



# Reminiscences of Dhaka University

AK FAZLUL HAQ

In the beginning of the present century the Muslims of Bengal were very backward in education. The number of Muslim students in the Presidency College of Calcutta was negligible. In 1912 there were less than 80 Muslim students in the Colleges of Dhaka. The leaders of the Muslim community, men like the late Nawab Khwaja Salimullah and Nawab Ali Choudhury realised that unless there was development of education the Muslim community would remain backward and weak, and would continue to be exploited by more advanced communities. The partition of Bengal had brought new hopes to the people

of East Bengal where Muslims were in majority; the annulment of the partition was a grievous wrong and it dashed all our hopes for the development of this country and the advancement of its people. The late Nawab Salimullah received a great shock from which he did not recover. The Government of India said that as an Imperial concession to the Muslims of East Bengal a University would be established at Dhaka.

I was very closely and actively associated with all the plans and schemes and I know the difficulties which we Muslims had to face and the obstinate opposition we had to overcome at that time in pushing the scheme for the establishment

of University. In January, 1912 we presented an address to Lord Hardinge, the then Viceroy, and submitted our proposals for the improvement of the conditions of Muslims in East Bengal. He said that the Government of India would take steps to establish a University at Dhaka. The promise was officially confirmed in a Communique published on 2nd February, 1912. A protest was made against this proposal and on the 16th of February, 1912, Sir Rash Behary Ghosh led a deputation and told the Viceroy that the creation of a separate University at Dhaka would be an 'impartial partition'.

In the same month [the] Government appointed a Committee under Mr. Nathan to frame the scheme for the

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proposed University. The late Maulana Mohammad Ali of revered memory was one of its members. The Nathan Committee's Report was the basis of the scheme of the new University of Dhaka with its emphasis on Islamic Studies. The outbreak of the First World War was made an excuse for delaying the implementation of the scheme and we Muslims of East Bengal instructed the late Nawab Nawab Ali Choudhury, who was then a member of the Imperial Legislative Council, to move in the Council that the Bill for incorporation of the University of Dhaka should be introduced 'at an early date'.

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The Government of the India built up a fund of Rs. 65 lakhs for capital expenditure on the university; this sum was transferred to the Government of Bengal, and Sir Pravash Mitter, who was then in charge of education, merged this money with provincial funds and said that Government would make grants to the University from time to time. I believe that the University received about 9 lakhs, out of the fund of 65 lakhs, and invested it in Government securities.

When the late Sir Mohammad Shafi

was a member of the Government of India I was in close association with him, moved about with him and used his help and influence for the advancement of higher education in Bengal.

The University of Dhaka had to beg for money every year from the Government of Bengal; through the help of Sir Abdur Rahim I obtained from Government a statutory recurring grant of 5.5 lakhs for the University.

The University of Dhaka was established in July, 1921; in the first meeting of the University Court I moved the resolution recording the appreciation and gratefulness of the Muslims of East Bengal to the late Nawab Salimullah who was a true lover of his country and people, and a courageous and unselfish fighter for their progress and prosperity.

I have spoken more than I had intended. ... My only excuse is that I am an old man, an old man are proverbially garrulous. I am the living history of Bengal and of East Pakistan of the last sixty years. I am the last survivor of that band of unselfish and courageous Muslims who fought fearlessly against terrific odds in order to secure the rights and prestige of Muslims in this part of the world.

This is an abridged version of the speech delivered by Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Haq at the annual convocation of Dhaka University on February 19, 1957.



AK Fazlul Haq and his cabinet, 1937. Source: Bangladesh on Record

## Revolutionising female education

M A RAHIM

It is worth-mentioning that the University of Dhaka broke the barrier of conservatism of the society in Eastern Bengal with regard to the University education and co-education of women in the University. Not to speak of the Muslim society, even in the Hindu society of Eastern Bengal education beyond the school stage was disfavoured. Very few parents would like to give their daughters higher education in Colleges and University for fear of social odium.

Lila Nag, the first woman student of the University of Dhaka, faced enormous difficulty in getting herself admitted to the M. A. Course of English in 1921. She was courageous and her father, who was an enlightened person, was bold enough to ignore social displeasure of the time.

Lila Nag's admission caused a breach in the conservatism of the society against co-education in the University of Dhaka. Her admission encouraged other female students of Dhaka. In 1923 three female students got themselves admitted into this University.

Gradually the number of female students in the Dhaka University increased. In the beginning they took such subjects as Sanskrit and Bengali and had their admission into the M. A. Course, after completing B. A. degree from some College in Calcutta. In course of time, they are found to take other subjects of Arts and Science. They got themselves admitted into the B. A. Pass and Honours Courses. In 1934 the number of women students rose to 39 and in 1936-37 to 59. Their number increased to 90 in 1945-46 and in 1946-47 to 100. In 1947-48 the number of female students fell to 72, on account of the departure of Hindu students to Calcutta.

The Muslim society was all the more conservative in respect of the co-education of the females in the University. The first Muslim female student to cross this barrier of conservatism was Fazilatun Nesa, who got herself admitted into the M. A. Course of Mathematics at the Dhaka University in 1925, after passing her B. A. examination from a College in Calcutta. But the number of the Muslim female students did not increase in the following years. Occasionally one or two female students, such as Azizun Nesa,

Khodeja Khatun, Jamsherun Nesa and Anwara Khatun studied in the University. They generally took subjects of the Arts Faculty.

Malika Akhtar Banu was the first Muslim woman student in science at the Dhaka University. She got herself admitted into first year M. Sc. Chemistry in 1941. After 1947 the number of the Muslim female students increased and some of them took subjects of the Science Faculty.

lady teacher at the University was a surprise to the society, but it was favourably commented in the press. This appointment infused confidence in the female students of the Dhaka University. From this time, they felt bold to set up women Students' Society and organise their own literary, social and cultural functions. Two years after the appointment of Karunakana Gupta, Charupama Bose was appointed Assistant Lecturer in



Leela Nag was the first woman to be admitted to the University of Dhaka. The then Vice Chancellor Philip Hartog gave a special permission for her admission.

At present their number in the University has considerably increased and they count 25% to 33% [1981] of the total roll of the students in the University. There are two Halls for the residence of the women students and these are now found inadequate for their accommodation.

At present the female students are moving freely in the University campus. This was unthinkable in the early years of the University of Dhaka. Another stage in the progress of the female education in the University and the erosion of the conservatism of the society in Eastern Bengal regarding the coeducation of women was the appointment of a lady teacher in the University of Dhaka. In 1935 Karunakana Gupta, who passed M. A. with first class in 1933, was appointed Assistant Lecturer in the Department of History. She was the first lady teacher in the University of Dhaka. The appointment of a

the Department of English. In this way meritorious women students made their entry into the teaching staff of the Dhaka University. The number of lady teachers gradually increased and at present about 140 of them are engaged in different departments of this university.

If we think of the education of women in the Dhaka University in the twenties and thirties and compare with the present state of their educational progress and their academic distinction, we wonder at the revolutionary change the University of Dhaka has effected in social outlook in respect of the higher education of the females in Eastern Bengal.

Dr M A Rahim (1921-1981) was a Professor of History at the University of Dhaka.

Source: M A Rahim, The History of the University of Dhaka, University of Dhaka, 1981, pp. 174-176.

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