



Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Dhirendranath Dutta.

# SHER-E-BANGLA AK FAZLUL HUQ

## A Pioneer of the Bengali Muslim renaissance

A K FAIZUL HUQ RAZU

Once in a century, a man is born with extraordinary leadership skills that can change the course of history and blessed is the country where such a man is born. Such a man was Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq – a great statesman, a self-sacrificing patriot, a spokesman of truth and justice and a champion of freedom and liberty.

Our great national leader, Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq was born on October 26, 1873 in his maternal uncle's house in the village of Satura under the Rajapur Thana in the district of Jhalakathi, then under greater Barisal. His father's residence was at the village Chakhar in the Banaripara Thana, under Barisal district. His forefathers, however, were the inhabitants of the village Bilbillash under the Baufal Thana, in the district of Patuakhali.

AK Fazlul Huq, since his childhood, was an extra-ordinarily meritorious student. He obtained scholarship in his mid-level examinations and passed the Entrance (SSC) Examination with brilliant marks in the year 1889. In 1891, in his FA Examination, Sher-e-Bangla also got scholarship. In 1894, he passed the Honours Examination simulta-

MA degree in Mathematics. He also passed the Law degree with distinction only to become one of the most celebrated and legendary lawyers of the Indian Sub-continent in no time. Once, the then district Magistrate Briston Bell while discussing matters relating to education in the district, had asked Moulvi Mohammad Wazed, the father of Sher-e-Bangla, "How many graduates are there in the Bakerganj (a large area of the then greater Barisal was known as Bakerganj) district?" In reply, to the English Magistrate's utter surprise, Mr Wazed, a renowned lawyer (Muktar) by profession, said proudly, "Me and my only son Fazlul Huq are the only two known graduates in the entire district." This was in 1901, a time during which, most common people of the Indian Sub-continent were living in illiteracy, extreme poverty and acute frustration.

In 1873, when AK Fazlul Huq was born, the Indian Sub-continent lay prostrate at the feet of the British Raj. The great mutiny of 1857 had been ruthlessly quelled and the ancient ruling classes had been either wiped out or lay cringing in the dust. The foreign

which sometimes turned his personal achievements into an agony at the sight of so much folly, so much futility and so much hatred all around.

Sher-e-Bangla's was a career of outstanding service, of great achievement and of dedication to a cause. The flame of his faith in freedom and in nationalism never flickered. As a statesman, an orator, a philanthropist, an administrator and an educationist, Sher-e-Bangla was undoubtedly a giant among men, almost an institution by himself. A rare combination of human qualities, he had a heart that suffered for the poor and the people around him. Courteous, sharp, witty, and kind, he gave out his mature judgment and counsel which was often sought and valued. Single-minded in his devotion to the national movement, broad-minded in his approach to the varied international problems, national, regional and sectional, Sher-e-Bangla had always been revered and adored as a keen intellectual, eloquent speaker, eagle-eyed politician, and above all a loveable human-being.

Entirely selfless, free from all narrowness,

the post of the first-ever elected Mayor of Calcutta City Corporations in 1930 to becoming the Education Minister of Bengal in 1924 to crowning the coveted chair of the Prime Minister of Undivided Bengal in 1937 to the post ranging from the Chief Minister of East Pakistan after the landslide victory of the 1954 general elections under the historic platform of the Jukto-Front to the Home Minister of Pakistan in 1956. As rare as his political acumen and personality was that he was able to hold two completely diverse positions of, the President of the Muslim League of India on one hand, and the Secretary General of the All-India Congress party, on the other and all at the same time.

A champion of spreading mass education throughout Bengal, his active support and contributions had shaped the establishing of the Dhaka University in 1921. Indeed, he set up a number of schools, colleges and other educational institutions among them the Adina Fazlul Huq College of Rajshahi, Harganga College of Munshiganj, Chakhar Fazlul Huq College, Wazed Memorial Institutions, Islamia college of Calcutta, a



Bangladesh) following which we saw the establishment of numerous schools and colleges in many villages and remote areas for the down-trodden people.

AK Fazlul Huq was the pioneer of the Bengali Muslim renaissance. We are indebted to him in more ways than one. The very word 'We' covers a multitude of things from peasants of Bangladesh to the politicians, leaders, poets, journalists, educationists, students to mention but a few only. We are indebted to him for the inspiring leadership that brought about the revolution. He was the great mover of the historic Lahore resolution in 1940, drafting which, he had clearly indicated with all its diligent arguments, a separate and an independent land for the Muslim majority Bengalis of this part (Bangladesh) Indeed, through the upheaval journeys starting from 1947, after the great divide, through to the oppressive and struggling years of 1952, 1954, 1962, 1966, 1970 and finally, the year of 1971 the teeming millions of Bangladesh witnessed the very birth of a free land through the undisputed leadership of its founding father-Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Guided by the gracious gleam of nature, AK Fazlul Huq was dear to this land of ours as a prince without royal titles or crowns. But a beloved household name, which will live through all times. In defiance of time's tyrannical mortality and oblivion, such triumphant immortals, reposing in the bosom of God, conquer death; deprive it of its terror, making it almost beloved. It would have been difficult to recall a more beautiful life with a purer heart, a richer mind and a nobler dedication than his, even in the ampler days that are no more. He was a giant amongst the giants and his name echoed through the shouts of millions. It is only such a kingly spirit which could dare demand the public audiences of his fellowmen.

Sher-e-Bangla is no more with us, yet he is alive in the hearts of all. His memory persists in the long cherished and yet unfulfilled dreams, hopes and aspirations of the people whom he inspired. His name will persist as long as Bangladesh remains and we have the capacity to dream and realise the object of his dream. He will thus continue to live in the continuity of the hopes and aspirations of the people of Bangladesh. Joy Bangla.

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Sher-e-Bangla administering oath to Bangabandhu as one of the cabinet members, soon after the historic victory of Jukto Front in 1954.



With Rabindranath Tagore.

neously in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry with credit from the Presidency College, Kolkata (Calcutta) India. It was the first time that a Muslim student had passed the honours exams in three different subjects at the same time. The following year, one day, while Fazlul Huq was busy preparing himself for the MA Examination in English, one of his Hindu friends said, "You are appearing in MA in English because you Muslim students are afraid of Mathematics – Is it not so?" AK Fazlul Huq was shocked at this negative attitude from his friend while his friend went on to add that Muslim students are very much afraid of intelligent subjects.

The Tiger of Bengal, challenged him that he would not appear in the MA exams in English, rather he would appear for the MA exams in Mathematics and hence prove such a perception wrong. Subsequently, AK Fazlul Huq passed the MA in Mathematics with the highest credits and that too with only a mere six month's preparation by obtaining special permission from the Calcutta University. It is worth mentioning that Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq was the first Muslim in undivided Bengal (the then greater Bengal) to obtain an

traders had been firmly entrenched as rulers and the British Queen had been proclaimed the Emperor of the India. It seemed to be taken for granted that this bright jewel would continue to shed lustre on the Imperial Crown forever. Almost ninety years later, when Sher-e-Bangla died in 1962, the face of Bengal had been totally transformed politically and socially. She had also recovered her self-respect and spiritually, she had started discovering the hidden springs of creative life.

A multitude of political and social factors were responsible for this historic transformation. Among the greatest individuals who made these forces creative in shaping the destiny of Bengalis and Bangladesh, Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq stands out as pre-eminent. It is not only in the history of Bangladesh, but in the history of the entire Sub-continent that he will always be among the greatest. AK Fazlul Huq was one of the fortunate few whom the Creator, in his infinite mercy, gave in full measures, all the things which human beings desire and yet with a contrariety which is beyond human understanding. Along with these gifts he had immense sympathy for human suffering,

truthful in thought, fearless in action, meek as a lamb but a lion in spirit as he was, Fazlul Huq never failed to rise to the occasion and respond to the call and urges of his country, his people. His foresight was indeed amazing and in a letter written to the then Governor of Bengal, Sir John Herbert on the August 2, 1942, he had the courage and firm conviction to demand a separate Bengali Army and wrote, "I want you to consent to the formation of a Bengali Army consisting of a hundred thousand young Bengalis consisting of Muslim and Hindu youths on a fifty-fifty basis. There is an insistent demand for such a step being taken at once, and the people of great Bengal will not be satisfied with any excuses. It is a national demand which must be immediately considered." He also pointed out in the same letter, "Administrative measures must be suited to the genius and traditions of the people and not fashioned according to the whims and caprices of hundred bureaucrats to many of whom autocratic ideas are bound up with the very breath of their lives"

So diverse was his entire political life that among a host of political positions, he held

number of Hostels for the Muslim students, Lady Brabourne College of Calcutta for women and Eden Girl's College Hostel. He also contributed to the improvement of the Shakawat Memorial Girl's College set up by Begum Rokeya. In 1933 Sher-e-Bangla established the Tejgaon Agricultural College for imparting modern agricultural methods to the Bengalis, which has been converted and upgraded to a full-fledged Agricultural University named after him by the honorable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina as a mark of national respect to his fond memories.

In the year 1938, during his premiership of Bengal, Sher-e-Bangla, by passing and implementing the Mahajani Law and the Bengal Tenancy Act and setting up the debt settlement board, not only saved millions of Bengali peasants from the torture and oppression of Zamindars (landlords) but also paved the way to bring the light of education to every house. It was Sher-e-Bangla who had introduced free primary education up to Class-IV. It was Fazlul Huq's free primary education system that helped the emergence of an educated middle-class and lower middle-class throughout Bengal, (today's