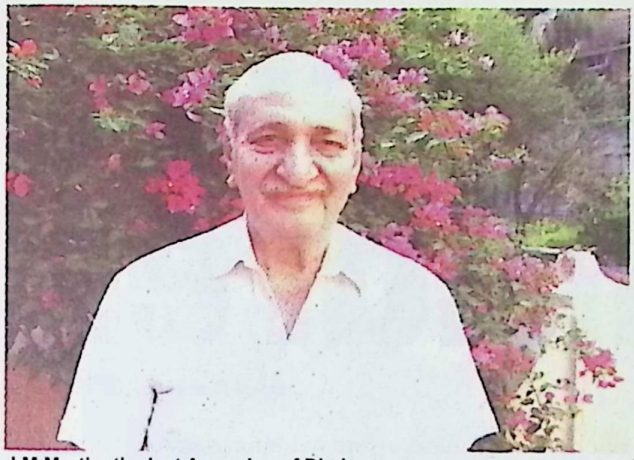


J.M.Martin, the last Armenian of Dhaka.

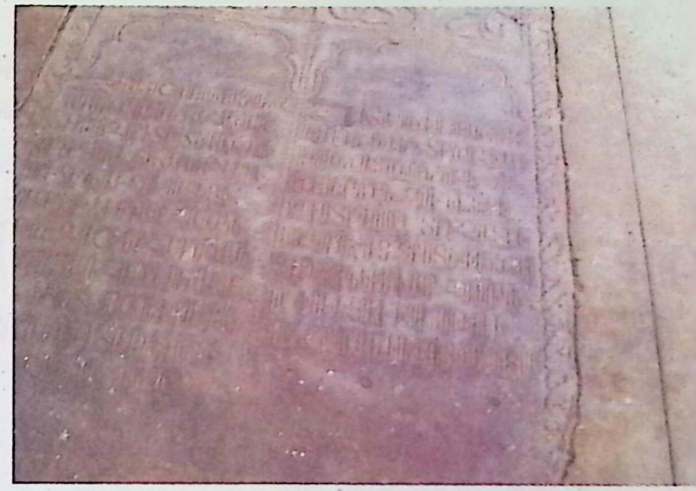
years. Who would come and who would offer prayers? No one in our community now lives in Dhaka. Even there is no Bengali Christian community in my surrounding areas except the Hindu and Muslim abodes. This is why I keep the main gate of the Church closed. But, I can show you the interior," he comes out of his shell.

Within the Church there is a beautiful icon of Jesus Christ by an Anglo-Indian painter Charles Paut, a teacher of Pogos School in Dhaka. Like the interior of the Church, the condition of the graveyard is also quite sad. "Shankar, my assistant, looks after this whole graveyard all by himself. This is why it cannot be very well maintained," Martirosen shows me Shankar, his assistant.

The graveyard in the premises of the Church contains graves of Armenians who died as early as the seventeenth century. They came here from Julfa, Ispahan and Carmen of Persia (Iran) and Basra of Iraq. There is even a grave of an Irish soldier of the East India Company. That Irish soldier was the husband of an Armenian lady and killed by the rebel Indian soldiers in the mutiny or the first Indian Independence Struggle of 1857. It is in this struggle that the Indian soldiers first took arms against the British colonial rulers since their defeat in the war of 1757.

James Wise, the famous historian cum Civil Surgeon of Dhaka in 1870, writes in his widely acclaimed book Notes on Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal: "There is no brief history of the Armenian habitat in Dhaka. The first evidential information we get on the Armenians is an old and dilapidated grave in the Tejgaon graveyard of Dhaka. It could be known from the epitaph of this grave that this is the grave of an Armenian businessman named Avitis. He died in 1714."

Muntasir Mamun, in his "Dhaka: Smriti Bismritir Nagari (Dhaka: The City of Memoirs and Forgetfullness)," narrates: `Some famous or eminent Armenian families living in the Dhaka of 19th century were Pogos, Aratoon, Paniati, Koja Michael, Manook, Harni and Sarcis. Incomes from land and business were



Discoloured and faded epitaphs still capturing a distinctive Armenian design.



Avetick Thomas who died in 1877. His wife installed this statue to adorn the grave.

their major source of livelihood." It is the Armenians who have the glory of establishing famous architectural installations like Ruplal House or Pogos school. The Armenians first introduced horse carriages in Dhaka. They earned a lot from salt and jute business. But insularity, intermarriage, inability to adapt to the heat and a reluctance to interact with the locals were the major causes behind the decline of Armenian population in Dhaka. The Armenians also started leaving Dhaka by the first decade of the 20th century.

"The government, media and conscious citizens of the country should come forward for preservation, maintenance and promotion of the different historical, archaeological and heritage sites of this city which largely contribute to the culture of diversity of Dhaka," observes the historian. ■