

## The Movement for Khulna University: A Qualitative Exploration of its Historical Establishment

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**Cite as:** Amin, A. et al. (2023), The Movement for Khulna University: A Qualitative Exploration of its Historical Establishment, *The Yore: Research and Review*, 1(1), pg. 1-24

### Abstract

*Khulna University is one of the familiar leading public universities in Bangladesh in the field of research and education. But this university had a struggling established historical background. Despite being developed from many dimensions, there was no university in Khulna before 1991. So, the people of Khulna went for a movement to establish a university in Khulna. Although a recommendation for a university in the Khulna Division was brought in the first Education Commission Report of Bangladesh submitted in 1974, the issue was beyond implementation for a few years. So, Khulna became the centre city of the struggle for a University in South-West Bangla. Students of various institutions and people belonging to different professions marched to the town to establish a university. Consequently, the government was convinced to take steps for establishing a university for the greater Khulna region. Two committees were made for justifying the academic and location purposes for a new university in Khulna. The experiments of the committees and reports submitted paved the way for establishing Khulna University. The data of this study has been developed through qualitative research. The main objective of this assertion is to discover the nature of the movement behind this institution and its result.*

**Keywords:** Movement, development, university, procession, demand, education

### Introduction

American politician Ben Sasse once said that an institution of higher education is a partnership among students and alumni, faculty and administrators, donors and trustees, neighbourhoods, and more to build a community and a culture (Sasse, 2017). A university might play the role to create such a community and culture through knowledge-creating and its distribution. Such a process contributes to the overall advancement of a particular society.

Khulna was one of the four divisions of post-independent Bangladesh. Khulna's contribution to the country's industry, ports, and trades was undeniable, which resulted in the country's

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present development. Khulna has a traditional background of educational and cultural atmosphere. But the people of Khulna felt the necessity of a university for higher education.

Quadrat-i-Khuda Commission<sup>4</sup> formed during the reign of the Bangabandhu government stated the importance of establishing a public university in the Khulna Division in its final report (Kamruzzaman, 2020). In November 1979, it was decided to set up a technical University in the Khulna Division in a cabinet meeting. In the Five-Year Plan, Tk. 10 crores were allocated for the establishment of a university in Khulna. However, this decision for setting up a technical university was pending which provoked people's protests. So, a movement started for the establishment of Khulna University in 1983. From 1983 to 1986, Khulna became a burning question as the city of movement all over Bangladesh. When the demands of the people of Khulna were not being met in their protests, the head of the municipality, the commissioners, the student unity councils, journalists, teachers, attorneys, freedom fighters, and others called for a mass movement. Even after this, when there was no preparation for the establishment of the university, then A.H. Deldar Ahmed (Ex- Central Food Minister of Pakistan) placed the nameplate of Khulna University on 16 December 1986 in the former radio centre at Gollamari among thousands of people. After that, the movement gradually came to an end with success. On 9 March 1989, H.M.Ershad laid the foundation stone of Khulna University. The academic activities of this university started on 31st August 1991. Thus, the movement for the establishment of the university got its result. The main objective of this research is to determine how Khulna University was established through this movement. This research will explain, how Khulna University gets a real form from the document through the movement. This paper will be treated as evidence or information for further research. It will demonstrate the struggle that led to the foundation of Khulna University, as well as its movement and its current image of majesties. And it will give a coherent concept to everyone. This study would also be an animation for those who would struggle for education and educational institution in another particular region reviving the theme and structure of the mass movement for Khulna University. (University of Khulna-Banglapedia, n.d.).

### **Aim of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to aware people and the students of Khulna about the University, and to know the struggle and history behind the establishment of Khulna University. We think history is one of the most important indicators which can easily identify its origin through investigating the real fact. From this aspect, we believe, this article will help any student of this university and also the interested ones who are eager to know about the historical background of the university.

### **Methods of the Study**

This article has been written based on historical methods. Historical research is based on a wide range of primary and secondary sources, as well as the oral tradition. Data were collected

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<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Quadrat-i-Khuda was a Bangladeshi organic chemist, educator, and writer who lived from 1900 to 1977. He established the Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research). He was the president of the Pakistan Academy of Sciences from 1969 to 1972. As head of the National Education Commission after Bangladesh's independence, he produced the Quadrat-i-Khuda Education Commission Report. (Muhammad Quadrat-i-Khuda, 2021b)

through accounts from eyewitnesses, minutes of meetings, newspapers, related books, letters, and artifacts such as posters, pictures, and papers. Public records or legal documents are also collected along with the data from university archives or special collections, as well as collections held by local historical societies or privately owned collections. Besides these textbooks, journal articles, newspapers, biographies, and other forms of media were used as secondary sources for cross-checking the information.

### **Background of the Movement of Establishing Khulna University:**



**Map 1: Location of Khulna Division (Khulna Division, 2022)**

### **Khulna's Educational Situation at that Moment**

After the establishment of Khulna Mahakuma in 1842, the rapid development of Khulna city started and the population continued to increase. Due to the increase in settlements, there was a need to build educational institutions here (Biswas Babla, 2019, pp. 1–2). The name of the first school in Khulna city was Middle English School (M.E. School) which was established in 1867 at Daulatpur Khulna. In 1874 this school was named High English School and its last name was changed to Hazi Muhammad Muhsin School in 1937 (Islam & others, 2008, pp. 8–9). The first college of this division was established at Daulatpur in 1902. At first, it was called Hindu Academy, but later it was renamed Brajlal College (Islam & others, 2008, pp. 8–9). As a result, Khulna's educational system began to develop. The people of Khulna were always enthusiastic about education and had the inquisition to set up any higher educational institution.

Names of some initial educational institutions in this city are given below according to their establishment time.

**Table 1, List of Initial Educational Institutions in Khulna according to their Establishment Time.**

<b>Institutions' Name</b>	<b>Establishing Year</b>
Middle English School (1st School)	1867

Tutpara Kalachad Pathshala (1st Primary School)	1880
Victoria Primary School	1900
Govt. Coronation Secondary Girls School	1913
Hindu Academy (BL College, 1st College)	1902
Khulna Government Girls' College	1940
Government Azam Khan Commerce College	1953
Khulna Polytechnic Institute	1963
KUET (As an Engineering College)	1974
Khulna University	1990

(Islam & others, 2008, pp. 8–9)

Khulna's contribution to the country's industry, ports, and trades was undeniable even then. Khulna University was established so late as the ninth university in Bangladesh. Along with these developments, the construction of this university should have been at the same pace but that happened late.

Sheikh Ashraf-uz-Zaman, Vice president of the Greater Khulna Development Coordination Committee said that the Khulna region is more suitable than other regions of Bangladesh in terms of climate and altitude (Islam, 2010, pp. 80–81). Despite being such a promising region, Khulna is always being deprived. It has many contributions to the state as an industrial city but did not improve much in the field of education. Besides this, very little of the revenue is being used for the educational development of Khulna.

Although it is the third-largest industrial, trade, and port city in the country, Khulna differs greatly from Dhaka and Chittagong. Khulna has been seen as a source of income, but no attention has been paid to its development. So, after independence, there was a demand for establishing a university in Khulna division as well (Islam, 2010, pp. 80–81). However, it is to be mentioned that there was a demand to establish a university in Khulna, even before the independence.

When the then President of Pakistan Field Marshal Ayub Khan<sup>5</sup> arrived in Khulna in 1963, a group of students from BL College met him at the Circuit House about the establishment of Khulna University. Ayub Khan said, "*Put your demand through your leader*" (Karim, 2012, p. 51). After this incident, no initiatives had been taken for the establishment of a university in Khulna before independence. When Bangladesh got independence, there felt a need to determine the education system of the country. For this purpose, scientists and eminent persons took the initiative to formulate their education policy by forming an education commission on 24 September 1972 by an eminent educationist and scientist Dr. Qudrat-i-Khuda. Dr. Qudrat-

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<sup>5</sup> Field Marshal Muhammad Ayub Khan served as Pakistan's second president. He was an army officer who took over the president from Iskander Mirza in a coup in 1958, the country's first successful coup. In 1969, he was compelled to retire as a result of popular demonstrations and labor strikes in East Pakistan. (Ayub Khan (general), 2020)

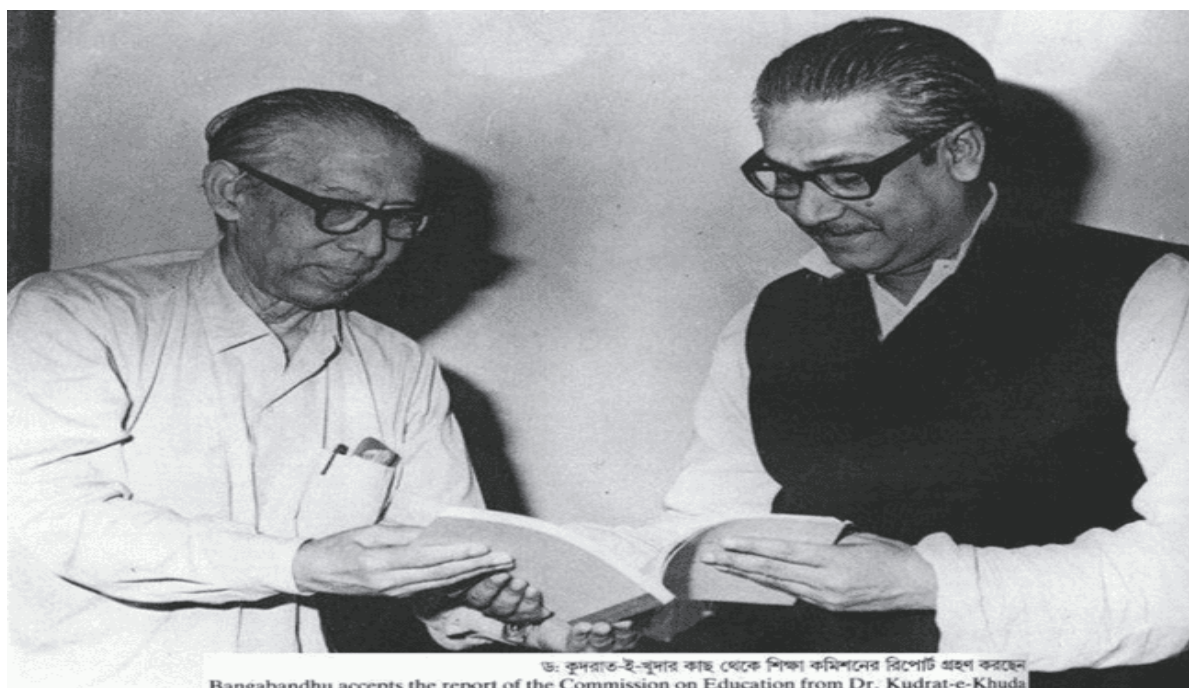
e-Khuda Education Commission submitted its report on 30 May 1974. The report recommended the establishment of a university in the Khulna division (Karim, 2012, p. 3).



**Picture 1: Dr. Muhammad Qudrat-i-Khuda (Muhammad Qudrat-i-Khuda, 2021)**

### **Khulna University on Dr. Qudrat-e-Khuda Report**

Article 13.52 of Chapter 13 of the Qudrat-e-Khuda Report mentions the establishment of a university in Khulna and states that “*At present the total number of universities in Bangladesh is six; of these four are general, one agricultural, and one engineering and technological. There are four administrative divisions in Bangladesh: Chittagong, Dacca, Rajshahi, and Khulna. Of the above six universities, four are in the Dacca division one in the Rajshahi division, and one in the Chittagong division. No university has been set up so far in the Khulna division. The necessity of more than one university in the Dacca Division for historical and other reasons cannot be denied. But one-fifth of the population of Bangladesh lives in the Khulna division, and we visualize the necessity of a university in that division in the near future*” (Bangladesh Education Commission Report, 1974)



**Picture 2: Bangabandhu accepts the report of the Commission from Dr. Kudrat-e- Khuda on 7 June 1974 (1974 - 25th January 1975: Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Memorial Museum, n.d.)**

Then the government formed two committees in 1985:

1. The 'Zillur Rahman Siddiqui Committee' for preparing academic and administrative programs, and
2. The 'Mahbubuzzaman Committee' for site selection.

Based on the reports of the above committees, the government finalized the program for establishing a university in Khulna on January 4, 1987 (University of Khulna-Banglapedia, n.d.).

In November 1979, a cabinet meeting was formed during the reign of President Ziaur Rahman who decided to set up a technical university in Khulna (the University of Khulna-Banglapedia, n.d.). But when this decision was not implemented later, a movement began to establish a university in Khulna in 1979, and it was a movement for a general university in Khulna. (University of Khulna-Banglapedia, n.d.) On the occasion of the centenary of Khulna Municipality, the then Chairman of the Municipality Md. Sirajul Islam invited the then President H.M. Ershad to Khulna. When the President arrived in Khulna on 12 December 1984, he was given a public reception by the people of Khulna at Shaheed Hadis Park. At this time people raised some important demands. Among them, an application was made to establish a university and medical college in Khulna, including upgrading Khulna Municipality to a corporation. He promised to set up a university and a medical college in Khulna in phases (Karim, 2012, pp. 4-5).

## **Initiatives Taken for the Establishment of Khulna University:**

Under Section 5(1)G of the Bangladesh University Grants Commission Order, the Commission submitted a report to the Government in 1973 for the establishment of a new University in the Khulna Division (Bozlul Karim, n.d., pp. 4-5). It was a burning question among the journalists' society and was a regular discussion matter at Khulna Press Club, on the helipad of the Khulna Circuit House. Through the initiative of journalists, it spread among local politicians, academics, eminent persons, and social workers. In the Five-Year Plan formulated by the then government in 1975, Tk. 10 crores was allocated for the establishment of a university in the Khulna division (Bozlul Karim, n.d., pp. 4-5). It has already been mentioned that in November 1979, the government took a decision to establish a technical university but the people of Khulna asked for a general university (University of Khulna-Banglapedia, n.d.). As a result, the movement for the establishment of Khulna University started. Besides, at this stage of the movement demanding the establishment in 1985, the government formed two committees:

### **1. Zillur Rahman Siddiqui Committee:**

The Zillur Rahman Siddiqui Committee was an education committee that was formed on 14 November 1985 during the rule of the Ershad government by Zillur Rahman Siddiqui and this committee formulated an academic and administrative framework for the establishment of Khulna University. Deciding on the features and delineation of the university was the main responsibility of the committee for designing academic as well as administrative programs (Kabir & Ahmed, 1985a). The committee headed by Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui<sup>6</sup> was supposed to submit its report within three months but the report was submitted on 22 April 1986 to the government (Kabir & Ahmed, 1985b).

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<sup>6</sup> Zillur Rahman Siddiqui was a Bangladeshi writer, scholar, and educator who lived from February 23, 1928, until November 11, 2014[1]. Siddiqui worked as an English professor at Rajshahi University. From 1976 until 1984, he was the Vice-Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University. In Bengali and English, Siddiqui wrote roughly 40 novels. He was the editor of the literary magazine Purbamegh. He compiled the Bangla Academy English- Bengali Dictionary, which he edited





**Picture 3: *President Hussain Muhammad Ershad, President Ziaur Rahman, and Dr. Zillur Rahman Siddiqui***

## **2. Mahbubuzzaman Committee:**

Mahbub Uzzaman Committee was also an education committee that was formed under the chairmanship of Mahbub Uzzaman in December 1985. It was formed also during the period of the Ershad government to select the site for the university on 4 January 1987. Through the reports of the two committees, the government finalized the programs for establishing the university in Khulna. At this stage, especially in Khulna, Jessore, and Barisal areas, the residents of their respective areas have been carrying out various programs arguing for the establishment of Khulna Divisional University, and on 22 December 1985, Cabinet Secretary Mahbub Uzzaman visited all the districts under Khulna Division and exchanged views with eminent persons. The site selection committee recommended setting up the university in the divisional city of Khulna (Karim, 2012, p. 4).

### **Beginning of the Movement:**

The report which was headed by Cabinet Secretary Mahbub Uzzaman contains the recommendations for building a university in Khulna, which were submitted to the government on 21 December 1986. Due to the delay in submitting the report of the place selection committee to the government, questions arose among the people about setting up a university in Khulna divisional town (Rahman, 2021). As a result, dissatisfaction was created in the minds of the people and they chose the path of intense movement. The movement for the establishment of a university in Khulna was transformed into an unprecedented unity. During this time several spontaneous strikes and blockades were observed. It is said that after the war of independence the people of Khulna did not show much unity and solidarity for a single demand (Rahman, 2021).

The Khulna University Movement Coordinating Committee, founded on August 10, 1985, announced such a program, and thousands of people marched towards Gallamari on Victory Day. This committee was formed to coordinate the movements organized for the formation of Khulna University. The people of Khulna unveil the university plaque by them at Gallamari, Khulna on 16 December 1986. In the context of this intense movement to establish a university



in Khulna, erected as “Khulna University”, the establishment movement of a university took the form of tension. This event is an initial milestone for the establishment of the university. Because of this, the announcement of the establishment of Khulna University at Gallamari in Khulna was broadcast on 16 December 1986 by Bangladesh Television and Radio Bangladesh. The day after the news of the government's decision was announced, the people of Khulna rejoiced. Subsequently, the official gazette was published on 4 January 1987. And on 12 January the first project director was appointed (Abdul Halim, n.d.). Thus, the way of establishing Khulna University started running.

### **The phases of Establishing the Movement of Khulna University:**

First Phase: In 1974, Dr. Qudrat-i-Khuda Education Commission announced the establishment of a university in Khulna. A cabinet meeting chaired by him on 10 November 1979 decided to set up a technical university, oil refinery, and medical college in Khulna. Later no further progress was made in this regard. Although several initiatives were taken in some aspects at that time, any initiatives weren't taken to establish a university in Khulna. For this reason meeting- procession, a hunger strike was started demanding for establishment of a University. Education is a basic human right. But even so, the people of this area have to join the movement for this education. This seems to be the first movement to establish a university in this country. In this case, "Khulna Unnayan Parishad"<sup>7</sup> played a major role in the movement for the establishment of the university (Mazed, 2011, p. 33). They continued to hold procession meetings to form public opinion on the establishment of the university, among other things. This system lasted for several days. Finally, the then Government realized the rationale of these claims. From the year of 1983, Khulna's people strongly started the movement (Mazed, 2011, p. 33).

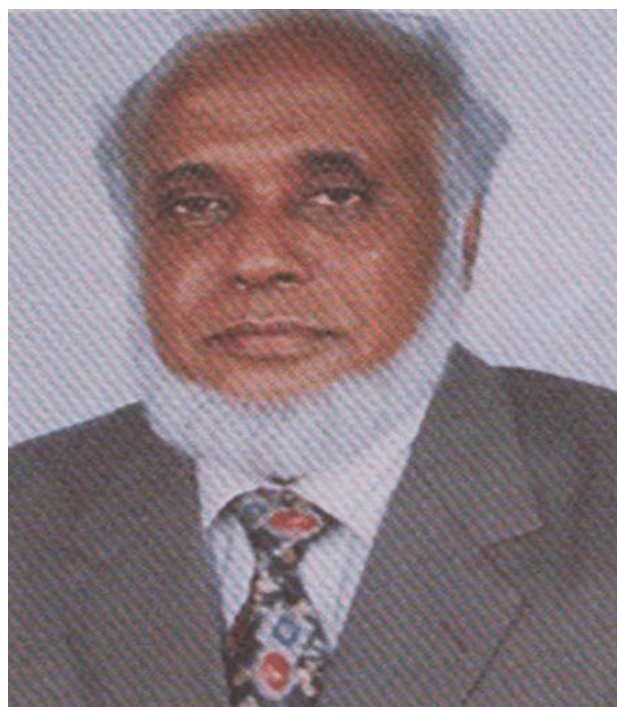
Second Phase: In 1985, at a public meeting in Kushtia, then-President H.M. Ershad<sup>8</sup> announced the establishment of a full-fledged university in the Khulna division. It was a pragmatic and neutral step of the government to meet the demands of millions of people in the area of Greater Khulna and its surrounding districts. After this announcement, the demand for the establishment of universities in different districts became stronger. Attempts were made to make regional demands. Since Khulna is a divisional city, there were not any universities and the people were demanding the establishment of a university. It was a reasonable claim according to the circumstances (Mazed, 2011, p. 34). The purpose of the establishment of a university was to solve the existing crisis in the field of higher education not only in Khulna but also in the whole country. However, when the meeting was not possible due to socio-economic reasons, a discussion was held keeping the issue ahead of setting up a new university and, where it will be set up so that the maximum number of students can be benefited. Khulna is the headquarter of this division and, there exists a good communication system with other

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<sup>7</sup> "Khulna Unnayan Parishad" or the Khulna Development Authority (KDA) is a governing body in the city of Khulna, Bangladesh. It was established by an East Pakistan government ordinance known as the Khulna Development Authority Ordinance, 1961. It was established to improve planning for Khulna and its surrounding areas.

<sup>8</sup> Hussain Muhammad Ershad was a Bangladeshi general and politician who served as President of Bangladesh from 1983 to 1990,[2] a period that many regards as a military dictatorship. On March 24, 1982, he seized power as leader of the army in a bloodless coup against President Abdus Sattar (by imposing martial law and suspending the Constitution).)

districts and remote areas. Apart from this, Khulna also has good communication with the rest of the country as well as the capital both on road and waterways. This city is an industrial city with a lot of natural resources. Here the land is fertile, with an abundance of fish because of numerous wetlands. Besides these, Sundarbans is one of the strongest economic zones in respect of resources and tourism. Therefore, Khulna University should be established at the departmental headquarters not only for improved communication but also for the proper utilization of potential industrial plants and available natural resources. Then with these arguments, this demand started to be raised in Jessore. Former Vice-Chancellor of Khulna University, Prof. Dr. Golam Ali Fakir, sitting at the then Mymensingh Agricultural University, wrote: "*Proposed Khulna Divisional University, Location, and Outline*", edited by M. Jamaluddin, was published in 1986 in a local named '*Alor Bhuvan*' (Mazed, 2011, p. 34).



**Picture 4: *Former Vice-Chancellor of Khulna University, Prof. Dr. Golam Ali Fakir***  
***(Khulna University, n.d.)***

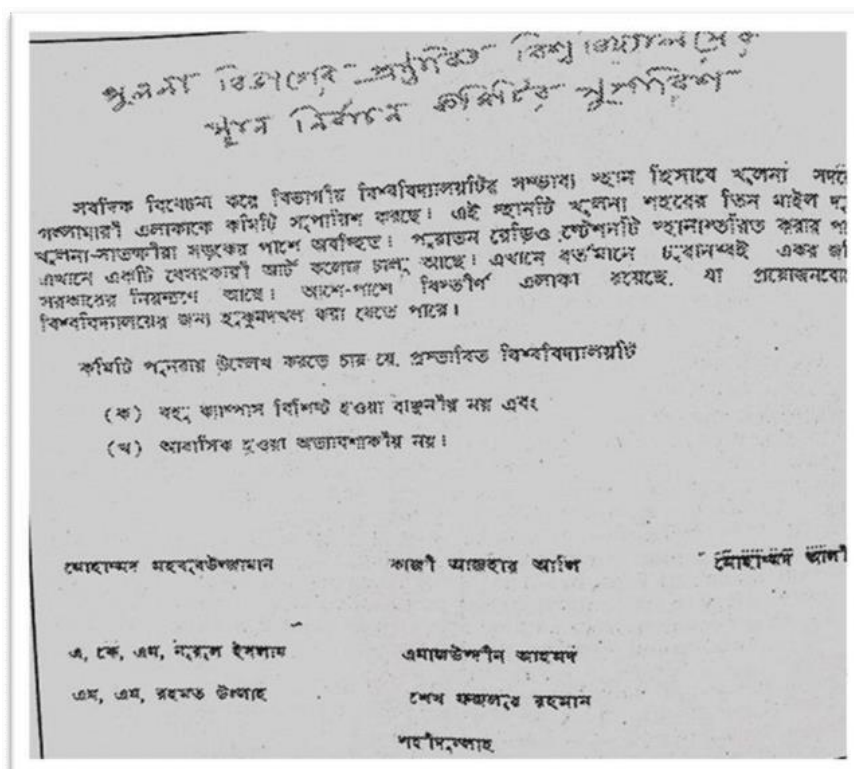
#### **Place and Academic Feature Selection Committee:**

According to the information of all concerned, the government wants to know clearly that in the 3rd "Five Year Plan", arrangements have been made to set up a university in the Khulna division, and funds have been allocated for this in the current annual development program. The University Grants Commission<sup>9</sup> has already formed a committee headed by former Vice-

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<sup>9</sup> Bangladesh's University Grants Commission (UGC) was formed on December 16, 1972. It was established by the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh's Presidential Order (P.O. No. 10 of 1973). The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) stated in 2010 that it will overhaul the University Grants Commission (UGC) and rename it the Higher Education Commission of Bangladesh (HECB) (HEC). The UGC is the governing organization of all Bangladesh's affiliated public, private, and international universities. It offers cash to Bangladesh's "Government Funded Universities." Its purpose is to guarantee that higher education in the United

Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University, Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, to submit a report within three months on the nature and outline of the university to be established (Kabir & Ahmed, 1985c).



**Picture 05: Recommendation Letter of the Place Selection Committee of the Proposed University of Khulna Division; Atiar Rahman's (Director of the Public Relations Department of Khulna University) Personal Collection**

The government has then decided to form a high-level space selection committee headed by Cabinet Secretary Mr. Mahbub-uz-Zaman to select a suitable place considering all the issues related to the Khulna division. The other members of the committee were Prof. Mohammad Ali, Vice-Chancellor of Chittagong University, Prof. Emaduddin Ahmed and Prof. Nurul Islam of Dhaka University, Mr. Jamil Ahmed, Chief Engineer, Ministry of Public Works, and Mr. Ayubur Rahman, Chief Engineer, Department of Roads and Highways. Mr. Shahidullah, Secretary of, the University Grants Commission, is the Member Secretary of the Committee. The committee was directed to submit a report within three months. The government wanted the committee in its report to properly raise the demand for setting up a university in the Khulna division (Kabir & Ahmed, 1985d).

### Continuity of the Movement:

The movement was started before the place selection committee was formed. From 1983, Khulna became a bustling city. Various organizations, institutions, and students of schools,

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States is of excellent quality. Before they may function, private institutions must first get approval from the UGC. The University Grants Commission (UGC) was created to protect universities' autonomy. (University Grants Commission (Bangladesh), 2022)

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colleges, and madrasas started marching in the city to establish Khulna University. On August 10, 1985, a meeting was held in MM City College<sup>10</sup> with the student representatives of different schools and colleges. Sutar, a student of KUET<sup>11</sup> presided over the meeting, and Chhatra Sangram Parishad formed on this day. Later a press conference was held at Khulna Press Club on 9 October 1985 to establish a University in Khulna. The conference decided that Khulna is a division so the demand for a full-fledged university in Khulna is very justified. It reflects the views of the journalists and the intellectuals in Khulna (Bozlul Karim, n.d., p. 5).

It has been demanded at the meeting of Khulna Vishwabidyalay Bastobyon Songram Parishad whose aim was to make a proper announcement about the establishment of the proposed university in Khulna Sadar without any delay. This Songram Parishad was founded on 10 August 1985 (Kabir & Ahmed, 1985a). The demand was made at a meeting of the Sangram Parishad held at the Kala Bhaban (Arts Building) premises of Dhaka University on Tuesday afternoon. Dr. Farooq Ahmed, Dr. Azim Jahangir, Gazi Abdul Hakim, and others addressed the meeting which was presided over by the convener of the council Dr. Gazi Abdul Haq. At the meeting, the Khulna 23-point Implementation Council called for a greater strike in Khulna on 23rd December. It may be that the students of greater Khulna in Dhaka staged a procession last Sunday demanding the establishment of the proposed university in Khulna Sadar. The procession went around Kala Bhavan, Curzon Hall, and Dhaka Medical College (Kabir & Ahmed, 1985a).

This news was also published in The Daily Ittefaq newspaper. On 18th December 1985 rallies were held in several areas and four Upazilas of the metropolis today on the initiative of the Khulna Vishwabidyalay Andolon Samonnoy Committee demanding the establishment of a university in Khulna. A U Ahmed, Ashraf Hossain, Lokman Hakim, KS Zaman, Deen Mohammad, Kiran Chandra Roy, Bedouin Samad, Nuruzzaman Khokon, and Abdul Hai, among others, addressed the gathering (Hossain, 1985). Speakers at the rallies said that unless a clear announcement is made about the location of the university in the Khulna divisional headquarters by December 20, a strike will be observed from morning to evening in greater Khulna including Chalna port on December 21. The committee has appealed to the people of Khulna to follow the strike. Meanwhile, the place for establishing the name plaque of Khulna University was selected at Khulna Gallamari old railway station in the presence of about 10,000 people on 23rd December. Three mass rallies were held in Kaliganj, Nalta, and Devata of Satkhira district on 18 December demanding the establishment of a university in Khulna. A public meeting and a procession will be held at Chalna port on 20 December afternoon demanding the same (Hossain, 1985a).

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<sup>10</sup> Government Majid Memorial City College is a university in the Bangladeshi city of Khulna. The institute was founded in the mid-nineteenth century. It is located near the "Royal er mor" on Khan Jahan Ali Road. It is a two-year institution that offers science, business, and the arts to students in grades 11 and 12. (Government Majid Memorial City College, 2021)

<sup>11</sup> Khulna Institution of Engineering and Technology, previously BIT, Khulna, is a public engineering university in Bangladesh that focuses on engineering and technology teaching and research. It began as an engineering college in 1967 and evolved into a university over time. (Wikipedia Contributors, 2022)

In December 1985. Khulna Vishwabidyalay Somonnay Committee had expressed its full support for the 23rd December program in the whole of Khulna and called upon all to observe this program peacefully (Kabir & Ahmed, 1985a).

A full-day strike has been called in the greater Khulna district on 20 December 1985 demanding the establishment of a university in Khulna. In support of the strike called by the Khulna University Establishment Cooperative Committee, processions, roadshows, and rallies were held at various places in the greater Khulna district including Khulna city. Shops and schools and colleges were closed. No train or launch left Khulna. Government, semi-government and private offices-courts, and business establishments did not work. Transactions of all state and private banks including Bangladesh Bank were closed. All industrial factories except jute mills were closed. The 13 ships anchored at Mongla port did not carry any cargo. Numerous small and large processions circled the various streets of the city. The meeting was held at Hadith Park in the afternoon (Kabir & Ahmed, 1985b).

Where will the University be established? This question was getting more important day by day. The people of Barisal, Khulna, and Jessore tried their best for establishing the university in their district. Barisal, Kushtia Faridpur also strike demanding the divisional university to be established in their district. Speakers at a meeting of the Faridpur Chatra Kallyan Samiti held at the Dhaka University TSC premises on 17 December demanded that Faridpur had to be declared as a division and a university be established there. A public meeting held in front of the local Keya auditorium on December 16, 1985, demanded that the proposed university of Khulna division be set up in the Kushtia district. Ten local organizations had expressed support for the demand for setting up a university at Shantidanga Chalalpur (Kabir & Ahmed, 1985c).

A rally was held at Chalna Port Auditorium on 19 December 1985 afternoon demanding the establishment of Khulna divisional university at Khulna Sadar and support for the strike on 21 December. Mongla Upazila Chairman Mollah Abdur Rashid presided over the rally. Speakers at the rally said that if the establishment of a university other than the Khulna divisional headquarters was announced, the Chalna port would be closed indefinitely. A procession was taken out at the end of the rally. Similar rallies were held in Satkhira, Kalaroa, Bagerhat, and Daulatpur in support of the demand (Hossain, 1985b).

On 24 December, Khulna 23 Points Committee declared that the location of Khulna divisional University had been announced within January otherwise a larger movement will be launched for the demand (Hossain, 1985b). This movement continued. The people of Barisal and Jessore continued their movement to establish the university in their cities. To avoid this place selection issue, Advocate A. H. Deldar Ahmed took an ageless step. The people of Khulna walked five kilometers from Hadis Park under the leadership of A. H. Deldar Ahmed and laid the foundation stone of Khulna University on 16 December 1986 (Hossain, 1985b).

At last, the place selection committee submitted its report on 21 December 1986. Considering all aspects, the committee recommended the Gallamari area of Khulna Sadar as a possible place for the divisional university. This place is located three miles away from Khulna city on the side of Khulna-Satkhira Road. Khulna Art College is hereafter relocating the old radio station. There are currently 94 (ninety-four) acres of land under government control (Rahman, 2021). There is a large area in the vicinity, which can be ordered for the university if necessary. Journalists Atiar Rahman suggested this area for establishing the divisional University and



submitted a report in the Daily Purbanchal newspaper named ‘*Vishwabiday Ti Kothay Sthapito Hobe*’. He presented valuable logic on the place selection topic and recommends the Gollamari area. His suggestion was granted by the authority (Rahman, 2021).



**Map 2: Topographic Map of Khulna University (Worldwide Elevation Finder, n.d.)**



**Map 3: Territorial Map of Khulna University (Khulna University, n.d.-b)**



And after that, the Bangladesh government appointed Anwaruzzaman Chowdhury, then chairman of KDA<sup>12</sup> as the first Project Director of Khulna University. The activities of Khulna University started at a rented house in Khalishpur and later the office was transferred to Hasan Ahmed Road. At last, the office was shifted to the campus (Rahman, 2021).

### **Contributions of Journalists and Intellectuals at that Time:**

The establishment of a university in Khulna was not then easy. People from all classes in Khulna had struggled to establish the university. People from all classes contributed to the present-day Khulna University. However, some leading figures played an active role in this movement. These are— Liyakot Ali (Journalist), Quazi Azhar Ali (Education Secretary of Khulna), Atiar Rahman (Journalist), A.U. Ahmed (Industrialist), A.H. Deldar Ahmed (Advocate), and others. Among the organizations, there were the Chatra Sangram Committee of Khulna, Khulna Unnayan Sangram Samonnay Committee, Torun Sangha, Khulna Labour Union, etc.

Quazi Azhar Ali:



**Picture 6: *Quazi Azhar Ali, Former Secretary to the Government of Bangladesh (Hussain, 2010)***

Former Secretary to the Government of Bangladesh Quazi Azhar Ali presented an essay titled 'Origin of Khulna University' written by him. It was later published in The Daily 'Purbanchal'. The gist of this article is that the university has been established at the headquarters of three of the four departments of Bangladesh but no university, medical college, or education board has been established here even after the establishment of the Khulna division in 1960. At that time the present Barisal division was also included in the Khulna division. There was no opportunity for higher education in this vast area. The people of Khulna feel strongly about the

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<sup>12</sup> The Khulna Development Authority (KDA) is a government entity in the Bangladeshi city of Khulna. The Khulna Development Authority Ordinance, 1961, was passed by the East Pakistan government and formed it. It was founded in order to properly organize the city of Khulna and its surrounding territories. (Khulna Development Authority, 2022)

establishment of a university in the Khulna division, especially in the Khulna divisional town, to fill this gap.

The terms given by the Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui Committee of the Bangladesh University Grants Commission formed on 14 November 1985 did not specify where the divisional university would be located. As a result, there are various doubts in the minds of the people about the district in which the departmental university will be established. At that time Quazi Azhar Ali was the acting secretary of education. He discussed with President H.M. Ershad, stating the need to establish a university in Khulna in this regard. Later, with the approval of the President, a committee was formed to determine a suitable place for the establishment of a university in the Khulna division. Cabinet Secretary Mr. Mahbub Uzzaman was appointed as the Chairman of the Committee and was given the responsibility of determining a suitable place for the Khulna Division. The committee members visited Barisal, Khulna, Jessore, and Kushtia (Rahman, 2021). He discussed with the local officials, politicians, teachers, and intellectuals of these cities, about the location of the university in the Khulna division. Individuals from each district spoke of establishing universities in their respective district towns. As there were six ministers and state ministers from greater Barisal at that time, they put tremendous pressure to establish the university in Barisal. At that time there was no other secretary in Khulna except Kazi Azhar Ali. In this situation, President H.M (Rahman, 2021). Ershad advised Secretary Azhar Ali to think deeply about the matter and take action. He then took three days off from the President. Barisal Minister Anwar Hossain discussed the matter with Manzur. Since the divisional headquarters is in Khulna, he will discuss and agree with the leaders of Barisal to establish a university here. He explained these issues to the President. As a result, President HM Ershad agreed to continue the work of establishing Khulna University. H.M. Ershad established the foundation stone of Khulna University on 9 March 1989 at Gollamari, Khulna (Rahman, 2021).

The people of Khulna did the movement for the establishment of the university, and Kazi Azhar Ali was the one who documented the movement. Every type of official work about the establishment was done by him (Rahman, 2021).

#### **Advocate A.H. Delder Ahmed:**

In the eighties, many leaders came forward with the demands of deprived Khulna, especially the university, and continued their activities. At that time a strong movement was formed for the establishment of the university in almost all the districts of the Khulna division, especially in Barisal, Jessore, and Kushtia. The people of Khulna became apprehensive. Seeing the activities of other districts, the leaders decided to take the movement one step further. About 100 acres of occupied land in Gallamari for Radio Pakistan was then lying unused. Meanwhile, the radio centre was shifted to Nurnagar along Jessore Road. Khulna Art College was walking on foot. Among them, a group from Khulna was conspiring to divide the land occupied by the huge order by contacting the upper house. He decided to lay the foundation stone of the university there. People of Khulna on December 16, 1975, from Hadith Park to Deldar. He walked for about 5 kilometres towards Gollamari (Abdul Halim, 2000, p. 131).



**Picture 7: 16 December 1986 is a historic moment in the movement for the establishment of Khulna University. Thousands of people established the nameplate of Khulna University at the Gollamari Radio Center under the leadership of Advocate A.H. Delder Ahmed; Atiar Rahman's (Director of the Public Relations Department of Khulna University) Personal Collection**

When the people of Khulna, deprived of higher education, were agitating for the establishment of a university in 1975, it did not turn into a mass movement. In this situation, the urge for undisputed leadership is felt among all. The name of a person who was universally respected was also suggested. After proposing his name, all the currents of the movement seemed to merge into the same. In the movement for the establishment of Khulna University, there is no longer any dilemma among the leaders. Now it's time to move on. Forgetting everything from the past, the people of this region jumped into the movement for the establishment of Khulna University. “*I want Khulna University*” - this is the demand of their lives. An unprecedented response to this demand started from intellectuals, various professionals, day laborers, and rickshaw pullers who joined the movement for the establishment of Khulna University. Not one day, not two days, at least 13/14 points of general strike-strike is observed. The people of this region made the establishment of this university impractical everywhere on that day. Enthusiastically drawn banners, banners, and posters were spread everywhere (Bozlul Karim, 2012, p. 55).

The most respected of these is the veteran lawyer, Adv. A.H. Deldar Ahmed - in whose hands the first nameplate of Khulna University was erected on 16 December 1985. This auspicious moment of the day was unforgettable. Thousands of people marched to Gallamari after the formality of Victory Day. A.H. Deldar Ahmed was at the forefront of the procession. He was the convener of the Struggle Co-ordination Committee of Khulna University. Thousands of people from different walks of life gathered at Gallamari (in front of the west gate of the present university) on the side of the Khulna-Satkhirra highway to read '*Khulna University. Add. Deldar Ahmed*' placed the plaque in his hand. The nameplate read: *Designated place: Khulna Divisional University, Khulna University Project; Monday 10 Agrahayan / 1396 Bangla* (Bozlul Karim, 2012, p. 56).

### **Contribution of A.U. Ahmed:**

AU Ahmed, a prominent businessman and social worker of Khulna, played a significant role in the final phase of the movement for the establishment of Khulna University in 1985-86. As he helped financially in spreading and inspiring the movement among the masses, he travelled to different areas. He played a role in organizing numerous banners, miking, and rallies in and around Khulna. Rickshaws had banners of the movement in his name. He generously supported the university movement financially. Entrez Uddin Ahmed was known as AU Ahmed for short. An entrepreneur by profession, but nominated as first-class in social service. Although his ancestral home was Noakhali, he came to Khulna for business purposes after the creation of Pakistan. He would come forward as needed for the welfare of the people of the society. In Khulna, his name was at a high level. Meetings and processions have been held many times from the seventies to the eighties to establish a university in Khulna. People are not unaware of this. Industrialist AU Ahmed has spent a lot of money on paper printing, publicity, and public relations for setting up a university in Khulna. AU Ahmed used to draw different coloured banners on the back of cars, on the backs of rickshaws, and on the walls to attract people's attention. In this regard, Khulna was identified as the city of banners. The printed poster read: "*Our demand is Khulna University*". AU Ahmed was very active in this regard. AU Ahmed has spent money, labour, and talent to direct the initiative of the people of Khulna. He was the convener of the 23-point implementation committee for the development of Khulna. Through this program, advertisements, press conferences, and processions were carried out. The half-day hartal was observed on 15 December 1985 and the full-day strike on 21 December 1985, demanding the establishment of the university. "Khulna is one of the four divisions of the country. The resources of the country are not being distributed equally among the four children. In each case, a university has been set up in the departmental town but not in the case of Khulna. The matter has turned into a conspiracy. The people of Khulna are united in this regard." He died in the United States in 1941 and was buried there (Bozlul Karim, 2012, p. 59).

### **Contribution of Liaquat Ali:**



**Picture 8: Journalist Liaquat Ali (*Liaquat Ali Lucky – Let's Talk, n.d.*)**

Although there was a demand to establish a university in Khulna from the sixties, it became strong in the eighties. The procession-meeting hartal hunger strike continues. To this end, the Civil Rights Implementation Committee was formed in 1983. Among other things, this committee started a movement to establish a university in Khulna. Later, to speed up the movement, Khulna University Implementation Committee was formed consisting of various organizations and student labour organizations of Khulna. The committee was chaired by journalist Liaquat Ali. Under his leadership, the movement for the establishment of the university became more vigorous, in which case the 'Purbanchal' newspaper he edited acted as the mouthpiece of the movement. He published every news item in the movement with a special emphasis which played a vital role in shaping public opinion and inspiring the government to set up a university in the area. And as a result of these struggles, the government decided to establish a university in Khulna. Work on the project began in 1987. Khulna University started its journey from 1990 to 91 academic years with 80 students in only four disciplines on a priority basis. Every time journalist Liaquat Ali visited Khulna University, he discussed various aspects of the development of the university. Among those who have raised the profile and development of Khulna University through his writings are SM Atiyar Rahman, a veteran journalist from the eastern part of the country and the current director of the public relations department of Khulna University.

Journalist Liaquat has made an immense contribution to the establishment and development of Khulna University. Khulna University authorities did not hesitate to acknowledge his contribution. An auditorium of Khulna University has been named "Journalist Liaquat Ali Auditorium" in his memory. The 220-seat modern auditorium was inaugurated on September 28, 2016, by Ferdousi Ali, editor of the daily Purbanchal and The Daily Tribune (Haque, 2020).

### **Contribution of Atiar Rahman**

Atiar Rahman was a reporter for the 'Purbanchal' newspaper. At present, he is working as the director of the Public Relations Department of Khulna University. His contribution to the establishment of Khulna University is unforgettable. He published a report on where the university would be located. He suggested the Gollamari Radio Center area as the place for the divisional University of Khulna and showed the logic behind his recommendation. He also contributed to making a Monogram of Khulna University. The theme of this Monogram was given by him. Kula is a symbol of the folklore of Bangladesh. It is used as a paddy release pot. From Universities, students are trained to become skilled and human resources. The open book is meant to scatter the light of knowledge and at the same time, it is meant to radiate at the rising sun. And the lively deer symbolized the Sundarban. He gave a briefing on the theme to Gautam Das, and Gautam Das drew the theme on paper. That's how the Monogram of Khulna University was created (Rahman, 2021).





**Picture 9: Atiar Rahman, Director of the Public Relations Department of Khulna University (Public Relations & Publications Division, n.d.)**

Atiar Rahman is still involved with Khulna University and is contributing to the university from different angles.

### **The Success of the Demand**

At last, the dream of Khulna came true and the foundation day of Khulna University was unveiled. On 9 March 1989, President H. M. Ershad came to Khulna and laid out the foundation of Khulna University. A. Haque wrote in Doinik Purbachal, “*Today March 9, 1989, is a historic day for the people of Khulna. On this day, to lay the foundation stone of Khulna University, his excellency is impossible to forget. President H. M. Ershad has come to Khulna today, and on that day, the people of Khulna greeted him heartily. H. M. Ershad with his own hands lay the foundation stone of the university. Laying the foundation stone of the university in Khulna, the people of Khulna again expressed their sincere gratitude to the President for announcing the establishment*” (Haque, 1989).





**Picture 10: *Then-President H.M. Ershad is seen delivering a speech at a large gathering at Gollamari in Khulna on the occasion of laying the foundation stone of the University of Khulna on 9 March 1989. Atiar Rahman's (Director of the Public Relations Department of Khulna University) Personal Collection***

#### **Establishment of the Foundation Stone:**

It is known that people from everywhere of all ages such as old, middle-aged, young, and teenagers, were coming to Gallamari in groups to founding the foundation stone. Shortly after, the foundation stone of Khulna University will be laid as a preliminary step. The number of people is innumerable, endless. When the sound of the helicopter carrying the President was heard, the gathering place was crowded. The President has sincerely acknowledged that he has never seen such a large gathering in the last seven years of his tenure (Bozlul Karim, n.d., p. 51).



**Picture 11: *Then Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia<sup>13</sup> was seen offering prayer after laying the foundation stone of Khan Jahan Ali Hall after the inauguration of the academic activities of the University of Khulna on 25 November 1991. Atiar Rahman's (Director of the Public Relations Department of Khulna University) Personal Collection***

On March 9, 1989, President H.M. Ershad laid the foundation stone of Khulna University on the premises of the old radio station Gallamari, 3 km from Khulna City. Speaking on the

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<sup>13</sup>Khaleda Zia is a Bangladeshi politician who was the country's Prime Minister from 1991 to 1996 and again from 2001 to 2006. She was the country's first female prime minister and the second Muslim majority country's (after Benazir Bhutto) to lead a democratic administration. She was the wife of Bangladesh's former president, Ziaur Rahman. Rahman created the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in 1978, and she is the current chairman and leader of the party. (Khaleda Zia, 2020)

occasion, he said that Tk 8 (eight) crore has been allocated in the third five-year plan for the construction of this university. His government has always attached importance to education. In the last six years, his government has nationalized 91 colleges and 144 schools. Kazi Zafar Ahmed, a political advisor to the president and deputy prime minister in charge of the information ministry, said the dream of the people of the area had come true with the laying of the foundation stone of the university (Bozlul Karim, n.d., p. 52).

The President landed at the newly constructed helipad at Gallamari at 11:02 a.m. Bangladesh time. He laid the foundation stone of Khulna University in 11-11 minutes. Laying the foundation stone of Khulna University. The people of Khulna have accepted the movement, struggle, strike, hunger strike, memorandum, and many sacrifices for the establishment of a university in Khulna Sadar. In return, former President Hussain Mohammad Ershad laid the foundation stone on March 9, 1989, at Gallamari (an old radio station) in Khulna, the headquarters of their coveted university department (Bozlul Karim, n.d., p. 52).

In the movement to establish a university in Khulna Sadar, all political leaders, students, politicians, lawyers, academics, engineers, working businessmen, transport owners, chambers of commerce, and people from all walks of life jumped into the movement. The tide of movement was seen in Khulna for the establishment of a university. University Implementation Journalist Council, Student Struggle Committee, Student Unity Council, and Youth Struggle Committee were formed in phases. Moreover, Khulna Rights Implementation Committee, a 23-point implementation council played a vocal role in the university movement. Later a mass movement was formed and for this purpose 'Khulna University Implementation Committee' was formed. Adopted a 72-hour hunger strike. Unable to ignore the massive movement and struggle of the people of Khulna, the government laid its foundation at the Khulna University Khulna headquarters (Bozlul Karim, n.d., p. 52). On the occasion of laying the foundation stone of Khulna University, a memorandum was published on 9 March 1989, entitled "The door to higher knowledge was opened in Khulna" (Bozlul Karim, n.d., p. 52).

### **Conclusion:**

A university is not only a knowledge-creating workshop or knowledge-distributor institution but also it has a rational impact on the society and culture of a certain area. Establishing a university and the universal knowledge practice in it brings about revolutionary changes in the existing socio-cultural circumstances of that region. The establishment of a University in Khulna was a long-cherished expectation for the people of Khulna. A higher educational institution in this region would pave the way for their fulfillment of socio-cultural demands. Khulna had s industrial and economic participation at the regional and national level but a lacking of a university was a matter of non-attainment for the residents of Khulna. So to ensure the acquisition of the right to higher education, the people of Khulna had to go through a struggle to establish Khulna University. As a legacy of the mass movement, the decision was taken to set up the university in Khulna. Through academic and location selection experiments, the Gollamari Radio Centre area was finally fixed to establish the university and at last, the people of Khulna established the nameplate of Khulna University on 16 December 1986 in 1989 the foundation stone was established. Finally, the academic activities of Khulna University were inaugurated at 3 pm, on 25 November 1991. Thus, people of the Khulna region consciously or subconsciously proved that education is a right and a tool of culture. In the field

of higher education, a university is a way to reach the right. So, a movement for a university recalls the consciousness of people that education is their right and that educational institution is the medium to reach the goal. So anywhere, a movement for cultural and educational rights, the history of establishing movement for Khulna University. would be a stimulation.

### **Acknowledgment:**

Acknowledgment of the people who contributed to the study by offering in-depth knowledge and experience by supplying numerous data and would like to express our gratitude to everyone who volunteered to assist in the data collection process. We also appreciate the journal editor's and anonymous reviewers' ideas, which helped to improve the paper's quality. The authors express their gratitude to the History and Civilization Discipline at Khulna University in Khulna, Bangladesh, for allowing them to conduct the research.

### **Appendix:**

- Malin Basu, ‘‘Movement of the establishment of Khulna University’’; Age: 60 years; Interview Date: 7 December 2021; Interview Place: Karimnagar, Khulna (at his own Residential); At: 07.30 pm.
- Atiar Rahman, ‘‘ Movement of the establishment of Khulna University’’; Age: 60 years; Interview Date: 9 December 2021; Interview Place: Khulna University Admin Building (at his office room); At: 02.15 pm.

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