

MUFAKHKHARUL ISLAM

(B.1921- D. 2006)

Mufakhkharul Islam (who was also known as *Islam Sahib*), was a poet who wrote Bengali poems on Islamic themes and erudite essays on Bengali literature. He was a champion of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (the Household of the Prophet of Islam), namely Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Hussain (*radi Allahu anhum*) and was the local promoter of the *Tamaddun Majlis* (literally, Cultural Society), to whose membership he recruited students who could compose poems, short stories and other types of Bengali literature.

Mufakhkharul Islam was a brilliant thinker who advocated the use of Arabic and Persian words, which are an inseparable part of the Bengal's Islamic literary heritage. He also encouraged his students to collect old unpublished literary manuscripts from their villages and bring them to him. Inspired by him, I collected a hand-written copy of the Holy Qur'an in beautiful calligraphy from a village Imam and presented it to him to add to his collection. I also collected from Basudevpur village in Dinajpur district an old manuscript entitled *Sar-e-Sal* (lit. the beginning of the year) which was translated from the Persian into Bengali. Professor Mufakhkharul Islam wrote an article on the significance of the manuscript in the monthly journal, *Mah-e-Nao*, published from Dhaka; he cited my name as the collector of the manuscript.

In my early student days, I was fond of Bengali literature and aspired to become a literary figure. Among the teachers of Bengali literature at Carmichael College were Bilabamangal Bhattacharjee, Sufi Motahar Husain, Muhammad Abu Talib and Mufakhkharul Islam. The latter deserves special attention. As a poet, philosopher and historian, Mufakhkharul Islam was my favourite Professor at the college. Born in Tangail on 30th April 1921 (corresponding to 21 Sha'ban 1339 AH), the 17th day *Baishakh* 1328 B.E. or Bengali Era), he graduated from Karatia Sa'adat College, where Principal Ebrahim Khan was the leading light. He earned his MA Degree in Bengali literature in 1949 from the Salimullah Muslim Hall of Dhaka University, and spent most of his life as a Professor of Bengali literature at various colleges including Edward College Pabna (from April 1950 to July 1953); Carmichael College, Rangpur (from August 1953 to July 1963); Dhaka Government College (from July 1963 to February 1969); Dawlatpur College (Khulna) (from February 1969 to January 1971); Jinnah (Titumir) College (from

January 1971 to June 1975); Government Girls' College Khulna where he served as the Principal (from July 1975 onward).

Among his best known works were the following 'Language and Stylistics' or *Bhasa-o-Rachanariti* (1963); *Beatific Vision* (in Bengali: *Allahke Dekha-Jay*), which is a philosophical discourse (1974) written in response to a debate with the philosopher, Mohammad Kalimuddin, at Carmichael College Rangpur. His hagiographical booklet is entitled *Pak-Pancatan* (literally, the five holy persons) namely Prophet Muhammad, Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husain, who are also known as *ahlul kisa*. This is a book about the *Ahlul Bayt* (or the Household of the Prophet Muhammad). A similar book is entitled, *Hazrat 'Abbas Alamdar* regarding Abbas ibn 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. On the back page of *Sher-e-Khuda Sani Hazrat Abbas Alamdar*, 14 of his books are listed as follows: *Hi Pak Fawj* (poems); 2. *Murshid* (romantic drama); 3. *Awlad* (youth drama); 4. *Prahari Putra* (youth drama); 5. *Jalali Kabutar* (anthology of poems); 6. *Bara Eid*; 7. *Maratha Bijayini* (one act drama); 8. *Nabir Jobba Pelen Jini*; 9. *Kalo Kaylay Sonar Agun*; 10. *Istiska* (one act drama); 11. *Itihasgata Bibhrantir Rahasya*; 12. *Adi tariqah* (vol.1); 13. *Adi Tariqah* (vol. 2); and 14. *Allah-ke Dekha Jay*.

Professor Mufakhkharul Islam was an adherent of *Uwaysiyah tariqah*. He stated that the 14th century Persian poet Hafiz belonged to this Sufi order. Professor Islam contributed an original research article entitled 'The Advent of the *Uwaysi Tariqah* in Bangladesh' or *Uwaysi Tariqah -o- Bangladeshe Tar Abirbhab to Muhammad Enamul Haq Commemoration Volume (Muhammad Enamul Haq Smarak-grantha)* edited by Muhammad Maniruzzaman and published by *Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* in 1985. Another book on a historical theme is titled *The Mystery of Historical Errors* or *Itihasgata Bibhrantir Rahasya*. It was published by Suraya Sultana Mufliha Uwaisi, the wife of the author (Dhaka, 1984 (1391 B.E.)). A sizable book of 253 pages, it discusses various Islamic themes. Dr. Paresh Islam Syed Mustafizur Rahman of the Department of Islamic History and Culture at Dhaka University contributed a Foreword to the book. He earned a Ph.D. from Cambridge University and became Professor of Islamic History at Dhaka University.

Mufakhkharul Islam's other books were *The Preaching of Islam in Jamalpur District (Jamalpur Jelay Islam Prachar*, published by the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka 1988). Professors A.B.M. Habibullah, the former head of the Department of Islamic History and Culture at Dhaka University and the celebrated author of 'The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India' and Momtazur Rahman Tarafdar of the Department of Islamic History and Culture at Dhaka University hailed it as an important contribution. Dr Habibullah wrote,

"I was acquainted with Professor Mufakhkharul Islam through a few articles he published some years ago in a Bengali journal of History. I was struck by the historical acumen he show-ed and his devotion to search out original materials. The use that he made of the materials was original and in some cases perceptive. It seems to me that his interest in local history and his ability to integrate different kinds of scattered materials into an intelligible pattern to highlight local history is a very commendable trait. Later

when I came to know him personally and to learn that he is a teacher of Bengali rather than history, my admiration for him increased for his devotion to history and ability to handle local materials historically, would give his writings a depth and perspective which are very much needed in our research. If some way could be found to utilize his genuine interest and mental efforts in wholly historical research this will really be fruitful.” 21-9-1975.

Similarly, Dr M. R. Tarafdar wrote,

“I have known Professor Mufakhkharul Islam for a period of about three decades and can testify to his literary achievements in the field of Bengali poetry and prose compositions. Nearly twenty five years ago some of his poetical writings created a sensation in our literary world. But what remains concealed from the public eye is his ability to investigate selected units of history throwing light on our heritage. His papers on the history of Tangail and life of Ram Mohan Roy published in the Bengali Journal Itihas are of value and as such they have been estimated by a number of Professional historians. As a matter of fact, Mufakhkharul Islam’s capability to carry out research in certain chosen fields of history and his dedication to unearthing antiquities are unquestionable. In handling historical materials, the professor shows immense skill and synthetic approach. I can firmly say that our country would certainly benefit, if he remains closely connected with any organization that has something to do with local history.” University of Dhaka, 1976.

Apart from his prose writings, Mufakhkharul Islam published collections of his poems, such as *He Pak Fawj*, which was printed during his student life as early as 1947. His most famous collection of poems is entitled *Jalali Kabutar* focusing on *Hazrat Shah Jalal* (pp.3-12), *Bakhtiyar Khalji* (pp.13-22), *Shah Isma’il Ghazi* (born in Makkah but buried at Pirganj Thana in the Rangpur district) (pp.36-46), ‘Hafiz’ is a poem dedicated to 14th century Persian poet Shamsuddin Muhammad Hafiz Shirazi (pp.29-35), ‘*Hazrat Khan Jahan*’ (pp. 64-72) and *Sher-e-Bangal Zindabad* (pp.60-63). This anthology of poems on historic themes was published in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 1978. It deserves to be translated into Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Urdu and English. *Jalali Kabutar* was the most famous book of poems by Mufakhkharul Islam.

Another collection of poems by the poet is *Vateer Nawara* (The Naval Force of Lowland), which was published by Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1987. Mufakhkharul Islam wrote that Sultan Ghiyas uddin Khalji (*r. 1213-1227 AD*) of 13th Century was the founder of the Muslim naval force of East Bengal. The book celebrated the glorious naval history of Bengal which resisted Mughal and Portuguese invasions. Mufakhkharul Islam has left behind 25 manuscripts of unpublished books of poems. Dr. Kazi Din Muhammad, author of the *Literary History of Bengal* (vol. 3), has admired the unique literary talents of Mufakhkharul Islam. Dr Kazi informed me that Mufakhkharul Islam had died in 2006 at the age of 85.

Besides writing poems and historical essays, Mufakhkharul Islam composed a drama titled *Murshid* (1951) and a one-act children’s drama entitled *Awlad*, which

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appeared in 1958. His unpublished dramas include *Hakim Abu Ali Sina*, *Adham Ashiq*, and *Allahr Marzi*. His unpublished one-act dramas include *Tawbatun-Nasuha*, *Maratha -Mardini* and the *Munsif of Elachipur*. His unpublished children's dramas are *Eman Parakh*, *Bara Eid* and *Prahari-Putra*. His unpublished books of essays are *Nawab Bakir-Jang and Maznu Faqir*, *Rangpurer Kahini* (Stories of Rangpur), *Tamaddun Rupayan*, *Tangail Bibaran* and *Islam Pather Badha*. Mufakhkharul Islam presented to me autographed copies of some of his books during my visits to his house in Dhaka.

By Prof. Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg, MA (Rajshahi), PhD (Cambridge), UK.