

Sher-e-Bangla

Contribution To Mass Education

—Muhammad Abdul Khaleque

SHER-e-BANGLA A.K. Fazlul Huq, a great son of this land was born on 26 October, 1873. His father's home was in the village of Chakhar in Barisal district. His forefathers were inhabitants of Bilbilash under Baufal thana in the district of Patuakhali. His grandfather Kazi Akram Ali migrated to Chakhar and settled there permanently.

From his very childhood Fazlul Huq was a very meritorious student. He obtained scholarship in his mid-level examinations and passed the entrance examination with distinction in the year 1889. In his F.A. examination too he got scholarship. In 1894 he passed the degree examination with Honours in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry from the Presidency College, Calcutta. Next year, one day when Fazlul Huq was busy preparing himself for his Master's degree in English one of his friends came and told him that he was studying in English because he was not good at Mathematics. Fazlul Huq took it as a challenge and the same year after a few months' preparation obtained his Master's degree in Mathematics with distinction. It is worth mentioning that he was the first Muslim in the pre-1947 Bengal to obtain M.A. degree in Mathematics. He also passed the Law examination with distinction in 1897.

During those days the common people of the subcontinent were living amidst illiteracy, poverty and acute frustration. Sher-e-Bangla realised that the backward people can only be rescued by spreading education. It was next to impossible to remove poverty of the people and restore their political and human rights without education.

Fazlul Huq was one of the pioneers of the 1906 All India Education Conference. In that convention he in his deliberations put forward programmes of mass education for the common people of the country. At that time he was only 33 years old. The speech is treated as one of the most valuable documents of political, social and economic history of the country.

In the year 1912 Sher-e-Bangla formed an educational institution at Calcutta under the name and style of Central Muslim Educational Institution. Through this he carried forward the education of the deprived common masses step by step.

In 1914 he delivered a memorable speech in the premises of Dhaka Ahsanullah Engineering College on the occasion of the Muslim Education convention. The convention was presided over by Nawab Sir Salimullah with Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah as a participant.

Though Fazlul Huq was also a leader of the Indian Congress in addition to Muslim League he did not support the quit education policy. He conceived that without education the already backward Bengal Muslims would fall further behind. Even during his office as General Secretary of the Congress he played a pioneering role to spread mass education. Because of his ceaseless efforts Baker Hostel and Carmichael Hostel were established in Calcutta.

As a real lover of education Sher-e-Bangla understood that in the absence of proper education nothing fruitful could be achieved.

—B. Chittar

leges by the students. In this convention he categorically stated that it would not do any harm even if all the Hindu boys stopped attending school and have their education at home because all the members of their families were educated. But for the Muslim boys boycotting would be suicidal as they would not have education at home. As a result the already backward people would fall 50 years back in education. A few days later he reiterated his views on education in his presidential address at Dhaka on the 13 December 1920.

In 1924 Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq accepted the office of Education Minister of Bengal. The tenure of his office was as short as six months, yet during this short period he set up a college in Calcutta. Later on this college was named as Islamia College. After setting up of the Islamia College, Muslim teachers from different parts of India were appointed teachers in the college. This time he set up a separate directorate and separate Muslim fund for the education of the Muslims. Even admission of Muslim boys to school was difficult. Moreover, the Muslim boys were required to study Sanskrit, because apart from a few government schools there were no provision for teaching Urdu or Arabic. As such he passed an order that in order to get government assistance every school will have to have one Muslim teacher and one Moulvi teacher. Fazlul Huq also introduced the system of reserved seats for Muslim boys in all schools, colleges, medical and engineering colleges. This system actually helped the Muslims to make significant progress in the field of education.

In those days it was also very difficult to get recognition of schools and colleges under the Calcutta University, established for the education of Muslim boys. Sher-e-Bangla made a special system to remove this. Besides these, under his leadership Eliot hostel, Engineering College, Muslim hostel and Muslim Institute buildings were set up.

During his tenure of office as

Education Minister for six months Sher-e-Bangla played a remarkable role in converting the Aligarh Anglo Oriental College into a university in collaboration with the Aga Khan and Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk. He was a founder member of the first court of the newly established Aligarh University.

After the 1937 general election an eleven-member cabinet was formed under the leadership of Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq. He became the Prime Minister, and unlike all other former Prime Ministers he instead took charge of the Ministry of Education. He was keen to spread education and formulate plans and programmes so that neglected Muslims could get equal rights, especially in the field of education.

In the year 1938, Sher-e-Bangla by passing and implementing the Mahajoni Law and Tenancy Act and setting up a large number of Debt Settlement Boards not only saved the millions of Muslim peasants from the clutches of zamindars and userers but also helped them to carry the light of education to every house. He set up the Mowla Box Committee for the extension and development of education.

During his Prime Ministership of Bengal he established the Lady Brabourne College in Calcutta. He helped improve the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' College of Calcutta set up by Begum Rokeya, by bringing the college under the control and management of the provincial government.

Sher-e-Bangla contributed much towards the improvement of literature, culture and ideal journalism for the progress and prosperity of the country. He made allocations in his cabinet budget for financial assistance to all these fields. From that fund he donated Tk. 30,000 to the Azad.

Sher-e-Bangla did not like that there should be any prohibitive law to control the voice of newspapers. When the then British Government in order to control the voice of newspapers passed a law named Press Act of India in 1917, Sher-e-Bangla criticised that Act at the

Assembly session.

In 1940, under the patronage of Sher-e-Bangla the Fazlul Huq Hall of Dhaka University and Haraganga College of Munshigonj were established. This time he also set up a college in his village, Chakhar. The madrassah and the school beside the college too are his contributions. He had positive contributions to the establishment of the University of Dhaka.

The Sarshina Madrassah is one of the famous madrassahs of Bangladesh and Sher-e-Bangla's contribution towards its development was unlimited. He is the first man who kept provision in his budget for the education of the Tapsili community. He also helped develop the Adina Fazlul Huq College at Rajshahi.

Thoroughly a cultured man and lover of culture, he loved the company of poet Nazrul and singer Abbasuddin. On many occasions he met and discussed various problems with Rabindranath Tagore.

Sher-e-Bangla had a cordial relationship with Mahatma Gandhi also, in spite of his difference of opinion on the non-cooperation movement of the latter.

After the formation of the cabinet under the leadership of A.K. Fazlul Huq in 1954 the Bengali language got recognition as the main language of the country. During his Prime Ministership the Bengal Academy was established. Besides the establishment of a lot of schools, colleges, institutions and hostels, he had significant contributions towards the establishment of Eden Girls' College, Tejgaon Agriculture College, Bulbul Lalitkola Academy, Central Women's College etc. Pahela Baishakh is a very significant day to the people of Bangladesh and it is Sher-e-Bangla who first declared this day as a government holiday in 1954.

It can be said that the contributions of Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Huq towards mass education were unlimited. The people of our country, irrespective of caste, creed and colour will preserve in their minds forever the sweet memories of the great son of this sub-continent.