

RITUALS or traditional ceremonies in temples and other places of worship in Asia range from the hauntingly solemn to the really macabre.

But in Penang's popular Goddess of Mercy temple along Kapitan Keling Road, a daily ritual by devotees of the deity really takes the cake: instead of being done in all seriousness, it has a touch of the comic.

As video cameras roll, devotees make holes in paper drawings with burning joss-sticks, stamp their feet on pieces of paper and spit out repeatedly at nothing in particular.

Welcome to the "reversal of bad luck" (kai oon in Hokkien) ritual held daily before the tiger deity (Hor Eiah) at the 19th century temple. Many Chinese in Malaysia, as elsewhere, are tradition-bound. For them, there's nothing like a temple ritual to cleanse themselves of bad luck, like the "kai oon."

Amidst the disgusting phoo! phoo! spitting sounds, the prayer leader calls out the names of all known evils, sing-song fashion, punctuated by loud, eerie drones and chants.

Imagined, real or mythical, the evils are conjured up as evil spirits and demons, snakes and monsters, neglected souls of the dead, hungry ghosts, robbers, burglars, prostitutes, dangerous streets teeming with bandits and people choking on their food.

asian diary BY ARJUNA

Luck: Only a Hope, Skip and Jump Away!

Ouan Keh is another evil depicted in the paper drawings — "people who cause disharmony within the family, curse you behind your back, and those who spread vicious, malicious lies about you."

The list goes on and on. The devotee "kills" each evil, as it is named, by burning out its eyes on the paper drawing with a lit joss-stick.

Next, the devotee would trample the evils on the Pak Kai (100 antidotes) paper talisman, folded and placed on the ground.

The spitting part follows next with the devotee "driving away his bad luck" by spraying paper drawings of the evils and all around him with streams of saliva.

The ritual ends with the devotee burning the various paraphernalia.

The tiger deity, which devotees believe helps ward off bad luck, is mainly worshipped by the Cantonese. But other Chinese, especially Hokkien, have over the years also become devotees. Bad luck, after all, isn't a Can-

tonese monopoly. "There are days (thoo jit) for ritual cleansing of ill-luck, as specified in the Chinese almanac (tong shu), every 12 days throughout the year," said Mr Lim Hun Swee, who administers major Chinese temples on Penang Island. "Many traditionally do it on the second and 16th day of each month of the Chinese calendar."

One need not wait until the kai oon ceremony. "Prevention is better than cure," said Lim. Many devotees "try to prevent bad luck" by holding a ceremony before Thai Soay, the God who controls evil.

"Even if it's been decreed by the stars that it's rack and ruin ahead, the Chinese believe there are still ways and means of getting around bad luck," said one expert. "Perhaps no race is more obsessed with that fickle thing called luck than the Chinese."

Luck rituals at Chinese temples have many variations. Common features running through the rituals include

crawling under the altar or kneeling and bowing (kow tow) before the dieties as a mark of respect.

"Those who come for the ceremony must come with sincerity and clean thoughts," said a spokesman for the century-old Kuan Tai temple in Kuala Lumpur.

The rituals is not enough to change one's luck for the better. One must follow with good deeds.

Whatever the pros and cons, believers can get hopelessly hooked on luck rituals. KL resident Mrs Tricia Wong, a New Zealand graduate who runs her own business, is a case in point. She takes part in the chin wan (Cantonese for changing luck) ritual faithfully every year with her family and relatives. The ritual is held at the home of Tei Moh Leong, a woman reportedly blessed with psychic powers, in Petaling Jaya near KL.

Mrs Wong, 36, describes the ritual as "spiritual guidance."

"One feels reassured that a higher being is there to keep an eye on one's safety and welfare," she added. Her family believes that the more frequent such sessions, the better their luck will be.

Luck, however, cannot be changed for free. Most temples charge between US\$14 and US\$19 per person. Tricia Wong's Tei Moh Leong, however, charges US\$40 per person and up to US\$1,000 per family.

—Depthnews Asia

POPULARLY known as a 'King-maker' Mohan Mian was loath to assume Ministerial offices. He preferred to remain behind the scene and make/unmake ministries.

Only once Mr Yusuf Ali Chowdhury (Mohan Mian) took the oath of office as a Minister: in the cabinet headed by Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Huq (may 1954). He was assigned the Jute portfolio — a subject very close to his heart. However, the cabinet was dismissed before the month was out.

Mohan Mian became the General Secretary of the ruling Muslim League's Provincial Committee at the age of 41. He opted for the party post — unlike others whose principal aim in politics appeared to acquire ministerial positions.

Mohan Mian certainly made no money out of politics, on the contrary (it may sound strange, but it is a fact) he spent his own money for political purposes. The result: his family had to live in modest circumstances and believe it or not, he left no house he Dhaka or assets worth the name for his large family when he passed away in 1971. From this viewpoint alone, he was surely a remarkable person.

The second son of a local zaminder Mr Mizuddin Biswas (the eldest was Moezzem Ali Chowdhury alias Lal Mian who later changed his name into Abdullah Zaheeruddin and was a Central Minister during the Ayub era, Mohan Mian was popularly known, in his hometown Faridpur, as

DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

Personality Profile

Yusuf Ali Chowdhury (Mohan Mian)

by A K M Jalaluddin

'Majhya Mian'. He had a large number of followers and admirers in the area; my father was one of them.

Several years younger than Mohan Mian, my father used to treat him with respect and admiration. It was my father's desire that his children should know a number of 'able and good people' he knew. As his eldest child, it was my good fortune to know some of them.

I came to Dhaka with my father Mr Abdul Mannan (now deceased) he was a minor Government functionary in Dec 1953 (my first visit to Dhaka). Abba decided that it was about time I were introduced to Mohan Mian. He took me to his Wari/Rankin Street residence one evening. Mohan Mian was holding a kind of 'darbar' with 10/15 persons in his drawing room.

He received my father affectionately and kissed my forehead when I was introduced to him. As it was, his eldest son (Kamal Ibne Yusuf) was also of my age and both of us were studying in the same class. I was introduced to Kamal and we had a brief conversation. He spoke of

'flights' in his school (St Greory's) over the language issue.

When Mohan Mian asked my father about his impressions on the forthcoming provincial elections, my father said, half in zest and half in earnest, that his son (i.e me) "seemed to know more about it as he almost memorises the daily papers" and asked me to speak up. Much as it showed Abba's sense of pride in his son I felt quite shy to own up the compliment. I said meekly that I did not have much information about elections; but those who opposed Bangla were foredoomed to an inglorious defeat.

It was a reference to the language issue which was then my number one concern in political terms. Under the influence of my father, I had become a passionate supporter of Bangla. As a matter of fact young and immature as I was, I once fought a bodily fight (and was soundly beaten) with the supporter of a local politic (who opposed Bangla).

"I am interested to know your views" Mohan Mian said very affectionately to me.

what makes Bangla such an invincible case? "I did not understand the question well enough nor did I know the answer. "Those who do not support the cause of Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan are either traitors or idiots", I said with visible emotion.

Mohan Mian asked my father about the views of Moulana Abdul Ais, his likely contestant in the legislative elections scheduled only a couple of months away (March 1954). Abba said that the Moulana's personal views did not matter at all. So long as he was a Muslim League nominee, he was sure to lose to the Joint Front candidate.

I met Mohan Mian again after several years, at my father's behest, at his Armanitola residence. He called me in as soon as my presence was announced. I was given the responsibility to inform Mohan Mian about some difficulties a mutual friend of theirs was experiencing in his place of posting.

Mohan Mian was about to take his bath: a couple of domestic aides were massaging him with herbal oil. He listened to my father's message with rapt attention. He said he would do his best. And he did do his best.

Mohan Mian, the king-maker, died without leaving much property or for his family. But the legacy of honesty he left was worth millions — he will always live in the roll of honour for honesty in politics in our land. In death, Mohan Mian was worth his weight in gold.

GOLDEN JUBILEE SPECIAL

The University of Dhaka: Through 75 Years

THE University of Dhaka formally opened its doors on 1 July 1921 with the faculties of Arts, Science and Law, 12 departments and a teaching staff of 60. Spread over 600 acres, the University inherited the old buildings of Dacca college and a great part of the buildings and estate in the Ramna area created for the short-lived Government of East Bengal and Assam.

The first Vice-Chancellor of the University, P J Hartog thought that the University of Dhaka occupied a site more splendid than any modern University in Great Britain. Lord Lytton in his address to the first graduates in 1922 said, "this University is Dacca's greatest possession..."

The Origin of the University

The creation of the University, however, was not an easy task. The project which originated in 1912 took 9 years to come to fruition.

The idea for a University in Dhaka came about due to conditions at that time. In 1905, the Muslims of East Bengal had welcomed partition as they had hoped it would facilitate their educational advancement. The present system, it was thought, did not meet the religious requirements of the community: there was no instruction in Arabic or Persian and some of the books used were seen as prejudicial to religion and tradition. During the period between 1905-1911, the Muslims made marked educational progress, and steps were taken by the Government to introduce scholarships, make appointments of Muslims, and introduce Urdu into certain schools.

The annulment of the partition, which had benefited the educational progress of the Muslims of East Bengal, was thus a great shock to them. The concept of a University in Dhaka originated from the desire of the Muslims to stimulate the

educational progress of their community and was seen in part as a small "compensation" for the end of partition.

At the same time, the Government of India wanted a new type of residential and teaching university in the country. Steps also had to be taken to relieve the congestion of the University of Calcutta. As a result, a communication was issued on 2 February 1912 stating that the Government of India made the decision to recommend the constitution of a university at Dhaka.

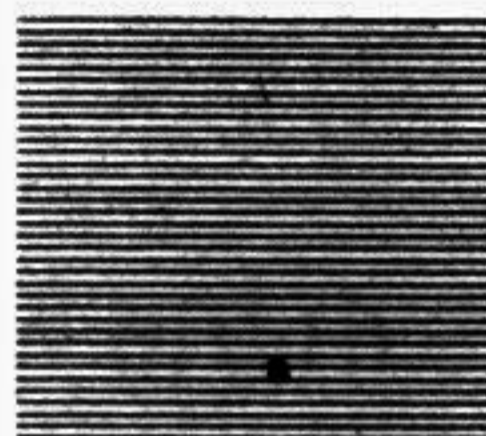
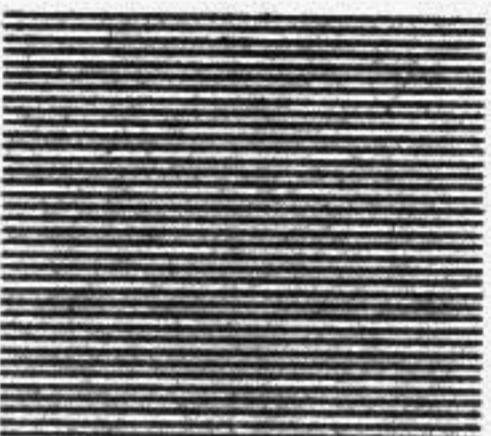
In May 1912, the Government of Bengal published a resolution with regard to the proposed university. The Nathan Committee of 13 members was appointed to submit plans on the type of buildings, teaching and so forth for the University. The original scheme involved the creation of 7 colleges, and residence for 2890 students on an area of 450 acres. Unfortunately, the outbreak of World War I led to financial stringency and the plan was modified to 4 colleges: Dacca, Muhammadan, Jagannath and a new Arts college.

The Dhaka University scheme was also referred to the Calcutta University Commission for its advice. The Commission made several recommendations and suggested that the University should be autonomous with regard to finance. The Commission recommended that the hall be designed to play an important part in its social and intellectual life. Teachers would come to know their students through activities of hall life.

The Dacca University Act was passed in 1920 with the assent of the Governor General. Its object was "to establish and incorporate a unitary teaching and residential University at Dacca..." Clause 5 of the Act stated, "The University shall be open to all persons of either sex, classes, castes and creeds." The Court was established as the supreme legislative body of the University and was composed of 158 members, with the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and sitting as ex-officio members.

The University faced certain difficulties at its inception. It was at first dependent on public revenue. It also had to satisfy the high expectations of the Muslim community, but could only find a very small number of Muslim teaching staff to begin with. There were also rumours spread by non-cooperationists that the University would charge fees amounting to Rs 60 a month whereas it was only Rs 8 a month. This discouraged admission in the 1921 session. Furthermore, educated Hindus criticised the University by calling it "Mecca University or Fucca (hollow) University."

The Vice-Chancellor defended the University by pointing out that it had a progressive type of syllabus, an effective tutorial system, better laboratory and library facilities, and personal contact between students and



teachers. The V.C. also pointed out that although the University was open to all, it was created in response to the Muslim community.

Formative Phase: 1921-1947

The period from 1921 to 1947 was the formative phase of the University. Unlike other Universities of the Indian subcontinent, the University of Dhaka was designed on a new model with a teaching cum residential character. It aimed at comprehensive teaching of the mind and body.

The first 26 years were a glorious period during which the University produced 11,475 graduates. The development of the University was

university to new experiences. British rule ended on August 15 of that year and East Bengal became a part of Pakistan. There were high hopes for the development of the University in the free atmosphere of an independent country. But immediately after independence, the University had to accept new responsibilities and faced problems in keeping its departments and administration in working order.

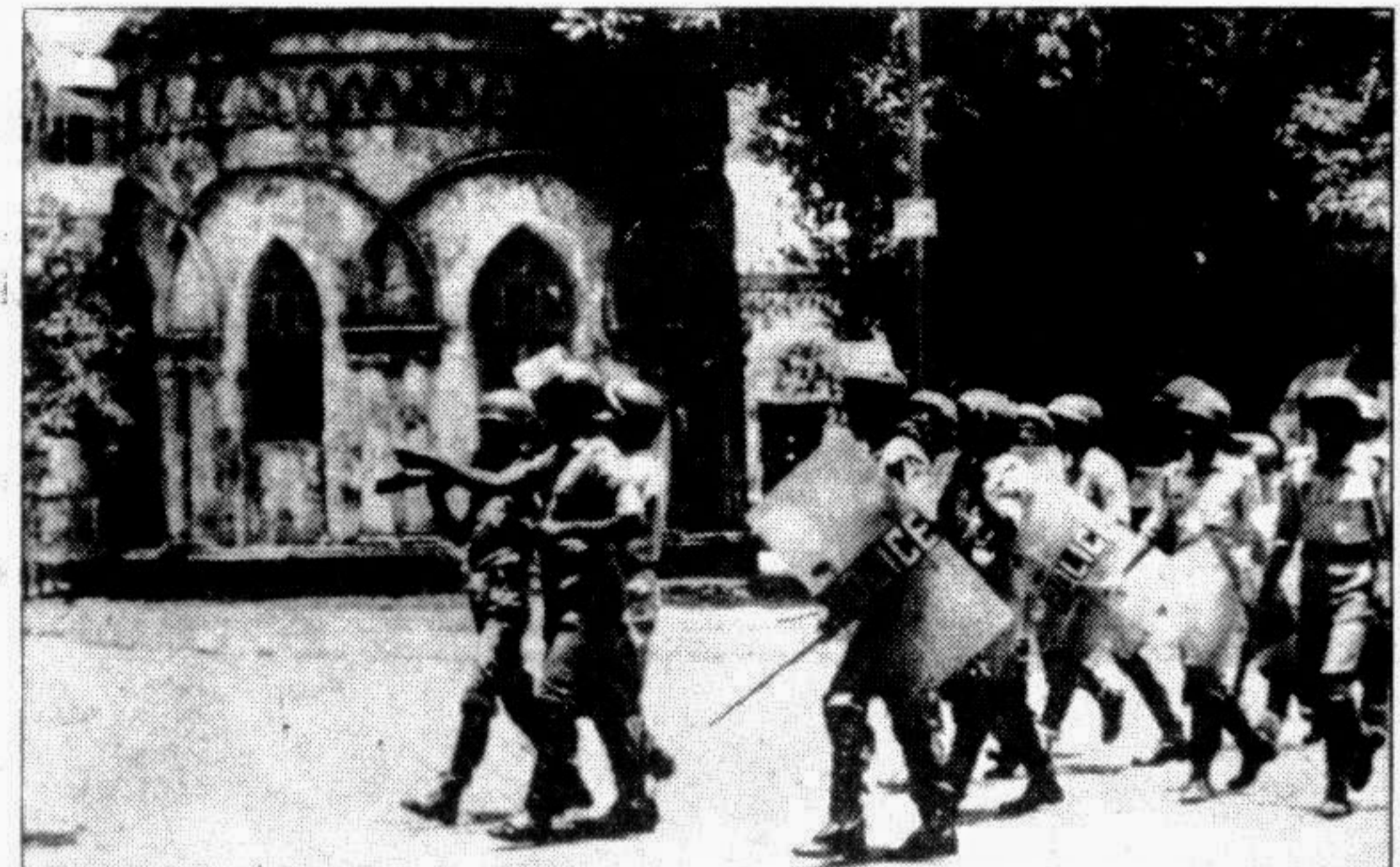
The workload of the University increased manifold. It was given an affiliating role and supervise teaching in the affiliated colleges and had to conduct their exams. The number of students also increased in an unprecedented manner from 1092 in

sought to crush.

The Dhaka University Act was replaced by the Dhaka University Ordinance which rejected the autonomy and democratic character of the University. The Court, the legislative body of the University was abolished. The Ordinance was termed a

changed the conservative outlook of the Muslims with regard to an English type of education which they were averse to because it did not provide for Islamic learning. The University of Dhaka designed its education system in a way acceptable to Muslims.

agricultural or rural, and an intelligentsia was almost non-existent. The Dhaka University educated youths became teachers, government employees, lawyers and journalists. Their numbers increased every year and by 1947 a middle class had emerged.



Police on the campus in turmoil, August '94: Continuing unrest 'black law'.

Post 1971

Following liberation and the creation of Bangladesh, the University returned to the democratic traditions of the pre-Pakistan days. Dr Muzaffer Ahmad Chowdhury became the V.C. in 1972.

The considerate attitude of the Government towards the University led to grants for books and accommodation. The period was marked by remarkable internal progress in the teaching departments. A new trend of thought also emerged with regards to the system of teaching. It was found that teaching had deteriorated at all levels in Bangladesh and affected the standard of education at the University. It was thus felt necessary to depart from the British system and to adopt the course system followed in other developed countries.

Popular and public lectures which became rare after the early years of the University, were revived following liberation. Nobel prize physicist Dr A. Salam addressed the University during its Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 1981. Mother Teresa also made a visit.

The Socio-Political Impact of the University

The University of Dhaka has witnessed a phenomenal development from its humble beginnings. The number of students has also increased beyond all expectations.

The University has played an important role in the educational development of the people of East Bengal. This previously backward region made rapid advance and was soon regarded as a progressive part of the subcontinent. The educational system

The University also broke the conservative barrier with regard to University education and co-education of women in both Hindu and Muslim society. Lila Nag became the first woman admitted in 1921. Fazilatun Nesa was the first Muslim woman admitted in 1925.

The University also contributed to the creation of a Muslim middle class. Previously the people of East Bengal were predominantly

The University students and teachers also played vital roles in the independence movement of 1947, the language movement and the liberation movement.

The University of Dhaka now celebrates its 75th year of existence.

— from "The History of the University of Dacca" by M. A. Rahim, published by the University of Dhaka in 1981.

Compiled by Lamis Hossain.

Publications on DU

1. Dhaka Biswavidyalay O Purbongyo Samaj a book by Sardar Fazlul Karim, based on an interview with Professor Abdur Razzak.

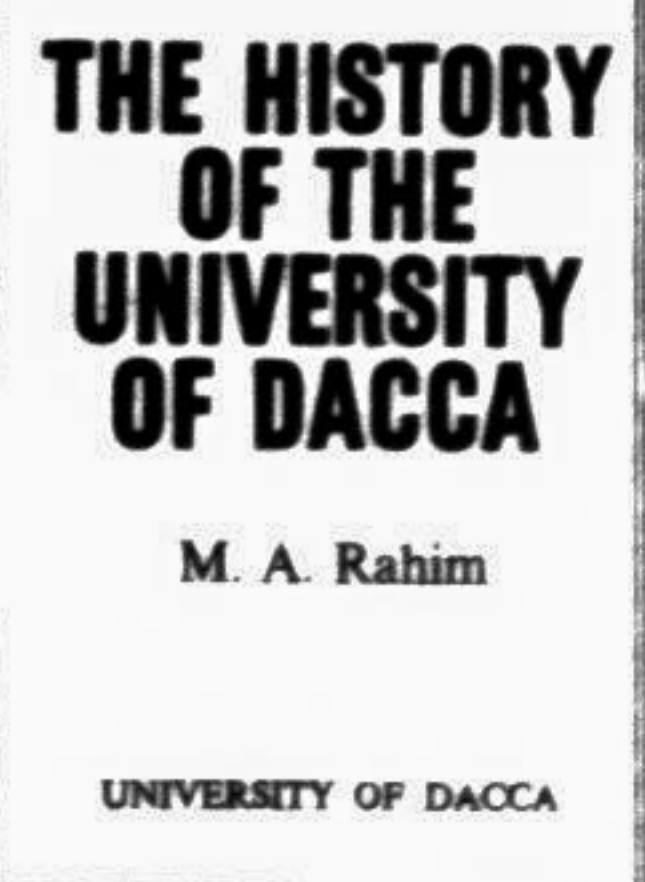
Published by Shahitya Prokash. Price 90 taka. The book is an extensive interview with Professor Abdur Razzak in which he gives his insight and opinion on a wide range of topics including historical events, academic atmosphere at different periods, the first professors at DU, his own student days, changes in the university's laws, interviews with famous names such as Professor Jenkins, Justice Ibrahim, governor Zakir Hussain etc.



2. Smriti Kothai Dhaka Biswavidyalay by Muhammad Jahangir with an introduction by Anisuzzaman. Published by Mowla Brothers. Price 100 taka. The book includes reminiscences of well known figures — Rameshchandra Majumdar, A M Haroonur Rashid, Budhadeb Basu, NC Sengupta, Akhtar Imam etc.



3. The History of the University of Dhaka by M A Rahim is a comprehensive account of the University. The author describes in much detail the different phases of the university: The origin of the project, the foundation of the University, the early years, the Pakistan period and the post 1971 phase. The book also attempts to analyze the socio-political impact of the University of Dhaka. The author relies mostly on primary sources of information.



Faculty Facts

The University of Dhaka was established in the year 1921. 1995 sees the beginning of its 75th year. In 1921, the university comprised four faculties — Arts, Social Sciences, Law and Science. Since then, two new faculties have been added — those of Commerce, and Biological Science, in 1970 and 1974 respectively. From its foundation, Dhaka University has been a growing, expanding and dynamic institution. Although the university began with only 13 departments (Bangla, English, Arabic, Urdu & Persian, History, Philosophy, Islamic Studies, Economics, Political Science, Law, Physics, Mathematics and Chemistry), there are now 40 separate departments under six faculties. The most recently established departments, this decade, have been Sanskrit & Pall (1991), Philology (1992), Computer Science (1992), Anthropology (1993-4) and Music (1993). The largest department at present, is Accounting with a total of 1632 students. The smallest is the recently established Computer Science department with 20 students in their MSc final year. The total number of students at Dhaka University is 27,123. 9882 students live in resident halls on campus which include three hostels for female students, eleven for male students and one for international students. Dhaka University also has several Institutes, including the Institute of Fine Arts, Modern Language Institute, ISRI, and constituent colleges under its jurisdiction. Source: 73rd Annual Report, Dhaka University