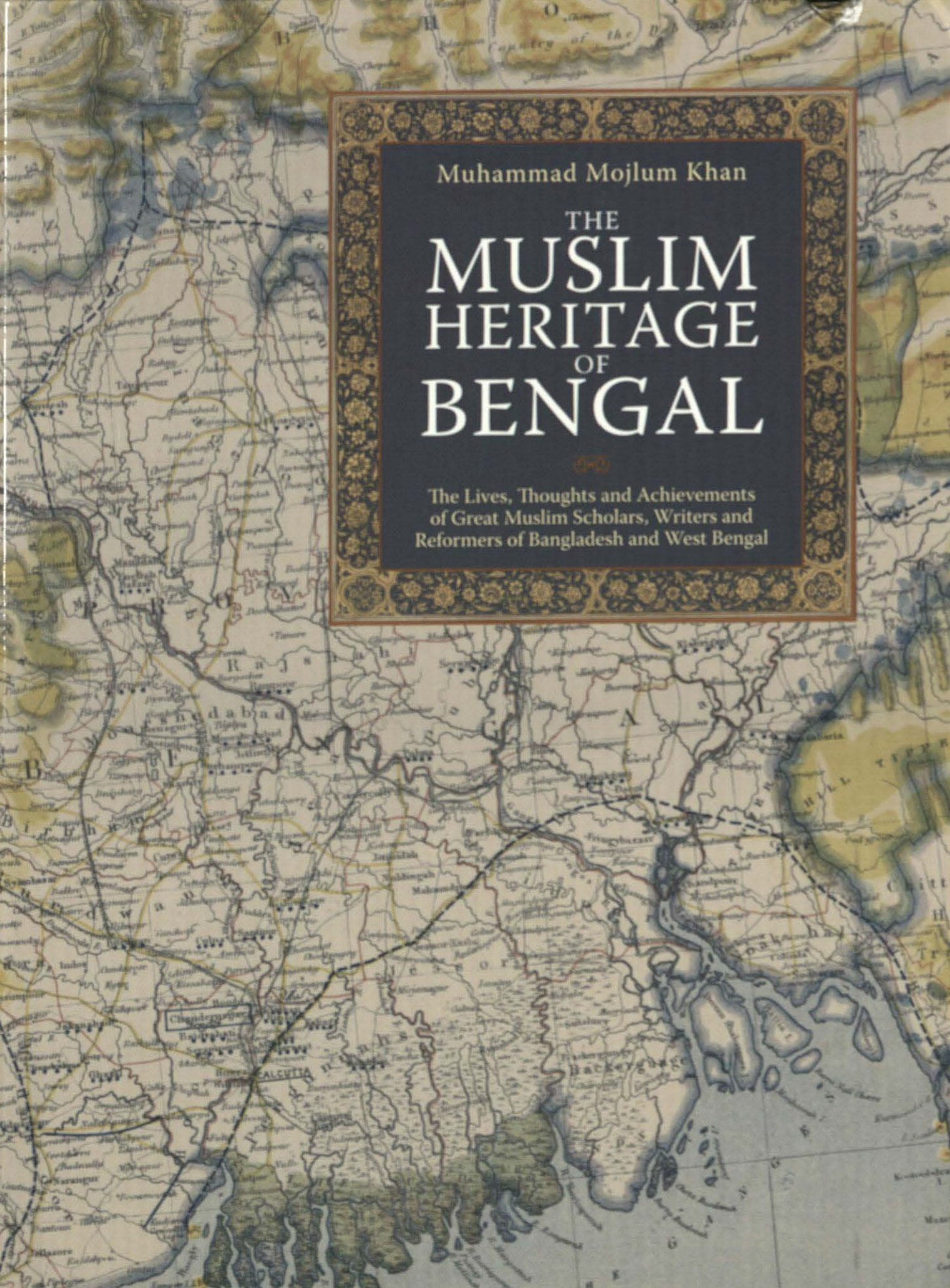


Muhammad Mojlum Khan

THE MUSLIM HERITAGE OF BENGAL

The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of Great Muslim Scholars, Writers and Reformers of Bangladesh and West Bengal

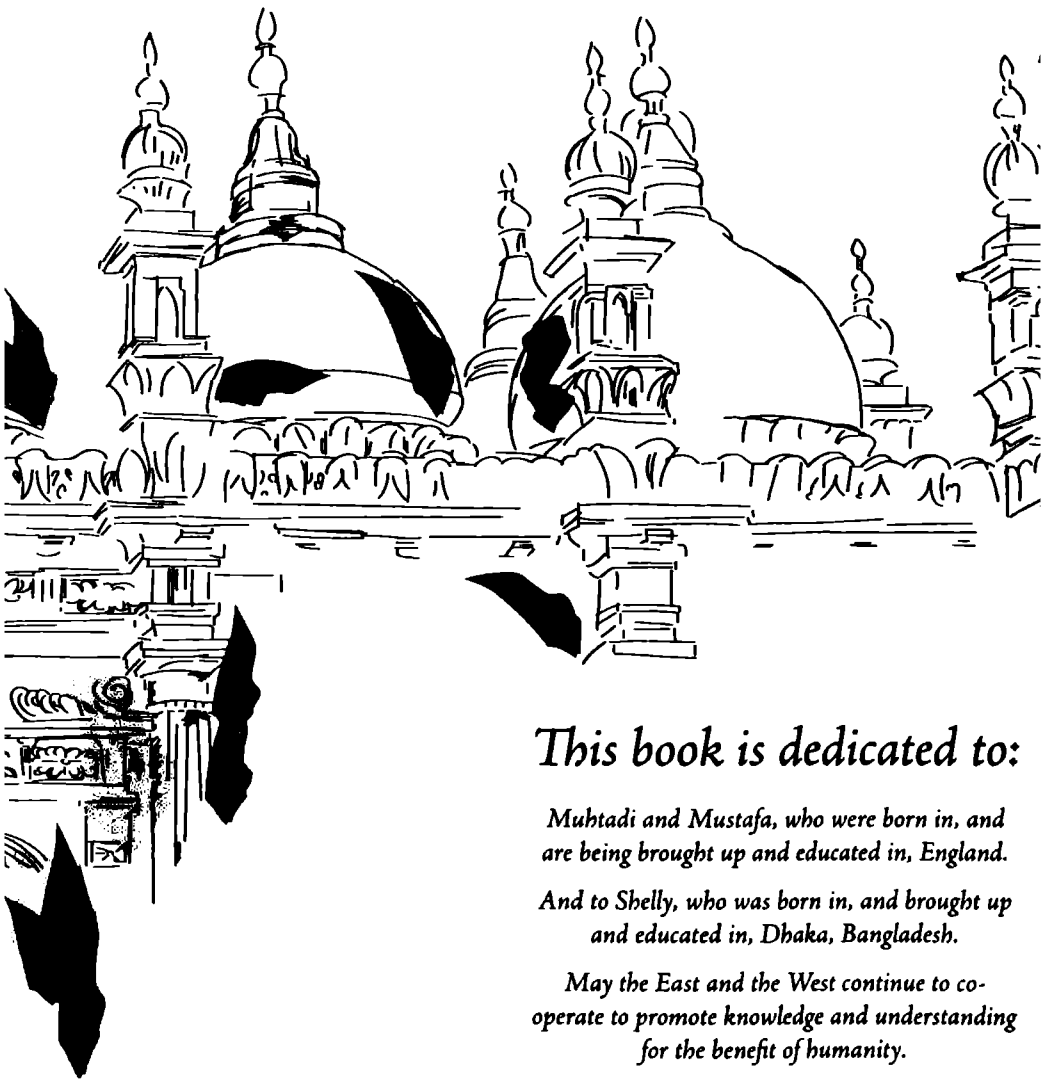
THE MUSLIM HERITAGE OF BENGAL

The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of Great Muslim Scholars, Writers and Reformers of Bangladesh and West Bengal

www.pathagar.com



www.pathagar.com



This book is dedicated to:

Muhtadi and Mustafa, who were born in, and are being brought up and educated in, England.

And to Shelly, who was born in, and brought up and educated in, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

May the East and the West continue to co-operate to promote knowledge and understanding for the benefit of humanity.

www.pathagar.com

The Muslim Heritage of Bengal: The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of Great Muslim Scholars, Writers and Reformers of Bangladesh and West Bengal

First published in England by

Kube Publishing Ltd
Markfield Conference Centre
Ratby Lane, Markfield,
Leicestershire LE67 9SY
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 1530 249230
Fax: +44 (0) 1530 249656

Website: www.kubepublishing.com
Email: info@kubepublishing.com

© Muhammad Mojlum Khan, 2013
All rights reserved

The right of Muhammad Mojlum Khan to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

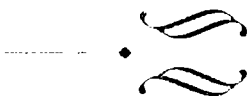
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-84774-059-5 casebound
ISBN 978-1-84774-052-6 paperback
ISBN 978-1-84774-062-5 ebook

Book Design • Illustration: © Fatima Jamadar
Cover Design • Typesetting: Nasir Cadir

Printed by: IMAK Ofset, Turkey

www.pathagar.com



CONTENTS

	Introduction	1
1.	Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji	13
2.	Shah Jalal of Sylhet	21
3.	Khan Jahan Ali	29
4.	Syed Sultan	36
5.	Syed Alaol	45
6.	Hayat Mahmud	53
7.	Mannujan Khanum	60
8.	Haji Muhammad Muhsin	66
9.	Rahimunnesa	73
10.	Haji Shari'atullah	80
11.	Titu Mir	88
12.	Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri	95
13.	Sir Abdul Ghani	103
14.	Nawab Abdul Latif	110
15.	Abdur Ra'uf Wahid	118
16.	Abdul Ghafur Nassakh	126
17.	Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi	133

www.pathagar.com

18. Nawab Faizunnesa Choudhurani 141
19. Dilwar Husayn Ahmad 148
20. Sir Ahsanullah 156
21. Pir Abu Bakr Siddiqi of Furfura 163
22. Mir Musharraf Husayn 171
23. Rt. Hon. Syed Ameer Ali 179
24. Rt. Hon. Taslimuddin Ahmad 190
25. Muhammad Daad Ali 199
26. Kazim al-Qurayshi Kaykobad 207
27. Shaykh Abdur Rahim of Basirhat 213
28. Muzammil Haq of Shantipur 220
29. Munshi Muhammad Meherullah 227
30. Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet 235
31. Sir Syed Shamsul Huda 247
32. Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury 255
33. Mawlana Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri 264
34. Sir Abdur Rahim 272
35. Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan 281
36. Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad 290
37. Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin 300
38. Sir Salimullah Khan Bahadur 308
39. Wajid Ali Khan Panni 320
40. Mawlana Abu Nasr Wahid 328
41. Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah 337
42. Begum Rokeya 346
Conclusion 356
Brief Chronology of the Islamic History of Bengal 360
List of Further Reading 364
Select Bibliography 384
Index 406

www.pathagar.com

INTRODUCTION

THE PIONEERING ROLE played by early Muslim rulers, scholars and masses in promoting a culture of learning, exchange and understanding between the different communities of Bengal—especially between the Muslims and Hindus—was nothing short of remarkable. Yet, the majority of the Hindu and Western historians have failed to acknowledge this fact in their works. Thanks to the remarkable efforts of Muslim scholars and historians, however, this important chapter in the history of medieval Bengal has been carefully analysed and preserved for the benefit of posterity.

Soon after the publication of *The Muslim 100* (2008) I turned my attention to the Muslim history and heritage of Bengal. An awareness of the increasing number of people of Bangladeshi origin in Europe, America and Canada, coupled

www.pathagar.com

with the fact that the majority of these people (especially those born and being brought up in the West) knew little about their family history, culture and heritage, prompted me to undertake this research. The need for good quality literature on this subject that is written in a language and format that is relevant and easy to understand has been felt for a long time. I have written this book to fill that gap.

Thanks to the success of *The Muslim 100*, the decision to write a book on the Muslim history and heritage of Bengal was not a difficult one to make. However, I had no intention of writing yet another standard, narrative political history of Bengal: for there is no shortage of such books in Bengali. Instead, using the same approach as *The Muslim 100*, here I have explored the Muslim history and culture of Bengal through the lives, thoughts and achievements of 42 prominent Muslim scholars, writers and reformers of Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal, for the benefit of the present and future generations (especially those living in the West).

My approach to the subject is different from that pursued by the other scholars and historians of the past and present. The existing literature on the Muslim history and culture of Bengal has been written from secular, nationalist, sectarian or political perspectives, or under the influence of an inherently partial—if not actually flawed—Orientalist theoretical framework, which regards the history of the Muslims of Bengal as no more than a footnote to a greater India-centric view of the subcontinent. This approach is not only reflected in the writings of the Hindu historians (such as Sir Jadunath Sarkar and R. C. Majumdar), but also, to a lesser extent, in the works of the Muslim historians (such as I. H. Qureshi and A. M. Zaidi). In contrast, the members of the Dani School of History have made a concerted effort to move away from an India-centric view of the subcontinent, only to embrace a narrow Pakistan-centric view. As a result of these approaches, the Islamic approach to understanding and interpreting the Muslim history of the subcontinent in general, and of Bengal in particular, has been overlooked, if not deliberately ignored.

In this book, I move beyond the prevailing ideological interpretations by pursuing an Islamic approach to understanding the Muslim history and culture of Bengal. The reason for this is that Bengali-speaking Muslims as a group consists of around 200 million people, making it one of the largest linguistic groups in the Muslim world (second only to the Arabs). Thus, although the Bengali-speaking people are a minority in the subcontinent, the Muslims of Bengal are far from being a minority in the *ummah* (global Islamic community). Accordingly, reasserting the Muslim-ness of their identity along with their Bengali-ness is the key to defining their religious and cultural identity as one of the largest linguistic groups in the global *ummah*. For this reason, there is an urgent need for pursuing a clear, unequivocal and unapologetic Islamic approach to the history and culture of the Muslims of Bengal. This book is a small step in that direction.

However, selecting only 42 personalities from the Muslims who lived from the beginning of the thirteenth to the early twentieth century was not an easy task, as I had already discovered while researching and writing *The*

www.pathagar.com

Muslim 100. In this book, I have deliberately focused on those people who have, in one way or another, made substantial and lasting contributions to the development, progress and regeneration of the Muslim community of Bengal during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As expected, the personalities from this period feature prominently in this book. Of course, in the process many other notable political, religious, intellectual and military figures have been left out. I do hope that this book will inspire other writers and researchers to focus on the personalities not covered in this book.

Readers will notice, as they go through the book, that the families or the biographers of many of the personalities covered in this volume trace their ancestry back to the Prophet of Islam or his prominent Companions. I was unable to prove or disprove such claims, due to the lack of authentic historical information, and therefore these claims need not necessarily be taken seriously. All the entries in this book appear in a chronological order, and for the sake of simplicity and brevity only the Gregorian dates have been used. I have attempted to present a critical, balanced and non-partisan approach to analysis of the lives, thoughts and contributions of all the personalities. However, some readers may wonder why only four women have been included in this volume: especially given that women have played an important role in the development and progress of the Muslim community of Bengal. Although Muslim women have made substantial contributions, they often worked from behind the scenes, and for this reason their efforts have remained unrecorded and unacknowledged. For this reason, reconstructing their life and work is a difficult task, and is hampered by a lack of authentic information and data. Hopefully the readers will understand the challenges that I encountered as they go through the biographies of the four women that I have included in this volume. Furthermore, due to social, cultural, geographical and historical overlaps, some repetition was unavoidable.

Although this book is aimed primarily at students and general readers, academics and scholars will also find it useful and informative. I have used straightforward language throughout, and have avoided unnecessary jargon and technical terms. Likewise, I have kept footnotes to a minimum, although at the end of the book I have provided a list of further reading for those who wish to pursue further study and research. In addition, I have included a select bibliography and a brief chronology of the Islamic history of Bengal for the benefit of students, researchers and scholars alike. In order to contextualise the personalities, each chapter begins with an introductory statement that provides the historical, cultural or religious context in which the personality concerned lived, worked and made their contribution.

Islam is generally perceived to have first entered the subcontinent during the beginning of the eighth century (in 711) under the leadership of Muhammad ibn al-Qasim al-Thaqifi. However, this view is only accurate insofar as the emergence of political Islam in the subcontinent is concerned: as a faith and culture, Islam came into contact with the coastal regions of the subcontinent much earlier. According to some historians, the Arabs had been travelling to Ceylon, Sumatra, Java, Malabar, Maldives

www.pathagar.com

and the other coastal regions of India from the early days of Islam. Both Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi, a subcontinental Islamic scholar and author of *A Geographical History of the Qur'an* (*Ard ul-Qur'an*), and Jurji Zaydan, an Arab Christian scholar and author of *The History of Islamic Civilization* (*Tarikh al-Tamaddun al-Islami*), assert that the Arabs were navigating to distant lands even during the pre-Islamic times. Following the advent of Islam in Arabia in the early part of the seventh century, and the subsequent spread of the new faith in and around the Arabian Peninsula, the early Muslims became more adventurous and daring in their pursuit of trade and commerce to distant lands by sea. With the rapid expansion of the Islamic dominion under the leadership of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab (r. 634–644), this process was intensified. Islam expanded even further during the time of his successor, Caliph Uthman ibn Affan (r. 644–656).

Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi and Jurji Zaydan (among others) argue that the Muslim expedition to India did not take place only by land. Sulaiman, in *The Arab Navigation* (2006), argues that the first Muslim contact with the coastal regions of India took place much earlier than is commonly assumed, and that Muhammad ibn al-Qasim's successful conquest of the Indian province of Sind and its neighbouring territories in 711 was preceded by Muslim naval expeditions to Debul during the time of Caliph Uthman in the mid-seventh century. According to Muhammad Ishaq of Dhaka University, Arabs first came to India in 643, during the reign of Caliph Umar, and successfully reached Thana, a seaport near Bombay. Another expedition reached the coast of Gujarat, thus heralding the advent of the *Sahabah* (Companions of the Prophet) in South India. Similar expeditions were sent against Barwas (or Broach) and to the gulf of al-Daybul (Debul). Muhammad Ishaq came to this conclusion after carefully examining al-Baladhuri and al-Tabari's account of the advent of Islam in the subcontinent. This view is also confirmed by the *Chach Nama* (another important early source regarding the early Arab expedition to India), which states that the first naval attack against Debul took place prior to the death of Caliph Umar in 644.[1]

Tara Chand, a noted Hindu historian, similarly states that the first Muslim fleet appeared in Indian waters in 636 AD during the Caliphate of Umar, when Usman Sakifi the Governor of Bahrain and Uman, sent an army across the sea to Tana.'[2] However, other historians (such as George Hourani) disagree with this view; instead they argue that the pre-Islamic Persians of the Sassanian times were sailors and traders in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean during the pre-Islamic and early Islamic eras. The Arabs neither built ships nor used them as sailors or navigators until the Umayyad period, when some Arab governors initiated shipbuilding in the Mediterranean coast of Syria (among other places). Accordingly, these historians consider the accounts—supplied by al-Baladhuri, al-Tabari and even Ibn al-Athir—of the arrival of Islam in the subcontinent during the time of Prophet and his immediate Companions to be questionable, if not entirely legendary. This view is somewhat compromised, however, as it does not take into account the evidence provided by the *Chach Nama*, an important early source that corroborates the account of al-Baladhuri,

www.pathagar.com

al-Tabari and other classical Islamic chroniclers concerning the advent of Islam in the Indian subcontinent (*Bilad al-Hind*).

Notably, it is not widely known that Islam had reached Bengal long before Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji's conquest of Bengal in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Excavations carried out during the 1930s led to the discovery of two coins issued by the early Abbasid Caliphs in Paharpur in Rajshahi and Mainamati in Comilla. The coin discovered in Paharpur is dated 788 and was issued during the time of Harun al-Rashid, the famous Abbasid Caliph who reigned from 786–809; the coin found in Mainamati was issued during the time of Caliph Abu Ahmad Abdullah al-Muntasir Billah, who ruled from 861–862. The discovery of these coins clearly showed that the Muslim traders and merchants had been visiting different parts of Bengal during the eighth and ninth century, if not earlier.

The early Muslim travellers came to Bengal via the Persian Gulf and Tai'zz, a port in Yemen, and Thatta (or Debul), the port of Sind. From there they moved to Gujarat, Calicut and Madras, before reaching the Bay of Bengal, where Sylhet (known to them as Shilahat) became their main centre of activity, long before the time of Shah Jalal, the patron saint of Sylhet; a similar process occured in Chittagong (which was known to the early Muslim traders and businessmen as Sadjam). The arrival of these Muslim traders to the coastal regions of the subcontinent in general, and Bengal in particular, paved the way for the Sufis to move into different parts of Bengal in order to disseminate the message of Islam in that region.

Not surprisingly, the Muslims of Bengal are, in the words of Syed Ali Ashraf, 'The joint product of Muslim immigrants and local converts. Immigrants came mainly from Turkey and the Turkistans including Mongolia and Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan.'[3] As such, the Muslims of Bengal hailed from a mixed racial and ethnic origin that was facilitated by intermarriage. This helped to integrate the immigrants with the local converts. Although the community began to emerge in Bengal long before the time of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji, after the Muslim conquest of Bengal in the beginning of thirteenth century a large number of Turks, Afghans, Persians and Arabs arrived and settled there. A lesser flow of immigrants occured during the Sultanate rule of Bengal (1350–1576), and after the Mughal conquest of Bengal in 1575 another wave of immigrants arrived, this time mainly from Iran.

Mawlana Minhaj al-Din Siraj (also known as Minhaj-i-Siraj), the classical historian of Muslim Bengal, points out Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji's conquest of Bengal in the early part of the thirteenth century was virtually unopposed and, as a result, it completely transformed the history of that entire region.[4] Even so, there is considerable disagreement among historians concerning the exact date of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji's conquest of Bengal: some say it took place in 1201, others have suggested that it happened between 1202–1203, and yet others suggest that Bakhtiyar Khalji marched into Bengal in 1204 or 1205. According to the majority of the historians, the Muslim conquest of Bengal took place around 1203–1204 under Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji's leadership.

This raises an important question: namely, what does the word 'Bengal' denote? In a

www.pathagar.com

historical sense, Bengal (Arabic 'Bangalah', Persian 'Bangal', Bengali 'Bangla' and Sanskrit 'Vanga') primarily consisted of the territory that today encompasses Bangladesh and West Bengal; although Orissa, Bihar and Assam also formed a part of Bengal at various times. Collectively, these territories became known as *Suba-i-Bangalah* (the province of Bengal) or *Bilad al-Bangalah* (the territory of Bengal), however, for the purpose of this book, Bengal refers to the territories that consist of present-day Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal. This was a necessary decision, as it is not always possible to identify the exact origin, connotation and the territorial meaning of the word Bengal.

A. K. M. Yaqub Ali, a leading scholar of medieval Bengal, argues that the name Bengal, as the Arabic Bangalah, was coined much later than it is generally assumed. As such, the Palas, Senas or the Muslims did not ascribe the name Bangalah to the region. Although the name 'Bang' (or 'Vanga') appeared in epigraphy and literature prior to the advent of the Muslims, the name 'Bangalah' or 'Bengal' was most probably coined by Sultan Shams al-Din Ilyas Shah, who reigned between 1339 and 1358. As expected, modern historians have advanced conflicting views on this issue. Thus, H. C. Ray-Choudhury admits that it was the Muslims who had popularised the name Bangalah, while tracing its origin to the Pala period. Likewise, R. C. Majumdar argues that Bangalah as a country originated during the time of the Palas, but that the term later referred to Bengal as a whole. However, A. H. Dani argues that Sultan Shams al-Din Ilyas Shah united Lakhnawati, Satgaon and Sonargoan into one coutry that became known as Bangalah or Bengal.[5]

The most authoritative view is that the name Bangalah arose—as Yaqub Ali suggests—during Sultan Shams al-Din Ilyas Shah's reign, rather than Pala's: during the reign of the latter Bengal was divided into five principalities (namely Bang, Barendra, Radha, Bagdi and Mithila). That is why both the Pala and Sena rulers proudly assumed the title of *Gaudesvar*; unlike Sultan Shams al-Din Ilyas Shah, who by virtue of being able to unify the different principalities into one territorial unit was hailed as the *Shah-i-Bangalah*. Needless to say, this would not have been possible without the remarkable and lasting military conquest that was first initiated by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji around a 150 years before Sultan Ilyas Shah's reign. For this reason, the credit for laying the foundation of Muslim rule in Bengal must go firstly to Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji and thereafter to Sultan Ilyas Shah for his efforts to unify Bengal which, at the time extended, in the words of Yaqub Ali (1988), from 'Teliagarhi in the west to Chittagong in the east, and from the foot of the Himalayas in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south.'[6]

Historians often divide the pre-modern history of Muslim rule in Bengal into three periods: the early phase, the Sultanate, and the Mughal periods. The early phase was initiated by the conquest of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji in the beginning of the thirteenth century and it ended with the suppression of Mughith al-Din Tughral in 1281. This paved the way for the Sultanate period, which endured for nearly three centuries before the Mughals conquered Bengal in 1576. The Mughal rule of Bengal, in turn, endured until the death

www.pathagar.com

of Emperor Awrangzeb, the last of the great Mughal rulers. Following the death of Emperor Awrangzeb in 1707, Bengal formally became independent, until the British defeated Siraj al-Dawlah, the Nawab of Bengal in 1757. The defeat of the latter at the hands of Robert Clive of the East India Company marked the end of Muslim rule of Bengal and the beginning of British domination of the subcontinent. For the next century, Bengal remained firmly under the control of the British East India Company, until the Sepoy revolt broke out in 1857, which prompted the British government to intervene and formally establish their control of India. This led to the exile of Bahadur Shah Zafar II, the last of the Mughals, in 1858. Nearly three decades later, the National Indian Congress was formed under the auspices of leading Indian Hindu leaders and exactly two decades later, in 1905, Bengal was formally partitioned by the British Viceroy, Lord Curzon: thus creating the predominantly Muslim province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, and the Hindu-dominated West Bengal. A year after the partition of Bengal some of India's leading Muslim scholars and leaders met in Dhaka, where, under the leadership of Sir Salimullah Khan Bahadur, the influential Nawab of Dhaka, they inaugurated the All-India Muslim League.[7]

According to Matiur Rahman, the formation of All-India Muslim League at Dhaka (in December 1906) marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Muslims of India, because it helped the entire community to rally under the banner of one political organisation, thus strengthening the Muslims' claim to a separate identity as one people.[8] This, in turn, enabled the community to express its hopes, desires and aspirations in a powerful and effective way. Barely five years after the formation of the league, the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was formally abolished, and this represented another wake-up call for Muslims of India in general, and for Bengal in particular. This forced the Muslim masses and the leadership to engage in a long period of soul-searching, and they eventually gave their full backing to the concept of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent. This concept later took the form of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

From the remarkable military conquests of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji in the beginning of the thirteenth century to the formation of the All-India Muslim League during the early years of the twentieth century, and from the unification of Bengal under the leadership of Sultan Shams al-Din Ilyas Shah in the mid-fourteenth century to the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, the Muslims of Bengal had played an influential role in the political history of the subcontinent. Likewise, the pioneering social, cultural, religious and educational activities of Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, Haji Muhammad Muhsin, Nawab Abdul Latif, Rt. Hon. Justice Syed Ameer Ali, Sir Abdur Rahim, Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan and Nawab Sir Salimullah Khan Bahadur, among others, have contributed substantially to the development and progress of the Muslim culture and heritage in Bengal and throughout the entire subcontinent. However, the remarkable contributions made by the Muslims of Bengal in the political, social, cultural, religious, educational and intellectual history of the subcontinent is, for some reason, not widely

www.pathagar.com

known in Bangladesh and West Bengal or in the Western world. That is very unfortunate, given the fact that the Muslims of Bengal had played an importnant role in shaping the history of the subcontinent and of Bengal in particular.

Muhammad Abdur Rahim, a leading historian of Bengal, argues that the Muslim conquest was a blessing for Bengal because it led to the political unification of Bengali people, and because it was during this period that the Muslim rulers actively promoted Bengali language and literature. In other words, without the patronage of the Muslim rulers, Bengali language would have remained unnoticed, if not forgotten. In addition, Rahim suggests that Muslims enriched Bengali literature by introducing new traditions, themes and vocabularies from other languages including Arabic, Persian and Turkish. It is worth pointing out that the Muslim rulers also became generous patrons of Sanskrit. Not surprisingly, Navadvip became a prominent centre for the study of Sanskrit during the Muslim rule. Relieved of the oppressive rule of the Senas, the Bengali people, Muslims and Hindus alike, made considerable social, political and economic progress, not to mention important literary and intellectual contributions to society, thanks to the generosity and support of the Muslim rulers of Bengal.[9]

Although I was born in Bangladesh, I was brought up and educated in England. Keen to explore my family history, culture and religious heritage, I began to collect books on the Muslim culture and heritage of Bengal in both Bengali and English. During the course of my research, it became clear to me that there were very few good quality books available on the subject, in either Bengali or English. The only exceptions to this rule were the writings of the members of—what I prefer to call—the Dani School of History. Ahmad Hasan Dani was born in 1920 in Raipur (Central India) and was trained in archaeology and history in India and Britain. He subsequently became one of the subcontinent's leading authorities on South and Central Asian archaeology and history. Author of 30 books, he was also proficient in more than half a dozen languages including Persian, Sanskrit, Urdu, Arabic and Turkish. From 1950 to 1962, Dani served as a superintendent of Archaeology, a professor of History at Dhaka University and a curator at Dhaka Museum. During his time at Dhaka University Dani worked with a group of young scholars who subsequently became some of Bengal's most gifted and outstanding Muslim historians in modern times. These include Muhammad Abdur Rahim, Abdul Karim, Muhammad Mohar Ali and Mu'in-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, among others.

Muhammad Abdur Rahim was born in 1921 in Chandpur District (located in present-day Bangladesh) and was educated at Dhaka and London Universities, obtaining his doctorate in Indian history. He served as a professor of history at Karachi and Dhaka Universities, and subsequently established his reputation as a researcher and historian with the publication of *The Social and Cultural History of Bengal* (two volumes published in 1963 and 1967), *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal, AD 1757–1947* (1978) and *The History of the University of Dacca* (1981).

Abdul Karim was born in 1928 in Chittagong and was educated at Dhaka and London Universities, specialising in the history of Bengal. He is the author of more than 20 books

www.pathagar.com

on the history and culture of the Muslims of Bengal and taught at Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong Universities, eventually serving as the Vice-Chancellor of Chittagong University from 1975 to 1981. Some of his important literary contributions include *The Social History of the Muslims in Bengal* (reprinted 1985), *Corpus of the Muslim Coins of Bengal* (1960), *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times* (1963), *Banglar Itihas (Sultani Amal)* (reprinted 1987), *Banglar Itihas (Mughal Amal)* (1992), *Dhaka: The Mughal Capital* (1964) and *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal* (1992).

Like Abdul Karim, Muhammad Mohar Ali was born in 1928 and was educated at Dhaka and London Universities, where he specialised in the cultural history of Bengal. He taught at Dhaka, Imam Muhammad ibn Saud and Madinah Islamic Universities. He wrote prolifically on history and Islamic topics, establishing his reputation as a researcher, translator and historian. His *Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities 1833–1857* (1965) and *History of the Muslims of Bengal* (3 volumes published in 1985 and 1988) have been critically acclaimed.

Mu'in-ud-Din Ahmad Khan was born in 1926 in Chittagong and was educated in history and Islamic studies at Dhaka and McGill Universities (Montreal), where he specialised in general history. He taught at Karachi, Chittagong and Southern Universities, serving as the Vice-Chancellor of the latter. He is the author of more than a dozen books on history, Muslim freedom movements and contemporary topics. His major publications include *History of the Fara'idi Movement in Bengal* (1965), *Titu Mir and His Followers in British Indian Records, 1831–1833 AD* (1980), *Muslim Struggle for Freedom in Bengal* (1961), *Social History of the Muslims of Bangladesh Under the British Rule* (1992) and *A Bibliographical Introduction to Modern Islamic Developments in India and Pakistan 1700–1965* (1959).

With the support and encouragement of Ahmad Hasan Dani and his colleagues, these scholars and historians pursued extensive and original research into various aspects of Muslim history and heritage of Bengal. Aiming to investigate and rectify the prevailing misconceptions and misinterpretation, the members of the Dani School of History pursued a critical, evidence-based approach to the Muslim history and heritage of Bengal. They achieved this by collecting original historical documents, archaeological evidence and by analysing Arabic and Persian epigraphs relating to the history and culture of the Muslims of Bengal. Accordingly, they critiqued and re-evaluated the existing literature on the subject, which, in turn, enabled them to correct prevailing misconceptions and misinterpretations.[10]

Compared to the writings of the majority of contemporary Bangladeshi academics and researchers on the Muslim history and culture of Bengal, the intellectual honesty, originality and high quality of works produced by the members of the Dani School of History captured my attention. Study of their works clarified my many historical, cultural and religious misconceptions on the subject. Even so—as I subsequently discovered—their works are not free from error and misinterpretation either. For this reason, it was important to maintain a critical, impartial and detached approach to the subject in the course of the study, research and

www.pathagar.com

inquiry that led to this book.

Needless to say, combining full-time work and family life with writing and research is never an easy task. For this reason, I cannot thank my wife enough for her patience, understanding and tolerance during the course of my research for and writing of this book. Without her constant encouragement and unstinting support, it would not have been possible for me to complete this work. Also, my two young sons—Muhtadi and Mustafa—patiently tolerated my long hours of research and writing. I pray for their continued happiness, prosperity and success. During our visit to Dhaka, I spent more time in libraries, research institutes and bookshops than I did with my family and relatives. I am extremely grateful to them for their love, kindness and understanding. I would also like to thank Sohail and Fahim for accompanying me during my visits to different libraries, institutions and bookshops in Dhaka and Sylhet. Without their co-operation, it would not have been possible to obtain many of the old and out-of-print books and manuscripts that have proven to be invaluable.

Others also encouraged and supported me during my research. These include Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg, FRAS. Although a historian by training, Beg is equally familiar with aspects of Bengali language, literature and history. He read this manuscript thoroughly and provided detailed feedback, which enabled me to improve the book. He continues to send me photocopies of relevant articles, books and other information; may the Almighty reward him for his support and encouragement. A. K. M. Yaqub Ali, a senior academic, historian and prolific writer of Bangladesh, has been a source of inspiration for several years and I am grateful to him for sending me many out-of-print books and articles that have been very helpful. As soon as Muhammad Kamrul Hasan found out that I was working on this project, he became an important source of information and a keen supporter of this work. Our discussions, debates and deliberations eventually led to the establishment of the Bengal Muslim Research Institute UK (BMRI) in May 2010. This institute was set up to pursue research, organise seminars and conferences, and create a comprehensive website of relevant information about the Muslim history, culture and heritage of Bengal. The website has now become an important source of information on the subject and has already generated considerable interest in many parts of the world including the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Without the support and co-operation of Kamrul Hasan, Muhammad Akhteruzzaman, Firoz Kamal and Moshahid Ali, it would not have been possible to initiate this project.

Mushtaque Ali, the son of Maulvi Munawwar Ali of Sylhet, went out of his way to collect relevant books and other information for me and I am grateful to him for his encouragement. Likewise, Muhammad Mujibur Rahman, former chairman of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Rajshahi University, has been a valuable source of information. I spoke with Muhammad Abdullah of Dhaka University about the Muslim history and culture of Bengal on several occasions prior to his death. Fluent in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, English and Bengali, Muhammad Abdullah researched and wrote more than 30 books (in Bengali) on

www.pathagar.com

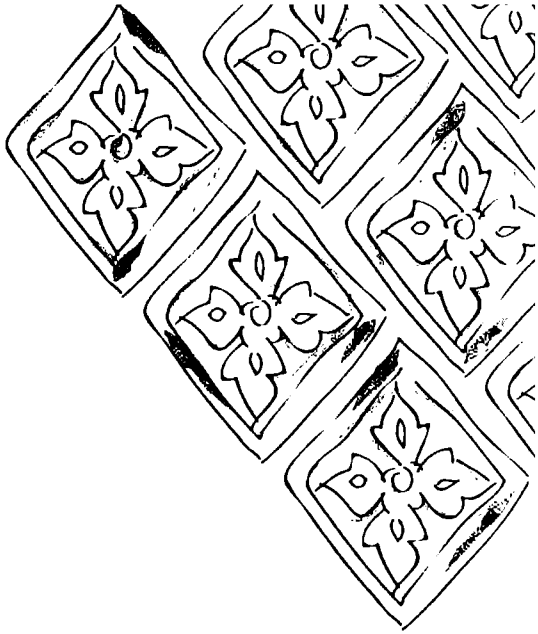
the Muslim history and culture of Bengal. His books were an important source of information for me. I would like to thank his family members for their support and co-operation. Likewise, Mu'in-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, an eminent academic, historian and writer of Bangladesh, sent me copies of his books and essays and my conversations with him helped clarify a number of historical and chronological issues. I am also grateful to Abdus Subhan, a former professor of Persian at Calcutta University, for his encouragement and co-operation. He kindly sent me copies of his articles and essays. I spoke to Kazi Din Muhammad, a former professor of Bengali language and literature at Dhaka University and director of the Bangla Academy, on several occasions, and he encouraged me to continue my studies and research.

Syed Mahmudul Hasan, a senior academic and archaeologist of Bangladesh, was kind enough to publish my essay, 'The Pioneers of Islam in Bengal: Early Muslim Preachers and Their Contributions', in *Nazimuddin Ahmed Commemoration Volume* (2011); he also sent me copies of his books and essays. I am grateful to Haris Ahmad, the director at Kube Publishing, and Yahya Birt, the commissioning editor at Kube Publishing, for their contributions. Yahya thoroughly read the entire manuscript and provided detailed editorial feedback. This has enabled me to further improve the book. In addition to this, I have visited many libraries and research institutes to collect relevant books, journals, articles and other information. I am grateful to the staff of the following organisations for their co-operation and assistance: The Bangla Academy in Dhaka, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Library in London, University of Cambridge Library, Islamic Foundation Library in Leicester and Suffolk Central Library.

However, the views and opinions expressed in this book are solely mine, and none of the aforementioned people are in any way responsible for any shortcomings. Given the nature and size of this book, it is possible that some errors have escaped my attention and scrutiny. Should anyone identify any errors or mistakes, I would be grateful if they would write to the publisher so that necessary corrections can be made in any future edition of the book.

Ultimately, praise and thanks are due to the One and Only: all Glory and Majesty belongs to Him; nothing can happen without His leave, not even a drop of water falls from the sky nor does a leaf fall from the tree except by His will. And peace and blessings upon the chosen one, who came to show the way, the way back to the One!

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. Muhammad Ishaq, *India's Contribution to the Study of Hadith Literature*; Qadi Isma'il, *Chach Nama: An Ancient History of Sind.*
2. Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture.*
3. Syed Ali Ashraf, *The Muslim Traditions in Bengali Literature.*
4. Minhaj-i-Siraj, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri.*
5. A. K. M. Yaqub Ali, *Select Arabic and Persian Epigraphs: Sources for the Socio-Administrative History of Bengal (Turko-Afghan and Mughal Periods).*
6. Ibid.
7. Muhammad Abdullah, *Nawab Salimullah: Jiban-o-Karma.*
8. Matiur Rahman, *From Consultation to Confrontation: A Study of the Muslim League in British Indian Politics, 1906–1912.*
9. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *The Social and Cultural History of Bengal.*
10. Interview with Dr Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, January 2010.

www.pathagar.com

D. 1206

MUHAMMAD BAKHTIYAR KHALJI

HISTORIANS OFTEN TRACE initial Muslim contact with Bengal to the seventh century, when the early Arab and Persian traders and seafarers came to the remote coastal regions of India in pursuit of business and commerce. The presence of early Muslim traders in Bengal has been confirmed by the discovery of coins issued by the Abbasid Caliphs at sites in Paharpur in Rajshahi and Mainamati in Comilla. Indeed, the early Arab and Persian traders paved the way for the Sufis and other Muslim preachers to proceed to Bengal in order to convey the message of Islam to its non-Muslim inhabitants: the majority of whom were Hindus and Buddhists at the time.

Some early Muslim preachers included Baba Adam Shahid of Dhaka, Shah Sultan Rumi

www.pathagar.com

of Mymensingh and Makhdum Shah Dawlah Shahid of Pabna. These pioneering preachers not only played a pivotal role in disseminating Islam in Bengal, they also prepared the way for political Islam to make inroads into that part of the subcontinent. Although political Islam first entered the subcontinent in the year 711 under the leadership of the young and inspirational Muhammad ibn al-Qasim al-Thaqifi, it was left to the genius of Sultan Mahmud, the great Turkish Ghaznavid ruler, to make serious inroads into India during the beginning of the eleventh century. His repeated excursions into mainland India not only opened the floodgates for Islam in the subcontinent, they also paved the way for Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad Ghuri to instigate his conquests in northern India; which, in turn, enabled Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji to march into Bengal virtually unopposed.

Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji (known as Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji) was born in Garamsir (located in modern-day Dasht-i-Marg) in Central Afghanistan, into the tribe of Khalaj in Khaljistan. Although the Khalaj tribe was of Turkish origin, it consisted of people of various ethnic groups. They initially settled in eastern Afghanistan, before being recruited into the Ghurid military and civil services.[1] Although little is known about his early life, according to some historians, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji was born into an ordinary family of the Khalaj tribe and, not unlike his fellow tribesmen, he was known to have been a brave and ambitious young man. Despite being short in height and of slim build, with unusually long arms, he nonetheless aspired to become a soldier. According to Minhaj al-Din Siraj (also known as Minhaj-i-Siraj), author of *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* (*The Chronicle of Nasir*), Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji initially worked for the Ghurids until he was dismissed from his job for repeatedly turning up to work late.[2] However, according to another account, he proceeded to Ghazni in order to join the army of Muhammad Ghuri, but was not recruited due to his short height and long arms. Distraught but undeterred, he then travelled all the way to Delhi to serve Qutb al-Din Aybak (who served as a commander of Muhammad Ghuri, then became a ruler in Lahore after the latter's death in 602). Again he was unable to secure permanent employment, probably because he did not have a horse or any armour.

Determined to prove his skills and talent, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji then proceeded to Badayun in Northern India where, at last, he was able to join the service of Malik Hizbar al-Din as a low-ranking army commander. Since the salary he received was very poor and there were no prospects of promotion, he subsequently quit this job, moved further towards the east and settled at Oudh. As luck would have it, Malik Husam al-Din, the governor of this province, was impressed with Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji and offered him a sizable plot of land in Mirzapur District (located in the present-day Indian state of Uttar Pradesh). Accordingly, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji settled there and began to consolidate his political position in and around that area. Having worked as a soldier and military strategist, it did not take him long to out-manoeuvre his opponents and thereby become the undisputed master of the neighbouring territories.

Hoping to extend his dominion further,

www.pathagar.com

sometime between 1203 and 1205 he marched towards the east and annexed the province of Bihar (which was then known as Magadha) and added this territory to his expanding state. It should be mentioned here that Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji marched towards Bihar with no more than 200 soldiers, yet he managed to capture one of its most heavily fortified forts, Udantapuri with ease. Although it is true that the locals put up resistance against the Muslim general and his army (and, as a result, many people died on the battlefield), it is factually inaccurate to suggest that he destroyed many ancient seats of learning at Nalanda and Vikramshila before instigating a wholesale massacre of innocent people upon entering the fort. In fact, according to majority of the historians, the opposite is true: Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji was far from being a cruel, ruthless and bloodthirsty military general. Nevertheless, the importance of this victory should not be underestimated, not least because this fort had in the past successfully resisted many attacks on it from Vallala Sena, the powerful Hindu ruler of Bengal. As expected, the capture of Bihar greatly enhanced the Muslim general's standing and this, no doubt, prompted the Viceroy Qutb al-Din Aybak to publicly recognise and honour him for his success and achievements, thus encouraging him to continue his military conquests.

The annexation of Bihar opened the way for Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji and his cavalry to move into Lakhnawati (Bengal) and to capture this large province. However, before launching an excursion into Bengal, he first consolidated his grip on Bihar and its neighbouring territories. He did so by creating several garrisons (*thanas*) throughout his expanding state. The creation of military outposts not only enabled the Muslim general to strengthen his hold on those areas, but also enabled him to swiftly establish his political authority across those territories. This shows that Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji was more than a successful conqueror; he was also a brilliant political strategist and organiser. With Bihar and its neighbouring territories firmly under his sway, the Muslim general prepared for his next important move: the conquest of Bengal. Bengal at the time was under the rule of the members of the Sena dynasty, who hailed from the south of India (that is, from the region that today consists of Andhra Pradesh, Mysore and Karnataka). The mother tongue of the Sena ruler was Kanarese. Although historians do not know exactly when the Senas moved to Bengal and acquired power there, according to one account, they came to Bengal to serve in the military service of the Pala dynasty: when this dynasty began to decline irreversibly the Sena generals assumed power and inaugurated their rule.

However, according to other historians, the Senas came to Bengal with an army from the Deccan, and they acquired power in this region by ousting the Palas. Since historians have provided conflicting accounts about the arrival of the Senas to Bengal, it is not surprising that very little is known about Samantasena, the founder of the Sena dynasty, who most probably lived during the middle of the eleventh century. His descendants (such as Hemantasena and Vijaysena), however, went onto establish their rule across Bengal by ousting their rivals. After a long reign, Vijaysena was succeeded by his son, Vallalasena, who was a prominent scholar

www.pathagar.com

and writer, and—like his father—a devotee of the Hindu god Shiva. Prior to the arrival of the Senas, the dominant religion of Bengal was Buddhism; but after assuming power they ruthlessly suppressed the Buddhists and instead forcibly imposed their rigid version of Brahmanic Hinduism on the locals. This creed required strict adherence to the caste system and the practice of kulinism (a form of racial and cultural superiority).

By the time Laksmanasena became the ruler of the Sena dynasty, he was considered to be rather old and weak, and this probably contributed to the political disruption and decline that occured towards the end of his reign. As the Sena dynasty became politically weak and disunited, various independent rulers emerged across Bengal, and this led to the irreversible fragmentation and disintegration of the Sena dynasty. Sensing the Sena's vulnerability, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji advanced in the direction of Bengal and thereby established Muslim rule for the first time in the history of Bengal. Indeed, as soon as the Muslim general marched into Bihar and established his rule there, the Sena ruler knew he was in trouble: not least because he was very unpopular at home and his political rivals were busy plotting his downfall. Caught between a rock and a hard place, Laksmanasena was not in a position to repel the Muslim general once the latter had decided to march into Bengal.

As expected, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji proceeded as far as the gates of the Hindu ruler's palace virtually unopposed. Although historians have continued to debate the exact details of the route taken by the Muslim general and his army, they agree that he planned and executed his military excursion with much precision and effectiveness. Minhaj al-Siraj, the earliest and most reliable historical source, states that Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji marched into Nadia (the capital of the Sena dynasty) at great speed, with only 18 horsemen able to keep pace with him.[3] Seeing the Muslim general march into his capital virtually unopposed, the Sena ruler attempted to escape from his palace through the back door in order to seek refuge (this refuge was in a location nearby modern Dhaka). Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji did not pursue him; he allowed the Sena ruler to escape with his family and close aides. The arrival of the Muslim general in Bengal in around 1204 represented the end of the Sena dynasty. In so doing, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji inaugurated Muslim rule in Bengal for the first time.

According to Muhammad Yusuf Siddiq, an underlying reason for this victory was the Senas failure to gain support from the ordinary people, both Hindus and Buddhists, who had not supported them fully from the outset. Since Bengal was ruled by a prominent native Buddhist Pala dynasty for many centuries, the Hindu Senas, who were Brahman Kshatriya (one of the highest Hindu castes), had failed to connect with the masses. Their hold on Bengal was also weakened by their strict adherence to the caste system, which led to social segregation. In addition to this, the Senas did not speak Bengali; thus culturally, linguistically and spiritually they were alienated from the ordinary people. For this reason, the Vedic religion of the Aryans had never captured the imagination of the locals. This probably prompted, according to Muhammad Yusuf Siddiq:

www.pathagar.com

> [The] indigenous Mlechcha (a Sanskrit term essentially connoting non-Aryan natives/uncivilized non-Hindu aborigines of India) population (such as the Mech tribe in the north, according to *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*) to cooperate with the Muslim conquerors identified by the Aryan (Vedic) Hindus as *Yavana* (originally Sanskrit word meaning polluted outsiders/aliens).[4]

Unlike the Senas, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji quickly won over the non-Aryan people of the region; to such an extent that he even sponsored the construction of a monastery for the Buddhists. His open and welcoming approach enabled the indigenous people to interact with the Muslim newcomers from Arabia, Turkistan, Afghanistan and Persia during the early days of Muslim rule, and this fostered a culture of respect and mutual understanding in Bengal.

Unfortunately, the chronicler Minhaj al-Din Siraj did not provide any date for the conquest; as expected, historians have suggested various dates, although the majority of historians are of the view that Bengal was conquered in the year 1204. By all standards, the Muslim conquest of Bengal was a remarkable military feat, as it was achieved without any collateral damage. This has prompted many modern Hindu nationalists and historians to play down the significance of this epoch-making event. Perhaps the idea of a heroic Muslim conqueror and military general marching into the bastion of Brahmanic Hinduism, while its supposed patron and defender chose to flee for his life through the back door of his palace, is too disconcerting and humiliating for these nationalists to accept. Be that as it may, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji's conquest of Bengal was remarkable. The majority of researchers and historians—Muslims and non-Muslims alike—have recognised this to be the case.

After the conquest of Nadia, the Muslim general stayed there in order to establish as many military outposts (*thanas*) as were necessary to enable him to administer the area properly before proceeding to Gaud (Lakhnawati), which was his political capital. Within a very short period Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji had carved out a huge dominion, and he did so without causing unnecessary damage and destruction. From his original base in Mirzapur in Oudh (located in southern Bihar), his dominion extended all the way to Rajmahal, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Dinajpur and Bogra in the north; and from the borders of the Kingdom of Kamrup in the east to as far as Jessore in the south. The considerable size of his dominion prompted him to devise and implement effective political administration throughout his territories. He did this by dividing his realm into different regions and districts. He then sent governors to those areas, who reported directly to him at his headquarters in Gaud. Three of his chief governors were: Muhammad Shiran Khalji, who was put in charge of Lakhnur (Birbhum); Husam al-Din Iwad Khalji, who took charge of Tirhut, Oudh and the surrounding areas; and Ali Mardan Khalji, who was dispatched to an area close to modern Rangpur. With these governers Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji established a sound political administration.

After creating an inclusive and effective political and administrative structure, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji helped to undermine

www.pathagar.com

the socially and morally reprehensible Brahmanically-inspired caste system. In so doing, he liberated the masses from the bondage of decades—if not centuries—of slavery and destitution. As expected, his kindness and benevolence won the locals (mostly Hindus and Buddhists) over to Islam. As the Muslim population gradually increased, he instigated a programme that included building mosques, *madrasah*s and *khanqah*s to meet his people's social, cultural, religious and educational needs. In this sense, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji was more than a great military general and conqueror: he was also a liberal and humane ruler and administrator. Unsurprisingly, he became a pioneer of Islamic thought, culture and civilisation in northern India in general and in Bengal in particular.

After consolidating his rule in Bengal, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji planned and launched yet another large-scale military expedition. This time, he planned to set out in the direction of Tibet. Unfortunately, very little is known about the aims and objectives of this expedition. Historians suggest differing reasons for this military campaign. Some claim that he was keen to secure the trade route which linked Bengal to Tibet and Central Asia; while others argue that he wanted to expand his territory further in the north because the area in the south, beyond the borders of Jessore, consisted mainly of forests and delta land, and therefore would not have been an attractive proposition for him. Either way, after much planning and due preparation he led an expedition to Tibet. Before setting out, he contacted many local tribal leaders, and one of them, known as Ali Mech, not only embraced Islam at the invitation of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji but also volunteered to act as the official guide during the expedition. Guided by Ali Mech and accompanied by 10,000 strong cavalry, the Muslim general left Deokot (located close to modern Dinajpur) early in 1206, and marched in the direction of Tibet.[5]

After two weeks of travel through extremely cold and difficult terrain, the Muslim general and his forces arrived at a location that was very close to the borders of Tibet. In response, the Tibetan forces came to meet the advancing Muslim army. The two armies fought a fierce battle, which continued for some time. Unable to breach enemy defence, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji and his cavalry were forced to retreat. However, his forces had suffered considerable casualties, and as a result of injuries, and exacerbated by severe cold and hilly terrain, many of the remaining cavalry were unable to continue the long journey back. To add insult to injury, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji and his tired cavalry were then ambushed by the forces of the-then ruler of Kamrup (located in Assam). Attacked by the Tibetan forces from one direction and ambushed from the rear by the Kamrupis, he was forced to abandon his expedition. Things went from bad to worse when most of his forces perished while trying to cross a local river, and only the Muslim general and around a hundred of his men reached the other side of the river. Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji's failure to conquer Tibet, coupled with the loss of his entire contingent, represented a major blow to his pride and prestige. On his return to his cantonment in Deokot, he fell seriously ill and subsequently died in 1206. According to an unconfirmed account, he was actually

www.pathagar.com

stabbed to death by Ali Mardan Khalji (who was one of his governors) while he was sick. However, Minhaj-i-Siraj has suggested that Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji was so devastated by his loss that soon after returning home he died heartbroken.[6]

Even so, according to Muhammad Yusuf Siddiq, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji's conquest of Bengal led to the creation of a strong Muslim presence in the eastern India. This, in turn, inspired the new Muslim rulers to expand their territories through expedition and conquest. If Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji's expedition to Tibet had succeeded, the history of Islam in Asia in general, and of the subcontinent in particular, might have been rather different. Even so, the successors of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji continued their expeditions and in so doing they expanded their territories substantially. Thus, Husam al-Din Iwad Khalji and Mughith al-Din Tughril instigated several military campaigns in eastern Bengal. In the first half of the fourteenth century Muslims conquered a wide area: 'Sylhet, Kamru (Kamrup) and Assam, crossing the Brahmaputra in the east and northeast, and to Chittagong on the Bay of Bengal in the south.[7]

Although Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji had died without being able to extend his rule to Tibet, he and his successors achieved enough success for him to be recognised as one of Islamic history's great military generals and conquerors. This was no mean feat for a man who, at one stage, was not considered to be good enough to enter the military service of Muhammad Ghuri. Despite setbacks, the brave and indomitable Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji went onto carve out a vast dominion and inaugurated Islamic rule in a region that has remained Islamic to this day, in the form of Bangladesh.

His achievement and legacy has continued to inspire the Muslims of Bengal to this day. For this reason, many prominent Muslim writers and poets of Bengal have composed songs and poetry in praise of the son of Bakhtiyar Khalji. For example, al-Mahmud (b. 1936), the renowned contemporary Bangladeshi writer and poet, composed a book during the early 1990s in which he praised and glorified the Muslim conqueror as a great Islamic hero of Bengal.[8] Likewise, Mufakhkharul Islam (b. 1921), a prominent Bangladeshi writer, historian and poet, fondly remembered and praised Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji as a great Muslim conqueror in his book *Jalali Kabutar* (*Jalal's Pigeon*), which was published in 1978.

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. Jadunath Sarkar (ed.), *The History of Bengal: The Muslim Period.*
2. Minhaj-i-Siraj, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri.*
3. Ibid.
4. Muhammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Historical and Cultural Aspects of the Islamic Inscriptions of Bengal: A Reflective Study of Some New Epigraphic Discoveries.*
5. Muhammad Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume 1A: Muslim Rule in Bengal (600–1170/ 12031757).*
6. Minhaj-i-Siraj, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri.*
7. M. Y. Siddiq, op. cit.
8. al-Mahmud, *Bakhtiyarer Ghora.*

www.pathagar.com

c. 1271–1347

SHAH JALAL OF SYLHET

Sir Thomas W. Arnold once wrote:

> It was not to force that Islam owed its permanent success in Lower Bengal. It appealed to the people, and it derived the great mass of its converts from the poor.[1]

Historically speaking, Islam had not only reached Bengal long before the arrival of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji, it had also become permanently established in that region long before the Muslim conquest. Due credit for this must go to missionary efforts of the early Muslim preachers, including Jalal al-Din Tabrizi, Sharaf al-Din Abu Tawwamah, Ala al-Haq and Nur Qutb Alam, who played a pivotal role in the dissemination of Islam in Bengal.

www.pathagar.com

Tabrizi was a contemporary of prominent scholars and sages, including Mu'in al-Din Chishti, Shihab al-Din Umar Suhrawardi, Abu Sa'id Tabrizi and Farid al-Din Attar. After travelling extensively in Arabia, Iraq and Iran, he came to the subcontinent in order to preach Islam. He eventually settled in northern Bengal in the beginning of the thirteenth century and attracted a large following there.

Like Tabrizi, Abu Tawwamah was a prominent Muslim scholar and sage who came to the subcontinent to disseminate the message of Islam. He settled in Sonargaon (close to Dhaka), where he established one of Bengal's first Islamic seminaries. Abu Tawwamah and his disciples thus disseminated Islam in East Bengal.

Unlike Tabrizi and Abu Tawwamah, Ala al-Haq and Nur Qutb Alam were father and son, and they also played an important role in the propagation of Islam in Bengal. Ala al-Haq initially lived in Sonargaon but then moved to northern Bengal, where he transformed Pandua into a prominent centre of Islamic activities. Like his father, Nur Qutb Alam was a famous sage who exercised considerable influence in Bengal on account of his profound learning and spiritual attainments.[2]

Although the aforementioned scholars and sages have been largely forgotten today, this is not the case with Shaykh al-Mashaykh Makhdum Shaykh Jalal al-Din Mujarrad ibn Muhammad. Better known as Hazrat Shah Jalal, this sage was one of the most famous scholars and preachers to have disseminated Islam throughout Bengal. Despite the fact that he was a high-profile Muslim preacher and reformer, his family background and early life remains shrouded in mystery. It is not surprising therefore that his biographers disagree concerning some of the most important details about his ancestry and early life. So much so, that the exact date of birth and death of Shah Jalal is strongly debated: one view is that that he was born in 1271 while others (such as Ibn Battutah) have stated that he died in 1347. However, these dates are no more than suggestions and should not be considered to be definitive.

According to Maulvi Nasir al-Din Haidar (or Haldar), the author of *Suhail-i-Yaman*, Shah Jalal's father was a Sufi from the Yemen. Having lost both his father and mother very early on in life, young Shah Jalal was raised and educated by his maternal uncle Sayyid Ahmad Kabir Suhrawardi, who was a prominent Muslim scholar and practitioner of Sufism. After Shah Jalal had completed his formal education, his uncle gave him a handful of earth. He then urged Shah Jalal to travel to India and settle in a place where the colour of the soil matched the earth in his hand. This sacred place, according to the author of *Suhail-i-Yaman*, was none other than Sylhet in East Bengal (located in the north east of present-day Bangladesh). Since Haidar's biography of Shah Jalal was composed in around 1860 using two other eighteenth century Persian sources, it is not surprising that, over time, it became a standard source of information about the life and activities of Shah Jalal. This book inspired many other writers to compose their own accounts of the life and activities of Shah Jalal. Unfortunately, however, most of those writers rehashed Haidar's views and arguments without subjecting them to critical analysis and scrutiny. Haidar's

www.pathagar.com

biography of Shah Jalal consisted of authentic historical data as well as unconfirmed information about supernatural events, miracles and legends, and most of the subsequent biographers of Shah Jalal found it impossible to separate the wheat from the chaff; as such they—wittingly or unwittingly—popularised myth and legend along with the facts.

Thankfully, several modern historians of Bengal have taken on the task of sifting fact from fiction. They have not only questioned the authenticity of certain information contained in Haidar's biography of Shah Jalal, they have also corrected many of his misconceptions and unsubstantiated claims. For instance, Haidar's contention that this great Muslim preacher and saint came from Yemen has been thoroughly discredited by the discovery of an inscription dated 1505. This inscription was found inside the *dargah* (mausoleum) of Shah Jalal in Sylhet in 1873, and refers to Shah Jalal as *Kunyayi*: that is, from *Kuniya* (today known as Konya, a town located in present-day Turkey). This is supported by other reliable historical accounts of the conquest of Sylhet, including the *Gulzar-i-Abrar* (composed in 1613) by Muhammad Ghausi Shattari, which categorically states that Shah Jalal hailed from Turkistan. Most interestingly, this book's main source of information was *Sharh-i-Nuzhat-ul-Arwah*, which, in turn, was written by Shaykh Nur al-Huda Abul Karamat, a disciple of Shah Jalal who (according to some historians) also participated in the conquest of Sylhet. As such, it would not be unreasonable to consider the *Gulzar-i-Abrar* to be a more authentic and reliable source of information concerning Shah Jalal's ancestry than Haidar's views on this matter.

According to Muhammad Ghausi Shattari, Shah Jalal was not only born in Turkistan, he was also a prominent disciple of Shaykh Ahmad Yisiwi, an eminent Naqshbandiyyah Sufi scholar and sage of Western Turkistan. In fact, Shah Jalal may have joined the Yisiwiyyah tariqah, as it was a popular and widely-followed Sufi order in Turkey at the time. He was a follower of this Sufi order, rather than a direct disciple of Shaykh Ahmad Yisiwi, because the latter had died in 1166, long before Shah Jalal was born. By all accounts, young Shah Jalal was raised in a devout Muslim family, since his father was a noted Islamic scholar who, according to one account, was also a contemporary of Jalal al-Din Rumi, the famous Muslim poet and Sufi saint, who died in 1273 and was buried in Konya.

Shah Jalal was blessed with a highly retentive memory and a sharp intellect, and he assimilated Islamic principles and practices with relative ease. The standard curriculum of the day required him to learn Turkish (his mother-tongue) along with Arabic, in addition to completing the memorisation of the Holy Qur'an. Being a gifted student, he soon committed the entire Qur'an to memory and became familiar with the traditional Islamic sciences, thus acquiring proficiency in Arabic grammar, Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Prophetic traditions (*hadith*) and aspects of Islamic mysticism and spirituality (*tasawwuf*) during his formative years. Since a thorough study of traditional Islamic sciences was a *sine qua non* for pursuing training in Islamic spirituality, Shah Jalal must have acquired a sound knowledge of traditional Islamic subjects before receiving training in the

www.pathagar.com

mystical dimension of Islam under the tutelage of prominent local Naqshbandiyyah and Yisiwiyyah sages.

According to the author of *Suhail-i-Yaman*, after completing his religious education and spiritual training, Shah Jalal set out for India. At the time, India was a bustling centre of Islamic learning and religious activities, thanks to the efforts of scholars and mystics including Abul Hasan Ali al-Hujwiri (better known as Data Ganj Bakhsh) and Mu'in al-Din Chishti (better known as Khwajah Mu'in al-Din Chishti Ajmeri). These pioneers of Islam in the subcontinent paved the way for scholars such as Shah Jalal to enter India and carve out an indelible place for themselves in the annals of the subcontinent. After reaching Delhi, Mu'in al-Din Chishti settled in Ajmer (located in the Indian province of Rajasthan) and gathered around him a large following, who subsequently spread across India in order to propagate the message of Islam. As a prominent adherent of the Chishtiyyah order, Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya lived in Delhi during the beginning of the fourteenth century and, on his arrival there he met this great Sufi luminary who may have also initiated him into the Chishtiyyah tariqah. According to some of Shah Jalal's biographers, he had met Khwajah Mu'in al-Din Chishti: however, this view is erroneous, because the latter died in 1236, long before Shah Jalal was born. Given this, Haidar's claim that Shah Jalal met Nizam al-Din Awliya is more plausible: indeed, he stated that Nizam al-Din was so impressed with Shah Jalal that he gave him a beautiful, rare pair of pigeons as a gift, which subsequently became known as Jalali Kabutar ('Jalal's pigeons'). According to local folklore, these species have continued to breed to this day and they can be seen in and around the *dargah* of Shah Jalal in Sylhet.

According to the author of *Suhail-i-Yaman*, after thanking Nizam al-Din for his generous hospitality, Shah Jalal left Delhi and set out in the direction of East Bengal. This was a period of considerable socio-political volatility and confusion across the subcontinent, however, it was also a time of great opportunity, and the saint from Konya was only too aware of this. Unsurprisingly, he was very keen to seize this opportunity and take the message of Islam to the hitherto unexplored part of Eastern Bengal. Historians suggested that this region was known as Srihatta (or the 'encircled marketplace') until the Sultanate period, when it became known as Jalalabad. Today this area is known as Sylhet. Unlike this region, the northern part of Bengal had become the hub of Sufi activities much earlier, thanks to the efforts of Shaykh Jalal al-Din Tabrizi.[3] However, as both of these men had similar names, some scholars have erroneously claimed that there was, in fact, only one Jalal al-Din. This view was reinforced by Ibn Battutah's statement that he had met a great Muslim saint in Bengal by the name of Shaykh Jalal al-Din Tabrizi. However, according to majority of modern historians, the two Jalals were not one person. Furthermore, incontrovertible historical evidence (including inscriptions and literary accounts) has confirmed that they were, in fact, two different individuals: one called Shah Jalal and the other known as Jalal al-Din Tabrizi. As such, although Ibn Battutah had met Shah Jalal of Sylhet, he wrongly claimed to have had met Jalal al-Din Tabrizi; he clearly confused the former with the

www.pathagar.com

latter.[4] What is more, Jalal al-Din Tabrizi lived and propagated Islam in and around Pandua and Deotala during the thirteenth century, long before Shah Jalal's time. Therefore, they could not have been the same person, even though their lives and careers were strikingly similar, in addition to both of them sharing the same name.

Given Jalal al-Din Tabrizi's successful propagation of Islam in and around Deotala, one could be forgiven for thinking that Shah Jalal's mission would also be resoundingly successful. Yet, upon the arrival of Shah Jalal and his followers in Sylhet, the local ruler, Gaur Govinda, put up forceful resistance. Shah Jalal was a tall, handsome, profoundly learned and charismatic Sufi, who was in the habit of picking up disciples during his travel from one place to another. He had acquired a sizable following by the time he had moved close to Sylhet: in fact, according to one account he had a total of 360 disciples with him at the time. Although not a match for the local Hindu ruler's forces, Shah Jalal and his disciples were undeterred by the threat of military strike against them. According to the author of *Suhail-i-Yaman*, the episode was precipitated by Burhan al-Din, a local Muslim who had sacrificed a cow to celebrate the birth of his son: a kite picked up a piece of the beef and dropped it in the house of a Brahmin, who not only informed King Gaur Govinda but also demanded redress. In response, the King had Burhan al-Din amputated and his son brutally murdered. Distraught and devastated by his loss, Burhan al-Din proceeded to Gawr, the capital of Sultan Shams al-Din Firuz Shah, and begged the latter to intervene. Moved by the tragic tale, the Sultan sent an expedition to Sylhet under the command of his nephew Sikander Khan Ghazi. Gaur Govinda's forces successfully repelled the Muslim army twice in succession. Alarmed by his failure to topple the Hindu ruler, the Sultan then sent Nasir al-Din, his chief military commander, on another expedition to Sylhet. On this occasion Shah Jalal and his band of followers met and joined the advancing Muslim army. Together they helped to liberate Sylhet from the grip of the tyrannical Hindu ruler and brought this region under Muslim rule for the first time.[5]

According to the author of *Gulzar-i-Abrar*, however, the conquest of Sylhet was solely masterminded by Shah Jalal and his band of 313 disciples. In this account, as soon as they arrived on the outskirts of Sylhet, the local ruler resisted Shah Jalal and his disciples. Undeterred by the enemy's superior forces, they fought back. The saint was reported to have performed many miracles during the battle including crossing the river Surma on carpet as well as triggering the collapse of King Gaur Govinda's palace by pronouncing the *adhan* (call to prayer). These and many other supernatural events, myths and legends have been attributed to Shah Jalal and his disciples by his biographers: but most—if not all—of these stories have neither historical credence nor religious value. Having said that, all the sources agree that Shah Jalal and his disciples played a pivotal role in the conquest of Sylhet. It is also an undisputed fact that Gaur Govinda was the ruler of Sylhet at the time and that Sultan Shams al-Din Firuz Shah was the ruler of Bengal from 1301 to 1322. The claim that Sylhet was conquered during the reign of Sultan Shams al-Din is therefore credible, and

www.pathagar.com

is confirmed by many epigraphic and literary sources.

In addition to this, Ibn Battutah's monumental work, *A Gift to Observers, Dealing with the Curiosities of Cities and the Wonder of Travels* (*Tuhfat al-Nuzzar fi Ghara'ib al-Amsar wa Aja'ib al-Asfar*), known in short as *Accounts of Travel* (*Rihla*), furnishes further light on Shah Jalal and his activities in Sylhet. Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Luwati (better known as Ibn Battutah), was born in 1304 in Tangier (in modern Morocco) and travelled around the Muslim world before reaching India in 1333 at the age of 29. During his stay of nearly a decade in India, he visited Chittagong in East Bengal and it was on this occasion that he went to Sylhet specifically to meet Shah Jalal and his disciples. In Ibn Battutah's own words:

> [Shah Jalal] was numbered among the principal saints and was one of the most distinguished men. He had performed many noteworthy acts, and wrought many celebrated miracles. He used to remain standing (in prayer) all night. The inhabitants of these mountains received Islam from his hands, and it was for this reason that he stayed among them.[6]

In Sylhet, Shah Jalal settled in an area today known as Chowkidhiki and established a Sufi lodge (known as *khanqah* in Persian and *zawiyah* in Arabic), which became the centre of Islamic education, propagation and spiritual training for the locals. Ibn Battutah must have met Shah Jalal in this lodge, because he provided a detailed and vivid description of the saint and the local area. It is also worth pointing out here that although Shah Jalal was a pioneering Muslim preacher, he was not the founder of the institution of *khanqah* or *zawiyah* in Bengal: indeed, according to the chronicler Minhaj al-Din Siraj, the credit for establishing some of the first mosques (*masajid*), Islamic schools (*madaris*), Sufi lodges (*khanqah*) and tombs (*mazar*) in Bengal must go to Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji and his immediate successors who ruled during the beginning of the thirteenth century.

According to Ibn Battutah, Shah Jalal was tall, of slim build, had a light complexion and was very energetic. He lived in a small lodge, surviving on bare minimum (that is, milk, butter and yoghurt). Most of the saints' disciples, according to Ibn Battutah, looked 'like the Turks possessing strength' (which seems to imply that most were of foreign origin) and that they became known for their bravery and devotion to Islamic values and principles.[7] When Ibn Battutah went to Sylhet to visit Shah Jalal, the latter was very advanced in age and by that time had already established his reputation as the patron saint of that area. Perhaps Shah Jalal's increasing fame prompted Ibn Battutah to make a detour and pay homage to the saint of Sylhet. During his stay with Shah Jalal, Ibn Battutah observed that the locals visited the lodge of Shah Jalal on a regular basis for instruction and guidance on all sorts of issues, including religious and worldly matters. In other words, Shah Jalal was more than a conqueror of land, as he was also a great conqueror of people's hearts, minds and thoughts, and this enabled him and his disciples to win the locals (most of whom were low caste Hindus and Buddhists) over to the fold of Islam.

Shah Jalal was an adherent of the Yisiwiyyah

www.pathagar.com

Sufi order, which was an offshoot of the more famous and prevalent Naqshbandiyyah tariqah. He seemed to have been a strict practitioner of *zuhd* (asceticism) because he remained a confirmed bachelor throughout his life. This also explains why he became known as *mujarrad*, meaning 'selfless, pure'. Although the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) married and encouraged his Companions (*Sahabah*) to marry and set up their own families, some Sufis, such as Rabi'a al-Adawiyyah, did not marry because they felt this would inevitably divert them from their single-minded devotion and dedication to the Almighty. Even so, majority of great Sufis (including Muhyi al-Din Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Khwajah Mu'in al-Din Chishti and Jalal al-Din Rumi) married and established their own families, and in so doing they continued to adhere to the Prophetic *sunnah* (norms and practices). Perhaps Shah Jalal had no desire to marry and instead devoted all his effort and energy to the pursuit of spirituality and gnosis as well as to the teaching and dissemination of Islam.

As expected, his efforts bore fruit, as the locals came in their droves to enter the fold of Islam. Inspired by their success, all of Shah Jalal's prominent disciples then spread throughout East Bengal and beyond in order to propagate the message of Islam. These included the well-known preacher Shah Paran, who was also Shah Jalal's nephew. Shah Paran settled on the outskirts of Sylhet town (near Major Tila area), whereas Shah Taqi al-Din settled in Jalalpur in Sadar Thana. Likewise, Shah Siddiq moved to Panchpara (located in Balaganj Thana in Sylhet). Another prominent disciple of Shah Jalal was Shah Malik, who settled in Dhaka, the capital of present-day Bangladesh. Similarly, Sayyid Ahmad Kolla Shahid moved to Comilla District to propagate Islam there, while Shah Nasir al-Din moved to Pargana Taraf region where he established his religious centre.[8]

In short, the combined efforts of these pioneering Muslims soon gathered pace and this led to the Islamisation of this whole region. Due credit for this remarkable achievement must go to Shah Jalal, the famous patron saint of Sylhet and one of Muslim Bengal's most influential and enduring personalities. As such, it would not be an exaggeration to consider Shah Jalal and his disciples to be the real pioneers of Islam in East Bengal and especially in Sylhet. In recognition of his remarkable efforts and achievements, the Shah Jalal University of Science and Technology in Sylhet—which is one of Bangladesh's leading universities—was named after him. Recently, the country's main international airport in Dhaka was also named after this pioneering Muslim peacher and Sufi sage of Bengal.

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. Thomas W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam.*
2. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal.*
3. Shamsuddin Ahmed, *Inscriptions of Bengal.*
4. S. M. Ikram, 'An Unnoticed Account of Shaikh Jalal of Sylhet'.
5. D. N. A. H. Choudhury, *Hazrat Shah Jalal: Dalil-o-Shakhyo*; Azharuddin Ahmed, *The History of Shahjalal.*
6. Ibn Battutah, *The Travels of Ibn Battutah, AD 1325–1354.*
7. Ibid.
8. M. A. Aziz et al. (eds.), *Brihattar Sylheter Itihas.*



www.pathagar.com

c.1375–1459

KHAN JAHAN ALI

ISLAM CAME INTO contact with Bengal in more than one way. This contact began with the establishment of lucrative trade and business by the early Arab and Persian traders in and around the coastal regions of India during the seventh century. This, in turn, brought the early Arab and Persian traders directly into contact with Bengal, via Chittagong and its surrounding areas. As a result of this exchange, Islam began to make headway into the coastal regions of Bengal. Following in the footsteps of the early Muslim traders, the armies of the Umayyad dynasty of Damascus then marched into northern India during the beginning of the eighth century and conquered Sindh and Multan. This later inspired Sultan Mahmud, the Turkish Ghaznavid ruler, to make serious

www.pathagar.com

in-roads into mainland India during the early part of the eleventh century. This activity brought political Islam directly in contact with mainland India for the very first time. As the Umayyad and Ghaznavid conquerors opened up the borders of India, other Muslim rulers of the time moved into different regions of India and established Islamic presence there. Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji was one such military conqueror: he marched into Bengal for the first time in the beginning of the thirteenth century and brought political Islam directly into contact with this region of subcontinent.

This, in turn, inspired the Sufis and other Muslim preachers to enter India *en masse*, in order to propagate the message of Islam in that country. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these early pioneering Sufis and Muslim preachers included Baba Adam Shahid of Dhaka, Shah Sultan Rumi of Mymensingh, Makhdum Shah Dawlah Shahid of Pabna, Jalal al-Din Tabrizi of Deotala and Shah Jalal of Sylhet.[1] However, all of these Sufis were primarily Islamic preachers, and therefore none of them claimed to be the political leader of their people. Indeed, being Sufi sages, they considered themselves to be the champions of faith, morality and Islamic spirituality. Their Islamic mission and activities were certainly not motivated by material considerations or any political ambition. Their selflessness and strict asceticism (*zuhd*) proved that they had little time for things temporal and transient (such as wealth, political power and status); instead they had devoted themselves to the pursuit of things that are permanent and enduring (like faith, spirituality and the attainment of Divine pleasure). Even so, one influential Muslim personality of Bengal successfully combined both roles by being a Sufi and a political ruler at the same time: this was Khan Jahan Ali of Bagerhat.

Khan-i-Azam ('the great Khan') Khan Jahan, better known as Hazrat Khan Jahan Ali, may have been of Turkish extraction, although very little is known about his early life, education and background. According to historians, he hailed from a noble Turkish family, and as such he may have had some training in Turkish, Arabic and aspects of Islamic sciences during his early years, before pursuing a career under the Tughluqids.[2] The Tughluqids came to power in Delhi under the leadership of Ghiyath al-Din Tughluq Shah I and his son, Abul Mujahid Muhammad Shah II, in 1320. They restored sultanate rule by ousting Nasir al-Din Khusraw Khan Barwari, who had assumed power after Qutb al-Din Mubarak Shah, the last of the Khalji Sultans of Delhi. Both Ghiyath al-Din Tughluq Shah and his son restored the Delhi sultanate after a period of considerable socio-political upheaval and helped to re-establish Muslim control over Deccan. However, it was not until the reign of Kamal al-Din Firuz Shah III, the third Tughluqid ruler, that the sultanate rule of Bengal was restored. Khan Jahan may have been born during the rule of Ghiyath al-Din Mahmud, the fourth Tughluqid Sultan, going on to serve the rulers of this dynasty with considerable distinction, and he was a notable member of this ruling family. However, the rule of this dynasty was brought to an abrupt end towards the final years of the fourteenth century in the wake of Timurid invasion and destruction of Delhi.

www.pathagar.com

Amir Timur's sacking of Delhi may have persuaded Khan Jahan to move to Bengal in 1398. However, according to another account, thanks to his dedicated service to the Tughluqids, the Sultan of Delhi offered Khan Jahan a plot of land in the Sundarban area (located in present-day Bangladesh). This offer was subsequently confirmed by the then Sultan of Bengal, and this prompted Khan Jahan to take necessary steps to establish himself in this difficult and challenging part of Bengal. Located in the southwestern District of Khulna, Khan Jahan's fief (*jagir*) was virtually an inhabitable plot of land, albeit an integral part of the Sundarban, and the the largest mangrove forest in the world. This region was surrounded by dense forest, with wild animals and beasts roaming around at will. Khan Jahan must have moved into this unusually fertile jungle somewhat reluctantly. After clearing up the locality, he established several settlements in and around the area today known as Bagerhat. This took place during the early part of the fifteenth century. Thanks to his devotion and dedication to his task, Khan Jahan soon cleared up a large area and formally established his rule there.

Inspired by Islam, Khan Jahan was a prominent adherent and practitioner of Sufism. Although it is not clear if he was a Chishtiyyah, Suhrawardiyyah, Naqshbandiyyah or Qadiriyah Sufi (or an adherent of a combination of two or three of those Sufi orders), soon after establishing himself in Bagerhat he became instrumental in the conversion of the local Hindus, Buddhists and animists to the fold of Islam. Similar to Shah Jalal of Sylhet (located in the north-eastern Bengal) and Jalal al-Din Tabrizi of Deotala, Khan Jahan became the pioneer of Islam in south-western Bengal. His valiant and pioneering efforts to transform a largely inhospitable region into permanent human settlement proved to be such a success that he later gave the name of Khalifatabad to this region. Derived from the Arabic word *khalifah* (meaning 'representative' or 'vicegerent'), this word is used in the Holy Qur'an to refer to human beings as God's trustworthy *khalifah* (representative on the earth).[3] The choice of the name Khalifatabad says a lot about Khan Jahan as Sufi preacher, Islamic reformer and ruler. He was steeped in Islamic thought, culture and spirituality, and was determined to establish a settlement where the people would live by the principles and practices of Islam: that is to say, they would live as *khalifat Allah fi'l-ard* or God's representatives on the earth. Inspired by the Qur'anic view of humanity, and the role and purpose of people in this world, Khan Jahan encouraged the locals not only to embrace Islam but also to co-operate with him to transform the Bagerhat region into a fully-fledged Islamic dominion.

While Khan Jahan was busy expanding his settlements by clearing the dense forests of the Sundarban, the Ilyas Shahi rule of Bengal was passing through a volatile and unpredictable period. After Firuz Shah's reign came to an end in 1414, Raja Ganesh's descendants assumed power. Their rule lasted only two decades, until the Ilyasids restored their rule under the leadership of Abul Muzaffar Nasir al-Din Mahmud Shah, who was a descendant of Sultan Shams al-Din Ilyas Shah, the founder of the Ilyas Shahi rule in Bengal. By all accounts, Nasir al-Din Mahmud Shah was a wise and peaceful ruler who took full advantage of political rivalry

www.pathagar.com

and military conflict that then ensued between the Sharqi rulers of Jaunpur and the Lodis of Delhi, and he instigated a large programme of reconstruction and restoration throughout his dominion. Since he ruled a very large kingdom, which extended all the way from Sylhet in the east to Bhagalpur in the west and from Hughli in the south to Gawr Pandua in the north, Nasir al-Din Mahmud Shah strengthened his hold on power by promoting socio-economic development and Islamic expansion across his expanding kingdom.[4]

During this period of political calm and considerable socio-economic prosperity in Bengal, Khan Jahan consolidated his power base in Khalifatabad. He expanded his political suzerainty to include not only the whole of the modern Khulna division but also a significant part of Jessore and its neighbouring territories. Given the eagerness of Sultan Nasir al-Din Mahmud Shah to promote Islamic expansion, he may have directly, or indirectly, encouraged Khan Jahan to pursue his programme of Islamisation across the south-western territories of Bengal. Due to the absence of reliable historical information, it is not possible to say, categorically, whether the latter was in the service of the former or they were, in fact, two independent rulers in their own right. According to inscriptions found on Khan Jahan's tomb, he was known variously as Khan-i-Azam and Ulugh Khan: these names suggest that he may have been in the service of Sultan Nasir al-Din Mahmud Shah who, in turn, probably bestowed these titles on him.[5] Either way, the two men were certainly aware of each other, and as such, it would not have been unusual for them to communicate with each other from time to time, although there is no evidence to prove this.

With the assistance of his able deputies (including Burhan Khan and Fatih Khan) the ruler of Khalifatabad transformed a large inhospitable part of present-day Bangladesh, and then went out of his way to rule that region according to Islamic law (Shari'ah). In so doing, he established justice, fair play and accountability across his dominion. The majority of the local people were low caste Hindus with little real status or position in society, and Khan Jahan's exposition of the Islamic message of equality and brotherhood clearly struck a chord, as they came in their droves to enter the fold of Islam. This, in turn, inspired the saintly Muslim ruler to clear more areas for the establishment of additional human settlement. His policy was to construct mosques (*masajid*), Islamic schools (*madaris*), lodges (*khanqah*), roads, highways, bridges and trading centres (bazars) in each and every new settlement. In this way, Khan Jahan was more than a conqueror; he was also a wise and able administrator who was keen to promote social justice and equality, economic development and fairness and cultural advancement and solidarity. In this respect, he was very much like Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, the great saintly Umayyad ruler of the eighth century, and Sultan Nur al-Din Zangi, the famous saintly ruler of the Zangid dynasty of the twelfth century. These two great Muslim rulers became renowned for living in the world, but—by the same token—refusing to become a part of it. As a pioneering Sufi and powerful ruler, Khan Jahan led a very simple and austere lifestyle, while striving hard to meet the social, economic and religious needs of his subjects.

www.pathagar.com

This was not surprising given the fact that he was, after all, following in the footsteps (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet of Islam who, as tradition reliably informs us, consistently gave priority to the needs and requirements of others at the expense of his own comfort and pleasure.

Khan Jahan was not only an able administrator and ruler, he must also be considered to be one of the most prolific builders in the history of Muslim Bengal. According to his biographers, in addition to instigating numerous *madrasah*, *khanqah*, *mazar*, bazars, roads and highways he constructed around 360 mosques and dug more than 300 reservoirs to provide clean and fresh water to his subjects. Although these numbers may be somewhat exaggerated, there is no doubt that Khan Jahan was a great builder. Indeed, some of his most important architectural projects include the historic Shatgumbad Mosque, Masjidkur Mosque and his own tomb, which is attached to a single-domed mosque. Located around four miles to the west of Bagerhat, the *Shatgumbad* (meaning 'sixty-domed') mosque is not only one of the oldest mosques in Bangladesh; it is also one of the subcontinent's most impressive works of architecture. Although it has become famous as the 'sixty-domed' mosque, this edifice actually consisted of 81 domes in total. Of the 81 domes, 77 were placed over the mosque roof, and the remaining four were constructed above each of the heavy (but beautifully decorated) corner towers.

The mosque was rectangular in shape, and was protected by an outer wall that had two separate entrances or gates. The mosque was built mainly with solid bricks and decorated with a combination of terracotta, stone carving and brickwork. It was 160 foot in length by 180 foot in width, and bore a striking resemblance to the Tughluqid architecture of Delhi.[6] This is not surprising, given Khan Jahan's early contact with the Tughluqid rulers of Delhi. However, the general appearance of the mosque unmistakably reflects its patron's strength of character and simplicity of outlook. The style, design and layout of the mosque suggests that it was constructed to serve three main purposes: namely, as a place of congregational prayers, as an assembly hall for meetings, and as a place for teaching and imparting Islamic knowledge. In this respect, the Shatgumbad was modelled on some of Islamic history's earliest mosques, most notably the *masjid al-nabi* (or the Prophet's Mosque) in Madinah (located in modern-day Saudi Arabia). Since Khan Jahan was renowned for excavating reservoirs (*dighis*), he dug a large *dighi* adjacent to this mosque, presumably to provide regular supply of clean water to the locals. This pond subsequently became known as *ghora dighi* (the 'horse's reservoir').

In addition to the Shatgumbad, Khan Jahan constructed the Masjidkur Mosque, which is today located in Masjidkur village in Khulna. This mosque is a very important historical edifice: so much so that the Directorate of Archaeology of the Government of Bangladesh has now designated it as protected building. Like the Shatgumbad, this mosque was constructed with solid bricks and decorated with terracotta but, unlike the former, it is of square-shape and is much more simplistic in its design and layout, and it also has fewer domes. Nonetheless, this mosque is an impressive sight and resembles the other mosques and buildings constructed by Khan Jahan during his reign as

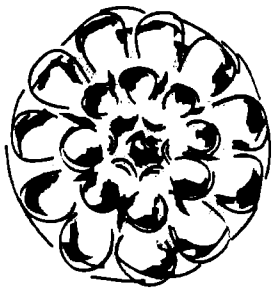
www.pathagar.com

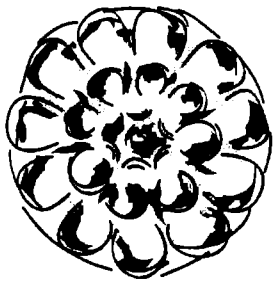
the ruler of Khalifatabad. Most interestingly, the tombs of Burhan Khan and Fatih Khan (who ruled the coastal areas of Khalifatabad as Khan Jahan's two most trusted deputies), are said to be located close to this mosque; which is probably the reason why some scholars have suggested that this edifice was actually built by Burhan Khan and Fatih Khan on the orders of Khan Jahan himself.

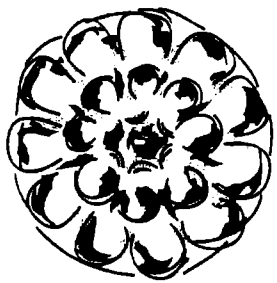
Khan Jahan erected another mosque adjacent to his own tomb. He may have built this edifice towards the end of his life because it was meant to be his last resting place. An inscription on his tombstone clearly states that the saintly ruler of Khalifatabad died on 25 October 1459. Known locally as Khan Jahan's *dargah* (shrine complex), this site not only includes his own square-shaped tomb building, but also the shrine of his trusted advisor and aide, Muhammad Tahir. The latter's tomb is located towards the west of Khan Jahan's mausoleum and, according to the inscription on this edifice, Muhammad Tahir died in the same year as his master.[7] As expected, this edifice (along with all the buildings and sites that Khan Jahan and his deputies constructed) is today considered by the Government of Bangladesh to be one of the country's most important heritage sites. Indeed, the town of Bagerhat, which was the headquarters of Khan Jahan's Khalifatabad, is today considered to be one of the three World Heritage sites in Bangladesh, and UNESCO has catalogued more than 50 mosques and buildings from the site for inclusion in their World Heritage record. It is also worth pointing out here that the name Khalifatabad remained in use well into the eighteenth century, when it was referred to as 'Haweli Khalifatabad' by Abul Fadl, the court historian of Emperor Akbar.[8]

Given Hazrat Khan Jahan Ali's all-round contribution and achievements, it is not surprising that today he is considered to be one of the pioneers of Islam in Bengal, as well as a successful ruler and outstanding builder who by the sheer dint of his remarkable character and captivating personality left his indelible marks in the annals of Bangladesh. As expected, his shrine in Bagerhat continues to attract tourists from far and wide, and every year the locals continue to celebrate and fondly remember his life, contribution and achievements, by organising a religious ceremony at his shrine complex.

www.pathagar.com







Notes

1. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal.*
2. Syed Mahmudul Hasan, *Khan Jahan: Patron Saint of the Sundarbans.*
3. See the Qur'an, *Surah Baqarah*, verse 30.
4. Abdul Karim, *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal.*
5. Shamsuddin Ahmed, *Inscriptions of Bengal.*
6. Ahmad Hasan Dani, *Muslim Architecture in Bengal.*
7. S. Ahmed, op. cit.
8. Abul Fadl, *Ain-i-Akbari.*

www.pathagar.com

c.1550–c.1648



SYED SULTAN

THE ORIGIN OF Bengali literature is often traced back to the seventh century; while three key developmental phases have been identified in the history of Bengali literature: the classical, medieval and modern periods. The classical period began with the dissemination of different Aryan languages in and around Bengal from the third century BCE up to the latter part of the twelfth century. The medieval period of Bengali literature is considered to have occurred from the beginning of thirteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, and most historians of Bengali literature identify the modern period as spanning from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present. Although the foundation of Bengali literature was laid during the classical period, some of its most important

www.pathagar.com

and invaluable contributions were made during the medieval period, by both Muslim and Hindu writers and poets. During this period, a number of influential Muslim writers and poets emerged who, by virtue of their refreshing and enduring contributions, became the pioneers of Bengali Muslim literature. In other words, Muslims had played a significant role in the development of Bengali language and literature. During the Muslim rule, the foundation for the growth and development of Bengal was laid through the political integration of the Bengali-speaking territories into one entity. This enabled the Bengali people to establish their place in history by making a remarkable contribution in political, cultural as well as literary spheres of life.

In the words of Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, a renowned historian of Bengal:

> Had there been no Muslim rule in this province, the names Bangala and Bengali would have languished for ages on account of the contemptuous indifference of the Brahmin and Sanskrit dominated Hindu state and society of Gaur (North and West Bengal) towards it. Indeed the Muslims are rightly entitled to the distinguished position of the Bengali political union and of the Bengali linguistic and cultural platform.[1]

By contrast, during the Hindu period, Sanskrit was the language of religion, education and culture of Bengal; the language of the masses was Bengali, but it was largely ignored, if not despised, by the Hindu elites. The Muslim rulers elevated the language through their generous patronage of Bengali literature and poetry. It would not be an exaggeration, therefore, to say that the Muslim rulers saved this language from destruction at the hands of the Brahmins.

Shah Muhammad Saghir is generally considered to be the first Muslim poet of Bengal. According to one account, he lived during the latter part of the fourteenth and early years of the fifteenth century. Reportedly patronised by Ghiyath al-Din Azam (the third Ilyas Shahi monarch who not only ruled Bengal from 1390 to 1410 but was himself a scholar and poet), Saghir versified the classical romantic tale, *Yusuf Zulaykhah* (*Prophet Joseph and the Wife of Potiphar*) for the first time into Bengali for his benefactor. Originally based on an incident mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, the story of Prophet Yusuf and Zulaykhah was first versified by the great Persian poet, Abul Qasim Firdawsi, during the early part of the eleventh century.[2] Saghir was probably inspired by this Persian work to compose his own Bengali book. Historically speaking, Persia and Bengal had developed close contact since ancient times and this process of social, cultural and economic exchange became more common following the Islamisation of Persia in the seventh century.

This, in turn, contributed to the Islamisation and Persianisation of Bengali culture and society; so much so that Persian eventually became the official language of Bengal from the beginning of the thirteenth century up until the early part of the nineteenth century. This enabled the medieval Muslim poets of Bengal (including Shah Muhammad Saghir, Amir Zain al-Din, Shaykh Faizullah, Haji Muhammad, Mir Muhammad Shafi, Muhammad Khan, Shah Garibullah, Abdul Hakim and Shaykh Chand) to compose their works. These works were based on the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) and his efforts

www.pathagar.com

to disseminate Islam in seventh-century Arabia, the heroic deeds of Hamza ibn Abd al-Muttalib and Ali ibn Abi Talib, the martyrdom of Imam Husayn at Karbala and the romantic tale of *Layla Majnun*, among others. Although the Muslim writers and poets of medieval Bengal contributed significantly to the development of Muslim culture and literature, the most prolific and influential Muslim literary figure of that period was none other than Syed Sultan.

Like the other medieval Muslim writers and poets of Bengal, information about the life and career of Syed Sultan is shrouded in mystery. Historians consider even the limited information that is available to be uncertain and controversial. According to some of his biographers, Syed Sultan was born in the coastal district of Chittagong during the middle of the sixteenth century; although others have argued that he was, in fact, born in Lashkarpur village in Habiganj District (located in Greater Sylhet). Either way, he lived during a politically volatile and socio-economically degenerative period in the history of Muslim Bengal. Not too long before his birth, the Husayn Shahi rule in Bengal came to an abrupt end. The Shahi rulers (especially Nasir al-Din Nusrat Shah) became renowned patrons of learning and literary activities in Bengali language. They sponsored the translation of *Mahabharata* (a classical Indian epic) into Bengali for the first time, among other literary works. The demise of the Shahi rule and the rise of Shir Shah Sur, an Afghan chief, wrought considerable political and socio-economic uncertainty in Bengal. He engaged in a fierce military campaign to drive out Humayun, the son of Zahir al-Din Babar (the founder of the Mughal dynasty), from India. However, his efforts were in vain, as Mughal power and authority expanded, paving the way for Sulaiman Karrani, the one-time governor of southern Bihar, to emerge and formally acknowledge Mughal authority. As a result, Bengal became a part of the Mughal Empire in 1576.[3] Syed Sultan would have been in his mid-twenties at the time and was probably too busy pursuing his studies in Bengali, Persian, Arabic and aspects of Islamic theology and Sufism to engage with the politics of the time.

Little is known about Syed Sultan's early teachers, other than the fact that he was a disciple of Syed Hasan, a local religious instructor and spiritual guide. It was not unusual in those days for young students to attach themselves to prominent religious figures in order to learn and acquire spiritual training from them. Following the custom of the day, Syed Sultan became a follower (*murid*) of Syed Hasan and the latter, in turn, initiated him into the ways of Islamic spirituality (*tasawwuf*). Adherents to *tasawwuf* trace its origin to the Prophet of Islam: according to the Sufis, he was the first exponent of Islamic spirituality in its purest form. In Bengal, the Sufis were generally considered to be an enlightened, wise, peaceful and non-materialistic people. That is why they became very effective preachers of Islam in the subcontinent in general, and in Bengal in particular (see the chapters on Shah Jalal and Khan Jahan Ali for more information on the role played by many prominent Sufis in the dissemination of Islam in Bengal).

Unlike Jalal al-Din Tabrizi of Deotala, Shah Jalal of Sylhet and Khan Jahan Ali of Bagerhat, Syed Sultan was an indigenous

www.pathagar.com

Sufi. He was born, brought up and educated in Bengal. Although he was an accomplished Sufi, and later became a tutor and spiritual guide (*pir*) to all his followers (*murids*), and preferred to express his spiritual experiences and insights in the form of poetry. As far as historians know, neither Jalal al-Din Tabrizi, Khan Jahan Ali nor Shah Jalal wrote a book or treatise on any aspect of Islamic spirituality. Syed Sultan, however, became a prolific writer and poet of medieval Bengali literature, and he authored several important works on Islamic theological, spiritual and historical topics. The medieval Muslim poets of Bengal wrote two different types of verses: namely *shastrakabya* (theological) and *padavali* (spiritual) poems. Along with Shaykh Zahid, Amir Zain al-Din, Shaykh Chand, Ali Raza, Abdul Hakim, Syed Murtaza, Shaykh Mansur and many others, Syed Sultan became a major contributor to both of these genres of medieval Muslim Bengali literature. The names and works of a large number of early Muslim writers and poets was discovered by several prominent researchers of medieval Muslim Bengali literature, including Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad, who became a renowned collector of medieval *Punthi* (or *Puthi*) literature.

The theological works of the early Muslim scholars of Bengal focused on delineating the principles and practices of Islam and Sufism. This included analytical as well as descriptive poems on Sufi cosmology, Islamic worldview and the ethical dimension of the Prophetic mission of Muhammad (peace be on him), who, they argued, was the quintessential Islamic spiritual authority. Some early Sufi poets were also influenced by aspects of Hindu mystical traditions, and Syed Sultan was no exception. The subject matter of the shorter spiritual poems was Sufi metaphysical philosophy (*hikmat*) and gnosis (*irfan*). The influence of prominent classical Persian Sufi writers and poets (including Firdawsi, Farid al-Din Attar, Shaykh Sa'di, Abd al-Rahman Jami and Abu Muhammad Ilyas Nizami) on the early Sufi poets of Bengal is evident from the very titles of their works: such as Shah Muhammad Saghir's *Yusuf Zulaykhah* and Dawlat Uzair Bahram Khan's *Layla Majnun*. Similarly, the metaphysical thought and philosophy of influential Muslim thinkers (including Muhyi al-Din ibn al-Arabi, the great thirteenth century Andalusian Sufi, and Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, who is better known as *Mujaddid-i-Alf-i-Thani* or 'renewer of the second millennium of Islam') also influenced the ideas and thoughts of many early Sufi writers and poets of Bengal, including Haji Muhammad and Syed Sultan. In other words, the works of medieval Muslim writers and poets of Bengal were not only influenced by the writings of early Arabic and Persian Sufis, they may also have been inspired by aspects of ancient Hindu philosophy and mysticism.

This influence can be identified in the writings of Syed Sultan and his contemporaries (such as Shaykh Pir, Shaykh Muttalib, Nasrullah Khan and Haji Muhammad). In the words of Muhammad Enamul Haq:

> The Muslim philosophy of those days was mainly based on Sufistic ideas. Its origin could be traced to Iran, Bukhara, and Samarqand. There is a predominance of Sufi literature in Persian. Bengali Muslims got these philosophical ideas through the same language. The Yogi system also

www.pathagar.com

> got mixed up with it. The literature resulting from the blend may be termed Yoga-Qalandar.[4]

Likewise, Sukumar Sen states that Syed Sultan was a Sufi who was influenced by different mystical traditions.[5] Other scholars, such as Asim Roy, have further argued that this provides sufficient evidence for the presence of a thriving Islamic syncretistic tradition in Bengal.[6] However, Muhammad Abdur Rahim, a renowned historian of Bengal, was of the opinion that this is, rather, evidence of a degenerative Sufism that had very little in common with traditional Islam.[7] This raises an interesting question: was Syed Sultan a practitioner of traditional Islamic spirituality or a champion of a form of 'degenerative Sufism'? As we shall see below, Syed Sultan does not easily fit into any one of these categories.

Syed Sultan was the author of more than a half a dozen works. His most famous titles were *Family of the Prophets* (*Nabi Bangsha*), *Triumph of the Prophet* (*Rasul-Vijaya*), *Light of Knowledge* (*Jnan-Pradipa*), *Death of the Prophet* (*Ofat-i-Rasul*), *The Story of Satan* (*Iblisnama*) and *Prophet's Night of Ascension* (*Shab-i-Mi'raj*). In *Family of the Prophets*, he tried to versify the life and career of the prominent Prophet's mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, and therefore to show that the Prophets came from one school with one message: namely, that they all called their people to the service and worship of One God. Accordingly, he suggested that the Prophets tried to unify their people under the banner of Divine Unity (*tawhid*), social justice and brotherhood of men. Like the classical Islamic historians and biographers (including Muhammad ibn Ishaq, Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Ibn al-Athir and Ibn Kathir), he traced the origin of man from Prophet Adam, the first human being, and the other prominent Prophets including Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Dawud (David), Yusuf (Joseph) and Isa (Jesus), concluding with the last and greatest of God's messengers, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him). However, unlike the classical Islamic historians, Syed Sultan also included prominent Hindu deities like Brahman, Krishna, Rama, Vishnu and Shiva in his book. He considered that they, too, may have been Prophets. However, this was no more than a speculation on his part, as there is no scriptural evidence to prove this. However, he argued that the original message of the Prophets was one and the same, and that after the death of the Prophets their message was changed and corrupted by their people; that is why the Almighty had sent Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) to guide humanity back to the worship of One True God.

In the words of Syed Sajjad Husain:

> Syed Sultan... was one of the first poets, if not the very first to celebrate the greatness of the Prophet in verse. He planned an epic called *Nabi Bangsa* or *The Dynasty of Prophets* in which his intention, as he explains in the prologue, was to trace the story of all Qur'anic Prophets beginning with Adam with a finale on Prophet Muhammad... Syed carefully avoids attributing divinity to the Prophet, but he writes whether for poetic effect or from a firm conviction that the Prophet was not made of clay like ordinary mortals. The substance out of which God created him was Nur or Light, and he was the first to be so created before even the universe came

www.pathagar.com

into being. The idea that the Prophet was created out of light gained so firm a hold on the Bengali imagination that it is found repeated in practically all verse narratives from the 16th century to which Syed Sultan belonged down to the end of the 18th century. The Prophet is painted as the paragon of all earthly virtues but it is his origination from light in a literal sense which is emphasized over and over again.[8]

Syed Sultan wrote this book for the instruction of his fellow Muslims. In his own words:

> Muslims of Bengal, you all listen to me. May you all be engaged in pious deeds to please the Lord... The learned who live in the land but do not expound the truth for you are destined to be castigated to hell. Should people commit sins the learned will be taken to task in the presence of Allah. I am born in the midst of you and so I have to talk to you about religious matters. Allah shall accuse: 'all you learned ones there did not stop people from committing sin'... When God calls for you about your good and bad deeds, you may very well plead before Him that you took recourse to the *guru*, who did not warn you. God shall chastise me much more than you. I am ever haunted by this fear, and driven by this I composed *Nabi vamsa* to take people away from sin.[9]

Since Syed Sultan had an excellent command of his mother tongue, it is not surprising that this book was written in beautiful and lucid Bengali. Unfortunately, very little is known about his main sources of reference. In addition to the Qur'an, he no doubt had access to some Persian works, such as *The Stories of the Prophets* (*Qisas al-Anbiya*), which covered the lives and careers of all the prominent Prophets mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. Nevertheless, his work represents a great achievement in the history of Bengali literature. For this reason, some scholars of medieval Bengali literature (such as Muhammad Enamul Haq) consider this epic to be far superior to the *Ramayana*.

Like the *Nabi Bangsha*, Syed Sultan's *Rasul Vijaya* (also known as *Rasul Charita* or *Jaikum Rajar Larai*) is a biographical account of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) and his achievements in verse. Probably based on an original Persian historical account of the Prophet's life and career as well as some imaginary scenarios, in this work the poet proved that he was far from being a one-time wonder. As a proud Muslim, Syed Sultan did not shy away from proclaiming the greatness of Islam and its Prophet, and in so doing he showed how the Prophet, despite facing stiff opposition from his opponents, eventually gained victory over them. According to some scholars, *Rasul Vijaya* was originally intended to be the second part of *Nabi Bangsha*, although it is now considered to be a separate work. Careful examination of both works shows that there are strong thematic links between them, although they do stand very well on their own. Similarly, some scholars have considered the *Shab-i-Miraj* and *Ofat-i-Rasul* to be two separate works; whereas according to others they are in fact two parts of the larger *Rasul Vijaya*. Either way (as the title indicates), *Shab-i-Miraj* described the Prophet's journey to Jerusalem and his miraculous ascension (*al-Isra wa'l-Mi'raj*) to the highest heavens.[10] Syed Sultan was clearly very fond of the Prophet, and he showed how God favoured His last Messenger with this remarkable spiritual gift. Likewise, in the

www.pathagar.com

Ofat-i-Rasul, he described the events that took place during and after the Prophet's death. To Syed Sultan, the birth of the Prophet was a remarkable and unique event in human history, and his departure was an equally sad occasion for his followers; the poet's love and longing for the Prophet come through very clearly in this work.

In the *Iblisnama*, Syed Sultan narrated another Qur'anic story: namely that of Satan's refusal to obey God's command and his subsequent expulsion from paradise. He highlighted the fact that Satan had promised to misguide the children of Adam away from Islam, the straight path (*sirat al-mustaqim*), and to lead them astray. By relating this story, the poet reminded his readers that Satan is ever ready to misguide humanity; Muslims must never let their guard down, even for a moment. Whereas the *Iblisnama* was essentially a theological tract, Syed Sultan's *Jnan-Pradipa* was an impressive work on Sufi cosmology, ethics, morality and devotion (an abridged version of this work was subsequently published under the title of *Jnan-Chautisa*). Since the Sufis long for the 'unveiling' (*kashf*) of the Ultimate Reality before the eye of the heart in order to attain spiritual illumination, a proper understanding of Sufi metaphysics and ways of achieving unveiling is *sine qua non* for spiritual elevation. This, in turn, requires adherence to exoteric practices of Islam, which, according to the Sufis, leads to the esoteric dimension of the faith: the stages of 'self-annihilation' (*fana*) and 'absolute union' (*jam al-jam*) with the Ultimate Reality.

Historians remain uncertain as to whether Syed Sultan was an adherent of the Nasqsbandiyyah, Qadiriyah, Suhrawardiyyah, Chishtiyyah or a member of an indigenous Sufi Order of Bengal, however, his exploration of Sufi ideas and thoughts in the form of questions and answers (conducted between the Prophet and Ali, his cousin and son-in-law) suggests that he may have been influenced by the Qadiriyyah and Chishtiyyah orders of Sufism. However, this is only a suggestion, as most Sufi Orders traced their spiritual genealogy to the Prophet through Ali; only the Naqshbandiyyah traced their spiritual link to the Prophet through Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, his friend and father-in-law.

As highlighted earlier, aspects of Hindu yogic thought and philosophy also influenced the poet; but, due to the philosophical nature of his Sufi metaphysics, this influence was very limited. Even so, some scholars consider Syed Sultan's ideas and thoughts to be unorthodox, if not entirely unIslamic. In the words of Muhammad Abdur Rahim:

> Nabibansa is regarded as the magnum opus of [Syed Sultan]... based partly on facts and mostly on legends, [it] gives an account of the Prophets. The author composed this epic with a view to preach Islam, so that the people who did not understand Arabic could know about their religion in their mother tongue... Their contents reflect a mixture of *yogism* with *sufism*. These show that the poet belonged to heterodox *faqirism* which was a prevailing force in his time.[11]

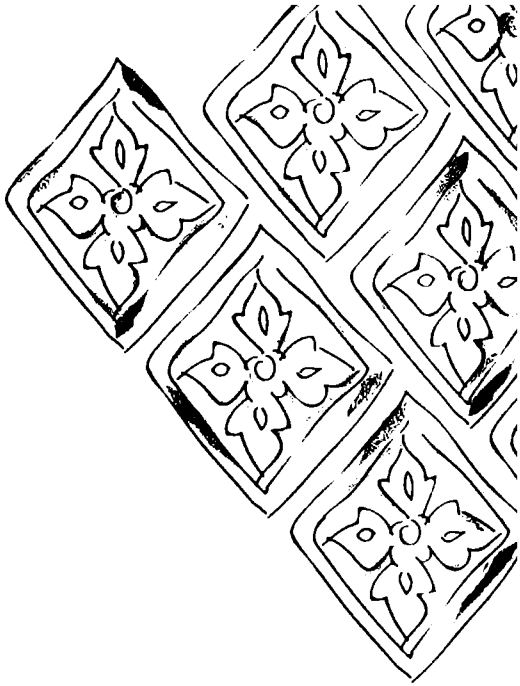
Those Sufis who engaged in local tradition, music and cultural practices were more influenced by Hindu norms and imagery than those who focused primarily on the philosophical dimension of Sufism, and Syed Sultan belonged to the latter category. Furthermore, he and his disciples considered themselves to be

www.pathagar.com

the propagators of Islam in Bengal, and for this reason they remained more orthodox in their Islamic thinking and practices than most of their contemporaries.

In fact, as a Sufi scholar and guide, Syed Sultan became a spiritual mentor to his many followers. These followers included many prominent individuals: including Syed Hasan, who was his son and successor, and Muhammad Khan, the renowned Sufi writer and poet of Bengal, who was author of the famous *Martyrdom of Husayn* (*Maqtul Husayn*), which is considered by some scholars to be the concluding part of the *Nabi Bangsha*. Given Syed Sultan's remarkable literary contribution, it is not surprising that many prominent scholars of medieval Bengali literature have carefully analysed his life and works. These scholars include: Muhammad Shahidullah, a renowned Bengali linguist and literary figure; Muhammad Enamul Haq, an eminent scholar of Bengali literature and author of *A History of Sufism in Bengal*; Sukumar Sen, a prominent Hindu scholar and author of *Islami Bangla Sahitya*; and, last but not least, Ahmad Sharif, a nephew of Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad, who not only wrote a doctoral thesis on Syed Sultan at Dhaka University in 1967 but who subsequently edited most of his works, which were published by the Bangla Academy in one volume in 1978.

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, 'Impact of Islam on Religio-Social Life of the People of Bangladesh' in *Islam in Bangladeshi through the Ages.*
2. See *Surah Yusuf*, verses 23–34.
3. Abdul Karim, *Banglar Itihas: Mughal Amal.*
4. Muhammad Enamul Haq, *A History of Sufism in Bengal.*
5. Sukumar Sen, *Islami Bangla Sahitya.*
6. Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal.*
7. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal.*
8. Syed Sajjad Husain, *Society and Civilisation.*
9. Syed Sultan, *Nabi Bangsha.*
10. See the Qur'an, *Surah al-Isra.*
11. M. A. Rahim, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

c.1607–c.1680



SYED ALAOL

Shah Muhammad Saghir, Amir Zain al-Din, Shaykh Faizullah, Syed Sultan, Dawlat Uzair Bahram Khan, Haji Muhammad, Mir Muhammad Shafi, Shaykh Paran, Nasrullah Khan and Chand Qazi are today considered to be the pioneers of medieval Muslim Bengali literature. However, the contributions and achievements of Muslim writers and poets of the late medieval era of Bengali literature are equally remarkable. Prominent Muslim writers and poets of this period include Abdul Hakim, Faqir Gharibullah, Nawazis Khan, Shaykh Mansur, Abdul Nabi, Afzal Ali and Hayat Mahmud, among others. Following in the footsteps of their eminent predecessors, these writers and poets not only wrote narrative, cultural and religious poems, but they also improved and popularised the

www.pathagar.com

writing of spiritual and romantic verse, inspired by historical and cultural themes adapted from the original Persian and Arabic sources. In the words of historian Mu'in-ud-Din Ahmad Khan:

> The Muslim poets also enriched the Bengali literature by introducing the Islamic tradition and new themes, ideas and vocabularies. The vast wealth of the Arabic and Persian literatures contributed immensely to the prosperity of the Bengali language and literature.[1]

Shah Muhammad Saghir's *Yusuf Zulaykhah* was one such work. Originally based on the story of Prophet Yusuf and the wife of Potiphar, as narrated in the Holy Qur'an, this work was, in fact, an adaptation from the Persian work of the same name by Hasan ibn Ishaq ibn Sharaf (better known as Abul Qasim Firdawsi).

Likewise, Syed Sultan's *Nabi Bangsha* was based on a combination of original Arabic and Persian sources, tracing the history of humanity through the lives and careers of prominent Prophets and Messengers, highlighting the fact that all the Divinely-inspired Prophets came with one and the same message from one source: namely, God Almighty. In the same way, Muhammad Khan's *Martyrdom of Husayn* (*Maqtul Husayn*) was inspired by the tragic death of Imam Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him), at Karbala (located in present-day Iraq) in the seventh century. In other words, the medieval Muslim writers and poets not only translated, adapted and versified religious tales, historical events and cultural themes into Bengali, they also inspired other writers and poets to emerge and dominate Bengali literature during the late medieval period.

One of the most prolific and important Muslim writers and poets of this period was Syed Alaol. Although Syed Alaol was a famous writer and poet, little is known about his early life and family background. Attempts have been made by several prominent scholars (including Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad, Muhammad Shahidullah, Muhammad Enamul Haq and Syed Ali Ahsan) to reconstruct his life and career, however, much of his early life has remained shrouded in mystery and legend. According to both Sahityavisharad and Enamul Haq, Syed Alaol was born in Jobra village (located close to Chittagong University in present-day Bangladesh). However, there is no textual basis for their views, other than the fact that there are two places in that village named after him: Alaol's Resevoir (*Alaoler Dighi*) and Alaol's Mosque (*Alaoler Masjid*).[2] For this reason, their views are considered to be speculative—if not erroneous—by other prominent scholars and researchers, who have argued that there is clear textual evidence to suggest that Alaol was born and brought up in the village of Jalalpur in the Fathabad Pargana (located in present-day Faridpur District). These textual evidences are Alaol's own poems. In one such poem he mentioned both Jalalpur and Fathabad by name, suggesting that he hailed from this area. His own father was a senior official of Majlis Qutb, the ruler of Fathabad, and Syed Alaol has referred to this ruler by name in his poem. On the basis of such textual evidence, the majority of his biographers have argued that he was born in Jalalpur (in Faridpur District).

The exact date of his birth and death also remains a matter of controversy. According to

www.pathagar.com

Enamul Haq, he was born in 1607 and died in 1680; but Muhammad Shahidullah argues that he may have been born in 1597 and died in 1673.[3] However, in the absence of any primary literary or historical data, these views are no more than conjecture and speculation. Other scholars, for instance, have argued that Alaol was born during the first or second decade of the seventeenth century and that he had died in the last decade of that century, if not earlier. This view has been formulated on the basis of dates of important events and activities that took place during Alaol's life as well as some of his writings. Not surprisingly, this view is also rather vague and imprecise.

The controversy around his date and place of birth aside, Alalo's biographers agree that his ancestors came to Bengal long before the arrival of the Mughals, as traders and preachers: that is to say, to pursue business and disseminate the message of Islam, because the majority of the people in Bengal at the time were Hindus and Buddhists. In due course, these traders and preachers married and settled in different parts of Bengal, thereby attaining positions of power and influence. Alaol's father was one such individual, who, on account of his superior education and talent, became a high-ranking Government official in the administration of Majlis Qutb, the ruler of Fathabad. This small fiefdom was formed in 1582 following the Mughal division of the Bengal Sultanate into 19 parts (*Suba Bangla*): Majlis Qutb reigned supreme in Fathabad, which was one of these. This was a politically volatile and unpredictable period in the history of Muslim Bengal, as one powerful dynasty gave way to another following the defeat of the Afghans at the hands of the Mughals at Raj Mahal in July 1576. Bengal formally became a part of the Mughal Empire, although opposition to their rule continued well into the reign of Emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan. During this politically chaotic period in the history of Bengal, some of the defeated Afghan leaders and officials were forced to move to the remote eastern parts of Bengal, while others found a warm welcome in Arakan where, in due course, they occupied positions of power and influence.[4]

Alaol was born and brought up during this tumultuous and unpredictable period in the history of Bengal. However, as the son of a government minister (*amatya putra*), he must have received a privileged upbringing and a thorough education from the leading scholars and teachers of his locality. Although Alaol stated that his father was a minister in the government of Majlis Qutb, he did not record his father's name, and therefore no further personal information is available about his father, or that of any other member of his family. Nevertheless, according to Abul Fadl (the court historian of Emperor Akbar) the Jalalpur region was one of the most developed, prosperous and busy places in Fathabad. The locals, unconcerned by events elsewhere, remained focused on their day-to-day activities.[5] This suggests that Jalalpur was not only a wealthy place but also a relatively peaceful one where traders, scholars and lay people alike were able to pursue their business interests and other activities without unnecessary governmental interference or hindrance.

Alaol must have benefited from the peaceful ambience that prevailed in his locality at the time. He may have received training in

www.pathagar.com

Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit and Bengali under the tutelage of local teachers because he was thoroughly familiar with these languages, in addition to gaining proficiency in aspects of Islamic thought, history, Persian poetry, Sufi metaphysics and Hindu mythology. Alaol learned Persian and Arabic from his parents. Like the other members of his family, he spoke Persian at home and learned Arabic in order to fulfil his religious obligations. At the time, Persian was the official language of the state and therefore all governmental work was carried out in this language. As such, those who were ambitious and keen to attain positions of power and influence had no choice but to learn Persian. By contrast, Bengali was (and had remained) the language of the masses. Alaol not only learned this language but, over time, he became very fond of it.

In addition to receiving a thorough education in Persian, Arabic and Bengali, during his early years Alaol developed a keen interest in archery, hunting and traditional music. These were encouraged by his father, and in his spare time Alaol pursued various types of extra-curricular activities and became a proficient archer, hunter and singer. He was raised under the care and watchful gaze of his family, and spent the early part of his life in peace and tranquillity in Fathabad, until he was about 20. As a government official, his father was often required to make official trips to the coastal regions of Bengal. On one of those occasions, young Alaol accompanied him. In those days, travel to the remote coastal regions was undertaken by boat, but piracy made such journeys extremely difficult and dangerous. Alaol's father must have been a brave and experienced sailor because he set off with his son, knowing the dangers and difficulties he could face. Unfortunately, on that occasion their boat was attacked at sea by Portuguese pirates. Alaol's father died fighting them and his son was captured and taken to the province of Arakan. His captors took him to the slave market where he was sold to the officials of the local ruler. During this period he worked as a royal bodyguard or horseman. Alaol referred to this difficult and dangerous period of his life in his writings.

However, thanks to his loyalty and hard work, coupled with his profound learning and scholarly outlook, he was soon brought to the attention of Magan Thakur, who served as the prime minister or chief advisor to two successive rulers of Arakan (from 1645 to 1660). Magan was himself a learned individual and distinguished poet, and he not only promoted Alaol but also brought him into the royal court where he encouraged Alaol to pursue his intellectual and literary interests. It should be pointed out here that, in addition to being an expert in several languages (such as Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit and Bengali), Alaol was a gifted poet and musician. As such, his new patron encouraged him to make a contribution in these fields for the benefit of posterity. Arakan was, at the time, a predominantly Buddhist province. Even so, a devout Muslim like Alaol was allowed to operate there and to pursue his literary activities, because the majority of royal officials were Muslims who hailed from Bengal. It was thanks to the patronage of these Muslim officials that the largely Buddhist province of Arakan became a major centre of Bengali language and literature during the late medieval period. In the words of Muhammad Mohar

www.pathagar.com

Ali, a noted historian of Bengal:

> The kingdom of Arakan had come in close cultural contact with the Muslim Sultanat of Bengal since the fifteenth century so much so that many of the Buddhist rulers of that country adopted Muslim names for themselves, appointed Muslim officials in their courts and, apparently under the latter's influence, even inscribed the *Kalimah* on their coins.[6]

Magan was a Muslim who had hailed from a notable Siddiqi family, and as such was well versed in Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit and Bengali. He composed several works of poetry, even though only one of them, the *Chandravati*, has been discovered so far. Under his patronage (as well as that of other Muslim officials of the royal court), eminent Muslim writers and poets, such as Dawlat Qazi and Mardan, were able to produce some of their most influential literary works. Of all the Muslim writers and poets who had lived and worked in Arakan, perhaps the most prolific and outstanding was Alaol. As a translator, poet and musician, Alaol wrote on a wide range of subjects: including historical epics, religious topics, romantic tales, mystical poetry and musical themes. The number of works he composed in total remains unknown, although, according to some scholars, seven of his compositions have survived. Muhammad Shahidullah, a leading authority on the subject, stated that only six are extant.[7] Of these, only four have been professionally edited: *Padmavati*, *Sikandarnama*, *Sati Maina-Lor Chandrani* and *Tuhfa*. The remaining works (*Saiful Mulk Badiul Jamal*, *Haft Paykar* and *Ragtalnama*) are yet to be critically edited and published.

According to some of his biographers, one of Alaol's earliest works was *Ragtalnama*. The subject of this work is traditional music. This is considered to be one of his original contributions, along with his mystical and lyrical poetry. However, in his entry on Alaol in *History of Bengali Literature* (*Bangla Sahityer Katha*), Muhammad Shahidullah did not even mention this work: perhaps because he did not consider it to be amongst Alaol's works. Nevertheless, according to Wakil Ahmed, the *Ragtalnama* was one of Alaol's earliest and most original contributions. By contrast, Alaol's *Padmavati*, which is perhaps his most famous work, was a Bengali adaptation of Malik Muhammad Jaysi's original Hindi romantic epic about a beautiful Sri Lankan princess who was desired by two prominent rulers of the time, King Ratna Sen of Chitore and Sultan Alauddin Khalji of Delhi. Despite the Sultan's efforts to rescue the beautiful princess, the King of Chitore married her, much to the disappointment of the former. Although Jaysi's romantic epic was partly historical and partly fictional, its central message was a mystical one: drawing a parallel between Divine love and gnosis (which are perpetual and everlasting), as opposed to worldly love and affection (which are temporal and limited). Unlike the Hindi original, Alaol's Bengali adaptation of *Padmavati* (consisting of about 10,500 lines) conveyed a more human and worldly message of love and longing, being devoid of mystical traces and tendencies. This is somewhat surprising, given the fact that Alaol himself was a practising Sufi, and was affiliated with the famous Qadiriyyah tariqah initiated by the great Sufi master, Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, who lived in the late eleventh and early twelfth century in Baghdad. Nevertheless, the

www.pathagar.com

fact that Alaol was a devout Muslim is evident from the following lines, which he wrote in praise of God:

> He created life to manifest Himself in love, and death to show that He is also the terrible. Sweet scents of flowers He created to indicate heaven and evil odours to warn men of the filth of hell. As a sign of His high favour, He created sweet things, delicious to the taste, and the bitter and pungent, to indicate His wrath. He secretly hid the honey in the flowers and by creating the bees He brought it all in the twinkling of an eye, and the great firmament created by Him stands without the support of pillars. The sun and the moon He created, and also created the night and the day. The winter and the summer He created, and the heat, the rays of the sun and the clouds which He lined with lightning. He pervades the universe—both revealed and unrevealed. The virtuous and the saintly know Him, but the vicous know Him not.[8]

Alaol's biographers have agreed that he completed this work under the patronage of Magan, who was honoured with the title of 'Thakur' by the King of Arakan on account of his loyalty and dedication. In fact, most of his writings were produced during this period of relative peace and happiness in his life.

After his *Padmavati*, which was perhaps completed in 1651, Alaol was commissioned by Magan to complete his *Saiful Mulk Badiul Jamal*, which was also a romantic tale involving Saiful Mulk and a beautiful princess named Badiul Jamal. This tale was originally related in the *Thousand and One Nights* (*Alf Layla wa Layla*, also known as *The Arabian Nights*). Alaol was not able to complete this work during the lifetime of his patron, who died in 1652. In his preface to this work, Alaol stated that it remained incomplete for a period before he finally completed it around 1658.

Thereafter, under the patronage of several other senior government ministers and royal courtiers (including Sulaiman, Syed Musa, Syed Muhammad Khan and Majlis Nabraj) he completed several other works. *Sati Maina-Lor Chandrani* was one of these: although this work was initiated by Dawlat Qazi (a renowned Muslim poet of Arakan), it was left to Alaol to complete, under the patronage of Sulaiman Siddiqi, the chief minister of Arakan.[9] This poem was based on an ancient Indian story wherein Queen Maina is forced to endure considerable difficulties while her husband, King Lorai, is on a mission to rescue a beautiful princess from her husband who was incapable of satisfying her needs.

Following this, Alaol completed his *Seven Portraits* (*Haft Paykar*) under the patronage of Syed Muhammad Khan, who served the King of Arakan as his Defence Minister. This was based on a well-known poem by the twelfth-century Persian poet, Nizam Ganjabi, which was published in his *Khamsah*. Alaol completed this work (according to his own narrative) at a time when Shah Shuja, the Mughal prince and the son of Emperor Shah Jahan, arrived in Arakan in 1660 seeking political asylum after fleeing from Bengal. In due course, the Mughal prince fell out with the King and the latter swiftly had him murdered. Alaol and his family were imprisoned for their suspected involvement in political intrigue against the King. At the request of Syed Mas'ud Shah (the chief justice of Arakan) he was released from prison,

www.pathagar.com

although he continued to endure considerable personal and financial hardship until Syed Mas'ud Shah finally took him back into the royal court.

During this period Alaol translated *Tuhfa-i-Nasihah*. Originally written in Persian in the fourteenth century by Yusuf Gada (the Delhi-based Sufi writer and scholar) the *Tuhfa-i-Nasihah* was a religious treatise dealing with Islamic principles, practices and morality. Alaol translated this work into Bengali in 1664, and it was perhaps on this occasion that he was initiated into the Qadiriyah order of Sufism by Mas'ud Shah, who became his spiritual master and guide. In addition to the above, Alaol translated another poem from Nizam Ganjabi's *Khamsah*: namely, *The Book of Alexander* (*Sikandarnama*), which consisted of some legendary stories about Alexander the Great's exploits in Persia. He completed this work under the patronage of Majlis Nabraj, who at the time served as minister of finance at the royal court. Besides these, Alaol wrote many other poems, both mystical and lyrical, and became a renowned singer and musician. Thus, he was often invited by the wealthy and powerful elites of Arakan to perform at important functions and ceremonies.

Given his wide-ranging contributions, Alaol's contemporaries came nowhere near to matching his literary achievements, either in terms of quality and quantity. After Syed Sultan, he must be considered the greatest and most prolific Muslim writer and poet of medieval and late medieval Bengali literature. He was proficient in Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindi, and initiated a new trend in Bengali literature by combining traditional themes with modern thinking and imagination. Dinesh Chandra Sen, a renowned Hindu scholar, stated that:

> For a Moslem writer to have the credit of importing the largest number of Sanskritic words into a Bengali poem... is no small achievement, and we are bound to admit that none of the Hindu poets of the age in which he lived, was in this respect, a match for him.[10]

Likewise, Muhammad Abdur Rahim argued that Alaol's works were full of:

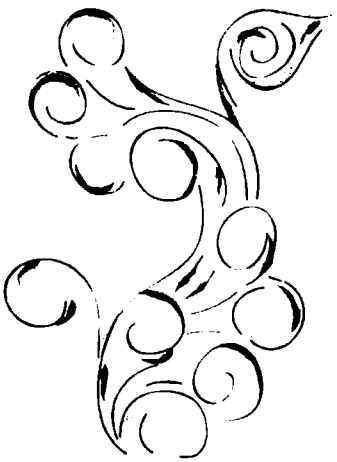
> Poetical imagination, richness of metaphors, freshness of dictions, excellence of humours and touch of life... The tradition of humanism which began with the earlier Muslim poets found full expression in *Padmavati*, in which Alaol gave supreme importance to man and life.[11]

Jaysi's works were influenced by mystical ideas and thoughts, whereas Alaol ensured his writings reflected the reality of life in Bengal during the Muslim rule. Thus, his works, like all great literature, provide commentary on the social, cultural and political trends of the time.

Similar to the debate surrounding the date and place of his birth, the date and place of his death is also contested by his biographers. According to some, towards the end of his life, Alaol left Arakan and moved to Chittagong where he died and was buried at the age of around 73. Others, however, argue that during the final years of his life, Alaol received the Qadiriyyah *khilafat* from Syed Mas'ud Shah: as such, he died and was buried in the capital of Arakan and he may have been in his mid-seventies at the time. Nevertheless, all his biographers agree that he was one of the most

www.pathagar.com

influential Muslim writers and poets of his time. In recognition of his contribution to Bengali literature, one of the halls of Chittagong University was named after him. There is also a well-known literary prize in Bangladesh, *Alaol Purashkar* (Alaol Prize), which is awarded to writers and scholars who have made an outstanding contribution to Bengali language and literature.



Notes

1. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, 'Impact of Islam on Religio-Social Life of the People of Bangladesh' in *Islam in Bangladesh through the Ages.*
2. Muhammad Enamul Haq, *Muslim Bengali Literature.*
3. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bangla Sahityer Katha.*
4. Muhammad Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume 1B: Survey of Administration, Society and Culture.*
5. Abul Fadl, *Ain-i-Akbari.*
6. M. M. Ali, op. cit.
7. M. Shahidullah, op. cit.
8. Syed Alaol, *Padmavati* (translated by D. C. Sen).
9. N. I. Manik, *Mahakabi Alaol.*
10. Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature.*
11. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal.*



www.pathagar.com

c.1680–c.1760

HAYAT MAHMUD

HISTORIANS FREQUENTLY DIVIDE Muslim rule in Bengal into two main parts: the Sultanate and Mughal periods. During the former, Muslim patronage of Bengali laid the foundation for the development and the progress of this language. Bengali was neglected—if not despised—during the Hindu rule. The Muslim ruler's official recognition of Bengali as the language of the people provided fresh impetus to the growth of Muslim culture. One consequence of this official recognition of Bengali was that, for the first time in the history of Bengal, education was no longer the monopoly of the rich and powerful Brahmins but was made accessible to the masses, and many Muslim writers and poets were inspired to make their contributions. For this reason, this period is often regarded as the

www.pathagar.com

formative period of Bengali literature. According to Muhammad Abdur Rahim:

> The liberalism of Muslim rule opened facilities of education even to the lower class of Hindus and they found scope to make their contribution to Bengali. Above all, the Muslim rule introduced a rich Muslim tradition with the wealth of Arabic and Persian literatures into Bengali. The humanistic and romantic elements of the Muslim tradition with their universal appeal infused a new lease of life to the Bengali literature.[1]

During the Mughal rule, this tradition continued unabated. This, in turn, inspired scores of Muslim writers and poets to emerge and leave their mark on Bengali literature. Thus, the Muslim tradition in Bengali literature was initiated during the Sultanate time, and it became firmly established during the Mughal period through the production of literary works on a range of topics including history, religion, mysticism, philosophy and romance.

Hayat Mahmud, a renowned Muslim writer and poet of Bengal, was one of the most prominent—and one of the last—representatives of this rich tradition of medieval Muslim Bengali literature and poetry. He was born into a prominent Muslim family from Jharbishila, a village in Pirganj Upazila (located in the present-day Rangpur District of Bangladesh). His exact date of birth and death are not known. However, according to his biographer, the late Mazharul Islam, he was likely to have been born around 1680–1690 and to have died 70–80 years later. This view is, however, no more than speculation, as there is no literary or historical evidence available to prove this conclusively. Around this time, Jharbishila was a part of Dinajpur, which was an integral part of Baghduar Pargana. Hayat Mahmud's father, Shah Kabir, was a respected local Muslim personality who had served the local ruler in his capacity as an administrator. He was also a poet and literary figure known for his personal piety and good character. According to some of Hayat Mahmud's biographers (including the late Mehrab Ali of Dinajpur), his ancestors had come to Bengal during the time of Akbar, the Great Mughal Emperor, and were wealthy landholders who may have hailed from Afghanistan. However, according to Mazharul Islam, Phul Khan, a Pathan by origin, was one of Hayat Mahmud's prominent ancestors, although the latter for some unknown reason never used Khan as his surname.

Hayat Mahmud was certainly brought up and educated in an Islamic context, and he became very fond of traditional Islamic subjects and languages from the outset. After completing his elementary education at home, Hayat Mahmud pursued further training in Arabic, Persian, the traditional Islamic sciences and Bengali (which was his mother tongue) at local educational institutions. In those days, three languages were usually taught at school: Arabic, Persian and Bengali. This language education was coupled with an introduction to the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions (*hadith*). Knowledge of Arabic was necessary for religious purposes, and Persian was the official language of administration during the Muslim rule. Knowledge of Persian was therefore essential for employment in political administration, military service, education or any other similar role. By contrast, learning of Bengali was encouraged because this was the mother tongue of the

www.pathagar.com

masses (both Muslims and non-Muslims). In the words of the historian Muhammad Abdur Rahim, 'the Chinese records show that Bengali occupied an important position in the society even in the opening years of the fifteenth century.'[2] After completing his formal education in traditional Islamic sciences and the languages, Hayat Mahmud became well known for his linguistic skills and ability. Like his father, he acquired such a mastery of Persian language and literature that in due course he began to translate Persian poetry into Bengali.

Hayat Mahmud's forefathers had been wealthy landholders, and had owned large plots of land. Over time his family lost their claim to the property due to a lack of a proper supervision and management. This prompted Hayat Mahmud to visit the local government administrator to reclaim the lost properties. His application was rejected, probably on account of unpaid taxes.

This was a politically very difficult and confusing time in the history of Bengal, as Mughal rule gradually declined and the European powers began to flex their muscles. According to Abdul Karim (the renowned historian and epigraphist of Bangladesh) the Mughals established themselves in Bengal in the beginning of the seventeenth century during the reign of Emperor Jahangir (1605–1627). However, it was never easy for them to maintain a firm grip on that region, given the political upheveal of the time. This forced the Mughals to rule this province through royal princes or senior administrators, who acted as governors. This approach brought relative peace and prosperity to this province for almost a century, until the Mughal power began to decline towards the end of the seventeenth century. Emperor Awrangzeb maintained his grip on most of India including the southern regions, although diverted by Maratha insurgency and attacks against the Mughals, he took his eyes off events in the northern parts of the dynasty.[3] As a result, political rivary and rebellion ensued in many parts of Bengal and its neighbouring territories. In the ensuing tussle, Subha Singh, an influential landholder of West Bengal, and Rahim Khan, an Afghan warlord in Orissa, openly rebelled against Ibrahim Khan, the *subahdar* of Bengal and Orissa in 1696. In so doing, they took control of much of south-western region of Bengal. This, in turn, forced the European traders to take necessary steps to protect their goods and services. They accordingly fortified their factories and protected them through private security guards. Fort William was eventually established in Calcutta in order to safeguard their trade and business interests.

Living during such a volatile and unpredictable period in the history of Bengal, Hayat Mahmud was aware of the challenges and difficulties facing Muslims at the time. That is probably why he agreed to serve the local ruler in his capacity as a *qadi* (judge). His father had worked as an administrator for the local authorities and therefore his family was well connected to the ruling elites. This, coupled with his thorough education in Arabic, Persian and the traditional Islamic sciences, prompted the local ruler to appoint him as a judge. According to his biographers, Hayat Mahmud joined government service after the death of his father, although the exact date of his appointment is not known. According to Mazharul Islam, he

www.pathagar.com

was appointed during the time of Murshid Quli Khan. The latter's reign was an interesting period in the history of Bengal, as it coincided with the reign of Emperor Awrangzeb and that of his successors, paving the way for the establishment of foreign rule in Bengal. By all accounts, Hayat Mahmud served as a *qadi* very well, and it was during this period that he composed most—if not all—of his literary works.

Although a politically and economically turbulent time in the history of Bengal, this was also an intellectually and culturally vibrant period in the annals of Muslim Bengal. During this period a number of prominent Muslim writers and poets emerged who left their indelible marks in the history of Bengali literature. According to Muhammad Mohar Ali, the first half of the eighteenth century was an important period as a number of Muslim poets emerged in Bengal who later became prominent writers.[4] Shaykh Chand, who hailed from Comilla District, was one such poet. He composed many works, including *Rasul Vijaya* (also known as *Rasul Nama*), wherein he highlighted the life and works of the Prophet of Islam. His other works include *Shah Daulah Nama*, written in memory of Shah Daulah (his spiritual guide), and *Qiyamat Nama*, which described the Day of Judgement. The latter was completed in 1734, and thus the poet belonged to the first part of the eighteenth century. Shaykh Sa'di was another poet of the time. He wrote an epic titled *Gada Mallikar Punthi* in 1722. This work narrated the debates Princess Mallika conducted with the scholars of her time: she eventually married Abdullah Gada who alone was able to answer all her questions. Two other poets of the time, namely Nawazish Khan and Wazir Ali, are also worth mentioning. Both of them hailed from Chittagong District and they composed three works of history and biography.

Hayat Mahmud was a contemporary of these writers and poets. However, unlike them, he did not write in order to establish his name, increase his fame or popularise his family history. Nor was he interested in composing outstanding poetry or literary masterpieces for cultural or aesthetic reasons. Muhammad Abu Talib, a prominent scholar of Bengali literature, stated that Hayat Mahmud was inspired to compose his poetry in order to instruct and guide the Muslims in their religious teachings and morals.[5] Although Hayat Mahmud was a prolific writer, only four of his works have survived: *Janganama*, *Sarbabhedabani*, *Hitajnanabani* and *Ambiyabani*. His biographers have not been able to ascertain how many books of poems he had composed in total, but they have analysed and interpreted his extant works very well.

Mazharul Islam was one scholar who studied Hayat Mahmud. Under the supervision of Muhammad Shahidullah, he prepared a doctoral thesis on the life and works of Hayat Mahmud at Rajshahi University, and this study was published in 1961. In this book, he traced the family background, life and thoughts of Hayat Mahmud using a wide range of sources, including the latter's writings. In addition to this, Mazharul Islam thoroughly edited and included the four extant works of Hayat Mahmud in his thesis; this was published under the title of *Kabi Hayat Mahmud*. In his foreword to the second edition of this book, which was published in 2000, Mazharul Islam wrote that the

www.pathagar.com

thesis was carefully examined by Muhammad Shahidullah, Muhammad Enamul Haq and Sukumar Sen: all three of them being highly-respected scholars of Bengali language and literature.[6] As expected, the examiners rated the thesis very highly, commending Mazharul Islam for successfully reconstructing the life, thoughts and achievements of Hayat Mahmud for the benefit of posterity.

According to Mazharul Islam, Hayat Mahmud's *Janganama* was completed in 1723 although others (like, for example, Muhammad Shahabuddin) have argued that it was written sometime around 1723 or 1724.[7] If that is true, then the poet was probably in his early forties when he composed this work. Consisting of nearly 80 pages, the main theme of *Janganama* (also known as *Muharram Parba*) was the battle between right and wrong, and the fight for justice in the face of oppression and tyranny. The theme revolved around the tragic story of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn ibn Ali (the grandson of the Prophet) in the Iraqi city of Karbala in the seventh century. After the death of the founder of the Umayyad Dynasty Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan (in 680), his son Yazid ibn Muawiyah ascended the Umayyad throne and forced all his opponents to pledge their loyalty to him. Some prominent Muslims of the time (including Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr and Husayn ibn Ali) refused to recognise Yazid as a legitimate ruler. This set them on a collision course with Yazid. In due course, Husayn moved from Madinah to Makkah, and from there he set out for the Iraqi city of Kufah. However, the Umayyad forces stopped him and his followers at Karbala. In the ensuing battle, the Umayyad army attacked and killed Husayn and his followers. The grisly murder of Imam Husayn in 680 sent a shiver down the Islamic spine that continues to reverberate to this day. That is why Muslims (especially the Shia Muslims) commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn every year in the month of Muharram. The story of Husayn's heroic struggle against the forces of oppression and tyranny was skilfully versified by many Persian writers and poets. This, in turn, inspired many prominent Muslim poets of Bengal to do the same. Hayat Mahmud emulated them by composing his *Janganama*.

According to his biographers, Hayat Mahmud completed his second book of poems, *Sarbabhedabani*, in around 1732 or 1733, when he was in his eary fifties. Unlike the *Janganama*, this poem was partly a Bengali adaptation of the Persian translation of *Panchatantra*. It was also an original work on morals and ethics, because he made it relevant to the Muslim culture and society of Bengal. According to Mazharul Islam, the poet was so successful in adapting this poem to his local context that it should be considered to be an original work rather than a reproduction of the original Persian translation. In this sense, Hayat Mahmud was not only a successful poet but also a careful and intelligent observer of his people and their culture and norms. His third work, *Hitajnanabani*, was composed circa 1753–1754, when he was in his early seventies. This was unlike his other poems, as in this work he explained the basic principles and practices of Islam for the benefit of his people. In addition to outlining the basic Islamic rites and rituals, he explained aspects of Islamic law (*shari'ah*), spirituality (*tasawwuf*) and gnosis (*ma'rifah*) from a traditional

www.pathagar.com

perspective. This is not surprising, considering the fact that Hayat Mahmud was a Sufi of the Qadiriyyah tariqah. The concluding part of this work focused on the life and works of prominent Prophets like Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus) and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on them all). This poem is around 45 pages long, and was based on original Arabic and Persian works on Islamic history and theology. According to Mazharul Islam, this work is very similar to Syed Alaol's *Gift of Admonition* (*Tuhfa-i-Nasihah*), which was a religious treatise dealing with Islamic principles, practices and morality.[8] By comparison, Alaol's *Tuhfa* (1664) was merely a translation, into Bengali, of a document that was originally written in Persian in the fourteenth century.

Hayat Mahmud's fourth work, *Ambiyabani*, was written circa 1757–1758, when he was in his late seventies. More than 170 pages in length, this poem was his masterpiece. Like the Persian *Qisas al-Anbiya* and Syed Sultan's *Nabi Bangsha*, in this work the poet provided an historical overview of humanity through the lives and careers of prominent Prophets such as Adam, Idris, Nuh, Hud, Salih, Ibrahim and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on them all). In this work, Mahmud also gave a detailed account of the life and teachings of the Prophet of Islam, who he considered to be an outstanding role model for humanity. That is why he explained the message of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* (Prophetic norms and practices) for the benefit of the Muslims of Bengal. According to Mazharul Islam, this was an original work, because nothing like it had been produced in Bengali previously.[9] This observation is correct, because Hayat Mahmud's work was based on authentic Arabic and Persian sources; whereas Syed Sultan's *Nabi Bangsha* was a partly historical and partly fictional work. As such, Hayat Mahmud's work was the first authentic and comprehensive work to be written on the lives of the Prophets in the history of Bengali literature.

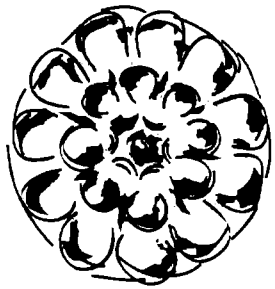
Referring to the contribution of the early Muslim poets of Bengal, Muhammad Abdur Rahim argued that the Muslim poets not only enriched Bengali literature by incorporating Persian and Arabic ideas, thoughts and linguistic flavour, they also assimilated aspects of Hindi literature into Bengali for the first time.[10] For example, one of the first Hindi romantic epics was *Mrigavati*, which was composed by Qutban in 1512 at the court of Sultan Husain Shah. In his introduction to this work, the author has provided a vivid picture of life in the court of the Sultan. In so doing, Hindi literary tradition was introduced into Bengal by Muslim writers. Another example of how Muslim writers and poets learned Hindi and then assimilated its literary wealth for the benefit of the people of Bengal is the famous *Padmavati* of Syed Alaol (see the chapter on Alaol for more information).

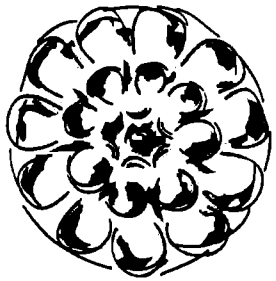
Like his predecessors, Hayat Mahmud was a true seeker of knowledge and an avid reader of Arabic and Persian literature. A quick browse through his books proves that he was steeped in traditional Islamic thought, culture and literature. According to his biographers, his last work was *Ambiyabani*, which he had completed shortly before his death at the age of around 80. However, thanks to the remarkable efforts of scholars like Muhammad Shahidullah,

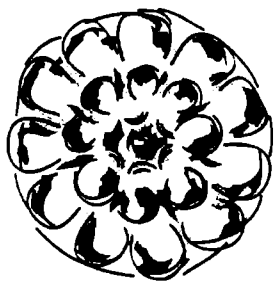
www.pathagar.com

Muhammad Enamul Haq, Mazharul Islam, Muhammad Abu Talib, Mehrab Ali and Muhammad Shahabuddin, the life and legacy of this important Muslim poet of late medieval Bengali literature has been brought to the fore for the benefit of posterity.

Nevertheless, more research and enquiry is needed in this field in order to shed new light on different aspects of medieval Muslim culture, literature and society of Bengal. I hope this biographical entry on the life and works of Hayat Mahmud—probably the first of its kind to be written in English—will inspire others to pursue further research for the benefit of both the present and future generations.







Notes

1. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal.*
2. Ibid.
3. Abdul Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times.*
4. Muhammad Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume 1B: Survey of Administration, Society and Culture.*
5. Muhammad Abu Talib, *Uttar Bangiyer Sahitya Sadhana.*
6. Mazharul Islam, *Hayat Mahmud.*
7. Muhammad Shahabuddin, *Sahitya Sadhanay Koyekjon Muslim Prativa.*
8. M. Islam, op. cit.
9. Ibid.
10. M. A. Rahim, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

c.1717–1803

MANNUJAN KHANUM

When Muslim rule in Bengal is divided into the pre-Mughal and the Mughal periods, the pre-Mughal period can be seen to have lasted much longer, because it covered a period of around 400 years. This era was also known as the Sultanate period. During this phase of Muslim rule Bengal was an independent dominion: except for about 60 years when Sultanate rule was interrupted due to internal political upheavals (this happened from 1227 to 1286 and again from 1539 to 1553). Even so, the systems of political administration that prevailed in Bengal and Delhi were very similar, due to the fact that the people who ruled both places were of Turkish, Afghan, Persian and Arab backgrounds, and they had assimilated the political and administrative ideas and practices of the

www.pathagar.com

earlier Islamic empires (such as Umayyad and Abbasids). During the Mughal period Bengal became an integral part of the Mughal dynasty and it was ruled by Mughal governors (similar to the other provinces). Despite the Mughals' efforts to adjust their system of administration to meet the changing social, political and economic circumstances in Bengal, full Mughal authority over Bengal lasted only for a century, from the beginning of the seventeenth to the early years of the eighteenth century. Soon after the death of Emperor Awrangzeb in 1707, his viceroy, Murshid Quli Khan, became an independent ruler in Bengal in all but name.[1]

According to one account, Maryam Khanum (better known as Mannujan Khanum) was born in 1717: the same year in which Muhammad Hadi (otherwise known as Murshid Quli Khan) assumed power in Bengal and established his headquarters in Murshidabad. According to the historian Abdul Karim, the administration of Murshid Quli Khan (which covered the early part of the eighteenth century) was an interesting period in the history of Bengal. This period witnessed the vigour of Awrangzeb's reign as well as the declining years of Mughal rule under his successors, and also paved the way for the emergence of foreign powers who went on to consolidate their power in Bengal.[2] However, according to another account, Mannujan was born in 1722 into a devout Muslim family of Hughli (located in present-day Indian state of West Bengal). Her father, Agha Mutahar, was a Persian merchant who settled in Hughli and became a wealthy landholder. He had received large plots of land (*jagir*) in Jessore, Murshidabad, Nadia and Hughli from Awrangeb, the Mughal Emperor, on account of his loyalty and dedication to the Mughals. He subsequently married Zainab Khanum, who hailed from a noble Muslim family, and she bore him a daughter, Mannujan. Aga Mutahar was a devout Muslim, and hired private tutors to teach his daughter Arabic, Persian, Holy Qur'an and Islamic studies during her early years at home. Being well versed in Persian language and literature himself, he was in the habit of reading ancient Persian and Islamic stories to his daughter: thus Mannujan became familiar with Abul Qasim Mansur Firdawsi's *Book of Kings* (*Shahnama*) during her early years.

In 1729, when Mannujan was around 12 years of age (or, according to others, seven) her father suddenly died, and had bequeathed a large estate to his wife and only daughter. During this difficult period her mother married Haji Faizullah Isfahani, who was a senior employee of Aga Muhatar. Like the latter, Haji Faizullah was a devout Muslim of Persian origin. He had served his employer with loyalty and dedication, and this no doubt prompted Zainab Khanum to marry him. Out of this marriage was born Haji Muhammad Muhsin, who became a celebrated landholder and philanthrophist of Muslim Bengal. Although Haji Muhsin is very widely known today, his half-sister has been virtually forgotten: although it would not have been possible for him to contribute as much as he did without her support and encouragement. For this reason, there is an urgent need to focus more on the lives and works of prominent Muslim women of Bengal, and in so doing, to highlight their contribution and achievements for the benefit of future generations.

www.pathagar.com

Mannujan and her half-brother had completed their early education in Arabic, Persian and traditional Islamic sciences under the guidance of some private tutors (such as Aga Shirazi), and accordingly, they became familiar with the works of renowned Persian literary figures (including Firdawsi, Umar Khayyam, Shaykh Sa'di and Abdur Rahman Jami). Haji Muhsin then went to Murshidabad for higher education, while Mannujan pursued her other interests and hobbies, including aspects of classical music. She became proficient in playing the sitar, under the guidance of Ustadh Bholanath. In fact, according to Muhammad Abdur Rahim, at the time the strict social practice of seclusion (*purda*):

> Restricted the education of girls at the secondary and higher stage. Co-education was not favoured after the primary stage. There was no regular system of secondary education for girls at the *madrasas* of the time. Secondary education for girls was confined to the higher and upper middle class, who could make special arrangement for the same.[3]

That is to say, the wealthy and educated Muslim families hired tutors for their daughters to be educated at home. This was a special arrangement that only wealthy and influential families could afford, and the majority of Muslim girls could not pursue secondary and higher education due to social and cultural barriers.

Mannujan was a strict observer of purda, however, the system of purda involved more than simply secluding women from the wider society. At the time, in Bengal, it was also viewed as mark of aristocracy, high morality and social decency. That is why both Muslim and Hindu women of nobility rarely came out in public with their faces and heads uncovered: to do so was seen as a dishonourable act in those days. Not surprisingly, Mannujan combined her interest in classical literature and music with management of the family business and estates, and did so while proudly wearing the purda. By shadowing her stepfather, she became familiar with various procedures, legislation and guidelines concerning estate management and accountability. She was able to achieve this due to her superior education, aristoractic background and high position in society.

However, when she had reached the age of 30, her stepfather arranged her marriage to Mirza Salah al-Din, who was his nephew and a deputy military governor (*naib faujdar*) of Hughli. By all accounts, Mannujan was an intelligent, independent-minded and very beautiful lady who, soon after her marriage, moved to her husband's large mansion located in the Syedpur Zamindari (estate) in 1752. Nine years later, in 1761, her beloved husband died unexpectedly at the age of only 39; this tragedy brought an abrupt end to her marital life. As a result, she was forced to assume full ownership and responsibility for her family estate (which was located in the districts of Hughli, Murshidabad, Nadia, Jessore and Khulna). Her knowledge of government rules and regulations, coupled with considerable experience of estate management and impeccable morals and ethics—not to mention her determination to preserve and protect the family wealth—soon impressed friend and foe alike.

According to Sonia Nishat Amin, Mannujan 'was one of the most capable zamindars in 18th century Bengal.'[4] Despite living in a

www.pathagar.com

conservative society, she was able to administer the Syedpur Zamindari at a time when the socio-economic circumstances of the Muslims of Bengal had been radically transformed through the Permanent Settlement. She assumed the responsibility of administering her family estate following the untimely death of her husband, and protected her family estate from being sold off to the highest bidders by the authorities. Mannujan not only refused to remarry, she also ignored threats to her life and regularly attended meetings with officials to save her estate. Eventually, she was able to plead her case in court and in so doing saved her Zamindari. This was a remarkable achievement on her part, especially when considering that the majority of Muslim landholders had failed to comply with the settlement terms and conditions of Hasting, and as a result had lost their lands and properties.

Muhammad Abdur Rahim stated that, at the time:

> The Muslim landed aristocracy were hard hit in consequence of the Company's profit-making land revenue policy. Although Murshid Quli and his successors had advanced the Hindus in land, the Muslims still held substantial portion of the land of Bengal as zamindars, taluqdars and jagirdars.[5]

However, during the East India Company's rule, the system of land revenue auction was such that many Muslim landholders could not compete with the emerging Hindu and European elites to retain control of their lands. This was compounded by the fact that the British elites distrusted the Muslims and preferred the Hindus in their allocation of land revenue. Not surprisingly, one British observer referred to this policy as the:

> Most sweeping act of oppression ever committed in any country by which the landed property of the country had been transferred from the class of people entitled to it to a set of baboos, who had made their wealth by bribery and corruption.[6]

Likewise, James O'Kinley, a researcher of Company land policy states:

> It elevated the Hindu collectors, who up to that time had held but unimportant posts, to the position of landholders, gave them a proprietary right in the soil, and allowed them to acculmulate wealth which would have gone to the Mussalmans under their own rule.[7]

The British policy of preferring the Hindus over the Muslims on this issue, coupled with the Muslim Zamindars' neglect and mismanagement of their estates, ensured that wealthy Muslim families became poor and landless almost overnight. This not only represented a major economic setback for the Muslims of Bengal, from which they struggled to recover; it also seriously impeded their social, political, economic, educational and cultural development and progress.

During this difficult period in Bengal's history, Mannujan rose to the challenge of protecting her estate from being taken over by the authorities and sold off to the highest bidders. Krishnaram Bose, her loyal employee, assisted with her efforts: especially during the Great Famine (1769–1770) when Mannujan, like the other landholders of the time, had sustained considerable loss. As a result, she

www.pathagar.com

not only struggled to recover her loss but also found it very difficult to meet the strict and unusually harsh demands of the company. When the authorities threatened to sell off her estates to recover the arrears, she argued her case with such clarity and eloquence that the company soon changed its decision to sell off her estate. During her forty-year career as an estate manager, none of her employees ever accused her of abusing her power or authority, nor did the company officials lodge a complaint against her for failing to pay her dues on time or for miscalculating the amount of revenue she had collected. This was an impressive record, for which she was widely respected by her staff and was held in high regard by the government officials.

Since Mannujan refused to remarry after the death of her first husband, she remained childless. However, as she grew older, she was keen to hand over the family estates to her half-brother, Haji Muhammad Muhsin, who had been busy travelling and studying in the Middle East at the time. She persuaded him to return to Bengal after nearly three decades of travelling and to take responsibility for the family wealth. Selfless and mystically inclined, Haji Muhsin had remained a confirmed bachelor all his life and as such he had no successors. Three years after the death of Mannujan at the age of around 80 (according to another account, she was in her early seventies), in 1806, Haji Muhsin created a deed of endowment (*waqfnama*) and appointed two full-time *mutwallis* (administrators) to oversee its proper administration: namely, to use its proceeds for charitable purposes. Soon after Haji Muhsin's death in 1812, the two administrators began to misuse and abuse the Muhsin Fund, and accordingly the government intervened and took over its management in 1818. The proceeds of the fund were then used to establish and maintain mosques, schools, colleges, hospitals, religious shrines and hostels for the benefit of the Muslims of Bengal.

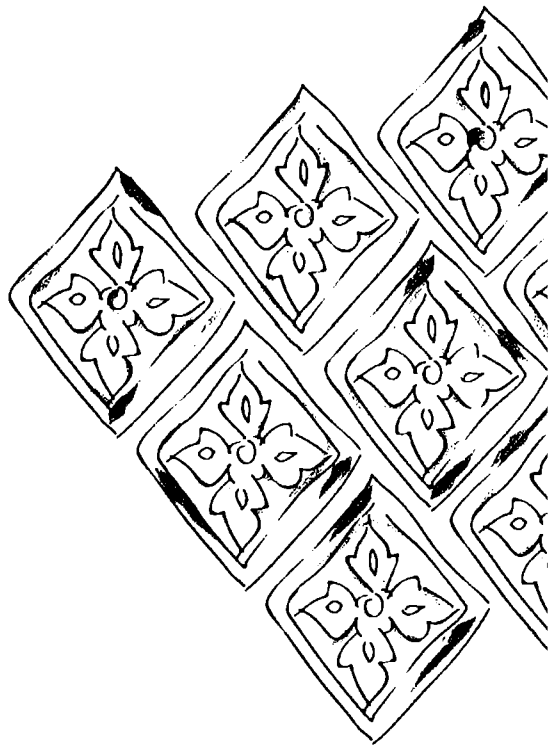
All the institutions that were built or maintained with the proceeds of the Muhsin Fund were named after Haji Muhsin: none of them were ever named after Mannujan, even though she had protected and managed the family wealth for around 40 years which, in turn, had enabled Haji Muhsin to subsequently establish the Muhsin Fund. In the words of Shirin Akhter:

> There would have been no Hughli Madrasa, Hughli Mohsin College or the Mohsin Fund, which played a vital role in the spread of education especially among the Muslims of Bengal, if Mannujan had not bequeathed her well-managed estate to Mohsin before her death in 1803.[8]

The Muhsin Fund not only played an important role in the dissemination of education in both East and West Bengal, it was also instrumental in the social, cultural, economic and intellectual regeneration of the Muslims of Bengal. The credit for this must not only go to Haji Muhsin, but also to his remarkable—and largely forgotten—half-sister, Mannujan Khanum. The fact that only Rajshahi University (located in northern Bangladesh) has a hall named after this outstanding Muslim woman is in itself evidence of the fact that she has been largely forgotten. If Bangladesh hopes to develop and make significant progress, then it urgently needs to re-examine its attitude towards its great patriots and benefactors of

www.pathagar.com

the past. For, as Edmund Burke, the great Irish philosopher and statesman, once stated, 'people will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors.'



Notes

1. Muhammad Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume 1A: Muslim Rule in Bengal (600–1170/ 1203–1757).*
2. Abdul Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times.*
3. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal, 1757–1947.*
4. Sonia Nishat Amin, 'Women and Society' in *History of Bangladesh.*
5. M. A. Rahim, op. cit.
6. A. R. Mallick, *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal.*
7. William W. Hunter quoted by M. A. Rahim, op. cit.
8. Shirin Akhter, 'Gender Issue and Women in Oral and Written Cultural Production' in *Nazimuddin Ahmed Commemoration Volume.*

www.pathagar.com

1732–1812

HAJI MUHAMMAD MUHSIN

PRIOR TO THE Muslim conquest of Bengal, the early Muslim traders and Sufis had laid the foundation of Islamic learning and education in different parts of that region by establishing mosques and Sufi lodges. However, following the arrival of political Islam in the early part of the thirteenth century under the leadership of Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji, a comprehensive programme of building mosques, *madrasah*s and *khanqah*s (lodges) was initiated.[1] This, in turn, led to the promotion of Islamic education across Muslim Bengal in a systematic way. Prominent Muslim rulers of Bengal, including Nasir al-Din Mahmud Shah and Ala al-Din Husayn Shah, continued their generous patronage of Islamic education in Bengal.[2] The same was true during the Mughal

www.pathagar.com

rule of Bengal, however, following the establishment of British power in India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Islamic educational institutions experienced serious financial difficulties and this, of course, contributed to the intellectual decline and backwardness of the Muslim community.

During this critical period in the history of India, many prominent Muslim figures, including Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Nawab Abdul Latif, attempted to revive the political fortunes and educational prospects of the Indian Muslims. In so doing, they not only helped to revive Muslim society but they also left their indelible marks in modern Indian history. However, the contributions of other prominent Muslim personalities of Bengal, such as Haji Muhammad Muhsin, are not widely known today, although their generous patronage and funding of Islamic learning and education proved to be a substantial contribution to the regeneration of the Muslim community, which helped to preserve Muslim culture and heritage in Bengal.

Haji Muhammad Muhsin was born into a prosperous Muslim family of Hughli (in the present-day Indian state of West Bengal). His grandfather, Agha Faizullah, was of Persian origin and was a wealthy landholder. Like his grandfather, his father, Haji Faizullah Isfahani was a wealthy individual. He had married Zainab Khanum, a wealthy widow: after the death of her first husband (Aga Mutahar, a Persian merchant who had received a large estate), Zainab and her daughter, Maryam (better known as Mannujan Khanum) had inherited the family wealth and properties.[3]

Haji Faizullah and Zainab's son was named Muhammad Muhsin. He received his early education at home in Persian, Arabic, Bengali and aspects of traditional Islamic sciences. Being very wealthy, his parents were able to pay for him to be educated at home, although it was the custom of the day for children to attend their local *maktab* (Qur'an school) where they would learn to read the Qur'an and receive basic training in Islamic rites and rituals.[4] Young Muhsin, and his stepsister, Mannujan, were good students who quickly assimilated Arabic as well as Islamic principles and practices. They gained considerable knowledge and understanding of the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions (*hadith*) and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). From the outset, Muhsin became known for his piety, morality and impeccable Islamic manners and etiquette.

Muhammad Muhsin was born during the reign of the second Nasirid ruler, Nawab Shuja al-Din Muhammad Khan (r. 1727–1739). He was brought up during a volatile period in the history of Bengal. Politically speaking, although the Mughal rule of Bengal was fully consolidated during the reign of Emperor Jahangir (in the seventeenth century), a succession of nawabs continued to rule this region on behalf of the Mughals until the latter began to decline irreversibly after the death of Emperor Awrangzeb, the last of the Great Mughals, in 1707. Unlike Awrangzeb, his sons failed to maintain the unity and strength of the Mughal dynasty and this enabled their opponents—both from within India and from outside of India—to plot their downfall.[5] The decline of Mughal rule paved the way for the British to establish their politico-economic hegemony in Bengal under the guise of the East India Company. By the time Siraj al-Dawlah became the Nawab of

www.pathagar.com

Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1756, Muhammad Muhsin would have been in his mid-twenties. However, being detached and otherworldly in his outlook, he probably did not pay much attention to the political upheaval of the time.

Soon after his ascension to power, Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah was determined to curtail the rising influence and increasing interference of the British in the political and economic affairs of Bengal. However, betrayed by his friends and foes alike, the young Nawab was defeated by the forces of Robert Clive at the Battle of Plassey (Palashi) in 1757. This represented a watershed in the history of Muslim India, as the British consolidated their politico-economic grip on the country while the Muslims became increasingly politically marginalised in India.[6] The political instability exacerbated the socio-economic condition of the time as prosperity gave way to uncertainty, hardship, scarcity of food and educational and cultural decline across Muslim India, especially in Bengal. This state of affairs prompted many Indian Muslims (Shah Waliullah of Delhi and Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotwi, among others) to take stock of the new political, social and economic situation in India and to take steps to strengthen Islamic culture and heritage in the face of foreign politico-economic encroachment. Shah Waliullah became a great Islamic thinker and prolific writer on all aspects of Islam, and in so doing he tried to inspire the Indian Muslims to reclaim their past glory. Maulana Nanotwi founded the *dar al-'ulum*, a famous Islamic seminary, at Deoband with a view to training Islamic scholars and theologians who could champion the cause of Islam and Muslims in India.

Although Muhammad Muhsin was a contemporary of these Muslim luminaries, during his formative years he focused his full attention to his studies. After completing his early education, he left home and proceeded to Murshidabad for higher education, before travelling in pursuit of knowledge. As a firm believer in the Prophetic exhortation that 'seeking knowledge is an obligatory duty for all Muslims, male and female,' he travelled to Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Arabia, in addition to several other Asian countries. During his stay in Makkah (in present-day Saudi Arabia) he performed the sacred *hajj* (or pilgrimage), which is the fifth pillar of Islam, and visited Madinah to pay homage to the blessed Prophet. By virtue of the fact that he had successfully completed all the rites of *hajj* and was highly learned in Islam, he subsequently became known as Haji Muhsin.

During his sojourn across Turkey and the Middle East, Muhsin continued to polish his knowledge of Arabic, Persian and Turkish, in addition to mastering traditional Islamic sciences: including Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), Prophetic *hadith*, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Islamic spirituality (*tasawwuf*). As a voracious reader of Islamic literature, he attended the lectures of many prominent scholars in Makkah, Madinah, Kufah and Karbala. He also visited the place where Imam Husayn ibn Ali and his small band of followers were brutally murdered by the Umayyad henchmen in the year 680. While Haji Muhsin was travelling around Asia and the Middle East in pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, in Bengal his parents had died and were buried in their locality. After the death of his parents, Mannujan Khanum, his older half-sister, assumed control of the

www.pathagar.com

family properties and estates. Subsequently, she married Mirza Salah al-Din Muhammad Khan, who was the deputy military governor of Hughli, but as fate would have it, her marriage came to an abrupt end following the untimely death of her husband, and she had no children from that marriage. Mannujan devoted the rest of her life to managing her family properties and estates.[7]

Although Haji Muhsin was a great traveller and an insatiable seeker of knowledge, he returned to Bengal on several occasions during his nearly three decades of travel. Indeed, according to British government records, he was in Bengal during the Great Famine of 1769 and 1770 (otherwise known as *Chhiyattarer Manvantar*): his name appeared on a list of philanthropists who contributed substantially to improving the dire socio-economic condition of his people at the time. It is true that Bengal had experienced famine on many other occasions, but it is equally true that this particular famine was of a different order altogether, both in terms of human and material loss. Severe drought in the year 1769 was followed by heavy rainfall in 1770, and this caused rivers to overflow and, as a result, rice and other crops were completely washed away. This, in turn, led to a severe shortage of food, and the East India Company's failure to suspend revenue collection only served to compound the problem. During this very difficult and damaging period in the history of Bengal, Haji Muhsin not only donated generously to the Government Famine Fund; he also went out of his way to establish several feeding centres for the poor and needy (*langarkhanas*). This was a remarkable gesture and an exemplary humanitarian initiative on his part. His love and affection for his people, both Muslims and Hindus, undoubtedly motivated him to undertake such a noble and praiseworthy initiative at this time of great socio-economic need.

When Muhsin assumed leadership of his family, his stepsister, Mannujan, handed over the day-to-day responsibility of managing the family estates to him. Following Mannujan's death in 1803—at the advanced age of around 80—Muhsin inherited all the family wealth; however, in accordance with his detached and ascetic ways, he opted to bequeath all his wealth and properties to charitable purposes. Three years after his sister's death, the seventy-four-year-old Muhsin established a *waqfnama* (or deed of endowment), which consisted of estates and properties worth in excess of 150,000 taka.[8] Although the Arabic word *waqf* (pl. *awqaf*) literally means 'prohibition' or 'confinement', it generally refers to the endowment of properties for certain specific charitable purposes. There are generally three main types of *waqf*: religious endowments (that is, endowment of estates to provide revenue for maintenance of mosques); charitable or philanthropic endowments (which provide support to the poor and serve public interest by funding schools, colleges, libraries, hospitals, orphanage and shelter for the needy and destitute); and family endowments (which are specifically established to provide an income for one's descendants). Haji Muhsin divided his *waqfnama* into three parts, such that one-third of the fund was set aside for the provision of religious and educational activities; one-ninth was specifically set aside to provide stipends to elderly and disabled people, and the remaining

www.pathagar.com

two-ninths was allocated to cover the costs of administering the fund including covering the remuneration of the two full-time *mutwallis* (administrators of the trust).

Six years after he established the fund, Muhammad Muhsin passed away, and, as per his instructions, two trustees assumed control of the fund. However, over time, they proved to be very incompetent and unscrupulous: so much so that they systematically misused and abused its proceeds, and even forged documents in order to create perpetual benefits for themselves and their families. This forced the East India Company to intervene in order to protect its own share of the revenue. After the two trustees were dismissed by the company officials, a lengthy and complex legal case ensued. This lasted for many years, until the Privy Council in London decided the case in favour of the fund. With the court's backing, the company assumed full control over the fund and, as a result, its revenue increased substantially (with its surplus income alone reaching around a million taka). This, in turn, enabled the company to utilise the surplus income to establish the Hughli (Hooghly) Muhsin College in 1836.[9]

This college was established to encourage Muslims to pursue further and higher education, however, according to Muhammad Abdur Rahim the majority of its students were Hindus: only two percent of students were Muslims. Thus an endowment established mainly for the educational advancement of the Muslims was used to primarily benefit the Hindu community.[10] In addition to this, no provision was made to support the poor—but deserving—Muslim students with scholarships or other concessionary benefits. Accordingly, the main purpose of the endowment was undermined, and the Muslim community was deprived of its benefits. Unsurprisingly, the authorities were accused of misusing the endowment, and as Sir William Hunter noted: 'It is painful to dwell on this charge of misappropriation, because it is impossible to rebut it.' To add insult to injury, the educational institutions that were controlled by the Hindus at the time did not admit Muslims. For example, the Hindu College in Calcutta was an exclusive institution that only admitted Hindu students (although this changed after 1854, when it became the Presidency College, and allowed Muslim students to enrol). Arabic and Persian were not taught in educational institutions controlled by the Hindus. Likewise, Bengali, the language of the masses, was taught in a Sanskritised form and this made the language inaccessible to majority of the students.

Even so, the Muhsin College was hailed as a pioneering centre for modern education in India, and it became affiliated with the University of Calcutta in 1857. Later, after the establishment of the University of Burdwan in 1960, the college became its constituent college. Since its founding, this college had attracted large numbers of students by offering high quality education and training. This allowed it to produce such famous scholars and personalities as Bankim Chandra Chattapadhyay, Justice Syed Ameer Ali, Muzaffar Ahmad and Muhammad Lutfur Rahman, among others. Thanks to the college's academic excellence and considerable intellectual, cultural and literary contributions, in 1872 the Government of India absorbed all the costs of maintaining the college building

www.pathagar.com

as well as paying the salary of its teachers and other staff.

Prior to the founding of Hughly Muhsin College, the fund had either established or maintained several other schools and *madrasahs*: including the Hughly Madrasah, which provided education in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, as well as the traditional Islamic sciences. In addition to this, the fund continued to maintain the Imambara Complex, sponsored major religious festivals and ceremonies and offer scholarships to poor but gifted Muslim students. The word *imambara* literally means 'the residence of the Imam' and in the subcontinent it refers to the place where the Shia Muslims gather to observe the Muharram (the first month of the Islamic calendar and the month in which Imam Husayn ibn Ali was brutally murdered by the Umayyad army in 680). This and other Shia religious ceremonies have been historically held in the Imambara. Since one of the aims of the Muhsin Fund was to maintain the Imambara Complex, its trustees ensured that it was managed properly. Today the Imambara is considered to be one of the most attractive tourist sites in the town of Hughli in West Bengal. Recently, the Indian Government allocated 59 lakh rupees for the restoration of the historic Imambara Complex as a tribute to the memory of Haji Muhammad Muhsin.

In addition to maintaining the Imambara and founding the Hughli Muhsin College, the fund also established the Chittagong Madrasah in 1874 in order to promote Islamic education and culture in East Bengal. In 1927, the Chittagong Madrasah was renamed Islamic Intermediate College, and following merger with the Government Higher Secondary College in 1979, it became known as Haji Muhammad Muhsin College. Today, it is considered to be one of Bangladesh's oldest and leading colleges. Given Muhsin's relentless effort to improve and enhance the educational condition of the Muslims of Bengal and the Muhsin Fund's remarkable contribution to the establishment of numerous tombs, mosques, hospitals, schools, colleges, *madrasahs* and other educational institutions throughout Bengal (in addition to offering regular scholarships to many poor but highly gifted Muslim students), the least that the Muslims of Bangladesh could have done was to name one of the Halls of Dhaka University after him, and thankfully this has now happened. F. B. Bradley-Birt, Muhsin's biographer, paid him this glowing tribute:

> No Muhammadan in Bengal in the nineteenth century has left behind him a greater or more honoured name than Haji Mahomed Mohsin. By his learning, piety and philanthrophy he set, while the century was yet young, a splendid example of all that a good citizen should be, not only to his own co-religionists but to all Bengal of whatever caste or creed. For over a hundred years the great Trust that he left behind him has kept his memory fresh, conferring immense benefits on succeeding generations and still continuing its educational and philantrophic work today. For all time it promises to remain a great memorial to his name... No man could have raised a greater and more noble a monument to himself than that which bears the name of Haji Mahomed Mohsin.[11]

This important Muslim philanthropist of Bengal (and that of the subcontinent as a whole) passed away at the age of 80. He was laid to rest

www.pathagar.com

within the precinct of the Imambara Complex (located in the present-day Indian state of West Bengal), where a tomb was later erected in his memory. His contributions to the regeneration of Muslim community of Bengal will no doubt ensure that his legacy will endure for a long time to come.



Notes

1. A. K. M. Yaqub Ali, *Aspects of Society and Culture of the Varendra, 1200–1576 AD.*
2. Muhammad Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume 1A: Muslim Rule in Bengal (600–1170/ 1203–1757).*
3. F. B. Bradley-Birt, *Twelve Men of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century.*
4. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal.*
5. Abdul Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times.*
6. M. M. Ali, op.cit.
7. F. B. Bradley-Birt, op. cit.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal, 1757–1947.*
11. F. B. Bradley-Birt, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

c.1763–c.1800



RAHIMUNNESA

ALTHOUGH SOME HISTORIANS have divided the history of Bengali literature into three periods, others have argued that four distinct phases can be identified in the development of Bengali literature. An advocate of the latter view was Muhammad Shahidullah, the renowned linguist and scholar of Bengali literature. He identified four phases in the emergence of Bengali literature: ancient, early medieval, late medieval and modern periods.[1] According to him, the ancient period began in 650 and ended in 1200, and the second phase started in 1200 and came to an end in 1350. During this latter period political Islam had entered Bengal under the leadership of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji and considerable progress was made in Bengali literature under the generous patronage of

www.pathagar.com

various Muslim rulers of the time. However, it was during the third phase, from 1350 to 1800, that the Muslims made their most important and enduring contribution to Bengali language and literature. Thanks to the encouragement and generous patronage of various Muslim rulers, pioneering writers and poets, including Shah Muhammad Saghir, Syed Sultan and Syed Alaol, emerged during this period and left their indelible marks in the annals of Bengali literature. The fourth period, according to Shahidullah, was post-1800, known as the modern period. Although during the late medieval period scores of Muslim writers and poets had produced some of the most important works of Bengali literature, it had been assumed that the literary scene at the time was entirely dominated by men; until, of course, the works of Rahimunnesa were discovered during the mid-twentieth century. With the discovery of her writings, she became the first—and as far as we know, the only—significant Muslim woman writer and poet of the late medieval Bengali literature.

Rahim al-Nisa, better known as Rahimunnesa, was born around the middle of eighteenth century into a learned but devout Muslim family in the village of Shulukhbhar in Chittagong (in present-day Bangladesh). Enamul Haq is the sole source of information about the life and literary activities of Rahimunnesa. In 1955, while he was teaching at Chittagong College, a retired college lecturer Sirajul Haq gave him a manuscript of Syed Alaol's famous *Padmavati*. Upon inspection, he discovered that it was a transliteration of the *Padmavati* by Rahimunnesa, a hitherto unknown female poet of late medieval Bengali literature. Excited by his discovery of a female Muslim writer and poet, two years later, Enamul Haq published an article on her life and work in the first issue of Bangla Academy Journal (*Bangla Academy Patrika*), which, as expected, generated much interest in the life and work of this remarkable and unique poetess.[2]

Thankfully, Enamul Haq's reconstruction of her life and work was based on a primary source: Rahimunnesa's own versified autobiographical account, which was appended to her transliteration of Syed Alaol's *Padmavati*. In this brief—but invaluable—autobiographical account, Rahimunnesa stated that her family members traced their ancestry back to the *Ahl-i-Quraysh*, referring to the noble Qurayshi tribe of Makkah (located in present-day Saudi Arabia). That is to say, her forefathers not only considered themselves to be the descendants of the Prophet of Islam, they also claimed to have accompanied Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet and son of Ali ibn Abi Talib (the fourth Caliph of Islam), from Makkah to the Iraqi city of Karbala in 680, where Husayn and his companions were subsequently brutally murdered by the forces of Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah, the-then Umayyad ruler. According to Rahimunnesa's account, her forefathers had fought on the side of Husayn at Karbala, but following the latter's defeat, they were swiftly dispatched to a place near present-day Baghdad. Although she did not outline the reason for this, it is likely that they were captured in the battlefield by the Umayyad forces and then sent there as prisoners of war where, after their release, they settled permanently. Later, they left Iraq and moved to Monghyr (located in the northeastern Indian state of Bihar). They may have travelled

www.pathagar.com

to that part of the world after the Muslims had conquered parts of northern India in 711 under the leadership of Muhammad ibn al-Qasim, although Rahimunnesa did not mention any dates. Accordingly, biographers can only speculate regarding the exact time, date and circumstances that led to her forefather's migration from Iraq to India.

In addition, Rahimunnesa did not mention her own date of birth. Enamul Haq contends that she was born during the mid-eighteenth century and had died towards the end of that century,[3] although there is no evidence to prove this. Nonetheless, it is very clear from Rahimunnesa's autobiographical account that her family members, after settling in Monghyr, had actively participated in several battles. They may have acted in the military service of the local rulers and, as such, were forced to take up arms to defend their territories against the other encroaching powers. Most notably, she stated that her immediate forefathers had fought against the British. For this reason, Jali Shah, her maternal great-grandfather, was forced to flee Monghyr and seek refuge in Chittagong, the coastal port-city of East Bengal (now located in Bangladesh). Rahimunnesa's reference to the battle against the British is important for understanding the politico-economic condition of the time. Enamul Haq and others have suggested that Rahimunnesa's reference to the battle against the British referred to Nawab Mir Qasim's political and military opposition to British hegemony in Bengal. If that is true, then it is important to understand the reasons for this battle that forced Jali Shah (her great-grandfather) to move to Chittagong.

The politico-economic condition of Bengal during the mid-eighteenth century was marred by both internal disunity and external political, economic and military challenges. Although the East India Company was initially established by the British in order to strengthen their economic interests in the subcontinent, over time the company became embroiled in the internal political affairs of India in general and those of Bengal in particular. This was, no doubt, facilitated by the rapid decline of the Mughal Empire following the death of Awrangzeb (the last of the great Mughals) in 1707, which enabled the company to accelerate its grip on politico-economic power in Bengal.[4] Following the defeat of Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah at the hands of the British in 1757, the latter fully consolidated their hegemony in that part of the world. Although the post of nawab remained, this was largely a ceremonial role, as the British began to exercise real political power and authority in Bengal at the time.

In 1760, following Robert Clive's departure from Bengal, his successor replaced Mir Ja'far, with Mir Qasim as the new Nawab. However, unlike his father-in-law, Mir Qasim was a brave and patriotic leader who had no intention of being a puppet in the service of the British. Accordingly, he took steps to regain Bengal's independence. Britain initiated military action against the poorly trained and ill-equipped forces of Mir Qasim, inflicting a crushing defeat on them at the Battle of Baxar. Mir Qasim's attempt to regain independence ended in failure because the political condition of the time was not in his favour. Although he and his supporters were inspired by genuine patriotic feelings, they were not fully prepared for the challenge that lay ahead. In the words of the

www.pathagar.com

historian Muhammad Mohar Ali:

> The English were already firmly established in Bengal ... [Yet] had there been no Mir Qasim there would have been no Baxar. That Mir Qasim failed at Baxar was due to the cardinal fact that the battle of Plassey had made the English the real power in Bengal. Plassey was the real beginning, while Baxar was a reconfirmation, of the English political domination over Bengal.[5]

Jali Shah, Rahimunnesa's great-grandfather, most probably fought on the side of Nawab Mir Qasim against the British at Baxar and, having suffered defeat, was forced to leave his native Monghyr and seek refuge in Chittagong. Whether he had directly participated in the battle or not, he no longer felt safe in Monghyr and therefore moved to a secure part of Chittagong, where he established his reputation as a man of considerable Islamic learning and spirituality. In Rahimunnesa's own words (the verses translated by Shirin Akhter,[6] with some modifications by the present writer):

I hereby describe my name and family

Dear poets, listen to my words

Jali Shah is a renowned person

He belongs to the family of Ahl-i-Quraysh

When he followed Imam

He followed him to a battle

Men were attached to the General of Husayn

Remembering God they advanced

Their dresses varied a lot

The Imam reached Baghdad as ordered

Some of the forces went to Monghyr

Where they fought against many Kings

They also fought against the British

It's God's will that the British were victorious

All wealth of the leading personalities

Were robbed by sinners

Thereafter he left his own native land

And moved to Chittagong, where he settled.

Following in the footsteps of her great-grandfather, her grandfather became a prominent spiritual figure in that locality. His son, Shah Abdul Qadir, in turn, became a notable Sufi personality and in due course he married Alimunnesa, who bore him three sons and one daughter. Their sons were Abdul Jabbar, Abdul Sattar and Abdul Ghafur; their daughter was none other than Rahimunnesa. Since Shah Abdul Qadir died when Rahimunnesa was still young, she was brought up and educated under the care of her mother. Alimunnesa was known to have been an honourable and learned person, and she ensured her young daughter received a good education.

As Muhammad Mohar Ali has pointed out, at the time children started their education at the age of four to five years of age, and this often took place at the *maktab* (Qur'an school) where they learnt to read the Qur'an and received basic instruction in Islamic practices, such as how to perform ablution, prayer, fasting, *hajj*, *zakat*, and other observances. They would usually study at Qur'an schools for four to five years before enrolling at high school for further education in Arabic, Persian and Bengali languages, mathematics, science, aspects of

www.pathagar.com

history and other similar subjects. An ability to read and write Persian was considered to be essential, as this was the official language of administration in Bengal. Thus, Persian was learned thoroughly by both Muslim and Hindu students, as this enabled them to secure government jobs and services.[7]

Although Rahimunnesa was a bright student who pursued education up to secondary level, it is not known whether she attended her local schools or if she was educated privately at home. She was probably taught, initially, by her mother at home, before enrolling at the village school. However, we do know that Rahimunnesa had studied under the tutelage of Abul Husayn, who was a local teacher and educationalist, and who had thus acquired considerable proficiency in Persian, Arabic and Bengali; Rahimunnesa paid a glowing tribute to Abul Husayn in one of her poems. However, if losing her father was a traumatic experience for young Rahimunnesa, then the unexpected death of her brother, Abdul Sattar, made her inconsolable. As a gifted poet, she expressed her sorrow and pain in the form of elegaic poetry. In due course, her mother arranged her marriage with Ahmad Ali who hailed from a noble and wealthy family from the village of Meghla in Chittagong.

According to her own account, Ahmad Ali and his family treated her like a princess, and her marriage was a blissful affair. In addition to praising her husband for his kindness and liberality, she paid a glowing tribute to Ghulam Husayn, her father-in-law, for his good qualities and attributes. In Rahimunnesa's own words:

In Meghla's virtuous residence

A very beautiful house of cultured people

With abiding happiness

No crime enters

Aristocratic culture performed

[The] head is the father-in-law

Very sophisticated

Ghulam Husayn is sober

He is the embodiment of all virtue

Giver of ample alms

He is as temperate as Judhisthir.

Also, referring to her husband, Rahimunnesa wrote:

[My] husband is Ahmad Ali

My husband is a king of sweetness

Cultured society, a great religious act

Never spoils his soul.

After a difficult and traumatic early life, Rahimunnesa finally found lasting peace, prosperity and happiness in her husband's family. Her wise and supportive husband encouraged her to pursue literary activities. This was not surprising, given the fact that Ahmad Ali was himself an educated and devout Muslim, who was very fond of learning and literature. So much so that Rahimunnesa composed her *Elegy on Dordana* (*Dordana Bilap*) at the insistence of her husband. In her own words:

Gentle Ahmad Ali is full of knowledge

Is rightly honoured, generous in giving alms

I compose this literary contribution on his guidance

www.pathagar.com

I, Rahimunnessa, is my name

Gentle lady is my prefix.

Although Enamul Haq had discovered her transliteration of Syed Alaol's *Padmavati* (which incorporated her versified autobiographical account), it was Muhammad Shahidullah who had identified and introduced her other important contribution, namely *Layli-Majnu*.[8] Derived from original Persian sources, this desert-based, romantic story of *Laylah Majnun* was first popularised by the Persian poet, Nizam Ganj, and subsequently became very famous throughout Persia and the subcontinent. Dawlat Uzair Bahram Khan, the medieval Muslim poet of Bengal, first introduced and popularised this romantic tale in Bengal, between 1545 and 1553. According to her biographers, Rahimunnesa had composed this work (referred to as *Layli-Majnu*) before her marriage, whereas the transliteration of the *Padmavati* was completed after her marriage. She wrote:

Padmavati is a pious lady

I honour Alaol

He is honoured by his acumen

He wrote this memorable volume

Melodious verses are very powerful

How could I fathom, poor lady

[My] husband's request I do accept

I dared to craft these lines.

Like *Layli-Majnu*, the *Padmavati* was a love story with a mystical meaning and message. It highlighted the story of a Sri Lankan princess who is desired by two of the leading rulers of the time, namely the King Ratna Sen of Chitore and Sultan Alauddin Khalji of Delhi. This story sought to draw a direct parallel between Divine love (which is everlasting) and worldly love (which is temporal). Originally composed in Hindi by Malik Muhammad Jaysi, it was later adapated into Bengali by Syed Alaol.[9] Encouraged by her husband, Rahimunnesa not only successfully completed this important work, she also composed several other, smaller works of poetry, including *Elegy for My Brother* (*Bhratri Bilap*). She is said to have composed this work after the death of her younger brother. However, it could have also been written in memory of her father, as she also made a direct reference to being an orphan. Either way, this poem expresses her deep sorrow and feelings of anguish and loss in a very powerful and poignant way. In her own words:

Jewel of destiny returns

Fate changes mindlessly

Suddenly lightening strikes my head

I've sinned in [my] earlier life

That fault, I reap now

Hopeless, I've been turned into an orphan.

She continues:

Ashwin is spotted with sand

I weep calling my brother

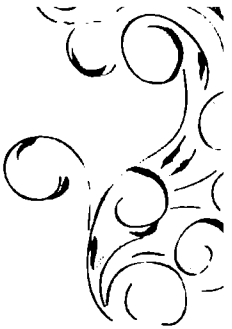
Hearing my cries

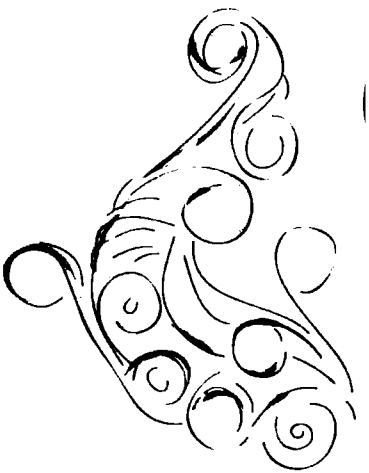
Animals in the woods cry too

Fishes hide, crying in the water.

www.pathagar.com

Having been brought up in a religiously conservative family and educated in a patriarchal society, Rahimunnesa, by way of her outstanding character, intellect and creative abilities, carved out a unique place for herself in the annals of Bengali language and literature. It is not possible to say whether she had composed any other books, as none have come to light so far. As an intelligent, emotional and sensitive lady, it would not have been surprising if she had composed other works, although we may never know that for sure. However, thanks to Muhammad Enamul Haq's remarkable efforts, Rahimunnesa today rightly occupies an honourable and well-deserved place in the annals of Bengali literature.





Notes

1. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bangla Bhashar Itibritta.*
2. A. I. Sheikh, 'Mudyeyuger Bangla Sahityer Muslim Mahila Kabi Rahimunnesa' in *Bangla Bhasay Musalmander Abadan.*
3. Ibid.
4. Abdul Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times.*
5. Muhammad Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume 2: Bengal Muslims During the First Century of British Rule, 1757–1871.*
6. Shirin Akhter, *Rahimunnisa (circa 1763–1800): First Woman Poetess of Bengal.*
7. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal, 1757–1947.*
8. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bangla Sahityer Katha.*
9. M. A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal.*

www.pathagar.com

1781–1840

HAJI SHARI'ATULLAH

THE EIGHTEENTH AND nineteenth centuries represented a challenging period in the history of the subcontinent for a number of reasons. Firstly, politically the decline of Mughal authority gave way to British encroachment in the form of the East India Company, which eventually led to British occupation of India in 1857. Likewise, from a socio-economic perspective, the subcontinent was going through a very difficult time: partly precipitated by shortage of food, and partly by the breakdown of social solidarity and political unity that led to further chaos and confusion. Furthermore, the religious communities became increasingly hostile towards each other due to deterioration in Hindu–Muslim relations and the influx of Christian missionaries from Europe (especially

www.pathagar.com

Britain).[1] During this period of considerable political, social, economic and religious challenges and difficulties, a number of Muslim political and religious movements emerged to reverse the tide of decline and degeneration. Valiant efforts for change were made by a number of Muslims, including: Shah Waliullah of Delhi and his successors; Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotwi and his *dar al-'ulum* at Deoband; Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his Aligarh movement; and Sayyid Ahmad Shahid and his *jihad* movement. Haji Shari'atullah also emerged in Bengal to reform Muslim society in the light of the Holy Qur'an and the authentic Prophetic norms and practices (*sunnah*).

Haji Shari'atullah was born into a lower middle-class Muslim family from the village of Char Shamail in present-day Madaripur District (formerly Faridpur District). His father, Abdul Jalil Talukdar, was a small landholder who ensured his son attended the local Qur'an school (*maktab*) to learn Arabic and acquire Islamic knowledge. Shari'atullah was only eight when his father died. After his father's death, the family endured considerable personal and economic hardship, although his uncles, Muhammad Ashiq Talukdar and Abdul Azim Talukdar, supported the family as much as they could.[2] The former worked as an officer at the court of the Nawab of Murshidabad and the latter was a small-time landholder who struggled to make ends meet. After completing his early education in Shamail, at the age of 12, Shari'atullah left his native village and moved to Calcutta where he studied the Qur'an for a year under the tutelage of Mawlana Basharat Ali, who was a local Islamic teacher and preacher. Encouraged by Mawlana Basharat Ali, he proceeded to Furfura (located in Hughli in the present-day Indian state of West Bengal), where he pursued Arabic and Persian, before moving to Murshidabad where his uncle was working at the time. As a studious young man, he continued to polish his knowledge of Arabic and Persian before setting off for Arabia along with Mawlana Basharat Ali, his erstwhile mentor and guide, to perform the sacred *hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah).

According to Shari'atullah's biographers, he did not return to Bengal after completing the pilgrimage; instead he stayed in Makkah in order to pursue higher education in Arabic, Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), *hadith* literature, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and aspects of Islamic spirituality (*tasawwuf*). He became known as Haji Shari'atullah by virtue of the fact that he had successfully completed the sacred *hajj* and became a scholar. As cradles of Islamic civilisation, Makkah and Madinah had been major centres of Islamic learning and scholarship from the outset. As such, Shari'atullah had access to the prominent scholars and preachers who lived there at the time, including Shaykh Murad (who was himself of Bengali origin) and Shaykh Tahir Sambal, a prominent Hanafi jurist and Sufi scholar. According to his biographers, Shari'atullah stayed in Makkah for no less than 15 years, during which he not only mastered Arabic but also acquired an unrivalled expertise in traditional Islamic sciences.[3] In addition to this, he performed the *hajj* more than half-a-dozen times and engaged in devotional activities in the Prophet's mosque (*masjid al-nabi*) in Madinah. He lived at a time when Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, an influential Islamic reformer of the nineteenth century,

www.pathagar.com

emerged in Arabia and called his people back to the original, pristine message of Islam. He may even have met this great Islamic scholar and reformer during his travels in Arabia, although there is no conclusive evidence to prove this.

After living in Arabia for more than a decade-and-a half, Haji Shari'atullah proceeded to Egypt and stayed in Cairo for two years, during which he pursued further research in Islamic sciences at the library of the historic al-Azhar University, before finally returning home to Faridpur. He had been away for almost a quarter of a century (he left home at the age of 12 and returned in 1818 when he was around 37). Thanks to his long stay in the heartlands of Islam, Shari'atullah was regarded as one of the most fluent Arabic speakers among the Bengali *ulama* (Islamic scholars) of his generation. More importantly, on his return to Bengal, he was shocked and dismayed to see how the locals had succumbed to the lures of many un-Islamic customs and practices (such as excessive veneration of Sufis, celebration of Hindu festivals, frequent visits to shrines of saints, and the widespread acceptance of magic and sorcery within Bengal's Muslim society). Shari'atullah was further horrified to learn that the locals had begun to neglect fundamental Islamic rites and rituals (such as the five daily prayers) and that this, in turn, had led to the gradual dilution of original, pristine Islamic principles and practices across the Muslim society. According to his biographers, his uncle Muhammad Ashiq Talukdar had died on the very day he had returned home from Egypt and his refusal to participate in superstitious funeral practices earned him the wrath of the local people.[4] Perhaps this was inevitable, given Shari'atullah's thorough knowledge of Islam in stark contrast to the locals' eclectic version of the faith that synthesised aspects of Islamic and Hindu practices.

Noting the local lack of knowledge of the faith, and its deviation from original, pristine Islam, Shari'atullah instigated a programme of reform in his locality. He formulated and espoused a reformist methodology, even though he had no previous experience of social reform, political activism or religious work. He began by delivering regular lectures on the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions in his locality, thereby hoping to win over the locals to his cause. This marked the beginning of his Islamic reform movement. His initial efforts did not impress the locals and, as a result, he was forced to rethink his strategy. During this period he married and, a year later, his son Muhsinuddin Ahmad (better known as Dudu Mian) was born. After the birth of his son, Shari'atullah returned to Makkah where he lived for nearly a year and it was during his stay in the sacred city of Islam that he decided to return to his native Bengal and relaunch his reformist movement.[5]

After returning home, a reinvigorated Shari'atullah began to preach the authentic message of Islam to the locals. His stinging criticism of un-Islamic local customs and practices, coupled with his powerful and cogent exposition of the fundamentals of Islam, soon captured the imagination of the local Muslims. That is to say, his twofold strategy—the cogent critique of deviant religious customs on the one hand and the articulation of authentic Islamic beliefs and practices on the other—proved to be an instant success, because his repudiation of un-Islamic practices was based solely on the

www.pathagar.com

scriptural sources of Islam. In that sense, his approach to Islamic reform was very similar to that of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the eighteenth-century Arabian reformer, who was also a champion of pure, unadulterated Islam that was based primarily on a literalist interpretation and understanding of the Divine revelation and the Prophetic norms and practices.

Perhaps inspired by the reformist ideas and thoughts of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Shari'atullah emphasised the Islamic concept of *tawhid* (or Unity of God) in the light of the Holy Qur'an and authentic Prophetic teachings. Although the Arabic word *tawhid* literally means 'to make something one', theologically speaking it refers to the fact that God is One (*Al-Ahad*). That is to say: He is the First (*Al-Awwal*) and the Last (*Al-Akhir*), the only Creator (*Khaliq*), Cherisher and Sustainer (*Rabb*) of the entire universe and as such He alone deserves to be glorified and worshipped. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab argued that the main mission of all the Prophets and Messengers of God, including the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him), was to disseminate this pure, unadulterated message of *tawhid*. Indeed, he developed a comprehensive exposition of this fundamental Islamic concept in his famous work, *A Treatise on Divine Unity* (*Kitab al-Tawhid*). Although historians do not know if Shari'atullah read this book, like Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, he argued that *tawhid* was the fountainhead of the Islamic worldview and that all the principles and practices of the faith emanated from this fundamental belief.

It is worth pointing out that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab emerged at a time when much of Arabia had succumbed to the lures of folklore, superstition and degenerative mysticism. Thus, his religious mission was to free Arabian society from the stranglehold of superstitious beliefs (*shirk*) and blameworthy innovations (*bid'ah dalalah*). He attempted to revive the pure message of Islam based on his literalist reading of the Holy Qur'an and *sahih ahadith* (authentic Prophetic traditions). Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's reformist approach to Islam was welcomed by Muhammad ibn Saud, the local ruler, and this in turn bolstered the former's politico-religious standing in Arabia, thus inspiring others to follow in his footsteps. Not unlike Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Shari'atullah believed that reforming the existing social, political, economic and legal systems in the light of *tawhid* was a *sine qua non* for the realisation of the message of Divine Unity in practice. In addition to emphasising the need for a correct understanding of the Islamic concepts of Divine Unity (*tawhid*), Prophethood (*risalah*) and Life after Death (*akhirah*), Shari'atullah highlighted the fundamental religious duties of Islam: namely the five daily prayers (*salah*), poor due (*zakat*), fasting during the month of Ramadan (*sawm*) and pilgrimage to Makkah (*hajj*). Belief in *tawhid* in its purity and entirety demanded, he argued, the necessity of implementing the fundamental religious duties and obligations by all Muslims, men and women alike.[6]

Just as Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had lived and pursued his reformist movement in eighteenth century Arabia, Shari'atullah did the same in Bengal during the nineteenth century. Despite the striking similarity between their messages, however there were some differences in their separate approaches to—and interpretation of—Islamic law and jurisprudence. For instance, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab did not believe

www.pathagar.com

in the imitation (*taqlid*) of the medieval Islamic jurists (*fuqaha*). Inspired by eminent thirteenth century Islamic jurist Ibn Taymiyyah, and his prominent disciples (like Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and Imam Ibn Kathir), the Arabian reformer advocated the need for fresh *ijtihad* (individual juristic reasoning) in matters of Islamic law and jurisprudence. Conversly, Shari'atullah was a strict adherent of the Hanafi *madhhab* (school of Islamic jurisprudence founded by Imam Abu Hanifah back in Kufah, Iraq, in the eighth century). In other words, despite his strong and uncompromising exposition of fundamental Islamic beliefs, Shari'atullah's reformist movement maintained continuity with the Islamic past by their rigorous adherence to traditional Islamic thought and scholarship (especially Hanafi jurisprudence). Perhaps this was inevitable, given the challenges faced by the Muslims in eighteenth century Arabia were very different from the problems and predicament that confronted the Muslims of Bengal in the nineteenth century. For this reason Shari'atullah deliberately focused on purifying the fundamental beliefs and practices of local Muslims while adhering to the Hanafi *madhhab* at the same time.

Although Shari'atullah's focus on the fundamentals of Islam was a legitimate and praiseworthy approach (Islamic scholars and jurists of all schools of thought [*madhahib*] have agreed on the importance of upholding the fundamental principles and practices of the faith), he never referred to his reformist efforts as the Fara'idi movement. On the contrary, he and his followers only considered themselves to be practising Muslims. Yet, over time, he and his followers became known as the instigators of the Fara'idi (meaning 'those who emphasise the fundamental principles and practices of Islam') movement. The term Fara'idi was, in fact, coined by others, although it is not clear who first applied this term to the followers of Shari'atullah. According to some historians, it was Shari'atullah's Muslim rivals who had applied the term to his reformist movement, due to his peculiar stance on the two Eid prayers and the weekly congregational (*jumu'ah*) prayers.[7] Despite being an adherent of the Hanafi *madhhab*, Shari'atullah was of the opinion that the performance of the above prayers was not *wajib* (obligatory) on the Muslims of Bengal because they were living under non-Muslim rule, that is to say, he considered British-ruled Bengal to be *dar al-harb* (literally 'the land of war'). His stance on this issue was a moral and legalistic one, and he did not oppose the British authorities using either political or military means.

Nevertheless, his views on this issue did not go unchallenged by other prominent Muslim scholars and reformers of Bengal (including Titu Mir and Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, among others). Thanks to his insistence on the observance of the obligatory religious duties (*fara'id*) and, at the same time, his suspension of some compulsory (*wajib*) rites and rituals, as well as his literalist understanding of Islamic scriptural sources and as his profound and outspoken dislike of the veneration of saints and their tombs, Shari'atullah and his followers were criticised across Bengal. In summary, the key religious beliefs and doctrines of Shari'atullah's reform movement emphasised the importance of the following: maintaining the *tawhid* (Oneness of Divinity); the need for constant performance of *tawbah* (genuine

www.pathagar.com

repentance to God); the necessity of adhering to the five pillars of Islam (*arkan al-Islam*); and the need to avoid all forms of *shirk* (acts that violate *tawhid*) and *bid'ah* (or blameworthy religious innovations), such as the veneration of Sufis, visiting Sufi shrines and participation in un-Islamic festivities.[8]

Although Shari'atullah considered British-ruled Bengal as *dar al-harb* (this is the reason he disagreed with his fellow Hanafi Muslims concerning the performance of Eid and *jumu'ah* prayers in Bengal), he nevertheless believed that all people, irrespective of their race, colour, nationality and socio-economic status, were equal in the sight of God. For this reason, he not only opposed but also repudiated the Hindu caste system. His formulation of the Islamic concept of brotherhood and equality soon attracted the attention of the poor and the downtrodden people in Faridpur, Dhaka, Bakarganj, Noakhali, Mymensingh and parts of Chittagong and Assam. This, in turn, led to the popularisation and dissemination of his reformist message, which won him a large following among working-class families, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. At a time when poor and disenfranchised Muslims of Bengal faced considerable political and economic problems and difficulties, which were exacerbated by the unfavourable attitude of the British elites and the unjust policies of the Hindu landholders (*zamindar*) towards the Muslims of Bengal, Shari'atullah empowered and reinvigorated the masses by advocating social equality, economic self-sufficiency and the need for political unity and solidarity.

Shari'atullah detested the fact that the Muslims of Bengal were living under non-Muslim rule, however, he did not go out of his way to provoke the British authorities nor did he engage in any subversive activities, even though some of his biographers have argued that he had encouraged his followers to rebel against unjust, oppressive Hindu landlords and the indigo planters. There is no evidence to prove that he had advocated any form of political rebellion or subversion, however he had protested against the imposition of excessive taxes on the poor, especially in circumstances where that was over and above the limit prescribed in law. Even so, his effort to revive authentic Islamic principles and practices in Bengal's Muslim society was not welcomed either by the British elites or the Hindu landlords. Both kept a close eye on his religious activities, to the extent that in 1831 he was forced to leave Nayabari and move to Nawabganj because the British authorities felt threatened by his ability to mobilise the masses.

Undeterred, he continued his mission and over time his message spread far and wide. Due to his success, in 1837 the British authorities accused him of plotting to establish a separate Muslim state. British officials and their supporters filed several lawsuits against Shari'atullah and his followers. As a result, Shari'atullah was forced to endure considerable personal hardship and suffering (he was forced to spend time in police custody on more than one occasion). However, these trials and tribulations only strengthened his resolve as he continued to encourage his followers to adhere to the authentic principles and practices of Islam. Shari'atullah had laid so much emphasis on the need to purify one's beliefs, thoughts and practices from un-Islamic influence and habits

www.pathagar.com

that, over time, his followers became renowned for their strict and uncompromising adherence to his religious instructions and guidelines.

A few years later, this gifted and outstanding Muslim reformer of Bengal passed away at the age of 59, and he was laid to rest in Dhaka. He was succeeded by his son, Dudu Mian. Brought up and educated under the watchful gaze of his learned father, Dudu Mian had left for Makkah when he was only 12, in order to pursue further and higher education. After studying in Makkah and Madinah for nearly five years, he returned to Bengal at the age of around 17 and assumed leadership of the Fara'idi movement.

Under his inspirational leadership, this organisation became a complex, unified and consolidated mass movement that championed the rights of the poor and disenfranchised members of society. Although the political and socio-economic policies of the Fara'idi movement were formulated by his father, it was Dudu Mian who took practical measures to protect the masses from the unfair and unjust policies of the Hindu landlords as well as the European indigo planters. Driven to secure justice and fairplay for the peasants, Dudu Mian created a hierarchy of leadership (that is, deputies or *khalifah* of different grades) within the movement whose main task was to guide the masses and help him to implement the organisation's socio-economic policies at the grassroots level.[9]

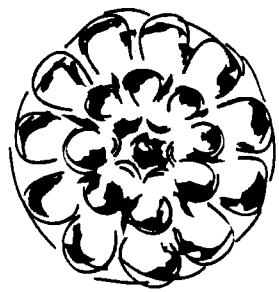
Under Dudu Mian's stewardship, the Fara'idi movement advocated the need for political freedom, economic fairness and self-sufficiency, and social equality and justice in Bengal. As soon as the movement became strong and unified, he organised some of his followers into village fighting forces (*lathiyal*) whose sole job was to protect their members and their properties from the unscrupulous henchmen hired by the wealthy Hindu landlords and the indigo planters.[10] These fighting forces consisted of volunteers from local villages. According to some historians, Dudu Mian was inspired to set up this fighting force by his contemporary, Sayyid Mir Nisar Ali (better known as Titu Mir), following his meeting with the latter in 1830, a year before Titu Mir and his followers were attacked and brutally suppressed by the forces of the East India Company.

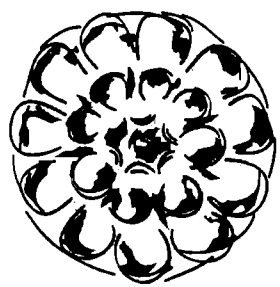
Dudu Mian's fighting forces became so influential and effective that they were able to drive out the henchmen hired by the Hindu landlords and the indigo planters. This, in turn, brought much-needed peace and prosperity in those rural areas where they were in the majority. Following in the footsteps of his father, Dudu Mian did not go out of his way to provoke confrontation with the British officials; rather, he regularly liaised with them and ensured that his activities did not violate the law or opposed the British government. The brutal suppression of Titu Mir and his followers by the powerful East India Company probably served as a clear warning against provoking the British army. Even so, following the Sepoy Revolt of 1857 Dudu Mian was arrested by the British authorities and held in custody at Alipur prison (located close to Calcutta). He was held there until 1861, when he was freed by the government. Dudu Mian passed away in 1862 at the age of 41 and, like his father, was laid to rest in Dhaka.

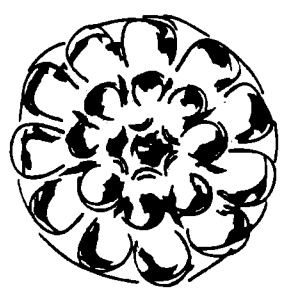
By all accounts, the contributions of Haji Shari'atullah and the Fara'idi movement to

www.pathagar.com

the revival of Islam in Bengal in general and in East Bengal in particular were nothing short of remarkable. His reformist efforts and activities popularised authentic Islamic thought, culture and heritage in that part of the subcontinent.[11] In fact, his religious ideas and thoughts have continued to play a powerful and enduring role in Bangladesh and parts of West Bengal to this day. For this reason, the name of Haji Shari'atullah will be fondly remembered by posterity for a long time to come.







Notes

1. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, *Social History of the Muslims of Bangladesh under British Rule.*
2. Z. A. Kismati, *Bangladesher Katipay Alim-o-Pir Mashaikh.*
3. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, *Faraizi Andalaner Itihas.*
4. Ibid.
5. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, *Islamic Revivalism of the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries.*
6. M. A. Khan, op. cit.
7. Muhammad Abdullah, *Rajnitite Bangiya Ulamar Bhumika.*
8. M. A. Khan, op. cit.
9. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
10. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, *British Bharatiya Nathite Titumir-o-Tar Anusarigan.*
11. M. I. Ansari, 'The Fara'idi Movement and its Role in the Development of Islamic Culture in East Bengal' in *Seminar Papers.*

www.pathagar.com

1782–1831

TITU MIR

In 1707, the death of Awrangzeb, the last of the Great Mughals, represented a major turning point in the history of Muslim India. Awrangzeb was succeeded by his sons, who failed to live up to their father's expectations, and the Mughal Empire began to decline irreversibly. Mughal decline paved the way for the British East India Company to strengthen its economic influence in the country and it became more active in the political arena.

Exactly half a century after the death of Awrangzeb, the young Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah of Bengal took steps to curtail the growing power of the East India Company, however, he was resoundingly defeated by Robert Clive at the Battle of Plassey (Palashi) on 23 June 1757. This enabled the British authorities to

www.pathagar.com

install a puppet nawab at Murshidabad while they consolidated their political, economic and military power in India. In addition to receiving the Chabbish (24) Parganas from the new Nawab as a gift, the East India Company obtained the strategically important districts of Burdwan, Midnapur and Chittagong in 1760. In so doing, they laid claim to some of Bengal's most important regions. While the British increased their ownership of land and resources, the administrators of this puppet nawab did not hold back either, and they, too, played their part in the mass plunder of Bengal's wealth and natural resources that contributed to the decimation of local economies, and precipitated the Great Famine of 1769–1770 (also known as *Chhiyattarer Manvantar*). This famine proved to be devastating in terms of human suffering and hardship as it killed a large proportion of Bengal's population.[1] Amidst the prevailing political, social, economic and military conflict and confusion, Titu Mir, a brave Muslim freedom fighter of Bengal, emerged to challenge British politico-economic hegemony in that part of the world.

Sayyid Mir Nisar Ali, better known as Titu Mir, was born on 27 January 1782 in the village of Chandpur in the then Chabbish (24) Parganas in present-day Indian state of West Bengal. By all accounts, Titu Mir hailed from a noble and learned family whose members traced their genealogy back to Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him). According to his biographers, Titu Mir's father, Mir Hasan Ali, was a descendant of Sayyid Shahadat Ali who, in turn, claimed to be a descendant of the Prophet of Islam through Caliph Ali and Fatimah, the youngest daughter of the Prophet.[2]

After Sayyid Abdullah Ali (a direct descendant of Mir Hasan Ali and a man of profound learning) was appointed *Mir-i-Insaf* (Chief Judge) of his locality by the-then ruler of Delhi, the family assumed the title of 'Mir' (it should be pointed out here that the titles 'Mir' and 'Sayyid' are often used interchangeably by those families who claim to be the descendants of the Prophet of Islam). Titu Mir's mother, Abida Ruqaiyyah Khatun, was as devout as his father, and she ensured that her son received a thorough Islamic education. During his early years, Titu Mir learned Arabic and committed the Qur'an to memory, in addition to receiving tutorials in Persian and Urdu from Hafiz Ni'matullah of Bihar who was a teacher at a local Islamic seminary. While pursuing aspects of traditional Islamic sciences, he learned Bengali and became a successful wrestler, renowned for his physical prowess and mental stamina. He completed memorisation of the Qur'an and collections of Prophetic traditions (*ahadith*) before he had reached his twentieth birthday. Subsequently, he married the daughter of Muhammad Rahimullah Siddiqi, who was a well-known local teacher and Islamic scholar.[3]

After his marriage, and accompanied by his mentor Hafiz Ni'matullah, Titu Mir moved to Calcutta where he came in contact with two distinguished Muslim personalities of the time: Jamal al-Din Affendi and Mirza Ghulam Anbiya. Both were prominent local businessmen and Mirza Ghulam was a generous patron of Islamic learning and scholarship. Titu Mir received much support from both of them. During this period he polished his knowledge and understanding of Arabic and the Islamic

www.pathagar.com

sciences under the tutelage of eminent scholars like Shaykh Kamal Bakarganji and Shaykh Zaki of Bihar and, at the same time, gained a reputation as a skilful wrestler. Since Calcutta was a bustling centre of commerce and learning at the time, it was not surprising that a talented young man like Titu Mir flourished under the patronage of some of the city's prominent Muslim personalities. Thanks to his early training in Islamic sciences, he remained true to his Islamic values and principles throughout his career as a wrestler, even though his critics (especially the Hindu and European landholders) tried to malign his character to paint him as an unscrupulous person and a petty criminal. As expected, most of his biographers have dismissed such accusations as being inaccurate and unreliable.[4] To the contrary, his biographers have argued that he was a sincere young man who was determined to excel as a professional wrestler while simultaneously specialising in Islamic thought and spirituality. This view was reinforced by his subsequent decision to leave Calcutta and go to Arabia in order to perform the sacred *hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah).

Perhaps encouraged by his mentors, Shaykh Kamal Bakarganji and Shaykh Kamal, he arrived in Makkah in around 1823 accompanied by his patron, Mirza Ghulam Anbiya. During his stay in Arabia he performed the *hajj* and engaged in devotional activities in the Prophet's mosque in Madinah. He also received advanced training in Arabic and Islamic sciences under the guidance of some of Arabia's leading scholars. Since Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (the founder of the Islamic reformist movement in Arabia and an ally of Muhammad ibn Saud, the founder of the first Saudi state) had died barely three decades before Titu Mir's came to Makkah, the former's reformist Islamic message was still fresh and vibrant in the heartlands of Islam. As such, Titu Mir was likely to have come into contact with scholars and preachers who championed the reformist message; although there is no evidence to suggest that he was influenced by the religious doctrines of the reformer. Although he was a contemporary of Haji Shari'atullah and Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, as far as we know, he had not met either of them. However, all three of them had visited Arabia and initiated similar reform movements: Haji Shari'atullah initated his reform movement in East Bengal, Sayyid Ahmad Shahid died fighting the Sikhs in northern India, and Titu Mir lived and instigated his *jihad* against the corrupted, oppressive landholders in West Bengal during the same period.

Titu Mir returned to Calcutta in around 1827, when he was in his mid-forties. His stay in Arabia exposed him to the original scriptural sources of Islam and this probably changed his view of his faith and culture. On his return to Calcutta he carefully observed the society, culture and customs of the local Muslims and found their knowledge and understanding of Islam to be eclectic and confusing. They claimed to be Muslims; however their habits, customs and practices were heavily influenced by Hindu beliefs, folklore and polytheistic practices. Titu Mir launched his reformist movement in order to call the Muslims back to the authentic message of the Qur'an and the Prophet. Like the other Muslim reformers of the time, he began by inviting the locals to the message of *tawhid* (Oneness of Divinity), which is the central tenet of Islam. Similar to

www.pathagar.com

Haji Shari'atullah and his son Muhsinuddin Ahmad (Dudu Mian), Titu Mir criticised the locals for their veneration of saints and their shrines and repudiated all forms of blameworthy religious innovations (*bid'ah dalalah*) that were prevalent in Bengal's Muslim society at the time.[5] Although some traditional Muslims disagreed with Titu Mir's reformist agenda, the masses responded very positively to his call for reform. He encouraged his supporters to build mosques to accommodate increasing numbers of worshippers and urged them to lead their lives in accordance with fundamental Islamic principles and practices, thus stressing the importance of observing the five pillars of Islam (*arkan al-Islam*): namely, the declaration of faith (*shahadah*), the performance of five daily prayers (*salah*), the poor due (*zakat*), fasting during the month of Ramadan (*sawm*) and the pilgrimage to Makkah (*hajj*).

In addition to this, Titu Mir emphasised the need for moral responsibility, social equality, economic fairness and political independence, which struck a chord with the locals. By openly repudiating the Hindu caste system and criticising the oppressive socio-economic policies of the wealthy Hindu landholders (*zamindar*) and the unjust policies of the European indigo planters, he became a spokesman for the long suffering working-class people of Chabbish (24) Parganas. As his reformist message spread across that area, local people came in their droves to join his expanding Islamic movement. In response, he organised his followers into a brotherhood and encouraged them to perform their prayers in congregation in their local mosques, thus fostering a sense of community and solidarity in the Muslim community. Following in the footsteps of the Prophet of Islam, Titu Mir and his followers established many mosques and *maktab* (Qur'anic school) throughout the Chabbish Parganas, Nadia, Jessore and other areas.[6] These institutions became their centres of social and religious activities. Thanks to his uncompromising message of social equality and economic fairness, Titu Mir's movement became very popular within a very short time.

His growing success soon alarmed the wealthy Hindu landholders and the European indigo planters. In response to Titu Mir's rising popularity as well as his message of socio-economic fairness and equality, the local landholders and the indigo planters joined forces to create confusion and dissension within the Islamic movement and to neutralise its growing power and position in the local Muslim community. Led by prominent Hindu landholders like Ram Narayan Nag (of Taragoonia), Gaur Prasad Chowdhury (of Nagarpur) and Krishna Deb Rai (of Purwa or Punrah), they encouraged Titu Mir's rivals to oppose his movement. Thereafter, more intrusive and provocative measures were instigated against the Muslim reformer and his followers by their rivals including a ban on building mosques and the prohibition of slaughtering cows, among other things.[7]

Although these draconian measures were instigated by the local Hindu landholders (with the support of the European indigo planters), Titu Mir and his followers did not take any provocative actions against the landholders. In accordance with Islamic etiquette and morality, he wanted to resolve these issues through negotiation however—as expected—his

www.pathagar.com

opponents had no desire to settle the issues in a peaceful way. To add insult to injury, Krishna Deb Rai then imposed a tax on some of Titu Mir's followers for growing their beards, which they rightly refused to pay. When the 'beard tax' collectors arrived, Titu Mir's followers detained them for a short period. Incensed by the audacity of the Muslims, Krishna and his henchmen not only marched into their village and demolished the mosque but also confiscated their valuables. That is to say, the Hindu landlord deliberately provoked Titu Mir and his followers with a view to evicting them from their homes.[8]

Even so, Titu Mir's followers still refused to be provoked, and instead they sought redress for their grievances through the local judiciary. However, the Hindu landholders had no respect for law and justice. In fact, the outcome of a number of lawsuits proved that they considered themselves to be above the law. Faced with an impotent and ineffective judiciary, coupled with constant provocation by the local Hindu landholders and their henchmen, the followers of Titu Mir had no option other than to take up arms to defend themselves and their livelihood. This decision was not taken lightly, and was only reached after repeated attempts to seek peaceful resolution for their grievances and after having obstacles placed in their way by their powerful and well-connected rivals. Once Titu Mir and his followers decided to defend themselves, Krishna Deb Rai and his hencemen launched an unprovoked attack against them, which this took place on 29 October 1831. During this attack, Titu Mir and many of his prominent followers were injured. In response, his followers (led by his young nephew Ghulam Masum) erected a defensive enclave using bamboo sticks (*bansher killa*) covering around 30 acres of land.[9] This enclave served as a safety zone for Titu Mir's followers, which protected them from unprovoked attacks led by the *zamindars* and their henchmen.

While Titu Mir's followers were busy erecting the enclave, Krishna Deb Rai organised a coalition against the Muslim reformer and his followers in order to drive them out of their homes. In due course, Debanath Rai, the brother of Krishna Dev Rai (who was a powerful Hindu *zamindar*), launched an unprovoked attack against Titu Mir and his followers. Their advance was successfully checked by the Muslims, thanks to the support they had received from the locals who, at the time, had been suffering hardship under the oppressive policies of the Hindu *zamindar* and the European indigo planters. Victory at Laoghati emboldened Titu Mir's followers, but it had left a nasty taste in the mouth of the *zamindar* and their European supporters, who, on finding themselves unable to suppress the growing Islamic movement, urged the government to intervene. The government responded on 15 November 1831, instigating military action against the Muslim reformer and his followers without seeking to resolve their differences through negotiation. Forced to defend themselves, Titu Mir and his followers fought back, defeating government forces on two separate occasions. This set the scene for a larger conflict. The final conflict erupted on the 19 November 1831 when the heavily armed and professionally trained government cavalry opened fire on Titu Mir and his followers while they were sheltering inside the bamboo enclave. In the ensuing attack, the

www.pathagar.com

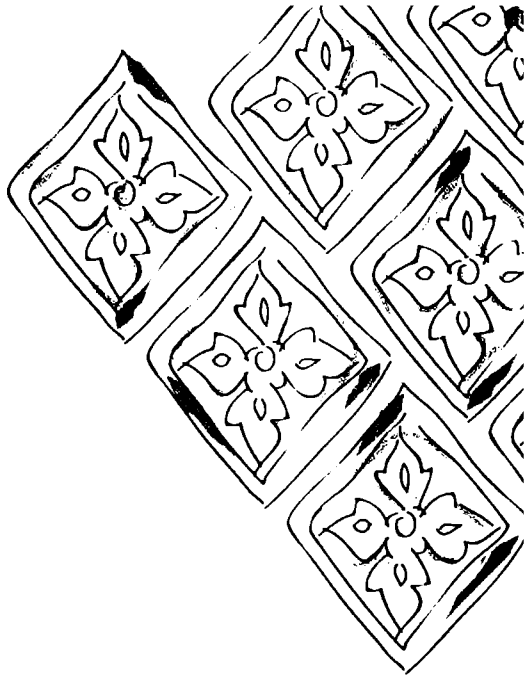
Muslim reformer and many of his followers were massacred by government forces and their homes and villages were razed to the ground. Some of his followers were killed immediately, while others were arrested. The latter were subsequently put on trial, and some were sentenced to death while others were sent to prison to serve long sentences.

Although Titu Mir had initiated his reformist movement in order to reinvigorate the Muslim society of Bengal by liberating the locals from the bondage of the caste system, cultural superstition and blameworthy religious innovations, his message of universal brotherhood and social equality, as well as economic justice and fairplay, proved to be too powerful for the liking of the local oligarchy. Despite repeated attempts to depict him as a rebel, a careful analysis and evaluation of Titu Mir's life and career shows that his main aim was to reform Bengal's Muslim culture and society for the better rather than to fight against the British government: this is quite contrary to what his critics would have us believe.[10] Even when he was forced to take up arms against the British, he did so in self-defence rather than to overthrow the government by force. In the same way, he had no intention of taking up arms against the Hindu *zamindar*; in fact, it was the latter who forced him and his followers to defend themselves and their livelihood against their political oppression and economic injustice. In that sense, Titu Mir was a strict adherent of Islamic rules of war and peace.

This is unsurprising given his training in classical Islamic thought and scholarship. Thanks to his learning, unusual bravery and heroic struggle for the socio-economic rights of the poor, disenfranchised and oppressed people of Bengal, Titu Mir was (and still is) considered to be one of India's foremost reformers and freedom fighters. In the words of Mu'in-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, a leading authority on the life and works of Titu Mir:

> A closer look into the life and career of Titu Mir further shows that the dominating feature of his movement lay in his concern to safeguard the rights of the Muslim peasantry against the oppressive and extortionate measures of the Hindu *zamindars*, which he sought to accomplish by introducing socio-religious reforms into the Muslim society and by uniting the Muslim peasantry on this religious platform... [However] Titu Mir himself was not an original contributor in the field of religious reform. He propagated the doctrines advocated by Sayyid Ahmad Shahid. But the spirit of reform survived his death. In violent death he became even more widely known than in his life-time. His martyrdom became symbolic of his ideals and as a lasting source of inspiration to the peasantry of Bengal in their subsequent struggle against the oppression of the *zamindars* and indigo planters.[11]

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, *Social History of the Muslims of Bangladesh under British Rule.*
2. Muhammad Abdullah, *Rajnitite Bangiya Ulamar Bhumika.*
3. Mu'in un-Din Ahmad Khan, *Titu Mir and His Followers in British Indian Records, 1831–1833 AD.*
4. Ibid.
5. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
6. M. A. Khan, op. cit.
7. Ibid.
8. M. A. Khan, *Islamic Revivalism of the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries.*
9. A. G. Siddiqi, *Shahid Titu Mir.*
10. M. A. Khan, op. cit.
11. Ibid.

www.pathagar.com

1800–1872



MAWLANA KARAMAT ALI JAUNPURI

DURING THE EIGHTEENTH and nineteenth centuries, several important Islamic revivalist movements emerged in Bengal. These movements emerged in response to the many social, political, economic and religious needs and challenges of the time. Similar to the Fara'idi movement of Haji Shari'atullah and the reformist efforts of Titu Mir, the Ahl-i-Hadith movement called the Muslim masses back to the original message of Islam as preserved in the Holy Qur'an and the authentic Prophetic *sunnah* (norms and practices). Although the Ahl-i-Hadith school of thought was originally known as the Muhammadi movement, it had a lot in common with the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyyah, which was another reformist movement led by Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, an influential Indian

www.pathagar.com

Muslim scholar and warrior who died fighting against the Sikhs in north-western India in 1831 (Titu Mir and his followers were attacked and brutally massacred by the British army in West Bengal in the same year). The aforementioned Islamic reformist movements had two things in common: firstly, they called the Muslims back to the original message of Islam based on an unadulterated understanding of *tawhid* (Oneness of Divinity); and, secondly they tried to change and improve the pitiful social, political and economic conditions of the Muslims of Bengal. In the process, some of the leaders (especially Titu Mir and Sayyid Ahmad Shahid) were forced to take up arms against their opponents. During the same period, another important Islamic reformist movement emerged in Bengal, which pursued a more conciliatory approach towards the non-Muslim rulers of Bengal as well as the people of other faiths. The initiator of this movement was Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, who was an influential Islamic scholar and reformer of his generation.

Karamat Ali was born into a respected and learned Muslim family in the village of Mullahata in Jaunpur (in the present-day Indian state of Uttar Pradesh). His family traced their genealogy back to Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, the father-in-law of the Prophet and the first Caliph of Islam.[1] Like Karamat Ali's uncle, his father, Mawlana Muhammad Imam Baksh, was a prominent Islamic scholar who had studied under the tutelage of Shah Abd al-Aziz, the son of Shah Waliullah of Delhi; who, in turn, was a great Indian Islamic scholar and reformer of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Learned in Persian, Urdu and Arabic and also steeped in traditional Islamic sciences, Mawlana Baksh taught his son basic Arabic and Islamic studies at home. Karamat Ali then began to memorise the Qur'an. Known to have been very studious during his early years, he refused to play games with the local children, preferring to focus on his studies. As a result, he completed memorisation of the Qur'an before he was 10 years old. His father, impressed with his son's achievement, taught him aspects of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), Prophetic traditions (*hadith*) and Islamic spirituality (*tasawwuf*). Karamat Ali specialised in these subjects under the guidance of several prominent scholars like Mawlana Qudratullah Rudlavi and Mawlana Ahmadullah Thanvi. The former taught him Islamic jurisprudence while the latter guided him in Prophetic traditions. In addition to this, Karamat Ali pursued advance training in Persian, Urdu and Arabic under the tutelage of Mawlana Ahmad Ali. Unlike the other prominent Islamic scholars of the time, Karamat Ali not only mastered *tajwid* (the science of reciting the Qur'an), he also became a renowned authority on the subject and was known for his melodious recitation of the Holy Qur'an.[2]

As a result of his thorough training in traditional Islamic sciences, Karamat Ali became known as a promising young scholar in his locality. As an insatiable seeker of Islamic knowledge and spirituality, he subsequently visited Bengal and was dismayed by the pitiful existential condition of the Muslims. Thereafter, he joined the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyyah movement of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid. He stayed with Sayyid Ahmad for several weeks and pledged his allegiance (*bay'ah*) to him.

www.pathagar.com

The latter then urged Karamat Ali to return to Bengal in order to preach Islam and reform the Muslim community in the light of the Qur'an and the Prophetic norms. According to his biographers, Karamat Ali first returned to his native Jaunpur where he established Madrasah-i-Hanafiyyah, an Islamic seminary, with the support of Haji Munshi Imam Baksh, a local businessman, before moving to Calcutta in around 1835 (he was in his mid-thirties at the time).[3] Following Sayyid Ahmad's instructions, he began to preach Islam to the people of Calcutta.

Sayyid Ahmad was an influential Islamic reformer who endeavoured to revive traditional Islamic teachings in India, who died fighting against the Sikhs at Balakot (in the North Western Frontier) in 1831, but after his death the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyyah movement became divided into two major camps. One group (led by Mawlana Wilayat Ali of Sadiqpur in Bihar) continued to advocate the need for military struggle (*jihad*) against their opponents and he was represented in Bengal by his younger brother, Mawlana Inayat Ali, who worked tirelessly to improve the existential condition of the Muslims of Northwestern Bengal. Thanks to his efforts, this movement became popular in parts of Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Murshidabad, Nadia, Jessore, 24-Parganas, Burdwan and the other neighbouring territories. While the Ali brothers championed the jihadist strand of the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyyah, Karamat Ali deliberately adopted a pacifist approach to Islamic reform and revival.[4]

Even so, both strands of the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyyah movement continued to emphasise the importance of upholding the central tenets of Islam: namely the absolute Oneness of Divinity (*tawhid*) and the observance of the five pillars of Islam. They also urged the masses to refrain from the veneration of Sufis, worship at Sufi shrines and adoption of local superstitious customs and practices. Similar to the Ali brothers, Karamat Ali repudiated all forms of blameworthy religious innovation (*bid'ah dalalah*), racial segregation, political oppression, social inequality and economic disparity that existed between the rich and the poor. However, unlike the Ali brothers, he did not condemn all forms of religious gatherings (*urs*) at the shrines of saints. He was in favour of Sufi music and considered the observance of *mawlid* (celebration of the birth of the Prophet of Islam) to be a praiseworthy action. He only condemned those religious practices that he felt directly contradicted fundamental Islamic principles and practices.[5] In this respect, Karamat Ali was a discerning and pragmatic Islamic scholar who was determined to revive the authentic teachings of Islam without undermining the praiseworthy social and cultural practices of the Muslims of Bengal.

Karamat Ali formulated his religious ideas and thoughts in two books he authored in 1837 and 1840, respectively. In his earlier book, *The Power of Faith* (*Quwwat ul-Iman*), he clearly spelled out his main theological ideas and thoughts, arguing that Islam was a complete way of life that is centred on belief in One God and the normative practice of the Prophet. His later book, *Empowering the Muslims* (*Taqwiyat al-Muslimun*), was written in response to Mawlana Abd al-Jabbar's response to his earlier book. In it, he defended imitation (*taqlid*) of the existing schools of Islamic jurisprudence

www.pathagar.com

(*madhahib*) of Abu Hanifah, Malik ibn Anas, al-Shafi'i and Ahmad ibn Hanbal. He vehemently disagreed with those who chose to undertake their own interpretation of the fundamental scriptural sources of Islam. Even so, Karamat Ali had no desire to establish the 'finality of the four schools of Islamic law' (as has been suggested by some historians)[6]; rather, he argued that the principles of the *madhahib* are always open to interpretation and reconsideration in the light of the ever-changing circumstances even though, he felt, this task should only be undertaken by qualified and reputable Islamic jurists and scholars.

Contrary to what Muhammad Mohar Ali would have us believe, Karamat Ali was not against individual juristic reasoning undertaken by reputable Islamic jurists (*ijtihad*) per se; he only opposed the wholesale rejection of imitation of renowned Islamic jurists by lay people.[7] In this respect, his understanding of Islamic jurisprudence was no different from that of Shah Waliullah of Delhi and his prominent disciples. Also, despite being an adherent of the Hanafi *madhhab*, Karamat Ali was also thoroughly familiar with Shafi'i *fiqh* and he expressed his profound respect and regard for Maliki and Hanbali schools of Islamic jurisprudence. He strongly disagreed with those who questioned the validity and relevance of the existing schools of Islamic legal thought, as he considered these people to be ill-informed and misguided.

In addition to the aforementioned works, Karamat Ali authored at least 40 other books and treatises in Urdu on a range of Islamic topics: including the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions, Islamic jurisprudence, theology and aspects of *tasawwuf* (Islamic spirituality). These included *Pledge of Repentance* (*Bay'at-i-Tawbah*), a translation of Imam al-Tirmidhi's *Treatise on the Characteristics of the Prophet* (*Tarjumah Shama'il-i-Tirmidhi*), a translation of Khatib al-Tabrizi's collection of Prophetic traditions (*Tarjumah-i-Mishkat*), *Light upon Light* (*Nur ala Nur*) and *Key to Paradise* (*Miftah al-Jannah*). Of all his works, perhaps the latter was the most important, as it continues to be reprinted and is widely read to this day. Unlike some of his contemporaries (such as Haji Shari'atullah and Titu Mir), Karamat Ali had an appreciation of Islamic spirituality. This was not surprising given his early training in aspects of *tasawwuf* and his pledge (*bay'ah*) of spiritual allegiance to Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, who was an undisputed master of Islamic spirituality as interpreted by Shah Abd al-Aziz, the eldest son of Shah Waliullah (who, in turn, was a master of the Qadiriyyah, Naqshbandiyyah and Shadiliyyah orders of Sufism). Unlike the popular mysticism that was prevalent in Bengal's Muslim society at the time, Karamat Ali's spirituality was based on authentic Islamic principles and practices. Indeed, as a scholar of *hadith* literature and a strict adherent of the Prophetic *sunnah*, he opposed any social or cultural practices that contradicted the norms and practices of the Prophet of Islam.

Although he was a champion of Islamic unity and solidarity, Karamat Ali later developed profound differences with the revivalist movement of Haji Shari'atullah and Dudu Mian. Their differences are even discernible from the names given to their two movements: namely, Fara'idi (those who focus on the obligatory duties of Islam) and Ta'ayuni (those who

www.pathagar.com

identify with Islam in its entirety). That is to say, the main purpose of Haji Shari'atullah's reformist movement was to revive and popularise the fundamentals of Islam because, he felt, the Muslims of Bengal had succumbed to local cultural practices at the expense of Islamic fundamentals. For this reason, he developed a literalist interpretation of Islamic scriptural sources and unequivocally condemned such social and cultural practices that, in his opinion, contradicted the meaning and message of *tawhid*. He pursued a similar approach to Islamic jurisprudence and in so doing he declared Bengal to be *dar al-harb* (a domain of war). Accordingly, he outlawed the performance of Friday congregational prayers (*salat al-jumu'ah*) and the two Eid prayers (*salat al-idayn*) in that part of the world.[8] As mentioned in Chapter 10, Haji Shari'atullah stayed in Arabia for a long time and pursued advance Islamic education there at a time when the reformist movement of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab was still new and vibrant. Not surprisingly, his approach to Islam was strikingly similar to that of the Arabian reformer. However, it is worth pointing out here that, unlike Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Haji Shari'atullah was a believer in *taqlid*, thus he remained a committed adherent of the Hanafi *madhhab*.

Unlike Haji Shari'atullah, Karamat Ali was brought up and educated in the subcontinent, and as a result his approach to Islam was largely informed and influenced by indigenous Islamic thought and scholarship. Likewise, his understanding of the prevailing socio-political situation in India in general and Bengal in particular was far better than that of Haji Shari'atullah. Noting the tragic death of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid and his followers at Balakot, as well as the brutal massacre of Titu Mir and his followers by the British army and the suppression of the Sepoy Revolt of 1857, Karamat Ali became aware that major socio-political changes had taken place in India in general and Bengal in particular at the time. This forced him to re-examine and re-evaluate his approach to Islam as well as his socio-political views of the British government, who were the new rulers of the country. Determined to safeguard the interest of Islam and Muslims in the new geo-political situation, he deliberately adopted a less confrontational approach towards the British government, unlike the other Muslim reformists of the time. In the words of Muin-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, a distinguished historian of modern Islamic revivalist movements in Bengal, Karamat Ali was:

> The first among the religious leaders (ulama) to realise the futility of militant opposition to the British rule, especially after the failure of the great revolt of 1857. Thereupon, he became a close associate of Nawab Abdul Latif, one of the great pioneers of Muslim renaissance in Bengal.[9]

Karamat Ali argued that since the British rulers did not prevent the Muslims from observing their religious duties and obligations, British India could be regarded as a domain of security (*dar al-aman*). As such, it was not permissible for Muslims to declare *jihad* against the British. Since Karamat Ali was a highly respected Islamic scholar and jurist, his legal verdict on the status of British India was particularly welcomed by the modernist Muslim reformers. So much so that Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan of the Aligarh movement frequently referred to this

www.pathagar.com

legal verdict (*fatwa*) to justify his engagement with the British authorities. Unlike the other Muslim scholars of Bengal (such as Mawlana Wilayat Ali), Karamat Ali emphasised the need to maintain peace, law and order in society and, therefore, he opposed the radical approach of the Fara'idi and Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyyah movements. Adopting a confrontational approach towards the British, he felt, was no longer a viable option, especially after the failure of the Sepoy Revolt of 1857. As he was eager to protect the social, political, economic and religious rights of the Muslims of the subcontinent, and felt that declaring British India to be *dar al-aman* would achieve this.

From Calcutta in West Bengal, he took his message of Islamic reform, unity and solidarity into East Bengal visiting the districts of Barisal, Khulna, Jessore, Rangpur, Chittagong and Noakhali. He urged the local Muslims to remain true to their Islamic identity and, at the same time, to face the challenges that confronted them, with faith, hope and confidence. He vehemently disagreed with Haji Shari'atullah's declaration of British India as *dar al-harb*: he argued that it was a domain of security, because Muslims were able to live there and practise their faith without any governmental interference or hindrance. On this issue, he engaged in heated debate with the leaders of the Fara'idi movement (especially Mawlana Abd al-Jabbar) and in so doing he repudiated their ruling that British India was a domain of war. Karamat Ali's view on this issue was supported by other prominent Muslim leaders and scholars of Bengal, including Nawab Abdul Latif, Mawlana Fazli Ali and Munshi Azimuddin Hanafi.

According to the historian Muhammad Abdur Rahim, Nawab Abdul Latif of the Muhammadan Literary and Scientific Society of Calcutta organised a meeting of prominent Muslim scholars and leaders on 23 November 1870. At this meeting, Karamat Ali spoke on the topic, 'That, according to the Mahomedan Law, British India is Darul Islam, and that it is not lawful for the Mahomedans of British India to make jihad'.[10] Based on an authoritative interpretation of classical works of Islamic jurisprudence (especially that of the Hanafi school of thought), Karamat Ali convincingly argued that British India was *dar al-aman*. His view was supported by many Muslim scholars, including Qadi Abdul Bari, the President of the Society. In fact, Qadi Abdul Bari went further and argued that according to a *fatwa* issued by the jurists in Makkah, in a country where the principles and practices of Islam prevailed even partially, such a country could be classified as *dar al-aman*, if not *dar al-Islam*. His *fatwa* (legal verdict) on the status of India later proved to be a shrewd, cogent and very influential judgement, not least because it provided the legal justification for subsequent Muslim engagement with the British rulers of India. Nawab Abdul Latif of Calcutta, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan of Aligarh and other Muslim reformers used this *fatwa* to justify their loyalty to, and co-operation with, the British authorities. Thereafter, Karamat Ali urged the masses to publicly announce the five daily *adhan* (call to prayer), to perform the Friday congregational prayer and to observe the two annual Eid prayers. At first he faced opposition from certain quarters but, over time, his pragmatic approach to Islamic thought and Hanafi jurisprudence, coupled with his other religious and cultural reforms, was openly

www.pathagar.com

embraced by the masses in India in general and Bengal in particular.

On a personal level, Karamat Ali was a very pious and spiritually-inclined individual. Despite being an outstanding writer, Islamic scholar (*alim*), jurist (*faqih*) and reformer, he freely interacted with the masses. His scrupulous habits, simple lifestyle and profound respect and regard for Prophetic norms and practices endeared him to the locals. Being an expert in *tajwid*, he was able to recite the Qur'an according to the seven traditional modes of recitation. Large numbers of people came to listen to him recite the Qur'an in his sweet, melodious tone. During his more than 50 years of preaching and reformist activities in Bengal (of which he spent the first two decades in West Bengal and the remainder in East Bengal), Karamat Ali found time to marry and set up his own family. He married four times. His first wife was from his native Jaunpur, but she subsequently died. Thereafter, he married twice in Noakhali but both his wives died, one after the other. His fourth wife hailed from northern India and she lived with him at his Islamic centre in Rangpur. He had six sons and nine daughters. Of his children, perhaps the most gifted and outstanding was Mawlana Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri, who was fluent in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Bengali, and authored more than 100 books and treatises on all aspects of traditional Islamic sciences.

Towards the end of his life, Karamat Ali became widely known as *Hadi-i-Zaman* ('Guide of his Age'). He died at the age of around 72 and was laid to rest in Rangpur (located in northern Bangladesh). After his death, his mission was continued by his sons, who also became prominent scholars, writers and Sufis in their own right. According to the historian Mu'in-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri will be remembered by posterity for:

> His strong personality, milder reform ideas and great power of persuasion [that] exerted tremendous influence on the Muslim society of Bengal where he dedicated his whole life for the propagation of Islamic values and ideals.[11]

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. Z. A. Kismati, *Bangladesher Katipay Alim-o-Pir Masha'ikh.*
2. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, *Islamic Revivalism of the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries.*
3. Muhammad Abdullah, *Rajnitite Bangiya Ulamar Bhumika.*
4. M. A. Khan, op. cit.
5. Muhammad Abdullah, *Bangladesher Khetinama Arabibid.*
6. Muhammad Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume II A: Bengal Muslims During the First Century of British Rule (1757–1871).*
7. Ibid.
8. M. A. Khan, op. cit.
9. Ibid.
10. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Nawab Abdul Latif and the Education of Muslims of Bengal.*
11. M. A. Khan, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

1813–1896

SIR ABDUL GHANI

WRITING IN 1901, C. E. Buckland stated of Sir Abdul Ghani that:

> His acts of public and private charity were very numerous and magnificent. In aid of schools and colleges, hospitals and dispensaries, clubs and societies, mosques and tombs, the sick and the poor, he spent very large sums. His charity was not confined to his country or nationality. Thus he would subscribe as largely to the relief of the sick and wounded in the European wars and to some public movements in India. His donations fill a large catalogue and amount to lakhs of rupees.[1]

Likewise, F. B. Bradley-Birt, a younger contemporary of Sir Abdul Ghani wrote that:

> Throughout the nineteenth century there was no name more revered in Eastern Bengal than [his]...

www.pathagar.com

> For over fifty years he was the leading Muhammadan in Dacca and the eastern provinces, occupying a unique position there among Europeans and his own fellow countrymen alike. From a position of comparative insignificance he raised himself and his family to one of commanding eminence, eliciting universal admiration and respect. Loyal, generous and public-spirited he won the affection of all who came in contact with him.[2]

Sir Abdul Ghani of Dacca (now spelt as Dhaka) was clearly an influential Muslim businessman, wealthy landlord, philantrophist and public figure.

Nawab Bahadur Sir Khwajah Abdul Ghani Miah, also known as Ghani Miah (Gunny Meah) for short, was born into a wealthy and prominent Muslim family that traced its origin all the way back to Persia. Maulvi Abdullah, the founder of the Nawab family, hailed from Kashmir and moved to Delhi during the reign of the Mughal Emperor, Muhammad Shah, in search of fame and fortune. However, on his arrival in Delhi, he was disappointed by the lack of business and investment opportunities in the capital and instead he set out for the eastern provinces with a view to pursuing trade and commerce. During this period he settled in Sylhet (located in present-day Bangladesh) and there he established himself as a relatively successful trader and businessman. Following the death of Maulvi Abdullah, his successors moved to the Begum Bazaar area in Dhaka, which at the time was a thriving centre of commerce and culture in East Bengal. This was a politically and economically unpredictable period in the history of India in general, and in Bengal in particular, as the Mughal Dynasty had begun to decline and the British were gradually consolidating their presence in the country under the guise of the East India Company. As political power and authority shifted from the Muslims to the British, important economic changes were taking place at the time as the old, feudal families of Dhaka gave way to a new generation of businessmen, traders and landholders. Khwajah Alimullah, the father of Abdul Ghani, was a shrewd businessman who purchased substantial plots of land and estates in many parts of East Bengal (including Dhaka, Comilla, Barisal, Mymensingh and Khulna) during this period. In so doing, almost overnight he transformed the political and economic fortunes of the Nawab family for good.

Abdul Ghani's exact date of birth is contested by his biographers: according to some (such as F. B. Bradley-Birt), he was born in 1830; others have suggested he was born in 1823, while most of his biographers (including Muhammad Abdullah of Dhaka University) have argued that he was, in fact, born in 1813.[3] As the son of one of Dhaka's wealthiest and influential men, Abdul Ghani was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Although his father had married more than six times and fathered around 15 children, young Abdul Ghani was brought up under the watchful gaze of his parents, Khwajah Alimullah and Zinat Begum. He received his early training in Arabic, Persian and Islamic studies at home. Though his mother tongue was Urdu, he was equally conversant in Bengali. Known to have been very studious during his early years, Abdul Ghani acquired fluency in no less than six languages (including English), which he studied at Dhaka

www.pathagar.com

Collegiate School as one of the first students to study at this institution. His biographers have agreed that Abdul Ghani was a gifted young man whose organisational skills and leadership abilities soon endeared him to his aging father. Khwajah Alimullah was happy to hand over the management of his family estates and landholdings to the most learned and ablest of his sons, and towards the end of his life he prepared a Deed of Endowment (*waqfnama*) wherein he appointed Abdul Ghani the sole trustee and administrator (*mutawalli*) of his entire family estate.

When Khwajah Alimullah died in 1854, Abdul Ghani was in his early forties. By then he had already acquired considerable skills and experience as a manager of the family business and properties under his father's able supervision. However, after his father's death, he not only became the head of his family, but also assumed full responsibility for the administration of family business and estates. As a wise, generous and understanding leader of his family, as well as a skilled arbitrator of disputes and a shrewd businessman, Abdul Ghani was, by all accounts, a worthy successor of his father. According to F. B. Bradley-Birt, he followed in the footsteps of his father in his personal conduct as well as pursuit of trade, and in so doing he expanded the family business considerably. His aristocratic lifestyle and impeccable manners meant that he was widely admired by his own people and by the Europeans alike. He was a good father and husband who was often required to act as an arbiter of disputes and disagreement in his large family. Being a man of principles and fairplay, he always managed to resolve such disputes to the satisfaction of all concerned, and even when his decision went against a member of the family this was willing accepted, thanks to his impartiality and sense of justice.[4] He was a supporter of sports, music and poetry, and he actively funded and promoted artistic, recreational and educational activities. He was well known for his efforts to promote education among the Muslim community of Bengal and he provided funding for schools, religious centres and other similar institutions on a regular basis.

In other words, Abdul Ghani's all-round skills and abilities enabled him to step into his father's shoes without any difficulties; in fact, he went onto rapidly expand his family business and property portfolio, and thereby surpassed his whole family's hopes and expectation. His ability to make sound and balanced political and economic judgements was vindicated soon after the death of his father. In 1857, when the Sepoy Revolt against the British erupted, Abdul Ghani understood the futility of such action and, accordingly, he sided with the British authorities, donating substantial sums to the government's debt fund for the welfare of the locals who were directly affected by the revolt. Having combined traditional learning with modern English education during his early years, Abdul Ghani had acquired fluency in English. This enabled him to communicate with his fellow countrymen as well as the senior British officials with ease, thus developing good rapport and understanding between the Muslims of Bengal and their new rulers. In 1861, in recognition of his loyalty and sound judgement, the British authorities appointed him an honorary magistrate. He became widely recognised for his skills as an arbitrator of

www.pathagar.com

disputes. So much so that, over time, the people preferred to come to him with their cases rather than go to the courts. Likewise, he maintained good relationships with the different Muslim communities of Bengal. As a devout Muslim, he was very close to both the Sunni and Shia communities of Dhaka. Accordingly, he supported the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet, in the month of Muharram and also contributed to the restoration and renovation of the Husayni Dalan, the Shia religious centre in Dhaka.[5]

Given his high standing within Bengal's Muslim society, the British authorities made him a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1866. A year later, he joined the Governor-General's Legislative Council. In addition to this, Abdul Ghani developed good relations with several prominent British rulers of India, including Lord Northbrook (Governor-General of India, 1872–1876) and Lord Dufferin (Viceroy of India, 1884–1888), among others. In so doing, he tried to protect and promote the interests of the Muslims of Bengal. Given the respect and unrivalled position he occupied within the Muslim community, he was frequently called upon by the masses to resolve their disputes: which he did through discussion, tact and dialogue. As a result, he became the most revered and renowned Muslim leader of his generation. In the words of F. B. Bradley-Birt:

> So great was his influence with both Sunnis and Shias that when a serious difference occurred between them, threatening to lead to open mutiny, he was asked by the local authorities to arbitrate between them. This he did with such success that their differences were speedily healed.[6]

Not only did Abdul Ghani maintain very good relations with the British rulers as well as all the faith communities in Bengal, his charitable contribution and activities were nothing short of remarkable. In his *Nawab Abdul Ghani-o-Nawab Ahsanullah: Jiban-o-Karma* (1998), the historian Muhammad Abdullah compiled a long list of Abdul Ghani's financial contributions to different charitable and philanthropic causes. Consisting of five pages and outlining around 150 donations of both small and large amounts, this list proves that Abdul Ghani was not only a very wealthy man, but also an equally generous and patriotic Muslim leader.

Some of his major donations included 35,000 rupees for the construction of a dam to protect Dhaka City from flooding and river erosion. This massive project was initiated by C. E. Buckland, who was the Commissioner of Dhaka City at the time. Abdul Ghani also donated 50,000 rupees to initiate works to supply pipe water to the residents of Dhaka. It should be pointed out here that Abdul Ghani's donation contributed to the development of the first water supply system in Dhaka in 1871. Subsequently, Nawab Sir Ahsanullah, his son and successor, doubled the donation made by his father and the work was eventually completed in 1878 at the cost of 195,000 rupees.

His other important contributions included the establishment of several educational institutions for the progress and development of the Muslim community. As a result, schools were opened in Tangail and Kumartuli (the latter was subsequently renamed Salimullah

www.pathagar.com

College). Referring to Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's efforts to promote modern education within the Muslim community of India, Abdul Ghani once remarked that it was a:

> Matter of deep regret for all the well-wishers of this community to behold that while Hindoos and others are progressing with long strides and daily reaping the fruits of their labor and perseverance, the Mohamedans are going down-hill under the pressure of deep-rooted apathy and ignorance, but thank God now that you have so nobly come forward to their assistance. It is devoutly expected that matters will soon take a favourable turn and that your labor will be soon crowned with success. [7]

As a patriotic Muslim and a leader of his people, Abdul Ghani's generous contributions and donations helped to promote education throughout the Muslim community of East Bengal including Mymensingh, Barisal, Comilla and Dhaka. In addition to this, Abdul Ghani played a pivotal role in the success of the *panchayat* system in Dhaka. The *panchayat* system was established in order to conduct the local administrative affairs in a more co-ordinated, coherent and effective manner. He used to attend the *panchayat* sessions regularly, along with the other community leaders, to ensure that all the works and activities were carried out efficiently and effectively across the city. During this period he paid for the installation of street lights to facilitate night travel in Dhaka.

Moreover, along with the Ghani Miah's water works (which he financed to the tune of 250,000 rupees to provide filtered running water in Dhaka collected from the River Buriganga), his other major achievement was the development of the historic Ahsan Manzil complex in Dhaka. Planned and constructed by Martin & Company (a British construction and engineering firm) between 1859 and 1872. This old and derelict structure was transformed into one of Dhaka's most beautiful and exquisite works of architecture; named after Nawab Sir Ahsanullah, his second son and successor, this historic building was destined to become the main centre of activity for the Nawabs of Dhaka as well as the Muslims of East Bengal until the partition of India in 1947.

Despite being a very wealthy man, Abdul Ghani's generosity towards the poor and needy was no less remarkable. In 1866, he established a large shelter (*langarkhana*) in Dhaka for the city's poor and destitute and also donated large sums to the victims of famine and natural disaster in Bengal and other parts of the world. For example, he donated 25,000 rupees for the construction of a female ward in Mitford Hospital in Dhaka; he distributed 10,000 rupees to the victims of famine in 1867; and 20,000 was given to the victims of an earthquake in Kashmir, in addition to numerous other small and large donations to various charitable and disaster relief efforts in Turkey, Italy, France, Ireland and England, among other places.[8]

In recognition of Abdul Ghani's impressive leadership, as well as loyalty to the British authorities, the latter conferred the title of 'Nawab' on him in 1875. Two years later, this title was made hereditary. Furthermore, in recognition of his on-going charity work and philantrophy, the British government made him a knight in 1886 and, six years later, the title of 'Nawab Bahadur' was conferred on him.

www.pathagar.com

Normally, one would expect a man of his status and wealth to lead an aristocratic lifestyle, surrounded by much luxuries and material things of this world. However, according to his biographers, Abdul Ghani led a very simple, informal lifestyle. As F. B. Bradley-Birt has remarked:

> In spite of his great wealth Abdul Ghani conducted his life with great simplicity. He habitually rose early, either riding out, hunting or shooting, busying himself in his garden or taking long walks in the cool morning air.[9]

This would be followed by breakfast with all his visitors, whether they were young or old, rich or poor did not matter. As people often came to him for advice and financial support, he always treated his visitors with care and respect, and rarely did any one return empty-handed. After this, he would retire to his private room for rest and to spend quality time with his wife and children. After prayers in the afternoon, he would go to his office in the Ahsan Manzil and remained preoccupied with the main business of the day, before he returned to his family for dinner. Blessed with good health, Abdul Ghani maintained this routine for nearly 40 years with very little variation. Despite being a wealthy businessman and an influential Muslim leader, he was very simple, humble and equally conservative in his behaviour and personal habits.

Unlike his father (who had eight wives), Abdul Ghani only married four times. He fathered 11 children, including Nawab Sir Ahsanullah, who was his favourite son and successor. As a wise and approachable person, Abdul Ghani used his skills of tact and diplomacy to ensure that all members of his large and extended family were happy with their share of the family wealth and income. He was known as a humble and selfless individual. His wise advice and counsel was appreciated by rich and poor, Muslims and non-Muslims, friends and foe alike, although as he approached old age, he encouraged Nawab Sir Ahsanullah, his second son and chosen successor, to take more and more responsibility of managing the family's business and other affairs. In 1896 Nawab Sir Abdul Ghani died, loved and respected by everyone who knew him. Like Nawab Abdul Latif, his prominent contemporary, he successfully combined his loyalty to the British government with his desire to protect the interests of the Muslim community of Bengal. Despite being a very successful businessman, he became well known for his sympathies and generosity, and he had won the hearts and minds of his people.

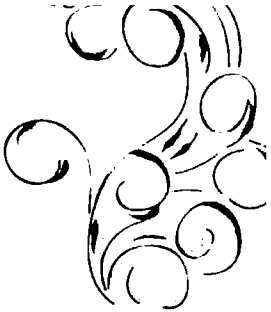
He has been hailed as:

> One of the best types of Zemindars that Bengal has produced, content to live in the midst of his own people and with an ear always open to their petitions and complaints. His will always remain one of the greatest and grandest figures in Eastern Bengal in the nineteenth century.[10]

Nawab Sir Abdul Ghani died at the age of 83 inside the Ahsan Manzil in Dhaka and was laid to rest in his family graveyard. Tens of thousands of people turned up to pay their respects to one of Bengal's foremost Muslim leaders and benefactors, as the entire city came to a standstill. On 26 August 1896 the Calcutta-based *The Bengal Times* paid him the following tribute:

www.pathagar.com

He was a willing patron to all in need, giving with a free hand, relieving distress whenever he knew of its existence. He was a man of wide catholic sympathies, kind-hearted to a fault, and not difficult to be imposed upon a well-connected tale of suffering. He was [a] loving, devoted parent, a judicious counsellor, a loyal subject and a zealous citizen combining in a large degree, many amiable qualities which endeared him to a large class of attached foreigners. Dacca will mourn his loss for many years to come and sigh in vain for a second Gunny Meah.[11]





Notes

1. C. E. Buckland, *Bengal under Lieutenant-Governors.*
2. F. B. Bradley-Birt, *Twelve Men of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century.*
3. Muhammad Abdullah, *Nawab Abdul Ghani-o-Nawab Ahsanullah: Jiban-o-Karma.*
4. F. B. Bradley-Birt, op. cit.
5. Muhammad Abdullah, *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Kayekjon Muslim Dishari.*
6. F. B. Bradley-Birt, op. cit.
7. Ibid.
8. Muhammad Abdullah, op. cit.
9. F. B. Bradley-Birt, op. cit.
10. Ibid.
11. Quoted in Muhammad Abdullah, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

1828–1893

NAWAB ABDUL LATIF

DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY India had produced Muslim scholars and reformers of various persuasions. One group was the traditionalist scholars. This group included: Muhammad Qasim Nanotwi, the founder of the famous *dar ul-'ulum* (Islamic seminary) in Deoband; Haji Shari'atullah, an influential Islamic scholar and revivalist of Bengal; and Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, who was the initiator of the *jihad* movement in northern India. The main task of these traditionalist scholars was to call the masses back to the original foundation of Islam. Another group of Muslim scholars and leaders included reformists of a more modernist outlook, such as Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the founder of the Aligarh movement, and Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri.[1] Disillusioned with the pitiful social,

www.pathagar.com

political, economic and intellectual condition of the Indian Muslims at the time, Sir Sayyid argued that the Muslims had no choice but to co-operate with the ruling British authorities to strengthen their political standing and, at the same time, pursue modern education and learning (especially in science, philosophy and technology) in order to reinvigorate Islamic thought and culture, and thereby improve the condition of Indian Muslims. Nawab Abdul Latif, of Calcutta shared this idea, and he is considered by many today to be the father of Islamic modernism and reformation in Bengal.

Nawab Abdul Latif was born into an educated and respected Muslim family in the District of Faridpur in East Bengal in present-day Bangladesh. His parents traced their ancestry back to a notable family of Arabia whose members moved to Bengal during the Muslim rule of India and they settled in East Bengal. Abdul Latif's father, Qazi Faqir Muhammad, was well versed in Persian, Urdu and the Islamic sciences. He worked as a lawyer at the civil courts (Sadr Diwani Adalat) in Calcutta.[2] He was an educated and wealthy individual, and owned a sizable plot of land and properties in both Faridpur and Calcutta, which enabled him to lead a very comfortable life. His learning and foresight, coupled with his friendship and close interaction with the British elites in Calcutta, led him to become convinced that the British were in India to stay and that was therefore futile to oppose them. Instead, he co-operated with the British authorities and, like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, he tried to improve the condition of the Muslims of Bengal through political co-operation and the pursuit of modern education. He felt that the pursuit of modern education (based on the English model) would lead to the regeneration the Muslim society of Bengal. Although young Abdul Latif was born in rural Faridpur and underwent his early education there, Qazi Faqir Muhammad then enrolled him at Calcutta Madrasah for higher education in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and the Islamic sciences. Calcutta Madrasah was originally founded in October 1780 by Warren Hastings, an official of the East India Company, to train up a new generation of Indians who could work for the company, however, it had become a renowned centre for Arabic and Persian studies in Bengal. Through his studies there, Abdul Latif acquired proficiency in English, modern sciences and philosophy.

Qazi Faqir Muhammad's decision to provide a varied and balanced education to his son was an important and decisive move on his part, given the fact that English education was not very popular in the Muslim community at the time. Abdul Latif was brought up and educated at a time when the Muslims of India had developed an indifferent attitude towards the British. Having ruled the subcontinent for centuries, the Muslims struggled to come to terms with the new politico-economic order that had been ushered in by the East India Company. Not surprisingly, they also failed to anticipate the wider social, cultural and educational transformations that were taking place across Bengal following the defeat of Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah at the hands of the East India Company in 1757. Thus, maintaining a negative attitude toward the British was an unrealistic and inappropriate policy, and the Muslim leaders failed to appreciate the long-term impact and significance of British

www.pathagar.com

presence in India. This proved to be very detrimental to the social, political, economic and educational interests of the Muslims of India in general, and that of Bengal in particular.[3] The traditionalist Muslim opposition towards the British did not improve this situation. For example, some religious scholars argued that British India was *dar al-harb* (a domain of war) which, in turn, discouraged other scholars and the masses from coming forward and engaging with the British elites in order to safeguard the interests of the Muslims of the subcontinent. This created considerable barriers between the Muslims of India and their new rulers: after all, why should they approach and engage in debate and dialogue with the rulers of *dar al-harb*?

The prevailing social, political and religious challenges and difficulties aside, the Muslims of Bengal had fallen behind their Hindu counterparts, both educationally and economically. The Hindu elites had not only embraced English education and culture; they also fully co-operated with the latter from the outset. This enabled them to retain their estates and properties, thus they were financially in a far better position to access modern education and learning than were their Muslim counterparts. By encouraging their children to acquire an English education, the Hindus were able to secure well-paid, high-ranking government jobs. Accordingly, they reached the highest echelons of the Indian civil, judicial and administrative services while the Muslim community of Bengal suffered from political disunity and cultural stagnation, as well as widespread poverty and economic backwardness, religious in-fighting and bickering among the *ulama*. This eventually forced some members of the Muslim community to break with the past and to proactively engage with the new rulers of their country. In so doing, they encouraged the Muslims to become dynamic members of society, although most of the Muslim leaders of Bengal at the time were Urdu-speaking urban elites who struggled to relate to the predominantly Bengali-speaking rural Muslim masses. Unlike the Muslim elites, Qazi Faqir Muhammad, the father of Abdul Latif, belonged to a new generation of Muslims who wanted to reshape the future of their country. In so doing they left their indelible marks in the annals of modern Indian history in general and of Bengal in particular.

Encouraged by his father, Abdul Latif not only excelled in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Islamic sciences, he also learned English and became thoroughly familiar with the culture and traditions of the British elite. This broad and balanced education enabled Abdul Latif to become a confident and disciplined young man who was proud of his Islamic culture and heritage; and yet, at the same time, he was able to converse and interact with both the Hindu and British elites of Calcutta. After completing his formal education, he worked as a personal assistant to a wealthy exiled Muslim leader of Sind who had been living in Calcutta. Thereafter, he joined government educational service and was posted to Dhaka where he served as a teacher at Dhaka Collegiate School. While still in his early twenties, he became well known as a lively and enthusiastic teacher who was determined to reach the height of his profession. However, after a brief spell at this school, he returned to the Calcutta Madrasah, his almer mater, to take up the position of lecturer in

www.pathagar.com

Arabic, Islamic Studies and English.[4] Thanks to his sound knowledge of both traditional and modern learning, he could teach both Islamic subjects and modern sciences, which was a rare and unusual combination for a Muslim to achieve at the time.

In 1849, when he was barely 21, Abdul Latif was appointed as a deputy magistrate in Calcutta. Given his fluency in English and sound knowledge of Islamic law (at the time this was known as 'Muhammadan Law'), he was expected to deal with a range of legal cases, queries and disputes concerning family, marriage, divorce, land law, properties, endowments and wills. He served in this capacity for a quarter of a century and became well known for his legal acumen, sound judgement and personal integrity. Although the post of deputy magistrate was not very high-ranking, Abdul Latif was well regarded within the corridors of power on account of his good social standing and excellent reputation in the Muslim community. Indeed, according to F. B. Bradley-Birt, he was 'universally acknowledged as one of the foremost leaders of Muhammadan society not only in Bengal but throughout India.'[5] This reputation did not come automatically, but was a result of his hard work and diligence to earn the love and respect of his people as well as that of the government. During his tenure as deputy magistrate, Abdul Latif served in many rural locations, and everywhere he went he became a champion of the poor (Muslim and Hindu alike) through his opposition to the oppressive policies and practices of the wealthy Hindu landholders as well as the European indigo planters.

His efforts on behalf of the peasants during his posting in Satkhira prompted the government to establish the Indigo Commission on 31 March 1860, and in due course W. S. Seton-Kar was appointed its chairman. This was a significant achievement for Abdul Latif as the commission was formed only a few years after the Sepoy Revolt of 1857. The purpose of this commission was to investigate the complaints made by the peasants against the European indigo planters. The major issue was that the planters had forced the peasants to increase the production of indigo but they consistently failed to pay them a fair price for their crops. The Indigo Commission was established in the aftermath of widespread protest that took place in Bengal in 1859 against the oppressive measures of the indigo planters and the wealthy Hindu landholders. The commission investigated and found that the peasants had genuine grievances against the indigo planters. Accordingly, the commission recommended that competent and impartial law enforcement personnel (including police and magistrates) were sent to the rural areas to protect the peasants' rights.

Abdul Latif's efforts to protect the poor farmers, his honesty, loyalty and dedication to the government as well as his increasing popularity in the Muslim community, prompted the government to make him the first Muslim member of the Bengal Legislative Council in 1862, although he was only 34 at the time. According to the historian Mahmuda Khatun, Nawab Abdul Latif can be regarded as a champion of Muslim education and awakening in Bengal due to his efforts to uphold the 'cause of the peasants of Bengal'.[6] Abdul Latif's pioneering work as a leader and educational reformer

www.pathagar.com

is well known, but his role as a champion of the rights of the peasants of Bengal has not received much attention. In fact, his efforts during the indigo planters-*ryots* conflict showed that he was a man of tremendous courage, sense of justice and fairplay in a society where the poor and downtrodden were often ignored—if not entirely forgotten—by the rich and powerful.

A year after joining the Bengal Legislative Council, Abdul Latif was appointed a fellow of Calcutta University, which had hitherto been dominated by Hindu and British elites. Then, in April 1863 he founded the Muhammadan Literary and Scientific Society in Calcutta, which inspired Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan to establish his Scientific Society in Ghazipur in the same year. According to the Muhammadan Literary and Scientific Society's abstract of proceedings, its purpose was: 'To impart useful information to the higher and educated classes of the Mahomedan community by means of Lectures, Addresses, and Discourses on various subjects in Literature, Science and Society.'[7] Abdul Latif wanted to promote learning, education and scholarship amongst the Muslims of Bengal who were way behind their Hindu counterparts both economically and educationally. Although Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan had played a pivotal role in promoting modern education and learning in the wider Indian Muslim community, Abdul Latif must also be considered a pioneer in this area.

As an educationalist and prominent leader of his people, Abdul Latif had few rivals in the Muslim community. He urged the Muslim masses to engage with the modern world. As a devout Muslim who was equally conservative in his style and outlook, Abdul Latif's reformist approach to Islam did not entail a complete break with the Islamic past; rather he advocated the need to pursue traditional Islamic education and learning, while, at the same time, he encouraged efforts to excel in modern English education. In other words, Abdul Latif argued that it was possible to be a devout, practising Muslim and to attain worldly success at the same time. Abdul Latif was also far from being a blind imitator of all things Western; instead, he became a very wise and discerning champion of modern education, who was equally determined to uphold the traditional Islamic values and ethos. He was supported in his efforts by many prominent Muslim leaders and scholars of the time, including Mawlana Ubaydullah al-Ubaydi Suhrawardi and Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri.

Although Abdul Latif's approach to Islam was sound and well-informed, he was aware that his reformist agenda was unlikely to make any headway without any discussion and dialogue between the Muslims of Bengal and the ruling British elites. To achieve this, he joined hands with Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri (profiled in chapter 12) who, in due course, issued a *fatwa* (legal verdict) declaring Bengal to be *dar al-aman* (a domain of security); this was in opposition to the view of Haji Shari'atullah and his Fara'idi movement that Bengal was *dar al-harb* (a domain of war; see chapter 10). This legal verdict justified the performance of Friday congregational prayers and the two Eid prayers in Bengal, and it also provided the religious justification for direct political engagement between Muslims and the British government. Equipped with an authoritative Islamic legal edict (*fatwa*) issued by one of

www.pathagar.com

Bengal's pre-eminent Islamic scholars, Abdul Latif proudly announced a national essay competition, offering a prize for the best essay on the topic of: 'How far would the inculcation of European sciences benefit the Mahomedan students in the present circumstances of India and what are the most practical means of imparting such instruction'.[8]

This competition helped raise awareness of the importance of modern education in the Muslim community and encouraged young Muslims to pursue further and higher education. He worked under the umbrella of the Muhammadan Literary and Scientific Society and eventually persuaded the government to establish an Anglo-Persian Department at the Calcutta Madrasah and to provide scholarships to worthy Muslim students. Abdul Latif then successfully argued the case for transforming the Hindu College into the Presidency College, to enable Muslim students to join the college to pursue higher education. Abdul Latif argued for this change because the Muslims refused to send their children to the Hindu College as this was, at the time, dominated by non-Muslim teachers. He then suggested that the Anglo-Persian Department at the Calcutta Madrasah be transformed into a college long before Sir Sayyid established the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh. In other words, he urged the government to take the necessary steps to address the genuine needs and concerns of the Muslim community. During this period he authored numerous research papers on the educational needs and requirements of the Muslims of Bengal, including 'A Minute on the Hooghly Madrasah' (1861) and 'A Paper on Mohammedan Education in Bengal' (1868). At the same time, he was promoted, by the government, to the post of presidency magistrate, thanks to his devotion and dedication to his work.

Although Abdul Latif was not a politician as such, he nevertheless became actively involved in the affairs of the Muslim community. As a result of his efforts, the Muhsin Endowment Fund was set aside by the government for the benefit of the Muslim students, as well as for the maintenance of Bengal's *madrasahs* (Islamic seminaries). Although Abdul Latif was primarily an Urdu-speaking Muslim, the suggestion that he considered Bengali to be an inferior language (as some secular Bengali nationalists have suggested) is both factually inaccurate and misleading. On the contrary, he was fluent in Bengali and played a pivotal role in promoting Bengali by including it on the curriculum of Calcutta Madrasah along with Arabic, Persian and Urdu.[9] His efforts to promote Bengali were subsequently acknowledged by Mir Musharraf Husayn, the renowned Muslim writer of Bengal, who dedicated his well-known book, *Basanta Kumari Play* (*Basanta Kumari Natak*) to him. Mir Musharraf Husayn not only held Abdul Latif in high estimation, he also considered him to be a lover of Bengali language and literature.

Thanks to his long, loyal and distinguished service to the government as well as the Muslims of Bengal, in 1877, Abdul Latif was awarded the title of 'Khan Bahadur'. Three years later, he was given the title of 'Nawab' by the British Government. Then, in 1883, he was honoured by the British authorities with the Order of Companion of the Indian Empire and, finally, in 1887, at the age of 59, he received

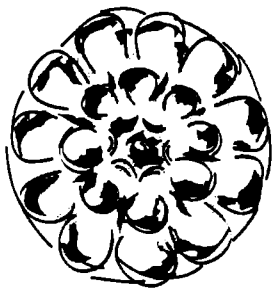
www.pathagar.com

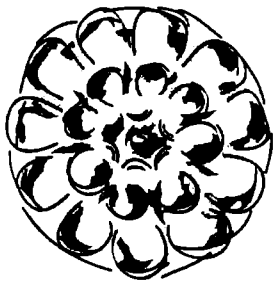
one of the highest honours to be awarded by the British government to a Muslim citizen of Bengal, namely that of 'Nawab Bahadur'. This was a significant achievement for a man who started his career as a humble *madrasah* teacher, as it was through hard work and devotion to his cause that he attained this lofty position in society. It is also worth pointing out that, during his retirement he wrote a booklet titled *A Short Account of My Public Life*, which was subsequently published from Calcutta in 1885. In recognition of his outstanding services to the Muslims of Bengal, in 1915 a statue of Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur was unveiled at the Senate House of Calcutta University.

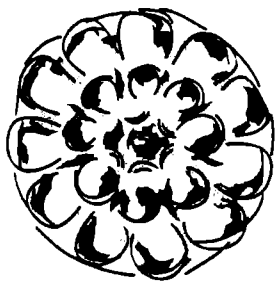
This important Muslim leader of Bengal died at the age of 65 and was laid to rest in Calcutta. According to F. B. Bradley-Birt, the Muslim community of Bengal owes a debt of gratitude to Nawab Abdul Latif for his efforts to awaken it from its political and educational slumber. Nawab Abdul Latif found that the Muslim community was educationally backward and politically disorganised, and therefore unprepared for the challenges that lay ahead; but he urged them to arise and work hard to reclaim their rightful place in society. He therefore deserves to be recognised as the first reformer to have pointed, 'out the road of progress along which the Muhammadan community has since made such great strides'.[10] Dr S. C. Mukherjee, the renowned journalist, paid this tribute:

> He loved to call himself a representative of the Mahomedans. He was their guide, philosopher and friend. He was their all in all. The Mahomedan society and interest of the day is of his making. Everything that Mussalmans now are or enjoy, they owe to Abdul Lateef Khan whether they know it or not, whether they choose to confess it or not.[11]

www.pathagar.com







Notes

1. Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India.*
2. Nawab Abdul Latif, *A Short Account of My Public Life.*
3. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, *Social History of the Muslims of Bangladesh under the British Rule.*
4. N. A. Latif, op. cit.
5. F. B. Bradley-Birt, *Twelve Men of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century.*
6. Mahmuda Khatun, 'Nawab Abdul Latif and the Planters-Ryots Conflict in Bengal'.
7. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Nawab Abdul Latif and the Education of Muslims of Bengal*; Abdul Karim, 'Nawab Abdul Latif and Modern Education of the Muslims of Bengal'.
8. Ibid.
9. M. A. Khan, op. cit.
10. F. B. Bradley-Birt, op. cit.
11. M. A. Rahim, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

1828–1893

ABDUR RA'UF WAHID

THE ROLES OF Nawab Abdul Latif and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who have been outlined in previous chapters, can be summarised in the words of the historian Mu'in-ud-Din Ahmad Khan:

> The chief architects of Muslim modernism in Bengal and India respectively, who dominated the Muslim society in the latter half of the nineteenth century and who succeeded in forging a Western outlook among the younger generation of the Muslims, amenable to the exigencies of the time which was identified as Muslim modernism.[1]

Their call for reform did not fall on deaf ears. The Muslim leaders of the time were aware that radical change was urgently needed in Muslim attitude towards English education to enable

www.pathagar.com

the community to compete with the Hindus. This, in turn, required the establishment of new and progressive educational institutions so that the younger generation could be prepared to face the challenges of the time in a confident and effective way. The combining of English education with traditional learning, they felt, would facilitate access to a range of government jobs and services, and this would have positive benefit for the Muslim community as a whole. If the *ulama* of Deoband felt that English-medium schools and colleges were no more than factories for producing government workers, thus making the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom subservient to worldly attainment, then they failed to understand what the Muslim reformers meant by 'loyalism'. To Abdul Latif and Sir Sayyid, the attainment of the former (worldly success) was never contrary to achieving the latter (success in the hereafter).

One man who supported Nawab Abdul Latif and Sir Sayyid's strand of Muslim modernism and reaped full benefits of a modern education by serving the British government with distinction (without losing his Islamic identity, independence of thought or loyalty to the Muslims of Bengal) was Abdur Ra'uf Wahid, an influential Muslim scholar, poet, journalist and political leader of West Bengal.

Abul Ma'ali Muhammad Abdur Ra'uf was better known as Abdur Ra'uf Wahid ('Wahid' was his pen-name, which means 'one' or 'unique' in Arabic). He was born into a prominent Muslim family of scholars, Sufis and statesmen in Calcutta (in the present-day Indian state of West Bengal). His grandfather, Shaykh Ahmad Ramzan, and his father, Shaykh Ahmad Ali Siddiqi Hanafi Naqshbandi, traced their family lineage back to a prominent Muslim family of Delhi: specifically, they traced it to Qazi Shaykh Muhammad Abdul Qadir Siddiqi and his brother, Shaykh Abdur Rahim Siddiqi, who left Delhi and travelled to West Bengal via Patna and settled there permanently in 1650. At the time, the famous Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan, was the ruler of India and Prince Abu Nasr Nasiruddin Muhammad Shuja was the Viceroy in Bengal. According to Muhammad Mohar Ali, Prince Shuja served as a Viceroy for 21 years, from 1639–1660, during which time Bengal enjoyed a long period of peace and prosperity. Located far away from Mughal headquarters, Bengal was not an easy province to govern but the appointment of Prince Shuja and his success there showed that the Mughals attached great importance to this frontier province.[2]

Perhaps it was the peaceful ambience and prosperity of Bengal that prompted Abdul Qadir Siddiqi and his brother to move to the village of Shutanuti in West Bengal. Subsequently, this village and two others (namely Gobindpur and Kalighat) were merged to form the city of Calcutta in 1690. Abdur Ra'uf's forefathers were not only the founders of their local village; they also played an active part in the formation of Calcutta as a prominent centre of commerce and culture in West Bengal. Perhaps in recognition of their considerable learning and cultural contribution, the members of this family were granted a large plot of land by none other than Awrangzeb, the last of the great Mughal emperors. At the time, Mu'azzam Khan (who is better known as Mir Jumla) was the viceroy in Bengal and, impressed with Abdur Ra'uf's forefather's contribution to Islamic learning

www.pathagar.com

and spirituality, he sponsored the construction of a mosque complex adjacent to their home and appointed them as its caretakers.

Mir Jumla took charge of Bengal during a politically chaotic and unpredictable period in its history, but he proved to be an effective administrator. As the historian Mohar Ali explained, 'Mir Jumla was a great man, great alike in war and peace. His record as a general and administrator in both the Deccan and Bengal is brilliant.'[3] His Kuch-Assam campaign aside, Mir Jumla governed Bengal for just over a year. During this short period he successfully restored Mughal authority across the province. He also reorganised and improved administration after the unsettling civil war. As a sincere Muslim, he ensured revenue collection and administration of justice were carried out according to the principles of Islamic law, and he thus outlawed excessive tax and judicial malpractive. Unsurprisingly, during his military campaigns (such as the Assam war), he issued strict guidelines to his soldiers to avoid excess so that the ordinary people did not suffer unnecessarily. In that sense, he was an outstanding military leader who also served the Mughals with considerable distinction.

During this unpredictable period in the history of Bengal, Abdur Ra'uf's forefathers established their reputation as Muslim scholars and spiritual guides to their people. However, as Mughal power and authority began to deteriorate after the death of the Emperor Awrangzeb in 1707, the Muslims of Bengal became alarmed by the growing power of the East India Company. Their fear was not only justified but also confirmed after the defeat of Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah at the hands of Robert Clive of the East India Company in 1757. During this period of political upheaval and economic uncertainty, Abdur Ra'uf's family lost control of their plots of land and estates to the increasingly powerful Hindu landlords. Subsequently, his grandfather, Shaykh Ahmad Ramzan, did recover some of the land and built a large, beautiful mosque complex for the benefit of the locals. He spent no less than 100,000 rupees on this extensive—but much-needed—project. Located in the Nimtala area of Calcutta, this mosque was completed within two years and it was formally opened to the worshippers in 1784. After the contribution of the mosque, the locals held the family of Abdur Ra'uf in high regard. After the death of his grandfather in 1813, Abdur Ra'uf's father assumed responsibility for the large, extended family. Under his father's tutelage young Abdur Ra'uf received his early education in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and traditional Islamic sciences.

Despite being a devout Muslim and a reputed Islamic scholar, Shaykh Ahmad Ali provided a modern education to his son at the Calcutta Madrasah, after grounding him in the Islamic curriculum under the leading scholars of the day. At this institution, Abdur Ra'uf studied Oriental languages, Islamic studies and modern sciences under the tutelage of several renowned scholars like Mawlana Muhammad Wajee Bihari, who was an eminent Muslim leader, scholar and senior lecturer at this institution. During his time at *madrasah*, Abdur Ra'uf also started writing articles and poetry on a wide range of subjects. After mastering Persian and Urdu, he acquired proficiency in Arabic. Then he received training in Persian and Urdu poetry under the tutelage of Sayyid Ulfat Husayn

www.pathagar.com

Fariad Azimabadi, who was a well-known journalist, historian and scholar of Persian language and Urdu literature.[4] While Abdur Ra'uf was studying at Calcutta Madrasah, the socio-political conditions of the Muslims of Bengal were deteriorating quickly. Hoping to reverse decline, senior Muslim leaders (like Nawab Abdul Latif) encouraged Muslims to acquire both traditional Islamic learning and modern education, as this combination would enable them to address confidently the challenges that confronted Bengal's Muslim society at the time. Like his father, Abdur Ra'uf took the advice of Muslim leaders very seriously. Thus, soon after completing his education at Calcutta, he became a journalist. Thanks to his efforts, the Calcutta-based *Sultanul Akhbar*, which was originally established in 1835, was revived and it remained in circulation until 1857. As a patriotic Muslim and a journalist, Abdur Ra'uf was eager to serve the Muslims of Bengal by raising awareness of the various challenges that confronted his people at the time.

The year 1857 was defining in the history of India in general, and in Bengal in particular. Bengal was politically marginalised and economically, socially and educationally sidelined, and the Muslims revolted against British hegemony in Bengal; the latter brutally suppressed the revolt and thereby established their rule in India. Once rulers of the land, the Muslims now felt like foreigners in their own country. During this period of political upheaval and socio-economic uncertainty, Abdur Ra'uf was keen to protect the interests of the Muslims of Bengal. As a writer, he felt that he could use his literary skills to serve his community. Accordingly, in 1853, he joined the *Durbeen*, a weekly Calcutta-based Persian journal that was established and edited by Shah Syed Riyazatullah of Brahmanbaria District (located in present-day Bangladesh). Although this was a Persian journal, it emphasised the need for political and religious unity as well as educational reform in the Muslim community.[5]

As expected, this struck a chord with the educated Muslims of Calcutta, thus attracting the attention of the Muslim middle classes. In addition to this, the journal became a valuable medium of communication for the leading Muslim writers, scholars and poets of the time. Like the *Durbeen*, Abdur Ra'uf established and edited the weekly *Urdu Guide*, which also became an important publication as it was a valuable vehicle for the Muslim intellectuals who wrote on a wide range of subjects. Through the *Urdu Guide*, Abdur Ra'uf attempted to promote a culture of learning in the Muslim community. He had become a journalist at a time when it was not fashion to pursue a career in journalism in the Muslim community. Furthermore, there were not enough journals and magazines published by Muslims at the time. His journalistic efforts therefore inspired a new generation of Muslim writers, poets and journalists to emerge including the members of the Sudhakar Group (see the profile of Shaykh Abdur Rahim of Basirhat in chapter 34).

As a result of his excellent command of Urdu, Persian and English, coupled with his skill and experience as a journalist and editor, in 1855 he was offered the post of translator at the civil courts (Sadar Diwani Adalat) in Calcutta. He was aged 27 at the time. Journalism was a poorly paid profession, whereas employment as a translator provided Abdur Ra'uf with

www.pathagar.com

a regular income, which allowed him to pursue literary activities in his spare time. He worked in this capacity for some time and established his reputation as a gifted linguist and translator. In due course, when the post of lecturer in Persian at the Calcutta Madrasah became vacant after the death of Maulvi Mirza Buzurg Shirazi, he was invited to fill the vacancy. Delighted to have been offered this prestigious post, in 1860 Abdur Ra'uf started teaching Persian at his former college. Two years later, the British government promoted him to the post of senior translator in the Legislative Council of the Governor-General. He continued to serve in this capacity for the rest of his working life. Also, on account of his linguistic skills and loyal service to the British government, in 1889, Abdur Ra'uf was elected a fellow of Calcutta University. During this period he helped the university staff to improve and enhance the teaching of the Oriental languages, especially Arabic, Persian and Urdu. This shows his stature as an educationalist whose views on educational policy and the teaching of Oriental languages were taken seriously by the leading scholars and educationalists of Bengal.

Although Abdur Ra'uf served the British government with loyalty and distinction, he was an equally devout and patriotic Muslim and was profoundly concerned with the pitiful condition of the Muslims of Bengal. Abdur Ra'uf lived at a time when Muslim leaders and scholars were calling for reform and modernisation; while others were rejecting any such proposal as being ill-informed, or misguided. Referring to the difficult challenges and opportunities which the Muslims faced at the time, the historian Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan identified four modes of social advancement that came to be recognised as modernism by its Hindu and Muslim advocates and its critics alike:

> (i) Quest for the acquisition of western scientific knowledge, (ii) cultivation of western culture, (iii) shunning the spirit of rebelliousness and agitational mentality against the British rulers by recognising the westerners as the agents of modern civilization and as such, accepting the British rule as providential and good, (iv) channelizing the thinking process towards a constitutional development of the socio-politico-economic conditions of the society.[6]

These strands of thinking called for a new vision, a different outlook on life and—of course—new attitudes and behaviours. Since the Muslim society of the subcontinent was based on a traditionalist worldview, a modernist approach to life and society required fresh thinking. Just as the Hindus had gone through this process during the early part of the nineteenth century, the Muslim community was forced to do the same during the latter part of that century.

Like his eminent contemporaries (such as Nawab Abdul Latif, Mawlana Muhammad Wajee, Qadi Abdul Bari, Maulvi Abdul Hakim and Mawlana Ubaydullah al-Ubaydi Suhrawardi) Abdur Ra'uf hailed from a traditional Muslim family. The pitiful and degenerative condition of his people prompted him to advocate the need for social, political and educational reform in the Muslim community of Bengal. This led him and his colleagues to form The Islamic Society (Anjuman-i-Islami) in Calcutta on 6 May 1855.[6] This was a pioneering

www.pathagar.com

social and political organisation, being one of the first of its kind to have been established by Muslims in the history of the subcontinent. Established by some of Calcutta's leading Muslim figures, the first meeting of the Anjuman took place at the Taltola residence of Maulvi Shams-ud-Duha Muhammad Mazhar Hanafi. The meeting was chaired by Qadi Maulvi Abdul Bari of Calcutta and Abdur Ra'uf delivered the inaugural speech in Persian, highlighting the main aims and objectives of the organisation. For him, the purpose of the Anjuman was to revive Muslim culture and society in the light of authentic Islamic principles and practices by harnessing the benefits of modern education and learning. This view was shared by all of the founding members of the Anjuman. They explained and documented the fundamental aims and objectives of Anjuman in the form of a constitution. This was carried out by a board of 15 members, of which Qazi Fazlur Rahman was the chair and Abdur Ra'uf was elected joint secretary along with Maulvi Mazhar. Hoping to establish a political organisation capable of representing the interests of the Muslims of Bengal in the same way the British Indian Association represented the Hindus, Abdur Ra'uf and his colleagues pursued this work with dedication and commitment.

In July 1855 the Anjuman was officially launched in Calcutta Town Hall, and around 400 prominent scholars, leaders and government officials (Muslims and non-Muslims alike) attended this historic event. At this meeting Abdur Ra'uf was elected secretary of the Anjuman but, being too preoccupied with the weekly *Durbeen* at the time, he asked the Anjuman's elected Working Committee to excuse him of this responsibility, which the committee reluctantly accepted. Even so, he maintained close links with the Anjuman and its leaders, regularly attending its gatherings where he recited beautiful Persian and Urdu poems. As it was the first and only Muslim political organisation of the time, the Anjuman-i-Islami played an important role in raising awareness of the pressing political, social, economic, cultural and religious challenges that confronted the Muslims of Bengal. In that sense, the Anjuman was a pioneering initiative, which later inspired Nawab Abdul Latif to establish his Muhammadan Literary and Scientific Society in 1863 and, in the same year, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan to inaugurate his Scientific Society in Ghazipur.[7] This also inspired Syed Ameer Ali to form his Central National Muhammadan Association in 1877. Thanks to Abdur Ra'uf's clear vision and foresight, the politically demoralised and educationally deprived Muslims of Bengal began to rise under the banner of the Anjuman and its successors (most notably Nawab Abdul Latif's Muhammadan Literary and Scientific Society). It is worth highlighting here that Abdur Ra'uf was also directly associated with Nawab Abdul Latif's Literary and Scientific Society, and on several occasions he delivered speeches at the society's gatherings on the personal invitation of the Nawab himself.

In addition to being a gifted journalist and one of the leading Muslim figures of his generation, Abdur Ra'uf was a noted poet and writer. Besides working full-time as a senior translator in the Legislative Council of the Governor-General as well as his important role in the formation of the Anjuman-i-Islami,

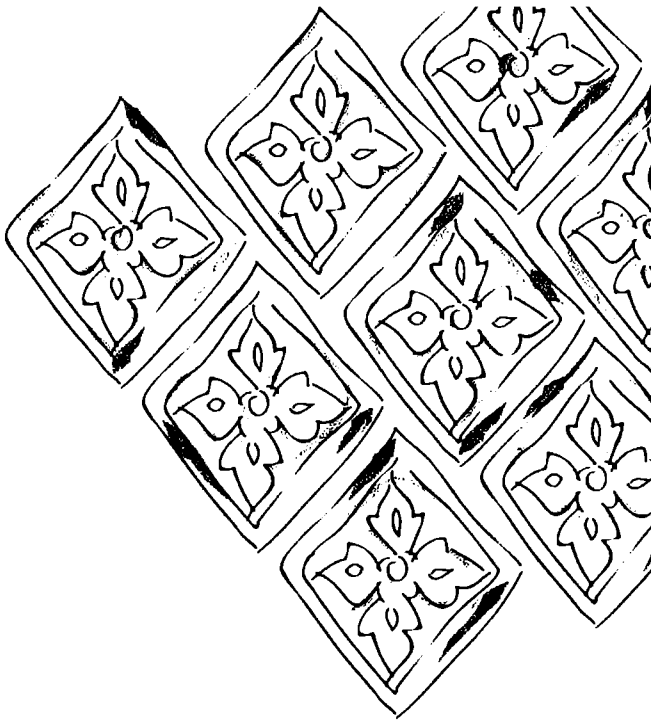
www.pathagar.com

Abdur Ra'uf found time to engage in literary activities. He authored many books and collections of poetry on a wide range of subjects. Along with Sir Sayyid, Mawlana Altaf Husayn Hali, Allama Shibli Numani and others, Abdur Ra'uf was one of the most prolific Urdu and Persian writers of the time.[8] Some of his most notable contributions include *Tahrirat-i-Wahidi* (a collection of his talks and speeches) and *Tawarikh-i-Bangal* (a Persian translation of Marsham's *History of Bengal*). Likewise, Abdur Ra'uf's *Sharf-i-Wahidi* and *Nahab-i-Wahidi* were two valuable works on Persian grammar, syntax and etymology that were written as textbooks for the students of the Calcutta Madrasah. Among his collections of poetry, most notable were *Rubaiyat-i-Wahidi* and *Diwan-i-Wahidi*. He also wrote a book on the history of Calcutta under the title of *Tarikh-i-Kolkata*. Approximately a dozen of his works were published and circulated during his lifetime, although many others remained unpublished and most probably they are no longer extant. Thankfully, copies of some of his writings have been preserved at Dhaka University for the benefit of posterity.[9]

In short, as a Muslim leader, educationalist, journalist, author and poet, Abdur Ra'uf attempted to awaken the Muslims of Bengal from their deep slumber. Through his intellectual, literary and political efforts and activities he sought to inspire the Muslims of Bengal to rise and face the difficulties and challenges of the time, and to do so with vision, courage and boldness. His political activities and literary contributions (in particular, his poetry and his role in the formation of the Anjuman-i-Islami) were recognised and widely appreciated during his lifetime and after his death. Abdur Ra'uf died at the age of 65 and was buried in Calcutta. In recognition of his wide-ranging services to the Muslim community of Bengal, Nawab Abdul Latif paid him (and his colleagues) this heart-felt tribute:

> A great deal of this success was due to the countenance and patronage of three worthies, long since deceased—Moulvie Mahomed Wajee, Kazi Abdool Baree and Moulvie Hafiz Ajeeb Ahmud, who were respected by the entire Mahomedan community, as the most learned and pious men of their time, and to the untiring zeal and unflinching devotion, manifested by Moulvie Mahomed Abdool Roof [Maulvi Abdur Ra'uf], the late Moulvie Abdool Hukeem and several other gentlemen.[10]

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, 'Pan-Islamic and Khilafat Movements' in *Islam in Bangladesh through the Ages*.
2. Muhammad Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume II: Bengal Muslims During the First Century of British Rule*.
3. Ibid.
4. Muhammad Abdullah, *Paschim Bangiya Farsi Sahitya*.
5. Ibid.
6. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, 'Muslim Renaissance in Bangladesh' in *Islam in Bangladesh through the Ages*.
7. Jayanti Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1855–1906*.
8. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.

www.pathagar.com

1833–1889

ABDUL GHAFUR NASSAKH

Although political Islam first entered Bengal in the beginning of the thirteenth century, Islam as a religious and cultural force had become an integral part of Bengal many centuries earlier. Muslims first came to Bengal as early as the seventh century to pursue trade and commerce, and over time they settled in the coastal regions of India, including Bengal. As a result, Islamic culture and traditions became an integral part of Bengal long before the arrival of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji. The early Muslim travellers not only came to Bengal with their goods and merchandise, but they also brought their language, culture and literature with them. In this way, aspects of Arabic and Persian languages became a part of Bengal's culture and heritage: so much so that after the

www.pathagar.com

establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal during the early part of the thirteenth century, the Muslim rulers became generous patrons of Islamic learning and education, and Persian became the main language of their political and civil administration. Likewise, Persian became the main language for intellectual discourse in Bengal; thus the Muslim scholars and writers produced their works in this language. During this period the Muslim scholars of Delhi (undoubtedly encouraged by their local rulers) developed Urdu: another language that was destined to become an influential medium of Islamic thought, scholarship and culture in the subcontinent. Developed in Delhi, Urdu subsequently became one of the foremost languages of India.[1] In due course, it became an imporant language of poetry and literature in Bengal, thanks to the efforts of prominent Muslim writers and poets of Bengal such as Abdul Ghafur Nassakh, who is widely considered to be the father of Urdu poetry in Bengal.

Khan Bahadur Abu Muhammad Abdul Ghafur, better known by his pen name Nassakh (meaning 'the great renewer'), was born in the village of Rajapur (located in Faridpur District in present-day Bangladesh).

His father, Qazi Faqir Muhammad, traced his ancestry back to Khalid ibn al-Walid, a prominent Companion of the Prophet of Islam and a great military general, who spearheaded the Muslim conquest of Persia and Byzantium in the seventh century.[2] Qazi Faqir Muhammad, the father of Abdul Ghafur Nassakh, hailed from a prominent Muslim family. Shah Azimuddin, a descendant of Khalid ibn al-Walid and a forefather of Qazi Faqir Muhammad had travelled from Arabia and settled in India. After making his way to Delhi, according to F. B. Bradley-Birt, Shah Azimuddin settled there and soon became well known for his learning and piety. Later, his son Abdur Rasul was appointed a judge in Rajapur in East Bengal, where he eventually settled. This was a difficult period in the history of East Bengal, as political upheveal, coupled with travel and communication difficulties that were created by the presence of pirates at the great rivers that were the main highways of East Bengal, led to considerable uncertainty and a sense of unease. Undeterred, Abdur Rasul chose a quiet and secure retreat where he built himself a home. His descendants have continued to live there and his son later became a judge, thus establishing their name and fame in the locality.[3]

Qazi Faqir Muhammad was also a learned individual who, on account of his expertise in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and traditional Islamic learning was appointed a pleader at the civil courts (Sadr Diwani Adalat) in Calcutta. In addition to being a successful lawyer, Qazi Faqir Muhammad became a prominent scholar and writer, and authored several books, including *Jami al-Tawarikh*, a universal history written in Persian, which was rated highly by the scholars. Given his scholarly disposition and literary interests, it is not surprising that he ensured his three sons received a thorough education in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Islamic studies. They pursued their early education at home before enrolling at the renowned Calcutta Madrasah for further and higher education. At age seven, Nassakh followed in the footsteps of his two brothers, Nawab Abdul Latif and Maulvi Abdul Bari, and joined the Calcutta Madrasah in 1841 to pursue a modern English

www.pathagar.com

education.[4] Three years later, his father passed away and, as expected, Nawab Abdul Latif, his older brother, assumed responsibility for the youngster. After completing his English education, Nassakh and Maulvi Abdul Bari were transferred to the Hughly Madrasah where they pursued higher education in Persian under the tutelage of Khwajah Muhammad Mustaqim, who was an eminent scholar of Persian poetry and literature.

According to Muhammad Abdullah, Nassakh's biographer, the young man soon fell under the influence of Khwajah Mustaqim and became interested in Persian poetry and literature: so much so that he began to compose Persian poetry in imitation of his teacher. Subsequently, he received training in literary composition and poetry under the guidance of Hafiz Rashidun Nabi Wahshat of Rampur and Hafiz Ikram Ahmad Zaygham. The former was a prominent scholar and literary figure of his generation, while the latter was a renowned Islamic scholar, Sufi sage and alchemist (who became well known for his expertise in poetry). Under the guidance of these scholars and poets, Nassakh not only mastered the art of literary composition but also began to write poetry in both Persian and Urdu. In 1853, at the age of 20, Nassakh successfully completed his studies at Hughly Madrasah and returned to his native village in Faridpur in search of suitable employment, although to no avail. Accordingly, Nawab Abdul Latif sent him to Dhaka where he became a clerk in the office of Henry Bailey, Additional Judge of Dhaka. During this period he continued his literary activities, composing works of poetry and prose. It was not long before he moved to Calcutta where he captured the attention of K. B. Kelvin, a British official and a linguist who was fluent in around a dozen languages. The latter was so impressed with Nassakh's mastery of Arabic, Persian and Urdu that he employed him as his private Persian and Urdu tutor.[5] In due course, Nassakh secured employment as a linguist at the Department of Translation at Calcutta's civil courts (Sadr Diwani Adalat), specialising in Arabic, Persian and Urdu.

While Nassakh was busy working as a translator in Calcutta, the Sepoy Revolt of 1857 erupted. During this period he, like Nawab Abdul Latif, remained loyal to the British authorities. In fact, Nawab Abdul Latif played such a prominent political role during this turbulent time that he quickly won the confidence and admiration of the British government, firmly establishing his reputation as a visionary leader and spokesman for the Muslims of Bengal. Thanks to his newfound fame and increasing influence within government circles, Nawab Abdul Latif helped his young brother to secure the vacant post of deputy magistrate in Barisal in 1860. Nassakh excelled in his new role, restoring peace and order across this jurisdiction in a matter of months. His success won him acclaim throughout Barisal. After nearly three years of continuous service in East Bengal, he was transferred to Calcutta and during this period Nassakh published his first collection of poetry under the title of *Daftar-i-Bimisal*. He also translated Shaykh Farid al-Din Attar's Persian *Pandnamah* into Urdu under the title of *Chashma-i-Faiz* (to avoid confusion, it should be pointed out here that Shaykh Muslih al-Din Sa'di, who was a famous Persian poet, had also composed a collection of

www.pathagar.com

poems under the title of *Pandnamah*). Nassakh was in his early thirties at the time. Soon after its publication, Nassakh's *Daftar* was hailed as a major contribution to Urdu poetry and literature to the extent that the great Urdu poet, Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, considered it to be an outstanding contribution.[6] This was a substantial achievement, as Ghalib subsequently became one of the greatest Urdu poets of all time along with Mir Taqi Mir and Allamah Sir Muhammad Iqbal.

Nassakh stayed in Calcutta for about a year until he was transferred to Rajshahi where he married for the second time. Mirza Humayun Barkat, his father-in-law, was a prominent local Muslim figure. In due course, Nassakh fell ill and was advised to proceed to Delhi for specialised medical treatment. During his stay he came into contact with several prominent writers and poets of the time, including Mawlana Altaf Husayn Hali, Nawab Mustafa Khan and Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib. Nassakh's encounter with these luminaries of Urdu literature and poetry no doubt inspired him to continue his literary activities. On his return from Delhi, he resumed his work as a deputy magistrate in Bhagalpur until 1869, when he was transferred to Bihar for a short period. In the following year, he returned to Bhagalpur as a deputy collector and during this period of relative calm and stability in his life he completed his *Ash'ar-i-Nassakh* and *Shukan-i-Shu'ara*. The former is a collection of Urdu poems that sought to inspire its readers to become intellectually active citizens, while the latter is an anthology of biographies of prominent Persian and Urdu poets. By composing these works, he hoped to revive Islamic cultural and literary heritage for the benefit of his people.

By that time, Nassakh's name and fame as a writer and poet had been firmly established. So when he was posted to Sylhet, the local literary figures there gave him a warm reception. Impressed with Nassakh's intellectual and poetical abilities, the local scholars and poets (including Hakim Ashraf Ali Masht and Haji Abdullah Ashayfta) became his disciples. Thereafter, in 1874, at the age of 41, Nassakh was transferred to Dhaka. He had worked in Dhaka as a clerk during the early part of his career, but at that time he occupied prominent positions as a deputy magistrate and deputy collector.

Local Muslim leaders and intellectuals (including Nawab Sir Abdul Ghani, Nawab Ahsanullah, Mawlana Ubaydullah al-Ubaydi Suhrawardi and Sayyid Mahmud Azad) became his close friends and associates. Also, thanks to his popularity as a writer and poet in the literary circles of Bengal, prominent scholars and teachers of Dhaka (including Ahmad Husayn Wafi and Maulvi Abdul Ghafur of Dhaka Madrasah) became his literary disciples. In fact, these scholars and teachers rated Nassakh's literary contribution so highly that they considered him to be one of the best writers and poets of his generation. His literary prowess and standing was confirmed after the publication of *Armaghan* and *Ganj-i-Tawarikh*. Written during his stay in Dhaka, these two books of poetry and biographies of eminent Muslim personalities enhanced Nassakh's reputation as a gifted writer and poet. During this period he visited Delhi for the third time. There he met many prominent Muslim writers and intellectuals, and also completed a critical study of the elegies of Mir Anis (1803–1874) and Mirza

www.pathagar.com

Dabir (1803–1805): two renowned Muslim poets of Lucknow. This study was published in 1879 under the title of *Intikhab-i-Naqsh*.

While Nassakh worked as a deputy magistrate in Dhaka he pursued his literary activities in his spare time. In 1879 he was transferred to Birbhum (located in West Bengal) where he stayed for 18 months before moving to Hughli. Here his health began to deteriorate and, as a result, he was forced to proceed to Delhi for medical treatment for the fourth time. As on previous occasions, here he met several well-known Muslim writers and poets of the time (including the Urdu poet, Mirza Dargh Dihlawi). On his return from Delhi, Nassakh resumed his duties as a deputy magistrate and, in 1884, published his fourth major anthology of poems under the title of *Armaghan*. Like his three previous collections, this anthology received widespread acclaim in Bengal and beyond. After more than five years of service in different parts of West Bengal, in 1885 he was transferred to Dhaka for the third time. Here he served for another three years before retiring after 28 years of unblemished service as a deputy magistrate and deputy collector. He juggled his legal career with his literary activities so well that he proved to be a success in both, thanks to his single-minded devotion and dedication. In fact, he was such a committed scholar, researcher, poet and writer that, despite suffering from ill health and discomfort, he authored yet another book, titled *Tadhkirat-i-Mu'asirin*, towards the end of his life. In this book, he highlighted the lives, works and achievements of the modern Persian literary figures. This book is today considered to be an invaluable contribution to the study of Persian history, culture and literature in the subcontinent in general and of Bengal in particular.[7]

In addition to being well versed in Arabic, English, Hindi and Bengali (which was his mother-tongue), Nassakh became an outstanding scholar, writer and poet in Urdu and Persian. Bengal produced many prominent Urdu writers and poets (such as Khwajah Abdul Ghafur, Sayyid Mahmud Azad and Mawlana Ubaydullah al-Ubaydi Suhrawardi); but it was Nassakh who became known as the 'father of Urdu poetry' in Bengal. Abdus Subhan, editor of *Khudnawisht Sawanih Hayat-i-Nassakh* (*The Autobiography of Abdul Ghafur Nassakh*) wrote the following:

> The brightest among the literary luminaries of Bengal in the 19th century was Abdul Ghafur Nassakh... [he] acquired a rare mastery over the intricacies of the Urdu language, besides being perfectly proficient in Arabic and Persian.[8]

For this reason Sambhu Chandra Mukherjee (1839–1894), a leading Bengali journalist, described him as a 'genuine chip off the old bloc of Islam'.

Through his Urdu poetry and writing, he established his reputation as a prominent scholar and poet. Garcin de Tassy, a celebrated French Orientalist, rated his works highly in the *Monthly Reviews* published from Paris.[9] For a native Bengali-speaker, born and brought up far away from Delhi and Lucknow (which were the leading centres of Urdu) it was remarkable that he won widespread acclaim for his contribution to Urdu poetry and literature.

Before his death, Nassakh completed his autobiography in Urdu in which he provided a

www.pathagar.com

vivid account of his life and work, highlighting the social, political and intellectual condition of Bengal at the time. In addition to this, Nassakh authored several other smaller books and collections of poetry in Persian and Urdu including *Madhhab-i-Mu'amma* and *Margab-i-Din*, and he also edited a collection of Persian poetry under the title of *Khand-i-Farsi* in 1872. In fact, his Persian works were rated so highly that Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan, a renowned Islamic scholar and author, stated in his *Sham-i-Anjuman* that Nassakh's Persian works elevated India's contribution to Persian literature and poetry to a higher level.[10] This important Muslim scholar, writer and poet of Bengal died in Calcutta a year after his retirement from government service—he was 56 at the time—and was laid to rest in the city's Talbagan Cemetery. However, his important literary contribution (in both Urdu and Persian) has continued to inspire writers and poets of the subcontinent to this day.

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. S. M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan.*
2. F. B. Bradley-Birt, *Twelve Men in Bengal in the Nineteenth Century.*
3. Ibid.
4. Muhammad Abdullah, *Muslim Jagarane Koyekjon Kabi Sahityik.*
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Sirajul Islam (ed.) *History of Bangladesh.*
9. Ibid.
10. M. Abdullah, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

1834–1885



MAWLANA UBAYDULLAH SUHRAWARDI

ALTHOUGH NINETEENTH-CENTURY India produced many eminent Islamic scholars and reformers (such as Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Mawlana Muhammad Qasim Nanotwi and Shah Isma'il Shahid), Bengal also produced some important Islamic thinkers and reformers (including Haji Shari'atullah, Titu Mir, Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri and Nawab Abdul Latif). Since these scholars and reformers lived at a very difficult time in the history of the subcontinent, it is not surprising that their understanding of—and approach to—Islam varied depending on their local circumstances. Like their co-religionists in other parts of India, the Muslim population of Bengal at the time were going through considerable uncertainty and upheaval. Just as the

www.pathagar.com

Muslim leaders of mainland India responded to these challenges and difficulties in their own ways, the Muslim scholars and reformers of Bengal also adopted different approaches to reform in order to arrest the decline of Islamic thought and culture, and thereby reinvigorate the Muslim society of Bengal.

For example, the purposes of Haji Shari'atullah and Titu Mir's reformist movements were twofold: to cleanse and purify the religious beliefs and practices of the Muslims from un-Islamic influences and secondly, and to improve the socio-economic condition of their people. In contrast, Nawab Abdul Latif wanted to change the educational and intellectual condition of the Muslims of Bengal by formulating a modern educational philosophy underpinned by traditional Islamic values and principles.[1] By so doing, he paved the way for Muslims to move into further and higher education in large numbers. This helped to break the cycle of intellectual poverty and underachievement amongst the Muslims of Bengal. During this period another influential Muslim personality emerged who became known as the father of traditional Islamic learning and scholarship in Bengal: this was none other than Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi.

According to his unpublished Persian autobiography, Ubaydullah al-Ubaydi Suhrawardi (or Suhrawardy) hailed from a noble Muslim family of village Chitwah (Daspur) in West Medinipur (in the present-day Indian state of West Bengal). His father, Shah Aminuddin, claimed to be a descendant of Shaykh Shihab al-Din Umar Suhrawardi, the famous Persian Sufi and sage, who flourished in and around Baghdad in the thirteenth century.[2] Since Shah Aminuddin traced his family roots back to the Persian city of Suhraward, they soon became known as the Suhrawardi family. One of Shah Aminuddin's forefathers came from Persia and settled in the village of Fathabad, which was located in Murshidabad in Bengal. Shah Aminuddin later left Fathabad and moved to the village of Chitwah in Medinipur. Like his two older brothers (Muhammad Ali and Mubarak Ali), young Ubaydullah was born, brought up and educated in Urdu and Persian at home. He then moved to Calcutta (Kolkata) where he continued his education in Urdu, Arabic and Persian under the tutelage of local Muslim scholars and teachers.

As the future leading figure of the famous Suhrawardi family of Calcutta, he received a thorough education in Islam and the Oriental languages during his early years. Despite being born and raised in an Urdu-speaking family, his varied early education and love for learning enabled Ubaydullah to acquire fluency in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, in addition to learning English, Bengali, Sanskrit, Latin, Hebrew and Greek. He then mastered traditional Islamic sciences at the famous Calcutta Madrasah. As a gifted student, Ubaydullah studied Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), Prophetic traditions (*hadith*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the life of the Prophet Muhammad (*sirah*), and early Islamic history (*tarikh*). He specialised in the lives and teachings of the first four caliphs of Islam (*al-khulafa al-rashidun*). In addition to this, he studied aspects of Islamic theology (*ilm al-kalam*) and philosophy (*falsafah*). His devotion and dedication to his studies soon endeared him to his teachers and peers alike. As expected, he passed his Final Central Examinations

www.pathagar.com

(FCE) from the Calcutta Madrasah with flying colours, even though he was only 25 years old at the time.[3] One of his favourite teachers was Mawlana Abdur Razzaq Isfahani, who taught him Persian literature, poetry and the traditional Islamic sciences.

During his early years, Ubaydullah was profoundly influenced by traditional Islamic values and principles. As a result, he not only became a committed and practising Muslim but he also developed an Islamic outlook on life which remained with him for the rest of his life. Despite being a faithful and devout Muslim (as well as a distinguished scholar of traditional Islamic sciences), he was very fond of modern English education and learning. Thus, he not only learned English on his own and became fluent in it; he also studied aspects of Islamic and Western philosophy and theology under the tutelage of Abdur Rahim Gorakhpuri, who was an eminent Muslim rationalist thinker, writer and poet.[4] Although he was much younger than Nawab Abdul Latif, Ubaydullah was thoroughly familiar with the latter's educational philosophy and approach to Islam. That is to say, Nawab Abdul Latif was of the view that the Muslims of Bengal had no choice but to remain faithful to their Islamic faith, culture and practices in their traditional form whilst, at the same time, he urged them to strive hard to improve and enhance their social, political, economic and educational condition. Although he was in favour of combining English education (including modern sciences and philosophy) with traditional Islamic sciences, he warned his fellow Muslims against assimilating Western materialistic values and ethos. Like Nawab Abdul Latif, Ubaydullah was of the opinion that it was possible to seek the former without necessarily becoming a victim of the latter. More than anyone else of his generation, Ubaydullah was able to strike a balance between being modern while remaining deeply rooted in traditional Islam.

As a result of his expertise in different languages and his thorough education in Islamic sciences, Ubaydullah was recruited into the service of Prince Jalal al-Din, the grandson of the great Muslim warrior of Mysore, Tipu Sultan. After the latter's defeat at the hands of the British army in 1799, the family of Tipu Sultan had moved from Mysore to Tollyganj in Calcutta where they had become prominent patrons of Urdu language and literature. Since several members of this family attained fame as eminent Urdu poets and writers, Ubaydullah became very close to this family on account of his dedicated service to Prince Jalal al-Din and due to his keen interest in Urdu and Persian literature. Thanks to his unusual linguistic skills and abilities, he later secured employment in the Translation Department of the Legislative Council of the-then Governor-General of Bengal. His work in this department involved drafting legal contracts and others documents for the government in different languages. During this period he continued to pursue research in Arabic, Persian and Urdu literature as well as in the traditional Islamic sciences.

An admirer of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Nawab Abdul Latif, Ubaydullah became an active member of the latter's Muhammadan Literary and Scientific Society. Founded in April 1863 in Calcutta by the Nawab, this organisation was patronised by the family of Tipu Sultan, and its activities were carried

www.pathagar.com

out by a committee of 12 members. Two years later, Ubaydullah joined Hughli College as a lecturer in Persian, Arabic and Islamic sciences. Here he became a popular lecturer and Syed Ameer Ali, the eminent Muslim jurist and the acclaimed author of *The Spirit of Islam*, was one of his students. Ameer Ali had profound respect for his teacher; he would later recall in his *Memoirs* that every Sunday he had breakfast with Ubaydullah and his colleague, Syed Karamat Ali, the custodian of Hughly Imambara complex. They engaged in discussion of many aspects of Islamic philosophy, history and theology. According to Syed Ameer Ali, Ubaydullah was an unusually learned scholar who was widely read and very talkative.[5]

After teaching at the Hughly College for nearly a decade, Ubaydullah left Calcutta and moved to Dhaka, with his family, where he became the founding superintendent of Dhaka Madrasah, which was modelled on its Calcutta counterpart. According to S. M. Ali, a former Treasurer of Dhaka University, this *madrasah* was established in 1874 on the recommendation of Sir George Campbell, the lieutenant governor, who drew the government's attention to the fact that the Muhsin Fund was created to promote education in the Muslim community. In response, the government established three new *madrasahs* in Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi out of the fund. As one of the founding directors of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh, Ubaydullah was well qualified to lead the Dhaka Madrasah during its early years. Hoping to promote English education, Ubaydullah established an English department at this institution to allow students to sit for the entrance examinations of the Calcutta University. This again proved that he was a man of progressive ideas and was keen to promote traditional learning side-by-side with modern education. That is likely to be the reason why Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan was fond of Ubaydullah and counted him as one of his leading supporters in the dissemination of modern learning in the subcontinent.[6]

During his tenure as superintendent of this institution, Ubaydullah not only supervised the daily affairs of the whole *madrasah* but also taught advanced Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Islamic sciences. Despite his busy schedule, Ubaydullah found time to write prolifically. Thus, his *Grammar of the Persian Language* (*Dastan-i-Farsi Amuz*) was published in 1873 in five volumes from Agra; it was later reissued from Dhaka in 1877. This book subsequently became a standard work on Persian grammar: to the extent that it is still considered to be a standard work of reference on the subject. A year after his move to Dhaka in 1874, his *Grammar of the Arabic Language* (*Lubb-ul-Arab*) was published by Calcutta University and, like his *Dastan-i-Farsi Amuz* it instantly became an authoritative reference work on the subject. In due course it was included in the syllabus of different colleges, universities and *madrasahs* in Bengal; and likewise has continued to be used widely to this day. Ubaydullah was also an outstanding scholar of Urdu language and literature. His *Key to Literature* (*Miftah ul-Adab*) was a proof of his remarkable grasp of the intricacies of Urdu grammar. Likewise, his command of English was equally accomplished. He translated (with the assistance of Syed Ameer Ali) both Syed Karamat Ali's *Makhaz-i-Ulum*, a book on the

www.pathagar.com

origin of the sciences, and Ram Mohan Roy's Persian treatise, *Gift to the Monetheists* (*Tuhfat al-Muwahhidun*), into English.[7]

Not only was Ubaydullah a prolific writer, he was also a gifted poet. His collections of poems written in Persian and Urdu were published as *Urdu Diwan* (1880) and *Farsi Diwan* (1886), while his Arabic poetry remains unpublished. Although Ubaydullah was not the first person to write Arabic and Persian poetry in Dhaka at the time, his poetry later inspired others such as Abdur Rahim Khaki, a local civil servant, and Muhammad Ishaq Bardwani, a lecturer at Dhaka Intermediate College, to compose their own works.[8] Ubaydullah's poetry was heavily influenced by the works of the classical Persian and Urdu poets (like Shaykh Sa'di, Hafiz of Shiraz, Abdur Rahman Jami and Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib). Ubaydullah's ability to learn from people of all backgrounds and persuasions without being unduly influenced by one particular strand of thought at the expense of the others was nothing short of remarkable. His tutors included conservative Muslim theologians who had no exposure to modern learning (such as the *ulama* of the Calcutta Madrasah) and scholars who were entirely rationalistic in their approach to Muslim faith and culture (like Abdur Rahim Gorakhpuri), as well as prominent Hindu thinkers (like Raj Narayan Bose and Ram Mohan Roy). He benefited from their works and did so without compromising his beliefs and practices as a traditionalist Muslim. By all accounts, this was a great achievement, considering the fact that the conservative *ulama* on the one hand and the secular, rationalist thinkers of the time on the other did not think it was possible to create a balance between the two approaches: Ubaydullah proved them wrong.

For most people, combining full-time teaching with the day-to-day supervision of a busy *madrasah*, as well as writing prolifically and discharging one's family responsibilities, would be more than enough to keep them fully occupied, but not so Ubaydullah. In addition to the above, he was a member of the central committee of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (the present-day Aligarh Muslim University), which was founded by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan in 1877, and also a member of the Central National Muhammadan Association (established by Justice Syed Ameer Ali in the same year). A year later, he founded the National Social Association (Samaj Sammilani Sabha) in Dhaka. Patronised by Nawab Sir Ahsanullah, a leading member of Dhaka's Nawab family, this was the first Muslim organisation to work for socio-economic regeneration and communal harmony between the Muslims and Hindus in Dhaka. With Ubaydullah's guidance and support the students of the Dhaka College also established the Dhaka Muslim Friends Conference (Dhaka Mussalman Suhrid Sammilani) in 1883.[9] The purpose of this student organisation was to empower the Muslim students of the college and engage them in constructive community development work and activities. Led by some of Ubaydullah's leading students and followers (including Abdul Aziz, Himmat Ali, Maqbul Ali and Himayatuddin Ahmad), this organisation played an important role in raising awareness of Islamic culture, social welfare and the importance of female education in the Muslim community. It also promoted the teaching of Bengali and Urdu languages

www.pathagar.com

in Bengal. This organisation continued to function until the early years of the twentieth century, when it was replaced by the Muhammadan Provincial Union.

Despite his extremely busy life, Ubaydullah found time for his family. His children were born when he was in his mid to late thirties, yet he kept a close eye on them, providing them with a good Islamic and modern education. His eldest son, Allamah Sir Abdullah al-Ma'mun Suhrawardi was born, brought up and educated in Dhaka. He graduated in English in 1898 before obtaining a First Class Masters Degree in Arabic. Thereafter, he obtained a doctorate from Calcutta University (being one of first two students to do so in 1908) and then qualified as a barrister from Gray's Inn, London. Subsequently, he carved out a distinguished career as a university professor, politician and Islamic scholar. Like his father, he became a prolific writer, authoring books on Islamic jurisprudence and history. He compiled a famous collection of Prophetic traditions under the title of *The Sayings of Muhammad*.[10] Likewise, Ubaydullah's other son, Lt. Colonel Sir Dr Hasan Suhrawardi, became the first Muslim vice-chancellor of Calcutta University and a deputy president of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly; he was knighted by the British government for his bravery and other contributions. Ubaydullah's daughter Khujistha Akhtar also became a prominent scholar and writer in Urdu and English. She wrote a biography of the Prophet of Islam in Urdu under the title of *The Life of the Prophet* (*Sirat-un-Nabi*). Her other books included *The Celebration of the Prophet's Birthday* (*Milad-un-Nabi*) and *Female Education* (*Talim-un-Nisa*). She also translated one of Henry Wood's books on ethics into Urdu under the title of *The Mirror of Counsel* (*Aina-i-Ibrat*).

Ubaydullah inspired his children to follow in his footsteps and they became prominent writers, scholars and politicians. Also, during his time as the superintendent of Dhaka Madrasah, Ubaydullah laid the foundation of classical Islamic learning and scholarship in East Bengal which enabled generations of students to pursue Arabic, Persian, Urdu, English and Bengali, coupled with specialisation in traditional Islamic sciences in Dhaka and beyond. Ubaydullah pioneered this dual system of education in East Bengal, combining the traditional Islamic learning with modern education for the benefit of the Muslim community. This inspired the young Muslims of East Bengal to become proud of their Islamic culture and heritage. His vision for the Muslims of Bengal was an ambitious and lofty one, wherein there was no contradiction between the Islamic faith and culture and Bengali language and literature. Although, as a true seeker of knowledge, Ubaydullah was prepared to learn from all different sources, he differentiated the wheat from the chaff by using his God-given mind, intellect and intuition. Not surprisingly, despite being a traditionally minded Islamic scholar, he was thoroughly familiar with aspects of physics, logic, philology, psychology, rhetoric and spirituality, in addition to writing many essays and treatises on these subjects (including *Dabistan-i-Danish Amuz*). Unfortunately, many of his writings have remained unpublished to this day.

Ubaydullah was an outstanding scholar, thinker and reformer, and his religious ideas

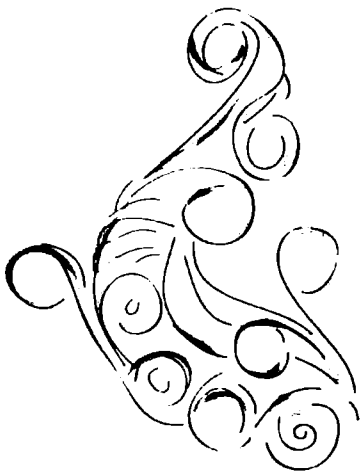
www.pathagar.com

and thoughts profoundly influenced generations of Muslim scholars, thinkers and writers of both West and East Bengal, including: Rt. Hon. Justice Syed Ameer Ali (a renowned jurist and author), Khan Bahadur Abdul Aziz (a prominent writer, educationist and social worker), Abul Khair Muhammad Siddiq (an eminent Islamic scholar and superintendent of Dhaka Madrasah), Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan (a prominent Islamic scholar, journalist and politician) and Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah (a celebrated writer and philantrophist), among many others. In recognition of his wide-ranging contributions and achievements, the government of India awarded him the title of 'Sea of Knowledge' (*Bahr ul-Ulum*) and the late Professor Muhammad Abdullah of Dhaka University referred to him as the 'Sir Sayyid of Bengal'.[11] In addition, the University of Dhaka has continued to confer the Ubaydullah al-Ubaydi Suhrawardi Medal to this day: this medal is awarded annually to the best honours graduate in Arabic or Islamic studies and was initiated in 1938 by his illustrious son, Sir Hasan Suhrawardi, who donated 1500 rupees to Dhaka University in memory of his father.

After a lifetime devoted to the service of Islam and the Muslims of Bengal, Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi passed away at the relatively young age of 51. He lies buried in the Lalbagh Cemetery in Dhaka. His fame will no doubt endure for a long time to come on account of his important educational and literary contribution and achievements.

www.pathagar.com





Notes

1. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Banglar Musalmander Itihas.*
2. Ubaydullah Suhrawardi, *Dastan-i-Ibratbar.*
3. Muhammad Abdullah, *Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi.*
4. K. M. Mohsin, 'Muslim Rationalist Thought in Nineteenth Century Bengal' in *Bangladesh: Society, Religion and Politics.*
5. Syed Ameer Ali, *Memoirs and other Writings of Syed Ameer Ali.*
6. S. M. Ali, 'Education and Culture in Dacca during the Last One Hundred Years' in *Muhammad Shahidullah Felicitation Volume.*
7. S. A. Ali, op. cit.
8. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
9. Ibid.
10. Muhammad Abdullah, *Dhakar Koyekjon Muslim Shudi.*
11. M. Abdullah, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

1834–1903



FAIZUNNESA CHOUDHURANI

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING, women have played an influential role in the rise and development of Islamic civilisation. During the early days of Islam, when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) had no one to help and support him, his wife Khadijah bint Khuwailid who became his foremost supporter and benefactor. Other early Muslim women who played a pivotal role in the development of Islamic thought and scholarship include Aishah bint Abi Bakr, Hafsah bint Umar and Amrah bint Abd al-Rahman. During the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, the contribution and achievements of women such as Zaynab ibn Ali, Rabi'ah al-Adawiyyah, Khayzuran bint Atta and Zubayda (the wife of Caliph Harun al-Rashid) were noteworthy.

www.pathagar.com

Later, during the Muslim rule of the subcontinent, women such as Sultanah Razia, Nur Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal played their part in the development of Islamic thought, culture and heritage in that part of the world. These pioneering Muslim women played an important role in the emergence of Islam as a global faith and culture. Needless to say, the examples set by the early Muslim women subsequently inspired others to transcend social, economic and cultural barriers to carve out a unique place for themselves in the records of Islamic history. Like the rest of the Muslim world, Bengal also produced many outstanding and inspirational Muslim women. Faizunnesa Choudhurani was one such lady who, by the sheer dint of her powerful character and personality, has left indelible marks upon the history of Muslim Bengal.

Faizunnesa Choudhurani was born into a devout and wealthy Muslim family in the village of Paschimgaon near the town of Laksham in the District of Comilla (in present-day Bangladesh). Her father, Ahmad Ali Chowdhury, was the sixth descendant of Amir Agha Khan, a noted Muslim figure of his generation.[1] Having inherited the Homnabad-Paschimgaon estate from his forefathers, Ahmad Ali Chowdhury was considered to be one of the wealthiest Muslims in his locality. In addition to this, he was a learned individual who was well versed in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Bengali and aspects of Islamic teachings and practices. He encouraged young Faizunnesa to learn Arabic, Urdu, Sanskrit and Bengali. She also became thoroughly familiar with the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions and aspects of Islamic history and jurisprudence. She received tutorials in these subjects at home under the tutelage of various local Muslim teachers and scholars. The absence of proper educational institutions for Muslim girls, coupled with the prevailing social and cultural barriers of the time, prevented women from pursuing formal education and training; this also held them back from realising their intellectual and literary potential.[2] This state of affairs prevailed throughout Muslim East Bengal despite the fact that the Prophet of Islam had made the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom an obligatory (*fard*) duty upon all Muslims, male and female, as early as the seventh century. The majority of Bengal's Muslim population had remained ignorant and illiterate, a circumstance that was almost certainly exacerbated by the absence of educational opportunities for women, who continued to suffer from all kinds of social and cultural restrictions that had no religious justification. Perhaps it was a combination of these factors that prompted her family to make special arrangements for Faizunnesa to be educated at home. Although her father died when she was young, her family ensured that she continued to receive a decent education. As expected, her early education empowered her, and in due course, she became known for her intellectual abilities and for her maturity of thought as well as good looks.[3]

Faizunnesa's love of learning and education prompted her family to delay her marriage. This enabled her to read widely and she became actively engaged in literary activities. Other than her early studies, Faizunnesa did not receive any formal further or higher education, although she continued to read and write on her own. She not only became proficient

www.pathagar.com

in several languages but also became familiar with aspects of Bengali literature, the Qur'an, Urdu poetry and ancient Indian epics such as *Mohabharata* and *Ramayana*. Faizunnesa was a devout and intellectually curious Muslim like her father. She was prepared to learn from a range of sources (including Islamic scripture, ancient Indian literature and Hindu religious epics), and did so without compromising her own faith and culture. She was able to acquire varied linguistic skills and abilities due to her profound love for learning and education, and thanks to her privileged upbringing.

It is worth pointing out here that Faizunnesa was brought up at a time when women had very few rights, and their status in society was poor and abysmal. Apart from those born into wealthy Muslim and Hindu families, women had few opportunities to pursue education and literary activities at the time. They were generally not considered to be productive or active members of their society. Local social taboos and cultural restrictions, coupled with the absence of role models, ensured that they remained passive members of their societies. They were rarely consulted or asked to contribute to decision-making within either the family or the wider society. Women were excluded from participating actively in their family affairs and, as a result, they exercised very little influence in the politico-economic spheres of their society.[4] While the Hindu caste system represented a barrier to the liberation of low-caste Hindu families and their womenfolk, the Muslims hardly fared any better when it came to attitudes towards women and gender issues. This state of affairs prevailed across the Muslim society of Bengal, despite the fact that the Qur'an had enjoined social, economic, moral and spiritual equality between the sexes; in the words of the Holy Qur'an:

> For men and women who are devoted to God–believing men and women, obedient men and women, truthful men and women, steadfast men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and women, chaste men and women, men and women who remember God often–God has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward. When God and His Messenger have decided on a matter that concerns them, it is not fitting for any believing man or woman to claim freedom of choice in that matter: whoever disobeys God and His Messenger is far astray.[5]

This Qur'anic command left no room for any doubt concerning equality between men and women although, sadly, such a progressive approach to gender relations was—be it advertently or inadvertently—pushed aside in favour of local tribalistic and cultural practices that systematically undermined the role and status of women in Bengal. To add insult to injury, the Muslim scholars and preachers did not pay much attention to the abysmal socio-economic condition of their womenfolk either. Apart from Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanvi (a Deoband-trained Islamic scholar, who wrote *Ornament of Heaven* (*Behesti Zewar*), a manual of Islamic guidelines in Urdu for the benefit of Muslim women), very few books were written for Muslim women at the time. In *Behesti Zewar*, Mawlana Thanvi pointed out that both men and women enjoyed rights and responsibilities in Islam, and argued that as such, they were required to observe Islamic rules and regulations equally.[6] Unfortunately, very few Islamic

www.pathagar.com

scholars of the time were able to rise above the prevailing socio-cultural taboos to highlight the rights granted to Muslim women by the Qur'an.

However, because of her noble character and strong personality (and a measure of good fortune, family status and a sound upbringing) Faizunnesa was able to overcome prevailing social and cultural obstacles. In the process, she became an outstanding role model for other Muslim women of Bengal. Like the Hindus of the time, it was a custom in the Muslim community to make arrangements for the girls to be married off before they had reached their puberty. Thankfully, Faizunnesa's family was more enlightened in this respect, and did not make preparation for her marriage until she was well into her mid-twenties. In fact, according to her biographers, Faizunnesa was married at the age of 26 to a distant relative. Her husband's name was Muhammad Ghazi, and he was also a wealthy *zamindar* (landholder). It was common for wealthy Muslim men to have more than one wife in those days and, as such, Faizunnesa became the second wife of her husband.[7] She must have consented to this arrangement because, given her strong character, personality and independence of mind, it is unlikely that her family would have pushed her into such an arrangement without her approval. It was the cultural practice of the time for wealthy and aristocratic Muslim families to seek brides for their sons (or bridegrooms for their daughters) from families of similar standing. Since Muhammad Ghazi was a wealthy landholder of considerable socio-economic standing, no doubt Faizunnesa's family was happy for her to become his second wife.

Although many people are aware that the Qur'an permits Muslim men to have more than one wife, perhaps less widely known is that the Qur'an also says: 'If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], then marry only one.' (*Surah al-Nisa'*, verse 3) In other words, Islamic law (Shari'ah) does not permit unrestricted practice of polygamy without regulating the rights and responsibilities of both the husband and his wives. The permission to have more than one wife is only granted where the husband is certain that he will be able to treat his wives fairly and equitably. If he fears that he will not be able to treat them equally, then the recommendation is to marry only one. After her marriage, Faizunnesa moved to her husband's house, but due to circumstances unknown to us, her marriage to Muhammad Ghazi was not a blissful one. As an independently minded lady who could not tolerate being sidelined or pushed around by others, Faizunnesa may have not fitted into her husband's extended family set-up.

Furthermore, as an intelligent, widely-read and confident woman, she may have defied Muhammad Ghazi's picture of a quiet, submissive and obedient wife; and as an outspoken and empowered young lady who always stood up for what was right, she would not have accepted being treated unfairly or inequitably. Some biographers speculate that this led to conflict with the other members of her husband's family which, in turn, may have created misunderstanding with her husband, thus forcing her to seek divorce and return to her family home.[8] Under Islamic law, a Muslim woman can initiate divorce (*khula*) on the grounds of incompatibility or mistreatment by

www.pathagar.com

the husband, but in a patriarchal nineteenth-century Muslim society it was very unusual for a woman to initiate divorce. Faizunnesa was not a typical Muslim lady, however, and the fact that she initiated divorce showed that she was a bright, confident lady who knew what she wanted and was not prepared to put up with any form of inequality and injustice.

According to her biographers, Faizunnesa's proper education took place after she returned to her father's house. However, this view is only partially true: during her short marital life she continued her literary interests, although after her divorce she did focus more attention to her studies. Faizunnesa was, beyond doubt, a true seeker of knowledge who pursued lifelong education and in so doing she became one of the pioneers of learning and education in Muslim East Bengal.[9] In fact, in 1873, when she was only 39 years old, she founded and patronised the first private high school for Muslim girls in the history of the subcontinent. As a traditional Muslim lady, she was acutely aware of the cultural barriers and social taboos that prevented girls from pursuing education, which was further exacerbated by the lack of female-only educational institutions. She was determined to reverse this trend by setting up her own educational institutions, which she funded with the income she received from the estates and properties she had inherited from her wealthy father.

In fact, after the death of her mother in 1883, Faizunnesa took charge of her family wealth and this enabled her to use the inherited wealth to achieve two important objectives: to contribute to the regeneration of the socio-cultural condition of the Muslim women of her locality and to establish as many educational facilities for poor female students as possible. She set about achieving her first goal by initiating a social welfare programme that promoted the health and welfare of women in and around Comilla. The charitable centre she founded for the women of her village was later expanded and renamed as the Faizunnesa Zanana Hospital. Likewise, Faizunnesa became a great champion and pioneer of female education at a time when it was considered a social and cultural taboo to educate girls. In addition to establishing a high school for girls, she also founded a free *madrasah* (Islamic seminary), which is today known as the Nawab Faizunnesa Government Degree College. All her educational establishments were open to students of all faiths and backgrounds, but she insisted on paying the hostel fees for only the poor female Muslim students.

A year after founding the Zenana Hospital, Faizunnesa went to Arabia to perform the sacred *hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah) and it was during her stay there that, according to her biographers, she paid for a *madrasah* to be established there along with a lodge for the pilgrims and travellers alike (*musafirkhana*). As a devout Muslim, she observed full *purda* (seclusion) and used most of her income for the promotion of Islamic learning and education. Not surprisingly, on her return from Makkah, Faizunnesa became a major supporter and financier of several Muslim journals and magazines of the time including the *Islam Pracharak*, *Dhaka Prakash* and the *Sudhakar*. The former was a monthly Islamic magazine that was first published in 1891 in Calcutta by Munshi Muhammad Reazuddin Ahmad. Its main aim was

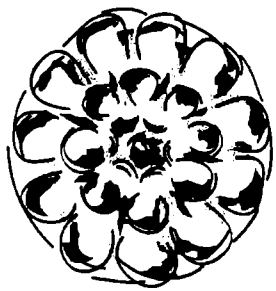
www.pathagar.com

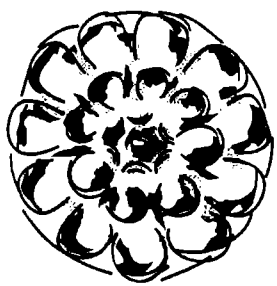
to promote Islamic thought, history, culture and practices for the benefit of the Muslims of Bengal. *Dhaka Prakash* was first published in 1861 and became the first Bengali newspaper to be published from Dhaka. It started as a weekly paper with a limited circulation, which focused mainly on social, economic and political issues. Over time, however, it became very influential in Dhaka. Like *Islam Pracharak*, the *Sudhakar* was another weekly magazine that received financial support from Faizunnesa. Established by Munshi Muhammad Reazuddin Ahmad and Shaykh Abdur Rahim, who were two well-known Muslim journalists of the time, this magazine highlighted the history, culture and heritage of the Muslims of Bengal through regular articles and essays contributed by prominent Muslim scholars and writers.[10]

Faizunnesa not only supported the above journals and magazines; she also became a skilled writer and poet herself. Written in both prose and verse, her *Roopjalal* was published when she was 42. In this work, she skilfully depicted her own troubled marital life and highlighted the difficult existential condition that confronted women in nineteenth-century Bengal, using the form of an allegory. The book related the story of Prince Jalal who married two heroines (Rupbanu and Hurbanu) and highlighted the subsequent challenges, exploits and difficulties he faced. She painted a picture of an aristocratic life that was not far removed from reality; the excessive and over-indulgent lifestyle of the elites appeared to be completely detached from the day-to-day challenges, difficulties and experience of the poor, hard working Muslim masses of Bengal. In addition to the *Roopjalal*, Faizunnesa authored several other books and essays, including *The Essence of Music* (*Sangitsar*) and *The Rhythm of Music* (*Sangitlahari*). In recognition of Faizunnesa's pioneering social work, educational activities and literary contribution, the title of 'Nawab Bahadur' was conferred on her by Queen Victoria in 1889. Thus, at the age of 55, she became the first woman to be made a 'Nawab' in the history of the subcontinent. She arguably deserved this accolade more than anyone else, thanks to her remarkable efforts to improve and enhance the social, cultural and educational conditions of the Muslim women of East Bengal in general, and of Comilla in particular.

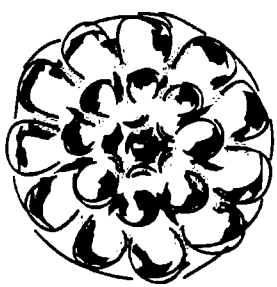
Furthermore, just before her death she gave away most of her wealth to a *waqf* (a religious endowment), which has continued to provide support and scholarship to poor students to this day. After a lifetime devoted to seeking knowledge and promoting education, as well as promoting the social, cultural and health needs of women, Nawab Faizunnesa died at the age of 59. She was laid to rest in her own family graveyard in Comilla. More than a century after her death, the government of Bangladesh finally recognised her outstanding contribution and achievements by posthumously awarding her the Ekushey Padak (which is the highest honour that is awarded by the state) in 2004. For some unknown reason, none of her relatives came forward to receive the award of 25,000 taka and an eighteen-carat gold medal. Even so, her important educational and cultural contributions will be remembered by posterity for a long time to come.

www.pathagar.com





Notes



1. M. M. B. Ali, *Nawab Faizunnesa Choudhurani.*
2. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Banglar Musalmander Itihas.*
3. M. M. B. Ali, op. cit.
4. S. N. Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876–1939.*
5. *Surah al-Ahzab,* verses 35–36.
6. Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, *Behesti Zewar.*
7. M. M. B. Ali, op. cit.
8. Fayeza Hasanat (trans.) *Nawab Faizunnesa's Rupjalal.*
9. Muhammad Abdullah, *Adhunik Shikha Bistare Koyekjon Muslim Dishari.*
10. Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra.*

www.pathagar.com

1840–1913

DILWAR HUSAYN AHMAD

Two main strands of religious thinking are discernible in the history of Muslim Bengal: namely, the spiritualist and pragmatic message of the Sufis and the literalist and traditionalist Islam of the *ulama*. Since the early Muslim traders and Sufi preachers were responsible for the dissemination of Islam in Bengal, it is not surprising that the Sufi tariqah (orders) became very influential in Bengal. Thanks to their efforts, many indigenous Muslim communities were established in the coastal regions of the subcontinent; in turn, this led to the spread of Islam into mainland India. Although initiated by the Arab, Persian and Turkish Muslim traders and Sufis, this work was later complemented by the activities of the local Muslim scholars and preachers. Some of the famous

www.pathagar.com

early Muslim scholars and missionaries of Bengal include Jalal al-Din Tabrizi of Deotala, Shah Jalal of Sylhet and Khan Jahan Ali of Bagerhat. However, over time, as the Muslim community of Bengal expanded and interacted with Arabia and the other heartlands of Islam, many indigenous Muslim scholars and reformers (including Haji Shari'atullah, Dudu Mian and Titu Mir) emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to call the masses back to the original, pristine message of Islam. Influenced by the message of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (an eighteenth-century Arabian reformer), many Muslim scholars and reformers of Bengal repudiated aspects of Sufi teachings and practices, and urged the masses to return to the original scriptural sources of Islam of the Qur'an and the Prophetic norms (*sunnah*). Along with these two strands of religious thinking that prevailed in the Muslim community of Bengal at the time, the Islamic modernist and rationalist tendencies also became evident in Bengal's Muslim intellectual circles. Maulvi Dilwar Husayn Ahmad was one of the most influential exponents of this strand of Islamic thinking in Bengal.

Dilwar Husayn Ahmad, who was also known as Delawar Husayn Ahmad Mirza, was born into a notable Muslim family in the village of Baabnaan in the district of Hughly (in the present-day Indian state of West Bengal). He traced his family ancestry back to the early Mug-hal period.[1] Ghulam Ahmad, his grandfather, was a resident of the village of Bakhtiyarpur in Bihar. Ghulam Ahmad's fifth son was Mawlana Ghulam Qadir, the father of Dilwar, who married and subsequently settled in Hughly. Having received a thorough education in Arabic and traditional Islamic sciences at the famous Calcutta Madrasah, Mawlana Qadir became a prominent Islamic scholar and an advocate of modern education and learning. Given his unusual linguistic skills, he was appointed a lecturer in Oriental languages in Lucknow, although he later returned to Calcutta Madrasah as a lecturer in Arabic and Islamic sciences. During his tenure at the *madrasah*, Mawlana Qadir became a close friend of Maulvi Abdur Razzaq, who was also a lecturer at the same institution. Maulvi Abdur Razzaq invited him to move to Baabnaan. Here Mawlana Qadir became a prominent Islamic scholar and highly respected public figure. He had married more than once, and his second wife, Zeenat al-Nisa (Zeenatunnesa), bore him a son, Dilwar Husayn Ahmad.

Despite receiving a traditional education, Mawlana Qadir was a farsighted and pragmatic scholar who understood the nature of the problems that confronted the Muslims of India at the time.[2] Not surprisingly, he became—like Nawab Abdul Latif, Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi, Justice Syed Ameer Ali and others—a vociferous advocate of modern English education. That is to say, Mawlana Qadir was in favour of combining Arabic and traditional *madrasah* education with a thorough training in modern English curriculum. In his own words:

> If I had one hundred sons, I would give them the best English education in my power, because it would enable them to live in ease... for getting on in this world I consider English is essential, but on religious grounds a Mohammadan should know Arabic.[3]

www.pathagar.com

By combining traditional Islamic learning with a modern English education, he felt, it would be possible to create a new generation of Muslim scholars and leaders who would be able to tackle the difficulties and challenges that confronted the Muslims of India in general and particularly in Bengal. True to his words, Mawlana Qadir ensured that young Dilwar learned Arabic and traditional Islamic sciences at home before enrolling him at the famous Calcutta Madrasah for further education. This *madrasah* was originally founded by the British for the purpose of training up a new generation of workforce for the East India Company, however in 1867 it became affiliated to the Calcutta University, and this undoubtedly enhanced its reputation as one of the leading institutions of higher education in Bengal.[4] Young Dilwar regularly travelled from his village to the *madrasah*, even though there was no proper public transport available in Calcutta at the time. His dedication and hard work meant that his time at this institution proved to be very fruitful. In addition to learning Arabic, Persian and Urdu, he became thoroughly familiar with English.

As a bright student, Dilwar excelled in his studies beyond his family's and teachers' expectations. So much so, that in 1858 he passed his entrance examination with flying colours and was awarded a two-year scholarship to pursue higher education. As expected, in 1861, he obtained his Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree from Calcutta University. In so doing, Dilwar not only became the first Muslim graduate of Calcutta University but also the first Muslim to obtain a BA degree during the British rule in India. This was a unique achievement on his part, and one that was appreciated by the local Muslims as well as the *madrasah* authorities. To celebrate this historic occasion, the Calcutta Madrasah officials inaugurated 'Dilwar Husayn Day' in his honour: thus encouraging other Muslim students to follow in his footsteps. This event continued to be held at the *madrasah* annually for many decades.[5] In addition to acquiring fluency in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, Dilwar's knowledge of English was considered by his tutors to be superior to those of other students. He elected to write mainly in English, even though his command of Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Bengali (his mother-tongue) was equally accomplished. Inspired, no doubt, by his father's favourable attitude towards modern English education and learning, he became a pioneer who, on account of his remarkable academic achievements, paved the way for other Muslim students to follow in his footsteps.

Although Dilwar's time at the Calcutta Madrasah was very fruitful, the same cannot be said about the condition of the Muslims of Bengal at the time. Indeed, this was a very difficult time for the Muslims of India as a whole. In addition to the Islamic reformist movements led by Haji Shari'atullah and Titu Mir, the brutal suppression of the Sepoy Uprising of 1857, and the reformist activities of Muslim modernists (such as Nawab Abdul Latif), this period was a defining moment in the history of the subcontinent. That is to say, the events of this period not only forced the masses to awaken from their slumber, they also proved that, in reality, there were only two political options open to the Muslims of Bengal: to rebel or to co-operate with their new British rulers.

The brutal suppression of Titu Mir's

www.pathagar.com

movement and the revolt of 1857 confirmed that rebellion was no longer viable. The only way forward for the Muslims of Bengal was to co-operate with the British authorities and to encourage the Muslim masses to combine traditional Islamic learning with modern education in order to improve their social, educational and economic condition. This twofold strategy, advocated by the leading Muslim modernists of Bengal (including Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, Nawab Sir Abdul Ghani, Nawab Abdul Latif, Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi and Mawlana Ghulam Qadir, the father of Dilwar) represented a decisive turning point in the history of Bengal. The shift in Muslim attitude towards the British government paved the way for a new generation of Muslims to acquire higher English education and assume positions of power and influence in their society. Dilwar belonged to this generation of modern Muslims of Bengal. His educational success and achievements are therefore of paramount historical and cultural significance for the Muslims of India, and of Bengal in particular.

In 1861, at the age of 21, Dilwar had completed his higher education and was appointed a deputy magistrate and deputy collector. He began his career at Barisal (then known as Bakerganj) and served in these positions across East Bengal and parts of Bihar. As an honest, upright and fair-minded lawyer, he soon acquired a reputation for skills in arbitration and for his scruplousness. Since the post of deputy magistrate was offered only to the brightest and most worthy candidates, Dilwar was more than happy to serve in this capacity: not least because it was rare for Muslims to be appointed in this position at the time. As expected, he turned out to be a very effective lawyer and was repeatedly promoted. Like other prominent Muslims of the time (such as Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi and Maulvi Abdul Ghafur Nassakh), he combined his government service with literary activities. In fact, he began to write soon after entering government service and published essays and articles on a wide range of topics in the local newspapers and magazines. Being acutely aware of the disadvantages his fellow Muslims faced, Dilwar focused his attention to the social and cultural challenges facing the Muslims of Bengal at the time. However, this was a tricky subject to tackle, because both the conservative *ulama* (traditional Islamic scholars) and ordinary Muslims fiercely resisted any form of change or reform in the socio-cultural spheres of their lives. Being intimately acquainted with his community's fears and apprehensions, Dilwar wrote most of his essays and articles using different pen names (such as 'Saeed' and 'Mutazaleh') to avoid being misunderstood or even branded a heretic or a government agent. During his career of more than 30 years as a deputy magistrate and deputy collector, he continued to write about all the pressing issues of the day. Although as a government official he could not participate directly in any political activities, this did not stop him from analysing and commenting on the difficulties and challenges confronting the Muslims of Bengal.

As a dedicated government official and a committed Muslim, Dilwar pursued a reformist agenda that was supported by the government but was not necessarily supported by the traditional Islamic scholars or the Muslim masses. Before identifying the nature of his

www.pathagar.com

reformist agenda, it should be pointed out that Dilwar was a proud Muslim who was deeply concerned about the problems and difficulties that confronted the Muslims of Bengal: socially, politically, economically and spiritually. Unlike Abdur Rahim Gorakhpuri, he remained a devout and committed Muslim throughout his life. The main purpose of his reformist agenda was to improve the condition of the Muslims. In other words, like his prominent contemporaries Nawab Abdul Latif, Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi and Syed Ameer Ali, Dilwar pursued a modernist approach to Islam; influenced by the modernist and rationalist ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, modernist Muslim scholars and reformers of Bengal argued that the Muslims had no choice but to engage with modern Western science and education if they were to improve their circumstances.

Unlike Abdur Rahim Gorakhpuri, Dilwar was not an absolute rationalist or a secular humanist. To the contrary, he was a committed Muslim and a firm believer in Sir Sayyid's reformist agenda. In fact, he argued the following:

> It is the duty of every man of intelligence and knowledge to seek Truth and when he finds it, it is his duty to proclaim it; I have endeavoured to find the Truth and I am bound to give it to the Mohammedan community... If my voice has been lost in the wilderness, I have yet done my duty... I have by my writings sought no worldly good; I have sought neither wealth nor reputation. I have placed myself in opposition to the Moslem community. I have brought on me the dislike of the classes and the masses... I know the path I have taken is full of ups and downs, of hills and dales – but there must be men and there are men in all communities able and willing to point out faults so that they may be remedied.[6]

In this article, Dilwar made it clear that he had been thinking and writing about the difficulties and challenges facing the Muslim community for many decades and, given the contentious nature of some of those issues, he did not expect everyone to agree with his views. Even so, Dilwar developed and expounded his views clearly in a series of essays and articles written over a quarter of a century. They were subsequently collected and published in 1889 in two volumes under the title of *Essays on Mohammedan Social Reform*.

Dilwar insisted that Islam as a faith and ethical framework was sound, robust, advanced and progressive. However, he felt, the majority of the social practices and customs of Indian Muslims in general (and the Muslims of Bengal in particular) were misunderstood, if not wrongly confused with the fundamental ethical principles of Islam. He held the traditionalist Islamic scholars, as well as the Muslim masses, responsible for this state of affairs. He considered Islamic moral and ethical system (based on the Qur'an and sound Prophetic *sunnah*) to be eternal and absolute; by the same token, he regarded the Muslim scholars and jurists interpretation of the Qur'an and the Prophetic norms to be relative, and therefore open to reconsideration and reinterpretation by qualified and competent Muslim scholars.[7] He contended that this was necessary for the Muslims of Bengal, in order to enable them to face emerging challenges and difficulties. Writing in *The Mussalman*, he explained this in the context of natural progression, social mobility and cultural evolution:

www.pathagar.com

> It is absurd to suppose that the ordinances and institutions of Islam are not subject to the laws of evolution: nothing in this world is exempt from the operation of the laws of nature—nothing can therefore be exempt from the law of evolution. There will be no advance in Mohammedan civilization until we begin to perceive that the religious and moral truths inculcated in Mekka are fundamental and eternal truths for all times and all places, for all races and all peoples, but that the regulations of Madeena were ordained for government of men just emerging from barbarism: there will be no advance until we dissociate our civil polity from our creed—until we believe that our laws and institutions need modification.[8]

Dilwar's approach to Islam was a modernistic and rationalistic one, however his rationalism was firmly rooted in the Islamic worldview. He was a devout Muslim who was eager to change and reform Muslim thought, culture and social practices in the light of universal Qur'anic ethics and Prophetic wisdom. In addition to Islamic ethical, legal and social topics, Dilwar wrote prolifically on civil, administrative and educational policy and procedures. Having served as a deputy magistrate and deputy collector for more than 30 years (and as an inspector-general of registration for another three years), he eventually retired from government service in 1898. Freed from the restriction of government service, he settled permanently in Calcutta and wrote extensively on all the central issues of the day, including on the political leadership and the future of the Muslims of Bengal. At the time, most of his writings were published in Calcutta's leading newspapers and magazines, including *The Moslem Chronicle* and *The Mussalman*. He wrote almost entirely in English and, for this reason, only the Anglophone Muslims of Bengal were familiar with his ideas and thoughts.

As an independent thinker and writer, Dilwar never shied away from challenging or questioning policies or initiatives that he considered to be inappropriate or detrimental to the interests of the Muslims. Not surprisingly, at a time when the Muslim League was busy campaigning in favour of Hindu Muslim unity, Dilwar argued against this strategy because, he felt, the Hindus were politically, economically and educationally much stronger than the Muslims of India; he advocated political separatism at a time when it was unfashionable to do so. In his own words:

> Equality of conditions is necessary for joint action. The Hindu community are independent of our help and are able to move in good order while we are perfectly unorganised and suffering from constitutional disease. We must put our house in order; we must become equal to our Hindu neighbours in all those elements that make for development and progress. We require wealth and knowledge and strength, we require determination and earnestness and hopefulness. It is not by joining our Hindu countrymen as humble and senile followers that we shall ever be able to improve our social organisation. In our present state of poverty and helplessness and their present state of wealth and powerfulness, we shall, if we follow Mr. Abul Qaasim of Western Bengal and Mr. Abdul Rasul of Eastern Bengal and join the Hindus in political movements; illustrate two truly the history of the Dwarf and the Giant of whose friendship and adventures we read in school books.[9]

www.pathagar.com

For argument's sake, even if Dilwar was not one of the first to speak in favour of political separatism, he was certainly one of the first to openly repudiate the idea of bilingualism in Bengal. According to some eminent Muslims of the time, such as Nawab Abdul Latif, Urdu was to continue as the language of Bengal's Muslim elites while Bengali would remain the language of the masses. However, Dilwar considered this bilingual policy of the Muslim elites of Bengal to be ill informed and practically unworkable. Instead, he argued for Bengali to be the main language of the Muslims of Bengal:

> Neglect of the Bengali language is another evidence of lack of imagination. Throughout the Bengali speaking area, the Mohammedan speaks the Bengali language at home and not the Hindustani [Urdu], but we have not yet perceived that we must include the vernacular in our curriculum of education... Do Bengali Mohammedans believe that the affectation of ignoring the Bengali language will make them a Hindi-speaking people; they must keep up Hindustani as a medium of communication with other provinces, but their neglect of the Bengali has left its development entirely with the Hindus of Bengal and its literature therefore bears no trace whatever of Mohammedan influence.[10]

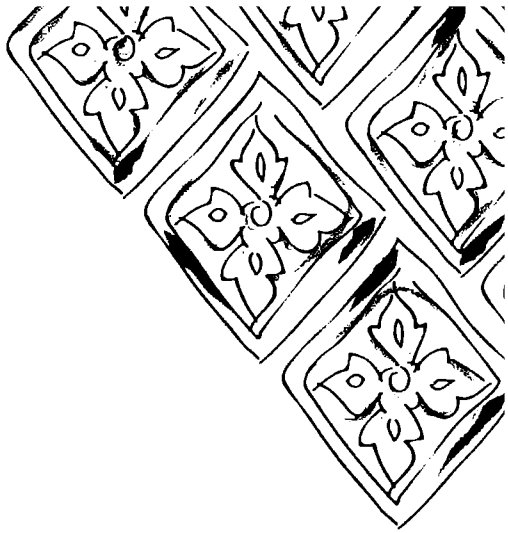
Unlike most of his contemporaries, Dilwar was a farsighted political visionary and an outstanding Islamic thinker who, by way of his impressive achievements, good character and powerful imagination, succeeded in highlighting some of the important issues which affected the Muslims of Bengal at the time: issues that the Muslim leaders and elites frequently ignored or overlooked, to the detriment of their community.

Towards the end of his life, Dilwar became involved with the Central National Mohammedan Association (CNMA). Originally founded in 1877 by Justice Syed Ameer Ali, this association hoped to represent the interests of the Indian Muslims in general, and the Muslims of Bengal in particular, to the government. Over time, it became an influential political voice for the Muslim community of the subcontinent. Having been a member of this association for many years, Dilwar was elected its vice-president in 1911, and during this period he helped the British authorities to reach out to the Muslim community of Bengal by improving and reforming the government's educational policies and practices. In recognition of his outstanding services to the British government and the Muslim community of Bengal, in 1894, Dilwar was awarded the title of 'Khan Bahadur'. The award citation stated:

> For services which he had rendered to the State in his public capacity... he had also the distinction of being the first Mohammedan student who took B.A. degree in Bengal. We congratulate Khan Bahadur Moulvi D. H. Ahmed B.A. A man of cultural taste and advanced views, he has well deserved the honour.[11]

Dilwar Husayn Ahmad passed away at his home in Calcutta at the age of 73. He was buried at the city's Muhammadan Burial Ground in Tiljala. His legacy has continued to inspire the Muslims of Bengal to this day.

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. Sultan Jahan Salik (ed.) *Muslim Modernism in Bengal: Selected Writings of Delawar Hosaen Ahmed Meerza.*
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912.*
5. S. J. Salik, op. cit.
6. *The Mussalman,* 11 August 1911.
7. R. Ahmad, 'Trends in Bengali Muslim Social Thought in the Nineteenth Century', in *Islam in Bangladesh* (ed.) Rafiuddin Ahmad.
8. *The Mussalman,* 10 February 1911.
9. *The Moslem Chronicle,* 26 December 1908.
10. *The Mussalman,* 3 March 1911.
11. *The Muhammadan Observer,* 23 August 1894.

www.pathagar.com

1846–1901

SIR AHSANULLAH

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING, the members of the Nawab family had played an important role in the development of Dhaka, the pre-eminent capital of East Bengal. Of all the members of the Nawab family, three proved to be most influential: Nawab Sir Abdul Ghani, Nawab Sir Ahsanullah and Nawab Sir Salimullah. It is on account of their wide-ranging socio-cultural, economic, philanthropic and political contributions to the development of a vibrant Islamic identity and culture in East Bengal that the three of them have been included in this book.

As one of the main founders of the Dhaka Nawab family, Sir Abdul Ghani was undoubtedly one of the wealthiest and most influential Muslim leaders of the nineteenth century. In addition to being a prominent businessman and

www.pathagar.com

landholder, he became a generous patron of learning, culture and economic development in East Bengal. Only two decades after the death, of Sir Abdul Ghani, his grandson, Nawab Sir Salimullah, became arguably one of the most influential Muslim leaders of the subcontinent. As the chief architect and organiser of the All-India Muslim League, Sir Salimullah deserves to be recognised as one of the founders of Pakistan and, by extension, of Bangladesh also. In short, although Nawab Sir Abdul Ghani became a great benefactor of the Muslims of Bengal, Nawab Sir Salimullah was one of the most influential Muslim politicians to have hailed from Bengal. Building on the work of his illustrious father, and paving the way for his influential son, was Nawab Sir Ahsanullah, who through his personal qualities, attributes and skills, became a leading Muslim figure in mid to late nineteenth-century Bengal.

Nawab Sir Ahsanullah Khan Bahadur was thus born in Dhaka into one of the most wealthiest and famous Muslim families of East Bengal. His grandfather, Khwajah Alimullah, and father, Nawab Sir Abdul Ghani, traced their family history back to Kashmir. According to F. B. Bradley-Birt, the founder of this family was Maulvi Abdullah who came to India during the time of Emperor Muhammad Shah. But as the Mughal dynasty began to decline irreversibly, Maulvi Abdullah left Delhi and settled in Sylhet, located in the eastern part of India. There he established his reputation as a successful trader and merchant. Thereafter, he invited his father and brother to come to Sylhet from Kashmir and collectively they pursued their business interests with considerable success. However, after Maulvi Abdullah's death, his son left Sylhet and moved to Dhaka in order to expand their business interests. The successors of Maulvi Abdullah soon established themselves as prominent traders, merchants and landholders. They bought large plots of land and estates and did so very cheaply; so much so that they eventually gave up trading and became one of the wealthiest landholding families in Dhaka, if not in East Bengal as a whole.[1]

As the son of one of Dhaka's wealthiest landlords and businessmen, young Ahsanullah had a very privileged upbringing. Surrounded by wealth and luxuries, he grew up under the watchful gaze of his father, Sir Abdul Ghani, and mother, Ismat un-Nisa Khanum. As his eldest son, the Nawab ensured Ahsanullah received a good education during his early years. Taught by private tutors at his father's impressive palace in Dhaka, young Ahsanullah studied Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Bengali and aspects of Islam under the tutelage of several prominent Muslim scholars of the subcontinent, including Abdur Rahim Shaba and Munshi Ramzan Ali. He then received one-to-one tuition in English under the guidance of British educationalists. Sir Abdul Ghani hired some of the best teachers to ensure his son and successor received a thorough education in traditional subjects as well as modern languages and literature. According to the *History of the Nawabs of Dhaka* (*Tarikh-i-Khandan-i-Kashmiria*), Ahsanullah was a gifted student who was blessed with a highly retentive memory.[2] Although he spoke Urdu at home, he was equally proficient in Persian, English and Bengali. His all-round education enabled Ahsanullah to become thoroughly familiar with Islamic, cultural and linguistic

www.pathagar.com

topics and themes; it also prepared him for the management and leadership of the Nawab family's extensive wealth and properties.

Impressed with Ahsanullah's educational achievements and good interpersonal skills, Sir Abdul Ghani encouraged his son to assume more responsibility for managing their family business and affairs. During this period Ahsanullah not only helped his father to expand their family business, he also helped and supported him to resolve their family disputes and quarrels. In doing so, he proved to be very wise and worthy and this, in turn, convinced his father to hand over more family responsibilities to him. Satisfied that his son was now mature and experienced enough to manage the affairs of the Nawab family, in 1866 Sir Abdul Ghani formally transferred the leadership of the family to Ahsanullah, who was only 22 years old at the time. The father and son developed a good understanding and relationship, and in her memoirs, *Our Viceregal Life in India*, Lady Dufferin observed:

> The Nawab may be said to consist of two persons, a very old father and a middle-aged son. The son has all the power and does all the business, but both are devoted to each other, and the son is so attentive to his father, who can scarely bear him to go out of his sight. He cannot go out shooting, or be away half a day from the old man, and it is nice to see them with each other. The son dined and took me into dinner. He speaks English quite well, and the entertainment was exceedingly well done and nice in every way.[3]

The partnership between Ahsanullah and his father not only maintained unity and solidarity within the Nawab family, it also enabled Ahsanullah to consolidate his own position in his family and to win the support of the people of Dhaka. Despite being enourmously wealthy, like his father, Ahsanullah led a simple and dignified lifestyle. He was approachable, intellectually alert and always fair and considerate in his dealings with others, irrespective of whether they were his own family members or strangers. In the words of *The Moslem Chronicle*:

> Simple in dress and habits and with a large-heartedness worthy of royalty, the Nawab is the ideal of a Mussalman Zemindar, who while retaining the graces of oriental accomplishment is an up-to-date man in regard both to appreciating and encouraging the best side of Western Culture.[4]

Ahsanullah was a morally upright person, a good leader of his extended family and a successful businessman, however, good fortune did not characterise his family life. Following the death of his first wife, who bore him two sons (Khwajah Hafizullah and Nawab Sir Salimullah), he married for the second time. Although his second wife bore him a son (Khwajah Atiqullah) she died soon afterwards. Ahsanullah then married for the third time and his third wife also passed away. Subsequently, he married for the fourth and last time. However, throughout these personal family difficulties and tragedies, he remained upright, composed and dignified.[5]

Although Ahsanullah was an unusually wealthy man, he was also one of East Bengal's most famous and generous philanthropists and social reformers of his generation. Like his father, Ahsanullah's contribution to the

www.pathagar.com

development of education, health facilities, social welfare programmes and other infrastructural projects in Dhaka and elsewhere were nothing short of remarkable. With reference to his charitable and philanthropic activities, *The Moslem Chronicle* commented:

> His charities were unbounded, wide, generous, Catholic and bountiful and knew no distinction of creeds and colours... He used to say that the wealth and affluence which it has pleased God to endow him with, was a trust for the good of humanity... In Dacca itself, which with its filtered water and electric light, is now ahead of all districts in Bengal, and which owes its present importance and its prosperity to the generosity of the Nawab.[6]

Like his illustrious father, Ahsanullah's list of grants, donations and allowances were too numerous to count. While Nawab Sir Abdul Ghani's biographers have been able to prepare a list of his main grants and donations, Ahsanullah's biographers have not been able to do the same due, to the fact that he 'gave with one hand while the other did not know anything about it'. Ahsanullah considered wealth and property—like life and health—to be a gift and blessing from God. He felt that it was important to share his God-given wealth and bounties with others, irrespective of creed, colour or social status.

His notable donations, grants and funds fall into three categories: donations to disaster relief funds and welfare facilities, grants to individuals and educational institutions, and contributions to the development of infrastructural projects in Dhaka and elsewhere.

His major donations included 40,000 rupees to the Famine Relief Fund for the people of Dhaka, Barisal and Mymensingh; 5000 rupees to Abdul Ghani Relief Fund; 100,000 rupees to Dhaka Plague Control Fund and 50,000 rupees to the Governor-General's Relief Fund. Other important grants offered by Ahsanullah included 50,000 rupees for the construction of Lady Dufferin Women's Hospital in Dhaka; 100,000 rupees towards the cost of renovating the Husayni Dalan (a prominent Shia religious centre); 100,000 rupees to Mitford Hospital; and 60,000 rupees for the restoration of Nahr al-Zubaydah in Makkah, the sacred city of Islam. In addition to this, Ahsanullah built or renovated countless mosques, religious shrines and Islamic schools, including Sat Gambuj Mosque, Lalbag Shahi Mosque, Madaripur Mosque and Madrasah, Begumbari Mosque as well as the tombs of Pir Yemeni, Shah Ni'matullah, Shah Ali Baghdadi and Chishti Behesti. Another significant contribution made by Ahsanullah was 80,000 rupees for the infrastructural development of Comilla town in 1898.

Ahsanullah contributed 112,000 rupees for the development of Dhaka Survey School into a specialist engineering school (subsequently renamed Ahsanullah Engineering School). In 1948, this school was expanded and it became known as Ahsanullah Engineering College, which became affiliated to Dhaka University's Faculty of Engineering. Thereafter, in 1962, this college was redeveloped and renamed East Pakistan University of Engineering and Technology. After the independence struggle of 1971, this institution became known as Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). This is today considered

www.pathagar.com

to be one of Bangladesh's most prestigious universities, specialising in science, engineering and technology. However, the majority of the people of Bangladesh are unaware of this institution's rich history; it was due to Ahsanullah's generosity and patronage that this renowned university is regarded as one of Bangladesh's oldest institutions of further and higher education.

Another crowning achievement of his life was the establishment of Dhaka Electricity Supply. Ahsanullah contributed 450,000 rupees in 1901 for the establishment of this huge and very important project. Thanks to his loyalty to (and love for) the historic city of Dhaka, the great capital of East Bengal, he ensured that it became the first city in Bengal to be lit with electric lights at night.[7]

Furthermore, Ahsanullah used to pay the cost of performing the sacred pilgrimage to Makkah for 30 to 40 people every year. His kindness and generosity enabled hundreds—if not thousands—of pilgrims to go to Makkah in order to perform the *hajj*, the fifth pillar of Islam.

As a man of culture, varied tastes and abilities, he also became a founder and one of the major benefactors of the Dhaka Muhammadan Sporting Club, which was established in 1899 in order to encourage and foster better understanding between the city's middle classes and the elites (both Muslim and non-Muslim) through sports and other recreational activities. On one occasion, when several prominent Muslim members of the Sporting Club and the Indian Cyclist Association (led by Maulvi Dilwar Husayn Ahmad and Khan Bahadur M. S. Ali Baig) visited the Nawab, he urged them not to pursue sport for its own sake; he argued that the main purpose of sport and recreational activities was to promote understanding and dialogue, and to encourage people to better themselves physically, culturally and intellectually.

On a personal level, Ahsanullah was a gifted poet and writer and also a notable dramatist, singer and photographer. He composed poetry in both Urdu and Persian under the pen name of 'Falcon' (*Shahin*). A collection of his Urdu and Persian poetry was published under the title of the *Collected Poetry of Falcon* (*Kulliyat-i-Shahin*). Consisting of four Persian, 30 Urdu and 85 Hindi verses, songs and other similar contributions, this book was rated highly by the Muslim poets and scholars of Bengal. Likewise, his unpublished *Tarikh-i-Khandan-i-Kashmiriyah* is today considered to be a document of great cultural and historical significance by the historians of Bengal. Consisting of 295 pages, this manuscript has been preserved at Dhaka University library for the benefit of posterity.

Under his patronage, a new weekly Urdu periodical, *Ahsanul Qasas*, was published from Dhaka in 1884. He also kept a diary of his personal, family, business and charitable activities in Urdu; this diary has been preserved in the Ahsan Manzil Museum in Dhaka. On account of his unusual generosity, dedication and wide-ranging services and contribution to the people of East Bengal, Ahsanullah was awarded the titles of 'Khan Bahadur' in 1871, 'Nawab' in 1875, 'Nawab Bahadur' in 1892 and in 1892 he was knighted by the British government. He was also asked by the government officials to serve as a member of the Bengal Legislative Council in 1890 and 1899.

www.pathagar.com

After a busy and highly productive life that was devoted entirely to the service of the Muslims of Bengal in general, and the people of Dhaka in particular, Nawab Bahadur Sir Ahsanullah died rather unexpectedly in the month of Ramadan at the age of only 55. He was laid to rest at his family graveyard at Begum Bazar in Dhaka. Even so, posterity will remember him for his important and enduring contribution to the progress and development of the Muslim community of East Bengal (now Bangladesh). Published soon after his death, the-then Governor-General of Bengal paid him this glowing tribute in the *Calcutta Gazette* (this was reprinted in *The Moslem Chronicle*):

> For more than thirty years he has been in effect the most prominent man of Eastern Bengal. To great natural abilities, he added spotless integrity of character, broad sympathies and an unstinted liberality. His ripe judgement and wise counsel were ever at the service of the Government, while his striking personality won for him universal affection, and a unique influence among his countrymen. His great wealth was continuously used for the good of others. In him the State has lost a valued counsellor and the Lieutenant-Governor a personal friend, while his death will be deplored throughout the Province.[8]

Likewise, five days after his death, *The Moslem Chronicle* paid him this emotional tribute:

> Nawab Sir Ahsanullah was well-read in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Bengalee, which he wrote, and spoke English with an astonishing facility and remarkable accent. His English letters, for an Indian Prince, are simply charming to peruse and the fact that he made it a point to write personally as far as possible, most of his letters, private as well as business, go to show in an indisputable way that he late Nawab, been though he was to inherit a rich patrimony, by no means, lived unlike many of our Indian princes, a life of ease and indolence. He used to personally superintend and to pass orders on even the smallest details connected with the administration of his large estate. It is impossible to conceive a man, surrounded by wealth, position and honors such as his, more pains-taking and more hardworking than the late lamented Nawab.[9]

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. F. B. Bradley-Birt, *Twelve Men of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century.*
2. Muhammad Abdullah, *Nawab Abdul Ghani-o-Nawab Ahsanullah: Jiban-o-Karma.*
3. Lady Dufferin, *Our Viceregal Life in India.*
4. *The Moslem Chronicle,* 25 February 1899.
5. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
6. *The Moslem Chronicle,* 16 December 1901.
7. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
8. *The Moslem Chronicle,* 21 December 1901.
9. *The Moslem Chronicle,* 16 December 1901.

www.pathagar.com

B.1846 – D.1939

PIR ABU BAKR SIDDIQI OF FURFURA

THE TASK OF disseminating Islam in the coastal regions of India was spearheaded by the early Muslim traders during the eighth and ninth centuries. Sufi preachers then continued this work throughout the subcontinent. As the mystical dimension of Islam, Sufism was considered by its adherents to be the heart and soul of Islam, which seeks to elevate the human spirit without harming the flesh, and in so doing it hopes to connect humanity to Divinity (the primordial origin of all that exists). This humanistic, universalistic and essentially peaceful message of love and spirituality captured the imagination of the people of the subcontinent in general, and of the people of Bengal specifically. After Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji's conquest of Bengal in the beginning of the thirteenth

www.pathagar.com

century, the Muslim traders and Sufis moved into the rural parts of Bengal in large numbers in order to disseminate the message of Islam and Sufism. Some of the leading Sufis and Muslim preachers of the time included Jalal al-Din Tabrizi of Deotala, Shah Jalal of Sylhet and Khan Jahan Ali of Bagerhat in Khulna. These pioneering Sufis lit the flame of Islam in Bengal and in so doing they inspired generations of indigenous Islamic scholars, preachers and Sufis to emerge to take their work forward. Along with Mawlana Karamat Ali of Jaunpur, Pir Abu Bakr Siddiqi of Furfura was arguably one of the most learned, revered and influential Sufis of nineteenth century Bengal.

Shah Sufi Abu Bakr Siddiqi (better known as Furfurar Pir Sahib) was born into a prominent Muslim family of religious scholars and Sufi luminaries in the village of Furfura, Jangipara in Srirampur (in the present-day District of Hughly in the Indian state of West Bengal). His exact date of birth has been debated by his biographers. According to most of his biographers, his father, Mawlana Abdul Muqtadir, claimed to be a descendant of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, the Prophet's father-in-law and first Caliph of Islam, through Mansur Baghdadi who came to India and settled in Bengal during the reign of Sultan Alauddin Khalji (who reigned from 1296–1326). According to Abu Bakr Siddiqi's biographers, his forefather, Mansur Baghdadi (a native of Baghdad), was a learned Islamic scholar and Sufi who came to the subcontinent in order to disseminate the message of Islam in that part of the world. Soon after his arrival in Bengal, he settled in the Hughly District of West Bengal.[1] Subsequently, Haji Mustafa Madani, who was one of his prominent descendants, went to Delhi Central Mosque (as did Emperor Awrangzeb, the last of the Great Mughals) to pledge his spiritual allegiance to Shaykh Muhammad Ma'sum, the third son and successor of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (otherwise known as *Mujaddid-i-Alf-i-Thani*), a famous Indian Sufi theoretician and Islamic reformer of the sixteenth century. Abu Bakr was born and brought up in a distinguished Muslim family, and it is not surprising that he developed an affinity with Islam and Islamic spirituality from an early age. Although Abu Bakr's father died unexpectedly when he was only nine months old, his devout mother, Muhabbatunessa, not only took good care of him but also encouraged him to continue his education.

After receiving his early education at home under the tutelage of his mother, Abu Bakr enrolled at the village *maktab* (Qur'an school) where he studied Arabic, Persian, the Qur'an and aspects of Islamic jurisprudence. He later joined Sheetapur Madrasah for further education in these subjects. Thereafter, he enrolled at Hughly's Muhsinia Senior Madrasah where, in 1863, he took his *Jami'at-i-Ula* (the equivalent of modern-day 'Fadil') examination and passed with flying colours. Then he left Hughly and moved to Calcutta, which, at the time, was the centre for intellectual, literary and cultural activity in Bengal. Here he privately pursued higher Islamic education under the tutelage of several prominent scholars. We do not know whether he joined the Calcutta Madrasah, which was the most prominent institution of higher Islamic education in Bengal at the time; he probably did not have the opportunity to join this institution or, alternatively, he may

www.pathagar.com

have considered its English-medium education to be too modern for his liking. Either way, he received private tuition in Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), Prophetic traditions (*hadith*) and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) from Mawlana Muhammad Jamaluddin, who was the Imam of the local mosque. After he acquired proficiency in these subjects, in 1868, Mawlana Jamaluddin granted him *ijazah* (certification) to teach traditional Islamic sciences.[2] However, Abu Bakr's thirst for knowledge was such that he joined the study circle of Mawlana Vilayat Husayn, the Imam of Calcutta's Nakhooda Mosque, for advanced education and training. The Mawlana taught him aspects of *tasawwuf* (Islamic spirituality), *mantiq* (logic) and *hikmat* (traditional Islamic theosophy) among other subjects. At the age of 23, he became thoroughly familiar with traditional Islamic sciences as well as aspects of Islamic spirituality, traditional wisdom and philosophy.

After becoming an Islamic scholar, Abu Bakr felt that he needed additional training in the methods of Islamic spirituality and gnosis in order to personally experience the different stages (*maqamat*) of Islamic spirituality. Since the purpose of *tasawwuf* is to internalise the fundamental principles and practices of Islam to achieve purification of the body, mind and the soul, Abu Bakr was determined to attain the summit of Islamic spirituality and gnosis. This prompted him to join the Sufi circle of Shah Sufi Sayyid Fathi Ali, who was one of the foremost Sufi luminaries of his generation.[3] Under this tutelage Abu Bakr received rigorous training in all aspects of Sufism. His time with Shah Fathi Ali was unlike any other training that he had received before; detached from the material world, he practised abstinence and asceticism (*zuhd*), and immersed himself in the ocean of Islamic spirituality and gnosis until he was able to distinguish reality from illusion. Studying the traditional Islamic sciences during his early years was a challenging task, however, his 15 years of training in Islamic spirituality and gnosis under the guidance of Fathi Ali was an even more gruelling—but equally fruitful—time for him. Satisfied that his disciple had proved himself worthy of the gift of Divine grace and illumination, Fathi Ali formally granted him *khilafa* (spiritual leadership) and *ijazah* (certification) in the Qadiriyyah, Naqshbandiyyah, Chishtiyyah and Mujaddidiyyah orders of Sufism. By all accounts, this was a remarkable achievement for Abu Bakr, who had become an expert in both esoteric (*batini*) and exoteric (*zahiri*) sciences and practices of Islam. This meant that Abu Bakr was not only a fully trained Islamic scholar but also a genuine practitioner of Islamic spirituality, unlike many other so-called Sufis and Pirs of the time. After successfully completing his advanced education in the religious and spiritual sciences of Islam, Abu Bakr devoted the rest of his life to preaching Islam and reviving the Prophetic norms and practices in Bengal.

As noted in previous chapters, the year 1857 was a defining period in the history of the subcontinent. It marked the formal establishment of British power in India. Thus, for the first time in the history of the subcontinent, the Muslims were no longer in charge of their political, social and economic destiny. The direction of Indian politics, economy, culture and education was no firmly in the hands of the British government and its principal beneficiaries,

www.pathagar.com

namely the Hindu elites of India. The situation in Bengal was no different. Politically sidelined, economically impoverished and educationally backward, the Muslims of Bengal faced many challenges and difficulties. They feared that they would struggle to retain their religious and cultural identity as Muslims in the face of these problems and difficulties.[4] Abu Bakr was brought up and educated during this politically uncertain and culturally confusing time. For this reason, he was determined to bring about change in the Muslim society of Bengal in the light of authentic Islamic teachings, to enable the Muslims to face the challenges of the future with vision, wisdom and boldness. Accordingly, he engaged in a range of activities, including educational, social and political initiatives, research, writing, and the promotion of Islamic spirituality.

As an eminent Islamic scholar, reformer and spiritual guide, his most important and enduring contribution was in the field of education. This was not surprising, given the fact that the Muslims of Bengal were behind their Hindu counterparts when it came to learning and educational attainment. This state of affairs shocked Abu Bakr, who was determined to change the status quo. In the process he became one of the pioneers of Islamic learning and education in Bengal. In addition to Fatihiyah Madrasah (which he founded in 1898 in memory of his teacher), more than 30 other Islamic schools and *madrasahs* were established by him for both male and female students in Bengal (and especially in West Bengal). He hoped to revive authentic Islamic learning, and these institutions therefore provided thorough education in Arabic, *tajwid* (the art of Qur'anic recitation), Urdu, Persian, Qur'anic exegesis, Prophetic traditions and aspects of Islamic spirituality, traditional theosophy and logic. He aimed to train up a new generation of Islamic scholars, writers and teachers who, in turn, would become champions of Islamic learning, values and ethos across Bengal.

For an Islamic scholar and spiritual figure who was steeped in traditional Islamic teachings and conservative values, Abu Bakr was surprisingly liberal and open-minded when it came to female education: so much so that he established female-only schools and *madrasahs* in order to promote learning, education and scholarship in Bengal's conservative, patriarchal Muslim society. One such institution was the Siddiqa Girls High School, which was one of Furfura's leading girls school. Likewise, he established the Furfura High Madrasah in 1908 and it remains one of the oldest *madrasahs* in the whole district. He also founded the Fatihiyah Senior Madrasah, which is today considered to be one of the best institutions of its kind in Bengal.[5]

In addition to this, Abu Bakr became a prominent social reformer. Aware of the desperate socio-economic condition of the poor and needy Muslims of Bengal, he established many orphanages and free health facilities. With the support of the education minister, he created the New Scheme Madrasah in Furfura to meet the educational needs of the poor and disadvantaged students. This institution also provided free food and boarding facilities to the poor but deserving students. Likewise, in 1911, he formed the Anjuman-i-Wazin-i-Bangla with the support of several other prominent Muslim scholars and personalities (including

www.pathagar.com

Shaykh Abdur Rahim, the celebrated editor of *Mihir-o-Sudhakar* journal, and Mawlana Muhammad Ruhul Amin, who was a leading Muslim scholar and writer of West Bengal).[6] As a socio-political organisation, the Anjuman and its founders urged the Muslim leaders and *ulama* (religious scholars) to unite and work collectively to strengthen the Muslim community of Bengal on the basis of authentic Islamic principles and practices. With this in mind, the Executive Committee of the Anjuman, led by Abu Bakr, sent many scholars and preachers to different parts of Bengal in order to raise awareness of Islam and encourage the masses to renew their commitment to their faith and its practices. That is to say, they urged the masses to perform their five daily prayers, pay the poor due, fast during the month of Ramadan and to refrain from all forms of un-Islamic activities and practices such as *shirk* (associationism), *bid'ah* (blameworthy religious innovation), usury, bribery and fraud.

The Anjuman published several magazines and journals for the benefit of the Muslims, including the *Hanafi*, *Islam Darshan*, *Shari'at-i-Islam* and *Sunnat-i-Jama'at*. These publications espoused a traditionalist interpretation and understanding of Islam and, as such, they were often critical of the reformist tendencies of the Ahl-i-Hadith school of thought, including the writings of Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan and his monthly *Muhammadi*. Being adherents of the Hanafi *madhhab* (school of Islamic jurisprudence founded by Imam Abu Hanifah and his colleagues in the eighth century), the Anjuman and its members considered themselves to be Ahl-i-Sunnat wa'l-Jama'at (followers of the Prophetic norms and ways). Unsurprisingly, they considered the Ahl-i-Hadith methodology to be weak or misguided, especially because the Ahl-i-Hadith disapproved of aspects of Sufi teachings and practices. Accordingly, the followers of the two schools of thought wrote articles and books in order to affirm or refute certain theological and legal views and opinions. The Anjuman played an important role in disseminating Islam, raising awareness of Islamic, social and cultural issues in the Muslim community. They achieved this through their schools, *madrasahs* and village councils, which were established in many rural parts of Bengal. Also, they promoted intellectual and literary activities through their journals, books and other publications, as well as annual religious gatherings and events. In so doing, they encouraged and promoted debate and discussion on social, economic, religious, cultural and legal issues that faced the Muslims at the time.

Under Abu Bakr's patronage, a large collection of Islamic books was published and widely disseminated across India and Bengal in particular. The exact number of publications is not known, but they were said to have been in the hundreds, if not thousands. Most of these books and manuscripts were translations from Arabic, Persian or Urdu, and they were published to meet the needs of *madrasah* teachers and students alike, and some books were published for the benefit of the masses. Most of the titles were preserved in a library in Furfura for the benefit of local people. It should be pointed out here that although Abu Bakr himself did not pursue English education, he was not against modern education per se. On the contrary, in 1933, during his keynote speech at the annual conference of the

www.pathagar.com

Jami'at-i-Tulaba-i-Arabia of Assam he argued that pursuing a modern education was essential for Muslims, especially if they are to secure positions of power and responsibility in the government. He also acknowledged that there was an urgent need to revise and update the *madrasah* curriculum to equip students with appropriate skills to enable them to pursue different careers after completing their formal education. In short, by educating and mobilising the Muslim masses, Abu Bakr hoped to empower them to engage in direct social, economic and educational activities in order to improve their condition. In this respect, the Anjuman became a pioneering socio-political organisation that played an important role in awakening of the Muslims of Bengal from their political and educational slumber.[6]

Unlike other Muslim organisations of the time, the Anjuman did not refrain from politics. Although led by one of Bengal's foremost Sufis, the Anjuman became actively involved in the socio-political affairs of the time. He may have been an outstanding scholar and revered Sufi, but Abu Bakr was not a hermit. As a strict follower of the Prophet (peace be on him), he did not believe in the compartmentalisation of religion into watertight parts. His vision of Islam as a faith was very broad and all-encompassing, thus he did not believe in separating politics from Islam, economics from justice, education from morality and ethics, or faith from spirituality; Abu Bakr believed that these elements fitted nicely into a comprehensive, integrated view of Islam as a complete faith, worldview and system of life. Not surprisingly, the Anjuman played an active part in the Khilafat movement by moblising Muslim public opinion in favour of Pan-Islamism. The preachers and members of this organisation visited different parts of Bengal (both urban centres and rural locations) and they organised meetings, conferences and gatherings, thus urging the masses to support Pan-Islamic organisations and their policies.[7]

As a discerning socio-political operator, Abu Bakr supported the Khilafat movement, but he was against any form of rebellion, subversion or agitation on the basis that such actions were outlawed by the Islamic law (Shari'ah) and were counter-productive. Accordingly, the Anjuman supported the Bengal Pact of 1923 but was against the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930. Likewise, in 1937, the Anjuman campaigned against the Krishak Praja Party and actively supported the Muslim League candidates. As the president of the Anjuman, Abu Bakr issued a religious edict (*fatwa*) urging the Muslim masses to vote for the Muslim League candidates. Under his leadership, the Anjuman became an influential social, political and educational organisation in Bengal. After Abu Bakr's death, the Anjuman ceased to exist as a united and cohesive body, but many of his followers continued their activities under the banner of other similar organisations (like the Jami'at-i-Ulama-i-Bangla-o-Assam and Jami'at-i-Ulama-i-Islam), which, in turn, played an important role in the Pakistan movement (1940–1947).[8]

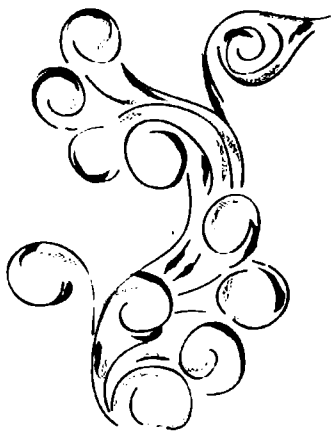
Despite being an Islamic scholar, social reformer, educationalist and a revered Sufi master with a large following, Abu Bakr (unlike many other great Sufis of the past) found time to marry more than once, and he was blessed with many children. At the time of his death, 10 of his children were alive: five sons and five daughters.

www.pathagar.com

He led a normal but spirituality-enriched life, surrounded by his extended family, friends and thousands of disciples and followers who came from across Bengal and beyond. In his role as a Sufi sage he initiated the Silsilah-i-Furfura Sharif, a Sufi order that traced itself back to the Prophet (peace be on him) through many great Sufi luminaries of the past.[9] He organised regular religious gatherings but he refused to call them *urs*; instead he referred to such gatherings as *isla-i-sawab* (or conveying rewards to the deceased). After a lifetime devoted to the service of Islam and the Muslim community of Bengal, Pir Abu Bakr Siddiqi Sahib passed away at the ripe old age of around 93. He was laid to rest inside the Furfura Sharif where his tomb continues to attract thousands of visitors every year from across India and beyond.

After his death, his mission was continued by Mawlana Abdul Hai Siddiqi, his son and successor, and many prominent disciples including Muhammad Shahidullah, a renowned linguist and scholar of Bengali literature, and Mawlana Ahmad Ali Inayatpuri, who was a prominent Islamic scholar, politician, journalist and social reformer of Jessore.

www.pathagar.com



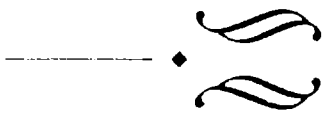
Notes

1. A. F. M. Ishaq, *Shah Sufi Abu Bakr Siddiqi*
2. Z. A. Kismati, *Bangladesher Katipay Alim-o-Pir Mashaikh.*
3. A. F. M. Ishaq, op.cit.
4. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Banglar Musalmander Itihas.*
5. A. R. M. A. Haidar, *Shikha Bistar-o-Sanskare Furfurar Pir Abu Bakr Siddiqi.*
6. M. A. Salam, *Mawlana Ruhul Amin: Jiban-o-Karma.*
7. Muhammad Abdullah, *Rajnitite Bangiya Ulamar Bhumika.*
8. S. Kanti, *Anjuman-i-Ulamaye Bangla-o-Muslim.*
9. Z. A. Kismati, op. cit.



www.pathagar.com

1847–1912



MIR MUSHARRAF HUSAYN

Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji's conquest of Bengal in the beginning of the thirteenth century brought political Islam directly in contact with that region for the first time, and the inauguration of Muslim rule led to considerable social, economic and intellectual progress in Bengal. The establishment of mosques, *madrasahs* and Sufi lodges (*khanqah*) by the Muslim rulers, coupled with the influx of Muslim traders and Sufi preachers, encouraged local Hindus, Buddhists and others to embrace Islam. This, in turn, led to the development of a new and vibrant Muslim culture in Bengal. Although the early Muslim scholars, writers and poets wrote primarily on religious and spiritual topics, this trend changed during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, thanks to the efforts

www.pathagar.com

of prominent Muslim writers such as Nur Qutb Alam, Shah Muhammad Saghir, Amir Zayn al-Din, Muhammad Kabir and Syed Sultan. These scholars and writers produced a large number of works on Islamic, historical, cultural, philosophical and mystical topics, as well as aspects of comparative religion and mythology. The medieval Muslim writers and poets contributed substantially to the development of Bengali literature under the patronage of the Muslim rulers, even though only a fraction of their writing has survived. As a result of the contribution of these writers to the development of Bengali language and literature, many indigenous Muslim writers and poets later emerged and became some of the major contributors to Bengali literature. Mir Musharraf Husayn was one such Muslim scholar and writer of the nineteenth century, and he enriched modern Bengali literature more than any other.

Mir Musharraf Husayn was born into a notable Muslim family in the village of Lahinipada in Kushtia District, formerly Nadia subdivision in Kushtia (which is located in present-day Bangladesh). His father, Mir Mu'azzam Husayn, was one of only a handful of Muslim landholders (*zamindar*) at the time and, as such, young Musharraf had a relatively privileged upbringing. A learned person himself, Mu'azzam Husayn claimed to be a descendant of the Prophet (peace be on him) through Imam Husayn ibn Ali. However, in his *Bangla Sahitye Muslim Kabi-o-Sahityik*, Anwarul Karim traced Musharraf's genealogy back to Syed Sa'dullah: as such his family's claim to have been among the descendants of the Prophet is questionable, if not spurious.[1] Even so, Mir Mu'azzam Husayn ensured that his son received a thorough education during his early years. He began his education at home and learned Arabic and Persian with a private tutor. Thereafter, he enrolled at the local school where he learned Bengali and completed his studies up to class five at Krishnanagar Collegiate School. As an able and enthusiastic student, he excelled in his studies and this prompted his family to send him to Calcutta (Kolkata) to pursue further and higher education. In Calcutta, he enrolled at Kalighat School where he pursued the standard curriculum of the day and became well known for his love of Bengali literature and poetry. In his autobiography, *My Life* (*Amar Jibani*), Musharraf stated that he became fond of reading and writing from an early age and his interest in Bengali and Islamic literature became a lifelong hobby. However, he was unable to complete his education at Kalighat School as he was forced to return home to look after his family's landholdings and other properties.[2]

Born and educated at a difficult and challenging period in the history of Bengal, Musharraf was only 10 years old when the Sepoy Revolt of 1857 broke out against British encroachment. This created considerable unrest and upheaval across India in general and especially in the Muslim community of Bengal. Faced with political impotency, coupled with economic insecurity and educational barriers, the Muslims spearheaded India's response to the presence of the British in that part of the world. After ruling Bengal for more than five centuries, the Muslims had lost their grip on power in 1757 after the defeat of Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah at the hands of Robert Clive of the

www.pathagar.com

East India Company. However, it was not until 1857 that the British assumed full political and military control of India, and in so doing they brought Muslim rule to an end. This forced the Muslims to reassess their politico-economic condition and, at the same time, to re-engage with their religious and cultural heritage in order to make sense of the new situation in which they found themselves. Musharraf was born, brought up and educated during such a socio-politically volatile period in the history of Bengal, and it is not surprising that his life, thoughts and writings also reflected these concerns and difficulties.

As a result of his literary interests, Musharraf became a reporter for the *Sangbad Prabhakar* and *Grambarta Prakashika* while he was still a student. Founded by Ishwar Chandra Gupta, the *Sangbad Prabhakar* was a weekly newspaper that first appeared in 1831. Following the death of Yogendramohan Thakur, the paper's financier, its publication was temporarily interrupted until it was re-launched in 1836. As the first Bengali daily newspaper, it soon established itself as the voice of the people. In addition to current news, it published articles, essays and poems on political, social, cultural and religious topics by prominent scholars and writers, including Radhakanta Deva, Jaygopal Tarkalankar and Ramkamal Sen. Like the *Sangbad Prabhakar*, the *Grambarta Prakashika* was an influential publication; unlike the former, it was a journal rather than a newspaper. Founded by Kangal Harinath Majumdar in 1863, it was initially a tri-weekly journal that later became a weekly. The *Grambarta Prakashika* published articles, essays and poems on a wide range of subjects such as politics, philosophy, science, religion and literature. Musharraf became a regular contributor to this journal and, as a result, he established his reputation as a promising young writer. Other contributors to this journal included prominent Bengali writers like Rabindranath Tagore and Jaladhar Sen. During this period Musharraf and Kangal Harinath Majumdar, editor of *Grambarta Prakashika* and a folk singer and poet, became very good friends. In fact, the latter's literary style and worldview influenced Musharraf in many ways: so much so that it is not possible to understand and appreciate Musharraf's worldview and writings without understanding Harinath's ideas and thoughts.

Kangal Harinath Majumdar was born in 1833 in the village of Kumarkhali in the District of Kushtia. He attended a local English school but was unable to complete his education due to financial difficulties. He experienced considerable personal and financial difficulties during his early years, and it is not surprising that later he became a champion of the rights of the poor and needy people. As a journalist and editor he highlighted the plight and predicament of the ordinary people, seeking to highlight the socio-economic disparity that existed between the rich and the poor. Although he started his journalistic career with *Sangbad Prabhakar*, he subsequently published the *Grambarta Prakashika*, which, under his able stewardship, became an unrelenting voice for the poor, downtrodden people. In addition, the journal campaigned in favour of mass education in Bengal and fiercely opposed unfair social, political and economic policies of the government as well as the unscrupulous practices of the European indigo planters.[3]

www.pathagar.com

Harinath Majumdar was a disciple of Lalan Shah, a notable Bengali singer, poet, spiritualist and eclectic lyricist who hailed from Bhandara in Kushtia. Young Musharraf became influenced by the ideas and thoughts of Majumdar as did Rabindranath Tagore and many others. After publishing the *Grambarta Prakashika* for 18 years and having authored around 20 books on a range of subjects, Harinath Majumdar died in 1896 at the age of 53. His journalistic style, coupled with his socio-political ideas and writings inspired Musharraf.

Musharraf had a number of other influences: Nawab Abdul Latif and Mawlana Ubaydullah al-Ubaydi Suhrawardi, two foremost Muslim scholars and reformers of Bengal, similarly influenced Musharraf's socio-cultural ideas and religious ideas; and the works of classical Persian and Urdu writers and poets influenced Musharraf's literary themes and style. Musharraf was particularly fond of Nawab Abdul Latif, to the extent that he later dedicated his well-known play, *Basanta Kumari*, to him.[4]

In those days, the educated and wealthy Muslim families of Bengal encouraged their sons to join government service as it offered good salaries, secure jobs and a lucrative retirement pension scheme. Not surprisingly, eminent Muslims such as Nawab Abdul Latif, Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi and Syed Ameer Ali had worked for the government for most of their working lives. Unlike these illustrious individuals, Musharraf was unable to complete higher education and this, of course, limited his choice of career. However, his interest in literature prompted him to become a journalist and writer, even though this was far from being a lucrative choice of career. He was forced to combine journalism with estate management to make ends meet. As the son of a *zamindar*, Musharraf became an able and experienced manager of land and properties, which enabled him to carve out a career in real estate management. His work took him to Kushtia, Calcutta, Tangail and Faridpur while, at the same time, he continued his journalistic and literary work.

Musharraf was a talented writer, and he wrote his first novel, *Ratnavati*, at the age of 22. Four years later, he published three other books: *Gauri-Setu*, *Basanta Kumari Natak* and *Jamidar Darpan*. Of these books, the latter was an important contribution to the Muslim community as it reflected the social, political and economic condition of the time. The *Reflection on Landholders* (*Jamidar Darpan*) was written in the form of a play. It was inspired by the riots that took place in the district of Sirajganj (located in Rajshahi Division in present-day Bangladesh). In this book, he provided a vivid and powerful picture of inequality and hardship as it was experienced by the masses at the hands of the rich, powerful *zamindars*.[5] Despite being a son of a *zamindar* himself and a prominent estate manager, he went out of his way to expose the greed and selfishness of the elites who had turned significant number of Bengal's population into social outcastes, economic destitutes and political non-entities. As an experienced journalist and skilful writer, he developed his arguments in a powerful and convincing way, aided by his literary skills and flair.

A year after publishing the *Jamidar Darpan*, Musharraf edited the *Azizannehar* for a short period. During this time he wrote several

www.pathagar.com

plays and novels. Of these, his most important contribution was *The Ocean of Sorrow* (*Vishad-Sindhu*). This was published in three volumes over a period of six years. The subject of this novel was Husayn ibn Ali and his martyrdom at Karbala (located in present-day Iraq). Imam Husayn was the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) and the son of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the fourth Caliph of Islam. He was born in 625 in Madinah, in Saudi Arabia, and was brought up under the care of the Prophet and his parents, Ali and Fatimah. Raised in a family where Islam first planted its seeds, Husayn became an honest, principled and intelligent young man. After the death of the Prophet in 632, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq became the ruler of the Muslims but he died two years later. Umar ibn al-Khattab succeeded him and reigned for a decade during which he rapidly expanded the Islamic dominion. Uthman ibn Affan succeeded Umar as the Caliph and his reign endured for around 12 years. During the first part of his reign, all went well, but subsequently things turned for the worse. This was a difficult period in early Islamic history and young Husayn and his brother, Hasan ibn Ali, did all they could to restore peace and order in the Islamic dominion. However, the Caliph was brutally murdered by a group of insurgents in 656.

Thereafter, Ali, the father of Husayn, succeeded Uthman as the leader of the Muslims. The prevailing socio-political problems presented a major challenge for the new Caliph. Husayn and his brother helped their father to restore law and order but the tide of history had turned against them. As a result, Caliph Ali was murdered by the *khawarij*, a renegade splinter group. With the death of Ali, the period of the rightly-guided Caliphs (*al-khulafa' al-rashidun*) came to an abrupt end. This, in turn, brought Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan to power and he established the Umayyad dynasty, which became the first political dynasty in Islamic history. By all accounts, Muawiyah was a clever and skilful politician, but after his death his son Yazid succeeded him and the leading Muslim figures of the time refused to recognise his authority because he was corrupt and incompetent. Husayn also refused to pledge allegiance to Yazid. This set him on a collision course with the Umayyads, and the standoff reached its climax in 680 at Karbala. There, Husayn, his family and followers were attacked and killed by the Umayyad army.

Although this tragedy took place more than 1400 years ago, it has continued to rouse Muslim passion to this day (Shia Muslims re-enact this tragic event every year during the month of Muharram). Muslim historians, writers and poets have written extensively about this tragedy. Following in their footsteps, Musharraf re-told this story in his *Vishad-Sindhu* with remarkable skill and imagination, and this novel became a success soon after its publication. However, *Vishad-Sindhu* was a novel that presented a fictional account of the events that unfolded in Karbala back in the seventh century: it was not a work of Islamic history or biography as such.

As a devout Muslim, Musharraf wrote many books on Islamic historical and cultural themes, although he was not a historian or an Islamic scholar. His books *Hazrat Umar's Acceptance of Islam* (*Hazrat Umarer Dharmajiban Labh*), *The Life of Hazrat Bilal* (*Hazrat Bilaler Jibani*), *The*

www.pathagar.com

Pride of Madinah (*Madinar Gaurav*), *Victory of Islam* (*Islamer Jay*), *Hazrat Khadijah's Marriage* (*Bibi Khadijahar Bibaha*) and *Hazrat Hamza's Acceptance of Islam* (*Hazrat Amir Hamzar Dharmajiban Labh*) fall into this category. In the words of Syed Sajjad Husain:

> Greatest among the first generation of modern Muslim writers [was] Mir Musharraf Husain (1848–1911), more noted for his prose works, especially his semi-historical novel based on the story of Husain's martyrdom, was equally at home in verse and wrote as many as five books in verse dealing either with the life of the Prophet or with the lives of his first wife Khadija and companions, Umar and Bilal.[6]

His other books include *Mawlid Sharif*, a collection of poetry written in praise of the Prophet. These poems are often recited on the occasion of Prophet Muhammad's birthday.

He considered the Prophet to be the best possible human being, who was endowed with great spiritual and intellectual gifts in order to guide humanity. In that sense, Musharraf's understanding of Islamic scriptures was traditional and conservative, although he was far from being a religious literalist. That is to say, although he became an indefatigable champion of Islamic values and ethos, his understanding and interpretation of Islamic principles and practices was liberal and pragmatic. He had more in common with Nawab Abdul Latif than he did with Haji Shari'atullah and the Fara'idi movement. He considered the Fara'idis to be religious literalists whose interpretation of Islam was too rigid and inflexible for his liking. For this reason, he was a supporter of Nawab Abdul Latif's reformist approach to Islam. Even so, it is factually inaccurate to suggest that Musharraf was a secular humanist (as some contemporary Bangladeshi writers have argued). On the contrary, he was a practising Muslim who was not only proud of his faith, culture and identity but was a champion of Islamic values and ethos.

Even so, he did not always agree with the other Muslim scholars and activists of the time, and was a fiercely independent-minded Muslim writer who never shied away from taking a unilateral stance on an issue, if he felt it was required. For example, he vehemently disagreed with Mawlana Muhammad Na'imuddin, a prominent journalist and Islamic scholar, on the question of slaughtering cows. Like Mawlana Na'imuddin, Musharraf was a practising Muslim, but unlike the former, he argued (in his *Go-Jiban*) that the mass slaughter of cows should be stopped.[7] As expected, Mawlana Na'imuddin took exception to this and strongly opposed Musharraf's stance on this issue. Being pragmatic and liberal, Musharraf felt that the mass slaughter of cows not only offended the Hindus, it also contributed to the reduction of agricultural output in Bengal, in addition to having long-term environmental consequences. At the time, the Hindus of Bengal were in a stronger position politically, economically and educationally than their Muslim counterparts, and as such they were not prepared to make any further concessions. Even though Musharraf continued to robustly defend his view on this issue, the majority of the Muslims ignored him. He felt the Muslims and Hindus of Bengal had more in common than they thought, and that it was therefore important to emphasise the commonalities rather than to always highlight

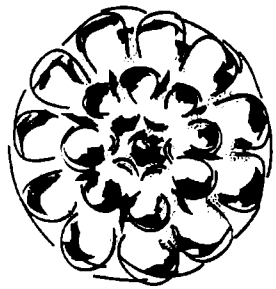
www.pathagar.com

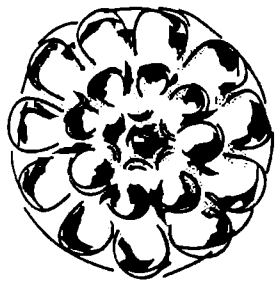
the differences.

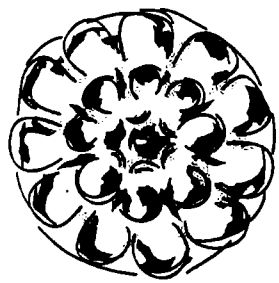
Not only was Musharraf outspoken when it came to reforming Bengal's Muslim society, he was equally critical of political tyranny, economic corruption and the restrictive social practices of the time. In his acclaimed novel, *Gaji Miar Bastani*, he vividly portrayed the corrupt and over-indulgent lifestyle of the *zamindars*, highlighting their unjust and oppressed practices against the masses.[8] In this book, he comes across as a champion of the masses and an opponent of the *zamindars*, even though he had worked as an estate manager for several *zamindars*. In fact, he wrote this novel while he was working as manager of Delduar estate. Abdul Hamid Khan Yusufzai, who was himself a prominent estate manager, journalist and writer, was one of his colleagues. The main characters of the novel were two wealthy and powerful female *zamindars*. They clashed with each other and in so doing they inflicted considerable suffering and hardship on society as a whole. Being socially very conservative, Musharraf considered women to be quarrelsome and very difficult to work with, especially if they occupied positions of power and authority; if he was alive today, he would probably oppose the feminist movement. Whether his negative views about women were influenced by his own experience with his first wife, Aziz-un-Nisa, or the result of his work experience as an estate manager for a female *zamindar*, is not clear. Either way, for a wise, liberal and enlightened Muslim writer and novelist, his views about the role and position of women in nineteenth-century Bengal was surprisingly negative and illiberal.

By all accounts, Musharraf was a highly gifted writer and novelist. He authored 38 books and numerous essays, articles and poems.[9] As a result of his literary interests and achievements, he became linked with the Bengal Academy of Literature (*Bangiya Sahitya Parishad*) in Calcutta. The purpose of this literary society was to promote the development of Bengali literature. Yet, strangely enough, the society's literary activities were mainly carried out in English rather than in Bengali. Musharraf appeared on Bengal's literary scene at a time when the Muslims were behind their Hindu counterparts when it came to cultural and educational activities. For this reason, his literary contribution was remarkable. He inspired a new generation of Muslim scholars, writers and poets (including Syed Isma'il Husayn Shirazi and Mawlana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi), who, in turn, inspired others to pursue intellectual and literary activities. In so doing Mir Musharraf Husayn became a pioneering Muslim novelist, playwright, essayist and poet of modern Bengali literature. He died at the age of 65 and was laid to rest in Padamdi. Thanks to his wide ranging literary contribution and achievements, his name and fame will endure for a long time to come, especially in Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal.

www.pathagar.com







Notes

1. Anwarul Karim, *Bangla Sahitye Muslim Kabi-o-Sahityik.*
2. S. M. A. Latif, *Gadya Shilpi Mir Musharraf Husayn.*
3. Ibid.
4. M. M. Husayn, *Musharraf Racana-Shanbar.*
5. S. M. A. Latif, op. cit.
6. S. S. Husain, *Civilization and Society.*
7. M. A. Hai and S. A. Ahsan, *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta: Adhunik Yug.*
8. M. M. Husayn, op.cit.
9. M. A. Hai and S. A. Ahsan, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

1849–1928

RT. HON. SYED AMEER ALI

THE DECLINE OF the Mughal dynasty during the eighteenth century marked a major turning point in the history of the subcontinent. This encouraged the leading European powers, especially the British, to flex their muscles and gradually establish their politico-economic presence in the Muslim world. The European colonisation of a large part of the Muslim world led to the loss of political independence, economic decline and educational backwardness in the Islamic world. Furthermore, it precipitated the degeneration of Muslim culture and society: morally, culturally and intellectually. During this critical period in the history of modern Islam, a number of prominent Muslim intellectuals and reformers emerged to rejuvenate the Muslim global community (*ummah*). Muslim reformers

www.pathagar.com

such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan led the call for Islamic unity, solidarity and reformation (modernism) in the Muslim world. While al-Afghani and his disciple, Shaykh Muhammad Abduh, were busy popularising their message of Pan-Islamism in Ottoman Turkey and the Arab world, Sir Sayyid and Nawab Abdul Latif launched their Islamic modernist movement in the subcontinent. Inspired by the Islamic modernist message, Syed Ameer Ali of Bengal subsequently became an eloquent and influential champion of Islamic values, principles and ethos during the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century.

Syed Ameer Ali's father, Syed Saadat Ali, was born in Chinsura in a Dutch settlement on the river Hughly (in present-day Indian state of West Bengal). He traced his family's ancestory back to the Prophet through Ali al-Rida, the eighth Shia Imam, who lived during the reign of the famous Abbasid Caliph, Abdullah al-Ma'mun. According to another account, Ameer Ali's ancestors descended from a Shia family that hailed from Khurasan. They came to India with the invading Persian army of Nadir Shah (around 1738–1739) and in the ensuing battle, the forces of Muhammad Shah, the Mughal emperor, were defeated by the former.[1] After this momentus event, Ameer Ali's ancestors settled in India, where they served the Mughal and Oudh courts. Ameer Ali was the fourth of Syed Saadat's five sons and his father provided him with a good modern education along with classical Arabic and traditional Islamic subjects. As expected, young Ameer Ali began his early education at home under his father's tutelage. Later, a private tutor was hired to teach him Arabic, Persian and Urdu.

According to Ameer Ali's *Memoirs*, he became a voracious reader of Persian, Urdu and English books during his early years. So much so, that he claimed to have completed Shaykh Sa'di's *The Rose Garden* (*Gulistan*) and most of Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* before his twelfth birthday, in addition to attaining proficiency in shooting and wrestling.[2] His mother, although shocked by the sudden death of his father in 1856, nevertheless ensured that young Ameer Ali's education was not interrupted. Indeed, she encouraged him to continue his studies with renewed commitment and vigor. As a result of his devotion and dedication to his studies, he not only completed his early education at Hughly Collegiate School at the age of 13, he also passed his entrance examination in the first division. He then joined Hughly Muhsin College, where he pursued further and higher English education under the supervision of Robert Thwaytes, who was the Principal of the College. Four years later, Ameer Ali graduated with Honours in History. Then, in 1869, he successfully completed his Master's degree in History and Bachelor of Law degree, and in so doing he became the first Muslim student from Bengal to achieve such an impressive academic result.

Thereafter, he began to practise law in Calcutta but, advised and supported by Robert Thwaytes, he applied for one of the few state scholarships, which were reserved for the gifted Indian students at the time. His application was successful, and at the age of 20, Ameer Ali left his legal practice and sailed to England in order to pursue advanced education. It is worth

www.pathagar.com

highlighting here that during his student days Ameer Ali was profoundly influenced by the religious ideas and thoughts of Syed Karamat Ali, the charismatic custodian (*mutawalli*) of the Hughly Imambara Complex. Likewise, the modern educational philosophy and work ethic of Robert Thwaytes, the Principal of Hughly Muhsin College, deeply influenced Ameer Ali. In his *Memoirs*, he wrote that before setting off for England, he had completed translating Syed Karamat Ali's *Makhaz-i-Ulum*, a treatise on the origin and development of the sciences into English. However, this book was actually translated by Mawlana Ubaydullah al-Ubaydi Suhrawardi: Ameer Ali had merely assisted the latter in his endeavours.[3] Even so, nobody doubted his linguistic skills, as he had not only acquired proficiency in Persian and English but was also familiar with Arabic, Urdu and Bengali. This enabled Ameer Ali to assimilate aspects of traditional Islamic sciences, Muslim history and culture and English literature with ease. This, in turn, stood him in good stead upon his arrival in England in January 1869.

Unlike Muhammad Ali Jinnah, his younger contemporary, Ameer Ali found Londoners to be warm and hospitable. In his own words:

> I lived in the family of a widow of a clergyman, a Mrs Chase, until my return to India four years later. She treated me as one of themselves, and I shall always treasure with abiding gratitude their unvarying kindness... though I had arrived in England in the depth of winter, I did not find the climate severely inclement in spite of a good deal of frost and snow. Horse buses and 'growlers' were the ordinary means of conveyance.[4]

Ameer Ali was very sociable, aristocratic in his mannerisms and open-minded. He soon befriended the Fawcetts and was invited to dine with them and their acquaintances on a regular basis. During this period, he became a good friend to a number of people of high social standing: Lord and Lady Lawrence of Oxfordshire; Sir Frederick Halliday, who was the Lieutenant-General of Bengal during the revolt of 1857 (otherwise known as the Indian Mutiny); and the Montalbas family, who entertained him with their music, cuisine and artistic talents. When, in 1871 Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan came to England accompanied by his two sons, Ameer Ali met them in London where he discussed with Sir Sayyid the problems and difficulties that confronted the Indian Muslims at the time. Although Ameer Ali shared Sir Sayyid's views about the importance of pursuing modern English education, he warned Sir Sayyid of the dangers of growing Hindu nationalism. However, according to Ameer Ali, the former did not take him seriously on this issue until the Indian National Congress was formed. During this period Ameer Ali also came in contact with Henry Channing, a nephew of the great Channing and a sympathiser of Islam, who encouraged him to write an authentic biography of the Prophet of Islam in English.

While pursuing his advanced legal education in London from 1869 to 1873, Ameer Ali undertook research on the life and works of the Prophet of Islam. After devoting an entire year to research and writing, he finally completed his *The Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed*. This short but beautifully written account of the life and career of the Prophet was completed in 1873,

www.pathagar.com

when Ameer Ali was only 24. It was published in the same year that he was called to the Bar at Inner Temple, where he became the first Muslim from Bengal to qualify as a barrister. Although this book was not a scholarly work, it was arguably the first book to be written by a Muslim on an Islamic topic in English. Repudiating the Orientalists' misrepresentation of the Prophet, Ameer Ali considered him to be great champion of freedom, equality and social justice, and an outstanding teacher and exemplar of morality, ethics and spirituality. Dedicated to the memory of Waris Ali, his elder brother who had died suddenly of heart failure, Ameer Ali's first literary endeavour received a favourable review from the Orientalist, Major R. D. Osborn, who writing in the *Calcutta Review*, stated that it was:

> A literary achievement, we have never read anything issuing from the educated classes in this country which could be compared with it; and the Muslims of India are to be congratulated on the possession of so able a man in their ranks. It is impossible, if his after-life accords with his early promise that he should not leave his influence for good stamped upon the country in deep and enduring characters.[5]

After completing his advanced legal education, Ameer Ali returned to India via Paris, where he met M. Garcin de Tassy, who was a renowned French Orientalist, and the latter was very impressed with the former's mastery of Urdu language and literature.

Back in Hughly, Ameer Ali received a warm welcome from his erstwhile mentors, Syed Karamat Ali and Robert Thwaytes; the latter was so delighted to see his former student that he suspended classes for a day at the Muhsin College in his honour. Thereafter, Ameer Ali joined the High Court in Calcutta as an advocate and soon established his reputation as an expert in Muslim law which, in turn, enabled him to secure the post of lecturer in Muslim Law at the Presidency College. He combined his work as a lecturer with professional legal work and, in due course, he was promoted to the position of presidency magistrate in Calcutta. As a fair-minded and impartial lawyer, Ameer Ali had a soft spot for his poor and needy clients, irrespective their race, colour and creed. In his own words:

> An elderly Hindu woman was once charged with attempting to commit suicide; an offence punishable by imprisonment. I asked her why she desired to take her life. Her story was a sad one. A son who maintained her had died a few months before; his widow had supported her by begging. This daughter-in-law had also died. The old woman said she had nothing now to live for. I ordered her immediate discharge and a monthly allowance of 3 rupees from the Police box. When the order was explained to her she wept in gratitude.[6]

Ameer Ali became well known for his acts of generosity as a lawyer; but he also became known for his stinging criticism of those who did not share his vision of the future. As a devout Muslim, he became an indefatigable champion of Islam and its Prophet during his stay in Europe, but upon his return to India, he became a critical friend of the Indian Muslims, being keen to preserve and protect their interests. Thanks to his impressive academic achievements and good performance as

www.pathagar.com

a magistrate, Ameer Ali was made a member of Bengal Legislative Council. In the absence of an electoral political process, members of the council were selected on the basis of their academic achievements or professional experience, and Ameer Ali met both criteria.

The absence of a proper and effective political body to represent the interests of the Muslims of India in general, and of the Muslims of Bengal in particular, inspired Ameer Ali to establish the National Muhammadan Association (NMA) in 1877. Soon after, branches of this organisation mushroomed across India and only five years after its inception, it had around 50 different branches across Bengal, Bihar, Bombay, Punjab and the United Provinces. According to Rafiuddin Ahmed, the Association had no less than 16 branches in Bengal: including Bogra, Barisal, Khulna, Rangpur, Chittagong, Hughli and Mymensingh. As a result of this growth, the name of this organisation was changed to the Central National Muhammadan Association (CNMA). This association was an inclusive and effective body, and accordingly the non-Muslims were allowed to become members, although they were not eligible to vote on issues of concern to the Muslim community. The main aim of this association was to represent the political interests of the Indian Muslims and champion their rights, although it also hoped to unify the different faith communities of India (Muslims and non-Muslims alike) for the social, political and economic advancement of the country. Not surprisingly, the CNMA's members included prominent Indian Muslims, as well as leading Hindus such as Babu Saligram Singh and Babu Chunder.

Ameer Ali's initiatives were not directly supported by two of the senior Indian Muslims of the time: Nawab Abdul Latif of Bengal and Sir Sayyid of Aligarh. Although both of them highlighted the importance of pursuing modern English education, they adopted a pacifist approach to political engagement with the British. Like them, Ameer Ali was in favour of promoting modern English education in the Muslim community but he profoundly disagreed with their pacifist political stance. He was in favour of forging a distinct Indian Muslim political identity: otherwise, he felt, the Hindus would completely dominate the Indian political landscape in the future. Seven years later, the Hindu-dominated Indian National Congress was formally launched and this confirmed Ameer Ali's premonition. In response, Sir Sayyid hastily established his own Muhammadan Defence Association (MDA) which Ameer Ali considered to be an 'unfortunate' and 'provocative' move on the part of his senior contemporary, who should have known better. Both of these Muslim leaders were motivated by the desire to preserve and protect the interests of the Indian Muslims, however, Ameer Ali deserves to be recognised as a pioneer of Muslim political awakening in the history of the subcontinent.

In addition to working as a part-time lecturer and serving as a member of Bengal Legislative Council and the Oudh Commission of Enquiry, Ameer Ali was promoted to the post of Chief Presidency Magistrate in 1879. His busy schedule took its toll, and he was offered an extended leave on medical grounds. He returned to England where he met and befriended a number of prominent writers and politicians of

www.pathagar.com

the time including James Knowles, the editor of *Nineteenth Century*, Lord Hartington, the Secretary of State for India, and George Morrison, the author of *The Religion of Humanity* and the father of Sir Theodore Morrison, as well as Lord Stanley of Alderley who became a Muslim. During this period, Ameer Ali began work on his *Personal Law of the Muhammadans*. Later, he revised and expanded this book and it was published as the second volume of his much larger work titled *Muhammadan Law: Compiled from Authorities in the Original Arabic*. Recently reissued by Kitab Bhavan of Delhi, the first volume consists of more than 800 pages and primarily covers the Islamic law of gifts and *waqf* (endowment); Volume Two consists of more than 500 pages covering aspects of Muslim personal law including marriage, divorce, the law of succession and status.

In this massive and scholarly work, Ameer Ali interpreted Islamic law, primarily from a Hanafi perspective. His main sources of reference were *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri*, *Durr al-Mukhtar* of al-Haskafi, *Radd al-Muhtar* of Ibn Abidin and *al-Hidayah* of al-Marghinani. In some sections of the book he explains aspects of Shia law, however, a large part of the work consists of discussion of substantive (case) laws as developed by the Indian courts. This shows that Ameer Ali was thoroughly versed in Islamic law as it was formulated and applied in an Indian context. Following in his footsteps, Sir Abdur Rahim and Asaf A. A. Fayzee later authored similar works, although Ameer Ali's contribution has remained the most comprehensive and authoritative work on the subject to this day.

In 1880, during his stay in England, he met his future wife at the home of his English friends. He married Isabella, the daughter of Ida Konstam, in a Unitarian Church. On his return to India, Ameer Ali resigned from his post as Chief Presidency Magistrate to concentrate on his work at the Bar. In the same year, he was appointed Tagore Professor of Law at Calcutta University. He played an important role in resolving the Dacca Waqf Case, which involved Nawab Sir Ahsanullah and his father, Nawab Sir Abdul Ghani, who were the defendants. Another high profile case he took up at the time was the Mysore Appeal, which involved the descendants of Tipu Sultan, the great Muslim warrior of Mysore. During this period Ameer Ali lectured on Muslim Law at Calcutta University and established his reputation as an eminent barrister. He also wrote and published numerous articles and essays in prominent journals and newspapers like *Nineteenth Century* and *The Times* of London to raise awareness and understanding of the interests of the Indian Muslims. Thanks to his wide-ranging contributions, he was awarded the Order of the Companion of the Indian Empire in 1887 and, three years later, Ameer Ali became a judge in the Calcutta High Court: he was the first Muslim to occupy this position. He served in this capacity for 14 years and became renowned for his innovative legal thinking, analytical skills and sound judgement. His fair and impartial interpretation of law, coupled with his unusual grasp of English, enabled him to formulate concise and highly readable legal judgements that earned him the respect of the judiciary.

Despite working full-time as a Judge, Ameer Ali found time to write another major work, *A Short History of the Saracens*, which was

www.pathagar.com

published by Macmillan & Co. of London in 1889. He then revised and enlarged his *Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Muhammad*. This book was published in 1891 by W. H. Allen & Co. of London titled *The Spirit of Islam*. However, in his *Memoirs*, Ameer Ali stated that *The Spirit of Islam* was published before *A Short History of the Saracens*: this might have been an oversight on his part, as the former was published at least two years after the latter. Although he wrote several important books and many essays on aspects of Islam and Muslim history, his *The Spirit of Islam, A Short History of the Saracens* and *Muhammadan Law* established his reputation as a gifted scholar and writer. These books continue to be reprinted and read to this day. In *The Spirit of Islam*, Ameer Ali presented a modernist interpretation of Islam as a religion and way of life. As such, his views on personal and collective struggle (*jihad*), polygamy, multiple marriages of the Prophet and political succession during the early days of Islam were considered to be apologetic—or even factually inaccurate—by the traditionalist scholars. Even so, understanding Ameer Ali's approach to religion requires some appreciation of the existential condition in which he was brought up, educated and pursued his career.

Born into a devout Shia family of Bengal, he combined his early education in Arabic, Persian and traditional Islamic sciences with modern English education. This enabled him to explore the traditional Islamic worldview vis-à-vis the post-Enlightenment European *Weltanschauung*. He completed his study of Islam and of the European people's attitude towards religion in general (and especially Islam) during his student days in London. The outcome of his study was *The Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed*, which he completed while in his mid-twenties. In this book, Ameer Ali created a synthesis between traditional Islam and modern Western secular mind-set. That is to say, unlike the Muslim traditionalists, he presented the life and teachings of the Prophet of Islam as if they were a set of timeless universal ethical principles and moral values that were applicable in all times and condition. This enabled him to move away from a traditionalist, literalist notion of a faith and law that was fixed and unchangable, while at the same time rejecting the prevalent European secular views of human life, in terms of its meaning and purpose. Ameer Ali considered both approaches to be restrictive, incomplete and flawed; instead, he argued that the message of the Prophet was a universal, holistic and all-encompassing worldview that was relevant for all people and all times:

> The process by which humanity has been lifted from the adoration of material objects to the worship of God, has often been retarded. Masses of mankind and individuals have broken away from the stream of progress, have listened to the promptings of their own desires, have given way to the cravings of their own hearts; they have gone back to the worship of their passions, symbolised in the idols of their infancy. But though unheard, the voice of God has always sounded the call to truth and when the time has arrived His servants had risen to proclaim the duties of man to himself and to his Creator. These men have been the veritable 'messengers of Heaven'. They came among their people as the children of

www.pathagar.com

> their time; they represented the burning aspirations of the human soul for truth, purity, and justice. Each was an embodiment of the spiritual necessities of his age; each came to purify, to reform, to elevate a degraded race, a corrupted commonwealth. Some came as teachers of a smaller culture, to influence a smaller sphere; others came with a world-wide message—a message not confined to one race or nation, but intended for all humanity. Such was Mohammed. His mission was not to the Arabs alone. He was not sent for one age or clime, but for all mankind to the end of the world.[7]

In other words, according to Ameer Ali, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) was no ordinary Prophet, because his message was universal. Whereas all other Prophets were sent to a people in a specific time and place, the Prophet's message was for all people. In that sense, Ameer Ali's understanding of Islam was traditionalist and, at the same time, rationalistic, because he advocated the need for harmony between faith and reason in the interpretation and understanding of Islamic scriptures. For this reason, he developed a liberal and modernistic approach to the life and teachings of the Prophet in response to the needs of his time. His approach to Islam was very similar to that of other prominent Indian Muslims like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Nawab Abdul Latif of Bengal. Indeed, a few years before Ameer Ali had completed his book, Sir Sayyid had also authored a biography of the Prophet titled *Essays on the Life of Muhammad*, during his stay in London from 1869 to 1870. Sir Sayyid and Ameer Ali not only refuted the charges levelled against the Prophet by his European detractors, they also developed a modernist interpretation of his teachings which, they hoped, would appeal to educated, middle-class Europeans.

Like Sir Sayyid, Nawab Abdul Latif was an influential Muslim reformer whose educational ideas and thoughts were shared by Ameer Ali. Like Nawab Abdul Latif, Ameer Ali also hailed from Bengal. However, unlike the Nawab, Ameer Ali was not a socially and culturally conservative Muslim. He married an English lady, Isabella Konstam, and ensured both his sons received a modern, liberal education in England. Their political and cultural differences aside, these three influential Muslim reformers of the nineteenth century were passionate and patriotic Muslims who were motivated by their desire to improve the image of Islam in general, and the condition of the Indian Muslims in particular. As a firm believer in Islam as a universal message, Ameer Ali ensured that *The Spirit of Islam* had a message for Muslims and Europeans alike. As for the former, he urged them to respond to the challenge of European colonialism with both wisdom and collective efforts to liberate their land from foreign domination; his message to the Europeans was equally clear, namely that because the message of the Prophet was a universal and humanistic one, the more they tried to understand and appreciate the Arabian Prophet, the better it would be for them. In that sense, Ameer Ali was a great cosmopolitan and sincere bridge-builder between Islam and the Western world.

The Spirit of Islam was a modernist interpretation of Islam, however Ameer Ali's *A Short History of the Saracens* was nothing short of a pioneering work on Islamic history in English. Prior to this work, no serious attempt had been

www.pathagar.com

made by a Muslim to write a comprehensive history of Islam in a European language. Perhaps inspired by Simon Ockley's *History of the Saracens*, Ameer Ali researched and wrote this book during his tenure as a judge of the Calcutta High Court. However, in comparison to Ockley's book, which only covered the early part of Islamic history, Ameer Ali's work was far more ambitious. In his preface to the 1899 edition, he wrote:

> I have dealt very briefly with the pre-Islamite history of the Arabs, and the work and ministry of the Arabian Prophet. More space has been devoted to the Republic. The Ommeyade and Abbasside periods have, I hope, been treated with sufficient fullness to make the account interesting without being wearisome. It was somewhat difficult to compress the story of the eight centuries during which the Saracens held Spain, within about a hundred pages; and yet the reader will, I trust, find that nothing of importance has been omitted. The account of the Saracens in Northern Africa occupies a very small compass, and naturally so, for the glory of the Fatimides...their culture sunk into the sands under the misrule of the later Mamelukes. To each period is attached in the shape of a Retrospect a description of the intellectual, social, and economic condition of the people, of their manners and customs, and their system of administration.[8]

Although Ameer Ali's work began with a description of pre-Islamic Arabia and concluded with the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongol hordes, his interpretation of the period of the four rightly-guided caliphs (*al-khulafa al-rashidun*) was one of the most balanced account to have been penned by a Shia writer. However, the same cannot be said about his coverage of the Umayyad period. He was very critical of all the Umayyad rulers (other than Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, the seventh Umayyad ruler), while his views on the Abbasids are more balanced and discerning. It should be noted here that Ameer Ali was a lawyer by profession, not a historian, and his assessment of early Islamic history (especially that of the Umayyad period) is far from being impartial and rigorous. Even so, his work inspired many other historians both Muslim and non-Muslim to produce smiliar works on Islamic history in general and Arab history and culture in particular. One such historian was Philip Khuri Hitti of Lebanon, who was inspired to write his acclaimed *History of the Arabs* in 1937 by Ameer Ali's work. In the preface to the tenth edition of the book, Hitti wrote:

> The year 1970 marks the thirty-third anniversary of the publication of History of the Arabs and witnesses its tenth edition. The initiative for its writing was taken by Mr. Daniel Macmillan, who, as early as 1927, wrote to the author suggesting a book comparable to Ameer Ali, *A Short History of the Saracens*.[9]

Unlike Ameer Ali, who used the words 'Saracens' and 'Arabs' interchangeably, Hitti employed the word 'Arab' throughout his book because he considered the term 'Saracen' to be outmoded and obsolete. Nevertheless, Ameer Ali's book was a pioneering effort that clarified many misunderstandings and misconceptions about Islam and Muslims in the English-speaking world during the early part of the twentieth century.

After serving as a Judge for 14 years, Ameer

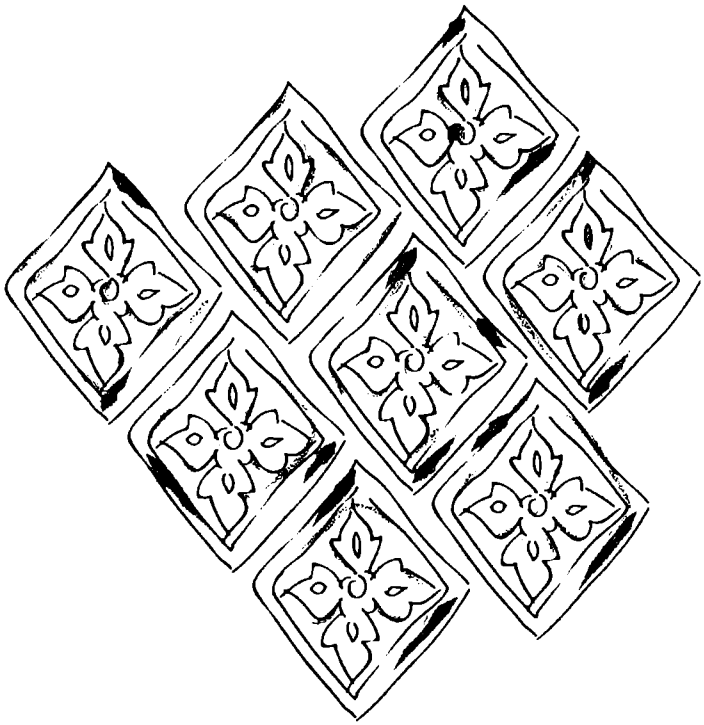
www.pathagar.com

Ali eventually retired from Calcutta High Court in April 1904 and lived in England with his wife and two sons (Waris Ameer Ali and Torick Ameer Ali), both of whom were educated at public school. In 1909, he became the first Indian—and also the first Muslim—to be appointed a member of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, which was the Supreme Court of the British Empire.[10] A year later, he helped establish a fund for a mosque in London, to which Sultan Muhammad V of Turkey and a former Shah of Persia contributed generously. This fund subsequently laid the foundation of what is today known as the East London Mosque and London Muslim Centre (LMC). He also set up the London branch of the Muslim League (1909–1913).

Ameer Ali's decision to leave India and settle permanently in England removed him from the political affairs of that country, but he continued to champion Islam and Muslim affairs, and became an able spokesman for the preservation of the Ottoman Caliphate and a founding president of the British Red Crescent Society. In recognition of his wide ranging contribution and achievements, the universities of Cambridge, Calcutta and Aligarh all awarded him honorary doctorates.

Towards the end of his life, he wrote his *Memoirs*, which was initially serialised in the *Islamic Culture* from 1931 to 1932, and was subsequently published in the form of a book by his family. However, all his private papers and notes were destroyed as per his instruction.[11] Although Ameer Ali died before the concept of Pakistan was formulated by Sir Muhammad Iqbal and others during the 1930s, as a champion of Muslim rights and separatism in India he had certainly played an indirect role in the emergence of Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Rt. Hon. Allama Justice Syed Ameer Ali died of heart attack at his 'beautiful home', the Polingford Manor, Rudgwick, Sussex, at the age of 79, and was buried in Brookwood Cemetry, near Surrey.

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. K. K. Aziz, *Ameer Ali: His Life and Work.*
2. Syed Ameer Ali, *Memoirs and Other Writings of Syed Ameer Ali.*
3. Muhammad Abdullah, *Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi.*
4. S. A. Ali, op. cit
5. Ibid.
6. S. A. Ali, op. cit.
7. S. A. Ali, *The Spirit of Islam.*
8. S. A. Ali, *A Short History of Saracens.*
9. Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs.*
10. S. M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan.*
11. S. A. Ali, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

1852–1927



RT. HON. TASLIMUDDIN AHMAD

To MUSLIMS, the Qur'an is not only a holy book: it is a Divine revelation and a guide for all people for all times to come. In the words of the Qur'an:

> These are verses of the wise book, a guide and a mercy to the good-doers; those who establish regular prayer, and give regular poor due, and have (in their hearts) the assurance of the hereafter. These are on (true) guidance from their Lord; and these are the ones who will prosper (*Surah Luqman*, verses 2–5).

The Arabic Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) over a period of 23 years, and is considered by Muslims to be God's final message to humanity. For this reason, even during the Prophet's own lifetime,

www.pathagar.com

the question of how to convey the message of the Divine revelation to the non-Arabic speaking Muslims occupied the minds of the early Muslims. According to the classical Islamic historians, the Prophet authorised Salman al-Farsi, one of his prominent Companions who had hailed from Persia, to translate *Surah al-Fatihah* ('The Opening Chapter' of the Qur'an) into Persian: thus the tradition of translating the Arabic Qur'an into other languages was initiated by the Prophet himself.[1] After the death of the Prophet in 632, Islam began to spread rapidly both in the East and the West.

As more and more non-Arabic speaking people embraced the new faith, the need to convey the message of the Divine revelation to them became a priority for the Muslim scholars and rulers. In response, many prominent Muslims translated the Qur'an into some of the leading Muslim languages, including Persian, Hindi and Urdu. These early translations inspired other Muslim scholars and writers to translate the Qur'an into many other languages, including Turkish, Urdu, English and Bengali. Inspired by the efforts of scholars like Amiruddin Basunia of Rangpur, Ghulam Akbar Ali of Calcutta, Khandakar Mir Wahid Ali of Chittagong, Girish Chandra Sen of Narayanganj, Mawlana Muhammad Na'imuddin of Tangail and Mawlana Abbas Ali of Basirhat in West Bengal, Taslimuddin Ahmad produced one of the first complete Bengali translations of the Qur'an, and in so doing he became a leading Muslim scholar and writer of his generation.[2]

Maulvi Taslimuddin Ahmad Khan Bahadur was born in Darjeeling (in the present-day Indian state of West Bengal). He hailed from a highly-educated and respected Muslim family of Chandannagar village in Panchagarh, part of Dinajpur District in Bangladesh. His family traced their ancestory back to Mir Jumla, the Mughal viceroy of Bengal, whose brother settled in Panchagarh area during the reign of Awrangzeb, the last of the great Mughal emperors.[3] Hoping to annex the Assam region, Awrangzeb authorised Mir Jumla to spearhead a campaign to conquer this area. Thus, from 1662 to 1663, Mir Jumla initiated a military campaign to annex Assam. On this occasion Panchagarh and its surrounding areas (which happened to be on the path of the Mughal army) became an integral part of their expanding empire. Once it had been conquered, Mir Jumla established a garrison (*thana*) there and placed his brother, Muhammad Daniyal, in charge of administering the area before continuing his march towards Assam.

Taslimuddin's family traced their lineage to the family of Mir Jumla through Muhammad Daniyal and his sucessors. Born into a prominent Muslim family, Tajuddin Ahmad, the grandfather of Taslimuddin, became a respected Judge (*qadi*). Accordingly, he ensured that his son, Munshi Muhammad Tariqullah (the father of Taslimuddin), received a thorough training in traditional Islamic sciences and modern education. After successfully completing his education, Tariqullah became a government revenue officer. He served in this capacity in Darjeeling for a period and established his reputation as an efficient, loyal and dedicated government officer. Impressed with his services, Major A. Campbell, his line manager, praised him in these words:

> Monshi Mohamed Tarickoollah has served me as

www.pathagar.com

> revenue officer for several years. He is very intelligent, intimately acquainted with affairs of Sikim and with its connection with the British Government. He is equally well acquainted with the system of revenue administration in the Morung Hills of the Darjeeling territory, and I consider him to be a competent, faithful and trustworthy servant of Government.[4]

Taslimuddin was born while his father was working as a revenue officer in Darjeeling, and he was only five when the Sepoy Revolt of 1857 erupted. As noted in previous chapters, this was a politically difficult and culturally testing time for the Muslims of India in general (and of Bengal in particular) who were forced to re-examine their social, political, cultural and educational condition, and in the process, realign their relationship with the new rulers of their country. Taslimuddin's father served the British government with loyalty and dedication. In response, the government authorities not only supported his educational programmes, they also appointed him an honorary magistrate.

As a devout Muslim, learned scholar and a prominent local Muslim leader, Taslimuddin's father ensured his children received a good education in traditional Islamic subjects and modern sciences. Of his 11 sons and one daughter, Taslimuddin, his third son, was destined to leave his mark on modern Bengali literature. Taslimuddin received his early education at home under the guidance of his father, and then enrolled at Chandannagar Model School. After completing his primary education at this institution, he moved to the present-day Bangladeshi District of Rangpur and enrolled at the local Zilla School. His time at this school was a fruitful one, as he passed his entrance examination with flying colours. As a gifted student, he always stood first in his exams. Encouraged by his father and teachers, he then proceeded to Calcutta to pursue higher education. According to his biographers, it was during this period that his love for learning and research became clear. As expected, after completing his Intermediate of Arts (IA), he obtained his Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in 1877 from the Presidency College in Calcutta. Five years later, he obtained a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree from Calcutta University and thereby became one of the first few Muslim graduates of that university along with Dilwar Husayn Ahmad, Syed Ameer Ali and Ubaidur Rahman.[5] During this period he married Naimunessa, who bore him four sons. One of his sons, Talimuddin Ahmad (better known as Tariqul Alam), later became a deputy magistrate and a prominent writer of Bengali literature; his other sons, however, died young.

A year after completing his Bachelor of Laws degree, Taslimuddin began to practise law. During this period he worked in different parts of Bengal, including Purnia, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, but he struggled to make ends meet. This prompted him to move to Rangpur in 1889 at the age of 37. There he bought a plot of land in the Munshipara area and settled with his family for good. In due course, he established his own legal practice and became well known for his honesty and success as a lawyer. Hoping to recruit him into government service, British officials offered him lucrative legal posts, but he chose to work as an independent lawyer, earning more than 1000 taka per month. By all accounts, this was a very good income for

www.pathagar.com

the time, and it enabled Taslimuddin to work for himself and devote more time to social, cultural and literary activities. In due course, he became a prominent member of *Rangpur Sahitya Parishad* (a local literary society), Rangpur Muhammadan Association (a leading socio-political organisation) and Nurul Iman Jama'at (a reformist Islamic organisation).

Although he was actively involved in socio-cultural activities, he never supported political rebellion or agitation against the government.[6] In that sense, he maintained his family tradition of supporting the British and this, no doubt, endeared him to the government officials who sought his advice and guidance on the important social, political and educational issues of the day. However, it would be unfair to describe Taslimuddin as a blind supporter of the government, for that was patently not the case. As a devout and practising Muslim, he was an eloquent and effective champion of Islam and the Muslims of Bengal (especially the people of Rangpur). Like his father, he successfully combined his role as a supporter of the British government with that of a spokesman of Islam and the Muslim community with remarkable skill and success.

Taslimuddin was not only a successful lawyer and a prominent local Muslim leader, he was also one of the most outstanding Islamic scholars and writers of his generation. A devout Muslim since his early years, he continued to polish his knowledge of Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Bengali (which was his mother-tongue) in his spare time. This enabled him to pursue research in Qur'anic studies, *hadith* (Prophetic traditions), *sirah* (life of the Prophet Muhammad) and early Islamic history and culture. Although Taslimuddin studied Arabic, Persian and Urdu during his time at the Presidency College in Calcutta, he later mastered these languages and aspects of Islamic sciences under the tutelage of several local Islamic scholars including Maulvi Abdul Majid, who was a senior teacher at Rangpur Zilla School. Impressed with his knowledge and understanding of Islam, his teachers encouraged him to continue his research and writing, which was his real aim and passion in life. Taslimuddin began to write on Islamic topics since his college days in Calcutta. With the help of some friends, he founded a monthly journal called *Islam* (however they were unable to sustain it due to financial difficulties). Thereafter, he published numerous articles and poems on a wide range of subjects in some prominent journals including *Nabanoor* and *Islam Pracharak*.[7] As a talented writer, he wrote prolifically on all aspects of Islam including early Muslim history. He published many books and treatises but his most famous works were *Qur'an* (an annotated translation of the Qur'an into Bengali), *Selection of Prophetic Traditions* (*Priya Paygambarer Priya Katha*), *Lives of the Companions of the Prophet* (*Sahabira*), *Prophet as Emperor* (*Shamrat Paygambar*) and *Celebration of the Prophet's Birth* (*Janmotsab*).

Before Taslimuddin, several other prominent Muslim scholars and writers of Bengal had translated parts of the Holy Qur'an into Bengali. These included Amiruddin Basunia of Mukhtarpur in Rangpur, Mawlana Muhammad Na'imuddin of Surujgram in Tangail, Ghulam Akbar Ali of Mirzapur in Calcutta and Khandakar Wahid Ali of Chittagong. However, these scholars translated only

www.pathagar.com

parts of the Qur'an: especially the thirtieth part of the Qur'an (*Juz Amma*). Notably, the early Muslim scholars translated parts of the Qur'an in *dobashi*; whereas their successors adopted a chaste, modern Bengali literary style, which made their works popular with the masses. Thus, the first Muslim scholar to have translated the whole Qur'an into Bengali was Mawlana Abbas Ali of Basirhat in 24 Parganas in the Indian state of West Bengal. He was the son of Munshi Muhammad Tamizudddin and he published his translation of the thirtieth part of the Qur'an in 1907. Two years later, his complete bilingual translation of Islam's sacred text was printed. Consisting of 976 pages, his combined Urdu and Bengali translation of the Qur'an was accompanied by the original Arabic text along with explanatory notes in both Urdu and Bengali.[8] Although Mawlana Abbas Ali deserves to be known more widely, the life and work of this important scholar has been largely forgotten.

The other scholar who had translated the whole Qur'an into Bengali prior to Taslimuddin was Girish Chandra Sen, a notable Bengali writer and translator. His translation was completed between 1881 and 1886, and it was well received by the Hindu scholars and intellectuals. However, the Muslim scholars did not rate it very highly for a number of reasons. Firstly, unlike Abbas Ali's translation, Sen's translation did not include the original Arabic text. Secondly, Girish Chandra Sen was a Hindu who had converted to Brahma religion in 1865 and as such his knowledge and understanding of key Qur'anic concepts and beliefs was highly questionable. Unsurprisingly, he wrongly translated key Qur'anic terms: 'Allah', 'Jahannam' and 'Yatim' were translated as 'Ishwar' or 'Parameshwar', 'Nerashrai' and 'Naraka', respectively. In addition, he did not believe in heaven or hell, and as such his translation was considered by the Muslims to be theologically problematic as well as linguistically archaic. For these reasons, Sen's translation proved to be more popular with the Hindus than Muslims, although it remains an important achievement.

Taslimuddin was the second Muslim to have had translated the whole Qur'an into Bengali, and only the third person to have accomplished such a feat in the history of Bengali literature. His was the result of more than three decades of study and research. Chronologically speaking, Taslimuddin's translation of *Surah al-Mulk* first appeared in 1907 under the title of *Tabarakallazi Surar Banganubad*. This was followed by his translation of the thirtieth part (*Juz Amma*) of the Qur'an, which was published in Calcutta in 1908. His full translation of the Qur'an was eventually completed in 1925. Published in three volumes, the first part consisted of nine chapters (*suwar*): that is, from *Surah Fatiha* to *Surah Tawbah* (the first 10 paras).

The first volume was published in Calcutta in 1922 by Muhammad Muzammil Haq of the Oriental Printers & Publishers Limited, a leading publisher of Islamic literature at the time. It consisted of 458 pages, including an introduction of 80 pages. In the Introduction, Taslimuddin provided an overview of the history of the Arabian Peninsula (*al-Jazirat al-Arab*), including that of the sacred city of Makkah and the Holy Ka'bah, an overview of the life of the Prophet, and some information on the socio-cultural context in which the Qur'anic revelation took place.[9] Taslimuddin

www.pathagar.com

was proficient in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and English, which meant that he had access to original Arabic, Persian and Urdu sources, as well as some modern English books: this enabled him to write a useful and informative introduction to his translation for the benefit of Bengali-speaking readers.

A year after the publication of first volume, the second part of Taslimuddin's translation was printed by the same publisher. Consisting of next 10 paras (from *Surah Yunus* to *Surah Ankabut*), this volume comprised of 458 pages. As expected, the third volume consisted of last 10 paras (from *Surah Rum* to *Surah al-Nas*) and it was published in 1925, and it consisted of 521 pages. The completion of Taslimuddin's Bengali translation of the Qur'an was an important event in the history of Bengali literature, and was one of the crowning achievements of his literary career. It became an instant hit soon after its publication and was reviewed widely in both Bengali and English journals. Prominent publications, including *Muslim Jagot*, *Nabajug*, *Bangla* and *The Servant*, reviewed it and praised Taslimuddin for his good command of Arabic and Bengali. After thoroughly checking Taslimuddin's translation, some of the leading Muslim scholars and writers hailed it as a major achievement. Thus, Hafiz Amjad Husayn and Mawlana Muhammad Husayn, both of whom were professors of Arabic and Persian at the Rangpur Carmichael College, heaped praise on him for his contribution. Likewise, Mawlana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi published a glowing review in his well-known journal, the *Sultan*. In this review, the Mawlana praised Taslimuddin by expressing his profound gratitude to him for the invaluable and much-needed contribution, which, he felt, would be of great benefit to the Muslims of Bengal. This translation later inspired other prominent Muslim scholars of Bengal to translate the Qur'an into Bengali (Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan's *Tafsir ul-Qur'an*, a Bengali translation and commentary of the Qur'an, is one such example).

In addition to his translation, Taslimuddin wrote and published several other books on early Islamic history, the life of the Prophet and aspects of Islamic teachings. Of these, his most valuable works were *Priya Paygambarer Priya Katha*, *Sahabira*, *Shamrat Paygambar* and *Janmotsab*. First published in 1915, the *Priya Paygambarer Priya Katha* was a short—but equally important—collection of Prophetic traditions, which he translated from the original Arabic into Bengali. Consisting of 500 Prophetic traditions (selected from Shaykh Wali al-Din al-Khatib al-Tabrizi's famous *Mishkat al-Masabih*), this book of 125 pages was compiled for the general readers: to guide them in their personal, social, religious, cultural, economic and spiritual affairs. This collection of Prophetic traditions was, according to Taslimuddin himself, the first of its kind to have been published in Bengali. This may or may not have been the case, but it was, beyond doubt, a valuable collection of Prophetic traditions on Islamic moral and ethical issues aimed at the general reader. His work may have later inspired Mawlana Fazlur Rahim Chowdhury to translate the entire *Mishkat* into Bengali for the first time in the 1920s. To Taslimuddin's surprise, this book of Prophetic traditions also attracted the attention of the scholars. So much so that, after reading this book, Sir Debaprashad Sharbadikari, a former vice-chancellor of

www.pathagar.com

Calcutta University, sent Taslimuddin a letter, thanking him for his important contribution.[10]

Taslimuddin also published two books on early Islamic history: *Sahabira* and *Shamrat Paygambar*. The former consisted of 28 biographies of prominent companions and family members of the Prophet and was divided into three parts, highlighting the sterling qualities and attributes of the early Muslims for the benefit of his readers. Taslimuddin emphasised the importance of studying the lives and careers of the early Muslims in order to acquire a better understanding of Islam as a religion and way of life. Although the entries were of unequal length, Taslimuddin focused his attention on the lives and works of three prominent Muslim women: namely Khadijah bint Khuwailid, Aishah bint Abi Bakr and Fatimah bint Muhammad. The first two ladies were the wives of the Prophet, and Fatimah was his youngest daughter. According to Taslimuddin, these three women were not only great champions of Islam during its early years, they were also role models for the Muslim women of Bengal. Based on a combination of original Arabic, Persian and Urdu sources, this book was published in 1926 and it consisted of 269 pages.

After the publication of *Sahabira*, Taslimuddin spent the last year of his life writing a biography of the Prophet, *Shamrat Paygambar*. Consisting of 268 pages and four photographs, this book was published in 1928, a year after his death. In this book, Taslimuddin traced the genealogy of the Prophet back to Abraham (Ibrahim) through Ishmael (Isma'il) and his descendants. He then provided a brief account of main events and activities that took place during the Prophet's life, highlighting aspects of his teachings and guidance for the benefit of the readers. Like his other books, Taslimuddin's biography of the Prophet was based on a combination of sources: including the Qur'an, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Mishkat al-Masabih*, various *tafsir* literature (such as *Tafsir-i-Haqqani* and *Tafsir-i-Qadiri*) and some modern English books (for example, Stanley Lane-Poole's *The Moors in Spain*). His proficiency in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and English enabled Taslimuddin to read widely and to use a variety of sources. As a result, he wrote an authoritative and highly readable biography of the Prophet in Bengali. Thanks to Syed Emdad Ali, this book included a 13-page biographical sketch of its author and his activities. Although Emdad Ali's short biography of Taslimuddin was based on information he had obtained from Maulvi Tajammul Husayn (who was a relative of Taslimuddin), according to Motahar Hossain Sufee, this biographical sketch was not free from error.[11] Even so, it is an important early source on the life and works of Maulvi Taslimuddin Ahmad.

Like most of the Muslim scholars and writers of his generation, Taslimuddin wrote both prose and poetry. In fact, he was an accomplished poet who composed verses on a wide range of topics. Of his many poetic contributions, his *Janmotsab* (also known as *Mawlud Nafisa*) was his most recognised and valuable work. These verses were written in praise of the Prophet, because Taslimuddin considered his birth and Prophethood to be a great source of blessing and mercy for the entire humanity. Taslimuddin was in favour of observing the celebration of the birth of the Prophet (*mawlid al-nabi*). Some conservative

www.pathagar.com

Islamic scholars (*ulama*) considered it to be a detestable religious innovation (*bid'ah*), and Taslimuddin profoundly disagreed with this view and actively participated in *mawlid* celebrations.

In recognition of his outstanding services to the government and the Muslims of Bengal, in 1912 the British government awarded Taslimuddin the title of 'Khan Bahadur' and allowed him to use 'Rt. Hon.' before his name. After a lifetime devoted to research and writing on aspects of Islam, the Rt. Hon. Maulvi Taslimuddin Ahmad Khan Bahadur died at the age of 75. He was laid to rest in his local cemetery in Munshipara. Thanks to his important literary contributions, his name and fame will endure for a long time to come, especially in Bangladesh and West Bengal.

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. M. Abdul Jabbar Beg, *Biographical Dictionary of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad.*
2. M. Mujibur Rahman, *Bangla Bhashey Qur'an Charcha.*
3. M. H. Sufee, *Taslimuddin Ahmad.*
4. Ibid.
5. Sultan Jahan Salik (ed.) *Muslim Modernism in Bengal: Selected Writings of Delawar Hosaen Ahmed Meerza.*
6. M. Mujibur Rahman, *Taslimuddin Ahmad.*
7. Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press 1901–1930.*
8. M. M. Rahman, op. cit.
9. M. H. Sufee, op. cit
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.

www.pathagar.com

c.1852–c.1936

MUHAMMAD DAAD ALI

THE MID-NINTEENTH CENTURY represented one of the most politically uncertain and volatile periods in the history of Muslim Bengal; however, although many Muslim writers and poets of Bengal were born during this difficult and testing time, they blazed a literary trail that has few parallels in the history of Bengali literature.

Born in 1847 in Nadia (the present-day Kushtia District of Bangladesh), Mir Musharraf Husayn became one of the foremost Muslim writers of modern Bengali literature: so much so that his famous *Vishad-Sindhu* is read widely to this day. Five years later, Taslimuddin Ahmad was born in Darjeeling (located in the Indian state of West Bengal) and he went onto become a prominent Muslim scholar and writer, having translated the whole Qur'an into Bengali during

www.pathagar.com

the early part of the twentieth century. A year after the Sepoy Revolt of 1857, Kazim al-Qurayshi (better known as Mohakabi Kaykobad) was born in Nawabganj (in Dhaka) and he also became one of the foremost Muslim poets of his generation. Two years later, Muzammil Haq was born in Shantipur (located in the Indian state of West Bengal) and he, too, became one of the most influential Muslim writers and poets of modern times. During this important period in the history of modern Bengali literature and poetry, many other gifted Muslim writers and poets were born. Muhammad Daad Ali was one such writer and poet who, on account of his important literary contribution and achievements, has left an indelible mark on modern Bengali literature.

Muhammad Daad Ali was born into a devout and equally respected Muslim family of village Atigram (which is today located in Kushtia District in present-day Bangladesh). However, his biographers disagree concerning his exact date of birth. Some say he was born in 1852, while others assert that he was born in 1856.[1] Either way, his family traced their ancestry back to the Arabian citadel of Makkah, which was the birthplace of the Prophet. Accordingly, they considered themselves to be the descendants of the Prophet, although there is no conclusive evidence for this. According to Daad Ali's biographers, Shaykh Muhammad Burhanullah al-Qurayshi, one of his forefathers, came to India from Makkah in order to preach Islam in the subcontinent. Subsequently, he settled in Delhi (perhaps during the early Mughal period). With the aim of disseminating the message of Islam, he then proceeded to a place close to the borders of Jessore and Khulna in Bangladesh. After settling there, he began to preach Islam to the locals, and his success prompted him to move to the village of Baribarthan in Jessore. Thereafter, he proceeded to Catholi village in Kushtia, where he settled permanently and began to propagate Islam in that locality. Two generations later, Muhammad Najibullah, the grandfather of Daad Ali, established himself there as a prominent figure. Najibullah married twice, and his first wife, Sharifunnesa, bore him a son, Naad Ali. His second wife also bore him a son and daughter, Fakhr Ali and Maymuna Khatun.[2]

Naad Ali received a good education in Arabic and Persian at home, and he did not attend any educational institutions. As a result of his early education (which he received under the tutelage of his father), he was able to join the police force and was posted to Murshidabad where he served, for a period, as an inspector. However, after the death of his father, he returned home to take care of his family. Naad Ali's only son, Daad Ali, was brought up under the watchful gaze of his parents until his father died, after which his mother then took good care of him. Daad Ali began his early education under the tutelage of an *alim* (Islamic scholar) who had moved to their locality from Delhi. According to Abul Ahsan Choudhury, he received a thorough education in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and aspects of Islam under the tutelage of this scholar.[3] After completing his elementary education, Daad Ali was enrolled at his local school where he learned Bengali language and literature. Thereafter, his mother hired a prominent local Hindu scholar to teach him Sanskrit, Bengali, mathematics and aspects of Hindu philosophy and mysticism.

www.pathagar.com

Daad Ali, according to some of his biographers, then proceeded to Shah Abdul Haq, the Pir Sahib (Sufi master) of Binodia in Murshidabad. He stayed there for nearly four years, and during that period he received one-to-one instruction in Islamic spirituality (*tasawwuf*) and gnosis (*irfan*) under the guidance of the Pir Sahib. In addition to polishing his knowledge of Arabic, Persian, Urdu and aspects of Islamic sciences such as *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *hadith* (Prophetic traditions) and *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), he undertook practical training in *tasawwuf* in order to acquire insight into the inner dimensions of Islamic teachings through spiritual illumination. Shaykh Abd al-Khaliq Ghujdawani, who was one of the great early Sufis of the Naqshbandiyyah tariqh, advised the students of Islamic spirituality to:

> Learn Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the traditions of the Prophet (*ahadith*). Do not mix with illiterate mystics... offer prayers in congregation... do not seek fame... do not accept any office... do not be a surety for anybody... do not go to the court. Do not mix with rulers or princes... do not construct a *khanqah*... do not hear too much mystic music... do not condemn music... so far as you can, do not marry a woman who wants material comforts... laughter kills one's heart. Your heart should be full of grief, your body as if of an ailing person, your eyes wet, your actions sincere, your prayers earnest, your dress tattered, your company dervishes, your wealth poverty, your house the mosque and your friend God.[4]

Daad Ali followed this advice rigorously during his four years with Shah Abdul Haq and, as expected, his efforts pleased his spiritual mentor. After four years of gruelling training, he returned home both wiser and spiritually enriched. Before going to the Pir Sahib for spiritual training, he was a very ambitious and outgoing young man who wanted to become wealthy and famous; after his life-transforming time with his spiritual mentor, Daad Ali began to see things differently, observing human life and its challenges in the light of his new spiritual insights and experiences. This, in turn, changed his outlook on life as he became more spiritually inclined and otherworldly in his attitude and behaviour. However, unlike some Sufis, he did not abandon the material world and become a hermit. On the contrary, he struck a balance between leading a normal, ordinary life (like the Prophet) whilst keeping his eyes firmly fixed on the hereafter.

This period was therefore an intellectually and spiritually defining moment of his life that was destined to have a profound and lasting impact on his religious ideas, thoughts and writings. So much so that he dedicated his first book, *Bhanga Pran*, to his spiritual mentor. According to Ghulam Sakhlayn, a prominent scholar of Bengali language and literature, Daad Ali was equally proficient in Sanskrit. Not surprisingly, he regularly read the poems of Kali Das, the classical Sanskrit poet. This suggests that, as a seeker of knowledge and spiritual enlightenment, Daad Ali was open-minded and non-sectarian in his pursuit of knowledge; 'Knowledge,' stated the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him), 'is the lost property of the believer and he should pick it up wherever he may find it.' Daad Ali was a firm believer in this Prophetic advice and, as such, he acquired good knowledge of Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Sanskrit

www.pathagar.com

and Bengali. In so doing he became thoroughly familiar with both Islamic and Hindu religious thought and philosophy by his own effort and initiative.

Daad Ali's grandfather was a wealthy individual who owned large plots of land and several properties. His father inherited the wealth and made good use of the land, which enabled his family to lead a comfortable lifestyle. This, in turn, enabled Daad Ali to pursue higher education and learning. He became a lawyer, writer, poet and a prominent Muslim leader. In addition to serving as the president of Chatiyan Union Board for nearly 10 years, he was appointed an honorary magistrate in Kushtia by the government officials, and he served in this capacity for nearly 30 years. Steeped in traditional Islamic learning and spirituality, he became renowned for his sense of justice, fairplay and impartiality in resolving legal disputes.

During his spare time, he practised homeopathy, traditional medicine and subsequently became renowned for his expertise in these subjects in both Kushtia and Calcutta. Furthermore, Daad Ali was a supporter of education and learning, and he established a school, mosque and fresh water reservoir (*dighi*) for the locals. As a devout Muslim, he supported the Muslim scholars and preachers in their efforts to disseminate the message of Islam in Bengal. As such, he befriended Munshi Muhammad Meherullah and Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin, two leading Muslim preachers of Bengal, and encouraged them to promote Islam and protect the Muslims of Bengal from the Christian missionaries. According to his biographers, Daad Ali was a member of the Anjuman-i-Itifaq-i-Islam, which was originally founded by Syed Abdul Quddus Rami in order to unify the Muslims of Bengal and to protect their rights and interests.[5]

On a personal level, Daad Ali married at an early age: according to one account he was only 17 at the time. His wife, Shafiunnesa, hailed from a prominent Muslim family of village Rahimpur in Jessore and she bore him seven sons (Uthman, Ihsan, Yunus, Yusuf, Muhsin, Mansur and Idris) and three daughters (Latifunnesa, Zahra and Meherunnesa). Like his father, Uthman became an insatiable seeker of knowledge and studied at both Calcutta Madrasah and Aligarh's Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (MAO), while Yusuf and Mansur became the publishers of much of their father's writings. Idris Ali was a gifted poet and who later collected and published some of his father's works, especially those dealing with Muslim law of inheritance. Daad Ali had a happy family life until his wife died unexpectedly at the age of 44. The death of his beloved wife was a major blow for him, and overwhelmed by grief and sadness, he left his family home and moved into a new property. He stayed there for the next 33 years, during which he focused mainly on social, religious and cultural activities, in addition to research and writing. The death of his wife, coupled with his profound spiritual outlook on life, later inspired him to compose some of his most important works of poetry.

Daad Ali was a prolific writer and poet, authoring more than 15 works of prose and poetry. Of these, his most important and widely recognised contributions were *Bhanga Pran* (two volumes), *Ashiq-i-Rasul* (two volumes),

www.pathagar.com

Akhayri-Mawut, Samaj Shikha, Shantikunja, Diwan-i-Daad and *Fara'id*. The first volume of *Bhanga Pran* ('Broken-heart') consisted of 17 poems. *Bhanga Pran* was written in response to the death of his wife, and it was printed in 1905. This anthology consisted of more than 250 pages and was published by his son, Muhammad Yusuf Ali. Although it was widely praised by the scholars and general readers, according to Azhar Islam (a prominent scholar of Bengali literature), these poems were not of the highest quality. However, after reading his poems, Gopal Chandra Lahiri of Pabna Institution wrote:

> I have great pleasure in testifying to the rather uncommon accomplishments of Munshi Dad Ali, a respectable Mohammedan gentleman of Kushtia. In him are combined both Hindu and Mohammedan idea and feelings, derived from close familiarity with both literatures. He is an author and his poems which are of no mean order, bear ample evidence to this unique combination. As a devoted Mohammedan, he has been to Mecca and description of his pilgrimage is beautiful and graphic. His circumstances however, do not enable him to present his writings to the public; and the consequent mortification is really painful to a writer of his parts. I recommend him, therefore, to the consideration of the educated public.[6]

Likewise, Justice Sardar Charan Mitra wrote:

> I have read with great care and attention the poems styled 'Bhanga Pran' Part 1 by Munshi Mohammad Dad Ali. I have also heard him read his own poems and a new poem not yet published. He has a poet's poetry and enthusiasm and he has evinced an excellent knowledge of the Bengalee Mussalman community. He has also considerable art. I hope the poems will be received and read with avidity by all Bengalees.[7]

The success of the first part of *Bhanga Pran* prompted the poet to complete and publish the second part, which was also appreciated by his readers, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

Daad Ali's *Bhanga Pran* established his reputation as a writer and poet; however, his most important and widely read work was *Ashiq-i-Rasul*. After setting off for Arabia to perform the sacred pilgrimage (*hajj*), he travelled for many months before he reached Makkah, the sacred city of Islam. Once there, he successfully completed the rites of the *hajj* and prepared to go to Madinah, to pay homage to blessed Prophet. However, due to circumstances beyond his control, he had to return home without being able to visit Madinah. As a devout Muslim and a lover (*ashiq*) of the Prophet, he expressed his profound grief and sadness at not being able to visit Madinah in the form of poetry. The first volume of this work was published in 1908 by Muhammad Yusuf Ali, and it consisted of more than 220 pages. Volume Two was published two years later by Yusuf Ali and Mansur Ali, and consisted of more than 130 pages. Composed in chaste, modern Bengali verse, this remarkable collection of original and romantic Islamic poetry became well known in the Muslim community of Bengal. *Ashiq-i-Rasul* initiated a new trend in modern Bengali literature, which subsequently inspired others like Kazi Nazrul Islam to compose poetry in praise of the Prophet in Bengali. The credit for developing this new genre of literature must

www.pathagar.com

therefore go to none other than Daad Ali.

After reading Daad Ali's poetry, Adita Parshad Dey, the sub-judge of Mymensingh, wrote:

> I was extremely glad to find that a Mohammedan gentleman who wrote in chaste Bengali such good poetry... The author deserves every encouragement from educated gentleman to whatever race or creed he may belong.[8]

Likewise, after reading Daad Ali's *Ashiq-i-Rasul*, Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah, a prominent educationalist and the assistant director of public instruction in Bengal, acknowledged that the work was a proof of the author's profound love and affection for the blessed Prophet. Accordingly, Ahsanullah recommended the book to his fellow Muslims, and especially to the younger generation. Likewise, Shams al-Ulama Mawlana Abu Nasr Muhammad Wahid, a professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Dhaka University and superintendent of Dhaka Madrasah, rated Daad Ali's *Ashiq-i-Rasul* very highly, expressing his profound appreciation for his Islamic poetry.

Over time, Daad Ali's writings became very popular in Bengal's Muslim community. So much so that Mawlana Maniruzzman Islamabadi, a renowned Muslim scholar, writer and political leader of Bengal, publicly praised Daad Ali for his literary contributions. Mawlana Islamabadi compared him with other well-known Muslim literary figures (including Munshi Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad, Munshi Abdul Latif, Mir Musharraf Husayn, Isma'il Husayn Shirazi, Kazim al-Qurayshi Kaykobad and Shaykh Fazlul Karim), during his opening address at the fourth Annual *Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Sammilan* (Bengal Muslim Literary Conference).[9]

In addition to his *Bhanga Pran* and *Ashiq-i-Rasul*, Daad Ali's other notable contributions included *Akhayri-Mawut*, *Samaj Shikha*, *Shantikanja*, *Diwan-i-Daad* and *Fara'id*. *Akhayri-Mawut* was a short poem on the topic of death, which was published in 10 pages in 1910 by Yusuf Ali. By contrast, his *Samaj Shikha* was a much larger poem, wherein he highlighted some of the social, economic and cultural problems and difficulties that confronted the Muslim society of Bengal at the time, and even suggested ways to make social progress and economic development in the Muslim community. Consisting of 18 poems and more than 100 pages, this book was published by Yusuf Ali and Mansur Ali. His other notable works were *Shantikanja* and *Diwan-i-Daad*. Published 10 years after it was originally written, the former consisted of 22 poems; the latter consisted of 28 poems. Both of these works consisted of more than 250 pages each. As with his previous contributions, in these poems he articulated his views and feelings on a wide range of topics including his love for the Prophet (he also implored the Prophet to intercede for him on the Day of Judgement); the importance of observing the celebration of the Prophet's birth (*mawlid al-nabi*); and the need for Muslims to regenerate their society through hard work and co-operation. He also emphasised the importance of seeking knowledge and the pursuit of spiritual purity and elevation. He warned against the dangers of illiteracy, superstition and ignorance.

Daad Ali's other important work was the *Fara'id*, wherein he explained the Islamic law

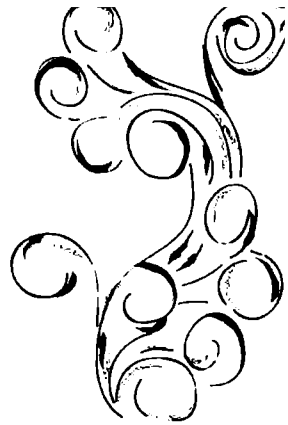
www.pathagar.com

of inheritance in the form of verse. This was an important contribution, as the Islamic rules relating to *mirath* (inheritance) encompass some of the most difficult and complicated aspects of the Shari'ah. Daad Ali's knowledge of this aspect of Islamic law was so good that he was able to compose an entire poem explaining the rules of *mirath* for the benefit of his readers. According to one of his biographers, after reading his *Fara'id*, the Honourable Judge A. C. Lahidir (who was himself a notable authority on the Muslim law of inheritance), stated that, 'It is a marvel how the difficult question of "Faraij" has been solved by him [Daad Ali] by poems which may well be memorized.'[10] However, according to other scholars, Judge Lahidir's remark did not refer to Daad Ali's *Fara'id*, but rather to a separate work that was composed by his son, Idris Ali. Even so, most of Daad Ali's biographers are agreed that Idris Ali had mastered the rules of *mirath* from his father who was thoroughly familiar with this subject from original Arabic, Persian and Urdu sources. In addition to the above, Daad Ali left behind many unpublished books and manuscripts (including *Updeshmala*, *Masaala Shikha* and *Sangit-Prasun*), which are probably no longer extant.

As a result of his literary contribution and achievements, Daad Ali attracted the attention of some of the leading Muslim writers and literary figures of Bengal. Thus, Munshi Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad mentioned him in one of his articles. According to Muhammad Enamul Haq, a renowned scholar of Bengali literature, Daad Ali's *Ashiq-i-Rasul* became so popular that almost every Muslim home had a copy of this book. In addition to this, many scholars and academics (including Syed Ali Ahsan, Syed Murtaza Ali, Abdul Qadir, Muhammad Mansuruddin, Ghulam Sakhlayn, Ashraf Siddiqi, Alamgir Jalil, Minnat Ali, Zamiruddin Ahmad, Muhammad Zahirul Islam, Abdur Razzaq, Najibur Rahman, A. K. M. Siddiqur Rahman, Anisuzzaman and Kazi Din Muhammad) have carried out research on the life and works of Daad Ali, focusing primarily on his literary contributions. They have all praised Daad Ali for his memorable literary works, which contributed to the intellectual regeneration of the Muslim community of Bengal.

After devoting more than three decades to social, cultural, religious and literary work, Muhammad Daad Ali eventually passed away at the age of 84. Towards the end of his life, he suffered from many age-related illnesses and became partially sighted. He died on a Friday and was laid to rest in his local graveyard after a simple funeral prayer (*salat al-janazah*), which was performed soon after Friday congregational prayer (*salat al-jumu'ah*). In recognition of his literary contribution, his local village school was renamed Daad Ali Primary School. In 1977, Muhammad Tajul Haq (a prominent leader of Kushtia) established the Kabi Daad Ali Trust, a socio-cultural organisation, as a tribute to his memory.

www.pathagar.com



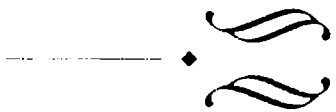


Notes

1. Abul Ahsan Choudhury, *Muhammad Daad Ali.*
2. Siddiqur Rahman, *Kabi Daad Alier Jiban-o-Kabya.*
3. A. A. Choudhury, op. cit.
4. H. Shushud, *Masters of Wisdom of Central Asia.*
5. S. Rahman, op. cit.
6. Ibid.
7. Muhammad Daad Ali, *Bhanga Pran.*
8. A. A. Choudhury, op. cit.
9. Ibid.
10. S. Rahman, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

1858–1952



KAZIM AL-QURAYSHI KAYKOBAD

According to Muhammad Shahidullah, a distinguished scholar and Bengali linguist, the study of Bengali literature not only flourished during the Muslim rule: medieval Bengali literature owed its origin to the patronage of the Muslim rulers. For example, Sikandar Shah of Gaur (1357–93) was the patron of Chandidas, an early mediaeval poet of Bengal, and Shah Muhammad Saghir flourished during the time of Ghiyas al-Din Azam Shah (1393–1410). Likewise, Krittibas produced his Bengali translation of *Ramayana* under the patronage of a Muslim ruler, most probably Jalal al-Din Muhammad Shah (1418–31). Other examples include Maladhar Basu, who composed a Bengali translation of the life of Srikrishna under the title of *Srikrishna Vijaya* from the *Bhagavata*

www.pathagar.com

Purana. For his efforts, Shams al-Din Yusuf Shah (1474–1481) honoured him with the title of 'Gunaraja Khan'. Similarly, Kavindra Parameśvara versified the *Mahabharata* into Bengali under the patronage of Paragal Khan, a senior officer of Husain Shah of Gaur (1413–1519).[1] Under the patronage of the Muslim rulers of Bengal, both Hindu and Muslim writers enriched Bengali language and literature with their invaluable contributions: although majority of the modern Hindu historians have failed to acknowledge this fact. Although the Muslims of Bengal dominated Bengali literature during the medieval period, the same cannot be said about the modern period. Other than Mir Musharraf Husayn and Muzammil Haq of Shantipur, the only other outstanding Muslim scholar, writer and poet of the modern period was Mohakabi Kaykobad.

Muhammad Kazim al-Qurayshi Kaykobad (also spelt 'Kaikobad'), is better known as Mohakabi Kaykobad (the 'great poet Kaykobad'). He was born into a middle-class Muslim family in the village of Agla in Nawabganj which is today located in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh.[2] Since his family members claimed to be the descendants of the Prophet, they became known as the 'Qurayshi' family: the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) hailed from the noble Qurayshi tribe of Makkah. However, Kaykobad's family may have had an ancestral connection to Persia rather than Arabia, because the name Kaykobad itself was a Persian name. In fact, it was the name of an ancient Persian emperor. As such, the claim that he was a descendant of the Prophet is questionable. Nevertheless, Persian language and literature had certainly exerted profound influence on the lives, thoughts and cultural practices of the Muslims of Bengal, thanks to Persia's extensive trade and cultural links with Bengal. Moreover, Persian became the official language of political administration in Bengal from the beginning of the thirteenth century, and this continued for the next six centuries until it was officially outlawed by the British in 1837.[3] During this period the Muslim traders, merchants and preachers came from as far as Arabia, Central Asia, Turkey, Afghanistan and Persia to conduct business and disseminate Islam in India and Bengal in particular. For this reason, it was common for the Muslims of Bengal to trace their family ancestry back to prominent Muslim rulers, scholars and Sufis of Arabia, Central Asia, Turkey, Afghanistan and Persia. This was often done in order to claim social, cultural or genealogical respectability in society.

Shahmatullah al-Qurayshi, the father of Kaykobad, hailed from a respected Muslim family of Agla. He qualified as a lawyer and practised law at the Dhaka District Court. His son, Kazim al-Qurayshi Kaykobad, was born during a politically volatile and socio-economically difficult time in the history of Muslim Bengal. In 1757, the British had defeated Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah at the Battle of Plassey (Palashi) and in so doing had established their politico-economic hegemony in Bengal. Kaykobad was born a century later, just as the Sepoy Revolt erupted in 1857. This revolt was brutally suppressed by the British who abolished more than 300 years of Mughal rule in India.The Muslims of Bengal (like their co-religionists in other parts of India) suddenly found themselves at the mercy of a

www.pathagar.com

foreign political and military power. Whilst the Hindus of Bengal quickly came to terms with the country's new political, economic, social and military make-up, the Muslims of Bengal remained politically detached and aloof. As a result, they became politically alienated, economically sidelined, educationally out of touch and culturally static. This state of affairs subsequently prompted many prominent Muslim leaders and reformers of Bengal (including Haji Muhammad Muhsin, Nawab Abdul Latif and Mawlana Ubaydullah al-Ubaydi Suhrawardi) to urge the Muslims to make changes.[4] These reformers questioned and re-aligned their political strategy vis-à-vis the British government and actively engaged in political, social, economic and educational activities in order to reinvigorate the Muslim society.

During this politically difficult and culturally confusing time, young Kaykobad learned Bengali at home and then studied Arabic and Persian at his local Qur'an school (*maktab*). He was a gifted child, and began to compose verses from an early age. Impressed by his son's literary talent, his father enrolled him at Pogose School in Dhaka, which was considered to be a modern, forward-looking school. After completing his early education at this school, Kaykobad moved to Saint Gregory School in Dhaka where he read Bengali literature. Thereafter, he enrolled at the Dhaka Madrasah where he studied Persian, Arabic and aspects of Muslim history and culture. Modelled on the historic Calcutta Madrasah, Dhaka Madrasah was led by Mawlana Ubaydullah al-Ubaydi Suhrawardi.[5] The purpose of this *madrasah* was to train up a new generation of Muslim scholars, writers and poets who would be thoroughly versed in traditional Islamic sciences as well as English and modern thought. The founders of Dhaka Madrasah hoped that this would contribute to the regeneration of Islamic thought and culture, and thereby help revive the Muslim society of Bengal. During his time at this institution, Kaykobad became thoroughly familiar with Ubaydullah's vision for the future of the Muslims of Bengal. However, according to some of his biographers, Kaykobad had also studied for a period at the Calcutta Madrasah, where he had met many Muslim scholars, writers and thinkers who were keen to revive and popularise their glorious Islamic past.

Although Kaykobad pursued further education at the Dhaka Madrasah, he was unable to take his final examination, due to circumstances beyond his control. Instead, he returned to his native village where he became a postmaster. This was not a well-paid job, however he earned enough to lead a relatively comfortable life, which, in turn, enabled him to pursue his literary interests in his spare time. His biographers have identified three important phases in his intellectual and literary development: from the ages of 13 to 37, he composed mainly poetry and became well known for his beautiful, melodious poetic voice. Then, for the next two decades, he wrote his major literary works, which were characterised by maturity of thought, literary elegance and an imaginative, innovative approach to literature and poetry. During the last phase of his literary career, Kaykobad composed many collections of short stories, nationalistic songs and religious and cultural works.[6] Given the diverse range, quality and quantity of his works, it is not surprising that Kaykobad is considered

www.pathagar.com

one of the most gifted and outstanding Muslim writers and poets of the nineteenth century, along with Mir Musharraf Husayn; had it not been for these two remarkable Muslim writers, the Muslim contribution to Bengal literature during the nineteenth century would have been insignificant. For this reason, I have included both of them in this book.

Kaykobad began to write from an early age. He published his first work, *Biraha Bilash*, when he was only 13. In this book he focused on aspects of social, emotional and cultural issues, even though he was too young to fully understand and appreciate the social, cultural and psychological condition of his people at the time. The same cannot be said about his *Kusum Kanan*, which was published in 1873, when he was only 16: this was much more romantic in content. Although most of Kaykobad's early writings focused on a combination of social, psychological and emotional themes, his ideas and thoughts were not necessarily rooted in reality. It would be unfair to expect someone so young to be well informed of the challenges of the time. According to Azhar Islam, a noted scholar of Bengali literature, he was a very romantic poet during his early years. He was also heavily influenced by the writings of prominent scholars and poets such as Micheal Madhusudan Dutt, Hemchandra Banerjee and Nabinchandra Sen.[7] However, the presence of some similarity between Kaykobad's literary style and that of the aforementioned writers does not, in itself, mean that he copied or imitated their literary style. Kaykobad was not an imaginative or scholarly writer, yet he developed his own literary style, which—although not sophisticated—was elegant and moving. In that sense he was indeed a naturally gifted writer and poet.

One reason why some scholars of Bengali literature have argued that Kaykobad was influenced by Hemchandra Banerjee and Nabinchandra Sen is because he authored a highly acclaimed historical epic, as did Hemchandra Banerjee. Inspired by the classical Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, Hemchandra Banerjee wrote his epic, *Vrtrasanghar*, in two volumes between 1875 and 1877. This book became a bestseller and some scholars considered it to be his literary masterpiece. Like Hemchandra, Nabinchandra Sen was an epic poet who was inspired by Michael Madhusudan Dutt. He authored several epics including *Raivatak* (1887), *Kuruksetra* (1893) and *Prabhas* (1896). These epics were based on the life and career of the Hindu god, Krishna. Since Kaykobad was their younger contemporary, it is not surprising that some historians of Bengali literature have argued that he was influenced by the works of Hemchandra and Nabinchandra Sen, although there is no clear textual or historical evidence to prove this. On the contrary, the suggestion that Kaykobad was inspired by Mir Musharraf Husayn's celebrated novel, *The Ocean of Sorrow* (*Vishad-Sindhu*), seems more plausible given the fact that, like Mir Musharraf Husayn, his epic was based on an important Islamic historical event.

Kaykobad's *The Great Crematorium* (*Mahashamshan Kabya*) was published in 1904: during the second phase of his intellectual and literary development. During this period he not only authored the *Mahashamshan* but he also produced several other important works, including *Ashrumala*, *Shashan Sangit*, *Siraj*

www.pathagar.com

Shamadi and *Muslim Shashan*, wherein he expressed his profound sadness and grief at the loss of Muslim political power and glory. As a devout Muslim, in these works he highlighted the rich history and heritage of the Muslims of Bengal in order to inspire Muslims to regain their former glory and greatness. Being a wise and skilful writer, Kaykobad was able to sing the glories of Muslim past without offending Hindu sensibilities. Unlike some Hindu and Muslim writers, he pursued an objective and non-partisan approach to literature, shunning sectarianism and communalism. In fact, his approach was motivated by the need to preserve and protect human life and its dignity regardless of one's race, colour and creed. In that sense, his approach was intrinsically Islamic. From his early education at the Dhaka Madrasah, he was influenced by Islamic principles, values and ethos, and for this reason, he pursued an impartial, objective and non-communalist approach. Thus, Kaykobad's *Mahashamshan* was an important example of a literary work that transcended the social, cultural and religious bias and subjectivity of the time.

The *Mahashamshan* was based on the third Battle of Panipat (wherein the Muslim army led by Ahmad Shah Abdali inflicted a crushing defeat on the Hindus of Maratha). Kaykobad considered this conflict to be destructive and damaging for everyone involved, irrespective of their race, caste, colour or creed. Historically speaking, the third Battle of Panipat was fought in 1761 at a time when the Marathas were busy planning the downfall of the Mughal Empire and the Muslim states of northern India. In response, Ahmad Shah Abdali, a legendary Muslim general, rose to defend the Mughal dynasty against their Maratha opponents. As a gifted military general, Abdali led 60,000 soldiers into the battlefield and inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Maratha forces, numbering 500,000, and in so doing he became the saviour of Muslim rule in India. According to Kalikinkar Datta, a prominent Indian historian, during this battle:

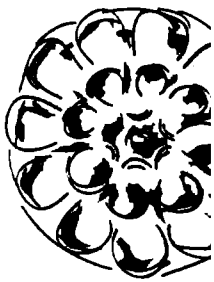
> The supreme leaders of the defeated Maratha army had fallen on the field... The Marathas lost 50,000 horses, 200,000 draught cattle, some thousands of camels, 500 elephants, besides cash and jewellery... The third battle of Panipat produced disastrous consequences for the Marathas and seriously deflected the course of Maratha imperialism... The Marathas could never return to the position they had established before 1761.[8]

Since Kaykobad was a writer and poet rather than a historian, his epic (which consisted of more than 800 pages) was a partly fictional and partly historical account of the third Battle of Panipat. That is to say, it did not provide an accurate historical account of the Battle of Panipat, nor did it touch upon the political and strategic reasons that led to this decisive and destructive encounter. Even so, it can be considered to be an important work of literature, because it attempted to vividly portray the enormous loss of life and livelihood as a result of the conflict. In short, in this massive work, Kaykobad highlighted the sheer futility and destructive nature of armed conflict, touching on its wider consequences, and he did this in an objective and impartial way. In that sense, he was a balanced writer who championed the cause of peace, harmony and co-existence, without taking sides.

www.pathagar.com

Having authored his historical epic during the second phase of his intellectual and literary development, Kaykobad then devoted the last phase of his literary career to writing short stories, articles, essays and books on religious, cultural and inter-faith issues, among other topics. Despite working full-time as a post-master, he found time to write prolifically on a wide range of subjects. However, towards the end of his life, ill health forced him to leave his native village and move to Dhaka. He received medical treatment at Dhaka Medical College, but eventually died at the age of around 94. He was laid to rest at Azimpur Cemetery in Dhaka.[9] His name and fame will endure for a long time to come on account of his literary contributions, which have continued to inspire the Muslims of Bengal to this day.







Notes

1. Muhammad Shahidullah, 'Traditional Culture in East Pakistan: Introduction' in *Muhammad Shahidullah Smarakgrantha.*
2. F. Kawser, *Kaykabad: Kabi-o-Kabita.*
3. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, *Social History of the Muslims of Bangladesh under the British Rule.*
4. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Banglar Musalmander Itihas.*
5. Kazim al-Qurayshi Kaykobad, *Kaykobad Racanabali.*
6. F. Kawsar, op. cit.
7. Azhar Islam, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas Prasanga.*
8. R.C. Majumdar et al, *An Advanced History of India.*
9. F. Kawsar, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

1859–1931



SHAYKH ABDUR RAHIM OF BASIRHAT

When the British traders first came to Bengal during the beginning of the seventeenth century, they found the region to be economically prosperous but politically very weak. Keen to expand their economic interests across that region, the East India Company was established in the year 1600 in London in order to increase Britain's political and economic influence in Bengal. The defeat of Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah in 1757 at the hands of Robert Clive confirmed that real power was firmly in the hands of the East India Company and its senior officials. As expected, this led to considerable politico-economic changes across Bengal, which, in turn, precipitated much socio-cultural transformation in that region.

Following the establishment of British

www.pathagar.com

hegemony in India and Bengal in particular, the European Christian missionaries also came to that region to disseminate their religion. The intensification of missionary activities in Bengal led to the conversion of many Hindus and Muslims to Christianity, which prompted a number of Muslim scholars and reformers to emerge in order to challenge the missionaries. Led by Munshi Muhammad Meherullah and Munshi Shaykh Muhammad Zamiruddin, the battle for the hearts and minds of the Muslims of Bengal reached its climax during the later part of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Munshi Meherullah and Munshi Zamiruddin's success against the missionaries not only raised awareness and understanding of Islam in Bengal's Muslim society, it also inspired a new generation of Muslim scholars, writers and journalists to emerge who, in turn, became champions of Islamic thought, scholarship and journalism in Bengal. Munshi Shaykh Abdur Rahim was one such individual, who by way of his character and personality became a leading Muslim scholar, writer and journalist of his generation.

Shaykh Abdur Rahim was born into an educated and respected Muslim family of village Muhammadpur in Basirhat (in the present-day Indian state of West Bengal). His father, Munshi Shaykh Ghulam Yahya, was a notable educationalist and teacher who hailed from a prominent local family. As such, he provided his son with a thorough education in traditional Islamic sciences as well as modern education. Unfortunately he passed away when Abdur Rahim was young. Accordingly, he was brought up by Radhamadhav Basu, a government official and landholder of Taki, who ensured that the youngster received a good education. As a talented student, Abdur Rahim pursued his early education with considerable devotion and dedication, and this enabled him to complete his early education with success. Thereafter, with the full support and backing of Radhamadhav Basu, he moved to Calcutta in order to pursue his secondary education. Although Basu continued to provide him some financial support, during this period he was forced to endure considerable personal hardship.[1] These difficulties aside, Abdur Rahim was determined to complete his secondary education. However, in 1875—when he was only 14—he had smallpox, and although he later made a full recovery, he was not able to resume his formal education. Disappointed but undeterred, Abdur Rahim continued his studies privately and he not only acquired fluency in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Bengali, he also became thoroughly familiar with traditional Islamic thought, history and literature.

Abdur Rahim was brought up and educated at a time when the Muslims of India (and Bengal) in particular were passing through a politically volatile, economically difficult and socio-culturally challenging time in their history. According to Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, a renowned historian of Bengal, political corruption, economic deterioration and social degradation paved the way to spiritual detachment, moral confusion and educational decline. As a result, the call for Islamic revival was led by many Muslim reformers of the time. The protagonists of Islamic resurgence wanted the masses to unify and work together to change their condition for the better. Accordingly, they developed a three-stage reform program, which

www.pathagar.com

comprised of:

> (i) re-educating the masses and sympathetic elites with the pristine doctrines of Prophetic Islam, (ii) re-organizing the people into compact settlements and societies of practising Muslims and (iii) waging internal struggle and external *jihad* against all hostile forces and consolidating ideologically converted masses into political States.[2]

The ruling elites response to the reformist activities of the Muslim leaders was swift and uncompromising. Thus, reformers like Titu Mir and Haji Shari'atullah faced stiff opposition from the Hindus as well as the British government. By contrast, the apolitical activities of scholars like Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri was not only accepted, but also encouraged, by the ruling elites.

Even so, the combined efforts of the Muslim reformers, coupled with the proselytising activities of the missionaries, inspired Muslim scholars and preachers like Munshi Meherullah and Munshi Zamiruddin to initiate a counter movement against the missionaries in Bengal. Although Abdur Rahim was in his late twenties at the time, he was nonetheless a committed Muslim who was able to devote all his time, efforts and energy to reform and regenerate the Muslim society. Although the activities of the Muslim traditionalists were indecisive and rather ineffective, the modernist message of leaders like Nawab Abdul Latif and Justice Syed Ameer Ali only seemed to reach the wealthy and educated Muslim elites of Bengal. As a discerning observer of the condition of his people, Abdur Rahim was aware that the traditionalists as well as the modernists had limited success in their efforts to awaken the Muslims from their slumber. Unlike them, Abdur Rahim hoped to take the message of Islam directly to the masses and do so in a language and format that was accessible, attractive and equally meaningful for the ordinary people.

His desire to change and reform the socio-cultural condition of his people inspired Abdur Rahim to become a journalist and writer. This was an unusual choice of career because, at the time, the number of Muslims who wrote on Islamic topics was few and far between. That was because there were hardly any Muslim-owned Bengali language newspapers and magazines; a situation that undoubtedly contributed to the social, cultural and intellectual backwardness of the Muslims of Bengal. According to Sufia Ahmed, a Bangladeshi historian and author:

> One of the most interesting phenomena of the period was thus the emergence of a group of Bengali Muslims, who wrote in pure Bengali, but whose aim was definitely a communal one. This was the *Sudhakar Group*.[3]

The members of the Sudhakar Group aimed to bring about change in the Muslim community and also counter the activities of the missionaries who were seeking to convert Muslims to Christianity. This was particularly true of poor Hindu and Muslim families who were unhappy with their social and economic condition. Conversion to Christianity, they felt, would help them to improve their circumstances. Munshi Meherullah, and his disciple, Munshi Zamiruddin, had played an important role in countering Christian missionary activities in Bengal, and now the challenge of rousing Muslims of Bengal was led by the members of

www.pathagar.com

the Sudhakar Group, of which Abdur Rahim was a leading member.

The Sudhakar Group consisted of Muslim scholars, writers and journalists who were inspired by the ideals, values and principles of Islam. As devout Muslims, the members of this group published several influential newspapers and magazines in order to promote Islamic principles and values. One such influential weekly magazine was *Moon* (*Sudhakar*), which was founded in Calcutta in 1889 by Abdur Rahim and his colleague Munshi Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad. Other members of this group included Maulvi Mirajuddin Ahmad and Maulvi Riyazuddin Ahmad Mashhadi. Born in Barisal in 1861, Munshi Riyazuddin Ahmad was brought up and educated in the paternal home of A. K. Fazlul Haq, a prominent Muslim leader of twentieth century Bengal. After studying Arabic, Persian and Bengali, he moved to Calcutta where he became a journalist and edited several newspapers and magazines. In the process, he became a champion of Islam and fought for Muslim rights and interests. By contrast, Maulvi Mirajuddin Ahmad was born in Satkhira in Khulna and he was a professor of Arabic and Persian at Doveton and St. Xavier's Colleges in Calcutta. He was familiar with Bengali and Urdu and authored numerous books on Islamic subjects including *Gift to the Muslims* (*Tuhfatul Muslimin*), which he co-authored with his colleague Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad. Likewise, Maulvi Riyazuddin Ahmad Mashhadi was born in Tangail and he became a professor of Sanskrit and Bengali at Calcutta Madrasah. He subsequently became actively involved in literary activities. He was one of the main contributors of the two-volume *Theories of Islam* (1888–1889), which he co-authored with Abdur Rahim, Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad and Mirajuddin Ahmad for the benefit of the Muslims of Bengal.[4]

Although the members of the Sudhakar Group were based in the central location of Calcutta, their work was initially hampered by lack of financial and human resources. Even so, they managed to translate and publish one of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's Persian works into Bengali under the title of *The Substance of Islam* (*Islam Tattva*). This was followed by the Bengali translation of Mawlana Abd al-Haq Haqqani's famous *Tafsir-i-Haqqani*, which was published as the second part of *Islam Tattva*. These books soon generated considerable interest in the Muslim community and this inspired Abdur Rahim and his colleagues to plan even more ambitious projects. With the financial backing of few wealthy Muslim landholders, they then launched *Sudhakar*, a weekly magazine. This magazine acquired a large following, and also became very influential in the Muslim community. In the words of Sufia Ahmed:

> It was through this publication that the Bengali Muslims became a little conscious of the greatness of their religion, its principles, facts, their national culture and glory. And it was this paper which raised its objection against the writings of Bankim and others who wrote against Muslims.[5]

In other words, this group created a new genre of Islamic literature in modern Bengali that appealed to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Through their literary activities, they also championed a culture of Islamic learning and literary activities that contributed to raising awareness of a distinct Islamic identity in

www.pathagar.com

Bengal: one that was internationalist in its essence but also in harmony with its local context in its form. They achieved this by translating original classical Islamic literature from Arabic and Persian into Bengali, including biographies of the Prophet, his companions, and prominent Muslim rulers. In addition to this, the members of this group produced a number of series of original books, monographs and hundreds of essays and articles, in which they addressed issues confronting their fellow Muslims in a language and format that these Muslims could readily relate to and understand. More importantly, the literary activities of Abdur Rahim and his colleagues showed that, like Urdu, Persian, Turkish and Arabic, the Bengali language was more than capable of carrying the Islamic message to the people of Bengal.

The intellectual and literary activities of the Sudhakar Group inspired many other important Muslim scholars and literary figures, including Shaykh Fazlul Karim, Syed Isma'il Husayn Shirazi, Muzammil Haq of Shantipur and Kazim al-Qurayshi Kaykobad. Like the members of the Sudhakar Group, these Muslim scholars, writers and poets were inspired by their Islamic faith to engage in intellectual and literary activities in order to revive their Muslim culture and society. Unlike the early Muslim reformers of Bengal, the members of the Sudhakar Group were very fond of Bengali language and literature, which they enriched considerably through their literary and journalistic contributions. Abdur Rahim played a pivotal role in this respect. As one of the leading members of this group, he was responsible for creating a new literary trend in Bengal wherein local Muslim scholars and writers produced authentic Islamic literature in modern, chaste Bengali. Based on original Islamic sources, their writings enabled the Muslims of Bengal to learn about their faith, history, culture and heritage in their mother tongue. Abdur Rahim was a champion of this new approach, which he formulated very eloquently in his important study titled *Bengali Language and the Muslim Society* (*Bangabhasa-o-Mussalman Samaj*). By all accounts, this cultural shift was a remarkable achievement on the part of the members of the Sudhakar Group and Abdur Rahim in particular.

In addition to *Sudhakar*, Abdur Rahim edited and published many other newspapers and magazines, including *Islam Pracharak* (1891), *Mihir* (1892), *Mihir-o-Sudhakar* (1894) and the *Moslem Bharat* (1900). He also authored numerous books and treatises on various aspects of Islam. According to Muhammad Enamul Haq, a renowned scholar of Bengali literature, Abdur Rahim wrote no less than 11 books on Islam.[6] However, Muhammad Abdul Hai and Syed Ali Ahsan listed only eight of his books in their *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta*.[7] His most important works were *Hazrat Muhammader Jiban Charit-o-Dharma Niti* and *Islam Itibritta*. He completed the former when he was only 28 years old, and it was published in 1887. Consisting of 958 pages, this book was not only a comprehensive biography of the Prophet, it was also one of the first to be written in Bengali by a Muslim. According to Syed Ali Ashraf, it was:

> The conversion of lower class Muslims to Christianity [which] led Shaikh Abdur Rahim to publish pamphlets and, later on, write the first

www.pathagar.com

> biography of the Holy Prophet in Bengali. He was a rationalist like Sir Sayyid. His tradition was perserved by Maulana Akram Khan.[8]

Likewise, Syed Sajjad Husain wrote:

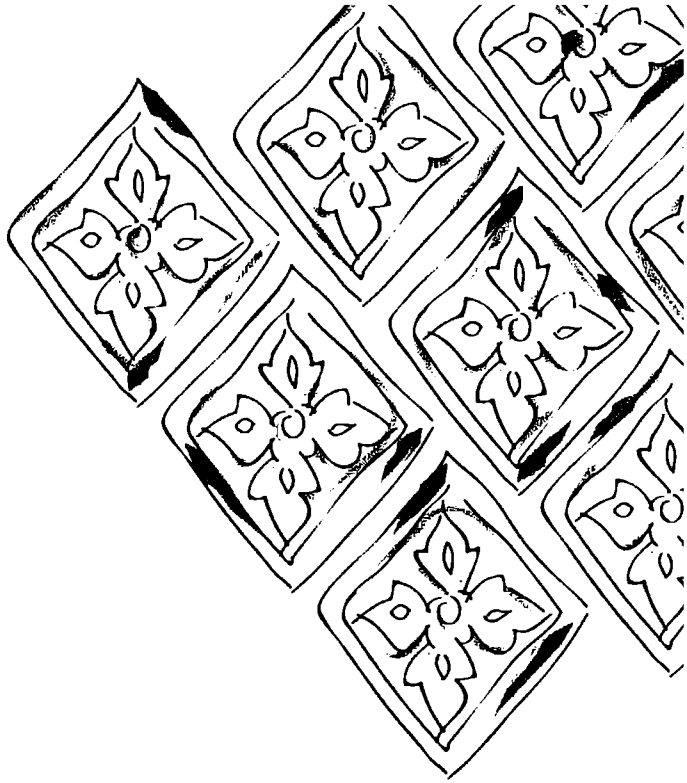
> The first good prose study of the Prophet is Hazrat Muhammader Jiban Chinta-o-Dharmaniti by Shaikh Abdur Rahim... it is the first book in which different aspects of the Prophet's life, as Prophet, as husband, as householder, as statesman and as fighter and strategist are discussed in some detail.[9]

In fact, Abdur Rahim's biography of the Prophet became very influential, and it inspired other prominent Muslim scholars and writers to compose their own biographies of the Prophet: namely, Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan's *The Character of the Prophet* (*Mustafa Charit*), Yaqub Ali Chowdhury's *The Luminous Prophet* (*Noor Nabi*) and Ghulam Mustafa's *The Universal Prophet* (*Biswanabi*). Abdur Rahim's other important contribution was *History of the Muslim World* (*Islam Itibritta*). Published in 1910, in this two-volume work he surveyed Islamic history from the beginning, covering the period of the first four Caliphs (*al-khulafa al-rashidun*), the Umayyad and Abbasid periods as well as the contributions of the Fatimids of Egypt and North Africa, the Umayyads of Spain, and the Muslim rule of India. Abdur Rahim intended to write a comprehensive history of the Muslim world, beginning with the Prophet and concluding in his own time.[10]

While his *Hazrat Muhammader Jiban Charit-o-Dharma Niti* provided a detailed survey of the life and teachings of the Prophet, his *Islam Itibritta* covered the period of Islamic expansion in the East and the West. Due to circumstances beyond his control, Abdur Rahim's desire to cover the subsequent period of Islamic history—leading up to and including the modern period—was not realised. As a leading literary figure, he was closely associated with several literary and cultural organisations, including the Calcutta Muhammadan Union, Bengal Muslim Literary Society (*Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti*), Bengal Muslim Literary Association (*Bangiya Sahitya Parishad*) and Calcutta Central Textbook Committee. Thanks to his excellent command of his mother tongue, he was appointed by the University of Calcutta as an examiner of Bengali for their entrance examinations.

After a lifetime devoted to Islamic activism, research, writing and journalism, Abdur Rahim eventually died at the age of 72, and he was laid to rest in his native village. Without his valiant efforts and important contribution, the Muslim society of Bengal would have been much poorer. It is therefore very unfortunate that the life and works of this Muslim savant is not widely known in Bengal today. I hope that this short biographical entry, probably the first of its kind in English, will generate more interest in his life and career, and in the future inspire others to pursue further research on his life and works for the benefit of the present and future generations.

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. M. E. Haq, *Muslim Bengali Literature.*
2. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, 'Islamic Renaissance in Bangladesh.'
3. Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912.*
4. M. A. Hai and S. A. Ahsan, *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta: Adhunik Yug.*
5. Sufia Ahmed, op. cit.
6. M. E. Haq, op. cit.
7. M. A. Hai and S. A. Ahsan, op. cit.
8. S. A. Ashraf, *Muslim Traditions in Bengali Literature.*
9. S. S. Husain, *Civilization and Society.*
10. T. H. Sheikh (ed.) *Bangla Bhashay Musalmander Abadan.*

www.pathagar.com

1860–1933

MUZAMMIL HAQ OF SHANTIPUR

Muzammil Haq of Shantipur (not to be confused with Muhammad Muzammil Haq of Bela who was also a prominent writer, poet and politician) was a poet and writer. He wrote many biographies and novels and translated several Persian books into Bengali. He was an editor of many publications, including *The Waves* (*Laharis*), *Journal of the Muhammadan Literary Association* (*Vangiya Mussalman Sahittya Patrika*) and *Muslim India* (*Moslem Bharat*). These journals and magazines published articles, essays, poems and reviews on different subjects. Through his literary activities, he endeavoured to motivate the Muslims of Bengal. Inspired by his faith and burning desire to bring about positive change in society, he also composed some of the first school textbooks for Muslim students,

www.pathagar.com

in order to educate them in their faith, culture and heritage. His books became so popular that they were reprinted many times.[1]

Most of the Muslim writers of his generation can be readily put into one of the following categories: traditional, conservative or modernist in their outlook. However, Muzammil Haq of Shantipur does not easily fit into any such categories. He was a gifted poet and prolific writer, and an equally devout Muslim. He understood the real need for change and reform in the social, educational and intellectual spheres of Bengal's Muslim society, and wrote prolifically in response to the needs of his time. As an outstanding journalist, editor and translator, he earned widespread acclaim.

Muzammil Haq was born into a prominent Muslim family of religious scholars and social workers in village Baweegachi of Shantipur (in the present-day Indian state of West Bengal). His forefathers hailed from Isa Khan Masnad-i-Ali's Sonargaon principality, but the socio-political upheaval and uncertainty of the time forced them to move to Shantipur in the-then Nadia District, where they eventually settled. According to Ashraful Haq (Muzammil Haq's son and author of an unpublished biography of his father), Muhammad Giyasuddin Ahmad, the brother of Muhammad Shukrullah, became renowned for his devotion to Islam and the promotion of education in his locality. On account of Giyasuddin Ahmad's invaluable services to the Muslims of Shantipur, Muzammil Haq's family became renowned throughout that area.

A member of this family, Nasimuddin Ahmad, married Mukta Bibi, who bore him three sons: Mafizuddin Ahmad, Maniruddin Ahmad and Muzammil Haq. According to Azhar Islam, a prominent scholar of Bengali literature and Muzammil's biographer, Ahmad was the surname of the other members of his family but, for some unknown reason, his surname was Haq.[2] Maniruddin Ahmad's older brother, Mafizuddin Ahmad, died when he was young, but nevertheless Maniruddin Ahmad became a skilled hunter. He later married and his son, Sir Muhammad Azizul Haq, became a renowned Muslim politician and educationalist. When Muzammil was young his father died and as such he was initially cared for by his mother who, in due course, returned to her parental home with her young son. Muzammil was therefore brought up under the watchful gaze of Muhammad Badullah, his maternal grandfather, who encouraged him to pursue education. His grandfather then enrolled him at a local school where the youngster received his early education.

Muzammil Haq was known to have been a dedicated student and voracious reader, and he passed his primary school exam with flying colours. He was therefore awarded a scholarship to pursue secondary education. Thereafter, he was enrolled at Shantipur Municipal English High School, where he studied up to entrance level although he was unable to take his exam due to circumstances beyond his control. Despite his failure to complete his exam, he continued his studies under the guidance of several private tutors, and in so doing he not only acquired proficiency in Persian, Urdu and Bengali, he also became familiar with Arabic and English. During this period he began his journalistic career with *Samay*, a Calcutta-based weekly journal, and regularly contributed poetry and

www.pathagar.com

articles on a wide range of subjects to the other local publications. As a result, he became well known throughout Calcutta and this, in turn, enabled him to secure the post of an assistant teacher at Shantipur Ramnagar Vernacular School.[3]

As a result of his dedication and excellent linguistic skills, in 1887 he joined Shantipur Junior Jubilee Madrasah as a teacher, and he continued to write articles and poetry during this period. After working at this institution for a period, he joined Tamachika Bangla School as an assistant teacher. There he taught Bengali language and grammar and his peers considered him to be an expert in these subjects. Unlike Maulvi Dilwar Husayn Ahmad, Khan Bahadur Taslimuddin Ahmad, Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet and Maulvi Riyazuddin Ahmad Mashhadi (who were all his contemporaries), Muzammil Haq was unable to pursue higher education and therefore he could not secure a high-ranking and well-paid government job. In that sense he had more in common with Shaykh Abdur Rahim, Muhammad Daad Ali, Munshi Muhammad Meherullah and Munshi Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad, who, notwithstanding their limited formal education and low-ranking jobs, became renowned Islamic scholars and writers of their generation. Similar to the latter, Muzammil was determined that his inability to pursue higher education would not become a barrier to achieving his aims and objectives in life.

Athough he had formally entered journalism with a short stint at *Samay* during his student days, he established his reputation as a journalist with the publication of *Lahari* (1899), *Moslem Bharat* (1920) and *Shantipur*, a monthly journal. The *Lahari* was a monthly poetry magazine that Muzammil Haq edited from Shantipur. It was the first of its kind to be edited and published by a Muslim in Bengal. Although it was published for only a year, it nonetheless became a prominent magazine that encouraged other young Muslim writers and poets of the time to engage in literary activities. Like the *Lahari*, the *Moslem Bharat* was a monthly literary journal that became prominent in Calcutta soon after its publication. Edited and published by Muzammil Haq with the assistance of Afzalul Haq, his son, the *Moslem Bharat* endeavoured to inspire the Muslims of Bengal toward social, cultural and educational growth, through the promotion of education and literary activities. Some of its prominent contributors included Rabindranath Tagore, the renowned poet and Nobel laureate, and Kazi Nazrul Islam, who later became the national poet of Bangladesh. Similar to the *Lahari*, *Moslem Bharat* and *Shantipur*, Muzammil edited and published *Moslem Pratibha*, a monthly journal from Calcutta, with the help of Shaykh Abdur Rahim of Basirhat.[4] However, this journal became defunct soon after its launch due to lack of funding.

Despite their endeavours to publish regular, good quality and popular newspapers and journals for the articulation of Islamic views on a wide range of topics (including social, cultural, educational and literary issues), the Muslim editors and journalists struggled to sustain their publications due to lack of financial support. Most of the magazines and journals that were published by the Muslims at the time folded within a year after their launch, if not sooner. However, there were a few exceptions,

www.pathagar.com

such as the *Mihir-o-Sudhakar* and *Islam Pracharak*. The *Mihir-o-Sudhakar* was initially edited by Shaykh Abdur Rahim, and then published by Munshi Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad. This journal was first published in 1895 and it remained in circulation until 1915. Likewise, *Islam Pracharak* was founded by Munshi Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad in 1891, and it continued to be published until 1910.[5] These two journals survived as long as they did thanks to the generous financial backing of prominent Muslim wealthy landholders including Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, Nawab Sir Salimullah Khan Bahadur and Nawab Faizunnesa Choudhurani. As expected, without the generous financial support of the Muslim landholders, Muzammil struggled to sustain his journals and magazines.

As a devout Muslim and dedicated writer and poet, Muzammil Haq never wavered in his determination to improve the condition of the Muslims of Bengal. He may have struggled to publish a regular journal, however, he never ceased to write. To the contrary, thanks to his wide-ranging literary contributions he became one of the most popular and prolific Muslim writers and poets of his generation. Muzammil started writing from an early age, and his writings were published in some of the leading journals and mazagines of the time (such as *Mihir*, *Mihir-o-Sudhakar*, *Koo-i-Noor* and *Hafiz*), although today he is better known as a poet than a prose writer. He was the author of more than 40 books and booklets, and his writings fall into four main categories: poetry, novels, school textbooks and historical works. Some of his prominent works of poetry include *Kusumanjali*, *Apurbadarshan*, *Premhar*, *Hazrat Muhammad*, *Jatiya Foyara* and *Islam Sangit*.

First published in 1881, his *Kusumanjali* was a small collection of poetry that consisted of only 50 pages, but it was received well within the literary and intellectuals circles of Calcutta. He was only 22 years old at the time. With the publication of this collection, he became one of the first Muslim poets to express views on a range of topics in the form of poetry in chaste, modern Bengali. Four years later, his *Apurbadarshan* was published by Muhammad Rowshan Ali of Shantipur Muhammadia Library. This was a historical poem that re-told the story of a visit made by Kaykobad, the emperor of Delhi, with his father, and it consisted of 82 pages. Like his *Kusumanjali*, Muzammil's *Premhar* was a small collection of 21 poems. First published in 1898 by M. R. Ali of Calcutta, according to Muzammil's biographers, this collection of love poems may have been inspired by the writings of the famous English poets like Shakespeare, Milton and Keats. However, this view is no more than speculation, as there is no conclusive historical or literary evidence to prove this. In 1903, Muzammil Haq's *Hazrat Muhammad* was published by Shantipur Muhammadia Library. Consisting of 190 pages, this book highlighted the life and works of the Prophet of Islam in the form of poetry. This work established his reputation as a serious Muslim scholar and writer. Almost a decade later, in 1912, his *Jatiya Foyara* was published by the Calcutta-based Nath and Company. This collection consisted of a range of different poems that he had written and published in various journals and magazines. Muzammil Haq's other noteworthy contribution was *Islam Sangit*. Published by A.

www.pathagar.com

Ahmad of Calcutta in 1923, in this collection the poet highlighted some of the central issues of the time, and suggested ways to regenerate Bengali Muslim society.[6] Inspired by his idealistic understanding and interpretation of the Islamic past, Muzammil urged the Muslims to reclaim their past glory by collectively striving to improve their social, cultural and intellectual condition.

Muzammil Haq was a gifted poet who captured the imagination of the Muslims of Calcutta through his poetic output, however, he was an equally gifted prose writer, and he authored and translated several important works: including *Maharsi Mansur, Firdawsi Charita, Shahnama, Tapaskahini, Khwajah Mu'in al-Din Chishti* and *Tipu Sultan*. The *Maharsi Mansur* was first published in 1896 and reprinted in 1905. This was a biographical account of the life and works of Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, a ninth century Persian-Arab Sufi mystic who became very controversial for his unusual and spontaneous mystical flashes and utterances. Charged with blasphemy and heresy, the Abbasid elites sentenced him to death by hanging. Al-Hallaj protested his innocence, arguing that he was neither a blasphemer nor a pantheist. Indeed, he claimed to have been an adherent of a mystical philosophy that revolved around the concept of disinterested love (*mahabbah*), although his persecutors considered him to be a heretic. Like many other prominent Muslim scholars and Sufis (including Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Farid al-Din Attar, Jalal al-Din Rumi and Sir Muhammad Iqbal), Muzammil was of the opinion that al-Hallaj was misunderstood and treated unfairly by the Abbasid elites. Muzammil had a soft spot for Sufism, so he wrote seven short bio-graphies of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, Ibrahim ibn Adham, Fudayl ibn Ayaz, Bashar Harfi, Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Abu Hafs Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi and Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya, under the title of *Tapaskahini*. In addition to this, he wrote two other books on the life and works of Khwajah Mu'in al-Din Chishti and Pir Abu Bakr Siddiqi of Furfura, both of which were published in 1918.[7]

Muzammil Haq's most widely acclaimed literary contribution was his short biography of Hasan ibn Ishaq ibn Sharaf (better known as Firdawsi), the great classical Persian poet. He also translated his monumental *Shahnama* into Bengali. Published in 1918 in Calcutta, according to the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*:

> Ferdausi-charit, as the title indicates, is a beautiful biography of Ferdausi, the author of the immortal Persian epic 'Shahnamah'. This small volume, it seems to us, is a fountain of inexplicable joy. It has been written in highly refined Bengali. It will be simply redundant to say more about this famous book.[8]

This short biography was intended to provide an introduction to his translation of the *Shahnama*. However, soon after its publication this volume was hailed as an important contribution to Bengali literature. Likewise, the first part of Muzammil Haq's translation of Firdawsi's epic poem was considered to be a major event in the history of modern Bengali literature soon after its publication in 1909. In the words of *The Mussalman*:

> The work under review is one of the latest productions of poet Mozammel Haque of Santipur.

www.pathagar.com

> The name of Firdousi has become immortalised with the Shahnamah—a history in rhyme, an epic poem comprising the national legends and ancient history of the Persian Empire; and the author is to be congratulated in his admirable courage and success to present the Bengali readers with this famous lore of the East.[9]

The published version of this translation consisted of 336 pages and was reprinted several times, thanks to its popularity. In addition to the above, Muzammil wrote two other biographical works: *Tipu Sultan* (1931) and *Hatimtai* (1919). He also published several novels, including *Zahra* (1917) and *Daraf Khan* (1919).

Although a prolific writer and poet, Muzammil Haq also found time to participate in several social, cultural and political organisations of the time. He served as the Commissioner of Shantipur Municipality for nearly 40 years, he was a member of the Education Committee of the Nadia District Board for three decades and he also served as an Honorary Magistrate for nearly 20 years. As a leading Muslim writer and poet, he was a member of the Bengal Muslim Literary Society (Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti) and served as its vice-president for a time. Motivated to improve the social, cultural and educational condition of the Muslims of Bengal, he fought against all forms of corruption, illiteracy and backwardness through his writings and involvement in social and cultural activities.

Muzammil Haq married three times and had an extended family. He was barely 17 when his maternal grandfather arranged his first marriage in 1876. From this marriage he had three sons but only one of them, Muhammad Afzalul Haq, survived. Muhammad Afzalul Haq became a prominent literary figure and a close friend of Kazi Abdul Wadud, who was a prominent Muslim writer and scholar, and Kazi Nazrul Islam, who was arguably Bengal's greatest Muslim literary figure of the twentieth century. After the death of his first wife in 1903, Muzammil married for the second time. Unfortunately, his second wife died soon after the marriage, thus he married for the third time in 1903 and from this marriage he had two sons and four daughters; although according to another account, he had three sons and five daughters. Muhammad Ashraful Haq later wrote a biographer of his father, which unfortunately has remained unpublished to this day. Ashraful Haq was born in 1909, and he worked as a sub-registrar for a long time and died in 1992 at the age of 83.

Thanks to his literary and social and cultural activities, Muzammil Haq was awarded the title of *Kavyakantha* by Bangiya Sahitya Parishad (a leading literary society of the time). Towards the end of his life, he suffered from stomach-related illnesses and is said to have experienced much pain and discomfort. He eventually died at the age of 73.[10] His literary contribution improved the intellectual image of the Muslims of Bengal, and inspired a new generation of Muslim writers and poets to emerge and make their own contribution to Bengali language and literature. For that reason he will be fondly remembered.

www.pathagar.com

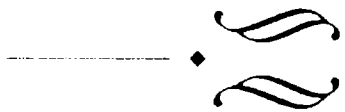


Notes

1. Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912.*
2. Azhar Islam, *Muzammil Haq.*
3. S. K. Mukhopadhay, *Muzammil Haq.*
4. Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press 1901–1930.*
5. Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra.*
6. Azhar Islam, op. cit.
7. Kazi Din Muhammad, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas.*
8. Ghulam Saklayen, *Muzammil Haq-o-Firdawsi Charita.*
9. Azhar Islam, op. cit.
10. Ghulam Saklayen, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

1861–1907



MUNSHI MUHAMMAD MEHERULLAH

THE DECLINE OF the Mughal dynasty not only paved the way for the leading European nations (especially the British) to come to the subcontinent and gradually consolidate their hegemony during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; it also inspired the Christian missionaries to come to that part of the world to propagate their faith within the Muslim and Hindu communities of India. With the tacit support and approval of the East India Company officials, several Christian missionary societies (including The Baptist Missionary Society and The London Missionary Society) became active in various parts of the subcontinent. Led by prominent missionaries like William Carey and John Thomas, the aim of these societies was to repudiate Islam and Hinduism on the one hand;

www.pathagar.com

and to vindicate the claims of Christianity on the other. The missionary societies published scores of books, treatises, journals and newspapers attacking Islam, its Prophet and the Qur'an. At the same time, they translated the Bible and other Christian literature into various Indian languages including Hindi, Urdu and Bengali, and distributed these widely.[1] Alarmed by the increasing activities of the Christian missionaries, several Muslim scholars and reformers emerged in different parts of the subcontinent to defend Islam, its Prophet and the Qur'an against the virulent attacks of the missionaries. These scholars engaged in a thorough and systematic study of the Bible and other relevant Christian literature in order to gain first-hand knowledge of Christian theology and history. One of the most prominent Muslim scholars and reformers of the time was Munshi Meherullah of East Bengal.

Munshi Muhammad Meherullah was born in his maternal grandfather's home in the village of Ghope in the District of Jessore in present-day Bangladesh. His father, Munshi Muhammad Warithuddin, hailed from the nearby village of Chhatiantala and he was known to have been a devout Muslim. Munshi Warithuddin died when Meherullah was only five and this forced his family to endure considerable socio-economic hardship. Young Meherullah was raised by his mother, who also became his first tutor.[2] In those days, there were no proper elementary schools or religious seminaries in rural parts of East Bengal. As such, he received his early education at home under the supervision of his mother. His formal education did not begin until he was around the age of 14. After studying Arabic, Persian, Bengali and aspects of traditional Islamic sciences under the tutelage of Maulvi Mashabuddin of Kayalkali for three years, he pursued further education in Arabic, Persian and Urdu for another three years under the guidance of Maulvi Muhammad Isma'il. Known to have been an insatiable seeker of knowledge, he rarely went out to play with other children and remained preoccupied with his studies. Thanks to his dedication and hard work, he soon became thoroughly familiar with Arabic, Persian, Urdu and aspects of Islamic theology and Prophetic traditions, as well as Bengali (which was his mother tongue). In addition to this, he learned classical Persian poetry, especially *The Rose Garden* (*Gulistan*) and *The Fruit Garden* (*Bustan*) of Shaykh Sa'di of Shiraz. In due course, he became well known in his locality for being able to recite Persian poetry in a beautiful, melodious tone.

Although Meherullah was an able and gifted student, his family responsibilities and financial difficuties forced him to abandon formal education and seek full-time employment. Given his linguistic ability and interpersonal skills, he was able to secure employment as a clerk in the local District Board office when he was only 17. The routine and monotonous nature of this job soon forced him to quit and he instead became a tailor. While he was busy learning tailoring, he continued his advance education in Persian and Urdu literature under the tutelage of Maulvi Taj Muhammad in his spare time. The latter ensured he became thoroughly familiar with aspects of Islamic theology, ethics and history. As he continued his advanced training, Meherullah became familiar with the glorious Islamic past, which profoundly inspired him. His awareness and understanding of Islam as

www.pathagar.com

a great culture and civilisation transformed his intellectual worldview and increased his confidence, self-esteem and morale as a Muslim. Prior to this, Meherullah's approach to, and understanding of, his faith and culture was confined to his local context, however, as a result of his studies under the tutelage of Maulvi Taj, his intellectual horizon widened. This enabled him to view and analyse subjects in the context of the universal Islamic worldview. By the time Meherullah had completed his advanced studies, he had become a skilled tailor. In due course, he established his own business on Daratana Road in Jessore. Thanks to his dedication and excellent skills, his business thrived, and his clients included the district magistrate, among others.[3]

While Meherullah was busy expanding his business, he came in contact with the Christian missionaries for the first time. At the time, the missionaries were promoting their faith in Bengal. Since the cities and towns were easily accessible, the missionaries targeted those places, but subsequently they proceeded to the rural locations, including the local bazaars, which soon became their main centres of activity. As expected, the missionaries targeted both Muslims and Hindus, but they found it easier to preach to the latter than the former, perhaps because Muslims were already familiar with Jesus as a Prophet and Mary, his mother, as a saintly lady. As they intensified their activities in and around Jessore, Meherullah became increasingly alarmed. The missionaries were dedicated, and soon their efforts begun to pay off as more and more Muslims embraced Christianity. As a proud Muslim, Meherullah was concerned by this state of affairs. To add insult to injury, the missionaries then began to attack Islam by deliberately distorting the message of the Qur'an and vilifying the Prophet. In due course, Meherullah came across a Bengali missionary journal called *Susamachar*. Through this journal, the missionaries disseminated their faith and launched their attacks against Islam and its Prophet, and they succeeded in creating misunderstanding and confusion about Islam in the local communities. Alarmed by their tactics, Meherullah resolved to defend Islam, its Prophet and the Qur'an by refuting the missionaries' misconceptions about Islam. By so doing, he hoped to empower the local Muslims to protect themselves against the proselytising activities of the missionaries.

With this in mind, Meherullah began to read Christian literature—especially the Bible—with much interest. Although he was only 19 at the time, he nonetheless became an avid reader of both Islamic and Christian literature, journals and magazines. During this period he came across two books that played an important role in his life and career as a Muslim preacher, debater and religious reformer. The first was Mawlana Muhammad Na'imuddin's *The Trash of Christianity* (*Khristia Dharmer Broshtotha*), and the other was Munshi Muhammad Ahsanullah's *Prophet Muhammad as Mentioned in the Bible* (*Injilay-o-Hadrat Muhammader Kobar Asay*). These two books, when coupled with his extensive study of the Bible and other relevant Christian literature, provided Meherullah with all the religious and scriptural resource he needed to counter missionary activities. He began his campaign against the missionaries by engaging them in religious discussion and debate, challenging

www.pathagar.com

their views about Jesus and his teachings. After carefully studying and analysing the Bible, Meherullah found it to be historically questionable and theologically contradictory, and he questioned the historicity of the Bible. In the same way, he closely examined the Qur'an and its teachings, and found it to be historically reliable and theologically consistent.[4] This enabled him to refute the missionaries' wilful distortion of Islam, while, at the same time, to highlight the inadequacies of Christian theological and historical claims.

By all accounts, Meherullah was an eloquent, articulate and charismatic speaker. His sound knowledge of the religious scriptures, his logical approach and his debating prowess soon established his reputation as a champion of Islam in and around Jessore. As his name and fame began to spread far and wide, he received invitations to deliver lectures on aspects of Islam and Christianity from across Jessore and beyond. His lectures were attended by hundreds (if not thousands) of people at a time, and he inspired the local Muslims to take their faith seriously. This, in turn, forced the missionaries to retreat and eventually withdraw from those areas. Hailed as an outstanding orator and champion of Islam, Meherullah soon became a celebrity in Jessore: so much so that the local district magistrate became one of his admirers. Later, he accompanied this magistrate to Darjeeling (in the present-day Indian state of West Bengal) where he established a tailoring business, which also became a success. During this period he continued his study of comparative religion and accordingly he became familiar with the religious scriptures of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam.

During his stay in Darjeeling he discovered three important books by Sulaiman Wacha, who was an Egyptian Muslim scholar: *Why I Left My Ancestral Faith* (*Keno Ami Amar Paitrik Dharma Tayg Karechhilam*), *Why I Embraced Islam* (*Keno Ami Islam Dharma Bisashi Hayechhilam*) and *Where is the Real Truth* (*Prakrita Sathy Kothay*). In these books, Wacha carefully analysed and evaluated the fundamental teachings of Christianity, and in the process he questioned the theological claims of that faith. Reading these books enabled Meherullah to delve deeper into aspects of Christian theology and history, which also clarified and sharpened his understanding of Islamic thought and history.

Henceforth, he resolved to devote the rest of his life to the propagation of Islam. Accordingly, he gave up his tailoring business and joined hands with other prominent Muslim scholars and writers of the time, including Munshi Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad of Barisal, Shaykh Abdur Rahim of Basirhat, Maulvi Mirajuddin Ahmad of Tangail and Maulvi Riyazuddin Mashhadi of Satkhira. Like Meherullah, these scholars were devout Muslims who wanted to revive authentic Islamic teachings in Bengal and thereby safeguard the Muslim masses from the activities of the missionaries. As publishers and editors of many Muslim journals and magazines, Munshi Riyazuddin Ahmad, Shaykh Abdur Rahim and others worked closely with Meherullah to raise awareness of Islam in the Muslim community.[5] Their activities were carried out under the aegis of local organisations such as the Bengali Muslim Literary Society (Bangiya Sahitya Bisayini Mussalman Samiti). At other

www.pathagar.com

times, they worked individually in their own localities.

During this period Meherullah wrote scores of articles on Islam and comparative religion, in addition to engaging in discussion and debate with prominent Christian missionaries. One such prominent missionary was Zamiruddin Bidabinad who, after converting to Christianity, became known as Reverend John Zamiruddin. Born in 1870 in Meherpur District and educated in missionary schools, Zamiruddin converted to Christianity in 1887. He then pursued theological training at St. Paul's Divinity College in Allahabad and graduated in 1891. Thereafter, he studied Sanskrit, Arabic, Hebrew and Greek at the Divinity College in Calcutta (Kolkata), in addition to being familiar with Bengali, English, Urdu, Persian and Latin.[6] In other words, he became a prominent Christian theologian, linguist, writer, poet and orator. Given his scholarly achievements and linguistic abilities, it is not surprising that he was considered by the Christians of Bengal to be one of their formidable intellectuals and debators. Meherullah, having debated and outsmarted many prominent Christian scholars of the time, was keen to engage in debate with this Christian intellectual heavyweight.

The opportunity for this came in 1892, when Reverend John Zamiruddin published an article in a missionary journal called *The Christian Comrade* (*Kristia Bandhab*). Entitled 'Where is the Original Qur'an?' (*Asal Koran Kothay*), in this article Reverend Zamiruddin argued that the Qur'an of the time was not the text that was revealed to the Prophet in seventh-century Arabia. After reading this article, Meherullah wrote a rebuttal, however the editor did not print his article. Instead, this was published in three separate issues of the weekly *Sudhakar*. In this article, Meherullah refuted Zamiruddin's arguments by demonstrating that the Qur'an was, in fact, the same as that which was revealed to the Prophet. In response, Zamiruddin published another article in the *Sudhakar* reiterating his views about the Qur'an. Again Meherullah refuted his views, in an article titled 'The Original Qur'an is Everywhere' (*Asal Koran Sarbatra*), and proved beyond doubt that the existing Qur'an was an authentic revelation; unlike the Bible, which—according to Meherullah—no longer existed in its original form. The debate eventually culminated in victory for Meherullah, as his opponent had no answer to his logical thinking, textual analysis and cogent arguments. Finally convinced of the truth of Islam, Zamiruddin then met up with Meherullah and, eight years after his baptism, he returned to the fold of Islam in 1892, renouncing Christanity. Meherullah was only 31 at the time.[7]

Reverend John Zamiruddin thereafter became known as Shaykh Muhammad Zamiruddin. Meherullah and his new recruit then joined forces to refute the anti-Islamic propaganda that was being spread by the missionaries in East Bengal. Having mastered the intricacies of Christian theology and history under the guidance of some of India's leading Christian scholars and thinkers, Shaykh Zamiruddin (supported by Meherullah) took the intellectual battle to his Christian adversaries, responding to their attacks and criticism with ease. Both of them travelled to different parts of East Bengal, including Rangpur, Jessore and Noakhali, to deliver public lectures on

www.pathagar.com

Islam, the life of the Prophet, the Qur'an and aspects of comparative religion. They urged the Muslim masses to take their faith seriously and to reclaim their past glory. Toward this end, Meherullah founded an Islamic organisation, Islam Dharmattejika, to promote Islam across East Bengal. In the words of Rafiuddin Ahmed:

> The role of Munshi Meherullah... in popularizing the idea of anjumans was also important. The first anjuman which he helped to establish in Jessore, known as *Islam Dharmattejika*, was certainly not the first anjuman in Bengal. But what made his efforts particularly significant was the special role his anjuman was intended to play, for, unlike the political associations, Meherullah's organization was avowedly a religious body founded with the specific aim of propagating Islam. His biographer, Asiruddin Pradhan, claimed that the Munshi initiated a move which resulted in the foundation of similar anjumans all over Bengal.[8]

The locals responded to their call positively and soon both of them became household names in many parts of Bengal. Also, in their debates and discussions with the Christian missionaries, Meherullah and Zamiruddin proved to be very skilful, well informed and quick-witted, which enabled them to debate and out-manoeuvre their opponents with ease.

Meherullah was an important Muslim scholar and preacher; however, he was also a prolific writer. He wrote around half a dozen books on a range of subjects including aspects of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and the prevailing social and cultural issues. *The Futility of Christianity* (*Kristia Dharmer Asarata*) was his first major literary work, which was published in 1886, when he was only 25 years old. When Shaykh Zamiruddin read this book, he was impressed by Meherullah's sound knowledge of Christian theology. His other notable works include *The Suffering of Widows* (*Bidhabaganjana-o-Bishadvandar*), which was first published in 1894. In this book, Meherullah highlighted the plight and suffering of women and of widows in Bengal's Hindu society. This book had a positive effect on its readers and was reprinted several times. His *Muslim and Christian Debates* (*Mussalman-o-Christian Tarayuddha*) was published in 1908, and *Refutation of Christianity and Vindication of Islam* (*Radd-i-Christian-o-Dalil al-Islam*) was published in 1909. In the latter, Meherullah analysed aspects of Christian beliefs and practices, and refuted misconceptions about Jesus and his teachings. He argued that Jesus was a prophet (like the other prophets before him) and that Prophet Muhammad (peace he on him) was his successor. This book was published in two volumes. Meherullah's reply to the Christians (*Jawab-i-Nasara*) was published in 1909 by Shaykh Zamiruddin. In addition to the above, Meherullah wrote and published lots of poetry on a range of subjects. Some of these were published, while others remained unpublished (if not lost). Following in the footsteps of his mentor and guide, Shaykh Zamiruddin also became a distinguished Islamic scholar, preacher and writer.

Although Meherullah and Zamiruddin had played an important role in countering Christian missionary activities in the nineteenth and early twentieth century East Bengal, they were not the pioneers in this field. That credit must go to Jawad ibn Ibrahim Sabat, who was of Arab origin and traced his ancestry back to Ali

www.pathagar.com

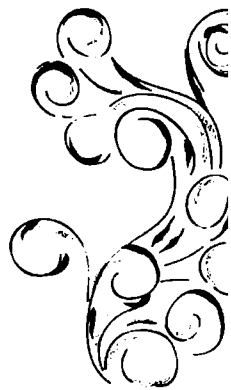
ibn Abi Talib, the fourth Caliph of Islam. He came to Bengal during the eighteenth century via India and, after undertaking a thorough study of Christian theology and scriptures, he composed his *Sabatian Proofs* (*al-Barahin al-Sabatin*) in Arabic, which consisted of more than 200 pages, wherein he refuted Christian attacks against Islam and vindicated the claims of the latter.[9]

It is also worth mentioning here that only seven years before the birth of Meherullah, a prominent north Indian Muslim scholar, Shaykh Rahmatullah Kairanawi of Panipat, out-manoeuvred Carl Gottaleb Pfander, a leading European Christian missionary, during a public debate on Islam and Christianity in Agra. Shaykh Kairanawi was assisted in his efforts by Muhammad Wazir Ali, who was a lecturer at Agra Medical College. In response to Pfander's *The Balance of Truth* (*Mizan al-Haq*) wherein he launched a virulent attack on Islam, Shaykh Kairanawi wrote his acclaimed book, *Revelation of the Truth* (*Izhar al-Haq*) in Arabic. In this book, he highlighted the inconsistencies and contradictions contained in the Bible and defended the claims of Islam and its Prophet.[10] This work was completed in Istanbul and published there under the patronage of Sultan Aziz Khan in 1864, only three years after the birth of Meherullah. This book was subsequently translated into several languages (including English and French) during its author's lifetime (Shaykh Kairanawi died in 1891). It is not clear whether Meherullah read this book: since his biographiers are silent on this matter, he probably was not aware of it.

There is a clear similarity between Meherullah's career as a preacher and defender of Islam and that of his two aforementioned illustrious predecessors. However, Meherullah's achievements are perhaps more remarkable, considering that he had died when he was only 46; if he had lived another 10 or 15 years, he would undoubtedly have achieved much more. Even so, his intellectual and literary achievements, coupled with his efforts to protect the Muslims of East Bengal from the attacks of the missionaries, as well as his attempts to revive and rejuvenate the Muslim society of Bengal, were nothing short of remarkable.

After Meherullah's death, his work was continued by Munshi Shaykh Muhammad Zamiruddin and the other Muslim scholars and writers of the time. One way or another, his Islamic activities subsequently inspired many other Muslim scholars and reformers (including Syed Isma'il Husayn Shirazi, Shaykh Fazlul Karim Sahityavisharad and Shaykh Habibur Rahman) to make their own contributions. For this reason, posterity will remain indebted to this important Muslim preacher, writer, orator and reformer of East Bengal. Munshi Muhammad Meherullah was buried in his native village, where the locals have continued to honour him by organising annual religious festivals in his memory.

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. Muhammad Mohar Ali, *Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities 1833–1857.*
2. Nasir Hilal (ed.) *Munshi Meherullah: JIban-o-Karma.*
3. Muhammad Abu Talib, *Munshi Meherullah: Deshkal Samaj.*
4. Nasir Hilal, op. cit.
5. M. A. Talib, op. cit.
6. M. Abdur Ra'uf, *Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin: Shamakalin Prekhapote Islam Prachare Tar Abadan.*
7. Nasir Hilal (ed.) *Munshi Meherullah Rachanabali.*
8. Rafiuddin Ahmed, 'The Role of Associations and Anjumans in the Political Mobilization of the Bengali Muslims in the Later Nineteenth Century'.
9. M. Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume II: Bengal Muslims During the First Century of British Rule.*
10. R. Kairanawi, *Izhar al-Haq.*



www.pathagar.com

1863–1943

MAULVI ABDUL KARIM OF SYLHET

The Indian Education Commission was established by the government in 1882 to carry out a detailed review of the education system. The commission was chaired by Sir William W. Hunter, who was a member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council and author of *The Indian Mussalmans* (1871). Of the 20 members of this commission, only two were Muslims: Haji Ghulam Hasan and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Furthermore, the Muslims of Bengal were not represented on the commission: this was pointed out by Syed Ameer Ali's Central National Muhammadan Association in 1882. Despite this, the *Report of the Indian Education Commission* was published in 1883, and it presented an exhaustive analysis of the educational condition of the Muslims of India. This report

www.pathagar.com

succeeded in highlighting the social, cultural, religious and linguistic factors responsible for the educational disadvantage and backwardness of the Muslims of India and that of Bengal in particular. As expected, the authors of the report had made a series of suggestions and recommendations for the improvement of the educational condition of the Muslims, although some government officials and influential Hindu leaders opposed a number of the recommendations, arguing that the Muslims did not deserve additional support.

Thankfully, the government as a whole was more understanding and sympathetic, and thus authorised certain provinces to provide additional educational support to the Muslims to meet their specific educational needs and requirements. However, at the provincial level, it took a lot longer to decide how such support and assistance was to be provided in each province.[1] In Bengal, where the Muslim community had been suffering considerable educational disadvantage due to the absence of government-funded educational facilities, the first serious attempt to remedy this situation and implement some of the recommendations of the Education Commission report was taken in 1889, with the appointment of two Assistant Inspectors to the School for Muhammadan Education. Maulvi Muhammad Ibrahim was appointed in Bihar, and Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet was put in charge of Muhammadan Education in East Bengal.

Muhammad Abdul Karim was born into a respected Muslim family from the village of Pathantola (in the present-day district town of Sylhet, Bangladesh). His father, Muhammad Nadir Ali, traced his family ancestry to Shaykh Khizer Qurayshi who was one of the disciples of Shaykh al-Mashaykh Makhdum Shaykh Jalal al-Din Mujarrad ibn Muhammad (better known as Hazrat Shah Jalal), the patron saint of Sylhet and one of the pioneers of Islam in Bengal. Like Shah Jalal's other disciples, Shaykh Qurayshi came to Bengal with his spiritual guide and mentor during the early part of the fourteenth century to preach Islam and subsequently settled in Sylhet. Over time, the descendants of Shaykh Qurayshi established themselves as prominent citizens of their locality. Nadir Ali, the father of Abdul Karim, was one of these. According to Muhammad Ali Azam (one of the early biographers of Abdul Karim) when Abdul Karim was only six months old, his family home was destroyed by fire. This forced his family to move to Sylhet's Sheikhghat area, where his uncle, Muhammad Sanaullah, lived with his family. Young Abdul Karim lived at his uncle's house for a few years before returning to his family home. Brought up in a devout and educated Muslim family, he received his early education at home under the care of his parents. Impressed with his son's intellectual abilities, his father formally enrolled him at the Middle English School in Dargah Mahalla when he was around seven. It was the only English-medium school of its kind in Sylhet and young Abdul Karim thrived at the school, thanks to his dedication and hard work.[2]

After completing his primary education, Abdul Karim joined the Sylhet Zila School, where he studied for a year before being taken seriously ill. Although he made a swift recovery, he then suffered from a severe form of dysentery and this caused him to miss school for

www.pathagar.com

nearly a year. After making a full recovery, he returned to school to continue his studies. He became popular with his teachers on account of his dedication and intellectual abilities. Some of his early well-wishers included prominent personalities such as Durga Kumar Bose, Taraki Shore Chowdhury and Hamid Bakht Majumdar. As a student, Abdul Karim excelled in Urdu, English and Bengali along with Arabic and Persian. However, he disliked mathematics: so much so that he initially refused to take examinations at school due to his weakness in this subject. He eventually took his exam and although he performed poorly in mathematics his teacher allowed him to take the university entrance exam because he had secured high marks in English and history. He passed his exam and prepared to move to Calcutta to pursue further and higher education. However, his mother was reluctant to part with her only son, as she had lost five other children (four sons and a daughter) prior to the birth of Abdul Karim. Eventually she allowed him to go to Calcutta, because she knew that her son could not progress in his education without leaving home.

As long distance travel was fraught with danger and difficulties in those days, Abdul Karim travelled by a combination of boat and train for nearly two weeks before arriving in Calcutta. There he enrolled at the Presidency College and became well known for his debating skills. It was on this occasion that he met many prominent personalities like Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee and Nawab Sir Syed Shamsul Huda. Sir Abdur Rahim and Kamendra Sunder Trivedi were his classmates. In 1883, at the age of 20, he took his First of Arts (FA) examination. As a result of his weakness in mathematics, he failed the exam. Almost inconsolable, he planned to give up education altogether and instead travel to Africa but, by coincidence, the university authorities held a re-examination, thanks to a radical overhaul of the FA and Bachelor of Arts (BA) examinations. Abdul Karim changed his plans and prepared meticulously for his maths exam and, on this occasion, he performed well. Delighted to have overcome his largest obstacle, he then enrolled for his BA degree. As mathematics was optional at the degree level, he chose to study English, Persian and philosophy. During this period his education was funded by a scholarship offered to him by the government of Assam. Two years later, he passed his BA with Honours in English and in so doing he became the second Muslim from Sylhet to achieve this feat (Muhammad Daim was the other person). It should be mentioned here that 1885 was an important year in the history of Bengal because many Muslim students graduated in that year: including Sir Abdur Rahim, Sir Zahid Suhrawardi, Abdul Haq Abid, Ahmad Mahmood and Abdus Samad.

After completing his BA, Abdul Karim had an opportunity to go to England for postgraduate studies, thanks to the offer of a scholarship by Her Highness the Begum of Bhopal. Although he applied for this scholarship, the officials of Calcutta University offered this prestigious scholarship to Sir Abdur Rahim who went onto pursue higher education in law.[3] In the meantime, Abdul Karim married Aisha Khatun, a daughter of Mawlana Muhammad Hatim, a noted Islamic scholar and Sufi sage of Sylhet. Abdul Karim's wife became one of

www.pathagar.com

his great supporters. Throughout his long and distinguished career she played a leading role in promoting education and social welfare in the Muslim society. She bore him four sons and a daughter, and these became notable teachers and scholars in their own right. Soon after his marriage, Abdul Karim returned to Calcutta, where he was offered the editorship of a local Urdu newspaper. Thanks to his literary talent and thought-provoking articles, he soon established his reputation in Calcutta's literary circles. In his capacity as a journalist he met Justice Syed Ameer Ali, the renowned Muslim scholar and jurist of Bengal, who was then working as a barrister. In 1886, Abdul Karim was appointed a teacher in the Anglo-Persian Department of the historic Calcutta Madrasah. Despite being a very popular and able teacher, his teaching career was cut short by his swift promotion to the post of Assistant Inspector of Schools. Some of his students at the time included Justice Syed Hasan Imam, Khan Bahadur Aminul Islam and Khan Bahadur Abdul Mu'min who later occupied prominent positions in the government service.

Abdul Karim was appointed in this role on the recommendations of Justice Syed Ameer Ali and Nawab Abdul Latif, two prominent Muslim leaders of nineteenth century Bengal. His appointment was hailed by the Calcutta reporter of *Patna Institute Gazette* with these words:

> Maulavi Abdul Karim's appointment as an Assistant Inspector of Schools has given satisfaction to the entire Muhammadan community of Calcutta, and I believe that the whole Muhammadan community of Bengal will be quite satisfied with his selection.[4]

Although he was only 25 at the time, Abdul Karim was already on his way to establishing his reputation as a scholar, writer and educationalist of Bengal (and of Calcutta in particular.) Unfortunately, his success was not to be witnessed by his parents, as his father and mother died in quick succession, and they were buried before he was able to return to Sylhet. Abdul Karim's only consolation at that time was that he met Hamid Bakht Majumdar, his erstwhile patron and supporter, who wished him well.

He stayed in Sylhet for a short period and, in January 1890, Abdul Karim moved to Dhaka to take up his new post. Since his remit covered the whole of Dhaka and Chittagong divisions, he was responsible for eight districts. On his arrival in Dhaka, he received a warm welcome from some of its leading figures, including Nawab Sir Abdul Ghani and Nawab Sir Ahsanullah, as well as Mr L. Johnson, Commissioner of Dhaka, and Mr Dina Nath Sen, Inspector of Schools. Likewise, his friends and well-wishers included Khan Bahadur Aulad Hasan, Shams al-Ulama Abul Khair Muhammad Siddiq and Ziauddin Ahmad. They supported him in his role as Assistant Inspector of Schools for Muhammadan Education. Subsequently, during his travels across East Bengal, Abdul Karim met and befriended other prominent Muslim personalities, including Mahmud Ali Khan Panni, a wealthy landholder and father of Maulvi Wajid Ali Khan Panni. The former gave 5000 rupees to Abdul Karim towards the cost of Dufferin Hostel for the benefit of Muslim students of Dhaka. He then visited the home of

www.pathagar.com

Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury in Dhanbari where his host gave him a tour of the local area. In Barisal, he befriended Maulvi Wajid Ali, the father of Maulvi A. K. Fazul Haq, who briefed him on the educational condition of the people of that district, as did Maulvi Ahmad, the father of Khan Bahadur Abdul Karim of Comilla. His travels across East Bengal enabled him to understand and appreciate the cultural problems and educational difficulties that the Muslims of Bengal faced at the time.[5]

As he was a devout Muslim, Abdul Karim was very keen to transform the educational condition of his people for the better. Being educated in Islamic subjects as well as modern English education, he understood why the Muslims of Bengal had reservations and misgivings about modern secular education. As a patriotic Muslim, he wanted to promote modern education in the Muslim community of East Bengal and to do so without upsetting the Muslim traditionalists. Thus, he emphasised the importance of traditional Islamic principles and practices but, at the same time, he argued that there was an urgent need for the young Muslims of East Bengal to pursue further and higher English education to enable them to secure highly paid and influential posts in the government service. During his tenure as Assistant Inspector of Education, he not only played a pivotal role in promoting and improving the educational condition of the Muslims of East Bengal, his understanding of, and profound respect for, traditional Islam also earned him the admiration of his friends and foe alike.

In 1895, when the government proposed to transfer him to the Presidency division after five years of unblemished service in Dhaka, *The Moslem Chronicle* wrote:

> The transfer of the Assistant Inspector of Schools for Muhammadan Education is a very great loss to East Bengal. By his amiable character and suavity of manners, Maulvi Abdul Karim made himself very popular in East Bengal. He was not only liked but also respected by those who had occasion to come in contact with him. As long as he was at Dacca, there was scarcely a public movement affecting Muhammadan interests in which he did not take an active part. His advice was sought after by all classes of his co-religionists. By his private charity he had so endeared himself to the poor of Dacca, that some of them actually burst into tears when they heard of his transfer.[6]

After his transfer to Calcutta, Abdul Karim's remit as Assistant Inspector of Education was extended to cover three divisions: the Presidency division, the Chota Nagpur division and the Orissa division. In Calcutta, he established his reputation as a leading educationalist and literary figure, as he had in Dhaka. For this reason, he was appointed a fellow of the Calcutta University on the recommendation of Sir Alfred Croft. As a result, he came in direct contact with some of Bengal's leading scholars and educationalists, including Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose and Sir Gurudas Banerji. During this period he became actively involved in Calcutta's cultural and literary societies, such as the Asiatic Society and Bengal Literary Society (Bangiya Sahitya Parishad). In due course, the Chaitanya Library initiated an essay competition in honour of Sir John Woodburn, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. The topic of the competition was 'Life

www.pathagar.com

and Times of Akbar' (Akbar was the great Mughal emperor). Abdul Karim wrote an essay for this competition and it was judged to be one of the best, thus earning him the Woodburn Gold Medal. With the full backing of sympathetic government officials including Dr C. A. Martin, Sir Alfred Croft, Rai Bahadur R. P. Mukherji and Radanath Roy, he drafted scores of proposals for the advancement of education in the Muslim community. More often than not the proposals were recommended for implementation.

In his role as a reformer of Muslim education, Abdul Karim had the full support of many prominent scholars and leaders, including Sir Denison Ross, the principal of Calcutta Madrasah, Justice Syed Ameer Ali, Nawab Sir Shamsul Huda, Maulvi Dilwar Husayn Ahmad and Shams al-Ulama Mawlana Ataur Rahman. During his tenure as Assistant Inspector of Schools in Calcutta, Abdul Karim travelled extensively and carefully observed the educational condition of the Muslims of Bengal first hand: this enabled him to draft proposals for educational reform and improvement that directly benefited the Muslim community of Bengal in general (and Muslim students in particular). Towards the end of his five-year term, the All-India Muhammadan Educational Conference was held in Calcutta and, being a prominent Muslim educationalist, he played an active part in this conference, delivering several lectures that were received well by his peers. During this event, he became acquainted with some of India's leading Muslim figures (including Nawab Muhsin al-Mulk, Allamah Shibli Nu'mani, Mawlana Altaf Husayn Hali, Sir Sayyid Ali Imam, Sir Muhammad Shafi and Dr Ziauddin Ahmad).

For the benefit of the delegates of this important conference, in 1900 Abdul Karim wrote an essay titled 'Muhammadan Education in Bengal'. In this essay he highlighted the major challenges and difficulties that confronted the Muslims of Bengal and suggested ways to deal with the pressing issues. After reading this booklet, Justice Syed Ameer Ali, the president of the conference, expressed his appreciation for Abdul Karim and his efforts to promote education in the Muslim community. Likewise, after reading this essay, Sir Alfred Croft (who had by then retired from his role as director of public instruction and returned to his native England) expressed his satisfaction that progress was being made in the promotion of education in the Muslim community.

After completing his five-year term in Calcutta, in 1900, Abdul Karim was transferred to Patna where his remit covered two divisions: Patna and Bhagalpur. There he befriended Khan Bahadur Dr Asadar Ali Khan of Sylhet, Khan Bahadur Khuda Baksh, the founder of the famous Oriental Library in Patna, and Nawab Sayyid Imdad Imam, the father of Sir Sayyid Ali Imam. During this period Abdul Karim became interested in Sufism and, accordingly, he received training in aspects of Islamic spirituality under the guidance of Mawlana Ghulam Salmani, a prominent Sufi sage of the Mujaddidia tariqah. This Sufi order was named after Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, the renowned sixteenth century Islamic reformer and Sufi sage of India. After nearly four years of training, Abdul Karim had made excellent progress, but his spiritual training was cut short by illness that forced him to take leave

www.pathagar.com

from work on medical grounds. However, once he had returned to work, the post of Assistant Inspector of Schools for Muhammadan Education was replaced by the posts of Inspectors of Schools. Even so, during his time as an Assistant Inspector of Schools in Dhaka, Calcutta and Patna, Abdul Karim played a defining role in improving the educational condition of the Muslims of Bengal. Thanks to his persistence and hard work, considerable progress was made in many areas of education including the following: the number of Muslims recruited into the Education Department increased considerably; more funds were set aside to help poor Muslim students than ever before including freeing up a large amount from the Muhsin Fund for the assistance of Muslim students; numerous hostels were established for Muslim students throughout Bengal; and *madrasah* and *maktab* education was reformed and improved to enable Muslim students to progress to higher education without any barriers or difficulties.[7]

Once Abdul Karim had made full recovery, he returned to work and was duly posted to Dhaka as Acting Inspector of Schools. Subsequently, he was promoted as a permanent Inspector of Schools for Chittagong division. Referring to his efforts and achievements in Chittagong, the *Weekly Chronicle* wrote:

> Mr. Abdul Karim, Inspector of Schools, Chittagong Division, is an educationist of repute in Bengal and has already made his mark in the service to which he belongs. As a native of our district we are proud of him, and his ways and work have always possessed special interest for us. A man of versatile talents and the very reverse of what Lord Curzon would call an 'admirable automaton'. Mr Abdul Karim does not walk in the stereotyped path, but is ever busy to discover new lines for the spread and improvement of education in his circle.[8]

After completing his term in Chittagong, Abdul Karim was offered the Inspectorship of Rajshahi Division by the Director of Public Instruction, Mr. Sharp. He turned down the offer and, instead, he took leave for three months. He went to Madras to recuperate before returning to Dhaka as Second Inspector of Schools. As an inspector, Abdul Karim was a dedicated, thoughtful and inspirational official. Inspired by his faith, coupled with his burning desire to improve the social, cultural and educational condition of his people, he carried out his duties with loyalty and commitment. Referring to his new, refreshing approach, the *People and Pratibashi* commented:

> We are used to mechanical officials... But Moulvi Abdul Karim, the Inspector of Schools... is, we understand, quite a new sort of man. He seems to be a man inspired with a higher sense of duty than what is to be found in the ordinary run. He does the mechanical work, which of course must be done, but he does something more, he investigates the causes of arrested progress and inspires others with his own ideal of work.[9]

Likewise, renowned scholars and personalities (including Rajendra Prasad of Patna, Sir Muhammad Azizul Haq, the vice-chancellor of Calcutta University, Captain Dr D. C. Majumdar and S. C. Majumdar of Presidency College) publicly acknowledged their debt to Abdul Karim as a teacher and inspector of schools.

Abdul Karim retired from government

www.pathagar.com

service in 1912 at the age of 59. The final years of his service were not favourable for him, as many of his erstwhile supporters and admirers (including Nawab Sir Ahsanullah, Sir John Woodburn and Sir Bamfylde Fuller) had by then passed away and were replaced by new government officials, and Abdul Karim did not get on well with them. Even so, Nawab Sir Salimullah Khan Bahadur held him in highest regard and regularly consulted him on the central issues of the day. As expected, Abdul Karim played an active role in the Annual Session of the All-India Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Dhaka, and on this occasion, he met all the leading Muslim scholars and leaders of India. After he formally announced his retirement from government service, *The Mussalman* paid him this tribute:

> The retirement of Moulvi Abdul Karim... has removed a notable figure from the ranks of educational officers, belonging to the Provincial Service. He was first appointed, in July 1886, as an assistant Master in the Anglo-Persian Department of the Calcutta Madrasah whence he was transferred to Dacca as an Assistant Inspector of Schools for Mohamedan Education, in the year 1890. The last appointment he held is well-known to the reader. Throughout his career Moulvi Abdul Karim discharged his duties to the complete satisfaction of the Government and the public. Able, independent and pains-taking, Moulvi Abdul Karim won the golden opinion of the community to which he belongs. His services to the cause of education, and especially of Mohamedan education, have been immense. His recommendations to Government regarding reforms in education and the special needs and requirements of the Mohamedans, were generally accepted, and most of his official superiors had a high opinion of him. Now that he has retired from official life, we hope he will devote the rest of his days to the service of the community, the educational progress and advancement of the Mussalmans. Though retired from Government service Moulvi Abdul Karim is not so old as to be unfit for work and we fervently hope he will lend his services for the community with readiness and alacrity.[10]

After his retirement, Abdul Karim became involved in social, political and literary activities. Forced, by ill health, to move to Ranchi, he spent almost three years recuperating there and during this time prepared a deed of endowment (*waqfnama*) with the help of Barrister Abdur Rasul, a leading Muslim lawyer and leader of Bengal. With this, he established this endowment of 50,000 rupees to promote education and learning in the Muslim community by providing financial support and scholarship to poor but deserving Muslim students. At a public meeting organised in Calcutta on 9 April 1916, Abdul Karim's generosity was duly acknowledged by leading Muslim personalities, including Nawab Sirajul Islam, Maulvi A. K. Fazlul Haq and Barrister Abdur Rasul. Hailed by the Honourable Sir Syed Muhammad Saadullah (a former premier of Assam) as one of the great sons of Sylhet, Abdul Karim's generosity was also applauded by *The Eastern Chronicle*:

> Maulavi Abdul Karim's contemplated endowment of Rs. 50,000 has now become an accomplished fact and as might be expected, the cause of Mahomedan education in Sylhet, the land of

www.pathagar.com

> his birth, receives a legitimate place in its dispensation. Maulavi Abdul Karim was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth and does not surely rank with the possessors of long purses and broad acres as they go in the country. On the contrary, he perhaps parts with his hard-earned limited resources, depriving his successors of a considerable portion of the heritage to which they naturally aspire. For this reason if for no other this princely gift has a significance all its own and invests its donor with a character for piety and philantrophy so rare in Bengal and Assam. Sylhet is proud to claim in Maulavi Abdul Karim a distinguished son and a great benefactor of his fellowmen.[11]

As an educationalist and scholar of high rank, Abdul Karim was also asked to provide advice and evidence to several royal commissions. Thus, on 17 October 1913 he provided evidence to the Royal Commission on Public Services in India through a memorandum. Although some of his suggestions were not well-received by the government of Bengal, his views were robustly defended by many leading educationalists, including Sir Muhammad Azizul Haq and Dr J. N. Bose. Likewise, in 1918, he provided evidence before the Calcutta University Commission, which was headed by Dr M. E. Sadler. The members of the commission were so impressed with him that they quoted him extensively in their final report.

During this period Abdul Karim became increasingly concerned by the political condition of the Muslim world in general and the future of Muslims of Bengal in particular. Urged by his close friends (Barrister Abdur Rasul, Maulvi A. K. Fazul Haq, Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan and Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad), he became involved in the political affairs of the country, and he lobbied senior government officials in favour of the Ottoman Khilafah. He became a member of the Bengal Legislative Council and served in this capacity for a decade. He was a signatory of the Bengal Pact of 1923: otherwise known as the Hindu-Muslim Pact, its purpose was to promote understanding and co-operation between the two communities.

Likewise, Abdul Karim was a member of the Council of State and, in 1915 he was elected president of the *Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti*, a literary society of the Muslims of Bengal. The society had been founded in 1911 by prominent Muslim scholars and leaders, including Mawlana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, Muzammil Haq of Shantipur and Yaqub Ali Chowdhury, with the purpose to revive Islamic thought and culture and to promote Bengali language and literature in the Muslim community. Abdul Karim also served as a president of several other organisations including the Bengal Muslim League, Bengal Muslim Graduates Association, Islamic Mission Society and Sylhet Muslim Students' Association Conference. He also drafted a scheme in order to bring about reform in the Muslim community: this was known as the Muslim Reform Society of Bengal (Anjuman-i-Islahul Muslimin Bangala).

In addition to being a prominent educationalist and politician, Abdul Karim was a prolific writer on Islamic thought, history and educational topics. He was fluent in English, Arabic, Urdu, Persian and Bengali, and wrote more than a dozen books and booklets: namely

www.pathagar.com

History of India for Beginners, Bharatbarsher Mussalman Rajatter Itibrittya, Islam's Contribution to Science and Civilisation, Prophet of Islam and His Teachings and *Islam, a Universal Religion of Peace and Progress*. The *History of India for Beginners* was a textbook that provided an overview of Indian history for high school students. Written in English, it was approved by the educational authorities as a textbook for English language schools. This became a popular text and was reprinted more than 20 times between 1892 and 1930. Abdul Karim wrote a similar textbook on Indian history in three other languages (Urdu, Hindi and Bengali) and these editions also became very popular. In fact, his Urdu book was widely reviewed in the Urdu journals of the time and leading scholars, including Allama Shibli Numani of Aligarh, Mawlana Altaf Husayn Hali of Panipat and Shams al-Ulama Muhammad Zakiullah of Delhi, considered it to be an authoritative work. Likewise, Abdul Karim's *History of Muslim Rule in India* (*Bharatbarsher Mussalman Rajatter Itibritta*) was widely reviewed in the leading Bengali journals of the time. It was hailed as a 'valuable contribution to Bengali literature' by Justice Gooroodas Bannerjee of the Calcutta High Court. This book was one of the first of its kind to be written by a Muslim from Bengal.

Abdul Karim's *Islam's Contribution to Science and Civlisation* and *Prophet of Islam and His Teachings* were published towards the end of his life, and both were written in English. In these two contributions he highlighted the salient features of Islam as a global faith and culture, focusing primarily on the moral and ethical teachings of the Prophet of Islam. He emphasised the achievements of the Muslims during the golden age of Islamic civilisation. In his Foreword to *Islam's Contribution to Science and Civilisation*, Rabindranath Tagore, a renowned poet and Nobel laureate wrote:

> One of the most potent sources of Hindu-Moslem conflict in India is our scant knowledge of each other. We live side by side and yet very often our worlds are entirely different. Such mental aloofness has done immense mischief in the past and forebodes an evil future. It is only through a sympathetic understanding of each other's culture and social customs and conventions that we can create an atmosphere of peace and goodwill... I heartily welcome, therefore, the series of articles from my distinguished countryman, Maulvi Abdul Karim, on Islam's contribution to Science and Civilisation. The writer has clothed his erudition in as simple a garb as possible and the book should have great popular appeal. It is with pleasure that I commend the book to my countrymen.[12]

Abdul Karim authored several other books on English language, grammar and other educational topics that proved to be helpful to teachers and students alike. These titles included: *Hints on English Pronunciation, Primary Education in Bengal* and *Hints on Class Management and Method of Teaching*. His last literary contribution was *Islam, a Universal Religion of Peace and Progress*. In this brochure, he provided a logical and succinct overview of Islam and its teachings, focusing on its moral, ethical and spiritual teachings. In his own words:

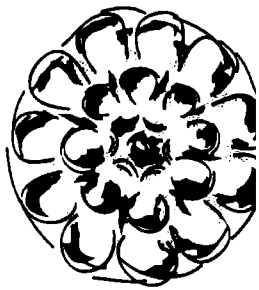
> Belief in the existence of a Supreme Being with supernatural powers and performance of duties of love and obedience to him is what is generally understood by Religion. Of all the handiworks of

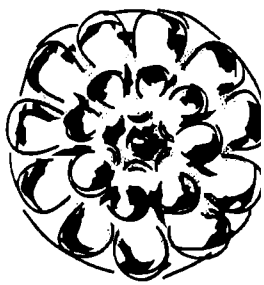
www.pathagar.com

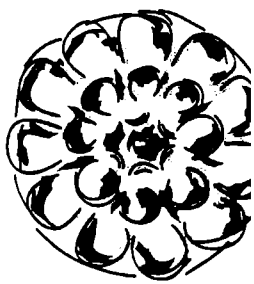
> God, man is the masterpiece. He is an amalgam of divinity and brutality. By developing the divine element in his nature man can elevate himself to the loftiest plane of morality and spirituality; and by allowing unrestricted scope to the development of the germs of evil in him he may lead himself to the lowest depth of degradation. Thus while by developing his unlimited moral and spiritual potentialities man may excel the angels and approach the borders of Divinity, by giving free rein to his carnal passions he may drag himself down to a much lower level than that of brutes.[13]

This quotation beautifully summarises Abdul Karim's entire philosophy and approach to life. He was a devout Muslim, a leading educationalist and a noted scholar and writer who devoted his entire life to the reformation and regeneration of Bengal's Muslim society. This important personality of Bengal passed away at the age of 80 and was laid to rest in Calcutta. His wide-ranging contributions ensure that he will be remembered for a long time to come.

www.pathagar.com







Notes

1. Muhammad Abdullah, *Adhunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari.*
2. Muhammad Ali Azam, *Life of Maulvi Abdul Karim.*
3. Muhammad Abdullah, *Sir Abdur Rahim: Jiban-o-Karma.*
4. M. A. Azam, op. cit.
5. Muhammad Abdullah, *Bangladesher Dash Dishari.*
6. *The Moslem Chronicle,* 5 April 1895.
7. M. A. Azam, op. cit.
8. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
9. Ibid.
10. *The Mussalman,* 11 September 1914.
11. *The Eastern Chronicle,* 14 March 1916.
12. Abdul Karim, *Islam's Contribution to Science and Civilisation.*
13. Abdul Karim, *Islam, a Universal Religion of Peace and Progress.*

www.pathagar.com

1863–1922

SIR SYED SHAMSUL HUDA

DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY Bengal produced a number of influential Muslim leaders and politicians, including Nawab Sir Abdul Ghani, Nawab Abdul Latif and Nawab Syed Abdus Subhan Chowdhury. These, in turn, inspired a new generation of Muslim scholars, politicians and leaders to emerge in order to improve the social, political, economic and educational conditions of the Muslims of Bengal. Some of the luminaries of that generation included Nawab Sir Ahsanullah, Rt. Hon. Justice Syed Ameer Ali, Khan Bahadur Heymayatuddin Ahmad, Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet, Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury and Sir Abdur Rahim. These Muslim scholars and leaders were aware of the problems that confronted their people and took steps to

www.pathagar.com

improve the condition of Muslims in Bengal.

According to Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet, the condition of the Muslim community of India (and Bengal in particular) was so pitiful during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the need for reform and reorganisation was long overdue. Despite the fact that Muslim population in Bengal was much larger than that of any other Muslim country, a combination of political, economic and social difficulties had held them back from achieving their potential. The masses, deprived of authentic Islamic teachings and firmly under the control of powerful non-Muslim landholders, were forced to live in virtual servitude. This situation was worsened by the unscrupulous traders and moneylenders, whose unhealthy influence had a lasting socio-economic impact on the poor and downtrodden. This situation could have been changed if the political parties had set their differences aside and co-operated to improve the condition of their people.[1] In the face of such mounting problems and challenges, the many Muslim scholars and leaders of Bengal fought valiantly to protect the interests of their people. Nawab Sir Syed Shamsul Huda belonged to this generation of outstanding Muslim scholars and leaders of Bengal.

Shamsul Huda was born into an upper middle-class Muslim family from the village of Gookon (in present-day Brahamanbaria District, Bangladesh). His family traced their ancestry back to Syed Bandigi Shah Isra'il, who was a prominent disciple of Shah Jalal, the famous patron saint of Sylhet. The latter came to East Bengal and permanently settled in Sylhet during the early part of the fourteenth century. Shah Jalal was a famous Sufi sage and successful Muslim preacher, and soon after his arrival in Sylhet he encouraged his followers and disciples to move to different parts of Bengal to disseminate the message of Islam across that region. Syed Israil may have settled in Gookon on the instruction of Shah Jalal himself. One of the descendants of Syed Israil was Syed Muhammad Sharafatullah, who was the grandfather of Shamsul Huda. Syed Sharafatullah was a learned individual and, for this reason, he was recruited into the government service in Chittagong during the mid-eighteenth century.

His son, Shah Syed Riyazatullah (the father of Shamsul Huda), was educated at the famous Calcutta Madrasah. Thereafter, he started practising law at Brahamanbaria Sadr Diwani Adalat (civil court) where he became known for his piety, scruplousness and honesty. Indeed, Khan Bahadur Abdul Ghafur Nassakh, a renowned Urdu writer and poet of Bengal, mentioned in his *Tadhkirat-ul-Mu'asirin* that Shah Riyazatullah was a prominent scholar and writer who had contributed a foreword to one of his books. According to Muhammad Abdullah (Shamsul Huda's biographer), two of Shah Riyazatullah's Persian manuscripts have been preserved at the Dhaka University for the benefit of posterity.[2] After practising law for a period, Shah Riyazatullah became a journalist and was apppointed an editor of *Durbeen* (a Persian journal that was founded by Nawab Abdul Latif, the brother of Nassakh). Later on, he became detached from worldly affairs and developed an interest in Sufism. In due course, he became a well-known practitioner of Islamic spirituality, and acquired a considerable

www.pathagar.com

following in and around Nabingarh Thana in Brahamanbaria.

His son, Shamsul Huda, received his early education in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Bengali and aspects of Islam at home under the care of his father. After completing his early education at home, Shamsul Huda moved to Calcutta for further and higher education. Since Calcutta was one of India's leading centres of education and commerce at the time, the bright and ambitious Muslim students went there to pursue religious sciences and modern English education. Soon after his arrival in Calcutta, Shamsul Huda enrolled at the Hughly Madrasah where he studied Arabic, Persian, Urdu and aspects of traditional Islamic sciences. According to Muhammad Abdullah, he may have completed his exams there before joining the renowned Presidency College for his undergraduate studies. In 1884, at the age of 21, he obtained his Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree and, a year later, he was appointed a lecturer in Arabic and Persian at the historic Calcutta Madrasah.[3]

Shamsul Huda joined the Calcutta Madrasah in the same year in which Mawlana Ubaydullah al-Ubaydi Suhrawardi, a former superintendent of that Madrasah, died. Thanks to his excellent linguistic skills, Shamsul Huda became a popular teacher in the Department of Arabic and Persian, and he also found time to study part-time for a Bachelor of Laws (BL) degree, which was awarded to him by the University of Calcutta in 1886. He was a bright student, who excelled in his studies and received high marks in both his BA and BL examinations. A year after obtaining his law degree, Shamsul Huda resigned as a lecturer at Calcutta Madrasah and began to practise law at the Calcutta High Court. While he was busy working as a lawyer, he continued to study Persian privately and, in 1889, he obtained a Master of Arts (MA) degree in that subject. He passed his exams with flying colours and in so doing he became one of the most eloquent, articulate and educated Muslims of his generation. As expected, Shamsul Huda went onto play an important and equally influential role as a Muslim scholar, leader and politican in Bengal during the early part of the twentieth century.

When the Indian National Congress was formally established in 1885 by Calcutta's leading Hindu leaders, this political body was intended to represent all the people of India, including its Hindu and Muslim population. For this reason, prominent Indian Muslim leaders, like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Nawab Abdul Latif and Justice Syed Ameer Ali, initially gave their full backing to this political body. In due course, when the Hindu Congress leadership began to pursue a partisan and communalistic approach to national politics and identity, the Muslim leaders and masses doubted whether the congress was, in fact, capable of representing all the communities of India: especially the large Muslim minority. In 1895, at a time when the leading Muslim leaders were asking questions about the political philosophy and strategy of the congress, Shamsul Huda attended the second annual gathering of the Calcutta Union, where he delivered a talk titled 'Indian Politics and the Muhammadans'. In this talk, he highlighted the political role of the Indian Muslims and suggested ways in which they could make the congress a more united and effective political body. His speech was

www.pathagar.com

welcomed by the Hindus and Muslims alike. In response to his speech, the Calcutta-based *Moslem Chronicle* wrote:

> On this occasion Moulvi Shamsul Huda, M.A., B. L. delivered a most sensible lecture on 'Indian politics and the Muhammadans'. His lecture was heard with earnest attention, and we have no doubt that our young men will profit by it. It is such a correct exposition of the views and attitude of the Muhammadans in regard to the so-called 'National Congress' that our young men could not do better than study and profit by it.[4]

Shamsul Huda combined his role as a lawyer with social, political and educational activities while he was still in his thirties. He started his legal career in 1887, and had soon established a thriving legal practice. He continued to work in this capacity until 1912. During his legal career of 25 years, he established an unrivalled reputation for being a fair, balanced and skilful lawyer as well as a patriotic leader. Thanks to his polished legal skills and increasing popularity in the Muslim community, Shamsul Huda was able to play an important role in defending the interests of the Muslims. Accordingly, in 1902, leading Muslim personalities like Justice Syed Ameer Ali, Sir Abdur Rahim and Shamsul Huda organised the Calcutta Muslim Educational Conference (Calcutta Muslim Shikha Shaba) to discuss and debate the educational challenges facing the Muslims. They also explored ways to reform and regenerate the social, political and economic condition of the Muslims of Bengal. Shamsul Huda continued to show interest in these issues, and during the first annual gathering of the Provincial Muhammadan Educational Conference (Bangiya Pradeshik Shikha Samiti), which was held in Rajshahi in 1904, he was able to clearly expound his ideas and thoughts on the educational needs and challenges facing his people. In a talk delivered in English, he concluded:

> The Mahomedans are now fully convinced of the utter futility and obstinate resistance to the forces now at work, and there is at the present moment a general desire to take advantage of the existing opportunities to acquire a knowledge of English and modern sciences.[5]

Like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Shamsul Huda was not only steeped in the traditional Islamic sciences and modern English education, he was also a devout Muslim and a loyal employee of the British government. In that sense, he was inspired by the educational philosophy and reformist ideas of prominent Indian Muslim leaders like Sir Sayyid, Nawab Abdul Latif and Justice Syed Ameer Ali. He aimed to champion the same cause as these leaders, and became known for his thoughtful, balanced and moderate views on how to revive and regenerate the stagnant Muslim society of India (and of Bengal in particular). He was a Muslim nationalist, and he became an active supporter of the All-India Muslim League, soon after its formation in 1906 under the leadership of Nawab Sir Salimullah of Dhaka. So much so, that when the Bengal Provincial Muslim League was formed in Calcutta a year later, Shamsul Huda was elected its assistant secretary, and Sir Salimullah became its general secretary.

Despite being an ardent supporter of Hindu-Muslim unity and solidarity, Shamsul Huda was honest and pragmatic enough to acknowledge that the partition of Bengal in

www.pathagar.com

1905, which he had initially opposed and subsequently accepted, proved to be beneficial to the Muslims of East Bengal, even though it was bitterly opposed by the Hindu elites. As a man of considerable learning and political awareness and understanding, Shamsul Huda was happy to accept the new reality. In his own words:

> I claim that after the creation of the new Province, East Bengal has received a great deal more of personal attention. Before the Partition the largest amount of money used to be spent in districts near Calcutta. The best of Colleges, Hospitals, and other institutions were founded in or near about the Capital of India. Bengal alone now reaps the benefit of those institutions towards which both the Provinces had contributed. We have inherited a heritage of the accumulated neglect of years and cannot be blamed if [we] require large sums to put our house in order.[6]

On another occasion, he reiterated this point in these words,

> They [Hindus] have benefited for very many years out of the revenues of Eastern Bengal and have paid very little for its progress and advancement... I will only say that if Eastern Bengal now for some years costs money, and if that money is to come from any province outside East Bengal, it should come from Western Bengal and the members from that province should not at any rate grumble at it.[7]

As a well-known lawyer and educationalist, Shamsul Huda was appointed a fellow of Calcutta University and, in 1902, he was invited to deliver the prestigious Tagore Law Lectures there. His lecture consisted of more than 400 pages, and were subsequently published under the title of *The Principles of the Crimes of Law in British India* by Butterworth and Co. of Calcutta. Over the course of the 13 lectures he delivered, Shamsul Huda provided a detailed and illuminating exposition of the fundamental principles of the law of crimes, with reference to the works of great British jurists such as Bentham, Austin, and Blackstone. This proved that he was thoroughly familiar with the legal ideas and thoughts of the foremost British jurists of the past and present. Although he was not a prolific writer, with the publication of this book, he nonetheless established his reputation as an outstanding jurist and scholar. In fact, this book was rated so highly by the students and lawyers alike that it has continued to be reprinted in India to this day. As Shamsul Huda's reputation as a lawyer and public figure spread across the Muslim community, in 1908 he was elected a member of the Bengal Legislative Council (he was only 45 years old at that time). A year later, he was elected as a member of the Imperial Legislative Council and as a representative of the Muslims of East Bengal. He fulfilled both roles to the full satisfaction of the government and the Muslim community.

The 1911 edition of *Who's Who in India* stated: 'He is one of the leaders of public opinion in his Province, and is on the forefront of all movements concerning the Mohammadan community'.[8] A year later, Shamsul Huda was elected as the president of the All-India Muslim League, in addition to serving as secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. Four years later, Sir Salimullah died unexpectedly, and this no doubt encouraged Shamsul Huda and other Muslim leaders of Bengal to continue to defend the interests of the Muslims. However, the year

www.pathagar.com

1917 was important in the life and career of Shamsul Huda, because he was appointed a judge of Calcutta High Court in that year. He became the second Muslim from Bengal to occupy this post after Justice Syed Ameer Ali. He was also elected vice-president of the Bengal Executive Council. He served in these roles with remarkable skill, loyalty and distinction. Impressed with Shamsul Huda's services, Lord Carmichael, the departing Governor of Bengal, stated in the Calcutta-based *Englishman* that:

> In all my endeavours to promote the welfare and to meet the legitimate desires of your community (Musalmans) I have been ably advised by my colleague the Hon'able Nawab Sir Syed Shamsul Huda; and I am glad to take this opportunity to testify to the fact that in my judgement the Mohamedan community in Bengal could have had no more sympathetic or better advocate than he has been.[9]

Thanks to his proven all-round abilities, in January 1921, he became the first Indian to be appointed president of the reformed Legislative Council of undivided Bengal. He resigned as a judge of the Calcutta High Court in order to take up this appointment. As expected, he excelled in his new role. In the words of the Calcutta-based *Statesman*:

> His term of office as the first President of the Bengal Legislative Council under the reformed constitution was the crowning distinction of a career in which he had already earned honours enough to satisfy the ambition of most men. In accepting that office he rendered the greatest service within his power to Bengal and to the Reforms —a service which will always be held in honourable remembrance. Until failing health compelled his retirement he gave his energies and his exceptional abilities ingrudgingly for the benefit of his countrymen, who will treasure his memory with gratitude.[10]

Although he was a devout Muslim, Shamsul Huda was far from being a communalist or a narrow-minded individual. On the contrary, as Dabu Surendra Nath Roy, an eminent Hindu politician and leader testified:

> The late Nawab Shahib was not a sectarian in any sense of the word. He never made any distinction between Hindus and Muhammadans. He was devoid of all class hatred. He was never unreasonable in his demands for the rights and claims of his co-religionists. In fact he was a gentleman in the highest sense of the word.[11]

It is worth mentioning here that 1921 was a historic year for the Muslims of East Bengal, because the University of Dhaka was formally established in that year by His Excellency, Lord Rhonaldshay the Governor of Bengal. Shamsul Huda, who had already received some of the highest accolades from the British government, was appointed a life member of this university by Lord Rhonaldshay, who was its chancellor. On the recommendation of Shamsul Huda Lord Rhonaldshay appointed Sir A. F. Rahman, who had been working at Aligarh Muslim University at the time, as a provost of Dhaka University.

As an influential Muslim jurist, leader and politician, Nawab Sir Justice Shamsul Huda played an important role in improving the political and educational condition of the Muslims of Bengal during the early part

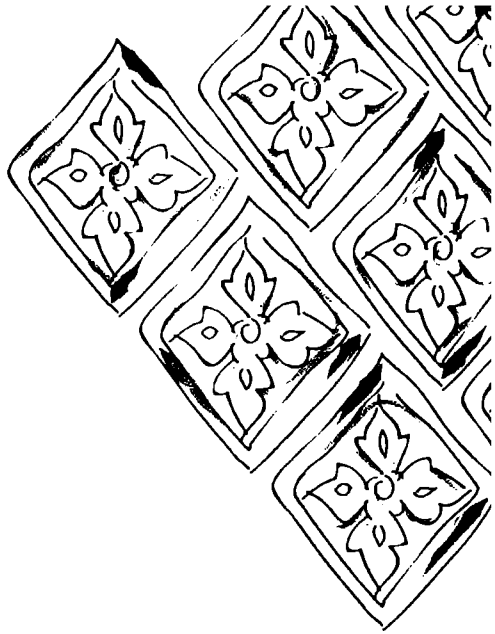
www.pathagar.com

of the twentieth century. Unlike many other Muslims of the time, he achieved great success and did so without undermining his faith and its teachings. On the contrary, according to the Calcutta-based *Progress* of 14 October 1922: 'Throughout his whole life Sir Shamsul Huda worked for the cause of Islam and he had no other aim in this world'. Even if this statement is somewhat exaggerated, there is no doubt that the progress and development of the Muslims of Bengal was very close to his heart. He worked round the clock to improve the existential condition of his fellow Muslims during his long and distinguished career as a jurist, leader and politician.

Nawab Sir Justice Shamsul Huda passed away in his Calcutta residence at the age of 61, but posterity will remember him for his contribution to regenerating the Muslim society of Bengal. As soon as the news of his death was relayed across the city, *The Calcutta Weekly Notes* paid him this glowing tribute:

> Starting life as a vakil of the Calcutta High Court, he took for years a leading part in the affairs of his own community, the city and the University and served with distinction in the Legislative Councils of the Province and the Government of India. As a vakil he long enjoyed a leading practice. For tact, breadth of mind, fair-mindedness and a shrewd yet well balanced judgement which seldom failed to take in the essentials of the most complicated situation at a glance, he had hardly an equal and few indeed on this side of India to surpass him. His genial temperament won him many friends in nearly every walk of life. He filled several high offices but his services to the public will be chiefly remembered in connection with his appointment as a Member of the Executive Council during Lord Carmichael's Governorship of Bengal. In this capacity, his countrymen found in him a staunch and powerful champion of their just claims and [he] was trusted by Hindus and Mahomedans alike, which itself was a significant tribute to his independence of outlook, catholicity and large heartedness... Sir Shamsul Huda has passed away at a time when his countrymen have stood in the greatest need of that happy combination of qualities which make leadership and which he possessed in a pre-eminent degree.[12]

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. M.A. Azam, *Life of Maulvi Abdul Karim.*
2. Muhammad Abdullah, *Nawab Sir Syed Shamsul Huda.*
3. Muhammad Abdullah, *Bangladesher Dash Dishari.*
4. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. *Who's Who in India*, 1911.
9. *Englishman*, 19 March 1917.
10. *Statesman*, 10 October 1922.
11. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
12. *The Calcutta Weekly Notes*, 13 November 1922.

www.pathagar.com

1863–1929

NAWAB SYED NAWAB ALI CHOWDHURY

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan of the Aligarh movement, Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur of East Bengal and Rt. Hon. Justice Syed Ameer Ali of West Bengal dominated Indian Muslim politics and public life during the nineteenth century. Following this, Sir Muhammad Iqbal, Mawlana Muhammad Ali Jauhar, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Sher-i-Bangla A. K. Fazlul Haq and Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad became the leading Muslim scholars, leaders and politicians of the subcontinent during the early part of the twentieth century. During this momentous and epoch-making period in the history of India (and of Bengal in particular) there emerged scores of towering Muslim scholars, reformers and philanthropists (such as Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah, Dr Zakir Husayn, Sir Muhammad

www.pathagar.com

Azizul Haq and Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet) who became champions of modern education and learning, social reformation and political unity as well as cultural renewal in the Muslim community of the subcontinent. Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, an influential Muslim politician, educationalist, philanthropist and wealthy landholder of East Bengal, belonged to this generation of Muslim leaders.

Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury was born into a devout and wealthy Muslim family of landholders (*zamindar*) in the district of Tangail of East Bengal in present-day Bangladesh. His family traced their ancestry back to two great Muslim scholars and personalities of the Abbasid era: Imam Abu Hanifah who lived in Kufah in the eighth century and Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani who flourished in Abbasid Baghdad during the twelfth century. According to Nawab Ali's biographers, Shah Atiqullah moved from Baghdad to Delhi, most probably during the reign of Mughal emperor Jahangir. Although Syed Janab Ali Chowdhury (father of Nawab Ali) claimed to be a descendant of the aforementioned Muslim scholars through Shah Syed Khuda Baksh, there is no conclusive evidence to prove this claim. Just as Syed Janab Ali hailed from a devout Muslim family of Bengal, Sayyida Rabia Khatun Chowdhury (the mother of Nawab Ali) also came from an aristocratic Muslim family. Her father, Khan Bahadur Muhammad Ali Khan Chowdhury, was a wealthy landholder of Natore in present-day District of Rajshahi in Bangladesh. During his early years, Nawab Ali lost his father and mother, and was brought up and educated in his maternal grandfather's home in Natore, under the supervision of his maternal uncle, Khan Bahadur Muhammad Rashid Khan.[1] After the death of his father, young Nawab Ali and his sister Shaira Khatun inherited the entire Dhanbari estate. Khan Bahadur Rashid Khan, their maternal uncle, supervised the estate on their behalf until Nawab Ali was old enough to assume his family responsibilities.

During his early years, Nawab Ali attended Rajshahi Collegiate School for further education. At the same time, he received instruction in Bengali language and literature under the tutelage of Nilkanta Roy, who was a prominent scholar and teacher of Bengali. In addition to this, he learned Arabic, the Qur'an and aspects of Islamic sciences at home under the guidance of local Muslim tutors. After completing his further education at Rajshahi Collegiate School, Nawab Ali proceeded to Calcutta, where he enrolled at the renowned St. Xaviers College for higher education. There he studied and became proficient in English, Persian, Arabic, Urdu and Bengali.[2] After completing his further and higher education, he—for some unknown reason—did not proceed to university. Instead, he married Altafunessa Chowdhury, who was the daughter of Nawab Abdus Subhan Chowdhury, a wealthy landholder and prominent personality of Bogra District. Thereafter, he assumed full responsibility of his Dhanbari family estate, which, at the time, was suffering from a lack of proper upkeep. With the help and guidance of his father-in-law, Nawab Ali swiftly restored the Dhanbari estate to its former condition and pursued his business interests. Even so, he had no desire to permanently settle at Dhanbari, and was keen to return to Calcutta as it was the hub of social, political, cultural and literary activities

www.pathagar.com

in Bengal at the time.

On his return to Calcutta, he initially lived with his father-in-law, but subsequently moved to his own house on Old Ballyjang Road where he lived with his son, Altaful Ali Chowdhury. Nawab Ali spent most of his life in Calcutta, although from time to time he visited his Dhanbari estate in Tangail, where he organised annual religious festivals in memory of the Prophet of Islam and his own father. Although he was not an academic or a scholar, the pitiful condition of the Muslims of Bengal inspired Nawab Ali to become actively involved in social, political, educational and philanthropic activities. In this respect, Nawab Ali had much in common with Shaykh Abdur Rahim of Basirhat and Munshi Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad of Barisal: both of whom were his contemporaries and close associates. As prominent Muslim scholars and journalists, Shaykh Abdur Rahim and Munshi Riyazuddin aimed to improve the condition of the Muslims of Bengal. They pursued their activities with vigor and determination through a combination of social, political, intellectual and journalistic activities and endeavours. Nawab Ali happily supported them, both morally and financially.

Although the weekly *Sudhakar* (1889) was edited by Shaykh Abdur Rahim and Munshi Riyazuddin Ahmad, Nawab Ali was the main financial supporter of this and the monthly *Mihir* (1892). He also financed two other influential Muslim newspapers: the *Islam Pracharak* (1891) and the *Pracharak* (1899). Thereafter, he established the Bengal Muslim Literary Society (*Bangiya Sahitya Bisayini Mussalman Samiti*) in Calcutta to encourage Muslim writers and poets to pursue their literary and journalistic activities. Nawab Ali was elected to the role of president of this society and Shaykh Abdur Rahim became its general secretary. The society's meetings were regularly attended by some of the leading Muslim scholars, writers and poets including Muzzamil Haq of Shantipur, Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan, Abul Husayn, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, Munshi Muhammad Meherullah, Muhammad Daad Ali, Munshi Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad and Munshi Shaykh Muhammad Zamiruddin.[3] To encourage the educated Muslims of Bengal to engage in research and literary activities, Nawab Ali announced an essay competition. He offered a gold medal and cash prize for the best essay on the 'Conditions of Bengali Muslims, Past and Present'. In addition to this, the society published many books and monographs by Muslim writers, which may not have been published otherwise. Many of these publications highlighted aspects of Muslim history, culture, Bengali language and literature.

Nawab Ali's effort to promote literary activities in the Muslim community was noteworthy; however, his contribution to educational development and progress was nothing short of remarkable. Nawab Ali was of the view that a community or nation can only advance through education. This, he felt, could only be realised through the establishment of first-class, modern educational centres and institutions. In his own words:

> The present is the most critical period for the Mussalmans in Bengal. We are faced with a sociological problem in which success depends upon certain moral and ethical laws. A vast process of

www.pathagar.com

evolution has been visibly affecting the Hindus across us. The horizon of their intellectual outlook is being widened. A new stage of intellectual revolution is just begun. Arts and sciences are being pursued with the sole aim of extending the bounds of knowledge. Hinduism and Aryan culture in India are studied and interpreted in accordance with the best tenets of modern science and philosophy. Hindus have been feeling the spur of forward spirit which makes small nations great and great nations greater. Amidst these surroundings, we the Muhammadans are faced with a silent process of intercommunal rivalries which mark the rise or fall of societies, and prepare them to live or die. The time has come for definite and decisive action on our part if we wish to exist at all as a living community. We may cry in vain for years for the recognition of our importance in this country. But I want you to realize that by legislation, resolutions and orders, societies have never risen and can never rise to prominence. Legislation and orders may serve as temporary props but ultimately the problem is that of the survival of the fittest. It is education and education alone that prepares the social units for this struggle, and unless we Muhammadans are determined upon a definite and deliberate plan of action, we are bound to be swamped by the tide of superior forces. Even the spirit of religion for which a Muhammadan lives and dies will slowly be sapped and disintegrated and the spirit will die away leaving only a semblance as it remains. Live or die or be absorbed by another is the eternal law of nature and man.[4]

Spurred on by his burning desire to see the Muslims of Bengal make real progress in education and learning, in March 1913 Nawab Ali proposed that the sum of 7500,000 rupees be incorporated into the government's annual educational budget of 1913–1914 for provision of better educational facilitaties for Muslim boys at colleges, schools and *madrasahs*, and to establish new educational institutions in those towns and cities with large Muslim population. To achieve the latter, he suggested that a grant of 13,2000 rupees be set aside. Without such grants and sustained financial backing, argued Nawab Ali, it would not be possible to tackle the educational decline in the Muslim community. According to him:

> My resolution merely wants new educational institutions in centres of Muhammadan population. It wants grants of money to bring about reforms in the existing Madrasas and Maktabs and to start new ones wherever there seems to be any demand. It demands facilities in the shape of hostels, stipends, new colleges, schools, remission of fees and in such other ways as the Government may think it proper and necessary. In asking for this I need not make any apology. It is so little to give and so much to receive that I hope the Government will be pleased to accept it.[5]

Nawab Ali was able to argue his case for financial support for education very forcefully, thanks to his high standing in the Muslim community and his support for the government. Indeed, during his long and distinguished public life, he served in his capacity as president of the Central National Muhammaddan Association, which was founded by Justice Syed Ameer Ali in 1877. He was also a member of the Board of Governors of Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, which was founded by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan in 1877. He was a member of the

www.pathagar.com

Calcutta University Senate, president of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and member of the Governing Board of the Presidency College in Calcutta. Likewise, he was an honorary secretary of the Provincial Muslim League of Eastern Bengal and Assam and vice-president of the All-India Muslim League. In addition to this, Nawab Ali was one of the most influential politicians in Bengal, having successively served as a member of the Eastern Bengal and Assam Legislative Council (from 1906 to 1911), the Bengal Legislative Council (from 1912 to 1916) and the Imperial Legislative Council of India (from 1916 to 1920).

Between 1906 and 1929 Nawab Ali worked tirelessly to increase the representation of Muslims in the Provincial and Central Legislative Councils of Bengal. He also represented the Muslims of East Bengal in the Simla Deputation in 1906 and was an important contributor to the All-India Muhammadan Educational Conference as well as being a founding member of All-India Muslim League. He was opposed to the Lucknow Pact, as he felt it would not protect the interests of the Muslims of Bengal in the long-term. Despite being directly involved in the aforementioned organisations and governmental bodies in order to defend the interests of the Muslims, Nawab Ali nonetheless refrained from taking part in the Non-Co-operation and Khilafat movements, which were spearheaded by the leading Indian Muslims of the time; unlike them, he was not interested in taking part in direct political protests, nor did he support any form of political agitation.

Even so, he continued to work for the educational progress of the Muslims of Bengal. Toward this end, in 1906 he donated 35,000 taka for the establishment of a residential hall for the Muslim students of Dhaka College. In 1922 he gave away another 16,000 taka to create a scholarship fund for the students of Dhaka University's Islamic Studies department, and he helped establish numerous hostels for the Muslim students of Dhaka, Mymensingh and Calcutta Colleges.[6]

Perhaps his most important contribution was the tireless campaign he led for the establishment of Dhaka University. Prior to the formation of this institution, Calcutta University dominated the educational landscape of Bengal. At the time, the Muslims of Bengal felt that the latter was dominated by the upper-class Hindus and, therefore, when Viceroy Lord Hardinge visited Dhaka in 1912, a group of leading Muslims including Nawab Sir Salimullah Khan Bahadur, Maulvi A. K. Fazlul Haq and Nawab Ali himself met him on 31 January to make their case for the establishment of Dhaka University in order to meet the growing educational needs of the Muslims of East Bengal. According to the historian Muhammad Abdur Rahim, the Muslim leaders informed the viceroy that there was an urgent need to take steps to meet the educational requirements of the Muslim community. In return for the annulment of the partition and Calcutta University's bias towards the Muslims, they demanded that a university be established in Dhaka.

As expected, the Hindu leaders vehemently opposed such a plan: so much so that on 16 February 1912 a delegation of Hindu leaders, led by Dr Rash Behary Ghose, met the viceroy to express their concerns and opposition against the establishment of a separate

www.pathagar.com

university in Dhaka, on the basis that it would lead to 'an internal partition of Bengal'.[7] Furthermore, they argued that the Muslims of East Bengal were essentially cultivators and therefore they would not benefit from such a large and expensive educational project. They feared that Calcutta University would lose out as a result. Thankfully the viceroy ignored their protest and instead agreed to implement the suggestion put forward by the Muslim leaders. The University of Dhaka formally opened its doors on 1 July 1921.

Throughout this period, Nawab Ali and other prominent Muslim leaders of Bengal had worked tirelessly to realise this ambitious but important project, and the university is today regarded as one of Bangladesh's foremost institutions of higher education and learning. Recalling Nawab Ali's pivotal role in the formation of Dhaka University, on 11 April 1920 Khan Bahadur Khwajah Muhammad Azam publicly stated that:

> The University came into being at the utmost exertion of the Hon'able Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, who had taken up this cause after the death of Sir Salimullah. Had he not agitated on the question ceaselessly, probably this Dacca University would not have come into being. The promise of the Viceroy would have remained a promise for all time to come. On behalf of the people of Dacca, I convey my best respect and hearty congratulation to the Hon'able Nawab for securing this happy result in this good worth.[8]

Despite being busy with social, political, educational and philantrophic activities, Nawab Ali took good care of his family. After the unexpected death of his first wife (who bore him a son and daughter) he married Sayyida Akhtar Khatun Chowdhury, who hailed from a prominent Muslim family of Junglebari, near Kishoreganj. However, she suffered from deteriorating health, and Nawab Ali married again. Sakina Khatun, his third wife, hailed from the family of Nawab Abdus Subhan Chowdhury of Bogra who bore him a son and daughter: Hasan Ali Chowdhury and Umm Fatimah Humera Khatun. On a personal level, Nawab Ali was a devout Muslim who led a scrupulously honest and simple lifestyle, shunning luxuries and ostentatious living although he was one of the wealthiest and influential Muslims of his generation. In the words of Chuchindranath Mukherjee, one of his political rivals:

> He [Nawab Ali] made his name as a sagacious member of the territorial aristocracy of Bengal. He worked his way up by virtue of his shrewdness and genial character. A Mohammadan of the old world type—affable and the pink of courtesy—the Nawab had an intense faith in the Bengali language and literature.[9]

Nawab Ali's love of Bengali language and literature was widely known; less widely known is that he was equally fond of Urdu. In Nawab Ali's own words:

> If Urdu is adopted as a compulsory subject of study alternative to Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian, the Muhammadans will very largely flock to secondary schools and Urdu will in the near future occupy a very important place among the other highly developed languages of the world. The Bengali language alone cannot help the Muhammadans in uplifting them from their present condition.[10]

www.pathagar.com

In other words, in spite of being an ardent supporter of Bengali language, Nawab Ali was of the opinion that only Urdu was capable of serving as the intellectual and cultural language of the Muslims of Bengal, because he considered Bengali, with its Sanskrit roots, to be the language of Hindu culture and mythology. Thus, he urged the Muslims of Bengal to promote Bengali as their vernacular and to learn Urdu to preserve their Islamic culture and heritage:

> Many of the religious books written in Arabic have been translated into that language and those who cannot afford to teach their children Arabic, teach them Urdu by which to give them an insight to the principles of their religion.[11]

Nawab Ali was thus keen to promote both Bengali and Urdu in the Muslim community, as he considered the former to be the language of the people, and the latter to be an inseparable part of their religious and cultural heritage. The preservation and promotion of Urdu was, therefore, as important to him as the promotion and popularisation of Bengali.

Nawab Ali was not an Islamic scholar (nor did he pretend to be one), however, he was a profoundly religious man who possessed a sound knowledge and understanding of Islam. In his presidential address to the Annual Bengal Presidency Muslim Educational Conference held in April 1914, he spelled out his approach to Islam in these words:

> Islam embodies within its sacred bosom all the elements of culture and progress. It stands for all that represents light and culture and opens up a bright vista leading up to the world beyond. It is the living force that uplifts the soul, elevates human nature and moves the world forward. If a Mussalman lags behind, it is because of the weakness in his faith which takes away that freshness that gives colour to life.[12]

As a devout Muslim, Nawab Ali was in favour of combining modern, secular education with a thorough grounding in Islamic moral, ethical and spiritual teachings. He felt that a balanced education would save the Muslims of Bengal from spiritual alienation, moral nihilism and cultural schizophrenia on the one hand, and religious bigotry, scriptural literalism and cultural degeneration on the other. In his own words:

> Purely secular institutions are not suitable for Muhammadans while traditional ones are in urgent need of a thorough reform. The secular education is divorced from religious instruction and moral teachings... Eastern life and society [is] based on religion. We have no morality apart from religion, and to us, Mussalmans life from cradle to grave is an unbroken rule of religion. With the inrush of western thoughts, everything was disturbed to an abnormal degree. The people became ultra-rationalistic in their tendencies, and as a consequence the religion divested of its earnestness, was reduced to a mere form.[13]

Nawab Ali was aware of the intense religiosity of the people of the subcontinent, and on one occasion he warned:

> Should India subordinate the spiritual ideal to the materialistic ideal? The religious ideals of the Indian communities are dearer to their members than their political ideals can ever be. For their religious ideals they will cheerfully sacrifice life and property, but if you change their ideal, you at once cut off the source of all their activities.[14]

www.pathagar.com

Nawab Ali championed his political, educational and religious views without fear or favour. He was an outstanding orator, and also a notable writer, having published numerous essays and articles in English and Bengali. Some of his publications include *Vernacular Education in Bengal* (1900), *Eid al-Adha* (1900) and *Mawlud Sharif* (1903). For his wide-ranging contribution and achievements, the British government made him 'Khan Bahadur' in 1906. Five years later, the title of 'Nawab' was conferred on him. In 1918, he was appointed as a Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire (CIE). True to his faith and values, only nine days before his death, Nawab Ali's deed of endowment (*waqfnama*) was registered with the government. In this, he set aside portion of his wealth for the upkeep of his family members, while the remainder was ring-fenced for charitable activities. Following in his footsteps, some of his descendants played an active part in politics including Muhammad Ali of Bogra who later became the third prime minister of Pakistan. Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury died at Eden Castle in Darjeeling at the age of 66 and was laid to rest at his family's Dhanbari estate in Tangail.

In recognition of his contribution to the Muslim community, it is hoped that the Muslims of Bangladesh will repay their debt to this great son of Bengal by naming one of the Halls of Dhaka University after him, as this is a university that he helped to establish. To his credit, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, a well-known linguist and scholar of Bengali literature, dedicated *The History and Development of Bengali Language* (*Bangla Bhashar Itibritta*) to Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury.

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. Muhammad Abdullah, *Nawab Ali Chowdhury: Jiban-o-Karma.*
2. Ibid.
3. Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press 1901–1930.*
4. Muhammad Abdullah, *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Kokekjon Muslim Dishari.*
5. Ibid.
6. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
7. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *The History of the University of Dacca.*
8. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
9. Ibid.
10. M. Abdullah, op cit.
11. Ibid.
12. M. Abdullah, op. cit
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.

www.pathagar.com

1866–1921



MAWLANA ABDUL AWWAL JAUNPURI

THE HISTORY OF ISLAM in Bengal is often divided into three major periods: the early, medieval and modern periods. During the early period (from the seventh to the twelfth centuries) Islam was introduced into Bengal by the Arab and Persian traders who came to the coastal regions of India in order to pursue commerce. They contributed to the establishment of a series of small—but thriving—indigenous Muslim communities across the coastal regions of India including Bengal. During this early phase the foundation of a new, distinct Muslim culture and spirituality was laid in Bengal. Thereafter, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, political Islam entered Bengal for the first time under the leadership of Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji and, as

www.pathagar.com

a result, a large part of Bengal came under Muslim rule. As soon as the political borders of Bengal were opened up by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji, a large number of Muslim preachers and Sufis moved into different parts of Bengal to disseminate the message of Islam across that region.

The establishment of an indigenous Muslim community during the early phase, along with the emergence of political Islam during the medieval period and the arrival of the Muslim peachers and Sufis during the subsequent centuries, paved the way for the rapid Islamisation of northeastern India, especially East Bengal. However, it was during the latter periods that the local Muslims played a pivotal role in development of a distinctive, but equally enduring, Islamic identity in Bengal, which has continued to thrive to this day. Many influential and gifted Muslim leaders, scholars, writers and Sufis of Bengal played an important role in that process. Mawlana Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri was one such scholar, writer and Sufi sage. His contribution and achievements deserve more recognition than they have received to date.

Abdul Awwal (otherwise known as *Bahr al-Ulum* or 'Sea of Knowledge'), was born into a devout Muslim family of Islamic scholars and preachers in the island of Sandwip off the coast of Chittagong District in present-day Bangladesh.[1] He was brought up and educated during a challenging and volatile period in the history of Bengal. The establishment of British rule in India and Bengal in particular paved the way for the economic decline and cultural stagnation in the Muslim community, thanks to the British elite's fear of (or, in some cases, indifference towards) the diverse needs and requirements of the Muslims of Bengal. This, coupled with the absence of an effective leadership, political unity and social solidarity among the Muslims of Bengal, contributed to their decline and backwardness.

Faced with such formidable challenges and difficulties, the religious scholars initiated Islamic reform movements. Some of the leading Islamic reform initiatives of the time included the Fara'idi, Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyyah, Ahl-i-Hadith and Ta'aiyuni movements, which were associated with prominent Muslim leaders like Haji Shari'atullah, Dudu Mian, Titu Mir, Wilayat Ali, Inayat Ali and Karamat Ali Jaunpuri. The founders of these movements responded to the challenges they faced in their own ways. Some, like the followers of the Fara'idi, Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyyah and the Ahl-i-Hadith movements, were forced to take up arms to defend themselves against the attacks of their opponents; while others, including the adherents of the Ta'aiyuni movement, deliberately focused their attention to reviving the authentic Islamic teachings, practices and spirituality in the Muslim community of Bengal,[2] and thus they never engaged in any form of political protestation or agitation against their opponents.

Abdul Awwal was the sixth and youngest son of Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri. He received his early education at home under the supervision of his father Karamat Ali, who ensured that Abdul Awwal had learnt to recite the Qur'an before he was six. As a prominent Islamic scholar, preacher and founder of the Ta'ayuni movement, Abdul Awwal's father originally hailed from Jaunpur in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. He moved to

www.pathagar.com

Bengal when he was only 20 in order to disseminate the message of Islam there. According to Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan (a leading historian of Islamic revivalist movements in Bengal), Karamat Ali travelled extensively and found the customs of the Muslims of Bengal to be far removed from the teachings of Islam. Accordingly, he dedicated the rest of his life to the propagation of true Islam to the Muslims of Bengal. Karamat Ali, like the other Muslim scholars of the time, repudiated superstitious beliefs and practices. Unsurprisingly, he condemned Sufi music and dance, veneration of tombs and other similar practices because he considered them to be blameworthy activities that were not sanctioned by Islamic law.[3] As he travelled from one place to another, he urged the masses to give up all forms of blameworthy innovative practices. He encouraged them to learn the basic principles and practices of their faith, and he focused especially on the five pillars of Islam.

Karamat Ali married more than once and fathered no less than 15 children: six sons and nine daughters. He and his wife, Batul Bibi (the mother of Abdul Awwal) died in 1872 when their son was only eight. Young Abdul Awwal was therefore brought up and educated by Mawlana Salah al-Din Ahmad, a nephew of Karamat Ali, who took the youngster back to their native Jaunpur. Abdul Awwal committed the entire Qur'an to memory before his sixteenth birthday. This achievement impressed the locals and, in the same year, he was asked to lead the *tarawih* prayers (these are special prayers performed in the evenings during the month of Ramadan wherein the whole Qur'an is recited). He led the *tarawih* prayers at the Jaunpur Mosque and to everyone's surprise he completed the whole Qur'an within the first 10 days of Ramadan: the normal practice was to complete it over the entire month. By doing this he proved that he had not only committed the whole Qur'an to memory properly but he had also mastered the art of reciting the Arabic Qur'an with great skill and ease. Thereafter, he was invited to recite the entire Qur'an during the annual *tarawih* prayers in other prominent mosques in Jaunpur, Lucknow, Noakhali and Dhaka (among other places). His knowledge of the Qur'an impressed everyone, and as a result Maulvi Muhammad Hamid of Noakhali, who was an eminent scholar of the Qur'an, agreed to teach Abdul Awwal aspects of Arabic grammar, syntax and the sciences of the Qur'an (*ulum al-Qur'an*).

After studying under the tutelage of Maulvi Hamid for a period, in 1882 he moved to Lucknow, where he enrolled at the Firingimahal Madrasah. There he studied Arabic, Persian, Urdu and the traditional Islamic sciences under the guidance of many prominent scholars (including Mawlana Hafiz Abul Hasanat Muhammad Abdul Hayy Lucknawi, Mawlana Hafiz Muhammad Naim Lucknawi, Mawlana Hafiz Hakim Nizamuddin Lucknawi, Mawlana Muhammad Muhsin, Maulvi Muhammad Uthman Chithanboari and Mulla Shah Zaman Vilayathi).[4] Abdul Awwal studied at this institution for about five years, and during this period he acquired a sound knowledge and understanding of traditional Islamic sciences, which enabled him to pursue advanced training in these subjects. After returning home from Lucknow, Abdul Awwal met Mawlana Lutfur Rahman Bardhamani (an eminent scholar of

www.pathagar.com

Arabic language and literature), who pursuaded him to move to Calcutta in order to pursue advance training in Arabic, and offered his personal supervision. Aiming to pursue higher education, Abdul Awwal moved to Calcutta in 1887, but, due to circumstances beyond his control, Mawlana Bardhamani was not able to teach him advanced Arabic. Disappointed but undeterred, Abdul Awwal then moved to Mymensingh where he stayed with his sister for a period. On the suggestion of his sister, Abdul Awwal proceeded to Makkah to pursue higher Islamic education in the sacred city of Islam. Upon his arrival there, Abdul Awwal experienced considerable financial hardship, until Qari Hafizuddin (who was a disciple of Mawlana Karamat Ali) provided him with financial support.

In due course, Abdul Awwal enrolled at Madrasah-i-Saulatia in Makkah, which was founded by Mawlana Rahmatullah al-Hindi, who was an eminent Indian Islamic scholar. There he pursued advanced training in Arabic and traditional Islamic sciences under the guidance of prominent scholars like Mawlana Abdullah al-Makki, Mawlana Muhammad Nur and Mawlana Rahmatullah al-Hindi.[5] During this period Abdul Awwal mastered the science of Islamic jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*), Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) and Prophetic traditions (*hadith*) under the tutelage of Mawlana Abdul Haq Allahabadi al-Muhaddith, who was a widely-recognised Indian scholar of *hadith* literature who lived in Makkah at the time. Most interestingly, Mawlana Abdul Haq himself was a student and disciple of Mawlana Karamat Ali, the father of Abdul Awwal. He took good care of the young scholar from Bengal and personally taught him more than 40 different anthologies of Prophetic traditions. Once Mawlana Abdul Haq was satisfied that Abdul Awwal had successfully mastered *hadith* literature, he granted him certification (*ijazah*) to teach the traditional Islamic sciences. During Abdul Awwal's stay in Makkah (between 1887 and 1889) he performed the sacred pilgrimage (*hajj*) twice and visited Madinah several times in order to pay homage to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him).

In addition to this, during his time in Makkah, Abdul Awwal authored two important books: *al-Nafhat al-Anbariyah fi Isbatil Qiyami fi Mawludi Khayr al-Bariyyah* and *al-Nawadir al-Munifah fi Manaqib al-Imam Abu Hanifah*. The former was written in Arabic, and in it Abdul Awwal developed a compelling argument in favour of observing the *mawlud* (the celebration of the birth, life and works of the Prophet of Islam). He also stated that standing up (*qiyam*) during the *mawlud* was, in his opinion, highly recommended (*mustahhab*). Soon after its publication, this book was widely praised by the renowned Islamic scholars of Makkah and Madinah, and their commendations were printed at the end of the book in a section that consisted of 107 pages. By contrast, Abdul Awwal's *al-Nawadir* was a short biographical account of Imam Abu Hanifah. It was widely praised by the Hanafi scholars of Makkah and Madinah for its clear exposition of the life, work and achievements of Imam Abu Hanifah, who was the founder of the Hanafi School of Islamic jurisprudence.

After completing his advanced education in Makkah, Abdul Awwal intended to visit other Middle Eastern countries (including Egypt

www.pathagar.com

and Syria) but he was unable to do so due to the unexpected news of the death of Mawlana Muslihuddin, the son of his eldest sister. After the death of Mawlana Karamat Ali, young Abdul Awwal was cared for and supported by his eldest sister and, as a result, he developed close affinity and friendship with her son, Mawlana Muslihuddin of Pabna. The untimely death of the latter in 1889 shocked and surprised Abdul Awwal, who promptly returned home. He then proceeded to Jaunpur where he began to lead the weekly Friday congregational prayer (*salat al-jumu'ah*) at the local mosque and, in due course, he became well known for his mastery of traditional Islamic sciences. As an Islamic scholar and preacher, Abdul Awwal was a strict adherent of traditional Islam: that is to say, he was a follower of Imam Abu Hanifah in jurisprudence and that of Muhyi al-Din Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Baha al-Din Naqshband and Khwajah Mu'in al-Din Chishti in Islamic spirituality.

In that sense, Abdul Awwal followed in the footsteps of his father, who was an outstanding Islamic scholar and reformer. His religious teachings and reformist efforts contributed to the emergence of a fresh and unified approach to Islamic thought and culture in Bengal during the nineteenth century. Inspired by the teachings of his eminent father, in 1890, Abdul Awwal left Jaunpur and moved to Dhaka to propagate Islam and contribute to the welfare of the Muslims of East Bengal. On his arrival in Dhaka, he received a warm welcome from the followers and disciples of his father. Mawlana Karamat Ali was an influential Islamic scholar and Sufi sage, and had a large following in Dhaka. This enabled Abdul Awwal to quickly establish himself there and attracted the attention of some of the city's leading Muslim scholars, leaders and religious figures. He was invited to deliver lectures at the city's Chawkbazar Shahi Mosque. Thanks to his excellent oratory skills and profound knowledge of traditional Islamic sciences, he captured the imagination of the locals. Subsequently, he received invitation from Dhaka's other leading mosques and *madrasahs* to deliver lectures on Islam. Once his name and fame began to spread beyond the borders of Dhaka, Abdul Awwal returned to Jaunpur where he married a daughter of Mawlana Hafiz Ahsan, who had taught him during his early years.[6] After his marriage, he built a house for his family, although financial difficulties forced him to return to Dhaka in search of employment. Although he was only 25 at the time, he was readily able to secure employment there on account of his knowledge and understanding of Islamic sciences. This, in turn, enabled him to save enough money to complete his house back in Jaunpur.

After nearly six years of teaching and disseminating Islam in Dhaka, Abdul Awwal again returned to Jaunpur upon receiving the news of the birth of his first son, Abdul Akhir. Unfortunately, his son died soon after birth. Distraught and devastated by his loss, Abdul Awwal returned to Dhaka via Calcutta. A year later, his second son, Muhammad Hammad Abdul Zahir was born. According to his biographers, on this occasion Abdul Awwal travelled across East Bengal (including Mymensingh, Faridpur, Chandpur and Lakhsham). According to Mawlana Abul Bashar (the author of *Sirat-i-Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri*) during his visit to Faridpur, Abdul Awwal was warmly

www.pathagar.com

received by Naiya Mian, the son and successor of Dudu Mian (the son of Haji Shari'atullah, who was the renowned founder of the Fara'idi movement in Bengal). On this occasion, Naiya Mian also pledged his spiritual allegiance (*ba'yah*) to Abdul Awwal.[7] This is interesting, because a few decades earlier, Mawlana Karamat Ali had comprehensively repudiated Haji Shari'atullah's view that India was a domain of war (*dar al-harb*): on the basis that since Muslims were able to perform their religious duties in India without any governmental hindrance or restriction, it was a domain of security (*dar al-aman*) rather than *dar al-harb*. Unlike Haji Shari'atullah, Mawlana Karamat Ali argued that it was obligatory for the Muslims of India to observe the Friday congregational prayer and the annual Eid prayers. Although the two great reformers had met only once (in 1836), their successors chose to put these legal and theological differences aside and work together for the benefit of the Muslims of Bengal. The credit for pursuing such a pragmatic and inclusive approach to Islamic thought, unity and solidarity must go to Abdul Awwal, whose efforts to unify the Muslim community were applauded by eminent Muslim leaders of the time, including Nawab Sir Ahsanullah of Dhaka.

During the next two decades of his career, Abdul Awwal continued to travel across Muslim Bengal. He urged the masses to revive the authentic message of Islam as preserved in the Holy Qur'an and the Prophetic norms, by learning and implementing them in their daily lives. In so doing he tried to popularise authentic Islamic principles and practices in the Muslim community. He initiated his Islamic reformist mission at a time when the majority of Bengal's Muslims had already fallen under the influence of un-Islamic ideas, thoughts and practices. Many of these ideas and practices had more in common with Hinduism than they did with Islamic principles and practices. Abdul Awwal was determined to change this state of affairs. His Islamic missionary activities aside, Abdul Awwal found time to author around 120 books and pamphets on all aspects of Islam.[8] On a personal level, he was blessed with seven sons and five daughters. Of his children, Mawlana Abdul Batin later became an outstanding Islamic scholar and writer. He wrote two important biographies: *Sirat-i-Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri* (1948) and *Sirat-i-Mawlana Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri* (1950). The former was a biography of Mawlana Karamat Ali, his grandfather, and the latter was a biographical account of his father, Mawlana Abdul Awwal. He eventually died in Mirpur, Dhaka, in 1973 at the age of 72.

Like his father, Abdul Awwal was an insatiable seeker and disseminator of Islamic knowledge and wisdom. He began to write on aspects of traditional Islamic sciences and practices during his student days. He continued to research and write on all aspects of Islamic thought and history to the very end of his life. As one of Bengal's great Islamic scholars and experts on *hadith* literature, he was a firm believer in the Prophetic tradition that one must 'seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave'. Although a large number of his books and pamphlets were published, many more remained unpublished, while others are no longer extant. Muhammad Abdullah, Abdul Awwal's biographer and a former professor of Persian and Urdu at Dhaka University,

www.pathagar.com

carried out painstaking research on the life and contributions of Abdul Awwal, and in so doing he was able to identify around 63 books and manuscripts authored by him. Thankfully, Muhammad Abdullah read most of his extant works and was able to provide a detailed summary of these books and pamphlets in his biography titled *Mawlana Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri*.[9] This book was published by the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh in 1995.

Despite being fluent in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Bengali, Abdul Awwal chose to write most of his books in Arabic and Urdu. He authored around 68 books and treatises in Arabic alone. He therefore deserves to be recognised as one of the most prolific writers of Arabic books in the history of Bengal: if not the whole of the subcontinent. This was a remarkable achievement, considering the fact that his mother tongue was Bengali. In addition to religious topics and themes, he wrote on aspects of Islamic history, biography, Sufism, poetry and linguistics. His *al-Nafhat al-Anbariyah fi Isbatil Qiyami fi Mawludi Khayr al-Bariyyah* and *al-Nawadir al-Munifah fi Manaqib al-Imam Abu Hanifah* aside, his other early literary contribution included *Khayr al-Zabur fi Istihbab Ziyarat al-Qubur*. Published in 1893, in this book Abdul Awwal clarified the Islamic position on visiting the graves.

In *Hidayatun Nisaun* (1895) he highlighted the rights and duties of Muslim women according to the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions. By contrast, in his *al-Durrat al-Ghaliyah fi Manaqib Mu'awiyah*, he analysed the life and works of Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, who was a notable companion of the Prophet and founder of the Umayyad dynasty, and in so doing he refuted all the charges levelled against Mu'awiyah by his critics. This book was published in 1898. Likewise, in his *al-Bayan al-Munsajim fi Kashf al-Musta'jim*, he provided brief biographical accounts of 184 Prophets, as well as many Companions of the Prophet (*Ashab-i-Rasul*) and their Followers (*tabi'un*), concluding with some leading early Muslim scholars. This book was published in 1920. On the other hand, his *ad-Durrun Nadid fi Garir al-Qasid* was a collection of his Arabic poetry, songs, sermons and letters. This book was published in 1904 and a copy of this work has been preserved at the University of Dhaka.

Towards the end of his life, after a lifetime devoted to education, research, writing and Islamic work, Abdul Awwal returned to his ancestral home in Jaunpur. After staying there for a short period, he returned to Faridpur via Calcutta. A few months later, ill health forced him to return to Calcutta for medical treatment and there he passed away at the relatively young age of 55. He was laid to rest in the garden of Abdur Rahman Khan of Dhaka, who was one of his prominent disciples. Referring to Mawlana Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri, Nawab A. F. M. Abdur Rahman, a prominent Muslim figure, wrote:

> Maulana Hafiz Abdul Awal is a son of the well-known preacher the late Maulana Karamat Ali of Jaunpur who was distinguished of Eastern Bengal. Maulana Abdul Awal is also greatly respected like his father and he is exercising his great influence for the good of the Muhamedan community. I have had the pleasure of knowing intimately both the father and the son and I can testify to the loyalty and good work the Maulana is doing among Muhamedans. He deserves every

www.pathagar.com





respect and encouragement wherever he travels.[10]

Notes

1. Muhammad Abdullah, *Bangladesher Kethinama Arabibid.*
2. Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, *Islamic Revivalism of the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries.*
3. Muhammad Abdullah, *Rajnitite Bangiya Ulamar Bhumika.*
4. Muhammad Abdullah, *Mawlana Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri.*
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Abul Bashar, *Sirat-i-Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri.*
8. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.

www.pathagar.com

1867–1952

SIR ABDUR RAHIM

India is as much the home and the only home of us, the Indian Musalmans, as of our Hindu and other fellow countrymen. India's political advancement and prosperity is as much, therefore, our concern and as near to our hearts, as to those of her other citizens. It is our duty and privilege equally with the rest of India's population to serve India. The constitution of the country should be so designed as to help the political and economic advancement of all India's citizens and remove once for all those causes of communal selfishness, distrust and jealousies which are such a disquieting feature of the present situation, by calling forth whole-hearted services of the representatives of all communities in the great national task.[1]

www.pathagar.com

THESE WORDS OF Sir Abdur Rahim beautifully sum up his approach to life and political philosophy. A man of his word, he became renowned for his clear thinking, intellectual abilities and political leadership. He was a contemporary of eminent Muslim leaders of Bengal, such as Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet, Munshi Muhammad Meherullah, Nawab Sir Syed Shamsul Huda, Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan and Nawab Sir Salimullah Khan Bahadur. Sir Abdur Rahim was an eminent jurist, an outstanding scholar and an influential Muslim leader who wanted to preserve and promote the interests of the Muslims of the subcontinent in general and that of Bengal in particular. He tried to achieve this without in any way seeking to undermine the rights and interests of the Hindus. In that sense, he was a leading Muslim leader and politician of his generation although his life, work and achievements are not very widely known today.

Allama Sir Justice Abdur Rahim was born into a wealthy and prominent Muslim family of Medinipur District in present-day Indian state of West Bengal. His father, Maulvi Abdur Rab, was a landholder (*zamindar*) who had inherited a considerable amount of wealth and estate from his father, who had worked for the British government as a deputy collector and in so doing had become a wealthy and prominent local Muslim leader.[2] Abdur Rab received a combination of traditional Islamic and modern English education and, over time, he became a notable Muslim leader and educationalist of his time. Aiming to provide a similar, balanced education to young Abdur Rahim, his father ensured he received a thorough training in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and aspects of Islamic theology and jurisprudence at home during his early years. After successfully completing his elementary education, Abdur Rahim enrolled at Medinipur Government High School where he prepared for his matriculation and successfully completed his exams in 1881 at the age of 14. Impressed by his dedication, hard work and academic abilities, his family encouraged him to join the renowned Presidency College in Calcutta for further education. At the Presidency College, he met Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet, who was also a student there. In due course, Abdur Rahim successfully passed his First of Arts (FA) exam in 1883. Thereafter, both Abdur Rahim and Abdul Karim pursued their undergraduate studies in English language and literature at the same college. Both were very able and gifted students, and passed their Bachelor of Arts (BA) examinations in 1885. In the same year, two of Abdur Rahim's other prominent contemporaries (Sir Zahid Suhrawardi, who later became an eminent judge and jurist, and Maulvi Zahurul Haq) graduated from Dhaka College in Persian and English, respectively.

A bright and ambitious student, Abdur Rahim then enrolled for the Master of Arts (MA) degree in English at the Presidency College and successfully passed his final exam, thus obtaining a first-class degree. Abdur Rahim wanted to pursue higher education in law and become a lawyer, and he planned to go to England for his advanced education. As luck would have it, at the time Her Highness Sultan Jahan Begum, the Nawab of Bhopal, was on a visit to Calcutta, and she agreed to offer a scholarship to a bright Indian Muslim student to go

www.pathagar.com

to England to pursue postgraduate studies. As soon as Abdur Rahim heard about this scholarship, he submitted an application and, thanks to his excellent academic achievements, he was offered a scholarship to study law in England.

On his arrival in London, Abdur Rahim began his studies and specialised in Islamic jurisprudence and criminal law. During this period he read extensively and became thoroughly familiar with original Arabic and Persian works on Islamic law and jurisprudence, to the extent that he later became a renowned scholar and authority on Islamic jurisprudence. His dedication and hard work eventually paid off when in 1890 he was awarded the degree of Bar-at-Law from the Middle Temple, Inns of Court in London. He qualified as a barrister at the age of 23 and returned to Calcutta where he began to practise law at the Calcutta High Court. Like Rt. Hon. Justice Syed Ameer Ali, Sir Syed Shamsul Huda and Barrister Abdur Rasul, he began his legal career at the Calcutta High Court and subsequently established a lucrative legal practice, which earned him fame in and around Calcutta.

The government was impressed with his legal skills and abilities, and in 1894 appointed him as a deputy legal remembrancer. He served in this capacity for more than a year before returning to his private legal practice, specialising in criminal law. In due course he established his reputation as a lawyer, and came to be known for his expertise in criminal law. This prompted the government to appoint him as a Presidency Magistrate in Calcutta. After three years of service, he returned to his legal practice, becoming renowned as an appeal lawyer. His expertise and experience as a criminal lawyer clearly impressed the authorities of Calcutta University because, in 1907, he was appointed a Tagore Lecturer in Muslim Law.[3] As he was fluent in Arabic and Persian, and a keen student of Islamic jurisprudence since his student days, in his spare time, Abdur Rahim continued his research in these subjects, and in so doing he became thoroughly familiar with classical Islamic thought and jurisprudence. Impressed with his deep knowledge and understanding of classical Islamic jurisprudence and modern legal thought, the officials of Calcutta University invited Abdur Rahim to deliver a series of lectures on the nature and philosophy of classical Islamic jurisprudence. These lectures were widely praised by his peers and in 1911 they were published in one volume by the Madras-based S. P. C. Press under the title of *The Principles of Muhammadan Jurisprudence.*

Although Abdur Rahim was not trained at a traditional *madrasah,* unlike Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet and Nawab Sir Syed Shamsul Huda (both of whom had studied at Calcutta and Hughly Madrasahs) he was fluent in Arabic, Persian and Urdu. Unsurprisingly, he became thoroughly familiar with traditional Islamic thought and scholarship. A quick browse through his *Principles of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* proves that Abdur Rahim was an erudite scholar of classical Islamic law and jurisprudence. Consisting of 398 pages, in this book he provided a theoretical and philosophical exposition of the fundamental principles of Islamic law and jurisprudence. He combined this with his sound knowledge and understanding of modern European law and jurisprudence. The following quotation from his *Principles of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* shows that

www.pathagar.com

he was keen to provide a modern—but also authentic—interpretation of classical Islamic jurisprudence, for the benefit of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars and general readers alike:

> According to the accepted Hanafi view... a man's action is partly within his power and partly the result of God's interference. It is so far within his power that he is left free to choose between the doing and not doing an act. This power to choose is called ('ikhtiyar') that is, will or volition. Having chosen one of the two alternatives, namely, doing the act, he is said to intend it (qasd iradat). If this intention is followed by the act intended, ordinarily it is only so when the act is such, as we are led by our experience to expect from the surrounding conditions; but sometimes it happens that the act intended happens though we should not have expected it in the ordinary causes of events as is evidenced by miracles... All that can be said is that if God wishes to produce a result contrary to the ordinary cause of nature, God's will, will prevail.[4]

Abdur Rahim received a largely modern education, however, unlike Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Justice Syed Ameer Ali, Maulvi Dilwar Husayn Ahmad and Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan, he pursued a traditionalist approach to Islamic scriptural sources. His references to the classical authorities (such as Imams Abu Hanifah, Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Shaybani, al-Shafi'i and Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazani) prove that Abdur Rahim was an erudite Muslim scholar and jurist who was thoroughly familiar with traditional Islamic sources. In his *Khutbat-i-Bhawalpur* (translated as the *Emergence of Islam*), Muhammad Hamidullah (one of the foremost Muslim scholars of the twentieth century) referred to Abdur Rahim's contribution to the study of Islamic jurisprudence:

> In the modern times the most significant contribution to the subject [Islamic jurisprudence] has been made by the late Sir Abdur Rahim... He has made a little innovation in this field. He has dealt with the subject as discussed in the old books on the principles of jurisprudence and he has dilated upon the new books on philosophy and law published in recent times in Europe. He has tried to compare the two i.e. the Islamic and the European principles of jurisprudence. From this point of view Sir Abdur Rahim's *Principles of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* opens a new chapter in our study of the classical books on the subject... It is his achievement that he has combined the classical and modern learning in his comprehensive work.[5]

Abdur Rahim's lectures on Islamic jurisprudence at the Calcutta University earned him recognition as an authority on the subject and this prompted the government to appoint him a judge of Madras High Court in 1908 at the age of 41. He served for about 12 years, and during this period he established his reputation as an analytical thinker, impartial arbitrator and sound administrator of justice. His loyalty and dedication subsequently led to his appointment as a member of the Royal Commission on the Public Services in India in 1912. As a Muslim member of the commission, he argued in favour of training and recruiting more deserving natives into the public services of India. In Abdur Rahim's own words:

> I have therefore recommended that for all appointments of a professorial status, the practice

www.pathagar.com

should be to secure men of achievement wherever found for the more important subjects of study and research, and that the state should offer them such reasonable terms as will be suitable in each case.[6]

On another occasion, he stated:

I do not accept the theory that the study of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian as part of the equipment of an English University graduate, would not be of considerable value to him as a man of culture, or that it would in any way detract from his efficency in the careers open to him in this country.[7]

Although some contemporary Bangladeshi writers and historians have accused Abdur Rahim of being a communalist, this is far from being the truth. He was not only an outstanding jurist and a public figure of considerable standing, but also a man of sound judgement and principles. Arguing against the allocation of job quotas along the communal lines, he once stated:

I have been particularly impressed by the unanimous condemnation by the Indian opinion of the system of pure nomination as it is now worked in the country... Generally speaking, the principle which has commended itself to me, and which is in accord with practically unanimous opinion of representative Indians of all communities and provinces, is that it is inadvisable as it is unsound and unnecessary to emphasise the question of communal or provincial representation in the superior services. The personnel required for these services must be possessed of the highest qualification available and narrow contraction of the area of recruitment should be avoided.[8]

Likewise, as a progressive and enlightened individual, Abdur Rahim argued in favour of promoting female education. He stated:

The question of women's education is of growing importance in India and, in my opinion, the most feasible way of promoting it is to enlist in the cause the services of educated Indian women as far as possible.[9]

Even so, he was realistic enough to acknowledge that:

It is necessary that in the recruitment of public services due regard be paid not solely to academic qualifications, but also to the need for securing the widest possible confidence in the administration by averting a communal or class monopoly.[10]

As a result of his balanced views and dedicated service, Abdur Rahim was subsequently promoted to the post of Chief Justice of the High Court of Madras by the government. He was also appointed a fellow of the University of Madras and, as a result, he became one of the most successful and widely recognised Muslim scholars, jurists and public figures to have hailed from Bengal. As well as being an eminent lawyer who served the British government with loyalty and dedication, he was also a devout Muslim. He played an important role in the socio-political re-awakening of the Muslims of India (and Bengal in particular). He not only chaired the meeting of the prominent Muslim leaders of India which was held in Lucknow on 15–16 September 1906, but he also went to Dhaka at the invitation of Nawab Sir Salimullah and stayed there from 27 to 29 December, playing an important role in the formation of the All-India Muslim League on 30 December

www.pathagar.com

1906.

During more than a decade of government service, Abdur Rahim remained detached from direct political involvement and activities, although he continued to play an important role in the promotion of education and social welfare provisions in the Muslim community. Accordingly, he played an active part in the annual Nadwat al-Ulama conference held in Madras in 1916. A year later, he chaired the Majlis al-Ulama conference held in Tanjor. Likewise, he was a leading trustee of the Muhammadan Education Association of Madras and Anjuman-i-Madras among others. However, after his retirement as a judge of Madras High Court in 1921, at the age of 54, he returned to Calcutta, where he increasingly became involved in the political affairs of Bengal. Appointed a member of the Governor's Executive Council in January 1921, he co-authored the Bengal [Hindu-Muslim] Pact with the assistance of C. R. Das, a prominent Hindu leader. This pact provided the basis for co-operation between the two communities and many eminent Muslims (including Sir Abdullah al-Ma'mun Suhrawardi and Husayn Shahid Suhrawardi) supported the Swarajist Party of C. R. Das. However, the Muslim leaders' willingness to co-operate was not reciprocated by the majority of their Hindu counterparts. As a result, C. R. Das's vision of unifying the two communities under the banner of one political party failed, thanks largely to the indifference of the All-India National Congress and the subsequent death of C. R. Das in 1925.

The unwillingness of Hindu leaders to join forces with the Muslims and work collectively for the common good of all the people of Bengal, irrespective of their class, creed or background, effectively forced Abdur Rahim to establish his Muslim Party in the Bengal Legislative Council in 1926, a year after he had been elected a member of the council. During this period, he became a champion of the Muslim community, arguing for propotional representation through separate electorates. He also tried to strengthen the Bengal Muslim Party, which, as expected, was bitterly opposed by the National Congress and their allies. Undeterred, Abdur Rahim became increasingly convinced that the majority of Hindu leaders had no desire to co-operate with the Muslims on an equal political footing, because the religious, cultural, economic and political beliefs and values of the Muslims were perceived by the Hindu leaders to be a foreign, alien intrusion into the Indian cultural landscape. His awareness of such negative and biased views forced Abdur Rahim to rethink his entire political strategy. He spelled out his new ideas on Hindu-Muslim unity and political co-operation in 1925 during his presidential address at the Aligarh Session of the All-India Muslim League:

> The Hindus and Muslims are not two religious sects like the Protestants and Catholics of England, but form two distinct communities of peoples, and so they regard themselves. Their respective attitude towards life, distinctive culture, civilization and social habits, their traditions and history, no less than their religion, divide them so completely that the fact that they have lived in the same country for nearly 1000 years has contributed hardly anything to their fusion into a nation... Any of us Indian Muslims, travelling... in Afghanistan, Persia, Central Asia, among

www.pathagar.com

> Chinese Muslims, Arabs, and Turks would at once be accustomed. On the contrary in India we find ourselves in all social matters aliens when we cross the street and enter that part of the town where our fellow townsmen live.[11]

Abdur Rahim's outspoken and forthright views angered Hindu leaders and they considered him to be a communalist and religious bigot, although the same Hindu leaders who had consistently and resolutely refused to support the Bengal [Hindu-Muslim] Pact as well as the aim and objectives of the Swarajist Party. Referring to these unscrupulous leaders, Abdur Rahim once remarked:

> I am not going to dwell on the mischievous activities of a certain class of Hindu politicians, because they unfortunately appeal to the lower instincts of a community; and human nature, such as we find it, seems to be governed by something akin to the physical law of gravitation, the lower level of passions and prejudices constantly pulling at the higher tendencies.[12]

As a prominent jurist and a man of principles, Abdur Rahim was clearly dismayed and saddened by the double standards and hypocritical behaviour of the Hindu leaders. Referring to these leaders on another occasion, he remarked:

> Those politicians who would deny us all opportunities in public life, should realize that if they really seek to establish self-Government responsible to the people, it is impossible to do without our help.[13]

Determined to preserve and promote the interests of the Muslim community of India in general (and of Bengal in particular) he advised his fellow Muslims to unify and work together to undermine the divisive strategies of their opponents. He stated:

> With even a fraction of our mass power, we can instantly stop that wild devil's dance in which some politicians are indulging, and then proceed smoothly with the great work of reconstruction in accordance with modern needs.[14]

Referring to Abdur Rahim's political activities at the time, Shila Sen commented that in Bengal, Abdur Rahim hoped to unite the Muslims who were opposed to all government measures that went against Muslim interests. He therefore became an advocate of unity on the basis of community's interest rather than on the basis of co-operation with the government.[15]

Being fully aware that India was a large and powerful nation, consisting of people of different creeds and cultures, Abdur Rahim continued to urge the Muslims to remain loyal and committed to their nation. During the Bengal Muslim Conference held in Calcutta on 9 August 1930, he stated:

> India is as much the home and the only home of us, the Indian Musalmans, as of our Hindu and other fellow countrymen. India's political advancement and prosperity is as much, therefore, our concern and as near to our hearts, as to those of her other citizens. It is our duty and privilege equally with the rest of India's population to serve India.[16]

Far from being a communalist, Abdur Rahim must be regarded as one of the most enlightened and visionary Muslim leaders of the subcontinent in general and the Bengal in particular. In the words of the compilers of the

www.pathagar.com

National Biography of India:

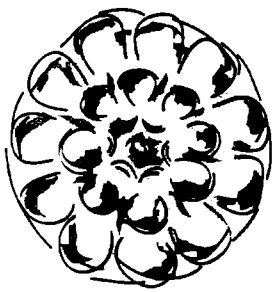
> He [Abdur Rahim] had been fighting for a quarter century for the rights of Indians. Although a nationalist, he felt a special obligation to secure justice for the Muslims in particular... He would be remembered as one of the most enlightened leaders of India. He struggled hard for the betterment of Indians in educational, social, cultural and political spheres of life.[17]

Similarly, Gautam Chattopadhyah wrote, '[Abdur Rahim] was an inveterate loyalist, but not a communal person.'[18]

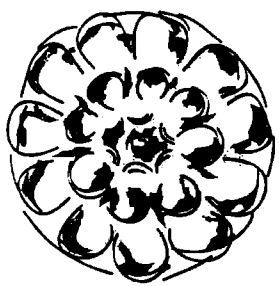
For his services to the British government, Abdur Rahim was knighted in 1919 and six years later was appointed a Knight Companion of the Order of the Star of India (KCOSI). He also supported the establishment of the Mawlana Azad College in Calcutta. Although he hailed from a wealthy and educated Muslim family, Abdur Rahim had empathy for the ordinary people of Bengal and for this reason he established the Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti, a party that championed the rights and interests of Bengal's peasantry. He retired from public life in 1934, but remained actively involved in the affairs of the Muslim community until his death. For example, in October 1939, he and Sir Abdullah Haroon visited Shaykh Mashriqi, the leader of the Khaksar community, after the latter's release from confinement. They were the first two leading Muslim leaders to visit him. Abdur Rahim was held in high estimation by the people of Calcutta, Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Abdur Rahim was a voracious reader of Arabic, Persian, Urdu and English books, and in 1946 he donated his large collection of Arabic books (which consisted of more than 300 titles) to the Imperial Library (the present-day National Library of India), where they are known as the 'Sir Abdur Rahim Collection'. After the partition of India in 1947, Allama Sir Justice Abdur Rahim moved to Pakistan and settled in Karachi where he eventually died of pneumonia at the age of around 85. It is worth mentioning here that his daughter, Niaz Fatimah, was married to Husayn Shaheed Suhrawardi, who later became the fifth prime minister of Pakistan. It is unfortunate that the life and work of this important Muslim scholar, jurist and politician of Bengal is hardly known in Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal today. I hope this short biographical account will inspire the younger generation to pursue further study and research about his life and works.

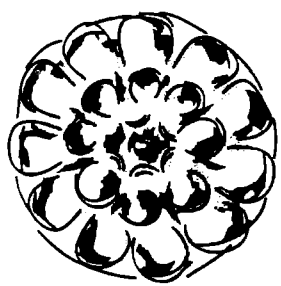
www.pathagar.com



Notes



1. Muhammad Abdullah, *Sir Abdur Rahim: Jiban-o-Karma.*
2. Ibid.
3. Author unknown, *Eminent Mussalmans.*
4. Sir Abdur Rahim, *Principles of Muhammadan Jurisprudence.*
5. Muhammad Hamidullah, *Emergence of Islam.*
6. Muhammad Abdullah, *Sir Abdur Rahim: Jiban-o-Karma.*
7. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Muhammad Abdullah, *Adunik Bistare Banglar Kayekjon Muslim Dishari.*
11. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
15. S. Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal (1937–1947).*
16. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
17. S. P. Sen (ed.) *National Biography of India.*
18. G. Chattopadhyah, *Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle (1892–1947).*



www.pathagar.com

1868–1968



MAWLANA MUHAMMAD AKRAM KHAN

After the British suppression of the uprising of 1857, the Muslims of the subcontinent were forced to rethink their political and ideological approach to the British, who had assumed full political and military control of India. The transformation of India's political, economic and military landscape inspired eminent Indian Muslim leaders, such as Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Nawab Abdul Latif, to realign their political worldview vis-à-vis the British government. They did this in order to safeguard the rights and interests of the Muslims of India and improve their social, political and economic situation. This, in turn, inspired other Muslim scholars and leaders (such as Justice Syed Ameer Ali and Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi) to champion the interests of

www.pathagar.com

the Muslims of Bengal, urging their people to pursue modern English education to improve their existential condition. During this period a number of prominent Muslim writers and journalists emerged in Bengal, and they attempted to motivate the Muslim masses.

Many of the leading Muslim writers and poets of the time (including Mir Musharraf Husayn and Muhammad Kazim al-Qurayshi, better known as Kaykobad) were inspired by the glories of the Islamic past and wanted the Muslim masses to be proud of their historical and cultural legacy. This, they hoped, would inspire the masses to reclaim their lost glory. Such a message of political empowerment, intellectual progress and cultural advancement of the Muslims of Bengal subsequently found a powerful and articulate champion in the person of Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan, who was an eminent Islamic scholar, prolific writer and influential journalist of Bengal.

According to some of his biographers, Muhammad Akram Khan's ancestors were Hindu Brahmins who embraced Islam during the time of Khan Jahan Ali (the famous fifteenth century Muslim preacher who lived in Bagerhat in present-day Khulna District of Bangladesh). Subsequently, they left their home and settled in the District of 24 (Chabish) Parganas in West Bengal. However, according to another account, his family hailed from a village that is today located between the districts of Khulna and Jessore, and subsequently his forefather's settled in 24 Parganas. Either way, his biographers have agreed that he was born in the village of Hakimpur into a learned and devout Muslim family.[1] His father, Mawlana Abdul Bari Khan, and mother, Rabia Khatun, took good care of young Akram Khan and taught him Arabic, Bengali, Persian and Urdu at home. As a noted Islamic scholar himself, Akram Khan's father was well versed in Arabic and Persian, having authored several books on aspects of Islam in those languages. He was a member of West Bengal's Ahl-i-Hadith movement and a man of considerable piety and spirituality.

After his early education at home, Akram Khan joined his local village school where he learnt to read the Qur'an and studied the famous texts *The Rose Garden* (*Gulistan*) and *The Fruit Garden* (*Bustan*) of Shaykh Sa'di, the thirteenth-century Persian poet and moralist. At the age of 10, he moved to Calcutta with his father, but became ill upon his arrival. His father took him to Patna where he received treatment for two years before making a full recovery. Thereafter, he returned to Calcutta with his father but upon arrival his younger brother, Ashraf Khan, died and this forced his father to return to their native village. To his shock and horror, his father and mother then died of cholera on the same day. Young Akram Khan was brought up by his maternal grandfather, who enrolled him at the local primary school. After completing his early education, Akram Khan moved to Qulshana Madrasah, where he studied under the care of Mawlana Niyamatullah, who was a prominent Islamic scholar and friend of his father. His maternal uncle then took him to Calcutta where he enrolled at Jubilee English School: however, he was more interested in Arabic and Islamic studies than in English education.[2] Whilst receiving private tuition in Arabic at home, he married one of his close relatives. In 1896, at the age of 28, he joined the Calcutta Madrasah

www.pathagar.com

and four (according to others, five) years later, he graduated in Arabic and traditional Islamic sciences. According to his biographers, during his time at Calcutta Madrasah, he successfully campaigned for the inclusion of Bengali as a medium of instruction there. By the time he had completed his *madrasah* education, Akram Khan had acquired proficiency in Arabic, Persian and English, in addition to Bengali and Urdu.

Furthermore, during his time at *madrasah*, Akram Khan became well known as a sportsman. Far from being a bookworm, he used to spend his spare time in recreational and sports activities. As the founding member of Calcutta's Muhammadan Sporting Club, he was known to have been an accomplished sportsman: skilled in wrestling and playing with sticks. Nevertheless, during his student days, Akram Khan also became very fond of poetry.[3] Having studied the works of prominent Persian poets like Shaykh Sa'di, he began to compose poetry. His older brother, Abdur Rahman Khan, was not impressed, as he felt being a poet was not a viable choice of career. Despite his brother's disapproval, Akram Khan continued to compose poems on different topics but, when his brother found out, he burnt the manuscripts. Although saddened by his brother's harsh actions, Akram Khan realised that his brother wanted him to focus on other constructive activities, and he gave up poetry for good.

Akram Khan was brought up and educated at a time when the Muslims of Bengal faced considerable challenges and difficulties. In addition to the prevailing social, political and economic uncertainty and hardship, the European Christian missionaries had become very active in Bengal. The missionaries were aided and abetted by the British officials, and they did not hesitate to attack Islam and its Prophet: both verbally and in their writings. Akram Khan was concerned by the missionaries' activities and in response he toured his local areas and delivered lectures on Islam, urging the masses to remain true to their faith. In addition to this, he wrote scores of articles in Bengali and Urdu in defence of Islam and its Prophet, which were widely circulated in the Muslim community.

Although Akram Khan began his journalistic career as a contributor to the weekly *Ahl-i-Hadith*, he established his reputation as a writer and exponent of Islam following the publication of his articles in the weekly *Akhbar-i-Muhammadi*. Originally founded in 1878, the *Akhbar-i-Muhammadi* was a bilingual journal that was first edited by Kazi Abdul Khaliq. In addition to contributing to this journal, Akram Khan translated articles and other information from Urdu into Bengali and vice versa: his bilingual columns were published regularly in this journal. Thanks to his excellent linguistic skills, coupled with his ability to write relevant and topical articles, he was appointed an assistant editor of this journal. Once he became an experienced journalist and editor, in 1903, Akram Khan established his own monthly journal titled *Muhammadi*. The purpose of this journal was to champion Islamic principles, values and ethos by creating a new generation of Muslim writers and intellectuals.[4] Under Akram Khan's editorship, this journal became a vociferous supporter of Muslim nationalistic causes including Muhammad Ali Jinnah's two nation theory. After 1947 it actively promoted the ideology of Pakistan as a united

www.pathagar.com

and independent nation for the Muslims of the subcontinent.

The *Muhammadi* was a new, refreshing and bold journal, and it published articles and essays on a wide range of topics, including Islam, socio-political issues and comparative religion. Thanks to Akram Khan's bold and refreshing approach to Islam and current affairs, the journal became well known in the Muslim community. Inspired by the religious ideas and thoughts of Shah Waliullah (the eighteenth-century Indian Muslim thinker and reformer) Akram Khan wrote and published articles regularly calling on the Muslim scholars to engage in new, creative thinking in order to provide Islamic answers to the challenges facing the Muslims of Bengal. Through his writings he urged the Muslim writers and scholars to help to raise social, political, cultural and religious awareness and understanding in the Muslim community. As a courageous and energetic journalist, from 1903 to 1921, Akram Khan worked full time as an editor of *Muhammadi* and *Al-Islam* journals.

During this period he became actively involved in politics, firstly as a supporter of the Indian National Congress and subsequently as a member of the Muslim League. The Congress, established in 1885 by the Hindu elites, remained loyal to the British government; however, this changed as soon as Lord Curzon proposed to partition Bengal in 1905. The Hindu leaders bitterly opposed this measure and they clashed with their loyalist opponents, which led to a major split within the Congress. While the congress was going through a crisis of leadership and an internal schism, the Muslim leaders led by Nawab Sir Salimullah Khan Bahadur formed the All-India Muslim League in Dhaka in December 1906. Although one of the aims of the Muslim League was to oppose the anti-partition campaign instigated by the congress, under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah it later became a powerful political voice for the Muslims of India.

Akram Khan aimed to promote the interests of the Muslims of India (and of Bengal in particular), and he participated in the formation of the Muslim League and fully endorsed its aims, objectives and activities in his journals. Aware of the social, educational and cultural backwardness of the Muslims of Bengal, in 1913 he joined forces with the leading Muslim scholars and religious leaders to form the Bengal Muslim Scholars Association (Anjuman-i-Ulama-i-Bangalah) in Calcutta. Some of the founding members of this organisation were Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad, Mawlana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi and Mawlana Abdullahil Baqi. The aims of this organisation were: to spread the message of Islam by producing authentic Islamic literature; to repudiate the anti-Islamic views of the Christian missionaries; and to reform the Muslim culture and society of Bengal in accordance with the principles and practices of Islam. As one of the founder members of this organisation, Akram Khan was appointed editor of *Al-Islam*, which became an influential mouthpiece of the Anjuman.[5]

Anjuman's founders, as Bengal's leading Muslim scholars and leaders, actively participated in the Khilafat and Non-Co-operation movements between 1918 and 1924. Akram Khan was no exception: he was at the forefront of these events and activities. The Khilafat

www.pathagar.com

movement was launched in September 1919. This was a Pan-Islamic movement spearheaded in the subcontinent by prominent Muslim leaders in order to ensure support for the fledgling Ottoman Caliphate, which was facing serious challenges from the leading European powers (including Britain and France). Led by Mawlana Muhammad Ali Jauhar, Mawlana Shawkat Ali and Mawlana Hasrat Mohani (among others), this movement became known as the 'Khilafat Non-Co-operation Movement in Bengal'. It acquired a mass following under the leadership of Abul Kalam Azad, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Abdullahil Baqi and Abdullahil Kafi (brothers), Syed Isma'il Husayn Shirazi, A. K. Fazlul Haq and Akram Khan himself. Akram Khan was elected as the general secretary of the Provincial Bengal Khilafat Committee in 1920, and he travelled extensively across Bengal and other parts of India to raise awareness of the plight of the Ottoman Empire and to collect funds for the preservation of the Khilafat. As a member of the Central Executive and Constitution Committee of the Council of Indian Muslim Scholars (Jam'iyat-i-Ulama-i-Hind), he played an influential role in the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements. During this period he became a vociferous critic of the British government for their role in the war against Ottoman Turkey, and he advocated the need for political empowerment and self-determination among Muslims at home. Unsurprisingly, he became embroiled in political controversies on a regular basis, to the extent that in 1921 the British authorities arrested and imprisoned him for a year for his political views and activism. Undeterred, he spent most of his time in prison translating and writing a commentary on the thirtieth part of the Holy Qur'an.

Although Akram Khan was a Pan-Islamist in his politics, he favoured a political set-up where the Muslims of India would live side-by-side in peace with their Hindu neighbours. Far from being a communalist, he advocated Hindu-Muslim co-operation in political, economic and social spheres.[6] He supported Chitta Ranjan Das's Swaraj Party, which won a resounding victory in the Bengal Legislative Council elections in 1923. Being a political realist, Das knew that both Muslims and Hindus had to work together to bring about real social, political and economic changes in Bengal. Akram Khan shared this vision and supported it wholeheartedly in the form of the Bengal Pact. This pact sought to unite Hindus and Muslims by addressing their political differences through the principle of power sharing and co-operation. Although Muslim leaders like Akram Khan enthusiastically supported this pact, the majority of the Hindu leaders bitterly opposed it, on the grounds that such an arrangement would undermine their power and influence in Bengal's political, economic and educational spheres.

Accordingly, the Indian National Congress rejected the pact, and after the premature death of Chitta Ranjan Das in 1925, the efforts to strengthen Hindu-Muslim co-operation suffered a major setback. This led to the defection of prominent Muslim leaders who, in turn, went onto establish the Independent Muslim Party in 1926. As a result, communal politics returned to the centre stage in Bengal. During this period Akram Khan became actively involved in Praja (known as 'peasant politics'). Disenchanted and demoralised by

www.pathagar.com

the communal riots of 1926 and 1927, he turned his back on nationalistic politics and instead devoted all his efforts to improving the social, political and economic condition of his people. In 1936, he formally joined the Muslim League and became involved in its activities. He became a member of its Central Working Committee and continued in this role until Pakistan was established in 1947, after which he chose to move to East Pakistan and settled permanently in Dhaka.

In addition to joining the Muslim League in 1936, in October that year Akram Khan established the famous *Azad* newspaper in Calcutta. As the only daily Bengali newspaper, *Azad* was a pioneering initiative that established itself as the voice of the Muslim community of Bengal and Assam.[7] Prior to 1947, it championed the cause of the Muslim League, and in so doing it generated considerable support for the league across Bengal. After 1947, it actively supported the political ideology of Pakistan as a united and independent nation for the Muslims of the subcontinent. The paper regularly published articles on social, cultural and political issues, as well as on aspects of Islamic teachings. In so doing, it helped to raise awareness of Islam in the Muslim community. The *Azad* undertook this work at a time when the Muslims of Bengal had very few media oulets. Like the influential *Muhammadi* journal, the daily *Azad* encouraged a new generation of Muslim writers, literary critics, poets and journalists to emerge, and thereby contributed to the intellectual advancement of the Muslim community.

As an independent newspaper, the *Azad* never shied away from reporting and analysing news and events in an objective manner, even if this upset the elites (be they Muslim or Hindu). Akram Khan was known for his bravery and independent thinking, and he ensured the paper was accurate and impartial in reporting and analysing news and events. In 1948, a year after transferring its headquarters from Calcutta to Dhaka, the paper published an editorial that was highly critical of the government. The latter responded by suspending its publication. Undeterred, the *Azad* continued to report and analyse news in an objective manner and in so doing it became very influential. However, after Akram Khan's death, the paper suffered from mismanagement until it was forced to close in 1992 due to financial difficulties.

Not only was Akram Khan a prominent political activist and journalist, he was also an outstanding Islamic scholar and writer. In addition to hundreds of articles and editorials in different newspapers and journals, he wrote prolifically on political issues, comparative religion, Islamic thought and history. Some of his well-known books include *The Character of the Prophet* (*Mustafa Charit*), *Commentary on the Qur'an* (*Tafsir al-Qur'an*), *Social History of the Muslims of Bengal* (*Muslim Banglar Samajik Itihas*) and *Problems and Solutions* (*Samasya-o-Samadhan*) among others. Although influenced by the religious ideas and thoughts of medieval Muslim thinkers (such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah) and modern scholars and reformers (such as Shah Waliullah of Delhi, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and Allamah Shibli Numani), Akram Khan was neither a religious literalist nor a pure rationalist. A devout Muslim, he argued that both human reason (*aql*) and Divine revelation (*wahy*) are necessary for a sound and comprehensive

www.pathagar.com

understanding of the Islamic scriptures.[8] One without the other, he felt, would lead to an incomplete, or even misguided, interpretation of the sources. According to Akram Khan, rationality and revealed wisdom are two sides of the same coin. As such he pursued a balanced approach to traditional Islamic sources in all his books.

For example, in his *Mustafa Charit*, which was first published around 1926, he analysed the life and career of the Prophet of Islam in a way that was neither completely scriptural nor wholly rationalistic. He combined the modernist approach of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (see his *Essays on the Life of Muhammad*) and Syed Ameer Ali (see his *The Spirit of Islam*) with the traditionalist methodology of Allamah Shibli Numani (see his famous *Sirat al-Nabi*). By harmonising human rationality with Divine revelation, he achieved two goals: firstly he popularised the universal Islamic worldview as formulated by Shah Waliullah during the eighteenth century; secondly, he cleared misunderstandings that prevailed between the religious literalism of the Ahl-i-Hadith, Deobandi and Barelwi movements, and rationalism of the Muslim modernists. In that sense, he had more in common with the ideas and thoughts of Mawlana Ubaydullah al-Ubaydi Suhrawardi, who was the first superintendent of Dhaka Madrasah. Suhrawardi was a proponent of a methodology where Divine revelation and human reason played their part in the formation of a comprehensive, universal Islamic worldview.[9]

In the words of Syed Sajjad Husain:

> The greatest landmark up to the present in the whole range of Seerah literature in Bengali is undoubtedly Maulana Akram Khan's Mustafa Charit or The Life of the Prophet. The book is also a masterpiece of prose. But Akram Khan's rationalism earned him the hostility of those not used to this kind of analysis... but a better appreciation of his qualities has led in recent times to a revision of the old attitude.[10]

Likewise, Ranabir Samaddar wrote:

> *Mustafacharit* is both a narration of Mohammad's life as well as an exercise in argumentation and refutation. It is a demonstration of rationality and a narration of a life that must be rescued from myths, as well as neglect by the Muslims. It is indeed an elaboration of the supreme statement of Akram Khan that to be a believer is to be a rationalist also.[11]

Akram Khan pursued a similiar methodology in his *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, a commentary on the Qur'an, published in five volumes in 1959, where he deliberately avoided the literalism of traditional Islamic scholars, while, at the same time, shunning the neo-Mu'tazilite approach of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and others. Thus, commenting on the Qur'an, he wrote:

> In the Quran Allah advised the Muslims to resort to *adl*. *Adl* means to put everything in its proper place. To place a particular thing below its proper station is the opposite of *adl*. The opposite of *adl* is injustice and Allah repeatedly states in the Qur'an that an unjust person or nation is bound to perish... If we observe the condition of the Muslims we find that their national life is filled with injustice... The Muslims are not practising *adl* with respect to the Qur'an. They have not placed the Qur'an in its proper place. They

www.pathagar.com

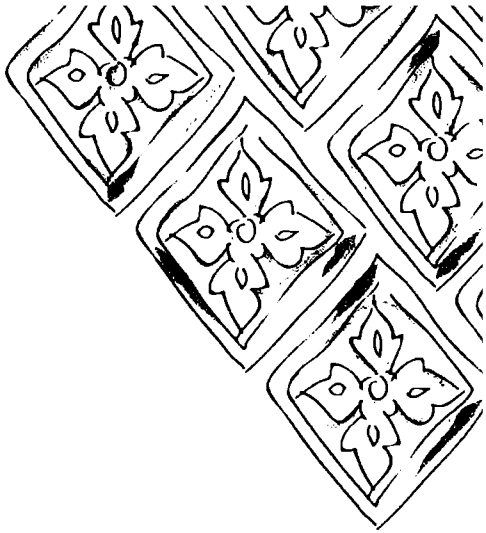
> have rather brought down the Qur'an from the highest place and put the hadith (Tradition of the Prophet) and fiqh (jurisprudence) above the Qur'an... Put the Qur'an at its proper place and Allah will place you in your proper place.[12]

As an orthodox Muslim scholar, in his *Social History of the Muslims of Bengal* (*Muslim Banglar Samajik Itihas*), Akram Khan strongly criticised the culture of saintship and the pirism that was widespread in Bengal: he considered this to be a decadant form of Sufism. By the same token, he was highly critical of Emperor Akbar's concept of Divine Religion (*Din-i-Ilahi*): he considered it to be a religious mish-mash opposed by both the orthodox Muslims and Hindus. Instead, he considered Emperor Awrangzeb to be a model Muslim worth emulating because he was orthodox in his faith and, at the same time, in favour of social and cultural pluralism and co-existence.

In short, Akram Khan was not only an important scholar, thinker and prolific writer, but also a well-known journalist and campaigner for the rights and interests of the Muslims of India (and of Bengal in particular). Despite leading a busy life, he found time to marry and to establish an extended family. In 1928, he visited Arabia and performed the sacred pilgrimage. According to his biographers, he was a devout Muslim who led a simple lifestyle. A man of loyalty and principles, he became a role model for his family, friends and colleagues alike. Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan died at the ripe old age of 99, and was laid to rest close to the Ahl-i-Hadith Mosque at Bangshal in Dhaka. He devoted his entire life to the service of Islam and in so doing left behind an enduring legacy of personal sacrifice, scores of literary contribution and other achievements. That is why posterity will forever remain indebted to this great Muslim personality. The *Pakistan Observer* paid him this glowing tribute:

> Although he belonged to a strict orthodox sect, his Islam was modern; for instance, his pamphlet, Samasya O Samadhan (the problem and the solution) dealt with the question of pictorial representation of animals and the question of interest in a commercial society. His commentaries on the Quran and his life of the Prophet are an immensely valuable addition to religious literature of Bengal. It was similarly logical that the Maulana should not have been entirely reconciled to the basic philosophy of the present constitutional set-up. It is well known that efforts were made to win him over to the regime, but he strongly refused to fall in line with many of our literary and journalistic opportunists. It goes to the credit of the regime however that it did not hesitate to give open recognition to his outstanding services to the cause of the nation and the faith. We record here also with pride and gratitude that when the liberties of the Press in Pakistan were, directly threatened, the older soldier led with contagious zeal and enthusiasm the fight against it to what we believe a partial success. We salute today the illustrious dead.[13]

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. Abu Ja'far (ed.) *Mawlana Akram Khan.*
2. M. Jehangir, *Muhammad Akram Khan, 1868–1968.*
3. Muhammad Abdullah, *Rajnitite Bangiya Ulamar Bhumika.*
4. Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra.*
5. M. Jehangir, op. cit
6. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
7. Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Bengali Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press 1901–1930.*
8. Abu Ja'far, op. cit.
9. Muhammad Abdullah, *Mawlana Ubaidullah Suhrawardi.*
10. S. S. Husain, *Civilization and Society.*
11. R. Samaddar, 'Leaders and Legacies: Maulana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi and Mawlana Akram Khan.'
12. Muhammad Akram Khan, *Tafsir al-Qur'an.*
13. *Pakistan Observer* 20 August 1968.

www.pathagar.com

(1869–1953)

ABDUL KARIM SAHITYAVI-SHARAD

After the Muslim conquest of Bengal under the leadership of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji, the Muslim rulers began to expand and consolidate their political authority across Bengal. By the end of the thirteenth century, the Muslim rulers not only assumed full control of Bengal, but they became renowned patrons of education, arts and literature. The introduction of Persian language, customs and tradition into Bengal led to the emergence of a new Muslim culture based on Arabic and Persian literature, Islamic values and ethos, and aspects of local Hindu tradition. In due course, Persian became the official language of Muslim Bengal and this, in turn, inspired the Muslim writers and poets to dominate Bengali culture and literature during the medieval period. Although the early

www.pathagar.com

Muslim writers and poets produced their works mainly in Persian and Arabic, their contributions were original, covering religious, social, cultural and mystical themes. These writers were followed by others (including Shah Muhammad Saghir, Amir Zayn al-Din and Syed Sultan) who produced their works in Bengali. Their contribution, achievements and legacy remained in the doldrums for centuries until Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad, an important writer and researcher of medieval Bengali literature, emerged during the latter part of the nineteenth century and almost single-handedly revived the rich tradition of medieval Muslim literature of Bengal.

Abdul Karim's date of birth is contested by his biographers. According to Ahmad Sharif, who was Abdul Karim's nephew and scholar of Bengali literature, Abdul Karim was born in 1871.[1] However, elsewhere Ahmad Sharif has suggested that Abdul Karim was born in 1861.[2] Even then, Ahmad Sharif was far from being certain about his uncle's date of birth, because in *Abdul Karim Smarakgrantha* (1969) he further stated that Abdul Karim was born in 1869. Perhaps influenced by Ahmad Sharif, in *Banglapedia* (National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh) the historian Abdul Karim wrote that his namesake was born in 1871. By contrast, Muhammad Enamul Haq, who knew Abdul Karim personally and had co-authored his Bengali Literature in the Royal Court of Arakan (*Arakan Rajshabhay Bangla Sahitya*) with the latter, had no doubt that Abdul Karim was born in 1869. According to Enamul Haq:

> Maghi Year was very much in vogue in Chittagong for maintaining all kinds of records including documents, permanent or temporary even long after the birth of Abdul Karim, and this date was originally maintained in Maghi year which was also reported to me. I, therefore, have no doubt in its authenticity.[3]

If Enamul Haq is correct—and there is no reason to doubt him—then it would be safe to conclude that Abdul Karim was born on Thursday, 30 September 1869 in the village of Suchakradandi in Patiya Thana (located in the District of Chittagong in present-day Bangladesh).

Abdul Karim's father, Munshi Nuruddin, died four months before his birth. Abdul Karim was therefore brought up by his mother, Missrizan, with the help of his grandfather, Muhammad Nabi Chowdhury, and uncle, Munshi Aynuddin. Muhammad Nabi hailed from a prominent Muslim family of Patiya and was a learned individual who had a personal library of Persian, Arabic, Urdu and Bengali books as well as *puthi* (also known as *punthi*) manuscripts. Young Abdul Karim was encouraged to pursue his studies from the outset. Puthis are a unique genre in Bengali literature, which were composed by the Muslim writers and poets of the medieval period. As such, they were produced in a language that was heavily influenced by Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Sanskrit. Prominent medieval Muslim poets like Faqir Gharibullah and Syed Hamza were the pioneers of this genre of literature. These writers and poets eulogised the Muslim past and celebrated the heroic actions and deeds of early Muslim personalities. In so doing, they popularised aspects of Persian culture and literature in Muslim Bengal. The puthi literature

www.pathagar.com

was written by the Muslims in both *sadhu* (or chaste) Bengali and in *dobashi* (combining Arabic-Persian and Bengali words and terminology). Muhammad Nabi, the grandfather of Abdul Karim, collected both types of *puthi* literature. He was also a well-known organiser of *puthi majlis* (poetry gatherings) where professional puthi reciters competed with each other.

Thus, Abdul Karim was brought up in a family where the collection and recitation of puthi literature was common. Unsurprisingly, he became very fond of *puthi* from the outset. He was a subscriber to no less than half-a-dozen different Bengali and English newspapers and journals, which he read from cover to cover. As a voracious reader, he excelled in his studies. After completing his elementary education in Bengali, Arabic, Persian and the Qur'an at home, he was enrolled at his local primary school where he studied for a year. Thereafter, his grandfather sent him to Patiya High School, which was an English-medium school. In the same year, his beloved mother passed away, and this affected him both emotionally and psychologically. Even so, he continued his studies to achieve his goals in life. At Patiya High School, he studied Bengali, English and Sanskrit for six years and, in 1893, at the age of 24, he successfully passed his entrance examination, obtaining second division. His achievement won him much praise from his family and local people, because he was the first Muslim to pass the entrance exam from Patiya Thana.

Although he was of modest means, his grandson's achievement inspired Muhammad Nabi to enrol Abdul Karim at the Chittagong College where he studied for two years, although ill health prevented him from taking his First of Arts (FA) examination. According to his biographers, he suffered severely from typhoid and his entire family was concerned for him.[4] Thankfully, he made a full recovery, although his hearing was slightly damaged. His failure to complete FA exam abruptly brought his formal education to an end; nevertheless, for a true seeker of knowledge like Abdul Karim, reaching the summit of Bengali literature remained a realistic and achievable goal. Accordingly, he pursued his studies and research on his own. During this period he confined himself to his grandfather's private library and became thoroughly familiar with the works of the leading Bengali writers and poets. In this library he came into contact with some rare and old Bengali manuscripts, which, in due course, he read very carefully and edited for the benefit of posterity.

This was a remarkable achievement for Abdul Karim who had no one to help or train him in the art of reading and deciphering medieval Bengali manuscripts. In the words of Enamul Haq:

> When he was taking first lessons in this art [of reading old manuscripts], he discovered in 1895 a number of '*Padavalis*' i.e. Vaisanva lyrics of middle ages, which remained unpublished till then. He wrote a series of articles on his discovery and sent them for publication in the '*Purnima*', a very respectable monthly magazine of Hooghli. The first article was published in the magazine in its issue of the month of Magha, 1302 B.S., corresponding to January, 1896 AD. The article was widely appreciated and Acharya Akshay Chandra Sarkar, the editor of the '*Purnima*' wrote him

www.pathagar.com

> a letter in appreciation of his article. It at once sparked off the literary potentialities of Abdul Karim to a great extent and this ultimately made him what he was. The headline of this article was '*Aprakasita Prachin Padavali*' i.e. 'old unpublished Vaisanava lyrics' which subsequently became the title of a series of articles published in the different issues of the '*Purnima*' for four years from January, 1896 to December, 1899.[5]

Abdul Karim was in his late twenties at the time. The favourable response he received from prominent literary figures, including Chandra Sarkar, the editor of *Purnima*, no doubt encouraged him to continue his quest for medieval Bengali manuscripts which he was eager to collect, decipher and preserve for the benefit of future generations. In that sense, Abdul Karim was indeed a pioneering researcher, writer and patriot.

Abdul Karim collected and analysed medieval Bengali manuscripts at a time when his family was experiencing considerable economic difficulties. Hitherto his grandfather had paid for his education and maintained his extended family, thanks to the modest income he received from his landholdings and estate. However, as his sources of income began to decrease, Abdul Karim was forced to seek employment to support his family. He began his career as a teacher at Chittagong Municipal School, however, for some unknown reason he did not settle into this job and subsequently joined Sitakunda Middle English School where he taught for a year. After a short period of unemployment, in 1896, he became a clerk in the court of a sub-judge in Chittagong. As a result of his dedication and hard work, six months later he was promoted to the court of the Munsif of Patiya. During this period his articles in the *Purnima* captured the attention of Nabin Chandra Sen, a prominent literary figure of Bengal, who was serving as a deputy magistrate in Calcutta. Keen to support Abdul Karim in his endeavours, Sen arranged for him to be transferred from the court of the Munsif of Patiya to the office of the Commissioner so that he could continue his research. Unfortunately, Sen was transferred to Comilla District and Abdul Karim's employment was terminated with immediate effect.

This proved to be a difficut period for the promising young writer and researcher. Hit by a devastating cyclone in 1897, his family home—along with all the furniture, and the hundreds of books and manuscripts that were kept in his grandfather's personal library—was washed away by the storm. To add to his misery, a year later his grandfather passed away, and Abdul Karim was devastated by his loss. During this difficult period, he approached his former patron, Nabin Chandra Sen, for advice. Nabin Chandra Sen instructed him to proceed to Rangoon, the capital of Burma, however, Abdul Karim stayed in Patiya. In his own words:

> I always pray—may God allow me to spend the rest of my insignificant life without any let or hindrance, so that it may be over with the sacred hymn of my native land on my lips. You are requested to join me in this prayer of mine.[6]

Abdul Karim was a devout Muslim from his early days. Thus, he pursued his research and writing as if it was his religious duty to revive the rich literary heritage of the Muslims of Bengal. He stated:

www.pathagar.com

> Of late a charge has been brought against Bengali literature that it is not Islamic: matters related to the life of Muslims and the ideas, they hold fast in life, have not been significantly reflected in it. This charge against modern Bengali literature is, perhaps, not wholly incorrect. But in the case of Punthi Sahitya this charge is not true—not even an iota of it. It is Islamic from beginning to end and its every page is replete with Muslim materials. Musalmans are its writers and related to them are its subject matters... In spite of its being thoroughly Islamic, neither our high officials, nor our wealthy class, nor our men of letters, nor our litterateurs ever took any interest in the 'Punthi Sahitya'... If you are desirous of bringing in 'Islamism' to Bengali literature, first of all, have Islamic education, imbue yourself with the spirit of Islam and assimilate Islamic ideas and thoughts to enrich your mind. Then and then only, your creation can grow as an organic whole saturated with Islamic spirit.[7]

Motivated by his Islamic ideals and ethos, Abdul Karim continued his quest for medieval Bengali literature. However, financial difficulties forced him to combine research with teaching to make ends meet. Thus, in 1899, he was offered the post of headteacher of Anwara Middle English School and he served in this capacity for six years with considerable skill and effectiveness. As a teacher, Abdul Karim was polite, honest and meticulous: so much so that when he left Anwara in 1905, a public event was organised by his colleagues to recognise his services to the school.

According to Enamul Haq, during this period Abdul Karim collected enough old manuscripts from his locality and other places to be able to set up a personal library. He read so widely that he learned the technique of editing old manuscripts and was increasingly known as a research scholar and writer.[8] He later looked back at his time at Anwara as one of the most fruitful periods of his life: not least because he had discovered, edited and published Narottam Thakur's hitherto unknown work, *Radhikar Manbhanga*, during this period. Soon after its publication in 1901, leading scholars praised *Radhikar Manbhanga* as a major contribution to Bengali literature. In the words of Haraprasad Shastri, a prominent scholar of Bengali literature:

> Abdul Karim, the editor of the book, is a school teacher. His is a family of very small means. Yet, he works very hard only for giving his valuable services to our literature. His deep devotion to Bengali literature cannot but be admired. Such an amount of labour he has put in, of skill he has exhibited for, of sympathy he has extended to and of insight he has given into the editing of this rare middle Bengali work, is not available anywhere in Bengal, nay it seems, in the whole of India. It appears to me at times that the work has been edited by a German scholar.[9]

Although Abdul Karim edited this book very skilfully, the question remains: how and from whom did he acquire such linguistic and literary skills, given the fact that he had no formal training in linguistics or editing? The only reasonable answer to this question is that he was a naturally gifted researcher who put his skills to good use. In addition to his articles in the *Purnima* and publication of *Radhikar Manbhanga*, his first book, Abdul Karim contributed regular articles to other Bengali journals

www.pathagar.com

and magazines including the *Sahitya* (which was published from Calcutta). However, it is an exaggeration to say that he wrote as many as 20 publications. He was, however, the first Muslim writer to contribute regularly to *Sahitya* and in so doing Abdul Karim firmly established his reputation as a researcher, writer, editor and essayist in Bengal's literary circles. It should also be pointed out that Abdul Karim did not write to make money. In fact, he never requested nor received any renumeration for his writing. For this reason, he was forced to juggle research and literary activities with employment of one form or another to make ends meet.

Abdul Karim left his post as head teacher of Anwara School following the partition of Bengal in October 1905. The partition of Bengal was a momentus event in its history for a number of reasons. Firstly, after decades of political, economic and cultural domination of Bengal by the Hindu elites of Calcutta, the Muslims of East Bengal finally demanded partition in order to create political, economic and cultural parity between the Hindus and Muslims. As expected, the Hindu elites felt threatened by this demand. To maintain the status quo they began to oppose the partition of Bengal. During this turbulent period, scores of prominent Muslim scholars, writers and poets (such as Muzammil Haq of Shantipur, Mir Musharraf Husayn, Kazim al-Qurayshi Kaykobad, Syed Isma'il Husayn Shirazi, Yaqub Ali Chowdhury, Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan and Mawlana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi) urged the Muslims of Bengal to take control of their political, economic and educational affairs. This inspired the Muslims to develop their own cultural identity: one that was Islamic and, at the same time, rooted in their linguistic and literary heritage. Having lived and worked during this defining moment in the history of Bengal, Abdul Karim became a proud Muslim who was keen to research and revive Muslim literary heritage of Bengal.

Encouraged by Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet, who then served as inspector of schools in Chittagong, in January 1906, Abdul Karim became a clerk in the Office of the Inspector of Schools. This gave him with the opportunity to meet many visiting teachers, writers and educationalists from across Chittagong. This, in turn, enabled him to collect old and rare medieval Bengali manuscripts from the visitors. According to Enamul Haq, Abdul Karim collected more than 2000 Bengali manuscripts. He also collected some Arabic, Persian and Urdu manuscripts, although the exact number is not known.[10] He collected them from people of all ages and backgrounds. However, being a man of very modest means, it was not always possible for him to buy the manuscripts outright. Thus, he tried to persuade teachers, writers, students and members of the public to make donations so he could buy manuscripts. Sometimes he had to borrow manuscripts from their owners to study them. At other times, he encouraged people to collect manuscripts for him during their visits to different villages and schools. In return, he supported them in his capacity as a clerk in the Office of the Inspector of Schools.

Abdul Karim also collected the works of Hindu writers. However, collecting the works of the Hindu writers proved to be a more daunting task for him. According to the introduction to his *Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts* (1914), he faced considerable

www.pathagar.com

difficulties from the Hindus because he was:

> A Muslim; he has no access to the compound of the house of a Hindu. Yet, on information about the availability of an old manuscript in a Hindu house, he visited its owner like a beggar and requested him earnestly to allow him to examine it. As an old manuscript is worshipped ceremoniously by the Hindus on the day of the Sarasvati Puja, a Muslim is not allowed to touch it. On this consideration, some refused him permission even to have a look at it, while others, being moved by his entreaty, turned over the pages of the manuscripts and allowed him to read them from a distance. Abdul Karim had, therefore, to stand outside the threshold of a Hindu house and take note of the manuscripts for preparing the description embodied in the catalogue.[11]

In recognition of his efforts, in 1909, the Chattal Dharmamandali, an organisation of learned Hindu men, awarded Abdul Karim the title of 'Sahityavisharad', meaning 'a specialist in literature'. Then, in 1920, the Nadia Literary Association (Nadia Sahitya Sabha), an organisation of Hindu scholars and specialists in medieval Bengali literature, conferred the title of 'Sahitya Sagar' ('Sea of Literature') on him, even though he became widely known as Sahityavisharad; notably, these titles echo the title of 'Vidya Sagar' ('Sea of Learning') that was awarded to Ishwar Chandra.

In addition to editing *Radhikar Manbhanga*, Abdul Karim authored *Arakan Rajsabhay Bangla Sahitya*, written in collaboration with Enamul Haq, and *Islamabad*, which consisted of his articles on the history of Chittagong and was originally serialised in the monthly *Saogot*. Abdul Karim also edited 12 other books on medieval Bengali literature, including *Bangla Prachin Punthir Bivaran* (two volumes published in 1913 and 1914, respectively). These books were all published between 1913 and 1920. The only exceptions to this were the *Padmavati* of Syed Alaol and *Prachin Bangla Punthir Bivaran*, a catalogue of works by Hindu writers. Both of these books have remained unpublished to this day and are preserved in the Varendra Research Society in Rajshahi, Bangladesh. Referring to Abdul Karim's collection of medieval Muslim literature of Bengal, Syed Sajjad Husain, a former vice-chancellor of Dhaka and Rajshahi universities, stated that it was:

> Unique in more senses than one. Not only is it the largest single collection of Punthis built up by an individual; it contains rare copies of works not available in any other collection and it has helped reconstruct the entire history of middle Bengali literature. It would not be an exaggeration to state that without him a whole chapter in the annals of Bengali literature would have remained unknown. Posterity owes him a debt of profound gratitude for his services to literature.[12]

As well as a dedicated collector and editor of medieval Bengali literature, Abdul Karim must also be considered one of the most prolific writers of his generation. According to an incomplete list of his articles and essays compiled by Ahmad Sharif, Abdul Karim published more than 400 articles. However, according to Enamul Haq, the number exceeds 600 essays and articles (although most of them are no longer extant). His literary contribution aside, Abdul Karim played an active part in educational and cultural activities. Thus, he

www.pathagar.com

was invited to preside over the third session of the Bengal Muslim Literary Association (*Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti*), which was held in Chittagong in 1918. In 1937, he initiated the Bengal Literary Conference (Banga Sahitya Sammilan) and delivered its inaugural address. A year later, he was elected as the president of Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti in Calcutta. Subsequently, in 1952, he presided over the East Pakistan Cultural Conference (East Pakistan Sanskriti Sammilan), which was held in Comilla. In addition to this, he was actively involved with many other eduactional and cultural groups in Chittagong to promote cultural renewal there. In recognition of his literary contribution, the University of Calcutta appointed him an examiner for Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Bengali literature. He continued to serve in this capacity until the partition of India in 1947.

Given Abdul Karim's devotion and dedication to his studies, his full-time work as a clerk in the office of the Inspector of Schools, and his contribution as a guest speaker at many educational and literary organisations, it is not surprising that he had little time for socialising with family, friends and relatives. This was further compounded by his ongoing financial problems, which often led to misunderstandings with his wife. For instance, when Abdul Karim arranged the marriage of his underage daughter, who was his only child, his wife objected to this; he overruled her and ensured that the marriage went ahead, perhaps for financial reasons. He may have been socially conservative, but nonetheless he took good care of his wife and daughter. He was always kind and generous to his relatives and friends who, in turn, respected him for his honesty, hard work and scrupulousness. After 28 years of dedicated service to the office of the Inspector of Schools, in 1934, he retired on a small pension of 40 rupees and returned to his native village to spend his retirement in peace. However, soon after his arrival, the villagers elected him as chairman of the Union Board and Union Bench, and he served in those capacities for three years and in the process earned the respect of everyone who came into contact with him.

During this period, his personal library, consisting of around 2000 rare manuscripts of Bengali literature, became a centre of attraction for scholars, researchers and writers. Always keen to support and assist others, his village library was visited by renowned scholars and researchers like Dr Muhammad Shahidullah of Dhaka University, K. S. Shastri of Visvabharati University, Syed Murtaza Ali, a prominent writer and literary scholar, and Muhammad Habibullah Bahar, a famous writer and politician among others. These scholars often stayed with him overnight to read his large collection of manuscripts. For this reason, Abdul Karim's meagre pension was not enough to cover the costs of accommodating the visitors. He applied for a government literary pension, which was granted to him at the rate of 50 rupees per month 'in recognition of his valuable contribution to Bengali literature'. This award alleviated his financial difficulties and helped him to entertain his visitors properly. After a lifetime dedicated to collecting medieval Bengali literature, this pioneering Muslim scholar, writer and researcher passed away at the age of 84. He died two years after the death of his wife. Prior to his death, he donated his manuscripts

www.pathagar.com

to both Dhaka University and Varendra Research Society. The former received primarily the works of the Muslim authors, around 600 manuscripts; while the latter accepted the remainder including the *Padmavati* of Syed Alaol. In the words of Enamul Haq:

> Thus a real scholar who had dedicated his life to the acquisition of knowledge through reading books and conducting original research in the field of Bengali language and literature, passed away almost silently in a sequestered cottage of his native village... thousands from his village and the places around joined his funeral procession and prayer and his mortal remains were buried in his family grave-yard. It is now a national duty to preserve his cottage where he lived and died for the nation and also his grave.[13]

Unfortunately, the people of Bangladesh have yet to pay a fitting tribute to this remarkable Muslim savant of Bengali literature. It is hoped that the future generations will learn more about his life and work, and that his contributions and achievements will be more widely acknowledged.

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. F. Khan et al., *Abdul Karim Sahityavisharadke Nibedita Prabandha Sangkalana.*
2. Ahmad Sharif, *Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad.*
3. Muhammad Enamul Haq (ed.) *Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad Commemoration Volume.*
4. K.Choudhury and E. Haq (ed.) *Abdul Karim Smarakgrantha.*
5. Enamul Haq, op. cit.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Abdul Karim, *Abdul Karim Sahityavishard: Jiban-o-Karma.*
9. Enamul Haq, op. cit.
10. Ibid.
11. Syed Sajjad Husain, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts in Munshi Abdul Karim's Collection.*
12. Ibid.
13. M. Enamul Haq, op. cit.

www.pathagar.com

1870–1937

MUNSHI SHAYKH ZAMIRUDDIN

In his *The Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities 1833–1857*, Muhammad Mohar Ali stated that during the latter part of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century Christian missionaries entered India in large numbers to preach their faith. The promotion of Christianity, these missionaries argued, would help regenerate Indian society and make its people more loyal to the East India Company. Those who opposed their proselytising activities were misrepresented as a threat to the company and its interests. As the company was based in Bengal, Christian missionary activity in India was, in one way or another, initiated from that province.[1]

Although the arrival of William Carey and his colleague John Thomas in Bengal in the

www.pathagar.com

year 1793 is often referred to as the beginning of Protestant Christian missionary activities in that part of the world, there is no doubt that many other missionaries had been there before them, paving the way for Carey and his colleague. Carey and Thomas entered Bengal illegally, with the assistance of a Danish official of the East India Company, and they initially stayed with a Hindu gentleman, Ram Basu, before they were offered employment by George Udny, a prominent planter and commercial director of the company in northern Bengal. As a Christian himself, Udny was only too happy to help Carey and Thomas, who eventually settled in Bengal in 1800. They stayed with several Danish Baptist families in Serampore. With the support of these families and Udny's gift of a printing press, Carey and Thomas initiated full-scale missionary activities in India (and in Bengal in particular).[2]

The early Christian missionary activities in Bengal evinced different reactions from two of the largest native faith communities, the Hindus and Muslims. Although the Hindu reaction to Christian proselytising activities was somewhat muted, the Muslims defended their faith and practices against the attacks of the overzealous missionaries. For instance, in 1839, when Rev. C. G. Pfander's works against Islam were distributed in Calcutta, the Muslims were alarmed to the extent that Muslim scholars entered into heated discussion and debate with their Christian counterparts. This took place in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal. Likewise, when the Rev. J. J. Weitbrecht visited a Muslim village in Burdwan on 5 February 1841, he was challenged by a local Muslim scholar, who had the support of the entire village.[3] Pfander's attacks against Islam caused much alarm in the Muslim community, and they also inspired the Muslim scholars to take the challenge of the missionaries seriously. Accordingly, Muslim writers and scholars produced books and treatises that were critical of Christianity, and these were disseminated across Bengal including places like Rangpur and Dinajpur. This made the missionaries' task of promoting their faith in the Muslim community very difficult, if not impossible.

Munshi Shaykh Muhammad Zamiruddin was born into a notable Muslim family in the village of Garadobe Bahadurpur (in the Meherpur District of present-day Bangladesh). His grandfather, Shaykh Muhammad Baqiruddin, was a relatively wealthy individual who became known for his piety. Like Shaykh Baqiruddin, Sufi Muhammad Amiruddin, the father of Zamiruddin, was a devout Muslim and a successful businessman and agriculturalist. Born and brought up in a devout and wealthy Muslim family, young Zamiruddin was encouraged by his parents to pursue his studies. He received his early education at home from a local tutor before joining his village *maktab* (Qur'an school) where he received instruction in basic Arabic and Islamic studies. As a talented student, he quickly learned Arabic and became familiar with the Qur'an. Impressed with his progress, his teachers at the Qur'an school predicted a bright future for the youngster. His father enrolled him at the local school, where Zamiruddin quickly learned Bengali, Persian and Urdu, as well as aspects of science and mathematics. Hoping to learn English, he then joined Meherpur Amjuhpi Primary School. There were only a handful of

www.pathagar.com

Muslims at this school, as the majority of the students were Hindus. Even so, Zamiruddin excelled in his studies and subsequently moved to Meherpur English High School. However, he did not like this institution and instead enrolled at the Krishnanagar Normal School.[4]

Krishnanagar Normal School was one of Meherpur's leading schools, and only the bright students were offered a place at this institution. Here Zamiruddin met teachers and students of various religious and cultural backgrounds, and he excelled in his studies. His academic abilities earned him considerable reputation throughout the school. In due course his private room at the student hostel, which was located close to the school, became a centre of intellectual discussion and debate for the students. During his time at this school Zamiruddin first came in contact with a group of Baptist missionaries who were busy propagating Christianity in and around Meherpur. Accordingly, he visited the missionaries on a regular basis to improve his knowledge and understanding of aspects of religion, philosophy and theology. Impressed by his unusual linguistic and intellectual abilities, the missionaries befriended Zamiruddin and invited him to their religious centre to engage in discussion and debate. Keen to learn, he borrowed books on aspects of Christian theology and history from the missionaries and read them with interest. The more he read and discussed with the missionaries, the more he became impressed with them and their faith: not least because he found them to be well-versed in Islamic theology and history. In his *Amar Jibani-o-Islam Grahan Brittanta* Zamiruddin mentioned that he had read the missionaries' critiques of Islam and its Prophet, including books like *The Prophet's Testimony of Christ, Muhammadan Ceremonies* and *Reasons for Not Being a Mussalman*.[5]

Reading such polemical literature, coupled with his close contacts with the missionaries, increased his interest in Christianity. To the extent, in fact, that in due course he expressed his intention to convert to Christianity. The missionaries were only too happy to welcome him into their fold. Zamiruddin renounced Islam and became a Christian in 1887, at the age of 17, taking on the name John Zamiruddin. His conversion was by no means an isolated case; thanks to the organised efforts and activities of the Christian missionaries in nineteenth century Bengal, many Muslims converted to Christianity. Some of them subsequently became prominent priests and preachers (including Mir Hadi, Kazi Aynuddin and Munshi Nasiruddin).

At the time, the missionaries carried out their proselytising activities in the rural parts of Bengal with minimal opposition from the Muslim leaders and scholars. Being unaware of the rapidly changing political, economic and intellectual trends of the time, most of the Muslim leaders and scholars of Bengal were unprepared for the challenge that was presented by the European missionaries. Zamiruddin converted to Christianity during this difficult period in the history of Muslim Bengal. However, as a talented student, he was encouraged by his Christian friends to pursue higher education in Christian theology, history and philosophy. The missionaries wanted him to improve his linguistic skills and receive thorough training in Christian theology to become a scholar and preacher in Bengal. With

www.pathagar.com

this in mind, in 1891, at the age of 21, he went to Allahabad where he enrolled at the St. Paul's Divinity College for undergraduate studies in theology.[6] There he pursued his studies with such dedication that he successfully passed his Bachelor of Theology (BT) degree. During this period, he read a wider range of books on Christian thought, history and philosophy, and polished his knowledge of English, Sanskrit, Greek, Hebrew and Latin.

After completing his undergraduate studies in Allahabad, Zamiruddin moved to Calcutta, where he pursued advanced training in theology and linguistics at the C. M. S. Cathedral Mission Divinity College. By the time he had completed his advanced education, Reverend John Zamiruddin was considered to be one of the most gifted young Christian scholars and linguists of his generation, having acquired fluency in no less than a dozen languages. By all accounts, this was a remarkable achievement, which earned him considerable plaudits from his fellow Christians in Calcutta.

Although increasingly considered to be a rising star in Calcutta's missionary circles, Zamiruddin returned to Allahabad where he formally started his missionary activities. During this period he published numerous articles that criticised aspects of Islamic teachings and practices, and spoke in favour of Christianity. His knowledge of Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Bengali, coupled with his thorough training in Christian theology, history and Hebrew, enabled him to write authoritatively on aspects of comparative religion. This impressed the Christian missionaries, who now considered him to be a substantial asset in their efforts to convert more Muslims to their faith. Accordingly, the Calcutta-based missionaries urged Zamiruddin to move to their centre and to help them to promote Christianity in the Muslim community. He accepted their offer and moved to Calcutta. However, he did not stay there for long; instead he was posted to the Shikarpur Mission in Nadia where he began to preach the Gospel in earnest.

This was a challenging period in the history of Muslim Bengal as the missionaries became very active in the Muslim community. During this difficult time Munshi Muhammad Meherullah emerged to turn the table against the Christian missionaries. Born in 1862 in the district of Jessore (according to Sufia Ahmed, a Bangladeshi historian and author), he began his career as an official of the District Board before training to become a tailor. Having lost his father at an early age, Muhammad Meherullah received little formal education. However, under the guidance of local Muslim teachers, he became familiar with Arabic, Persian and Urdu, in addditon to aspects of Islam. He later learned English and Sanskrit. He thus combined his work as a tailor with that of a Muslim preacher.[7] Concerned by the activities of Christian missionaries, he took it upon himself to defend Islam and preach against the missionaries in and around Jessore. As a talented preacher, he engaged the missionaries in public discussion and regularly defeated them in debate. Once such debate took place in 1892 in Pirojpur in the District of Barisal, where Meherullah successfully vindicated the claims of Islam and repudiated Christian notions of Jesus. The local Muslims were so delighted that they hailed him as a Muslim hero.

Meherullah and the other Muslim preachers

www.pathagar.com

of the time not only defended Islam and its Prophet against the missionaries attacks, they also launched a counter-movement against them. They argued that God could not have a son, and that earlier Divine revelations (such as the Torah, Psalms and the Gospels) had been superseded by the Qur'an: which had been revealed to Muhammad (who was the final Prophet of God to humanity). They reiterated the Qur'anic view that Jesus was no more than a man and a prophet. As expected, the missionaries found such arguments very annoying, because they had no answers to these objections. Although largely self-taught, Meherullah was a proud, intelligent and eloquent Muslim preacher who was quick to recognise the seriousness of the challenge represented by the missionaries to the local Muslims. Accordingly, he studied aspects of comparative religion and became familiar with Christian thought and scriptures. Equipped with sufficient knowledge of Christianity, coupled a thorough understanding of Islamic thought and history, Meherullah took the battle to the Christian missionaries in many parts Bengal.

While he was busy engaging the missionaries in debate and discussion on aspects of Islam and Christianity, Meherullah came across an article in *The Christian Comrade* (*Krishtiya Bandhab*), which was a monthly journal published by the missionaries. This article was published under the title of 'Where is the Original Qur'an' (*Ashal Koran Kothay*). In this article Rev. John Zamiruddin attempted to cast aspersions on the historicity of the Qur'an by arguing that the real Qur'an no longer existed. In other words: the Qur'an that was available at that time was, in his opinion, a modified and distorted version of the original revelation. Accordingly, he urged the Muslims to renounce Islam and embrace Christianity, which—he argued—was the religion of truth and salvation.

As expected, this article generated much discussion and debate in Bengal, prompting Meherullah to write a critical response. Meherullah's article was titled the 'Deception of the Priests' ('Kristani Dhokavanja'), and it was published in *Sudhakar*, a weekly journal edited and published by Shaykh Abdur Rahim of Basirhat. In his lengthly reply, Meherullah argued that Zamiruddin's case against the Qur'an was flawed because he had not bothered to consult the original Arabic sources. That is to say, Zamiruddin's criticism against the Qur'an was based on questionable, secondary Orientalist literature produced by the Christian missionaries. Meherullah's article was critical, thoughtful and learned, which proved that he was a very skilful writer and debater. In response, Zamiruddin wrote a short rebuttal, which was also published in the *Sudhakar*. Not to be outdone, Meherullah wrote a counter-reply under the title of 'The Original Qur'an is Everywhere' (*Asal Koran Sarbatra*). In this article, he proved that the Qur'an was still available in its original form, unlike the Christian scriptures.[8]

Impressed by Meherullah's arguments, Zamiruddin began to question his own approach to religion in general, and to Islam in particular. As a discerning and intelligent scholar, he questioned and re-examined his knowledge and understanding of Islam and its scriptures. The more he engaged with the Qur'anic revelation, the more he became convinced that it was nothing other than what the Muslims claimed it to be: the expression of pure Divine revelation in

www.pathagar.com

Arabic, the language of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him). While Zamiruddin was busy re-examining his views about Islam and its Prophet, by coincidence, he came across a poster that advertised a lecture at the Calcutta Albert Hall by Babu Nagindranath Mitra, a prominent Hindu scholar, on the topic of 'Prophet Muhammad and His Religion' (*Muhammad-o-Tar Dharma*). Zamiruddin attended this lecture, and Babu Nagindranath's arguments in favour of the Prophet and his teachings profoundly impressed him, such that he began to have doubts about Christianity. In due course, he renounced Christianity and returned to Islam, his ancestral faith.[9] Thereafter, he approached his Christian friends and informed them about his decision to revert to Islam. Reverend John Zamiruddin, the rising star of Christian mission in Bengal, soon became famous in Muslim Bengal as Munshi Shaykh Muhammad Zamiruddin.

Zamiruddin reverted to Islam in 1895, exactly eight years after embracing Christianity, at the age of only 25. After returning to his ancestral faith, he devoted the rest of his life to the study, research, writing and dissemination of the message of Islam. He joined forces with Meherullah, and together they became well-known scholars, preachers and reformers of Muslim Bengal during the early part of the twentieth century. Like Meherullah, Zamiruddin was a prolific writer on Islam. However, unlike the former, he was a highly educated scholar and thinker who published half a dozen books and more than 100 articles on a wide range of subjects including Islamic thought, history, biography and comparative religion. He also translated several books into Bengali. In response to Christian missionary propaganda alone, he wrote 108 articles. Some of his well-known publications include: *Futility of Christianity* (*Radd-i-Khristia*), *To Prophet Jesus* (*Hazrat Esa Ke*), *Muhammad the Great Prophet* (*Shrestha Nabi Hazrat Muhammad*), *Biography of Munshi Meherullah* (*Meher Charita*), *Deception of the Priests* (*Padrir Dhokavanja*) and *Account of My Life and Acceptance of Islam* (*Amar Jibani-o-Islam Grahan Brittanta*).[10]

The *Radd-i-Khristia* consisted of a series of publications, in which he carefully analysed aspects of Christian theology and history. The purpose of the series was to refute Christian misconceptions about Jesus and to defend Islam and its Prophet against false and malicious accusations. Zamiruddin's *Hazrat Esa Ke* was the fourth part of *Radd-i-Khristia* series, and he wrote it at the personal request of Munshi Meherullah. His *Prophet Muhammad in the Bible* (*Inzil-i-Hazrat Muhammad*) was published as the second part of the same series. In this, he showed that Jesus had prophesied the advent of the Prophet. The eighth publication in the *Radd-i-Khristia* series was Zamiruddin's *Glory of Islam*. All the essays and articles contained in this volume were written in English.

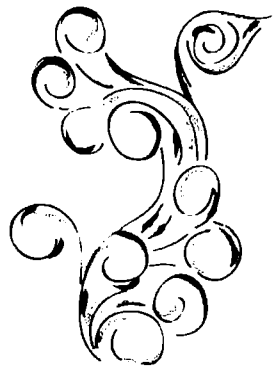
In addition to the above, Zamiruddin authored two other works on the Prophet: *Shrestha Nabi Hazrat Muhammad* and *Ma'sum Mustafa*. In both of these works, he not only defended the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) against false allegations, he also argued that the Prophet was an outstanding role model for humanity. Quoting extensively from the Qur'an and Bible, Zamiruddin argued that, far from being an adversary of Jesus, the Prophet was his natural successor. Likewise,

www.pathagar.com

in his *Padrir Dhokavanja* he clarified Christian misunderstanding of the Qur'an and Bible. In so doing he proved that Islam was a Divinely inspired message, and that Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) was the final messenger. He also corrected Christian misconceptions about Jesus and his teachings, and accused the missionaries of spreading false information about Islam. Zamiruddin's works on Islam and Christianity were rated highly by the Muslim scholars and preachers of Bengal, and his biography of Munshi Meherullah and his own autobiography are today considered to be important sources for understanding the social, economic and religious condition of the Muslims of Bengal during the latter part of nineteenth and early twentieth century.[11] Zamiruddin also published a volume of Islamic songs under the title of *Bangla Ghazal*. This work included contributions by many prominent Muslim writers and poets: including Mir Musharraf Husayn, Munshi Meherullah and Muhammad Muzammil Haq of Bela.

After a lifetime devoted to the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom and truth, Munshi Shaykh Muhammad Zamiruddin passed away at the age of 67. He was laid to rest in his family graveyard in Meherpur. In 1989, the Bangla Academy in Dhaka had published a short—but popular—biography of Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin by Abul Ahsan Choudhury under the title of *Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin (1870–1937)*. Furthermore, in recognition of his important contribution to the promotion of Islam in Bengal, in 1996, the Bangladesh Televison (BTV) produced and broadcasted a documentary on the life, work and achievements of this Muslim savant.

www.pathagar.com





Notes

1. Muhammad Mohar Ali, *The Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities 1833–1857.*
2. E. Carey, *Memoir of William Carey.*
3. M. M. Ali, op. cit.
4. Abul Ahsan Choudhury, *Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin 1870–1937.*
5. Munshi Zamiruddin, *Amar Jibani-o-Islam Grahan Brittanta.*
6. M. Abdur Rauf, *Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin: Shamakalin Prekhapote Islam Prachare Tar Abadan.*
7. Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912.*
8. A. A. Ahsan, op. cit.
9. M. Zamiruddin, op. cit.
10. M. A. Rauf. op. cit.
11. N. Hilal (ed.) *Munshi Meherullah Racahanabali.*

www.pathagar.com

1871–1915



SIR SALIMULLAH KHAN BAHADUR

NAWAB SIRAJ AL-DAWLAH'S defeat at the hands of Robert Clive of the East India Company in 1757 represented a major shift in the political landscape of India in general (and in that of Bengal in particular). Following this, the Permanent Settlement operation that was instigated by the British in 1793 led to the social and economic regeneration of the Hindus of Bengal at the expense of its Muslims. Through the Permanent Settlement operation, the British not only assumed full control of land and properties that had once belonged to the Muslims, they subsequently sold them to the Hindu landholders (*zamindar*) who, in turn, consolidated their political and economic grip on Bengal. This enabled the Hindus to pursue business and trade, and also to actively promote

www.pathagar.com

modern education in their community. As the Hindus consolidated their political clout and strengthened their social and economic position through the pursuit of modern education, the Muslims of Bengal suffered from political isolation, economic loss and educational backwardness. This was largely a result of the Muslim opposition to the British, as well as an unwillingness to pursue modern education: they feared that unrestricted exposure to modern, secular Western education would lead to the dilution of traditional Islamic values, morality and ethics.

During this challenging period in the history of Bengal, Nawab Sir Khwajah Salimullah Khan Bahadur, an outstanding Muslim leader, visionary, reformer and educationalist, was born in Dhaka. He was destined to transform the political, economic, cultural and educational fortunes of the Muslims of Bengal. Referring to some of history's great men, Sir George Bernard Shaw once stated that 'some are born great, some achieve greatness, some have greatness thrust upon them': Nawab Sir Khwajah Salimullah Khan Bahadur is the only Muslim personality of Bengal to have combined these three measures of greatness.

Salimullah was born into the Nawab family of Dhaka, which was the most famous and wealthy Muslim family of Bengal at the time. Salimullah's ancestors were originally Kashmiri merchants who came to East Bengal during the mid-eighteenth century to pursue trade and eventually they settled in the districts of Dhaka, Sylhet and Bakerganj. As successful merchants they established many businesses: they bought and sold various local commodities, and pursued indigo trade with their European counterparts. Khwajah Alimullah (the great-grandfather of Salimullah) was born in the Begum Bazar area in Dhaka, and became the founder of the Dhaka Nawab family. He inherited a considerable amount of wealth from his father, and was able to acquire a substantial land and property portfolio. As one of the directors of Dhaka Bank, he subsequently purchased the French Trading House, which was located close to the Buriganga River in Dhaka. This building became the official residence of the Nawab family.

After the death of Khwajah Alimullah in 1854, his son Sir Abdul Ghani succeeded him as the head of the Nawab family. Sir Abdul Ghani, the grandfather of Salimullah, was a highly educated and cultured individual who became renowned as an arbitrator of disputes and a patron of education, arts and other good causes. He expanded and thoroughly refurbished the Nawab family's residence in Dhaka. After his death in 1896, he was succeeded by his son, Nawab Sir Ahsanullah, who was a generous, pious and talented indivdual. In fact, Nawab Sir Abdul Ghani had been so impressed with him that in 1873 he had renamed their refurbished family residence after him. This historic building later became known as 'Ahsan Manzil' ('Palace of Goodness').[1]

Like his father, Nawab Ahsanullah became a champion of learning. He was keen to improve the social and economic condition of the Muslims of Bengal, and was a prominent philanthropist and charity worker. As a talented writer and poet, he found time to write beautiful Persian and Urdu poetry and became involved in politics through his membership of the Governor General's Legislative Council

www.pathagar.com

and the Central National Muhammadan Association (CNMA).

Nawab Sir Ahsanullah died in 1901 at the relatively young age of 55, and Salimullah, his eldest son, was born at the Ahsan Manzil when he was in his mid-twenties. Like his illustrious father, young Salimullah had a privileged upbringing, being surrounded by great wealth and luxury. According to the family tradition, he received his elementary and further education at home under the tutelage of several prominent Muslim teachers and scholars who taught him Arabic, Persian and Urdu. Nawab Sir Ahsanullah had felt that a modern education was important, and ensured that his son learned English and aspects of modern European thought and culture from British and German tutors. Salimullah was a devout Muslim during his early years and his parents adored him for that reason. His mother, Nawab Begum Wahidunnesa, was a daughter of the *zamindar* of Kartikpur, and she became very fond of her son on account of his good character and personal piety.

Salimullah completed his formal education under the guidance of private tutors in 1893 and, at the age of 21, he married his cousin, Ismatunnesa Begum. In the same year, he joined the Indian Civil Service as a junior deputy magistrate. According to Syed Muhammad Taifoor (a well-known historian and author of *Glimpses of Old Dhaka*) the British government offered Salimullah this high-ranking post because his relations with his father had deteriorated on account of Salimullah's religious zeal. However, Taifoor's opinion on this issue was highly questionable, because he assumed that Nawab Sir Ahsanullah was less religious than his son; whereas biographers describe Ahsanullah as an equally devout Muslim who would never have undermined his relationship with his son on account of religiosity.[2] Actually, the father and son developed a good working relationship and together they pursued many activities including travelling, hunting and playing sports. Contrary to Taifoor's assertion, their relationship only deteriorated after Salimullah went against his father's wishes and married the woman of his choice. Hoping to avoid embarrassing his father, he left Dhaka and served a year of his government service in Mymensingh and, a year later, he was transferred to Muzaffarpur in Bihar.

During his time in the Indian Civil Service, Salimullah established his reputation as a wise and intelligent arbitrator of legal disputes. After only two years of government service, Salimullah resigned in 1895 and returned to Mymensingh to pursue trade and commerce. He remained preoccupied with business for more than five years, until his father died of heart failure in 1901. Since he was in Mymensingh at the time of his father's death, his family in Dhaka asked Khwajah Atiqullah to become the new Nawab. He was Salimullah's younger stepbrother and, as such, he declined the offer; instead, he sent an urgent telegram to Salimullah to inform him of the death of their father and requested him to return to Dhaka forthwith. As the eldest son of Ahsansullah, soon after his arrival at Ahsan Manzil, Salimullah was appointed head of the Nawab family, thus inheriting the title of 'Nawab' at the age of 30.

Nawab, like his predecessors, was a proud Muslim who was determined to improve the

www.pathagar.com

social, political, economic and educational condition of the Muslims of Bengal. In that sense, he was like his father and grandfather, who proved to be great benefactors of the Muslims of Dhaka by providing generous funding for schools, colleges and other institutions. Unlike the Hindu community, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Muslims of Bengal suffered from a combination of economic loss and educational backwardness. This undermined their political and cultural standing, and as a result their morale and self-confidence suffered. During this period Calcutta (the capital of Bengal) became the hub for social, political, economic and educational activities. The Hindu-dominated West Bengal prospered at the expense of the Muslim-majority East Bengal. Likewise, the Calcutta University was dominated by the Hindu elites and, as a result, an educated Hindu middle-class emerged in and around Calcutta who had no desire to see the Muslims of East Bengal make progress (as this would—they felt—lead to stiff competition for jobs, services and other provisions).

This state of affairs persisted despite the valiant efforts of the members of the Nawab family to reverse this trend by funding social, economic and educational programs in East Bengal. In that respect, Nawab Sir Ahsanullah, the father of Salimullah, played a crucial role in rallying the Muslims of Bengal. In the words of Syed Muhammad Taifoor, a friend and colleague of Salimullah:

> Nawab Ahsanullah maintained a tireless vigil on mass education, and donated generously for various worthy causes. He established the Ahsanullah School of Engineering, and being thoughtful of the health of the residents of Dhaka he, along with his father, contributed towards the establishment of a water tank from which filtered water would be supplied to the citizens of Dhaka as far back as 1874. There is no Mosque, Mausoleum, or important public institution in Dhaka which does not bear the stamp of his magnificence.[3]

Sir Abdul Ghani and Sir Ahsanullah sowed the seeds of educational resurgence among the Muslims of Bengal in the nineteenth century, and Salimullah was destined to transform the political and educational fortunes of the Muslims of India in general (and of those in Bengal in particular) during the early part of the twentieth century.

Following in the footsteps of his illustrious father, Salimullah became interested in the political affairs of his people soon after becoming the head of the Nawab family. This occured during 1903–1904 when he had backed the government's proposal to partition Bengal. As a learned individual and devout Muslim, he was convinced that it was in the interest of the Muslims to back the partition of Bengal. He felt that the educated and wealthy Hindu middle-classes of West Bengal had not only consolidated political and economic power, they were also the main beneficiaries of modern education, thanks to their domination of the University of Calcutta; while the Muslims of East Bengal suffered from political isolation, economic impoverishment and educational backwardness. According to Salimullah, the only way to reverse this trend was to partition Bengal: namely, the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam (with its headquarters in Dhaka),

www.pathagar.com

and the province of Western Bengal (with Calcutta as its capital).[4] Lord Curzon devised a proposal to make political administration of the province of Bengal straightforward, and Salimullah welcomed it because he felt that it would enable the Muslims of East Bengal to reclaim their political rights and take control of their affairs. This would enable them to establish educational institutions, initiate social and economic programs and undertake cultural activities in accordance with their faith, culture and sensibilities.

After publishing the government's proposal to partition Bengal in January 1904, Lord Curzon went on an official tour of East Bengal, visiting the districts of Dhaka, Chittagong and Mymensingh, to assess public reaction to his proposal. He came back having received positive feedback from the people. However, although the Muslims of East Bengal had approved of his proposal, the Hindu leaders of West Bengal were incensed by the idea. Soon after the publication of the original proposal in 1903, the Hindu elites of Calcutta whipped up such an unprecedented political storm against the proposal that even the Indian National Congress was forced to oppose this measure. By succumbing to the political pressure of the Hindu nationalists of Calcutta, the congress effectively became their mouthpiece. The Hindu elites then launched mass protests and political agitation to force the government to abandon their plans. Their ideology of 'one Bengal' was influenced by the Hindu notion of *Bande-Mataram* ('Hail Motherland'). They felt the partition of Bengal would be a humiliation for them and a major victory for the Muslims of East Bengal: not least because the latter could challenge their domination of Bengal's political, economic and cultural spheres. Their opposition to the plan to partition Bengal was initially peaceful, however as soon as it became clear that their protest was being ignored, they encouraged their followers to engage in a campaign of boycott and terror. They even attempted to assassinate prominent government officials such as Sir Andrew Fraser and influential pro-partition Muslim leaders including Salimullah. As an influential Muslim leader, Salimullah had direct access to high-ranking government officials and for that reason he became a very unpopular figure in the Hindu community of West Bengal.

Undeterred by the Hindu leaders subversive activities, Salimullah and other prominent Muslim leaders of East Bengal gathered in Dhaka on the day Bengal was partitioned (16 October 1905) and they announced the formation of the Muhammadan Provincial Union. Through this union, the Muslim leaders, led by Salimullah, campaigned vigorously in favour of the partition; while the Indian National Congress, which was firmly under Hindu nationalist influence, campaigned against it. A year later, to strengthen their powerbase and unify the Muslim leaders of India, Salimullah convened the first session of Eastern Bengal and Assam Provincial Educational Conference at Shahbag in Dhaka, where he was duly elected president. He responded by swifting dispatching a communiqué to the leading Indian Muslim leaders, urging them to set their differences aside and unite under the banner of one political party. The call for Muslim unity and solidarity, issued by Salimullah, was published widely in Indian newspapers and journals.

www.pathagar.com

Prominent Muslim leaders, including those associated with the Aligarh movement of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, responded positively to his call. They urged him to organise the twentieth session of the All-India Muhammadan Educational Conference in Dhaka. Salimullah, then only 35, agreed to this, and from 27 to 30 December 1906, he lavishly entertained more than 2000 Indian Muslim scholars, leaders and their associates at his two-story Israt Manzil building in Shahbag.[5] This important gathering of Indian Muslim leaders was chaired by Nawab Viqar ul-Mulk Bahadur, who enabled all the participants to engage in extensive discussion and debate on the challenges and difficulties facing the Indian Muslims at the time. However, the young and visionary Salimullah proved to be the real mover-and-shaker at the event. He proposed that the meeting should agree to establish a national Muslim political party under the name of 'Muslim All-India Confederacy'. The Nawab made such a powerful and cogent case for Muslim unity and solidarity in the face of rising Hindu nationalism, that the meeting unanimously agreed to his suggestion. As soon as the Nawab presented his proposal, it was immediately seconded by Hakim Ajmal Khan of Delhi and supported by Mawlana Zafar Ali Khan, the editor of the Lahore-based *Zamindar*. Other prominent Muslim scholars and leaders (including Nawab Muhsin ul-Mulk, Mawlana Muhammad Ali Jauhar, Mawlana Shawkat Ali, Allama Shibli Nu'mani, Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad, Mawlana Altaf Husayn Hali, Sir Syed Ali Imam, Nawab Sir Sadiq Ali Khan, Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, Munshi Muhammad Meherullah, Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan and Raja Naoshad Ali) also backed the proposal without any changes: other than amending the name to 'All-India Muslim League'.

Salimullah was elected as vice-president of the Muslim League and a vice-chairman of the committee that was entrusted with the task of drafting a constitution for the new political body. In summary, the All-India Muslim League was established to achieve the following objectives:

> i) To promote unity among Muslims and encourage feelings of loyalty to the British government by seeking to remove misconceptions and misunderstandings on both sides.
>
> ii) To protect the rights of Indian Muslims and advance their social, political, economic and educational interests, and
>
> iii) To encourage and promote social and political co-existence between the different communities of India.

During this important period in the political history of India (and specifically Bengal), Salimullah recruited a group of very able and talented advisors, including Nawab Sir Syed Shamsul Huda, Maulvi A. K. Fazlul Haq and Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, who advised him on strategic and policy matters. It is worth pointing out that this three-day educational conference cost the Nawab six lakh rupees, which he was happy to pay to achieve Muslim unity and solidarity. Needless to say, the formation of the Muslim League was a personal triumph for Salimullah and it marked the beginning of Muslim political re-awakening in India (and especially in Bengal). The credit for the creation of this historic Muslim political

www.pathagar.com

party, which was destined to dominate Indian politics for much of the twentieth century and beyond, must go to Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka. He had played an important role in the partition of Bengal in 1905, however, by establishing the All-India Muslim League he became one of the most influential Muslim leaders of the subcontinent.

Salimullah's active role in the political unity and solidarity of the Indian Muslims was not well received by either the Hindus or the British government. The former saw the Nawab as a major obstacle to their campaign against the partition of Bengal, while the latter feared that the birth of the Muslim League could lead to the resurgence of Muslim political activity across India, potentially threatening their grip on power. On more than one occasion, Salimullah's opponents tried to assassinate him. For instance, when he visited the district of Comilla on 4 March 1907 to speak at a public meeting, the local Hindus instigated a communal riot. On the following day, Salimullah's personal secretary was physically assaulted by Hindu mobs. Furthermore, on his way back to Dhaka a group of Hindu extremists tried to assassinate him by derailing his train although, luckily, he escaped unscathed.

Despite the threats and challenges he faced during this period, Salimullah never wavered in his determination to improve the condition of the Muslims of Bengal. Having played a crucial role in the partition of Bengal and the formation of All-India Muslim League, he was profoundly disappointed when the government revoked the partition in December 1911, thanks to unprecedented opposition from the Hindu nationalists. Despite this setback, Salimullah continued to champion the cause of the Muslims of Bengal. Viceroy Hardinge was aware that the Muslims of East Bengal had felt betrayed by the government and thus he met some prominent Muslim leaders of East Bengal including Maulvi A. K. Fazlul Haq, Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, Khan Bahadur K. A. Siddiqi and Salimullah himself in January 1912. During this meeting Salimullah presented his eight demands to the viceroy to protect the rights and interests of the Muslims. These included a case for establishing a government-funded university in Dhaka: an idea that he had first shared with Governor Lancelot Hare and his successor back in August 1911 at the Curzon Hall. Viceroy Hardinge agreed to recommend this proposal to the government in order to meet the educational needs of the Muslims of Bengal.

However, as soon as this proposal became public, many influential Hindus, such as Dr Rashbihari Ghosh, expressed their concern and dismay. They felt that the establishment of a separate university in Dhaka would lead to 'an internal partition of Bengal'.[6] Some Hindu leaders even suggested—as recorded in the Calcutta University Commission Report—that since the majority of the Muslims of East Bengal were farmers they 'would benefit in no way by the foundation of a university'.[7] Although such views appear to be patronising and insulting, the reality was that the Hindu elites of West Bengal did not want the Muslims of East Bengal to progress to the extent that the Muslims could challenge the hegemony of the Hindu elite. Viceroy Hardinge tried to reason with the Hindu elites, assuring them that the new university would be open to everyone,

www.pathagar.com

irrespective of their gender, caste and creed; unlike the University of Calcutta, which at the time was dominated by the Hindu middle-classes of West Bengal.

After the government accepted Viceroy Hardinge's recommendation to establish a separate university in Dhaka, many more years of research and consultation were carried out before the Dacca University Act 1920 was formally approved by the government. Although Salimullah did not live long enough to witness the creation of the University of Dhaka, it was his dedication and hard work, along with that of his colleagues (including Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury and A. K. Fazlul Haq) that ensured that his dream became a reality. In December 1920, Dr P. J. Hartog, a former official of the University of London, was appointed the first vice-chancellor of the new university for a five-year term. Alhough Salimullah had died five years before the inauguration of the University of Dhaka, it is not an exaggeration to state that without his political influence and his persistent demand for a separate university in Dhaka (specifically, one that incorporated a Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies) this historic institution may not have been created. For this reason, he deserves to be recognised as the main founder and benefactor of the University of Dhaka.

As a dedicated educationalist, Salimullah was aware that the Muslims of East Bengal would not be able to make progress without effective institutions of further and higher education. Likewise, he felt, that the acquisition of technical knowledge and skills was essential for economic development and technological progress. In his own words:

> To my mind, what is more urgently needed for our community than any politics is a combined effort on the part of our leaders to spread education in all its branches amongst the various sections of our community... Our people have lost much ground in the past and I hold that their first great need as a community is practical education. For those who can afford the luxury of higher education, let it be provided by all means. Our first efforts should be directed to making our course of studies practical, for if we learn from our early days to be self-reliant and business-like, we shall find no occasion later on to sit down and lament our fate.[8]

Indeed, his approach to life and educational philosophy was motivated by concern for human welfare in this world and success and happiness in the hereafter.

Salimullah actively participated in numerous educational committees, often arguing in favour of reforming existing educational institutions and teaching methods. Thanks to his efforts, the government produced a plan in 1915 to reform *madrasah* education, and also suggested ways to make education accessible to women. Salimullah never failed to emphasise the importance of practical education and skills. He stated that:

> At present a boy fresh from school has no knowledge of everyday work, and has only consumed the midnight oil in mastering in detail philosophy, poetry, the history of ancient Rome and Greece most, if not all, of which is perfectly useless to him in afterlife.[9]

Referring to Salimullah's vision for the future and his progressive educational philosophy,

www.pathagar.com

Maulvi Mazharul Haq, a prominent Indian Muslim leader, once stated, 'What the Nawab Bahadur of Dacca thinks today, the Mussalmans of Eastern Bengal will think tomorrow'.[10]

Salimullah's concern for the welfare of the Muslims was not confined to Bengal. In 1912, when the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire faced serious difficulties and challenges as a result of wars in the Balkan, he not only spoke in favour of the Turks but also went out of his way to collect a large number of donations from the Muslims of East Bengal in order to assist their Turkish brethern. Even so, he was not a blind supporter of any particular political cause, Muslim or otherwise: any cause had to be a just and fair one. In 1914, when the Ottomans sided with Germany during the First World War, he refused to support them and sided instead with the Allies. As it turned out, his decision was vindicated, because after the war the Allies made the Ottomans pay a heavy price for siding with Germany; much to the annoyance and irritation of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who disagreed with his political superior's decision to side with Germany.

In April 1914, after convening the Muslim Educational Conference of United Bengal and the Muslim League a day later, Salimullah finally bowed out of active politics. However, he continued his religious and charitable activities, and regularly organised celebration of the birth of the Prophet (*Mawlid*) and other Islamic festivities. He established one of the largest orphanages in Bengal, which became known as Salimullah Muslim Orphanage. In addition to this, in 1902, he donated (in accordance with the wishes of his father) one lakh two thousand rupees for the establishment of an Engineering College in Dhaka. This institution is today known as Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). He also established the Salimullah Muslim Hall, a residential hall for the Muslim students in Dhaka. In recognition of his outstanding services to the people of East Bengal, the Sir Salimullah Medical College in Dhaka was named after him, and the British government awarded him many honours including the Companion of the Order of the Star of India (CSI) in 1906, Knight Commander of the Order of the Star of India (KCSI) in 1909 and Knight Grand Commander of the Indian Empire (GCIE) in 1911, which was one of the highest awards to have been conferred by the government on a Muslim.

On a personal level, Salimullah was pious, gentle, friendly and polite. He was fluent in Urdu, Persian and English, but was also familiar with Arabic and Bengali. Although he was a devout Muslim, he never forced his views and opinions on others, even his own family members. Thus, for instance, when his stepbrother, Khwajah Atiqullah, disagreed with him on the partition of Bengal and even actively campaigned against the partition, Salimullah did not allow his politics to poison their relationship. In other words, he was known to have been fair, just and equitable in his dealings with his friends and foe alike. Likewise, on one occasion, when an elderly lady complained to him that her grown up son had refused to serve her in old age, he immediately called her son. On his arrival, Salimullah asked him to go and buy a large jackfruit. When he returned with the biggest jackfruit he could find in the market, the Nawab tied the fruit to his belly and then

www.pathagar.com

ordered him to go up and down the steps of Ahsan Manzil nine times. He barely completed one round before he was overwhelmed by exhaustion. This way Salimullah reminded the son that his mother had carried him for nine months without complaining and therefore his mother deserved to be served by him. The son apparently returned to his mother and begged for forgiveness.[11]

Referring to Salimullah, Syed Muhammad Taifoor wrote:

> [I] never came across a more attractive personality. His heart always glowed if he could help a Muslim. He was very liberal in recommending cases of Muslims for some kind of employment. When the writer pointed out to him that his indiscriminate recommendations might prejudice their value. The Nawab at once replied that 'if out of these recommendations only one applicant becomes successful, I should think myself lucky that I have been successful in helping a Muslim brother.'[12]

The Nawab was selfless when it came to assisting others, and according to Taifoor, he used to stand in prayers before his Lord with complete devotion and utter humility:

> [I] along with several other enthusiasts followed the Nawab in this adventure in the Dilkusha Garden Mosque. After standing [in prayer] behind the Nawab for about an hour, the writer lost his patience and quietly slipped away from the mosque while the Nawab remained standing like a colossus imbued with all humility before his Creator.[13]

This visionary Muslim politician, philanthropist, educationalist and champion of the rights and interests of the Muslims of Bengal died unexpectedly in his residence in Chaurangi, Calcutta, at the relatively young age of 43. The circumstances surrounding his death are far from clear. According to one account, the revocation of the partition of Bengal by the government affected his health and, as a result, he was taken seriously ill and he died of this illness. Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, who was a close colleague of Salimullah and had been with the latter during his final moments, stated that the Nawab:

> Had been ailing long from complicated diseases and his object in coming to Calcutta was, chiefly to place himself in the hands of expert doctors. He was confined to bed since his arrival and there was no immediate cause for any anxiety. On Tuesday last, however, he had an attack of fever which abated on Friday morning, but in the afternoon towards 4 o'clock there was soon another relapse and he expired at two-twenty-five in the morning of Saturday. I was at his bedside when he passed away.[14]

However, according to another—albeit less credible—account, he was poisoned by his enemies because he threatened their interests; according to Nawab Begum Raushan Akhtar, Salimullah's youngest wife, he was poisoned and, for this reason, his body was escorted to Dhaka by government personnel in a carefully sealed coffin and his remains were buried in the family graveyard at Begum Bazar. The burial took place quickly and discretely and the other members of the Nawab's family were not allowed to see his body. Government personnel, she claimed, continued to guard his grave for six months before his family members were

www.pathagar.com

allowed to visit for the first time. If the Nawab was murdered, who could have been behind this ghastly crime? Was it the Hindu extremists who had tried to assassinate him before, for example, during his visit to Comilla? Or did the government have a role to play in his death? Historians may have to look at this issue again and, if necessary, objectively re-examine the circumstances surrounding his death in order to sift the facts from fiction, although the majority of his biographers have agreed that he had died of a combination of long-standing illness and medical complication.

Salimullah is today considered to be a leading politician and freedom fighter in both Pakistan and Bangladesh, because, by founding the All-India Muslim League in 1906 with the support of other prominent Indian Muslim leaders, he had, in effect, prepared the way for Muhammad Ali Jinnah to emerge and establish Pakistan as a separate homeland for the Muslims of India under the banner of the Muslim League. If Jinnah had not successfully argued the case for Pakistan, then the question of establishing an independent Bangladesh would not have arisen at all. For this reason, in 1990, the government of Pakistan issued a special commemorative stamp in honour of Salimullah, referring to him as a pioneer of freedom and democracy in the subcontinent. The government of Bangladesh did the same in 1993. As expected, his ideals and legacy continued to be championed by many of his descendants who played prominent roles in Pakistani politics including Sir Khwajah Nazimuddin who became the second prime minister of Pakistan.

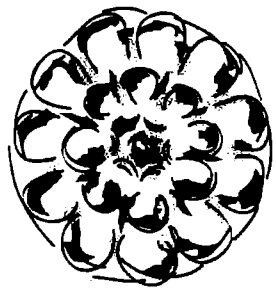
Nawab Sir Salimullah's life and work defined and changed the course of India's history during the early part of the twentieth century, and his legacy continues to influence the lives, thoughts and destinies of the Muslims of the subcontinent to this day. Yet, Ahmad Hasan Dani, a renowned historian and archaeologist of the subcontinent, included entries on the life and works of Sir Sayyid, Rt. Hon. Syed Ameer Ali, Nawab Muhsin ul-Mulk, the Ali Brothers, Sir Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah among others in his *Founding Fathers of Pakistan* (1981) but, for some unknown reason, completely overlooked Nawab Sir Salimullah. Clearly this was a serious omission, and I hope that the present biographical entry on the life and work of this important Muslim leader and of the subcontinent will inspire others to pursue further study and research on his life, contribution and achievements for the benefit of the present and future generations.

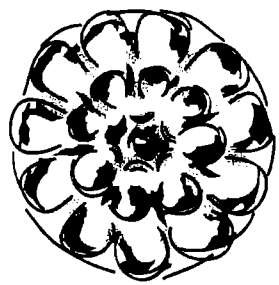
Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, who was a close colleague and supporter of Nawab Sir Salimullah, paid him this glowing tribute:

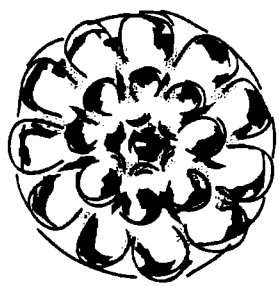
> The death of the Nawab Bahadur of Dacca will be keenly felt not only in Bengal but throughout India. The Mussalmans of Bengal have lost in him a great leader, counsellor and friend and his death leaves a gap hard to be filled. He was the people's friend and representative and was readily accessible to all. He was ever ready to take his share in any work entrusted to him either by the Government or his countrymen. Inspite of all that may be said, he was liked by Indian and European friends for his many qualities of head and heart. In later years the maladies he suffered from prevented him much from participating in Council meetings and other public affairs, but it must be said that his record of work

www.pathagar.com

in both the Councils—Imperial and Local—has been exemplary and his counsels were of great help... An excellent representative and an exponent of the highest ideals and aspirations of the Mussalmans, his death to them is a great blow and with him one of the most influential personalities which Mussalman India produced in recent years, passes away. Indian Mussalmans have lost in him a great and good man and the Mussalmans of Bengal and especially of Eastern Bengal a great patron of learning and one that was ever ready to ameliorate the conditions of the people.[15]







Notes

1. Muhammad Abdullah, *Nawab Abdul Ghani-o-Nawab Ahsanullah: Jiban-o-Karma.*
2. Syed Muhammad Taifoor, *Glimpses of Old Dhaka.*
3. Ibid.
4. Muhammad Abdullah, *Nawab Salimullah: Jiban-o-Karma.*
5. Matiur Rahman, *From Consultation to Confrontation: A Study of the Muslim League in British Indian Politics (1906–1912).*
6. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *The History of the University of Dacca.*
7. Ibid.
8. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. S. M. Taifoor, op. cit.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
15. Ibid.

www.pathagar.com

1871–1936

WAJID ALI KHAN PANNI

Speaking at the Eastern Bengal and Assam Provincial Muhammadan Educational Conference held in Dhaka on the 14 April 1906, Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet, a renowned Muslim educationalist, scholar and philanthropist of the time, observed the following:

> The Musalmans, confident of the superiority of their system of education, continued to pursue their old studies with the lamentable result that before long they were practically excluded from that share of office and emolument in Government service, which they had once almost monopolised. For a long time the Musalmans were quite indifferent to this regrettable state of things. At last they have realised their position, and of late a change for the better has taken place.[1]

www.pathagar.com

This change was triggered by the realisation that if the Muslims were to make progress, they could not do that without accessing modern education. The number of Muslims who were entering educational institutions for further and higher learning had been increasing steadily, but their numbers were not in proportion to their overall population in Bengal. Needless to say, this proved that while the Muslim community was progressing well, the other communities were making even bigger strides. Vigorous efforts were required on the part of the Muslims if they were to catch up with their Hindu counterparts. This lamentable condition of the Muslims of Bengal during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century prompted many leading Muslim personalities of the time to take steps to improve the educational condition of their people. One such patriotic and influential Muslim personality of Bengal was Wajid Ali Khan Panni.

Maulvi Wajid Ali Khan Panni, also known as 'Atiyar Chand', 'Chand Mian' and 'Bengal's second Muhsin', was born into a wealthy and prominent Muslim family of Karatia in Tangail District, which is located close to Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. According to Muhammad Abdullah, his forefathers were Pathans who settled in village Atiya, located five miles from Karatia, during the time of the Mughal emperor, Akbar the Great. Thanks to his loyalty and dedicated service to the Mughals, Salim Khan Panni, a prominent ancestor of Wajid Ali, was offered a large plot of land by Emperor Akbar, which in due course became known as the village of Atiya. Salim Khan settled there and served the Mughals as their loyal supporter and representative in Bengal. Subsequently, the members of the Panni family, including Sadat Ali Khan, the grandfather of Wajid Ali, moved to Karatia in 1858 and settled there permanently. Sadat Ali had only one son, Hafiz Mahmud Ali Khan Panni, who was the father of Wajid Ali.[2] The Pannis were devout Muslims who were known for their patronage of Islamic education and charitable activities. Sadat Ali Khan established one of the first primary schools in his area and in so doing he encouraged both Muslims and Hindus from the neighbouring villages to come and settle in and around Karatia.

Like his father, Mahmud Ali Khan became a prominent personality of his time. He was a devout Muslim and a wealthy landholder, and he bought and set up a printing machine near his house, which subsequently became known as the 'Mahmudia Press'. Through this press Mawlana Muhammad Na'imuddin of Tangail published the monthly *Akhbar-i-Islam* journal in 1884. Nine years later, Mawlana Na'imuddin's Bengali translation of parts of the Qur'an were published by the same press. In addition to this, Mahmud Ali Khan and Munshi Muhammad Ibrahim, who was a *zamindar* of West Bengal, provided regular financial support to the weekly *Sudhakar* journal for the benefit of the Muslim community.

Having been brought up and educated in a devout Muslim family, it was not surprising that Wajid Ali assimilated Islamic knowledge and practices from the outset. He completed his formal education in Arabic, Bengali, Urdu, Persian and traditional Islamic sciences at home under the supervision of private tutors, and he acquired proficiency in these languages. Like his father, Wajid Ali became very fond of

www.pathagar.com

learning and education; although unlike many of his contemporaries (such as Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet, Maulvi A. K. Fazlul Haq and Barrister Abdur Rasul) he did not pursue further or higher learning at a formal educational institution. Even so, he was a keen student of the languages and read classical Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Bengali literature extensively. In so doing he became a knowledgeable and erudite scholar in his own right, acquiring considerable fluency in English also.[3]

As the son of a wealthy *zamindar*, Wajid Ali was groomed by his father to succeed him as the head of the Panni family. In 1895, when Wajid Ali was 24 years old, his father died and Wajid Ali assumed full responsibility for his extended family. Under Mahmud Ali Khan's management, the family landholdings and properties had increased, and under Wajid Ali's personal supervision the profit multiplied further. He treated all his staff fairly and paid them well for their hard work (unlike many other *zamindars* of the time). As the family income continued to increase, Wajid Ali invested a considerable sum in philanthrophic and charitable activities. Thus, he requested that Mawlana Na'imuddin translate the thirtieth part (*Juz Amma*) of the Qur'an into Bengali. This translation was completed in 1893, and Wajid Ali sponsored its publication. Commending Mawlana Na'imuddin for his efforts, Wajid Ali stated that this translation would not only enable the Muslims of Bengal to engage directly with the Qur'an, it would also help them to mould their social, political and economic affairs in the light of the Divine revelation. Wajid Ali was convinced that the Qur'an had to be made accessible to the Muslim population of Bengal by translating it into their mother tongue. He took this important initiative long before Mawlana Abbas Ali of Basirhat and Khan Bahadur Taslimuddin Ahmad published their Bengali translations of the Qur'an (which was during the early part of the twentieth century).[4] As such, Wajid Ali played an important role in the dissemination of Islam's sacred scripture in Bengal, although this fact is not widely known today. Prior to this (in 1892) he had also sponsored a translation by Mawlana Na'imuddin of the entire *The Edicts of Alamgir* (*Fatawa-i-Alamgiri*) into Bengali for the first time; this was published in four volumes. This compendium of Islamic jurisprudence was originally compiled by a group of leading Indian Islamic scholars at the behest of Emperor Awrangzeb Alamgir, the last of the Great Mughals, and over time it had become a standard work of reference on the subject.

Wajid Ali is often referred to as 'Bengal's second Muhsin' due to his generosity and wide-ranging charitable activities. If Haji Muhammad Muhsin of West Bengal, the initiator of the famous Muhsin Fund, was a great benefactor of the Muslims of Bengal; then Wajid Khan's contribution to the regeneration of the Muslim community of East Bengal was no less remarkable. In 1901 (four years before the death of his father) Wajid Ali expanded the primary school established by his father and renamed it Hafiz Mahmud Ali Khan High School. He recruited Mr C. J. Smith (a Calcutta-based British academic and estate manager) to the school as its first headmaster. Later prominent headmasters of this school included P. C. Mukherjee and Ibrahim Khan.

In addition to the high school, Wajid Ali founded and patronised many other

www.pathagar.com

educational institutions: including numerous Qur'an schools, mosques and primary schools. However, one of the crowning achievements of his life was the establishment of the Sadat College. He founded this college in July 1926, in memory of his grandfather, Sadat Ali Khan Panni, and it became the first college to be established by a Muslim in the history of East Bengal. The purpose of this college was to encourage the students to pursue further and high education without having to travel to other parts of Bengal. Furthermore, he established separate hostels for the students (both boys and girls) and provided free medical facilities to enable them to pursue their education in a safe, secure and conducive environment. He paid for these services out of his own pocket. As a devout and learned Muslim, Wajid Ali was convinced that the Muslims of Bengal would not be able to advance and make progress without good quality education: for this to happen, he felt, there was an urgent need for good educational institutions.[5]

Although establishing schools and colleges was an easy task for a wealthy landholder like Wajid Ali, recruiting high calibre teachers and educational administrators became a much more challenging task, given the pitiful educational condition of the Muslims of Bengal. In the words of the historian Muhammad Abdur Rahim:

> From the beginning of the nineteenth century the Muslims of Bengal fell into educational backwardness. According to Adam's Report of 1838, the Hindu students at the Arabic-Persian institutions in Murshidabad, Burdwan, Birbhum, Tirhut and South Bihar numbered 2096, while the Muslim students were 1558 in number. The number of the Hindus and Muslims at the Vernacular schools in some districts were, Murshidabad 998 and 62, Burdwan 12,408 and 769 and Birbhum 6125 and 232 respectively. Adam noticed that the impoverished condition of the Muslims who were mostly rural people was a serious handicap to their education. He felt that poor and numerous Muslims of the rural areas required the special consideration and financial help of the government... The Muslims [also] failed to draw the benefit of the education system introduced by the British rulers on account of its serious limitations. E. C. Bayley, a British civilian, said, 'The Musalmans have held aloof from a system which made no concession to their prejudices; made no provision for what they esteemed to be their necessities, which was in its nature unavoidably antagonistic to their interests and at variance with their social traditions'. In analysing the causes, he observed, 'The truth is that our system of Public Instruction ignores the three most powerful instincts of the Musalman heart'. According to him, the Muslims did not like teaching through the medium of the vernacular language and also by the Hindu teachers.[6]

However, the reality was that the Muslim community of Bengal was not producing enough Muslim teachers at the time, and therefore the educational institutions founded by philanthropists like Wajid Ali had no choice but to hire non-Muslim teachers to impart education to the Muslim students. As expected, soon after establishing the Hafiz Mahmud Ali Khan High School, Wajid Ali was forced to hire an Englishman to take this school forward; who, in turn, was succeeded by a Hindu teacher.

www.pathagar.com

In fact, it was not until 1919 that he was able to recruit a senior Muslim teacher, Ibrahim Khan, to the school. Unlike Wajid Ali, Ibrahim was born and brought up in a working-class Muslim family in the Tangail District. After completing his entrance examination in 1912, he joined Anandamohan College and passed his First of Arts (FA) in 1914. Two years later, he obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree with Honours from St. Paul's College.

In addition to this, he obtained a Bachelor of Laws degree in 1918 and a Masters from Calcutta University. These impressive academic achievements prompted Wajid Ali to recruit Ibrahim Khan to his school. In his memoirs, titled *Batayan*, which were published by the Bangla Academy in 1967, Ibrahim stated that he wanted to pursue a legal career, but his encounter with Wajid Ali not only changed his outlook on life but also his choice of career.[7] Accordingly, in 1919, at the age of 25, Ibrahim was appointed headmaster of the school. Six years later, when Wajid Ali founded the Sadat College, Ibrahim became the principal of the new college: which thrived under his stewardship. Today this college offers higher secondary, degree and honours programs, as well as postgraduate education to more than 13,000 students, both male and female. The college library has more than 25,000 books and some of its former students include prominent writers and poets such as Bandi Ali Miah, Taslim Husayn and Mufakhkharul Islam.

Wajid Ali was influenced by the piety and patriotism of his wife, Rokeya Khanum, and by Nawab Sir Salimullah's idea of a Muslim renaissance in Bengal. Similarly, Ibrahim was profoundly influenced by Wajid Ali's desire and determination to contribute to the political, economic and educational regeneration of the Muslim society of East Bengal. Wajid Ali became a supporter of the All-India Muslim League, serving as the vice-president of the Eastern Bengal and Assam Provincial Muslim League in 1909 when Nawab Sir Salimullah was its president. Interestingly, he was also a member of the All-India Congress Committee as well as the president of Mymensingh District Congress Committee. He was the only *zamindar* to have played an active part in several political initiatives of the time including the Khilafat and Non-Co-operation movements. According to Muhammad Abdur Rahim:

> In 1919 some Muslim merchants established Majlis-i-Khilafat at Bombay to defend the honour of the Khalifa. This moved Maulana Abdul Bari to convene an All-India Muslim Conference at Lucknow. It set up All-India Khilafat Committee with headquarters at Bombay and branches in all provinces. A day of prayer was observed throughout India praying for Khalifa. The first session of the Khilafat Conference met at Delhi on 24 November 1919 with Fazlul Haq as the President. It resolved to boycott victory celebrations. It also decided to boycott English goods and adopt non-cooperation with the government, if their demands about the Khilafat were not accepted. Several Congress leaders attended this Conference and Gandhi, who presided over its special meeting, assured the Muslims of the cooperation of the Congress and Hindus in the Khilafat cause. The second session of the Khilafat Conference held at Lucknow in December under the Presidentship of Maulana Shaukat Ali decided to send deputations to the Viceroy and

www.pathagar.com

the British Prime Minister to represent Muslim feelings in respect of the Khilafat and Turkey.[8]

Wajid Ali became actively involved in these movements and served as president of Mymensingh District Khilafat Committee. His political activism and defiance led to his arrest on 17 December 1921. Although thousands of people came to show their support for Wajid Ali and expressed their opposition to the police, Wajid Ali insisted on accompanying the police to the district magistrate. The magistrate hoped to resolve the matter amicably and proposed that if Wajid Ali agreed to disassociate himself from the Khilafat and Non-Co-operation movements, then the case against him would be withdrawn. Being a true patriot, Wajid Ali turned down the offer without any hesitation. In response, the magistrate sent him to prison. He served part of his sentence in Mymensingh prison and was subsequently transferred to Alipore jail in Calcutta. There he met and became a good friend of Maulvi Mujibur Rahman, who was a prominent journalist and editor of *The Mussalman* (which was founded by the barrister Abdur Rasul in 1905). Later, in 1927, when this journal celebrated its twenty-first anniversary, Wajid Ali sent its editor the following message:

> It is with great pleasure that I felicitate 'The Mussalman' on its having attained its twenty-first year in Dec, 1927. It has had its summers and winters. In 1921, its able editor Maulvi Mujibur Rahman Shaheb, who has been tending it with a true parental fondness, became His Majesty's guest in the Alipore jail. As a fellow prisoner and a long associate, I had the pleasure of knowing him intimately. I wish I could be allowed to style 'The Musalman' as the champion of Hindu-Muslim unity.[9]

After having been confined to a prison cell for more than five months, Wajid Ali's health began to deteriorate, which led to his immediate release. Nevertheless, despite suffering such hardship, he did not abandon his political beliefs and activism. Thus, in 1923 he helped Sir Abdur Rahim, Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet, Maulvi Mujibur Rahman, Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan and others to draft the Bengal Pact in order to unite the Muslim and Hindu communities of Bengal. This pact was bitterly opposed by many right-wing leaders within the Hindu-dominated Congress, as well as by the members of the Anjuman-i-Islami. Wajid Ali reasoned with Anjuman's leadership and encouraged them to support this initiative. He was held in such a high regard by Bengal's Muslim scholars that he served as the president of Anjuman-i-Islami in Mymensingh for a period. As a prominent Muslim leader and philanthropist, he along with Abul Mansur Ahmad, persuaded Isma'il Husayn Shirazi (the famous Muslim poet of Bengal) to support the pact, despite the ongoing opposition to it from the Hindu Congress leadership. This initiative came to nothing, unfortunately, after the death of C. R. Das, the leading Hindu proponent of the pact.

Referring to Wajid Ali's wide ranging contributions to the people of Bengal, *The Moslem Chronicle* stated:

> He has evinced an enlightened patriotism which may be well imitated by many. Quiet, simple and of unobtrusive habits, his numerous charities of varying amounts to useful institutions of

www.pathagar.com

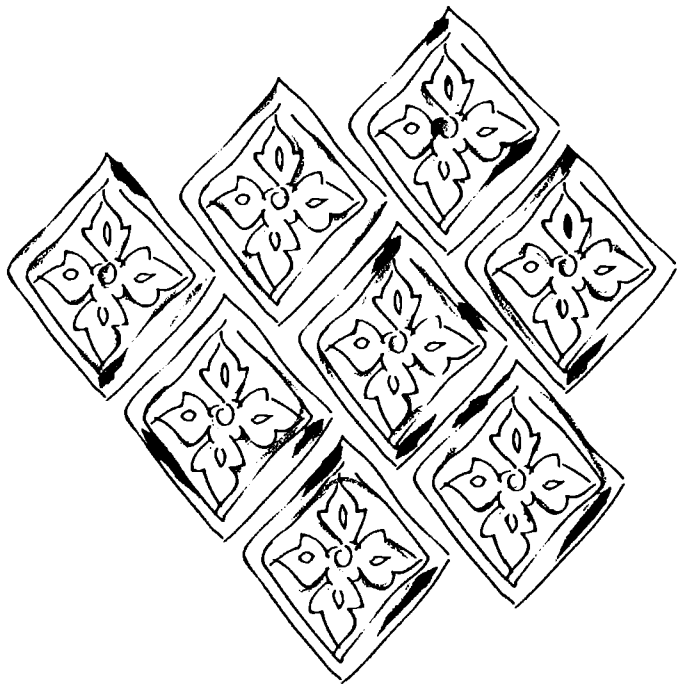
> whatever class or creed—take a distinctive oriental character. He maintains within his Zemindari a H. E. School, subsidises many Maktabs and Patshalas and helps every Anjuman or sabha that can show a record of good work done.[10]

Wajid Ali's generosity was such that he used to set aside more than twenty per cent of his annual income to charitable activities. He established a Shari'ah department in his locality, which recruited hundreds of Islamic scholars and preachers in order to raise awareness and understanding of Islam in the local community. He belonged to the Qadiriyyah order of Sufism, having received his spiritual initiation at the hands of Shah Burhanullah Qadiri, a prominent Islamic scholar and Sufi sage of Dhaka.

Towards the end of his life, Wajid Ali's beloved wife, Rokeya, died, and this made him almost inconsolable. A few years later, he passed away at the age of 66, and he was laid to rest in Karatia, not far from his family home. Before his death, Wajid Ali prepared a deed of endowment (*waqafnama*) wherein he set aside a considerable sum for educational and charitable activities. *The Mussalman* paid this important Muslim personality of Bengal the following tribute:

> A most notable figure has been removed from the ranks of Indian patriots and philanthropists... He responded to the call of his country and his religion and courted imprisonment during the Non-Coopertaion movement of 1921 and on two counts was sentenced to three months and one year's imprisonment respectively... No other person in Bengal belonging to the landed aristocracy showed such bold patriotism and such sacrifices as Chan Mea Shahed did.[11]

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. Muhammad Abdullah, *Bangladesher Dash Dishari.*
2. Ibid.
3. Muhammad Abdullah, *Adhunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari.*
4. Muhammad Mujibur Rahman, *Musalmander Sahitya Sadhana.*
5. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
6. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947.*
7. Ibrahim Khan, *Batayan.*
8. M. A. Rahim, op. cit.
9. *The Mussalman,* 6 December 1927.
10. *The Moslem Chronicle,* 25 April 1903.
11. *The Mussalman,* 1 May 1936.

www.pathagar.com

1872–1953



MAWLANA ABU NASR WAHID

ACCORDING TO THE HISTORIAN Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan (1995), English education became accessible to the Muslims of Bengal during the early part of the nineteenth century, when Calcutta Madrasah offered it as an option. Even so, very few Muslims pursued modern English education, because it was taught on an ad hoc basis rather than being fully integrated into the madrash system. Furthermore, the Calcutta Madrasah neglected to train Muslims to be capable of teaching the subject. The English Department of the Calcutta Madrash was poorly funded and the government officials paid little attention to it. Despite this, the Calcutta Madrash's attempt to combine modern education with traditional learning was arguably the appropriate approach for the Muslims of Bengal; the rise of Nawab

www.pathagar.com

Abdul Latif, a student of the Calcutta Madrash, proved that this system of education was the way forward for the Muslim community. Encouraged by the Nawab, in 1853, the principal of the Madrasah prepared a reform scheme to integrate traditional Islamic learning with modern scientific education, focusing on learning English as a key subject. The traditionalists, led by conservative religious scholars (*ulama*), strongly opposed the measure, as they felt this would lead to the infiltration of un-Islamic influences into the Muslim community and this would therefore undermine traditional Islamic culture. This forced Calcutta Madrasah to abandon their entire scheme.[1] Although the British government, as well as Nawab Abdul Latif and his colleagues, had tried and failed to reform *madrasah* education in Bengal, Mawlana Abu Nasr Wahid, a renowned Islamic scholar and educationalist, later took up this task and successfully combined modern English education with traditional Islamic learning, thereby reforming *madrasah* education for the better.

'Shamsul Ulama' Mawlana Abu Nasr Muhammad Wahid was born into a middle-class Muslim family in Hawapara area (in Sylhet town in present-day Bangladesh). His father, Qari Muhammad Javid Bakht, was a well-known Islamic scholar who was awarded the title of 'Shamsul Ulama' ('senior Islamic scholar') by the British government on account of his wide-ranging contribution to the Muslims of Sylhet. Qari Javid Bakht's forefathers hailed from village Hasnabad (or Hasnabaz village) in Chathak Thana, and later moved to Hawapara in Sylhet town, where the family settled permanently. Qari Javid Bakht was a prominent disciple and successor (*khalifah*) of Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, a renowned Muslim scholar and reformer of Bengal during the nineteenth century. Abu Nasr was born and brought up in an Islamic environment, and he received his early education in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Bengali and Islamic Studies at home under the tutelage of his learned father. He then attended his local primary school, where he was a bright and dedicated student and excelled in his studies. In 1884, at the age of 12, Abu Nasr joined Sylhet Government High School and, eight years later, he successfully completed his entrance examination in 1892. In the same year, he joined Sylhet Murari Chand College and passed his First of Arts (FA) with flying colours in 1895 at age 23. This was a remarkable achievement, as he became one of only a few Muslims to have passed this examination in Sylhet District at the time.[2]

From Sylhet, Abu Nasr proceeded to Calcutta and joined the Presidency College to study Arabic. In 1897 he obtained his Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree with Honours in Arabic and, six months later, he passed his Masters (MA) in the same subject (it was possible in those days to sit for the MA examination only six months after completing the BA degree). This was another important achievement for Abu Nasr, as he became the first Muslim student from Bengal to obtain both the BA and MA degrees in Arabic. In those days Arabic was mainly pursued in *madrasahs* where Arabic grammar and syntax was taught to enable students to understand and interpret traditional Islamic scriptures such as the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions and the corpus of classical Islamic literature. Unlike *madrasah* students, Abu Nasr completed his advanced Arabic education

www.pathagar.com

through the English-medium schools and colleges. If this was a highly unusual choice of educational route for someone brought up and educated in a conservative Muslim family, then it should be pointed out that Abu Nasr's father, unlike the majority of the *ulama* at the time, was an open-minded Islamic scholar who whole-heartedly supported Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Nawab Abdul Latif and Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri's policy of engagement with the British. He felt that the Muslims of India in general (and of Bengal in particular) had no choice but to pursue modern English education if they were to progress. In other words, as a prominent follower of Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, Qari Javid Bakht was in favour of combining Arabic, Persian and classical Islamic learning with modern English education.

In the words of Nawab Abdul Latif:

> If [a Muslim] knows Persian and Arabic along with English, he acquires influence in society, and is of course sure to use his influence in the interests of the government. The government should, therefore, in my humble opinion, devise such means whereby the Mahomedans may be taught at once English and Persian and Arabic.[3]

However, the reality in the Muslim community was rather different at the time: for Nawab Abdul Latif represented a minority, while the conservative *ulama* spoke for the majority. The fundamental difference between the two groups was that the former considered modern education to be an important route to progress and development, whereas the latter were very suspicious of government policies that related to educational change and reform. The conservative *ulama* felt that English education would pave the way for the progress of modernism and westernisation in the Muslim society, leading to loss of faith and moral confusion. Threatened by the changing circumstances, most of them felt clinging onto traditional system of education was the only way to preserve the status quo. The *ulama* continued to exert their influence through the large network of private *madrasahs* they operated throughout Bengal (including the Calcutta Madrasah and Muhsiniyah Madrasahs of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Hughly), which were partly funded and regulated by the British government. The *ulama* considered themselves to be the successors of the Prophet, and disapproved of any deviation from traditional Islamic values and practices.[4]

Unsurprisingly, the conservative *ulama* considered the reformist approach pursued by English educated Muslim leaders like Nawab Abdul Latif to be dangerous and misguided. However, Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri and his prominent disciples (including Qari Javid Bakht) were not in favour of such polarisation, and were keen to reconcile these seemingly conflicting approaches by encouraging the Muslims of Bengal to pursue both traditional subjects along with modern English education. For this reason, Qari Javid Bakht encouraged young Abu Nasr to join Sylhet Government High School after he had completed his early Islamic education at home. In that sense, Abu Nasr was a product of the modern educational institutions rather than the traditional *madrasah* system, although he was thoroughly familiar with the methods of the latter. According to Abu Nasr's biographer (Muhammad Abdullah), he completed his formal education

www.pathagar.com

at the age of 25 and returned to Sylhet where he began to teach at the Government High School.[5] Some of his leading students at this school included Abdul Hamid and Basanta Kumar Das, both of whom subsequently went onto work as government officials.

After teaching at the government high school for a period, Abu Nasr returned to Calcutta, where he joined the law college. He combined his legal studies with part-time teaching at the Calcutta Madrasah. At the time, some of his prominent students at the *madrasah* included Abu Salim Muhammad Akram (later Justice Abu Salim), Amiruddin Ahmad (later Justice Amiruddin), Amin Ahmad (later Justice Amin) and Badruddin Ahmad (later Deputy Registrar Badruddin). Abu Nasr's desire to pursue a legal career did not eventuate, and instead he joined Gauhati Cotton College as a lecturer in Arabic and Persian. During this period, he also taught English and logic, in the absence of a fellow lecturer. Some of his leading students at this time included Syed Muhammad Saadullah (later Sir Saadullah, the premier of Assam), Ataur Rahman (later A. P. P. I of Assam) and Shuda Nanda Dhuaba (later a member of Assam Public Service Commission). Abu Nasr continued to teach at this college until 1905, when government officials decided to transfer him to Hughly Muhsin College. However, Nawab Sir Salimullah intervened and requested the authorities to transfer him to Dhaka Madrasah instead. This institution was established in 1873 on the recommendation of Sir George Campbell, the lieutenant governor. At the time, three *madrasahs* were established in three major cities of East Bengal: Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi.

According to S. M. Ali (a former treasurer of Dhaka University), the Dhaka Madrasah became the first government-funded institution in 1873. After the defeat of Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah in 1757 the traditional *maktabs* and *madrasahs* became the main centres of Islamic education in Bengal, while Bengal's Muslim elite hired private Arabic and Islamic scholars to teach their children and other students in their locality. This teaching was carried out on an ad hoc basis, and lacked the systematic approach that was pursued in the *madrasah* system. The private *madrasahs* taught the Nizami syllabus that had been devised by Mawlana Nizamuddin of Farangi Mahall in Lucknow. This syllabus emphasised traditional subjects, and focused on logic and metaphysics; while the *maktabs* mainly taught the Qur'an.[6] The Dhaka Madrasah was established to fill an important gap that existed in the educational requirements of the Muslim community of East Bengal. The first superintendent of the *madrasah* was Mawlana Ubaydullah al-Ubaydi Suhrawardi, who was a renowned Islamic scholar of Bengal and one of the original directors of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (MAO), which had been founded by Sir Sayyid in Aligarh. Under his stewardship, the *madrasah* prospered. In addition to facilities for teaching Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Islamic Studies, philosophy and logic, the *madrasah* had an English department, so that its students could prepare for the Calcutta University entrance examination. Suhrawardi was succeeded by Mawlana Abul Khair Muhammad Siddiq who, in turn, was succeeded by Mawlana Shamsul Alam Abdul Mu'nim of Sylhet. Abdul Mu'nim continued to serve in this capacity until his

www.pathagar.com

retirement in 1905. Abu Nasr succeeded him as the Superintendent of Dhaka Madrasah.

The year 1905 was momentus in the history of Bengal, as the government readjusted the boundaries of the province in that year. According to Matiur Rahman (1971), the partition of Bengal infuriated the Hindu elites of West Bengal, although the majority of the Muslims of Eastern Bengal and Assam supported the new province. To support the partition, Nawab Sir Salimullah founded the Eastern Bengal and Assam Provincial Muhammadan Association on 16 October 1905, and this antagonised the Hindu leaders, who felt threatened by the creation of the new province. The anti-partition campaign launched by the Hindus received a major boost after the resignation of Sir Bampfylde Fuller, Lieutenant-Governor of the new province. The Muslims were dismpayed by his resignation. For the first time, they realised that the new province could not be saved unless they widened their pro-partition campaign across India to match the way that the Congress was spearheading anti-partition agitation all over the country. Led by Nawab Sir Salimullah, the Muslim campaign inspired the Muslim leaders of Bengal to actively enlist the support of other leaders from across India, which eventually led to the founding of All-India Muslim League as a political party.[7]

Thanks to Nawab Sir Salimullah's efforts and foresight, the All-India Muslim League was inaugurated in Dhaka on 30 December 1906. The formation of the League marked the beginning of the political awakening of the Muslims of India in general (and Bengal in particular) and could not have happened without the social, religious and educational reforms initiated by Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, Sir Sayyid, Nawab Abdul Latif and Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi, among others. Abu Nasr and his colleagues were the educational products of the same reforms. As such, it would not be an exaggeration to say that had it not been for the reforms undertaken by the early Muslim leaders and scholars, it would not have been possible for Abu Nasr to develop his proposal for *madrasah* reformation in Bengal.

The case for reforming *madrasah* education was made at a number of conferences that took place in Dhaka during the early part of the twentieth century and were attended by experts in Muslim education. The Madrasah Reform Scheme was eventually promulgated in July 1914. Under the new scheme, English replaced Persian as the main language of instruction, and modern education was combined with Arabic learning. The old system of education was rapidly becoming redundant, with only the post of Muhammadan Marriage Registrar being open to its graduates. The new scheme opened the doors of the university to *madrasah* students like never before. Abu Nasr became the father of this scheme, and prominent Muslim leaders like Nawab Ali Chowdhury, Nawab Sirajul Islam and Mawlana Muhammad Ali were also actively involved in devising it. At the Provincial Muhammadan Educational Conference held in Dhaka in 1906, a resolution was moved by Nawab Sir Shamsul Huda to adopt the new scheme, and this was duly passed. Sir Bampfylde Fuller supported the idea: in fact, he liked the idea so much that he told Abu Nasr: 'Why don't you set an example yourself and go abroad to get ideas about modernising

www.pathagar.com

Madrasahs?'[8]

Abu Nasr took up this challenge and travelled extensively across the Muslim world and Europe to carry out research on the different types of educational systems and philosophies that prevailed in those countries. In addition to Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Turkey, he visited Budapest, Vienna, Berlin and Paris. He left Bengal towards the end of 1906 and returned home early in 1907, having completed his educational research and survey. He then visited some of the leading traditional seats of Islamic learning in India, including Deoband, Lucknow and Rampur. These travels were facilitated by the government of Bengal. Based on his observations and research findings, Abu Nasr prepared a report wherein he proposed the idea of establishing the New Scheme Madrasah, which was subsequently accepted and implemented by the government. The New Scheme Madrasah transformed *madrasah* education throughout Bengal (and especially in East Bengal) as it enabled *madrasah* students to enter university for the first time. New Scheme Madrasahs were of two types: junior and senior. The junior *madrasah* students continued up to class five, while the senior students completed up to secondary level. This scheme also enabled *madrasah* graduates to compete with modern university graduates to secure well-paid government jobs and services for the first time.

According to Syed Sajjad Husain (a former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University and a direct beneficiary of the New Scheme Madrasah) this scheme, unlike the Aligarh model, attempted to integrate traditional learning with modern education, whereby students were obliged to study Arabic and Islamic Studies as well as English and modern subjects such as science, philosophy, algebra and geometry. Students took standardised examinations at *madrasah*s and schools, which enabled them to enrol at colleges and universities. Such an approach protected Muslim students from losing their faith and culture, by providing them with a firm religious foundation during their early years, thus exposing them to modern learning at a later stage.[9]

The credit for this educational reform and synthesis must go to Abu Nasr, for although he was not a product of the *madrasah* system, he nonetheless had an excellent command of Arabic, Persian, Urdu, English and Bengali as well as traditional Islamic sciences. This enabled him to successfully change and improve the *madrasah* system, and he did so with the full backing and support of the leading Muslim scholars and reformers of the time. In other words, although Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi paved the way for combining traditional Islamic learning with modern education in East Bengal, Abu Nasr was responsible for fully developing and popularising this dual system of education for the benefit of the Muslims of that province. While Abu Nasr took the lead in developing the New Scheme Madrasah, many other prominent Muslim leaders and scholars actively supported this initiative (including Nawab Sir Salimullah, Nawab Sirajul Islam, Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, Nawab Sir Syed Shamsul Huda, Mawlana Muhammad Ali, Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet and Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah). This scheme played a vital role in the social, economic and intellectual regeneration of the Muslim community of Bengal, as it

www.pathagar.com

enabled generations of Muslim students to receive modern education along with religious instruction. Thus, leading Muslim academics, scholars and writers like Syed Muhammad Taifoor (historian), Sayyid Muazzam Husayn (Vice-Chancellor, Dhaka University), Syed Sajjad Husain (Vice-Chancellor, Dhaka and Rajshahi Universities), Muhammad Abdul Hai (Professor of Bangla, Dhaka University) and Abul Fazl (Vice-Chancellor, Chittagong University) either studied at the Dhaka Madrasah or directly benefited from the New Scheme Madrasah.

After serving as superintendent of Dhaka Madrasah for 14 years, Abu Nasr became a professor of Arabic and Persian at the Islamic Intermediate College. He eventually retired in 1927. He also founded the Department of Arabic, Persian and Islamic Studies at two other leading institutions: Dhaka and Patna universities. In fact, he not only founded, but also served as professor and first head of, the Department of Arabic, Persian and Islamic Studies at Dhaka University after it was established in 1921. For the benefit of the students of this department, he went out of his way to obtain original Arabic, Persian, Urdu and English books on traditional Islamic sciences and history. In addition to this, Abu Nasr was a member of many educational councils and committees (including Earle Conference, Nathan Committee, Dhaka University Academic Council and Muslim Educational Advisory Council). He was held in such high estimation by the Muslims of Bengal that the Muslim leaders, as well as the government officials, regularly consulted him on major issues affecting the Muslim community.

Despite being a renowned teacher, educationalist, Arabist and Islamic scholar, Abu Nasr found time to write or compile books on Arabic literature and Islamic topics. His notable works included *Mirqat al-Adab* (on Arabic literature), *Bakurat al-Adab* (on Arabic literature), *Khutbat al-Nabi* (on Islamic principles and practices), *Nukab* (anthology of classical Arabic writing), *Nukab al-Ulum* (anthology of Arabic writing) and *Diniyat Shikha* (a book in Bengali on Islamic teachings).[10] However, these books were not scholarly or academic works; rather, they were aimed at school, *madrasah* or college students. That is to say, they were introductory textbooks on aspects of Arabic literature and Islamic studies. For this reason his writings did not receive much attention from the scholars and they were not circulated widely.

In recognition of his achievements and contribution, he was awarded the title of 'Shamsul Ulama' in 1909 by the government. In 1921 he was elevated to the elite Indian Educational Service (IES), and this was considered to be an important achievement for an Islamic scholar and *madrasah* teacher. After his retirement, Abu Nasr went to Makkah to perform the pilgrimage (*hajj*) in 1934; he also visited Madinah in order to pay homage to the blessed Prophet (peace be on him). A few years later, he returned to his native Sylhet and became actively involved in local politics. For a short period, he served as a minister of education in Sir Syed Muhammad Saadullah's administration. Subsequently, he retired from politics and lived with his family in his Hawapara residence. This eminent Muslim scholar, educationalist and reformer eventually died in Dhaka at the age of 81, and he was laid to rest in Nabindra Shah's

www.pathagar.com

family cemetery. He was survived by his wife, who was the daughter of Syed Abdul Jabbar, a *zamindar* of Comilla, and they had two sons both of whom became prominent individuals in their own right.

Notably, Mawlana Abu Nasr directly supported, supervised or mentored scores of students who later became influential scholars, writers and administrators in East Bengal (now Bangladesh). These included: Sayyid Muazzam Husayn (Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University), Sirajul Haq (Professor Emeritus, Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Dhaka University), Justice Abdul Jabbar Khan and Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan (Vice-Chancellor, Southern University, Chittagong). In conversation, Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan informed me that Mawlana Abu Nasr was of light brownish complexion, tall in height, of slim build and had an attractive personality.[11] The Mawlana was Professor Khan's MA examiner at Dhaka University. According to Professor Sirajul Haq, Mawlana Abu Nasr was a polite and approachable teacher who was very fond of his students.

As a follower of Mawlana Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri, a son of Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, and a great Muslim reformer of Bengal, Mawlana Abu Nasr was in the habit of discussing and debating aspects of Mawlana Abdul Awwal's life, works and teachings. He conducted his discussions with friends, colleagues and students at Dhaka University (these included Mawlana Nazir Uddin, Mawlana Belayat Husayn and Mawlana Hafiz Abdur Razzaq).

www.pathagar.com



Notes

1. M. A. Khan, 'Muslim Renaissance in Bangladesh' in *Islam in Bangladesh through the Ages*.
2. Muhammad Abdullah, *Bangladesher Dash Dishari*.
3. Enamul Haq (ed.) *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif, his Writings and Related documents*.
4. M. A. Khan, op. cit.
5. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
6. S. M. Ali, 'Education and Culture in Dacca during the Last One Hundred Years' in *Muhammad Shahidullah Felicitation Volume*.
7. Matiur Rahman, *From Consultation to Confrontation: A Study of the Muslim League in British Indian Politics (1906–1912)*.
8. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
9. Syed Sajjad Husain and S. A. Ashraf, *Crisis in Muslim Education*.
10. M. Abdullah, op. cit.
11. Interview with Dr Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan, January 2010.

www.pathagar.com

1873–1965

KHAN BAHADUR AHSANULLAH

Soon after the death of Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah, the renowned *Daily Azad* newspaper paid him this glowing tribute:

> Many achievements of [his] action-packed life will remain ever alive to the nation... the impact of the Muslim Education Movement had lived with him as the biggest inspiration till the last days of his life. This inspiration had developed in him a serious interest to do good [things] for the development of education, for the quest of religion and above all for selflessly serving the Muslim population of the country. The fact that he was blessed with a long life and could spend every moment of that life in silently serving the cause of Islam and the Muslim people was in itself, an act of blessing from the Almighty. With his death,

www.pathagar.com

> an irredeemable void has been created in the society.[1]

According to another admirer:

> In the awakening of Bengal and the rejuvenation of the Bengali Muslims, [he] emerged as a true renaissance man who had reconciled the worldly and the spiritual on the palm of a single hand; succeeded to strike a balance between the worldly brilliance and the divine brilliance; ultimately gaining the eligibility to start his proud journey to receive the honour of the successful human being or Insan-ul-Kamil.[2]

This important Muslim educationalist, reformer, writer, religious scholar and spiritual luminary of Bengal blazed a trail that has continued to inspire the Muslims of Bengal to this day.

Muhammad Ahsanullah, better known as Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah, was born into a middle class Muslim family of village Nalta in present-day Satkhira District of Bangladesh. His grandfather, Munshi Muhammad Danish, was a relatively wealthy individual who was widely respected in his locality for his sense of justice, fairplay and piety. Like his grandfather (and Ahsanullah's father), Munshi Muhammad Mafizuddin was a relatively wealthy and pious individual, and he ensured that his eldest son received a thorough education during his early years. In his autobiography (titled *Amar Jibandhara*), Ahsanullah wrote that his early education began when he was around five under the supervision of Matilal Bhanja Chowdhury, a prominent local tutor, who inspired him to excel in his studies.[3] This inspiration encouraged him to focus on his studies and achieve his full potential in life. After completing his early education, Ahsanullah joined Nalta Middle English School. He was physically weak and frail, however, such that his early education was interrupted on more than one occasion. After being treated by Puna Chandra Roy, a well-known physician from Taki, he made full recovery: although he had, by then, lost interest in his studies. Nevertheless, his father encouraged him to continue his studies and enrolled him at Taki Government High School. During this period young Ahsanullah lived with a local Hindu family and experienced racial and religious discrimination as a Muslim. He was barely 16 when his family called him back to Nalta, where he was married to a local girl in accordance with his grandmother's wishes. He agreed to this marriage to please his extended family, and separated from his wife until he was reunited with her some years later.

Subsequently, during a visit to his native village some Hindu students encouraged him to proceed to Calcutta for further and higher education. Accordingly, he moved from Taki Government High School to Calcutta where he joined London Missionary School. In 1890, he passed his entrance examination (the equivalent of present-day SSC) with distinction and was awarded a scholarship. During this period Ahsanullah endured personal and financial hardship, but, as a devout Muslim, his unwavering faith in God enabled him to overcome such difficulties including incidents of ill-health and misfortune. Two years later, he passed his First of Arts examination (the equivalent of present-day HSC) from Hughly Muhsin College and, again, he was awarded a scholarship.

www.pathagar.com

He then joined the Presidency College in Calcutta and, in 1894, at the age of 21, he passed his Bachelor of Arts degree with flying colours. It is worth mentioning that other prominent Muslims who had obtained their Bachelor's degrees from Calcutta University in the same year include A. K. Fazlul Haq, Abul Kashem, Zahrul Haque and Matlub Ahmad Khan Chowdhury. At this time, he was motivated to pursue advanced education, and enrolled on a Masters program in philosophy at the same college. A year later, he was awarded a Master of Arts degree in philosophy by the Calcutta University (as the Presidency College was one of its affiliate colleges at the time). While he was busy studying philosophy, Ahsanullah simultaneously pursued law at Ripon College although—for some unknown reason—he was unable to take his final exam. He stated in his autobiography that, at the time, being unable to make his mind up whether to become a lawyer or join government service, he instead returned home to Nalta.[4]

However, in due course Ahsanullah was urged by his father to visit Mr A. W. Croft, the director of education, and express his interest in joining government service. Accordingly, in 1896, while he was still in his early twenties, Ahsanullah was offered the post of supernumerary teacher at Rajshahi Collegiate School. He performed very well and within months he was promoted and posted to Faridpur as an additional deputy inspector. He became such an effective inspector that within a short period he was promoted to the post of sub-inspector of schools. He worked in this capacity for six months, and during that time he inspected many local schools and helped them to improve their performance. His devotion to his work, coupled with his sincere efforts to improve educational standards, led to another promotion. This time, he became a deputy inspector of education. This post took him to Bakerganj (present-day Barisal District) where he worked for seven years. During this period he regularly met with some of the leading personalities of that district, including Khan Bahadur Heymayetuddin, Aswini Kumar Datta and Kazi Wajid Ali, the father of A. K. Fazlul Haq. As a non-sectarian and a spiritually inclined individual, Ahsanullah developed good working relationship with both Muslims and Hindus. Although he spent most of his monthly salary of 150 takas for the upkeep of his extended family, this amount was not sufficient. He was compelled to take out loans to ensure his family had enough money. Forced to tighten his belt and save more, he soon repaid all his debts. Thankfully, he was able to rent a property in Barisal where he stayed with his wife. His eldest son, Muhammad Shams ud-Dojja, was born there, and Ahsanullah soon became very fond of Barisal and its people.[5]

Thanks to Ahsanullah's commitment and dedication, he was appointed headmaster of Rajshahi Collegiate School in 1904. He was the first Muslim to occupy this post and, as expected, he thrived in his new role. Soon after his arrival in Rajshahi, he observed that the Hindu students had their own hostel, thanks to the generosity of the Maharaja of Natore, but that Muslim students had no such facilities. He approached the local Muslims to help him raise sufficient funds to establish a hostel for the Muslim students; he managed to raise some funds, but not enough to establish

www.pathagar.com

a hostel. In due course, when Sir Bampfylde Fuller, the governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam, visited Rajshahi, Ahsanullah raised this issue with him. Despite opposition from local Hindu leaders, the governor approved the plan for establishing a hostel for Muslim students and he allocated 75,000 takas for this purpose. This building became known as Fuller Hostel.

As a devout Muslim, Ahsanullah was saddened to hear that the local Muslims had become bitterly divided along sectarian lines. He worked tirelessly to reunite them under the banner of Islam. Furthermore, during his tenure as headmaster, Ahsanullah improved and expanded the local *madrasah* (Islamic seminary) for the benefit of the Muslim community. He also played a pivotal role in appointing Maulvi Muhammad Emaduddin as the first Muslim chairman of the District Board. This again angered the local Hindus, who wanted to maintain their monopoly on local educational institutions and services at the expense of the Muslims. In addition to this, Ahsanullah recruited three Muslim graduates to join the staff of Collegiate School. In so doing he tried to address the increasing educational needs of the Muslim community, and he did this without reducing the educational provisions that were offered to the Hindus (even though they dominated most of the educational institutions in Rajshahi at the time).

Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet served as an inspector of Muhammadan education in Chittagong Division at the time. He was arguably one of the most influential Muslim scholars, leaders and educationalists of his generation, having served in the Eastern Bengal and Assam Educational Service for a long time. However, after his application for leave was granted, Ahsanullah replaced him as an inspector of education in Chittagong Division in 1907. Once again his dedication impressed everyone in the Education Department. During this period he became interested in Islamic spirituality, having visited the shrines of many prominent local Muslim saints and Sufis. Historically speaking, Chittagong had become a hub of Islamic learning and spirituality since the early days of Islam. Arab and Persian Muslim traders and preachers had sailed to Chittagong from many Muslim countries including Yemen, Iraq and Iran to pursue business and disseminate their faith. Accordingly, Islam became an integral part of Chittangong's landscape from the thirteenth century, if not earlier. As Ahsanullah became fond of Islamic spirituality, he befriended a local Sufi, Syed Habib Ahmad (who was also known as Ghafur Shah).[6] This saint had a tremendous influence on Ahsanullah's life. In due course, Ahsanullah pledged his spiritual loyalty to this saint and became one of his disciples, thus making a commitment to spend the rest of his life in the pursuit of Islamic spirituality (*tasawwuf*) and gnosis (*ma'rifah*). As in Rajshahi, in Chittagong he became a champion of education and learning in the Muslim community.

In addition to establishing many junior and secondary schools in Chittagong, Ahsanullah also refurbished the sub-divisional high schools, built many hostels for both Muslim and Hindu students and provided additional funds to existing schools in Noakhali, Brahmanbaria, Chandpur, Feni and Chittagong in order to improve their performance. He did this with the full backing of Mr Henry Sharp, the director of education in Eastern Bengal

www.pathagar.com

and Assam. Ahsanullah lavished much praise on Mr Sharp for his understanding and offer of additional resources to meet the educational needs of the Muslim community. Mr Sharp encouraged prominent Muslim educationalists of the time, including Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet and Ahsanullah himself, to actively promote education in the Muslim community. He was genuinely interested in the educational welfare and progress of the poor and needy, irrespective of their creed, caste and colour, and he allocated generous funding for this purpose. In that sense, Mr Sharp was an important patron of education in Bengal in general and the Muslim community in particular.

Despite being spiritually inclined, Ahsanullah never became detached from reality and, as such, he was aware of the challenges and difficulties that confronted the Muslims at the time. He was an important advocate for pursuing a balanced modern education. During this period he prepared a proposal for reforming Muslim education. He argued:

> It is true that Muhammadans attach great importance to religious education, but it is equally true that they seek the benefit of secular instruction and desire to take their place in the various activities which make up the public life of the Presidency.[7]

After the partition of Bengal was annulled in December 1911, Ahsanullah was transferred from Chittagong to Calcutta, where he became an additional inspector of education in the Presidency Division. During this period Syed Habib Ahmad, his spiritual guide, visited him and they decided to travel to Arabia to perform the sacred pilgrimage to Makkah. Ahsanullah took leave from his duties and returned home to Nalta to bid farewell to his family before setting off for Karachi, accompanied by Syed Habib and two other pilgrims with the intention of going to Makkah. After a long and gruelling journey, they reached Jeddah port, and from there they proceeded to Madinah by caravan. Ahsanullah and his fellow pilgrims were overwhelmed by emotional and spiritual longing for the blessed Prophet (peace be on him) as they approached Madinah. In his own words:

> We stood at the feet of the man for whom we braved so much troubles on the way, left behind family members, spent days after days, months after months, shed so much of bewailing tears and suffered untiring hardship. We were then free from all worldly thoughts and anxieties. What we only thought of, was the holy prophet. We sought forgiveness and confessed our sins, prepared ourselves for every sacrifice. No language could adequately express our mind. No writing even with the sea of ink could expound the yearning of our heart. There was an end to our misery. We were blessed with heavenly joys. We were speechless and our hearts stopped pounding. We were engrossed in the greatness of a soul. What an unearthly sight! What an ethereal happiness! We made a total surrender of ourselves to the most beloved, immersed ourselves totally in the divine sea of love and forgot our identity.[8]

From Madinah, Ahsanullah and his fellow pilgrims travelled to Makkah, just in time for the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage, it should be pointed out, is one of the five pillars of Islam, and every Muslim who has the means is required to perform this at least once in their

www.pathagar.com

lifetime. However, for a highly educated and spiritually inclined individual like Ahsanullah, there was more to the *hajj* than mere performance of rites and rituals. Indeed, informed by his sound understanding of Islam coupled with his spiritual approach to life, he was aware that Islam was much more than a set of do's and don't's. In Ahsanullah's own words:

> Islamic teachings are twofold: the Shariah and the Tariqah. The first is for the commoners and the second is for the devoted people. By pursuing Shariah one gains paradise; but by pursuing Tariqah one approaches God Almighty. A true lover of God never remains satisfied with the attainment of Paradise; he aspires after the companionship of the All Merciful.[9]

During his journey to Makkah, Ahsanullah devoted all his spare time to the performance of religious rites, meditation and rereading the biography of the Prophet (peace be on him). As a result, he became thoroughly familiar with the Prophet's life and teachings, and also became spiritually very close to the Prophet. He stated that:

> Without having great love for the Prophet, love for God Almighty cannot be strengthened. Love for the Holy Prophet and love for God Almighty is interrelated. Love for God Almighty rejuvenates in the Holy Prophet which kindles us.[10]

On his return from Makkah, Ahsanullah joined the Indian Educational Service (IES), and was one of the first to do so from the Muslim community. In 1924, he was promoted to the post of assistant director for Muslim education in Bengal. Prior to this, Ahsanullah had actively campaigned against the abolition of the post of school sub-inspector, and with the support of Maulvi A. K. Fazlul Haq, the education minister, he retained this post, which contributed to the development of education in the Muslim community. After replacing Mr Tellar as the assistant director of education, Ahsanullah became the first Indian to occupy this post. Thereafter, he was elected a senator of the University of Calcutta. His promotion meant that he received a monthly salary of 1250 takas, which improved his financial situation, as he was the sole breadwinner in his family. This also enabled him to pay for his son's education until the latter became financially independent.

During his long career in government service, Ahsanullah was responsible for a series of important reforms and initiatives, which played a pivotal role in promoting education in the Muslim community. Some of his main contributions and achievements during this period are outlined below.

Ahsanullah reformed a rule that required candidates to write their names on university examination papers. Instead of writing the students' names, he proposed that all students should be allocated serial numbers, in order to tackle discrimination against the Muslim students. At the time, it was possible for Muslim students to gain first-class degrees at Dhaka University but not at Calcutta University, as the Hindu examiners who marked the papers at Calcutta University often discriminated against Muslim students. Ahsanullah's innovation was adopted, despite strong opposition from the Hindu educationalists of the time.

He raised the standard of *madrasah* education by reforming the curriculum so that *madrasah* students could progress onto a Master's

www.pathagar.com

program at university and thereby improve their employment prospects. In his own words:

> I do not think the Muhammadan community will be satisfied with a system of education which will enable the boys only to recite the Qur'an and learn rituals of Islam. They are as anxious as any other community to give their children such education as will fit them for participation in public life.[11]

His views on this issue were very similar to that of Nawab Sir Salimullah, Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet, Maulvi Wajid Ali Khan Panni and other notable Muslims of the time.

Once the proposal to establish Dhaka University was placed before the Senate, the Hindu leaders and educationalists vehemently opposed it; however Ahsanullah, who was a member of the special committee that was formed to look into this issue, actively supported the proposal. He felt that there was a real need for a university in Dhaka for the benefit of the people of East Bengal.

Again, when a proposal for establishing a separate college for the Muslim students of East Bengal was prepared, Ahsanullah supported this, despite much opposition from the Hindu leaders, who feared that resources would be diverted from Hindu institutions to the Muslim ones. Ahsanullah argued that such a college was urgently needed and would contribute to the educational regeneration of the Muslim community by imparting Arabic, Urdu, Persian and traditional Islamic education. Accordingly, the Islamia College was established, and Mr Harley, the principal of Calcutta Madrasah, was appointed the first principal of this new college.

Ahsanullah played an important role in the preparation and publication of suitable curriculums and textbooks for primary and secondary *madrasahs*. He encouraged Muslim scholars and authors to prepare such material for use in schools. He also helped establish several scholarships for the poor but deserving Muslim students. He contributed to the establishment of the Baker, Tellar and Carmichael Hostels for the benefit of the Muslim students, in addition to supporting several Muslim libraries including the Makhdumi, Provincial and Islamia Libraries. He founded a publishing house, which played an important role by publishing and popularising the works of prominent Muslim writers and poets. Mir Musharraf Husayn's celebrated *Vishad Sindhu* was first published by this company.

Ahsanullah contributed to the development of the New Scheme Madrasah, which enabled bright Muslim students like Syed Sajjad Husain, Abul Fazl and Muhammad Abdul Hai (among others) to realise their full potential and contribute to the regeneration of the Muslim community of Bengal.

After serving as an assistant director of education for five years, Ahsanullah completed 30 years of service to his people, actively promoting education in Bengal. Ahsanullah retired in 1929 at the age of 55. He was granted a generous government pension, and he built a new house in Park Circus area and looked forward to a comfortable retirement. However, being a devout, active and selfless Muslim, he was keen to improve the condition of the Muslims of Bengal rather than lead a life of seclusion in a hermitage.

www.pathagar.com

Despite contributing and achieving so much, Ahsanullah remained very gracious and humble. As a devout Muslim, he frequently expressed his thanks and gratitude to God for His untold favours and blessings. He was a farsighted and gifted educationalist, who was determined to rejuvenate the educationally backward and economically impoverished Muslim community through the promotion of education. His educational philosophy was underpinned by his concern for both the present and the future. In Ahsanullah's own words:

> Man consists of body, mind and the soul. The body needs physical training and the soul needs spiritual one. The body is finite, but the soul infinite. We very often ignore any instruction for the soul. The education which caters both to the body and the mind is the real education. We should make our guardians aware of it. Our responsibility does not end with the fulfilment of our earthly obligation. It is our bounden duty to be aware of the purpose for which we have been created and we should make every effort to realise this fact.[12]

With this in mind, in 1935, he established the renowned Ahsania Mission, a religious and social welfare organisation, to improve his people's condition and promote authentic Islamic teachings in the Muslim community. This organisation has continued to serve the people of Bangladesh to this day with dedication and success.

Despite his busy schedule, Ahsanullah found time to write. He was a prolific writer who authored many books and textbooks for students, including a biography of the Prophet under the title of *Hazrat Muhammad* (1931). His other notable contributions include *Bengali Language and Muslim Literature* (*Bangabhasa-o-Muslim Sahitya*), *Islam and the Great Ideal Personality* (*Islam-o-Adarsha Mahapurush*), *Guide to Islamic Spirituality* (*Tariqah Shikha*) and *My Life* (*Amar Jibandhara*). The last was his autobiography, wherein he provided a brief—but vivid account—of his life and works in lucid and engaging Bengali prose. Although Ahsanullah was an educationalist by career, his knowledge and understanding of Bengali language, literature, Islamic thought and spirituality was impressive. In response to his all-round services to his people, the British government conferred the title of 'Khan Bahadur' on him. He also served as a vice-president of Bengal Muslim Literary Society (*Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti*). In 1960 he was appointed a fellow of the Bangla Academy, on account of his services to Bengali literature. In recognition of his wide-ranging contribution and achievements, *Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah Commemoration Volume* (*Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah Smarakgrantha*) was published by the Ahsania Mission as a tribute to his memory. This volume was edited by Ghulam Mu'inuddin, who was a director of the Bangla Academy. Some of Bengal's leading Muslim scholars, writers and poets contributed to this volume, including Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan, Abul Fazl, Syed Ali Ahsan and Dewan Muhammad Azraf.

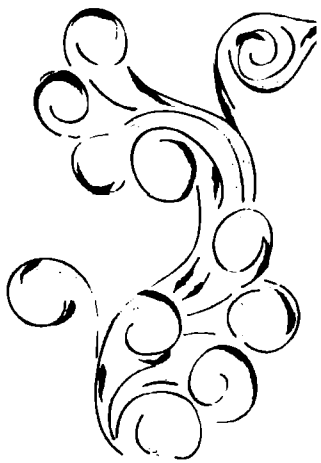
Ahsanullah returned to his native Nalta when he was in his sixties, and died there at the ripe old age of 92. Ahsanullah's philosophy and approach to life was beautifully summarised by him in these words:

> Knowledge by itself cannot bring about perfection in a man. One needs to co-ordinate his body,

www.pathagar.com

mind and soul. That is knowledge which caters to the body, mind and soul. The perfect knowledge is that which reduces the distance between the Creator and the created and establishes union between them. The seed of love is implanted in every heart which blossoms if one cultivates purity in character and attainment.[13]

He will be fondly remembered in times to come on account of his important contributions in the fields of education, literature, Islamic spirituality and cultural renewal.



Notes

1. G. Mu'inuddin, *Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah Smarakgrantha.*
2. Ahsanullah, *Amar Jibandhara.*
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. G. Mu'inuddin, op. cit.
6. Ahsanullah, op. cit.
7. Muhammad Abdullah, *Adhunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari.*
8. Ahsanullah, op. cit.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.



www.pathagar.com

1880–1932

BEGUM ROKEYA

MANY EUROPEAN TRAVELLERS and writers have pointed out that the women of Bengal seemed to play no meaningful role in their society. Indeed, when referring to Muslim women of Bengal, Barbosa only made references to their beauty, dress and ornaments. However, the historian Muhammad Abdur Rahim (1967) has argued that if the Muslim women were completely secluded from the public domain, then it would have been impossible for writers like Barbosa to refer to their beauty, dress and ornaments.

Actually, many Muslim women played important political and social roles in their society. Zinatun Nisa, the daughter of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan, played an influential role in administration of her husband Nawab Shuja

www.pathagar.com

al-Din. Thanks to her influence, Shuja al-Din was unable to appoint her stepson Muhammad Taqi Khan as deputy governor of Azimabad: Alivardi Khan was appointed to this post instead. Similarly, Dardana Begum advised her husband Murshid Quli II, the deputy governor of Orissa, on his political affairs. On account of this, she was esteemed more greatly by the people of that province than even her husband. Nafisah Begum was another lady who earned the respect of her people. She was the daughter of Nawab Shuja al-Din and sister of Sarfraz Khan, and even the fearsome Alivardi Khan dared not cross her path. Furthermore, Sharfun Nisa, the wife of Alivardi, influenced her husband's administration in many ways: known to have been a generous and pious lady, she took care of many poor and orphan children.[1]

Other prominent Muslim women of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Bengal included Ghasiti Begum, the wife of Nawazish Muhammad Khan (the deputy governor of the province of Jahangirnagar). Aminah Begum, the mother of Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah (the last independent Muslim ruler of Bengal), was also an influential lady. Likewise, Lutfun Nisa, the wife of Siraj al-Dawlah, despite her humble origins went onto play a prominent role in the Muslim society of the time as an advisor and supporter of her husband. Although we do not know much about these Muslim women today, there is no doubt that they paved the way for others to emerge and leave their indelible marks in the history of Muslim Bengal. The lives and works of Rahimunnessa, Mannujan Khanum and Nawab Faizunnessa Choudhurani have already been noted in this book, but the life and contribution of Begum Rokeya deserves special attention, thanks to her important literary and educational achievements in the early part of the twentieth century.

Ruqaiyyah Khatun (better known as Begum Rokeya) was, according to most of her biographers, born into a wealthy and learned Muslim family in the village of Pairaband in present-day Mithapukur Sub-District (Upazila) of Rangpur in Northern Bangladesh. Her father, Zahir al-Din Muhammad Abu Ali Haidar Sabir, was a prominent landholder (*zamindar*) who traced his ancestry back to Babar Ali Abul Babar, who hailed from the Persian province of Tabriz and travelled to the subcontinent to pursue business and trade. Eventually, Babar Ali settled in Rangpur and his descendants became influential members of the Mughal administration, thus they became well known in that locality.

Rokeya's mother was Rahatunnessa, first wife to the wealthy and powerful individual, Zahiruddin (he had four wives: Salma, Shainabor, Shafia and Rahatunnessa). Brought up and educated in a learned family, Rokeya and her siblings (two sisters and three brothers, one of whom had died young) were educated mainly in Arabic, Urdu and aspects of traditional Islamic subjects at home. Being learned but equally conservative in his outlook, her father ensured that all his children were proficient in traditional subjects, although the boys were encouraged to learn English. The aristocractic Hindu families of the time considered Sanskrit to be the main language of their faith and culture (rather than Bengali); however, the wealthy and educated Muslim families preferred to use Arabic, Persian and Urdu. Rokeya's mother tongue was not Bengali; it was Urdu.

www.pathagar.com

Young Rokeya received her early education under the guidance of her older sister, Karimunnessa, and brothers, Abu Zaigham Khalilur Rahman Sabir and Abul Asad Muhammad Ibrahim Sabir. Thanks to their support and encouragement, the inspiration and guidance of her husband, Khan Bahadur Sakhawat Husayn, and her own burning desire to learn different languages, Rokeya became fluent in Bengali, English and Persian, in addition to Urdu and Arabic. This was no small achievement, considering that she was born and brought up in a traditional, conservative Muslim family where girls were not necessarily encouraged to pursue further or higher education. In fact, in aristocractic Muslim families the girls were mainly educated in Arabic and traditional Islamic subjects at home by private female teachers, and this often continued until they reached the age of marriage. Their families would then find them suitable match and, accordingly, their education would come to an end. Like other Muslim girls of Rangpur, Rokeya never attended school, college or university but, thanks to her dedication, she became well versed in languages, literature and Islamic studies.

Rokeya grew up at a time when—according to Sonia Nishat Amin—Sir William W. Hunter became:

> Chairman of the Education Commission in 1882 [and] the situation was quite different from what it had been in 1835. There were now 1015 schools for girls at the primary level in Bengal with an enrolment of 41,349 pupils. Most of these were non-government schools receiving some form of government assistance. In 1899–1900 the number of primary schools for girls rose to 3094 and the enrolment was 107,403. The ratio of students' enrolment to total population during this period was 28.9% for boys and 0.9% for girls, the relative situation in female primary education shows a steady improvement. The situation of girls in the secondary and higher secondary schools was not so promising. Their ratios declined in the following years. In 1896–97 there were only two English High Schools for girls—Bethune School in Calcutta and Eden School in Dhaka. In the same report... the plight of the Muslim community was put down to economic and educational backwardness and a set of measures were recommended to assist the spread of modern education among the Muslims.[2]

Thanks to the recommendations of the Hunter Commission of 1882, the government took some steps to address the educational disparity and inequality that existed between the Muslim and Hindu communities. Likewise, as Mustafa Nurul Islam had pointed out, Muslims were forced to change their attitude to modern education as soon as the consequences of not doing so became clear to them. To survive and prosper as a community, they needed to reform their educational institutions, just as the Hindus had done, albeit much earlier. The challenge for the Muslims was to reconcile their religious and cultural practices with the demands of a modern, secular education, which was neccessary in order to make progress similar to their Hindu counterparts. The existing schools and colleges had been established by the British, and the conservative *ulama* were suspicious of such institutions, fearing that Muslim students could be influenced by un-Islamic ideas and

www.pathagar.com

thoughts. However, the education offered in the traditional Islamic seminaries did not prepare their students for government service either. Therefore economic necessity forced the Muslim community to embrace modern education.[3]

Although the traditional, conservative Muslim families were reluctant to send their daughters to English-language schools and colleges, they encouraged their sons to do just that. Rokeya's brothers, Muhammad Ibrahim and Khalilur Rahman, studied at St. Xavier's College in Calcutta, and they not only became proficient in English but also thoroughly familiar with modern Western education. In contrast, Karimunnessa Khanum, her older sister, was married when she was only 14. Thankfully, her husband, Abdul Hakim Khan Ghaznavi, was a prominent *zamindar* of Bengal who encouraged his wife to learn Bengali and English. Her sons, Nawab Sir Abdul Karim Ghaznavi (1872–1939) and Sir Abdul Halim Ghaznavi (1876–1953) later became prominent Muslim politicians during the period of British India. Perhaps inspired by his mother, Sir Abdul Karim once remarked that:

> The question of female education is, if anything, more important than that of male education, for it is the mother and sister that mould the character and have the greatest influence on boys when they are of tender age.[4]

Karimunnessa had a profound impact on Rokeya, because she had not only learned Bengali, English and Persian on her own, but she had also become a noted writer and poet. Rokeya later dedicated a collection of her essays to Karimunnessa as a token of gratitude. Rokeya's older sister taught her Bengali, and Muhammad Ibrahim, her older brother, taught her English, which inspired her to continue her studies after her marriage.

In 1898, when Rokeya was around 18, she was married to Khan Bahadur Syed Sakhawat Husayn (1858–1909), who hailed from Bhagalpur District in the Indian state of Bihar. Like Rokeya, Syed Sakhawat was brought up in an Urdu-speaking family. However, he was a highly-educated and wealthy individual who served as a deputy magistrate in Bhagalpur. Although he was nearly 20 years older than Rokeya, they had a blissful marital life, during which he encouraged his wife to improve her knowledge of English and pursue literary activities. They had two daughters, but unfortunately both of these daughters died as infants.

Thanks to her husband's support and encouragement, Rokeya wrote her first essay in Bengali titled *Thirst* (*Pipasha*), which was published in 1902 in *Nabaprabha*, a literary magazine that was published from Calcutta. However, according to another account, she wrote some of her first articles for *Nabanoor*, a monthly literary magazine, which was edited by Syed Emdad Ali from Calcutta. In 1904, she published a collection of articles and essays under the title of *Matichur* (Volume 1). This book was published under the pen name of Mrs R. S. Husayn.

During this period, Rokeya wrote extensively in the Bengali and English magazines, journals and periodicals of the time, including *Mashik Muhammadi* (which was edited by Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan) and *The Mussalman* (which was edited by Maulvi Mujibur Rahman). In 1905, she wrote her

www.pathagar.com

first English work, which was titled 'Sultana's Dream': this was published in *The Indian Ladies Magazine*, which was published from Madras. In this short but imaginative tale, Rokeya depicted a world where women assumed control of everything and men only played a limited, passive role in life and society. According to Sonia Nishat Amin, in this fictional tale:

> Rokeya gave full rein to her imagination by depicting 'Ladyland', a realm where gender roles were reversed and women assumed the public role while men stayed indoors. It is now hailed as a 'radical' piece of feminist writing though Rokeya herself was not a radical all of the time. But if one is to look for the radical in Rokeya one would have to look at her early feminist essays as well as her fiction where she freely resorted to subversion of existing ideologies.[5]

Four years after the publication of *Sultana's Dream*, Rokeya's husband died unexpectedly on 3rd May 1909 in Calcutta, and he was laid to rest in his native Bhagalpur. Prior to his death, Syed Sakhawat Husayn had set aside 10,000 rupees for the promotion of female education in the Muslim community. As per her husband's wish, on 1 October 1909 Rokeya started a part-time, elementary school for Muslim girls at Bhagalpur with only five students. Named after her husband, Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School performed well until family problems forced Rokeya to leave Bhagalpur and settle permanently in Calcutta a year later, where she hoped to restart the school. With this in mind, she wrote a letter to the editor of *The Mussalman* in order to inform the public of her decision:

> I intend to start a Girls' school in Calcutta in strict observance of Purda at an earliest opportunity possible, which is not only the crying need of the time but the want of which, I believe, is keenly felt by all right thinking men and women.[6]

Rokeya's decision to establish a girls' school received mixed reaction from the Muslim community. Some (like the editor of *The Mussalman* and his readers) not only actively welcomed the proposal but also supported Rokeya in her endeavours; while others (for example, the conservative *ulama*) felt this may lead to the infilteration of foreign ideas, thoughts and influence, resulting in cultural confusion and moral degradation in the Muslim community. To her credit, Rokeya was aware of these concerns and she tried to reassure members of her community that the students would be required to observe the Islamic dress code. Soon after the school was opened on 16 March 1911 in a house at 13 Waliullah Lane with only eight students, a reporter from *The Mussalman* attended the school and wrote this report:

> We are glad to announce that Mrs. Sakhawat Hossain has already translated her proposal of starting a girls' school into action... Strict purdah is maintained both at school as well as when girls are conveyed to and from it.[7]

The school became so popular that it was expanded and upgraded to Middle English Girls' School in 1917, before it became a High English Girls' School in 1931. This was thanks to Rokeya's dedication and commitment and her excellent teaching, management and organisational skills. The school's curriculum was diverse and rich, and combined theoretical

www.pathagar.com

learning with practical activities. In addition to Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Bengali and English, students were taught traditional music, first aid, nursing, sewing and physical exercise, among other things. Rokeya developed her own curriculum and trained tutors who could teach various subjects, as there was no dedicated teacher training colleges in Calcutta at the time. This eventually led to the establishment of the Muslim Women Training School in Calcutta, to enable Muslim girls to qualify as teachers. None of these initiatives would have been realised without Rokeya's efforts. Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School is today considered to be one of Calcutta's most popular educational institutions for girls.

Rokeya summarised her educational ideas and thoughts in an article titled 'Educational Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl', which was published in *The Mussalman*. In Rokeya's own words:

> In our daily prayers we Muslims beseech Allah saying 'Our Lord, grant us good in this world and good in the hereafter'. Our [aim] should be to harmonise in due proportion the two purposes, spiritual and secular, in the education we impart. Much can be done in accomplishing this aim by impressing on the girls the excellence of our national ideals and of the life of great national heroes... In short, our girls would not only obtain University degrees, but must be ideal daughter, wives and mother or—I may say obedient daughters, loving sisters, dutiful wives and instructive mothers.[8]

This article, written only a year before her death, proves that Rokeya was not a secularist, feminist or a narrow-minded Islamic traditionalist. Rather, she was a devout Muslim who was keen to develop a new, refreshing but equally authentic interpretation and understanding of her faith that reflected the conditions of the time. She also wrote:

> There is a saying, 'Man proposes, God disposes', but my bitter experience shows that God gives, Man Robs. That is, Allah has made no distinction in the general life of male and female—both are equally bound to seek food, drink, sleep, etc, necessary for animal life. Islam teaches that male and female are equally bound to say their daily prayers five times, and so on. Our great Prophet has said 'Talabul Ilmi Farizatu 'ala kull Muslimeen-o-Muslimat', (i.e. it is the bounden duty of all Muslim males and females to acquire knowledge). But our brothers will not give us our share in education... while Islam allows every freedom to women (so much so that a woman cannot be given in marriage without her consent or free will, which indirectly prohibits child-marriage) we see people giving away their daughters in marriage at tender ages or giving them in marriage without their consent... The worst crime which our brothers commit against us is to deprive us of education... May we challenge such grandfathers, fathers or uncles to show the authority on which they prevent their girls from acquiring education? Can they quote from the holy Quran or Hadis any injunction prohibiting women from obtaining knowledge?[9]

On another occasion, she asserted: 'What we want is neither alms nor gift of favour. It is our inborn right. Our claim is not a more than Islam gave women 1300 years ago'.

Rokeya argued that there was an urgent need for Muslim girls' schools, to enable:

www.pathagar.com

> Our daughters [to] receive a high education that will enable them to keep pace with people from other communities... Muslim women from other greatly civilized communities and even of other parts of the Indian sub-continent are becoming doctors, barristers, councillors and members of the Round Table. Why should our women be deprived of this splendid development and prosperity? Ideal Muslim girls' schools will produce ideal Muslim women whose children will be like Hazrat Omar Faruq and Hazrat Fatema Zohra. To realize this goal, the spread of the teachings of the Qur'an in a large measure is necessary; that is, extensive spread of its translations into Bangla and Urdu is essential. In my childhood, I used to hear my mother say: 'Qur'an Shareef will protect us as a shield'. That statement is very much true. However, this is not to say that we will need to fasten a big and beautifully wrapped-up Qur'an tightly on our back. Rather, what I understand is that the universal teachings of the Qur'an will guard us from the danger of superstitions of various kinds. Religious practices according to the Qur'an will protect us from moral downfalls and social degradations.[10]

Rokeya was not only educated in her faith, culture and history, she was also a sharp, independent-minded and intelligent interlocutor who argued her case on the basis of facts, reality and truth. In her writings—both in Bengali and English—she highlighted the challenges and difficulties that confronted Muslim women at the time and did so in a perceptive and insightful way without trivialising the issues. Her views on the social, economic, cultural, educational and religious topics were bold, progressive and rooted in the Islamic worldview. She espoused her ideas and thoughts in many books, essays, stories and poems, including: *Matichur* (Volume 2), which consisted of her essays, articles and stories, and was published in 1922 in Calcutta; *Padmarag*, a novel published in 1924; and *Abarodhbasini*, published from Calcutta in 1931, in which she highlighted the negative impact of strict seclusion on women.

Rokeya was against all forms of strict seclusion that were practised in the Muslim society of Bengal at the time. She made a clear distinction between 'purda' (the loose, outer garment which Muslim women wore out of modesty) and 'aborodh', a strict form of seclusion that removed women completely from the public sphere. Since Rokeya observed the Islamic dress code throughout her life, she considered 'purda' to be a symbol of modesty and dignity; whereas she considered 'aborodh' (literally, 'enshrouding') to be a distorted version of the former and therefore reprehensible. In that sense, according to Sonia Nishat Amin:

> Rokeya was an ultimate blend of pragmatism and idealism, of conservatism and radicalism. In her major writings on education, Rokeya slipped in one or two sentences advocating women's right to work and education as a means for this. But by and large, she stressed the more prevalent attitudes regarding female education in her public life. It was in her fiction that she allowed possibilities of female education to develop to its full economic significance. For to Rokeya female education was the great solution to the prevailing social malaise in the nation, not just her community. She never strayed far from her historically determined role of synthesization.[11]

www.pathagar.com

Roekya's other literary contributions included an unfinished essay titled *Narir Adhikar* (on the rights of women), a Bengali translation of 'Sultana's Dream' under the title of *Sultanar Svapna* and a poem entitled *Saogat*, which was, in fact, published on the first page of *Saogat* (which was an illustrated monthly magazine that was edited by Muhammad Nasiruddin in 1918 from Calcutta). The *Saogat* journal promoted many female Muslim writers during the 1920s, including Fazilatunnessa, Badrunnessa Khatun, Sakina Farrukh Sultan, Razia Khatun and of course Rokeya. In addition to the above, in 1916 Rokeya founded the Muslim Women's Association (Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam) to promote female education and raise awareness of the rights and obligations of women in Muslim society. Accordingly, in 1926, she presided over the Bengal Women's Education Conference held in Calcutta. In so doing she—directly or indirectly—inspired a generation of women writers, scholars, teachers and reformers to emerge including Begum Shamsunnahar Mahmud (1908–1964), Razia Khatun Choudhurani (1907–1934), Nurunnessa Khatun (b. 1894), Mamlukul Fatima Khanum (1894–1957) and Akhtar Mahal Syeda Khatun (1901–1921). Other women who contributed to the discussion and debates on the rights and duties of Muslim women in Bengal during the early part of the twentieth century included Fatima Khanum, Ayesha Ahmed, Feroza Begum and Mrs M. Rahman.

However, of all Rokeya's disciples and co-workers, Begum Shamsunnahar Mahmud left the greatest mark in the history of Muslim Bengal. According to Sonia Nishat Amin, Begum Shamsunnahar:

> Grew up in a family which had taken to western, liberal education and government employment very early on and had crusaded for women's rights. Her first work *Punyamayee* was written when she was only 10 and published in 1925 when she was only seventeen. It contained short biographies of eight great women of the Muslim world who served as role models. Among them were: the mystic Rabeya, the Prophet's daughter Fatema and his wives Ayesha and Khadija. *Begum Mahal* was another biographical work by Shamsun Nahar—it recorded the lives of great Pathan and Mughal women of medieval India. But Shamsun Nahar's most well-known book was *Rokeya Jibani*, the first biography of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein, her mentor and comrade in the crusade for women's education.[12]

The book mentioned above was first published in 1937 from Calcutta and it has since been reprinted many times in East Pakistan and now Bangladesh.

After a lifetime devoted to the pursuit of knowledge and education for the benefit of Muslim women of Bengal, Begum Rokeya (as she came to be known) died of heart disease in Calcutta at the age of only 52. She did not remarry after the death of her first husband, and therefore had no surviving children. However, as soon as the news of her death was relayed across Calcutta, glowing tributes were paid to her by the local media and prominent Muslim figures. According to *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 15 December 1932, Maulvi A. K. Fazlul Haq, a prominent Muslim politician, stated, 'She was one of those gifted people who raised their own memorial by their own hands in their own life time'. The same newspaper published

www.pathagar.com

the following obituary:

> Mrs R. S. Hossain, the well-known exponent of female education and foundress of Sakhawat Memorial Girls' High School, the only one institution of its kind for Muslim girls in the whole province, passed away peacefully at 5.30am on Friday morning in the premises of the school. A pioneer among the very few Muslim ladies, she had devoted her life and all her resources to the cause of female education. This girls' school was founded by Mrs. R. S. Hossain in 1911, with a nucleus of Rs. 10, 000, which was bequeathed by her husband and thereafter considerably augmented by all the resources she herself possessed. From a small beginning, the school has completed its twenty-first year of useful existence, and has behind it a history of steady progress and sustained work since its establishment. She has left noble example of lifelong devotion in the cause of the uplift of her community, and was able to create a genuine demand for the really good and up-to-date education of Muslim girls.[13]

The Statesman of 10 December 1932 paid Roekya this tribute:

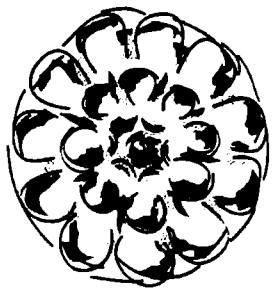
> The well-known educationist and founder of the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' High English School, died in Calcutta yesterday morning at the premises of the school. She devoted her life and all her resources to the cause of education for girls.

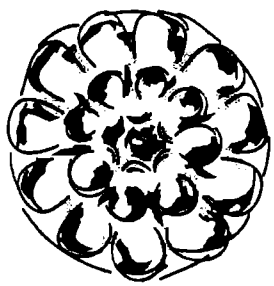
Likewise, *The Mussalman* stated that Rokeya was a:

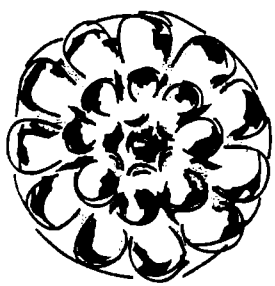
> Writer in Bengali, Urdu and English... the great torch-bearer of female education among Muslims...she was performing ablutions (wudhu) as usual for her 'Fajr' prayer, when suddenly her heart ceased to function. The janazah prayer was performed at the Bu-Ali mosque at Kaiser Street at 2pm, which was very largely attended by many leading members of the Muslim community and others including Mr. A. K. Fazlul Huq, Sir Abdul Karim Ghaznavi, Hon'ble Nawab K. J. M. Faruqi, Hon'ble Khawaja Nazimuddin, K. B. Tassaddaq, K. B. Tofazzal Ahmed, Mr. Amin Ahmed, Dr. R. Ahmed, Moulvi Abdur Rahman, Mr. Reazur Rahman, Nawabzada Kamruddin Haidar and Moulvi Mujibur Rahman... She advocated female emancipation and fought for it almost single handed, when the community almost shuddered to think of the idea. She strongly maintained all through her life that without women taking their full share in the economy of her coporate existence, the community could never attain its full stature.[14]

In recognition of Rokeya's contribution and achievements, one of the halls at Rajshahi University was named after her. Also, a statue of Begum Rokeya was erected in the Begum Rokeya Memorial Centre, which is located in her native Piraband in Rangpur. On the 9 December, annually, Bangladesh celebrates 'Rokeya Day'. Recently, the University of Rangpur was renamed Begum Rokeya University as a tribute to her memory.

www.pathagar.com







Notes

1. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947.*
2. Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876–1939.*
3. Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press 1901–1930.*
4. Muhammad Abdullah, *Adhunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari.*
5. S. N. Amin, op. cit.
6. *The Mussalman* 10 February 1911.
7. *The Mussalman* 16 March 1911.
8. *The Mussalman* 5 March 1931.
9. Laila Zaman (ed.) *The Mussalman Patrikai Rokeya Prashanga.*
10. Ibid.
11. S. N. Amin, op. cit.
12. Ibid.
13. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* 10 December 1932.
14. *The Mussalman* 10 December 1932.

www.pathagar.com



CONCLUSION

My experience of researching and writing this book has been that of a journey of self-discovery and enlightenment. Although I was born in Bangladesh, I was brought up and educated in England. Young British Bangladeshis of my generation grew up knowing hardly anything about the history, culture and heritage of Bengal and its people. Other than at times of major socio-political upheavals, natural disasters or tradegies (such as floods, cyclones, landslides, military coups, political corruption, poverty, shortage of electricity, lack of clean drinking water or an outbreak of epidemics) I would rarely hear anything about Bangladesh and its people. This meant that I would seldom hear anything about Bangladesh that was positive.

I grew up in the north of England in the late

www.pathagar.com

1980s, and in the south-east of England during the 1990s, and this one-sided and distorted view of Bangladesh created a negative attitude towards that country in my mind (and probably the minds of other young British Bangladeshis). This perception was often reinforced by visiting Bangladeshi politicians, whose negative attitudes, and use of undiplomatic language and behaviour towards their political rivals, only made matters worse. This negative opinion was confirmed when I had the opportunity to meet Husayn Muhammad Ershad, the president of Bangladesh, in Manchester during one of his visits to England in the 1980s. During his speech, Ershad said his government was very progressive and forward-looking while all his opponents were very difficult and unpatriotic people. Rightly or wrongly, these factors contributed to the perpetuation of a negative image of Bengal in general (and of Bangladesh in particular) in the minds of young British Bangladeshis like myself.

Stuart Butler, a British travel-writer and author of *Bangladesh*, has referred to the negative image of the country in these words:

> Within hours of Cyclone Sidr smashing into southwest Bangladesh, the world's media and aid organisations were on the move and Bangladesh was about to find herself wrenched back out of obscurity and once again presented to the global community as a classic 'basket case' (as Henry Kissinger once described the country) of disaster.[1]

Being prone to natural disasters, Bangladesh is often portrayed in the media as a nation with little hope; although its people have become accustomed to such events. Soon after Cyclone Sidr struck, the Bangladeshis quickly picked themselves up and got on with their daily lives as if nothing had happened. There is no doubt that Bangladesh is a nation of tough, resilient and inspirational people who are proud to be members of the global community. Despite suffering so much by way of both human-made and natural calamities and disasters, its people have never lost hope, and are always ready to improve their circumstances. Needless to say, we can all learn a thing or two from the indomitable people of Bangladesh. If you think that Bangladesh and its people cannot make good news, I would say to you: think again!

My own perceptions and attitudes towards the country began to change after several visits. This was largely thanks to the kindness, generosity and the positive attitude of the ordinary people who lived (and who continue to live) in the rural villages. I was struck by the natural beauty of the country as well as the creativity, natural talent and the resourcefulness of the ordinary people who, despite having so little by way of material possessions and belongings, were very warm and welcoming and appeared to be genuinely contented with their lot. By contrast, I found the urban elites to be materially obsessive, culturally detached, politically naïve and suffering from an inferiority complex. This was surprising given the fact that the people of Bengal in general, and those of Bangladesh in particular, have a rich and diverse history, culture and heritage. Like the majority of the people of Bangladesh (at least ninety per cent of whom are Muslims by faith) I was unaware of this remarkable history and heritage until I started my research. In the course of extensive reading and study, it became clear to me that

www.pathagar.com

the Muslims of Bengal had, in fact, led the rest of the subcontinent in political activism, economic development, intellectual advancement and cultural progress for many centuries.[2]

The historian Muhammad Abdur Rahim traced the beginning of intellectual awakening in Bengal back to the period of Muslim rule. Under the patronage of their Muslim rulers, the people of Bengal (both Muslim and Hindu) made tremendous contributions to a wide range of subjects. Bengal attracted students from all over India and foreign travellers praised its people for their integrity and good character. The Muslims also influenced their Hindu counterparts socially, culturally, intellectually and spiritually. Hindu elites not only imitated their fellow Muslims in their dress, mannerisms and etiquette, they also studied Arabic and Persian, and became well-versed in Islamic culture and traditions, often modelling their court life according to the Islamic pattern.[3] Thanks to the Arab and Persian traders and seafarers, the economy in Bengal improved considerably during the Muslim rule. Likewise, Bengali literature received a major boost during the medieval period, thanks to the generous patronage of the Muslim rulers. Muslim and Hindu scholars, writers and poets thrived during this period and left their indelible marks in the history of Bengal literature: although most of us are not aware of this today. If this book inspires the readers to pursue further study and research on these and related topics, I will feel my efforts have not been in vain.

As a British national, I was interested to discover that Bengal and Britain had a long history of political, economic and cultural understanding, friendship and co-operation, especially during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For instance, there are more than a dozen 'knights', 'nawabs', 'khan bahadurs' and 'shamsul ulamas' in this volume. These are titles that the Crown or her representatives had conferred upon prominent Muslims of Bengal for their outstanding contribution and achievements. Furthermore, this research helped to reconnect me to my ancestral roots by underlining the fact that the three cultural identities (British, Muslim and Bangladeshi) that I share can co-exist harmoniously, and they can also strengthen and enrich each other. I consider myself very fortunate to have such a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Needless to say, this encouraged me to continue this study and inquiry. This book is the outcome of that research. Here I had attempted to explore and highlight aspects of the Muslim history, culture and heritage of Bengal through the lives, thoughts and achievements of 42 influential Muslim personalities of Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal.

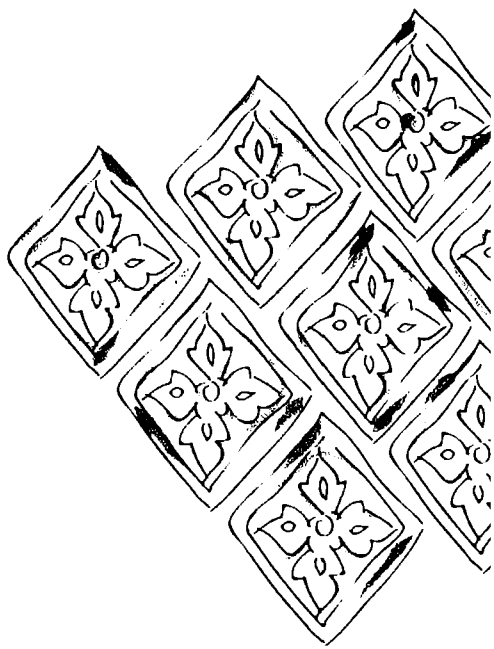
Readers must have noticed that my definition of heritage is not confined to the study of historic mosques and buildings, early coins and epigraphies or archaeological sites (interesting as these are); I believe that history and heritage revolve around people rather than historical relics. For this reason, Muslim figures from all walks of life feature in this book, including those who made their contribution in political, social, literary and religious spheres of Bengal. In other words, I believe it would not be possible to understand or appreciate the Muslim culture and heritage of Bengal without exploring the lives, thoughts and contributions of its people. I hope this new and integrated

www.pathagar.com

approach to the Muslim history and heritage of Bengal proves to be of benefit to the younger generation: especially those who were born, brought up and are currently being educated in the West. As the need for such a work has been felt for a long time, I hope you, dear reader, found this book interesting, informative and eye opening.

As for me, writing and researching this book has been a labour of love. I will feel my efforts duly rewarded if this book helps to promote a better understanding of the Muslim history and culture of Bengal, both in the East and the West. We can only try, for success comes from Him: the One and Only.

Salutations (*salawat*) upon the beloved one, the light who showed us the way, the way back to the Light (*Nur*)! Go in peace and you will return!



Notes

1. Stuart Butler, *Bangladesh.*
2. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947.*
3. M. A. Rahim, *The Social and Cultural History of Bengal.*

www.pathagar.com

BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF ISLAMIC HISTORY OF BENGAL

This is a brief chronology of the Islamic history of Bengal, and it is not meant to be exhaustive. All the entries have been kept short and simple. Only dates in accordance with the Gregorian calendar have been provided. All dates are Common Era (CE).

- **570** Birth of Prophet Muhammad in Makkah (located in present-day Saudi Arabia).
- **589** Chosroes II ascends the Persian throne.
- **c.610** Muhammad becomes Prophet. Heraclius becomes Emperor of Byzantium.

www.pathagar.com

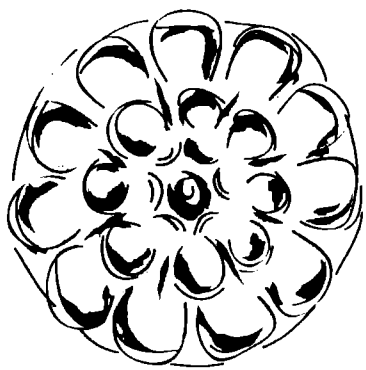
- **612** Muhammad begins preaching in Makkah.
- **614** Damascus falls to the Persians.
- **615** Persians capture Jerusalem.
- **622** Prophet's migration to Madinah (Hijrah). Heraclius defeats Chosroes II.
- **637** The Islamic Calendar is formalised by Caliph Umar, the second rightly-guided caliph.
- **638** Muslims occupy the historic city of Jerusalem.
- **600–700** According to some historians, the Arabs began to navigate and travelled to the coastal regions of India during this period.
- **711** Muhammad ibn Qasim al-Thaqifi conquers the northern Indian province of Sind and neighbouring territories.
- **715** Death of Muhammad ibn al-Qasim. Various Arab rulers continue to rule Sind and the neighbouring territories on behalf of the Umayyads and then the Abbasids.
- **786–809** Coin issued during the reign of Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid discovered during excavation at Paharpur in Rajshahi in the 1930s.
- **861–2** Coin minted during the reign of Abbasid Caliph Abu Abdullah al-Muntasir Billah discovered in Mainamati in Comilla during excavation in the 1930s.
- **873** Birth of Imam Abul Hasan al-Ash'ari, the founder of the Ash'arite school of Islamic theology (which subsequently spread to Bengal).
- **874** Death of Abu Yazid al-Bistami, a prominent Sufi master, who later acquired a large following in Bengal (so much so that legend has it that he lies buried in Chittagong).
- **910** Al-Junayd al-Baghdadi, a prominent 'sober' Sufi master dies in Baghdad. He later acquires large following among the Sufis of Bengal.
- **940** Birth of Firdawsi of Persia, the celebrated author of *Shahnama* (which subsequently became very popular in Bengal).
- **998** Subuktekin is succeeded by his son Mahmud as ruler of Ghazna. Sultan Mahmud leads no less than 17 military excursions into India.
- **1030** Death of Sultan Mahmud. He is succeeded by Sultan Mas'ud.
- **1050** Death of al-Biruni, the great Muslim polymath who stayed in the subcontinent for a decade studying mathematics, Indian culture and history.
- **1142** Birth of Mu'in al-Din Chishti, the founder of the Chishtiyyah Sufi Order in India and Bengal.
- **1166** Death of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, an influential Sufi whose ideas and thoughts exerted great influence in Bengal.

www.pathagar.com

- **1174** Birth of Shaykh Sa'di of Shiraz, whose writings acquired considerable following in Muslim Bengal.
- **1200–4** Muhammad ibn Bakhtiyar Khalji conquers Bengal and Bihar, inaugurating the Muslim rule of Bengal.
- **1206** Death of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji.
- **1210** Ala al-Din Ali Mardan regains power.
- **1244** Death of Shaykh Jalal al-Din Tabrizi at Deotala near Pandua (who preached Islam in the northern parts of Bengal long time before Shah Jalal's time).
- **1259** Izz al-Din Balban Yuzbaki is succeeded by Taj al-Din Muhammad Arslan Khan Sanjar.
- **c.1271** Birth of Shah Jalal of Sylhet in Konya in modern Turkey.
- **1282** Inauguration of the Balbani rule of Bengal by Nasir al-Din Bughra Balban.
- **1339** Balbani rule ends with the rise of Shams al-Ilyas Shah.
- **1347** Death of Shah Jalal of Sylhet (his mausoleum is later erected at this sight, attracting thousands of visitors daily).
- **c.1375** Birth of Khan Jahan Ali of Bagherhat.
- **1390** Ghiyath al-Din Azam Shah succeeds Sikandar Shah.
- **1414** Jadu, the son of Raja Ganesa, assumes power.
- **1418** Jadu, renamed Jalal al-Din Muhammad Shah, resumes his rule.
- **1437** Nasir al-Din Mahmud Shah restores the rule of Ilyas Shahis.
- **1459** Death of Khan Jahan Ali of Bagerhat.
- **1487** Sultan Shahzada Barbak Shah and the domination of the Habashis.
- **1493** Inauguration of Sayyid Husayn Shahi rule after the chaotic period of Habashi rule.
- **1537** The rise of Sher Shah Sur, the Afghan chief, thus marking the beginning of Suri rule.
- **1550** Birth of Syed Sultan, the great scholar and poet of medieval Bengal.
- **1564** Emergence of Sulaiman Karrani marks the end of the Suris.
- **1576** Mughal rule of Bengal established by Emperor Akbar the Great (Bengal thus became one his Subas or provinces).
- **1576–1716** Mughals continue to rule Bengal through Subhadars (governors).
- **c.1607** Birth of Syed Alaol, an outstanding Muslim poet of medieval Bengali literature.
- **1608–13** Islam Khan, Mughal Subahdar subjugates local rulers and Dhaka is renamed Jahangirnagar.
- **c.1680** Birth of Hayat Mahmud, the great Muslim poet of late medieval Bengal.

www.pathagar.com

- **1717** Beginning of the rule of Murshid Quli Khan in Bengal with his headquarters in Murshidabad. Birth of Mannujan Khanum.
- **1732** Birth of Haji Muhammad Muhsin, the founder of the Muhsin Fund and Hughly Muhsin College in Calcutta.
- **1756** Death of Nawab Alivardi Khan, who brought peace and prosperity to Bengal. His successor young Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah, struggles to maintain peace and order.
- **1757** Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah suffers deafeat at the hands of Robert Clive of British East India Company at the Battle of Plassey. Muslim rule of Bengal comes to an end.
- **c.1763** Birth of Rahimunessa, the first female poet of late medieval Bengali literature.
- **1770** Major famine in Bengal, around 15 million people die as a result.
- **1781** Birth of Haji Shari'atullah of Bengal.
- **1782** Birth of Titu Mir and the launch of his freedom movement against foreign rule.
- **1793** Permanent Settlement Act enacted and implemented to the detriment of the Muslim community.
- **1846** Birth of Nawab Sir Ahsanullah of Dhaka.
- **1857** Revolt breaks out (also known as Indian Mutiny or Sepoy Mutiny).
- **1858** East India Company formally dissolved and British rule of India confirmed.
- **1861** Birth of Munshi Muhammad Meherullah, the great Muslim preacher of East Bengal.
- **1871** Birth of Sir Salimullah, the Nawab of Dhaka and founder of the All-India Muslim League, and Wajid Ali Khan Panni of Karatia, Tangail.
- **1872** Birth of Mawlana Abu Nasr Wahid of Sylhet.
- **1873** Birth of Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah of Nalta, Satkhira.
- **1880** Birth of Begum Rokeya, a pioneer of female education in Bengal.



www.pathagar.com

LIST OF FURTHER READING

Full references are given in the Bibliography.

Introduction

Ahmed, M. S. *Inscriptions of Bengal*; Ahsan, M. M. 'The Penetration of Islam in South Asia: The Case of Bengal'; Ali, A. K. M. Yaqub. *Aspects of Society and Culture of the Varendra, 1200–1576 AD*; _____: *Select Arabic and Persian Epigraphs*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume 1A*; _____: *An Outline of Ancient Indo-Pak History*; _____: *Questionnaire on the Life and Work of Muhammad Mohar Ali*; Alterazi, A. 'Propagation of Islam by Arabs in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent'; Amin, A. *Fajr al-Islam*; Ashraf, S.A. *The Muslim Traditions in Bengali Literature*; _____: *The Qur'anic Concept of History*; Al-Baladhuri,

www.pathagar.com

Kitab Futuh al-Buldan; Bosworth, C.E. *The New Islamic Dynasties*; Chand, T. *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*; Dani, A. H. 'Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah Shahi-i-Bangalah'; _____: *Bibliography of the Muslim Inscriptions of Bengal*; Firishta, M. Q. *Tarikh-i Firishta*; Hossain, R. S. *Review of Samaj-o-Jiban*; Hourani, G. *Arab Sea-faring* ; Ishaq, M. *India's Contribution to the Study of Hadith Literature*; Ismail, Q. *Chach Nama: An Ancient History of Sind*; Joffe, L. 'Ahmad Hasan Dani' in *The Guardian*; al-Kafi, M. A. *Ahl-i-Hadith Parichiti*; Karim, A. *Samaj-o-Jiban* (Autobiography of Abdul Karim); _____: *Banglar Itihas (Sultani Amal)*; _____: *Banglar Itihas (Mughal Amal)*; _____: *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*; Khan, M. A. *Comprehensive CV of Muin-ud-Din Ahmad Khan*; Khan, M. M. *The Muslim 100*; _____: 'The Pioneers of Islam in Bengal: Early Muslim Preachers and Their Contributions'; Majumdar, R. C. et al., *An Advanced History of India*; al-Maturidi, A. M. *Ta'wilat Ahl al-Sunnah*, 10 vols; Mohsin, K. M. 'Muhammad Abdur Rahim', entry in *Banglapedia*; Nadwi, A. S. S. *The Arab Navigation*; Patwari, M. 'Professor Abdul Karim's Thoughts on History'; Qureshi, I. H. *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*; Rahim, M. A. *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; _____: *The History of the University of Dacca*; Rahman, M. *From Consultation to Confrontation: A Study of the Muslim League in British Indian Politics (1906–1912)*; Rasool, M. G. 'The Advent of Islam in Bengal: Its Socio-cultural Impact'; Sarkar, J (ed.) *The History of Bengal: The Muslim Period*; Savastava, A. L. *The Sultanate of Delhi (711–1526)*; Sen, D. C. *History of Bengali Language and Literature*; Siraj, M. D. *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*; al-Tabari, *Kitab Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'l Muluk*; Zaidi, A. M. *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India*; Zaydan, J. *History of Islamic Civilization*; _____: *Ta'rikh al-Tamaddun al-Islami*.

• Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji

Ahmed, M. S. *Inscriptions of Bengal*; Akhtaruzzaman, M. *Society and Urbanization in Medieval Bengal*; al-Ahsan, A. 'Spread of Islam in Pre-Mughal Bengal'; Alam, M. S. and Khan, M. N. R. *Banglay Muslim Shasaner Shuchana Parba*; Ali, A. K. M. Yaqub. *Aspects of Society and Culture of the Varendra, 1200–1576 AD*; _____: *Rajshahite Islam*; _____: 'Mahisantosh: An Early Muslim Settlement'; _____: 'Racial Identity of Muslim Population of Medieval Bengal'; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume 1A*; Ali, M. 'Dinajpur' in *Islami Bishakosh*; Bosworth, C. E. *The New Islamic Dynasties*; _____: *The Later Ghaznavaids, Spendour and Decay: The Dynasty in Afghanistan and Northern India, 1040–1186*; _____: 'Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khaldji'; Chowdhury, M. A. M. *The Rise and Fall of Buddhism in South Asia: A Study in History*; Dani, A. H. 'Date of Bakhtiyar's raid on Nadiya'; _____: *Muslim Architecture in Bengal*; Eaton, R. M. *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*; Firishta, M. Q. *Tarikh-i Firishta*; Gupta, P. L. 'The Date of Bakhtiyar Khilji's Occupation of Gauda'; Habibullah, A. B. M. *Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*; Hasan, S. M. *Mosque Architecture of Pre-Mughal Bengal*; Islam, M. 'Bakhtiyar Khalji'; Karim, A. *Banglar Itihas (Sultani Amal)*; _____: *Corpus of the Muslim Coins of Bengal (down to AD 1538)*; _____: *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (down to 1538)*; Majumdar, R. C. (ed.) *The History of Bengal: The Hindu Period*; Majumdar, R. C. et al., *An Advanced History of India*; Nizami, K. A. 'Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the 13th Century AD'; Qureshi, I. H. *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*; Rahim, M. A. *History of Afghans in India, AD 1545–1631*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; _____: 'The Advent of Islam in

www.pathagar.com

Bangladesh'; Rasool, M. G. *Chishti-Nizami Sufi Order of Bengal (Till Mid-15th Century) and its Socio-Religious Contribution*; Salim, G. H. *Riyaz-us-Salatin*; Sarkar, J. (ed.) *The History of Bengal: The Muslim Period*; Sarkar, J. *Islam in Bengal*; Siddiq, M. Y. *Historical and Cultural Aspects of the Islamic Inscriptions of Bengal*; _____: 'The Diffusion of Islam in Bengal and the Articulation of a New Order'; Siraj, M. D. *Tabakat-i-Nasiri* (translation); _____: *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*.

• Shah Jalal of Sylhet

Afsaruddin, M. 'Muslim Society in Bangladesh'; Ahmed, S. *Inscriptions of Bengal*; Ahmed, A. *The History of Shahjalal*; Arnold, T. W. *The Preaching of Islam*; Aziz, M. A. et al. (eds.) *Brihattar Sylheter Itihas*; Choudhury, D. N. A. H. *Hazrat Shah Jalal: Dalil-o-Shakhyo*; Karim, A. (trans.) *Futuhat-i-Firuzshahi*; Haq, M. E. *A History of Sufism in Bengal*; Hafiz, A. I. (ed.) *Nirbachita Na't-i-Rasul*; Ibn Battutah, *The Travels of Ibn Battutah, AD 1325–1354*; Ikram, S. M. 'An Unnoticed Account of Shaikh Jalal of Sylhet'; Islam, M. 'Hazrat Shah Jalal'; Islam, S. *Hazrat Shah Jalaler Jibani*; Karim, A. *Shah Jalal*; _____: *Banglar Itihas (Sultani Amal)*; _____: *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*; Khan, M. A. 'Impact of Islam on Religio-Social Life of the People of Bangladesh'; Latif, S. A. *The Muslim Mystic Movement in Bengal 1301–1550*; Nizami, K. A. 'Some Aspects of Khanqah Life in Medieval India'; Rahim, M. A. *History of Afghans in India, AD 1545–1631*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; _____: 'The Saints in Bengal: Shaikh Jalal al-Din Tabrizi and Shah Jalal'; Rahman, F. *Sylheter Ekshata Ekjon*; Rasool, M. G. *Chishti-Nizami Sufi Order of Bengal (Till Mid-15th Century) and its Socio-Religious Contribution*; Roy, A. *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*; Saklayen, G. *Bangladesher Sufi Sadhak*; Sarkar, J (ed.) *The History of Bengal: The Muslim Period*; Sharfuddin, S. *Bangladeshe Sufiprabhab-o-Islam Prachar*.

• Khan Jahan Ali

Abul Fadl *Ain-i-Akbari*; Ali, A. K. M. Yaqub *Select Arabic and Persian Epigraphs*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal. Volume 1B*; Dani, A. H. *Muslim Architecture in Bengal*; Haq, M. E. *A History of Sufism in Bengal*; Hasan, S. M. *Khan Jahan: Patron Saint of the Sundarbans*; _____: *Mosque Architecture of Pre-Mughal Bengal*; _____: *Muslim Monuments of Bangladesh*; Islam, M. 'Hazrat Khan Jahan'; Khan, M. M. *The Muslim 100*; Karim, A. *Banglar Itihas (Mughal Amal)*; _____: *Banglar Itihas (Sultani Amal)*; Latif, S. A. *The Muslim Mystic Movement in Bengal 1301–1550*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; Rasool, M. G. *Chishti-Nizami Sufi Order of Bengal (Till Mid-15th Century)*; Roy, A. *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*; Saklayen, G. *Bangladesher Sufi Sadhak*; Sharfuddin, S. *Bangladeshe Sufiprabhab-o-Islam Prachar*; Sharif, A. 'Upekkhit Itihas: Bagerhater Khan-i-Jahan-o-Kichhu Tattbhakatha'.

• Syed Sultan

Addas, C. *Quest for the Red Sulphur*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume 1B*; Ali, A. K. M. *Muslim Mudra-o-Hastalikhan Shilpa*; Ansari, M. A. H. *Sufism and Shari'ah*; Ashraf, S. A. *The Muslim Traditions in Bengali Literature*; Attar, F. *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*; Bosworth, C. E. *The New Islamic Dynasties*; Chand, T. *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*; Browne, E. G. *A Literary History of Persia: From the Earliest Times to*

www.pathagar.com

Firdawsi; De Bruijn, J. T. P. *Persian Sufi Poetry*; Faruqi, B. A. *The Mujjaddid's Conception of Tawhid*; Haq, M. E. *A History of Sufism in Bengal*; _____: *Abdul Karim Sahitya-Vishard Commemoration Volume*; _____: (ed.) *Muhammad Shahidullah Felicitation Volume*; _____: (ed.) *Muslim Bengali Literature*; al-Hujwiri. *Kashf al-Mahjub*; Husain, S. S. *Civilization and Society*; Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*; Karim, A. *Bangla Sahitye Muslim Kabi-o-Sahityik*; _____: *Banglar Itihas (Mughal Amal)*; _____: *Banglar Itihas (Sultani Amal)*; _____: *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*; Khan, D. U. B. *Layla Majnun*; Khan, M. A. 'Impact of Islam on Religio-Social Life of the People of Bangladesh'; Latif, S. A. *The Muslim Mystic Movement in Bengal 1301–1550*; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Nasr, S. H (ed.) *Islamic Spirituality*; Nasr, S. H. and Leaman, O (eds.) *History of Islamic Philosophy*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; Rahman, F. *Sylheter Ekshata Ekjon*; Roy, A. *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*; Sen, D. C. *History of Bengali Language and Literature*. Sen, S. *Islami Bangla Sahitya*; Shahidullah, M. *Bangla Sahityer Katha*; Sharfuddin, S. *Bangladeshe Sufiprabhab-o-Islam Prachar*; Sharif, A. *Banglar Sufi Sahitya*; _____: *Mudyeyuger Bangla Sahitya*; _____: *Syed Sultan: Tar Granthabali-o-Tar Yug*; Sultan, S. *Nabi Bangsha*.

• Syed Alaol

Alaol, S. *Alaol Birachita Tuhfa*; _____: *Padmavati*; Akond, M. R. 'Mahakabi Alaoler Kayba Mahanabi Hazrat Muhammad'; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal. Volume 1B*; Browne, E. G. *A Literary History of Persia*; Haq, M. E. *A History of Sufism in Bengal*; _____: *Muslim Bengali Literature*; Hoque, M. I. *Bengal towards the Close of Aurangzib's Reign (1690–1707)*; d'Hubert, T. *Alaol's Poetry as a Source for Arakanese History*; Islam, M. N. *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*; Karim, A. *Bangla Sahitye Muslim Kabi-o-Sahityik*; _____: *Banglar Itihas (Mughal Amal)*; _____: *Banglar Itihas (Sultani Amal)*; _____: *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*; _____: *Mudyeyuger Sheresta Bangali Kabi Alaol*; Khan, M. A.'Impact of Islam on Religio-Social Life of the People of Bangladesh'; Latif, S. A. *The Muslim Mystic Movement in Bengal 1301–1550*; Manik, N. I. *Mahakabi Alaol*; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Roy, A. *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*; Sen, D. C. *History of Bengali Language and Literature*; Sen, S. *Islami Bangla Sahitya*; Sharfuddin, S. *Bangladeshe Sufiprabhab-o-Islam Prachar*; Sharif, A. *Bangali-o-Bangla Sahitya*; _____: (ed.) *Banglar Sufi Sahitya*; _____: *Mudyeyuger Bangla Sahitya*; Shahidullah, M. *Bangla Sahityer Katha*; Sultan, S. *Nabi Bangsha*; Tarafdar, M. R. *Husain Shahi Bengal, 1494–1538 AD*.

• Hayat Mahmud

Abdullah, M. *Bangladeshey Farsi Sahitay*; Akanda, S. A (ed.) *The District of Rajshahi: Its Past and Present*; Alaol, S. *Alaol Birachita Tuhfa*; _____: *Padmavati*; Ali, A. K. M. *Rajshahite Islam*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal. Volume 1B*; Browne, E. G. *A Literary History of Persia*; Haq, M. E. *A History of Sufism in Bengal*; _____: (ed.) *Abdul Karim Sahitya-Vishard Commemoration Volume*; _____: (ed.) *Muhammad Shahidullah Felicitation Volume*; _____: *Muslim*

www.pathagar.com

Bengali Literature; Hoque, M. I. *Bengal Towards the Close of Aurangzib's Reign (1690–1707)*; Islam, M. *Kabi Hayat Mahmud*; Islam, M. N. *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*; Karim, A. *Bangla Sahitye Muslim Kabi-o-Sahityik*; _____: *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times*; Khan, M. A. 'Impact of Islam on Religio-Social Life of the People of Bangladesh'; Khan, S. et al. (eds.) *Muhammad Shahidullah Smarakgrantha*; Latif, S. A. *The Muslim Mystic Movement in Bengal 1301–1550*; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Rahim, M. A. *Afghans in India, AD 1545–1631*; _____: *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Sen, D. C. *History of Bengali Language and Literature*; Sen, S. *Islami Bangla Sahitya*; Shahabuddin, M. *Sahitya Sadhanay Koekjon Muslim Prativa*; Sharif, A. (ed.) *Bangali-o-Bangla Sahitya*; _____: *Banglar Sufi Sahitya*; _____: *Mudyeyuger Bangla Sahitya*; Sharfuddin, S. *Bangladeshe Sufiprabhab-o-Islam Prachar*; Shahidullah, M. *Bangla Sahityer Katha*; Sultan, S. *Nabi Bangsha*; Tarafdar, M. R. *Husain Shahi Bengal, 1494–1538 AD: A Socio-Political Study*.

• MANNUJAN KHANUM

Akhtar, S. 'Gender Issue and Women in Oral and Written Cultural Production'; _____: 'Mannujan Khanam'; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume 1B*; Amin, S. N. *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal*; _____: 'Women and Society'; Ali, M. A. *Haji Muhammad Mohsin*; Bradley-Birt, F. B. *Twelve Men of Bengal*; Buckland, C. E. *Bengal under Lieutenant-Governors*; Hossain, S., et al. *Jender Biswakosh*; Huque, M. A. *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Karim, A. *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times*; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Khatun, S. 'Adunik Shikha-o-Unish Shataker Banglar Nari Samaj'; Mallick, A. R. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal*; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Waiz, R. 'Women's Emanicipation in Bengal'.

• HAJI MUHAMMAD MUHSIN

Akhtar, S. 'Mannujan Khanam'; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume 1B*; Ali, M. A. *Haji Muhammad Mohsin*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Bradley-Birt, F. B. *Twelve Men of Bengal*; Buckland, C. E. *Bengal under Lieutenant-Governors*; Choudhury, N. H. *Peasant Radicalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal*; Haq, M. E. *A History of Sufism in Bengal*; _____: (ed.) *Muhammad Shahidullah Felicitation Volume*; Hoque, M. I. *Bengal Towards the Close of Aurangzib's Reign (1690–1707)*; Ikram, S. M. *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Karim, A. *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times*; Khan, A. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas*; Kozlowski, G. C. *Muslim Endowments and Society in British India*; Mallick, A. R. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; _____: *The History of the University of Dacca*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Sarkar, J. (ed.) *The History of Bengal: The Muslim Period*.

www.pathagar.com

• Rahimunnesa

Akhtar, S. 'Gender Issue and Women in Oral and Written Cultural Production'; _____: 'Rahimunnisa (circa 1763–1800): First Woman Poetess of Bengal'; Alaol, S. *Alaol Birachita Tuhfa*; _____: *Padmavati*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume 1B*; Amin, S. N. *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876–1939*; _____: 'Women and Society'; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*; Asani, A. *Muslim Literatures in South Asia*; Browne, E. G. *A Literary History of Persia*; Chakrabarty, A. A. *Bengali Muslim Literati*; Chakravarty, S. R. and Narain, V (eds.). *Bangladesh: History and Culture*; Haq, M. E. *A History of Sufism in Bengal*; _____: *Muslim Bengali Literature*; d'Hubert, T. 'Alaol's Poetry as a Source for Arakanese History'; Hoque, M. I. *Bengal Towards the Close of Aurangzib's Reign (1690–1707)*; Islam, M. N. *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*; Karim, A. *Bangla Sahitye Muslim Kabi-o-Sahityik*; _____: *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times*; Manik, N.I. *Mahakabi Alaol*; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; Sen, D. C. *Bangla Sahityer Katha*; Shahidullah, M. *History of Bengali Language and Literature*; _____: *Bangla Bhashar Itibritta*; Sheikh, A. I. 'Mudyeyuger Bangla Sahityer Muslim Mahila Kabi Rahimunnesa'; Waiz, R. 'Women's Emancipation in Bengal'.

• Haji Shari'atullah

Abdullah, M. *Rajnitite Bangiya Ulamar Bhumika*; _____: *Some Muslim Stalwarts*; Ahmad, A. *Islamic Modernism*; Ahmad, M. *Madrasah-i-Aliar Itihas*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume II A*; Ansari, M. I. 'The Fara'idi Movement and its Role in the Development of Islamic Culture in East Bengal'; Bari, M. A. 'A Nineteenth-Century Muslim Reform Movement in India'; _____: 'The Reform Movement in Bengal'; Choudhury, N. H. *Peasant Radicalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal*; Haroon, S. 'Reform and Orthodox Practice in Early Nineteenth-Century Muslim North India'; Hoque, M. I. *Bengal Towards the Close of Aurangzib's Reign (1690–1707)*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India: A Biographical Dictionary*; Khan, A. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas*; Khan, M. A. *Faraizi Andalaner Itihas*; _____: *History of the Fara'idi Movement*; _____: *Islamic Revivalism of the 18th, 19th & 20th Centuries*; _____: *Muslim Struggle for Freedom in Bengal*; _____: *Rashta Darshaner Shatray Muslim Abadan*; _____: 'Religious Reform Movements of the Muslims'; _____: *Social History of the Muslims of Bangladesh under the British Rule*; _____: *The Great Revolt of 1857 in India and the Muslims of Bengal*; Khan, M. M. 'Ibn Abd al-Wahhab' in *The Muslim 100*; Kismati, Z. A. *Bangladesher Katipay Alim-o-Pir Mashaikh*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*.

• Titu Mir

Abdullah, M. *Rajnitite Bangiya Ulamar Bhumika*; Ahmad, M. *Madrasah-i-Aliar Itihas*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Ahsan, M. *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume II A*; Choudhury, N. H. *Peasant Radicalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal*; Dasgupta, S (ed.). *BBC Joripe Sera 20 Bangali*; Hamid, A. *Muslim Separatism in India*; Haroon, S. 'Reform and

www.pathagar.com

Orthodox Practice in Early Nineteenth-Century Muslim North India'; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; al-Kafi, M. A. *Ahl-i-Hadith Parichiti*; Khan, A. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas*; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Khan, M. A. *British Bharatiya Nathite Titumir-o-Tar Anusarigan*; _____: *Faraizi Andalaner Itihas*; _____: *History of the Fara'idi Movement*; _____: *Islamic Revivalism of the 18th, 19th & 20th Centuries*; _____: *Muslim Struggle for Freedom in Bengal*; _____: 'Religious Reform Movements of the Muslims'; _____: *The Great Revolt of 1857 in India and the Muslims of Bengal*; _____: *Titu Mir and His Followers in British Indian Records, 1831–1833 AD*; Kismati, Z. A. *Bangladesher Katipay Alim-o-Pir Mashaikh*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Siddiqi, A. G. *Shahid Titu Mir*.

• Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri

Abdullah, M. *Bangladesher Kheytinama Arabibid*; _____: *Mawlana Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri*; _____: *Rajnitite Bangiya Ulamar Bhumika*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal. Volume II A*; Ahmad, A. *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857–1964*; Hamid, A. *Muslim Separatism in India: A Brief Survey 1858–1947*; Haroon, S. 'Reform and Orthodox Practice in Early Nineteenth-Century Muslim North India'; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; al-Kafi, M. A. *Ahl-i-Hadith Parichiti*; Khan, A. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas*; Khan, M. A. *Faraizi Andalaner Itihas*; _____: *History of the Fara'idi Movement*; _____: *Islamic Revivalism of the 18th, 19th & 20th Centuries*; _____: 'Muslim Rennaisance in Bangladesh'; _____: *The Great Revolt of 1857 in India and the Muslims of Bengal*; Kismati, Z. A. *Bangladesher Katipay Alim-o-Pir Mashaikh*; Rahim, M. A. *Nawab Abdul Latif and Education of Muslims of Bengal*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; Rashid, M. H. *Dialogue on Islam*; Sharif, A. (ed.) *Banglar Sufi Sahitya*; Subhan, A. 'Bharatbasher Musalmander Partham Shanga'; _____: 'Father of Muslim Modernism';

• Sir Abdul Ghani

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Kayekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Nawab Abdul Ghani-o-Nawab Ahsanullah*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Alamgir, M. *Khwaja Abdul Ghani*; _____: 'Dhakar Nawab Paribar-o-Thader Abadan'; _____: *Banglar Muslimder Samaj Jibaney Dhakar Nawab Paribarir Abadan*; Bradley-Birt, F. B. *Twelve Men of Bengal*; Buckland, C. E. *Bengal under Lieutenant-Governors*; Habibullah, A. B. M. 'Dhakar Itihas'; Hasan, S. M. *Dhaka: The City of Mosques*; Ikram, S. M. *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Karim, A. *Dacca: The Mughal Capital*; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Kozlowski, G. C. *Muslim Endowments and Society in British India*; Mallick, A. R. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Taifoor, S. M. *Glimpses of Old Dhaka*; Zaidi, A. M. *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India*.

• Nawab Abdul Latif

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; Ahmad, A. *Islamic*

www.pathagar.com

Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857–1964; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; _____: *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Ali, M. M. (ed.) *Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur: Autobiography and Other Writings*; Ali, S. M. *Personality Profiles*; Bradley-Birt, F. B. *Twelve Men of Bengal*; Buckland, C. E. *Bengal under Lieutenant-Governors*; Choudhury, N. H. *Peasant Radicalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal*; Hamid, A. *Muslim Separatism in India*; Haq, E. (ed.) *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif*; Huque, M. A. *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*; Ikram, S. M. *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India: A Biographical Dictionary*; Kanti, S. *Anjuman-i-Ulamaye Bangla-o-Muslim Samaj*; Karim, A. 'Nawab Abdul Latif and Modern Education of the Muslims of Bengal'; Khaleque, M. A. 'Nawab Abdool Luteef'; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Khan, M.A. 'Muslim Rennaisance in Bangladesh'; _____: *Social History of the Muslims of Bangladesh under the British Rule*; _____: *The Great Revolt of 1857 in India and the Muslims of Bengal*; Khatun, M. 'Nawab Abdul Latif and the Planters-Ryots Conflict in Bengal'; Latif, N. A. *A Short Account of My Public Life*; Mallick, A. R. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal*; Metcalf, B. D. *Islamic Revival in British India*; Rahim, M.A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *Nawab Abdul Latif and the Education of Muslims of Bengal*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Subhan, A. 'Bharatbasher Musalmander Partham Shanga'; _____: Kolkater Anjuman-i-Islami'; Taifoor, S. M. *Glimpses of Old Dhaka*; Yusofjee, N. A. K. *Bangiya Musalman*; Zaidi, A. M. *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India*.

• Abdur Ra'uf Wahid

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Kayekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Bangladeshe Farsi Sahitya*; _____: *Paschim Bangiya Farsi Sahitya*; Ahmad, A. *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857–1964*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; _____: *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal. Volume II*; _____: (ed.) *Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur: Autobiography and Other Writings*; Browne, E. G. *A Literary History of Persia*; Hamid, A. *Muslim Separatism in India*; Haq, E. (ed.) *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif*; Islam, S (ed.) *History of Bangladesh*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Kanti, S. *Anjuman-i-Ulamaye Bangla-o-Muslim Samaj*; Karim, A. *Banglar Itihas*; Khan, A. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas*; Khan, M. A. 'Impact of Islam on Religio-Social Life of the People of Bangladesh'; _____: *Islamic Revivalism of the 18th, 19th & 20th Centuries*; _____: *Muslim Struggle for Freedom in Bengal*; _____: *The Great Revolt of 1857 in India and the Muslims of Bengal*; Latif, N. A. *A Short Account of My Public Life*; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Subhan, A. 'Banglar Pashe Farsi-o-Urdu'; _____: 'Bharatbasher Musalmander Partham Shanga: Kolkater Anjuman-i-Islami'; _____: 'Father of Muslim Modernism'; Yusofjee, N. A. K. *Bangiya Musalman*.

• Abdul Ghafur Nassakh

Abdullah, M. *Bangladeshe Farsi Sahitya*; _____: *Muslim Jagarane Koyekjon Kabi*

www.pathagar.com

Sahityik; _____: *Paschim Bangiya Farsi Sahitya*; Ahmad, A. *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857–1964*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; _____: *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume II*; _____: (ed.) *Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur*; Bradley-Birt, F. B. *Twelve Men of Bengal*; Browne, E.G. *A Literary History of Persia*; Butool, K.'Nassakh'; Haq, E (ed.) *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif*; Islam, S (ed.) *History of Bangladesh*; Islam, M. N. *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*; Latif, N. A. *A Short Account of My Public Life*; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Nassakh, A. G. *Khudnawisht Sawanih Hayat-i-Nassakh*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Subhan, A. 'Banglar Pashe Farsi-o-Urdu'; _____: 'Bharatbasher Musalmander Partham Shango: Kolkater Anjuman-i-Islami'; _____: 'Father of Muslim Modernism'; _____: 'Ode to a Poet'; Yusofjee, N. A. K. *Bangiya Musalman*.

• Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Bangladeshe Farsi Sahitya*; _____: *Bangladesher Kethinama Arabibid*; _____: *Islami Darshan*; _____: *Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi*; _____: *Muslim Jagarane Koyekjon Kabi Sahityik*; _____: *Paschim Bangiya Farsi Sahitya*; _____: *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khaner Dharmia-o-Samajik Chinta Dhara*; Ahmed, A. F. S. 'Muslim Rationalist Thought in Nineteenth Century Bengal'; Ahmad, M. *Madrasah-i-Aliar Itihas*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, W. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; _____: 'Ubaidullah al-Ubaidi Suhrawardy'; _____: *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Ali, S. A. *Memoirs and Other Writings of Syed Ameer Ali*; Ali, S. M. 'Education and Culture in Dacca during the Last One Hundred Years'; Ali, S. M. *Personality Profiles*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal. Volume II*; _____: (ed.) *Náwab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur*; Dhali, A. H. 'Humanist Movements in Bengal'; Fakhry, M. *A History of Islamic Philosophy*; _____: *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*; Huque, M. A. *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Kanti, S. *Anjuman-i-Ulamaye Bangla-o-Muslim Samaj*; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Mahmood, S. *A History of English Education in India 1781–1893*; Makdisi, G. *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West*; Mallick, A. R. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal*; Martin, R. C. & Woodward, M. R. *Defenders of Reason in Islam*; Mohsin, K. M. 'Muslim Rationalist Thought in Nineteenth Century Bengal'; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Suhrawardi, U. *Dastan-i-Ibratbar*.

• Nawab Faizunnesa Choudhurani

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Muslim Jagarane Koyekjon Kabi Sahityik*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; _____: (ed.) *Understanding Bengali Muslims*; Akhtar, S. 'Gender Issue and Women in Oral and Written Cultural Production'; Ali, M. M. B. *Nawab Faizunnesa Choudhurani*; Amin, S. N. *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876–1939*;

www.pathagar.com

_____: 'Women and Society'; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*; Chakraborty, A. A. *Bengali Muslim Literati*; Chakraborty, G. R. *Nawab Faizunnesa Choudhurani*; Chakravarty, S. R. and Narain, V (eds.). *Bangladesh: History and Culture*; Faizunnesa, N. *Nawab Faizunnesa's Rupjalal*; Hai, M. A and Ahsan, S. A. *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta*; Haq, M. E. *Muslim Bengali Literature*; Hasan, K. M. *Bangladesh Kash*; Huque, M. A. *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Khatun, S. 'Adunik Shikha-o-Unish Shataker Banglar Nari Samaj'; Mallick, A. R. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal*; Muhammad, K.D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Sen, D. C. *History of Bengali Language and Literature*.

• Dilwar Husayn Ahmad

Abdullah, M. *Islami Darshan*; _____: *Paschim Bangiya Farsi Sahitya*; _____: *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khaner Dharmia-o-Samajik Chinta Dhara*; Ahmed, A. F. S. 'Muslim Rationalist Thought in Nineteenth Century Bengal'; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; _____: *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity*; _____: (ed.) *Understanding Bengali Muslims: Interpretive Essays*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal. Volume II*; _____: (ed.) *Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur: Autobiography and Other Writings*; Chakraborty, A. A. *Bengali Muslim Literati and the Development of Muslim Community in Bengal*; Chakravarty, S. R. and Narain, V (eds.). *Bangladesh: History and Culture*; Dhali, A. H. 'Humanist Movements in Bengal: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Trends'; Fakhry, M. *A History of Islamic Philosophy*; _____: *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*; Hamid, A. *Muslim Separatism in India: A Brief Survey 1858–1947*; Makdisi, G. *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West*; Mallick, A. R. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal*; Martin, R. C. and Woodward, M. R. *Defenders of Reason in Islam*; Mohsin, K. M. 'Muslim Rationalist Thought in Nineteenth Century Bengal'; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Salik, S. J (ed.) *Muslim Modernism in Bengal*.

• Sir Ahsanullah

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Nawab Abdul Ghani-o-Nawab Ahsanullah*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Alamgir, M. 'Ahsan Manzil'; _____: *Banglar Muslimder Samaj Jibaney Dhakar Nawab Paribarir Abadan*; _____: 'Dhakar Nawab Paribar-o-Thader Abadan'; _____: 'Khwaja Ahsanullah'; Bradley-Birt, F. B. *Twelve Men of Bengal*; Buckland, C. E. *Bengal under Lieutenant-Governors*; Chakraborty, A. A. *Bengali Muslim Literati*; Chakravarty, S. R. and Narain, V (eds.). *Bangladesh: History and Culture*; Habibullah, A. B. M. 'Dhakar Itihas'; Hasan, S. M. *Dhaka*; Huque, M. A. *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*; Ikram, S. M. *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Karim, A. *Dacca: The Mughal Capital*; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Kozlowski, G. C. *Muslim Endowments and Society in British India*; Lady Dufferin. *Our Viceregal Life in India*; Mallick, A. R. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar*

www.pathagar.com

Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947); _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947.*
Taifoor, S. M. *Glimpses of Old Dhaka.*

• PIR ABU BAKR SIDDIQI OF FURFURA

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Bangladeshe Farsi Sahitya*; _____: *Bangladesher Kethinama Arabibid*; _____: *Banglay Khilafat-Asahoyug Andalan*; _____: *Islami Darshan*; _____: *Paschim Bangiya Farsi Sahitya*; _____: *Rajnitite Bangiya Ulamar Bhumika*; Ahmad, M. *Madrasah-i-Aliar Itihas*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Dey, S. K. 'Anuman-i-Wazin-i-Bangla'; Haidar, A. R. M. A. *Shikha Bistar-o-Sanskare Furfurar Pir Abu Bakr Siddiqi*; Hamid, A. *Muslim Separatism in India*; Haq, E (ed.) *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif*; Haq, M. U. *Banglar Pir-Awliyagan*; Huque, M. A. *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*; Ikram, S. M. *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*; Ishaq, A. F. M. *Shah Sufi Abu Bakr Siddiqi*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; al-Kafi, M. A. *Ahl-i-Hadith Parichiti*; Kanti, S. *Anjuman-i-Ulamaye Bangla-o-Muslim Samaj*; Khan, M. A. *Islamic Revivalism of the 18th, 19th & 20th Centuries*; _____: *Muslim Struggle for Freedom in Bengal*; Kismati, Z. A. *Bangladesher Katipay Alim-o-Pir Mashaikh*; Mallick, A. R. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Salam, M. A. *Mawlana Ruhul Amin.*

• MIR MUSHARRAF HUSAYN

Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; _____: *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; _____: (ed.) *Understanding Bengali Muslims*; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*; _____: *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*; Browne, E. G. *A Literary History of Persia*; Chakraborty, A. A. *Bengali Muslim Literati*; Chakravarty, S. R. and Narain, V (ed.). *Bangladesh: History and Culture*; Guha, B. 'Mir Mosharraf Hossain'; Hafiz, A. I. (ed.) *Nirbachita Nat-i-Rasul*; Hai, M. A and Ahsan, S. A. *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta: Adhunik Yug*; Haq, E. (ed.) *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif, his Writings and Related Documents*; Haq, M. E. *Muslim Bengali Literature*; Husain, S. S. *Civilization and Society*; Husayn, M. M. *Musharraf Racana-Shanbar*; Ikram, S. M. *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*; Islam, M. N. *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Karim, A. *Bangla Sahitye Muslim Kabi-o-Sahityik*; Latif, S. M. A. *Gadya Shilpi Mir Musharraf Husayn*; Mallick, A. R. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal*; Mannan, Q. A. 'Mir Musharraf Husayn: Tar Kal-o-Shilposhayli'; _____: 'Mir Musharraf Husayner Pratham Upanash Ratnavati'; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Qayyum, M. A. 'Samakalin Samaluchakder Drishtite Mir Musharraf Husayn'; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Yusofjee, N. A. K. *Bangiya Musalman.*

www.pathagar.com

◆ Rt. Hon. Syed Ameer Ali

Abdullah, M. *Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi*; _____: *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khaner Dharmeya-o-Samajik Chinta Dhara*; Ahmad, R. *All India Muslim League and the Creation of Pakistan*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, W. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; Ali, S. A. *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed*; _____: *A History of the Saracens*; _____: *Ethics of Islam*; _____: *Islam*; _____: *Memoirs and Other Writings of Syed Ameer Ali*; _____: *Muhammadan Law*; _____: *The Spirit of Islam*; Ali, S. M. *Personality Profiles*; Aziz, K. K. *Ameer Ali*; Baljon, J. M. S. *The Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*; Bradley-Birt, F. B. *Twelve Men of Bengal*; Buckland, C.E. *Bengal under Lieutenant-Governors*; Cantwell-Smith, W.'Amir Ali, Sayyid'; Hitti, P. K. *History of the Arabs*; Hodgson, M. G. S. *The Venture of Islam*; Ikram, S. M. *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India: A Biographical Dictionary*; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Khan, M. A. *Social History of the Muslims of Bangladesh under the British Rule*; Khan, M. M. *The Muslim 100*; Khan, M. R. *Pakistan Andalan-o-Muslim Sahitya*; Leonard, A. G. *Bengal*; Mallick, A. R. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Suhrawardi, U. *Dastan-i-Ibratbar*.

◆ Rt. Hon. Taslimuddin Ahmad

Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*; _____: *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*; Badiuzzaman, 'Taslimuddin Ahmed'; Chakraborty, A. A. *Bengali Muslim Literati*; Chakravarty, S. R. and Narain, V (ed.). *Bangladesh: History and Culture*; Hai, M. A and Ahsan, S. A. *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta*; Haq, M. E. *Muslim Bengali Literature*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; Islam, M. N. *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*; Khan, A. A. *Banglar Mussalmander Itihas*; Khan, M. H. *Pabitra Qur'an Pracharer Itihas-o-Banganubader Shatabarsha*; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Rahman, M. M. *Bangla Bhashay Qur'an Charcha*; _____: *Mussalmander Sahitya Sadhana*; Salik, S. J (ed.) *Muslim Modernism in Bengal*; Sufee, M. H. *Taslimuddin Ahmad*; Wadud, M. A. *Bangla Bhashay Qur'an Charcha*.

◆ Muhammad Daad Ali

Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*; _____: *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*; Chakraborty, A. A. *Bengali Muslim Literati*; Choudhury, A. A. *Muhammad Daad Ali*; Hafiz, A. I. (ed.) *Nirbachita Nat-i-Rasul*; Hai, M. A and Ahsan, S. A. *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta*; Haq, M. E. *Muslim Bengali Literature*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; _____: *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*; Islam, A. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas Prasanga*; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Rahim, M.A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Rahman, S. *Kabi Daad Alier*

www.pathagar.com

Jiban-o-Kabya; Rahman, M.M. *Mussalmander Sahitya Sadhana*; Syed, A.M. *Bangla Sahitye Musalman*.

• KAZIM AL-QURAYSHI KAYKOBAD

Ahmad, M. *Madrasah-i-Aliar Itihas*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Alam, M. 'Bangla Sahitye Kaykobader Abadan'; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*; _____: *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*; Ashraf, S. A. *Muslim Traditions in Bengali Literature*; _____: *Literature, Society and Culture in East Pakistan*; Chakraborty, A. A. *Bengali Muslim Literati*; Chakravarty, S. R. and Narain, V (ed.). *Bangladesh: History and Culture*; Hai, M. A and Ahsan, S. A. *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta*; Haq, M. E. *Muslim Bengali Literature*; Hafiz, A. I. (ed.) *Nirbachita Nat-i-Rasul*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; Islam, A. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas Prasanga*; Islam, M. N. *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*; Kawser, F. *Kaykabad: Kabi-o-Kabita*; Kaykobad, K. Q. *Kaykobad Rachanabali*; Majumdar, R. C. 'Bengali Prose Writing before 1800'; Majumdar, R. C. et al., *An Advanced History of India*; Mannan, Q. A. 'Kaykobad Rachita Jatiya Akkana Kabha'; _____: 'The Tradition of Literary Languages in Indo-Pak Sub-continent'; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Rahman, M. M. *Mussalmander Sahitya Sadhana*; Shahidullah, M.'Traditional Culture in East Pakistan'; Sharif, A. *Banglar Manisha*; Sheikh, T. H. (ed.) *Bangla Bhashay Musalmander Abadan*; Syed, A. M. *Bangla Sahitye Musalman*.

• SHAYKH ABDUR RAHIM OF BASIRHAT

Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; _____: *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*; _____: *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*; Ashraf, S. A. *Muslim Traditions in Bengali Literature*; _____: *Literature, Society and Culture in East Pakistan*; Chakraborty, A. A. *Bengali Muslim Literati*; Chakravarty, S. R. and Narain, V. (ed.). *Bangladesh: History and Culture*; Hai, M. A and Ahsan, S. A. *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta: Adhunik Yug*; Haq, M. E. *Muslim Bengali Literature*; Haque, K. S.'Sheikh Abdur Rahim'; Huque, M. A. *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*; Husayn, S. S. *Civilization and Society*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; Khan, M. R. *Pakistan Andalan-o-Muslim Sahitya*; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Shahidullah, M.'Traditional Culture in East Pakistan: Introduction'; Sharif, A. *Banglar Manisha*; Sheikh, T. H. (ed.) *Bangla Bhashay Musalmander Abadan*; Syed, A. M. *Bangla Sahitye Musalman*. Talib, A. M. *Bangladeshey Islam*; Yusofjee, N. A. K. *Bangiya Musalman*.

• MUZAMMIL HAQ OF SHANTIPUR

Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; _____: *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*; _____: *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*; Ashraf, S. A.

www.pathagar.com

Muslim Traditions in Bengali Literature; Browne, E. G. *A Literary History of Persia*; Chakraborty, A. A. *Bengali Muslim Literati*; Hafiz, A. I. (ed.) *Nirbachita Nat-i-Rasul*; Hai, M. A and Ahsan, S. A. *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta*; Haq, M. E. *Muslim Bengali Literature*; Islam, A. *Muzammil Haq*; _____: *Bangla Sahityer Itihas Prasanga*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; _____: *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*; Khan, A. A. *Banglar Mussalmander Itihas*; Khan, M. M. *The Muslim 100*; Leonard, A. G. *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement 1876–1940*; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Mukhopadhay, S. K. *Muzammil Haq*; Rahman, M. M. *Mussalmander Sahitya Sadhana*; Saklayen, G. *Muzammil Haq-o-Firdawsi Charita*; Syed, A. M. *Bangla Sahitye Musalman*; Talib, A. M. *Bangladeshey Islam*; Yusofjee, N. A. K. *Bangiya Musalman*.

• Munshi Muhammad Meherullah

Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; _____: 'The Role of Associations and Anjumans in the Political Mobilization of the Bengali Muslims in the Later Nineteenth Century'; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; _____: *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Ali, M. M. *Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities 1833–1857*; _____: *History of the Muslims of Bengal. Volume II*; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*; _____: *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*; Carey, E. *Memoir of William Carey*; Hai, M. A and Ahsan, S. A. *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta*; Haq, M. E. *Muslim Bengali Literature*; Hilal, N. (ed.) *Munshi Meherullah*; _____: *Munshi Meherullah Rachanabali*; Ibn Taymiyyah. *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity*; Islam, A. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas Prasanga*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; _____: *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*; Kairanawi, R. *Izhar al-Haq*; Khan, A. A. *Banglar Mussalmander Itihas*; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Rahman, S. H. *Karmobir Munshi Meherullah*; Rauf, M. A. *Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin*; Talib, A. M. *Bangladeshey Islam*; Talib, M. A. *Munshi Meherullah*; Yusofjee, N. A. K. *Bangiya Musalman*.

• Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Bangladeshe Farsi Sahitay*; _____: *Bangladesher Dash Dishari*; _____: *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khaner Dharmeya-o-Samajik Chinta Dhara*; Ahmad, A. *Islamic Modernism*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Muslim Budhijibi*; _____: *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara. Banglar*; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*; Azam, M. A. *Life of Maulavi Abdul Karim*; Gandhi, R, *Understanding the Muslim Mind*; Hunter, W. W. *The Indian Mussalmans*; Huque, M. A. *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press 1901–1930*; _____: *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Karim, A. *Bangla Sahitye Muslim Kabi-o-Sahityik*; Karim, M. A. *Islam's Contribution to Science and Civilisation*; Khan, A. A. *Banglar Mussalmander Itihas*; Khan, M. A. 'Impact of Islam on Religio-Social Life of the People of Bangladesh'; Latif, S. A. *The Muslim Mystic Movement in Bengal 1301–1550*; Leonard, A. G. *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement*

www.pathagar.com

1876–1940; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Rahman, F. *Sylheter Ekshata Ekjon*; Yusofjee, N. A. K. *Bangiya Musalman*.

• SIR SYED SHAMSUL HUDA

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Bangladesher Dash Dishari*; _____: *Nawab Sir Syed Shamsul Huda*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; _____: *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; Ali, S. M. *Personality Profiles*; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*; Azam, M. A. *Life of Maulavi Abdul Karim*; Aziz, K. K. *Ameer Ali*; Baljon, J. M. S. *The Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*; Bradley-Birt, F. B. *Twelve Men of Bengal*; Buckland, C. E. *Bengal under Lieutenant-Governors*; Chakravarty, S. R. and Narain, V. (ed.). *Bangladesh: History and Culture*; Gordon, L. A. *Bengal*; Habibullah, A. M. 'Dhakar Itihas'; Hasan, S. M. *Dhaka*; Ikram, S. M. *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Mannan, M. S. *Muslim Political Parties in Bengal (1936–1947)*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The History of the University of Dacca*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Rahman, M. *From Consultation to Confrontation*; Rashid, H. *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*; Sen, S. *Muslim Politics in Bengal (1937–1947)*; Zaidi, A. M. *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India*.

• NAWAB SYED NAWAB ALI CHOWDHURY

Abdullah, M. *Bangladesher Dash Dishari*; _____: *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Nawab Ali Chowdhury*; _____: *Nawab Salimullah*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; _____: *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; Gordon, L. A. *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement 1876–1940*; Hasan, K. M. *Bangladesh Kash*; Hunter, W. W. *The Indian Mussalmans*; Huque, M. A. *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*; Ikram, S. M. *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press 1901–1930*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India: A Biographical Dictionary*; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Khan, M. R. *Pakistan Andalan-o-Muslim Sahitya*; Mahmud, A. (ed.). *Banglar Jibanta Itihas Sher-i-Bangla*; Mannan, M. A. *Amader Jatiswattar Bikashdhara*; _____: *Bangobanga Theke Bangladesh*; Mannan, M. S. *Muslim Political Parties in Bengal (1936–1947)*; Rahman, M. *From Consultation to Confrontation*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; _____: *The History of the University of Dacca*; Rashid, H. *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*; Sen, S. *Muslim Politics in Bengal (1937–1947)*; Zaidi, A. M. *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India*.

• MAWLANA ABDUL AWWAL JAUNPURI

Abdullah, M. *Bangladesher Kethinama Arabibid*; _____: *Mawlana Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri*; _____: *Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi*;

www.pathagar.com

_____: *Rajnitite Bangiya Ulamar Bhumika*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal. Volume II A*; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*; Ashraf, S. A. *The Muslim Traditions in Bengali Literature*; Banu, U. A. B. R. A. *Islam in Bangladesh*; Hasan, K. M. *Bangladesh Kash*; Husayn, S. *Politics and Society in Bengal 1921–1936*; Khan, A. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas*; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Khan, M. A. *Islamic Revivalism of the 18th, 19th & 20th Centuries*; Kismati, Z. A. *Bangladesher Katipay Alim-o-Pir Mashaikh*; Mannan, M. A. *Amader Jatiswattar Bikashdhara*; _____: *Bangobanga Theke Bangladesh*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; _____: *Nawab Abdul Latif and Education of Muslims of Bengal*; Rashid, M. H. *Dialogue on Islam*; Sarkar, J. *Islam in Bengal*; Talib, A. M. *Bangladeshey Islam*;

◆ Sir Abdur Rahim

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Sir Abdur Rahim: Jiban-o-Karma*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ali, S. M. *Personality Profiles*; Ahmed, W. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; _____: *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Chattopadhyah, G. *Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle (1892–1947)*; Gordon, L. A. *Bengal*; Hamidullah, M. *The Emergence of Islam*; Hasan, K. M. *Bangladesh Kash*; Husayn, S. *Politics and Society in Bengal 1921–1936*; Ikram, S. M. *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; Islam, S. 'Sir Abdur Rahim'; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Khan, B. R. *Politics in Bengal (1927–1936)*; Mahmud, A. (ed.). *Banglar Jibanta Itihas Sher-i-Bangla*; Mannan, M. S. *Muslim Political Parties in Bengal (1936–1947)*; Rahim, A. *Principles of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*; Rahim, M.A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Rahman, M. *From Consultation to Confrontation*; Rashid, H. *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*; Sen, S. *Muslim Politics in Bengal (1937–1947)*; Sen, S. P. (ed.) *National Biography of India*; Zaidi, A. M. *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India*.

◆ Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan

Abdullah, M: *Bangladesher Kethinama Arabibid*; _____: *Banglay Khilafat-Asahoyug Andalan*; _____: *Rajnitite Bangiya Ulamar Bhumika*; Ahmad, M. *Madrasah-i-Aliar Itihas*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; _____: *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal. Volume II A*; Amin, M. R. *Chotodayr Mawlana Akram Khan*; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*; Banu, U. A. B. R. A. *Islam in Bangladesh*; Ghazi, M. A. *Islamic Renaissance in South Asia 1707–1867*; Husain, S. S. *Civilization and Society*; Husayn, S. *Politics and Society in Bengal 1921–1936*; Ikram, S. M. *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; Jafar, A. (ed.) *Mawlana Akram Khan*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Jehangir, M. *Muhammad Akram Khan, 1868–1968*; Kanti, S. *Anjuman-i-Ulamaye Bangla-o-Muslim Samaj*; Khan, A. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas*; Khan, M. A. *Islamic Revivalism of the 18th, 19th & 20th Centuries*; Khan, M. M. A. *Muslim Banglar Samajik Itihas*; _____: *Mustafa Charit*; Khan, M. R. *Pakistan Andalan-o-Muslim Sahitya*; Kismati, Z. A. *Bangladesher Katipay Alim-o-Pir Mashaikh*; Mahmud, A (ed.). *Banglar Jibanta Itihas Sher-i-Bangla*; Mannan, M.

www.pathagar.com

A. *Amader Jatiswattar Bikashdhara*; _____: *Bangobanga Theke Bangladesh*; Mannan, M. S. *Muslim Political Parties in Bengal (1936–1947)*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Rahman, M. *From Consultation to Confrontation*; Rashid, H. *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*; Samaddar, R. 'Leaders and Legacies'; Sarkar, J. *Islam in Bengal*; Sen, S. P. (ed.) *National Biography of India*; Sen, S. *Muslim Politics in Bengal (1937–1947)*; Talib, A. M. *Bangladeshey Islam*; Zaidi, A. M. *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India*.

• Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad

Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; _____: *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*; _____: *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*; Ashraf, S. A. *The Muslim Traditions in Bengali Literature*; Chakraborty, A. A. *Bengali Muslim Literati*; Chakravarty, S. R. and Narain, V. (ed.). *Bangladesh: History and Culture*; Chand, T. *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*; Choudhury, A. A. *Aalapchari Ahmad Sharif*; Choudhury, K. and Haq, E. (ed.) *Abdul Karim Smarakgrantha*; Hai, M. A and Ahsan, S. A. *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta*; Haq, M. E. (ed.): *Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad Commemoration Volume*; _____: *Muslim Bengali Literature*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; Karim, A. *Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad*; _____: *Samaj-o-Jiban*; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Khan, F. et al. *Abdul Karim Sahityavisharadke Nibedita Prabandha Sangkalana*; Mannan, Q. A. 'The Tradition of Literary Languages in Indo-Pak Subcontinent'; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Rahman, M. M. *Mussalmander Sahitya Sadhana*; Sahityavishard, A. K. *Arakan Rajsabhay Bangla Sahitya*; _____: *Islamabad*; _____: *Puthi Parichiti*; Shahidullah, M. 'Traditional Culture in East Pakistan: Introduction'; Sharif, A. *Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad*; _____: *Banglar Manisha*; Sheikh, T. H. (ed.) *Bangla Bhashay Musalmander Abadan*; Talib, A. M. *Bangladeshey Islam*.

• Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin

Abdullah, M. *Bangladesher Kethinama Arabibid*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*; _____: *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Ali, M. M. *Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities 1833–1857*; _____: *History of the Muslims of Bengal, Volume II*; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*; _____: *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*; Banu, U. A. B. R. A. *Islam in Bangladesh*; Carey, E. *Memoir of William Carey*; Choudhury, A. A. *Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin (1870–1937)*; Hai, M. A and Ahsan, S. A. *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta: Adhunik Yug*; Haq, M. E. *Muslim Bengali Literature*; Hilal, N. (ed.) *Munshi Meherullah: Jiban-o-Karma*; _____: *Munshi Meherullah Rachanabali*; Islam, A. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas Prasanga*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; _____: *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*; Khan, A. A. *Banglar Mussalmander Itihas*; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Rahim, M.A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Rahman, M. M. *Mussalmander Sahitya Sadhana*; Rauf, M. A. *Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin*; Sarkar, J. *Islam in Bengal*; Sheikh, T. H. (ed.) *Bangla Bhashay Musalmander*

www.pathagar.com

Abadan; Talib, A. M. *Bangladeshey Islam*; Talib, M. A. *Munshi Meherullah: Deshkal Samaj*; Yusofjee, N. A. K. *Bangiya Musalman*; Zamiruddin, M. S. *Amar Jibani-o-Islam Grahan Brittanta*.

• Sir Salimullah Khan Bahadur

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Bangladesher Dash Dishari*; _____: *Banglay Khilafat-Asahajog Andalan*; _____: *Dhakar Koyekjon Muslim Shudi*; _____: *Nawab Abdul Ghani-o-Nawab Ahsanullah*; _____: *Nawab Ali Chowdhury: Jiban-o-Karma*; _____: *Nawab Salimullah: Jiban-o-Karma*; _____: *Nawab Sir Syed Shamsul Huda*; _____: *Sir Abdur Rahim: Jiban-o-Karma*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Alamgir, M. 'Khwaja Salimullah'; Ali, S. M. *Personality Profiles*; Allana, G. *Muslim Political Thought Through the Ages: 1562–1947*; Azraf, D. M. *Munawwar Ali: An Illustrious Son of Sylhet*; Bakul, T. R. *Barrister Abdur Rasul*; Banu, U. A. B. R. A. *Islam in Bangladesh*; Bradley-Birt, F. B. *Twelve Men of Bengal*; Buckland, C. E. *Bengal under Lieutenant-Governors*; Dani, A. H. (ed.) *Founding Fathers of Pakistan*; Hasan, S. M. *Dhaka*; Ikram, S. M. *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Khan, M. R. *Pakistan Andalan-o-Muslim Sahitya*; Kozlowski, G. C. *Muslim Endowments and Society in British India*; Mannan, M. A. *Amader Jatiswattar Bikashdhara*; _____: *Bangobanga Theke Bangladesh*; Quadir, A. 'Nawab Salimullah and the Partition of Bengal'; Quadir, I. F. 'Nawab Khawaja Salimullah'; Rab, A. S. M. A. A. K. *Fazlul Haq*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; _____: *The History of the University of Dacca*; Rahman, M. *From Consultation to Confrontation*; Rashid, H. *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*; Sen, S. *Muslim Politics in Bengal (1937–1947)*; Taifoor, S. M. *Glimpses of Old Dhaka*; Zaidi, A. M. *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India*.

• Wajid Ali Khan Panni

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Bangladesher Dash Dishari*; _____: *Banglay Khilafat-Asahajog Andalan*; _____: *Dhakar Koyekjon Muslim Shudi*; _____: *Sir Abdur Rahim: Jiban-o-Karma*; _____: *Nawab Salimullah: Jiban-o-Karma*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Ali, S. M. *Personality Profiles*; Allana, G. *Muslim Political Thought Through the Ages*; Bakul, T. R. *Barrister Abdur Rasul*; Bradley-Birt, F. B. *Twelve Men of Bengal*; Buckland, C. E. *Bengal under Lieutenant-Governors*; Choudhury, N. I. *Peasant Radicalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal*; al-Hilal, B. *Ibrahim Khan (1894–1978)*; Hunter, W. W. *The Indian Mussalmans*; Islam, M.N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Khan, I. *Batayan*; Kozlowski, G. C. *Muslim Endowments and Society in British India*; Rab, A. S. M. A. A. K. *Fazlul Haq*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; Rahman, M. S. 'Wazed Ali Khan Panni'.

www.pathagar.com

◆ MAWLANA ABU NASR WAHID

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Bangladesher Dash Dishari*; _____: *Bangladesher Kethinama Arabibid*; _____: *Banglay Khilafat-Asahajog Andalan*; _____: *Dhakar Koyekjon Muslim Shudi*; _____: *Mawlana Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri*; _____: *Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi*; Ahmad, M. *Madrasah-i-Aliar Itihas*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Alam, A. K. M. N. 'Shamsul Ulema Abu Nasar Waheed'; Ali, S. M. 'Education and Culture in Dacca during the Last One Hundred Years'; Allana, G. *Muslim Political Thought Through the Ages*; Azam, M. A. *Life of Maulavi Abdul Karim*; Bakul, T. R. *Barrister Abdur Rasul*; Bradley-Birt, F. B. *Twelve Men of Bengal*; Buckland, C. E. *Bengal under Lieutenant-Governors*; Haq, E. (ed.) *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif*; Hunter, W. W. *The Indian Mussalmans*; Huque, M. A. *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*; Husain, S. S and Ashraf, S. A. *Crisis in Muslim Education*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Khan, I. *Batayan*; Khan, I. *Muslim Sampaditaya-o-Prokashitya Bangla Sahitaya*; Khan, M. A. 'Muslim Renaissance in Bangladesh'; Kozlowski, G. C. *Muslim Endowments and Society in British India*; Mannan, M. A. *Amader Jatiswattar Bikashdhara*; _____: *Bangobanga Theke Bangladesh*; Mannan, M. S. *Muslim Political Parties in Bengal (1936–1947)*; Rab, A. S. M. A. *A. K. Fazlul Haq*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; _____: *The History of the University of Dacca*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Rahman, M. *From Consultation to Confrontation: A Study of the Muslim League in British Indian Politics (1906–1912)*; Rahman, F. *Sylheter Ekshata Ekjon*; Sen, S. *Muslim Politics in Bengal (1937–1947)*; Taifoor, S. M. *Glimpses of Old Dhaka*; Zaidi, A. M. *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India*.

◆ KHAN BAHADUR AHSANULLAH

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; _____: *Bangladesher Dash Dishari*; _____: *Bangladesher Kethinama Arabibid*; _____: *Banglay Khilafat-Asahajog Andalan*; _____: *Dhakar Koyekjon Muslim Shudi*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; Ahmed, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Ahsanullah, K. B. *Amar Jibandhara*; _____: *Islam Shopan*; Alam, A. K. M. N. *Shamsul Ulema Abu Nasar Waheed*; Ali, S. M. *Personality Profiles*; Allana, G. *Muslim Political Thought Through the Ages*; Azam, M. A. *Life of Maulavi Abdul Karim*; Bakul, T. R. *Barrister Abdur Rasul*; Bradley-Birt, F. B. *Twelve Men of Bengal*; Buckland, C. E. *Bengal under Lieutenant-Governors*; Hunter, W. W. *The Indian Mussalmans*; Huque, M. A. *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*; Husayn, M. M. *Musharraf Racana-Shanbar*; Islam, M. N. *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Khan, I. *Batayan*; _____: *Muslim Sampaditaya-o-Prokashitya Bangla Sahitaya*; Khan, M. A. 'Muslim Renaissance in Bangladesh'; Kozlowski, G. C. *Muslim Endowments and Society in British India*; Latif, S. M. A. *Gadya Shilpi Mir Musharraf Husayn*; Mannan, M. S. *Muslim Political Parties in Bengal (1936–1947)*; Mu'inuddin, G. (ed.) *Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah Smarakgrantha*; Rab, A. S. M. A. A. K. *Fazlul Haq*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas*

www.pathagar.com

(1757–1947); _____: *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*; _____: *The History of the University of Dacca*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Rahman, M. *From Consultation to Confrontation*; Sheikh, T. H. (ed.) *Bangla Bhashay Musalmander Abadan*; Talib, A. M. *Bangladeshey Islam*.

◆ Begum Rokeya

Abdullah, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*; Ahmed, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906*; _____: (ed.) *Understanding Bengali Muslims*; Ahmed, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara*; Akhtar, S. 'Gender Issue and Women in Oral and Written Cultural Production'; _____: 'Roquiah Sakhawat Hossain'; Akmam, A. *Begum Rokeya*; Alam, M. S. *Rokeya Sakhawat Husayn*; Ali, M. M. *History of the Muslims of Bengal. Volume 1B*; Amin, S. N. 'Women and Society'; _____: *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876–1939*; Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*; _____: *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*; Banu, U. A. B. R. A. *Islam in Bangladesh*; Bhuiyan, A. (ed.) *Rokeya Juktibad Nabajagaran-o-Shikha Samajtata*; Begum, M. *Mrittunjayee Rokeya*; Chakraborty, A. A. *Bengali Muslim Literati*; Chakravarty, S. R. and Narain, V. (ed.). *Bangladesh: History and Culture*; Hai, M. A and Ahsan, S. A. *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta*; Haq, M. E. *Muslim Bengali Literature*; Hasan, M. S. *Begum Rokeya: Samay-o-Sahitya*; Hossain, R. S. 'Bengal Muslims on the Way to Decline'; Hossain, S, et al., *Jender Biswakosh*; Huque, M. A. *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*; Islam, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*; Islam, M. S. *Mohiyoshi Rokeya*; Jain, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India*; Khan, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*; Khatun, S.'Adunik Shikha-o-Unish Shataker Banglar Nari Samaj'; Mallick, A. R. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal*; Muhammad, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*; Murshid, G. *Rashsundari Theke Rokeya: Nari Pargathir Eksha Boshar*; Quadir, A. (ed.) *Rokeya Rachanabali*; Rahim, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*; _____: *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*; Shamsuzzaman, A. F. et al., *Who's Who in Bangladesh*; Sharif, A. *Banglar Manisha*; Waiz, R. 'Women's Emanicipation in Bengal'; Zaman, L. *Rokeya Sakhawat Husayn*; _____: *TheMussalman Patrikai Rokeya Prashanga*.



www.pathagar.com

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABDULLAH, M. *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*, Dhaka: Kamiyab Parkashani, 2000.

_____. *Bangladeshe Farsi Sahitay*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1983.

_____. *Bangladesher Dash Dishari*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1990.

_____. *Bangladesher Kethinama Arabibid*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1986.

_____. *Banglay Khilafat-Asahajog Andalan*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1996.

_____. *Dhakar Koyekjon Muslim Shudi*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1991

_____. *Islami Darshan* (Bengali translation of *Ilm ul-Kalam* by Shibli Numani), Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1981.

www.pathagar.com

_____. *Mawlana Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1995.

_____. *Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1984.

_____. *Muslim Jagarone Koyekjon Kabi Sahityik*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladeshi, 1980.

_____. *Nawab Abdul Ghani-o-Nawab Ahsanullah: Jiban-o-Karma*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1998.

_____. *Nawab Ali Chowdhury: Jiban-o-Karma*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1987.

_____. *Nawab Salimullah: Jiban-o-Karma*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1986.

_____. *Nawab Sir Syed Shamsul Huda*, Dhaka: BRAC, 1987.

_____. *Paschim Bangiya Farsi Sahitya*, Dhaka: Iranian Cultural Centre, 1994.

_____. *Rajnitite Bangiya Ulamar Bhumika*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1995.

_____. *Sir Abdur Rahim: Jiban-o-Karma*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1990.

_____. *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khaner Dharmeya-o-Samajik Chinta Dhara*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1982.

_____. *Some Muslim Stalwarts*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1980.

ABUL FADL. *Ain-i-Akbari* (vol. 1), translated by H. Blochmann, Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1993.

ADDAS, C. *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn Arabi*, Cambridge: The Islamic Text Society, 1993.

Administration of Bengal under Sir Andrew Fraser, KCSI, 1903–08, unknown author, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1908.

AFSARUDDIN, M. 'Muslim Society in Bangladesh' in *Islam in Bangladesh Through Ages*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1995, pp. 140–166.

AHMAD, A. *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857–1964*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967.

AHMAD, F. *Mohy-ud-Din Alamgir Aurangzeb*, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1976.

_____. *Husayn the Great Martyr*, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1984.

AHMAD, J. *Hundred Great Muslims*, Lahore: Ferozsons Ltd, 1984.

AHMAD, K. and MUQTADIR, A. *Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the Calcutta Madrasah*, Calcutta: BSBD, 1905.

AHMAD, M. *Madrasah-i-Aliar Itihas*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004.

AHMAD, N. *Muslim Contribution to Geography*, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1972.

AHMAD, R. *All India Muslim League and the Creation of Pakistan: A Chronology (1906–1947)*, Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 2006.

AHMED, A. F. S. 'Muslim Rationalist Thought in Nineteenth Century Bengal: Abdur Rahim Dahri (c.1785–1853)', in *Bangladesh: Society, Religion and Politics*, edited by Rafiuddin Ahmed, Chittagong: South Asia Studies Group, 1985.

AHMED, A. S. *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*, London: Routledge, 1988.

_____. *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin*, London: Routledge, 1997.

AHMED, A. *The History of Shahjalal*, Dhaka: Vitso Prokash, 2007.

www.pathagar.com

AHMED, L. *Women and Gender in Islam; Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

AHMED, M. B et al. (ed.). *Muslim Contributions to World Civilization*, Richmond: IIIT & AMSS, 2005.

AHMED, M. S. *Inscriptions of Bengal* (vol. 4), Rajshahi: Varendra Research Museum, 1960.

AHMED, N. *Forty Great Men and Women in Islam*, New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1990.

AHMED, R. *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity*, New Delhi: OUP, 1981.

_____. (ed.) *Understanding Bengali Muslims: Interpretive Essays*, New Delhi: OUP, 2000.

_____. 'The Role of Associations and Anjumans in the Political Mobilization of the Bengali Muslims in the Later Nineteenth Century', *Bangladesh Historical Studies*, pp. 31–48.

_____. 'Trends in Bengali Muslim Social Thought in the Nineteenth Century', in *Islam in Bangladesh* (ed.) R. Ahmad, Dhaka: Bangladesh Itihas Samiti, 1983.

AHMED, S. *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912*, Dacca: Published by the author, 1974.

AHMED, W. *Unish Shatake Bangali Musalmander Chinta Chetanar Dhara* (2 vols.), Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1983.

_____. *Banglar Muslim Budhijibi*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985.

_____. *Ubaydullah al-Ubaidi Suhrawardi*, entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

AL-AHSAN, A. 'Spread of Islam in Pre-Mughal Bengal', in *Seminar Papers* (vol. 1), Islamabad: IIU, 1986.

AHSAN, M. 'Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

AHSAN, M. M. 'The Penetration of Islam in South Asia: The Case of Bengal', in *Seminar Papers* (vol. 2), Islamabad: IIU, 1986.

AHSANULLAH, K. B. *Islam Shopan*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1963 (reprinted 1995).

_____. *Amar Jibandhara (My Life)*, Dhaka: Ahsania Mission, 2000.

AKANDA, S. A (ed.) *The District of Rajshahi: Its Past and Present*, Rajshahi: Institute of Bangladesh Studies, 1983.

AKHTAR, S. *Mannujan Khanam*, entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

_____. 'Roquiah Sakhawat Hossain', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

_____. 'Rahimunnisa (circa 1763–1800): First Woman Poetess of Bengal'. Source: www.trulyBangladesh.com, 2009.

_____. 'Gender Issue and Women in Oral and Written Cultural Production' in *Nazimuddin Ahmed Commemoration Volume*, Dhaka: Islamic Arts Organisation Bangladesh, 2011.

AKHTARUZZAMAN, M. *Society and Urbanization in Medieval Bengal*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2009.

AKMAM, A. *Begum Rokeya: Sangrami ek Pratibimba*, Dhaka: Bangladesh National Museum, 2001.

AKOND, M. R. 'Mahakabi Alaoler Kayba Mahanabi Hazrat Muhammad', in *History, Society, Culture: ABM Husain Festschrift*, Dhaka: Khan Brothers & Co., 2009.

ALAM, A. K. M. N. 'Shamsul Ulema Abu Nasar Waheed', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

ALAM, M. 'Bangla Sahitye Kaikobader Abadan', in *Bangla Sahityer Pancharatna*, edited by

www.pathagar.com

Ruhul Amin Babul, Dhaka: Dashdik, 2006.

ALAM, M. S. *Rokeya Sakhawat Husayn: Jiban-o-Sahitya*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1989.

ALAM, M. S. and Khan, M. N. R. 'Banglay Muslim Shasaner Shuchana Parba: Bakhtiyar Khaljir Bangla Vijay', *Islami Ghabayshana Patrika* (vol. 4), pp. 197–208, Rajshahi, Bangladesh.

ALAM, Z. *Education in Early Islamic Period*, New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami, 1991.

ALAMGIR, M. 'Ahsan Manzil', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

_____. *Banglar Muslimder Samaj Jibaney Dhakar Nawab Paribarir Abadan*, PhD thesis, University of Dhaka, 1999.

_____. 'Khwaja Abdul Ghani', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

_____. 'Khwaja Salimullah', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

_____. 'Khwaja Ahsanullah' and 'Ahsan Manzil', entries in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

_____. 'Dhakar Nawab Paribar-o-Thader Abadan' in *Nazimuddin Ahmed Commemoration Volume*, edited by Syed Mahmudul Hasan, Dhaka: Islamic Arts Organisation Bangladesh, 2011.

ALAOL, S. *Alaol Birachita Tuhfa*, edited by Ahmad Sharif, Dacca: Dacca University, 1958.

_____. *Padmavati*, edited by Syed Ali Ahsan, Dhaka: Ahmed Publishing House, 2000.

ALI, A. K. M. Yaqub. 'Mahisantosh: An Early Muslim Settlement' in *The District of Rajshahi: Its Past and Present*, edited by S. A. Akanda, Rajshahi University: IBS, 1983.

_____. *Select Arabic and Persian Epigraphs: Sources for the Socio-Administrative History of Bengal (Turko-Afghan and Mughal Periods)*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1988.

_____. *Aspects of Society and Culture of the Varendra, 1200–1576 AD.* Rajshahi: M. Sajjadur Rahim, 1998.

_____. *Muslim Mudra-o-Hastalikhan Shilpa*, Dhaka: Book Choice, 2008.

_____. *Rajshahite Islam*, Dhaka: Tamralipi, 2008.

_____. 'Racial Identity of Muslim Population of Medieval Bengal', in *Nazimuddin Ahmed Commemoration Volume*, Dhaka: Islamic Arts Organization Bangladesh, 2011.

_____. *Musalmander Itihas Charcha*, Dhaka: ABSAR, 2008.

ALI, A. Y. *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an: New Edition with Revised Translation, Commentary and Index*, Maryland: Amana Publications, 2001.

ALI, M. 'Dinajpur' in *Islami Bishakosh* (vol. 13), Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1992.

ALI, M. A. 'Haji Muhammad Mohsin', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

ALI, M. M. *An Outline of Ancient Indo-Pak History*, Dacca: Shaikh Brothers, 1960

_____. *Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities 1833—1857*, Chittagong: Mehrub Publications, 1965.

_____. *History of the Muslims of Bengal* (3 vols.), Riyadh: Imam Muhammad ibn Sa'ud Islamic University, 1985.

_____. (ed.) *Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur: Autobiography and Other Writings*, Chittagong: Mehrub Publications, 1968.

_____. 'Questionnaire on the Life and Work of Muhammad Mohar Ali', completed for this author by his wife and son, 2010.

www.pathagar.com

ALI, M. M. B. *Nawab Faizunnesa Choudhurani*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2007.

ALI, M. S. et al. (eds.) *Muslim Contribution to Science and Technology*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation, 1996.

ALI, S. A. *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1873.

_____. *A History of the Saracens*, New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994.

_____. *Ethics of Islam*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1893.

_____. *Islam*, London: Constable & Co., 1909.

_____. *Memoirs and Other Writings of Syed Ameer Ali*, edited by Syed Razi Wasti, Lahore: People's Publishing House, 1968.

_____. *Muhammadan Law: Compiled from Authorities in the Original Arabic* (2 vols.), New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2002.

_____. *The Spirit of Islam*, New Delhi: Kutub Khana, no date.

ALI, S. M. *Personality Profiles*, Dacca: National Institute of Public Administration, 1965.

_____. 'Education and Culture in Dacca during the Last One Hundred Years', in *Muhammad Shahidullah Felicitation Volume*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1966.

ALLANA, G. *Muslim Political Thought Through the Ages: 1562–1947*, Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1988.

ALLEN, B. C. *Eastern Bengal District Gazetters Dacca*, Allahabad: The Pioneer Press, 1912.

ALTERAZI, A. 'Propagation of Islam by Arabs in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent', in *Seminar Papers* (vol. 1), Islamabad: IIU, 1986.

AMIN, A. *Fajr al-Islam*, Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 1969.

AMIN, S. N. 'Women and Society', in *History of Bangladesh*, edited by Sirajul Islam, (vol. 3), Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1992.

_____. *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876–1939*, Leiden: E J Brill, 1996.

AMIN, M. R. *Chotodayr Mawlana Akram Khan*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, reprinted 2009.

ANISUZZAMAN, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1969.

_____. *Muslim Manosh-o-Bangla Sahitya*, Dhaka: Partham Peperash, 2001.

ANSARI, M. A. H. *Sufism and Shari'ah: A Study of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's Effort to Reform Sufism*, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1986.

ANSARI, M. I. 'The Fara'idi Movement and its Role in the Development of Islamic Culture in East Bengal', in *Seminar Papers* (vol. 1) Islamabad: IIU, 1986.

ARBERRY, A. J. *Revelation and Reason in Islam*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1957.

_____. *Aspects of Islamic Civilization: As Depicted in the Original Texts*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1964.

_____. *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1969.

_____. *The Islamic Art of Persia*, New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2001.

ARCHER, N. P . (ed.) *The Sufi Mystery*, London: Octagon Press, 1988.

ARMSTRONG, K. *A History of God*, London: Mandarin, 1994.

ARNOLD, T. W. *The Caliphate*, New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1988.

_____. *The Islamic Art and Architecture*, New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2001.

www.pathagar.com

_____. *The Preaching of Islam*, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1979.

ARSALAN, A. S. *Our Decline and its Causes*, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1990.

ASAD, M. *The Road to Mecca*, Tangier: Dar al-Andalus, 1974.

_____. *The Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980.

ASANI, A. *Muslim Literatures in South Asia*, London: The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2006.

ASHRAF, S. A. *Literature, Society and Culture in East Pakistan from 1947 to 1971*, Karachi: Bengali Literary Society, 1977.

_____. *The Muslim Traditions in Bengali Literature*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1983.

_____. *The Qur'anic Concept of History*, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1980.

ATTAR, F. *Tadhkirat al-Awliyah*, translated as *Muslim Saints and Mystics* by A. J. Arberry, London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1976.

AYOUB, M. M. *The Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005.

AZAD, A. K. *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, translated by S. A. Latif, (2 vols.), Lahore: Sind Sagar Academy, 1976.

AZAM, M. A. *Life of Maulavi Abdul Karim*, Calcutta: Sri Gouranga Press, 1939.

AZAMI, M. M. *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature*, Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1977.

_____. *The History of the Qur'anic Text from Revelation to Compilation*, Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003.

AZIMABADI, B. *Great Personalities in Islam*, New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1998.

AZIZ, K. K. *Ameer Ali: His Life and Work*, Lahore: Publishers United, 1968.

AZIZ, M. A. et al. (eds.), *Brihattar Sylheter Itihas* (vol. 1), Sylhet: Brihattar Sylhet Parishad, 1997.

AZRAF, D. M. *Munawwar Ali: An Illustrious Son of Sylhet*, Islamabad: Concept Publications, 1993.

BADIUZZAMAN, 'Taslimuddin Ahmed', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

BAKAR, O. *Classification of Knowledge in Islam*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1998.

_____. *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1999.

BAKUL, T. R. *Barrister Abdur Rasul: Jiban-o-Karma*, Dhaka: Utshow Prokashan, 2003.

AL-BALADHURI, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, translated by P. K. Hitti, New York: Columbia University, 1916.

BALDOCK, J. *The Essence of Sufism*, Hertfordshire: Eagle Editions Ltd, 2004.

BALJON, J. M. S. *The Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, Lahore: Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf, reprinted 1970.

BANERJI, B. D. *The Palas of Bengal*, Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1915.

BANU, U. A. B. R. A. *Islam in Bangladesh*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992.

BARI, M. A. 'A Nineteenth-Century Muslim Reform Movement in India' in *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb*, edited by George Makdisi, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965.

_____. 'The Reform Movement in Bengal' in *A History of the Freedom Movement 1707–1947* (vol. 1), Karachi: The Board of Editors, 1957.

www.pathagar.com

BEG, M. A. J. *A Short Encyclopaedia of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad*, Cambridge: M. A. J. Beg, 2007.

_____. *Biographical Dictionary of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad*, Cambridge: M. A. J. Beg, 2008.

_____. *Essays on the Origins of Islamic Civilization*, Cambridge: M. A. J. Beg, 2006.

_____. *Maniruddin Anwari*, Cambridge: 21st Century Publications, 2002.

BEGUM, M. *Mrittunjayee Rokeya: Shadeshi-o-Shadeshik*, Dhaka: Sucheepatra, 2008.

BERINSTAIN, V. *Mughal India: Splendours of the Peacock Throne*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1998.

BHATTASALI, N. *Coins and Chronology of the Early Independent Sultans of Bengal*, Cambridge: W. Hepper & Co., 1922.

BHUIYAN, A. (ed.) *Rokeya Juktibad Nabajagaran-o-Shikha Samajtata*, Dhaka: Rodela Prakashani, 2008.

BLOOM, J. & BLAIR, S. *Islam: Empire of Faith*, London: BBC Worldwide Ltd, 2001.

BLUNT, W. *Splendours of Islam*, London: Angus & Robertson, 1976.

BOLITHO, H. *Jinnah: Creator of Pakistan*, London: John Murray, 1960.

BOSWORTH, C. E. 'Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khaldji', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (2nd edition, vol. vii), 1953.

_____. *New Islamic Dynasties*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

_____. *The Later Ghaznavaids, Spendour and Decay: The Dynasty in Afghanistan and Northern India, 1040–1186*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992.

BOURDILLON, J. A. *Bengal under the Muhammadans: Brief Notes on its Geography and History*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902.

BRADLEY-BIRT, F. B. *The Romance of an Eastern Capital*, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1906.

_____. *The Story of an Indian Upland*, London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1905.

_____. *Twelve Men of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century*, Calcutta: S. K. Lahiri & Co, 1910.

BROCKLEMAN, C. *History of the Islamic Peoples*, London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1948.

BROWNE, E. G. *A Literary History of Persia: From the Earliest Times to Firdawsi* (4 vols.), New Delhi: Goodword, 2002.

_____. *Arabian Medicine*, Lahore: Kazi Publications, no date.

BUCKLAND, C. E. *Bengal under Lieutenant-Governors* (2 vols.), New Delhi: Deep Publications, 1976.

_____. *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, London: S. Sonnenschein & Co., 1906.

AL-BUKHARI. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Arabic text with English translation by M. M. Khan (9 vols.), New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1987.

BULLOCK, A. & TROMBLEY, S (eds.). *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, London: HarperCollins, 1999.

BURCKHARDT, T. *Introduction to Sufism*, London: Thorsons, 1995.

BURNS, K. *Eastern Philosophy*, London: Arcturus Publishing, 2004.

BUTOOL, K. 'Nassakh', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

CAIN, P. J. and Hopkins, A. G. *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688–1914*, Harlow: Longman Group, 1993.

CANTWELL-SMITH, W. 'Amir Ali, Sayyid', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, vol. 1, pp. 442–443, 1953.

www.pathagar.com

CAREY, E. *Memoir of William Carey*, Boston: Gould, Kendall & Lincoln, 1836.

CASTLEDEN, R. *People Who Changed the World*, London: Time Warner Books, 2005.

CHAKRABORTY, A. A. *Bengali Muslim Literati and the Development of Muslim Community in Bengal*, Shimla: I. I. A. S, 2002.

CHAKRABORTY, G. R. 'Nawab Faizunnesa Choudhurani', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

CHAKRAVARTY, S. R. and Narain, V. (ed.). *Bangladesh: History and Culture* (2 vols.), New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1986.

CHAND, T. *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, Allahabad: The Indian Press, 1954.

CHATTERJI, S. K. *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language* (3 vols.), London: Allen & Unwin, 1970.

CHATTOPADHYAH, G. *Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle (1892–1947)*, New Delhi, 1984.

CHOUDHURY, A. A. *Aalapchari Ahmad Sharif*, Dhaka: Sucheepatra, 2007.

_____. *Muhammad Daad Ali*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1992.

_____. *Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin (1870–1937)*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1989.

CHOUDHURY, D. N. A. H. *Hazrat Shah Jalal: Dalil-o-Shakkha*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004.

CHOUDHURY, K. and HAQ, E. (ed.) *Abdul Karim Smarakgrantha*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1969.

CHOUDHURY, N. H. *Peasant Radicalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal: The Faraizi, Indigo and Pabna Movements*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2001.

CHOWDHRY, S. R. *al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf: An Examination of His Works and Personality*, New Delhi: Kutub Khana, 1979.

CHOWDHURY, M. A. M. *The Rise and Fall of Buddhism in South Asia: A Study in History*, Hayes: London Institute of South Asia, 2008.

CLARK, K. *Civilization: A Personal View*, London: Book Club Associates, 1972.

COLLINS, L. and LAPIERRE, D. *Freedom at Midnight: The Epic Drama of India's Struggle for Independence*, London: HarperCollins, 1997.

COOK, S. B. *Colonial Encounters in the Age of High Imperialism*, New York: HarperCollins, 1996.

COOPER, J. et al. (ed.). *Islam and Modernity*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1998.

CRAGG, K. *Counsels in Contemporary Islam*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965.

CRAWFORD, D. G. *A Brief History of the Hughli District*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1903.

DANI, A. H. *Bibliography of the Muslim Inscriptions of Bengal*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1957.

_____. (ed.) *Founding Fathers of Pakistan*, Islamabad: Ahmad Hasan Dani, 1981.

_____. *Muslim Architecture in Bengal*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961.

_____. 'Date of Bakhtiyar's raid on Nadiya', Calcutta: *Indian Historical Quarterly*, vol. XXX, no. 4, 1954.

_____. 'Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah Shahi-i-Bangalah', in *Sir Jadunath Sarkar Commemoration Volume*, Lahore: Punjab University, 1958.

DASGUPTA, J. N. *Bengal in the Sixteenth Century*, Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1914.

DASGUPTA, S. (ed.). *BBC Joripe Sera 20 Bangali*, Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 2007.

www.pathagar.com

DAWSON, R. (ed.). *The Legacy of China*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

DE BRUIJN, J. T. P. *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Poems*, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997.

DE, S. K. *History of Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century 1800–1825*, Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1919.

DELGODA, S. T. *History of India*, Gloucester: Windrush Press, 1997.

DEY, S. K. *Anuman-i-Wazin-i-Bangla* entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

DHALI, A. H. 'Humanist Movements in Bengal: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Trends' in *Bangladesh: Society, Religion and Politics*, edited by Rafiuddin Ahmed, Chittagong: South Asia Studies Group, 1985.

DUTT, R. C. *The Literature of Bengal*, London: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1895.

EATON, R. M. *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, New Delhi: OUP, 2000.

_____. *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*, Berkeley: UCP, 1993.

EHRLICH, E. *Nil Desperandum: A Dictionary of Latin Tags and Phrases*, London: Guild Publishing, 1987.

ENAYAT, H. *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2001.

ESPOSITO, J. L. (ed). *Islam in Asia: Religion, Politics & Society*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

_____. *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

_____. *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World*, 4 vols, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

FAIZUNNESA, N. *Nawab Faizunnesa's Rupjalal*, translated by Fayeza Hasanat, Leiden: E J Brill, 2009.

FAKHRY, M. *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.

_____. *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000

FARUQI, B. A. *The Mujjaddid's Conception of Tawhid*, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1979.

AL-FARUQI, I. R. *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, New York: Macmillan, 1986.

FINLEY, M. I. *The Use and Abuse of History*, London: Pimlico, 2000.

FIRISHTA, M. Q. *Tarikh-i Firishta*, translated as 'History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power in India' by John Briggs (4 vols.), Calcutta: Editions Indian, 1966.

FITZGERALD, E. *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, New York: Dover Publications, 1990.

FRAZER, J. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1993.

FRYE, R. N. *The Golden Age of Persia*, London: Phoenix Press, 2000.

GANDHI, R. *Understanding the Muslim Mind*, London: Penguin, 1987.

GARRETT, J. H. E. *Bengal District Gazetters Nadia*, Calcutta: BSBD, 1910.

GHADANFAR, M. A. *Great Women of Islam*, Riyadh: Darussalam, 2001.

AL-GHAZALI. *The Alchemy of Happiness*, translated by Claud Field, London: Octagon Press, 1983.

_____. *The Confessions of Al-Ghazzali*, translated by Claud Field, New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1992.

_____. *Ihya Uloom al-Din*, translated as 'The Revival of Religious Learning' by Fazlul Karim, 4 vols, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 2000.

www.pathagar.com

AL-GHAZALI, M. *The Socio-Political Thought of Shah Waliallah*, New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2004.

GIBB, H. A. R. and Kramers, J. H. (ed). *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, London: Luzac &Co., 1961.

_____. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2001.

GLASSE, C. *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, London: Stacey International, 1989.

GLUBB, J. B. *The Great Arab Conquests*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963.

GOFF, R. et al. (ed.) *The Twentieth Century: A Brief Global History*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998.

GOSWAMI, K. *Kazi Nazrul Islam: A Biography*, Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1996.

GUHA, B. 'Mir Mosharraf Hossain', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

GUPTA, P. L. 'The Date of Bakhtiyar Khilji's Occupation of Gauda', Rajshahi: *Journal of the Varendra Research Museum*, no. 4, 1975–1976.

HABIBULLAH, A. B. M. 'Dhakar Itihas', in *Abu Muhammad Habibullah Smarakgrantha*, edited by Salahuddin Ahmed et al., Dhaka: Bangladeshi Itihas Parishad, 1991.

_____. *Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*, Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1961.

HAFIZ, A. B. (ed.) *Nirbachita Nat-i-Rasul*, Dhaka: Preeti Prokation, 1996.

HAI, M. A. and Ahsan, S. A. *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta: Adhunik Yug*, Dhaka: Ahmed Publishing House, 2008.

HAIDAR, A. R. M. A. *Shikha Bistar-o-Sanskare Furfurar Pir Abu Bakr Siddiqi*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004.

HAIG, W. *Comparative Tables of Islamic and Christian Dates*, New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1981.

HAMID, A. *Muslim Separatism in India: A Brief Survey 1858–1947*, Lahore: Oxford University Press, 1967.

HAMIDULLAH, M. *The First Written Constitution in the World*, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1981.

_____. *The Emergence of Islam*, New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1995.

HAQ, E. (ed.) *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif, his Writings and Related Documents*, Dacca: Samundra Prakashan, 1968.

HAQ, M. E. *A History of Sufism in Bengal*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1975.

_____. (ed.) *Abdul Karim Sahitya-Vishard Commemoration Volume*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1972.

_____. (ed.) *Muhammad Shahidullah Felicitation Volume*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1966.

_____. *Muslim Bengali Literature*, Karachi: Pakistan Publications, 1957.

HAQ, M. U. *Banglar Pir-Awliyagan*, Feni: Hamidiyya Library, 1969.

HAQUE, A. *Muslim Heroes of the World*, London: Ta Ha Publishers, 1990.

HAQUE, E. *Islamic Art Heritage of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Bangladesh National Museum, 1983.

HAQUE, K. S. 'Sheikh Abdur Rahim', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

HAROON, S. 'Reform and Orthodox Practice in Early Nineteenth-Century Muslim North India: Sayyid Ahmad Shaheed Reconsidered', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 21, part 2, 2011.

www.pathagar.com

HASAN, M. *History of Islam* (2 vols.), Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd, 1992.

HASAN, M. S. *Begum Rokeya: Samay-o-Sahitya*, Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 1982.

HASAN, S. M. *Dhaka: The City of Mosques*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2002.

_____. *Khan Jahan: Patron Saint of the Sundarbans*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004.

_____. *Mosque Architecture of Pre-Mughal Bengal*, Dacca: The Academy for Pakistan Affairs, 1971.

_____. *Muslim Monuments of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2003.

AL-HASSANI, S. T. S (ed.) *1001 Inventions: Muslim Heritage in Our World*, Manchester: FSTC, 2006.

HATTSTEIN, M. and Delius, P (ed.). *Islam: Art and Architecture*, Konigswinter: Konemann, 2004.

HAYKAL, M. H. *The Life of Muhammad*, translated by I. R. al-Faruqi, Indiana: The North American Islamic Trust, 1976.

AL-HILAL, B. *Ibrahim Khan (1894–1978)*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1988.

HILAL, N. *Munshi Meherullah: Jiban-o-Karma*, Dhaka: Adhunik Prakashani, 2000.

_____. (ed.) *Munshi Meherullah Rachanabali* (vol. 1), Dhaka: Shoorud Prakashani, 1999.

HITTI, P. K. *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

HODGSON, M. G. S. *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (3 vols.), Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974.

HOLT, P. M. et al. (ed.). *The Cambridge History of Islam* (4 vols.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

HOQUE, M. I. *Bengal Towards the Close of Aurangzib's Reign (1690–1707)*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1994.

HOSSAIN, R. S. 'Bengal Muslims on the Way to Decline', in *Rokeya Rachanabali*, translated by Md. Mahmudul Hasan. Source: www.newsfrombangladesh.com, 2011.

HOSSAIN, S. 'Review of Samaj-o-Jiban', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, vol. 53, no.1, 2008.

HOSSAIN, S, et al., *Jender Biswakosh* (vol. 2), Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 2006.

HOURANI, G. *Arab Sea-faring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, Beirut: Khayats, 1963.

D'HUBERT, T. 'Alaol's Poetry as a Source for Arakanese History' paper delivered at Arakan History Conference, Bangkok, Thailand, 2005.

HUJWIRI, A. I. U. J. *Kashf al-Mahjub*, translated by Reynold A. Nicholson, Karachi: Darul Isha'at, 1990.

HUNTER, W. W. *The Indian Mussalmans*, Calcutta: The Comrade Publishers, 1945.

HUQUE, M. A. *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1917.

HUSAIN, S. S. (ed.) *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts in Munshi Abdul Karim's Collection*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1960.

_____. *Civilization and Society*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought, 2002.

HUSAIN, S.S and ASHRAF, S.A. *Crisis in Muslim Education*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979.

www.pathagar.com

HUSAYN, M. M. *Musharraf Rachana-Shambar* (5 vols.), edited by Qazi Abdul Mannan, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1976–1985.

HUSAYN, S. *Politics and Society in Bengal 1921–1936*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1991.

IBN BATTUTAH, *Travels of Ibn Battutah, AD 1325–1352* (5 vols.), London: Hakluyt Society: Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1956.

IBN ISHAQ, M. *Sirat Rasul Allah*, translated as 'The Life of Muhammad' by A. Guillaume, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1990.

IBN KHALDUN. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, translated by F. Rosenthal, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967.

IBN TAYMIYYAH. *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawab al-Sahih*, edited and translated by T. F. Michel, New York: Caravan Books, 1984.

IBRAHIM, D. *The Islamization of Central Asia*, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1993.

IKRAM, S. M. 'An Unnoticed Account of Shaikh Jalal of Sylhet', *Journal of Asiatic Society of Pakistan* (vol. 2), 1957, pp. 63–8.

_____. *History of Muslim Civilization in India and Pakistan: A Political and Cultural History*, Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1993.

_____. *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*, Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1997.

IMAMUDDIN, S. M. *Arabic Writing and Arab Libraries*, London: TaHa Publishers, 1983.

IQBAL, A. *Culture of Islam*, Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1974.

_____. *Life and Work of Muhammad Jalal-ud-Din Rumi*, New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1999.

IQBAL, M. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1982.

ISHAQ, M. *India's Contribution to the Study of Hadith Literature*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1955 (reprinted 1995).

ISHAQ, A. F. M. *Shah Sufi Abu Bakr Siddiqi*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1980.

ISLAM, A. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas Prasanga*, Dhaka: Ideal Library, 1971.

_____. *Muzammil Haq*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993.

ISLAM, M. 'Bakhtiyar Khalji' in *Jalali Kabutar* (an anthology of poems), Dhaka, 1978.

_____. 'Hazrat Khan Jahan', in *Jalali Kabutar* (an anthology of poems), Dhaka, 1978.

_____. *Kabi Hayat Mahmud*, Dhaka: Agami Prakashani, 2000.

ISLAM, M. N. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press 1901–1930*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2003.

_____. *Muslim Bangla Sahitya*, Dacca: Pakistan Book Corporation, 1969.

ISLAM, M. S. *Mohiyoshi Rokeya: Jiban-o-Sahitya*, Dhaka: A. R. Prakashan, 2004.

ISLAM, S. *Hazrat Shah Jalaler Jibani*, Dhaka: Isamoti, 2005.

_____. *History of Bangladesh* (3 vols.), Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1992.

_____. (ed.) 'Sir Abdur Rahim', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

ISMAIL, Q. *Chach Nama: An Ancient History of Sind*, Barachi: Commissioner's Press, 1900.

www.pathagar.com

JACK, J. C. *Bengal District Gazetteers Bakarganj*, Calcutta: BSBD, 1918.

JAIN, N. K. (ed.) *Muslims in India: A Biographical Dictionary*, New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1979.

JALBANI, G. N. *Teachings of Shah Waliyullah of Delhi*, New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 1998.

JEHANGIR, M. *Muhammad Akram Khan, 1868–1968*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1987.

JOFFE, L. *Ahmad Hasan Dani*, Obituary published in *The Guardian*. Source: www.guardian.co.uk, accessed on 7 June, 2010.

JONES, L. (ed.). *Encyclopaedia of Religion* (14 vols.), New York: Thomson Gale, 2005.

JONES, M. E. M. *Warren Hastings in Bengal 1772–1774*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918.

AL-KAFI, M. A. *Ahl-i-Hadith Parichiti*, Dhaka: Jami'yyat Ahl-i-Hadith, 1964 (reprinted 1992).

KAIRANAWI, R. *Izhar al-Haq* (4 vols.), London: Ta Ha Publishers, 1990.

KAMALI, M. H. *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1991.

KANDA, K. C. *Masterpieces of Urdu Ghazals*, New Delhi: Sterling Publisher, 1994.

KANTI, S. *Anjuman-i-Ulamaye Bangla-o-Muslim Samaj*, Calcutta: Mallick Brothers, 1992.

KARIM, A. 'Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

_____. *Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad: Jiban-o-Karma*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994.

_____. *Bangla Sahitye Muslim Kabi-o-Sahityik*, Dhaka: Nawruz Kitabistan, 1969.

_____. 'Bangladesh During the Muslim Rule' in *Islam in Bangladesh Through the Ages*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1995, pp. 33–79.

_____. *Banglar Itihas (Mughal Amal)*, Dhaka: Jatiya Grantha Prakashan, reprinted 2005.

_____. *Banglar Itihas (Sultani Amal)*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1977.

_____. *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1992.

_____. *Dacca: The Mughal Capital*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1964.

_____. *Futuhat-i-Firuzshah*, translated by Abdul Karim, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1989.

_____. *Mudyeyuger Sheresta Bangali Kabi Alaol*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2005.

_____. *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1963.

_____. 'Nawab Abdul Latif and Modern Education of the Muslims of Bengal' *Islamic Studies*, vol. 9, issue 4, 1970.

_____. *Samaj-o-Jiban* an Autobiography of Abdul Karim (2 vols.), Dhaka: Jatiya Sahitya Prakash, 2008.

_____. 'Shah Jalal', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

_____. *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (down to AD 1538)*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1959.

KARIM, M. A. *Islam's Contribution to Science and Civilisation, Foreword by Rabindranath Tagore*, New Delhi: Goodword, 2001.

KARIM, M. F. *Al-Hadis: Translation and Commentary of Mishkat ul-Masabih* (4 vols.), Lahore: The Book House, no date.

KAWSER, F. *Kaikabad: Kabi-o-Kabita*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1998.

www.pathagar.com

KAYKOBAD, K. Q. *Kaikobad Racanabali* (4 vols.), edited by Abdul Mannan Syed, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994–7.

KEIR, A. *Thoughts on the Affairs of Bengal*, London: unknown publisher, 1772.

KENNEDY, H. *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 1986.

_____. *The Courts of the Caliphs: The Rise and Fall of Islam's Greatest Dynasty*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004.

KHALEQUE, M. A. 'Nawab Abdool Luteef', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

KHAN, A. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Islamic Centre, 2007.

KHAN, A. H. *Bangladesher Muslim Oitijhya*, Dhaka: Sahityabikash, 2010.

KHAN, B. R. *Politics in Bengal (1927–1936)*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1987.

KHAN, D. U. B. *Layla Majnun*, edited by Ahmad Sharif, Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, reprinted 2002.

KHAN, F. et al. *Abdul Karim Sahityavisharadke Nibedita Prabandha Sangkalana*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994.

KHAN, I. *Batayan*, Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1967.

_____. *Muslim Sampaditaya-o-Prokashitya Bangla Sahitaya*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2005.

KHAN, M. A. *British Bharatiya Nathite Titumir-o-Tar Anusarigan*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1999.

_____. 'Comprehensive CV of Muin-ud-Din Ahmad Khan', personal correspondence, author's collection, 2010.

_____. *Faraizi Andalaner Itihas*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2007.

_____. *History of the Fara'idi Movement*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1984.

_____. 'Impact of Islam on Religio-Social Life of the People of Bangladesh' in *Islam in Bangladesh Through Ages*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1995, pp. 115–139.

_____. *Islamic Revivalism of the 18th, 19th & 20th Centuries CE Significant Phases of Muwahhidun (miscalled) Wahhabi Movement in Arabia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Afghan Borders*, Chittagong, 2009 (collection of research articles, author's private collection).

_____. 'Muslim Renaissance in Bangladesh' in *Islam in Bangladesh through the Ages*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1995, pp. 167–203.

_____. *Muslim Struggle for Freedom in Bengal (From Plassey to Pakistan, AD 1757–1947)*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1982.

_____. *Rashta Darshaner Shatray Muslim Abadan*, Chittagong: N. A. Khan, 1977.

_____. *Religious Reform Movements of the Muslims* in *History of Bangladesh 1704–1971: Social and Cultural History* (vol. 3), edited by Sirajul Islam, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1992.

_____. 'Pan-Islamic and Khilafat Movements' in *Islam in Bangladesh through the Ages*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1995, pp. 204-216.

_____. *Social History of the Muslims of Bangladesh under the British Rule*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1992.

_____. *The Great Revolt of 1857 in India and the Muslims of Bengal*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1983

_____. *Titu Mir and His Followers in British Indian Records, 1830–1833 AD*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1980.

www.pathagar.com

KHAN, M. H. *Pabitra Qur'an Pracharer Itihas-o-Banganubader Shatabarsha*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1997.

KHAN, M. M. *The Muslim 100: The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of the Most Influential Muslims in History*, Leicester: Kube Publishing, 2008.

_____. 'The Pioneers of Islam in Bengal: Early Muslim Preachers and Their Contributions', published in *Nazimuddin Ahmed Commemoration Volume*, Dhaka: Islamic Arts Organisation, 2011.

KHAN, M. M. A. *Muslim Banglar Samajik Itihas*, Dhaka: Azad Office, 1965.

_____. *Mustafa Charit*, Dhaka: Kakali Prakashani, 2005.

KHAN, M. R. *Pakistan Andalan-o-Muslim Sahitya*, Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1968.

KHAN, S. et al. (eds.) *Muhammad Shahidullah Smarakgrantha*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985.

KHAN, S. A. *Essays on the Life of Muhammad*, Lahore: Premier Book House, 1968.

_____. *Review of Hunter's Indian Musalmans*, Lahore: Premier Book Hosue, 1968.

KHANDHLAWI, M. Y. *Hayat al-Sahabah* (3 vols.), New Delhi: Idarat Isha'at-i-Diniyat, 1989.

KHATUN, M. 'Nawab Abdul Latif and the Planters-Ryots Conflict in Bengal', in *Journal of Pakistan Historical Society*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2006, pp. 61–72.

KHATUN, S. 'Adunik Shikha-o-Unish Shataker Banglar Nari Samaj', in *Muhammad Enamul Haq Samarakgrantha* edited by M.Moniruzzaman, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1985.

KIERNAN, V. G. *Poems from Iqbal*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

KISMATI, Z. A. *Bangladesher Katipay Alim-o-Pir Mashaikh*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2005.

KOZLOWSKI, G. C. *Muslim Endowments and Society in British India*, Cambridge: CUP, 1985.

LADY DUFFERIN. *Our Viceregal Life in India*, London: John Murray, 1889.

LANE-POOLE, S. *Medieval India from Contemporary Sources*, Bombay: J & K Cooper, 1914.

LATIF, N. A. *A Short Account of My Public Life*, Calcutta: Newman, Dalhousie Square, 1885.

LATIF, S. A. *The Muslim Mystic Movement in Bengal 1301–1550*, Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi & Co, 1993.

LATIF, S. M. A. *Gadya Shilpi Mir Musharraf Husayn*, Dhaka: Chaynika, 2003.

LAW, N. *Promotion of Learning in India by Early European Settlers*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1915.

_____. *Promotion of Learning in India during Muhammadan Rule*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1916.

LEONARD, A. G. *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement 1876–1940*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.

LETHBRIDGE, R. *The Golden Book of India*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1893.

LINGS, M. *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1987.

_____. *What is Sufism?* London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1981.

MADELUNG, W. *The Sucession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

MAHDI, M. *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1957.

MAHMOOD, S. *A History of English Education in*

www.pathagar.com

India 1781–1893, Aligarh: MAO College, 1895.

MAHMUD, A. (ed.). *Banglar Jibanta Itihas Sher-i-Bangla*, Dhaka: Asia Publication, 2010.

MAJUMDAR, R. C. (ed.) 'Bengali Prose Writing before 1800', in *Muhammad Shahidullah Felicitation Volume*, edited by Muhammad Enamul Haq, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1966.

_____. *The History of Bengal* (vol. 1), Dacca: Dacca University, 1963.

MAJUMDAR, R. C. et al., *An Advanced History of India* (vol. 1), Lahore: Aziz Publishers, 1980.

MAKDISI, G. *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West: With Special Reference to Scholasticism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990.

MALLICK, A. R. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal*, Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1977.

MANIK, N. I. *Mohakabi Alaol*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004.

MANNAN, M. A. *Amader Jatiswattar Bikashdhara*, Dhaka: Kamiyab Prakashan, 2006.

_____. *Bangobanga Theke Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Kathamela Prakashan, 2007.

MANNAN, M. S. *Muslim Political Parties in Bengal (1936–1947)*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangaldesh, 1987.

MANNAN, Q. A. 'Kaikobad Rachita Jatiya Akkana Kabha' in *Bangla Sahityer Pancharatna*, edited by Ruhul Amin Babul, Dhaka: Dashdik, 2006.

_____. 'Mir Musharraf Husayn: Tar Kal-o-Shilpashayli' in *Adunik Bangla Sahitya Prativa: Swatantra Bichar*, edited by Wakil Ahmed, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1987.

_____. 'Mir Musharraf Husayner Partham Upanyas Ratnavati' in *Bangla Sahityer Pancharatna* edited by Ruhul Amin Babul, Dhaka: Dashdik, 2006.

_____. 'The Tradition of Literary Languages in Indo-Pak Sub-continent', in *Muhammad Shahidullah Felicitation Volume*, edited by M. E. Haq, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1966.

MARTIN, R. C. (ed.). *Encyclopaedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (2 vols.), New York: Thomson Gale, 2004.

MARTIN, R. C. and Woodward, M. R. *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997.

AL-MAS'UDI, *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawahir*, translated as 'The Meadows of Gold' by P. Lunde & C. Stone, London: Keegan Paul International, 1989.

AL-MATURIDI, A. M. *Ta'wilat Ahl al-Sunnah* (10 vols.), Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2005.

MAWDUDI, S. A. A. *Jajdid-o-Ihya-i-Din*, translated as 'A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam', Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1986.

MAZRUI, A. A. *Cultural Forces in World Politics*, London: James Currey, 1990.

MEERZA, D. H. A. *Essays on Mohammadan Social Reform*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1889.

Memoirs of the Revolution in Bengal AD 1757, unknown author, London: A. Millar, no date.

METCALF, B. D. *Islamic Revival in British India*, Delhi: OUP, 2004.

MIRZA, M. R. et al. (ed), *Muslim Contribution to Science*, Lahore: Kazi Publications, 1986.

MOAZZAM, A. *Jamal al-Din al-Afghani: A Muslim Intellectual*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1984.

www.pathagar.com

MOHSIN, K. M. 'Muslim Rationalist Thought in Nineteenth Century Bengal' in *Bangladesh: Society, Religion and Politics* edited by R. Ahmed, Chittagong: South Asia Studies Group, 1985.

_____. 'Muhammad Abdur Rahim', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

MUHAMMAD, K. D. *Bangla Sahityer Itihas* (4 vols.), Dhaka: Student Ways, 1968.

MU'INUDDIN, G. (ed.) *Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah Smarakgrantha*, Dhaka: Ahsania Mission, 2002.

AL-MUJAHID, S. *Allama Iqbal*, London: UK Islamic Mission, 1986.

MUKHOPADHAY, S.K. *Muzammil Haq*, Dhaka: Abdul Haq, 1970.

MURSHID, G. *Rashsundari Theke Rokeya: Nari Pargathir Eksha Boshar*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993.

Mutiny of the Bengal Army: An Historical Narrative, unknown author, London: Bosworth & Harrison, 1857.

MUZAFFAR, A. *The Language of Political Islam: India 1200–1800*, London: C. Hurst & Co, 2004.

NADVI, A. S. S. *Ard ul-Qur'an (A Geographical History of the Qur'an)* translated by S. M. Nadvi, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1974.

_____. *Hazrat Aisha Siddiqa: Her Life and Works*, Kuwait: Islamic Book Publishers, 1986.

_____. *Heroic Deeds of Muslim Women*, New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1985.

_____. *The Arab Navigation*, New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2006.

NADWI, A. H. A. *Islam and the Earliest Muslims: Two Conflicting Portraits*, Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research & Publications, 1985.

_____. *Saviours of Islamic Spirit* (4 vols.), Karachi: Darul Isha'at, 1994.

_____. *The Glory of Iqbal*, Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1979.

NASR, S. H. (ed.). *Three Muslim Sages*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964.

_____. *Science and Civilization in Islam*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1987.

_____. *Islamic Spirituality* (2 vols.), London: SCM Press, 1989.

NASSAKH, A. G. *Khudnawisht Sawanih Hayat-i-Nassakh (The Autobiography of Abdul Ghafur Nassakh)*, edited by Abdus Subhan, Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1986.

NEWMAN, A. *Safavid Iran*, London: I. B.Tauris, 2005.

NICHOLSON, R. A. *The Mystics of Islam*, London: Arkana, 1989.

NIZAMI, K. A. *On History and Historians of Medieval India*, New Delhi: M.M. Publishers, 1983.

_____. 'Some Aspects of Khanqah Life in Medieval India', *Studia Islamica*, No. 8, 1957.

_____. *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the 13th Century AD*, Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delhi, 1974.

PATWARI, M. 'Professor Abdul Karim's Thoughts on History', in *Abdul Karim Commemoration Volume*, Dhaka: Adorn Publication, 2008.

PICKTHALL, M. M. *The Cultural Side of Islam*, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1979.

QAYYUM, M. A. 'Samakalin Samaluchakayer Drishtithe Mir Musharraf Husayn' in *Bangla Sahityer Pancharatna* edited by R. A. Babul, Dhaka: Dashdik, 2006.

QUADIR, A. (ed.) *Rokeya Rachanabali*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, reprinted 1984.

QUADIR, I. F. 'Nawab Khawaja Salimullah:

www.pathagar.com

Architect of the Muslim League', www.nawabbari.com, accessed 6 April 2009.

_____. 'Nawab Salimullah and the Partition of Bengal', www.nawabbari.com, accessed 6 April 2009.

QURESHI, I. H. *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*, Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1958.

QURESHI, S. A. *Letters of the Holy Prophet*, New Delhi: Noor Publishing House, 1986.

RAB, A. S. M. A. A. K. *Fazlul Haq (Life and Achievements)*, Lahore: Ferozsons, no date.

RAHIM, A. *Principles of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, Madras: S P C Press, 1911.

RAHIM, M. A. *Banglar Musalmander Itihas (1757–1947)*, Dhaka: Ahmed Publishing House, 2009.

_____. *History of Afghans in India, AD 1545–1631*, Karachi: Pakistan Publishing House, 1961.

_____. *Nawab Abdul Latif and Education of Muslims of Bengal*, Dacca: Mrs Farida Hossain, 1969.

_____. *Social and Cultural History of Bengal* (2 vols.), Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1963–7.

_____. *The History of the University of Dacca*, Dacca: University of Dacca, 1981.

_____. *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal AD 1757–1947*, Dacca: The University of Dacca, 1978.

_____. 'The Saints in Bengal: Shaikh Jalal al-Din Tabrizi and Shah Jalal', *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, vol. 8, 1960, pp. 206–26.

RAHIM, M. A. et al., 'The Advent of Islam in Bangladesh' in *Islam in Bangladesh through the Ages*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1995, pp. 1–32.

RAHMAN, F. *Revival and Reform in Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld Publishers, 2000

RAHMAN, F. *Sylheter Ekshata Ekjon*, Sylhet: F. K. Khan, 1994.

RAHMAN, M. *From Consultation to Confrontation: A Study of the Muslim League in British Indian Politics (1906–1912)*, London: Luzac, 1971.

RAHMAN, M. and RAHMAN, G. *Geography of the Muslim World*, Chicago: Iqra, 1997.

RAHNEMA, A. et al. *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, London: Zed Books, 2005.

RAHMAN, M. M. *Bangla Bhashay Qur'an Charcha*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1986.

_____. *Mussalmander Sahitya Sadhana*, Dhaka: Bud Publications, 2010.

_____. *Bangla Bhasay Qur'an Charchar Patabhumi*, Kolkata: Shah Amanullah, 2011.

_____. *Tafsir ibn Kathir* (Bengali translation), 10 vols, Dhaka: Tafsir Publishing Committee, 2001.

RAHMAN, M. S. 'Wazed Ali Khan Panni', entry in *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003.

RAHMAN, S. *Kabi Daad Alier Jiban-o-Kabya*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985.

RAHMAN, S. H. *Karmobir Munshi Meherullah*, Dhaka: Shurid Prakashoni, 2010.

RAO, C. H. *The Indian Biographical Dictionary*, Madras: Pillar and Co., 1915.

RASHID, H. *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906–1947*, Dhaka: UPL, 2003.

RASHID, M. H. *Dialogue on Islam: Syed Rashid Ahmed Jaunpuri on the Form and Spirit of Islam*, Dhaka: Lamisa Books, 1999.

RASOOL, M. G. 'The Advent of Islam in Bengal: Its Socio-Cultural Impact', in *Society and*

www.pathagar.com

Culture in Islam, edited by M. I. Hoque, Chittagong: University of Chittagong, 1986.

_____. *Chishti-Nizami Sufi Order of Bengal (Till Mid-15th Century) and its Socio-Religious Contribution*, Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1990.

RAUF, M. A. *Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin: Shamakalin Prekhapote Islam Prachare Tar Abandan*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2005.

ROBINSON, F (ed.). *Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

ROSENTHAL, F. *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1975.

ROY, A. *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, Dhaka: Academic Publishers, 1983.

RUMI, J. *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi* (3 vols.), translated by R. A. Nicholson, Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1989.

SACHSE, F. A. *Bengal District Gazetters Mymensingh*, Calcutta: BSBD, 1917.

SA'DI, M. *The Bustan of Sa'di*, translated by A. H. Edwards, New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2000.

SAHITYAVISHARD, A. K. *Arakan Rajsabhay Bangla Sahitya*, Calcutta: Guru Dash Chattopadhyah & Sons, 1935.

_____. *Puthi Parichiti*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1960.

_____. *Islamabad*, Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1964.

SAID, E. W. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London: Penguin, 1995.

SAKLAYEN, G. *Muzammil Haq-o-Firdawsi Charita*, Dhaka: Nawrug Kitabistan, 1968.

_____. *Bangladesher Sufi Sadhak*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1982.

SALAM, M. A. *Mawlana Ruhul Amin: Jiban-o-Karma*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2005.

SALIK, S. A. *The Saint of Jilan*, New Delhi: Kutub Khana Ishayatul Islam, 1978.

SALIK, S. J (ed.) *Muslim Modernism in Bengal: Selected Writings of Delawarr Hosaen Ahamed Meerza (1840–1913)*, vol. 1, Dhaka: Centre for Social Studies, 1980.

SALIM, G. H. *Riyazu-s-Salatin: A History of Bengal*, translated by Abdus Salam, New Delhi: Idarah-i- Adabiyat-i Delli, 1903, reprinted 1975.

SAMADDAR, R. 'Leaders and Legacies: Maulana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi and Mawlana Akram Khan', in *Essays in Memory of Momtazur Rahman Tarafdar*, edited by P. Hasan et al., Dhaka: Dhaka University, 1999.

SARKAR, J. *Economics of British India*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1917.

_____. *India of Aurangzib Compared with the India of Akbar*, Sanyal & Co Printers, 1901.

_____. (ed.) *The History of Bengal: The Muslim Period*, vol. 2, Dacca: University of Dacca, 1948.

SARKAR, J. N. *Islam in Bengal*, Calcutta: Ratna Prakashani, 1972.

SAVASTAVA, A. L. *The Sultanate of Delhi (711–1526)*, Agra: S. L. Agarwala & Co., 1950.

SCHACHT, J. and BOSWORTH, C. E (eds.) *The Legacy of Islam*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.

SEN, D. C. *Bengali Prose Style, 1800–1857*, Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1921.

_____. *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1911.

_____. *The Folk Literature of Bengal*, Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1920.

www.pathagar.com

SEN, S. *Muslim Politics in Bengal (1937–1947)*, New Delhi: Impex India, 1976.

_____. *Islami Bangla Sahitya*, Calcutta: Ananda, 1994.

SEN, S. P. (ed.) *National Biography of India*, Calcutta, 1972.

SHAH, I. *Thinkers of the East*, London: Penguin, 1974.

SHAHABUDDIN, M. *Sahitya Sadhanay Koekjon Muslim Prativa*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004.

SHAHIDULLAH, M. 'Traditional Culture in East Pakistan: Introduction', in *Shahidullah Smarakgrantha* edited by S. Khan et al., Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985.

_____. *Bangla Bhashar Itibritta*, Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 2006.

_____. *Bangla Sahityar Katha*, vol. 2: Middle Ages, Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 2007.

SHAMSUZZAMAN, A. F. et al., *Who's Who in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Tribhuj Prakshani, 1992.

SHAMSUZZAMAN, M. (ed.) *Munshi Meherullah Samarak Sankalan*, Dhaka: Munshi Meheruddin Foundation, 2009.

SHARFUDDIN, S. *Bangladeshe Sufiprabhab-o-Islam Prachar*, Dhaka: Barnayan, 2006.

SHARIF, A. *Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2002.

_____. *Bangali-o-Bangla Sahitya* (2 vols.), Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1983.

_____. *Banglar Manisha*, Dhaka: Annana, 2005.

_____. *Banglar Sufi Sahitya*, Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1969.

_____. *Mudyeyuger Bangla Sahitya*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985.

_____. *Syed Sultan: Tar Granthabali-o-Tar Yug*, Dhaka: Agamee Prakashani, 2006.

_____. 'Upekkhit Itihas: Bagerhater Khan-i-Jahan-o-Kichhu Tattbhakatha', in *Essays in Memory of Momtazur Rahman Tarafdar*, Dhaka: University of Dhaka, 1999.

SHARIF, M. M (ed.). *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (2 vols.), Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2001.

SHEIKH, T. H. (ed.) *Bangla Bhashay Musalmander Abadan*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2003.

SHEIKH, A. I. 'Madyayuge Bangla Sahityer Muslim Mahila Kabi Rahimunnesa' in *Bangla Bhashay Musalmander Abadan* edited by S. T. Hossain, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2003.

SHERIF, M. A. *Searching for Solace: A Biography of Abdullah Yusuf Ali*, Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 1994.

SHUSHUD, H. *Masters of Wisdom of Central Asia*, Moorcote: Coombe Springs Press, 1983.

SIDDIQI, A. G. *Shahid Titu Mir*, Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1962

SIDDIQI, M. *The Qur'anic Concept of History*, Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1984.

SIDDIQI, M. I. *Asharah Mubashsharah*, New Delhi: Idara Isha'at-i-Diniyat, 1990.

SIDDIQ, M. Y. *Historical and Cultural Aspects of the Islamic Inscriptions of Bengal: A Reflective Study of Some New Epigraphic Discoveries*, Dhaka: ICSBA, 2009.

_____. 'The Diffusion of Islam in Bengal and the Articulation of a New Order', *JRSP*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2008.

SIDDIQI, M. Z. *Hadith Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1993.

SIDDIQUI, I. H. *Islam and Muslims in South Asia: Historical Perspective*, Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1997.

www.pathagar.com

SIRAJ, M. D. *Tabakat-i-Nasiri* (2 vols.), translated by Major Raverty, Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, reprinted 1995.

_____. *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, edited by W. Nassu Lees, Calcutta: College Press, 1864.

SIVANATHSATRI, P. *Ramtanu Lahiri: Brahman and Reformer, A History of the Renaissance in Bengal*, London: S. Sonnenschein & Co., 1907.

SMITH, J. Z. *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion*, London: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.

SMITH, M. *Rabia the Mystic and Her Fellow Saints in Islam*, Cambridge: Press Syndicate, 1984.

STIERLIN, H. *Islamic Art and Architecture: From Isfahan to Taj Mahal*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2002.

SUBHAN, A. 'Banglar Pashe Farsi-o-Urdu', *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 13 March 1994, Calcutta.

_____. 'Bharatbasher Musalmander Partham Shanga: Kolkater Anjuman-i-Islami', unpublished essay, author's collection, 2009.

_____. 'Father of Muslim Modernism', *The Statesman*, 30 March 1998, Calcutta.

_____. 'Ode to a Poet', *The Sunday Statesman*, 4 January 1998, Calcutta.

SUFEE, M. H. *Taslimuddin Ahmad*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993.

SUFI, G. M. D. *Al-Minhaj being the Evolution of Curriculum in the Muslim Educational Institutions of India*, Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1941.

SUHRAWARDI, U. *Dastan-i-Ibratbar* (Suhrawardi's Persian autobiography appended to his biography by M. Abdullah), Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1984.

SULTAN, S. *Nabi Bangsha* (2 vols.), edited by Ahmad Sharif, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1978.

SUVOROVA, A. *Muslim Saints of South Asia: The Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries*, London: Routledge, 2004.

SYED, A. M. *Bangla Sahitye Musalman*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2005.

AL-TABARI, *Tarikh al-Rusul wal Muluk* translated as *The History of al-Tabari* (38 vols.), edited by Y. Yarshater, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985–2000.

TAGORE, S. *Raja Rammohan Roy*, Calcutta: Sahitya Academy, 1966.

TAIFOOR, S. M. *Glimpses of Old Dhaka: A Short Historical Narration of East Bengal and Assam with Special Treatment of Dhaka*, Dhaka: Lulu Bilquis Banu & Others, 1985.

TALIB, A. M. *Bangladeshey Islam*, Dhaka: Adhunik Prakashani, 1980.

TALIB, M. A. *Munshi Meherullah: Deshkal Samaj*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1983.

TARAFDAR, M. R. *Husain Shahi Bengal, 1494–1538 AD: A Socio-Political Study*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1965.

TRIMINGHAM, S. *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

TROLL, C. W. *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1978.

TULL-WALSH, J. H. *A History of Murshidabad with Biographies of Some of its Noted Families*, London: Jarrold & Sons, 1902.

WADUD, M. A. *Bangla Bhashay Qur'an Charcha: Utpatti-o-Kramabikas*, Dhaka: Al-Qur'an International Research Academy, 2004.

AL-WAHHAB, M. I. A. *Kitab al-Tawhid*, Kuwait: IIFSO, 1979.

WAIZ, R. 'Women Emanicipation in Bengal' in *Nazimuddin Ahmed Commemoration Volume*,

www.pathagar.com

Dhaka: Islamic Arts Organisation Bangladesh, 2011.

WALIULLAH, S. *Hujjat Allah al-Balighah*, Dhaka: Rashid Book House, 1992.

_____. *Sufism and the Islamic Tradition*, translated by G. N. Jalbani, London: Octagon Press, 1980.

WARREN, J. *History and the Historians*, Oxon: Bookpoint Ltd, 2004.

WATT, W. M. *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998.

WILLIAMS, R. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, London: Fontana Press, 1988.

Yunus, M and JOLIS, A. *Banker to the Poor*, London: Aurum Press, 1999.

YUSOFJEE, N. A. K. *Bangiya Musalman*, edited by G. Saklayen, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1985.

ZAIDI, A. M. *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India*, vols 1–4, New Delhi: Indian Institute of Applied Political Research, 1975–1978.

ZAMAN, L. *Rokeya Sakhawat Husayn*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1987.

_____. *The Mussalman Patrikai Rokeya Prashanga*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994.

ZAMIRUDDIN, M. S. *Amar Jibani-o-Islam Grahan Brittanta*, Rajshahi: Notun Shagskaran, 1967.

ZAYDAN, J. *History of Islamic Civilization*, New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994.

_____. *Ta'rikh al-Tamaddun al-Islami*, Cairo, 1902.

www.pathagar.com

INDEX

(Page ranges may include passing references. The main 42 personalities and their dedicated entries are shown in bold.)

24 Parganas 89, 91, 97, 194, 282

A
A.K. Fazlul Haq 216, 242, 255, 259, 285, 313–15, 322, 324, 339, 342, 353
A.K.M Yaqub Ali 6, 10
A.M. Zaidi 2
Abbasids 5, 13, 61, 141, 180, 187, 218, 224, 256, 361
Abdul Awwal Jaunpuri 101, **264–72**, 335, 378
Abdul Ghafur Nassakh **126–32**, 151, 248, 371–2
Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad 39, 43, 46, **290–9**, 380
Abdur Ra'uf Wahid **118–25**, 371
Abu Tawwamah 21–2
Abul Kalam Azad 243, 255, 284–5, 313
Afghanistan 5, 14, 17, 54, 208, 278

www.pathagar.com

Agra 136, 233
Ahl-i-Hadith 95, 167, 265, 282, 287–8
Ahmad Hasan Dani 8–9, 318
Ahmad Sharif 43, 291, 296
Ahsan Manzil Complex 107–8, 309–10, 317; Museum 160
Ala al-Haq 21–2
Ali Mardan Khalji 17, 19, 362
Ali Mech 18
Aligarh 81, 99–100, 110, 115, 136–7, 183, 188, 202, 244, 252, 255, 277, 313, 331
All-India Muhammadan Educational Conference 240, 242, 313
All-India Muslim League 7, 157, 250–1, 259, 276–7, 284, 313–4, 318, 324, 332, 363
Al-Mahmud 19
Altaf Husayn Hali 124, 129, 240, 244, 313
Anisuzzaman 205
Anjuman-i-Islami 122–4, 325
Arabia 4–5, 17, 22, 33, 38, 68, 81, 83–4, 90, 99, 127, 145, 175, 187, 195, 203, 208, 341, 360; Arab World 180
Arabic 6, 8–9, 42, 46, 54, 58, 126, 136–7, 149, 261, 270, 276, 290–2, 323, 330, 334, 343, 347, and *passim*
Arabs 3–4, 13, 31, 148–9, 264, 278, 340, 358, 361
Arakan, Kingdom of, 47–51, 291, 296
Ashiq-i-Rasul (book) 205
Asiatic Society of Bangladesh 11
Assam 6–7, 18–19, 85, 120, 168, 191, 237, 242–3, 259, 286, 311–12, 321, 324, 331–2, 340–1
Autobiography 74, 78, 130, 134, 172, 306, 338–9, 344

B
Bagerhat 30–1, 33–4, 38, 149, 164, 282, 362
Bahadur Shah Zafar 7
Bahr al-Ulum (title) 139
Bangalah 6
Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti 204, 218, 225, 243, 344
Bangiya Sahitya Parishad 177, 218, 225, 230, 239
Bangla 6, 352
Bangla Academy 11, 43, 306, 324, 344
Bangla Academy Patrika (journal) 74
Bangladesh 6, 19, 64–5, 356–7, and *passim*
Banglapedia (encyclopedia) 291
Barelwis 287
Barisal (Bakerganj) 100, 104, 107, 128, 151, 159, 183, 216, 230, 239, 257, 303, 339
Battle of Palashi (Plassey) 68, 76, 88, 208, 363
Begum Rokeya 346–55, 363, 383
Begum Shamsunnahar Mahmud 353
Bengal Legislative Council 113–4, 160, 183, 243, 251–2, 259, 277, 285
Bengal Muslims: community 2, 3, 72, 124; conquest 5, 7, 15, 66, 164, 290; literature 8, 36, 45, 73, 172, 203, 291; progress of 3, 63, 116, 161, 204, 253, 321
Bengal Pact 168, 243, 285, 325
Bengal Sultanate 47
Bengal Times (newspaper) 108
Bengali 2, 6, 9–10, 16, 37, 41, 45, 53, 74, 115, 137, 146, 154, 173, 192, 261, 350
Bhagalpur 32, 129, 240, 349–50
Bid'ah (innovation) 85, 91, 97, 167
Bihar 6, 15–7, 38, 68, 74, 89–90, 97, 129, 149, 151, 183, 236, 310, 323, 349, 362
Biography 22–5, 33, 41, 54, 71, 75, 104, 108, 128, 159, 200–2, 205, 209, 221, 223, 236, 248, 256, 267–70, 282–3, 288, 291–2, 310, 318, 330, 339, 347, 353
Brahamanbaria 248–9
Brahmins 25, 37, 53, 282
Britain 75, 80, 213, 285, 358
British 7, 63, 67–8, 75–6, 80, 84–6, 88–9, 93, 99–100, 104–8, 111–12, 114–16, 119, 121, 128, 138, 150–1, 154, 157, 160, 165, 171, 173, 191, 208–9, 214–15, 250, 265, 281, 283–5, 308–9, 314, 323, 330, 348, 363
British army 86, 96, 99, 135
British India 9, 99–100, 112
Buddhism 16, 250

C
C.E. Buckland 103, 106
C.R. Das 277, 325
Cairo 82
Calcutta 55, 70, 81, 89–90, 97, 100, 108, 111–13, 119–21, 123, 127–9, 131, 134, 136, 145, 150, 153–4, 164, 172, 180, 191, 216, 218, 221–4, 237–40, 249–50, 255–7, 267, 274, 277–9, 284, 286, 293, 295, 301, 303, 305, 311–12, 317, 338, 341, 349–51, 353–4, 365
Calcutta High Court 182, 184, 187–8, 244, 249, 252, 274

www.pathagar.com

Calcutta Madrasah 111, 115, 121–2, 124, 127, 134–5, 137, 149–50, 164, 202, 209, 238, 241, 248, 274, 282–3, 283, 328–31, 343
Calcutta University 11, 115, 116, 136, 138, 150, 184, 191–3, 239–40, 243, 251, 259–60, 274–5, 297, 311, 314–5, 324, 339, 342
Caliphs 4–5, 13, 32, 74, 89, 96, 134, 141, 164, 175, 180, 187, 218, 252, 361; Caliphate 188, 285
Caste system 16, 18, 85, 91, 93, 143
Central Asia 8, 18, 208, 278
Central National Muhammadan Association 123, 137, 183, 235, 310
Chach Nama (historical source) 4
Chishtiyyah 24, 31, 42, 165, 361
Chittagong 5, 6, 8–9, 19, 38, 46, 51, 56, 71, 74–7, 85, 89, 100, 156, 183, 258, 241, 248, 265, 291–3, 295–7, 312, 330–1, 335, 340–1, 361
Christianity 80, 202, 214–5, 217, 227–33, 283–4, 300–6
Civilization 5, 123, 154, 178, 278
Coinage 5–6, 9, 13, 49, 358, 361
Comilla 5, 13, 17, 56, 104, 107, 142, 145–6, 159, 239, 293, 297, 314, 318, 335, 361
Communalism 211, 249, 252, 276, 278
Conquest of Bengal 5–8, 15, 17, 19, 23, 66, 163, 171, 290
Corruption 63, 177, 214, 225, 356
Critique: of Islam, 302; of religious custom, 82
Culture 2, 18, 38, 54, 156, 216, 261, 356

D
Dar al-Aman (land of security) 99–100, 114, 269
Dar al-Harb (land of war) 84–5, 99–100, 112, 114, 269
Dar al-Islam (land of security) 100
Dargah (mausoleum) 23–4, 34
Dawlat Qazi 49–50
Debul 4–5
Deccan 15, 50, 120
Delhi 14, 24, 30–3, 49, 51, 60, 68, 89, 104, 119, 127, 129–30, 157, 164, 200, 225, 256, 324
Deoband 68, 81, 110, 119, 143, 287, 335
Deokot 18
Deotala 25, 30–1, 38, 149, 164, 362
Deputy Collectors 129, 150–1, 153, 275
Deputy Magistrates 113, 128–30, 151, 153, 191, 293, 310, 349
Dhaka (Dacca) 7, 27, 85–6, 101, 104, 106–7, 112, 128–30, 136–9, 146, 156–61, 167, 200–1, 209, 211–12, 238–9, 241–2, 259–60, 268–9, 284, 286, 309–12, 314, 332, 362–3
Dhaka Madrasah 129, 136, 138–9, 201, 209, 211, 287, 331–2, 334
Dhaka University 4, 8, 10–11, 71, 124, 136, 139, 160, 248, 252, 259–61, 269, 297–8, 331, 333–5, 342–3
Dilwar Husayn Ahmad 148–55, 160, 192, 222, 240, 275, 373
Dinajpur 17–18, 54, 97, 191, 301
Dudu Mian 82, 86, 91, 98, 149, 165, 269
Durbeen (journal) 121, 123, 248

E
East Bengal 23, 71, 104, 156, 232, 312, 324, 331
East India Company 7, 63, 67, 69–70, 75, 80, 86, 88–9, 104, 111, 120, 150, 173, 213, 227, 300–1, 308, 363
Education 27, 38, 53, 106, 138, 235, 315
Egypt 81, 218, 267, 33
Emperor Awrangzeb 7, 55–6, 61, 67, 75, 88, 119–20, 164, 191, 288, 312
Endowments 5, 64, 69–70, 105, 115, 146, 184, 242, 262, 326
England 180–1, 183–4, 186, 188, 237, 274, 277, 356–7

F
F. B. Bradley-Birt 71, 103, 105–16, 108, 115–16, 127, 157
Famine 107, 159; Great Famine (of 1769–70) 63, 69, 89, 363
Fara'idi Movement 9, 84, 86, 95, 98, 100, 114, 176, 265, 269
Farid al-Din Attar 22, 39, 128, 224
Faridpur 46, 81–2, 85, 111, 127–8, 174, 268, 270, 339
Fasting 76, 83, 91, 143
Fatwa (legal opinon) 100, 114, 168
Fiction 49, 58, 175, 211, 350, 352
Fiqh (jurisprudence) 201, 288
Firdawsi 37, 39, 46, 81–2, 224, 361
Freedom 9, 86, 89, 93, 182, 318, 351, 363

G
Gaud 17
Gaur 17

www.pathagar.com

God 40–1, 46, 50, 76, 83, 85, 97, 107, 138, 143, 159, 185, 201, 210, 245, 275, 293, 304, 338, 342, 344, 351
Governor-Generals: of Bengal 135, 161; of India 106
Governor-General's Legislative Council 166
Gulzar-i-Abrar (book) 23, 25

H
Hadith 98, 269, 288
Haji Muhammad Muhsin 7, 61, 64, **66–72**, 209, 312, 363, 368
Haji Shari'atullah 80–7, 90–1, 95, 98–100, 110, 114, 134, 149–50, 176, 215, 265, 269, 369
Hajj 68, 81, 83, 90–1, 145, 160, 203, 267, 334, 342
Hanafis 81, 84–5, 98–100, 167, 184, 267, 275
Hanbalis 98
Hayat Mahmud 45, **53–9**, 362, 367–8
Hindi 49, 51, 58, 78, 130, 154, 160, 191, 228, 244
Hindus 15, 16, 25, 37, 39–40, 42–3, 48, 51, 53, 62–3, 70, 77, 80, 82, 112, 114, 137, 143, 166, 177, 181–3, 194, 208, 227, 236, 242–44, 249
Hindu *zamindars* (landholders) 85–6, 90–3, 113, 120, 308
Hinduism 16–17, 90, 200, 202–3, 210, 227, 230, 258, 261, 269, 290
History 10, 17, 43, 160, 211, 358
Hughly Madrasah 71, 180–1, 331, 338, 363
Hughly Muhsin College 71, 180–1, 331, 338, 363
Husam al-Din Iwad Khalji 17, 19

I
I.H. Qureshi 2
Ibn Abd al-Wahhab 81, 83, 90, 99, 149
Ibn Battutah 22, 24, 26
Imam Husayn 38, 46, 57, 68, 71, 106, 172, 175
Imperial Legislative Council 251, 259
India 4, 15, 29, 67, 112, 193, 309, 333, 358
Indian National Congress 181, 183, 249, 284–5, 312
Indian Uprising (or Mutiny) *see* Sepoy Revolt
Indigo planters 85–6, 91–3, 113–14, 173
Inspectors of Education 239, 339–41
Iran 5, 22, 39, 68, 340
Iraq 22, 46, 68, 74–5, 84, 175, 340
Islam 4, 24, 85, 148, 185, 227, 253, 265, 302, 340, 351
Islam Pracharak (journal) 145–6, 193, 217, 223, 257
Islamic Foundation Bangladesh 11, 270
Islamic History 4, 19, 33, 57, 142, 186, 193, 270, 360
Itihas

J
Jalal al-Din al-Tabrizi 21–2, 24–5, 30–1, 38–9, 149, 164, 362
Jam'iyat-i-Ulama-i-Hind 285
Jami 39, 62, 137
Jihad movement 81, 111
Journalism 116, 119, 121, 123–4, 130, 139, 146, 169, 173–4, 214–18, 221–2, 238, 248, 257, 282, 284, 286, 288, 325
Jurji Zaydan 4

K
Kashmir 104, 107, 157, 309
Kazi Din Muhammad 11, 205
Kazim al-Qurayshi Kaykobad 204, **207–12**, 217, 295, 276
Khalaj tribe 14
Khalifatabad 31–2, 34
Khan Bahadur (title) 115, 154, 160, 197, 262
Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah 139, 204, 255, 333, **337–45**, 363, 382
Khan Jahan Ali 29–35, 38–9, 149, 164, 282, 362, 366
Khanqah (Sufi lodge) 26, 32–3, 171, 201
Khilafah (successor to Sufi shaykh) 51
Khilafat Movement 168, 259, 284–5, 324–5
Khulna 31–3, 62, 100, 104, 164, 183, 200, 216, 282
Khurasan 180
Khwajah Alimullah 104–5, 157, 309
Konya 23–4, 362
Kulinism (form of racism) 16

L
Lahore 14
Liberation 143
Logic 331
London 8–9, 11, 70, 138, 181, 185–6, 188, 214, 227, 274
Lord Curzon 7, 241, 284, 312

M
Madinah 9, 33, 57, 68, 81, 86, 90, 175, 203, 267, 334, 341, 361
Madras 5, 241, 274; Madras High Court 275–7
Madrasahs (Islamic seminaries) 18, 33, 66, 71, 97, 115, 120, 136–7, 145, 149, 159, 164, 166–8, 170, 222, 241, 258, 266–8, 282, 315, 329–34, 342–3
Mahabharata (classical Indian epic) 38, 208, 210

www.pathagar.com

Makkah 57, 68, 74, 81–3, 86, 90–1, 100, 145, 159–60, 194, 200, 203, 208, 267, 334, 341–2, 360–1
Maktab (Qur'an School) 67, 76, **81**, 91, 164, 209, 241, 258, 301, 326
Mannujan Khanum 60–5, 67–8, 347, 363, 368
Maqtul Husayn (book) 43, 46
Maulvi Abdul Karim of Sylhet 222, **235–46**, 247–8, 256, 273–4, 295, 320, 322, 325, 333, 340–1, 343, 377
Maulvi Abdullah 104, 157
Mawlana Abu Nasr Wahid 328–36, 363, 382
Mawlana Azad College 279
Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri 7, 84, **95–102**, 110, 114, 133, 151, 215, 265, 329–30, 332, 335, 370
Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan 7, 139, 167, 195, 218, 243, 257, 273, 275, **281–9**, 295, 313, 325, 344, 349, 380
Mawlana Muhammad Ali Jauhar 255, 285, 313, 332–3
Mawlana Ubaydullah Suhrawardi 114, 122, 129–30, **133–40**, 149, 151–2, 174, 181, 209, 249, 281, 287, 331–3, 372
Medieval Bengali Literature *see under* 'Bengal Muslims'
Medinipur 134, 273
Mihir-o-Sudhakar (journal) 167, 217, 223
Minhaj al-Din Siraj 5, 14, 17, 26
Mir Musharraf Husayn 115, **171–8**, 199, 204, 208, 210, 282, 295, 306, 343, 374
Mission: Christian 9, 80, 202, 214–15, 227–33, 283–4, 300–6; Muslim 21, 25, 30, 83, 85, 101, 149, 169, 243, 269
Modern Bengali Literature *see under* 'Bengal Muslims'
Modernism: Muslim 99, 110–11, 118–19, 122, 149–53, 180, 185–6, 215, 221, 287; Western 330
Moslem Bharat (journal) 8, 9, 11, 37, 46, 93, 118, 122, 266, 329, 335
Mu'in ud-Din Ahmad Khan 8–9, 11, 37, 46, 93, 118, 122, 266, 329, 335
Mughals 5–7, 38, 47, 50, 53–5, 60–1, 66, 75, 80, 88, 104, 119–20, 149, 157, 164, 179–80, 191, 200, 208, 211, 227, 240, 256, 321–22, 347, 362
Muhammad Abdullah 10, 104, 106, 128, 139, 248–9, 269–70, 321
Muhammad Abdur Rahim 8, 40, 42, 51, 54–5, 58, 62–3, 70, 100, 259, 323–4, 346, 358
Muhammad Ali Jinnah 181, 255, 283–4, 318
Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji 5–7, **13–20**, 21, 26, 30, 66, 73, 126, 163, 171, 264, 265, 290, 362, 365
Muhammad Daad Ali 199–206, 222, 257, 375
Muhammad Enamul Haq 39, 41, 43, 46, 57–8, 79, 205, 217, 291
Muhammad Ghausi Shattari 23
Muhammad ibn al-Qasim 3–4, 14, 75, 361
Muhammad Ishaq 4
Muhammad Khan 37, 43, 46, 50
Muhammad Mohar Ali 8–9, 56, 76, 98, 119, 300
Muhammad Mujibur Rahman 10
Muhammad Riyazuddin Ahmad 145–6, 204–5, 216, 222–3, 230, 257
Muhammad Shahidullah 43, 46–7, 49, 56, 58, 73, 78, 169, 207, 243, 257, 262, 284, 297
Muhammad Yusuf Siddiq 16, 19
Muhammadan Literary and Scientific Society 100, 114–15, 123, 135
Muhsin Fund, 64, 136, 241, 322, 363
Munshi Muhammad Meherullah 202, 214, 222, **227–34**, 257, 273, 303, 313, 363, 377
Munshi Shaykh Zamiruddin 202, **300–7**, 380
Mustafa Nurul Islam 348
Mutawallis (custodian) 105, 181
Muzammil Haq of Shantipur 200, 208, 217, **220–6**, 243, 295, 376–7
Mymensingh 14, 30, 85, 104, 107, 159, 183, 204, 259, 267–8, 310, 312, 324–5
Nabi Bangsha (book) 40–1, 43, 46, 58

N
Naqshbandiyyah 23–4, 27, 31, 42, 98, 165, 201
Nasir al-Din Haidar 22
Nationalism: Bengali 115, 209; Hindu 17, 181, 312–4; Indian 279; Muslim 250, 283
Nawab Abdul Latif 7, 67, 99–100, 108, **110–17**, 118–19, 121–4, 127–8, 133–5, 149–52, 154, 174, 176, 180, 183, 186, 209, 215, 238, 247–50, 255, 281, 329–30, 332, 370–1
Nawab Bahadur (title) 107, 116, 146, 160
Nawab Faizunnesa Choudhurani 141–7, 223, 372–3
Nawab family 104, 137, 156, 158, 309–11
Nawab Mir Qasim 75–6
Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah 68, 75, 88, 111, 120, 172, 208, 213, 308, 331, 347, 363
Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury 223, 239, 247, **255–63**, 273, 313–14, 317–18, 333, 343
Newspapers 151, 153, 184, 215–17, 222, 228, 257, 286, 292, 312

www.pathagar.com

Nizam al-Din Awliya 24
Noakhali 85, 100–1, 231, 266, 340
Nur Qutb Alam 21–2, 172

O
Orissa 6, 55, 68, 239, 347
Ottomans 180, 188, 243, 285, 316

P
Padmavati (book) 49–51, 58, 74, 78, 296, 298
Pakistan 7, 157, 168, 188, 262, 279, 283, 286, 288, 318
Pala Dynasty 15–16
Panchayat System 107
Pandua 22, 25, 32, 362
Partition of Bengal 7, 250–1, 259–60, 284, 295, 311–12, 314, 316–17, 332, 341
Patronage 8, 37, 48–51, 53, 66–7, 73–4, 90, 124, 160, 167, 172, 207–8, 233, 321, 358
Persia 17, 37, 78, 104, 134, 208, 278, 361
Persian literature 131, 290
Persian poetry 55, 128, 131, 160, 228
Philanthropy 61, 69, 71, 106, 156, 158–9, 255–7, 309, 317, 320, 322–3, 325–6
Philosophy: classical Muslim 134, 136, 172; Hindu 39, 42, 200; modern Western 111, 135, 258, 275, 339; Sufi metaphysics 39, 42, 172
Pirs (spiritual guides) 39, 201
Pir Abu Bakr Siddiqi of Furfura 163–70, 224, 374
Poetry 19, 37, 39, 49, 54, 56, 77–8, 120, 124, 127–30, 137, 160, 172, 176, 196, 200, 202–4, 209, 222–3, 232, 270, 283, 309
Presidency College 70, 115, 182, 192–3, 237, 249, 259, 273, 329, 339
Privy Council (London) 70, 188
Prophet Muhammad 27, 37, 40–1, 46, 58, 83, 89, 134, 141, 175, 186, 190, 193, 201, 208, 229, 232, 267, 305–6, 360
Puthi (*Punthi*) Literature 39, 291–2

Q
Qadiriyyah 31, 42, 49, 51, 58, 102, 165, 326
Qur'an, 38, 67, 81, 95, 145, 190, 266, 287, 352
Qutb al-Din Aybak 14–15

R
R.C. Majumdar 2, 6
Rahimunnesa 73–9, 369
Rajmahal 17
Rajshahi 5, 9–11, 17, 56, 64, 97, 129, 136, 174, 241, 250, 256, 296, 330–1, 334, 339–40, 354, 361
Ramayana (classical Indian epic) 41, 143, 207
Rangpur 17, 54, 100–1, 183, 191–3, 195, 231, 301, 347–8, 354
Rationalism 135, 137, 149, 152–3, 186, 218, 261, 286–7
Reformist movement 82–4, 90, 93, 96, 99, 134, 150
Robert Clive 7, 68, 75, 88, 120, 172, 213, 308, 363
Rt. Hon. Syed Ameer Ali 7, 70, 123, 136–7, 139, 149, 152, 154, 174, **179–89**, 192, 215, 235, 238, 240, 247, 249–50, 252, 255, 258, 274–5, 281, 287, 318, 375
Rt. Hon. Taslimuddin Ahmad 190–8, 199, 222, 322, 375

S
S.M. Ali 136, 331
Sadr Diwani Adalat (civil courts) 111, 127–8, 248
Sahabah (the Prophet's Companions) 3–4, 27, 176, 191, 217, 270
Samaj (association) 137, 202, 204, 217
Sanskrit 6, 8, 17, 37, 48–9, 51, 70, 134, 142, 200–1, 231, 260–1, 276, 291–2, 303, 347
Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi 81, 90, 93, 95–9, 110, 133
Science 111, 113–5, 120, 134–5, 152, 160, 173, 192, 244, 250, 258, 301, 333
Secularism 2, 115, 137, 152, 176, 185, 239, 309, 348
Sena dynasty 15–16
Sepoy Revolt 7, 86, 99–100, 105, 113, 128, 172, 192, 200, 208
Shafi'is 98
Shah Abd al-Aziz 96, 98
Shah Jalal of Sylhet 21–8, 30–1, 38, 149, 164, 362, 366
Shah Muhammad Saghir 37, 39, 45–6, 74, 172, 207, 291
Shah Waliullah 68, 81, 96, 98, 284, 286–7
Shams al-Ulama (title) 204, 238, 240, 244
Shatgumbad Mosque 33
Shaykh Abdur Rahim of Basirhat 121, **213–19**, 222, 230, 257, 304, 376
Shaykh Ahmad Yisiwi 23
Shaykh Sa'di 56, 128, 137, 180, 228, 362
Shibli Nu'mani 124, 240, 244, 286–7, 313
Shirk (polytheism) 83, 85, 167

www.pathagar.com

Sir Abdul Ghani 103–9, 129, 151, 156–9, 184, 238, 247, 309, 311, 370
Sir Abdur Rahim 7, 184, 237, 248, 250, **272–80**, 325, 379
Sir Ahsanullah 106–8, 137, **156–62**, 184, 238, 242, 247, 269, 309–11, 363
Sir Jadunath Sarkar 2
Sir Muhammad Azizul Haq 221, 241, 243
Sir Muhammad Iqbal 129, 188, 224, 256, 318
Sir Salimullah Khan Bahadur 7, 223, 242, 259, 273, 284, **308–19**, 381
Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan 67, 81, 99–100, 107, 110–11, 114, 118, 123, 133, 135–7, 152, 180–1, 136, 235, 249–50, 255, 258, 275, 281, 286–7, 313, 330
Sir Syed Shamsul Huda 237, **247–54**, 273–4, 313, 333, 378
Sir Thomas Arnold 21
Sir William W. Hunter 235, 348
Sudhakar (journal) 145, 154, 167, 216–17, 223, 231, 257, 304, 321
Sudhakar Group 121, 215–17
Sufia Ahmed 215–16, 303
Sufism 22, 38, 40, 98, 163, 224, 240, 288, 326
Suhail-i-Yaman (book) 21, 24–5
Sukumar Sen 40, 43, 57
Sultan Mahmud 14, 29, 361
Sunnah 27, 33, 58, 81, 152, 365
Superintendent (Madrasah) 135, 138–9, 204, 249, 287, 331–2, 334
Syed Alaol 45–52, 58, 74, 78, 296, 298, 362
Syed Ali Ahsan 46, 205, 217, 344
Syed Ali Ashraf 5, 217
Syed Muhammad Taifoor 310–11, 317, 334
Syed Sultan 36–44, 45–6, 51, 58, 74, 174, 291, 361, 366–7
Sylhet 5, 10, 19, 22–7, 31, 38, 104, 129, 149, 157, 236–8, 242–3, 309, 329–31, 333–4, 340, 361, 363

T
Ta'ayuni Movement 98, 265
Tabaqat-i-Nasiri (book) 14, 17
Tabriz 347
The Eastern Chronicle (newspaper) 242
The Moslem Chronicle (newspaper) 153, 158–9, 161, 239, 325
The Mussalman (newspaper) 152–3, 224, 242, 325–6, 349–51, 354
The Statesman (newspaper) 354
Tibet 18–19
Titu Mir 9, 84, 86, **88–94**, 95–6, 98–9, 133, 149–50, 215, 265, 363, 369–70
Turkistan 17, 23
Turks 5, 14, 23, 29–30, 147, 208, 278, 316, 325, 333, 362

U
Umayyads 4, 29–31, 57, 68, 71, 74, 141, 175, 187, 218, 279, 361
Urdu 98, 112, 115, 121–4, 127–31, 134–8, 154, 160, 167, 194, 238, 260–1, 266, 295, 309
Uttar Pradesh 14, 96, 265

VWXYZ
Viceroys 7, 15, 106, 235, 259–60, 314–15, 324
Wajid Ali Khan Panni 238, **320–7**, 343, 363
Wakil Ahmed 49
Waqf (endowment) 64, 69, 105, 146, 184, 242, 262
Warren Hastings 111
West Bengal 2, 6, 64, 87, 100, 177, 197, 279, 311, 321, 358
Yemen 5, 22–3, 340
Yusuf–Zulaykhah (poem) 17, 19, 46
Zakat 76, 83, 91
Zamindars (landholder) 63, 85, 91–3, 144, 172, 174, 177, 256, 275, 308, 310, 313, 321–2, 324–5, 347, 349



www.pathagar.com

3 0800 03068 3699

THE MUSLIM HERITAGE OF BENGAL reveals a rich and diverse cultural history spanning more than 800 years, looking at the lives, times and works of 42 extraordinary and influential figures. The book endeavours to avoid the secular, nationalist, sectarian and orientalist biases that have prevented a comprehensive and balanced Islamic approach towards this heritage; indeed, a separate presentation is itself novel, given that the region has all too often been presented as a regional footnote to the history of India. Numbering around 200 million people, the Bengali-speaking Muslims constitute one of the largest linguistic groups in the Muslim world, second only to the Arabs. This informative, authoritative and inspiring book is a timely contribution on the subject that is aimed at students, scholars and general readers.

History | Islam | South Asian Studies

MUHAMMAD MOJLUM KHAN was born in 1973 in Habiganj, Bangladesh, and was brought up and educated in England. As an award-winning writer, literary critic and research scholar, he has published more than 150 essays and articles worldwide, and his writings have been translated into several languages. He is author of the bestseller *The Muslim 100* (2008). He is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Director of the Bengal Muslim Research Institute UK.

Advance Praise for *The Muslim Heritage of Bengal*:

The Muslim Heritage of Bengal is a multidimensional work covering aspects of the Muslim history, culture and heritage of Bengal from the early thirteenth century to modern times. I am sure this book shall add to the vista of knowledge in the field and I recommend this work.

Dr A. K. M. Yaqub Ali, Professor Emeritus,
Islamic History & Culture, University of Rajshahi

The Muslim Heritage of Bengal is a fascinating, inspiring book written by a young British writer. Khan's book provides invaluable information that will inspire present and future generations regarding the Muslim history, culture and heritage of Bengal.

Dr M. Abdul Jabbar Beg, Formerly Professor of Islamic History
& Civilization at the National University of Malaysia

KUBE PUBLISHING
KUBEPUBLISHING.COM

ISBN 978-1-84774-069-6 | US $45.00
545002
9 781847 740595

www.pathagar.com