

OBITUARY

Professor Kazi Din Muhammad (1927-2011)

I have been aware of the name of Kazi Din Muhammad since my youth. My first memory of this name goes as far back as 1958, when I read a book of humorous anecdotes entitled, *Golak Chandrer Atmakatha* (literally, 'The Autobiography of Golak Chandra'). For the first time in my young life a book made me laugh heartily. The author was said to have been born in the district of Faridpur circa 1906 but he is not the person whose obituary I am writing today. Many years later I asked Dr. Kazi Din Muhammad whether he was the author; he revealed that another Kazi Din Muhammad was the author. Though I was disappointed by his answer, I was happy to know the truth.

A long time after I left Alokdihi High English School in Dinajpur, Professor Mufakhkharul Islam of Bengali literature, at Carmichael College, Rangpur, reintroduced me to the name 'Kazi Din Muhammad' who told me that he was a classmate of Kazi Din Muhammad in the Department of Bangla at Dacca University in the late 1940s. He remembered the man affectionately and told me that both of them had studied for a master's degree (M.A.) in Bengali literature at Dacca University in 1949. When the examination results were published, it became known that Kazi Din Muhammad was being awarded a First Class First degree and that Mufakhkharul Islam received a Second Class First. In fact, both of them became celebrated in the history of Bengali literature.

When I had an opportunity to contact Professor Kazi Din Muhammad in 2006, he confirmed that he was indeed a classmate of Mufakhkharul Islam at Dacca University. He also revealed that Mufakhkhar had an original mind which was capable of using his notes brilliantly. When examination questions were analysed, it was found that the answers given by Mufakhkhar scored high marks. I was grateful that Din Muhammad had shared his thought with me about his friend. When I contacted Din Muhammad again in 2007, he informed me that his friend Mufakhkharul Islam had died in the previous year due to old age. These two writers of Bengali literature held each other in high esteem throughout their lives. Kazi Din Muhammad was a hard-working scholar who taught Bengali literature as a lecturer at Carmichael College, Rangpur for a few months from July to October 1951, before joining the Bengali Department of Dhaka University as a lecturer in November of that year. He worked at Dacca University (1951-86), first as a lecturer (1951-1961) and finally as a professor. He also served as the Director General of the Bangla Academy during 1967-70. On the other hand, Professor Mufakhkharul Islam was a professor at various Government Colleges, including Carmichael College in Rangpur, B. L. College at Daulatpur in Khulna and Dhaka Government College in Dhaka. He retired

as principal of Khulna Government Women's College.

Mufakhkharul Islam emerged as a versatile writer, Islamic poet, essayist, philosopher and historian of Islam with special reference to the *Ahl al-Bayt* (People of the House of the Prophet – pbuh). On the other hand, Professor Kazi Din Muhammad became an officer in the Bengali Development Board, Dacca, (1964-65). Kazi Din Muhammad gained a Ph.D. degree from the University of London in 1961 for a thesis in linguistics, entitled, 'The Verb Structure in Colloquial Bengali,' which was published by the Bangla Academy in 1985. His most famous research publication is entitled, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas* (lit. 'A History of Bengali Literature'), in four bulky volumes (vol. I: 410 pages; vol. II: 387 pages; vol. III: 508 pages and vol. IV: 677 pages), published in Dhaka, East Pakistan in 1968. This major work is claimed by critics to have been written during his service at Bangla Academy, Dhaka, where his fellow employees and specialists in Bengali literature helped him to write this voluminous book. Whatever may be the truth of this, it was a work authored by Kazi Din Muhammad alone. This book gives broad coverage to literary contributions of Muslim literary figures of Bengal. According to the *Bhumika* (lit. 'Introduction') to the third volume, volumes I and II deal with the ancient and medieval era of Bengali literature, while the volumes III and IV discuss the modern period. Volume III comprises 12 chapters which not only focus on the social and political backgrounds of Bengal, but also cover the development of lyrical poems, the epic, the growth of Bengal prose, the development of Bengali novels and short stories, history, travel literature and religious trends. Volume IV is devoted to the growth of drama, biography, lexicography, grammar and linguistics. The history of journalistic literature, *Dobhashi Punthi* (bilingual books), *Baul* (minstrels) songs and the history of music are also covered. This literary history has many good features, but some critics find it comprehensive but insufficiently critical. Whatever the critics may say, the history of Bengali literature was the magnum opus of Kazi Din Muhammad.

Apart from writing these massive tomes, Kazi Din Muhammad wrote prolifically on a variety of subjects, such as folklore (e.g. *Lok Sahitye Dhandha o Prabodh*, 1969, lit. 'Riddles and Proverbs in Folklore'), philosophy (e.g. *Astikata o Nastikata*, 1993, lit. 'Theism and Atheism') and religion (e.g. *Mahanabir Bani Satak*, 1988, lit. '100 Teachings of the Great Prophet'; *Chotoder Mahanabi Muhammad*, lit. 'Prophet Muhammad for Young People'; Islamic Foundation, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1999; 'Thus Spoke Prophet Muhammad', Puthipustak, Dhaka, 2000) and a volume of poems entitled, *Prabhat* (lit. 'Dawn'), Dhaka, 1975.

Professor Mujibur Rahman once told me that Kazi Din Muhammad was a courteous and helpful writer. Once he requested the latter to write a foreword to one of his books on the subject of the miraculousness of the Qur'ān (Ar. *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*). Din Muhammad told him to leave his manuscript behind for his investigation, but he could not guarantee his response. He would try to write something about it. His non-committal response caused him anxiety. However, within a week Kazi Din Muhammad wrote a well-crafted four page 'Foreword' to Dr. Mujibur Rahman's book entitled, *Qur'āner Chirantan Mujizah* (lit. The Eternal Miracles of the Holy Qur'ān) I have seen his *Mukhabandha* (Foreword) written in 1979. As a result of his beautiful and scholarly 'Foreword', says the author, the book sold out very rapidly and four editions were published by the Islamic Foundation, Dhaka, Bangladesh in

the 1980s. Despite its success, the book is now out of print. Recently Professor Kazi Din Muhammad wrote an article on the life and work of Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah in a journal entitled, *Agrapathik* (lit. 'The Pioneer'). It was a tribute to his teacher, the polyglot, Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah. Kazi Din Muhammad received many awards, including the Bangladesh Daemi Complex Award, 1989; the Bangladesh Islamic Foundation Award, 1990; Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar Gold Plaque, 2002, India. There was also a controversial side to his career. He suffered imprisonment with Professor Syed Sajjad Husain, Dr. Mohar Ali, Professor Hasan Zaman, and other writers for his support of Pakistan during 1971. He was later released (around 1974) when Shaikh Mujibur Rahman granted a general amnesty to political prisoners. It would seem that political persecution drove Kazi Din Muhammad to a 'reclusive life' and he sought solace in the secretive life of so-called 'mysticism'/sufism. Being a creative writer he recorded his thoughts in some books, such as *Sufibader Gorar Katha* (lit. 'Origins of Sufism', 1980) as well as *Sufibad o Amader Samaj* (lit. 'Sufism and our Society'). He befriended mystical poets like Syed Ali Ashraf and enlisted himself as professor of Bengali at Darul Ihsan University, Dhaka which was founded and led by Professor Ashraf. Din Muhammad was also associated with the Asian University of Bangladesh.

It is not surprising that Kazi Din Muhammad dabbled in Islamic thought and wrote some books regarding Islamic culture, such as *Bangladeshe Islamer Abirbhab* (lit. The Advent of Islam in Bangladesh), 1975; *Islami Sanskriti* (lit. Islamic Culture), Dhaka, 1989; *Sanskriti o Adarsha* (lit. Culture and Idealism), 1990; *Samaj, Sanskriti o Sahitya* (lit. Society, Culture and Literature), 1990. On the 9th October 2011, Dhaka University celebrated the 90th year of its service to the cause of Bengali language and literature and Dr. Kazi Din Muhammad was one of the eight scholars to receive an honour for his outstanding service. He died on Saturday, the 29th October 2011. His death was mourned by his admirers, students, fellow writers and members of the public.

Kazi Din Muhammad was born on 1 February 1927 in the village of Rupshi, Rupganj Thana in Narayanganj and he died at Labaid Hospital in Dhaka after midnight on Friday. His demise at the age of 84 was reported on 11th November 2011. His death was mourned by thousands in three funeral services (*Janāzah*). His first funeral prayer was held at Kalabagan Sports Ground in Dhaka at 11 a.m. The second funeral prayer was performed after midday (*Zuhr*) prayer at the Dhaka University Central Mosque. The Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University, Professor Arefin Siddique, proclaimed his death as a national loss to Bengali language and literature. His final funeral service was held before his burial at his ancestral graveyard at his birthplace in Rupshi. May Allah have mercy on his departed soul. He was also a philanthropist, who founded Kazi Din Muhammad School at Kalabagan in Dhaka, Bangladesh. His literary and educational legacy will be remembered for a long time.

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