

OBITUARY

DR. SUFYA AHMED

(20 November 1932 - 9 April 2020)

Dr. Sufya Ahmed (Faridpur 20 November 1932 - Dhaka 9 April 2020) was Senior Lecturer in the Department of Islamic History and Culture, University of Dhaka in 1964, the year I had enrolled. She was the daughter of Justice Muhammad Ibrahim a former Vice-Chancellor of the Dhaka University and Law Minister in the cabinet of President M. Ayub Khan. Even so Sufya Ibrahim was the first student to cross the police barrier on 21 February 1952 that fateful day of the Bengali Language Movement. I have survived so far, despite my illness perhaps to place on record that despite her commitment to causes she had no trace of chauvinism or prejudice in her nature. On the first day of our class, she noticed a girl, very diffident, barely audible in either Urdu or English. At the end of the class, Dr. Sufya Ahmed took this girl to her office room, and within 10 minutes she emerged as a much more confident student. Dr. Sufya Ahmed taught us Medieval India and her method of teaching was to introduce us to various strands of opinion. For example she discussed both Muhammad Habib, *Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznin*, Alighr, 1927 (though we had the Amritsar S. Chand, 1960 edition and Muhammad Nazim, *Life and Times of Mahmud of Ghazna*, Cambridge, 1931. Even generally she made us write on contentious issues helping us grade the sources, managing to teach us History and Historiography at the same time.

Dr. Sufya Ahmed obtained her PhD from the University of London in 1960 for her dissertation *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884-1912*. The following year she joined the University of Dhaka. When her dissertation was published in 1974, she was an Associate Professor. She was made Professor in 1983. In January 1994, Dr. Sufya Ahmed was made National Professor.

Dr. Sufya Ahmed had married Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed a barrister hailing from Ghazipur in India. In 1972, Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed became the first Attorney General of Bangladesh. He passed away in 2003. Dr. Sufya Ahmed kept her-self busy and taught many generations of students. The Government of Bangladesh awarded her the *Ekusey Padak* in 2002 and the Sufiya Kamal Award in 2015. Dr. Sufya Ahmed also served as President, Bangladesh Itihas Parishad (Bangladesh Historical Society).

I myself could not benefit much from her teaching, but perhaps as an asymptomatic carrier of her genius, I may have been able to infect my own students with her erudition.

Dr. Muhammad Reza Kazimi