

Professor
KAZI DIN MUHAMMAD
(b. 1927- d. 2011)

I have been aware of Kazi Din Muhammad since my youth. I first became familiar with his name as early as 1958 when I read a book of humorous anecdotes titled “*Golak Chandrer Antmakatha*” (Autobiography of Golak Chandra). As a young student, I found the book very funny and hilarious. The author of this book was born in the district Faridpur (circa 1906), but many years later when I asked Dr Kazi Din Muhammad whether he was the author of that book, he revealed that it was, in fact, written by another Kazi Din Muhammad who was also a prominent writer.

Long time after I left Alokdihi Jan Bakhsh High English School in Dinajpur, I heard Kazi Din Muhammad’s name again, thanks to late Professor Mufakhkharul Islam, who taught Bengali Literature at Carmichael College, Rangpur. He told me that he was a classmate of Kazi Din Muhammad in the Department of Bangla at Dhaka University in the late 1940s. He remembered him affectionately, as both of them had studied for their Master’s Degree (MA) in Bengali Literature at Dhaka University in 1949. When the Examination results were published, Kazi Din Muhammad was awarded First Class First Degree and Mufakhkharul Islam had received a Second Class First. They remained good friends and held each other in high regard. In fact, both of them became very prominent scholars of Bengali Literature. When I had an opportunity to speak to Professor Kazi Din Muhammad in 2006, he confirmed that he was indeed a classmate of Mufakhkharul Islam at Dhaka University. He also stated that Mufakhkhar had an original mind which is evident from his collections of poetry. When I spoke to Kazi Din Muhammad again in 2007, he informed me that his friend Mufakhkharul Islam had died a year earlier due to old age.

Kazi Din Muhammad was a hard working scholar who taught Bengali Literature at Carmichael College, Rangpur for a few months (from July to October 1951), before he joined the Bangla Department at Dhaka University as a Lecturer. He worked at this university (1951-86), first as a Lecturer (1951-1961) and then as a Professor. He also served as the Director-General of the Bangla Academy during 1967-70. He became an Officer in the Bengali Development Board, Dacca (1964-65). Kazi Din Muhammad gained a PhD Degree for his thesis titled ‘*The Verb Structure in Colloquial Bengali*’ from

the University of London in 1961, which was published by the Bangla Academy in 1985. After publishing this work in the field of Bengali linguistics, Kazi Din Muhammad joined an elite group of linguists who had preceded him in the Department of Bengali at Dhaka University. Other celebrated linguists who had worked in the Bengali Department at Dhaka University included Hara Prasad Shastri, Head of the Department of Bengali and Sanskrit (b.1853-d.1931); Dr Muhammad Shahidullah (b.1885-d.1969) who specialised in historical and comparative study of Bangla language; Professor Muhammad Abdul Hai (b.1919-d.1969) who had studied Bengali phonology at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London; Munir Chowdhury (b. 1925-d. 1971), who had studied Bengali phonemes at Harvard University; Mofazzal Haidar Chowdhury (b.1926-d.1971) had studied phonology at SOAS, while Professor Humayun Azad (b. 1947-d. 2004) had studied generative syntax at Edinburgh University and applied comparative theory of syntax to Bengali. The other linguists who graced the Bangla Department at Dhaka University included Professor Abul Kalam Manzur Morshid and Professor Rajib Humayun, a Founder-Chairman of the Department of Linguistics at Dhaka University.

Like them, Kazi Din Muhammad was an outstanding scholar of Bengali language and literature. He was also a prolific writer who authored numerous books on a range of subjects. However, his most famous publication was *Bangla Sahityer Itihas (A History of Bengali Literature)* published in four bulky volumes in 1968 (vol. 1 consists of 410 pages; volume 2 consists of 387 pages; vol 3 consists of 508 pages and vol 4 consists of 677 pages). He may have completed this massive work during his service at Bangla Academy, Dhaka, where his fellow employees and specialists probably helped him. In this book, he provided a detailed coverage of the literary contributions made by the Muslim writers and poets of Bengal. Volumes 1 and 2 deal with the Ancient and Medieval Era of Bengali Literature, while volumes 3 and 4 discuss the Modern period of Bengali Literature. Volume 3 comprises of 12 chapters which not only focus on the social and political background of Bengal, but also cover the development of lyrical and epic poems, the growth of Bengali prose as well as the development of Bengali novels and short stories, along with history, travel literature, and religious trends. Volume 4 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 is highlighted. This work has many good features, but some critics have found it to be insufficiently critical and rather comprehensive. Whatever the critics may say, this work was Kazi Din Muhammad's *magnum opus*.

In addition to the above, Professor Kazi Din Muhammad wrote prolifically on several other subjects including folklore ((e.g. Riddles and proverbs in *Folklore/Lok-sahitye dhadha-o-prabad*, 1969), philosophy (Theism and Atheism/ *Astikata-o-nastikata*, 1993) and Religion (eg, *Mahanabir Bani Satak/100 Sayings of the Great Prophet*, 1988; *Chotoder Mahanabi Muhammad (The Prophet Muhammad for Younger People)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1999; *Thus Spoke Prophet Muhammad*, Puthipustak, Dhaka, (2000) and a volume of poems titled *Prabat*, Dhaka, 1975.

According to Professor Muhammad Mujibur Rahman, the translator of the Holy Qur'an and Tafsir Ibn Kathir into Bengali, Kazi Din Muhammad was a courteous and helpful writer who wrote a Foreword to his book on the *I'jaz* (inimitability) of the Qur'an. Kazi Din Muhammad's four-page Foreword to Dr Mujibur's book titled 'The Eternal Miracle of the Holy Qur'an (*Qur'aner Chirantan Mujiza*) was published by the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh; this book became very popular, having been reprinted many times due to popular demand.

Recently, Professor Kazi Din Muhammad wrote an article on the life and work of late Dr Muhammad Shahidullah and it was published in a journal called *The Pioneer (Agraphik)*. This was a tribute to Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, who was his teacher. Thanks to his remarkable contributions, Kazi Din Muhammad received many awards including Bangladesh Daemi Complex Award in 1989; Islamic Foundation Bangladesh Award in 1990 and Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar Gold Plaque in 2002. However, Kazi Din Muhammad also suffered imprisonment along with late Professor Syed Sajjad Husain, late Dr Muhammad Mohar Ali and late Professor Hasan Zaman on account of his political beliefs and principles. This happened during the war of 1971. He was later released (in around 1974) when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman granted a general amnesty to political prisoners. Fear of political demonisation may have driven Professor Kazi Din Muhammad to lead a reclusive life, finding solace in the message of Sufism. Not surprisingly, he wrote several books on this topic namely *Sufibader Gorar Katha* (The Origins of Sufism, 1980) as well as *Sufibad-o-Amader Samaj* (Sufism and Our Society).

He befriended many mystical poets like late Professor Syed Ali Ashraf and became a Professor of Bengali at Darul Ihsan University, which was founded and led by Professor Ashraf. He was also associated with the Asian University of Bangladesh. His other books on Islamic thought and related subjects included *Bangladeshe Islamer Abirbhab* (The Advent of Islam in Bangladesh, 1975); *Islami Sanskriti* (Islamic Culture, 1989; *Sanskriti -o-Adarsha* (Culture and Idealism, 1990; *Samaj, Sanskriti-o-Sahitya* (Society, Culture and Literature, 1990).

On 9th October 2011, when Dhaka University celebrated its 90th year of service to the cause of Bengali Language and Literature, Dr Kazi Din Muhammad was one of eight scholars to receive an honour for his outstanding service to this subject. He died on 29th October, 2011. His death was mourned by his admirers, students, fellow-writers and members of the public. He was born on 1 February 1927 in the Rupsi village of Narayanganj district and died at Labaid Hospital in Dhaka after midnight on Friday. His demise at the age of 84 was reported on the 11th November 2011. His funeral prayer was held at Kalabagan Sports Ground in Dhaka at 11am. Another funeral prayer was performed after midday (*Zuhr*) prayer at the Dhaka University Central Mosque. The Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University, Professor Arefin Siddique, said his death was a great loss to the nation. His final funeral prayer was held at his ancestral graveyard at Rupsha, Rupganj Thana in the district of Narayanganj. As a philanthropist, Kazi Din Muhammad also founded *Kazi Din Muhammad School* at Kalabagan in Dhaka.

Additional Comment by Muhammad Mojlum Khan, the editor of BMRI website:

I was fortunate to have spoken to Professor Kazi Din Muhammad on several occasions over the telephone and he was delighted to hear that I was carrying out research on the Muslim history and heritage of Bengal for benefit of the new generation of Bengal's Muslims living in the West; he encouraged this writer to complete his book, 'The Muslim Heritage of Bengal' as soon as possible as he felt that there was an urgent need for such works in Bengali and English. He also encouraged this writer to read his Bangla Sahityer Itihas (A History of Bengali Literature, 4 volumes) and bring it to the attention of the younger generation. Professor Kazi Din Muhammad was a proud Muslim who was equally fond of his motherland and, not surprisingly, he was very unhappy with the country's current social, political, economic and intellectual problems and difficulties. He felt that the people of Bangladesh were desperate for political, economic, social and educational change and reform in order to meet their basic needs and requirements, but the ruling elites were detached from reality. Professor Kazi Din Muhammad was a dedicated scholar, prolific writer and a practising Muslim who was also a man of principles, honesty and rectitude. May the Almighty rest his soul in peace!

By Professor Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg is a prominent historian, academic and author. He graduated from Rajshahi University, Bangladesh and obtained his PhD from Cambridge University in 1971. This article was edited by Muhammad Mojlum Khan for BMRI website. See www.bmri.org.uk