

**Of Blood and Tears:**  
**Tracing Self and Community in Karbala Narratives of Bengal**  
**(late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century)**

Thesis submitted to Jadavpur University, West Bengal for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in Arts (Comparative Literature)

By

EPSITA HALDER

Supervised by:

Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta

Professor (Rtd)

Department of Comparative Literature

Jadavpur University

Amit Dey

Professor

Department of History

University of Calcutta

Certified that the Thesis entitled  
**Of Blood and Tears:**  
**Tracing Self and Community in Karbala Narratives of Bengal**  
**(late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century)**

Re-Submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried under the supervision of Dr. Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta, Professor (Rtd.) Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University and Dr. Amit Dey, Professor, Department of History, University of Calcutta and that the thesis is a **revised version** of the one submitted on Jadavpur University, West Bengal, for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts (Comparative Literature) on 27.04.2016.

It is certified that neither the thesis nor any part of it has been submitted for any degree or diploma elsewhere.

Candidate: EPSITA HALDER

Date:

Countersigned by the Supervisors:

SUBHA CHAKRABORTY DASGUPTA

Professor (Rtd.) Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur  
University

PROFESSOR AMIT DEY

Professor, Department of History, University of Calcutta

## CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	i
<i>Notes on Transliteration and Non-English Terms</i>	ii
<i>Introduction</i>	iii-xxi
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
From Recitation to Re-print: At the Threshold	1
1.1 Uncertain Author, Fixed Publisher	
1.2 Oral Form, Scripted format	
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
Print and Popular Piety	
2.1 From Pir-centric Piety to Prophet-centric Piety	43
2.2 Popular Piety between Scripture and <i>Kathmullah</i> : Conflict and Consensus	
2.3 Mapping ‘the Other’, Marking the Self: (an Imagined Community)	
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	96
Popular Piety in Print: Themes and Issues	
3.1.1 The Author, the Implied Reader/Audience and the Community	
3.1.2 From Prophet-centric Piety to Husayn-centric Piety	
3.1.3 <i>Nasihatinama</i> and the <i>Sabiqi</i> Mullah	
3.2.1 Censoring the Sensory: Shia and <i>Shirk</i>	
3.2.2 Cursing the Companions: Otherness of Shia Rituals	
3.2.3 Popular Piety, Print and the Prophet(ic)	
3.3.1 Prohibition in the Cheap print	
3.3.2 Performing Pain in Print	

The Moment of *Jatiya*: an Arrival

4.1.1 Association and *Anjuman*: Arriving at the Moment of  
*Jatiya*

4.1.2 From Kalikata to Karatiya: The Spread of Print

4.1.3 *Anjuman*, Periodical and Piety for a *Jatiya*

4.2.1 Crisscross, Transference, Overlap: A Network of Gathering,  
Reading, Printing, Publishing for *Jatiya*

4.2.2 Between Mr. Abdur Rahim and Shaikh Abdul Rahim: Bangla as  
*Jatiya*

4.2.3 Saiyad Emdad Ali and Mohammad Emdad Ali: The  
Question of *Jatiya Unnati* and *Jatiya Sahitya*

History and Biography: as *Jatiya*

5.1.1 The Search for a *Jatiya*: History-Biography-Literature

5.1.2 Muir and Sir Sayyid Ahmad, Sen and *Sudhakar*:  
Claiming the Prophetic life

5.1.3 Bios as the Ideal: *Jiban* as *Jatiya*

5.2.1 Biography and Biographies:  
Between the Prophetic and the Profane

5.2.2 History: The Rational and the Miraculous

5.2.3 From Province to Pan: Between Bengal and Balkan

5.3.1 From Pan to Province: Between Turkey and Furfura

5.3.2 *Ummah*, *Khilafat* and the Bengal Muslims:  
through History and Biography

## On Literature

6.1.1 BMSP *Sikha Islam Darshan Ahle Hadis*: Search for a Bangla

6.1.2 Sameness and Difference: Search for Muslim Bangla *Sahitya*

6.1.3 Bangla vs. Urdu and the Arabic Cosmopolis

6.2. Folk & Popular: A linguist, a folklorist, a collector of manuscripts

6.3.1 Muslim *Jatiya*, Bangla *Sahitya*

6.3.2 The Prophet between Pan-Islamism and Pakistanism

6.3.3 *Bishad Sindhu* between Reading and Listening

6.3.3a *Kabi*, *Maulabi* and *Bhai*: Claiming of Literature

6.3.3b Come, readers, let us know. এস জেনে লই, পাঠকগণ

6.3.3c *Karamat*, *Ummah*, Muharram

*Conclusion*

446

*Bibliography*

455

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals and institutions have seen me through this journey in search of Imam Husayn. First and foremost, my dissertation supervisors, Professor Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta and Professor Amit Dey, who motivated me to continue with my journey. I cannot thank them enough for their patience, guidance, and encouragement, all of which finally enabled me to submit my thesis.

Thanking Mofidul Hoque and Seema Hoque of Dhaka would belittle the gratitude I feel for their warmth and hospitality since 2000. I started searching for Karbala texts in 2008, which had me going to Dhaka time and again. Indeed, their house became my second home.

I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Gautam Bhadra for his encouragement.

I must thank all my colleagues at the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, especially Sujit Kumar Mandal, Parthasarathi Bhaumik and Debashree Dattaray, who chipped in with their constant support and suggestions.

During my research trips to Bangladesh, I worked at the Dhaka University Library and Bangla Academy. In India, I worked at the National Library, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Kolkata, and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. In London, an intense month-long research tenure at the British Library was immensely useful. I am grateful to the Charles Wallace India Trust for their short-term fellowship that enabled me to work at the British Library. I would like to thank the staff at all the libraries for their patience and help.

Thanks are due to Sumita di for listening to its beginning.

I thank Monami, who was witness to its finishing line.

I thank Sulagana, for her unconditional faith in me, which often includes stringing criticism and praise in the same sentence.

I also thank Bono, for being with me.

Finally, my deepest gratitude to Ma and Baba, as they trusted me enough to let me follow my heart, the outcome of which is this thesis. I wish Baba could see it.

## Notes on Transliteration and Non-English Terms

I have discussed material from both the Perso-Arabic and from the South Asian sources. Urdu reception of Perso-Arabic vocabulary was dissimilar from the reception of Perso-Arabic in Bangla which had different registers within. This poses considerable challenge in maintaining uniformity in transliterating titles, terms and names of the sacred Islamic figures. Also I choose to keep the flavour of Bangla, the host language, avoiding 'hyper-Arabisation' when Arabic vocabulary was received and recast in Bangla. I have tried to maintain the status of Bangla in the titles (*Jobdatol Masael*, *Asheqe Rasul*, *Ahle Hadis*) and names (Tajaddin Muhammad, Eshak Uddin) without writing them following the Perso-Arabic register.

I have used the old spelling 'Dacca', 'Calcutta' and 'Kalikata' for the cities which are now spelt Dhaka and Kolkata respectively.

Also, overall I used the Roman script in italics to designate non-English words without any diacritic marks to avoid further confusion.

## INTRODUCTION

শোনেন আমার ক'ই শ্রোতাগণ করি বিশ্লেষণ

(Hear my words, listeners; I will explain)

This is a part of an invocation that Mary Frances Dunham heard as a member of the audience at a *Jarigaan* recital in 1995 Gouripur, Bangladesh<sup>1</sup>. The etymological root of *jari* goes back to Arabic and Persian, the Arabic *azadari* and Persian *zari* – lamentation or mourning. *Jarigaan* became a part of the folk musical repertoire commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, included in the Muharram ritual or as an independent recital in Bengal. Her search was the culmination of what Jasimuddin, the poet and folklorist, started as a part of his folklore collection project in the 1930s. Folk became the all-engrossing theme in Jasimuddin's poetic oeuvre too. His 1933 long narrative poem '*Sojanbadiyar Ghat*' had the reference of *jarigaan* as a part of commemorating Muharram. But in the 1930s, while folk consciousness was being reclaimed as the part of the Bengali Muslim identity by the secular intelligentsia, *jari* was yet to be explored and *marsiya* — the ritualistic songs of lamentation over the loss of Imam Husayn — could not be included in the folkloric.

Jasimuddin finally worked on *jari* as folk repertoire in the 1960s in a different political-territorial-linguistic context of identity formation of the people of East Pakistan. But, already, the lines had been drawn between the folk and religious-ritualistic that was integral to the identity formation and consolidation of the Shias through the commemoration of Muharram. The narrative of lament and identity formation had already been taken up as major issues of public debate since the start of the nineteenth century after reformist movements surfaced in

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary Frances Dunham, *Jarigan: Muslim Epic Songs of Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: The University press Limited, 1997)



this subcontinent. In my thesis, I look at the changing contours of this debate in the identity formation project of Muslims in Bengal since the mid nineteenth century to the 1940s. I work on the debates about religion, region, literature and language as integral issues in the quest for the Bengali Muslim public sphere for both Bengaliness and Muslimness. My thesis looks at the supra-territorial, national and regional thrust of this identification project of the Bengali Muslim community which discovered, reclaimed or negated the story/history of the battle of Karbala.

In the *jari* quoted in the beginning, it was an all-inclusive category of the audience/listener for the folk repertoire. But not always was the audience so inclusive. Rather, the literary community was invoked as an exclusive imagined community of a specific kind by addressing them as the *mumin* — the believers. This began as a generic practice in the first half of the nineteenth century in the Karbala narratives in Bangla. This shows not only an exclusivity of the audience's religious configuration, the exclusivity also served to discern the attributes of that community spoken through the narrative. The narrative on the battle of Karbala and the attributes of its implied audience/readership since the introduction of print culture to its more standardized expressions is what I study in this thesis.

The religious-ritualistic dimension of Muharram is based on the lamentation over the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and the commemoration of a battle in 680AD (61AH) on the banks of the Euphrates/Forat on the plains of Karbala. Forty years after the death of Prophet Muhammad, his grandson Imam Husayn was killed with his band of army on the plains by the army of caliph Yezid. This event triggered tremendous emotional energy, initiating a performative ritual of a 10-day-long annual lament that came to be known as Muharram. Simultaneously, an illustrious and intensely affective literary tradition of short lyrical expositions and long narratives on the battle of Karbala emerged to define the community wherever Islam went, and in whatever garb.

Though Islam has many martyrs, the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and — and later Hasan, by poison — their attributes remained unique in the affective demography of the religion beyond the sectarian divide. The Sunni system of selecting the caliph which had Ali as the fourth hurt Alid sentiments since the beginning of the caliphate. They disregarded the first three caliphs – Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman - to get a separate imamate inaugurated by Ali. The disagreement and struggle for political authority culminated in the battle of Karbala that not only provided a narrative source for Islamic popular piety, but also stood as the primal moment of sectarian conflict in Islamic history. In what historian Marshal Hodgson has described as Islamicate<sup>2</sup> world, narratives on the battle of Karbala and the martyrdom of Imam Husayn are told and retold, shaped and textured through generations, endowed with or kept away from scriptural dimensions.

In my thesis, I concentrate on a particular period of history in Bengal when there were strong attempts of identity formation with the growing consciousness about the nation and the national. A traditional colonialist framework equated victimhood and political resentment of the elite Muslims after the transfer of power with the advent of colonialism and thus confined the project of the counter-narrative of identity formation within the elite. The Pakistan resolution in the 1940s came as the result of this elitist monolithic goal for Indian Muslims as a whole, erasing regional, linguistic, cultural, racial differentiators. The idea of a separate homeland for Muslims of this subcontinent, if this elitist paradigm is to be believed, oversimplified differences in the identity politics of Muslims residing at several economic, cultural, linguistic, social and aesthetic systems in this subcontinent. My thesis

---

<sup>2</sup> The use of Islamicate instead of Islamization perhaps is more explanatory in understanding the complex network of religion, religion and identity wherever Islam travelled through or resided. In his own words, Islamicate “would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims”, Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol I, *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 59.

looks at the divergence of religious emotion and political aspirations and cultural orientations in the processes of identification so that a different chapter of the quest for the identity of the Bengal Muslims can be written.

I am not discussing about existing theories of nationalism and identity formation in India with the advent of colonialism, rather I am trying to engage with a polemic of discourses in the Bengali Muslim public sphere, that sometimes are connected to politics but not always definable by political orientations and aspirations. I will be talking about formations of popular piety that developed as a form of identitarian politics, responded to and got entangled with political aspirations of the community. I try to understand these communitarian aspects from the expressions in the public sphere in print culture, where I take print neither as a monolith nor as an evolutionary one. Rather I attempt to excavate inclinations, aspirations and claims of various temporalities as coexisting, coalescing and confronting each other to understand the Bengal Muslim community's search for a collective identity.

For that I try to study both the elite and non-elite sources and also the vast plethora of ideological and textual formations in between. I explore all the genres possible to accomplish this task without getting into the generic demarcation between religious treatises and entertaining narratives as they did overlap as generic spaces to cater to a vast plethora of audience/readership that did not belong to the same order of literacy. The marks of recitability and orality were still there in the Karbala texts written in the first decades of the twentieth century when a strand of radical intelligentsia, simultaneously, claimed a reason for literary modernism. My intention is to look at the simultaneity of the discourses, both didactic and entertaining, created for various forms of the public — from elite to popular — created by the traditional mullah, the religious intelligentsia and the literati.

But the question remains, how do we access and know about the emerging consciousness of the non-elites about their concepts of identity and belongingness? We perhaps won't be able to talk about non-elite semi-literate

or oral societies other than exploring the cheap religious tracts that invaded the market after the beginning of the reform movements that triggered processes of self-identification for the masses. Cheap prints were published from not only the Battala area of colonial Calcutta, but also from the printing presses in Barisal, Comilla, Mymensingh, Noakhali, Rangpur and others with massive engagement of both reformist preachers and traditional mullahs who often spread non-consensual material about the ways of becoming a Muslim. Later on, with the structuring of the madrasa education and the impact of reformist consciousness, a new-age traditional mullah emerged, creating overlapping zones between the religious elite and the popular mass.

To understand these changes in religiosity, popular piety and community identity of the Bengal Muslims, there can be no other way for a researcher than to follow Rafiuddin Ahmad and Gautam Bhadra, pioneers in the field of studying the formulations of the consciousness of the non-elite Muslim masses. Both of them have not only showed anxiety over the inadequacy of material to read non-elite inclinations and actions, they have also questioned the methodology of reading whatever non-elite material there is. In his path-breaking book *Quest for Identity* Rafiuddin Ahmad<sup>3</sup> initiated a reading of the cheap vernacular printed *nasihatnama* (religious instructions) along with the *bahas* (public religious debates) and *waz* (preaching) literature to understand how a loose mass of oral or semi-literate agrarian community living in the remotest corners of swampy lands suddenly woke up to a new community consciousness.

Gautam Bhadra, in his *Iman O Nishan*<sup>4</sup>, has shown up the limitation of elite mainstream material to represent the non-elite —the *nimnokoti*. Drawing an analogy, Bhadra points out that as the methodology of writing history from a

---

<sup>3</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmad, *A Quest for Relevance: The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> Gautam Bhadra, *Iman O Nishan* (Kalikata, Subarnarekha, 1994).

western monolithic perspective is inadequate, so are generic and analytical categories to itemize and explain non-elite expressions and consciousness to write history. The testimonials of the non-elite, even if they could be retrieved, Bhadra warns, might not be fully interpretable by the elite historian because of the inherent distance between epistemological positions. Also, consciousness and culture of the non-elite are not a monolithic whole; rather they get produced from tension and the transaction between popular, folk and elite/classical forms of cultural exchange and entanglement. Even if new analytical categories are made and we get to engage with patterns of production of non-elite values and articulations, changing patterns of transaction and exchange produces new material to connect to. Bhadra applies the category *dwin*/religion to approach the question of consciousness and collectivity. Following Bhadra, I have taken ‘popular piety’ as the effect of *dwin* as my analytical category to understand non-elite consciousness and the transaction between elite scriptural worldview and different forms of ritualistic and folk consciousness to produce forms of religiosity, identity and community. The popular/non-elite, thus, is questioned and made to come out of an essential definition to a dynamic field of transaction and mutual influence with forms of elite expressions. I see the transaction between popular piety and forms of religiosity and political consolidation as an illustration of the journey of Bengal Muslim community towards a separate identity and modernity.

Sumit Sarkar, in his reading of two Muslim tracts for peasants<sup>5</sup> critiques Rafiuddin Ahmad for not explaining the connection between ‘class’ and ‘religious’ interpretations, and reads P.K. Datta’s seminal work on the emergence of a new ‘peasant improvement’ theme<sup>6</sup> through cheap print culture

---

<sup>5</sup> Sumit Sarkar, “Two Muslim Tracts for Peasants: Bengal 1909-10” in *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Relocating Postmodernism, Hindutva, History* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> P. K. Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth Century Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

as bringing out mutually productive interrelations between such an ethos and the aspirations and fears of an upwardly mobile class of peasants. What is most important in Datta's work is his emphasis on the fluidity and open-endedness of multiple identity formations of peasants. While Sarkar does justice by praising Datta's work, his dissatisfaction with Ahmad needs special scrutiny. Peasant consciousness, as it were, as an emerging consciousness, was a 1910s onwards phenomenon outside the realm of Ahmad's work which focuses between 1871 and 1906. Not only that, Ahmad explained class consciousness as connected to existing forms of power demarcated between the *ashraf* and *atraf*. With Ahmad, upward mobility was explicated in terms of *ashrafization* within the society that determined forms of class consciousness. Here the use of the concept of *ashrafization*, as a category to understand inherent hegemonic configuration of power and aspiration, is connected to the dimension of class, as Bhadra proposes to go for other categories. Datta, as a valid successor of Ahmad's work, shows the growing rifts in the agrarian communities of Bengal, where any kind of community formation is subsumed into a strong sense of religiosity. Sarkar in his article repeatedly remarks class-based upward mobility was negotiated and curbed by a language of religious solidarity now offered to a new category '*krishak*'. Following Bhadra's category *dwin*, we can see that it is the essence of *iman* and *ad'ab* that seeped in from the *nasihatnama* genre to this new literature for peasants. The connection between these peasant communities and rising political consciousness after the birth of Muslim League and *Khilafat* movement is worth noticing, and it has come as the backdrop of my study where I engage with formations of religiosity and piety that are also expressed in terms of the debates on other forms of solidarity based on language and culture.

Partha Chatterjee in his article “Bengal Politics and Muslim masses: 1920-1947”<sup>7</sup> says to understand the ‘entry’ of the peasant masses into organized politics, a relatively autonomous political authority in peasant communities should be traced and understood. But my study does coincide less with Partha Chatterjee’s as I remain focused on reading practises of the Muslim public, the choice of books to translate, the choice of source language to translate from, and also prioritizing a language to read and write about the community, to build knowledge systems with bricks of identity. Reading as an analytical practice opens up various possibilities to probe into the multitude of identity formation project of various social strata. My thesis tries to look into the complex web of the literary community through which the connection between language, literature and region might be achieved to understand the identitarian politics of the Bengal Muslim community.

To engage with identity formation, the mutual influence of the elite and the non-elite has so far been under-explored in writing the history of politicization and modernization of the Bengal Muslim public sphere. My thesis explores mutual contact, consent, coercion and exchange between several layers of this literary community by redefining the traditional bipolarity between the elite and folk/popular, and in the process tries to understand the goal – belonging to a collective. This shared collective identity —*ummah*— has been a topic of dissent and unity and ultimate aspiration for the Muslim community since the processes towards it started. At different times, different conceptual artefacts were formulated and put to use to reclaim and reaffirm identification and belongingness with the *ummah*.

My thesis looks into such dynamics and processes in the climactic days of colonialism and late colonialism when nationalists ideas were being the invented in Bengal as the master key to understand autonomy, collectivity and belongingness in political, social and cultural terms. As Talal Asad indicates, it

---

<sup>7</sup> Partha Chatterjee, “Bengal Politics and Muslim masses: 1920-1947”, *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Volm 20, Issue 1 (1982).

is imperative to notice Muslim people's 'continual and historically situated interaction to their foundational texts', which reasserts a certain kind of essentialization and 'orthodoxy'<sup>8</sup>. Asad calls for an open discussion of orthodoxy along changing maps of time and place and suggests an inclusion of the regional context. As Sufia M. Uddin explains<sup>9</sup> while referring to Asad, orthodoxy, produced at the moment of the reaffirmation of the core texts - the *Qur'an* and the *Hadis* - might be multiple and self-contradictory. My reading of the Bengali Muslim literary discourse exposes this multiplicity and polyphony in the nation-making process in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal. My thesis takes up Bhadra's *dwin* and Asad's 'orthodoxy'<sup>10</sup> as two analytical categories. I have used expressions like 'piety' to understand the different engagements with *dwin* and different social layers of 'orthodoxy' ranging from *kathmullah*, reformist preachers and religious intelligentsia or the new age religious authorities to understand the forms of religious collective identification and religious nationalism in Bengal.

To demarcate between the Benedict Andersonian notion of the nation and national and the indigenous forms of the collective as a response to the colonial paradigms, I have used *jatiya* instead of national as an untranslatable conceptual category throughout.

My emphasis and focus on the multiplicity of religious agents and their continuous attempts to motivate certain sections of people to become a religious community with the correct understanding of the *Qur'an* and the *Hadis* not only brings a different and region-specific meaning of

---

<sup>8</sup> Talal Asad indicates, "Orthodoxy is not a mere body of opinion but a distinct relationship – a relationship of power". *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University, 1986), p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Sufia M. Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity and Language in an Islamic Nation* (Delhi: Vistar Publications, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Talal Asad, *Formation of the Secular: Christianity, Islam and Modernity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003).



‘orthodoxy’ or religious consciousness, it also makes collective identification difficult to be expressed as national consciousness. But I try to read multifarious groups with religious aspirations and agency as the impact and legacy of colonialism. By reading the tension within these groups — elite Urdu-speaking urban *ashraf*, aspiring rural *ashraf* landholders, reformist preachers, traditional mullahs, reformed Sufis — I understand the idea of Islamic nation that took root in the 1940s. All these are attempted through an engagement with the literary network, as forms of reading and reception, which brought the groups of orthodoxy and non-elite literate or semi-literate together as mutually constitutive categories. Again, by looking into literary communities and the pattern of consumption we might be able to understand the literary network that made the religious community possible.

My analysis of the Bengal Muslim identity formation deals with issues of language, religiosity and popular piety. At many points, frontrunners of this identity project directly negotiate with the question of ‘religious nationalism’ and use the concept of ‘Arabic cosmopolis’. Peter van der Veer critiques the modernization paradigm that homogenizes what was not in sync and erases processes of heterogenization that erupted after colonial contact<sup>11</sup>. In his book *Religious Nationalism*, showing the limits of Benedict Anderson’s modernization as fully explicable in secular terms and realities, van der Veer proposes another version of the relation between the secular and the traditional. He talks about what Asad would term ‘ambiguity’<sup>12</sup>, that is the coexistence and enmeshedness of both at a single moment that redefines bipolarity of the secular and the traditional, liberal and the orthodox at the same time. The dichotomy between forward-looking/progressive and backward/regressive, the rational and the religious, collapses in this kind of study. Ambiguity offers various modernities and identities beyond the traditionalist templates of

---

<sup>11</sup> Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Talal Asad, *Formation of the Secular: Christianity, Islam and Modernity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003).

modernist monoliths. Thus laicization becomes an analytical category to read fractured modernities and heterogeneous forms of orthodoxy and responses to them. Sacredness of religious language in connection to new forces of the printing press (enticing for both the vernacular elite and the popular masses) in the context of reform and religious nationalism attributed to a debate over national language - all these were forms of laicization, our context to understand identity and nation formation.

Laicization, popular piety and the issue of language raise another question about categorization. A new consciousness to define and fix the genre for standardized literature becomes a new project of modernity and community identification. Consciousness about genre was not something new as *sawal*, *malfuzat*, *tarikh*, *akhbar*, *shariyatnama*, *nameh/kissa*, *sirat*, *maghazi* et al were generic categories for thematically separate textual traditions. Following Ronit Ricci, when I use the term literary community or literary network, I intend to include all kinds of genres not only because they shared certain common literary elements (like rhythm) but also to see how and when naming and the rationale of nomenclature started changing under the impact of colonial institutions. Literature, as a category, took complex shapes by including *kavya* and *sastra* and other forms of the narrative. Colonial impact and the advent of print posited a unique relationship between theme and genre by producing the need of having history, biography, and literature as separate domains with a demarcated space for scriptural knowledge. In my thesis I have pointed out these demands of demarcation and also showed several layers of overlap and interstitial spaces in the attempt to separate the genres.

Following the Sheldon Pollock model of the ‘Sanskrit cosmopolis’<sup>13</sup>, Ricci explores the ‘Arabic cosmopolis’ to understand the diffusion of Arabic in the Islamicate world as the sacred language and conceptualizes Arabicized

---

<sup>13</sup> Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Postmodern India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

language and literary cultures<sup>14</sup>. As local languages absorbed Sanskrit vocabulary, Ricci refers to a wide range of instances in which Arabic influenced local languages, often combining with them rather than replacing them<sup>15</sup>. But to import Ricci's notion of Arabic cosmopolis to understand an Islamicate Bengal and its literary networks as connected to power and religion would be problematic. While the Tamil, Malay, Java instances were close to the culture of the *Qur'an*, the *Hadis* and the grammar in Arabic, in Bengal the close exchange with the Persian literary system was no less. A bulk of narrative and the scriptural connections came from original texts in Persian.

Sometimes, authors did not even refer to the source of their translations/transcreations and simply referred to what Becker understood as 'prior text' – some “□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □” – “an aggregate of remembered and half-remembered prior texts, which are there to be invoked”<sup>16</sup>. For Bengal, it would be rather a complex of an Arabo-Persian, rather than an undisputed and authentic Arabic which is needed to understand the literary network for which an Arabic cosmopolis might be inadequate. A Persian court and proliferation of Persian *nameh* and *kissa* genres inside and outside court, assignments of translations from Sanskrit to Persian and Arabic and vice versa, translations of *sirat*, *maghazi* and behavioural manual and *sawal* literature to and from Arabic and Persian corpuses tilted the Arabic cosmopolis towards a multifarious reception of Persian literary cultures. With the beginning of the mosque-madrassa culture, Arabic came into structured circulation. More and more *shariyatnama* texts were translated and written into Bangla, more and more manuscripts were being written in Arabic script, but there was not much demarcation in the literary community between Arabic and Persian sources.

---

<sup>14</sup> Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Ricci made a distinction between Sanskrit and Arabic cosmopolis by saying the proliferation of the cultural productions in the Arabicized domain was integrally religious unlike that of Sanskrit *kavya* where religion did not carry such value.

<sup>16</sup> A. L. Becker, *Beyond Translation: Essays Towards a Modern Philology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), pp. 286-87.

For the sustenance of a community where new members came from local literary-ritualistic traditions and had to be engulfed into a literary network that the religious authorities could provide about *tauhid* — the oneness of Allah — the absence of translations of the *Qur'an* and the *Hadis*, the life of the Prophet, the martyrdom of his grandsons Imam Hasan and Husayn came to offer the devotional resource to a literary community which was also offered the quasi-historical quasi-mythological tales of war.

While taking into account the unfixity of the source text and proposing the term ‘acquisition’ — usually via translation — “of new stories, where previously unknown materials became prior texts, adapting to their changed circumstances”<sup>17</sup>, Ricci however does not go beyond Arabic origin and makes sweeping ahistorical comments for medieval and early modern eras, for instance, this: “Muslims living in India and Indonesia invested great effort, time and ingenuity into gradually assembling the pieces of a long history – with its origin in Arabia – which led to their own familiar presence”<sup>18</sup>.

The case of *shariyatnama* and *sawal* literature – two textual forms of scriptural Islam for the Bangla speaking community – was markedly different from this pull towards an Arabic origin and its literary network, proposed as it was in an Arabic cosmopolis. Its dimension and dynamic was different from the Javanese *sawal* literature whose Arabic origin was apparent and interchangeable with the ‘Sanskrit’<sup>19</sup> words<sup>20</sup>. I would rather say that, in case of Bengal, even if not apparent in a full-blown nexus of religion-culture-power, Sanskrit derivatives were present in the vocabulary of many religious textual traditions along with local and localized linguistic signs. The linear exchange between Arabic and Sanskrit words as a way to bring equivalence through

---

<sup>17</sup> Ricci, 2011, p147.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p 249.

<sup>19</sup> She even does not say Sanskritized. Ibid, p. 249.

<sup>20</sup> “Interestingly, in the context of discussions of alphabet mysticism in Javanese *One Thousand Questions* telling, different words for “letters” – adopted from Arabic and Sanskrit – are used interchangeably for the same purpose...”, Ibid, p. 249.

translation may not be adequate for us to imagine the network “as a map of literary roads, crossings, and signals”. Rather, Bengal demands a more close study of several religious-aesthetic traditions and connected literary idioms as the source of equivalence.

The great tradition of the Perso-Arabic was engaged with and picked up linguistic equivalents and generic types and stocks from available great and little traditions of Bengal.

I’d rather refer to Ahmad Sharif who looked at the elite-popular conjuncture to understand the literary network created by *sawal* literature. What he says can be read in connection to Becker’s notion of ‘prior text’ that imagination of the source, many a times, was a necessity for the religious authority of *sawal* literature, who did not have much authority over Arabic and Persian in the original. Ahmad Sharif shows discrepancy between truth and imagination to categorize the community not as Arabicized or Islamic, rather as “desi Musalman” thus giving us enough cues to see the dynamics of popular piety in *sawal* literature in an early modern Bengal. As the titles go, they place evidence of a network of the major reception of Persian ‘prior texts’<sup>21</sup> and if the texts are followed, we can derive how through *sawal* literature, forms of devotion and popular piety emerged to mark the attributes of the literary community. In one *sawal* text, *Gada-Mallika Sambad*, a 1712 Bangla translation of Persian Shaikh Sadi’s *sawal* literature, the *na’at* (the praise of Muhammad) section, shows the veneration of the characters who would remain at the core of Muslim popular piety and who would be thoroughly argued over

---

<sup>21</sup> Ahmad Sharif repeatedly warns in this book that not always were argumentation and affect scripturally inclined and derived from; rather, these were interwoven with local ritualistic imagination, folkloric belief and memory-based recapitulation. The titles of Bangla *sawal* texts like *Musanama* (Nuhammad Aqil), *Musar Sawal* (Nasrullah Khondakar), *Hajar Masael* (Abdul Hakim Khaondakar), *Sahabuddin Nama* (Rajjak Nandan Abdul Hakim), *Talibnama* (Shaikh Chand), *Satyakali Bibad Samvad* (Muhammad Khan), *Siraj Kulb* (Ali Raza) and *Abdullar Hajar Sawal* (Etim Alam) show close affinity with original Persian sources.

to form the ideal form of 'dwin' by the 'orthodoxy' to validate the project of identity formation that my thesis follows.

না'ত

আল্লার পরম সখা নবী মোহাম্মদ।  
তান পদে নিছনি যে এ সুখ সম্পদ।।

...

তান পাছে বন্দিম যতেক পয়গম্বর।  
এক লাখ চল্লিশ হাজার নবীবর।।  
অবশেষে বন্দিম নবীর চার ইয়ার।  
যাঁহার উপরে বহু আল্লার পিয়ার।।  
তান পাছে বন্দিম ফাতেমা বিবি সতী।  
যা হতে মোচন হইব দোজখ দুর্গতি।।  
তবে বন্দিম দুই ভাই হাসান হোসেন।  
যাহার কারণে হইব ভেহেস্তে গমন।।

I mark the reformist turn in early nineteenth century as the major shift towards the making of an Arabic cosmopolis where the Arabic scriptural traditions were invented by the reformers and a true and proper form of obeying the *Qur'an* and the *Hadis* started to be disseminated to invoke a true sense of the Islamic self and the community. My thesis tries to follow a literary network to understand the complexities and viabilities of this move.

Outline of Chapters:

In Chapter 1, by placing the theme of Karbala within new forms of textuality and new systems of production and consumption of print, I try to understand the culture of textuality, both popular and elite, that formed the community an interpretive one. In an attempt to bring the popular print out of its traditional monolithic meaning, easy binaries between the elite and folk/popular, urban and rural, great tradition and little tradition, the book and body, have been problematized. I show here that no evolutionary history of popular print can ever be achieved; rather, different temporalities can be seen present at any point of history. Popular print might not be able to do away with the thrust of the performative and the oral but it can simultaneously reformulate the sense of pain and the ritual of the early modern after experiencing the effects of a

reformist Islam. It can also live simultaneously when the Muslim public sphere achieves a certain standardization of print market, literary genre and language as the effect of modernity.

In Chapter 2, I show how the reformist movements brought a new turn in the Karbala narrative. I discuss how the battle of Karbala and the piety associated with it are given a new shape and interpretive context in the late nineteenth and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries by reformist Islamic agendas and how Karbala, in turn, added a new justification and interpretation to reformist piety and religiosity. I have discussed how different reformist platforms emerged in North India in the 1830s and talked at length about their reception in Bengal. The zeal to purge out the un-Islamic from the body of Islam and to go back to the Prophetic Islamic purity, the sense of an imagined community was envisaged no matter how diverse the notion of solidarity. I read the growth of religious ideology and piety and their connection to identity and solidarity, expressed in the language of rupture and continuity, in an effort to create a context for the Karbala narratives. I discuss Tariqah-e-Muhammadya and the Faraidi movements to understand the ideology about the Islamic ideal and un-Islamic and follow how the latter. *Shirk* (polytheistic religiosity) and *bida't* (harmful innovations) started to be identified within the Muslim community and without. I show how, as an effect of reformist discourse, Urs, Milad and Muharram were considered false forms of Islam. I also mark that while Urs and Milad were gradually reshaped to include them in reformed piety, Muharram could not be. But the narrative of Karbala was reclaimed and through a new reformist narrative, the un-Islamic within was marked and eliminated.

Chapter 3 shows how Prophet-centric piety was formulated by both reformist and traditionalist *ulemas*, replacing the *pir*-centric piety prevalent in the pre-reform early modern period. The narratives of Karbala in popular print show how a reformed scriptural Sufism supported these processes by reconfiguring forms of religiosity and piety. I trace how in the space of popular piety, the figure of the Prophet came up as the ideal man who became the template for

individuals along with the simultaneous proliferation of texts on *farz* and *ada'b*. In each and every Karbala narrative, not only did the Prophet-centric piety yield a Husayn-centric piety to strengthen the notion of self-sacrifice, it also solved and resolved the question of *umma* and inheritance. By placing many behavioural manuals in connection to the Karbala repertoire, I also show that while the *ummah* was being secured and settled, the ideal Islamic attitude towards mourning over the martyrdom of Imam Husayn was strictly reformulated. This chapter thoroughly shows this dichotomy that while the narrative made it eligible to reaffirm *ummah* and the caliphate by prioritizing a Husayn-centric piety, it simultaneously barred the performative affect to connect to Imam Husayn. The ideological struggle between the scriptural and the *shirk* has been discussed by a close reading of a literary network that dealt with the battle of Karbala/ Imam brothers in some way or the other.

In Chapter 4, I talk about how reformist Islam, as an effect, created a group within the Bengal Muslim public sphere to continue with the question of identity and origin as a direct response to colonialism and in the formation of a national consciousness, the *jatiya*. The supra-national consciousness inaugurated through the awakening in the path of pan-Islamism in late nineteenth century also gave rise to the question of location and other belongings. Regional identity of the Muslims came out in connection to its solidarity with and difference to pan and national belongingness. It was carved out by the Muslim public by producing identity as difference and also located in the configuration of *jatiya*. This locatedness in Bengal with an essential core belonging to Islam was the arena of ideological struggle for the Bengali Muslim community in their quest for identity. My thesis shows the impossibility of achieving the Bengali Muslim identity as a purely middle class activity. If *jatiya* became the most viable explanatory expression to embody that sense of community, even that conceptualization of *jatiya* was not a monolith. Rather, it emerged with polyvalent possibilities forged by various groups of the community. Thus the identity of the community remained ever-



expanding as I follow various expressions from multiple layers of the Muslim public here, namely, urban platforms like Central National Muhammadan Association (CNMA) and literary societies like Mahomedan Literary Society (MLS), *anjumans* in the districts and group of religious intelligentsia of *Sudhakar* and of other journals and periodicals like *Mohommodi* and also reformed traditional platforms of the Hanafi and Ahl-e-Hadis who strove for three-fold identity formulation — pan, national and regional. This chapter shows the polyphony that emerged from an argumentative community, making the project of a sovereign identity impossible.

In Chapter 5 I notice the scriptural and affective relevance of the emergence of history and biography as two modern genres to define the *jatiya* affinity. Here, I show that the attempt to achieve a historical time by negating folkloric time to attain a structure of religious reason. But the process of transformation is never complete as reason always carries the impulse of the miraculous, as the authors of history and narrative inaugurated by the *Sudhakar* associates display it. Here, I talk about the struggle and consensus between multiple journeys and registers of reasoning that make the domain of biography and history fraught with ambiguities of history and belief. No matter how much the *Sudhakar* group tried, a modernist secular notion of the real historical time and space wasn't conceived. But these two important genres — biography and history — reaffirmed the validity of the Prophet, his companions and grandsons as the actors to define the identity of a religious community. The reading of biography and history opened time and space to the community's supra-territorial realization. I show here how different the other actors are, from reformist leaders to the sultans of Islamic states. In turn, they interpreted the search for an identity of the Bengal Muslim community, giving it more nuance, making it more relevant by touching upon the contemporary, defining the question of the origin of *ummah* and caliphate from contemporary references.

For chapters 4, 5 and 6, I have arranged the context of historical framework to facilitate a historicity of this identity formation project.

Though the argument and demand for Bangla to express the Bengali Muslim *jatiya* was already started by the Sudhakar group, Chapter 6 marks another debate that emerged since the 1920s, that of having a separate domain for literature. *Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Parishat* (BMSP) inaugurated the question of autonomy for the literary but the MSS strived very hard to take the question of the literary away from the religious moorings. The BMSP neither offered a homogeneous membership, nor did it want a *jatiya* without the religiosity of the themes intact, but *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* (MSS) and *Sikha* attempted to empty out religious symbols to create a shared Bangla literature for the community. Here, I arrange the argument in a synchronous arrangement and bring at least three layers of the public sphere, the literary associations BMSP-MSS, the periodical *Mohommadi* and two religious platforms *Hanafi* and *Ahl-e-Hadis*, to show conflicting ideas on literature and choice of language. I also show how the multivalence of scriptural reason, secular reason and sectarian reason collide, the resultant expressions of public debate in journals and periodicals indicating the choice of Bangla as a very complex phenomenon and a prequel to the 1947 Partition dilemma. Here, I come back again to the question of *dwin*, popular piety and orthodoxy to understand the debate during the 1930s between conflicting and consenting positions in the search for Bengal Muslim identity.

This thesis does not give a comprehensive study of the historical processes behind the formation of an Islamic nation in 1947. Rather it looks at and picks up certain threads of history to understand the literary practices of a particular period in time and highlight a crucial moment of identity formation of the Bengali Muslims that has lingered on in postcolonial moments of East Pakistan and then Bangladesh, and also in the decolonization project.

## CHAPTER I

### **From Recitation to Re-print: At the Threshold**

Little did Heyat Mamud, the Sufi pir in late eighteenth century Rangpur, know that the manuscript that he scribed with his own hands at the age of eighty for a sacred purpose, would finally be sold by some of his heirs to a printer-publisher. *Ambiya Bani*, the handwritten manuscript on the lives of Islamic prophets by Mamud, was printed in 1874, within fifty years Heyat Mamud's death, at a cheap rate to reach a wider mass, not everybody among whom knew how to read and write. What would have struck Mamud most was the manuscript he had prepared as a sacred duty to enlighten the vernacular soul with the lives of Islamic Prophets was registered<sup>1</sup> to prevent any other printer/publisher extract money from that particular text.

This phenomenon indicates a shift in the conception of the sacred and the way the sacred was realized by a community through narratives. It is also a shift from the way the community constantly produced itself through its relation to the narratives and the way the narratives functioned on/with the community. While talking about changes brought in by print, we need to look at the transformation also as a flow, a continuity of a prevalent memory about the stories, into a new mode of remembrance. For something to be remembered, for something to continue to stay in the mind of a different era, new paths of remembrance in a different domain of culture need to be followed. Print indicates the formation of a new sensibility within the community through its new technologies of production and change in the medium of expression. Print, as a technology and a new social force, brought new dimensions to the culture of words/narratives, new realizations of the community and religion. This chapter will initiate an understanding of the Muslim community in Bengal as the consumer of

---

<sup>1</sup> The Press and Books Registration Act, 1867 was amended for the preservation of copies of books (and newspapers) printed in India and for the registration of such books.

words, scripted or oral, in the wake of its modernity. As the thesis will ask about and attempt to delineate the definition of modernity for the Muslim public from the later decades of nineteenth century to the early decades of the next, it will be necessary to raise issues on the various relationships between different groups that used print to meet various ends. While doing so, I will try to engage with the relationship between print and the Muslim public in Bengal<sup>2</sup> to understand the dealings in/with religion and literature that facilitated the urge and argumentation for modernity. In this chapter, the narratives of Karbala will be discussed from their early print attributes to a more standardized form of articulation to explore Karbala's connection with the network of literary systems and the argumentative publics connected to it.

If we talk about the continuation of the Karbala theme from its pre-modern days to the early print culture, we need to investigate new forms of textuality and new systems of production and consumption of this theme in a new era. An investigation of the community demands an understanding of the culture of textuality, both popular and elite<sup>3</sup>, that formed the community as an interpretive community<sup>4</sup>. But, to accomplish that investigation in the age of print technology we need to be careful about not devising an oversimplistic dichotomy between print and orality<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, a clear-cut

---

<sup>2</sup> I am using Muslim public in Bengal in the beginning instead of Bengal Muslim community to mark the very deliberate moment of claiming the Bengalingness by this community in the later period.

<sup>3</sup> The dichotomy and dialogue between the popular and the elite will be developed further in the later sections.

<sup>4</sup> Interpretive community was first conceived by Stanley Fish and then was much contested by the later theoreticians. Reader-response theory also developed this idea. M M Bakhtin emphasized on the dialogic between the text and the readers/critics where the readers/critics are situated in social and historical context. (Shepherd, 'Bakhtin and the Reader' in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, 96-97. Roger Chartier identifies the construction of 'communities of readers' as 'interpretive communities' Chartier, *The Order of Books*, p23. Chartier, while using Stanley Fish's expression, critic his theory which tends to simply and dihistoricize the relationship between reader and text.

<sup>5</sup> Which begins with Roger Chartier warning against the too simplistic opposition between print and orality was much developed by later historians of print culture. He saw print as a simultaneous process which went with orders of oral, scribal and performative traditions rather than acting as a direct replacement of the oral. Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the*

division between the popular and the elite may not be adequate to chart out a layered argumentative space of claiming modernity. In the study of cheap popular print that invaded the cultural landscape of early modern Bengal, the easy binaries between the elite and the folk/popular, urban vs. rural, great tradition vs. little tradition, the book and the body, will be problematized to propose a new understanding of the popular, as also of religiosity and piety, and of the Bengal Muslim community.

In The theoreticians' stance, like that of Elizabeth Eisenstein, about looking at print as a radical force of change<sup>6</sup> may overlook the complex ways in which print and orality coexisted and acted simultaneously to contest and complement each other in the period of my study. Thus a linear idea of consumption of cheaply printed books by a lowly and lived community which overwhelmed the theoretical understanding of early print cultures may fail to understand both culture and society in their layered and complex forms. Though cheap print culture, as the most important field of popular culture, on the very onset, may seem to be exclusively connected with producers and consumers from the socio-economic margins of society, a study of the reception of the cheap print culture may expose only points of overlap and contest. Here, to understand popular culture and popular piety in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal vis-à-vis cheap prints, it is a compelling theoretical invite that the researcher should go beyond a set of binary opposites that explain popular print culture traditionally. That may enable this thesis look beyond the binaries to form and formulate a new problematic for the consumer communities and also raise new questions of identity formation (of the Muslim community in Bengal).

---

*French Revolution*, tr. Lydia G Cochrane, (Duke University Press, 1991). Sheldon Pollock, to add to this discussion of beyond the binaries, points out this simultaneity of different cultures of text-formation and dissemination coexisting at the same time. Pollock (ed), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press), which will be referred to in this chapter in due time.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Eisenstein, *Print as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-modern Europe*, Vols. 1-2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1980).

While studying the battle of Karbala as a particular theme that motivated the understanding of both history and narrative, it becomes a crucial factor to understand the Muslim community that attempted this historical/narrative experience of Karbala and the experience which, in turn, sustained the idea and ideals of the community. In the latter half of nineteenth century, perceptible changes could be felt in the Muslim community in its understanding of socio-economic-ideological newness ushered in due to the transformation of political power with the advent of colonialism. In the latter half of nineteenth century, irrespective of demographic and social cleavages, responses of various kinds could be discerned in various degrees within the Muslim community in Bengal. In agrarian areas, anti-colonialist struggle broke out when the Muslim peasants tried to defend their religious and economic interests against the Hindu landowners. Antagonisms, mainly in the form of *Wahhabi*<sup>7</sup> and *Faraizi* movements, in different parts of Bengal, articulated in a call by the fundamentalist reformers to return to a true Islam . Here I use fundamentalist following Rafiuddin Ahmed's terminology to define the religious reformers who sought to go back to the fundamentals of Islam by replacing the affective-ideological impact of the local mullahs who Ahmed calls the traditionalists. Rafiuddin Ahmed explained how the Muslims of Bengal experienced 'a profound change'<sup>8</sup> in their religious ideology and social mores during the latter half of the nineteenth century because of the proliferation of Islamic reformist movements. These changes were connected to the emergence of a new sense of identity as belonging to an imagined community. The *Tariqah-e-Muhammadiya* and the *Faraizi* created the first wave of reformist ideology to overwhelm Bengal with the

---

<sup>7</sup> In Bengal it was not *Wahhabi* movement per se, rather it was both a North Indian and a local variant of *Tariqah-e-Muhammadiya* that more adequately explains the dynamics of fundamentalist reform of the times. Gautam Bhadra, *Iman o Nishan: Unish Shatake Banglar Krishak Choitanyer Ek Adhyay* (Kolkata: Subarnarekha, 1994) The preachers from North India brought *Tariqah-e-Muhammadiya* and preached all over the districts. Mir Nisar Ali, better known as Titu Mir, was also a follower of *Tariqah* who defended a true Islam and the religious rights of his fellow peasants against the Hindu and Muslim landlords to finally fight against the British.

<sup>8</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmed, *Quest for Identity: The Bengal Muslims 1871-1905* (Delhi: Oxford University press, 1981, p39.

consciousness of the true ways of Islam. I will be talking about their reformist dynamics and its effect to create forms of religiosity and piety in the next two chapters, where I will be discussing the later reformist branches and their impacts as well. Throughout my thesis I use fundamentalist-traditionalist in the strict sense with which Rafiuddin Ahmed has used to designate the reformist preachers with the proper scriptural knowledge and the local petty religious authorities for whom not always the source of Islam was clear and fixed and many a times were connected to a *pir*-centric piety.

A group of historians say that these fundamentalist religious affirmations<sup>9</sup> articulated in the language of agrarian unrest in these cases did not become autonomously religious; rather the religious questions could hardly be differentiated from the questions of land and social rights of poor Muslim peasantry<sup>10</sup>. Though the rebellion led by Mir Nisar Ali who was the disciple of *Tariqah* founder Shah Sayyid Ahmed of Rae Bareli (1786-1831) against the local feudal order was suppressed by the British in 1831, the *Faraizi* unrest could be felt till the 1860s before it took a more moderate stance vis-à-vis the British. Marxist historians like Narahari Kaviraj explains the reformist movements launched by the agrarian mass through the class consciousness of the peasant and interpreted the confrontation as a form of class-struggle<sup>11</sup>. Rafiuddin Ahmed points out his reservations about using the Marxian conceptual categories to define the conflict between the reformist and the land-holding classes, even though we find a whole lot of literature devoted to interpreting the conflict as a form of class-war as Kaviraj's. I follow Ahmed and Bhadra to stick to the point that a prioritization of class perhaps devalues the form of consciousness made through a kind of indoctrination of the common mass and *dwin* as a basis of

---

<sup>9</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmed, 1981.

<sup>10</sup> Muin-ud-Din Ahmed Khan, *The History of Faraidi Movement (1818-1906)* (Dacca: Pakistan Historical Society, 1965), Qeyamuddin Ahmed, *The Wahhabi Movement of India* (Kolkata: Farma K L Mukhopadhyay, 1966)

<sup>11</sup> Narahari Kaviraj, *Wahabi and Farazi Rebels of Bengal* (Kolkata: People's Publishing House, 1982)

their collective consciousness<sup>12</sup>. The impact of rural fundamentalist reform on textual culture and the responses of the rural Muslim communities to the reformist ethos affirmed a unique process of adaptation and accommodation among the folk, popular and the elite textual genres and references. Both the movements, reformist-revivalist in nature, attempted to purge out *shirk* and *bid'at* – polytheistic rites and rituals and bad innovation respectively<sup>13</sup> from the body of Islam that accumulated after a long-term intimate transaction with more physical, ritual-based, polytheistic local communities.

The *Tariqah* movement was more connected to political struggle than the *Faraizis*, though the later expression became more effective in terms of its direct dealing with the oppression of the peasantry. These two movements, with their different orientations, moved the rural masses a lot to energize a pure Islam<sup>14</sup>. It was played out in the form of increasing interest in printing didactic manuals and the constant mobility of the preachers from the first and second wave reformist platforms moving through the villages to secure their interpretation of Islam. The print culture reflected this newly found interest to save a 'degenerated' Islam; nonetheless, no uni-linearity could be found in this attempt towards a more structured knowledge. The effort to purge out non-Islamic elements cannot be called as achieving major success because of the existing structure of traditionalist religious authorities in the rural areas. In the practice of religion in the rural areas patronized by the small scale landlords, organized by the rural traditionalist mullahs, one finds a more reliance on narratives rather than on the scriptures. While the *ulama* from outside<sup>15</sup> and also indigenous preachers like the *Faraizi* leader

---

<sup>12</sup> Ahmed, 1981, pp. 45-46, Gautam Bhadra, *ibid*, pp.232-299.

<sup>13</sup> *Shirk, bida't* were coined to mark the un-Islamic since Shah Wali Allah conceptualized a true Islam and demarcated it from the Islam that had been practised in the Islamicate territories of this subcontinent. *Tariqa* and *Faraizi* were two moments in the colonial times that adapted and appropriated them to begin an illustrious tradition of reform.

<sup>14</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmed discusses in details the fundamental similarities and practical conceptual differences between the two main reformist trends in late nineteenth century Bengal in a chapter entitled 'Fundamentalist Reform and the Rural Responses', Ahmed, *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> *Ulama* came from UP and also from Calcutta to roam around the interior parts of Bengal as a part of different Islamic reformist schools and later *anjuman* came up to spread



Haji Shariatullah (1781-1840), with his knowledge of the *Qur'an-Hadis*-based scriptural Islam, roamed through the inner districts, local landlords along with the rural religious authorities were threatened by their presence and popular print carried the dynamic relationship of adaptation, rejection and influence taking place in the conjuncture of different literary-religious communities.

Responses and reactions from within the Muslim community in the atmosphere of changing social paradigms of colonialism followed no single parameter to define the social cleavages between the elite and the folk-popular. The urban Urdu-speaking elite and the rural-upwardly mobile landlords were dead against the reformist movements in the rural quarters. Social elites of the urban Muslim community along with the Muslim landlords of the rural areas were sceptical and critical about the anti-British sentiment of the rebellion as they thought that the British might refuse them many opportunities that they were entitled to have as allies<sup>16</sup>. Opportunities like English education were on the top priority list of the urban elite who did not consider the rural Muslims as belonging to their class because of their less-refined religiosity and less-authenticity as convert Muslims<sup>17</sup>. Thus the horizontal territorial division between the urban and the rural got more fractured with the verticality of *ashraf* (elite) and *atraf* (lowly, folk-popular) divide. Rafiuddin Ahmed invites readers to look at the configuration of power by showing the social cleavage between the *ashraf* and *atraf* which was informed by other divisions based on class, literacy, Urdu-Bangla divide, exposure to scriptures etc.

Local landlords who used to patronize rural mullahs for a basic practice of Islamic knowledge among their subjects, tried to retain their hold on the masses against the influence of the reformist activities from outside by

---

sensibilities around an Islamic community. Contemporary periodicals like *Ahl e Hadis*, *Islam Pracharak* etc have reported these missionary movements in details that will be discussed in the next chapters.

<sup>16</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmed, *Ibid*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>17</sup> Following the two different schools of Syed Amir Ali and Nawab Abdul Latif, issues of identity, religiosity and education, will be discussed in the next chapters.

reaffirming the authority of the mullahs<sup>18</sup>. They even assigned them to write *fatwas* against the fundamentalist reformers' activities to keep their religious-social secure<sup>19</sup>. The inherited beliefs and practices that came from the folk imagination of rural Bengal had such a powerful control over the rural mass that even Maulana Akram Khan, the religious rationalist<sup>20</sup>, could not win in the 1930s where his references from the *Hadis* was cancelled by the local mullah's reference of *qissa*. As the rural communities were exposed to a religion through the experience of the narratives and were so used to a fractured understanding of Islam taught by the traditional mullahs, they could hardly demarcate between scriptures and *qissas* as sources of religion.

A constant transaction and overlap between the *sharia* and the sensory has been the ethos of Islam since it reached the frontiers of Bengal because of the religious-ritualistic practices of the host culture that accommodated a new religion. Karbala, with its voracious capacity as history and also as narrative, became a relatively more viable and productive site to engage with the intentions of the community in transition<sup>21</sup>. Though there were attempts to organize the community along the line of Islamic behaviour through *shariyatnama*, *nasihatnama*, *sawal* and other scriptural literature since the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was neither any deliberation

---

<sup>18</sup> *Bahas* or the public debates between the fundamentalist preachers and traditionalists were a common phenomenon in the rural districts of Bengal. William Hunter described several occasions where he witnessed strong antagonism between rural religious systems and the external reformist zeal. "Public opinion, although divided, was generally against the preacher. One said: 'He forbids the drums and the dancing girls at the marriage of our daughters.' A third was more favourable... [But a mullah] authoritatively ended the discussion: 'This fellow', he said 'is a follower of the false Imam who took the Holy cities by the sword, closed up the path of pilgrimage and wrote on the wall of the pure House 'There is no God but one God, and Sa'ud is his Prophet'. in the Hunter, *The Indian Musalman*, pp. 74-75.

Bahas continued and I have talked about *bahas* between *Taiyunis* and *Faraizis* and then between the *Hanafi* and the *Ahl-e-Hadis* in the 1930s.

<sup>19</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmed, 1981, p. 54.

<sup>20</sup> I have discussed about Maulana Akram Khan in chapter V and VI at length.

<sup>21</sup> The next chapters will raise issues to revisit various consenting and contesting relationships between different groups that belonged to the print culture and used it to meet several needs about religion and community vis-à-vis modernity. This will raise methodological and conceptual issues concerning the formation of cultural history and the imagination of Islam and the Muslim community in late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

nor any technology that could claim to give the Islamic community a standardized homogenous status with the universal values of Islam, which happened after the advent of religious reform. Though there were attempts of religious authorities including the wandering *Qalandarya sufis*<sup>22</sup> in medieval Bengal to explore different genres and pose the notion of *dwin* to inculcate some standardization, but it happened at the local levels, and never touched the notion of a universal *ummah* beyond one's own territory. *Sirat* literature like Saiyad Sultan's *Nabibamsha*, along with Sufi philosophical treatises and didactic *shariyatnama* and *nasihatnama* were among those articulations that constantly recast classical religious resources while borrowing freely from local high and folk religious cultures<sup>23</sup>. These literary articulations of *dwin* and *adab* cannot but be read as a layered zone of reception-accommodation starting from the early eighteenth century Bengal in their constant negotiations between Islamic scriptures, mythologies and other narrative imaginations. The free borrowing of words, idioms and symbols from various layers of aesthetics and poetics in the texts of Saiyid Sultan, Ali Raja and Sheikh Paran makes it impossible for

---

<sup>22</sup> From the fourteenth century onwards, along with the *Qadiriya* and *Chishtiya* schools of Sufism in Bengal, the *Qalandariyas* shot into prominence. Manuscripts like *Chandimangal* affirm the presence of the *Qalandariyas* across Bengal. Also, it is likely that all groups of wandering dervishes acquired the generic name of the *Qalandariyas*. A large number of Bangla manuscripts of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries written by the Sufi authors of eastern Bengal reflected the conversation between the *Qalandariyas* and local forms of Yogic knowledge. Titles like *Yoga Qalandar* are evidence of such transactions. *Muhammad Enamul Haq Rachanabali* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1995), pp149-151

<sup>23</sup> Saiyad Sultan, Sheikh Paran, Sheikh Muttalib and Abdul Hakim are the important religious authorities between 16<sup>th</sup> and late 18<sup>th</sup> century Bengal who wrote *sirat* and *shariyatnama* to provide Islamic knowledge for the Bangla-speaking mass. Authors like Saiyid Sultan felt the urge to provide an affective-narrative cue to the masses coming close to the *Sufis* and *Sufi* ways of devotionism. Sultan expressed his disappointment in seeing these people still continuing with their emotional submission to mythological-divine heroes like Krishna and Rama. Religious identity, in the medieval period, was acquired by belonging to a narrative community. For authors like Sultan, replacing those ideal characters and finding literary equivalence in local aesthetic-theological world to denote unfamiliar Islamic terms was a vital task. Sultan offered the life-stories of all the prophets of Islam (*Nabivamsa*) to finally centre his narrative universe around Prophet Muhammad (*Rasul-Bijoy*). He also intended to write a sequel on the Prophet's life. After his death, his disciple Muhammad Khan fulfilled his dream by writing the sequel *Muqatal Husayn* on the battle of Karbala.

any kind of linear categorization of their literature in either grand or little tradition. When the religious authorities in the early modern era borrowed profusely, from the available idioms of both the host and travelling cultures, it carried the qualities of high and little traditions at the same time, creating the possibility for several interpretive communities claiming the text as their audience<sup>24</sup>.

Authors like Sayyid Sultan felt an urge to provide a structure and the narrative-affective cue so that their religico-mythological heroes could be replaced by the piety around the Prophet. Other quasi-historical characters, like Amir Hamza and Abu Hanifa, also flocked in to provide a more lived and affective connection to religiosity. All these efforts with different inclinations to the Arabic scriptural and the Persian narrative create a layered religiosity – with different literary communities sharing different positions in the spectrum of piety. This new religious sensibility articulated as narrative affect between the scripture and the ritual, so symptomatic to medieval vernacular literature, could not be designated as simple recitation of the sacred text. Even if it began as a recital for the community, the reading itself, as bringing forth and binding together the members of a community of similar affective belongingness, evolved into some ritual or got connected with ritual performances. Thus a religious community evolved as either a literary community or a performative community, whose identity was created and got solidified with the reading/performance of the text concerned.

---

<sup>24</sup> In the sixteenth century, Saiyid Sultan was adapting and transforming Islamic scriptural words and conceptions to fit them in the vernacular imagination. While the Vedas, the conception of the gods and the *asuras*, the notion of *avatara* were acceptable by Sultan, he interpreted the story about Krishna and drew parallels to bring forth the concept of *tauhid*. Tony Stewart, in his path breaking article “Search for Equivalence”, breaks the myth of syncretism that historians of medieval Bengal created by interpreting the coexistence of vocabulary from both the Perso-Arabic and Brahminical/local religious sources. Stewart refined this phenomenon as the attempt of the religious authorities to replace the polytheistic emotion of the newly converted community with *tauhid*. This multivalent involvement with different source materials, and in this conjecture of two or more religious-literary systems, of the scriptural and the folk, moved towards the making of the popular in the later period to determine the attributes of the print culture.

When Arabic-Persian original scriptures and narratives, transcribed and translated into Bangla, entered the domain of print at a later period, they experienced a different culture of multiplication and consumption. Print, conceptually, attempted to produce readership by transforming the literary-performative community into a literary community. Reading about the Karbala, started as a narration of the sacred grandsons of the Prophet, later on became an integral performative part of *muharram*. A reading-recitation became a sacred performance in itself as not for all the readings there was some traditional form of ritual. Some readings, like those of the didactic manuals, instructed about the performance of ritual and prescribed religious rites. There was no such ritual, as it happens, in the case of reading about the life of the Prophet. *Milad* emerged as a very important ritual to celebrate the life of the Prophet which included the reading of his biography. Following the *pir*-centric piety, *urs* – the commemoration of the death of the *pir* started too<sup>25</sup>. The outright negation of certain rituals – *urs*, *milad* and *muharram* – as expressions of *shirk* and *bid'at* – was a part of bringing the transformation and codification of the community. For us, the history of the narrative of Karbala, instead of offering a simple linear history of a single genre, allures us to open up new methodologies of doing literary texts within a broader socio-cultural-political milieu, within the field of cultural production.

Reading of Karbala (any of the themes of the early modern genre/theme in a new printed format for that matter) would initiate a discussion of the literary communities belonging to different orders of literacy and orality. The Karbala repertoire, while being placed within forms of popular piety conceived and expressed in different genres of the cheap print culture,

---

<sup>25</sup> As Sufi *pirs* were migrating from different parts of central and west Asia to fan across Bengal, they created their own abodes as primary forms of *dargas*, making a space for congregation of the masses who came to hear them preach Islam through narratives. The institution of Sufism emerged around such figures who composed narratives and religious tracts and *pirs* became a part of the local landscape with myths around their supernatural powers and charisma. *Urs*, that is the ritual-commemoration on the day of death of such *pirs* settled in this local landscape, became an instrument to create and maintain *pir* cults.

becomes productive in understanding the changing perception of Islamic self and the Muslim community in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal. In this historical conjuncture – piety, Muslim community and modernity have to be understood in the interface between the unfixity of orality and the fixity of a printed text; the script and the speech; between the elite and the folk; between the book and the body.

To attempt the connection between the oral-scribal and the print and to engage with the interface and rupture between we need to explore the Karbala texts emanated in these cultures. Gholam Saklayen divided the *marsiya* lyrical tradition in two time zones – The Mughal period and British period. But the sequence of the names of the poets/authors might not always match the time frame and might not do justice to Shaikh Faizullah and Daulat Ujir Bahram Khan who write their *kavya* before what Saklayen posits as the Mughal period. Saklayen has placed Heyat Mamud before Hamid who, according to the editor of Hamid’s scribal manuscript *Sangram Husayn*, belonged to the latter half of seventeenth century<sup>26</sup>. Heyat Mamud completed his first long narrative *Jarijungnama* in 1723<sup>27</sup>.

#### Pre-British:

Shaikh Faizullah: *Joynober Choutisha* (early 16<sup>th</sup> century)

Daulat Ujir Bahram Khan: *Imam Bijoy* (Chittagong, between 1545 and 1556)

Muhammad Khan: *Maqul Husayn* (Chittagong, 1645)

Hamid: *Sangram Husayn* (late 17<sup>th</sup> century)

Sherbaj: *Kashemer Lorhai* (Tripura, 18<sup>th</sup> century)

Jafar: *Shahid-i-Karbala* (18<sup>th</sup> century)

Heyat Mamud: *Jarijungnama* (Rangpur, 1723)

#### British:

Garibullah: *Jungnama* (Hooghly, 1794)

---

<sup>26</sup> Shahjahan Mian, *Madhyajuger Kabi Hamid Pranita Sangram Husayn* (Dhaka: Jyoti Prakashan, 2002) p.6.

<sup>27</sup> Mazharul Islam, *Kabi Heyat Mamud* (Rajshahi: Rajshahi Biswabidyalay, 1961) p17.

Radhacharan Gop: *Imamyener Keccha, Afatnama* (Mid Bengal, 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>28</sup>)

Muhammad Hamidullah Khan: *Gulzar-e-Shahadat* (Chittagong, 1863)

Mir Manohar: *Hanifar Lorhai* (Bogra, mid nineteenth century)

Wahid Ali: *Barha Jungnama* (Sylhet, late nineteenth century)

Jonab Ali: *Shadide Karbala* (1882)

Muhammad Munshi: *Shahide Karbala* (Hooghly, 1900)

Sa'd Ali Abdul Wahhab: *Shahide Karbala* (first half of twentieth century)

Muhammad Eshak Uddin: *Dastan Shahide Karbala* (Rangpur, 1929)

Qazi Aminul Hoq: *Jange Karbala* (Chittagong, 1940s)

### 1.1. Uncertain Author, Fixed Publisher

Stuart Blackburn emphasizes on this simultaneity while discussing the relationship between Tamil folklore in print in the context of nationalism and critiques any binary between oral and print cultures for the early print culture<sup>29</sup>. It's an interface between the performative and the print that emerged when non-modern expressions that he proposes: both performative forms and scribal-oral narratives, like musical drama, ballad, *dastan*, *qissa* were being printed<sup>30</sup>.

The entry of the Karbala repertoire into the printed format, similarly, did not break open the link loose from the scribal-performative traditions. Rather Karbala texts from the scribal culture were chosen to be printed and

---

<sup>28</sup> Sukumar Sen, *Islami Bangla Sahitya* (Kolkata: Ananda Prakashana, 2002)

<sup>29</sup> According to Blackburn, the print, without creating any rupture in the existing mode of transmission, bridged the gap between orality and print, and brought them together in the form of printed Tamil folklore. The printed form, with the beginning of reading, did not terminate performance-based dissemination; but opened up other engagements with print like reading aloud from the book in front of an audience etc. Blackburn, *Print, Folklore and Tamil Nationalism in Colonial South Asia* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2006)

<sup>30</sup> The printed form, with the beginning of reading, did not terminate performance-based dissemination, but also opened up other engagements with print, like reading aloud from the book in front of an audience. Kathryn Hansen worked on the orality-print interface in North Indian popular musical drama form and the narrative tradition. Hansen, *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1992). Kumkum Sangari said, in "Multiple Temporalities, Unsettled Boundaries, Trickster Women: Reading a Nineteenth-century Qissa" that even if the form entered the domain of print, it moved 'back and forth between oral narration, print and performance' in Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia (eds) *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004) p. 215.

published in this early print culture without making much alteration in the text to fit in a new format. It was a simple change in the media, in the beginning, the medium of expression, that carried the ambivalence of orality and print together which made recitation of the printed book possible in front of an audience with varying degrees of literacy or a lack of it. Maybe it was Garibullah and Heyat Mamud, who were chosen by the print culture for the reproduction of their manuscripts, but there was an array of authors whose manuscripts were being scribed and orally transmitted while the cheaply printed versions were simultaneously available in Battala<sup>31</sup>. It is not only an author's concurrent presence in the scribal and print cultures in the same historical period, cheap print culture coexisted with the newly developing elite genres and sensibilities around them. In this multi-dimensionality of the literary community, relatively successful Karbala authors like Jonab Ali and Muhammad Munshi continued to scribe their manuscripts<sup>32</sup>, both entitled *Shahid e Karbala*, which would be extremely popular in print in a more standardized climate of print culture in the latter half of nineteenth century. Within one year of the scribing of his manuscript, Jonab Ali's *Shahid e Karbala* was published from Battala, Siddikiya Library of Upper Chitpur Road published and reprinted editions from 1883. Within twelve years of the scribing of the manuscript, Muhammad Munshi had ten editions because of the high demand of the Karbala narratives. Mobarak Ali Khondakar of 29/12 Gopi Krishna Pal Lane published these editions from Satyanarayan Press, Kolkata<sup>33</sup>. The reiteration of Stuart Blackburn's comment in the beginning of his book on the relationship between printed folklore and nationalism in

---

<sup>31</sup> This was the symptom of early print culture where manuscripts from different genres were simultaneously scribed and printed.

<sup>32</sup> Jonab Ali finished scribing his manuscript in 1882 and Muhammad Munshi finished his in 1900.

<sup>33</sup> That these texts possessed positions in both scribal and print cultures are evident in their presence in both types of catalogues. Ahmed Sharif, in his *Puthi Parichiti*, has enlisted all these puthis with their dates and other specifications. In this book it can be noticed that manuscripts continued to be scribed even in a period of much proliferation of print and standardized genres simultaneous with literacy. *Puthi Parichiti*, (Dhaka: Dhaka Biswabidyalaya Bangla Bibhag, 1958).



colonial south India may seem valid here too, as a symptom of early print culture: “that print did not produce new books, only more old books.”<sup>34</sup>

The classical reading of print culture as bringing forth ‘communications revolution’ as proposed by Elizabeth Eisenstein necessitates a more nuanced study of different consumer-communities inhabiting different ends of the socio-political-ideational spaces which were claimed to be transformed radically with the advent of print. Much work had been done after Eisenstein’s ground breaking work on print culture *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*<sup>35</sup> where she proposed a mechanistic approach to explore ‘the preservative power of print’ and identified increased dissemination, standardization and fixity of text as the main features of print culture<sup>36</sup>. Later, this reading became inadequate as being mechanistic and upholding an evolutionary approach to the ideational and material changes in the society with a reading of the society as divided between several binary poles like the elite and the folk, the literate and the illiterate etc. This was refuted by Adrian Johns in his study of print in early modern England where he showed evidence of piracy and unauthorized printing against Eisenstein’s ‘intrinsic fixity’ of the print culture<sup>37</sup>. Johns’ key concept was, rather, ‘uncertainty’. Print, according to him, has many cultures within which one might like to explore interpretive communities. Francis Robinson, quite rightly, put up this observation in his study on print and Islam in South Asia that it was till mid nineteenth century that this

---

<sup>34</sup> It can be a print of a prevalent manuscript written sometimes in the late eighteenth century or it can be a manuscript coming directly from the author to the printer. The prevalent text, oscillating between the copyist’s desk and the printer’s workshop, had already a community of listeners who used to enjoy the text as a recited text. Words are not only events in the oral culture (as being performed or recited), they carry the elements of performance as well. They are performative in both the sense which continued even when standardization was achieved in linguistic and generic terms. Printed texts continued to act as scribal manuscripts and were recited for a community of listeners even when printed genres were standardized and language sanitized to cater to the reading public.

<sup>35</sup> Eisenstein, 1980.

<sup>36</sup> Eisenstein, 1980, pp.51-159.

<sup>37</sup> Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

fixity was unimaginable<sup>38</sup>. Frances Pritchett has already shown through the example of the *qissa* genre and its proliferation in the printed form that fixity was never absolute and some genres defied it even if they were produced in the printed format<sup>39</sup>.

But what Robinson follows is a two-storied idea of a society with the *sharia* and the lived forms of Islam working along with ever expanding power of the *sharia*. In his formulation of the impact of print on the Muslim community and Islamic ideology, Robinson disclaims the position of some historians who proposed the idea of peaceful coexistence of the scripture and the lived-folk sides of Islam to define the quality of Islam in this subcontinent. In those theorizations, like the voluminous work of Imtiaz Ahmad<sup>40</sup> which Robinson opposes, the lived, without being affected by the *sharia*, continued to be there in the ritualistic realisation of Islam from below<sup>41</sup>. My observation is that, though Robinson calls to explore the Muslim history in south Asia as a layered transaction between the

---

<sup>38</sup> Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>39</sup> Frances Pritchett, *Marvelous Encounters: Qissa Literature in Urdu and Hindi* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981).

<sup>40</sup> To contest Imtiaz Ahmed's idea of a static, lived and custom-centric ritual Islam emanating from below and sustaining itself without any connection to elite and scriptural Islam, Robinson proposed 'a dynamic relationship between Islamic knowledge and society through history'. Robinson observes mass-oriented religious reform movements shattering 'any sense that there might be equilibrium maintained between the high Islamic and the custom-centered traditions'. But, Robinson's dynamic model too suffers from a certain binarism, wherein he only looks at the orthodox-orthoprax gnawing away the multiple and the lived without taking into consideration possible seepage and mutual influence. It may be noticed that the orthodox, for its own survival, not only hegemonizes the heterodox but also imbibes popular and folk parameters to reach out to different layers of Muslim society. The heterodox, in this discussion, cannot remain a monolithic essence that Ahmed posits; rather, it becomes multiple entities with different degrees of exchange with orthodox elements. The discussion of orality-print in this chapter and in others, while talking about the impossibility of keeping the binaries between orality and print, elite and popular, will lead us to look at this dynamic relationship between orthodox and heterodox forms of Islam.

<sup>41</sup> Imtiaz Ahmad, (ed) *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims in India* (Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1973), *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India* (Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1976), *Ritual and Religion among the Muslims in India* (Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1981) and , Helmut Reifeld (eds), *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation, Conflict* (Delhi: Social Science Press, 2004).

orthodox-orthoprax and the heterodox-heteroprax, he remained within the gamut of a two-storied social for Islam, hardly mentioning the ‘middling’ categories<sup>42</sup> that could have made transactions more layered, appropriation more nuanced. Robinson’s theorization of transaction between two groups, the ortho and the hetero, proposes a one-way *hegemonic* structure where the grand tradition slowly eats up the small, shattering the idea of any peaceful coexistence. To contest the idea of a static and lived custom-centric ritual-based Islam from below continuing itself side by side with the *shariyati* reformist zeal of Islam, by proposing ‘a dynamic relationship between Islamic knowledge and society through history’<sup>43</sup>, Robinson reads mass reform movements shattering ‘any sense that there might be equilibrium maintained between the high Islamic and the custom-centred traditions’. Thus Robinson imagines two layers of the Muslim community where it was the orthodox that continuously appropriated the cultural expressions of the heterodox to minimize the gap between the poles.

Ambivalence was carried through by the early printed texts till a more fixed consumer entered the domain of print, till institutions of literature (printing press, publishing houses, and literary societies) got more structured and gave rise to the standardization of genre and language. Standardization and fixity, as discussed earlier, took time to settle as key characteristics of the print culture. The medium took time to act as a mover, it took time to explore the printer’s workshop as a prime cite of bringing displacement<sup>44</sup>.

The early days of Battala print could show this ambiguity as there was neither much standardization of language nor the itemization of new genre. Without the standardization of language and new genre, it was difficult to

---

<sup>42</sup> Tim Harris, ‘The Problem of “popular political culture” in seventeenth century London’, in *History of European Ideas*, 10, pp.43-58, 198; Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1991).

<sup>43</sup> Robinson, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Printed books were appearing as commodities once the rules of the market were clear to the native entrepreneurs. The printers and publishers, in the act of multiplying texts, became more important than the author of the previous era as the making of the text as a printed form and controlling its dissemination was more crucial for this new culture. Here aroused a sensibility around profit to be achieved in the market without the fixity that is the general marker of a profit-oriented organization in Battala.

achieve fixity. Non-authorization of the text was a process through which the printer-publisher could commodify the text. Later, the text was fixed with the undoubted stability of the name of the author showing the individuation of the text in a world where individual talent was the condition for the popularity of the text. Before this fixity – text, textuality and the reception of the text was not individualized to form an individual approach to religion and society, to form a this-worldly religion from a that-worldly Islam<sup>45</sup>. That-worldly Islam of the medieval and early modern that contemplated the mysteries of the divine accessed by the *pirs* through their charismatic and supernatural powers changed into a this-worldly Islam with the intervention of reformists. In the reformist discourse the capacity of the individual Muslim to perform his Islamic duties and responsibilities became the core of religious agency. In Islamic reform movements' engagement and investment, that-worldly-Islam was interpreted as pir-centric piety that they proposed to replace by a prophet-centric piety – the ideal form of this-worldly Islam. Here, in this new individualistic scheme of personal religious duties and ethics, Muhammad was considered the ideal man/leader of the Muslim community whose life should be replicated to become an ideal Muslim. Gradually, figures of the caliphate were also cited as the bearers of ideal Islamic values and Imam Husayn was dissociated from his intercessory position in the Shia worldview to be claimed as the moral exemplar of the Sunni community as a whole. This move was articulated in countless little religious tracts, biographies published from Bat Tala and a more standardized publishing industry. I have discussed the connection between this-worldly Islam, print culture and popular piety in the following chapters.

Piracy was the symptom of this unfixity of authority. Text was more a production of an institution of early print culture which was attested and operated by the printer/publisher, not by the author. Most of Garibullah's *puthis* were printed and re-printed with other authors' names by several

---

<sup>45</sup> Francis Robinson, "Other-worldly and This-worldly Islam and the Islamic Revival", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol 14, No. 1, (Apr 2004) pp 47-58

publishers. His *Jungnama* was published under the name of Yakub Ali by several publishers which ran out of print several times<sup>46</sup>. This *puthi* was published also under the name of Shifiuddin in 1877 from Kolkata which shows the business cunning of the publishers that attempted to extract the maximum by using this inclination to unfixity<sup>47</sup>. That several editions of Yakub Ali's *Jungnama* were published by a Hindu press confirmed this strategy of the market ruled more by the enterprise of the printer- publisher than the attestation of the author's authenticity<sup>48</sup>. Fixity came out of this appropriation of the text by the publisher turning the name of the author as the part of the title of the text, an attestation which did not carry any agency of the author. If we follow the structure of the text, it can be noticed that it was the attestation by the publisher of the printed text that overshadowed the name and the presence of the person who wrote it. Especially after the 1848 Registration Act, the publisher was inspired to become more self-positing as to referring to his claim over the printed material to be protected by the act from being pirated. Paradoxically, the powerful presence of the publisher added another kind of fixity technically, by suppressing the claim

---

<sup>46</sup> All the *puthis* written by Garibullah followed the condition of unfixity and lack of authenticity of a less structured print-market. That there was maximum confusion around the authorship of *Jungnama* might prove its maximum popularity among the readers and maximum viability in the market. It is really difficult to say that the scribal sensibility of the contemporary times was affected by the lack of fixity of the print but that the scribed *puthis* also carried this confusion around might be an evidence of a dialogicity between an old and a new technology. That it is not only the continuation of an old system into the new as a productive residual form, but a simultaneous event of influence on the older and much fixed form by a new and emergent one. Though Ahmed Sharif has referred that "We presume that the first part of 'Jungnama' or *Shahide Karbala* was written by Garibullah and the last part was by Mohammad Yakub. Because, in some *puthis*, in the first part, Garibullah's *bhanita* is seen whereas in the second part, Yakub's *bhanita* is seen". *Puthi Parichiti*, Collected by Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad and edited by Ahmed Sharif, p171. But all the *puthis*, not some, carried this division of authorship, be it a manuscript or a printed *Jungnama*'. Sometimes Yakub's *bhanita* outnumbered Garibullah's to such an extent that Abdul Gaffar Siddiqi even claimed *Jungnama* to be originally written by Yakub, not Garibullah. 'Jungnama', *Sahitya Parishat Patrika*, Vol2, 1324, pp130-131

<sup>47</sup> That the original author of 'Jungnama' was Garibullah and Yakub might be the magnificent scribe, was authenticated by Sukumar Sen in *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*, Vol1 (Kolkata: Eastern Publishers, 1962) p524, footnote), Muhammad Shahidullah (*Bangla Sahityer Katha*, Vol2, p299-300), Ahmed Sharif (Bangali O Bangla sahitya, p125 and Anisujjaman (*Muslim Manas O Bangla Sahitya*, p125).

<sup>48</sup> In the British Library collection we find *Jungnama* came out in 1878/1285, 1880/1286, 1881/1287 from Harihar Press. Also in 1876/1283 from Mortajabi Press, Kalikata, from Siddikiye Press in 1880/1286 and 1881/1287. This confirms the unparalleled popularity of this *Jungnama* *puthi* based on the *Karbala* narrative.

of the author as the publishers were the movers of a system based on production and consumption where the author's name could not attain an individualistic claim over his own creative material. Unfixity of a text with/without the name of the author, thus, opened up the possibility of the control of authorities who would tend to lose their symbolic power over the text, once texts were individualized with the name of the author. This transformation brought change in the pattern and dynamics of the print culture as a system which involved a change in authorial affiliation, as also a new understanding of piety, religion, language, genre and the society.

But it should always be remembered that Karbala can be posited in a fluidity, where while gradually conforming to the emerging demands of a more structured institution of print, it continued to defy the tenets of the fixity of print attained diachronically. Cheap print culture, as an expression of the popular reading habit, did not always follow an evolutionary model to merge into an elitist standardized narrative tradition. Rather, it always remained as a viable and valid textual system within the bigger cultural field of production. While we notice the present of the popular imagination along with the elite effort to carve out a valid expression for modernity, we should not take this 'popular presence' as some sort of a monolith. Popular print, while remaining popular, showed imprints of contact and conversation with different elitist efforts thus making it difficult to pose something as an authentic popular ethos/consciousness.

After *Bishad Sindhu*, the first attempt to write about the Karbala in prose by Mir Musharraf Husain (pub 1887), when there was a flood of such standardizing attempts to express Karbala in modern generic patterns, there was simultaneous presence of cheap prints on Karbala. In a period of literary standardization and a more structured print culture, along with Mir Musharraf Husain (*Bishad Sindhu*, 1887), Abul Ma'ali Muhammad Hamid Ali (*Kasembadh Kavya*, 1905, *Jaoynamoddhar Kavya*, 1907), Matiur Rahman Khan (*Yezidbadh Kavya*, 1899, *Moslembadh Kavya*, 1308BS/1901), Kaykobad (*Muharram Sharif ba Atmabisarjan Kavya*, 1933), Abdul Bari (*Karbala Kavya*, 1912), Mohammad Uddin Ahmed

(*Moharram Kanda*, 1912), Sayyid Islamil Husain Siraji (*Mahashiksha*, 1322BS/1915), Abdul Munaem (*Pancha Shahid Kavya*, 1919), Azhar Ali (*Hazrat Imam Hasan Hosayner Jiboni*, 1932), Muhammad Abdul Rashid (*Karbala*, 1936)<sup>49</sup> – we can see a constant flow of popular renditions of Karbala that continued to appear in the cheap print format using *Musalmani Bangla*. I will talk about the emerging middleclass authorship in following chapters where I will show mutual contact between standardized Bangla expressions and popular prints. I will also chart out the processes of simultaneous rejection and adaptation of popular sensibilities by the standardized narrative culture.

*Musalmani Bangla* was a term coined by Reverend James Long while preparing his *Descriptive Catalogue* to denote numerous books written in an admixture of languages basically of Arabic-Persian and local Bangla registers. Sunitikumar Chatterjee recognizes ‘*Musalmani Bangla*’ as the ‘Maulavi’s reply to the Pandit’s *sadhubhasha*’ and confirms it as a counter-narrative to Fort William College’s prioritization of a Sankritized register as the ideal form of Bangla language. But Sunitikumar’s observation of *Musalmani Bangla* conceived only in aesthetic-poetic terms obliterates the possibility of any study of language and its connection with identity formation and other political-literary implications. This explanation that ‘The literature in [*Musalmani* or *dobhasi*] Bengali has no merit and some of the deathless tales of [Persia and Islam] ... have been ruined by the hack versifiers of Calcutta and Chittagong in rendering them as jargon’ and marking of *Musalmani Bangla* as a case of communal taste only washes away the possibility of reading social dynamics and nuanced processes of the Bengali identity formation in the literary repertoire written in *Musalmani Bangla*<sup>50</sup>.

---

<sup>49</sup> I omit Bhai Girish Chandra Sen’s rendition of the lives of Imam Hasan and Husayn (*Imam Hasan O Hosayn*, 1833 shak) for the time being as I am charting out a domain of popular print in the Muslim public itself. Surely, that had a dialogic with the Hindu author’s interpretation of Islam which will be discussed in the chapters followed.

<sup>50</sup> Sunitikumar Chatterjee, *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1934); 211f

Qazi Abdul Mannan emphasizes on the fact that mixed diction – Arabic, Persian, Hindvi and colloquial Bangla – first appeared in the compositions of Hindu poets, many of them Brahmins (like Bharatchandra) which Muslim authors in the later period adopted and elevated to fine art. From the publication of texts in *Musalmani* Bangla, it can be deduced that since the late eighteenth century *dobhasi* became the lingua franca for Hooghly and Chittagong regions and also the lower districts of Bengal.

Enamul Haq, marking the mixed diction status of *Musalmani* Bangla (Haq, 1957, 175 cf. 192), evaluates the use of *dobhasi* as a class factor, not a religious community-based one. He says that in 1871 when the British colonial administrators proposed a separate Muslim Bangla for Bengal Muslims to communicate in, some Bengali Muslims opposed it (Ahmed 1981, 124). In this thesis, how *Musalmani* Bangla was disowned and again reclaimed by different layers of Bengal Muslim community to configure Bengali identity, will be discussed<sup>51</sup>.

Bangla as the linguistic medium that did not really match with the aspirations of the Muslim publics that started envisaging their modernity by exploring a more elite language and genre. Muhammad Munshi finished *Shahid e Karbala* in 1900 which had its 10<sup>th</sup> edition within 19 years of its inception<sup>52</sup>. Sa'ad Ali and Abdul Wahhab, co-authored *Shahide Karbala* in the first decade of the twentieth century<sup>53</sup>, that experienced much success at the market and continued to be reprinted for the next few decades. Muhammad Eshakuddin's *Dastan Shahid e Karbala* (1929) and Qazi Aminul Hak's *Jung e Karbala* (between 1939-1945<sup>54</sup>) were written as the steady and simultaneous popular tradition. All these *puthis* written in

---

<sup>51</sup> Sunitikumar Chatterjee *Muslim Bengali Literature*, 1934; Muhammad Enamul Haq (Decca: Pakistan Publications, 1957) ; *The Emergence and Development of Dobhasi Literature in Bengal upto 1855*, Dr. Qazi Abdul Mannan (Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1974/1966)

<sup>52</sup> *Shahide Karbala*, Muhammad Munshi, publisher, Mobarak Ali Khondakar, 29/12 Gopi Krishna Pal Lane, Satyanarayan Press, 10<sup>th</sup> edition, 1319/1912.

<sup>53</sup> Saklayen, p. 236.

<sup>54</sup> The author referred to the Second World War and the famine of the 1943 when he could not continue with writing and resumed it after the calamities were over.



Musalmani Bangla continued to be printed with much popular reception creating the possibility of further authoring of cheap prints on the theme of Karbala as a living tradition till date. Garibullah's *Jungnama*, though under the name of Yakub, still gets printed by a popular press. Qazi Aminul Hak's *Jung e Karbala* was printed as late as in the 1970s<sup>55</sup>. Babur Ali's *Bahatture Khun*, scarcely available in the district of North 24 Parganas, is claimed to have been printed in the 1980s<sup>56</sup>.

For me, it is this dialogic between these two registers, a widely ranged argumentative space, the interstitial space, the middling categories, a complexity of Muslim counter-publics that I try to engage with. That it was not adequate for the researcher to look at the co-existence of the elite and popular, but it is necessary to delineate two systems interacting with each other, influencing cancelling and accommodating each other. The efforts to create a counter-public with the publication of journals and periodicals had to address the varied consumer patterns that were produced in between, with varied degrees of belongingness as narrative communities. Gradually, the popular print culture, in general, attained fixity with a new set of rules and a gradual expansion of literacy expanded the market for the popular prints<sup>57</sup>. As Roger Chartier said in another context, these widely circulated books crossed social boundaries of the Muslim community and drew readers from very different social and economic levels. So there should be caution in predetermining the sociological level of the non-elite prints as purely popular<sup>58</sup>. Between the unfixity of the cheap and the fixity of the elite, emerged texts like Muhammad Eshakuddin's *Dastan Shahid e Karbala* that was divided in 7 chapters (*balam*) with 622 pages and priced Rs 7, and Sa'ad Ali's *Shahid e Karbala* divided in four chapters (*daptar*) with 525 pages priced Rs 6.5 published till the fourth decade of the

---

<sup>55</sup> Bangla Academy Library, Dhaka.

<sup>56</sup> I found *Bahatture Khun* on a field trip to the village Mandra in 2012 in a personal collection, claimed to be the only copy available in the vicinity.

<sup>57</sup> As already proposed, a part of the popular, say the Karbala narratives and the *qissas* written in Musalmani Bangala, could not be a valid part of this project of modernity, but there had always been a cross current.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Sauer's *Paper Contestations and Textual Communities in England, 1640-1675* (Toronto: University of Toronto press, 2005)

twentieth century. These texts with their repeated references to the scriptural sources<sup>59</sup> eventually demanded different kinds of interpretive practices as popular texts which I will discuss in the coming sections of the thesis.

Gradual fixity of these texts in Musalmani Bangla while following the same textual format of the older *puthis* on Karbala, was different from what was taking place through the middle class efforts. The class configuration of the authors of Karbala texts in Musalmani Bangla, by the learned Munshis and Maulavis in the first half of the twentieth century was different from their counterparts who were writing in standardized Bangla. The madrasa educated Maulavi Azhar Ali or Mohammad Uddin Ahmed had another set of generic elements for targeting another set of readership, different from the Persian educated poets like Eshakuddin, Muhammad Munshi and Qazi Aminul Haq. Eshakuddin did not claim an *alem* lineage like Muhammad Munshi and Qazi Aminul Haq who clearly posed their high learning status in the scriptural tradition in the beginning of the narrative. As an Abdul Bari with the aspiration of a poet of the Hindu-Bengali middle class readership had his books distributed from the madrasas in Dacca and Bogra, the authors of the *Musalmani* Bangla also craved for the standardization and fixity within the ideological space of *Musalmani* Bangla by introducing the elite scriptural rhetoric of Islam that added a more authentic and fixed value to the piety that they were cultivating. It was an urge to refer to an array of authentic sources that was consulted by the authors while writing each and every episode that was necessary as an inherent defence against the allegation about the popular being far removed from the authentic. It was no more enough to refer to ‘some Persian text’ like in the pre-print Karbala tradition, or more specifically a single *Muktal Husayn* to place the transcreation with respect to the original<sup>60</sup>. Now, it was

---

<sup>59</sup> Either the reference of different *Hadis* literatures and / or the reference of the Rabi who wrote those authentic verses were given to claim a connection with high religious knowledge.

<sup>60</sup> মুজ্জাল হোসেন এক কিতাব আছিল।

বাঙ্গালা করিতে তবে তান আজ্ঞা দিল।।

a constant anxiety to claim some kind of authenticity of the narrative that they were narrating simultaneously with the middle class Bengali Karbala narratives<sup>61</sup>. Authentication was accomplished not only in the beginning of the *dastan* as given by these authors. Following the thrust of the eliticization/*ashrafization* of the genre, Eshakuddin gave the names of more than twelve books as his source and reference<sup>62</sup>. Not only that, it became a repetitive reminder embedded within the narrative as a ploy by the author where he concluded many episodes with citations. Sa’ad Ali and Abdul

---

প্রচার করিল মুই রচিয়া পয়ার।

সংগ্রাম হুসন নাম রাখিলু ইহার।। হামিদ, *সংগ্রাম হুসন*

(There was a book called *Muktal Hussein*...

I composed it in rhymed couplets.

I named it *Sangram Hussain*)

<sup>61</sup> It was sufficient for most Muslim authors in the medieval and early modern periods to indicate “some Persian text” as the source text which they were translating/transcreating to compose their poetry in Bangla. Though Sayyid Alaol, the court poet of the Arakan in seventeenth century, indicated Jayasi’s Awadhi *Paumavat* as his source text, authors like Daulat Ujir Bahram Khan, Hamid, Heyat Mamud simply referred to a Persian original or a *Muqatal Husayn* which makes it difficult to trace the journey of a source text and map exact elements of reception and adaptation that emanated from the recipient culture. Sometimes *Muqatal Husayn* became a generic name rather than a single text in this larger literary network of reading and writing about the Karbala battle.

<sup>62</sup> যে সব কেতাব হৈতে লিখি এ দাস্তান।

সে কেতাবের নাম শোন যত মোছলমান।।

লতায়েফ আসরফি আনাছের সাহাদাতে।

নবুওতন সোহাদা ছওয়াকে মহরেকাতে।।

কাশফল মাহজুব আর তফসির কাশশাফ।

ছাবাছানা হুলিয়া আর আওনা রেওয়াজ।।

রাহাতল কুলুব আর মোছবাহাল কুলুব।

ফাজায়লে সহুরে চিহিয়াম কেতাব মহবুব।।

এসব কেতাব আর এমাম জীবনী।

পাইনু কেতাব যাহা রওয়াকেত বানী।। (Eshakuddin, 3)

(Muslims, Listen to the names of the books from which I have translated.

*Lotayef Asarfi, Anachher Sahadate,*

*Nobuyotan Sohada, Chawoyayek Mohrekate*

*Kashphal Mahjub and Mochhbahal Kulub Fajayel*

*Sohure chchhiyam Ketab Mahbub*

All these books and the biography of Imam

And also the sacred books of the *Hadis*)

Wahhab, after writing every episode, continuously referred to the authentic source to posit that they were following the well established narrations in sacred books written by some learned Rabi<sup>63</sup>. As it can be noticed that the rendition of Sa'ad Ali and Abdul Wahhab carried a close thematic and narrative resemblance to Eshakuddin's *dastan*, the narrative specialties of claiming authenticity and showing attempt to have an elite scriptural tradition, in some way or the other, can be seen repeated by the latter authors also. This new paradigm of authentication was shared by both the streams of standardized Bangla and Musalmani Bangla to write about Karbala and both can be read as two ramifications of the reformist impact on the Muslim public. One that used the standardized Bangla of the literati was already exposed to the public discourses on a Muslim *jatiya* made familiar by the religious intelligentsia of *Sudhakar*. Though the authors of Musalmani Bangla did never refer to *jatiya* because of the impossibility of such appropriation within this linguistic register, they did continuously reaffirm the sense of the collective with the sanction of the scriptures where one might not find any direct connection with contemporary politics. But if we put the texts written in Musalmani Bangla within the larger context of the political and socio-cultural changes that broke out in the form of a search for a national identity, a *jatiya*, then we might say that all these texts, by resolving the primal divide between the caliphate and the *ahl-ul-bayt* – the governance and the family<sup>64</sup> – were trying to secure the *ummah* – which now had another signifier in the modern vocabulary – *jati*. What I will discuss in Chapter Three by engaging with the issues and themes of popular piety explored by these traditionalist munshis and maulavis in their Karbala narratives would have its resonance and equivalence in the effort of the religious intelligentsia in writing history and biography in a completely different vocabulary, as I will be presenting in Chapter Five.

## 1.2 Oral Form, Scripted format

<sup>63</sup> It comes as a refrain that,

রাবিগণ ফের এয়ছা লেখে রওয়ায়েতে। (This is what the *Rabbis* wrote in the *hadis*)

<sup>64</sup> I have discussed the debate between caliphate and *ahl-ul-bayt* (the house of the Prophet) to form an ideal prophetic legacy in the following chapters.

Blackburn talked about the continuation of oral culture, patterns of spoken language and vernacular cognitive framework that confronted the content and the format of the printed book and created a liminal phase in the book industry. This oral, as an aesthetic-cognitive experience, also as a form of expression, would be tried to be eliminated in the next phase for the standardization and creation of a uni-linear version of modernity inaugurated by the *Sudhakar* group. This attempt for standardization, again, was multifarious, depending on the authors' affiliations, understanding of standardization, connection with scripture, and inclination to politics, about which I will be discussing in Chapter Five.

As the differences between oral and printed genres, language and thematic concerns were negotiated by the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Muslim intelligentsia to propose a *jatiya* and a modern, this aspiration for a more fixed and authentic version was felt within the cheap print culture as well, which reflected various modes of transaction and negotiation with the forces of modernity. It tried to envisage a connection with the sociology of writing and reading embedded in the culture of literacy that was not achieved in the beginning of print culture. Gradually, writing and reading were invoked as new sets of activities to construct the new narratives. Muslim literati marked a shift in the act of writing biography and history from oral and popular to the standardized script. Authors who weren't a direct part of the emerging middle class literati and wrote in rhythmic couplets what according to them were traditional Karbala narratives, also confirmed the value of print culture as their poetic sensibility followed those norms.

This demarcation between speech and script was not accomplished at certain social layers, most probably due to the constant presence of the nonstandard variants: the elements of oral cultures, and specific reading practices of the masses. Thus the reading of the texts printed in Battala opens up a network determined by the values of the trio – the oral and the performative and the script culture – the various temporalities – present in various capacities at one singular moment.

Though *jungnamas* were part of a bigger ritualistic repertoire commemorating *muharram*<sup>65</sup>, they simultaneously fulfilled different narrative-performative purpose as they were recited in the month of Muharram as a remembrance of the painful events in Karbala<sup>66</sup> and also at other reading occasions. The title of Heyat Mamud's narrative *Jarijungnama* affirmed the text's position within the performative tradition called the *jari*,<sup>67</sup> while the text retained the performative elements in the

<sup>65</sup> The reading of the pain of the events of Karbala and the commemoration of Muharram were not a sectarian exclusivity in early modern Bengal. The texts, even if they were recited or performed, did not attest Muharram as a sectarian event. The beginning of textualization on the themes of Karbala, first in fragments and then in a full length format from the late sixteenth and late seventeenth century did not confirm Muharram as a contemporary sacred ritual practice. The commemoration of Muharram began later when the reading of the narratives had already taken up the shape of a tradition. Hayat Mamud's *Jungnama*, reveals the sheer physicality of the grief. Chest beating and hair tearing, as lived and bodily expressions of performing grief, created the performative throughout Mamud's scribed and recited words, also affirmed the presence of the tradition of expressing grief during Muharram in early modern Bengal.

মুকুল উদাম মাখে কান্দে উচ্চ রাও

হায় হায় বুলি সবে বুকো মারে

কলসুম ছল্লমা কান্দে করে হায় হায়

প্রাণপুত্র মৈল বলি হিয়া ধাবরায়

সহরবানু কান্দে অতি হয়া শোকাকুলি

মস্তকের চুল ছিনডি করিল আউলি, *Jungnama Kavya*, ed. Majharul Islam, p60

(With bare head, in high pitched voice

Everybody beats their chests screaming Haya Haya!

Kulsum and Salma beat their chest in despair

Beloved son Husayn, beloved grandson Husayn is dead.

Shaharbanu wails in sorrow and tears her hair

She is in frenzy for her dead husband)

Even all the angels and the Prophets, who came down on the planes of Karbala when Imam Husayn was martyred, expressed their grief in the form of *matam* reaffirming the physical expression of pain, as a contemporary ritual.

<sup>66</sup> Though we should remember that the long narrative tradition on the of the Karbala battle offered narrative pleasure even without being connected to the rituals of Muharram in the month of Muharram. It proliferated following the rule of proliferation of any narrative in the early modern period to create an affective narrative community out of its audience.

<sup>67</sup> *Jari*, as a performative tradition, according to the researchers, developed along the culture of the recitation of puthis. Sukumar Sen commented that the *jungnama* narratives were recited like the *mangal kavya*. It has already been observed in the previous chapter that *Jungnama* or other long narratives like *Nabivamsa* were composed to fill up the blank in the minds of the newly converts which were previously occupied with the narrative imagination of the divine beings of the *panchali* and *mangal kavya*. (Bangla Sahityer Itihas, Vol II, p478. This singing about the stories of Karbala was in practice even before they entered into the written format. During the eighteenth century we can see the assimilation of different purely performative-narrative traditions (*Ghajir Gaan*, *Madar Purer Gan*, *Manik Purer Gaan* etc) into the manuscript culture. *Jari*, almost during that time, entered the domain of writing and became a folk performative tradition. ( *Folklore o*

scribed text<sup>68</sup>. The continuation of the text in the print format not only affirms the sensory aspects of Muharram as a contemporary socio-religious practice, but also shows the all-pervasiveness of the commemoration as a social event side by side with the popularity of the printed text across sects. Islamist reform tried to eradicate these sensory aspects by reconfiguring a meditative Islam for which a reformulation of the events of Karbala became necessary in the reformist discourse of the late nineteenth century.

The narrative structure of *Jarijungnama* affirmed the generic relevance of the adjective, *jari*, in the title<sup>69</sup>, a performative tradition in eastern part of Bengal that commemorates the death of Imam Husayn and others in his army on the plains of Karbala. *Jari* became a folk performative tradition, once the culture of expressing grief through narratives became religious reality for the converted mass in Bengal. Thus this became more than the reading of a narrative and became a part of the commemoration of Muharram, a performance connected to the ritual repertoire. Even when *Jarijungnama* was getting printed, all the performative elements were retained which somehow confirmed not only Blackburn's position regarding the continuity of old genres in a new technology of dissemination but also showing the overlap between printed and performed genres<sup>70</sup> in the early print culture<sup>71</sup>. The narrative patterns of the texts on Karbala

---

*Likhito Sahiya: Jariganer Asare Bishad-Sindhu: Atmikaran o Parobeshan Paddhati*, Simon Zacaria and Najmin Martuja, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 2012, P41)

<sup>68</sup> *Jarijungnama* retained the textual divisions used in its oral-performative original format.

<sup>69</sup> *Jari* comes from *azadari*, which means expressing sorrow over the death of Imam Husayn. This is a performative tradition where the main singer tells the story of Karbala in a *panchali* format and sometimes breaks into singing occasionally. There are musical accompaniments, vocal and instrumental, who supplement the performance of the main singer called *bayati*. Throughout the month of Muharram, people observe this pain by singing and listening to *jari* songs. Heyat Mamud and his scribes kept the name *raga*, and the rhythm structure, pointing out the sections which will come as *dhuya* (refrain). From such indicators, performance artifacts of *jarigaan* may be discerned.

<sup>70</sup> The introduction by the publisher and the cues of reading/performance at the same time

<sup>71</sup> This is an interesting study that other than Heyat Mamud's *Jarijungnama* that acclaimed its connection with the performative tradition of *jari*, rarely any text printed between late nineteenth and early twentieth century showed connections to the performative tradition. Rather, it was more like the culture of oration, predicated upon long narratives of fragmented episodes. As orated units, fragmented episodes (like those of Garibullah's

published in Battala showed these texts' belongingness to various registers of oration and performance. Garibullah's *Jungnama* was in the format of long narratives, descriptive, that is, diegetic which had an episodic progression like the *panchalis* as did the Karbala narratives by Jonab Ali, Mohammad Munshi and Sa'ad Ali-Abdul Wahhab offering us an explanation that they were all read, even if not as a part of a performative repertoire of Muharram, but as a part of recitation-performance for a designated audience. That these recitation-performances did have sacred values for the orator-performer was quite apparent in the narratives where the audience was inspired to engage with the text for a sacred purpose. Thus the retention of the sacredness of listening in the printed format transformed the value of print and the implied reader placed between the acts of reading and listening according to his capacity in his ambivalent milieu of the literary-performative<sup>72</sup>. It can be said from the literary references of the *puthis* under discussion that it was a network of reading-listening-performing-writing where writing about Karbala was being accomplished. Print culture, at least in Battala, did not try to create any new network nullifying the impact of the performative; rather kept it as a virtue

---

*Jungnama*) were different from small units closely resembling *marsiya* (as it was in Heyat Mamud's *Jarijungnama*). The textual difference between a narrative and a lyrical exposition could be connected to the difference in the performative arena of the texts that are the condition of their generic differences so to say. It is also worthy of noticing that the North Indian Urdu textual culture about Karbala generally did not produce much long narratives, rather produced an array of lyrics – *soz*, *marsiya* and *nawhas* – Anis and Dabir excelled in. Books concerning the Muharram culture of Awadh do not mention even a single long verse narrative like *maqal*, but refer to traditions of reciting *marsiyas* as an illustrious practice of commemorating grief in the month of Muharram.. Muhammad Husain Azad, *Ab-e- Hayat*. J R I Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988) In Bengal, the emphasis was more on long narrative formations based on *Hadis* and other historical narratives so far our library and archival evidences go.

<sup>72</sup> পড়িবেন যেহিঁজনে কেতাব আমার

তাহার জোনাবে কহি হয়ে জার জার ।।

আর শুনিবেন জিনি করিয়া গরজ ।

তাহার খেদমতে আমি জানাই আরজ ।। (emphasis mine)

(He who reads my book

I tell him this story of grief.

And he who hears it with attention

I tell him this story of grief)



to connect to the expectation that the audience/readership brought in with them while experiencing the text, while listening or reading. As already told, it was not sufficient to interrogate whether it was a mechanical distinction between two channels of communication – between the scribed-and-heard and the written-and-read; rather, it was the *sensibility of orality* that needs to be realized as continued in various degrees with varying degrees of the impact of writing-print.

Heyat Mamud's long narrative was interspersed with small lyrical expositions, the mimetic (ways of speaking), that went very closely to the *marsiya*. The presence of this multi-generic format where the descriptive complemented by the mimetic<sup>73</sup> affirmed the culture of expressing

<sup>73</sup> Mimetic, because generally elegies have a speaking persona, the grieving self, with the narration of grief and pain as direct speech, was the ethos of *marsiyas*. Heyat Mamud had other narrative spaces in the diegetic mood where speech is always reported speech as the self is always reported by the narrator.

Diegetic Mode:

আকবর পড়িল যবে                      ভেস্তে চলি গেল তবে  
নবী আদি শের আলী যথা  
ভেস্তের ভিতর ধ্বনি                      হাহাকার রোল শুনি  
কান্দে সবে মনে পায় ব্যথা  
সবে ধূলা ছিটে মুণ্ডে                      মস্তকের লোম ছিণ্ডে  
অতি ক্ষেদে পায় মনস্তাপ।  
ছিঁড়িল গায়ের বাস                      পুরী হইল দিস পাস  
হাহাকার শব্দের আলাপ।  
হুসেন কান্দায় এথা                      পুত্র শোকে পায় ব্যথা  
হাহা মোর বিধি হইল বাম।  
সংগ্রামে দাঁড়াইয়া দেখে                      জলধারা বহে চক্ষু  
পুত্র মৈল পড়িয়া সংগ্রাম।। *Jarijungnama*, p50

(Akbar had fallen in the war and gone to heaven  
Following Muhammad and Ali  
In heaven lament rose  
Everyone rolled on the dust tore hair  
The grief was so intense  
They tore their clothes, Medina became deserted  
Only mourning could be heard.  
Husayn stood at the war front,  
Tears flowed from his eyes for his son was dead.

Mimetic:

ritualistic pain and grief physically over Imam Husayn's martyrdom by the performing community. The text might or might not be a part of the event of Muharram, but as a text of *jari*, it definitely showed its affiliation to a semi-ritualistic semi-narrative performative repertoire connected to the bigger framework of the commemoration of Muharram. From the presence of a heavy bulk of autonomous elegies inside the long narrative, the living culture of reciting *marsiya* with the physicality of showing pain in contemporary Muslim society can be deduced<sup>74</sup>.

Similarly, when the author was writing for the scribal and the print cultures at the same time, recitation of the narrative went beyond the generality of reading and started following a sacred calendar by expounding writing as a performative act, here a sacred performance in itself<sup>75</sup>, thus making writing

---

তৃষ্ণায় মরিল বুঝি কাসিম আকবর ।  
শোকাকুনি জ্বলে মোর শরীর ভিতর ।  
দুশ্মের ছাওয়াল হের তৃষ্ণায় বিকল ।  
যদি পার ইহাকে আনিয়া দেহ জল ॥ *Jarijungnama*, p. 51.  
(Kasim and Akbar have died of thirst.  
Fire perched my heart  
This little boy cannot even move because of thirst.  
Please get him some water if you can)

<sup>74</sup> Here the performing community is the reader/listener and actor of *Jarijungnama* that gave a new status to the text as something to be performed and as something that evolved from performance too. Heyat Mamud's text in the early print culture not only had different kinds of interpretive communities based on their rates of literacy and inclination to performance, its popularity proves the presence of these communities even after much standardization in print culture and adaptation of modern genres. From the early modern culture of writing *jungnama* narratives, it is already evident that no sectarian divide in terms of the Shias and Sunnis was maintained in the narrative imagination of Karbala. Here also any sectarian segregation in commemorating Muharram with *matam* and *marsiya* could not be observed. Rather, it devised a lived sensory aspect of observing Islam in the vernacular communities where a more inclusive piety can be read as the basic motivating force.

<sup>75</sup> বন্দিখানায় যত ছিল হইল খালাস  
সত্য পীরের পাএ ভনে রাধাচরণ দাস ॥  
রাধা-দাসে লেখে মহরমের দশ দিন ।  
নাপাক গোলামে দয়া করিবেন যাবদিন ॥ (quoted in Sukumar Sen, p48)  
(Prisoners are released from captivity.  
Radhacharan Das worships at the feet of the *Satya Pir*.  
Radha Das writes about the ten days of Muharrum.  
Bless me O god for I am a sinner.)

a ritualized sacred act. This is true for the authors of the scribal culture of late eighteenth century that was continued by the authors of the early print culture as well<sup>76</sup>. Here, we should again remember that these authors of the popular print culture did not transcend the conditions of the scribal-oral culture and their understanding of writing as an *act* showed the ambivalence of these two phases as well. The orator's invocation of the audience was juxtaposed with his self-conscious entry as a writer in Sa'ad Ali Abdul Wahhab's *Adi Brihot Shahid e Karbala* and Eshakuddin's *Dastan Shahide Karbala* showing the ambivalence that these texts<sup>77</sup> continued to carry within as a symptom of the Battala prints even when they found a more structured system of print to claim higher prices at the market.

Eshakuddin's small rearrangement of the format of the narrative in the beginning may be seen as a simple deviation from the traditional format of the *qissas*, *jungnamas* and the didactic material written by Muslim authors, as the postponement of *hamd* and *naat* to the second *balam* (chapter) did not really de-arrange the traditional sensibility that the repertoire was supposed to carry. But it can be said that when the author opened up the narrative with *monajat*, it created space for an author's subjective attempt to place his effort as a form of pious activity. The act of writing was taken up by him as a compensation for not being able to attend the hajj which was similar to Radhacharan's attempt to write about Karbala as a form of showing grief on the first ten days of the month of Muharram.

তিনি আছে মদিনাতে আমি বাঙ্গলাতে।

<sup>76</sup> Radhacharan, Heyat Mamud, Ishakuddin and others.

<sup>77</sup> হীন ছাদ আলী বলে      সবার কদম তলে

শুন ভাই যত দিনদার।

কলম লইয়া হাতে      কালি কিছু দিয়া তাতে

লিখি হাল সদি সবার ।। (Sa'ad Ali, emphasis mine)

লেগে আফছোছের তীর      ছিনা হইল চৌচির

শোকের আঙন দেলে জ্বলে ।

কলম কাঁদিয়া কয়      কি করে লিখিবে হয়

এমামের সহিদি বয়ান।। (Sa'ad Ali, emphasis mine)

জেলা রংপুর বিচে থানা জলঢাকাতে।। ...  
 খালিসা খুটামারা গ্রাম জনমের ভূমি।  
 সেখানে গরীবী হালে রাখো মোরে তুমি।।  
 টাকা নাহি কেমনেতে যাব মদিনায়।  
 রওজা শরিফের মাটি মাখি মাঠে গায়।। *Dastan Shahide Karbala*, Eshakuddin, p2  
 (He resides in Medina, I in Bengal  
 I was born in Rangpur district, Thana Jaldhaka, village Khalisa Khutamara.  
 You have made me live in poverty.  
 I don't have money. How do I go to Medina?  
 So I smear the dust of *rowza sharif* on my body)

Thus, writing about the Prophet and his progeny was employed as an ethical action to compensate *gonah* in the case of Eshakuddin. He might follow a traditional format that had already established the act of writing/scribing as a pious activity, but that this author had referred to the names and qualifications of his sons and grandsons instead of referring to any pir or charting out a family genealogy or affiliation to a scriptural knowledge system, showed his transaction with other systems of print culture, more profane to carry this pious effort. In Eshakuddin's case, which we may hesitate to call a cheap print because of its volume and price, the accommodation of the blessings of some pir was not needed to validate the author's claim over a traditional act of writing about the Prophet<sup>78</sup>. Eshakuddin created his *dastan* performing between recitation and writing, listening and reading. The recurrent reference of pen as the tool and writing as the verb<sup>79</sup> showed the author's deliberative crossing over of the scribal practice and a new engagement with the script-print culture while his pen 'talking'. Or, his retaining of the generic terms for description from the age of manuscripts<sup>80</sup> shows a co-existence of a ambiguous sensibility. When the

---

<sup>78</sup> It was these sacred connections, either the initiation by the pir, or a blessed family lineage, that validated an individual as the author of the sacred subject. Here, that the author could not claim one and had to replace the sacred with the description of the profane 'this' life of his family, showed the overlap between the that and this, the exclusivity of the traditional repertoires and the inclusive nature of the print culture. Here the author did not need to have any sacred connections to be the author of any sacred theme.

<sup>79</sup> জুম্মার ফজর কালে তারিখ দেখিয়া বন্দ হৈল. (I stopped writing on the day of *Jumma* during the early morning prayer)

<sup>80</sup> আরেক রওয়াকেতের করি যে বয়ান, বাখানি (Let me tell you what the *hadith* said)

author's pen was crying over the grief of loosing Imam, saying that he had decided to write about the Karbala battle as a compensation of his absence at the battle field where he could martyr himself while slaying Imam's enemies, he designated the act of writing a form of performing grief.

This can be seen as the inner variation in the sensibility of popular print when we notice that, a few years ago, the set of verbs in Jonab Ali's invocation of the audience never crossed the boundary of the oral-performative. It had always been "listen to"<sup>81</sup> whereas for Eshakuddin it had been both "listen to" and "read" that invoked the implied readers<sup>82</sup>. For this implied reader, the pen became another character to show the inadequacy of language to translate grief through poetry<sup>83</sup>.

In a new condition of print and piety then, writing became ritual performance and script became the medium for lamenting, showing the changed channels of communication and changed understanding of religiosity. Though Sa'ad Ali and Abdul Ohab's *puthi* was very much influenced by Muhammad Munshi's and we can notice simple recognizable units in the latter production, the latter authors' negotiations with the script

---

<sup>81</sup> Jonab Ali or any other poet of the Battala Karbala before Eshakuddin did not conceive their text to be read by the audience, or, even if they imagined, the thrust of reading as a new sensibility and practice could never surpass the pre-existing order of what they belonged to. It had always been the listener rather than a reader that all the authors before Eshakuddin addressed.

<sup>82</sup> The refrain goes both ways, connecting to the listener and the reader,  
এসহাকউদ্দিন কহে কারবালার বাত। (Eshakuddin will tell the written tale)

and

তারপর শুন ভাই কলমের বাত।

কান্দিয়া কলম কহে করিব সাক্ষাত, (p348) (Listen to what the pen as to say. The pen cries and wants to go to Medina)

<sup>83</sup> কান্দিয়া কলম বলে জার জার হৈয়া দেলে

শুন ভাই ওহে কবিকার।

কারবালার হাল দেখি আছুতে ভরিল আঁখি

আর তুমি না কর সায়ের।।

The pen cries with a saddened heart

Listen, o poet

Karbala brings tears in my eyes.

Do not write poems anymore.

and the oral compel us to look at texts as having various positions in the field of print culture.

Though in Garibullah's *Jungnama*, there was no narrative cue as in *Jarijungnama* to figure out the text's position as a part of the performative tradition of Muharram, Muharram as a performative arena of articulating actual grief had always been present in the narrativized grief. Muhammad himself anticipated the performance of grief in the form of *matam* after the death of his grandsons which the text eventually revealed in the course of narrative progression<sup>84</sup> which was the established thematic and generic

---

<sup>84</sup> ইমাম হোসেন যবে কারবালায় শহীদ হবে

এহি সবে ফেরেশতা আসিয়া ।

বহুত মাতম জহারী করিবে ময়দান ঘিরি

ইমামের খবর পাইয়া ॥ (Garibullah, p81)

(Eshakuddin tells the story of Karbala

When Imam Hussein will be martyred at Karbala

The Angels will come to sing the song of pain while beating their chests.

When they will hear about the Imam)

Not only that, the physicality of grief and pain showed the excess of the performative community that had already attained a definite performative structure in the contemporary period. Chest beating, so practiced by a collective of the Islamic community connected to the commemoration of Muharram, would recur after Imam Hasan death (আসমান ভাঙ্গিয়া যেন পড়িল মাথায়। বুকে হাত মারে আর করে হায় হায় – the sky had fallen on their head, they cry, scream and beat their chest) and after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn,

উম্মে সালেমা বিবি আর উম্মে কুলসুম ।

বিবি জয়নাব আদি করিয়া মাতম ॥

এতেক করিল জারি কাতর হইয়া ।

আমি কি লিখিব তাহা অবোধ হইয়া ।

শহরবানু কান্দে শিরে খাক মাটি ডালে ।

শোকতে ফাটিয়া শির যায় এককালে ॥

তামাম আওরাত সবে এলো করে চুল ।

ইমাম ইমাম করে কান্দিয়া আকুল ॥

বুকে মুখে মারে কেহ শির যে ঠুকিল ।

ঐ ভাবে পেয়ারা জান কেবা নিকলিল ॥ p197

(Shaharbanu cried as she banged her head on the ground.

She hurt herself.

All the women let their hair loose.

They cried and called Imam's name over and over.

Some beat themselves on their faces, some on their heads.

Who could take that beloved life?

They cried calling out the name of Imam

Some died calling out the name of Imam)

concern of the *puthis* printed in Battala. Muhammad's emotional entanglement with the Imam brothers became a thematic necessity for the authors to sustain the idea of a leader and his legacy. Popular piety needed to have Muhammad, the moral exemplar for the community, and attested his love for Imam Hasan and Husayn whom he sacrificed to save his *ummah* from moral punishment. The sorrow of losing Imam Husayn must be articulated in the acutest form, which is *matam* , otherwise his sacrifice would not be established as ideal.

I should include here that depending on the text's engagement with the performative, different layers of textual status can be delineated showing their positions vis-à-vis performance repertoires.

The performative-performed, pain and piety, presented at the level of the text, was tried to be minimized in a later period when an eagerness to standardize a language culture attempted to prohibit this physicality to envisage different modes of expressing grief fit for an authentic and reformed Islamic piety and for an individualistic claim over modernity. In this process, an awakened consciousness about the life of Muhammad and the history of Islam during his life time and after started to be re-assessed and reclaimed by the Muslim intelligentsia to conceptualize an imagined community and speculate a future for it.

While trying to delineate a standardized ethical figure through Muhammad and his grandsons who died for bigger community cause, the authors were attempting a standardized vernacular and fixed genres to explicate literary and an ideological model for modernity, the community in transition, and a this-worldly inwardly piety/religiosity at the same time. Between this modernist effort and the old generic expressions of cheap print, there lay middling categories, middling aspirations, always in dialogue amongst themselves. In this dynamics we need to ask this question as well whether

---

The text, here, possessed the in-between space between the printed and the performative realities.

the Battala (in the broader sense, as a generic term explaining popular print) can be seen solely as popular while relegating the middle class efforts to the realm of the elite.

As already proposed in the beginning of this section, if the Muslim community is to be discerned from its patterns of consumption of printed material as a literary community, it will be almost impossible to locate an exclusive group consuming a fixed corpora of cultural products<sup>85</sup>. Chartier refused the assumption ‘that it is possible to establish exclusive relationship between specific cultural forms and particular social groups’ to chart out a territory of readership where various intentions and imaginations about religiosity and piety overlapped and argued with each other<sup>86</sup>. After this theorization of consumption, it becomes difficult to remain confined in Robinson’s ideation of a bi-polar system no matter how interactive they are. If a traditional reading of popular culture offers a scripture-ritual, script-phono/body divide in terms of the format and thematic concerns, it may end up, as David Hall says, precluding sharing, interchange and conflict and compromise both the categories engage in within the same literary system<sup>87</sup>. David D. Hall follows Roger Chartier’s conception of “culture as appropriation”. Popular culture might not be a direct resultant of the culture of the lowly. Imbibing Chartier’s alternative notion of “appropriation”, Hall affirms differing ways through which social groups take over and remake high/orthodox/official elements. The one way hegemonic structure is critiqued by showing the possibility of how the motifs, stories move up or down various strata to influence each other<sup>88</sup>.

---

<sup>85</sup> We follow Roger Chartier’s negation of traditional historiography that tried to discover two cultures, (grand and little, elite and subaltern/folk/popular) separated by a changeable but definable boundary. Disclaiming the ideal of pre-given cultural cleavages that may determine patterns of consumption later historians of popular culture like Chartier offered a more layered reading of culture, consumption and appropriation. Chartier, *ibid*.

<sup>86</sup> Chartier, *ibid*.

<sup>87</sup> David D. Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1996). P4



Rather, Hall would second what Chartier proposes to read culture as appropriation<sup>89</sup>. It is a critique of a hegemonic structure of culture and society by acknowledging the fact that stories, motifs could descend from the learned culture or move up. Popular culture, rather, can be read as ‘a reciprocal influence that gives rise to a plethora of layers’ so instrumental in understanding the Muslim community as practices of sets of texts engaged in constant negotiation and mutual influence. Rather than looking at a set of artefacts assigned to some groups, it is a study of asymmetry and similarity, conflict and consensus, negotiation and negation among groups.

While little traditions are taken to be over-expanding, it will be too simplistic after these previous thinkers to consider the high tradition to be closed as proposed by Peter Burke<sup>90</sup>. A lazy understanding of Burke’s thesis may, in turn, produce the great tradition/orthodox as a non-negotiable domain, thus creating a two-layered division of the social like Robinson’s. But if the popular is open even to the elite, if the elite is also a consumer of the popular, the popular will have to be negotiated by the high tradition, either by assimilating it or by erasing it. We need to understand here that the elite may not always mean an already stable category; rather, it should be understood in the aspiration of some social group, the way it negotiates with available social elements. We need to look at the moments and efforts of these engagements between the popular and the high as a dynamic relationship to grasp in-between spaces within a culture which goes beyond binary divisions of socio-economic-ideational factors and doesn’t propose an uncritical homogeneous space of consumption<sup>91</sup>. The Muslim public should be understood as a multiplicity of positions both in the domain of ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘modernists’ informed by religiosity, piety, politics and culture – producing different layers of reformist, traditionalist, new traditionalist, religious intelligentsia and the secular literati.

---

<sup>89</sup> Chartier, *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Ashgate, 1988).

<sup>91</sup> That cheap print culture in Battala may not be considered as a one way disciplinary process.

Readers from different quarters of the society built up connection with cheap prints which may define the consumption patterns of the Battala books and produce their afterlife. It may denote an inclusive character of cheap print culture and also the possibilities of overlapped values, generic or otherwise, and shared symbols of the narrative across different cross sections of the society<sup>92</sup>. The engagement of urban labouring classes and rural mass in the cheap book distribution circuit simultaneously with the literate middle class actually shows a shared but stratified cultural zone of consumption.

As these narrative expositions did not feel the responsibility of keeping historical authenticity, it was more like telling the tale rather than describing historical events. We should keep in mind this superior power of the tale/the story, the miraculous and the belief in defining history and identity. Within the institution of literature, as already proposed in the question of multiplicity, there can be different affiliations of the authors' and readers' claims and aspirations over a literary tradition that may invite a different configuration of the popular. Battala may not be attempted to be read as the monolith of literature 'produced by the people'<sup>93</sup>, rather, in this study different orders of literacy and different social affiliations of the author may problematize this view about the popular. A study of the social aspirations over print and piety and an asymmetrical growth of literacy within communities helped sustaining a simultaneity of cheap popular prints and the elitist forms<sup>94</sup>.

---

<sup>92</sup> Though erotica and erotic gossip was the core of literature that invaded cheap prints in the mid nineteenth century, there are other genres that remained popular among literate and semi-literate masses. Mythological tales and epics in Bengali translation along with the *qissa* and *pala* topped the chart. Similarly, as fulfilling a mythological narrative purpose of the society, the tales of Karbala became outrageously popular.

<sup>93</sup> However, Battala or cheap prints to be more accurate about the social position of the texts will not hold that monolithic origin that is 'by the people'. A hegemonic model to read the relationship between the elite and popular print which considers the popular to be the repository of otherness, of resistance, of counter-hegemonic virtues, is inadequate to explain the mode of appropriation working between the elite and the popular beyond their binaries.

<sup>94</sup> Barry Reay, *Popular Cultures in England: 1550-1750* (London: Longman, 1998) pp. 337-348; Tim Harris, 1989, p. 10; Chartier, 1991, pp. 37-48.

Can we ask here, when the texts in the popular print tradition were attempting more doctrinal sophistication, or a change in the format, or reference to sources, were not those connected to its own kind of standardization? If the popular is multifarious, aspirations ambivalence, could the popular remain as the “speech of the people”<sup>95</sup>? Battala prints transcended the orthodox notion of only catering to the popular masses and became a part of a varied readership, elite and popular alike. Both Hindu elite and new generation of Muslims were a part of the Battala readership, which allowed Battala – generically and thematically – to enter the scripted elite culture and coexist with standardized elite forms of print. We take Peter Burke’s description of elite masses as amphibious or bi-cultural and can talk about an overlapping zone between the elite and the popular by using the term ‘middling sort’<sup>96</sup>.

Studies by historians of the early modern compel us through print and piety and an asymmetrical growth of literacy to see the case of early print culture as a liminal moment that touched upon the pre-print and the newly emerging sensibilities around print. The boundaries defining popular culture in the early modern period have been recently extended by the scholars. The predominantly literate middling sort has been studied to understand the non-elite culture which is no more a monolithic folk or common. Popular rhetoric may get formulated and informed through elite textual references. Similarly, elite expressions may, unknowingly, respond to the folk and popular aspirations and expressions while trying to eradicate

---

<sup>95</sup> Though Peter Burke identifies popular culture through residual theory against Robert Redfield’s contrast between the ‘great tradition’ and the ‘little tradition’ his account of popular culture has the traces of binarism. Burke defined elite as ‘amphibious’ and bi-cultural but this elite remains withdrawn from the scope of the popular. Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1978) Later while explaining the specific case of London, Burke introduces the participatory ‘culture which come from the people ’with the mediated culture which was intended for the people. Peter Burke, ‘Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century London’ (1985). See also Lawrence Manley, ‘London and Urban Popular Culture’ in (eds) Andrew Hadfield, Matthew Dimmock and Abigail Shinn, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Culture in Early Modern England*, (Ashgate, 2014) pp. 357-372.

<sup>96</sup> Peter Burke, ed, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper, 1978), pp212-34

those elements from the body of the elite and standardized. Do popular as well as elite remain the same if we include them as viable elements of the public sphere that had been strived for an identity and modernity? In a different configuration of the public where ‘orthodoxy’ (in the Talal Asad sense) with several conflicting and consensual orientation, affiliation and aspiration to actualize a community separate from its other, the notion of both identity and modernity got fractured. In the following chapters, my thesis will try to trace and capture that internally fractured polemic and an ever multiple public sphere in search of a Bengali Muslim identity, by looking at various transactions between the elite religiosity and the popular piety and in turn will redefine their mutual connection beyond the binary framework.

## CHAPTER II

### Print and Popular Piety

জারি মরচিয়া বহু পাপ না করিবে।  
আসহাবগণে গালি কভু নাহি দিবে।।  
মক্তুল হোসেন, মোহাম্মদ খান

[Never commit the sin of reciting *jari* and *marsiya*

Never defame the *ashab*

*Maqtul Husayn*, Muhammad Khan]

From this reference to *marsiya* and *jari* in a scribed *puthi*, titled *Maqtul Husayn* by Muhammad Khan, it might appear that the culture of elegiac mourning was contemporary to this author of the mid seventeenth century, when such negativity towards the culture of mourning by singing *jari* and *marsiya* had already become a part of religiosity. But, it can be said that the inherent tone of displeasure shown by the narrator/author towards the culture of mourning was surely anachronistic. Till the mid nineteenth century, when the didactic manuals began to adopt a critical position towards the intercessory piety towards Imam Husayn as a part of their reformist responsibility—the community was not particularly worried about the status of *muharram* as something un-Islamic. Rather, Heyat Mamud's *Jarijungnama*, written in 1728, could be placed in the interstitial zone between narrative (*Nama/Nameh*) and performance (*Jari*). From the elements of reading and recitation within *Jarijungnama*, a religious and literary culture of showing grief over the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his companions in the battle of Karbala can also be discerned as having been a very important and inclusive ritualistic practice. This negative reaction towards the ritual of elegiac mourning was not only absent in *Imam Bijoy* by Daulat Ujir Bahram Khan, who pre-dates Muhammad Khan, but also in all the authors of Karbala texts after Muhammad Khan, namely Hamid, Jafar and Heyat Mamud, who wrote before the advent of print. None of them show any unease about the physicality of lamenting and the figuration of ritualistic traditions during *muharram*.

It was because of the impact of the reformist movements that the narrativization of Karbala took a new turn to minimize *shirk* and *bida't*—i.e. the physicality of grief and intercessory sentiments, that I have already discussed to a certain extent in the first chapter. In this chapter, I will discuss how the piety associated with Karbala was given a new shape and interpretive context in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by the fundamentalist reformist Islamic agendas and how Karbala, in turn, added a new justification and interpretation to reformist piety and religiosity by stabilizing the self and producing the other.

I will begin my account with an overview of the different reformist platforms whose evolution and impact were beginning to be felt in different parts of Bengal as early as the 1830s. Within the zeal to purge out the un-Islamic from the body of Islam, and to go back to the Prophetic Islamic purity, the sense of an imagined community was envisaged, no matter how diverse that notion of solidarity might have been. In the late nineteenth century, various attempts, first by the learned *maulanas* and then by the political elite, to modify the community and to transform a diverse populace into a community, ended up in creating a language of separatism. The imagined community—premised upon identity, identification (of the self and other) and solidarity—thus, is most meaningful in the context of internal debates and discussions over the authentic form that this imagined community had to assume, as well as in the engagements with the persistent presence of heterodox beliefs and practices and constant transactions within. I will attempt to read the growth of religious ideology and piety, and their connection to identity and solidarity, expressed in the language of rupture, and also in that of continuity, in an effort to create a context for the Karbala narratives.

To go back to the expressions of lament in the medieval period, we need to refer to the early modern poets of the Karbala narratives like Daulat Ujir Bahram Khan, Hamid, and Heyat Mamud, who produced invested descriptions of the lament even at the time of anticipation of the martyrdom of the Imam brothers. This lament introduced in the narrative by Prophet Muhammad himself in anticipation of his grandsons' imminent deaths was

later manifested in the physical acts of disheveling one's hair and beating of one's chest as undertaken by the women of the sacred house following the martyrdom of the Imam brothers.

When no poet of the medieval and the early modern can be found to have been antagonistic to the ritual of performing grief, as is evident from the passages referred to above—how was it that Muhammad Khan was expressing a moralistic animosity towards the physicality of grief, an animosity which would only be historically produced much later in the mid nineteenth century reformist ideology? Perhaps, within the network of scribing and re-scribing, Muhammad Khan's *Maqtul Husayn* was interpellated by the scribes' own inscriptions; whereby a handwritten *puthi* became a palimpsest. Manuscripts thus tend to exude the intentions and intonations of the scribes belonging to different times and different spaces. Consequently, it becomes really difficult to derive a historical reference from the reading, even when the texts had begun to be printed, as they did not immediately reflect any kind of stable historicity. Recitation of *jari* and *marsiya* was not targeted as being un-Islamic before the reformist platforms started to configure a pure Islam at the expense of the lived and the ritualistic. Consequently they began to earn structures and not so structured forms of disapproval as an effect of the reformist ideals of a pure Islam. In the mid nineteenth century, there was the almost universally ubiquitous appearance of a reformist sensibility, directed towards locating and purging out the un-Islamic thoughts and practices which constituted Islam for the vernacular speaking masses, who were initiated and led by traditional petty religious authorities, or the *mullahs*, with minimum or no exposure to scriptural traditions in Arabic. Later, if we concentrate on Bengal, it can be observed that the traditionalist *mullahs*, following years of long-drawn debates over the traditional and reformist forms of knowledge about Islam, felt motivated enough to follow these reformist ideals and produced a plethora of texts in *Musalmani Bangla*.

Peter van der Veer says, 'if we want to take religious discourse and practice as relevant to the project of religious nationalism, we have to attempt to understand religious identities as historically produced in religious

institutions that are in a constant process of transformation'<sup>1</sup>. This thesis looks at the reformist platforms by following the changing socio-political-cultural impetuses and inflections to understand the varying configurations of scriptural reformist inclinations and their connections to popular forms of reception, consumption, and further re-enactments, resulting in turn in a multiplicity of forms of religiosity and identity.

In Bengal it was due to the *Tariqah-e-Muhammadiya* and *Faraizi* movements, as the two major strands of fundamentalist reformist Islam, that certain practices were considered to be *shirk* (the practice of polytheism) and *bid'at* (innovation, in the sense of deviating from the norm). The reformist platforms intended the total annihilation or eradication of a pantheon of confused beliefs which had accumulated semi-divine deities from multiple religious and cultural contacts, including practices and beliefs influenced by superstition, animism, demotic syncreticism, the *Bhakti* movement, *Sufi* tolerance, ontological monism, from instances of poetic license and several other factors and sources, Indian as well as foreign, but all of them alien to fundamentalist Islam.

Usha Sanyal proposes a reading of the *ulama*-led (religious authorities with scriptural knowledge, where *alim* or *alem* denotes the singular of *ulama*) movements since the early nineteenth century with reference to their own discourses and shows how the *ulama* used the notions of *tajdid* (renewal) and *islah* (reform) to mark the ideological conceptual changes. But she mentions that the traditional *ulama* (who are deemed to be 'orthodox' in Talal Asad's terminology<sup>2</sup>) actually used the notion of *tajdid* (renewal) to designate the conceptual changes; though references to *islah*, which actually meant the improvement of behavioural and worldly matters<sup>3</sup>, were rampant in the literature relating to this change. This was a part of the rise

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington DC: Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986), p. 14

<sup>3</sup> Scholars of this ideological change in South Asia including Sanyal have been using 'reform' as the analytical category to actually designate 'renewal' that the *ulama* specified to mark the conceptual, but it is Sanyal who explains its usage. Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and His Movement, 1870-1920* (Bombay/Calcutta/Madras: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.10-11.



of fundamentalist Islamic reformist thought throughout the world which emanated in various forms and expressions in different locales, starting from the early eighteenth century. In the Indian sub-continent, the most influential thinker was Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (1703–1762) who provided the earliest reformist sensibility in North India as a remedy for political and spiritual degeneration. It was clear to Wali Allah that without ‘curing it [i.e. Islam as practiced in the subcontinent] of un-Islamic practices and aberrations from the true path’<sup>4</sup> no other kind of authority was possible. Rather, spiritual-scriptural authority was the only possible path towards attaining all other kinds of authority and agency<sup>5</sup>. The impact of this reformist-revivalist thought spread to the remotest corners of Bengal, changing the traditional ways of interpreting and practising Islam from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The *Tariqah* movement, which majorly influenced Bengal, came out of the Waliullahi School of Delhi as an extension of *jihad*, or holy war, as it was conceived and propagated by Shah Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Brelwi (1786–1831), the founder of *Tariqah e Muhammadiya*. Muhammad Ismail (1782–1831), the grandson of Shah Wali Allah, cast a major influence over the masses of rural Bengal, who responded overwhelmingly to the missionary zeal of the *Muhammadiyahs*. While Sayyid Ahmad Brelwi and Muhammad Ismail were aware of a similar movement called Wahhabism in Arabiyya, *Tariqah* was never associated with it, nor could their movement be understood as *Wahhabism* in India, though many European authors, like William Hunter and James Wise, for example, have identified *Tariqah* with Wahhabism<sup>6</sup>.

In Bengal it was basically the missionary activities of Maulana Inayat Ali (1794–1858) and Waliyat Ali (1791–1835) whose missionary work in the rural areas of Bengal initiated the rural masses of Bengal in the path of *jihad*; and who responded to the campaigns by taking part in the *jihad*

---

<sup>4</sup> I. H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent 610-1947* (S’Gravenhage, 1962), p192

<sup>5</sup> Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (London: 1964), pp.210-212; P. Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Harlan O. Pearson, *Islamic Reform and Revival in Nineteenth-century India: The Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* (Delhi: Yoda Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Hunter, *Indian Musalmans*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1872.

movement in the north-western provinces: either by going physically to the war front for *jihad* against the Sikhs and the British or by contributing to the fund<sup>7</sup>. The contemporary *Faraizi* movement, no less popular among the masses, was clearly initiated as a local reformist movement by Haji Shariatullah (1781–1840), who was directly influenced by the *Wahhabism* of Arabiyya while he was on a *hajj*, i.e. pilgrimage to the sacred sites of Islam. The *Faraizi* movement reached the remotest corners of Bengal very rapidly by channelizing the grievances of the Muslim peasants against the Hindu landlords and the British Indigo planters and was instrumental in simultaneously spreading the reformist values of Islam. The channelization of the peasants in agrarian issues was done with the idea of a unified community, which for the first time brought locally separated and undefined Muslim masses within the rubric of an imagined community. Under the leadership of Dudu Mian (d. 1862), Shariatullah's son and successor, the *Faraizi* movement reached its zenith and spread over a vast expanse in Bengal; especially in Faridpur, Backergunj, Jessore, Tipperah, Dacca, Mymensingh, Pabna and Noakhali. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, after the death of Dudu Mian, the anti-British stance and sectarian strength of the *Faraizi* movement weakened with the growing influence of the *Taiyuni* sect under the leadership of Maulana Keramat Ali Jaunpuri (1800–1874) and the emerging *Hanafi* platforms.

The concept of *dar-ul-harb* (India as the land of the enemy) as expounded by Abdul Aziz (1746–1824), the son of Shah Wali Allah, culminated in the discourse of *jihad*—as interpreted by Shah Sayyid Ahmad Rai Barelwi and Shah Ismail. After coming back from *hajj*, Shah Sayyid Ahmad started developing and practising the theory of *jihad*, which made him a *mujahid* (an authority of the discourses on *jihad*) following the *tariqah* (path) of Muhammad. In the *Tariqah* religious tracts, this *tariqah* of Muhammad was explained differently from the traditional way of understanding it as *ilm*<sup>8</sup>: i.e. scriptural rational knowledge. New conceptualizations, debates and

---

<sup>7</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmed discusses the Bengal response to the *jihad* movement in detail, Ahmed, 1981, p.42; Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *The Wahhabi Movement in India* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1966), p105

<sup>8</sup> Pearson, pp.72-81.

discursive formations took place within the Islamic community in this scriptural ideation of *Tariqah*, as the process of purification towards attaining an authentic and pure Islam, by believing in *tauhid* (the oneness of Allah) and following the path of *iman* (the honour of being a believer in Islam). Thus the un-Islamic was identified and delegitimized, and the ideas relating to them were disseminated through easy language and cheap prints which invaded the market<sup>9</sup>. The beginning of writing against the processes of intercession and idolatry brought a paradigmatic shift to the local Muslim community, whose intercession and idol-based consciousness, in turn, influenced the scriptural practice of Islam, resulting in the formation of several layers—between the reformist-revivalist<sup>10</sup> scriptural and the lived-ritualistic—in terms of articulations of popular piety.

## **2.1 From *pir*<sup>11</sup>-centric Piety to Prophet-centric Piety:**

Waking up late to the call of print<sup>12</sup>, the Muslim intelligentsia tried to save people from *zahiliyat* (ignorance of Islamic knowledge). Cheap prints were available in the vernacular language. Though there was massive doctrinal debate over the comparative validity of the Prophetic *sunnah*, *i.e.* what *Tariqah* ideated and propagated, and the *Mazhabi sunnah*, *i.e.* the *Hanafi* scriptural position, a renewed interest grew in the character of the Prophet. The Prophet became the ideal to follow, the sole reference frame to validate all scriptural religious obligations and ritual formalities. Not only philosophical ideas about doctrine, but crucial questions about important mundane matters like the appropriate length of hair for a man or where to place one's hands while praying *namaz* were also explicated through the

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp. 90-126.

<sup>10</sup> By reformist-revivalist, Rafiuddin Ahmad explained a system which intended to purge the Muslim society of its age-long un-Islamic beliefs and practices and, at the same time, defended Islam against all outside intervention. Ahmad, 1981, p.41.

<sup>11</sup> A *pir* is the teacher in a *Sufi* sect who initiates the disciple in the path of knowledge. Having grown in the vernacular soil in close proximity with the lived ritualistic communities, the *pirs* created an autonomous institution by themselves. By becoming the mediators of Allah they could channelize the devotional emotion of the common masses and became the central authorities of Islamic knowledge, amassing a following which was again based on their charismatic and supernatural power.

<sup>12</sup> Francis Robinson, 'Islam and Impact of Print in South Asia', in *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.66-104.

Prophet's life: by citing the manner in which the Prophet had acted and lived his life. In this process, the reform movements made a paradigmatic shift in the way the Prophet was imagined and narrativized in local and lived Islam, and presented the Prophet as scripturally actualized. In the new genres of the vernacular *sirat* (sacred biography or hagiography) and *maulud* or *mauludsharif* (poetry venerating the birth of the Prophet) and *maghazi* (about the military exploits of Muhammad for the territorial spread of Islam) literature there were constant evocations of the life and acts of the Prophet with reference to the *hadis*<sup>13</sup>. *Sirat* had emerged in the Islamicate world. The instance of *sirat* as hagiography, a form potentially more familiar and familial, and thus easier to comprehend than the Hadis, indicates a strong presence of a Prophet-centric piety in the medieval and the early modern period, other than the *pir*-centric piety. Prophet-centric piety in the *sirat* and *junghama*, based on the martyrdom of Imam Hasan and Husayn, shaped the narrative expectation of the vernacular community, whereas through *milad* and *muharram*, a major cohesive force was produced within the community that performed them as their sacred duty at a time when a structured *namaz* was neither so vigorously introduced and nor practised. Various authors of the Muslim intelligentsia with various inclinations and orientations—Sirhindi to Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Altaf Husain Hali, Shibli Numani, Muhammad Iqbal and Maulana Akram Khan—all wrote about the life of the Prophet from different social-ideological-religious positions side by side with the proliferation of *sirat*, and tracts based on auxiliary emotions in popular print. In this popular domain of print, Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn, as the Prophet's grandsons, emerged as another set of ideals for the community through whom the devotional-affective justification of the community could be resolved. The events connected to the battle of Karbala, as being the sequel to Muhammad's life, became an equally significant repository of the community's affective piety. Because Karbala addressed the questions of inheritance and the responsibility of the *ashab* (i.e. the companions of the

---

<sup>13</sup> I must note here that *Sirat* had a strong connection to the high theosophical ideals of Vaishnavism, Nathaism and Islam as espoused in the biography of the Prophet by Sayyid Sultan and Sheikh Chand, but there were many layers where the common masses could connect with their common knowledge of these high traditions and folkloric imagination.

Prophet, who one after the other would become the Imams after the Prophet's death) after the death of the Prophet and the subsequent resolution of these questions, the affective-familial bond between the Prophet and his family (which consisted of his daughter Fatima and grandsons Hasan-Husayn), and his companions (Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali), it became the most productive narrative site to fall back upon. With the standardization of language and genre, and with a more demarcated political aim for the national and the historical, Karbala would undergo different narrative turns in order to secure a community.

While the early modern texts were more interested in placing the Prophet in the line of other Prophets of Islam following the tradition of writing *Qasas ul-Anbiya*<sup>14</sup>—or life narratives of the prophets—texts by all the authors from the mid eighteenth century were keener on adding the social-historical lineage of Muhammad. This not only made the figure of the Prophet historically placed, this context of the lineage in an *a priori* way explained the enmity between Imam Hasan-Husayn and Yezid as something created in the distant past. The enmity between Muhammad's grandsons and Muiawia's son Yezid, which caused the grandsons' death, was thus explicated as the result of a historical enmity between two ancestors from whom emerged two different clans of the Muslims: Banu Umayyad and Banu Hashim. This emphasis on the enmity of the past exempted the caliphate from being internally fractured, by positing Yezid as the individual mind behind the death of the Prophet's grandsons. It was the intellectual and affective vacuum—well anticipated during Muhammad's lifetime—after the death of Muhammad, that marks the beginning of anxiety and debate over the question: who would rightfully inherit the spiritual and political authority over Islamdom? The introductory episodes of the Karbala narratives are saturated with these battles so emblematic of Islam's internal crisis and power struggle<sup>15</sup>. We will see how the authors manipulated emotions and situations by taking creative liberties to minimize coercion and conflict within the Islamic community and to posit a

---

<sup>14</sup> *Qasas ul-Anbiya* in Urdu.

<sup>15</sup> To be discussed in the following chapters.

sense of the collective, an *ummat*. But, what I want to stress here, is that instead of looking at it as a deliberate ideological ploy specific to the Karbala narrative, this should be conceived and conceptualized as a part of the social; it was as a part of discursive efforts made towards consolidating an imagined community that all these literary resonances were brought in, and were not restricted to the renditions of Karbala alone.

These new sensibilities emerged in the conflict and power struggle between the scriptural Islam of the reformists, and a more ritualistic bodily legacy of Islam practised by the traditional religious authorities (called *kathmullahs* by the reformists) all over Bengal. In this respect, primary distinctions between the elite and the popular, the urban and the rural, the scripture and the *qissa*, would tend to weaken to produce overlaps and interstitial zones to define and determine forms of popular piety. Such varied forms of religiosity and piety began to be transmitted through print and a range of social performances especially in the public *bahas*—or arguments, and *waz mehfil*—or individual preaching ceremonies, which began to mark the other-within by identifying sensory ritual performances (like *urs*, *milad* and *muharram*) and imposing taboos on them.

To engage with the polemic on the ideal form of the collective—or *ummah*—and ideal forms of belonging to the collective, we need to understand the context of piety in the production of the Karbala narratives. In this respect, we must mention that *Tariqah e Muhammadiya* and *Faraizis* always remained two distinct forms of fundamentalist reformist Islam. They differed in terms of their position with respect to *Eid*, *juma* and *jihad* through which historians have tried to map their distinctive positions. Reformist Islam was against certain rituals and beliefs that emerged in the process of the domestication of Islam in the local religious-aesthetic systems. It was also against certain practices of Sufism, which by then had become a cult based on ritual, rite and the supernatural intercessory power of the *pirs*, which functionally superseded even the figure of the Prophet. In this practice of intercession, embodied in the *pir*-centric piety in rural Bengal, a scripture-based *shariyati* Islam did not feature as the authentic source, which worried the reformers from all the sectors alike. Reformist

Islam, while remaining aggressively critical about the profane and physical practices, produced extremely sophisticated discourse, either by combining *Sufi* philosophy with the *shariyati* systems of knowledge, or by theorizing the intercession of the Sufi *pir* as the highest channel towards cultivating and attaining knowledge. Thus, it differentiated between a more mass-oriented practice-based *pir*-ism (which it considered to be an expression of *shirk*) handed down from the medieval period, and Sufism as a system of conceptual knowledge, which had its own discursive domain. In the later period, when *kathmullahs* were turned into institutionally trained *munshis* and *maulavis*, the systematization of *pir* culture and the re-orientation of *Sufi* systems, both conceptual and practical, could also be observed as part of the reformist agenda in Bengal since the late nineteenth century<sup>16</sup>.

Reformists were severely critical of the *pirs* who had become authorities of local Islamic worlds since the inception of Islam in different parts of the Indian sub-continent. Though transfer of scriptural knowledge was initiated in the hands of *Sufi* masters like Syed Sultan, Muhammad Khan, and others who had enough exposure to the scriptural and narrative sources of Islam, the folk population was gradually brought under the authority of the local *pirs*, who were not that well versed in the scriptural sources, and offered their loosely structured interpretations of Islam to the vernacular speaking masses—this was basically an admixture of mythology and narrative, qualified by their personal charisma<sup>17</sup>. By interpreting Islam in not-so-*shariyati* ways for the vernacular masses and intervening in their world with their charismatic personalities, the *pirs* had created an evolved system of intercession which came to be considered as *shirk* by the reformist preachers. The personalities, inclinations and scriptural ignorance of the *pirs* and the practices they followed and preached, now marked as *shirk* and *bid'at* in reformist rhetoric, were considered to have been the major causes behind the decline and dilution of Islam, which in turn was considered as having resulted in the political downfall under the colonial regime. The

---

<sup>16</sup> This is discussed in greater detail in chapter IV.

<sup>17</sup> Major work has been done on these charismatic *pirs*. Tony Stewart, *Fabulous Female and Peerless Pirs: Tales of Mad Adventure in Old Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

manner in which Shah Wali Allah condemned the cult of unorthodox *pirs* and the masses, who were thoroughly impressed and controlled by these cults, set the tune for the reformist antagonism towards the sensory and the physical of the ritual, as also towards any practice which was, for the reformists, a deviation from *tauhid*, i.e. Allah's oneness.

One should not become a disciple of contemporary Sufis because they are engaged in various *bida'* [impious innovations]. Do not be taken in just because they pretend to work miracles and the masses are impressed by them. The zealotry of the masses is due mainly to their sheepish imitation, which is always in variance with reality. With the exception of a few, these contemporary miracle-mongers regard magic and trick as miracles<sup>18</sup>.

This antagonism, as expressed in Shah Wali Allah's testament quoted above, was generally followed by the *Tariqah* and the *Faraizi* movements alike in Bengal, who, while differing from each other in ideological terms, vilified all sensory ways of practicing and performing Islam. *Urs*, *milad*, *fatiha* and *muharram* — every ceremony that gathered impulse from the local polytheistic rites and rituals was condemned as un-Islamic. Thus, a profound change, as an effect of reformist Islam, was experienced by the Muslims in Bengal in their religious-social ideologies and in their understanding of the Muslim collective during the mid nineteenth century. These changes crucial to the emergence of a new sense of identity, in various forms and discourses generated around these movements, were not only evident in scholarly print endeavours, but were also expressed in a whole array of cheap books, and through events like *bahas* and *waz mehfils* held in urban religious centres, as also in the districts. Depending on the varied literacy levels of the masses across towns and villages, interpretive communities emerged with their own developing ideas about Islam and the collective. From the arguments performed at the *bahas* sessions across villages between antagonistic sects, both within reformism itself, and in between reformist and traditionalist sects, the changing religious scenario at

---

<sup>18</sup> Shah Wali Allah, *Shah Wali Allah's Last Testament*, quoted in Pearson, p.27.



the ideational level, as well as at the level of practice, was apparent. The reception of ideas was not monolithic as audiences—with different exposures, orientations to, and interpretations of scriptures, practices of orality-performative, script and general access to literacy—perceived these debates and responded to them through various means. But as Rafiuddin Ahmed points out, the cheap prints and *bahas-waz* were an effect of the early reform movements, which awakened the sense of an imagined community in a mass which remained physically unconnected and separated most of the times of the year by flood water, without being aware of each other's shared belongingness to some bigger collective<sup>19</sup>.

*Urs, milad* and *muharram*—were all performative rituals with close textual connections, and it is difficult to separate the domain of literature from the ritual, as together they created the devotional repertoire. These rituals were the constant targets of the Muslim religious leaders, fundamentalists, and later the learned *munshis* and *maulavis*, as being forms of deviation from a scripture-based *shariyati* Islam. The immediate consequence of the rise of Islamic reform movements, as Rafiuddin Ahmad illustrates, was the aggravation of sectarian and communal tension expressed in religious, as well as economic, terms<sup>20</sup>. The inter-communal tension between the reformers and the land-owning class of society affected the *zamindar-ryot* relationship, involving the reformers where the peasants functioned as a part of the entire Muslim community. Intra communal tension was part and parcel of any socio-religious consciousness, expressed in terms of agrarian unrest and sectarian disagreement within the community. Sectarian disagreements produced a polemic of religious ideologies, expressed in printed and performed dialogues, debates, and arguments as a result of the conflicting rivalry and jealousy between the religious authorities of *Tariqah, Faraizi, Taiyuni*, and later *Hanafi* and *Ahl-e-Hadis* platforms, so obsessively and egoistically upholding their respective ideological lines<sup>21</sup>. The interpretive communities-within, thus, produced mutually clashing and

---

<sup>19</sup> Ahmad, 1981, p.35.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.50.

<sup>21</sup> I will be discussing the *Hanafi* and *Ahl-e-Hadis* in chapters five and six, while here in chapters two and three, I talk about the debate and dialogue between the early reformist platforms exclusively.

also overlapping narratives to validate their respective claims in order to uphold an authentic form of Islam. While there were conflicts between the *Tariqah* and the *Faraizi* reformers over the legitimacy of *jihad* and *juma namaz*, and over the right *path* to follow Muhammad—the traditionalist *mullahs* were constantly producing serious counter-propaganda by issuing *fatwas* (scriptural injunction or prohibition) and counter-*fatwas* against the reformers to hold on to the monopoly that they used to have over the rural masses prior to the reform movements. These traditionalist *mullahs*, or the *kathmullah* as they were named by the reformists in their discourses, were also prompt in defining *shirk* and *bid'at*, while condemning the reformers, to validate themselves as the authentic bearers of Islamic knowledge.

There were sincere attempts from within every sectarian fold to find what authentic Islam was and to posit oneself as the truthful bearer of that Islam, by defending themselves and refuting the enemy. A host of names for the other was invented at this time—often by borrowing from doctrinal sources the names of existing sects and sub-sects with whom their own reformist ideologies did not coincide—and was put to use to define and refute the enemy within. *Shia*, *Khareji*, *Rafegi*, *Nechari* are among the few who were repeatedly named, marked, otherised and vilified, as the attributes of those sects and sub-sects could not be appropriated or assimilated by the reformist platforms. The names and characteristics of these sects, came to overlap and blur with age to some extent, as their historical sectarian differences were not what reformist Islam was particularly concerned with. Rather, it created a monolithic other-within by not considering specificities. All such sects became the markers of the living and continuing residual heterodox-heteroprax cultures, which reformist Islam wanted to vilify and disown as false forms of Islam.

There is ample evidence that compels us to think that the reformist efforts, no matter how painstaking they were, could not succeed in obliterating heterodox sensibilities so strongly evident in the dynamics of popular piety. What is more important to note here is that, neither the traditionalist *mullahs* who were the backbone of the religious ideology of a previous era, nor popular *pirism*, were fully obliterated with the advent of reformed

Islam. Similarly, ceremonies and rituals like *fatiha*, *milad*, *urs* and *muharram* continued to exist even after a rigorous process of Islamization of the masses in rural Bengal. Imtiyaz Ahmad describes the Islamicate world of this era as one of a peaceful coexistence of the high Islamic and the custom-centred traditions ‘as complementary and integral parts of a single common religious system’<sup>22</sup>. But from the evidence available to us of continuing accretion of the local religious-aesthetic systems into forms of popular piety, such peaceful co-existence can hardly be deduced without an awareness of the aggressive hegemony of the orthodox over the lived and the ritualistic. According to Francis Robinson on the other hand, this was a dynamic situation where law-based Islam and custom-centred traditions over-determined each other<sup>23</sup>. Robinson, rather, would like us to apply Aziz Ahmad’s and Clifford Geertz’s readings of the processes of Islamization to understand instances in India, which hint at a slow but gradual overshadowing of heterodox and heteroprax little traditions by an orthodox and orthoprax great tradition<sup>24</sup>. Aziz Ahmad considers the folk and syncretic elements in Indian Islam as mere temporal anomalies which would eventually be eliminated by the actions of Muslim reformers<sup>25</sup>. For Clifford Geertz, ‘the typical mode of Islamization’ is,

[...] painfully gradual. First comes the confession of faith, then the other pillars, then the certain observance of law, and finally, perhaps, especially as a scholarly tradition develops and takes hold, a certain amount of learning in the law and the Qur’an and the Hadis upon which it rests. The intricate norms, doctrines, explications, and annotations that make up Islam, or at least Sunni Islam, can be apprehended only step by step, as one comes to control, to a greater or lesser degree, the scriptural sources upon which it rests. [...] Islamic conversion is not, as a rule, a sudden, total, overwhelming illumination but a slow turning towards a new light’<sup>26</sup>.

---

<sup>22</sup> Imtiyaz Ahmad, *Ritual and Religion among Muslims in India*, 1981, p.15

<sup>23</sup> Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*, 2000, p.46

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pp.46-47

<sup>25</sup> Aziz Ahmad, *An Intellectual History of Islam in India* (Edinburg: University of Edinburg Press, 1969).

<sup>26</sup> Discussed in Imtiyaz Ahmad, 1981, pp.8-11.

Imtiyaz Ahmad does not think that the models proposed by Aziz Ahmad and Clifford Geertz apply to the Indian situation, as he argues that the orthodox and the orthoprax have been living peacefully in India. Francis Robinson criticizes Imtiyaz Ahmad for not being able to see any dynamism within Islam, and for relying heavily on the idea of syncretism, and proposes a more dynamic model in contradistinction to Imtiyaz Ahmad, who fails to bring in a historical context for understanding behaviour as dynamic and fluid. The study of the change in ritualistic expressions themselves, in the context of reformist hegemony, can expand the understanding of ritual as a process, and enable us to mark genuine shifts in religious orientation even while we are following the same sign system. ‘Saint worship’, as Robinson interjects, revealed gradients of Islamization, while retaining its close connection to old belief systems<sup>27</sup>. While there was a constant anxiety and antipathy in all the reformist positions towards the figurative expressions of piety—manifested through saint worshipping, praying at the graveyard, *urs* and *milad*—there were constant modifications of these ceremonies, to render them fit for a newly found reformist consciousness about religion. *Fatiha* and *milad*, as practices, were constantly being negotiated to make them valid expressions of a reformist Prophet-centrism while minimizing their physical and sensory aspects. The *ulama* of *Firangi Mahal*, as well as the *Hanafi mullahs* and *maulavis* of the late nineteenth century sought to alter the practice of praying at the grave by prohibiting lighting of the lamp so as to make it Islamic and associate it with a reformed version of *Ishabesawaal*<sup>28</sup>.

When we consider the scenario in Bengal, a multivocal and multilayered reality emerges, where reform began as a communal expression, articulated in terms of a class war between the Hindu landlords and their Muslim *ryots* (peasants) in the *Faraizi* revolt and in Titu Mir’s insurgency, but was not

---

<sup>27</sup> Robinson, 2000, p.47.

<sup>28</sup> The argument between the Jewish leader Abdullah Ibnu Salam and Prophet Muhammad which proved the theological superiority of Islam and culminated in the subsequent conversion of Ibnu Salam became a meta-narrative and meta-form generating a number of texts related to knowledge and conversion. *Ishabe Sawal* written in Bangla with a reformist sensibility, was the alternative offered to the masses to minimize the sensory aspects of prayer at the graves.

limited simply to a Hindu-Muslim class war. Constant conflict between different reformist schools, as well as between the reformist schools and traditionalist forums, held the rural masses in thrall and they in turn, responded to all these ideas transmitted in various forms. In this chapter, I will try to trace the formation of an imagined community, as envisaged by the different movements in this context—it was a process, which, while having the same goal of perfecting the ways of observing *farz* and *ad'ab*, as the means by which one could become a true Muslim, followed widely diverse paths. The following sections will be an exercise in positing and analysing the narrativization of Karbala in the context of these debates and arguments, sometimes overlapping, but more often in conflict with each other, in order to attain the Islamic in the real practical sense as well as at an ideational level.

While the paths were theoretically different, and zealously guarded, and debated over, the common impulse to go back to the authentic form of Islam meant it was crucially important to reformulate the figure of the Prophet, in what Francis Robinson calls a shift from an other-worldly Islam to a this-worldly Islam<sup>29</sup>. In the heated debate over the correct ways of performing *farz*, reform movements, especially *Tariqah-e-Muhammadiya*, proposed a scriptural model for understanding the figure of the Prophet Muhammad, made emotionally and historically viable as the central figure which could bind the community together<sup>30</sup>. While *Tariqah e Muhammadiya* was keen on re-defining the Prophet as the Perfect Man, in order to go back to the Prophetic *sunnat* and *hadis* traditions, other reformist platforms, directly opposed to or shifting away from *Tariqah* and from each other—like *Hanafi* and *Ahl-e-Hadis*, *Deoband* or *FiringiMahal*—also clung on to the Prophet so as to claim and reclaim the Prophetic *sunnah* (inscriptions prescribed by the Prophet in the *hadis* literature). In a host of literary genres continuing from the early modern period, or having emerged during the reform movements—which either celebrated the birth of the Prophet, or his military exploits, or commemorated his death—one

---

<sup>29</sup> Robinson, *ibid*, p9.

<sup>30</sup> Pearson, 2008.

can discern a laborious shift from a *Sufi*-centric piety to a Prophet-centric piety. Muhammad became the ideal figure, and his life experiences became the prescribed mode of becoming an ideal Muslim in this newly arranged interpretive literary space. As already mentioned, within a broader repertoire of reformed and reformulated religiosity, modes of belief and practice were prescribed and didactically produced through discursive writings to transform the performative-ritualistic piety related to Prophet Muhammad. A close study of Prophet-centric piety can, thus, enable one to deduce that individual responsibility in religious matters invoked a this-worldly-Islam and contributed to the formation of an Islamic modernity, and consequently, of an educated Muslim middle class.

As the Prophet's life became an ideal model, his kinship, irrespective of sectarian affiliations, for the reformist platforms, religious intelligentsia, and new traditionalist *Hanafis* alike, became an affective-ideological structure to be taken as the core of piety. Starting from the scriptural efforts, to different forms of popular and folk piety, the figure of Muhammad, along with his daughter Fatima, son-in-law Imam Ali and two grand-sons Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn, taken together as the *pak-panjatan* (i.e. the sacred five—Muhammad, Ali, Fatema, Hasan and Husayn), created a valid ground for understanding Islamic ideals and devotionism. As the sequel to the Prophet's life, the battle of Karbala, where his grandson Imam Husayn is killed, became a narrative stock equivalent to the life the Prophet, to illustrate the notion of willing sacrifice for the betterment of the *ummah* (i.e. the community of the Prophet) as a central ideal for the Muslim individual. That everything that happened was pre-destined, in the pure form, as a concept, caused the figure of *the* martyr of Karbala, Imam Husayn, to emerge as parallel to the Prophet, as a character embodying the ethics of the community.

Here we should refer to the *pir*-centric piety that was instrumental in creating and transcreating texts, ranging from the *qissas* on love and war, to the sacred lives of the Prophet and his grandsons, and inaugurating a religious sensibility within the masses. *Tauhid* and the prophethood of Muhammad were refracted through the presence of the *Sufi pirs*, who held

on to the sacredness of Muhammad and his progeny as their religious possession and as constituting the core of piety, thus coming into conflict with the fundamentalist reformists who wanted to claim the same for their idea of a reformed Islam.

Thus, a unique paradox emerged in the age of the reform movements. While the Karbala narrative repertoire was highlighted as an integral part of Prophet-centric piety, which was formulated and proposed by the reformists and later traditionalists alike, the performative tradition of *muharram* was thoroughly attacked as *shirk* and *bid'at* by both. The Muslim community was pleaded with, persuaded and persistently pressed upon to distance themselves from everything connected to the 'heretical' practices of *muharram* while at the same time positing the grandsons of the Prophet (the very martyrs who were grieved for in the observance of *muharram*) as the ideal models of devotionism for the Bengal Muslims.

While *muharram* was overtly condemned in the discursive practices of both the reformists and the traditionalists in good measure, the theme of Karbala was carried forward as a valid source and context of history, social ideal and religiosity in the modernist approach, which sought to consolidate the search for identity for the Bengal Muslims. To understand the contours of this search, we need to look into the trials and trysts of the Bengal Muslim community with the contemporary print culture, which induced forms of piety for the cohesion of a community that might not have followed a singular pattern.

As I have already discussed in the previous chapter, within print culture there resides the inclination and aspiration of various ages, and we cannot delineate a linear evolutionary transformation. In this section, we will attempt to cover authors across a very wide time frame, from Heyat Mamud from the first half of the eighteenth century to Qazi Aminul Haq who wrote his *Jungnama* in the 1940s. Though Heyat Mamud and Garibullah both predated print culture, their assimilation and iconic status in early print culture make them very important cases for our study of the relationship between print culture and piety. We will look closely at Karbala narratives

written by Jonab Ali (*Maktul Husayn*), Muhammad Munshi (*Shahid e Karbala*), Saad Ali and Abdul Wahhab (*Shahid e Karbala*), Muhammad Eshak Uddin (*Dastan Shahid e Karbala*), and Qazi Aminul Hak (*Jung e Karbala*) in this context.

The most intriguing issue here is, as we posit the narrativization of Karbala within a bigger framework of conflicting and consenting religious ideologies, the autonomy of the literary cannot be preserved; rather, the literary needs to be placed within the social polemic of the time. Most of the Karbala authors in the cheap print culture connected themselves with the discursive religious network in curious ways. Authors who were producing narratives about the battle of Karbala were the authors of romance and didactic manuals at the same time, thus creating a unique repertoire or literary system encompassing several different genres.

*Nasihatinama*, that is the didactic manuals, were beginning to prescribe the basic outlines of obligatory prayers and rituals (*farz*), which became more structured and also started defining and defying groups and individuals in terms of how they qualified with respect to the criteria set out in these manuals. The failure to perform *namaz* in a manner prescribed—as one of the very basic criteria of conducting *farz*—became a marker for identifying the ‘other’ prevalent in the *nasihatnama* genre. Gradually, an understanding of a pious life emerged, based on the strict observance of the essential practices of Islam in opposition to un-Islamic rituals and rites. What is important to note here is that, though the early modern narratives and scriptures frequently referred to the obliteration of the *kafir*, a comprehensive way of distinguishing, otherising and identifying the other was not clear in local socio-religious terms. The gradual solidification of a community consciousness was attempted through the performance of *farz*, which, in combination with *iman*, started becoming key words for the identification of the true Muslim. *Nasihatinama* and *shariyatnama* were the two instructive genres which enjoyed the status of being almost the only sources of such instructions for the masses, even after the translations of the *Qur’an* and the *Hadis* were available in the vernacular. While the reformist sensibilities so inculcated were motivating the community to imagine an



end designed for one and all, if *farz* was strictly followed—*behesht*, or paradise, emerged as a sensuous space of indulgence denied in this life, but promised afterwards as the reward for one's abstinence. Between the *marga* (*grand*) and the *lok* (little), emerged different layers of the *jan* (popular) forms of piety, which were being produced constantly through transactions between a *shariyati* rigidity and the more polemic process of making it accessible to the masses.

## 2.2 Popular Piety between Scripture and *Kathmullah*: Conflict and Consensus

What strikes us in the first place, when we enter the domain of popular print from the early modern, is the sudden need felt by the authors of Karbala to attest the narrative with *hadis* citations. Expressions like—‘রওয়াকেত মতে শুন জীবনী দাস্তান’, [listen to the tale as told by the *hadis* teachers] ‘এইমত লিখিয়াছে রাব্বি রওয়াকেতে’ [thus wrote the *hadis* teachers in their discourses] ‘রওয়াকেতে রাবি লোগ কহে এ প্রকার’ [in the religious discourse, the teachers of *hadis* spoke thus]—affirmed scriptural inclinations and narrative situations re-arranged according to the reformist ideals. This constant reference to the *hadis* traditions not only authenticated the source of the narrative in popular print but also produced the literary community, i.e. the community of readers/listeners, as belonging to a particular imagined community. With the non-scriptural variants of narrative situations and emotions still prevailing, the Karbala narratives in popular print carried the impressions of new ideas and sensibilities emerging out of the debates and declarations over and about this imagined community, though not always in direct and overt ways. We can see that the need to authenticate the source of the sacred characters in history brought in generic innovations and thematic variations.

After the *hamd* (the praise of Allah) and *naat* (the praise of Muhammad) sections, Qazi Eshak Uddin had to include the names of the scriptures from which his narrative on Karbala was rendered. Also, at every narrative juncture, Jonab Ali and Sa'ad Ali-Abdul Wahhab continued to refer to

the source *hadis* texts. Karbala narratives took a new generic shape when separate chapters were named with *hadis* citations. But, we can always enquire whether there were connections between the external socio-religious transformations and the internal textual issues. The believer is asked to utter the name of Allah in the beginning of the narrative (‘আল্লা আল্লা বল ভাই সকল মোমিন’ —utter the supreme name of Allah, O believers), or asked to pray a *darood* (salutation) after any sacred name is mentioned in the text. Such new invocations and activities, inclinations and attitudes, involving the audience/readers in the cheap print culture, show the basic elements of the literary community as now being marked by religious identity through the redefinition of theme and genre.

The inclusive category of the audience in the medieval and the early modern textual traditions did not specify a religious affiliation for their implied audience. Within popular print culture on the other hand, the audience was attributed a more definitive position as being the ‘people of religion’—‘দেল লাগাইয়া শুন যত দিনদার’ [listen with your heart, O believers]. It can be said that, in this age of new channels of communication and new sensibilities towards religion, a new sense of identity was emerging out of all the genres that the print culture was producing. That the narratives on Karbala evidently addressed and shared the same implied reader/audience with the religious tracts, manuals and prescriptive writings, points to the emergence of interstitial spaces between genres, and indicates a common goal for a literary community with certain shared elements of identification. In the speech of the Prophet, the imagined community—the *ummah* of the Prophet—was consolidated for the audience in the language of affective belongingness. The Prophet wanted to bear the punishment that was allotted to the people belonging to his *ummah* and asked the angel of death to spare his people.

শোন আজরাইল আমি বলি যে তোমায় ।  
একবার সেদত করনা আমায় ।  
আমার ওক্ষত বড় জইফি কমজোর ।  
তাদের বদলে কর আমার উপর ।।  
আমার উপরে কর সেদত সবার ।

যাতে আজিয়েতে বাঁচে ওক্ষত আমার ।।

(Muhammad Munshi, *Asal Shahide Karbala*)

This is not to say that this affective connection between the Prophet and his *ummah* was a paradigmatically new theme in print culture following the emergence of reformist ideas. The pre-print early modern scribal culture had also constantly referred to *ummat*, and the Prophet's emotive-ethical connection to it, to form a community around the sacred figure of the Prophet. Sayyid Sultan, the author of *Nabivamsa*, wanted to replace the affective universe of the community which still had Ram and Krishna—in their epic and familial incarnations and stories— dominating their narrative and religious imagination.

সদাই পড়য়ে রাম কৃষ্ণর যে কথা ।

শুনিয়া মোহর মনে লাগে অতি ব্যথা ।। *নবীবংশ*, সৈয়দ সুলতান

Poets of the early modern period narrativized the moment in which the death of the Prophet's grandsons was anticipated with utmost care to induce an affective energy in the literary community which would enable it to mark itself with that affect. No narrative failed to domesticize the larger-than-life figure of the Prophet who resonated with the medieval *Bhakti-Sufi* oriented affect. The emotion towards the sacred figures was brought down to the realm of the familiar and the familial by imagining a personal bond with the divine figures, and Muhammad, though a mortal, became a substitute for the divine, in a manner that replicated the *Bhakti-Sufi* fervour. It was necessary to cast Muhammad's intense attachment with his grandsons as familial and familiar, it was a historical need to attest and confirm Muhammad's position in the devotional landscape of Bengal, where a new literary community was emerging around Islamic sacred characters. This familial bond between Prophet Muhammad and his grandsons served to fulfil a paradoxical situation in the narrative. First, by placing him within familiar-familiar reason, this sequence made both the Prophet and his grandsons affectively acceptable to a newly converted literary community. But the acute emotion with which he was placed in the Sufi vocabulary could actually have been counter-productive if he was to be

posited as the leader of the community, as someone who was expected to have an objective rational vision and position vis-à-vis the community, which was more than the subjective attachment of a mortal individual. Absolute affect would confine him to the mortal domain, where sacrifice of the self was the only way through which the absolute cause of the community could be served. The narrative, then, by showing this familial affect as counter-productive for the ideological spearhead of the community, created a narrative situation where the death of the Prophet's grandsons was prescribed by Allah to give him the opportunity to act like a Prophet. Here, in this divine scheme, Muhammad, though a mortal human being, was re-confirmed as the chosen one when he, as a Prophet, was assigned to suffer in anticipation of the death of his dearest ones and withstand the suffering. That he was able to withstand pain in a non-attached, non-familial, non-subjective manner placed him as the Prophet over mortal familial humans and also, in turn, secured the community as one which was destined to be doomed because of the Prophet's mortal attachments. Now, with the advent of print culture, the narrative space was expanded to its fullest extent to make the audience/reader understand the relevance of an identity, which solidified not only around a familial bond, but was extended to other viable relational values necessary for creating belongingness and collectivity. What the Prophet thought, and how he acted for the *ummah*, became a template for the ordinary Muslims, for whom, the primary task of being a Muslim was to belong to the *ummah*. The ethical-moral codes began to be consolidated at this juncture, not only through the reinvigoration of the *nasihatnama* genre, but also through the new culture of writing *sirat* (hagiographies) and the Karbala narratives, where these ideals were not only prescribed but were also already embodied and enacted by the Prophet and his grandsons. Eshak Uddin's Muhammad, like in any narrative, thus always remains perturbed by his concern about the future of his *ummah*.

ওক্ষতের কি হইবে কি হবে উপায়।

জইফ ওক্ষত মেরা ভাবি তার দায়।। এসহাকউদ্দীন



With the advent of reformist sensibility, the public anxiety over the Prophet's death was not an exclusive issue in the *sirat* or in the Karbala narratives. Generic and thematic overlaps with the instructional manuals could also be discerned in the Prophet-centric piety shared by the *sirat*-Karbala and *nasihatnama* and also in the shared anxiety over the inheritance of his spiritual status in matters of governance. Now, *ummat* was more like an enterprise centred on a public understanding of how a core group constituted by the Prophet's companions undertook the political responsibility of the community after the death of the Prophet, as well as the emotional import of the pre-destined loss of his grandsons. Characters and issues chosen specifically for this purpose, were now given considerable narrative space—like the age-old debate over the legitimacy of Abu-Bakr versus Ali as the first rightful caliph of the *ummah*—emphases were redrawn, and histories re-told about the last days of the life of the Prophet, to secure a connection between the Karbala narratives and the Prophetic *sirat*, or biographical literature.

This connection, while ensuring an overlap between the life of the Prophet and the fate of the community, was played out in the language of Prophet-centric piety. Even while the acutely affective language described the organic love between the Prophet and his grandsons, it never failed to depict the Prophet as sitting on the throne of Arab. Whenever there was a throne being cited, the inheritance of the throne became the next issue that needed to be resolved. The miraculous deeds of Imam Hasan and Husayn and the oracle predicting their pre-mature deaths, as told by Zibryl to the Prophet, which used to inaugurate the early modern texts, were now pushed to a later episode. These narratives now began by recounting the death of the Prophet and the anxiety over the caliphate, and once the question of inheritance was resolved, by using a kind of flashback technique, which brought back episodes from the life of the Prophet to explain the eventual death of his grandsons. It was clear that the episode of martyrdom could no longer be placed in the narrative before the issues of spiritual and political inheritance were secured by the Prophet, and the devotional landscape—vis-à-vis the caliphate—affirmed after his death. Sometimes the private

space of the Prophet's emotion and the public domain of the state were connected when Muhammad spoke of the preordained death of his grandsons to his companions at the public gatherings. Thus, the early modern narrative setting of the oracle, which took place in the domain of the family, was now resituated within the Islamic public to create a link and equivalence between the two, the private familial and the public Islamic state, and to demonstrate that it was impossible to imagine one without the other. Devotion towards the Prophet and his grandsons could never be imagined and realised without the context of a proper positioning of the Prophetic family —the *ahl ul-bayt*, and governance—represented by the caliphate. Any form of piety or devotionism that went against this mutually implicated delineation of the *ahl ul-bayt* and the caliphate was vilified and declared to be false by the authors, who were laying down the rudiments of the ideal Islamic way of life and an ideal imagined community. Both the Shias as a community which followed an alternative interpretation of the inheritance, and the observance of *muharram* as an alternative form of devotionism, were marked and denigrated, and the Shias thus became the target of attack for possessing and performing un-Islamic sensibilities.

What we can see from this narrative culture is the emergence of a profile of the Prophet which not only secured the emotional need of a community as being the head of *ahl ul-bayt*, but also as the head of a religious-ethical-political system which all the reformist sects claimed. *Siratul-Mustaqim* (the straight path) was a term propounded by the *Tariqah e Muhammadiya* preachers to show a direct connection with the Prophetic *sunnah*<sup>31</sup> disregarding later interpretations by theologians who propounded the notion of *mazhab*. Later interpretations of the *hadis* proposed and propounded by four Sunni philosophers and theoreticians of *fiqh*, i.e. the *shariyati* law, divided Sunni Islam into four *mazhabs*—*Hanafi*, *Shaifi*, *Hanbali* and *Malaiki*.

---

<sup>31</sup> Pearson, pp.82-89.

*Sirat al-Mustaqim*, written in Persian by Maulavi Ismail Shah about the thoughts and deeds of Sayyid Ahmad Brelwi, the unparalleled leader of the *Tariqah*, is the most complete articulation of the ideology of *Tariqah*. It is the first printed tract of the movement published in Calcutta, in 1823. The term was claimed in order to secure the authenticity of the Prophet even by those platforms which were vehemently opposed to *Tariqah* for its disavowal of *mazhab*. However, the Karbala narratives that I have found and discussed in this thesis cannot be read as propaganda texts for any of the sects—whether reformist or traditionalist, but rather, bear evidence of the complexity of their conflicts and consensus over the true form of Islam.

It is necessary to take account of how the local traditionalist *mullahs* at first felt threatened by the new scriptural references, and very often countered the reformist attempts by citing references from non-doctrinal sources. But they gradually came closer to the doctrinal sources and transformed their foundation of religiosity. Thus, while countering the reformist zeal, the traditionalists imbibed some elements from the reformist ideas, just as the reformist schools, in articulating reformist ideals, replicated mass oriented narrative formats as a creative ploy to address the needs of the market and better utilise its reach. While the community was fractured within itself with internal conflicts and disagreements, belongingness was sought through the creation and manipulation of a set of common symbols and overlapping ideas. Though reformist discourses and colonial administrative writings document and suggest how the reform movements succeeded in transforming vast areas of north and eastern India, in actuality, more polyvalent and ambiguous zones of religious transaction appeared between several layers of society. Hunter writes, in his book *The Indian Mussalmans*, that the initial mistrust towards the reformers in the rural areas was gradually washed away with time<sup>32</sup>. Hunter goes on to describe how the reform movements eventually progressed ‘down the whole course of the Ganges’, through the districts, and how a frenzied mass ‘flocked’ to see Sayyid Ahmad Brelwi when he visited Calcutta<sup>33</sup>. While Sayyid Ahmad

---

<sup>32</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmad, 1981, p47

<sup>33</sup> Hunter, p.13, 99.



Brelwi appointed a *khalifa* (the next administrator after him, and heir of the reformist master's knowledge system and missionary activities, selected from among his disciples)—Maulana Wilayat Ali (1791–1835)—and formulated a specific administrative policy at Patna to organize the large number of newly found disciples, no similar examples have been documented for Bengal in any official administrative and or narrative sources. Though it is true that the *Tariqah e Muhammadiya*'s ideal of *jihad*, as propounded by Shah Abdul Aziz, the son of Shah Wali Allah, came to be preached extensively by two Patna caliphs Maulana Inayet Ali (1794–1858) and Wilayat Ali (1791–1835) in the districts of Bengal, it is not clear whether the *Tariqah* established a system of appointing *khalifas* in Bengal. Yet, the influence of *Tariqah* was as strong as the *Faraizi* movement. The *Faraizi* and the *Tariqah* movements, as complementary to each other, brought almost all of Bengal under the influence of a reformist sensibility. The *Tariqah* movement, with the Patna school as its later offshoot, was more influential in the rural districts, urban and suburban centres across Dinajpur, Malda, Rajshahi, Murshidabad, Nadia, Burdwan, Jessore, Calcutta and the 24 Parganas while the *Faraizis* were instrumental in spreading reformist ideals in the districts of lower Bengal.

When Sayyid Ahmad and Shah Ismail, the two pioneers of the *Tariqah* movement, started preaching in Delhi, Haji Shariatullah (1781–1840), began to advocate *Faraizi* ideologies in Eastern Bengal. *Tariqah* became a known doctrine in several districts of Bengal as a result of the initiative taken by the two Patna *khalifas*, Maulana Inayet Ali and Waliyat Ali, with the latter becoming the next *khalifa* after the death of Sayyid Ahmad in the battle of Balakot in 1831. Haji Shariatullah's *Faraizi* movement—which came into being as an indigenous reform movement in 1818—continued till the first decade of the twentieth century, when the militant tone of its religious politics was diluted after the incarceration of Dudu Mian by the British government.

Sayyid Ahmad Shahid's disciple Mir Nisar Ali, more popularly known as Titu Mir, returned to his district 24 Parganas to initiate purification movements as an offshoot of *Tariqah* and excelled in his campaigns against

*shirk* and *bid'at*. It is quite impossible to discern which of these movements or impetuses garnered the most popularity or influence at the time, and between the competitive reform movements and their rivals the traditionalist *mullahs*, the age is best considered as one of conflict, debate, mutual influence and criss-crossing of these various sects.

*Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* and the *Faraizi* were in fact the earliest and most notable fundamentalist reformist attempts in bringing about 'remarkable change'<sup>34</sup> in the religious ideology and social configuration of the Muslims in Bengal. In the later period, especially after 1857, more new reform movements and ramifications of the older reformist schools started to exert their influence over the Muslim population of this subcontinent.

There were the Patna School, the *Taiyuni*, and the *Ahl-e-Hadis* as offshoots of *Tariqah*, and Deoband and *Ahl-e Sunnat* as new movements, creating mutual transactions and transpositions, reformulating the relationship between the enemy within and without, in sectarian terms, and also in terms of their relationship with the colonizer. The early reform movements were also changing their anti-colonialist stance and adopting moderate forms of reform as a result of gradual negotiations between rival politics and religious ideologies. The preliminary antagonism between the reformist and the traditionalist positions took on a different shape in the later period when sectarian autonomy began to be defused on some issues; for instance, *Tariqah* disclaimed any *mazhabi* jurisprudence, but its offshoot *Taiyuni* imbibed a *mazhabi* stance. The staunch anti-British militancy of the *Faraizis* was gradually diminished in favour of more moderate terms with the British. This was the beginning of an overlap with other sectarian ideals, and with the British, which gave rise to a moderate reformist Islam, and in connection to the British, this succeeded in raising issues of economic reform. Negotiation with the British was a deliberate move to express demands of social equality and economic upgradation of the community when the Muslim community realized how far it had fallen, not

---

<sup>34</sup>Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Quest for Relevance*, p39

only in terms of religious language, but also in terms of socio-economic marginalization, in comparison to its Hindu counterpart.

Regarding the authority of the Prophet, in the process of purifying Islam of *bed'ati* practices, i.e. practices deriving from *bid'at* or innovation, the *Faraizis* belonged to the same plane of theosophical programme as the *Wahhabis* and the *Tariqah e Muhammadiya* while at the same time differing from the latter two in some matters. While *Tariqah e Muhammadiya*, following Shah Wali Allah, advocated following *ittiba e sunnah*, that is, the *sunnah* of the Prophet without following the *mazhabi* interventions, *Faraizis* identified themselves with the *Hanafis*. While *Tariqah* wanted to diminish the importance of the law-makers, i.e. the four Sunni imams—Hanifa, Shaifi, Maleiki and Hambali—and introduced individual capacity i.e. *ijtihad* (independent judgement on religious matters) instead of *taqlid* (consensus, and adherence to one's respective *mazhab*, or school of law as the premise of such consensus), the *Faraizis* attested to *ijtihad* as an action of the Imam (Hanifa) that should be followed as *taqlid*<sup>35</sup>. After the death of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, *Tariqah* branched out into the Patna school, the Taiyuni school of Maulana Keramat Ali Jaunpuri, and *Ahl-e-Hadis* in the 1820s, while *Deoband* and *Ahl-e-Sunnat* emerged as later additions to the reformist discourse after the 1857 Revolt. In 1867, Maulana Muhammad Qasim Natautawi (1833–1877) and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829–1905) founded the *Deobandi* Movement in Deoband which impacted upon the remotest corners of Bengal, increasing the inter-sectarian conflict and also the sense of belongingness to a collective, i.e. the Muslim *ummah*; while also creating the scope for the traditionalists to reformulate their positions through *Deobandi* madrasa education. Sayyid Ahmad Reza Khan was the person behind the emergence of the *Ahl-e-Sunnat* movement which took shape in the 1880s and 1890s, and we need to trace its impact in Bengal, since it remains yet unexplored.

These conflicts, gradual overlaps and negotiations have been well 'archived' in the narratives of *nasihatnama* and *bahas* literature, journals,

---

<sup>35</sup> Muinun Din Ahmad Khan, *Banglaye Faraizi Andoloner Itihas* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2007), pp. 40-52.

and also in the activities of their respective *anjumans*. One of the important issues in the reformist debate, in the formation of ideological specificity, was the question of *taqlid* versus *ijtihad* as the valid channel for attaining the knowledge of *sunnah*. Also important were the questions of *ijma* (consensus) and *qiyas* (analogy). The popular print through which all the genres mentioned above proliferated, bears evidence of the debates and discussions on all these conceptual questions central to the reformist ideals. Shah Wali Allah proposed *ijtihad*, minimizing the significance of *taqlid*, which to him was a blind following of the interpretation of the Prophetic *sunnah*. *Ijma* and *qiyas* became the two means through which the *ulama* could preach and establish *ijtihad*. In the late nineteenth century *Ahl-e-Hadis* attempted to narrow the scope of *ijma* and *qiyas* which pushed them to rely more and more upon direct connection to the Prophetic *sunnah* and also to the Prophetic lineage. The explanation of their name and the devotionism produced through their reform work, delineated and strengthened the Prophet-centric piety which was not always confined to the *Ahl-e-Hadis*<sup>36</sup>. These ideas created the productive condition for popular piety where the Prophet became the most directly connectable and reachable common denominator for the masses not so well versed in the theological debates that made this denomination possible.

Throughout this period, major antagonism was also created against the local *pirs* who actually provided the converted masses with the security of a new religion. Local *pirs* in the pre-colonial contact period were able to achieve this power over the vernacular masses through the affective processes of the narrative they transcreated and recited. High theories about reform thus collided not merely with the *sabiqi* platforms, that is the older traditional system of religious authorities, but also with the most popular strength of vernacular Islam, that is, *pirism*. Later when the *sabiqi* attempted to reconfigure itself, it entered into similar confrontations with a more lived *pirism* and vouched to establish a more initiated and *sharia*-oriented system for the *pir*. This gave rise to a very illustrious system of reformed Sufism since the late nineteenth century, which was also propagated widely

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

through popular print culture, where *Sufi* affect redefined and reaffirmed the Prophet-centric piety and piety towards Imam Husayn.

Shah Wali Allah criticized Muslims for relying more on *ijma* which, according to him, minimized one's ability to interpret on one's own. In the same vein, Wali Allah wanted to replace the guidance of the contemporary *Sufis*, that is, the traditional spiritual leaders. He recommended readings of impersonally written scriptures instead of the guidance of a spiritual mentor by means of subjective communication. First the *Tariqah*, then the *Ahl-e-Hadis* as its offshoot, in order to advocate in favour of original Prophetic sources, namely the *Qur'an* and the *Hadis*, began to celebrate a knowledge-system and a community without *mazhab*, which resulted in constant disagreements over the configuration of the *ummah*. *Hanafis*, the major school of law among the four *mazhabs*, was adhered to by a majority of the converted Muslims in Bengal, and the traditional mullahs also identified themselves as *Hanafis*. When the traditionalists reconfigured themselves to withstand transformations brought about by the fundamentalists, they created an illustrious articulation of *Hanafis* discourse in Bangla reflected in the *nasihatnama* and *sirat* texts and in the Karbala narratives.

The cause of Islam, as it were, became the condition for new thematic innovations in the narrative. We are not proposing a one-to-one correspondence between the social exterior and narrative interiority by saying that the militant zeal of the *Tariqah* or the prowess of the *Faraizi* were reflected in the narrativization of the Karbala battles. Depiction of war had always been a stock that characterized the narrative tradition of the community which included *maghazi*, or war tales from the life of the Prophet, and *junghnama*, which was based on battles fought by sacred and quasi-historical heroes. Even at the moment of literary and ideational transactions, stock metaphors of war from the local aesthetic-poetic systems, like the description of battles in the *Ramayana* and other local genres with the theme of war (*Mangal-Kavya*, *Bijoy-Kavya*, etc.) were imbibed to cater to the local audience. But the ethical emotional justification of the battle of Karbala connected itself to broader historical forces during the reform movements when warfare began to be endowed

with the new fervour of *jihad* that made battle something more than an incident caused by enmity and ended in loss or victory. No hero of the epic tradition or of the *Mangal-Kavya* died to secure another form of war ethics. Death as an ethical victory was never a theme in the existing parameters of poetry in Bengal or in medieval India. Death came as a *Bhakti-Sufi* metaphor as an enchanted form of separation from god/Allah. But the dead lover/beloved at the end of a *Sufi*, or *Sufi*-influenced narrative neither offered a template of heroism, nor any social ideal.

Husayn had always been an embodiment of social ethics, as someone who refused to touch water because his kin were thirsty, and who sacrificed himself for the greater cause of the community. But while the Karbala episode offered a stock of sorrow and grief, reformist Islam, by attaching the question of caliphate with martyrdom, created an ethical parameter out of the event of Husayn's death. It became an ethical programme to reorient one's understanding of the other, and one's relationship to it in a more structured way.

Sayyid Ahmad Brelwi started preaching *jihad* after he became a *haji* and propounded the scheme of ethical reformist action for the *Tariqah* in 1823. Though in his famous *fatwa*, Shah Abd al Aziz referred to India as *dar-ul-harb* (the land of the enemy), it was not to prescribe the Muslim to make *hijra* (migration to the original land of Islam) or wage *jihad* (holy war), but to describe the political realities of the time. Sayyid Ahmad attempted to activate the masses to take part in a religious movement to restore and revive the original purity of Islam. Restoration of scriptural beliefs and practices were supplemented by an idea of reviving the Indian Muslim community as a political force, by organizing them around action.

Bengal became a very productive site in responding to the missionary work of the Patna *khalifas*, namely, that of Maulana Inayet Ali, in the creation of a *jihadi* zeal in the rural areas of Bengal. While the *Faraizis*, as an indigenous reform movement, did not come into direct contact with the *Tariqah* campaign and remained quite localized in terms of showing radical resistance in religious and economic terms, the *Tariqah* campaign became a

crucial and real reformist phenomenon in connecting the local to a territorially expanded idea of Islamdom. In government reports, the regular band of the rural Bengali Muslims could be seen marching to the north-west frontier to take part in the holy war against the Sikhs, a war in which the British would soon intervene. That the colonial officials would often fail to distinguish between the *Tariqah* and the *Faraizi* in a later period, must have been because of their similar anti-colonial positions in terms of understanding India as *dar-ul-harb* and their subsequent engagement in an anti-colonial struggle (*jihad*), though the two differed in their degrees of commitment to the notion of both *dar-ul-harb* and *jihad*<sup>37</sup>. Regardless of their inherent differences, the first wave of reform movements envisaged massive territorial connections, ideological and physical, between the rural districts of Bengal and the centres of reformist activities—North India, the north western frontiers and Arabiya—and induced through elitist and popular literature the sense of an imagined community hitherto unimagined. We can delineate four phases of reform by following the growth and branching out of *Tariqah* since its inception and up to the 1940s in Bengal. The first phase was between 1820 and 1831 when Sayyid Ahmad Shahid and Shah Ismail Shahid visited Calcutta, the second phase was the missionary activities of the *khalifas* of Patna school—Inayet Ali and Wilayet Ali (1831–1870s), the third was the *Taiyuni* phase with the missionary preachings of Keramat Ali Jaunpuri and his son Hafez Ali (since the 1850s to the 1910s) and the last phase was marked by the activities of *Ahl-e-Hadis* (1910–1940s). Activities in these phases collided with other sectarian ideals—the *Faraizis* were active as a competitor to the *Taiyuni* sect while *Ahl-e-Hadis* had to struggle with the emerging majority consciousness of the *Hanafi* platforms till the 1940s. Some debate and controversy over the ideal form of doing Islam, and the ideal form of the *ummah*, remained relevant with the persistence of the sectarian consciousness within the *Ahl-e-Sunnat*, *Faraizi* and other *Hanafi* platforms in the post-independence period.

---

<sup>37</sup>William Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans* (London: Trübner and Company, 1876; 3<sup>rd</sup> edition).

The debates and disagreements between the fundamentalists and traditionalists, as also between the reformist fora, created a complex discursive polemic over the issue of *juma namaz*, i.e. the congregational prayer of *Eid*, and over the question of *mazhab*. Reformists differed from each other, keeping their distance from, or negotiating with, the traditionalist schools. *Taiyunis* shifted from their original position as followers of *Tariqah* with regard to *Tariqah's* staunch antipathy towards and rejection of the *mazhab*, and attempted to configure an ideology based on the *Hanafi mazhab*. This *mazhabi* inclination of Keramat Ali thus brought the *Taiyunis* and the *Faraizis* together along with the traditionalist *mullahs* under the category of *mazhabis*, whereas the enmity between the *Taiyuni* and the *Faraizi* movements reached its climax over the issue of *juma namaz* in the districts of Bengal in the form of public *bahas*<sup>38</sup>. *Taiyunis* also recast the figure of the *pir* following the *Tariqah* doctrine by displacing him from the charismatic throne of popular affect and reforming their knowledge through *sharia*. Thus Keramat Ali kept the figure of the *Sufi pir* as the teacher and guide, but ensured that they had no scope to rise above the ordinary and compete with Muhammad. From this polemic where ideas crisscrossed, horizontally and vertically, came close to or were refracted by each other, we can see the creation of some common denominators, which could enable the common masses to identify themselves as the Muslim community. Karbala narratives can be read as a space bearing the traces, impulses and manifestations of such debates and common denominators.

### 2.3 Mapping ‘the Other’, Marking the Self (an Imagined Community)

কারবালা জমিন পরে      হোচ্ছেনে খঞ্জর মেরে  
    কাতল করিবে খরিজান।  
 মাঝিয়া ইয়ার হয়      তার বেটা এজিদায়  
    এই কাম করিবে নাদান।।  
 Eshak Uddin, *Dastan Shahide Karbala*

---

<sup>38</sup> Muinuddin Ahmad Khan, *ibid*, pp. 130-138.



For the Karbala narratives to create two opposing forces and to validate a rationale for the division, the followers of Husayn had to give the enemy of *ahl-ul-bayt* a name. In this act of naming, quite interestingly, either Yezid was denied his place as a part of the caliphate and vilified freely, or he was posited as a decontextualized and de-historicized enemy (similar to the manner in which the inhabitants of Kufa were dehistoricised and vilified in other texts).

এজিদ দোজখি ব্যাটা চেড়ীর নন্দন।

আমি তার নামে পড়ি খুতবা কেমন।। জারিজঙ্গনামা, হেয়াত মামুদ

The narrative situation in Heyat Mamud's *Jarijungnama* where Hasan refuses to surrender to Yezid by not accepting him as the caliph, clearly validated the superiority of Hasan because of his sacred lineage while Yezid is dismissed and disparaged for his mother's lowly status as a menial servant. Surprisingly, the lineage of the father, Muawiya, did not count because Yezid, here, had to be vilified as an individual transgressor, not as a part of the caliphate and a legitimate caliph who had ruled for three years. Rather, Muawiya was exempted from the tainted position of being the father of Yezid, instead his position at the prophet's court as a loyal member was highlighted, without referring to his historical rise to a haloed position brought about as a result of the parochialism of the third caliph Usman. Eshak Uddin beautifully illustrates the narrative instance where Muawiya brings Yezid in by carrying him on his shoulders, described as a denizen of *dozakh* or hell, astride the shoulder of an angel—'দোজখি চড়েছে যেন বেহেস্তির কাঁধে'—to demarcate the spiritual distance between the father and the son.

It was not only the other of Husayn, but more emphatically the other of the *ummah* which was repeatedly marked in the rampant acts of naming found in the popular print —*bedati*, *beiman*, *benamazi*, *gomrahi*, *dozakhi*, *kufar*, *malaun*, *Khareji*, *la-mazhabi* and Shia. All these appellations designating the other were also found in instructional and behavioural manuals, the *nasihatnamas* of the reformist and reform-influenced literature. Thus we find a Muslim public, now engaged in defining its other-within, in its

search for an authentic form of Islam in order to implement and practise it, first— in the Karbala narratives which offered a unique site for raising certain unresolved questions pertinent to the inception of the *ummah* and second—to resolve them in order to produce a secure sense of the *ummah*. The enemy without was produced in the process where the identity of the Bengal Muslims was to be secured as a counter-narrative to Hindu identity formation as part of a larger project of modernity and nationalism.

The sensibility of creating the other within, then, fitted perfectly with the thematic of the Karbala narrative where the enemy of Imam Husayn, the *kafir*, was not somebody non-Muslim but was from within the community. Conceptualization of the self, by defining and vilifying the other, resulted in an ever expanding vocabulary of derogatory terms excavated, and taken out of their historical context without any concern about their specific denotative meanings, to designate forms of *shirk* and *bida't*. These terms which were reformulated liberally to categorize the other, found currency in the Karbala narratives where they appeared via transference, i.e. borrowed freely from derogatory speech already in circulation as an after-effect of the reform movements.

In such an ambience of mobility and mayhem spreading through the ‘tropical swamps’ of the districts of Bengal<sup>39</sup>, we are tracing the connections between narrative situations and the real. When Azrayl, the angel of death, appeared to a tormented Muhammad on his deathbed to announce death, Muhammad wanted to spare his *ummat* the inevitable pain of death by taking it solely unto himself. নবিজি বকসিস চাহে আল্লার দরগায়। ওক্ষতের গোনা মেরা জাতে মাফ হয়।। [the Prophet wants a sacred gift from Allah/ that the punishment assigned to his *ummah* be exempted—Muhammad Munshi] In poignant descriptions of the Prophet dying, the messenger of death—*malekulmaot*—Azrail, does not waste his time in suggesting a remedy for the people of Muhammad’s *ummat* which could lessen the pain of death. Muhammad thus reaffirms the value of belonging to an *ummat* by not

---

<sup>39</sup> William Hunter, *The Indian Mussalmans*, p. 9

committing any *shirk* to escape the inevitable pain of death, an act which would be awarded with a confirmed place for him in *behesht*.

এয়ছা আছানিতে জান ওক্ষতে তোমার।

কবজ করিব শুন বয়ান তাহার ॥

যেজন নামাজ পরে একিন করিয়া।

না করে শেরেক যেই ওক্ষত হইয়া ॥

[Let me show an easy path for the exemption of punishment. Those who believe in the sacred prayer and perform the sacred prayer without being polytheistic, their sin is forgiven—Eshak Uddin, *Dastan Shahide Karbala*]

Here, there was this sudden opening up of a thematic interface between the Karbala narratives and the *shariyatnama* (or instructional manuals) with the insertion of the Prophet's speech in the narrative, as a non-narrative didactic voice, which elucidated upon his life thus rendering it into *Hadis*, and constantly addressed issues central to a religious morality—like praying the *namaz*—this animated the community with a new rigour. These insertions and intersections can be read as key moments for understanding the connection between the ideational realm of the Muslim public and the narrative tradition that the public was consuming in popular print. We would like to question whether certain narrative situations were of particular significance in this context, for example, where for the first time we begin to see Imam Husayn hearing the sound of the war drums while praying the morning *namaz*.

ফজর নামাজ পড়ে ইমাম জাহান।

জঙ্গে নাকারা বাজে শুনিবারে পান ॥

[Imam prays the *namaz* of dawn, he listens to the roaring beats of war drums.]

Drums, cymbals and trumpets had always been a part of the soundscape of the Karbala battles in Persian which continued in Bengali from the seventeenth century onwards. But the juxtaposition of *namaz* with the drums, and the new visual of a solitary warrior, who not only bid farewell to his family but also prayed to Allah as a part of his religious obligations, was something unique. I am not saying that *namaz* was something new that Imam Husayn would not have been depicted as performing in the pre-reformist period. *Namaz* as a religious practice had always been mentioned

in *Sufi* and other narratives with popular appeal at a time when it was yet to become a prescribed regimen; it was referred to in the public recitations made by the *pirs*, who, along with the authors of scriptural texts like *nasihatnama*, wanted to structure the community since as early as the early eighteenth century. But after the reformist movement had begun, the search and deployment of common denominators, conceptually and behaviourally manifested as *iman*, and *farz* or *adaab*, were the outcome of a complex discursive sensibility which tried to give the Muslims their core sense of collective identification.

এত বলি শাহজাদা দু'রেকাত নামাজ।  
 পড়িয়া করিল আগে মহিমের সাজ।।  
 জেরা বখত লিয়ে পিন্দে আলী মর্তুজার।  
 রছুলের দেওয়া পাগ ছিরের দস্তার।।  
 মবারক জুলুফ যুই পড়িয়াছে কান্ধে।  
 কোমর বান্ধিলা যে দাউদের কোমরবন্ধে।।  
 ছালে পয়গম্বরের মোজা পরিলেন পায়।  
 হজ মক্কার কবা জোড়া তুলি দিলা গায়।।  
 পৃষ্ঠেতে বান্ধিলা ঢাল আমীর হামযার।  
 তীর তরকশ ছুলফা খনজর কামান।।  
 নেজা গুর্জ ছংগপাশী আরবি নিশান।  
 সাজান করিল ঘোড়া দুলাদুল সংকার।।<sup>40</sup>  
 অতিশয় উচা ঘোড়া পর্বত আকার।।—ওয়াহিদআলী, *বড়জঙ্গনামা*

In the search involved, *Faraizis*, unlike the *Tariqah* followers, did not use the discourse of *dar-ul-harb*; rather, they used the term *misr-al-zami* (a land without *shari*) to distinguish between a locale with, and without, *sunnah*. The *Tariqah* followers waged *jihad* and set out on *hijarat* in their refusal to remain connected to the *dar-ul-harb*, while for the *Faraizis*, the solution was not mobility. Rather, it was the suspension of the *Eid* prayer and *juma namaz* in this alien space. For the *Faraizis*, the theosophical impossibility of having *juma* and *Eid* prayers in India under the colonial rule was because of their reading of the space as *misr-al-zami*. Suspension of *juma* and *Eid* prayers, as proposed and aggressively practised by the *Faraizis*, invited a massive resistance from the traditional religious authorities, or the

---

<sup>40</sup> Through this description of how Imam Husayn was preparing for the war, by first praying the *namaz* and then taking up the signature weapons and attire of the Prophet, Imam Ali validates his position in an Islamic genealogy.

*kathmullahs*, whose practice was based on the accretion of local religious-aesthetic and poetic elements, and also from the charismatic local *pirs* who claimed a close connection to and control over the supernatural. A *Taiyuni* account of the contemporary times said,

বরিসাল যখন আইল বহুত দেখিতে পাইল সেরেক বেদাতে ভরপুর। ...  
জুম্মা ইদ নাহি পড়ে নাহি দেয় মসজিদ খোদার।  
দেখিয়া মোরসেদ মোর নছিত করিল ভোর।

ছাড়িবারে সেরেক বেদাত।  
শুনিয়া দুদার গোর। মনে হইল বড় ডর। ...  
লক্ষ লক্ষ লোকজন জুম্মা ইদে দিল মন।  
শতে শতে দিলেন মসজিদ।—Munshi Abdul Rahim<sup>41</sup>

While *Tariqah* claimed to bring in the language of popular piety through print, *namaz* and *roza*, as basic obligatory principles of Islam in a more rite based practice of local Islam, were being prescribed to structure the community along regulatory principles and ethical action. The older generation, i.e. the *sabiqi* system, had to create a scope for *namaz* through new instructional material in popular print to take part in this new reformist sensibility.

Even after rigorous discursive efforts and relentless preaching from the reformists, traditional ways of interpreting and understanding Islam continued to be in practice, as much seepage had already taken place in between. This seepage was the condition for popular piety. While the preliminary debate over the *mazhab*, which started between the *Tariqah* and *Faraizis*, took on a more complicated form in the debate between the *Taiyunis* and the *Faraizis*, between *Ahl e-Hadis* and the *Hanafis*, the *Taiyunis* reclaimed *mazhab* as the validation for *sunnah*. According to Keramat Ali Jaunpuri (1800–1873), who founded *Taiyunism*, the *mazhabi* imams (as opposed to what the *Tariqah* reformers would suggest), were the ones who had actually established the Prophetic *sunnah*. Keramat Ali Jaunpuri, as a *Hanafi* himself, gradually adopted a moderate view and created a space for positive negotiations with the colonial power and the

---

<sup>41</sup> Munshi Abdul Rahim. *Akhlaq-i-Ahmadiya*, p.20

traditional broad *mazhabi* Muslim society. Keramat Ali marked a major (almost paradigmatic) shift in the *Tariqah* doctrines in the later period when the religious movement acquired a somewhat political character.

In the later period, as I have already mentioned, *Taiyuni*'s ideological battle with the *Ahl e-Hadis* preachers and practitioners of Bengal over the issue of *mazhab*, and with the *Faraizis*, over the issue of *juma* and *jihad* defined the next phase of arguments and counter-arguments within the Muslim community. While the propaganda and counter-propaganda were threatening the possibility of any consensus within the Muslim community not only at the theological level, but 'cut at', to use Rafiuddin Ahmed's phrase<sup>42</sup>, the social root of the traditional Sunni society—moments of consensus arose, negotiations happened in direct or in curious ways. In this domain of an argumentative public, it was impossible to conceive any basic unity for the Muslim community, and these arguments only wasted time and energy at the expense of decelerating the pace of unification based on a common faith.

We need to keep two things in mind: one, the internal coercion—to conform or be vilified as the other-within—could not have been nullified without an instrumental unification of the reformist and traditionalist platforms against a common enemy. And two, when different sectors within this argumentative public finally tried to negotiate with each other for a consensual moderate position, differences with the other-without were conceptualized for the consolidation of a unified community.

The elite section, which had remained totally disinterested in the reform movement that was taking the shape of an agrarian unrest in the rural areas, started collaborating with preachers in the second phase of reform, like Keramat Ali, whose moderate position brought him into negotiations with both the *sabiqi* and the urban elite society simultaneously but separately. From the narrative references it can be deduced that texts on the battle of Karbala in popular print in this context were produced by the traditional *sabiqi* society at its several transitional moments and continued to be

---

<sup>42</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmed, *Quest for Relevance*, p. 106

produced till the end of the time frame which I have considered for my thesis.

Though *Faraizis* remained active till the beginning of the twentieth century, their doctrinal impact decreased because of the widely felt need to have negotiations with the British colonial power, which in turn reduced their impact on the decision to suspend the observance of *juma*. Traditionalists of the next generation reclaimed their place in the religious landscape of Bengal by entering the domain of emerging religious education and reformulating their position, and finally made their exit from, and denounced, the domain of local rituals and practices. They started aligning themselves with reformist ideas about un-Islamic elements in Muslim religious practice, and reformulating the figure of the *pir* by connecting it to the *Sunnah*. As the majority of the Muslim population were inclined to identify themselves as *Hanafi*, the *Hanafi* school of religious thought became the paradigm for the traditionalists in their efforts to re-cast themselves. That a spiritual guide was needed for the common Muslims, who were thought of as lacking the capacity for realizing *ijtihad* on their own, was justified by the *Hanafi* maulavis (strengthened by the *Faraizi* and the *Taiyuni* conformation to *mazhab*), and characters including the Prophet were chosen from Islamic history to secure this need. Newly formulated *Sufi* intercessory figures started to surface with scriptural *Sufism*, which began to proliferate with the advent of reform, print culture, and the need for identity formation. The founder of the Qadiriya sect—Abdur Qadir Jilani—as the Barha Pir, and Abu Bakr Siddiqi of the Furfura Sharif became two very important figures: one supra-national and the other a local *Sufi* master, creating various cleavages between the scriptural and the popular.

The figure of the guide became an instrumental need of the times for the sustenance of the *ummah*. In the same way that the *Hanafi pir* Abu Bakr had provided guidance physically by dominating over the scriptures at the Furfura Sharif, the episodes of Karbala narratives also provided many characters fit for giving guidance and ensuring a sense of community

security. It is not surprising that the question—of who should be presiding over the *namaz* after the Prophet’s demise—became a spiritual-political issue because the community needed a leader in order to be guided and directed physically at all times.

The role of Abu-Bakr, as the first Imam after the Prophet, was resolved by establishing his role to preside over the prayer. The choice of the leader and guiding figure for *namaz* was the crucial factor in finalizing the question of caliphate, governance, and scriptural authority. This is why this figure recurred in the literature of popular piety—as the leader who presided over the *namaz* could resolve the ambiguity over succession, by becoming the legitimate successor himself. The Karbala narratives did not miss any opportunity in utilizing narrative sequences to place *namaz* as the ultimate form of religious duty, as something which could even resolve the anxiety, undecidability and competitiveness within the Prophetic realm itself.

*Namaz*, thus, became the most emblematic *farz* in the demography of Muslim religiosity producing *benamazi* as the designation for the other. It should be noted, that with increasing factional debates over the true path of Islam, *benamazi* signified the Hindu-other more than the other-within, an idea which would perhaps continue even when the Hindus were finally marked as the ultimate other. Even Ali—the son-in-law of Muhammad, married to Fatema, and the father of Hasan and Husayn—who was constantly being referred to as the embodiment of mystical knowledge, needed to recite two segments of the Qur’an, while immersing himself in the love for Allah.

জেন্দেগি হইতে হাট ধুইনু এখন।

খোদার এক্ষেতে ফের দিলেন মোন।।

তাহিহাল নামাজ সাহা পড়ে দুরেকাত।

সহিদের তালাসেতে আলী নেকজাত।।

[Ali renounced the life of indulgence, he immersed himself solely in the love of Allah, he prayed the *namaz* and remained pure—Muhammad Munshi, *Asal Shahide Karbala*]

Narrative situations and the inclinations of the ideal characters were made more acutely structured, along with the obligatory principles, for providing



the masses with rules and ethics to follow, where the direct didactic voices of these ideal characters functioned to guide the audience. Ali not only recited the *Qur'an* himself, but like a stern guide and instructor, motivated and instructed others to pray *namaz*. Because Abdur Rahman was lying idly, ignoring the obligatory *namaz*, he was categorically marked as a sinner by the narrator. This scriptural-ethical lack in Abdur Rahman was used as a narrative cue to finally explain, in a causal framework, that he had always had the un-Islamic potential within him necessary for him to have finally killed Ali while Ali was praying. Ali even rebukes Abdur Rahman on one occasion for not being attentive to the obligatory principles, for sleeping at the time of *namaz* and tries to lead him back to the right path of Islam.

জাহারা শুইয়াছিল মসজিদের পড়ে।  
 নামাজ পড়িতে সাহা ওঠায় সবারে।।  
 আবদুর রহমান পাপি মক্যর করিয়া।  
 শুয়ে ছিল বগলেতে তলওয়ার রাখিয়া।।  
 পায়ের ঠোকর মেরে আবদুর রহমানে।  
 নামাজের ওক্ত যায় শুয়ে কি কারণে।।  
 এলাহির হুকুম গাফেল আছ কাহে।  
 ওক্ত মত পড়িলে ছওয়ার পাবে তাতে।।

[Those who were sleeping inside the mosque, Ali woke them up for *namaz*. Abdur, the sinner, was sleeping clutching his sword, Ali moved him with his feet for neglecting his *namaz*. Ali said to Abdur: Why are you disobeying Allah's dictum? Pray *namaz*, you will get Allah's blessings.— Muhammad Munshi)

This is the narrative situation where Ali is described in the act of nudging Abdur Rahman with his foot because Rahman had been lying with his sword under his arm at the time for *namaz*. This particular figuration of their respective bodies is reversed when Ali, in the next sequence, while presiding over *namaz*, is killed from behind by Abdur Rahman with that very same sword. This specific quasi-historical situation was chosen for inclusion and elaboration in the narrative so that Ali, a member of the *pak panjtan*, could impart instructions about the proper way and importance of praying *namaz*, thus making religious codes available in the Karbala narratives, and merging the potentials of the entertaining and didactic genres. Not only that, the narratives continued to cite specific sections from

the Qur'an to explain the need for and relevance of *namaz*—these citations and references were not a direct part of the narrative but added an interpretive framework within. This made the narrative more inclined towards the scriptural instructive tradition, and invested it with the responsibility of forming a community with popular and mass-oriented exegeses of the scriptures. Thus *namaz*, and *farz* as a whole, was the connecting thread between the narrative and the scriptural traditions and produced forms of piety with the duality of obligatory functions and faith-emotion which could also be found in the *Sufi* treatises of the time.

The scheme of the Karbala narrative not only rearranged the theme to secure the community, but also worked to produce the desired form of obligatory principles through the actions of the chosen characters. When Moslem is sent to Kufa (to understand the dynamics of the Kufis' proposal to provide Imam Husayn military support in order to regain sovereign power over Islamdom by defeating Yezid, the ruler of Syria) the Kufis showed their subservience to Imam Husayn by letting Moslem preside over their *namaz* and by standing behind him during the prayer. This willingness of the Kufis to honour Moslem at the *namaz* not only validated *namaz* as an obligation, but also saved the common people of Kufa from the allegation of being the murderers of Imam Husayn at Karbala following this incident. Some narratives about the battle of Karbala, thus, exempted the common people of Kufa from being marked as traitors and singled out only Yezid, often along with Abdul Ziyad, the governor of Kufa, as the perpetrators of the heinous act of murder. Rather, at the level of the narrative, opportunities were created for the reader/audience to identify with the common citizens of Kufa who were articulating their devotion towards Imam Husayn by praying *namaz* behind Moslem, one of Husayn's chieftains. This emphasis on their allegiance to Husayn as the spiritual leader superseded any possible allegiance to Yezid and Ziyad, the two political figures. This part of the narrative, here exempted the Kufis from being party to an unethical plot to kill Imam Husayn at Karbala. Thus, through the process of writing-reading-listening of the narrative, a community was evolving, which could now link their religiosity with the *farz* of Islam and piety towards Imam

Husayn. Modes of devotionism and piety were being set out by the authors inventorying the ways of doing *farz*, and were also being produced in the acts of reading and listening. It became a common phenomenon that every chapter was to be opened and initiated with the chanting of a salutation—*darood*. Thus we can see how by the induction of a sacred space for performing Islam by reading and listening about *farz* became the performance of *farz* itself. Not only did ‘imamate’ become the self-explanatory term in popular imagination for understanding inheritance, or অস্থিত—imamate also implied the act of presiding over the collective prayer at the mosque, thus the one who presided over the *namaz* was the rightful inheritor of the caliphate. The Karbala authors would spend much narrative energy to present the relevance of *namaz* in order to mark the presiding Imam as the true authority of Islamdom after Muhammad, and thus prioritized *namaz* as one of the *farz* by repeatedly invoking its relevance within the narrative for the literary community. This is why the episode where Muhammad assigns Abu-Bakr the task of presiding over *namaz* after his death became such an ideologically poignant narrative instance. It would effectively cancel out other alternative and competing claims—for example, where Bibi Hafiza, one of Muhammad’s wives, wanted her father, Umar (a *sahaba* among the core four *ashab*) to become the first presiding Imam after the death of Muhammad, Muhammad refused, opting in favour of Abu-Bakr instead.

Belal, the *muezzin*, i.e. the one who calls his people to prayer, along with Muhammad’s grieving daughter Fatema and the four companions of the Prophet, emerged as important characters embodying immense devotion towards the Prophet in this episode that marked the elements of popular piety. Belal’s grief after hearing the news of the Prophet’s death was juxtaposed with the grief of Abu-Bakr looking at the empty *mimbar*—or podium from which Muhammad presided over *namaz*—in his absence. Though still tinged with a sense of emotion for the figurative, grief was validated as a pure form of devotion towards the Prophet, this was necessary to solidify a sense of the community. This multivalence, that is,

the non-erasable reminiscence of the physicality of emotion, along with the scripture-based affirmation of the *Hadis*, became the markers of popular piety so emblematically represented in the Karbala narratives.

Hafez Ahmad, Keramat Ali's son, is chronicled to have come to Bengal to preach the *Taiyuni* principles along with his father in the face of the immense popularity of the *Faraizis*. His biographer Abdul Rahman Rashid, very curiously, blurs the distinction between the *Faraizi* denial of the congregational prayer and a more lived traditional society's reluctance towards following a proper Islamic *farz*. The first reported *bahas* between the *Taiyunis* and *Faraizis* over *juma namaz* took place in Barisal in 1867, though Keramat Ali encountered the then *Faraizi* leader Dudu Mian as early as 1839. *Bahas* between the *Taiyunis* and *Faraizis* took on complex shapes over the validity of *juma* and continued till the first decade of the twentieth century. The next decades experienced debates between the *Ahle-Hadis* and the *Hanafis* with their interventions in religious as well as in socio-political issues through books, journals, *anjumans*, madrasas and libraries producing and affecting the expectations of the common readers in urban and rural areas alike. No matter how distantly the Muslim public were placed with respect to the centres of formation of reformist knowledge and its counter-narratives, the masses responded to the ideological struggle and became the target audience for the cheap prints and thus strongly influenced the directions taken by the cheap prints. In the ideological struggle between the *Muhammadiyahs* and the *Hanafis*, both used the same vocabulary to negate each other's claims and arguments with accusations of sacrilege. Muhammad Babar Ali, the editor of the *Ahle Hadis* journal, claimed in his editorial that the *Hanafis* were calling them *Shia* and *khareji* and non-Muslims and non-practitioners of *farz* and innovators, while he himself equated the *Hanafis* with the *Kufis*, the alleged murderers of Imam Husayn.

বিপক্ষীগণ কত বই লিখিয়া তোমাদিগকে লা-মজহাবী, শীয়া, ওহাবী, খারেজী, মরশেক, বেদাতি এবং প্রায় কাফের বানাইতেছে। ... দিনের দুস্মুন, কোরআন দুস্মুন, মুসলমান নামধারী হজরতের প্রিয় সন্তান এমাম

হোসায়নের (সঃ) সাহেবের প্রাণহন্তা বাসস্থান বেওফা কুফার মজহাবধারী, কুফী, অত্যাচারী, জুলুমকারী হানাফীগণ<sup>43</sup>।

[Writing book after book, your rivals are designating you the status of the enemy of Islam. You are becoming, in their hands, the enemy of Islam, of Qur'an, and you are becoming the inhabitants of Kufa...the Hanafis, who killed the beloved grandson of the Prophet.]

When a reformist leader, in a hardcore reformist text, goes to such an extent to vilify his opponent, tampering liberally with context and temporality, it becomes really difficult for us to derive points of history or authentic historical references from available texts. Our engagement with the Karbala narrative tradition—which primarily relied upon the abundance of affective energy directed towards and invested in the inheritance of prophetic knowledge and the injustice done to his family—should not therefore equate its narrative situations with real history.

This discussion claims that even when the doctrinal differences were immense, even when there was much competition between the fundamentalists and the traditionalists, undercurrents of mutual transaction formed several layers of popular piety. Some common denominators in popular psyche remained quite open, with volatile meanings, fixed only at the instances of usage, while some were in the process of being fixed in more, or less, standardized formats. We should not forget that even though the reformist and traditionalist ideas were proliferated through cheap print—overlaps and dialogues were also reflected in that very same culture. In this context, the Karbala narratives oscillating between scripture and the narrative hardly created any kind of hermetic bipolarity between the elite and the popular in terms of popular piety. When the Karbala narratives primarily dealt with the ethical relevance of *shahadat*, or martyrdom, in bearing witness to the sublime, was not it fed by the popular imagination of *shahadat* described in the *qissas*, and also derived from the martyrdom of contemporary real life heroes who had been rendered supernatural as

---

<sup>43</sup> *Ahle Hadis* 1, 2, (Aswin 1322 BS): p.145.

*pirs*<sup>44</sup>? I should also mention here that the rampant use of decontextualized sectarian identitarian terms like *khareji*, *rafeji* and *kafir* was not paradigmatically new to the reformist times. Since the early eighteenth century, with the volatile use of the terms *kafir* or *kufar*, we can see a host of identitarian words being used to designate the other-within. After the advent of reformist movements, these terms were not re-contextualized; rather, they were re-affirmed to define the other with much deliberation. A more historical understanding of the terms can be observed in the literature which used a more standardized Bangla and which sought to align itself with a refined Bengali literary modernity<sup>45</sup>; but at the level of popular piety, these identity markers would remain unresolved and divorced from context, as they had already been collectively put to use, to name a monolithic other-within, without the necessity of historicizing or distinguishing between the individual terms.

কেবল নবীন বিভা হ্যাছিল তার।  
 খারিজি বধিতে যায় রণের মাঝার।।  
 কাফের খারিজি তোখে বরশী হানিল বুকে  
 রক্তে রাজা হৈল কলেবর।।

[Just after being wed, our dear Kashem went to the war to kill the Kharijites. The non-believer Kharijities shot their spear and Kashem's body was awash with blood.—*Jarijungnama*, Heyat Mamud]

The reclamation of *mazhab* made Keramat Ali closer to the *mazhab* *Faraizis*; but his difference in opinion about *jihad* and *juma* resulted in many open public arguments, or *bahas*. Keramat Ali's open antagonism towards his contemporary Patna school regarding their rejection of *mazhab* and towards the *Faraizis* regarding their staunch opposition to *juma* was expressed in his writings and in open debates. He termed the *Faraizis* the *kharijities* of Bengal and the Patna school 'la-mazhabi'—an appellation which gained popular currency in defining the enemy-within with much reaction and critique from the *Tariqah* off-shoots. *Kharijites*, *kharijan/khareji*, as terms of abuse, began to be used retroactively to designate the

<sup>44</sup> This will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>45</sup> I shall discuss the writing of two modern genres —biography and history in chaste Bangla by the religious intelligentsia in the next chapter to illustrate this point.

enemy for a historical era when the sect had not even come into existence. For example, *kharijites* is the name given to the enemy vanquished by the ancestors in the pre-Islamic battles, and it predictably became the generic name for the enemy of Islam at the battle of Karbala. Munshi Eshak Uddin, on the other hand, quite meticulously documents the historical provenance of the *kharejis* when he defines them as a new sect originating from the battle of Uhud—a sect which was subsequently instrumental in the assassination of Ali. The battle of Uhud, in Eshak Uddin’s account, is described as the first declared battle between two antagonistic forces within Islam. A section of Ali’s army, dissatisfied with Ali’s decision to make a peace treaty with Muawiya, broke the bond of submission to Ali and became *kharejis*.

*Kafir* did not generally mean Hindu, though it had been used to designate the non-Islamic population even in the pre-Islamic period. Since the early modern period, in the narratives on territorial expansion, the term had generically been used to designate the non-Islamic other even in pre-Islamic times. For example, authors, in describing Hamza, a pre-Islamic hero, spared no emotion in positing him as an ideal—in terms of both prowess and wisdom—in his quest to Islamize the ‘*kafir*’. A vast array of pre-Islamic and Islamic heroes, thus, could be observed in the acts of killing hordes of *kafir* in the battlefield, or in polemics or argumentation in order to Islamize them. In the Karbala texts of the pre-modern, the term *kafir* was used to demarcate the profane. Heyat Mamud says, Allah created the *kafirs* to prove that the Imam brothers were sacred, and ideals for the *ummat*,—হায় হায় আল্লা কে বুঝে মক্কর। হাসান হুসন লাগি সৃজিলা কুফর।। [Who understands the mystery of Allah, to make Hasan-Husayn martyrs, he created the enemy of Islam]

In the reformist period, the term *kafir* was also explicated as a marker of the other-within, which fractured the sense of the *ummah*. This fracture within, in the argumentative space, delayed the processes of unification of Muslims as *ummat*, but slowly created the consciousness of an imagined community within the masses at the same time. While the competitive claims for

authenticity tended to invalidate the varied, at a broader level these processes created a religious and communitarian consciousness within the masses, no matter how populist and fluid it may have been. Documentations of *bahas* between the *Taiyunis* and the *Faraizis* spans over more than forty years with opposing claims to supposed victories over the other, thus making it difficult for us to measure the comparative superiority of either group with any degree of accuracy. Though reform literatures claim that *juma* was re-established in Bengal by Keramat Ali back in the last decade of the nineteenth century, *juma* continued to be a focus of sectarian debate even in the early decades of the twentieth century when the *Muhammadiyahs* and the *Hanafis* began to fight each other with clenched teeth in order to get hold of the masses.

No scholar of the time could definitely assess the impact of the scriptural dimensions of *bahas* on the common people congregated around these conversations, which gradually became saturated with *Hadis* references and explanations. But the carnivalesque gatherings made religion public, something to be engaged with as performance, and to be debated over like petty local feuds. From the transaction between the citations of *Hadis* literature and the loose and fluid rationale of the local *pirs* arose multiple layers of literature with different scriptural orientations, which we can now consider as the active sites of popular piety. With varied proximity to the scriptures and different degrees of exposure to Arabic and Persian at the level of language, popular piety took on multifarious attributes and characteristics, touching upon the lives of a vast population of Muslims who had finally begun to grasp the imagination of a community. It was also for the first time that the rural Muslims, who were more than merely 'remote, isolated and unlettered communities'<sup>46</sup> became aware of the issues concerning the ways of a Muslim life.

These *bahas* and complementary literature between the *Muhammadiyahs* and the *Hanafis*, which were the sites of constant struggle for achieving the valid form of Islam, were gradually connecting themselves with the

---

<sup>46</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmed, 1981, p.82.



political issues of the time. Primarily, the *jihadi* zeal was transformed into consent to the British power for gaining economic and social agency in a new colonial social. Complicated inter-sectarian relationships were formed when *Ahle Hadis*, the eponymous journal of *Ahl e-Hadis*, demanded protection from the empire for being persecuted by the majority *Hanafis*. The journal even criticised the *Muhammadi* journal *Moslem Hitaishi*, for its reluctance to express any antagonism towards the Hanafis—which would have disturbed the fragile sense of solidarity within Muslim society—in spite of the latter’s constant refutations of and attacks on *Muhammadi* society. This was considered an act of sabotage by the *Ahle Hadis*.

A survey of the affiliation of the Karbala authors, made by carefully studying the texts, might help us place them within the demography of scripture and popular piety. Different attitudes and affiliations, once deduced, could be used as interpretive frameworks to understand the identitarian forms and religiosity in connection to the project of identity. It is important to note here that, the other was being explicated as the other-within, not as something outside the community. But the other within was the other precisely because of its connection with the other-without. In the process of identifying and labelling the other to differentiate and authentic Islam, the Shias turned out to be the strongest enemy for all the reformist and traditionalist sects. It was because the very identity of the Shias was premised upon the *ahl-ul-bayt*, their particular claim in the matter of the Prophetic succession, their commemoration of *muharram*, their dismissal of the first three Sunni Caliphs, and their disregard for the scriptural tradition of the Sunnis by offering an intercessory form of faith.

The following chapter will show how the authors of the Karbala narratives went on to reclaim the *ahl-ul-bayt* from the Shias, to form a legitimate claim over the Prophetic succession and validated mourning through weeping—which meant that only the silent shedding of tears was recognised as the ideal form of piety, while crying and grieving in all its bodily excesses of the performative was emphatically delegitimized.

## Chapter III

### Popular Piety in Print: Issues and Themes

In the competitive field of religious polemic from the mid-nineteenth century, the ‘co-religionists’ at the popular level sought the most authentic form of Islam in the language of devotionism towards the figure of the Prophet. In this ideological struggle, the authorities of custom based Islam<sup>1</sup> were marginalized and refuted as *kathmullahs* who eventually took part in the polemic by negotiating with the forces of reform. After much conflict and coercion with the reformers in the beginning, the traditionalist authorities of custom-based Islam gradually came to deploy the same devices that the reformist platforms used and no longer maintained a bipolarity of position. Rather, adversity was now scripturally authenticated as a means of reconciliation between custom and the *sharia*. Through print and new entrepreneurship, and with the formation of locally defined groups broadly under the generic category of the *Hanafi* sect, there were attempts for reconciliation from within custom-based religion with the *sharia* and the legacy of *Sufi* ideals. Previously, the use of scripture had not held much value in the oral communities where the saints and their living representatives acted as spiritual interlocutors for the masses. Persuasive oratory, together with the popular appeal of *qissa* and *kavya* in the pre-print period was retained in the newly awakened traditionalist efforts, while memory and manuscript were replaced by the printed *puthis*. What was new, was a systematization of the traditional narrative now qualified by scriptural authentication. Both the *qissa* and the *kavya* traditions of the time had imbibed the zeal to authenticate their statements and narrative situations with constant references to the *sharia*, in which they were basically taking their cue from the *Hadis* tradition. Traditionalist *mullahs* also began to rely on the new systems of communication to secure their

---

<sup>1</sup> The idea of custom, here, is informed by E.P. Thompson’s idea of the customary idioms of English labour groups. Custom, following this conceptualization is more a ‘pool of diverse resources’ that place custom in a creative tension between perpetuity and change. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (London: Merlin Press, 1991).

position with the popular masses of rural Bengal, while generally identifying themselves as *Hanafis*. An already well-established network of cheap prints, primarily created and utilized by the fundamentalist reformists, now inspired the *Hanafi mullahs* to proliferate their newly formed knowledge through the same network. This resulted in the publication of a huge variety of textual material, which shows the process of formation of the community as an argumentative community, defining itself in terms of its connection to the obligatory principles of Islam.

If we want to trace the basic organizing principles of popular piety that emerged, by looking closely at the new religious sensibility through the cheaply printed religious books from the reformist (*Wahhabi, Tariqah, Taiyuni, Ahl-e-Hadis*, etc.) and counter-reformist platforms, as well as the reformed *Hanafi* sensibilities, we would find the presence of a Prophet-centric piety at their core. In the process of claiming the Prophet, all the reformist and counter-reformist platforms, between the *Hanafi* and the *Ahl-e-Hadis* organizations, articulated and resolved their doctrinal differences at the same time. Debates over issues to identify and mark the ideal forms of Islam forms against practices of *shirk* and *bid'at* were always informed by references to the Prophet <sup>2</sup>. In Bengal, for this argumentative public, the newly structured obligatory principles were always informed by the status of the Prophet. In the tumultuous debates between the *Ahl-e-Hadis* and the *Hanafis* in late nineteenth century Bengal, the performance of *farz* and rituals were authenticated differently by referring to the Prophet in different ways. Different interpretive frameworks arose to create a centrality of the figure of the Prophet, thus opening up the path for a Prophet-centric piety. This Prophet-centric piety, as formulated by both the reformist and traditionalist *ulama* replaced the *Sufi*-centric piety prevalent in the pre-reform early modern period. Demystification of the pre-existing mediators (namely, the local *Sufi pirs*), and replacement of their influence within the

---

<sup>2</sup> In *Hadis* the notion of ideals emanated through and were attested by Muhammad. The three ideals are *qaol*—what Muhammad said, *fayel*—what Muhammad did and *taqrir* — what Muhammad sanctioned.  
সহবি-খারশরীফ, মুনশনিইমুদনিদ্বারা অনুদতি, করটয়ামাহমুদয়াযন্ত্রমুদ্রতিও প্রকাশিত। ১৯৩০৪১১৮৯৭

arena of ideological struggle, was done through the affirmation of the position of the Prophet in the landscape of devotionism in order to channelize the affect and aesthetics of popular piety.

In this time of mutual negotiation and influence, the traditional forms of custom changed, and with that changed the way Sufism was conceived and practiced. A more doctrinal form of Sufism (apparent in medieval *Sufi* texts like *Yogakalandar*, and *Jnansagar* or in *sirat* literature like *Rasul-Charit*) continued and took on a distinctly structured shape during the last decades of the nineteenth century as Sufism came to be increasingly informed by the reformist sensibilities. Cheap print culture was also the primary platform for the transmission of texts, which attest to the affiliation of the authors to various *Sufi silsilahs*, or schools. In this newly organized field of knowledge propounded and disseminated by the *Sufi* practitioners, the *Sufi* interpretation of Muhammad was reaffirmed, and strongly recommended. The verses that I quote below belong to a corpus of literature written by the *Sufi* practitioners of Bengal, who had had proper initiation into the major *silsilahs*, or schools, of Sufism—namely, *Suhrawardiya*, *Nakshbandiya*, *Qadiriya* and *Chishtiya*. With their exposure to the major *silsilahs*, and high propensity towards either the *Qadiriya* or the *Chishtiya* traditions, these *Sufi* authors composed poetry which bear testimony to their mystical realizations and at the same time, is a reaffirmation of their theoretic-affective claim over not only the Prophet but the prophetic system. This was a system which included the sacred figures of the Prophetic family, and which seems to closely approximate the affective piety of the Shias. Abdur Rahim Chishti, for instance, a *Sufi* author with reformist ideas about Sufism and Islam, not only said that he would cling to the robe of the Prophet as his last refuge, he also claimed the sacred five and the Imams, who were the core of the Shia theosophical universe.

ধরেছি দামন আমি আল রসুলের।  
না ছাড়িব না ছাড়িব না ছাড়িব ফের।।

*Atharbba Muhammad Veda*, Abdur Rahim Chishti

This is a legacy that began in the hands of Sayyid Sultan, who sought to chart out a sense of the divine and of devotion through the *sirat*, and continued to organize a sense of collective identity for the people of the Prophet in the later period. Prophet-centric piety, formulated in the *sirat*, continued to be present in the narratives on Karbala, and in any narrative that had *naat* (the praise of Muhammad) in the exposition, and now began to appear in *Sufi* tracts as well. These transactions between texts and the changes within them indicate the modalities of change in the forms in piety. They show how *Sufi*-centric emotion was reformulated into a more pronounced Prophet-centric piety in accordance with the urges of reform. The figure of the Prophet provided the community with an ideal life which was to be followed and emulated in order to become an ideal Musalman within a religious landscape that did not have recourse to any translation of the scriptures — Muhammad was reclaimed as an ideal for the creation of a this-worldly Islam. Thus, the life of Muhammad recounted in the beginning of the narratives of Karbala was the condition for the understanding of the community as *ummah*—the community of the Prophet.

Qazi Eshak Uddin, while starting his narrative with *hamd* and *naat*<sup>3</sup>, makes a curious juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane by including references to his own family between the praise for Allah, and that of Muhammad. His reference to the *darga*, as the abode of Allah, hints at the author's inclination towards Sufism. Also, his pleadings to Allah for granting him a glimpse of the sacred feet of Muhammad, who is Allah's friend, minimizes the traditionally longish *hamd* and expands the *naat* instead, to show an acute Sufi affinity towards Muhammad<sup>4</sup>. If we follow the emotional charge of the couplets, we can see that the importance of Allah derives more from his capacity to grant a vision of Muhammad's feet, rather than from his being the absolute creator. From these narrative clues,

---

<sup>3</sup> *Hamd* is the praise of Allah and *naat* is the praise of Muhammad. These two sections are the integral generic elements of texts written by any Muslim author. In the invocation section, Eshak Uddin thus shows a *Sufi* inclination in this articulation, খোদার দরগাহে মোনাজাত

<sup>4</sup> খাবেতে দেখাও তাঁর মোবারক কদম।  
দুনিয়াতে সফল করছে জনম।।

one can deduce that Eshak Uddin's tract is an apt reflection of a moment emphatically dominated and qualified by Prophet-centric piety.

Among various conceptualizations and renditions of this Prophet-centric piety, here, in *Dastan Shahide Karbala*, we see the author making a formulation of piety that touches upon the affect towards Muhammad<sup>5</sup>. It clearly follows the language of *Sufi*-tinged piety in invoking its addressees —“সোন জত আসেকান নবি মোস্তফার”<sup>6</sup> (“Listen to this O lovers of Muhammad”)— who will be instructed about the obligatory principles, behavioural codes, about prayer and the notions of sin and redemption in the book.

Knowledge about the obligatory principles became important from the late eighteenth century onwards; different behavioural manuals and theosophical treatises began to be written from this time by the vernacular-*maulanas* who had had sufficient exposure to Arabic-Persian religious knowledge. *Iman* started to become a structured aspiration during the reformist period, as I have already discussed in the previous chapter, and there were constant attempts to incorporate it into all kinds of scriptural and devotional literature prevalent in Bengal at the time. In an attempt to connect *Sufi* sensibilities with *iman*, the distance between scriptural obligation and Sufi emotion (which had been one of the foremost concerns of the fundamentalist reformists) was resolved in the hands of the

---

<sup>5</sup> আর কিছু নাহি চাহি তোমার হুজুরে।  
না চাহিতে সব চিজ দিয়াছেন মোরে।।  
কেবল ইমান লাগি আরজ দরগায়।  
দয়া করে এই চিজ বকশাও আমায়।।  
দিন ইছলামেতে যেন সদা থাকে মতি।  
তোমার দরগাহে আল্লা হাজার মিনতি।।  
আর এক মোনাজাত ওহে আল্লা সাঁই।  
সেই চিজ দেহ মোরে তোমার দোহাই।।  
তোমার হবিব নবি দিন মোহাম্মাদ।

তাঁর উছলাতে তাঁর দেখাও দু-পদ।। Eshak Uddin, *Dastan Shahide Karbala*

(Show me, Allah, his sacred feet in my dreams. Let my life be fulfilled. You have given me more than what I need, I do not want more. Only give me *iman* so that I remain faithful to Islam).

<sup>6</sup> Eshak Uddin, *Dastan Shahide Karbala*

traditional *mullahs* and contemporary Sufi *pirs* in this period of mutual negotiations<sup>7</sup>.

Already in a late eighteenth or early nineteenth century *fiqah* (Islamic jurisprudence) text written by Nazar Mamud, entitled *Tauhid Iman*<sup>8</sup>—*Sufi tariqah* and the mystical *ishq* (পরিত) were refuted by positing the supremacy of the cerebral (আকলে)<sup>9</sup>. This textual reference shows, that while there were processes of reconciliation, the mainstream religious authorities were trying to minimize the power of the charismatic local *Sufis*, who lacked any *shariyati* understanding. Sufism inclined itself to become a part of the reformist polemic by confirming its status as *bashara* (with *sharia*), and differentiating itself from the practices of the *beshara Sufis*<sup>10</sup> (i.e. those inclined to *shirk* and practising *bid'at*). *Bashara Sufi* (Sufism with an Islamic scriptural orientation) tracts like *Atharva Muhammadi Veda* and *Asheqe Rasul* not only validated their own claim over the sacred characters of the *pak panjatan* or the *ahl-ul-bayt*, while negating the Shia claim over them, they were extremely particular in disowning everything associated with the commemoration of *Muharram*. In a similar ideological ploy, the narratives on Karbala, while valorising *ahl-ul-bayt* or the family of the Prophet, disclaimed *Muharram* and any form of ritualistic mourning on the whole.

All the poets and authors who were part of the printed *puthi* culture of the Karbala narrative in Bangla came from the traditional folds of the *mullahs* having different inclinations to Sufism and to the reformist platforms. With

---

<sup>7</sup> Though I have already discussed the issue of reconciliation in the previous sections of this chapter, just to reiterate, the *Sufi* tracts were deeply invested in the reconciliation between the *sharia* and *tariqah* by offering a new symbolism. According to Abdur Rahim Chishti, *sharia* and *tariqah* take the places of the father and the mother respectively, while *haqiqah* (truth) is the *pir* and *marifa* (mystical practice of that truth) the disciple.

শরিয়তে মাতা আর পিতা তরিকতে।

হকিকতে ওস্তাদ আর মুরশিদ মারফতে।। আব্দুর রহমান চিশতী

<sup>8</sup> Nazar Mamud wrote his *shariyati* treatise in the first half of the nineteenth century. He was from Balia Pargana, Hooghly and used Arabic-Persian and Urdu registers in Bangla. We will talk about the social relevance of language in the next chapter.

<sup>9</sup> *Tauhid Imam*. Nazar Mamud, ed. Shahjahan Mian (Dhaka: Jyoti Prakashan, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> *Beshra* is a derogatory term used to designate the cult of the *pirs* that was lived, not so much, or at all, enlightened by Islamic scriptures and was based on a personalized form of religiosity. During the reform movements, *pirs* belonging to such peripheral forms of religiosity were severely attacked in order to establish an ideal Islam.

the changing demands of the time, the engagement of the traditional *mullahs* with the scriptures and reformist expressions of Islam changed, producing a new class of traditional *mullahs*. It might have been out of the insecurity that reform induced in them, of losing hold over the common masses in Bengal, that the authors of the Karbala since the late nineteenth century (more specifically since the 1880s) began to produce narratives which constantly referred to the *Hadis*—authenticating both the story and what they wanted to emphasize in the story. When the authors of the Karbala texts in print punctuated their narratives with citations from the *Hadis* literature, it brought them closer to the contemporary instructional manuals, which used the same generic ploy to address the pressing need for scriptural authentication<sup>11</sup>.

Almost all the narratives of Karbala written in *Dobhashi* or *Musalmani* Bangla reveal their inclination towards the Islamic knowledge systems, which pushed them away from the local poetic idioms that had constituted their aesthetic in the medieval period. The writers of Karbala narratives since the mid nineteenth century, who deployed a language with scriptural references, can be identified as being *Hanafis*. From their deployment of scriptural values it can be deduced that they were quite well-versed in the Islamic knowledge systems that they had received in the newly emerged reformed madrasa education system. This inclination was quite evident in their attempts to write *adab* literature. *Puthis* such as *Namaj Mahatma*, *Fajilate Darood*, *Jiyarate Kabbar*, *Jihade Islamia*<sup>12</sup>, *Haqiqatchchhalat*<sup>13</sup>—all published under Jonab Ali's name, established his *adab* texts within a repertoire of translated manuals that tried to bridge the gap between high, grand scriptural traditions and the vernacular masses, by offering proper knowledge of Islam in cheap prints. With these attempts, certain patterns began to take shape, where it was not only the Karbala texts from the cheap

---

<sup>11</sup> This need for scriptural authentication was a new sensibility of the age that was absent till Garibullah or Munshi Yakub. If we follow the dates of composition of the available printed Karbala texts, they appear to coincide with a culture full of transaction and mutual seepage between different reform ideologies and the traditionalist responses.

<sup>12</sup> Ahmed Sharif has detected the authorship of Jonab Ali for these *puthis*. *Puthi Parichiti*, (Dacca: Dacca University) 1958, p. 672.

<sup>13</sup> Sukumar Sen claimed this *puthi* along with the mentioned others as having been authored by Jonab Ali. *Islami Bangla Sahitya*, (Kolkata: Ananda Prakashana) p. 167.



print culture that revealed a strong scriptural concern, but the more entertaining *qissas* about non-religious battles and romances somehow also began to talk about issues of conversion in a more deliberate and self-conscious way. Though Muhammad Munshi primarily wrote *kecchas* (popular narratives like *qissas*), other than one Karbala narrative, and acquired popularity as the author of entertaining narratives, his Karbala narrative was not lacking in its scriptural claims. In his repertoire again, devotionism towards the Prophet and his family was a common theme, regardless of whether it was a *keccha* or a Karbala narrative.

### 3.1.1 The Author, the Implied Reader/Audience and the Community

Reading continued to remain a sacred ritual for the community, thus still blurring the distinction between the designated space of the ritual and the designated act of reading the narratives. But what was added as a new generic element with the references to the *Hadis*, was the invocation of the audience as a community with a new consciousness. When the new narrative structure of the printed Karbala *puthis* reaffirmed reading—as a sacred act and also as a channel to produce and disseminate religiosity—in an attempt to impart a basic understandings of *farz*, *iman* and *dwin*, the audience/literary community was produced as a community of Islamic virtue. This new turn was interpreted and narrativized in the Karbala texts by shuffling and securing new thematics; for example, the flow of the events in the narrative after the birth of Muhammad was paused, to render the act of reading into a sacred act of religiosity, by inviting the audience to recite *darood*.

পয়দা হইল নবি দীনের রওশন।  
দরুদ তাঁহার পরে ভেজ মমিনান।।  
ইয়া নবী ছালাম আলায়কা।  
ইয়া রাছুল ছালাম আলায়কা।।  
ইয়া হাবিব ছালাম আলায়কা।  
ছালাওয়াতুল্লাহে আলায়কা।।  
ভেজ আয় রব মোরে দরুদো ছালাম।

বর গুজিদা নবি পর আপনি মোদাম।<sup>14</sup> *Dastan Shahide Karbala*, Eshak Uddin

When the angels, or *firishtas*, Zybril, Asrail (the angel of death), Ismail and another three lakh angels, come to greet the dying Prophet in the narrative, the audience listening to it must have broken into a *darood* along with the narrator, as he described the *firishtas* greeting Muhammad. While reading aloud or while listening to the recitation of the Karbala text, the audience must have joined their voices in prayer when Muhammad was greeted in the recitation. “আলবেদা বলিয়া সবে আরজ করিল। ছালাম আলেক লেও সকলে কহিল।। আছলামো আলায়কা আয় আহাম্মদ। আছলামো আলায়কা আয় আহাম্মদ।। আছলামো আলায়কা ইয়া রছুলুল্লা। আছলামো আলায়কা ইয়া হবিবুল্লা”।<sup>15</sup> We have clearer evidence of the recitation of Karbala books as a sacred practice from certain generic elements elaborated in the book as well. Through the rhythmic divisions of the narrative (changes in the rhythm scheme, “পয়ার”, “ছোটপয়ার”, specified within the text to indicate breaks in the act of reading), Muhammad Munshi invites his audience to recite *darood*, which clearly establishes the participation of the audience in the act of reading to make it a sacred ritual. In the episode where the Prophet is dying, the recurrent invocation of the audience to recite *darood* produced a sense of the community and a ritual act that stabilized it at the same time.

The texts repeatedly described and emphasised how a dying Muhammad was in immense unease and pain thinking about the punishment that was due to his community for the sin it had committed. They also underscored how Allah forgave the community in exchange for Muhammad’s *safa’at*, or penance. It was also stated that according to Muhammad’s wish, Allah exempted the community from the excruciating pain of death by bestowing the collective pain due to them on Muhammad instead. Thus the Prophet, as the saviour of the community, when revered in the act of reading, connected the act of reading to the performing tradition of revering and celebrating

---

<sup>14</sup> ‘Nabi, the aura of Islam, is born, Send your salutations to him’ – this instruction embedded in the narrative was followed by a long honorific verse.

<sup>15</sup> This is a long section of salutation where Muhammad has been called the friend of Allah which again has a *Sufi* connotation. Muhammad Munshi, *Asal Shahide Karbala*

him. In Muhammad Munshi, one section ends with an invitation to recite *darood*, “ভেজহ দরুদ সবে নবিজীর পরে। এয়ছা নবি না হইবে দুনিয়া উপরে” (send your salutations to the revered Prophet, There would not be any other Prophet after him) only to have the next section begin with another very similar invocation—“দরুদ ছালাম ভেজসবে। এয়ছা নবি না হইবে দুনিয়া উপরে” (To the respected Prophet, send your salutations, There would not be any other Prophet after him) In the *Sufi* tract *Atharbba Mahammadi Veda* by Shah Abdur Karim, the author, while defining *Tariqah* as connected to *sharia*, prescribes that *darood* be recited every time Muhammad and the *ahl-ul-bayt* is mentioned in the text.

হাজার শুকুর ভেজি আল্লার দরগায়।  
 দরুদ তাহার বাদে নবি মস্তাফায়।।  
 আওলাদ রছুল পড়ে দরুদ নিহাত।  
 আহলে বয়েতেরে আর দরুদ ছালাত।।

<sup>1</sup> খোদাতালার দরগাহে মোনাজাত, *দাস্তান শহীদে কারবালা*, মহাম্মদ মুনশী

(I send a thousand salutations to the shrine of Allah. Then I salute the Prophet. Then I salute the family of the Prophet)

The use of the phrase ‘*darga of Khoda*’, in currency at the time in some religious tracts and also in Karbala texts<sup>16</sup>, also attest to this interconnectedness between scripture and *Sufi* sensibilities.

Thus, the active engagement of the audience by reading a *darood* in the middle of recitation to celebrate the Prophet endowed the narrative with a ritualistic energy, namely *milad*—i.e. the ritual of celebrating the birth of the Prophet. At the turn of the century, *milad*, in forming and providing the basics of piety, became a common and signature ritual for the local Islamic communities. The ritual status of the narrative of Karbala opened up the scope for *milad* not only to be a lived obligatory proforma for the literary community in *Dastan Shahide Karbala*, but also brought the narrative genre close to the discursive genre of instruction. While the reformist platforms sometimes opposed and sometimes rectified forms of piety

---

<sup>16</sup> খোদাতালার দরগাহে মোনাজাত, *দাস্তান শহীদে কারবালা*, মহাম্মদ মুনশী

associated with *milad*, the new traditionalist *Hanafi* authors validated the observance of *milad*<sup>17</sup>. The overlap between the narrative and the discursive was not unlikely, as the authors did not separate the value of the narrative as dissociated from the value of the sacred, as envisaged by the religious tracts. Hence a common audience/readership of the narrative, and of the discursive tracts, could be discerned from the implied audience, addressed by the author in the text, which was a ritual community as well. Whereas the previous generation of *kathmullahs* took narrative as scripture, where *qissas* enjoyed the status of didactic or theological tracts, now there were several attempts to qualify the narrative as scripture, by informing it with a different and structured kind of religiosity. Both the mode of performance of the texts, i.e. recitation, and the textual cues meant to arouse the audience to break into a chant, marked the text's position as close to, or within, the ritualistic tradition—like in the observance of *milad*, for instance. *Sirat*, *Maulud Sharif*, *mirajnama*<sup>18</sup>, *ofatnama*<sup>19</sup>—as ritual-narrative genres, all defined a form of piety, where recitation of the narratives produced the ritualistic format for the community. When Daad Ali in his *Aseke Rasul* praises Hasan and Husayn as the progeny of the Prophet, he not only sets down the general devotional idioms, but also validates a common claim of the *Hanafi* mullahs and the contemporary *Sufis* over *milad* to take it away from pre-reformist popular imagination.

হাসান ও হোসেন তাঁহারই সূত  
রাজি আল্লাহো আন্‌হুম্ গুণ যুত  
এই পঞ্চ-তনু হন অতি পূত  
গাও গাও মোহাম্মদ সালে আল্লাহ্ ।।

[Hasan and Husayn are his progeny. The *Pak panjatan* is the sacred five. Sing the praise of Muhammad.] — *Aseke Rasul*, Daad Ali

From the early modern period, the same author wrote instruction manuals about obligatory rules, scriptural tracts, *sawal* literature and *qissas*—connected or not-connected to sacred characters. Poets of the scribal culture like Heyat Mamud and Garibullah attempted more or less all the discursive

<sup>17</sup> The occurrence of debates on *milad* between *Ahl-e-Hadis* and *Hanafis* could be discerned till the 1940s, I have discussed this in greater detail in chapters IV and V.

<sup>18</sup> *Mirajnama* is the narrative about *shab-e-miraj* when Allah revealed his knowledge to Muhammad.

<sup>19</sup> *Ofatnama* is the narrative about the death of the Prophet.

and narrative genres available to them. Later poets of print culture carried on with the legacy by writing religious manuals along with the *qissas*<sup>20</sup>.

### 3.1.2 From Prophet-centric Piety to Husayn-centric Piety

What is also important to note here is that, within a newly found prophet-centric piety, not only reading, but writing about the lives of the Prophet and his grandsons also became a mode of sublimation for many devotional urges contemporary to the time. When Eshak Uddin laments over the spatial distance between Medina where Muhammad's *rowza* (tomb marking his grave) is, and his own village in a remote part of Bengal, complete with its prosaic quotidian co-ordinates —'zila Rangpur, thana Jaldhaka'<sup>21</sup>—the location of the author is cited without going through any customary generic formulations. In this lament, the new realisation about the necessity of *hajj* as one of the basic precepts of Islam is articulated. Writing about the sacred life of the prophet, then, became a sacred act, which sublimated many pragmatic lacks for not being able to go to *hajj* that the author recast as a *Sufi* state of separation<sup>22</sup>. When the angel Zibrail reveals to Muhammad the destined death of his grandsons, Eshak Uddin in his *Dastan Shahide Karbala*, in addition to describing the grief-stricken Nabi, Ali and Fatema, also describes the acute pain felt by the narrator himself. Thus the narrator validated the act of showing grief as a form of piety through this identification with the pain of the sacred figures, and in the process,

---

<sup>20</sup> Other *puthis* of Jonab Ali also reveal his concern over the basic obligatory principles of Islam, including—*Namaj Mahatma*, *Fajilate Darood*, *Jiyarate Kabar*, *Jehade Islamia* (battles during the reign of Umar), *JangeKhoybar*, *Haqiqachchalat*. Sharif, *PuthiParichiti*, 1958, p 672. Muhammad Munshi wrote *qissas* like *Rupchand Saodagar O Kanchanmala*, *Samnurimaner Jang*, *UmmarUmmiyarNakal*, *Delbahar O Ali*. Ahmed Sharif, *PuthiParichiti*, A. Q. N. Adam remarks that (*Masik Mohammadi*, Aswin, 1352, p582) that Abdul Ohab wrote *Layli Majnun*, *Asrarul Salat*, *Ojudnama*, *NajatArowar*, , but Ahmed Sharif claims *RagnamaShatamana*, *FoyjaleAhkam* and *Achhrarchhhalat* to have been written by Abdul Ohab, Sharif, *PuthiParichiti*, 1358, p670

<sup>21</sup> তিনি আছে মদিনাতে আমি বাঙ্গালাতে।

জেলা রঙ্গপুর থানা জলঢাকাতে।।

<sup>22</sup>খালিসা খুটামারা গ্রাম জনমের ভূমি।

সেখানে গরীব হলে রাখ মোরে তুমি।।

টাকা নাহি কেমনেতে যাব মদিনায়।

রওজা শরিফের মাটি মাখি মাঠে গায়। [You are there in far Medina, and I am here in remote Khalisa Khutamara village of Bengal. You have kept me in poverty, how would I go to Medina. I smear myself with the soil of your tomb in my imagination]

invoked a community of listeners to undergo the same agony. Thus reading, in different ways, became ‘doing’ piety, as well as an act of preaching about the forms of piety<sup>23</sup>. Also, writing, here as a ritual act to ask for *dowa* (blessings) from the audience, which listened to the sacred tale about the grandsons of the Prophet<sup>24</sup>, became sacred because of its authentic root in the scriptures<sup>25</sup>.

When the author’s self-identification, which had been a stock generic element of any traditional text, was endowed with the author’s familial coordinates, descriptions of his health and his sons’ physical and educational troubles, it also gave a new shape to popular piety. With the inclusion of these profane elements, we see the emergence of individualistic engagements with religiosity within the realm of popular piety. That the author, while writing about the grandsons of the prophet, prays to Allah to grant his *madrassa*-enrolled son a respectable degree points to a new interest in *madrassa* education as the condition for superiority in religious knowledge. This juxtaposition of the secular and the profane emerged as one of the parameters of popular piety while *iman* was considered to be attainable in religiosity for an individual. An individual’s voice like Eshak Uddin’s, even outside the domain of initiation into Sufism, attests to, and affirms an individual’s access to piety that was generally overtly based on complete surrender to the Prophet and his family and companions. In this repertoire of cheap print culture, one text after another affirmed the sacred

---

<sup>23</sup> কবি বলে এমাম দায় কলিজা ফাটিয়া যায়

মউতের খবর শুনিয়া।...

শুনি এ খবর বাতে বান্ধি হইয়া কেমনেতে

হায় হায় নিদারুন বাণী।

কেমনে ছবুর করে কলম কাগজ পরে

বর বর পড়িছে যে পানি।।[The poet says his heart bursts in pain to know

about the death of the Imam. How could he restrain his heart? How would the pen remain calm, the ink flows like tears.]

<sup>24</sup> শুনিয়া করিবে দোয়া এ আরজ মেরা।

<sup>25</sup> সে দোন ভায়ের হাল শুনহে মমিন।

কেতাব দেখিয়া কহে এছহাক অধীন।।...

আল্লা আলম বেছওয়াব কেতাবে যা ছিল।

দাস্তানের বিচে তাহা সায়েরি হইল।।

bond between the Prophet and his grandsons and claimed them as the core of piety.

আওলাদে ফাতেমার ধরিয়া দামন।

ভজিব সত্বের পির মুরশিদ রতন।। [By holding on to the robe of the son of Fatima, I will be able to worship my *Sufi* master] মুনশী আব্দুর রহমান, *অখর্ব মহাম্মদী বেদ*

This reverence towards the sacred-five, rather than radiating a Shia-piety, proves a strong connection between *Sufi* devotionism based on mystic love and piety towards the *ahl e-bayt*. These *Sufi* authors like Daad Ali and Munshi Abdur Rahman represented that generation of *Sufis* in late nineteenth century Bengal, who were initiated in the high textual knowledge of Sufism, with special training in the doctrinal philosophies of major *Tariqahs* like *Suhrawardiya*, *Naqshbandiya*, *Chistiya* and *Qadiriya* at the different knowledge centres of North India<sup>26</sup>. There were many who were initiated into Sufism in turn by these *Sufis* in the local religious institutions. These *Sufis* contributed much to shaping the devotional landscape of post reformist Bengal by reformulating the inclination towards *ahl-e-bayt* as something more than scripturally sanctioned mysticism or simple piety. The traditional *mullahs*, also trained in the new systems of madrasa education, with the newly acquired impetus of the *Deoband* and *Ahl-e-Sunnat* education, developed an expertise in scriptural knowledge. These educated *mullahs*, after coming back to their native villages, founded madrasas, thus inculcating a practice of religion, which is thought to have been the moment of initiation of the community in the language of *Qur'anic* knowledge<sup>27</sup>.

When these *mullahs* began to write religious treatises, along with *qissa* and *jungnama* as their next move, generic overlaps and thematic seepages occurred as a result of their newly informed authorial selves and aspirations. It should also be mentioned here that Prophet-centric piety took a new shape in their hands with their marked attempts to have ownership over the printed texts. The forces of the market were in a mutually

---

<sup>26</sup> Abdur Rahman referred to his training in four major *silsilahs* in some learning centres in north India.

<sup>27</sup> Cheap print culture made this move apparent.

constitutive link with the religious emotion forming the basis of piety as a social phenomenon in the days of print. The market and the new channels of communication changed the perception of religiosity, which also changed the emotional landscape by bringing the Prophet and his auxiliaries at a close tactile distance. Through the distribution network of the cheap print culture, everything that was needed as religion, and was necessary for the common masses to understand the community they belonged to, was readily available to fulfil their needs and demands.

The extension of the history/story after the death of the Prophet brought the inevitable sacred characters into the narratives to strengthen a prophet-centric piety. While, traditionally it was believed that Hasan resembled Muhammad in the lower half of his body, while Husayn bore the resemblance of the upper half, this was constantly reiterated in the narratives on Karbala to place Husayn as somewhat superior. Eshak Uddin's emphasis on the description of Husayn as radiating light in the dark was almost equivalent to the celebrated *nur* or divine aura or radiance of Muhammad in the *Sufi* worldview<sup>28</sup>. In the narrative space, created by all the authors alike, it was Husayn to whom the Prophet appeared in a dream and called upon him to be a *shahid*, or martyr, and join him in *jannat*—heaven. Though Hasan was martyred before Husayn and much emotion was invested in him too, it was through Husayn that a conduit was created for the readers/audience of Karbala, in the popular print, for carrying over their Prophet-centric piety and extending it into a Hasan-Husayn-centric piety. This Husayn-centric piety thus served to strengthen Prophet-centric piety, and enriched the forms of popular piety proliferated through the Karbala narratives, which had many overlaps with *Sufi* tracts, and other forms of narratives, where the *naat* was extended to include all the members of the *pak panjatan* (besides Muhammad) along with the *ashab* (or the

---

<sup>28</sup> কেতাবেতে রাবি এয়ছা করে রওয়ায়েত।

আছিল হোছেন শাহা হাছিন ছুরাত।।

আস্কারিয়া রাতে যদি বসিয়া থাকিত।

ছুরাতের জ্যোতে ঘর রওশান হইত।। [The *hadis* says that, Imam Husayn was so beautiful that even a dark room would have been illuminated with the radiance of his beauty]



companions of Muhammad). The narratives on Karbala, being the most valid form of these, with the *pak panjatan* as its protagonists, took on acutely emotional shapes—for example, in Eshak Uddin’s text, in response to Zybril’s question, Muhammad says, he would prefer the death of his own son if it meant he could keep Husayn alive<sup>29</sup>. The author, in explaining the Prophet’s choice to his readers/audience, thus implores them to have devotion towards Husayn, because he was evidently the one most precious to the Prophet himself<sup>30</sup>.

In this context, it must be noted that Muhammad and his venerated family had always been at the crux of piety irrespective of all sectarian differences. The texts of Islamicate Bengal always celebrated affiliation to and connection with these figures so close to the Prophet, giving the family almost a polytheistic status. While the reformist ideology, and subsequently the new traditionalists, fought with all their might to eradicate polytheistic fervour, or *shirk*, these characters were validated and their intercessory values were appropriated through a new religious affect with the help of scriptural citations. It must be mentioned that nowhere do we get any reference of denial or refutation of any previous text for its polytheistic overtone<sup>31</sup> and physically expressed grief<sup>32</sup> therein from either the

---

<sup>29</sup> But this was neither *Shia* nor deriving from the *Ahl-e-Hadis* platform of the *Muhammadiyahs*. Rather, this was the form of popular piety among the *Hanafi* community.

<sup>30</sup> দেখে ভাই মোমিনান করিয়া বিচার।

হোছেন কেমন চিজ ছিল মোস্তাফার।।...

আশেকান মোমিনান দুনিয়ার পরে।

হোছেনের পরে যেবা মহব্বত করে।।

দিন ও দুনিয়া বিচে দানা সেইজন।

হাসরে পাইবে সেই হোছেনের দামন।।[O believers, judge for yourself how precious was Imam Husayn to the Prophet. He, who loves Husayn, will go to paradise and will receive Husayn’s blessings]

<sup>31</sup> তুমি বিনা কেবা আছে কার নেব ছায়া।

নবীর আওলাদ বিনে কে করিবে দয়া।।

এমামের পাদপদ্ম শিরেতে বন্দিয়া।

হয়্যোতমামুদরচকেতিবদখেয়িয়া।। [There is no one other than you to give us protection, Without the progeny of the prophet who will give us blessings. Worshipping at the sacred lotus-feet of Imam Husayn, Heyat Mamud writes this poem] *Jarijungnama, Kabi Heyat Mamud*, ed. Mazharul Islam, p342

<sup>32</sup> সতী নারী সাহাবানু অতি বিকলিত তনু

reformists or the new traditionalists (*Hanafis*). It may be conjectured that the authors were either oblivious to the preceding textual traditions, or were so overwhelmingly disturbed by the performance of ritual in real life, that they did not really pay heed to the evidence of similar emotions in the precedent literature.

As the Prophet had sacrificed his grandsons for the *ummat*, the grandsons in all their glory became equally important as the Prophet's gifts to the *ummat*<sup>33</sup>. What we can see here is that, irrespective of what was happening at the religious front, all the approaches were in some way or the other placing the Imam brothers at the forefront of piety. In mid nineteenth century Bengal, with the emergence of a more scripturally informed Sufism, closely connected to the *Hanafī mazhab* and in denial of some sects<sup>34</sup>, we see Imam Ali being prioritized,<sup>35</sup> with his sons and wife, i.e. the

---

ধরনীতে কান্দএ গড়িয়া।

আউল মাথার কেশ বাউল মলিন বেশ

সঘনে হানএ নিজ হিয়া।।[The chaste wife Sahabanu, with trembling and writhing limbs, rolls in the dust. With her hair open and unkempt, attire torn, she beats her chest in the frenzy of grief] *Imam Bijoy*, Daulat Ujir Bahram Khan, p160

<sup>33</sup> Texts written in *Musalmani Bangla* carefully crafted narrative sections titled “রসূল উম্মতের জন্য যে যে দুই চিজ রেখে গেছেন তার বয়ান” to explicate and establish this.

<sup>34</sup> While writing a *Sufi* tract on love and devotion towards the Prophet, Shah Abdur Rahim categorically excluded certain sects for whom he was not offering this mystical knowledge about Allah. He mentioned the *Shias*, *Ahl-e-Sunnat*, *Rafeji*, *Khareji*, *Nechari* and the *Bauls* as the people whom he was deliberately excluding from his target readership. *Atharbbā Muhammadi Veda*, p298

<sup>35</sup> All the four *ashab*, or companions of the Prophet were always given a very crucial space without any hint of historical internal conflict between them, as they were so important in carrying forward the legacy of Muhammad. Historians/narrators of the later period never talked in the language of conflict in the process of claiming validity for the originary moments of Islam. But when in texts like Abdur Rahim's, all the other three competent *ashab*, who had spread Islam with such charisma, praised Ali, another level of validation was drawn for Ali. This scope for Ali actually validated the path of *marifat* as Ali was chosen by the Prophet to carry on his *marfati ilm*, that is, the mystical knowledge of the Prophet. Consequentially, in this process of creating an Ali-centric piety in this *marfati tariqah*, an affective devotionism was produced again towards his sons — Hasan and Husayn.

বোখারি মোছলেম আর ছহি তিরমজিতে।

নিছাই দাউদ এবনে মাজার বিচেতে।।

আর বাজে হদিছের কেতাব মাঝার।।

শুনেছি তারিফ খুব তিন ছাহাবার।।

নবির ইয়ার খেশি দোস্তুদার ছিল।

একিদা ইমানে দিল কবুল করিল।।

grandsons and the daughter of the Prophet respectively, thus completing the familial design with him. Authors of the *Sufi* tracts referred to two instances of *miraj*, or revelation, which took place in the history of Islam—the event of revelation: one concerned Muhammad and the other Ali—thus creating the scope for an Ali-centric piety within reformed Sufism, while also emphasizing the inheritance of the Prophetic spiritual knowledge. In Abdur Rahim’s *Sufi* tract *Atharbba Muhammad Veda*, the affective importance of the figures of *ahl-ul-bayt* is proposed as the basis of his *mazhab*, one which he calls এস্করে মজহাব or the *mazhab* of *ishq*<sup>36</sup>. These *Sufi* tracts and all the genres celebrating devotionism<sup>37</sup>, mystical or otherwise, created a ground for মহব্বত, or love, for the Prophet, and an affective subservience to Husayn. Not only the genres directly connected to the Prophet-centric piety, but in *qissa*/narrative genres and *nasihatnama*/instructional manuals as well, even when they were not actors/characters themselves, at every pretext, either Muhammad, or the other sacred characters of the *pak panjatan*, were given narrative priority. Even if Muhammad was not a character in the narrative in question (he could not have been so, other than

---

এ তিন ছাহাবা নিজে তারিফ আলীর।

করেছেন বাড়াইয়া কতক জিকির।। ...

এসব দলিল ভাব মনে বিচারিয়া।

রাহে মওলা পরে রব কাইম হইয়া।।...

আওলাদে ফাতেমা আলী জান মোস্তফার।

কদম হোছেন মেরা খান্দানের সার।।[All the *hadis* texts say that the first three caliphs praised Ali. Taking their suggestion I have decided to remain faithful to Ali. Fatema’s son was so dear to Ali. I will worship Husayn’s feet] অথর্ব মোহাম্মাদী বেদ।Abdur Rahim Chishti

Also in other *Sufi* tracts, like,

নবীর স্ববংশ আছহাব জামাতা প্রধান।

বাহুবলে রাজ্যশাসি করল মুসলমান,Prabhu Parichoy, Shah Abdul Jalil

Or Ali could also appear as a historical character in some *junghnama*, dealing with Islamic battles, that the authors needed so much to create and cater to a structured literary community,

আলি বাদে মর্দ কে বা মদিনা মাঝার

সেই মর্দ গেলো জদি মদিনা ছাড়িয়া

ছেপাহি হইয়া জাব শেখানে চলিয়া

মক্কা মদিনার খাক দিব উড়াইয়া,Junge Khoybor, Dosta Muhammad

Here, in this *qissa* Ali was placed above even Umar, which was very unusual in a narrative tradition that exhausted many narrative situations to keep the *ashab* together and in order.

<sup>36</sup>*Atharbba Muhammadi Veda*, Abdur Rahim Chishti.

<sup>37</sup>*Asheqe Rasul*, Daad Ali, Prabhu Parichoy, Shah Abdul Jalil (1923).

in the narratives connected to his life) he could be there as an all-pervasive presence because of the generic inevitability of *naat* in all literature ever produced by any Muslim author belonging to the traditions, which I am describing here in this thesis. In upholding the community ideals through the instructional manuals emphasising the notions of *farz* and *adab*, Muhammad appears with his family and grandsons in the *naat* section as an emotional and pious validation for the community. This is where the *adab* literature intersects with the Karbala repertoire.

It must be mentioned here that Fatema had become the most revered feminine figure from the beginning of Islamication, and continued to remain so, in the subsequent periods of history by appearing in the narrative even when she did not have much to do in a particular *qissa*<sup>38</sup>. She was the one most stricken with grief in anticipating the death of the Imam brothers, and was thus the connecting thread between her father Muhammad and her sons Hasan and Husayn. She was also revered in the instructional manuals—as some instructions were specifically validated as being told by Muhammad to his daughter Fatema<sup>39</sup>, thus making her the Prophet’s own companion in the matters of *iman* and *farz*. A language of Fatema-centric piety could be discerned in affective matters with which the act of showing grief over personal loss was now elevated to the realm of a sublime pain, in order to endow it with a spiritual essence. আফতাব মাহতাব কান্দে পশুপক্ষীগণে/ পাহাড় জঙ্গল কান্দে ফাতেমার কান্দনে...ফাতেমার কান্দনে কান্দে হজরত রছুল/ মোবারক হাতে বান্ধে ফাতেমার চুল। [Everybody cried including the beasts and birds, to see Fatema crying. The Prophet cried too, and with his own compassionate hands, he tied up his daughter’s hair—Eshak Uddin]. What we intend to draw attention to here, is the design based on the sacred familial bonds of *ahl ul-bayt* which

---

<sup>38</sup> Not even a not-so-sacred moment was spared to reaffirm Fatema’s reverence. In the most celebrated *qissa* of the cheap print culture entitled *Hanifar Puthi*, aco-wife of Fatema, another wife called Hanufa bibi came to surrender at her feet so that she would recognise Hanufa as Ali’s wife and her son as Ali’s son. When Fatema did that by reading sections from the Qur’an, Fatema was called the mother of the universe.

<sup>39</sup>কোন ফল না হইবে দিন ইমানের  
যেমন আসিল হাদিছেতে এ জেকের  
পয়গম্বর বলে বিবি ফতেমার তরে  
সাফাত না পাবে নেক আমল না করে

pervaded the literary and discursive imagination of the time. Karbala narratives cannot be dissociated from that imagination as a separate domain of study<sup>40</sup>. No sense of generic autonomy can be preserved, or distinguished in their study as it was this acute affective entanglement of Hasan-Husayn and the life of the Prophet that made most any expression meaningful in the generic spaces so saturated with them, and because they shared the same domain of popular piety. This duality—of devotion on the one hand, and doctrinal obligatory function on the other—could be achieved because in the explanation of Prophet-centric piety, two important things were secured by the Prophet for the *ummat*. In *Atharba Mahammad Veda*, Abdur Rahman states, আহলে বয়েত নবি আরতে কোরান/ এহি দুই চিজ তাহা শুন মেহেরবা.....সেই চিজ যদি সবে ধরিয়া থাকিবে। হরগেজ গোমরাহি কেহ কতু না হইবে।<sup>41</sup> [There are two things for the Muslims. *Ahl-ul-bayt* and the *Qur'an*. If you hold on tight to these two, you will never become a sinner]

হজরতের পরে আল্লা আশেক হইয়া।

তাঁর নূরে পয়দা কৈল এই যে দুনিয়া।। [Falling in love with Muhammad, Allah created the whole world] Eshak Uddin, *Dastan Shahide Karbala*

কোরান শরিফ মতে নাহিত চলিলে।

---

<sup>40</sup>রছুল দেখিল যদি ফাতেমা কারণ

দুই ভাই ইমাম কোলে আছিল তখন।।

সেতাবি ফাতেমা আগে যাইয়া পৌঁছিল।

ফাতেমার হাত ধরি কহিতে লাগিল।

শুনহ ফাতেমা মোর ধড়ের পরাণ।

ছবর করহ মাগো ভাবিয়া ছোবহান।।Eshak Uddin, *Dastan Shahide Karbala*

This figuration of the father-daughter and the grandsons, in conjunction with the figure of the son-in-law was a recurrent motif that secured the religious purpose and emotional security of the community. In Muhammad Munshi's Karbala narrative, Nabi is just like a father-in-law, coaxing the son-in-law at the moment of utter chaos and crisis, in such language, providing the audience a form of piety based on familial values, where the family is the sublime and sacred family. The Nabi was imparting the premonition of his death that he had received in his dreams —“খাবের তাবির শুন বাবাজান। আমার রাহের লোকে তুঝে করিবে হয়রান।। খবরদার তাতে তুমি ছবর করিবে। সোকরের ডুরি হাত হৈতে না ছাড়িবে।। শুন বাবা সেরে খোদা কহিয়ে তমায়। মোলাকাত কিয়ামতে পাইবে আমায়। Mohammad Munshi *Shahide Karbala*.

<sup>41</sup> That this *Sufi* tract used references from both *Sufi* and *Hadis* sources, affirms the fact that there was no longer a distinction being made between the traditional scriptural sources and mystical treatises. Rumi and Sadi's *Sufi* texts were taken together with *Hadis* and *tafsir* (commentaries on the Qur'an) discourses as citations, in order to make the contours of popular piety clearer.

আর আহলে বয়েতের তাবে না চলিলে।।  
নাহি মেলে রাহে রাস্ত নাজাত মোকাম।  
আছিল মোরাদ এহি নবির কালাম।। অথর্ব মহম্মদী বেদ, শাহ আবদুল রহিম, ১২৯৮

That the obligatory and affective principles could be placed together was an outcome of the transactions between different ideas about Islam, a moment of synthesis so to speak. It was through an emotional landscape that the obligation was validated—whereby a dying *nabi* expressing his anxiety over the continued observance of praying *namaz* shaped the forms of popular piety, and in so doing, consolidated a Prophet-centric piety<sup>42</sup>. Texts constantly referred to the affective audience as both মমিন (followers) and আশেকান (lovers), validated through the Hadis, and confirming a synthesis, without any sort of demarcation between scripture-based knowledge and affect-based emotion. Affect, which was considered to have been at the root of the polytheistic emotion that the traditional Sufi *pirs* upheld, was recast with the new consciousness of the scripture. In the domain of the Karbala narratives, prophet-centric piety was strongly articulated in the emotional rationale of Sufism<sup>43</sup>, not always with the direct and institutional attestation of some *pir* but through individual devotion. The traditional title of *hamd* changed into ‘খোদাতালার দরগাহে মোনাজাত’ revealing the *Sufi* leanings of the authors, who continued to refer to *dargah* as the abode of Allah in the following sections of the text. Eshak Uddin clearly explains Allah’s love for

---

<sup>42</sup> The Nabi, unable to move because of illness, seemed to be really satisfied and assured when he saw the community praying *namaz* standing after Abu Bakr.

সোমবার ফজরের নামাজ সমায়।...

হুজুরা হইতে নবি পরদা উঠাইল।

ছিদ্দিকেরে ইমামতি করিতে দেখিল।।

যতেক আনছার আর আসহাব বেকার।

পিছেতে মজাদি হয়ে বান্দিয়া কাতার।।

এহাল দেখিয়া নবি খোসাল হইল।

সেওক্কে মসজিদ জেতে জোর নাহি ছিল।।[When the Prophet was severely ill, he saw Abu Bakr presiding over *namaz* in his absence. Finding that the *namaz* was being performed in the proper way, the Prophet became happy] *Asal Shahide Karbala*, Muhammad Munshi

<sup>43</sup> Thus, even when the texts wanted to get rid of the sensory aspects of showing grief, the intensity with which they presented the figure of the Prophet followed the intoxication of *Sufi* ideals. This paradox marked the elements of popular piety that took a scriptural turn.

Hazrat Muhammad as the condition for the creation of the universe which Allah created in the likeness of the Prophet's *nur*, or aura<sup>44</sup>.

যাঁহার নূরেতে পয়দা দুনিয়া জাহান।  
এমন গুনের চিজ নাই কোন ধন।।  
লাওলা-কালাম আল্লা কহে যাঁর পরে।  
এয়ছাই মরতবা আল্লা না দিল কাহারে।।  
নবিজীর পরে যদি পয়দা না করিত।

না হইত এ দুনিয়া শূন্যময় রৈত।।এসহাক উদ্দীন, *দাস্তান শহীদে কারবালা* [From whose aura the world has been created, he created Muhammad from his abstract being. If He did not create the Prophet, the world would have been void—Eshak Uddin, *Dastan Shahid e Karbala*]

There are other references that affirm the *Sufi* connections of the Karbala narratives. The fact that the *marifati* knowledge of Hazrat was bestowed upon Ali as the prophetic inheritance was made more prominent in certain texts. Through constant references to Ali mediated by *Sufi* elements, rather than by invoking the Caliphate, these narrative situations foregrounded their *Sufi* connections. When Ali, in *Dastan Shahide Karbala*, is informed about the destined death of his sons, the dishevelled state of his body in lamentation points to this *Sufi* embodiment of grief.

এইমত কান্দে আলী গড়াগড়ি যায়।  
মারফতে গঞ্জ<sup>45</sup> তনু ধুলাতে লুটায়।।Eshak Uddin, *Dastan Shahide Karbala*

Within this arena of ideological struggle, popular piety emerged in these overlapping zones showing signs of negotiation between the fundamentalist reformist sensibilities and the survival techniques adopted by the traditional systems. In the wide and complex field of mutual reception, authors from Sayyid Ahmad to Shariatullah to Keramat Ali, irrespective of their differences in interpretation and engagement with the *Sufi Tariqah*, became meaningful in popular imagination as *pirs*. The reception of their doctrinal and military charisma, as it were, could only be accommodated and rationalized within the emotive systems created around, and by the *pirs* who

---

<sup>44</sup> This, again, minimized the separate importance of *hamd* and made it meaningful only with respect to *naat*. This depiction brings in references of all the prophets of Islam and talks about their inevitable deaths to begin the episode on the death of the Prophet—which was a central situation of crisis.

<sup>45</sup> Thus cries Ali, who is called *marfat e ganj*, rolling on the ground. *Marfat-e-ganj* is a Sufi expression used to describe Ali.

had always been fearless and fierce in tackling the enemy, whether social or supernatural, from the very beginning of Islamic contact. It is said that when groups of *jihadi* masses went to join the war at the Frontier from the districts of Bengal, they went to see Sayyid Ahmad the *pir*, rather than out of any ideological compulsion<sup>46</sup>. *Faraizis*, while striving towards widespread reform to eradicate cults and rituals, had to project and accommodate their leaders as *pirs* in the common psyche in spite of the fact that they were fiercely opposed to *Tariqahsufi* practices like *dastbaiyat*<sup>47</sup>.

শোকর আলহামদো লিল্লা রবেল আলামিন।

এয়ছা নেয়ামত পাইল এছহাক উদ্দিন।।

আর কিছু নাহি চাই তোমার ছজুরে।

না চাহিতে সব চিজ দিয়াছেন মোরে।।

কেবল ইমান লাগি আরজ দরগায়।

দয়া করি এই চিজ বকশাও আমায়।।

দিন ইছলামেতে জেন সদা থাকে মতি।

তোমার দরগাহে আল্লা হাজার মিনতি।। [I don't want anything else. Just give me *iman* so that I remain faithful to Islam] Eshak Uddin, *Dastan Shahide Kabrbala*

Emotions related to *hajj* were being aroused in several forms, as the contemporary texts suggested *hajj* as being one of the obligatory principles. This was a new turn in popular piety itself when an individual path could be imagined and undertaken to embody a collective emotion in order to form an imagined community.

### 3.1.3 *Nasihatinama* and the *Sabiqi mullah*

---

<sup>46</sup> The founder of *Tariqah* Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, was a figure equivalent to Imam Mehdi to the common masses who expected him to disappear only to be resurrected again so that he could mow down the enemy at the north-western frontier. When elite scriptural efforts were strong and many to depict the details of his death to propagate Allah's mercy/*rahmat* for the upliftment of the Muslims, the common masses wanted to believe in the supernatural power of their hero. This form of piety, inherited through literature, was instrumental in drawing upon the forms and contours of popular piety. Miun ud-Din Ahmad Khan, 2007, p. 39.

<sup>47</sup> *Dast bayt* is a *Sufi* practice of making disciples by a teacher/*murshid/pir* by the touch of his hand. In Hunter's documentation, on his first visit, Sayyid Ahmad Shahid induced such enthusiasm and eagerness when he came to Calcutta, that he had to unfurl his turban so that people could touch it instead of his hand to become his disciple.



Rival activities among and between the reformers and the *mullahs* activated the Muslim society as a whole through the production of polemic literature and *bahas* performances. New energies could be seen in the interaction between different localities and social groups. If we study the modes and patterns of reception of these literatures, and try to contextualize the *bahas* performances, the social configuration of these groups as both reader and audience cannot be thought of as being either elite or scriptural. Also, if we follow the scriptural texts and didactic manuals to isolate and compare, propose and oppose the basic doctrines of the reformist sects from within, no homogeneous readership can be extrapolated from the configurations of genre, language, and patterns of narrativization of those texts.

Though Hunter notes the presence of the middle class in the *Tariqah* movement<sup>48</sup>, in reality, both the *Faraizi* and *Tariqah* movements in Bengal could only claim a number of lowly peasants<sup>49</sup> as their members—the implied readership of those texts produced during this period only revealed the heterogeneity of a readership, belonging to different layers of literacy, with varying exposures to narrative culture and religious ideologies. Both the *sirat* and Karbala narratives became the site for these ideological struggles, which were instrumental in organizing a prophet-centric piety and the sense of the *ummat*. In the section, ‘chhept iman’, where Heyat Mamud defines the days of apocalypse in his *adab* text entitled *Hitajnanbani*, he mentions that at the moment of judgement a person would be asked about his community-affiliation, whose *ummat* he belonged to.

কোন যুগে জন্মিয়াছ কাহার উম্মতি। (হিতজ্ঞানবাণী কাব্য, হেয়াত মামুদ)

The anxiety that was felt by Heyat Mamud in the early eighteenth century took a more structured shape in the zeal to reform in the mid nineteenth century, leading to the formation of a politically charged community, spelt out in terms of its difference with the other, and in the final count—with the Hindus. It was an anxiety inherent in the effort to explicate Islamic symbols and signs. Along with the *bahas*, the proliferation of ‘cheap religious

---

<sup>48</sup> Hunter, *Indian Musalmans*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1872.

<sup>49</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmed, Muin ud-Din Ahmad and Qeyamuddin Khan discusses this issue at length from different perspectives.

books', instruction manual and religious tracts, *nasihatnama* as it was commonly known, reflected the growing enthusiasm for reform as well as the reaction to it from the traditional *sabiqi* society. The enthusiasm followed the circulation of cheap print culture and reached the *madrasa*, *maktab* in the rural areas, accompanying the preachers and *bahas* participants where they were being circulated. *Nasihatnama* did not emerge as a new literary genre (if this nomenclature can suggest the notion of a genre) during the heyday of the reform movements; rather, its continuity can be traced from the pre-print culture which entered the domain of print without much ideological modification<sup>50</sup>. But this continuity helped

---

<sup>50</sup> A list of the pre-print *nasihatnamas* will include *Nasihatnamah* (Afzal Ali, sixteenth century) and Shaikh Paran (sixteenth-seventeenth century), *Shariyatnama* (Nasrullah Khan (1560-1625), *KifaetulMusallin* (Shaikh Muttalib, 1559-1660), and *HazarMasail* (Abdul Karim Khondakar, seventeenth century). From the later period, we can cite *Hitajnanbani* (Heyat Mamud) and *Tauhid Iman* (Nazar Mamud) as examples of texts which were easily chosen and printed, thus providing print culture with a genre that could be explored to the maximum extent. *Nasihatnama* as a genre became reflective of the contemporary times. As already mentioned, the late eighteenth century experienced a more deliberate attempt to identify with religious obligations especially at the trade and political centres of Bengal, such as Hooghly, Dhaka and Chittagong. These textual traditions created a sense of division between Muslims and their other(s) through the textualization that dealt with military expansion of Islam. But these texts were part of a new thrust towards doing religion in the later part of the eighteenth century. In Heyat Mamud's *Jarijungnama*, Imam Husayn does not engage in war until he has chanted *darood* and the attendant paraphernalia of performing *namaz*.

নিরঞ্জন স্মরি তবে চড়িলা ষোড়াতে।

আয়াত পড়িয়া ফুঁক দিলা হৃদয়েতে।। *Sangramhusayn*, Hamid

In *Sikandarnama* of Alaol, Sikandar (Alexander) is seen to be praying to Allah through *yogic* means before going into battle. In the same manner in which Alaol incorporates conversations between *Yoga* philosophy and Sufism in his poetic oeuvre, Hamid, who is almost contemporaneous to Alaol, makes his hero Husayn engage in obligatory activities which were repeatedly foregrounded in the contemporary period. The culture of reading bits of *Qur'anicayat* (verses) with the intervention of religious authorities might have been introduced to make a departure from the previous *jungnamas* where grief over an anticipated *shahadat* was not qualified by any obligatory ritual activity.

Though the tradition of *nasihatnama* was not completely new, a new turn in language and structure of the narrative can be noticed if we make a journey from Heyat Mamud to Nazar Mamud. In pre-reformist texts too, we will begin to see references being made to *iman*, as it were, along with other more definite references to the scriptural orientations by the authors in more popular texts like *jungnama* and *qissa*. That heroes like Amir Hamza, who pre-dates Islam, was bringing *iman* to the non-Islamic territories and won furious battles as an Islamic hero even before the birth of Muhammad, did not represent a rupture in the historicity of Islam. Rather, it strengthened the emotional sphere and secured the masses. Other references can be observed where the authors are clearly drawing from the scribal culture, like:

দেওপূজা ক্ষমা দেহ ঝুটি মালা ছাড়।

একভাবে নবীর কলেমা মুখে পড়।।

আমার নবীর দীনে কোন লেঠা নাই।

articulate the complexity inherent in the transactions between the reform movements and subsequent changes in the *sabiqi* community through an already explicated genre, thus giving it a more structured and orthodox shape. Their prescriptions of obligatory tasks and ritual observances for the masses indicate the general antipathy among the rural masses towards observing these obligations, a reluctance caused because of their unfamiliarity with the practice of *juma namaz*. *Nasihatanamas*, coming from the *sabiqi* society, advocated the *juma namaz* both as a counter-narrative to the *Faraizis* and also as a result of an awakened interest in obeying the principles of *iman*. This more structured kind of *nasihatnama* emerged at the beginning of the reform movement, and continued to remain in circulation in the later period when the religious ideologies and social values associated with it took on new shapes and forms. In the making of religious consciousness among the common Muslims, this genre acted as the most popular and effective didactic tool for the illiterate and semi-literate, rural and urban Muslims alike. Like *iman*, ‘*nasihat*’ also appeared to be reflecting an emerging consciousness and anxiety over the ideals necessary to become a community.

In *Asal Shahide Karbala* by Munshi Muhammad, when Belal calls all the people of Medina to gather to have a last glimpse of the dying Prophet, his primary concern was about the instructions that the Prophet used to impart. “কোথা নবি জাবে আর কোথা নছিত”। [When the Prophet would not be here, Islamic values would disappear with him] Here again, while making religious instructions an important prophetic virtue, the *Sufi* idea of having his ‘last glimpse’ (আখেরী দিদার)<sup>51</sup> is juxtaposed with the inevitability of instructions. As *benamazi* was equivalent to otherness, the structure of the

---

সব ছাড়ি দাড়ি রাখ শুন মেরা ভাই।। *Jaiguner Puthi*, Sayyad Hamza, 1798

Also, it should not be forgotten that the text that both Gholam Saklayn and Shahjahan Mian consulted was scribed in 1740 when the literary tradition of *nasihatnama*, as well as basic religious teachings, were both initiated in the rural mosque-related religious culture (Eaton, 1993, pp.172-173). Even if we consider these performances of Husayn as scribal interpellations, it only reinstates the case for *junghnama*’s immediate response to *nasihatnama* and contemporary religious practices with which this chapter began.

<sup>51</sup> Though *didar* has a connotation of vision—as being the vision of certitude as the Sufis Say — *ayn-al-iyakin*, but here glimpse refers to the first register rather than to the ultimate moment of epiphany.

self and the forms of piety were produced by making detailed references to praying *namaz*, in order to construct the virtues of the self. It was no longer sufficient to simply posit the fact that Belal was the muezzin for *namaz*, as the traditional Karbala narratives indicated, now the authors needed to qualify it more specifically as পাঁচওক্তের নামাজ (or, *namaz* to be prayed five times a day) and had to include other obligatory specifications associated with it. That Muhammad himself used to respond to all the calls made by Belal to prayer, created an ideal picture to follow, an ideal life, whose activities were like instructions for the masses<sup>52</sup>. Munshi Muhammad describes how, while waiting for his imminent death, Mohammad did not forget to clean his mouth as a part of purifying the body, i.e. to perform অজু (ritual ablution), before *namaz*. This was not only an indication of the prophetic figure offering an ideal for living, but also firmly put forward a set of obligatory principles which were to be followed so that one could attain a death without pain<sup>53</sup>. Similarly, other sacred figures of the *pak panjatan* were also posited as the prototypes of the sacred duties to be performed through the narrative.

As belonging to the same network of circulation of popular print, the Karbala theme in the narrative tradition, and *nasihatnama* in the tradition of religious instructional manuals, also shared a similar language and sensibility about duty and piety. On the whole, the authors took all the poetic liberty necessary to insert and illustrate occasions for the common Muslims to follow as instructions. Since most all of the narrative situations

---

<sup>52</sup> Muhammad as the ideal character became the supreme template, where what he said, what he did and what he instructed to do functioned as illustrative prescriptions. The translator of the Hadis describes all these three forms as the true principles taken from Muhammad's life.

<sup>53</sup> আয়ছা মেছগাক দাঁতে চেবায় সেবক।

আখিরি ওক্তে তে তবু করিল মেছগাক ॥

পাচ ওক্তে মেছগাক করে জে অজুতে ॥

মওত করেন তার আছানির সাথে ॥[The Prophet performed all the obligatory acts before the five-time *namaz*. That made his death painless] Muhammad Munshi, *Asal Shahide Karbala*

We can see a great anxiety over the pain of death being resolved primarily through the sacrifice of his grandsons by the Prophet and also through the codes of conduct (related to birth, death and other sacred occasions like performing *namaz* five times a day) to the ordinary masses through the ideal life of the Prophet.

of the Karbala narratives were interspersed with instances of death or martyrdom, the authors made the *janaja* ritual prominent after each death—thus providing the community with an occasion through which they could connect emotionally and functionally with it. What ought to be done after death was explicated as part of the formation of piety, and became intrinsic parts of the narrative. Even Eshak Uddin, in the section that follows the lament and ritual after Muhammad’s death, gives the readers/audience (who were addressed as নকেজাত, i.e. born of pious acts) a narrative push to learn more about the rites of death from other texts. The domain of *farz* was now added to the embodied articulation of piety, and the authors never failed to utilise occasions of death to instruct their audience (in the language of the narrative) about what was to be done after a death. The correct ways of carrying out the rites and rituals of *kafan*, *dafan* and then *janaja*<sup>54</sup> were now categorically explicated as obligatory principles.

Popular piety, as discernible from the *nasihatnama*<sup>55</sup>, had its resonance in other forms of literature, in *junghnama* and also in the romantic *qissa* from the very beginning, as the superiority of Islam and conversion (as a form of Islamization<sup>56</sup>) was an issue integral to understanding the relationship

---

<sup>54</sup> ওছিয়ত মতে আছমা সেই মতে গোছল কাফন দিয়া।

জে কাপড়ে ছিল তাহে কাফনাইল আলিকে কহেন গিয়া।। ...

তাবুত লইয়া ছামনে রাখিয়া মরতযা জানাজা পড়ে।

আলি সেই রাতে জিন্নতল বকিয়াতে জাইয়া সেখানে গাড়ে।। Muhammad Munshi

It is interesting to note that how Fatema was given a burial as instructed to Ali by the *rabbi*. Rabbis who were the commentators on the *Hadis* were given prominence in the Karbala narratives as providing scriptural justification. In some other sections, from the nuances of burial, sectarian questions and role of the Prophetic companions were resolved. See chapter IV.

<sup>55</sup>The search for equivalence was the responsibility of the religious authorities in the beginning to make the idea of monotheism/*tauhid* palpable for the newly converted masses. Afzal Ali (16<sup>th</sup> c), Shaikh Paran (1550–1615), Nasrullah Khan (1560–1625, *ShariatNamah*), Shaikh Muttalib (1559–1660, *Kifaetul Musallin*, and Abdul Karim Khondakar (Seventeenth century, *HazarMasail*) attempted to posit the supremacy of Islam in the local religious-aesthetic idioms. From the literatures of this period, the processes of gradual localization of Islam, accomplished in both competitive and consenting ways, can be discerned. With such translations of scriptures, transcriptions/narrativization of historical and mythological martial heroes like Amir Hamza and Muhammad Hanifa, the battle of Karbala as a part of the *sirat* literature and also as events of military exploits, the miracles of the *pirs* to win over local feudal-religious systems, along with the aesthetics of erotic themes, different layers of Islamic ideals (popular versions of *shariyati* doctrines and Sufi metaphors) were instrumental in creating religious sensibilities in the audience.

<sup>56</sup> Here I have deliberately used the term ‘Islamization’ to demarcate the deliberate processes of conversion and laicization in the early modern period through *nasihatnama*

between the Islamic self and the non-Islamic other. Emotions that began to be directed towards and invested in Islam in this cloister of genres, were far removed from a *shariyati* understanding and could not be purged from the psyche of the masses.

### 3.2.1 Censoring the Sensory: Shia and *Shirk*

As a part of the common ethos of the time, in a didactic manual of the late nineteenth century entitled *Bedarol Ghafilin* by the author Munshi Samiruddin<sup>57</sup>, the commemoration of *Muharram* was denied the status of an Islamic activity. With this dismissal of *Muharram*, the community performing it was thus also dismissed from being the community of the Prophet.

ছাড়হে আল্লার বান্দা সেরেক বেদাত।  
তওবা করিলে আল্লা দিবেক নাজাত।।  
একবার বুরাই এজিদ করেছিল।  
গোনাগার সাগরে সে ডুবিয়া মরিল।।  
নাএব এজিদ জারা বচ্ছরে বচ্ছরে।  
রাখে মরে এজিদের এয়ছা নকশা করে।  
গেল্লাগারি করে জেই সবারে জাহির।  
মিছা দাবি করে তারা ওম্মত নবির।।

বেদারেল গাফেলিন, মুন্শি সমিরুদ্দিন

Among the rituals that were relegated to the status of *shirk* and *bid'at* in the hands of the reformists, the commemoration of *muharram* was the most condemned of all. There was hardly ever any discussion about deviations in the understanding and practice of Islamic ideals that did not express an acute disparagement of and disapproval towards *Muharram*, and towards all the paraphernalia of performing this lament over the martyrdom of Imam Hasan and Husayn. In Hamid's *Sangram Husayn*, a late seventeenth century text, there are dramatic descriptions of the expression of grief for

---

and *sawal* literature. This gained a structured form and universality in the reformist sensibilities.

<sup>57</sup> *Bedarol Ghafilin* had several editions and was published by many publishers.



power and aristocracy, but the ritualistic was always shared by lived communities without much understanding about the inherent sectarian divisions within. Shias, as a specific designated category or nomenclature, was generally claimed by the elite Shia immigrants settled in Bengal; never by the common and lived-ritualistic communities.

As already mentioned, in *Jarijungnama*, the Prophet was not only informed about the destined death of his beloved grandsons as their sacrifice was necessary for the sake of his *ummah*, he was also consoled at that very moment that there would be people, his own, to cry over their martyrdom. It was almost as if an afterlife was granted to the martyred heroes, whose ideals and sacrifice was to be remembered through the very act of mourning, *matam*, and would thus be kept alive. References to doing *matam* would remain in circulation, as a form of devotion towards the Prophet and his grandsons. But what makes Heyat Mamud a curious case for us, is his unprecedented reference to *Muharram*, as an annual ritual marking and validating the *ummat* of the Prophet.

নবী বলে কে করিবে মাতম ইহার।  
জিবরিল বলে নবী উম্মত তোমার।।  
ভকত উম্মত যত আছেন তোমার।  
বিষাদ ভাবিয়া সবে কান্দিবে ওপার।।  
বৎসরে বৎসরে দাহা করিবে সভায়।  
দশ দিন কান্দিব করিব হয় হয়।।  
করিবে ফাতেহা রোজা তোমার উম্মত।  
হেয়াত মামুদ বলে নবীর ভকত।। ...

তবে কে করিবে ভাই মাতম ইহার।  
যতেক উম্মত নবী আছএ তোমার।।  
বৎসরে বৎসরে লোক তাহাতে মিলিয়া।  
ক্রন্দন করিবে অতি ইমাম স্মরিয়া।।  
মুকুল উদাম মাখে করিবে মাতম।

ব্যাহ্ন হরিণ আদি কান্দিবে সম্ভ্রম।। *জারিজঙ্গনামা*, হেয়াত মামুদ

[Who will cry for my progeny, the Prophet asked. Zybril answered, that all the followers of Muhammad would lament the death of his grandsons. His followers would commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn every year in a frenzied performance of lament. They would bare their heads and beat their chests to show grief. All the animals would cry in reverence too]



While asserting the need for remembrance and mourning for the martyrs of Karbala, this physicality of grief did not have any continuity in the literary traditions that followed, and which divested themselves of any connection to this religious-ritualistic culture of *Muharram*. But what we can interject here, is that this perception of the ritualistic performance of grief might have grown into the broader performative articulations of the *jari* repertoire, and would become exclusive to the Shia community in the later period. In the literary traditions which followed, there was a marked impulse to demarcate the *expression* of grief from the physical and ritualistic domain of *performing* grief with its many relics and rites, by shifting grief from the domain of doing to that of feeling. These relics and rites related to the physical, *shirk* and *bida'at* to reiterate, were considered to have been the result of the accretion and acculturation which happened due to Islam's exposure to the bodily and ritualistic religiosity and polytheism of the host cultures.

Historians who have worked on the *Marsiya* literature, and specifically on Heyat Mamud, confirm Mamud's Shia affiliations by referring to the stanzas just mentioned above. As this section makes a direct reference to *Muharram* as a yearly ritual, through the performance of which Mamud emotionally secures the community as being the community of the Imam brothers, the historians are motivated to posit Mamud as a Shia. The fact that Mamud also repeatedly refers to Fatema's feet, has strengthened the perception of Mamud as being Shia to the historians<sup>60</sup>. We should mention here that majority of the contemporary poets, who express a similar

---

<sup>60</sup> As in these two lines,

বিবি ফাতেমার পদ শিরেতে বন্দিয়া।

হায়াত মামুদ কহে কেতাব দেখিয়া।। [placing his head at Fatema's feet, Heyat Mamud recites from the book]

Mansuruddin, in his *Bangla Sahitye Muslim Sadhana* deduces that Mamud belonged to the Shia community. This was vehemently opposed by Mazharul Islam who published an edited volume of all of Mamud's *puthis*. He affirmed the fact that Mamud was a staunch Sunni with his affiliation with the *Hanafi* sect and the *Qadiri* Sufi *Tariqah* but did not attempt to decode the presence of the physical in his expressions of devotionism and pain (*Kabi Heyat Mamud*, p 35-36). Also, we should mention here that Mamud hailed from Rangpur which was majorly under the influence of the *Qadiri* sect with Shaikh Abdur Qadir Jilani as the main saint.

devotion to Fatema, do not identify themselves as Shia. Not only that, Heyat Mamud explicitly expresses his devotion to the twelve Imams so exclusively owned by the Shias, together with the four companions without making any discrimination between them<sup>61</sup>. It seems that, to delineate devotion in Bengal and to induce piety in the literary community, the religious authorities could not leave any stone unturned—figures of devotion were invoked with equal zeal, no matter what their original contexts were. The intention and aim, above all, at the moment, was to secure a community, broadly defined, along the lines of both affective piety and obligatory principles.

We differ from these historians and refrain from calling Mamud a Shia, as the forms of piety that he elucidated did not emanate from any fixed and rigid sectarian virtue. Instead, the obligatory principles that Mamud prescribed for his literary community secured the domain of *Sunni farz*<sup>62</sup>. Not only in the case of Heyat Mamud, when it comes to the question of *Marsiya* literature and the Karbala repertoire as a whole, including the commemoration of *Muharram*, the literary historians, quite surprisingly, have failed to address the fact that it was not really a sectarian difference at work in the texts. Rather, to the authors who attempted to compose or write about Karbala in the early modern period, what mattered first and foremost was the necessity of inculcating a sense of belongingness beyond any sectarian boundaries. While these historians search for clues that hint at a Shia influence behind the proliferation and popularity of the narratives touching upon the lives of the grandsons of the prophet, they fail to explain the presence of markedly non-Shia elements (like the devotional relevance of the four companions) which came to constitute the base for the Karbala repertoire in the early modern. They also fail to interpret the presence of

---

<sup>61</sup>হেন সে নবীর পড়ে দরুদ ছালাম।

চারি য়ার লয়া সহ দ্বাদশ এমাম। [he sends his salutations to the Prophet, the four caliphs and the twelve imams]

<sup>62</sup> The notion of *iman* and *farz* illustrated through *waz*, *machhla*, *ozu* and *toimmam*, *chheptiman*, *panch-waqt-namaz* affirms the Sunni affiliation of the author in *Hitajnanbani kavya*. Gradually the question of attaining and preserving one's identity by observing *farz* became the most important message to be imparted to the audience—a process which had already begun in the late seventeenth century.

intense non-Sunni emotions (like those expressed towards Ali as one of the four companions, not as the father of Hasan and Husayn, or even in terms of emotions inclined towards a *Sufi* tradition) in the renditions of belongingness and pain. This kind of study only prioritizes a literary history from above, and focuses on the dynamics of influence and impact of a structured literary system over the ‘others’ without really looking at how the ‘other’ receives the established norms and idioms and conventions, both thematic and generic, and rewrites them.

### **3.2.2 Cursing the Companions: Otherness of Shia Rituals**

It was during the latter half of the nineteenth century that these authors suddenly woke up to the call of *ummat* and arranged the narratives to meet that end. The sectarian divide, as a concept and as an experience, was first realized in the transaction between the reformists and traditionalists. Though quite non-existent as a community to respond to the reformist wave in Bengal which majorly identified itself as being *Hanafi* Sunni, the Shias became another other-within in Bengal’s transactions with the reformist platforms which had germinated in Northern India. From the very beginning of the reformist zeal, which was overwhelmingly Sunni in orientation, the reformists condemned Shia practices. Shia rituals and rites, as organized in Shia-dominated states in the Deccan or in Northern India, marked the presence of a communities associated with elitism and state-sponsorship.

In the Deccan, starting from sixteenth century, in the Shia-led city-states of Golconda and Bijapur, the commemoration of *Muharram* and patronage for prayer mosques for the congregation gathered every Friday, and houses, or sacred sites of lamentation for remembering Imam Husayn became institutionally prominent, unlike in Bengal, though similar institutional support would be witnessed much later in Dhaka and Murshidabad. Though in the Iranian-Indian cultural landscape the sixteenth century was designated as the Twelver century, the Twelver sentiment to praise Ali over the other three caliphs or *ashab* could not motivate the Sunni nobles. In the

Deccan, an inclination towards Persian literary culture, with a special emphasis on *marsiya*, remained an exclusive practice insulated from the Dravidian local masses<sup>63</sup>. When it finally made its way into mass culture, much accretion took place from local rites and religious affiliations, while the Shia state with its state sponsored *Muharram*—marked by its elite configuration —was gradually diminished under the Sunni rule in the North. In the North, the Shias faced frequent persecution and suppression under the Mughal state, which did not let them succeed in making a mass religion in the way it had been established in the Deccan. But what can be discerned is that from this century onwards, proto-Shia sentiments and creative ways of mourning in the commemoration of *Muharram* developed among the popular masses, which were sometimes suppressed by Mughal rulers<sup>64</sup>. Shi'ism as a designated and structured community and *Muharram* as its main ritual failed to spread due to the regressive state machinery, especially during the reign of Aurangzeb<sup>65</sup>. With this stilted growth of a community of migrated Iranian nobles and travelling merchants, it became really difficult for Shi'sm to become a mass religion in India. Whenever there was a community secured with state-patronage, like in Kashmir or in the Deccan, the eventual replacement of Shia monarchs with a Sunni domination caused the community to disperse from Kashmir to Delhi or Awadh, from Hyderabad to Delhi, spreading its rituals to Delhi in the process<sup>66</sup>. On a broader spectrum, the Afghan conquest of Iran and subsequent changes in the political and patronage systems in the beginning of the eighteenth century mobilized Shia scholarly families as well as bands of other professionals to migrate to different small towns and provincial cities in South Asia. In Murshidabad, where a Shia family inaugurated a Shia state in Bengal under Murshid Kuli Khan (ruling between 1740 and

---

<sup>63</sup> J. R. I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'sm in Iran and Iraq*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989) pp. 22–25.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p24

<sup>65</sup> Though Akbar introduced his ethics of tolerance in religious ideas, he did not show enthusiasm towards Shi'sm. In 1668 Aurangzeb prohibited the display of Shia piety in *Muharram* processions whereas they can be found in contemporary Southern India as pointed out in John Fryer, ed. William Crooke, *A New Account of East India and Persia, Being Nine Years Travel 1672-1681*, 3 vols (London: Hakluyt Society, 1909-15), 1:273-74, as quoted in Cole, 1989, p 26.

<sup>66</sup> Cole, 1989, p 27; Rizvi, *Shah Wali-Allah and His Times*, (Canberra: Marifat, 1980) pp.190–195.

1757), migrated Iranians took refuge as literary men, civil servants and physicians<sup>67</sup>, with the commemoration of *muharram* gaining the status of an organized state-ritual. Historians from the 1970s have reconsidered the decline of the mighty empire of the Mughals in the eighteenth century (along with the fall of the Ottoman and Safavid Empires) as being a time for political decentralization and the rise of regionalism<sup>68</sup>. The rise of Awadh as a Shia-affiliated province and also the gradual rise of the political autonomy of Bengal in Murshidabad, which would finally become Shia before falling into the hands of the British show the course of these changes. For the Mughals, the Awadhi *nawabate* and Shi'ism became emblematic of moral and religious decadence.

But we will be making a grave mistake if we were to equate the process of Shia state formation in North India with the Bengal chapter. Moreover, we will make another serious mistake if we think that the impact of a Shia knowledge system is clearly discernible from the folk interpretations of and engagement with the *muharram* traditions. In mid-eighteenth century Bengal, in the absence of a structured Sunni or Shia system of thought in the local Muslim consciousness, the language of sectarian divide was never spoken, even after a Shia-state was formed in Murshidabad. French traveller Jean Law de Laureston categorically denied the presence of any Shia-Sunni divide in understanding Islam, which was neither *ulama*-based nor mosque-based both in Bengal and in North India.

Muslims are enthusiastic about their religion, but here the sectarian followers of 'Umar' and 'Ali' never dispute among themselves for the purpose of establishing the true successor to the caliphate. There are few mosques, even fewer mullahs, and the nobles although they are

---

<sup>67</sup> Cole, 1989, pp. 29–30.

<sup>68</sup> Satish Chandra, *Mughal India: From Sultanat to Mughals (1526–1748)*, Part II (Mughal empire) (Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1999), Peter Clark, ed, *The Oxford Handbook of Cities in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

punctual enough in performing their own devotions, hardly ever go to the mosque<sup>69</sup>.

While this scenario was applicable to Bengal till the idea of sectarian difference emerged as an after-effect of fundamentalist reform that differentiated between pure Islam and *bid'at*, Awadh began to witness Shia-Sunni disputes and tension from the second half of the eighteenth century itself.

While with the prominence of the intellectual clergy with Shia affiliations, the development of Shia theosophy and jurisprudence excelled in Awadh, the state started an elaborate ceremonious patronage of *muharram*. J. R. I. Cole has pointed out that Sunni and Shia scholarship started to collide not only because of their theosophical difference but also because of the inclination of the state towards Shia jurisprudence over the Sunni<sup>70</sup>. Though *Firingi Mahal*, one of the superior Sunni institutions of North India, retained its intellectual leadership, its relationship with the Shia government started to become strained<sup>71</sup>. The Awadhi state gradually encouraged and extended patronage to the commemoration of *muharram* and took part in various capacities in the state-sponsored processions<sup>72</sup>.

Devotion towards *ahl-ul-bayt* — the family of the Prophet — had always been an emotional core for the masses that had structured connections with neither the nobles nor the clerics. What this thesis has been emphasizing upon, is that this popular sentiment of keeping Ali as the spiritual successor of Muhammad, and the devotional connection with Fatema and her sons did not disqualify the other companions from the devotional landscape of the

---

<sup>69</sup> *Memoire sur quelques affaires de l'empire mogul, 1756-1761* (Paris: Edouard Champion and Emile Larose, 1913), p272, translated by J.R.I. Cole and quoted in Cole, 1989, p. 49.

<sup>70</sup> J. R. I. Cole explains that the Shia *ulama* in North India “enjoyed few of the advantages that accrued to the Sunni *ulama* under Mughal rule”. Though they contributed in the development of rational sciences, they were not well versed in the oral tradition of the Imams, Imami law and jurisprudence. The Shia *ulama* lacked integrated institutions and physical sites for communal study, the development of which would have institutionalized Shia scholarship in North India, p. 60.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p. 49.

<sup>72</sup> William Knighton, a British officer at the Awadh court in the eighteenth century, estimated that an amount of 3,00,000 pounds was spent by the nawabs for *Muharram*. Quoted in Rizvi, (1986, vol 2:131) and Cole, pp130–131.

common Sunni population. Shia notables in Awadh, while practising the cult of cursing the first three caliphs during *muharram* as a part of the Imami belief system, wanted to orient the popular masses into the same practice of cursing. While a section of the artisans and labour classes chose to identify themselves as Shias<sup>73</sup> by pledging their allegiance to the *ahl-ul-bayt* as against the first three caliphs, the majority of the popular masses remained faithful towards both the Prophetic line and the first three *ashab*<sup>74</sup>. Thus arose, through the practice and advocacy of cursing the first three caliphs, a great disapproval within the notable Sunnis towards the Imami Shias.

Thus at the level of performance, while integrating a community coming from various socio-economic backgrounds through the rites and rituals of *muharram*, two conflicting approaches can be found in the early-nineteenth century. Awadh was one of the most significant sites for the development of an antagonistic sectarian relationship between the Shias and the Sunnis, and the articulation of that relationship. While piety towards Imam Husayn became an all-encompassing emotion in North India, the observance of *muharram* and the practice of cursing the first three caliphs brought out intense communal tensions that frequently culminated in riots<sup>75</sup>.

It will be erroneous to think that the physicality of *Muharram*, articulated through chest beating, self flagellation and singing *marsiyas* went unquestioned in the Shia community itself in the early nineteenth century. Rather, a more physical form of *Muharram* was the target of attack from the more scriptural quarters of Shi'ism which raised objections similar to the Sunni fundamentalist reformers who were soon to follow. The stricter Shia *ulama* with exposure to theological and juridical Islam questioned the validity of such sensory practices—like singing elegiac poetry and frenzied sessions of self-flagellation—which were major aspects of commemorating *Muharram*. The most notable contemporary Shia scholar, Sayyid Dildar Ali

---

<sup>73</sup> J. R. I. Cole talks about the impact of patronization of the artisan and labourer classes by the Shia notables in the processes of conversion, p. 89.

<sup>74</sup> J. R. I. Cole, 1989, pp. 88-90.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

Nasirabadi, in this crucial moment of interpreting and conceiving *Muharram* as a Shia rite, posited the necessity of mourning and weeping as ideal forms of showing devotion<sup>76</sup>, while negating the physical expression of grief. But, while *muharram* was being questioned and theoretically modified by the high Shia *ulama*, it was also being increasingly associated with the local emotive and aesthetic systems and entering the domain of religious sensibility and social customs for both the popular and the elite Sunnis<sup>77</sup>.

Thus the polemic over the relative superiority of the *ashab* (or the four companions of the prophet who were also the first four inheritors of the caliphate—Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali) arose as a reflection of the competition over property and power within the Sunni elite and between the Shias and Sunnis in the first half of the nineteenth century. Not only did the ideological strife over the superiority of the first three caliphs versus Ali mark the pre-history of the sectarian divide between the Sunnis and the Shias—the competitive strife for superiority between Abu Bakr and Umar also posited differences within the Sunni community itself<sup>78</sup>. Shia *ulama* like Dildar Ali Nasirabadi and his disciples, while paring down the ritual of mourning during *muharram* to a basic expression of meditative weeping, defended the public cursing of the first three caliphs<sup>79</sup>.

What is interesting to note here is that: what was taking place in Awadh as a reflection of the anxiety of the traditional Usuli *ulama* regarding the common and pedestrian nature of *muharram*, being practised as a ritual close to polytheistic emotions, would also become the main concern for the Sunni fundamentalist scholars active in the following decades in North India. It is also worth noticing that the Nasirabadi Shias were primarily against the Hindus while they considered the Sunnis as Muslims because of

---

<sup>76</sup> J. R. I. Cole, p. 108.

<sup>77</sup> J. R. I. Cole talks about the reflections of Shah Abdul Aziz and Mawlavi Sami on how Shia practices of prayer, marriage ceremonies, burials and divisions of inheritance were being adopted in the elite Sunni households. Cole, 1989, p. 230.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 231.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p 231.



their allegiance to the Prophetic family<sup>80</sup>. Though the impact of the Sunni revivalist strand was not as intense in Awadh as in other places, the Awadhi polemic over the imams was resolved in the Prophet-centric piety as conceptualized by the *Tariqah-e-Muhammadiya*, which became so influential as the first of the fundamentalist movements in the North. In the Prophet-centric piety of the *Nakshbandiya*-inclined Sunni revivalist platform, internal conflicts had to be wiped out by upholding the solidarity of the first four *ashab*, or caliphs, as the ideal companions of the Prophet, in terms of both intellect and affect, marked the ideal time for the growth of Islamic knowledge and military prowess. Fundamentalist reform, irrespective of whether it was a platform taking recourse to pre-*mazhabi* Islam, or one associating itself with the initiators of the Sunni *mazhab*, had to create solidarity among the *ashab*. That is why, in popular imagination, the relation between the first three Sunni Imams or caliphs, and the first *Shia* Imam Ali, who was the fourth Imam according to the Sunnis, was to be established with much narrative manipulation and rigour<sup>81</sup>.

Now, historians have already shown that Sunni revivalist movements, like the *Tariqah-e-Muhammadiya*, might be read as counter-narratives to the *Shia* dominated administration and sociality in Awadh, which was followed by the British colonial invasion and subsequent changes in power relations. The Awadh state ceremony of *muharram* and its participants, which included both the *Shias* and the Sunni feudal lords, rejected the *Nakshbandiya* revival which called itself the *Tariqah-e-Muhammadiya*. As the dispute over *muharram*, over the validity of the practice of cursing the first three caliphs, reached its climax, it culminated in riots between the

---

<sup>80</sup> Sayyid Dildar Ali argued that Sunnis should be given a legal status equal to the *Shias* as Muslims, whereas the Hindus would burn in hell as *kafirs*. He propagated the idea that those Sunnis who did not have enmity towards the family of the Prophet were ritually pure. We have already seen that the fundamentalist Sunni reforms clung on to the notion of prophet-centric piety to form their emotional and theoretical core, albeit in various capacities and interpretations. Thus, it was not the Prophet, but rather—a prioritization of Ali, and disregard of the first three caliphs—which was the basis of the most prominent schism in the creation of sectarian difference.

<sup>81</sup> I have already discussed in detail earlier in this chapter, how the Karbala narratives in popular print dealt with this internal anxiety over the relationship between the *ashab* and attempted to resolve it.

*Tariqah* and the Shias of North India<sup>82</sup>. This must have added some impetus to the anti-Shia outlook of the Nakshbandiya/*Tariqah* revivalists<sup>83</sup>.

### 3.2.3 Popular Piety, Print and the Prophet(ic):

While exclusion and appropriation were quite connected in the dynamics of these treatises, the Karbala repertoire similarly claimed the *pak panjatan*, an exclusively Shia devotional idiom, to formulate piety in a Shia vocabulary while relegating the Shias to the realm of the un-Islamic. This categorization of the Shias was done at two levels: conceptual and practical. The conceptual was procured to define the ideal *ummat* of the Prophet. In this process, the Shias, as a community, had to be denied any claim of belonging to this *ideal* community. The second, the practical one, was to define how the *ummat* would be performing and practising its engagement with the prophetic realm.

That the Shias became the target of an organized denial by the majority of Muslim groups in the nineteenth century, from the reformists and later traditionalists alike, was a phenomenon that derived from the mainstream interpretation of the Shias as a threat to Muslim solidarity. The sense of an *ummat*, conceptualized as centring on the Prophet, needed a sense of solidarity within a community created by the Prophet himself. This was why the family of the Prophet, and the social that he created, were conceived as the core in order to define both the community and the idea of devotionism. Shia religiosity was predicated upon a rupture in the lineage of the Imams who came after the Prophet, with the disavowal of the first three imams—Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman—as the Shias believed that the true inheritance of the imamate began with Ali, who was the fourth Imam for the Sunnis. The idea of an ideal original community, which was so vehemently claimed in the mid nineteenth century, was predicated upon the bonding among the *ashab*. Narrative twists were thus envisaged to create a

---

<sup>82</sup> In 1819, a massive riot broke out between the *Tariqah* members and Shias of Rai Bareli. *ibid*, p 238.

<sup>83</sup> Cole refers to a manuscript of S. Muhammad Ali's *Makhazan-I Ahmadi*, (p 46-52) which suggests that Sayyid Ahmad Shahid planned an organized massacre of the Nasirabadi Shias. *Ibid*, p 237, fn 39.

flawless utopian sense of the community. Historically speaking, the post-Prophet period was marked by a contest for power saturated with anxiety, mistrust, clever war strategies and secret assassinations, all of which the authors were trying to recast, reformulate and re-fabricate, as solidarity had to be affirmed above all. Since the early modern, devotionism had been articulated through the close proximity between the Prophet and his four companions. From long narratives on the amorous theme, to the long narratives on war, *naat* had to have the presence of these four even when there was a pre-eminence accorded to Ali, as the inheritor of the Prophetic mystical knowledge, in some latter sections. All the authors of the Karbala repertoire available to us today—Daulat Ujir Bahram Khan, Muhammad Khan, Hamid, and then Heyat Mamud and Garibullah— followed the same model of devotionism towards the four *ashab*, who were always seen as accompanying the Prophet, and whose collective mourning at the site of Karbala over the martyrdom of Imam Husayn bound the Prophet’s family together with the Prophet’s companions as the most natural thing. In Heyat Mamud’s *Jarijungnama*, when Yezid forces an imprisoned Joynal Abedin to read the *khutba*, an enunciation of surrender, Joynal reaffirms the delineation of the primary figures of the community by declaring he would only surrender to Muhammad, the four companions, Hasan and Husayn, in that order—but never to Yezid.

মস্তফার নামে আমি পড়িব প্রথমে ।  
 তারপর চারয়্যার পড়িব সে নামে ॥  
 আবু বকর উমর উসমান শের আলি ।  
 নবীর ছাহাবা যাখে চারয়্যার বলি ॥  
 ষষ্ঠমে হাসন আর হুসেন সপ্তমে ।  
 পড়িব খতুবা এহি খলিফার নামে ॥ *জারিজঙ্গনামা*, হেয়াত মামুদ

This same emotion prevails from the beginning in the Karbala narratives in Bengali. The same core community evolves from Daulat Ujir’s narration, as well:

প্রথমে আল্লার অস্ত্বতি কহিব নিশ্চএ ।  
 নবীর মহিমা আমি কহিব সত্বর ।  
 চারি সখা রসুলের গুণের সাগর ॥

একে২ কহিবাম সে সব মহিমা।  
হাছন হোছন দুই গুণের নাহি সীমা।।

Even Ali, with his unique standing as the son-in-law of the Prophet, was not granted a separate identity at times, to make him integral to the collectivity of the *ashab*<sup>84</sup>.

While devotionism and solidarity vis-à-vis the *ashab* remained the same, the *ashab* now represented a new domain—that of the public of Islam, which also brought forth a new anxiety over the question of inheritance.

---

<sup>84</sup> The companions became the witnesses to of all the important events; especially those revealing the supernatural power of the Imam brothers.

হেন কালে পয়গম্বর চারি সখা সঙ্গে।

সেহি স্থানে আসিআ মিলিল মন রঙ্গে।। *Imambijoy*, Daulat Ujir Bahram Khan

That the companions were present with the Prophet at the time of mourning attests the superiority of Husayn in the demography of piety. The Prophet was heartbroken after coming to know that Husayn's mother Fatema and the four *ashab* would also not be there to protect Imam Husayn when he would be martyred. There was no distinction between the Imam brothers and the four companions in the section following *naat* in *Jarijungnama* of Heyat Mamud.

হাসন হুসন আদি য়ার চারিজন।

প্রণতি করিয়া বন্দো সভার চরণ।। [I present my salutations at the feet of Hasan, Husayn and the four companions of the Prophet]

This emotion was not only specific to the Karbala repertoire, but was symptomatic even of the didactic literature, as no text could begin without the invocation of the sacred. Heyat Mamud says at the beginning of his *adab* text *Sarbabhedha Bani Kavya*,

হাসন হুসন য়ার চারি জন।

দরুদ সবার পায়।

ফাতেমা চরণ করিয়া স্মরণ

হেয়াত মামুদ কয়।। [I present my salutations at the feet of Hasan, Husayn and the four companions. I, Heyat Mamud, worship Fatema's feet and begin this recitation]

It is to be noted that, to keep Ali as one of the companions, he is never qualified differently from the other three companions, as the son-in-law of the Prophet, rather, he appeared to be creating a triad with Muhammad, Fatema and Hasan-Husayn. Ali appeared as the father in a separate section to express his acute grief when he comes to know about the destined death of his sons, and also as a husband who had to bear the death of his wife Fatema. But there Ali's status as one of the Prophetic companions did not overlap with his familial status. When Ali spoke alone, he spoke as a father; for all other instances, he cannot be distinguished as an individual amongst the four companions.

দুই পুত্র নিল আলী কোলেতে করিয়া।

কহিতে লাগিল অতি কান্দিয়া কান্দিয়া।।

না জানি পুত্রের মোর কি বা হয় গতি।

পালায়ে থুইব কোথা না আসে যুকতি।।

Rather, these two sides of Ali were kept separate affirming the need for both the spheres, the companions and the family, (that is the *ashab* and the *ahl-ul-bayt*) with Ali connecting the two spheres.

Prior to the reformist era, this question of inheritance did not appear as an issue in the Karbala narratives of the early modern period, though it was raised and resolved in the Prophet's choice, when he nominates Abu Bakr to preside over the *namaz* in *Rasul Charit* by Sayyid Sultan<sup>85</sup>. As the division among the *ashab* was not an issue in the early modern, in the Karbala narratives of the time, no additional narrative effort was needed to underscore solidarity along those lines. This was an entirely new narrative effort that evolved in the mid nineteenth century. This anxiety was dispelled by the authors of the manuscript-print culture, like Jonab Ali, among others, by reclaiming the *ashab* squarely within the domain of Prophet-centric piety. In their efforts, the gap between the family and the friends, between the private and the public, between the *ashab* and the *ahl ul bayt* was minimized to claim both, in order to create an ideal community based on the love for the Prophet. There were many narrative occasions to illustrate this. In Eshak Uddin's *Asal Shahid E Karbala*, it is not only Abu Bakr who shows a desire to be buried after death in the burial ground meant for the *ahl ul bayt*, it was Ali, too, whose lament over the imminent separation with Abu Bakr diminished any possibility of an affective distance between the Shias and the Sunnis.

সেইখানে আহলে বয়েতের বরাবরে।

দফন করিয়া দিবে আমার খাতেরে। *আদি ও আসল সহিদে কারবালা*, এসহাক উদ্দিন

To make the bond even stronger, the authors defined Muwayia as a part of the *ashab* while portraying Yezid as an enemy of Islam. Yezid's did not emerge from within the fray of the companions to which Muwayia belonged, rather it was explained as having originated from his lowly birth,

---

<sup>85</sup> Karbala texts of the early modern were more concerned with the question of familial affect, although the questions of inheritance, and those of the duties incumbent upon the community constituted around the Prophet were already addressed in *Rasul Charit*. While the *nasihatnama* genre took on the responsibility of defining duty for a Muslim, the questions of inheritance and the formation of *ummat* could not be addressed in the Karbala narratives before the reformist turn in the mid nineteenth century.

as the son of a maid-servant, – the class contamination– to cure the poisonous effect of the scorpion was explained as the reason behind<sup>86</sup>.

While there was an age-old antipathy towards the Shia belief system in the Sunni community, it was during the eighteenth century that a degree of acculturation within Islam occurred as an effect of the presence of the Shias. The great unease among the Sunni notables about the emerging influence of the Persian Shias in the Mughal bureaucracy was now entangled with the Sunni revivalist urge<sup>87</sup>. Waliullah's affirmation of the divine approval of the reign of the first two caliphs, Abu-Bakr and Umar, in opposition to the troubled times that ensued under Ali's reign<sup>88</sup>, later prompted the Sunni reformers and also the traditionalists to cultivate a newfound interest in the biographies of Abu Bakr and Umar as a validation of their piety towards the Prophet. While keeping the caliphate separate from the refutation of the Shias, Waliullah resolved the fundamental difference with the Shias by accepting the spiritual supremacy of Imam Ali<sup>89</sup>. Thus, in the fundamentalist reformist circles, a Prophet-centric piety encompassing Ali and the sacred family (which essentially constituted the Shia core of religiosity) was appropriated without making any ideological rupture with the Sunni system. What is important to note here is that these theoretical dialogues not only marked clear instances of overlap and negotiation between the Shia and Sunni ideologies for the making of Sunni revivalist Islamic thought, but that these dialogues and transactions also made it possible for the popular masses to connect to various issues central to the revivalist dictum in a manner suited to their sensibilities. While

---

<sup>86</sup> The common audience tended to understand that it was the battle between the sacred clan and the profane class of commoners, and Yezid's mother's lowly status as a maid, was cited to be the reason behind Yezid's evil nature. Joynal Abedin refuses to surrender to Yezid precisely because his mother was a maid.

<sup>87</sup> Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi's theoretical departure marks the connection between Sunni hostility towards Akbar's religious policy, Shia possession of power and doctrinal difference (between the Sunnis and the Shias). S.A.A. Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Agra: Agra University, 1965), pp. 210-224; Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and His Movement, 1870-1920*, (Bombay/Calcutta/Madras: Oxford University Press, 1996), p42.

<sup>88</sup> Pearson, p24, Aziz Ahmad, 'An Eighteenth-Century Theory of the caliphate', *Studia Islamica*, 28 (1968): pp. 135-44.

<sup>89</sup> Pearson, 2008, p. 24.

remaining aggressively cautious about the popular intercessory capacities of the Shia Imams and the charisma of the local *Sufi pirs*, Waliullah upheld the validity of Imam Mehdi, the twelfth Imam of the Shias, by reconnecting with the Hadith tradition<sup>90</sup>.

That Sayyid Ahmad Shahid was believed by the masses to have been, in all probability, Imam Mehdi, who was believed to have made an occult disappearance, did not stand in opposition to *Tariqah*'s staunch adversity towards the Shias and their popular rites and rituals<sup>91</sup>. Though it was sufficient to lay out the basic tenets of Islam with overlapping ideas, which were still not so rigidly perceived by the masses, for the learned elite, a particular demarcation was needed to be made between the un-Islamic and the Islamic, with strong scriptural references. That the authors of *Sirat-ul-Mustaqim*—an anthology of the teachings of the founder of *Tariqah* anthologized by his disciples—could not subscribe to Waliullah's reconciliation with the Shias by accepting the superiority of Ali as the spiritual leader, must have been because of the growing culture of cursing of the first three caliphs during *Muharram*. In the second chapter entitled 'On avoiding religious innovations (*bid'at*); and the ways of performing religious duties and worship', the authors listed the ritual paraphernalia associated with *Muharram* along with other customs that should be forbidden and abandoned 'before any further stages'<sup>92</sup>. While the decorating and carrying of *taziyeh* (the sacred hearses of the martyrs) and physically overt lamentation during *Muharram* were strongly disparaged citing scriptural disapproval, even the reformers retained the *pak-panjatan*, or the sacred five, as the source of providence. The *pak-panjatan* were not only invoked in chants, Calvin notes the presence of a symbol, emblazoned on a sacred garment, showing the simultaneous presence of four hands representing the four caliphs, and the *pak panjatan* together<sup>93</sup>. The Shias were the community largely marked as the target of attack from the *Tariqah* preachers and followers. Ideological differences were noted, and verbal

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, pp. 48-52.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, pp. 84-85.

<sup>93</sup> Calvin, 'Peculiar Tenets of Sirat' as quoted by Pearson, p. 87.

abuse and physical violence were prescribed in the basic Muhammadi texts of the early nineteenth century<sup>94</sup> Waliullah's son Abdul Aziz, in his 1818 treatise *Tuhfa Ithna Ashari*, describes Shia beliefs and practices as practised in Lucknow and Bengal in order to make a plea for their validity as being Islamic, which resulted in much controversy<sup>95</sup>.

The offshoots of *Tariqah*, Patna School, Ahl-e-Hadis and Taiyuni remained staunch critics of Shia rituals and practices, along with their negation of other practices, like visiting the grave of the Prophet. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, all the contemporary reform movements, *Ahl e Hadis*, *Deoband* and *Ahl e Sunnat*, erupted into *fatwa* wars with each other in North India<sup>96</sup> producing an ever-argumentative space-within, as well as some common enemies with definable identities, among whom the Shias became the most vilified of all. *Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at*, under the leadership of Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi (1856–1921), from the late nineteenth century (1880) onwards, added to the great impetus in this well-thought out and well-attempted process of differentiation with the Shia community. Though no substantial work has been done on the impact of the *Ahl-e Sunnat* as a reformist platform on the Muslim masses in Bengal (which was already experiencing the multivocal debates about doing Ideal Islam)<sup>97</sup>, the basic tenets of the new *Hanafi* traditionalist *ulama* of Bengal reveal that the *Hanafi ulama* received doctrinal Islam and devotionism as they were understood and interpreted by Ahmad Riza Khan of the *Ahl-e-Sunnat*. The qualities of the Prophet, the relevance or redundancy of the intercession of the *pir*, or the calling of the *azaan* were the basic concerns of *Ahl-e-Sunnat*<sup>98</sup> projected to posit their identity in the face of other competing Muslim groups.

---

<sup>94</sup> This book generated much controversy and Shia scholars wrote back defying several sections of this book. Pearson, p. 200.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p 200.

<sup>96</sup> *Ahl-e-Sunnat*, as a contemporary Sunni revivalist movement debated with *Tablighi Jama'at*, *Ahl-e Hadis*, Ahmadiyya Movement and the *Deobandis*. Usha Sanyal, 1996, p. 3.

<sup>97</sup> Even the iconic book on *Ahl-e-Sunnat* and on Ahmad Riza Khan by Usha Sanyal remains silent about that. We will talk about the reception of *Ahl-e Sunnat* in defining *Hanafi* doctrination in a later section of this chapter.

<sup>98</sup> Usha Sanyal, 1996.



The effect of *Ahl-e-Sunnat* and *Deoband* on the Bengal Muslim population was cumulative with respect to the increasing antagonism towards *Muharram* because of the similarity of their objections towards the Shias. *Ahl-e-Sunnat* differed from the *Deobandis* in terms of its connection to and rendition of the Shia rituals. While Ahmad Riza Khan was fiercely against the Shias, because of his close ideological proximity to the *Sufi* orders, he was driven towards the *ahl ul-bayt*. Moreover, his validation of some *Sufi*-inclined rituals, like *urs*, for example, paved the way for the subsequent demarcation of reformed *Sufi* ritualistic practices, thus reconciling the *Sufi* path with the reformist *Ahl-e-Sunnat*.

If we look at the new *Hanafi* traditionalist interpretations of Islam, these two distinct kinds of *Sufi* inclinations of *Ahl-e-Sunnat* can be clearly discerned. While *Tariqah* and *Ahl-e-Hadis* refuted the interlocution of the *mazhabi* Imams, *Hanafi* traditionalists, following Ahmad Riza Khan, established the need for a spiritual guide for understanding and doing Islam. For Ahmad Riza Khan of the *Qadiriya* order, it was essentially a *Sufi pir*, who was to be taken as the spiritual guide. In contradistinction to the *wahdat al-shuhud* (oneness of appearance) of al-Ghazzali, followed by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi of the *Nakshbandiya* order, Ahmad Riza Khan affirmed his belief in *wahdal al-wujud* (unity of being) of Shaikh Abd ul-Haqq Muhaddus Dehlawi of the *Qadiriya* order. Riza Khan revered Shaikh Abd al-Qadir Gilani (d. 1166) and affirmed his superiority over all other iconic figures of other *Sufi Tariqahs*<sup>99</sup>. Thus Ahmad Riza Khan believed in the confinement of knowledge in the hands of the learned *khawas* rather than advocating dissemination to the *awamm*, and reclaimed the figure of the *pir*—as the spiritual guide in illuminating the path of devotion and also as affirming the *mazhab* and defining the qualities of the Prophet. Riza

---

<sup>99</sup> S.A.A. Rizvi confirms the influence of Shaikh Abd ul-Haqq on Ahmad Riza Khan in his understanding of the reconciliation of *Sufi Tariqah* with the *sharia*. It is through him that Abd ul-Qadir Gilani was established as the supreme being in the *Sufi silsilah*. *A History of Sufism in India*, vol2 (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1983), p90.

Khan also reaffirmed the miraculous qualities of the Prophet in following Shaikh Abd ul-Haqq's conception of the divine nature of the Prophet<sup>100</sup>.

These qualities of the Prophet and the love towards him in the form of devotional emotion swept the interiors of Bengal, which was majorly Sunni Hanafi in nature<sup>101</sup>. That a huge number of popular prints came out on the biography of Ghaus-e-Azam Shaikh Abd ur-Qadir Gilani proved the popularity of the *Qadiriya Tariqah* as the *Sufi* core of the *Hanafi mazhab* in Bengal<sup>102</sup>. The sudden non-sequential references to Gilani in the middle of a Karbala narrative, thus, redrew the demography of emotion for the Imams in a newly formed consciousness about *Sufi* connections. The need for a spiritual leader in Bengal in the figure of a *pir* was culminated in Maolana Abu Bakr of the Furfura Sharif in Hooghly, who, almost singlehandedly, manoeuvred the dynamics of the traditionalist *Hanafi* ideologies and refuted the contemporary reformists and other definable social practices like *Muharram*. We can mark this age as a moment for reaffirmation of a traditionalist *Hanafi* identity and position through a certain set of practices (like *milad*, or praying at the grave), which were confirmed through the *sharia* and remained close to their *Sufi* articulations.

The traditionalist *ulama* did so, as a response to, and as influenced and informed by, the reformist ideologies they were primarily against. *Sufi* reform, thus, happened in the garb of affirming the *mazhab* not only for the *Qadiriyya* order, but also in the case of the *Chistiyya* order. *Chistiyya* reform in the Punjab took place as influenced by the *Ahl-e-Sunnat*

---

<sup>100</sup> Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements*, p171, Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, p89, Usha Sanyal, 1996, p44.

<sup>101</sup> The biography of the Prophet by Shaikh Abd ul-Haqq in Persian attests to this emotion for Ahmad Riza Khan and *Ahl-e-Sunnat*. Shaikh Abd ul-Haqq also affirms the abundance of love for the Prophet and the excellence of the 'Muhammadiyah *Tariqah*' in al-Wasiti's book on Muhammad. S.A.A Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, p94, Usha Sanyal, 1998, p44.

<sup>102</sup> The author of *Prabhu Parichoy*, Shah Abdul Jalil Shikdar, belonging to the *Qadiriyya* order, prescribed the essential reading of the order of Abd-ur Qagir Gilani, Barho Pir, along with the reading of treatises of one's own order.

কেতাব পড়িবে প্রায় নিজ তরিকার।

বড় পীর রচিত কেতাব পড়িবেন আর।।

Published by M Abdul Majid Choudhury, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1923, printed by Mohammad Sharif in Chattagram Eslamabad Press.

movement in the United Provinces where the *Chistiyya pirs* had travelled to receive religious education.

What I intend to say here is that, while there was renewed interest among the traditionalist *ulama* in reforming some customs by validating them through the new knowledge and vocabulary of the reformist agenda, they remained staunchly adversarial to the practices of *Muharram*. But with the inclination to and reconciliation with *Sufi* ideologies, they gradually came to claim an affective connection with the *ahl ul-bayt*. The emotional resemblance between the reformist *ulama* Prophet-centric piety and the traditionalist claim over the prophetic figures can be clearly noted, especially in the domain of popular piety.

As the Shias were against the belief in the perfection of the Qur'an, the superiority of the non-legislative prophets (*anbiyas/ambiyas*) over their imams, and the legitimacy of the first three caliphates, they earned the designation of *kafir* in the *fatwas* of Ahmad Riza Khan<sup>103</sup>. Though Bengal did not have any largely defined Shia community, the gradual process of reception of the reformist ideas disseminating from North India and their translation and transcreations into Bangla fell in line with the organized scheme of nullifying Shia sensibilities. New traditionalists stood in staunch adversity against the ritual practices associated with *Muharram*, which were not exclusively Shia<sup>104</sup>. What is important to note here is that, while the reformist *ulama* posited a scriptural justification for prophet-centric piety, some traditionalist *ulama* created a space for *Muharram* rituals as a means to imagine and articulate valid expressions of piety. While *taziyeh*, as it was practised then, was considered to be *bid'at* by Ahmad Riza Khan, he principally did not show any dissent against the making of *taziyeh* or the reading of *shahadatnama* (narratives of martyrdom) till these practices replicated the 'original' *taziyeh* and reproduced the authentic historical facts about martyrdom. By validating the making of a faithfully reproduced

---

<sup>103</sup> Usha Sanyal, 1996, p209

<sup>104</sup> I have already elaborated how *Muharram* was an inclusive custom in Bengal without any sectarian demarcation prior to the reformist agenda.

*taziyeh*, Ahmad Riza Khan made a case for the common Sunni practice of keeping a sacred picture of the *ka'ba* and other sacred relics, like the replicas of Muhammad's shoes or feet, *kadam-e Rasul*<sup>105</sup>. Reading of the *marsiyas* and *shahadatnamas* were approved by Ahmad Riza Khan, as long as the reader could recollect the qualities and patience and self-sacrificial ethics, in the place of overt expressions of grief and performances of bodily pain. Thus a new demography and proposition for performing piety was created not by banishing the *taziyeh*, or banning the reading of *shahdatnama*—rather, it was accomplished by reformulating and reforming the modes of performing grief in a meditative way. This new consideration for showing grief, albeit in a meditative manner sanctioned *ahl ul-bayt*-centric piety and Prophet-centric piety scripturally for the common Sunni *Hanafi* Muslims<sup>106</sup>.

From the mid-nineteenth century, all the derogatory terms designated, employed and manipulated to create an 'other' within—already discussed in section II of this chapter — were also to be used for the Shias. Shia, as a sectarian identity, was beginning to be conceptualized through processes of vilification and exclusion in all kinds of discursive and non-discursive efforts: the traditional orthodox *Nasihatinama*, printed material originating from different reformist platforms, *Sufi* tracts and treatises, new *Hanafi* liturgical writing and also in narratives on romantic themes or on battle.

We will talk about the new demography of piety charted out by the new traditionalist *ulama* in the next section, after taking account of the processes of denial and refutation of the Shia community in popular print. This denial of the Shias, premised on a new discursive production of what it meant to

---

<sup>105</sup> This is based on Usha Sanyal's reading of Ahmad Riza Khan's *fatwas*. Usha Sanyal talks about Ahmad Riza's *fatwa's* on the *taziyeh*, *taziyedari* and *shahadatnama*, *A'la al-Ifada al-Hind wa Bayan al-Shahada in Majmu'a-e Rasa'il*, Usha Sanyal, 1996, p. 209

<sup>106</sup> It will be another mistake if we think that the practice of *Muharram* was suddenly subdued because of the structured antagonism of the reformists and *Hanafi* traditionalists. This lived form of Islam continued to stay as a popular ritual of the general popular Muslim masses without a sense of sectarian antagonism. If we look at the autobiographies of both the Hindu and Muslim intelligentsia we will find references to the presence of the *Muharram* ritual in early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

be Shia, was not in keeping with its historical meaning. I will be discussing some liturgical and narrative genres to understand how, within a fluid popular definition, the Shias were created as an other in the contemporary polemic, in order to negate their belongingness to an ideal Islamic order, and also to invalidate their claim over the Prophet and the *ahl ul-bayt*.

### 3.3.1 Prohibition in Cheap Print:

#### Traditional *Nasihatinama*:

*Tauhid Iman* was one of the *fiqh* (relating to jurisprudence) and *sharah* (scriptural) texts from the manuscript tradition that survived and continued to be in circulation in the age of print, though predating it. Although Nazar Mamud was a follower of the *Chishtiyya Tariqah*<sup>107</sup>, his *Tauhid Iman* showed much enthusiasm towards *iman* and the scriptural understanding of Islam as early as the early nineteenth century (written between 1825 and 1851). While the religious authorities were alerting themselves to the influential effect of the local ritualistic practices, and wanted to introduce Islamic scriptural tenets, their rancour towards *Muharram*, or other forms of localized ritual, till then, did not follow any organized scheme.

বেদাতি রসুম কএ পূজার বেভার।  
 আছুক পূজিবে কিনা অল্প করা ভার।।  
 জলপূজা পরিপূর্ণ মন্দল বাজাও।  
 ইমামের নকশা করি চত্বরে হাঁকাও।। ...  
 এসব রসুমীবর্গ জানিবা নিশ্চয়।  
 করিলে কাফির করি হৃদিসেতে কয়।।

#### Reformist Literature:

While there were massive efforts within the reformist platforms to cancel each other out by calling them *bid'ati* or *gomrahi* (one who leads to a deviant path), the Shias with their rituals, as already discussed<sup>108</sup>, were the

<sup>107</sup> *Tauhid Iman*, *Heyatnandan Najar Mamud*, ed. Muhammad Shahjahan Mian, (Dhaka: Jyoti Prakashan),

<sup>108</sup> *Ahl-e-Hadis* tracts like *Ekhrajol Mobtadiyen fi radde Ferqatol Nazin* by Muhammad Babar Ali marks the traditionalists as *bid'ati Sufi* for their reconciliation with sufism so

most defined and definable social group to be negated as a Muslim community.

A *Taiyuni* treatise entitled *Shejra-Sharif* written by Hazrat Maulana Hafiz, the son of Maulana Keramat Ali, commented on *bid'at* and *shirk*<sup>109</sup>. It emphasized the fact that any path other than the *sharia* of Muhammad was to be considered the path of the *kafir*, this included practices such as physical mourning and lament over death, embellishment of the grave and the making of the *taziyeh*.

### **Post-Reform Traditional Hanafi Ulama:**

Referring to the absence of *taziyeh* in the land where Bibi Fatema and Hasan Husayn died, the author of *Fechhanaye Sore Keyamat*, Shah Abdul Wahed Muhammad Ebrahim, confirmed *taziyeh* as *bid'at*. His impatience towards *Muharram* pushed him far enough to write that the 1897 earthquake was an immediate result of committing the sin of commemorating *Muharram* on that very day.

হায় হায় জমি বিচে কি রোগ জন্মিল।  
খোদ বখোদ তার চোটে কাঁপিয়া উঠিল।।  
শনিবার দিন ছিল আছরের সময়।  
মহরম উৎসব ছিল বেদিন সবায়।।  
খোদার গজব জেন সেই সমে হল।...<sup>110</sup>

The author identified himself as belonging to the *Chistiyya* order with Shah Munshi Chhamiruddin as his *pir*. We are tempted to see him as a Sufi *pir* as it was the same Munshi Chhamiruddin who wrote the most popular *Hanafi*

---

apparent in their faith in Abu Bakr of Furfura Sharif. *Ekhrajol Mobtadiyen fi radde Ferqatol*, published by Maulana Muhammad Abdul Latif, Misrigunj, Marquis Lane, Mohammadi Press, 1332/1927

<sup>109</sup> *Shejra-Sarif*, 1318/1911, printed by Reyazuddin Ahmad, 159 Karheya Road, Kalikata

<sup>110</sup> তের শত চারি সনের খোদাই গজবের পর এক দল সয়তানের নায়েব ঘর ঘর ওছা দিয়া ধর্মবিরুদ্ধে সয়তানী কার্যের পথ পরিষ্কার করিয়া দিতেছে। পবিত্র কোরাণ সরিফ যাহার বলে নিজে মুসলমান, সেই ধর্মগ্রন্থের বাক্য লঙ্ঘন করিয়া কোরাণ হাদিছের বর খেলাম তাজিয়া, মছিয়া, জারী, মাদার, বাপড়ি, বুড়ি, ঠাকুরাণীকে পূজা করতঃ জন্ম সফল মনে করিতেছে। ...এবং এমাম হাছেন হোছেন ও বিবি ফাতেমার বদগেল্লা জারি করা কি পাপের কার্য নয়? *ফেছানায়ে সোরে-কেয়ামত*, printed by Shaikh Abdul Jabbar, in Bagura Chowdhury Press, 16 Chaitra 1304 Saal.

tract titled *Bedaral Ghafilin* which underwent numerous editions<sup>111</sup>, and influenced many socially conscious *ulama* to follow in his steps. Clear in his intention and unambiguous in his argument, Munshi Samiruddin defined *shirk* and refuted the ritualistic practices associated with *Muharram*. *Ulama* like Munshi Samiruddin reclaimed *ashura* (or the 10<sup>th</sup> day of *muharram*) by extracting it from the domain of Shia piety and placing the event of Husayn's martyrdom on the day of *ashura* alongside the *nabuwwati* of ten thousand prophets of Islam, i.e. the ritual investiture of the *nabi* (which was also supposed to have happened on the same day of the Islamic calendar, albeit not on the same date, or year). Munshi Samiruddin, like most of the other *Hanafi ulama* would propose looking at the day of *ashura* as a day of bliss, as it was connected with *nabuwwati*, rather than as the day of grief for the martyrdom of Husayn, and prescribed a different *farz*<sup>112</sup>.

এই সব নেকি কাম নেকি দান করা।  
 তাহা না করিয়া লোকে করে আর ধারা।।  
 মহরমের চাঁদ ভাই এমামের নয়।  
 আল্লারতও এবাদত জানিবে সবায়।।  
 জাহেল গাওল লোক গাওরা বানায়।  
 বুটমুট নাম লয় এমামের তায়।।  
 ফারছির কেতাব পড়ে যত মরছিয়ান।  
 জাহেলের সাথে মিলে জারি মরছে গান।।  
 তার সাথে বুরা জাহেল দুই চারি থাকে।  
 কবি জাত্রার গোদার মত জানিবে তাহাকে।।  
 ছাতি পেটে দরগা ফেরে হয় হয় করে।  
 মরেছে বড় বন্দ খেয়েছে কহেন সবারে।।  
 জাহেলের কাছে মুন্শি মওবা পাইবা।  
 বৎসরে বৎসরে এয়ছা করে খুশি হৈয়া।।  
 ...  
 এমামে না দিয়া মাটি লাশ নাই তামাম।

<sup>111</sup> Tajaddin Muhammad, the publisher of a prolific number of popular print from Masjid Barhi Street, published *Hanafi* tracts, Sufi inclined literature and *qissas*, Samiruddin's *Bedaral Ghafilin* among one of those *Hanafi* tracts.

<sup>112</sup> It was not a unique step, rather a recasting of the traditional narratives on Karbala of the early modern where sacred values of *ashura* were featured. Following their Persian source, both *Imam Bijoy* of early eighteenth century and *Jarijungnama* of late eighteenth, exhausted much narrative space to disseminate religiosity around *ashura*. What was new was a schematic distinction between the value of *ashura* as a sacred day on the Islamic scriptural calendar and that of *ashura* as the climactic day of the Karbala battle by the new writers of Karbala.

মাতম করে সাত রোজে বেকুফি কালাম ।।  
কবে সে মরিল তাঁরা করে সে মাতম ।  
এত কাল হৈল তবু না হৈল খতম ।।

...

নওহা মাতম কৈলে আল্লা সে বেজার ।  
না দিবে সাফাত নবি কেতাৰে আজকার ।।

In *Neyamate Dwaniya*, another *Hanafi* religious tract, the author Munshi Mohammad Abdul Ghani also placed *ashura* as the day of *nabuwwati* and refuted anything otherwise.

এইছাই ছওয়াব যান রোজ আশুরার ।  
খেলাফ জানিবে জেই হবে গোনাগার ।। *নেয়ামতে দ্বনিয়া*, মুনসী মহাশ্বদ আবদুল গনি<sup>113</sup>

Even *Hanafi* tracts written about the social duties of women, like *Tambiyatannechha* by Munshi Male Muhammad, did not neglect to show reverence towards the figures of the sacred five, or the *pak-panjatan*, of the Shias and the four *ashab*, along with a specific section elaborating upon the practices of *shirk* and *bid'at*<sup>114</sup>.

আল্লা ছেগা আন্নের কাছে যে চাহে মদত ।  
বড়ই জালেম সেই কুফরের মত ।।  
ফাতেমা ইমামের রোজা কিম্বা খেজেরের ।  
মহরমের গোঙারা কেহ বাগা মাদারের ।।।  
এ কাম করিবে জেবা হইবে মসরিক ।...

### **Sufi Tracts:**

*Atharbba Muhammadi Veda*, the *Sufi* tract which has already been referred to on many occasions in this chapter, also confirmed its implied audience by excluding the other(s)-within.

মুরিদ হইবেন যিনি শিয়া মোজহাবের ।  
আর হইবেন যিনি ছুন্নি জোমাতের ।।  
রাফিজি খারিজি আর নেচারি নাস্তিক ।  
আদম রফা রফায়দান উলবি ছিফিলিক ।।

---

<sup>113</sup> The second edition had 2000 copies, published by Kamar Ali Mahammad, from Ameer Hoseniya Press of Agha Fazle Ali, Dhaka, printed by Mahammad Abdul Ghani, 1903.

<sup>114</sup> Published by Tajaddin Muhammad in 1286/1879.



বাউলি নজুমি ধুলে বিমারি আরাম।  
আমেলতী রাজুহাতী গয়রহ তামাম।।  
এহি সব তরিকের ফয়দার খাতিরে।  
নাহি লিখি এ কেতাব শোন বেরাদরে।। অথর্ব মহাম্মদী বেদ, শাহ আবদুর করিম

This book which claimed to have been written to compensate for the shortcomings of the discursive practices of the *Sufi Tariqah* in Bengal (দেখিয়াছি হিন্দুস্তান দেখেছি পাঞ্জাব। সে দেশেতে জারি আছে একের মোজহাব।। বহুত কেতাব আছে সে দেশে জাহের। নাহি দেখি বাঙ্গলায় তেয়ছা এক শের।।), [I have seen Hindustan and I have travelled to Punjab. I have seen the sect of love there. There are several *Sufi* tracts on love. But there is not anything of that kind in Bengal] organized and arranged devotion and piety invested in the *ahl ul-bayt* by erasing all possible Shia claims over the Prophetic family. In this treatise we see that the basic thematic of Shia devotionism towards *ahl ul-bayt*, synonymous with the *pak panjatan*, has been appropriated by the *Hanafi* author with a *Qadiriyya* affiliation, to create a form of piety centred upon the Prophet and the *ahl ul-bayt* alike, and in this process Shia connections to the *ahl ul-bayt* are invalidated<sup>115</sup>. Another Sufi tract from 1923, *Prabhu Parichoy* by Shah Abdul Jalil Shikdar, provides a list of dates marking the deaths of the *nabis* and *awliyas* (or *Sufi pirs*), which are to be commemorated. This list validated the dates of death for the iconic *Sufi* saints along with the dates of death for Imam Ali, Hasan and Husayn, thus merging the tradition of *urs* (i.e. commemorating the day of passing of a saint or *pir*) with that of

---

<sup>115</sup> While repeatedly referring to different *hadis* literature valid for the *Hanafi* order, the author did not hesitate to appropriate the section which the Shias claimed their authenticity through the verbatim of the Prophet. It goes like this:

যে জনার মওলা আমি হই জাহানেতে।

আলিও তাহার মওলা জানিবে মনেতে।। অথর্ব মহাম্মদী বেদ, সাহ আবদুর রহিম

Not only that, with this, the Qadiri Sufi author devalued all the texts claiming supremacy of Ali. In his argument, Ali was praised by the first three caliphs and also by the four *mazhabi* imams which brought strength to the relationship of the four sahabas as contributing to the wellbeing of Islam.

এ তিন ছাহাবা নিজে তারিফ আলীর।

করেছেন বাড়াইয়া কতক জিকির।। ...

দিওয়ান হাফেজ লেখে এ ভাবেতে শের।

নাহলে আলীর দোস্ত বেশক কাফের।।

আর বাজে কেতাবেতে কত রকমেতে।

বহুত লিখেছে মওলা আলীর সানেতে।।

Abur Rahim also claimed the Shia twelve Imams, nine after Imam Ali, Hasan and Husayn to create a *Qadiriyya Hanafi* Sufi devotional cosmos.

*Muharram*—but poses a different ideological justification for commemorating *Muharram*.

### 3.3.2 Performing Pain in Print

অতএব ভ্রাতাগণ! একবার পড়িয়া দেখুন মুনসী ছাদ আলী ও আবদুল ওহাব সাহেবদ্বয়ের সায়েরী কিরূপ মধুর ও হৃদয়গ্রাহী। সহিদে কারবালা অনেকেই পড়িয়াছেন, কিন্তু অশ্রুবারিতে বক্ষ ভাসাইয়াছেন কিনা সন্দেহ। তাই বলি, দীনদার মোসলমান ভ্রাতাগণ! যদি অশ্রুবারিতে বক্ষ প্লাবিত করিয়া অশেষ ছওয়াব হাসেল করিতে চান তবে এই গঞ্জে সহিদে কারবালা একবার পড়িয়া দেখুন। *Sachitra Ganje Sahide Karbala*, Sa'ad Ali and Abdul Wahhab<sup>116</sup>.

This excerpt from an advertorial written by the publisher, Hajji Mohammad Soleman, which appears at the beginning of *Shahide Karbala* by Sa'ad ali and Abdul Wahhab, attests to the scriptural status of the Karbala narratives in the realm of popular piety. The reader is implored to weep over the loss of the Imams in an irrepressible flow of tears while reading—an act which is described here, in this passage, as a newly formulated ritual which could earn the reader divine blessings, or *sawab*. While *ahl-e-Sunnat* was theorizing *milad* as being equivalent to reading the Qur'an, which had been the sole source of attaining *sawab*, the act of reading of the Karbala narratives were now beginning to enter the newly formulated domain of *Hanafi* Sunni piety. Because of the need for authentication, modes of enunciation had to be changed, and reading was to be reformulated by minimizing the performative and the sensory, in order to make the reading of the narrative equivalent to the reading of the scriptures.

In the Karbala narratives of the popular print culture, the polemic of the reformist tenets and the traditionalist responses became quite evident from the mid nineteenth century. The authors—writing from varied zones of religious and literary practices, from Bhursut, Rangpur and Chittagong—referred to the Hadis literature with the desire to authenticate the narratives associated with the life of the Prophet and the prophetic system. This intertextuality between the narratives of Karbala and the Hadis repertoire

---

<sup>116</sup> Published from Babur Bazar, Dhaka, date of publication not mentioned.

not only posited narrative as the truth, qualified by the claim of scripture as history, it also rendered to the narrative a status equal to scriptures. That is why, the authors of Karbala, in an ethico-moral mode, demarcated between grief, as it were, in the commemoration of *Muharram*, and grief as derived from the scriptural.

A close study of the Karbala narratives from the early nineteenth century onwards clearly shows the attempts of the authors to imagine and envisage a new demography which could conceive grief and pain. Grief as a valid form of piety towards the Prophet and the prophetic (*ahl ul-bayt* and the *ashab*) was being re-conceptualized in the fabrication of the sequences that demanded grief and pain inside and outside the narrative. The sanctioned form of grief had to be separated from the kind of performance of grief that the reformists so vehemently disapproved. To this end, weeping as a form of showing grief was permitted and sanctioned, while a more bodily act of performing the sublime experience of pain was prohibited. It would thus be linear and simplistic on our part to search for a trajectory in which the physically enchanted articulations of grief was replaced altogether with the formulation and inculcation of a scripturally sanctioned form of grief, rather the trajectory was also an instance of overlap between the scriptural and the ritualistic, where *bid'at* insinuated itself as an integral part of the reformed sensibilities about grief.

Before the influence of fundamentalist reform, the texts used to contain the impulse of the performative; especially when they were generically connected to the *Muharram* repertoire. The changes in religiosity, and the changing markers that defined them, can be traced in the interface between poetry and ritual. Texts started inviting the audience to perform the narrative through recitation to feel like a religious-performative-literary community without much effort to define either weeping or chest beating. The imperative to 'do grief' ('করো শোক')—i.e. the physically enchanted expression of grief by beating the chest hard ('দড় মুষ্টি হান বুক')—was intertwined with weeping in sections of *Jarijungnama* to formulate the

expression of grief as a whole, in all its aspects, which was prescribed to the audience.

হেয়াত মামুদ ভুনে শুন ভাই সর্বজনে

চক্ষে যেন বহে জলধার।

হায় হায় কর মুখে দড় মুষ্টি হান বুকে

করো শোক চিত্তের মাঝার।। *জারিজঙ্গনামা*, হেয়াত মামুদ প ৬৬

In this section quoted above, where the audience are being initiated into religiosity—crying and lamenting are entangled with the act of beating the chest in such a way, that an ideal form of showing grief could not be conceived if they were done separately. But, for a new conception of sanctioned grief, all the performative excesses were purged from the expression of lament, and weeping as an expression of devotion and piety was separated from crying, while chest-beating and other frenzied bodily movements like rolling on the ground with hair undone and dishevelled were forbidden in the narrative itself.

This intertwining of weeping and physical expressions of grief was undone in the period of reform. The *Hanafi* response was in the form of a religious imagination (driven by its deliberate goal to form a community), in which weeping was conceived as an authentic and scriptural form of showing grief and the physical was marked as *bid'at*. This was a journey from crying to weeping, from an overt enactment of grief to an internalization of it<sup>117</sup>.

In the early modern Karbala narratives, detailed descriptions of performing lament, in all its physical and bodily excesses, were an integral part of narration since the overall imperative for the genre was precisely to convey this sense of loss and lamentation. It was especially women whose lament constituted the paradigm of grief to be connected with by the audience. In Mamud's *Jarijungnama*, after Kashem is killed in the war, the narrator builds a scene of an intense bodily performance of grief, describing how his mother beat her chest violently while screaming uncontrollably and tearing at her clothes.

---

<sup>117</sup> Weeping has been attempted to be understood as Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley, *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005

তাহাকে দেখিয়া মায়      করি অতি হয় হয়  
কান্দিতে লাগিল উচ্চ রাও।  
ছিড়িল গায়ের বাস      ঘন ছাড়ে হা নিশ্বাস  
বুকে হানে মুষ্টিকের ঘাও।। *জারিজঙ্গনামা*, হেয়াত মামুদ

Similarly, when Ali Akbar dies, the entire house of women rolled in the dust, tearing off their hair, tearing their clothes and screaming out their grief.

আকবর পড়িল যবে      ভেস্তে চলি গেল তবে  
নবী আদি শের আলী যথা  
ভেস্তের ভিতর ধ্বনি      হাহাকার রোল শুনি  
কান্দে সবে মনে পায় বেথা।  
সবে ধূলা ছিটে মুণ্ডে      মস্তকের লোম ছিণ্ডে  
অতি ক্ষেদে পায় মনস্তাপ।  
ছিড়িল গায়ের বাস      পুরী হইল দিস পাস।  
হাহাকার শব্দের আলাপ।  
শুনিয়া তাহার মাও      বুকে মাথে হানে ঘাও  
শীঘ্র দাঁড়াইল হাহা করি।  
গালে মাথে মারে চড়      নিজ্জাস করিয়া বড়  
কান্দে অতি সক্রম স্বর।  
ক্ষেণে উঠে ক্ষেণে পড়ে      নাম ধরি ডাক পাড়ে  
বলে পুত্র আলী আকবর।। *জারিজঙ্গনামা*, হেয়াত মামুদ

In another sequence of the *Jarijungnama*, Imam Husayn, even after having broken down in grief at the loss of his sons and nephews in the battle, gathered himself together and reminded the grieving women of the ultimate, divinely ordained purpose of carrying on through with this battle of inevitable loss. He explained to them the ideal that they had to uphold for the *ummat* by sacrificing Imam Husayn himself, along with the kin and companions of the *ahl ul-bayt*. Here, in the narrative, it was simply a battle between emotion and duty, entanglement and responsibility that Imam Husayn underwent, without showing any ideological grievance against the forms of articulating grief.

পুরীর ভিতরে সবে কান্দিয়া ব্যাকুল ।  
 মুকল উদাম মাথে নাহি বান্দে চুল ॥  
 অচেতন হৈয়া কান্দে এমাম হুসন ।  
 ক্ষেণেক কান্দিয়া পাছে স্থির কৈল মন ॥  
 প্রবোধ বচন বুলি বুঝায় সভাক ।  
 ছাড়হ ক্রন্দন কর শুকুর খোদাক ॥  
 উস্মতের কাজে নানা দিয়াছে খোদাক ॥  
 এজিদের হাথে এথা মরিতে আমাক ॥ *জারিজঙ্গনামা, হেয়াত মামুদ*

Even when the Prophet Mohammad is described as tying up his daughter Fatema's hair<sup>118</sup>, dishevelled from grieving and lamenting after hearing about the destined death of her sons—Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn—this gesture was not one of controlling the physical, rather it was an act of affection and consolation that a father (who was a grieving grandfather at the same time) could offer to his grieving daughter. In popular Karbala prints, this situation of affective bonding between the Prophet and Fatema, the father and the daughter, was becoming stronger, where the anticipation of a great loss acted as a paradigmatic moment that, in turn, strengthened the affective bonding between the characters of the Karbala repertoire and produced a community around the memory of that great loss.

The Prophet's affection towards Fatema, the grieving daughter with her dishevelled hair, changed into rebuke in the reform era, though an immense amount of energy was spent towards creating the realization of pain in the anticipation, or at the actual occurrence, of death in the narratives. The most emblematic moments were the death of the Prophet, and the declaration of the destined death of his grandsons, which were to be grieved and mourned over, thus preparing and directing the community in the ideal forms of piety, and the sanctioned ways of feeling and expressing it. Shedding holy tears by weeping became the paradigmatic act of surrendering to Islam. Here, at the level of language, the reconciliation between *sharia* and *Tariqah* took the shape of refining death as the paradigmatic moment of mystical separation, or *juda'i*— জুদাঈর গমে দলি বকোরার হইল। (The heart has

---

<sup>118</sup> মবারক হাতে বান্ধে ফাতমোর চুল।

become frenzied with the pangs of separation) The mortality of the Prophet who was the manifestation of the divine attribute of mercy, created an occasion to reaffirm one's belongingness to the community by weeping to experience and express this mourning, longing, and pain of separation. Later in the narrative, the deaths of the *ashab* would provide subsequent episodes of grief and images of showing grief, presenting almost equally poignant occasions for devotion which demanded tears from the audience. Thus the deaths of Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali all invoked an equal amount of weeping from the audience in an attempt to wash away ideological differences among the *ashab*.

*Jari*, a derivative of *azadari*, which means performing lament, became an all-encompassing verb in this domain of expressing grief, signifying both weeping and crying. Though the *Hanafi* authors of the popular print wanted to envisage weeping as differentiated from crying, and were quite deliberate in abandoning crying with chest beating and other frenzied movements—*jari*, either in overtly expressive references<sup>119</sup> or as having an inner connotation of showing grief<sup>120</sup>—they inevitably brought in the act of crying which the reformists and traditionalists were so opposed to. The audience/reader had experienced enough ecstasy of crying and themselves cried in tandem with the images of violent grief — likened, for instance, to the death throes of a freshly slaughtered rooster<sup>121</sup> —which appeared in the

---

<sup>119</sup> তোমরা দুভাই মেরা পেয়ারা জানের।

কান্দিয়া ২ জাবে সাতত লাসের।।

শুনিয়া সকলে এই খাবের তাচির।

আফছেছ করিয়া কান্দে হইয়া অস্থির।।

কান্দনার সোর গোল পঙছিল আছমানে।

রোজ হারসাত জেয়ছা হৈল সেই দিনে।।

কাহাতক কব এয়ছা কৈলে রোনাজারি।

সেসব জারির হাল লিখিতে না পারি।। *আসল সহিদে কারবালা*, জোনাব আলী

<sup>120</sup> কলম আজিজ হয় সে জারি লিখিতে। তদেব

This physical configuration was used as a stock metaphor to signify grief and distress wherever necessary. It was even extended to such an extent that it lost its devotional value to attain the status of an empty sign carrying any situation of distress attached to it. Even after failing to get Joynab, Yezid performed *matam* by beating his chest in Jonab Ali's *Asal Shahide Karbala*. ছের পিটে জারি করে কান্দে জার জার।

<sup>121</sup> জবে করা মুরগির মত ছটপট করে।

text till the penultimate scene in which Husayn, at the battle field before his martyrdom, prohibits the community from crying and grieving by beating the chest, disheveling one's hair and rolling on the earth.

However, before Husayn could say this, the authors described how the *ahl ul-bayt* had performed *matam*, or grief, at the death of the Prophet in a section entitled *matam*, হজরতের আহলে বয়েতের মাতম করিবার বয়ান।(Jonab Ali<sup>122</sup>).

Abu Bakr's death, by producing a solidarity through weeping led by Ali, not only affirmed tears as the most valid element of piety, but also resolved the ideological difference between the Abu Bakr-centric and Ali-centric sectarianism (that signified the Sunni and Shia divide). Piety was endowed with such power, that it could even smooth out historical creases, whenever there was any instance of conflict between the *ashab*. The historical speculation—that Usman was parochial enough to enhance the power of his kinsmen in the Islamic court resulting in internal conflict—was recast by posing a strong affective bond between Usman and Ali<sup>123</sup>. Karbala texts in popular print fabricated their own truth by claiming that their authenticity derived from the Hadis repertoire<sup>124</sup>. Thus, while weeping as a form of piety and as the ideal form of devotion was validated through Hadis citations, while crying or *ronajari* or *matam* as traditional forms of lamenting continued to remain in an environment which was trying its best to eradicate those forms as *bid'at*. The section entitled 'how the family of the prophet performed lament' ('হজরতের আহলে বয়েতের মাতম করিবার বয়ান') was

---

<sup>122</sup> *Shahide Karbala*, p. 342

<sup>123</sup> When Usman was assassinated, Ali was so enraged with grief that he hit his own sons, who were the ideal characters after the Prophet.

দৌড়াইয়া আসে আলী কান্দিতে কান্দিতে...

হাসানের গালে এক তামেচা মারিল।

আর হোসেনের মুখে ঘূসা মেরেছিল।

ফজিহত করে দহে চক্ষু বহে পানি।

তোমা দোহে করিতে ভেজিনু নেঘাবানি।

তোমা না হইলে কেন সাত্তি ওসমানের।

তোমরা থাকিতে মারে ওসমান খাতের।। *শহিদ-ই-কারবালা*, মহাম্মদ মুনশী

<sup>124</sup> Even the fact that Hasan had 90 wives was validated through the Hadis literature. Jonab Ali, *Adi o Asal Shahide Karbala*



followed by a reference from the *hadis* validating it as being stated by the *hadis* narrators. (রাবি লোগে রঙয়েতে কহে এ খবর।)

From the cover of his translation of *Tajkiratul Awliya*, Jonab Ali's antipathy towards the *pirs* who lacked *shariyati* knowledge, and his own inclination towards scriptural Islam can be clearly discerned<sup>125</sup>. In his *Shahide Karbala*, Jonab Ali describes a time in the pre-British period when common Muslims, claiming themselves to be Sunni without any proper understanding of *dwin* or *iman* and, and lacking proper exposure to Islam, were inclined to commit *shirk* and *bid'at*. Jonab Ali might appear to be a proud Muhammadi when he claims that it was only due to the reformist activities of Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi that Bengal could be purged of *shirk* and *kufir*<sup>126</sup>. But the manner in which he narrativises the events and fabricates affect around the sacred characters, reveals the efforts of a traditionalist *alem* whose sensibility was still charged with physical affect, no matter how sincere his *shariyati* efforts were to reform the tradition. If

---

<sup>125</sup> আজকাল দাগাবাজ ফকিরেরা ঢের।

ঠাঁই ঠাঁই যথা তথা হতেছে জাহের।।

শরিয়তের বরখেলাফ করিয়া বেড়ায়।

মারফতী ফকির আমি বলে যে সবায়।।

মারফৎ পাইবে কিসে শরিয়ত ছাড়িলে।

কেতাব কোরানে যাহা না আছে দলিলে।।

ওয়াকিফ হইয়া হাল আওলিয়া লোকের।

লাঠি মার মাথে দাগাবাজ ফকিরের।। তাজকিরাতুল আওলিয়া, জোনাব আলী

Anisujjaman, *Muslim Manas O Bangla Sahitya*, p141

<sup>126</sup> আগে জমানার বীছে নবাবি আমলে।

ইংরাজের আমল না ছিল জেই কালে।।

সেইকালে বাজে লোক বাঙ্গালা দেশের।

ইসলামী তরিকা না ছিল তাহাদের।।

জানিত না দ্বীন আর ইসলামী ঈমান।

মুখে খালি ফলাইত সুন্নি মুসলমান।।

হিন্দুদের দেখে শুনে করিত সে কাম।

শেরেক বেদাতে ছিল ভরিয়া তামাম।।

হেন কালে আঞ্জা-পাক দয়াল খোদায়।

মোজাদ্দেদ পাঠাইয়া দিল বাঙ্গালায়।।

সৈয়দ আহম্মদ শাহে মোজাদ্দেদ করি।

মিটাইল বাঙ্গালায় শেরেক কুফরি।। *শহীদে কারবালা*, জোনাব আলী

grief is the core emotion of piety, and grieving the elemental performance, grief/grieving took the shape of rage, and grief became a sign of mystical love, too powerful to be converted to weeping by repressing the intense physical passion so deeply entrenched within the community that produced and received this emotion. All the authors made a great effort to meticulously draw the picture of grieving, efficacious enough to produce narrative solidarity, while eliminating the ritualistic solidarity created during *Muharram*. Their efforts were primarily concentrated on the period following the death of Mohammad, and the subsequent death of the *ashab*

In Muhammad Munshi's *Shahid-i-Karbala*, in the lamentations of the *ashab* and the *ahl ul-bayt* after Muhammad's death, the prohibition on crying was spelt out as given by the Prophet himself, though the text could not hide traces of *bid'at*, even if it was only happening at the level of language.

নবির আওলাদ জত সাহাবা কেবার কত  
কান্দে সবে কোরে হয় হয়  
গমের আতস পরে জোলে ভুনে একেবারে  
কয়লা২ সকলে হইল  
হজরত ওম্মর সাহা নবির এক্ষেতে তাহা  
তলওয়ার খুলিয়া জে লইল  
নবির ওকাত জেই বলিবেক জারে এই  
কাটিয়া ডালিব তলওয়ারেতে।  
নাহি মান এইবাত শুয়ে আছে নেকজাত  
কথা কহে এলাহির সাথে  
হজরত উছমান ঠায় মুখ বন্ধ হয়ে যায়  
চেয়ে রহে বোবার আকার  
হজরত মোরতজা আলি শোন তার কথা বলি  
নবিজির এক্ষে জার জার  
এহাতক কৈল জারি সে সব লিখিতে নারী  
গমে টোটে কোরস তেনার।  
জেয়ছা বিমারি লোকে উঠিতে না তাকত থাকে  
সেই হাল হইল আলি। ...  
ছিন্দিক আকবর জিনি নবির গমেতে তিনি  
বেকারারে লাগিল কান্দিতে। ...  
কান্দিয়া২ কয় শোন নবি মোস্তফায়  
যদি রাজি থাকিতেন মোরে

যান মাল জত মেরা      তোমার নামেতে সারা  
করিয়া জে দিতুন কোরবানি  
আর এই বাত পরে      মানা না করিতে মোরে  
কান্দিবারে বহাইয়া পানি  
তবে এয়ছা কান্দিতুন      আপে খুন বাহাতুন  
তোমার লাগিয়া দোজাহান... (মুহম্মদ মুনশী)

(This passage has a thick description of grief and lament that went beyond the meditative by carrying the enchantment of the physical)

The narrative describes how Fatema died of grief for her father within six months of his death, which she spent without ever smiling or taking care of herself. (ফাতেমা খাতুন বিবি খুবই নেককার। নবির ওফাত বাদে ফাতেমা দুনিয়ার।। ছয় মাস বেঁচেছিল শুনহ সবায়। ওই ছয় মাস বিবি কভু না হাসিল। বাপের গমেতে চুরহ হয়ে ছিল।। তাকত নাহিক গায়ে যেমন বিমারি। বাপের গমেতে করতেন আহা জারি।।)<sup>127</sup>

It can be said that at the level of the narrative, the traces of *bid'at* had to be retained as the situation needed to be more intense than it could have possibly been expressed through weeping alone. Grief for the *ashab* always carried the intensity of the physical in Muhammad Munshi, as this intensity of lament helped to prove the solidarity among the *ashab*. When Abu-Bakr dies, his last wish to be buried with the *ahl ul-bayt* not only bridged the gap between Abu-Bakr and Ali, the *matam* of the *ashab* led by Ali in grief solidified the community.

জারে জার কান্দ আলি এ কথা শুনিয়া।  
কান্দেন সাহাবাগন আফছোছ করিয়া।  
ছিন্দিকের জুদাইতে করে সবে গম।  
শোকের সাগরে পোড়ে করেন মাতম।।(মুহম্মদ মুনশী)

### Conclusion:

There was a replacement of blood with tears, but tears were symbolized as blood. Thus after Umar's death we see: বহত কান্দিল সবে সবে হয়ে বেকার। সে সব জারির কথা কি লিখিব আর। কলিজার খুন আখ হৈতে নেকালিল। ধুলায় পড়িয়া যান ধুনিতে লাগিল।।  
(Everyone cried in a frenzy. How can I describe such pain? Blood from the

<sup>127</sup> Jonab Ali, *Shahide Karbala*

wounded and pining hearts flowed from the eyes. Everybody was rolling on the ground in pain)

And we can find a similar agony after Ali's death,

এমন আজব হাল হইল সেই ওক্কে।  
দম বন্ধ হয়ে গেল কান্দিতে२।।  
জার জার হয়ে সবে এতেক কান্দিল।  
আখেতে আছুর নদী বহিয়া চলিল।।...  
কান্দবার ধমক এয়ছা হইল তাতে।  
আসমান জমিন সব লাগিল কাঁপিতে।।  
লতাএফ আসরফিতে লেখে এই ধারা।  
আর সোওহেদান নবুওতে আছে এই ধারা।।

[They cried so hard that they were out of breath. They cried so hard that their tears made a river. They cried so hard that the sky and the earth were shaken. This is how it is said in the *Hadis* texts.]

It must be noted that, while the Karbala narrative gradually became didactic in handling the physical excesses of showing grief by calling it *bid'at*, they continued to carry the affect inside, as the inerasable condition of being localized, or by re-formulating the concept of that excess. It is precisely in this condition of ambiguity, that we need to put the question of the formation of identity, formation of cultural nationalism, and orientation to politics for the Bengal Muslim community.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Moment of *Jatiya*: An Arrival

জাতীয় জীবন গঠন করিতে হইলে মুসলমান বালককে গৃহকাহিনীতে, স্কুলপাঠে, ধর্মাগারে ও সভাসমিতিতে সর্বদা পূর্ব ইতিহাস স্মরণ করাইয়া পূর্ব গৌরব রক্ষণার্থ বাল্যহৃদয়কে উদ্দীপিত করিতে হইবে। যে জাতির সাহিত্য নাই, সে জাতির আত্মসম্মান নাই। জাতীয় অস্তিত্ব রক্ষা করিতে হইলে বাঙ্গালা ভাষার উন্নতি অত্যন্ত আবশ্যিক।

‘বঙ্গভাষা ও মুসলিম সাহিত্য’, আহসান উল্লাহ

যশোহর-খুলনা-সিদ্ধিকিয়া সাহিত্য সমিতির অধিবেশনে পঠিত ১৯১৮

We should remember, that when the Urdu-speaking intelligentsia were debating vehemently about how to define one’s collectivity, the sense of national identity and pan-Islamic belongingness through words like *qaum*, *watan*, *millat*, etc. were being used in an attempt to reclaim them from the scriptural vocabulary in order to designate a modern identity for the Indian Muslims<sup>1</sup>—the Bengal Muslim had only the expression *jatiya*, or national, to mark all kinds of belongingness and collective consciousness. *Jatiya*, henceforth, has several interpretive contexts—not a unilinear one, necessary for understanding the Bengal Muslim’s search for a collective identity. In this chapter, I will attempt to unpack several contexts against which the term *jatiya* was formulated for the Muslim public sphere in Bengal since the late nineteenth century, by several groups—antagonistic to or resonating with each other—in order to form a set of common denominators for a secure identity.

In Calcutta the Hindus are called Bengalees by every Mohamedan who has never travelled beyond the Marhata Ditch, as if such Mohamedans, by the fact of their professing the faith of the Great Arabian Prophet, have a right to be non-Bengalees.

Maulvi Yaqinuddin Ahmed, *The Moslem Chronicle*, 11 April  
1896, p.164

---

<sup>1</sup> Ayesha Jalal, “Identity Crisis: Rethinking the Politics of Community and Region in South Asia”, *Harvard Internatinal Review*, vol. xxi, no. 3 (Summer 1999).

Abul Hayat writes that he was thus informed in a predominantly Muslim village in Faridpur:

হুজুর এখানে খালি মুসলমানরাই আছেন। এখানে বাঙ্গালীর বাস নাই।<sup>2</sup>

[Sir, only Muslims live in this village. There are no Bengalis here]

Abul Hayat, *Mussalmans of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1960, p 97

Similarly, if we are to understand the import of the much discussed first sentence of Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's novel *Srikanta*, which begins: "There was a football match between the Bangalis and Musalmans", as a reflection of the Hindu nationalist hegemony that discovered and defined its other—the Muslims—as 'not Bengalis', we need to look at the polemic that it gave rise to, or was embedded in. The creation of otherness as 'not-Bengali' produced further self-identification for the Muslims through the process of creating counter-narratives, by discovering both Muslimness and Bengaliness for the Muslims of Bengal. These two concepts, Bengaliness and Muslimness, in this effort, became antagonistic and incommensurable, in a conflict which the Muslims had to engage with and negotiate. The located identity of the Muslims, or more specifically, of the Bengali Muslims, was carved out by the Muslim public by producing identity as difference and also as located. This locatedness as Bengalis of Bengal, and difference in the sense of having some essential core as belonging to Islam became a complex and charged terrain for the Bengali Muslim community in their quest for an identity, as Bengalis, and as Muslims.

If we try to think about this search and the inherent negotiations it entailed, it might appear to be a middle-class discourse and artistic phenomenon (in terms of self expression) at the surface level in general. But a more nuanced reading of this sense of 'feeling separate' and 'feeling located' might show the inclinations and engagements of various social groups within the community, which was becoming ever-fractured with the varying

---

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Rafiuddin Ahmad, Rafiuddin Ahmad, *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1905: A Quest for Identity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 112.

conceptualization of a Bengali regional identity for the Muslims, which might not have been derived from typically middle-class realizations. In the following chapters, while I attempt to delineate the multidimensionality of a public fractured-within, I will show that an understanding of the creation of a regional Bengali Muslim identity cannot be accomplished if we look at it as a purely middle class activity. Rather, we need to go beyond the static understanding of the middle-class, or the elite, and look into the layers and folds of a consumer-producer community which, through its various uses of print culture, attempted to understand and configure the sense of a community. If *jatiya* became the most viable explanatory expression to embody this sense of the community, I will show how, even the conceptualization of *jatiya* never remained a monolithic signifier in the process, as polyvalent possibilities were being forged within the various layers of the community. The identity of the community, thus, remained ever expanding.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Muslim community in Bengal started to respond to the impulse of another identitarian concept in order to define its collective experience. The rightful community of the Prophet, *ummah*, so vigorously expressed in reformist literature and activities, was beginning to manifest itself in a new sense of the collective—*jatiya* or national—with the rise of the Muslim literati and a new generation of religious intelligentsia, in the form of learned *munshis* and *maulavis*. This chapter engages with the multiple processes of conceptualization and articulation through which the Bengali Muslim identity was produced through and around the imagination of this *jatiya*. Mine will be a reading of the heterogeneity of the Muslim public, and of the polemic which was also produced through the concepts of the *jatiya* and *jatiya* identity vis-à-vis the reconceptualization of history, religion and language. However, this *jatiya* may not always be the national, and/or national identity. Hence I have kept *jatiya* and its paraphernalia of associated words, like *bhab* (emotion), *unnati* (progress) and *sahitya* (literature) untranslated from the Bengali.

The desire to become a collective by performing prescribed norms acquired a new sensibility when the community needed to discover its meaning through its location, that is, its location in Bengal. The desire to become the rightful community of the Prophet (*ummah*) explored with such vigour in reformist literature<sup>3</sup> was gradually tempered with the dilemma of belongingness, both in its spatial and temporal senses. In the following phase of the search for identity, with the rise of the educated Muslim literati and a new generation of clergies, the regional experience of location, literature, language and identity became new issues to incorporate into the understanding of the collective. Temporal and spatial anxiety was further qualified by the invention of the discipline of history, and also by the attempts to make narrative historically viable. Thus, biographies of the sacred characters of Islam not only provided the template for an individual Muslim, but also legitimized those ideals in historical time. The quest for a Bengali Muslim identity, therefore, was the outcome of a constant interplay between trans-regional and regional understandings of religion, history, language and politics. I will show that, while looking at and making meaning of these efforts, no secular-religious binary can be maintained if we are to understand the Muslim public, which consumed and produced discourses about identity by formulating and reformulating history, literature and religious texts.

Available scholarships on Muslim identity in modern South Asian historiography have put much emphasis on regional aspects in the making of a Muslim 'nationhood' and identity. These studies, ranging from C. A. Bayly's to Prachi Deshpande's, disregard any possibility of a collective ethnic identity, or any statist model, to understand the nation and the national. We might not be able to import Bayly's concept of the "regional patriotism" of early modern South Asia<sup>4</sup> as informing later models of nationalism in the colonial period, in order to understand the Bengal Muslim chapter. Regional patriotism was prominent and decisive for the Hindu nationalist ideals of the time, and was magnificently expressed in the

---

<sup>3</sup> Already discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>4</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).



discursive and poetic material produced by the litterateurs. C. A. Bayly shows how this regional patriotism developed from different forms of pre-modern notions of space, and fear of the ‘Other’, which finally resulted in the perception of Muslims as the most recognizable socio-religious ‘Other’ in the colonial period. But for my project I am not going to look into the pre-modern forms of self-other relationships, and will concentrate upon the contemporary actions and discourses of the Muslim public geared towards the creation of self-identity. In this chapter, I will look at the processes of identity formation undertaken by the Muslims of Bengal since the mid nineteenth century, which oscillated not only between the national and the regional, but between the regional, the national and the trans-national religious-political-literary aspirations, overlapping and influencing each other.

Chitralkha Zutshi<sup>5</sup>, Mridu Rai<sup>6</sup> and Prachi Deshpande<sup>7</sup> engage with paradigmatically new understandings of regional history, arguing that, hardly any opposition between the regional and national can ever be conceived in the context of Kashmiri and Marathi nationalist historiographies.

When we come to similar studies on Bengal, we see how Asim Roy underscores the value of medieval folk Islam of Bengal in problematizing the binaries between the scriptural and lived forms, and between great and little traditions. But the idea of syncretism that he propounds, relies on a rigid opposition between two poles, one of “Bengali culture” and the other of “Islam” as being essentially different, coming together in only one region, that of Bengal<sup>8</sup>. This difference, expressed in the duality between Hindu and Islamic cultures, also prevails in the work of theoreticians of

---

<sup>5</sup> Chitralkha Zutshi, *Languages and belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Mridhu Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1760–1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, Princeton (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

syncretism who do not explore the cluster of religious-aesthetic ideologies in the high and lived literary performative cultures, with which different layers of Islam interacted. Syncretism, when used as an analytical category for understanding Hindu-Muslim relationship, would emphasize the harmonious coexistence of 'two' essentially different religious-social systems, rather than taking account of their co-constitutivity.

In current scholarship, this question of region for understanding Muslimness in Bengal has become extremely important, as something that authors like Rafiuddin Ahmad, and more recently, Sufia M. Uddin<sup>9</sup> have attempted to conceptualize and unpack.

Neilesh Bose attempts to fill in the methodological gaps in Tazeen Murshid's book in which she tries to unpack the "problem in identity" of the Bengal Muslims between the years 1871 and 1977, a timeframe which covers the late colonial, East Pakistani and early Bangladeshi periods. Murshid's engagement with official documents and governmental archival material, which she uses to delineate the creation of the Bengali Muslim middle-class, bypasses an enormous body of intellectual literature written in Bangla. Bose has shown how Murshid fails to take into account the activities of the litterateur-intelligentsia. While commenting on society and culture, she hardly ever delves into a detailed analysis of the activities of literary societies and journals and the creative-analytical corpus written in Bangla<sup>10</sup>. While arranging her material, Murshid does not quite realise the redundancy of maintaining a binary opposition between the secular and religious, and continues to work with the exclusivity of secular and religious inclinations, which Bose attempts to redo in his work. Bose not only 'interprets' the 'religious' and the 'secular' as continually imbricated, but also looks into Bengali regional history within a bigger interpretive framework to understand the identity formation for the Bengal Muslims.

---

<sup>9</sup> Sufia M. Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity and Language in an Islamic Nation* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Neilesh Bose discusses in detail Murshid's not-so-detailed analysis of *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* and scattered references to journals like *Samyabadi*, *Bulbul* and the *Bengali Muslim Sahitya Patrika* marking her effort as methodologically inadequate.

While agreeing totally with the continually imbricated nature of the secular and the religious, I find Bose's choice of texts largely confined to the authorship of the emerging middle class, which would contribute to the imagination of the imminent state of Pakistan. While he looks into the religiously informed nature of literary works, which do not otherwise have any scriptural-religious affiliation or agenda, and rather, work against such attempts<sup>11</sup>, he fails to note the dialogic relationship between the so called religious matter, and the so called social matter, in the way he defines an intellectual and cultural history of Muslim Bengal. Maulavi Keramat Ali, who embodied such a paradigmatic shift in the relationship between rural reformism and elite culturalism in the late nineteenth century, has been allotted a single sweeping sentence in Bose, as "one of Bengal's most famous Muslim preachers who vigorously promoted a "purified" Islam amongst eastern Bengal's Muslim masses in the nineteenth century."

So, while the intellectual activities of Abu Jafr Shamsuddin, the grandson of one of the disciples of Maulana Keramat Ali, are taken into consideration as being informed by a sense of Islamic ideals, Neilesh Bose, while looking at the struggle for an independent state of Bangladesh<sup>12</sup>, does not consider discourses directly related to religion and Islamic ideals and other forms of intellectual practice, which offered tremendous impetus to the thought process and world-view of the Muslim public in defining modernity and identity formation.

My study follows the work of Rafiuddin Ahmad, in looking at individuals and organizations reconfiguring and rearticulating religion and religiosity across urban and rural areas and includes spaces beyond the Calcutta-Dhaka intellectual domains. My study proposes that while it is impossible to retain any binary opposition between the secular and the religious, we might need to look beyond the social-literary-creative material produced by the so-called intelligentsia. Here, an in depth analysis of what was happening in

---

<sup>11</sup> To be discussed in Chapter V.

<sup>12</sup> Neilesh Bose, PhD Dissertation entitled "Anti-colonialism, Regionalism, and Cultural Autonomy: Bengali Muslim Politics, c.1840–1952", Tuft University, August 2009, p. 1.

the domain of religious discourses produced from different sections of the community, with different access and orientations to religion, will help us interrogate the monolithic understanding of intellectuals belonging to the middle-class. I would rather extend the possibility of this scholarship by including works of different layers of the clergy, who might have been trained in traditional education systems in Bengal or in north India, or have had exposure to English and chaste Bangla in the new state-sponsored *madrasa* system, or nurtured various multifarious inclinations towards religious knowledge in between. The choice of language and genre, and varied explanations pertaining to those choices made to consolidate religion as the core of identity and modernity, made the journey immensely productive and polyvalent. Finally, no easy unilinearity can be traced to define the identity formation of the community, which might have resulted in any direct or straightforward separatism or communalism. An identity-indifference with the Hindus was now fraught with a sense of defiance, dialogue, alliance, co-existence, competition and coercion performed in the language of alliance, and also in the language of separatism. Here, I will humbly go beyond the approach taken by Rafiuddin Ahmad, who argues for an acute sense of growing 'separatism' in the Muslim public geared towards achieving economic agency, education and communitarian solidarity. What I want to add relates to a much more complex tug-of-war between defiance and dependence, attraction and anger, felt by the Muslim public towards the Hindus.

The Muslim intelligentsia of the time (now with a varied and complex configuration) had to create its own counter-narrative to define its essence and identity through the conception of *jatiya*, expressed through discursive and creative languages.

It is to be noted that while we can see attempts being made to reformulate genre and language to carve out a *jatiya*, parallel streams of narratives were flowing with *ummah* as the expression for a sense of identity. Traditional narratives on Karbala in an Arabo-Persian-Urdu-saturated Bangla, written

by the traditional clergy<sup>13</sup> based in the Bengal *mufassils*, continued to use the term *ummah* to designate the community of the Prophet. There was a huge ideological conflict between the traditional clergy, and a generation—trained in the new *madrassa* system and belonging to a new group of intelligentsia (like the *Sudhakar* group)—in choosing the ideal language as the medium for a Bengali Muslim identity. But it should be mentioned here that I am not proposing another set of binaries between the traditionalists and the religious intelligentsia; rather, I am proposing a relationship of direct and subtle mutual influence and exchange. While the traditional clergy was dead-against the adaptation of a Sankritized chaste Bangla as the language for Muslims and advocated for the reorientation of Bangla with Perso-Arabic sacred words<sup>14</sup>, they were also very much affected by the discourses of the elite clergy. Their literary formulations, whether scriptural or narrative, also responded to the newly formed consciousness about modernity in some way or the other. The adjustment of the *hamd* and *naat* sections—by including the names of the publisher and the patron, the sacred and mortal causes to write the book, the advertorial of other books in the beginning or at the end of the printed or published volume, and the disclaimers and claims made by the authors—functioned to place traditional texts written in the traditional language of *puthi* culture within a network that was responding to the forces of modernity and a consciousness of identity not fully addressable in the concept of *ummah*<sup>15</sup>. We will see that while the texts tried to differentiate between other forms of Islam and a sectarian form of religious-sociality, played out in the form of religious duties, these duties in turn, consolidated a community in terms of their

---

<sup>13</sup> This generation of traditional clergy, as I have already discussed in the previous chapters, was now endowed with proper religious education and scriptural instructions, in *madrassas* in Bengal or in North India as an effect of reformist institutions. They were, in turn, instrumental in imparting scriptural knowledge to the masses by establishing their own *madrassas* or acting as the mediator between the vernacular masses and Perso-Arabic scriptures. They translated and transcreated not only traditional scriptures, but also narratives, which, with their characters from the sacred family of the Prophet, were still valued as having a scriptural status.

<sup>14</sup> To be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>15</sup> The impossibility of the dichotomy between the traditional and the modern with respect to traditional Karbala texts has been problematized and discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

broader religious difference from the Hindus<sup>16</sup>. It will be explained in greater detail in this chapter how this *ummah* was no longer configured in the same way in which it had been in the medieval period. *Ummah* had been used as a loose marker of identification without much separatist value in the medieval texts, other than to establish or distinguish the name of a community and its ideals. *Ummah* became a little more structured with the introduction and inclusion of religious instructions, and exegeses. The sectarian identity created as an outcome of the reform movements gradually led to a stronger community identity. The slow emergence of the *Hanafis* as the most overpowering, majoritarian religious-social sect, resulted in the gradual identification of the community with *Hanafī* ideals that became, in overt and subtle ways<sup>17</sup>, a defining factor in the discursive formation of the *jatiya*. For this reason, along with Muhammad Shahidullah and Nazrul Islam, who have been chosen by Neilesh Bose as creative-intellectual icons, it is very important that we take into consideration other networks as well. We should take into consideration how Keramat Ali's illustrious disciples, *Sufi pir* Abu Bakr of the Furfura Sharif, and Munshi Meherullah of Jessore, contributed to the making of the community as much as individuals, as they did as part of bigger collectives. Organizations connected to them, like the *Sufi darga* at Furfura, *Hanafī madrasas*, *anjumans*, as well as the activities undertaken for the reformulation of scriptural texts—by the *Sudhakar* group for Abu Bakr, and by *anjuman Dharmottejika* for Munshi Meherullah—gave rise to various interpretations and configurations of religion, history and the construction of a language relating to identity formation and the formation of the *jatiya*. In the duality of individuals and collectives as two forms of the public, we would see many intellectuals raising issues related to modernity and religion. Bangla as the valid language of expression and scriptural knowledge was one of them.

---

<sup>16</sup> The imperative that one should pray the *juma* namaz, not only marked the reclamation of *juma* by the *Hanafī* community against the *Faraizis*, but it also marked the historical dynamics of consolidation of the Muslim society in its difference from the Hindu ritualistic patterns.

<sup>17</sup> Ideals could be preached and propagandized by the *Hanafī* platforms with the blessings of Pir Abu Bakr against the *Mohammadis* or ideals could be inherent as the religious truth in the discursive formations.

Spatial location, and the anxiety which it gave rise to, was an integral part in the construction of a Bengali Muslim identity, explicated in racial, linguistic and generic terms. The sense of the collective—an imagined community—articulated in the language of religious destination and sectarian conflict, responded to the calls of political mobilization and identity formation in the later period. Primarily, the sense of identity was multifarious, fraught with the various inclinations of groups (whether urban or rural, elite/*ashraf* or peasant/*atraf*, for or against performing the *juma namaz*, *mazhabi Hanafi* or *la-mazhabi Muhammadi*<sup>18</sup>) without any possibility of deciding what was to be the definitive Muslim identity. Concerns about and articulations of the ideal form of Islam in the reformist zeal were transformed because of the impact of transnational events happening as a part of a bigger and broader Islamic experience. While there was a growing concern about the immediate economic and political marginality of the community in relation to the Hindus, who had become a viable subject of the empire, the community was becoming more and more conscious and susceptible to pan-Islamic events like the Hejaz Railways<sup>19</sup> and the Russo-Turkish war (1888–1889). The growing concern over *hajj* and for donations—made for the construction of the Hejaz Railways to Egypt from the Indian Muslims—posed a strategic problem to the British. The increasing connectivity with Egypt, which had been a British territory so far, specifically presented a premonition of the growth of Ottoman political power over Egypt, and in general, pointed to a climatic intensification of pan-Islamism over the *hajj* route to Jeddah-Mecca-Medina. This dramatic rise of the spiritual commitment to the Islamic caliph was expressed emotionally in the support for Turkey in the Russo-Turkish war

---

<sup>18</sup> As discussed in the earlier chapters.

<sup>19</sup> The Hejaz railways, as an enterprise, was considered to be constructed by the Muslims for sustaining an essentially Muslim religious spiritual network, namely, for the *hajj* to Mecca and Medina. A pan-islamic fervour was integrally associated to the modernization of the pilgrimage route and modes of doing *hajj*. Jacob M. Landau, *The Hejaz Railways and the Muslim Pilgrimage: A Case of Ottoman Political Propaganda*, introduction (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1971).

The Hedjaz Railway and the Ottoman Empire were integral to each other by providing the spiritual identification for Muslims worldwide with the caliphate. *The Hedjaz Railway and the Ottoman Empire: Modernity, Industrialization and Ottoman Decline*, Murat Ozyuksel (I. B. Tauris, London/New York, 2014), pp. 69–96.

of 1888–89. When we talk about regional location, the proposed division of Bengal by Lord Curzon presented another opportunity to the Muslims of Bengal towards attaining social and economic upgradation with a simultaneous consolidation of the imagined community.

From the 1920s onwards, these claims of identity would be more prone to political mobilization and motivation and take a more unified shape, expressed in the formulation of a *jatiya*, and in the conceptualization of *jatiya itihas* (history), *jatiya bhab* (attribute) and *jatiya bishoy* (theme) to formulate a literary corpus. This chapter talks about the multiple discursive processes through which the polemic of the Bengali Muslim identity was produced—as Bengali, and also as Muslim in attribute. This search, quest, or journey for a community identity, as this chapter will try to see and show, cannot be understood through a singular notion of the *jatiya*/national, rather a polyvalent *jatiya* would emerge to make ‘communal’ an inadequate category to qualify and mark this search for an identity. It will be my attempt to show in this chapter and the next, that this quest for a separate identity, while remaining religiously informed, cannot be adequately understood in terms of either nation or religion alone. The search remained a dynamic process with the polyvalent possibilities of *jatiya* as the signifier of this journey, making the understanding of Islam and Muslim social identities only explicable within the broader framework of a regional, national and trans-national pan-Islamic fervour.

It has already been discussed that print had hardly managed to become the homogenizing force in the manner promised by Benedict Anderson; rather, print created various aspirations in different groups towards forming a sense of the community. It has also been discussed how, between diverse and opposite aspirations, there were moments of contact and negotiation, overt or tangential. Muslim identity was redefined as a political category in the 1920s as a result of the population census, which gave rise to a new



consciousness about administrative and constitutional reform <sup>20</sup>. New representative systems in the government offices point to a new alertness towards a “bureaucratically fixed frame for Muslim community definition”<sup>21</sup>, which was completely different from the polemical nature of the public debate regarding identity and community. While this fluid polemic around Muslim identity was still prevalent during the 1920s, we would also see the simultaneous hardening of Muslim identity-in-difference as Rafiuddin Ahmad has argued (though he stops at the year 1905). Perhaps, the debates between the sects-within would continue vigorously to organise and rearrange the Muslim community, as a whole, in structural terms. It can be noticed that through periodicals, cheap prints and the activities of *anjumans*, both *Ahl-e-Hadis* and *Hanafi* leaders continued to debate about the ideal form of Islam with much vigour, as late as the 1930s, by which time the Muslim intelligentsia had had ample exposure to the processes and contours of political formation of their identity, and was engaged with new literary/cultural formations and formulations.

My proposition is that, a study of the intellectual-creative exercises of the Muslim middle class concentrated in Calcutta or Dhaka of the time might not be fully adequate for understanding the nuanced multivalent polemic that the Muslim public produced around the questions of identity formation. This chapter will be discussing overlaps, crisscrossings, antagonisms and coalitions between urban and rural organizations, elite and popular efforts, and the different effects of print, between sects, between socio-cultural and religious inclinations, between the universal value of Islam and the regional specificity of the Muslim communities, which actually produced the notion of *jatiya* for the community. If I may reiterate what I have already hinted at, the elite intelligentsia and the popular might both demand a different sort of definition in this discussion.

---

<sup>20</sup> The Montague-Chelmsford Reform Act of 1918 that finally took the form of the Government of India Act, 1919, had a deep impact on the politicization of community identity and the solidification of religious boundaries.

<sup>21</sup> David Gilmartin, “Partition, Pakistan and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol 57, no. 4 (Nov 1998): p. 1097.

As Rafiuddin Ahmad explains in detail, the late nineteenth century was not only a time for attempts to reform Islam, but also for the production of larger political goals towards attaining Muslim solidarity by envisaging “the unity of all Muslim and their separation from all others, particularly the Hindus”<sup>22</sup>. The pan-Islamic movement initiated by Jamaluddin Afghani (1838–97) provided a common ground for a sense of solidarity beyond the confinements of spatial location in a trans-national fervour. Pan-Islamism induced a ground for cooperation between the traditional clergy and the later-day reformists in terms of Islamic solidarity, irrespective of their major dogmatic differences. This zeal of the traditionalist clergy and the reformers in proliferating knowledge about Islam and the duties of a Muslim created a new system of patronage where individual prosperous men, generally feudal proprietors, from different corners of rural Bengal and *mufassil* towns began to provide funds for the production of new knowledge about Islam. This entry of the rural gentry into the publishing industry might be interpreted as a new kind of class interest, which might have helped these new patrons to attain economic and emotional agency in a new system. Together, the patron and the new age publisher built a mesh encompassing the urban and the rural domains, contributing greatly to the formation of a sense of solidarity among the Muslim masses.

The culture of travelling itinerant reformist Islamization<sup>23</sup> in the later period, was supplemented by religious associations and *anjumans* pointing out the need for socio-moral upliftment of the community. This shaped the forms taken by the Muslim public and inculcated the need for political mobilization of the community. These organizations had a regular flow of members, associates and contributors, from newly found *madrasas*—in Dhaka, Calcutta, Chittagong and other *mufassil* towns—which produced a generation with proper knowledge of scriptures who, again, in their turn

---

<sup>22</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmad, *ibid.* p. 83.

<sup>23</sup> I have deliberately used the term Islamization for reformist movements following Rafiuddin Ahmad, who analyses in detail, the intensity and quality of the activities of Islamic reformists and preachers in rural Bengal which started in the mid nineteenth century.

joined these organizations<sup>24</sup>, opened *madrasas*, and made arrangements for students' hostels. If we need to understand the processes of political mobilization of the common Muslims spread over the rural areas and *mufassils* of Bengal, we need to engage with the dynamics of these associations, *anjumans* and the special attributes of their members, who were different from the previous generations of traditionalist clergy.

I have already discussed, following the work of Rafiuddin Ahmad and Sufia M. Uddin, how the basic schism between the urban *ashraf* and the rural *atraf* created a drift in the notion of the community in the flow of its development. But negotiations, overlaps and mutual exchanges also followed in the later period with the increasing reception of Urdu books (scriptures and narratives) through the translations done by the new religious intelligentsia, who were multilingual, as also by the new traditional clergy who continued to refer to the Urdu sources to create their own corpus of texts. Here, I want to humbly argue that “a historical framework that foregrounds Islam and Muslim social identities inside the construction of modern Bengali regional history”<sup>25</sup> compounded with a linear understanding of this ‘regional’ might fall short if we are to understand the complex webs encompassing the regional, national and pan-Islamic forces acting on the regional communities, and also the entanglement between the universal values and regional varieties of Islam.

Similarly, the *jatiya* can only be discerned in the paradoxical language of alliance and adversity with respect to the British colonial power. This ambivalence of, disavowal of, and dependence on the colonial power was fraught with the Bengal Muslim's unique position as a colonial subject vis-à-vis the Hindus, with whom the Muslim communities had an ambivalent relationship as well.

---

<sup>24</sup> If we go through reports on the activities of the *mufassil anjumans*, what would strike us most is their tremendous effort to establish *madrasas* to inculcate a basic learning of Islam among the students. Grants were released by local patrons, demands for inspectors and teachers were constantly being made through the periodicals showing a general concern for making communities in the *mufassil* and the rural areas acquire Islamic knowledge as the base of the community.

<sup>25</sup> Neilesh Bose, abstract for PhD Dissertation.

In the beginning, the Urdu speaking elite sought alliance with the colonial power by distancing themselves from the rural reformist zeal in order to keep their social rights and access under the empire unaffected. This positioning and demands made by the elite to the colonial power were so over-determined with the exclusive language of class, that hardly any imagined community can be discerned in the practices inspired by these truncated dreams of the elite. In a period when the *Faraizi* movement was more developed, and the *Tariqah-e-Muhammadiyah* movement had diversified in different forms, negotiations between the colonial power and reformist platforms started taking place, along with more enthusiastic dialogues between the urban elite and rural reformers, as also between these reformers and the traditional clergy. Later on, both the traditionally inclined clergy and the newly formed religious intelligentsia addressed the question of community identity, now facilitated by the easy access to Islamic knowledge available in local languages, and promoted an understanding of an ideal life, both conceptually and functionally, as a means for the social betterment of the community. When there were massive efforts to translate Persian-Urdu texts into Bangla, authors simultaneously created a Muslim social-in-difference by producing texts dealing with social duties.

#### 4.1.1 Association and *Anjuman*: Arriving at the Moment of *Jatiya*

‘সে দিন ফিরিয়া পুনঃ আসিবে কি আর?’  
 যেদিন ইসলাম ছিল বরণ্য সবার,  
 সে দিন ফিরিয়া কি গো আসিবে কি আর?

লক্ষ লক্ষ বীর দক্ষ ইল্লাম রক্ষণে,  
 অরপিত হর্ষে শির ভীম রণাঙ্গনে  
 বাড়ী ঘর ছাড়ি কত শত জন আর  
 দূর দেশে গিয়া ধর্ম করিত প্রচার  
 সে দিন ফিরিয়া কি গো আসিবে কি আর?

যেদিন মোক্লেম ছিল সবার প্রধান  
 যেদিন মোক্লেম গৃহে ছিল ধন মান; -  
 ইল্লাম-মহিমা গীত হ’ত আনিবার,

সে দিন ফিরিয়া কি গো আসিবে কি আর?

ইসলাম-চিত্র ও সমাজ চিত্র

মৌলভী শেখ আবদুল জব্বার সম্পাদিত

[Will the glorious days return, when Islam was revered by everyone, will they, O will they return? Millions of soldiers, with shining prowess, fought in the battlefield to protect Islam, Leaving their homes they travelled to distant lands and preached true religion. Will they, O will they return? Muslims were supreme then. Prosperous were they, were honoured. Everybody sang in praise of Islam, Will they, O will they return?]

*Islam Chitra O Samaj Chitra*, Sheikh Abdul Jabbar.

The lament over the lost glory of Islam culminated in an interpretation of the present time as an absence of *jatiya jibon* (national life) in the lives of the Muslims of Bengal, a *jatiya jibon*, which was thought to have been already achieved by the Muslims in Punjab and UP. What was more important in this anthology, *Islam Chitra O Samaj Chitra*, was the simultaneous claims it posited over the splendours, chiefly architectural, which the Muslim rulers in medieval India had so triumphantly created, along with the supremacy attained in abstract universal knowledge systems like jurisprudence, art, chemistry, philosophy, science, mathematics, history, geography, astronomy, visual arts, sculpture, metallurgy, medicine, scripture, and politics. The subsequent fall from grace, in the universal quality of Islam and located achievement in India, was thought of as being caused by the mindless imitation of things *bijatiya*. While the *bijatiya* was being marked and defined as being the essence of the British and Hindu *jatiya*, the Muslim *jatiya* was to be configured by the Muslim community as a counter-narrative to *bijatiya*, by reaffirming the universal truths of Islam and Muslim identity—as spatially located.

With these endeavours, and with the rise of a generation of clergy with an exposure to Perso-Arabic scriptures and discursive material in Bangla, and also with the emergent Bengal Muslim literati, the curves and contours of a Bengali Muslim identity was being formed through literature, scripture, journals and periodicals. While the first wave of *anjumans* and organizations in rural Bengal was based on the reformist ideals, urban associations like the Central National Muhammadan Association (CNMA), established by Syed Ameer Ali in 1887, claimed strictly to be a political

body subservient to the British government<sup>26</sup>. Under the umbrella of the CNMA, the English-educated Urdu speaking literati and government professionals were joined by the land-holding classes, without engaging themselves with the common vernacular Muslim population of Bengal as a whole. They focused on the socio-moral upgradation of the Muslim community as an initiative which was exclusively determined by their class position. CNMA, as the most important political pressure group, strived for British protection against the power of the Hindu community in the political-economic and social spheres. This pro-British sentiment was not in keeping with other formulations of the community in the wake of pan-Islamism in the late nineteenth century and the *khilafat* movement in the early twentieth. We would be amazed to see how several factions of the community, i.e. the Muslim public, would be dissenting and conforming to the British in their formulations of the community guided by a desire for the socio-moral development of the community. Political organizations like the CNMA, and the new education system reliant on scriptures—including the *Deoband* as well as the *Ahl e-Sunnat madrasas*—influenced the way in which the newly educated generation from the rural populations of Bengal was now able to think as a religious and also as a political community.

This public developed various aspirations and understandings of the community, which included ideas about the moral and economic improvement of the community. What the literary discursive effort of this public in the vernacular offered, for creating moral-ethical prescriptions for the new community, ranged from the reformulated descriptions of the character of the Prophet (as the template for ideal behaviour for a Muslim) to tracts on codes of conduct, journals reporting on *bahas* (sectarian religious arguments) and *waz mehfiles* (individual preaching sessions), to debates over language and belongingness, genre and history. All these efforts were fraught with the realisation of and desire to resolve the dichotomy between origin and location.

---

<sup>26</sup> National Muhammedan Association became Central National Muhammadan Association in 1883 and maintained its political character. Rafiuddin Ahmad, 1981, p. 163.

P. K. Datta claims in his book that the multiplicity of possibilities of the notion of a collective Muslim identity became unilinear, and was articulated in its difference with the Hindu identity from the 1920s onwards<sup>27</sup>. While P. K. Datta does not go beyond the 1920s, Muhammad Shah on the other hand, divides the evolution of the Bengali Muslim community into three phases where he, too, looks into the beginning of the solidification of the Bengali Muslim community in its unified difference with the Hindus<sup>28</sup>. Joya Chatterjee describes how the Bengali Hindu *bhadralok* community felt threatened in a Muslim-majority province and eventually demanded the partition of Bengal as a part of the partition of India<sup>29</sup>. Sana Aiyar explicates the different ways in which we could understand location-regionality and connection/disconnection with the Hindus<sup>30</sup>. Aiyar talks about provincial politics emerging in Bengal as a challenge to the centrality of national-level political parties. She tries to map Fazlul Huq's unique position between the secular and religious binary in contemporary politics, which appealed to both religious sentiments and regional belongingness. Aiyar describes how Huq reconciled the two identities of religion and region within the same political paradigm and in so doing, foreshadowed the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971.

But the claims of historians like Mohammad Shah, who says "if the Muslims as a community did not feel separate from the Hindus, India would not have been divided on the basis of the two-nation theory, or at least Bengal and Punjab would have remained undivided"<sup>31</sup>, seem inadequate for understanding other social, political and economic factors that led to the Partition<sup>32</sup>. This standpoint of Mohammad Shah calls for a

---

<sup>27</sup> P. K. Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal ideology in Early Twentieth-century Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> Muhammad Shah, 'Political Evolution of the Muslims of Bengal under the British Administration', *Quarterly Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, vol 48, no. 1 (Jan–March 2000): 9–28.

<sup>29</sup> Joya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* (Cambridge University Press, 1994)

<sup>30</sup> Sana Aiyar, 'Fazlul Huq, Region and Religion in Bengal': The Forgotten Alternative of 1940–43, *Modern South Asian Studies*, Vol 42, No, 6 (November 2008)

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Zahir Abbas, *Construction of Bengali Muslim Identity in Colonial Bengal, c 1870–1920*, M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010.

monologic Muslim communal solidarity as the cause behind Partition even at a time when solidarity was not that unilinearly defined. Zahir Abbas talks about the various discourses on the formation of Bengali Muslim identity in colonial Bengal until the 1920s before it started to get politicized. The other standpoint has been provided by Sana Aiyar, of looking at Bengali Muslim identity in terms of culture, religion and region to interpret political changes until the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. The ‘third alternative’ as proposed by Aiyar invokes another essential motivating factor, which was the role of region/Bengaliness of the Muslims in defining the dynamics behind the Bangladesh Liberation War<sup>33</sup>. In both the cases, in the mode of rejection as also in that of belonging, Bengaliness appears to have been unquestionable and monolithic<sup>34</sup>. We will keep in mind in this chapter, that the notion of otherness and difference as two modes of identity was not only imagined and placed along communal lines, but was aroused as a result of the dialogic exchange with the colonial administrative and Orientalist discourses, and with an already established Hindu nationalism. In the processes of this response and reaction, reception and rejection, Muslim identity in Bengal, with its universal truth and regional specificity, emerged as a matter of debate and contestation.

The decennial census reports of 1872 and 1911, by producing enumerative knowledge about the community—like categories and identitarian boundaries—somehow influenced the way in which the Muslim community was thinking about itself in terms of identity. No matter how fluid the process of self-marking was, the census somehow induced a sense of

---

<sup>33</sup> Sana Aiyar, *ibid.* pp.1213–1249.

<sup>34</sup> I disagree with Zahir Abbas’s position that the realization of Bengaliness as the core of identity cannot be tracked since the 1940s as a condition for the creation of Bangladesh as an independent nation state. Rather, I find it conceptually intriguing when Aiyar looks into the presence of regional solidarity (language, history, literature, culture, etc.) and cross-communal alliances between the Hindu and Muslim intelligentsia and political figures. Aiyar is important as she never assumes any secular-religious binary and emphasizes that in these alliances and the sense of solidarity there was never any claim to being secular. Abbas, on the other hand, does not develop his understanding along this non-secular nature of region explored in Aiyar’s argument. What Abbas could have pointed out is that Aiyar’s is a partial interpretation of regionalism and Bengaliness because she focuses solely on the works of the intelligentsia, not including other layers of the contemporary Muslim articulations about identity, history and language. This is the thrust of this chapter.



identity<sup>35</sup>—numerical and quantifiable—through which a discourse and an emotion of difference (with the Hindus who were also being produced as a category through the same machinery) was beginning to be articulated by the Muslim community. Again, in this process, the oppositional energy between origin and location, and between Bengaliness and Islam was inaugurated through the technologies of census. This oppositional energy between being Bengali and being Muslim, and the desire to resolve it, marked the very dynamics of the Bengali Muslims’ identity, which needs to be unpacked. It was not as if the dissociation between origin and location, and between Bengaliness and Islam was felt for the first time because of the colonial intervention. Rather, even from the early modern period, the anxiety of the contemporary clergy regarding the vernacularization of scriptures and localization of the community-self had been clearly visible. At the beginning of each and every translation or transcreation from Persian originals, whether it was didactic or entertaining, the poet did not neglect to beg forgiveness for his sacrilegious act of transferring a sacred text into a profane language. Abdul Hakim categorically rebuked this tendency of the Islamic clergy for remaining alienated and withdrawn from the local linguistic-aesthetic systems<sup>36</sup>. But once the Qur’an and the Hadith literatures were beginning to be translated into Bangla, another ideological framework was to be produced vis-à-vis Bangla as one’s mother tongue. The question of whether Bangla was the mother tongue, or an other, was connected to the Bengali Muslim’s idea of the community and its problematic relationship with location. Khondakar Fazl e Rubee’s *The Origin of the Muhammadans of Bengal* (published in 1895), written as a counter-narrative to John Beverly’s 1972 census findings, which claimed that the large population of Muslims in Bengal was not due to the migration of Turks and Afghans from Central Asia; rather, it was the former local

---

<sup>35</sup> Bernard Cohn emphasizes that “the census was one of the situations in which Indians were confronted with the question of who they are and what their social and cultural systems were”, which implies that the census was not only an instrument of data collection, but an active process of creating an inviolable identity for the Indians. ‘The Census and Objectification in South Asia’, in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987.

<sup>36</sup> যে জন বঙ্গতে জন্মে হিংসে বঙ্গবাণী

সেসব কাহার জনম নির্ণয় না জানি। Abdul Hakim.

inhabitants who had converted to Islam and created this vast majority of Muslims in Bengal<sup>37</sup>. While members of the rural elite, like Rubees, were trying to relocate their origins with the help of such theories of immigration, the non-elite classes also showed elements of *ashrafization* in trying to rename themselves as Sheikhs or Pathans<sup>38</sup>. The common clergy, too, showed an impulse to *ashrafizing* the stratum of the community that could not, as such, claim an origin in Arab<sup>39</sup>. Several processes of *ashrafization* continued to gradually create crevices between the race that the Hindus identified with, and what the Muslims wanted to become. While the Hindus thought of their race/tribe as Bengali, the Muslim lower classes identified themselves as Sheikhs and Pathans<sup>40</sup>. Thus the *ashrafization* of the mind of the lower class Muslims presumed a foreignness of their origin, with the growing eliticism in the discourses produced by the middle-class Muslim literati in defining the Bengaliness of the Bengal Muslims. On the other hand, the Muslim literati and the new generation of clergy—who were trying to reconcile the incommensurability between an Arabic origin of Islam and the locatedness of the Muslims in Bengal, as Bengalis—in search of a ‘*jatiya*’—had to grapple with the Hindu nationalist forces that had been proactive in asserting Muslims as the outsider other<sup>41</sup>.

The dual effect of Islamic reform and census operations somehow made the rural Muslims aware of the ‘discrepancy’ between their Bengali

---

<sup>37</sup> *Report on the Census of Bengal*, 1972, p132, Richard Eaton, 1994, pp.124–125

<sup>38</sup> The colonial government, after at first turning down the request of the *Jolahas* of Eastern Bengal, a weaver class—who wanted to be recognized as Sheikhs and not by their functionary name—finally granted the *jolahas* the category of Sheikhs in the census. *Census of Bengal*, 1901, p. 442.

<sup>39</sup> Muhammad Abdur Rahim Ansari, *Mahajer O al-Ansari*, Shahjadpur, Pabna, 1928 (the author-publisher claimed that the farmers, artisans and traders were descendents of the Ansar class of Arabiya).

<sup>40</sup> With the creation of broader racial categorizations, the non-*ashraf* communities of Bengal started developing sectarian identities similar to the caste system of the Hindus, thus ending up producing the Sunnis as the majority and Shias as the minority. Richard Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, pp. 101–137.

<sup>41</sup> Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay’s ideation and fixation of the Muslims as the other of a Hindu *jatiya* produced a massive amount of antipathy and distress among the Muslim literati who, in an urge to reaffirm their claim as Bengalis, created many counter-narratives. This will be discussed in the next chapter while discussing *jatiya sahitya*.

names/surnames and their Muslim origins<sup>42</sup>. The simultaneous effects of Hindu nationalism, Islamic reform, Christian Missionary propaganda, and the census and various other administrative policies were instrumental in affecting the awareness of being Hindu and Muslim for the two communities, making the boundaries and distinctions sharper to some extent. Later on, it was not only the Bengali Muslim literati who attempted to claim Bengali language and culture, as part of an Islamic lineage; but the generation which had been trained in traditional knowledge also did not confine themselves to the isolation of an Arabo-Persian imagination, and the extra-territorial imagination of an originary land. Rather, the traditionally-educated multi-lingual generation produced an ambivalence of identity as being caught between their location and origin, creating multiple registers and aspirations for both Bengaliness and Muslimness. In this process we might want to look beyond the clergy-litterateur binary to locate many groups and categories overlapping these finite poles. A new interest towards *madrasa* education, and also towards colonial schooling, also led to the creation of a generation which was conversant with both a core scriptural knowledge and the new literary forms in Bangla, and with pan-Islamic expressions and the demands of a regional identity.

In this chapter, I will talk about the multiple registers articulated by individual persons (the clergy, the literati and the in-betweens), as also by the collectives of *anjumans*, journals and periodicals. I will talk about the layers and multiplicities of articulation that made it impossible to imagine any singular understanding of Bengaliness for the Muslim community of Bengal in the first few decades of the twentieth century.

#### **4.1.2 From Kalikata to Karatiya: The spread of Print**

Studies by Rafiuddin Ahmad and P. K. Datta prove that through the vernacular tracts in cheap print, the Muslim community in Bengal was

---

<sup>42</sup> Richard Eaton has shown how the idiom and vocabulary of common life and literature changed, being suddenly informed by the knowledge about origin and essences different from one's local neighbours. Eaton, 1994, pp. 268–272.

being reoriented in the language of scriptural ethics and social moralities. Within the domain of popular piety, these tracts prescribing *adaab* and *iman*, as also the ethics of hard work, the evils of smoking, money-lending or borrowing, were instrumental in connecting the ethical to the practical moral codes for the betterment of the community<sup>43</sup>. In these tracts, *nasihatnamas*, and other moral literatures, Hindu as the other was not properly defined as the other with-out, and was rather described “as a contaminating presence in the self”, realised and expressed in terms of their physical attributes and ritualistic extravagances, that is, through all kinds of un-Islamic inclinations. While in the last two chapters I have elaborated upon the processes of formulation of popular piety and a sense of the community—through the rejection of un-Islamic practices, and through the struggle over the ideal form of Islam among different Islamic groups—and hinted at negotiation and influence, in this chapter, I will be pointing out a stronger deliberation to formulate a sense of the community, which could see the Hindus as Islam’s other, while claiming/disclaiming Bengaliness as the primary axis of their identity. To do that, I will look at the formation of the *jatiya*, and the making of history as a genre in Muslim public culture, as reflected in and generated by the aspirations expressed in print and publication.

In the formation of a Muslim public via print and publication, the reception of regional literary and aesthetic traditions, the impact of North Indian literary and political articulations in Urdu, and a widespread pan-Islamic fervour became other important factors which would define its dynamics. While there was a strong anti-British, anti-feudal rebellious attitude in rural fundamentalist reform, the urban Urdu-speaking intelligentsia articulated their distance from the reformist movement, and expressed their affinity towards the British government in quite clear terms. Thus, the demands of the early elite associations were exclusive to their class, and did not engage in any way with the broader issues and concerns

---

<sup>43</sup> Names of different tracts relating to the development of the socio-moral status of the members of the community can be found from the 1920s onwards. *Mochhlem Samaj-Sangskar*, Ahmdullah, Chattagram, 1926, *Sud Nibarani Samiti (Samaj Tattwa)*, Muhammad Ansal Ali, 1926, Mymensingh,

of the Muslim community. The founders and members of all these associations primarily come from a high lineage, or had influential administrative connections. The oldest among these associations was the Mahomedan Literary Society (MLS) founded by Nawab Abdul Latif (1828–1893) in 1863, which, while demanding social and educational support from the colonial government, in actuality, made the urban-rural and *ashraf-atraf* disjunction more apparent<sup>44</sup>. Responding to the Indian National Congress's request for alliance, MLS reaffirmed its pro-British and non-political standing and remained 'more a show of *ashraf* splendour than anything useful to the community'<sup>45</sup>. Nawab Abdul Latif, in an attempt to affirm a connection between his own loyalty towards the British and his commitment to reformist Islam, made an alliance with the reformist platforms. This was an iconic moment which foreshadows the gradual diminishment of the anti-colonial sentiment among the reformist schools in the later period, when Maulana Keramat Ali Jaunpuri responded to the invitation of Nawab Abdul Latif and delivered a *fatwa* at a MLS lecture which affirmed British India as the country of Islam; not of the enemy<sup>46</sup>. His efforts at negotiation had a massive impact on the *ulema*-based high society, when the proceedings of the meeting—where Keramat Ali had presented his *fatwa* on 30 September 1870—were printed and 5,000 copies were distributed all over India. Maulana Keramat Ali, throughout the 50 years of his life in preaching, had had a major impact and influence over a newly awakened *Hanafi* community, whose position of negotiation vis-à-vis British governance, and connection with pan-Islamism and *khilafat*, was instrumental in carving out the shapes and patterns of the quest for the

---

<sup>44</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmad refers to several records, proceedings, and documents to validate the exclusive nature of demands made by the MLS, like *Muslim Documents* (1886), *Muslim Chronicle*, etc.

<sup>45</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmad, *ibid*, p. 163.

<sup>46</sup> As the founder of the *Tayyuni* sect, which was an offshoot of *Tariqah*, Keramat Ali preached relentlessly for over 50 years in the eastern districts of Bengal. He fought against the impact of the *Faraizi* leaders, like Haji Shariatullah and his son Dudu Mian, to reintroduce the *juma namaz*. When, as a *Hanafi* himself, he created the scope for dialogues between the *la-mazhabi* and the *mazhabi Hanafi* of rural Bengal, thus opening up possibilities for reformist *Hanafi* platforms, he also changed from his previous pre-British reformist stance to a stance of mutual support and negotiation.

meaning of a community identity for the Bengal Muslims<sup>47</sup>. While MLS had almost no effect on the non-elite majority of the Muslim society in Bengal as a whole, the British government took this association quite seriously, Nawab Abdul Latif became the most influential representative of the Muslim intelligentsia, and his suggestions and demands shaped the *madrasa* education system (no matter how class exclusive they remained)<sup>48</sup>. The apparent non-political stance of the MLS was not carried forward by another influential association, the National Muhammadan Association (known as the Central National Muhammadan Association from 1883), which emerged 15 years after the establishment of MLS in 1878. This association, led by Syed Ameer Ali, had more people from the tertiary sectors and was politically inclined from the beginning. This association also made connections and negotiations between a North-Indian Urdu speaking politics and an emerging consciousness related to politics, education and religion. We can see that this was a time when the urban elite-led associations were trying to expand and test their viability among the rural masses, while the Bangla speaking intelligentsia tried to engage with the urban associations in various capacities. In this new moment of negotiation and dialogue, it was really difficult to make any qualitative distinction between the religious and secular themes for the conceptualization of the solidarity of the community. Rather, a reformulation of religion and history of the community was the discursive target of the Urdu-speaking English-educated urban elite and the *madrasa*-educated Muslim intelligentsia. While the *madrasa*-educated generation with proper knowledge of Bangla—like the *Sudhakar* group—was translating Arabo-Persian-Urdu scriptural texts, and socio-historical

---

<sup>47</sup> On the questions of *dar-ul-Islam* and *jihad*, Maulana Keramat Ali declared jihad “an unlawful activity in British India”, such “rebellion is strictly forbidden by Mahomedan laws”. *Abstract Proceedings of Mahomedan Literary Society*, 1871, p. 6, Rafiuddin Ahmad, 1981, pp. 51–52.

<sup>48</sup> Sufia M. Uddin, *ibid*, pp. 7, 9–10. He became an icon of his times for the Urdu-speaking English-educated section of the urban Muslim society. Sufia M. Uddin quotes from an article by M. A. Hossain, published in *The Tribune* where the author says, “The Nawab Bahadur, if I am not wrong to say, is the reformer of the Mohamedans of India, especially of Bengal under the benign British Government.” She also quotes from *The Times*, “The British government gave him what it had to give to shape titles and honours but it is as a Muhammadan who led forth his countrymen into new fields of achievement and the new realms of knowledge, without losing his own orthodoxy, that Abdul Latif has won his place in Indian history.” Sufia M. Uddin, p. 89.

treatises, Syed Ameer Ali was re-writing the life of the Prophet, or the history of the Muslim community, against the pejorative manner in which they had been narrativized by the colonial historians and litterateurs. Syed Ameer Ali's task was an epic one, as he was the first among the intelligentsia to respond to and comment on Sir William Muir's *The Life of Mahomet* (1861), which had put the Muslim community in utter disgrace by describing the Prophet as "prey to sexual passion, a preacher of a religion of the sword". Muir devastated the community by saying, "[t]he sword of Muhammad and the Quran are the most stubborn enemies of Civilization, Liberty and Truth which the world has yet known"<sup>49</sup>. What Syed Ameer Ali was formulating as a counter narrative, by writing the biography of the Prophet, was similar to the work being done by the *madrassa* educated intelligentsia in Bangla, who attempted to posit the essence, or *jatiya bhab*, of Islam as an identity-in-defence, as well. It was not, we must say, a simple journey in the form of piety, from a that-worldly to a this-worldly Islam; rather, the journey was fraught with other complications relating to aspirations, negations and identity formation. The recasting of the figure of the Prophet, as a rational and ideal figure, as attempted by the Urdu-speaking English educated urban intelligentsia, was well-received by the new vernacular intelligentsia, who did not fail to include Syed Ameer Ali as another authentic source for understanding the life of the Prophet and the history of Islam, alongside other Persian and English sources<sup>50</sup>. This was a curious phase, to understand it, we must also understand the impact of the reception of Persian original scriptural texts and Orientalist English texts, as also the reception of the Urdu literature originating from UP, which came to different distributors located in the corners of Calcutta, and were instrumental in creating the dynamics and layers of the quest for identity of the Bengal Muslims<sup>51</sup>.

---

<sup>49</sup> In Tarif Khalidi, *Images of the Prophet: Narratives of the Prophet of Islam across Centuries*, New York: Doubleday, 2009, p. 250.

<sup>50</sup> The *Hadis* repertoire, *tarikhi* literature and the *sirat* would be the dominant genres to be reworked by the Urdu elite and the vernacular Muslim intelligentsia to formulate new genres of biography and history, and utilized in order to posit a Bengali Muslim modernity.

<sup>51</sup> If we look at the distribution patterns of Urdu books from different parts of North India to Calcutta, and if we also follow the source texts that the authors referred to in the beginning of their Bangla translations/transcreations, we will be able to understand the connection between Urdu and its reception in Bengal as a part of defining the *jatiya*.

While urban institutions like the CNMA did not confine itself to the question of education for the urban elite class, and was becoming politically influential in presenting its claims to the colonial government, the Bengali intelligentsia was also becoming politically aware, consenting to, and debating with, the urban sector as political mobilization and political benefits were fast becoming a priority for the new age Muslim leaders. But what I intend to say here is that, it was out of the mutual negotiations and conflicts between heterogeneously inclined groups, that the nature of a Muslim public was produced, which sought a Muslim *jatiya* and modernity for the Muslims of Bengal. Here, though Ameer Ali's correspondences and writings were basically in English, his association, as being politically motivated, and believing in creating safeguards for the community, unlike the MLS, managed to spread to the rural districts of Bengal. Rafiuddin Ahmad has noted that it was a time for the proliferation of organizations, and the CNMA was highly influenced by the quick spread of vernacular socio-religious organizations, or *anjumans*, present all over Bengal in this period, which were instrumental in inducing both political activism and religious consciousness.

The discrepancy in the ratio of representation between the Hindu and Muslim communities in local and national socio-political boards and councils was first articulated by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan in 1883. It was a demand for a separate electorate on a communal basis that was imagined to resolve this problem, with *The Muslim Chronicle* and *Mihir O Sudhakar* constantly voicing their discontent about the unjustness of the lack of representation of their interests against that of the Hindus, despite the high ratio of Muslims in terms of the actual population.

Though the Muslim population of Bengal is not less numerous than the Hindu, the privilege of local self government and of electing members for the Bengal Council is enjoyed solely by the Hindus ... the power of the Hindus



has been pressing so heavily upon the Musalmans that it will not be long before the latter to throw of the yoke<sup>52</sup>.

This was a time when the need for the spread of the ideals of Islam and the need for the social upliftment of the Muslims were equally felt; the rural *ashraf* felt a new connection to the masses and helped publish scriptures in Bangla, organized *anjumans* to spread the message of Islam, and created support systems for the social well-being of the community as well. This was a time for curious connections—between the urban religious elite and the rural semi-literate, the rural *ashraf* and the educated clergy of the *mufassils*—in a network of print, publication and a proliferation of exchanges encompassing the urban centres, *mufassil* towns and villages alike.

We should not neglect to make note here of the different aspirations working at the level of the choice of language, the declarations about social status, and the creation of an implied readership for scriptural knowledge, or the activities undertaken specifically to prepare the masses for the reception of religious knowledge. As Richard Eaton has already shown, as an effect of the reformist movement, a zeal for *ashrafization* was felt by the common masses<sup>53</sup> and there was a slow solidification of the practice of *namaz* and other routinized obligatory principles among the rural masses<sup>54</sup>. The landowners, who were now more informed and aware, also felt the zeal to be a part of the contemporary socio-religious activities, which for them, included patronization of *anjumans* and publication of scriptural books translated from the Perso-Arabic original into Bangla, or the commission of more contemporary literary materials<sup>55</sup>.

---

<sup>52</sup> The *Mihir*, 25 May 1895, BNNR 1895, p. 435 and also *Sudhakar*, 2 May 1890, p. 449 as quoted in Rafiuddin Ahmad, p. 161.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Eaton, from the Census Report.

<sup>54</sup> Rafiuddin Ahmad, 1981.

<sup>55</sup> Abdul Jabbar of the *Sudhakar* group dedicated his edited book *Islam-Chitra O Samaj-Chitra* to the *zaminder* of Dinajpur, Moulavi Mohammad Mehrara Ali Chowdhury, and sang the praise of his sympathetic giving heart, thus affirming Chowdhury as the patron of Abdul Jabbar's literary activities.

It was, on the one hand, *ashrafization* and on the other, the elimination of medieval and early-modern Sanskritic titles by the traditionalist and rigid *ulama*—like Munshi Samiruddin, Male Muhammad, and Mohammad Tahir—who continued to keep a large number of Arabic and Persian words in their Bangla religious tracts, and preserved the syntax of *Musalmani-Bangla*. Simultaneously, the new age clergy like Munshi Naimuddin (1832–1907) were writing another kind of *nasihatnamas*, or religious tracts, moving towards a chaste standardized Bangla. This hints at the presence of different layers of consumption and production in print culture, subject to the use of different kinds of Bangla, but sharing the same objective of imparting religious knowledge to the reading public. Naimuddin was writing in Bangla prose, making a rupture in the Battala cheap-print culture, while retaining the original Arabic titles. Naimuddin was patronized by the *zaminder* of Karatiya, Hafez Mahmud Ali Khan Panni<sup>56</sup>, and began publishing religious tracts and a monthly paper, called *Akhbare Islamia*, from the press Mahmudia Jatra. Munshi Naimuddin wrote and published from Karatiya, Mymensingh, Tangail and Calcutta and his voluminous work had a significant role in defining the contours of the Muslim community as a reading public in Bangla.

Naimuddin’s translation of the *Qur’an Sharif*, the *Hadis*, as also of *Hanafi* religious instruction manuals<sup>57</sup>, and original tracts and treatises against the local *Muhammadis*<sup>58</sup>, created a literary network connecting various centres, where literary communities were thriving with different goals and aspirations, with various kinds of engagements with religion and varying

---

<sup>56</sup> This was the beginning of the phenomenon of local feudal patronization, like that of Hafez Mahmud Ali Khan of Atiya, Mymensingh, who commissioned the writing/translating of supplementary scriptural texts into Bangla to minimize the gap between the scriptural sources and the local vernacular masses.

<sup>57</sup> He translated 10 sections of the *Qur’an*, *Sahih Hadis*, *Bukhari Sharif* and *fiqh-like Fatwa-i-Alamgiri*, *Jobdat al-Masayel*.

<sup>58</sup> Munshi Naimuddin wrote *nasihatnama* in Bangla entitled *Kalimatul Kufr*, 1890, Karatiya, *Akher Johar*, Karatiya, 1890, *Beter*, Karatiya, 1894. Against the *Muhammadis* Naimuddin wrote *Insaf*, Karatiya, 1886, *Dhoka Bhanjan*, Karatiya, 1889, *Adellaye Hanifa radde-la Mazhabiya*, Karatiya, 1894.

interpretations of identity<sup>59</sup>. This age witnessed the production of a vast number of *nasihatnamas*<sup>60</sup>, with numerous editions pervading the cheap print market, which were written in a traditional format, using a Bangla thick with Arabic-Persian words and their derivatives, to create a more structured and scripturally well-referenced religious knowledge in Bengal. With this, we can demarcate at least two (if not more) attempts of the time by the *alem* community, which reveal the variedness of the Muslim public—the first of which was more traditional *ulema*-centric, as it were, using the more Arabo-Persian saturated register of Bangla (*Musalmani-Bangla*) of the cheap print culture; and the other was inclined to a chaste Bangla—forming two distinct parameters for religious knowledge. One was more traditionally derived and orthodox in terms of format, in the way it intended to condition and influence its readers, and in its linguistic choices; and the other was very much embedded in a traditional scriptural base, while it rendered religion into a contemporary device for the identification and interpretation of the community. A widely varied public can also be discerned from the fact that, the reaffirmation of a Perso-Arabic register (clearly evident from the titles of the books and also from the Bangla that the clergy used) was happening simultaneously with the proliferation of chaste Bangla, which was being used even by the new generation of reformist platforms, in a project in which chaste Bangla was being proposed as the ideal medium for the dissemination of religious knowledge for the Bengal Muslims. This fluid oscillation between a standardized language and the more Battala-centred register of *Musalmani-Bangla* points to many kinds of target readers, and also to the many purposes of writing, different from each other. If the translation of *Fatwai Alamgiri*<sup>61</sup>, which the *Hanafi ulama* chose to adopt as one of the basic scriptures in the late nineteenth century, was carried out in a more standardized form of Bangla, and religious tracts like *Insaf* (Justice) and *La-mazhabiganer Dhoka Bhanjan* (On dismantling the illusions of those who have strayed from the *mazhab*)

---

<sup>59</sup> After being trained in the traditional Islamic knowledge system in a *madrassa* and also independently from the *ulama*, Naimuddin wrote behavioural manuals, translated the Qur'an and the Hadis and also many scriptural books from Arabic into Bangla.

<sup>60</sup> *Zobdataul Masayel*, Munshi Naimuddin, *BedaralGafilin*, Munshi Samiruddin.

<sup>61</sup> *Fatwa-i-Alamgiri*, Vol. 2, Mahmudia Jantra, Karatiya, 1894.

were written in a mixed register for a different readership, it only goes to show that their author, Munshi Naimuddin, was catering to, and creating possibilities for, many different sections within the Muslim community such that they could belong to and partake of a sense of the collective<sup>62</sup>. It is also from his discursive oeuvre, that a strong *Hanafi* identification within the Muslim community could be discerned, at a time of modernization and identification with the *jatiya*. While the debates between the *Hanafi* and the *Ahl-e-Hadis* continued, *Hanafi* religiosity was taking centre-stage in Islam, and literary and discursive practices and new religious institutions were being both subtly and heavily informed by the *Hanafi* interpretation of Islam. From the sectarian reformist understandings of Islam, we could now observe the gradual emergence of a community with stable *mazhabi* ideals. Periodicals and journals, books and treatises, which together held the discursive imagination, formulations and interpretations of an ideal Islam, its sociality, history and ideals, also carried in them the implicit search for a community identity in spatial and temporal terms.

What began in the hands of Munshi Naimuddin, who was more traditionalist in terms his engagement with religion, was followed by a generation of new clergy, who would be using modern Bangla prose to write their religious and didactic treatises. Modern Bangla was not only favoured by the prominent intelligentsia, like the *Sudhakar* group, who were well versed in contemporary social debates within and outside Islam, but Babur Ali of the *Ahl e-Hadis* sect and Ruhul Amin of the *Hanafi*, who were both more traditional in their outlook and engagement, emerged in the later period as two very influential and antagonistic personalities inclined towards chaste Bangla. If we want to make a categorization within the Muslim community based on their use of chaste or Arabo-Persian-Urdu

---

<sup>62</sup> If we compare the prices of the books by Naimuddin, we will see that they ranged from 1 paisa to 2.5 rupees, demarcating different socio-economic groups as their consumers. It will not be an over-reading if we understand that the price of a volume was determined by its theme and language. We will see that tracts written on behavioural codes and also on the division between the *Hanafi* and the *Mohammadis*, and tracts refuting the *Mohammadis* written in a mixed language register were priced lower, whereas translations of the *Qur'an* and hard core scriptural treatises written in chaste Bangla were priced between 1.5 rupees to 2.5 rupees during 1891–1892, *Bangla Muslim Granthapanji*, Ali Ahmad, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1985.

mixed Bangla, it might neither hint at the demarcation between the traditionalists and the modernists among the clergy, nor between the religious intelligentsia and the litterateurs, nor between the secular and the religious. Rather, the variedness in the ways in which each of them validated the use of Bangla, produced various meanings and imaginations of Bengaliness for the Muslims, as well as an essence, or *jatiya*, that they conceived and intended to achieve.

From the contestations on paper (periodicals and treatises) between Babur Ali of Baruipur, 24 Parganas, an eminent leader of *Ahl-e-Hadis*, and Ruhul Amin, of Basirhat, 24 Parganas, who led the *Hanafi* sect in lower Bengal, we can rewrite the socio-political-religious dialogue that took place within the Muslim community in the 1920s and 30s. They used Arabic titles (sometimes with Bangla subtitles) for the discursive treatises they wrote against each other, while at the same time reaffirming multiple meanings of being a Muslim in Bengal. It was not so much that they were configuring a Bengaliness for the Muslim community of Bengal in their own distinct religious ways, but through their arguments and counter-arguments, the community of Muslims was repeatedly being invoked as being specifically located in Bengal.

A *Hanafi* named Maulavi Ruhul Amin of Taki, Narayanpur (24 Parganas) has written a book named *Firqatonnajin or The Selection of the True Firqa*. His hatred towards the *Mohammadis* and poisonous attack on them is not unknown to the *Muslims of Bengal*. (Emphasis mine)

*Ekhrajol-Mobtadiyen firadde Firqatol-Nazin*, Misriganj, Marquis Street, 1925<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> ঢাকী নারায়ণপুরের (২৪ পং) মৌলবী রুহোল আমিন নামক জনৈক হানাফী, ফেরকাতোন্নাভিন বা সভ্য ফেরকা নির্বাচন নামক একটা পুস্তক লিখিয়াছেন। তাঁহার উৎকট মোহাম্মদীবিদ্বেষ, গরল-উদলীরণ ও উৎপাত বাঙ্গালার মুসলমান সমাজের অপরিচিত নহে।[Emphasis mine.]

The notable thing here is, while validating the *Mohammadi* form of Islam as the truest form of Islam, with its thick and intense references to the Hadis repertoire, and with Urdu sections kept unchanged in the book for authentication, Babur Ali was addressing a community specifically located in Bengal. What we find in the writings of the clergy, in general, is the demarcation of a distinct and different religion, based on a universal truth of the community, while conceiving the community to be securely situated in Bengal.

This duality and ambivalence had marked the new religious material produced by the Muslim religious intelligentsia from the very beginning. The *Sudhakar* group was the pioneer, not just for using standardized Sankritized Bangla and changing Naimuddin's Arabic titles into Bangla, they were the also the creators of new genres, thus moving out of the given parameters of *nahisatnama* that Munshi Naimuddin was still producing<sup>64</sup>. But Munshi Naimuddin was no Munshi Samiruddin, who wrote *nasihatinama* and was published in a cheap print culture by publishers like Muhammad Khater or Tajaddin Muhammad. Munshi Naimuddin was a part of the printer-publisher network that initiated a new deliberation about religion and religious knowledge. Munshi Naimuddin was a part of a network made up of the religious intelligentsia, *anjumans* and a new culture of patronage. But the difference was that, if Munshi Naimuddin followed a linear scriptural discursive style in Bangla prose, the *Sudhakar* group and its associates were responsible for the formulation and reformulation of history and biography as modern genres, thus defining the imagination of the community and its identity. Sometimes fraught with romanticism about the past, sometimes really pragmatic in rationally defining the need for an ideal life (of Muhammad, of *kholafayerashidin*, Imam Hasan and Husayn) and for history, the *Sudhakar* group, along with other members of a new age intelligentsia, created a discursive domain of identification and community formation. While Syed Ameer Ali did not know any Bengali with which he could have communicated his ideas to the Muslim masses of

---

<sup>64</sup> We will talk about Munshi Naimuddin in the next section in detail.

Bengal, *Sudhakar* and other socio-religious-literary groups created a direct link between the Bengal Muslims and the religious ideals rearticulated in these new genres. Tracts and treatises radiated with the same energy as the journals and periodicals to identify the reasons behind the degradation and degeneration of the Muslims, and to devise an ideological framework for the restoration of Islamic glory, and make it viable for the identity formation project, as also for the project of modernity. These efforts, targeted at the Bengali reading public, in turn, produced their own readers and gradually moved towards a chaste and standardized Bangla as a marker of its identity.

What the individual members of the intelligentsia attempted to convey about the essential core of Muslim identity was embedded in its past. The retrieval of that past was a goal equivocally shared and expressed by the individuals, by most of the periodicals of the time, and catered to by the *anjumans* in various ways, in their search for a *jatiya bhab* and *jatiya* glory. The attempts to write a counter-narrative to the constructions and confabulations of the British historians, by Christian Missionaries and also by their nationalist Hindu counterparts, the periodicals and journals, whether they were inclined more to literature or to defining religion, all engaged with history in different forms, and through the translation of Persian and Urdu works, in which the early history of Islam was thought to have been captured.

#### **4.1.3 Anjuman, Periodical and Piety for a Jatiya**

বারশ' পাঁচচল্লিশ সালে হিন্দুস্তানী।  
মাওলানা ক্রামত আলী আসে বঙ্গে শুনি।।  
তিনি আসি জুমা ঈদ আদেশিয়া দিল।  
ভবিষ্যতে দু একজন সে দিকে ঝুঁকিল।।  
এই মাত্র ক্রামত আলীররায় হইল তামাম।  
পূর্বেতে দুদু মিঞার রায় আছিল তামাম। *মুসলিমরত্নহার*, ওয়াজের আলি

[When Maulana Keramat Ali came to Bengal from Hindustan in 1245, he prescribed *juma*. As people started to follow this edict, he became really

influential in the districts, which were previously the domain of Dudu Mian]

বক্তৃতাজক্তি তাঁহার ংরূপ প্রবল ও তেজিয়ান ছিল যে, যেসময় তিনি বক্তৃতামঞ্চে বক্তৃতা করণার্থ দণ্ডায়মান হইতেন তখন বোধ হইত যেন মোক্লেম সমাজস্থ নভোমণ্ডলের পতন ও কলঙ্কস্বরূপ জীমূতবর্গকে বিতাড়িত করিতে ইসলামপ্রচারকরূপ সূর্যের উদয় হইল। *মেহেরউল্লার জীবনী*, মোহাম্মদ আছিরউদ্দীন প্রধান, ১৯০৯, জলপাইগুড়ি প্রেস। পৃ ২

[His lectures were so fierce and intense that when he stood on the podium to speak, it appeared as if in the firmament of the Muslim Society had suddenly appeared the sun in the form of this fiery preacher of Islam, dispelling the clouds of disgrace and disrepute staining the horizon.]

Wajir Ali narrativized the lives of the *Faraizi* leaders between the years 1830 and 1928 and published them in a collected volume entitled *Muslim Ratnahar* in the 1930s. It can be deduced from the date of publication that *Faraizi* ideas were still relevant in the thirties, as was the knowledge of the sectarian conflict between the *Taiyuni* and the *Faraizi* sects—as they were referred to in *Muslim Rantahar*—in defining the Muslim community even as late as the 1930s.

These two sections quoted above tempt us to make a really intriguing observation about the two kinds of language registers of Bangla, which were explored in reformist Islam to cater to different sections of the masses. The language register used in *Muslim Ratnahar* claimed the same audience/readership as the cheap print culture, whereas the biographer of Munshi Meherullah, Muhammad Achhiruddin, posited his narrative to an audience that had exposure to and fluency in a more standardized Bangla, as it were<sup>65</sup>.

---

<sup>65</sup> Munshi Meherullah wrote a number of books refuting the Christian Missionaries and proposing Islam as the ideal and supreme path; namely, *Khrishtan Dharmer Asarota*, 1887, Jessore, *Rodde Christian o Dolilol Islam*, vol I, 1909, Jessore, *Mehrul Islam* (in *Musalmani Bangla*), 1897, Jessore, *Hindu Dharma Rahosya O Debalila*, Jessore, 1898 (All the books were printed by Reyazuddin Ahmad of the *Sudhakar* group, Karheya Road, Kalikata).



The date of publication of *Muslim Ratnahar* shows a continuing interest among the masses about the *Faraizi* movement, and its position vis-à-vis other reformist positions, most prominently that of the *Taiyuni* sect. From the thick references to *bahas* between Keramat Ali and different leaders of the *Faraizi* movement<sup>66</sup>, it is apparent that while the new religious intelligentsia of the *Sudhakar* group was trying to stabilize a more unitary and rational consensual ideal of Islam, the rural areas were still turbulent with sectarian conflict and constant argumentations<sup>67</sup>. From the traces available in cheap print culture, and also in the periodicals published by *Ahl-e-Hadis* and the *Hanafi* platforms, it is evident that there was a vehement antagonism between these two sects even as late as the 1940s.

I would stretch the reading of the narratives on the life of the Prophet and the history of Islam to the extent of saying that the authors of the battle of Karbala were heavily informed, and emotionally charged by these debates because of their curious and precarious position between Arabo-Persian knowledge and Bangla literary cultures, between *madrasa* and English education, and between reformist emotion and the rational position. If *Muslim Ratnahar* was targeted at an audience still caught in the process of resolving the debate over *Eid namaz* and *juma*, it is evident that the culture of defining the un-Islamic within was still a relevant practice. The general claim was that he, who did not pray in a certain way on a certain day, was not a true Muslim.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> After the independence and partition of India, the *Faraizi* leaders felt a new urge to validate *Eid* and *juma* namaz and decided upon praying *namaz* in more crowded towns in East Pakistan on 14 October 1947. The debate was resolved based on the rationale of Hanafi jurisprudence, which was what the *Faraizis* had conformed their identity to. From a pamphlet ‘*Juma Sambandhe Mimansa*’ published on 17 Oct 1947. See Muin ud-Din Ahmad Khan, Appendix Jha.

<sup>67</sup> The 1920s and 30s saw acute antagonism between the *Ahl-e-Hadis* and the *Hanafi* sects in the form of *bahas*, records of which have been archived in treatises and also in the respective journals and periodicals of the two sects. While *Ahl e-Hadis* published *JeyanatolMomenin*, Kalikata, 1917 and *Ekhratol-motadiyen-firaddeFerqaton-najin*, 1925, Baruipur written by Babur Ali, *Hanafis* had *SayekatolMoslemin* by Muhammad Ruhul Amin, 1922, Basirhat, and *Nababpure Hanifi Mohammadidiger Bahachh*, 1923, Kalikata, and *Lakshmipur Hanifi O Mohammadider Bahachh*, Muhammad Baser Biswas, 1922, Jessore

<sup>68</sup> নাজেমুদ্দীন আহমদ, বোরহানেচ্ছালাহিন লে হেদায়েতেল মফছেদিন, ১৩৩৩ (১৯২৬), Tippera, contains discussions about the validity of *Eid* and *juma* namaz.

What Syed Ameer Ali did in English for the English educated reading public, Munshi Meherullah—who popularized the *anjuman* culture in rural Bengal—did in turn through his *waz mehfiles* and religious tracts in Bangla. For both Ameer Ali and Munshi Meherullah, it was an other, discursive for the former (in the form of derogatory writings about Islam and the prophet by the Orientalists and colonial officials in English) and performative for the latter (in the form of the activities of Christian missionaries), with respect to the Muslim identity that was being formulated. Both Ali and Meherullah devised their activities to save Islam from disgrace, and tried to validate its glory. Meherullah's *anjuman*, along with his *waz* sessions, was primarily religious in nature and in function, unlike those of the CNMA, which tried to raise both political and social questions. The first *anjuman* that he created in Jessore in 1887, named *Islam Dharmottejita*, must have been influenced by the organizational structure that the CNMA was following. But Meherullah's sustained efforts in the rural districts in organizing people not only prompted the CNMA to create its own rural branches in turn, it also acted as the template for hundreds of *anjumans* in the period that followed. These organizations were instrumental in defining the processes of identity formation for the Bengal Muslims in rural Bengal. The *Sudhakar* group, that Meherullah would be joining soon, bridged the gap between the respective positions of the rural traditionalists and the religious intelligentsia, who had a rational outlook towards Islam. Meherullah, as an individual, was creating counter-narratives to the Christian propaganda against Islam through his overt oratory skills and discursive efforts, to which *Sudhakar*, as a public group, was providing ideological and functional literary support. While creating counter-Christian Missionary discourses, *Sudhakar* was simultaneously instrumental in locating negative portrayals of Islam in the discourses and literatures created by the contemporary Hindu intelligentsia, and also in offering Islamic theosophy and history as its counter-project for the construction and preservation of the self. If we follow the patterns of mutual exchange, dialogue, and debate within this literary community that the Muslim public was at the time, we can see the emergence of several designs—which should discourage scholars working on the period from looking for any

easy unitary pattern behind the search for self and identity. The list of editors, contributors, and interlocutors of the periodicals and journals, and their articles and books, along with the members of the working committees of the *anjumans* and their activities show several kinds of connections and dissociations which I will discuss in this chapter.

Mir Musharraf Husain was much criticized for his portrayal of the tragedy of Karbala in a Bangla modelled after the prose of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, at a time when the literary field was neither ready to unravel or excavate Islamic sacred history in order to fulfil any autonomous literary purpose of its own<sup>69</sup>, nor was it able to place Musharraf Husain within a history of literature between Battala and Bankim. The possibility or impossibility of the autonomy of literature without religious overtures, in a way that would make it possible for literature to be defined as *jatiya sahitya*, would be a question that was perennially asked and debated over by the Muslim intelligentsia of the time—this is what I will discuss in the following section.

Musharraf Husain, in the preface to *Bishad Sindhu*, mentions that he had had to keep some *jatiya* words in chaste Bangla in fear of some orthodox *maulana*. What he was alluding to, was the moralistic attitude of the traditional clergy who had strictly confined all words connected to scriptures and the Islamic social to the domain of the untranslatable. The scripture has not really been one of Husain's concerns in writing *Bishad Sindhu*, which he attempted as a 'historical novel'. The words in Arabo-Persian that Musharraf Husain had identified and kept unchanged as *jatiya* were however, translated by Munshi Naimuddin and the *Sudhakar* Group, along with other members of the religious intelligentsia, provoking much controversy and conflict with the traditional clergy. But both Munshi Naimuddin and the *Sudhakar* group vehemently opposed the literary turn taken by Musharraf Husain in narrating the stories of Islamic sacred characters so deeply embedded in Islamic history. The *Sudhakar* group,

---

<sup>69</sup> To be discussed in the next chapter.

named after the newspaper *Mihir O Sudhakar*, included Shaikh Abdur Rahim (1859–1931)<sup>70</sup>, Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad<sup>71</sup> (1862–1933), Pandit Reazuddin Mashadi (1859–1919)<sup>72</sup>, and Maulavi Merazuddin Ahmad<sup>73</sup> who were also writing and getting published in their individual capacities.

Notable personalities of this period include Mirza Mohammad Yusuf Ali (1858–1920)<sup>74</sup>, Naosher Ali Khan Yusufzai (1864–1924), Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad (1869–1953)<sup>75</sup>, Shaikh Mohammad Zamiruddin (1870–1930)<sup>76</sup>, Matiyur Rahman Khan (1872–1937)<sup>77</sup>, Abu Ma'a Ali Mohammad Hamid Ali (1874–1954)<sup>78</sup>, Mohammad Maniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875–1950)<sup>79</sup>, Saiyad Emdad Ali (1976–1956)<sup>80</sup>, Saiyad Abul Mohammad Ismail

---

<sup>70</sup> Munshi Abdur Rahim hailed from Basirhat, in 24 Parganas. He was the first editor of *Sudhakar*.

<sup>71</sup> Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad originated from Mymensing and used to teach Bangla and Sanskrit at the Alia madrasa.

<sup>72</sup> Mashadi came from the village of Rupsa, Tippera.

<sup>73</sup> Maulavi Merazuddin Ahmad was a native of Khulna and used to teach Arbi and Farsi in Douvton and St Xavier's College, Kolkata.

<sup>74</sup> Yusuf Ali was from and worked in Rajshahi. He has been compared to Munshi Meherullah, Maulavi Naimuddin, Maulana Maniruzzaman, and Mohammad Reyajuddin in terms of his work in translating scriptures into Bangla, and for establishing an organization and editing periodicals. Waqil Ahmad, p. 250.

<sup>75</sup> Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad was from Chittagong, and collected thousands of Bangla *puthis* to change the conception and contours of what Bangla literature by Muslim authors was considered to be.

<sup>76</sup> Hailing from Kushtiya, Shaikh Zamiruddin first converted to Christianity and started preaching to the Muslim communities to influence them to become Christians. He published profusely, and refuted the *Qur'an* and Islam till he was entirely overwhelmed by Munshi Meherullah's counter-logic in the article '*Islami ba Khristani Dhokabhanjan*'. Reverting into Islam, Zamiruddin worked for the rest of his life, preaching Islam as an associate of Munshi Meherullah. He was also the author of Meherullah's biography *Meher Charit*, Kalikata, 1909.

<sup>77</sup> Matiyur Rahman Khan was from Manikganj in Dhaka, and worked as school teacher and also at the land settlement department.

<sup>78</sup> Abu Ma'a Ali Mohammad Hamid Ali hailed from Chittagong. Mohammad Hamid Ali, after getting his education in a *madrasa*, worked as a school teacher for a long period of time.

<sup>79</sup> After being taught in a traditional *madrasa* in Hooghly, Mohammad Maniruzzaman Islamabadi learnt Bangla, studied law and started working in the district *madrasas*. Later, he left his job to take up the life of a preacher and teacher of Islam. *Mihir O Sudhakar* reported, "Our dear Head Maulavi of Kumedpur Madrasa, so popular to the Bengal Muslims, honourable Maulavi Mohammad Maniruzzaman Islamabadi has determined to be a preacher of Islam." 1306, 8 Poush.

<sup>80</sup> Saiyad Emdad Ali Bikrampur was inspired by pan-Islamism and Hindu-Muslim solidarity, and prioritized literature that carried an essence of the Islamic *jatiya*. Waqil Ahmad, p. 305

Husain Siraji (1880–1931)<sup>81</sup>, Shaikh Fajlul Karim (1882–1936), Shaikh Abdul Jabbar (1882–1919)<sup>82</sup>, et al. The basic curves and contours of the Muslim modern was brought out by configuring a Muslim *jatiya* which was so diversely produced through the diversity of exchanges between people engaged in the domain of print, publication and preaching. These were the people who were majorly instrumental in the establishment of *anjumans* and periodicals along with the writing of books. Some of them were actually still active when other ideological parameters about the *jatiya* vis-à-vis history, literature and language began to emerge in the pages of periodicals like *Saogat* (1918–1950), *Bulbul* and *Shikha*<sup>83</sup>. The ideological conflict between these later periodicals with a more pronounced radical stand, and the older ones, is well documented, and marks the new turns in the Muslim public in terms of defining *jatiya* identity and *jatiya* qualities for the Muslim communities in Bengal<sup>84</sup>.

Rafiuddin Ahmad remarks on the change in the articulation of religion and piety in the shift from *bahas* ceremonies to the individual performances of *waz mehfilis* by Munshi Meherullah<sup>85</sup>. Meherullah had a place in the history of proselytization for the prowess and popularity of his speeches<sup>86</sup>. The not-so-informed audience of *bahas*, who were often overwhelmed by this concept of a community at the contentious fuming argumentations, became a little more consolidated through the more individualistic passionate lecture sessions of *waz*. Instead of argumentative parties confronting each other, the audience was now experiencing a single preacher, the counterpart

---

<sup>81</sup> Saiyad Abul Mohammad Ismail Husain Siraji was born in Sirajganj of Pabna. Pan-Islamism and the Islamic *jatiya* in literature were his basic ideological concerns. His book *Anal Prabaha* was confiscated by the British government for its anti-British fervour.

<sup>82</sup> Shaikh Abdul Jabbar hailed from Mymensingh. After receiving mid-level education in a Bangla medium school, he studied in a *madrassa* for two years. He became an examiner at Calcutta University. Ali Ahmad, p. 120–121.

<sup>83</sup> References from *Saogat* and *Shikha* will be drawn and discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>84</sup> The iconic debate between *Mohammadi* and *Saogat* will be discussed in the next chapter and the critical ideological-political relevance of Mohammad Manirujjaman Islambadi, the editor of *Mohammadi*, will be contextualized.

<sup>85</sup> Meherullah worked extensively against the Christian propaganda by consolidating the audience through the preaching of sermons in sessions called *waz mehfilis*, which became instrumental in arranging the sense of a religious community through such performance of discourse.

<sup>86</sup> Munshi Meherullah was born in Jessore and did not have much formal education in either a *madrassa* or a school.

of the single author of a single printed text, and instead of remaining a passive spectator of the battle between two reformers, the *waz mehfiles* inspired and enabled the audience to make its own interpretive connection to the individual preacher.

The iconic shift in language from what Wajir Ali used in his *Muslim Ratnahar* to describe the *bahas* between Haji Shariatullah and Keramat Ali to the language used to describe the *waz* sessions of Munshi Meherullah, affirms a linguistic choice made expressly to communicate religiosity and sociality for the Muslim masses. It also shows that a readership, both implied and targeted, of literary and scriptural discourses written in a chaste Sanskritized Bangla, was emerging through these literary choices made by the new educated clergy as individuals and also as collectives. Munshi Meherullah not only produced a counter-narrative to the discursive formations of Islam by Christian and Hindu dogmatism, his attempts to incorporate the ideologies of the urban-based elite reformulation of Islam, in a rationalist way, influenced other Islamic reformist groups like *Sudhakar*.

The *Sudhakar* group, after Munshi Naimuddin, and with Munshi Meherullah, was the first generation of religious intelligentsia who tried to bridge the gap between Arabo-Persian original texts and a standardized Bangla in their quest to formulate religion, history and identity. In this respect, Munshi Keramat Ali became another important figure, through whose preaching, the religious cartography of the *Hanafi* communities were prepared and posited. The religious cartography of the emerging *Hanafi* sect, which came to dominate the Muslim socio-religious identity in Bengal, was majorly influenced by both Pir Abu Bakr and Munshi Meherullah. But the difference was that, while Munshi Meherullah and Munshi Naimuddin were traditionalists in their thought, in connecting religion and community, Munshi Keramat Ali took a middle path to negotiate with the urban ideologies about religion and the Empire. With Pir Abu Bakr, on the other hand, we can observe the emergence of an institution at Furfura Sharif, which started defining the *Hanafi* identity in a

more structured way as Muslim identity, exploring print to the fullest extent.

Munshi Naimuddin's monthly journal *Akhbare Islamia* (1884), for its focused and journalistic reports on the Russo-Turkish war, succeeded in creating a pro-Turkey sentiment among its readership after Nawab Abdul Latif had started sensitizing the Calcutta Muslims to identify with and support Turkey against Russia<sup>87</sup>. For the readers of the journal, a sense of the community grew beyond the boundaries of Bengal to a broader Muslim world, and was manifested in the act of collecting money or creating ideological support for the Sultan of Turkey, who was the caliph of the Muslims, not marked by any regional location. The focus of this initiative had more to do with religion and scriptures, rather than with the literary rendition of religious ideals, which many others associated with *Sudhakar* were invested in.

As I have already said, while imagining and devising a territorially expanded pan-Islamic identity, for the Bengal Muslim intelligentsia, it was necessary to claim Bengality, in terms of a language-culture, to define a *jatiya bhab*, or Islamic essence. The paradox integral to the search of the Bengal Muslims for a *jatiya* identity—subject to the creation of a standardized language and standardized genre to reclaim its *jatiya* history—was precisely that it necessitated both the replication and the replacement of the templates that the Hindu nationalist intelligentsia had already created in order to define a Hindu *jatiya*. Consequently, it was both a discourse of coexistence and of opposition that the periodicals attempted to devise in relation to the Hindus. The *Anjumans*, and the publishing industry associated with them, reaffirmed this duality through their direct, or differently nuanced, approaches to the Hindu community.

What we will witness in the later period, are the acute disagreements between two periodicals, *Islam Darshan* and *Ahl e Hadis*, with their

---

<sup>87</sup> Abdul Latif, *My Public Life*, Calcutta, 1885, pp. 176–177.

respective inclinations to *Hanafi* and *Ahl e-Hadis* sectarianism, about the right way to do Islam. This sectarian competitiveness was also prefigured in the debates between *Akhbare Islamiya* and *Ahmadi* in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Tangail experienced the heat of the paper war between these two periodicals on issues like cow-killing, and the *mazhabi-Muhammadi* interpretation of Islam. Munshi Naimuddin was a declared religious preacher, and his periodical *Akhbare Islamiya* made a strong case for religious reformulation through *Hanafi* scriptures, whereas *Ahmadi* was inclined to *Ahl-e-Hadis*, and put together religious texts and literary activities guided by this orientation<sup>88</sup>. Yusufzai and Musharraf Husain were the two most instrumental figures connected to *Ahmadi*, but it should be mentioned here that it is absolutely impossible to attribute the devotional songs by Yusufzai<sup>89</sup> and *Bishad Sindhu* by Musharraf Husain with any sectarian religious intonation, in the way that it is possible for Naimuddin. In the hands of Yusufzai and Musharraf Husain, literary-aesthetic expressions—either religiously informed or based on a part of religious history—were also taking shape in their response to the generic demands of contemporary Bangla literature. The reception of Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay for Yusufzai, and that of Bankim for Musharraf Husain, marked the beginning of another formulation of literature in the themes connected to religion, achieving another realm. What is interesting to note here is that the complete literary career of an author might not always give us a monolithic idea about his ideology, and also that his choice and use of source texts might not really be in keeping with the original intentions of the source. The fact, that Yusufzai translated Fazl e Rabbi's book *The Origin of the Musalmans* in Bengal, did not make him a patron of the immigration theory. Rather, his poetry created the scope for literature to be religiously informed, without any dogmatic references. Musharraf Husain was thoroughly rebuked by the religious intelligentsia for having brought down the sacred history of Islam to the profane realm. But the fabrication of tales based on history, or historical themes, was inspired by the narrative

---

<sup>88</sup> *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*, pp. 6–7, Waqil Ahmad, pp. 242–247.

<sup>89</sup> In his anthologies *Birag Sangeet* (1880), *Prabodh Sangeet* (1891) and *Udasi* (1900), Yusufzai demarcated between different kinds of *Sufi* musical performances and proposed a more meditative way of recitation thus making another version of mystical poetry.



potential of *Bishad Sindhu*, resulting in various generic formulations in prose and poetry in the processes of reception of this particular text in the first decades of the twentieth century. We can also look at how either through the affirmation of *Bishad Sindhu*, or through the negation of it, the Bengali Muslim religious intelligentsia and litterateurs attempted to formulate and define the *jatiya*, in terms of *sahitya* and *bhaba*.

#### **4.2.1 Crisscross, Transference, Overlap: A Network of Gathering, Reading, Printing, Publishing for *jatiya***

হায় আজ কোথায় সেই মুসলমান, আর কোথায় সেই মুসলমান সাম্রাজ্য।

*মদিনাশরিফের ইতিহাস*, শেখ আবদুল জব্বার ময়মনসিংহ, ১৯০৭, পৃ ৮

This angst about feeling inferior points to a moment of self-reflexivity, when the Muslim community became aware of its absence of representation in the social, political, and economic domains in Bengal. Suddenly, they had woken up to find out that the western education that they had bypassed, had enabled and equipped the Hindus to assume agential roles in defining political and social matters and in gaining economic status. They finally realised that the Hindus had assumed a position of authority second in line to the British, while the Muslims were mourning over the loss of their glory in the hands of the British. In Bengal, the Muslim educated class opposed representative government and pleaded for separate representation on a communal basis. The demand for a separate electorate, first voiced by Syed Ahmad Khan in 1883, was echoed in *The Moslem Chronicle*, “Nothing short of abstention from voting will induce the government to consult our interests. We should all send in respectful representations to the government to give us separate electorates.”<sup>90</sup> The urgent need for political mobilization—to exert pressure on the government, for acquiring protection and safeguards, and to compete in an unequal battle with the already well-established Hindu intelligentsia—was finally felt by the Muslim public.

Rafiuddin Ahmad has shown that the increasing number of socio-religious associations in the rural districts of Bengal created an environment of both

---

<sup>90</sup> *The Moslem Chronicle*, 25 April 1885, p. 173.

political mobilization and socio-religious modifications. The rural landowners carved the path for not only *anjumans*, scriptural books and reformist periodicals, but the alliance between the new patrons and the aspiring litterateurs was instrumental in the creation of new literary genres and literary associations as well. Rural landowners with their patronage, and the clergy with their printing publishing sector,<sup>91</sup> produced a new network of circulation of cheap prints for the religious and moral uplift of the masses. While remaining cheap, these literary traditions were instrumental in reformulating religion, and made religion an affair to be individually engaged with by the new reading public.

This reading public was gradually being exposed to a standardized Bangla as the medium for making statements about religion and social ideologies. These patrons connected to the *anjumans* and other social organizations, worked simultaneously with more literary-minded authors and publishers, creating much overlap in interest between groups and organizations working with the common aim of making a community of Bengali Muslims. The Bengali Muslims, in the literature of the reformers, of the traditional clergy and also of the litterateurs, became the identitarian trope that was to be imagined, conceived and debated over. The connection and discrepancy between the origin and the location of the community, and the difficulty it faced in becoming a part of the hegemonic Urdu nationalism of North India, its deliberate attempts to take the case of Urdu as a template, its choice and justification of Bangla as the medium of scripture, history, and literature for the Muslims of Bengal—all marked the discourse and polemic defining the Muslim community of Bengal.

The internal ideological struggle for the making of an ideal Islam, by defining the other-within<sup>92</sup>, was now prompted by the necessity to posit the community in terms of its difference from the Hindus (as well as with the

---

<sup>91</sup> We should make note here of the contribution of Reyazuddin Ahmad, of Gorosthan Road, Karheya, Kolkata, a very important *Sudhakar* member, and a prominent figure in the print and publishing industry, who printed one hundred books produced by the new generation of clergy from different districts of Bengal.

<sup>92</sup> Discussed in the previous chapter.

Christians). The Hindus, who had been, for them, not a particularly well-defined community outside, but rather a contamination within, was now defined in concrete terms as the inevitable other. Munshi Meherullah's writings not only analyzed and evaluated Christian religious ideals as inferior and worthless, but were also harsh and strict in their critique of the indulgent and pleasure-seeking Hindu pantheon<sup>93</sup>. He also had his compatriots to carry forward this tradition<sup>94</sup>.

This phase could be read as the Muslim community's discovery of themselves as 'the other' in the Hindu nationalist discourses that were in the process of overwhelming all contemporary imaginations about the history and narrative of India. It was a time when the Muslim connection with pan-Islamism, and the Hindu insistence on a nationalism based on an exclusive Vedic-Aryan past, were both gathering momentum almost simultaneously producing new forms of identification and discourse. These articulations by and about communities premised upon inherently separate identities erupted when Dayananda Saraswati launched a movement against cow killing in 1882, and gained further impetus when Bal Gangadhar Tilak initiated the Shivaji Festival in 1885. While pan-Islamism evoked a universal identity for the Muslims, settled anywhere in the world, the Muslims tried to understand and articulate their identity through their location as well. For the Bengal Muslims, the desire for alliance and adversity with the Hindus to create their own *jatiya* was articulated in the reclamation of Bangla as the language of the Muslims, as a part of their identification as Bengali Muslims<sup>95</sup>.

In an environment of trans-nationalism, when the Bengali Muslims wanted to have Bangla as their medium of expression, the language had already been reformulated and overloaded with a Hindu nationalistic fervour; hence, almost closed to the expressions of the Muslim *jatiya*. The

---

<sup>93</sup> *Khristiya Dharmer Asharata*, Jessore, 1887, *Hindu Dharma Rahasya O Deblila*, 1898, Jessore.

<sup>94</sup> *Hindu Darma Rahasya ba Debalila*, Abul Mansur, Jessore, 1315BS/1907

<sup>95</sup> Of course this Bangla was fraught with several interpretations, was given several statuses, and was even rejected in favour of Urdu by several groups engaged in defining Muslimness of the Muslims of Bengal. This will be discussed in chapter V.

proliferation of texts on history and other literary genres in Bangla produced the Muslims as a race marked by the sword and by vengeance—following a colonialist paradigm<sup>96</sup>; the language also was fraught with a Hindu polytheistic imagination. The polemic over the Muslim *jatiya* shows much anxiety and displeasure over the use of such polytheistically ordained emotions embedded in language, while it was claiming Bangla as the language for the Bengal Muslims<sup>97</sup>.

Muslim communities in rural and urban areas had to engage with such representations, in a ploy of defence, and create discourses, or produce a counter-narrative. Gradually a sense of the community-in-separation was emerging not only in the standardization and structuring of religion and religious duties, or in the channelization of ritual activities, but also in the act of history writing and in the fabrication of narratives geared towards the formulation of *jatiya bhaba* and *jatiya sahitya*.

This otherness of essence was delineated by defining the Islamic community in qualitative terms—in the abstraction of religious ideals, and in trans-national terms—with the attribution of political values. In seeking protection by virtue of its otherness from the colonial government, in order to be at par with the Hindus, these ideals needed to be realized and projected as the essence of the community, and as a defence against the imposed superiority of the Hindus. When extra-territorial connections and understandings of the community came to clash with the colonial

---

<sup>96</sup> In the hands of Hindu intelligentsia nationalism became Hindu revivalism; organizations formed to revive lost national glory were bent on retrieving and formulating a Vedic-Aryan past. *Jatiya Gaurab Sampadani Sabha* (established by Rajnarayan Basu) and *Sanatan Dharmarakshini Sabha* in the 1870s propelled a new interest about an imagined community which was based on the revival and recasting of the Vedic-Brahminical past. In this legacy, strengthened by the activities of the *Hindu Mela* (which was initiated in 1867 and continued with the enthusiasm and support of Rajnarayan Basu, Nabagopal Mitra, Dwijendranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, and Jyotirindranath Tagore) the question of self-reliance and self-sovereignty, the prime agenda of this Mela, was never extended to any non-Hindu community. Starting with Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Ramesh Chandra Datta, the literary imagination about the past and future was overdetermined with a very strong negative emotion towards the Muslims and thus an essence of the Muslims as a race/community/*jati* was produced.

<sup>97</sup> To be discussed later in chapter V.

government, like it did over the question of *khilafat*, the inter-community relationship took another turn.

Otherness was envisaged following another parameter based on the essential attributes of the Hindus and Muslims as religious communities which were not to meet on any grounds. The presence of the Hindu extremist intelligentsia was more influential in the INC from 1905 onwards, but this changed during the *Khilafat* movement, with the Muslim intelligentsia from all over India joining the INC to safeguard the interests of the Muslims and the honour of the caliphate.

Political and social coalition with the Hindus, and defiance of the British rule also produced other interpretations of history, historical writings, and poetic and literary endeavours with a curious relationship to the medium of expression and religiosity. Whether it was predicated upon an alliance with the Hindus, or the reclamation of an identity against them, Bangla as a language was adopted to give shape to this attempt to standardize religiosity and history. I will be illustrating here the contours of the debate on the Arya Samaj and its propaganda against cow-killing, which resulted in massive riots in North India, sending tremors to the remotest parts of Bengal, catalyzing the debate over religion and religious emotion, and forging partnerships and camaraderie within different circuits of the Muslim clergy and intelligentsia.

In an article entitled ‘Bangla Language and the Muslim Society’, Sheikh Abdur Rahim, one of the most important members of the religious intelligentsia of the late nineteenth and the early-twentieth century belonging to the *Sudhakar* group, defined Mir Musharraf Husain and Munshi Naimuddin as two stars in the literary sky of Bengal<sup>98</sup> at a time

---

<sup>98</sup> আমার প্রথম যৌবনে যখন সাহিত্যের পুণ্যক্ষেত্রে প্রথম পদার্পণ করি, মুসলমানদের জাতীয় জীবনে তখন এক সূচীভেদ্য ঘোর অমানিশা রাজত্ব করিতেছিল, ... দেখিলাম সেই অন্ধকার যুগেও বাঙ্গালার সাহিত্য গগনে সমাজের দুইটি প্রবতারা অন্ধকারের আলোকচ্ছটা বিকিরন করিতেছে ... তাহার একটি পরলোকগত মীর মশাররফ হোসেন সাহেব, এবং অন্যটি মৌলবী নইমুদ্দীন মরহুম মগফুর সাহেব। “বঙ্গভাষা ও মুসলিম সমাজ”, *মাসিক মোহাম্মদী*, ভাদ্র ১৩৩৬

when the national life of the Muslims was veiled in darkness. Because of their literary activities, and the responsibility they assumed in rendering *jatiya bhab* in Bangla literary-language, Abdur Rahim brought together the profiles of Naimuddin and Husain, to explain the Muslim *jatiya*—these two figures were otherwise symbolic of an iconic ideological strife between historical and fictional sensibilities within the literary community in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

The debates and legal battle that ensued between them marked a new era of identification for a community different in matters as mundane as its food habits, and also marked a beginning of a paper contestation that disclosed and produced several strands within that community vis-à-vis the mundane. It was not only the mutual relationship of antagonism between Musharraf Husain and Munshi Naimuddin that worsened, the more important thing to take note of here is how the Muslim public formally and deliberately aligned itself (along the issues of religiosity, identity and *jatiya bhaba*) in order to support Munshi Naimuddin in the legal battle. It was not only prominent personalities like Munshi Meherullah and Maulavi Reyazuddin Ahmad, who brought a paradigmatic shift in the formulation of the Muslim *jatiya* and found themselves entangled in this debate, but minor authors with the backing of the minor *anjumans* also became instrumental in propounding a position against Musharraf Hosain's conceptualization. Musharraf Husain's *Gojiban* can be read as an attempt to bring about Hindu-Muslim communal harmony with respect to the preservation of the cows, which in the process of this debate came to be identified as the *jatiya* food for the Muslims. Musharraf emphasized the usefulness of cows and attempted to offer an idea of local food, which kindled a very powerful antagonism within the Muslim community and fetched much praise from the Hindu quarters<sup>99</sup>. This debate marked the beginning of the production of a counter-narrative, an identity-in-difference, and a dialogue with Hindu nationalism in the broader sense. Even ordinary Muslims not associated, as

---

<sup>99</sup> *Bharati O Balak*, Chaitra, 1295, *Anusandhan*, 25 Baishakh 1296 reviewed this book of articles with much enthusiasm, underlining the liberal mind of its Muslim author. Waqil Ahmad, p. 229.

such, with the intelligentsia wrote and circulated pamphlets and collected subscriptions. Noakhali Eslamiya Sabha wanted to bear the cost of printing for Ohazuddin Ahmad's monograph *Gobadhe Apotti Keno*<sup>100</sup> (Why Disagree with Cow-killing) and intended to circulate 4000 copies of the booklet for free to the rural masses<sup>101</sup>.

This was an entirely new phenomenon through which connections were built and exchanges were made between the clergy and intelligentsia, and between *anjumans* and periodicals, forming a sense of belongingness to a collective defined by a social habit like food. Adversity towards Musharraf Husain not only showed disagreements with his socio-cultural stand, which Munshi Naimuddin refuted scripturally<sup>102</sup> but also resulted in Musharraf Husain being designated as a *kafir* and a sinner by Naimuddin. The case of defamation filed by Musharraf Husain made him a solitary figure, who was pursuing the matter beyond the limits permitted by religion and Musharraf was forced to withdraw all copies of his book from the market with an undertaking not to re-publish *Gojiban*. In this legal-ideological-emotional debate, the contemporary religious intelligentsia of the *Sudhakar* group officially supported Munshi Naimuddin. This debate not only marked a paradigmatic moment of community-identification in the history of the Bengal Muslims, but also had a profound ideological impact on what *jatiya bhab* and the *jatiya* would become. We cannot look at this ideological battle as a social event isolated from the idea of *jatiya sahitya* and the idea of valid themes and genres. That Mir Musharraf Husain's *Bishad Sindhu* and Kaykobad's *Mahasmashan*, both written on the battle of Karbala, would not gain critical acclaim from the religious intelligentsia, was played out in accordance with the same technologies of acceptance and rejection of objects, ideas and practices necessary to create the value of *jatiya*.

---

<sup>100</sup> *Gobadhe Apotti Keno*, Ohazuddin Ahmad, 1900 (1889), Noakhali Press.

<sup>101</sup> *Sudhakar*, (Poush 1296).

<sup>102</sup> When Musharraf's article against cow-killing entitled 'Gokul Nirmul Ashanka' (Fearing the Extinction of the Cows) came out in *Ahmadi* in 1886, Munshi Naimuddin protested very sharply to it, and named Musharraf a *kafir*. Naimuddin's article written as the response to Musharraf's took the shape of a *fatwa* when he said that as a sinner Musharraf is not entitled to have a pious wife who performed *namaz*. The conflict culminated in a case of defamation filed by Musharraf Husain against Naimuddin as I have already cited.

Positions informed by religious sensibilities became an all important basis for interpreting and validating literary aesthetics with no space for the autonomy of literature. Later, in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, periodicals like *Saogat* and *Shikha* proposed different ethics and aesthetics to create a more egalitarian notion of Bangla literature written by the Muslims of Bengal<sup>103</sup>.

Without journals and periodicals there is no scope for the construction of *jatiya* life, evolution of *jatiya* strength, establishment of *jatiya* deeds and *jatiya* achievements.

*Ahl-e-Hadis*, Year 2, *Baishakh*, Vol VIII, p. 370.

It has already been proposed that there would be a reformulation of the scripture, and formulation of history as essential moves necessary to imagine and define a *jatiya bhab*. In the zeal to place the origin of the Muslim community in historical and territorial terms, *ashraf* Muslims of Bengal, in the beginning, did not imagine themselves as having a territorial connection to Bengal. Khondakar Fazl e Rabbi attempted to refute the proposition put forward by John Beverley, about the local origin of the Muslims, by counter-posing a theory of migration for the Muslims of Bengal. When the Muslim intelligentsia began to accumulate an archive of texts representing Muslim values, by translating and compiling scriptures, and creating a history for the community, this text by Rabbi was also translated, where the translator, Abdul Hamid Khan Yusufzai categorically placed it in opposition to the colonial discursive formations about the Muslims, while in the same breath he hailed Her Highness the Queen of British India in referring to the Bengal Muslims as her loyal subjects.

উক্ত শিক্ষিত মহাত্মা গৌরবান্বিত রাজরাজেশ্বরী মাতা ভারতেশ্বরীর বঙ্গীয় মুসলমান প্রজাগণের বিরুদ্ধে কতিপয় প্রসিদ্ধ লেখক অযথা নিন্দা ও অপবাদ রটনা করিয়াছেন তাহা হইতে তাহাদিগকে উদ্ধার করিতে যাইয়া স্বজাতির এবং স্বদেশের এক মহৎ উপকার সাধন করিয়াছেন। ...খান বাহাদুর সাহেব যে বিষয়

---

<sup>103</sup> To be discussed in the next chapter in more detail.



কথায় প্রমাণ করিতে চেষ্টা করিয়াছেন, ভরসা করি আমরা তাহা কার্যে প্রমাণ করিতে সমর্থ হইব। আমাদের পূর্বপুরুষগণের ন্যায় চিন্তে, শৈর্ষে, কার্যে, উৎসাহে, জ্ঞান-চর্চায় আগ্রহ, ধর্মে দৃঢ়তা প্রভৃতি আমরাও দেখাইতে সমর্থ হইব। ... এখন আর বিজাতীয় অলসতায় কাটাইবার সময় আমাদের নাই<sup>104</sup>।

[An educated noble person has done a great service to his own race and country by recovering the subjects of Her Highness and our Mother the Queen of Bharat, i.e. British India, from the slander and defamation undertaken by a handful of celebrated authors. We presume that we will be able to prove by our earnest deeds the subject that Khan Bahadur Sahib has argued for so eloquently in his words. We will be able to demonstrate, like our glorious ancestors, prowess and perseverance in our character, and in our serenity, our deeds, our zeal, our dedication to knowledge, and our fortitude in religion. There is no time to waste in the pursuit of *bijatiya* indulgences.]

What Yusufzai attempted and succeeded to create was a binary between a *jatiya* dynamism and a *bijaiya* staticity posed as the two essential features, which he had derived from the book by Fazl e Rabbi. Yusufzai adopted migration theory, though not exactly in the way Fazl e Rabbi had used it, to refute the local connection of the Muslims. Yusufzai, rather, created dual positions for the community, with its past in Arabiya and its present in Bengal, by dividing the community along the temporalities of past, present and future. Rabbi's atemporal discourse about the origin of the Muslims was put to use for a different end to minimize the discrepancy between a glorious past and a disgraced present. Rabbi's migration theory was important to Yusufzai for validating a glorious past and to propose a prescription for the re-enactment of that past in the future to come.

Moreover, if we follow Yusufzai's career as devoted to the cause of moral upgradation of the Muslim youth, we might not be able to categorize him under the ideological parameters of the migration theory that Fazl e Rabbi had endorsed. Yusufzai's translation of the original text was more of an exploration of the glorious past of Islam, and did not actually endorse the theory that the Muslims of Bengal had originated in remote Arabiya. Yusufzai used a broader categorical term *Bangali jati* without defining it in

---

<sup>104</sup> *Bangalar Musalmanganer Adibrittanta*, Bharat Mihir Jantra, Kalikata, 1306, pp. 1–4.

religious communitarian terms and connected the Muslims of Bengal with Arabiya as having the same racially defined essential qualities<sup>105</sup>. He was doing so to find the essential glory of the Muslims as a race, and his was also a search for the essence of the Muslims in Bengal. While their Hindu counterparts were discovering regional histories to reclaim the martial agency of Bengali Hindus<sup>106</sup> in contradistinction to the colonial construction of their racial frailty<sup>107</sup>, the Muslim intelligentsia was reclaiming the ideals and essences of their own community by creating historiographical discourses on a Muslim past.

It was an easy solution for the Hindu *bhadrolok* classes to mark *Dobhashi*, that is *Musalmani*-Bangla literature as a medium of expression confirming Muslim degeneration, another element which symbolized the paradigmatic otherness assigned to the Muslim community. Muslim litterateurs had a mixed reaction and resolution to this mainstream nationalist discourse on language and literature. In actuality, these interconnected yet ideologically different stands mark the acute productivity of a period that must have held so many aspirations and inclinations of the time, of being Muslims in Bengal. Sometimes it was qualified by territorial distance and a disconnect with location, expressed in the form of historiographical writings about an Islamic past in a Sanskritized Bangla which had been cultivated by the Hindu nationalist intelligentsia of Bengal to find a standard expression for the Hindu national self. Sometimes it was the creation of literature in that very standardized Bangla, with Muslim historical or literary tropes, to bridge the gap between a Bangla embodying the Hindu mythological-social and its Muslim counterpart with their own acutely emotional articulations.

---

<sup>105</sup> Yusufzai was also writing a book on the history of Arabiya, as reported in a travelogue. Anonymous, *Islam Pracharak*, Poush, 1307 BS.

<sup>106</sup> Along with the local martial heroes of the early modern period, like Raja Pratapadiya, authors were looking at the history of regions not always political in nature, but culturally meaningful as well. *Haorha O Hughlir itihas*, Vidhu Bhushan Bhattacharya, 1926, *Bikrampur Itihas*, Yogedranath Gupta, 1906, *Medinipur Itihas*, Yogendra Chandra Vasu, 1921, *Atiya Parganar Itihas*, Akshay Kumar Mullika, 1917, *Baro Bhuiyan ba Shorosh Shatabdir Bangala Itihas*, 1912 etc among many.

<sup>107</sup> Indira Chowdhury, *The Frail Hero and the Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and The 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

Sometimes it was an attempt to reclaim early modern texts written by Muslim authors to create a historical continuity of literary tropes, in order to trace the essence of Muslim literary traditions<sup>108</sup>. *Puthi sahitya*, or cheap print culture in *Dobhashi Bangla*, which many members of the intelligentsia were skeptical about, was also described as having the inner quality of the Muslim *jatiya*, which the writers had created for the Muslim community in Bengal<sup>109</sup>. The sense of feeling separate was thus informed by an urge to reconciliation.

When the Urdu-speaking urban organizations, like the CMNA, began to have their *mufassil* counterparts working partly in alliance, and partly with autonomy, in towns like Bogra, Chittagong, Khulna, Hooghly, Jahanabad, Midnapore, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Burdwan, Mymensing, Pabna, and Maldah, the gap between the urban wealthy population and its counterpart in the *mufassil* narrowed significantly. From providing better education, to debating over whether to join the Indian National Congress under a Hindu leadership, these *mufassil* organizations came to be in tune with each other, creating a broader ideological network addressing the community on issues of socio-economic and political import. If we look into the curious network that the publishers, printers and patrons had created in print culture, we will be able to find that various cross sections of the Muslim society were being catered to, through the invention and dissemination of different models of language and genre. Periodicals and journals produced by the educated Muslim clergy were addressing and constructing a new reading public, exposing to them pan-Islamic and pan-Indian Muslim issues, and forming a sense of the collective, to be understood as *jatiya* in its turn.

The lesser counter-parts of this public in urban and rural Bengal was awakened through narratives and *farz* texts, as also by texts on ethical performance prescribed for the Muslims. Interestingly, while at a certain

---

<sup>108</sup> In a later section I have discussed these issues in detail.

<sup>109</sup> To acquire the *jatiya* of Muslims as distinct from the Hindu one, Muslim litterateurs had to look to the localized forms of Muslim expressions. It is important to note that while the national literature of the Hindus was trying to negate the thrust of the popular, Muslim modernity, while remaining true to a standardized this-worldly form of Islam, was also carrying an ideological legacy of the popular.

level the producers and consumers of standardized genres and chaste Bangla, and those of traditional scriptural and narrative texts in Dobhashi remained separate, we can also perceive the cross-currents and overlaps always at work. A member of the religious intelligentsia, Reyazuddin Ahmad, one of the pioneers of the *Sudhakar* group, was not only writing and publishing high religious tracts<sup>110</sup>, a Muhammadiya almanac<sup>111</sup>, *fiqh* literature<sup>112</sup>, a history of Turkey and Greece<sup>113</sup>, and a biography of the Prophet and the *pak panjatan* in chaste Bangla<sup>114</sup>—his address in Karheya Road, Kolkata, had also become a printing-press that used to produce producing religious material in cheap prints<sup>115</sup>. If we follow his literary oeuvre, from writing to print and publishing, we would see it encompassing various genres, language registers, and themes catering to various kinds of Muslim readership, extending from urban centres to the remotest of villages.

*Anjumans*, in their nascent stages, and also periodicals, were instrumental in collecting subscriptions and recruiting volunteers, especially for the Russo-Turkish war<sup>116</sup> as I have already mentioned earlier in this chapter. Later they became quite crucial in mobilizing the rural masses in political terms, directly concerning Bengal as a region and also in terms of the national. The activities and arguments of the town or city-based elite or clergy were readily transferred to the rural masses in the form of *waz mehfils*<sup>117</sup> and also through cheap print and periodicals. The patrons of the *anjumans* were generally also the patrons of the *madrastas* or *maktabs* that they had

---

<sup>110</sup> *Bishuddha Bangla Kholachhatal Machhayel*, published by Haji Ajazuddin Ahmad, Kalikata, 1928.

<sup>111</sup> *Asol Brihat Muhammadiya Panjika*, published by Reyazuddin Ahmad, Kareya Road, Kalikata, 1302–1321/1895–1914.

<sup>112</sup> *Tohfatul Moslemin*, published by Shah Sha & Co, Kalikata, 1886.

<sup>113</sup> *Gris-turaska Juddha*, 1900, *Jange Rum O Yunan*, 1905.

<sup>114</sup> *Hazrat Muhammad Mostafa (Chaa:) er Jibancharit*, Upper Chitpur Road, 1927, *Pak Panjatan*, Upper Chitpur Road, 1928.

<sup>115</sup> Published by Reyazuddin Ahmad.

<sup>116</sup> *Muhammadi Akhbar* wrote, “ভাইগণ! রাশিয়া লালচ ও আদাওতের সববে রুমের পরে চড়াই করিয়াছে, কারণ এই যে, মক্কা, বায়তুল মাকাদ্দস, মদিনা ও কারবালা হাত করিয়া মুসলমানদের ইমানে হানি করে তুর্কী মুসলমানেরা ইমানকে জান হইতে অধিক জানে; এই বিপদ টলিবার জন্য জোর, লাড়কা, জানমাল শুদ্ধা খোদার রাহে দিতে আছে। ৪ জুন, ১৮৭৭

<sup>117</sup> Munshi Meherullah initiated and proliferated this form in rural and semi-rural areas for the community of the Prophet.

founded, creating a new web of exposure to a Perso-Arabic language, Urdu and the basics of the scriptures. They also contributed to the local mosques and to trans-territorial activities.

The *anjumans*, not only contributed to generating communitarian cohesion through the path of religion, but also by involving different layers of the community for the sustenance of their activities. In many cases a network of branches evolved in time, keeping close connections with the central one across remote districts, which enabled them to mobilize the masses politically by inducing the notion of a trans-territorial Islamhood, or pan-Islamism. They also took on the necessary responsibility for the social-moral-economic upliftment of the masses by establishing *madrastas* and hostels and creating an ideological and material infrastructure for the Muslim society.

While this religio-socio-moral policy of the *anjumans* was motivating the community to shift towards another realm, with an emphasis on the performance of more structured daily obligations, other social organizations and literary societies were bringing forward major issues about language, culture, and society, and were sometimes supported in their initiatives by the *anjumans*.

When *Anjamane Islami* was established in 1855 by the English-educated Urdu-speaking Muslim public connected to the government service sectors, it was not surprising that it would work towards inculcating participation from the Muslims in the newly found culture of organizations and associations already active in raising issues related to religion, society, education, literature, culture, politics, nationalism, science and economy. The already well-established Hindu nationalist and Brahmo organizations and associations had contributed majorly in shaping new social paradigms of spirituality, patriotism, nationalism, humanism and rationalism<sup>118</sup>. When

---

<sup>118</sup> *Gouriya Samaj* of Prasanna Kumar Tagore (1823), *Dharma Sabha* of Radhakanta Deb (1828), Academic Sabha of Vivian Derozio (1828), *Brahmo Samaj* (1829), *Jnan Sandipan Sabha* (1830), *Tattwabodhini Sabha* of Debendranath Tagore (1838), *Hindu Mela*, etc.

*Anjamane Islami* was established, public dailies like *Somprakash* exclaimed that now this organization would unleash a critique of the absence of Muslim issues in administrative matters, which had not been done so far by the Muslims. This inability of the Muslims to critique government policies, according to *Somprakash*, had earned the Muslims in Bengal the name of ‘barbarians’. Now through the activities of organizations of this sort, alliance with the British government had become possible for Muslims, in the manner accomplished by the Hindus<sup>119</sup>. What began as an exclusively urban English-Urdu elite practice, in time, spread with a formidable force in the rural districts to awaken the Muslim masses from their deep-rooted slumber in terms of questions of identity and religiosity. Midnapore, Hooghly, Rajshahi, Dhaka, Chittagong, Bogra, Rangpur, and Faridpur all had more than one *anjuman*, which were creating a gradual connection between the religious clergy and the litterateurs, the educated and the semi-educated, the urban and the *mufassil*, and the *mufassil* and the rural. If we follow the development of the *anjumans* and their growth in the districts, we will be able to trace the shift from a North-India inclined Islamic fervour—with an emphasis on Urdu as the medium for Muslim ideals and identity, to a sensibility of being located in Bengal, which was to be articulated in Bangla<sup>120</sup>. These associations, while propagating an ideal of social coexistence with the Hindus, were instrumental in creating essential gaps with them in defining the Muslims as an exclusive religious community. The *anjumans* worked very hard to eradicate *shirk* and *bid’at*, which has already been discussed in a previous chapter, and became a very influential force in creating a new consciousness about the dissemination of Islamic ideals in print and through performance. Individual preachers or publishers were also connected to the network of *anjumans*, thus producing the crisscrossing and overlapping of ideas and activities that could

---

<sup>119</sup> যবনজাতির মধ্যে একাল পর্যন্ত কোন প্রকার সভা স্থাপন হয় নাই, গবর্নমেন্ট যাহা ইচ্ছা তাহা করুন, তাঁহাদিগের কার্যবিষয়ে যবনজাতি কোন কথাই উল্লেখ করেন না, ইহাতে সভা লোকেরা যবনগণকে অসভ্য বলেন। ... অধুনা নগরবাসী সম্ভ্রান্ত ও সদ্ধিধান যবনেরা আমাদিগের সেই দুঃখ নিবারণ করিলেন। *Somprakash*, 29 May, 1855, Binoy Ghosh, *Samayikpatre Banglar Samajchitra*,

<sup>120</sup> The *anjumans*, multifarious in their position, were instrumental in bridging the urban and the rural, the political and the religious, and we can make a complex discursive history of religiosity, education, economic demands from a study of their evolution and social function.

somehow forge a sense of belongingness to a broader collective despite apparent dissonances<sup>121</sup>.

Munshi Meherullah, with his comrades of *Islam Dharmottejika*, collected subscriptions for Munshi Naimuddin, who was not a direct member of Meherullah's association. That *Islam Dharmottejika* took a stand for Munshi Naimuddin to provide him with economic support in keeping with their ideological support to the cause Munshi Naimuddin was fighting for, that is, the legal battle with Musharraf Husain about *Gojiban*<sup>122</sup>. When members of the religious intelligentsia, like Reyazuddin Ahmad, Meyrazuddin Ahmad, and Shaikh Abdur Rahim of *Sudhakar* were invited to Jessore by Meherullah, their meeting was also a coming together of print and the functional performative ways of rejuvenating Islam, to make it palpable for the masses. Many *anjumans* were declared religious associations—like *Islam Dharmottejina*, *Anjamane Hemayate Islam*, *Anjamane Mainal Islam*, and *Rangpur Nurul Jama'at Islam*—which provided a material base for the translation of scripture, and the writing of biographies and narratives including those on the battle of Karbala. If we follow the location of the patrons, printers and publishers, we will notice the growth of a huge network between the land-owning patrons located in the rural districts, and the printers located in different quarters of Calcutta and also in other important towns of Bengal. It was not really surprising that the major centres of cheap print culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were actually located at the same places as the district *anjumans*. Tangail, Jessore, Mymensingh, Karatiya, Rajshahi, and Rangpur

---

<sup>121</sup> Periodicals connected to certain *anjumans* used to publish letters from other minor *anjumans* expressing their very localized demands. *Mihir O Sudhakar*, for example, published a letter from the editor of *Dhupchachiya Muhammadan Association* demanding the recruitment of a new local school inspector. Waqil Ahmad, p. 149. Shaikh Zamiruddin published 'Jatiya Musalman Samitir Anusthanpatra' on the Bogra chapter of the Central National Muhammadan Association, though he did not have any functional connection with the association. Ibid. p. 141.

<sup>122</sup> The legal battle that took place between Mir Musharraf Husain and Munshi Naimuddin regarding Husain's treatise *Go-Jibon* on the debate over cow-killing, subsequently culminated in several events of riot in North India. That the *Sudhakar Gosthi* supported Munshi Naimuddin in this matter, can be considered as being symbolic of their ideological position between what Husain adopted vis-à-vis language, and the connection between narrative and history, on the one hand and that of the religious intelligentsia on the other. To be discussed in more detail in a later section of this chapter.

were all such places, where the individual ambition of the patrons and printer-publishers aiming to awaken the Muslim masses with the idea and ideals of Islam, were being prominently inscribed into the history of books, when their names appeared in print on the title page of the published volumes. Even minor *anjumans*, otherwise not archived in the list of *anjumans*, like the *Kushtiya Mohamedan Association*, for example, came to be known when Mohammad Abdul Aziz referred to it as the publisher of his book entitled *Samkshiya Muhammad Charit*<sup>123</sup>. Mohammad Abdul Aziz was again a member of the *Nur-al Iman Samaj*, and his books were published by different *anjumans* in different districts, thus providing a connecting thread between the work of translation and print culture endorsed by different organizations of the period<sup>124</sup>. Reports on the policies and activities of the *anjumans* were regularly sent to the periodicals for publication, which resulted in the creation of a network of a reading public, now restructured as a religious community.

Some *anjumans* had core committee members from the traditional clergy who took care of basic Islamic education for the poorer sections of society. They, like *Sudhakar*, took the task of translation quite seriously. When the *anjumans* were instrumental in the translation or transcreation of Persian or Arabic works, a web of exchanges were put in place between patronization, print, and the publication of periodicals, through the acts of translation, and dissemination of the translated work. *Rangpur Nur-al Iman Samaj* (1884) had members with the highest formal education in traditional knowledge and those members created a committee to translate Imam Ghazali's *Kimiya-i-Sadat* into *Soubhagya Sparshamani* (5 volumes, 1895–1915). Based in Rajshahi, this *anjuman* with its periodical *Nur-al-Iman*, was a campaigner for Muslim religion, Muslim knowledge and Muslim sciences, as claimed by *Mihir O Sudhakar*<sup>125</sup>. This network might reveal its design when we take account of the mutual transactions and exchanges between

---

<sup>123</sup> Mohammad Abdul Aziz, *Samkshiya Muhammad Charit*, Mathuraloy Jantra, Kumarkhali, 1901.

<sup>124</sup> *Arabya O Parasy Madhupak* was published by *Rajshahi Anjamane Hemayate Islam* and *Rangpur Nur-al Iman. Islam Pracharak* (Aswin 1298 BS).

<sup>125</sup> *Mihir O Sudhakar* (25 Aswin, 1308 BS).



different *anjumans* and periodicals discernible in the transactions between the individual members of a specific *anjuman*, or between them and the religious intelligentsia publishing periodicals and writing books.

The location of these periodicals shows that the culture of reading and the printing-publishing industry had proliferated to the districts well beyond the print quarters of Calcutta. It was basically a network between periodicals, *anjumans*, and patronage which marked the location and dynamics of new sensibilities about the community and its core essence. Periodicals, along with the other paraphernalia of print culture and the performance of preaching, contributed majorly to the creation of the community, which was now becoming responsive to various national and pan-Islamic phenomena, and susceptible to the contemporary in a manner so far neither imagined nor experienced by the Muslim communities of Bengal. A new patronage system and the slow awakening of the traditional clergy, along with the work of the religious intelligentsia and the litterateurs, created a multifarious domain of periodicals inclined differently to religion, language, and literature, to form a distinct social identity for the Muslims of Bengal. Along with periodicals from Calcutta, others were beginning to be published from Barisal, Hooghly, Dhaka, Karatiya, Tangail, Pangsha, Shantipur, Jessore, Rajshahi, Kumarkhali, and Mymensingh, marking a thick cartography of deliberation and consciousness of a literary community<sup>126</sup>. A detailed analysis of the editorial stands and articles published in the periodicals shows the earnest zeal for the creation of an imagined community that was fraught with multiple inclinations and

---

<sup>126</sup> *Ajjannehar* (1874), Mir Musharraf Husain, Hooghly, *Muhammadi Akhbar* (1877), Qazi Abdul Khaleq, Sealdah, *Akhbare Islamia* (1884), Munshi Naimuddin, Karatiya, *Musalman* (1884), Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmad, Calcutta, *Naba Sudhakar* (1886), Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmad, Calcutta, *Ahmadi* (1886), Abdul Hamid Khan Yusufjai, Tangail, *Sudhakar* (1889), Shaikh Abdur Rahim, *Islam Pracharak* (1891), Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmad, Calcutta, *Mihir* (1892), Shaikh Abdur Rahim, Calcutta, *Hafez* (1892), Shaikh Abdur Rahim, Calcutta, *Mihir O Sudhakar* (1895), Shaikh Abdur Rahim, Calcutta, *Kohinur* (1898), Mohammad Raoshan Ali Chaudhury, Pangsha, *Nur al-Iman* (1900), Mirza Mohammad Yusuf Ali, Rajshahi, *Soltan* (1901), M Najiruddin Ahmad, Kumarkhali, *Nur al Islam* (1901), Munshi Meherullah, Jessore, *Balak* (1901), A K Fajlul Hoque, Barishal, *Mohammadi* (1903), Mohammad Akram Khan, Calcutta, *Hanifi* (1903), Nurul Husain Kasimpuri, Mymensingh *Islam Darshan*, Mohammad Abdul Hakim, *Ahl e Hadis*, Babur Ali.

For a detailed list, *Muslim Bangladye Samayikpatre Jibon O Janamat*, Anisujjaman,

engagements. It was a time when the new reading public, i.e. the consumers, became producers by becoming editors of periodicals themselves, and often had their own printing presses, through which, they contributed to creating public opinion and orientations that became markers of the imagined community that they were heading towards.

#### **4.2.2 Between Mr. Abdur Rahim and Shaikh Abdul Rahim: Bangla as *Jatiya***

If there is such practice of language-use by the colonized race, the fire of independence lights up a bit, this is assured<sup>127</sup>.

Gopalchandra Sastri, “Muslim Literature”, *Nabyabharat Patrika*,  
Volume IX, 1300 BS

Shaikh Abdur Rahim, in his article entitled ‘Bangla Language and the Muslim Society’ adopted the familiar rhetoric of the itinerant religious preachers to illustrate his mission of spreading Bangla as the language of the Muslims of Bengal. His ideology of language was targeted at producing Bangla as the medium through which the darkness of ignorance of the common Muslims of Bengal could be dispelled, with the production of *jatiya sahitya* in the mother tongue—Bangla<sup>128</sup>. It was, in actuality, an ideological stance assumed by the religious intelligentsia connected to *Sudhakar* who believed that it was the absence and lack of religious knowledge and religious ideals that had caused such backwardness in the Muslim communities of Bengal. Using a revivalist rhetoric, signified by the use of the prefix ‘re-’ or ‘*punoh-*’ this group formulated a *jatiya* in order to regain the lost honour of the community. It was not sufficient for the Bengali Muslim religious intelligentsia to formulate a *jatiya* following the

---

<sup>127</sup> পরাধীন জাতির মধ্যে একরূপ ভাষার চর্চা থাকিলে, স্বাধীনতার বহি কয়ং পরিমাণে উদ্দীপ্ত হইতে পারে, এমন ভরসা করা যায়।

<sup>128</sup> সে চিন্তাটি এই যে- কেমন করিয়া আমার প্রিয়তমা স্বজাতি বাঙালী মুসলমানদিগের মধ্যে বাঙ্গালা ভাষার অবাধ প্রচার করিব, কেমন করিয়া তাহাদের ভ্রান্ত কুহেলিকা ও জড়তা মচন করিয়া তাহাদিগকে মাতৃভাষার পুণ্যমন্দিরে লইয়া আসিব এবং কেমন করিয়া তাঁহাদের মনের মধ্যে মাতৃভাষার সাহায্যে জাতীয় সাহিত্য গঠনের প্রেরণা জাগাইয়া দিব। *Shaikh Abdur Rahim Granthabali*, Vol II, p. 218.

north-Indian template, by devising a knowledge system based on Urdu literary-religious activities alone. Rather, the Bengal Muslims had to identify not only with a *jatiya* encompassing pan-Islamic ideals, but also needed to posit a set of differences from the Urdu-based Muslimness in order to address their ‘locatedness’, which could not be expressed through Urdu. Thus, the anxiety to establish the mother tongue, Bangla, as the bearer of the *jatiya*, led to the realization of a *jatiya*—to be articulated in Bangla—and was disseminated in the sector of education, in forms of social upliftment, for communicating religious knowledge, and in the attempts to retrieve history and in the formulation of literary genres.

*Kalikata Muslim Shikkhasabha* was established<sup>129</sup> by Mr. Abdur Rahim (1867–1952)<sup>130</sup>, Magistrate of Northern Calcutta Presidency, to look into the educational development of the Muslims. The organization proposed the establishment of an ‘ideal’ *maktab* in the Karheya area, which would prioritize vocational training<sup>131</sup> with Urdu as its language of instruction and education. The essential connection between Urdu and the Muslim *jatiya*, as affirmed by Dr Edward Denison Ross<sup>132</sup>, the Principal of Calcutta Madrasa, and its unanimous acceptance of this connection, put the Bangla speaking intelligentsia at great unease and despair. *Mihir O Sudhakar* categorically objected to this elite attempt to impose a North Indian Muslimness as the master-key to understanding and formulating Muslimness in Bengal, and proclaimed the Urdu-speaking self-appointed elites unfit to be representatives of the Bengal Muslims<sup>133</sup>.

---

<sup>129</sup> Waqil Ahmad deduced that the date must have been between 1900 and 1902, p. 178.

<sup>130</sup> Mr Abdur Rahim, as he was addressed in *Mihir O Sudhakar*, was educated in Presidency College and studied law in Britain. His lectures on law came out in a book entitled *Principles of Muhammedan Jurisprudence*. He was a representative in the Shimla Deputation and his ideological contribution in the formation of the Muslim League is looked upon with reverence. He was generally a practitioner of Urdu and English.

<sup>131</sup> Sayed Ameer Ali proposed the idea of this kind of training.

<sup>132</sup> তৎপরে মি. রস প্রস্তাব করিলেন যে, মক্তবে উর্দু ভাষায় শিক্ষা দেওয়া হইবে, কেননা বাঙ্গালা ভাষায় শিক্ষা হইবে এবং বাংলা ভাষায় শিক্ষা দিলে মুসলমানের জাতীয়তা অর্ধেক বিনষ্ট হইবে এবং বাংলা ভাষা মুসলমানদিগকে হীনবীর্য করিয়া ফেলিবে। *Mihir O Sudhakar*, 13 Asharh, 1309

<sup>133</sup> আবদুর রহিম সাহেব বাঙ্গালা দেশের মুসলমান; তিনি এখন উচ্চ শিক্ষায় শিক্ষিত হইয়া ও উচ্চপদে সমাসীন হইয়া তাঁহার বঙ্গদেশীয় ভ্রাতাগণকে ভুলিয়া কতিপয় হিন্দুস্তানী ভ্রাতার শিক্ষার উন্নতিকল্পে যত্নবান হইয়াছেন। আর আমাদের বঙ্গীয় গবর্নমেন্টের নিকট উহার উন্নতিকল্পে যত্নবান হইয়াছেন। ... কলিকাতাস্থ

The religious intelligentsia trying to make a case for Bangla was not only looking at religious knowledge as it had been traditionally understood. It was for them ‘*samajshiksha*’<sup>134</sup>, i.e. religion as social knowledge, an aspect which had not been undertaken or achieved so far in the traditional education system. No matter how much antagonism there was between the more liberal *Sudhakar* and the stricter *Islam Pracharak*, they came together on the basis of their common choice of Bangla as the language for conceiving and spreading religious knowledge, which was reformulated to address a competitive contemporary reality. But while *Sudhakar* was proposing a reformulated knowledge system based on history and biography, traditionalist platforms like *Ahl-e-Hadis* and *Eslam Darshan* were rethinking the traditional knowledge base and their approach towards religion, which had remained traditionalist because of their preference for a hardcore scriptural Islamic education system for the Muslims of Bengal. But while the editorials of *Ahl-e-Hadis* and *Islam Darshan* were expressing the need for a traditional scripture-based education system, articles published in these periodicals were reflecting much more nuanced ideas about language, identity, history, and the troubled relation with the Hindus and the British government.

There is no madrasa in Bengal where higher level of scriptural Islam is being taught. If you desire to achieve honourable positions like the eminent personalities of the past, then wake up, establish a *madrasa* where only Islamic scriptures will be studied.

(From the lecture by Maulana Abul Ofa Sanaullah Amritsari, Editor, *Ahle-Hadis*, delivered at the All India *Ahl-e-Hadis* Conference, 1915, *Ahle Hadis*<sup>135</sup>)

---

কথিত জননেতাগণ বঙ্গীয় মুসলমানের পক্ষ হইতে যে-সকল কার্যের অনুষ্ঠান করেন, তাহাতে তাঁহাদের স্বার্থ বিজড়িত তাহাতে বঙ্গীয় মুসলমানগণের উপকারের আশা কিছুমাত্রই নাই। Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Maulavi Abdul Karim, Inspector of Schools in Chittagong District, in his 1906 book, differentiated between religion that was being inadequately taught in the *madrasa* system, and religion as a means and method of acquiring social knowledge. Discussed in *Islam-Chitra O Samaj- Chitra*, Shaikh Abdul Jabbar, 1320, Mymensingh, p. 61.

<sup>135</sup> *Ahle Hadis*, Year II, No. vi (Falgun 1323BS): p. 250.

To spread scriptural Islamic knowledge, establish *madrasas* and *maktabs*, especially a higher level *jatiya madrasa*. This is your contemporary *jihad*—this is your *dharmajuddha*.

—published in *Ahle-Hadis*<sup>136</sup>

The editors of *Ahle-Hadis* and *Islam Darshan*, Abul Ofa Sanaullah Amritsari and Maulavi Abdul Hakim respectively, suggested the path of scriptural Islam as a survival strategy necessary to regain ideological and social power. This may seem to be echoing the intentions, attempts and the considerable achievements accomplished by the *Sudhakar* group and its paraphernalia—but in the *Sudhakar* group’s formulation of *jatiya*, a curious status of Bangla had been created through the reclamation of religion, and also in the formulation of history and biography as literary genres. What we can see is a phenomenal overlap and seepage between a consciousness about religion and inclination on the one hand, and an engagement with modern literary genres on the other. This resulted in a formulation of Bangla as the language of *jatiya sahitya* carrying the impulse of religion and also of the language of religion that had made its tryst with literary genres.

In the pages following the dedication page of *Islam-Chitra O Samaj-Chitra*, another book written by the same author was advertised to allure the common reader to the values of Islam as represented by the life of the Prophet. The exceptional qualities of this book were highlighted in all their material excellence—with the description of the imported ‘antique’ paper it was printed on, the blue and red inks used for the text, the gold embossed title, and the superior binding in its beautiful silk jacket—to juxtapose with the radiant and intriguing life of the Prophet, and was presented as a potential prized possession. What was equally highlighted with the physical form of the book, and the revered life it spoke of, was the language—described as *manoharini*, alluring, lucid and sweet—such was the quality of

---

<sup>136</sup> *Ahle Hadis*, Year II, No. viii (Baishakh 1324BS): p. 370.

Bangla that was offered by the market which distributed this book on the life of the Prophet as a repository of Islamic ideals<sup>137</sup>.

We should remember that the first generation of graduates coming from the urban elite section of the Muslim society reconfirmed the prevalent *ashraf-atraf* divide through an Urdu-Bangla separation. Delwar Husain Ahmad, Saiyad Ameer Ali, Abdur Rahim, Abdur Karim, Abdul Rasul, Mohammad Ibrahim, Saiyad Samshul Huda, Sirajul Islam, and Abdul Latif remained bilingual with the use of English and Urdu in their public and private transactions. Their fear towards using Bangla or giving Bangla a valid status as the medium of transaction for the Muslims was tempered by an anxiety of being irrevocably marked with a localized identity for the Muslims. The search for an authentic identity in immigration theory, so vehemently put forward by Khondakar Fuzli Rubbee<sup>138</sup>, set them apart from the vernacular speaking Muslim masses, socially, functionally and ideologically. Even if there was some conceivable connection with Bangla, it was because Bangla had become the official language of the public sector, not because this class had any emotional or identitarian connection with the language. In this discourse of the authentic, conversion and localization were seen as drawbacks, as black spots that they had to deal with in order to identify themselves as Muslims. The pan-Islamic fervour was unilinear for this class, whereas the vernacular-speaking Muslim intelligentsia was caught between the pan and the local, oscillating between these two poles.

The Bangla speaking intelligentsia, the religious authorities, and the litterateurs remained utterly critical towards this elitist approach and understanding of Bangla. When Kamruddin Ahmad critiqued this Urdu-speaking elite class, he categorically mentioned the lack of patriotism in

---

<sup>137</sup> এমন মনোহারিণী ভাষায়, এমন অভিনব সাজে ধর্ম-প্রতিষ্ঠাতার সর্বাঙ্গ-সুন্দর জীবনী এই নূতন। বিলাতী এন্টিক কাগজে লাল ও ব্লু কালিতে দুই রঙ্গে মনোহর ছাপা, নয়ন-মন-মুগ্ধকর সিল্কের কাপড়ে বিলাতি বাঁধাই; সোনার জলে চকচকে নাম লেখা। এমন উজ্জ্বল চরিত্র মাপুর্ষ, এমন চিত্তাকর্ষক জীবনী গ্রন্থ বঙ্গভাষায় নিতান্তই দুর্লভ। ভাষা সরল ও মধুর। মূল্য ১ টাকা মাত্র।

<sup>138</sup> Khondnakar Fuzli Rubbee, 1895.

this class, which did not accept Bangla as their mother tongue and Bengal as their mother-land<sup>139</sup>. Nawab Abdul Latif argued against Sayid Amir Husain's proposal for a modern college by validating instead a traditional *madrasa* education, and knowledge of Arabic and Persian to acquire a 'respectable position in Mahomedan society', and of English to gain 'influence in society'<sup>140</sup> without giving any consideration to Bangla and the Bangla-speaking masses.

Abdul Latif sharply bifurcated the use of language, and assigned a Bangla purified with the thick presence of Arabic and Persian words for the lower class Muslims, and Urdu as the vernacular for the middle and upper classes. This resulted in a socio-linguistic schism between the lower classes and upper classes of the Muslims where the in-between Muslims always tried to detach themselves from Bangla in the fear of being marked as less-authentic. A class made of the Urdu-speaking rural *ashraf* and the elite class, which had migrated from UP and Bihar to live in Bengal, was accompanied by traditional *mullahs*, who, without any knowledge either in English or in Bangla, could not be a part of the new education systems. When reformers like Meherullah, and clergy like Naimuddin, along with the religious intelligentsia like the *Sudhakar* group started converting scriptural texts into Bangla, these traditional *mullahs* opposed vehemently, fearing an ideological contamination of the Islamic by the vernacular. But the litterateurs of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal continued with their efforts and advocated the learning of Persian and Urdu along with Arabic. Though Mir Musharraf Husain radicalized the theme of Karbala by writing the first prose narrative on the battle, and there was no evidence that he had studied Arabic and Persian properly, he too underlined the necessity of learning Persian and Urdu for the Muslim public. English or Bangla by themselves, according to Musharraf Husain, could not fetch honour to the Bengal Muslims. In an article named 'Our Learning' he exclaimed, "If we cannot maintain *jatiya* essences, if we are incapable of protecting the tools for

---

<sup>139</sup> Kamruddin Ahmad, *Purba Banglar Samaj O Rajniti*, Students' Publication, Dhaka, 1374, pp. 17–18.

<sup>140</sup> *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif: His Writings and Related Documents*, p. 23.

engaging with matters of *jatiya* education, or *jatiya* politics, then we are indeed faced with a crisis, a great embarrassment.”<sup>141</sup>. The sense of honour associated with these languages was not only cultural in essence, though Musharraf Husain was much invested in defining the cultural aspect of these languages. In the contemporary period, exposure to Urdu and Persian meant exposure to scriptural and discursive texts. The Bengal Muslims were becoming inherently polyvalent in terms of identification, and multilingual in terms of its expression. It was the *Sudhakar* group that tried to put Bangla on the same pedestal with Urdu or Persian through their acts of translation. For them, the content of *jatiya* was the same as what Musharraf Husain was attempting to convey, but the carrier and bearer of this *jatiya* was Bangla.

But what is important to note here is, while translating scriptural texts to Bangla, *Sudhakar* accepted and highlighted Urdu-nationalism as the ideological and literary template for the creation of Bangla as the bearer of an Islamic *bhab* for the vernacular Muslims. It can be said that while they were critical about the educational policy and cultural ideology of the Urdu-speaking elite of Bengal, they were looking up to what had already been done in Arabic-Persian and local languages in several other provinces. They lamented over the fact that the reason for the degradation of the Bengal Muslims was the absence of any *jatiya* life, a *jatiya* life that had already been achieved by the Muslims of Punjab and UP by envisaging connections between scriptures and their mother tongues<sup>142</sup>. What Maulavi Shaikh Abdul Jabbar advocated in *Islam-Chitra O Samaj-Chitra* in a section entitled ‘*Jatiya jibaner abhab*’ was seconded and practised by the members of the *Sudhakar* group as they adopted the template of the work that had been done in Urdu by the Urdu-speaking North Indian intelligentsia for

---

<sup>141</sup> জাতীয় বিদ্যার আলাপ, জাতীয় রীতিনীতি পদ্ধতি রক্ষা করিতে না পারিলে, না জানিলে, এক প্রকার বিপদ, অপ্রস্তুতের একশেষ। “আমাদের শিক্ষা”, *Adhunik Bangla Sahitye Muslim Sadhana*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p. 326.

<sup>142</sup> Shaikh Abdul Jabbar referred to the activities of *anjumans* in Lahore, Punjab, Delhi, Aligarh and Lucknow where the systems of *anjumans* and *madradas* were instrumental in proliferating books in Urdu, English and Punjabi to awaken local Muslims as a community. He categorically emphasized their efforts in writing primers, and publishing newspapers, journals and periodicals. *Islam-Chitra O Samaj-Chitra*, p. 32.



their own activities, that is the translation of scriptural and discursive texts for the inculcation of a *jatiya bhab* among the vernacular masses. While remaining antagonistic to the linguistic exclusionism of the Urdu-elite of Bengal, they never misjudged or disqualified the impact and importance of Urdu as the lingua-franca of the pan-Indian Muslims.

What this Bengali intelligentsia envisioned and employed was a more nuanced structure of identity formation for the Bengal Muslims, which was inflected by pan-Islamic, pan-Indian and local-regional political-cultural and creative tensions. When Bangla was being cultivated as the medium for imparting knowledge about the Muslim community, it was never meant to be used for creation of a Muslimness solely in terms of a disconnected regional named Bengal. It was always the imagination of a trans-regional and trans-national community for which Bangla was posited as the *jatiya* within a network of certain other universals (via Urdu, about Perso-Arabic universals pertaining to Islam). Mohammad Akram Khan, the editor of *Mohammadi*, in his presidential lecture at the *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Sammelan* said, “Urdu is not our mother tongue, not our *jatiya* language either. But to maintain and preserve *jatiyataa* for the Indian Muslims we need Urdu<sup>143</sup>. Reyazuddin Ahmad traced the root cause for the degradation of the Bengal Muslims to the Bengal Muslim’s disconnection with Urdu, caused by the predominance of Bangla as the mother tongue. This thesis was developed by Reyazuddin to explain the status of Bengal Muslims as lacking the *jatiya*, and as feeble, weak and vulnerable<sup>144</sup>. But, to negotiate with their separation from the Muslims in other provinces of India, Reyazuddin neither thought it necessary to impose an Urdu paradigm over the vernacular masses, nor was he separating the vernacular degraded masses from the Urdu speaking community. Rather, a large section of the religious intelligentsia, as mentioned before, launched rigorous efforts to

---

<sup>143</sup> *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, Magh 1325, cited in Waqil Ahmad, p. 510.

<sup>144</sup> উর্দু ভাষা না থাকিলে আজ ভারতীয় মোসলমানগণ জাতীয় ভাবহীন ও কিরূপ দুর্দশাগ্রস্ত হইত, তাহা চিন্তা করিবার বিষয়। বাঙ্গলা দেশের মোসলমানদিগের মাতৃভাষা বাঙ্গলা হওয়াতে বঙ্গীয় মোসলমানজাতির সর্বনাশ হইয়াছে। এই কারণে তারা জাতীয়তাবিহীন, নিস্তেজ, দুর্বল ও কাপুরুষ হইয়া গিয়াছে। ... ভারতের অন্যান্য প্রদেশের মোসলমানগণ হইতে তাহারা এই ভাষা বিভ্রাটে বিচ্ছিন্ন হইয়া পড়িয়াছে। Introduction, *Hazrat Mohammad Mostafa*, Soleimani Press, Kalikata, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1355.

create a Bangla equivalent to the pan-Indian *jatiya*. Their primary aim was the dissemination of the ideals of Islam to the vernacular Muslims, and the invocation of a *jatiya* through it<sup>145</sup>.

Jamaluddin Afghani's core book on pan-Islamism was translated as *Eslam Tattwa* by the *Sudhakar* collective in Kalikata (which included Reyazuddin Mashhadi, Shaikh Abdur Rahim, et al) and Ghazzali's *Kimiyaye Sa'adat* was translated by Mirza Yusuf with the help of a few learned clergy in Rajshahi. Both were deliberate attempts to bring the knowledge and science of Islam to a common mass that had so far been immersed in *qissa* and traditional literary narratives<sup>146</sup>. The second edition also pointed out that the book intended to restore, to the brothers and sisters of one's own country and of one's own race<sup>147</sup>, the honour that they had lost.

Writing in Bangla was also a schematic programme to let the neighbour know what Islam was, and how Muslim society and culture had flourished beyond compare in the classical age of the Prophet and his companions. Without any knowledge of Persian or Arabic, not only were the common masses unable to know of the glory that they had had as Muslims, the Hindus were also ignorant of the glorious civilizational truth of its apparently degraded neighbour. Use of Bangla was thus a means to self-preservation, self-sustenance and self-defence, an ingredient to creating a counter-narrative to Hindu nationalism.

This is why *dharma*, or religion, became the issue central to redefining *jati* and the *jatiya*—encompassing the society, culture, education, and moral status of the Muslim community. From *Sudhakar* to *Eslam Pracharak*, from *Ahl-e-Hadis* to *Islam Darshan*, the literary culture focused on explicating a

---

<sup>145</sup> Waqil Ahmad, p. 251.

<sup>146</sup> Mirza Yusuf Ali (ed), Introduction to *Soubhagya Sparshamani*, Vol. I, Kalikata, 1963, as cited in Waqil Ahmad, p. 252.

<sup>147</sup> বঙ্গদেশে বঙ্গভাষায় অদ্য এক অপূর্ব গ্রন্থ প্রকাশ হইতে চলিল। হাতেম তাই, আমীর হামজা, গলে বকাওলী, সোনাভান, জৈগুণ, বিদ্যাসুন্দর ও নানাপ্রকার নাটক-নভেল প্লাবিত দেশে ইহার কিরূপ সম্মান হইবে তাহা অনুবাদক সমাজ জানে না। ... স্বদেশীয় স্বজাতীয় ভ্রাতাভগিনীদিগকে জ্ঞানের একটা নতুন পথ প্রদর্শন করা এবং তাহাদিগকে ধর্মতত্ত্ব ও ধর্মবিজ্ঞান বুঝাইয়া দেওয়াই এই অনুবাদের উদ্দেশ্য। Ibid.

sense of the community informed by ethico-religious terms. By understanding Islam as inherently logical, based on socio-moral values, and expounded ethically, the culture of the Bengal Muslims was elucidated as a counter-narrative to narrative-pleasure and any sort of performative indulgence, ritualistic or quotidian<sup>148</sup>. So, gradually, the *jatiya* essence, based on the ethical framework of religion, was made the crux of *jatiya* literature. These social groups tended to separate themselves from the idea of the autonomy of literary genres and narratives, and kept a critical moralistic distance from anything unconnected to Islamic religious ideals. It was only much later, in order to explore the autonomy of Bangla literature written by Muslim authors, that there would be several attempts to delink it from the overt religious fervour apparent in the literary activities of the periodicals in the twenties and thirties<sup>149</sup>.

It was a struggle in the beginning to claim Bangla as the language of the Muslims too. We can see constant efforts being made by the advocates of Bangla to convince the Hindu intelligentsia and the Muslim traditionalists about their own eligibility and about the viability of Bangla. The Bangla attempted by the Muslim intelligentsia, like Mirza Mohammad Yusuf Ali, for instance, with residual Arabic and Persian words which were prevalent in the common vocabulary of the Muslims, was not accepted by the Hindu Bangla intelligentsia. After Yusuf Ali's *Dugdha-Sarobar* (Ocean of Milk) was published by the *Nur-al Iman Samaj Anjuman*<sup>150</sup>, their periodical *Nur-al Iman* reported a response from a Hindu author of a daily who sarcastically refused to "taste" the milk that had been "brought to the boil in a Muslim kitchen"<sup>151</sup>.

The attempts and experiments made by the Muslim authors with Bangla in the following years gradually fetched high praise, attention and admiration

---

<sup>148</sup> Antagonism towards the physical, lived and ritualistic—*milad*, *urs* and *muharram* has been discussed in detail in the previous chapters, while charting out the relationship between print and popular piety. We will try to chart out a continuity of this antagonism in a more standardized culture of print as a form of *jatiya* literature in the next chapter.

<sup>149</sup> To be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>150</sup> Mirza Muhammad Yusuf Ali, *Dugdha-Sarobar*, Binod Press, Boalia (Rajshahi), 1914.

<sup>151</sup> *Islam Pracharak* (Aswin–Kartik 1310 BS).

from the Hindu intelligentsia and litterateurs, but their surprise towards Muslims writing such flawless Bangla only reaffirmed the hegemonic Hindu nationalist inability to relate to the culture of Bangla coming out of the Muslim community<sup>152</sup>. Perhaps their surprise, praise, and admiration only confirmed a release of anxiety with the emergence of a monolithic Sanskritized Bangla superseding a Muslim one.

While the *Sudhakar* group's use of Bangla was meant strictly for the reconstruction of Islamic knowledge systems, factions within *Sudhakar* gradually extended themselves to address the question of literature and the literary in their own writings and periodicals. We can see how several members of the intelligentsia who were editing and writing in various journals and periodicals, were not always fully in consensus with the editorial policies. Reyazuddin Ahmad, editor of *Islam Pracharak*, while intermittently editing and writing in *Mihir* and *Mihir O Sudhakar*, critiqued the inclusion of theatre advertisements and reviews in *Mihir O Sudhakar* in *Islam Pracharak*<sup>153</sup>. However, there was a well-articulated demarcation between the different editorial policies and ideological stances of *Mihir*, *Mihir O Sudhakar* and *Islam Pracharak*. *Islam Pracharak*, as the bearer of pan-Islamism, and instrumental in purifying the Muslim society of Hindu sensibilities, remained orthodox in its attitude and also skeptical towards the activities of the Indian National Congress and the nationalist movement. While *Mihir* and *Mihir O Sudhakar* were more interested in creating a holistic approach to literature, science, mythology, sociology and contemporary issues, *Islam Pracharak* intended to disseminate Islamic theology, sociology, history and literature, with literature brought under the rubrics of Islamic knowledge. *Mihir* categorically declared that “*Mihir* is not a periodical on religion”, and that “*Mihir* is a monthly on literature and history”<sup>154</sup>.

---

<sup>152</sup> To be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>153</sup> *মিহির ও সুধাকর* থিয়েটারের লম্বাচওড়া সমালোচনা বাহির করিয়া মুসলমান গ্রাহক ও ও পাঠকদিগকে ভীষণ নরকের দিকে আহ্বান করিতেছে। *Islam Pracharak* (Magh–Phalgun 1306 BS).

<sup>154</sup> Waqil Ahmad, p. 387.

We might want to consider these particular stands taken by *Mihir* and *Mihir O Sudhakar* in order to understand later interests that emerged towards inducing a certain kind of literary autonomy, and actualizing a sense of the literary in Bangla literature practised by the Muslim authors. This literariness, which had been so skillfully inaugurated by Mir Musharraf Husain in *Bishad Sindhu*, as also by Mojammel Hoque and Kaykobad, was carried forward by Nazrul Islam along with hundreds of other minor authors and poets. Shaikh Abdur Rahim marked the shift from *Musalmani*-Bangla to a chaste Sanskritic Bangla achieved by the Bengal Muslim authors as an event of pride for Bengal. He was quite clear in saying that in the same way that no progress can be achieved in Bengal without the combined effort of the Hindus and the Muslims, Bangla as a language could not flourish either without the combined literary efforts of both communities<sup>155</sup>. The thematically wide range of *Mihir* was truncated with Shaikh Abdur Rahim having stabilized his position in *Hafez*<sup>156</sup>, where he categorically stated in the introduction to the first issue of *Hafez* that the periodical intended to wake up the indulgent and slumberous Muslims, and blessed with the mercy of the compassionate one, it was going to tell the glorious stories of past times, about devotionism and the sacred duties of religion. In *Hafez*, the literariness of Bangla and the thematic variations of its contents were subsumed under its religious intentions. We will see how this argument about the internal connection between literature and religion was underplayed in some instances, truncated in others, and produced in yet others as the basic condition.

But what remained the most productive, nuanced, and polyvalent was the notion of the configuration of an identity for the Bengal Muslims, which continued to be multifarious and fractured and overlapping in responding to the question of *jatiya*, and to the politics of language use.

---

<sup>155</sup> অতি অল্পদিন পূর্বে মুসলমানী বাংলা হিন্দুর অপার্য ছিল। কিন্তু শিক্ষার উন্নতি সহকারে এখন হিন্দু-মুসলমানের লেখা প্রভেদ করা যায় না। ...মুসলমানগণ সংস্কৃতজ্ঞ হিন্দুর ন্যায় খাঁটি বাংলা লিখিতেছেন ইহা বঙ্গদেশের গৌরবের বিষয়। হিন্দু-মুসলমানের সমবেত চেষ্টা ভিন্ন যেমন এদেশে কোনও হিতকর কার্যই সুসম্পন্ন হইবে না, তেমন এই দুই জাতির পূর্ণ চেষ্টা ভিন্ন বঙ্গভাষার শ্রীবৃদ্ধি হওয়াও অসম্ভব।

<sup>156</sup> *Hafez*, edited by Shaikh Abdur Rahim, got published between 1892 and 1897. It was published first as quarterly and then as a monthly periodical.

#### 4.2.3 Saiyad Emdad Ali and Mohammad Emdad Ali<sup>157</sup>: The question of *jatiya unnati* (socio-moral uplift) and *jatiya sahitya*

*Nabanur* began with a promise to carry on with the responsibility of igniting a passion for literature among the Muslims of Bengal. The editor Saiyad Emdad Ali<sup>158</sup> and his associates<sup>159</sup>, by pointing out the positive impact of literature on society, declared the purity of their intention—of serving the mother tongue with all of their might. That only the practice of literary culture could uplift the *jatiya* life from the passivity and depression that had befallen the contemporary Muslim community<sup>160</sup>, was admitted unanimously by almost all the members of this Muslim public in justifying their urge to define and produce a *jatiya sahitya*. While this causality between *sahitya-charcha* (cultivation of literature) in chaste Bangla and socio-moral upgradation continued to be maintained in other literary journals like *Saogat*, *Bulbul* and *Shikha*, chaste Bangla was the language of treatises and books which directly addressed socio-moral-religious issues to build *jatiya bhab* for the community.

The need for Bangla as the medium was felt by the traditional clergy and litterateurs alike. The location of the community—as *Bangadeshiya* (of

---

<sup>157</sup> Zaheer Abbas, throughout his MA dissertation, refers to Mohammad Emdad Ali as only Emdad Ali and discusses only one text by Ali which neither identifies the author fully, nor contextualizes his literary corpus in this process. Zaheer Abbas, ‘Construction of Bengali Muslim Identity in Colonial Bengal, c.1870-1920’, thesis submitted to the faculty of University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for MA at the Department of History, 2010.

<sup>158</sup> Saiyad Emdad Ali (1876–1956) was the editor of a literary journal *Nabanur*, Ahmad Sharif, ‘Sayid Emdad Alir Sadhana’, *Saptahik Prabah*, Year I, Vol. IV, 30 Agraphayan, 1363, 15 December 1956, pp. 127–128.

<sup>159</sup> It was the collective effort of Saiyad Emdad Ali, Qazi Imdadul Hoque, Mohammad Hedayetullah and Mohammad Asad Ali to conceptualize and initiate such a literary journey.

<sup>160</sup> “... মাতৃভাষার সেবাব্রতে দীক্ষিত হইবার জন্যই আমরা বাহিরের পুন্যালোকে ছুটিয়া আসিয়াছি। ... মুসলমানগণ সকল বিষয়ে পশ্চাৎপদ হইয়া পড়িয়াছে এবং তাহাদের জাতীয় জীবনে অবসাদই যেন একাধিপত্য বিস্তার করিয়াছে। ... পতিত মুসলমানকে উন্নত করিবার, উদ্ধার করিবার একমাত্র অবলম্বন সাহিত্য। সাহিত্য দ্বারাই জাতীয় জীবনের শক্তি উপস্থিত হয় এবং যদি কখনও মুসলমান জাতি নিজের পদে ভর করিয়া দণ্ডায়মান হইতে সক্ষম হয়, তবে তাহা সাহিত্য-চর্চালব্ধ শক্তি দ্বারাই হইবে”। Waqil Ahmad, p. 395.

Bengal), or its locational quality as *Bangiya* (Bengali in character or origin)—was repeatedly referred to as qualitative adjectives for the Muslims in religious, literary and social treatises.

The twenties and thirties witnessed the proliferation of the literary journals mentioned above, and the simultaneous mass production of treatises advocating the right way of living based on Islamic scriptures. Provincial *anjumans* and also *anjumans* located in Calcutta, through a network of print and publishing, produced texts that were on religious duties and belief, *ada'ab* and *iman*. *Anjumans* in Calcutta, advocating for a *mazhabi Hanafi* Islam, like *Anjumane Waizine Bangla*, *Anjumane Ulamaye Bangla*, and also provincial *anjumans* in Faridpur, Rangpur and Mymensingh with their periodicals like *Islam Darshan* and *Mohammadi* and *Ahl e Hadis* were fixated on addressing Muslims in 'Bengal' and in Bangla for the advocacy of their form of Islam. Social texts on *iman* or *farz*, along with texts on religious ideals were very much preoccupied in creating an ideal form of Islam for the Muslims of Bengal. Emdad Ali wrote *Koo Riti Barjan* (On the Eradication of Evil Social Practices) in 1922 with the patronage of Hajji Nasiruddin Ahmed, who was a follower of Pir Abu Bakr of Furfura, the most revered and influential *Hanafi* authority to have shaped the contours of Muslim community in the first decades of the twentieth century. There were several *Hanafi* and *Mohammadi* texts and treatises—saturating the cheap print market and covering a readership, that extended from Kolkata to Karatiya—which were not only written in lucid chaste Bangla but also used a residual *Musalmani*-Bangla, and simultaneously claimed their position in the gamut of Bangla texts written for the Bengal Muslims.

In this section I will discuss the different emotional-functional positions present within Bangla—considered as a socio-moral language unit in itself—which might not let us conceive one monolithic Bangla. Rather, a discussion of inclinations and intentions attached to the processes of identification of a language called Bangla for the Bengal Muslims will be productive for us in understanding the dynamics of identification for the Muslim community in Bengal.

We see that even when Arabic titles were kept intact, following Naimuddin's paradigm, it was a lucid Bangla that was borrowed by authors from the prose tradition authored by the Hindu intelligentsia in order to write a text, or to translate from an Arabic-Persian-Urdu original. Sometimes a Bengali equivalent title was added, or an explanatory phrase was attached along with the Arabic title. *Tawazzaye Ahsaniya* by Moulavi Sayid Hafizullah (1332/1925) not only had the Bangla equivalent 'Diksha' in brackets appearing with the Arabic title, the narrative also used a couplet strikingly similar to the *Brahmasangeet*<sup>161</sup> repertoire to offer an explanation of *Bismillah* written in Arabic<sup>162</sup>.

In *Tawazzaye Ahsaniya*, the author reaffirms in the preface that it was the scarcity of scriptural texts in Bangla that had created such a religiously ignorant population. Then he went on to explain that it was because of the Hindu nationalists and the ritualistic practices of the lower class Muslims that Islam has earned such disrepute. He echoed the strong sentiments of the times by proposing to change the common perception about Islam and to awaken the ignorant masses with the publication of his book. *Talimuddarayan*, a treatise written by Abdul Aziz, and published in 1917, to impart the notion of *farz* and *iman* to the masses, was written in the format of a dialogue between a teacher and a student. Engaging the words *shikshak* (teacher) and *chhatra* (student) in Bangla instead of the familiar *ustad* (master) and *murid* (disciple) in the dialogue, the book wanted to familiarize its readers with the meanings and equivalences of different Arabic words and terms in Bangla, while the dialogue itself delved deep into the scheme of the duties and responsibilities to be undertaken<sup>163</sup>.

---

<sup>161</sup> তোমার কথা হেথা কেহ তো বলে না

পান করে শুধু হলাহল

'Nobody remembers you here, everybody drinks only poison'—sounds so similar to the contemporary song repertoire prevalent in Brahmoism as *Brahmosangeet*.

<sup>162</sup> *Tawajjaye Ahsaniya*, Moulavi Saiyid Hafizullah, 1332 BS, Dacca.

<sup>163</sup> Abdul Aziz, *Talimuddarayan*, Tippera, 1917.



While different kinds of Bangla were being identified as Bangla by the various Muslim communities, the decision to compose and publish *jatiya sahitya* or *jatiya bhaber pustak* (books with a *jatiya* essence) was unanimously taken by all. The periodical of the eponymous *Tariqah* offshoot *Ahle Hadis*, along with the *Hanafi* periodical *Islam Pracharak*, in very similar tones, explained that the pervasive lethargy within the Muslim community was due to their deviation from religious ideology<sup>164</sup>. But surprisingly, by religious education *Ahle Hadis* and *Islam-Darshan* did not mean the education that one received in a traditional *madrasa*, rather, they were advocating books written in Bangla, and *madrasas* as the places where the *jatiya* essence of Islam would be taught through Bangla<sup>165</sup>. It was a concerted cry from the religious thinkers, reformers and preachers to claim a certain form of modernity for their knowledge systems as well, articulated through the language and genres chosen, against the traditional *ulama* of the traditional *madrasas*, who clung on to the Perso-Arabic language and script. *Ahle Hadis* expressed the utter despair they felt when they looked at the traditional *madrasa* system which had confined itself to ‘obscurantism’<sup>166</sup>. They blamed this traditionalism on the scarcity of easy translations of the *Qur’an* and the *Hadis* in Urdu and Bangla<sup>167</sup>. It is interesting to note that while critiquing the traditionalists for their lack of interest in easy translations in the vernacular, they were blaming the *Hanafis* (who had zealously taken up the work of translation, setting up a network of *anjumans* and publishing periodicals) for keeping this knowledge system confined to the *mazhabs* and thus making it difficult for the masses to have

---

<sup>164</sup> The cause of our disgraceful situation now is because of the fact that we are not real Muslims. ...Had we been real Muslims, we would not have been tortured by the people of an ‘other’ religion (*bidharmi*) and our economic condition would not have been so distressed. *Islam-Darshan*, Year I (Magh, 1312) pp. 27–28.

<sup>165</sup> যদিও বাঙ্গালী মুসলমান বাঙ্গলা পড়িতে আগ্রহ প্রকাশ করে না, তথাপি, যদি খোদার মর্জি হয়, আমরা তাহাদিগকে বাঙ্গলা পড়াইব। খোদা করিলে, মাতৃভাষার সাহাজ্যেই তাহাদের ধর্ম ও নৈতিক জীবনের উন্নতি সাধনে চেষ্টা করিব। মাতৃভাষাকে উপেক্ষা করিয়া কোন জাতি স্থায়ী উন্নতি সাধন করিতে সমর্থ হইয়াছে? *Islam-Darshan*, Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>166</sup> “Imprisoned in the impenetrable forts of Arabic and Persian.”

<sup>167</sup> Here the Urdu case was not taken up, following the spirit of the age, not as a hegemonic ploy of some Urdu-speaking elite, rather it was projected as a phenomenon, a bridge between the original scriptural tradition and the common mass. *Ahle Hadis*, Year II, Vol. II (Kartik, 1323): p. 51.

free and independent access to it<sup>168</sup>. On the other hand, *Islam-Darshan* disqualified any literary periodical which was not that focused on religion, as ineligible for the production of *jatiya* literature. With this argument, *Islam-Darshan* disqualified periodicals with sectarian leanings (like *Ahle Hadis*) as communal and autocratic, and as guilty of defaming a universal brotherhood, humanism and the high *jatiya* ideal of Islam<sup>169</sup>. *Islam-Darshan* claimed itself a *jatiya* monthly journal, and printed as much on the cover page of every issue.

Not only because of the sectarian divide, but the pro-British stance of *Ahle Hadis* also came to clash with both *Mohammadi* and *Islam-Darshan* because of the anti-British sentiment which qualified the fabrication of the *jatiya* for these two platforms. Since the inception of *Mohammadi* and *Islam-Darshan*, the form of Islam appropriate for creating a *jatiya bhab* underwent massive debate and discussion, thereby producing the *jatiya* as varied and multitudinous. The *jatiya* was tinged with sectarian interpretations and was constantly being produced as a space where claims over an ideal form of Islam—as *jatiya*—could be made and refuted. In this process of claiming the community, as I have already mentioned, the platforms were constantly invoking location as the qualifying factor for the community. The names of the *anjumans* were now prominently marked by their location<sup>170</sup> thus, they not only contributed to generating communitarian cohesion through the path of religion, but also by involving different layers of the community for the sustenance of their activities. A web of branches evolved in time, keeping in close connection with the central branch across remote districts, and mobilized the masses politically by inducing the notion of a trans-territorial Islamhood, or pan-Islamism. They also took upon themselves the necessary responsibility for the social-moral-economic upliftment of the masses by establishing *madrasas* and

---

<sup>168</sup> উর্দু ও বাংলায় কোর-আন সহজ করিবার ভাব আমাদের মধ্যে ক্রমে শিথিল হইয়া আসিতেছে। আরও পরিতাপের কথা আমাদের প্রিয় হানাফি মৌলবীগণ কোরান-হাদিসকে চারি ইমামের একচেটিয়া করিয়া রাখিয়াছেন। সাধারণ লোক কোরান-হাদিস বুঝিবার চেষ্টা করিবে কি? Ibid. p. 60.

<sup>169</sup> Editorial, *Islam-Darshan*, Year I, Vol. I (1338): p. 3.

<sup>170</sup> *Anjamane Ahl-e-Hadis Bangla, Anjamane Waezin Bangala, etc.*

hostels and by creating an ideological and material infrastructure for the Muslim society, which was also now marked by location<sup>171</sup>. The Hanafi periodical *Islam Darshan*, edited by Mohammad Abdul Hakim, was backed by a *Hanafi* network which was becoming increasingly powerful in Bengal and was led by the *pir* Abu Bakr, of the Furfura Sharif.

While the *Hanafi* platforms were inclined towards the politics of the Indian National Congress and openly proclaimed their alliance with the *Khilafat* movement, *Ahl-e-Hadis* kept continued to show its mistrust towards the Hindus, remaining loyal to the British government for material and religious protection; and were against Home Rule<sup>172</sup>. In this process, *Ahl-e-Hadis* was looking at the Hindu-Muslim alliance in national politics with much criticism and skepticism by taking into consideration the aggression<sup>173</sup> shown towards the Muslims by the Hindus in the region<sup>174</sup>. It was repeatedly articulated in *Ahle-Hadis* that the religion and honour of the Muslims (or those that *Ahl-e-Hadis* understood as being Muslims) were constantly being saved and safeguarded by the British government from Hindu atrocities.

*Sudhakar, Mihir O Sudhakar* and *Hafez*, under the editorship of Reyazuddin Ahmad and Shaikh Abdul Rahim, remained critical about the role of the nationalist movement during the pan-Islamic wave. Later, during the *Khilafat* movement, the connection between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim intelligentsia of Bengal took a different turn

---

<sup>171</sup> *Ahle Hadis* made an appeal to the wealthy *Ahl-e-Hadis* brothers of 'Bengal' to contribute to the projects of *Anjamane Ahle Hadis Bangla*. Year II (Baishakh: 1324) Vol vii, p. 380.

<sup>172</sup> যে সময় যে দেশের হিন্দু মুসলমান "ন্যাতা মহান্যাতা" গণ একযোগে একমিল হইয়া স্বায়ত্তশাসনের সুখ-স্বপ্ন দেখিতেছেন, ঠিক সেই সময়ে সেই দেশীয় হিন্দুর সেই দেশীয় মুসলমানের প্রতি এইরূপ মিলনের প্রীতি-সম্ভাষণ।... মুসলমান তোমাদের জ্ঞানচক্ষু ফুটিয়াছে কি?...এখন হোমরুলের প্রত্যাশী হইও না। মনে রাখিও - ও হোমরুল তোমাদের জন্য যমরুল হইয়া সুধার পরিবর্তে গরল উদ্দীর্ণ করিবে। ...আমরা সদাশয় গবর্নমেন্ট সমীপে ইহাও নিবেদন করিতেছি যে, ভারতবাসীকে স্বায়ত্তশাসন অধিকার প্রদান করিলে হিন্দুর অত্যাচারে মুসলমানের মানসম্মত, ধর্মকর্ম রক্ষা করা দায় সঙ্কুল হইয়া উঠিবে। *Ahle-Hadis*, Year III, Vol. I (Aswin, 1324): pp. 68–70.

<sup>173</sup> অত্যাচার, *Ibid.*, pp. 68–69.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

when the spiritual centre of Islam came directly under British attack. Previously, during the Russo-Turkish war, the British support to Russia had changed into British unease about the growing political power of Russia on the one hand; on the other, the Muslim intelligentsia struck a balance between their political subservience to the British while simultaneously defining their spiritual allegiance to the Sultan of Turkey. *Jihad for Turkey*<sup>175</sup> was considered to be the ultimate duty for the Muslim masses, to be performed in the form of contributions and donations for the cause and aftermath of war. Thus there was a split between the political and spiritual identities as they were conceptualized and accommodated within a Muslim identity being simultaneously defined by its regional locationality and trans-national/territorial belonging.

*Hanafi* oriented individuals and platforms became critical about the British government and many of them joined the Indian National Congress with a faith in the possibility of Hindu-Muslim unity, and a national based on it. Interestingly, these figures did create an interface between religious deliberation and the national when a politically motivated sense of the Muslim community was being formed. Personalities like Mohammad Maniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875–1950) can be taken as an apt illustration to mark this paradigm of identification and social values associated with the construction of the *jatiya*. Maniruzzaman Islamabadi was trained at the Hooghly *madrassa*, studied law, and chose to learn Bangla, and then English. He had been published in English, Arabic and Bangla. After working as the head of the institution in various *madrassas*, he devoted himself to being a full time preacher, while also editing various journals and periodicals, and publishing essays and books on the history of Islam and on pan-Islamic themes.

Maniruzzaman Islamabadi can be considered to be representing the symbolic moment when, because of the question of *Khilafat*, the Muslim

---

<sup>175</sup> Editorial, Abdul Kadir, *Muhammadi Akhbar*, 4 June, 1877, cited in Anisujjaman, *Muslim Bangla Samayikpatra*, Dhaka, 1366, p. 22.

intelligentsia made their alliance with the Congress, while conceiving and cultivating the notion of a community (*jati*) with separate essences. The repeated invocation of Turkey and its Sultan as the spiritual centre of Islamdom, beyond any regional or national alliance and identification, yet produced and cultivated within regional parameters, is what this chapter had referred to in the beginning. Islamabadi remained a co-fighter in the war, producing books on Turkey and collecting contributions for the Damesque-Hejaj railways alongside Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmad. Maniruzzaman Islamabadi was deeply influenced by Shibli Nomani, a member of the Urdu intelligentsia of the nineteenth century, who reclaimed Islamic history as a condition necessary for a *jatiya* awakening<sup>176</sup>. Maniruzzaman Islamabadi was the editor of *Soltan* (1901), *Hablun Matin* (1912) and *Bangiya Sahitya Patrika*. *Soltan* was marked with greater ideological fervour when Maniruzzaman Islamabadi joined the Indian National Congress and became the editor of *Soltan* after Reyazuddin Ahmad. In 1912, he was imprisoned for his active connections with the non-cooperation movement. Subsequently, he joined the *Khilafat* movement in 1921.

While *Ahl-e-Hadis* was constantly reiterating its political subservience to the government, some individuals of Hanafi alignment were critiquing the British by taking part in the North Indian anti-colonial political movements. *Ahl-e-Hadis* was desperate to separate itself from the ‘Wahhabi’ platforms while periodicals like *Islam Darshan* sang in favour of the *Khilafat* movements. The editor of *Islam-Darshan*, Mohammad Abdul Hakim, burst out in lyrical passion in talking of the confluence of the Congress and its own *anjuman*<sup>177</sup> in the non-cooperation movement<sup>178</sup>. *Islam-Darshan* had remained a loyal advocate of the emotion generated around *Khilafat* since its inception and published on a host of themes including writings on Islamic history, culture and society, poems on the contemporary state of the Muslim community, devotional poems, and religion. Discussions on religion, under the name of *shariyat-sankalan* (collection of scriptures),

---

<sup>176</sup> To be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>177</sup> *Anjamine Wayezin Bangala*, the Hanafi *anjuman* which published *Islam-Darshan*.

<sup>178</sup> ‘*Non-Cooperation ba Sansrob Barjan*’, Mohammad Abdul Hakim, Year I, Vol.VII (Kartik, 1327): p. 247.

initiated a consciousness about *Khilafat*, about *Sufi* knowledge and about the difference between *sunnat* and *bid'at*. It was emphatically stated in the beginning of the 1920s that “for the distress of Reverend Sultan of Rum [of Turkey], each and every Muslim is feeling utmost pain”. The emotion about *Khilafat* was not an ideological product of the 1920s alone; the imagination of an Islamic *ummah* had begun to take shape during the pan-Islamic movements of the late 1880s and were articulated and spread through print, which actually prepared the educated Muslims to take part in the *Khilafat* movement.

We will also see that in this *shariyati-sankalan* section, other criteria for defining the community continued to appear from the previous period. The *Hanafi* community was struggling to separate the scriptural knowledge of Sufism from the ritual-based and physicality-based devotionism of folk Sufism. Moreover, the *Hanafi-Mohammadi* debate would continue throughout the 1920s to be diluted only by the end of the decade with the gradual absorption of *Hanafi* religious education systems into the *madrasas*, and the spread of *Hanafi anjumans* and libraries after the 1920s<sup>179</sup>.

Mohammad Emdad Ali of Bhandariya, Barishal, was a *khalifa* of Pir Maulana Nisaruddin of Sharsina, and a disciple of Pir Abu Bakr of Furfura Sharif. His books and treatises on religion and socio-moral instructions started invading the market in cheap prints published from Calcutta and Barishal since 1917, when Reyazuddin Ahmad published the first volume of *Tarikhul Islam* from the Reyazul Islam Press in 1917. For Mohammad Emdad Ali, it was neither history nor literature; rather, he took on the responsibility of writing socio-moral treatises giving instructive schemes on *jatiya unnati* to the Muslim masses. These treatises were instrumental in affirming religious scriptural codes and in maintaining a connection with the social, and thus succeeded in carving out an identity based on different practical ethics. A dialogic narrative format was the strategy that he had

---

<sup>179</sup> Waqil Ahmad, p. 469.

chosen to make the discourse more communicable to his audience, a strategy he maintained even to impart scriptural knowledge in several volumes of *Tarikhol Islam*. For the purposes of direct communication, he used the form of a transaction between a teacher and his student in *Hukka-Binash O Dhumpaner Apokarita* (On the Evils of Smoking)<sup>180</sup> and *Kooriti Barjan* (On the Eradication of Evil Social Practices)<sup>181</sup>, he also exploited the format of a quarrel between a husband and wife to expound upon proper forms of the *sharia* in everyday matters in *Swami-Stree Tarka Juddha ba Shanti-Sopan* (The battle of reason between a married couple, or the path to peace)<sup>182</sup>. There was even an argument with a Brahmin in *Ekacharer Pantha ba Brahmaner Nikat Prashna* (Question to a Brahmin)<sup>183</sup> to refute the rationale of the *Suddhi* Movement initiated by Dayanand Saraswati. Mohammad Emdad Ali represented that group of authors who could successfully connect an individualistic paradigm of self-enhancement to the greater goal of collective betterment of the community. A reformulation of popular Islam—by linking the practical with the religico-ethical, by arranging an individualistic responsibility towards inscriptional rituals, economy, and education<sup>184</sup>—was attempted and achieved in these works. These authors of the popular vernacular, I will show, were also instrumental in claiming Bangla and reconfiguring it as the vehicle of this ethico-moral scheme.

We will see that the claims over Bangla made by different sectors of the Muslim public would produce different versions of Bangla, making it almost impossible to delineate a univocal language by the name of Bangla.

A constant effort towards the *ashrafization* of Bangla in the reformist times would also mean Islamization continued to screen and scrutinize adjectives and nouns borrowed from the Hindu religious vocabulary to signify religious or pious expressions. On one occasion, Muhammad Emdad Ali

---

<sup>180</sup> 1922, Barishal.

<sup>181</sup> 1923, Barishal.

<sup>182</sup> 1941, Barishal.

<sup>183</sup> 1927 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Barishal.

<sup>184</sup> P. K. Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth-century Bengal* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 67–77

condemned this by saying, that the use of the word *Shri* (Goddess Lakshmi) as an honorific prefix before any name was strictly Hindu and Muslims were not considered to be committing a sin if the same was used by them<sup>185</sup>. Phenomena like this reaffirm the scarcity of books encapsulating the *jatiya bhab* of Islam, which could have produced a host of useful Muslim *jatiya* signifiers creating a vocabulary different from the one that was being identified and condemned as Hindu. It is to be noted that the attempts made to sanitize Bangla, in books like *Kooriti Barjan*, with the inclusion of more *jatiya* words from the Arabic-Persian vocabulary were not against Bangla, as such, and there was also the impulse towards modernization of the language, where a Bangla was being configured—dismissing other paradigms which did not conform to *tauhid*, or the oneness of Allah. In this process, Bangla was claimed as the mother tongue and deemed eligible to carry the impulses of Islam too, with the insertion of appropriate Arabic and Persian words in it. Emdad Ali, as the teacher (*shikshak*) in *Kooriti Barjan* continuously harped on how distant Bangla was from Islam, especially since it was a language shared with non-Muslims, and emphasized the importance of the struggle necessary to render it appropriate for an Islamic *jatiya bhab*—this could be accomplished, according to Emdad Ali, through the insertion of an appropriate termininology within Bangla.

*Jatiya*, was becoming a popular and all-engrossing signifier to claim an identity for the Bengal Muslims in every possible way. A practising *Nakshbandiya sufi*, Mohammad Abdul Karim of Jessore, in the advertisement of the first edition of his book *Ershade Khaleqiya ba Khoda Prapti Tattwa* (Treatise on Finding God) spoke of the Bangla that needed to be formulated for the common Muslim reading public. Like Mohammad Emdad Ali, he also proposed a bridge between the chaste Bangla of the intelligentsia and the *Musalmani*-Bangla of the cheap print culture. Mohammad Abdul Karim categorically proposed that instead of difficult and unfamiliar Bangla words, familiar Arabic and Persian words should be made an integral part of the Bangla meant for the Muslim masses. For less

---

<sup>185</sup> *Kooriti Barjan*, p. 6.



commonly used Arabic and Persian words, he proposed that the authors should provide their meanings and explanations within parantheses<sup>186</sup>.

There is a similarity of approach between Emdad Ali and Mohammad Abdul Hakim towards the making of a Bangla valid for writing scriptures and undertaking ethico-moral transactions; both were thoroughly critiqued as orthodox, and other templates were being formulated for Bangla. But Emdad Ali's approach to connect Islam to the *jatiya* through Bangla neither made him an orthodox member of the clergy, nor indicates a monolithic position taken by the orthodox religious authorities. *Ahle Hadis*—the enemy of the *mazhabi Hanafis*, and the *Hanafi-affiliated Islam Darshan*—the sworn enemy of the *la-mazhab Ahl-E-Hadis* in turn, both patronised their respective ideologies for the construction of an appropriate Bangla different from Emdad Ali's, who was a practising *Hanafi* religious authority. At the same time, authors like Emdad Ali were trying to bridge the gap between *Musalmani*-Bangla and the chaste-Bangla that they thought of as having been created by the Hindus, by keeping scriptural words in Arabo-Persian. Even within the *Hanafi*-identified Muslim public, the claim over Bangla was not monolithic at all. The editor of *Eslam Darshan*, Mohammad Abdul Hakim, in a section entitled 'Bibidha Prasanga' (Miscellaneous), uttered in exasperation that there should be the same language for the Hindus and Muslims, even if there were essential differences in their *jatiya bhab* and *sahitya*. There was, according to the editor, no need to construct separate values for Bangla to write about the separate *jatiya bhab* of these two communities.

By saying so, he was critiquing both the Muslim authors who were insistent about inserting Arabo-Persian-Urdu into Bangla to make it the bearer of a Muslim *jatiya*, as also the rigid Hindu authors who refused to accommodate words from the Perso-Arabic vocabulary that were a part of the then prevalent Bangla. This was also a time when Hindu authors had just

---

<sup>186</sup> Mohammad Abdul karim, *Ershade Kholaqiya na Khoda Prapti Tattwa*, Reyazul Islam Press, Kalikata, 1316. The name of the press, again, hints at the network within which Reyazuddin Ahmad was a very important personality of print.

concluded a long-term project started in Fort William College to purge out every last trace of the Perso-Arabic from the body of Bangla, and thus keep it closed to anything but the essence of the Hindu *jatiya*. He condemned in the same article the traditionalist orthodox attempts of the *maulavis* to write Bangla in the Arabic script as an act of absurd imagination<sup>187</sup>.

On the other hand, from the opposite camp, another Mohammad Abdul Hakim (not the editor of *Islam Darshan* with the same name)<sup>188</sup>, a regular contributor to *Ahle Hadis* on socio-religious topics, broke the liaison between *Musalmani*-Bangla and chaste Bangla. This link had been one of the central concerns of the aforementioned traditionalists (as explained in the last few paragraphs). Mohammad Abdul Hakim of *Ahle Hadis* offered to adopt the Bangla of the Hindu intelligentsia to write back to them in their own language. Hakim, in an article entitled ‘Abahan’ (Invocation), differentiated between the Bangla used by the litterateurs and the Bangla that was adopted by the Muslim authors lacking the talent necessary to render it beyond religion<sup>189</sup>. He traced historically the rejection of English as the language of power and education, and also of Bangla, by the Muslim authors since the beginning of the colonial experience. Bangla, for Hakim, was a language of culture which had the potential to create a Muslim *jatiya*. Hakim felt that the Muslims, since the fall of Persian as the Royal language, had nurtured an ‘immature infant language’ which they called *Musalmani*-Bangla, to constitute the *jatiya* component of their identity. He commented in detail on how the Hindu intelligentsia, in its half-baked inquisitiveness had based their search for historical truth on the highly offensive histories

---

<sup>187</sup> *Islam Darshan*, Year I, Vol. IV (Baishakh 1323 /1916): pp. 190–191.

<sup>188</sup> Mohammad Abdul Hakim who used to contribute in *Ahle-Hadis* on socio-cultural questions should not be confused with the editor of *Islam Darshan*. The other Mohammad Abdul Hakim was the editor of *Islam Darshan* and *Hanafi Patrika*, and was a follower of Abu Bakr Siddiki of Furfura Sharif, and became the Secretary of *Anjumane Waizane Bangla* in 1921. Later he joined the Krishak Praja Party under Fazlul Haque’s leadership and became a member of its Executive Council in 1930. We get no reference of Mohammad Abdul Hakim of *Ahle Hadis* in the catalogue of books compiled by Ali Ahmad or in the chapter on minor Muslim authors in Waqil Ahmad’s book. Perhaps he did not publish any major substantial work.

<sup>189</sup> সর্বস্বহীন মুসলমান আপনার অস্তিত্ব রক্ষার জন্য দিশেহারা ন্যায় ধর্মের পথে প্রত্যাবৃত্ত হইলেন।; প্রতিভাহীন মুসলমান একমাত্র ধর্ম ভাষাকেই সার-সর্বস্ব করিয়া আর যাবতীয় বিষয়েই উপেক্ষা প্রদর্শন করিলেন।

written by Todd and other European authors. In the absence of any Muslim counterpart which could have presented an authentic Muslim history, the Hindu intelligentsia had hegemonized the history, narrative, and language, which could have illuminated the historical truth about Islam and the Muslim community. The author, again, echoed the ethos of the time by reclaiming Bangla as the language through which the Islamic *jatiya* could be spelt out. It was a common realization of this group of authors that a standardized Bangla would have a much higher functional value than *Musalmani*-Bangla in all forms of modern transactions, and that this Bangla had to be brought out of the clutches of the Hindu hegemonic nationalistic project, which had already rendered Bangla as a Hindu matter.

Both the authors, Mohammad Abdul Hakim (*Islam Darshan*) and Mohammad Abdul Hakim (*Ahle Hadis*), rejected any possibility of allowing the use of *Musalmani*-Bangla as the vehicle of the *jatiya*. Mohammad Abdul Hakim of *Ahle Hadis* dismissed it for of its lack of functional value, as compared to standardized Bangla, and both rejected *Musalmani*-Bangla also because of the absence of an evolved grammar and standardized phrases and idioms in it<sup>190</sup>. Mohammad Abdul Hakim of *Ahle Hadis* did not fail to mention the aesthetic values of Muslim Bangla as being equivalent to that of Bangla, this did not remain a solitary opinion and in the later period some other authors also claimed *Musalmani*-Bangla as the core of the Islamic *jatiya*<sup>191</sup>.

Moreover, the very quality of *Musalmani*-Bangla that Mohammad Abdul Hakim of *Islam Darshan* had dismissed for being folk and oral, would be reclaimed and posited later as a component of Bangla, and also as a component of the Muslim *jatiya* through the poetic works of Jasimuddin, and also through the extensive work done on the manuscript traditions by Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad<sup>192</sup>.

---

<sup>190</sup> *Ahle Hadis*, Year I, Vol.I (Ashwin 1322): p. 15 and *Islam Darshan*, Year I, Vol. IV (Baishakh 1323): p. 190.

<sup>191</sup> Will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>192</sup> Will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CONCLUSION:

Being exclusively moralistic, the project for the upliftment of the downtrodden community had to use various means and methods to include the Bengali Muslim masses as the receivers of the discourses specifically meant for their betterment—social, moral, and economic—all of which were informed by the value of religion.

In the editorial section of *Ahle-Hadis*, the editor declared that the purpose of the *anjumans* and the periodicals was to emulate the ideals of those great men who had served religion and community as best as they could<sup>193</sup>. In this declaration, chaste and Sanskritized Bangla were juxtaposed with three Arabic words signifying religion, community and service—*dwin*, *qaum* and *khedmat*—which would not always recur in the next sections in relation to the community. *Qaum*, would soon be signified in various ways with the addition of the adjective *jatiya*. *Jatiya* would be emptied out of its closed unilinear meaning, and would become more of a master key to conceptualize, create and circulate an essential quality of Islam and the Muslim community. These accretions and evolutions followed the multifarious processes of identification and articulation true to the times; it clashed with and claimed Bangla to create a language as the carrier of the essence that was *jatiya*—in the identity of the Bengal Muslims.

The journey in search of an essence, of an identity, began with the inherent absence of an equivalent word for *qaum/jaati* and the essence of that *qaum*—in the *jatiya*. Even in 1307/1900, *qaumi*—i.e. the Arabic word, which had already been in circulation because of the initiatives taken by the *Sudhakar* group, *Mihir*, and *Mihir O Sudhakar*, was being used instead of *jatiya*. So, it was for a specific group, the members of *Nur-al Iman Samaj*, that the *anjuman* published its '*qaumi pustak*' (not a *jatiya pustak* as the *Sudhakar* group would have had it) with the title *Dugdha Sarobar* (Ocean of Milk). Though the expression *qaum* was still being maintained instead

---

<sup>193</sup> *Ahle Hadis*, Year 2, Vol.I (Ashwin 1323): p. 3.

of introducing the expression *jatiya*, the collective used Sanskritized titles for their translated books on scriptures in Bangla, whereas Munshi Naimuddin chose to retain the Arabic titles for his translations of scriptures. Under the supervision of Mohammad Abdul Aziz, Abu Ali and Mohammad Saber Uddin Amin, who were teachers in *madrasas*, Mirza Mohammad Yusufzai, who translated *Dugdha-Sarobar* and *Nur-al Iman Samaj*, also produced the translation of Imam Ghazzali's *Kimiyaye Shahadat* as *Soubhagya Sparshamani*. All of these were out of an immediate necessity which was so passionately articulated by Naosher Ali Khan Yusufzai, a Professor at Dhaka University, who devoted his time to write about the well-being of the Muslim society. He said there was no point in shedding tears for the socio-economically downtrodden status of his *swajati*, i.e. the people of his own race. This was why he wrote *Bangiya Musalman*<sup>194</sup> to show the reasons behind this distressful situation and the ways in which it could be overcome. His other books, especially *Uccha Bangla Shikshabidhi* (Learning Higher-level Bangla language, 1901), *Notes on Mahomedan Education in Bengal* (1903), *Moslem Jatiya Sangeet* (1909), and *Sahitya Shiksha* (1915) brought the economic, the educational and the emotional-ideological questions together. By excavating the reasons which had led to the dilution of the essential qualities of the Muslim community in a land of physical and lived rituals and polytheism, he suggested that the established and emerging authorities of knowledge should devote their efforts to restore those essences, now collectively termed as *jatiya*. With the effects of reform, direct or tangential, the search for the essence and the efforts towards the restoration of that essence, became an agenda for the creation of the identity of the Bengal Muslims, which was a modernizing project at the same time.

---

<sup>194</sup> Naosher Ali Khan Yusufzai, *Bangiya Musalman*, Hindu Press, Kalikata 1297, from the 'Bijnapan' section. The author spelt out in this section that this book "contains a description of the condition of Musalmans in Bengal. Sometime ago the Musalmans had fallen so low that even the richest and best men among them had no scruples in performing Durgapuja in their houses. But a change has come over the spirit of Islam in Bengal. The exertions of *Maulavis* from various parts of India are purifying it from superstitions and idolatry." Ali Ahmad, p. 469.

Yusufzai, in his book *Bangiya Musalman*, brings together all the personal and collective agendas, which could be understood as *jatiya unnati*—i.e. the upliftment of the community—this was a concern shared equally by the cheap print tradition using *Musalmani*-Bangla. The publishers, along with the authors, claimed that this project had to be undertaken for the profit of the common Muslims. This sense of profit, or *fayda*, was constantly being posed in terms of the religio-moral betterment of the masses, and was in no way different from the agenda of the standardized print culture using a chaste Bangla. To claim that the agenda undertaken by the cheap print—of translating scriptural texts—was as valid as that of the standardized print, the authors and proprietors of the cheap prints claimed the residual *Musalmani*-Bangla in which they were working—as Bangla. This nomenclature and identification, in turn, problematized again the linear definition of Bangla and reaffirmed the possibility of polyphony even within the single register of language that was Bangla. This polyphony within Bangla became equivalent to the polyphony of the theme of *jatiya* and also that of the modernity through which the Muslims of Bengal strived for self-identification.

We can see in the prefaces provided by the publishers (sometimes the author himself was the publisher) what had almost become a template for declaring that the book had been registered under the author's name, as also to enumerate all the trouble that the author had taken solely for the betterment of Muslim society. These authors of cheap print, like Abdul Gani Khan of Karatiya Pargana, Atiya, Mymensingh, were quite sure that no matter how thick the presence of Arabic and Persian was in their language, it was Bangla nonetheless<sup>195</sup>. Surprisingly, while the author was using *Musalmani*-Bangla, he not only used *Shri* as the dignitary prefix to his name, he also used it twice in succession, to fashion an expression

---

<sup>195</sup> এক ওস্তাদের কাছে পৈড়াছি ছবক

বাঙ্গালা কেতাবে তিনি বড়ই আশক

...আগে ছিল আরবিতে হিন্দি হইল শেষে

আমি লিখি বঙ্গভাষা করিয়া কোশেয। *Joaher Maknun*.

equivalent to Allah's name, *Shri Shri Haq Nam*, i.e. the truest name<sup>196</sup>. With this it becomes difficult for us to group Abdul Ghani Khan with the traditional clergy, who wanted to retain and re-introduce an Arabo-Persian vocabulary by purging out the polytheistic sensibility of Bangla; of which the use of the prefix *Shri* was just one among numerous instances. Simultaneously, with the enlightened intelligentsia trying to capture *jatiya bhab* in a Bangla, and keeping it separate from a *Musalmani-Bangla*, *Musalmani-Bangla* was also trying to situate itself in the project for the community.

From within the cheap print culture another sort of identification of Bangla emerged from the late nineteenth century onwards, when it needed to validate a whole corpus of texts of different genres. The claim of authenticity, that is the fixation of 'some' Arabic or Persian original, was now juxtaposed with the fixation of Bangla as a target language, which was to be the lingua franca of the 'common people of our land'<sup>197</sup>. Each of these texts, published by either Banerwar Ghosh or Tajaddin Mohammad, invoked a readership of Muslims—represented by the term *muminan*—and it seems that even when they used '*Shri Shri Haq Naam*', *Shri* did not signify any deliberate sharing of Hindu emotional resources; rather, it only signified that *Shri*, like many other words, had become a stock generic term. When Abdul Ghani Khan, the author of *Jowaher Maqnun*, referred to his patron Qorban Ali of Baliya, he did not forget to mention his interest in 'Bangla' books; neither did he forget to mention a network of translations from Arabic to Hindi to Bangla. Similar attempts to fix the source and target language could be seen in Shri Dost Mohamad's book *Junge Khaybar*, which he translated from Persian into Bangla.

While these authors did not have any doubt about the Bengaliness of their Bangla, they did not make any effort to make their Bangla the vehicle for

---

<sup>196</sup> শ্রী শ্রী হক নাম। *Ibid*.

<sup>197</sup> "সকল মমিনবর্গ জানিবেন, এই কেতাব মায়াদানোল ওলুম নামক আমি বহুতর মেহনতে বাঙ্গালা জবানে জেমত আমাদের দেশের সাধারণে বলিয়া থাকে, বহুতর আরবী কেতাব হইতে তরজমা করিলাম ও ছাপাইলাম...", *Mayadanol Olum*, Moulavi Abdul Aziz, Mahmudiya Jantra, Karatiya, 1298.

the *jatiya*. But they did get entangled in the debate over the claim to a valid Bangla. These authors lamented over the absence of wise men in the recent times, but did not causally connect this absence to the downfall of the Muslims, as some *jatiya* calamity. Rather, they remained true to the mythic understanding of time, of *kalikal*. An acute unease followed with respect to this cheap print culture in *Musalmani*-Bangla, as we have already seen, since this language was identified with the stagnation of the Muslim community caused as an after-effect of colonization. While being labelled unfit for expressing the *jatiya*, this language would nonetheless be claimed to define this *jatiya*, and would make the definition of Bangla multivalent in nature as well. When new intentions arose after the 1920s with the birth of new socio-literary platforms and periodicals, like *Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Samaj*, *Shikha*, *Bulbul* and *Saogat*, armed with another set of understandings and interpretations of Islamic scripture and history, Bangla as a medium was still being struggled over, on whether it was a language equipped to carry the impulse of the *jatiya*. The battle of Karbala continued to be written in *Musalmani*-Bangla and also in the standardized Bangla introduced to problematize the monolithic conception of the *jatiya*, *jatiya bhab*, *jatiya bhasha* and *sahitya*. How this struggle was undertaken—to define the *jatiya* of Islam in the making of the history of Islam and *jatiya sahitya* in a contested Bangla—will be discussed in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER V

### History and Biography: As *Jatiya*

৬৩

হাসানে বিঘের দ্বারা  
করিবেক নিধন  
জল বিনা কাসেমের  
যুদ্ধে হত্যা সাধন

৬৪

লক্ষ লক্ষ যোদ্ধা মিলি  
সংহারিবে হোসেনে  
তাদের সে লোহ-রেখা  
রবে চির এ মনে

৬৫

শুনেছি তোমার কাছে  
ভীষণ অত্যাচারে  
তোমার শিষ্য-বংশধর  
আমার বংশধরে

৬৬

করিবে নিহত হয়!  
কৈতে হৃদি বিদরে  
এইসব প্রতিশোধ  
লইতাম হাসরে

৬৭

করিব তাদের ক্ষমা  
প্রতিশোধ লব না  
সে পুণ্য ওম্মতে দিব  
ক'রনাক ভাবনা।

The above sections, taken from *Asheqe Rasul*, a poem praising the Prophet by Mohammad Dad Ali (1852–1936)<sup>1</sup>, a practising *Sufi*<sup>2</sup> of Bengal, describes the life of Muhammad with such narrative grace that it can be

---

<sup>1</sup>Published by Muhammad Yusuf Ali, Atigram, Nadia, 1908.

<sup>2</sup>Dad Ali was from Atigram, near Kushtiya, and published several *Sufi* treatises.

thought of as containing within itself the possibility of becoming history, biography and poetry at the same time. However, its generic expansiveness was not something exclusive to the late nineteenth–early twentieth century articulations about the Prophet in Bangla. The multivalence of the *sirat* genre, or sacred biography, had been the strength of the medieval and the early modern eras in catering to an audience gradually coming to identify itself with both the narrative imagination and the instructive life of Islam. In the absence of Bangla translations of the *Qur'an* and the *Hadis* till the late nineteenth century<sup>3</sup>, narratives on the sacred life of the Prophet became the ultimate sacred template, and ideal, for the understanding of Islam and Islamic theosophy. What is really interesting to note here, is the potential of the genre of *sirat* to offer theoretical interpretations of Islam, and a narrative imagination to the audience, at the same time. By writing about *tauhid* and other truly exclusive concepts of theosophical Islam through their equivalents borrowed from the local narrative repertoires, Sayyid Sultan made the reception of the Islamic concepts possible for the target audience of his *sirat*<sup>4</sup>. *Sirat* was polyvalent as a genre, since by celebrating the military exploits of the Prophet and his companions, *sirat* texts like *Rasul-Charit* of Sayyid Sultan<sup>5</sup>, or *Rasul-Bijoy* by Sheikh Chand, created the scope for narrative overlap with the much more fluid *junghnama*, or war narratives, while by retaining the more conceptual sections, they connected with the *nasihatnama* and *shariyatnama* genres, which were the ethico-moral instructive manuals of Islam.

Almost all the authors who wrote *sirat* in the medieval period and in the early modern, invariably wrote Islamic conceptual treatises or instructional manuals side by side, showing their *forte* in a conceptual Islam. Heyat Mamud, in the beginning of eighteenth century, began his literary oeuvre by writing about the battle of Karbala, and after elaborately writing about the ethical conceptual parameters in *Sarbavedabani Kavya* and *Hitajnanbani Kavya*, came a full circle with *Ambiya-Bani*, which was his last creation

---

<sup>3</sup> Bhai Girishchandra Sen was the first to translate the *Qur'an* into Bangla in 1881.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Stewart, 'In Search for Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory', *History of Religions*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (February, 2001), pp. 260–287

<sup>5</sup> Approximate time of composition, 1560.

about the life stories of all the Islamic Prophets, ending with the life of Muhammad. The anxiety felt by the Prophet for his *ummah*, and the culmination of that anxiety in the battle of Karbala, offered another stock for the composition of *sirat*—in the sacred lives of Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn, the grandsons of the Prophet.

But in the mid-nineteenth century we can see other impulses at work in the writing of the *sirat*. The biography of the Prophet was serving many purposes that were driven by the demands of the age. While the Prophet became an icon, whose life was to be formulated and emulated by the new reading public, a whole gamut of biographies came up on the lives of other sacred and not-so-sacred characters of Islam. Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn, who had offered their sacred lives not only in the autonomous narrative universe of the *sirat* but also in the Karbala narratives, now became the subjects of hagiographies in a new wave around this genre.

The idea of a this-worldly Islam from the nineteenth century had posited the centrality of the Prophet (a phenomenon, which began in the hands of Sayyid Sultan) in the devotional field, thus nullifying the effects of the *pirs* of the previous era represented by a more physicality-based Islam<sup>6</sup>. Reformist Islam wanted to bring the community back to the fundamentals of Islam by purging out the elements of *shirk* and *bid'at* accumulated in the processes of localization. To accomplish this, the figure of the Prophet himself and his time spent in the company of his companions, i.e. the first four caliphs became the ideal time imbued with the ideal attributes and values of Islam that one had to attain. The paradigmatic shift in positing *sirat* as the crux of religiosity and identity came about in the mid nineteenth century when an authentic history of Islam needed to be claimed and

---

<sup>6</sup> I have already discussed in Chapter III how medieval and early modern Bengal was marked by the psychic authority of the charismatic *pirs* over the lived and folk communities. Thus forms of Islam were created in terms of a *pir*-centric piety. Texts written by Sayyid Sultan and Sheikh Chand signified what Mohammad Enamul Hoque called the phase of *samanwoy* (in his *Sufism in Bengal*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka), that is, a period of inter-cultural dialogue between the authorities of knowledge and between Islam and other forms of knowledge prevalent in Bengal at that time. We have come across *sirat* and *Sufi* treatises carrying the marks of this transaction. Texts like *Rasul-Charit* and *Jog-Qalandar* can be cited, among many others, to validate this argument.

posited as the *jatiya* for the Muslim community. The Prophet's life did not only become *the* life to be revered and emulated, the narration of his personal life also became the narration of the history of the collective. This gave rise to the new discipline of history writing, and especially to the history of the Prophetic time written as a political strategy to reclaim and proclaim the ideal Islamic essence—now expressed as the *jatiya*.

As I have already discussed in the previous chapter, the search for an identity, with the *jatiya* as its core, was always fraught with the sensibility of religion and the socio-moral ethics drawn from it. Depending on the affiliation of the group, the history of Islam was imagined, and according to it the ideological process of reclamation and retrieval was accomplished. The reformist understanding of Prophetic time was differently articulated from that of the elite intelligentsia, like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan or Sayed Ameer Ali, who expressed it in Urdu or in English.

Reawakening an interest in the biography of the Prophet, and the history of his times, or the writing of Muhammad's biography as history, as new genres, were not necessarily conceived of as counter-narratives to the Orientalist or Occidental discourses, though colonial rule did aggravate a particular generic and ideological formulation. The life of Muhammad had always been a source for the purposes of theorizing and reformulating Islam. During the first half of the eighteenth century, Shah Wali Allah (1702–1760) minimized the divine status of Muhammad, and the superiority of his heart and mind were posited as historical facts, instead. His status as the messenger of Allah, as defined and sanctioned by the scriptures, was rather historically explicated to present him as the last and final Prophet. With this move, Shah Wali Allah proposed to chart the evolution of history of Islam from the time of primitive organization, and went on to show the transformation from mere belief to a more illustrious knowledge of the Prophet, which would culminate in the creation of the final stage of the caliphate, with the affirmation of the ultimate authority of the Prophet over

all the kings of the world<sup>7</sup>. In this evolutionary staging of history, Islam reached its zenith in the Prophetic time, a state of perfection beyond compare—and this was the moment of time that would be posited henceforth as the template or the ideal model. In Shah Wali Allah's theorizations, made in the early eighteenth century, Muhammad figures as a physician, who offers a healing touch to degenerated Islam and the Muslim community. Shah Wali Allah restored the primacy accorded to the time of the Prophet, by invoking a direct contact to the texts, which were supposed to have been generated during the Prophetic time, to engage with *ijtihad* rather than by following *taqlid*. In this project to reclaim and bring back the classical age of the Arab Muslims, it was the Prophet and his immediate followers (the *ashab* and *the ahl-ul-bayt*) after him, in his absence, who became very important as the sources of Islamic scriptural knowledge. No matter how much antagonism there was between Shah Wali Allah and his theoretical opponents, like Shaikh Ahmad Shirhindi, they consented over the importance of the historical model centred on the Prophet, and on the absolute authority of the divine law<sup>8</sup>. What the reformist ideas of Shah Wali Allah offered, was a direct connection with the high scriptures of the time of the Prophet that truly revealed the purity of Islam. This position of Shah Wali Allah superseded the *Sufi* idea of Muhammad as the Perfect Man, which was reaffirmed later by Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi, the founder of *Tariqah*, who propagated a scriptural model for Muhammad with his humane and historical attributes<sup>9</sup>. Though the interpretation of reformist Islam took different shapes and forms in due course, what had started with the invocation of the figure of the Prophet in its scriptural and historical models, tended to inform the reformists' idea of Muhammad as the ideal ethico-political leader of the community, as expressed in the writings of the Muslim intelligentsia from the mid nineteenth century onwards. Even the *Sufi* turn within the *Hanafi* sect, manifested in the connection between Pir Abu Bakr Siddiqi of the Furfura Sharif and the religious intelligentsia of the *Sudhakar* group was invested in the rational scriptural profile of the

---

<sup>7</sup> Harlan O. Pearson, *Islamic Reform and Revival in Nineteenth-century India: The Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah*, (Delhi: Yoda Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 19–20, 31.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.

Prophet, which became the ideological cornerstone of the *Hanafi* sect. Two *Sudhakar* members, Reyazuddin Ahmad and Shaikh Abdul Jabbar, wrote the biography of the Prophet and the history of Islam with a rational outlook and in turn rationalized both the Prophet's life and history. These writers vehemently critiqued the supernatural elements which had accumulated and attached themselves to the life of Muhammad through Islam's close proximity with the local aesthetic and religious systems. They worked hard to give it the shape of historical reason, chiefly by redefining the inter-generic connections between biography and history, while minimizing the fluidity of narrative and mythological imaginations.

The repertoire of ideal lives from the purest form of Islam not only invoked the life histories of the *Kholafaye Rashidin*—Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali, alongside Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn as parts of the *ahl-ul-bayt* and the *pak panjatan*; reformist Islam led to an explosion of biographies and hagiographies of the leaders and preachers of Islam proliferating through the print culture. Even when a tract did not fall under the generic category of biography, it provided enough material and evidential support from the examples, illustrations and occasions taken from the real lives. In *Sirat al-Mustaqim*, for instance, the sayings of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid were compiled by Muhammad Ismail and Abd al-Hayy, and instances from his life was narrated to conclude all the tenets of *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya*<sup>10</sup>. Surprisingly enough, while Islamic prophetology disregards any other Prophet after Muhammad, and the Qadiyani sect—which was founded on their leader Gholam Qadiyan's claim that he was the last prophet of Islam—was faced with much antagonism<sup>11</sup>, these lives, like that of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, were endowed with attributes of a prophet. Sayyid Ahmad Shahid became an exemplary figure because of his doctrinal and devotional connection with all the major *Sufi* spiritual developments, his great piety and his physical capabilities, which placed him in the likeness of the prophets. Thus, Sayyid Ahmad Shahid's life became a paradigmatic

---

<sup>10</sup> Pearson, 2008, p. 82

<sup>11</sup> Qadiyani was another name for the Ahmadi sect of Islam. This sect emerged in the north Indian town of Qadian, where the founder of the sect, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was born in 1840.

example for all the followers of *Tariqah*, who sought to pursue a spiritual path emulating the lives of the prophets.<sup>12</sup>

I have already discussed in the chapter on popular piety how it was through print culture and its associated channels of dissemination that the common followers of *Tariqah* tended to think of religiosity. After Sayyid Ahmad Shahid was martyred in the battle of Balakot, so great was the emotional import of his life, that various mythological tales emerged on the subject of his immortality, and extolled him as a *pir* to the reading public.

What produced such affinity to the life stories of the reformers was their capability to approximate in their own life, their work, and their conduct, the template of Muhammad's life, and they also functioned as extensions or continuations of the *Sufi* hagiographies of the pre and early modern vernacular traditions, which the community was already familiar with as subjects of devotion and reverence. It is not surprising to see that while there was the presence of acute antagonism and critique towards the lived traditions of the *pirs*, and the forms of folk and popular piety created around them—the reformists, from Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, to Munshi Meherullah, to Keramat Ali Jaunpuri, no matter what decade or inclination they belonged to, aspired to be known as *pirs*, and to inspire the same devotion and reverence from the masses. This was due to the fact that the main strength of all these reformers derived from the domain of the public, who as consumers, demanded, created, and were also produced by the overlaps between literary genres (scriptural and narrative, rational and mythological) and also between sensibilities (the rational-scriptural and the supernatural).

We will see in this chapter how, while the *Sudhakar* group was trying hard to create a domain of historicity by referring to various sources—from the *Hadis* texts to the texts on modern history—an element of miracle still pervaded the imagination of history, because of the unavoidable presence of the miraculous in the *Hadis* too. In this context, we can name another icon

---

<sup>12</sup> Pearson, 2008, p. 85.

of the time, Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan (1868–1968), who was the editor of *Mohammadi* (in all of its *avatars*, monthly, weekly, or daily, and he was also the editor of many other periodicals) till his death, and who attempted to create another rational trajectory for the reformulation of scripture, and the ideals of Islam, in order to form the *jatiya*. Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan's life became a very important site to trace the journey of the Muslim public from the birth of an Islamic *jatiya* in the colonial times to the imagination of Pakistan which culminated in the *Bhasha Andolan* in Purba (East) Pakistan in the 1950s.

As the emergence of Pakistan/Purba Pakistan as a reality is beyond the scope of this thesis, we would be more interested here in how the thoughts and actions of the Muslim intelligentsia acquired a shape and a trajectory with respect to the literary-political journey and leadership of Maulana Akram Khan<sup>13</sup>. *Mostafa-Charit*, the biography of the Prophet by Mohammad Akram Khan showed, beyond being inspired by, or imitating the works of the Hindu intelligentsia, the author could create a rationalism based on his own analytical reading of the *Hadis* repertoire. He created—and we can be confident in saying this—the staunchest rationalist discourse about the life of Muhammad by building a rational interpretive framework around the *Hadis* repertoire itself. *Mostafa-charit* is not a linear biography of the Prophet, but a discursive project to formulate a rationalism for the *Hadis* repertoire by differentiating between genuine and false renditions of the *Hadis*, and by applying all the techniques and strategies that the authors of scripture had invented and used to define a true Prophetic event and

---

<sup>13</sup> We will talk in a later section of this chapter about Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan's contribution to the political-religious-intellectual and social life of the Muslim community in many different ways. As the editor of periodicals and journals, and also as a politician and social reformer, his contributions added very strongly to the imagination of Pakistan and related to questions of identity and language. We need to understand how the questions of *jatiya* and political identity were envisaged by Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan for the Muslim community, and how it connected to the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress as two differently oriented political platforms. For us, the understanding of *jatiya* here, in the formation of a national identity through the imagination of Pakistan, is important and it is crucial to explore and understand how that imagination chose Bangla, as a language, to articulate itself, without imagining it to be the domain of a shared cultural space between the Hindus and Muslims. It is also important to see how in the various phases of his intellectual life, Mohammad Akram Khan came to belong in the same network as Maulana Shaoqat Ali, Manirujjaman Islamabadi and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, while having a political position different from theirs.



speech. Other forms, which could not be validated according to the dictum of the scriptural authorities were relegated as false discourse, be it *Hadis* or *tarikh* or *sirat*, or any text written with a *Sufi* inclination. It was not, for Mohammad Akram Khan, a simple reiteration of the language of reason to reform the traditional narratives on life and history, but another template for modernity that emanated from the rationalism of *Hadis*, a complete counter-narrative to the western European form of reason<sup>14</sup>. In the introduction to *Mostafa-Charit*, Akram Khan qualitatively demarcated between the scriptural texts (the *Qur'an* and the *Hadis* repertoire) and *tarikh* and *sirat* because of their different values—the former were defined as religious texts while the latter (*tarikh* and *sirat*) as descriptive narratives which might not have authentic sources<sup>15</sup>.

We can see, thus, a more rationalist approach that emerged within religious thought to define modernity and the *jatiya*, though the continuation of a traditionally driven sensibility of piety could not be fully escaped nor could the popular thrust of the miraculous be evaded. It was not only the traditionalist *mullahs*, but also the new age *madrassa*-taught religious clergy, who could not escape the residual influence of the supernatural charisma of the sacred characters, whose lives they would posit as the rationale and the ideal for the community as part of the project of modernity. The biographies

---

<sup>14</sup> Though Dr Saiyyid Sajjad Husain, (in Abu Jafar compiled and edited, *Maulana Akram Khan*, Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1982, p. 132) the editor of *Comrade*, published by Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan, while vouching for Akram Khan's knowledge of English said that he had collected his propositions for *Mostafa-Charit* from several English texts—in reality, Akram Khan refuted the propositions proffered by those books in English. Akram Khan cited 15 authors from the seventeenth century and 27 more from eighteenth and nineteenth century England, whom he was writing against. *Mostafa-Charit*, 2010, pp. 88–95.

<sup>15</sup> Mohammad Akram Khan justified the lack of scrutiny directed at all these descriptive genres by the *mohaddes* (the authorities of the true *Hadis*), who were expected to stop the wide proliferation of texts with inauthentic information, by saying they did not think it prudent to waste their attention and efforts on genres which had no significance or value whatsoever for religion. পূর্বে আলেমগন মনে করিতেন—আল্লাহর কালাম কোরআন এবং সর্বতোভাবে বিশ্বাস্য ছহী হাদীছ ব্যতীত, শরিয়তের কোন হুকুম বা আকিদা প্রমানিত হয় না। ইতিহাস লেখকগণ যাহা ইচ্ছা বলুন না কেন, ধর্মের হিসাবে তাহার যখন কোনই মূল্য ও গুরুত্ব নাই, তখন কোরআন ও হাদীছের অত্যাবশ্যকীয় খেদমৎ পরিত্যাগ করিয়া ইতিহাস পরীক্ষার জন্য নিজেদের মহামূল্য সময় ব্যয় করা মোহাদ্দেছগণের পক্ষে সঙ্গত হইবে না। এই কারণে তাঁরা ইতিহাস বা ছিরৎ রচনায় বা তাহার পরীক্ষায় আদৌ মনোযোগ প্রদান করেন নাই। Mohammad Akram Khan, *Mostafa-Charit*, Kakali Prakashani: Dhaka, 2010, p. 7

of the Prophet and of Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn, the narratives on the battle of Karbala, both in prose and in poetry, showed the ambivalence of the rational-historical and the mythical-supernatural, creating new generic ambiguities and a modernity that this community was striving for.

However, I consider these overlaps and ambivalence to be the strength of this history, which continued to produce internal conflict and consensus, anxiety and ambiguity, such that we can understand community identity as inherently plural. In this chapter, I will be talking about the overlaps between the rational and the miraculous, between modernity and tradition, and between the religious and the secular in the act of reclaiming and reformulating history and biography as two distinct genres. I will also be engaging with a frame of consciousness which helped to minimize these overlaps in two different ways.

Reformers, like Sayyid Ahmad Shahid and Munshi Meherullah, who fought so aggressively and vehemently against *pirism* and its impact on the common masses resulting in a lived and physical form of Islam, were themselves very keen to be called *pirs*. In this desire to be identified in terms of the old system of devotional authority while emptying out its meaning, an equation between continuity and rupture materialized in the new genre of biography. Both *Ahmad-charit* and *Meher-charit* came out to an audience who were the consumers of the life of the Prophet and the Imam brothers, thus securing the significance of a non-sacred life and of contemporary history as elements of this-worldly Islam<sup>16</sup>. We should note here that biography, as a genre, not only made it possible for a wider range of original texts in Persian and Urdu to be translated into Bangla, but when narratives on the lives of the companions of the Prophet, and several *Sufi* masters and saints were being chosen for translation to meet several ideological-emotional ends—the life-stories of local personages, like Pir Abu Bakr of Furfura, just like Munshi Meherullah, were thought of as

---

<sup>16</sup> The *Hanafi* reformist Meherullah and the rationalist Sir Sayed Ahman Khan were both very popular as personalities whose biographies were eagerly consumed by various sections of the Muslim community. Afghan Amir, and the Turkish leader Kemal Pasha were two other figures who emerged as the contemporary sacred icons.

containing a tremendous energy capable of consolidating a community with invigorated devotion directed towards the figure of the *pir*, which was now attributed with scriptural authentication.

Through the study of the biographies of the reformist figures and contemporary *Sufi* teachers in late nineteenth century Bengal, we can see a renewed interest in a ‘scriptural intercessory’ figure, validating the mediation of knowledge as exemplified by the four *mazhabi* Imams of Islam. It is evident that against the idea of direct access to Prophetic knowledge—as expounded and prioritized by the *Muhammadiyahs* (*Tariqapanthis* as they were called in Bengal) and their emphasis on individual analysis (*ijtihad*)<sup>17</sup>—the *Hanafi* reclamation of a *mazhabi* interpretation of Islamic knowledge in Bengal could not have been possible without the production and wide circulation of biographies of Pir Abu Bakr of Furfura. This was a time when we see how all these exemplary life-stories, of *Sufi* authorities and reformists alike, were extolling the life of the Prophet along with his companions, his daughter and his grandsons, and so doing, they secured a sense of a community and identity. The interest in and proliferation of the biographies of the Sultan of Afghanistan during the *Khilafat* movement and, since the 1920s, those of the ruler of Turkey—Kemal Ataturk<sup>18</sup>—was growing, which connected a sense of the past with the acute demands of the pan-Islamic situation in the present. These biographies added more nuance to the debates about identity and modernity within the Muslim communities of Bengal.

There was also a growing interest in the life and works of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, whose biography appeared in the print market in the 1940s. It is worth noting how authors, who were writing about the life of Mohammad Ali Jinnah in the 1940s and ’50s, were also writing the biographies of the

---

<sup>17</sup> I have discussed the *Hanafi* and *Muhammadi* forms of religiosity in Chapter II already.

<sup>18</sup> I have attempted to understand the political relevance of Afghan Amir and Kemal Pasha in the making of a Muslim identity in Bengal through their biographies. Maulavi Tamizur Rahman, *Ghazi Kemal Pasha*, Chittagong, 1922, Mainuddin Husayn, B.A., *Ghazi Mostafa Kemal Pasha*, Kalikata, 1924, Abdur Rahman, *Nabya Turasker Janmadata Kemal Ataturk*, 24 Parganas, 1939, Muhammad Mubarak Ali, *KemalAtaturk*, B. A., Nur Library, Kalikata, 1941.

Prophet, of Abu Bakr Siddiqi—the first caliph, of *Sufi* saints, and also of more contemporary characters like Haji Muhammad Mohsin, Sir Saiyyid Ahmad, and Nawab Abdul Latif. These authors were also attempting to write a history of Urdu literature and to translate the works of Iqbal<sup>19</sup>. The lives of Afghan Amir and Kemal Pasha not only intrigued the authors enough, so that they would want to attempt writing biographies of living people, but also brought a sharp focus on the history of contemporary Afghanistan and Turkey, which expanded the understanding of a Muslim-*jahan*, or world, beyond the classical ages of Rum (Turkey), Sham (Syria) and Baitul Moqarram (Jerusalem). The life of Jinnah, along with the biography of Iqbal, and translations of his work added to the concern over a national identity for the Muslims and its articulation and actualization. It is worth noticing that which biographies, what sort of history used for a template, and what ideals of literature and language, possessed the imagination of the Muslim community in the 1930s and '40s—this could give us a clearer understanding of the kinds of identity that generated from these preoccupations.

The last stanza of *Asheqe Rasul* that we referred to in the beginning of this chapter describes one of the key elements to defining the community attribute, i.e. the essence of the Muslims, or the *jatiya* in the form of an individual and collective ethical-social code. This was a language of non-violence—an ethics of non-attached attachment which erupted at the moment of Imam Husayn's *shahadat*, or self-sacrifice, for the *ummah*.

### 5.1a The Search for a *jatiya*: history-biography-literature

এই সমস্ত মাদ্রাসার ছাত্রগণ কি জানে ইসলামের ইতিহাস কি? রসূলে খোদার ঐতিহাসিক জীবনী কি জিনিষ? তাহারা কি মুসলমানের ধর্মবিধিই সম্যক পরিজ্ঞাত? তফসির এবং হাদিসেই কি তাহাদের সম্পূর্ণ

---

<sup>19</sup> Sayed Abdul Mannan wrote *Tapas Kahini*, Barisal, 1939, *AsrareKhudi* (translation of Iqbal's poetry, Kalikata, 1945, *Abu Bakr Siddiqi*, Kalikata, 1946, *MaHuqabIQbal*, Kalikata, 1946, along with *Qaede Azam* (biography of Zinnah), Kalikata 1952, and Muhammad Wajid Ali wrote *Mahamanus Mohsin*, Kalikata, 1934, *SayyidAhmad*, Kalikata 1935, *Nawab Abdul Latif*, Kalikata, 1936, *Marubhaskar Hazrat Muhammad*, Kalikata, 1942, *Qayede Azam Mohammad Ali*, Moslem Book Depot, 1949. Shah Abdul Bari wrote *Qaede Azm Zinnah*, Bogra, 1946.

দক্ষতা আছে? ইসলাম -চিত্র ও সমাজ-চিত্র, মৌলভী শেখ আবদুল জব্বার, গফরগাঁও, ময়মনসিংহ, ১৯১৩[emphasis mine]

Interest in the life of Muhammad was not an entirely new thing that started in mid nineteenth century Bengal. The life of the Prophet had always been one of the major sources of religious sensibilities and concepts, as it had always acted as a substitute for scriptural sources and as a path towards the sublimation of devotional energy for the medieval vernacular masses. What was however new to the renewed interest in his life in the mid nineteenth century was its use in the attempt to minimize the impact of a *pir*-centric piety by reinstating a Prophet-centric piety. This was followed by attempts, in the beginning of the twentieth century, to inculcate a consciousness which was based on rational explication and historical claims. History, the historical, and historicity became the new logical framework through which one could talk about the life of the Prophet, to create a sensibility about elevated lives, or lives with the potential to be elevated. The fact that any theme connected to the Islamic scriptural tradition, or any narrative from the Persian literary tradition, when they were rendered into Bangla, faced much antagonism can be deduced from many authorial confessions. From Shah Muhammad Sagir, who translated the Persian *Yusuf Zalaikha*, to Sayyid Sultan, who wrote *Nabivamsa* in Bangla, both in the sixteenth century, most all authors expressed their urge to translate/transcreate texts into Bangla, and at the same time confessed to a guilt for having chosen the text. They generally resolved the anxiety by saying that, because they were writing to impart the knowledge of Islam to the local vernacular-speaking (‘দশেঁি ভাষ’) community that was coming slowly under the rubrics of Islam, that it was is for the better good, and that the people with *iman* must be forgiving towards the author (‘‘বুঝিয়া মুমনি দয়া করবি আমার’, *Nabivamsa*, Sayyid Sultan).

The authors of *sirat* in pre-colonial Bengal chose the life of the Islamic prophets, concluding with the last and final Prophet Muhammad, to recount the basic concepts of Islam, where the Prophet’s life attested to the oneness of Allah, and to the fact that Mohammad was His messenger. The narrative

power and energy of the life of Muhammad functioned as a substitute for as criptural tradition, as his life itself was the *Hadis*. So the truth-claim of the narrative of Muhammad's life, historically real but too sacred to be confined within the limits of time, marked the sensibility that coalesced around the Prophet. With the emergent need for history in keeping with the real linear time of late nineteenth century Bengal, the Prophet's life became a carrier of the historical time of the community.

With the publication and dissemination of defined biographies between the mid sixteenth and the early eighteenth centuries, other narrative forms like *maulud sharif* and lyrical expositions of *naat* were composed, cutting across different demographic regions and audiences. Both *maulud sharif* and *naat* became parts of recitation and singing on the occasions of *milad* when the birth ceremony of the Prophet entered the domain of performative rituals<sup>20</sup>. In the mid nineteenth century, when the life of the Prophet was given a historical grounding as the basic rationale for the knowledge he imparted for his community, the validity of such physical emotional expression was severely questioned alongside other ritualistic practices like Muharram and *Urs*, which reformist Islam would call un-Islamic<sup>21</sup>.

Though the name *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* conspicuously carries a direct reference to the order of Muhammad (as a concept premised on the historical model of the life of Muhammad and his absolute authority over the divine law, i.e. *sharia*), it was unanimously accepted and followed by individual reformers and reformist schools alike. The theoretical difference between Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and Shah Wali Allah, that marked the major ideological schism within the tradition of scriptural Islam in sixteenth century North India, was diminished on the question of Muhammad's authority<sup>22</sup>, in spite of their other doctrinal and ideological conflicts. The

---

<sup>20</sup> Amit Dey discusses the structure of the *mauludsharif* and its relevance for the Muslim community across time. *The Image of the Prophet* (Ratna Prakashana, Kolkata, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> I have talked extensively about the *shariyati* unease towards *shirk* and *bid'at* in the previous chapters.

<sup>22</sup> Pearson also mentions how Shah Wali Allah himself provided to his descendants, the theoretical aids necessary to transform the idea of the *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya*, by taking account of the issues pointed out by his eighteenth century critics. Pearson, p. 31.

forms of emotion and embodiment in contemporary Bengal, inspired by *Sufi* authors like Sayyid Sultan or Shaikh Chand were different from this scriptural reformist Prophet-centric consciousness. But that hardly means that we would be able to create another set of essences by positing the case of Bengal, as one that grew out of a folk consciousness about Prophet-centric piety. Rather, the *sirat* in Bangla, which generated over the space of a few centuries with respect to *mauludsharif*, *naat* and *mirajnama*, points to the variedness in the affiliation of the audience, the different demographic locations and their respective cultural-religious significances, and the scriptural and ritualistic inclinations of the authors and the way they addressed their target audience. All these authors of the *sirat*, Saiyid Sultan, Shaikh Chand, Shah Barid Khan and Heyat Mamud, showed a tremendous energy in their transactions between the high scriptural tradition of Islam and the non-Islamic scriptural knowledge bases of Bengal—like the *puranic*, *Vaishnavite* and *Nathapanthi* traditions—while also borrowing from lived folk expressions, depending on their various interests and capacities<sup>23</sup>. Tony Stewart's much discussed article 'In Search of an Equivalence'<sup>24</sup> is one of our major critical sources for understanding such dialogue and transactions between the different high scriptural traditions in Bengal after the advent of Islam, and after the beginning of several narrative traditions in print. By taking account of the *sirat* literature in Bengal and the performative rituals connected to the narrative of the Prophet's life, I want to keep in mind that the multitudinous forms of piety which emanated and developed in medieval Bengal ranged from high scriptural traditions and aesthetic idioms to more lived-folk, piety oriented expressions, making any linear form of religiosity impossible for the following generations. Connections and disjunctions within the literary consumer groups marked the community in medieval and early modern Bengal, and continued to remain so even in a period which strived for a more structured identity from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, albeit in a different format. So, when we say that it was the life of the Prophet that was demanded by the Muslim

---

<sup>23</sup> How the different inclinations of the authors of the Prophet's biographies symbolized different layers in the Muslim public has been discussed thoroughly by Amit Dey, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Tony Stewart, 'In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory', *History of Religions*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (February, 2001), pp. 260–287

public sphere in Bengal, we need to keep in mind that the definition of history and the modes of belief were diverse within the Muslim community which was searching for its identity and responding to contemporary political situations.

The audience's claim over the historical was so diverse in its understanding of history in connection to belief and piety that the project of modernity became really complex and enchanting for the community. We will talk about the literary practices around the writing of spatial-temporal history that consumed and formulated history, biography and literature to claim a *jatiya* for the Bengal Muslim community.

In the scriptural theological reclamation of Prophet Muhammad from the mid eighteenth century in North India, the spiritual dimension of Muhammad was highlighted to overcome the political-ideological crisis by theologians like Shah Wali Allah. Later, in the first decades of the nineteenth century Sayyid Ahmad, of Rai Bareilly, introduced the political and military aspects of the personality of the Prophet as an ideal template for the *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya*. I should be mention here, that the reason for which the common masses responded so enthusiastically to the calls of the reformist preachers, was also because of the fact that they could identify the spiritual and military attributes of the Prophet, as the core of piety. We could see it as a certain continuation of the literary-performative communities of medieval and early modern Bengal, which had so far been identified with the Prophetic narrative traditions produced by the *Sufis*. What I would like to add here is that, the life events of the Prophet, connected both to his ideal conduct and military accomplishments in the *Hadis*, and offered the possibility of forging a sense of historicity in his sacred life, which was otherwise ethereal and atemporal.

Though within the Islamic world-view, there have been robust attempts and debates through the ages on the methodologies of writing objective history, as connected to jurisprudence and polity, the indispensability of the life of Muhammad had always remained central. Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855)



says, “As regards traditions from the Messenger of God on what is allowed and what is forbidden, on what is laid down and what is decreed, we are tough on the *isnad*, but for traditions of the prophet on the virtues of certain actions and what does not prescribe or proscribe, we go easy on the *isnad*”<sup>25</sup>. That is why the *isnad*—i.e. the narrator—who was the means for the transmission of the *Hadis* was always reviewed critically so that one could recognize and accept its truth claim. To demarcate between the status of the *Hadis* and other forms of historical narration, say of *khobar*, the *muhaddiths*, as a criterion of evaluation, emphasized the flawlessness of narration, which indicated an impartial, untreated form of pure transmission. The use of the prefix *sahi-*, or right, before the *Hadis* texts came into practice once these truth-claims of the narratorial voice were beginning to be questioned as part of the debates over historical methodology. *Khobar*, which was the other kind of narration, was predicated upon imparting a structure, and a trace of mediation, which created other forms of historical narration. These two forms, the *Hadis* and *khobar*, as Julia Bray shows in her discussion of the culture of representation in medieval Islam, were placed against fictional narration, which appears for example, in *Alif Laila*, and other poetic works. Though the difference between the truth and imaginative invention was thoroughly marked, fiction and history shared techniques and strategies for the composition of their discourses.

Theological status had always been given to the narrations which could claim the truth, that is, narrations about the life of the Prophet. A very curious thing was witnessed when the life of the Prophet, with the proliferation of *sirat* and *maghazi* literature in Islamicate countries, could not remain in isolation and made overlaps and interfaces with the poetic imaginative tradition. In the Islamicate world the poetic imaginative tradition would also refer back to the Prophetic tradition to claim the truth. When Shah Muhammad Sagir wrote *YusufZaleikha*, he could easily claim authenticity by choosing a story from the Qur’an. *YusufZaleikha*, thus, in the context of the romantic *qissa* tradition written in the vernacular—like

---

<sup>25</sup> From *Writing and Representation in Medieval Islam: Muslim Horizons*, (ed) Julia Bray, Routledge, London & New York, p. 20.

*Padmavati* by Sayid Alaol or *Laila Majnu*—stood apart because of its Qur’anic reference; and could hence make a claim for historicity. In the Islamicate world, with the proliferation of Sufism and its greater capacity to reach the masses, this question of historical authenticity was not based on any sanctioned methodology of writing history that the classical and medieval Arabic traditions were so bothered about. It was never a search for history; but, for a secure substitute of the *Qur’an* and the *Hadis*, which were not available to the masses in medieval Bengal. While there was no practice of history writing in the vernacular using the methodology of historicity, the al-Bukhari statement—that anything related to the biography of the Prophet is the truth—was somehow perennially carried forward, as the core belief guiding the production of narratives connected to the Prophetic world. Following the ethics of *isnad* as attesting direct experience, granting an access to the truth, and transmitting it without any loss or addition, the testaments of the Prophet’s companions became very important as they were thought of as preserving reports of the Prophet’s life. A gradual codification of the life events of the Prophet, was needed for giving the life of the Prophet the shape of a meta-trope of history. Writing about the life of the Prophet started to become an attempt motivated and qualified by the science of narration/history—*ilm-ar-Rijal*<sup>26</sup>. The earliest expositions about the life of the Prophet—in both the genres of *sirat* and *maghazi* literature, followed the same narrative configuration as *isnad* where anecdotes, battle narratives, miraculous tales and poetry created the body of literatures entitled *Al-sirah al-nabawiyah*<sup>27</sup>.

The debate in Arabic historiography about the ethics of historicity and the methodology of writing history did not touch the vernacular mind where rather than *isnad*, or the presence of the flawless reporter, a report with emplotment, characterization and narrative sequence had greater value because it could strike the right chord with the target audience. The Perso-Arabic derived tradition of historicity had to find other ways of being

---

<sup>26</sup>A *Cultural History of Arabic Language*, Sharron Gu, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2014, p. 125.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid, p. 124.

“obliged to defend God”<sup>28</sup> in polytheistic ritual based locations. It was both the spiritual aspect of Muhammad in the local *Sufi sirat* literature in Bangla, as I have already mentioned, as also his military prowess; which had already been explored in *sirat* and *maghazi* literature in Bangla, that were separately emphasized by Wali Allah and Sayyid Ahmad of Rai Bareilly.

While the reformers were reinvigorating the life of Muhammad to meet a theological end, there were simultaneous efforts to create a contemporary version of the Prophet’s life, such that it could represent the ideal, and the idea of modernity. These latter efforts were the counter-narratives to the discourses on the life of the Prophet produced by the Orientalists and the colonialists, and intended to reclaim the life of the Prophet as rational-scientific-ethical values, which in turn could be extended to and emulated by the community.

What was most striking in these efforts was not only the introduction of historicity for the Prophet and his community through the narration of his life, but also the move towards the generic categorization of the life-narratives under history as a discipline. The life of Muhammad, in this process, would be simultaneously connected to its historical site in Arabiya in the work of Muslim religious scholars and in the literature produced in north India—in order to validate the Muslim community of the region—this was an effect of the dialogic exchanges between genres. The Bengal Muslim community, in their rendition of the life of Muhammad and of the community, would constantly refer to sources in Persian-Urdu-English to formulate a Bangla counterpart of Islamic history in order to articulate the *jatiya* of the community. However, as the multiple sources for the writing of history were ideologically polyvalent, including the theological *Hadis*, as well as the history books by the Oriental-colonial administrators and the modernist English and/or Urdu speaking Islamic intelligentsia, it is worth noting how different social groups in Bengal were receiving, and responding to, this polyvalence.

---

<sup>28</sup>Ibid. p. 119.

With that, we go back to the beginning of this section, where Shaikh Abdul Jabbar was expressing a major unease and displeasure with the lack of historical consciousness in the traditional conception of the Prophet's life, and of an Islamic past. That an Islamic past should be retrieved in a rational way, and be reclaimed as the essence of the community from the traditional knowledge systems, were the criteria set down by both the reformists and religious intelligentsia at the same time. The difference between an ideal form of Islam, and other forms which were connected more to the performative and ritualistic within the community, was debated over to assert Muslim identity as historical-rational, and also to express it as history.

The depiction of Medina as a devotional centre was not a new thing in the Arabic or Persian narratives because of its sacred inhabitants, and also because of the increasing proliferation of *hajj* literature since the medieval period. But what was new was its new positioning in the landscape of devotionalism in the minds of the people of Bengal. In the medieval and the early modern, Medina or Mecca were distant references in the narratives and did not need to become real geographical spaces for the Bangla speaking audience. Rather, with the localization of the sacred and quasi-historical characters, all the spatial coordinates around them used to accrue a local character. But this was a paradigmatic moment, when Mecca and Medina came into being, as real spaces, with their full spiritual scriptural coordinates, in constituting the core of community identity, forging new connections between the local and the pan-Islamic coordinates of Muslim identity.

These narratives on the originary lands, of both Mecca and Medina, not only solidified the core of one's identity but also gave rise to another form of devotionalism as integrally connected to the discourse of the obligatory principles of Islam, namely, to the discourse of *hajj*. These texts started to function as catalysts by offering a narrative imagination of these alien lands, to which one could now belong, and which now came to constitute the core

of one's spatial identity. These texts, of history and biography, invoked a certain sense of psychological and physical mobility between one's region and these ordinary lands, such that the Muslims in Bengal who were unable to perform the physical pilgrimage of *hajj*, could now read these books as a form of sublimation of their desire to perform *hajj*<sup>29</sup>. A host of elite Bangla literature, and also popular print productions, could thus stake their claims on certain forms of religiosity, which were perceived by the reading public. While these texts were trying to purge out the physical forms of religiosity and devotionism that derived from the medieval and the early modern periods, they also proposed other alternative forms of devotionism authenticated by modern genres, but their content or import cannot be fully accommodated and justified within the limits of these genres. So the values of these genres, and the modernity that they embodied, both had to be expanded beyond their pre-given limits in order to enable them to hold a Muslim *jatiya* and a Muslim identity in Bengal. In this reworking of genres, we might be able to find how the Muslim community worked on, and with modernity, in their search for a *jatiya* identity.

In the domain of literature, the stock generic expressions for praising one's motherland, as formulated by the Hindu nationalist poets and authors, were adapted to sing the glory of Medina and to secure its affective position in the hearts of the Bengal Muslims. Now, the concept of surrender was predicated upon the concept of feeling, which was also integral to the sense of the *jatiya*, thus invocations to surrender to the motherland—Medina—followed this agenda. If we look at the 'Praise for the Motherland' section in *Karbala Kabya* by Abdul Bari, we would see that if the Muslim references (three to be precise—Medina-*bhumi*, Nabi-Mohammad and Islam-Rabi) are taken out of it, the poem would seem to be no different from any poem praising Bharat, or Bengal, by any Hindu nationalist poet<sup>30</sup>—like Dwijendralal Roy, for instance.

---

<sup>29</sup>আমাদের ভাগ্যে তাহা দেখিবার উপায় নাই। চক্ষু না দেখিলেও গ্রন্থকারের বর্তমান গ্রন্থে আমরা তাহার অনেক তথ্য জানিতে পারিলাম। *MoslemSuhrid*, 13 Baishakh, 1314

<sup>30</sup>শক্তি-মন্দাকিনী ওগো মাতৃভূমি মা আমার!

Referring to *Sahi Bokhari*, Abdul Jabbar expounded upon the sacred value of the dust of Medina, which Hazrat Muhammad did not allow his people to wipe off from his face. Abdul Jabbar vouched for the power of the dust of Medina, which had the power to purify even the hearts of the sinful. The author even quoted the testimony of one reverend Mozaddadain Firuzabadi, who gave his servant the dust of Medina dissolved in water, to drink, when all medicine had failed<sup>31</sup>.

As explained in the previous chapter, the *jatiya* was also a concept taken on by several groups of litterateurs, who tried to create a scope for the rational in the context of religion and religious identity. Literature became a site of contestation, and literary societies attempted to create a sensibility towards literature as a discursive site, to realize and secure a linguistic quotient for identity. Within this milieu, the discursive and the literary ceased to exist in separate autonomous domains, and started talking to each other around the questions of linguistic and generic sensibilities. While the authors of history from the *Sudhakar* group were trying very hard to define history as a genre, separating it from the folkloric and ritualistic consciousness prevalent in the *sabiqi* system, they were inclined to make use of the generic strategies and contemporary storytelling patterns so painstakingly devised by the litterateurs. The legacy of *Sudhakar* and the Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Samaj (BMSS)<sup>32</sup> came to overlap over the question of a *jatiya* history and a *jatiya sahitya* for the sustenance of the community.

---

তোমার গৌরব-পণে  
আজই মা এখানে রণে  
তোমারই প্রসাদে কত বহাইছি রক্তধার!  
জপি তরে নিরবধি  
সাতারিয়ে রক্তনদী  
বিজয় ঘোষিতে আজই পেরেছি গো মা তোমার!...  
নতুবা হেন কাজে শক্তি ছিলকোথা অভাগার?

শক্তি-মন্দাকিনী ওগো মাতৃভূমি মা আমার! *KarbalaKabya*, Abdul Bari, p. 149.

<sup>31</sup> *Medinasharifer Itihas*, Shaikh Abdul Jabbar, p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samaj* was a response from the Muslim intelligentsia of Bengal to the functioning of the *Bangiya Sahitya Parishat*. Chandiprasad Sarkar, 1991.

In this chapter, we will also be talking about conflicts and debates, and also about overlaps and interstitial spaces in the attempts to define biography, history, language and genre by the religious intelligentsia and the litterateurs. While we look at the increasing imperative towards standardization within the print culture that supported the religious intelligentsia and litterateurs alike, and while we are talking about the *anjumans* and literary societies in Kolkata and Dacca and in the major *mufassil* towns, we will be discussing the popular and lived forms of identity within these conceptualizations, and without. In this thesis, I will attempt to address and unpack this tremendous energy invested towards identity formation—an identity that became thoroughly ambivalent and fractured within—in the formulation of biography and history, and their connection to the questions of language, genre and literature.

### **5.1b Muir and Sir Sayyid Ahmad, Sen and *Sudhakar*: The Age of claiming the Prophetic life**

We find an explosion of *sirat*/biographies of Muhammad since the late nineteenth century. When Sir Sayyid Ahmad—who believed in and campaigned for western education through the Aligarh movement—wrote a biography of the Prophet as a counter-narrative to William Muir’s Orientalist-colonialist rendition entitled *Life of Mohamet* (1861), two purposes were served. Sir Ahamad Khan’s *A Series of Essays on the Life of Mohammed from the Original Sources*<sup>33</sup> made a paradigmatic break in the way biographies of the Prophet were being conceived and written in the colonial period. In Sir Ahmad’s rationalist agenda, the spiritual and reformist goals of the reformer-authors (as already mentioned) were completely transformed to make room for the emergence of Muhammad as a historical personality with his superior but worldly virtues. This text massively influenced the formulation of the genre of history and biography not only for the elite Urdu sphere, but also for vernacular cultures like Bangla. What is important to note here is that, Muir also played a

---

<sup>33</sup> The last revised version of this book was published in 1912 and was then reprinted in 1923 under the supervision of T. H. Weir.

significant part in this paradigmatic shift in placing the life of Muhammad in/as historical events, since he lended historical plausibility to the Prophet and Islam, even though his figuration was essentialist and Orientalist in nature<sup>34</sup>. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan was quick to understand that Muir had written his biography of the Prophet precisely at a moment when “the biography of the Prophet of Islam, suitable for the perusal of his followers, should be compiled in the Hindoostani languages from the early sources acknowledged by themselves to be authentic and authoritative”. He felt great unease to see that the English-educated young men from the community had remained ignorant about their own theology because they did not have a proper knowledge of Persian or Arabic, and would endow themselves with Muir’s “misrepresentation of plain and simple facts”<sup>35</sup>. Sir Sayyid Ahmad’s question, indeed, continued to recur in the psyche of the educated intelligentsia in northern India and in Bengal alike, as to “what are those facts in reality”<sup>36</sup>?

From Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan to the minor Muslim writers of Bengal, everyone attempted to solve the same riddle—‘what are those facts in reality’—and in the process, produced the genre of history. Before Shibli Nomani (1857–1914) could finish his *Sirat-un-Nabi*, the next volume in Urdu on the life of Muhammad, which would be completed and published by his disciple Syed Sulaiman Nadvi in 1914 after Nomani’s death, Syed Ameer Ali published his biography of the Prophet entitled *The Spirit of Islam, Or the Life and Teaching of Muhammad* (1874). This book actually acted as more of a direct counter-narrative to Muir’s for being written in English, and addressing the same readership as Muir. From the campaigners of western education to their opponents, symbolically articulated so aptly in the difference between Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Shibli Nomani<sup>37</sup>, the

---

<sup>34</sup> This is a shift from the Christian Missionary framework of classifying Islam as a false religion by imparting historical evidential facts to place Islam and its Prophet as essentially demeaning, derogatory and false. J. M. S. Balijon, *The Reform and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, Leiden, 1948, p. 88.

<sup>35</sup> Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, p. xix, cited in Antonie Wessels, p. 226.

<sup>36</sup> Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, p. xix, cited in Antonie Wessels, p. 226.

<sup>37</sup> Nomani was opposed to western education, as such, and was said to be an opponent of the Aligarh movement. In 1914 he established Dar-ul-Musannofeen in Azamgarh which encouraged the writing of non-fictional prose to promote biography and historical writing



Urdu public sphere, in expressing its connection to the life of the Prophet, could not, and did not, hide a defensive tone as that, actually, was their explicit agenda. Sir Syed Ameer Ali primarily worked with two genres, namely, biography and history, along with his other writings on the system of Islamic law. The biography of Muhammad by Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam: A History of the Evolution and Ideals of Islam*, by putting the biography of Muhammad, and the history of development of Islamic theosophical, social and political ideas within the framework of a single book written to explain the spirit of Islam, established the generic abilities of biography—both as constituting the core scriptural values and also as history. What we can deduce from this, is the inevitability of Muhammad’s life in any statement about theology, piety, polity and social values in Islam. However, since the life of Muhammad, as something real, was also connected to the lives of both his family and the ministry of the caliphate—thus it was, that the biographies of his grandsons and his companions also became such important resources for charting out devotionalism and history as modern realizations.

Bengal can be taken as a rich site of reception since the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia referred to Muir, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Syed Ameer Ali in the same breath with the *Hadis* texts, as being authentic sources for the life of Muhammad. But the curious positioning of the Prophet’s life and Islamic history, in drawing the *jatiya* from the Urdu meta-narratives, was not in actuality, a replication of the Urdu-model, just as the claim of a Muslim *jatiya* was essentially separate from its Hindu counterpart. This layered appropriation of the Urdu and the Bangla model, and their separation from the same was what made this drive so creative, and so layered. So, a linear idea of an Urdu template working on the minds of the Bengal Muslims to produce the Bengal Muslim *jatiya* cannot be adequate to explain the case of Bengal. The defence mechanism at work here was not only against the British hegemonic Orientalist texts, but also against the

---

as the meta-narrative for the community. His biography of the Prophet titled *Sirat-un-Nabi*, a book of history called *Tarikh-i-Islam*, and a treatise on the splendours of Mughal architecture in India called *Hindustan ki Ahd-i-Wasta ki ek Jhalak* were received in the Bangla print culture, which eventually published books on the same themes.

Hindu Orientalist-nationalist idea about Islam, from which the Muslim intelligentsia had to defend its history and its *jatiya*. They had to retrieve and also to re-create.

While Syed Ameer Ali and Abdul Latif were in direct communication with, and ideologically and culturally strongly connected with, the north Indian rationalist movements, the Bangla speaking intelligentsia showed a much more nuanced and layered relationship with reform and rationality, in terms of both the elite and the popular forms of expression.

*Maulud* literature in Bengal continued to be written in the first decades of the twentieth century without much of a care for the historical accuracy of facts and intentions. Between the ritualistic celebration of *milad* and the high literature about the life of Muhammad, these texts offered the intersectional interstitial spaces where *tauhid* was being proclaimed as the ideal form of Islam, against the common masses' inclination to *shirk*. These *maulud* texts in *Musalmani*-Bangla were more concerned with the supernatural aspect of Muhammad (rather than a rational historical Muhammad), that was so vehemently opposed by the writers of biography (a practice initiated by *Sudhakar*), who attempted to demythologize Muhammad's life to carve out an authentic historical version of it. No matter what aspect or event of Muhammad's life was being written about, whether it was rational or miraculous, it would be deployed equally by the texts from the late nineteenth century onwards, for a quite different sort of distinction altogether, as the texts began to differentiate between the monotheism of Islam and its polytheistic neighbourhood.

In this process, there were various points of overlap between the two poles, between the miraculous and the rational. Mir Musharraf Husain's *Maulud Sharif* was different from his predecessors, like Abdul Ali Chowdhuri<sup>38</sup> and Munshi Bainuddin<sup>39</sup>, and also from the generation that followed him, writing with a religious agenda in their minds. Mir Musharraf, while modernizing the *maulud* form by incorporating prose along with the verse

---

<sup>38</sup> *Maulud Sharif* was published in 1874 from Kalikata. Amit Dey, p. 32, *Motir Haar, Sonar Khani, Bangla Maulud, Hilar Khani*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Decca, 1925.

<sup>39</sup> Mian, *Rasul-Charit*, p. 226, Amit Dey, p. 32.

form, however, could not quite capture the pure historical rationale of his contemporary Syed Ameer Ali<sup>40</sup>. It will be difficult for us, to find a strictly historical rational consciousness in these narratives in Bangla, including that of Mir Musharraf Husain, but, again, in this thesis I am not in search of any binary between historical and mythological consciousness. Rather, my intention is to engage with the overlaps between the deliberate<sup>41</sup> and non-deliberate attempts to cling on to the miraculous, or towards the historical, while writing biographies of the sacred figures of Islam. In this discussion, as we may have already presaged, we will see that historicity and historical consciousness might not be found or charted out that easily, if our search is really for a unilinear notion of history. That way we might fail to see how the popular was affected by, and also absorbed, various ideological thrusts and practices of the intelligentsia, and how the standardizing principles of the vernacular absorbed high linguistic cultural artefacts, and yet, retained an affective connection with the popular ways of believing, thinking and articulating.

As literature is formed and rationality is claimed, how the rational, in terms of its understanding of history and of collective identity functioned to reformulate and reaffirm a religious consciousness, and how it was reformulated, in turn, by religious consciousness, needs to be noted carefully, especially in the case of the Muslim community in Bengal in their quest towards the formation of a identity, and of the modern. Finally, we will have to say that this religious consciousness never became an enemy of modernity; rather, it remained and recurred as an explanatory framework and as an integral value constituting the ideas of both identity and modernity.

Depending on the affiliation of the author and the implied readership, the presence of this excess took on several shapes. But one has to carefully note what kinds of texts were positing which elements or aspects as valid, and

---

<sup>40</sup> Amit Dey, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> When Mir Musharraf Husain deliberately kept the miraculous in his narratives on the life of the Prophet and on the battle of Karbala, it did not become devoid of historical consciousness; rather it produced an immense amount of creative energy which was ambiguous, fluid, unfixed as a mode of consciousness and also as a form—it was, in effect, a marker of Muslim colonial modernity in the late nineteenth century.

with what sense of reason and rationality here. Shaikh Abdur Rahim validated the oracle, which involved a unique un-earthly transaction between Allah and Muhammad, and tried very hard to eliminate, from Muhammad's life, the supernatural and miraculous, which since reformism had been regarded as forms of *shirk*. All the biographies attempted to refute the falsehood that, according to these new-age writers, had been an integral part of the pre-reform period or prevalent in the popular traditions. The religious intelligentsia had to save the scriptural divine from the supernatural and the miraculous, in order to modernize religion with scriptural reason.

In the process, this refutation of the supernatural became very much like a stock, an integral generic utterance in the domain of history, biography and literature; so much so that sometimes it was used without any rationalization of the stock material that a sacred life traditionally offered. For instance, when the biographies of Shaikh Abdur Kadir Jilani, the founder of the *Qadiriya* sect, invaded the religious and devotional landscape of Bengal<sup>42</sup>, a truth claim relating to his life, following the generic characteristics of the biographies of Muhammad and other sacred characters, was posited in the beginning of the narrative by Azhar Ali, in *Barha Pir Saheber Jibani O Asacharjo Keramat*<sup>43</sup> unabated by the reference,

---

<sup>42</sup> Shah Khalilur Rahman Qaderi, *Emdade Mahbube Sobhani Shaikh Abdul Qader Jilani*, Noakhali, 1927, Maulavi Alauddin Ahmad, *Barha Pir Saheber Jibani*, 1899. He also wrote *OmarCharit*. His connection with *IslamPracharak*, not only strengthened his position within the contemporary *Hanafi* sect but also stands proof to the major connections between this sect and the *QadiriyaSufi* order in Bengal. It is important to note how Jilani as a *Sufi* teacher and leader was accepted in Bengal with the same reverence as the four companions and the house of the Prophet. *Ghasul Azam Barha Pir*, Abdul Wahhab Siddiqi, Ahsan Ullah Book House Ltd., College Square, 1940 (he also wrote *Nabi-Jiban*, *Tajmahal*, *Amar Dekha Hamidpur*, which places his devotion towards Jilani within a landscape of devotionalism with certain important characteristic markers, for which his location in Bengal was as important as national pride and pan-Islamic belonging); pp. 88–89

<sup>43</sup> *Barha Pir Saheber Jibani O Ashcharjo Keramat*, Upper Chitpur Road, Kalikata, 1918. One cannot but notice that his book was published by Muhammad Suleiman, Muhammad Aftabuddin and Muhammad Kamruddin—the trio who co-translated the book *Qasasol Ambiya*. The exposition of the narrative fixed a linear historical time and space, and the author vilified the Shias and Rafeji sects and held them responsible for the decline of the glory of Islam. The Shias were disowned as an Islamic community for their frenzied expressions of emotion for Imam Ali, and the Rafegies for their rejection of Ali, the caliph. Thus any other claim over Ali, whether it was in a positive sense, like that of the Shias, or in a negative sense, like the Rafejis, was negated to preserve Ali at the centre of

in the title of the volume, to the ‘wondrous miracles’, which he had supposedly performed.

Azhar Ali’s biography of Abdul Qadir Jilani struck the chord between the new found rationalizing-historicizing mission and the still felt need and relevance of the miraculous. The title kept the term *keramat* (miracle); while in the authorial note Ali, the author, refuted all the previous books (which could not offer the historical life of Barho Pir because they were based on the miraculous), the biography itself, however, could not let go of the miraculous events of Jilani’s life because they served to affirm the extraordinariness of his life. In the same way that the early efforts of *Sudhakar* could not entirely give the miraculous away, and justified its presence as a basic tenet of piety, as we have already seen, Azhar Ali too, represented the liminal stage between the strict rationalism of Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan, and the authors of the cheap print, who were critiqued not only by *Sudhakar* and by other members of the religious intelligentsia, but also by Azhar Ali himself for their belief in *keramat*. Azhar Ali’s Husayn also was seen as performing several miracles in his book *Karbala Kabya*. By saying this, I just want to reiterate the fact that between these two opposing positions, one liberal and rational and the other traditional, lay the possibility for the emergence of various groups and groupings regarding how, exactly, a template of ideals for the community would arise.

### 5.1c Biographies as the ideal: *Jibon as Jatiya*

এই মহাপুরুষের জীবনবৃত্তান্ত যতই আলোচিত হইবে, পাপের প্রভাব ততই কমিয়া আসিবে, এবং ভ্রমাক্রম মানবগণও পুণ্যের দিকে ততই অগ্রসর হইতে থাকিবে।

কবিবর মুনশী কায়কোবাদ সাহেব লিখিত ভূমিকা, *হজরতের জীবনী*, মৌলভী শেখ আবদুল জব্বার।<sup>44</sup>

---

*Qadiriya* devotionalism. Ali had to be reclaimed, as the *Qadiriya* order claims to have originated from Ali’s line of the family.

<sup>44</sup> “The more you recount the life stories of this great *man* [emphasis mine], the more your sins shall wash away, and the deviant men will move towards *punya*.” From the ‘Introduction’, written by the poet Kaykobad to *Hajrater Jibani*, Shaikh Abdul Jabbar, 1913.

We cannot but notice here, in this quote, the great emphasis placed on the greatness of a ‘man’ whose bare name ‘Hajarat’ stood as a self-sufficient self-explanatory signifier. The Prophet, in the hands of the religious intelligentsia like Shaikh Abdul Jabbar, became a man, with the text shedding off the invocation to *darood*, or prayer, which had always appeared after his name—‘*allahassalam*’ (meaning ‘Peace be upon him’) or the *pbuh*, as this *darood* was known. Massive debates among the Muslim public followed in this period to critique or justify this absence of the *pbuh*, showing the emergence of various ideologies concerning the viability of language, as connected or disconnected with religious expressions. With the absence of the *darood*, in the form of *pbuh*, these authors of biography and history envisaged a deliberate tryst with modernity, by bringing the sacred narrative closer to the domain of modern literary genres. This, in turn, created the possibility of adding a this-worldly orientation to religion, opening the narrative up to the individual ability of the readers, to engage with and follow ‘the life’, as a template for their own religious life. The emergence of a Man, he, Muhammad, who with his rationalistic-political-moral values could initiate a religion and an *ummah*, became a theme with the help of which Muhammad could be brought out of the domain of magical qualities and miraculous deeds. Both biography and history, within their own respective generic capacities, and going beyond their limitations, analyzed the root cause for the fall of their community, and proposed ways to regain past ideals. Shaikh Abdul Jabbar of *Sudhakar*, diligently discussed the ideals of Islam, the historical context of the ideas, and the fall of the community from its original glory; and like all the authors of these genres, he also proposed Prophetic grace as its salvation.

Muhammad’s life was made a template to propose an ideal, both a reservoir and a channel for the social values so intensely needed for the reformulation of the community<sup>45</sup>. His life was articulated and posited as the solution to

---

<sup>45</sup> We have already discussed in the previous chapter the need that was felt for the moral-social-economic upliftment of the community. Literature on religious codes went hand in hand with social treatises, and the values articulated were inherently informed by the religio-moral codes of Islam.

the conflict over the inheritance of his knowledge, and the political power handed down through the *khilafat*, to serve the causes of reform, identification, nationalism and modernity. To create the community through the life of the prophet, his companions and his family were also reclaimed by the individual authors and religious sectarian platforms. For an individual like Shaikh Abdul Jabbar, on the one hand, it was his affiliation to the *Hanafi* ideology and on the other, his endeavour to re-write the traditional *sirat* within the scope of modern generic configurations of biography-history that together defined the demands of the time.

Where Muhammad's life was concerned, and ideals were to be set down for the moral betterment of the community, the purpose could not be fulfilled without the inclusion of his companions and his family. Thus Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman, Ali and Hasan-Husayn offered their life-stories for the creation of other biographical texts, and the women of the Prophet's family were also included to posit the ideal feminine conduct in Islam for the women of the community. Also, if we make a list of the narratives on the life of Muhammad, we will see that it encompasses a wide range of texts written by people with different orientations and affiliations.

Whatever the orientations and affiliations were, the reformist ideals and the modernizing thrust together made a paradigmatic change by inducing an urge to clarify what was the ideal form of Islam. The life of the Prophet was a tool to show what was false and non-viable for the formation and the formulation of the Prophet's community.

It was both the birth ceremony of the prophet, and the death of his grandsons, which had to be recovered from the clutches of the ritualistic and returned to the domain of the scriptural-historical. Since the beginning of the emergence of a consciousness based on a historical depiction of the Prophet, there were attempts to prohibit *milad* and *Muharram*, because of their physical portent. But it is interesting to note that while *milad* could be re-appropriated as a scripturally sanctioned ritual, (by rewriting its codes of conduct) *Muharram*, as a ritual, could not be accommodated because of the

sheer impossibility of lessening in any way the acute bodily expression of pain intrinsic to it. However, when we talk about the thrust of history and modernity, we need to find texts which also responded to this thrust and responded in various ways, which might not be looked at as purely historical or rational, but were important in the new turn towards the scriptural in defining the community across class and location, and across socio-moral affiliations. Vehement critiques of *milad* could be found even in *Musalmani-Bangla* texts like *Kalir Fakirer Khela O Alemganer Nasihat* (1920) as an outcome of the reformist movements—these texts were aimed at a readership not so well-exposed to the newly availed practice of standardized Bangla; that is to say, they remained beyond the circuit or circulation of books written by new age religious clergy, intelligentsia and litterateurs. In this text, the author, Shri Abbas Ali<sup>46</sup> clearly described how the *kathmullahs* were more interested in performing *maulud* than reading the *Qur'an* and the *Hadis*<sup>47</sup>. A critique of *milad* was generally accompanied by the critique of other physical and lived forms which had imbibed *shirk* and could be considered as *bid'at*. The concern for a conscious turn to the scriptural sources was placed differently by different segments of the public through the invocation of the life of Muhammad.

It will be futile to make generic demarcations between history, biography and literature in *Sudhakar's* understanding and formulation of the *jatiya*, which would continue as the ideology of the religious intelligentsia till the 1930s and 1940s. Because of the way the religious intelligentsia defined *jatiya sahiyta* for the community, literature could not be conceived without

---

<sup>46</sup>Here it should also be mentioned here that the honorary prefix '*Shri*' does not present an overlap with the honorific used by the Hindu community, rather, it was borrowed without any communal context as a symbol of status readily available in the print market, where the Hindu proprietors were printing and publishing cheap prints in *Musalmani-Bangla* for profit. Banerwar Ghosh was one such prolific publisher.

<sup>47</sup>কোরান শরীফ মোল্লা পড়িতে না চায়।

মৌলুদ পড়িতে তারা বাড়ী বাড়ী যায়।। ...

দুই দিগে দুই ছোকরা বসাইয়া লয়।

মুরাসা বাকিয়া মোল্লা মধ্যখানে রয়।। ...

মৌলুদ পড়িতে করে অনেক পরিপাটী।

কোরান পড়িতে গেলে লাগে ফাটাফাটী।। ঢাকা, ১৩২৭



the life narratives, and historical references to an ideal age of Islam. Though initially it might seem that generic distinctions were being made between the biographical, the historical and the literary, we would see much mutual exchange, transaction and generic overlap within this network, making it impossible to claim any autonomy for any of the three. However, as biography had always been about the sacred Prophetic lives and the history related to the Prophet, literature—as defined by the members of *Sudhakar* and other religious intelligentsia—was always thickly informed by *dharmabhab*, i.e. the basic ethico-religious ideas of Islam.

Attempts were being made since the 1920s to separate the domain of literature and culture from the scriptural religious, as I have already said in the previous chapters—this was happening in the face of much antipathy from the religiously inclined intelligentsia. The ideological conflict between the journals *Sikha*, *Saogat*, and *Mohammadi* can be read as a representative example of a conflict between two kinds of interpretations of and approaches to religion, in order to define modernity and literariness, where both claimed to be equally viable for the purpose of defining the identity of the Bengal Muslims.

I will be discussing the debates and deliberations in the attempts to define a cultural nationalism outside of this overtly religious domain in the next chapter and will talk about the patterns of contest and coalition. I will discuss the plausibilities and possibilities that these debates delivered, by going through the reports and exegeses in several journals and literary societies emerging since the 1920s, which shaped the contours of other perspectives on modernity. It should be mentioned here that while much work has been done elsewhere on the relevance of the ideology and functioning of a more ‘secular’ stint with modernity<sup>48</sup>, the relevance of the religious intelligentsia in forming the dynamics of Muslim identity and modernity has not been properly discussed.

---

<sup>48</sup> A.K. Chakraborty, Neilesh Bose, 2014, Suchetana Bandyopadhyay, 2010, Zahir Abbas, 2011.

The magnitude of the power of the narrative to tell the realities of Islamic sacred figures and concepts bypassed the question of authenticity, as history, as such, was not the concern. When history writing itself was thought to have been affected by narratives “to the point that many historians repeat[ed] the same material without proper analysis and divorce[d] of an overall detailed understanding of the events”<sup>49</sup>, we can understand how narratives became so autonomously powerful without the need for any kind of authentication from objective history, and became history themselves.

Munshi Naimuddin’s translation of the *Qur’an* translation began to be published from 1887 at a time when all the three volumes of the translation (in twelve parts) by Bhai Girishchandra Sen had already been published (1881–1885)<sup>50</sup>. Girishchandra Sen’s attempt to tell the life stories of Muhammad and his grandsons falls chronologically between those by Syed Ameer Ali and the *Sudhakar* network. But his agenda was different from Ameer Ali’s, and Sen was the first among the Bangla-speaking Bengalis to explore a plethora of original Arabic and Persian texts, to create his discursive corpus in Bangla. His use of the word মহাপুরুষ, i.e. a great man, to designate Hazrat Muhammad, inspired another generation of authors, like Shaikh Abdul Jabbar, for example. Girishchandra’s project in *Mahapurush Charit*, where he describes all the prophets of Islam in three volumes and the biography of the Prophet in another three volumes (1886–1887)<sup>51</sup>, would not have been complete without a separate book on the life-stories of Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn (1901)<sup>52</sup>. It is to be noted that Girishchandra’s renditions in Bangla predated the publication of Shibli Nomani’s *Sirat-un-Nabi* (1914), and perhaps he was the first to have attempted a separate biography of Imam Hasan and Husayn in Bangla; alongside those on the *ashab* and also the revered women in Islam—Hazrat

---

<sup>49</sup> ‘Islamic Historical Writing: A Critical Analysis’, in *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research* 13 (3): 2013, p. 306 (by Fadila Grine, Mohd Yakub Zulkifli Mohd Yusoff, Tarek Ladjal, Aizan Ali Mat Zin, Tatiana A. Denisova and Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor).

<sup>50</sup> Ali Ahmad, pp. 379–394.

<sup>51</sup> *Mahapurush Muhammader Jiban Charit*, Vol. I, II and III were published from 72, Upper Circular Road, Kalikata in 1886, 1887 and 1887.

<sup>52</sup> *Imam Hasan and Imam Husyan (Jibani)*, Ramanath Majumdar Street, Kalikata, 1901.

Khadeja, Fatema, Ayesha and Rabeya—in *Charti Sadhwi Mosalman Nari(Jibani)*<sup>53</sup>. Girishchandra stood outside of the colonial-Christian, missionary-Brahmo, missionary-Hindu hegemonic constructions of the Muslim community and Islam, and he was actually the one to provide the Bengal Muslims with a template for writing, by scanning various *Hadis* texts and colonial sources at the same time<sup>54</sup>. Syed Ameer Ali and Girishchandra together, thus, created an oeuvre that was more easily received by the Muslim intellectuals of Bengal.

### **5.2a Biography and Biographies: Between the Prophetic and the Profane**

When Girishchandra Sen was learning Arabic and Persian in Lucknow, Jamaluddin Afghani, the founder of pan-Islamism, came to visit Calcutta in 1880 and the Muslim intelligentsia were nearly swept out by the rising consciousness about Islam at the time. While Girishchandra Sen was preparing to write his biography of the *ambiya, mahapurush*, concluding with Muhammad, the newly awakened generation of Muslim intellectuals were not only narrativizing the figures of an Islamic ideal past, but through their act of writing they were assimilating the ideas of the contemporary mediators of Islam. At the same time that the ‘biography’ of the Prophet was being attempted by the *Sudhakar* group, one of its members, Reyazuddin Mashhadi, wrote *Samaj O Sangskarak*, a biography of Jamaluddin Afghani (1889). This new consciousness about the biography, thus, embraced figures, who could become the bearers and the embodiment of the ideals, like the figures connected to the Prophet. In their reception, the binary between the opposing ideologies, in terms of the figures in the biographies who reflected these ideologies, represented by the works of Jamaluddin Afghani and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, were sometimes not kept at such great distance and were perhaps brought under the same umbrella to define Islam as a rational force. *Ahmadcharit*, or the life of Sir Sayyid

---

<sup>53</sup> In my opinion this sole literary oeuvre of Girishchandra motivated the Bengali Muslims and also charted out the course for the writing of biographies that they would undertake.

<sup>54</sup> Though Girishchandra himself did not fall under this hegemonic framework, the Brahmo missionary zeal did not spare the Muslim community from their due Orientalist humiliation.

Ahmad Khan, was constantly being written in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Altaf Husain Hali's biography was translated into Bangla early in 1911 by Abdul Wadud from Noakhali<sup>55</sup> and by Al-Hajj Malawi Abdul Wahid from Kalikata<sup>56</sup>, before he became a figure celebrated by the literary societies from the 1920s onwards. The biography of Iqbal, a contemporary poet in Urdu, (along with other pioneers of the Urdu literary and discursive traditions), had much of his work translated as autonomous volumes or as selections published in journals and periodicals<sup>57</sup>, which attests to the reception and appreciation of his poetry and a pan-Islamic ideology, especially after the *Khilafat* movement.

If we intend to deduce the possibility of the rise of a rationalism solely from the publication of the two biographies of Sayyid Ahmad Khan in the same year from Noakhali, we might fail to notice the unique case of the Bengal *mufassils*, where Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the companions of the Prophet went hand in hand as the subjects of biographies, under very different parameters of reason and rationality. When Maulana Abdul Wahid, attempted three biographies in his literary career—the history of the Islam with the inevitable biographies of its central figures (the rule of the four *ashab*, from the time of Hasan to Caliph Uthman) and those of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the *Sufi* philosophers, the life of the rationalist author Sayyid Ahmad Khan was brought under another rationalist interpretive framework different from his own. But it took a few more years for the contemporary reformers to fully break into the domain of biography, it was only since the 1930s, that contemporary characters began to generate their own biographies to shape the understanding of the real social for the community and were able to connect the Islamic past with the present. Some of the prominent biographies would include *Sir Sayyid Ahmad O Haji Muhammad Mohsin* (1930) by Qazi Abdur Rashid, *Sir Sayyid Ahmad, Data Mohsin, Kholafaye Rashidin*, Vols. I & II, and *Nawab Sirajdaullaby*

---

<sup>55</sup>Imperial Library catalogue, Vol. I, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup>British Museum Library Catalogue, Vol. III, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup>How these periodicals with various ideological and political orientations eventually managed to create different orientations about literature will be discussed in the next chapter.

Muhammad Salauddin, and *Mahamanush Muhsin* by Muhammad Wajir Ali (1934), who was the editor of *Samyabadi* for the first two years.

Qazi Abdur Rashid

*Sir Sayyid Ahmad O Haji Muhammad Mohsin*, Provincial Library, Dacca, 1930

Muhammad Salauddin:

*Sir Sayyid Ahmad, Data Mohsin*, Waqil Ahmad p. 762,

*Kholafaye Rashidin*, Vol I & II, Kitabbar, Kalikata, 1947

*Nawab Sirajdaulla*, Park Circus, Kalikata, 1943.

Muhammad Wajir Ali (1896-1954) [editor of *Samyabadi*, first two years] *MahamanushMuhsin*, Crematorium Street, Kalikata, 1934

It is interesting to note how, the superhuman qualifiers ‘*Mahapurush*’ and ‘*Mahamanab*’, used to designate Muhammad was now joined by the word ‘*Mahamanush*’ which had so far only been used to designate mortal characters like Hajji Muhammad Mohsin in writing about their contribution to the growth of the social.

As he was a member of the Brahmo Samaj, Girishchandra’s engagement with the Islamic knowledge systems and his translations of original scriptural and *fiqh* texts had certain other intentions, as well<sup>58</sup>. Munshi Naimuddin was the first person from the Muslim community to have translated the *Qur’an* into Bangla, drawing much antagonism and threats from the traditional orthodox clergy as it was considered a sacrilegious act<sup>59</sup>. Girishchandra Sen would escape a similar fate because of his position outside the community, and because his texts were entirely unanticipated, and had a different implied readership (i.e. a middle-class readership acquainted with standardized Bangla)—his books, thus, did not reach the traditional clergy who had attacked Munshi Naimuddin and his Bangla

---

<sup>58</sup> Hailing from Dhaka district, Girishchandra shifted to Mymensingh where he converted into Brahmoism. Under the direction of Keshabchandra Sen, the chief of Nababidhan Sangha of Brahmoism, Girishchandra began to study Islamic knowledge systems in Lucknow. After learning Arabic, Persian and Urdu he translated the *Qur’an* and the *Hadis* and also other scriptural manuals, *fiqh* texts, and *Sufi* treatises, along with the biographies of the Islamic prophets, Hazrat Muhammad, Imam Hasan and Husayn.

<sup>59</sup> Abdul Jabbar, *Mashik Mohammadi*, 1336, cited in Waqil Ahmad, p. 240.

translations of the *Qur'an*. Munshi Naimuddin was the target of a *fatwa* issued by the orthodox *sabiqi* section of the Muslim community in Bengal for translating the *Qur'an* into the language of the *kufri*.

It is rather necessary to mention here that, though there was tremendous antagonism and ideological opposition between Munshi Naimuddin and Mir Musharraf Husain, Shaikh Abdur Rahim, writing as the representative of the next generation of the *Sudhakar* group, equated the radicalism inherent in Naimuddin's translation of the *Qur'an* and other religious texts into Bangla with Musharraf Husain's rendition of a part of Islamic history—the battle of Karbala—into literature. Thus Abdur Rahim, in his deployment of these two personae, not only minimized the gap between two antagonistic positions of his generation, he also made the value of religious texts and literature equivalent for the construction of the *jatiya*.

But not everyone was comfortable with the inclusions made by Mir Musharraf Husain. As for the intelligentsia of *Sudhakar*, the differentiations between what was *jatiya* literature and what was not, was one of the first things that they had sought to formulate and establish. In accordance with this formulation, Mir Musharraf Husain was attacked heavily by the *Sudhakar* group, for being unable to offer a *jatiya*. *Sudhakar* vehemently refuted the work of Mir Musharraf Husain, for his prioritization of the value of pure narrative, within which he had rendered the sacred theme of Karbala—a subject, which, according to the *Sudhakar* group, was meant to provide the core experience in the creation of a *jatiya bhab* for the community. Without the *jatiya adarsha*, literature was not to be considered legitimate literature by the intelligentsia of *Sudhakar*, and others, who were redefining a religiously informed modernity. From the beginning, since the publication of *Bishad Sindhu* and then of *Mahasmashan* by Kaykobad, the religious intelligentsia, both belonging to *Sudhakar* and also with other sectarian affiliations, made vehement distinctions between literature with *jatiya* values and without. It is very interesting to look at *Sudhakar* in this respect, as the authors connected to this group exhausted different kinds of narrative strategies to make history rational, authentic, truthful, and enjoyable in the name of the *jatiya*. This was both proposed, and considered

permissible as these narrative strategies were framed to tell the stories of Islamic ideals and virtue. Any autonomous literary agenda, which attempted to define the *jatiya* within the domain of culture, rather than of religious sensibilities, were met with dissatisfaction so evident in the ideological battle between two very important periodicals—*Mohammadi* and *Sikha*<sup>60</sup>.

But no matter what the positionality of the author was, or what sort of interface or intersectionality he stood for, from English and Urdu speaking authors, to the authors of the cheap print culture alike, Muhammad always remained a great champion of freedom, an icon of social justice and equality, a teacher, a counsellor, a guardian of the community, an exemplar of morality, ethics, and spirituality—which was expressed in different tones following the demands of the genre that the authors chose to authenticate as the essence of their community. We will see that this search for a past in Arabiya also culminated in the specification of the community as located, primarily in India, and simultaneously or more vigorously in Bengal<sup>61</sup>.

What we cannot fail to notice about the *Sudhakar* group is their enormous capacity to receive and process the already available scholarship on the life of the Prophet and Islam. From Shaikh Abdur Rahim's citations in *Hazrat Muhammader Jibon O Dharmmaniti* (1888), for instance, we can divine an all-inclusive field of Perso-Arabic scriptural and historical sources, European books, and also references to Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Ameer Ali, this was the archival arsenal which Rahim deployed to its full potential to defend both the Prophet and Islam<sup>62</sup>.

What emerges from this network of biographies is the idea of an ideal man, from each individual domain of the text. As the reformers became almost equal to the *pirs* in popular imagination, Muhammad, in this rationalist approach, became more like a reformer—the primal reformer. In the introduction to *Samaj O Sanskarak* by Reyazuddin Mashhadi, the exposition given by the author of the reasons behind his choice of Afghani's

---

<sup>60</sup> To be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>61</sup> How it captured the imagination of the literary world will be discussed in the later sections of this chapter.

<sup>62</sup> Shaikh Abdur Rahim, *Hazrat Muhammader Jibancharit O Dharmmaniti*, Kalikata 1926 (6<sup>th</sup> edition).

life to for narrativization, seems to be an exact echo of the urge for writing the biographies of the Prophet—to address and rectify the fallen state of the Muslims.<sup>63</sup> So the emotion and logic that appears in all the biographies of Muhammad by the *Sudhakar* group shifts from the language of traditional piety to a language of contemporary rationalism that would redefine the sense of surrender.

We can see a profusion of the life stories of the *Sufi* philosophers in this new generic format of biography, simultaneously with those of *sirat* and *charit*, which had been in circulation ever since biographies of any sort were being written. But while the biography proliferated as a genre which would standardize language, the idea of piety, and the lives themselves, were entirely transformed and redefined in the attempts of the *Sudhakar* group.

Girishchandra Sen, who sought to write a rationalist version of the Prophet's life and Islamic scriptural knowledge, alongside the Qur'an and the *Hadis*, also translated *Tazkiratul Awliya*, to offer in Bangla the concept of *tasawwuf* and the biographies of the *Sufi* dervishes. The primary authors of the historical life of the Prophet, like those of *Sudhakar* group, did not pay much heed to the popular forms of *tasawwuf* that were traditionally practised in Bengal, and were not interested in looking for elements of the rational within it, rather, they believed in the separation of the domains of physical *pirism* and a rational Islam<sup>64</sup>. There was the rereading and reclamation of *tasawwuf*<sup>65</sup> as a basis for contemporary reformed Islam, and

---

<sup>63</sup> This is the essence of what Reyazuddin Mashhadi said about Afghani, "We witness around us today the collective roar of dismissal, dishonour and defamation of the Muslims from the contemporary opponent communities. Now, the Muslims are considered to be mentally feeble, the enemy of the world, any scholastic knowledge, material efficiency, and as lazy and indulgent, of a vulgar nature... After thinking this over for a long time, finally, I have decided to save the Muslims from such moral attacks, to expose their real condition to the world and to alert the Muslims with regard to their future, I have placed the real picture of the distressed contemporary Muslim community in juxtaposition with the life of an immensely potent reformer."—This passage uses the same rhetoric as the biographies which posit the life of Muhammad as the valid template of the values that the Muslim community could imbibe, and also as an interpretive framework for understanding the glorious past and their fallen state in the present. *Mashhadi Rachanabali*, Vol. I, pp. 5–6.

<sup>64</sup> This separation in the names of historical biography and rational history will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

<sup>65</sup> From the sixteenth century onwards, there had been, within the Islamic scriptural practices of North India, an enthusiastic engagement with and vigorous debates over the theoretical-ideational part of Sufism to formulate different versions of Islam and to claim their scriptural hegemony.



there was an acutely felt need for translations of *Sufi* poetry and philosophy, and for renditions of the lives of the *Sufi* saints. Rumi's philosophical treatises and poetry by several Persian *Sufi* poets like Hafiz, Omar Khayyam and Sadi started featuring more and more in publications since the very beginning of this new trend in translation.

What might seem a more provocative development was the gradual emergence of the biographies of the *mazhabi* imams, and of the authors of the *Hadis*, which might direct us to historicise the gradual solidification of the *Hanafis* as the majority community. When Munshi Naimuddin translated *Bokhari Sharif* in 1898<sup>66</sup>, biography, as a genre, had not yet extruded to the realm beyond the prophetic world; rather, we will see biographies of Imam Abu Hanifa and then Imam Saud, and Imam Bokhari in the 1930s. The biography of Imam Abu Hanifa, entitled *Mahatma Hazrat Imam Abu Hanifa Saheber Jiban-charit*, by Qazi Maulavi Nawabuddin Ahmad, was published in 1898. Ali Akbar Qaderi attempted to write a biography of Imam Bokhari titled *Imam Bokharir Sankshipta Jibani*<sup>67</sup> at first, then after two years wrote *Shahid Samrat Hazrat Husayn*<sup>68</sup> which shows that the creator of the *mazhabs*, *Imam Bokhari*, was gradually gaining in importance while Imam Husayn would only become the subject matter of the second biography by the author, much later. Thus gradually, another set of lives became indispensable to the imagination of the community self, and another template of ideals emerged with a reinvigorated interest in the *tasawwuf*. I have already mentioned in the previous chapter that while the lived form of Sufism embodied in the figure and the practice of the *pirs* was refuted, and there were attempts to purge them out of and the body of Islam, the reformist ideology was also at the same time conditioned by the interpretations of theoretical Sufism.

Since the time of Shah Wali Allah, this ideational topography resulted in reformist *Sufi* ideals and platforms which were so closely connected to the new reformed *madrassa* system. References are given in various treatises to

---

<sup>66</sup> *Chhahi Bukhari Sharif*, Karatiya, Mymensingh, 1898.

<sup>67</sup> Comilla, 1935.

<sup>68</sup> Kohinur Library, Chittagong, 1938.

how the new practitioners of knowledge, since the late nineteenth century, were either involved with the practices of all these branches/*silsilah* or with the functioning of one single *silsilah*<sup>69</sup>. This new *Sufi* turn, again, produced various internal debates and configurations of identity-in separation through the print culture that influenced the everyday practices of the common masses. Shah Abdul Jalil emphasized the performance of the *farz*—i.e. Islamic codes and conducts—and posited an almost non-bridgeable distance between the *mazhabi* followers of any *Sufi silsilah* (termed *Tariqah* in his vocabulary, which included individuals from the *Hanafi* sect, following *Chishtiya*, or *Qadiriya*, or any other *silsilah*) and the people who did not have any faith or respect in this *tariqati* knowledge<sup>70</sup>. Shah Abdul Jalil wrote no biography, but he belonged to and was one of the co-creators of a form of devotionism that was redefining Muslim religious thought and life with the advent of a reformed *Sufi* culture. The new sensibility reaffirmed the necessity of prophetic grace for this renewed interest in reformed *Sufi* ideas, understood only as a structured knowledge system, no matter how layered its reception might have been<sup>71</sup>. What is really interesting to notice here, is that at the end of his text, after several verses on the *Sufi* symbolic or philosophical tenets, he includes in the text a list of the dates of death of the Prophet, his son-in-law Ali, his grandsons and the *awliyas* (*Sufi* saints), which were to be commemorated. Interestingly, as the list of dates is arranged not according to the Islamic calendar, but rather by

---

<sup>69</sup> Abdur Rashid Chishti described his training in all the major scripturally inclined *silsilahs*: *Nakshbandiya*, *Suhrawardiya*, *Qadiriya* and *Chishtiya* till he finally chose the *Chishtiya* tradition to become a practitioner. *Sufi* inclined poets generally belonged to the *Chishtiya* tradition for its inclination to music and performance as a form of showing devotion.

<sup>70</sup> আপনার তরিকতি লোকের মিলন।

শুভ জানি মিলে যাই কখন কখন।।

সেইসব ভিন্ন অন্য লোকের শীত।

তরিকার কথা না কহিবে কদাচিৎ।।

তরিকা যে নিন্দা করে তাঁর সঙ্গে করে।

আলাপ কি উঠক বৈঠক না করিবে।। প্রভু-পরিচয়, *Prabhu-Parichoy*, Shah Abdul Jalil Shikdar, Chittagong, 1923.

<sup>71</sup> Contrary to popular historiography, in the medieval and the early modern *sirat*, mostly written by *Sufi* practitioners like Sayyid Sultan and Shaikh Chand, the figure of Muhammad was fully conceptualized and realized following scriptural *Sufi* thought, while a more folk-ritual oriented *maulud* and *maghazi* literature was prone to depicting Muhammad as supernatural and miraculous.

placing the date of death of the Prophet in the month of Rabiul Awal in the beginning, the death of Imam Husayn (put together with Imam Hasan) in the month of Muharram appears only at the end of the list, even though Muharram is the first month in the Islamic lunar calendar. The author had already said that the *nabi* (i.e. the Prophet) and the *awliyas* would appear together in his list. The list illustrates the tremendous capacity for expansion of the sacred *Sufi* space, which, alongside Muhammad, Ali and Hasan-Husayn could effortlessly accommodate the founder of a *tariqah*—Abdur Qader Jilani and went on to incorporate the renowned *Sufi* saint Nizamuddin Awliya of Delhi and a local *pir*, Amanat Ullah of Dacca.

From such incorporations of the regional *Sufi* imagination in this book, it can be deduced that the local *Sufi* institutions and leaders were slowly gaining currency, with greater emphasis being placed on the Prophet and Imam Hasan and Husayn, which motivated its followers into imbibing a new sensibility towards the prophetic characters. The founder of the *Qadiriya* sect, Abdul Qader Jilani, within this new *Sufi* sensibility, became an iconic figure to the Muslim community by influencing religiosity and community formation in religious terms. There would be no greater personality than the Barho Pir (a title conferred upon Jilani, which means, the Supreme Pir), as Abdur Qadir Jilani was referred to in the biographies, in this new tradition of the biography. The life of Jilani, while being posited in the lineage of biographies on the life of Imam Hasan, would be articulated in a vocabulary and with a passion possible only within the aesthetic-poetic vocabulary of popular piety specific to Bengal. The life of Jilani, in the way it was connected to Imam Hasan, brought together both the religious elite and the authors of a more popular culture of print, producing various generic and thematic overlaps and exchanges<sup>72</sup>. It created

---

<sup>72</sup> As designated biographies of the *Sufi* masters were being translated into Bangla from the Persian originals, many original texts were being written about the local *Sufi* masters, as well. From Ahsan Ullah of Dacca, to Hazrat Rahman Shahid of Burdwan, these biographies showed how the local figures and their local abodes had to be brought within the broader network of Islam. What concerns us here, is not only the fact that a high lineage was claimed for the local *pir* Hazrat Rahman Shahid, by the author Shri Abdul Latif, who identified him as belonging to the line of some Meccaites *ashraf*, but we must also take note of the language of historiography that the author, Shri Abdul Latif used to prove each and every fact that had been given. But what became an integral part of historical language was the language of deduction used to accomplish wishful thinking, a

a legitimate form of *Sufi* piety through the mediation of the *Qadiriya* sect in Bengal.

In this section we look at the impact of *Tariqah* on the *Hanafi* Muslim community in Bengal. In the new demography of religious sensibility in Bengal since the beginning of the twentieth century, *mazhabi* Islam and *Sufi tariqah* came together to fall back on each other. The religious dynamics was marked by the constant claim for validity as a new devotionalism, predicated upon the knowledge-base of scriptures, was the new turn in the processes of community formation for the Bengal Muslims. Biography, in this respect, became a very important tool and explanatory device through which we can see the emergence and crisscrossing of different sensibilities, based on *mazhabi* and *tariqati* ideals since the 1910s, which flowed simultaneously with the formation of a political identity for the Muslims. So, unlike the scholarly literature that claims that there was a clear transformation from the domain of piety to that of politics for the Muslim community in search of an identity, I would rather reiterate my point about the mutual connection between piety and politics as integral to the modern conceptualization of the Bengal Muslim identity. What is very important to note here is that, when the notion of region was introduced in the discourses of the religious intelligentsia and the literati as constituting the core of the Bengali Muslims' identity, the circulation of the life stories of these locally embedded, vernacular, Bangla-speaking *pirs* had already made the region a viable sacred place of belonging for the Bengali community. The emergence of the culture of writing regional history was another form envisaged by the intelligentsia to connect to the region and the inherent Bengaliness of the community, but this sense of the community premised on regional belonging had already been produced in the language and sensibility of popular piety associated with the local *pirs*.

What began as the creation of a counter-narrative to refute the Orientalist-colonialist construction of Islam by the intelligentsia, like the Urdu-

---

not-so-empirical project that reveals the ambivalence in the conceptualization of history and historicity in the popular imagination that sustained the society to a certain extent. In this case, the book was written to fill in the blanks in that imagination. Shri Abdul Latif, *Hazrat Rahman Shahid*, Kalikata, 1917.

speaking Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, or the Anglophone Syed Ameer Ali, or the *Sudhakar* group, became a generic expression, a basic trope, within popular print to posit and claim authenticity in the search for an identity. Authenticity became a necessary condition for understanding the community as rational, and the contemporary popular prints, who we should remember, were participants in a competitive market, strategically used this claim of authenticity for increasing sales. What was produced as *sahitya*, was deeply influenced by this discourse and emotion of authenticity to ensure the fact that *jatiya sahitya* did not derail from authentic life and authentic history. For the creation of biographies—an ordinary but ethical Muslim life, was now being invoked in the light of biography and history, and had to shed off its inauthentic immediate past and present. *Maulaud Sharif* was rewritten and the physicality of the observance of Muharram had to be removed to attain that ideal.

এ পর্যন্ত সিরাত অধিকাংশই মউলুদ শরিফের কল্পিত গল্প এবং মৌজু ও জইফ হাদিসের অনুবাদ আর কতকগুলি হিন্দু ও ইউরোপীয় গ্রন্থকারগণের লিখিত জীবনী অবলম্বনে সংকলিত। সেই সকল গ্রন্থপাঠে ধর্ম ও নীতিশিক্ষা হওয়া দূরে থাক, বরং তাহাতে বেদাতি, শেরেকী, নেচারী ও কুফরি ভাবাপন্ন হতে হয়।

শেখ আব্দুর রহিম, *হজরত মহম্মদের জীবন ও ধর্মনীতি*, ১৮৮৭, মহম্মদপুর, বসিরহাট

[All the *sirat*, till date, have been written by taking cues from imaginary tales and also from false *hadis*. Also they are based on books written by European Orientalists and Hindu Nationalists. Forget about ethical-moral training, these books induce only an un-Islamic belief.]

যে পবিত্র ধর্মের জন্য হজরত এমাম হোসেন কারবালা প্রান্তরে শহিদ হইয়াছিলেন ... হায় হায় খোদাতালার মনোনীত পবিত্র এসলাম। ভারতীয় মুসলমানের হস্তে তোমার এ কি অপমান?

ঐ দেখ, বাঙ্গালী মুসলমান তাজিয়া পূজা, কবর পূজা, পীর পূজা, দরগা পূজা, নৃত্যগীত শ্রবণ ইত্যাদি শেরেক ও বেদাত কারজ করিয়া পবিত্র এল্লামের অঙ্গে কালিমা লেপন করিতে কুণ্ঠিত হইতেছে না।

ঐ দেখ, যে ১০ই মহরম তারিখে সৈয়দ বংশের অমূল্য নিধি হজরত মোহাম্মদের (সঃ) এর দৌহিত্র মক্কা মদিনার খলিফা হজরত এমাম হোসেন শহিদ হইয়াছিলেন, যাহার মৃত্যুতে আকাশ, পাতা, অন্তরীক্ষ, অরণ্য, সাগর, পর্বত, বায়ু ইত্যাদি চতুর্দিক হইতে শোক উথিত হইয়াছিল।

এ হেন শোকের দিনে, অদ্যপি দেখ তাজিয়া পূজক মুসলমানগণ শোক করিবার পরিবর্তে আনন্দের জয়ঢাক পিটিয়া চতুর্দিকে প্রতিধ্বনিত করিতেছে।

মোহাম্মদ ইয়ুসুফ আলী, *আহলে হাদিস*, খণ্ড III, সংখ্যা ৭, ১৩২৪/১৯১৭, পৃ ৩১৭

[Open your eyes and see, the Muslims of Bengal do not hesitate to dishonour Islam by indulging in worshipping the *taziyeh*, the graves and the *pirs*, listening to song and dance, and numerous other *shirk* and *bed'ati* activities.]

In this zeal to separate the historical and rational from its other, along with prohibiting the physical in the ritual, the Muslim intelligentsia from the late nineteenth century onwards tried to eliminate the supernatural elements from the traditional tales and narratives connected to the Prophet and the prophetic to formulate new narratives for the community. The writings of the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia, like Shaikh Abdur Rahim, or Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan (1868–1968) can be taken as illustrative examples through which we can understand how they dealt with this impulse of rationalization.

These were writings which vehemently opposed the supernatural and the ritualistic, and used different generic strategies taken from the new realist modes to place their narratives within the framework of the rational-historical. Shaikh Abdul Jabbar, in his *Madinasharifer Itihas* (1314/1907), like many other authors of history, put down in detail the family tree of Hazrat Muhammad, with both the paternal and the maternal sides to historically place him. Another family-tree emanating from Fatema, followed the blood line till the twelfth Imam (though the author, a Sayyid himself) neither claimed himself a Shia, nor posited a Sayyid in the line of inheritance). Shaikh Abdur Rahim, in *Hazrat Muhammader Jiban O Dharmaniti*<sup>73</sup>, like most other authors, cited references from *Hadis* and several contemporary sources, and used photographs and diagrams to bring his writing closer to the contemporary modern discourses. But what we intend to stress here emphatically, is that in all these efforts, there was the recurrent impossibility that one encounters, of writing outside a form of devotionism that was so deeply and inextricably embedded in the traditional wisdom of both the *Hadis* and the different mythological variants of scriptural texts. Rather, the authors of history, in turn, historicized the supernatural while distancing themselves from a body of texts in popular print, whose basic tenets of devotionism was predicated upon the supernatural, or the other-worldly attributes of the sacred figures. We should note here the tremendous creative tension in these efforts to

---

<sup>73</sup>Shaikh Abdur Rahim, *Hazrat Muhammader Jiban O Dharmaniti*, College Street, 1887.

historicize working against the supernatural, and also the impossibility of completely moving away from the latter. This marked the ambivalence of the public culture and also points to the various layers within it, which contributed to the formulation of an emerging *jatiya*. Shaikh Abdur Rahim used photographs and cartographical images, and referred to contemporary technological instances to create a historical narrative. Ahsan Ullah used photographs of al-Hamra, al-Azhar, Tajmahal and Mostafa Kemal in his book *Ichhlamer Itibritta* (1934)<sup>74</sup>. Abdur Rahim, to fabricate the past, began his narrative with contemporary Arab, discussed the recent situation in Mecca and Medina, and used the present as a frame to posit the past along a linear real time. While he inserted an archival photo of the Hera cave in his book, Abdur Rahim added a scientific justification for the oracle at the cave, which had been attacked by Edward Gibbon in his book. This attempt to bring in the extra-rational in the framework of history can be seen in various other biographies and history which only shows the mutual seepage that took place between what we can call an elite *jatiya*-modernist stance and a more popular search for a Muslim identity, both of which were acutely informed by religion. In the advertorial at the beginning of Shaikh Abdul Jabbar's *Medina Sharifer Itihas*<sup>75</sup>, Maulana Abdul Haq referred to the survival and reception of an authentic book of history, named *Jwazul Qulub*, written by a Medinite Sayyid Nuruddin Ali Begh Sayyid Afifaddin bin Ahmad Husaini Samhudi in seventeenth century Delhi—this book would become one of the major sources not only for Abdul Jabbar, but also for other writers of biography, history and literature dealing with sacred lives. While attempting to trace the first book of history of Mecca and Medina written in Bangla, the author could neither eliminate nor minimize the devotional excess that the land of Medina stood for in the collective psyche.

When we talk about crisscrossing, overlaps and mutual exchange, we talk not only about thematic concern—that is, how, between the historical of

---

<sup>74</sup> We should not forget here that another compatriot of Ahsan Ullah, Muhammad Akram Khan, had published photographs in *Al-Eslam* which had provoked strong reactions from the traditional fold of the *ulama*. A thoroughly hurt *Ahle-Hadis* expressed their displeasure towards *Mohommadi* for this blasphemous act.

<sup>75</sup> Shaikh Abdur Jabbar, Gafargaon, Mymensing, 1314/1907.

*Sudhakar*, and the miraculous of the cheap prints, the life-stories or biographies with their various historical-miraculous capacities were becoming instrumental in creating a community. But, more importantly, through different acts of refuting or reclaiming the rational and the miraculous, they became integral parts of the popular psyche in the formation of the public sphere. The overlaps and exchanges made at the level of genre can be read as forming the expressions of modernity, by claiming a *jatiya bhab*, as expressed through the life of the community. In Shaikh Abdur Rahim's *Hazrat Muhammader Dharmaniti O Samajniti*, for instance, had a picture of the Kaba Masjid with its four sides signifying the four *mazhabs*<sup>76</sup>. While the introduction written by the poet Kaykobad emphasized the historicity of the life of the Prophet, the expression '*jiban-brittanto*' printed in a bigger font, and used recurrently in the narrative as a visual aid, by default, authenticated a time (of the *mazhabs*) beyond the scope of the Prophet's life.

What is significant here is the reciprocity on the one hand, and an almost supplementary connection on the other, between an evidentially proven history and the narrative expansion of any historical theme. It is no wonder that the author had chosen Kaykobad the poet, and not a religious rationalist, to write an introduction to the biography. While continuously referring to sections from the *Qur'an* to authenticate each and every event and utterance, the author/narrator remained anecdotal, exclamatory, and somewhat inclined to the lyricism of literature by the Hindu litterateur already in circulation. But what becomes apparent in the book, is the inseparability of Muhammad's life from that of his grandsons. Like the life of the Prophet had to touch upon the battle of Karbala, the narratives on the battle of Karbala could not be broached without episodes in which the deaths of Imam Hasan and Husayn were prophesied to Muhammad. Thus no life of Muhammad, or of his grandsons, could be written separately, following this historical reason with its claim on the *jatiya*, and also following the logic of popular piety that had made a new liaison with historical reason. By the latter we mean the huge network of texts produced

---

<sup>76</sup>Shaikh Abdur Rahim, *Hazrat Muhammader Dharmaniti O Samajniti* (1888).



in more or less standardized Bangla, as well as those in *Musalmani*-Bangla for the masses, which were now exposed to the new sensibilities about the community and about religion<sup>77</sup>. Such complementarity between the life of the Prophet and his grandsons together, authenticating the early history of Islam, made life and history—the two themes which defined the *jatiya*—inseparable.

Among the *Sudhakar* group, Shaikh Abdur Rahim (1859–1931) and Shaikh Abdul Jabbar (1898/1389–1917/1326) were more inclined to the biography, along with history. Shaikh Abdur Rahim, who was the editor of many journals and periodicals, and an early advocate of pan-Islamism in Bengal, wrote *Hazrat Muhammader Jibancharit O Dharmaniti* (1888), which brought together the historical life of Muhammad and the basics of scriptural Islam in order to carve out the core of the *jatiya*<sup>78</sup>. What is noteworthy here is that Abdur Rahim was analysing contemporary religious situations and placing them in connection to the life of Hazrat Muhammad and his teachings, and posited the latter as the ideal remedy for the contemporary malaise. Though only the first half of the book had been given to an authentic historical biography of Muhammad, it seemed that the remainder of it—on his teachings, with close references to the *Hadis*, became equally true and authentic by virtue of having been taken from his life itself. As there was no ‘complete biography’ of the Prophet in Bangla and whatever were available were replications of books in English, Abdur Rahim proclaimed he had written this biography to give a full ‘historical’ account of Hazrat’s life which would refute the theory that Islam was a religion of the sword<sup>79</sup>. As one of the iconic representatives of the first generation of the intelligentsia who wanted to formulate history and biography in Bangla, Abdur Rahim created a textual network which included biography, scriptural knowledge of Islam, codes of religious conduct and history. Shaikh Abdur Rahim’s agenda was purely that of a reformer, which is apparent from his quest for the essence of Islam and the

---

<sup>77</sup>Forms of popular piety and networks of printed texts have been discussed in detail in Chapter III.

<sup>78</sup>Already discussed in the last chapter.

<sup>79</sup>Shaikh Abdur Rahim, *Hazrat Muhammader Jibon O Dharmaniti*, Kalikata, 1926 (6<sup>th</sup> edition).

*jatiya*, for which he left no genre unexplored. His attempts in biography and history would not have been fulfilled without his interventions towards creating a body of essential texts in Bangla for the community—in the course of which he wrote *Islamtattwa* (1896), *Namaztattwa* (1898), *HajjBidhi* (1903), *Namazshikkha* (1917), *Quran Hadiser Upadeshbali* (1926), and *Rozatattwa* (1926).

This period shows the tremendous creative power of a Muslim public that was attempting to build a *jatiya* identity for the Bengal Muslims by formulating history, biography, scripture and codes of conduct together, as connected to each other and each mutually validating or authenticating the other. This generation of the intelligentsia were trying to give a structure to the community by re-imposing the scriptural codes and norms, which for them was a sort of modernization of the community as well<sup>80</sup>. This was a modernity that allowed Abdur Rahim to propose the historicized biography of Muhammad, written in the chaste Sanskritized paradigm of Bangla, to the community of readers—as a sacred text. Its reading public, the middle-class Bengal Muslims of Bengal could, thus, by keeping the text at home and by reading it in a particular way, be blessed by the divine at the same time<sup>81</sup>. The imagined community of modernity was thus simultaneously a sacred religious community, where religion was interpreted and treated as a form of modernity. It is important to note how Abdur Rahim was attaching the status of literature—i.e. *sahitya*—to what he had been writing in the form of history, biography and scriptures.

As the author of the history of Mecca and Medina along with Jerusalem<sup>82</sup>, Abdur Jabbar wrote the biographies of Hazrat Muhammad, Rabeya, and a

---

<sup>80</sup> For Abdur Rahim one of the root causes for the degradation of the Muslims was that the Muslims did not perform *namaz* as they used to do in the classical period. He advocated proper obedience to the the *Qur'an* and praying of *namaz* for the Muslims to regain the prowess and glory of the past and to become the best in the world. From the 'Introduction' to *Namajattwa*, *Shaikh Abdur Rahim Granthaboli*, Vol. II, p. 267.

<sup>81</sup> আমি আশা করি, প্রত্যেক বঙ্গভাষাভিজ্ঞ মুসলমান নরনারী মহাত্মা রসুলে করিমের (দং) ভক্তিচিহ্নরূপ এই মহারত্নখানি নিজের নিকটে রাখেন এবং ধর্মনীতিশিক্ষা ও সওয়াব হাসেল মানসে দৈনিক পাঠ (অফিজা) করেন। Preface to the book, 1913 edition.

<sup>82</sup> We will talk about historical discourse in the next section of this chapter.

host of sacred female figures of Islam<sup>83</sup>. While writing the history of Mecca and Medina, Abdul Jabbar narrated the lives of Imam Hasan and Husayn without attempting to write separate biographies for them. Muzammil Hoque forged another link with Shaikh Abdur Rahim by creating a bridge between the writers of biography and the authors of creative works, in the same way that there had been a connection between Munshi Kaykobad and Shaikh Abdul Jabbar. This bridge between the poets and the biographers encouraged instances of cross-generic seepage, where the poets emphasized collective and individual devotion and the biographers wrote in the lyrical language of narrative or poetry<sup>84</sup>.

Abdul Bari Kabiratna (1872–1944)<sup>85</sup> of Noakhali wrote *Karbala Kavya* (1319/1913) as a long poem, which, according to the present day Bengal Library Catalogue is “related to the biography of Imam Husayn”. This attempt shows a paradigmatic moment when literature proper was being conceived on the sacred lives and sacred domain of history. Abdul Bari did not have any claim, like Shaikh Abdur Rahman’s or Abdul Jabbar’s, of writing an authentic history or biography; rather his was a claim pertaining to literature alone. He placed himself within the poetic culture, and to validate his source as also his choice of language and belonging, he laid his claim to Asia, though it was, for him, a poetic Asia. This Asia had the Bengali poets of the nineteenth century as his direct influences and also included several Persian and Sanskrit poets in an anachronistic list of inspirations to mark his position in the legacy of poetic icons.

Another book written by Abdul Bari was *Furfurar Isabe Saowab*, on the *urs* that used to take place at Furfura—the abode of Pir Maulana Abu Bakr<sup>86</sup>.

---

<sup>83</sup> It is really interesting to note the constant references to sacred women in different books. These figures were also being explored and offered as templates to reform women as the biographies of women were taken as the moralistic-didactic manuals for the women of the community. *AdarshaRamani* (vol i), 1316/1909, Vol. ii, 1319/1912 even predated the biography of Muhammad, *HazraterJibani*, Albert Library, Dacca, 1320/1914

<sup>84</sup> রবিকরের রক্তিম আভায় পূর্ব গগন উদ্ভাসিত হইবার পূর্বক্ষণে, উষার অরুণ রাগমঞ্জিত মধুর পবন হিল্লোল সঙ্গে লইয়া ফুল্লকান্তি মোহাম্মদ (দঃ) ভূমিষ্ঠহইলেন। ১৩২০.

<sup>85</sup> Abdul Bari received the title *Kabiratna* from the British government for his poetic excellence.

<sup>86</sup> *Furfurar Isale Saowab Darshan*, published by Qazi Sirajul Haq, Sujapur, Islamia Library, Noakhali, 1330/1923.

We cannot deduce with certainty from this connection whether Abdul Bari was a part of the legacy of *Sudhakar*, with whom Pir Abu Bakr had a scriptural spiritual alliance, but it nonetheless marks his identification with and inclination to the *Hanafi* sect, which was authorized by Pir Abu Bakr. While Abdul Bari intended to write neither history nor biography, in his attempts, the aesthetic value of poetry did not and could not bypass the question of historical authenticity and values associated with the essential values of Islam and the superiority of its Prophet. The stance that Abdul Bari took became a paradigmatic one to define the position of literature, based on the sacred lives, where literature should not and could not be deciphered only in aesthetic-poetic terms<sup>87</sup>.

While Abdul Jabbar and Abdur Rahim, in the late nineteenth century, were primarily directed towards creating a knowledge base for the Muslims, from the beginning of the twentieth century, we can see the zeal to create literature, based on Islamic themes, for a Bengali audience which encompassed Hindus and Muslims together. This was aimed at demonstrating for one's immediate neighbours the glory that was Islam, and also to claim one's position in the domain of Bangla literature. We will see how, with the support of the religious intelligentsia, namely the *Sudhakar* group, this literary discourse in the form of poetry could emerge between history/biography and religious tracts, blurring several boundaries, and was distributed widely to the new reading public across the districts. Reyazuddin Ahmad published a long narrative poem, *Bilap Lahari or Muharram Parba* (1318/1911), written by Muhammad Abdul Bari of Mymensingh. This *Muharramparba*, being priced one *anna*, was supposed to reach another readership, who might not have been able to afford Abdul Bari Kabiratna's *Karbala*, which was priced at one rupee. While the life of the Prophet in all its autonomy was being rendered into poetry, like in Dr Muhammad Abul Kasem's *Hazrat Mohammad Kabya* (1931)<sup>88</sup>, his life in relation to his grandsons' lives, and the tragedy that happened afterwards was chosen for the creation of beautiful literature, both in prose and in poetry.

---

<sup>87</sup> We will talk about the distribution of literature and generic and thematic issues in the next chapter.

<sup>88</sup> Makhdumi Library, College Square, 1931.

While the life of Muhammad was being formulated as history, or as the source of scriptures, it was also to validate and resolve the question of inheritance—presented in the question of *khilafat*—which could not have been possible without including in the texts a period that followed the event of his death. The lives of Imam Hasan and Husayn provided the essences of Islamic virtues—patience, and the ability to sacrifice oneself for the greater cause of the *ummah*—these could be seen in the Prophet himself and offered a template to be followed by the Muslims of Bengal. The life of Imam Husayn could also offer a counter-narrative to Islam being equated with the sword and vengeance in Orientalist-colonialist discourses, by providing an example of passive prowess and martyrdom and also by providing an ethico-political framework to understand *jihad*.

To posit these virtues, the creation and putting together of an authentic life with its authentic events could not be accomplished without negating, in the same move, the inauthentic versions of these lives and histories and by placing prohibitions on the inauthentic ways of remembering those lives. The act of writing about an authentic life, as a part of claiming an authentic history was thus predicated upon violent attacks on the non-historical, the ritualistic and the emotional. Muharram could not be transformed into a reformed ritual, and would be relegated to the domain of the prohibited by continuously producing the physicality of pain as false and un-Islamic, and by separating the community from all forms of the physical. Muharram, as a ritual, would be relegated to the margins as a physical, bodily, enchanted Shia practice, and literature about Muharram, in the way it was now being claimed specifically by the *Hanafi* Sunnis, would claim the caliphate and the *ahl-ul-bayt*, i.e. the state and the family of the Prophet, in order to validate the community.

### **5.2b History: The Rational and the Miraculous**

পূর্ণ নহে মন যার ইতিহাস জ্ঞানে

জীবন তিক্ত হতে মিষ্ট নাহি জানে

অতীত-কাহিনী মালা গাঁথে যে যতনে

নব নব জনম যেই লভে এ জীবনে।।

এ জাতীয় অভ্যুদয়ের দিন ইসলামের ইতিহাস প্রত্যেক নরনারীর অবশ্য পাঠ্য। যে সাধনায় বিরাট মোসলেম সভ্যতা ও সাম্রাজ্য সাধিত হইয়াছে ইসলামের ইতিহাসে তাহার সুস্পষ্ট নির্দেশ রহিয়াছে। Qazi Akram Husain, MA, *Islamer Itibritta*, [title page]

Qazi Akram Husain M.A. (1896–1963)<sup>89</sup>, of Khulna, whose two books on the history of Islam were published by the Itikatha Book Depot of Chetlahat Road in the 1920s, not only invoked the need for reading and knowing the history of Islam, but also made these two almost mandatory for the resurrection of the *jati*. Lessons about resurrection, suggested Akram Husain, in the preface of *Islamer Itihas*, could be obtained from the Islamic civilization's own ability to be reborn from destruction. He added that the life of the Prophet and those of his four companions, and the battle of Karbala were integral to the history of Islam. He also included a special reference to Karbala as that moment of utter dismay in which the community proved its ability to carry on, by rationalizing the trauma of losing the grandsons of the Prophet as being caused solely by an internal conflict. Then he went on to explain in a more schematic way, the two basic necessities for the writing of history as a genre. It should be mentioned here that at this moment in time, an entire generation was not only receiving the literary oeuvre of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, the *oupanyashikor* novelist—but were also reading the discursive efforts of Bankim, in which he was mourning over the lack of a history written by the Bengalis. Naturally, Bankim's own notion of Bengal and *Bharatbarsha*, being inspired by an Orientalist-colonialist paradigm, did not include the Muslims among the valid inhabitants of Bengal in imagining the past and formulating the future—but what was important to his Muslim readers, was the emotion it conveyed and the vocabulary in which this lack was expressed. This time however, the writing of history was played out in a competitive domain where the Muslims were no longer writing in order to produce counter-narratives to the Orientalist and colonialist authors of history, but rather,

---

<sup>89</sup> He got his B.A. and M.A. degrees in English Literature from Presidency College after having completed his Higher Secondary education at Calcutta University. We know this from Ali Ahmad, 1985, p. 19. Qazi Akram Husain wrote *IslamerItihas*, Moslem Publishing House, Kalikata, 1924, *IslamerKahini*, Karheya Road, Kalikata, 1931, and *IslamerItikatha*, Karheya Road, Kalikata, 1932 which were meant for students as well as for a general readership.

they were writing the history of Islam specifically to enlighten the Hindu readers about the glorious past of the Muslim community. These two were the symptomatic reasons of the time, which all the writers of history wanted to make very clear at the beginning of their writing, where this clarification would appear as the prelude.

যে জাতির ইতিহাস নাই, সে জাতি নগণ্য; আর যে জাতির ইতিহাস আছে, অথচ তাহার সন্ধান রাখে না, বাস্তবিকই সে জাতি ভাগ্যহীন। বাংলাদেশের মুসলমান এই শেফোক শ্রেনীর অন্তর্গত।<sup>90</sup>

[A race without a history is of no consequence whatsoever, and one that has a history but chooses not to know it, is truly an ill-fated race. The Bengal Muslims belong to this latter category—Qazi Akram Husain *Islamer Itihas*]

This was the recurrent motif, a remembrance of the discursive practices that Islam had once stood for, a counter-narrative to Macaulay's *Minute*, where, we must admit, the aim was not only the discovery of a discursive past, but also the reclamation of the Muslims as a race that gave birth to the discipline of history.

Thus, Ahsan Ullah, M.A., I.E.S., wrote in the preface of his history book *Ichhlamer Itibritta*:

এ কথা চির সত্য যে, মোছলমানরাই জগতে ইতিহাসের জন্মদাতা ও মন্ত্রগুরু। অতি প্রাচীনকাল হইতেই তাঁহাদের যেরূপ পুঙ্খনাপুঙ্খ ও ধারাবাহিক ইতিহাস আছে, জগতের আর কোন জাতির সেরূপ ইতিহাস আছে কিনা সন্দেহ। কিন্তু দুঃখের বিষয়, এ কথা অনেকেই অবগত।<sup>91</sup>

[It is but an eternal truth that the Muslims are the progenitors and mentors of history. I doubt that any other race in the world has had the kind of meticulous and episodic history that the Muslims have had since the most ancient times. But lamentably, very few are aware of this fact.]

Similarly, Qazi Akram Husain, M.A., writes in *Islamer Itihas*:

মুসলমানের ইতিহাস অবগত হওয়া আমরা যে কেবল মুসলমানের জন্যই প্রয়োজন মনে করি তাহা নহে, হিন্দুর পক্ষেও অবশ্যকর্তব্য বলিয়া বিবেচনা করি। নিয়তির চক্রে আমরা দুইটা জাতি পাশাপাশি আসিয়া দাঁড়াইয়াছি। হিন্দু-মুসলমানে সড়াব না হইলে ভারতে শান্তি ও সমৃদ্ধির আশা সুদূর-পর্যন্ত। সড়াবের পূর্বে পরিচয় প্রয়োজন। সেই জন্য হিন্দুকে মুসলমানের এবং মুসলমানকে হিন্দুর ইতিহাস অনুসন্ধান করিতে হইবে।<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup>Qazi Akram Husain, M A, *IslamerItihas*, 1924, p. 1

<sup>91</sup>Ahsan Ullah, *IchhlamerItibritta*, 1934, p. 1

<sup>92</sup>Qazi Akram Husain, M. A., *IslamerItihas*, 1924, p. 1

[We believe that it is not only the Muslims who should be aware of their own history, but that it is also essential for the Hindus. By a twist of fate our two races have come to stand side by side. Without amity between the Hindus and the Muslims, our country will neither flourish, nor will there be peace. But before we can have amity, it is necessary that we make our acquaintance with the other. This is why the Hindus must seek to excavate the history of the Muslims, and the Muslims must do the same.]

This was a realization shared by many authors of the history books and writers of biography. Ahsan Ullah almost exactly echoes, in *Ichhlamer Itibritta*, the sentiments expressed by Qazi Akram Husain above:

ভারতে হিন্দু-মোছলমানের একতা লইয়া চতুর্দিকে একটা রোল উঠিয়াছে। যে পর্যন্ত হিন্দু ও মোছলমান পরস্পরের ইতিহাস ও পূর্ব গৌরব অনবগত থাকিবে, সে পর্যন্ত হিন্দু-মোছলমানের মধ্যে সম্প্রীতি সম্ভবপর হইবে বলিয়া মনে হয় না।<sup>93</sup>

[There has lately been much hue and cry about the unity between Hindus and Muslims. But as long as the Hindus and Muslims remain unaware and ignorant of each others histories, and of the glories that either race have had in its past, I don't think there can be any accord between the two.]

While history writing had become the central concern in the project of identity formation, in this section of the chapter, we look into its socio-political context, to understand how the writing of history brought into relief the layers and crevices, and the sort of expansions and extensions of the ways in which Bengali Muslim identity was being reworked and consolidated through the history of Islam. We will also try to see whether we can discern any affiliation of the authors, or the patterns of reception by the community from the changing understandings and projections of the history of Islam—as defining the identity of the Bengal Muslim.

For that we need to see how the project initiated in the hands of the *Sudhakar* pioneers, like Reyazuddin Ahmad and Shaikh Abdul Jabbar, sustained itself in the work of the more politically inclined religious intelligentsia, like Manirujjaman Islamabadi and Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan. We also need to know what happened to the context of history writing, when these politically motivated leaders who were so in

---

<sup>93</sup>Ahsan Ullah, *IchhlamerItibritta*, 1934, p. 1



tune with the formation of *jatiya bhab* and *jati* out of Islamic history changed their political orientations.

While the history books and biographies were attempting to forge a bond between the Hindus and Muslims, an attempt to situate *jatiya bhab* within the broader domain of political imagination of the Hindu-Muslim relationship was also taking place. For this we need to briefly know about the gradual political mobilization of the Bengali Muslim community that enabled them to engage with the national political platforms and to put forward demands integrally connected to the formation of an identity—this was an identity realized primarily in terms of the supranational, or pan-Islamic as an Islamic community, but at the same time it was an identity which was also gradually becoming nationally and regionally explicated. Thus, it was rather a ‘trichotomy’ which became so acute and inevitable for the Muslim communities in Bengal at this juncture. We will try to see how the first generation of authors of the history of Mecca and Medina was joined at a later period by other authors trying to look at Muslim civilization in India and more specifically in Bengal. There was much motivation offered by the network encompassing the centres of the Urdu-Hindi print culture and its Bengali counterpart towards the reception of history books written on the glory of Islam in India by the Bengali authors, who had started writing about the achievements of Sultan Mamud, Akbar and Aurangzeb, as also about a Muslim medieval Bengal and the history of certain regions in Bengal. It was the tremendous thrust that the Bengal Muslims experienced at this time to discover its *jatiya* between the pan-Islamic, the national-Indian and the regional-Bengali identifications, that made the quest so threatening and so nuanced at the same time. The need to excavate a regional history and identity might hint at the historical processes where a kind of robust cultural-nationalism was needed not only to reclaim one’s contemporary regional cultural belonging within the Hindu hegemonic discourses, but also to posit counter-narratives to other cultural political hegemonic functions. Within the hegemonic discourses of the nationalistic political organizations, like the Indian National Congress during the *Khilafat* movement, and also the authoritarianism of the North

Indian elite Muslims in the functioning of the Muslim League, the Muslim leaders and the literati of Bengal were prompted to reclaim their Bengaliness as the core of their identity. These dynamics of identity formation constituted the core values required to define the *jatiya* of the community and to envisage modernity. The imagination of and relationship with the other, the non-Muslim—i.e. the Hindus—was changed, and became increasingly nuanced in the process of this identity formation connected to the politics of the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League and regional political platforms—like the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, or the Nikhil Bangla Praja Samiti—to name the most important ones. Our question hence is, given the transformations that were taking place at this juncture, how can we create a context for the authors of history books like Reyazuddin Ahmad, Shaikh Abdul Jabbar of *Sudhakar*, or Ahsan Ullah.

### **5.2c From Province to Pan: Between the Frontiers of Bengal and the Frontiers of Balkan**

As I have already mentioned, a close reading of the prolific energy of print can help us understand the Muslim community's tryst with modernity. What is so productive about this attempt is that no evolutionary framework can be drawn if we allow ourselves to engage with several expressions of print synchronically. I refer here to a publication list from 1922 to show how print culture could subsume several temporalities, intentions, and aspirations of the community at a single historical conjuncture:

1922: *Jange Hazrat Ali*, Mohammad Aziz Baks, Kalikata

1922: *Mochhayele Jaruriya Fatawaye Akramiya*, Subidhpur

1922: *Eksha O Tirish Farz O Kursinama*, Mohammad Asraf Uddin,  
Dacca

1922: *Pratistha Ba Hazrat Abu Bakrer Sanks*

1922: *Mandraj Baktrita*, Maulana Mohammad Ali [on the Non-Cooperation movement], Kalikata

When we try to delineate a context for the writing of history, we should remember that, though a somewhat causal evolutionary progression had been charted out from the Greek-Turkey war of 1877 to the Election that the Nikhil Banga Krishak Samiti (NBKS) won in 1937, any kind of linear causality was impossible given the existence of the multiple temporalities that we have just enumerated above.

Actually, within the cultural-ideational sphere encompassing the entire network of print, nothing was happening in linear or unitary ways. Rather, there was a multivalence, so evident in the names of the books in print given above, which points to the coexistence of several gradations of the religious and the political, as also of the connection between the two. Akram Khan of Subidpur and Mohammad Ashraf Uddin of Dacca belonged to a more structured traditional *ulema* imbued with a new zeal to proliferate Islamic knowledge, while at the same time some minor writer's biography of Ali in a cheap print, or a more *Sudhakar*-oriented biography of Abu Bakr, were being produced simultaneously with a translation of the Madras *Khilafat* lecture by Maulana Muhammad Ali—all contributing to the different aspects of the formation of the socio-religious-political dimensions of a Bengal Muslim identity and modernity. The pan-Islamic solidarity that had induced a sense of essential common virtues among the Muslims as a community was now strengthened in the *Khilafat* movement with the formation of new orientations of power, anxiety, and volatility in keeping with the emerging political consciousness within the Muslim community. As the definition of pan-Islamism was not properly explicated in traditional scriptures, it took on different theoretical and practical shapes in the zeal to consolidate the community across the world. It reemphasized the idea of an Islamic *ummah*—a community not geographically, territorially, or spatially intelligible, but viable only as a spiritual community and explicable only as a political community under the spiritual-scriptural authenticity of the caliphate<sup>94</sup>.

---

<sup>94</sup>For details see, N. Rahman Farooqi, 'Pan-Islamism in the Nineteenth century', *Islamic Culture*, Vol. LVII, no. 4, Oct. 1983.

Jamaluddin Afghani's repeated visits to Calcutta and his constant advocacy of Pan-Islamism sensitized a bigger audience<sup>95</sup> constituted of both Urdu and Bangla speaking enthusiasts of Pan-Islamism became a source of reference for the writers of the *Sudhakar* group. Reyazuddin Mashadi of *Sudhakar* wrote *Samaj O Sanskarak*, the biography of Jamaluddin Afghani (1889), as a reflection of his ideological closeness to Afghani's Pan-Islamism. The *Sudhakar*, as a group, was inspired by and followed pan-Islamic values which initiated and endowed its search for the *jatiya*, as evident in the works of Mohammad Meyarajuddin Ahmad, Manirujjaman Islamabadi and Ismail Hosain Siraji. As it was directed against the British Empire, *Samaj O Samaskarak* was banned and withdrawn by the British Government, but the idea of pan-Islamism, as portrayed in the historiographies of the glorious days of Mecca, Medina and Turkey and Afghanistan, became ever proliferating in the works of the members of *Sudhakar*, who had begun to cultivate a competitive-differential relationship with its neighbour, the Hindus.

This new model of religious authority, offered by the educated *Munshis* and *Maulavis*, actually formed the paradigm that Jamaluddin Afghani had proposed by seeking modern values within Islamic tradition<sup>96</sup>. This neo-traditionalism of Afghani, situated between orthodox traditionalism and Western philosophical thought, created several layers of modernity for/by the Muslim public, with *Sudhakar* as its pioneer. In this phase, the effects of both the Greece-Turkey war in 1877 and of Jamaluddin Afghani's visit to Calcutta were in the process of being firmly established in Bengal. With Sayid Ameer Ali's *The Spirit of Islam* and *The Life of Muhammad* well-received and responded to by the neo-traditionalists, the discourse of an essential separation between the Hindus and Muslims was now formally inaugurated with *Sudhakar* emphasizing on an irreconcilable gap between the two communities.

---

<sup>95</sup>While we are not going into the debate and discussion of the different theories of the origin and development of pan-Islamism, we must definitely follow some historians who affirmed spatial transcendentalism as the core value of Islam which pan-Islamism reaffirmed by creating a new political-ideology to understand the community in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

<sup>96</sup>*Muslims in India, Attitudes, Adjustments and Reactions*, Qamar Hasan (Northern Book Centre: New Delhi, 1987), p. 13, Keddie, 1968, p. 3.

In this phase, the Pan-Islamism of the Bengali Muslims, expressed in the form of the *jatiya*, was not at all concerned with any nationalistic idea concerning the bigger political relevance of the community in India. Though the print network was all-encompassing, with the reception of Persian and Urdu books coming from North India, the consciousness of/about the community was by and large cultural, without being politically oriented. The empowerment of the Muslims who had had substantially less privilege, capacity and agency than their Hindu counterparts in Bengal was rather thought to have been brought about by the intervention of the British Government through its educational and economic policies. Even when the elite Muslims of Bengal were supporting the Indian National Congress after its impact began to be felt after the 1886 Conference held in Calcutta<sup>97</sup>, the majority of the community were not aroused by the national consciousness germinated through the activities of the INC. This was because the Indian National Congress had only managed to create ripples in the elite layer of the Muslim society in the absence of an all inclusive functional model.

Even when we acknowledge the regularity and the vested nature of the engagement of these elite Muslims in the activities of the INC, like that of Abul Kasim<sup>98</sup>, for example, we should clarify that this involvement was largely in the form of individual participation and accomplishment, as hardly any of these individuals could be called the representatives of the community. They were just individual names from the community, who supported the demands of the Congress without really bringing forward the specific causes of the economic and social marginality of the Muslim community or proposing solutions. Sir Syed Ahmad spoke of the immense gap between the Congress and the Muslims in Bengal, regretting that the educated and the common masses were equally unaware of the existence

---

<sup>97</sup> In the 1906 conference, out of 56 Muslim participants, 22 were from Bengal. The elite supporters consisted of Alimujjaman, the zamindar of Faridpur, A. H. Ghaznavi of Tangail, and Abul Kasim of Burdwan.

<sup>98</sup> Abul Kasim attended all the conferences since 1896 and also seconded many demands made to the British government by the Congress which were not specifically meant for the Muslims. Specific demands for the betterment of the Muslim community were neither envisioned nor realized by the Congress as yet. Sufia Ahmad, p. 106

and function of the INC<sup>99</sup>. The Congress did not become a part of either the political experience in the districts and or of the section of the community which had greater exposure to national politics. The distance was so great that, in the beginning, the Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Samiti and the Central National Muhammedan Association (CNMA) even after being approached by the Congress, did not wish to participate in the INC's political endeavours<sup>100</sup>. Till the *Khilafat* movement, even when some members of the Bengali intelligentsia, like Abdul Hamid Yusufzai, called for the participation of Muslims in the Indian National Congress<sup>101</sup>, the community was not convinced, as they remained sceptical about the possibility of the fulfilment of Muslim communitarian interests within the Hindu majoritarian Congress.

From within the community, such calls were critiqued and the majority of the intelligentsia were dead-against the idea of participation of the Muslims in the INC and did not restrain themselves from disseminating this opinion<sup>102</sup>. This scepticism emerged from a deep insecurity that was born when the community realised the extent of the gap that already existed between the Hindus and the Muslims in terms of their own economic and political backwardness. The public sphere of Bengal—political and

---

<sup>99</sup> "...if you take the population of the whole of Bengal, nearly half are Mahomedans and something over half are Bengalis. Those Mahomedans are quite unaware of what sort of thing the National Congress is. No Mahomedan *rais* [aristocrat] of Bengal took part in it; and the ordinary Bengalis who live in the district are also ignorant of it as the Mamomedans." Speech delivered at Meerut, 14 March 1888, on the 'Present State of Indian Politics', p 63. By Bengali Sir Syed Ahmad meant only the Hindus. That Muslims of Bengal would call them Bengalis was a reclamation project which was attempted by the Muslim intelligentsia in the period that followed.

<sup>100</sup> In response to the invitation of the Congress, Abdul Latif responded, "...this committee of the Mahomedan Literary Society regret their inability to accept your invitation as they do not anticipate any benefit to be derived from further present discussion of the difficult and momentous questions likely to occupy the deliberation of the Congress. *A Quarter Century of Muhammadan Literary Society of Calcutta*, p. X-XI.

<sup>101</sup> "A great dissention has lately arisen among the Mahomedans in regard to the question of the National Congress. Most of them not being able to understand its real scope and aims and have thought it to be inimical to their interests...unfortunately for us, two of the three highly-placed and intelligent Musalmans have joined in this cry, and the consequence is this that 'a fuel has been added to the fire' of this unthinking and foolish cry." *The Indian Mirror*, 7 October 1888.

<sup>102</sup> Abdus Sobhan appealed to the Muslims saying, "If now the Muslims join the Hindus and the National Congress then the British will regard the Muslims as unruly characters. Consequently the Muslims will be deprived of the attention of the Government. And if in future the Hindus take resort to any irresponsible acts, then the government will hold only the Muslims responsible for them and regard them as rebels and will probably treat them in such a manner as one should treat rebels. *Hindu Mussalman*, Vols. II and II, p. 135.

cultural—was totally hegemonized by the upper caste Hindus and their perspective was what Mujibur Rahman, the editor of *The Mussalman* (established in 1905), articulated in these words, “The Bengali Hindus, while they profess such equality in the press and on the platform, scarcely give any opportunity to the Bengalee Mussalmans to believe in their sincerity. In social life the Mussalmans in Bengal were generally looked down upon as beings of an inferior order, so much so that their very touch is pollution.”<sup>103</sup> The general mistrust of the Muslims for the Hindus in the political and cultural sphere was aggravated by the emergence of Hindu extremists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak in the Indian National Congress, and by the Bengali Muslim reading public’s exposure to a Bengali literary modernism that was under the sway of the iconic Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. Tilak defied the efforts of the moderate Congressmen like Surendranath Banerjee to unite Hindus and Bankim, as is widely known, created the *jatiya* paradigm of language and genre for the Bengali-speaking community, and threatened the Muslims by vilifying and demonizing them. While the Hindu middle-class opposed the proposed Partition of 1905, apart from a few elite members of the community<sup>104</sup>, the majority of Muslims supported the partition to have a less Hinduized space, looking to gain the political and economic agency and authority which had so far been denied to them. When the *Swadeshi* movement gained historic impetus as an expression of the Congress’ anti-Partition stand, the Muslim community<sup>105</sup> did not feel themselves equally motivated because of the *Swadeshi* movement’s overt Hindu religious imagination<sup>106</sup>. The boycott of foreign goods movement did not motivate the Muslims either, and the growing gap

---

<sup>103</sup> Mujibur Rahman, ‘Indian Unity: As evidenced by Hindu-Mussalman Relations in Bengal’, p. 418.

<sup>104</sup> The zamindar of Faridpur, Alimujjaman Chowdhury, sent a memorandum to the government for a reconsideration of the decision of the Partition, which was declared to be non-unanimous by the newly formed government of Bengal and Assam. Sufia Ahmad, p. 131.

<sup>105</sup> There were a few elite Muslims who supported the *Swadeshi* movement, Sufia Ahmad, p. 132

<sup>106</sup> Some Muslims said, “We must not here hesitate to say that the so-called “Swadeshi movement” has been carried on a long line. Surely it might be safe, if it had no connection with the partition of Bengal. Since the “movement” has been somehow or the other identified with it, the leader or the author of the movement must have committed a mistake, a mistake, which is a gross one, and which admits of no remedy, for which it is too late.”

M. G. Hosain, *বঙ্গ দেশীয় হিন্দু মুসলমান*, p. 230.

between the Hindu and Muslim communities in terms of mutual trust and a shared language of empowerment was aggravated by the communally differentiated ruling policy of the British—this was the time when the desire for the autonomy and self-assertion of the community was articulated in the creation of the Muslim League in 1906.

Here, it has to be reiterated that the Muslim League had to emerge as a modern identity-based platform inclined to the British, not only by creating a counter-narrative to the ideology and policy of the Indian National Congress, but also by shedding off the charge of treachery that had been so violently punished in the *Wahhabi* trials of the mid-nineteenth century. The policy for the acquisition of political rights for the Muslims was predicated upon their loyalty towards the British<sup>107</sup> till the Khilafat movement broke out to bring the Khilafatists and the Congress close to each other.

Pan-Islamism induced a sense of solidarity within a newly found imagined community, a solidarity which brought the community close to the concept of the caliphate through which it could imagine itself. The defeat of Turkey had a spiritual implication as it meant the loss of control for the caliph over the holy sites of Islam—i.e. the *hajj* sites. The Bengal Muslims, too, felt what the *Anwar ul-Akhbar*, exclaimed, "If the integrity of the Ottoman Empire is injured, our recognition, our honour and our lives will be imperilled"<sup>108</sup>.

But what is important to note is that while the beginning of an all India political organization, the All India Muslim League in Dacca, signified the emergence of political aspirations of the Muslims to accommodate the interests of the community, it was also the beginning of a realization of the regional dimension of the Muslim community in Bengal. What was in

---

<sup>107</sup> In the first meeting of the League, the outline of its policy was charted out as:

- a. To promote among Mussalmans of India feeling of loyalty to the British Government and to remove any misconception that may arise as to the intentions of the Government with regard to any of its measures.
- b. To protect in advance the political rights and interests of Mussalmans of India and respectfully to represent their needs and aspirations to the Government..."

*The Pioneer*, 2 January 1907, cited in Sufia Ahmad, p. 113.

<sup>108</sup> *Anwar ul-Akhbar*, 1 August 1877, L/R/5/54, India Office Records, cited in Sufia Ahmad.



nascent form between the Urdu-speaking elite led CNMA, the MLS and the *anjumans* spread over every district and sub-divisional town, was now brought to the forefront in a full-fledged way in the separation between the Urdu-speaking and Bengali-speaking factions within the Muslim League.

A sense of this separation was first realized and articulated in the All India Mohammedan Conference in Dacca in 1906 prior to the foundation of the AIML in the controversy that broke out over the valid language of instruction, and also about the position of Urdu and Persian in the curriculum of Muslim education in Bengal. Maulana Abdul Karim strongly pleaded for the prioritization of the use of Bangla over Urdu and Persian, as a method of ‘self-preservation’<sup>109</sup>, this became a part of the making of the *jatiya* as envisaged and implemented by the authors of history and biography in Bangla. This provincial identity of the Muslims, and the question of a valid language of expression for that identity, gradually became a marker for understanding the *jatiya*—as an amalgam of the pan-Islamic and the Bengali regional. The choice of the right language to write the history of Islam gradually became a political question impinging upon the Bengali identity of the Muslims, which had the valence of the ‘pan’, the national and the regional thrust together at the same time. That the authors were becoming aware of and responsible for writing the history of Islam in medieval India, and were searching for identitarian validation in the near history of Bengal, was connected to the community’s religious and political orientations between the national and the regional.

But we are not trying to find any easy connection between the rising consciousness about the ‘Bharat’ part of Islamic history and the national consciousness that came out of the community’s connection with and participation in the INC. A supra-national consciousness was the outcome of the community’s connection with Indian nationalism, but the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia’s reclamation of India via the discovery of the glory

---

<sup>109</sup> “...the Muslims of Eastern Bengal cannot do without Bengali, the vernacular of the province ... They could do without the other two languages (i.e. Urdu and Persian) ...this I think, far from being a ‘suicidal policy’, is rather a policy of self-preservation.” Abdul Karim’s letter in *The Bengalee*, 11 January, 1907, p. 3

of Islam in medieval India was mediated by the writings of North Indian reformers and political personalities, who were creating a counter-narrative for the community. The dual connection with the Aligarh movement<sup>110</sup> and the All India Muslim League (AIML) contributed to the making of this national, which had a completely different meaning so far as the Muslim communities were concerned, and remained ignored in the historical consciousness of the INC.

After the Bengal Partition was reversed in 1911, and after the Balkan War, the defensive policy of the Muslim political organizations changed towards an offensive turn, which was propelled by the emotions of the *Khilafat* movement. At the same time the Muslim intelligentsia of Bengal grew more and more cautious and suspicious of the adequacy of any national level platform to really understand and address the specific requirements of Bengal<sup>111</sup>. We can see the rise of local young leaders in Bengal's political field forming regional-provincial bodies to assert their regional claims. The rise of Fazlul Huq with his regional agency and anti-British stand brought the question of Bengality into the political arena, though it was not particularly well-acknowledged by the contemporary literati cum religious intelligentsia.

That Maulavi Mohammad Abdur Rashid, B.A. B.T.<sup>112</sup> dedicated his book *Karbala Kavya*, quite surprisingly to Fazlul Huq can be taken as a symbolic moment in the rise and consolidation of a separate political consciousness with a distinct Bengali essence. Surprising, because a book of this genre, written to negate the inauthentic histories of Karbala by minimizing the

---

<sup>110</sup>The Aligarh movement, initiated by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan opened up the possibilities of modern education for the Muslim community in India. The Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College with its major impact in the field of politics in this subcontinent remained unparalleled in imparting western education and secularism. The movement was pro-British throughout.

<sup>111</sup> Central League Secretary Aziz Mirza wrote to Abdur Rasul, "...The All India Muslim League claims to represent the whole Muslim population, and if the important Presidency of Bengal does not accommodate it, its [i.e. AIML's] position will certainly be undermined and it will never be able to speak on behalf of the Muslim of India." referred in Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics 1936-1947*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1987, p. 11

<sup>112</sup>*Karbala* was published in 1936 by Muhammad Abdul Khalek from Mymensingh and was being circulated from Calcutta and from different parts of Mymensingh.

effect of the popular narratives (including *Bishad Sindhu* and cheap *Jungnama* prints), was undoubtedly a result of the political consciousness that had been taking shape in Bengal since the first decade of the twentieth century. The dedication part where Fazlul Huq is hailed as the sovereign Emperor of Bengal without the crown, actually recasts the position of the Karbala narratives, not generically or thematically, since there was no paradigmatic change in the narratives that came out of the intelligentsia, who had the dual advantage of both a religious and a government education. But this dedication, as also the designation of the authors here and elsewhere in the narratives show the contemporaneity of writing about history and life, undertaking the essential task of relating it to the political realizations taking place in Bengal.

While this dedication seems surprising, the sudden eruption of the Bengal Muslim's political consciousness bookending the narrative was not an exception, as a reading of the changing contours of history writing and the telling of life-stories would show. While the turn towards a regional history was marked by the emergence of regional political platforms and by the connection between the supra-national and national consciousness—in the domain of literature, the change in consciousness could also be discerned in the effort to demarcate a Bengali Muslim literary culture.

Not only were there major shifts in the political scenario brought about by several connections and disconnections between the national and regional forms of politics, defining several modes with regard to the relationship with the British and the Hindus, individuals also shifted their positions in national and regional politics, adding to the turbulence in the public consciousness around politics and culture. The assertion of a shared Bengal propagated during the *Bangabhanga* movement did not really induce a Hindu-Muslim unity, but yet somehow the Bengal counterpart of the Muslims within the political front were finally aroused to raise questions about their regionally specific demands following the withdrawal of the proposal for partition. This became apparent when the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (named after 1937) was established in 1912 to address

provincial concerns<sup>113</sup>. The question that was repeatedly asked was how far this branch could act as a provincial chapter, and how far it was intended to become autonomous in terms of its region-specific issues—this was a time marking the rise of the provincial leaders, like Fazlul Huq, to the national level. Hindu-Muslim collaboration was an ongoing process as the culmination of several political developments: like the Lucknow Pact (1916), the Council Reform (1917), *Khilafat* Non-cooperation (1919–1923), and the Bengal Pact (1923). When C. R. Das advocated for accommodating the differences between the Hindus and the Muslims to forge greater national unity, the anti-collaboration stand of the Muslims was echoed in the discourse of self-governance, so clear in the words of Nawab Ali Chowdhury: “Hitherto the whole history of India [...] is a history of continuous antagonism of the two communities”<sup>114</sup>.

Thus, by finding out the right enemy in the British or in the Hindu community and by changing the signs and degrees of separation and collaboration with them was how the political and cultural identity of the Bengal Muslims was being shaped. Our project is not to state that the Bengal Muslim’s connection to national and regional politics induced processes of self-identification processes in national and regional terms, but to highlight the fact that the complex web of the political-communal (pan-national-regional) consciousness can be seen as the backdrop against which the North Indian Urdu-speaking intelligentsia started writing about the glorious days of Muslims in India. It was the desire to propose and reclaim a Muslim India, and as such, it was received and implemented by the authors of the history books in Bengal.

---

<sup>113</sup> Central League Secretary Aziz Mirza wrote to Abdur Rasul, “...The All-India Muslim League claims to represent the whole Muslim population, and if the important Presidency of Bengal does not accommodate it, its [i.e. AIML’s] position will certainly be undermined and it will never be able to speak on behalf of the Muslims of India.” Harun-or-Rashid, *Foreshadowing Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics 1936–1947* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1982), p. 11

<sup>114</sup> ‘View on the Present Political Situation in India’, [pamphlet] in *TheEnglishman*, 28 Oct 1920, p. 10, cited by Rashid, p. 19

From the life of the Prophet to his companions, from the time of Aurangzeb to a life of ideals, in prose or in the form of poetry, the writings of Sir Sayyid Ahmad and his allies or opponents in the Urdu elite public forged a connection and a relation of criticality between religion and politics. Now, it would be relevant for us to ask the question that Partha Chatterjee raises, as to when the *jatiya* was fraught so deeply with the idea of the Bengaliness of the Muslims, could there have been only one form of nationalism that was based on an imagination of a pan and national past, as formulated by the Urdu-speaking elites in North India?<sup>115</sup>

Thus, while a Muslim history of medieval India was refurbished to claim the glory of a community which was placed between a supra-national and a national value, the authors of historical discourses in Bengal showed a unique quotient, by formulating original histories of the region, the history of a Muslim Bengal. Again we are not proposing any evolutionary model where the regional intelligentsia might have progressed from national politics to their regional location in a way in which the latter revealed the inadequacies of identification in the former. The *Sudhakar's* search for a Bengali past was initiated by Abdul Hamid Khan Ahmadi Yusufzai back in 1899 in *Bangalar Musalmandiger Adi Brittanto* and by Abdul Karim, B.A., who wrote *Bharatbarshe Musalman Rajatwer Itibritta* in 1898. But this much can be said that while the North Indian, Urdu, elite, literary culture was being received by the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia, the whole cultural space was not only made open to the national, but as a reaction to the national, the local-regional chapter of historical identity formation was also being procured. But, this made the notion of the *jatiya* and the processes of *jati* formation even more internally fractured, since the conditions necessary to validate the time of Aurangzeb were entirely different from the dynamics of making Sirajuddaula into a hero for the Bengali Muslims. Thus, while the *Hanafi* community's choice of *Fatwa e Alamgiri* as the most viable text of *fiqh/sharyati* law, appearing hand-in-hand with Aurangzeb's life-stories might not seem amenable to a language of coalition and cooperation with

---

<sup>115</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996)

the Hindus, on the other hand, the community's choice of Akbar's life might indicate an attempt to put forth a syncretistic ideology.

While the political story which entailed the 'son-of-the-soil', Fazlul Huq's expulsion from a more traditionalist Muslim League and his victory in the 1937 election had nothing to do with the attempts to exclude Imam Husayn from the political domain in Arabiya, the Bengal Muslim community in fact, from the 1920s onwards, was able to bring the distinctiveness of regional identity at par with, or in line with pan-Islamism. With the inauguration of regional histories, many interpretations of the past flourished, many justifications and clarifications were formulated to bring Muslim characters from history as counter-narratives to the national imagination of the Hindu heroes. It is interesting to note that while Akbar and Aurangzeb were the two figures extolled to define and demarcate Muslim glory in order to reclaim a medieval 'Bharat', Sirajuddaula's title as the 'Nawab of Bengal' was reaffirmed in another trajectory for an identitarian project.

It might not be a simple coincidence that in 1937 when the Bengal Provincial Muslim League became almost non-existent, at the same time as the victory of Fazlul Huq, who had stood for an independent non-communal Krishak Praja Party against a professed communal organization, the Muslim League, this was also the year that the periodical *Mohammadi* was publishing serialized instalments of 'Bange Islam-Bistar' (i.e. The Expansion of Islam in Bengal)<sup>116</sup>. Though the Krishak Praja Party neither began nor functioned with a communal point of view in mind, it certainly managed to attract all the Muslim votes of Bengal, eventually making Fazlul Huq, to use the words of Abdur Rashid, the Emperor of Bengal without the crown. The Muslim League offered a premiership to Fazlul Huq, whose creation of his Bengal cabinet in coalition with the League eliminated any possibility of future coalition between a non-communal Krishak Praja Party and the Congress. The phase that followed was of a

---

<sup>116</sup>*Mohammadi*, Year 10, No. 9 (Kartik 1344/1937) pp. 48-52, 99, 153, 263, 321, 385, 457, 534, 534, 633

history of economic betterment of Bengal led by Huq<sup>117</sup>, who started attending, as a coalition leader, the sessions of the Muslim League, and became the President of the Bengal Muslim League while remaining the President of the Krishak Praja Party. Fazlul Huq's subsequent coalition with the Hindu Mahasabha, the Forward Block and the Scheduled Castes led to the creation of the Progressive Coalition Party, which also resulted in the resignation of all the Muslim League members from his cabinet at the ministry, forcing him to tender the resignation for his ministry<sup>118</sup>. Next, Fazlul Huq put together his ministry with those representatives of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Forward Block who already belonged to his Progressive Coalition Party, which earned him a great deal of displeasure from the Muslims, and the Muslim students' associations shifted their support from Fazlul Huq to the Muslim League<sup>119</sup>. This phase saw the huge and dramatic migration of the supporters of the Krishak Praja Party to the Muslim League and Fazlul Huq was eventually expelled from the League in 1941.

While there was a constant celebration of the icons and ideals of *Khilafat*, with the proliferation and recasting of pan-Islamic symbols to suit them to the national context, the abolition of the *khilafat* by a republican revolution under Kemal Ataturk in 1924, brought newer dimensions to the political and cultural expressions of the Indian Muslims. The most important among these, was the beginning of the Freedom of Intellect movement with the inauguration of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj (MSS) that reformulated the notion of *jatiya* history and identity following the venture of Kemal Pasha in Bengal. We can certainly see a rationalizing-modernizing impulse to differentiate the modern spirit from the scripture-dependence of the traditional mind in the literary sector (similar to secular-rationalist Aligarh

---

<sup>117</sup> The rise of Huq as the leader of Bengal followed the Bengal Tenant Act (1928), against the North Indian leaders, who supported the landlords while Fazlul Huq was for the interest of the peasants.

<sup>118</sup> Harun-ur-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengali Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906–1947* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1987) p. 96.

<sup>119</sup> Jinnah inaugurated the All-India Muslim Students' Federation in Kolkata by dissolving the All-Bengal Muslim Students' League, the Lucknow Muslim Students' Conference, and the Aligarh University Union in 1937. Ibid p. 94

movement), which was defining the question of language, genre and identity in other ways<sup>120</sup>.

### **5.2d What is Defeat? What is Victory?**

The defensive mechanism of producing narratives about the heroes and their military exploits culminated in the history of two cities which constituted the land of the grandsons of the Prophet, who had marched into battle, but still his prowess was not an instrument of vengeance or virility like the previous heroes. Rather, his dispassionate prowess was projected as an ideal, a commitment to serve the community even when defeat and doom were certain. The concept of the ideal was coupled with the prowess of knowledge (*sawal* and *jung*, i.e. argument over scriptural knowledge and battle which had been so integrally linked in the early modern period) as the Muslim religious intelligentsia were trying to formulate the presence of a scientific spirit in Islam and project the community's excellence in knowledge systems which predated the European Renaissance. Titles that appeared at the time, like 'Bhugolshastre Muslim' (Muslims in the Study of Geography), or 'Khawgolshastre Muslim' (Muslims in the Discipline of Geography and Astronomy), etc., are self explanatory in this context.

The ideal of life and the ideal form of knowledge were both central concerns in the changing political-social context of coalition and coercion. The end of the *khilafat* movement triggered various forms of realization and identity formation with a climactic outbreak of growing mistrust between the Hindus and the Muslims. No less than ninety Hindu-Muslim riots took place between 1923 and 1927, which marked an eruption of distrust and blocked the possibility of any kind of future interdependence between the two communities<sup>121</sup>. After the phase of 'temporary cooperation'<sup>122</sup> during the *Khilafat* movement, the gap between the Muslim Community and the INC, and the overall Hindu community in general, was doubly affirmed as a

---

<sup>120</sup> The next chapter will try to situate this Freedom of Intellect and its intersectionality with other socialities, and attempt to explain how it defined the Muslim public sphere after the end of the *Khilafat* movement.

<sup>121</sup> *Hate Crime: The Global Politics of Polarization*, (eds) Robert J Kelly and Jess Magham, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1998, p. 124.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, p. 132.



reaction to the *Suddhi* Movement launched in Punjab, and then in other parts of the country by the *Arya Samaj* under the leadership of Dayanand Saraswati in 1924, and the *Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh* was born in the same year. In the 1920s and 30s, in the course of the dialogue of narratives and counter-narratives between a more orthodox Hindu and Muslim publics, we also see the emergence and proliferation of *tabligh* and *tanzim* (social institutions with cohesive attributes engaged in spreading Islamic ideals) in the search for a set of common signifiers for the community<sup>123</sup>. In Bengal the *Hanafī* institutions were proliferating, as I have already mentioned, with their own knowledge bases and institutions—*masjids*, *anjumans*, periodicals and *madrasas*—simultaneously with Fazlul Huq’s political front trying to speak in the language of economic reform for the common masses of Bengal<sup>124</sup>. We need to see this ambivalence in identity formation, where the ideals of life were being drawn from the rationale of the sacred lives—Mustafa Kemal Pasha was being simultaneously projected as showing the path of an ideal life along with Anwar Pasha, though they were opposed in spirit to the *Khilafat*.

Anwar Pasha and Kemal Pasha became the ideological motivation behind two completely opposite ideological trends among the Muslim public in the 1920s and 1930s. On the one hand, the Young Turk Revolution was appropriated by a more secular oriented intelligentsia, like Nazrul Islam and his compatriots, but the *Khilafati* part of Turkey also continued to persist in the imagination of Anwar Pasha<sup>125</sup> and Kemal Pasha.

The inclination towards a free spirit so well articulated by the periodical *Sikha*, and also in the later period by Nazrul and his compatriots, was counter-balanced by the religious intelligentsia. The religious intelligentsia

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>124</sup> We have already discussed how the *Hanafī* platforms adopted the language of the economic betterment of the community as prescribed in the scriptures around this time.

<sup>125</sup> Anwar Pasha (1881–1922) was an Ottoman military officer and a leader of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, who rose to the ultimate military designation of Pasha. He became the main leader of the Ottoman Empire in both the Balkan Wars (1912–13) and in World War I (1914–18). He was considered to be the saviour of Islamic glory by the religious intelligentsia because he defended the caliph of Turkey, whereas the Young Turks provided a rational differential vis-à-vis the sacred to the young new intelligentsia located in Dacca and Calcutta.

was in the process of rationalizing the sacred life and also of making the rational sacred. The inclusion of the biographies of Kemal Pasha was parallel to those of Sayed Ahamad Shahid, Sir Saiyyad Ahmad Khan, Munshi Meherullah and finally, of Muhammad Ali Jinnah (in the 1940s). But what we should note here is that while the rational was being made sacred simultaneously with the rationalization of the sacred, the process co-created the contours of Muslim modernity in Bengal, with a certain group of the intelligentsia and litterateurs campaigning for a secular and rational kind of modernity. The self-proclaimed secularists of *Sikha* worked together simultaneously with a Communism-induced form of identity, as well as with the project of modernity of the periodicals *Samyabadi* and *Langol* to create this other face of Muslim modernity in such a complex manner, that the history of any one of these cannot be written without exploring the mutual constitutivity of all these strands.

As far as the template for an individual Muslim's life and an ideal for the community were concerned, both the religious intelligentsia and the litterateurs showed a tremendous creative energy towards its construction. Nazrul Islam's poem 'Kemal Pasha' radicalized the existing reservoir of the Bangla lyrical tradition, both generically and conceptually<sup>126</sup> different from the forms that were in circulation and used by the Muslim authors and poets. It is really curious to note how the religious intelligentsia appropriated the life of the anti-*khilafat* Kemal Pasha for the cause of the *ummah* and produced his biographies under the all-inclusive signifying system of the *khilafat*. The glorious histories of Mecca and Medina, *Baitul Mokarram*, and Rum and Sham (alluding to Jerusalem, Turkey and Syria respectively) that had made the project of the *jatiya* so viable was conceptually crushed with the abolition of the caliphate under the military leadership of Kemal Pasha. As I have already recounted, the celebration of Turkey in the Greek-Turkey war was thwarted by Kemal Pasha's abolishment of the *khilafat* in Turkey, but the Bengali religious intelligentsia could still manage to control the damage done to the *khilafat*,

---

<sup>126</sup> We have referred to Nazrul Islam here as the most iconic figure of the Freedom of Intellect Movement (*BuddhirMukti*). Other pioneers like Abul Husain, and Abdul Wadud will be discussed in the next chapter.

and the *ummah*, by appropriating and assimilating the perpetrator of this damage—Kemal Pasha, within its literary repertoire. The life/history of the Prophet and his grandsons seemed to remain incomplete without the inclusion of the life of Kemal Pasha, who had won the Greco-Turkish war even though the British had supported Greece to dismantle Turkey. So if Ahsan Ullah's history book *Ichhlamer Itibritta* began with a map of Arabiya, thus placing the abode of Muhammad and the origin of Islam within the coordinates of spatial realism, it ended with a map of Turkey—the Turkey that had defeated the enemy in the Tripoli and Balkan Wars under the leadership of Anwar Pasha and Kemal Pasha. It should be noted that though *Ichhlamer Itibritta* was published in 1934, the author did not really turn to the real historical forces of the time, that is, the end of the caliphate, rather, he talked about a Turkey that had defeated Greek in the late nineteenth century. He hailed the Turk *jati*, which, as the possessor of the Islamic Empire, had become equal to the Christian *jati* in terms of its modern qualities and attributes suited to the current times.

The inclusion of Kemal Pasha was thus becoming quite necessary to mend the damage that was done with the collapse of the *Khilafat*, and in this process, Kemal Pasha, from his anti-*Khilafat* persona<sup>127</sup> became an authenticating extension and modernized version of the ideals that the sacred characters represented. As Kemal Pasha was still alive and far away, what was more important to project, remember, and continue, was the collective effort to support Turkey in the war, which had made Kemal Pasha a victor and the perennial leader of Turkey, even though he had eventually dismantled the caliphate.

So, even though the grandsons of the Prophet were killed as a result of Yazd's military ambitions, the fact of Yazd being a caliph in the Sunni system was appropriated in the textual tradition of Karbala. In the search for a common set of signifiers, Ahsan Ullah even placed Yazd as a rational and ethical character by securing the fact that no woman was violated and no infant was tortured in the aftermath of the battle, since Yazd had first kept

---

<sup>127</sup>*Ichhlamer Itibritto*, Ahsan Ullah, pp. 295–298.

the women and children safe in his own personal quarters and had then sent them off to Medina with honour. Also, unlike the traditional formats, Ahsan Ullah did not write that it was Yazd who had plotted to poison Imam Hasan by manipulating one of his wives; rather, in this version the poisoning was simply perpetrated by an anonymous enemy<sup>128</sup>.

The following list of titles show how Turkey, and Kemal Pasha as its chief, caught the imagination of the Bengal Muslims in the early decades of the twentieth century:

Abdul Qadir, B.Sc., (1908–...), *Kemal Pasha*, Mirzapur Street, Kalikata, *Turasker Itihas Kemal Pasha O Nabin Turaska*, (date not mentioned)

*Gris-Turaska Juddha*, 1900, 1908, Vols. I and II, published by Munshi Azijuddin Ahmad, Kareya Road, Gorasthan Road, printer Reyazuddin Ahmad

*Turasker Itihas*, Sufi Madhu Mian orafe Mayezuddin Ahmad (1262/1857-1327/1920), editor of *Pracharak*, date not specified,

*Tafsir Huqkani* (1901), *Jehad Ba Crusade* (1909), *Shantikarta Ba Hazrat Muhammad*, Vols. I & II, 1912, 1914

*Turkibir Ba Islam Gourab*, (Turkey Sultan Mahmuder Jibani), 1927, Masjid Bari Street, Kalikata

The *Daily Inqilab* reported a miraculous event just the day after Kemal Pasha expired, where he was reported to have shouted *Allahu Akbar* thrice before revealing the secret of Islamic life as follows:

Life is another name for action. The Muslims will remain alive as long as they follow in the footsteps of the Prophet, Choose a simple life. Base it on hard work and avoid ostentation. Do not waste any time. Organize your life according to the military discipline, which the caliph Umar Farooq has laid down for the believers. Seek knowledge to the command of the Prophet. Use your brains.<sup>129</sup>

This report on the surprising attestation of the caliphate by a person who had abolished the system shows the tremendous creative energy of the

---

<sup>128</sup>শত্রুর প্ররোচনায় জনৈক স্ত্রী মায়মুনা ... বিষ প্রয়োগে মৃত্যুমুখে পতিত হন' Ibid p. 160.

<sup>129</sup> Markus Daechsel, *The Politics of Self Expression: The Urdu Middleclass Milieu in mid 20<sup>th</sup> century India and Pakistan*, Rutledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 137.

religious intelligentsia in reclaiming the *khilafat* after its abolishment, while the upholders of the Freedom of Intellect Movement were claiming the rationality and secularism of the Young Turks in order to formulate a modernity for the Muslim community. In this section of this chapter, I talk about how the religious intelligentsia were reclaiming and reformulating, appropriating and articulating the pan-Islamic and pan-Indian symbols to secure the Bengal Muslim community, and what were the generic formulations and thematic concerns for doing that.

A medieval Islamic India had been created in the hands of the Urdu-speaking religious intelligentsia of North India, like Shibli Nomani, who tried to find scriptural and historical sources of Islam in India<sup>130</sup>. In an article entitled ‘Non-co-Operation ba Asahajogita’ published in the illustrated monthly journal *Moslem-Bharat*, it was suggested that the narrow confinement of the local *masjid* be opened up to the codes and conducts of the pan-Islamic imagination; but the author warned his readers not to be so exclusive as to offend the non-Muslims as that would disturb the national unity of India<sup>131</sup>. He tried to resolve the main anxiety of the Muslim in choosing between the supra-national and the national by saying that if one supports *Khilafat*, he should still go against it if the caliph attacks India, or should go against India if it attacks Afghanistan. However, the most important question was to oppose tyranny at all counts, for which, one needed to prioritize the Muslims or non-Muslims according to the exigencies of the situation<sup>132</sup>.

Be it Hakim Masihar Rahman Qoreshi’s *Bharate Pratham Moslem Padarpan* in cheap print<sup>133</sup>, or a more standardized and historiographically placed *Bharate Musalman Sabhyata* (1914)<sup>134</sup>, or *Bharate Islam Prachar*

---

<sup>130</sup> The reception of his literary oeuvre in Bengal demands a separate domain of study. Shibli’s writing includes the biographies of the Prophet’s companions, Islamic theological writing, writing on Persian poets, the history of Persian poetry, writings on the time of Aurangzeb and a travelogue written on his trips to Turkey, Egypt and Syria.

<sup>131</sup> Abdullah al-Azad, (Falgun-Poush-Magh, 1327), Vols. 1, 2, Nos. II-III-IV, p. 634.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, p. 666.

<sup>133</sup> Priced at 4 *annas*, date not mentioned, it must have been in the 1930s—to the extent that we can deduce its provenance from the list of books in Ali Ahmad, p. 610

<sup>134</sup> Published by Shahjahan & Co, 11 Mechhua Bajar Street, Kalikata

(1915)<sup>135</sup> by Manirujjaman Islamabadi, the national was now being claimed as a space of glory for the Muslims too, which the Muslims were thought to have lost to the Christians, and as a result had become a backward community in comparison to the Hindus. But the difference was that whereas some of the cheap prints, like the ones mentioned above, were unabashedly praising the military glory of the Muslims (the biography of Mamud entitled *Sultan Mamud*, for example), Manirujjaman Islamabadi followed Shibli Nomani's rhetoric of counter-Orientalist propaganda by refuting the theory that it was the sword and vengeance that defined Islam. This is why Akbar's syncretism necessarily had to be a part the imagination of the past at a time when a politics of coalition between the Hindus and the Muslims had to be reaffirmed during the *Khilafat*. When the authors attempted to dismantle the idea of a 'marriage of convenience' which Gandhi had supposedly used to explain the relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims during the *Khilafat* and the no-cooperation movements, the *Hanafi* community in Bengal took recourse to the life of Aurangzeb, not as an ideal form of polity but also to understand and explicate the context within which reformist ideals were taking shape. *Fatwa e Alamgiri* was the compilation of the *Hanafi shariyati* law (*fiqh*) as commissioned by Aurangzeb, who had gathered 500 *Hanafi* scholars together defining the contours of the *Hanafi* affiliated parts of the community all over India—Bengal included<sup>136</sup>. This community had to envision the ideals of *jihad* in the form of a prophetic ideal, actualized and authenticated in the acutest manner in the figure of Husayn, who had willingly become a martyr for the sake of the *ummah*.

Now, it is important to note the affiliations of those authors who were recreating Husayn as the ideal figure of the *ummah*. Many of them were the products of a new sensibility that had been consolidated by the *Hanafi* majority with its institutions and expansive repository of knowledge. This community had various inclinations ranging from the religious intelligentsia of *Sudhakar*, to minor authors and peripheral intelligentsia who

---

<sup>135</sup> Published by Muzaffaruddin Ahmad, Altafi press, Benepukur Road, Kalikata

<sup>136</sup> *Fatwa-e-Alamgiri*, first translated by Munhi Naimuddin, had a tremendous effect on defining the Muslim community in Bengal as a *Hanafi* community.

standardized, stretched, and manipulated various doctrinal matters and ideals connected to the Sunni Imams. Manirujjaman Islamabadi's own discursive projects ranged from the life of Anwar Pasha, the Sultan of Turkey (*Mahamanya Turasker Sultan*, 1901<sup>137</sup>), to the biography of Aurangzeb, thus validating the past and present of *khilafat* with respect to India. His agenda of writing history for the Bengal Muslims was focused on making the pan-Islamic sensibility national (through *Bharate Muslman Sabhyata*<sup>138</sup> and *Bharate Islam Prachar*<sup>139</sup>) and on supplementing Munshi Naimuddin's translation of *Fatwa Alamgiri* (1884–1892)<sup>140</sup>. The *Khilafat* Movement jointly ventured by the Muslims and the Hindus against the British was based on an understanding of national identity, and the Muslim religious intelligentsia were able to appropriate pan-Islamic symbols to envisage pan-Islamism.<sup>141</sup>

It was a productive moment for inducing, realizing and performing mobility. With new engagements with the sacred places of Islam, *hajj* became a ritualistic reality for the Muslims in Bengal<sup>142</sup>. While *hajj* was not affordable for a vast majority of Muslims due to their economic constraints, they could now read books about the sacred characters and sacred sites, in the form of the life-stories and histories, which became viable channels of sublimation. Both the cheap print culture and the standardized print created this space of sublimation through the figures of Muhammad, his grandsons Hasan and Husyan, and the holy spaces of Mecca and Medina.

In this effort to write history, the Islamic sacred characters were narrated as having actually come to the borders of India thus making India a part of their sacred mobility. In Nurannechha Khatun's *Moslem Bikram O*

---

<sup>137</sup> Printed by Reyazuddin Ahmad, Karheya Road

<sup>138</sup> Mechhua Bajar Street, Kolkata, 1914

<sup>139</sup> Altafi Press, 33 Benepukur Lane, 1915

<sup>140</sup> *Fatua Alamgiri*, Munshi Naimuddin, Simla Street, 1884.

<sup>141</sup> *Political Parties of South Asia*, (eds) Subrata K Mitra, Mike Enskat and Lemens Spieß, Praeger, Westminister, Connecticut and London, 2004, p. 335

<sup>142</sup> *Hajj* travel narratives started to emerge in the first decade of the twentieth century. *Bhraman-Brittanta*, (with an English title and sub-title *Travels and Observations: Arabia* (Hedjaz), Syria, Palestine (Jerusalem or *Baitul Moquddes*), Egypt and Baghdad by Mohammed Badruja was not only a narrative about the the pilgrim's sacred experience, but became a travel guide with the most viable and comfortable route and approximate costs of travel suggested by the author.

*Bangalay Mosalman Rajatwa* (1927), the author drew a parallel between Imam Ali's march to the borders of India and Sultan Mamud's invasion. The Hindu soldiers stepped back and were deafened by the sky-piercing roar of 'Allahu Akbar' from Hazrat Ali's army<sup>143</sup>. This validation of India was then qualified by the sensibility of location in Bengal. Though location in Bengal could not really be claimed as a part of the sacred physical connection in the same way that it was done to appropriate "Bharat" through Ali and Imam Husayn, Bengal was to be reclaimed as a place of historical belonging. A new need was felt to connect the place of origin and the place of birth, thus putting in place a connecting thread between Mecca-Medina and Mymensingh.

### 5.3a From Pan to Province: Between Turkey and Furfura:

We can see how the Bengal Muslim community was articulating their belonging to the pan and the local from the following list of titles:

Shibli Nomani: *Safarnama i Rum-o-Misr-o-Sham*, Agra, 1894

Saiyyd Abu Muhammad Islamil Hosain Siraji, *Turaska Bhraman*, Shajahan Co, 11 Mechhua Bajar Street, Kalikata 1913

Abdul Bari Kabiratna, *Furfurar Ichhale Sawab Darshan*, Sujapur, Islamiya Library, 1923 [a description of the *Urs* at the abode of Pir Abu Bakr in Furfura, Hooghly]

Abul Mazaffar Ahmad, BC, *Mishar O Prachyer Pathe, Syria O Nabya Turaska*, 7 Park lane, Kalikata, 1937

Though Mohammad Mozammel Haq of Shantipur, Nadia, mourned over a Bengal in distress<sup>144</sup> and in so doing surprised the Hindu reading public

---

<sup>143</sup> Nurannechha gave a vivid description of how Sultan Mamud defeated an army created by each and every Indian—man or woman, old or young. The narrative zeal appears to be the same.

<sup>144</sup> ভাসিছ নয়ন-নীরে কেন গো নলিনী

তোমার সে মুখ-রবি পরম প্রেমের ছবি

ঢাকিয়াছ গাঢ়তর চির অন্ধকারে

তম ভেদি সে কি পুনঃ পারে উঠিবারে?—'বঙ্গবিধবা', কুসুমাজ্জলি, কর প্রেস, কলিকাতা। ফাল্গুন, ১২৮৮, পৃ



with his splendid Bangla which they found to be “as chaste as that of the Hindus”<sup>145</sup>, there was neither a Muslim readership to relate to his cry, nor was his Bengal realized in accordance with the form of regional belonging that would arise in a later period. Rather, it can be said that Mozammel Haq was appropriating the lyrical language and theme initiated and used by the Hindu poets and no sort of community specificity was articulated in his thematic rendition and generic exploit. His anthology of poetry *Islamsangeet* (1898) actually marked the beginning of his tryst with an Islamic theme, and he went on to write about the historical life of the Prophet in a book entitled *Hazrat Muhammad* in 1903, and ended up penning passionate poetry with a *jatiya* fervour in a collection entitled *Jatiya Phoyara* in 1912 in the heyday of pan-Islamism and the *Khilafat* movement. We do not know whether it was because of the critics of his first book, who alerted the poet of imminent extinction if he did not try some new theme in poetry, or whether it was as a part of the *Sudhakar* group that he shifted his focus, but eventually he became a part of the search for a *jatiya* identity.

Mozammel Haq was a disciple of Abu Bakr of Furfura and we can delineate this trajectory from a poem on Muharram<sup>146</sup> in his first anthology to his renditions of the lives of the *Sufi* masters in his later poetic career. This trajectory showed that while the fierce anti-British pan-Islamism of his poetry in *Jatiya Phoyara* prompted the British to confiscate the book, it was also creating another form of ideal mediated by Karbala and the lives of the *Sufi* saints.

The need to have the history of Muslims in Bengal (while the initial need to write history in Bangla continued to persist) was beginning to be articulated as a collective responsibility since the 1920s by the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia. At the fifth annual conference of the *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti*, the president S. Wajid Ali said, “even after residing in this country for the last seven centuries we do not have any history in Bengal”.

---

<sup>145</sup>“বাঙালী মুসলমান ভদ্রলোকেরা এইরূপ সুন্দর বাঙ্গালা লিখিতে পারেন ইহা আমরা কখনও জানিতাম না।” *বাক্বব*, অগ্রহায়ণ ১২৮৯—Cited in Waqil Ahmad, p. 263.

<sup>146</sup> Except for this poem, no Islamic theme can be discerned in his first book of poetry.

The claim over location was integral to the reclamation of Bangla; and indeed, the language project could not have been achieved without having Bengal as the identitarian core of spatial belonging. S. Wajid Ali spoke about the presence of a vast majority of the Bangla speaking Bengali Muslims—who remained outside of the domain of the Urdu and English speaking political leaders—and emphasised their linguistic needs. He even went to the extent of calling upon the urban Muslims urging them to stand on the same plane as the masses by rejecting Urdu. This concern over language created a massive ideological strife—of coalition and dissent—which was instrumental in the imagination of political identity of the Bengal Muslims.

We have mentioned Abdul Bari Kabiratna's travel to Furfura where he was witness to the observance of *Urs*. This not only shows how certain popular rituals were appropriated as a part of the *Hanafī* experience that could accommodate both *Fatwa e Alamgiri* and a ritualistic imagination of Furfura within the same fold of religiosity, but Abdul Bari's easy oscillation between Mecca-Medina and Furfura also validated both the pan and the regional for the Muslim community of Bengal. Again, his acquired title as the 'jewel amongst the poets' ('Kabiratna'), and his literary attempts (on the history of Islam, the battle of Karbala, etc., that expressed a standardized piety of a *Hanafī* Muslim with a *Sufī* inclination) as such, function to diminish the possibility of thinking of the literary as a secular venture. Abdul Bari Kabiratna, in the 1920s and 1930s, offered an interstitial place between the literariness of poetic works and an identity-belonging informed by religious sensibility. In this context, we need to look at the self-proclaimed litterateurs of the *Bengali Muslim Sahitya Samaj* and *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* in the 1920s and 30s, who were exploring themes to create a Bangla literature that could be ascribed to Muslim authors, and we need to explore how they dealt with the constant negotiation between the sacred and the secular<sup>147</sup>.

---

<sup>147</sup> This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Bengal was being specifically considered not only in terms of emotional belonging, but also as a reason behind the economic and social backwardness of the Muslims. In this reclamation of Bengal, Sirajuddaula, the defeated hero, was reclaimed as the ‘Nawab of Bengal’ in the mould of a grand tragedy to explain the current degradation of the community. We might suggest here a subtle connection between Husayn and Sirajuddaula, which was forged by the authors of both characters because of the similarity of their tragic fates, in their defeat and death<sup>148</sup>. The instance of the tragic became in fact the moment of the creation of ideals about sacrificing oneself for the greater cause of the community, when it was at the moment of martyrdom of the hero that the community achieved its status as a community. For Siraj, it was the Bengali identity—and for Husayn it was the *ummah* of the prophet. In Syed Muzaffar Ahmad’s play *Bangalar Patan*<sup>149</sup>, at the moment of death Siraj cried out to Mir Kashem, calling Bengal his birthplace: “I am leaving my distraught and unprotected *Bengali* brothers to you<sup>150</sup> [emphasis mine]. Thus, at the moment of his death, as thunder roared in the sky, Gulneyar cried out addressing Siraj: “Nawab—Nawab! The God of the Bengalis—the father of the Bengalis!”<sup>151</sup>

We can find evidence from print culture in the following list, which can help us gauge how crucially important the reclamation of Bengal had become for a sense of belonging of the community:

*Nawab Sirajdaulla*, Salauddin Muhammad, 1943, Kalikata

‘Bange Islam-Bistar’, published in *Mohommadi*, year 10, Kartik, No. 9, 1344/1937, pp. 48-52, 99, 153, 263, 321, 385, 457, 534, 534, 633

*Mochhlem Banger Samajik Itihas*, Maulana Akram Khan, 1865

*Moslem Bikram O Bangalay Moslem Rajatwa*, Nurannesa Khatun, Upper Circular Road, 1927

*Siraj-daular Kalanka Mochan*, published by Mohammad Mojammel Haq, Ramchandrapur Hat, Malda, 1940

---

<sup>148</sup> Amit Dey found a folk song where Siraj was equated with Husayn. Amit Dey, 2006.

<sup>149</sup> Kohinur Press, Chittagong, 1932

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, Act 5, Scene 6, p. 175

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, 176

*Islam Pracharak* commented in 1900, “[w]e understand Bengal well and are happy to declare ourselves Bengalis. One can never think that the country where one has lived for thousands of years, and experienced its winters and summers, its good as well as bad fortunes, its happiness and wealth, and its joys and sorrows in equal measure, is not his own country. One can never imagine that his own country lies elsewhere, in another place far beyond.” (“আমরা বাঙলা দেশের কথা বিশদরূপে বুঝি। বাঙালী বলিয়া নিজের পরিচয় দিয়া সন্তুষ্ট হই। সহস্র বৎসর যে দেশে বাস করিয়া আসিয়াছি, যাহার শীত গ্রীষ্ম সৌভাগ্য দুর্ভাগ্য, সুখ সম্পদ হর্ষ বিষাদ সমভাবে ভোগ করিয়া আসিতেছি সে আমার স্বদেশ নহে? তাহার বাহিরে আবার আমার এক নিজের দেশ আছে একথা কখনও কেহ মনে করিতে পারে না।”<sup>152</sup>)

### **5.3b *Ummah, Khilafat and the Bengal Muslims: Through History and Biography***

The life of Muhammad was being formulated as history, or as the source of scriptures, and it was also invoked to validate and resolve the question of inheritance of his knowledge and the caliphate, for which one needed to engage with the event of his death, and hence resolve the dissent over inheritance. Thus, for a *jatiya* history to be created for the Muslim community, the lives of the grandsons became an almost obvious choice, along with, and integral to the narratives about the life of the Prophet, both as biography and as history. The life of Imam Hasan, and especially the life of Imam Husayn, provided the essences of Islamic virtues—patience, and the ability to sacrifice oneself for the greater cause of the *ummah*. These virtues could be seen in the Prophet himself and offered a template to be emulated by the Muslims of Bengal. The life of Imam Husayn could also offer a counter-narrative to the theory that Islam was solely associable with the sword and with vengeance, as being an example of passive prowess and martyrdom and also providing an ethico-political framework to understand *jihad*. What Girishchandra Sen had referred to was reiterated by all the authors of the battle of Karbala as the inherent qualities of a Muslim, embodied in the character of Imam Husayn.

---

<sup>152</sup>*Pracharak*, (Ashar 1307 BS /1900), p. 2.

সেইদিন যেরূপ হৃদয়বিদীর্ণকর নিদারুণ লোমহর্ষক ব্যাপার ঘটিয়াছিল তাহা স্মরণ করিলেও প্রাণ বিকম্পিত ও নয়নযুগল অশ্রুপূর্ণ হয়। এমাম হস্যনের এই জীবনচরিত পুস্তক পাঠ করিলে বঙ্গীয় পাঠকগণ তাঁহার দুর্বিষহ দুঃখ ক্লেশের ও করবলার সেই ভীষণ সংগ্রামের আনুপূর্বিক বৃত্তান্ত, এবং সেই সমরপ্রধান যুগের আরব্য বীরপুরুষদিগের অসাধারণ বীরত্ব বিবরণ অবগত হইতে পারিবেন। ... অসহনীয় শোক দুঃখ ও যোরতর বিপৎ পরীক্ষার মধ্যে অসামান্য ধৈর্য সহিষ্ণুতা, ঈশ্বরের প্রতি একান্ত নির্ভর এবং অটল বিশ্বাস, এই দুই বিশ্বাসী ধর্মনেতৃত্ববরের জীবনে জ্বলন্তরূপে অভিব্যক্ত। আপনাদের নেতা ও আচার্যের প্রতি প্রগাঢ় ভক্তিবশতঃ তাঁহার জন্য বিশ্বাসী অনুগামীদিগের সমরে অকাতরে ও উৎসাহসহকারে প্রাণদান এই করবলার ব্যাপারে যেরূপে চিত্রিত, এরূপ আর কোথাও লক্ষিত হয় নাই।

এমাম হসন ও হোসয়ন, গিরিশচন্দ্র সেন<sup>153</sup>

এমাম ভাতুয়ুগলের মধ্যে যে কারামত, সাধুতা, সরলতা, সহিষ্ণুতা, ধৈর্যগুণ ও রেজামন্দী ছিল, সেই সকল আসল সত্যঘটনা গুলিঅনেক চেষ্টা করিয়াহাদিস ও প্রসিদ্ধ তওআরিখ (ইতিহাস) হইতে সংগ্রহ করিয়া হজরত এমাম হাসান হোসেনের জীবনী মধ্যে লিপিবদ্ধ করা হইল।... খোদা-প্রেমিক আদি সৈয়দ পুরুষ জনাব এমাম সাহেব মোসলেমদিগকে ইসলাম ধর্মের নিয়ম, রেজামন্দী ও খোদা-প্রেমের মাহাত্ম্য দেখাইয়া, পাপিষ্ঠ শেমারের খঞ্জরে কেবল সত্যের মহিমা বজায় করিতে গলা কাটাইয়া সহিদ হইয়াছিলেন। ... তজ্জন্য আমরা আমাদের প্রত্যেক শিক্ষিত মুসলমান নর-নারীকে হজরত এমাম হাসান হোসেনের জীবনী পাঠ করিতে অনুরোধ করি।

মৌলবী আজহার আলী, হজরত এমাম হাসান হোসেনের জীবনী<sup>154</sup>

To posit these virtues, the creation of an authentic life with its authentic life-events could not be accomplished without striking out the inauthentic versions of these lives and histories, and without prohibiting the inauthentic ways of remembering those lives. Writing about an authentic life as a part of claiming an authentic history was thus predicated upon violent attacks on the non-historical, the ritualistic and the emotions which constituted the basic values of both *milad* and *Muharram* and the traditional texts associated with them. As I have already said earlier, in this endeavour *milad* was given a reformed ritualistic-performative shape, while *Muharram* remained beyond the scope of any possible reform. *Muharram*, as a ritual, was thus relegated to the margins as a physical, bodily, enchanted Shia practice, while the literature about *Muharram*, was now claimed specifically by the *Hanafi* Sunnis.

<sup>153</sup> এমাম হসন ও হোসয়ন, গিরিশচন্দ্র সেন, কলিকাতা, ১৮৩৩ শক দ্বিতীয় সংস্করণ, পৃষ্ঠা ৯০

<sup>154</sup> মৌলবী আজহার আলী, হজরত এমাম হাসান হোসেনের জীবনী, মসজিদ বাড়ি স্ট্রীট, কলকাতা, ১৯৩২, p. 10.

From the late nineteenth century, the Muslim public was witnessing the simultaneous formation of the Shias as a community in the process of demarcating *Muharram* as a ritual to be shunned by the majority Muslim community. This is why, not only the narratives on the battle of Karbala which were the core texts for realising and articulating the emotions associated with the commemoration of *Muharram*, a whole array of texts mostly formulated by the *Hanafi* majority of the community—history, biography and literature related to sacred characters and events, and reformed scriptural texts—tried so hard to posit the Shias as the most viable ‘other’ of the Muslim community. The paradox for the Muslim community was that it had also to identify the other-within, as an integral part of their identity formation in its essential difference from the Hindus. The majority *Hanafi* sect that the Muslim community had started to identify with had to resolve the first sectarian schism in order to appropriate the inheritance of the Prophetic wisdom and the *ummah*, and to negate the Shias, who were equally valid and potential claimants to the prophetic line. Thus, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Bengal witnessed how the *Hanafi* religious authorities and intelligentsia tried their best to resolve this question of inheritance by reclaiming the Prophet and his grandsons, by claiming both the caliphate and the *ahl-ul-bayt*, both the state and the family, both governance and familial affect, and both the public and the private of the Prophetic life through the narratives on the battle of Karbala.

When we say the claim over the *ahl-ul-bayt*, i.e. broadly the family of the Prophet, we must be really careful about its moral-religious-spiritual relevance, as the authors always made a distinction between the Prophet’s wife Ayesha and his daughter Fatema in terms of their roles and functions with respect to the *ummah*—this distinction was played out in the dichotomy between governance and familial affect. While we get references to Ayesha—who was the daughter of Abu Bakr and the wife of Muhammad—in matters connected to the question of inheritance, and the narratives usually depict her as playing a key role in the civic unrest (it is said that she herself provoked the *jung-e-jamal* and witnessed the whole war perched on the back of a camel). Whereas Muhammad’s daughter, and

Ali's wife—Fatema, embodies a pure spiritual core, sanctioned and illustrated by the scriptures. Ayesha always remains in the domain of the public, which is defined and secured by the scriptures as the public form of belonging. From a close reading of the Karbala narratives, these two sacred women can be seen as emerging as the feminine symbols of two different aspects in order to resolve the questions of inheritance and forms of piety respectively. It can be said that an Ayesha-centric discourse was the discourse of the caliphate which could be connected to the biographies about the life of Abu Bakr, and the other caliphs following him, including Ali. But Ali himself, because of his special attributes that secure his position both as a part of the caliphate as the fourth caliph, and as the spearhead of mystical Islam, could conjoin the discourse on the caliphate and that of a Fatema-centric piety. Narratives of Karbala took much effort to show that Ali, though Ayesha was critical towards his role during the rule of the first three caliphs, took great care to show her due respect, and when the battle of *Jamal* was over escorted Ayesha himself to her house.

Authors worked hard to portray a unified originary caliphate which carried the Prophet's teaching of the *Qur'an*, this formed an inviolable link between the biographies of the four companions, whether they were clubbed together or given their individual narrative spaces<sup>155</sup>. While a unified sense of the community was being envisaged with these four figures, what was not desirable for the *ummah* was also being demarcated in the narratives of Karbala. Even Azhar Ali, who along with the references to the caliphate included the twelve Imams of the Shias, classified the physical expression of pain during the observance of *Muharram* as sin. He could not but take up the voice of a preacher rather than that of a poet, when this narrative interdiction had to be made<sup>156</sup>.

---

<sup>155</sup> মৌলবী আজহার আলী, মহাবীর হজরত আলীর জীবনী, কলকাতা, ১৯১৪, চারি আসহাবের কাহিনী, কলকাতা, ১৯২৯, গোলাম মোস্তফা, হজরত আবু বকর, ঢাকা, ১৯৬৫, সৈয়দ আবদর রউফ, হজরত ওমর, কলকাতা, ১৯২৭, নূরদ্দীন আহমদ, হজরত আহমদ, ঢাকা, ১৯৬৫

<sup>156</sup> সাবধানমুসলমানগণ! এরূপমহাপাপেরকার্যকরিওনা। যিনিবিপদকালেঅসীমধৈর্যধারণকরিয়াছিলেন, তাহাঁরইশোকেছাতিপিটিয়া, “হোসেন”, “হোসেন” করিয়াকেনপাপেরবোঝামাথায়করিতেযাইবে!” *Karbala Kabya*, p. 350.

The authors of history books and biographies alike, took much trouble to explore whether Muhammad had in his life time resolved the question of inheritance. This problem which did not have any final answer in the traditional scriptures, was brought back, and history as a genre was supplemented by the life-narratives of the prophet and his grandsons, and also those of his companions as the core of identity formation. While Ali, being the spiritual head of Islam after Muhammad, was not given any less importance than the first three caliphs, the *Hanafi* narratives (if we can use such a category) attempted at first to minimize, and then to entirely eliminate any Shia claim over Ali. This was accomplished with the help of a narrative twist, where the inhabitants of Kufa—the supposed supporters of Ali as the claimant of the caliphate after the Prophet—were turned into the traitors who had, through a series of machinations and manipulations, plotted for the destruction of Imam Husayn. Maulavi Mohammad Abdur Rashid, in his prose narrative entitled *Karbala*, categorically demarcated the Shias of Kufa as traitors and arranged the narrative in such a way that Yezid could be exempted from the sin of being an agent in the killing of Imam Husayn. It had already been postulated in *Bishad Sindhu* that it was in fact Ziyad, the governor of Kufa, who had tricked Imam Husayn under Yezid's command, but it was not Yezid himself who had actually perpetrated the violent and unethical acts against Imam Husayn and the family of the Prophet. Though Abdur Rashid started his text by refuting the historical authenticity of *Bishad Sindhu*, it reiterated the apparent lack of engagement on the part of Yezid in the assassination of Imam Husayn, and put the onus on other peripheral characters, like Ziyad, in the instance cited above. The *ummat* of Muhammad that was created through the loyalty of his people continued in the loyalty towards Imam Husayn, which demanded that the people be deemed eligible of being the rightful people of the Prophet. The scheme of narratives in this genre, thus constantly disqualified the Shias on the one hand, and Muharram on the other as the expressive form of piety of the Shias—in order to facilitate a scriptural and reformed sense of piety.

কি আশ্চর্য, যাহারা আপনাদিগকে শিয়া বা হজরত আলীর দলভুক্ত বলিয়া পরিচয় দেয় তাহারাও আজই ভক্তির মস্তকে কুঠারাঘাত করিয়া, এমাম হোসায়নের প্রতিকূলতা করিতেছে।



[It is such a surprise that even those who call themselves Shia, or the followers of Hazrat Ali, have struck such a fatal blow to devotion, and opposed Imam Husayn]

We cannot really understand, why, after hearing about the martyrs, who were left unburied, and without the performance of any funereal rites, on the field of Karbala, a tearful Yezid proclaimed that he would have forgiven Husayn if he had been in Ziyad's place. Husayn is never portrayed as having some inherent folly or fault, or as performing some unethical act in the narrative for which he might have been punished by Ziyad. This is a curious moment in the narrative where, though apparently Husayn was innocent and clearly possessed higher community ideals, he was at the same time being shown as a lacking person from the point of view of a political ruler, Yezid. In the moment where Yezid sheds tears after hearing about the condition of the dead bodies lying unburied, the narrative introduces the possibility of a compassionate caliph to take the internal conflict (that caused the Prophet's grandsons to die) by taking the caliphate beyond the zone of the sectarian conflict. Yezid's tears also proposed a template for the correct way of showing grief for the martyrs and validated silent tears for the *ahl-ul-bayt* as a scripturally sanctioned form of emotion. At the moment of emergence of the first incommensurability between political inheritance and spiritual lineage, in order to secure the position of the individual representing the caliphate, and to exempt him from the grave sin that he had committed, many different narrative strategies were adopted to shape the *ummah* as a collective of the people of Muhammad, and moreover, as a community that would always be identified with the caliphate. At the end of the narrative, the narrator relieved Yezid of the charge of murdering Imam Husayn and placed all the responsibility on Allah<sup>157</sup>.

যাহার রাজত্ব রক্ষার নিমিত্ত এমাম নিহত হইয়াছেন প্রকৃত প্রস্তাবে তিনিই এমাম হত্যাকারী।

[For the sake of whose kingdom the Imam had died, surely He Himself is his slayer]

---

<sup>157</sup>P. 188.

The post-Karbala events involved a series of ideological-political struggles between the Yezid-led caliphate and the factions that supported the *ahl-ul-bayt* and wanted to avenge the killings at Karbala. While the authors neither wanted to minimize nor denigrate the form of piety involved (as this piety towards the *ahl-ul-bayt*, or more accurately towards the *pak panjatan*, was thought to be the ultimate form of piety by the Muslim community, irrespective of any sectarian affiliation) they had to disown the Shias from being the sole agents and performers of this piety. To serve this purpose, the author writes in a flat descriptive tone about the zeal of the Shias, who were the devotees of Hazrat Ali, to avenge the killings at Karbala, and continues to describe dispassionately the bodily forms and expressions through which the soldiers grieved for their Imam, solely to mark the occasion as the factual provenance of the custom of commemorating *Muharram*. Thus their form of showing grief by tearing hair, chest-beating and rolling on the ground, the very basic acts of the ritualistic performance of *Muharram*, was categorized by the author as not sanctioned by the scriptures.

৬১ হিজরী সনে হজরত আলীর ভক্ত শিয়া সম্প্রদায়ে এক নতুন জোঁশ সৃষ্টি হইল। তাহারা কারবালার নৃশংস হত্যাকাণ্ডের প্রতিশোধ গ্রহণ করিতে চেষ্টা করিতে লাগিল। ... ৫ই রবিয়স সানি শুক্রবার ৬৫ হিজরী সনে সোলায়মান নখিলা হইতে যাত্রা আরম্ভ করিলেন। তাঁহারা এমাম হোসেনের কাতলগাহ কারবালায় পহঁছিয়া একদিন একরাত্র তথায় অবস্থান করিলেন। সৈন্যগণ বুক চাপড়াইয়া, মাথার কেশ উৎপাটন করিয়া, বিলাপ করতঃ নানা প্রকারে এমাম হত্যার জন্য শরাহ বিগর্হিত ভাবে শোক করিতে লাগিল। এই সময় হইতেই শরাহ বিগর্হিত ভাবে এমাম হত্যার শোক প্রকাশ করিবার রীতি প্রবর্তিত হয়<sup>158</sup>।

It should be noted that when Girishchandra Sen wrote the biography of Imam Hasan in 1901, perhaps the earliest in this genre in Bangla<sup>159</sup>, in the introduction, he categorically marked the ritual of *Muharram* as belonging to the Shias without taking any critical stand on the ritual itself. But his was a different search because of his affiliation and intentions as a part of the Brahmo intelligentsia. As his search for higher religious ideals in the

<sup>158</sup>Maulan Abdur Rashid, *Karbala*, p. 206.

<sup>159</sup>এ পর্যন্ত এমাম হসন ও হোসয়নের জীবনবৃত্তান্ত বঙ্গভাষায় যথাযথরূপে পুস্তকাকারে প্রকাশিত হয় নাই। কারবালয় এমাম হোসয়নের নির্যাতন, নিগ্রহ ও দুঃখক্লেশ এবং নিধনকাহিনীমাত্র বাঙ্গালা কাব্যাকারে কেহ প্রকাশ করিয়াছেন। পৃ। ৯০, *Emam Hasan O Hosayan*, Girishchandra Sen, printed and published by K P Nath, 1833, (2nd edition)

historical lives and scriptural traditions of Islam was solely for the purpose of articulating it for a wider readership, both in his introduction and in the anecdotal parts of the narrative, no single sectarian sense of the community was privileged over the other. Girishchandra's biography of Imam Hasan and Husayn, while also referring to the exclusive Shia claim over Muhammad, did not become a Shia-oriented narrative, rather it constantly upheld the universal value of suffering, pain, endurance and patience as bigger ideals, which Imam Husayn was the repository of, by virtue of being the ultimate martyr of the community. To become the sole claimant of the *ahl-ul-bayt*-centric piety, the Sunnis would vehemently disqualify the Shias, even as Muslims, in the period that followed. Girishchandra, without having any such agenda in mind, did not attempt any sectarian differentiation within the narrative. For him it was a bigger and broader idea of Islam, which offered such ideals to humanity, and which he was in turn offering to a wider Bengali readership. His Muhammad qualified Husayn as the best of all men exactly as he would in any other narrative, but in this instance it was outside the ambit of any sectarian appropriation, as Muhammad declared that Husayn was martyred because, through his death, Allah had intended to create a bond between two antagonistic sects, the Sunnis and the Shias<sup>160</sup>.

Now, when the narrative on the battle of Karbala had to be claimed by the Muslim community, for every individual Muslim, it bypassed the Shia sectarian claim and rather proposed Muslimness as a monolithic identitarian concept. In the review of Abdul Bari Kabiratna's *Karbala Kabya*, the newspaper *Anandabazar* demarcated an undivided Muslim community that in a unilinear way could respond to the pain inherent in the events of Karbala<sup>161</sup>. "Each and every Muslim"—this phrase was recurrent as the only way in which to describe the readers of Karbala who were all part of

---

<sup>160</sup> এই আমার সন্তান সৈয়দ (মানবশ্রেষ্ঠ), পরমেশ্বর ইহার যোগে পরস্পরবিরোধী দুই সম্প্রদায়ের মধ্যে সম্মিলনের স্থাপন করিবেন। *Imam Hasan O Hosayn*, Girishchandra Sen, p. 12.

<sup>161</sup> কারবালা নাম স্মরণ করিলেই মুসলমানের হৃদয় শোকে অবসন্ন হইয়া পড়ে, বিষাদের অশ্রুহরী অনিবার্য হইয়া পড়ে। , কেবল মুসলমান বলিয়া নহে, এই ভীষণ শোকোদ্দীপক বৃত্তান্ত যিনি পাঠ করেন অথবা শ্রবণ করেন তাহারই হৃদয় মর্মান্তিক শোকানলে দগ্ধ হয়। ১ ফাল্গুন, ১৩১৯, cited in Abdul Bari, p. 19.

the *ummah* and part of the *jatiya*. While claiming Karbala for each and every Muslim, the texts on the battle of Karbala resolved the question of inheritance not only by negating a non-ideal Shia form of showing grief, but also by re-invoking the Prophet's life to resolve the conflict between the caliphate and imamate. While this was being done inside the text, the contemporary social was identifying the community through the books on Karbala narratives by placing Karbala at the core of the entire community without any presuppositions of sectarian conflict.

But, biography and history alike, as we have already seen, constantly tried to eliminate all the unhistorical and the false forms from the body of the community. The authors had to specify what would be the ideal form of showing grief with the help of anecdotes<sup>162</sup> and by making Imam Husayn's mimetic voice prescribe some and negate many other practices through a binary opposition between the *sharia* and the sensory forms of showing grief<sup>163</sup>. There was much value added to tears; one could even faint in grief like Imam Hasan and Husayn had upon seeing a wounded Ali, thus embodying a performative moment very similar to the designated space of *Muharram*. This zeal for crying was maintained without much negotiation to keep the forms of affective piety alive, even while Imam Husayn instructed his sisters Joynab and Kulsum never to indulge in non-*shariyati*

---

<sup>162</sup> পাঠক-পাঠিকাগণ! আমরাও যদি বিপদকালে ধৈর্যধারণ করতে পারি, তাহা হইলে কি খোদাতায়লার প্রিয়পাত্র হইতে পারিব না? অবশ্যই পারিব। কেবল শিয়া সম্প্রদায়ের ন্যায় 'হায় হোসেন!' 'হায় হোসেন!' করিলেই যে হজরত ইমাম হোসেন (রাঃ) এর প্রতি ভক্তি দেখান হইবে তাহা হইতেই পারে না। আমরাও যদি নবী-বংশাতংস ধর্মবীরদের ন্যায় পবিত্রভাবে জীবনযাপন করিতে পারি, আমরাও আল্লাহর প্রিয়পাত্র হইয়া ওই সকল মহাপুরুষের দাসগণের ন্যায় অতুলকীর্তি রাখিতে পারিব। ব্রিথা হইচই করিয়া ধর্মের প্রকৃত তত্ত্ব গ্রহণ করা যায় না। আজহার আলী, *কারবালা কাব্য*, পৃষ্ঠা ২৪৭-২৪৮

<sup>163</sup> We have already seen how the cheap print and the popular print culture dealt with the same anxiety in a previous chapter. But if we might add a disclaimer, while trying to analyze a more standardized format, we are not positing an unbridgeable gap between the standardized and the popular. Popular and cheap prints had their own kinds of standardization and the so called elite-inclined print had different kinds of overlap with the popular imagination. We have already referred to this while talking about the attempts to eliminate *keramat* (supernatural) within the historical, and about how the authors reaffirmed some miraculous moments that were handed down from the cheap print imaginations.

forms of grief after his death. As his death was pre-given, this prescription could come from Imam Husayn himself<sup>164</sup>.

For all the authors of Karbala, the formation of a Husayn-centric piety was needed to show devotion but it is curious that Azhar Ali, unlike other authors, also referred to the Shia *Hadis* to justify that other form of piety<sup>165</sup>. Girishchandra Sen did the same<sup>166</sup>, and like him, Azhar Ali also wrote the biography of the *ashab* with another book on the life of Hazrat Ali<sup>167</sup>. But Girishchandra Sen did not have the same affiliation as Azhar Ali, who was inclined to the *Qadiriya* sect, and had also written a biography of its founder, Abdul Qadir Jilani<sup>168</sup>, before he attempted the biographies of Ali or Abu Bakr. It is not surprising to notice how, in the separate texts, as also on other occasions, Azhar Ali had to attest that Abdur Qadir Jilani belonged to the lineage of Imam Hasan. In *Karbala Kabya*, without any apparent logic, while giving the names of Imam Hasan's sons who were martyred in the battle of Karbala, the author abruptly intervened to say, using his anecdotal voice, that Abdur Qadir Jilani was born in the clan that sprang from Imam Hasan's sixth son Hasan Masanna. In his *Chari Ashaber Jibani*, Azhar Ali resolved the question of inheritance by legitimizing Abu Bakr's position as the first caliph, while keeping the space of piety for Imam Ali, Fatema and their progeny. While other authors attempted to deduce a resolution from the ambivalence in the Prophet's phrasing in appointing the first caliph,

---

<sup>164</sup>সম্মুখ সমরে আমার মৃত্যু হইলে, তোমরা শরিয়তের সীমা লঙ্ঘন করিয়া শোকে মুহাম্মান হইও না'। আজহার আলী, *কারবালা কাব্য*, পৃষ্ঠা ২৪৭ 'দেখ, তোমরা আমার মৃত্যু সংবাদ পাইলে শোকে অধীরা হওয়া উচ্চশব্দে ক্রন্দন ক্রিও না - শরিয়তের নিয়ম লঙ্ঘন করিয়া বক্ষে করাঘাত পূর্বক অধৈর্য হইয়া রদন করিও না।' ৩০৫ And also, to his wife Shaherbanu in Girishchandra Sen's rendition where he wanted to show a template of ideal—of tolerance and perseverance beyond any sectarian inclination, 'প্রেয়সি, যদি তুমি এস্থানে এরূপ দেখ যে আমি তুরঙ্গপৃষ্ঠ হইতে পতিত হইয়াছি, আমার মস্তক ক্ষতবিক্ষত এবং অঙ্গপ্রত্যঙ্গ সকল শস্ত্রাঘাতে ছিন্ন ভিন্ন, সাবধান! তখন স্বীয় মস্তক ও কেশপুঞ্জকে আবরণমুক্ত এবং ললাটদেশে ও বক্ষঃস্থলে করাঘাত করিও না। তাহা দেখিয়া শত্রুকুলের আনন্দ উল্লাস হইবে, তাহা বড়ই ক্লেশকর ব্যাপার। পৃ।৭৭

<sup>165</sup>চতুর্থ হাদিস, যে ব্যক্তি আমার আহলে বয়েতের শত্রু, সে আমারও শত্রু। আমি কখনই তাঁহার শাফায়াত করিব না। Ibid., p 367

<sup>166</sup>হোসয়েন আমার ও আমি হোসয়েনের। যে ব্যক্তি হোসয়েনকে প্রেম করে ঈশ্বর তাহাকে প্রেম করিয়া থাকেন। p. 18.

<sup>167</sup>আলীর জীবনী, কলকাতা, ১৯২৬, *চারি আসহাবের জীবনী*, কলকাতা, ১৯২৯

<sup>168</sup>*Barha Pir Saheber Jibani*, Kalkata, 1917.

Azhar Ali authenticated historical time by using a linear flow of time. Shaikh Abdur Rahim, in *Hazrat Mohammader Jibancharit O Dharmaniti* (1887) describes Muhammad as saying that if he had to choose another companion next to Allah, it would be Abu Bakr whom he would choose as his best companion. And he also asked to keep a window in the mosque open for Abu Bakr<sup>169</sup>. This statement was taken to be a symptomatic one, which a whole array of authors of standardized and popular cheap print cultures used to deduce that Muhammad's decision of handing over the responsibility of the *ummah* to Abu Bakr is evident in his choice of Abu Bakr as the one who should preside over the *namaz* after himself. He also mentioned from *Tawarikh Kholafa* that Allah attested Abu Bakr's position by granting the decision thrice. In this resolution of the question of inheritance, any Shia demand over the prophetic line was sidelined along with the performative passion for pain.

When Fatema was shown to be distraught by the pain of separation from her father, she is described as silently shedding copious tears that made her garments wet, keeping in mind her father's advice against crying with loud screams as it was sinful<sup>170</sup>. While any excess of physicality in piety was denied, Hazrat Ali was shown to be the sole follower of the Prophet using superlative words to express his virtue<sup>171</sup>. This position of Ali could not be demarcated solely in the language of piety, rather, he was posited in the line of the previous caliphs as the bearer of Prophetic knowledge, as faithful towards the *Qur'an*, as possessing unsurpassed valour, extraordinary knowledge, uncommon erudition, as an incomparable worker and a peerless

---

<sup>169</sup>যদিও হজরত মহম্মদ কাহাকেও আপনার প্রতিনিধি (খলিফা) নিযুক্ত করিয়া যান নাই, তথাপিও উপরোক্ত কথাগুলিতে (হাদিসে) স্পষ্টই প্রতীয়মান হইতেছে যে, তাঁহার মৃত্যুর পর হজরত আবু বকর খলিফা হন, এই তাঁহার ইচ্ছা ছিল। Shaikh Abdur Rahman, 1887, p. 559.

<sup>170</sup>তিনি পিতৃশোকে দিবারাত্রি অবিরলধারে অশ্রুপাত করিয়া বসন ভিজাইতে লাগিলেন। পিতার উপদেশে পাপের ভয়ে তিনি কোন সময়ই চীৎকার করিয়া রোদন করিতেন না। Azhar Ali, *Chari Ahsaber Jibani*, p. 582.

<sup>171</sup>হজরত রসুল-আকরম (সঃ) এর সম্পূর্ণ পদাঙ্ক অনুসরণকারী, কোরআন শরিফের প্রকৃত আদেশ পালক, অদ্বিতীয় বীর, আসাধারন জ্ঞানী, অসুলভ বিদ্বান, অতুল্য কর্মী, অপ্রতিদ্বন্দ্বী বক্তা আমিরুল মোমেনীন হজরত আলী নশ্বর দুনিয়া হইতে চিরবিদায় লইলেন। *Ibid*, p. 597.

orator, and thus, in other words, shown as having the qualities of an iconic leader of the community.

Rather, in Azhar Ali's historicizing effort Abu Bakr became the most affectively drawn companion, perhaps to make him as mystically legitimate as Ali. Piety here was an immersion in love (প্রাণ-ঢালা ভালোবাসা) and devotion towards the Prophet (অতুলনীয় নবী-ভক্তি), projected as more than what scriptural knowledge could produce<sup>172</sup>. There was even an instance of a *Sufi*-informed tactile transfer of affect between the Prophet and Abu Bakr<sup>173</sup> the likes of which were never used in the section where Ali's life was described. Now the question is, was this because an equal emphasis on the mystical lineage of Ali and the piety towards him could have possibly legitimized the Shia claim over the Prophet-centric piety and threatened the question of inheritance? One cannot say with certainty that the Muhammad-Ali dyad was downplayed by the authors of the biographies of the *ashab*, but there was recurrent caution maintained in the biographies to censor an Ali-centric piety from growing 'out of proportion' and creating a Shia form of piety. Ali's precarious and ambivalent position vis-à-vis the Sunnis and the Shias was disambiguated to eliminate any Shia claim over him. The author also critiques the critiques and denigrations of Ali, which he ascribes to the Khariji sect.

একদল লোক হজরত আলী(রঃ)র অতিরিক্ত ও আত্মভাবিক ভক্ত সাজিয়া ন্যায়পথ উল্লঙ্ঘন করিয়াছে এবং ... প্রকৃত খোদাভক্ত আদর্শ মহাপুরুষদিগের (পূর্ববর্তী) মহামান্য খলিফাত্রয়ের বিরুদ্ধে এমন সকল কল্পিত ও অযথা দোষারোপ করিতেছে ও গালি বর্ষণ করিতেছে যে, যাহা শুনিলে কানে অঞ্জুলি দিতে হয়। উপরোক্ত দল শিয়া বা রাফেজী। আবার এক দল ইহার ঠিক বিপরীত – যাহারা হজরত আলীর করমুল্লাহ ওয়াজহুর প্রতি এরূপ মিথ্যা দোষারোপ ও গালি বর্ষণ করে যে, তাহাদিগকে খাঁটি মোসলমান নামে অভিহিত করিতেও সঙ্কোচ বোধ হয়। ইহার খারেজী সম্প্রদায়। আজহার আলী, *মহাবীর হজরত আলীর জীবনী*, পৃষ্ঠা ৬৩৯

---

<sup>172</sup> Abu Bakr said about the Prophet, যাঁহার তিলেক বিচ্ছেদে আমার চক্ষে দুনিয়া অন্ধকার বোধ হয়, জাহাকে ক্ষণেকের জন্য চক্ষুর অন্তরাল করিতে আমি জীবন শূন্যময় বোধ করি, যিনি আমার হৃদয়ের সকল অজ্ঞতা-আঁধার দূর করিয়া মহা সত্যের আলোক জ্বালিয়া দিয়াছেন তাহাকে ত্যাগ করিয়া আমি একদণ্ডও প্রাণ ধারণ করিতে পারিব না। Azhar Ali, *Chari Ashaber Jibani*, 1929, p. 46.

<sup>173</sup> হজরত মোবারক অঙ্গ স্পর্শে তাঁহার শিরা-উপশিরা সমূহ উৎসাহ শোণিত দ্রুত ধাবিত হইতে লাগিল। কী অপূর্ব নবী-ভক্তি! কি অসুলভ ভালোবাসা! Ibid, p. 91.

Azhar Ali refuted any antagonism towards Ali who might be interpreted as a rival to the caliphate from a Shia perspective, rather than being an integral part of it. He discursively minimized the presence and possibility of any Sunni antagonism against Ali by placing him at the legitimate core of the Sunni caliphate.

এসলাম ধর্ম প্রতিষ্ঠাতা মহাপুরুষ হজরত মোহাম্মদ (ছালঃ) শিষ্যমণ্ডলীর মধ্যে যাঁহারা হজরত আলীর মতের বিরুদ্ধাচরণ করিয়া ইচ্ছার অনুকূলে বাঁধা প্রদান করতঃ স্ব স্ব ইচ্ছা সমর্থন করিয়াছে তাহারা ধর্মভ্রষ্ট হইয়া কুপথগামী হইয়াছে। তাহারা হজরত রসুলের শিষ্য হইতে পরিত্যক্ত হইবে। তদেব, পৃষ্ঠা ২৭

Azhar Ali, unlike other historians, continued to remain direct in his placing of the problem and its resolutions. Without taking the strategy of deduction—in his book *Ali*, when he is asked about the inheritance, directly and expressly denies that the prophet himself had promised him the caliphate (which was the Shia claim).

জঙ্গ-জমল এর পরে যখন আলি বস্রা নগরে প্রবেশ করলেন , তখন কয়েস-বিন-এবাদাঃ তাঁর খেদমতে আরজ করলেন, ‘হে আমিরুল মুমেনিন! লোকে বলিয়া থাকে হজরত আপনাকে প্রতিশ্রুতি দান করেছিলেন যে আমার পরে তোমাকে খলিফা মনোনীত করা হইবে, এ কথা কি সত্য?’ উত্তরে খলিফা ফরমাইলেন, একথা সত্য নহে<sup>174</sup>।

From the titles used to address Ali, we can see how the narrative prepares for the emergence of a warrior and stately character, who knew how to strike a balance between the mystical and the *shariyati* dimensions of Islam. This was the first attempt by Azhar Ali to write any biography, and the *Sudhakar* pioneer Reyazuddin Ahmad, as is stated by the publisher in the preface, edited the book and eliminated all the miraculous and un-historical sections to “preserve the sanctity of evidential history and the truth”. By “eliminating almost everything” that Azhar Ali wrote that was based on “baseless verses of a *Hadis* without proof”, Reyazuddin Ahmed inserted references to Ali’s military prowess and his caliphate from historical sources<sup>175</sup>. This affected Azhar Ali’s sense of history to the extent that he

---

<sup>174</sup>Ibid, p. 635.

<sup>175</sup> Reyazuddin Ahmad took from several history books (*tarikh*) in Urdu to refute the Urdu narrative (*ketab*) to correct Azhar Ali’s writing. “মোসলেম বাঙ্গালা সংবাদপত্রের প্রথম প্রতিষ্ঠাতা, বহু সংবাদপত্রের ভূতপূর্ব সম্পাদক ও বহু গ্রন্থপ্রণেতা মুনশী মোহাম্মদ রেয়াজুদ্দীন আহমদ সংশোধন করেছেন।” As stated in the preface by the publisher, who gave the manuscript to



did not let even a minor event or a quotidian situation slip from the tight clutch of historical calendrical time to make it authentic and true<sup>176</sup>.

### CONCLUSION:

What began with the Greece-Turkey war, and was consolidated with Jamaluddin Afghani's visit to and campaigning in Kolkata, culminated in the Bengal Muslims' collaboration with the Indian National Congress on the question of *Khilafat*. If we go through the history of *Khilafat* in Bengal, we would be surprised at how wide and varied the participation of the Muslim public was, irrespective of their understanding of the policy and profile of the INC. On the question of *Khilafat*, no Muslim, whether urban or rural, literate or semi-literate, could remain emotionally inactive. Rather, a new cohesiveness was generated through different kinds of engagement with the *Khilafat*; also, this new cohesiveness produced a community consciousness through several kinds of articulations. History and biography, and a host of literature dealing with the battle of Karbala were written since the late 1910s as testimonials to this *khilafati* sensibility. It became easier with the question of *khilafat* to accommodate religious intelligentsia like the members of the *Sudhakar*, or those of the *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti* who were the authors and editors of several journals, periodicals and publisher of popular print, alongside people who belonged to the domain of popular piety germinated through the reading of the narratives of Karbala, and the biographies and through their attendance at the observance of *Urs* at Furfura. There was a clear demarcation between the political question—through which the Muslim religious intelligentsia, like Manirujjaman Islamabadi, Muhammad Akram Khan and Badsha Mian, and the Pir of Noakhali, were addressing the religious status of the *Khilafat*—and the religious stand of Pir Abu Bakr of Furfura who declared his complete dissociation from the political elements connected to the *Khilafat*

---

Reyazuddin Ahmad for correcting historically inauthentic elements. *Mahabir Hazrat Alir Jibani*, Upper Chitpur Road, Kalikata.

<sup>176</sup>৮৯ হিজরির দ্বিতীয় সফর মাসে ২৭ শে তারিখ জুমার রাতে এমাম সাহেব আপন শয্যায় ঘোর নিদ্রায় অভিভূত। আজহার আলী, *হজরত ইমাম হাসান হুসেনের জীবনী*, পৃষ্ঠা ১৩০।

movement<sup>177</sup>. In 1920, the Bengal *Khilafat* Conference was able to bring together important personalities from the districts, and Maulana Abdul Bari's (1878–1926) fiery speech was printed and distributed<sup>178</sup>. The sudden eruption of Iqbal's poem 'Sare Jahaan se Achha', as a common and popular anthem, signified a new sensibility for a national belonging. It also gave rise to an interest in Iqbal's life and literary work. We should not forget here that when Iqbal was talking about Islamic universalism and territorial nationalism for the Muslim community, his discourse was also received in Bengal as a corollary to the reception of his life story and the translations of his poetry<sup>179</sup>.

We can see some ambivalence in the Bengal Muslim public's connection with *Khilafat* as a political endeavour. A huge majority of the Muslim public under the impact of Pir Abu Bakr of Furfura dismissed the Non Cooperation movement and remained sceptical about the *Swadeshi* movement. For them coalition on the question of *Khilafat* did not minimize the gap between the Hindus and the Muslims; rather it only re-emphasized the Muslims as a race with an essentially different *jatiya bhab*.

In 1919 the Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Parishat (BMSPP) said, "The ideology of the Muslims with regard to nation or race is autonomous. This autonomy itself constitutes the specificity of the Muslim *jatiya* and protects the race like a talisman. This autonomy is entirely born of religiosity for the Muslims. All the Muslims of the world together constitute an inseparable and undifferentiated race."—নেশান বা জাতি সম্বন্ধে মুসলমানের আদর্শ স্বতন্ত্র। এই স্বতন্ত্র্যই

---

<sup>177</sup>Pir Abu Bakr made it explicitly clear at the annual *Urs* at Furfura that the present *Khilafat* agitation aimed only at preserving the religious rights of the Muslims and had nothing to do with politics. *The Bengal Muslims: A Study in Their Politicization: 1912–1929*, Chandiprasad Sarkar, K P Bangchi, Kolkata & New Delhi, 1991, p. 92.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid, p. 90.

<sup>179</sup> Multiple biographies of Iqbal and translations of his work could be seen in Bengal since the 1920s along with a growing interest in the history of Urdu literature. That there was an emerging interest in Urdu literature can be explained by the growing emphasis placed by a section of the Muslim public on Urdu which only brought about more debates about the question of identity between Urdu and Bangla. How this Urdu-Bangla debate reflected the ideological and political strife to shape the Bengaliness of the Bengal Muslims will be discussed in the next chapter.

মোছলেম জাতীয়তার বিশেষত্ব ও মোছলেম জাতির রক্ষাকবচ। ... মুসলমানের জাতীয়তা সম্পূর্ণ ধর্মগত।  
বিশ্বের সকল মুসলমান মিলিয়া এক অভিন্ন ও অভেদ্য জাতি<sup>180</sup>।

In 1922 *Islam-Darshan* said, “Every Muslim must remember that for us, Islam always comes before country, religion before motherland. We are Muslims first and only then are we the inhabitants of Bharat.”—প্রত্যেকমুসলমান সন্তানকে মনে রাখিতে হইবে যে, আমাদের আগে ইসলাম পরে দেশ, আগে ধর্ম শেষে জন্মভূমি। আমরা আগে মোসলমান, তারপরে ভারতবাসী<sup>181</sup>।

On this note and with an utter dissatisfaction with the thematic and symbolic concerns germinated in the *Khilafat* movement, the religious intelligentsia reached the 1920s, and this had a continued impact on the Muslim public which was widely varied in shape and inclination. We can sense a growing dissociation between the pan-Indian forms of belonging initiated by the Indian National Congress and the Muslims of Bengal.

*Islam-Darshan* stated in 1921 that “the way Mr. Gandhi had decreed the burning of foreign goods by declaring them illegal and sinful, and the manner in which he had compared the spinning wheel with the *sudarshan chakra* of Krishna, advising us to invest our faith in it—leaves much to be said.”(মিঃ গান্ধী যেভাবে বিলাতী দ্রব্য অবৈধ ও মহাপাপ বলিয়া উহা দণ্ড করিবার হুকুম দিয়েছেন এবং চরকাকে শ্রীকৃষ্ণের সুদর্শন চক্র বলিয়া অভিহিত করিয়া তাহার শক্তিতে যেরূপ আস্থা জ্ঞাপন করিতে উপদেশ প্রদান করিয়াছেন – তৎসম্বন্ধে আমাদের ... বলিবার আছে<sup>182</sup>।)

Together with its claim on a Muslimness and Bengalines exclusive to the Muslims of Bengal, the identity formation project moved towards the 1940s where this would become so evident in the political, literary and linguistic questions it posed.

---

<sup>180</sup> *Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Patrika*, (Magh 1326), Maulana Akram Khan, ‘Abhibhasan’, p. 293.

<sup>181</sup> *Islam-Darshan* (Phalgun 1328 BS), ‘Islam O Bartaman Andolon’

<sup>182</sup> *Islam Darshan* (Aswin/Oct–Nov 1921): pp. 205–206

## CHAPTER VI

### On Literature

Ismail Hussain Sirajee (1880-1931) wrote in 1902:

বঙ্গভাষা ব্যতীত বঙ্গীয় মুসলমানগণের মাতৃভাষা আর কি হইতে পারে? যাহারা জোর করিয়া উর্দুকে বঙ্গীয় মুসলমানের মাতৃভাষার আসন প্রদান করিতে চান, তাঁহারা কেবল অসাধ্য সাধনে প্রয়াস করেন মাত্র।<sup>1</sup>

Litterateur Abul Fazl, commented on the overall status of the literary field in terms of new generic and thematic turns and innovations in Bangla literature (approximately in 1965)

সাহিত্য সমাজের জন্ম থেকে প্রায় চল্লিশ বছর হতে চল্লো এর মধ্যে দেশের ওপর দিয়ে ওলট-পালটের কত হাওয়াই না বয়ে গেছে। আমূল পরিবর্তন ঘটেছে রাজনীতির ক্ষেত্রে, অবিশ্বাস্য রদবদল হয়েছে সামাজিক জীবনে, খুলে গেছে সুযোগ সুবিধার এস্তার পথ। তবুও চিন্তার ক্ষেত্রে আমাদের কি অগ্রগমন হয়েছে? ঘটেছে কি কোনও পরিবর্তন? সাহিত্যে এমন কোনও রচনা কি লেখা হয়েছে যাতে প্রতিফলন ঘটেছে নতুন চিন্তার? বিশেষত প্রগতিশীল আধুনিক সমাজ গঠনের জন্য যে গতিশীল চিন্তা আর দুঃসাহসিক পদক্ষেপ প্রয়োজন তা তো আজও দুর্নিরীক্ষ। চিন্তায় ও ভাবে গতানুগতিক আর সনাতনী আর বাহ্যিক জীবন যাপনে আধুনিক ও প্রগতিশীল। ... আমাদের সমাজ আজও এ এক স্বকীয়তার শিকার নয় কি? মুসলিম সাহিত্য সমাজ চেয়েছিল সমাজকে স্ববিরোধীতার হাট থেকে বাঁচাতে, চিন্তার ক্ষেত্রেও তাকে আধুনিক ও গতিশীল করে তুলতে।<sup>2</sup>

*Muslim Sahitya Samaj* (MSS) was initiated by the young intellectuals, basically the faculty and students of Dacca University, to claim autonomy for literature like their predecessors - *BangiyaMuslimSahityaSamaj* (BMSS). Since its inception MSS emphasized the potential of literature to bring radical transformation in the traditional form of thinking and living. The difference between these two literary societies can be seen as creating two paradigmatic cases of literary criticism and community identification. While *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samaj* was initiated by the religious

---

<sup>1</sup>(Other than Bangla what could be the mother tongue of the Bengal Muslims? Imposition of Urdu as the mother tongue of Bengal Muslims is not a rational thing) *Naba Nur* (Pous 1310 BS/1903): 348.

<sup>2</sup>After the birth of *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* forty years have passed and during that time many political, social, ideational changes have taken place. But have they been reflected in our literature? ... There is no trace of progressive and radial efforts. MSS wanted to save Muslim society from ambiguity, wanted to make it open and dynamic. *Rekhachitra*, Boighar, Dhaka (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), 1985, pp. 149-150.

intelligentsia whose members were forging different creative connections between the religious and the political, the members of *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* tried to empty out the traditional meaning of religion and attempted to refill the religious symbols with new aesthetic values. What is important to note here is that the religious intelligentsia, and the university intellectuals, though taking different positions vis-à-vis religious sensibility and scriptures, both of these platforms were devising ‘rationalist’ projects for achieving some kind of solidarity and unity; but with different parameters what could be called rationalism.

The search for an identity and search for the most preferable medium to articulate that had been the concern for the Muslim intelligentsia since the beginning of the realization of *jatiya* as the core of Muslim identity. With this statement made by Sirajee (as mentioned above), we begin a journey to look into the possibility of multiple voices, consent and dissent in terms of the value of that search and of the articulation too. Sirajee was not only talking in terms of the choice of Bangla over Urdu since the beginning of such consciousness, this linguistic Bengalingness put a simultaneous claim over Bangla literature – refuting the cultural hegemony of the Hindu authors mainly Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.

We should also reiterate here that the concern initiated by the *Sudhakar* group as expressed by Shaikh Abdur Rahim in 1887, continued to be a viable question to claim and reclaim Bangla as the marker of Bengal Muslim identity. This pre-1905 Bengal Partition expression of Sirajee, not only affirmed an identification of a regional language as the viable medium for a pan-Islamic Muslim community, but also by claiming it to be the ‘mother tongue’, it brought forth multitude in the Muslim identification in national terms. The national, here, expressed in declaring Urdu as the national language of the Indian Muslim was being formulated and practised by the Urdu literati and some religious intelligentsia of Bengal. During the *Khilafat* movement, while the Muslim public of Bengal came in close

proximity with the national political question, throughout the years of *Khilafat* the simultaneous attempts to define and redefine one's claim over Bengal and Bangla as the core of identity remained constant. With the collapse of *Khilafat* movement, and the right extremists gaining much power in the Congress with their emphasis on Hindi as the marker of national identity, the Muslim intelligentsia in North India was prompted to incline and cling on to Urdu as their communitarian identity<sup>3</sup>.

Bengal was not exempted from this rejuvenated and redefined status of Urdu in defining Muslim identity in national terms. Muslim intelligentsia in Bengal was much motivated by the use of regional languages – mother tongues of the Muslims of Punjab and UP – and by the proliferating potential of these languages in print to consolidate pan-Islamic identity. In this period the choice of language by the Muslim intelligentsia in Bengal was facing two other ideological forces – one, the constant pressure from the traditional *ulama* who were fighting for an Arabic-oriented Bangla and a part of the Muslim public with a new interest in Urdu as the reflection of a new national consciousness.

While *Khilafat* forged a connection between the two communities, simultaneously the Hindu Bengali intelligentsia was attempting a Hindu monolithic culture to formulate self-identity, thus making 'culture' an analytical category emerging from within the public<sup>4</sup>. In this attempt, the glorious past of India, discovered and honed by litterateur and intelligentsia like Bankimchandra Chattapadhyay, Rameshchandra Dutta with an entire paraphernalia of periodicals, journals, associations and literary societies, was reinvigorated with an anthropological essentialization of difference in terms of caste and religion. As anthropologically derived, the race that the Muslim

---

<sup>3</sup>Francesca Orsini (ed), *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010).

<sup>4</sup>Joya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

community of India belonged to was considered to be inextricably related to some extraneous origin and the discourse on patriotism remained essentially Hindu and was not open enough to the Muslims to become the co-fighters for independence. This foundationalism gave rise to anxiety and mistrust so apparent in the discourses of Hindu public culture provoking the Muslim public to engage in making counter-narratives, consenting with the idea of regeneration but clashing with the inherent assumptions. But what is important here is that, while formulating *jatiyabhab/culture*, both the communities attempted to regenerate themselves as monolithic entities. In this project I have been trying to show the internal cleavages within the Muslim community when the interconnections between religion, politics and literary expressions formulated the project of identification and belongingness.

After discussing the significance of ideological and generic interface between history and biography in formulating *jatiya* identity and the *ummah* for the Bengal Muslims in the last chapter, I would now interrogate the question about the literary/literariness vis-à-vis the question of language, location and the community consciousness. I would try to show in this process that no matter how rigorous the attempts were, the notion of a Muslim nation/*jatiya* expressed in language through literature exposed points of collaboration, divergence and hence multiple possibilities to imagine a community.

However, the intelligentsia, so rigorously working on defining an identity of/for the Muslims in Bengal was trying to reclaim Bangla language and *sahitya* so far hegemonized by the Hindu intelligentsia and litterateur, and to define a *jatiya sahitya* for that. This attempt generated a polemic of discourses on and about Muslim belongingness and identity as Bengali and as Muslims. This duality, when expressed to claim and define a literature for/of the Bengali Muslim literati, the Muslim public sometimes reclaimed religious sensibility/scriptures and sometimes refuted them to forge a new sense of identity. These two axes, the discourse of the 'religious

intelligentsia’ and that of the ‘intelligentsia’, had two different kinds of community in their minds which came very close to colliding and took shape according to such collisions. No history of the formation of the intellectual movement and the cultural process could ever be written without taking into consideration the dynamics of dialogic with which several inclinations and affiliations within the community were crisscrossing each other, getting dissolved into or hegemonizing the others. As I have mentioned earlier, this history cannot be mapped as an evolutionary history; rather, as a multiplicity of voices represented several temporalities, each one having a valid claim over modernity and identity formation.

We have already noticed and discussed about the co-presence of different temporalities in thematic and generic terms in pervious chapters where a standardizing Bangla and Muslim Bangla were proliferating simultaneously. We have already noticed a viable and structured print market for the production and dissemination of Musalmani Bangla *puthi* during the Second World War, too. We also discussed about their separate generic concerns, different readerships, and also marked where there was mutual seepage. In this chapter we will see how the ideologies about Bangla as a language and Bangla literature as a domain of cultural belonging, identification and the project of modernization for the Bengal Muslims were being formulated by the intelligentsia and the literati, from multiple folds of the public. In this chapter, we will see the emergence of literary associations and journals solely devoted to the cause of literature-culture with their charted out ideology on language-literature and policy of making Bangla *sahitya* of/for the Muslim community. We will see how the religious-political-generic concerns affected the individuals and the collective and how they, as a response, reformulated the question of religion, defined political orientation and created literature – all of which together marked the identity question for the Bengal Muslims.



This quest begins with an observation that this creation of the counter-narrative by the Muslims to reclaim their *jatiyabhab* through history-biography-literature; the Muslim public broke into a debate regarding the ideological position vis-à-vis the template of language that this Hindu authors created and offered as the only viable template erasing linguistic diversity from within the Hindu community as well. Muslim intelligentsia had to struggle a lot to reclaim a language oversaturated with cultural essentialization and sense of ethnic difference embedded in Bangla *sahitya*. In this struggle over language, the Muslim literati was torn between a language that was the emblem of identity and the Orientalist hatred towards the Muslim which was made integral to Bangla. Their struggle was to reclaim Bangla and Bangla *sahitya* by separating it from its essence – *bhab* - created by the Hindu literati. In this chapter, I will attempt to map the moments and modes of struggle that the Muslim intelligentsia had to undergo with the Hindu literary hegemony and also with the dissenting voices within the community. When I say dissenting I neither imagine nor search for incommensurable positions, which is an ideological proposition of my project too. I rather talk about mutual seepage, influence, a dialogic between multiple positions and voices.

I give a brief timeline (1905 – 1941) as an aid to reading and placing the cultural processes along with the major political-social events as this is the time when the Bengal Muslim community was politically awakening.

1905: Partition of Bengal

1911: Revocation of Partition

1911: *BangiyaMuslimSahityaSamiti* (BMSS) established

1912: Foundation of the All India Muslim League

1918: *Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Patrika* with Maulavi Abdul Karim (1918-1923) as its editor

*Saogat bagan* with Muhammad Nasiruddin as editor

1919: *Khilafat* movement began

1920: University of Dacca

1922: '*Bidrohi*', a poem by Nazrul Islam was published

1923: End of *Khilafat* Movement

1925: Workers' and Peasants' Party: Qutubuddin Ahmad, Shamsuddin Husain, Abdul Halim, Muzaffar Ahmad, Qazi Nazrul Islam

1926: *Muslim SahityaSamaj* began, *Buddhir Mukti Andolon*, Qazi Abdul Odud, Abul Hosain

1926: *Sikha* started to be published

1926: Annulment of the Bengal Pact by the Provincial Congress leadership

1927: Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan left the Indian National Congress

1927: *Mashik Mohommadi* restarts

1928: Bengal Tenancy Bill, a considerable amount of Bengali Muslim social leaders left Congress under the leadership of Manirujjaman Islamabadi

1929: Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti was established

1930: Allahabad session of the All India Muslim League, Sir Mohammad Iqbal forwarded his idea of a separate electorate

1936: '*SojanbadiyarGhat*', narrative poem by Jasimuddin was published

1937: NBPS won the Assembly Election, Ministry under Fazlul Huq

1941: Fazlul Huq was expelled from the Muslim League

The 'marriage of convenience' between the Hindu and Muslim political authorities during the *Khilafat* could not be re-experienced even when Fazlul Huq made an appeal to the Congress to join his ministry. Rather, it was a coalition between NBPS, now Krishak Praja

Party and AIML that defined the future course of Bengal politics and related social-cultural orientations.

*Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti*, from its nomenclature to its emphasis on the specific economic degradation of the Bengal peasants, had a strong regional inclination and base and claimed to be non-communal in spite of an overwhelming majority of its Muslim mass support. NBPS/KPP became emblematic of the dual existence of the 'Bengal' 'Muslims', especially when it became an officially demarcated political authority in the 1937 election. This result showed a temporary replacement of the authorship of the non-Bengali elite Muslims and elite Hindu Congress politicians over the Bengali masses with a non-communal force. But the failure of the Congress to respond to the call of Fazlul Huq tempted him to create a cabinet with the support of Provincial ML<sup>5</sup>. This again made this cabinet ambivalent in communal terms by bringing communal (ML) and non-communal (BMPS, KPP since 1936) forces together<sup>6</sup>.

Historians working on the political awakening and community consciousness of the Muslim community in Bengal investigated the multiple forms of the connection between the national and regional, between the communal and economic questions. Chandiprasad Sarkar has analysed that though NBPS attempted to realise solidarity through a non-communal lens, they could only analyse oppression as mechanisms of landlordism; without making any policy to eradicate that, they ended up looking at agrarian oppression as only a Muslim question always threatened by Hindu dominance<sup>7</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> "It could muster enough support within the legislature to form a ministry, had the leadership of the Bengal Congress responded to the appeal of Fazlul Haq to join his ministry as coalition partners". Abul Mansur Ahmad, p134, cited in Sarkar, *The Bengal Muslims: A Study in Their Politicization: 1912-1929* (Kolkata: K. P. Bagchi, 1991) p. 243.

<sup>6</sup>Harun ar-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengali Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906-1947* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1987).

<sup>7</sup>Sarkar, 1991, p. 225.

To a certain extent, the project of literature and literary criticism showed similar inclination in understanding the literary question to form a counter-narrative where an identity-in-difference vis-à-vis the Hindus was conceived. When BMSS started, it had a simultaneous growth, conversation, overlap and seepage with the literary ideologies of *Sudhakar* not only for having many *Sudhakarists* in but also for the fact that *Sudhakar*, as a predecessor, mobilized a certain kind of consciousness about the community to be expressed as difference through literature. This difference, as already discussed in the previous chapter, was articulated in terms of separatism and also in the language of solidarity/coexistence with the Hindus with the *jatiyabhab* of the Muslims kept and relived as it were.

*Anjuman-e-Ahl-e-Hadis-e-Bangla* and *Anjuman-e-Waizan-e-Bangla*, the respective platforms of the *Ahl-e-Hadis* sect and *Hanafi* community in Bengal, both had well worked out network in rural Bengal with the rural Muslims getting exposed to various Islamic themes (history, biography, *farz*, *iman*, *adab*) in cheap prints, there was a beginning of taking into consideration the economic condition of the Muslim agrarian people as a part of the community formation project since the 1920s. By this time the religious intelligentsia and traditional *ulama* together attempted to talk about the peasant condition and the betterment of the rural folk through a new discourse where '*Krishak*' would feature as a new social category. This discourse was a new interface between economy and religion and also an exposition of folk life as the viable motif for literature emerging with a new ideology of language. This was also generally conceived on Islamic scriptural references and there was a whole array of literature on the duty and responsibility of the Bengali-speaking Muslim peasants and on their collective religious-ethical-economic betterment. The following treatises and tracts between the 1920s and the 1940s show the paradigmatic connection of the age between the economic question and the religious duties in cheap prints.

Abdul Hai Bhowali, A F M, *Adarsha Krishak*, Mymensingh, 1328 BS, 1922

Abu Ahm M Najiruddin, *Upadesh Mala ba Jnaner Jhola*, Saheb Bajar, Rajshahi, 1935

*Krishak-Bandhu*, Garib Shayer (Muhammad Reyazuddin Ahmad), Karheya Road, 1910

Muhammad Zafar Ali, *Krishi Sahay*, Mymensingh, 1334 BS/1927

Maolana Moyezzadin Hamidi, *Krishaker Unnati O Dukkha Durdashar Pratikar*, Khulna, 1930

Munshi Ahmad Taheruddin, *Krishaker Dukkha O Tar Pratikar*, Sirajganj, Pabna, 1928

Shamsuddin Khan, *Desher Bartaman Samasyay Amar Katha*, (On the limitation of Bengal tenancy act and a proposal for revision), Bhawal, Dacca, 1343 BS/1937

Abed Ali Mian, *Palli Raksha*, Rangpur, 1925

*Palli Swastha*, Rangpur, 1925

*Palli Dasha*, Rangpur, 1926

It was not a coincidence rather an outcome of a dynamic process happening in the economic and political spheres of Bengal that the *praja* of Bengal Tenancy Act or of *Praja Sattwa Ayin* would feature in the name of the counter-platform to the Indian National Congress and Muslim League, which would again put the regional identity forward. *Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti* was formed when Muhammad Akram Khan left the Congress in 1927 and other important Muslim members of the Congress also left in 1928 with Manirujjaman Islamabadi. *Nikhil Bangla Praja Samiti* was divided for ideological

rift between Muhamad Akram Khan and Fazlul Huq and a new *KrishakPrajaParty* was born<sup>8</sup>.

Maulana Akram Khan, with his immense ability to mobilize both intelligentsia and religious authorities, created other forms of connection with identity, language-literature and religion via his constant negotiations with the social as a political leader. Akram Khan's attempts to define literature, perhaps with a strong political endeavour as the Munshi Naimuddin of next generation, oriented the ideology of language and its connection to identity and religion, and created a major paradigm for the next generation. *Anjuman-e-Olama-e-Bangla*, the platform that he created in 1922 to bring the religious authorities of Bengal together, was a rational addition to his ideology of transmission of scriptural knowledge to the lower levels of the community through translation of religious texts and the conceptualization of new madrasa. Akram Khan, with the perfect companionship of Manirujjaman Islamabadi, created another paradigm for understanding *jatiya* and *jatiyasahitya*. His position between the literary platforms like *Sikha* and more orthodox religious platforms of *Hanafi* and *Ahl-e-Hadis* shows paradigmatic ambivalence so productive to understand how language was claimed and literature was conceived as the forms of Muslim identity in Bengal.

### **6.1.1 BMSP, *Sikha*, *IslamDarshan*, *Ahle Hadis***

Here are the addresses of the the offices of the above mentioned literary religious organization showing the vibrant presence of structured efforts connected to society and religion.

20 Chhaku Khansama Lane, Kolkata (Office: BMSS)

Muslim Hall, Dacca University (Publisher's Address: *Sikha*)

---

<sup>8</sup>Maulana Akram Khan continued to work with the old *Praja* name. A. K. Muhammad Abdullah, p. 67.

1 Marquis Street, Misriganj, Kolkata (Office: *Ahle Hadis*)

21 Antony Bagan Lane, Kolkata (Office: *Anjuman-e-Waizan-e-Bangla*)

Not only did the members and contributors of BMSS come from various socio-political backgrounds and inclinations with a common cause in mind, individual members also changed the course and orientation throughout their intellectual career, producing the attributes of the public in various forms. Sometimes a person cannot be taken as the representative of one single ideological stance and the readers of the time are compelled to look at multiple genres and thematics that he created by shifting the positions and affiliations. Here, in the first section of this chapter, I discuss how these multiple associations within BMSS produced non-unilateral assumptions of modernity and identity.

BMSS began with the same *Sudhakar* zeal to define the *jatiya* which they aspired to have via the creation of the *jatiyasahitya*. The need of a *jatiyasahitya* in the climactic days of *Khilafat* marked a very important version of regional Muslim identity formation between pan-Islamism and a located regional identity best articulated through literature. The project of history and biography by *Sudhakar* already promoted an idea essentially carrying the *jatiya* of the Muslim to make it an integral part of Bangla literature. The advertorial of Shaikh Abdul Jabbar's *MeccashariferItihas* that came out at the end of his *MedinashariferItihas* in 1906 noted how the Hindu intelligentsia was expressing their satisfaction at their Muslim brothers' participation in the exercise of Bangla. As there was no history of Mecca written in Bangla as yet, with this a great blank in 'Bangla literature' could be filled up – as *Bangabasi*, Dacca wrote<sup>9</sup>. That they also emphasized

---

<sup>9</sup>আমাদের মুসলমান ভ্রাতারা বঙ্গভাষার অনুশীলনে প্রবৃত্ত হইয়াছেন, ইহা বড়ই আহ্লাদের কথা। ... বঙ্গভাষায় মক্কা-শরীফের ইতিহাস আর নাই। সুতরাং ইহার দ্বারা বঙ্গ সাহিত্যের এক বিশেষ অভাব পূর্ণ হইল। আমরা মনে করি, মুসলমানদের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে হিন্দুরাও ইহা পাঠ করিয়া উপকৃত হইবেন। *Bangabasi*, Daccaprakash (11 Magh 1313 BS/ 1906). (It is a time of pleasure that our Muslim brothers have started to practice Bangla language. There was no history of Mecca-sharif in Bangla. Hence, with this book a hitherto present

the need of the Hindus to read this to know the history of their immediate neighbour better was what the intelligentsia was attempting at. Along with the reclamation of Bangla to gain a hitherto unattained position in the history of Bengal as its own inhabitants, the other main reason to write in Bangla was to let the Hindu neighbours know the glory that Islam was to have a claim over present times. *Nabyabharat*, echoing a *Khilafati* sensibility and also an anti-Partition sentiment of the Congress, declared that Hindus and Muslims are the two children of Mother Bengal and if they do not work on the betterment of Bangla, national language could not flourish and there would not be any betterment of the Bengalis<sup>10</sup>. We should not forget that the modernization of literary genre and the choice of Bangla and claim over history and biography as claims of literature were initiated by the religious intelligentsia, the *ulama* with their sometimes organic, sometimes cultivated hold on Bangla to claim it to be the mother tongue created a viable paradigm that continued from *Sudhakar* to BMSS. In their first issue, they declared,

এই উন্নতির যুগে সকলেই উন্নতির খরবেগে ধাবিত হইতেছে। বঙ্গীয় মুসলমান সমাজকেও উন্নত হইতে হইবে। জাতীয় উন্নতির জন্য জাতীয় সাহিত্য আবশ্যিক। ...  
 প্রথমতঃ আমরা চাই - আমাদের গুণ, লুপ্ত অথচ গৌরবময় সুদৃঢ় ভিত্তি পুনরায় লোক চক্ষুর সম্মুখে আনিয়া তাহার উপর বর্তমানের বিরাট, বিশাল, উদার, উন্নত ও মহামহিম সৌধ রচনা করিতে। ...  
 দ্বিতীয়তঃ আমরা চাই আমাদের ঘরের ভালো ভালো জিনিসগুলির বিষয় আমাদের প্রতিবেশীদিগকে জানাইয়া তাঁহাদের মন হইতে আমাদের সম্বন্ধে হীন ধারণা দূর করিতে হইবে। ...  
 চতুর্থতঃ আমরা চাই - অসার গ্রন্থকে সমালোচনা দ্বারা দূর করিয়া সাহিত্য ক্ষেত্র পরিষ্কার করতঃ সৎ সাহিত্যের উন্নতি সাধন করিতে।<sup>11</sup>

---

gap in Bangla literature has been fulfilled. Along with the Muslims the Hindus will be benefitted as well by reading this book)

<sup>10</sup>হিন্দু ও মুসলমান বঙ্গমাতার দুই সন্তান, ঐ দুইয়ের উন্নতি ও শ্রীবৃদ্ধির ভিন্ন বাঙ্গালার উন্নতি সুদূর পরাহত। দুই ভাই এক হয়ে বাঙ্গালা ভাষার শ্রীবৃদ্ধি সাধন না করিলে জাতীয় ভাষার গঠন হইবে না, এবং বাঙ্গালীর উন্নতি হইবে না। ... আজ কাল মুসলমান ভ্রাতারা মাতৃভাষা সেবায় এরূপ ব্রতী হইয়াছেন যে, আর বহুদিন বাঙ্গালাভাষা উপেক্ষিত থাকিবে না।(Hindu and Muslim are the two children of Mother Bengal, without their progress Bengal cannot progress. If these two brothers do not work together for the betterment of Bangla, there could not be any progress of this language. The way Muslim brothers have started to serve Bangla nowadays, this language would not remain ignored any longer)*Nabyabharat*, Falgun, 1313 BS, 1906.

<sup>11</sup>(In this pace of progress Bengal Muslim community needs *jatiya* literature to unlift its *jatiya* upliftment. For that we need to 1) reclaim our past to create our



BMSS was the first of its kind to bring people – *ulama*, aspiring poets and authors and critics, students together on literary issues, for the creation of Bangla literature for and by the Bengal Muslims. Responsibility for the community intermingled with personal political and literary ambitions created a modern moment of identity formation with political and religious intersections. If we look at the list of members and contributors, we would be seeing an array of representatives from the Muslim public sphere, Maulavi Imdadul Huq (1882-1926)<sup>12</sup>, author and government official; Kaikobad, poet; Maulavi Muhammad Shahudullah M.A. B.L.(1885-1969)<sup>13</sup>, literary critic and linguist, Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad (1869-1963) (till the mid twentieth century he was the sole collector, preserver and expert of the Bangla *kalmi* puthi from the Muslim community<sup>14</sup>); Syed Emdad Ali (1876-1956) – the editor of *Nabanur*, Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan (journalist and editor of several periodicals; *Mohamadi*, *al-Islam*, *Azad* to name a few); Manirujjaman Islamabadi (a close association of the *Sudhakar* group, a dedicated preacher of pan-Islamism and *jatiya* identity, author), Muhammad Muzammel Huq BA poet; Maulavi Shaikh Abdur Rahim (*Sudhakar*, wrote history and biography), Munshi Muhammad Reyazuddin Ahmad (*Sudhakar*, editor of *IslamPracharak*), Ismail Hussein Sirajee

---

present from that 2) let our neighbors know our past acievements to wipe away their negative impression about us...4) eliminate unnecessary books to create high literature) *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, 1<sup>st</sup> year, No 1, Baishakh 1325 BS (1918), pp.1-2.

<sup>12</sup>Wrote Abdullah, a novel published in 1932 and also biography of the prophets, *Nabikahini* (volm I), 1917 and on geography and science as Islamic knowledge systems.

<sup>13</sup>Collection of essays on Bangla language and literature, *Bhasha O Sahitya*, 1932, Dacca Library, Dacca, *Bangla Sahityer Katha*, (volm I), 1953, Volm II, 1965, *Bidyapati Shatak*, 1954, *Bangala Bhashar Itibritta*, 1959, *Bangla Byakaran*, 1936, *Padmabati* (ed), 1950, *Amader Samasya* (on the problems of language-literature-pedagogy) which marked a very serious and official engagement by a Muslim intelligentsia to make a body of knowledge on Bangla language-literature with Muslim authorial agency. His work on Bidyapati and Alaol along with his translations of Hafiz, Omar Khayyam and Iqbal marked an effort to place Bangla literature along the line of Persian and then Urdu literatures thus claiming a pan and then national connection with the regional.

<sup>14</sup>Ali Ahmad, p. 94.

(author of essays with pan-Islamic fervour, poet, a regular contributor to *Islam Pracharak*); Munshi Meher Ullah (a staunch preacher of Islamic ideals against the Christian missionary propaganda, close to *Sudhakarists* like Munshi Naimuddin), Munshi Jamiruddin (disciple of Munshi Meherullah, a preacher against the Christian missionary zeal), Munshi Shaikh Reyazuddin (*Sudhakar*), Shaikh Wajid Ali BA. Bar-at-Law (1890 -1951); Gholam Mustafa (1879-1964) poet, Maulavi Shaikh Abdul Jabbar (*Sudhakar*, author of history and biography), Sheikh Habibur Rahman, Qazi Nazrul Islam etc.

It is not easy to delineate a single framework of language and literary ideals from a group which had such variety and expanded to other literary and political coalitions and ventures. We have already noticed, in the previous chapters, how modern education gave rise to a new age *ulama*, with *Sudhakar* and many high profiles of the BMSS belonging to this middling position. But with the inauguration of *Anjuman-e-Olama-e-Bangla*, Muhammad Akram Khan brought a section of traditional *ulama* together to engage them in the cause of *jatiyasahitya* which was being separately done by the *Hanafi* and *Ahl-e-Hadis* platforms. As Akram Khan was oscillating between *Mohommadi* and *Anjuman-e-Olama-e-Bangla*, his position shows seepage and constant transaction between the traditional end and the intelligentsia unlike the efforts of Ruhul Amin, Abdul Hakim and Babur Ali, and also the most illustrious one – pir Abu Bakr Siddiqi. The first three, without having much dialogue with the literary intelligentsia, remained confined within the domain of dogmatic religiosity. Abu Bakr Siddiqi had prolific disciples and associates in the intelligentsia and in the popular domain of religion. From religious to peasant tracts and literature in the popular print were not ready to move forward without the blessings of Abu Bakr, the *pir* of Furfura. It is to be noticed and discussed while talking about language, region and identification of the Muslims of Bengal that, members of a heterogeneous public had some stake on language and literature, but they were neither co-terminus nor fully exclusive.

As already happened, *sahitya*, thus, not only was extended from its general value (with the history of Islamic civilization and rule becoming literature in the hands of the *Sudhakar* group and proliferated to different layers of the print culture), the definition of *sahitya* with new interpretations and additions from the ideological end of understanding history and biography made it constricted too. With a more and more structured form of *jatiya* as the attribute of literature offered and practised by this religious intelligentsia, innovations within and experiments with aesthetic values faced much accuse and created splits within the Muslim public culture of Bengal. There was massive struggle and conflict between *Mohommadi*, the journal edited by Muhammad Akram Khan, and radical platforms like *Sikha*, so iconic in defining such debate over the ideal form of literature for the Bengal Muslims.

The carves and contours of the debate over language, religion and identity had forms other than the cleavage between Muhammad Akram Khan and the radical lot – Abul Husain and Nazrul Islam. Akram Khan and his *Mohommadi* did not always have a smooth relationship with the *ulama* class of Bengal also engaged in defining the community identity and devoted in creating an Islamic knowledge base in Bangla. This *ulama* class, again, was internally fractured in terms of their sectarian specificities so iconically reflected in the *bahas* between the *Hanafi* and the *Ahl-e-Hadis* sects, sometimes the *bahas* between the *Faraizis* and the *Hanafis* existent in the 1940s too<sup>15</sup>. We should mention here that the *Hanafi* oriented *Sudhakar* members associated with Muhammad Akram Khan with a *Tariqah*-inclined *jihadi* lineage (Manirujjman Islamabadi was a staunch *Sudhakarist* himself) for the cause of Bangla language and literature without ever raising the issue. The *Hanafialem* Ruhul Amin of *Anjuman-e-Waizane-e-Bangla*, the editor of *IslamDarshan*, could not forget Akram Khan's initial association with *Ahl-e-Hadis* and *Tariqah*

---

<sup>15</sup>Discussed in details in chapter II.

lineage and remained sceptical to a certain extent<sup>16</sup>. *Ahl-e-Hadis*, again, could not trust *Mohommadi* as it, in spite of the editor's *Tariqah* connection, was not fighting for the cause of *Ahl-e-Hadis*<sup>17</sup>. But all of them were unanimous on the issue that 'the *Qur'an* and the *Hadis* should be spread in Bengal following various means'<sup>18</sup>. Translating the Islamic scriptures into Bangla was also the unanimous solution, with different ideologies of Bangla coming out of different quarters.

Since the moment of reform in mid nineteenth century, we can discern this reinvigorated interest in the original Perso-Arabic texts to reformulate Islam. What was 'some' Persian books to be translated for the Muslim mass in pre and early modern Bengal, now had mostly specific Arabic and Persian names. Ronit Ricci introduced the concept of an "Arabic cosmopolis" following the seminal work of Sheldon Pollock on the "Sanskrit Cosmopolis" where he pointed out the proliferation of Sanskrit from the sacred domain to literature and politics<sup>19</sup>. Ricci defined the case of South and Southeast Asia through Arabic operating historically in "conflated multilingual, diglossic, and "hyperglossic' environments"<sup>20</sup>. Ricci was right to point out reverence towards Arabic language in those regions where religious authorities set up madrasas, adopted Arabic script to scribe texts in local languages, borrowed its religious terminology and everyday vocabulary, but Ricci neither really historicized these processes, nor did she take into account the reception of Arabic literature via Persian

---

<sup>16</sup>*Ahl-e-Hadis* published complaints against the *Mohommadi* as why it was not standing beside *Ahl-e-Hadis* when the *Hanafis* had been campaigning against them. *Mohommadi's* policy on and call for Muslim solidarity was not supported by *Ahl-e-Hadis* and in the pages of *Ahl-e-Hadis* its followers were restricted from subscribing to *Mohommadi*. *Ahl-e-Hadis*, Year II, No. vi (*Falgun* 1323): 326.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid*, p. 302.

<sup>18</sup>*Ahl-e-Hadis*, Year II, No.1 (Aswin 1323 BS)

<sup>19</sup>Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>20</sup>Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2011), p. 10.

in many localities as in Bengal. In Bengal, the journey from a Persian original into Bangla was as important and instrumental in the dynamics of translation and transcreation. If we need to talk about Bengal, it is the language of Persian, as the source of narratives and also the language of administration that should be taken into account in understanding the dynamics of narrative imagination, religiosity and the community. What we can say is that the mid-nineteenth century can be called another moment when the workings of Arabic cosmopolis could be discerned with a renewed interest in original Arabic scriptural texts. While Arabiyya becoming the source to learn the ethics of Islamic reform, Arabic cosmopolis meant more than a language and became a symbol of a knowledge system no matter whether new scriptural texts were being translated into Bangla from Arabic, Persian or Urdu.

When we try to understand such cases of identity formation and structuring of religiosity by the Bengal Muslims within the rubric of an Arabic cosmopolis, we should also remember that it is an internally fractured phenomenon of reception of that cosmopolis and all the attempts for the standardization of scriptural and cultural Islam only produced contingent overlapped argumentative history.

When Mohammad Shahidullah, an Arabic and Sanskrit scholar with highest degrees in linguistics, also participated in the scriptural discourse of Sufism *Ahl-e-Hadis* attacked him by clubbing him together with the *Hanafi* pir Abu Bakr to refute *tasawwuf* as a part of Islam<sup>21</sup>. If we go through the separate discourses of *Islam Darshan*, *Ahl-e-Hadis* and *Mohommedi* – similar ideology regarding the construction of *jatiya* and creation of an able community could be discerned with Bangla as the ideal medium. What *Ahl-e-Hadis* declared in 1323 BS/1916 the need for a higher education madrasa for the scriptural learning of Islam in Bangla medium was equivalent to Akram Khan's idea of an Arabic University, proposed in 1915 with

---

<sup>21</sup>*Ahl-e-Hadis*, Year 2, volm xi (*Shrabon* 1324 BS/ 1917): 485

Manirujjaman Islamabadi, where scriptures were offered to be taught in Bangla<sup>22</sup>. But the difference was, unlike Maulana Akram Khan who had a staunch anti-British stance (as an important *Khilafat* leader of Bengal), and conceived the Arabic University as the national university of the Bengal Muslims, *Ahl-e-Hadis* never hesitated to show their pro-British sentiment. Being a *Khilafatist* Muhammad Akram Khan's non-cooperation culminated in the constructive *swadeshi* framework which included the establishment of *swadeshi* institutions, an Arabic University being one among the lot.

The new age traditional *ulama* like Abdul Hakim and Ruhul Amin of *Islam Darshan* and *Anjuman-e-Waizin-e-Bangla* and Babur Ali of *Ahle Hadis* believed in and also spread the need for all the public cultural artefact for the dissemination of *jatiya*. Echoing Akram Khan, *Ahl-e-Hadis* said, without newspaper and associations, there was no way to construct *jatiya* life, flourish *jatiya* energy, establish *jatiya* glory and have *jatiya* development<sup>23</sup>. The need for autonomous institutions and activities as the reflection of non-cooperation was all-engrossing as it came with the name of *Khilafat*, *Islam Pracharak* had one poem by Abul Fazl Mohammad where the poet juxtaposed the need for independent institutions for the community and a military zeal to defend one's own country<sup>24</sup> so similar to Maulana Akram Khan's agendas.

---

<sup>22</sup>The foundation stone was laid in 1935 with the name of the University Maolana Shaokat Ali Arbi Biswabidyaloy. Dr Sunil Kanti de, *Anjumane Olamaye Bangla*, Kolkata, p. 66, cited in A K Muhammad Abdullah, p. 58

<sup>23</sup>*Ahl-e-Hadis*, Year II, Volm viii (Baishakh 1324 BS/1917)

<sup>24</sup>স্থাপন মিশন প্রচার মানসে

শিক্ষাগার খোল শিক্ষার ভরে

স্বাধীন ব্যবসা শিল্প ও বানিজ্যে

মাতহে সকলে আবেগ ভরে

দেশ রক্ষা হেতু রাজার কাজেতে

সৈন্যবৃদ্ধি ধরি প্রফুল্ল মনে

মোসলেমের শৌর্য মোসলেমের বীর্য -

দেখাও আবার জগত জনে।

(Establish organizations, open schools, start independent trade. Show your loyalty towards the king. To save the land become soldiers, Be happy to show the prowess of the Muslims)

Maulana Akram Khan said, he sublimated his zeal for *jihad* with the mighty prowess of the pen.

বাঙলা ভাষার জ্ঞানকে আমি আমার ইলমে লাদুনী জ্ঞান মনে করি। জিহাদের জন্য আমি বাংলা ভাষাকে গ্রহণ করেছি। সে জন্য আমি বাংলা লেখা শুরু করি। প্রয়োজনীয়তা যখন তীব্র হয়ে দেখা দিয়েছে, আমার অস্ত্রও তেমনি আরও শানিত হয়েছে। আমার পূর্বপুরুষগণ জিহাদে অংশগ্রহণ করেছেন। তবে আল্লাহ আমাকে তলোয়ারের লড়াইয়ের বদলে কলমের লড়াইয়ে নিযুক্ত করেছেন। আল্লাহ আমার জন্য বাংলা ভাষাকে একটি দান হিসেবে প্রদান করেছেন।<sup>25</sup>

What I notice here is the strong modernizing impulse within the domain of scriptural Islam itself which remained a strong core in the journey to modernity and decolonization. Maulana Akram Khan was in search for a modernity and collective liberation by reinvoking *ijtihad*, individual analytical ability as against the blind following of the pre-given interpretation of the scriptures. In this matter Maulana Akram Khan has been compared to Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan who also emphasized the value of *ijtihad*<sup>26</sup>. While placing *ijtihad* at the forefront, practically, Akram Khan proposed a dynamic model for the Bengal Muslim community as a religious community and announced that the unprecedented experiences and realities of the Bengal Muslims cannot be dealt with through apriori explanations<sup>27</sup>. Muhammad Akram Khan's model of individual scholarship and

---

'Keno Shudhu Mora Rahibo Porhe', *Ahl-e-Hadis*, Year III (Aswin 1324 BS/1917): 23

<sup>25</sup>(I consider Bangla as the grace of Allah. I have taken Bangla as the weapon of *jihad*. As the resistance is higher, sharper is my pen. My ancestors took part in *jihad*. But Allah has engaged me in the fight of pen rather than in the battle of sword. Pen is a blessing from Allah) Munsur Uddin, *Bangla Sahitye Muslim Sadhana*, p. 245.

<sup>26</sup>Abul Kalam Muhammad Abdullah, p. 226

<sup>27</sup>Though Maulana Akram Khan went against the *Hanafimazhabi* concern for *taqlid* and replaced the '*gayermuqallid*' (one who practices *taqlid*) with the figure of the *mujtahid* (one who practices *ijtihad*), he was a staunch critique of Akbar for his syncretistic views and affirmed his preference for Aurangzeb and a strong interest in *Fatwa-e-Alamgiri* as the authentic version of *fiqh* as the *Hanafis* of the time were doing. Also, while there was massive debate between Ruhul Amin and Babur Ali regarding the theoretical superiority of *mujtahid* and *muqallid*, *Hanafi* and *Mohommedi* came close for their anti-British stance and though scripturally Akram Khan and Babur Ali were supposed to be close for their common root in *Tariqah* that did not happen. Maulana Akram Khan, despite his *ijtihadi* position, continued to have associates and collaborators from *Sudhakar*, whose members were inclined to the *Hanafi* sectarian values.

analysis called for the need of the initiated, much eligible religious intelligentsia as a bridge between the scriptures and the common masses, who could be attempting and analyzing the new questions. Muhammad Akram Khan's attempt to organize the *ulama* in the form of *Anjuman-e-Olama-e-Bangla* (1913-1916) came out of such ideology. This *anjuman* was to play a very important part to translate scriptures into Bangla. But what kind of Bangla did the traditional *ulama* imagined for themselves to translate Islamic scriptures into Bangla?

Ruhal Amin, the *Hanafi* traditionalist of the first half of twentieth century, proposed a Bangla with Arabic words of high untranslatability and thus attempted to create a Bangla much Arabicized, one must admit. In the prolific literary career (either translation or original composition) not a single book was written by Ruhal Amin (a *Hanafi* religious authority and preacher, as also a torchbearer for the cause of translating the sacred texts and writing original religious literature) with Bangla title<sup>28</sup>. But his compatriot, Mohammad Abdul Hakim, the editor of *Islam Darshan*, not only used a Bangla of the literati, but also published essays on literary criticism and debates on language in his periodical which was the voice of *Hanafi Anjuman-e-Waizane-e-Bangla*. In 1921, Shaikh Habibur Rahman Sahityaratna in an essay entitled “বঙ্গ-সাহিত্যে ইসলামী শব্দ” (Islamic words in Bangla Literature) talked about the connotative value of language that might not be replaced by another<sup>29</sup>. In this discussion, he criticized those *ulama* who for the connotative exclusivity of the sacred words in Arabic and Persian wanted to keep Arabic and Persian in the newly formulated body of Bangla. Habibur Rahman, concluded by saying that traditionalist *ulama* by advocating for an Arabic-Persian saturated Bangla without allowing easy replacements, were fighting for a *jatiya* as a defence mechanism against the Hindus.

---

<sup>28</sup>*Chhayeqatol Moslemin*, 1913, Kalikata, *Borhanol-Moqalledin*, 1914, Karheya Road, *Nachhrol Mojtahedin*, Karheya Road, 1916, *Nachhrol Mojtahedin*, 1916.

<sup>29</sup>*Islam Darshan*, Year II, vol viii (Agrahayan 1328 BS/1921):283-293.



The editor commented in the footnote that, the periodical intended to create an argumentative space to resolve the debate over language between the literati and the religious authorities. The editor also mentioned that, the whole discourse was arranged supporting the literati and was open for further inclusion by the *ulama* in the argument. To Habibur Rahman, it was the language of Bangla – the material medium – in its entirety, that was to be imbibed for the Muslims – to create literature<sup>30</sup>. He was rather proposed to have Islamic words (ইসলামী শব্দ) in Bangla which after a cautious and rational scrutiny would appear to be untranslatable. Habibur Rahman, too, like the editor of *Islam Darshan*, wanted to create a Muslim public with the formulation of a Bangla fit for the refined (মার্জিত) by dismissing an Arabic-Persian saturated Musalmani Bangla (which could remain the medium for popular texts printed in Battala as he said). Mir Musharraf Husain echoed the same sensibility over his choice of Bangla and retention of the Perso-Arabic to bring the Muslim community in the domain of Bangla literature back in 1887. Musharraf Husain was the pioneer of the authors to bring out the Karbala narrative from its religious overture and attempted to make a literary theme out of it.

বর্তমান গ্রন্থে আমি মুসলমান সমাজে ও পরিবারে নিত্য কথিত কতিপয় মধুর আরবী, পারসী শব্দ প্রয়োগের প্রলোভন সংবরণ করিতে পারি নাই। বঙ্গীয় মুসলমান পাঠক-পাঠিকাগণ আহাৰে বিহাৰে কি কৰ্মক্ষেত্ৰে প্ৰায়ই যে সমস্ত শব্দাবলী উচ্চাৰণ কৰিয়া মনোভাব ব্যক্ত কৰেন, তাহাঁদের মাতৃভাষায় সম্ভবমতে ওই পদগুলি ক্ৰমে প্ৰবেশলাভ কৰিতে পাবিলে তাহারা স্বভাবতই বঙ্গ-মাতৃভাষাৰ প্ৰতি অনুরক্ত হইয়া উঠিবেন, প্ৰধানতঃ এই যুক্তিৰ উপৰে নিৰ্ভৰ কৰিয়াই আমি, স্বজাতীয় ভ্ৰাতৃগণের বঙ্গমাতৃভাষাৰ প্ৰতি ভক্তি-আকৰ্ষণ-মানসে, ‘কাৰবালায়’ কতকগুলি বৈদেশিক পদ-প্ৰয়োগে সাহসী হইয়াছি। পাঠক বোধ সৌকৰ্য্যার্থে গ্ৰন্থশেষে, -পৰিশিষ্টে, উক্ত বৈদেশিক শব্দগুলিৰ বাঙ্গালা অৰ্থ দেওয়া হইয়াছে।<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup>আমরা কোনও প্রচলিত বাংলা শব্দকেই ত্যাগ করতে পারি না। ত্যাগ করলে আমাদেরই ক্ষতি, আমাদেরই দুর্বলতা। এক একটা শব্দ ও ভাব কি ভাবে আর দশটা ও ভাবসম্পদকে দৃঢ় রূপে আটকাইয়া ধরিয়া আছে তাহাদের একটিকে বাদ দিতে গেলে আর দশটার মায়া ত্যাগ করিতে হইবে। অতখানি স্বার্থ ত্যাগ করিব আমরা কোন লোভে। (We can not give up any colloquial terms of Bangla. If we eliminate them, it will be our lose. One word is entangled with ten other words and their connotations. if we leave one out a repertoire will be lost) *Ibid*, p. 286.

<sup>31</sup>I could not but resist myself from keeping some beautiful Arabic and Persian words in this book. If those common words that are a part of Bengal Muslim everyday vocabulary could be included in Bangla, Muslim men and women will

In BMSS, in an article entitled “Banglabhasha O Musalman” (“বঙ্গভাষা ও মুসলমান”), Sayid Emdad Ali discussed the relevance of Arabic-Persian words in Bangla and by addressing those who were in favour of an immediate and straight inclusion of Arabic and Persian, he, rather, proposed a slow and cautious inclusion of those, so not as to hurt the sentiment of the Hindus who had a Sanskritized exclusive template for contemporary Bangla.

এক যোগে কতগুলি আরবী পারসী শব্দের প্রচলন করিয়া আমরা ভাষার দিক দিয়া কখনই লাভবান হইতে পারিব না। ... বঙ্গভাষার মধ্যে আমরা যদি মুসলমানী ভাব ও মুসলমানী আদর্শ প্রচার করিতে পারি, তবেই কেবল আমাদের মাতৃভাষা বাঙ্গালা আমাদের সেবায় সমৃদ্ধ হইতে পারেন। হিন্দুগণ বঙ্গভাষায় আরবী পারসী শব্দ বিরোধী। কিন্তু আমরা যদি ভাষার বিস্তৃতি রক্ষা করিয়া আমাদের সঙ্কল্পিত কার্য সমাধা করিয়া যাইতে পারি, তাহাতে যে ফল ফলিবে, তাতে হিন্দু মুসলমানের মধ্যে হৃদয়তা বৃদ্ধি করিবে এবং জোর করিয়া আরবী পারসী শব্দ আপনা হইতেই ধীরে ধীরে বঙ্গভাষার বক্ষে নিজের স্থান করিয়া নিতে সক্ষম হইবে<sup>32</sup>।

This ideology matched with the BMSS policy of Hindu-Muslim solidarity already articulated by Muhammad Shaidullah. Maulana Akram Khan was connected to BMSS, but he was too prolific to be identified with just one organization. Maulana Akram Khan neither had such patience nor hope towards a communal solidarity since his disillusionment about the INC, he, therefore, proposed a slow process of mutation to keep Arabic and Persian words in Bangla. He himself wrote in a structured and chaste Bangla practised by the ‘Hindu pundits’ and remained quite cautious about the haste inclusion of Arabic and Persian. His concern was the concern of the theme – the *bhab - jatiya* to reiterate. In *Purba-Pakistan Jatiya Sahitya Sammelan* in 1958, in the presence of Ibrahim Khan, Abul Mansur Ahmad, Abul

---

automatically be drawn to this language. Depending on this rationale, to create an affinity towards Bangla, I have included Muslim vocabulary in “Karbala”. Their Bangla meanings are given at the end in the appendix) Abdul Bari Kabiratna, *Karbala Kabya*, 1935. p. 32

<sup>32</sup>We might not be able to achieve anything by forcibly including some Arabic and Persian words. If we can propagate Muslim essence and ideal in Bangla, only then Bangla, the goddess, would be pleased. The Hindus who are vehemently against the inclusion of any Perso-Arabic words, will be pleased if we can keep the sanctity of Bangla by not imposing Perso-Arabic yet spreading Islamic ideals. The Perso-Arabic vocabulary will automatically be accepted in Bangla.

Kalam Shamsuddin, Joynul Abedin, he proposed a constructive process,

আরবী, ফার্সি শব্দের প্রচলন যখন বন্ধ করা যাইবে না, তখন ওই সকল শব্দ বাংলা ভাষায় যাহাতে শুদ্ধ করিয়া লিখিতে পারা যায়, তাহার চেষ্টা করিতে হইবে। এ জন্য আমাদের বিশেষজ্ঞ লোকদিগকে বিশেষ আলোচনা ও গবেষণা করিয়া লিখন প্রণালীর একটা standardঠিক করিয়া দিতে হইবে। এবং মুসলমান লেখকগণের সকল পুস্তকে এবং মুসলমান পরিচালিত সমস্ত সংবাদ ও সাময়িকপত্রে তাহা চালাইয়া দিতে সকলের চেষ্টা করিতে হইবে, তাহা হইলে ক্রমে ক্রমে এই লিপি বিভ্রাটের প্রতিকার হইবে<sup>33</sup>।

In this new age of awakening, this new search for identity, thus, also entailed the realization of the question of aesthetics and functionality of language. Of course, when Muhammad Abdul Hakim dismissed Musalmani Bangla as a less developed language, he did not attempt to talk in terms of the aesthetics of language (as that would be left for the late 1920s radicals of MSS/*Sikha*), but he could look at language outside the domain of its connection with scriptures and emphasized its everyday functionality. He preferred to claim a Bangla that already became a language of ‘material function’. He made a distinction between *dharmabhasha* (Mussalmani Bangla) and *karmabhasha* (general Bangla) to claim *karmabhasha* to express the Muslim *jatiya*<sup>34</sup>. *Jatiya* was formulated in the early 1920s in *IslamDarshan*, not only by marking social-ritualistic-religious sensibilities as *bijatiya*, but by demarcating a kind of literature as not being fit for Muslim *jatiya* ideals. This turn is really important to notice from the 1920s onwards; it was not easy to talk about literature only in terms of history and biography as forms of *jatiya* (already discussed in the previous chapter), here, rather, different literary genres – *kabya*, *upanyas*, *galpa*, *kabita* had to be addressed and included as viable categories to express and articulate a Muslim *jatiya*. In this attempt, authors ranging from Alaol to Mir Musharraf Husain were sternly

---

<sup>33</sup>(As we cannot do away with Arabic and Persian, we will have to take the effort of writing them in the correct way. There should be a set standard of writing which should be followed by all the newspaper, periodicals and books and journals published by the Muslims. Rezwan Siddiqi, p. 248.

<sup>34</sup>বঙ্গালা ভাষাও কি একদিন মুসলমানের নামে গৌরবান্বিত হইতে পারে না?(Cannot Bangla be marked by the imprints of Muslims?) *Abahan*, Mohammad Abdul Hakim, *AhleHadis*, Year I, Vol I, (1322 BS, 1915):15-18.

rebuked for not maintaining Islamic virtues in their writings and rather Maulavi Naumuddin and Munshi Meherullah were claimed as the ideal literati for the Bengal Muslim community<sup>35</sup>. *Mohommadi* echoed the similar tone though *Mohommadi* was not to overtly engage with any sectarian intonation that *IslamDarshan* did at the organizational level. Sectarian periodicals like *Ahle Hadis*, *IslamDarshan* along with *Mohommadi* with their strict antagonism towards physically ordained ritualistic intercessory Islam, attacked the aesthetic and poetics of language with the figurative physicality openly.

These figurative and the sensual imaginations were already embedded in Bangla because of its polytheistic experiences which *Sikha* wanted to carry forward as its legacy and wanted to create a new aesthetics of Bangla language without making any exclusivity of Hindu or Muslim attributes. This mutual seepage and the phenomenon of linguistic transference and transformation that came out of the close contact between the Hindu and Muslim aesthetic-poetic-ritualistic worlds was what the *Sikha* members were working out as a new aesthetics and the politics of Bangla language for the Muslims. *Sikha* from Dacca and *Saogat* from Kalikata, with their shared resource of writers like Nazrul Islam, Qazi Abdul Odud (1894-1970), Abul Husain (1897-1938), Abul Fazl (1903-1983) and Abdul Qadir (1906-1984) and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin (1897-1979) opened up other potentials of Bangla beyond the *jatiya* that was expected to be explicated through it.

---

<sup>35</sup> ... কিন্তু কাব্যেই হউক, কিংবা উপন্যাসেই হউক, গল্পেই হউক অথবা কবিতায় হউক, যাহাতে মোসলমানের ধর্মনীতি ও জাতীয় আদর্শ ক্ষুণ্ণ না হয়, তৎপ্রতি মোসলমান সাহিত্যিকদের সর্বদা সতর্ক দৃষ্টি রাখিতে হইবে। মোসলেম জীবনের ঐ মহাসত্যের অপলাপ করিয়া মহাকবি আলাওল হইতে খ্যাতনামা সাহিত্যিক মীর পর্যন্ত বহু শক্তিশালী কবি ও লেখক হিন্দুর নিকট সহস্র কণ্ঠে প্রশংসিত হইয়াও মোসলমানের নিকট শ্রদ্ধা ও সম্মান লাভ করিতে পারেন নাই। মৌলবি নইমুদ্দিন ও মুন্শি মেহরুল্লা সাহেব সমাজে যে সম্মান পাইয়া গিয়াছেন, মশাররফ হোসেন বা কায়কোবাদ তাহা পাইতেছেন না। (Be it in poetry or in novel, We should always maintain Islamic ideals. From Alaol to Mir, for their failure to maintain Islamic ideal in their poetry could not become dear to the Muslims even though they were praised by the Hindus. The respect that Munshi Naimuddin and Munshi Meherullah got, could not be achieved by Kaykobad or Mir Musharraf Husayn for the same reason)

In the first generation of poets and authors who did not as such follow the Muslim *jatiya* as charted out by *Sudhakar* were Mir Musharraf Husain and Munshi Kaykobad. While *Mohommadi*'s language of literary criticism did not entail any sectarian value for Akram Khan's positioning of Islam as one, *IslamDarshan* refuted Kaykobad after the publication of his poem *Mahasmashan* and concluded that he could be so un-Islamic because of his lack of training in any *mazhab* of Islam. *IslamDarshan* also proposed to change the name *Mahashmasham* to *Mahasamadhi* – from 'The Great Crematorium' to 'The Great Burial Ground' as the original name was considered to be exclusively Hindu<sup>36</sup>.

What is interesting to notice is, with the strict criticism of the poet for his language, the critic of *IslamDarshan* was also moved by his poetic genius which was seconded in the editorial note<sup>37</sup>. For his poetic genius he was exempted from an outright refusal by the Muslim community. Rather, the poet was given a chance to replace *kofri* (polytheistic) expressions and connotations from his poetry, failing which, the editor threatened, a far more violent critique awaited Kaykobad.

It is to be noticed that, in the same *IslamDarshan*, in 1327 BS/1920, Alaol was reclaimed by Dr Abdul Gafur with the whole repertoire of scribal texts of the medieval period and the early modern<sup>38</sup>. In the same volume, in another article, Dr Abdul Gafur brought Shaikh Abdul Jabbar, Munshi Naimuddin and poet Muzammel Haq as authors with *jatiya* essence and remained critical towards *BishadSindhu* of Mir Musharraf Husain confirming his writings as having some faults in using *jatiya* language and lacking *jatiya*

---

<sup>36</sup>*IslamDarshan*, Year I, vol v (1327 BS/1920): 208.

<sup>37</sup>'Banga Sahityer Bartaman Abostha Evam Jatiya Sahityer Adarsha', *IslamDarshan* year 3, vol I (Aswin 1329BS/1922).

<sup>38</sup>'Islami Bangla Punthi Sahitya', Dr Abdul Gafur, *IslamDarshan*, Year I, vol xii (Chaitra 1327 BS/1920): 535.

elements<sup>39</sup>. With all these, it becomes really difficult to delineate one model of language and literature as forming the base of the Bengali Muslim literary collective identity as a literary community, rather, this research only finds its internal fractures and acute contestations within the community. It would not be an out-of-the-context comment here that, when language became the only axis of identification-in-difference in post-independent East Pakistan, we should keep in mind that it was not a Bangla by a small group of intelligentsia, MSS and *Saogat*, but a language equally claimed by such influential personalities as Muhammad Akram Khan, Manirujjaman Islamabadi, Ruhul Amin and Babur Ali, as also the common masses that their *anjumans* were catering to, which made the Bangla of the Muslim communities in Bengal internally so varied and imagined in multiple ways.

The same anxiety regarding *jatiyasahitya* and language to carry that *jatiya* out can be seen in the debate between *Mohommadi* and *Sikha*, and also between *Mohommadi* and *Saogat* just a couple of years after the debate over Kaykobad in *IslamDarshan* with the question of aesthetics gaining more and more debatable value. But this should not be qualitatively understood as the already experienced bi-polar debate between Sayed Ameer Ali and the traditional *ulama*. Rather, throughout his literary and political career and also as a social reformer Akram Khan attempted to distinguish between the position of the traditional *ulama* and a new generation religious intelligentsia which emerged since the inception of *Sudhakar*. In 1334BS/1927, he opened up a discussion in *Mohommadi* on the inadequacy of both the traditional *kathmullah* and the radical liberals who were not, according to Akram Khan, using their own individualistic power of judgment (*ijtihad* in his own rationale), rather, was aping the western templates of modernity and rationalism available to them. As the *kathmullahs* did not have the power of individual argument, the liberal

---

<sup>39</sup>Ibid, p. 533.

lot was only replicating either European or Hindu ideology about modernity, religion and community<sup>40</sup>.

The need for Bangla that the traditional *ulama*-centric *anjumans* and periodicals felt for transferring Islamic knowledge into Bangla was not dissimilar from the need that Akram Khan, Manirujjaman Islamabdi and even Dr Muhammad Shahidullah felt. The need was to reclaim and appropriate Bangla as the mother tongue of regional Muslim identity of Bengal and express Islamic *jatiya* through it for the consolidation of the community. This new vigour towards Bangla came when Turkey collapsed and from within the Muslim community a language of *jihad* was coming out which was a bit different from the vocabulary of non-cooperation – that is passive resistance. Interestingly, the sensibility of martial grace was not to be physically executed, though it was full of physically enchanted expressions and was transformed into the development of Islamic knowledge in Bangla. As *Ahl-e-Hadis* was pro-British, as a sect they sought British protection for sustaining its own religiosity at the face of *Hanafi* adversity, which was apparent in *Hanafi* refusal to let any *Mohommadi* (people belonging to the *Ahl-e-Hadis* sect) enter into a *Hanafi* Masjid. *Ahl-e-Hadis* struggled to maintain its subordination to and faith in the British government<sup>41</sup>. *Ahl-e-Hadis* remained adversary towards the *Hanafi* majority and there had been reports and discourses on the arguments from different parts of Bengal – mid eastern Bengal, in particular. *Ahl-e-Hadis* did never shy away from expressing their mistrust over the concept of the Hindu-Muslim unity and went dead against Home Rule as it meant Hindu political authority over the Muslim community. Home Rule for them was to bring more economic marginalization for the Muslims, which would eventually

---

<sup>40</sup>*Mohommadi*, Year I, volm vi, (Chaitra 1334BS/1927)

<sup>41</sup>আমরা ‘মোহাম্মদী আহলে হাদিস’ আমরা হজরত মোহাম্মদের (সঃ) কথা মত আমাদের রাজা ব্রিটিশ গবর্নমেন্টকে যার পর নাই কৃতজ্ঞতা ভক্তি ও সম্মানের চক্ষে দেখে থাকি। *Ahl-e-Hadis*, Year 2, volii (Kartik 1323 BS/1916): 183. (We, the Mohammadi Ahle Hadis, following the dictum of Hazrat Muhammad, respect the British government sincerely)

lead to the loss of Muslim agency over their own religion and *jatiya* identity.

*IslamDarshan*, while articulating an essential racial difference between the Hindus and the Muslims, was determined to have Bangla as the shared language. As *Ahl-e-Hadis*, *IslamDarshan*, too, had an exclusive definition of what *jatiyasahitya* should be. By 1330BS/1923 *IslamDarshan* dismissed contemporary periodicals and journals which they thought to be without the ideology of religion. In an essay entitled “সাময়িক সাহিত্যে মুসলমান” (Muslims in Periodicals and Journals) by Abdullah Hashemi, we see a total disavowal of periodicals that were attempting to create new aesthetic ideals beyond the scopes of religion and adding some other aesthetic value to religion<sup>42</sup>.

*Ahl-e-Hadis* and *IslamDarshan*, both, as already discussed in a previous chapter, while reformulating history and reclaiming scripture in their own ways, have been defining the Shias as the non-legitimate social-sect within Islam. This should be kept in mind that they were not only cancelling each other to claim legitimacy as the ideal community of the Prophet, they were also cancelling Shias by calling each other Shia while referring to the battle of Karbala and also muharram as the basic core of general Muslim experience<sup>43</sup>.

*Anjaman-e-Waizin-e-Bangla*, with Pir Abu Bakr’s spiritual leadership, was gaining much popularity in rural Bengal, as evident in the history

---

<sup>42</sup>*IslamDarshan*, Year 3, vol viii (Baishakh 1330 BS/1923): 291-295.

<sup>43</sup>When *IslamDarshan* reported the Shias were converting people, they actually meant *Ahl-e-Hadis* which, like the former had a missionary base to preach and spread their form of Islam to the people residing in the countryside. There were lots of pamphlets published and circulated from both the ends about the arguments, sometimes with embezzled reportage. ‘Basirhate Shia-Sunnir Bahas Bibaran’, *IslamDarshan*, Year 3, Vol ix, jaistha, 1330BS/1922

যে স্থানে আট-দশ বছর পূর্বেও একজন শিয়া রাফেজী ছিল না, বর্তমানে সেই স্থানে একজনও সুন্নী নাই। আর্য ও কাদিয়ানী সম্প্রদায়ের ন্যায় শিয়া-রাফেজি প্রচারকগণ স্থানে স্থানে প্রচারও ভ্রমণ করিয়া বেড়াইতেছে আর আমাদের অনভিজ্ঞ সুন্নী ভাইদিগকে আওলাদে-রছুলের মহব্বতের ভান করিয়া দলভুক্ত করিয়া লইতেছে। *IslamDarshan*, Year 3, Vol xi, (Shraban 1330BS/1922): 348. (Where there was no Shia Rafegi, now are infested with them. Like the Arya Samaj and Kadiyanis Shia-Rafegi missionary preachers are proseletizing



of cheap print. With the emergence of *Hanafi* institutions (*madrasa* and *masjid*) in different nooks and corners, the peasants of Bengal were gaining importance as a category (consumer of cheap print, economic subject, valid part of the religious community, part of the political system and provincial identity).

Maulana Akram Khan and Manirujjaman Islamabadi brought with them in the new NBPS their experience of working in the provincial towns and rural areas for the cause of *Khilafat* and when they left the Congress, INC lost whatever Muslim mass base it had in the districts and in mufassil towns. Thus, we will now be able to look into the political orientation (if that can really be applied to understand the sensibility of the common collective) of the Muslim masses as inclined to their community leaders who were creating new platforms, leaving them for new and unique collaborations<sup>44</sup>.

In this volatile political scenario after the fall of Turkey, the question of aesthetics was gaining currency – *Saogat* from Kolkata and *Sikha* from Dacca being two periodicals that were attempting to carry language from sheer materiality of carrying *jatiya* to the aesthetics-poetics. There was an array of other periodicals with left orientation with Nazrul Islam as their most prolific connecting genius between aesthetics and socialist ideology. Muzaffar Alam was another highly influential resource to understand this leftist orientation<sup>45</sup>.

In this new awakening to language and literature, Karbala, as an important trope with its ability to provide the source of history and biography, was reclaimed in the domain of literature. Karbala, after

---

<sup>44</sup>The new party had Sir Abdur Rahim as its president and Muhammad Akram Khan as secretary with Muhammad Mujibur Rahman, Fazlul Huq, Abdullah Sohrawarthy, Khan Bahadur Abdul Momin as vice-presidents. Later the younger lot of NBPS followed Fazlul Huq to belong to the new Krishak Praja Party<sup>44</sup> after the ideological conflict between Akram Khan and Huq, and after the Muslim League became active in gaining some footing in Bengal, Akram Khan joined the Bengal Provincial Muslim League as its president. Fazlul Huq also joined ML with the status of KPP as his party and his position as its president kept intact. Harun-ar-Rashid, *ibid*.

<sup>45</sup>Suchetana Bandyopadhyay, *An Early Communist: Muzaffar Ahmed in Calcutta, 1913-1929* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2010).

being attempted by Mir Musharraf Husain, showed a tremendous ability to be stretched and identified to meet the aesthetic-poetic end<sup>46</sup>. We will discuss here the context and ideological significance of the aesthetic-poetic and thematic concerns that came out of the narrativization of Karbala in the context of the debates over language, religion, region and identity. There are an array of renditions of the Karbala that claimed themselves specifically to be literature, like *Muharram-Chitra* by Fazlur Rahman Chaudhury, Kalikata (1917); *Karbala-Kabya* by Abdul Bari Kabiratna, Sujapur (1935); *Karbala* by Muhammad Abdur Rashid, Mymensingh (1936); *Taziya* by Muhammad Hedayetullah, Kalikata (1936); *Karbalar Juddha* by Amir Husain al-Qaderi, (1936) etc.

It is curious to notice the proliferation of the battle of Karbala as a part of literary venture by the Bengali Muslims in the 1930s, which is a tumultuous historical moment that emerged from the end of the *Khilafat* movement in India and also from the end of *Khilafat* in Turkey, thus paving the way for future political and social changes. We will discuss the thematic and generic relevance of these texts as this chapter proceeds vis-à-vis the changing carves and contours of social and political situations relevant for the Muslim identification of Bengal.

### 6.1.2 Sameness and Difference: Search for Muslim Bangla *Sahitya*

বর্তমান বঙ্গীয় মুসলমানদের কোনো স্বতন্ত্র সাহিত্য আছে বলা যায় না<sup>47</sup>।

M Ansari, 'Sahitye Boichitra', *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, Year 4, volm iii, *Kartik*, 1328BS/1921

It is to be noticed that while *Sudhakar* prioritized religious and social ideas for the reformulation of the community to regain its past glory,

---

<sup>46</sup>Here we are just talking about the literary expositions of the battle of Karbala in standardized Bangla to understand the debate on Bangla language and literature. Karbala in Musalmani Bangla has already been discussed in some previous chapters to a certain extent and will not be brought back here.

<sup>47</sup>It can't be said that Muslims have a separate literature.

the literary societies started to look and interpret the community with literature as their basic mode of identification. Bengali Muslim literati analyzed and lamented at length for both creative inadequacy and imitative nature of the educated Muslims as the cause of the inability to create worthy literature for the community.

Identity-in-difference, in the process of explicating the *jatiya* essence of the Muslims vis-à-vis the Hindus got reaffirmed in imagining the connection between the Hindus and the Muslims as literary-aesthetic communities too. Muhammad Shahidullah's conception of literature-in-difference for the Hindus and the Muslims and imagination of an integral called Bangla literature with two distinct and exclusive literary-aesthetic-socio poetics of the communities confirmed this. But going one step further, he created a radical departure from the prevailing notion of literature-as-identity or identity-as-literature by disengaging the Bengal Muslim identity from Muslim literature. This upheld the specificity of Muslim literature in Bangla as carrying some essence – very specific to the socio-cultural-scriptural-philosophical ideals of the Muslim community – but not exclusive to the experience of the Muslims; could rather be explored as literary ideals not confined within the domain of religion.

তাই একটু খোলসা করে বলা দরকার – মুসলিম সাহিত্য বলতে কি বুঝি। আমাদের ঘর ও পর, আমাদের সুখ ও দুঃখ, আমাদের আশা ও ভরসা, আমাদের লক্ষ্য ও আদর্শ নিয়ে যে সাহিত্য, তা-ই আমাদের সাহিত্য। কেবল মুসলমান হলেই মুসলমান সাহিত্য হয় না। হিন্দুর সাহিত্য অনুপ্রেরণা পাচ্ছে বেদান্ত ও গীতা, হিন্দু ইতিহাস ও হিন্দু জীবনী থেকে। আমাদের সাহিত্য অনুপ্রেরণা পাবে কুরআন ও হাদিস, মুসলিম ইতিহাস ও মুসলিম জীবনী থেকে। হিন্দুর সাহিত্য রস সংগ্রহ করে হিন্দু সমাজ থেকে, আমাদের সাহিত্য করবে মুসলিম সমাজ থেকে। ... হিন্দু সাহিত্য ও মুসলমান সাহিত্য হিন্দুর মন্দির ও মুসলমানের মসজিদের মত এক সম্প্রদায়ের একচেটে জিনিস নয়।... বাস্তবিক বাঙলা সাহিত্য হিন্দু মুসলমানে অক্ষয় মিলন মন্দির হবে। ... যে পর্যন্ত মুসলিম সাহিত্য না গড়ে উঠছে, সে পর্যন্ত মিলন মন্দির পূর্ণাঙ্গ হচ্ছে না।<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup>(This is to be explained what we understand as Muslim literature. Literature that deals with our everyday and social-political life, our pain and pleasure, our aspiration and ideal is our literature. As Hindus derive their literary sources from their scriptural texts, Muslims will have to draw their ideals from their scriptures too. Hindu literature and Muslim literature are not exclusive like Hindu temple or Muslim mosque, rather they are inclusive spaces for creating togetherness and

While this sense of separation had an accommodative tone for Shahidullah, the realization of Hindu hegemony and ideological oppression and the assertion of Muslim Bangla literature as the counter-narrative had a more fierce expression in the voices of intelligentsia and literati like Wajid Ali and Syed Abul Husain. Shahidullah's literary career based on an easy movement from a hardcore study of language and literature to poetry and religious discourses. His literary oeuvre included discursive writings on linguistics, poetry, religious instructions, an inevitable *Muharram Sharif* and a biography of the Prophet, history of medieval Bangla literature (through readings of Vidyapati and Alaol) and proposed an idea of the inclusion of separate literary values without marking their essential separatedness. His choice of the religious subject along with a modernist approach to literature as a trained linguist did not create any paradoxical position; rather, exposed another face of modernity where apparently disparate moments came together to form a whole.

Wajid Ali (1890-1951), naturally a rationalist after being educated in Aligarh College, was a custodian of the activities of BMSS who analyzed the context of exclusivity of Hindu and Muslim experiences and vouched for the necessity of maintaining such cultural-historical differences. What is interesting, as already pointed out, now reiterated, is a focus on expressing these differences in terms of finding out literary themes and tropes that arose from the domain of culture. Religious experience and social ritualistic customs are the elements to define the exclusive literary cultures. Wajid Ali explained his ideology of difference by saying that as Hindus, quite justifiably would not take away their cultural markers from the body of Bangla literature, its hegemonic values, if not defended by the Muslim literati, would inevitably subsume Muslim universal essences within the Hindu homogeneity.

---

Hindu-Muslim solidarity) Muhammad Shahidullah, 'Abhibhashan', *Saogat*, Year 6, Vol VI (Baishakh 1336 BS/1929).

...হিন্দুশোষিত বাংলা সাহিত্য হিন্দু সভ্যতাকে ভিত্তি করিয়াই দণ্ডয়মান, পৌত্তলিকতা, জাতিভেদ, পুনর্জন্মবাদ, অবতারবাদ প্রভৃতি হিন্দু সভ্যতার বৈশিষ্ট্যগুলি তাহার রক্তমাংসে, অস্থিমজ্জায় বিজড়িত রহিয়াছে। মুসলমানকে নিজের সঙ্গী, সহচর দোসররূপে পাইবার আশায় হিন্দু কখনও বাংলা সাহিত্যের অঙ্গ হইতে তাঁহার নিজস্ব সভ্যতার এই ছাপগুলি তুলিয়া লইতে রাজি হইবেন না। পক্ষান্তরে মুসলমান নিজের সার্বজনীন বৈশিষ্ট্যগুলি বিসর্জন দিয়া হিন্দু-সেবিত বাংলা সাহিত্যকে নিজস্ব বলিয়া গ্রহণ করিতে পারিবেন না বা হিন্দুর অন্ধ অনুকরণ দ্বারা নিজের সর্বনাশের পথ পরিষ্কার করিতে সম্মত হইবেন না। ... বাংলা সাহিত্যের আদিযুগ হইতে এ পর্যন্ত তাদের যে তীব্র তিক্ত অভিজ্ঞতা সঞ্চিত হইয়াছে তাহার ফলে তাঁহারা স্পষ্ট বুঝিতে পারিয়েছেন যে, পৌত্তলিক হিন্দুর এবং ইসলামের সহিত সম্পূর্ণ বিরুদ্ধভাবাপন্ন সভ্যতার উত্তরাধিকারী হিন্দুর অঙ্গে অঙ্গ মিলাইয়া, কণ্ঠে কণ্ঠ মিশাইয়া সাহিত্য সেবা করিতে গেলেই তাহাকে বাগদেবীর রাতুল চরণে ভক্তি কুসুমাজ্জলী উপহার দিতে হইবে।... ইহার আওতায় গেলে মুসলমানের স্বরূপ লুপ্ত হওয়া অবশ্যস্বাভাবিক। এই কারণে মুসলমানেরা স্বতন্ত্র থাকিয়া বাংলা ভাষা ও সাহিত্যের বুকে তাঁহাদের নিজস্ব সভ্যতার জন্য স্থায়ী আসন রচনা করিতে প্রবৃত্ত হইয়াছে<sup>49</sup>.

This is the same anxiety that Muhammad Akram Khan expressed at the third *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Sammelan* towards the Hindu hegemonic functioning of organizations like *Bangiya Sahitya Parishat*.

একটা খুব অপ্রীতিকর এবং খুব সত্য কথা এই যে, – “বঙ্গীয় সাহিত্য পরিষৎ” ও বঙ্গীয় সাহিত্য সম্মেলনে” যোগ দিয়া অনেক সময় ‘আপনাকে হারাইয়া ফেলিয়াছে’ বলিয়া মুসলমান সাহিত্যিকের মনে হয়। সেখানে উদ্বোধনে, অভিভাষণে, প্রবন্ধে, বক্তৃতায় হিন্দুভাব ও পৌত্তলিকতার প্রভাব এত তীব্র ভাবে প্রকট হইয়া উঠে যে, আপনাকে সম্পূর্ণ না হারাইয়া মুসলমান তাহাতে আনন্দ লাভ করিতে পারে না<sup>50</sup>।

These writings and argumentations as a part of public discourse not only showed the choice over language but also a critique of how hegemonically the Hindu literati were using Bangla. The paradox that the Muslim intelligentsia had to carry was that their claim over Bangla as their mother tongue that had already been denotatively created and connotatively attested by their Hindu counterpart and they had to express Muslim *jatiya* through it. The anxiety of the intelligentsia was how to reclaim this Bangla without getting subsumed in the Hindu idolatric imaginations embedded in this language. At the moment of

<sup>49</sup>Wajid Ali, Muhammad, “Sahitye Swatantra keno”, *Saogat*, Year 6, volm v (Agrahayan 1335BS/1928).

<sup>50</sup>(In the gatherings of Bangiya Sahitya Parishat and Bangiya Sahitya Sammelan, Muslims feel identity-less. There in every utterance Hindu metaphors are so overemphasized that Muslims fail to connect) *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, Year I, vol iv, p. 303.

claiming Bangla as the mother tongue of the Bengal Muslims, Bangla was understood to be having two dimensions – *bhasha* and *bhab* – the material aspect and the connotative essence – to facilitate this self-assertion. Poets writing about the battle of Karbala had no ethical problem in imbibing both language and genre explored by poets like Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, Rangalal Bandyopadhyay and Nabinchandra Sen, who had made a ceremony of Hindu nationalism in their poetry. As long as the denotative value of literature – *bhasha* – was sincerely maintained, this group was open to a Sanskritized Bangla, that is, the Bankimi paradigm. But for that they needed to break down the *bhab* embedded in the Hindu hegemonic thematic of his literature and offered a counter-narrative by bringing in a different *jatiya* to configure language, genre and literature. This generation of intelligentsia began a paradigmatically new journey by marking a clear division between the denotative and the connotative dimensions of Bangla language and strived to achieve the denotation by emptying out the connotative hegemonized by the Hindus.

### 6.1.3 Bangla vs Urdu and the Arabic cosmopolis

পিউ কাঁহা

৮

এই বঙ্গে তব কেন আগমন  
বঙ্গভাষা নাহি কর উচ্চারণ  
এ ভাষা কী হীন? – সুধা সম্মিলন  
কারে খুঁজ পাখি। বলি, ‘পিউ কাঁহা’।

৯

না না পাখি। কভু তাহা ভাবিও না  
বঙ্গভাষা বলি ঘৃণা করিও না  
সুধা পূর্ণ এটি – নহে প্রভারণা।

...

১১

তজি তব ভাষা, এই ভাষা ধর  
‘কোথা প্রিয়’ বলি রসলাপ কর<sup>51</sup>।

---

<sup>51</sup>(If you have come to Bengal, why don't you speak in Bangla? Is this a low language, no it is full of honey and merit. No nightangle, don't hate it, it is not treachery, it is ful of honey. Forget your language and speak in Bangla, pine for the loer in this language)

আশেবে রসুল, মোহাম্মদ দাদ আলী, ১৯১০, কলিকাতা

বাংলাদেশে জোর করে উর্দুকে মাতৃভাষা করতে চাওয়ার মত আহম্মকি আর নাই। বাংলার মুসলমান এতদিন অনর্থক উর্দুর পিছু পিছু ছুটে মারাত্মক ভুল করেছে। তাই আজ তারা অন্যান্য প্রদেশের মুসলমানদের চেয়ে অনুন্নত<sup>52</sup>।

BMSP started with the demarcation between the *jatiya* of the Hindus and the Muslims and finally found a justification for using the standardized Bangla. As *jatiyabhab* had to be thematized and fabricated through narrative imaginations that were more varied and strategic. The Bengali Muslim intelligentsia had to address various issues in their claim over Bangla. While the Hindu hegemony was to be answered back, they had to justify Bangla as the ideal medium for expressing *jatiya* as against the over emphasis on Arabic-Persian traditionalist *ulama*.

বঙ্গভাষা দেবভাষা সংস্কৃতের দুহিতা হইলেও মুসলমান ধাত্রীর ক্রোড়াশয়েই ইহা প্রতিপালিত ও পরিবর্ধিত হইয়াছে। ... কারণ, মুসলমানি ভাষার সহায়তাতেই বঙ্গভাষার ক্ষীণদেহ বহুল পরিমাণে পরিস্ফুট ও বিকশিত হইয়াছে। ... বাঙলা ভাষার অনেক শব্দই মুসলমানী ভাষার অপভ্রংশ ও সহযোগে গঠিত। ... কথিত ভাষায় মুসলমানী প্রভাব আরও বেশি<sup>53</sup>।

There was also an emergence of an ideology with a primacy over Urdu replacing Bangla as the mode of communication, literature and politics for the Bengal Muslims which BMSP had to address. In the tripartite domain of identification, many among the religious intelligentsia had no way other than organizing a simultaneous claim over all the three languages to define the collective identity of the Bengal Muslims.

In the presidential lecture of the second conference of the BMSS Muhammad Shahidullah explained the five-language-situation for the

---

<sup>52</sup>(There can't be anything more idiotic than the imposition of Urdu as the mother tongue of the Bengal Muslims. Bengal Muslims have committed a grave mistake by following the path of Urdu. That's why they are less developed from the Muslims of other provinces)Mahmud Hasan, Second Annual Conference of MSS, the presidential speech, *Sikha*, 1335

<sup>53</sup>(Though Bangla is the daughter of Sanskrit it has been raised in the lap of its Muslim nurse. Muslim language has nurtured the thin countenance of Bangla. Many Bangla words have been derived from the Muslim originals. The colloquial language has more influence of Muslim languages)*Islam Pracharak, Shraban-Bhadra*, 1310, quoted in M N Islam, *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*, p. 44.

Bengal Muslims. In his attempt to bring Bangla in the horizontal plane same with Arabic-Persian-Urdu and English, the uniqueness of the Bengal Muslim community as possessing a mother tongue was placed.

আমাদের শিক্ষার পথে প্রথমেই ভাষা সমস্যা আসিয়া পড়ে। আরবী আমাদের ধর্মভাষা, পারসী আমাদের সভ্যভাষা, উর্দু আমাদের ভারতীয় আন্তর্জাতিক ভাষা, ইংরাজি আমাদের রাজভাষা, বাংলা আমাদের মাতৃভাষা।

আমরা বঙ্গদেশবাসী। আমাদের কথাবার্তার, ভালোবাসার, চিন্তা কল্পনার ভাষা বাংলা। দুঃখের বিষয়, ... দুই চারিজন বিশিষ্ট ব্যক্তি ব্যতীত, আমাদের মৌলভী মৌলানাগণ বঙ্গভাষায় গ্রন্থ রচনা দূরে থাকুক, বঙ্গভাষা কাফেরি ভাষা, তাহাতে ধর্মগ্রন্থের অনুবাদ করিলে ধর্মগ্রন্থের অমর্যাদা করা হয় ইত্যাদি রূপ প্রলাপ উক্তি করিতে ছাড়েন না<sup>54</sup>।

What he mentioned as horizontal movement of the Bengal Muslim community through its various markers of linguistic belongingness and identity, would be reiterated in the next course of history in the discussion of madrasa education and language teaching as the difficulty of language teaching for the Bengal Muslim community. It is curious to notice that while Muhammad Shahidullah was fighting with the traditionalist maulavis and maulanas as a staunch advocate of Bangla to have all the scriptures in Bangla, he did not restrain from showing his preference to read the *Qur'an* in the Arabic original as “অনুবাদে মূলের ছায়া পাওয়া যায় মাত্র”. It can be deduced that while there were consolidated and separate struggles for both Islamic knowledge and literature in Bangla, there were two other strands for language also – one is the retention of Arabic as the scriptural language by not accepting Bangla and also an emphasis on Urdu as the language of communication for the Bengal Muslims even when intelligentsia and litterateurs like Muhammad Shahidullah, Muhammad Akram Khan,

---

<sup>54</sup>(Language is the major problem in our education. Arabic is the language of our religion, Persian is the language of our civilization, Urdu is our national language, English is the language of our empire, Bangla is our mother tongue. We are the inhabitants of Bengal. We speak, live, dream, think in Bangla. But the tragedy is except for two-three persons, our *maulavis* and *munshis*, do not touch Bangla designating it as the language as non-believers) *Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Patrika* (tri-monthly), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, eds. Muhammad Shahidullah M.A. B.L., Muzammel Hoq B.A., 1325BS/1918



Manirujjaman Islamabadi and also traditionalist religious preachers of *Hanafi* and *Ahl-e-Hadis* platforms preached for Bangla. We also need to remember that as we cannot overlook the fact that while an Arabic orientation was simultaneously fighting against Bangla, Bangla could never be understood by *Sudhakar* and BMSP as a free linguistic domain as aesthetics and poetics. Thus Bangla as the embodiment of *jatiya* – could never be imagined outside of the Arabic cosmopolis.

But BMSP did not really discard Urdu to clutch an exclusivity of Bangla; rather, a specific kind of multilingualism became the condition for being a Bengali and using Bangla language. Muhammad Shahidullah like his comrades historicized the Bengal Muslim community by pointing at the phenomenon of conversion and located the origin of Muslim communities in Bengal itself. But while claiming one's origin in Bengal, and reclaiming Bangla, Shahidullah was strict in proposing an upgradation of the Bengal Muslims. A compulsory learning of Urdu, for Saiyad Emdad Ali, in his essay “বঙ্গভাষা ও সাহিত্য”(Bangla Language and Literature), was the remedy to bridge the class-gap between the Urdu-speaking Muslims of Bengal and also North Indian Muslims. According to Muhammad Shahidullah, while claiming one's origin in Bengal, one should not become a petty peasant. “হে মুসলমান, তুমি বাপ দাদার নাম ডুবাইয়া হেদে জোলার নাতি হইতে যাইও না”। This was for the fact that political and social leaders like Muhammad Sayid Emdad Ali reaffirmed here the fact that Hindus belonging to upper and lower classes both got converted into Islam, thus creating some scope for him to pose his lineage in Arabiyya.

As Urdu was needed to gain cultural aristocracy, the learning of Arabic was proposed for the fact that the identity of the Muslims cannot be confined within the narrow domain of the regional and the national. Where Islam was concerned, the Muslim community had to identify with a bigger order, an imagined community, not bound by any nation, though the Muslims as a community can be parts of many nations.

Mozaffar Ahmad, in 1919, in his article “বঙ্গদেশে মাদারসা শিক্ষা”(Madrasa Education in Bengal)said,

“মুসলমানের আরবী চর্চা না করিয়া উপায় নাই। মুসলমানেরা কোন দেশ বিশেষের অধিবাসী নহে। ... বিভিন্ন দেশে বাস করিয়া মুসলমানগণ বিভিন্ন জাতির (nationএর) অংশীভূত হইতে পারে, কিন্তু মুসলমান সম্প্রদায়ের আপনাদের মধ্যে যে একটা বিরাট সম্বন্ধ আছে তাহার নিকট এই জাতি বা nation নিতান্ত হীনপ্রভ হইয়া পড়ে<sup>55</sup>।

What we can deduce is that, the theorization about the choice of Bangla as the language of scripture and *jatiyasahitya* for this generation never became an antithesis to an inclination to Arabic because the attainment of scriptural knowledge in Arabic was not only needed for the religious cause. But it was necessary for making literature essentially rich with the *jatiyabhab* of Islam.

At the end of the last essay, it was reported that more than 400 students of Kalikata madrasa demanded to the Director of Education that Bangla should be made the instruction of teaching of the madrasas and through Bangla many streams of knowledge should be taught. This is really surprising to know that when Saiyyd Emdad Ali, could fight for making Bangla the language of instruction for the Muslims of Bengal while never forgetting the fact that his forefathers were from Arabiyya, the son of the soil and *Sher-e-Bangla* Fazlul Huq was a staunch believer of Urdu as the medium of instruction for the Bengali Muslim students. That Bengal Muslims needed Urdu as the medium of instruction while naturally having Bangla as the medium of conversation at home, made the language issue quite nuanced and also discussed in the legislative sphere. This can be seen as a much problematized outcome of the effects of *ashrafization*.

Sir Abdul Karim, with his emphasis on the significance of the Urdu-speaking minority based in Kolkata, advocated Urdu as the national

---

<sup>55</sup>(Muslims have no other option than learning Arabic. Muslims are not confined to the marker of citizenship of any particular nation. Muslims can be a part of many nations, but with respect to their inner sense of community bonding, national identity becomes a secondary issue) *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, Year II, volm iii (1326 BS/1919): 232

level culture for the Muslims, disregarding their regional specificities. A mainstream Hindu led newspaper *Bengalee* (1879- 1931) showed their scepticism towards such opinions of Sir Rahim and did not refrain from calling him communalist. Not only that, *Bengalee* also opined that Sir Rahim did not bother to know the presence of high literati among the Bengal Muslim community, who had already excelled in writing Bengali poetry and prose like Mir Musharraf Husain and Kaykobad. We have already seen that the pro-Bangla sentiment within the Muslim community was not equally enthusiastic like *Bengalee* towards Musharraf and Kaykobad; rather, their preference of a Bangla literature was predicated upon an overall rejection of Musharraf and Kaykobad. A proliferation of the biographies and translation of the works of high Persian and Urdu poets in Bangla affirmed the multilingual nature of the Bengal Muslim's linguistic-literary belongingness.

*Ananda BazarPatrika* and *Bengalee*, followed this internal conflict within the Muslim intelligentsia and asked whether some kind of communalism was being advocated by these influential political leaders<sup>56</sup>. If the debates over language, between the status as *jatiya* and mother tongue are followed like this, no single formula can be drawn from the 1920s. It is quite apparent that along the line over the choice of language for the Muslims, Fazlul Huq and Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan took up opposite positions by choosing Urdu and Bangla respectively. It is curious to notice that while Fazlul Huq was a prime advocate of bringing the peasant question into politics, he could not think about Bangla, though a mother tongue, as the language of the Muslim social. Perhaps a constant tug-of-war with the Muslim League and the baggage of backwardness of the Bengal Muslims pushed him to this sort of eliticization project for the Bengal Muslim community through the choice of language.

---

<sup>56</sup>Cited in Neilesh Bose, p. 111.

Muhammad Akram Khan, for whom scriptural Islam was the main orientation, on the other hand, had been an advocate of Bangla throughout. The debate over language and identity formation could be discerned in the oppositional impulse Between the Calcutta centric Urdu-lobby and the instrumental efforts of BMSS and MSS. Bedar Bakht, the secretary of the Muslim Graduates Association sent a memorandum in 1928 to consider the idea of an Urdu medium instruction for the Muslim students in Calcutta University<sup>57</sup>. While the Urdu-speaking elite of Bengal demanded Urdu as the lingua franca, regional political leaders like Fazlul Huq wanted it to minimize the gap between the North Indian Muslim community and the regional Bengal. Suhrawardy, in 1929, vouched for the unanimous preference of Bangla by Muslims of Bengal from all the regional quarters and mentioned that the Bangla that they used were infested with Arabic, Persian and Urdu; that it was advisable that they be taught those languages with more emphasis as the Bengali that they had to imbibe was already excelled by the Hindus. Muslims with their historical closeness with Arabic, Persian and Urdu would face difficulty in competing with the Hindus by using Bangla. In this argumentation, not only did two lobbies surface, it also showed the presence of language cleavage within the Muslim community. Suhrawadry mentioned about the Urdu preference of the Muslims of Calcutta, Dacca, Murshidabad, Midnapore, Malda and Birbhum as being Urdu-speaking. As the rest in residing in the rural districts spoke a Bangla with Arabic-Persian-Urdu residual, it was easier for them to adopt Urdu without major effort which was inevitable in their attempt to imbibe a chaste Bangla. But already in 1918 in the article “বঙগভাষা ও মুসলমান” Sayid Emdad Ali claimed a standardized Bangla for the rural Muslims who were already exposed to a standardized Bangla circulated through religious treatises and narratives even in the remotest districts. This claim of Bangla for the Bengal Muslims continued to be refuted in official gatherings and Suhrawardy

---

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid*, p. 111.

dismissed Sir Abdul Karim Ghuznavi's demand for Bangla as a medium of instruction.

The advocates of Bangla were not monolithic and in several ways they tried to bridge the gap between the Bengal Muslims and their pan and national counterparts, sometimes as a deliberate project, sometimes as a consequential by-product. S Wajid Ali, while studying in Aligarh, realized this in terms of major cultural differences between the North Indian Muslims and those of Bengal in terms of their attire and etiquette. That the Bengal Muslim wore *dhoti* and *chador* was interpreted by Wajid Ali as an act of compulsion and strategy to hide their identity in a Hindu educational system 'as they are not particularly proud of their culture or community'<sup>58</sup>. To bring back the supreme quotient of their culture, both *adab* and etiquette, the scriptures and also the literary were attempted. From Mir Musharraf Husain to *ulama* wrote about the correct ways of behaving like a Muslim, translations from the Persian texts were proliferating since the 1920s to expose the illustrious world of cultural splendour. So far as Persian literature was concerned, a question of aesthetic-poetic excellence overpowered the sense of polity and philosophy. Scriptural religion took up an ambiguous shape within the domain of literature. But that does not mean that interest in Persian was the sole concern of the radicals of literature like Nazrul or Odud. It is the reception of Persian literature that, too, took up several shapes and forms. Some went to reaffirm the Muslim *jatiya* by looking at its Muslim associations and the others like Nazrul brought it out of the domain of purely religious reason and gave it a new shape which in Wajid Ali's language "typified the modern age, as it had no specific creed, dogma, religion, it oscillated between faith, negotiation, belief, doubt, and Epicureanism and stoicism".<sup>59</sup> Reception of Persian was all invading.

---

<sup>58</sup>S Wajid Ali, 'Aligarh Memories', *MuslimReview* 26, 2 (October – November 1926): 39

<sup>59</sup> Neilesh Bose cited this from an unpublished paper by Amber Abbas, 'Isolation and Solidarity: Aligarh Students and The Demand for Pakistan', Bose, p. 127.

It encompassed the ideological enemies, *Mohommadi* and Nazrul, the scriptural and the poetic traditions alike though took up different shapes according to the target to be fulfilled.

Habibur Rahman Sahityaratna, L. T. (1891-1962), assistant editor of *Mohommadi*, not only translated from Shaikh Sadi's *Gulistan* (whose various versions came out from various publishing houses between 1926 and 1943), he emphasized Islamic religious teachings in Sadi. This emphasis went smoothly with the ideology of *Mohommadi* that refuted the sensuous exposition of the *ghazal* tradition in the hands of Nazrul. Habibur Rahman also wrote in favour of Aurangzeb and discussed many scriptural issues in his other books, thus placing *ghazal* as the poetic works of scriptural consciousness.

Abul Fazl (1903-1983), the editor of *Sikha*, analyzed the lack of the Bengal Muslims in adopting Bangla by saying that the way Urdu had become the language of culture, Bangla could not because Bengal Muslims could not take it in public as the viable language of culture. Bengal Muslims, according to Abul Faz, did never think about a language of culture though they learnt Arabic, Persian and Urdu in the name of religion. Mamtazuddin Ahmad, in a rather sacrilegious tone, wrote in *Sikha*,

“...আরবী পার্শী না বুঝিয়া পড়িলেও পুণ্য সঞ্চয় হয় এই কুসংস্কার ত্যাগ করিয়া এই সকল বিজাতীয় ভাষা ছাড়িয়া দিয়া যদি ছেলেমেয়েদিগকে একমনে বাংলা ভাষা শিক্ষা দেওয়া হয় তাহা হইলে তাহারা অল্প সময়েই ভাষা কার্যোপযোগী মত আয়ত্ত করিয়া ফেলতে পারে এবং স্বাস্থ্য, কৃষি, সর্ববিধ বিষয়ে পুস্তকাদি পড়িয়া এবং কোরানশরিফ ও অন্যান্য ধর্ম ও নীতিশাস্ত্রগুলিও বাংলায় পাঠ করিয়া অর্থ গ্রহণ করতঃ কর্ম ধর্ম নীতিজ্ঞান লাভ করিতে পারবে”<sup>60</sup>।

An interest towards Persian mystical poetry was inaugurated by *Mohommadi* where translations of Sadi were carried out. Maulavi Qazi Niwaj Khoda (1880-1959), another associate of *Mohommadi*, who wrote the sixth sequence of a multi-authored novel *Baroyari*

---

<sup>60</sup>(The superstition that one could attain divine blessings by reading Arabi-Pesian without understanding their meanings should be rejected. If a child is imparted with Bangla language they would be capable enough to learn it to read manual on health and agriculture and also engage with the scriptures)Mamtazuddin Ahmad, “Shikkha Samasya”, *Sikha*, 1333BS/1926

initiated by Muhammad Akram Khan<sup>61</sup> wrote a biography of Shaikh Sadi.

Rumi, Khayyam and Hafiz were rather invented to fulfill a strong aesthetic generic concern. Since the 1920s we can see Hindu poets also started translating from Khayyam; due credit might go to *Saogat* where such translations were encouraged as to create a shared domain of language-culture for the Hindus and the Muslims in Bangla. Narendra Deb (1925), Shyamacharan Kabiratna (1931), Shyamapada Chakraborty (1931) were among a few who translated Khayyam. Muhammad Shahidullah himself translated from Hafiz (1938), Iqbal (1942), Omar Khayyam (1942) and also wrote a biography of Iqbal (1945) and it was a part of his agenda to fulfil the demands of all the languages that had been handed down to the Muslims of Bengal as historical, cultural and religious legacy. Considering his interest in Alaol and Vidyapati, we might again see the horizontal plan of a linguistic cartography where any Bengali Muslim always had a set of five belongings inseparable from each other. He, thus, exemplified what he proposed (already quoted) that literature written by the Muslims of Bengal and the Hindus would create the whole of Bangla literature.

But the case of Urdu might seem to offer a different interpretation of linguistic choice and carry a different linguistic-ideological connotation for translation. An interest in Iqbal's poetry perhaps could not be dissociated from his political thinking as Iqbal was received since the *Khilafat* movement by the Bengali political literati. The author translating Iqbal's poetry or writing his biography had some kind of inclination to write about Jinnah or the reason to support Pakistan since the early 1940s. Sayid Abdul Mannan, who worked with *Nabajug* (of Fazlul Huq), *Azad*, *Saogat*, *Ittefaq* and then

---

<sup>61</sup>*Baroyari*, Upper Circular Road, Mohommadi Press, 1933. The others authors were Shahadat Husain, Gholam Mostafa, Muhammad Gholam Jilani, Muhammad Qasim, Nripendra Krishna Chattopadhyay, Qazi Nawaz Khoda, Abdul Qadir, Muhammad Nural Anam Khan, A. Z. Nur Ahmad, Muhammad Abdur Rashid Khan.

*Mohommadi*, translated Iqbal's poetry, his discursive writings<sup>62</sup> and also wrote Iqbal's biography (1946) along with Jinnah's biography (*Quaid-e-Azam*, 1946) and a treatise articulating the reasons behind the creation of Pakistan (*Iqbaler Sikkha Darshan Pakistaner Oitihashik Patabhumi* (1952). Such writings together show an emerging emotional and ideological need for Pakistan placed within a network of translating from Urdu. Abuzzoha Nur Ahmad (1907-1993) was one of many writing the biography of *Quaid-e-Azam* Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Sadi and Iqbal and on Pakistanism (most profusely coming out in the 1950s in Bengal) also publishing the 10<sup>th</sup> sequence of the *Baroyari* novel in *Mohommadi*<sup>63</sup>.

The last bit of information is important as from this a network of intelligentsia and literati as the associates of Muhammad Akram Khan could be delineated who wanted to write in Bangla, read Arabic to translate scriptures, read Persian to translate high philosophy from the mystical traditions, read Urdu to formulate a national connection with the demand of Pakistan and fought for having Bangla and not for Urdu as the mother tongue and as the language of communication. Pakistanism in Bengal and choice of Bangla could not be called antagonistic, because the *Mohommadi-Azad* network led by Maulana Akram Khan served acutely in formulating both political, education and cultural policy based on the choice of Bangla while facilitating the demands of Pakistan<sup>64</sup>.

But, this Bangla was never a monolithic one, and rather fractured along the community identity line with respect to the *jatiya* of the Hindu and the Muslim communities. This claim over Bangla, as already mentioned, was never dissociated from the Arabic-Persian-Urdu imagination and that's how Maulana Akram Khan could be elected as the Chairman of the Bangla Committee in a post-

---

<sup>62</sup>*Asrare Khudi* (1945)

<sup>63</sup>*Mohommadi*, Year III, volm x (Shraban 1337BS/1930).

<sup>64</sup>*Pakistannama* by Maulana Akram Khan in the form of a *puthikavya* was published in 1943.



independence East Pakistan in 1948 by the Pakistan Government. He became the President of Educational Reform and Language Reform of East Pakistan, was elected as the first member of Bangla Academy and finally became its President in 1961 and was also selected as the President of *Anjuman-e-Tarakki-e-Urdu* and Nikhil Bangla Urdu Conference. These overlaps help us rethink about status and attributes of Bangla that gradually became the identity marker of the Bengal Muslim community. As a consequence, through the *BhashaAndolon* in 1952, a Bangla-speaking community gained rights over the mother tongue and then through Liberation War in 1971 achieved to attain an autonomous nation-state based on ethnic-cultural identity as Bengalis.

The author Abdur Rashid Khan, in 1952, at the Islamic Cultural Conference, in Dacca in an article entitled “পূর্ব-পাকিস্তানের আধুনিক কাব্য-সাহিত্য”, consolidated the idea of a community through the territorially explicated idea of linguistic and cultural separatism between Bangla of West and East Bengals to create an imagined community not bound by one monolithic language, but realized in the *bhab*, the essence.

পশ্চিমবঙ্গের বাংলা সাহিত্যকে আমাদের সাহিত্য বলতে পারিনে, যেমন পারেনি আইরিশগণ ইংরাজী সাহিত্যকে নিজেদের সাহিত্য বলে স্বীকার করতে। আদর্শের ও জীবনের প্রতি দৃষ্টিভঙ্গিরই যে পার্থক্য। ... পূর্ব পাকিস্তানী সাহিত্যের ধারা হবে পশ্চিমবঙ্গ বা যুক্ত বঙ্গের ধারা হতে স্বতন্ত্র। এই সাহিত্যের রূপক উপমায় থাকবে না কোন পৌত্তলিকতার ছাপ, যা আমাদের আদর্শের পরিপন্থী। আমাদের মহান ঐতিহ্য থেকে, পুঁথি ও লোক সাহিত্য থেকে সংকলিত হবে আমাদের রূপক ও উপমা। উভয় বাংলার ভাষা বাংলা হলেও তার মধ্যে (বিশেষত পূর্ব পাকিস্তানী বাংলা ভাষার মধ্যে) আসবে পরিবর্তন। আমাদের জীবন, দর্শন, আমাদের বিশিষ্ট জীবন পদ্ধতি ও ঐতিহ্য এই ভাষাকে করে দেবে স্বতন্ত্র, যেমন আইরিশ ও ইংরাজী ভাষার মাধ্যম হয়েও স্বতন্ত্র<sup>65</sup>।

We need to notice two things here. One, the reference of a hierarchized relationship between the British and the Irish to define Hindu-Muslim cultural relationship, perhaps, came from a deep rooted sense of marginalization and non-recognition of the Bengal Muslims as a cultural and also as a linguistic entity in the Hindu hegemonized cultural-political space.

---

<sup>65</sup>Dr Rezwan Siddiqi, *Purba Banglar Sanskritik Sanghathan O Sanskritik Andolon*, (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1996) p. 349.

This stance, insecurity and long-drawn mistrust towards the Hindu intelligentsia and their control and possessiveness on Bangla language and culture started to be publicly articulated back in 1958 when *MashikMohommadi* reported about the *JatiyaMahaSammelan* where the president of the literature wing, Maulana Akram Khan, spoke about the possible forms and formulations of Muslim Bangla literature. *Mohommadi*, after reporting this speech in details, added,

পাক-বাংলার সাহিত্যিক স্বকীয়ত্বের ঘোষণা গোলামীর প্রতিবাদ। ... সুতরাং পাকিস্তানের সাহিত্য পাকিস্তানবাদের পশ্চাৎভূমিতে দাঁড়াইয়াই মুক্ত আকাশতলের আলোক ও বৃদ্ধিধারায় নাহিয়া ফুলে-ফলে মঞ্জুরিত ও বিকশিত হইবে। এছলাম পকিস্তানবাদের মূল ধারায় আবেহায়াতের যে অমরত্ব যুক্ত করিয়া দিয়াছে, তাহা হইতে আমাদের বিচ্যুতি চলে না। ... সকল বৈচিত্র ও বিভিন্নতাকে ছাপাইয়া যে সুরটি বার বার অকুণ্ঠ স্বীকৃতি লাভ করিয়াছে, তাহা হইল পাক-বাংলার বৈশিষ্ট্যের কথা, তার স্বাতন্ত্র্যের কথা ও তার সেরাতুল মোস্তাকিমের কথা<sup>66</sup>।

It is really important to notice here that, in the post Language Movement (in 1952) period, Bangla in East Pakistan could be claimed publicly as an antithesis of the Bangla in West Bengal. Also that Bangla was not something that *Saogat* or *Sikha* struggled to bring forward, invoke and practice as an open inclusive space of culture.

The Maulana Akram creed, Abul Mansur Ahmad and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, showed simultaneously, how Bangla could become the bearer of Muslim religious values. Secondly, while talking about the space of theme, metaphor and symbols, the authors not only showed their preference for the high scriptural and literary traditions in Arabic, Persian and Urdu; they also proposed the folkloric and the popular print both in terms of theme, genre and language choice. Thus to create a separate cultural identity, Muslim intelligentsia could not ignore the folk and the popular within that was structurally being rejected before the 1920s. The energetic role of BMSS and MSS was

---

<sup>66</sup>(Pak-Bangla is the declaration of autonomy, end of slavery ... Hence literature of Pakistan will stand at the backdrop of Pakistanism and will flourish from free thinking. We should not deviate from the Pakistanism. We should maintain the uniqueness of Pak-bengal and its straight path.)

instrumental in restoring and reclaiming the folk and the popular within as the core of Muslim literary and cultural identity. In the next section we will try to see how the folk and the popular were being reclaimed in the formation of a Bangla Muslim *sahitya*.

## **6.2. Folk & Popular: A linguist, a folklorist, a collector of manuscripts**

In this section we will be discussing about the contribution of Muhammad Shahidullah (linguist), Jasimuddin (folklorist) and Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad (collector of manuscripts) in discovering the folk as the core of Bengal Muslim identity and their formulations of modernity and identity vis-à-vis the folk.

At the first conference of *Purba Pakistan Sahitya Samsad* at Salimullah Muslim Hall, 1943, certain propositions were placed:

1. অধুনা অপাংডেয় মুসলমানি পুঁথিকে পরিমার্জিত করে শালীন সাহিত্যের অঙ্গীভূত করা
2. পূর্ব পাকিস্তানের অস্বীকৃত গ্রামীণ জীবনকে আরও বেশি করে সাহিত্যের মধ্যে নিয়ে আসা<sup>67</sup>

This began with the search for the literary oeuvre of the sixteenth century poet Alaol to affirm the presence of Muslim literary excellence in Bengal and to create a literary legacy. Alaol, who was to be discarded for his Hindu-inclined vocabulary and poetics and continued to be seen with a bit of scepticism by the traditional *ulama*, was reinvented in the 1920s by the literati to delineate a seamless lineage of Muslim Bangla literature from Alaol to the present. This new turn to the past not only created a regional literary history and configured Bengal Muslim identity; it also reclaimed Bangla, the mother tongue, as *jatiya*<sup>68</sup>. With a tremendous and inimitable energy of Abdul Karim Bisharad, the big and the little literary traditions in the medieval and the pre-modern were exposed to the bigger literary

---

<sup>67</sup>(We will have to reclaim so-far-marginalized Musalmani puthi as the core of our identity To bring the lives of the marginalized rural Muslims in literature) Said-ur-Rahman, *Purba Banglar Rajniti-Sanskriti o Kabita*, 1983, pp.25-26.

<sup>68</sup>Gautam Bhadra, *Nyarha Battalay Jaye Kawbar*, Kolkata: Chhatim, 2011, p. 41.

world as not only literature, but also as a project of identity where Sahitya Bisharad, in a comparative framework, differentiated literature along the axes of religious identities<sup>69</sup>.

Interestingly, in the dynamics of *puthi*/manuscripts taking a re-entry in the domain of legitimate *jatiya* literature of the Bengal Muslims, *BishadSindhu*, so far accused by the religious intelligentsia as being not true to the Islamic spirit, was reclaimed for its popularity among the masses, which gave it an unavoidable unparalleled status as a literary tool for awakening the *jatiya* sensibility in the masses. In this section of the chapter, we will be discussing about the potential of the manuscript and the cheap print, the folk and the popular, as the chosen domain since the 1920s for the rearticulation of *jatiya* and the Bengal Muslim identity.

In *Islam-Darshan*, where a lineage from Alaol to Kaykobad was dismissed for a Hinduized literary imagination, there could be seen an acceptance of *BishadSindhu* for its ability to function as more than what it could be. As for the *Islam-Darshan* intelligentsia, the Musalmani Bangla and *jatiya* theme were the only concerns for the validation of the Alaol repertoire. Again, when that had to be countered by another narrative repertoire, for them it was the cheap print culture that swept the masses with Islamic historical and narrative themes in Muslim-oriented language. In this dynamics, another historical line of Muslim literary history with a focus on scriptural scribal texts and cheap print in Musalmani Bangla was claimed and charted out. *IslamDarshan* praised and revered both Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad and Dr Abdul Gafur, two researchers on scribal manuscripts, as the creators of the necessary archive for *jatiyasahitya* for the community as they filled the major blank in the formation of the *jatiya*.

বিদ্যাসাগর-বঙ্কিম ও মাইকেল-হেমচন্দ্রের পূর্ববর্তী হিন্দু সাহিত্যিকগণের সুদীর্ঘ সমাস ও সংস্কৃত শব্দ-সমাচ্ছন্ন কঠোর ও কর্কশ পণ্ডিতী বাঙ্গলার প্রবল প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বী রূপে তৎকালীন মুসলমান

---

<sup>69</sup>Ibid, p. 41.

সাহিত্যিকবৃন্দ আরবী-ফারসী শব্দবহুল জাতীয় ভাবমণ্ডিত ...মধুর ও মোলায়েম ইসলামী বাংলা বা পুঁথি-সাহিত্যের সৃষ্টি করিয়াছিলেন...। মুসলমান কবিগণের কল্পনা ও কবিত্ব পুঁথি-সাহিত্যের মধ্যে নানা রসে অভিসিক্ত হইয়া কেমন অধীর আবেগে উচ্ছ্বসিত হইয়াছিল, দুর্ভাগ্যবশত আমরা এতদিন তাহার কোনই খোঁজখবর লইতে পারি নাই। পুঁথি সাহিত্যের প্রতি উপেক্ষা যে আমাদের জাতীয় সাহিত্য ও জাতীয় জীবনের পক্ষে একটি মারাত্মক ত্রুটি, সে কথা কিছুতেই অস্বীকার করা যায় না<sup>70</sup>।

In this zeal *BishadSindhu* was received not for its intention to be a part of the so called elite literary domain. Rather *BishadSindhu* was acknowledged for its tremendous acceptance in the masses for whom Musalmani Bangla was the lingua franca. It is to be noticed that while Kaykobad was dismissed for not possessing the ability to become the *jatiya* though he wrote about a *jatiya* theme, *BishadSindhu*'s chaste and Sanskrit Bangla (with few Arabic and Persian words in it), for its connection to the themes so far celebrated in the scribal and cheap print culture, was acknowledged and accepted. What was important was a deliberate and perhaps not-so-deliberate charting out of the mass/popular as a very important part of the Muslim public through whose reading habit and response, some kind of *jatiya* could be formed for the Bengal Muslims.

*Bishad-Sindhu* could be reclaimed (with a disclaimer as such “অবশ্যমীর সাহেবের রচনায় জাতীয় ভাব ও ভাষার দিক দিয়া যে কতকটা ত্রুটি ছিল, তাহা কিছুতেই অস্বীকার করা যায় না”(we cannot dismiss the fact that there was a problem of dealing with Islamic ideals in Musharraf Husain's writings)because it could be seen as the prose version of the *jangnama* puthis (“বিষাদ সিন্ধু ... জঙ্গনামার অন্ধ ও অপরিবর্তিত গদ্যানুবাদ মাত্র”).Altaf Husain B.A. brought this discussion forward in an article entitled “Faridpurer Sahitya Pratibha” in the same issue by again making a case for Musalmani Bangla and the *puthisahitya*. He again hailed *BishadSindhu* for its ability to bring the deviated Muslim masses back to the blessed yard of *jatiyasahitya*.

---

<sup>70</sup>“ Islami Bangla O Puthi Sahitya”, *IslamDarshan*, Year I, vol xii (Chaitra 1327BS/1920).

“বিষাদ সিন্ধুর করুন সুর শুধু যে বাংলাদেশের এক প্রান্ত হইতে ওপর প্রান্ত পর্যন্ত প্রতিধ্বনিত হইয়াছিল তাহা নহে; বিষাদ সিন্ধুর প্রবল আকর্ষণই বাংলার পথভ্রান্ত মুসলমান সমাজকে জাতীয় সাহিত্যের পুণ্য ক্ষেত্রে আকর্ষণ করিয়া লইয়া আসিয়াছিল”<sup>71</sup>।

As Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad was publishing in various kinds of journals and periodicals, from a high brow *Sahitya* to a more district oriented *Alaol* and to expose his archive of the scribal *puthis* for the reformulation of a past in Bengal culture, many literary and cultural religious platforms – from *IslamDarshan* to *Mohommadi*, from *BMSP* to *Saogat*, attempted to formulate the regional dimension of the Muslim identity by connecting literary culture with the scribal past and also with the Musalmani *puthi* culture. The difference in positions could be discerned if they are looked at from their position vis-à-vis *Alaol* and *BishadSindhu*.

Muhamad Shahidullah and Abdul Karim, both had drawn from *Alaol* the beginning of Muslim Bangla literature. Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad, in the presidential lecture at *Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Sammelan* proposed Battala cheap print in Musalmani Bangla as the *jatiyasahitya* archive for the Bengal Muslims.

অনেকেই বোধহয় জানেন না, কলিকাতায় এবং মফঃস্বলে মুসলমানদিগের পরিচালিত প্রায় ৪০ টি ছাপাখানা আছে। যেই ‘বটতলার’ সাহিত্যকেই প্রধান ভিত্তি করিয়া আমাদের হিন্দু ভ্রাতৃগণ বঙ্গ সাহিত্যে অভ্রংলিহ সৌধ নির্মাণ করিয়া যশস্বী হইয়াছেন, সেই ‘বটতলার পুথি’র নাম শুনিয়া আমরা ঘুণায় নাসিকা কুণ্ঠিত করি।... আমাদেরযুগ যুগান্তরের সেই নীরব সাহিত্য-সাধনা ইসলামের কীর্তিগাথা বক্ষে ধারণ করিয়া আজও অবজ্ঞাত ভাবে বটতলায় পড়িয়া রহিয়াছে<sup>72</sup>।

Abdul Karim put the popular back on the pedestal not for the fact that they had the essential literary articulations of the Muslims, rather he qualified the *puthi* culture as having certain thematic attributes which could be revived for the betterment of the society. Here, by not

---

<sup>71</sup>(The attraction towards “Bishad Sindhu” brought the wayward Bengal Muslims to the sacred path of literature) *IslamDarshan*, Year I, volm xii (Chaitra 1327BS/1920): 561.

<sup>72</sup>(Many do not know that in Calcutta and in the Mufassil towns there are more or less 40 printing presses owned by the Muslims. The Battala literature through which our Hindu brethren have achieved name and fame, we detaste that Bartala puthi. ... The result of our age old meditation in popular print has been relegated to the margins under shadow of a banyan tree without any recognition)

specifying the term *jatiya*, Abdul Karim's understanding of *jatiya* can be seen as integral to the popular and the religious.

এ পর্যন্ত প্রাণ্ডুক্ত 'বটতলার' মুসলমান কবিগণ ৮৩২৫ খানি পুস্তক রচনা করিয়া গিয়াছেন; প্রাচীন সাহিত্যে আমাদের ধর্মমূলক গ্রন্থই বেশী। ওই সকল গ্রন্থের ভাব রাশি যদি নূতন ভাষায় – নূতন ছন্দে আমাদের মর্মে মর্মে প্রবাহিত করা যায়, তাহলে আমাদের প্রভূত কল্যাণ সাধিত হইতে পারে<sup>73</sup>।

BMSS already started to disseminate ideas about the folk consciousness through the writings and lectures of Muhammad Shahidullah. With BMSP, in the 1930s, *Bulbul* became one of the most prominent journals to disseminate the folk as one of the integral parts of Bengali Muslim literature. The 1920s could be seen as a watershed when the folk became a part of Rabindranath's search for the literary ideals and Dinesh Chandra Sen, who was travelling through the remote areas of Mymensingh to collect ballads. Both Muhammad Shahidullah, a student of Dinesh Chandra Sen at Calcutta University, and Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad had already begun to show their inclinations to the folk repertoire. Shahidullah had already started speaking on Alaol and old Bangla practised by the Muslims and Abdul Karim started disseminating his collections through periodicals. Another student of Dinesh Chandra Sen – Jasimuddin – started contributing much by celebrating the folk as one of the integral themes of Bengali Muslim literature. Jasimuddin not only assisted Sen in the latter's collection of the ballads from Mymensingh, he himself also became a collector and researcher of the folk repertoire in due course of the time. The publication of Jasimuddin's *SojonBadiyarGhat* (1929), *NakshiKantharMath* (1939), the conference on folklore (in Kishenganj, Mymensingh) and setting up of Eastern Bengal Folklore Collection Society and inclusion of the study of folklore in the Dacca University Bangla syllabus, and with regular contribution of Abdul Karim especially to *Bulbul* brought a

---

<sup>73</sup>(Till date Muslim poets of Battala have composed 8325 books; our old literature is basically scriptures. If the essence of those books could be transferred in new language and new form, we will achieve a lot)

folk turn in the Bengal Muslim's national consciousness. In *Sikha* too, Abdul Qadir tried to discover and offer the folk consciousness through his articles entitled "Banglar Lok-Sangeet" (*Chaitra*, 1333BS), "Bangla Gramya-ganer Natyarup" (*Upasana*), "Banglar Palli-Sangeete Lilabad" (*Kallol, Falgun*, 1335BS).

It is important to notice here that, while *Mohommadi* and *IslamDarshan* were playing the card of exclusivity of Islamic themes handed down by the *nasihatnama* and *sirat* writers, Abdul Karim never dissociated the aesthetic-literary of Alaol from the scriptural consciousness of Sayyid Sultan; never attempted to distantiate the pleasure in *LailiMajnu* from the instruction manuals to chart out a folk consciousness and popular Islamic literary idioms. It would be an interesting observation that the *Buddhir Mukti* group also attempted to discuss about the literary potential of the medieval *puthis*. In *Saogat*, between 1940 and 1947, both Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad and Abdul Qadir of *Sikha* discussed about the ancient poets of Bengal, resulting in a very interesting dialogue. As an outcome as such Abdul Qadir added the poetic works of Daulat Ujir Bahram Khan who wrote *Imam-Bijoy*, the first full length lyrical narrative on the Karbala events<sup>74</sup> to his literary criticism. Not only Bahram Khan and his long elegiac poetry on the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, Abdul Qadir also wrote on the *marsiya* poetry of the medieval period. This simultaneity of the *marsiya* and intellectual emancipation, retention of the folk in the minds of the rational lot shows not only a new phase of Bengaliness, but also the all pervasive capacity of the elegiac tradition to remain at the affective core of literary experience of the radical lot too.

---

<sup>74</sup>Abdul Qadir , "Banglar Prachin Musalman Kabi", Year 22, volm 5, Kartik 1346BS/1939, "Prachin Punthir Pandulipi", Year 23, volm 2, Poush 1347BS/1940, "Kabi Daulat Ujir Bahram Khan", Year 29, volm 8, Asharh 1354BS/1947 and Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad, "Prachin Punthir Pandulipi", Year 23, volm 2, Kartik 1347BS/1940



By saying this, I want to claim that, when the Karbala was being written in the 1920s and 30s as a part of history or as literature, by the religious intelligentsia in standardized Bangla, it did not, perhaps fail to allure the radical literati in terms of its affective values as a theme and its all-pervasiveness in /as folk imagination. Here, we are not talking about real tactility between the text and its reader – like the real reading of the Karbala texts written by Abdul Bari Kabiratna, by Abul Hosain of *Sikha* – rather, we are talking about a possible potent field of reception where in the horizon of expectation the elegy for the grandson of the prophet had always been alive as a collective experience which the radicals and the folklorists were equally eager to retrieve for the creation of another meaning of the Bengal Muslim identity<sup>75</sup>.

In fact, this turn towards the scribal and the cheap print with Muslim themes opened various avenues to imagine identity through literature, Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad included the narrative and the scriptural domains in the identification of the past – from the authors of the *sirat* and the Karbala narratives to the writers of scriptural codes – from Sayyid Sultan, Muhammad Khan, Saiyad Murtaza to Nasrullah Khan and also the authors of *qissa* and mythological *jungnama*. This validation prompted another set of intelligentsia to pick up the religious thread overlooking the sensuous theme that Abdul Karim kept in. Though the charge of the narrative – of amour and armour – could not fully be bypassed while talking about the reception of folk and popular within the Muslim public, the military zeal coming from the *jungnamas* had to be addressed as the *jatiyabhab* of the Muslim community.

---

<sup>75</sup>We should remember here that all the members of the Dacca radicals who contributed to other contemporary magazines and periodicals came from the mufassils to study in Dacca. All of them were also a part of the performative folk repertoire that made their understanding of the literary tradition of Bengal that they had to excavate and propose as the core of Bengal Muslim community. A study of autobiographical writings might shed some light on this point more, which I have not developed here, though.

While this quest for the folk in the Bengal Muslim’s literary past was not to create any exclusive model of language or consciousness, rather demarcated many literary cultures within, discursive literature grew targeting at positing the exclusivity of language based on the inclusion of Persian, Arabic and Urdu. The connection with and claim over the popular and mass-based literature of Battala was a validation of the presence of the vocabulary as normal and practised by the Muslims. While claiming this Arabic and Persian registers, the *Mohommadi* group had to disclaim any connection with Nazrul who was not considered to be a bearer of the *jatiya* consciousness. Sayid Emdad Ali placed,

নজরুল ইসলামের মতের উপাসক না হইয়াও বাংলা কবিতায় আরবী ফারসী শব্দের সুপ্রয়োগকে আমরা ভাষার শব্দসম্পদ বৃদ্ধির সহায়ক বলিয়া সমর্থন করি। বাংলা ভাষা এতদিন হিন্দুর দান গ্রহণ করিয়াছে, এইবার তাহাকে মুসলমানের দানও গ্রহণ করিতে হইবে। ...আমাদের লক্ষ্য হইবে এক ও অনন্য মোসলেম বাংলায় বোধগম্য সাহিত্য সৃষ্টি করিয়া জাতির ভিতরে জাগরণ আনয়ন<sup>76</sup>।

Two points can be deduced from this statement on literature here: one, the inevitability of the Islamic theme and two, easily perceptible language to embody such themes. In the next section, I will be discussing the narratives based on the battle of Karbala – from history, biography and poetry. I will not be looking only at the formation of a community or forms of piety as we have already done. Rather, I will be looking at the literary issues that were being discussed and given shape along the 1920s and 1930s. I will try to place the narratives with respect to the ethical question about the relationship between religion and literature which split the literary community in the 1920s and 1930s. Can the question of being religious and being literary be asked together while studying the battle of Karbala as a part of history and narrative?

---

<sup>76</sup>(Even if we are not followers of Nazrul Islam, we can endorse his use of Arabic and Persian words in Bangla to enrich Bangla. Bangla has so far been accepting the offerings of the Hindus, now she will have to accept that of Muslims) “Bangla Bhasa o Musalman”, *MasikMohommadi* (Chaitra, 1334BS/1927)

### 6.3.1 The Search for a Muslim Bangla *Sahitya*

Sir F. Rahman said in his presidential lecture at the fourth annual Conference of MSS<sup>77</sup>,

যে জাতিতে সাহিত্য চর্চা নাই তারা নিজেদের ইতিহাসের উপর সমাধি মন্দির তুলে দিয়েছে।

Abdul Rab Choudhury articulated in the same MSS conference<sup>78</sup>,

যে জাতির মধ্যে সাহিত্য চর্চা নাই, তাহার প্রাণ-চাঞ্চল্যের পরিচয় পাওয়া যায় না। যে জাতির জীবন চারিদিক দিয়া পুষ্ট ও বিকশিত হইয়া উঠে নাই, তাহার নিকট হইতে কোন সাহিত্যের আশা রাখা বিড়ম্বনা মাত্র।... বাংলা সাহিত্য আজ বিশ্বের দরবারে গৌরবান্বিত আসনে সমাসীন, কিন্তু ওই গৌরবের প্রতিষ্ঠানে আমাদের দান কিছুই নাই। আমরা সাহিত্য চর্চা করি না বলিয়া আমাদের জাতীয় জীবনে গভীর থেকে গভীরতর অবসাদে নিমজ্জিত হইতেছি<sup>79</sup>।

These articulations might appear to be a reiteration of what *Sudhakar* and *Mohommadi* and to a certain extent BMSS expressed regarding the need for a national literature for the Bengal Muslim community. But in the attempts of MSS/*Sikha*, a new understanding of literature in its poetic-aesthetic autonomy, a new sense of individuality and identity came up to flourish. The Muslim public found a new rationalism by maintaining a certain distance from religiously ordained sensibilities growing in tandem with the proliferation of literary meets, debates and creative works.

Use of rationalism was not something unfamiliar in the scriptural tradition of Islam and Maulana Akram Khan was a staunch practitioner of *ijtihad* as already discussed. The fierce antagonism and debate between *Mohommadi* and *Sikha-Saogat* can be read as the struggle between two forms of reason: one was being articulated from within doctrinal ideologies and the other from without. *Mohommadi*, also, published pictures and Maulana Akram Khan wrote himself and published many articles showing scriptural validation of visual art and

---

<sup>77</sup>*Sikha*, 1339

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup>(Bangla is a language of international repute now. But in that glory the Bengal Muslim has no contrinution. As we don't create jatiya literature, we are falling into dark abyss)

music in Islam<sup>80</sup>. *Sikha*'s inclination towards several forms of art not only produced several articles on Islamic architecture, painting and music<sup>81</sup>, it had a special interest in exposing Bengal as a viable space for art practice<sup>82</sup>. But the difference was, what was the basic ideological difference and conflict between *Mohommadi* and *Sikha* (also between *Mohommadi* and *Saogat*), the validation of *Mohommadi* stemmed from scriptural support, from the Prophetic life<sup>83</sup>, whereas *Sikha*'s exploration was more historical-evidential and directed towards finding some aesthetic code and reason.

This cleavage should be read as a very important moment of departure and also symptomatic to understand the ambivalence in the Muslim public culture in studying the question of the literary. It was the moment when any theme from the Islamic history went beyond the validation of religiosity and became poignant enough to posit aesthetic issues and to raise questions of poetics. Here it would be interesting if we could refer to one letter written by Ismail Husain Sirajee, published in *Saogat*.

---

<sup>80</sup> Maulana Akram Khan, "Chitrakala O Islam", *Mohommadi*, Year III, volm viii (Jaistha 1337BS/1990), Gholam Mostafa, "Islam O Sangeet", *Mohommadi*, Year IV, volm iii (Poush1337BS/1990), Muin Uddin Husain, "Sangeet Sambandhe Arbi Pandulipir Abishkar", *Mohommadi*, Year IV, volm ix (Magh 1337BS/1990).

<sup>81</sup>(When *milad-mehfil* by Nazrul was performed, there is massive critique by *Mohommadi*, but *Mohommadi* itself endorses this kinds of expressions in its volumes) Motahar Husain, "Sangeet Charchaye Musalman", *Sikha*, Year I, 1927, Abdus salam, "Moghal Juge Chitra-Charcha", *Sikha*, Year II, 1927, Abdul Maeed Choudhury, *Sikha*, "Sthapatya-Charchaye Musalman", Year II 1928

<sup>82</sup> Abdul Qader, "Banglar Lok-Sangeet", Year I, 1927, "Mymensingher Geet", Year III, 1929

<sup>83</sup>"হজরতে রসুলে করিম স্বয়ং সঙ্গীত শ্রবণ করিয়াছেন এবং তাহার অনুমতি - এমনকি স্থান বিশেষে আদেশ পর্যন্ত প্রদান করিয়াছেন। ... খায়রুল্ল-কোরানের স্বর্ণযুগে হজরতের ছাহাবা ও তাবেরীগণ ও আলেমগণের মধ্যে অনেকেই নিজেরা সঙ্গীত শ্রবণ করিতেন ও তাহাকে জায়েজ মনে করিতেন"। (Hazrat Muhammad himself himself used to listen to music and gave permission for it. Sometimes he prescribed it) Muhammad Akram Khan, "Samasya O Samadhan", *MashikMohommadi*, Year I, volm I (Kartik 1335BS/1928)

মিলাদ মহফিলেযে গান গাওয়া লইয়া কবি নজরুল ইসলামকে অতীব জঘন্য ভাষায় জঘন্য ভাবে গালাগালি দিয়া (সাপ্তাহিক মোহাম্মদীতে) ইসলামী ভদ্রতার মাথায় পাদুকাঘাত করা হইয়াছে, আবার মাসিক মোহাম্মদীতে) জোরে-সোরে সেই বাজনাকে জায়েজ বলিয়া ফতোয়া দেওয়া হইতেছে<sup>84</sup>।

The pan-Islamist Sirajee suddenly did not become a rationalist in the sense *Saogat* was, neither was he one of the regular contributors of this periodical, rather he was sharing the anti-*Mohommadi* stance of *Saogat* to place his own kind of critique against the ‘inconsistency’ of Maulana Akram Khan disregarding the fact that Akram Khan, very diligently, attempted to differentiate between what was prescribed, recommended and accepted as *milad* in the scriptural tradition and what was not. For Akram Khan, the exercise of making aesthetic codes from religious themes by neutralizing them, what *Sikha* and *Saogat* were doing with the tremendous energy of Nazrul Islam was not accepted, and Akram Khan was reaffirming his position within the reason of religion. In this context, we need to know these two strands of reason and rationality – ‘*BuddhirMukti*’ of *Sikha* and *Saogat* and ‘*ijtihad*’ of Maulana Akram Khan created what kinds of network of reception, appropriation and affirmation of the characters of the Prophet and his grandsons. In the next section we will try to situate the literature concerned in this ideological transaction, conflict and overlap till the 1930s.

In the concluding section we will try to look at the connection between the literary (linguistic, generic and thematic) with the issues of authenticity and religiosity. It is curious to notice that in the immense reception of *BishadSindhu* – how many forms it had taken up according to the variety of reception. No text on the martyrdom of Imam Husayn was written after the publication of *BishadSindhu* without a direct or indirect reference of *BishadSindhu*. Authors remained unanimous or took up antagonistic position vis-à-vis *BishadSindhu*, and could not do anything without invoking this prime prose on Karbala of the print culture. To understand the afterlife of

---

<sup>84</sup>Ismail Hosain Sirajee, “Patra”, *SaptahikSaogat* (30 Kartik 1335BS/1928)

*BishadSindhu*, we will be studying the network of reception and appropriation and a history of negation and affirmation too.

### **6.3.2 The Prophet between pan-Islamism and Pakistanism**

Shaikh Abdur Rahil: *Hazrat Muhamader Jiban O Dharmaniti* (1887)

Mir Musharraf Husain: *MauludSharif* (1900)

Mozammel Hoque :*Hazrat Muhammad* (1903)

Mohammad Dad Ali: *Asheqe Rasul* (1907)

Dr Sayed Abul Hossain: *Moslem Pataka ba Hazrat Muhamader Jibani* (1908)

Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan: *Mostapha Charit* (1921)

Muhammad Reyazuddin Ahmad Mashadi: *Hazrat Muahmmad Mostafat Jiban Charit* (1927)

Khan Bahadur Taslimuddin Ahmad: *MauludNafisa* (1925), *SamratPaigambar* (1928)

Muhaddam Wajid Ali: *Maru-Bhaskar* (1941)

Gholam Mostafa (1867-1964): *Viswa-Nabi* (1942)<sup>85</sup>

The increasing debate, in the 1920s between the *jatiya* of Islam and the aesthetic-poetic autonomy of literature for the identification of the Bengal Muslim community, defined many authors and their treatment of the themes related to the life of the Prophet and the martyrdom of Imam Hasan and Husayn. In this debate, the history that was needed and was formulated by the flag bearers of *jatiya* (from *Sudhakar* to *Mohommadi*) was different from the later rationalists. It was also different from the groups that were inclined towards the socialist ideal

---

<sup>85</sup>Amit Dey has worked extensively on this issue, Dey, *The Image of the Prophet in Bengali Muslim Piety 1850-1947* (Kolkata: Readers Service, 2006).

since the mid 1930s. We have already discussed in a previous chapter how forms of piety around the figure of the Prophet along with Imam Hasan and Husayn emerged and were proliferated through a new reason called *jatiya* through the works of *Sudhakar*. Here we will be talking about the same thematic but from the perspective of a debate on the literary.

The debate over the literary between *Mohommadi* and *Sikha-Saogat* touched its zenith on the question of Nazrul Islam who, with his tremendous creative energy, was spilling over in all the spheres of creative engagements. His poetic radicalism, vibrant with his inclination both to the socialism of Russia and the sensuous aesthetics of Persia, made him a unique case to be categorized in any sort of single paradigm of literary ideal. Nazrul's robust and playful oscillation between Hindu and Islamic mythological-scriptural, between high Persian and Bengal folk aesthetic repertoires, between narcissistic individualism and sensitive socialism made it quite difficult for any conservative – Hindu or Muslim alike – to feel at ease with. Through the literary criticism on Nazrul, in the pages of *Mohommadi*, *Saogat* and *Sikha*, the domain of literary ideals got split into two definable poles. Nazrul was violently attacked by *Mohommadi* for being un-Islamic in his content and literary ideals. At the same time, Nazrul had been diligently and passionately defended by the litterateur of *Saogat* and *Sikha*. For us, the question is, when Prophet Muhammad was being claimed and written by both the binary platforms and the martyrdom of Imam Husayn offered the core affective possession of every Muslim, how to deal with the issues of Islamic ideal, authenticity, deviation and validation as the marker of literature and hence, of the literary community.

Nazrul was defended by his *Saogat* comrades. They critiqued the traditionalist criticism that went against Nazrul and proposed an other literary paradigm by remarking on the traditionalist criticism as “...

ইহাকে আমরা প্রবুদ্ধ কাব্য-উপভোগের ফল বলিয়া মনে করি না, বরং কাব্য সম্বন্ধে উন্নত ধারণার

অভাবের নিদর্শন বলিয়াই ধরিয়া লইতে বাধ্য হই।...শুধু দেখিতে হইবে তাহার সৃষ্টির সহিত সৌন্দর্যবোধের আন্তরিক সামঞ্জস্য আছে কিনা<sup>86</sup>। In a series of long-drawn arguments through articles and counter-articles, it became clear that *Sikha* and *Saogat* were talking about the connection between religion and rationalism by emphasizing on individual thinking and individual will whereas *Mohommadi* was reaffirming individualism of the *mojaddid* that was always scripturally explicated. The *BuddhirMukti* group was trying to bring literature out of the domain of its religious identitarian marker<sup>87</sup> whereas *Mohommadi* affirmed the need for religious ideal as the ideal of literature<sup>88</sup>.

It is to be noticed that Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan was for Hindu-Muslim unity and had always been cautious about a hurried mixing of Arabic and Persian with Bangla (so as not to arouse unease among the Hindu practitioners of language). He was not at all flexible in bringing idolatric images even if Nazrul and his associates had already emptied them out. The *Mohommadi* front, led by Muhammad Akram Khan and contributors like Gholam Mostafa and S Wajid Ali<sup>89</sup> to protect the essence of Islam, continued the ideal of separatism by proposing a different *jatiya* essence (invoked first by the *Sudhkarists*) that culminated in his ideals of Pakistanism in the 1940s.

The '*BuddhirMuktiAndolon*' which had its reverberation felt in the inauguration of many other liberal literary platforms that also preferred Bengali identification over the Islamic, critiqued women's

---

<sup>86</sup>(We cannot call it a sublime reference of literature, rather we see it as a lack of it... we need to see whether there is a connection between form and the essence of Islam) "Kabya Sahitye Bangali Musalman", *Saogat* (Poush, 1333BS)

<sup>87</sup>ভাষা অনুসারে সাহিত্যের নামকরণ হয় বলিয়া আমরা জানি - যেমন ইংরাজী সাহিত্য, পারসী সাহিত্য, আরবী সাহিত্য, ফরাসী সাহিত্য ইত্যাদি। ধর্মানুসারে সাহিত্যের নামকরণের কথা আমরা এ যাবত শুনি নাই।(We know the names like English, Persian, Arabic, French for the languages, we have not heard any language designated by the name of any religion) Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, "Sahitye Sampradayikta", *Saogat*, Annual Volm 1333BS.

<sup>88</sup>Gholam Mostafa, "Sahitye sampradayikata", *MashikMohommadi*, 20 July, 1928.

<sup>89</sup>Especially his "Bangali Musalmaner Sadhanar Patha", *MashikMohommadi*, Chaitra 1336BS.



social oppression, conservative madrasa education and communalism. These journals wanted to work in collaboration with the Hindu literati too. *Tarun Patra* (1332), *Abhijan* (1333), *Jagaran* (1335), *Sanchay* (1335), *Jayati* (1337) – these journals also shared a common strength of radical young intelligentsia with *Saogat* and *Sikha*. Abul Husain, Nazrul Islam, Abdul Kasem, Qazi Abdul Odud, Qazi Motahar Hossain, Jasimuddin were among the few who used to be the patrons, organizers and contributors to these short term efforts.

These periodicals and journals achieved to bring up new interpretations of religion and a different reason from the unparalleled value of Hazrat Muhammad. For them, as Muhammad was the last Prophet, after his death Muslims would not need any Prophet to direct them each and every moment. End of prophethood meant the beginning of an independent rational cycle where individuals are bound to think on their own, rather than relying solely upon some pre-given prescriptions or scriptural reason expounded by some authorities of religion.

When the religious intelligentsia was trying to mend the damage that was done by Kemal Pasha to *Khilafat* by not keeping history up to date<sup>90</sup> in the Bangla biography of Kemal Pasha, the associates of '*Buddhir Mukti*' did not leave pan-Islamism, and *khilafat* without criticizing them vehemently. According to the '*Buddhir Mukti*' groups, pan-Islamism and *Khilafat* were the stumbling blocks in the intellectual-creative growth of a community which did not let the collective go beyond an identity politics marked by religion and religious sensibilities. It is quite interesting to notice that the supra-national imagined community of pan-Islamism, which took the local-national community of the Muslims beyond its territorial limitations, was critiqued by the '*Buddhir Mukti*' groups. Rather, they found out

---

<sup>90</sup>In chapter five, I have discussed about how history writing did not include the fall of *khilafat* in the hands of Kemal Pasha and rather kept on portraying Turkey as the citadel of the Muslim caliph with Kemal Pasha as the defender of *Khilafat* against the British army.

the merit in the political situation of Turkey where Kemal Pasha collapsed the status of a religion as the state religion. *Jayati* editor Nasiruddin Ahamad wrote,

প্যান-ইসলামিজমের ‘আইডিয়া’ও মুসলমান জগতের কোন উপকার করতে পারে নি। তুরস্ক এসব খেয়ালি পোলাওয়ার স্বপ্ন ত্যাগ করে খেলাফত, প্যান-ইসলামিজম ত্যাগ করে ভালই করেছে। ভারতীয় অনেক মুসলমান – ‘তুরস্কে ইসলাম আর রাষ্ট্র ধর্ম নয়, এই ঘোষণার জন্য মুস্তাফা কামালের প্রতি দোষারোপ করে থাকেন, কিন্তু আমাদের মনে হয় এটা ভালই হয়েছে। ... সমাজের চিন্তা করবার শক্তি যে পর্যন্ত না আসে, বৃহৎ কল্পনা বা ‘আইডিয়া’ তাঁকে অনুপ্রানিত না করে, সে পর্যন্ত এর উন্নতির কোনই আশা নেই<sup>91</sup>।

The claim over the Prophet came from such ideological stance about religion and community where Hazrat Muhammad showed open and free rational ways<sup>92</sup> to the modern man in a world beyond religious limitations and boundaries. Muhammad’s religion was interpreted not as something exclusive; rather, it was reclaimed as a discourse that could open up fraternity among humans, from any creed or clan. They even went far enough to look at his flaws if that was needed<sup>93</sup>. In the very beginning, *Sikha* had a discussion on the talents of Hazrat Muhammad by Shamsul Huda, “Hazrat Muhammader Pratibha”<sup>94</sup>.

Though Muhammad Akram Khan and Gholam Mostafa were fighting from the same platform of *Mohommedi* to keep the sanctity of the Islamic virtues in literature and were trying very hard to nullify the radical syncretism of *Saogat* and *Sikha*, they possessed different

---

<sup>91</sup>(To reject the idea of pan-Islamism and khilafat might be productive in the long run) “Juktibad O Islam”, *Jayati* (Baishakh 1337).

<sup>92</sup>“হজরত বলেছেন ‘তাখাল্লাকু বিআখলাকিল্লা’ (খোদার গুণাবলী লাভ করতে চেষ্টা কর)। মানুষের চরম বিকাশের প্রথম পথ হচ্ছে মুক্ত বুদ্ধি”। (The ultimate way to attain liberation is through the path of reason) Abul Hosain, “Bangali Musلمانer Sikkha Samsya”, *Sikha*, (1333BS)

<sup>93</sup>Qazi Motahar Hossain wrote in his “Manush Mohammad” article, “একথা যদি সত্য হয়, তবে রাজনৈতিক প্রয়োজন হিসাবে তৎকালীন অবস্থার প্রতি লক্ষ্য করে হয়ত বা হজরতকে সমর্থন করা যেতে পারে, কিন্তু আমরা মানুষ হিসাবে তাঁর প্রসঙ্গ আলোচনা করছি, তখন এরূপ প্রচেষ্টাকে কোনোক্রমেই নির্দোষ বলে অভিহিত করতে পারি না”। (If it is the question of the political need of his time, Hazrat Muhammad could be supported, but as a human being we might need to see the context and engage with his human attributes) *Jayati*, Year I, volm vii-viii (1337).

<sup>94</sup>*Sikha*, Year I (1333/1927)

ideological positions vis-à-vis the Prophet to make him the ideal for modernity and community identification.

But unlike the *Sudhakar*-led intelligentsia, for this next generation of Muslim public of *Sikha-Saogat*, the martyrdom of Imam Husayn did not become a viable theme of literature. Though much was discussed about the life of the Prophet and the relevance of his position as a Prophet and also as a rational man, his grandsons were not taken up to validate the claims of the community. *Mohommodi* too, did not really show much effort to bring the post-Prophetic affective history so celebrated by the *Sudhakarists*. Rather, *Mohommodi*'s ideological formulation of the past was predicated upon the political reason of *Kholafaye Rashidin*. In this new formulation, the primacy of Abu Bakr and Umar was, rather, Maulana Akram Khan's matter of concern.

We have already pointed that, the performance traditions of the narrative connected to *muharram* had already been relegated to the domain of the folk. We should remember here that when Abdul Qadir sang some 'folk songs' at an MSS gathering as a corollary to his academic interest in the folk, he did not perform the *marsiya* about which he had already written with much care and enthusiasm. The difficulty of bringing the *marsiya* in the realm of the reclaimed folk, even by the *BuddhirMukti* people, marked the elegiac tradition as a consciousness that cannot be retrieved even by using the folk as an analytical tool. The impossibility of the categorization of the *marsiya* and *jari* as the folk, by the religious and secular elite only affirmed the emerging identification of *muharram* in the Shia social which had already been relegated to the realm of the non-viable of the Muslim public sphere. The anxiety over the physical was now embodied in the formation of a community – the community of the Shias and performance of mourning was placed at a growing distance by the emerging intelligentsia – both liberal and religious, now identifying as the *Hanafi* Sunnis. The folk as an alternative tool of identification, till the 1940s, could not be applied in the discursive practices of the

radical intelligentsia to accommodate the story of Imam Husyan's martyrdom.

### **6.3.3 *BishadSindhu*: Between Reading and Listening:**

As this literary network cannot be realized without an understanding of the folk and the popular, this attempt will remain unattainable without the positioning of *BishadSindhu* in the domain of popular consumption. *BishadSindhu* also stood as the iconic expression of the narrative on the battle of Karbala in the newly emerging standardized literature that was raising many ideologically fraught questions on genre and theme handed down from history and popular imagination. *BishadSindhu* was attempted to be appropriated as an extension of Battala for its close proximity to the themes explored in Battala. It was also interpreted as the paradigmatic shift towards literary modernity in terms of its generic formulations as a prose narrative. In the nuanced field of reception, we will see, no text, be it coming from *Sudhakar* or from a poet with sheer poetic intention in his mind like Abdul Bari Kabiratna, could inaugurate itself without the reference of *BishadSindhu*.

It is also to notice that there was no reference of *BishadSindhu* or any sort of existing prose narrative – be it history or biography related to the Imam brothers – in Akram Khan's writings. Of course, he considered the tragic battle of Karbala as the primal moment of crisis in the history of Islam and categorically said this in his *Mochhlem Banger Samajik Itihas*<sup>95</sup>, but he did not attempt to carry forward the sequence of the death of Muhammad in his *MostaphaCharit* to encompass the inevitable history of the martyrdom of his grandsons like his predecessors or his contemporaries did. Also, the way he explained the 'martyrdom' of Caliph Usman as the condition and context of the battle of Karbala, the martyrdom of the Imam brothers

---

<sup>95</sup>Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan, *Mochhlem Banger Samajik Itihas*, (Dhaka: Azad & Publications, 1965).

went out of the domain of the affective and was explained in the language of polity and governance only. We will try to understand the configuration of the Muslim public based on the consumption of a culture of literature about the life of the Prophet and the life of his grandsons as an afterlife of *BishadSindhu*.

The most enchanting thing about *BishadSindhu* is its capacity to go beyond its implied readership to become a part of mass literary consumption created by the circulation of cheap prints. This precarious position of *BishadSindhu* made certain claims possible and certain anxiety apparent if we talk about authenticity and an aesthetic-poetics taking shape in the first decades of the twentieth century.

It was the moment when *BishadSindhu*, even with some deviations from *jatiyabhab* and theme, could be reclaimed by the intelligentsia of BMSP for the book's popular thrust. BMSP defined the mass reaching capacity of the *puthi* tradition which eventually *BishadSindhu*, the first prose narrative in standardized Bangla, became as an after-effect of its reception by the *puthi* reading masses:

নায়েব মাঝি হইতে গৃহস্থের বৌ ঝি তাহাদের দিনে হাড় ভাঙা কাজ সারিয়া পুঁথি শুনিতে বসে। পুঁথি পাঠক যখন সুর করিয়া পুঁথি পড়িতে থাকে, তখন শোত্বর্গ কখন কারবালার শহীদগণের দুঃখে করুন রসে গলিয়া যায়, কখন আমীর হামযার বা রোস্তমের বীরত্বে বীররসে মাতিয়া উঠে, কখন বা হাতেমের দয়ায় দয়া-রসে ভিজিয়া যায়। বেচারাদের আহাৰ নিদ্রার কথা, ঘর সংসারের কথা, চিরদৈন্যের কথা আর মনে থাকে না<sup>96</sup>।

In this complex network of the folk, popular and the standardized *jatiya*, the proliferation of the narrative on the battle of Karbala should be understood as posing the question of identity and community, its locatedness and its universality.

---

<sup>96</sup>(From the clerk to the boatman, and the domestic women, when after their whole day long hard work sat to recite the *puthi* for their entertainment, the audience melts in tears for the martyrs of Karbala. They don't remember their grueling life experiences), BMSP, 1325, pp8-9.

### 6.3.3a *Kabi, Maulabi and Bhai: the claim of literature*

In the preface of *BishadSindhu*, Mir Musharraf Husain himself declared that he retained some Arabic and Persian '*jatiyashabda*', in the fear of the traditionalist maulanas. Perhaps he wanted to refer to the traditionalists and also the religious intelligentsia who did not let him escape when the cow-killing debate touched its zenith<sup>97</sup>. When all these subsided, Musharraf Husain could not be ignored for the tremendous task he had performed by converting the battle of Karbala with its Prophetic prelude and the mythological moorings into prose. Though *BishadSindhu* neither claimed itself to be history nor a biography, rather, placed a claim to belong to the novelistic tradition, the whole genre of writing history and biography in the later period was influenced by *BishadSindhu*'s linguistic and narratological expositions. The primary scepticism towards Mir Musharraf Husain was swept away when his literary genius as expounding the *jatiya* was realized by the religious intelligentsia of *Sudhakar*. What Musharraf Husain did the arrangement of Arabic and Persian words within a Sanskritik register was also proposed by Ahsan Ullah in his *Bangabhasha O Musalman Sahitya*<sup>98</sup>. Musharraf Husain attempted no distinction between the Hindu-Bangla and the Musalmani-Bangla as he thought that he was arranging Bangla as a shared space of literary belongingness for the middle class Hindu and Muslim readership, both in terms of theme and language.

...যে পর্যন্ত বঙ্গভাষায় সংস্কৃত ও মুসলমানী শব্দের সমবায় না হইবে, যে পর্যন্ত উভয় জাতির মধ্যে সৌহার্দ স্থাপিত না হইবে, যে পর্যন্ত বঙ্গদেশের উন্নতি সুদূরপর্যন্ত...<sup>99</sup>

What was emerging as the need of the community was not only to find and set a template of ideals through the sacred characters, but it was also necessary to propose a counter-narrative to the essential qualities that Muslim characters embodied in an Orientalist-colonialist

---

<sup>97</sup>Already discussed in chapter III.

<sup>98</sup>Ahsan Ullah, 1918, Mechhuabazar Street, Kolkata.

<sup>99</sup>(Unless and until there won't be any synchrony of Sanskrit and Muslim words, there can't be any bonding between these two communities. Progress of Bengal will remain a dream) *Ibid*, p. 5.

nationalist discourse. The counter-narrative to Bankim desperately searched for its core values in the sacred actors of Karbala so that what Ahsan Ullah demanded could be fulfilled:

...মুসলমান বলিতেই ধর্মপ্রাণ, উৎসাহী, সত্যবাদী, নিষ্ঠাবান, পরিশ্রমী, পরোপকারী ও রাজভক্ত  
বুঝিতে হইবে। যাহাতে মুসলমান চরিত্র যথারীতি গঠিত হইতে পারে, প্রত্যেক সাহিত্যিকের তৎপ্রতি  
দৃষ্টি রাখা আবশ্যিক<sup>100</sup>।

We need to keep in mind that we are placing the narratives on Karbala within a context of a massive debate on translatability and untranslatability where no unified version of the translatable could be derived. Hence no unilinear ideology on language for writing about the Karbala could be attempted. Rather, we need to watch and see what kind of affective and also argumentative network was coming up from the linguistic, generic and thematic arrangements offered by the texts. The debate that took up much aggressive shape in books like *Hindu-Dharma Rahasya O Deblila* by Abul Mansur M. S. U. of Jessore<sup>101</sup> where the author categorically exposed the sexual deviancy of Hindu gods-goddesses-sages and demigods and also analyzed how the hegemonic Hindu literature negatively portrayed the Muslim characters<sup>102</sup>. We are to notice here that while the author did not believe in translating “Allah ta’ala” into any other language, he did translate it as “Iswar” and “Mohan Iswar” at places. This discussion brings in and extends the issues raised in a previous section that any change in the materiality of language – the denotative transfer – might not bring any ideological change. That is no matter how intensely Sanskritized language became to write about the Islamic *jatiya*, that might not prove any ideological overlap between two language-literature systems.

---

<sup>100</sup>(A Muslim character should convey religious, enthusiastic, sincere, hardworking, patriotic and philanthropist essence. This should be the concern and responsibility of the author)Ibid, pp. 12-13.

<sup>101</sup>Jessore, 1315BS/1908.

<sup>102</sup> With a close textual analysis he criticized Iswar Gupta, Damodar Mukhopadhyay, Babu Jajneswar Mukhopadhyay, Dinabandhu Mitra and majorly Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay.

The juxtaposition of Arabic-Persian and Sanskritic words in some literary texts on Karbala was accepted by the Hindu readership to a certain extent, fulfilling the slow processes of accumulation of the Arabo-Persian proposed by the Muslim literati (as already discussed before). It might be so that the poetic versatility of Abdul Bari Kabiratna in 1913 to use Sanskritic Bangla, in his *KarbalaKavya*, minimized the prevalent ideological gap between a text written by a Muslim and his Hindu audience. In the preface, Abdul Bari explained his idea of Bangla where he wanted to include some ‘beautiful words’ from the everyday vocabulary of Bengali Muslims – not only to make that vocabulary known to his Hindu readership, but also to attract the Bengali Muslim common masses to Bangla with the allure of the Arabic-Persian. In 1935 Abdul Bari wrote in the second edition of his book,

‘কারবালা’ পাঠ করিয়া, যদি ইসলাম-ধর্ম ও তাঁহার প্রতিষ্ঠাতা অতি মানুষিক শক্তি সম্পন্ন মহাপুরুষের প্রতি বঙ্গীয় পাঠকপাঠিকাগণের শ্রদ্ধা ও সদ্ভাব সমধিক বর্ধিত হয়, তাহা হইলেই আমার পরিশ্রম সফল ও আত্মার সম্যক পরিতৃপ্তি হইবে। বর্তমান গ্রন্থে, আমি মুসলমানগণেরসমাজে ও পরিবারে নিত্য কথিত, কতিপয় মধুর আরবী পারসী শব্দ প্রয়োগের প্রলোভন সংবরণ করিতে পারি নাই। বঙ্গীয় মুসলমান পাঠক-পাঠিকাগণ আহা, বিহারে কি কর্মক্ষেত্রে প্রায়ই যে সমস্ত শব্দাবলী উচ্চারণ করিয়া মনোভাব পরিব্যক্ত করেন, তাঁহাদের মাতৃভাষায় সম্ভবমতে ওই পদগুলি ক্রমে প্রবেশ লাভ করিতে পারলে তাঁহারা স্বভাবতই বঙ্গ-মাতৃভাষার প্রতি অনুরক্ত হইয়া উঠিবেন, প্রধানত এই যুক্তির উপরে নির্ভর করিয়াই আমি স্বজাতীয় আত্মগণের বঙ্গমাতৃভাষার প্রতি ভক্তি-আকর্ষণ মানসে ‘কারবালায়’ সেইরূপ কতগুলি বৈদেশিক পদ-প্রয়োগে সাহসী হইয়াছি।

Though the description at spaces were sprinkled with Arabic and Persian, the overwhelming presence of a known paradigm of Bangla (of Madhusudan Dutta, Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay and Nabinchandra Sen according to the first stanza of the poem), compelled the Hindu readers to even speak like this, “গ্রন্থখানি পাঠ করিয়া গ্রন্থকারকে মুসলমান বলিয়া সন্দেহ হয় না”<sup>103</sup> and accepted the fact that Arabic and Persian had enhanced the charm of Bangla. One reader said, the text not only had high social ideals, it was made liberal and neutral for the readers from both the communities to enjoy and learn. *AnandaBazarPatrika* (1319BS/1912) also interjected that, it was so

---

<sup>103</sup>Satischandra Bidyabhusan, Princlipal, Sanskrit College.



tragic as an incident, that it could touch the cord of any reader's heart<sup>104</sup>, not only of the Muslims. *MoslemHitaishi* (1319BS/1912) concluded by saying that, such writings only increase the acceptance of Bangla literature among the Bengal Muslim community.

The poet here, in the exposition, resolved the debate between Bangla and Arabic-Persian by hailing Bangla as the mother tongue and calling Arabic 'boideshik bhasha' and "বিমাতা"। "সে দেশ-ভাষাকে ভুলে ডাকিব কি, বিমাতাকে জননী বলে?"<sup>105</sup>। The close proximity of a Sanskritized "ঋটিকা-স্বননে" "সাধনানি" with "বেএজ্জেরার" and "নামদার" created a unique linguistic landscape. But perhaps the denotation of Yezid's obsession with wine, woman and war with "ত্রি-শক্তি সাধনা" and a whole array of vocabulary that he used were already made available to the Hindu Bengali readers by the three prolific poets of nineteenth century Bengal. The process fulfilled the Hindu readers' language expectation to such an extent that the theme of Karbala could go beyond its religious specificities and become pure literature. The poet, who was also a follower of the *Hanafi* pir Abu Bakr like many other *Sudhakar* intelligentsia, was not bothered about the historicity of the past which was the primary concern of the intelligentsia of the time<sup>106</sup>. Following the popular imagination, he took the unreciprocated erotic emotion of Yezid as the cause of the whole tragedy without going into other versions and without raising the question of authenticity. His poetry was received and went beyond the close foundationalism of religious values. When this book was selected by the Kalikata Central Text Book Committee as prize and library books for the schools (1914), the text's capacity to move beyond the project of Islamic identity formation to venture into the domain of other usage of literature as the building block of public

---

<sup>104</sup>(If the readers of Bangla language acquire respect for Islam and its Prophet by reading my "Karbala", that will be my reward. ... The vocabulary that the Bengal Muslims use in their everyday, I have kept them in my book. When the Muslim readers will find them in Bangla, they will naturally get attracted to Bangla)Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>105</sup>Abdul Bari Kabiratna, *KarbalaKabya*, p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> Abdul Bari Kabiratna's other book *Furfurar Ichhale Sawal* attests his spiritual connection with pir Abu Bakr of Furfura.

sphere was established. To give it a shape of autonomous poetry, the author even took the liberty of translating another untranslatable word - Islam – and moved forward with the scriptural connotation of Islam as ‘faith’ – “বিশ্বাস” and Muslim as “বিশ্বাসী”, which perhaps opened the door for the Hindu readers to identify with the characters and the narrative emotion on a neutral plane of religiosity. After such translation, Islam might appear a hundred times more acceptable; the openness of these two words signifying faith and religious identification made it easier for the Hindu readers also to identify with a pain otherwise so exclusive to a religious community. Imam Husayn was offered as a universal ideal and the pain attached to his martyrdom became an inclusive emotion to feel attached to. Here, in this text, the author took poetic licence to formulate a counter-narrative to ‘sword theory’ by spending 122 lines to create Imam Husayn’s speech as the defence of Islam in the middle of war.

ইসলাম, নবীর মিথ্যা অপবাদ বিধর্মীর মুখে শুনি  
 গর্জিলা এমাম, কাঁপিলা কারবালা যথাভীম-মেঘধ্বনি।  
 ‘ওরে মিথ্যাবাদী, হিংসুক বিধর্মী, স্থূলদর্শী “বেঈমান”  
 তীক্ষ্ণধার-অস্ত্রে কাটিব রসনা করি তোর শতখান।  
 বিনা জলে মার, শত পীড়া দাও সহিব সে সব যত,  
 ইসলামের নিন্দা, নবীর অখ্যাতি করলে করিব হত।  
 ইল্লাম-প্রচার বাহুবল-গুণে, তীক্ষ্ণ তরবারি ধারে,  
 একথা যে বলে শতবার বলি ঘোর মিথ্যাবাদী তারে। ...

This is an illustrious example of how the long narrative poetry with Hindu nationalist ideals was received to create a space for Islamic themes by creating poetry out of them. The poet did not restrain from equating Joynab who declined Yezid’s marriage proposal to choose Imam Hasan to marry with Helen to align Karbala along the line of the epic poetry – to make it a song of arms and amour. Joynab was made to lament like this, “হেলেনার মত আমার কারণে/টলমল দেশ ঘোরতর রণে”। But it was no syncretism when Abdul Bari’s Husayn coaxed his daughter saying that a pantheon of gods were inviting him to go there and life after death would be fulfilled in heaven – *swarga*. It is

surprising that how a staunch *Hanafi* like Bari was formulating the social of Husayn like in a polytheistic universe. But we might try to rationalize this as the reproduction of the received poetic situation from the Indian and also from the Greek epic traditions that he was imbibing. He remained another torchbearer of the Islamic *jatiya* to be written in Bangla. He hailed Bangla as the mother tongue<sup>107</sup> and celebrated Arab as the origin of Islamic *jatiya*<sup>108</sup>. In a curious poetic turn he praised Medina as the mother-land and then talked about a foster mother without naming Bengal but with reference to its language and other sustaining forces. The author even kept this unresolved puzzle when he called Bangla as mother tongue and Medina as mother-land. Perhaps this discrepancy and impossibility to resolve this remained the core of identity for the Muslims of Bengal.

Maulavi Abdur Rashid, BA BT, School Inspector, from Phulpur, Mymensingh, wrote a prose narrative *Karbala*, in 1936. *Karbala*, as a literary venture, exposes a unique design of interconnection within the Muslim public sphere. This book was printed by the *Mohommadi* press of Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan, distributed by Ahsan Ullah of House of Ahsan Ullah and was dedicated to Fazlul Huq, who had just come to power to create his cabinet as the Chief of Bengal. The *Sudhakar-Mohommadi*-influenced historicity and rationalism of the historical tale in *Karbala* deters us from identifying Abdur Rashid BA BT as one of the two eponymous members of MSS. Especially, he could not be the editor of *Sikha* who was also Maulavi Abdur Rashid, BA BT. But our author can be a general member with the same name

---

<sup>107</sup>ভুলিও না শিক্ষা, মাতৃভাষা-দেবী,  
জাতীয়-উন্নতি মাতৃভাষা সেবি,  
মাতৃভাষা-বরে হয় লোকে কবি  
লভে অতুলন গৌরব ধন;  
ভুলে মাতৃ শিক্ষা, সেবি অন্য-ভাষা  
মিটে কি মনের অতৃপ্ত পিপাসা?  
পূরে কি অক্ষয় যশের উচ্চাশা?

মানব অমর হয় কি ভবে?*KarbalaKavya*, p.130.

<sup>108</sup>ধর্মবলে হয় জাতির উন্নতি/আরবে তাহার পূর্ণ পরিণতি,*Ibid* p. 129.

who used to be present in the MSS literary meets a few times in the late 1920s. If they were the same person, this exposure might have inspired him to connect his narrative to the Bengal regional political realities. While a section of the intelligentsia was validating the popular perception about *BishadSindhu* for the dissemination of Bengali Muslim consciousness, Abdul Rashid, again, was attempting to redo the negative impact of the popular and folk with a special emphasis on *BishadSindhu*. His attempt was again to secure the truth -

“বিষাদসিন্ধু ও জঙ্গনামা প্রভৃতি পুস্তক ও এই সকল পুস্তকাবলম্বনে লিখিত অন্যান্য পুস্তক, মুসলিম সমাজে মারাত্মক প্রভাব বিস্তার করিয়া আছে। সত্য ঘটনা প্রচার করিয়া তাহার প্রতিষ্ঠা করা এই জন্য দুরূহ হইয়া পড়িয়াছে”। Not only the *tarikh* repertoire in Arabic, in his reading list, the Bangla biography of Imam Hasan and Husayn by Girishchnadra Sen and contemporary Urdu books were also included. A comfortable coexistence of majorly Sanskritized Bangla and sporadic Arabic-Persian-Urdu in Abdur Rashid’s narrative to depict history neither claimed itself to be literature, nor did it target a typically middle class audience of Mir Musharraf Husain and Abdul Bari as its readership. His attempt was the attempt of history, very specific to the community following the line of *Sudhakar* with such expressions like “আসমান থেকে তকদীর লোকের ভাগ্য নিয়ন্ত্রণ করে” “খোদার নাখাস্তা আপনি শহীদ হইলে পৃথিবীর জ্যোতি অস্তর্হিত হইবে”. This shows the connection between a language which was multivalent, but not really the way Maulana Muhammad Khan or BMSP envisioned it for Bangla. Abdur Rashid, though with traditional education, was also an Inspector of the government schools and, showed another possibility of Islamic history to be articulated in between.

In this attempt at historicity, the text did not leave a single occasion without demarcating its date and became anecdotal to add affective social values. Starting from the beginning of the formation of the Shias as a community to that of the physical practice of performing

grief by them after the massacre of Karbala, nothing was kept outside of history, though uttered with a sense of reluctance and rebuke.

৬১ হিজরি সনে হজরত আলীর ভক্ত শিয়া সম্প্রদায়ে এক নতুন জোঁশ সৃষ্টি হইল। তারা কারবালার নৃশংস হত্যাকাণ্ডের প্রতিশোধ গ্রহণ করিতে চেষ্টা করিতে লাগিল।

তিনি ৫ই রবিয়স সানি শুক্রবার ৬৫ হিজরি সনে সোলায়মান নখিলা হইতে যাত্রা আরম্ভ করিলেন। তাঁহারা এমাম হোসেনের কাতলগাহ কারবালায় পহঁছিয়া একদিন একরাত্র তথায় অবস্থান করিলেন। সৈন্যগণ বুক চাপড়াইয়া, মাথার কেশ উৎপাটন করিয়া, বিলাপ করতঃ নানা প্রকারে এমাম হত্যার জন্য শরাহ বিগর্হিত ভাবে শোক করিতে লাগিলেন। এই সময় হইতেই শরা বিগর্হিত ভাবে এমাম হত্যার শোক প্রকাশ করিবার রীতি প্রবর্তিত হয়<sup>109</sup>।

Though Abdul Rashid did not really mention about his interest in seeing the Hindu reading public as a part of his readership, Mohammad Uddin Ahmad in 1912 was quite cautious about his Hindu readership and was quite articulate in declaring so. It is to be noticed here that while poetry about Karbala by the Muslim authors in popular print was centripetal in nature and autonomously directed towards the exclusive Muslim community<sup>110</sup>, prose narratives on Karbala, being caught between *Sudhakar* and mainstream Bangla literature, was exposing themselves to a more open kind of public sphere. “কি কারণে এমামদ্বয়ের নিদারুণ হত্যাকাণ্ড হয়, তৎসম্বন্ধে এ পর্যন্ত বাঙ্গলা ভাষায় সত্য ঘটনামূলক কোন পুস্তকই প্রকাশিত না হওয়ায় বাঙ্গালী মোসলমান বিশেষত আমাদের প্রতিবেশী হিন্দু ভ্রাতৃগণ তদ্বিত্ত অবগত নহেন<sup>111</sup>। Though he claimed to make his text open to Hindu and Musalman readership alike, he explained and directed in details about the salutation/*darood* (*salawat*) that had to be used for different levels of sacred characters of the prophetic community. On the other hand, Maulavi Azhar Ali, the illustrious author of many biographies, one *MauludSharif* and many scriptural instructional manuals, did not use *darood* after the sacred names as his literary career and affiliation demanded him to remain more inclusive. Abdul Wahed, in prose

---

<sup>109</sup>*Karbala*, Abdur Rashid BA BT, Mymensingh, p. 206.

<sup>110</sup>I have already discussed about the construction of a literary community as the identifiable Muslim community after the reform movements through popular print culture in previous chapters.

<sup>111</sup>Published by *Eslam-Mission*, Rangpur.

narrative in standardized Bangla on the life of Muhammad, *MoslemPratibha*, in 1902 left these marks out by apologizing to the reader and instructing him to utter *darood* after reading every sacred name while reading the book. From Abdul Khalek’s instance we need to conclude that language was only amateriality, offering a neutral meaning without the context from which it emerged. Words like “লীলা”, “পুন্যাত্মা সাধুশ্রেষ্ঠ হজরত মোহাম্মদ চক্রবাল হইতে বিনির্গত পূর্ণজ্যোতিঃ শশধর সম জগতে আবির্ভূত হইলেন” or “তাঁহার হৃদয়াস্থিত তরঙ্গায়িত ধর্মসাগরের প্রবল অভিঘাতে শত সহস্র অমৃতময়ী প্রবাহিণী চতুর্দিকে প্রবাহিত হইতে লাগিল” or “আশীর্বাদ করুন, যেন আপনার চরণ কমলে অচলা ভক্তি রাখিয়া মরিতে সমর্থ হই এবং অন্তিমে আপনার পাদপদ্মে স্থান পাই<sup>112</sup>” or in Shaikh Abdur Rahim’s *IslamItibritto* “যিনি এই শোক দুঃখ বিষাদকুলিত শ্মশানক্ষেত্রে জীবের প্রাণে শান্তি দিবার জন্য অমৃতকলস হস্তে উপস্থিত হইয়াছিলেন”(1910) did mean neither any overlap between the two systems of religious thought, nor exchange or sharing of ideas, as it was a separate identity that was being formed in tandem. Mohammad Uddin, by referring to the authentic sources criticized the ‘misconceptions’ that had been in circulation through the Karbala narratives. In his attempts of authentication, from Mir Musharraf Husain to Bhai Girishchandra Sen, nobody was spared. But in the midst of all these re-articulations of thematic concern, also the physical expression of grief was denied at necessary points.

Other than Abdul Bari Kabiratna, who was so determined to attain excellence in his poetic oeuvre, the basic concern for all the authors was to offer a template of ideals through the character of Imam Husayn - be it for making it known to the readers of the other religion or exclusively prescribed to the community. The narrative voice said,

---

<sup>112</sup>Azhar Ali, p.167.

এমামদ্বয় যেমন স্বীয় শোচনীয় পরিণাম-বার্তা অবগত হইয়াও খোদাতৌলার প্রতি নির্ভরতা, নিঃস্বার্থপরতা ও বীতস্পৃহতার পরিচয় দিয়া গিয়াছেন, প্রত্যেক মানব ও তদ্রূপ নিঃস্বার্থপরতা, ধৈর্যশীলতা, বীতস্পৃহতা, নম্রতা এবং প্রতিপালকের প্রতি সর্বনির্ভরতা শিক্ষা করুক<sup>113</sup>।

Maulavi Azhar Ali's *HazratEmam Hasan Husayner Jibani* was published in 1932 from Sulaimani Sulabh Pustakalay, Upper Chitpur Road. While the author continued the claims of historicity from the authentic *tarikh* and *Hadis* sources, his narrative continued to show ambivalence between the poetic sensibility of the popular print culture and a high standardized literature published in Bangla. Again, though it was thoroughly inspired by the history-biography writings of *Sudhakar*, the claim of *Sudhakar* for making texts open to the Hindu readers for its due exposure to Islamic history and sacred characters was not the concern for Azhar Ali. The thick references from the *Hadis* and *tarikh* at every instance fixed the text for an exclusive audience who needed these original authentic texts for their self affirmation and identity formation. The author was also categorically clear in his preface where he placed the forms of patience and sacrifice as performed by Imam Husayn as a template for the Muslim readers of both the genders. Thus Azhar Ali belonged closer to the domain of texts written in Musalmani Bangla in his need and processes of authentication.

“খোদা-প্রেমিক আদি সৈয়দ পুরুষ জনাব এমাম সাহেব মোসলেমদিগকে ইসলাম ধর্মের নিয়ম, রেজামন্দী ও খোদা-প্রেমের মাহাত্ম্য দেখাইয়া পাপিষ্ঠ শেমারের খঞ্জরে কেবল সত্যের মহিমা বজায় করিতে গলা কাটাইয়া শহীদ হইয়াছিলেন।... কাহাকেও একটা অভিশাপ পর্যন্ত করেন নাই, কেবল ধৈর্যধারণ করিয়াছিলেন। তজ্জন্য আমরা আমাদের প্রত্যেক শিক্ষিত মুসলমান নর-নারীকে হজরত এমাম হাসান হোসেনের জীবনী পাঠ করিতে অনুরোধ করি।

It is to be confirmed that while these authors like Abdur Rashid and Azhar Ali were writing in the first half of the twentieth century using standardized Bangla and were targeting a readership proficient both in that Bangla and the Perso-Arabic-Urdu registers, they, with their inclination to *tarikh* and *Hadis* to validate any situation – rational or supernatural – came close not only to *Sudhakar* in terms of historicity

---

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid*, p. 8.

but majorly to the popular print culture still being written using Musalmani Bangla<sup>114</sup>. We might conclude by saying that the use of standardized Bangla prose in the mid 1930s might not validate any standardized Bengali public sphere as its target audience and might rather consolidate a part of the Muslim public now proficient in standardized Bangla, but as a literary community overlapped with the popular print culture being articulated in rhythmic couplets. The titles of the sub sections of Azhar Ali’s poem show much poetic sensibility of the popular print from which the threads of the narrative were picked up to arrange events historiographically. In that sequential arrangement, the small teaser-like titles with their catchy preciseness “কাহার বুক জোড়া ধন”, “মুজিলাভেও ফল হইল না”, “পানী না রক্ত”, “টাটকা রক্ত”, “আকৃতির বিকৃতি”, “ঢাল পানী ঢাল পানী”, “মুখের দুর্গন্ধে তিষ্ঠান দায়” remained separate from the main text below where language was serious, epic-like and expressive with the liberal use of punctuation marks “স্বার্থ! লালসা! হিংস্রা! তোরা জগতে কি না করতে পারিস; যাহারা একবার তোদের কুহকজালে পতিত হইয়াছে, তাহারা কোন অন্যায় কার্য করিতে পশ্চাৎপদ হয় না<sup>115</sup>. Perhaps this presence of the popular consciousness made him linear with certain facts which could manage to have affective influence on the Muslim audience. Abdul Rashid hinted at the birth of Ziyad (that he was the illegitimate son of Muawiya) at the footnote to explain the deeds of Ziyad, the governor of Kufa, who under Yezid’s directions became the prime brain behind the Karbala massacre. Azhar Ali went ahead and declared that straight, “জারজ পুত্র বলিয়া অতি ধূর্ত, নির্দয় ও নবীবংশের পরম শত্রু”<sup>116</sup>।

Being parts of the community, the Muslim authors had the constant task to de-validate the Shia claim over the Prophet and his grandsons. Azhar Ali, though also the author of a biography of Imam Ali and had

---

<sup>114</sup>We have already discussed about the dynamics of the popular print in previous chapters.

<sup>115</sup>*Imam Hasan Hosayner Jibani*, p. 68.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid*, p171



given a list of the names of *IthnaAshari* Shia Imamate<sup>117</sup>, we hardly find any Shia oriented affect or belonging in him. He did not really openly propose any counter-narrative to the majority discourse and differentiated between the Shias and the descendents of the Prophetic family. So, no matter whether Azhar Ali was inclined to an Ali-centric piety or described *IthnaAshari* Imamate, his connection was not a Shia connection. Rather, his devotion was towards the *ahl-ul-bayt*<sup>118</sup> almost similar to Sayed Abul Hosain who also wrote about the battle of Karbala as a part of writing Islamic history.

Girishchandra Sen, the first biographer of Imam Hasan and Husayn<sup>119</sup> in the print culture, without having any standardized historicized template in Bangla quotation from *Qur'an*, relied heavily on Arabic-Persian sources and in turn became a source himself. Being a non-Muslim, he had a unique position vis-à-vis the interiority of the text where he took up unique points of engagement and dissociation as a narrator. How narratorial voice brought in an interstitial space between history and literature to fulfil certain aesthetic-social will be discussed in the next section.

### 6.3.3b Come Readers, let us know. এস জেনে লই, পাঠকগণ

পাঠকপাঠিকাবৃন্দ। হজরত মোহাম্মদ মস্তাফা (দরুদ) যে সাধারণ তন্ত্রের প্রতিষ্ঠা করে যান, যে সাধারণ তন্ত্র প্রতিষ্ঠিত থাকিলে আজ বিবদানলে শত শত মোসলমান রাজ্য ও সাম্রাজ্য ধ্বংস প্রাপ্ত হইত না...

Not only Mohammad Uddin Ahmad invoked his readers in the fabrication of the tale and guided them to the desired narrative destiny, all the authors of the standardized prose and poetry were involved in the making of the reader through the act of telling.

---

<sup>117</sup>They are the twelve Shia Imams down from Ali, together, who make the spiritual universe of Shia theology and piety.

<sup>118</sup> The devotion towards *ahl-ul-bayt* was made secure by demarcating it from the caliphate and both were accommodated together in the emotion of Prophet-centric piety. Already discussed in chapter II.

<sup>119</sup>Discussed in a previous chapter.

While all these efforts were going on in the field of writing biography and history, Dr. Sayed Abul Hosain had to lament that even if there were many excellent Bengali Muslim writers, they, in the greed for money, were just reiterating the paradigm that had already been set by Bankim and other Hindu poets. He even went far enough to call them the Mirzafars of the age.

As already discussed, in the debate about the claim on Bangla as the mother tongue and as the ideal medium to express the Muslim *jatiya*, the materiality of language and the inner essence were made separate to imbibe an already set Bangla in the hands of Hindu writers. This paradigm was called Bankimi for Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's enormous ability to create and standardize Bangla as a language and his notoriously strong and hegemonic ability to create Hindu nationalistic ideological value in that language. Sayed Abul Hosain was vehement and quite rebellious in stating the “তাহারা... দুষ্ট গ্রন্থকার বঙ্কিমবাবু প্রভৃতি হিন্দু কবিদিগের পতিত ভাবময় গর্হিত কল্পনার উপাসক সাজিয়া, ওই ধরনের নাটক নভেল ভিন্ন আর কিছুই লিখিতেছেন না”<sup>120</sup>।As already in a BMSS conference Sayed Emdad Ali had proposed that the materiality of language created by Bankim could be taken as the linguistic template to claim a Bengali identity by the Muslims of Bengal and the *bhab* – essence – theme can be changed from a Hindu hegemonic one to articulate Muslim *jatiya* essence. “বঙ্গভাষাকে বঙ্কিম যে ভাবে সাজাইয়াছিলেন, বোধ করি তাহাই বঙ্গভাষার আদর্শ হওয়া উচিত। উহা কাহারও বুঝিতে কষ্ট হইবে না। উহা সম্পূর্ণরূপে সংস্কৃতের প্রভাব মুক্ত নহে, আবার সংস্কৃতবহুলও নহে। উহা যে কথ্যভাষাও নহে ইহা ঠিক”<sup>121</sup>।

The Muslim public felt quite zealous in offering the history of Karbala as against the themes of pleasure that they were vehemently discarding. The song of sorrow and a sacred character who sacrificed

---

<sup>120</sup>*MoslemPataka*, Dr Sayed Abul Hosain, MD, Collin St, Calcutta, 1924,

<sup>121</sup>BMSP, 1325BS/1918, p80. Though he deliberately bypassed a critique of Bankim's theme while proposing to adapt his language, there was non-stop and recurrent critique among the Muslim public about the value that Bankim narrativized in his novels.

himself for the betterment of the *ummah*, to heal the *ummah*, was the strongest thematic alternative they could offer to the reading public. To tell that history in a language created by the Hindu literati, generic expositions also had to be imbibed in formulating a theme which they could not claim. The author had to propose a narrator/historian following Bankim's model that came into circulation as a viable mode because of Musharraf Husain's rendition of Karbala. The narrator speaking to the reader(s) made history a kind of narrative that was full of affective values, prone to creative manipulation, susceptible to the narrator's ideological orientations.

As hinted in chapter five, history writing with *Sudhakar* also could not achieve its goal without claiming a narrative status. Both Shaikh Abdur Rahim in the last two decades of nineteenth century and Shaikh Abdul Jabbar in the first two decades of twentieth century in writing history inaugurated an active narratorial voice to create an implied reader and steered the reader to follow their form of historical reason and authenticity. But for the authors of the history of Arab and the life of the Prophet, Bankim's narrative strategy, and then Musharraf Husain's, became extremely influential to attain new generic codes and values for the use of prose and poetry both. These generic ploys were the attributes of *jatiya* narrative to write *jatiya* history. The narrative on the battle of Karbala was no different, rather, a reaffirmation of such narrative voice claiming and fabricating identitarian values.

In *MedinashariferItihas*, Shaikh Abdul Jabbar broke into an anecdotal mode while describing the martial glory of Islam. He said, "মুসলমানগণের পূর্বগৌরব কাহিনী স্মৃতিপথে আরুঢ় হইলে হৃদয়ে কি এক অপূর্ব ভাবের উদয় হইয়া থাকে, তাহা ভাষায় বর্ণনা করা যায় না। হয় আজ কোথায় সেই মুসলমান, কোথায় সেই মুসলমান সাম্রাজ্য!(1907) In 1924 Qazi Akram Husain's *IslamerItihas*<sup>122</sup>, after the narrator moved forward with the poise of an analytical

---

<sup>122</sup> Qazi Akram Husain, *IslamerItihas*, Itihas Book Depot, 15 Chetlahat Road, Kalikata

objective historian exposing the necessity of writing the history of Islam for both Hindu and Muslim readership, suddenly burst into intense emotive expressions to describe the events in Karbala. The diegetic here quickly went beyond the historical reason and sounded almost like Abdul Bari's passionate poetic description of Karbala. The present tense of Akram Husain's narratorial voice got suddenly changed into present continuous and got entangled with the events and emotion shifting from the domain of hardcore history to create a passionate narrative.

কারবালা! মাতৃক্রোড়ে শিশু যাহার নাম শুনিলে কাঁপিয়া উঠে, সেই কারবালা-প্রান্তর ধূ ধূ করিতেছে; মরুভূমির তপ্তশ্বাস নিয়ত তাহার বুকের ওপর বহিয়া যাইতেছে। কোনও ত্রিলোকদ্রষ্টা মহাপুরুষ যেন কারবালার ভবিষ্যৎ জানিতে পারিয়া উহার উপর অভিসম্পাত বর্ষণ করিয়াছেন। সেই অনলে সে অনবরত জ্বলিতেছে। নিকটেই সুবিখ্যাত ইউফ্রেটিস নদী প্রবাহিত; কিন্তু সে তাহার বুকের আগুন নিবাইতে অসমর্থ। বিধাতার অলঙ্ঘনীয় নির্দেশ পালন করিবার নিমিত্ত এমনই স্থানে, কারবালার জন-মানব বৃক্ষলতাদিশূন্য বিয়াবানে মহাত্মা হোসায়েন তাঁহার ক্ষুদ্র দল ও স্ত্রী-পুত্র লইয়া শিবির সংস্থাপন করিলেন<sup>123</sup>।

The whole battle, with its articulation of nuances and sacrificial ideals through dialogues and analysis, the narrator, after the sequence of the battle, became the narrator in a novel: এই সময় হসায়েনের শিবিরের কথা স্মরণ করিলে প্রান শিহরিয়া উঠে; সেখানে কেহ বা শোকে দুঃখে হাহাকার করিতেছেন, কেহ বা নববিরহে অধীর হইয়া মূর্ছিতা হইয়াছেন, কেহ বা মৃতদেহ বৃকে করিয়া পাষণের মত নীরব হইয়া আছেন। সর্বোপরি ক্ষুদ্র ক্ষুদ্র বালক-বালিকাগণ পানি পানি বলিয়া চীৎকার করিতেছে। কিন্তু পানি কোথায়<sup>124</sup>?

A similar section from Abdul Bari:

অই ইরাকের ভয়ঙ্কর-মরু, দিগন্ত বিস্তৃত ভীষণ-স্থান!  
অগ্নিরাশি যেন জ্বলে বালুকণা, নিরখিলে হয় স্তম্ভিত প্রাণ!  
শাঁ শাঁ বহিছে তপ্ত-সমীরন, কত তীক্ষ্ণ, তীর উত্তাপ তার!  
নাহি সেথা ছায়া, নাহি পশু, পক্ষী, ধূ ধূ প্রান্তর নাহিক পার!

---

<sup>123</sup>Ibid, p. 100.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid, p. 101.

...  
এই বিশ্ব-খ্যাত ভীষণ-কারবালা অই দূরে তার ফোরাত নদী,  
বিশ্ব নর-ত্রাস, বিকট-দর্শন, সীমাহীন-মাঠ, নাহি অবধি!

...  
নাই যদি মোর মস্তিষ্ক -বিকৃতি, নয়নের ধাঁ ধাঁ, বিকার ঘোর,  
অইত শিবিরে এমাম হোসেন, ঘুচিল এখন সংশয় মোর!  
নবী মস্তাফার স্নেহের দৌহিত্র, ধর্মাঘ্না আলীর সুযোগ্যসুত,  
কেন তিনি জেথা জন্মে যাঁহার হয়েছে আরব গৌরব-পূত?  
অই যে সঙ্গীয় লোকজন তাঁর, বালক রমণী পুরুষজন  
কে ইহারা সবে, কেনইবা এথা, এস জেনে লই পাঠকগণ<sup>125</sup>!

Though Mohammad Abdur Rashid neither invoked his readers by directly addressing them, nor did he deviate from the position of a neutral narrator, he became vested and entangled as a narrator when he had to narrate the sequence where Imam Husayn was not allowed to collect water for his thirsty family and companions<sup>126</sup>. As if he became the witness of the gruesome event. ওবায়দুল্লা মানুষ না শয়তান? তাহার কি মৃত্যুর পর হজরত মোহাম্মদের শাফায়াতের প্রয়োজন হইবে না? ... উহাদের কি ধর্মাধর্ম জ্ঞান নাই? We can see the increasing use of exclamation marks and question marks to make episodes in history gain narrative affect. We can see the narrator taking up more and more narrative space by imbibing an anecdotal voice to take history closer to the narrative. When Akbar entered into the battlefield Azhar Ali broke in lyrical expressions inside the prose narrative, perhaps becoming incapable of holding the emotion of seeing Ali Akbar who resembled the Prophet<sup>127</sup>.

The writer of many *nahihatnama*, Azhar Ali, similar to his compatriots of the time Mohammad Uddin used dash, hyphen, colon, semicolon, exclamation and question marks in abundance which induced different emotions and paces into an otherwise neutral narration. Azhar Ali's narrative opened as if following the patterns of the exposition of a novel (such uses of punctuation marks had already

---

<sup>125</sup>Abdul Bari, *KarbalaKabya*, p. 3-5.

<sup>126</sup>*Karbala*, 1936, p. 122-123.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid*, p. 285

been explored by Musharraf Husain in the beginning of *BishadSindhu*). Writers like Azhar Ali, after Musharraf Husain, had to use the real configuration of time-space for narrating which had been *naat* – the praise of Muhammad – in the pre-print culture and continued in the lyrical formations in the print cultures.

তৃতীয় হিজরির অষ্টম মাসে, ভবপারের কর্ণধার হজরত মোহাম্মদ মস্তফা (সঃ), মদিনা শরিফের মসজিদ নবুয়ীর পার্শ্বে প্রধান প্রধান সহচর ও শিষ্যমণ্ডলীর মধ্যে উপবেশন করিয়া ধর্ম-সম্বন্ধে নানারূপ কথোপকথনে নিযুক্ত আছেন, এমন সময়ে...<sup>128</sup>. Azhar Ali remained anecdotal, continued to comment critically on events and always invoked the readers for justice that was not given. “সালে ইহুদী হওয়া সত্ত্বেও অষ্টাদশ দিবস পর্যন্ত আপনার অপরাধ স্বীকার করিয়া অনবরত কাঁদিয়াছিল। কিন্তু যাহারা মুসলমান হইয়া হজরত হোসেন (রাঃ) কে হত্যা করিয়া একটুও চক্ষের পানী ফেলে নাই, তাহারা কিরূপ কঠোর প্রাণ নির্দয় মুসলমান, তাহা প্রিয় পাঠক-পাঠিকার বিবেচনার উপরে নির্ভর রহিল<sup>129</sup>।

Girishchandra Sen, whose writings acted as a resource for the later generations of writers as we have already seen in this section, also could not remain dispassionate while recollecting the lives of Imam Hasan and Husayn. His narratorial voice became anecdotal, explanatory not only for a Hindu readership but also for the fact that he could not hide his unease at things that were culturally alien and morally threatening to him. He had to struggle a lot to hide his discomfort at the marriage between the cousins – between Imam Hasan’s son and Imam Husayn’s daughter. Where all the authors including Girishchandra minimized the effect of what they considered to be untrue, to posit one unilinear truth of history, Girishchandra commented that this marriage section was not clear and could not be commented on straight. Perhaps the daughter was “অতি কুৎসিত ও অস্বাভাবিক” -was what the author could think about to rationalize such a marriage, though that could not justify the marriage from the side of

---

<sup>128</sup> *Hazrat Emam Hasan O HusaynerJibani*, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>129</sup> Azhar Ali, p. 20

Kashem, the son of Hasan, who was healthy and beautiful. Once Kashem died at the battlefield, after his martyrdom/*shahadat*, Girishchandra could not but took up such a lyrical passion to articulate grief that could not be anticipated in the matter-of-fact narratorial tone of the previous sections. At this point a bridge was envisaged between Girishchandra's discursive writings and an aesthetic-poetic tradition that celebrated lack, lapse and longing in beautiful lyrical language. “হায়! নবযৌবনবনবসন্তের সমাগমমাত্র; সেই প্রমোদোদ্যানের নবতরু শমনরূপ হৈমনীল সংস্পর্শে বিশীর্ণ ও জীবনশূন্য হইল, জীবনের মাধুর্য সন্ভোগ না করিতেই সেই লোকললামরূপ অনুপম রূপলাবণ্যময়তনু কণ্টকাহত কুসুমকরকের ন্যায় কৃতান্তকরমর্দিত হইয়া বিবর্ণ হইয়া গেল<sup>130</sup>।

### 6.3.3c *Karamat, Ummah, Muharram*

These texts were not only charting out the historical events as we have already seen, in the process of authenticating the truth, these texts also generated values, emotions and social framework beyond the scope of the historical, articulated only through the ability of the subjective narrative. Scepticism towards the previous texts on the similar theme and refutation of them as untrue became a stock generic marker in the competitive and profit-oriented print market. But the writers of biography, history and literature took the generic marker out of the forces of the market to build a greater value of authenticity and discursivity. The narrator of Mohammad Uddin Ahmad's *Moharram Kanda* displayed constant scepticism towards various data and events already produced in the previous texts on Karbala. But Muhammad Uddin Ahmad did not show this scepticism as a stock generic utterance, his was a vested elaboration of argumentation, “কারবালার সেই ভীষণতম মরুপ্রান্তরে অপার বালুকারাশির মধ্যে কি প্রকারে সপ্ততি হস্ত কূপ খনন করা হইয়াছিল, তাহা আমরা বুঝিতে পারিলাম না<sup>131</sup>” Mohammad Uddin did not write a simple

---

<sup>130</sup>Girishchandra Sen, p. 159.

<sup>131</sup>*MoharramKanda*, p. 35

narrative; rather, made his text a discursive space for argument, sometimes minimizing the main text with an overpowering section of footnotes where he differed from the prevalent textual traditions, to place his own authentication of history. He also added various explanations of technical terms like *shahadat* etc to define the historical-ethical question around Karbala. He brought in the debates already emerged in the Muslim public discursive culture like why Hazrat Muhammad himself did not become a Shahid<sup>132</sup> and why was he imparted with only one prophesy, that is, the deaths of his grandsons<sup>133</sup>. The author utilized his full ability and authority as the narrator by incorporating his explanation in the footnotes. Sometimes he did not extend himself fully to the footnote section; rather, he expressed his overwhelming passion in the main text using exclamation marks after elaborating upon the meaning and interpretation like he did for *shahadat*. ধন্য হজরত ইমাম, ধন্য তোমার স্বার্থত্যাগ! এরূপ না হইলে শাহাদাতে জাহেরীই বা তোমার প্রতি বর্তিবে কেন<sup>134</sup>? But at times, he really lost hopes and got exasperated by looking at the sheer ability of the readers to consume what he thought to be illogical and irrational of the traditional and popular Karbala narratives that had already invaded the market and catered to the common readership.

In his list of the illogical and irrational, *BishadSindhu* topped and as said before, Girishchandra Sen was also rebuked for following certain Urdu books that he thought to be inauthentic.

While Mohammad Uddin was so discursively alert to clear conceptual questions and minimize affective excess, Abdul Bari remained quite reluctant towards them in the name of poetic freedom. He did not have any qualm in celebrating amour as the condition of armour. Whereas Mohammad Uddin was vehement and direct in saying, “যিনি

---

<sup>132</sup>Mohammad Uddin Ahmad, pp. 3-4

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid*, p. 7-8.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid*, p. 39.



একটা স্ত্রীলোকের সৌন্দর্যের কথা শুনিয়েই মুগ্ধ হন এবং তাকে বিবাহ করিয়া বিবদানলপ্রজ্জ্বলিত করেন, তিনি কখনই শেষ প্রেরিত মহাপুরুষের দৌহিত্র হওয়ার যোগ্য নন”<sup>135</sup>।

By poetic sensibility we mean a particular connection to the affective reason here which attempted to validate the supernatural deeds of Imam Husyan and other sacred characters, which were claimed to be validated by *Hadis* and *tariqh*. Abdur Rashid remained more prone to historical dates to arrange his narrative whereas Azhar Ali went a few steps towards popular consciousness by claiming and validating the supernatural. Like the poets of the popular print, he had no doubt about the miraculous, as he was writing the prose for the same readership of the popular print. The events of the supernatural power of the Imam brothers were referred to by taking instances from the *tariqh* and *Hadis* literature. Loads of references, coming not only from the *tariqh* and *Hadis* but also from the narrative traditions which had *RowzatulShohada* and *AnsareShahdatayen* as two major texts, fulfilled the criteria of the truth. Sequences and allegories floated in not only from *tariqh* and *Hadis*, but also from the narrative texts on the battle of Karbala to validate all the miraculous deeds of a child Husayn. There were separate sections entitled “Emam Husayner Keramat”<sup>136</sup>.

Azhar Ali was keen on keeping the supernatural as he had the supernatural as his reason. In keeping the supernatural he was not rationalizing the selected miraculous moments like the *Sudhakar* history/biography authors. Rather, he was placing his prose with a different reason that had so far been carried out in rhythmic couplets of the popular print. The narrator, unlike in the other narratives, did not take up the ultimate position to control and steer the narrative;

---

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid*, p. 30. We should not forget here that the book was produced and distributed by Islam Mission, Rangpur which was a branch of *Bangiya Islam Mission Samiti* founded in 1904. BIMS was established under the leadership of Reyazuddin Ahmad, Manirujjaman Islamabadi etc to resist the Christian Missionary zeal in the districts.

<sup>136</sup>Azhar Ali, pp. 84-85.

rather, he let the oracle speak at regular intervals to determine the course of destiny and create a community of believers. Azhar Ali, thus, was creating another domain of popular piety connecting the readers of cheap print culture with a standardized Bangla prose that had rich reference from the Perso-Arabic-Urdu sources. Azhar Ali did not miss any chance to point out while giving the details of the descendents of the member of *ahl-ul-bayt* the lineage of pir Abdul Qadir Jilani whose line of Sufi teaching Azhar Ali was inclined to. This connection, again, fulfilled his intention to connect the bigger literary network that encompassed the readers of Jilani's biography and miraculous deeds. Here the miraculous should not be posited as the anti-thesis of reason, and popular piety should not be understood in the bipolarity of the scriptural. He also had sections from the *Qur'an* both transcribed and translated in Bangla when Imam Husayn was uttering his last speech.

These Karbala narratives had to vilify Kufa not only for the reason that its governor was instrumental in military terms for the tragic defeat and martyrdom of Husayn, but also to distantiate the mainstream Islamic social from the supporters of Ali who were the residents of Kufa. So the Karbala narratives used many overt or subtle strategies to devalidate the Kufis as proper Muslims. That, in turn, devalidated the supporters of Ali – the Shias. Dr Sayed Abul Hosain, as a Sayed – that is with a lineage from Fatima - proposed a new interpretation of the question of the caliphate. While the entire lot of Sunni authors was disowning an Ali-centric piety, but keeping him as a part of the *ashab*, Dr Abul Hosain nonchalantly affirmed his claim over the caliphate and cancelled the selection of Abu Bakr as idolatrous.

Sayed Hosain was a litterateur who spent his energy for the creation of not only a thematically arranged counter-narrative to Bankim, but also claimed to have created a counter-genre by introducing

*Husaynichhanda. MoslemPataka*, which he wrote using both prose and poetry, had poetry especially to describe the battle sequences.

ভাঙ্গিলে পিঞ্জর যথা ক্ষুধার্ত শাদুল, পড়ে লক্ষ দিয়া ঘাড়ে ছাগল দলের, পড়িল হজরত আলি, সেইরূপ বীরবলে অরিদল মাঝে। হজরত আলির যুদ্ধ হেরি সর্বজন, করিলেন ‘আশ’ ‘আশ’, প্রফুল্ল বদনে আর, ‘ঐ মারিয়াছে’ বলি, করিতে লাগিল সবে অঙ্গুলি নির্দেশ<sup>137</sup>।

A staunch critique of the Hindus and the British, Dr Abul Husain’s literary career was spread over the first three decades of the twentieth century, mostly to write parodies to Bankim’s novels and the history of Islam. Dr Abul Hosain drew major attention to the MSS associate Abdul Qadir. Dr Abul Hosain, while writing a standardized text in standardized Bangla for a middle class reading public, could not escape the allure of the supernatural which either gave him poetic trigger or avenged the unjust massacre. For that he even accepted evidence from some books without the name of the author and the introduction of such elements pushed the borders of his historicity and the borders of the genre. Even when certain points were not accepted, the authors became a bit critical towards some, he insisted on having another set of evidence to be accepted as reason.

যে দিন হজরত হোসেন শহীদ হন, সে দিন সূর্যে এমন সর্বগ্রাসী গ্রহণ লাগে যে, জোহরের সময় সমুদায় জগত রাত্রিকালের ন্যায় অন্ধকার হইয়া যায়। ব্যয়তুল মোকাদ্দেসের প্রস্তর ও কাষ্ঠাদিতে রক্ত দেখা গিয়াছিল। সূর্যকিরণে রক্তের আভা এবং সমগ্র আকাশ রক্তবর্ণের মেঘে ছাইয়া গিয়াছিল। ততপূর্বে এরাকে আরবে কখনও রক্তবর্ণ মেঘ দেখা যায় নাই। রক্তের বৃষ্টিও হইয়াছিল। তিন দিন ধরিয়া মৃত্তিকা কৃষ্ণবর্ণ ধারণ করিয়াছিল। ...উপরোক্ত কথাগুলিতে সন্দেহ থাকিলেও নিচের কথাগুলি একেবারে সত্য। হজরত হোসেনের বিপক্ষে যতগুলি লোক কার্বালায় যুদ্ধে জগদান করিয়াছিল, তাঁহারা আবাসে আসিয়া সকলেই পীড়াগ্রস্ত এবং সেই যন্ত্রনায় অস্থির হইয়া প্রাণ ত্যাগ করে এবং অবশিষ্ট সকলে উন্মাদ হইয়া আত্মঘাতী হয়...<sup>138</sup>

Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan’s *siratMostafaCharit* (1925) can be categorized as a rational approach to Muhammad’s life, which was first seen in Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s *Khutabate Ahmadiya* (1870). As a counter-narrative to this rationalist approach, Shibli Numani started writing *Siratunnabi*, which was finished by his disciple Sayid

---

<sup>137</sup>*MoslemPataka*, Dr Abul Hosain, p. 73.

<sup>138</sup>*MoslemPataka*, p. 456.

Sulaiman Nadvi. In the third chapter, a counter-argument to *KhatabateAhmadiya* was posed where the miraculous with the justification of the *Hadis* was brought back. Gholam Mostafa wrote *BiswaNabi* (1942) to counter Muhammad Akam Khan's *sirat* just as *Siratunnabi* of Shibli attempted to devalidate the rationalist *KhutabateAhmadiya*. Not only did Gholam Mostafa go close to Nomani, but his biography *BiswaNabi* also became extremely popular for its poetic energy and connection with popular piety. In *MostafaCharit*, unlike all books on history and biography, neither was there any tryst with the narrative, nor any narrative voice subjectively playing with the emotion of the reader. He remained matter of fact, out-and-out-rational and objectively very close to the *Hadis* repertoire without much exclamatory marks to write in the standardized Bangla of the discursive prose writing tradition. We are talking about *MostafaCharit* in details because of the already discussed ability of the *sirat*/biography to ask the question of inheritance and resolve the spiritual and scriptural questions by arranging the narrative at the time of the Prophet's death from where the narrative turned to the battle of Karbala. Muhammad Akram Khan did not leave any scope for debate or discussion over the question of inheritance and *khilafat*. Ali was nowhere near Muhammad when the Prophet, after falling suddenly ill, instructed to let Abu Bakr preside over the community for *namaz*<sup>139</sup> in a public announcement. Also, when he died, brief references of Fatima, Abu Bakr, Ayesha and Ali were given as lamenting over the death of their dear one who was the last Prophet. But in spite of this, there was neither the exposition of the man of the *ummah* as the man of the family, neither the family with the grandsons surfaced at the time of his departure. Karbala had come to surface in Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan's discourses once: in his *Moslem Banger Samajik Itihas*, he demarcated the 'martyrdom' of Usman as the first and the biggest tragic event in the history of Muslim community superseding the affective-political impact of Karbala on Muslim

---

<sup>139</sup> *MostafaCharit*, (Dhaka: Kakali Prakashani, 2010 (1995)), p. 568.

history. The sin of this assassination was the condition for the battle of Karbala, such was Akram Khan's postulate.

Other *sirat*/biographies that tried so hard to resolve the question of *ummah* by securing the space of affect like Shaikh Abdur Rahim, in his *Hazrat Muhammader Jiban O Dharmaniti* (1887) while stabilizing *khilafat* with Abu Bakr from this Hadis statement “মসজ্জাদের মধ্যে আবু বকরের জানলা ভিন্ন আর যেন কোন জানলা খোলা না থাকে” –the author secured the position of Imam Hasan and Husyan in the heart of the Prophet. “এই সময় আবার প্রিয়তম দৌহিত্র এমাম হাসান ও হসায়নকে নিকটে ডাকিলেন এবং স্নেহ গদ গদ ভাবে আহ্বান করিয়া মস্তকে হস্তার্গপূর্বক আশীর্বাদ করিলেন। তখন গৃহস্থিত নরনারী ও বালক বালিকা সকলেই রোদন করিতে লাগিলেন<sup>140</sup>”. As the community identified itself with the crowd gathered around Hazrat's death bed, there was no problem in carrying this affective reason within and rationalize the Imam brothers' position in mainstream Muslim piety. The scriptural reason of Muhammad Akram Khan did not touch upon and embody such familiarity with the Prophetic family and Akram Khan devaluated the cause of the family within a rational discourse. By relegating it to the domain of the popular, he affirmed his kind of reason against the affect.

On the other hand, *BuddhirMukti*, though quite vested in cultivating the rational attributes of Hazrat Muhammad, relegated the elegiac tradition, as being part of the ritualistic, to the realm of the irretrievable folk consciousness.

We have already pointed out that while the textual tradition around the sacred characters were appropriated and actualized in various ways, the relevance of martyrdom, *muharram* remained the irretrievable, the inexplicable.

---

<sup>140</sup>Shaikh Abdur Rahim, *Hazrat Muhammader Jiboncharit O Dharmaniti*, p. 564

Azhar Ali too took great effort to demarcate and purge out the non-sanctioned forms of showing grief. Where Imam brothers could break into tears at their father Ali being wounded, the community had repeatedly been warned not to show any physical expression of grief. Husayn himself said, like his counterpart in the popular poetic tradition, “সম্মুখ সমরে আমার মৃত্যু হইলে তোমরা শরিয়তের সীমা লঙ্ঘন করিয়া শোকে মুহাম্মান হইও না”<sup>141</sup> and more specifically, “শোকে অধীরা হইয়া উচ্চশব্দে ক্রন্দন করিও না - শরিয়তের নিয়ম লঙ্ঘন করিয়া বক্ষে করাঘাত পূর্বক অধৈর্য হইয়া রোদন করিও না”<sup>142</sup>।

In the realm of popular piety, the pain for the Imam brothers was sanctioned as conforming to the affective reason for the family of the Prophet, but not as a counter-narrative to the *khilafat*. The Shia formulation pain and Shia identity that got consolidated and structured through the commemoration of this pain in *muharram* were relegated to the domain of the un-Islamic by the majority religious discourses. The mainstream Muslim communities in Bengal, gradually, appropriated the history of the battle as the history of the caliphate with *ahl-ul-bayt* given a sacred domain of piety.

The proliferation of biographies of the sacred characters of the prophetic family and his companions were joined by new sacred characters like Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Iqbal for the reading public with the simultaneity of the Pakistan resolution in 1940. The Pakistan ideal of the larger section of the BPML was completely different from that of Jinnah, for they developed the idea of either an independent Eastern Pakistan or some kind of Greater Bengal well before 1947. The existence of this sub-national dimension among the Bengal Muslims could be discerned within the League or the Pakistan movement. With Maulana Akram Khan gaining more power by joining the Muslim League while ML was reorganizing its provincial branches gave rise to a different kind of political ambition and atmosphere. During this period, how did people try to understand its

---

<sup>141</sup>See Sufia M Uddin, Harun ar-Rashid, p. 247.

<sup>142</sup>See Harun-ar-Rashid, p. 305.

religious orientation, political identification and solidarity? While *muharram* was being relegated to the domain of the ritual practice of a minority group within the community and texts producing the marginality as a recurrent theme, did the community, the popular and the folk, live with the name of Imam Husyan? Did modernization/*ashrafization*/identity formation give rise to new marginalities, new forms of power and hegemony within the community?

As Qazi Emanul Huq was finishing his long lyrical narrative *Dastan Shahide Karbala* in Musalmani Bangla during the 1940s, he could hear the beagles of the Second World War as he noted that down while opening up the history of the caliphate and *ahl-ul-bayt*. His community was struggling to belong to the universal fraternity of Islam, and was also striving to have a sovereign nation state identified with the Muslim national identity, while keeping the search for Bengaliness alive. This search for Muslimness of the Bengalis and Bengaliness of the Muslims was a political-cultural assertion that also came as an affective reflex of regional belongingness. I have looked at points of ambiguities, polyvalence and anxiety – in the making of the Bengali Muslim community through a reading of the battle of Karbala narratives.

## CONCLUSION

### **300 Karbalas: A return to story/history**

I began by saying that it was the pull of the story — perhaps history as story — that triggered this search. The journey went through various retellings and re-enactments since mid-nineteenth century Bengal. The history of Karbala was not simply history-in-itself, since in its retellings lay the meaning of the self and community. The story, too, was never a simple (re)telling alone. By (re)enacting the grief inside the story, for the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the people of Husayn got their identity, and the meaning of their collective selves. But, we have already noticed that at a point in history, physical expressions of grief and pain associated with the battle and martyrdom were denied admission to the ideal Muslim world.

While the physicality and the performative aspects of grief were denied entry, the story/history was taken up as a source of the ideal moment of Islamic history and Imam Husayn, as the grandson of the Prophet, was offered as an ideal template for individual Muslims to follow. I wanted to look at the literary network that adapted, appropriated and assimilated the story/history to build up a nuanced scope for modernity and identity. Karbala as a theme produced a very complex literary network in itself, but could not be held within one paradigm of literary transaction in a diachronic framework of study. The dynamic process of excavating history from the story of Karbala, thus, had various sources of production and patterns of consumption that created various consenting and quarrelling literary communities within the Muslim society. These literary communities were the arena of identity formation for Bengali Muslims which I have studied in detail without proposing any evolutionary framework or placing synchronicity as adequate. My study, thus, went beyond the diachronic reading of a fixed particular group of consumers and explored within the Bengal Muslim public sphere various groups, across time and space, infused with various ideological values to take part in creating literary



networks in/as the process of identity formation. In this process, in the dynamic movement within Karbala as a literary network, the binary opposition between the rural and urban, elite and popular, religious and secular, belief and history, mythology and scripture, collapsed to produce the multivalent attributes of the Muslim people.

It was a journey in itself, seeing how many renditions of the battle of Karbala in mid-nineteenth century set out on a journey to find an ideal one and in these processes again splintered into many more. I wanted keep in mind the concept of Arabic cosmopolis that Ronit Ricci had explored in conceptualizing the connection between literary network and the phenomenon of conversion. Though I have not tried to engage with the issue of conversion as such and also with texts from the medieval and early modern, my study of the new literary productions and identity formation since mid-nineteenth century Bengal did invite a study from the perspective of the Arabic cosmopolis. This study of the identity formation certainly demanded a simultaneous study of the medieval and the early modern to check how Arabic cosmopolis developed in the literary networks in the pre-print culture and continued rigorously through print. But by deviating little, I moved on to my period when a stronger bent towards Arabic scriptural Islam could be discerned in the identity of Muslims all over South Asia.

The beginning of education system through the madrasas in the early modern Bengal, translation of *sirat*, *sawal* literature and *shariyatnama*, the introduction of Arabic scripts to write Bangla manuscripts show us a well-laid network of Arabic cosmopolis in the early modern period. But we should not leave out the practice and impact of the storytelling traditions that stemmed from a Persianate literary network through massive translation and transcreations of Persian literary works into Bangla. Here also, the tradition of the story – *kissa* or *nameh* – showed another layer of the literary network and the journey of theme, genre and values. If we talk about translation and conversion, Persian held no less value than Arabic, *kissa* was as instrumental in the processes of

conversion through its telling as was Arabic *sawal* literature or *Kifaetul Musallin* in Bangla translations. The Arabic cosmopolis was never unilinear in Bengal where the study of literary network demands inauguration of different linguistic aesthetic transactions. Since the mid-nineteenth century both Persian and Urdu came to define Arabic cosmopolis. When Bangla as a language was claimed by the Muslim public sphere in Bengal since the last decade of nineteenth century, the language was posited within a multilingual network making any ‘search’ or ‘identification’ anything but unilinear.

Amid interlocking strands of reality, I tried to understand the processes of purification of a localized ritualized Islam by reformers since mid-nineteenth century. I have found that in between the staunch reformers with scriptural zeal and traditional mullahs arose several layers of religiosity, piety and devotionism. How print became the marker and carrier of such a multitude and produced such a multitude by bringing the possibility of a newly formulated sacred to the market and created various groups and their intersections, was what I discussed to understand how no boundaries could be sealed between different groups horizontally or vertically placed within the Muslim community.

For this discussion, I did not maintain an evolutionary framework, rather devised my thesis in a somewhat thematic order. Of course I had to go along the axis of time to finally reach the 1930s and 1940s as the culmination of previous literary discourses, and discuss the issue of *jatiya sahitya* and literariness of literature to engage with the emergence of a language of separatism as identity, but I neither intended to write a causal history nor did I want to break my findings into episodes. Rather, I tried to bring in the polemic produced at a singular time zone to show multiple temporalities. In this maze of different authorial inclinations, sectarian ideas and many perspectives on language and literature, I held some dates crucial to locate events. The dates, simultaneously, showed the impossibility of creating a linear progressive narrative towards modernity and identity formation of the Bengali Muslim

community, and indeed, the impossibility to define the Bengaliness of the Muslims and the Muslimness of Bengalis.

So, while noting the idea of emancipation of intellect that emerged in Dacca and Calcutta through MSS and *Saogat*, I also had to bear in mind the activities of Hanafi and Ahl-e-Hadis *anjumans*, madrasas and preachers in the districts with their inter-sectarian debates throughout the 1930s and the 1940s. For me, it was important to notice that Muslim League, which did not have much rural base in Bengal, gradually became a prominent force since the start of the 1940s. There must have been some prequel building up. Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan's political career — shifting from INC to join NBPS and then leaving NBPS to join Muslim League — can be read as a symptomatic journey of the Bengali religious intelligentsia to become a part of Pakistanism in the 1940s.

Of course an individual life cannot be the marker of the change in political orientation of a community and this thesis brought in several individual actors and platforms in action, in consent or in coercion with each other for the greater cause of identifying ideal Muslims. Through this, we can demarcate an argumentative community, an internally fractured public sphere struggling to form a hegemonic version of identity to arrive at the moment of the modern.

The purpose of my thesis was not to write a political history of how the Bengali Muslim public sphere was configured with the impact of the reform movement since the 1830s and after going through various processes strove for a separate nation in the 1940s. My thesis wanted to follow the changing structures of feeling around the martyrdom of the grandsons of the Prophet in the Karbala repertoire to understand how the language of piety with the market forces of print culture got a new orientation of the political and with that how piety and the political coexisted even if there were organized efforts from secular radicals and the religious intelligentsia to separate them. Secular radicals wanted people free of any religious mooring by emptying out relics and religious symbols in a

linguistic cultural space without essentialist identity for any religious community and with open space for the individual. The religious intelligentsia of the 1930s especially under the leadership of Muhammad Akram Khan and Manirujjaman Islamabadi wanted to structure the forms of piety close to their illustrious predecessor *Sudhakar* to organize a scriptural Islam in Bangla. But a study of the Karbala narrative showed there were different forms of religiosity, piety and the political which might not be understood from the *Sikha-Mohammadi* binary. I have argued in my thesis that all these forms of imagination and historicization of Karbala exposed many kinds of connection between discourses, ideologies, inclinations around religiosity, language, literature and the identity of the Muslim community in Bengal.

What became most apparent and almost all engrossing in all aspects the Muslim people in this period was the constant unease about the physicality of ritual. While interrogating this and finding out the inevitability of structured prohibition placed against the ritual of showing grief, I have shown it was not easy for this community with multifarious inclinations to completely arrive at the moment of non-physical, leaving the dimension of the physical out. I have shown that the domain of popular piety via the print culture, spread across several cross sections of the social in various forms, attested this multiple connection with the physical. I have also marked that while some of the physicality-based rituals were appropriated by the sections of religious intelligentsia, the physicality of grief in the commemoration of Muharram could not be accommodated in the new narrative of religiosity. Among *milad*, *urs* and *Muharram* — three rituals which started to be marked and attacked by religious authorities with reformist sensibility as the domain of *shirk* and *bida't* — the last one remained too inappropriate to become a Muslim ritual which the first two could. Islamic reform also changed a *pir*-centric piety of the early modern and emphasized on scriptural Sufism. Pir Abu Bakr of Furfura stood for this scriptural Sufism and a refashioned *pir*-centric piety which reformulated and validated *urs* in the ritualistic calendar of

reformed Islam. A re-emergence of *sawal* literature connected to the urs in the 1920s was instrumental in authenticating the position of the *pirs* in the scriptural tradition of Islam. Also, a redefined *maulud* literature was attempted throughout this period to make the demarcation between the ritualistic celebration of the birth of the Prophet and more scripturally sanctioned ways of doing it. But, as said earlier, no effort of writing a reformulated *maulud sharif* or *sawal* literature could fully escape the thrust of the miraculous showing much cleavage within what the religious authority wanted to propose as rational and reformed. In whatever means, a reformed literature of Muharram could not be found. While writing about the life of the Prophet and his progeny, and while narrating the Karbala as a part of the Prophetic history, the commemoration of grief was fully relegated to the realm of the non-retrievable, without any capacity to be recast or reformed.

As we have already seen, the efforts of writing history and biography as two facets of the project of rationalism also bore the marks of such cleavage when even the religious intelligentsia of *Sudhakar* could not fully do away with the supernatural and the miraculous rather brought in *Hadis* texts to validate them in their writing of history of Islam and the biography of the Islamic sacred figures.

If pan-Islamism was the moment that officially connected the Muslims of Bengal to a supra-territorial consciousness of identification in late nineteenth century, the *Khilafat* movement got them to express themselves through the realisation of the national at the start of the twentieth century. The connection between religious intelligentsia and the *Khilafat* movement showed different aspirations within the regional Muslim community, some fraught with political orientation and some with the religious. From my study, it appears that, perhaps, for Bengal Muslims it was difficult to arrive at the moment of ‘pure political’ leaving religion as the attribute of the past. Perhaps without the realignment of religion, political claims over identity could never be achieved. Thus my study of the Karbala became a vantage point to study the ‘quest for

identity' of the Bengal Muslim community in its tripartite orientation between the pan, national and the regional. The engagement with Karbala – the martyrdom Imam Husayn - offered enough material and cues to engage with the transforming contours of the Bengal Muslim community's search for an identity and trials with modernity.

With the proliferation of cheap print culture, the newfound community awareness of the ideal modes of behaviour was spread to the masses across rural areas. Popular print continued to cater to people with the scriptural injunctions through *adab* literature and with narrative skill, relate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. Both *farz* and martyrdom played a vital role in defining the sense of the community and its loyalty towards the caliphate. An imagined community was being formed within the reading public, the consumer of the popular print culture (I have shown that popular print was not always cheap) through their engagement in the public discourses embodied at the arena of *bahas* and also at the arena of reformed rituals of the *urs* and *milad*.

In the public discourse since the 1920s, gradually, we saw the emergence of the categories like '*krishak*' and '*arthanoitik sangkat*', sometimes autonomous and sometimes overlapping with religious duties. This can be marked as simultaneous growth with a new turn in regional politics with the development of NBPS/KPP and its interest in peasantry and economic development. We should remember here that while NBPP and KPP did not carry the communal marker in their names and were open to people from any stratum of society, their understanding of the peasant population was always Muslim and the notion of economic and social oppression was articulated as a class struggle between Hindu landlords and their Muslim *ryots*.

In defining this public consumption and identification, the question of language became a vital issue as on the question of language, the identity of the Bengali Muslims aspired to connect to its national counterpart or assert its regional

separate identity. Like identity multiplies on the basis of territory, linguistic identification also produced a highly fractured sense of Bengali Muslimness as the community chose to articulate in Bangla by claiming Bangla as its mother tongue. From my thesis it came up that this choice of Bangla demands special merit, as it would inaugurate another chapter of history by claiming a nation state beyond the scope of static religious identity and providing identification via choice of language since the 1950s. But the history and context of Bangla became a vital issue of debate since the 1920s to the 1940s.

The battle of Karbala, as a real historical event, became an iconic moment to induce pain in the community as a result of internal mistrust. As the Hanafi section of the Muslim community followed the caliphate which Yezid was a part of, the Hanafi sect not only had to minimize the damage caused by Yezid but also tried very hard to erase those against the caliphate, the Shia imamate. Modernity and religious reform within the Muslim community shaped forms of religiosity and piety that emanated in the context of the battle of Karbala. In this thesis, ideological tension and affective strife between the caliphate and the imamate has been followed by exploring discursive and literary attempts since the mid-nineteenth century. In these attempts, the demarcation of the other-within became the most important factor to legitimize the caliphate and minimize the claim of the other, the Shias. The reformist attempt in the beginning of the nineteenth century also emanated from the anxiety of the non-Islamic within, now understood as the accumulation and accretion of elements after living in close proximity with the polytheism of host cultures. In this thesis, I have attempted to show the quest for an identity began in finding out and expunging the other-within, Hindus as the outsider-other was a more gradual coming. We have also shown that the identity politics, spoken through the changing configuration of piety, politics and language-culture always had this simultaneous war with the other-within and without.

In such multivalence of identity formation, the folkloric was also discovered as the core of the Bengali Muslim self. But we have noticed that though

Jasimuddin worked rigorously on the *jari* throughout the 1960s<sup>1</sup> — the folk song repertoire based on the battle of Karbala — it could not be retrieved as the folk consciousness as being a part of the religious-ritualistic in the 1940s. Rather some other histories started to be told and retold, some other lives started to be written. New martyrs were sought to connect to a supra-national contemporary caliphate. Husayn remained there to cater to the popular consciousness – to offer the notion of *behesht*, feminine virtue, sacrificial ideal of the Muslim and loyalty to the caliphate wherever its centre was laid after the fall of Turkey.

In this context perhaps, the history/story of Muharram could not be retrieved. The history of the caliphate and the story of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn as the epic song of Bangladesh, antagonistic to or resonating with each other, would remain as another reckoning. The death of Imam Husayn that Sunnis observe and the martyrdom of Imam Husayn that the Shias mourn over would remain an unresolved script.

Perhaps, this end is the beginning of another journey. For the story/history of Muharram.

---

<sup>1</sup> The book titled *Jarigaan* was published in 1968.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### A. PRIMARY SOURCES:

#### **Bangla Puthis and Tracts**

- Abdil Husain, Maulavi, *Musalman Sahityo Shiksha*, Decca, 1929-30.
- Abdil Ra'uf , Saiyid, *Hazrat Umar*, Kalikata, 1927.
- Abdul Ghafur, *Rajbhakti O Kirtilahari*, Srihatta 1919.
- Abdul Hai Bhowali, A F M, *Adarsha Krishak*, Mymensingh, 1328 BS, 1922.
- Abdul Hamid Shah, *Shason Samaskar Gramyo Musalman*, Mymensingh, 1328BS
- Abdul Hasan Muhammad Abbas Al, *Masail-i-Zaruria*, 1917.
- Abdul Hashim Khan, *Shikshakhetre Bagnio Musalmandiger Durbyabastha*, Chittagong, 1930.
- Abdul Husain, Saiyid M.A., *Moslem Pataka ba Hazrat Muhammad er Jiboni*, Kalikata 1908.
- Durgeshnandini Ba Trijarja*, 1922.
- Anandamath Ba Nader Fandi*, Kalikata 1922.
- Bankim Samalochona*, Kalikata 1922.
- Abdul Jabbar, Shaikh, *Madina-Sharifer Itihash*, Mymensingh 1314BS.
- Abdul Jalil, *Prabhu Parichay*(3e), Barkal Chittagong, 1341BS.
- Abdul Kadir ibn Musa, *Baropir Sahib Jibanchorit*, 1899.
- Abdul Kadir of Sudampara, *Baropir Gunabali*.
- Abdul Mansur, *Hindu Dharmo Rahasya O Debleela*, Kalikata 1315BS.
- Abdul Muhammad Ismail Husain, Shiraji, *Adabkayda Shiksha*, 1926.
- Abdul Rahim Shah, *Atharbba Muhammadi Ved*, Kalikata 1298BS.
- Abdul Rashid Khan , Haqi, *Haj Jatrir Rojnamcha*, Kalikata 1930.
- Abdul Ra'uf Khan Hath, *Inqilab-i-Turki*, Agra 1910.
- Abdul Samad, *Fikire Fakir*, Mymensingh, 1924.
- Abdul Samad, *Krishak Boka*, Mymansingh, 1921.
- Abdul Qadir, *Muslim Kirti*, Kalikata 1931.
- Spainer Itihas*, 1932.

Abdur Rahim, Shaikh, *Hazrat Muhammader Jiban O Dharmaniti*, College Street, 1887.

*Eslam Tattwa*, Baithakkhana Bazar Street, 1889.

*Islam Itibritta*, vol I, Kalikata, 1910.

*Islam Itibritta*, vol II, Kalikata, 1911.

Abdur Rahman, *Nabya Turasker Janmadata Kemal Ataturk*, 24 Parganas, 1939.

Abed Ali Mian, *Palli Raksha*, Rangpur, 1925.

Abu Ali M Najiruddin, *Upadesh Mala ba Jnaner Jhola*, Saheb Bajar, Rajshahi, 1935.

Ahmad Ali Inayatpuri, *Shariyer Chabuk*, 1925.

Ahmad Taheruddin, Munshi, *Krishaker Dukkha O Tar Pratikar*, Sirajganj, Pabna, 1928.

Akram Husain, *Islam Er Itihas*, 1931.

Akram Husain, Qazi, M A, *Islamer Itihas*, 1924.

*Afgan- Aamir- Charit*

Anis Al Rahman, *Raddi Tajif*, Kalikata 1930.

Beharilal Sarkar, *Titumir ba Narkelberiar Lorhai*, Kalikata, 1897.

Dost Muhammad, *Khaibarar Jungnama*, 1889.

Fakir al-Din , *Emamchurir Pnuthi*, Kalikata 1287.

Fazl al Karim, Shaikh, *Afghanistan er Itihas*, Decca 1927.

Garib Shayer (Muhammad Reyazuddin Ahmad), *Krishak-Bandhu*, Garib, Kareya Road, 1910.

Ghulam Ahmad, Maulavi, *Moslem Jatir Itihas*, Burdhaman 1338BS.

Girishchandra Sen, *Quran Sharif*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, Kalikata 1829.

*Darbeshdiger Kriya*, Kalikata 1878.

*Mahapurush Muhammader Jiban Charit*, Vol I, II and III, 72, Upper Circular Road, Kalikata in 1886, 1887 and 1887

*Imam Hasan and Imam Husyan*, Kalikata, 1901.

Gopendralal Ray, *Nabyaturki O Mustafa Kamal Pasha*, Kalikata 1923.

Ibrahim Khan, *Anwar Pasha*,

*Kamal Pasha Natok*, 1308

Ihsan Allah , Khan Bahadur, *Ichlamer Itibritto*, 1934.

Jan Muhammad , *Hazar Mas'alah*, 1879.

Krishnakumar Mitra, *Muhammadcharit*, 1886.

Maulana Moyezaddin Hamidi, *Krishker Unnati O Dukkha Durdashar Pratikar*, Khulna, 1930.

Muhammad Abdul Aziz, *Bedayat Dhangsho*, Comilla , 1931.

Muhammad Asiruddin Pradhan, *Meherullar Jibani*, Jalpaiguri, 1909.

Muhammad Faizal Din, *Ahakamochalat*, Dacca 1286BS.

Muzammil Haq, *Hazrat Muhammad*, 1916.

Muhammad Habibullah, *Aamir Ali*, Kalikata 1934.

Mainuddin Husayn, B.A., *Ghazi Mostafa Kemal Pasha*, Kalikata, 1924.

Muhammad Hamid Ali, *Kasem Badh Kabyo*, Decca, 1320BS.

Muhammad Hasan Ali, *Afghan-Maratha*, Decca, 1932-33BS

Muhammad Inaqatallah, *Ashraf O Atraf Samasya*, 1929.

Muhammad K Chand, *Moslem Sabhyatar Itihas*, 1917.

Muhammad Mubarak Ali, *Kemal Ataturk*, B. A., Nur Library , Kalikata, 1941.

Muhammad Ruhul Amin, *Burhanal Mukalladin*, Kalikata 1321BS.

*Grame-Juma*, 24 Pargana, 1924.

Muhammad Zafar Ali, *Krishi Sahay*, Mymensingh, 1334 BS/1927.

Naimuddin, Munshi, *Dhoka Bhanjan*, Karatiya, 1889.

*Jobdatol Masael*, Karatiya, 1891.

Nawab Al-Din Ahmad, *Mahatma Hazrat Imam Abu Hanifa Saheb er Jibancharit*, Kalikata, 1305.

Nurunnisa Khatun, *Moslem Bikram O Bangalay Moslem Rajatwa*, Kalikata, 1927.

Riyaz Al-Din Ahmad , *Fakiri Dhoka Radde Fatwa*, Kalikata 1926-27.

Samiruddin, Munshi, *Bedarel Gafelin*, Kalikata 1286BS.

Sharafat Ali, *Hazrat Muhammader Bistrilo Jibani O Dharmapodesh*, 1910.

Tamizur Rahman, Maulavi, *Ghazi Kemal Pasha*, Chittagong, 1922.

Wajid Ali, Sayyis, *Bangiyo Musalman Sahityo Samiti Pancham Barshik Adhibeshan Sabhaoatir Abhibhashan*, 1926.

Yakub Ali, Munshi, *Jungnamar Punthi*, Kalikata 1283.

### **Newspaper and Periodicals**

Ahle Hadis

Al-Islam

Anisuzzaman (ed.), *Muslim Banger Samayik Patra: 1831-1930*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1969.

Azad

Bangabasi

Eslam Pracharak

Islam Darshan

Nabyabharat

Nabanur

Mohommadi

Saogat

Sikha

#### **A. Secondary Source:**

Abbas, Zahir, *Construction of Bengal Muslim identity in Colonial Bengal, C 1870-1920*, Bibliobazar, 2011.

Ahmad, Ali, *Bangla Muslim Granthapanji*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985.

Ahmad, Aziz, "Political and Religious Ideas of Shah Wali-Ullah of Delhi", in *Muslim World* 52 (1962): 22-30

*Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857-1964*, London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

*Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

"Islamic Reform Movements", in A. L. Basham, ed. *A Cultural History of India*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, pp.383-390.

Ahmad, Imtiyaz, ed. *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims in India*, Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1973.

*Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*, Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1976.

*Ritual and Religion among the Muslims in India*, Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1981.

Ahmad Imtiyaz and Helmut Reifeld, ed., *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation, Conflict*, Delhi: Social Science Press, 2004.

Ahmad, Qeyamuddin, *The Wahhabi Movement in India*, Calcutta: 1966.

Ahmed, Rafiuddin, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1905: A Quest for Identity*, Delhi: Oxford University press, 1981.

Ed., *Understanding the Bengal Muslims: Interpretive Essay* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Ahmed, Sufia, *The Muslim Community in Bengal, 1884-1912*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994.

Ahmed Khan, Muin ud-din, *History of the Fara'idi Movement in Bengal (1818-1906)*, Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1965.

Ahsan, Sayed Ali, *Essays on Bengali Literature*, Karachi: University of Karachi, 1960.

Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New York: Verso, 1991.

Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas O Bangla Sahitya*, Dacca: Muktaadhara, 1969.

Appadurai, Arjun, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Asad, Talal, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, Washington D.C.: Georgetown University, 1986.

*Formation of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Balijon, J. M. S., *The Reform and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, Leiden: Brill, 1948.

Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar, ed., *Bengal: Rethinking History: Essays in Historiography*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2001.

Bandyopadhyay, Suchetana, *An Early Communist: Muzaffar Ahmed in Calcutta, 1913-1929*, New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2010.

Bayly, C.A. *The Origins of Nationality in Modern South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Becker, A. L., *Beyond Translation: Essays Towards a Modern Philology*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.

Bhadra, Gautam, *Iman o Nishan: Unish Shatake Banglar Krishak Choitanyer Ek Adhyay*, Kolkata: Subarnarekha, 1994.

- *Nyarha Battalay Jaye Kawbar*, Kolkata: Chhatim, 2011.

Blackburn, Stuart and Vasudha Dalmia, eds., *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.

Blackburn, Stuart, *Print, Folklore and Tamil Nationalism in Colonial South Asia*, Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2006.

Bogra, Baharuddin, *The Bengal Mussalmans*, Calcutta, 1885.

Bray, Julia, ed., *Writing and Representation in Medieval Islam: Muslim Horizons*, London & New York: Routledge, 2006.

Breckenridge, Carol A and Peter van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

Burke, Peter, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Ashgate, 1988.

Chartier, Roger, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, tr. Lydia G. Cochrane, Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.

Chatterjee, Joya, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Chatterjee, Partha, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, London: Zed, 1986.

*The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and the Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Chatterjee, Srila, *Congress Politics in Bengal, 1919-1939*, London: Anthem Press, 2002.

Chaudhury, Syed Nawab Ali, *Vernacular Education in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1900.

Cole, J R I, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Das, Suranjan, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Datta, Pradip Kumar, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth-Century Bengal*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.

De, Amalendu, "Fazlul Huq and His Reaction to the Two-Nation Theory", *Bengal Past and Present* 72,175 (1974).

*Roots of Separatism in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Kolkata: Ratna Prakashan, 1974.

De, Sushil Kumar, *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century (1757-1857)*, Calcutta: Calcutta Oriental Press, 1962.

- Despande, Prachi, *Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700-1960*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Dey, Amit, *The Image of the Prophet in Bengali Muslim Piety 1850-1947*, Kolkata: Primus Books, 2006.
- Eaton, Richard, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Fazl, Abul , *Rekhachitra*, Dhaka: Boighar (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), 1985.
- Fazl, Sayyid Abul, *On the Muhammadans of India*, Calcutta, 1962.
- Gellner, Ernest, *Nation and Nationalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- Ghosh, Anindita, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Gilmartin, David and Bruce B. Lawrence, eds., *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000.
- Gottschalk, Peter, *Beyond Hindu and Muslim: Multiple Identity in Narratives from Village India*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Gu, Sharron, *A Cultural History of Arabic Language*, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2014.
- Gupta, Abhijit and Swapan Chakraborty, ed., *Print Areas: Book History in India*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.
- Gupta, Charu, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslim and the Hindu Public in Colonial India*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.
- Hall, David D., *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1996.
- Hansen, Kathryn, *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India*, Berkley/Los Angeles/Oxford: University of California Press, 1992.
- Harris, Tim, "The Problem of 'popular political culture' in seventeenth century London", *History of European Ideas*, 10 (1989) pp43-58.
- Haq, Muhammad Enamul, *Muhammad Enamul Haq Rahanabali*, vol iv, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1995.
- Muslim Bengali Literature*, Karachi: Pakistan Publications, 1957.

- Hardy, Peter, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.
- Hunter, W. W., *The Indian Mussalmans*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, London, 1872.
- Islam, Mazharul, *Kabi Heyat Mamud*, Rajshahi: Rajshahi Biswabidyalay, 1961.
- Islam, Mustafa Nurul, ed., *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press, 1901-1930*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1973.
- Jafar, Abu, ed., *Maulana Akram Khan*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, 1982.
- Jalal, Ayesha, "Nation, Region and Religion: Punjab's Role in the Partition of India", *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, 32 (August 8-14, 1998): 2183-90.
- Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*, New York: Rutledge, 2000.
- Johns, Adrian, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Kabir, Muhammad Ghulam, *Changing Face of Nationbalism: The Case of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: University Press, 1995.
- Karim, Abdul, *A Social History of the Muslims of Bengal, down to A.D. 1538*, Dacca: The Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1959.
- Karim, Munshi Abdul and Ahmad Sharif, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Bengali Manuscripts in Munshi Abdul Karim's Collection*, Dacca: The Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1964.
- Khan, Shamsuddin, *Deshar Bartaman Samasyay Amar Katha*, (On the limitation of Bengal tenancy act and a proposal for revision), Dacca: Bhawal, 1343 BS/1937.
- Khan, Akbar Ali, *Discovery of Bangladesh: Explorations into the Dynamics of a Hidden Nation*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1996.
- Khan, Zillur R., "Islam and Bengali Nationalism", in *Asian Survey* 25:8 (August 1985) pp.834-851.
- Kelly, Robert J and Jess Magham, eds., *Hate Crime: The Global Politics of Polarization*, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University, 1998.
- Kopf, David, ed., *Bengal Regional Identity*, East Lansing, MI: Asian Studie4s Centre, 1969.



- The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- Lahiri, P.K., *Bengali Muslim Thought, 1818-1947: Liberal and Rational Trends*, Kolkata: K.P. Bagchi, 1991.
- Long, James, *Returns Relating to Publications in the Bengali Language, in 1857*, Calcutta: General Printing Department, 1859
- Mannan, Q. A., *Adhunik Bangla Sahitye Muslim Sadhana*, Rajshahi, 1961.
- The Emergence and Development of Dobhasi Literature in Bengal*, Dacca: Dacca University, 1966.
- Martin, Richard C., ed., *Islam in Local Contexts*, Leiden: The Netherlands, Brill, 1982.
- Mian, Shahjahan, *Madhyajuger Kabi Hamid Pranita SangramHusayn*, Dhaka: Jyoti Prakashan, 2002.
- Mitra, Subrata K, Mike Enskat and Lemens Spieß, eds., *Political Parties of South Asia*, Westminster, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 2004.
- Maitra, Jayanti, *Muslim Politics in Bengal: 1855-1906*, Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi, 1984.
- Metcalf, Barbara Dally, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- Minault, Gail, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Mir, Fairina, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- Murshid, Gholam, *Kalantare Bangla Gadya*, Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1992.
- Murshid, Tazeen, *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengali Muslim Discourse, 1871-1977*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Orsini, Francesca, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- ed., *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*, Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010.
- Pearson, Harlan O., *Islamic Reform and Revival in Nineteenth-century India: The Tariqa-i Muhammadiyah*, Delhi: Yoda Press, 2008.

Pollock, Sheldon, ed., *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2003.

Pollock, Sheldon, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, Berkeley and Los Angeles University of California Press, 2006.

Pritchett, Frances, *Marvelous Encounters: Qissa Literature in Urdu and Hindi*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981.

Qureshi, Ishtiaq. Husain., *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent 610-1947*, The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1962.

Rahman, A.T.M, Atiqur, *Banglar rajnitite Maulana Akram Khan*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1995.

Rashid, Harun ur, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengali Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906-1947*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1987.

Reay, Barry, *Popular Cultures in England: 1550-1750*, London: Longman, 1998.

Robinson, Francis, *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims 1860-1923*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

“Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Image of Print”, in *Modern Asian Studies*, 27:1 (1993): 229-251

*Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Roy Asim, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, Princeton: Princeton University press. 1981.

*Islam in South Asia: A Regional perspective*, New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1996.

Ruabbee, Khondkar Fuzli, *The Origin of the Musalmans of Bengal*, Dacca: Society for Pakistan Studies, (1895; 2d ed.) 1970.

Ricci, Ronit, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011.

Said-ur-Rahman, *Purba banglar Rajniti-Sanskriti o Kabita*, 1983.

- Sanyal, Usha, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and His Movement, 1870-1920*, Bombay/Calcutta/Madras: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Sarkar , Chandiprasad, *The Bengal Muslims: A Study in Their Politicization: 1912-1929*, Kolkata: K P Bagchi, 1991.
- Schimmel, Annemarie, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent*, Leiden: The Netherlands: Brill, 1980.
- Shah, Muhammad, *In Search of an Identity: Bengali Muslims, 1880-1940*, Kolkata: K.P.Bagchi, 1996.
- Shahidullah , Muhammad, *Bangla Sahityer Katha*, Vol ii,
- Shaikh, Farzana, ‘Muslims and Political Representation in Colonial India: The Making of Pakistan’. In *Modern Asian Studies* 20 (1986): 539-57.
- Sharif , Ahmad, *Bangali O Bangla Sahitya*, vol II, Dhaka: Barnamichhil, 1971  
*Puthi Parichiti*, Dhaka: Dhaka Biswabidyalaya Bangla Bibhag, 1958.
- Sen, Shila, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, New Delhi: Impex, 1977.
- Sen, Sukumar, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*, Vol 4, Kolkata: Isthm Publishers, 1965.  
*Islami Bangla Sahitya*, Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1993.
- Shums, Nasreen, *Nirbachita Bulbul*, Dhaka: Bulbul Publishing House, 2005.
- Siddiqi, Abdul Gaffar, ‘Jungnama’, *Sahitya Parishat Patrika*, 2 (1324BS)
- Siddiqi, Dr Rezwan, *Purba Banglar Sanskritik Sanghathan O Sanskritik Andolon*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1996.
- Stewart, Tony, “In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory”, *History of Religions*, 40 (2001): 261-288.
- Tarafdar, Mumtazur Rahman, *Husain Shahi Bengal, 1494-1538AD: A Socio-Political Study*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1965.
- Thorp, John p., “The Muslim Farmers of Bangaldesha nd Allah’s Creation of the World,” in *Asian Folklore Studies*, 41 (1982): 201-215.
- Troll, Christian W., *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1978.
- Uddin, Sufia M. *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity and Language in an Islamic Nation*. New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 2006.