

**BOOK REVIEW**

## *Legacy of Dr Nazimuddin Ahmed*

**NAZIMUDDIN AHMED COMMEMORATION VOLUME** edited by Syed Mahmudul Hasan, Dhaka: Islamic Arts Organisation Bangladesh, pp616, Price £8.00, US\$10.00

As the older generation of English educated scholars of Bangladesh is passing away there is a rush to publish *Commemoration Volumes* to celebrate their achievements. Dr Nazimuddin was one of the senior scholars of Pakistan and Bangladesh who had carried out pioneering research in archaeology and prehistory and had outstanding linguistic skills.

Dr Nazimuddin Ahmed was one of the most outstanding archaeologists of the Indian sub-continent. Born in Azmatpur (West Bengal) in March 1923, he graduated from Islamia College, Calcutta in 1946 and completed his Master's degree in Islamic History and Culture from Calcutta University in 1949. Late in 1949 he migrated to Pakistan and initially worked as a trainee archaeologist at Mohenjodaro under the supervision of Sir Mortimer Wheeler. He went on to work on archaeological sites in Quetta and Zoab Valley under the guidance of Dr Walter Fairervis. His archaeological career allowed him to work at ancient sites in Rajshahi and Lahore (i.e. West Pakistan as well as East Pakistan). In 1959 he was appointed Superintendent of Archaeology and in 1970 he achieved the position of Director of Archaeology and Museums of Pakistan. During his busy career he was allowed study leave to upgrade his skills and in 1958 under the supervision of K. de B. Codrington at SOAS, he wrote a Ph.D. thesis entitled '**History and Archaeology of Taxila**'.

In later life he worked as Director of Archaeology and Museums of Bangladesh, and retired from active public service in 1983. He died on 7 November 2009, leaving behind three sons and five grandchildren. He published many books, including *Sculptures of East Pakistan: 5000 years of art in Pakistan* (1964), *Islamic Heritage of Bangladesh* (1977) and edited *Inscriptions and architecture: a portrait of the Sultanate period* ( Dhaka 2000 ) among others. After his death in 2009, his friends commemorated his life and work with a *Nazimuddin Ahmed Commemoration Volume*, which was edited by Syed Mahmudul Hasan, who was a former Professor of Islamic History and Culture at Dhaka University.

A brief review of this volume is presented here. It is essentially an English publication, comprising 40 essays, of which 32 are in English and only 8 are in Bengali. This publication is characterized by diversity of its contents and contributors. It is, in fact, a miscellany of articles on history, archaeology, art and current affairs written by Asian, European and American scholars and writers. For instance, 'The trend of History and historical research' by Dr Muhammad Shamsuddin Miah (pp. 123-131) is a valuable contribution. This hard-working historian is familiar with the history of the Middle East and of the Indian sub-continent. He is also an Arabist and is familiar with Persian language and historiography. Dr Shamsuddin studied general history as a subject for his BA Honours degree at Calcutta University and then moved to the subject of Islamic History and Culture for his Master's degree. Such an anomalous course of study was possible only at Calcutta University before the partition of India. Then Dr Sharifuddin has contributed a paper on the 'Future prospects of historical research in Bangladesh - the role of national archives' (pp.569-578). Thus history is viewed with serious interest in this commemoration volume. Another interesting paper in this volume deals with a controversial subject titled 'The spread of Islam in Malaysia' by Md. Musa Ansari (pp.75-86). This article deals with the preaching of Islam in South-east Asia. This essay is especially addressed to the Bangladeshi readers and for this reason it is written in vernacular Bengali language. It deals with the Malay world comprising Malay-Indonesian archipelago, Brunei Darussalam and part of the Filipino islands as a whole. Musa Ansari's article is informative but it does not take into account recent researches on the subject. However, the essay is a fair introduction to the topic, and it is useful for Bangladeshi readers who are seeking close co-operation with the Malaysian labour market. While in the 1980's there were only a handful of Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia, it has now increased to tens of thousands. It is a substantial improvement of the situation.

Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg has contributed an article titled "*The Mongols in Arabic Sources/ Records*" (pp.157-179) which was written at the invitation of the head of the Mongolia and Inner Asia Unit of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at Cambridge University; this interdisciplinary research was presented at a Seminar of the Mongolian Studies on 2 June 1994. The paper was written from newly discovered sources such as al-Safadi's 30-volume book entitled *al-Wafi bi'l-Wafayat* and other original Arabic sources. The Seminar was attended by many students and lecturers of the University and there were some attendees from other educational institutions in London.

Another original article in this volume is by T. B. Irving (Al-Hajj Ta'lim Ali Abu Nasr). Titled "America and Palestine: thoughts of an American Muslim" (pp. 564- 568). In this article, Irving argued, "... Palestine is a thorny topic; but out of the danger of that nettle we must pluck the flower of safety in order to assure a peace which the Middle East and the United States of America both need....Palestinian Arabs also happen to be human beings, now live under Zionist control in Palestine, subjected to both subtle as well as brazen pressure to vacate their native land. Not only their land, but also their houses may literally be torn down or blown up over their heads, without fair trial or any of the legal machinery which most of us expect when a new thorough way or interstate is

pushed through our property. Civil rights as we know them simply do not exist in Palestine today. Moreover, almost two million Palestinians live abroad, expelled from their homeland. History will eventually say whether this is not an important Diaspora, when these Palestinians took their technical training and political awareness to other Arab countries. The whole matter is still not solved.....The occupation of Palestine is now a totality, and what does the United States have to show for this callous intervention which Washington has permitted in the liberty of millions of others? Israel is really a rump, it is not a state; speaking in North American terms it consists of only three counties: Galilee, Samaria and Judea. That is as if the Menominee Indians held everything between here and Milwaukee and threatened both Chicago and Wisconsin, just because the Japanese or the Chinese or the Russians backed the Menominee in their occupation of these counties., Galilee, even in Jesus' time, was not fully Jewish; Samaria never was; and the Jews were expelled from Judea by the Assyrians and then the Romans. In this century (i.e. 20<sup>th</sup> century) Galilee was largely Christian even before partition, when the Jews seized it against the plans of the United Nations."

The rest of the topics, with few exceptions [e.g. i. 'Blue pottery of Rajasthan - a brief history and origin of Blue pottery' by Marufa A. Chowdhury (pp. 426-430); ii. 'Mural paintings and ornamentation of the Lahore Fort: a reappraisal' by Najma Khan Majlis, (452-477); and iii. 'Mughal dresses and Jewellery' by Sajeda Yusuf (pp.478-500)] are devoted to the history and archaeology of East and West Bengal. Notable among the articles are '*Racial Identity of Muslim population of Bengal*' by Professor A. K. M. Yaqub Ali (pp.180-202). Another very attractive article is '*Pioneers of Islam in Bengal*' by Muhammad Mojlum Khan (pp.203-216). Khan discusses the role of the preacher Shah Jalal of Sylhet in the 14th century, Khan Jahan Ali of Bagerhat and Baba Adam Shahid among others.

'**The Nature of Muslim rule in Bengal**' by Dr M. Abdul Mu'min Chowdhury (pp.217-250) discusses some intriguing issues that facilitated the conquest of Bengal by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji and the nature of Muslim rule that followed in the wake of the military conquest. K. M. Karim contributed an historical essay entitled 'Shaista Khan in Bengal' (pp. 147-156). Some essays are dedicated to the primate city of Dhaka in Bangladesh; for instance, 'The Nawwabs of Dhaka and their contribution' by Md. Alamgir (pp.37-74); '**Growth of Dhaka city in pre-Mughal Times**' by Habiba Khatun (pp.330-339) and '**Colonial architecture of Dhaka**' by Rasheda Waez (pp.251-274).

This memorial volume reprints three articles by Dr Ahmed himself. These articles include 'Importance of pottery in archaeological investigation' (pp.108-117); 'Gaud and Pandua in history and legends (pp.589- 590); and a review of S. M. Hasan's book, Gaud and Pandua: Romance in brick and stone' (pp.589- 90). The historian Dr Muhammad Shamsuddin Miah has also reviewed *Essays on the origins of Islamic civilization* (pp.583- 588). The reviewer claims that "the author has arranged over a number of topics including the foundation of the Islamic state of Madinah; Equality and Meritocracy in Islam; women of Arabia in early Islamic times; the Muslim attitude to labour and crafts; the origin of some Islamic cities; the development of architecture, the growth of minor arts, and lastly the growth of Islamic sciences, poetry and calligraphy". (p.585). Relevant to the last theme are Professor S. Mahmudul Hasan's two informative essays titled 'Islamic calligraphy vis-a-vis Bangladesh perspective' (pp.501-14) and 'The development of the Mehrab in Sultani Mosques of Bengal' (pp.275- 313).

The decline of the standard of English in educational institutions in Bangladesh is reflected in some of the articles in this book. Although it is rich in historical and archaeological data, the book has not been proof-read properly. A new edition will require a good deal of copy-editing of many articles. It is an important reference work for college and university libraries in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India.

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