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Reminiscences of Dhaka University

MR. A.K. Fazlul Huq, Governor of East Pakistan and Chancellor of Dhaka University in his convocation address on February 19, 1957 said, 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 rapid 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 communiqué 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 'internal partition'.

In the same month Government appointed a Committee under Mr. Nathan to frame the scheme for the proposed University. The late Maulana Mohammad Ali of revered mem-

ory 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. This was in March, 1917. The Viceroy confirmed the intention of the government to establish Dhaka University, and in its communique dated 26th November, 1917, the Government of Bengal assured the Muslim community that the University would be established after the Calcutta University Commission had given its 'valuable advice regarding its constitution and management'. The government of 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 5½ 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.