

Sixty-seven years of Dhaka University

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In the early second decade of the twentieth century, after the fulfilment of the partition of Bengal (1911), one of the popular demands of the Muslims of Eastern Bengal was the establishment of a University at Dhaka. A delegation consisting of Sir Nawab Salimullah, Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Haq waited upon the Viceroy Lord Hardinge when he was on an official visit to Dhaka in January 1912. The deputation pressed a vigorous demand for a University at Dhaka. Within a few weeks, on February 2, 1912 the British Government issued a communique stating the decision of the establishment of a University at Dhaka.

In May 1912 the Government published a resolution in regard to the proposed University of Dhaka and appointed a committee consisting of 13 members, called the Nathan Commission, to frame a scheme. The committee, after a thorough discussion recommended for a state sponsored residential University at Dhaka. When the Nathan Committee Report was published the Bengali intelligentsia expressed their views both for and against the scheme. Finally, the report was approved by the Secretary of State in December 1913. A Calcutta University Commission was appointed to recommend further valuable suggestions regarding the constitution and management the University of Dhaka.

Eventually, the Dhaka University Act, 1920 was passed by the Indian Legislative Council in March 1920. This Act offered a legal basis for the constitution of a residential University at Dhaka. On the first of December of the same year P.J. Hartog was appointed the first Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dhaka for a term of five years.

The University of Dhaka formally opened its doors for the students on July 1, 1921. It inherited the estate of the Ramna area comprising 600 acres of land, and its buildings included the old Secretariat Building (New Medical College), the old Buildings of Dhaka College (Curzon Hall and its adjacent buildings), Government House (old High Court building) and about 100 beautiful Bungalows. Initially, the University had 3 faculties: Arts, Science and Law. The Faculty of Arts consisted of 8 departments: English, Sanskrit and Bengali, Arabic and Islamic Studies, Persian and Urdu, History, Philosophy, Political Economy and Education. The Faculty of Science included 3 departments: Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry. The Faculty of Law had only one department, i.e., the Department of Law. The total number of students was 877, including double entry of 30 students.

The University began functioning with a teaching staff of 60 members. The distinguished scholars like Mahamahopadhyaya Haraprashad Shastri, F.C. Turner, Fida Ali Khan, Muhammad Shahidullah, G.H. Langley, Haridas Bhattacharya, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, A.F. Rahman, W.A. Jenkins, Satyandra Nath Bose, Gyan Chandra Ghosh, Naresh Chandra Sengupta were the teachers of the University. The courses which were offered in the University were for B.A. and B.Sc. (Pass and Honours), M.A. and M.Sc., L.T. and B.T., B.L. Ph.D. and D.Sc. degrees.

The University of Dhaka was unique in many respects in the Indian Subcontinent. It was designed with the distinctive character of a teaching-cum-residential University. For the first time in the sub-continent

In the University of Dhaka classes began during the academic session of 1921-22. Faculties of Arts and Law held their classes in the Old Secretariat building and those of Science, in the Curzon Hall. The Library was situated in the Old Secretariat building. A gymnasium was also constructed for the students. Subsequently, during the period 1921-47 Dhaka University had opened two more faculties: Faculty of Agriculture and Faculty of Medicine. Many of the original departments were subdivided and 8 new departments were created. These were the Departments of Commerce, French Language, German Language, Islamic History and Culture, Economics, Bengali, Political Science and Biology. The number of teachers and students became almost double. In the field of research the University achieved great success. During this period, 57 research scholars obtained Ph.D. and D.Sc. degrees. The Faculties and Departments of the University also began organising seminars and lectures. In 1925 the University of Dhaka published its first book, The Early History of Bengal, written by Ramesh Chandra Majumdar. The Dhaka University Bulletin began to be published regularly. The University also built two more Halls—Salimullah Muslim Hall and Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall—and one Women's Hostel during the period. Various student organizations took initiative to arrange sports and cultural activities in various Departments and Halls. Thus there was remarkable development of the University in studies, research and cultural activities during the period, 1921-47.

At the end of the colonial rule in 1947 the University of Dhaka had to

accept new responsibilities. The city of Dhaka was accorded the status of capital of the Province of East Pakistan. The University of Dhaka became the only University in the Province. Consequently, it had to assume the responsibilities for Masters' and Post-Graduate degrees and of affiliation and supervision of 55 Colleges which were previously under the University of Calcutta. In the period from 1947 to 1971 more faculties were started and these were: Faculty of Engineering (47-48), Faculty of Education (60-61), Faculty of Arts (63-64), Faculty of Social Science (69-70), and Faculty of Commerce (70-71). 16 new departments were set up during this period. These were the departments of International Relations, Social Psychology, Sociology, Social Welfare, Geography, Journalism, Foreign Languages, Library Science, Botany, Mathematics, Soil Science, Geology, Zoology, Applied Physics, Biochemistry and Pharmacy. Some of these departments were separated from the old departments but some of them were fully departments.

In the 1960, the University of Dhaka began to establish several Institutes and Research Centres on an experimental basis. The Institute of Education and Research was the first institute, which was followed by the Institute of Statistical Research and Training, Institute of Business Administration, and Institute of Nutrition and Food Sciences. During the decade the number of students and teachers increased considerably. The University authority built a new Arts Building, Science Annex, Administrative Building and 5 new residential Halls for the Students. However, along with this success, the passage of 1961 Dhaka University Ordinance created reaction in the

academic circle. The 1961 ordinance replaced the Act of 1920 and thus rejected autonomy and the democratic tradition of the University of Dhaka. This new ordinance created a suffocating atmosphere in the University.

Despite the Pakistan Government's attempt to reduce the autonomy of the University of Dhaka it played the central role in the autonomy movement of East Pakistan. Since the Language Movement of 1952 to the Liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 the University of Dhaka had a remarkable contribution for the nation. It will be no exaggeration to say that in the Socio-Political development of East Bengal, Dhaka University had to take up a bold leadership. During the Liberation War Dhaka University became the principal target of attack several times by the Pakistani Army. In the Liberation War, 14 teachers, one officer, 26 employees and few hundred students of Dhaka University became martyrs.

After independence in 1971 a new phase began in the history of the University of Dhaka. The government of Bangladesh annulled the Dhaka University Ordinances of 1961 and substituted it by the Dhaka University Order of 1973 which revived the democratic traditions and spirit of the pre-liberation days. There has been an extraordinary increase in the number of teachers and students in the University of Dhaka. It is the highest seat of learning in the country. The University of Dhaka is now a large family consisting of 36 Departments, 7 Institutes, 13 residential Halls, one International Hostel, 22 constituent and 180 affiliated colleges. It is marching forward with great success.