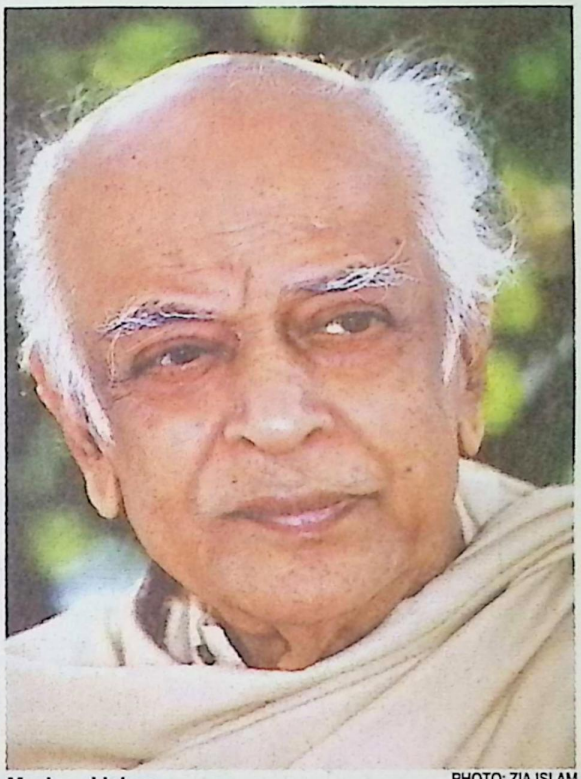
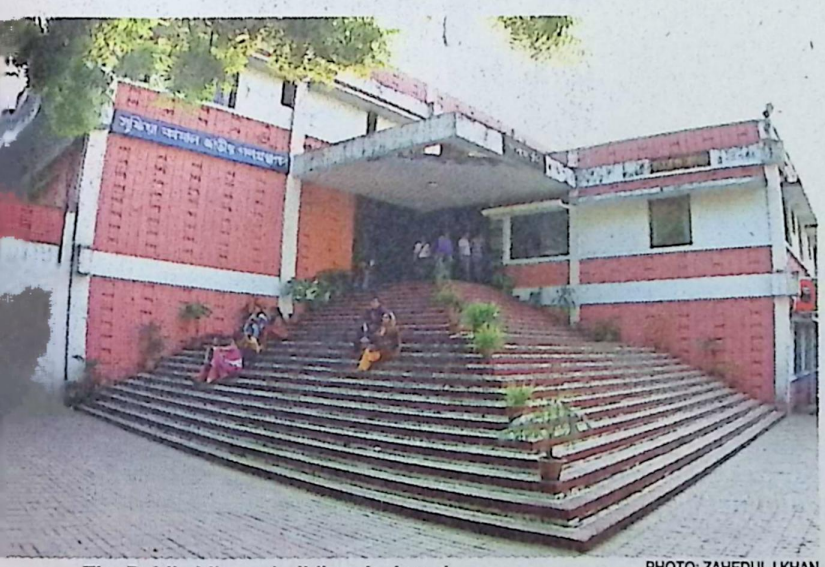
ture, ceramics, graphics and commercial art) within Dhaka University campus, but there was no progress in this regard until 1953, when McConnel asked Muzharul Islam to design the college complex. Islam did not waste time and within six months almost single headedly prepared all the designs and drawings required for the academic, administrative and common facilities of the college.

Islam studied the character of the site which was surrounded by open spaces and lush green trees and divided the college in three building blocks and connected them with a linear corridor along east-west direction. The two storey front block of the College is open in the ground floor without walls and articulates the threshold between large open to sky spaces and enclosed class rooms. The central teaching block contains class rooms with provision for cross ventilation and light. A curvilinear teaching block redefines the existing circular shape of the pond. The openness of the buildings, walkways, garden spaces and the sensorial ambiance of the whole created a campus ideal for contemplation of the learning of the arts. The college, immediately on completion, achieved an iconic status in Dhaka as a fine work of modernism inflected by time and place.

Before putting the pencil on the drawing board, Muzharul Islam was looking for inspiration from within his land. He found a number of British colonial and a few Mughal buildings in and around Dhaka, such as Curzon Hall, Old High Court, Bardhawan House, SM Hall, Lalbag fort, Bara and Chota Katra, etc. He found these rigid buildings not only as a means to hamper growth but also as a collection of restrictions for his creative exercise. So instead of surrendering to the static and permanent looking buildings of the colonial past he opted for the "liberal" as the theme for his post colonial spirit and accepted the European modernism as the means to achieve freedom of expression. He also understood modernity as a mode of social life in which the establishment of the new was a driving force to attain the fruits of progress and innovation.



Mazharul Islam PHOTO: ZIA ISLAM



The Public Library building designed by Muzharul Islam in 1953-54. PHOTO: ZAHEDUL I KHAN

It is understandable that in Oregon Islam learned how Aalto used to ground his buildings in the configuration of a specific topography and how he created the fine grained texture of the local materials. Islam was also inspired by the openness and transparency of Le Corbusier's "Plan Libre", his pilotis and flat concrete slab. He found these adaptable and suitable to satisfy his social and political responsibility in evoking a nationalist, secular, realistic and liberal regional architecture accessible to the people at large.

The openness at the ground floor of the Front Block close to the approach road on the west under the flat roof slab supported by circular columns has created the unhindered entry to the building without any door. This door-less entry along with free flow of circulation area without any barrier with the exterior woody landscape created