Bengali Muslims and Linguistic Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century

Dissertation submitted in Partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of

Philosophy in Arts, Jadavpur University

By

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2019

Certified that the thesis entitled **Bengali Muslims and Linguistic Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century** submitted by me towards the partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Philosophy (arts) in Department of History of Jadavpur University, is based upon my own original work and there is no plagiarism. This is also to certify that the work has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree/diploma of the same institution where the work is carried out, or to any other institution. A paper out of this dissertation has also been presented by me at a seminar/conference at the Department of History, Jadavpur University, thereby fulfilling the criteria for submission, as per the M.Phil Regulation (2017) of Jadavpur University.

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On the basis of academic merit and satisfying all the criteria as declared above, the dissertation work of Deborshi Chakraborty entitled **Bengali Muslims and Linguistic Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century**, is now ready for submission towards the partial fulfillment of the Degree of Master of Philosophy (Arts) in Department of History of Jadavpur University.

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Content

Introduction

In his novel *Do Gaz Jameen*, Abdus Samad narrated a story of an aristocrat family which originally belonged to Bihar province of British India. The story was about the agony the family went through because of partition.[1] At the end of the novel in 1972, three branches of this family ended up in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The central question that haunts the readers throughout the novel is- where is the homeland of Muslims? What is their nation? Amongst all the Muslim communities in South Asia perhaps the Bengali Muslims had to search for the answers of these questions for the longest time and through the deaths of millions of their fellow community members. Bengali Muslims had vigorously participated in Pakistan movement in the 1940s, had witnessed a partition in 1947 and became part of Pakistan. Yet within twenty five years and though a violent liberation war Bengali Muslims left Pakistan and established Bangladesh, the Bengali nation-state. The premise of the liberation war was founded within one year of the creation of Pakistan. Muhammad Ali Jinnah visited Dhaka University in 1948 and in a speech he declared that for a strong Pakistan to exist the county needed a single national language and Urdu would be the national language of Pakistan.[2] As he was giving the speech, the students started protesting this declaration. Surprised by this protest, Kayed-e-Azam repeated himself twice but the response from the student was the same. Then he stated that whoever was trying to oppose Urdu as national language was in collaboration with India or was a communist.[3] While the students disagreed with the highest leader of the country on the matter of national language, Maulana Vasani, a veteran peasant leader and a staunch supporter of Pakistan movement had raised questions in support of more autonomy for East Pakistan. One can trace back the root of these claims to 'Lahore Resolution' which proposed Pakistan (the name was not mentioned in the resolution) to be a 'federation of independent Muslim

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[1] Abdus Samad, *Do Gaz Zameen* (*Sarhe Tin Haat Bhumi*), trans. Afsar Ahmed, Kalim Hajik, (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1998)

[2] Rabindranath Tribedi, *Bangladesher Aitihashik Sangram o Muktijuddho: Prasangik Dalilpatro*, (Dhaka: Jatiyo Grontho Prakashan, 1998), 127

[3] Tribedi, *Bangladesher Aitihashik Sangram o Muktijuddho: Prasangik Dalilpatro*, 127

States'. Haroon-Ar-Rashid suggested that the Bengali Muslim leaders supported the Pakistan movement as autonomy was promised to them by the Lahore resolution.[4]

The question, at this point, is whether the roots of this aspiration for autonomy can be traced back to the Lahore Resolution or whether it is associated with something more than just a resolution which intrigued the Muslim leaders and the students of Dhaka University to stand up against the man, who brought them independence? Lahore resolution was the political culmination of Muslim activism in South Asia for the first three decades of the last century. Before that happened, there was a century-long process that had consolidated the Muslim masses through various socio-economic and cultural means. This process had also created an 'imagined space' where this Muslim identity could fit itself as a community at first and then as a nation.

General Arguments in the Thesis

Nationalism is genealogically a European phenomenon that emerged much later in South Asia. Europe has a long history of nationalism all the way from its inception as an idea to its culmination in the establishment of nation-states in Western Europe. In its onward journey towards World War II, nationalism in a number of cases developed links with fascism. Nationalism was part of the journey of European societies towards modernity and extended its roots deep into their culture, be it in literature, art-work or cinema.

If we try to determine the space where the ideas of nationalism gained strength, it is obvious that language worked as a central theme in many cases. Barring the major exception of French nationalism with its emphasis on the "social contract" theory, usually the stress lays on language as a major component. In the German and most other cases, the 'imagined communities' of nations grew under the umbrella of the respective languages, which provided the psycho-sociological precondition of developing those communities into nations. This implies that the imagination regarding modern

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[4] Harun-Ar-Rashid, *History of Bangladesh* , ed. Sirajul Islam, (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2001), 241

European languages provides an important context that should be discussed first when addressing the genesis of nationalism. The ensuing process of 'nation making' was not only a cultural phenomenon, but was an economic one that was accelerated by the change in the dominant mode of production: the new emphasis on modern European languages was followed by the production shift in (predominantly Western) Europe. We can assume that the fortification of modern European languages from the Renaissance onwards and the production shift both worked as the fundamental catalysts which brought about the political transformation in Europe manifested in the establishment of different nation-states.

In the South Asian context, by contrast, nationalism is a fairly late phenomenon which emerged in colonial India in the last decades of the 19th century. A cursory glance through the history of nationalism and the sociological background of its emergence demonstrates that the modern Indian languages played a less important role in this context. No doubt, North Indian languages like Bengali, Hindi and Urdu were important instruments of spreading nationalism among the masses, but what I intend to state is that, in India, unlike Europe, nationalism did not grow or evolve around any particular language. During the movement against the Partition of Bengal (1905), a unity process was initiated within a particular middle class section, which was not centered on language but on the question of *jati* identity. We can interpret this extended concept of *jati* as 'nation' or 'ethnicity', but there was no distinguished socio-cultural position of this identity from the nascent identity of Indian nationalism which was forming its 'inner domain' through anti-colonial struggles. The study of symbols is a way to understand the content of a particular form of nationalism. Analyzed based on this premise, it becomes clear that the Swadeshi movement displays strong cultural attachments to Hindu philosophy, such as the 'Pratapaditya Festival', reading the Bhagavadgita, or drawing inspiration from ideologies of Vivekananda. Lower Caste Hindu Bengalis or Muslim Bengalis were not natural participants of this movement. The same attachment to Hindu philosophy continued to influence Indian nationalism in absence of a central linguistic theme, a radical shift in the production system or a secular 'modern' idea (like social contract). Anti-colonial Indian Nationalism drew its core ideology from various wings of Hindu thought (e.g. of thinkers such as

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Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Mahatma Gandhi and V.D. Savarkar perceived Indian nationalism in this way).

When we look back to the history of Bengal and the emergence of nationalism in there, we find that Bengali as a language had been used as an important instrument to unfold various traits of nationalist thoughts. However, historically the larger section of the Bengali demography, the Bengali Muslim community had never become an intrinsic part of this discourse. For various socio-economic reasons, the Bengali Muslim population as a community was left out of colonial education system. Primarily, being largely a peasant society in East Bengal, the larger section of the Bengali Muslims could not effort to participate in the colonial institutions of education. Also because of the fact that the eastern part of Bengal lacked attention of the colonial rulers or native philanthropists, it hardly had any composite institutional structure for primary or higher education. Moreover, since the early 18th century, the Bengali Muslim community experienced a growth of Islamic revivalism or purism in the society through the *Wahabi* and *Faraizi* movements, which also discouraged the Bengali Muslims to be part of the colonial education structure. The colonial rulers had a very peculiar policy when it came to the matter of Muslim education; they favored the *Madrasa* system of education instead of encouraging and funding western education for Muslims, which was exactly opposite of their position in regards to Hindu education. Therefore, there was a huge numerical as well as sociological imbalance between Hindus and Muslims when it came to the matter of participation in colonial education system and learning and practicing English or modern Indian vernacular such as Bengali.[5]

Since the 1880s, these circumstances started changing. In the early 1880s, the Hunter commission report came into public, which proposed a radical change in the colonial policy regarding the Muslim education. The Hunter commission proposed that the government should spend more amount of money for the establishment and running of primary and high schools instead of *Maktabs* and *Madrasas*. The commission also proposed special scholarship for the Muslim students in Bengal to encourage them to

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[5] Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, (Oxford 1981), 133-159

pursue higher studies. The outlook of the society in general was also passing through a shift. Since the 1880s, there was a growing urge among Muslims to be educated in schools instead of *Madrasas*; the reason being completely economic, as English education would help the students to find jobs in colonial administration or otherwise.

From 1880 to 1920, the Muslim society in Bengal went through a radical change in terms of socio-economic context. The process of sub-infeudation in *zamindari* system had given rise to a new agrarian class- *Jotedar*. The *Jotedars* belonged to a class which was directly associated with the land and their capacity of producing the surplus as well collecting it from various other small peasants. Since the early 1920, Muslims in the eastern part of Bengal were becoming the larger section of the rent receiving class.[6] As a rising economic class, it bore specific aspirations of going up in the socio-economic ladder in the society. We also see a great change when it comes to making of a professional class within the Bengali Muslim society as substantially large number of educated people taking part in various professions including civil service, legal service and teaching professions. This phenomenon had further exposed the Bengali Muslim society to new ideas about politics, nationhood, ethnicity and language. The Bengali Muslims initiated their literary (fictional and non-fictional) works at this phase, which brought them to a new discourse on medium of communication (the language they should use and how to use the language).

In 1889, the first society for exploring the possibilities in Bengali language was established amongst the Bengali Muslim- Bangiya Sahitya Biswayani Musalman Samiti, which was indeed inspired by the formation of Bangiya Sahitya Parishad few years back. In 1895, the much discussed novel of Mir Musaraf Hossein, Bishadsindhu was published, which was not only one of the most significant footprint of the Muslims in Bengali literary works, but also opened a new discourse about the form of the language that should be used by the Bengali Muslims. In 1911, another organization, which had deeper impact than its predecessor (Biswayani Samiti), Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti was established. In the time between

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[6] Partha Chatterjee, "The Colonial State and The Peasant Resistance in Bengal 1920-1947", *Past and Present*, No. 110 (1986) 169-204

the formations of these two organizations, several periodicals dedicated to Muslim readership came out such as Islam Pracharak, Pracharak.

All these developments had given rise to a new form of Bengali writing. The early Bengali Muslim scholars were critical of the existing Bengali language as often it did not represent the 'original' Bengali culture or the language people used to speak. The *Vidyasagari* Bengali was disparaged as a sanskritized language and hence as hindu-ized as well.[7] Also, the written language was perceived as a hegemonic language, which served only the middle class of Calcutta. The new form of the language that was proposed and practiced at that time was characterized as *Mussalmani Bangla* or the Bengali of Muslims. Scholars like Maolana Akram Khan had proposed the use of more Arabic and Persian words instead of *Tatsama* and *Tatbhaba* words. Even a section of scholars in the Sahitya Samiti proposed a new set of alphabets which would better help to grip over the Arabic and Persian Phonetics.

These developments should not be dealt with in isolation from the political imagination of the Bengali Muslim society at that time. The Bengali Muslims were also consolidating themselves and were looking for a political setup to fit them in. The constant exchange that they had with West Asia at that time was profound in their political imagination. There was an effort in the society to identify themselves with the larger Muslim community living outside Bengal and also the geo-political boundary of British India. Therefore, pan-Islamism became an important trait in their understanding of the politics at that moment. The periodicals covered news from Turkey and Arab very intensely. The religious developments in that region were directly dinned into the ears of Bengali Muslims through these periodicals as well. Not only that, the periodicals such as *Mohammadi* managed to organize a dedicated readership to it which deliberated into debates and discussion on these matters.

However, there was also a secular effort towards *Mussalmani Bangla*, which did not engage with the religious or political developments in West Asia, rather concentrated on the socio-economic conditions of

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[7] Vidyut Chakravarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947*", (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 43-47

the Bengali Muslims. Even sometimes these scholars had engaged in conflicts with the orthodox Muslim periodicals on questions related to individual rights and religious overreach on private matters. They perceived their works as a movement which would be able to create a 'renaissance' like situation in the Bengali Muslim Society by bringing reasoning as the fundamental ethics of the society. They termed it as *Buddir Mukti Andolon*. Muslim Sahitya Samaj was founded on the basis of this understanding in Dhaka. The periodicals such as *Sikha*, *Saogat*, *Tarun Patro* were more keen to discuss the subjects of agrarian distress of Bengali Muslim peasants, possible entrepreneurship in the society and hindrance towards that, educational system, and most importantly the struggle against the colonial rule. The periodicals edited by Nazrul Islam, such as *Dhumketu* or *Langal* had used *Mussalmani Bangla* very consciously as the form of writing but never indulged to break away from the discourse of mainstream anti-colonial struggle.

A further interesting development of this period was the Bengali-Urdu debate, where a section of Muslim scholars proposed Urdu to be the national language of the Bengali Muslims, as it would help them to consolidate themselves with other Muslim communities in Bengal in a more solid manner. However, both sections (Secular practitioner of *Mussalmani Bangla* and non-secular practitioners) were opposed to this proposal and had taken initiatives to build up a consensus in the society to defeat this opinion. All these efforts had shaped the lingual and political identity of the Bengali Muslims to a great extent.

Literature Review

The historiography on Muslim community(ies) in colonial South Asia has been enriched by various scholarly writings. One of the pioneering works in this area is Peter Hardy's *Muslims of British India*. On one hand, Hardy has dealt with the complex dynamics within the Muslim communities in colonial South Asia. There were several components such as the pre-colonial legacy of the Mughals, the Islamic revivalist movements, the socio-economic discourses of the community. All these factors compounded into a process of shaping an identitarian politics for the Muslims in British India. On the other hand, he also attempted to show the nature of relationship between the colonial administration and the Muslim

communities especially after the rebellion of 1857. He had tried to track down the evolution of the Muslim communities through exploring the reform processes they had gone through. And while doing that, he has also shown that the communities had different perspective and reactions to these reforms, which had varied based on the region and class. These reforms had helped the communities to shape themselves in a major way. Mushirul Hasan's *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1885-1930* is another major intervention in this area of study. Hasan has tracked down the evolution of anti-colonial struggle through comparing the nationalist and communal politics in South Asia. He has reflected on the developments in the Muslim politics through different perspective. One of these perspectives was the tracking of rise and fall of '*Ulema*' in Indian Muslim politics. The class of '*Ulema*' was the most important group of people in the nineteenth century Muslim politics; the position, which they lost in the early twentieth century. He has also focused on the matters concerning the disillusionment of Muslims regarding Congress in Bengal and the tussle between the Nationalists and Swarajists. In general, he had tried to find out the reasons behind the rise of Muslim communal politics in the 1930s through exploring the inner-dynamics of the Muslim society, the rise of Hindu communal politics and the responsibility of the British Raj. Hasan's another major work; *Islam in the Subcontinent: Muslims in a Plural Society* is also an important part of this historiography. This collection of essays tracks the history of the Muslims in a plural society like South Asia since the nineteenth century to the last decades of the twentieth century. His essays have covered a vast number of issues concerning the Muslim communities in South Asia. On one hand, he has dealt with the politics of Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan, Muhammad Ali, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. On the other, he has reflected upon the early reactions of the Muslims to the British Raj, the debates in Islam and the perceptions of Hindus and Muslims about communal harmony and shared spaces. He also has a very delicate discussion on Pan-Islamism in India and its relation to nationalism or South Asian Muslim identity.

Stanley Wolpert's *Jinnah of Pakistan* and Ayesha Jalal's *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan* are also major works which have enriched the state of the art on

this subject. Wolpert had shown the evolution of Muslim politics in colonial South Asia through the transformation of Jinnah's political thoughts. Jinnah started his political career as a young nationalist and in two decades had transformed into the champion of Muslim causes in South Asia. He followed Jinnah's transformation through the debates between Congress and Muslim League and through the socio-economic and political changes taking place in the late colonial period. Wolpert has credited Jinnah for creating the nation-state of Pakistan singlehandedly. In contrary to Wolpert's views, Ayesha Jalal has attempted to portray Jinnah rather as the man who opposed the partition. Though she did not reflect much on the early years of Jinnah's political career or for that matter the evolution of Muslim politics in South Asia until 1930s, she has attempted to ventilate lights on the multiple processes of negations that went on in the last years of the Raj. According to Jalal, Jinnah did not seek separation but wanted to ensure parity between Hindus and Muslims in the post-colonial South Asia. Through her dealings with the recently available papers, she opened a new arena of debate on whether one can label the Muslim politics of colonial India as communal politics instead of identity politics.

Rafiuddin Ahmed's *Quest of Identity* can be considered as one of the rudimentary secondary source of this thesis. He had diligently engaged with the history of Bengali Muslim society in the nineteenth century and had minutely observed the changes it has gone through during this time. Ahmed's primary contribution is to provide an elaborate explanation of the fundamentalist reforms taken place in rural Muslim society of Bengal and its consequences in the Muslim minds. He has tried to strike a balance between the religious and class components of these movements by describing the exact economic and cultural dynamics between the peasantry and the reformers. Following that, he has attempted to go through the educational reforms taken place in the Muslim society in the later decades of the century which were made possible by the initiatives of various Muslim social leaders and one section of the colonial administration. He has shown how these reforms had qualitatively impacted the Muslim lives and how they had brought transformation in the political economy of the Muslim society. Furthermore, he has ultimately engaged with the question of identity and had shown how the Islamic reforms and educational

reforms had influenced the debates on identity. His work stops investigating the quest of identity of Bengali Muslims in the first decade of the twentieth century, exactly from where this thesis starts its own research on this question. The answer Ahmed found that this identity shaped at that period had an Islamic nature was questioned by this thesis as the research on the events onwards 1906 suggested otherwise. The thesis tried to conclude that it was rather a mix of Bengali and Muslim identity that was getting shaped in the next decades instead of an Islamic identity. The thesis also admits that at the point where Ahmed has drawn his conclusion, the identity of the Bengali Muslims indeed had an Islamic overtone.

Kenneth W Jones's *Socio Religious Reform Movements in India* also engaged with the tenets of the Islamic movements in colonial Bengal. His work vividly describes the objectives and procedurals of these movements and the relation (differences and similarities) they had with each other and with the masses of Rural Bengal. He also has tried to measure the influence of these movements on rural Muslim masses. Jayanti Maitra's *Muslim Politics of Bengal* and Narahari Kaviraj's *Wahabi and Faraizi Rebels of Bengal* tried to bring a different perspective on the matters of reformist movements. Though primarily both of them have admitted the inherent religious nature of these movements, they have attempted to show how these movement in form and in content had gradually became peasant movements against the landlords and the colonial administration. They also have tried to explore the use of religion to justify the rebellion against the Raj. Jayanti Maitra has engaged further with the events unfolded in the urban space and tried to analyze how through various socio-political measures the urban Muslims were forming their identity.

Vidyut Chakrabarty's and Shila Sen's works are more political in nature. Chakrabarty in his *The Partition of Bengal and Assam* has tried to reach to the events of partition in 1947 through a logical framework of socio-economic and political events and reforms that had taken place in the Muslim Society and in Bengal in general. He has engaged briefly with the shifts taking place in the agrarian sector and the cultural milieu of the early twentieth century. Though briefly, the work has engaged with the case of *Musalmani Bangla* and its repercussions in the literary sector of late colonial Bengal. However, it would have been of great value for further research, if the transformations in the cultural sector would have been studied in

more depth. . Partha Chatterjee's work on the changes in the agrarian class relationship and Sugata Bose's work on peasant mobilization have fundamental influence on this thesis. Chatterjee's work on the changing tenant-rent-receiver composition in Bengal in relation to the Hindu-Muslim relationship and his further elaboration of the cultural hegemony on the peasantry inflicted by the rent-receiving class has been helpful in shaping the thesis to a great extent.

Another work, which this thesis follows in a very fundamental way, is *Recasting the Region, Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal* by Neilesh Bose. Bose has rigorously engaged with the changes in the cultural sector of the early twentieth century. He has shown how the *Musalmani Bangla* had been shaped during this period through various debates and discourses. Most importantly, he has brought debate between the pre-colonial and colonial literary practices into the surface. He has also shown how the organized efforts of the Bengali Muslim scholars ushered in a new era in the Bengali literary sector and opened up not only literary but also new socio-political possibilities in colonial Bengal. This thesis has critically engaged with this work on two points. First, though he has shown how the language was changing during this period for *Musalmani Bangla*, he concludes *Musalmani Bangla* as a continuation of the Pre-colonial literary practice or the marginalized Do-Bhashi tradition of colonial times. This thesis has tried to show that the *Musalmani Bangla* was obviously a continuation of such traditions but there was a qualitative change that occurred in the writing culture through the adoption of new vocabularies in Bengali from Arabic and Persian, making the language more acceptable to Bengali Muslims. Secondly, he has concluded that this whole discourse was merged with the broader Indian Muslim politics. The thesis tries to show that the merger was never completed. The Bengali Muslim identity, shaped through this discourse had always kept its autonomy alive outside the purview of Indian Muslim politics. There was an inherent independent *jati* identity in this discourse, which never allowed itself to fully merge with any kind of broader Indian politics. The thesis also had deeply engaged with the works of Anisuzzaman. The historical positioning of the periodicals published by the Bengali Muslims and its impact on the

social, religious and political discourses on colonial Bengal as portrayed in his *Muslim Banglar Samayik Patra* had shaped the thesis to some extent.

This thesis in many ways has agreed to the historical questions that have been placed by Semanti Ghosh's *Different Nationalism*. Ghosh has tried to bring a new dimension to this debate by delving into the quest of *jati* identity of Muslims in relation to the Swadeshi Movement. She has attempted to find the answers of this quest in the writings of the scholars at that time. She has shown how the identity of the Bengali Muslims had been shaped vis-à-vis the narration of Swadeshi and at the same time vis-à-vis the colonial argument on the origin of the Bengali identity. While taking notes of the influence of West Asia and *Wahabi* movement, she questioned the prevailing perception, that there was no locational belongingness present in the Muslim mind. She has also negated the traditional view on this and asserted that there was an obvious attachment of the Bengali Muslims to the land of Bengal and she has refused to label the identity of Bengali Muslims as an Islamic identity.

Though not used as a source, the idea of this thesis first came to me after I read Sabyasachi Bhattacharya's *The Defining Moments in Bengal*. He has, though from a different perspective, opened up an intriguing discourse about the socio-cultural and political discourses of the late colonial Bengal. He challenged the existing historiography in various ways, which until now had more or less depicted the cultural and political discourse of colonial Bengal as a trickledown effect of larger South Asian political developments. He located many autonomous spaces in the history of colonial Bengal and has tried to show how those spaces had shaped Bengal in multifarious ways. This thesis has tried to locate and examine such an autonomous space in the history, where different and diverse discourses had been debated, shaped and had influenced other larger socio-political events. Those discourses were not always complete, were not always perfectly shaped, and were sometimes confused and self-contradictory as well. But those spaces were there and they always remained alive and autonomous and from to time to time came to surface, bringing with them revolutionary transformation in South Asia.

Tracking the Thesis Down

The first chapter of the thesis focuses on the various religious and social reforms that had taken place in the Bengali Muslim society in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Between 1820s and 1880s, Bengal had witnessed many reformist/ fundamentalist movements, which had attempted to correct the course of Islamic rituals and customs in the Muslim society. Due to various reasons, the Islamic practices in Bengal had few unique traits, which were not supported by the theology of Islam. The reformist movements marked these practices as un-Islamic and tried to stop such practices in the Bengali Muslim community. The focus of these movements was mainly in the rural regions, especially in the eastern parts of the province, where Muslims lived in large numbers. The Wahabi or *Tariqat-i-Muhammadiayah* movement was initiated in Bengal by Sayed Ahmed of Ray Bareli himself in 1820, when he visited Calcutta and formed a small group to look over the movement in the province. Haji Sharituallah, a Bengali *Taluqder*, went to Mecca and then to Cairo. During his stay there, he was indoctrinated in Islamic puritan theology and initiated the Faraizi movement in Bengal when he returned. Both of these movements had long term social, political and economic impact on the rural Muslim classes. These movements started as reformist movements but with time they had been changed to a peasant uprising both in form and content. *Tariqat* and Faraizi movements declared *Jihad* against the colonial administration and the landlords (who were Hindus by and large). They declared India as Dar-ul-Herb (the House of War) and preached *Jihad* as a duty for the followers of Islam. As the peasant dissatisfaction and religious fundamentalism were combined together, these movements had led various violent uprisings of Muslim peasantry against the administration and the landlords. The first chapter tries to explore the balance between these two components within the movement and their consequence thereafter. The third and perhaps the most significant of all reformist movement was the Ta'ayuni movement, led by Karamat Ali. Karamat Ali, a Bihari by origin, toured vast parts of rural Bengal extensively and preached the puritan Islam. Though he belonged to the fundamentalist reformist groups, he adopted many local practices and legitimized them in Islamic theology, which in turn helped his movement to gain more

popularity among the rural masses. Rafiuddin Ahmed observed, "Karamat Ali alone tried to steer a middle course between rigid fundamentalism and acceptance of current practice."[8] Not only did Karamat Ali oppose the call for *Jihad*, as he suggested that India was not a Dar-ul-Herb but a Dar-ul-Islam (House of Islam), but he also opined for western education for Muslims, which was largely discouraged by other reformist movements.

While the rural parts of Bengal were witnessing a fundamentalist revival in the Muslim society, in the urban space, a section of Muslim society was trying to engage with the colonial educational system. Personalities like Nawab Abdul Latif and Sayed Amir Ali had made several pleas to the government seeking reforms in the Muslim educational system. Their initiatives were not only restricted to educational reform. They founded social and political organizations for Muslims, had voiced out opinions on several issues concerning the South Asian Muslims and even sometimes had put forward their opinions about International politics. Through these efforts and initiatives both in rural and urban spaces, the Muslim society in Bengal was taking a consolidated shape. This chapter tries to explore those debates taking place at the end of the century regarding the identity formation of Bengali Muslims.

The second chapter attempts to ventilate lights on the socio-economic changes that occurred in Bengali Muslim society between the 1880s and 1920s. The class character of a large section of the Bengali Muslims had changed within this time period. Due to the process of sub-infeudation, more people were getting into the fold of the rent-receiving class. This phenomenon had a sociological impact particularly in East Bengal. This process of sub-infeudation was not simply increasing the number of rent-receivers there; it was also changing the religious composition of the rent-receiving class. The census report of 1911 clearly shows that in East Bengal, the number of Muslim rent-receivers was more than Hindu rent-receivers in most of the districts.[9] The 1921 census suggests that the number of Hindu rent-receivers had

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[8] Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, 59
[9] The Census of India, 1911, Vol. V, Part II, Page 299

declined in absolute terms while the same amongst the Muslim had grown steadily.[10] The increase in numbers of rent-receivers amongst Muslims had created a rural class which was capable of holding the social leadership in the community. At the same time that class had an aspiration of upward (or urban) mobility. One can see that this shift in class character in the rural Muslim community commensurate with the increase in participation of the community in the colonial educational system. The changes that we witnessed in the matters of education amongst the Bengali Muslim community were manifold. The colonial perspective about the Muslim education was quite different than it was about the Hindu education. The Calcutta Madrassa was established in 1780 and since then the colonial administration had encouraged and invested in the traditional *Makatab* and *Madrassa* education for the Muslims, while at the same time they supported the propagation of western education amongst the Hindus. Ever since English had replaced Persian as the official language, the Muslims trained in traditional education perished in the professional sector.[11] The Hunter commission reports, which were backed by the government of Bengal, had brought changes in the Raj's perspective regarding the Muslim education. In between 1880s to 1920s, the participation of the Muslims in colonial educational system increased steadily and as a consequence, more people from the community got engaged in professional jobs and were seeking higher education.

The establishment of Dhaka University in 1921 was a watershed in the social history of the Bengali Muslim community. The demand for a university in Dhaka was there for a long time as East Bengal had no university and the students had to depend on Calcutta University. This demand has two perspectives-regional and communal. Regionally, East Bengal, though it was more productive in terms of agriculture was considered as the 'backward' region due to its rural dominance. Also due to various socio-economic changes in the nineteenth century, Calcutta University was hegemonised by the Bengali Hindus. The Muslims were also poorly underrepresented amongst the students and teachers. Therefore, there was a demand on behalf of the Muslim community to have a university of their own.

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[10] Census of India 1921, Volume V Part II, page 362
[11] Syed Murtaza Ali, "Muslim Education in Bengal: 1837-1937", *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1971), 183

This chapter tries to focus on how the establishment of the Dhaka University created an independent space for the Bengali Muslims to evolve. It was free from the Hindu hegemony of Kolkata and the students and teachers of the university predominantly came from the rural Muslim community of East Bengal. The intellectual gathering around the university therefore had a unique Bengali Muslim character, which further had devoted its literary practices focusing on the Bengali Muslim community. The *Buddhir Mukti* Movement or the Muslim Sahitya Samaj had represented this character to the most. Muslim *Sahitya Samaj's* objective was to focus on the problems of the Bengali Muslim society and to find remedies for them. At the beginning, the organization tried not to get into conflict with the orthodox section of the Muslim society but eventually, when they tried to take position of various problems of the Muslim society of Bengal, they had to engage in conflict with them. This movement had challenged the existing conservative views about the society and economy and opened a platform for democratic discussions of the problems of the community. This had created a space for liberal ideas to flow into the Muslim society. This chapter tries to examine this hypothesis by going through various publications of the *Samaj* and the movement.

The last chapter attempts to look through the changes taking place in the Muslim minds of Bengal between the period of 1900s and 1920s. One can see that how the Muslims of Bengal are being projected as a *jati* by various publications at this time. Several calls were made for awakening the Muslims of Bengal, pleading them to fight for their rights and reminding them of their duties. The *jati* identity was being debated in the educated Muslim society on the historical and religious grounds. The first chapter depicts that there was an attempt to connect the *jati* identity of the Muslims with the larger Islamic population living in West Asia by attempting to prove the existing Bengali Muslim population as the descendent of the migrating Muslims during the advent of Islam in Bengal. However, the first two decades of last century witnessed an opposite effort, which discarded this view and tried to establish the fact that Bengali Muslims were indeed the original inhibitors of Bengal as most of their predecessors were converted from Hinduism to Islam. These scholars have refused to admit West Asia as their *desh*

(country) and Arabic as their *Matribhasha* (Mother tongue). All of these Scholars portrayed Muslims of Bengal as *Bangali jati*. Though it is not clear what exactly *jati* connotes here- ethnicity, nationality or linguistic community.

Musalmani Bangla, though existed since pre-colonial times, started being strengthened through this engagement. Since the early decades of the nineteenth century, Bengali as a language was taking a modern shape with the advent of printing press and colonial assistance. The *Savarna* middle class Hindus of Kolkata, through their close contact with the early colonizers and orientalists, had got the opportunity to shape the language accordingly. In this chapter, an attempt is made to look through this process and understand how the pre-colonial colloquial Bengali used by the Muslims and a large section Hindus had been abandoned and marginalized in the written form of the language. In the early decades of the twentieth century, this marginalized language made a comeback to the mainstream writing culture through the assertion of *Musalmani Bangla*. While these changes were being debated, Abdul Karim's effort to explore the pre-colonial *Punthi Sahitya* in Bengali ushered in a new era in Bengali literature. The pre-colonial Bengali literary sector was heavily dominated by the Muslim authors, unlike the colonial time. The exploration and publication of the writings of that period further added confidence in the Muslim minds. Simultaneously, another discourse that came up at this time was the Bengali-Urdu debate. Bengali-Urdu debate was complicated because of many reasons. First of all, it was not clear to what exact was the role of Urdu in the lives of Bengali Muslims at that time. It was neither the Mother tongue nor the language used for religious purposes. Urdu was being proposed as the national language in order to counter the claim of Hindi that was made by a section of Congress leaders. It also became an instrument to create a Pan-Indian solidarity amongst the Muslims.[12] The Bengali Muslim scholars were perplexed and divided on the issue of Urdu. Some of them suggested Urdu to be the national (*jatiyo*) language, some proposed Urdu as the lingua-franca of Indian Muslim communities, some had totally rejected the claims of Urdu as either national language or lingua-franca. But the suggestion of making Urdu the mother

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[12] Kavita Saraswathi Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India*, (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2013), 8-9

tongue of the Bengali Muslims had been almost unanimously rejected. Therefore, the events unfolded during the Language Movement in post-colonial Pakistan had its roots in the process of shaping the Bengali identity of Muslims during the early decades of the last century. Definitely, the discourses of jati identity, the shaping of language and the issue of mother tongue created an identity consciousness amongst the Bengali Muslims which had further consequences in the political history of South Asia.

Formation of Muslim Identity in Bengal

'Islamization' of Rural Bengal

In the nineteenth century Bengal, the Muslim community had gone through several revivalist and reformist movements. The objectives of these movements were to purify the religious practices of Islam in Bengal and to consolidate the Islamic identity of the Bengali Muslims in accordance with the Pan-Islamic ideals. The *Wahabi* and *Faraizi* movements of the nineteenth century Bengal brought the Muslims together and formed a community cluster providing them with the power to negotiate with the colonial administration and its native collaborators of Zamindars.

Neither of these movements originated in Bengal itself. The *Wahab*i movement originated in Arabia with the main aim of purifying the Islamic practices and aligning it with the 'original Islam' as preached by the Prophet himself. In South Asia the movement was popularized as *Tariqat-i-Muhammadiayah*. *Tariqat-i-Muhammadiayah* was started by Sayyid Ahmed of Ray Bareli and Shah Ismail Shahid. Sayyid Ahmed visited Kolkata in 1820, where he was received by a huge enthusiastic mass.[1] Sayyid Ahmed's one of the primary intentions was to get rid of 'un-Islamic' practices. Therefore, Bengal was one of the most important battlegrounds for *Tariqat-i-Muhammadiayah* as the syncretic practices of Bengal, influenced by the Sufi ideologies were in many ways perceived to be 'un-Islamic' in nature.

Though the school of thought was different from the *Wahabi* movement, the *Faraizi* movement was attempting to bring reforms in Islamic practices in Bengal of the same nature. Unlike *Wahabi* movement, the *Faraizi* movement was initiated in Bengal by a Bengali *Taluqdar* (Rent-collector), Haji Shariatullah. Though he was a Bengali by birth and resident of Faridpur district in the Eastern part of the province, his

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[1]Jayanti Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1855-1906, Collaboration and Confrontation* (Calcutta: KP Bagchi and company, 1984)*,* 12

indoctrination to orthodoxy did not take place in Bengal.[2] It happened when he visited Mecca, studied Sufism and was indoctrinated by *Hanafi* School and then went to Cairo to study theology for two years before he finally returned to Bengal.[3]

One of the biggest concerns of *Faraizi* movement was that the common Bengali Muslims did not understand their prayers as only a few amongst millions knew Arabic. The lack of Arabic knowledge and the resulting weak understanding of Islam was perceived by the *Faraizi*'s movement as the main reason for the existence of 'un-Islamic' practices in Bengal. This in turn triggered the *Faraizis* to publish their literature in Bengali. 'The formula of Repentance' (preached by Sharitullah) was written and circulated among the masses of East Bengal by the movement.[4] Haji Badruddin of Dacca, one of the important figures of *Tariqat-i-Muhammadiayah* in Bengal, compiled a series of *Fatwas* on several religious subjects to attract the 'ignorant' Bengali masses towards the true practices of Islam.[5] A book named Nasihat Namahs was also written at this time in Bengali to teach the Islamic practices in a simpler manner.[6] *Faraizi* leaders started as well to speak and write *Fatwas* in Bengali instead of Arabic or Persian.[7]

When this pamphlets and books were being published and circulated among the common Muslim masses of Bengal, the organizers of these movements had this belief that the Muslims of Bengal are not "enough Islamic". The attempt was not only to preach Islam in Bengal but also to transform Bengali Muslims to the ideal followers of Islamic practices exercised in the Arab world. This process of Islamization (or Arabization of Islam in Bengal) had a different consequence as well. The preachers of 'ideal Islam' in Bengal understood that their teachings would be futile if they stick to their Arabic hymns and commentaries. They had to improvise and translate their theological materials into Bengali to connect more thoroughly with the masses of Bengal. However, it was not something unique that they were

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[2] Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, 15
[3] Neilesh Bose, *Anti-colonialism, Regionalism, and Cultural Autonomy: Bengali Muslim Politics 1840s-1942*. (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Tufts University 2009), 45
[4] JN Sarkar, 'Islam in Bengal' *Journal of Indian History*, vol. XLVIII, (1970), 495
[5] Qeyamuddin Ahmed, *The Wahabi Movement in India* (Kolkata: Manohar, 1966), 277
[6] Kenneth W Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India (Volume III.A): Socio Religious Reform Movement of India*, (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 20
[7] Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India*, 16

introducing in Bengal. There was an old legacy of translating or creating original works in Bengali to preach Islamic ideals to the common masses in easy language. Sayyid Sultan, Razzak Nandan, Abdul Hakim, Muhammad Khan, Jainuddin and many more in the pre-colonial period composed Islamic literatures in their Punthis. Sayyid Sultan's *Nabi-Vangsa* was one of the fine examples of such literary production, which elaborately described the life and work of the prophet Muhammad.[8]

Yet in reality the main objectives of both movements were not confined to purifying and reforming Islamic practices in Bengal as well as strengthening the Islamic identity of Muslims. Since the introduction of Permanent Settlement, Bengal witnessed a series of peasant rebellions. Especially in the early decades of the nineteenth century, these rebellions erupted from time to time and from region to region in Bengal. The South eastern and mid eastern part of the presidency had a unique landlord-tenant relationship where the majority of the peasants were Muslims and the landlords were mostly Hindus. Therefore, while these movements were strengthening the Islamic identity amongst the common Muslim masses of Bengal, they also facilitated a process of consolidation amongst the Muslim peasants against the Hindu Zaminders. Because of the lack of any modern egalitarian ideology, the Muslim peasants were attacked towards the egalitarian ideals of these Movements. "The concept of Islamic brotherhood (*Ummah*) or equality of the mankind, irrespective of lineage, tribe or wealth constitutes a premise for social justice."[9]There are several verses in Quran which could be interpreted as an indication towards building an egalitarian society which would allocate equal share of wealth for everyone.[10]It is difficult to determine that how far the peasants were inspired by the ideals of *Wahabi* and *Faraizi* movements themselves and how far they had rebelled just as a consequence to the economic and social exploitation they had faced under Permanent Settlement. The other peasants' rebellion of that time in Bengal

[8]Neilesh Bose, *Recasting the Region, Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal*, (New Delhi: Oxford 2015), 153
For details, see, Abdul Karim, *Prachin Banglar Punthir Bibaran*
[9]Nurul Hasan Choudhury, *Peasant Radicalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal: The Farai'zi, Indigo and Pabna Movements* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2001), 37
[10]Bose, *Anti-colonialism, Regionalism, and Cultural Autonomy: Bengali Muslim Politics 1840s-1942*, 46

presidency showed a similar characteristic.[11] The leadership of those rebellions too used 'religiousity' as an important factor to induce people in rebellion.

One of the most important figures in this context was Titu Mir, the leader of Barasat Rebellion. Titu Mir, a wrestler in Calcutta and then a member of a Hindu Landlord's militia (*Lethel*) in early life became a disciple of Sayyid Ahmed of Rai Bereily and started preaching Wahabi ideals amongst the common Muslim masses. Though Titu Mir was a disciple of Sayyid Ahmed but was also influence by the teachings of Sharitullah and thus built a compound ideological campaign for revivalist Islam.[12] Titu Mir had an extensive following in the Mid southern part of the province and scared of his popularity, Zaminder Krishna Dev Ray issued an order to his subjects not to contact him and if found otherwise would be punishable offence.[13]Though Titu Mir began his journey as a religious leader but soon he emerged as a peasant leader, who extensively had campaigned against the exploitation of the Permanent Settlement and of the Hindu Zaminders in particular.

The nature of exploitation was not always necessarily economic. There were discriminatory taxes levied on the Muslim peasants by the Hindu landlords. One such tax was the *Durga Puja* tax, which were levied particularly on the Muslim peasants in order to facilitate the *Durga Puja* ceremony of the Landlords' households.[14] Titu Mir started campaigning against such taxations and leveled it as anti-Wahabi taxes and asked people not to give these taxes. The most outrageous tax leveled on the Muslims was the Beard Tax, which had been introduced by Krishna Dev Ray in 1931 on the Muslim men who had beard.[15]Immediately an adverse reaction generated in the Muslim community of Barasat region and skirmishes between the *Wahabi* followers and the armed men of the Zaminder was reported.[16]

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[11] Sido and Kanho in Santhal rebellion and Birsa Munda in Munda Rebellion used religious appeals to encourage people to join the struggle. See- Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* and Mahasweta Devi, *Aranyer Adhikar*

[12]Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, 19

[13]Bose, *Anti-colonialism, Regionalism, and Cultural Autonomy: Bengali Muslim Politics 1840s-1942*, 59

[14]Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India*, 20

[15]Narahari Kaviraj, *Wahabi and Farazi Rebels of Bengal*, (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1982), 35

[16]Judical (c) Proceedings., 3 April 1832, 5

On 23rd October of the same year the Barasat Rebellion started. Titu Mir's followers reportedly attacked and slaughtered a cow in front of the Temple in Purwa village, which was under the jurisdiction of Krishna Dev Ray.[17]But not only were the Hindus attacked by the Titu Mir's party. Reportedly in Sherpur village, they attacked a Muslim man's household too, namely Yar Mahomed. They robbed their house, kidnapped his two daughters and forced them to enter into a marriage with two of the members of Titu Mir's party. They also manhandled a Fakir in the village too.[18] The Muslim men of these villages were also allegedly compelled to fashion their beard in a particular way.[19] After almost one month, the rebellion was suppressed brutally by the Company's armed forces and Titu Mir himself died in the battle. In total one hundred and ninety seven people were tried by the court for taking part in the rebellion.[20]

This rebellion had three distinct features intrinsically connected with each other. Titu Mir's struggle started as a religious campaign and therefore had bore a strong theocratic component within it throughout. The acts such as slaughtering cows in Hindu temple and compelling fellow Muslims to fashion beard in particular way expresses the mark of the religious tone of the rebellion. However, that was not the only factor that triggered the uprising. The struggle featured and inherited the resentment of the peasant community of Bengal against the permanent Settlement and the arbitrary taxation of the Landlords. The principle opponent of this insurgency was not the Hindu community but the Hindu landlords who had subjected the Muslim peasants to awful poverty and exploitation. Thirdly, this movement had an anti-colonial undertone as well. Because of the religious understanding of *Wahabism*, India was a *Dar-ul-Herb* (House of War, or Land ruled by infidels) for Titu Mir and his follower. It was pious duty of the followers of Wahabi ideals to convert a *Dar-ul-Herb* into a *Dar-ul-Islam*. And in reality too, the Company

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[17]Judical (c) Proceedings., 3 April 1832, 5
[18]Judical (c) Proceedings , 5 August 1833, 11
[19]Judical (c) Proceedings , 5 August 1833, 11
[20]Reports on trials, Judicial (c) Proceedings, 5 August 1833, 11

administration was complicit with the arbitrary exploitation[21] by the landlords and therefore, Company Raj also became a target of this uprising.

Dudu Miyan, son of Haji Shariatullah was perhaps the most influential reformist leader amongst Muslims in nineteenth century Bengal. Dudu Miyan, as the revivalist theorists suggested, declared British rule in India as '*Dar-ul-Herb*' and declared '*Jihad*' against the Raj. Haji Sharitullah confined his movement within the dome of religious reforms and never directly rebelled against the British. But by declaring '*Jihad*' against the British Dudu Miyan changed the socio-religious sect of Faraizis into a politico-economic body.[22]

Dudu Miyan had built up a vast network in the Eastern part of the province, centering his native district of Faridpur. It was estimated that in the districts of East Bengal he had around two hundred fifty thousand followers.[23]Dudu Miyan managed his network through neat chain of command. He had a private militia armed with sticks and other non-lethal weapons. He also founded a '*Panchayat*' system which was divided into two parts *Siyasi* (administrative) and *Din* (religious), which were coordinated through a hierarchical *Khilafat* system under the direct control of the Ustad. Each circle (which were constituted with few *Panchayat*) had a *Khalifa*, *Munshi* or *Sardar* who directly informed Dudu Miyan about the happenings in his respective constituency. They were also responsible for extracting the contribution of the followers, known as *Farizi* Tax. The money was used to help any follower if he is being sued by any Zaminder in court.[24] He also asked his followers to refuse to give tax to Zaminders, he formulated that the land belonged to no one but Allah and therefore the taxation on cultivator is a crime (*Zulm*). So he forbid

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[21]Judical (c) Proceedings., 3 April 1832 shows that the local civil servants were reported of this atrocious tax regime of Krishna Deva Ray, but they did not take any action on that.
[22]Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, 17
[23]Faraizi Trials, Quoted by Narahari Kaviraj
[24]Sarkar, 'Islam in Bengal', 495
Kaviraj, *Wahabi and Farazi Rebels of Bengal*, 79

his followers to pay tax and he appealed to them to settle on the Government lands (*Khas Mahal*) to escape the burden of land revenue.[25]

Dudu Miyan not only built a parallel tax regime, he also founded a parallel judicial system within the sect too. Faraizis had their own law courts and they mostly used to boycott the government courts (as part of their general boycott of government institutions). Dudu Miyan himself acted as the adjudicator if there is a criminal charge or a civil dispute. He used to receive many memorandums and appeals from his followers across Bengal.[26]Not only Dudu Miyan alone, at the local level the Munshis used to function as the local juries, who used to try and settle criminal charges and civil disputes. Dudu Miyan's jurisdiction sometime crossed the boundary of his sect and the local Muslims, Hindus and Christians, who had committed any crime against any of his followers were also brought into the 'court of justice' ran by Dudu Miyan. Dudu Miyan also had prepared a penal system in accordance with the crimes committed and thus gave his judicial system a definitive structure.

The *Faraizi* Movement, after the death of Dudu Miyan in 1862 became a weak movement. Dudu Miyan's son Naya Miyan was the leader of the movement after his death. The Faraizis raised into occasional rebellions against the Raj in the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century. In Bakherganj district, there was a uprising against the local Zaminder in 1869. The Faraizis attacked the office of the local tax collector.[27] In 1870 there was a resistance movement against the indigo planters in Malda where the Faraizis were mainly involved.[28] In 1872, the villagers in several villages of Noakhali district raised against the program of census under the leadership of *Faraizis*. They had beaten the officers involved in the process and forced them to return.[29]After a point in late nineteenth century, gradually the importance of the movement declined. And not only that the leadership of the movement took a collaborationist

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[25]Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, 18

[26]Faraizi Trials Papers quoted by Narahari Kaviraj in *Wahabi and Farazi Rebels of Bengal*, 80
[27]Kaviraj, *Wahabi and Farazi Rebels of Bengal*, 84

[28]Kaviraj, *Wahabi and Farazi Rebels of Bengal*, 86
[29]Kaviraj, *Wahabi and Farazi Rebels of Bengal*, 87

position vis-à-vis the British Raj. Dudu Miyan's youngest son, Sa'id Al-din Ahmed, the leader of the movement after Naya Miyan was even conferred the title of '*Khan Bahadur*' by the Raj for his cooperation.[30]

The *Faraizi* movement left a deep impact on the Muslim society of colonial Bengal. The movement like the movement of Titu Mir, started as a reformist movement but after the accession of Dudu Miyan as the leader of the sect, had become a political movement too. Faraizi movement was successful in bringing thousands of poor Muslims peasants of rural Bengal within its fold and shaped their political and social thinking and acts through Islamic reformist preaching. The formulation of 'lands belongs to *Allah*' and therefore revenue is *Zulm* on peasants had helped thousands of peasants in Bengal to raise against the oppression of the Zaminders and the Raj. The *Panchayat* system and the judicial system established by Dudu Miyan also had an effect on shaping the identity of the Muslims in Bengal. The autonomous and parallel system of justice had given hope to poor peasants, who did not have financial ability to fight their cases against the rich landlord. The *Panchayat* system which became a parallel to British administration was also become a signifier of sovereignty of the community. The religious preaching of *Faraizi* movement was thus strengthened amongst the Muslims of Bengal and amplified as a call for socio-political uprising and change. The idea of communitarian sovereignty shaped and consolidated the identity of being Muslim amongst the vast numbers of Muslims in Bengal and they could be able to distinguish and identify themselves as an autonomous functionary of the society. The fight against the *Dar-ul-Herb* and the Hindu Zaminders further consolidated this vision.

Maulana Karamat Ali was a member of *Tariqat-i-Muhammadiayah* at the beginning but then he started working independently and founded his own *Ta'ayuni* movement. Maulana Karamat Ali, originally from the province of Bihar[31] had travelled and preached his theology extensively across Eastern part of Bengal and Assam. He used to travel and stay in a flotilla for nearly forty years and used to go from village to

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[30]Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India*, 20

[31]Moved to Bengal in 1835

village and teach his followers.[32] He also had a vast following like Dudu Miyan and had managed to have

at least few followers in every village of East Bengal. [33] As he had succeed from *Tariqat-i-Muhammadiayah* and had carried a similar kind of a reformist appeal as *Faraizis* did to the same

constituency, they had a competition between themselves. There were, even bitter point of divergence

between these two movements.[34]Though Karamat Ali belonged to the *Hanafi* School of Islamic thought

and was an adherent supporter of puritanical Islam, he denounced the orthodox approach of the *Tariqat-i-Muhammadiayah* and *Fairizis* in one hand and also rejected the traditional 'un-Islamic' rituals practiced

in Bengali Muslim society.[35]The *Ta'ayuni* Movement like the *Faraizis* also dictated on the attire of the

Muslims. Like length of Kurta, style of fashioning beard, compulsory skull cap were part of the

teachings.[36]He also adopted a few things outside of the theological understanding of Hanafi School. The

Pir-Muridi system, the teacher-student relationship, which is mostly a characteristic of Sufi sects, was

adopted by Karamat Ali making a moderation in the practices regarding the particular relationship.[37]The

principal point of contestation between the *Ta'ayuni* movement and the other reformist movement was

about the characteristic of the colonial Indian state. While the *Faraizis* and *Tariqat-i-Muhammadiayah*

believed that rule of British Raj *is Dar-ul-Herb* and therefore they suspended the congressional prayer of

Friday and Id, Keramat Ali believed that colonial India is indeed a *Dar-ul-Islam* and therefore there is no

point in stopping the Congressional prayers.[38] However, this debate was not merely about the holding of

prayer. Rather, Karamat Ali did not see British Raj as the primary enemy of South Asian Muslims and he

wanted Muslims to rather concentrate on issues of social importance. He realized that the attempt to

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[32]Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India*, 23
[33]Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, (Oxford 1981), 45
[34]Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India*, 23
[35]Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*,18
[36]"The Faraizis were known for their peculiar manners. They wore their Dhutis loose and kept beard, tying up the beard with the hairs of their heads."- Narahari Kaviraj, *Wahabi and Farazi Rebels of Bengal*, 80
[37]Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India*, 23-24
The Pir-Muridi relationship was allowed in Ta'ayuni Movement but the rituals such as observing the death anniversary of the Pir was not permitted.
[38]Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India*, 23-24

establish a Muslim rule in India by defeating the Raj is a futile task[39] and focusing on that was hampering the social progress of the community.

Therefore, Keramat Ali unlike Dudu Miyan or Titu Mir did not call upon uprising against the British Raj or the Hindu Zaminders. He worked for the general well being of the common Muslims in Bengal[40] and has preached how to abandon the un-Islamic rituals and practice a purer form of Islam. He collaborated with Nabab Abdul Latif, who himself was trying to modernize the Muslim community in Bengal since late 1850s and pleaded for reconciliation between the Raj and the Muslim peasants.[41]The government in return also had recognized his influence among the vast Muslim population in Bengal and thought to use him for propagating modern education among the Muslims.[42]

Though he himself was a Bihari, Karamat Ali's role in shaping the identity of the Bengali Muslim was quite important. He had taken a different approach than the *Faraizis* or *Wahabis*. Rather inspiring the common Muslims to raise in rebellion against the Raj, he concentrated on the social issues of common Muslim life and tried to find solution for them within the arena of Islamic teachings and later in collaboration with Abdul Latif, outside the arena of Islamic teaching as well. Religiously speaking, he also had abandoned the orthodox approach of *Hanafi* School in many ways by adopting necessary rituals (such as *Pir-Muridi*) outside the purview of the School in order to propagate the teachings more effectively. His philanthropic works also impacted the common Muslim minds and therefore they felt connected with his teachings. This approach had given the common Muslims a sense of purpose in their daily social life, through which their Muslim identity was established more deeply without negating vast share of their cultural inheritance they had as the habitant of Bengal.

Urban Muslim Space

[39]Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, 21
[40]Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, 48
[41]Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, 22
[42]H Beveridge, The District of Bakarganj, Its History and Statistics, (London 1876), 254

The revivalist and reformist movements in Bengal had consolidated the Islamic identity of the rural Muslim masses. The *Wahabi* and *Faraizi* movements were shaping the identity principally as a counter to British Raj. However, there were parallel initiatives being taken by urban Muslims which warrant a discussion different from the *Wahabi* and *Faraizi* movement. Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan established the Anglo-oriental Muslim College in Aligarh to introduce widespread English education among the Muslims. In Bengal, Nawab Abdul Latif and Sayed Amir Ali took similar initiatives of spreading English education. The perception of Raj was completely different in the minds of these urban Muslims. They did not perceive Raj as the enemy- rather they wanted to collaborate with the Raj in order to change the socio-economic condition of the Muslim society in South Asia. Nawab Abdul Latif belonged to an aristocratic family, whose history goes back to Islam's first entry in India in seventh century.[43] Latif was himself a English educated man and was conferred the title of '*Nawab Bahadur*' in 1872 on the occasion of Her Majesty's jubilee because of his consistent public service.[44]

Abdul Latif had a long public life, in which he had attempted to spread the English education in Muslim society, consolidate Muslim political opinion and establish a tradition of social mobilization in the society. He became instrumental in establishing the Anglo-Persian department in Calcutta Madrassah.[45] He also held the opinion that the department should be converted into a full-fledged college. Even before the establishment of Anglo-Oriental Muslim College in Aligarh, the proposal for foundation of a college for the Muslims was put forward by Abdul Latif. At a public meeting in 10 January 1868, Abdul Latif made a vigorous plea for the propagation of English education among the Muslims.[46] Surendranath Banerjee observed, "But before Sir Sayed Ahmed was on the field, Abdool Luteef was there, exhorting, supplicating, entreating, earnest appealing to his co-religionists to give their sons an English education, if

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[43]Bose, *Anti-colonialism, Regionalism, and Cultural Autonomy: Bengali Muslim Politics 1840s-1952*, 46
[44]Bose, *Anti-colonialism, Regionalism, and Cultural Autonomy: Bengali Muslim Politics* 47, Also See, 'Nawab Abdul Latif: Father of Muslim Awakening in Bengal' *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* (1990), 37-53
[45]Jayanti Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, 114
[46]Jayanti Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal,* 112

they wanted to hold their own, in competition with the Hindus."[47] Abdul Latif's success was to bring consciousness amongst the Muslims about English education without hurting the religious sentiment of the Muslims. He was indeed a thoroughly English educated man but never had been considered as a renegade by the Muslims because of his commitment to Muslim cause.

Abdul Latif established the Mohammedan Literary Society in 1863. The objective of the society was to propagate literary consciousness among the Muslims. Abdul Latif was first to recognize Bengali as the mother tongue of the Muslims of Bengal and suggested use of an Islamized Bengali for them. However, he had distinguished between the *Ashrafs* and *Atrafs* of Bengal- while recognizing the Bengali as the Mother tongue of both the *Atrafs* and *Ashrafs*, he encouraged the Asrafs to learn Urdu and Persian and develop a similar etiquette consistent with that of the Non-Bengali Muslims of South Asia.[48] The proceedings of Mohammedan Literary Society also further confirms this belief of Abdul Latif as the Society had almost exclusively conducted its meeting in Urdu and English and at times in Persian.[49] His writings on the language issue further established his belief that the Atrafs of Bengal were racially different from the Ashrafs and were closer to fellow Hindus and therefore were not the original descendent of the Islamic traditions.

Abdul Latif's political views differed from the *Wahabis* and *Faraizis* in a very strong manner. He did not believe in *Jihad* against the British government and was himself a convinced collaborationist. His views vis-à-vis the British Raj was not well-accepted among the revivalist groups and he was denounced as 'an enemy and revolutionizer of Islam'.[50] The only reformist who supported his political views was Karamat Ali. On 23 November 1870, in a meeting of the Mohammedan Literary Society Karamat Ali delivered a speech- "The Duty of Mohammedans in British India towards the ruling Power".[51] In this address,

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[47]Speech of Surendranath Banerjee at the Abdul Latif Memorial meeting held in Town Hall, Calcutta on Friday 11 1893, Quoted in RC Majumdar, *The History and Culture of the Indian People: British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, Vol.X, Part II (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhaban, 1965), 298

[48]Bose, *Anti-colonialism, Regionalism, and Cultural Autonomy: Bengali Muslim Politics 1840s-1942*, 47

[49]Bose, *Anti-colonialism, Regionalism, and Cultural Autonomy: Bengali Muslim Politics 1840s-1942,* 48

[50]Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, 114

[51]Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, 120

Karamat Ali pointed out by quoting Islamic jurisprudence that British India is not '*Dar-ul-Herb*' but is indeed a '*Dar-ul-Islam*'. And therefore it would be unlawful and anti-Islamic to preach Jihad against the Raj. Karamat Ali further appealed to the Muslims to cooperate with the Raj and focus on the material improvement of the society. Five thousand copies of this speech were printed by the Mohammedan Literary Society and circulated widely in Bengal and other provinces.

Karamat Ali's support was instrumental for Abdul Latif as Ali held a huge influence over the masses of Muslim society. Ali's Support extended a religious legitimacy towards Latif's political work. In 1976 when Bulgarian Massacre happened in the Ottoman Empire, the public opinion in Britain raised against the Caliph. On 7 October 1876, Abdul Latif organized and presided over a large meeting of the Muslims in the Town Hall of Calcutta. Apart from hundreds of common Muslim men, this meeting was attended by several elite Muslims of then Calcutta along with many Princes and *Nawabs*. The Meeting took a resolution of raising a fund for the Turkish wounded soldiers and civilians and also sent a plea to the governor requesting the Raj for continuation of the good diplomatic relation that Britain and Turkey shared at that moment.[52]

The political notion of Abdul Latif had shaped the views of Muslims of Bengal for the next few decades. His loyalty to the British raj triumphed over the *Jihad* propagated by the revivalists of Bengal. We would observe in the following decades how the educated Muslims of Kolkata had collaborated with the Raj and had focused on the socio-economic issues pertaining the Muslim society. Sayed Amir Ali's endeavors in this regard were phenomenal. Though his loyalty lied with the Raj, Abdul Latif did not disconnect with the pan-Islamic identity of the Muslims of South Asia which was strongly connected with the Ottoman Empire. Latif and his associates were ideologically aligned with the Pan-Islamism but his notions of *realpolitik* induced him to evolve a strategy of collaboration with the Raj.

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[52]Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, 121

Sayed Amir Ali was the successor of Abdul Latif in this regard. He was also an English educated man, studied law in London and then married an English woman. Besides that, he was a *Si'aite*, therefore unlike Abdul Latif, he was not successful to stay at the center of Sunni Majority Muslim society of Bengal. Nevertheless, his contribution in the formation of political opinion of the Muslims in Bengal was influential in many ways. In 1877 Amir Ali founded the National Mohammedan Association, the pioneering Muslim political body in colonial South Asia. The reason of foundation of the association cited by Amir Ali was- "Perceiving the lack of complete political trainings among the Muslim inhabitants of India and the immense advantage and the preponderance the Hindu organizations gave to their community I had founded…the association."[53] The objective of the association was the 'political regeneration of the Indian Mohammedans by their moral revival and constant endeavors to obtain from government a recognition of their just and reasonable claims'. To make this possible the association decided to be loyal towards the British Raj and to adopt constitutional means to put forward their demands.[54] However, interestingly neither Sayed Ahmed Khan nor Abdul Latif had supported this initiative. Latif even criticized 'Amir Ali and his young political associates'.[55]

National Mohammedan Association discussed and put forward demands for Muslim education at length. The Association pointed out that the Muhsin Fund is being wasted by getting invested into the different Madrassahs, which were at that time declining. Therefore, the association demanded that instead of investing there, the government should use the fund to establish and run schools and colleges for English Education. In his representation to Hunter Commission, Amir Ali opined that the Muslims were no longer adverse to the English education rather it was the general poverty of the Muslim society that caused the backwardness. He also suggested that the schools, as dominated by the Hindus did not sympathized with the backward Muslim students and therefore and consequently caused further exclusion of Muslim Students. He demanded for lowering the fees for the Muslim students, introduction of Arabic and Persian

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[53]Ernest H Griffin (ed.), Memoirs of Rt. Hon'ble Sayed Amir Ali, *Islamic Culture*, vol. V (1931), Pages 513-20
Later on the organization's was known as Central Mohammedan Association
[54]MA Rahim, 'Sayed Amir Ali and Muslim Politics and Renaissance', *Islamic Studies* vol. 7 No 2 (1968), 99
[55]Rahim, 'Sayed Amir Ali and Muslim Politics and Renaissance', 97

curricula, appointment of Muslim teachers and school inspectors as remedies. [56] Indeed, Hunter Commission had accepted and implemented few of the suggestions made by Ali.[57]

The Association put forward a memorandum to the British governor in 1882. The memorandum was based on the essay 'A cry from the Indian Mohammedans" written by Amir Ali in the same year. This memorandum explicitly traced the historical reasons behind the backwardness of the Muslim masses and therefore had sought some specific actions from the government. The memorandum pointed out the disparity between the Hindus and Muslims in government services and in legal jobs. Therefore, it sought a reservation for the Muslims in the services through a special provision of appointment of the Muslims in there. Though it had popular support but Abdul Latif had distanced himself from the memorandum showing the reason that such arrangements would be against the ideals of equality of the British Government.[58] However, this demand, though not was fulfilled at that time but paved the way of forty five percent reservations of the government jobs for Muslims in near future.

While based in London, in 1904, Amir Ali advocated for formation of a political party for the Muslims. In an Article 'India and the New Parliament', he opined that foundation of a political party for the Muslims is crucial for their existence.[59] He also advocated for the Separate Electorate for the Muslims in India. He wrote in a letter to the Times, "Separate Electorate is indispensable for the existence of Muslims in India."[60] He also led a deputation to Lord Morley on 27 January 1909 pleading for the Separate electorate. Thus, Amir Ali shaped the political identity of the Muslims through his activism and intellectual fervor. His Memorandum of 1882 was a crucial historical documentation of the socio-economic reasons behind the backwardness of the Muslim society in colonial South Asia, which can be compared to the phenomenal work of Nauraji- 'The poverty and the Un-British Rule in India'.

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[56]Rahim, 'Sayed Amir Ali and Muslim Politics and Renaissance', 100-101
[57]See Next Chapter
[58]Latif wrote an disclaimer in Time of India- cited by Rahim, 'Sayed Amir Ali and Muslim Politics and Renaissance', 102
[59]Rahim, 'Sayed Amir Ali and Muslim Politics and Renaissance', 104
[60]Rahim, 'Sayed Amir Ali and Muslim Politics and Renaissance', 106

Amir Ali had constantly tried to negotiate between the communitarian identity of the Muslims and the modern statehood of the Raj. Unlike the *Wahabis* and *Faraizis*, Sayed Amir Ali adopted constitutional means to put forward the demands of the Muslims of South Asia and tried to depict Islam as a modern socio-political ideology which did not warrant any quarrel with modern state mechanisms and democratic ideals of the British Empire. He described the prophet as 'an exemplary man, an ideal leader and the founder of the democratic order of the society'.[61] He noted on Islam that "Socially at a time when the masses were in hopeless subjection, Islam elaborated a political system fundamentally republican and stressing the duties of the sovereigns towards their subjects, and the freedom and equality of the people".[62] Hence he tried to portray Islam as a modern ideology which contains democratic, republican and egalitarian concepts within it and therefore did not require a *Jihad* against the Raj. This endeavour had indeed carried a sense of Islamic sovereignty within it which had in turn helped in consolidating the political identity of the Muslims of Bengal (and of South Asia) in accordance with the Islamic ideals.

Quest of *Jati* Identity

The predominant question in the social discourse of the Bengali Muslim society in the late nineteenth century was to ascertain the communitarian identity of the Muslims of Bengal. While the Muslim self of the society was becoming stronger through various socio-religious attempts, the question of *Jati* (ethnic/ national) identity also become quite important to resolve. The late decades of the nineteenth century were witnessing the consolidation of the anti-colonial identity especially in the urban Hindu space. The pre-colonial historical signifiers were becoming important in that regard to negate the colonial hegemony. When this issue of *Jati* identity started to surface in the social discourse, facilitating the construction of a unique Muslim *jati* identity, the intellectuals and the leaders of the society had to negate two 'hegemonies'- namely, the colonial hegemony and the Hindu hegemony of glorious Hindu past. At the same time, the process of Islamization in rural Bengal and the consolidation of the Muslim identity in the

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[61] Sayed Amir Ali, 'Spirit of Islam' (5th edition), 118
[62] Rahim, 'Sayed Amir Ali and Muslim Politics and Renaissance'108

urban space opened a possibility for the Bengali Muslims to 'imagine' themselves as part of the larger Muslim world. Therefore, the making of the identity was not depending only on establishing a counter hegemony against the Raj or the newfound Hindu pre-colonial past glory. It seemed that Muslims were capable of making the *jati* identity independently as the part of the larger Muslim world.

For the first time, the 1871 Census reports established the fact that the Muslims are the dominant religious community in Bengal. Moreover, this report ushered in a new debate if the Muslims in Bengal had come from outside or they were the original inhabitants of the land. The Census commissioner, Mr. Beverly opined that the dominance of the Muslims as religious community in the province was a consequence of the large scale conversion of the local inhabitants after the arrival of Islam.[63] However, this view was challenged by the Muslim scholars heavily. Khondaker Fuzli Rubee's *Hakiqaat-i-Musalman-i-Banglah*, which was first published in Urdu in 1895 and then translated into English was a classic opposition to Beverly's views. This book remarked that the predominance of Muslims in Bengal was indeed a consequence of the large scale migration of Muslim professionals in Bengal after the arrival of Islam there.[64] He argued, as the Muslim migrants were not part of the same Bengali ethnicity which the Bengali Hindu constituted, the Bengali Muslims were fundamentally a separate community of their own.[65]

Another piece of pamphlet, which was published by a Zaminder of Mymansingh, described that twenty percent of the Muslims in Bengal were direct descendants of the foreign settlers, fifty percent of them are of mixed origin (between foreign settlers and local inhabitants) and only thirty percent of them are local inhabitants, whose predecessors were converted into Islam.[66]

The Moslem Chronicle of Kolkata also supported the views of Rubee and wrote that the suggestion indicating a local origin of the Muslims in Bengal was incorrect and should not be taken into account.[67] The periodical, *Hafez* also wrote an editorial piece supporting Rubee's opinion about the origins of

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[63] Census Report of India, 1872, Volume V, Page 132
[64] Khondker Fuzli Rubee, The Origin of Muslims, (Kolkata, 1895), 4-10
[65] Rubee, The Origin of Muslims, 5
[66] Census Report of India, 1901, Vol. V Part I, 104
[67] Editorial, *The Moslem Chronicle*, 17 January 1895

Bengali Muslims.[68] At the same time, Nausar Ali Yusufzai wrote a book in which he contested the prevailing argument on the foreign origins of Bengali Muslims. He remarked that though there was a section of Bengali Muslims, whose roots did not belong to Bengal but elsewhere, the descendants of the local inhabitants constituted the larger section of the Muslim society in Bengal. Eventually, Nausar Ali changed his views in this regard and in the second edition of his book he wrote- "Those who are aware of existence of genuine aristocratic families in Bengal but contend that the majority of the Bengali Muslims are descendants of the low-caste Hindu converts... are doing great injustice to the legitimate claims of the Muslims of Bengal."[69]Kazi Imdadul Hawk, wrote that '...unlike the Hindus the Muslims have much to look beyond the handful of their members left in India."[70] Against the background, the Bengali Muslim scholars were attributing to the fact that the Muslims in South Asia (Bengal in our case) were more deeply connected to the history of West Asia and therefore were part of a 'supra-territorial, supra-regional Islamic identity.'[71] In this particular period, one could observe how the history, folklore and mythology of West Asia connected with Islamic glory had been enthusiastically translated in Bengali by various scholars and intellectuals and how the current affairs of West Asia had occupied a large part of the printing culture of Bengali Muslim society.[72]

However, there was a counter attempt of defining the identity within the geographical location of south Asia. Maulavi Mohammad Hedayetullah wrote extensively about the 'Indian' identity of the Muslims in *Nabanur*. In an article written in *Nabanur* in 1905, Hedayetullah attempted to explain how India had transformed Islam in many ways.[73] He further elaborated that the changes made to Islamic practices in South Asia had given birth to a new community- the 'Indian Muslims'. It was the British Raj who desired to create a division between the religious communities in India by portraying Indian Muslims as

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[68]Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*,114

[69] Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity* 114-115

[70] Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayik Patra, 1831-1930*, (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1969), 27

[71] Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayik Patra*, 27

[72] detailed discussions in third chapter

[73] Maulavi Mohammad Hedayetullah, *'Swadeshi Andolon'*, *Nabanur*, November 1905

foreigners. The task he conferred was to resist this effort of the government and not to encourage further division along the religious lines in Bengal during the first partition of Bengal in 1905.[74]

Though Mohammad Hedayetullah's effort was praiseworthy, he has never been able to surpass the impact of the '*Ashraf*' outlook on the foreign origin. During the Swadeshi Movement the Bengali Muslim scholars and intellectuals remained mostly neutral or in support of Partition of Bengal.[75] Semanti Ghosh in her 'Different Nationalisms' had raised a very important question in this regard. She asked, "Did such laments about a glorious past and a decadent present necessarily entail a representation of extra-territorial belongingness?" and does it as well negate the present locational ties altogether?[76] She thus questioned Rafiuddin Ahmed's inference that there was an Islamization of the society in an overall sense. She rather remarked that it was the 'high-class' which shared the view of foreign origin. However, millions of Muslims from the small towns and villages of Bengal did not ascribe to such position. She also questioned that if the depiction of the Hindu past during the same time was indeed an effort to negate the colonial hegemony and not an effort to 'Hinduisation' then why the same deed for the Muslims would inevitably lead to a process of 'Islamization'?

The above mentioned attempts did not necessarily lead to the Islamization of the Bengali Muslim society nor was it preparing a self identity of the Muslims negating the colonial hegemony. In a matter of fact, the process was producing a discourse different from both. The quest of identity had indeed an Islamic overtone and the international political situation facilitated in solidifying that overtone. As a consequence, the process had resulted into creating a 'Muslim' rather than an 'Islamic' identity. The Muslims of Bengal through the Census process had become aware of their demographic strength in the province but socio-economically the society lagged far behind the Hindus. The quest had made the Muslims conscious about their collective bargaining strength in the province by providing them the primary preconditions for

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[74] Hedayetullah, *'Swadeshi Andolon', Nabanur*
[75] With few exceptions, such as Maniruzzaman Isalamabadi, who was a vocal supporter of the Swadeshi Movement and Abdul Rasul, who presided the Provincial Congress session in Barisal against the partition.
[76] Semanti Ghosh, *Different Nationalisms*, (New Delhi: Oxford, 2017), 39

consolidating themselves as a community. There was a prevailing identity crisis amongst Muslims when it came to their *jati* identity as they were confused to choose between their glorious Islamic past and their decadent Muslim present. The socio-economic condition of the community needed to be addressed immediately. The rejuvenation of glorious Islamic past in the works of the Muslim religious leaders and scholars worked as a catalyst to make the members of the society conscious about what they had lost in the last few centuries and what was there to be rightfully demanded from the government of the day. The foundation of All India Muslim League in Dhaka was a natural result of this process. The league was founded to tackle the disdain and agony of the Muslim society in the colonial period instead of rejoicing the glorious Islamic past.

What should be the duties of the Muslims at that moment? Nausar Ali Yusufzai attempted to explain that in the following words:

The Bengali Muslims have to rise on their own strength, just as others are doing; they have to produce, nurture and fulfil their National life (*jatiyo Jibone*) just as others are doing; they have to grow strong and prosperous through their own enterprise, just as the Hindus are doing: never ever should we indulge in the passive expectation that the British or the Hindus would actually salvage us from our all-round degradation.[77]

It was not the only instance where '*jati*' (or *jatiyo*) was invoked to refer to the Muslims of Bengal. Sayed Abul Mohammed Ismail Hossein asked for developing a self-conscious *Jati* in his article in *Nabanur*.[78] In this article he had mentioned that Muslims had a larger commitment and obligation to India, which is their country (*desh*) and home of many nations (*jati*). Regarding the language issue, Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury warned that the Bengali Muslims should not neglect to learn and practice Bengali as they did when it came to English. Otherwise they had to repent again.[79]

There are several other instances where the Muslim scholars of Bengal had opposed the '*Ashraf*' view of origin of Bengali Muslims.[80] Yet, the important question was how to perceive the country of India and the

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[77] Nausar Ali Yusufzai, *Bangiya Muslaman*, trans. by Ghosh, *Different Nationalisms*, 40
[78] Sayed Abul Mohammed Ismail Hossein, *Bangiya Muslaman*, quoted by Ghosh, *Different Nationalisms*, 41
[79] Sayed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, *The Moslem Chronicle*, 21 April 1900
[80] detailed discussion in the third chapter

land of Bengal and how to position the Muslims culturally and socially in this country and this land. Since the days of *Tariqaat-i-Muhamaddiyah*, a section of Islamic clergy promoted the notion that India was a *'Dar-ul-Herb'* and hence could not be the country of the Muslims. Furthermore, as the concept of 'motherland' did not reconcile with the Islamic theology this detachment with South Asia became a quite strong phenomenon. Accordingly, the duty of a Muslim was solely to focus on *Jihad* and to serve the Pan-Islamic world order. But with the practical failure of such doctrines and the rise of another theological explanation which portrayed South Asia as *'Dar-ul-Islam'* instead of '*Dar-ul-Herb,* the focus shifted from Jihad against the Raj to the introduction of socio-economic reform in the Muslim society. At the same time, the urban Muslims were attempting to look beyond the theological analysis of South Asia and trying to focus on the material condition of the Muslim society in Bengal. In this context, they did not entirely abandon Islam or Pan-Islamic identity as they maintained strong solidarity towards the Islamic world of West Asia and concentrated on the socio-economic conditions of the Muslims of Bengal. The focus was hence not on religious duties but on the social and economic agenda. While attempting a reform of the Muslim society in Bengal, the question of identity appeared in front of the intelligentsia, which could not be resolved immediately. There was indeed an impact of *Wahabi* and *Faraizi* campaigns in Bengal, which trained a large section of the society to imagine itself as the part of the larger Islamic world. But the immediate socio-economic agenda of the Bengali Muslims compelled them to reconsider colonial India as their *desh* and invoked them to imagine themselves as a *jati* (as the other Muslim communities in West Asia or in other places were not sharing the same socio-economic fate as the Bengali Muslims). This process marked the beginning of the emergence of a Muslim identity amongst the Muslims of Bengal.

Socio-Economic Changes in Bengali Muslim Society: Evolution of Muslim Middle Class Mind

When the events of the outer world have already started influencing the Indian life and thought process then we can be assured of one thing that this influence will correct the perversion of the course of the Hindu, Muslims and other communities in India. With that the arrival of Mustafa Kemal in the Muslim world is also remarkable. Though the Wahabi fundamentalism is a mighty force today but we can hope that Kemal's scientific ideas and nationalism would definitely spread its sphere of influence.

Kazi Abdul Wadud concluded his essay *Banglar Musalman'er Kotha* (The Saga of Bengali Muslims) expressing his hope for a rational and modern Bengali Muslim society.[1] Wadud was not the only one who was trying to envisage a modern Bengali Muslim Society in line of the social and political progress that happened in Turkey. There are many intellectuals in Bengali Muslim society who had taken the evolution of Turkey from a theocratic Monarchy to a secular republic as a role model to be followed in Bengal as well. However, the process of political consolidation of Muslim society in Bengal started much earlier than the revolution in Turkey. During the Partition of Bengal, Muslim League was established in Dhaka in 1906, but for the following decade it remained in a dormant stage, not capable of developing any program, that would consolidate the Bengali Muslims, the second largest linguistic community in the Muslim world. During the Khilafat movement, for the first time, a large section of Bengali Muslims directly participated in a 'political' movement against the British. However, the movement ended disastrously when the Khilafat was delegitimized by the people of Turkey themselves by establishing a secular republic. The evolution of Bengali Muslim mind as discussed in the last chapter had coherence with the ideological understanding of the Khilafat movement. Yet, the events in Turkey had completely jeopardized that course of socio-political evolution and compelled to bring about new lines of thinking.

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[1] Kazi Abdul Wadud, Banglar Musalman'er Kotha, *shreshtho Prabandho,*(Kolkata: Kathaprakash, 2015) 216-217

However, any distant political track as the revolution of Turkey had very cosmetic influence on daily socio-political discourse in Bengal. Therefore, more material changes were needed at the ground to bend the social and political thoughts within the community. Furthermore, the first two decades of the twentieth century brought major socio-political changes in the Bengali Muslim Society. The changes were manifold- shift in the class character of the landed gentry and peasants, spread of education, evolution of a professional and business class and growth of an intellectual class, which had adhered to scientific temperament and secular ideals as the core of their social and political understanding. All these changes had resulted into the evolvement of a new Bengali 'other,' which was largely inspired by the evolution of the Hindu Bengali Society in the nineteenth century, but at the same time was successful to preserve their unique and parallel identity.

Changes in the Landed Class

Since the inception of Permanent Settlement as the revenue collection method in the agrarian sector of Bengal, a particular section of the society had benefited from the program. All over Bengal, most of the appointed Zaminders (Landlords) were mostly Savarna Hindu Bengalis. Unlike Mahalwari and Rayatwari System, Permanent Settlement gave absolute rights of the lands to the Zaminders, which in turn converted the peasants into mere tenants of the land. In eastern district of the undivided province, this landlord-tenant relationship had a communal colour because the vast majority of the peasantry was Muslims. Census report of 1901 noted that in Bengal presidency- "…the very large proportion of Musalmans, who subsist by agriculture and the small number engaged in intellectual pursuits. Of those who live by agriculture again, the proportion is high in the case of tenants, while that of landlords and agricultural labourers is relatively small. No less than 7,316 in every 10,000 Mohammedans are cultivators, compared with 5,555 amongst the same number of Hindus but the proportion who are land-owners is only 170 in 10,000 as against 217 in the same number of Hindus."[2]

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[2] Census of India 1901, Volume V. Page 484

Therefore, most of the times, the class conflict in those areas surpassed the class consolidation of the peasantry and took a communal turn. Rafiuddin Ahmed observed,

…the class of economic interests between the predominantly Muslim Peasantry and their oppressors, the high caste landlords and moneylenders with whom the entire Hindu community came to be identified in the Muslim mind. Peasant resentments, cleverly manipulated by the prosperous *Jotedar* class, had already caused a series of Zaminder-Ryot riots in the districts of eastern Bengal. Although the conflicts were basically economic, in the prevailing ideological atmosphere the grievances of the Muslim peasantry soon acquired a communal colour.[3]

Earlier historians often emphasized the communal factors of the riots and rather demeaned the class consciousness of the Muslim peasantry. However, the course of events of a particular riot in East Bengal could be resourceful enough to prove it otherwise. While discussing the riots of Kishoreganj in Mymansingh district, Sugata Bose had described how the houses and treasury of the moneylenders were attacked in July 1930. On 14 July 1930, the Mathkhola Bazar, which was dominated by the Hindus, was attacked by the rioting Muslim mob. The Bazar was burnt down and looted, but the Kali Temple of Mathkhola, which was part of the Bazar itself, remained unharmed.[4] Also, not only in Kishoreganj, generally, the nature of 'communal' violence in rural Bengal was quite different as the violence in most cases never impacted the Hindu peasants (who were mostly *Namasudras*). Partha Chatterjee, while describing the common feature of attacking the Hindu Zaminder and moneylenders' households by the Muslim mob during the riots has identified this behavior of the Muslim peasantry as the 'negation' of the Zamindari hegemony.[5] Yet regardless of the explanatory factor behind the incidence, one finding can be drawn based on this incidence; by the early 1920s, the Bengali Muslim Peasantry started to function under the coupled identity of religious community and economic class. The balance between these two had differed from time to time and from place to place.

At the same time, this simple religious-class relationship between Hindu Zaminder and Muslim Ryots was getting complicated. Since the late nineteenth century the process of sub-infeudation had begun and

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[3] Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, (Oxford 1981) 186
[4] Sugata Bose, "The Roots of Communal Violence in Rural Bengal. A Study of the Kishoreganj Riots 1930", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol-16 No: 3 (1982), 474
[5] Partha Chatterjee, "The Colonial State and The Peasant Resistance in Bengal 1920-1947", *Past and Present*, No. 110 (1986) 169-204

in the first two decades of twentieth century the process was accelerated. The class of *Jotedar* (rich farmer) became a strong socio-economic category in rural Bengal by this time. Rise of *Jotedars* had various consequences in rural Bengal. *Jotedars* were themselves cultivators but at the same time they received substantial rent from their lands. Therefore, economically they belonged to the rent-receiving class but culturally they were very much part of the peasantry.[6] The *Jotedars* themselves used to cultivate the lands and lived side by side with the fellow peasants and the Muslim *Jotedars*, followed the same rituals and customs in daily life as the Muslim peasants did. That is why, there was a strong cultural attachment between the *Jotedars* and the common peasantry. As far as the *Jotedars* class is concerned, the Muslim rent-receivers were almost as par with the Hindu rent-receivers in number, if not more than them.

Districts[7]	Percentage of Muslims in total Population	Percentage of Muslims among Rent-receivers	Percentage of Hindus in Total Population	Percentage of Upper Caste Hindus among rent receivers	Percentage of Others among rent receivers
Rajshahi	60.93	37.22	35.53	20.04	42.74
Dhaka	68.55	33.44	30.80	38.50	28.06
Chittagong	71.37	49.13	24.73	30.74	20.13

Between 1911 and 1921, the number of Hindu rent receivers decreased, while the number of Muslim rent receiver increased. That change mostly took place in the eastern part of the province. The comparative picture of Hindu and Muslim rent receivers stood in 1911 and 1921 as follows[8]:

Year	Hindu Rent Receivers	Muslim Rent Receivers
1911	1,076,381	432,236

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[6] Chatterjee, "The Colonial State and The Peasant Resistance in Bengal 1920-1947", 186
[7] The Census of India, 1911, Vol. V, Part II, Page 299
[8] Census of India 1911, Volume V Part II, Page 449 and Census of India 1921, Volume V Part II, page 362

1921	855,961	452,131

In the next two decades, the number of Muslim rent-receivers increased steadily as a result of the perpetual sub-infeudation. This *Jotedar* class, as it was very much part of the peasant community, had captured the leadership role in the community. The surplus generated from the agriculture, which was almost exclusively appropriated by the Savarna Hindus earlier, had now been accessed and appropriated by a section of Muslim *Jotedars*. This change in agrarian economy paved the opportunity for the evolution of the rural Muslim middle-class. This class had a definite class aspiration and hence a definite class based economic demands. As their demand did neither correspond with the generic peasant demands, nor with those of the landlords to the Raj, a specific rural middle class socio-political formation was needed to consolidate rural Muslim middle-class. This phenomenon gave rise to the 'Praja' politics. Prajas were neither mere landless peasants, nor affluent landholders, but they were very much attached to the land in their capacity of revenue production and as well revenue collection. The charter drafted in 1920s on behalf of the tenants had few specific demands-

1. Abolition of illegal exactions

2. Reduction of Rent

3. Reduction of interest rates and relief from indebtedness

4. 'Honouable' treatment of the tenants in Zaminders' offices

5. Abolition of landlord's fee on Raiyati land.

These demands were also part of the amendment proposed to the 1928 Bengal Tenancy Act. In the 1930s, these demands were aggregated to the general demand of the abolition of the Permanent Settlement.[9] With this shift in class character, the Bengali Muslims in East Bengal consolidated themselves politically in economic terms with a subverted religious sentiment. But at the same time, this shift in class position

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[9] Chatterjee, "The Colonial State and The Peasant Resistance in Bengal 1920-1947", 184

brought a differentiated class consciousness and aspiration, which pushed a significant section towards institutional education and professional occupations.

Change in Education Sector

"The fact of 'Muslim Majority' and that of 'Muslim Backwardness' in Bengal perhaps were the antithesis of the political development as well as political cohesion, which Bengal achieved during the nineteenth century, if one sees it through the Hindu point of View."[10] Even if the Hindu point of view is rejected, the facts do not change. Considering that the province was populated by a Muslim Majority and historically ruled by Muslim elites for more than four hundred years, the poor socio-economic conditions of Muslims under the rule of Raj were a sheer anomaly. The nineteenth century witnessed a great advancement of Bengali middle class, which was exceptional in comparison to other British provinces. Yet, this positive socio-economic development was exclusively monopolised by the Hindus. The census of 1901 reported that the Mohammedans held a much smaller proportion in civil services in comparison to Hindus. The census report also noted that in other middle class occupations, the Muslims had a very low representation. Other than agriculture, the chief occupations of Muslims in Bengal were- tailor, dyer, mason and builder, silkworm rearer, cotton cleaners and pressers, butchers and book-binders etc.[11]

The advancement of the Bengali Hindu middle class could be credited to their close association with the Raj through education and professional collaboration. The propagation of Western education did not change the socio-economic conditions of Muslims in Bengal. Until 1837 Persian remained to be the language of upper and lower courts, which implied that e Muslims, who had historically mastered the language and developed a structured setup for learning it, were unconcerned about the utility of English education. Lieutenant Governor Revees Thompson argued differently on this matter. In the *General*

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[10] Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937-1947*, (Kolkata: Viswakosh Parishad, 2001) 1-2
[11] Census of India 1901, Volume V, Page 485

Report on Public Interest: Bengal 1884-85 (Page 18), he concluded that there is no general apathy towards English education amongst the Muslims. The interest in English education depends on the family's socio-economic conditions. Wherever Muslims are well off, they are participating in the educational system and the opposite applies in the cases where the economic conditions are harsh.[12] Against this background, it can be concluded that the ill-nourished socio-economic conditions of the Muslims in the nineteenth century Bengal was a vicious cycle within itself with a little outside assistance of the 'Islamic rejection of western education'. The Hindu-Muslim comparative chart in regards to their participation in English education in the early nineteenth century stands as follows: [13]

Year	Hindus	Muslims
1841	3188	751
1846	3846	606
1852	3814	796
1856	6448	731

In 1874, it stands as:[14]

Divisions	Percentage of Muslim Population	Percentage in schools	Percentage in Hindu Population	Percentage in Schools
Burdwan	12.8	6.0	85.3	93.5
Presidency	48.2	24.0	50.9	75.0
Divisions	Percentage of Muslim Population	Percentage in schools	Percentage in Hindu Population	Percentage in Schools
Rajshahi	61.0	45.0	38.5	54.5

[12] Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937-1947*, 6
[13] Syed Murtaza Ali, "Muslim Education in Bengal: 1837-1937", *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1971), 183
[14] Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, 134-35

Dhaka	59.1	27.0	40.4	73.0
Chittagong	67.4	43.0	29.7	54.5
Total for Bengal Proper	48.8	29.0	50.1	70.1

This figures show how far Muslims were underrepresented in school education. The situation was far worse when it came to higher education. The participation of Muslims in higher education as of 1882-83 stands as follows:[15]

Type of Educational Institute	Total Students	Muslim Students	Percentage of Muslim Students
Arts Colleges	2,900	115	3.9
Professional Colleges	856	19	2.2
High Schools	50,606	4,464	8.8

This table shows that generally, Muslims were far behind in English education, but when it came to college education, there was a sharp fall in the number of Muslim students. The remarkable number of drop out after school education proves that Muslims were not engaging with the western education because of their economic condition, rather than apathy towards western education due to orthodox preaching. The Census report of 1901 accounted that- "The Muhammadans are much more backward, and the proportion, who can read and write is barely half as great as it is amongst the Hindus. In every thousand males sixty eight are literate and in every one thousand female only two."[16]

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[15] Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, 150
[16] Census Report of 1901, Volume V, Page 208

British Raj's policy of education was ambiguous as well. For Muslim education, the Raj was following two lines. The pre-colonial education system of the Muslim society stood fast on the *Madrasahs* and *Maktabs*. The British government did not only run them and fund them, but as well they opened new *Madrasahs* and *Maktabs.* "It was often found that, while the number of Muslims in arts colleges and secondary schools had increased marginally, their number in the special Muslim schools and government aided *Maktabas* more than doubled.[17] WW Hornell, the Director of Public Instruction in Bengal observed,

The successful Moslem cultivator of these parts who desires to educate his son will send him to a *Madrassah* to learn Moslem law, literature, logic, rhetoric and philosophy and to study *Hadis* and *Tafsir…*If a Moslem in Eastern Bengal wants to endow an educational institution, he founds a *Madrassah* and puts it under the charge of *Maulavis…*[18]

Though there was pressure from the orthodox to follow a religious education system to create more 'Good Muslims' and they often complained about the Hindu hegemony in the educational system, even in private schools founded by Muslims, there were plenty Hindu teachers and students around. This shows that the co-education of Hindus and Muslims was not a great obstacle before Muslim participation in western education- WS Atkinson, the director of Public Instruction observed.[19]

Since 1870-80, the attitude towards the Muslim educational system in Bengal changed quite starkly. While inspecting the *Madrassas* in Dhaka and Rajshahi, AR Thompson, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, wrote to the Governor General in Council that these institutions are 'unsuited to the wants of the Mohammedan community*'*[20] The government of Bengal wanted more funding for the Mohammedan College in Calcutta, but the Government of India was persistent on continuing the policy of running pre-colonial Muslim Institutions. To mediate, the government of Bengal sent a new proposal, where they wanted the *Madrassas* to be closed and as compensation, the Muslim students would get opportunity to read Arabic and Persian in the high schools.

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[17] Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, 142
[18] Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, 142
[19] Bengal Education Proceedings, 1872, Page-77,
[20] General Report on Public Instruction, 1883-84.

While changes were occurring in the government's outlook, a large section of Muslim Society understood the necessity of the western language. Their abstention from the western education cost them dearly. For example, when Persian used to be the official language in judiciary, it was dominated by Muslims. However, ever since English has become the official court language, the number of Muslim advocates and clerks reduced drastically. According to Hunter, there were six Muslim lawyers against seven Hindu Lawyers in 1838. These figure changed significantly between 1852 and 1868, with the number of Muslims lawyers falling to one Muslim among forty two lawyers.[21] In other professions as well, the number of Muslims was perishing in comparison to Hindus. In this regard, Muslim Chronicle on 21 January, 1889 observed,

An Arabic student from a Bengal *Madrassa* is a peculiar scholar. While he can explain Arabic philosophy and has at his command a budget of apt quotations from Persian poetry, he has a very insufficient knowledge of the districts where he will have to earn his livelihood and is therefore unfit to conduct business. He can neither be a clerk, nor a sarkar, a journalist nor author…[22]

In an article in *Islam Pracharak* in 1902, an anonymous writer accused their forefather of failing to adopt an educational policy, which would enable them to learn English without compromising their religious obligations.[23] In another article in the same periodical, Abdul Haq Chowdhury called the idea of not learning English absurd, quoting Muhammad that "for education, if needed, one must also go to China."[24] Coupled with changes in government's outlook, the demand for the western education was growing rapidly among the general Muslim masses. The enhancement of jute production and its growth as a valued crop brought certain prosperity in the society, which in turn strengthened the demand.[25] As a consequence, the process of sub-infeudation created a new class of rich Muslims farmers (*Jotedars*), who also had a certain middle class aspiration. Altogether, a small but sizable section of Muslims in rural Bengal started to associate with the western education in hope for a change in their social status and economic fate as many of them aspired for respectable government jobs for their sons. This upward social

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[21] Ali, "Muslim Education in Bengal: 1837-1937", 191
[22] Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937-1947*, 13-14
[23] Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937-1947*, 14
[24] Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937-1947*, 14
[25] Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, 149

mobility was conjugated by another economic cause. Due to higher birth rate, the lands possessed by the famers were split into many small portions in successive generations and these small holdings were unable to feed everyone in the family. Therefore, the rural families needed someone from the house to seek other occupation, preferably a government one.

The Indian Education Commission (Hunter Commission) of 1882-1883 made the following recommendations in reagards to the Muslim Education:

1. The special encouragement of Mohammedan education be regarded as a legitimate charge on local and provincial funds.
2. The indigenous Mohammedan schools be liberally encouraged to add secular subjects to their course of instruction.
3. Special standards for Mohammedan primary schools be prescribed.
4. A graduate system of special scholarship for Mohammedan to be established.
5. Mohammedan inspecting officers to be employed largely for inspecting primary schools.[26]

Clearly, the government policy in regard to Muslim education changed drastically from what it used to be since the British rule was established in Bengal. After exactly hundred years of foundation of Calcutta Madrassa by Lord Hastings, the Hunter Commission recommendation came and the Raj started following the recommendations swiftly.

However, the barriers for Muslim students to engage with western education were multidimensional. Apart from the religious prejudice (which was overcome by the end of nineteenth century) and the structural problem (which was largely overcome by the 1920s, as the new education policy for the Muslims was adapted, many new schools were opened in Muslim majority districts), the language burden was a significant impediment for the aspiring students. The committee on Muslim Education (1915) pointed out that while a Bengali student perusing western education had to read only three

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[26]Ali, "*Muslim Education in Bengal: 1837-1937*", 189-190

languages (Bengali, English and Sanskrit), a Muslim student had to study five languages (Bengali, English, Persian, Urdu and Arabic).[27] This was a huge burden on the students, especially as their parents wanted them to learn the 'Islamic languages' in order to become a 'Good Muslim'. Moreover, the Hunter commission encouraged the idea of inclusion of these languages in the curriculum to attract more Muslim students in high schools. However, until 1915, it was not pointed out that neither the students were willing to learn the languages nor the languages are assisting them in seeking jobs. As a result of that, the committee in 1915 decided that apart from Bengali and English, learning these three languages would not be essentials for the students.[28] The "Muslim of Calcutta" made their observation on this matter clear by submitting a memorandum to the committee, which proposed,

Though we cannot drop the study of any of the five languages, it is not necessary for every individual boy to study all of them. The Mohammedan boy whose mother tongue is Bengali should receive his primary education in Bengali and should study a classical language, Arabic, Persian or Urdu…[29]

These efforts changed the language curriculum of high schools. A 'Third Language' system was applied universally for the Hindu and Muslim students. Hindu Students studied Sanskrit as the third compulsory language, while the Muslim students studied mostly Arabic or occasionally Urdu as the third language. Therefore, the efforts came from the government side and the newly emerging Muslim middle class along with the changing necessity of the time brought the Muslim education system at par with the Hindu educational system. The differences between these two were almost removed and the educational system as a whole was more secularized with the introduction of humanities and science subjects in the case of Muslims. All these factors, coupled with the change in attitude towards western education had a considerable impact on the participation rate of Muslims in higher education. The participation chart shown previously of 1882-83 stands as follows in 1921:[30]

Type of Educational	Total Students	Muslim Students	Percentage of Muslim

[27] Report of the committee appointed by the Bengal Government to consider questions connected with Muslim education (1915) Para 94 and 95, quoted by Rafiuddin Ahmed in Quest for identity.
[28] Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, 137
[29] Memorandum from 'Muslims of Calcutta', Calcutta University Commission Report Vol. VII, 212
[30] Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, 150

Institute			Students
Arts Colleges	12,896	999	7.74
Professional Colleges	2,842	142	5.13
High Schools	167,334	32,562	19.45

While the participation in college education was still very low[31], the remarkable shift happened at high school level, where the percentage of Muslim students went up from mere eight percent to nineteen percent. As for the next two decades, the percentage of Muslim students in high school increased steadfastly and the conversion rate of high school graduates to college students grew quite outstandingly. The picture of Muslim education in the period between 1911 and 1921 stands as following:

Year	Total Population	Male	Female	Literate	Male	Female
1911	25,495,416	12,855,816	12,639,598	904,650	874,453	26,197
1921	26,488,124	13,104,307	12,381,817	1,299,548	1,240,488	59,379

While the total Muslim population in 1921 was almost the same as 1911, the increase in the number of literates was huge. Within ten years, the number of male literates was raised by almost four hundred thousand. More remarkably, the number of female literates doubled between 1911 and 1921.[32] In 1911

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[31] That is because of the fact that though there was a rise of a *Jotedar* class happening in the rural Muslim society, but it was not as significant as it stands in early 1920s. Rather the process of Sub-infeudation accelerated in the decades of 1920s and 1930s, See Chatterjee, *The Colonial State and The Peasant Resistance in Bengal 1920-1947*, 169-204

Also, most of the students from Muslim background were the first generation learners, therefore many of them could not succeed in getting into colleges due to their socio-economic background.

Also since late 1880s, when the government policy changed on Muslim education, the emphasis was not on college education but on the high school education and as we can see here as well that the reforms (Hunter Commission, Committee on Muslim Education) proposed in various spheres were introduced in hope for more Muslim participation in high school education.

[32] Census of India 1911, Volume V Part II, Page 60 and Census of India 1921, Volume V Part II, page 71

the number of Muslims associated with teaching profession was four thousand seven hundred and eighty two. In 1921 the number jumped to twenty nine thousand three hundred ninety seven.[33]

Foundation of Dhaka University and its impact

All these initiatives and their consequences culminated in the foundation of Dhaka University in 1921. The demand for a university in Dhaka was there for a long time as East Bengal had no university and the students had to depend on Calcutta University. This demand has two perspectives- regional and communal. Regionally, East Bengal was considered as the 'backward' region due to its rural dominance, though it was more productive in terms of agriculture. The literacy rate was also low in comparison to the western part of the province. However, within four decades (1880-1920), the increase in the literacy rate, which was mainly caused by the change in the educational policy of the Bengal Government, generated a stronger demand for higher education among the dwellers. It should also be noted that due to various socio-economic changes in the nineteenth century, Calcutta University was hegemonised by the Bengali Hindus. In 1920, many Muslim intellectuals pointed out the fact that there was not a single Muslim Vice Chancellor ever appointed to the University. The Muslims were also poorly underrepresented amongst the students and teachers. Therefore, there was a demand on behalf of the Muslim community to have a university of their own. The Hindu hegemony over the university was proven to be true, when the proposals of founding a University in Dhaka were opposed by Hindu intellectuals, including the then Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University, Sir Asutosh Mukhopadhya, who protested against it and send their disagreement to the Education Department through deputation.[34]

These disagreements were, however, not completely communal. There were certain groups of Muslims as well, who opposed the establishment if a University in Dhaka. A section of Muslims in Calcutta believed that the founding of a university in Dhaka 'for Muslims' would not benefit them. They were therefore not interested in this proposal at all. There was also a section of Muslims in East Bengal, who

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[33] Census of India 1911, Volume V Part II, Page 456 and Census of India 1921, Volume V Part II, page 368
[34] Calcutta University Commission Report, Vol.IV, Part 2, 133

was not in favor of the idea of the University. They believed that, instead of building a university, the funds should be spent on primary education system in east Bengal.[35] On the other hand, Hindu elites like Jagannath Ray Choudhuri, Zaminder of Baliyati, came forward and donated lands to the university. Therefore, it is difficult to characterize the protest as only communal or as regionalist. The demand for Dhaka University was raised first in 1911-12. Immediately it was contested by Asuthosh Mukhopadhyay and Surendranath Banerjee.[36] Until, the Dhaka University act was passed in the Legislative Council in 1920, the demand from Muslim leaders and counter-demand from Calcutta Hindu elites continued. In 1921, the university was formally founded.

The establishment of Dhaka University was another stepping stone in the making of Muslim consciousness in Bengal as a community as well as a nation (or part of a nation). Though, the literary initiatives in Bengali Muslim society started much earlier in the decades of 1890s, Dhaka University provided a new space for the culture to grow independently. In 1895, *Bishadsindhu*, authored by Mir Musaraf Hossein was published, which is considered one of the foremost Muslim Bengali literary creations. This piece of workhad set a trend of writing, which had unique literary as well as social style to present a fictional literature work. This style of writing later gave birth to '*Musalmani* Bangla'. In 1889 *Bangiya Sahitya Bishwanai Musalman Samiti* was founded.[37]This was followed by the the foundation of *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti* in 1911, which is resulted in the establishment of a new social leadership in Bengali Muslim Society because of its non-elite class character.[38] All these initiatives had their own roles to play in the making of the Muslim self in Bengal (discussed in the next chapter). However, these initiatives were mostly counter-initiatives of the efforts made by the Hindus in that field. Whether *Bangiya Sahitya Bishwanai Musalman Samiti* or *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti, both were a* clear mirror image of *Bangiya Sahitya Parishad*, founded in 1885. The creation of 'other' Bengali culture

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[35] Sayed Abul Maksud, *Dhaka Bishwabidyalay O Bangladeshe Uchhoshikkh*a, (Dhaka: Prathama, 2016) Page 35-46
[36] Maksud, *Dhaka Bishwabidyalay O Bangladeshe Uchhoshikkha*, 52
[37] Wakil Ahmed, *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmaner Chinta O Chetonar Dhara*, 123
[38] Neilesh Bose, *Recasting the Region: Language, culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal*, (New Delhi: Oxford, 2014) 23

was important, but not sufficient as it was suffering from independent initiatives, that would generate an original footprint of Bengali Muslim culture rather than being mere reflection of Hindu middle class initiatives. Dhaka University provided such an opportunity, not only because of its Muslim dominance but also for its geographical location. Unlike Kolkata, there was no already evolved Hindu dominated middle class in Dhaka. It hence offered a fresh start for the Muslim intellectuals there. Apart from that, the university was situated in Bengali Muslim dominated East Bengal, which implied that it inherited a more pure or original Bengali Muslim culture to start with. Furthermore, as many of the students and teachers of the university came from rural east Bengal, they could identify themselves with the primary problems of the Bengali Muslim society more than the Muslim intellectuals in Calcutta. Hence, their works dealt not only with the cultural self of Bengali Muslims but also with their economic problems and other material hindrance before the socio-economic improvement of the Bengali Muslim society.

Apart from these factors, the exposure to the western education and ideals in the university had taken a pivotal role in establishing an intellectual class in Dhaka, which functions as a space to generate new ideas, literary works and even social and political organizations. Dhaka University in the 1920s had quite a few similarities with the 1820s and 1830s Hindoo College, which also played an essential role in the nineteenth century 'Bengal Renaissance'.

Muslim Sahitya Samaj/Buddir Mukti

Muslim Sahitya Samaj was the major literary-social organization that came into being centering the Dhaka University. *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* was founded in the year 1926 in Dhaka University Muslim Hall. This organization existed for ten years. *Shikha* was the mouthpiece of the organization, which due to the lack of funds was published only for five years. [39] The convening meeting was presided by Muhammad Sahidullah. Five people were given the responsibility of the organization: Namely, Abul Hussein (Professor of Economics), Abdul Haq (Student DU), Abujjoha Nur Ahmed, Abdul Kadir, Anwar

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[39] Habib Rahman, *Bangali Musalman Samaj O Buddhir Mukti Andolon*, (Kolkata: Mitram, 2009) 39

Hossein (Dhaka intermediate College). Abul Hussein became the first secretary of the organization. Kazi Abdul Wadud was also made a member of the first core committee of the organization. Abul Fazal observes,

The Muslim teachers at Dhaka University were conscious about their society and their objective was to change the current situation of the society by social reform through literature. The foundation of Dhaka University became a turning event in the cultural life of the Muslim Bengali Society. The University created a class of intellectuals both teachers and students who wanted to contribute for the society and to change it.[40]

The objective of the organization as declared was to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Bengali Muslims. The legacy of the organization was directly drawn from the ideals of Islam itself. The founding members did not want to confront Islam directly, but they rather wanted to point out the material problems of a Bengali Muslim man's life and to find remedy to those problems. In the beginning, unlike the intellectuals of Hindoo College, members of *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* admitted that Islam is sacrosanct and its ideals are irreversible. They wanted to bring reason into Islamic practices and wanted to introduce modern western education along with Islamic teachings.[41] However, after a while, this idea was abandoned and the members of *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* directly confronted the orthodox Muslim groups.

Abdul Haq, one of the founding members, summarized the context of the foundation of Muslim Sahitya Samaj as following:

The normal culmination of the events took place in the sub-continent and in the outer world was foundation of *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*. The Democratic revolution of Turkey, the abolishment of Khilafat, secularization of Turkey, was influential events in this context. Also the effort made by the Badshah of Afghanistan to modernize the Afghan society was also another important contemporary event. The whole Muslim world was going through a positive change. In Subcontinent, just few years earlier than the foundation of *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*, the Hindus and Muslims fought together against the Raj. If we minutely follow the changes occurring in the field of literature in Bengal, that was also significant. Najrul has already appeared amongst us, Kaji Imdadul Haq Was writing his novel, "Abdullah", reinterpreting the Islamic ethics. Begum Rokeya Sakhawat penned down her articles. Sayed Amir Ali published his book 'The Spirit of Islam'. The neighboring Hindu Society had already gone through a change in 19th century. The 19th century Renaissance was exemplary for the Muslim Society. Therefore the eventual culmination of these events was foundation of *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*.[42]

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[40] Abul Fazal, "*Rekhachitra",* (Dhaka: Boighar, 1985), 127
[41] Rahman, *Bangali Musalman Samaj O Buddhir Mukti Andolon*, 12
[42] Abdul Haq, "*Dhakar Muslim Sahitya Samaj, Sahitya, Atijhya, Mulyabodh*, (Dhaka: Muktadhara, 1976) 126

Though it was declared in its convening conference that *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* would follow the ideals of Islam, it was not essentially an Islamist organization. The basic aim of the organization was to create a milieu of reformation in the Muslim society. The word Muslim in the name implied this idea. Kaji Mohatar Hossein categorically said, "Though the name of our organization is **Muslim** *Sahitya Samaj*, we are not communal. We grant membership to all literary interested persons, belonging to different religions. One of our objective is to create literature, which would carry the essence of both Hindu and Muslim ideas."[43]

The submission to Islamic ideals should not be taken in the literal sense. It was more tactical than ideological for *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*. Unlike Hindu society in the early nineteenth century, the fundamentalists and orthodox forces were more consolidated in the case of the early twentieth century of Muslim Bengali Society. Therefore, the *Samaj* wanted to avoid any confrontation with these forces initially. However, the writings of both Abul Hussein and Kaji Abdul Wadud had infuriated the Islamists within few years. Furthermore, the organization had tried to bring many of the Hindu scholars and literary persons on board. The first yearly conference was presided over Charu Bandyopadhyay. The last conference in 1936 was presided over none other than Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay. Mohitlal Majumder read an essay in the third conference named '*Muslim Sahitya Samaj*'. Apart from them, Lila Nag, Hemlata Das, Bipinchandra Pal, Ramesh Chandra Majumder had also attended the meetings of *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*.

Abul Hussein, the first secretary of *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*, started a magazine in 1925 named *Tarun Patra*. This magazine was not meant for any particular community; its objective was was the development of the Bengali youth. Unlike *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*, *Tarun Patra* did not submit to Islam. Not only that, *Tarun Patra* started to critically examine the Islamic practices and customs. In the second edition of *Tarun Patra*, Abul Hussein wrote in the article 'Satya' (Truth),

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[43] 3rd Yearly Report of *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*, *Kamohor*, vol 3, (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1992), 103

Through perseverance anyone can become like Muhammad, even greater than Muhammad. Muhammad is an ideal of the mankind. However, he became great through rigor and one can also become great through the same path. If one does not admit to this fact then his soul will always remain as common.[44]

Abul Hussein wrote another article named '*Satkara Pnay*tallish*'* (Forty Five Percent), which was read in the second conference of the first year of *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*. In this article, Abul Hussein had objected to the forty five percent reservations for Muslims in government jobs. He argued that this reservation policy is making Muslims less aspirant. However, this article did not only draw criticism from the Islamists, but from other corners of the Muslim Society as well. In response to this article Poet Gulam Mustafa attacked Abul Hussein personally, saying that Hussein got his job in the University because of this reservation policy.

Kaji Abdul Wadud wrote an article, '*Sammohito Mussalman'* (Hypnotized Muslims) in *Abhijan* Magazine in 1926. He wrote,

Only one word can describe the condition of the Muslims, the Modern Muslims- 'hypnotized'. Muslims today are not only idolaters, their condition is far worse. All human qualities, reasoning, power of judgment, everything is lost for them. Their present is clouded, aimless and has no past or no future…The only truth for them is the master's command. By that command they dream for a meaningless future-dream of 'Pan-Islam', or dream of 'establishment of *Sharia*'s rule'…There is no conflict between Islam and liberal thinking…But those who identify themselves with Islam today, they are ignorant of every kind of liberal thinking.[45]

This article immediately sparked a backlash from the conservatives. Maolana Akram Khan furiously objected, "I have read that article minutely and concluded that in the name of new generation writing, Kaji is only trying to take down Islam.[46]

Kazi Abdul Wadud and Abul Hussein were vilified immediately for their opinions. They had to face dire consequences for these publications. They were declared as the 'Rebels against Islam'. Dhaka University was asked to fire Abul Hussein from his post. They were even threatened with their lives.[47] Kazi Abdul Wadud wrote in his memoir that after the 'Mohammadi' criticized him, a group of people in Dhaka

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[44] Kadir Abdul (ed), Abul Hussein *Rachanabali*, (Dhaka: Naoroj Kitabistan, 1968) 423
[45] Wadud, *Srestho Prabandho*, 197-202
[46] Rahman, *Bangali Musalman Samaj O Buddhir Mukti Andolon*, 94
[47] Rahman, *Bangali Musalman Samaj O Buddhir Mukti Andolon*, 93

wanted him dead.[48] After a while, Kaji had to write an open letter, in which he apologized in case his writing has hurt anyone's religious sentiment. *Mohammadi*, the conservative Islamist magazine published the letter.[49]

Though Abul Hussein apologized, he but did not stop his critical writings. Yet again he drew attack from the Islamists. In response to his article '*AdesherNigraha*' (The torture of Order), *Mohammadi* wrote, "Hindus called for destroying their temples. Then these people (*Muslim Sahitya Samaj*) thought that they also have to give a call so they would call for lit a fire to burn the Mosque. Hindus declared that they do not obey the Vedas from dark ages. Promptly these people replied that they do not comply with *sharia'* of Arabic dessert.[50]

Therefore, the *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* and especially Kazi Abdul wadud and Abul Hussein had taken a position different from the earlier understanding of the *Samaj* of on religious issues when indeed they started to challenge the conservatives of Muslim society. It was seen as the enactment of the same events occurred in the Hindu Bengali Society in 19th century. The social reformation which was due in the Bengali Muslim Society was initiated through the efforts of the *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*. Abdul Kadir, one of the founding members of MSS said in an interview,

The *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* had played the same role hundred years after in Dhaka what Young Bengal did in Kolkata in 19th century." Parthenon, *Jnaneshwan*, Enquirer were the mouthpieces of Young Bengal. In the same way, *Shikha*, *Jagaran*, *Jayati* were the mouthpieces of Muslim Sahity Samaj. The objective of these magazines was same, which was to hit on the conservative ideas of the society and exploration of the people's mind and progressiveness. In Young Bengal, the western democratic values were the primary source of ideas, whereas in *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*, the ideological thrust came from humanism, in many cases socialist humanism in particular.[51]

The influence of socialist humanism can be found in Abul Hussein's writings in particular. In the period between 1926 to 1932, Abdul Husseuin wrote consecutive essays on the peasant question of East Bengal, such as '*Krishaker Artanaad*' (The Peasants' Lament), '*Krishaker Durdasha'* (The Peasants'

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[48] Kazi Abdul Wadud, *Nana Kotha*, 77
[49] "Dhakar Duikhani Ghoshonapatra", *Saptahik Mohammadi*, 15 Bhadro, 1335
[50] *Masik Mohammadi*, Agrahayan 1336, Page 160
[51]Rahman, *Bangali Musalman Samaj O Buddhir Mukti Andolon*, 110

Plight), '*Krishi Biplober suchona*' (The Beginning of the Agricultural Revolution). Abul Hussein also dealt with the problems of primary education in the Muslim Society in his book *'Bangali Mussalman'er Shikkha Samasya*' (The Problems of Education of Bengali Muslims). Also Kazi Abdul Wadud had dealt with the matter of 'Hindu-Muslim Unity' in couple of essays ('*Miloner Kotha*', '*Milon Samosya*').

While trying to resolve the problems of Bengali Muslim society, the members of *Muslim sahitya Samaj* attempted to look into the economic problem of the society. According to *Samaj,* one of the major hindrances confronting the society was the absence of Muslim entrepreneurship. They believed that without building industries, the economic backwardness of the Muslim society in Bengal cannot be eradicated. In the case of East Bengal, it was true that in comparison to its western counterpart, it was industrially poor. Even though East Bengal produced the lion's share of jute, it depended on Western Part of Bengal for the industrial output of the crop. This economic disparity was a consequence of the colonial industrial policy. However, since the Swadeshi movement, there was an inflow of capital (very marginal in respect to the surplus Bengal produced in industrial Sector) due to the establishment of Swadeshi factories. In a matter of fact, *Samaj* wanted the Swadeshi establishments to be the model for Muslim entrepreneurship. Therefore, the *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* appealed to the Bengali Muslims to introspect their own responsibility for their poor economic condition.[52] In his article "*Musalmaner Arthik Smasya"* (The Financial problems of the Muslims); Anwar Hussein observed, "We, Muslims do not have any comprehensive idea of trade and business. We are also not honest at all. There is a deficit of trust among us; the skills are also very poor. The Muslim businessmen are not coming together to form corporations, which can invest substantial capital in the business.[53]

While there was general concern about the industrialization of Bengal (by Muslims), there was a conflict of ideas on the methodology of the process. Mohatar Hossein Chowdhury observed,

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[52]Khondakar Sirajul Haq, *Muslim Sahitya Samaj: Samajchinta o Sahityakormo*, (Dhaka, Bangla Academy 1984) 204
[53] Anwar Hussein, "Bangali Musalmaner Arthik Samasya*", Shikha*, 1st Year, 1333, Page 53

"We have to create thousands of factories in this country. We have to channelize all our resources, will power to there…However I do not know, if there is any reservation about this from the side of the state. If the state does not cooperate then the financial crisis cannot be dealt with. We have to ensure that we remain in the good book of the state."[54]

On contrary to this view of getting aids from the government by keeping the Muslim society in the 'good book' of the state, Anwar Hossein proposed Cooperative as an alternative. In his article, "Samabay Samiti' (Cooperative Association), he argued,

We know the only purpose of the cooperatives is to provide credits to the poor. Yes, Cooperatives are essential to save the poor peasants from the hands of the moneylenders. If a cooperative functions properly then it can generate 'reserve funds' of its own and then can function independently without any support taking from the banks. The cooperative fund can also be utilized for development works of the villages. However, giving credit cannot be the only purpose of having cooperatives. To run factories, trades, generating more capital are also essential objectives of cooperatives. In other countries (England, Denmark, Italy), this types of cooperatives also became very popular.[55]

Accordingly, the interest in financial activism and entrepreneurship was growing among the middle class Bengali Muslim society since the mid 1920s. There are two distinct approaches to this financial activism. One is to cooperate with the government and seek support from them. The other approach, which was propagated by *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*, can be compared to the Swadeshi of the early 1900s as it aimed to build up industries with own capacity and indigenous efforts. The preference of the latter approach reflects the fact that *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* was not trying to find out an economic solution for the Bengali Muslim society without considering its political consequence. In their idea of industrialization, they wanted to combine 'nationalist capitalism' with cooperative economy.

In this regard, the question of 'Interest' was also to be resolved. In Islam, 'taking interest' is not *Haram*. However, Credit and interest are intrinsic part of modern banking system and without a functioning banking system, initiation of industrialization was impossible. The Muslim intellectuals had therefore to debate on this issue. Anwar Hossein categorically contested the Islamic view on credit and interest. He wrote,

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[54] Mohtar Hussein Chowdhury, editorial, *Bulbul*, 3rd Year, 4th edition, Shrabon 1343, Pages 280-281
[55] Anwar Hussein, 'Samabay Samiti', *Muajjin*, 1st year, 4th edition, Magh-Chaitro 1335, Page- 185-86

Sharia' had forbidden exchange of interest. In the modern age, we are giving interest to other '*jatis*', while debating whether we should take interest or not. This 20th century is the century of factories. The world is not the same as it was thirteen hundred years earlier. With the progress of the civilization, everything is being changed. The Muslims of Bengal also want to be part of this change. The modern economy says that if one has to get more capital then he has to take interest. But we do not take interest…But the peasant has to hand over his house to the Hindu moneylender. If the Muslims want to be in agricultural works then they have to take credit and interest as well. To survive the economic struggle of the modern world, the Muslims must resolve the question of Interest immediately.[56]

In the fourth annual conference of the *Muslim Sahitya Samaj*, in his presidential Address, Nasiruddin Ahmed articulated that the problem of not taking interest is responsible for the economic poverty of the Bengali Muslims. He argued that Bengali Muslims do not take interest because it is *Haram* in Islam but they have to pay interest to the creditor nonetheless. He distinguished between *Reba* (usury) and *Sud* (interest), making the main argument that usury in Islam is not permissible and that religious leaders had wrongly preached that interest is also *Haram*, though that is not correct.[57]

Abdus Samad in the third conference of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj has read an essay named 'Savings *Banker Sud*' (Interest of the Savings Bank). In this essay, he states that the Waqaf Board should take the interest from the Savings Bank and spend that interest amount in spreading education.[58]

Kazi Abdul Wadud had taken a step further. He urged the young generation to come forward to take interest from the Savings Bank. He says,

We have to problematize Islam through the questions arisen in modern life. If needed, we should explain Quran and Hadis accordingly. The Maulvalis do not want to reinterpret Quran and Hadis. Therefore, we have to do it ourselves…The meaning of religion is 'good life'. If we see in that way, many things will become simpler. Rather than looking at interest from a religious point of view, we should take into consideration whether it goes against our conscience or not, whether it is scientific or not.[59]

In the question of land reformation and the development of the financial conditions of the peasants, there was no consensus among the members of Muslim Sahitya Samaj. Abul Hussein for instance had

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[56] Anwar Hussein, "Bangali Musalmaner Arthik Samasya*", Shikha*, 1st Year, 1333, Page 123-124
[57]Haq, *Muslim Sahitya Samaj: Samajchinta o Sahityakormo*, 215
[58] Haq, *Muslim Sahitya Samaj: Samajchinta o Sahityakormo*, 217
[59] 5th Annual Report, *Shikha*, 5th Year, 1338

advocated for more scientific approach towards cultivation. According to him, as the Zamindars are not taking care of the land or the cultivation process and their only objective is to exploit the peasantry, the educated middle class should come forward and provide the necessary equipments and fertilizers to the peasants.[60] Anwar Hussein, on the other hand, has stressed the importance of improving the tenant-landlord relationship.[61] Abdul Kadir had called for state's intervention for transforming this situation. He wrote that without the state taking initiative, the situation would not alter. By this, he meant that the state should initiate farmers' cooperative immediately.[62]

The economic viewpoints of the intellectuals associated with *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* reveal the fact that they were envisaging a modern secular bourgeoisie economy as a model for Bengali Muslim Society. The way they had looked into the problem of 'interest' reflects their secular approach to the problem. They wanted to modernize the Islamic practices, which could help the Bengali Muslim Society to survive the 20th century colonial economy of South Asia. On one hand, they understood that in order to create a prosperous society, industrial initiatives had to be taken, at the same time; the absence of surplus capital in the society has compelled them to explore other alternatives, such as cooperative. However, while exploring the possibilities of industrialization, they did not forget about their anti-colonial political position and henceforth did not advocate the idea to collaborate with the Raj to accumulate primary capital for the purpose of industrialization in return. While dealing with the problems of the peasantry, there was no expedient solution in sight, as the agrarian crisis in Bengal was a complex multi-layered problem, which had religious and other components beside the primary economic reasons. The class relations in agriculture in the early 20th century Bengal was changing rapidly, which was not always easy to comprehend from a middle class economic position. However, the intellectuals of Dhaka, who emerged centering the '*Buddhir Mukti Andolan*' as the product of the foundation of Dhaka University was

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[60] Haq, *Muslim Sahitya Samaj: Samajchinta o Sahityakormo* 219
[61] *Shikha* 1st year, 1333, page 120
[62] Haq, *Muslim Sahitya Samaj: Samajchinta o Sahityakormo* 220

successful in creating a middle class Bengali Muslim worldview, which was to a great extent independent from its Hindu counterpart and was also successful in challenging the worldviews of the late colonial Bengali Muslim Society.

Consolidation of Bengali Identity

The Bengali Muslim Society had gone through a sea change in the first few decades of the last century. The class composition was rapidly changing within the society and the middle class Bengali Muslims were being more exposed to the public sphere. This change was demanding them to consolidate themselves within social/ cultural/ political associations. In the eve of new century, there were calls made by Bengali Muslim periodicals for awakening of the society.

Jago Jago netro meli Musalman Nandan

Nuton Borosh Asi dechhe dorshon

Utsaho udyomaloye

Ache dhare dnaraiye

Nuton borosh oi tomar karon

Jago jago netro meli muslim nondon…

Jago Jago he bangiya Moslem sontan!

'Jorobot' stobdho keno? Nai kihe pran?

Kortobyo kori japon

Sofol kori jibon

Bhobo nodi pare jeye korite bishram

Nai totha duhkho klesh paibe aram.[1]

This poem, written at the advent of the twentieth century, calls for the awakening of the Bengali Muslims and appeals them to engage themselves in hard work, leaving all their indolence behind and to only take rest at the end of their lives when they become successful. Another poem, published in *Pracharak* reminds the Muslims of Bengal of their glorious past. It asks them to leave he dark age they are currently living in and to return to that glorious past.

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[1] Khadem Ul Eslam, *Pracharak*, 2nd year, 1st issue, 1900

Re Bangiya Musalman! Nai ki toder pran

Hay! Hay! Nai kire netro

Chhilire prochondo robi Pabitro punyer chhobi

Ere ghor khodyoter chitro!!!

Tothapi hridoy majhe, shel ki re nahi baje?

Ashrujole bhase na bodon?

Tothapi jibon pone lobhite se purbason

Hoy na re manose monon?[2]

As this poem was reminding the readers about the past glory of the Muslims, there were several articles, essays and historical fictions also being published in numerous Muslim edited periodicals in the first decades of the last century. The life and work of Muhammad, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni[3], the description of Crusades[4], the description of Turko-Russian War[5], the stories of Mughal bravery[6], and also stories like the romance of *Layla* and *Maznu*[7] were published in several periodicals which reminded the readers of the glorious past of the Muslims. In reference to these writings, the question is how the Muslim literati of the early 20th century located Bengali Muslims in the greater historical context. The early writings reflect the fact that the imagination of a Pan Islamic world was strong in the Muslim minds and therefore the attempt was to identify Bengali Muslims with the events of the greater Islamic world, especially the events unfolding in Central and West Asia. In this quest of identity, two questions had occupied the pivotal position in the public debate. The first question was about the genealogy of the Bengali Muslims and the other one was related to the mother tongue of Bengali Muslims.[8] These two questions were inseparable. The identity of the Bengali Muslims was debated on two grounds- their origin and their mother tongue. Many Muslim scholars in the 1890s claimed that since the origins of Bengali Muslims were in West Asia,

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[2] Mahammad Ismael Hossein, 'Chokh gelo', *Pracharak*, 2nd year, 5th issue, 1901

[3] *Pracharak*, 2nd year 1st issue

[4] *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, 1st year, 1st, 2nd and 3rd issue.

[5] *Pracharak* 2nd year, 1st issue

[6] *Pracharak* 2nd year 2nd issue

[7] *Pracharak* 2nd year 6th issue

[8] Soumitra Sinha, *The Quest for Modernity and the Bengali Muslims*, 1921-47, (Kolkata: Minerva Associates, 1995), 54

the Muslims of Bengal should identify themselves as the part of *Islami Jahan* or the Muslim world. Until 1919-20 these efforts to identify themselves with the larger Muslim world continued in the Muslim society as the Ottoman Empire had provided the material ground to such proposal. The periodicals such as *Pracharak*, *Islam Pracharak* had a section in all their issues dedicated to the news of Islamic world- that is the Ottoman Empire. This endeavor of identifying the Bengali Muslim populace went on until the demise of the Ottoman Empire in 1920. The early literature of this age was therefore more focused on the Muslim past rather than the Bengali past. However, this genealogical identification with West Asia did not go unchallenged. There were several articles published in Muslim periodicals challenging the theory of West Asian Muslim self and in return were proposing a new identity of being a Bengali Muslim. As early as 1907, in *Basana*, Hamid Ali published an article, where he categorically stated that no matter if the forefathers of the Bengali Muslims had come from Arabia, Turkey, Iran or Afghanistan, or they were Hindus, the fact of the matter is that the Muslims were living in Bengal for the last seven hundred years, making it the homeland of the Muslims.[9] In 1901, In *Islam Pracharak*, an article named '*Bibad*' (Dispute) was published anonymously, which dismissed the idea of Muslims of Bengal being anything but Bengali. The article remarked that for the last one thousand years, Muslims were living in this country and they had experienced both good and bad things equally in this land. Therefore Bengal was their country and no one had the rights to tell Muslims that they had a country outside the geography of Bengal.[10] The essay had also criticized those, who do not believe in the Bengali identity.[11] Abdul Malek Chowdhury ridiculed those Muslims who slept in the thatched houses in the mango-groves or bamboo bushes of Syllhet but dreamed of Bagdad, Bokhara, Kabul, Kandahar, Iran and Turkey. He argued that regardless of whether their forefathers came from West Asia or originated from local Hindus, Bengali alone is their mother tongue.[12] *Islam Pracharak* observed, "It is no exaggeration even to say that we are now natives to this

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[9]Hamid Ali, "Uttarbanger Musalman Sahitya", *Basana* 2nd volume, 1st issue, 1909
[10] "Bibad"*, Pracharak*, 2nd year, 6th issue, 1901
[11] "Bibad"*, Pracharak*, 2nd year, 6th issue, 1901
[12] Abdul Malek Chowdhury, 'Bangla Sahitye Srihatter Musalman', *El-Islam*, 1917, quoted by Ashoke Kumar Chakraborty, *Bengali Muslim Literati and the Development of Muslim Community in Bengal,* Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 2002, Page-114

country because of the fact that we lived here for more than seven hundred years and therefore we are Bengali."[13]

The term that should be observed carefully in the article by Hamid Ali and the one published in *Islam Pracharak* is 'country' (*Desh*). The process of the conceptualization of the imagined space for the Bengali Muslims was still at the nascent stage at the time when these articles were published. In both articles, the imagined space (country) is neither the Islamic world nor India (or for that matter Muslim South Asia), Bengal. The Muslims of Bengal linked their prestige and pride with the West Asian origin or history and also were keen to maintain certain political, religious connection with West Asia. However, naturally, the Bengali Muslims realized that this connection is more superficial than the materialistic connection that they had with Bengal.[14] Their socio-economic condition as a community was dependent on the political/economic/social development of that region, which is why their allegiance to Bengali as lingua-franca within the community increased over time.

Furthermore, on why Bengali should be the mother tongue of Bengali Muslims, The *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika* observed,

Certainly not all the ancestors of Bengali Muslims came from Arabia, Iran, Turan or Turkey to Bengal. If one examines the genealogies of the Bengali Muslims then it can be found that the founders of many families were excluded from the Hindu society and became Muslims through conversion and therefore it is not possible to abandon their mother tongue altogether.[15]

Clearly, the Bengali Muslim intellectuals were taking into consideration the fact that the larger section of the Bengali Muslims was converted into Islam after it had arrived in Bengal. Therefore,

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[13] Abdul Haq Chowdhury, "Musalman Sampraday O Tahar Patan", *Islam Pracharak*, 8th year, 11th issue.
[14] Mustafa Rurul Islam, *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in Bengali Press, 1901-1930*, (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1973), Page 219
[15] Hamid Ali, *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, 1st Year 2nd issue, 1918

anthropologically, it was unfeasible to identify the origin of the Bengali Muslims with West Asian past alone.

There was an intriguing article published in *Pracharak* in 1901, which was about the census being conducted by the Raj at that time. The column eight of the census form asked about the '*Jati*' (caste) of the subjects. The article opposed this question as it claimed that there is no division of '*jati*' (caste) amongst the Muslims. The Muslims had only one identity and that is of Islam. According to the article, the colonial officials suggested that the Muslims should choose among from four categories- Sheikh, Sayed, Mughal or Pathan. Many educated Muslims, according to the article were answering identifying themselves as 'either *Ashraf*' or '*Atraf*' or '*Jola*'. The article categorically rejected this classification as there is no mention of such categorization in the Quran or *Hadis*. It also alleged that the district magistrate of Satkhira compelled the poor Muslims to write '*Atraf*' in that column. The article concluded suggesting that if Muslims had to fill up the answer, then they should write 'Bengali' in that column instead of anything else.[16]

This article demands a mention because of the fact that it used the Islamic theology to discard the caste stratification of the Muslim society and at the same time it appealed the Muslim Population of Bengal to write 'Bengali' as their '*jati*' identity. '*Jati*' being a multi-connotative word has always denoted an individual's caste, ethnic and national identity simultaneously. However, in this case, simultaneously *Pracharak* rejected the caste division in the Bengali Muslim society had proposed that the Muslims should take advantage of the multi-connotative nature of the term and mention their ethnic (national?) identity instead of the caste identity. Thus the Islamic theology had been used by the author to demonstrate Bengali Muslims' ethnic or national character. Accordingly, the Bengali identity of the Muslims of Bengal was not always dependent on the rejection of its Islamic connection. Pan-Islamic movements such as *Wahabi* movement had attempted to monopolize the Muslim identity over any other identity that Bengali Muslims had. Nonetheless, the educated Muslims of the early twentieth century

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[16] *Pracharak*, 3rd year, 3rd issue, 1901

made an effort to bridge between the Islamic and Bengali identity of the Muslims of Bengal. While doing that, the question of Mother tongue and how that mother tongue could be enhanced by bringing Islamic components into it, became one of the most important matters of deliberation of that time.

The Case of *Musalmani Bangla*

Do-Bhashi or *Musalmani Bangla* as a genre of Bengali writing evolved in the late nineteenth century when a particular approach of writing emerged amongst the Muslim scholars, which borrowed a vast vocabulary from Arabic, Persian and Urdu (Hindustani).[17] However, many argues that neither the term *Do-bhashi* nor *Musalmani Bangla* is accurate as this particular writing culture borrowed words from numerous languages including Arabic, Persian and Urdu and did not entail any self-conscious religious effort behind it. Many Hindu authors and publishers used that genre of writing at that time.[18] Even if that was the case in the late nineteenth century *Battala* literature, but in early twentieth century, the genre obviously represented the agency of the Muslims in Bengali literature. There was a conscious effort on behalf of the Muslim scholars of that time to make the language different from the form in which it was used by the early Hindu scholars and literati, and make it more convenient to use for religious purposes as well. In the construction and consolidation of the Muslim self distinct from Hindus, the role of *Musalmani Bangla* was immensely important.[19] Reverend James Long published his book *A descriptive catalogue of Bengali Works* in 1955 and in that book he was the first person to use the term '*Musalmani Bangla*'. He defined '*Musalmani Bangla*' as a mixture of Urdu and Bengali and claimed that this version was very popular in Dhaka and Calcutta.[20]

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[17] Quazi Abdul Mannan, "*The Emergence and Development of the Dobhashi Literature in bengal*" *(up to 1885 AD)*, (Dhaka: Dhaka University Press, 1966)

[18] Neilesh Bose, *Recasting the Region, Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal*, (New Delhi: Oxford, 2014) , 5

[19] Vidyut Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947*, (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 43

[20] Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society*, (New Delhi: Oxford, 2006), 60

However, as a modern South Asian vernacular, new writing genres developed in Bengali in the nineteenth century, mostly influenced by the colonial printing culture and the exercise of the language in the colonial institutions such as Fort William College. Before, having any 'standardized' form of writing, there were several genres which were used in writing the language. The pre-modern influence was still not mitigated by the writing form of the language even in the first half of the nineteenth century. For example, while Ramaram Basu used a genre of writing which garner many Persian and Arabic words, Mrityunjay Tarkalankar was using a 'pure' sanskritized Bengali.[21] A vast number of 'foreign words' was always present in the colloquial Bengali. A large number of those words were borrowed from Arabic and Persian. This is mainly due to the fact that Persian was the official language of the company until 1833 and that many Hindu scholars like Rammohan were fluent in Persian and had used Persian words in their Bengali writings without any hesitation. However, ever since Persian had lost its position as the court language and Iswarchandra Vidysagar had standardized the language by bringing out several original publications and translations of Sanskrit literature, the 'Sanskritized' genre won the battle and became the standard form of writing. The other form did not die altogether as it was closer to the colloquial language and a large number of publication continued to be done in that genre in the '*Battala*' presses. But with time, Sanskritized Bengali became the mainstream, especially after the arrival of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay.

The other form of language was not only flowing through the 'marginalized' 'Battala' literature. The preachers of Islam also continued to use this form of language. Figures like Keramat Ali, who had influenced the consolidation of Muslim identity especially in the eastern part of the province, were against the use of the standardized Bengali as it inherently carried idolatry of Hindu religion into it.[22] Many of the preachers, especially the lower strata of *Maulavis* did not show interest in preaching in Bengali for a long time, partly due to the intrinsic 'Hindu' nature of the language. Repeated advice was given to the

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[21]Bose, *Recasting the Region, Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal*, 7
[22]Bose, *Recasting the Region, Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal*, 9
Also see Rajarshi Ghose's, *Politics of Faith: Karamat Ali Jaunpuri and Islamic Revivalist Movements in British India circa 1800-73,* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2012)

Maulavis to preach in Bengali instead of Arabic as it would be beneficial for the local populace.[23] The Islam Mission Samity, which was founded in 1904, set its objective to propagate ideals of Islam to the Bengali Muslims as they were according to the *Samity* 'ignorant of their cultural roots'.[24] In perusing that objective, Samity decided to publish books and magazines in Bengali and translate religious scriptures in Bengali too.[25] Not only Islam Mission Samity, there were several other organization or periodical groups that evolved at that time for the purpose of preaching Islam and 'cultural roots of Muslims'. All these periodicals agreed that this work should be carried out in Bengali. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, a large number of Islamic original or translated literary works was published in the *Musalmani Bangla*. *Musalmani Bangla* at that moment of history was no longer representing only a genre of writing, but became a genre of literature, which was on the one had representing the diverse linguistic register of Bengal and on the other consciously bringing new words in Bengali vocabulary to meet the demands of the translation of the Islamic literatures. This development facilitated the creation of a cultural space which was essential for nurturing a political ideal of Pan-Islamic identity on a broader sense and a Muslim identity in narrower sense.

There was a parallel but not contradicting development happening in the field of literature. In 1899, the *Bangiya Sahitya Biswayani Musalman Samity* was founded, which can be considered one of the pioneering associations of discussing and propagating Bengali language among Muslims. It was the successor of the *Bangiya Sahitya Biswayani Musalman*, established in 1860 and of Mohammedan Literary Society founded in 1863. However, since the establishment of *Bangiya Sahitya Biswayani Musalman Samity*, many new periodicals edited by Muslims started coming up. Their primary objective was to catch the attention of the Muslim readership. In the years between the establishment of *Bangiya Sahitya Biswayani Musalman Samity* (in 1889) and *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity* in 1911, *Pracharak*, *Islam Pracharak*, *Nabanur*, *Kohinur*, *Basana* and several other new magazines started being

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[23] *Pracharak*, 4th and 5th issue, 1902
[24] *Islam Pracharak*, March 1904
[25] *Islam Pracharak*, March 1904

published by the Muslim intellectuals and literary personas. Amongst them, *Pracharak* or *Islam Pracharak* had declared 'propagation of Islam' as their primary objective but the others maintained a secular literary outlook broadly, though they also tended to publish articles on religious matters. All these periodicals agreed on one matter and that is Bengali should be the language of their religious works or literary creations. For accomplishing that, it was argued, that the Muslims should accept Bengali language as their mother tongue but the current Bengali literature and linguistic practices could not suit the Bengali Muslims as part of a larger Muslim Nation (*Jati*). The Bengali language as it was developed by the Hindus did not match the Muslim national spirit. Therefore, Bengali Muslims should model their language and literature in terms of Muslim national ideals with borrowings from Arabic, Persian and Urdu.[26] As the debate gravitated more on the matter of the mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims, the advocates of Bengali for that case pointed out that Bengali should be the mother tongue for the Bengali Muslims but admitted at the same time the standardized form of Bengali writing needed a course correction.

In the midst of the ongoing debate on the form of writing, *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity* was founded. Though it was founded in 1911and Muhammad Shahidullah became its first president, the society remained in a dormant stage until 1917. By that time, Maolana Akram Khan also arrived in the scene with his own periodical *Saptahik Mohammadi* (1910). In his other periodical *Ahl-e-Hadis*, Akram Khan was consistently campaigning for *Musalmani Bangla*.[27] By the time *Samity* started working actively, there were already a group of people and periodicals present in the public domain, who were enthusiastically campaigning for the case *of Musalmani Bangla*. *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity* declared its objectives as following:

1. Discussion of Bengali literature in the Bengali Muslim society and development of the same.

2. Translation of scriptures and history from Arabic, Persian and Urdu.

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[26] Syed Siraji, 'Sahitya Shakti O Jati Sangathan', *Nabanur*, 1904
[27] Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947*, 45

3. Collection and preservation of early Muslim Bengali literature.

4. Collection and publication of the biographies of the *Pirs* and *Olis* across Bengal.

5. Collection of family ancestry of Bengali Muslim society, the deeds of those families and other historical items.

6. Propagation of weekly, monthly periodical in Bengali Muslim society.

7. Inspiring the literati for propagation of good quality books.

8. Establishment of harmony between Hindus and Muslims in the arena of literature.[28]

The fact these objectives were set in the second conference of the society demonstrated that the society was trying to bring all the initiatives of *Musalmani Bangla* under control of one organization. On one hand the society decided to translate the scriptures and history from Arabic, Persian and Urdu, and on the other hand, it decided to explore the pre-colonial literary and cultural (as well religious) heritage of the Bengali Muslim Society. Accordingly, both the identity of 'Muslim' and 'Bengali' was promised to be cultivated by the society. In the second conference, the presidential address by Muhammad Sahidullah reflected the exact spirit of *Musalmani Bangla*, without terming it as *Musalmani Bangla*. Rather Shahidullah tried to position *Muslamani Bangla* as the original secular colloquial language of the people. He stated,

Muslims have five languages now- Arabic (language of religion), Persian (language of civilization), Urdu (lingua-franca of India), English (official language) and Bengali (mother tongue)… Muslim students have to learn all five languages and that is making them tired and hopeless. This cannot be the case for ever. The elementary education must be provided in Bengali only. We are habitants of Bengal. Bengali is our mother tongue. However, the problem is there is a section in the society which does not recognize this fact.

There is a group of Sanskrit educated people who wants to exclude the Arabic and Persian words which are already been used in Bengali marking them as alien (*Jabanik*). My suggestion to them is first you expel the *Jabans* (Muslims) from Bengal then exclude the *jabanik* words. Those Arabic and Persian words are now inherent part of the language. You cannot exclude them forcibly. Words like *Ain*, *Adalat*, *Kagaj*, *kalam* are used en mass in Bengali. You can provide new words in lieu of these terms, but they would only remain in books, would never find a place in people's mind. There are hundreds of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, English, French and Portuguese words, which are perfectly placed in the Bengali

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[28] *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, proceedings, 1st year, 1st issue

vocabulary. Their occupancy right will always remain in the language. It would be an offence to exclude them by force.[29]

Abdul Karim, the president of the Welcome Committee of the conference more aggressively declared his

support for *Musalmani Bangla* saying,

Muslims had given birth to the Bengali language. The language itself is constituted of the flesh and blood of the Muslims. And the language had grown up receiving the affection and care of the Muslims. Therefore, Bengali is Muslims' own language. Now this language has been occupied by the heretics and they have vandalized the language without even knowing that. There are tons of emotions and influences of Muslims connected with this language. Why should we then go to someone's door begging for his language? We have to remember the fact that Syed Alawal[30] is the master of this language. We must follow his path. Bengali language in its current form is not fitting for composing Islamic literature. We have to bring new contents and forms from outside to purify the language. We already have so much difference amongst us due to religion in Bengal; therefore we do not need any more differences regarding language. Bengali would be our own language, but we have to prepare ourselves for that and then only the enemies would start fearing us.[31]

This speech seems like contradicting itself. However, Abdul Karim had differentiated between the

common Bengali Hindus and the section of Hindu literati, who advocated for a more sanskritized version

of Bengali. Karim had labeled them as enemies, but at the same time he did not forget to address the issue

that the Bengali Hindus and Muslims had so many differences already that they could not afford to have

different language over that.

Most of the Muslim scholars of early twentieth century agreed on the fact that the Bengali language

needed a course correction in order to occupy the literary imagination of the Bengali Muslims. Now the

matter of discussion was how far these changes should be done in the existing genre of writing and what

should be the methodology of doing that. From both the address and the objective of the *Samity* as

declared, it was clear that while the *Samity* and the scholars individually were prepared to bring about

changes in the literary and linguistic practices by challenging the Hindu scholars but at the same time they

were cautious of the fact that it should not create more matters of contestation between the common

Hindu and Muslim population in Bengal.

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[29] Presidential Address to 2nd conference of *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity*, By Mohammad Shahidullah, transcript from *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, 1st year 1st issue, 1920
[30] Author of *Padmavati Kavya*.
[31] Welcome Committee President's Note by Abdul Karim, 2nd conference of *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti*, transcript in *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, 1st year, 4th issue, 1921

Maolana Akram Khan, the enthusiastic adherent of *Musalmani Bangla* presided over the third conference

of *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity*. He raised some pertinent question in his speech advocating the use

of *Musalmani Bangla*,

How can use of few Arabic and Persian words be not justified in Bengali? There are already hundreds of Arabic, Persian and English words in Bengali vocabulary. If we add few more in order to satisfy our need then how can that be not justified? If all this words (foreign) be eliminated from the language then Bengalis would have to become dumb. If using this words, which the Bengali Muslims already use in colloquial language is '*asadhu*' (impure) then the entire spoken language of the Hindu Bengalis is impure too. When the *Sahitya Adalat* has already passed its judgment in favour of using foreign vocabulary then why some scholars are not agreeing with use of words such as '*Allah*', '*Rasul*', '*Namaj*', '*Roja*'? The language which has to remove these words cannot become mother tongue of the Muslims.[32]

He also proposed to borrow new words from Persian and Arabic to enrich Bengali vocabulary with

Islamic values. He also complained about the fact that the idolatry of the existing standardized language

repulsed Muslims in many ways.[33] To make it correct, Bengali had to be filled up with more Arabic and

Persian words.

The words with religious connotations became the issue of the contestation. Words such as '*Allah*',

'*Roja*', '*Namaz*', '*Hajj*' were being replaced by '*Iswar*' (god), '*Upabasa*' (fasting), '*Upasana*' (Prayer),

'*Tirthagaman*' (Visit to holy place) respectively in many writings. It was argued that the original

meanings of these words are lost in translation. For example, in the case of '*Allah*' and '*Iswar*' was that

while '*Allah* denotes the one and only omnipotent God, '*Iswar*' represents any god in Hindu theology,

hence the idolatry of Hinduism was fundamentally present in that terminology.

There were many examples like the case of '*Allah*'. One could notice that ever since the debate was

initiated, the use of the word '*Iswar*' was diminishing in Muslim publication and it was being replaced by

'*Allah*'. In that context, Akram Khan argued that even though these changes are necessary, not all the

desired changes could be made in analogy to the case of Persian at the advent of Islam in Persia. Unlike

Persia, there were millions of Hindu Bengalis who did not aspire such radical changes. Based in this

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[32] Presidential Address to 3rd conference of *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity*, By Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan, transcript from *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, 1st year 4st issue, 1921
[33] Presidential Address to 3rd conference of *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity*, By Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan

analysis, Akram Khan suggested some pertinent changes that should be made in order to bring positive changes in the linguistic practice of Bengali. Akram Khan proposed a transformation of the Bengali alphabets in order to pronounce the Arabic and Persian words accurately. According to him, the corruption of pronunciation of such words had changed the meanings of few words entirely. Therefore, he believed that there should be an initiative to start a process of transliteration in Bengali. For example, he observed that since many Persian words came to Bengali via English, the '*gayen*' alphabet had been corrupted as 'gh (in case of Mughal). He therefore proposed a partial reformation of Bengali alphabet in order to correct these mistakes. On one hand, he asked to add few new letters borrowed from *Nastalik* script (Perso-Arabic) to Bengali. On the other hand, he proposed to change the existing alphabets in a moderate way, which would be helpful in this regard. He hoped that by bringing these changes, a set of standardized alphabets could be prepared and then all the Muslim authors, newspapers and periodicals would be able to exercise them in their pieces, bringing the corruption of words and pronunciation gradually to an end.[34]

Taking cues from Akram Khan's suggestion, S Wajed Ali prepared a new set of Bengali Alphabets, heavily influenced by Urdu phonetics, which according to him would be helpful in 'facilitating proper pronunciation of Islamic words in vernacular'.[35] Ali presented this new set of alphabets in the annual conference of *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity*. According to him, the Arabic and Persian words were misspelled often because of the absence of proper alphabets and grammar in Bengali that would help to understand and pronounce the words properly. He appealed to the Muslim literati to use and popularize the new set of alphabets.

But this debate, in essence, was not merely a deliberation about borrowing foreign words into Bengali. The nineteenth century literary practice, which was heavily sanskritized by the early scholars, set a trend which refused to take thousands of colloquial words in the written vocabulary. The colloquial Bengali had

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[34] Presidential Address to 3rd conference of *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity*, By Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan
[35] *Sahityik*, *Srabana* 1334 (1924), quoted by Chakrabarty in *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947*, 46

always a presence of numerous foreign words, among which Arabic and Persian words were evidently predominant. This practice of differentiating *Sadhu* (pure) and *Chalit* (colloquial) created a Hindu brahminical hegemony centered in Kolkata over the written language. At the advent of the twentieth century, this hegemony was challenged in many ways and *Musalmani Bangla* was one of them. *Musalmani Bangla* was primarily against this hegemony of refusing usage of colloquial words, originated or borrowed from Arabic and Persian, used by both Hindus and Muslims. Therefore, there was a clash between the pre-colonial linguistic practices and the linguistic and literary practices emerging in the colonial period.

The pre-colonial Bengali literature was dominated by Islam in different ways. The sultanate period of Bengal had witnessed the creation of vast original and translation works. The successive sultanates of Bengal patronized these works. Sultan Jalaluddin patronized poet Kirttibas who translated *Ramayana* in Bengali. Maladhar Basu, the author of *Shri Khrishna Vijaya*, was patronized by Sultan Rukunuddin Burbak Khan. Apart from them, Kasiram Das the translator of *Mahabharata* in Bengali, Parameswar Das, who was titled 'Master poet' by Paragal Khan, were also patronized by the Sultanate. The rich heritage of *Vaishanabite* literature in Bengali and Sanskrit were also composed during the Sultanate period. Not only that, there were many Muslim poets who also belonged to the *Vaishanabite* School composed verses and poems on Shri Krishna and Chaitanya.[36]

Among the prominent Muslim literary persons in pre-colonial period was Sayed Alawal, who composed *Padmavati*, which was a translation of Malik Muhammad Jaysi's classic *Padmavat Kavya*. Apart from him there were Shah Muhammad Sagir, who composed Yusuf-zulekha and Qazi Doulat Khan who authored number of *Vaishanabite* literatures. The *Mangal Kavyas* and *Panchali* of different gods and goddesses (there are few syncretic ones which are still worshiped by both Hindus and Muslims in Bengal) were also composed during the period between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, mostly

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[36]Bhattacharya Jatindra Mohan, *Banglar Baishnabbhaponno Musalman Kabi*, (Kolkata: Calcutta University, 1962)

anonymously, but became the most important and popular literary and liturgical creations of Bengali literature.

In the early twentieth century, this cultural past began to be explored again by the scholars. Since the discovery of *Charjapadas*, and exploration and preservation of *Punthis*, a new chapter of literary history of Bengali language was opened- this in many ways became an anti-thesis to the existing ideas of the modern vernacular of Bengali. Many of the campaigners of *Musalmani Bangla* were also in favour of reforming the language and giving it a national character by following the *Punthi* culture.[37] The form that was followed in *Punthi* literature was not the sanskritized form of the language that evolved in Fort William College, rather it was the colloquial language used in 'middle' ages in Bengal. Therefore, there were abundance of Arabic and Persian words in those literary creations.[38] Abdul Karim, in his welcome committee president's address in the second conference of *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity* reminded the audience of that heritage and appealed to them to look back to the glorious past of the language and to follow the legacy.[39]

In 1913, Abdul Karim[40] published his most commendable work on *Punthis*- "*Prachin Banglar Punthir Bibaran*" (A Description of Ancient *Punthis* of Bengal). This was first scholarly work on *Punthi* literature, which created awareness about the vast 'middle' age literature in Bengal. Karim wrote extensively about the works of Alawal and Daulat Kazi. Apart from that he also focused on the works of lesser known literary personas such as Sayyid Sultan, Razzak Nandan, Abdul Hakim, Muhammad Khan, Jainuddin and many others.[41] These *Punthis* were Islamic as well as Bengali by content. In Sayyid Sultan's *Nabi-Vangsa*, there was vivid description of the life of prophet but it was followed by lengthy

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[37] Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayik Patra, 1831-1930* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1969), 110
[38] Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947*, 45
[39] Welcome Committee President's Note by Abdul Karim, 2nd conference of Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti, transcript in Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika, 1st year, 4th issue, 1921
[40] He was given the title of 'Sahityabisharad' for his excellence research work in the history of Bangali literature.
[41] Bose, *Recasting the Region, Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal,* 153
For details, see, Abdul Karim, *Prachin Banglar Punthir Bibaran*

description of Hindu gods like Ram, Krishna and Bramha, who according to the author came earlier.[42] Therefore, these *Punthis* had reflected the syncretic Bengali culture with a predominance of Islamic theology.

Karim was not the only one who was enthusiastic about the *Punthis*. *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity* already had declared collection and preservation of *Punthis* as one of their many objectives. Muhammad Shahidullah, the other compatriot of Karim in the *Samity* became the Head of the Bengali Department in Dhaka University in 1938 and there he incorporated *Punthi* and folklores in the syllabus. In the same year, he also presided over a conference dedicated to collection of *Punthis* in Mymensingh and also started the Eastern Bengal Folklore Collection Society.[43] Akram Khan also waged his support for the exploration of *Punthis* as he believed, they were "necessary for strengthening the edifice of the Muslim National Character."[44] Muhammad Sahidullah and Akram Khan edited a volume of *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika* dedicated solely to *Punthis*. In *Saogat*, Abdul Majid held the view that "absorption of the *Punthis* was probably the most appropriate, if not the only, step to help in developing a national literature to the satisfaction of both the common masses and the educated minority."[45]

The Muslim literary space was not only exploring the Punthis at that time. There were several poets and authors like Jashimuddin and Kazi Abdul Odud, who were also making attempts to bring back the culture of *Punthi* in modern literary works. Exploration of *Punthi* and other folklores of 'middle' ages and the attempt to bring back the culture in the modern Bengali literary space had manifold impact on the social changes occurring at that time. First of all, this had diminished the colonial[46] influence on the language and brought back the pre-colonial linguistic and literary components not only as matter of debates and deliberation but also as practice of the same. The literary space was also hegemonised by the elites of

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[42] Bose, *Recasting the Region, Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal*, 154
 Rasul Charitra, the sequel of *Nabi-Vangsa* also carried same line of content.
[43] Bose, *Recasting the Region, Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal*, 150
[44] *Bangiya Musalman Sahiitya Patrika*, 2nd year, 1921
[45] *Saogat*, *Magh* 1325 (Bengali Calendar), Quoted by Vidyut Chakrabarty in *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947,* 47
[46] Both of Colonisers and the Colonised elite

Calcutta (mostly Hindus); these efforts also reduced their hegemonic presence by exploring the popular Bengali literary creations. The focus also somehow shifted to small towns, villages and especially to eastern parts of the province where such popular literature were found in abundance. By doing that, it created an 'other' center of literature which was not Calcutta based (though until late 1930s most publications were from Calcutta for technical reasons, such as absence of printing press in small towns), and which was also centered around the emerging Muslim scholars, authors and intellectuals. Thus the a literary and a linguistic practice with the domain of Bengali language subsequently captured popular and scholarly imaginations, which in return had given a confidence to the practitioners of this genre and helped in constructing a new Muslim self which was ardently Bengali in nature.

Neilesh Bose has argued that- "But with the advent of a Bengali Muslim press in the later portion of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century, various articulations of Bengali Muslim grievances were voiced over and were merged with the broader Indian Muslim politics with Bengali energies."[47] However, the process of emergence of a Muslim self in colonial Bengal did not fully merged with the *broader Indian Muslim politics.* The broader Indian Muslim politics at the first decades of the twentieth century was trying to negotiate the position of the Muslim communities with the National Congress and the emerging anti-colonial politics, which had taken a Gandhian turn by 1917. The voices articulated through the various literary works and debates within Bengali Muslim intelligentsia was not circling around this political negotiation. Rather it was defining its identity through a unique balancing act between the linguistic and religious identity of the Bengali Muslim society. The 'act' was to define 'Muslim' identity without collaborating with the broader Islamic identity. The rejection of Pan-Islamic politics was quite profound in the Bengali Muslim polemics of the early twentieth century. As far as the broader Indian Muslim politics is concerned, the Indian Muslim League, guardian body of that politics was still suffering from absence of a Pan-Indian Muslim narrative, which could counter the anti-colonial narratives of National Congress. Hence, one can observe that how Broader Indian Muslim politics was

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[47] Bose, *Recasting the Region, Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal*, 30

obliged to take a Gandhian course during the Non-cooperation and Khilafat movement. Nevertheless, *Musalmani Bangla* was an important discourse which had qualitatively transformed the dynamics of Muslim politics in Bengal. The Muslim self created in Bengal through various socio-religious reformist movements (both in rural and urban space) was qualified with the presence of an inherent Bengali character. This unique feature had never allowed the Bengali Muslims to be appropriated within the broader Indian Muslim Politics. The foundation and success of Krishak Praja Party in Bengal politics is a fine example of this hypothesis. Despite of various efforts from All India Muslim League, the party could never make headway in Bengal politics until Fazlul Hawk, the undisputed leader of Krishak Praja Party joined the League. Even in the heydays of Pakistan Movement, there were several attempts which proved that the unique identity of being a Bengali Muslim was always alive.[48] Therefore, the Bengali self of Bengali Muslim was not a post-colonial phenomenon as many prescribe; the Bengali self which had provided the Muslim identity of the Bengali Muslim a unique character was shaped in the early decades of twentieth century.

Bengali-Urdu Debate

Regarding Urdu, there were two important questions that were debated at that point of history. The first one was whether Urdu should be the mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims. And the second one was whether Urdu should be the official state language of post colonial India and the lingua-franca of the Muslim communities in South Asia. When it came to the matter of Urdu becoming the lingua-franca of Muslim communities in India or the future state language of independent India, the intellectual society was not as consolidated as it was regarding the debate over mother tongue. There was an outside factor (Hindi), which was not only posing a lingual challenge but a communal challenge as well and that is why, many of the advocates of Bengali as mother tongue also proposed Urdu to be a compulsory language that should be learnt and practiced by Bengali Muslims.

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[48] Attempt of creating an Independent Sovereign Bengal was taken up by a section of Provincial Muslim League and Provincial National Congress.
For details see Sen, *Muslim Politics of Bengal*, Chakravarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam*

Since the late 1910s, Congress leaders like Gokhale, Tilak were advocating Hindi to be the national language of India surpassing all the other modern vernaculars. El-Islam edited by Akram Khan observed,

…Hindu politicians are striving to introduce Hindi language and *Nagri* script on the off chance that it will become the state language throughout the whole of India when India becomes self-governed. Under these circumstances is it not duty of Muslims to attempt to place upon the head of their own language and script (which is Urdu language and Arabic script) the prestigious crown of the future state language of India by disseminating it everywhere?[49]

This debate naturally had the effect of mobilizing greater support for Urdu in Bengal, which to some extent influenced the earlier controversy over mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims.[50]

Accordingly, Urdu was garnering support from different corners of Bengali Muslim society as the language controversy between Hindi and Urdu became a communal-political one. "Urdu was not simply a tool for the South Asian Muslim intelligentsia in the articulation of their identitarian claims but as the grounds on which they grappled with the most pressing question of the early twentieth century South Asian Political history, namely the shape and future of a secular national culture and- for them equally pressing- the place of Muslim past and scholarly traditions within it."[51] However, the lingua-franca of the Muslims of South Asia and the Mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims were two different matters for the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia. Though they supported the claim of Urdu to be the lingua-franca of the Muslims of India or for that matter as the state language of future Independent India, they never considered it an option to be the mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims. The Same El-Islam observed, "The mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims was Bengali even before the Urdu language was born."[52] The Bengali Muslims were ready to support Urdu as the lingua-franca but the advocacy of Urdu as the mother tongue was unacceptable to them.[53]

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[49] Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, "Bangiya Mosalman O Urdu Samasya", *El-Islam* 3rd year, 6th issue, 1917
[50] Sinha, *The Quest for Modernity and the Bengali Muslims*, 54
[51] Kavita Saraswathi Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India*, (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2013), 9
[52] Muzaffar Ahmed, "Urdu Bhasha O Bangiya Musalman", *El-Islam,* 3rd Year, 4th Issue, 1917
[53] Mustafa Rurul Islam, *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in Bengali Press, 1901-1930*, 218

In 1918, El-Islam proposed that Urdu should be taught in schools as a compulsory language and Bengali Muslims as citizens of India and also Muslims by religious identity, should learn the same. [54] Maniruzzaman Isalamabadi was also of the opinion that as a second language the Bengali Muslims should learn Urdu.[55] Akram Khan in his address to *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Sammelan* (1919) remarked that the Bengali Muslims should cultivate Urdu in order to develop the Muslim nationalism in India.[56] This support towards Urdu has deeper political undercurrent into it. While the Ottoman Empire was being defeated by the British in the First World War, the possibility of being part of a greater Pan-Islamic statehood was becoming bleaker in the Bengali Muslim mind. The Bengali Muslims were therefore indulged into a quest of identity or an imagined space where they could fit themselves politically as well as culturally. Consequently, the solidarity among different Muslim communities in South Asia became a pertinent question at that time. Also constructing a counter nationalist vision for South Asian Muslims was necessary vis-à-vis the emerging Indian nationalism, which in many ways replicated and appropriated Hindu cultural nationalist trends within it. Hindi, origin of which was linked to a communal division of colonial language politics, was becoming a symbol of this cultural nationalism at that time. The original Hindustani language, over which Muslims had an equal claim, had already lost in oblivion giving birth to Urdu and Hindi. Hindi and Urdu being two religiously identified different versions of a same language (Hindustani), which could be considered as the only pan-Indian language of that time, was no doubt made the contest between Hindi and Urdu so vociferous.[57]Therefore, Urdu became a symbol for Muslims to confirm their equal share in the cultural and political nationhood of the post colonial South Asia.

However, this view drew some scathing attacks to itself. In the same periodical El-Islam, Muzaffar Ahmed wrote in 1917,

It is extremely difficult to determine in which country-bazaar in India, Urdu used to be spoken when the Bengali Muslim poet composed his *Padmavati Kabya*? The Urdu speakers enriched their language by

[54] Basarat Ali,"Urdu Samasya", El-Islam, 4th year, 8th issue, 1918
[55] Maniruzzaman Eslamabadi, 'Bangiya Musalman O Urdu Samasya.', El-Islam. 1917
[56] *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, February 1919
[57] Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* , 8
G. A. Grierson in his book Linguistic Survey of India called the predecessor language 'Literary Hindostani'.

translating the Arabic literature in Urdu. Why should we learn Urdu on that account? Is it in order to make translations from translations?... More than half of the Muslims in India speak Bengali and the others speak various languages. 'Nevertheless, the Bengali speakers should learn Urdu' is a fine piece of oppression and no mistake. Let Urdu be the language of the bazaar and the camps (as Urdu originally means 'belonging to camps' in Turkish). What necessity is there to teach Urdu compulsorily to the whole nation?... In short, Urdu cannot be encouraged in Bengal. If anyone wants to learn the language for himself, let him learn but teaching Urdu to Bengalis is unnecessary.[58]

Kohinur in 1916 remarked, "However necessary it maybe to introduce Urdu in Bengal in order to create a pan-Indian nationhood that attempt is as futile as trying to build a house in the sky."[59]

In 1920, *Nur* explicitly had attacked the advocacy of Urdu saying, "Unless we can dislodge Urdu from the soil of Bengal, the Bengali language would be unable to hold its head high in the Bengali Muslim society. No nation (*jati*) can ever hope to achieve its own welfare and salvation except by a vast and vigorous cultivation of its mother tongue."[60] In his presidential address to *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity's* second conference Mohammad Sahidullah remarked that no Nation (*Jati*) could prosper in the world without cultivating their mother tongue and no other language could appeal to the heart except the mother tongue.[61]

In 1926 Tasaddak Ahmed observed, "We still hear that there is section of Bengali Muslims who are ashamed to admit the fact that their mother tongue is Bengali. They argue that in order to qualify as aristocratic Muslims it is essential to change their mother tongue to Urdu.[62] As late as in 1930 *Moyajjin* observed,

Though being raised in the lap of Bengal for many centuries and though they have heard Bengali from the laps of their mothers for ages after ages, the Bengali Muslims still have not learnt Bengali language. Both the language and countries are foreign to them. Because of an abortive attempt to express our thoughts and to convey our emotions through Arabic, Persian and Urdu have from the beginning neglected the opportunity to maintain our prestige in, and to establish our rights to our mother tongue and its literature.[63]

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[58] Muzaffar Ahmed, "Urdu Bhasha O Bangiya Musalman", *El-Islam,* 3rd Year, 4th Issue, 1917
[59] Muhammad Yakub Ali Chowdhury, "Bangali Muslmaner Bhasha O Sahitya", *Kohinur*, 1916
[60] 'Banga Bhashar Andar', editorial, *Nur,* 1st year, 2nd issue, 1920, translated by Soumitra Sinha
[61] *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, 1st year, 1st issue, 1920
[62] Tasaddak Ahmed, 'Abhibhashan', *Shikha*, 1st year 1927
[63] Abul Majid, 'Banga Bhasha o Musalman' *Moyajjin*, 2nd year 9th-10th issue, 1930

While the Muslim scholars of Bengal were consolidated advocating the case of Bengali when it came to the matter of mother tongue- they were not confidant about what should be done when it came to the question of national language of India or the lingua-franca among the different linguistic communities of the South Asia. *Saogat* criticized Subhas Chandra Bose for his support towards Hindi as the state language. *Saogat* opined that while the issue is still debated all over the society, Bose's initiative to propagate Hindi as the state language would only harm the harmony between Hindus and Muslims but also the Muslims leaders would not be able to inspire the Muslim society to follow Congress's ideals.[64]

Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity proposed a different solution to this problem. The *Samity* suggested that neither 'Sanskritized' Hindi nor 'Perso-Arabized' Urdu should be the state language of India. Instead, the old Hindustani, which is the spoken language of the common people should be revived and be accepted by all as the state language and as well the lingua-franca.[65]

Muhammad Shahidullah, presented a proposal different from all the options being discussed at that time. He proposed English as the lingua-franca of the nation. The argument in favour of English was that as it was already being used as de-facto lingua-franca of colonial India and therefore the language would be indispensable for future. He further advised the Muslims to 'prepare themselves mentally and publicly' to welcome English as their own language.[66]

Semanti Ghosh observed, "The Bengali Muslim 'national' sentiment relied mainly on its linguistic communality, an important vehicle for any nationalist doctrine to thrive on. However Bengali as the primary language of this particular *Jati* had always suffered from challenges from Urdu."[67] She had correctly pointed out that there was a 'national' conscious shaping within the Bengali Muslims from the very beginning whenever there was a challenge surfaced from Urdu. Rafiuddin Ahmed, in his 'quest of Identity', in the chapter of 'Crisis of Identity' had inferred that the Bengali Muslims were more Muslim

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[64] *Saogat*, 10th issue, 2nd year, 1931

[65] Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in Bengali Press, 1901-1930*, 234

[66] Mohammad Sahidullah, "Bharater Sadharan Bhasha", *Moslem Bharat*, 1st year, 1st issue, 1920

[67] Semanti Ghosh, *Different Nationalisms: Bengal 1905-1947*, (New Delhi: Oxford, 2017), 42

than Bengali during this period but had pointed out that even then Urdu seemed to be a foreign language to Bengali Muslims like Sanskrit to the Hindus.[68] Hence, there was always a 'national' consciousness present in Bengali Muslim minds even during colonial period whenever they had to deal with the imposition of Urdu in the name of Pan-Indian Muslim unity.

This debate was not concluded in colonial period. Since the emergence of *realpolitik* after the elections in 1937, these debates took a backseat in the political discourses. The victory of Krishak Praja Party in the provincial elections, Congress's refusal to form a government with KPP, Muslim League's alliance with KPP and Fazlul Huq's presentation of historical Lahore Resolution in League's conference brought a whole new narrative in the political discourse, which for the time being was successful to keep aside Urdu-Bengali debate and subsequently had given rise to a consolidated Muslim identitarian politics. The cultural differences which were pertinent questions in making of the Muslim nationhood was overlooked because of mainly two factors- one, the question of state language was a post-colonial problem therefore it was not necessary at that time to be addressed and secondly, the Bengali Muslims grew a self confidence within the community based on its demographical majority not only in Bengal vis-à-vis the Hindus but also amongst all the South Asian Muslim societies as a linguistic community. The National Congress also lacked prominent Muslim leadership in Bengal, which would be able to attract the larger Muslim Community in Bengal.[69] The Bengali identity of the Muslims were politically in a way represented by the Krishak Praja Party but as in the early 1940s the party itself joined Muslim League- the separate political representation of this cultural ethnic (and national) discourse went into oblivion. The discourse was subverted but remained alive. And this same discourse was rejuvenated and gave rise to a new dimension in politics of post-colonial Pakistan.

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[68]Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, (New Delhi: Oxford 1981), 124
[69] See John Gallagher, "Congress in Decline: Bengal, 1930 to 1939", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol.7, No. 3 (1973) Pages-589-645

Conclusion

My thesis has tried to explore the religious, social, and cultural changes that had occurred in the Muslim society in colonial Bengal. While doing so, it tried to look through the process of shaping certain identities, their reflections in literary works and process of mass mobilization. The Muslim community of Bengal had largely interacted with three different identities- Islamic, Muslim and Bengali. The thesis had tried to show the track of the shift from one identity to another. However, one has to keep in mind that while one identity had captured the larger popular imagination; the other identities did not die down. The other identities always remained alive at the margins and kept intriguing the scholars, intellectuals, social and political leaders to think differently and maneuver the existing ideas in the society. The Bengali identity started taking a definite structure in the Muslim minds in the early decades of the last century. Throughout this process, it had sometimes to directly confront the Islamic and Muslim identity and sometimes it had engaged positively with them as well. The Muslim and the Bengali identity had crossed path of each other multiple times and through interactions, a combined Bengali Muslim identity had been created in the society. In this combined identity, sometimes the Bengali identity triumphed over the Muslim identity and sometimes vice versa. The thesis has tried to capture the historical evolution of this dynamic identity and how the linguistic identity through this process had been shaped and strengthened.

The attempt here was to grasp a better understanding of the context that paved the way for the formation of the linguistic identity. The period discussed in the dissertation was not the period of popular imaginations and mass mobilizations on the basis of this linguistic identity. It was rather the time when the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia was robustly debating over the question of identity and a section of this intelligentsia was trying to put the linguistic identity as the most fundamental of all the identities that the Bengali Muslims had. The question of identity was too complex in South Asia as the multiple identities of a human being overlapped with each other. The most problematic terminology in this regard was *jati*,

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which had connoted multiple identities simultaneously. A Bengali Muslim Man from 1920 was from *Manushya jati, Purush jati, Muslim jati, Bangali jati, Bharatiyo jati* and *Ashraf jati.* It is difficult to define where *jati* meant what, especially when it came to *Muslim jati, Bangali jati* and *Bharatiyo jati.* The demarcation lines amongst religious, ethnic and national identities were blurred. This problem shows exactly how the notions of nationality and ideas of nationalism in the colonial South Asia were different from the ideal definitions of these categories. Therefore, one cannot perceive the then scholarly reflections on identity as they appeared, rather one has to delve deep inside the socio-political perspectives of such writings. The thesis had attempted to see through the writings in comparison to the material developments occurring in the colonial Bengali Muslim society and tried to infer the exact locus standee of the linguistic nationalism in the Bengali Muslim Minds.

The inference that the thesis draws is that the timeframe of shaping Bengali nationalism in the Muslim minds was the colonial Bengal not the Post-colonial East Pakistan. The large scale political manifestation and mass mobilizations on the basis of Bengali nationalism had started in post-colonial East Pakistan, but was not completely missing from the anti-colonial struggle/ identity based politics during the late colonial period. The programs of Krishak Praja Samiti demanded concrete actions for the betterment of the mother tongue.[70] In his response to the efforts of Muslim League to marginalize him in Bengal politics, Fazlul Haq wrote,

This brings me to the question, what I am fighting for? As I have made it abundantly clear already, I am fighting for a satisfactory solution of the bread problems or in other words, of the '*Dal bhat*' problem of Bengal and also for the thorough overhauling of the Tenancy Lawas in Bengal so as to give some relief to agriculturists. This cannot be affected by the Muslim League Parliamentary Board because in that Board out of 28 members, as as 11 are non-Bengalees who hail from Ispahan, Teharan, Badakshan and Samarkand and other places outside Bengal…[71]

There are several other instances from the events of 1930s and 1940s, from where one can draw the conclusion that there was a subverted Bengali nationalistic tendency that remained alive under the garb of Muslim politics in Bengal. The thesis thus tries to explore the background of the linguistic nationalism in

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[70] Objects and Programs of the Nikhil Banga Krishak Praja Samiti, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 10 September 1936
[71] AK Fazlul Huq's reply to critics, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 24 September, 1936

the Bengali Muslim society and locate the 'other' history in colonial Bengal which had significant social, cultural and political consequences that opened up new possibilities in colonial and post-colonial political history of South Asia.

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