

Book Review

Tribute to Maulvi Munawwar Ali of Sylhet

Ek Alokito Bektitta Munawwar Ali, compiled and edited by Sampadana Parishad, 404 pages, ISBN 984-300-000084-4, Price \$10.00

Maulvi Munawwar Ali was an important historic figure of Bengal and Assam during the British rule in India.

He made a significant contribution towards the welfare of the people of this region. He also played an important part in the Pakistani movement working hand in hand with other Muslim leaders of the subcontinent. He had a vision for the newly independent country which he presented in the form of “The constitution of Pakistan”.

Munawwar Ali was born in Sunamganj district of Greater Sylhet. He was educated in a local school where he successfully completed his secondary education. He then went to Calcutta Presidency College where he received his higher secondary education. He received his BA degree from Meerat College in 1907. Munawwar Ali then studied Law in Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (now known as Aligarh Muslim University) and received his LLB degree in 1909. He then went onto carve out an influential legal and political career in Bengal. Some of the important milestones in the life of Munawwar Ali are as follows:

- Member of the Red Crescent Society (established by Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar) to serve the injured soldiers of the Balkan War (1913-1919)
- Member and Chairman of Sunamganj Municipality (1921-1937)
- Member of Assam Legislative Assembly (1919-1922, 1926-1947)
- Member of East Pakistan Parliament (1947-1951)
- Active role in promoting education and employment of Muslims in Assam (1922-1923)
- Protection of his people from the usury-related transactions of the Mohajans of Assam (1928-1930)

- Protecting the rights of expatriate Muslims in Assam from neighbouring Bengal (1919-1947)
- Chair, Assam Muslim League (Shafi Group) (1930-1935)
- Member, All-India Muslim League headed by Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1937 onwards)
- Member of Assam Provincial Cabinet (1938-1942, 1944)
- Secretary, Assam Provincial Muslim League Parliamentary Board (1946)
- Active participant in the Referendum for Sylhet to join Pakistan (1947)
- Speaker, East Pakistan Assembly (1947-1951)

In spite of his busy life schedule, Munawwar Ali found the time to compose poems. “Jilwa” was his collection of poetry which was published in 1942. He also wrote poems based on Surahs (chapters) of the 30th part (Juz) of the Holy Qur’an and published them as “Bangla Amparar Kabyanubad” (Poetic Translation of 30th part of the Qur’an) in 1950.

After a lifetime devoted to serving the people of Bengal and especially the Muslims of East Bengal and Pakistan, this great son of Bangladesh eventually died on the 11th December, 1951. Throughout his life, Munawwar Ali was known for his excellent personality qualities and attributes as a human being, a politician, a lawyer, a reformer and as a leading Muslim figure. His life and legacy needs to be consider and properly reassessed for the benefit of future generations.

‘**Ek Alokito Bektitta Munawwar Ali**’ (Munawwar Ali: An Enlightened Personality) is a compilation of articles contributed by many scholars and historians of Bangladesh, focusing on the life and works of Munawwar Ali. The eminent historian, late Dr Muhammad Mohar Ali has, in his Introduction provided the background to the prevailing social, economic and educational conditions of the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent which became the future sphere of activities of Munawwar Ali. He also analysed the effects of the decades of oppression and suppression of the ruling class, and their conniving associates, which contributed to the degeneration of the Muslims of Bengal. He has provided a vivid description of the plight of the Muslims and their struggle for nationhood as a means of survival and an avenue to escape the clutches of tyranny which prevailed at the time. He has also provided details of the movements initiated by the Muslim leaders and Ulama (Islamic scholars) for the regeneration of the Muslim community of Bengal.

Famous author, late National Professor Dewan Muhammad Azraf, has described various aspects of the life of Munawwar Ali and the impact of his activities on the life of the ordinary people of Bengal and Assam in general and the Muslims in particular.

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Other contributors include Sarkar Shahabuddin Ahmed, Ahmad Ali, Muhammad Abdus Johar, Subrata Dey, Muhammad Karam Ali, Miah Muhammad Maniruzzaman, Muhammad Abdur Rahim, M A Tahir, Gulshan Abdul Hye and Nurul Akhtar Chowdhury.

The book recognises the talent and services of one of the most prominent sons of Sunamganj district and Sylhet as a whole during the twentieth century. It is important to learn more such personalities who can serve as role models for the people of Bangladesh. For this reason, I would like to recommend this book to all, scholars and lay readers alike.

By Dr Muhammad Akhteruzzaman; the reviewer is a founding Director of Bengal Muslim Research Institute and a regular contributor to its website.