

OBSERVATIONS

Missing links in the history of Dhaka University

MUHAMMAD ABDUL MAZID

The University of Dhaka was established in 1921 under the Dacca University Act 1920 of the Indian Legislative Council. It opened its doors to academic activities on 1 July 1921 with 3 faculties, 12 teaching departments, 60 teachers, 847 students and 3 residential halls. Today, arriving at the age of ninety two, the university has 10 faculties, 48 departments, 9 institutes, 26 research centres, 1,345 teachers, about 25,000 students and 17 residential halls. After the partition of India in 1947, the university was transformed from its status of a residential institution to a teaching-cum-affiliating institution as well as a proud alma mater of the country's leading intelligentsia, academics, political leadership, businessmen and bureaucrats.

The university was not founded in a day nor did the process get going without pains. A combination of political, social and economic compulsions persuaded the British government in India to establish it 'as a splendid imperial compensation' to Muslims for the annulment of the partition of Bengal. The partition of Bengal in 1905 provided the Muslim majority community of East Bengal and Assam with a sphere of influence of their own and raised new hopes for the development of the region and the advancement of its people. But its annulment on December 12, 1911 in the face of stiff opposition from the powerful Hindu leadership was viewed by Muslims as 'a grievous wrong'.

Distressed at the government's decision for the annulment of the Bengal partition, Nawab Salimullah, in consultation with other leaders, sent two handwritten letters to the British Viceroy in India, Lord Hardinge, within a week --- one on December 17 (expressing anguish over the annulment) and the other on December 20 (demanding a development of institutions for the advancement of education in East Bengal). The Viceroy immediately forwarded these letters to his Education Member in the Council, Sir H. Butler, with a note inquiring 'whether it would not be desirable to encourage the creation of a University in Dacca with Mahomedan Hostels', which should be 'an undeniable proof of our [government's] intention to encourage Mahomedan education, or in this way to safeguard the interests of the Mahomedans in the province'. The Viceroy was quick to perceive the dissatisfaction of Muslims and decided to

pay an official visit to Dhaka to assuage the aggrieved community. A deputation of high ranking Muslim leaders, among whom were Sir Nawab Salimullah, Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury and A K Fazlul Huq, met him on 31 January 1912 and expressed their apprehension that the annulment would retard the educational progress of the major community. In response, the Viceroy acknowledged that education was the true salvation of Muslims and that the government would recommend to the Secretary of State the constitution of a university in Dhaka.

This was confirmed in an official communiqué on 2 February 1912. Many Hindu leaders were not happy with the government's intention to set up a university in Dhaka. On 16 February 1912,

Accordingly, through a resolution of 27 May 1912, the government of Bengal appointed a committee of 13 members headed by Robert Nathan, a barrister from London, to draw up a scheme for Dhaka University. The committee acted with speed. With the thoroughness and wisdom of 25 special sub-committees it submitted its report on December 24 which was circulated next day to the relevant quarters for comments. On March 1, 2013, influential members of the Calcutta University Senate at its ninth meeting strongly opposed the establishment of a university in Dhaka and condemned the Nathan Committee recommendations. However, the Secretary of State approved it in December 1913. Then the First World War



a delegation headed by advocate Dr Rash Bihari Ghosh, along with the Hindu zamindars of Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, Faridpur and Mymensingh, met the Viceroy and expressed the apprehension that the establishment of a separate university in Dhaka would promote 'an internal partition of Bengal'. They also contended, as was recorded in the Calcutta University Commission report later, that 'Muslims of Eastern Bengal were in large majority cultivators and they would benefit in no way by the foundation of a university'. The opposition by the Hindu intelligentsia was not the only hurdle in the implementation of the plan for the new university. Many complex legal and material issues were to be examined. After obtaining the approval of the Secretary of State, in a letter on 4 April 1912, the government of India invited the government of Bengal to submit a complete scheme for the university, along with a financial estimate.

intervened, creating acute financial stringency for the government.

The inordinate delay in the project being undertaken caused worries in the minds of Muslim leaders. Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury raised his voice on 14 April 1914 while inaugurating the Presidency Mohamedan Education Conference. To cool down such sentiments the government formed a committee headed by the DPI, W. W. Hornell, to ascertain the reasons behind the backwardness of Muslims in education. Hornell engaged one of his key colleagues in the Education Department, Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah, as a member of his Committee. Two and a half years later, with no significant progress having been made, Nawab Ali Choudhury again raised the issue in the Indian Legislative Council on 7 March 1917. In response, the government spokesman reaffirmed the government pledge to establish the university in Dhaka, but added that

consideration of a bill already drafted would now have to wait for a report from the Calcutta University Commission, to which the Dhaka university scheme had been referred for advice regarding its constitution and management.

The Calcutta University Commission, formed in 1917 with Dr. ME Sadler as its chairman, invited memoranda from noted intellectuals and educationists on 22 specific questions. In written responses to the major questionnaires, mostly related to the establishment of the university in Dhaka, Muslim leaders and educationists, such as Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah, were able to convince the commission of its importance. Thus the commission justified the setting up of a university in Dhaka. The commission agreed with most parts of the Nathan Committee scheme and urged that the University of Dhaka be established without further delay.

Getting favorable recommendations from the commission, the government tabled the draft Dhaka University Act in the Imperial Legislative Council on 11 September 1919 and invited comments on the draft Act from Calcutta University on September 23. The University Senate opposed the government move again and sent its protest resolution telegraphically to New Delhi. However, at its 14th meeting on 1 November 1919, the Senate formed a nine-member Senate Special Committee to review the draft Act. Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah, the lone Muslim member from East Bengal in the Senate, was included in the special committee. He supported the cause for the establishment of Dhaka University. The special committee submitted the report on 27 November along with a note of dissent from Khan Bahadur who could not be in agreement with all other members' propositions. In his note of dissent he reiterated the reasons for the establishment of the university and justified safeguarding such provisions in the Act which should be treated as lifeblood support for the sustainability of the university. Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah was vocal and intervened at appropriate stages while reviewing the Act, both at the committee meeting and in the senate proceedings. Most of his suggestions were adopted, with few exceptions, in the Dhaka University Act 1920.

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LETTER FROM BOSTON

Visit me this summer

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

Please come to Boston
For the springtime
I'm stayin' here with some friends
And they've got lots of room!

The first time I heard this song, written by singer song-writer Dave Loggins, I could not fully relate to it since he refers to springtime. But over time I came to appreciate it more as I learned that he was not specifying spring as the only season when to visit Boston. Summer and even fall (autumn) are just as beautiful and a good time to visit Boston. The twin cities of Boston and Cambridge, situated by the ocean and split by the Charles River, have been home for me, a transplanted Bangladeshi, for the past few decades, and even though I tried several times to leave the coop, I always came back. Now, as I reflect on the years past, I can see the attraction or the magnetic effect of this city.

There are times, when I am busy and can't seem to find time even for my family, when I can at least rest in the belief that they all know where to find me. Thanks to my friend Gora, who showed me the "cool" places to visit when I first got off the boat, these are still my favourite ones that I visit from time to time: Harvard Square, Kenmore Square, Downtown Crossing, Fenway Park and the Esplanade on the Charles River; the coffee shops and the fast food restaurants; and the museums and the parks.

Boston can be a place where you can spend weeks and weeks just getting to know how the two cities, Boston and Cambridge, work together; the people; and how we live. If there are three things I recommend to my visitors to learn about, they would be the vast network of the region's higher education system, the history of the American Revolution, and the workings of this world-renowned scientific and technological capital. You can visit the universities, the museums and the libraries to get a sense of its intellectual foundations and its various facets. I can also take you to visit the surrounding towns, including Lexington, Plymouth or New Bedford, for a brief lesson on the history of American Independence, settlement of the continent, and its seafaring industry.

The Bangladeshis here are an amazing group, too. In a way the community, more than 10,000 strong, brings with it all the genealogical traits of the motherland, but also learns to live without the turmoil and tension we see back home. Nonetheless, we find people of different political views, religious faiths, and ideologies from all walks of life. But we all get together under one banner, the Bangladesh Association of New England (BANE), and celebrate national holidays, cultural events, annual picnics and all other events together. Make sure you come when a picnic is scheduled since this will give you a chance to meet many from all the different professions, political beliefs, cultural leanings and sartorial tastes. The picnic spots are quite incredible, one might add: sea shores, state parks, river banks, lakes or amusement parks.

We can also spend hours doing nothing in my backyard. It doesn't rain much in summer, and the mornings and evenings are very cool and you can hear the birds chirp, the trees sway in the breeze, or you can just stare at the blue sky. I don't promise restaurant quality food but I can cook up a decent dinner every night or, if you prefer, I can let Rumi cook to order: Indian, Chinese, Italian or Mexican, whichever you are in a mood for. And let me assure you, as long as you don't mind leftover (bashi) food you will never go hungry. But I am sure you'll get sick of eating my daal and bhat every day, and might want to try some of the specialties in this area. We could try fast food, MacDonalds or Mexican at Taco Bells,



authentic Italian food in the North End, or street food from the trucks in Dorchester. If you have a taste for salad or seafood we can do that too. Even my nearest grocery store has a 50-item salad bar. Or we can eat fried fish, shrimp, clams or sea food salad right on the beach.

I can drive you to Cape Cod, where you will find hundreds and hundreds of miles of sea shore and sandy beaches. I know you might feel nostalgic for the beaches in Cox's Bazaar, but let me just say this, you will not feel let down. We can also drive along the seashore and just enjoy the cool breeze blowing in from the ocean and watch the sail boats, motor boats or ocean liners.

Finally, I would also like to take you for a glimpse of the famous Harvard Square Cinema, if it hasn't already closed by then. I saw in the newspaper that this historic Cineplex will be closed down permanently this summer. This finale down means a piece of my personal memorabilia will be lost to me. Rumi and I have lots of memories intertwined with this venerable theater: good movies, friends and many beautiful phases of our life together. My friend Gora, now deceased, first introduced us to the cinema and its "two-for-one" deal. This is where we saw *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, *Lion in Winter* and *Last Tango in Paris*, to name a few masterpieces. It is here that we tried to act as a catalyst for romance for our friend Mona with a Harvard Law School student.

However, if you are really coming, please give me a few days advance notice to allow me to prepare an itinerary to your taste. I would like to find out what is happening at the museums, what is playing at the free theatre known as "Shakespeare on the Common"; to find out if Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen is in town; to take you to pass by the offices of some of my favorite economists at MIT; or take you to the computing center of Boston University, my alma mater. Just a little piece of caution before you pack your bag for the trip. The weather can be temperamental so bring a light jacket along, and you can explore all the important places by its underground trains, known locally as the T. I'll introduce you to my friends, Geoff the Professor, Nasim the Poet, and Yon my ex-colleague. You'll also meet my family, my neighbors Roz the grad student, Mahdi the artist, and Taposh the musician. Along with countless others, they make Boston an interesting place to stay, love, and grow with.

DR. ABDULLAH SHIBLI LIVES AND WORKS IN BOSTON, USA.

FICTION

The good guy

NAVEED ISLAM

Esha shifts uneasily in the passenger's seat as Safwan slams the door shut beside her. She nervously clicks open the lock on her leather purse and pulls out her mother's old Nokia cellphone in one swift motion. Safwan's footsteps on the rain-soaked asphalt echo in her ears like the ticking of a slow moving second hand on a clock.

Her thumbs dance along the number keys as the "New Message" screen flashes before her eyes: a single tap on 3, two gentle presses on 6, a jab on 8. The door to her right unlocks and the wet smell of grass and earth from the garden outside her apartment building fills the car. She doesn't have much time left. Press 0 for space and three clicks on 2. The weight of the vehicle shifts slightly to the right as he seats himself in front of the steering wheel. Her thumb lingers on the 2 and jumps down a notch to 5. The engine revs as the meters on the dashboard spark to life, but only for a moment. An arm reaches over and suddenly grabs hold of her wrist. The car stops shaking as Safwan's unmerciful gaze meets her fearful eyes.

"Who are you SMS-ing?" he asks with an uncharacteristically stern voice, changed from its usual unassuming boyish tone.

"Tanveer Bhaiya," she says, taking care not to move any muscle on her face to suggest that she was lying, "he's a colleague of mine."

"Why is he calling you on a Saturday?"

She would have said that they wanted to see if she was free to come in, that she wanted to say no because he had asked her to spend the afternoon with him instead. It would have been another lie, since she did not want to be here. But, it no longer mattered. He had seen the message she was going to send from the corner of his eye. The recipient was a nameless string of numbers. She had made sure not to save this contact in her phone for fear that he would see it.

"Whom are you asking not to call you?"

Your Tanveer Bhaiya?"

She doesn't respond.

"Esha, I can find out who this is, you know."

She remains quiet, her wrist being crushed under his strong grip.

"Let go, Safwan."

"Tell me who you're sending this to," he

says, his voice beginning to shake. "Is it him?"

"No."

"I told you to break up with him."

"I did," she said. This was true. She hated him for it.

"Then why are you sending him a message?"

"I'm not," she said, wincing in pain, "I was asking Nadia apu not to call me!"

"Why?" he asks, his anger unwavering.

"I thought you would get mad," she says, "I didn't want to..."

"You're lying!" he growls. Safwan's fingers tighten around her arm, "You think you can protect him?"

"Safwan, you're hurting me."

"Give me your phone and see what I do to him," he says as his thin but muscular free arm, hidden beneath the rolled-up sleeves of a striped red shirt, wrestles with her over the phone. Esha's arm twists and her body screams in pain. She grabs hold of his right arm and digs her pink polished fingernails into the meat on his forearm. He holds his ground and overpowers her, giving her a light shove that knocks her back against the armrest on the passenger's side door. Esha sits in her corner defeated and glares at Safwan. He takes a cursory glance at the message, presses the cancel key and tucks it into the right pocket of his black dress pants. "We're going," he says while releasing the handbrake.

Esha sits facing forward. The rain pelts the windshield as pedestrians along the sidewalk scurry into shops and under awnings looking for shelter. Her fingers find the hem of her sky-blue *ornaa* and begin fiddling with it, a nervous tick from when she was a child. Spots of rain adorn an aqua colored *kameez* that Safwan had bought for her two years ago when they were dating. They had been walking in Arcadia Plaza, casting sideways glances and secretive knowing smiles at each other as waves of shoppers oblivious passed them by. She had stopped at a small boutique and asked to look at the blue *shalwar kameez* at the top which, now that she thought about it, had looked turquoise in that light. Safwan had smiled, pulled out his wallet and insisted on buying it for her. She was like a child at a toy store who was being bought a present for her good behavior or academic accomplishment. But their relationship had ended a long time ago and she had moved on. Someone new had taken the

space where Safwan's slight frame, scruffy hair and simple good looks had once occupied. It had been years since he had been in her life. She had been happy until he came looking for her.

"I want my phone back," Esha said.

"No."

"I'm not going to call him."

"You better not, or God help you both."

The boy who sat in the driver's seat now was someone she did not recognize. Safwan furrowed his eyebrows as the car slowed to a halt behind traffic. He pulled down his window and opened a pack of cigarettes from his back pocket. Safwan stuck a Benson in his mouth and let it dangle from his lip while he held a black Zippo lighter up to its tip. It burnt bright orange as he removed it from his lips with his index and ring fingers to exhale a puff. One hand remained on the steering wheel with the cigarette while another dangled from the side of the car. He had begun smoking during their relationship and had never been able to quit.

Esha resumed looking through her window as translucent beads of water dripped down the glass. She now wished for nothing more than to be washed away with the rain, to flow with the stream freely to where not even Safwan could keep her from finding happiness. Wasn't she entitled to that too? Couldn't she smile and laugh again just like everyone else?

"Give me my phone back," she repeated, this time her patience waning.

"I was good to you."

"What?"

"I was good to you and you took advantage of me," he said, the anger rising in him from somewhere dark but warm, "you made me suffer so now it's my turn. This is what you deserve! I won't let you go back to him."

The car slowly edged forward but Esha did not care. She flung her door open as the cacophony of horns on the street welcomed her back from purgatory. A loud slam signaled the beginning of her march toward freedom. The rain beat down heavily as she climbed onto the sidewalk, ignoring the muted surprise of people in nearby cars and confused pedestrians on the street. Safwan's door had slammed shut behind her. He was now giving chase while she walked down a wet and muddy street in high heels. She held her purse up above her forehead to see through the thick of water pouring

from the heavens. Safwan grabbed her free hand and tugged hard enough to nearly trip her. He spun her around, placed his hands on her shoulders and stared into her eyes with vengeance in his. They stood in the middle of the sidewalk in the rain.

"I'm going to scream if you don't let me go!"

"Go ahead and scream!"

"I'll do it."

"No one will come."

Esha first brushed his hands off of her. He grabbed hold of her wrist and then she started crying for help. Safwan's cold and unflinching stare stayed fixed on her as she struggled to break free. The men who hurried past them in the rain couldn't care less and no one watching from their cars seemed to want to come out. Safwan brought his face close to hers, his wet hair sticking to his forehead and cheeks.

"Get back in the car," he said, letting go of her arm. Esha stood there quietly for a minute before he repeated the order. They crossed back to where the traffic had barely moved. Cars behind them honked loudly at the white Allion whose driver had run out into the rain. Safwan did not hold the door open for her this time. Esha sat back in the passenger's seat and began to sob. Safwan slid into his space and moved his car forward as the street demanded.

"Any other guy would have knocked you to the ground right there," he barked. Hot tears ran down Esha's cheeks. Safwan sighed and turned to face her, his arm outstretched so that his elbow rested on the back of her seat. The livid glow in his eyes seemed to give way as he said, "