

Remembering Professor
NAZIMUDDIN AHMED

By Professor Dr M A J BEG

Dr Nazimuddin Ahmed, son of Maulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed, was the foremost authority on the prehistory of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Born in 1926 at Azmatpur in the district of Murshidabad, West Bengal, and graduated from Calcutta University in 1946. He then took an MA degree in Islamic History and Culture from the same University in 1949. His father was an eminent archaeologist, who had migrated to Pakistan in 1947, and his son followed suit two years later.

After moving to Pakistan in 1949-50, Nazimuddin Ahmed was employed under the supervision of the great British archaeologist, Sir Mortimer Wheeler, as a trainee archaeologist at the prehistoric site of Mohenjodaro in 1949-50 and he continued to work at archaeological sites at Quetta, Zoab Valley, Lora Lai and Pishin in Baluchistan under the guidance of Professor Fairservis.

In 1950 he became a junior archaeologist and in the following year, Assistant Superintendent of Archaeology. In 1959 he was elevated to Superintendent of Archaeology. He initially worked at Karachi Department of Archaeology, and was then transferred to Rajshahi Circle of Archaeology (1952-54) and, in December 1954 he was transferred to Lahore, where he worked until 1956. During this period he registered at

London University for a PhD degree in Archaeology under the supervision of Professor K. de B. Cordington of SOAS.

His doctoral dissertation, "History and Archaeology of Taxila" was completed in 1958. As Superintendent of Archaeology, Dr Nazimuddin Ahmed had worked at the Dhaka office of the Department of Archaeology of Pakistan from 1959 to 1969. He was then transferred to Lahore, where in November 1970 he was promoted to the office of Director of Archaeology and Museums of Pakistan. He was working as an archaeologist in Lahore when East Pakistan seceded and became Bangladesh.

Dr Nazimuddin left Pakistan in 1973 for Bangladesh, where he was appointed Director of Archaeology and Museums; he was also appointed UNESCO consultant in Somalia, where he conducted pioneering archaeological surveys and submitted a recommendation to establish a Department of Archaeology and Museums. He retired from Bangladesh Department of Archaeology in 1983 and continued to work as an advisor to UNESCO Cultural Heritage Project in the Buddhist Monastery at Paharpur (Rajshahi) and the Mosque - City of Bagerhat of Khan Jahan Ali from 1984 and 1989. He was a prolific writer whose books on Muslim culture of Bengal include:

1. *Islamic Heritage of Bangladesh*, Parjatan Tourist (Parjatan) Corporation, Dacca, Bangladesh, 1977.
2. *Islamic Heritage of Bangladesh* (2nd edition), Department of Films and Publication, Dacca, 1980.
3. *The Buildings of Khan Jahan in and around Bagerhat*, Dhaka, University Press Ltd., (not dated).
4. *Mughal Dhaka and Lalbagh Fort*, Department of Archaeology, Dhaka, 2004.
5. **History of Dhaka through Inscription and Architecture: A portrait of the Sultanate Period**, (edited text), Department of Archaeology, Dhaka, 2000.

6. *Islamic Art and Islami Silpakala* (a collection of research papers by eminent scholars), edited by Nazimuddin Ahmed and Syed Mahmudul Hasan, published by Islamic Art Organisation, Islamic Art Organisation, Dhaka, 2007.

Besides these books, Dr Nazimuddin Ahmed wrote many interesting articles on aspects of the Muslim history of Bengal including 1) 'Evolution of Architecture in East Pakistan', in *Journal of Pakistan Historical Conference*, 1952, 2) 'Pre-Muslim and Muslim Architecture in East Pakistan', in *Pakistan Quarterly*, February and June, 1966, 3) 'Our Heritage: Few early Islamic monuments in Bangladesh', in *Illustrated Weekly of Bangladesh*, 3 April 1977, 4) 'Shat Gumbad Mosque', in *Magazine of South Asian Archaeology*, 1984, 5) 'A Unique Mosque with Figural Representation', in *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, vol.33, No. 1, Dhaka, 1988, 6) 'Some historical monuments of the last two centuries in Bangladesh', in *Bangladesh Quarterly*, Departments of Film and Publication, December 1992, 7) Cox's Bazar: its history and antiquity, in *Bangladesh Quarterly*, Department of Film and Publications, September, 1992.

At least one of his works covers the prehistory of the Indus Valley region. *A Guide to Mohenjodaro*, Department of Archaeology and Museums, Karachi, Pakistan, 1952, was based on Nazimuddin's earliest work on the archaeological excavations under the supervision of Sir Mortimer Wheeler. This was his first assignment as a young archaeologist. During his subsequent career he devoted himself to the archaeological explorations of East Pakistan (and then Bangladesh) and produced a number of publications. His books seek to discover the truth regarding the heritage of Hindu, Buddhist (Pala period) and pagan cultures of Bengal. In addition to being the Director of Archaeology Department in Pakistan until 1970, he was also the Founder Director of Archaeology in Bangladesh. According to Professor Syed Mahmudul Hasan, "Nazim Bhai retired in 1983 but he had close attachment with the Department of Archaeology as UNESCO consultant. Nazim Bhai will shine for ever as the architect of his own Department as conservator, excavator, explorer, scholar, editor, and author of many outstanding books on art and archaeology. But like his life long friend, the late Professor Dr Sirajul Islam, (of the Department of Islamic History and Culture in Dacca University),

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he did not leave behind any autobiography.” Dr Nazimuddin edited and helped publish a Commemoration Volume to celebrate the life and work of his classmate titled *Professor Dr Sirajul Islam Smarakgrantha* in 2009.

Dr Nazimuddin Ahmed was one of the greatest archaeologists to emerge from East Bengal. His works on Buddhist sites of Ananda Vihara (monastery) in Mainamati (in Comilla) and *Halud Vihara* (monastery) in Dinajpur (2001) together with “**Kanta Nagar (Hindu) Temple: a wonder in Terracotta**”, in *Bangladesh Quarterly* (1991), as well as the *Archaeological Survey Report of Bogra District* (1986) are important, but his “**Importance of Paharpur Vihara (Monastery) in the Buddhist Legacy of Asia**” (1987) and ‘**Ruins of Paharpur**’ (Rajshahi) jointly written with John Sandy, published in *ARTS ASIATIQUE* (1986), will be remembered for a long time.

His rare writings include “A Fresh-study of the Fire-Temple at Taxila”, in *Pakistan Archaeology*, (vol. 4, 1967), and “*Sculptures of East Pakistan: 5000 Years of Art in Pakistan*” an exhibition organised by the German Arts Council (1964), are evidence of his erudition. Among his far-sighted works include “Early Cultural Contacts between Pakistan and Persia,” (*Regional Co-operation and Development (R.C.D.) Colloquium Journal* (1959) and “The Common Cultural Legacy of Iran and Pakistan”, in *IRAN-Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies* (1952).

Dr Nazimuddin Ahmed died on 7 November 2009. *Dr Nazimuddin Ahmed Commemoration Volume*, an excellent collection of articles (edited by Syed Mahmudul Hasan, President of the Islamic Arts Organisation, Dhaka) was published in 2011 as a tribute to him.

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