

Akhter Hameed Khan

*A Short Profile
of
Life and Contributions*



*December, 1999
Dhaka, Bangladesh*

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1. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Akhter Hameed Khan is well known in South Asia and a large part of the wider world for his distinguished leadership of the rural development experiment at Comilla, Bangladesh. His attainments as a scholar, educator, administrator and experimenter-demonstrator of innovative rural development activities, his contributions to the improvement of conditions of the characteristically low income densely populated agrarian society of Bangladesh earned him international recognition.

He was born in Agra, India on 15 July 1914. He received his Masters of Arts degree in English from Agra University in 1934. In 1936 he entered the Indian Civil Service (ICS), the most prestigious and cherished service of British India. He attended the Magdalene College, Cambridge University from 1936 to 1938 as an ICS probationer. His first posting was at Comilla Collectorate in 1938 as an Assistant Commissioner. Comilla became a turning point in his life. In later years, he chose this place as the centre of his epoch-making innovations in rural development.

In 1944 he resigned from the Indian Civil Service due to his disagreement with the colonial rulers on their attitude towards the deplorable Bengal Famine of 1943 which took a toll of more than 3 million human lives. Thereafter, throwing himself into the position of an ordinary workman, he began to work in a village near Aligarh in India as an apprentice locksmith. He gave up the work after two years.

For some time in between 1944 and 1949, Akhter Hameed Khan had practically withdrawn himself from active life and studied Islamic history and theology. He also became appreciative of economics as an essential understanding of the process of human advancement, and for some years he seriously studied the works of Plato, Aristotle, Marx, Lenin and the Fabians. Along with the Quran, he read the Vedanta, the Bhagwadgita and the Dhammapada. He studied the famous works of Imam Ghazali, Rumi, Hali and Iqbal. He was well versed in several languages - such as Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Hindi and English. He could communicate effectively with the common people of Bangladesh villages in simple Bangla.

In 1947 he took up a teaching position at the Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi, a Gandhite institution set up by an eminent educationist,

