol directed at high-profile persons of the civil society. They should take it as constructive criticism instead. Believe me, it would benefit them immensely.



Like or Dislike:  0  0

[Reply](#)

 Golam Arshad on June 5, 2012 at 10:53 pm



Rubana: I salute you for your staunch discreet and brilliant write up, to protect, defend the honor and dignity of Professor Abu Sayeed. Our Public Representatives totally tarnished the image of Parliament. The Honorable Speaker must issue a censure notice and warrant those members of Parliament to tender an unconditional apology to the distinguished Professor.

Like or Dislike:  1  0



[Reply](#)



Ali on June 6, 2012 at 4:38 pm

Indeed, he is a distinguished professor and promoter of education, who has created many beautiful minds.

Soon persons like them will be a total rarity!



Like or Dislike:  1  0

[Reply](#)



[Mozahad](#) on June 5, 2012 at 8:20 pm

Well written.



Like or Dislike:  0  0

[Reply](#)



M H Enayet on June 5, 2012 at 7:33 pm

In our country we have forgotten how to honor anyone unless the persons come from own political group. We have forgotten to allow people to say anything against corruption. We have forgotten to allow freedom of speech. It's a recent invention how to harass intellectuals so that they do not attend meetings/seminars and do not say anything against corruption. It's a threat that speakers should avoid criticising those who they voted to power to run the country democratically.

Well-loved. Like or Dislike:  4  0



[Reply](#)



zaman on June 6, 2012 at 12:15 am

One thing I do not understand why MPs act like a dictator and not allow freedom of speech. If MPs claim that we have democracy in Bangladesh why the MPs are so scared of people's opinion and criticism?

People have rights to give their opinions and criticise if something not right, this is called democracy. Put your hand on your heart and ask yourself these questions whether you have been honest in your duties, if you are, than you do not have to react this way. Be transparent in all your conduct and you will regain people's trust.



Like or Dislike:  0  1

[Reply](#)



Ezajur Rahman on June 6, 2012 at 4:14 pm

The reason is that in private they believe that the country belongs to them and not the common citizens.



Like or Dislike:  1  0

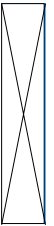
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Sam on June 5, 2012 at 7:09 pm

God created man but so very few are entitled to be called a "Real Man" and you MP's are not the one.


Like or Dislike:  1  0



[Reply](#)



faruk kader on June 5, 2012 at 7:08 pm

Probably our lawmakers didn't get what the Prof said and hence the confusion. Thank you Rubana Huq for this analytical piece.

Like or Dislike:  1  0[Reply](#)

Ezajur Rahman on June 5, 2012 at 6:11 pm

The Prime Minister did actually nod her ahead in approval and she was acknowledging comments made in her name. Fact.



Like or Dislike:  1  0[Reply](#)

Ezajur Rahman on June 5, 2012 at 6:08 pm

Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed should be the President of Bangladesh. Then we would have a President behind whom the whole nation could unite, a President not slavishly subservient to the Prime Minister, a President who would speak up for the people and the nation when needed – and a President from whom we could all learn something.

Instead, our glorious democracy requires him to kneel in Parliament before a host of self-centred lawmakers.

Ridiculous.









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