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KUMARKHALI, the headquarters of the thana administration in Kushtia district, is situated on the bank of the river Gorai — a river which was also a source of inspiration to the Nobel Prize winner, poet Rabindranath Tagore. The Gorai takes off from the Ganges (Padma) not far from Kushtia town and after flowing in a south-easterly direction it passes over the border into Faridpur district from Kumarkhali-Khoksa. Gorai in fact gave birth to two important distributaries viz, the Kaliganga and the Dakua.

Kumarkhali, which has had a chequered history of its own, was part of Pabna district till 1871. It became part of Nadia district in 1872. On the formation of the Goalundo sub-division of Faridpur district in 1891, Kumarkhali joined with Kushtia sub-division.

The Kumarkhali Municipality, which was set up in 1869, presently covers an area of about 6.61 square miles. It is one of the oldest municipalities in Bangladesh. It was established with six government nominated Commissioners. Since elective system was introduced in 1884, 10 out of 15 Commissioners were used to be elected till partition of British India.

Immediately after the imposition of Martial Law in 1958 the municipality was converted into a town committee. Following independence of Bangladesh the municipality regained its status.

Kumarkhali was a big commercial centre during the rule of East India Company. A commercial resident stationed here carried out largescale business in silk. It was a sub-divisional headquarters of Pabna district when business was at its peak. It had a Munsiff's Court, subordinate to Pabna District Judge's Court. Following its transfer from Pabna district the Munsiff Court ceased to exist at Kumarkhali. A big Christian graveyard near the railway station indicates that a sizeable number of Britishers used to live at Kumarkhali. The cemetery dates back to 1790. The movement against indigo planters in 1859-60 had its origin in Kumarkhali.

Kumarkhali also became an important commercial centre after partition of British India particularly for weekly Saturday bazar. Kumarkhali is visited every weekend by businessmen from all over Bangladesh to buy handloom products — lungis, saris, genjis (T-shirt), chadars (bed sheet) and cotton yarn. Kumarkhali is inhabited by large number of weavers. As a result of their expertise and knowledge about weaving and dyeing, the town gradually became an important centre of hand and electric loom industries. Now their products are not only confined to local market but also reach other markets including the capital.

Before the arrival of East India Company quite a number of Buddhist monks had been living in Kumarkhali. Two Pagodas, one demolished and the other on the verge of demolition, remind of the presence of Buddhist monks in the seventeenth century. There is a scope for further research on this.

Notable Saints

Hazrat Shah Mulk Khorshed Faquir, a great Muslim saint, lived at Khorshedpur, a village under Kumarkhali thana. The village Khorshedpur derived its name from the saint's. There is a shrine of Khorshed Faquir at the village which was made pucca by no less a person than world famous poet Rabindranath Tagore in 1908. Surendranath Tagore encircled the mazar in 1923. Possibly the saint came to Khorshedpur during the reign of Palas.

There is a saying that while the saint was on a boat to cross the river, the boatman as usual asked the saint to make payment for the ferry. The saint said that he did not have money for payment as he was a poor man. While the boatman was insisting for payment the saint landed in the river and miraculously on an island to the amazement of the boatman and other passengers. Since then Hazrat Shah Mulk Khorshed Faquir had spent the rest of his life there.

Dwijata Sannyasi of Batikamara, Kumarkhali, was a holy saint of supernatural power whose ashram is still preserved in that village. However, the condition of the ashram is not good.

Sonabandhu Faquir of Kumarkhali was another holy saint whose mazar is located near the local bazar. Apparently there is no record to ascertain the date of his birth. It is learnt that Sonabandhu is a title conferred on the Faquir

People and Places

Kumarkhali: Luminaries of Glorious Past

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

because of his preaching for unity and brotherhood among the Muslims and Hindus. According to one story, he was Hindu by birth but accepted Islam as religion and achieved divine power while he was in meditation in the ashram at Batikamara. Renowned writer Harinath Majumder is reported

"Bangabashi" and in April same year he became assistant editor of weekly "Basumat" which turned out to be a daily from Calcutta at a later date. He was also associated with "Sandhya", "Hitobadi" and "Sulov Samachar". In 1914 he took over

thana, wrote essays and made speeches which earned popularity in Europe.

Khondakar Muhammad Ashraf Islam, who was born in 1883 at Baniakhandi village in Kumarkhali was a novelist and his illustrious daughter Zoheda Khayam, born in 1920 at the same village, excelled in writing novels and plays.

was Jatindranath Mukhopadhyaya, popularly known as Bagha Jatin, who was born in 1883 at Kaya, Kumarkhali. Following the failure of Alipore Conspiracy Case, Jugantar Dal under the leadership of Bagha Jatin had emerged as a powerful revolutionary organisation. The battle at Balasore fought between the revolutionaries under the command of Bagha Jatin and



Kumarkhali Municipality of 1869.

ted to have achieved saintly power at this ashram.

Educational Institutions

M N High School, which was set up by Mathuranath Kundu, a Dewan of East India Company, possibly the oldest school in Bangladesh. It was set up in 1856 AD in Kumarkhali. In 1933, Kumarkhali Girls' High School started functioning. Another (J N School) was upgraded to a high school in 1963. In 1965, an intermediate college was set up which became a degree college after Bangladesh came into being.

Literary Culture

Kumarkhali is known as a centre of learning and culture. Kumarkhali, like Kushtia, remains under the literary and cultural influence of Nabadwip. Literary giants like Harinath Majumder, Roy Bahadur Jaladhar Sen, Mir Musharrif Hussain were born in and around Kumarkhali.

Born in 1833 at Kumarkhali, Harinath Majumder, a great writer, who was also known as Kargal Harinath, published a weekly "Gram Barta Prakashika" from Kumarkhali Printing Press in 1853 espousing the cause of poor people and exposing repressive rule of the British. The oldest printing press which was a gift of Mathuranath Maitra, father of renowned historian Akhya Kumar Maitra, still exists in Kumarkhali. Mathuranath Maitra was a friend of Harinath Majumder. Jaladhar Sen, Akhya Kumar Maitra, Mir Musharrif Hussain and Dindendra Kumar Roy had their first hand experience in literature through "Gram Barta Prakashika". Harinath Majumder had five books to his credit. His immortal songs preaching universal brotherhood are known as Fakir Chand songs. Although Akhya

the charge of editorship of "Bharatbarsha" and continued to serve for twenty-six years. He wrote as many as 39 books, of which nine are travelogues.

Mir Musharrif Hussain, who was born at Lahiripara under Kumarkhali thana in 1847, published more than thirty books. Of these, Bishad Sindhu (epic), Zamidar Darpan (drama) and Basanta Kumari (drama) have name in literature.

Pandit Shib Chandra Bidyarnava of Kumarkhali, who was born in 1860 and expired in 1919, was a great scholar. He advocated tantric system of worship. The ashram of tantric system, which was established at Kumarkhali 373 years back, exists till today in a dilapidated condition. He wrote 14 books. He also edited "Shabd", a monthly journal which advocated tantra shashtra. Justice Sir Woodroff, a judge of Calcutta High Court and a few other European scholars are said to be his disciples. London and Bombay are the main centres of Shib Chandra Bidyarnava's tantric system in the present day. Pandit Shib Chandra visited London in the year 1911 and 1913. Poet Mukunda Das, German poet Mueller and then Principal of Calcutta Art College E V Havel paid courteous calls on Shib Chandra at Kumarkhali.

Gagan Harkara (Gagan Chandra Dam) was a rural poet from this place. He was a postal mail runner whose enchanting songs were collected by the world famous poet Rabindranath Tagore in his "Prabasi".

Shashibhusan Adhikari (better known as Shashi Adhikari), Brahmin violinist of great fame and the proprietor of famous jatra party, lived in Khorshedpur under Kumarkhali nearly one and a half century ago. Not much information on him is traceable.

Profulla Kumar Sarkar, the



Partial view of MN High School being washed away by the erosion of river Gorai.

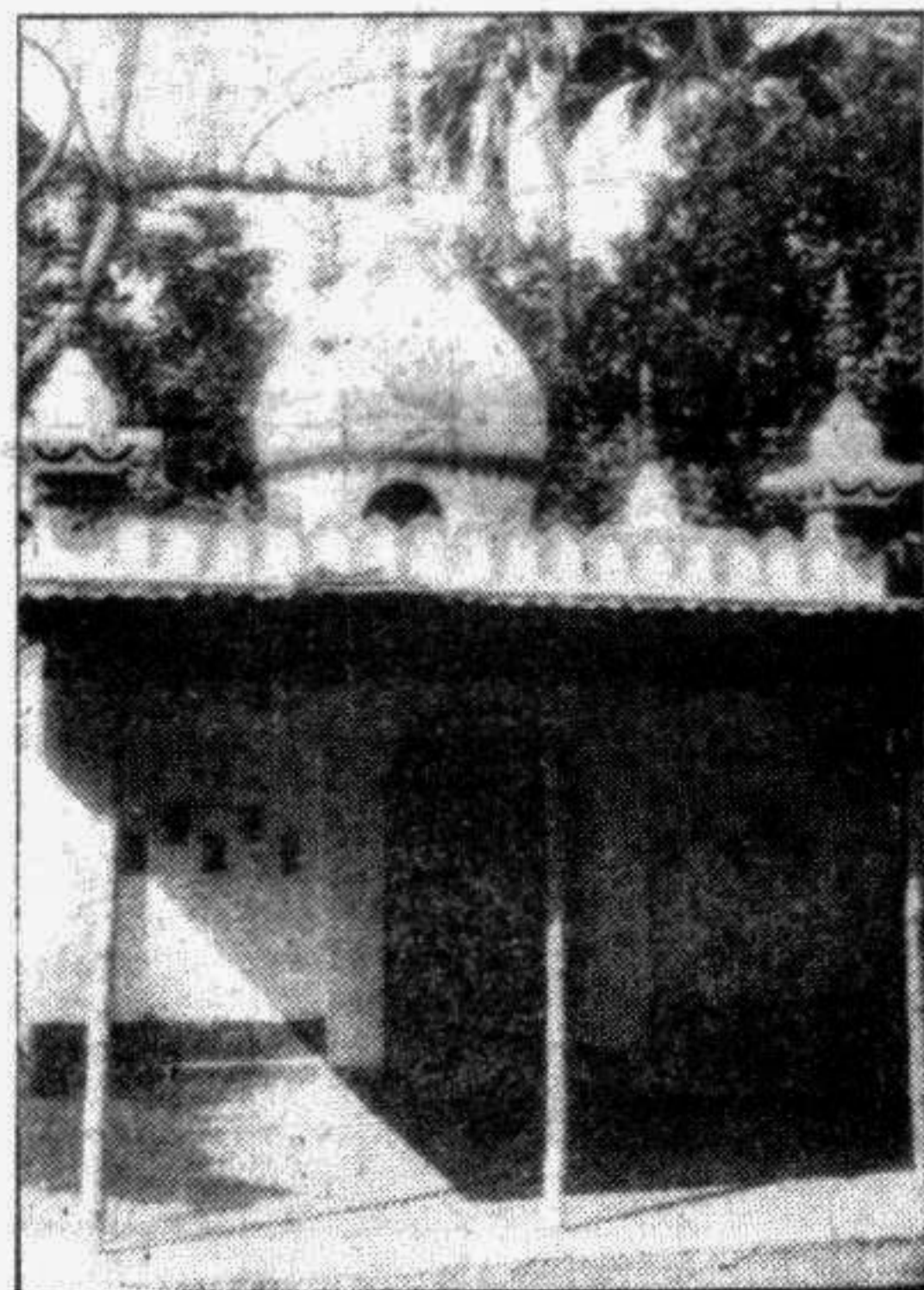
Bamacharan Karmaker, who composed Shyama songs was a famous vocal artist of All India Radio and Dacca Radio as well. He died in 1969 at Kumarkhali.

Political and Social Leadership

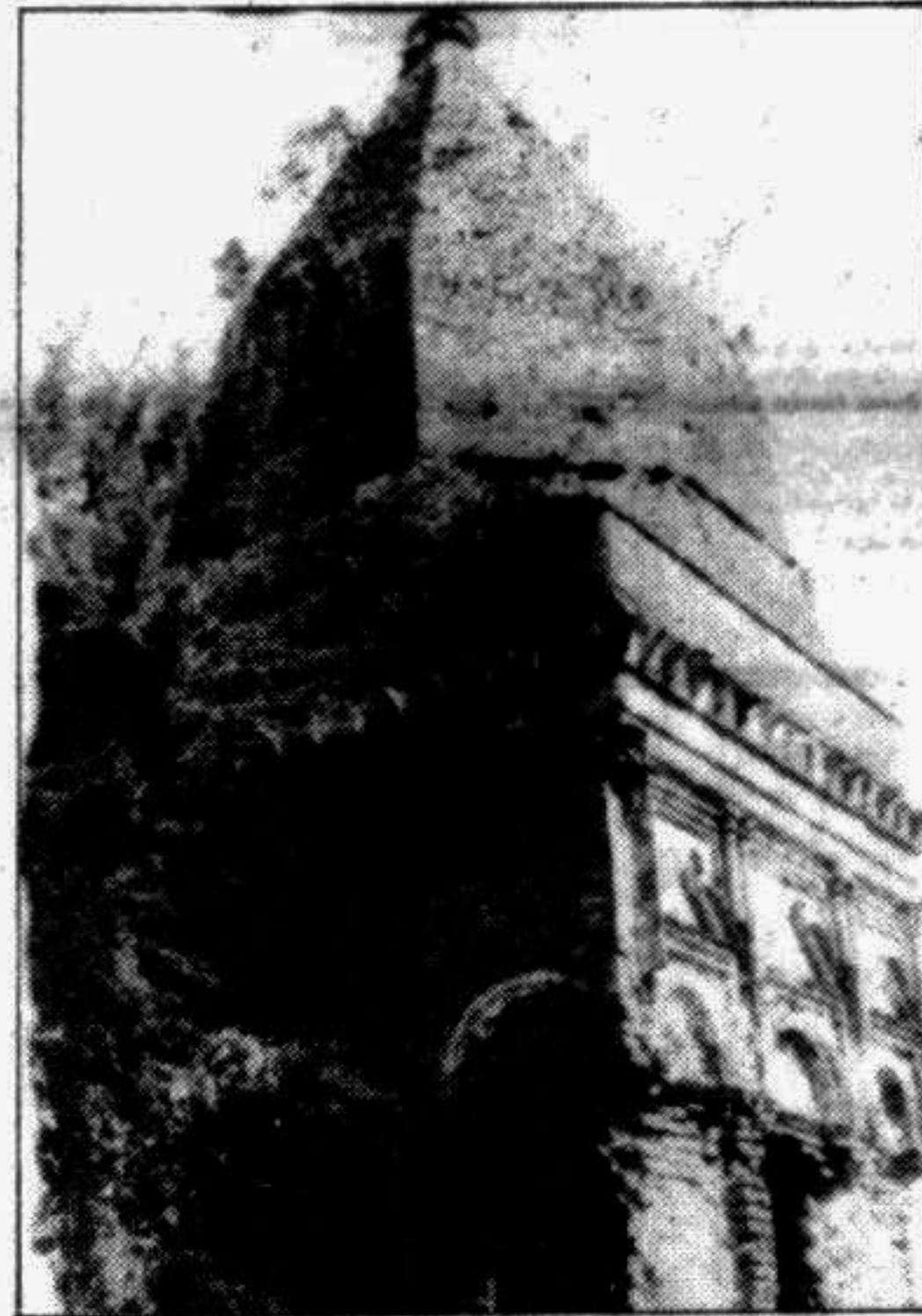
Qazi Miah Jan of Kumarkhali, who had distinguished himself as an un-

der the British police constitutes a golden chapter in the history of revolution in India against the British.

Born at Kaya under Kumarkhali in 1889 Moulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed, another political stalwart of Bengal, began his law profession in Calcutta High Court in 1919 under Chittaranjan Das. Moulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed had ob-



Mazar of Saint Sonabandhu.



Only surviving Pagoda at Kumarkhali.

daunted fighter, joined Wahabi Movement initiated by Syed Ahmed of Rae Bareilly in the early years of nineteenth century. He was arrested as political suspect and subjected to torture by the British. Qazi Miah Jan was taken to Ambala for political and seditious activities, but he remained undaunted and refused to give false evidence in spite of tortures.

In 1904, a movement

tained M A and LLB degrees from Calcutta University in 1916.

As a young lawyer he participated actively in Khilafat and non-cooperation movements. Moulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed took a lead in organising a campaign against zamindari system of the British. In 1920, he was interned in Alipor Central Jail by the British. He was also vocal against indigo planters. Moulvi Shamsuddin along with his elder brother Afzaruddin Ahmed had suffered imprisonment several times. Moulvi Shamsuddin was also a member of the Congress. In 1922, he was elected Secretary of Bengal Congress and Khilafat Committee on his release from Alipor Jail. He won the election and became a member of Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1927 on Congress ticket.

In response to the call for civil disobedience movement Moulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed resigned from the membership of the legislative assembly. His entire life was dedicated to the well-being of the poor peasants. He became Minister in Bengal under A K Fazlul Huq in 1938 but resigned on protest. Again he joined as Minister in 1942. He was also given a portfolio of Ministry of Industries in the Suhrawardy cabinet in 1946.

Munshi Nooruddin Ahmed of Khorshedpur, who died at the age of 92 in 1962, was pioneer in spreading education at Shelaidah following his retirement from the government service in Burma. During twenty years of chairmanship of Shelaidah Union Council, Munshi Nooruddin Ahmed came close to Rabindranath Tagore. Because of his intellectual bend of mind, Nooruddin had organised All Bengal Pali Shabhtya Conference at Shelaidah where Tagore was invited but could not join be-

cause of ill health. Nooruddin Ahmed was also vice-chairman of Kushtia District Board for four years until 1960.

Born in 1893 under Kumarkhali thana late Dr Sadruddin Ahmed, younger brother of Moulavi Shamsuddin Ahmed, is reported to be a first Muslim physician in Nadia district, who contributed for the spread of education in Kushtia.

Another patron of learning was late Mohammad Akbar Hossain of Durgapur. Kumarkhali who devoted his last part of life, following retirement from government service in Burma, to the spread of education. He was secretary of the School Committee of J N High School and vice-president of the Girls' High School till his death in 1982 at the age of 86. He was vice-chairman of Kumarkhali Municipality in mid 50's. His elder brother Montaz Hossain was the first Muslim graduate in Pabna district (Kumarkhali was part of Pabna till 1871).

War of Liberation

During the nine months of traumatic developments of the War of Liberation in 1971, Kumarkhali witnessed many battles between freedom fighters and occupation forces including the one on ninth of December, 1971, one day before the fall of Kushtia. Because of shortage of ammunition freedom fighters had to retreat while occupation forces destroyed houses and killed innocent people in order to capture the freedom fighters but they could not succeed in holding a single freedom fighter because of non-cooperation by the entire population, except a microscopic section of people. So far eleven free-

DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

Those Old Days of Jagannath College

Friends and colleagues were surprised when they heard that on October 1, 1967 I had joined as Principal, Jagannath College, Dhaka, on deputation. To them this college was then a hot-bed of "nasty politics," where any thing might happen at any time.

In early sixties, when I was in Chittagong College, I had similar chance to join as Principal, M M College, Jessore and, later, Victoria College, Comilla, but I did not. Again, I was appointed Principal, Govt A M College, Mymensingh in absentia. That was because my services were then at the disposal of Establishment Division in the Secretariat, for "revising and rewriting" the District Gazetteer — a job I found exceedingly fascinating. I would have continued there till the end, had not the "challenge" to join Jagannath College come in my way. I was reminded of Shakespeare's immortal words: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends."

Rough-hew them how we will. Why did I call the offer to join Jagannath College a "challenge"? Because of my early association with the holy atmosphere that permeated thro-

to my residence at Dhanmondi. We had half an hour's talk, he asked me to attend his farewell meeting arranged by the staff, at 5 pm on 30-9-67 and to be ready to join Jagannath College as early as possible. I was surprised, but did not say anything. On the following day I got two telephone calls from the Education Secretary and the DPI — both asking me the same question: How soon I could take over the administration of Jagannath College. My reply to both was: 1st October, 1967.

From these hectic developments, it was clear that the Governor, elated at his success at Dhaka University, was desperately looking for a Principal for this college, who could play here the same role as the Vice-Chancellor had been playing in Dhaka University. Jagannath College was surrounded by a dozen of schools and three colleges in the heart of Old Dhaka city. At the slightest provocation, students from those institutions rushed shouting slogans to join the students of Jagannath College for demonstration. Late Principal Saidur Rahman could easily and justifiably outmanoeuvre the Governor in his attempt to have some of the stu-

by Md Irshadullah

Former Principal, Jagannath College

ough the environment around this campus in mid-thirties. I was then just a boy, a student of Islamic Intermediate College (1935-37), which was at first Mohsinia Madrasah and at present is Kabi Nazrul College. On my way to and from the college, I passed through this campus, and saw some of the personages who hallowed it. Sometimes I paused to listen to the lectures delivered in the classes. Ray Bahadur Saiten Bhadra, a great scholar in English literature, was the Principal. In different functions I heard his lectures in English. I also heard those of Sir A F Rahman, Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University. Madam Alfonso and Sujata Roy, Principal of Eden College and Quamrun Nesa College, respectively, which were also in this area and Brothers of St. Gregory's School and Mr Akhbar, Superintendent, Normal School were also here to complete the galaxy of the learned people who inspired their admirers in a wider circle.

It was, indeed, that influence which made me change my course of studies and take Honours and Master's degrees in English from Dhaka University in 1940 and 1941 respectively, and join on July 13, 1942 as a Lecturer in English, Islamia College, Calcutta where I headed of the Department of English was Friend Perira, a Cambridge man, and the Principal of the College was Dr I H Zuberi, PhD in English from Edinburgh University.

I never thought that I would ever get an opportunity to tread this holy ground and breathe the pure and fragrant academic air that once inspired hundreds of worthy children of this soil, who later made their mark throughout this sub-continent. My predecessor late Principal Saidur Rahman, who was my senior colleague at Islamia College, Calcutta (1942-43) and a friend till his death, was a clever man. He somehow eluded the wrath of Governor Monem Khan whose avowed object was to "discipline" the students and terrorise them to silence, if necessary. He got his man at Dhaka University in the Vice-Chancellor himself, who helped the Governor in organising his Students' Front (NSF). As a result, unpleasant things happened on the University campus, creating anger and discontent throughout East Pakistan. That was, indeed, the birth of "campus terrorism," which quickly spread, like wild fire, in other spheres of our national life. Hopefully, that also sounded for the first time the death-knell of the regime, and was the first step towards the Liberation War, and finally creation of independent Bangladesh.

Late Principal Saidur Rahman met the Governor towards the end of September, 1967 and saw the red signal to stop his activities in Jagannath College and quit. He drove straight from the Govt House

denials caught. That hastened his end, and he went away, with dignity and honour, leaving Jagannath College, in the words of poet Thomas Gray, "to darkness and to me".

Principal Rahman knew I was also a fighter, but I was a teacher too, and the way of fighting varies from man to man. I must fight on in my own way, and he conceded that, and helped me as much as he could. On the day I joined the college, I sat with some teachers and after a few minutes, we decided to move about the campus talking with one another and having an idea about the location of different departments, office rooms, classrooms, etc. I was advised to sit with a few students and talk with them in the presence of two or three teachers. I welcomed the idea. One hour later the Vice-Principal entered my room along with seven students and two teachers. We had half an hour's talk, and were pleased to be assured of their whole-hearted co-operation in the matter of maintaining peace on the campus.

Satisfied with the talk I had with teachers and students, and encouraged by their assurance of co-operation, I started working hard. I did not confine myself within the office room, but rushed from class to class and entered the class I found without a teacher. I had all sorts of talk with them, giving them chance to have talks with me as well. I continued till the teacher came, if he did not come for some reason, I passed the whole period telling them what they never heard. They looked pleased, and I was happy. What a great joy it was for all of us. I had my own classes also, at least one a day. Late Professor M A Matin, Head of the Dept of English, a dedicated teacher and strict task-master, with a class register, a book and a piece of chalk in hand, used to enter my room smiling, at least ten minutes before the bell rang, just to remind me of my class, lest I forgot. I too stood up, smiling and gesturing in return, to show him my respectful appreciation, ending finally in a hearty laughter. Alas! he is no more to be here today.

In this way I along with my colleagues had the atmosphere of the college campus cleared of distrust, misunderstanding and uncertainties. As a result, there was a general feeling both inside and outside, that the college was improving. But I had no peace of mind. I had a premonition that, as the stake was too high, and the power and prestige of Field Marshal Md Ayub Khan, deputed to Governor Monem Khan, was involved, there would be at least a show-down if not crack-down on Jagannath College campus. During five months after I had joined the college I had neither seen the Governor nor heard from him. He was perhaps watching my activities and planning future steps.

On 28.2.68 at about 9 am Governor's supporter (NSF) students along with some out-

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