

Remembering

Justice Abdul Moudud (b.1908 – d.cir.1969)

By Professor Dr A. B. M. Habibullah

By the death of Abdul Moudud which occurred on the 21st July this year [cir.1969], the Asiatic Society of Pakistan has lost a distinguished member, a past President and a man of wide scholarly interests. Born in 1908 in Wari, a village in Burdwan district of what was then Bengal, Abdul Moudud was the first in his family and in his local community to receive an English education. He attended a high school in a village three miles away from his home and matriculated in 1925 from the same school as the first Muslim boy to have done so in forty years of its existence. In 1926 he completed his graduate studies from Hooghly College with Honours in History which he also took up for his MA course in the Calcutta University Post-graduate Department. There he came in touch with Professor Salahuddin Khuda Bukhsh, one of the greatest Islamologists of India, whose erudition and enthusiasm for research in Muslim history touched him very deeply.

After completing his MA in 1929, he studied for a Law degree which he obtained in 1933 and then joined Bengal Judicial Service as a *munsif*. In this service he distinguished himself sufficiently to become sessions Judge, Law Secretary to the Government of Pakistan and ultimately a judge of the Dacca High Court from which he retired in 1968.

Abdul Moudud belonged to that rare band of men, now becoming still rarer in this part of the world, who, despite and in addition to their routine preoccupations as high executive and judicial officer in Government, strive to maintain and actively peruse their interest in scholarly studies. While addressing a Conference of Historians he once said that although law was his profession and means of livelihood history has been the singular passion of his life. He regretted that he could never have enough leisure and opportunity to cultivate it. Even so, his reading was very wide and writing copious.

He wrote mostly in his mother tongue, Bengali, in which he took a great pride, years before the use of Bengali for serious writing became fashionable, as now. Moudud's special field was cultural and social history of Bengal and Muslim intellectual history. His wide readings in Bengali literature gave his writings on Bengal history a certain depth and flavour which professional historians do not generally strive for. In his approach and conclusions, particularly on the evolution of society and culture of Bengali Muslims, he held to certain assumptions whose validity, many thought, required to be established. He had, however, the integrity of a scholar who followed

his own convictions and like the judge that he was questioningly accepting the codified law as an unalterable frame of reference, he would depend only on the evidence presented. But he was not impervious to the need of re-examining his materials and the undersigned can testify that latterly he was engaged in doing so. His style of writing was marked by a primitive vigour and clarity which made his statements inflexibly emphatic leaving no room for equivocation, a position which more prudent writers do not allow themselves to get into.

Abdul Moudud's published Bengali writings include a translation of Hunters "*Indian Musalmans*", a concise account of the Wahhabi Movement in India, a volume on the Muslim thinkers, and a book on the rise of the middle class in Bengal and its cultural evolution. As an example of his capacity as a writer of imaginative fiction, mention should also be made of a volume of short stories based mostly on his experience as a Judge. Besides papers in English on aspects of the history of justice and law courts in Bengal, he published a long essay on Indo-Muslim culture. A major work in English on which he was engaged till his death and which he had nearly completed is a history of the Bengali Muslim contribution to the freedom movement in India.

Till his death he was the Chairman of the Central Board for the Development of Bengali, and the founder President of the Nazrul Academy. In 1968 he was elected President of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan and because of a nagging ill-health was unable to serve a second term. He was closely associated with several other learned bodies in Pakistan, all of which deeply mourn the passing away of a notable scholar, and the present writer, of a life-long friend.

Additional Comment by Muhammad Mojlum Khan, author of *Muslim Heritage of Bengal* and editor of BMRI website:

Although late Justice Abdul Moudud was a prolific writer, journalist, historian and lawyer, he became well-known for his *Muslim Manisha* (Muslim Thinkers) which was originally published by Islamic Foundation Bangladesh. This book became so popular that it was reprinted several times. Subsequently, Professor Muhammad Atiqul Haque of Sylhet translated parts of this book into English under the title of *Muslim Heroes of the World*, and it was published in 1990 by Ta Ha Publishers based in London. This writer read the book as a young student during the mid-1990s.

It is also worth mentioning that Justice Abdul Moudud contributed articles to many journals and magazines published in Bengal and elsewhere including *The Islamic Review* published from Woking Mosque, England. Late Professor Habibullah, who was an eminent Muslim historian of Bengal, published a short obituary of Abdul Moudud and it was published in the Journal of Asiatic Society of Pakistan, vol.15, No. 3, pp.285-287 (reproduced above with minor editorial changes). Unfortunately, this distinguished Muslim scholar and lawyer is hardly known today in Bangladesh so much so even the editors of the *Banglapedia* (National Encyclopaedia of Bangladesh) have failed to include an entry on him. We hope this short, but long over-due tribute will inspire others to carry out further research on his life and works for the benefit of future generations!